

KELAWAR TAUGHT LESSON AT UNIVERSITY

Datuk Bandar 1st March 2009

It's a funny old thing, the life of an international jetsetting Kelawar cricketer: one weekend you're roasting by day in an ash-laden outfield in sight of an active volcano in a competition honouring the shortest form of the game, and by night circumambulating the Stygian stretch of Field Avenue in a frenzy of Dionysian excess, trading badinage with the bathycolpian and steatopygous populace; and the following weekend you're turning up for duty in the rather more prosaic setting of a waterlogged ground in exotic Bangi....

We are here to play the team of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, a young, disciplined and well-drilled outfit judging by the rigorousness of its members' fielding regimen. Most of our players, needless to say, are none of the above, judging by the lucifugous, haunted looks of some of our senior members, still suffering the effects of the night before, and by the manner in which they plump themselves down in the inviting chairs and spark up the first fag of the morning.

Owing to a couple of irritating puddles on the field of play, we sit around chewing the fat for a bit, then Skip wins the toss and elects to bat, after which we continue to sit around chewing the fat until one o'clock, when the ground is deemed fit for play.

During this enforced interlude, we are privy to the following bizarre telephonic exchange, courtesy of the speakerphone on Webby's Motorola TX427, which he hasn't yet worked out how to de-activate after only four years of ownership:

Webby (politely): I say, is that Simon of Million Lights in Singapore?

Simon (for it is indeed he): Wei?

Webby (all officious-like): Good morning, my good man, I'm following up about some lights that I enquired about yesterday. I can't quite remember what they're called, but I remember that they have a girl's name.....

Simon (keenly): Ah yah, I remember, you Honourable Foreign Gentleman Mr Trixie that call yesterday. We got lights, they call Mesmerize.

Webby (dream-like): Ah, interesting, interesting.....good name....and do they?

Simon (justifiably nonplussed): Do they what?

Webby (slightly impatiently): Mesmerize, my dear fellow?

Simon (ingratiatingly): Indeed, Mr Trixie, they mesmerize real good one. You believe me, you invite poor, unsuspecting trollop to your place and turn on lights, she not going nowhere, she going to be transfixed like deer in headlights, like little bunny before stare of cobra snake, like....

Webby (brusquely): Yes, yes, I get the picture. (Slightly softer) Excellent, excellent, so how much are these lights?

Simon (wheedlingly): For you, Mr Trixie, Honourable Foreign Gentleman, Sir, I give good price, only 8888 sing per unit.

Webby (flooded with relief): Capital, capital, and a snip at the price, I'm sure. I'll take a dozen of the fuchsia ones with peach tassels. Have them sent up to KL via Queen's Messenger forthwith.

Unfortunately, the umpires' call-to-arms precludes any opportunity on our part to enquire as to why Webby would order lights at a premium from Singapore rather than make do with the truly staggering range to be found in any one of several dozen outlets in KL, but our focus turns instead to the job in hand - setting a target in a match reduced to 35 overs.

Darvin and Rohit open up against a lively bowling duo but seem comfortable enough until the former, having just pulled a ball just shy of six, plays a lazy shot across the line and is bowled for 6. Dil comes in at three and this pairing put on 21 until Rohit (10) offers up a straightforward chance to mid off, which brings to the wicket Fordy, who plays an almost identical shot first ball to the same fielder with the same result for a golden duck. 32 for 3.

Thenceforth we lose wickets at a steady rate, almost all caught. Scott comes and goes for 2, Dil (9) gets a nasty lifter that brushes his gloves to the cordon behind and Webby (9) hits a beautifully-timed six over cow, then lobs the next one down mid-wicket's throat on the boundary, when he really should have been emulating his Player of the Tournament form of the week before by spooning everything in sight over the covers. The only player not to follow this trend in the middle order is Vignesh (16), who entertains with some eccentric and improvised shots, particularly off the back foot, but eventually can't resist going after the spinner and is stumped – the inelegance of his hoik to cow in stark contrast to the neatness of the keeper's removal of the bails.

By this stage, we are on the dismal score of 62 for 7 with H and Geoff at the crease, but redemption looks possible if we can bat through the full quota of overs and hope that the looming clouds bring relief through a match-saving and speedy president of showers (the collective noun for any number of showers above four). However, the wind direction ensures that the cumulonimbus skirts around the ground, neither is either batsman able to stay in long enough to trouble the scorer too much, both departing for 4 and 5 respectively, H disappointed as his well-hit drive finds mid off and Geoff bowled by a quicker delivery from the impressive spinner Shahrul, to leave us on 78 for 9.

The only highlight in a continually ingravescient innings is Sharrad (19), who hits some lusty blows over the inner circle, including a particularly pleasing straight six, and he is well supported by the obdurate senior pro, Phil Render (1), who holds up one end admirably until Webby calls, rather superfluously, for the batting side's power play in the 32nd over (during which the fielders are only allowed three men outside the inner circle – nobody moves). Phil takes this as a message to force the pace and immediately lobs an easy catch to the covers, leaving us all out for 98.

Quick and cheap wickets being the order of the day, we open with three slips and a gully to Sharrad, who gets the odd one to bounce off the seam at an alarming pace (for me, anyway). One of these finds the outside edge early on, only to shoot through Phil's hands at 2nd slip for four runs. Thereafter, the luckless Sharrad (0-25 off 4 overs) continues to bowl a mixture of unplayable balls and ones which sit up and get some impressive treatment from the batsmen. He is partnered at the other end by Geoff (0-11 off 3 overs), who bowls tightly enough (including the only maiden of the innings) but without much danger to the batsmen, both of whom negotiate his in-swingers with some ease.

These two are replaced by Phil and Dil (there's a poem in there somewhere). The former (0-26 off 5 overs) uses all his experience and guile to bowl some beauties but drops several too short, which are dispatched through the covers, while the latter (2-34 off 5.4 overs) is quite expensive, including being hit for two massive sixes, but does pick up the only two wickets to fall, both straightforward catches to Webby in the covers, who makes a complete meal of it before clutching the ball at the second attempt, and Geoff at fly slip, who takes his chance with ease even though the ball is spinning viciously.

H (0-3) gets one over at the death (how the mighty have fallen) but neither batsman is tempted to finish with a flourish, having been promised RM10 each by Fordy if they don't get out to H, and they pass the target in the 19th over to win by 8 wickets.

Handshakes all round and compliments to the better side, which plays the game in an admirable fashion and with a refreshing lack of the fatuous appealing and general carrying-on seen in some of our recent matches.

We walk off the field and greet Malcolm and family, who have come down to support (thanks, Malcolm) and haven't seen a ball bowled for the second time of trying. We repair to our tent, where we have a couple of beers, and are privy to a second bizarre telephonic exchange, courtesy of the speakerphone on Webby's Motorola TX427, which he hasn't yet worked out how to deactivate after only four years of ownership:

Motorola TX427: Ring ring.

Webby: Hello, is that Simon of Million Lights?

Club de Plage Grunter (keenly): Hello, Sor, long time no see, are you married yet?

Webby (evasively): Er, I've been a bit busy recently and no, actually, not yet.

CdPG (pressing): So are you in KL, Sor?

Webby (reconsidering): I am indeed. In fact, I'm having some new lights installed this week....