

Captains Report

It goes without saying that on a personal level it has been a strange season. My intention of playing every game possible went out the window with the news of Fiona's illness. The first thing that I would like to do is thank everybody at the club for their support. Not only in putting up with a captain who kept disappearing for game after game but also for the best wishes and enquires about Fiona's health when I did play. A special thank you must also go to Paul Jacobs and Harry Stoneman who, as vice-captains, I made aware of my situation early on and both were very supportive. My thanks to you both. An extra special thank you must also go to the third vice-captain, Joe Walter. At the start of the season he was a great support with regard to Fiona but also in helping explain the intricate and wondrous workings of the clubs Gmail account and the selection procedures and generally getting me back into the swing of all things Isis. Thank you Joe.

What of the Captain's Report? I have written a number of these in the past and listened to other Captain's report back on their seasons. I thought it might be interesting to write this year's report from the perspective of someone who has been away from the club for a while and therefore perhaps in a position to see the way the club has changed over the years. It will certainly be different from one of my attempts years ago when I tried to get as many Bruce Springsteen song titles into the report as possible without anyone noticing. Nobody noticed!

What of the season? Well it began with the Chairman demanding a 67% win ratio over the whole season! No pressure there then.

In a lot of ways the season was summed up for me by two games, a Saturday game at Queens against Infosys and then the final game of the season at Ipsden. The first was not particularly a game that stood out or that will live long in the memory but it did for me highlight a couple of issues that I feel should be raised as well as illustrate the progress the club continues to make.

I was five minutes late leaving and consequently did not arrive until twenty five to two. Only Ollie Walter was there. We went out to help Martin get the covers off the pitch.

Point One. Late arrivals, particularly for midweek games, cause a number of problems.

- a) The games do not start on time meaning we can end up playing in the dark. This is usually a problem in midweek but on this particular Saturday it was 2.20pm when we started the game which meant we were batting in fading light. More importantly I feel it is disrespectful to the opposition who are stood around waiting for us.
- b) As a Captain it can affect your decision as to what to do at the toss. Clearly taking the field with seven or eight men is a problem. On two occasions during the season I changed my decision.
- c) On this Saturday, Martin was at the ground but often he is not. Who is responsible for getting the covers off the pitch? Getting the numbers for the scoreboard out? Putting the wickets out. Making sure Umpires Coats are out. Checking we have bails. Etc. (On a similar issue why do we find it so difficult to update a scoreboard at the end of every over or two? There should be six players sat watching the game at most points of our innings with one scoring. I can remember this being discussed previously and proposing that it is the

responsibility of the next batsman in to keep the scoreboard up to date. This keeps him focused on the game as well as keeping the board up to date.)

- d) Warming up. We should have at least ten minutes before the game starts when the bowlers can turn their arms over or the batsman can feel the ball on their bats and the fielders and wicket keeper can catch/throw the ball. I am not advocating a professional warm up and stretching session (which we probably should do) but we should be doing something.

Back to the game. When Ollie and myself returned from removing the covers, Joe and Roy had arrived. The latter asked me about the team we had out that day and we sat on the bench and chatted. We had seven bowlers (eight if you include Seamus) and two recognised batsman in the eleven with no wicket keeper.

Point Two. The selection procedure. Bearing in mind this is always a nightmare. Too many players available/ not enough players available/etc.

- a) Can Emails be sent two weeks in advance of the game? This is only fair to those who are selected, and those who are not, to make any arrangements they have to.
- b) There seemed to be a tendency to allow the first 11 who sign up to be the 11 who are playing. This can result in the unbalanced team that we had on this particular day but also means that selection becomes a matter of first come first served. Surely the whole point of 'selection' is to select a team, not just allow it to evolve on its own. Select a team that follows the club constitution of providing cricket for all its members while at the same time providing a team that whoever is captaining is balanced. I know this is not always possible but if you start the process earlier rather than later we can pick two or three teams and ensure that everyone is getting to play regularly.
- c) Three vice captains seem to be too many and with it the role of the captain seems to have been devalued. To be chosen as captain is an honour but with that comes responsibility. The responsibilities to select a team, to make sure everybody is being selected, to make sure everybody gets to do something during a game, to develop the team throughout the season, bring in new players, develop the younger players, and build relationships with all the players.

The game itself turned out to be a cracker. The sort of game that to me Isis Cricket Club should be all about. Seven bowlers were used, all of whom bowled well. Jonny Gifford and Nick Wyatt opened the bowling. Both bowled really well and on another day, with a bit of luck, could have bowled the opposition out for well under fifty. On this particular day they formed one of if not the best opening bowling partnership I have seen at Isis. Johnny bowled with pace and aggression while Nick's line and length were immaculate. I have witnessed pace and aggression before, for example, from Rob Scoffin and Jonathan Ponsford and I have seen line and length from, for example, Keith Whiter. To get the two together was an impressive sight. At one point we had just one fielder in front of the wicket for Johnny and a ring of fielders in the slips and gully area and still the opposition could not score any runs.

Keith Whiter, Roy Blatchford and Nick Hardy then bowled the middle overs of the innings. Fifteen of them for just forty runs. Again, all three bowled really well and with more luck could have had more wickets. Keith Ponsford and Joe Walter then mopped up the tail between them, as they often do.

On the usual flat wicket at Queens the bowlers had all bowled really well, Pascal Hardy had kept wicket immaculately and everybody had fielded well. As captain the problem had been trying to give all the bowlers a fair crack. The openers had bowled twelve overs between them but did not deserve to be taken off. Keith Whiter was champing at the bit having not opened the bowling. The other four bowlers were forever rolling their arms and looking hopefully in my direction. As in all games, trying to balance the bowling, making sure all get a decent bowl and still keeping the team competitive is not easy. In this game it was probably easier than a game when some bowlers are struggling.

The batting in this particular game does not really reflect the season as a whole. Amongst the four who did not get a bowl were Pascal and Seamus who are not, with respect, top order batsmen yet. For almost the only time in the season Ollie failed to score any runs but somehow in a very exciting finish we managed to stumble over the winning line chasing about 140 I think.

The final game of the season was also a cracker. An initially strong batting performance turned into a desperate fight for runs and to bat out our overs. An excellent bowling performance was briefly threatened by one of their batsmen and our inability to catch the ball. All hiccups were overcome and another victory ensued.

For me the highlight of this game, which mirrors my highlight of the whole summer, was Harry Stoneman's innings. Not having been around much for the past few years I have not seen Harry bat that much. This innings was full of exceptional shots, particularly his straight drives and for me reflects a pleasing development at Isis, the development of some younger players. The other player to be mentioned here is Luke Blatchford who has also developed into a more than useful member of the team. Although he did not play in either of the games I have highlighted he did make valuable contributions throughout the summer, with both his batting and his fielding. Developing younger players is vital to our team and the future of the game at our level.

Our bowling in the game at Ipsden was excellent and won us the game. All the usual suspects contributed with Roy picking up the vital wicket. For me it again highlighted one of the jobs of the captain in trying to everyone a bowl but still win the game. It can be a difficult balancing act at times.

One final subplot from the game was the battle for leading catcher. I was not really up to speed on this but it appears that Joe and Ollie were heading the list going into the game. Joe was disappointed with Ollie being named wicketkeeper and seemingly getting an advantage but proceeded to drop half a dozen catches off various bowlers before clinging on to one of his own bowling! It ended as a thirteen all draw apparently! It is good to see such competition. Fielding is an often undervalued part of the game we play. I believe a number of the games we lost during the season were due to us being out fielded by the opposition.

What of the season as a whole? Ollie deserves a special mention for his batting. Lester also showed what he is capable of; we just need him to play a few more games. Luke and Harry who I have already mentioned contributed well with the bat. Paul Jacobs batting has improved greatly in the past few years. Something that is not accurately reflected in his statistics. The same could be said of his wicketkeeping. Nick Wyatt's bowling seems to get better each season. It was the first time I had really seen Johnny Gifford bowl. From flattening Keith Whiter in the nets with a beamer he developed as the season went on to someone with more control of the ball with pace. Keith Whiter also deserves mention. I know he was not always happy about not opening the bowling but when a Captain needs someone to keep control or regain control of an innings there is no better man. Joe Walter, Keith Ponsford, Peter Gregory and Roy Blatchford also contributed greatly to what is a pretty effective bowling attack. You can add Jonathan Ponsford Alf Symons and Nick Hardy to the mix.

The bare statistics are that we completed 39 games. Winning 23. Losing 16. We did not meet the Chairman's target of 67%.

Ollie scored 834 runs at an average of 44 and scored the only hundred of the season. Luke and Lester both scored over 400 runs. 9 different batsmen scored fifties.

Nick W took 51 wickets @ under 13. Twice taking 5 wicket hauls. Joe took 37 wickets at 17. The two Keith's taking 29 each.

The club has come a long way since I first played in the summer of 1988. There were barely 20 fixtures on the list and only two fifties had ever been scored, no hundreds. Only Keith Ponsford and Pete Wiblin remain from the original Isis team but the current team reflect the progress we have made.

Tramps like us, baby we were Born to Run!