

London Erratics v Balliol Erratics

Erratics (of London or Balliol) waking up to torrential rain might not have expected to play cricket that afternoon; but thanks to hard work by Jim Head (Erratic of both cities and dedicated groundsman) and to Balliol's possession of covers (why was I so unappreciative when there?), our oldest fixture could start on time, under clearing skies. Jim himself missed the game with a calf tear: a relief to our bowlers, but denying us the chance to work out why his bowling which looks so innocuous takes so many wickets.

Thanks to multiple droppings out and in, and confusion as to how many were left standing, London Erratics fielded 12 (but no more than 11 at any time). We included there debutants – John Butcher (squash partner of Matthew Eltringham), George Dabby (Richard Heller's latest young find from Holland Park nets), and Thinehavone (aka Tim) Soutphommasane (ex-colleague of Michael Stephenson, Balliol graduate student and first XI player – which caused some Balliol muttering – and, with a name like that, obviously an Australian), plus a revenant, Richard Carver (Southfield Superstar and occasional distant past Erratic).

The toss was settled by negotiation, with London batting first, since several Balliol men had early evening engagements more alluring than cricket. Balliol captain Chris Bodimeade suggested a 40-over game, but our skipper Chris Dunabin rashly said 'We quite like to play time' – an unwise move in the eyes of those hungry for victories, though applauded by the cognoscenti in the crowd (RW) as making for a more interesting game – which it did. Is lack of a killer instinct in pre-match negotiation Chris's Achilles heel as captain – see also FC London game in 2007. [No, he has many others – Ed]

Had regular opener James Rivington been changed by the start time, the batting order – and perhaps what ensued – might have been different. As it was, Chris asked Richard C and Tim S to open, on the principle of seeing what fresh talent had to offer. The pitch was slow but essentially batsman-friendly; Balliol's opening attack were lively but occasionally wayward; and Tim and Richard accumulated steadily. On 25, Richard played across a straight one, and Nasir Khawaja picked up where he left off. Balliol rotated the attack, and Tim accelerated, with some thumping drives and pulls, being especially harsh on the final over from James Villalard, recent London Erratics debutant. Tim reached 50 out of 80-odd and 100 out of 150, at which point Chris, umpiring, suggested it might be time to give someone else a go, so Tim demonstrated his skill to the full by picking out a fielder at long-on who could catch. Tim is the third London Erratic to score a century on debut: we hope that, unlike W Hickman (who?) in 1989, and Adam Mellows-Facer in 2005, he doesn't immediately conclude that he should be playing a higher class of cricket.

Nasir went on accumulating undemonstratively. John Butcher, our next debutant, looked stylish and solid, but unluckily fell cheaply when a yorker slowly bounced up from the toe of his bat and just dislodged a bail. Chris, sensing that we had a competitive total, reshuffled the batting order to give fresh young talent its chance. George Dabby appeared competent and unruffled, but soon holed out at in the covers. This brought Jaspar Khawaja to join his father at the crease for the first time ever. Spectators tensed in anticipation of a run-out drama and harsh paternal censure; but in the event Nasir walked for a catch behind. Brian Berrigan joined Jaspar for long enough for the latter to equal his highest score, when Chris called them in: if forewarned, he might have delayed the declaration for a ball or three. (Sorry Jaspar.) On the other hand, perhaps he should have declared sooner: Balliol sage Jim Head was rumoured to have said that 150 would be enough.

Alex, opening the bowling, generated good pace and bounce, mostly on a good line; with Michael Stephenson giving little away at the other end, Balliol's top order were unable to cope. Balliol's No. 5 looked to be their danger-man, putting both bowlers away with stylish on-drives; but Alex had his revenge, taking a sharp low caught and bowled when the batsman tried to repeat the stroke to a straighter ball.

Matthew Eltringham, replacing Michael, and Jaspar, replacing Alex, bowled tidily and took a wicket each, Jaspar's a neat return catch, and by the 17th over Balliol were 52 for 7. At this point, captain Chris Bodimeade, batting at 8, concluded that victory was out of reach, and with his new partner settled in to hang on for the draw.

Chris rotated the attack, introducing his own loopy pretend leg-breaks in the hope of persuading Balliol that 7.5 an over was still achievable – they were too prudent to fall for that – and asking George to show us what he could do at the other end – respectable medium pace as it turned out. At this point, the London Erratic fielding fell from grace. Until then, we had held every chance offered: besides Alex's and Jaspar's c&bs, Nasir and James had taken routine dollies, Chris and Tim slightly more missable ones at gully and cover.

And then ... Icarus fell to earth. Nemesis was visited on hubris. James, on taking his earlier catch, was heard to point out that it was his fourth this season. We were presumably meant to draw some conclusion about superior technique. But, presented with the opportunity to display this and add a fifth, a simple chance at short extra, did he take it? The answer lies – or rather doesn't – in the scorebook (which doesn't lie). (Sorry James.) And then, off successive balls, George missed one off his own bowling (return catches are never easy), and Alex dropped a low chance at mid-off.

Buoyed by those reprieves, Balliol's 8th-wicket pair stayed for 16 overs, showing great restraint in adding only 24. After a brief spell from James in which he failed to atone for that miss, Chris turned – perhaps belatedly – to Erratic all-time leading wicket-taker Brian, and soon afterwards brought back Alex. Brian made one breakthrough, having the No. 9 – beneficiary of all three drops – judged caught behind off a ball that some thought had brushed his hip (by then we were in no mood to query the umpire's verdict); but the No. 10 proved similarly adhesive and stayed with his captain to the end.

London Erratics 209 for 5 off 43 overs, Balliol 81 for 8 off 38. The crowds flocking to the IPL would have been unimpressed. Perhaps a 40-over match would have delivered us the glow of victory; but all tension would have evaporated long before the scheduled close.

CD

LONDON ERRATICS — batting

		4s	6s
Soutphommasane	caught	114	20
Carver	bowled	25	3
† Khawaja N	caught	37	1
Butcher	bowled	6	1
Dabby	caught	7	
Khawaja J	NOT OUT	3	
Berrigan	NOT OUT	0	
Stephenson			
Rivington			
Eltringham			
Padmore			
* Dunabin			

209 for 5 dec

Fall of wickets: 1(Carver)–71, 2(Southpammasane)–169, 3(Butcher)–184, 4(Dabby)–197, 5(KhawajaN)–206

BALLIOL ERRATICS — batting

1	c Khawaja N	b Padmore	0
2		b Padmore	5
3	c S'phommasane	b Stephenson	2
4	c Dunabin	b Padmore	8
5	c & b	b Padmore	24
6	c Rivington	b Eltringham	5
7	c & b	b Khawaja J	0
8	not out		9
9	c Khawaja N	b Berrigan	5
10	not out		1
11			

81 for 8

Fall of wickets: 1–0, 2–7, 3–12, 4–42, 5–47, 6–52, 7–52, 8–76

LONDON ERRATICS — bowling

Padmore	11	3	19	4
Stephenson	6	0	22	1
Eltringham	5	1	12	1
Khawaja J	3	0	6	1
Dabby	4	2	3	0
Dunabin	3	0	6	0
Rivington	2	1	5	0
Berrigan	4	0	4	1

MATCH DRAWN