

Steep 1st XI V Andover 3rd XI

Having assured themselves of promotion last week, it only remained to see if Steep could secure the 22 points that would provide the championship crown. In order to do this they needed to beat mid-table Andover by a comfortable margin on their less than welcoming London Road pitch.

Skipper called correctly and elected to field on a wicket that promised many surprises but not many runs. Andover sent out Mops to pinch hit which he did with some skill and a large helping of luck. Steep picked away at the other end with John Smith striking first and Tom Callingham picking up two in a well-controlled spell of 10 overs for 16 runs. Mops was finally bowled for 54 by Mark Turnbull just after drinks exposing the Andover tail. Wickets for Ally Bone and Tom Mercer reduced Andover to 125 for 7 and Steep went in search of the final three wickets and precious bonus points. However, Goodman and Roberts put up fine resistance and ensured no further wickets fell and set a victory target of 167.

During tea the calculators came out and it came clear that this total had to be achieved for no more than 4 wickets down. Steep openers Dale Collins and Sean Noble went on the attack immediately before Noble got an unplayable delivery to be bowled for 5. Dean Knight joined Collins and the scoreboard moved rapidly on to 56 off 9 overs when Knight missed a straight one from the canny Andrews.

Makeshift number 4 Graham Hughes joined Collins knowing they needed a big partnership to keep things on track. However, Collins was removed by a juggling catch for a swashbuckling 35, swiftly followed by the skipper for a duck.

This left Hughes and key all-rounder Bone 90 runs to get for no further wickets. The score edged up gradually until they had reached 118. At this point the doomsday scenario struck and Bone was bowled going back to a straight one. The championship was now dependent upon other results but still this game had to be won. Hughes battled gamely but perished for 45 leaving Tom Callingham and Mike Murray with 30 runs to get. Murray took up the challenge and smashed a couple of boundaries whilst Callingham ticked the score over. With the victory target in sight and no further batsmen to come the crowd fell silent until a thick edge from Callingham assured victory.

After a flurry of phone calls it transpired that second place St Cross had secured a maximum points victory meaning that Steep had fallen a mere 2 points short of the title they were after. However, promotion had been the aim at the beginning of the season and with Petersfield also securing promotion, the future for East Hampshire looks good.

Many congratulations should go to the young St Cross side that have been in magical form this season despite being beaten by Steep in the first game. There is also the mouth-watering prospect of the friendly rivalry with Petersfield being continued into next season which only bodes well for the local cricket scene.