

Chelsea Flower show- the traditional opener of 'The Season' has been and gone in a cloud of pollen. While many itchy eyes are focussed on the World Cup, another event of far greater importance slips onto the radar of the true sport aficionado. 364 days of waiting are over. The entrance fee of £30,000 per player has been duly deposited. One afternoon. No second chances. Winner takes all. The annual Staff vs. Parents cricket matches. This is the year that the Parents win.

Excitement increased by the sporting fervour gripping the nation and the expectation as ever of one of Dave's great cream teas. The day itself dawns with clear blue skies, and by lunch time, the weather is hot and the atmosphere heavy with expectation. Slowly but surely the players converge upon the Memorial Pitch. For the parents this year, some new faces from across all three schools, and some survivors from previous campaigns. For the staff, the usual suspects, a couple of gap years students and somebody who looks suspiciously like AJ- the demon fast bowler from last year's 1<sup>st</sup> XI- although "don't worry he won't bowl at full pace".

The parents win the toss and elect to bowl- better to chase in this one. This is the year that the Parents win. The staff open with their version of Little and Large- as Gordon Dale and Al McConville stride to the wicket, conversation is suspended and hushed tones of respect and formality become the order of the day. Except for Sledger Petrie who gets a few well aimed barbs in before the first ball is bowled. Despite the razor sharp bowling of the entire parents team, and some stunning work behind the stumps by Jeremy "If England Need a Keeper I'm Your Man" Sturges, the staff get off to a good start. Thankfully an inspired bowling change brings Wethers in from the deep, and one of his too good not to whack deliveries tempts McConville into testing Raj Raithatha at mid off. Moving with the athleticism of Usain Bolt, Raj rolls back the years and the first wicket is down. With Gardner off to a flier, Wise steps in to the bowling attack. Using his well tried arsenal of keep 'em guessing deliveries, the short one that keeps low proves unplayable as ever.

Alan Wright comes to the crease looking every inch the dashing sports master- such a change from the McMorrow years. With a smile as white and gleaming as his new Gray Nicholls pads, he sets about the bowling with Mark Collins. The Batman and Robin duo are a blur of activity between the wickets until Clappie finally breaks up the romance. With Wright having to retire at 25, Mike Lambert and McNaughtie are at the crease together. Skipper Dale sends out a subliminal message to the team. Let's keep this pair in for a while. All seems to be working. A couple of dropped catches later and the run rate has dropped nicely until Wethers takes out a middle stump. Clearly not on the same wave length, Wethers celebrates his wicket alone to the sadness of his team.

And so with the stage set for the fight of his life, Chris Bott strides to the crease. A quick two gets him on his way and his eye in. All set. The next Dale delivery is a beauty and Bott is caught by Wise at mid off. A turning point surely. This is the year that the Parents win. With Wrighty and Mike Lambert batting superbly on their return the score keeps ticking along until the end of the 30 overs.

Refreshed and fortified by the break, the staff take to the field. The parental openers of Clappie and Sturges get off to just the right start, scoring freely off all bowlers. Sadly Clappie misjudges one and is out for a premature 17. Raithatha strides out to the wicket all purpose and focus and is back in the blink of an eye after an unplayable delivery from Lambert, who really is after that man of the match award. Tom Baigrie comes to the crease and the parents find another sporting hero. Every inch the Errol Flynn of the team, he cuts, parries and slices with gay abandon. With Wise and Dale, the Bott slayers, set to accompany him to accelerate the run rate in the middle of the innings all is going according to plan.

Wise and Dale are out for ducks. The scorebook reads simply "bowled Bott". Revenge is sweet.

Bill Hay is in and the score accelerates once more. Neale Smithers looks to be in startling form until dispatched by a cruel run out. With the match finely balanced Wethers strides to the crease, intent on wreaking havoc on the bowling. Aware that his usual Boycott-esque style will not win the match, he transforms before our very eyes. And who said that 20:20 wasn't good for the game. A little reverse sweep here, an up and over there, he sprints between the wickets taking quick singles. In a further nod to modern fashions and trends, Wethers seems to be wearing his old trousers at a jaunty angle. Not for him the strictures of a belt.

As the parents' top batsmen retire at 25, all thoughts turn to those great double acts over the years. Brierley and Randall. Gower and Botham. Peitersen and Collingwood. Morecambe and Wise. Rolt and Petrie find themselves once more joined at the crease. For a moment mothers usher their children indoors as memories of last year's run out and the ensuing profanities resurface. Not this year. This is the year that the Parents win. The two push the score on until Rolt is brilliantly caught by Gordie and Petrie, inconsolable in the absence of his partner, falls to an lbw. Although the required run rate looks challenging, nobody thought to tell Sturges and Blaignie. They return to the crease and set about the bowlers with ruthless intent until a run out ends this most wonderful of partnerships. Wethers returns for the last few balls and everything goes down to the last delivery. Tom dispatches it for 4 and a huge cheer goes up.

What a game, what a match, what a spectacle. What a result. It was of course never in question. This is the year that the Parents win.

The staff won by one run- apparently.

To end, a tale that could so easily be from the annals of Bedales life.

Two guys are sitting at a bar. One starts to insult the other. He screams, "I slept with your mother!". The bar goes quiet as everyone listens to see what the other weasel will do. The first again yells, "I SLEPT WITH YOUR MOTHER!" The other says, "Go home Dad you're drunk".