**Knights vs DCSCC, Belmont, 25 July 2024**

For this return fixture with Knights, a week after our relatively easy victory, DCSCC opted for a change in the line-up. The decision was to give some of those who didn’t bat last time a promotion in the order - with such a wealth of players, we could give more people more action at the crease, take a few risks and still come out on top. That was the idea, anyway.

And so Ashish opened the batting for us. A dot, a quick single and Kris Cartledge faced the rest of the first over – he who knows the Belmont wicket well enough and usually peppers the leg-side boundary with fours and sixes. Except this time. A couple of dots and – oops – he gets caught in the gully. The first duck of the day.

Srikant came in next, but it is Ashish who is facing the second over. Bang! Four. Bang! Another four. The north end of the pitch at Belmont slopes away down to a hedge and Ashish is threatening to lose the ball down there. Keep up the good work, Ashish! Srikant takes a little time to get going but he joins in the attack until, in the eighth over, after scoring ten, he retires hurt. Ashish, meanwhile, is on 29.

Your chairman correspondent – who has yet to face a ball all season - now comes in to replace Srikant and show all these younger fellows what it takes to really wield the willow to maximum effect. Except the new bowler Pennels throws it down all over the place: the first a no-ball well over head height; the next one just out of reach down off; the third similar. Oh dear. Stretching to reach the fourth delivery, yet again outside off, yours truly flails a mighty bat …and just snicks it through to the keeper. Second duck of the day! Your chairman troops off, mightily disappointed, and Phil Hancock – he of the master blaster league of batsmen – now troops in. Phil faces the fifth ball of this new bowler (who allegedly has only just come back to play after being injured for most of the season) and gets bowled by the one delivery that is at last on line. Bad luck! And the third duck of the day.

Ashish finally gets to face the next over and, of course, hits the boundary to retire on 33. Vinay and Pat are now our new pair who promptly take up the slogging, taking it in turns to run singles and smack fours. Vinay gets bowled and leaves on 10, to be replaced by Ian. Ian prods a single and then, after a succession of dots, takes a big sweep and gets caught at leg slip. He leaves the crease on 1, in exchange for Eckart.

Knights’ bowling by this time is of the slow, looping quality that is difficult to get away on a wicket of variable quality, but Pat wastes no time, scoring more fours and finally pulling a trademark six over the hedge to retire on 32. This makes room for Theo to come in next. Eckart and Theo take it in turns to exchange dots and singles until Theo reaches for a wide... and just manages to toe-end it to gully. A second man departs on 1. Nigel replaces him in the eighteenth over.

One over down, singles are exchanged and then Nigel gets bowled, becoming the third man to leave on 1 and that means Ashish is recalled. Knights’ fielders are now dispersed to all parts and, despite Eckart and Ashish’s best efforts, the final over of the Durham innings yields only two more singles. DCSCC finish on 100 for 7, with Eckart not out on 4; Ashish not out on 34.

(With six batsmen scoring only three runs between them, you might say that this was not the most impressive performance that DCSCC have produced this season!)

Theo opened the bowling, conceding only a single in his first over. Your correspondent opened the other end with a wicket maiden as the facing batsman top-edged a rising ball way up into the air for Kris to catch at long-on. Well done, Kris: reliable hands!

Knights were 1 for 1 in two overs: a brilliant start…although this did not exactly foretell what would come to pass. Theo conceded a boundary and two singles in his next over and your chairman was then hit for a six and a four shortly after. Ouch! These batsmen had quickly settled to their task. Theo tightened his end with a maiden, next over, but yours truly conceded two more fours before figuring out how to reduce the lively attack to dots.

The battery resumed, however, as Ian and Phil took over the bowling against batsmen that were now hitting the boundary regularly…and then in Ian’s second over he hit the stumps twice, followed by Phil in the next over removing the bails also. An excellent reply.

Knights were still not finished, however, determined to take the fight to DCSCC at every opportunity. The run rate slowed a little by the thirteenth over when Nigel - the magic - Metcalfe, came in with his tantalising donkey-drops, but Kris’s pace was more hittable such that at the end of the fourteenth over Knights had reached 94. Only six runs needed to win!

Parsimonious Nigel gave them only two. Fifteen overs down, Knights on 96.

Kris conceded a single, then a wide, and then the last of the big-hitters Kris got caught and bowled. Hooray! Dot followed dot. Could Durham achieve a miracle, with only tailenders left?

Actually, no! The tailender who was next at the crease managed to top-edge the last of Kris’s rockets - which promptly flew up into the air and over the leg-side boundary. Knights had scored 103 for 5 on the last ball of the 16th over. Durham were beaten. Well and truly!

But it was an enjoyable contest against a really friendly opposition, with revamped sides for both teams, with lots of laughs both on and off the pitch and in the pub afterwards and it is now honours even after two games. We look forward to meeting again for the deciding fixture, wherever it might be!