**Edinburgh E = MCC versus DCSCC**

The fixture sounds more like some esoteric Celtic ritual than what it was supposed to be – a cricket contest. And as can be seen in the photos below, an esoteric ritual it certainly was at first: various members standing around watching the rain, dressed in strange garb, bearing assorted weapons, with the tribal banner bearing the cryptic message: 00 0 00 00.

It started out so differently – bright, cheerful, the team in high spirits as we drove north in sunshine to take the battle across the border to the might of Caledonia (well, a multicultural group of academics). An armada of various vessels (actually four cars) set forth from separate origins to converge on the capital of Scotland …but the closer we got to our destination, the lower and darker grew the skies and the gloomier became the outlook. A brief shower. Then another. The general consensus was that the weather was not too bad, so better get started since late afternoon the forecast was even worse.

So we all donned our whites and set out across a myriad of artificial playing surfaces to arrive eventually at the distant cricket ground, that now looked more like well-watered pasture, more fit for a herd of cows than a huddle of cricketers. And huddle we did, in the odd Perspex dugouts that lined the boundary (a revealing feature for a cricket pitch: clearly, the Scots were accustomed to coping with bad weather in the summer game.)

A brief conference agreed to a shortened game. The opinion was that we should see ‘how it goes’ between intermittent showers. Guy and guest batsman Ryan Patrick started us off on the artificial wicket - which was declared to be too wet at the northern end of the strip, so batting was to take strike only from the south! The very first ball splashed through at ankle height, fortunately just missing Guy’s stumps, and signalled the way things were going to be. Nonetheless our two openers responded to the conditions with resigned vigour, clouting the ball across the wet turf at every opportunity. Until rain stopped play after four overs.

Twenty for nought off four overs. Hmm. Not so bad – if things improved, we might make a game of it yet. The players waited for the weather to clear and then trooped back to resume the contest. Only for more rain and yet another delay.

A second brief dalliance in the dugout, more moaning and groaning and peering at the clouds scudding by and then – wait a minute - it really did look like the skies were brightening. The game resumed. Guy and Ryan took up the fight again, whilst Edinburgh rotated their bowlers after every over. Hitting the boundary across a sodden outfield was almost impossible so our men opted to run threes instead, until Ryan carved a mighty six off one looping delivery. He retired shortly afterwards on 31, with Matty Grieves, the second of our guest players, replacing him. Matty continued the Durham onslaught, scoring a four, just to prove it was actually possible, before missing one wet bounce and losing his leg stump. Kris came next as, with every over, the bowling kept changing. Kris and Guy proceeded to smack the ball to all parts and run twos that should have been fours until, overreaching for another high looper, Kris top-edged a catch to the ‘keeper.

Next it was Vinay’s turn: more of the same battering of the ball, only to find it was singles and twos that had to be run on pastures that refused to yield. This eventually proved Vinay’s undoing – he had scored 28 in one and twos and was run out trying to get back for another two. Guy meanwhile batted on, accumulating runs until retiring on 30. Sure and steady does it, as he proved yet again.

Aidan replaced Guy and, after Vinay’s over-optimistic and failing run, Pat came on next. After quick singles, Pat opted for a big six, as is his way, only for the ball to drop just short of the boundary and grovel over the line. Four. Aiden scored one and then missed another which did not miss his wicket. Captain Chris came on to face the last two balls of the innings, scoring one, not out. Durham had totalled 128 for three, off 20 overs - an excellent result given the conditions.

Now it was the time for the opposition to reply, the weather at last steadily improving. Not exactly beaming sunshine, but it had stopped raining and was beginning to dry out a little. Your chairman and Ian B took up the bowling; Edinburgh’s openers meanwhile determined to prove that they could match Durham’s demanding run-rate. This they attempted until yours truly hit the stumps of one of them and Ian promptly did for the other opener, and the number 3 who followed him.

Edinburgh’s innings never really got going, what with a succession of tight bowling, a slow, wet and overgrown outfield and Pat the wicketkeeper plunging around behind the timbers like an over-excited porpoise. Pat’s determination to throw himself horizontal at every opportunity was truly impressive, matched only by Matty at cover who occasionally was also tempted to dive into the swamp to stop runs accumulating. Matty did more than just cover himself with mud in the field, however. His bowling hit wickets twice in his first over and then a third wicket in his second. Super impressive.

In between Matty’s overs, Nigel sent down his customary bamboozlers, clattering the stumps of one unfortunate, and his success was followed by Aidan whose deliveries were similarly difficult to get away. In Aidan’s second over, the batsman, frustrated at getting only the occasional single so far, struck the last ball of the over with gusto, only for Ryan to catapult himself sideways, fling out an arm and catch the red missile just above the ground, one-handed. Spectacular! Awesome! Nothing like this had ever been seen before in DCSCC’s history.

And so Edinburgh’s batting line-up, and their run-rate, was humbled. Eight wickets down and the last two batsmen elected to block out the rest of the game. Dot ball followed dot ball as Ryan, Kris, Chris, Nigel and finally your chairman (again) bowled out the remains of the match. The last nine overs went for 10 runs and Edinburgh finished with only 42 for 8, a resounding defeat.

After the game, the two teams gathered in a reserved room at the Southern Pub – many thanks to our hosts for arranging this. It was a harmonious way to end the day – despite the appallingly s l o w service – and then it was the long drive back to Durham, with thoughts in our minds of the next tour to Sheffield - and hopefully continuing success.