

GARGOYLES OPENING NIGHT DRAMA ENDS IN A FARCE

You couldn't write the script. Surprising themselves and the hardy Abbots Bromley audience, the players of Alstonefield Cricket Club moved seamlessly from their indoor rehearsals to the big stage of a major league club and dismissed their hosts for just 105. But, the Gargoyles' reputation for improvising thrilling finishes instead of just winning, has been justly earned.*To read, more click here.*

Up against some experienced league players, already two games into their season, Gargoyles' captain Simon Smith must have been delighted with the accuracy of the bowling and the sharpness of the fielding, from a side shorn of some regulars and giving debuts to Steve King from Hope and Mark Farmer from Milldale. From the very off, Andy Bray's maiden over and then Shahid Ali's first over away swinger, edged and nonchalantly snaffled by Ian McKay at slip, put a spring in the Gargoyles' step. Determined to give all his bowlers the stage, captain Smith was duly rewarded. Ali took two wickets, as did Richard Allen and Will Siddons, with Tony Guest, Ian McKay and the captain himself, taking one apiece. Andy Bray's 4 overs went for only 5 runs.

There were pockets of resistance from the hosts, but after 33 overs Abbots Bromley were all out for 105 and a delightful tea was taken in the historic pavilion, surrounded by the Abbots Bromley CC (founded in 1881) honours boards.

The pitch was firm, but the ball was slow coming on to the bat and had shown signs of variable bounce, so watchfulness was required from openers Dave Singleton and Andy Bray.

Alstonefield Team v. Abbots Bromley



They duly obliged against an accurate opening attack. Dispatching the odd bad ball to the boundary and nudging singles into gaps, these two put on 44 for the first in 15 overs. The stand was broken when Tracey, the Abbots Bromley captain, brought himself on and had immediate success. Bowling at a genuinely hostile pace, he proved too quick and accurate for Singleton, who played on for 28. That was the start of Tracey's destruction. In his next over he clean bowled Shahid Ali for 1, captain Simon Smith for 0 and Mark Farmer for a debut first ball duck. In his next over he splayed Richard Allen's timber and 44 for 0 was now 51 for 5. Meanwhile Andy Bray had been watching this mayhem from the other end. Ian McKay came out to join him and these two played the Gargoyles back into contention, firstly seeing off Tracey (5 wickets for 20) and then adding 31 runs for the sixth wicket, before Bray got a leading edge and was caught at mid-on for a fine 33. Exactly 20 were needed for victory off the remaining 7 overs. Will Siddons joined Ian McKay, who had looked in reasonable nick, when he played back to a ball that kept extremely low and he was gone for 17. Siddons took responsibility, with Tony Guest seeing the red mist for 4 and Steve King's debut knock ending with a quack, last man and broken fingered Neil Shotton strode out with the Gargoyles needing just 4 runs to win and 2 overs to get them. Bravely Shotton fended off the blood-scenting pace of Tracey's final over and Siddons mustered 3 runs, so the scene was set for the last over denouement.

Two to win, one to tie. Siddons plays a firmly hit drive to a deepish mid-on off the first ball of the final over. Now at this critical point in a match, batsmen the world over would have had their motivational glove punch and agreed on the rules of communication and just who would be calling for the vital runs. These two experienced Gargoyles are of course beyond all that, preferring to rely on their legendary powers of psychic osmosis. And so, in a slow-motion frenzy, both batsmen were to be found staring at each other in the middle of the pitch, while the disbelieving, but ultimately jubilant Abbots Bromley team, seemed to take turns in knocking the bails off at the non-strikers' end.

Entertaining without doubt, but comedy is all about timing.

ABBOTS BROMLEY CC 105 ALL OUT DEFEATED ALSTONEFIELD CC 104 ALL OUT BY 1 RUN