

Middleton Welcome Legend

Wednesday, 09 August 2017

It was 12.15pm at Towncroft on Saturday when a solitary figure emerged from the car park carrying his kit bag and making his way to the changing rooms at Middleton. He was first there first, changed and out into the pitch for his traditional warm ups, having completed several hours practice in the week.

This keen Uppermill second teamer wasn't some up and coming youngster trying to prove himself in the game, but 83 year old Jamaican legend Cec Wright. From the same era as Sir Garfield Sobers and Wes Hall and later playing with Viv Richards and Joel Garner, Cec would be looking to improve on his 7,000 wickets already taken in his career. What an honour for some of the Middleton second eleven youngsters to be even on the same pitch as Cec and what an example he sets.

Unfortunately this was to be no fairy tale ending for Cec as he and his Uppermill second eleven teammates would be all out for 69 having won the toss and elected to bat. The only real resistance given was by old Middletonian resident and Uppermill 2nds Captain Ian Johnson with a quickfire 20 runs. Credit must be given to the Middleton bowlers Mark Buckley with 3 wickets and Addison Holland who bowled with real pace and passion. Also some excellent fielding from Eaves, Stanley and Jackson. However star of the show was Mohammad Sohail with 6 wickets for a mere 18 runs including a hat-trick. His medium pace tweakers tied Uppermill in knots and was a masterclass in movement in the air and off the seam. His last wicket came just as Middleton 13 year old spinner Harry Aikenhead was preparing to come on and bowl to Cec Wright. A mere age difference of seventy years and what an experience that would have been.

The Middleton 2nd eleven batters knocked off the runs in no time with the in-form Le-Carpentier hitting a quick dozen and Addison Holland a very smooth 16. I was very impressed with opener Hussain Shahid who hit a quality 28 not out, including 3 fours and looked very comfortable, even against the legend Cec Wright. At 17 years of age Hussain is an excellent prospect and with others coming through, bodes well for Middletons future.

With the second team wrapping things up by 3.30pm many set off to watch the first team away at Uppermill who were not having an easy time of it. Uppermill first team had invested heavily in personnel since the last time the teams met in May. Joining from Saddleworth was ex Lancashire batsmen Darren Shadford and flying in from South Africa was Overseas Amateur and quick bowler Branden Berowsky. Together with Pakistani all rounder Ayaz Tasawar, Uppermill were turning their season round and had won 5 on the bounce. Their good form continued with the bat, compiling an impressive 255 off their 50 overs. Ayaz hit 72, opener Boote 58 and Captain Salmon 34. Bowling honours for Middleton went to Mike Pritchard who toiled away for 3 wickets for 52 and Pro Chris Williams with 2 for 47. Several Uppermill partnerships could not be broken and with Tom Rutter unavailable there was no impact wicket taker as Tom has proven to be. The umpires also seemed keen to penalise anything down legside from the Middleton bowlers which was not always replicated in the second innings.

This was the biggest target Middleton had been set this year and without the unavailable Grant Jones this would be a hard task. The openers got off to a great start with Harry Gee particularly looking impressive with 7 fours and a 6 and an opening partnership of 72. The quick bowlers including Berowsky had been seen off, however this meant the introduction of spinner Ayaz Tasawar who has a strange but effective action. He ended up with seven wickets by showing how to bowl attacking spinners with real variation in pace. Harry Gee was deceived by one and was out for a well earned 44, however Chris Williams appeared to get an inside edge, yet was given out LBW. Following that Mo Shahid hit a couple of impressive boundaries, however it was left to Reece Jones to carry on the fight with a superb 30 not out including 5 majestic fours to each corner of the ground. Sadly Reece ran out of partners but he was the one batsman who mastered the spin of Tasawar and looked comfortable when facing him. Middleton eventually were all out for 129 with 17 overs remaining and hopefully will get back on track next Saturday. However that will be a tough match against Shaw who have Jameel Stuart back in action and Tharshan Thayalan bang in form.

