**DCSCC vs Durham Farmers, 4 June 2024**

Durham Farmers are a competitive, well-drilled side that, in the past, DCSCC staff have had difficulty overcoming. We nonetheless beat them last year when, in a close contest with four runs needed in the last ball of the game, Vinay scored a mighty six and thus entered the annals of cricketing history at Maiden Castle.

How would things go this year?

Captain Guy lost the toss and the Farmers elected to bat. Your chairman correspondent opened the bowling with a maiden, the Farmers evidently beginning with caution. Hilal opened the other end, suffering a loss of eight runs in his first over but more than making up for this in a tight second. And thus began the most amazing and entertaining period in the fielding exploits of Durham Staff. If last year’s batting performance against the Farmers drew at least one moment of incredulity, this season the poise and pounce of one Phill Hancock, not to mention the startling reactions of certain others in the field at other times, drew gasps of admiration, nay disbelief, from all onlookers. Hilal’s second over found a bit of bounce in the wicket, the batsman edged it, and the ball looped up into the waiting hands of slip-fielder Phil. The first of an unbelievable series of exploits.

Despite the loss of this first wicket, Farmers knuckled down to it and started scoring regularly. In this they were helped by an entertaining first over from Sean, taking over the bowling from your correspondent. Sean’s first delivery was a slow, short, three-bouncing no-ball; his second was an orbiting asteroid that was launched into the stratosphere; subsequent deliveries were equally unpredictable and there is insufficient space in the records to tell exactly how many balls were bowled in Sean’s first appearance at the crease. A collection of black smudges that block out the scorebook is all that can be deciphered. Sean’s perseverance, however, allowed him (eventually!) to find his length and, no doubt startled in surprise, Farmer’s No. 3 batsman edged it into a stretching hand of slip-fielder Phil. Pause for delight and applause! Phil, who readily admits to a healthy appetite and fondness for the amber fluid, was establishing a reputation for plunging about in the field.

Now it was time for Ian B to enter the attack. A tight first over was accompanied by more spectacular fielding when the opposing batsman smacked the ball in return… which skidded off Ian’s out-stretched ankle to dislodge the stumps of the non-facing batsman, who was run-out! More remarkable, applause-winning athleticism.

The game progressed. Sean’s entertaining bowling was replaced by a much steadier Joanne, Ian meanwhile soldiered on, drew yet another edge and this time the ball flew faster past wicket-keeper Eckart. But not too fast for Phill! He leapt like a salmon and caught the ball with two hands at full stretch. Unbelievable! Three slip catches so far and still he was not finished.

As wickets fell, Farmers all the time were accumulating runs. Ian claimed another wicket, bowled in his last over, before he was replaced by Aiden. Some slow, looping deliveries and some big hitting, however, could not prevent yet another mis-timed shot and, once more, it was Phill to snaffle his fourth catch behind the stumps. Was there no stopping him?

The penultimate over saw the return of your chairman to the attack. Swinging the bat and going for it, Farmers edged yet three more chances to slip – this time all flying lower, faster and wider than our resolute fielder – and then it was Hilal to finish the innings in the field - Farmers meanwhile determined to amass as many runs as they could before the end. They finished on a respectable 122 for 6 in 20 overs.

Time for DCSCC to begin their reply. To be sure, with such a disciplined and competitive opposition in the field, there was never going to be such entertainment on offer for the second half of this match. Vinay and Phill strode out to face the onslaught and Farmers did not disappoint: the bowling was fast, accurate and offered no loose deliveries to plunder. Sharp bounce undid Phill after a couple of overs – he retired caught behind on two. Rory came in next and heaved a couple of magnificent boundaries before he was stranded indecisively between the stumps to be run out on 10. Vinay was caught out shortly after, scoring 8, and that left Guy and Raj to accumulate as many runs as possible in their remaining partnership. Dots, ones and twos were all that were on offer for most of the rest that followed. Boundaries were now rare. Raj managed two before being caught out in the sixteenth over on 22. Hilal replaced Raj and we battled on but Farmers were still giving nothing away and we finished on 88 for 5 – Hilal nobly running himself out on the last ball for 5 runs. (The scorebook is incomplete for Guy but he made some 30+ runs!)

So this year DCSCC were not so lucky with the bat, achieving a below par score, despite an enjoyable outing where we won many accolades, hearts and minds, if not the actual match itself!