



2nd XI Captain's Report 2023

2023 saw the 2nd XI step out of the expanded regional set-up to embrace the challenge of Division 9B. Facing fellow Division 10 winners Markyate (eventual winners) and West Herts IV (runners-up), the team ended up securing the top 7 finish required to avoid relegation in the final match away to Reed III – finishing 6th with 6 wins and 8 losses added to 4 cancelled/abandoned matches.

It was always likely to be a tricky season, and several factors contributed to this across both league sides:

- A few key playing members either left the club (for various reasons) or have taken a break from playing
- GCSE and A-Level exams affected most of the U18's in May/Jun
- Work commitments (including Saturday morning school matches) further limited availability (particularly for the 1st XI)
- Family commitments, including summer holidays, hit particularly hard

From a 2nd XI perspective, the team lost the runs of David Brandon and wickets of Freddie Pearson as both stepped up to the 1s, with David Malleon also "promoted" for around half the season. Weekly selection quickly became a regular week-long hunt to finalise a side, & it was a genuinely proud achievement to (somehow) field a full XI in every fixture. By my count 39 different players were named in the 2nd XI teamsheet, and some of those were last-ditch desperation appearances (thanks to those who know who they are).

From the difficulties arose the opportunity for positivity – and the emergence of Oliver Scott and Munt was an unsurprising but welcome highlight for the season. Both bowled with increasing maturity and confidence, gaining experience in new-ball, first change and death bowling spells. Oliver S also shone with the bat (when I wasn't trying to run him out...), and both received multiple platitudes from opposition captains and players which I was proud to pass on.

Weaker overall availability meant those who wanted to play on a Saturday were almost guaranteed a spot, with only Zane Green (three times) unfortunate to miss out on a game more than once all season. We also had the much-appreciated returns of Stuart Halley, Andy Corgan and Joe Murphy to league cricket (where have you been, lads?!), and Josh Corgan's senior debut (almost a wicket, but a welcome first run). It would be great all-round if cameo appearances led to increased encouragement to play for the club this year.

A selection of highlights, and a few that got away:

- Narrow defeats at home to West Herts IV and away to Markyate, with the catching (or lack of) particularly in the former proving to be very costly
- A largely forgettable day at London Colney saw two batting points and plenty of pride salvaged with Oliver Scott's 16 and Abbie and Oliver Munt's last-wicket partnership of 22





- Leverstock Green III at home was a low-scoring rain-reduced thriller, with an excellent 76 from Stuart Halley in our 145/6 (33 overs) and the bowling of Oliver Scott & Munt, Dan Gandy, David Malleson, Abbie and Josh Jones (plus 3 wk catches from Adam Jessop) getting us a 12 run win with 11 balls to spare
- The darkest day in our club's recent history, with our delayed second-innings run-chase vs Langleybury III finally curtailed due to the tree partially coming down (with thankfully no spectators or players impacted)
- Kieran Jones continuing his consistently high-level run-scoring, with 121 vs Stevenage IV and a match-defining 98 at Reed III proving particularly valuable
- A first away win of the season in our final match at Reed III, with arguably our best fielding performance taking us to a tight 6 run win
- Memorable catches including leg-side takes from Will Munt and Andy Pearson (wk), Abbie Jones (leaping at cover), James Scott (floating like a butterfly at London Colney), Andy MacMurdie (armpit?!) and Richard Lee ("you're nicked!")

It's also worth highlighting the positive feedback from virtually every side we faced during the season, with a combination of our hospitality, attitude, youthful line-ups, not-so-youthful scorer and performances drawing compliments. Those who have represented the side this year have done the club proud – a trait which not every club shares, and one we shouldn't take for granted.

As well as being grateful to all who have taken the field in 2023, a handful of people should be singled out. Chris Gillman and Steve Gandy took on the unenviable task of 1st team captaincy and played their part in ensuring the 2nd XI had sufficient strength to survive. Bob White, and Jess Lessiter, made many games significantly less stressful with their scoring. Garry Orton added square maintenance and pitch prep to his regular duty of solidifying the middle-order. Richard Sanders, plus Chris and Steve (& anyone else) helped prevent the outfield resembling London Colney's farm field. The mysterious art of maximising availability required diplomacy, negotiation and the assistance of several non-playing wives/partners/"influencers" – thanks and well done to you all. Lastly, thanks to my under-utilised but always supportive vice-captain, James Scott (who won't have "moving house" as a viable excuse for the coming year!).

The 2's face an even stiffer task in 2024 with the latest league restructuring seeing us in a regionalised Division 9 East. There will be four recent Division 10 winners and three former 8B/9A sides for company, along with Stevenage IV and London Colney II. This is the ideal competition for the side at present – opposition teams at or just above our level, and with an overall reduction on travel time as well. Whatever the availability for 2024 turns out to be, I'm confident the 2nd XI will continue to compete in every game (ideally with a full side) and provide a pathway for younger players to gain experience, confidence and test their potential in league cricket.

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