

Part 2 North Devon League

Our first outing in the DL was, this year, for the second XI. Whilst it was a sunny day, the scorebox was in complete shade., the door opened to the north allowing the howling wind whilst the Bude captain lectured me about the iniquities of playing a King in a 2nd XI match. Someone had tried to wind him up by saying we had Josh who had played for Devon, whereas we had the Fred variety (who had not played for Devon – then – but of course has appeared for the Lions, successfully, since). I thought this was a bit rich since I was doing his scorebook for him, and the wind was probably as cold as anything I have ever felt. However, the 2nds won comprehensively since. I have had the pleasure of scoring 3 or 4 2nds match this year, and apart from the disagreeable shambles at Petrockstowe (par for the course I imagine) I have enjoyed it and seen that we have some very good prospects who I look forward to seeing in the 1sts in the next couple of seasons. Marten Stanbury and John Weeks deserve lot of praise for the way they have brought on the youngsters.

The 1st XIs first match was away at Heathcoat, and frankly the weather wasn't much better. I did have a home scorer, a rarity in the North Devon League with me, but it was a cold wet and tetchy affair. Ji Eccles played what for me, was his best innings of the season with 76, his cuts and dabs in the 3rd man area being particularly destructive. Marten Stanbury, John Weeks and Jamie Lathwell all got into the 20s but no-one else progressed. 221 was a reasonable score, but with only two wickets falling to bowlers, one each to the King brothers, we were well beaten by 7 wickets.

Next came an away game to Sandford, where again things did not go well. All out on winning the toss and batting for 142 – 58 by captain Alex Hannam and 35 extras with only one other person getting double figures. Hatherleigh got the runs easily for the loss of only 2 wickets, so that after two matches we only had 4 points.

Next we were at home to Filleigh and things changed very much for the better. A score of 231 was made with 29 from Rob Hill, 55 from Paul Lathwell, 20 from Pete Stevens, 22 Jamie Lathwell and 36 from Fred King. Jamie Lathwell then took 3 -21, and James Ford 4 -5off 3.2 to gain our first win of the season by 87 runs.

Next a close affair at Hatherleigh. James Ford in his usual obdurate style started things off with 36, and Rob North, playing again after several seasons away, a splendid 83, and with Jamie Lathwell contributing 20 off 12 at the end of the season we put up a reasonable, but not spectacular total of 171. However, the bowlers did not let the batsmen get away and wickets fell consistently, Fred King, Jamie Lathwell, James Ford and Fergie Bradbeer getting one each and, Alex H 3 and Jack Ford 2, and with Jack running their last batsman out with some splendid fielding at square leg, we were home by 7 runs. A super win.

In this strange year, things got even better when we visited Instow. I was scoring on my home of course – North Devon never seem able to supply a scorer but expect the visiting scorer to work their box for them – one day I won't (but that's my little moan) and I will forget it on this occasion because, on deciding to bat we put up a half decent total of 216-7. James Ford lead the way with 73, Fred King 36 including a huge 6 off his brother who had left us by then, 21 from captain Alex. Was the bowling going to be good enough was the question. At 131-1, North Devon seemed to be cruising it, but then Martin Stewart and Jack Ford got one each, James Ford 3 and Fred King 4 including 2 off the last over, one of them the last ball with North Devon needing one to tie, and there we were winners by 1 run. I was laughing all the way to Hiscott, even better this was the day after the superb DL match against Ottery.

Disaster was however lurking around the corner, Hatherleigh came to the Ho! Smarting from their loss at their ground. John Weeks 24, Alex Hannam 36 and Ji Eccles 12 the only batsmen on double figures. Hatherleigh got them for the loss of no wickets, and there we were. Lost with no points

After that came perhaps one of the two strangest matches of the year, Heathcoat at home. Alex H won the toss and elected to bat and at 169 all out, surely, against a premier league club that was that? In our innings James Ford scored 22 and Gareth Davies 34, 5 other batsmen were in the teens. However, when the bowlers started – what a difference! Fred King opened with Chris Luxton, making a rare appearance in this League, and after their 8 overs their combined bowling was 16 overs 7 maidens 21 runs for seven wickets, CL 3-5 and FK 4-16, quite extraordinary. In the end Heathcoat were all out for 48.

Belstone then visited the Ho! They have had the better of us in most games since they were promoted, and this year was exception. A late start limited the game to 27 overs and Bideford 136 – 6, Oliver Hannam top scoring with 38, however Belstone got them with 5 wickets and three overs left. A trip to Filleigh is always difficult, this year was no exception winning the toss and batting Bideford all out for 126 in 36 overs, no-one bettering Ji Eccles 16. Belstone never looked as if they were going to lose, the only bright light being the Ford family, Jack 3-32, James 3-13.

We then went to my old stomping ground at Newton Tracey. NT won the toss and elected to field. While any team hopes to do well on their own ground, I don't think even NT could believe what happened. Ji Eccles made 18. No-one else got into double figures, there were 7 ducks, and 33 runs off the bat (10 extras). Extraordinary. No-one could believe it for the other strangest match of the year. James Ford got 1, Jack Ford got 2 and the whole game had taken just over 30 overs.

North Devon arrived at the HO! At the end of July hot for revenge for their humiliation at Instow. 2 centurions got their score to 273 – 7, Jack Ford getting 3 wickets, and Jamie Lathwell and James Ford 2 each. We had not chased down a total anywhere near that, and surely it was not possible. Well, if you thought so you had underestimated James Ford. I think he would have batted three days if necessary to win this one, but in facing for 139 minutes and 127 balls were enough for him to make 127 not out. John Weeks was run out for 27 with the score on 56, then Ji Eccles appears and smote 82 off 73 balls and Bideford were home by 8 wickets with nearly 2 overs left. Fantastic!

Next premier League Sandford at home – all out for 136 Tom Parkhouse with 4 Chris Luxton and Jamie Lathwell 2 each. Andy Webbe, playing a rare Sunday game, got us off to a good start with 46 and with Ji Eccles chipping in with 37 home by 6wickets with 19 overs left.

So there we were, the return match against Newton Tracey had to be abandoned. In this crazy league we had defeated North Devon (premier League twice) Heathcoat premier League once, Sandford and Hatherleigh, League one, once each. WE recorded 6 wins, 1 less than the champions, and yet we finished 2nd or third from bottom. Something has to be done about the points in this League to reflect what happens in the first innings, not all based on the second. As for the team all played well, all contributed from time to time younger players like Tom Parkhouse had their chances and took them and veterans like David Staddon and Fergie Bradbeer turned out when they were needed. Who could ask for more. The umpiring in this league was much better than the Devon League

If the team plays like it did this year, next year, then unless the points are radically altered, more consideration will have to be given when we win the toss on whether, if we were to lose, whether we would get more points bowling or batting in the second innings, it is a league that seems to benefit those who lose narrowly than those who play full hearted cricket. But what I know.

The only thing left is the play off with Brixham next Saturday & The Quill will return!