

Sports News

The Battle for Les Bails d'Or



With the recent controversy regarding match fixing in cricket, the back pages lost track of the most significant cricket event of the summer, the series between St. Michael's and St. Georges.

The fixture this year was set for September 18th and with the series being level, the tension before the game was almost bearable. We play the 20/20 format of cricket, which although may not suit the purists, does promote fast attacking stroke play. More importantly it also means we get to play with a ball that looks like a luminous orange.

History recalls that the first match in the series was won by St. Michael's in a fondly remembered classic back in 2008 at Headley cricket ground. We notched up a highly competitive 215 and then managed to restrict St. George's to 214.

In 2009 St. Michael's fielded a highly experimental side which resulted in a defeat that even charitable observers would not describe as 'close'. St. George's adopted a more traditional approach to their game which involved scoring significantly more runs than us. Whilst we placed emphasis on style, they focused very much on substance. The final score has been successfully erased from collective memories, but the important statistic became the 1:1 draw in the series.

With the scores all equal and to commemorate the fact that the fixture was now established on the calendar, it was felt that we ought to play for a trophy of some form. Although cricket trophies are available at reasonable prices, for some reason I decided that a more personal touch was required. So with a small slab of marble from an old quiz trophy, a block of wood, some 'Letraset' word transfers, a set of bails and some gold paint, I created 'Les Bails D'Or' (The Golden Bails). I would like it noted that using French was not in any way being pretentious on my part ('Moi!'), but simply because I did not have enough transfers to spell out Golden. I correctly guessed that the French for bails was les bails - as a French teacher I have always enjoyed great success teaching sporting terms (i.e. le football, le rugby, le golf, le cricket, etc.).

With a trophy to play for, the stakes seemed even higher, so it was very pleasing as captain to note that not only did all eleven players on the team turn up, but the vast majority had 'proper' cricket kit as well.

The scene at Headley was set for a great game of cricket and thankfully both sides delivered. The first success of the day was winning the toss. If the game had for any reason to be finished early due to bad light (unlikely) or too many injuries (likely) I would claim this as a match-winning event, never mind the Duckworth-Lewis. I had originally thought that I would elect to bat first on winning the toss, but Simon Alldridge had gently persuaded me that we would be better chasing a score than trying to establish one. As a good captain I listened to my team and changed my mind. However, a good captain should probably have thought of this in the first place.

My next role as captain was the team talk. I had thought of quoting from Andy McGregor's favourite film *Gladiator* ('On my command, unleash Hell!') but I felt there might be risks involved; Andy might lose his head in the adrenaline rush and we needed calm heads out on the battlefield today. Instead I simply reminded everyone how many balls there were to the over, ran through the list of injuries that we needed to bear in mind (who can't run because of their knees and who can't throw because of a bad shoulder etc.) and then reminded everyone about cakes at the interval.

There's a very evocative scene from the 2010 World Cup final; when the two teams walk past the World Cup trophy on the way to the pitch, the captains glance at it, knowing that one of them at the end of the game will lift the trophy to the acclaim of millions around the world and be a hero to their nation. As I jogged past Les Bails D'Or on the way to the pitch I merely noticed that I'd left a dab of glue on the base.

Team tactics were simply that everyone should get to bowl and we would try to make sure everyone gets to bat. We kept St. George's in check for the most part with some tight bowling and committed fielding. Matthew Mcloughlin's brave fielding deserves a mention here. The latest sports science technology uses GPS trackers to record a players' movement during a game. With Matthew we could simply follow drops of blood and bits of finger around the pitch.

St. George's managed to score 227, which seemed a long way off when we lost a couple early wickets, but we started to stabilise and once we had fully digested our tea and cake from the interval we regained our confidence and appetite for scoring runs rather than more cake.

There were a number of dramas along the way, for example, when I managed to get a decent hit I was caught on the boundary only for the fielder to land with a foot against the fence. My mind raced through the rule book; I initially thought that I would be given 6 and Out as that seemed the most obvious, but as I prepared to walk I remembered that this was no back garden knockabout, but a proper game of cricket. By such margins are games won and lost, the 6 stood, the fielder was despondent after such a great catch and I had a second life.

Although we lost further wickets we scored at a decent rate and it soon became evident that this match would go to the wire. At this stage the contribution from Neil Brettell deserves a mention. Out of the team due to a bad finger injury, he risked further damage to his grim looking little finger by keeping the scoreboard ticking over. This signalled to the batsmen exactly what they had to do - keep a calm head and keep plugging away at singles.

In the final over we had left ourselves with 6 to score off 6 balls. Two singles and then a 4 from Simon Arnott sealed the victory. The 'crowd' went wild; indeed, someone went to put the kettle on.

Having a trophy to present brought a degree of ceremony to the end of the day. I was very proud to be presented with Les Bails D'or, especially as I could now take them back home to clean off the glue. There was word of burning the trophy and creating the St. Giles Ashes. Apparently the church at St. Giles was once a Catholic one so this seemed to be neutral. I do like the idea of pilgrims coming to Ashted as they have heard that St. Giles ashes are around, only to find the remains of cricket stumps.

If anyone wants to take part next year then please let me know, as I will be devising a fitness programme for everyone to work through during the winter. Selection up to now has primarily been based on who responds first to emails and who is free on a Saturday afternoon in mid-September.

Thanks are extended to the St. George's team. The games are played in the appropriate manner; competitive enough for it to be fun and with a respect for the ideals of the game of cricket, but not taken too seriously.



Collecting the trophy from St. George's captain Simon Calverley



Above, the two teams

Representing St. Michael's:

Simon Alldridge, David Gwyther, Simon Arnett, Pete Leonard, Pete Tisi, Simon Fielder,
Rob Wint, Eunan McGregor, Joe Tisi, Matthew Mcloughlin, Andy McGregor

Peter Tisi