

Bideford Vs Dartington & Totnes – B Division 7th May 2022

This past Saturday marked our start of the 2022 B Division campaign. We travelled away to Dartington – who were by now a reasonably familiar foe with which we have had some good tussles with, in years gone by. Losing 2 players on the eve of the season was not ideal but could not be avoided (speedy recoveries to Tom Stone and Ben Gifford). They were replaced by James Greenleaf (on his 30th birthday) and Ian Hayter.

After an early start and a Morrison's fry up (which debutant James Roe decided to wear his playing shirt too) we set off. Arriving at the Foxhole in good time and under sunny skies it made the toss a slightly more difficult decision. Having previously discussed the intention to bowl first and put them under early pressure, the pitch and conditions swayed me towards starting the season with a bat. Thankfully one thing I didn't learn from previous skipper Hannam is how to lose a toss, I won and Bideford were batting.

James Hayter and I opened; James immediately set about punishing the bad balls. Having just hit my first boundary of the season, I left a ball which took the top of my off stump, ideal. Oliver Hannam joined Hayter at 3 and together they compiled a 100+ partnership to fire us towards 150. James as always looked completely unflustered and smashed his way to the first league ton of our B division campaign the day after his 18th birthday – what a batsman and more importantly what a bloke. The innings involved 15 fours and 1 six at a strike rate of 110 – the perfect start for the fridge. Oliver carried on his merry way past 50 – a discussion with him at drinks during his innings led to one of the poorest excuses for a free hit avoidance you'll ever hear. Having been warranted a free hit after a chest high no ball Oliver decided to respect the delivery and pat it back to the bowler. On being asked why he chose to do this Baz simply replied, 'I didn't want to break my new bat'. Jokes aside another very good knock from the student stalwart. A great example for how to manipulate the field and earn 1s and 2s.

Hayter fell shortly after his ton, picking out deep square. This brought Clayton Malgas to the crease for his debut. A confident start again running extremely well and allowing our opponents no way of generating pressure. Baz fell for 66 after hitting one back to the bowler and Clayton unfortunately top edged one to the keeper for 14. I jokingly enquired to Fordy about dropping down the order for the bigger hitters to come in (I am not able to write what he responded but it was a firm no) anyway, he went in at 5 and after a watchful start against fellow over 60s bowling he smashed his way to 61 not out off 55 balls with 7 fours and 2 sixes – my respect for this man increases week on week, top class once again. Roey came and went at 6 unluckily smacking his second ball to mid on who took a juggled catch. Julian finished off the innings with James Ford with a run-a-ball 8 not out to give us a total of 286-5 off 45 – a tremendous effort.

After the break we took to the field to defend our total. Discussions focused on how I felt Dartington probably gifted us a lot of runs through poor fielding. If we bowled our lines and lengths and fielded sharply, we would win the game. Our Bristol paceman Alex Hannam opened up with a fantastic 5 over spell gaining 2 for 11, he was unlucky not to get further reward with a few LBW's that Clayton asked to send upstairs. At the other end was Steve Bond who ran in well for 7 overs picking up 1 wicket bowling Chris Cook through bat and pad. Bond was his usually fiery self, offering the batsmen plenty of advice on their technique and telling them exactly how good he thought they were. The 2 opening seamers were replaced by James Roe and Clayton Malgas. Roey picked up his first wicket in Bideford colours bowling someone with a half tracker – one I'm sure he won't forget.

At Drinks, Dartington were 60-5 and we looked in a strong position. Clayton took over shortly after bowling 6 overs 3 for 22 with some excellent changes of pace, with one of their tail-enders at one stage remarking 'this is too good for me'. D&T's wicketkeeper offered some resistance batting his way to 39 off 26 balls – his fightback wasn't aided by some sloppy fielding and dropped catches – something I'm sure is just early season rust. Ian Hayter was the 5th bowler used and bowled his usual tidy lines and lengths and was unlucky to only have 2 wickets off his 4 overs – with a host of drops and mis-fields unfortunately all coming off him.

We wrapped up victory after 27 overs bowling D&T out for 122 giving us a massive 164 run victory. A virtually perfect start to our campaign. I don't think it's unreasonable to say we will face much stiffer tasks in the coming weeks with D&T representatives telling me post-game they think they may struggle this year. But still, this is a fixture we lost at their place last year, so certainly something to be proud of. Congratulations to Clayton and Roey for their competitive debuts with the club, and also to James Greenleaf and Ian for stepping in at short notice, a brilliant all round team performance – next week is Bovey 2nd XI at home, who also gained 20 points on the opening day. As always, I look forward to it and hope we can bag another win. Team news on Wednesday.

Cheers,

Tom