

# 1<sup>st</sup> XI Season Review 2021

## PROMOTION!

After the tribulations of the 2020 season, it was good to get back to a proper league season, even though some restrictions were still in force. Ultimately, our target was promotion, emphasised by the recruitment of Lesiba Ngoepe as our overseas player.

He arrived in time for the second league game (the first one was cancelled at Loughton due to heavy rain) and must have wondered what he had let himself in for as Upminster smashed 315-7 in 45 overs at ours. Skipper Ollie Ekers was the only player to offer any resistance, scoring 71. Our first trip away was to Old Southendian, where we managed another poor batting display, scoring 131 all out in 38 overs. This was bettered by an even worse batting display by the hosts who crumbled under pressure, all out for 123 in the 37<sup>th</sup> over.

Another home defeat followed, this time by 31 runs at the hands of Horndon. A loss at Buckhurst Hill the following week by six wickets (despite 141 not out from Lesiba, our only centurion of the season) saw us fall to the bottom of the table.

The season started in earnest with a win against local rivals Hutton by 97 runs. Lesiba carried on from the previous week with 81, whilst Mehad Khan took his first five wicket haul of the season. The next match saw half centuries from the skipper and Max Bear put us in a strong position at Ilford, but resistance (and delaying tactics) saw them hang on for a draw despite six wickets for Mehad, conceding 17 runs from 12 overs and two late wickets from Ollie Castell in a match reduced to 27 overs a side.

A second successive 50 from Max plus four wickets each for Jack Plom and Mehad saw us win by 44 runs at Fives & Heronians. Mehad then took another six wickets and top scored with 46 as we won at Woodford Wells by three wickets. This run saw us leap up to fourth in the table at the halfway stage.

Another reduced match saw Loughton hang on, scoring 93-9 after 27 overs chasing our 131-7 and looking comfortable at one stage for an easy victory.

The only side to do the double over us were Upminster, who ended our unbeaten run with a convincing 96 run win. It was back to winning ways though in our next two games against the two sides who would eventually be relegated. Old Southendian managed to cobble together 83 runs to lose by 89 runs, whilst Horndon's score of 63 all out was precipitated by Mehad getting his best ever figures of 15.3-4-27-8. Our next game was abandoned without a ball being bowled at home to Buckhurst Hill.

We were minced at Hutton, losing by 142 runs having responded to their 203-9 by getting bowled out for 61. With three games to go and still in with a chance of promotion, the team were given a serious wake up call. A two run victory at home to Ilford in the gloom re-ignited the promotion charge. Lesiba scored 75 in a match reduced to 31 overs a side.

Our last home game saw Fives bowled out for 76 and, despite a controversial running out of the skipper, the game was done and dusted by 3pm, seeing us win by seven wickets.

The last game of the season was away to Woodford Wells, with the knowledge that a win would see us promoted. Even a defeat might still have got us up as four teams were battling for the top two spots. At 40-4 we were in real trouble; but 81 from the captain and 85 from Jack saw us reach 204-9 from our allotted 45 overs. Extras was the only other score to get into double figures. In response, Wells collapsed to 47-5 before a mini fightback ensued. With Ollie Castell taking the final wicket in the 38<sup>th</sup> over, the win was achieved to wild celebrations which were taken back to the clubhouse!

Promotion back to the Premier division, alongside Hutton who were champions by two points. How will we get on? Let's savour the moment.....

Hugh Henry