

## Middleton Win Top Two Battle

Wednesday, 06 September 2017

Last Saturday saw the Championship top two, Middleton and Royton clash at Towncroft in what would be a critical match in determining the eventual league champions.

The reverse fixture at Royton earlier this year had been washed out, however Royton had prevailed in the quarter final of the Wood Cup and arrived with the same team minus Ryan Caruthers who had left to take up a paid position at Barrow CC.

Royton Captain James Maurice-Scott won the toss and elected to bat, walking out to an immaculate looking track with fellow opener and brother Daniel.

With the sun shining it was a glorious Bank Holiday Saturday and ideal batting conditions as Middleton bowlers Mike Pritchard and Professional Chris Williams took the new ball. A fair crowd had gathered at Towncroft with many followers making the short journey from Royton to support their team as they watched opener Daniel Maurice-Scott clean bowled by Pritchard in only the second over. This however brought the popular Royton Professional, Indian Churag Khurana to the wicket, looking to make amends for his low score the previous weekend.

"Chiggy" immediately got off the mark with a neat clip off his legs for four, one of fourteen he was to score that afternoon. With a low centre of gravity Chiggy can step back and cut to the boundary well placed balls, for four, making him the divisions leading run scorer. In his third season for Royton, the team from the Paddock have made quick work in signing him up for next year.

Able supported by Captain Maurice-Scott the Royton score moved rapidly along to 52 before Rhys Tierney took a superb catch to dismiss the Captain off the bowling of Williams. This brought Cumbrian Angus Carruthers to the wicket, who earlier in the season had plundered a half century off the Middleton attack in the Wood Cup. Angus like his brother Ryan is an accomplished all-rounder. Angus soon got off the mark with a couple of fours and together with Khurana would share in a hundred partnership taking Royton to 150. With plenty of overs left, a score of 250 was on the cards and that would be a tough ask batting second. However, I felt none of the Moonrakers bowlers were bowling badly. Indeed McGuinness was turning his arm very well and to concede only 30 off twelve overs was an excellent achievement. Tom Rutter eventually got Carruthers for 36 caught very well behind, by wicket keeper Foden.

Skipper Walker rotated his bowlers well, although I thought he might have brought himself on, following his recent successes with the ball. Khurana meanwhile was approaching his century with fourteen 4's and a 6. At the other end Rutter did a brilliant piece of fielding to run out the dangerous Brown. Professional Williams and McGuinness each got a further wicket whilst young Rhys Tierney bowled eight very good overs and helped peg back the Royton score to 227-6 off their 50 overs. Chiggy Khurana yet again produced a superb innings and remained not out on 121, receiving congratulatory handshakes from Middleton players as he left the pitch.

To chase such a score really needed a big score from one of the Middleton batsmen and stepping up to the plate was the quiet man of the team Harry Gee. Always polite and considered whenever interviewed, Harry was to continue his great run of form and partnership with fellow opener Chris Williams. Indeed this season has seen them both come together anew and form a fine relationship and understanding as openers. Harry, a left handed bat and Chris a right hander means the opposition opening bowlers cannot quickly find a regular spot on which to deliver each ball. Their good understanding has meant no run outs, or even close in their twenty times at the crease together. Today their partnership was over 150 with 17 boundaries, at a run every two balls. Neither batsman pinches the strike but encourages each other at the end of every over. Indeed Chris was first on the pitch to congratulate Harry on his match winning innings of 102 not out, his first century for Middleton and totally well deserved.

He plays the quick bowlers very well and anything close to his legs will be whipped away to the boundary. Indeed today he also drove magnificently and never offered a single chance to some very good Royton bowling. Chiggy was spinning

well and took a couple of wickets, Smith back from holiday was quick and with fellow opening bowler Maxwell was a constant threat. However Gee took it all in his stride. Good defensively, Harry had all the appropriate shots in his locker as he smoothly timed his innings to perfection, much to the admiration of his watching proud parents. I keep talking about his great knock at Shaw, but this innings even surpassed that.

At the other end, Chris Williams was also batting very well for a well deserved 54 before falling LBW to Chiggy in yet another close decision, supported enthusiastically by the Royton fielders. Grant Jones came to the wicket and hit a rapid 14 including a searing 6 and a 4 before being caught and bowled off Chiggy. With 40 needed and with Gee on 94, skipper Walker tore into the the Royton attack with a quickfire 28 although ensuring that Gee reached his magnificent century and victory with four overs to spare.

First over to offer Gee congratulations was the exceedingly sporting Royton skipper James Maurice-Scott, who together with every single Royton player applauded Harry Gee of the pitch. Top sportsmanship from Royton that they will take into the new Greater Manchester Cricket League next year, with the best wishes from all at Middleton. The Moonrakers remain 15 points clear with 5 games remaining. However Royton have appealed the Friarmere result which could mean 3 extra points for them.

This weekend sees a double header away at Moorside and home to Hollinwood, both very tricky fixtures. The weekend was complete with the second eleven dismissing Royton 2nds for 111 with Buckley and Sohail sharing seven wickets. These were knocked off comfortably with Reece Jones hitting 60 and Carpentier 47.