

## ASH WEDNESDAY

By LIONEL B. WICKET

A late August evening and a last-minute fixture reshuffle saw DCSCC heading north - not to the quaint, agricultural scenery of Stamfordham, but south of the Tyne to Greenside. A new team, a new ground and a fresh challenge for Durham Staff Cricketers. Another typically obscure boundary shape with one leg-side boundary stretching three times further than the other, a balcony to rival Lord's pavilion, and a small but growing crowd gathering half an hour before the first ball.

Patrick won the toss, and elected to bat, an eminently sensible choice, allowing for DCSCC to bat in good light but more crucially, to allow time for the other 5 players to turn up.

Will and Vinay opened against a sharp and testing attack on a dry, bouncy wicket. Will got going with a pair of boundaries deftly steered past the slips to the short pavilion-end rope. Both openers worked hard in defence, ducking semi-frequent bouncers. Vinay opened his account with a guided single, but in the third over a leg-side mis-hit saw him caught. Ash joined Will and settled quickly. More boundaries for Will but in the fifth over the bowler struck again. Will gone for 24 off 18, a valuable contribution in testing conditions. Saidur joined Ash and the pair rotated the strike well. After 7 overs, DCSCC were 37-2.

Saidur found the rope but just two balls later he moved down the track and the ball struck his pads. The appeal sounded and it was given, LBW. Peter Swift replaced him, offering steady support as Ash began to accelerate.

The partnership seemed secure, making use of the long road-side boundary to

run 1s and 2s, difficult work in the heat. Unfortunately things ended when Swiftie got caught up in a tricky delivery that saw him bowled. Patrick entered with intent, and he and Ash added 40 in style, Ash clearing the long leg-side boundary for six, giving the neighhhh-bouring horses something to play with. Patrick found the middle comfortable and threaded boundaries to both sides. At 93-4 after 16 overs, DCSCC looked set for a strong finish. Pat was bowled for 18, allowing for some last minute cameos from the lower order.

Poppy was up next but became unstuck against the tricky off-spinner. Theo followed and having scored a couple of flukey boundaries, decided not to stay too long in the heat and performed a form of declaration by chipping a full toss back to the bowlers hands.

Ash's fine innings ended on 30 after a mammoth 62 minutes in the heat - bravo! In romantic style Ben and Jemima saw out the last over and earned some red ink. DCSCC closing on 108-8, a competitive score given the conditions.

The break brought a detailed description of Theo's toils with his parents glassware selection followed by a heated discussion on whether modern society has become too dependent on the so-called "water bottle". Fascinating stuff...

Jemima opened the bowling with a maiden, Theo followed from the far end with just a single conceded. In her second over, a muted appeal from Jemima got DCSCC's first breakthrough, LBW to make it 2-1 after three overs. Greenside's reply then gathered pace, boundaries coming off anything short, with the short boundary proving tempting. DCSCC dipped into the kit bag to replace the first of many balls lost to the prickly foliage. After seven overs the opposition were 52-1 and well ahead of the rate.

Another breakthrough came in the 8th

with their opener clean bowled. Vinay recovered from a loose first over to bowl with control, while Saidur's spin caused real problems for the batters. Fielding standards were high: full-length diving boundary stops from Swiftie and Pat, and sharp work from all in the humid heat. Saidur's persistence earned him two wickets in his last two overs, a sharp gully catch from Ian followed by a plum LBW.

After 14 overs, Greenside needed 30 with six wickets left. Ian and Ben took the final spell. Ben struck early in his first over taking their number 7 clean bowled. Ian got in on the action with some quality line and length assisted by a fantastic catch from Ash. At 96-7 after 18 overs and another maiden courtesy of Ian, DCSCC had a sniff. A near (*very very* close) stumping in the 19th over kept it tight, 10 needed off the last.

The decisive moment came when Greenside's number 8 launched a short one over cover for six, the replacement ball was wet and soft. Ben nearly hit the stumps next ball, but the final delivery slipped wide and Greenside took the win.

An incredibly close game that showed real graft in all disciplines. Standards were set high and the game could've gone either way. Testament to the unmatched vibes of DCSCC, we've been invited back so this hopefully the start of fruitful & friendly rivalry.

Will had a faultless game behind the stumps with no (recorded) byes. Special mentions to Swiftie, Pat, Poppy, Vinay, and Ian (to name just five) for tireless fielding efforts. A huge thank you as well to Rich - who not only scored the whole match, but completed probably the most comprehensive score book this season. A talent that I'm sure is colossally wasted on our cricket team.