**ETON v HARROW 2014**

Lord’s was bathed in sunshine as the Captains walked out for a crucial toss in near perfect batting conditions. Both sides were keen to bat first since both were over-reliant on good players at the top of the order, and wanted to avoid batting under the pressure of a run-chase. Both also had strong bowling attacks, and the teams looked well matched, with Harrow perhaps shading the pre-match analysis because of their superior spin bowlers. De Silva was therefore delighted to win the toss for Harrow, and elected to bat without hesitation. The match had added poignancy, since it was John Rice’s final Lord’s match after a distinguished 30 year career as the Eton Cricket Professional, and Simon Halliday will step down as Master-in-Charge at Harrow after a highly successful 17 year tenure at the end of the season.

Eton immediately struck the first blow when MacMillan bowled a nervous Ruffell fifth ball. This looked a crucial wicket since Ruffell had scored consistent runs throughout the season. This brought White to the crease, becoming one of the rare cricketers who have made five appearances in this fixture. In previous years he had looked nervous and had a top score of 12, but this year he cast caution to the wind, and played fluently and aggressively right from the start. He was particularly strong driving straight and on the legside, and hit seven flawless boundaries. De Silva was playing soundly and responsibly, and the pair had added 50 by the 12th over, when the introduction of Fenwick brought immediate reward as he swung a ball away from De Silva (19) which was neatly held by Watt at slip. The left-handed Rath, a colt who has already represented Hong Kong in a full T20 international, began purposefully, and the score had reached 78 at more than 4 per over when White tried to run the slow left arm of Gnodde down to third man and was bowled for 45 - his first false shot. Eton were delighted with their progress, but Steward started confidently with a pair of boundaries, and Rath began to really dominate, driving powerfully, and was not afraid to hit the ball over the top. The pair had fluently added 67 in 11 overs when Gnodde had Steward caught at the wicket by Russell for a well-crafted 30. Gnodde had bowled a controlled spell of 7 overs 2-22 in the midst of the onslaught, but both Yerburgh and Bouchier had been expensive. Soon after, lunch was taken with Harrow 153-4 from 32 overs. They had established the platform for a large total, but Eton knew that there was a vulnerable lower order to come. Rath reached an assured and aggressive fifty from 55 balls, and the left-handed Wijaratne looked secure, so that the score mounted steadily to 175, until the return of Griffin induced a wild shot from Rath when a hundred was there for the taking. He had nonetheless taken the game away from Eton by scoring 59 from 68 balls. Wijaratne continued to play very sensibly, never missing the opportunity to score, but wickets began to fall at the other end: Fenwick having Grist lbw, Griffin bowling Smith and MacMillan having Kellock caught behind and trapping Robyns lbw. At 209-9 Eton had clawed themselves back into the game, and were potentially chasing a significantly lower target than expected. However Wijaratne now moved onto the offensive, and found stubborn support from Elworthy; they put on a crucial 24 runs in 23 balls before Wijaratne was bowled by MacMillan for 40. Harrow had finished on 233 from 53.1 overs, which was a large but not unchasable total on a good pitch and fast outfield. The Eton bowlers had stuck to their task, with MacMillan 4-39 and Gnodde 2-30 standing out, and were well supported in the field.

It was Eton’s turn to suffer a telling blow early in their innings when the in-form Watt was bizarrely run out, stationary and a couple of yards out of his ground when a good throw came in from Smith from third man in the fourth over. Gnodde came in to join Treon and was immediately into his stride with a pair of driven boundaries from successive balls. Treon was batting with determination but struggled to get the ball away, and the pair had added 41 in 11 overs when Treon hung his bat outside off-stump and was caught behind by White off Robyns for 11. Russell had played himself in sensibly, and had just scored his first boundary when he was well held at slip by Kellock attempting a cut off Robyns. Blake was soon lbw to the left-arm spin of Rath shuffling forward, and Ruffell began an impressive spell, evoking the traditional values of consistently pitching the ball up just outside off-stump at a lively pace, and clean bowling Collins (with a peach) and Bouchier, so that Eton had sagged to 91-6. Gnodde meanwhile continued his serene progress, driving with excellent and graceful timing off both front and back foot, and he at last found a reliable partner in MacMillan who got well forward and played straight. He reached a faultless 50 from 56 balls, but Harrow began to deny him much of the strike by dropping fielders out when he was facing, and ensuring that MacMillan could not get a single when he was not. Harrow cemented their strangle when the Eton captain was unluckily caught behind down the leg-side off the reliable Elworthy for a fine 73 from 85 balls including 9 boundaries. With his dismissal at 112-7 went Eton’s hopes of winning the game, but MacMillan and Griffin now embarked on a lively partnership of big hitting mixed with watchful defense. They had added 37 in 8 overs when Griffin was bowled by the ever-impressive Ruffell for 22. Yerburgh kept MacMillan company, who continued to hit effectively, until the former was bowled by Rath. MacMillan’s brave innings (33) was ended by a well-judged catch by Steward off Rath, running in from long-on soon after. Eton had been bowled out in the 51st over for 170, and therefore lost the match by 63 runs. All of the Harrow bowlers had bowled consistently straight (conceding just 4 wides compared to Eton’s 19), with Rath 3-30, Ruffell 3-42 and Kellock 0-27 from 10 overs standing out, and were also very well supported in the field.

A feature of the day was the very high standard of wicket-keeping on both sides. White and Russell stood up to the seamers most of the time, putting additional pressure on the batsmen, and taking the ball consistently cleanly, and whipping off the bails at every opportunity. As might have been predicted, neither side were able to use their full allocation of overs, and Gnodde shaded White and Rath for the innings of the day. The umpiring was of a consistently high standard as might be expected from two very experienced officials. Harrow fully deserved their win, demonstrating greater depth in their batting, and bowling a more consistent line. So for SJH the spoils of a win in his final game, and for JMR the commiserations, but memories of many fine triumphs: they will both be sorely missed by their respective schools.

*Mark Williams*