

Sunday 1st XI vs Valley End CC - ECB National Club Championships (Round 1)

On Sunday 26th April, the Ruts' travelled to Valley End to contest a 1st Round fixture in the ECB National Club Championships. Returning to the scene of the club's triumphant Surrey Trust Final victory of 2013, we arrived in confident mood.

With the sun most definitely not shining, the wind most definitely blowing and an early season chill in the air, getting changed took a little longer than usual due to all the layers everyone had to put on, everyone but Rozza that is. He looked miserable.

However, Captain Sal won the toss, elected to bowl and Rozza was soon able to warm up doing fine leg to fine leg. Out strode the boys, the OR crest proudly glistening in the sunshine (well it would have if there was any).

Now, there were not too many positives to take from the fielding performance. While everyone bowled relatively well, with 2015 Overseas Player, Simon Douglas making his first competitive appearance, we chased a lot of leather and dropped a few catches. Russell got his engine started, eventually pinning their number 3 on the helmet twice in a fiery spell. Barney bowled well despite injuring both hands (courtesy of Woody).

Valley End finished on 260-5 off their 45 overs.

We gathered our thoughts at tea, which consisted of decent pasta, salad (not of the Pez variety), hula hoops and Haribos.

With a big chase ahead, the aim was to obviously get off to a fast start. Out strode Sal and Woody who initially expected to be taking on the quick, tall, menacing pace attack of Valley End. It didn't materialise. Instead they started with a spinner whose half tracker lured Woody into trying a pull/sweep/hockey shot which eventually hit his back leg and continued on to the stumps. 1-1. With Woody back in the Pavilion/ Shipping Container, claiming it was the 1st golden duck of his career, he was soon reminded of his 1st baller vs OW in the 2020 game last season!

A period of consolidation followed until Sal decided to give some catching practice and departed for 15. 27-2 off 7 and it wasn't looking great for the Ruts'.

Now an observation was made at the start of the game that Valley End are a really tall team. Short batsman however, are amongst some of the best in the world. Bradman, Tendulkar, Lara, Pemberton. The way Rory was batting seemed to prove there was exception to the rule. He could have spun around twice and still managed to caress it in the gap such was the time he seemed to have at the crease.

Along with Rusty, who was intent on bullying the Valley End bowlers, they hammered and nudged it to all parts of the vast ground in equal measure.

Both reached well deserved 50s and bought the equation down to 99 required from 21 overs with 8 wickets in hand. This soon became 95 from 18 with 5 in hand as a clutch of wickets fell in quick succession.

Shack who had been topping up his tan, crawled out to the pitch and was joined at the crease by the more agile Mudey. These two constructed a careful partnership, taking us to 207 before Mudey followed in his skipper's foot steps by providing a bit more catching practice.

The Simon 'Italian Stallion' Douglas, suffering with with a pair of stiff quads (Aussies eh!) joined Shack and kept the score board ticking while keeping the equation to 6 an over.

Their partnership came to an end though as Shack departed trying to clear mid on. Foxy, (still hungover), was promoted up the order and joined Simon at the crease.

The equation was down to 21 required from 18 balls and the tension was palpable, not just in the ground, but to those following the drama unfold on Whatsapp/Periscope. A huge 6 from Simon brought the equation down to 12 required from the last 12 balls. Foxy edged one for 2, then drove another for 2. 8 runs collected. 4 to win from the last over, game in the bag, thanks for coming lads, bring on the next team. Or so it seemed.

A single from the first ball of the over left the Ruts' needing 3 from 5. A dot ball followed by a single brought the equation down to 2 from 3. Things were getting tense. A dot ball followed which cast huge doubts over the Ruts' progression to the next stage and what was to follow

didn't exactly help proceedings. With the tie now a very realistic result, the umpires halted play, conversed, consulted the rule book and eventually concluded that in the event of a tie, Valley End would go through due to losing fewer wickets. With 2 required from the final 2 balls of the game, play resumed. Tension at an all time high, bowler running in, the game was in the balance. An edge down to 3rd man brought about cheers from the sidelines and these cheers rose when Douglas and Fox turned back to complete a second run. The Ruts' had won!

A fabulous effort with the bat, with everyone contributing. Things to work on in the field but a hugely satisfying result.

We have been drawn against Beddington at home in the next round which will take place on Sunday 10th May.

Salman Mohammed