

REVIEW

2016

1. Devon League

The Quill is penning this as the rain falls from grey leaden skies, the match against Ivybridge having been abandoned without a ball being bowled, thus ensuring that Plymstock and Ivybridge are promoted with (unless a miracle has happened somewhere in Devon and there has been play) Bideford in 3rd place, and a very commendable third as well. There is always a fear, that when is relegated from one division, the slide continues, there are plenty of examples of that – Braunton for instance, so the first match of the season was always going to be very important, especially as it was against Tavistock who the year before had gone up to Division A with us, and then come straight back down again. Both teams were more or less what they had been the previous year, so this was always going to be a very important match. It was also unfortunately the first of 2 matches I had to miss. I was at a seminar in Bristol and rushed back to see the last hour only to find out that we had steamrollered Tavistock into submission - Paul Heard, Michael Lemmings and Fred King two each and with Josh Atkinson and Martin Stewart 1 each. One of the main talking points around the County centred on Tavistock's overseas player strained or broke something really important and had to go home, so his Devon league career lasted 21 balls. As for whether Bideford could get the runs, there seems to be no doubt. James Ford got the first of his half centuries, Tom Brend, his new opening partner 22 and Paul Heard 29*. 20 points and top of the league. Our first away trip was to Newton Abbott, the home of South Devon. The main memories of this match was Tom Brend's LBW, and the umpires dragging the players out after they had bowled out South Devon a couple of minutes before the cut off time for tea – so everyone had to drop what they were eating go onto play for an hour, and then come back for tea an hour after it was originally served, and when the football team next door were now taking their tea. Common sense? One of the worst features of this year. When they batted. Martin Stewart got 4 and Paul Heard, Josh Atkinson and Michael Lemmings two each, a total of 137 which was knocked off with ease by James Ford 51* and Paul Heard 44.

Thorverton were due next, but the rain put paid to that, so we travelled to Ottery St Mary for probably the best match of the year. Bideford won the toss and decided to bat, and at 32-5 and 80-6 it didn't seem much of a choice. James was ought early – very unusual, Tom Brend was run out by his captain. If ever a tail wag was needed, this was it, and boy, did it wag. Ji Eccles started it off with 32, then Fred King chipped in with 61. Michael lemmings 56* and Jamie Lathwell 37, with Chris Luxton making a welcome return 18. All scored

a run a ball or thereabouts. The total of 245 seemed about par. Paul Heard and Fred King got 1 wicket each, Chris Luxton and Martin Stewart 2, and at 234 for 7 needing only 12 to win, Ottery were just about there. But what inspiration. James Ford stuttering his arm, as he has done for years, teased the last three batsmen to get themselves out, result for JF 3 wickets in 9 balls for no runs, and there we were, home by 4 runs.

Next was Plymstock, who by now had overtaken us at the top of the table. Plymstock won the toss and batted. The bowlers did their stuff well, reducing them to 174 all out, Heard and King and Martin Stewart 2 each, and another with his 55, but had no support and there was our 1st defeat.

However, going to Braunton brought normality back. All the main batsmen fired this time, JF 76, TB 30, Paul H 60, Matt Shepherd 24 off 12 and Alex Hannam a lightening 31 off 13. 265 was our highest of the season, and as soon as Jamie Lathwell and Martin Stewart had got rid of the first 3 for 121 (including journeyman Neil Bettiss), Braunton were always behind and were all out for 194 – Martin Stewart and Michael Lemmings ending with 3 each.

Shoebrook Park next came to the Ho! I have witnessed quite a few matches against them, and we never seem to do all that well (apart from a couple of years ago when we won a very low scoring game by a couple of runs or so). Shoebrook won the toss elected to field and bowled Bideford out for 149, TB top scoring again with 24. Never going to be enough and the Park knocked them off with the loss of just two wickets with nearly 8 overs to spare.

Another longish journey, this time to Dartington and Totnes who were well stuck at the bottom of the table. D & T won the toss and elected to field. Again the batting stuttered, Paul H top scoring with 44, and several getting into double figures but not impressing, and the total of 163 looked alarmingly small. Their opening batsman made 22 over a long period, and their overseas player looked as if he were going to take the game away with his controlled hitting and at 113 – 3 things were beginning to look a little dodgy. However, after he was out, the last 7 wickets fell for 28 runs ML getting 6 -23 as the D & T batsmen rushed over the cliff to self-destruct. Home by 20 runs.

The last match of the first part of the season brought Ivybridge up to us. They were now in the top two in the table but surrendered as meek as lambs for 129 all out, Heard King and Lathwell getting 2 each, JF and TB put on 71,

TB was out for 31, Matt Shepherd for 12 and JF was not out 44 – home by 7 wickets.

So, on the reversal of the 1st half's fixtures, we travelled to Tavistock and watched, when possible through the fog and mist, the ponies grazing on the ground and then came home again. South Devon were next up and they surrendered meekly as well, 103 all out, Josh Atkinson getting 5-34 and everyone else chipping in. TB and JF put on 90, and after TB was out for 39, Matt Shepherd hit the necessary 12 runs off 5 balls and JF was not out again 45*

However, the tables were turned in us when we went to Thorverton. Winning the toss and electing bat we were shot out for 106, and few getting double figures. Josh A got three wickets, and Fred 1, but Thorverton were home and dry by 7 wickets. Ottery St Mary were next. Could the return fixture be as exciting as the first? Well, in a nutshell, no. The batsmen made 203, which seemed a bit low but the bowlers came up trumps but although the wickets kept falling, Ottery were always up with the rate until Alex Hannam bowled for the first time this season and his 3 -2 off 1.2 overs won the day.

We then travelled to the furthest outpost to Plymstock. We lost the toss and Plymstock batted. Things weren't going too badly, Fred, Josh A and Michael L had each got two, and then their overseas player, B. Bess came to the crease in 61 balls he creamed the bowling for 116 including 9 sixes, Alex Hannam also finished with 2 and Martin S 1. James Ford was run out for 46, Matt Shepherd, Oliver Hannam and Paul Heard each got into the 20s/40s, but in the end, the middle and tail order collapsed and we were all out for 178.

Next came Braunton at the Ho! All but relegated. I was unable to see this match but my able deputy Jeff King had things well in hand. Braunton were all out for 164, Steve Bond on debut got 3, Paul H and Josh A 2 each and Fred Jamie L and Michael L 1 each. Tom Brend being unable to play, Matt Shepherd opened with JF. Matt was out for 84 out of an opening stand of 125, Bideford were home by 8 wickets and JF was 65 not out.

Next was Shoebrook away. A very unpleasant day with wind and rain everywhere, but the match was eventually abandoned and little, actually nothing needs to be said.

Dartington and Totnes were next to the sacrificial altar. They could not field a full side and their hearts weren't in it. Bideford won the toss and D & T stumbled along, regularly losing wickets, and when Fred K came on, off his

short run, they caved in and were all out for 129. Fred got 3 and Martin and Pail 2 each. Matt opened with JF again and hit 50 off 25, JF tried to Lunch on himself, most unexpected and TB and Paul H were 30* and 24*. That just left Ivybridge away. They needed to get 8 points more than us to go up, and if we won and they got 7 or less – we would go up. So we all travelled to Ivybridge. Watched the rain fall heavier and heavier, and then all went home again.

So there we are. What a season., Third in the division, just missing out on promotion and, with such a young side compared to the other teams (JF apart of course!). The team has gelled very well and if this progress is continued with the basis of the team remaining, I confidently hope that I will be congratulating the team on its promotion, and as an afterthought, and journeying into territory that does not belong to me, what a fabulous job John W has done with the 2nds, and congratulation to all them.

The Quill