

# **1<sup>st</sup> XI Season Review 2022**

## **RELEGATION!!**

The highs of promotion in 2021 came crashing back to earth as, after one year in the Premier League, we were sent back from whence we came.

The season started brightly enough with an away League Cup victory against neighbours Hutton, winning by two wickets with four overs to spare. Standouts were Niraj Godhani (70) and Dave Hickey scoring 51 and the debut of our overseas player for the season, Chris Bridle. Round 2 saw us soundly beaten by Upminster. Despite a score of 88 not out from skipper Ollie Ekers in a total of 236-7, the hosts only lost two wickets and eased over the line with eight overs to spare.

Our first league game of the season was away to Chelmsford where Mehad Khan got the first five wicket haul of the year (10-0-40-5) as the home side 235-7 after a rain-delayed start. The spinners made short work of our batting, skittling us out for 91 having been 44-1. A sign of things to come?

Having restricted Colchester to 239-6 in our first home game of 2022, another batting collapse saw us lose our last seven wickets for 36 runs with the game firmly in our grasp. Defeat was by 34 runs. A first 50 of the season for opener Usman Ul-Haq (59) provided little consolation.

Ex-captain Roy Smith helped himself to 79 runs against us in our next match, away to Hadleigh & Thundersley as they posted 269 all out. Our response was meek, and we were bowled out for 119. This defeat put us at the bottom of the table where we were to remain for the rest of the season.

The next day, a much-weakened side travelled to Winchmore Hill, London to play in the Conference Cup and put up a battling display before losing by six weeks.

The last match of May saw us beaten by Hornchurch at home by four wickets. Usman scored his second 50 of the season (55), but there were never enough runs (143) to defend as the visitors won in the 31<sup>st</sup> over.

Another batting collapse whilst chasing saw us lose our next game at Hutton. Chasing 234, we lost our first six wickets for 62. It was then that the tailenders gave the score some respectability, with Jack Plom top scoring with 54.

Our biggest defeat came in our first timed game, at home to Wanstead. Their skipper turned the screw and declared once they had reached 400, and generously gave us nine of their overs to try and chase! Not a chance as we were bowled out for 139.

Chingford amassed 300-7 before declaring in the final over at theirs on a day where full thermals were required. At 74-7 and with 20 overs to go, it took a partnership of 108 from Tom Austin (55 n.o) and Chris (36 n.o) to get us our first positive result of the season.

Only a battling 55 n.o from Niraj got us close to beating Belhus. They had managed to get 260-8 in 63 overs which looked at the time looked like an obtainable score but losing wickets at crucial times didn't help. Niraj ran out of partners as he started to bludgeon their weaker bowlers.

At Brentwood, the hosts batted first and scored 330-5 in 52 overs before declaring. At 207-5 we were still in the game, but then lost our last five wickets for 17 runs. At the halfway stage of the season, it was a case of when, not if, we would be relegated.

Mehad took his second five wicket haul of the season (20-5-53-5) in game 10 at home to Chelmsford as the visitors were skittled out for 213. However, we capitulated again, this time from 147-4 to 195 all out to lose by 18 runs.

A determined 63 from Usman was the highlight of our innings at Castle Park as we struggled to 249-9 against Colchester. They responded by only losing two wickets, the second going down with the scores level!

There were two highlights in our next game, which was at home to Hadleigh. Two youngsters showed the more experienced players how a game could be won as first Sam Bear became the youngest player in the club's history to take a five-wicket haul in a senior 1st XI match (12-0-40-5). This was then followed by Thinod Balage being left stranded on 76 as we chased 197. We were bowled out for 158 with a possible 35 overs still left to bat!

At Hornchurch, a double hundred was achieved against a much-weakened bowling attack as they coasted to 311-6 before bowling us out

for 107. The highlight for us was Dominic Watts making his 1<sup>st</sup> XI debut and taking a wicket, something he mentioned several times during the rest of the season!

The last timed game of the season saw overseas player Chris finally get his first five wicket haul for the club (21-6-84-5). It was a closely fought match with local rivals Hutton where half centuries from Jack Plom (51) and Niraj (53 n.o) almost got us over the line. Chasing 285, we ran out of overs, scoring 263-8 and getting a draw.

A very weakened bowling attack was sent to Wanstead, and although the highlight was Tom Arnold getting his maiden 1<sup>st</sup> XI wicket, we were soundly beaten, with Wanstead getting the required 197 runs with almost 20 overs to spare.

Inspired by the Old Boys reunion taking place at The Shen in our next game, our first victory of the season came against Chingford. We scored 290-9, thanks mainly to the batting of Dave Hickey (55) and Jack Plom (65), whilst all five bowlers took two wickets each to bowl out the opposition for 247 in the 46<sup>th</sup> over.

The winning run continued in the next match as we went to Belhus and hit 209-7 in our 50 overs, with Plommie remaining unbeaten on 68. Again, all the bowlers contributed as the hosts were skittled out for 166 in the 40<sup>th</sup> over to see us have a second consecutive victory on the bounce by 43 runs. The highlight of the game was Jon Arnold coming on as 12<sup>th</sup> man to replace the injured Jaime Walton, thus providing us with the first father and son to play competitive cricket in the 1<sup>st</sup> XI since anyone can remember, if ever!

Our last match of the year took us down the road to Brentwood, where, despite his fifth 50 of the season, Plommie's 84 couldn't stop us losing by four wickets with over four overs to spare as they reached their target of 258.

Next season should see more home-grown talent playing in the 1's and a season of consolidation.

**Hugh Henry**