

## CAPTAINS BLOG - FRIENDLIES

The winters are getting quicker. I think it is because I am getting older, but they definitely are. The cricket season is just around the corner and our first friendly is on Saturday. Every year as friendlies approach, I am reminded of my first glut of them as a first team player for Radcliffe CC.

We had arranged to travel to the Fylde coast on a Saturday and Sunday to play Blackpool and St Anne's. A young Steven Dearden was our pro and I was about 14 years old.

I travelled up to Blackpool with Dasher. Something to do with the pro "imparting wisdom" on the youth. That occupied the first 3 minutes of the journey. The rest of the "imparting" process was more questionable. One nugget involved "teeing off from ball one" - I never did put that in to practice - and another tactic was to ask me about my sexual exploits. I went red. I blushed even more when a female hockey player got her breasts out during the game with the lads shouting "let Hayesy have a feel!". I wasn't up to the task. These conversations never happened in the under 14s.

We bowled first and I was first change (how things evolve!). Lancashire's present skipper, Steven Croft, played for them, as well as ex-India cricketer Rudra Singh. I felt out of my depth, but bowled a spell of steady away swing. The wind was responsible for the swing, such was my lack of pace. It meant I didn't get smashed too much...

At half way (after the breast incident), our opening pair of Damion Keegan and Richard Heaton were padding up. Sick of Keegy's faffing, Dasher, pencilled in to bat 3, performed a trick I saw many times thereafter. He whipped his pads on and strode out to bat, leaving Keegs to glare from the sidelines. He needn't have worried as Dasher was bowled first rock. He returned with a characteristic chuckle.

I batted for a short spell before the rain came down and I recall being not out. I probably blocked a lot of balls and frustrated everyone else, but hey, I enjoyed myself. My first friendly had been a roller coaster of an experience.

Day 2 involved driving up the motorway again to St Anne's. I sat in the passengers seat of Dasher's car in silence. All wisdom had been imparted previously and he'd had his fun making me blush. Two of our players had stayed in Blackpool the day before. Dasher gave one of them a call on his mobile to check on their whereabouts. He had a fancy hands free kit that pronounced the phone call to the cars on the opposite carriageway.

Ring ring, ring ring.

"Hello."

"Hi Paul, it's Steven. Just wonderi...."

"Hello???"

"HI PAUL, IT'S STEVEN, I WAS JU...."

"HELLO!!!!?????"

"PAUL, CAN YOU HEAR M...."

"Welcome to the Orange answer phone. Please record your message after the tone".

Dasher had fell for the oldest trick in the book whilst posing on his loudspeaker. He didn't seem too see the funny side.

We got closer to the ground and started to struggle with directions. St Anne's cricket club is a tricky little place to find. We passed two locals and stopped to ask.

"Hiya lads, we're just trying to find St Anne's cricket club. Do you know where it is?"

“Yeah mate, we’re just on our way there now!”

“Brilliant, why don’t you hop in?”

Two blokes jumped in to the back of Dasher’s car. I was a worldly un-wise 14 year old, but had my suspicions about the pedigree of our new co-travellers.

Take a left. Straight on here. Now a right. Just a bit further now. Yeah just here mate please.

“Where’s the club?”

“No idea pal. Thanks for the lift! We’re off to the pub”

And they scarpered! The two blokes jumped out of the car and did a runner. Dasher was dumfounded. His weekend was getting progressively worse.

We stumbled across the ground eventually, whited up and caught the last few minutes of a warm up. We won the toss and batted first. After yesterday’s exploits, Dasher was less hasty to put his pads on, but his confidence was misplaced.

Keegy lasted his customary few overs before succumbing to a big LB shout (I’m making this bit up, but hey, it’s my story....) and Dasher strode out to bat. Actually, he tiptoed. His calves pulsated with each stride. He reached the crease, marked centre and faced his second ball of the weekend. He prodded forward meekly and proceeded to lob a catch back to the bowler to complete his pair of golden ducks.

He turned for the pavilion just as the heavens started to open. The players followed him off in what was a scene symbolic of Dasher’s shambolic weekend. Shakespeare couldn’t have penned a better scene.

The rain saw to the fixture. We had tea and a pint. I was more than a little tipsy but relieved my first friendlies had passed without incident. Well, without any incident involving me. Dasher was one big incident.

I rode home with my good mate and future best man Paul Halliwell.

He’d been the creator of the prank voicemail and had stayed in Blackpool the night previous. Turns out his weekend hadn’t been incident free either. Whilst walking back to their B & B, a car had whistled passed the group of Radcliffe players with a local hanging out of the window. He proceeded to banjo one of the group, knocking him out cold.

I listened in awe looking forward to my first cricketing nights out. Hopefully they’d be less painful!

As a final hoorah, the heavens opened again on the motorway back. His car was ill-suited to the rain as his windscreen wipers were more like water spreaders. Visibility was shocking. As the youngest, I had the job of sticking my head out of the window and keeping the screen semi-visible.

Hopefully, this weekend will be less eventful!

Phill