Game 1 Long Marston CC vs Hetairoi CC

Just over two weeks ago, 22nd April, your correspondent departed from York in the drizzle for the first game of the new season. Just south of Doncaster the mizzle stopped, and by the time we reached London it was a pleasant day. Delays in departure of the train from Edinburgh had led to a slightly late arrival. Combined with the need to weave through football crowds, this made the dash form Kings X to Euston frenetic, but I caught the Milton Keynes train by the skin of my teeth, to be joined by John Ball at Harrow and Wealdstone. Together we were collected by David Freedman at 12.00 noon, arriving in very good time at Long Marston to find the ground in good shape for a 1.00 pm start.

Despite this the LM groundsman had needed persuading to let the game go ahead. This over-protective attitude would be displayed to even more disastrous effect by the WHCC groundsman, on Monday 24th, cancelling a game at six days notice ….

LM won the toss and batted. HCC had two new recruits, Dominic and Charl, but Fergus opened up with the tried and tested pairing of Wilman and himself. HCC had five over 60’s and five/six speedy hockey players, so part of Fergus’ challenge throughout the fielding would be to enable the speedsters to provide cover for the ageing members…..

Henry was getting some movement from the bottom end, but Fergus was bowling with pace and movement from the top end and it was he who took the first wicket with a marvellous Yorker cleaning up the opposition captain in his second over. Henry struck next inducing a false shot to mid on from the other opener. The ball looped ever so gently direct to Matthews but early season catching is never an Hetairoi strength so the betfair odds remained 50/50. But Stephen safely pouched it, much to his satisfaction. When Fergus pinned to NZ number three in his third over LM were 15 for 3. This good start induced Fergus to take himself off after only a four over spell, and allow Dominic into the fray.

Although Dominic had not bowled since mid-way through last summer he immediately settled into an excellent rhythm under the watchful eye of his one-time school captain, Aran, stationed at short extra. Henry completed his initial spell, but not before inducing a slash to gully, which sadly eluded David’s grasp. Fortunately in that same over the same batsman advanced down the wicket only to edge Henry to Pennington behind the stumps and LM were 30 for 4. Then, in another skilful tactical judgement, Fergus brought on Stephen M to replace Henry. Despite their parlous position, and the need to adopt an early season approach, LM continued with an aggressive approach, particularly keen to take Stephen on, but the number 6 did not reckon with Charl at deep-midwicket and, continuing to hit in the air, was very well taken by Charl low down after he (Charl) had made twenty yards to his right. The number 4 had also been aggressive but going back to Stephen managed to edge one to the WK.

Dominic had pretty much tied up the other end whilst this was going on, so with LM 50 for 6, Fergus decided it was time to unleash Freedman’s leg spin. When David’s first three balls were called as no-balls it looked as if this approach might lengthen the game considerably. That first over ended up as a tenballer, but David steadily found his way. The batsmen favoured deep mid-wicket, where fortunately Dominic was placed, doing a great job.

At the other end there had been a point early on where LM had run four as Stephen, at mid-on, went in pursuit of the ball to a long boundary at deep long-on. Subsequently Fergus hared after similar strokes from mid-off and restricted the batsmen to two.

LM now staged a small revival, at some pace, and were soon over the 100 mark for six wickets. But then over-exuberance led to a skyer to mid-off off Stephen. Betfair had Fergus as a certainty, but the ball did actually bobble before being retained to ensure the fall of the seventh wicket. David’s leg-spin also reaped a reward, with number ten swatting him to Aran at short mid-wicket. John Ball returned to mop up the tail, bowling the last two in his first eight balls (though there were also two fours in that short spell).

LM had reached 131 in just over 31 overs. From the point of view of a return to York we were well on track timewise.

Our batting was again a bit of a mixed bag but there were some very good players in the line-up so room for optimism about the chase. Michael P opened with Aran. Aran had not batted since this very same game in 2022, but immediately looked in good shape, leaving with good judgement and playing with a very straight bat. Michael dispatched a full toss for three in the first over and also looked good. But in the second was fed a short one outside off stump, right where he likes to play one of his most effective scoring shots. Unfortunately this square cut went straight to gully who clung on. 4 for 1.

Charl Pellissier will undoubtedly make good runs for the Hetairoi, but unsurprisingly he looked a little rusty after quite a long gap since last playing. This might or might not have been reflected in his judgement in leaving the first ball, which just passed over off-stump. But in the following over, after a lovely extra-cover drive that went straight to extra cover, a leading edge went straight to short mid-off. Nine for two. Your correspondent was batting six so needed to pad up. This meant that he missed Aran’s departure but it apparently involved being caught after toe-ending a full toss. 10 for 3 and two of our star batsmen gone! John Ball and Henry Wilman sought to steady the ship. Henry was hitting the ball hard from the off, though this was interspersed with some early season playing and missing. John looked steady and his a very nice four square of the wicket, but then in that same twelfth over he went back and was bowled as the opening bowler cut one into him. 34 for 4. Megone now joined Wilman with the principal end of holding up an end since Henry can always be relied on to keep the score ticking.

At one end Lewis Barnes, who had kindly proved an excellent sub-fielder for no-show Franklin (still unexplained at time of writing), was a slightly less threatening first change. But the opening bowler was replaced by a NZ off-spinner and after Lewis a wily campaigner set a 7 -2 offside field and did a good job pf controlling Henry for four overs. Fortunately Megone was able to do slightly better than simply hold up an end and after a stand of sixty eight in eighteen overs we had reached 102. Megone was then bowled by the opener for 22. This had the gratifying effect of allowing Fergus a bat, and the game was soon over as he hit the ball hard, finishing things off with a six and a four (16\*). Meanwhile Henry had achieved a deserved fifty (ending 55\*).

There had been a cool spell of weather early in the innings but the sun had shone for much of it and LM looked very well in the bright colours of a spring evening. Everyone had participated in both sides, the game had fluctuated, and been played in a good spirit. After all the hard work of raising a side, Fergus had captained us excellently, maintaining a positive attitude throughout and getting the best out of his team.

Floreat Hetairoi.

Games 2 and 3 see below.

Game 2 WHCC vs Hetairoi CC 29th April; cancelled by WHCC groundsman on evening of 24th April.

Game 3 Checkendon CC vs Hetairoi CC Sunday 7th May, cancelled due to waterlogged pitch.

It was sad that the weather intervened in this way as Varun had raised an excellent team (on paper) for the second game at Winchmore Hill, where we had enjoyed such a fine match in 2022. In fact we had twelve available.

The same applied the following week when we ended up with a very nice side to play Checkendon, and again the untold luxuries of having twelve available. It would have been particularly nice for your reporter to see Evans, Laurie and Taylor rejoining the Hetairoi fold, as well as to meet Hari and his talented son for the first time.

As I write it is pleasing to see we have eleven for Harpsden and are nearly there for Warborough and Shillingford, two lovely games. But there are still a good number of players who have not signed up for any games at all yet, so if you are reading this and that includes you then please go on the website and sign up for some games now.