

BGCC – 2010 Season Review

Player Diary By Tim Williams

It's April and the smell of cut grass is in the air and my attentions are very firmly turning towards the new season and in particular that big silver cup I have had my eyes on since the previous year's league dinner. A busy winter season has seen the club finally sign Andre Russell, a young Jamaican, sold to me as 'the next big thing in West Indian cricket,' Phil Harris return from a season in Western Australia and the news that Steve Adshead has joined Astwood Bank, our first opponents!

First week in and the stresses are rising! Volcanic cloud of all things sees our wicketkeeper and vice-captain Adam Binks stranded in the Caribbean, Portugal and then on a boat and bus for a monster journey meaning he misses our first match away to the OE's. A good bowling performance sees the Green restrict their illustrious opponents to an under par total. Particularly impressive were Lewis Hooper and Ash Brewer. In reply Golder and Rhodes made a good start but the middle order fell away and would provide a worry that would take some weeks to go away.

The cloud has cleared and so has the batting doom (at least for now)...'Dre' has arrived safely, as has Binksy, and both take their place in a friendly against Hatherley and Reddings. Andre wowed the crowds as he 'only strokes' a cameo with some massive sixes, surely a sign of things to come, and the Green complete a good victory.

So confidence is high as we make the trip to Astwood Bank. My normal lack of tossing ability see us put in on a decent 'April' wicket. The whole line up struggled with Mark Hooper gallantly holding the team together, carrying his bat for 57. In reply none of the bowlers were able to find any kind of rhythm (something to do with the aggressive approach taken by the Bank I think) and we were swept aside in a most disappointing start.

My shivering (about 4 jumpers) and general malaise in the Bank match was followed by a Monday morning visit to the doctors...a viral infection and I'm out the Nomads game (never mind the 10 days off work!!). With Binksy at antenatal it falls to ex skipper Smed to lead the boys in a local derby we daren't lose! The boys did well and gained 20 points in a rain affected match with Andre getting into the runs and wickets.

With the season back on track we are welcoming league new boys Bewdley to North End Lane today. Huge disappointment and the boys are really down. Andre swept the Bewdley line up aside and when Golder and Rhodes were flying at 79 for 1 chasing 137 we thought an early finish might be on the cards. Then the low point in my cricket career occurred. Somehow, in an unexplainable collapse of sanity, clear thinking and good batsman ship within the blink of an eye we fell like a pack of cards and were tumbled for just over 100. The most damaging aspect of this debacle was that few players were out to a good piece of bowling (I was 1 of 3 out to a full toss!)

Enquiries, texts and emails have been flying around for a few days but I insisted calm was needed and backed the players by selecting the same 11 for the following match, a trip to Bromyard, never an easy game.

My faith is rewarded with a marvellous bowling performance seeing the Green knock Bromyard over for a paltry 47. Though Andre hit the headlines the bowling of PH was most impressive, hopefully a sign of things to come. The standards were also set with a faultless catching display in the slips. The niggling doubts over the batting were still there though with the loss of 4 wickets in chasing down the total for another 24 points.

Bank Holiday weekend sees 2 easy wins against Colwall and Droitwich. The controversial game at Droitwich saw one of the most amazing periods of cricket I have ever seen. Andre took 5 wickets in 5 magnificent balls (well supported again by the slip fielders). I doubt the Worcestershire league has ever or will ever again see such pace, movement and control that's Andre not the slips!).

Bad news...Andre has been selected for the WI's A team and will be away for 8 weeks (including a trip home to participate in the National T20 competition).

Good news...Andre is a thoroughly nice guy and deserves the rewards he is getting and is clearly delighted with the news.

Andre signed off in style with 98 and 4 for seeing us to victory over the Ramblers (sorry Malvern CC).

So no overseas for 8 weeks and some of the toughest games coming up! I am happy though! We need to prove it isn't all about 1 man...for us as much as proving to everyone else.

No Andre...so not much help when PH books himself a romantic trip to Greece! So we are taking 3 spinners to Redditch and I have to dust off the bowling boots having been largely redundant with others taking all the wickets so far! Fordy's fine spell kick starts his season and gives the boys real belief that we can move up the league. 2 rare commodities, a 6 wicket haul for me and an unbeaten 50 for PH (although I'm sure I won't be saying that for long!) see us sweep past Romsley and a fantastic century from George sees us to victory at Stourbridge. We fielded first and our fitness and stamina get us through in sweltering heat with Smed complaining of hallucinations!

2 great performances batting first against Worcester (table toppers) and Astwood Bank (biggest threat at this point) leave us well placed in second. This time Rhodesy's bowling turns the match against Worcester and I took great joy in claiming the prized scalp of Steve Adshead! To secure a good draw vs the Bank. Thoroughly miserable performances against Nomads and Bewdley follow, but no damage is done as we find out that our rivals all slumped to worse fates than us! One more game before Andre returns and we need to

raise performance and get a result. Bromyard were the visitors and despite threatening a big total failed to capitalise and PH, Fordy and I shared the wickets in restricting the visitors to 142. Hoops showed great bravery in taking several body blows from Mbane (pretty sharp!) and KG shows a return to form, guiding us to victory.

Spirits are lifted further...the Joanna Brown nets are finished and Andre returns...safely and I win the bonus ball! All is looking rosey in the garden!

Colwall are smashed by Andre with a wonderful blitzkrieg of an innings (161) but the big man, failing to get on with light drizzle, a sniffly nose and a sore throat was unable to take a wicket. The bowlers did a top job sharing the wickets and securing another 24 points...we are now on a roll and really starting to feel confident.

Rain and more rain...2 games off and frustration is really building, we can all feel we can achieve something special but we can't get out there and do it!

A dry day, a hard track and a Redditch opposition openly stating they don't fancy it at the toss! So when 2 of the first 3 balls go to the boundary, no problems! Andre clean bowls the dangerous Gailey and Redditch simply can't stop the rot. Another early finish and another 20 points...nearly there...excitement builds...many onion related conversations!!

A hard 6 a side day with my team (mainly thanks to Fordy and PH) capturing the title. So a nice long sleep before Bank Holiday's game...NO! Woken early with the news that Andre has fallen down the stairs! And for once with an overseas, he wasn't drunk! Boys are all very buoyant that it shouldn't affect the result we can get. So off we go to a dream Bank Holiday venue...Romsley! Fordy finally shows what he can do with the bat with a very aggressive 75, backed up by another 50 (more regular these days!) from PH. The reply does not go well with all bowlers struggling and showing signs of fatigue. However yet another good Ford spell and support from PH (that pair again) and the never give up attitude we have built sees us secure a vital winning draw...what a great game of cricket!

2 games left...23 points for the title...surely we can't mess this up, what if we lose this week, what if we are rained off, what if we finish level on points? Lots of questions and all I want are answers! A trip into the offices at work gives me a sneaky look at that silver cup again...looks like Marshy has been polishing it up ready for us, I mean the winners!

7 wickets for 2 runs sees Stourbridge turn a positive position round in our favour and a sensational 98* from Andre (one of the finest knocks I have been privileged to see in local cricket...remarkable) secures us 20 points (but is it enough?). A nervous wait and a string of phone calls...'yes thank you Barry.' Barry Rees informs me that Woody and Karl have hung on and we are THE CHAMPIONS! The idea fails to sink in and the real celebrations are saved for the last match.

A trip to Worcester followed - the trophy, the photos, the team spirit...amazing feeling! 2 things that happened that epitomised our season...another wonderful Russell century (one six clearing the 3 storey flats!) and the hugely improved PH making another impressive 50 (I was really gutted he didn't make the hundred...he deserved it). The second innings becomes fairly irrelevant as rain fell and I agree an early finish with er Liam. Champagne, bucking Broncos and photos with the Colwall boys followed (after Jez drags me into one of the worst places I've ever been to...Priors Croft!).

So we've won the league and realised the aims we have all had for so long. I have been very fortunate to have a great squad of players (both in terms of ability and work ethic/attitude) at my disposal. All of the boys have such great attitudes and this has played no small part in our recent successes. They have displayed a great deal of confidence and self-belief but have combined this with a great thirst to improve and make the most of what we have. At some point every player has contributed positively and the moans and gripes have been few and far between. Equally every player has had a moment or two where things haven't gone well but every player has worked hard to put it right (many days/nights I pass the ground to say another impromptu training session in full swing)...no more so than the week following the Bewdley debacle!

I have had good support from the Committee and there has been no small measure of support from large parts of the playing membership, and to those people I say thank you. The support of your club members is so well appreciated and means a lot.

So on we go to the Birmingham League division 3. We start with Studley visiting North End Lane. A long hard winter of training and organisation lies ahead and the biggest challenge yet, for all of us. That will all come though, right now we, as a club, should enjoy this success and be proud to say we are Barnards Green CC. This success represents the strength of the club and not the players that played in the team this year. Well done everyone! All the best...

Wills