**ETON v HARROW 2013**

**Report by Mark Williams**

*For the full scorecard click here*

The portents were not promising; puddles on the tarmac behind the pavilion indicating substantial overnight rain, and a forecast which suggested at least one interruption to heavy showers during the day. In the event, thanks to the excellence of the covering on the square, the efficiency of the new drainage system on the outfield, and the hard work and positive co-operation of the groundstaff, the match was able to start on time in very good conditions, and thanks to a blustery wind, good fortune and some pragmatic umpiring, the players never left the field all day. Harrow won a toss that both captains might secretly have been hoping to lose because of the uncertainty of the weather, and bravely and correctly elected to bat. The pitch was dry and was two strips closer to the middle of the square than usual, although the Tavern boundary was still intimidatingly short for the bowlers; it had been used the previous day for the MCCU final. Both sides had had mixed seasons, losing more often than usual, but both had recorded several wins against good opposition. It looked an evenly balanced encounter in prospect, and as fortunes swung one way and the other all day, it wasn’t clear who would win until very close to the end.

Roy began with a maiden to Ruffell under overcast skies, so that the ball swung all morning, as the bowlers struggled to control their line, conceding regular wides. Bose (last year’s centurion) was quickly into his stride, confidently dispatching the ball to the boundary and favouring the pull shot. It should have been his undoing in the 9th over, when he misjudged a relatively short ball from Roy and offered a catch above head height to Mould at square leg, who could only palm it over the bar. Ruffell was more circumspect, and Harrow had established a secure foundation at 37-0 after 11 overs, when the introduction of Mould heralded an uncharacteristically loose back foot drive from Ruffell which was caught comfortably at cover by Carleton-Smith. Bose continued to dominate with a flurry of boundaries so that 3 overs later the score had reached 60-1. Once again a bowling change was immediately effective as the left arm spin of Eckett had the dangerous Bose skillfully caught behind by Russell chasing a wide half volley with his first ball. Cousens (the Harrow captain) began confidently, driving fluently and running aggressively, and the score had once again accelerated to 99-2 after just 21 overs. White had been playing himself in mainly in singles, and looked well set when he surprisingly shouldered arms to a ball from Mould, who had been bringing the ball back down the slope all morning, and was palpably lbw. Harrow had batted aggressively, but had paid the penalty of losing 3 key wickets, and Boyd represented their last dangerous batsman. Unsurprisingly, Harrow batted more circumspectly for the rest of the morning, and survived comfortably without further loss to lunch at 136-3 after 32 overs. The game was evenly poised, with Harrow probably the happier side, having established the foundation for a large score and with two senior batsmen well set, but one sensed that the half hour after lunch would be crucial. Just 9 runs later the momentum turned Eton’s way when Cousens misjudged a short single, and James moved quickly, hitting the stumps with an underarm throw to run Boyd out by inches. It was a fine piece of fielding to terminate Boyd’s fluent innings of 24 from 42 balls, and it opened the door to the less confident Harrow middle order. Cousens looked devastated, and he added just one more boundary before attempting to run Griffin down to third man, and being caught behind for an impressively assured 47 from 72 balls. A loose over from Roy conceded 11 runs, but Eton had the bit between their teeth and delivered three rapid blows: Griffin bowling Kellock through the gate, and having Turner lbw half forward, and Patel carelessly holing out at mid-on (Mould) to a full toss from Eckett, all with the score on 161. Harrow had lost 5 wickets since lunch in just 38 balls for the addition of 21 runs, and were in danger of being bowled out well within their 55 overs. Ward and Assani attempted to rebuild and had added 17 runs in 7 overs when Assani was caught on the crease on the back foot by Carleton-Smith and was lbw. With the left-handed Fosh not inspiring confidence, Ward now moved onto the offensive, hitting 2 fours and a towering six over mid-wicket, and adding 23 invaluable runs before Griffin removed Fosh’s off bail to finish with the impressive figures of 4-32 from 10.5 overs. Eton had bowled and fielded very well as a team, taking early wickets at key times, and there were very few mistakes, although they might well yet rue the 29 wides conceded. Harrow had begun almost too aggressively so that several of their key wickets fell to injudicious strokes; tellingly there wasn’t a partnership of 50, but they had achieved a score of 201 that would test Eton if early wickets fell.

Conditions were still overcast as the Eton innings began, and the new ball swung prodigiously. Boyd bowled a fine spell from the Nursery end, swinging the ball away down the slope, and beating James (Eton captain, who had just scored successive centuries) several times in the early overs as he went hard at the ball. Langen looked the more confident of the two, but in the 7th over with the score on 14, he chipped Boyd to mid-on, where the left-handed Fosh took a neat catch low away to his right. The left-handed Gnodde looked calm and assured, and he immediately stroked two boundaries off his legs fluently. At last James had put his jittery start behind him, and began driving, especially through mid-on, with certainty. Both batsmen continued to be beaten several times outside the off stump, but both were assertive and did not waste opportunities to score, and they had added 86 and the total had reached 100-1 in the 23rd over when James missed a straight full length ball from Kellock and was lbw for a fine 54 from 73 balls. There were no further mishaps as tea was taken at 103-2 from 25 overs, but the Eton middle order had been somewhat inconsistent over the season, so there was still everything to play for. Kellock settled into a fine spell of off-spin after tea, achieving the impressive figures of 11 overs, 1 for 25, and neither batsman played him with any confidence. However they were able to bat patiently against him since runs continued to flow at the other end, so that the overall momentum was maintained. Gnodde continued to bat responsibly and orthodoxly, and Halstead batted with increasing assurance and confidence, hitting 5 boundaries in a well-constructed innings. They had added a crucial 64 when Boyd returned from the pavilion end to have Halstead immediately caught behind for 37. Eton looked to have established a winning position at 164-3, with just 38 needed from 15 overs, but Russell looked nervous and was soon well caught by Ward at slip off Boyd for a duck. A couple of overs later there was a mix-up with both batsmen stranded at one end, and a wild throw to the middle of the pitch skillfully collected by Cousens, who calmly ran to the stumps to run out Blake who sensibly sacrificed himself. At 179-5 Harrow could still just squeeze an unlikely victory, especially if they could remove Gnodde, who had meanwhile just reached a very fine fifty off 82 balls. Roy entered the arena determined to finish the contest and put bat to ball. Harrow attacked with 3 slips as Boyd bowled his final over, but Roy swung hard to the leg side, and after a couple of mishits took 10 off the over including a six deposited into the Tavern stand. Finally the sun appeared, to bathe this finest of grounds in bright evening light, and there was time for Gnodde to play two fine cover drives for four before Roy delivered the *coup do grace* with an off drive to see Eton home by 5 wickets with 8 overs to spare.

Gnodde was the only batsman all day to play the ball on its merits consistently without over-forcing the pace, and he played very straight with commanding assurance to remain unbeaten on 65 from 105 balls. Boyd bowled wonderfully consistently and was always a threat, moving the ball away from the right-hander. Harrow fielded well throughout, but the rest of their bowlers were unable to provide the threat of wickets often enough, and Turner, who had been injured all season, was a shadow of the dangerous bowler seen last year. The umpires were prepared to give batsmen out lbw when they were, which always results in a fairer balance between bat and ball, and therefore a more interesting contest, and they did well to keep the players on the field and the groundsman at bay during the periods of persistent drizzle earlier in the day. Eton deserved their win, since although Harrow scored quickly, they bounced back with important wickets, and once they had established control in the 10 overs after lunch, they batted with an assurance and calmness which saw them through despite a dangerous Harrow comeback near the end.