
THE GENT

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Gents to follow in footsteps of W.G. Grace



...but no side bets or kidnapping

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Contact this magazine via email andrewburman_840@hotmail.com

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Club saved after meltdown



Two-hundred and 17 years and 10 days after Napoléon Bonaparte's bloodless 18 Brumaire coup d'état, a cricket club in west London attempted much the same. After 53 disturbing days the matter was resolved: Sumit Kumar is captain for the 2017 season and Praveen Bocha his second-in-command. At a chaotic AGM, Sanjay Patel's late candidature was allowed by chairman Hemin Patel in what appeared to be a bloodless coup. The vote was conducted by Hemin talking individually to the members and placing ticks next to the candidates' names. This rather rendered redundant the role of returning officer occupied by cackling Dave Bender. Sanjay won the vote. Business was concluded, or so it seemed, and the squad headed off to Club 182 for a curry to toast the new leader.

Antennae picked up on discontent during the meeting. Karthik Jampala used his acceptance speech after winning the fielder award to quote the club's constitution – nominations must be advised before the AGM. After an ominous silence for 24 hours, the dogs of war were let loose on social media and over the telephone. Civil war nearly resulted. Naveed Khan was particularly unhappy and eloquently shared his concerns. In their different ways, but no less emphatically, Vijay Basker and Vamsee Krishna, no doubt accustomed to the decorous dealings of the Indian Parliament, also expressed distaste at the events. History tells us that late nominations had been permitted as recently as 2013 which was the reason a club constitution was written to forestall them. The election was declared null and void.

After a month of sombre, tense reflection, Sanjay superbly and sacrificially withdrew his nomination, Hemin apologised for his misjudgement and Sumit, who had maintained a dignified silence amid the firestorm, remained as captain. Stress is an overused word but this was a genuinely difficult period with battle lines drawn. Hemin's powerful message was well received by the members. The club seems at peace with itself now. Right was done.

I want to provide some clarification and closure to the events that occurred at this year's AGM. As chairman elect at the time I made some serious errors that caused ill-feeling within the club. I hope this email clarifies matters for all of you and that we can finally put an end to this matter. So here are the facts:

- *Two to three weeks prior to the AGM, I had a conversation with Sumit regarding the captaincy. I won't go into the details of that conversation as it was a private conversation between Sumit and me.*
- *Three to four days before the AGM, Sanjay and I had spoken about the possibility of his going for captaincy. We discussed that he needed to decide this quickly so we can follow the correct process.*
- *Sanjay decided he wanted to nominate himself and we talked about how to proceed.*
- *Due to miscommunication between us, I assumed Sanjay would speak to the relevant parties, when in fact it was me who had the action to do that. I did not do this and I apologise for this.*
- *On the day of the AGM we both assumed the process had been followed and given that we were openly talking about it, we had no reason to believe that it had not. This then led to a vote where Sanjay was voted in.*
- *The day after when we had realised people were upset and their reasons why, the committee spoke to the affected individuals in order to resolve the issue. It was decided that the vote was null and void.*
- *We now have resolution to the matter where Sumit is captain, and rightly so.*

I hope this email has addressed your concerns and I really hope this draws a line under the whole issue so that we can now concentrate on the year ahead.

The good old days

A truthful feature on rowdy Gents AGMs that named names would treble this magazine's circulation but would probably bankrupt the club through lawyer's fees. Subject to review, it is believed that 2016's, entertaining as it was, was not even in the medal positions for mayhem as, to the best of our knowledge, the police were not called, there was no brawl with locals, no broken furniture and no goosing of pub landladies ("You cheeky little sod"). Nor did the captain disappear upstairs for a passionate romp with a 17-year-old. More work is needed here.

A strange coincidence

Veteran Sunderland SC seamer Len Baker will soon go to Wales to try to find an old school chum despite not having the faintest idea where he lives, it has emerged. Andrew Burman was enjoying a spot of lunch at the Station Cafe in Hounslow with ex-colleague Alan William Pratt, who mentioned that he had caught up with boyhood chum Len Baker, with whom he used to share paperboy duties in the 1950s. "I know a Len Baker from Hounslow, is he a Sunderland supporter?" chanced Burman. Baker was duly confirmed to be THE Len Baker who as a 62-year-old famously took 6 for 38 to destroy the Gents in 2006. Baker it seems is on a mission to reunite himself with every old school friend going but one had moved to Wales and nobody knew where he lived. "Never mind," he said "I'm going to Wales soon and will make some enquiries." This sort of thing must be encouraged.

Time for a rethink?

We have been mulling over timed games and here put the case for the prosecution and defence. Now before anyone gets on his high horse, our club's preferred format is 35/35 or 40/40 but there is no harm in discussing the timed one. It has been debated since cricket began. An eloquent denunciation of the draw came in *The Captain – A magazine for boys and "old boys" Vol. XV April-September 1906* under County Cricket Reform: "Everything that can be said against present day methods in county cricket centres round the word 'draw'. Once this baneful term could be eliminated, the game, financially, would be in the ascendant. A League System would, no doubt, facilitate the arrangements of management, but the greater and primary faults lie in the cricket itself.

To begin with, every team, and every individual player, should make it a point of honour never to play for a draw – that most unsportsmanlike juggle which must ever deserve a full measure of popular contempt. No leisurable person holds his leisure so cheaply as to cheerfully employ it in watching a side poke and block and tap for hours together for the sake of filling out time! Let your cricket captain realise this – and order his game accordingly."

To put the argument for the defence, we must go back in time. On 16 May 1999 Stuart Snelling had carded a respectable 8-2-26-1 against 12 Angry Men, having bowled in tandem with Sanjay Patel (7-2-21-0) at Albert Road RG in north London. The hosts stood at 59 for 1 off 15 overs with Angries' opener HP Denton in sound form. Had the scorebook been frozen at that point, perhaps by rain, commentators would have found nothing remarkable. Except that this was a timed match, on a dry day, with unlimited spells. First change Dhruv Patel then pinned Denton third ball for 17. In his next six overs, Snelling would bowl three maidens, concede four runs and take seven wickets. All his victims were bowled and he ended up with 17-6-33-8, Dhruv 10-0-33-2. It remains our longest and most successful bowling spell.

Some of the spells bowled in the early days would be incomprehensible to our modern players. Of recent recruits, perhaps only Raja Pentakota with Harpers in the Shropshire league has bowled such. Snelling's marathon bowling was not unusual for the time. The annals record his 16-4-28-5 against Urban Associates in 1997. Mark Ashton's took 16-3-55-7 against New Barbarian Weasels in 1994. Fifteen over spells were bowled by Gents Ashton and Hill and opponents Kirkwood (Weasels), Webster (London Saints) and Pigott (London Owls). The Gents bowled 48.2 overs against FC Chad in 1996 and got through them in less than three hours. Most bowling records will naturally be set in the timed format, which makes Sachin Desai's 8-0-31-7 against Cheltenham Allsorts in 2012 all the more impressive. It remains the only seven-wicket haul in a Gents' limited overs game.

The 2016 Bricklayer's Arms game attracted comment, *The Gent* reviewing it favourably. Brick were deprived at the eleventh hour of two bowlers and only had nine men, so their captain Watson negotiated a timed game with Sumit Kumar. The second innings was to last an hour plus 20 overs, with, unusually, no provision for extra overs in the event of an early declaration. Brick battled to a draw with 131 for 6 off 38 overs, a praiseworthy effort in difficult circumstances for them. We respectfully refer players who disapproved of this format to their club history.

The timed games referred to above were negotiated by the captains of the era for the very good reason that the early Gents often did not have the depth of bowling to accommodate limited overs. Mark Ashton puts it more robustly. It is a paradox that the arrival of Dhruv Patel, whose subtle spin was perfect for the format, strengthened the attack to the extent that limited overs became the preferred format. To this writer, and he understands he is in the minority, a brave rearguard for a draw in a timed game is preferable to a limited overs game effectively over with a first innings of, say, 250 for five.

Test matches show the timed format at its best. There have been many epic rearguard actions as fans of Mike Atherton, Hanif Mohammad, Sunil Gavaskar, Mark Greatbatch, Trevor Bailey and Willie Watson will confirm.

Farewell, Pavan

Pavan Kumar Kota returned to Anantapur on 15 February, four days after the winter curry. He served the club well and proved a kind, generous colleague with an impish sense of humour. The Lowell George look is coming on well. We wish him and his family all the very best. Pavan won all-rounder, batsman and bowler of 2016 with impressive totals of 480 runs, 30 wickets and nine catches. This was thoroughly merited although a sound case could have been made for Hemin Patel as bowler with 25 wickets at 4.29 rpo compared to Pavan's 4.66. He departs, not forever we hope, with a brief but impressive Gents CV. Gents and United Titans will miss him. Good luck with his new life and new cricket club.

| Date | Opponent | Runs | Bowling | Catches |
|-----------|------------------------|------|------------|---------|
| 30/8/2015 | Battersea Eagles | 10 | 2.1-0-9-1 | - |
| 30/8/2015 | Battersea Eagles | 1* | 2-0-6-2 | - |
| 13/9/2015 | Gubbays | 65* | 7-1-24-3 | - |
| 27/9/2015 | Hale | 29 | 4.3-1-11-2 | - |
| 1/5/2016 | Bengal Troopers | 3 | 7-0-45-2 | 1 |
| 8/5/2016 | Wimbledon United | 48* | 7-0-28-1 | - |
| 15/5/2016 | Gubbays | 21 | 3-0-14-0 | - |
| 22/5/2016 | Northfields | 7 | 8-0-43-2 | - |
| 29/5/2016 | White Swans (Southall) | - | 5-1-23-4 | 1 |
| 5/6/2016 | Judd Street Tigers | 22 | 5.3-0-37-3 | 1 |
| 26/6/2016 | Yarl | 62 | 3-0-21-0 | 1 |
| 3/7/2016 | St. Anne's Allstars | 3 | - | - |
| 10/7/2016 | Hounslow Hurricanes | 0 | 7-0-31-3 | - |
| 17/7/2016 | Bengal Troopers | 1 | 4-0-20-1 | - |
| 24/7/2016 | Monty RH | 83* | 5-0-19-0 | - |
| 31/7/2016 | Ashford | 0 | 6-1-28-1 | 1 |
| 7/8/2016 | Pak | 73* | 2-0-21-2 | - |
| 7/8/2016 | Pak | 11* | 1-0-8-1 | 1 |
| 14/8/2016 | Clapham In | 13 | 5-0-24-3 | 1 |
| 21/8/2016 | Bricklayer's Arms | 16* | 6-3-7-1 | - |
| 28/8/2016 | Battersea Eagles | 60 | 8-2-21-2 | - |
| 4/9/2016 | Millfields | 33 | 2-0-11-0 | - |
| 11/9/2016 | Salix | 7* | 4-0-24-1 | 1 |
| 25/9/2016 | Hale | 17 | 7-2-20-3 | 1 |



Matches **24**
 Runs **585**
 Avg. **39.00**
 Ct. **9**
 Overs **111.1**
 Wickets **38**
 Avg. **13.03**
 Econ. **4.45**
 SR **17.55**

Karthik Jampala retained his fielder trophy. He took six catches, fewer than Kota (nine) and Small (ten with three as 'keeper). A case could have been made for each. In his speech, he commended his pal Satyapal Pingili. Certainly, when those two play together they save 25 runs every game. Vice-captain Praveen Bocha won most improved, perhaps a result of play more and prosper. In 13 games he scored 300 attractive runs, took 15 wickets and four catches.

| | All-Rounder | Batsman | Bowler |
|-------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1998 | Sanjay Patel | Sanjay Patel | Sanjay Patel |
| 2013 | Ramanjit Lall | Ramanjit Lall | Ramanjit Lall |
| 2016 | Pavan Kota | Pavan Kota | Pavan Kota |

Pavan Kota was the third Gent after Rinku Lall and Sanjay Patel to scoop the three playing awards shown.

Carey's perfect over

On 25 January Aled Carey, 29, of Golden Point bowled the perfect over. He was wicketless in his first eight overs against East Ballarat. That all changed as the first three deliveries of his ninth over produced a catch at first slip, a caught behind and an lbw. Cue hat-trick celebrations from his teammates. Yet there was more to come. His last three victims were bowled as the opposition were all out for 40.

No bowler has ever taken five, let alone six wickets with successive balls in the professional game. Five in five happens from time to time in amateur matches. Stuart Snelling did it for the Gents against London Canaries in 2001 en route to six for 6 and in 2015 Mark Horne did it for Witney Swifts against Swinbrook IIs in Oxfordshire. Brett Lee claims to have bowled the perfect over as a 14-year-old, six clean bowled. There is no written record (why not?), but the claim is plausible as was bowling 80mph at that age. There are several instances of four in four in pro cricket.

On 7 February, Maavi XI's Mohit Ahlawat's scored 300 from 72 balls including 39 sixes and 14 fours in a Twenty20. This was on the BBC, so it must be true. We await confirmation of the boundary dimensions. These are remarkable days.

The 2017 fixtures

| Date | Opponent | Venue |
|------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 12/3 | Nets (12.00 – 14.00) | Teddington SC, TW11 9PJ |
| 26/3 | Nets (12.00 – 14.00) | Teddington SC, TW11 9PJ |
| 30/4 | Hounslow Hurricanes | Ealing Central SG, UB6 8AP |
| 7/5 | Millfields | Hilly Fields, SE4 1QA |
| 14/5 | Wimbledon United | Melbury Gardens, SW20 0DL |
| 21/5 | Gubbays | Old Tenisonians, KT3 6LX |
| 28/5 | Northfields | Durston House, W5 4DR |
| 4/6 | Mighty Wanderers | Old Tenisonians, KT3 6LX |
| 11/6 | Hounslow Hurricanes | Away, venue TBA |
| 18/6 | Hale | Old Tenisonians, KT3 6LX |
| 25/6 | St. Anne's Allstars | Old Tenisonians, KT3 6LX |
| 2/7 | White Swans (Southall) | Old Tenisonians, KT3 6LX |
| 9/7 | Crown Taverners | Crown Taverners, GU17 9UA |
| 16/7 | Bricklayer's Arms | Old Tenisonians, KT3 6LX |
| 23/7 | Battersea Eagles | Old Tenisonians, KT3 6LX |
| 30/7 | Judd Street Tigers | Old Tenisonians, KT3 6LX |
| 6/8 | Baker Street Irregulars | Ealing Central SG, UB6 8AP |
| 13/8 | Northfields | Old Tenisonians, KT3 6LX |
| 20/8 | Clapham In | Old Tenisonians, KT3 6LX |
| 27/8 | Bricklayer's Arms | Raynes Park SG, SW20 0BH |
| 3/9 | Stanmore Warriors | Shenley Cricket Centre, WD7 9DW |
| 10/9 | Gubbays | Cavendish RG, HA4 9PG |
| 17/9 | Salix | Imperial College, UB3 5AQ |
| 24/9 | Hale | Hale Common, GU9 0PB |

The fixture list is complete. Note added postcodes, demanded by the Satnav generation. We sent Gubbays on a fool's errand to Hayes last season by miskeying one flipping postcode digit, so exercise caution. Elite cricketers Bengal Troopers have returned the hospitality offered twice last season by dumping us, claiming league commitments. Hounslow Hurricanes and Northfields have been upgraded to home and away. We desperately need to get Northfields on our home pitch. Crown Taverners have reinstated their Sunday XI and will kindly host us on 9 July. This will be the first time since July 2012, Ravi Inkollu's last match – three for 19 including Jonny Comfort and 27 not out if you please.

The first nets will be on 12 March. Please try to attend, £5 a session, to make a dent in the £194 outlay. We have a splendid refresh of kit thanks to Naveed Khan and Hemin Patel so come along and use it. We have the whole hall including two bowling lanes so there will be fielding practice if enough turn up. Should there be demand, a mid-season net will be arranged at the Oval. But see Tigers' warnings later.

It is hard to estimate the strength of teams at this distance but April and May look tough – the record to date against these opponents is won 5 lost 10. There is an early trip to Hilly Fields near the home of Greg Newcombe and Jonny Small. What a good fixture that was, brokered by our great administrator Vamsee Krishna. We pay our first visit to Wimbledon United after hosting them twice and end the month with our annual 250 for not very many on Northfields' school ground followed by an absolute pasting. The Judd Street Tigers match, rained off in 2013 and 2015, has reverted to July. September builds to a crescendo of cricket with five excellent away trips as Old Tenisonians is given over to association football. Stanmore Warriors and Mighty Wanderers are new oppo (see Shenley).

Clapham Innovators

Clapham In now have a dedicated T20 team, Clapham Thunder and don't they look the business? The Thunder toured abroad for the last three seasons: Corfu (2016), Italy (2015, beating the Italian champions) and Prague (2014, losing to the Czech national side in the final of the Pepsi Cup, as well as being crowned the Fairest Team in Europe). We have long planned a family day with piles of food and entertainment for the little ones including a bouncy castle so we can ping Hemin into orbit. Clapham In will be the last home game and looks a suitable oppo for this day.

We hope to see their three innovations – Duck Suit, Headband and Fines Book in full glory. The Headband is awarded to the worst fielder each game and has never been washed.



Gents go to Shenley

Shenley Cricket Ground, where the Gents will play Stanmore Warriors on 3 September, was designed by W.G. Grace. The Porter family, who owned the Shenley estate in the latter part of the 19th century, asked Grace to design the ground to the dimensions of the Oval. He accepted, in a brief period between running up gambling debts and monopolising the crease, and the grounds together with the pavilion remain today. On 22 June 1997 Denis Compton unveiled the Denis Compton Oval. Since its unveiling it has according to its own publicity rapidly become one of the most attractive cricket venues in the country. Middlesex have played two first class games there, against Sri Lanka (2002) and Zimbabwe (2003). Other national teams who have played on the Oval are South Africa, Pakistan, West Indies, New Zealand, Ireland and Scotland. Nearby Radlett, which has also hosted Middlesex, was the post-war home of Bodyline captain D.R. Jardine. He turned out for them and more information on this is urgently required.



Pointless and fodder for the masses *Room 101* and *Big Brother* are recorded in Elstree Studios, a healthy walk away from the ground. Classic 1960s TV series *The Saint* and *The Avengers* and famous movies such as *Star Wars* were also filmed there. The old things are best though. Simon Templar, accompanied in his yellow Volvo by miniskirted ladies on his way to deal with villains, was delightful 1960s teatime entertainment.

Feet of clay



Grace's career was astonishingly long. He started his first class career at 16 and stopped at 60. In 1876, he scored 839 runs in eight days, with 344, 177 and 318 not out. He played 22 Tests, all against Australia, scoring 1,098 runs at 32.29. From the photographic evidence, his scores may have been inflated by the curious Victorian Law that third man must always lean on a bat. He was also a crook who made and lost fortunes from cricket betting, although he was far from unique in that. A trust fund was set up to help him in his retirement and it was said he knew its value to the nearest shilling each day. Most of it went settling gambling debts after he died, a lesson to us all. He is, however, revered through his skill in elevating the game from a minor Victorian pastime. And for designing a ground that the Gents will be proud to visit.

Grace had the tragic Billy Midwinter kidnapped to stop him playing for Australia, with whom Grace had less than cordial relations. Midwinter was eligible for both Gloucestershire and the Aussies. In 1878 there was a fixture clash. Grace wanted him to play for the county, captain Gregory for Australia at Lord's. Kidnapping was decided on and a wacky race involving horse-drawn carriages ensued. W.G.'s brother E.M. wrote to Gregory: "With the knowledge of Midwinter's engagement staring you in the face, you attempted to induce him to break his promise, desert his county, and to play for you by offering him a much larger sum than we could afford to pay him." Midwinter played for Gloucestershire, to little effect. He died aged 39 in an asylum, diagnosed as "hopelessly insane" after a series of personal tragedies.

Some Top 10s since 2008

GWLCC will enjoy its 30th season in 2017. Here are some recent achievements. Sanjay is as far ahead in runs as Hemin is in wickets. A special publication marking the anniversary will be available next winter.

| Games | Runs | Wickets | Catches |
|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| H Patel 137 | S Patel 2,386 | H Patel 208 | S Patel 38 |
| S Patel 130 | Kumar 1,286 | S Patel 154 | H Desai 33 |
| S Desai 85 | Small 1,283 | Sciberras 78 | H Patel 33 |
| Kumar 83 | Dubey 1,175 | Snelling 70 | S Desai 32 |
| Toft 83 | S Desai 1,167 | Kumar 64 | Newcombe 27 |
| Hibbert 73 | Khan 1,033 | Hibbert 59 | Khan 22 |
| Denton 71 | Bocha 1,017 | Inkollu 54 | Sciberras 22 |
| Newcombe 69 | Cloete 964 | Bocha 43 | Hibbert 21 |
| Gilkes 67 | Gilkes 941 | S Desai 43 | Small 21 |
| Caveney 66 | Lall 887 | Lall 43 | Bocha 17 |
| Sciberras 66 | | | |

Steve Bignell – a warning take by me

Net practice will begin shortly for the Tigers. Our members may or may not be aware of the horrific, life-changing injury suffered by the Bradford League player Alex Tait whilst bowling in pre-season nets. If not, Google ‘Alex Tait cricket injury’. Alex suffered the injury when the batsman smashed the ball back at him and he was unable to react in time, being struck right between the eyes, breaking 15 different bones in his skull.

Observing the behaviour of our players in the nets at Lord’s over many years it is surprising something similar has not occurred. Nets are a restricted environment, like playing cricket in a tunnel, and sometimes there is nowhere to hide. A couple of years ago, trapped against the netting, I took a nasty blow on the forearm in similar circumstances to the above, and I wasn’t even bowling. It was a complete accident, as were the spate of our batsmen being hit on the head with fast beamers some time back. Luckily, no serious damage was inflicted on these occasions, but it could have been very different. A cricket ball may only weigh five and a half ounces, but when propelled by a batsman or bowler at 70-80 mph can inflict severe damage to the human body.

The purpose of cricket nets – at least at our standard of play – is surely for team members to reconnect socially, activate muscles that may have been redundant during the winter, in addition to fine-tuning their batting and bowling techniques, and not for larking about and attempting things they would never think of doing in a match situation (e.g. bowlers frequently ignore the bowling crease and overstep by some distance, which can mean losing control of the ball).

So please, whilst not suggesting we bowl underarm lobs at each other or pat the ball gently back to the bowler, be sensible and have some consideration for your teammates. Don’t bowl fast short-pitched balls at batsmen with mobility and technical issues and don’t try and smash every ball straight back towards a gaggle of net bowlers who may or may not be paying attention. Injuries in cricket are inevitable, but accidents are preventable.

File under ‘Only a matter of time’.

(The Gent replies: very wise words and thank you for letting us share them, Steve. Our public liability insurance policy has been renewed but go easy at the nets, Gents. Cackling Dave Bender nearly took out the editor some years ago with a straight drive and the broken brickwork at the back of the hall bears witness to some ancient Sanjay violence with the bat.)

Maxie steps down (from St. Anne’s Allstars’ blog)

A huge round of applause to our founder, club secretary and inspiration Maxie Haddow-Allen, who’s stepping down after 16 glorious years at the helm. Many thanks to Maxie from every Allstar, past and present, for everything he’s done for our club - the Allstars simply would not exist without him. At our AGM in central London, Maxie handed over the reins to Nick Chadwick, our new club captain. Nick will enjoy the fullest of support from everyone in our club as he takes on this prestigious new role, and will be ably assisted by our new vice-captain, Pete Cresswell. Paul Bowman has become our new club treasurer and Garreth Duncan membership and communications secretary. Maxie becomes our honorary life president and will continue as our fixtures secretary for this year.

(The Gents replies: Hear hear. Maxie has been a good if strict friend to us over the past 15 years. We first met St. Anne’s on a rainy April day in 2002, match abandoned, and have played them ever since. Maxie seldom scored many runs, was usually the victim of a suicidal run out, and was a stickler for the Laws. He famously denounced the Gents’ boundary markers (twigs, to be fair) as leading to ambiguity in the recognition of fours and impugned our umpires’ inconsistency in signalling aerial No balls. Their new committee looks formidable and we look forward to meeting Allstars again in June.)

Welcome

The club welcomes Ranjith Chatharaju and Satyapal Pingili. They have appeared quite regularly in the last two seasons and have chosen to become members. They both play for United Titans in the Saturday TAL league and bring the number of joint Gent/UT passport holders since 2014 to eight. Ranjith and Satyapal work in IT, along with nearly all Vijay’s mates, pharmacist Karthik Jampala being the exception. We also welcome to the committee new treasurer Vamsee Krishna. Vamsee has already impressed by making progress in getting new signatories added to the club’s bank account. This fiendishly difficult process, which involves paperwork, signatures and a telephone call, has defied the best efforts of the past three treasurers over many years.

Debuts of some eminent Gents

HR manager Hemin Patel asked us six times last season when he made his debut, so we now share memories of when he and some other legends first played. We start with 1994 to 2000. Coming next time 2001 to 2009 – heroes such as Gilkesie, Greg Newcombe, HP, Ravi, Naveed and Sachin – when we can exhume the relevant scorebooks from the coat cupboard.

Dhruv Patel (197 games) and Jim Wright (149 games) 5/6/1994 Beverley Park v. Wandham

Wandham 184 (Wilson 107, Penny 41, Daly 20, D Patel 10-0-45-0, Wright 9.2-1-24-2, Thornicroft 10-1-41-3, Boddington 11-0-49-1, Alderman 1-0-7-0, Hubbucks 4-0-18-2)

Gents 185-5 (Hughes 7, Boddington 12, Hubbucks 96, Wright 28, Burville 3, Thornicroft 14*, D Patel 11*, Burman, Alderman, Black and Ashton DNB, Tupling 3-61). **Won by 5 wickets**

Until the arrival of Vijay Basker, nobody had showed greater energy in encouraging new talent than Dhruv Patel and for historical importance few games have been more celebrated in the club's development than this. Dhruv and Jim Wright were colleagues of Andrew Burman, who mentioned to Dhruv that his side were two short for the next game. Dhruv put his hand up, went and nabbed Jim and the deal was done. The pair debuted to some effect, Wright getting a caught Hughes at the wicket in his first over before adding 129 with Nick Hubbucks in a match-winning stand. Centurion Wilson and Penny had earlier added 111 for Wandham. Both sides batted for 45.2 overs in a timed game, the winning run not being struck until 8 o'clock. Captain Ashton was injured but gamely directed proceedings from slip. The days after were notable for chuntering by absent stalwarts about guests not only being allowed to play, but also being given plenty of involvement. Friction was in the air which would be earthed with a spate of resignations two years later (see the debuts of Buck and Naish).

Stuart Snelling (241 games) 7/5/1995 Battersea Park v. Rotherham SC

Rotherham SC 242-5 (Walker 150*, Mason 44, Snelling 7-0-46-0, Thornicroft 7-0-32-1, D Patel 5-0-41-1, Todd 6-0-49-0, Bignell 5-0-40-1, Hubbucks 5-0-19-2)

Gents 141 (Bignell 3, Thornicroft 0, Hubbucks 12, D Patel 17, Maughan 56, Todd 27, Burville 5, Snelling 4, Burman 1*, Clark 3-28). **Lost by 101 runs**

The powerful Urban Associates had been despatched a week before (Ashton 11.4-1-25-6) while a week earlier Lager Louts leg-spinner Cameron Fleming took perhaps the best two wickets of his career, inducing an Ashton hit wicket before having Jim Wright stumped Milton Jolin next ball. Fleming was an interesting character, a devout Chelsea and Rangers supporter with traditional views on the Irish question. Stuart Snelling, the club's best paceman, was introduced by friend Daniel Todd, the pair rocking up without talisman Mark Ashton on a hot May Battersea Sunday. Ken Toft has described Snelling as being famously unhappy about playing on artificial wickets and it was on such he was forced to play here, though contemporary historians record no dissent. Walker and Mason batted outstandingly and Snarler went wicketless. Only Ian Maughan's 56 spared red faces. The wickets – 31 of them in the season - would flow from his second game, played on his favoured surface of God's green grass.

Sanjay Patel (323 games) 20/8/1995 Alexandra RG v. London Saints

London Saints 145-9 (T Mayhew 29, A Mayhew 27*, Webster 26, Snelling 7-3-15-2, Ashton 7-1-27-1, S Patel 7-1-23-1, Todd 7-0-17-1, Bignell 4-0-27-1, K Patel 3-0-22-3)

Gents 148-8 (Bignell 23, Richmond 7, K Patel 0, S Patel 41, Ashton 39*, Maughan 6, Burville 0, Todd 13, Snelling 4, Burman 0*, Thomas 3-25). **Won by 1 wicket**

Sanjay Patel made his debut 15 weeks after Snelling, although he would not become a regular until 1997. Gents and London Saints had some splendid encounters during this era but August availability was poor. Dhruv Patel could not play but brokered the services of brother Ketan and debutant cousin Sanjay to take Gents up to ten. On a difficult wicket the Mayhews scored steadily but the visitors were pegged back by three identical dismissals, caught Sanjay at deep mid-wicket off Ketan's leg-breaks. The Gents' innings saw three of the four specialist batsmen deliver, Steve Bignell scoring a resolute 23 in support of dashing knocks by Sanjay and his captain. The Gents crawled over the line with one wicket intact. Sanjay's six was recorded in detail by the match reporter, who was in a state of physical arousal when describing how the ball damaged the dilapidated pavilion twenty yards behind the mid-wicket boundary. In a patrician gesture, Lord Ashton, unable to attend the after-match festivities, gave ten pounds to a teammate to treat the gallant losers. Forelocks were tugged and local tenements threw a street party to celebrate.

Tony Buck (218 games) and Colin Naish (48 games) 17/8/1996 Beverley Park v. London Saints
Gents 201 (Hill 46, Harper-Dallas 11, D Patel 35, Murphy 11, Ashton 43, Burville 18, Buck 7, Todd 5, Naish 16*, Snelling 0, Burman 0, Webster 3-30)
London Saints 183-8 (T Mayhew 101, Snelling 7-0-22-2, Hill 7-2-20-1, Ashton 7-0-37-2, D Patel 4-0-28-1, Todd 7-0-36-1, Murphy 3-0-24-0). **Won by 18 runs**

The 1996 season was atomised as old players left, several flouncing due to lack of involvement and marital clampdowns. New ones had to be recruited. This game saw the FC Chad pair Buck and Naish respond to gentle wooing by the Gents' secretary. They would continue to play for Chad, but as the south-east Londoners played only a handful of matches, they would be free to play for the Gents. Burman captained and the unusual opening pair recruited from West XI put up 45 in the first four overs.

Steady scoring down the order, including 7 for Buck and 16 not out from Naish saw the only two-hundred score of 1996. A brilliant Trevor Mayhew century took Saints close but the Gents fielded tightly in the final overs, with the debutants the stars of the show. Buck and Naish would become an integral part of Gents line-ups and engaged well, not least because they had some of the club's more boisterous personalities worked out from the word go. Naish moved to Gravesend in 1999.

Hemin Patel (189 games) 16/8/1998 Victoria RG v. FC Chad

Gents 166-7 (Burman 7, Beaumont 2, D Patel 22, S Patel 54, Murphy 21, Chhaya 2, K Patel 0, Naik 19*, H Patel 9*)
FC Chad 149 (Dimond 61, Heap 28, Naik 4-2-10-0, K Patel 2-0-17-0, Murphy 3-0-15-2, S Patel 4-0-41-1, D Patel 4-5-0-32-1, Chhaya 2-0-11-1, H Patel 1-0-10-1). **Won by 17 runs**

This was a warm, sunny Sunday and cricket was planned, but the omens were poor. London Saints had pulled out and replacements FC Chad, Tony Buck's team, were also light. In the days leading up to the match, only five Gents and five Chad had confirmed. Enterprise, another friendly oppo of that period, pulled three (who would become Gents members in 1990) and the tireless Dhruv Patel promised to sort spares. What joy there was when the doors of his white van slid open disgorging brother Ketan and four teenagers from his youth club, comprising future doctor Vivek Chhaya, Pritesh Naik, Hemin and Rikin Patel. Sanjay Patel scored 54 and Pritesh Naik and Hemin added an unbeaten 36 for the final Gents wicket off only 40 balls.

Nor was Hemin's day finished, for he had Rikin, loaned to Chad, caught by Naik. The match report refers to much abuse by Wimbledon fan Keith Dimond administered to Andrew Burman after his beloved Wimbledon had demolished Tottenham Hotspur 3-1 in the previous day's opening Premiership fixture. This was a steady debut by young Patel, 9 not out and 2-0-15-1 on a fun afternoon but you could see the potential in the teenager, although who would have predicted that he would become a £95m galáctico? In contrast to today's dapper figure, the fresh-faced paperboy was recorded as attending the match in a scruffy T-shirt and shellsuit trousers with a stain of doubtful provenance.

Ken Toft (137 games) 31/7/1999 Town Park v. Sunderland SC

Gents 188-9 (McGirr 9, Toft 1, Thornicroft 27, Wright 10, Ashton 46, Dimond 9, S Patel 41, Snelling 16*, Sangaralingam 2, Richmond 4*, Burman 0, Coad 3-43)
Sunderland SC 184-9 (Curry 61, Rough 37, Snelling 8-1-35-3, S Patel 8-2-21-2, Wright 8-1-27-2, Sangaralingam 4-1-26-0, Thornicroft 3-0-20-0, Dimond 4-0-21-0, McGirr 5-0-17-0). **Won by 4 runs**

This game, the first of an ambitious double-header, linked the old and new guard and was a rare example of a patchwork team melding well. The thermometer nudged 30C and Gents' captain Mark Ashton was a busy man as he introduced himself to three debutants: Ken Toft from London Owls (the only time the two met), Vinayagan Sangaralingam from West XI and John McGirr from the oversubscribed Mackems. David Thornicroft came out of retirement for his final game. Toft was bowled by the ferocious Ben Bradshaw for 1, no disgrace there and plenty suffered the same. Heavy hitting from Ashton and Sanjay Patel put up a fair total on a traditionally high-scoring ground. Sunderland nearly did it, failing to score 10 runs off the final over, bowled by the nerveless Keith Dimond, who had earlier given captain Ashton out lbw and lived to tell the tale. Toft would play regularly from 2003 after Owls reduced their fixtures and still trains down from Milton Keynes of a Sunday to support.

The Gents lost by 3 runs to Enterprise 24 hours later. Burman, Richmond, Snelling and Wright played both games for the Gents. Dimond played both but for different teams so was on the winning side twice. Apart from tours, no double-headers have been attempted since 2007. With many of the current squad playing T20 on a Saturday, it is difficult to make a case for their resurrection.

Mark Sciberras (173 games) 7/5/2000 Paulin Ground v. 12 Angry Men

12 Angry Men 121 (Harper 41, Hadfield 32, Bullock 21, Snelling 12-4-19-1, S Patel 12-5-17-2, D Patel 12.1-0-41-3, Wright 10-2-37-3, Dimond 1-1-0-0)

Gents 122-8 (Buck 8, S Patel 9, Wright 0, Beepath 0, D Patel 20, Evans 20, Sciberras 10, Dimond 0, Snelling 26*, Beaumont 11*, Richmond DNB). **Won by 2 wickets**

The 2000 season began badly with Mark Ashton’s orthopaedic consultant ruling him out for the season after a knee operation. It would be cameos only after that. Stuart Snelling took over and Mark Sciberras (a colleague of Dhruv Patel), his friend Damian Evans and Snelling’s colleague Damian Beepath debuted at Winchmore Hill’s splendid ground. The new-look Gents bowled 47.1 overs as Twelve made 121, Horace Hibbert bowled by a Dhruv Patel off-break for a silver duck.

Sciberras was not called on to bowl but scored 10. Twelve had Gents at 81 for 8 and were proceeding towards a simple win, Hibbert having bowled Wright for a duck. Chris Beaumont, who had a niche income starring in adult movies (don’t worry, he’s not Beau Beaumont), then joined Snelling. In an unlikely turnaround, the captain and the rampant sex God knocked off the runs. Sciberras was impressed, immediately became a regular and 19 weeks later figured in a record stand.

Horace Hibbert (74 games) 17/9/2000 Shepherd’s Bush v. Brondesbury Casuals

Gents 213 (Minbas 11, Hadfield 31, Wright 7, D Patel 7, S Patel 0, Evans 4, Fitch 12, Snelling 11, Hibbert 81, Sciberras 22, Burman 3*, Levesley 3-33, Rolfe 3-36)

Brondesbury Casuals 146 (Millar 32, Hilton 22, Snelling 7-1-24-0, S Patel 8-0-36-1, Fitch 8-2-24-3, D Patel 8-1-28-3, Hibbert 5-1-17-2, Hadfield 2-1-1-1). **Won by 67 runs**

| BATS MEN | | RUNS SCORED | | HOW OUT | | BOWLER | | TOTAL |
|---|-----------|-------------|----|---------|----------|--------|----|-------|
| 1 | Minbas | 11 | | LBW | ROLFE | | | 11 |
| 2 | HADFIELD | 31 | | BOWLED | MILLAR | | | 31 |
| 3 | WRIGHT | 7 | | CT | LEVESLEY | | | 7 |
| 4 | D. PATEL | 7 | | LBW | ROLFE | | | 7 |
| 5 | S. PATEL | 0 | | LBW | ROLFE | | | 0 |
| 6 | EVANS | 4 | | CT | HILTON | | | 4 |
| 7 | FITCH | 12 | | CT | LEVESLEY | | | 12 |
| 8 | SNELLING | 11 | | CT | BURMAN | | | 11 |
| 9 | HIBBERT | 81 | | BOWLED | MINBAS | | | 81 |
| 10 | SCIBERRAS | 22 | | BOWLED | MINBAS | | | 22 |
| 11 | A. BURMAN | 3 | | NOT OUT | | | | 3 |
| TOTAL | | 122 | 8 | | | | | 122 |
| TOTAL AT THE FALL OF EACH WICKET AND NO OF OUTING BATTERS | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 12 | 33 | 40 | 47 | 51 | 55 | 66 | 77 | 81 |
| 12 | 33 | 40 | 47 | 51 | 55 | 66 | 77 | 81 |

Bernie Spratt’s Casuals won seven out of ten against the Gents, who won the first two but rarely competed after that, with this glorious exception. Hibbert and young Sciberras added a record 108 for the ninth wicket to transform the match. Gents were two short when 12 Angry Men Neil Hadfield and teammate Hibbert volunteered. Hadfield, a tough cricketer, anchored the innings but defeat looked certain when Hibbert strode out at 90 for eight. The boundaries flowed, elegant cover drives mixed with booming straight drives, including three huge sixes. His 81 came off only 50 balls, as confirmed by rare ball by ball scoring (which may have scandalously deprived his partner of a run). Sciberras’s support was perfect. A rare Sanjay Patel golden duck (lbw on the back foot) was also of interest to historians.

A Gents seam attack comprising Snelling, Sanjay Patel, Hibbert and complex Yorkshireman Eddie Fitch tore into the Casuals like men possessed. The spinners cleaned up to ensure a successful climax to the best season to date – 15 wins in 21 games, all achieved without Mark Ashton. Hibbert became a regular once 12 Angry Men, at their peak the best side on the circuit, folded in 2007. He would go on to captain in 2014 and 2015.