

Yet again I begin my report with the comment that last season was yet another momentous one for Blunham Cricket Club, perhaps the best yet from a playing point of view. The playing strength of the club continues to improve both in terms of quality and quantity and along with Flitwick and Ampthill, both town clubs, we are putting out more teams than any other club in the county and managing two grounds. The rise in the club's fortunes continues to attract a lot of attention, especially as many of our neighbouring clubs are going through lean times. Success does not happen by chance. It has been achieved through a number of factors, notably good club spirit coupled with the hard work and dedication of a good number of members. Hopefully, there is now sufficient strength in depth to ensure our achievements are not lost but maintaining the momentum will be a real challenge

Last season's playing achievements were accompanied by more ground improvements and a variety of high-profile fundraising activities which are on-going. We are now officially listed in the Guinness Book of Records for our World Record achievement last year and if we are successful with the long-awaited nets project, this should be the icing on the cake as far as 2011 is concerned.

Turning now to the playing side and last season's performances there were several highlights:

- The Lashings day was brilliant despite the rain. To see a galaxy of world-famous stars gracing the Blunham field was an experience in itself but the whole event was something to remember. Giv. and his team deserve full marks for organisation and the general feedback couldn't have been better. Our guests really played their part and the fact we did manage a 15-over a side game in the conditions was a real achievement.
- The youth development programme continues to shine and last season all the year-group teams enjoyed at least some success in their respective leagues. The under 10A team had its best results yet. Numbers seem to be keeping up on Friday evenings and it is gratifying to see more young players are enrolling as coaches, which is the key to the future and all those involved in the youth set-up should feel justly proud of their endeavours. Chris Bruce should be applauded for all his hard work as should all the other coaches.
- As for the senior sides we had a mixed season in the Hunts League with the 1st team achieving promotion at the second attempt but sadly the 2nds finished next to bottom and will go down. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> teams struggled for opposition in a Millman division 3 which ended up with only 6 teams. Wed relied on Ampthill; for lots of friendlies. The 3rds finished in third place and did beat league winners Gt. Barford twice. The all-star Roxton and Blunham XI still await their first win but had some entertaining encounters! Sundays were a mixed story with the 1<sup>st</sup> team flatteringly to deceive but did recover well to end up mid-table in division 2 of the county league. The 2<sup>nd</sup> XI just managed to avoid relegation but pride of place must go to the young Development side which won their division at the first attempt, with just one defeat.

- There were not too many outstanding individual performances to report but it is clear most of our talented young players are continuing to improve. Matt Benson, Connor Heaps, Dom Aloia, Adam Grimes, David Garofalo, G Fitzgerald and Jordan Harrington all had their moments and star of the season has to be Michael Pickard who scored fifties for the club and the County U15s. Michael Clinton also looks a very good prospect and there are a number to watch in the U15 ranks. Matt Benson achieved his first ton, and promptly scored three with a massive 142 against AK Sports. Well done also to Andrew Jeffs who achieved his first century on tour. Of course. Nick Harding, Scott, Sid, Roger Bennett and Simon Ackroyd continue to prove there is still plenty of life in the 'old dogs'. On the bowling side, Ben Spendlove is now the main strike force and others like Chris Boulding are rapidly improving.
- Individual thanks must again go to Neil Wildon who has worn many hats over the past year and who worked very hard in the demanding role of club captain. He did a brilliant job coordinating the week-by-week team selection, especially given the number of teams we are now putting out, managing the fixtures and maintaining a watching brief over the club's playing strength.
- 2011 also saw the eighth Blunham CC tour, this time to Derbys/Notts. The weather was reasonably good and there were three good games. Sadly one opposition cried off late on. Again many thanks to Neil for all his hard work with the organisation.
- It was a mixed summer weather-wise with an exceptionally dry spring 'though variable from June onwards. Not too many cancellations thankfully and despite increased pressures on the square and the new team of Matt and Dom, the playing surface remained good. It takes hours and hours preparing strips and having to cope with sometimes unreliable equipment! Well done to the new team and to other helpers. The Roxton square played quite well and was certainly vastly superior to the one at Barford!!
- President's day was sadly a wash-out but we did eat Jodie's' delicious food. For the first time we defeated the Captain Scott's XI and comfortably at that.
- We entered no less than three teams in the winter indoor leagues and managed three midweek teams throughout the summer. All did well and all three midweek sides won promotion.
- Our backroom team again did us proud throughout the year, especially the ladies. Carole, Mel and Jodie again performed wonders with the week-to-week scoring and Presentation evening which was a super evening with a delicious meal. Neil, Daniel, Nick and others have been beavering away with organising a range of social, fundraising events. The Firewalk was certainly something different!
- The website continues to attract a great deal of interest and is a very worthwhile publicity mechanism for the club. Many thanks to Steve for his continued work in managing the site. The gallery of photographs is most impressive.
- Memberships and registrations were by and large completed and paid on time. Just one or two defaulters, which you find in any club. Match subs were again more regularly paid but there was still some chasing of captains! Hopefully, the Firewalk monies will come in promptly.

- The Roxton playing field has proved a very worthwhile addition to the club's playing strength. The revamped square produced plenty of runs and no broken bones, the new pavilion is small but attractive and the holes in the outfield are being repaired this autumn. We seem to have developed a good working arrangement with the Roxton Playing Fields Association but would like to see a few more Roxton players.
- Against all expectations we managed to get a grant of £5K from Sport England for a new electronic scoreboard which is now up and running. Hopefully the nets will be in place from the start of next season, ECB permitting.

Overall, as with previous seasons we can again feel really pleased and satisfied on many counts, but there is still plenty to think about for next season and beyond. The following would seem to be the most important;

- Pressures on the ground and the square are rising. Matt and Dom need all the help they can get and ideally, we need someone to take charge of the pitch at Roxton.
- More success for the top two Saturday sides. We need both teams to be promoted again to reach the playing standard to which we aspire, given the size and status of the club.
- Running FOUR teams on a Saturday is a real challenge. Hopefully the introduction of the new Invitation League will; see more fixtures for both the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> XIs.
- Keeping the new pavilion looking great week by week. The same goes at Roxton.
- New nets in place.
- Maintenance tasks such as umpiring and scoring. Much better than in the past but there is still a tendency amongst some young players to expect the 'oldies' to do all the chores. We need more individuals to do the training courses.
- A mad-cap tour of England in July 2012?

Overall 2011 was undoubtedly another hugely successful year for the club. Almost all neighbouring clubs in the area are experiencing hard times and we are undoubtedly the envy of most in terms of the playing strength of our young players and it has been very pleasing to note the improvements in terms of commitment and attitude in so many quarters. Neil has done a phenomenal amount over recent years and many others have given good support. All the captains deserve a positive mention, as do Dom and Matt their work on the square, Carole and Jodie for a wide range of contributions and Mel, who has done a really good job with memberships and Presentation evening and of course Giv. for organising Lashings day. Team spirit is currently good but not without the occasional blip. Young players need to be fully conscious of the fact that Blunham CC has offered and continues to offer them opportunities to develop as players which other clubs and schools would not have been able to provide. Let's hope we can all pull together to make the 2012 season another one to remember for all the right reasons.

Max Hill 25<sup>th</sup> September 2011.