

23 April 2011

Norfolk Alliance Premier League

Diss CC V Downham Town CC

Many onlookers thought Diss had drawn the short straw as they invited reigning champions of four consecutive years to the Rectory Meadow on Saturday. However, after last year's nail-biting tie Diss knew they had what it takes to stretch their quality counterparts to the limit.

The only change from the side that thrashed Lowestoft in last week's friendly was the difficult decision to leave out Jamie Allen for Alex Blakely.

Simon Cooper lost the toss, but somewhat surprisingly Diss found themselves batting first on a pitch that appeared it would offer very little for the bowlers. The successful pre-season opening pair of Simon Cooper and Ben Spinks looked to get Diss off to a solid start but with only seven runs on the board Cooper (4) drove loosely at an Alex Stuart delivery and was well caught in the gully. This brought David Tooke to the crease who got himself underway with some exquisitely placed pull-shots. However, Spinks (5) was soon to fall in almost identical fashion to his opening partner; this time Josh Stuart was the bowler.

The next partnership between Chris Cooper and Tooke was to be Diss' best of their innings as the pair played fluently and put on fifty runs together. Cooper eventually fell for nineteen, as PJ Cairns, the Downham overseas pro, tempted him into an expansive drive, but the ball gripped, caught the outside edge, and the catch was taken at slip.

Diss' next four wickets all fell with the batsman failing to reach double figures, and in doing so made batting look much harder than what was first perceived. In complete contrast the mainstay was David Tooke as soured past his fifty, mixing brutal back foot cuts and pulls with elegant front foot stroke-play.

In at nine, James Shepherd (8 not out), along with Tooke helped to drag the score towards respectability. Tooke released some lusty blows in the final few overs, and finished agonisingly one run short of a well deserved hundred on ninety-nine not out. Diss ended on 167 for seven after their fifty overs; a little way short of the 200 benchmark they had set themselves.

Diss knew that to protect such a score they would have to take regular wickets and bowl Downham out. They got off to the perfect start when James Shepherd, in his first competitive over for Diss, bowled A. Stuart with a brilliant in-swinging yorker. Diss continued to keep the scoring rate down with some excellent bowling and pieces of individual brilliance in the field, and their vigilance paid off as Tullett (15) drove a wide Chris Germon delivery straight into the hands of Chris Cooper at cover.

Thirty-three for two soon turned into thirty-three for four as Germon and Shepherd picked up another wicket each, with Tom Weal taking both catches behind the stumps. The home side's tails were up and

Downham were starting to crumble under the pressure with an ever-increasing partisan crowd baying for more wickets. After a frustrating 40-run stand between Harrison and Forder, Diss duly obliged, as Rob Tooke had the latter trapped in front for 12 and then the former caught smartly by Weal for 23. With Downham 79 for six Diss were beginning to dream.

Dreams started to turn into reality as Chris Cooper entered the fray and another LBW decision went Diss' way, Rob Tooke soon struck again as he trapped Tansley in front for naught. Diss thought they had the key wicket of Todd just before the second drinks break but controversially the decision was overturned, as the umpires ruled it a bump-ball. However, soon after they were celebrating the wicket of King who snapped under the pressure and hauled out to Tooke with Germon taking the simple catch.

While Diss needed just one more wicket to hand Downham only their second defeat in almost three years of league cricket, Downham required an unlikely seventy-four runs to deny Diss for the second year running. After a frustrating few overs, Greg Tulett, Downham's number eleven, started to throw caution to the wind and planted two massive sixes straight back over the bowlers head. With Downham inching ever closer Diss turned their hopes to Germon to wrap the game up, and with the score on 133 he did exactly that as Todd fended a rising delivery into the vacant cover region only for Will Dawson to complete a fine diving catch. Cue celebrations.

David Tooke was rightfully awarded the man-of-the-match award, as his monumental innings was made all the more special as the second highest score in the match was just 26.

Diss CC 167 for 7 (D. Tooke 99 not out), beat Downham Town CC 133 all out (R. Tooke 4 for 40, C. Germon 3 for 30) by 34 runs.