Bledlow Ridge v The Hetairoi

Sunday 25th July 2021

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**The Gods Look Kindly on The Ridge in Victory over Greek “Friends”**

**Raj’s Classical Education Ends in Personal Tragedy**

**Sniff and Jovan Adopt Amusement Arcade Batting Technique**

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Timed match (aka “proper cricket match”)

The Hetairoi: 214-4 dec (42 overs)

Tetsworth: 215-5 (26 overs)

**Result:** Won by 5 wickets

Is there no limit to his talent? The team was asked if anyone knew what “The Hetairoi” meant - a question which has never been correctly answered before, outside The Hetairoi’s tight group of travelling intellectuals.

Raj piped up.

“It means ‘Friends’.

And there in a moment, an education at Eton was laid bare in all its glory. After a week in which rocket science has put Branson and Bezos into space, in which medical science has enabled the Covid vaccine to put the brakes on the pandemic and in which sports science has enabled Olympic athletes to reach new heights, Raj proved that nothing can beat the value of a classical education.

“It’s not rocket science” remarked Raj correctly. I am beginning to think I could now even trust him with posting a letter.

Raj was one of eleven stars who had gone out of their way on a mizzly Sunday to play in this fixture. It had rained heavily, there were droplets in the air and the forecast was poor. Some portents from the gods were good however: for the first time this season a home Ridge X1 arrived before the opposition. Gazebos were erected, one resembling a Meccano set (ask me Raj) rather than a proper gazebo and the opposition were roped in to rope the rain from the ground surface.

The game got underway at 1.50pm and at 1.50 and 50 seconds opener Mike Penington was bowled by Carlton’s second delivery. He returned to the pavilion to send the news of this perfect mathematical symmetry to his wife, who may be one of the brainiest mathematicians in the country but probably knows less about the Classics than Raj.

Raj confided in skipper RolfeDog how nice it was that this was something of a

“οικογενειακό παιχνίδι” which RolfeDog instantly took to mean “family game”.

Two great classically trained minds.

Indeed our team included two Dows (probably one too many), two Podmores (just enough) and thanks to Preston’s persistence, two Shards, while The Hetairoi contained two Slades, three Fryers and one Henry Wilman engaged to Mike Penington’s daughter. Luckily for us their side contained only one of three Balls this time, thus depriving RolfeDog of headlines like “The Hetairoi contains a load of Balls”.

The incoming batsman was none of these and was the aptly named Clive *Mackintosh* – a shrewd move considering there was still rain in the air.

As a former contemporary at RolfeDog’s school it’s no surprise that Clive pulled off a few classical strokes (*geddit?)*. At the other end John Ball was making a nonsense of the skipper’s attempts to block his favourite shot through backward point. Charley Farley and Sniff were the (Roman) centurions strategically placed to fortify this area. The words ‘ear bit of a made a pigs it of’ could be rearranged by a classically trained mind to sum up their success or otherwise.

We had to wait until later in the afternoon for Duncan to demonstrate how to do it. What he called a dive involved something similar to the prone position footballers now adopt behind a ‘wall’ when facing a free kick… as in… they lie there and wait for the ball to hit them. Duncan proved remarkably effective at this and should be brought on by Premier League Football Clubs to defend free kicks.

While Carlton hurtled in from the top end, Malekei Shard, making his senior debut, was bowling up the hill although RolfeDog told him it was downhill as well, which seemed to help. His good spell was finally rewarded when he bowled a macintosh or rather Clive Mackintosh for 25 and he ended up with 1-29 off 6. Well bowled.

He was replaced by Charley Farley mostly to get Charley Farley out of backward point where he and Sniff had become comatose and after three more overs from Carlton, James Dow bowled from the top end and his dad started appealing for LBWs from square leg.

They had the misfortune to spend most of the afternoon bowling to John Ball who – as he has done before – carried his bat through the innings, and to Hari, once-of-this-parish Balikrishnan. In fact I may have missed a ‘Krishnan’ somewhere as I am pretty sure Hari is an abbreviation or an ‘abbr’, an ‘abbrv’ or an ‘abbrev’ as we sometimes call it.

Hari compiled a steady, if occasionally violent 70, mostly showing the fine judgement he first demonstrated years again a match at Long Marston when he declared “Rolfe, you make very funny jokes”.

For long periods James and Charlie contained him, Charlie by bowling around the wicket at Hari’s long legs and John’s shorter legs though without either a long leg or a short leg, or a fine leg for that matter. Which only goes to show.

Preston is nothing if not persuasive and had expressed great interest in playing though not selected. Watching our fielders at gully and backward point, he Sniffed an opportunity. “Where’s Preston?” asked Sniff. “Between Manchester and Blackpool” replied someone. Preston unceremoniously sent Sniff off the field and replaced him. Who would have thought that Sniff is replaceable?

Hari and Ball carried on (sounding like a 60s TV comedy duo) and Duncan took the opportunity to send Sniff back on so he could nip round the back of the shed and have a fag and a pint.

It took Stu (who had come on at last to replace Charlie) to remove Hari. Clean bowled. Stu celebrated like a man who hadn’t taken a wicket for 37 years, which turned out to be the case. Hugh was mostly indifferent. At the top end, fresh from a fag and pint Duncan was bowling to Hari’s replacement Henry Wilman. In a clearly pre-planned move he induced a powerful flick to square leg where Charley Farley flew through the air like a swallow, to pouch the catch. (Remind me readers, to tell you my joke about a swallow, a duck and a swift.)

“Just like we practised” called Dunc who was now in Fantasyland.

Hugh replaced Stu for three overs and someone said this was the first Ridge rhyming bowling pair since Fez and Bez, or Henry Donnelley and Matt Donnelley (which might be pushing it a bit). Stu was supported by enthusiastic appeals for LBW from his dad at cover point.

The Hetairoi declared on 214-4 and we wondered if it was just an over too early.

All eyes were on Raj who had been cruelly denied a bowl. On being asked to open the batting he cried “Eureka” and warmed up by reading a few chapters of Homer’s Iliad and quoting Thucydides. Well who doesn’t?

Big things were expected after his innings of 90 in this fixture a year ago when he was only denied becoming a (Roman) Centurion by a huge pie from bowler Stephen Matthews. He determined not to make the same mistake again.

And he didn’t.

After negotiating the first delivery he surveyed the field and identified only one fielder on the leg side between mid-on and the wicket-keeper. I now quote from last year’s match report:

*“Never trust a wandering team. Sometimes they pretend to be slow in the field but if you smash a long hop hard and low it is quite possible that someone called Henry Wilman will dive full length and catch it.”*

Well, it was a leg stump half volley which Raj middled and proved to be his Achilles Heel. Instead of diving Wilman H juggled the catch tantalisingly. “Zeus” exclaimed Raj who then lapsed momentarily into latin and trudged off muttering “Et tu Henry”.

The youth club in the form of James and Charlie built up the score with shots out of the MCC Coaching Manual and when Charlie was bowled, Sniff replaced him. Both played Stephen Matthew’s pies with suspicion as if they were laced with garlic. James made a senior debut 50 and Jovan joined Sniff when James was out for 53. They accelerated the scores with shots straight from amusement arcades: Jovan with a vertical bat swinging like a table footballer, Sniff pirouetting horizontally like a table hockey player.

Alas the fates seemed to be against them and they were out within one run of each other. 177-5 with 42 wanted. In came Malekei (sounds Greek to me) to join Carlton and he got off the mark with a straight four. Carlton went into blast mode though for a while there was more effort than result, so that 24 wanted from 24 balls became 18 from 12. Hari returned, the gods looked kindly on the Ridge and Carlton (22no) clicked into gear depositing a six to Bianca’s (café) door which fortunately was closed, followed a by a four. Malekei did the rest finishing with 14no, and a victory with six balls to spare.

Congrats to the youngsters for setting the platform and for those batsmen who followed who cheated the gods and discovered the Holy Grail.

For the Hetairoi they will continue their Odyssey next year.

For Raj it was nothing less than a Greek Tragedy.

*Asked to comment Boris Johnson said “τι φορτίο παλιά πατσά”*