

Match Report: Nevill Holt CC v Kilmacolm CC, Saturday 23rd August 2008.

Gavin Murray (Captain)
Mike Wilson
Mark Gibson
Jamie Davidson
Jonathan Potter

Charles Briggs
Kenneth Wilson
Allan Halliday
Nick Gibson

Rob Guyler
Charlie Craig
Roddy Davidson
Paul Jennings

They didn't know how important the game was. Well, one of them knew. Charlie Craig. He knew, and he told them. Several times. And then they all knew.

Net practice at Leicester University sports grounds honed their bowling and batting skills. The soft footfalls of the run-up, the solid connection of the bat, the grunting reach, the slapped catch, the murmurs of encouragement and the tish of the tinnies all gave the sunshine reason to shine. They were, for a while, Earth's purpose.

IPA and cider at a late morning pub was the precursor of a taxi tour of Leicester, seeking out the perfect lunch in the narrow terraced rows and faded boulevards. It took time. It took the lurching of sleeping policemen, the testing of locked doors, the returning to old ground, but they found the Khyber Pass and went to eat, and the food was glorious, layers of Indian authenticity laced with fire.

Then the two taxis became one, and it was standing room only. They needed a volunteer and it was the man in the hat. Through the winding country lanes as they headed out from city to sticks he stood. The commander. Flags of England and Scotland held proudly aloft and he the Union betwixt. He had tears in his eyes, from emotion and the speed-induced breeze, and those below steadied him and took pride in his steadfastness – their commander, their Charles Briggs.

To a Bhangra music tape the taxi wound through English hedgerows, towards the village of Medbourne and an English idyll.

They set out for an early evening tour of the nearest public houses with their opponent hosts. Great pubs. Real pubs. A wistful "If only we had one of these in Kilmacolm" type pubs. It had been one helluva day so far and the commander needed to sleep. They let him. He deserved it.

They dined on T-bone steak and waited for the second wave. The second wave were there. They had landed and taken a taxi. They could point out landmarks and knew they were in the right place. Only they weren't. They were in the misspelt midst of the wrong town, in the wrong direction and the wrong county. They took another taxi and travelled some more, and then arrived in the middle of the dancing to cheers and toasts and celebration into the small hours of Saturday.

Saturday. Match day. A morning stroll up the gentle hill to the hamlet of Nevill Holt to see the ground and take some practice. Groundsmen were out, trimming the grass, preparing the square, setting the boundary, getting it perfect in the summer sun. The Captain assembled the players, welcomed them formally and handed over to Rob Guyler.

Now here was a Mark Anthony! A Wallace! It was a call to arms, to WIN, a tactical plan, a briefing on etiquette, a bringing together of the team, a reminder of the opponents' qualities, a stressing of the importance of "walking in", of playing well and of WINNING.

Then lunch and the game!

Nevill Holt batted first. They were foxed by Kilmacolm's slow bowling pace, to which they were unaccustomed, and initially scored sluggishly. Gavin Murray took a sitter of a catch. Nick Gibson was bowling magnificently, taking wicket after wicket, and the Scots were in charge at 38 for 5. Then came Nevill Holt's number six, Joe Hughes, who turned his bat to anything and began to show how it was done. The runs mounted, the fielding was perforate, the ball found the boundary time and again, until at last Nick Gibson found the centre stump and put him out for sixty. Roddy Davidson took a catch and a wicket, and eventually Nevill Holt were all done for 136, Nick Gibson having accounted for 8 wickets.

The tea was a splendid English affair; sandwiches, pork pies, tea and cake.

Then Kilmacolm were in. The shock of the first few balls was palpable. The first and second batsmen could only defend, trying to put off the bowlers by displaying chalk-white faces. The runs were few, and wickets began to fall. Kenneth Wilson defended well and was encouraged to leave by Rob Guyler as temporary umpire. A burst of slow bowling by Rob Guyler's brother allowed some runs to mount and then Rob was in. He batted, he swiped, he lashed the ball and started making runs. And he stayed in. They couldn't shake him. He had the strength of ten men but couldn't quite reach the boundary so he ran for threes. Over upon over he ran for threes. Back and forth and back again, knocking out the runs. A three. Another three! And after each three he knelt and prayed, holding his bat heavenward. Was it symbolic cricket – every three emphasising the Trinity? They didn't know, just urged Rob onwards. Then a bowl was finally too much and he retired, having reached 40 runs and ending the rout. The last handful of batsmen went in and batted hard. The final pairing of Allan Halliday and Jamie Davidson edged the score past 100, a transparently fair decision by the umpire, Mike Wilson (a Solomon!), kept Jamie Davison in on the penultimate ball, and then it was over, Kilmacolm finishing on 102.

As moral victories go it was a win for Kilmacolm. The applause of the teams subsided into a few last drinks in the sun, then back to Medbourne and a celebratory barbeque at The Fox in Hallaton. Man-of-the-match Joe Hughes graciously accepted his prize from Gavin Murray.

For the rest of the evening they listened to Charlie Craig telling them, and they listened and understood, so he told them again.

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J Potter