

HAMPSHIRE CRICKET SOCIETY

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BOB WILLIS TROPHY 2020

ROUND FIVE (6-9 SEPTEMBER)

And so, as in 2019, the final first-class County match of the season featured the same two sides, Essex and Somerset, vying to be the best in the land. The new format had produced the same outcome as that in last year's Division One of the County Championship.

Both teams thoroughly deserved to contest the final, by virtue of being the only teams to win four of their five matches. Somerset were deprived of a 100% record, when rain washed out all but 16 overs of the final day at Edgbaston; they needed to take only two more wickets for victory at the close. Essex's only unfinished match was that against Hampshire at Arundel when the weather permitted only 78 overs to be bowled. It was Hampshire's shortest match this century. Somerset finished the group stage on 97 points, seven more than Essex and ten more than the other group winners, Yorkshire.

The most intriguing game of the final round was between **Worcestershire and Somerset** at New Road. The star of the show was Somerset's young opening batsman Tom Lammonby. Left-handed, of Australian heritage but born in Exeter, he had made his first-class debut in round one and scored his maiden century in the fourth match at Bristol. He now played an extraordinary innings when Somerset batted a second time by carrying his bat for 107 in just under five hours, out of a total of 193. But for that performance, Worcestershire may have reached the final instead. He has effectively replaced the retired Marcus Trescothick in the Somerset side; comparisons will be inevitable. Somerset gained a first innings lead of 50 (250-200). Their pace quartet of Craig Overton, Josh Davey, Lewis Gregory and Jack Brookes claimed all their opponents' wickets in the match, in taking their side to a 60-run victory.

Essex's nine wicket win over **Middlesex** at Chelmsford was a simpler affair, though, for much of the match, no less compelling. After bowling out Middlesex for 138 (Jamie Porter, Sam Cook and Simon Harmer sharing the wickets), Essex were in some trouble at 87 for five in their reply. The mercurial Adam Wheeler then came to the rescue with an unbeaten 83 to take them to 236, a lead of 98. Cook, Harmer and Aaron Beard (four for 21) took full advantage as they bowled out Middlesex for 150.

Yorkshire were also unbeaten, winning three of their five matches. The other two were drawn. Rain often intervened, particularly in their matches against Derbyshire and Lancashire, both at Headingley, but neither game developed sufficiently to

speculate on the outcome. They routed **Leicestershire** by 10 wickets in their final match, also played at their headquarters.

Hampshire fielded perhaps their youngest ever, and most inexperienced, side when they took the field for their final match against **Kent** at Canterbury. Only Sam Northeast, who captained the side throughout the Competition, was capped. They handed a first-class debut to Scott Currie (aged 19). Tom Scriven (21) and Ajeet Dale (20) made their second appearances. The first two distinguished themselves especially. Currie made a first innings 38 – second highest score before taking three wickets, including Zak Crawley, whom he trapped leg before for a duck, early on the second morning. On Crawley's previous appearance against the County in the last match of 2019, again at Canterbury, Kyle Abbott had also dismissed him without scoring.

For the first half of the match, Hampshire gave an extremely encouraging account of themselves. After being bowled out for 191, they had Kent reeling at 123 for nine. However, a last wicket partnership of 47 between Marcus O'Riordan and the pugnacious Harry Podmore shifted the momentum. The Hampshire top order virtually disappeared without trace as the first five wickets fell for only 23. It was now that Scriven came to the fore, making a most impressive and mature 68 in keeping Kent at bay for some three hours. He added 87 for the sixth wicket in partnership with Lewis McManus (50). The pair were the only two men to reach double figures as Hampshire were dismissed on the third morning for 159, leaving Kent requiring 180 to win. On paper, it looked a competitive target, especially when Ian Holland took the wicket of Daniel Bell-Drummond for the second time in the match. However, Crawley now revealed his class with a resplendent 105 in two and a half hours. He eventually fell leg-before to Mason Crane and Dale accounted Jack Leaning for a duck. Heino Kuhn then emphatically finalised the match with a six off Crane. It had been a game performance by Hampshire, but they had been undone during that two hour spell earlier in the day.

The reason for the truncated season was, of course, Covid-19 and the disease gave a salutary reminder of its continued presence in the match between **Gloucestershire and Northamptonshire** at Bristol. At lunch on the first day, it came to light that a member of the Northants playing squad had tested positive. Although the player concerned was not part of the squad that travelled to the match, and had been self-isolating at home, members of the Northamptonshire squad had been in contact with the player within 48 hours of him developing Covid symptoms. The two teams and the ECB agreed that in the interest of players' safety the match should be abandoned. It was a sad way for Jeremy Lloyds, standing in his last first-class match after 23 years on the Umpires' list, to end his career. Earlier, the players had formed a guard of honour as he stepped onto the field.

Ian Bell, having earlier announced his retirement, ended his distinguished career, spanning 22 years, by making 50 and 90 for **Warwickshire against Glamorgan** on a bowler-friendly wicket at Cardiff.

THE FINAL (23-27 SEPTEMBER)

Essex duly won the Bob Willis Trophy Final. In the event of a drawn match, the side who lead on first innings would win the Trophy. Essex narrowly gleaned that advantage (337 – 8; 301). Having been set 237 to win in 81 overs – a generous declaration - they decided pull down the shutters after losing their first four wickets, including that of Alastair Cook, for 98.

In the final analysis, it was a disappointing and negative end to the match and, indeed, the competition. Nevertheless, the game included a number of highlights. Eddie Byrom, recorded his maiden Championship century (117) for Somerset in the first innings. Like Hampshire's Sean Ervine before him, he was born in Zimbabwe and an Irish passport holder. Essex's Sam Cook also took five for 76. The match was virtually decided by Alastair Cook. He batted determinedly, but fluently, for nearly six and a half hours for 172. He demonstrated that he was still the best opening batsman in the country. Lewis Gregory (six for 72) set the Essex alarm bells ringing as he dismissed Cook and much of the Essex middle order, but Adam Wheeler (26 not out), displaying admirable restraint, ensured Essex achieved their goal. The precocious Tom Lammonby (116), who made his third century in as many matches and Craig Overton (45 not out) then set the scene for the final Act. Overton enjoyed a fine all round match. Would Essex have held on had his brother, Jamie, not joined Surrey earlier in the season? Somerset were once again the bridesmaid in red ball cricket, for the fourth time in five years. Their nemesis had won their third title in four years.

All those involved in bringing cricket coverage to the public deserve great credit. We were able to watch the matches on screen with commentary by the BBC local radio stations, and just listen to them by the same means. The commentators were, in fact, fans of their Counties and it was interesting to hear the views on the characters and personalities of the various members of "their" teams. David Allen reminded us in his blog that the commentators are also their own technicians, they have to set up all their communication equipment themselves. Full credit must be given to Kevan James on Radio Solent and his colleagues on the other BBC radio stations.

The matches were always full of interest and virtually every County had their memorable moments. Perhaps the most endearing feature was the sheer number of players making their first team debuts. It will be interesting to see how many establish themselves next season. There was certainly much talent prevalent. One of the heartening features was the number of spin bowlers who made an impact. The Irishman Jack Carson (Sussex) and Dan Moriarty (Surrey) seem two for the

future. And in Dale, Currie and Scriven, Hampshire have produced that rarity for the County: home grown pace bowlers.

BOB WILLIS TROPHY- STATS HIGHLIGHTS

MOST RUNS

563 Sir Alastair Cook (Essex), 498 Jake Libby (Worcestershire), 459 Tom Lammonby (Somerset), 425 Ben Slater (Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire), 423 Will Rhodes (Warwickshire).

MOST WICKETS

38 Simon Harmer (Essex), 30 Craig Overton (Somerset), 29 Darren Stevens (Kent), 25 Tim Murtagh (Middlesex).

INTERNATIONAL MATCHES AT THE AGEAS BOWL

THE TESTS AGAINST PAKISTAN

The teams arrived at The Ageas Bowl after England had secured a one-nil series lead at Old Trafford, after some memorable batting in the second innings by Jos Buttler and Chris Woakes, who took England to the brink of victory with an aggressive sixth wicket partnership of 139. Prior to that stand, a Pakistan victory looked inevitable.

The first of the two tests against Pakistan on Hampshire's ground was, unfortunately, eminently forgettable. Due to rain and bad light over the five days, only 134.4 overs were possible. (Pakistan 236; England 110 – 4 dec..) More play may have been possible had not the umpires strictly applied the rules, to wide condemnation. For example, on day two, they applied a full lunch break after a 90 – minute delay. It was poor public relations, given that cricket fans had been deprived so much cricket already. Later on, they came off for bad light just as Mohammad Rizwan (top score in the match with 73) was showing a distinct liking for Stuart Broad's bowling.

Thereafter, in the second match, more flexibility was in evidence. Though rain eventually had the final say, the match was memorable for four feats, two of which will find an indelible place in the history books.

ZAK CRAWLEY (267)

Zak Crawley's innings was one to treasure. Coming to the wicket after the early loss of Rory Burns, he looked at home immediately. He clipped the first ball he received off his hip to the square leg boundary. In the next nine hours he played the most watchable innings by an England batsman in recent years. It was one for the connoisseur, made the more pleasurable after having watched the stolid England openers offending our eyes for what has seemed an eternity. He was balanced; played straight; was equally adept off front and back foot; his timing was wondrous; his shot selection impeccable. His straight driving off the back foot was an indication of real class and quality. He always looked to score runs. Given that he had

previously scored only three centuries, his concentration was exceptional. His test match mentality was demonstrated by his waiting until he had scored 130 before pulling out the reverse sweep. Not surprisingly, he showed signs of tiring towards the end but he had played an innings for the Gods. His knock was simply too good to be a “one-off”.

JOS BUTTLER (152)

Buttler made his highest score in first-class cricket. Too often in the past he has been left to bat with the tail and lost his wicket whilst attempting to score quick runs before his remaining team mates were dismissed. However, in a fifth wicket partnership of 359 with Crawley – an England record – he was able to bat at his own pace. It was an innings of maturity and restraint. Unfortunately, his wicketkeeping remains troubling.

AZHAR ALI (141 not out in Pakistan’s first innings)

Azhar has always looked a good batsman but, surprisingly, he had not scored a test century away from home (in Pakistan or the UAE) for over three years. Like Crawley he came to the wicket after the loss of a very early wicket. He was under pressure having made only 38 runs in his three innings in the series. He then skilfully marshalled the rest of the Pakistan innings, scoring his runs out of 267 whilst he was at the wicket. He was watchful, untroubled, and as he approached his century, and afterwards, he played with more freedom. His efforts did not enable Pakistan to avoid the follow-on but their innings would have been a sorry mess otherwise. Of the other batsmen, only Rizwan (53) scored more than 21.

JAMES ANDERSON (600th test wicket)

There was much drama surrounding Jimmy Anderson’s 600th test wicket. He came into the match needing another seven to attain the landmark. He made significant inroads by claiming five for 65 with his usual mastery of swing in the Pakistan first innings. But for his own fielders he should have achieved the landmark towards the end of that innings. England’s fielding had been erratic throughout the summer and they now transpired to drop three catches in the space of 20 minutes. Anderson greeted each with a wry smile. Inwardly, he must have been seething. Buttler then dropped yet another straightforward chance at the start of the Pakistan second innings, but he dismissed Abid Ali, leg before, shortly before the close. He therefore still needed one wicket. The weather then did its best to deprive him on the final day. Play did not start until 4.15pm. Would the match have been abandoned earlier had he not been so close to the milestone? Finally, Azhar Ali mistimed a forcing shot off the back foot; the ball flew off the edge to Joe Root above his head at slip who clasped it at the top of his fingertips. Smiles and non social distancing congratulations all round. James Michael Anderson had become the first pace bowler to take 600 wickets in test cricket.

THE ONE DAY INTERNATIONALS AGAINST IRELAND

England won the three match series by two games to one. The surprise occurred in the last. Chasing 328 runs to win, Paul Stirling (142 off 128 balls), the former Middlesex opening batsman, and the Ireland captain Andrew Balbirnie (113 off 112

balls) routed England's bowling attack as they battered a match winning partnership of 214 for the second wicket. Earlier, Eoin Morgan had scored 106 off 84 balls. Ireland eased home by seven wickets with a ball to spare but, in reality, their win was a lot easier than that. It was a most uplifting performance. Though Jason Roy scored only one run in the last two matches, it was James Vince who drew most criticism from the Press. On all three occasions, he started well, cruised into double figures, but was then dismissed. The reasons why he has rarely been able to reproduce his County form at international level will remain one of the game's enduring mysteries.

THE T20 INTERNATIONALS AGAINST AUSTRALIA

England won the three match series by the same margin as they did against Ireland. They won the first match by two runs after Australia lost five wickets for 36 runs off the last 34 balls. England then won the next easily by six wickets. They owed much for those two wins to Jos Buttler (opening the batting with 44 and 77 not out) and Dawid Malan (66 and 42). With Buttler resting, Australia cruised home by five wickets in the third.

HAMPSHIRE IN THE VITALITY BLAST

The least said about Hampshire's t20 campaign, the better. When they won their third match against Essex at Chelmsford (always a hoodoo ground for them) with virtually the same youthful team that they fielded in the BWT, there was cause for optimism. However, though James Vince and Shaheen Shah Afridi later came into the side, they were rarely competitive. Their only other win was their last match, against Middlesex at the Ageas Bowl; and a memorable and remarkable one it was. Shaheen had only taken one wicket in his preceding six matches. He now took six for 19, including four in four balls (all clean bowled) to end the Middlesex innings. His figures were the best for Hampshire in t20 cricket. Also, no man had previously taken four in four for any team in the format. He thus emulated Kevan James in the Hampshire record book, though the latter's feat was, of course, in first-class cricket. It was though a marvellous performance by the delighted young Pakistan left-arm fast bowler. It was a pity that like Crawley, Anderson, Buttler, Azhar Ali, Stirling, and Balbirnie before him, there were no spectators on the ground to witness it. However, Hampshire did play before a crowd against Surrey at the Oval. Mention must also be made of an extraordinary batting display by the omnipresent Zak Crawley at The Ageas Bowl. After Hampshire posted a reasonable total of 182 – 6, Crawley stroked an unbeaten 108 off only 54 balls. The editor has been reliably informed that it was a strictly orthodox affair.

THE SOUTHERN VIPERS

Congratulations to the Southern Vipers for deservedly winning the Rachel Heyhoe Flint Trophy. There will be more coverage in the next Newsletter.