**Knights versus DCSCC**, at Belmont 10 Aug 2023

Knights are a friendly, talkative, competitive team with a strong batting line-up. Belmont, however, is not such a friendly and welcoming wicket: more like a well-vegetated garden with a brown strip of mud in the middle. Three weeks of rain had obviously done the wicket no favours but DCSCC were confident, coming off the back of nine straight wins, albeit strung over a frustratingly long period of cancelled fixtures.

Knights won the toss and opted to bat. DCSCC captain Chris Cowie – back after illness - opted to change bowlers after every two overs thus giving as many Durham men as possible a chance to contribute. Hilal and your chairman correspondent were first up but found it was not going to be so easy. Knights’ openers set about flinging the bat at every opportunity, at least until Hilal removed one of the opener’s stumps. Boundaries thereafter came occasionally, the long grass in the outfield and Phil Nathan’s deliveries being a barrier to ground shots, but taking the aerial route off Nigel’s bowling proved more dangerous. Knights no. 3 Monaghan literally played into the hands of Kris, one of our most athletic fielders. The remaining opener T Davidson eventually retired on a maximum, but then came the time for Phil Hancock to take the cherry and turn his hand over. He alleged he had been injured and been unable to bowl for several weeks, but this was clearly a ploy to bemuse the unfortunate opposition. Phil loped forward much as a big cat approaching its prey and lithe, menacing and deadly, he struck twice in his first over: off stump first, then middle stump next. Next over he hit the off stump again. Thanks, Phil: three batsmen dispatched with only one run between them, all wondering what had hit them. Knights’ run rate had suddenly slowed remarkably. Meanwhile, Guy at the other end had also kept up the pressure and batsman number 7 was removed LBW.

The opposition’s long batting line-up were not to be dismissed too easily, however. Kris, Pat, captain Chris and your chairman again battled on to try and contain their stroke play and Knights eventually finished on 97 for 8 off 20 overs, the last wicket falling to one of Chris’s rockets. On a low-scoring pitch this was, however, a respectable score and one that would be a challenge for DCSCC to overcome.

Guy and Hilal stepped up to the crease and challenging it turned out to be. It took time and numerous deliveries to get used to the pancake-like wicket and the overgrown outfield. At one end in particular, the ball would not bounce and left-arm sort-of-spinner N Worthy capitalised on that. Hilal was deceived by one that scuttled through like a frightened rabbit, gnawing at his leg stump as it passed. This brought John McNeill, guest player from the green isle, to take up the strike. And strike he did – like Tarzan swinging his club in the jungle, he wasted no time setting about his task. A two, a six, one more and then he too was dismissed lbw by another low scuttler. Enter the firing range Pat Card: the time had come to give the scorers some work. Guy and Pat together battled against the long grass and now decidedly (very) slow bowlers. It proved difficult to get the ball away, especially since Knights had placed most of their fielders on the boundary in the dastardly plan to restrict the runs to a single, or at most two, off looping donkey-drops. No chance of a monster six this time fired onto the house and garden shed overlooking the ground (see last Belmont report!) but plenty of hitting and running took place and eventually Pat and Guy both retired on 30 and 31 respectively.

It had, however, taken some time to get the score within striking distance of the opposition and, with three overs to go, DCSCC were required to score almost a run every ball. Replacing the retirees, Kris showed the right temperament - blasting a four soon after he arrived at the crease, but alas he kicked yet another low one onto his stumps, leaving Eckart and Phil Nathan facing the last two overs against a couple of the better bowlers charged with bringing Knights home in victory. A single, a dot ball, another single, another dot and then it was the last over with still eight runs short. A dot. Eckart grabbed a single. Another dot. Blast! But by then Phil Nathan, with three balls to go, had got his eye in. The bowling was brisk but this meant the ball came onto the bat and it needed only a master batsman to deliver the coup de grace. This Phil duly did: Bang! Four. Bang! Another four and victory was ours. DCSS had gained 100 runs, for 3 wickets, with only one ball left to spare. A famous result.

Congratulations to all concerned, and to Knights for giving us such a close, competitive but very amicable contest.