

Middleton Ease into the Next Round of the Wood Cup

Monday, 08 May 2017

It was a cool day at Towncroft on Saturday in what was a historical Wood Cup match versus Micklehurst. A competition Middleton first entered in 1921 and won at the first attempt, they then went on to win the competition a further eleven times. This would be their last time of entering the competition before they make the move to the Lancashire League next year.

Over the years local's such as Hyde, Clarkson and Roydes who all lived a stones throw from the ground performed wonders, now it was up to a new generation of local lads plus a professional to take the club forward.

The visitors Micklehurst are set in the quaint Mossley village of Saddleworth with a picturesque ground. They had a new Captain this year with Stu Chamley taking over from opening bat Mike Blomeley. Stuart has spent his life at Richmond Hill and been busy recruiting, with overseas Amateur Akil Greenidge joining the ranks and commuting every weekend from Cambridge University. Talented all rounder Lewis Daniel has made a good start to the season and has already had a spell with Lancashire youth.

Moonraker captain Walker won the toss and elected to bat with Professional Williams and the ever reliable Harry Gee walking out to the middle in a fresh breeze.

Wood Cup rules dictate that five bowlers must be used with a maximum 10 overs each. Gee, who joined the club from Flowery Field 18 months ago was soon into his stride finding the boundary with regularity, scoring 10 fours out of a fine 55. Professional Williams who is forming a fine partnership with Gee, kept the scoreboard ticking over at a run a ball.

Williams who began his career in Cumbria before taking over the pro reins at Unsworth for a number of years is a

genuine all rounder and Middleton were fortunate to acquire him. He is a local PE teacher and is said to eat, sleep and drink cricket.

With the score on 86 Gee was caught by Chamley off the bowling of Kohler. Joining Williams in the middle was Walker a talented bat and Captain of the Moonrakers. With the Pro scoring freely, George dug in and helped keep the scoreboard moving, before he was caught and bowled by the danger man Greenidge for a well fought 25.

This brought last weeks Centurian Grant Jones to the wicket and Micklehurst sensed this was a partnership that could potentially take the score into higher echelons. With each of the batters elegantly stroking the ball, between them they saw the ball reach the boundary on 27 occasions. Both were batting superbly and as the Oldham Chronicle stated “Micklehurst had no answer to them “.

With a century looking on the cards for Williams he was then well caught out by Kohler off the bowling of Greenidge for 88. This brought the intelligent batsman Zain Tahir to the crease and he again scored freely at a run a ball. Jones took over from where he left off last week and it was Groundhog Day all over again at Towncroft. Hitting the ball cleanly and with some force Jones made Skipper Chamley move his fielders out to the boundaries to keep the score down.

All six bowlers from the Mick tried in vain to prise Jones out, however he had his fine defence in place should a ball be pitched on a perfect line and length. Last year Grant mastered the bowling of the Greater Manchester League Division 1 with Bamford leading them to a League and Cup double before returning home to Middleton. He has a great eye for the ball and picks it up early and with 14 boundaries gradually moved to 99. The Micklehurst fielders were spread far and wide and an easy single was attainable. However, Grant unselfishly looked to obtain a maximum score for Middleton and attempted a four which was only just stopped on the boundary edge. Another unbeaten century, 300 runs in early May, averaging 150, the figure speak for themselves !!!!!.

Defending 327-4 , the effervescent Walker, sporting a floppy green cricket hat, led his team out to defend this total. Pro Williams opened the bowling from the Hollin Lane end and immediately got the perfect line and length from his twenty two step run up. Bowling all his 10 overs for a measly 24 runs and taking 2 wickets this was another top class bowling performance from Chris.

At the other end was his partner Mike Pritchard, himself an accurate and pacy bowler. He’s been a great asset since joining from Norden, a popular lad and gives his all. He picked up another wicket for next to nothing in a fine spell, with a caught behind from the agile Pete Foden. Seeing off the opening bowlers is key in the Wood Cup and with the score kept relatively low we all wondered who skipper Walker would now introduce into the attack.

I had been advised earlier in the day that youngster James Tierney had been drafted in to replace the unavailable Tom

Rutter and he was readying himself to come on at the Hollin Lane end.

Meanwhile at the Towncroft end Steve Mcguiness was introduced. Although his first loosener was dispatched for four, Steve bowled well with variation in flight and delivery and he kept the score down. Steve is an experienced spinner having played at the highest level in the GMCL and is another good asset to have. I must confess to not having seen a great deal of 16 year old James Tierney but what a pleasant surprise I got. Bowling with accuracy and some pace he was on the money from the word go. He finished with the incredible figures of 6 overs, 4 maidens, 3 wickets for 3 runs, including the prize wicket of Akil Greenidge caught by his brother Rhys.

Incidentally the wickets were only hit twice during the whole day by both James and the Pro. What a prospect Middleton have on their hands here. Credit to the coaches who have developed the Tierney brothers and the rest of the talented youngsters.

Walker decided to utilise his full complement of spin bowlers with Jones and Matty Foden both getting to turn their arms. Matt has been away at University but is now getting back into the groove of spin bowling which requires time. However, he put in an amazing spell taking 4-8, including the very dangerous Lewis Daniel. This was outstanding spin bowling from Matthew and just reward for all the hard work he's put in.

All out for 122 and a resounding win for Middleton and into the next round of the Wood Cup. It would be a long journey home for Micklehurst to the Saddleworth hills, but a fine club they are and you always get a warm welcome at Richmond Hill. They have 3 other clubs all within a couple of miles so the competition for players is immense, but they have a hard core of local lads who inspire others to join.

Middleton have a double header this weekend at home to Oldham on the Sunday, but on the Saturday are away to Shaw who feature ex England speedster Saj Mahmood and the highly dangerous batsman Jameel Stuart. Both games 1.30pm.

Philip Hamnett

Scorecard from Saturday Middleton Batting

Gee caught Chamley bowled Kohler for 55 Williams ct Kohler bowled Greenidge 88

Walker ct and b Greenidge 25 Jones not out 101

Tahir ct Bhatti bowled Chamley 18 Rhys Tierney not out 8

J Tierney dnb

P Foden dnb

M Pritchard dnb S McGuinness dnb M Foden dnb

Middleton Bowling

Williams 10 overs 2 maidens 2 wickets for 24 runs Pritchard 7 - 1 - 1 for 26

McGuinness 10 - 0 - 0 for 39

J Tierney 6- 4 - 3 for 3

Foden 5.1 - 2 - 4 for 8 Jones 4 - 1 - 0 for 5

