

THE HAMPSHIRE CRICKET SOCIETY

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LORD'S 2009

A DESERVED SUCCESS

Hampshire were properly rewarded for the quality of their cricket throughout the summer when they defeated their local south coast rivals Sussex, by six wickets in the Friends Provident Trophy at Lord's at the end of July. No praise can be too high for the team's display in the Final. They went about their task with a panache and style that captured the imagination. By the end, it was also a triumph of character, with at least two men – Sean Ervine and Nic Pothas – playing on one good leg and another, Chris Tremlett, appearing to be struggling. The performance was the culmination of a sustained and splendid run of form in the competition over a three-month period.

THE GROUP AND KNOCK OUT MATCHES

Hampshire had played positively and with assurance, despite two defeats against Worcestershire during the round robin competition in the early part of the summer. The only other point dropped was their away match in Ireland, which was abandoned without a ball being bowled. Comprehensive victories against Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire (both home and away) and Ireland (at the Rose Bowl) ensured the County finished top of their group. The away game at Trent Bridge in which they dismissed Nottinghamshire for 145, and then romped home without losing a wicket, was described by Kevan James on Radio Solent as "the perfect performance".

That match was only the second in which Michael Lumb and Jimmy Adams were paired together this season and it was their opening partnerships which formed the foundation of the County's wins in their subsequent matches against Middlesex in the quarter-final and Lancashire in the semis. Having started with an undefeated 149 at Trent Bridge, they then bettered that stand with 156 against Middlesex and improved on it still further with 159 at Old Trafford. Not even the fabled opening pair of Barry Richards and Gordon Greenidge had established such dominance in key one-day fixtures. In all three matches the left-handers scored their runs at virtually one a ball to reduce the opposition bowlers to impotency and the fieldsmen to bystanders as they changed through the gears. Their partnership in the latter match was brought to a wider public on SKY television and proved to be a revelation to the top-heavy Lancashire-based commentary team. David Lloyd commented that the days of "Happy Hampshire" were over and that the ultimate victory by 64 runs was a thoroughly professional performance. En route to the final, four

of the top-order five – Lumb, Michael Carberry, Ervine and Chris Benham had posted centuries. The latter was the first to do so when he made a rousing 108 not out against Leicestershire at the Rose Bowl, during which he and Nic Pothas rescued the County from a parlous position with an unbeaten sixth wicket partnership of 177. On the bowling front Dominic Cork had twice squeezed the early life out of the Nottinghamshire top-order. He and Dimitri Mascarenhas, who had missed the early part of the season due to his IPL commitment with the Rajasthan Royals, were proving to be an opening pair to be reckoned with in the latter stages of the run-up to Lord's, with their ability to swing and seam the new (white) ball. In Mascarenhas' absence, Pothas had captained the side in his usual hard-nosed, pragmatic fashion and with much skill.

ARUNDEL AND BEYOND

In the days leading up to the Final, Hampshire had twice had the worst of matches against Sussex at Arundel. They were behind on first innings in the rain-affected Championship fixture, and they then lost the first Pro 40 match of the season by four runs. However, it was only a Mascarenhas special of 78 in the latter part of the innings that brought his side so close. Also, in the week before the Final, Sussex were without a match and therefore possessed the luxury of more preparation time. Hampshire were required to engage Warwickshire in what proved to be a turgid Championship fixture, though there was a compensation in Carberry's double century (204) which was almost Vivianesque in its mastery and weight of stroke. Nevertheless, the County were unable to travel to London until the early evening on Friday. Sussex must have thought that they bore a crucial edge.

Another development that arose at the start of the week was a report alleging that Hampshire were considering playing Kevin Pietersen, who had not played at all for the County for over a year, subject to his release by the ECB. However, the operation on his Achilles terminated that debate, and ensured Hampshire would select from the same squad that had performed so wonderfully well to reach the Final.

Also, on the eve of the Final, Michael Lumb was named in England's 30-man squad for the Champions Trophy in September. Never was a call-up more deserved. His coruscating batting in limited-overs matches during the summer, the highlight of which was his breathtaking Twenty20 century against Essex at the Rose Bowl, simply demanded attention. He was beginning to attract a cult following among Hampshire's supporters; he was becoming one of those men who would empty bars whilst he was at the crease.

THE FINAL

Nic Pothas had missed the previous two weeks because of a groin injury. However, he was named in the team which meant that Hampshire took the field with the same side that had overcome Lancashire. For their part, Sussex omitted the young leg-spinner, Will Beer, who had played in all the previous FPT matches en route to the Final, in favour of the more experienced Robin Martin-Jenkins. It seemed a harsh and potentially damaging decision.

Michael Yardy won the toss and, perhaps surprisingly, decided to bat. From the boundary, the wicket appeared to be browner than the rest of the square, suggesting there might be some dampness under the surface. Cork and Mascarenhas frequently beat the bat in the first seven overs, by which time the score had reached 30. There was a need for Hampshire to take a wicket to reflect the quality of their initial sorties. Dominic Cork duly delivered, not once but three times. Some of the most memorable moments of his career have been at Lord's and he now added a few more cuttings to his scrapbook. First, he enticed Ed Joyce, perhaps deceived by extra bounce, to play on as he attempted to leave the ball. This brought Matt Prior, who had battered the flagging Australian bowlers on the previous Saturday, to the wicket. The first ball was an off cutter which rapped him on the pads but the ensuing choralistic leg before appeal was turned down. The next ball went the other way, took the bat's edge and carried to wicket-keeper, Pothas. It was a clever piece of bowling by Cork. The fall of Prior's wicket brought the Hampshire crowd to their feet; they knew its importance. He then trapped the much improved Chris Nash leg before. The explosive opening bowler had taken three wickets in 11 balls and had placed Hampshire in firm control.

Things then got even better for the County, thanks to a couple of interventions by Chris Tremlett. First, he ran out Murray Goodwin with a fine pick up, followed by a calculated throw to the bowler's end from mid-off. Replacing Mascarenhas at the pavilion end, and bowling at great pace – the speed gun indicated an average speed of some 90 mph – he then bowled the dangerous Luke Wright, also an ebullient strokemaker. Sussex were now teetering on the brink at 77 for 5 with their two fastest scoring batsmen back in the pavilion. However, Yardy was becoming well ensconced and he proceeded to play a captain's innings. He first received frenetic support from Dwayne Smith. He soon lifted Sean Ervine high into the stands over mid-on at the Nursery End. Unable to contain his exuberance, he eventually holed out to Carberry, off Tahir at deep mid-wicket with the score still on only 111. His Captain's reaction to his dismissal – he turned his back as Smith passed him – said it all. Spinners Dawson and Tahir were now bowling in harness largely due to Ervine having damaged his right knee when colliding with the advertising boards in front of the pavilion which led to him leaving the field for treatment. Though he returned later to complete his bowling stint, he left the field again before the end of the Sussex innings. Hamza Riazuddin fielded in his place.

Yardy then received more substantive support from the young Rory Hamilton-Brown. The pitch had now become straw coloured and more benign and the

pair were able to move the ball around the field. However, boundaries were few and far between and attempting to force the pace, the latter skied Tahir to Mascarenhas at mid-wicket. It was a clever piece of bowling by the leg spinner as he cramped Hamilton-Brown with a googly as the batsman moved away to leg. The pair, though, had added 60 priceless runs.

As Mascarenhas and Cork returned to claim a wicket each – Yasir Arafat and Martin-Jenkins respectively, as the Sussex innings drew to a close. Cork's wicket was greeted by thunderous and rapturous applause by the Hampshire faithful, in appreciation of a high-class display. His final figures were for 4 for 41. Yardy was unbeaten on 92 at the end of the Sussex innings at 218 for 9, and rightfully received the plaudits of the crowd and the Hampshire players. His innings had made a game of it, though the general feeling was that Sussex had not scored enough runs.

After early sighters, Adams, with his high, almost Laraesque, backlift, batted very fluently and really set the tone of the Hampshire response with three boundaries in an over off Kirtley – all driven off the front foot through extra cover and mid-off. He was not afraid to take the aerial route. A full blooded pull through mid-wicket off Arafat brought up 50 in the tenth over. Whilst his partner was hurtling along and receiving the lion's share of the bowling, Lumb was content to bide his time though he gave notice of his intentions when he skipped down the wicket to Martin-Jenkins to force him to the Grandstand at mid-wicket. Sussex started to stem the flow of boundaries but the two rapacious openers continued to score at five an over with shots into open spaces and sprinting their runs. Seventy-five came up in the 15th over by which time Yardy had turned to his fifth bowler, Nash with his off-breaks. A sixth bowler, Hamilton-Brown, came on in the next over but the two openers continued to score runs at will. Just when matters were beginning to look hopeless for Sussex, with Hampshire threatening to complete a runaway victory, Wright, who had previously received some fearful hammer, returned at the Nursery End and trapped Adams in front for 55 out of 93 in the 19th over. The bustling Wright then got one to straighten to take the outside edge of Lumb's bat (38) en route to Prior with the score on 110. When the two openers had been dismissed in the previous matches, their successors were unable to exert the same dominance. On this occasion, though, Carberry, with resplendent driving in particular and his trademark pull on one leg to mid-wicket continued to ensure that the momentum of the Hampshire innings was not lost. Ervine, too, got off the mark with a top-edged hook for six off Wright over backward square leg. Both men then perished hooking. Carberry (30 off only 24 balls) skied to be caught and bowled by Arafat; Ervine perished on the square leg boundary where Nash held another steepler, Wright again being the successful bowler. The score now stood on 154 for four and Sussex may have harboured thoughts of a further breakthrough. Overs were not a problem for Hampshire; it seemed a question of batting through quietly to the finish.

However, a period of quiet consolidation was obviously not on Hampshire's agenda on this afternoon. Pothas has become a massively reliable presence and, in tandem with Chris Benham, the pair continued to score their runs at

pace, and safely. The former hit his first ball through the covers for four and repeated the shot shortly afterwards. It was then obvious that his groin injury had resurfaced whilst winding himself up in preparation for the free hit following an Arafat no-ball. After communication with the balcony, he stayed on. Given his grit, determination and sheer cussedness, it would have been a major surprise had he done otherwise. Standing on one leg, he proceeded trading almost exclusively in boundaries, including one startling pulled six off Hamilton-Brown high into the Mound Stand. In the meantime, Benham was also pursuing the task with élan. Sussex repeatedly tested him out on the short ball but he accepted the challenge with alacrity by hooking and pulling to the boundary. He also pulled the young off-spinner far into the same stand. A Pothas on-drive through mid-on and a paddled boundary to square leg by Benham took Hampshire across the line. The pair had added 67 with scarcely an alarm.

The team performance was by far the most assured by a Hampshire side in a Lord's final. They allowed a very good Sussex side virtually no respite. It was a display reminiscent of the great Australian sides of the last twenty years in that every time they might have come under serious pressure the batsmen frequently found the boundary to relieve the situation. It was a mightily impressive and commanding accomplishment.

It was inevitable and deserving that Dominic Cork should receive the man-of-the-match award. It was, almost unbelievably, sixteen years since he last won the award in a Final; on that occasion it was for his batting. He had fully justified Hampshire's decision to sign him during the previous winter and became a folk hero with the County's supporters in the process.

It later transpired that the County may have won the last Cup Final ever to be held at Lord's. A few days after Hampshire's victory, the ECB announced a revised structure for the 2010 season which had, at that time, no place for the now traditional 50 – overs game. The Lord's Final since 1963 had incorporated a number of formats, from 50 overs to 65 overs a side, knock-out and leagues, various sponsors and different timings. Whilst many claimed, with some justification, that transferring the date of a Final from the end of the season removed some of the former sense of occasion, for both players and spectators alike a Cup Final at Lord's was a very special and memorable event in their lives, irrespective of the result. Talks are ongoing about a third competition. It must be hoped that a place will be found for a proper day long cricket match, culminating in a Final at cricket's Headquarters.

HAMPSHIRE IN THE TWENTY20

Hampshire never quite played with the same consistency in the Twenty20 as they had in the Friends Provident Trophy. Nevertheless, the County demonstrated they were coming to terms with the requirements of the Twenty20 format by reaching the Quarter-Finals for only the second time (the first was in 2004). They were defeated in a tight match with Northamptonshire by 13 runs. It was a game that fluctuated throughout. Chasing 135, the County eventually required 17 off the final 12 balls with four wickets in hand. The odds must have been on a Hampshire win but the dismissal of captain Dimi Mascarenhas (36) with 14 runs needed signalled an uncharacteristic collapse as the final three wickets then fell without the addition of a single run.

In the group stages of the Competition, Hampshire finished behind Kent and Sussex – who both eventually reached Finals Day – but qualified for the Quarter-Final by virtue of being one of the best third place finishers. Interestingly, Northamptonshire were top of their group, above a strongly fancied Somerset; both Counties also qualified for Finals Day. There were two highlights in the County's performances in the group phase. One was at last laying the Chelmsford bogey by defeating Essex in the final match.

If any criticism has to be levelled at Hampshire's one-day performances during the season, it is that they were virtually invincible at The Rose Bowl – the only defeat at the time of writing was the very first match against Worcestershire in the FPT – but much more vulnerable away.

Nevertheless, this year's Competition will always be memorable for Michael Lumb's astounding 124 not out in only 69 balls against Essex at The Rose Bowl. It was the fourth highest Twenty20 innings ever recorded anywhere in the world, and, of course, Hampshire's first such century. His second wicket partnership of 170 with Michael Carberry was also the fourth highest to date for any wicket.

Do visit the website at <http://hcs.cricketchive.co.uk>

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