**Darlington Economic Campus (DEC) vs DCSCC at Cliffe Cricket Club, 28 Aug 2024**

What a fascinating cricket ground! We had to open a farm gate and drive across a field of grazing sheep to arrive at the pavilion. A distinct farmyard aroma assaulted our nostrils as the DCSCC convoy assembled at this agricultural location. The weather was overcast, but dry. The wicket was firm and more or less flat, though the boundary was near 100 yards away on the western edge of the wicket, with the eastern side much closer.

DEC won the toss and elected to field. A 20 over game was agreed but due to the shorter evenings it was decided to bowl from one end only for ten overs straight, then switch ends for the next ten. This would allegedly save time, instead of rearranging the field every six balls.

And so Vinay and Guy went out to open our innings. They faced a smart opening bowler and a jumpy ball that veered off a green wicket. A maiden over to begin with, before Vinay could hit a boundary off the second over. Runs came slowly as our batsmen had to closely watch each unpredictable delivery. A steady start to Guy’s innings, but Vinay was caught at mid-wicket in the third over. Sid came out to replace him.

Some elegant stroke play by Guy and boundaries from Sid followed as DCSCC settled in but then, in the sixth over, Sid was bowled around his legs by another ball that unexpectedly changed direction and topped his leg stump. Time for Ashish to take guard – he hit an immediate boundary and then yet another awkward delivery hit his thigh pad, onto his bat and then into the stumps. The first ten overs from one unpredictable side was proving to be a nightmare for our batsmen.

Kris was next to the crease, advised to watch every ball carefully! This he did and the ten over halfway mark was passed with no further loss; 49 for 3 being scored.

The next overs saw an increase in the run rate. Guy drove some cracking fours and, after only singles, Kris was desperate to smack his trademark boundaries. After swishing and mis-timing a few he, at last, connected with a four and then *bang!* a six to the near fence. Excellent! But then, as Guy edged one behind him, Kris set off on a run only to hesitate as Guy was not looking. Ouch! Kris was run out on 14.

Phil Nathan, long time absent from our line-up, was absent no longer: he strode out to face the onslaught. The only problem now was that the pre-match agreement had been not to be too strict on wides - fine for DEC’s second-string bowlers; not too good for Phil who couldn’t reach their first few deliveries! Dot balls accumulated until at last some were straight enough to lay the willow into them.

Guy struck a boundary to retire on 25 – another successful innings – and Chris came out to partner Phil. Both now struck the ball regularly and the score accelerated. It was the nineteenth over when Phil eventually was caught out, on 18, to be replaced by Theo and then Chris – who had dealt only in fours until now – was caught and bowled for 21 in the last over. With four balls to go, Joanne faced the attack and managed to run a bye to reach a DCSCC total of 123 for 6. A very respectable score.

The light was just beginning to fade when the DEC batsmen came out to face the bowling attack of your chairman and Theo. But these were no timid strikers of the ball, after missing the first ball on his legs, the opener cut the next to the boundary. He followed this with smart cover drives, all well-fielded despite a single.

This man was a strong offside batsman as Theo found the same – conceding a cut to the boundary on his first ball – so he promptly bowled the next on his legs and hit the stumps. That showed him!

DEC, however, had fielded a very strong batting team. It took a lot of effort from some excellent fielding and a succession of bowlers to keep the score down. Notable in the field was firstly Theo at square leg as Chris came on to bowl. A scampered single… but Theo picked up and threw at the only stump visible to hit it with a mighty crash and an even mightier call of ‘Owzat!’. Unfortunately (for us) the batsmen had put in a frantic dive and the umpire ruled ‘not out’ (Was he, Theo?)

Shortly after that, off Ian’s bowling I believe, a square cut to the long boundary saw Kris pick it up and heave it in from fully 100 yards to, again, hit only one stump visible and light up the electronic bails. The batsman was well short of the crease...but the bail did not depart from the stumps! Not out!

At the halfway mark when ten overs saw a change of ends, DEC had reached 63 for 1.

Two batsmen eventually retired on a maximum by the time it was getting dark and the bowling had to slow down. Ian switched ends and continued, partnered by Joanne. No wickets for either but they kept it tight now. Then Guy and Phil came on to bowl. Slow spinning from Guy got him a catch in his first over; Phil gained the only maiden of the innings with his first. In respective second overs, Guy won another catch and Phil an LBW. Despite this excellent attempt to strangle the stroke play at the close of the game, DEC totalled 124 in the penultimate ball of the 18th over, thus winning the match.

An excellent game fought in a friendly spirit, albeit with failing light, in a memorable theatre of cricket. DEC are testing opponents and we must play them again – a decider, after we beat them last time out.

One sad note, after an excellent performance behind the stumps, Sid, our wicket-keeper is leaving us after only one year to live and work in London. All best wishes, Sid: we are sorry you must go, but keep up the cricket and come back and visit when you can – at the annual dinner this year, and as many dinners and games in the future, if you can make it!