

The Natural Order of Things

BRCC 2s 250-9 45 ov

Bicester & NO 2s 182-8 45 ov

Match Drawn

It was tense. After the late batting reshuffle the week before forced on the skipper by some late arrivals, the question was: 'would they arrive this week on time? would they be ready? or would things have to be changed? To everyone's relief they were on time.

Yes! Malcolm and his Put-up-a-nice-brown-tent-Friend were on time and had almost finished putting up the mess-tent by the time the players arrived. It was a narrow squeak. Just a little bit longer and the boundary would have been so short that even RolfeDog would have had a chance of hitting a six. But various guy-ropes were removed; various ropey-guys like Malcolm were removed and it was time for Robert the Bruce Murdoch to arrange the batting order.

The previous week this onerous task had fallen to the stand-in captain, Scotsman Dour Doug McIndoe. I would have incorporated his name into that of another famous Scotsman (like Robert the Bruce) if there were any, but there are not.

The week before, Malik had been down to bat 3 but Saeed couldn't remember where he lived, or where Malik lived, or where the ground was, or anything, so Malik had not arrived in time for the 'cut', had been relegated to 5, and had not made runs.

Misery.

So this week Malik and Driver Saeed arrived extra-extra early, possibly before Malcolm had even planted the first tent-peg, so to speak. Surely this meant promotion. But it is not for nothing that Robert the Bruce Murdoch is a dour Scotsman and somehow Malik was rewarded with Batting Spot number 7. Eat your heart out! Doug, Baz and Taggart himself had all contacted the ground to say they "might be a little late" each in a feeble attempt to impress and to prevent downgrading in the batting order, this being the more extraordinary for the fact that that Taggart should try and influence the captain in this way, seeing that he *is* the captain. Why ring in and warn himself that he might be late? He batted 11 anyway. He was obviously not impressed with his own excuse, whatever it was.

So where were we? As some of their team-mates padded up, Malik and Saeed were left to muse upon the concept of arriving late one week and dropping two places, then arriving extra-early the next and dropping a further two.

Robert the Bruce Taggart – who described himself this week as "rather more forgiving than Deadly Doug" (God help us all) - proved again what a useless tosser he is and so we were put in to bat on a damp one. Jilted John (no good reason) and Beautiful Baz (on account of his ever-pristine on-field appearance) were given the chance to flail at a young wild bowler for a while. Beautiful Baz then sympathised with Jilted John for the way that the bowler at the other end bowled rubbish at him and then well at Jilted John although the suspicion lingered that this might have had something to do with the batsmen's relative competence.

The bowler in question bowled with dark glasses on. No not cool-cricket-playing dark glasses but, £5 from Tesco dark glasses. Well he bowled Jilted John, no trouble. How was I able to see anything bowled by someone wearing such dark glasses. It was a scurrilous piece of gamesmanship.

So in came Determined Doug. Determined to last longer than last week: ie at least three balls. Beautiful Baz became lonely without his friend Jilted John and was out for 32, bringing Shenshational Shakey to the wicket. You will not be surprised to learn that Shenshational Shakey, who had made 30 not out the previous week carried on just where he had left off. Yes with Marlborough Light on arrival followed no doubt by a glass of vintage red.

At the wicket he was again in good form. Delighted Doug did indeed exceed his previous week's achievement this time with a total of 2 which brought in Desperate Dan and with it my best joke so far. Yes Dan was Desperate to re-establish himself after a week off and was immediately in excellent form. Shakey for his part was timing the ball so well that we were all shtaggered to see his wickets shmashed by the bowler one ball before drinks for, wait for it, 30. He clearly has a problem and gets shtuck on thirty. Four wickets down.

So Dicky Bird joined Desperate Dan Strange. Bird and Strange at the wicket; it's a Strange Bird the Cuckoo as they say and after two boundaries, one a magnificent straight drive, Dickers was cuckoo'd by their quickish bowler who bowled a short ball and Dickers was caught for 8. 134-5. Out walked Marvellous Malik. Little did he know he was not to be Malik for much longer.

At the other end Desperate Dan got a short ball and was caught. For 19: 134-6.

In came Anxious Andy Walters, Anxious to succeed and to create an excellent impression with his new teammates especially after imitating Dickers' Slog last week. He played four of the best forward defensives you will ever see. So good that even the fielder at square leg (I was umpiring at this time) commented on his technique. Sadly for Andy the fourth ball, which generated the best-looking forward defensive of the lot, hit off stump. Poor Andy left the wicket trying to work out what time he should arrive the following week, in order to be given a number in the batting order that would result in a mega-total.

His brain was soon to be scrambled even further. You see, the prompt Malik was batting at 7 and the arrived-in-good-time Andy had batted at 8. Marvellous Malik (who, remember was not to be called Malik for much longer) was joined by Sensible Saeed. The score now looking ominous at 134-7, having been 134-4 two minutes before. Malk (notice the slight change of name) started carefully with a couple of leg-side flicks. Sensible Saeed played some Walters-like defensives.

And then Malk went nuts. There I had been, trying to convince everyone how difficult it was, when Marvellous Malik made Mincemeat of the bowling. (What a pity "bowling" doesn't start with an "M").

The horses in the Stud Farm took cover as Malk's assault threatened relationships with the new tenants there. The coup de grace (ask me, Birdy!) was surely the flat six to the Stud Farm over extra cover, but later he went down the wicket and hit a straight six into the trees on the long-on boundary by the pavilion. Conor has done this once, Welshdog hit the sight screen off the back foot, Watkins of Wolverton did something like too, Jamie has cleared the pavilion no doubt after being called a MeatHead by Geoff, and his father once hit ex-Wycombe off-spinner Andy Lyon into the trees, or at least so he says, although it is commonly believed he was fast asleep when this happened.

Anyway this was a mighty blow, coming after several others which had by this time elicited cries of Great Shot Malkolm from the much-confused Shaky (Nowee). Yes Malik had made the transformation from Journeyman Number 8 to become our new Guv'nor, in one innings. We had arrived to find Malcolm the Guv'nor pitching a tent; by tea we had witnessed Malkolm the Guv'nor trying to hit shots into it.

Talking of which, Sensible Saeed almost did so. In a bizaare piece of cricket Malkolm decided he would take back seat and only jog a single to a ball that travelled about 70 yards, so that Saeed could have the strike. The amazed look was removed from my face when Saeed hit the next two balls for four and the following over hit a six off the back foot over extra cover and almost into the tent of Malcolm the Former Guv'nor.

The partnership of 109 had taken only 14 overs (with 43 runs between overs 40 and 44) when Marvellous Malik was bowled in the last over and returned to cries of "well done Malkolm" led by Shensational Shaky (No E) who was still baffled as to how his Shtylish Thirty fell 47 short of Malik's 77. A by now, much-confused Malcolm Ashby was sitting quietly in a brown tent.

This being the last over there was just enough time for Jilted John, who had umpired for 22 overs, to get in the act by giving Misfortunate Matt Donnelly out lbw first ball and then to 'wide' their bowler who had bowled 17 consecutive overs, with what was supposed to be the last ball of the innings, just so he could bowl one more ball. With Sensible Saeed on 33 not out we ended with 250-8. Dickers booked his place on the next Kangaroo Court by helping himself to two Dickers-sized handfuls of sandwiches before the opposition, this breaking this season's rule about only helping ourselves once the oppo have had their's. If the first team ever get to play any home games and Dakes is playing, I imagine he will suffer serious withdrawal symptoms if kept from his food like this for more than 30 seconds.

Well Robert the Bruce gave us one of his rousing battle cries, with no musical backing at all, not even Disco Inferno as per the first match. He concluded this call-to-arms (continuing the Robert the Bruce theme you see) with the amazing news that if we got them out for 249 we would win. Useful as the information was I couldn't help thinking this might be rather hard to contrive and that it might be easier to try and bowl them out for something less.

This began to look unlikely as the 30 over point, only two wickets down, they were giving us a rather hard time. It should be said that Shenshational Shakey had taken a Shtupendous catch off one of Taggart's better-judged long-hops and that Delighted Doug had helped Saeed to the first of his four wickets with a catch. But two experienced players held us up so long that, a draw seemed inevitable.

But we have strength this year. Sensible Spinning Saeed got one to rip and forced a catch to slip. By this time, the Skipper turned to his less-forgiving vice-skipper. What transpired as a master-stroke was surely made in Desperation.

Dutiful Doug showed his hand early. Full-toss, pitch, full toss, pitch etc was his routine. So astounded was their best player by this unusual tactic that he gave up the will to live and was caught by Masterly Matt.

All of a sudden we were in it. Not many overs to go, but Drastic Doug continued with what might loosely be described as variation, taking two more wickets, while Saeed took his third and fourth, these two bowlers ending with 3-16 off 3 and 4-47 off 14 respectively. On *closer* inspection of the scorebook Diligent Doug still ended with 3-16 off 3 which just proves that statistics can lie more than once.

We had two overs to get the last two wickets and couldn't quite do it but our powers of recovery put the previous week's defeat at Bledlow Village into the shade and showed how we should perform each week.

We ended with two significant pieces of news. Firstly that we now top the Division. Secondly, Ashtute Shaky (no E) asked Malik and Saeed for their word for Guv'nor and it is "Sahib". So we now have "Malcolm the Guv'nor" and "Malkolm the Sahib". All that matters is that a Sahib far outranks a Guv'nor. For one thing a Sahib never has to put up a tent: he gets a Guv'nor to do it for him.

And so we await next week's batting order. Do we arrive early and go down the order where runs could be found, or arrive at any old time and find ones'self promoted beyond competence? Anywhichways it will have a logic that even its perpetrator Robert the Bruce McTaggart will nae understand.

Who writes this rubbish?