Extract from Nick Allen’s diary

Wednesday 16 June 2010

In my life I have enjoyed many strange and fascinating days but today ranks among the most quintessential. For the last five days I have been immersed in the World Cup. After the excitement of Switzerland beating Spain I looked forward in anticipation to South Africa v Uruguay. It was only when I looked out of the window I noticed what a beautiful day it was. It was then that I decided to go for a walk and there is no better place than Verulamium Park. Oh what joy, not a cloud to be seen in the bright blue sky and the cathedral looking majestic rising out of a sea of green. As I bathed in what I can only describe as a bath of Englishness I noticed string of gentlemen dressed in white and carrying large bags making their way to a cricket pitch. What a magnificent sight and I made my way to join them. I wondered through the players making tentative enquires and discovered that Garden Fields Cricket Club where playing Alvin’s All-stars. I must say that I took straight away to Garden Fields. How grand they looked in the matching shirts and blue hats. Each player had their names embossed on their sleeve which made it easier for me to identify the players. I was informed the captain for tonight’s game was a lad called Big Al. He was easy to spot, a handsome man with twinkling blue eyes, a natural leader. It was now time for the toss up, Big Al greeted the All-stars captain, not surprisingly he was called Alvin; after a long discussion about the rules and such like they both walked away looking happy. It appears that Big Al thinks tossing a coin is vulgar and prefers to negotiate. It seems Big Al got his way and the All-stars were batting first. So, Garden Fields or Men of Fields, which they prefer to be called, made their way to the square. Now comes the weird part, they formed a circle and Big Al gave out his instructions – keep their score below 100, bowl straight and true, keep the fielding tight. Then he explained that to achieve this they must play as one, feel each others pain, share each others pleasure. He then called to the ancient gods, produced a phial of essence of papyrus and then anointed each player in turn as they chanted ‘we are as one’. All I can say is that, I now believe in Big Al, because what followed was the greatest display of bowling and fielding I have ever seen at this level. But more of that latter; the game was delayed for a moment because no one could find a match ball. Apparently an absent player called Rookie said that there were plenty of match balls in the bag, but none were to be found. Even a lad called Postie, who is famous for rummaging around in old bags, failed to find one. So a suitable second-hand ball was found and the game proceeded. Big Al informed the team of his bowling line-up, a Father Ted look-alike was delegated to arrange the field placings and a Scouser called Tiny Tim was to open the bowling. I was informed that Tiny Tim was suffering from gout and would only be using a short run up. I was thinking that perhaps Big Al had made a mistake as Tiny Tim’s first ball was wide and then hit for two 4’s, but he completed his first over with one wicket for 10 runs. But what do I know; Tiny Tim finished his spell with figures of 3 overs, 2 wickets for 19 runs. At the other another Scouser called Wilkie bowled magnificently with figures of 2 overs, 1 wicket for 4 runs, including a run-out. Next up was a wiry lad called Smudger who bowled an outstanding 3 overs for the loss of 10 runs. He was supported at the other end by some big noise at the BBC (I must say I’ve never heard of him) called Ol’ King Cole who also returned very respectable figures of 2 overs for just 4 runs. Now come the moment I had been waiting for, seeing Father Ted, sorry the Jock, bowl. It was clear from the outset that he was the main man. I wasn’t disappointed; he clean bowled the batsman with his first ball. He finished his short spell with unbelievable figures of 2 overs, 1 maiden, 3 wickets. At the other end Big Al had decided to give a new chap a few overs. His name is Andy; he hasn’t been given a nickname yet. Someone said it was Bart but if it were up to me it would be GI Joe; he was sporting a typical 1950’s GI haircut. A nervous start produced 2 wides, but after that he settled down with excellent figures of 2 overs, 1 wicket for 4 runs. Everything was going to plan, 8 wickets down less than 50 on the board and 6 overs to go. Chukka was then given an over and lived up to his name but there was a run out. At the other end an elderly gentleman was given the ball, his name the Dab. I thought he was some minor Royal with his elegant speech and manner. Again his produced a tidy performance, taking the last wicket in his second over. The other over was bowled by Big Al who conceded just 4 runs. I think it is important to mentioned the very tight fielding; Wilkie led by example with some superb diving stops. I laughed when Chukka missed one ball and was verbally abused by Big Al; needless to say he didn’t miss another. One interesting moment came Tiny Tim who, when asked to mind the track when crossing it between overs duly obliged by what can only be described as a mince halfway across, taking care to ensure that all parts of said pitch had been touched by spiked boots before bizarrely performing a hop-skip right at the edge. There was also a query about Tiny Tim’s backing up - or lack of it. So there it was Alvin’s All-stars all out for 67 in less than 18 overs. Whatever magic Big Al produced in that circle it definitely worked.

Now it was Men of fields turn to bat, could they knock the runs off quickly or as I was told, could snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. Someone suggested to Big Al that he should put the non-bowlers in first, but NO he said, we shall stick to the plan. His plan was to start with GI Joe and Coley; his intelligence told him that the new boy “Andy is a fairly decent bat and can bowl reasonably well. He looked good in the nets and difficult to get out.” Unfortunately he wasn’t that good in the field and was bowled first ball. He was then joined by Wilkie. Another thing that made me laugh was Jock, who was scoring at the time; he couldn’t distinguish between the 2 batsmen, both strapping 6 footers. So he decided that whoever scored the runs must be Wilkie. Perhaps that’s why when OKC was bowled he was only credited with 2 runs. Now enter Tiny Tim, complete with runner (Chukka or was it Frankie Dettori). Both Wilkie and Tiny Tim were bowled out for 18 and 7 respectively. Next in were Jock and Harry; Jock finished 17 not-out and made sure that he hit the winning runs and Harry finished his action-packed innings 13 not out. Harry deserves a mention for 2 reasons, first his claim that he nearly overtook Jock when running between the wickets and second, he has found a new stroke – the sweep. Unfortunately this didn’t help him when he was hit in the face by a beamer. He went down like a sack of spuds. Some players thought he milked it a bit, but fair play to the chap he did continue. It was rumoured that this was his punishment for stating that he was a better keeper than Postie – not a wise thing to do when Postie is Big Al’s younger brother – beware of the power of Big Al. So there it is – a magnificent victory over a rather useful side.

But the excitement didn’t end there; I decided to join the players for a celebration drink at the 6 Bells. Whilst lashings of London Pride, Landlord and other fines ales were consumed a platter of Sausage and Chips appeared. All the players heartily consumed these and roared with laughter when the Dab announced that one of his teeth had fallen out.

Overall a thoroughly enjoyable evening.