**DCSCC vs Knights at Durham School, 19 July 2024**

The weather was 25 degrees with not a breath of wind; Durham School’s ground was immaculate - the wicket was firm and the outfield fast; Knights, after many cancellations due to bad weather, had agreed to meet us at this ideal location, and so it happened that DCSCC won the toss and decided to bat first.

Sid was first to face: Tom Power, a tall athletic bowler who ran in fast and extracted a fierce bounce. Sid let the ball fly past a couple of times then clipped a beautiful boundary to leg, followed by a cut for two. A good start against an intimidating bowler.

From the other end, Vinay similarly let a couple of balls go by before edging two and then going for his trademark hoist over the bowler’s head. It dropped just short of the boundary for two.

Third over, Power steamed in and let fly a succession of tracer bullets, the last one lifting Sid’s bails. He had to walk on 6. Fourth over, Vinay started by sweeping a four, then resorted to hoisting a straight drive to fielders who stood well back, gaining only a single. Rory, replacing Sid, swept another single on the last ball, thus keeping the strike. Not that this helped much since the first ball of the next over, Power hit Rory’s middle stump. Shame, but it was a good, fast delivery to a batsman who had not had time yet to get his eye in. Ashish came in next but repulsed all remaining bullets. Power’s stint was finished.

Vinay continued with a variety of shots meanwhile, pulling sweeps to the legside boundary and hitting aerial drives for singles, until his personal score reached 31 and he had to retire. Guy came in to take his place.

Knights now rotated their bowlers every two overs but Guy and Ashish were undeterred, running breathlessly for singles, twos and (gasp) threes. Knights eventually brought on Keerthi, a Durham man last seen playing with us in the nets. (Well if you can’t get in the DCSCC team overloaded with players, then join the opposition!) Keerthi started with a superb off-break, claiming Ashish’s wicket, who left the field after having clubbed an impressive 24. Raj was next in, hitting a boundary before going for a sympathy vote with alleged cramp and asking for a runner (thanks Eckart for volunteering!). This was just a ruse to delay Keerthi’s bowling – to no avail since Raj was promptly given out LBW.

Coming in next to partner Guy was Pat, who lost little time to gain a couple of singles before pulling fours and then a 6 into the wooded boundary. Blame Pat for losing the opposition’s ball in the greenery! Pat hit a rapid-fire 28 before being run out in the last over and that left Eckart to come in and Guy to call him for a suicide run on the last ball for a respectable Durham total of 121 for six; Guy finishing on 20 and Eckart on zero.

Your chairman correspondent opened the bowling for Durham, keeping it tight and conceding only a single in the first over. Max followed suit in the second over, losing a single on his first ball but then getting some bounce and a catch for Rory at gully. A good start. Next over, even better: your chairman bowled a wicket maiden, the batsman playing on to his stumps, and Kings were now two down for only two runs. After six overs, yours truly conceding five and Max 12, then Ashish and Nigel came up to bowl next. Like chalk and cheese, Ashish commenced firing down rockets, while Nigel at the other end sent up slow loopers. Either way, Knights batsmen found it difficult to advance the score: Ashish they could barely touch; Nigel conceded a boundary and occasional singles but he hit the stumps with a bomb in his third and last over.

Knights were well behind the required run rate when Joanne and Rory were now the pair to come into the attack. Joanne served up a couple of dots, conceded a single and then gained a catch to remove the next Knight. Hooray! Her second over was a little more costly, however - Gimple, a portly left-hander, heaved a two and then a six to long on - but Joanne persevered and in her third and final over she hit the stumps of Al Clarke, one-time DCSCC captain and opening bat. An old friend, he’d only gathered a clutch of singles so won’t be pleased at going so cheaply!

Meanwhile at the other end, and in his last appearance before departing for some distant, Atlantic-tossed archipelago, Rory was firing down bamboozling leg-breaks. Knights’ batsmen couldn’t hit them and on several occasions they also, untypically, eluded Eckart behind the stumps. Clearly these were deliveries that were unplayable. An occasional single was all that was possible.

Sid came on for the penultimate over, sending down stinging and equally unplayable off-breaks. And then it was Rory’s final over and the last of the match, conceding a single and only 8 runs in his four overs in total. Knights had reached 77, woefully short of a competitive score, but an enjoyable victory for a Durham side about to lose its much-loved master blaster. Good luck in the Scillies, Rory, and make sure you keep in touch with the best cricket club in the North East!