

## **LRGS 1<sup>st</sup> XI Cricket Season Review – April 2021**

*Played 4 – Won 2 – Lost 2*

The start of the 2021 cricket season has seen mixed fortunes for the LRGS 1<sup>st</sup> XI but it is beginning to look like a team that is starting to gel and bond really well with some excellent performances. As a result of the pandemic, the squad lost vital pre-season practice and therefore a bit of early season rust was inevitable but it is looking as though the tightly-knit squad are starting to pull through with some impressive wins.

The season got underway away at Cheadle Hulme School for a T20 friendly game. LRGS lost the toss and were invited to bat first and the innings got off to the worst possible start losing McWilliam and Rosbottom to run outs and Beeden for a duck, leaving the team 20-3 in the first game of the season. From there, it was clearly an uphill battle with LRGS losing wickets at regular intervals and eventually scrambling along to 88-9 off their 20 overs thanks to a handy 30 from Chabbra and some rear-guard action with an entertaining cameo of 18 not out for Eccles. It was evident from this innings that there was a lack of pre-season training, however these two showed there were some positives to take away.

Into the field, LRGS put up an excellent effort in order to take the game all the way into the 19<sup>th</sup> over thanks to some tight bowling from captain Schofield, Eccles, Whatmuff, Deeks and Rosbottom who all bowled good areas and built pressure throughout the innings. As well as this, it was a fantastic fielding display that kept LRGS with some hope of a positive result with outstanding catches from Rosbottom at backward point and Beeden behind the stumps. Despite the pressure, LRGS lost in the 19<sup>th</sup> over, however plenty of positives to be taken away from the spirited fight back in the field and with 4 debutants in the team this was always going to be a good practice for the national T20 cup the following week.

Following this, on the Friday, LRGS had their first 40 over game of the season hosting the prestigious MCC who elected to bat first. Unfortunately, despite an early wicket from Eccles and some pressure from Schofield, the rest of the bowling showed there were lessons to be learned, with the MCC scoring a spectacular 276-5 off their 40 overs. This wasn't helped by some crucial dropped catches and the team were made to pay as the batsman went on to score big and post a total that would be very difficult to chase. Overall, lessons to be learned from a disappointing afternoon in the field.

Chasing the total was always going to be difficult but it must be said that again LRGS produced a spirited second innings to restore pride and finish with 180. Two early wickets saw LRGS 41-2 but then we got to witness a fantastic first hundred partnership of the season between Beeden and Rosbottom, with both playing shots that were delightful to watch. Rosbottom was first to fall for a magnificent 58 off 93 balls. Beeden then followed for a majestic 70 off 75 balls taking the attack to the MCC. It was also good to see vice-captain Deeks chip in with a 25. In the end, although finishing well short of the target set by the MCC, there were plenty of positives to take away from a tough game against fantastic opposition, played in a great spirit with Beeden deservedly picking up the Man Of The Match award. We would like to thank the MCC for playing against us as it is always an honour to host such a prestigious fixture.

After 2 defeats from 2 games, a positive result was needed and the team needed to piece together the positives of the first two games to get their first win. LRGS made the trip to Kirkham and Wesham CC in order to play Rossall School in the National T20 competition. Again, LRGS lost the toss and were invited to field first and they made use of it with another excellent bowling and fielding display to restrict Rossall to 105-5 off their 20 overs despite some lusty blows at the death from the

Rossall batsman. Schofield and Deeks finished with 2 wickets each, including sharp stumping from Beeden and they were backed up well by Wood, Eccles and Whatmuff, who all kept on the pressure. However, the special mention goes to McWilliam for a fantastic catch at deep square leg, pulling off a blinder, low down and diving forward!

In reply, LRGS got off to a fantastic start with a 100 partnership between openers Parkinson and McWilliam before Parkinson fell for a well made 32. However, LRGS were always in control and cruised to a 9 wicket win with McWilliam finishing up with his first 50 for the LRGS 1<sup>st</sup> XI, which included some fantastic shots. Ultimately, this meant McWilliam would scoop the MOTM award for a magnificent day in the field and with his batting and LRGS would progress to the next round of the National T20 competition. Perhaps more importantly, it was a first win of the season and a great team performance that really lifted confidence levels and showed that the team was beginning to gel nicely.

However, there was no chance to celebrate the victory for too long with the games coming thick and fast and the stern test of Bolton School away on the Saturday, in a game that is massive in the fixture calendar with Bolton having numerous county players within their side. LRGS lost the toss on a freezing cold day and were asked to bat first and they followed on from their good batting displays against MCC and Rossall to score 159-5 off their 40 overs. It was good to see McWilliam carry on his excellent form with a fantastic 44 and MOTM Rosbottom scoring back to back 40 over game 50s with yet another magnificent and well-paced innings. They were also aided by a good knock from Deeks with 20 and a superb cameo from Batty at the end to get the team to a very competitive score on a wicket that certainly had something in it for the bowlers.

Following on from the good batting display, LRGS then again were exceptional with the ball and in the field to bowl Bolton out for 134 in order to claim a fantastic 25 run victory. This was as a result of tight spells from Wood, Schofield and Eccles but the pick of the bowlers had to be Deeks who claimed 3 wickets in a magnificent spell of spin bowling which challenged the batsman throughout. Whatmuff also bowled very well to pick up 2 vital wickets including a very good caught and bowled. As well as this Batty caught an amazing catch diving forward at deep midwicket off the bowling of Deeks. Overall, a very pleasing performance and an excellent result to beat Bolton away from home at 1<sup>st</sup> XI level. Clear signs that the team is really starting to come together and pick up big wins and produce top-quality performances.

Overall, it has been a very pleasing start to the season with a group of players that are starting to become a very tightly-knit group that train and play very hard for each other. There are plenty of positives to take from all three elements of the game so far and these are starting to be put together to pick up some memorable wins and hopefully this team spirit will continue for the rest of the season, which would put them in a great place for some challenging upcoming fixtures as well as the RGS Cricket Festival looming in the distance.

*Ben Schofield – 1<sup>st</sup> XI captain*