**Mallards vs DCSCC, 29 Aug 23**

It was a bright, clear, warm afternoon at Riding Mill. The team assembled on time and the toss was taken just after 5.30pm. It was agreed to play a shortened game – only 16 overs – and we were to bat first. And so began the last game of our season against a well-known opposition that DCSCC had every expectation of overcoming. We had faced, and beaten, them many times before.

In order to even up the contest, DCSCC decided to reverse the usual batting and bowling orders, so your correspondent – a classy, experienced batsman but who had yet to face a ball in anger all season – went out to take strike, accompanied by his lesser partner Vinay. The first ball the Mallards’ opening bowler sent down was a virtual rocket…but it was swept away elegantly for a single by yours truly. This brought the youthful Vinay – still learning his craft (and not sure which way up to hold a cricket bat) - to face the next, somewhat less threatening delivery. Rather luckily, he hoofed it away for a boundary. In the next over, your chairman gallantly scored another single in order to give his partner a second chance and, as it turned out, Vinay’s luck continued. Closing his eyes, crossing his fingers and hoping for the best, Vinay took a mighty swipe and, would you believe it, the ball went for a six!

And so the opening partnership continued, a couple of dots, a single and Vinay hit the boundary again. And again. Clearly your chairman’s mentoring of this newcomer to the team was successful, so he decided to give that other novice – one Guy Paxman – an opportunity as well. Your correspondent gave an easy catch to the opposition and walked off, content to leave his younger colleagues the occasion to show what they’d learnt from the master.

The Mallards bowling was subsequently plundered by both Durham batsmen – Vinay retiring first on 30 – thus allowing that other veteran supremo, Nigel, to come in and help tutor Guy in the art of wielding the willow. Having seen how Guy had flowered with his help, Nigel was now perfectly willing to offer up a chance of stumping to bring on the next novice, Rory, but somewhat surprisingly the Mallards ‘keeper fumbled the opportunity. Rory had to wait a little longer until Nigel could serve up a dolly catch.

Rory and Guy were now given the time together to try and impress their seniors. Nigel and your chairman are very proud to report that both new boys had learnt their batsmanship well - each retiring on 31 after a succession of twos, fours and sixes.

There was a brief interlude in this joint performance for guest batsman Amitabh to dazzle the selectors. He unselfishly decided to give other team members their time at the crease by striking his first ball straight into the arms of the fielder at mid-on.

With only 16 overs to be played, there was indeed little time for anyone else to bat. Eckard faced one ball and scored a single. Only one ball was left to play by the time Rory retired and this brought Pat Card to face. He hoisted up a catch to give the Mallards some sense of achieving something – only for this chance to be dropped, flung back at the stumps, miss and shoot away for two overthrows. (Even when served up a present on a plate the opposition fluffed it!) Pat finished not out on three; Eckart on one and DCSCC 116 for three.

Ian and Pat were the chosen bowlers to test the best that Mallards could put up against us. Ian’s first over went for one run and Pat bowled the opener four balls later. An ignominious start. The incoming batsman fared little better, playing on to his stumps in Ian’s second over. Two down and only five runs scored so far. The Mallards number 2 and their best batsman had not yet faced a ball and must have been feeling frustrated. His chance came a little later when Aidan took over from Ian. He hit a number of singles, then Aiden put one on his toes that was pulled for a boundary and, attempting to do the same to the next delivery, Aidan clean-bowled him.

From there on, incoming batsmen found it more and more difficult to score. Mallards’ captain strutted out and attempted to score boundaries, successful on two occasions, and then he struck one straight into the waiting hands of Amitabh at mid-on, our guest team-member thus effectively gaining revenge for what he had himself suffered.

Your star veterans, Nigel and your chairman, finally came on to bowl – each claiming a wicket – before Pat came back to bowl the seventh man out with the final ball of the match. Mallards had scored 66 for 7, which included five boundaries in total, in reply to DCSCC’s 116 for 3 with 8 fours and three sixes (one apiece for Vinay, Guy and Rory). A comprehensive victory for Durham.

A relaxing evening, with much celebration and accompanying badinage, was concluded in the Duke of Wellington thereafter. The end of the season had sadly arrived with too many games lost to the weather, albeit with winter nets and the annual dinner (remember to sign up for it!) awaiting us.