

THE ARCHIVE

CLASSIC GENTS MATCHES

The 1993 season was the Gents' best to date with 14 wins, only six defeats, and the Bob Ashton Memorial Cup won for the first time at the fourth attempt. Owls pitched up in Surbiton eager to avenge a nine-wicket defeat in the July fixture but one senior player did not have them as favourites. "I didn't think they were very good," murmured big Mike Hughes in his lovely Glasgow brogue. "Let's wrap it up and have a beer," said the same player at tea before adopting a modified and quite swearsy position at 7pm.

Gentlemen of West London v. London Owls

Sunday 5 September 1993, Victoria RG. Gents won toss. Sunny, 18C

Lost by 10 wickets

Gentlemen of West London			London Owls			
Burman	c Haynes	b Seymour	21	Maddocks	not out	87
Richmond	lbw	b Heathcote	22	Bulmer	not out	140
Dolan		b Heathcote	0	Clayton, Heathcote, Seymour, Long, Wilkinson, *†Haynes, Hockey,		
Monk		b Heathcote	1	Colley and Green dnb		
Boddington	st Haynes	b Bulmer	29			
Hubbuck	lbw	b Long	45			
Hughes		b Wilkinson	14			
Burville	run out		39			
*Ashton	c Bulmer	b Heathcote	40			
Todd	not out		0			
†Maughan	not out		0			
Black	dnb					
Extras	b7 lb1 w16		24	Extras	b8 lb3 nb1	12
Total	9 wickets dec.	35 overs	235	Total	0 wickets	37.3 overs
FoW: 36, 36, 43, 48, 123, 146, 169, 228, 235				FoW: -		
Bowling: Clayton 8-1-42-0, Heathcote 12-2-53-4, Seymour 2-0-18-1, Long 4-0-30-1, Bulmer 4-0-47-1, Wilkinson 5-0-37-1				Bowling: Black 4-0-27-0, Todd 7-0-63-0, Dolan 7.3-0-44-0, Boddington 8-0-51-0, Ashton 11-0-43-0		

Owls opens in orgy of destruction

In an astonishing match, played in mellow autumn sunshine on a perfect pitch and with a parched outfield baked to the consistency of concrete, London Owls destroyed the Gents to inflict the biggest defeat in the club's history. Congratulations to Craig Maddocks and Richard Bulmer, whose stand of 239 is the highest in a Gents game. The hosts had batted fluently against some friendly bowling before the declaration, at which point the odds on an away win must have approached the 500/1 on offer at Headingley '81. But Owls flayed the bowling all over the Rec and left the Gents aghast.

At Wandsworth Common in July the Gents had blasted a patchwork Owls team by 9 wickets and Ashton was so confident of victory that with the exception of Black (always No.11) he reversed the batting order. A virgin pitch, hard and true, was provided and Gents took strike at 2.45pm. Richmond struck three fours and a six in the third and fourth overs before being controversially adjudged lbw by umpire Todd. At 1am he would set a new continuous lbw whinge record of ten hours. Dolan was bowled second ball heaving across the line. Monk fell in the 12th over before Burman gloved behind. The visitors had hopes of outing Gents for around a hundred but the next 22 overs were meat and drink to the talented five to nine batsmen, though Long maintained a good line and Wilkinson turned a few. Nicks Boddington and Hubbuck were fluent, Hubbuck striking ten boundaries in 45 minutes to bring up his 500 for the season, a club first. Nobody went on to a 50, but Marks Ashton and Burville cruised to a stand of 59 in 20 minutes. Burman warned about overconfidence. The declaration came at 5pm, the ask 236 in an hour plus 20 overs after 6.15pm.

The Gents were in the hunt for precisely eight balls. Four came off the first over. Todd bowled a dot ball then saw his next two cover-driven for fours and his fourth edged for a third successive boundary. Thereafter things really declined. The bowling was tepid and the fielding, Burville and Thornicroft aside, reminiscent of a convention of village idiots, though the batting was sublime. The red-capped, bespectacled Bulmer and his taller right-handed partner ran ones and twos at will, and stroked fours in 20 of the 37.5 overs at their disposal with a minimum of fuss. Black bowled too short, Todd too wide and Boddington too fast for a spinner. Dolan and Ashton were more challenging but seldom induced a false shot. There were a couple of half-hearted shouts for lbw, a correctly-declined run out and a half-chance to mid-wicket running in but that was it.

The first three ten-over segments yielded 67, 63 and 68 runs, remarkable consistency. Ashton decamped for a sulk at deep mid-wicket after eight overs (62-0) but partially restored his credit by rejoining the fray after 28 (116-0). From 198-0 off 30 Owls cruised towards their target, and it was merciful euthanasia when the end came, Bulmer, long past his ton, lofting Dolan for two fours into the tennis courts. He had struck 21 fours, Maddocks eight. They had run 77 singles.

After the game and in an atmosphere of some conviviality Ashton presented Bulmer with the match ball.

Postscript

The Gents have never won a game by ten wickets, and only Holt and Bennetts of Brondesbury Casuals in 2002 chasing just 107 matched what Bulmer and Maddocks did here. Wins by nine wickets have been more plentiful, Gents winning six and opponents three by such a margin. Both whitewashes must have had an effect though, for the Gents won their next games, beating Urban Associates in 1993, and, famously by 1 run, West XI in 2002.

The stand of 239 by Bulmer and Maddocks remains the highest in a Gents game, though two pairs have since cracked 200: Heyman and Jones for Village XI in 2006 (215), and Small and Kumar against St Anne's Allstars in 2015 (212).

John Black and Craig Maddocks have since died. They were part of an astonishing match.

Victoria RG



Victoria Recreation Ground in Surbiton was the Gents' home ground 1990-2005 and after falling into disuse has now been restored to something of its former glory with cricket offered once more.

The last time Gents played there was 2009 against Wombles. There was only the west pitch by then, but before June 1995 an east pitch was also available, in front of the tennis courts, and it was there that the Gents played most of their games with Virgin (later Brondesbury) Casuals using the west pitch.

Up to 1995 there was a beautiful old wooden pavilion. Gents played Casuals on 2 July that year and after the game Casuals caught a few scrotes in their dressing room going through their players' pockets. They knocked the crap out of the brats who returned after the clubs had gone to the pub, and torched the building.

The Gent of the time applauded the Casuals and administered blame in equal measure to the arsonists, their mutant parents and their bone-idle, overpaid teachers. Wheresoever the fault lay, a pile of ashes testified to the destruction of a beautiful example of art deco. The pavilion was rebuilt in 1996, if not to the same lavish dimensions but only one square was maintained by the groundsmen. By the end of the Wombles game, the Gents had played 133 games at the Victoria Rec, more than any other. We had some good times there.