

ISLIP CRICKET CLUB



We live in a world based on things binary. Ever since the arrival of the personal computer in the 1980s, our world has increasingly been built around yes and no, yin and yang, one and zero, enabling the devices and communications that underpin so much of our daily lives.

The notion that cricket matches could last five days and end in a draw has baffled non-cricket playing nations for many years and has exercised the minds of cricket law-makers since the late nineteenth century. The timeless Test was introduced to stop teams from playing for a draw and 99 timeless Tests were played between 1877 and 1939. The last timeless Test was played in Durban in March of 1939. After 9 days of play spread over 12 days, it ended in a draw; the English team had already missed their boat home from Durban and were now in danger of missing the train which would allow them to board the same boat at Capetown.

Those were the days when meeting triumph and disaster and treating those two impostors just the same (no mention of a draw in Kipling's immortal lines) on the cricket field seemed to take an unrealistically long time. Today, that has changed. Rather than extending the time a game takes, the number of overs in a game are limited so that a result – triumph or disaster, one or zero – is almost, but not quite, guaranteed. And it was on September 21st that Islip CC somehow slipped briefly into the “not quite”.

For the third time this season, Islip took on Ascott-u-Wychwood, this time in a home game. With school and university commitments making a number of regulars unavailable, Ajay Behan, a Saturday cricket colleague of Ben Crawford and Ryan Hambridge at Kidlington CC, made his debut. Bowling first, Islip first contained their opponents (Kevin “the metronome” Crawford 7 overs for 11 runs) and then began to take wickets, keeping their opponents total down to 158 -9 (Jack Launchbury 29-3, Ryan Hambridge 18-3) of which extras contributed a handy 28.

Islip's reply did not start well; at 5-2 in the 4th over with Ryan Hambridge and Ben Crawford back in the pavilion, the scales were definitely tilting away from triumph towards disaster; at 31-4 in the 14th over they had tilted even further. But no game is over until the fat lady sings and a stand of 56 between Alex Hamp and Ajay took Islip to 87 before Alex fell in the 24th over. When Ajay fell for 40 with the score on 97, Islip had a little over 9 overs to score 62 runs, with Jack Launchbury and Brian Deeley at the crease. Jack set about the Ascott bowling with Brian supporting him, and with one over to go the scores were tied on 158 (Jack 27, Brian 19, extras a very creditable 33), Islip with 4 wickets in hand. What could possibly go wrong?

First to go was Brian Deeley, caught off a skier and replaced by David Goodfellow who watched the ensuing carnage from the bowler's end. Two more wickets followed and it was Nigel Mason who faced the last ball with one run still needed. When describing the last ball, there are two very distinct and conflicting narratives. If you are Nigel, you received a 75 mph chest high full toss, a clear no ball that went through to the wicketkeeper. Others may have seen it as a legitimate delivery, among them the umpire. Ryan Hambridge has since admitted that this is an area of the laws of cricket where he might need to refine his knowledge. What

is certain is that Nigel was run out going for the winning run. The match was neither triumph nor disaster, it was simply a draw.

The season's final game against Oxford University Hospitals CC did not start well. When Islip batted, Ben Crawford demoted himself from opener to no 6 hoping for a little time to recover from the after effects of a Saturday night disco but might as well not have bothered as Islip slumped to 7-4 in just 6 overs; at that point Islip had lost 8 wickets for 7 runs in their last 7 overs of cricket. Disaster was in the ascendancy. There is an argument that more of Islip's batsmen should be sent to Saturday night discos; the next wicket (Jack Launchbury 35) fell on 92 and at the end of Islip's 35 overs, Ben was 110 no, reaching his century with proud father Kevin at the other end and taking Islip to 205-9. Alex Hamp (15), only the third Islip batsman to make double figures, gave him good support and extras provided a healthy 24.

OUHCC made a decent fist of their reply but the introduction of Ajay Behal into the attack (4-45) turned the match and their innings petered out in the 32nd over on 160, leaving Islip the victors by 45 runs. A fine way to finish the season.

Kipling did play cricket now and then. The Allahakbarries was an amateur cricket team founded by author J. M. Barrie, active from 1890 to 1913. The team's name was a concatenation of Barrie's name and 'Allah akbar' in the mistaken belief that it meant 'Heaven help us' in Arabic (rather than its actual meaning: 'God is great'). As well as Kipling, Barrie's squad included H.G. Wells, Conan Doyle, P.G. Wodehouse, G.K. Chesterton, Jerome K. Jerome, and A.A. Milne. Barrie wrote a 40-page book on his team, which was reprinted in 1950 with a foreword by Donald Bradman. It is said that Barrie's enthusiasm for the game eclipsed his talent for it; asked to describe his bowling, he replied that after delivering the ball he would go and sit on the turf at mid-off and wait for it to reach the other end which 'it sometimes did'. He forbade his team to practise on an opponent's ground before a match because 'this can only give them confidence'.

We still have eccentric team names but times have changed and I can't imagine J.M. Barrie's innocent mistake being allowed to pass unnoticed in the 21st century. We should not forget that in those days, cricket's lawmakers focused on simpler matters and may not have seen the side's name as offensive; they believed there were more important things to worry about. For example in the 1950s, the MCC stipulated that the hem of a skirt should be no more than 2 inches from the ground when the person (in those days woman) wearing the skirt knelt down.

In 2020, the ECB moved with the times and published their policy on Trans People playing Cricket. It came out a few days before lockdown and received no publicity at all as far as I can tell. It defines a few words and eligibility procedures and provides some assurances about fairness but fails to address the day-to-day usage of basic cricketing terms. Bowler and wicket keeper have never been a problem, fieldsman as a term seems to have vanished (but not yet from dictionaries), with fielder in universal usage. That just leaves batsman. While more and more professional commentators have moved towards saying "batter" as an alternative to batsman even in coverage of men's matches, at village level batsman remains the commonly used term and batter still conjures up images of fish and chips. One day perhaps that will change, but meanwhile Islip will continue to welcome players of all ages, genders, sexual inclinations, abilities and experience and we shall do our best not to misspeak. Do come and join us for the 2022 season.