

Hawkins in missed sale sensation

Bledlow Ridge	99-9	40 overs
Oxford Nondies	17-4	6.3 overs

Match abandoned due to rain

Last four confirm availability on Friday night, 3 will play but only if you absolutely need me, I can play but I'll be late, I can play but I have to leave early, Taggart declares Marshall law in attempt to find an umpire, Shaky's got a sore back, the newbie arrives without any trousers, oh, and it's raining!! New season? Sounds like we picked up exactly where we left off.

There was however one notable change. Having ranted incessantly on this web site about nurturing the youth of the club, the 2s skipper suffered an unprecedented attack of integrity and put the names of 2 U15s, Nathan and Joe, on the team sheet on Tuesday night and declared to all that would listen (Jamma and Rolfdog) that come hell, high water or a late application from Jimmy Anderson to join the club, they were both going to play.

And so with both teams boasting 11 players and an umpire in tow, the 2s set off to Bletchingdon less than 20 mins after the meet time. Perhaps it is a new season after all.

On arrival in the changing room, new recruit Ady Summons discovered that he had left both pairs of cricket trousers 'on the bed ready to go'. Rob scented a sale! His face dropped however as he realised he had failed to load the van with the entire shop stock. Never mind, he could still talk him round. Ady decided to test his marriage with a call home. Sharp intakes of admiring breath all round. Apart from Rob. Ady then popped his head round the Nondies dressing room door.

"Anyone got a spare pair of trousers?"

"There you go mate, keep 'em, they're too big for me".

Half way back to our dressing room, he stopped for a moment lost in thought. Turned, went back, popped his head round the door again,

"Anyone got a spare pair of pads, or gloves, or a bat, or a BMW 325?"

"&>\$*\$% off"

"Miserable 8@%(\$?5's "

Rob realised that someone at BRCC had just secured cricket kit for free and had an aneurism.

While all this was going on, Taggart lost the toss (plus ca change) and we were inserted. Sam got what he described as a 'good nut' early on which left him and clipped the off bail after the previous 3 had come in to him. Later analysis suggested that he simply played down the wrong line to a straight one, but in the spirit of early season generosity we'll go with his version. Rob, still seething from the missed sale, then missed all the gaps in the field and finally a low full toss, but it did hit the base of the stump, so in the spirit of early season generosity, we'll call it a Yorker. Ady was positive, racing to

16, but after the first rain break, he hooked the first bouncer for 4, got out of the way of the second, then forgot that the bowler was allowed to pitch it in his half and lost his off peg. Shaky mistimed a 4 ball down the throat of BSL but in the spirit etc etc we'll say it got big on him, and Geoff and Nathan both looked good and played straight before losing their castles.

Then it rained.

Fortunately for the Nondies ground staff it rained for a while, making the 15 minutes they spent getting the covers on at least of some worth, and as Leicester and Harlequins were about to kick off, we took an early tea.

At the resumption, the umpires declared the match to now be 67 overs long, of which we could bat a maximum of 40, which put a slightly better complexion on our slightly paltry score. Dave Maunder had already successfully extended his challenge to the Lord of Bledlow's record of consecutive ducks to three, made all the more impressive by the fact that his run now extends over the same number of seasons, and when Vajid, after a positive cameo of 13, departed, the skipper's ambition of not batting before July was thwarted and he joined his VC. Taggart got off the mark.....

....and then it rained..... again.

The home side had had some practise now and managed to get the covers on in under 10 minutes, just about in time in fact for the rain to stop and the umpires to tell them to take them off again. We all went out and stood around looking at the wicket. Memories of Cumnor at the Ridge last year were invoked, except that we couldn't find any pitchforks. Their umpire thought it was playable, as did their skipper. Russ wasn't so sure and dropped into groundsman mode, declaring that it needed time to dry out, probably about a month. Their umpire pulled out his magic over calculator table and announced that if we didn't start in five minutes, the game would have to be abandoned. If we did, it was a 40/20 game. We were 88-8 off 32 at this point, and the idea of giving them a hundred or so to chase in 20 seemed a sensible one, so we said OK, give it five minutes to dry a bit and we'll start again. Their umpire declared this sporting, their captain concurred, and Russ started composing a letter to the horticultural society on endemic cruelty to wickets.

It remained a difficult wicket to score on (or stand on for that matter), and with only young Mannion to follow, discretion remained the better part of valour and the management team meandered slowly up into the early 90s, mostly courtesy of Dickers. After the 38th, the VC was on strike and suggested that he should have a dig off the 5th or 6th ball. He then forgot how to count and played a fabulous yahoo to the third, becoming the 7th player to be bowled.

Young Joe arrived at the crease and adopted a stance that suggested his preferred guard was leg on the second set, two feet out of his crease, however after some gentle suggestion from his skipper (and to their credit the oppo's skipper and umpire), he took a more conventional stance, lunged forward to the first ball and nicked it through where second slip would have been for 2 (however if the rest of this reprobate team can have the spirit of early season generosity, so can our debutant, so we we'll say he played it late, opened the face and guided it into the vacant third man area).

No more wickets fell and the innings closed at the somewhat inevitable total of 99-9, given that the three rain breaks had occurred at 22-2, 44-4 and 88-8.

So after everything the weather could throw at us, we had set them 100 to get on a slow track in 20 overs. Both sides fancied that they had a chance. We had a contest.

Their sight screen at the pavilion end had suffered some fairly terminal damage from the weather the night before and had been tied to tree, set up for right arm over the wicket, and was declared unmovable, so in the spirit of early season generosity, we opened from that end with a left arm over the wicket bowler. Any suggestion that it was difficult to pick the ball out of the tree behind the bowler was of course nonsense. It was so dark, you couldn't see the tree.

There were a number of remarkable things about this short innings, not least that Taggart sent down 18 consecutive deliveries without once inspiring the umpire to spread his arms. When Dickers held a sharp catch at 2nd slip off the second of them, we cheered. When Geoff dived to take a sharper one at gully in Shaky's first over, we shouted. When Shaky uprooted their no 4's off stump in his second, we roared and when the umpire answered in the affirmative to our impassioned appeal off Taggart's 19th delivery, you would have thought we had won the ashes. They now needed 83 off 13.5 overs with 4 down on a wicket that had thus far produced just 116 runs in 46 overs. For the first time in the day, you would have had to say we were in the ascendancy. Taggart tore in for the next delivery, but half way to the crease tore his calf muscle instead.

As we debated who would complete the over,

It rained

The umpires looked at the skippers. The Nondies skipper looked at the scoreboard and didn't need asking twice. The Ridge skipper looked at his bowling attack, now depleted by a third, and reacted similarly. And as we shook hands convivially, thanked each other for making the effort and retired to the bar to watch the cup final, the big man upstairs watched us going off and thought he might as well drop the precipitous contents of the Gulf Stream on the pitch.