

2nd XI Season Review 2022

By James Borman - 2nd XI Captain

The 'Rhythm and Blues' premier league campaign was eagerly anticipated by all going into the 2022 season. Having finished 3rd in the premier last year, which transpired to be our highest finish in the division for over a decade, the team were eager to get cracking with the aim of a similar or even higher ranked finish.

Despite a few of our key regular players making the move to the South West of London to live and work, they had guaranteed their availability to the skipper to come back with bigger hair and a posher accent every Saturday, so the squad was full of promise. With our mixture of experienced 20 & 30 something year olds, and the added boost of our fantastic colts section who really proved themselves last year, we were hoping we could pick up where we left off and couldn't wait to get started.

Our first league game was at home to the reigning champions Chelmsford. The match proved to be nothing more than an absolute 'Thriller in Shenilla' with Shenfield winning the toss and electing to field. Some tidy bowling meant we restricted Chelmsford to a competitive 252 from their 45 overs. Young Sam Bear was the pick of the bowlers (as proved to be the case basically every time he played for us) with 3-38. Our chase started in the best possible fashion with George Pratt (68) and Jamie Walton (32) taking us to 109 for our first wicket. But with wickets falling at regular intervals and the scoreboard pressure increasing, we stumbled as we approached the target. Jack Newton's half century got us firmly back into the driving seat and after he despatched one over the club house for 6 we found ourselves needing 1 to win off the last 2 balls. Unfortunately our 2 experienced heads at the crease skied one, then snicked one behind as we lost 2 wickets in 2 balls - meaning the game ended in a tie. Despite the majority of our side loving a casual bet on a Saturday, I don't think any of us saw that result coming and we were left scratching our heads trying to work out how we hadn't started with a win. However, it went down as one of the great games and as ever, box office entertainment for the crowd.

The following week we travelled to Ilford to right the previous week's wrongs. Our start couldn't have been better - or luckier perhaps, with the first ball of the match being caught in the skipper's gut at slip. Fielding standards remained high with former captain Salisbury wearing one in the head backing up, then taking a great catch after he seemed to pirouette under a high ball that came down with snow on it. An inspired bowling and fielding performance ensued with 3 wickets each for Haddon, S. Bear and Borman. This led to Ilford being bowled out for 185 after winning the toss on a flat pitch. A professional run chase led by the experienced Martin Allen (79) meant our first win of the season was wrapped up with 10 overs to spare and 6 wickets in hand. The beer tasted 5 points sweeter than the week before, partly due to the win but also because that particular journey up the A12 was complete for another season.

Shenfield's momentum continued over the next few weeks, beating Upminster and Hornchurch. Chasing 130 against Upminster after a fine bowling display, George Pratt's destructive 55 (a birthday present for the skipper) meant we had an early finish before cover band 'Meatwood Flac' entertained us late into the evening. The Hornchurch match was a much closer affair as we restricted them to 222 thanks to 4 wickets from Cam 'the clown' Spicer. William Howard was his fiery self at the top and his first half century of the season set up a brilliant chase. Valuable 30's from Tom Austin and Jack Newton meant that Xander Rickenbach and the ever improving Sam Bear could see us home for another win in the final over. A tie and 3 wins meant we were on cloud 9, but there's an old saying about what goes up.....

Two losses followed to a strong Woodford Wells team and eventual league champions Wanstead as Shenfield seemed to struggle for runs especially. The next 3 matches petered out into high scoring draws against Harold Wood, Buckhurst Hill and Brentwood. Whilst Shenfield were left cursing the timed games format at this stage of the season, we did take inspiration in those matches from James Salibury scoring 73*, Nathan Woods scoring an excellent 79 in his debut season for the club and Martin Allen scoring 78*. This gave us something to cheer/drink about in what felt like a bad run without a win, in fairness though we never need much of an excuse.

Unfortunately this winless run extended to the next 3 games as we were beaten by Chelmsford, Ilford and Upminster. During a hot summer on good pitches (excluding Chelmer Park) Shenfield failed to get over 200 in those 3 matches, so never really got themselves in contention for positive results. The skippers tossing (of a coin) wasn't too helpful for the win effort; he either lost it or perhaps made the wrong call, as he was often reminded in the bar post match.

The following week saw us host Hornchurch in a huge fixture. The visitors were struggling at the bottom of the league and we found ourselves getting worryingly close to joining them. Winning the toss and electing to bat was nearly the worst call made since Cameron Spicer moved to Kent, as we found ourselves losing wickets fast and cheaply. Thankfully for Shenfield the reliable signing of the year Nathan Woods came to the crease and cruised his way to 65. This was assisted by a blistering assault from young Freddie Thorne, but when he fell Shenfield were still short of a defendable target.

Luckily, Alex Rickenbach who had actually picked and chosen this game to play (as often seemed to be the case when playing the lower ranked sides in the league), scored a handsome 58 full of class, elegance and general arrogance that helped us build toward a decent total (Alex would often be suffering from a bad back on a Saturday, so this made the runs even more impressive). Tom Arnold joined him for some brutal ball striking at the death as he smashed 23 off an over to leave Shenfield finishing on 244-8 and taking the momentum into tea.

With the target still very much gettable, Shenfield knew someone would have to stand up and take the match away from Hornchurch. Little did we know that that role would fall to Jack Newton. Having given up drinking, socialising and any general fun on Fridays throughout the season we were all waiting for this new lifestyle to impact on his cricket, and fortunately for us on the **30th July 2022** it certainly did. Newton ripped through the Hornchurch line up to leave him with figures of 7-77 from his 16 overs, this included removing the top 5 batsman in the line-up. This happened to be the highest wicket haul for a 2nd XI bowler since **30th July 2011** – which appears to be a good date for Shenfield seamers. The ever hungover yet reliable Spicer took the last pole (2-12), and ended a 50 plus run 10th wicket partnership meaning a much needed 25 points gave us some breathing room from the foot of the table.

A draw to Woodford Wells finished the last of the season's time games. Another toss lost lead to Wells posting an imposing 282 in the usual merciless summer heat. Shenfield lost Nathan Woods to a nasty concussion at tea (not the caterers fault), and after some questionable opposition captaincy only one result was made possible with us closing on 214-4. A special opening partnership seemed a shame to be wasted on a draw, with 3rd XI skipper Joe Massie scoring 66 in an opening partnership of over 150 runs. His opening partner Martin Allen scored a special century finishing with 102, registering the first Shenfield 2nd XI century for 3 seasons. On a personal note for Martin and the team the century was an incredibly emotional moment, and one that everyone present will remember for a long time.

The following week was the first of the remaining limited overs matches as we welcomed league leaders Wanstead. It was the hottest day of the year so inevitably the skipper lost yet another toss, but an excellent bowling display followed with Rickenbach, Newton & Borman all in the wickets. This was backed up with some very average catching/juggling but meant we bowled Wanstead out for

200. Despite 54* from James Salisbury, and looking in control for the majority of the chase, we fell 2 runs short and lost off the last ball in another entertaining, yet painful loss against a very strong side.

The following week saw us bowled out at Harold Wood for just 138 and suffering a heavy defeat in a quite frankly embarrassing loss. Credit to Harold Wood who bowled straight, but we helped them out by forgetting that if the ball hits the stumps it's generally out. I have to say 'generally' as we experienced a rather strange instance of this against Brentwood whereby the opening bat was bowled but somehow managed to convince the officials it was a gust of wind on a scorching day. Anyhow, I digress.....

This left us needing one more win to guarantee our safety from the drop. All eyes moved to Buckhurst Hill at home where a loss could see us dropping down to division 1 for the first time in 6 seasons.

With the toss again lost, Buckhurst Hill posted a decent 246 from their 45 overs. William Howard who had been impressing with gloves and bat in the 1st XI started our run chase gloriously with an entertaining and powerful 56. It was a typical Howard innings showing that if in doubt, be as laid back as physically possible without being asleep, and hit the ball for 4.

When Howard departed, that left the stage set for James Salisbury to come to the crease and get the job done for his side, and he did exactly that. Brilliantly assisted by Tom Austin (55*), Salisbury racked up his first league century of his Shenfield career. As you can imagine, it was certainly a century for the purists with graceful shots all around the ground, yet backed up with some powerful, aerial, yet elegant striking. With his last few seasons being blighted by injury and pure bad luck, this was a near perfect close to the season with 104* being his final total as he and Austin sealed not just the win, but the guarantee of top flight cricket for the 2nd XI next season.

This was also an historic day for the club as for the first time in our history, all 5 Saturday league XI's won their fixtures, leading to some wonderful celebrations. Unconfirmed reports state even 3rd XI skipper Joe Massie's wallet was seen on the evening buying a round!

For our final match of the season we made the short trip to Brentwood. Despite it being a dead rubber, the promise of cheap imported bottled lager and the opportunity to play our local rivals meant we either wanted it to hammer down with rain, or to win the match. It turned out the latter happened and with a brutal batting performance. The old mantra says that you can only be as good as the opposition let you be, and we were allowed to be rather good.

Left arm spinner George Ballington finally got his batting account started for the year with a hard hitting 59 before being bowled by an impossible delivery. Half centuries were also scored by Allen (69), Woods (74) as well as a maiden senior 50 for Sam Bear (57) on his return from injury. This led to Shenfield posting a huge 364-7 from 45 overs. A great start with the ball from Will 'Dobby' Dunleavy (2-34), who performed very well in his 2nd XI appearances towards the latter part of the season, meant Brentwood never got too close. They finished up 194 all out, meaning Shenfield earned 20 points to close the season.

Our season finished on 205 points earning us 7th place in the league. Naturally we were somewhat disappointed with this, but we take solace in the fact that so many of our squad had gone up to the 1st XI and performed well on many occasions. Especially Sam Bear, Will Howard and Tom Arnold who found themselves as regulars in the club's premier XI. Special mentions must also go to Will Dunleavy and Theo Robinson, who despite their youth looked in no way out of place in their debut season in the 2nd XI premier division.

A final further mention must go to Sam Bear who had a great season, not just with Shenfield's 1st & 2nd XI, but also with much deserved representative honours coming his way. With ever-growing skill and maturity, we're all very excited to see how he can improve moving forward.

As always, thanks go to our resident umpire Neil Osborne who had another good year officiating a fair and competitive season (whilst still finding time to trigger Martin Allen a few times). And further thanks to all who assisted with our fantastic catering, and all the running of the clubhouse/facilities and bar. And a final thanks from the skipper to all who played, dragged themselves out of bed hungover, got dropped down or pushed up a side, and all those who helped with selection. It was all done with a smile on the face and made the job much easier.

Next season we will look to improve on this campaign and hopefully find ourselves higher up the premier league.

"But what care I? It's the game that calls me – simply to be on the field of play; How can it matter what fate befalls me, with ten good fellows and one good day!" A.A. Milne.

2nd XI Awards 2022

Batsman of the year: Martin Allen - 483 runs

Bowler of the year: Cameron Spicer - 21 wickets

Players Player: Jack Newton – 255 runs & 22 wickets (including 7-77) & 6 dropped catches.