

Team performance key to Kelawar's fortunes

by Jason Lee
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Kelawar 168 for 3 (Lee 35 ret., Murray-Watson 29 ret., Porter 26 ret., C.Speed 29-3, D.Storer 12-2) beat **Warriors AFL** 148 for 7 (Dion 32 ret., Eggs 30*, Evans 26 ret., Dion 22-2, Michael 16-1) by 20 runs

In this third 20/20 match of the 2009 day/night series, a solid all-round Kelawar performance saw off an unknown, but potentially lethal force in, the Warriors AFL side. Previous encounters with this pack of naturally gifted, unpredictable, sternly competitive and mostly Australian athletes always suggested that anything could be possible, but in the end, Kelawar reinforced its flourishing image (at least amongst the AFL contingency) with a performance that saw all eleven contribute.

Victory was sealed shortly after 10pm when Chris Speed's final over resulted in only six runs and a wicket, leaving him with match-best figures of 29 for 3 from his four overs at the death. Even though the Warriors had chances to taste victory – they required 60 off the last 6 overs, then 40 over off the last 4 overs, and finally an improbable 27 off the last over – Kelawar was able to answer all of their challenges with clever bowling and calm captaining, much to the delight of the few blessed spectators and scorer (thanks Di) that witnessed the match.

This game will go down as one where captain Mike Speed did nothing, other than captain, but admirably at that. He didn't bat or bowl, and was mostly ineffective in the field. [Post-match conversations suggest that Old Speed was nursing a wounded elbow which he injured the night before in a night-club related drinking incident – that may or may not be reviewed by the disciplinary panel (his wife!) in the days to come – but notably the on-field stump microphones clearly heard Old Speed mention, after one calamitous effort, that his inability in this match to see, catch, stop, or backstop the ball was specifically due to the fact that he, at 55, is now 30 years past-his-prime.] Notwithstanding Old Speed's latest injury concerns his captaincy, whilst not perfect, was concise, controlled and authoritative. When bowling changes were required they were shuffled, when fields were pierced the troops were marshalled, and when catches were dropped cries of encouragement and patience were voiced.

The Warriors run-chase started woefully. Druvi Storer's first over from the far-end was quick and straight, and for four deliveries in a row Warriors' opener could do nothing but back away in fear that leather would connect with his nether region – apparently he wasn't wearing a box, such is the brave, yet brainless mindset of an AFL die-hard. The fifth ball of the innings cleaned up the stumps - simply too fast, too straight and too good - and Kelawar were off to the perfect start of one for none after one.

However, quick to forget events of the past (the first over in this case), as is the admirable yet obnoxious custom of almost all Australian professional and amateur sportsmen, the Warriors number two and three forged adventurously ahead during the next few overs sending several pitched up deliveries to the ropes through the vee. While a subtle change of length from full to short had been suggested to both bowlers with good effect, it wasn't always possible for Storer and Neil Morgan (in his come-back game) to acquire a firm grip on the ball, such was the deterioration of the seam as a result of Kinrara Oval's typically dewy lawns. After six overs Kelawar was slightly ahead (1 for 39) but there was still plenty of work to be done as both batsman had settled.

Looking to save his key bowlers, Older Speed expertly imposed a dual bowling change which again brought results, breaking a valuable 42 run partnership. Jason Lee who took advice early on from Storer, got a short of a length delivery to rear up to their number three, which squared him up and forced him to fend awkwardly off his chest catching the face of the blade and landing in the hands of the wicketkeeper Tim Vallis. That would be the first of Vallis' two snatches. Further variations by Lee should have earned him the wicket of Warriors' number two, but Morgan's dreadful attempt to clutch a lofted drive to long-off was a rare lowlight for Kelawar's evening.

At the other end Gary Porter demonstrated that years of experience in English club cricket is invaluable in these tight contests. With the ability to pitch the ball full and straight and with changes of pace, Porter's first two overs went for a miserly nine runs and again, overwhelmingly vindicated Old Speed's choice to turn to a fellow oldie in those crucial middle overs.

The latter half of the Warrior's innings saw the retirement [declared at the beginning of the match to be at the end of the over in which a batsmen reached 25] of Warrior's captain Eggs who had earlier connected handsomely with anything pitched up and noticeably enjoyed the ball coming on to the bat. Then in the fourteenth over Milbourne, whose constant singles and braces to all parts of the ground demonstrated his experience with willow in hand, and Dion, who although looking like he had played 100 straight minutes of an AFL grand-final such was the exhaustion exhibited in his running between wickets unfurled an interesting repertoire of shots including the scoop over the keeper and the 270 degree reverse sweep to fine leg, both retired much to the applause and universal satisfaction of the Warriors side. However in retrospect this dual retirement undoubtedly favoured Kelawar as it brought two new batsmen to the middle.

With the game carefully poised at the beginning of the seventeenth over with Warriors requiring forty, Old Speed's belief in Graeme Witt paid dividends as he bowled an unheralded match-sealing over that resulted in only three runs and a prized wicket. [The first delivery of Witt's spell should have resulted in a simple catch by Old Speed at mid-wicket but for the past-his-prime reasons previously mentioned.] Thereafter the task for the Warriors was simply too much as Young Speed, Witt and Storer reaped the spoils taking four tired and desperate wickets at the death. Young Speed in particular earned all his wickets by knocking over the castle, demonstrating the usefulness of bowling wicket to wicket in the short-form of the game. Complemented by solid and alert, though not entirely error-free, fielding, Kelawar's turn in the field was the main reason for the difference in the scoreline.

Earlier, after winning the toss and electing to bat in near-perfect conditions, Vallis and Matt Ford signalled their intent by getting Kelawar off to a strong start which featured respectable boundaries and brave running between the wickets. Ford in particular looked eager to make a bundle and his timing was beginning to come on, but shortly after running his first brace since, well, er, this writer can ever remember, a push and run to mid-on saw him fall agonisingly short to a direct hit at the bowler's end. Vallis too looked good, before misjudging a sharper delivery from one of the Warriors' left-handed contingency that saw his middle stump up-rooted.

Andy Murray-Watson, fresh from swatting ex-Bangladesh test bowlers for maximums in the recent Kelawar-Chittagong feature, strode to the crease confident and attentive. His initial watchfulness turned into hurried slaps outside off and several attempted hoicks across the line. While not at his best, being occasionally unsettled by some of Warriors' sharper bowlers, he was mostly on top of his game and made it to twenty-four with ease before snapping back to test mode to take almost three overs to finally reach his retirement. At the other end Porter had no troubles whether it was flicking, pushing, blocking, driving, or guiding and made it to his retirement before Murray-Watson did. Together they added fifty-five in what was the building blocks of the Kelawar innings (2-86 after 10).

Thereafter Lee and Ranjith Rangarajan kept the scoreboard rattling with a mix of fearless running between wickets, well-despatched fours and rope-clearers (one of which saw the loss of the ball over the far fence). For the most part their partnership (of 53), like the Porter-Murray-Watson partnership, demonstrated the type of fluency that every Kelawar pairing strives to fulfil, and although Ranjith had the sporadic struggle adjusting to the slowness of the pitch and strangely calling suicidal runs which were rightfully rejected by Lee, the two elevated the score to something that could be launched to stratospheric levels in the death overs.

Unfortunately after the retirement of Lee in the fourteenth over and Ranjith's soft dismissal shortly after (3-157 after 17), the experienced pairing of Morgan and Storer could not put the total out of reach for the Warriors outfit. But although both men struggled to hit out, the damage with the bat had been done by the upper order and having followed it up with a solid bowling and fielding performance the Kelawar victory was a deserved one.