



Chalke Valley v CCC – Sunday 21st May, 2017

<Sigh>.... How to describe this...?

I'll start with the positives: it was a beautiful, sunny day and someone brought a puppy along. Beyond one end of the field stood a hill and at one stage some hikers were atop it, silhouetted against the pastel blue sky while sparrow hawks circled on thermals in the valley below. Oh, the quaint English countryside on a sunny Sunday afternoon. Drink in the picture, dear reader, drink it in and bask. For things are about to get ugly.

The signs were bad when the team gathered at the Black Dog for car pooling and two thirds of them decided that to be in the venue without grabbing a pint was a form of sacrilege. Chief amongst them was captain for the day Ben Fowles who, leading from the front as always, quickly remedied the situation. Then Chaz Sheppard turned up looking as though he'd been at a well catered family barbecue until four in the morning, and sought a hair of the dog to realign his mind, body and conscience. A delay in departing then saw some of the assembled find time for a second round, as preparations for this encounter with one of the season's toughest opponents got off to an unorthodox start.

At Chalke Valley the toss was lost and the hosts decided to bat. For Chilmark the trauma was only just beginning. Paul Butler opened proceedings and managed to lure the opener into a slightly lofted flick to square leg in his first over. The ball just carried to Patrick Craig-McFeely, however The Doc was unable to get both hands under it and it spilled to the ground.

From the other end Pete Corbin steamed in and found the edge from just his third delivery. Unfortunately behind the stumps 'keeper Charlie Brinton and first slip Brand King were playing the game at a different speed, and the ball was half way to the boundary before either of them moved a hand in futile recognition of the fact it had briefly been within reach. It got worse in his next over as again he found the edge and this time Brinton reacted in time, diving in front of King and getting most of his glove to the ball, without actually pouching it.

After seven overs Chalke Valley were 16-0, when Corbin, for the third time in four overs, induced an edge from the batsman. This time it flew to King at slip, who with the reflexes of a tree sloth clawed hopelessly at the ball for a few ungainly moments, before seeing it roll off his shin and to the ground. From then on Corbin aimed directly at the stumps, rather than rely on his field to provide any assistance.

But there was to be some joy in Butler's next over, as a skied drive to mid off sailed directly towards Ben Fowles. Luckily for Chilmark the ball was hit high enough that Chaz Sheppard had enough time to move across from extra cover and take the catch instead.

Ben Eastmond took over from Corbin and continued the tight bowling from that end, however it was the introduction of King coming into the wind that emboldened Chalke Valley's batsmen. Boundaries began to flow and with 22 runs leaked from the Australian's first three overs, things were beginning to look dangerous for Chilmark. But then Eastmond struck, the wicket secured in the most unlikely of fashion when Fowles (Frog Lane's ninth best cricketer), without time to get out of the way, was forced to make an attempt at catching it, which he did. At drinks the hosts were 63-2.

After refreshments King continued to offer delicious half volleys to Chalke Valley's aggressive batsman. His fourth over saw a six clear the long, straight boundary, while his fifth over saw two boundaries fly in the same direction. With 39 runs coming from his opening five over spell, you might have thought that would be his lot for the day, but Captain Fowles would call on him later for further punishment.

Meanwhile Eastmond struck again. Twice. The first an edge easily caught by Brinton behind the stumps, the second, an over later, beating bat and pad and taking out the stumps. At 73-4 Chilmark could be excused for thinking they were in the game. They weren't.

Chaz Sheppard's introduction to the attack seemed to inspire further aggression from the home team's batsmen. His first two overs went for 17 as the run rate again increased. Needing a wicket Captain Fowles re-introduced Butler and he very nearly delivered straight away, as the second ball of the over was whipped behind square leg where King was stationed. Unfortunately fate had chosen this day to rain upon King karmic retribution for all his teasing of his teammate's fielding woes. The ball burst through his hands and another life went the home team's way. Butler though would finish with the brilliant figures of seven overs, 1-18.

Fowles then turned to Rod Taylor and his spin for an over. His first ball, short on leg stump, was cracked high and wide to deep square leg where the man of the moment, King, was sulking under a dark cloud. He back peddled, set himself just inside the boundary rope and leapt. The ball bounced off his fingers and over the rope for six. But karma wasn't finished yet. The very next ball saw a near instant replay, though this time it cleared King's head by a higher margin. King was required to fish the ball from the bushes just beyond the rope, where he found it amongst a clump of stinging nettles. Unaccustomed to the local flora, King spent the next five overs in a fair degree of discomfort.

Chalke Valley were cruising at 137-4 off 28 overs, a decent strike rate on the large ground. There were few volunteers amongst Chilmark's ranks to join the bowling attack, so Fowles stuck with Sheppard. His fifth over went for 17 as he wound up his five over spell with figures of 0-47. Corbin was then reintroduced and got revenge in his final over, breaking the stumps of Chalke Valley's number six. Corbin's seven over compliment produced the excellent figures of 1-26.

King was then sent to the bowling crease to serve the balance of his sentence. Duly boundaries and sixes were dispatched to all parts as 26 runs came from his last two overs. His seven over return of 0-65 combined with his three dropped catches (not to mention the stinging nettle incident) to render his day in the field as one he'd rather forget – but his fellow players never shall.

With everyone else bowled out and unwilling to bring himself on, Fowles turned to Taylor for the last over. It went for a relatively modest nine runs, as Chalke Valley completed their allotment of 35 overs with a total of 206-5. Their number three bat remained unbeaten on 119.

It was a very good score on the large ground, where shots that would usually go for four often yielded just a single. On any other day, however, with the batting line up they had, Chilmark might have considered themselves a chance of hauling it in. But there was something in the air on this Sunday afternoon, and it wasn't runs.

King was sent to the batting crease to try and claw back some dignity from his day. With him was The Doc. The pair put on four runs and survived into the fourth over, before The Doc spooned one to mid-on and was gone for two.

Charlie Brinton came in at first drop and got off the mark with a boundary through cover, however he was dismissed in the fifth over when he missed a straight one. Clinging to a morsel of hope and reluctant to look back at the damage himself, he asked King as he trudged off if it had taken out leg stump. King was unable to find a nice way of putting it, so said simply, 'middle, mate.'

Chilmark's best ever batsman, Chaz Sheppard, came in at four and blocked out an over in a determined effort to dig in and save the game. Then he edged behind and was gone for one. Rod Taylor swash buckled his way to five, before gifting a catch to mid-off, making way for Reg Allen, who lasted four, run-less balls, before spooning a catch to mid-wicket.

When Jason Stearman came to the crease Chilmark were five for not much. Addressing the situation in stark terms he announced that he was keen on making it back home in time to watch Antiques Roadshow. A few moments later he had his wish, caught out for a duck.

Ben Eastmond was next in and despite a back injury seriously hampering his movement, the big guy swung at anything within his arc. With King also getting a few boundaries away Chilmark's score finally edged beyond fifty and within view of the foothills of respectability. But just as King was beginning to feel like he might be able to get enough runs to help him sleep at night, he smashed a full toss back at the bowler, who took it with both hands and casually tossed it to the umpire.

No-one was really keeping tabs on the score at this stage, though it was probably something like 60-7 after 20 overs. Dismal, one way or another. Captain Fowles came in at nine and limped to five before giving up an easy catch in the manner of many of his team mates, and then Eastmond's brave knock was curtailed on 15, as he did something similar.

Paul Butler was sent out as last man with strict instructions to block out the remaining 13 or so overs and play for the draw. He got out first ball, leaving Pete Corbin undefeated on four.

And so the day's cricket was complete. An abject failure the likes of which those involved would prefer not to discuss ever again, if anyone reading this could please bear in mind should you attend a Cleeves Farm fixture later this season. But please do come along, the tea is class and far more reliable than the cricketers.

Chalke Valley 206-5 (B Eastmond 3-20; P Butler 1-18) defeated Chilmark 84 (B King 41; B Eastmond 15).