

## CIVIL SERVICE WITH A SMILE

By LIONEL B. WICKET

Cliffe CC, widely considered the prettiest ground on the DCSCC roster provided a picturesque setting for a late august game in the embers of the 2025 season. The Pringle™ shaped wicket sloped steeply away from the strip and the boundary consisted almost entirely of a wire fence that might benefit from kickboard.

The squad welcomed back Pat and Guy (c) from brief absences, Guy (c) filled with fresh confidence having dispensed sound tax advice to the upper echelons of the cabinet whilst Pat was jubilant that his medal design had been selected for the Great North Run. A narrow loss at KSOB meant that the good ship DCSCC was in need of win. Could the Civil servants provide the victory fodder staff so desperately yearned for?

Our resident professional Astrologer, Nigel, having made many mutterings about the long range forecast and the risk of rain in the previous week had to concede that the weather did in fact look "some what promising".

Skip made the first right call of the day, winning the toss and opting to bat.

Guy (c) and Ben strode out to face an unrelenting DEC attack that looked every bit the strongest bowling side of the season. With genuine pace from both ends, runs were scarce. The first two overs yielded only three, and in the third over, a leave turned inside edge came back onto the stumps and Guy was dismissed.

Ash joined Ben and the pair exercised caution seeing out the next two overs. By the end of eight overs, the scoreboard crept to a miserly 20-1. To underline their dominance, the DEC opening bowler's first three overs read: maiden-wicket maiden-maiden. Gulp.

Relief finally came with a change of bowlers. Ben was quick to pounce on

a slower ball, carving behind point for four. But jubilation was fleeting: bowled for 12 after some bump ball controversy (*ed. - umpire was probably right*). Ash however, was starting to look comfortable having survived an LBW appeal (leading to further constructive criticism of the ability of yours truly), and Pat joined him in steadying the ship. The Assistant to the Captain unfurled a pair of boundaries to lift spirits. Just as the partnership looked like bedding in, Pat chipped one tamely back to the bowler. DCSCC, 49-3, still searching for solid momentum.

Enter Sid, already having demonstrated commitment by travelling cross-country, who partnered Ash for the stand of the innings. Over 14 overs they crafted 77 runs, leaning into the natural slope of the ground to pierce the covers and mid-wicket. Sid's deft touches behind square added balance to Ash's increasingly expansive repertoire, including a couple of thunderous sixes that sailed into the neighbouring fields and took him gracefully past 50. Sid fell for a well-earned 27, caught going for the boundary.

After 29 overs, DCSCC were 126 - 4. 126 proved to be slightly unlucky for Staff, as no sooner had Vinay got to the crease, Ash departed caught on the leg side on an incredible 65. A talented, patient innings spanning 21 overs, adding yet more sparkles to an already glittering 2025 season.

Ian was next and survived a number of balls from the returning opener before falling clean bowled. Then came Theo, who with Vinay looked promising, the pair added 34 before Theo was run out by yet another direct hit. Keerthi followed with a brief but bright 5 before being bowled.

Vinay in secretarial solidarity was stumped on 15 going for a big shot leaving Rajat and chief Astrologer Nigel to close out the innings. Rajat contributed a sprightly 12\*, while Nigel, earned himself a splash of red ink, nudging a single to finish 1\*. The innings closed at 180-9 from

the full 40 overs: a return to form, with contributions throughout the order and a feeling that, with disciplined bowling, the target was defendable.

As light showers drifted across the ground, Pat and Guy debated karaoke duets for the Annual Dinner (neither keen on Kenny Rogers, both convinced they'd make a finer Dolly Parton). Meanwhile, the rest of the staff XI readied themselves for a long slog in the field.

Theo and Rajat took the new ball and set the tone, keeping scoring low. A maiden from Rajat prompted Theo to do the same forcing pressure onto the DEC top order. The ninth over brought breakthrough: a sharp chance was taken by Vinay, hands safe as houses. After eight overs, DEC were 40-1.

Nigel and Ian replaced the openers. Nigel created no shortage of aerial chances, but fortune deserted him. Ian, however, produced (what was at the time) the spell of the day, brutally accurate and rewarded with two vital wickets – one clean bowled, the other pouched by Pat at cover. His final figures of 2-11 from seven overs were nothing short of sensational, and DEC stumbled to 101-3 after 24 overs, shy of the run rate but by no means down-and-out.

Ash and Keerthi then took control. Ash clean bowled two batsmen with fizzing deliveries, while Keerthi began with a wicket-maiden assisted by Ian showing safe hands to cling on to a sharp chance. Guy and Ben put in good shifts protecting and chasing boundaries, whilst Sid provided a solid base behind the stumps. DEC stood at 132-5 after 31 overs.

And then came the Vinay Show. In what may prove to be his farewell appearance (though the club fervently hopes not), he delivered a spell to be remembered: 4 wickets for just 5 runs in 2.3 overs. Three were bowled clean, one was caught at square leg, a stunning run of form that decisively cleaned up the game. 5-4 off 2.3 overs, perhaps Nigel can make some

space on the website?

DEC were all out for 147, handing DCSCC victory by 33 runs – arguably the most emphatic margin in the history of this fixture (**N.B.** - *Not remotely fact checked, based solely on vibes*).

Thanks must go to Joanne and Tony

for their support and company; to Sid, not only for his wicketkeeping but also his dedication to keeping the East Coast Mainline in business; and to Ben, Pat and Guy for herculean efforts in the field on a tiring day. Above all, to Vinay: if this was indeed your last, I'd like to add from

all of DCSCC that you make every game a joy to play.

With gratitude to Pat and Guy for tireless behind-the-scenes graft throughout what has been a thoroughly enjoyable season, signing off until 2026 - LBW.

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