

BGCC – Captain's Review 2011

Well, where do we start! I guess the first game would be a good place!

Into the unknown: new league, new opposition, new season, new overseas player, new found confidence for some of the players, new spikes for the captain, same old aches and pains (no I don't mean Smed). Things started badly, losing the toss and being inserted on a green April wicket that would assist overseas Gagandeep Singh for Studley. That's about all that didn't go to plan that day! PH stroked a majestic maiden century in an assured team batting display and then Matt brushed some poor friendly performances aside with a hostile spell, taking six wickets. In a further boost, Pooley started well with pace and bounce that thrilled the patio. So, we took 24 points and a massive boost to the confidence of the team.

The time is 08:10, Saturday morning. TC is doing his round, Judders is having a cup of tea before chasing an eleventh player and any other sane person in Malvern is fast asleep. Not us! No, we were boarding a bus to go and play cricket in Oswestry. For those of you unsure, yes it is almost in Wales, North Wales and nearer to the Mersey than the Teme! A team with high credentials awaits and this time the toss goes our way. PH destroys them with the ball and we knock off the sub 100 total with ease. The result of this was an early start to the drinking session (followed later by an early finish) and the retiring of H's coolbox.

On to Handsworth and any worries of the quality of ground or hospitality were soon allayed. The welcoming smell of jerk chicken wafted up the path as we arrived to a beautiful park ground with a belting deck. I play safe and choose to field. Again, the bowlers reward me superbly and but for a lower order rally another sub 100 score might have been on. In reply Ad Dovey leads the way with an undefeated 50. Three wins out of three and the Green have hit the top!

Two abandoned games and 3 more wins see the Green comfortable at the top. Ironically, this is the moment that question marks over selection, criticism from the patio and a feeling of unpleasantness surfaces in the club. 100% record and still people criticise...unbelievable!

A trip to Lichfield sees a moment of personal success for the skipper! I help rescue our innings from near disaster, putting on 70 for the last wicket with Jon Dovey, who proved, not for the first or last time, what a vital part of the team he now is. The Green's now highly regarded bowling attack again rip into the Lichfield line up with a superb catch by Binksy highlighting a fine fielding performance. Another point of note is the figures of Andrew Ford. 3 for 0 off 3 overs would be the start of an amazing, and I'm sure unparalleled performance.

Sutton Coldfield's overseas (proving quite a hit) takes six wickets to leave the Green dismissed cheaply but the sharp turn witnessed in the first innings left me certain our 170 would be enough. And so it proved. Fordy continued his form with a remarkable 8-16 off 16 overs (11-16 in 19 overs over the 2 weeks). Fordy was almost unplayable; extracting wicket turn and bounce. He was again well supported by the close fielders, Binks in fine form and Golder again proving a fine specialist short leg.

A family barbecue, yes a family barbecue see me stranded in Birmingham with only the occasional text to keep me sane. The boys, after a poor bowling performance (apparently), knock off the 200+

St. Georges total with relative ease. Ford this time shows his class with the bat and he and Ad Dovey (another fine addition to the side) secure another 20 points.

Unavailability is now hitting hard and the return of Liam Paddock to the line-up is a massive boost. Paddy dives full stretch at cover to stop a rasping cover drive in the early overs to give us a major boost. Yet more good bowling sees the Studley batting tumbled out for another sub 100 score. Despite the loss of some early wickets, Paddy (with some well-timed pull shots) and Matt (showing more application with the bat as the season goes on) guide us home.

Seven more games pass with only one win but we still keep picking up points and remain firm promotion favourites. Mark Hooper's century at Wednesbury and PH, Matt and others plundering the feared Brewwood bowling attack, prove to be the highlights of this difficult run.

Low points are generally frequent in any season in sport and should be learnt from and moved on from. Our season is no different. This challenging run of games had its share of low points. An example of this is me being plundered to all parts by Oswestry's impressive overseas player. What did I learn? Don't bowl length and straight to a bloke on 120 with a short boundary! Or, did I learn not to continue bowling when you have 2 wickets in the spell and the man unbeaten on 120 is on strike?! I learnt, we moved on! Nobody will really remember that, and it isn't really important. Another thing that isn't really important is what happened against Coleshill. This time a family wedding drags me from my post. The ensuing loss to Coleshill causes all manner of hysteria around the club and some stinging criticism towards the players. As I have previously said, mistakes happen and good teams learn and move on. Good clubs DO NOT back bite and turn on each other. Those 2 points (I don't have to explain the situation, it is well publicised) could have been lost a number of other ways in the season. Also unimportant in the bigger picture is the abuse the team received during the match versus Tamworth on Bank Holiday. The biggest pitch I have played on for some time, the biggest tea I have eaten for some time and the furthest I have run for many years (although not as far as H – thanks Cricket Manager) made for an unpleasant experience, even before being abused off the park. However, the points that we gained and not losing (despite being hammered) showed what resilience this set of players have.

So, three games to go and now we are twitching and looking over our shoulder. What a great time to find form. Ordinary performances from Lichfield and Sutton render me almost not able to recall these games. One thing is for sure the power of our batting and the consistency and hostility (at times) of our bowling proved too much for the relegation candidates.

A trip to St. Georges was all that was left. Brewwood's fine form in the second half of the season means we need them to slip up in their final game to give us a chance of winning the league. However, we are now secured promotion. St. Georges is a ground that we all liked: picturesque, a nice size surface and a cracking bar (food made to order and ice cold coke for the kiddies!). Philip finished the season in fitting style. PH has grown and grown in stature the last few seasons and his continued development is a key reason to the club's recent success. With bat and ball he has shown outstanding abilities and great maturity. Not many days go by without PH having a net or a few throw downs. His dedication to his game is to be commended and something many of us could learn from. On this day, PH rode his luck to start and then proceeded to smash the bowling to all parts, falling 16 short of what looked a certain double century (apparently the board is coming down anyway PH!). Not to be totally outdone Ad Dovey scored his maiden league century for the club, a

fine knock in its own right. In response, having watched Phil end his season in fitting style, Matt did the same. Taking the first 7 wickets (including a hat-trick) had a few of us hoping Matt could emulate Keith Wagstaff and become only the second BGCC player to take all 10. Typically, PH spoiled the party and Matt was left to reflect on what might have been. He did, however, finish an amazing season with 75 league scalps, accompanied with 400 runs which surely makes him one of the finest overseas the club has ever had.

So, promotion again! A very enjoyable knees up at the club followed and talk turned to next season.

This has easily been my most challenging year in the job and the most successful too. The Birmingham League is hard work. The Birmingham league means lots of travel. The Birmingham League means a strong standard. Are we better with or without all of this? WITH!

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the group of players that have represented the club so well this season. We have an amazing set of lads. Despite all of the back-biting and un-called-for criticism that has been flying round at times I cannot deny that I love being part of this team. That is due to the boys and the fun we have each week. It is also due to the quality of cricket that I get to watch each week. 'Cmon the Green!'