

Barnards Green Second Eleven Review - 2011 Season

'Welcome to the Birmingham League – looks like it's a step too far!' the Studley players called as the second eleven slumped to 7-3 inside the first ten overs of the first game of a very BIG season. All concerned realised the club had moved up a level from the comfort and safety of the Worcestershire League but against all of the odds the side pulled together and won what was a fantastic match. The first game actually typified much of the season that followed. There were some bright spots, there were some close shaves, sides were destroyed at times and the side also suffered a couple of heavy defeats at the hands of strong opponents.

The basic facts of the season were thus:

- Played 22, won 11 (50%), drawn 3 (13.64%), lost 8 36.36% -
- Final League Position 7/12.
- Number of players used = 42
- Tom Clack and Lewis Hooper = 19 games each
- Number of wicket keepers used = 7 (Brewer, White, Doughty, Binks, Hooper, Perkins & Wheeler)
- Number of captains used = 5 (Doughty, Scullion, Brown, Dean & Wheeler)

The season was, generally, a success on the field. The side played some decent, competitive cricket at a host of grounds new to most and developed cricketing friendships and rivalries which should last well into next season if not beyond. As in the last few years the debate surrounding the purpose of the second team dragged on. At times the side was competitive and would have given many first eleven squads a run for their money, at other times it was hard to find eleven fit and able players and on one occasion only ten men turned out making a decent competition unlikely. However, despite the niggles, the debate and the discontent amongst some, the primary purpose of the side, to produce first team players, was fulfilled and this must be celebrated. Andy Wheeler, Ashlea Brewer, Eliot Hennessey, Mark Hooper, Tom Clack and Jack Macintosh all were given a chance represent the club at the highest level and all concerned deserve praise for this. Ashlea, Eliot and Jack, despite their young age look to have a bright future ahead of them. Andy, Mark and Tom are a little older but did well to force their way into a strong and successful senior side.

In an ideal world it would have been nice to have put a more competitive side out more regularly, however cricket clubs very rarely have the luxury of selecting their very best players week in, week out across all of their sides. The lack of players playing for their places and the limited movement of players between sides needs to be addressed however. It should be a reward for hard work and endeavour in the lower sides to be promoted to a higher team and vice-versa, all too often though players sat in a relative comfort zone safe in the knowledge due to a shortage of players, illness, or injury their place in the team was assured and this appeared to be the case in all teams, not just the seconds. A winter of sound recruitment and the continued production line of young players from the colts could and should change this unsatisfactory scenario.

Digging a little deeper and looking at the statistics a little further it is possible to tease apart the sinews of the season. Stripping meat from the bone and separating the wheat from the chaff one can see a mid-table finish was a very decent result indeed in what was the side's debut season in the Birmingham and District Premier League.

Batting

There were a number of positive aspects in the batting department this season. Andy Wheeler continued his outstanding form of the last few years and played some of the most memorable innings of the summer. Fielders across the West Midlands nursed sore fingers whilst bowlers nursed damaged figures at the hands of a number of amazing 'Jack Attacks'. Andy scored 615 runs at 51.25 with two hundreds and four fifties. Some of the shots he played were dismissive, some outstanding and just a few were pure filth. Andy scored 22.64% of the team runs - a telling statistic.

Judd Doughty, either side of his nuptials and ensuing honeymoon scored 333 runs at 37. At times lacking fluency he brought stability to the top order in the games he did play. In a successful opening partnership with Andy Wheeler they combined to score over 40% of the team's runs across the season - a mean feat in itself but indicative of failings further down the order.

Next highest scorer was Tom Clack who batted anywhere in the side between 1 and 9. Tom is yet to find his home in the line-up yet can be a destructive specimen, especially to bowling of width using his strong hands and powerful wrists to force the ball into the gaps. Tom scored 231 runs at 16.

Ash Brewer scored his long awaited maiden league hundred in Handsworth park and quickly made his way to the first team to finish off the season in style. Ash has, for three seasons, looked capable of making a big score and all who have played with him are pleased to see his coming of age. The hope now, without wishing to mix metaphors, is that he'll open the floodgates and fill his boots in big boy cricket whilst maintaining his high standards with the gauntlets.

After enduring a long and barren spell with the bat, Lewis Hooper, made a number of unbeaten matchwinning knocks as the season drew to a close. A sound batsman who can find the boundary with ease, it also mustn't be forgotten that Lewis, only a couple of seasons ago was taking wickets with ease in first team cricket. The hope has to be that'll he soon be doing this again.

Mark Hooper, Cyril Dean, Rich Tuck, Adam Binks, Steve Metcalfe, James Scullion and Eliot Hennessey all contributed runs in the middle order throughout the season but none went on to score that really big innings to define their role indefinitely.

Also worthy of mention is Dan Metcalfe, who, after working hard in pre-season scored some nuggety runs in the late-middle order and by the end of June had become the senior partner in the father/son relationship, at least until it was his turn to buy the beer.

Bowling

Lewis Hooper and Matthew Brookes led the way with the cherry in hand. Lewis took 32 wickets at 25 whilst his senior partner took 28 wickets at 15 but, to the detriment of the team, the two rarely played together. Had Brookes been able to play more games he surely could have taken over 60 wickets in the season. For all of his comedic sayings and actions he is a class act to have in any cricket team and a competitor to the last also. Hooper was, at times too good for some batsmen beating their inside and outside edges at will, a skill which actually denied him wickets conversely. Equally, at times, especially on the greener wickets, he found his control lacking and his length inconsistent.

Tom Clack and James Scullion took 25 and 17 wickets respectively whilst the only other bowler to take double figures was the diminutive figure of Jack Macintosh who pounced 13 wickets. The former pair bowled some excellent spells but lacked consistency and confidence with their bowling.

Bradley Adams, Shane Thompson, Richard Brown, Chris Hill, Judd Doughty, Andrew Banks, Tom Banks, Clive Churchill, Eliot Hennessey and Georgia Hennessey all bowled and took no more than a handful of wickets each but many bowled some useful spells and their efforts and endeavours are appreciated by all.

Fielding

As in previous years the fielding display could range from world stage to village green in the space of a ball. The performance away to Barnt Green was one of the worst performances of the season and regrettably will not be forgotten quickly. Strangely the number of easy catches put down across the team rose this year. Barely a game went by without a 'dolly' being dropped by someone inside the 30 yard circle. It is easy to over-analyse these errors and mistakes but, on at least a couple of occasions, they cost the team points. Equally, some blinding catches were taken by a number of players and this, if anything magnifies further the dropped catches and signifies that it is a lack of concentration rather a lack of technique which is to blame. A point to note is that every club, without exception were in awe of Tom Clack's powerful and accurate brutish throwing arm.

Yet again huge thanks go to Anne Wilson and Winston who braved wind, rain, sleet and snow to keep an immaculate book all season. Anne now has a legion of clubs who admire her handiwork in the Birmingham league as well as the Worcester league. Anne's ability to retain so much statistical information is wondrous and it is amazing how she manages to keep two books, entertain Winston and still remain sane across a long and arduous season.

Equally appreciated are the ground staff at North End Lane who week in, week out, produce flat and true wickets to play on and a lush outfield to match. Your work is much appreciated and the team have been proud to show off the ground and facilities to opposing teams this summer.

It is important to stress at this point that Barnards Green Cricket Club is a club in the rise and that the second team have played, and will continue to play, an integral part in this success nurturing talent and giving opportunities to those wishing to progress. Any club which moves up the league structure as quickly as the Green have will struggle to adapt, off the field as well as on it and it is up to the members, the committee and the captains to become more elastic with their thought processes and more concrete with their actions. The rumour mill has, for some strange reason, taken over at times this year and all concerned would do well to listen to those elected to drive the club forward and leave the gossiping and nit-picking to the old aged pensioners at the bus-stop. Over the long, dark and depressing winter months when the memories of this fine season begin to fade, stop and think and remember, 'the future is bright, the future is GREEN!'