

A clean sweep on the cards?

All four Seniors Group County Championship teams look set for the knock out stages

All four of the Oxfordshire Seniors Group Over 60s and Over 70s teams contesting their respective County Championships look set to qualify for the knock out stages of the competition.

With one game still to play the joint Oxs/Berks Over 70s are currently top of the Over 70s national group and look well set to join the Over 60s 3rd XI in both qualifying as group stage winners.

Both teams have thus far lost only one game each this season with current points averages of well over 18 out of a near impossible 20. Indeed the Over 60s 3rds have only lost four group games in the past two years! Neighbours Bucks await in the quarter finals for the 3rds.

The Over 60s 1st XI will qualify for the knock out stages despite there still being a match to be played in the North Group, but look set for a long tough away trip in the first knock out round - most likely against Kent.

Meanwhile for the Over 60s 2nd XI it's looking like an away win against Essex will be needed if they are to continue to defend their County Championship title.

In their penultimate match of the group stages this week the joint Oxs/Berks Over 70s eased past Wiltshire by the small matter of 132 runs in their home fixture at Challow and Childrey CC, in yet another game that was a 'recruitment poster' for seniors cricket.

After losing the toss on what is usually a good batting track with a fast outfield, Oxs/Berks somewhat surprisingly found themselves asked to bat and made a steady if unspectacular start despite the early loss of Derek Watts in the ninth over with the score on 24 as the visitors' opening bowlers kept things very tight.

Ian Stuart anchored the top order with a patient 50 off 82 balls as he and new batsman Charlie Anderson first saw the shine off the ball and then proceeded to add 73 runs in 15 overs before Stuart retired undefeated.

New batsman Phil Ridgeway quickly settled in and with Anderson soon began to dominate a tiring Wiltshire attack. In just under 16 overs the pair added 119 for the second wicket with Ridgeway making 52 from 61 balls before he was bowled by John Williams.

Anderson - despite a first ball duck in his last innings - continued to strike the ball fluently with 12 boundaries in his eventual total of 93, before he was caught by Richard Bryant off the bowling of Tim Mynott with the score on 224 for 3 in the 41st over.

Skipper Adrian Manger then went first ball - lbw to Mynott off the last ball of the over after which the bowler had an over to plot the downfall of the next home batsman to face him, which proved to be time well spent as he promptly trapped Ronnie Brock lbw with the first ball of the 43rd over to complete his hat-trick.

Amidst all the excitement Oxs/Berks eventually closed their innings on 239 for five, with Mynott's three in three making him the pick of the Wilts bowlers with 4-24 from his nine overs, well supported by his opening partner John Williams with 1-32 from nine.

While 239 was a demanding chase it was by no means a guaranteed match winner at Challow with the ball coming on to the bat and a large fast outfield to defend. However, the visitors did not make the required start when they lost their first three wickets for just nine runs.

Richard Guy and hat-trick hero Mynott were both removed by Jim Blackford, while Terry Blake was lbw to Trevor Spindler.

Watching this carnage from the other end was opener Adrian Jeffrey who then dug in with Ian Swain and steadied the ship somewhat as they added 66 for the fourth wicket in 17 overs.

Sadly that was the highpoint of the Wiltshire innings as Phil Ridgeway removed both for 35 runs apiece within 10 runs of each other and thereafter it became something of a procession as the last five wickets fell for just 22 runs in 12 overs, as Steve Partington tucked in to the tail with 3-8 from six overs as the visitors subsided to 107 all out.

‘Job done’ was the verdict from skipper Adrian Manger after the game. “It was another great knock from Charlie at the top of the order to set us up, but we should have pushed the score well past 250 in the last five overs to ensure we didn’t get under pressure in the field. As we head towards the latter stages of the competition we can’t afford to let sides off the hook like that because potentially it could cost us the game,” he said.

The Oxs/Bucks Over 70s will complete their national group fixtures with an away game against Hampshire at Twyford CC.

In a thrilling home encounter at Banbury XX CC, the Over 60s 1st XI took on Staffordshire and managed yet another tied game, as Staffs levelled the scores with two off the last ball of a game which saw both teams displaying grit and class in equal measure.

After being put into bat by the visitors, Oxfordshire got off to a steady start, thanks mainly to captain Darryl Woods, who led from the front with a classy 65 off 94 balls (7 fours). He anchored a solid top-order effort, well supported by Charlie Anderson (32) and Paul Hemming (41) that saw the home side to the 150 mark in the 32nd over with seven wickets in hand.

However, Staffs fought back and two wickets went down cheaply before Micky Thomas’ unbeaten 26 off just 13 balls, took the hosts to a challenging total of 222-6 in match reduced to 40 overs, owing to a rain delayed start.

Staffordshire’s bowling honours were shared evenly, with Martin Wynn with 2-57 the most successful, however, the visitors, also generously conceded no fewer than 20 wides that so nearly came back to haunt them.

Staffordshire’s reply could not have got off to a better start with openers Kevin Beattie (73 off 69) and Mark Hatton (75 off 103) putting on a commanding opening partnership of 116 runs. The aggressive Beattie struck 11 fours, while Hatton steered the chase deep into the innings.

The hosts were looking down the barrel at this point with Staffs looked well set for victory, but somehow Oxon clawed their way back with timely breakthroughs from Paul Hemming (2-41) and Rupert Taylor (2-42), aided by some great work behind the stumps from Phil Maning, which triggered a major wobble in the visitors’ middle order as they looked to accelerate the scoring rate.

When the final over bowled by Taylor arrived Staffs needed 14 to win and despite conceding a boundary off the first ball followed by a wide Oxon held their nerve and the visitors seventh wicket pair could only scamper a two to leave the scores exactly level at 222-6, which saw both sides qualify for the knock out stages of the competition.

"I think we showed great fighting spirit to get back into the game when Staffs looked very well set," said skipper Darryl Woods. "When we tied against Bucks I thought we'd let them back into the game, in this instance I think we fought our way back to bag the 10 points we secured.

"And yet again this was a game that showcased wonderfully the quality of the cricket being played in the national seniors competition."

Away to Hertfordshire is never an easy trip and a stuttering performance with the bat by the Over 60s 2nd XI saw them go down by five wickets at Langleybury CC, albeit off the last ball of a game again reduced to 40 overs because of a last minute change of venue.

Winning the toss and opting to bat, Oxfordshire's innings did not get off to the best of starts with Ivan Mulford, Tim House and Tom Scrase all back in the pavilion with only 20 on the board.

Mike Howat made a brisk 18, but it was David Warner's patient 47 off 74 balls and Adrian Manger's steady 37 from 53 balls that provided the backbone of the innings as they posted a valuable sixth-wicket stand of 50 runs.

A late cameo of 19 from Graham Nelson ensured respectability but defending 163 was always going to be a struggle.

For Herts John Smith was the stand out bowler with 3 for 15 off his eight overs, well supported by Matt Brown with 3 for 35 and Upali Perera with 2 for 28.

Herts began their pursuit cautiously. Grahame Smith and Martin Tipper laid a solid platform, as they scored 28 and 40 respectively and added 47 for the first wicket.

After which Chris Horne's 36 added further momentum before Peter Dudley guided the tail-end home to the win with a composed unbeaten 31, despite a brief wobble as they neared the finish line which saw them reach their target with just one ball to spare.

Simon Oldfield returned the best bowling figures for the visitors with 2 for 25 from six overs, although the opening pair of Adrian Manger and Graham Nelson made Herts work hard in the early overs as they returned figures of 0-21 and 1-22 respectively.

After the game stand-in skipper Tim House said: "We were probably at least 20 or 30 runs short with the bat which enabled them to just accumulate runs under no time pressure at all. However, we made a decent fight of it even with a number of key players missing, and it might have been a different second innings if we'd have had those extra runs to play with."

In their last match of the group stages of the season the Over 60s 3rd XI took their unbeaten, 20 point average record to Southgate against their old nemeses Middlesex – and went down by just 10 runs in an uncharacteristically low-scoring game.

After being asked to bat first by Oxfordshire, Middlesex got off to a nervy start, losing early wickets to the probing seam and swing of Richard Cook (2-33), as openers Melzer and Kennedy were soon back in the pavilion with only 12 on the board in the fifth over.

However, that shaky start was soon stabilised thanks to a classy knock from Kishor Dattani, who struck a fluent 84 off 101 balls, with 14 boundaries, well supported by Peter Berg (27) and Doug Gordon (25),

However, Oxfordshire's bowling remained disciplined in the latter stages of the innings and as a unit they fought back well and contained the hosts to 182 all out with Steve Wilson (2-32) and Steve Kelly (2-37) the main contributors during the latter overs.

Oxfordshire's reply got off to the best possible start with Chalky White and Andy Haynes adding 64 in 14 overs before Haynes was adjudged lbw for 35.

However this proved to be the highpoint of the visitors' innings as despite White continuing on his measured way with an excellent anchoring knock of 71 off 98 balls, with eight fours and two sixes, the remainder of the batting was first tied down and then dismissed by a disciplined Middlesex fightback by their change bowlers.

Only Fred Price (14) and Jerry Senior (20) managed to get into double figures, as Oxon lost their last six wickets for just 32 runs, coming up 10 runs short when bowled out with an over to spare.

The tide turned for Middlesex when they introduced Christopher Chunnillall (3-27) and Damian Egan (3-33), who ripped through the visitors middle and lower order when they looked well set for the win.

"It would have been nice to complete the unbeaten run in the group matches but we still finished top. I'm not sure we quite got the rub of the green today but that's cricket and we move on now to the knock out stages where if you're not on your 'A' game your season is done. Better to get a 'bad day at the office' out of the way now," he added.

The Over 60s 4th XI meanwhile were enjoying a break from West of England Seniors Cricket League action with a home friendly against the Fossils XI from Worcestershire at Minster Lovell.

Oxon won the toss and opted to bat and didn't get off to the best of starts when the usually reliable Adrian Beecroft was bowled for 0 in the first over by Paul Thompson.

Undaunted Colin Houseman and Roger Hutchence pulled things round and posted 33 for the second wicket before Hutchence was lbw to Tim Cull for 12.

Jim Head and Houseman then added a further 23 before Houseman was bowled by Liz Dean, after which new batsman Jerry Senior and Head put together the best stand of the innings with a well-made 67 runs together, before both departed with the score on 123, after which there was something of a procession as five wickets went down for the addition of only 18 runs with five overs still left to bowl.

John Walton and David Sample were the pick of the Fossil's bowlers with 3-19 from six overs and 2-27 from six respectively.

In reply the Fossils made a great start as David Sample and Bill Nicholson put on 63 for the first wicket before a double strike from Nick Warry got Oxon back into the game as he first bowled Nicholson for 18 and then trapped new batsman Mike Morrissey for a single.

With Sample run out shortly afterwards the new fourth wicket pairing of Tim Cull and Larry Deon had work to do and counter attacked nicely as they added 60 for the fourth wicket before another two wicket burst -this time from Oxon skipper Tim Gush – saw Cull bowled for 27 and Deon trapped in front for 23.

With the score on 131 the visitors looked on course to win but the overs were fast running out and none of the incoming batsman was able to find the boundary after which Oxon eventually ran out winners by a mere two runs when the final ball was bowled.

Acting skipper Tim Gush said: "For once we actually got on the right side of tight finish! On balance I think we just about deserved it. We battled hard throughout and got the breakthroughs with the ball at key moments. The most important thing though was we had a great game against great friends in the shape of the Fossils who we look forward to seeing again next year."