Cricket Society XI – 2026 Captain's Report

Record: Played 30, Won 16, Drawn 3, Lost 11, Cancelled 1.

2026 will surely be remembered as "The Summer of Sun". Indeed, fine weather certainly shone on the Society XI. We didn't lose any matches to inclement weather; the solitary cancellation was due to our opposition being unable to fulfil the fixture, meaning we played a few more games than in previous seasons and recorded the second-highest number of wins in a season (the record being 17 set in 1987).

In many ways, 2026 built on the foundations of 2025 where we recruited new players who brought all the attributes that make our Cricket Society XI such a unique and wonderful group to be part of. In bygone days, it could be a challenge to raise a side. Now we often need to "rotate"; such is the appetite and level of availability. This, of course, presents a different set of challenges and has meant that Peter Hardy and I have had to have some awkward conversations with numerous team members when we've been over-subscribed. My thanks to all who, without exception, have been gracious in that process!

The long dry summer meant most outfields were brown and rock hard by early to mid-June which allowed the batters to fill their boots. However, some groundsmen were finding the dry weather a real challenge, and some of the pitches were uneven in bounce, so not all were straightforward. That said, most of the Society batters enjoyed themselves. Six players averaged over 30 and ten players scored more than 200 runs. There were several standout performances and many consistent performers. Remarkably, five different players all scored centuries (David Farrington and Afzal Butt making two each).

David Farrington scored the first ton of the season; 120* at Tilford. David's haul of 1,181 runs at 53.68 was a tremendous effort, narrowly missing out on Kevin Carroll's record of 1,198 for a season set in 1973, and Jason Fenn's 1,187 in 2018. In addition to the two centuries, David also hit twelve 50's which demonstrates his consistency at the top of the order. A fine achievement. David's batting was the solid foundation on which we built many of our match-winning totals.

Afzal Butt reappeared for us in mid-summer at Marlow. Chasing an enormous 315 in 40 overs, David Farrington and Afzal set us on our way and at one stage, an unlikely victory wasn't beyond the realms of possibility. Although we eventually fell short, Afzal scored a fine 108. Unfortunately, he burnt the skipper in the process. However, that was all put right the following week in a remarkable game at Weybridge Vandals, where Afzal and I shared an opening partnership of 161 in swift time, with Afzal notching up his third consecutive Society century (125*). We declared on 256/2 after just 35 overs. At 75-5, the game seemed to be well and truly over. But their big, burly middle order batsman had other ideas. From nowhere, he crashed 24 off one over, and the complexion of the game changed. The young batter at the other end followed suit, and we were forced onto the defensive as they played their shots without any kind of restraint whatsoever. Runs flowed. And flowed. Amidst all

the mayhem, we managed to hold our catches, but the incoming batters simply carried on from where the departed left off. When a spindly-looking lad wandered out at number 9, I didn't expect him to rock back and play a classy back foot extra cover drive for 4 off Alex Cooper. At the point where they were 213/8, I was mildly concerned. Thankfully though, we got home by 17 runs, Alex eventually clean- bowling the young protagonist to win us the game. Remarkably, they had scored their runs quicker than us and had 16 overs to spare.

Ruky Wickremasinghe announced his return to the team, after nearly 3 years out due to a serious knee injury, with a century in his first game back at Egham. It was as if he'd never been away. This powerful innings set us up for a fine win at one of our new fixtures. It was great to see Ruky back in our colours again, and we were all relieved that his knee held up to allow him to play a full season.

Our fourth centurion of the season was Raj Shanmuganathan at Horsham Trinity. The ground has three very short boundaries and one very long square boundary. And usually when the ball is deposited to the 3 short boundaries, it disappears into flower beds, brambles, nettles etc. Much time is spent thrashing around with bats and sticks attempting to find lost balls. Horsham Trinity chose to bat first and made 179. Aman Nasir captured his best Society bowling figures (4/58) and Raj chipped in with 2/27. The total looked about 100 short. Our innings started with a bizarre first over, at the end of which we were 22/1. Poor Rob Humphreys was out in rather bizarre fashion, whereupon Raj entered the fray and played himself in by smashing three consecutive boundaries into the undergrowth. The carnage continued. Raj played some glorious shots, and we stationed "back up" fielders to hasten ball retrieval as he dealt mainly in fours and sixes. In an unbeaten stand of 175 with David (60*), Raj powered us to victory by 9 wickets with 19.3 overs to spare.

So it was, that Rob Humphreys' next game for us, saw him become the fifth player to reach three figures as scored a fine unbeaten 101 at South Nutfield (Rob's eleventh ton for the Society). This was the second of two mid-week all day games. Last season's match at South Nutfield was a very close game which saw us sneak home in the dying overs as we bowled them out to win a fine victory. This season, it looked as though we'd be on for an early finish, as South Nutfield struggled to 92-8. Anish Shah continuing his love affair with South Nutfield, bowling beautifully to return 5/47. But then their number 7 (a very handy bat) decided he'd have some fun and smashed 87 is 71 balls. Although they weren't going to threaten our total, the win threatened to elude us as we dropped a number of regulation catches. It was therefore left to the Serbian maestro, Ilja Krunic, to hit the stumps and break the 10th wicket partnership of 88 to see us home to victory.

The earlier midweek game was at Chertsey. This season, the club were celebrating 250 years of the Middle Stump. On a glorious day, we won the toss and batted first, declaring in even time on 224/7. Solid contributions from David Farrington (64), Simon Lister (33), Muhammed Amin (34) and the skipper (33) got us to what I thought was a competitive score. The Chertsey openers started briskly. Then Gareth Mort, so often our Golden Arm,

dismissed them both and we were in the game. Muhammed Amin was now into his unbroken 20 over spell, in which he bowled beautifully. His 5/69 was a joy to behold, however we also needed Paul Fielding's 2/9 and Ash Saleem to claim the final wicket to give us a memorable victory. Chertsey are brilliant hosts and it was a thoroughly enjoyable day.

The midweek games proved to be a very popular with most of them very competitive and enjoyable. Hampton Wick Royal was a new fixture for us this year. It's a beautiful setting in Bushy Park and the club have done tremendously well to host (and still provide teas), without a pavilion. The rebuild should be ready for the start of the 2027 season. In a very low-scoring time game, we set about defending 135. Peter Short bowled beautifully (4/22), as did Ash Saleem who beat the bat on countless occasions but still claimed 3/42. We were well in the game, but at 93/7, their 1st XI number 3 bat strode to the crease and saw them home with a classy 33, as the home side won by 2 wickets.

Finding new fixtures isn't as easy as it may seem. We're after the type of opposition who play the game and respect it as we do and are of a similar strength to hopefully generate a competitive match. Add to that a good pitch, pleasant surroundings, decent facilities and a tea, and we have the perfect scenario. We are very blessed to play at some excellent clubs, and new additions such as Old Rutlishians and Ewell, plus the new ones already mentioned give us a fixture card many clubs would envy.

These fixtures complement our longer-standing opponents, and there are many of these to look forward to. Northwood early in the season is always an excellent "old school" (one ball) time game. This year's match was no exception. They always field a very competitive team and this year they posted 242/8. David Farrington (48) and Shavran Patel (30) set us on our way. Aval Patel with his maiden Society half century batted fluently for his 52. We kept up the chase, but lost wickets at crucial moments. Their skipper skilfully kept the game open, with three results possible. In the end it came down to us needing to score 8 from the final over, with 2 wickets in hand. We fell just a couple short in a thrilling draw.

The week after Northwood is Tilford, another long-standing fixture played on their iconic Tilford Green pitch. This is where David a lovely 120* and the scene of Tom Gross's maiden Society half century (51*) as we racked up 231/2. An early breakthrough set us on our way, but we were frustrated by a second wicket partnership of 85. Sree Pathmarajah 4/47 (including a stinging caught and bowled) and Paul Fielding (4/32) did most of the damage with excellent spells. Golden Arm Raj got the winning wicket, with the only ball he bowled courtesy of smart work from Simon Lister, picking up his second stumping of the game.

Tom Gross followed up his maiden fifty with another hard hitting 52 the following day in the first of our midweek games played in the lovely surroundings of Shepperton CC against Cricket Media Club to help us up to 201/8 from our 35 overs. We eventually won quite easily, thanks largely to Peter Short's 4/27 and a fine throw from Tom Gross to run out their skipper. Tom scored two further half centuries; 55 at Kew and 52 (in 35 balls) at Ewell. Both

knocks powered our innings to very competitive totals and help set up those two victories. We wish Tom well with this move to Bristol but definitely hope to see him in 2027.

Thames Ditton are always excellent hosts. This year, a fine all round team performance ensured we recorded our first win at Giggs Hill. Anish Shah again distinguished himself with the ball (4/48), which included the wicket of their overseas 1st XI Saturday opening batsman and their Saturday 1st XI Skipper (who incidentally has scored 79 hundreds for Thames Ditton) with a perfect delivery that beat him in the flight, and Simon Lister did the rest, with an expert stumping. Alex Cooper again showed what a talented all-round performer he is. His miserly spell of 2/23 bowled mainly in tandem with Anish knocked the stuffing out of their batting, and after a whirlwind start where they looked on for 300+, we ended up chasing 203. We lost an early wicket, but David Farrington with 59 and the skipper put on 104 to take us to 124/2. We had a little wobble, but Alex completed a fine all-round display with a commanding 39* to see us home on a blistering mid summer's day.

At Ewhurst we were struggling at 94/5 where Alex again showed his prowess with the bat. His unbeaten 54 gave us something to bowl at. Alex was ably supported by David Woodhouse (48), one of our newcomers this season. An innings played against very decent bowling, one that helped to dig us out of a spot of bother was worthy of a half century ended when David unselfishly went for a second run and was unfortunately run out by an excellent piece of fielding. Speaking of which, David is a very decent fielder and stopped plenty of runs in the gully / backward point region this season. Our score of 190 never really looked enough, but we bowled superbly, especially Will Halliday who gave it everything in spite of carrying an injury with 4/47. Their number 9 has played County 2nd XI for Sussex and is a fine cricketer. His unbeaten fifty was the difference, but he was made to work hard for it. It was a shame that Will's injury limited his availability, and we hope he's fit and raring to go next season.

Warlingham in previous years have proved a tough nut to crack. Their pitch is usually quite batsman-friendly, and taking 10 wickets can be a challenge. Not this year. On a decent pitch and being 48/2, we dismissed our hosts for just 118. Ilija Krunic bowled his usual "corridor of uncertainty" line, something his cricketing hero would be proud of and was duly rewarded with 5/48. We noted with interest that Granny did make an appearance behind the bowler's arm at one point during his spell, not that Ilija really needs any assistance (other than from fielders who can catch). Ilija is such a fine bowler and we're always stronger when he's with us. Peter Short again took 4 wickets as we ended their innings quickly. An unbeaten opening stand of 121, in just 12 overs, between David Farrington (55* from 41 balls) and Mark Maksic (57* from 32 balls) wrapped up a very convincing win.

This season Mo Uddin has made huge strides with his game. He opened the bowling on several occasions and bowled a more accurate line and length, often troubling batsmen with his inswing. When it's on the money, it's a real handful. Mo's mid-season relocation hasn't deterred his enthusiasm or his availability. The journey to Findon took him 3 hours, but fond

memories from the previous season and the glorious surroundings made it worth the trip, and this time around he was rewarded with 3/56.

Our fielding in general was very good indeed. The tone is often set by the 'keeper. Simon Lister was behind the stumps for many of our games and snaffled 25 victims (12 caught, 13 stumped). Simon's enthusiasm and regular encouragement to the team, especially when the going gets a bit tough, is incredibly helpful and a real tonic. David Farrington was the leading outfield catcher with 12, several of which were superb catches. Raj Shanmuganathan held some fine catches, proving his Champagne Moment award form last year was no fluke. Sam Collyer's excellent ground fielding is an example to us all.

We had three excellent nominations for this year's Perry-Lewis & Kershaw trophy. The award goes to the player, umpire or scorer who best embodies the spirit and ideals of the Cricket Society XI.

The nominees were: firstly, Paul Fielding. Paul as we all know still possesses an incredible zest for the game (often playing three or four times a week!) and is fiercely competitive. He loves getting batsmen out (especially good bats), hates it when batsmen "don't play proper shots" and doesn't like being taken off (no bowler should, by the way). Paul captured 37 wickets (second highest) at 23.38, a fine achievement, although I think he was prouder of the on drive he stroked to the boundary at Hampton Wick Royal, the final flourish of which was captured by Peter Short's excellent photography.

Anish Shah in only his second season with us has now been nominated twice. I think this shows the measure of the man. A fine cricketer who absolutely loves the game and loves It to be played properly. Anish was our leading wicket taker (44 at 20.82) with many fine performances. None more so than at Cranleigh. We batted first and got off to another fine start. David Farrington with 58 and Peter Hardy with 50 (the half century brought up with a crunching six) gave us a solid start then Ruky put the gas on with an unbeaten 63 as we made 228/4 in our 35 overs. Avigat Patel, so often the unlucky bowler this season, produced a fine spell of 3/11. We had a firm grip on the game with Cranleigh on 91/7. Anish took 2 wickets with the last 2 balls of his sixth over. The next over passed without incident, so Anish is on a hattrick. Meticulous field setting ensured, and I had a hunch I need to bring Avigat up about 15 yards in from where he was fielding "on the 45". Anish delivers the hattrick ball, the batsman has a wild swing and the ball flies off the edge. Our hearts are in our mouths as Avigat back peddles and makes a tricky catch look quite easy and we all rush to congratulate Anish. It was the first Society hat-trick since 1986.

The third nominee and eventual winner was Alan (the Cardinal) Newman. Alan debuted for the Society in 2009 and has played 112 times up to 2023. Since then, he has umpired for us and more recently, following his surgery which has prevented him standing in the middle has been our "scribbler". This season Alan has taken on the role of Health & Safety Officer, which has been incredibly helpful to me as captain. Alan is meticulous with his scoring; the

neatness of his book and the accuracy is a thing of beauty. I know that the whole team will join me in thanking Alan for his contribution this year and congratulating him on his well-deserved award.

The Champagne Moment award has yet to be decided but allow me to share an image that will live long in my memory. Hampshire Hogs is a fine setting, with a very good pitch where they provide very decent teas and on a warm summer day, there are few better places to play cricket. We've yet to beat them in our recent run of games. We've always ended up batting first (whoever wins the toss) and we've not managed to get 10 wickets, so on the drive down this year I was committed to fielding first. However, when I won the toss with less than half our team present, that decision was revised; we batted. After a steady start, Sam Collyer joined me at the crease and from the first delivery he received, the ball cannoned off the meat of his bat with perfect timing. Sam played some sublime strokes and soon passed a richly deserved half century. He moved effortlessly on and I was fully expecting him to register his maiden Society ton, but sadly he was stumped for a wonderful 71. Raj (27) and Sree (28) continued where Sam left off and we declared on 224/6. Our bowlers all bowled superbly, and we took wickets at regular intervals. Sree capped a fine all-round performance with 3/20, Paul Fielding 3/40, Dave Sheppard (our friend from Kew, on debut) took 2/34 courtesy of fine catches from Raj and Peter Berg (also from Kew) behind the stumps. Golden Arm Gareth Mort chipped in with 2/11, and celebrations ensued when Gareth took the 10th wicket. As we gathered mid-pitch congratulating one another, Rob Humphreys produced a phone and we had a team selfie to commemorate our first win against the Hogs. It was one of those games you dream of as captain; beautiful day, bat first, bowl them out and everyone contributes something to the win.

Finally, some "thankyous". It may be a cliché, but it's true that without umpires, there would be no game. On behalf of the whole squad, we thank our umpires Richard Plume and Graham Jackson. Although still very much a player, thank you to Tom Carmichael for standing so frequently when not playing and to Peter Hardy to umpiring when injured. It makes our lives as players so much more enjoyable to have you standing for us.

Thank you to Alan Newman for scoring so diligently and your Health, Safety and Law enforcement advice. Your guidance to "playing umpires" has been very helpful.

Thank you to Peter Hardy for all his hard work as Team Secretary. His zealous player recruitment has been pivotal in accumulating the fine existing squad we now have. He puts hours of work into ensuring we take the field in good shape; your work Peter is much appreciated.

Tom Carmichael our Chair is a wise old sage. As a former skipper, I have valued his quiet words of advice and encouragement over this and previous seasons. Thank you, Tom.

To our loyal band of regular supporters, you are all part of our Cricket Society XI family. It's just not the same if Sue, Denise, Alison, Bill and Jan aren't watching from the boundary

edge. It’s been lovely to see Andrew and Sue Moss a couple of times this season, and some of the newer WAGS adding to our regular crew. Thank you all for your support and encouragement.

Winter well and see you at nets in January.