**Leigh CC v Hetairoi CC**

**Saturday, 26 September 2020**

This was an excellent game of cricket, played in a spirit as warm as the climatic conditions were frigid. The final over began with all results possible, the Hetairoi eventually squeaking home off the penultimate ball of the match.

There was the usual hokey-cokey with the side in the run-up to the match, with the Hetairoi eventually numbering 10. Great credit is due to Leigh, who not only ensured we always had 11 in the field (and those substitutes performed with gusto) but also provided us with an eleventh batsman. The Hetairoi adopted a wide-ranging approach to punctuality for this fixture. Three members (in two vehicles), arrived over an hour early for the 13:00 start (and repaired to the nearby Seven Stars pub), while others (you know who you are) arrived after the game had commenced. In view of the weather forecast for the back end of the afternoon it was agreed to play 30 overs a side. The game was played throughout in positively arctic conditions, with a biting wind. Modern synthetic cricket attire is just not up to post-equinoctial English weather.

Justin and Hari Krishnan opened the attack, the latter generating remarkable pace and bounce off a four-step run-up. He was very unlucky not to take a wicket, beating the outside edge on several occasions and nearly finding a way through to the stumps with a couple of yorkers. Leigh had three Surrey Under 13s in their side, one of whom, George McCloughlin, opened, batting well against Hari’s pace. However, it was his partner, Rob Glaysher, who found our bowling much to his liking, particularly after Shani Bisla replaced Justin after six overs, hitting the ball hard and freely, including one flat pull that prompted Hamza to pull out of a possibly catch on the short boundary at deep square leg for fear of ending up in A&E.

Soon, Leigh were 90 without loss after 11 overs and it looked like we would be chasing well over 200. However, Justin brought on John Ball and Stephen Matthews and the whole complexion of the game changed rapidly. John got bounce and turn with his leg breaks and was extremely accurate. Unaccountably, Glaysher charged down the pitch to John’s third ball and was neatly stumped by Neal, departing for 74 (6x4s, 5x6s), when a century was there for the taking. Stephen bowled the next over, which went for only one, then McCloughlin repeated Glaysher’s lemming-like dash down the pitch to John and met a similar fate. Leigh’s no. 4, Mike Swinn, departed first ball having hit a leg break high in the air to Justin at mid-on.

With both John and Stephen taking pace off the ball, the batsmen were required to do all the work and, although no more wickets fell (there were a couple of dropped catches and Neal was not quite able to complete a hat-trick of stumpings), these two established something of a stranglehold in the twelve overs they bowled in tandem, supported by some uncharacteristically tight Hetairoi fielding, with Andrew Wilson doing particularly well. John finished with 6-2-10-3 and Stephen 6-1-14-0, so that by the 24th over Leigh were only 117 for 3. Justin then brought himself back and shared the ‘death’ overs with Hamza. The latter, bowling with a very low arm, managed to pick up the fourth wicket (Advaith Bali). Glenn Hirchfield (3 not out) joined his son, Luke (25 not out) to see the innings close on 156.

With the wind-chill even more pronounced than when Leigh had batted, Michael Penington and John Ball opened the Hetairoi’s reply, Michael nonchalantly pulling the first ball of the innings for four. As the other end, John, facing the relentlessly-accurate Amit Bali (Advaith’s father), could have been LBW to his first ball and, having sweetly leg-glanced a four, had another close shout, before succumbing to one that was not doing anything other than crashing into middle. Michael was joined by Hamza, who cracked consecutive fours off Swins, but in that bowler’s next over sent Michael back after he had turned blind for a second run and despite a despairing dive, which left him spread-eagled at the non-striker’s end, Michael was run out, and less than chuffed.

In came Hari Krishnan, who played with extreme circumspection for his first seven balls, while Hamza hit another four off Advaith Bali’s first over before being caught in his second for 13. “Henry”, one of Leigh’s 13-year-olds, then came in for the Hetairoi and was given no quarter by his mates, soon departing for 2, the second of Advaith Bali’s wickets. At 41 for four after 13 overs, the Hetairoi were in some bother, but it was then that Hari began his murderous assault on the Leigh bowlers, first damaging Amit Bali’s figures (previously 5-4-4-1) by taking 10 off his final over and then laying in to the rest of the attack. Just as Hari generates great pace with a ludicrously short run-up when he bowls, so, when he bats, he manages to hit the ball extremely hard with no discernable back-lift. He was ably supported by Neal Thathapudi, who was quite content to play second fiddle and give as much of the strike as possible to Hari. The two made merry for 15 overs, early on in which Hari strained a muscle in his leg and needed a runner.

After an initial experiment with Hamza, who it turned out had never done it before, Michael volunteered as runner. (As he was the oldest person playing, there was a strong suspicion that his real motive in putting himself forward was to offset the effects of wind-chill.) When there is a runner on the field in amateur cricket a mix-up is always on the cards, but here everything proceeded smoothly, with clear calling and sharp running, until . . . the moment when Michael was called for a tight run and found himself once again spread-eagled at the same end at which he had been run out. Those of us beyond the boundary could hardly bear to look. And then John Ball at square leg umpire confirmed he had made his ground and it was all ok.

At 135 for four at the beginning of the 27th over it was the Hetairoi’s to lose, but Advaith Bali was back on and he accounted for Neal (caught, for 26). Thirteen were taken from the 28th over and it seemed in the bag. But Bali then bowled Hari (for 88 off 50 balls, 16x4s) and then Andrew Wilson (for 2 off the final ball of the 29th over), finishing with a well-deserved 6-0-25-5. Swins returned to bowl the last over, choosing to take pace off the ball, with the field set in a tight ring. Three were wanted for the win and two for a tie, and Leigh also only needed three wickets. Shani Bisla, joined by Justin for the final over, shouldered arms to the first ball (apparently thinking it would be called wide by umpire Penington; it wasn’t). There ensued a mid-pitch discussion between the batsmen, in which the umpire also seemed to be involved. The next ball Shani managed to pierce the field to give Justin the strike and, after two more balls of suspense, he struck the penultimate ball of the match back over the bowler’s head for four to seal the victory. As those members of the teams who were old enough settled in for a socially-distanced post-match beer, the drizzle began, thoroughly vindicating the decision to shorten the game.

Congratulations to Hari for a man-of-the-match-worthy knock, to Leigh for their hosting and generous lending of players and to everyone on both sides for making it such a wonderful, fluctuating game.

**Spritz**

**29 September 2020**