

3rd XI Captain's Report 2015

In the Fixture Booklet at the start of the season, our Cricket Manager stated that "...if they (the 3rd XI) are able to pull everything together for a series of games, then promotion should be on the cards" – well, things didn't quite turn out that way, but looking back now, there were a number of good things that I can reflect on from my third season as skipper.

In the end, the 3rd XI finished 6th in Division 10a, with a record of 9 wins (including 1 concession by our opponents), 2 draws and 6 defeats with 1 game abandoned half-way through due to the weather. Overall, I would say that this represents progress within the new league format, in what was a tougher division than in 2014, with in particular 3 stand-out teams that finished head & shoulders above the rest (and against whom we suffered 5 of our 6 defeats).

The main issue for the 3rds was once again the number of players that we had to use – a ridiculous total of **46** over the course of our 18 games – at least 10 more than any other team in the club had to. In addressing this issue, let me first say that I completely understand and accept that the 2nds & 1sts should take precedence over the 3rds in terms of players – but I would also argue that there should be more of a view of the value of the 3rd XI to the club and of those that play in it – rather than seeing it just as a pool for the higher teams to use to take players from when they are short. If we want the 3rds to be a place where players can hone their skills and be ready to move up to higher teams and fit straight in and not look out of place (Will Bryant being the most obvious recent example) then the club needs to help the 3rds put out as strong a team as possible each week and start to close the widening gap between us and the 2nds.

Back to the actual cricket though – there were a number of highlights over the season that those involved in should look back on with pride:

- The unexpected win at Hitchin in the first game of the season – where we kept our heads in the field (and were buoyed by a direct hit run-out from Gulam!) to pick up a tight victory after the home side's key batsman threw away his wicket
- the century stand between Dave Harrigan and Harry Hardcastle at Flamstead when we were in trouble but those two gave us a total we could defend
- our run of 4 wins from our last 5 games which saw us eventually fall just 1 point short of a top-half finish – including excellent wins away at Rickmansworth, where we overcame an outfield disguised as a ploughed field to win thanks to an unbroken stand of 106 between Mike Reeve & Robert Kennedy and our final day win at home to Hatfield & Crusaders where we recovered from a (very) poor batting performance as we were bowled out for 97, to come out all guns blazing and roll them over for 58 in our best bowling & fielding performance of the season.

Individually there were 9 fifties, shared by 7 batsmen, with Charles Hardcastle & Martin Tyler hitting 2 apiece and amongst the bowlers, Nigel Tyler finished as the leading wicket-taker with 26, whilst mention must go to Rich Lake for his 3 successive 4-wicket hauls in August!

Regrets: I've got a few – especially losing early games against the eventual top two teams - Mill Hill & West Herts - when we played half a good game each time, but then crumbled to comfortable defeats; as well as later in the season when we lost again to the same opponents thanks to poor batting performances that made the games easy for them. Also our game away at Hatfield & Crusaders where we bowled well for half of their innings to leave them struggling, but then bowled 25 overs of rubbish to allow them to recover from 60-5 to 211-7.

So – to summarise – whilst the weeks in between games were often nightmarish, I did enjoy the on-field side of my role this year & I hope that everybody who played for the thirds enjoyed their experience too (which seems to be the case from the feedback I have received so far) – as always, in looking to next season, I know that we can do better and push for promotion – the key will always be having the regular team to do so.

Thanks are due to Nigel Tyler & Mike Reeve for both standing in as captain when I was unable to do so (and not losing a game between them!), to Roy Rosenthal and Rob Moore for umpiring; to our scorers when we were lucky enough to have them, and to Jean and Lesley (and John Chadwick on one occasion!) for our marvellous teas - but mostly thanks are due to all the players who did play for the 3rd XI in 2015 – I did appreciate it all.

Rob Dunstone
September 2015.