

## Gentlemen of Bedales vs. Buriton- Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> May

Such sweet expectation. Seven long months. Wood fires. Strong ales. Crisp mornings. The great Petersfield white out. The football season come and gone. Another winter of hope for Martin Johnson and his men, so cruelly dashed on the hearth of expectation. Seven long months.

Excitement building now. The days are getting longer. The air is warming at last. Lush grass on the memorial pitches being mown. Rollers rolling. A new thatch for the pavilion- who needs a new music school? Priorities.

A new dawn for politics- a new season for the Gentlemen of Bedales- and for both country and team the same question hanging in the breeze- will Hillisy's groin be up to it this year?

Buriton at home- a fitting opener. After a week of scorching weather the Petersfield micro climate kicks in with a vengeance. Rolling clouds, jumpers on, and damp in the air. No doubt the ball will swing like a boomerang. The toss as ever critical- the shape of the whole season could depend on these revolutions of Murray's trusty old coin. Advantage with us. Tails up and a spring in our step. A bowler's paradise from the off. Come on Murray- seven months of church services about to pay off.

We are batting first. We all recognise the tall opening bowler from Buriton. Moves it both ways- slow one, fast one, but always a straight one. Always line and length.

Our trusty openers take to the field- the two B's- Bott and Britton- made for this type of encounter. They look the part in their new GOB shirts- the winter clearly used to sharpen reflexes and sculpt further their chiselled bodies. The light now clearly failing early. Botty off to his usual start with a six. No power play here. The field already set deep he clears them all. Gentleman Guy keeps nipping and prodding away as the score moves steadily, but the bowling is deadly accurate. Not much to hit here and after 10 overs we are only on 40 runs. The message heads out from the dressing room to attack the bowling, which immediately results in Guy's off stump tumbling. So much for tactics.

Dale heads out all purpose and menace, to join his old partner at the crease. These two have forged an understanding borne from hard toil with willow against leather. Pacey between the wickets, and unforgiving on the short ball. Nothing to chance. Just proper cricket. Bott skies one to mid off. Dale runs the length of the wicket before the umpire so cruelly raises his finger for an LBW. Waterhouse- still smarting from that catch last year at square leg – sets about the bowling before being brilliantly caught in the deep. Toby Brand “the Younger”- chastened and lighter for his winter in India perfecting the pull shot, the beach martini and the lavatory express, has learnt more than a thing or two. Sadly, not when it comes to cricket. Alan Knott stance, shoulders open, bat swings, ball skyward, gone for a duck.

It's all gone wrong. From 40 for no wicket and a call to bat on we are 52 for 5 and worried that we will not bat out our overs.

In times of crisis, we look as a team and a nation to a natural leader. Someone to steady the ship, to reassert authority, to restore order, and to exude calm confidence. We have Tim Wise. As he strides to the crease, one or two visibly flinch at the memory of the French exchange student and the under arm delivery that did for him. Surely Buriton don't have such a weapon. The coalition at the crease forms with Steve Gardner. They are colossal. Think Brearley and Gattling. Collingwood and Pietersen. Morecambe and Wise. As the score ratchets up, Buriton's skipper puts himself on to bowl. One over- 19 runs and four 4's from Gardner alone- he is never to return. By the time both are out we are into the hundreds and breathing a little easier.

Mike Lambert comes out to make his debut for the GOB's and in time honoured tradition goes for a duck to a horrible delivery and a caught and bowled.

As the match looks finely balanced, thank the Lord for the tail. Petrie cutting his usual fine dash in his retro cricket shirt- no polyester for him, Skip Chancellor playing with gay abandon, and young AJ showing that at 6 foot 8 with arms like windmill sails, he can bat as well as bowl. Between them they add a critical twenty something runs as we limp to 133 all out off 28 overs. Not quite the auspicious start we had hoped for.

It's good to see that despite the new dawn in politics and the talk of a new era, Dave's match tea hasn't changed a jot. The addition of some wonderful chocolate doughnuts was unquestionably the highlight of the first session of play.

Suitably refreshed we take to the field. With limited runs to play with, the team is on guard. Nothing must be allowed through. Every single counts. What follows is arguably the most accomplished fielding display ever witnessed by the GOB. Catches taken one handed by Bott, Gentleman Guy finishing with a four wicket haul, and Dicky 'The Cat' Dale taking "that catch". For those not there to witness it, a slow start, a dive and the ball plucked one handed from the air, inches from the ground, off Gardner's bowling. If after that the Gardner's don't name their any minute-now-to-be-born daughter Dicky, then there is no reason left in the world.

Buriton all out for 111 and we are off to a winning start.

And so as I bow out on this first match report of the season, brimming with confidence and optimism, it is worth pausing a moment to thank the managers of our great team for once more fixing up a list of worthy opponents. Not easy this management job.

"New West Ham Chairman David Sullivan was looking out of a window at Upton Park when he saw an old lady struggling along with 6 heavy shopping bags. He shouts down "can you manage love?" She replies "Fxxx off I don't want the job"