

The Jolly Tanners XI v The Jolly Tanners Odds & Sods XI

Venue: Staplefield Green

Conditions: Fair to middling on a slightly damp wicket.

Match Report: David Fairchild, Captain, Odds & Sods XI. Christopher Brazier-Cobus, Landlord, Umpire and demon off-spinner.

NB: Report may contain bias...

It started, as do so many things in life, with a chance conversation, fuelled by the fine ales and spirits proffered by our dear landlord, Chris, deep in the warm bosom of The Jolly Tanners public house.

It ended some weeks later, in an evening of high drama, played out in front of an adoring public, with the shock result leaving the peaceful village of Staplefield torn asunder.

Wednesday, 23rd June 2007 saw the inaugural cricket match between two sides hell-bent on claiming bragging rights within the pub.

The preparation of the two sides could not have been more different. The keen, well-drilled machine that is the Jolly Tanners XI had played a number of games together this season, albeit with varying success, and even had the cheek to practice in the nets before-hand.

Meanwhile, the scratch Odds & Sods XI had spent the big day preparing as only they knew how. Drinking. Heavily. Lacking the requisite kit and skills, we fell back on what we knew best. Suppressing the nerves is a kinder way of looking at it...

With our tails wagging in spite of half the team still stuck on the M25, we stumbled less than purposefully out of the Tanners to await our fate.

The Odds & Sods were kindly allowed to bat first, due to a slight shortage of players present, so we sent out our ad-hoc opening pair of Pat (one of only two with any previous regarding cricket) and the hulking Mischka (pin-up a la carte chef) to battle.

With our expectations riding on a prolific start, I'd like to say that Mischka dominated the opening bowlers. But reader, I cannot lie.

A play and miss, a devilish yorker accounting for a swollen big toe and then swiftly proceeded by a toppling of the bails was all that the big man could muster. Maybe the nerves got to him, maybe it was the consumption of 2 pints of Addlestons pre-match.

More likely his insistence on wearing sun-glasses to shield him from the glare of the hounding paparazzi and the adoration of the villages' women-folk.

This brought about the introduction of Pieter, our Kolpak player and the other member of our team who could actually play the game. Pieter played what is known in British sporting press terms "a blinder". Balls were pummelled to the boundary with an almost whimsical ease.

Pieter left the field, having reached the milestone of 25 not out, to an uproarious reception from those gathered (a number of layabouts and a few stray canines), with a cheeky peck on the cheek from his glamorous other half.

In strode Richard, my dear brother and a demon in terms of back-garden cricket. He managed a memorable four runs before being comprehensively bowled. Thoughts quickly turned to whether his exertion in the London-Brighton bike ride had put paid to him. It then occurred to us that maybe the curiously sunny weather had reflected off his bald pate and he had somehow managed to blind himself.

And so, dear reader, in I walked. Hampered as I was by a complete inability to play the game, not to mention my choice of pads which hung off my back leg like a loose flap of skin. Following a few played and missed air-shots worthy of someone with the nick-name of "Gay Dave", I somehow managed to spawn 15 of the Queens' runs before attempting a wild slog off the looped bowling of a young teenager. As the stumps splayed, off I walked.

From there on in, we witnessed the ups and downs of village cricket. Our London contingent acquitted themselves admirably, with Tim and Rob both making telling contributions with the bat. The Tanners XI however, kept their bowling tight and had it not been for the somewhat dubious attention span of Chris (now in his role as umpire but seemingly pre-occupied with counting daisies), the Tanners XI would surely have taken more wickets.

As it was, they restricted us to a thoroughly gettable target of 97-4 with two retirees.

Half time came and went as the Odds and Sods took the field. The ubiquitous captain set his field, at this time strengthened by the introduction of two young stalwarts from the gallery – Joe (11) and Isaac (8), and the captain unselfishly opened the bowling.

Robbie Greenfield played himself in and picked his spots meticulously. The score moved steadily on against some pretty accurate bowling (save for the normal tally of wides), but wickets began to fall.

Two outstanding (Pieter and Captain Insensible) catches pulled the match in the favour of the Odds and Sods and the Tanners were staring defeat in the face. Fortunately for the Tanners a couple of loose overs were all that was needed to get them back on track and the stage was set for a tight finish.

The captain, with five overs to go, turned to the legendary slow bowler – Chris Brazier – to turn the screw. First ball, and Zack who had looked comfortable, played and missed and was comprehensively stumped by the ever-alert Pat. The rest of the over passed with barely a move on the scoreboard.

Four overs left, twenty runs still needed, Nigel for the Tanners began to look dangerous and a couple of boundaries edged his side nearer their target. At this point the captain decided to switch Chris to bowl from the Tanners end and Geoff took up from the Victory end. Geoff's over passed with only a small cost in runs but Nigel was still there, ominously getting his eye in.

Two overs left, Chris came down from the Tanners end bowling off a two step run to the left hander, Nigel. A couple of non-descript balls for no cost followed by an unplayable slower-ball that turned slowly, very slowly, to bamboozle poor Nigel and the wicket was nudged and he was out.

Big Ron strode up to the crease and far from playing conservatively looked to play some shots. Unfortunately, off Chris' last ball he made good contact, ran a single and vaingloriously attempted a second, only to have his wicket dashed by crisp fielding by Isaac in the deep. Isaacs' hand may have got in the way just before it smashed him in the face....

Geoff bowled the last over with the Tanners needing eight runs. They nudged closer and finally were thwarted by tight bowling and desperate fielding by the Sods. Thus the match was won by the Odds and Sods by a slender margin of five runs.

Post-mortems followed joyously in the Tanners for hours after the event. Further fixtures were talked about and later on Phil and David brought their guitars over and a mini sing-song was enjoyed by all participants.

Bragging rights were on this occasion claimed by the Sods.

We look forward to the return match. Please keep an eye on this site for details to follow...