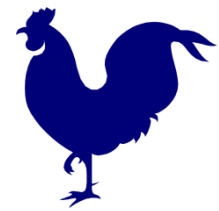


Review of the 2012 Season



1st XI

A good season for the club with the 1st XI exceeding expectations to finish an excellent third on their return to the top flight and whilst the 2's and 3s under-performed, Premier league status was maintained for both. The 4th XI had another excellent season and after just falling shy of back to back promotions, were retrospectively placed 2nd after Harlow Town fell foul of league rules. Expectations weighed heavily on new 1st XI skipper Jack Kliber, as he took the reins on the return to the Premier League after a 7 year hiatus. After losing three of the first four games, it looked like survival was the main target however the side went unbeaten for the rest of the season to be rewarded with a lofty place in the table.

An excellent opening win in a rain reduced affair at home to Colchester kicked the campaign off. Chasing 180 off 38 overs, a fifty from Arshad Ali plus contributions from the middle order left us needing 13 off the last over. However a couple of sixes from Matt Salisbury emphatically settled things, the start of an excellent season with the bat for him.

Three pretty convincing losses were a reality check, with Salisbury's 85 against Wanstead the only highlight, before a vital win on a difficult pitch at Ilford stopped the rot in the last of the first round of limited overs games. Chasing only 117 after excellent spells from Mike Hindley and Ryan Lugg, we were indebted to a gritty partnership between debutant Suhaib Sarwar and Salisbury to see us home.

The timed games saw us start by having much the better of a draw with Ardleigh Green, but despite Sarwar's 4-47 we were unable to winkle out the lower order. Sarwar again showed he was more than capable of filling the vacant left arm spinners' role (actually turning the ball unlike the previous incumbent), taking 5-52 to help dismiss South Woodford for 168. A middle order wobble threatened to derail the chase before some weighty blows from the captain gave us a 4 wicket win. We were forced to cling on for a draw at home to Buckhurst Hill, before the weather ruined the much anticipated renewal of derby hostilities at Brentwood. The home side were reeling at 62-6 when the rain came and it didn't stop before the following Saturday, wiping out the visit to the eventual champions. Another low scoring affair with Ilford was also weather affected, but we sneaked home by 4 wickets with Aussie import Daniel Jacob putting a frustrating start behind him to steer us home with an unbeaten 34.

Two games we could have feasibly won were drawn against Colchester and Woodford Wells. Chasing 217 at Colchester we ended two runs short with one wicket remaining, the captains well-built 53 not being quite enough at the end, before being unable to take Wells' last wicket the following week.

Chasing 228 against Chelmsford, Arshad crashed his way to 76 including 9 sixes, before a collapse was halted by a match winning partnership between Salisbury (61*) and Lugg (32*). Three wins and another washout in the derby, made up the closing limited overs fixtures, with Salisbury recording the only league ton of the season with a superb 110 against Buckhurst Hill.

All in all it was a really pleasing performance, with plenty of players contributing to the cause. Ali returned his usual good numbers, with over 400 runs and 35 wickets, whilst Salisbury led the run charts with 477 and probably deserved more than 13 wickets. Sarwar had a solid first season with 300 runs and 26 wickets whilst Daniel Jacob despite ending with over 400 runs will be looking to convert starts to the bigger scores he is clearly capable of when he returns in 2013. Jack Kliber led the side excellently on the field and at the tea table, his enthusiasm for both roles never waning, nor did his work with gloves and mouth behind the stumps suffer.

In the cup competitions we bowed out at the quarter final stage of both the league cup and Twenty20 tournaments to Hornchurch and Uppingham respectively and in the Conference Cup we lost a third round thriller to Brentwood. Looking down and out chasing 292, Tom Austin (69 off 47 balls) launched a heavy assault to leave us needing only 6 off the last over, but two untimely wickets left us 3 short.

2nd XI

The 2nd XI season experienced a season of some highs but more lows. An excellent first day win at home to perennial title chasers Chelmsford gave false hope for what lay ahead. On that day the top order scored runs with James Burgess and new recruit Thomas Fulk looking very impressive. A fine bowling and fielding display capped a great performance, but all too often the key players in this win were either not available or under performed for the rest of the season. Fulk went to the ones after 7 games scoring 379 runs at an average of 76. His season best of 154 not out at Fives was key to another great win against strong opposition. However this knock drew too much attention to his potential and Jack Kliber welcomed a team mate into the first team dressing room who could boast as much chest and back hair as him.

Following Burgess' fine century against Chelmsford he sent his identical twin to the next 12 games and this Burgess looked like he was meeting a cricket ball for the first time. Fortunately the talented twin returned for the end of season visit of Upminster when he scored another ton to boost the Burgess family season average to 28 (The poorer twin averaging 4).

Last season's skipper Martin Allen also averaged 28 with the bat but also made several key contributions with the ball, 5-33 being the highlight against Hornchurch. Chris Chapman was the pick of the bowlers and he blossomed as the season progressed. He took 18 wickets at an average of 21.9, including 6-22 against Upminster in a win that cemented our survival in the Premier League with a game to spare. Chappo's new ball partner, Mike Naylor, took 14 wickets and was unlucky to not get more.

Other key contributions came from Jon Hammond, BFT Austin, Charlie Sutherland and James Borman. Obviously the weather had a key part in a frustrating season, but poor availability was also a factor. Injury, illness (some self-induced I am sure!), extra-curricular activities such as Music Festivals (would not have happened in my day), excessive amounts of summer holidays (would not have happened in my day!) and the occasional case of just not manning up were all factors in contributing to the 42 players that were used during the season. Fulk will take over the Captaincy from the ever ageing and bitter Garry Sapsford and if he can perform as well as he did for the 2s as last season he can ensure the team are looking to the top of the league rather than over their shoulder in 2013.

3rd XI

The 3rd XI's quest for Premier glory fell well short of previous near misses after a disappointing campaign. Six games lost to the weather didn't help, but injuries, retirements, availability issues and some generally under par performances were also factors. Skipper Matt Barrett missed all but the first 5 games through injury and the team was further weakened as Larry Tredget could only be persuaded to delay retirement till mid-June and bowling lynchpin Joe Hedden missed several games to count his money and mingle with royalty.

After a first week washout, fifties from Matt Simmons and Will Ashby set local rivals Hutton 250 to win, but despite Hedden's 6-33 the last wicket proved elusive, whilst a win against Woodford Wells was sandwiched between two heavy losses to Hainault and Chelmsford. Four out of the next six games were lost to rain and left the side well off the pacesetters and needing to keep one eye on the bottom of the table.

A weakened side lost heavily in the return at Woodford Wells and after again being thwarted attempting to remove the Hutton lower order, a win started to become a must. This duly arrived against Upminster, where a century opening stand between Simmons (54) and veteran Andy Hayes (80) saw us towards our 187 target. Stand in captain Ollie Ives took 5-44 to almost force a win at home to Gidea Park to guarantee safety, but other results went in our favour and despite a heavy loss in the final game we finished eighth.

Steven Roach again led the scoring with four half centuries in his 397 run return, but only Matt Simmons with three fifties offered any real support. Only Joe Hedden (24) took over 15 wickets, but on the plus side several youngsters were introduced during the season who will hopefully grow into good players.

4th XI

The 4th XI surprised themselves more than anyone by securing back to back promotions. 52 players contributed to the success of the 4th XI. This included half a dozen under 13s who received numerous compliments from opponents finding more than their match.

The headline performance by an U13 was a hat-trick by Matt Beazeley amongst his 27 wickets at just over 9 a-piece. Young and old had good seasons with the bat. Chris Beazeley and David Castell averaged over 50. Colts, George Ballington and Joe Massie both scored maiden senior tons.