

A Team Season Report 2016

Following the ignominy of the 2015 season in which we failed to win a single game, culminating in relegation from a tough Division 3, the aspirations for the A Team heading into the 2016 were primarily that of survival in Division 4, coupled with the prospect of winning a few games in the process. That we were relegated for a 2nd successive season suggests another miserable failure, but given a little more luck the outcome could've been so much different.

We played 17 matches with 1 cancelled due to bad weather. Of those played we lost 13 & won only 4. We suffered 2 last-ball defeats, at home to Hethersett & Tas Valley & Norwich CC, which were arguably the difference between success & failure - had we won those 2 & we would have finished comfortably in mid-table. The Norwich defeat was particularly galling because that game fell on a week when availability was particularly poor; I firmly believe that if we'd been anywhere near full strength we may well have won the game.

I think we were also a bit unlucky with how the fixtures fell for us in general. We always seemed to be playing the teams in & around us in the league on weeks where we were struggling for players and found ourselves stronger against the top teams, whom we stood little chance of beating anyway (Martham, North Runcton, Dersingham). Also, our only rained off game was at home to Stow. They were really struggling at the time & brought a very young side to Melton, which we *may* have beaten if we'd been able to play.

Of course that's all ifs, buts and maybes. Ultimately we were relegated because we weren't good enough and in spite of our best endeavours we always seemed to find ourselves a bowler or a batsman short when it really counted.

The highlights were of course the 4 wins (all of which came away from home, oddly). 2 of those came in the first 4 weeks of the season; a solid team performance at Norwich followed by a Nick Aston inspired victory at Sheringham. At that stage we were comfortably in the top 4 & finding life a breeze.

However, we didn't win again for another 2 months and plummeted down the table. When we did win next we did it in style, beating the then-unbeaten Garboldisham A in their own back yard, thanks largely to the (p)luck of Paul Stearman, the guile of Rob Sims & the height of Jack Pearse.

The most gratifying victory was away to HTV, where we exacted some revenge for the earlier defeat at Melton Park by winning in the last over at their place, courtesy of sterling contributions from Tim Hales, Jack Pearse & Tom Moye. Sadly it was to be our last win of the season & relegation was soon to be confirmed.

Club availability overall was slightly better than in 2015, but not much. Some 41 players represented the A Team over the course of the season, which is clearly too many to establish any consistency and, perhaps tellingly, we were usually filling the team from below rather than above. It's no coincidence that all of our wins came on the odd weeks when we had 1st team players to draw on.

Having said all that, I can't think of many examples where a club can sustain its First & A Teams in consecutive divisions anyway, so we were perhaps always up against it. A 2 division difference is probably more realistic & sustainable for our club.

The Alliance were kind enough to impose upon us a number of significant rule changes for the season; the win/lose format, minimum of 5 bowlers per side, a 30 yard fielding circle & the 'wide' lines (it's a guideline, not a wide line as the league like to remind us). In hindsight I think we are worse off for all of them. Although the previous format was far from perfect, we've lost something without the draws - that ability to give you more results to play for can keep the games alive longer and is perhaps more pertinent for a losing team than a winning one, but we certainly missed it. The minimum of 5 bowlers rule is also misguided in my opinion. Bowlers, especially good ones are rare commodities. If the minimum is 5 then you need at least 6, which upsets the natural balance of the team (what place does the specialist 'keeper have in cricket anymore?!). It also means that a club with 4 teams needs to find 24 bowlers every week which is a tall order. The 30 yard fielding circle didn't really come into play & umpires at our level aren't looking for it anyway, whilst the 'wide' lines are a complete waste of a groundsman's time. Several clubs didn't bother to mark them at all but unless there is clear guidance from the league about their purpose (i.e. the ball passing outside them is always a wide) they will always be open to interpretation & therefore pointless. Still, I hear they are planning to address this by recommending they be painted in a different colour next year. Genius.

In spite of everything, I found it to be a strangely enjoyable season. As well as me, the team was built around a core of regular performers who played most of the games: Tim Hales, Woody Loines, Lee Whiddett, Rob Sims & Matt Henderson followed by Sam Mann and Ryan Hayward with Neal Clarke not far behind. As fine a bunch of men as you ever did see & a joy to captain. Although not all renowned for their natural prowess in the field, they made valuable contributions over the course of the season - Tim being rightly awarded the player of the season gong for his weight of runs. Matt Henderson deserves special mention, because he was new to club this year but embraced the spirit straight away & remains one of the few people I have ever met who has actually volunteered to do tea without prompting. Time will tell if that particular feat is to be repeated.

We were also able to bring forward some promising youngsters - James Robb had already begun to make his mark in 2015 and played a number of games across the top 2 sides this year but Hadi Kashif and in particular Matt Rennie broke through towards the end of the season and impressed. All of them displayed great attitude, ability and potential and I hope we'll see much more of them in the senior teams next season. Kyle Mason also made the step up from the B's & acquitted himself well with the ball in his hand.

Because of this we can look forward to the 2017 season with some optimism. I expect us to compete better and to consolidate our status in Div 5 but promotion may be beyond us without injections of new talent but you never know.

Thanks, as ever, to our relentlessly cheerful groundstaff and to everyone who helps make our great club what it is. Keep on keeping on...

Simon Woods, GMCC A Team Captain 2016.