

Match Review 2010

The weather left it's usual early mark on the 2010 season, with our first game of the season against Kingsclere cancelled. When the following weekend arrived we were due to play Pangbourne at home. As I drove to the ground the temperature according to my car thermometer was struggling to reach double figures, but was almost matched by the number of layers I was wearing. In the freezing cold, and under grey skies, I was slightly surprised to find myself fielding after the visitors won the toss, but it was no great surprise that batting was hard going for the visitors, who after 5 overs were 5 for 3, two batsmen out bowled, the second to a prodigious away swinger, and the other a run out after some dubious calling. The visitors started to re-build but the fourth wicket fell with the score at 34 and after that the wickets fell in a precession, Pangbourne all out for 65 well before tea, although they did bat long enough to fit in a drinks break – a nice cold glass of orange squash – just what I needed!. We went out to chase the target and managed to reach 32 for the loss of 1 wicket before the break. Our progress towards victory was slow thereafter, but with Garry Masters finishing on 48 not out we won by 7 wickets in the 25th over.

But that wasn't the end of the day, because someone had the slightly dubious of idea of choosing not to slope off to the pub, but having a beer match instead, with reversed batting orders and everyone getting a bowl. 20 very cold overs later we managed to win the 10 overs per side slog-fest, my contribution being taking a wicket with just about the widest, worst, slowest most horrible long hop ever bowled, which the Pangbourne opener very considerably hit straight to mid off, and scoring 2 in an mammoth opening stand of 14 as we chased 48 to win the game, and finally trudged off home as the weather closed in for the last time.

The following week we were off on our travels to Bradfield, where the previous August, we'd been playing on the afternoon England regained the Ashes at The Oval. Perhaps us playing at Bradfield is a good omen for the national side, as this was World Twenty20 Final day. The weather was slightly warmer, but showery, and this time we were put into bat. In fact I don't think the rain ever really completely stopped and eventually got too heavy for play to continue, by which time we'd reached an impressive 176 for 4 in 32 overs. After prolonged rain, there was standing water on the pitch which would have need a Super Sopper to shift, so the match had to be abandoned with no result, but with England were taking on Australia in only their third major tournament final in 18 years, and with the radio on in the pavilion, no-one minded as much as they may have done on another day. We were watching the rain fall as the match was getting underway in Barbados, and Australia were soon not very many runs for three wickets, with cheers emanating from the pavilion as we wandered back from the middle having gone out to measure the depth of the puddles. Soon after it was raining hard again and we trundled off either to find a pub to watch the final, or in my case, home to tune in to the radio commentary. England went on to give the old enemy what a Norwegian football commentator might have termed 'one hell of a beating,' the first of an alarming but pleasing number of such results in 2010.

The following week we were away to Bucklebury and the weather couldn't have been more different – blazing hot sunshine under a cloudless sky. The home side scored rapidly, aided by the artificial pitch, small boundary and fast outfield, and ran up an impressive 198 for 4 in their 35 overs. Our innings got away to a steady start but at 52 for 2 in the 15th over we were behind the clock. However a couple of key partnerships got us back in the game – Zafqar Ali added 63 in 51 balls with Garry Masters (42) and a further 53 in 47 balls with Naveed Raja (21). With two overs left we still needed 22 to win, but a couple of sixes swung the match back in our favour, and just 5 were needed from the last over. There was a last minute stutter as David Bardwell was run out off the second ball of the over, but the fourth ball was hit for four by Ali and the winning run came off the next delivery, seeing us home by 4 wickets.

We didn't have a match on the last weekend in May and the following week's game was called off, so on 13th June we were playing only our fourth game of the season, at Sulhamsptead. Both sides were a man short for this game, but our batsmen were again in imposing form, as we ran up 268 for 8 in 40 overs. I spent a good portion of the innings standing as square leg umpire, a sure sign we were very short of personnel that day. By the time the last three balls of the innings came round I was standing at the non-striker's end as Naveed tried to reach 100, only to connect with thin air and end on 94 not out. The weather closed in at tea and there was a real sense of urgency as the home side's innings started. And we got some early wickets as well, the home side soon struggling on 23 for 3. Our bowlers were consistently hitting the stumps, with five of the top six bowled and Sulhampstead soon in the more at 79 for 7. There was some resistance in a ninth wicket stand of 44 but by that time the weather was starting to clear and the result looked inevitable. Being a limited overs match the result was certain long before the last wicket eventually fell in the final over, the winning margin was a comfortable 140 runs. Ali was our best bowler with 4 for 11 in 6.3 overs.

Hot sunshine returned the following week, for our first trip to Yattendon in six years. The home side set off like a train after we put them into bat, their score standing at 43 for 1 in just 7 overs. However some impressive bowling clawed the scoring rate back at the home side eventually ended with 179 for 9 in 39 overs, this being a timed match. However, any hopes of a successful run chase, or surviving for a draw were soon in tatters as we subsided from 53 for 2 to 98 all out with plenty of time to spare.

The following weekend our match was called off, so we started July with a home , timed game against Ashford Hill. We had the visitors in some trouble at 89 for 6 after 27 overs, but Field (44) and Williamson (48) rescued the visors with a stand of 81 in 63 balls, and their total of 197 all out was always going to be an imposing one. Batting resources were a little thin on the ground so we needed some solidity from the top order, which we got with an opening partnership of 11 in 9 overs. Jerry Dobson (14) and Ed Pettit-Mills (44) then added 38 in 15.5 overs to take us into the last 20 overs. We had a familiar wobble in the middle order and two wickets in the 37th over made for a lively last few overs but we were guided to safety by Les Woodley (10 not out) and Rod Howell (8 not out) playing his first game for us, in which he also claimed two victims behind the stumps.

Pangbourne College was the destination the following week, and the match got off to an unbelievable start as the home side, who had elected to bat after winning the toss, lost two wickets in the first over bowled by Mike Palfrey, including a wicket to the first delivery, Houldey caught at square leg by Josh Howell, and then another to the third delivery, Booth bowled for another duck. After a start like that posting a good total was going to be difficult for the home side but Duncan and Roland went about re-building, adding 76 in 21 overs. A late clatter of wickets saw the visitors end on 155 for 8 in their 35 overs, with Paul Strong taking 4 for 24 in his first game for us. Our run chase was held together by Ed Pettit-Mills (39) and Garry Masters (38 not out), although things could have gone horribly wrong at 112 for 4. A stand of 42 between Masters and David Bardwell (24) saw us to the brink of victory, which was achieved by 5 wickets in the 30th over.

The following week we were on the receiving end against Whitchurch On Thames at Wasing Park. We batted first but struggled to get the ball to the boundary on a slow outfield, against some tight bowling by the visitors. We did manage to add 42 in the last 6 of our 35 overs thanks to Les Woodley (31 not out), and Jerry Dobson, whose 16 not out included one six which hit the front of the pavilion roof. But 130 for 5 was not likely to be enough and a second wicket stand of 72 between Gregory (35) and Hill (71 not out) saw the visitors the majority of the way to their target, which was reached with plenty of overs in hand.

July closed with our first trip to Mortimer for several years, and despite being thin on resources (we were a player short) we put in a creditable bowling performance after Mortimer won the toss and batted. With Mark Woodley claiming 3 for 29 and Mike Palfrey, Mark Whitelock and Paul Strong each claiming two wickets, the home side were restricted to 159 for 9, although they had recovered from 114 for 9. However, our batting line-up was quickly exposed as only one of our top six made double figures and we subsided to 53 for 6. A stand of 34 between Mark Woodley (24) and Paul Strong (11) briefly threatened to stop Mortimer's advance, but the last three wickets fell without another run being added, and we were all out for 87.

August started with a new opponent visiting Wasing Park, Woodland St Mary were the visitors. We won the toss and put them in to bat on a lovely afternoon, and at 11 for 3 and 26 for 5, the visitors were soon in deep trouble, Mike Palfrey claiming three of the first four wickets. But a partnership of 80 for the sixth wicket dug them out of the hole, although they ended up all out for 117, and one player short as we had been at Mortimer. We made harder work than we really should have done of the run chase, but thanks to Mark Whitelock's 48, his highest score of the season, and a stand of 25 in 9 overs between Mark Woodley and Les Woodley, we eventually won by 5 wickets.

Our trip to Ramsdell the following week was made in blazing sunshine again, although myself and Keith, were a little bleary eyed having returned from Twenty20 Finals Day at the Rose Bowl at around 2.00 that morning! We welcomed back Ben Hardy for his first match of the season after his travels around Australia and New Zealand, and he was soon in on the act, coming on first change, finishing with 4 for 28 and grabbing a difficult caught and bowled with another fielder bearing down on him. In between all that Ramsdell made hay, and ran up 251 for 8 in their 40 overs, a total which we never really looked like getting near once we were 4 for 2 and then 12 for 3. 68 from Garry Masters got our score moving, but only one other batsman reached double figures and inevitably, we were well short when the last wicket fell, on 115.

More new opposition awaited us back at Wasing Park the following week, as we played host to Goring on Thames. However their batting line-up proved difficult to break down and they ran up 226 for 7 by tea in a timed game, their opener, Harrigan, run out three runs short of a century. Of our bowlers, Garry Masters was the pick, taking 4 for 13 in the last 4 of his nine overs, his final figures were 9 overs, 4 for 39. Rod Howell collected three victims behind the stumps. We got away to a reasonable start, but lost two wickets with the score at 46, and were 92 for 4 when Garry Masters went for 59, with about 14 overs left. There were a few more wobbles, not to mention some big hitting by Rod Howell as we eventually finished on 152 for 8, and achieved a creditable draw, despite another wicket falling in the final over.

The cloud of an alleged spot-betting scandal hung over Test cricket on bank holiday weekend, although we were contending with normal watery clouds at Douii Abbey, where we played Woolhampton. This was another instance of us slightly letting the opposition off the hook as we claimed the first two Woolhampton wickets in the first 4 overs to leave the home side on 13 for 2, Mark Woodley getting Featherstone caught behind and then Mike Palfrey taking a smart return catch to dismiss Line. However a stand of 144 for the third wicket between Breadmore (83 not out) and Howe (83, ensured that we would be faced with a tricky target, this time of 203 in 40 overs. This proved beyond us on the big, slow outfield, and although Ben Hardy made 66, the fours and sixes we needed in the last 10 overs didn't come and we finished well short on 161 for 9.

We have had some very close, tight games over the last couple of seasons, the win off the penultimate ball at Bucklebury back in May was the latest – until we went to Ashford Hill. In a 35 overs per side match we bowled the home side out in the final over for 150, with Garry Masters again the outstanding bowler, finishing with the amazing figures of 4 for 6, including a small matter

of 3 for 2 in 7 deliveries in his 5th and 6th overs. There were also two wickets each for Mike Palfrey and Mark Woodley, and when we replied, we lost an early wicket but looked to be well on course at 70 for 1 in the 19th over. However our innings lost its momentum with 3 quick wickets and we were soon 86 for 4 with two new batsmen in the middle. A partnership of 23 in as many balls between Mark Whitelock and Rod Howell kept us in the hunt, before Rod was unluckily given out caught behind for 26. Mark Whitelock and Craig Woodley added a further 31 in 33 balls, and swung the match back in our favour, with Mark hitting a couple of huge sixes. Craig was out for 4 at 140, David Bardwell followed at 141 and when Mark was run out at 142 we were left with 9 needed off the final over. The first two deliveries produced no runs, but Richard Long square cut the third ball to the boundary to and almost repeated the feat off the next ball but ended up with three runs. Jerry Dobson scrambled a single off the next ball which left Richard with the task of grabbing another single off the last ball for a win, which unfortunately didn't happen, and he was run out, leaving the scores level and the match tied, the first instance of such a result that has occurred for a good many years.

Bucklebury were the visitors to Wasing Park the following week, for a timed match, the visitors put us into bat after we won the toss, and ran up 216 for 9, with Bingley top scoring on 61. Our reply started poorly as we lost two wickets in the first 10 balls, and were then 15 for 3 after 7 overs. A stand of 40 between Garry Masters, who again top scored with 41, and Ben Hardy briefly threatened to hold off Bucklebury's push for a win, but wickets fell regularly after that, and our final total of 110 was disappointing.

Our penultimate game of the season was against Bristol Llamas, who we had previously played a few years ago when the visitors had been on tour and were possibly starting to suffer the effects of being slightly worse for wear after a long weekend! They had no such problems this time however, and their openers set off at a rate of knots as they added 111 in 18.1 overs (108 balls). We didn't do much wrong in the field or bowling, but they kept finding the boundary with alarming regularity, and they ran up a total of 271 by tea. However, their total did show that batting was not alarmingly difficult and our innings began pretty solidly, with Ben Hardy and Jerry Dobson adding 25 in 12.3 overs for the first wicket before Jerry was out for 2. Garry Masters joined Ben and upped the pace in a stand of 108 in 16 overs before he went for 49. When Mark Whitelock hit a couple of big sixes it briefly looked like there could be a much closer finish than anyone had anticipated, but a couple of quick wickets ensured that the draw was the most likely result. Ben carried serenely on to make exactly 100, but was bowled the next ball, leaving our 7th wicket pair to bat out a couple of overs for a draw.

Our final match of the season arrived at the end of September in weather marginally warmer than on the opening day. The visitors, Bradfield batted first, and were soon in trouble at 15 for 3 after 7 overs. But the visiting captain, Ian Bliss immediately launched a rapid counter-attack, and by the time the fourth wicket fell with the score at 58, we'd bowled only another 33 balls. A further wicket fell at 63 but Bliss was still there, and with support from Bolton (34) added another 117 for the sixth wicket. He went on to score 123 out of 230 for 9, which took the game away from us, and at 45 for 5 after 15.3 overs it looked like we were sliding to a big defeat. But Craig Woodley joined Garry Masters and the pair added 56 before Garry went for 47, still with 15 overs left. But Craig was joined by Mark Woodley and with some sensible batting they added 71 to see us to the brink of safety, before Craig went for 45 in the penultimate over. As we had only ten players again the last 8 balls were slightly more tense than they should have been, but they were negotiated safely and the game ended drawn.

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