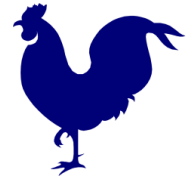


Review of the 2014 Season



2014 proved to be a massive disappointment after five years of progress as the 1st XI crashed out of the Premier League after successive third placed finishes. Likewise the 2nd XI went backwards and scabbled about the relegation zone before saving themselves on the penultimate weekend. The 3rd XI had a reasonably solid campaign, finishing 4th and a more than competitive season by the 4th XI rounded things off.

1st XI

The 1st XI took on a rather different look to the team that had a chance to win the whole shebang on the last day of 2013. Arshad Ali returned to newly promoted Upminster, Rana Arlsan moved to Woodford Green, Daniel Jacob wasn't returning for a third year from Sydney and we rarely saw Matt Salisbury who deservedly hit the big time with the county.

The story of the 1st XI's season was really that it never got started. Despite an early morale boosting League Cup win at eventual Premier League winners Chingford, the first half of the campaign was a bit of a write off with no wins recorded. Too often, decent starts with the bat were squandered by some impressive collapses, ruining some solid bowling performances and so at halfway we were looking at a really challenging late summer to survive the drop.

Things started to look up with a convincing win at Loughton, Richard Abson-Bennett the star with 5-15 from an assortment of leg breaks. A roll threatened to develop with an extraordinary win at defending champions Wanstead. Our total of 221 was built around an excellent 112 from Aussie import Simon Keen and then in a mental hour or so, the home side were bundled out for 65. Hussnain Kazmi, who really matured in the new ball role this season started the bedlam with the wickets of the openers and it was left to the ever reliable Keen (3-20) and the usually unreliable Tom Austin (4-14) to run through the order.

It proved a bit of a false dawn though, as three inept batting displays in the next four weeks probably sealed our fate. Two wins in the return to the 50:50 format were a little too late and a high scoring loss to Brentwood wasn't a pleasant way to end the season.

Keen was comfortably the leading run scorer, making the game look easy on occasions, recording 517 league runs with two centuries. Tom Phillipe often got starts and there was some useful knocks from Jamie Walton, James Burgess and Ollie Ekers, but overall the batting was too inconsistent.

Kazmi led the wicket takers with 26 and Keen provided reliable support with the new ball, whilst Abson-Bennet, Suhaib Sarwar and Harry Levy all had their moments with their tweekers.

Jack Kliber led the side tirelessly, his enthusiasm never waning although the stresses of the side's performances probably affected his batting and keeping returns.

Should also be mention of de facto vice captain Tom Austin's brutal cameo in the T20 1/4 final loss to South Woodford. Facing a daunting target of 229, he went berserk from the off and clocked up 106 in only 41 balls although ultimately we just fell short. A memorable moment for Tom, but his season will probably be most remembered for his decision to put petrol in a diesel minibus en route to the Bertie Joel Cup final leaving a conked out motor on the A3 near Sutton and the team hitching lifts to the ground off the police and other passing motorists. Not the ideal preparation and we lost that game as well.

2nd XI

The 2nd XI experienced a tricky season under northern leader Will Appleton. Wins were really hard to come by as a side that some weeks looked formidable on paper failed to produce, game after game following a similar vein of bad starts, good spells and disappointing finishes.

There was however some promising signs for the future. Haris Mahmood and Tom Ballington with the bat and Oliver Castell and Rishi Roy-Mukherjee with the ball looked more than capable on occasions and everyone was pleased to see James Salisbury return to the game after two years out with injury and score over 400 runs, including 97 at Buckhurst Hill in one of only three wins.

Relegation was a distinct possibility with two games to go and it looked like the game was up with Upminster 174-3 chasing 225 with an hour left. Miraculously the game didn't reach a similar conclusion to so many others as the visitors managed to throw away six wickets to some fat old bloke (also not seen in ill fitting whites for two years through injury) chucking up a load of left arm dross. It gave another veteran in Garry Sapsford, five victims behind the stumps and the win secured Premier League status for 2015. Will Appleton is clearly a glutton for punishment, as after an awful season with the bat, an admittedly forced, but also awful season with the gloves plus nightmares with injuries, drop outs and sandwich making he's carrying on next year.

3rd XI

The 3rd XI under Ollie Ives won half their games but were never really in a position to mount a serious challenge for honours. With batting mainstay Steve Roach running the bar rather than singles and lanky wicket taking trundler Joe Hedden struck down by injury it left the team looking elsewhere for big contributions.

George Pratt and Rob Hutcherson led the run scoring despite only playing around half the games and the skipper (never missing an opportunity to bring himself on) took 33 wickets (including 7-67 in the opening win at Woodford Wells) as did Riaz Rasool.

4th XI

As usual Dave Castell put everything into running the 4th XI, cajoling young and old into turning out at short notice and the team's wins were often the only highlight on some pretty depressing Saturdays for the club. Hopefully plenty of the young players blooded by Dave in senior cricket will move up through the ranks and whoever takes on the job next season will do well to commit so much time and effort to it.

Final word should go to Matt Salisbury who became the first player in the clubs history to gain a contract with Essex and he put in some excellent performances in both the Championship and T20 Blast. Matt thoroughly deserved his promotion and everyone hopes he pushes on next year, although the odd appearance in club colours wouldn't hurt!