

NAS-KED AND ANSWERED: DCSCC RESPOND IN STYLE

By LIONEL B. WICKET

The sun beat down as DCSCC arrived at South Hetton CC in temperatures usually reserved for indoor nets.

South Hetton is not just a cricket ground, it's a DCSCC cricket ground. Asymmetrical, sloped in places and surrounded entirely by a busy thoroughfare of bike and scooter traffic.

It was here that Durham Staff CC met with Sunderland NAS for a classic T20 encounter. The Staff squad, swelling with talent and sunscreen, fielded two debutants: James and Abdullah, both unaware of the sheer quality of cricket they were about to witness.

The ground featured a cruelly short western boundary until the 'home' side extended it by decree. Democracy in action; the result was a boundary exceptionally long square of the wicket and comparatively short behind the stumps.

For the second time in recent memory, Guy (c) lost the toss and DCSCC found themselves fielding first.

Theo opened proceedings from the pavilion end, the ball hard and shiny. Vinay donned the gloves and the game began.

The new ball, quick outfield and one left-handed batter made DCSCC work hard in the first couple of overs. The batters quickly demonstrated what would become the most lucrative shot of the day - behind square either with a graceful sweep or a not-so-graceful edge. The boundaries were short and the outfield quick. But chances were coming.

In the third over, a sharp flat drive was barely processed before it was caught one-handed by Theo. "Natural reaction," said some. "Blind luck," muttered others. One opener gone for 5 in a big coup for DCSCC.

Junaid followed with pace and preci-

sion but somehow the batters survived. Then in the fifth over after a string of failed LBW appeals — a full toss sneaked beneath the bat of the left-hander. Gone for 6. Wicket-maiden. NAS were 32-2 from 5, scoring well, but losing key players.

Then came debutant James, who bowled as if a man with a point to prove. His first ball swung like a pub door on a windy night. His second was even better. Wicket! Middle and off decimated. NAS 3 down. Welcome, James.

Ian joined the attack with considered bowling and tested the batters further. After 12 overs, NAS were 76-3 with one impressive retirement. The final bowling pair was Nigel and Joanne. Nigel's economic elegance at one end, Joanne's probing full-length deliveries at the other. The batters began to sweat — and not just from the heat. Both Nigel and Joanne were unlucky not to snag a wicket, with a near-stumping for Vinay the only thing between Nigel and justice (not that it's been mentioned of course).

Theo returned for the final over. A handful of singles, a boundary, and then — a final-ball brain fade. A well-fielded single turned suicidal two, and Guy (c) calmly tossed the ball to Vinay and they were swiftly run-out.

Fine bowling. Sharp fielding from all especially given the heat but particular mentions to Ben, Abdullah, and Guy.

Half-time brought fluid intake, SPF reapplication, and increasingly desperate conversations about the batting order. In a non-traditional moment of stealth strategy, Guy (c) mumbled "batter say what?" and ensnared Ash into opening with him.

And what a start it was.

Nine off the first over, with Ash showcasing his trademark cuts and elegant leg-side pulls, while Guy dealt in power-drives, forward defensives and composed singles. By the 6.3 over mark, Ash had retired on a blistering 33 (7 fours and 5 singles in 17 balls)*, ruthless, efficient, and barely sweating.

Ben joined Guy and immediately made the young (14?) NAS spinner question his life choices. A six over the leg side. A clipped four. Bazball. But karma, it turns out, bowls in school shoes: the young prodigy clean bowled Ben next over with a slow ball to the very top of off.

Abdullah followed. A couple of tidy leg-side flicks and he looked set. . . until he wasn't. Caught. A wicket maiden. DCSCC 73-2 off 10 and it looked like NAS had a foothold.

Vinay steadied things alongside Guy, but after a beautifully timed sweep to the boundary, a feathered edge ended the skipper's innings on a well-crafted 27. Three wickets down for just 18 runs. The chase, like the heat, intensified.

James joined the cause and saw out the over with a dot. Vinay fell to a mistimed shot that was caught. Then Junaid, looking to go big, was stumped after five exploratory balls. Make that four wickets lost for 18 runs. The middle order began to resemble a group chat — full of promise until everyone suddenly left.

In comes Theo, 3.4 overs left, 29 runs to win. A couple of singles and a drive that just sneaks past the bowler for four. 3 overs left, 23 needed. A tight over yielded just three runs. 20 needed off the last two. In the penultimate over both batters pushed themselves, a boundary each a few in between. This was going to be incredibly tight, 7 needed off the last six balls.

James and Theo discussed their multifaceted and complex plan in the middle of the square. This conversation wasn't caught on stump-mics but in an exclusive lip-reading for the Durham Chronicle we can confirm that the words "we need to cooking bun" were said repeatedly.

Thus begins the final over.

1. James taps a deft single
2. Theo "plays a leave" which the keeper fumbles. One bye.
3. James taps another single.

4. Theo squeezes two.
5. Dot ball. Pressure rises, fruity language muttered politely. Strong cheers (of hope not confidence) from the sidelines.
6. Two required. Theo goes big and connects, just about. Awkward chip just over cover and the boys at the crease came back for two.

DCSCC 128-5 off 20.0 overs. The crowd (two dogs and a man on a mobility scooter) erupts. James finishes 18*, Theo 17*.

There are wins, and then there are Staff wins. This was certainly the latter, a blend of chaos, debut heroics and calm captaincy. The bowling was shared beautifully (\pm 4 runs each), the fielding was sharp, and the chase, stressful but

memorable.

Thank you to everyone who played, supported, and most importantly survived the sun. Special thanks to Joanne and Nigel for scoring, all our umpires and our debutants, certainly an exciting start to your DCSCC career!
