

Arcadians survive scare and remain on course for survival

Walferdange, Luxembourg - 1 August 2010

Optimists versus Arcadians CC Ghent, BCF League 2

Result: Arcadians win by one wicket

Blood on lily-whites. And the game had yet to commence. Taking advantage of an early arrival, the Arcadians put in an early morning net session at the picturesque Pierre Warner ground in Walferdange. Unfortunately, Lahka took a blow to the snout, and bloodied his attire. No harm done, patched up and ready, he resumed 12th-man duties while the other off-field hero, Niki Lin, sharpened his pencil. Little did he know that he would be scoring a roller-coaster of a match. However, before the drama - a BIG thanks to Niki and Lahka for travelling a round-trip of 600 kms to support the side.

Skipper André once again bet on red instead of black, and the tossing-failure soon had Arcadians in the field. Wagener and Syed were tasked with the new ball. While showing tremendous pace, and not to forget formidable away swing, Wagener was too good and too quick to find the edge. Openers Suresh Kalagara and Paul Monico soon found the over-pitched bowling from Khurram Syed to their liking and dispatched some hefty boundaries. Suresh, a tall elegant stroke player, looked extremely dangerous. And supported by his resolute captain, Monico, the pair soon started to find plenty of gaps through the off-side. However, just as Suresh was hitting his strides, Khurram Syed produced a peach of a delivery that Kalagara gloved to the gleeful keeper. A big wicket had fallen. 25-1. Monico, adorning a black felt Ché Comrade cap (to show he is captain? Il Duce – Wags perhaps you should try the same?), buckled down and ground out some valuable runs with Aanand Pattabiraman.

Alas, before Vannie Thompson's parents arrived at the ground, the sanguine 'pace-man' from East London (SA) bowled Pattabiraman with a juicy out-swinging yorker. 65 – 2, and the visitors were edging ahead. For Thompson, things didn't get much better with the ball. After this he was wayward and expensive, and duly removed from the attack. And to make things worse, the gazelle-like fielder appeared to pull a groin muscle while trying to stop a boundary at long-on. With Lahka back in civilian clothes, Vannie (you are 'our Haanee') battled on in the field. A blow to lose such a talented bowler, but Vannie would have a major part to play later in the game.

Hot – yes it was. And after 15 overs Peter De Boeck called for drinks. The Optimists had seized the upper-hand with sensible batting from Monico. 102 – 2, at the interval, and Wagener rallied the troops with a battle-cry. The gist being that the bowlers were too loose and needed to sharpen up. And so they did! Two quick wickets followed, and the Arcadians had their tails up. First, Van Poucke brought on at the black-cow end, slung down a good length ball to Taral Desai who snicked a fine one to Gregson behind the wicket. Umpire gave Kumar the decision and Desai was back in the

hutch. Then followed a clever piece of bowling from the experienced Wasantha Medagoda. Bowling exceptional line and length, he got under the skin of Monico who uncharacteristically had a wild swipe at a decent ball and Balvir Singh's huge mitts were waiting in the outfield. These quick wickets certainly changed the complexion of the game.

The new pair of Visharanath and Pandey struggled to find the gaps as the Arcadians turned the screw. Captain Wagener decided to try some alternatives to seam in the form of Chaitya Khare and Sammy Zoheel. He wasn't to be disappointed. Khare, a masterful deliverer of line and length strangled the runs with dot ball after dot ball. His figures of 5 overs for 14 (with a maiden) were hugely influential in stemming the runs. Furthermore, Burt Reynolds would have been proud of the upper-lip hair sported by Ghent's Dutch all-rounder. At the other end, Zoheel was poetry in motion. Full flight, guile and spin. Almost unplayable. In a fair world, Khare deserved at least one wicket, but it was to be Zoheel's day. His four-wicket haul put the mockers on the hosts. Before Arcadians' Weekly Post describes the victims, there was a masterful piece of fielding to digest. Roshen Visharanath drove an easy single into the gap between cover and extra cover. Confident in his ability to make the run he ambled towards the bowler's end. But, how wrong he was. Swopping like an orang-utan on the last banana, Tom, Tom the Ginger B(r)ea(r)d man, pounced on the ball. A direct shy at the stumps had the astonished batsman returning to the pavilion. A Johnty Rhodes masterclass!

Time for some spin stories? Zoheel's victims:

1. Aanand Pandey – A slog sweep had him caught in the deep by the reliable Van Poucke.
2. Keeper, Tim Andrews, played through the ball too early and spooned a regulation catch back to Sammy.
3. Ravi Ramanathan could have been given out in two different ways – Gregson gloved a fine edge and then stumped the batsman who had wandered out of his crease. De Boeck agreed with the latter, and Zoheel was now on three wickets.
4. Chris Evans soon followed. Skipper Wagener taking a sharp chance in the slips.

At this stage, Arcadians had transformed 102 - 2 after 15 overs into 193 – 9, thanks largely to splendid bowling from Khare, Wagener (no wickets but economical at 22 runs of 9 overs) and Zoheel (4 for 21 of 6 overs). Blood was now in the tank, and the great Ginger Shark cleaned up with a regulation nick to Gregson behind the stumps. Given the position after 15 overs, the away side were extremely satisfied with their recovery. 193, easy to track down? *Non? Mais oui...*We'd do this with a few wickets to spare surely...Hold on to your hats.

Tea safely put away, Baljinder Singh and Chaitya Khare looked to tuck into the Optimists' bowling. However, Taral had other ideas and swiftly removed Khare for a couple of runs with a bending in-swing. Colin Walker strode to the crease. Walker has scored many-a-run at this lovely ground in Luxembourg in the past, but today was not to be his day. An in-jagging cherry which kept low, again from Talal, and Walker's stumps were sent cart-wheeling. 23 – 2 after 6 overs. Not what the doctor ordered. In at 4 was the dependable Van Poucke. Here the Belgian international did not fail. Supported by the 19-year-old Baljinder Singh, the pair steadied the ship. Singh is a real find for the Arcadians. At only 19, he showed immense grit and determination, playing the balls on their merit

and stealing 1s and 2s wherever he could. Baljinder's knock of 22 in 26 overs was precisely the way an opening bat should weather the heavy quicks. Van Poucke was soon delivering some crisp strokes to all parts of the ground. The youth of Chris Evans showed and he delivered too many short pitched deliveries which Van Poucke put away with ease. On 44 runs, the British Virginian (what do you expect with such a mouth piece?) went for the big swing. Unfortunately, he holed out 10 yards away from the boundary and 10 yards away from a deserved 50.

Next up the illustrious Pakistani all-rounder Syed. A couple of hefty strikes soon saw him to double figures. Then tragedy. An awful LBW decision had him back with the rest of the team on the bench. Gregson's offered suggestion of calling for the third umpire went down like a lead balloon. He'd hit the ball well before the ball struck his pads. That's cricket, though. Some you win, and some you lose. You could even compare it to losing money to friends at the poker table.

André Wagener polished his specks and took up his blade to do battle with the Optimists' bowling. Now, Captain Monico turned to his surprise weapon and unleashed Suresh Kalagara on the unsuspecting visitors. By far the quickest of the bowlers, Suresh was also producing large amounts of away-swing. Wagener was his first victim, slashing away at a good ball which took the bottom edge and then the three sticks. Panic stations. 115 – 6, still 80-odd runs away from victory. Seasoned veteran Wassie joined Baljinder in the middle. Amazingly, Baljinder had not put a foot wrong all day, and it was surprising to see him play a false shot and miss one to Piran - LBW. A good wicket for the young Optimists spinner. This lad has a great future in cricket. Keeper Gregson and Medagoda now had a mountain to climb. But, as the old adage goes, every 1,000 mile journey starts with the first step. Controlled batting saw Medagoda deal with Piran's spin. Gregson at the other end was far from comfortable with Suresh's pace and swing. Yet, the pair dug deep and started to amass the 5-an-over required. Some nice cover driving from Medagoda had Suresh wondering what he was doing wrong.

With the 50-partnership a reality, belief was spreading among the Arcadians. We could do this. 8 overs left and 30 runs to get. But, in typical Arcadians' fashion, the visitors were determined to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. First, Medagoda swiped a short-pitch ball straight up to long-on. His cries of: "Drop it, drop it!" went unheeded and Monico took a high catch. Nevertheless, Wassie had done a sterling job. His 31 runs were precisely what the side needed. Sammy joined Gregson at the crease. And after some wishful swings and misses, Zoheel got his head down. Arcadians only needed 3-an-over at this point in the contest. Gregson foolishly tried to turn a 2 into a 3 and was sharply run out for 25. 181 – 8. 2 wickets left and 13 runs to get.

Kumar dictated Zoheel to be LBW to Suresh soon thereafter, and the Optimists sensed that they could nick a win. But a surreal calm filtered over the ground. At the crease the two most laid-back batsmen that you could hope for – Balvir and Vannie T. Off the field, fingernails were being bitten to the nub and cigarettes smoked 10-to-a-dozen. And yours truly could hardly bare to watch. Thompson struck a hefty 4, and the Arcadians were within single figures. With Monico's field now all brought in, some streaky shoots over the top took the visitors within touching distance. Balvir was on hand to produce the *coup de grace* with a leg-side single which took the Arcadians to the promised land of 194. A narrow victory of one wicket!! Breatheeee. A good result for the visitors, but nobody deserved to lose this barn-stormer. The result leaves three teams staring down the

barrel of Division Three cricket next season...Will it be Antwerp, Arcadians or Optimists? Your roving reporter will in Mariakerke next Sunday for the Arcadians v Antwerp show down. Mg2010