

ASH WEDNESDAY

By LIONEL B. WICKET

Friday took DCSCC on their annual pilgrimage to Sheffield, city of steel, liquorice all-sorts and Jarvis Cocker. The pitch, freshly relaid and sloping politely north to south, offered a long leg-side boundary towards an impressive pavilion. Move over Greenside, we may have a new "balcony of the week".

Patrick lost the toss and DCSCC were sent to bowl first, an unusual role for Durham's finest, but accepted with the usual blend of optimism and suncream.

Steve Boothroyd opened the bowling and the game was afoot. Classic pace action kept the Sheffield openers pinned down. Theo joined the party from the opposite end, the uphill slope proved tricky – the outfield was quick and dry and anything heading south had elevation assistance. After three overs, the home side were 12-0. Six overs later, the rate had doubled, Sheffield 41-0, though Steve had impressively conceded only 8 runs (Theo's figures, mysteriously, remain redacted in the scorebook).

Ash and Vinay were first replacement and both started strong, chances started to look more likely as the opening batters persevered in the heat. Ash struck first, with stumpsman Eckart pouching a neat catch. Soon after, Sheffield's opener retired on a dignified 51*, and the Dons of Durham sensed opportunity. Ash struck again with a stump-splitting delivery whilst Vinay followed with a plumb LBW, dismissing their number 5 for a duck. Suddenly momentum had shifted.

Just before drinks, the DCSCC technology division clocked in. Joanne produced consistent line and length - she would go on to only concede singles in her first three overs, the longest time without conceding a boundary for any bowler that day. Nigel, economical from the north end, probed without luck. Outfield work was relentless, Ian was put to task

plugging Sheffield's love affair with the fine cut shot, while Guy, Pat, Will and Eckart each made telling stops in the heat.

At the end of the Fulton-Metcalf spell, both of whom were deeply unlucky not to have been rewarded for their graft, Sheffield were 142-3 off 25 overs.

After convincing the opposition that our next bowler was not just Steve pretending to have a shorter run-up, Ian came onto bowl – and what a spell he had in store. There are many great pairings and partnerships in DCSCC to talk about - Eckart and the Kit Bag, Nigel and his batting jumper and Patrick and an air fryer / microwave – but on this day, the partnership was Ian & Ashish. Bowling at the southern end Ian took two wickets in consecutive overs, caught with calm composure from Ash at cow corner.

Steve returned to finish with a bang - a teasing outswinger that was smartly collected again by Eckart. Ian then bowled their number 8 to take his third of the day, whilst Theo saw out the innings with a more respectable finish and wicket of his own.

Sheffield ended on 198, up three runs from the pre-break total of 195, thanks to a late "clarification" (rumours of a maths PhD gone rogue remain unconfirmed).

At half time, in lieu of a spirited motivational talk, Pat gave a short, 45 minute lecture on how chemtrails are being used to manipulate and medicate the global population touching briefly on the fact that it was these deep-state mechanics that caused untimely dismissal of his personal hero, Liz Truss. With DCSCC pondering the true nature of the global aviation industry, they took to the crease, donned their umpiring hats and cracked open the scorebook.

Guy (c) and Will opened brightly, each carving early boundaries. The Sheffield attack combined sharp outswing and tricky left-arm over, the third over brought a maiden but then staff began to accelerate. Smart drives through the covers and deft touches backwards of square

allowed the batters to accumulate singles and boundaries. The first 8 overs had passed without loss and DCSCC had 53. Impressive stuff.

The Change of bowling brought with it new challenges, from the southern end a devilish off-spinner. Guy (c) was caught off guard with a ball that turned into his back-leg and was dismissed LBW. Ash came to partner Will and he also opened his tally with a boundary. The partnership didn't last long though as Will swiped at a ball outside off and was caught behind. Out on a well hit 39, including 7 boundaries.

After 10 overs, DCSCC were 63-2 with Vinay joining Ash at the crease. Vinay scored 7 before unluckily caught out. In came Pat Card, having logged out of his Truth social account he was raring to go. Ash and Pat put on a magnificent display, running quick singles and punishing the bad balls. It was a fine partnership, with both firing on all cylinders, steadily accumulating runs in a manner that normally escapes DCSCC. After 16 overs, Staff were 92-3, after 23 overs, we were 113-3. Ash retired on an unbeaten 52*, another critical performance in what is turning out to be a superb season. At 28 overs, Staff were 153-3, within striking distance - 45 runs off 7 overs required. Eckart joined Pat and dealt sensibly with tricky, looping deliveries.

But Sheffield struck back - Eckart fell to a tough full length delivery. Theo having discussed with Paxman Senior (c) the necessity of running quick singles and the low chances of direct hits, came to the crease with new found confidence. In what is, in hindsight, an entirely predictable series of events – a dubious quick single was cut short when Sheffield produced a fine piece of fielding and a direct hit put an end to his innings. Hard cheese.

Steve replaced Theo, at 176-5 with 2 overs remaining, it was going to require a serious stroke of good fortune for staff to reach 198. Steve and Pat stayed the course allowing DCSCC to reach an admirable,

but just shy, 187-5 off 35 overs. Despite having the time to run a two on the last ball and despite the desperate cheers of the crowd, Pat finished on a very impressive 49* (likely cause = deep state).

It is a significant effort to travel down to Sheffield and play, particularly in the

hot weather. The team put in serious leg-work to get the game as close as it was. As always, each player contributed to a very good performance, special thanks to Steve for making the trip from Merseyside, as well as to Paxman Senior (c) and Joanne's parents whose company and support was

as welcome as it was questionable in tactical content.

The Steel City brought razor sharp opposition but DCSCC remain the cricket club with the best vibes and company.
