**Sheffield Staff vs DCSCC**

After a wet Edinburgh, all eyes and iPhones were turned to the weather forecast in the days before the trip to Sheffield. Would we suffer rain again?

Yes! The trip to Sheffield Uni’s playing fields saw miserable drizzle blowing across our various motors that slowly converged together from various origins. The traffic south on the M1 was particularly depressing through a stop-start progression of various roadworks, but one of our team came from a totally different direction – still rained upon, but returning to the fold from Liverpool, came recently departed but much missed opening bowler Stevie Boothroyd. Would the rain disperse before our merry band of brothers could come together to play?

Well no. But after a delay, and the decision to reduce the game to 30, instead of 35 overs, the skies cleared and we decided to go ahead. The wicket was flat, hard, if a little soggy. The outfield was wet and, whilst not quite so bushy as Edinburgh, it was certainly verdant and most likely resistant to the passing of ground shots. Sheffield clearly knew what the odds were like – they put DCSCC in to bat, reckoning we would find it difficult to reach the boundary whilst giving time to dry out further before they came to take their innings.

Guy opened the batting and Captain Chris took the long-delayed opportunity to partner him at the crease. Hooray! Sheffield’s opening bowler was, however, eye-blinkingly quick – Guy played it safe and the first over went for a maiden. Bowling from the other end was someone not quite so fast, allowing Chris to get off the mark with a single. Guy blocked the first from this man quite easily but in going for the next he edged a rising delivery to be well caught at slip. Guy tramped off, unusually for a zero, to be replaced by Rory.

The partnership of Guy and Rory now blossomed, though even muscular cover drives could not reach the boundary through the herbaceous borders. The score had to advance with singles and twos and much running. After showing he had lost none of his batting prowess after a long absence from the greensward, Chris then served up a dolly to be caught at cover. Shame! Vinay took his place only for Rory, shortly after striking the first four of the match, to go for another on a slow full toss that he missed completely. Ouch! Time for the long walk, and for Pat to replace him. Another partnership now developed – which might have yielded more runs if Vinay did not stop to admire his aerial shot to the distant line… which didn’t get there. And then he did it again. Eventually, after much lofted attempt, Vinay did hit a couple of fours before getting caught going for yet another. Pat, meanwhile, opted for a series of dot balls and singles before getting his eye in and smacking two boundaries. Stevie B partnered him for a while until Pat was bowled going for another big hit.

Sheffield by this time had brought on their secret weapon: the lady Helen, a specialist in slow, orbiting, donkey drops. The sort of bowling that batsmen have to wait for an age to arrive before dying of boredom. She did for Kris first – driven loopy by looping deliveries – and then Steve. Ian B came in and scored a quick single and then a four and then made a quick exit, being caught out swinging the willow again. Three overs to go and DCSCC had just reached 103, admittedly on a very low scoring wicket. Mike Costello and Nigel were now at the crease and it was heart-stopping stop, start, stop running between the stumps to try and get the score moving again. Alas, they managed only two more runs and a suicidal last dash by Nigel to be run out on the last ball for a total of 105 for nine. Your chairman was all padded up but had nowhere to go at the end, except to wait for the next innings.

The welcome (sadly temporary) return of Steve B from Scouse-land saw him open the bowling with a maiden. Hooray! Your chairman correspondent took the next over, conceded a single and then Chris took a catch at cover from the opener who had not managed to score from his first seven dots. Such are the results of tight bowling and mounting pressure. And so we kept them screwed down under the cosh for the first eight overs: no more wickets but conceding only 15 runs – a great beginning. Batsman no. 3, a left hander, was starting to get a bit steamed up – he edged behind and was lucky to survive, but you could see he was desperate to score. Ian and Nigel were the next into the attack but both batsmen by now had begun to get the measure of the slow wicket and started to lash out. The left-hander found that the outfield was not so resistant to ground shots by this time – lucky man – so he gained a succession of fours. You might have thought this would have released the pressure somewhat but oh no – he exploded when Nigel shouted (unsuccessfully) for the second of two LBWs: a dusky face turning purple with a two-year old’s tantrum! Shortly after that he was caught, hoisting Ian up in the air to Rory, but ‘keeper Pat remarked he was sorry to see the apoplectic lefty leave the field: it was such an entertainment seeing him fizz and pop at the crease.

Nigel’s foxtrot variations of slow, slow, quick, quick, slow brought such a session of chances in the field – all regretfully dropped – as Sheffield accumulated runs. It took a diving catch from yours truly to break the mould - clearly time for the old timers to show how it was done! In all, there were seven dropped catches – albeit some were extremely difficult – but in the end we were to rue that fact that more batsmen should have taken less time at the crease.

The final pairing of DCSCC’s bowling attack was the much-missed combination of skipper Chris and Rory. This took Sheffield batsmen a little off guard, not having had to face meteors from both ends before. They fenced off missiles manfully, ran crazily, Ian caught one off Rory, paying off his debt earlier, but two other batsmen were run out. The opposition’s captain, Hadley, was no rabbit, however. Despite coming on at no. 7 he resisted all assault and, in between dots, clipped a boundary and the odd one and two. He might have got more if he hadn’t whiskered one of Rory’s howitzers to be caught magnificently by Pat, some 200 yards (or so it looked) behind. No pouncing porpoise could have done better!

It was a closely fought encounter - with three overs to go, Sheffield were on 96, actually behind DCSCC’s run rate. Guy came on as Chris completed four overs but with tailenders now facing, and Rory still flinging them down from the other end, we were in with a chance.

Guy had batsman 8 caught (by Rory, who else?) but then, much to our amazement, one of the last men scored a four back over Rory’s head: a classy stroke that drew gasps of admiration from all around, since it took off with all the velocity that it came down with: a scoring shot that would eventually bring Sheffield victory.

Only two was needed off Guy’s last over, but this was not achieved without one last comic turn. Having lifted one ball over mid-wicket, the batsman responsible took what should have been two easy runs – only to be punished for taking one short! Scores were even! In the penultimate ball of the innings, however, the shortfall was made good and Sheffield finished at the end with 106 for eight.

A close, competitive match was completed with a very friendly and affable opposition (with one laughable exception!) and it was a pleasure to have played against them. We look forward to the next time we meet.