

HAMPSHIRE CRICKET SOCIETY

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AHMEDABAD CONCERNS

At the time of writing, the third test between India and England, in Ahmedabad's cavernous new cricket stadium, finished two days ago. It is difficult to remember a more notorious test; certainly one that has provoked so much discussion.

The match was completed in just over five sessions. If it had been a Championship game, the home side would have incurred penalty points and a heavy fine. But no system currently exists for punitive action in Test matches, or more to the point, the World Test Championship. Despite all of India's protestations, by any test, the pitch was, sub-standard. The fifth ball of the match disturbed the surface. It remains a fact that seven Indian wickets fell for 53 runs on the second morning, five of which were taken by Joe Root. He ended with the astonishing figures of five for eight. Should he have bowled much earlier?

Conspiracy theorists might say that India were always going to win the match. Ahmedabad is in Gujarat, in a stadium named after the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Modi is also President of the Gujarat Cricket Association. The pressure on India to win the match would have been immense.

There were troubling issues with the third umpire. In one instance, he did not allow the film to run on sufficiently when England had claimed a catch. Also, Rohit Sharma received a reprieve with his foot still in the air when Ben Foakes broke the wicket. At Chennai, he was similarly spared with his foot on the line. The line belongs to the wicketkeeper, not the batsman.

However, England also need to look at themselves, on and off the pitch. The rotation policy was laid bare as folly. After gaining momentum in Sri Lanka, Joe Root was deprived of Jonny Bairstow and Jos Buttler at the start of the Indian series as they were rostered to return home. Is it sensible to base a policy on the potential availability of players for an Ashes series in Australia several months hence? Also, India are currently a better side than Australia; so why weaken the side now?

England clearly had preconceived ideas about the pink ball and the swing it would generate. They did not change their views even when the pitch was revealed on the

morning of the match. Hence, not for the first time overseas, they were overloaded with underused seam bowlers at the expense of spin.

Also, the technical frailties of some of England's batsmen were shown graphically. Only Root, Zak Crawley (on the basis of a majestic first innings that had Sunil Gavaskar drooling) and, to a lesser extent, Ben Stokes can be exonerated. The latter played judiciously in the second innings, only to receive the inevitable ball with his name on it. Behind the wickets, Ben Foakes was quite magnificent. As the ball spat, squatted, and turned left and right prodigiously, he caught virtually everything in the middle of his gloves. And, as mentioned above, he was too quick for the umpires on two stumpings. Jack Leach, after a career threatening illness in New Zealand, and having barely played any cricket in 2020, as well as surviving a savage onslaught at the hands of the Indian batsmen in the first innings at Chennai, performed resourcefully, and demonstrated that he is a quick learner.

It is, though, difficult to be too critical of the England batsmen. They are a product of the County system. Unless they have endured trial by spin at Taunton, their opportunities to play on turning pitches have been very limited. Indeed, in recent years, it is possible that centrally contracted players have never played there. Batting on Oval shirt fronts, as is the case with three of the England squad, is poor preparation for an Indian tour.

And so what will happen in the fourth Test, again at Ahmedabad? For any change in the conditions, it needs the broadcasters, Star TV, to engage in robust dialogue with India. They must have felt short-changed. But it would be a major surprise if there is not going to be more of the same next Friday. In truth, India don't need to doctor the pitch. England, in one way or other, have already scored too many own goals to be a genuine threat. That marvellous victory in the first test at Chennai, founded on the excellent Joe Root, now seems a world away.

JAMES VINCE IN THE BBL (2)

Hampshire's supporters have had much to celebrate in the performances of James Vince in Australia's Big Bash League this winter. It has helped to shorten the winter and the third Covid lockdown.

Hampshire's captain demonstrated time and again that it is possible to score runs quickly in t20 cricket with proper cricket shots. He never resorted to "the ramp" or reverse sweep. Last winter in the BBL, bowlers were able to tie him down on the leg side. In this year's competition, they had to counter rasping pull shots, and penetrative hooks. He scored just as many runs on the leg side as the off. All his

innings were punctuated by his trademark glorious cover and straight driving, either along the ground or over the top, as well as square cutting. Because of his orthodoxy, opposing captains eventually forsook a fielder at long leg to strengthen the field in front of the wicket. But he still found a way through. He always batted stylishly off both front and back foot. And, as Ricky Ponting stated, he made it all look so effortless. In the process, he gave credibility to t20 cricket, a format so often mocked by the purists.

Moreover, he showed he possessed a steely temperament, producing his best performances in the final three matches of the season, when the pressure was really on, as his side, the Sydney Sixers, sought to retain their crown. In the last match of the group stage, against the Melbourne Stars at the MCG, the Sixers required one more point to finish in first place. The home side scored 177 for six. The Sixers needed to score 73 in the first ten overs for their batting bonus point, and hence the league title. The editor has never seen James Vince bat so commandingly from the first ball of an innings. He raced to 46 off 32 balls to put the issue beyond doubt. As is always the case when he is batting with ease, it was a shock when he was dismissed.

He then rolled-out two memorable innings, in the subsequent play-off section of the tournament, both against the Perth Scorchers. In the first (the Qualifier – so called as the winner progressed straight to the final), at the Manuka Oval, Canberra, he scored a wondrous 98 not out off just 53 balls to guide his side to a nine wicket victory. He barely seemed to break sweat. He and his opening partner, Josh Phillipe, added 92 for the first wicket in 8.5 overs in pursuit of a victory target of 168. Phillipe is a roman candle type of batsman – frenetic, sparkling shots as he sends the ball to all parts of the compass. He was later named Player of the Tournament. Vince then dominated the rest of the innings. He completed his fifty off only 26 balls. The end of the match was a controversial anti-climax. Conscious that Vince was so near his century, his partner, Daniel Hughes, unselfishly blocked the last three balls of the 19th over, with the scores level. The excitement, even watching on a television screen on the other side of the world, was palpable. The crowd were willing him on, as were his own team-mates. Even the umpires seemed to capture the mood. However, the first ball of the 20th over, bowled by Andrew Tye, was sent high and wide down the legside so that Vince was unable to reach it. It was clearly a wide. He looked stunned; the crowd momentarily fell silent. The umpire evidently did not want to signal the wide, but in the end, he had no option. Tye later protested it was an accident. His action when he reached the crease to bowl the ball suggested otherwise. A crescendo of booing by the crowd reverberated around the ground. James Vince left the arena to a standing ovation and when he reached the Sixers bench, he was engulfed by his team-mates in an un-Covid celebration. He had seen his side to the final.

The culmination of the tournament, on the following Saturday, when the Perth Scorchers again awaited them, posed a dilemma for the editor. It coincided with Joe Root's great innings at Chennai. However, having watched Vince's fortunes in the previous two matches, and as it was the final, the editor switched to BT Sports. He was glad he did. The match was the Sixer's first at the Sydney Cricket Ground in the winter, and James Vince left Australia in style.

On this occasion, his side batted first. He reached his half-century off 31 balls. So quickly was he scoring that Ponting declared that Vince would be eyeing 150 yet alone a century. The gasp when he was dismissed for 95 at the start of the 15th over, was audible. He had faced 60 balls, prompting yet another standing ovation from an appreciative crowd and acclaim from his team-mates. The Sixers innings eventually closed on 188 for six. The Scorchers were never in the hunt in their reply and they finished on 161 for nine. When he held a wonderful catch to dismiss the dangerous Mitchell Marsh, his Man of the Match award in successive matches was assured. Upon receipt of his award, it was obvious that Sydneysiders had taken the quiet, unassuming Hampshire captain to their hearts.

He ended his 16-match season with 537 runs. Only Alex Hales, in one fewer match (543) scored more. Hales was later selected for the England t20 squad. Vince was a conspicuous absentee. Ed Smith stated he needed another string to his bow to gain entry: really? His strike rate was an impressive 143.58 and he struck eleven sixes and 59 fours. The latter feat was by far the best in the competition, illustrating just how safely he made his runs.

One of the main features of the tournament was that it was played before crowds. The atmosphere they generated gave a reminder of what all sports fans in the UK have been missing in the past 12 months.

James Vince has now played on the winning side six times in national t20 competitions in four different countries – England and Australia (twice each), South Africa and Pakistan. After Sydney, he flew home for five days, before travelling east once more, to the Pakistan Super League. In the second match there, he scored 84 off 55 balls for Multan Sultans against Peshawar Zalmi at the National Stadium, Karachi. Unfortunately, his side lost with an over to spare.

THE FORTHCOMING SEASON

The published fixtures for next season's white ball cricket are listed below and overleaf. The editor understands that the ECB will be making a statement in the next fortnight, presumably after meeting with stakeholders, over detailed arrangements

for next season in the wake of the Prime Minister's statement on Monday 22 February, giving the key dates for moving out of lockdown.

It can be seen that the t20 programme is uniquely lop sided, with Hampshire scheduled to play away for the first half (including twice at Canterbury) and at home for the second.

VITALITY BLAST FIXTURES

Wednesday	09 June	Kent Spitfires	Canterbury	18.30
Friday	11 June	Essex Eagles	Chelmsford	18.30
Saturday	12 June	Sussex Sharks	Hove	19.00
Sunday	13 June	Kent Spitfires	Canterbury	14.30
Tuesday	15 June	Middlesex	Radlett	18.30
Friday	18 June	Surrey	Kia Oval	18.30
Sunday	20 June	Gloucestershire	Bristol	14.30
Friday	25 June	Somerset	Taunton	18.30
Monday	28 June	Middlesex	Ageas Bowl	18.30
Wednesday	30 June	Surrey	Ageas Bowl	18.30
Friday	02 July	Gloucestershire	Ageas Bowl	18.30
Friday	09 July	Somerset	Ageas Bowl	18.30
Friday	16 July	(Essex Eagles (Sussex Sharks	Ageas Bowl	14.00 19.00
Sunday	18 July	Glamorgan	Ageas Bowl	14.30

The matches against Essex Eagles and Sussex Sharks at the Ageas Bowl are a "double-header".

ROYAL LONDON CUP

Thursday	22 July	Essex	Ageas Bowl	11.00
Tuesday	27 July	Sussex	Ageas Bowl	11.00
Friday	30 July	Middlesex	Radlett	11.00
Sunday	01 August	Lancashire	Ageas Bowl	11.00
Wednesday	04 August	Worcestershire	Ageas Bowl	11.00
Friday	06 August	Gloucestershire	Bristol	11.00
Sunday	08 August	Kent	tbc	11.00
Thursday	12 August	Durham	Chester-le-Street	11.00
Saturday	14 August	Quarter-Finals		
Tuesday	17 August	Semi-Finals		
Thursday	19 August	Final at Trent Bridge		

The Hundred and Royal London Cup Group Stages (above) will run simultaneously. As things stand currently this means that Hampshire will be without James Vince, Liam Dawson, Mason Crane and Chris Wood for the latter competition.

KYLE ABBOTT

The original London Spirit selections for The Hundred in 2020 included Kyle Abbott; he is not now named for any team. Does that mean he will remain in South Africa? If so, the reasons will be well understood, given the South African Covid-19 variant and the current travel ban. Current advice on the government website is that direct flights between South Africa and the UK are suspended and that “visitors arriving into England who have been in or transited through South Africa in the previous 10 days will not be permitted entry”. However, South Africa’s Kagiso Rabada has been included in the Manchester Originals Squad.

SOUTHERN VIPERS – FIXTURES 2021

Southern Vipers begin their defence of the Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy against Loughborough Lightning at the Ageas Bowl on Saturday 29 May. The full fixture list is outlined below. At this stage, the venues for all the other matches remain to be confirmed.

Saturday 29 May	Loughborough Lightning
Monday 31 May	South East Stars (away)
Saturday 5 June	Central Sparks (home)
Saturday 12 June	Western Storm (away)
Friday 10 September	Lancashire Thunder (away)
Sunday 12 September	Sunrisers (away)
Saturday 18 September	Northern Diamonds (home)

All matches are of 50 overs duration and start at 11.00 am.

NORMAN AMEY

Members will be sad to learn that Norman Amey died in November. The Society has only just learned of his death. Norman was a long standing member of the Society and regularly attended our meetings until the recent past. He also rarely missed a day’s play at Hampshire’s home matches, where he would sit with his late wife, Jean. He and Jean also travelled on some England’s tours.

MEET THE MEMBER

If any other members wish to tell of their life in cricket, please contact the editor at newslettereditor@hantscricsoc.org.uk Contributions should be between 500 – 1000 words. The editor reserves the right to edit any submissions. There was a list of talking points to help with your article in the January Newsletter.