

Bledlow Ridge 2s vs Stokenchurch 2s

Home: Sat 11th August

How the hell ?

Actual language adapted for publishing purposes

BRCC 233-3 (45 overs)

Stokenchurch 95-6 (24 overs)

Match drawn BRCC 15pts, SCC 7pts

Saturday morning 01.00hrs. A decent percentage of the 2s are at the club (Sniff, Taggart, Saint, Shaun, Jov, Hairbear). Arriving 12 hours before 'play' is called, suggests impressive dedication, except that this was still the night before the morning after as we said goodbye to probably the most important RidgeBear never to play a game for the Ridge, the inimitable Tommy Beattie. There was cricket, there was beer, there was Jenga, there was karaoke, there was dancing, there was wine, there were speeches, there was much hugging, there was more beer, there was a presentation, there were some teary eyes, there was more wine, there was even a hospital dash (all good thankfully). It was a sweetly sad night.

Saturday morning 10.00hrs. A decent percentage of the 2s (see above) are softly weeping to themselves in between bouts of vomiting and swallowing handfuls of Ibuprofen to calm the hammer drills going off in their heads. Collectively they have one question they are all asking;

How the hell?

Saturday morning 11.30. The covers are pushed off. After 4 weeks of Saharan type drought and 2 days of rain, the pitch is a vivid deep green. The kind of green that would have the long absent Cooperman declaring "Whoa man, that's like ... really ... like ... green." And the grass on it seemed to be growing at a rate you would normally only see on a time lapse camera. 90 mins of sun and a quick run with the mower later, Sniff went out to toss, won it, and came back in to announce that we would bat. Collectively the team have one question they are all asking;

What the hell?

Stokenchurch started the day in 3rd place in the table with more than a sniff of promotion. They had brought pretty close to a full strength side that contained 2 of the top 4 run scorers in div 9, the top wicket taker and another bowler who featured in the top 10. Despite a morale boosting win against

Nondies last week, The Ridge were in 8th, a position we look destined to be glued to. Nevertheless, Chesh and Taggart (yep seriously, he's still doing it), went out and batted carefully, very carefully, the kind of soporific carefully that could have emptied the stand at Lords as quickly as Botham emptied the bar. The 48th ball of the innings was the first to reach the boundary (off the bat) as Taggart worked out why he had taken his bat out there and creamed one to extra cover. But 4 balls later, Chesh got a wonder ball. It pitched about a foot outside off stump, jagged at a right angle (ish) and thudded into said peg. Chesh stood for a moment, looking bewildered and thought to himself;

How the hell?

Enter Jai Angell at 3. Taggart warned about the vagary of the pitch as he walked in and having dutifully defended the first ball Jai decided it was actually fine and slapped the next one over extra cover for 4. And so it began. Taggart clipped a few to square leg (collective gasp of astonishment), Jai smashed 10 fours in his first 14 scoring shots and the scoreboard began to take on a moderately respectable look. After Jai had taken a particular liking to Sam Leppard (purveyor of Chesh's wonder ball) and dispatched him for 3 4s in an over, skipper Plows decided to play his ace and brought on Jack Springett, a young off spinner who had gone through us at their place earlier in the season and was sitting top of the div 9 wicket taking list on 34 from 14 matches. Bowling up the hill at the Ridge is not the most difficult end in the Cherwell, but it does require you to push the ball up on what would be a fuller length on the flat, especially if you're bowling slow. He didn't quite work that out and without ever getting too brutal (we didn't want him coming off too quickly) both batsmen milked the bowling effectively and Taggart began to see it so well that many of his shots were coming off quite thick edges.

With Jai on 35, and starting to think every ball should go, his more (life) experienced partner called him down the wicket for a chat. "Forget the game, forget the score, get 50. Oh, and if you call me through for any more 2s, I'm going to beat you to death with my bat" It took him 6 scoring shots. As Jai progressed serenely, Taggart's score was now reaching hitherto unimagined levels. In the clubhouse, Shaun and Hairbear figured they were still drunk and hallucinating, Shaky was posting Whats App updates with provisos like "this is real, honestly" and Chesh was just sat quietly, shaking his head and thinking:

How the hell?

With Taggart on his highest ever league score in any form of league cricket (45), his more experienced (run making) partner, who at the start of the day was precisely $\frac{1}{4}$ of Taggart's age, called him down the wicket for a chat. "You're playing some horrible hacks. Get them in 1s and get to 50". 6 more horrible hacks, 2 dropped catches and 3 singles later, he finally got a short ball that was hit off such a thick edge that it might have been mistaken for the middle and went for 4. Most batsmen on reaching 50 politely acknowledge the applause with a gentle raise of the bat. Taggart did this, then off came the helmet, both arms up, a hug for his partner and a bit of a one man Mexican Wave. He stopped short of kissing the wicket, but otherwise it was a celebration worthy of a double hundred at Lords on debut to win a test. Celebrations on the sidelines were equally ebullient. Chesh and Sniff shouted loud, Shaun stripped off his shirt (no, me neither) and Hairbear vomited again. Stokenchurch were very gracious but you could see the question that was collectively in their minds;

How the hell?

Taggart celebrated a few overs later by top edging one to a fielder on the mid-wicket boundary, who seemed to have caught it, only to drop it over the boundary for a 6 (drop number 4!). He then sent out for lottery numbers. BetFred had long since stopped taking bets on whether Jai would get a hundred (the only thing that looked less likely was a Stokenchurch fielder actually holding on to a catch from Taggart), so it came as quite a shock when on 91, he got a full banger from slow left armer Bains which collided with the top of off. It was all the more surprising as the over up to that point had consisted of 2 smashed to the boundary for 4 and 2 deliveries that were called no ball on account of them bouncing twice before reaching him. But 9 short it was to be for a chanceless, imperious innings that contained 15 4s and 2 6s. The score was now 184-2, meaning that the old dog and the young pup had put on 163, which I am sure Gilet (who will not be mentioned in this report) would confirm, is the highest partnership for any wicket, for either team in the last 4 years (when we started recording partnerships). The previous best of 150 between Rolfie and Rory, also featured a 40+ year age difference. Determined to finish top of every list, Keeps is now on the lookout for an octogenarian who can hold a bat long enough for him to smash 164.

Fahan came in and made a bright and breezy 18 before being trapped in front. He had suggested to Taggart, who had now worked his way into the 80s, that he should just smash his way to a hundred. Funny, I thought Fahan had seen Taggart play before. Besides, Stokenchurch, having given up any hope of holding a catch, were now deploying 2 sweepers on each boundary plus a long on and long off. Shaun came in, grabbed a quick single and made a very decent attempt to run out his now dead on his feet partner, but the wilting Flower of Scotland survived to carry his bat for 91*, which he wasted no time in informing Jai was just a little bit better than 91 without the asterisk.

Shaky posted it on the Whats App and momentarily the internet looked like breaking as a billion cyber dudes typed;

How the hell?

After the least complicated tea of the 2s season (it was all made by the same person) Stokenchurch came out and their early intentions were clear, at one end at least. Sam Leppard launched himself into the bowling, making a quick 23 before David Saint just pulled his length back a little and induced a skier to backward square where well who else but probably the possessor of the worst catching record in recent years. But sometimes you just have a day and it stuck. The Saint went on to maybe his best spell of the season, removing 2 more leg before and running up an impressive 3-41 off 10. Rohit had bowled without much luck at the other end and gave way to the owner of the 2nd worst hangover in the team. Shaun was quick and in combination with DS, brought the run rate down from 9 (27 off 3) to around 3.5 after 20 overs helped particularly by the other opener Langford who was still in single figures at drinks. Along the way he induced a sharp catch to Taggart (you're making this up!) at point and completely confounded Langford with a slower ball off which Jovan took an excellent catch.

On any normal day, Hairbear coming on to bowl might have had people wondering, but reality was suspended and so it seemed like the natural thing to do. In his first over, he brought about a hook shot that was landing in Taggart's general area and despite a bit of a lunge he did NOT take the catch, proving that there may still be some shade of normality left in the world. Taggart claimed that he picked it up late and to be fair, everyone was aware that it was getting dark. Very dark. Hairbear bowled the same

batsman with a full bumper in the next over, by which time it had begun to rain. It had been drizzling for a while, but now it was definitely raining. The umpire decided that it was a bit much, on came the covers and off we went, with no-one really complaining. Half an hour later, it was looking a very astute decision so the captains shook hands and settled for a draw. Stokenchurch were 96-6, with no realistic chance of getting close, but they had only had half their overs, so the draw points were split equally, 3 a piece.

So on a day when our 1s scored the 11th highest total in Cherwell history, our 2s made 233 against one of the best sides in the division and bowled them out of the game (if not out), the only side above the 1s in 6 got bowled out for 61 and lost, both teams stayed exactly where they were before, but in slightly weaker positions.

How the hell?