

## Cricket Society XI - Captain's Report 2024

Record: Played 20 (22), Won 13 (8), Drawn 1 (3), Lost 6 (8), Cancelled or Abandoned 8 (8).

The 2024 season didn't get underway until mid-May at Northwood, due to what seemed to be the wettest start to a season in living memory. The team was led by Ilija Kronic given that the joint skippers, Ruky Wickremasinghe and I were both unavailable. Ruky's on-going injury limited him to a just solitary game this year and my post op recovery ruled me out until mid-way through the season. My thanks to Ilija and David Farrington who between them captained the side until my return.

Despite 8 games cancelled, we managed to win an impressive 13 matches out of the 20 played. The number could have been even better had the (returning) skipper won the toss at either Sanderstead or Hampshire Hogs.

As in recent seasons, our batting was generally very powerful. Five players had an average above 30, with another six averaging between 23-29. David Farrington was the leading run scorer with 584, followed by Rehan Mehmood (401) and Amir Iqbal (353). Will Halliday scored his maiden century for us at West End Esher in a record (unbeaten) opening stand of 259 with the aforementioned David Farrington who blazed 150 not out.

With the ball, the evergreen Paul Fielding was our leading wicket taker with 29 (19.34) closely followed by Amir Iqbal with 25 (20.76). Mushy Hussain was next with 20 wickets (12.35). As well as being an able 'keeper, Mushy is a true all-rounder given that he's a stylish batter and bowls both seam and spin to great effect. Illy captured 18 wickets at a miserly 10.78. It is a joy to watch him in action with that wonderfully rhythmic action and metronomically honed accuracy. The bowling averages were headed by young Muhammed Amin, with an incredible average of 8.79.

As always there were some memorable games, stand out individual performances and tight finishes. We won for the first time in our opening game at Northwood. Ash Saleem with a fine 78 held our innings together and looked to have guided us home until he was run out. But skipper Illy and Peter Hardy showed all their experience and get us safely over the line with time running out in fading light.

In another close game at Beddington, we fell 3 runs short chasing the home side's 151 with Amir Iqbal's excellent 66\* sadly proving to be in vain. This unbeaten half century was off the back of a spell of 7/24!

Lingfield was the first of our 4 August mid-week games. This year, we played at the main ground on a pitch that wasn't the easiest to bat on. Bowling first we were always in control, bowling them out for 146. We seemed to be jogging along alright until 24-0 suddenly became 63-6. Tom Gross played a very impressive and intelligent innings, and he shared a superb partnership of 73 with Kronic (who by now had become the "Red Ink Master"). However, 11 runs short of our target, Tom was bowled for 40. Another wicket fell and the game went into the final over. Eventually Ilija hit the winning runs through the covers with just 2 balls to spare and we all breathed a huge sigh of relief.

Outwood was one of our new fixtures and we visited on a warm, sunny, late summer's day. After a slow start, David (52) and Will Halliday (70\*) went up the gears, then Amir with hard hitting 63 helped us to 222 from our 35 overs. The home side got off to a flyer but were then pegged back as

Andy Sheldon and Mushy Hussain bagged key wickets. Sam Collyer then chipped in with a couple whilst at the other end Muhammed Amin was spinning us to victory with a terrific spell claiming 5/27.

Chertsey proved to be our final game of the season. It's a very good set up and we were pleased to bat first. A quick start from Rehan (52) and David (42) gave us a firm platform and we ended up with a decent score of 223 from 40 overs.

Chertsey started strongly and had a couple of very good bats. None more so than their skipper who started to look very dangerous indeed as he moved to 23 from 10 balls. The field spread and as Amir ran in to bowl, I noticed Rehan wasn't quite on the long on boundary. Cursing that I hadn't noticed this a few seconds earlier, and put him right on the line, I just hoped their skipper would hit the ball somewhere else. He didn't. The ball was well struck and from my vantage point it looked as though it would sail over Rehan's left shoulder. It didn't. Somehow Rehan simply plucked the ball out of the sky, one handed and the rest of us went absolutely wild. Later their number 5 who had just passed very well compiled 50, slightly mistimed his attempted loft over long on off Paul Fielding. This time, Rehan (who was on the boundary line) ran in to take a wonderfully judged catch low down to all but secure the win. They were two superb catches, and we walked off the field at the end of the game with the sun just about to disappear behind the trees very satisfied at what was a fine all-round performance.

That first catch would take a lot of beating in the "Champagne Moment" award but there are other moments that will also be remembered fondly. Those that come to my mind include

- Ronald Paterson's 3 smart slip catches at Outwood were roundly celebrated by all (numbers 156, 157 & 158!).
- At Bramley, Peter Hardy took a sublime one-handed catch at extra cover (the ball would probably have gone for 6 as this was the shortest extra cover boundary you'll ever see. Earlier in the game Peter had taken a skier (complete with tumble dive on completion) only for the wicket to be ruled out by the umpire who had his arm stuck out indicating a no ball.
- At Chessington, Mo Uddin bowled his best spell of the season taking 4/19 as he sent back 4 of their top 5, giving us total control of the game therein.
- Amir Iqbal, never low on self-confidence, twice got off the mark (first ball) with a straight 6, having told us exactly what he was going to do as he strode out to the middle.

A huge "thank you" to our umpires; Richard Plume, Graham Jackson, Kevin Beaumont, and to Peter Hardy and Tom Carmichael who umpired when not playing. Having an umpire is such a blessing and we're very grateful to you for taking the time to stand for us. Thanks also to Alan Newman for the occasions when he took the pencils.

Part of the wonderful uniqueness of Cricket Society are our regular group of WAGS and other family members and friends who frequently join us on match day. Sometimes the number of supporters outnumber the players. Thank you for being part of our wider team.

Stuart Cosstick