

MIDDLETON GET OFF TO FINE START IN TOM HARDMAN TROPHY

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Middleton's first match in the T20 saw them at home to Shaw in front of a reasonable crowd at Towncroft on the Bank Holiday Monday. Shaw arrived with an experienced team including the Mahmood's, Chiapp and Jones and were no doubt scratching their heads from their bizarre game v Rochdale on the Saturday. Several of the bowlers that day couldn't find a length and at the end of the game there was a general consensus that the pitch was 2 yards short at only 20 yards.

Batting first it was good to see Harry Gee back in the starting eleven and he walked out to open with Grant Jones who had been promoted to boost the run rate. Not the best of starts with both quickly back in the pavilion after a run out for Harry and Grant receiving a peach of a ball that moved all over before hitting the wickets. Back together again were the partnership of Captain Walker and Pro Chris Williams both of whom had worked wonders at Moorside two days previous. Both were seeing the ball well and finding the Rochdale Road boundary with regularity. A good score of 150 was looking to be on the cards. Chris was keeping the scoreboard turning over nicely and finding the boundary on eight occasions before being bowled by Callum Jones for a well crafted 59 off only 44 balls. A key innings, holding it together for Middleton at a key moment for the Moonrakers. Following on from his fine 132 against Moorside, Chris is now close to 400 runs in all competitions and looking to top his 800 he scored in his debut season for Unsworth. A great start.

Likewise George is now in a fine run of form, great knocks at Shaw and Moorside and now a valuable 29 including an enormous 6 before being a victim of ex England quickie Saj Mahmood. Zain Tahir and Pete Foden then both got into double figures taking Middleton to a respectable 136 for 6 off their 20 overs.

It was quite a cool afternoon at Towncroft and you really need a blazing sun to fully appreciate T20, with the loud music and image emblazoned grass. In their group the Moonrakers still have to face Littleborough, Werneth, Walsden and Saddleworth in this 20 over format.

Jones and Whitehead opened the batting for Shaw and both made a good start reaching double figures before falling victims to Chris Williams and Steve McGuinness. The latter had replaced a strangely out of sorts Mike Pritchard, the man of the match against Moorside on the Saturday. However Mike would soon be back in full throttle against Werneth later in the week. McGuinness was joined in the attack by Tom Rutter and both only conceded a combined 39 off their allotted overs, a good effort. Tom Brimelow was now out in the middle where he would stay for the remainder of the innings for a hard fought 24 not out. However, what more concerned Captain Walker was the amount of extras conceded, a total of 33, which was well out of character for the Moonrakers. No doubt Walker would look at this at the next training session.

These extras put Shaw in a commanding position and with Rak Mahmood scoring a quick fire 28 they looked well positioned to win. However a spell of 1-19 from Matt Foden and the introduction of Rhys Tierney brought the Moonrakers back in with a shout. A fine spell of 3-24 off four overs from young Rhys swung the game Middleton's way and got them back into a game they looked destined to lose with only 8 needed off the last three overs. The final over was well bowled by Steve McGuinness taking a wicket and leaving Shaw one run short. Somehow the Shaw lads had managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. A top performance with both bat and ball for the Pro Williams, however I felt Rhys Tierney deservedly took the man of the match for his fine bowling spell.

Phil Hamnett