**DCSCC vs Durham Farmers, MC1 24 June 2025**

It was a miserable, drizzlable evening. The clouds were low, the light poor, the rain unrelenting. No way were we going to play cricket in conditions like this. Maiden Castle ground staff were never going to allow it – the slightest moisture in the air and they always deny us access to the cricket pitch. Added to that, the opposition were caught up in massive traffic jams on the A1 and around Durham. Nope. Game off, your correspondent was certain.

This assumption was, however, challenged by the collective youth and enthusiasm of DCSCC. Ignoring the wealth of experience and wet umbrellas of more senior members of the team, most of Durham staff were determined to make a go of it. And would you believe it, after half a soggy hour, the rain did relent and the Durham Farmers all arrived. Unbelievably, the game was on.

Guy won the toss – a welcome return to form – and elected to bat on the bedraggled surface. A courageous, if optimistic decision. The Farmers were an efficient, well-drilled team and right from the first ball they looked a serious bowling attack. Guy managed a single off the first over and, facing the second, galloped a two when his trademark drive failed to reach the boundary on a slow, rain-affected outfield. This was a sign of things to come – it would not be a high scoring game.

This impression was confirmed when Vinay did the same – whacking a two which would have normally gained him four – and then, calamity, went to lift the next ball into the distance only to top edge it to mid-wicket. He tramped off to be replaced by Will Hall.

Guy continued to drive with purpose – running three when a four was denied - and Will decided to take the aerial route with a one-bounce four over the boundary… which lost the ball in the Maiden Castle woods. The bowler soon retaliated, however, he sent down a scorching delivery which Will edged to the ‘keeper. Six overs gone and we were 23 for two.

Next in, after some absence from DCSCC, was Peter Swift. He too found the bowling testing, the outfield resistant, but he settled in quickly, scoring singles and twos amongst the dots. The missiles kept coming, even after a change in the bowling, and some were lifting off a good length. Peter used this to pull one impressive boundary but shortly after, one ball cut in, over the top of his stumps, taking the faintest of inside edges into the arms of the keeper. Peter didn’t wait for the umpire’s decision (I never heard it!). He walked. Eleventh over, three down for 48.

Rich Root came out to partner Guy, but not for long. Despite steadily accumulating runs all along (28) and approaching the designated maximum to retire, the very next over Guy faced he went forward to a ball that darted ‘through the gate’ and smacked his stumps. Shock, horror. Guy, as well as your despondent umpire, walked off. Twelve overs down, we were only 56 to the good for the loss of four.

Jon Warren trundled out to partner Guy. And a partnership it was. Slowly and steadily they batted away, with Jon trundling, Rich scampering - and hollering loud enough for most of Durham to hear. The bowling changed to less fearsome but far more unpredictable deliveries and eventually – after numerous wides, no balls and having notched up 23 in his favour with some admirable sweeps en route – Rich missed one pathetic looper which lifted his bails. Poppy came out to replace him.

Poppy, our hockey star, immediately set about swinging the bat and collecting two, then repeating the act and gaining another two. Jon, impressed, and having gained just five in his long partnership with Rich, was determined to increase his own run rate but was much frustrated from doing so by a bowler who refused to cooperate. The next delivery was wide. Jon was even more frustrated when the wicketkeeper had the audacity to stump him… as Jon had wandered wide out of the crease also.

Theo went out to join Poppy and, walloping a three which should have been a four he brought the twenty overs to a close. DCSCC finished with 97 for six wickets, including 13 extras.

The weather was distinctly brighter now as the Farmers went out to bat. Your chairman correspondent opened the bowling, partnered by Ben Kelly at the other end. The Farmers’ opening bat was an awkward left-hander but we kept it tight – Ben particularly with a maiden in his first over. Next over, yours truly then removed the left-hander who swished enthusiastically, only to play onto his stumps. Ben followed with the next response by removing the incoming bat with a glorious delivery which hit the top of off. Farmers were two down, anxious to get going on a drying wicket, but we were still bowling tight. Then came the first champagne moment of the match. After too many dots, the Farmers’ bat called for a quick single that he’d prodded to mid-on… but Peter Swift collected and, square to the bowler (myself) with the smallest of targets to aim at, he hit the stumps. The batsman was run out! (It must be added that Rich Root had simultaneously clattered into the runner, although *after* – he insists – the wicket had been broken!). Farmers were 23 for 3 after six overs: check above – same score as us at this stage of the game but we had gained one more wicket.

Ian and Theo were next into the attack. Farmers were winded but not bowed…and they were aided by an outfield that was drier and getting faster. Tight bowling continued to add dots to the scorebook, but ambitious shots were now going for four and not two. Theo got his revenge after conceding one boundary – his next ball hit the stumps with a resounding crash.

How to stop these Farmers getting too many runs? Hmmm. Guy brought on Rich in place of Ian. (Rich, so often a wicketkeeper, was approached by Guy looking for ‘someone else who might be able to bowl’.) And so Rich started with spin, of somewhat variable length. His first over was clattered for a boundary and a couple of singles; his second over was much better, bamboozling, and one ball took the edge, though too low for a catch.

At this stage of the proceedings, Farmers were 73 for 4 at the end of the 12th over. They were losing batsmen but they were getting closer to our total, finding the boundary easier to reach, and still with eight overs remaining. Guy now turned to Vinay to bowl - our reliable master-blaster opening bat - another untypical choice.

Vinay’s first ball, similar to Rich, was of variable length. That is, it was a head-high full toss which was promptly dispatched to the boundary. Oh dear. He followed this, however, by a series of cruise missiles bang on target and then finished with a slower dolly, at which the batsman grinned and scooped into the air…for Vinay to run and catch! In the 13th over, Farmers were five wickets down.

In the next, Rich’s third over, we saw a complete change: instead of spin he resorted to seam. This, I thought, was a foolish move – he had unnerved the batsman in his second over, why change? Rich changed, of course, because his bowling came zipping through at some pace. He found the edge again and this time the slip fielder (yours truly) leapt high like a young salmon (well, lunged clumsily like an old donkey) and caught the bullet in both hands. Surprise! A second champagne moment. Six down.

Vinay’s following over began with another missile – which hit the stumps! Seven down. Rich was now bowling tight at the other end but by Vinay’s next over, the seventeenth, the score was 91. First ball he conceded two, then dot, then dots again, until last ball – a scorcher – was hit straight at Theo in the covers and he swallowed it without flinching! Eight down!

Eighteenth over Rich still keeping it tight, four dots, but two twos…Farmers reached the magic total of 97. Only one run needed to win!

Nineteenth over, Vinay now sent down a rocket to a lower order bat who couldn’t cope. First ball a dot. Second ball, an edge and it flew like a lightning-bolt to Ben in the slips. He somehow stuck out an arm and caught it! Wow! A sparkling Dom Perignon moment! Vinay finished with a wicket maiden over…he had gained four wickets, and Farmers were nine men down!

Just one over left and one run needed by the opposition to win. Ben came back to bowl this final over. Shame - bang - first ball, they got it!

But what a finish to a great match! Close all the way, and we had pushed them to the last man standing. Farmers finished on 98 for 9 in the twentieth over, with only six extras - Will Hall our ‘keeper doing sterling work with only one bye. In the end we were defeated by a slow outfield which had held us back to only six boundaries, whereas Farmers had gained twelve on a drier surface. Batsmen and bowlers, we had all played well and had outplayed our opposition until the last run. Congratulations to every team member and most likely goodbye to our last game on Maiden Castle! From now on we are a wandering, peripatetic and homeless team of cricketers.