

Match reports w/c 12/8/25 r clapp

### **The sharp end of the season**

*The Oxs/Berks Over 70s live to fight another day, but the Over 60s thirds crash out.*

Having had all four Oxfordshire Seniors Groups sides battle through to the knock out stages of their respective County Championships, only the joint Oxs/Berks Over 70s now remain afloat as the Over 60s 3rds' season come to an abrupt end when they were soundly beaten by old rivals Sussex in this week's semi-finals.

The Joint Oxs/Berks Over 70s however lived to fight another day as their scheduled home semi-final against Hertfordshire at Horspath CC got underway but was curtailed by the weather, when very much in the balance.

Oxs/Berks won the toss and elected to field and had the visitors in trouble at 35 for 4 but Herts battled back and eventually posted a semi respectable 167 in their 45 overs, which seemingly put the hosts in control at tea.

However, the Oxs/Bucks top order batters also found it a struggle and were in an identical position 35-4 when the weather first stopped play and then rendered any further progress impossible after 15 overs.

The fixture has been rescheduled to be played on Sunday August 31st at Langleybury CC, with an early 12 noon start to avoid issues with failing light should it go the full 90 overs.

"Hopefully the weather hasn't scuppered our chances of making the final," said a somewhat frustrated skipper Adrian Manger, after the game.

"I can't help feeling somewhat aggrieved that such a vital game gets rained off during the driest summer in living memory and we end up surrendering our home advantage as a result.

However, we'll go to Langleybury with a strong side and a positive attitude and we'll just have to get to the final hard way!"

Meanwhile earlier in the week, Sussex once again proved to be formidable opponents in the latter stages of the competition when - for the second time in three years - the men from the south coast crushed the Over 60s 3<sup>rd</sup> XI's dreams of County Championship glory.

Even the advantage of playing at their 'fortress' home ground at Banbury XX CC could not prevent a decisive defeat for the hosts by five wickets as their usually powerful batting line-up failed to fire and left them painfully short of runs after having won the toss and opting to bat.

Setting Sussex a target of just 200 was never going to be enough but even that score looked respectable at tea after a disastrous start that saw Oxon teetering on the brink of disaster at 20-4 as the visitors opening attack of Mick Brazil and Roger Smith ripped through the hosts top order batting.

As Chalky White looked on in horror at the other end Andy Haynes was first to go for nought in the second over when he was bowled by Smith, followed 10 balls later by last week's centurion Tom Scrase for a single when he was excellently caught off a bottom edge by keeper Martin Burgess off Brazil, making the score 16-2.

But there was worse to come as one run later the in-form Fred Price went for a five ball nought, caught by Martin Wise off Smith, followed two balls later by Chris Butcher for a single when he was caught by Chris Sear off Brazil.

It looked like game over but the incoming Gary Cook had other ideas as he and Chalky White set about avoiding a rout. The pair looked comparatively well set as they doubled the total but Smith pounced on a sharp caught and bowled as White looked to drive him straight and he perished for 14 off 22 balls.

Steve Partington again looked comfortable in making 11 as he and Cook – now striking the ball fluently - posted a further 34 for the sixth wicket, before Partington was bowled by first change Chris Sear.

Next in was Steve Kelly and at last Cook had a partner that dug in and gave him the support he needed as the pair added 55 for the seventh wicket, with the Sussex second string attack proving less formidable than Smith and Brazil.

Cook's superb run a ball counter attack finally ended on 63 when he was again well stumped by Burgess off Brazil in his second spell.

Meanwhile Kelly had grafted his way to 22 and he too was about to get some excellent support from the incoming Richard Cook, as the pair looked to give the hosts a glimmer of hope by way of something at which to bowl.

With the field well back the pair found the gaps and ran hard as well as well as punishing the bad ball with boundaries and proceeded to add an unbeaten 69, which enabled Oxon to post an unlikely 199 for seven, after the debacle of 20-4.

Kelly made a wonderful battling 58 not out from 97 balls, while Cook struck the ball well in his run a ball 26 not out.

For Sussex it was the pairing of Smith and Brazil who did all the damage as they took 3 for 41 and 3 for 36 respectively from their nine overs, well supported by Sear whose miserly spell of nine overs returned him figures of 1 for 22.

The Sussex run chase was never in doubt but neither was it particularly fluent or aggressive in its early stages as Oxon secured the early breakthrough they needed to have any hope of a win when Gary Cook trapped Martin Brownsey leg before for just a single when the score was on 11.

However, there was no spectacular clatter of wickets to follow as in the first innings, as Roger Southgate and John Connelly took the score on to 43 before Southgate too was trapped in front for 21 from 48 balls this time via the left arm in-swing of Richard Cook.

The hosts were still in the game but another quick breakthrough was vital to get Sussex under pressure which sadly was not forthcoming, as Connelly and was joined by Martin Sims, who soon looked ominously well-set as the pairing doubled the score before Connelly was bowled by Steve Wilson for 20 from 53 balls.

New batsman Martin Wise was again under no pressure to score quickly and he quietly just rotated the strike while Simms got into his stride and passed 50 as the boundaries began to flow and Oxon's hopes gradually ebbed away.

Wise made another useful 20 from 30 balls in his supporting cameo before he was bowled by Andy Haynes with the score on 140, after which there was a minor breakthrough when Martin Burgess surprisingly went for just eight, when bowled by Steve Kelly.

However, with only 22 required and Sims in imperious form it only needed new batsman Roger Smith with 14 not out to hold up one end in order to see Sussex home with five overs and five wickets in hand. Sims remained unbeaten on 90 with 11 fours to his name in a match winning knock for his side.

At the end of a long season skipper Clive Ricks was philosophical. "We made them fight very hard for the win after looking dead and buried at 20 for 4. Gary Cook counter attacked very effectively while Steve Kelly rolled back the years as he found his best batting form when we really needed it.

"It's disappointing that we've fallen just one game short of the final having only lost only one other game all year, but we're still improving season on season. Today we had a nightmare start with the bat against very good opponents after which many sides would have rolled over – but we didn't which showed great character.

"It's just that extra one or two per cent improvement which we need to find at key moments in games that will see us through to winning this competition rather than just being perennially competitive but ultimately unsuccessful," he added.

"I'd also like to thank all the players, umpires and officials who have helped make this most enjoyable season so successful.

"And finally it is also interesting to note that since reaching the 2023 cup final we have only lost six matches - three to Middlesex, two to Sussex and one to Essex. Perhaps the only way we can eventually triumph is by avoiding sex on Tuesdays!!!"

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