

London Erratics v *The Times*

Having recruited a useful squad, match manager Richard Heller stood aside (apart from some substitute fielding), and Matthew Neal took the reins. *The Times* won the toss and elected to bat.

Simon Green initially assumed the gloves, as the potent pair of Alex Towers and Michael Stephenson steamed in. After a few fizzy overs that kept the opening batsmen quiet, debutant James Poole (aka Harry Bear, parliamentary candidate for Henley) arrived to take over behind the stumps.

As the batsmen tried to release the shackles, they gave one or two difficult chances. But they tended to hit the ball quite hard, and there were several bruised fingers – no longer protected by the gloves, Simon had to be bandaged up.

The change bowlers tried hard, but the batsmen were pretty ruthless with the loose deliveries – even when the field was adjusted to try and combat their preferred shots – and it was hard to see where a wicket was going to come from.

The score ground ever upwards. It didn't feel like the sort of battering that the Erratics have sometimes suffered, just an effectively remorseless flow of runs. The bats seemed slightly less at ease when there was less pace on the ball, so Matthew N tossed it up, and there was a later experiment with Chris Dunabin. But it was really a day when you were lucky *not* to be called on to bowl.

Alex came back for a final burst (Michael had tweaked a leg muscle early on), but this only spoiled his figures. Unaware of how close they were to shattering a most unwelcome Erratics record (Hartfield's 245 for 0 dec in 1999), *The Times*'s Michael Evans mercifully declared.

It was with hollow bravado that the Erratics recalled that glorious day in Sussex nine years earlier, when they had overturned that mighty total. But the line up was not without calibre, and there was much communal resolve about building a proper innings.

James P smashed a square cut to the boundary – except it was plucked out of the air en route. Matthew N strode out purposefully, but couldn't control the frustration he had been feeling as skipper. Both John Butcher and then debutant Bill Coales looked solid, up to the moment when they were surprisingly out.

Another shameful disintegration threatened – made worse by the fact that the injured Simon had already withdrawn. But there now blossomed a fine display of all the character, grit and skill that had deserted the Erratics recently. Matthew Eltringham displayed great control and restraint – then would thump a mighty boundary. At the other end, young George Dabby proved solid and brave in defence – even when wrapped on the arm by a beamer – and stole singles where he could.

As the pair stood firm, the tension on the boundary eased: indeed Matthew N's captaincy at this point was completely relaxed – he was laid out asleep in the pavilion. Now just 20 overs to survive ... now 10. *The Times* tried pace, they tried spin, they tried changing the ball – but to no avail. And 1 hour 23 minutes after George had walked out, he and Matthew E were applauded back by their team mates. The overall scoreline may not look particularly impressive, but I think we will look back on this as Matthew E's finest knock for the Erratics so far – as he added focus to his existing skill and power, to become the complete batsman.

JR

THE TIMES — batting

1	Mawson	not out	107
2	Gullick	not out	119
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			

236 for 0 dec

LONDON ERRATICS — bowling

Towers	9	0	38	0
Stephenson	6	1	18	0
Eltringham	5	0	47	0
Dabby	6	0	43	0
Neal	5	0	40	0
Green S	3	0	24	0
Dunabin	3	0	22	0

Fall of wickets: —

LONDON ERRATICS — batting

4s 6s

† Poole	caught	3		
Butcher	bowled	7		
* Neal	caught	3		
Coales	bowled	5		
Eltringham	NOT OUT	61	9	3
Dabby	NOT OUT	9		
Rivington				
Dunabin				
Stephenson				
Towers				
† Green S				

107 for 4

Fall of wickets: 1(Poole)–4, 2(Neal)–14, 3(Butcher)–17, 4(Coales)–39

MATCH DRAWN