

The Skippers' Column

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Chairman's End-of-Year Report March 2014

I am happy to report that 2013 was another year of accomplishment for your cricket club.

On the field, the improved weather meant that we played 23 weekend games, of which 13 were won and only 7 lost. However, despite the relative youth of our team, we were defeated in all 3 Twenty20 games, proving, I feel, that our cricketing prowess leans more toward the cultured than the agricultural (local farmers notwithstanding!).

Unfortunately, both scheduled Saturday games were cancelled due to a lack of players, leading us reluctantly to the decision that the club will henceforth play only one game per weekend and always on a Sunday. We similarly failed to raise a side to play Heartaches and we risk losing this prestigious fixture (and the support of an eminent and generous Vice-President) should we let them down again this season....so please put 18th May in your diaries now.

It would be impertinent of me to dwell on the inaugural fixture between Stonor CC and a scratch XI raised by your Chairman...or indeed the result of the game, or for that matter, my son-in-law scoring the winning runs! Instead, I will just highlight the lovely family atmosphere, the BBQ lunch (kindly prepared by Peter) and Alison's tea, enhanced by Ian and Michelle's delicious homemade cakes. I fear a more ruthless approach to this game from Stonor in 2014!

Thanks to the efforts of your committee and support from members, families, friends and VP's of the club, we managed to raise the finance necessary to replace the leaking pavilion roof and the job was completed at the end of the year. Little did we realize just how timely it proved to be! Old Father Time is still having a lie down in the changing room but I have informed our roofing contractor, who also happens to be Greys Green's opening bowler, that we will dispatch him to all parts of the ground if the clock tower is not back in place before the start of the season.....and that he may notice he bowls more no-balls and wides than usual!

Happily, despite the cost of the new roof plus the repairs to a seized engine on the outfield mower, the club ended the year free of debt for the first time in a decade or more.

More than half of the £4000 that we raised last year came from the Midsummer Party, the result of a tremendous collective effort by the club to stage an event for almost 100 people. From amongst the many contributions from club members, I would like to single out Dan Austin who performed a great set of cover versions, mixed with his own compositions and Guy Bradshaw, who managed to secure sponsorship for the auction prizes and the beer, thereby ensuring all our income from these items was clear profit.

Other fund-raising innovations included Ian Harris's pre-season Music Quiz and John's Cheltenham Preview evening, both of which raised over £300 and provided revealing insights about our Vice-Captain's liking for camp 1980's electronica sung in a falsetto voice and our Skipper's fascination with lining bookmakers' pockets!

On more mundane matters, ground improvements continued apace. The autumn refurbishment of the square was carried out and, clearly invigorated by the new roof, your evergreen maintenance team (average age 73), recently set to work redecorating the interior of the pavilion. Apparently inspired by the team's visit to the Royal Lympington Yacht Club during last year's tour, the classical royal blue and white colour scheme of the walls and beams has now been enhanced by the former Chairman's spontaneous decision to paint all the nuts and bolts bright yellow, thereby (quote) "imitating the club's colours".

We are very fortunate at Stonor to have a group of Vice-Presidents who take an active interest in the club and to share our ground with the V&A Cricket Club who are respectful and reliable tenants, despite having the temerity to take first prize in our Quiz Night at the first time of asking! We're also lucky to have a terrific groundsman in Titch Vickers. My thanks go to them all.

From within the membership, Peter continues to help the club in so many ways –his social network and understanding of what it takes to host an event have been invaluable; Tony helps to keep the pavilion standing and the outfield in good shape, as well as providing his usual sage advice from the Grumpy bench; Richard seems to have the equipment or the contacts to fix anything, and, not only provided us with a second shipping container, but also giftwrapped and delivered it personally; Marc has rallied the troops for many a get-together during his 8-year tenure as Social Secretary; Sandra is a brilliantly efficient secretary, Steffen has kept the pavilion ship-shape and Ashley has scandalised the fixture-organising world of South Oxfordshire with his desire to get our fixtures completed and in place more than two weeks before the start of the season! Ellie was a worthy winner of the Bob Davies Club Member of the Year Award, as much for her ability to defend the club’s honour as for her meticulous scoring. Sadly, Olly Nicholson stood down after almost 15 years building and managing the club’s website but Chris Maidlow has kindly agreed to take over, once he has returned from his world tour. These people are the heartbeat of the club and, as with the volunteers who prepare food for our games and our events, we owe them a debt of gratitude.

Finally, John has decided to stand down as Team Captain. His ability to involve everyone in the game, without losing sight of the result, has made him an outstanding skipper over the last 5 years and his leadership will be missed. His philosophy is echoed in the words of an American Football writer named Grantland Rice who captured the true spirit of village cricket when he wrote these words many years ago.....

“For when the Old Great Scorer comes

To mark against your name

He writes, not that you won or lost

But how you played the game”

I’m sure that, with your support, John’s successor will ensure we continue to play the game in the spirit of Grantland Rice’s words.

Nigel.

Chairman’s End-of-Year Report Feb 2013

I am pleased to report that Stonor Cricket Club emerged from one of the wettest cricket seasons in living memory with its playing, social and financial balance sheets well in credit.

Congratulations to the team for winning 11 out of 19 games. For those that managed to avoid the Stonor injury jinx, the highlight of an enjoyable season was the summer tour to the New Forest, efficiently organized as ever by Olly. A successful tour is a great asset to a cricket club as it brings together competitive cricket in a different part of the country and social time away from the usual pressures of life close to home. The introduction of some Twenty20 cricket on weekday evenings has also met with widespread approval, although the unrelenting pace of the game clearly favours those with youth on their side.

Away from the heat of battle, your ageing pavilion maintenance team managed eventually to remove several layers of flaking paintwork from the South end of the pavilion before re-painting it in a fetching shade of emerald green, specially selected by Peter from Victoria Beckham’s 2012 collection; the pavilion steps were then upgraded to meet building regulations and ensure Tony can get into the pavilion for a few more years yet; and more recently, a raised floor has been installed in the changing room and locking storage area to prevent flood damage. On a practical level, we’ve hopefully managed to retain the services of our match-day chefs and kitchen helpers by acquiring a dishwasher that actually washes dishes.

One of the most gratifying developments of the past few years has been the continuing success of our pavilion movie nights. The “Stonor Regal”, as it has become known locally, was originally Steffen’s brainchild and, whilst hard work to organize, it has the three-way benefit of involving the local community in the cricket club, providing a great night’s entertainment and raising funds from outside the club for projects such as the impending roof repairs.

Once again, we are hugely grateful to our Vice-Presidents whose generosity has allowed us to peg our subscriptions at the same level for the last seven years and helped to finance our ground maintenance work, and to our long-standing tenants the V&A Cricket Club, who always treat our facilities with respect and no little reverence.

As far as I am concerned, the main challenge over the next couple years is to shift the responsibility for running the club to the next generation. Two stalwarts of the club (three if you include me) are not getting any younger; Peter stepped down as Chairman a year ago; Tony will be 80 this year and has kindly agreed to continue mowing the outfield for one more season only; a lot of slack will need to be taken up as they scale down their contributions to the club.

On the plus side, the club will shortly be debt-free for the first time in many years and, whilst we can patch up the pavilion roof no longer, we do have a plan to raise the necessary funds so we can replace it. Each member of the committee has agreed to organize one or more events –Ian will host a pre-season Music Quiz, John has offered the club a share of the profits from his Cheltenham Preview in addition to running his well-established and popular Quiz Night, Marc is leading a team to organize a midsummer “Party on the Pitch” (using a marquee generously donated to the club by Mike Lakey) and Ashley will be running a monthly 100 Club draw from April onwards. Two more movie nights are planned for March and December. Marc’s team did investigate the possibility of a Summer Ball at Stonor Park but, despite Guy securing £2000 sponsorship from Savills, the numbers never quite looked good enough to justify the risk.

The playing surface looks in reasonable order. Last year, we took a calculated risk in not carrying out the autumn square renovation. Time will tell whether biennial treatment can be sustained in the future but, in any event, extensive rolling will be needed once we turn the corner into spring.

I’d like to express the club’s gratitude to John and his vice-captains for ensuring that Stonor plays its games competitively, but in the right spirit, to Sandra who deservedly won the “Clubman of the Year” award for her unstinting efforts, to Ashley for doing a great pro-active job in the first of his seventeen years as Fixture Secretary, to Marc, John and Steffen for helping out in different ways with the social events and to Olly for his work on the tour and the website. We should also recognise Titch Vickers who prepared the wickets each week with unremitting care and pride, although as a Lancastrian, he may lack some of the deeper insights of your Captain and Chairman! Finally, we should celebrate our life-members whose wisdom and fortitude have helped the club through another 12 months.

My philosophy is simple: Stonor is a God-given place to play cricket but we must keep the club moving forward at all costs, building on the past and making improvements each year. I hope we can all work together to achieve that objective.

Nigel.

Thursday 15th March 2012

Did you see the news yesterday? A hosepipe ban starting April 5th! What are they thinking of? Surely someone should have noticed that a far more effective drought remedy is just around the corner -one that is guaranteed to produce rain in copious quantities -oh yes, the cricket season starts on April 22nd!!

As you probably know, at the February AGM, we bade farewell to a Stonor legend with Peter Collings stepping down as Chairman after almost 20 years. The good news is that he will continue to be involved with the club as an Honorary Life Member -the bad news is that he will be hugely missed as Chairman. During his stewardship, the club has gone from strength to strength -practice nets with bowling machine, a new outfield mower (well, two to be more precise!), a fine playing surface, a pavilion with great social facilities and, most important, an improvement in the standard of our play. It is an honour to have been elected as his successor and I aim to carry on his excellent work, but with both Peter and Tony in their seventies (albeit still pretty sprightly!), the club will need your support off-the-field more than ever.

First of all (so you don't miss them), some important forthcoming dates for your diaries/Blackberrys/iPhones etc....

- Sunday April 1st -working party at the ground, followed (weather permitting) by an outdoor net -work on nets to be done first -please arrive by 10am
- Sunday April 15th -as above -all being well, our new groundsman, Titch Vickers, will be there so you get chance to meet him
- Saturday April 21st -eve-of-season dinner at The Crown -details to follow from Marc
- Sunday April 22nd -first game of the new season vs Weekenders at Stonor 2pm start
- Tuesday May 1st -deadline for 2012 subscriptions -please pay as soon as you are able
- Saturday May 5th -movie night in the pavilion "High Noon"

After six years with no change, subscriptions will once again be pegged at £50 (Adult Playing),£25 (Junior Playing) and £10 (Social). However, match fees will increase by £1 this season i.e. to £8 for senior players and £6 for juniors - still great value for an afternoon's entertainment. In addition, anyone prepared to commit to the club for 5 or 10 years can buy an inflation-proof membership at £230 (for 5 years) or £450 (for 10). The charge for teas will increase to £40 (for teams that offer us a home game) and £50 for all others.

A couple of housekeeping items....

- Please would Match Managers ensure the scorebook gets filled in after every game -including catches, run-outs, fall-of-wicket etc. This will help Ashley when it comes to compiling his epic year-end stats. Olly will send out a simple spreadsheet format which can be used to supply basic information to the Henley Standard.
- We are trying to expand our distribution list of "friends" of the club so that we can inform more people about forthcoming social events. Please let me know the e-mail address of anyone you believe may be interested in being added to the list
- Please support Matt Kimber in his efforts to purchase some "branded" club kit -he needs everyone's support to reach the required order quantities
- You will notice a Stonor Cricket Club "Code of Conduct" will be pinned to the pavilion notice board this year -seems a bit formal I know, but we live in a sensitive world and need to ensure that we respect other people, particularly youngsters, in all aspects of our behaviour. Please read and ensure you understand and observe it.

Finally, good luck to Team Stonor in the London Marathon -as part of their pre-season conditioning, Paul Kelso and Ben and Jeremy Denton will be stepping out next month so sponsor them if you can. The date coincides with our first game but fortunately they should have finished by 1pm -just in time to jog back to Stonor in time for the start!

Enjoy your cricket!

Nigel.

Wednesday 9th February 2011, Club Captain's Update

To the Cricketing Elite of Stonor,

Slowly but surely, the gloom that descended at Harpsden at the end of September is beginning to lift and the club has started to wake up from its winter slumbers. The Ashes are won, the grass is growing again, Olly is hammering in his new bat, e-mails are coming in thick and fast from Ashley, Ellie has sharpened her coloured pencils and John is practicing his tossing. Not that things have been quiet in the last four months....far from it. In fact, the heart of the club has been beating as strongly as ever.

Tony and Peter have been hard at work every Thursday, replacing the damaged flooring in the kitchen and laying a new floor in the shower area. Hats off to them both -thousands of pounds worth of work done for the price of a couple of hundred pounds worth of materials. In between times, we had to contend with burst pipes in the kitchen (fixed, needless to say, by Tony) and the consequent flood damage. Moreover, the dishwasher now works, the clock is still showing the correct time (well, British Summer Time, at least) and the library system has finally been set up (more books still needed though).

Once the weather improves, the nets will become a priority as, after six years, they are in need of some refurbishment. As well as new netting and white screens, we also need to buy a new boundary rope which, at around £1/metre doesn't sound too expensive. Unfortunately, we need about 500 metres of it!

In October, we staged the club's first film night, "Casablanca", complete with black tie and cocktails. Masterminded by Steffen and Peter, with help from everyone on the committee and featuring Tamsin Lovatt's Lamb Tagine with couscous, it was probably the most successful fund-raising event in the club's history. The Dooge Special Margarita and John's French 75 were responsible for more than one sore head the next day!

In December, the highlight of our annual Christmas extravaganza was a Mummers' Play, devised by Steffen and acted out by Ian as Beelzebub, Jez as the Turville Knight, Tony as a weird Scottish doctor and yours truly as Old Molly, an old tart (I know what you're thinking). The food was expertly prepared by Chef and Mrs Kimber and the chestnuts sold out, despite being burned by Scott!

Thanks to everyone that organized and/or attended these two events.....and, yes, there is more to come, so please give the following your support.

On Friday February 25th at 7.30pm, our AGM takes place in the pavilion. Anyone who has any new nominations for Club Officers should submit them to Sandra Denton in advance or make sure they are there for the vote. As ever, it's a great chance to find out what's happening at the club or raise any questions, ideas or concerns..... or just have a glass or two of Peter's (somewhat dodgy) Chardonnay!

Just over a week later on Monday March 7th, our pre-season conditioning programme starts at the Henley Leisure Centre at the new time of 8pm-9pm. The fitness of all players will be thoroughly assessed after which we will go to the pub. Here's a link for Ross, so he doesn't get lost:

<http://www.nexuscommunity.org/my-nearest-site/south-oxfordshire/henley-leisure-centre.html>

On Saturday March 26th, gird your loins for another Film Night. "Some Like It Hot" will be the feature, accompanied by top gangster-era cuisine, new and exciting cocktails and guests in period dress.

Working parties will take place at the ground on Sunday April 3rd and 10th starting at 10.30am –lots to do to get the ground shipshape so please lend a hand. If the weather's OK, we should be able to dust off Curtley, lubricate his bowling arm and have a net, once the work has been done.

Marc has requested numbers for the pre-season "bonding" dinner on Friday April 15th, two days before the season proper starts on April 17th with our annual game against those worthy opponents, Weekenders. Jasper has promised a full fixture list and some (nice) surprises, one of which will be the Richard Hunt trophy game against Turville, to be played this year on Bank Holiday Sunday at Wormsley ("one of those special places to play cricket" – Mark Ramprakash). Here's a link for more info on this beautiful ground....

<http://www.wormsleycricket.co.uk/pages/home.html>

Finally, I'd like to follow-up on Olly's earlier email about our Summer Tour 2011 - we can now reveal that Stonor will be playing 2 games in West Sussex on Saturday 30th and Sunday 31st July.

It promises to be another great weekend with some excellent cricket and social time (and possibly chili vodka). Please remember to email Olly by Sunday 25th February indicating whether you can come on Tour.

Well, once again it has been good therapy for me to think cricket – a welcome distraction from the hopeless plight of Sheffield United. Still, at least we didn't pay £50m for Torres!

All the best,

Nigel

Club Captain

Wednesday 10th February 2010, Club Captain's Update

Dear Fellow Cricketers,

Good news!! The Stonor youth have put their sledges away and spring is just around the corner!

After a January so cold that even Steffen was forced to put some clothes on, we have now emerged into February and the excitement of a new cricket season (or at least some nets) is starting to build.

As usual, activity at the club starts to increase at this time of year, as does the expenditure and we need as much support as possible to get the season off to a flying start. So here's a rundown of forthcoming events just to whet your appetites....and ask for your help.

On Friday February 26th at 7.30pm, our AGM takes place in the cricket pavilion. Anyone who has any nominations for Club Officers should submit them to Peter Collings in advance or make sure they are there for the vote. It's a great chance to find out what's happening at the club, raise any concerns or just have a glass of wine and catch up with your buddies. You can even volunteer to be Fixture Secretary!

The following evening (February 27th), the wine will be flowing a little more freely at our Wine Tasting – 7.30pm in the pavilion again. As well as sampling new and undiscovered vintages, there will be lots of complementary nibbles, a chance to win handsome prizes, an opportunity to brush up on your knowledge of viniculture (!) via a light-hearted quiz and fun alternatives for drivers/non-drinkers. So sign up today and bring as many alcoholic mates as you can!

Pre-season Nets start on Sunday March 7th 11.30am at Henley Indoor Sports Centre, and the same time the following week. Don't miss Marshall, Pennell, Harris, Denton and Agar cranking up the pace in an effort to impress the skipper, the guile and finesse of the "spin quads" (Fennell, Nicholson, Kimber, Denton junior) and the swingers doing what they do best. Gaze in awe at Lovatt's raw power, the serene grace of Mayo's cover drive and Ian Harris's dazzling footwork....or alternatively, just toss a few down and have a biff like we usually do!

Tony and Peter have been carrying out some structural repairs to the pavilion (mainly the roof) but there is much work still to be done. There will therefore be working parties as usual before the start of the season – this year, excluding Easter, they will take place on Sunday March 28th and Sunday April 11th at 10.30am. Please turn up and do some painting, rolling, strimming, leaf blowing, cleaning, vacuuming, furniture removal, gutter clearance, kit overhauling, coffee making etc.

Please also plan for a pre-season dinner on Friday April 16th. This is traditionally the time when discussions take place on topics as diverse as batting order, team selection for the Turville game, bookmakers' odds for the trophies, Neil Brown's plans for the season, Paul Kelso's ankle, Ashley's back and free contraception for Stonor players. Don't miss it!!

The season proper starts on April 18th with our usual curtain-raiser against Weekenders and we have 34 fixtures scheduled for the season, 2 more than last year. That means a lot of double weekends so we need to reinforce the player recruitment effort. The provisional fixture list should be on the website soon, together with Match Managers. All regular players can expect to manage a minimum of 1 home game plus usually 1 away game as well. If dates conflict, please resolve the issue during the season as it's too complex to do it in advance. Olly will also be sending out templates which should be used to send reports/scorecards to him (and the Henley Standard for home games) each week. It is the Match Manager's responsibility to ensure these are completed in full.

Finally, I would like to thank Olly for revamping the website and also for organizing the tour to Somerset - SCC's first tour since the Stonor Kites' visit to Cape Town in 2007. Dates are July 31st-August 1st. It promises to be a fantastic weekend with some great cricket and social time.

All the best,

Nigel

Club Captain

Tuesday 7th April 2009, Captain's Update

Finally the countdown is almost at an end and the new season is a matter of days away. Time to battle the mice and the moths for possession of the kit bag and to battle the effects of time and age in getting the muscles back in shape for the battles to come (for the junior elements of the team this is a feeling with which I fear you will become all too familiar in about 20 years or so!) It's at this point of the 2009 season when everything is possible ... the 1000 run season, the 50 wickets, the blinding full length diving catch running backwards at deep mid-on ... if Mon Mome can win the National at 100-1 then surely anything is possible, right?

What I hope will remain as a legacy from seasons past is the wonderful spirit in which we all approach our games, always playing to win but playing to enjoy the game. One challenge looks set to continue from last year as well, the problem of team selection. As with last year this will be handled as delicately as possible and we will all have to take our turns in standing down for the occasional game. We will clearly do our best to ensure this is handled as fairly and equitably as possible, but if you do ever find yourself having any issues with this, please let either Nigel, Olly or me know.

On a personal note I would like to say it is a huge honour to have been appointed captain and I'm looking forward to the challenge of carrying on in the same spirit as my predecessors, no doubt with the able advice from the usual suspects. I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the Pre-season meal; at outdoor nets starting the first week of May on Friday evenings; and on the pitch this season.

Finally, please note we are holding 'Open Evenings' for potential players from Gillott's School along with their parents on April 24th and May 8th at the ground, so please feel free to come along and encourage the next generation of Stonor players.

John

Team Captain

Monday 9th February 2009, Club Captain's Update

As I sit here in long johns and woolly mittens gazing out over the snow-covered hills of the Stonor Valley, listening to inquests on England's demise in the West Indies, my thoughts are inexorably drawn to 2.01pm on Sunday April 20th 2008. The ground is hushed, the Aussie takes guard, expectations high on both sides, the slip cordon crouches eagerly, the Umpire calls "Play", Marshall steams in, the perfect in-swinging yorker.....Stonor's season is under way!

Well, on April 18th 2009, Weekenders will be back, eager for revenge....but we have a lot to do between now then.

First and foremost, our AGM takes place on Friday 27th February at 7.30pm in the Cricket Pavilion. If you have any nominations you would like to make for Club Officers, please submit them in advance or ensure you are there for the vote. In any case, please try and attend the meeting -it usually lasts no more than 1 hour and will provide an informative over view of the state of the club, its finances and outlook...plus an opportunity to ask questions on issues which may concern you.

Secondly, we need to do our usual preparatory work on the ground, so there will be working parties on 4th April and 11th April. More details will follow but please reserve these dates in your diaries as we will need a good attendance at both sessions.

As you know, there will also be some changes to our weekly pitch and outfield preparation this season. The good news is we have now purchased an "easy-to-start" 1.5 tonne modified road roller which will be with us in time for some extensive work before the season starts - volunteer "drivers" will be welcome (mainly batsmen I suspect!). Adrian Saunders will be responsible for preparing the pitches and square weekly from mid-April onwards but we will need to share outfield mowing duties amongst ourselves. Again, offers of help will be welcome....and in the worst case, you may be press-ganged into duty on a Friday evening!

This season, we have 32 fixtures currently scheduled....that's 2 more than last year. The provisional list is now on the website. We did this in order that there would be less of a need for players to stand down, especially in the first half of the season. Having said that, Jay will be available less often, Ben will be away at university until late June and I believe Tim Treadaway will be away all summer. On the plus side, Steffen should be around and has promised he has more 50's in the locker. So that's a long-winded way of saying we still need to find more players. We are planning a leaflet drop locally and letters to local schools but history has shown that the best way of recruiting is by word of mouth...so bring your mates!!

Finally, indoor nets start this weekend, with a short gap then until March and we have a Pub Games evening planned for March 14th. Although, it hasn't officially been scheduled yet, I'm sure there will also be a pre-season dinner on the Friday evening before the start of the season. I cannot emphasize enough how important fund-raising is to Stonor CC and, like charity, it begins at home. So please make every effort to attend social events....and, once again, bring your mates!!

That's about all for now -I'm still reeling from Wednesday's first double over the Blades for 95 years so being forced to turn my thoughts to cricket has been quite therapeutic!

Hope to see you at Nets on Sunday.

Nigel

Club Captain

Saturday 15th November 2008, Club Captain's End-of-Year Report

As the nights get longer and our ground assumes its air of winter desolation, I thought it might be worth bringing the year to a close with a few ramblings on Cricket Past, Cricket Present and Cricket Yet-To-Come.

First and foremost, thanks to everyone that makes Stonor CC so special - players (young, not-so-young, home-grown and "Kolpak"), family members and friends, Vice-Presidents, supporters, sponsors and, of course, our Chairman and Groundsman who have contributed so richly to the success of the club.

Despite the weather, 2008 was another hugely enjoyable season of cricket, played in a friendly but competitive spirit. Jez (and his able lieutenants, Olly and John) captained the side in their own style but always, unmistakably in "the Stonor way", ensuring everybody had the opportunity to make a contribution and never allowing the desire-to-win to get in the way of enjoyment.

We welcomed some new, regular players - Dan Austin, Tim Treadaway and Nigel Hefferman and some new, occasional players, Gerhard Kruger, Mo Siddiqui and Ashish Kapila. Short of players at Greys Green, we were bailed out by 3 young Yorkshiremen who, despite never having played competitive cricket, demonstrated that cricket is indeed "in the blood" up there!

On a lovely September day, Tony's last pitch (arguably one of his best ever!) yielded a grand total of only 86 runs as we quickly saw off Warborough and Shillingford, signaling the end of an era spanning more than 40 years. Adrian Saunders, an experienced groundsman himself, has agreed to take on the near-impossible task of following a Stonor legend - he will prepare the square and weekend pitches from next season but we will still need to support him by ensuring the outfield is cut on a regular basis. Let's make Adrian feel an integral part of the club and help him to sustain the continuous improvement that was the hallmark of Tony's approach.

Unfortunately, our ancient roller, which has been ailing all season, has finally lost all semblance of combustion and needs to be replaced. We have identified a modified road roller which could fit the bill but we will need to raise a substantial sum of money quickly if we are to have it available for the start of next season. So please make every effort to attend and support our fund-raising events over the next few months.

Tony and Peter have set to work making and fitting replacement windows to replace the rotten ones that take a battering from the north winds blowing down the valley. Much more work needs to be done on the pavilion and again this will require some concentrated effort before the start of next season.

The Stonor Youth Policy continues apace - congratulations to Paul and Kirsty on the birth of Chloë - Ashley and Stephanie are next in line (in January, I believe) and I'm sure there are many glints still in the eyes of other Stonor players! Any clues on how to make boys, Jeremy?!!

We are aiming to have a Stonor Golf Day over the Christmas holidays (an early opportunity to practice for the 2009 Valley Cup), the Badminton should start up again soon and a group of us are having a crack at Real Tennis next week. We may not be the best cricket club in Oxfordshire but we are clearly the most multi-talented!

Right, that's enough verbal meandering for now - hope to see everyone at the Christmas Carol Evening. As well as being great fun, this is one of our biggest fund-raising events but, without wishing to labour the point, we do depend on your help to make it a success.

All the best for now,

Nigel

Club Captain

Monday 3rd November 2008, after the 2008 Awards Night

All

Thanks to Marc – another classic Stonor CC evening of entertainment with the choice of a fish and chip supper inspired. DD and the Dooj were on great form again and the evening was quite rightly Tonycentric – what a legend! I thought all the players who represented Stonor this year did so with passion and skill and John's excellent stats were interesting in that they indicated that we had a far more successful season than many of us realised. I guess losing twice to Turville clouded some perceptions but there were many other highlights and as Peter said – we can feel pleased that we did the good neighbourly thing by letting them take the honours for a change. I know next season will see a return to form for Stonor in these fixtures! Well, we might win the toss at least?

Well done to all of you who showed improvement and personal bests this year (too many to mention) and especially well done to.....

+ Tom (bowling cup, most improved player (the new 'Fisher Trophy') and 'Champagne Moment' (thanks Ashley) – just rewards for a fantastic improvement this season

+ Olly (batting cup) – a fine achievement in his first season of 'fatherhood' and o all the distractions that presents

+ John (fielding cup) – without doubt going down in history as one of Stonor's most accomplished fielders

+ Nigel – top 'keeper again and provided vital continuity by carrying on all the good club work that Martin so wisely put in place.

Anyone for indoor nets yet?

Jez

Team Captain

Sunday 29th June 2008

Dear All,

Believe it or not, after next weekend we will be half way through the season, so I thought it might be worth some quick comments on the season so far and the challenges we face if we are to continue to progress as we have over the past few years.

First and foremost, we have been pleased to welcome several new faces to the club, both young and old(er). At one end of the scale, Tim Treadaway, Ross Denton and Ali Fitzsimons have injected further youthful vigour and enthusiasm (and no little ability) whilst at the other end, Nigel Hefferman has brought experience and guile as well as providing much-needed age balance (and he lives in the village!). In between, Dan Austin, Mo Siddiqui and Gerhard Kruger have all played a major part in winning games for Stonor.

This brings me to challenge number one i.e. giving everyone a regular game. It is always unfortunate when people have to stand down from games and we are grateful to everyone for taking it in good heart -even volunteering from time to time. Various options are being considered for next year (more fixtures or running two teams being the obvious ones), but in the meantime please be patient with us and we will try to select teams as fairly and equitably as possible. If you feel you are missing out more than you should, speak to either myself or Jez and we will try to put things right. It's a nice problem to have but clearly one that needs to be resolved if we are to continue to develop as a club.

One of the reasons we are able to attract players to Stonor is our lovely ground and, thanks to Tony's unstinting efforts, it is generally looking and playing better than ever this season. We suffered initially when our ageing roller needed some TLC but the outfield and surrounding areas are now almost as beautifully manicured as the square. We do have a problem with 4's and 6's hit into the long grass surrounding the playing area and the resultant wasted time and loss of cricket balls, but again we are looking for a practical solution. Unfortunately, because this is "set-aside" land, the grass cannot be cut and baled.

The second challenge relates to ground care. We have been incredibly lucky to have Tony preparing the ground more or less single-handedly and with great dedication over the past 20 or 30 years. However, for sure he cannot continue forever. This season we have introduced the idea of weekly "Ground Assistants" tasked with helping Tony and learning some of his skills, in anticipation of having to share the workload at some point in the future. Please ensure you contact him when it is your designated turn as he will probably not contact you....but your help will definitely be appreciated!

The net sessions on a Friday evening have again been well attended - Peter has finally taken delivery of the missing protective sheets and they should be fitted in the near future. We went for "Olly strength" sheets just to be sure!! John's slip-catching net has proved a big hit, highlighting deficiencies in our throwing as well as improving our catching ability!

On the playing front, to date we have played 12 games - won 7, drawn 2 and lost 3 - with amazingly only one game lost to the weather. Unfortunately, one of the defeats was the inaugural "Richard Hunt Trophy" fixture against Turville but it was a good game which we could easily have won after a classic Stonor fight back. Richard clearly enjoyed his "50th season" celebrations and has written to the club to thank us all - I will post the letter in the pavilion. I think Paul Kelso may be the next 50-year candidate (in the year 2031!) highlighting Richard's unique achievement. Jez and his able deputies John and Olly have skippered the side astutely on the field and manfully shouldered the burden of selection. Stand-out performances so far have probably been Olly's quickfire 87 n.o. against SOB and 5-fers for both Ashley and Paul Hodkinson.

You will note from the fixture list that we have a "Family Day" scheduled for August 3rd. Marc is organizer-in-chief but he needs as much support as possible both before the event and on the day. Please volunteer your help when Marc contacts you. Remember, this is as much for wives, girlfriends, kids, parents, grandparents, social members, vice-presidents etc as it is for players so let's try and make it a big success and give something back to the people that support us.

Finally, here's to a scorching July and some more glorious Stonor victories so we can remind Fennell snr what he's missing!

Nigel

Club Captain

Tuesday 26th February 2008

Dear All,

It's under 8 weeks now to the first game on April 20th - so time to oil your bats, scale up those 10 mile training runs and wash the dirty kit that's been in your bag all winter.

Given that Martin's now in a different hemisphere and Olly has inexplicably timed his new arrival for March instead of October, it's also time for us all to step up the hunt for new players. With this in mind, I have sent you all a leaflet/poster which Jez has been pinning up on various leisure centre notice boards around South Oxfordshire. Please could you print off a few copies and give to friends, work colleagues, wives, girlfriends, mistresses.....in fact anyone you know who has ever expressed any kind of interest in cricket or associated things. You never know where the talent might come from these days!

As you can see from the new photos in the Gallery, Ben has already been hard at work with his recruitment drive. Contract details are yet to be finalized but he assures me they will be available for the first game against Turville (if selected).

The (almost) final version of the 2008 fixture list is now also available online. You will note there are 2 new fixtures (Stoke Row at home and Whitchurch away) but we have lost 2 as well (Nettlebed and Ibstone).....so for the non-mathematicians amongst you that means we will have the same number of games as last year. Match Manager duties will be allocated shortly.

Hope to see you at the Nets.

Nigel

Club Captain

PS: Working parties are planned at the ground on 31st March, 6th April and 13th April. Refreshments will be provided and we will once again have the opportunity to witness Turville's pre-season preparations as we work. More details to follow.

Sunday 28th October 2007

Another season has come and gone, one which suffered badly at the hands of a dreadful summer. We had 10 matches abandoned or cancelled, and of the rest we won 8, drew 7 and lost just 4. However, statistics don't tell us about the quality of the matches and we were fortunate to enjoy some great games in the course of the season, and even more so to end with the most thrilling win against Harpsden on the last day of the season.

Recently we gathered in the Pavilion for our Awards Dinner, an event supported by 30 people, which was a great turnout. For the record, the deserving winners were Jez (batting), Dan (bowling), Marc (fielding), and Ben (Most Improved Player). However, their efforts were supported by many individual and team performances, which meant that everybody can look back on their season knowing that they made a good contribution. And speaking of records, the "party" ended at 3am! Long winter evenings can now be spent analysing John's excellent statistical summary of the season!

Stonor continues to grow both as a cricket club and as a very happy social environment. I think we have the right balance between our ability and desire to play competitive cricket, and yet play the game in the right spirit. In stepping down this year as Skipper, I feel the club is in healthy state, and I have every confidence that things will only continue to improve. The median age of the slip cordon has already dropped dramatically whilst the scoring rate at the top of the order will soar!

On behalf of Patty and I, thanks and good wishes to everyone: we hope to see you in Cape Town!

Martin

Friday 20th April 2007

Welcome to the 2007 Season!

A lot of work has taken place over the off-season, including the replacement of the kitchen floor, the repainting of the interior and exterior of the Pavilion, and other general maintenance items. Thank you to all those who have contributed so much. We have also acquired a "new" ride-on 35cwt roller from Henley Cricket Club, matched in its antiquity only by the tractor and our Groundsman. Once the reparation work on the Nets has been completed we will be in tip-top shape for the new season.

We begin the season in a strong position with regard to the number of active players, and I hope we'll recruit some more players during the season. It is therefore appropriate to clarify the "rules" regarding team selection in order to ensure we give everyone a fair number of games, whilst also making sure we field a competitive team for each match. As has always been the case it is the Match Manager's responsibility to collect the names of the available players, from which the Captain will select the team. Equally, players should not wait to be asked: let the appropriate Match Manager know you are available in good time.

I'd like to take this opportunity to highlight a few other things which will make everyone's season that much more enjoyable:

+ Please show courtesy to your team-mates and the opposition by arriving in good time for each game. Also, there are always bits of preparation for each match (moving sight screens, placing the scoreboard, moving the boundary rope etc) and it creates a better image for the Club if they are not done at the last minute.

+ When you are asked to umpire, think about your role and your responsibilities to the game. If you are unsure of the laws relating to LBW decisions, Wides, No Balls etc, take the trouble to ask someone. If you are not 100% sure a batsman is out, he is Not Out! It's friendly cricket, not the World Cup.

+ Come to Friday nets! We'll start again on May 4th, any time from 6pm, followed by analysis and technical appraisals in The Crown. Watch out too for BBQ's when the weather looks suitable.

+ Please pay your subs on time! It really does help the Club.

So, enjoy your season: let's play to the best of our ability, and let's play to win, but not lose sight of the pleasure of the sport itself, the beautiful surroundings in which we play, and the companionship of our team-mates and their families.

Martin Fennell,

Captain.

Friday 23rd March 2007

Captain's Report for 2006 Season

For some of us, the 2006 season got off to an early start with our tour to Cape Town, which was the first overseas tour undertaken by the Club. Our numbers were bolstered by 4 players from Turville Park CC, and an excellent time was had by all. It greatly enhanced the team spirit within the Stonor camp, and also made our playing relationship with Turville more relaxed and enjoyable.

The season can be summarised as follows: played 23, lost 5, drew 9, and won 9. However, as usual the story behind the statistics is what matters. One interesting fact is that, unusually for us, we won 4 of our matches fielding second as opposed to chasing, in most of them our bowlers, and fielders, holding their nerve better than the opposition batsmen. We also greatly enjoyed our arch rivals' discomfort when we denied them a victory they really should have had in June, and thoroughly defeating them in the return match in August. All, I might say, given and taken in the right spirit.

Before I cover the on-field performance, it's worth mentioning that we did follow up with our commitment to use our wonderful net facilities by holding practice sessions every Friday night from early May until the light began to fade too early in September. Most weeks we had 6 to 8 players, and always a smattering of "the youths". They've all been very well attended, great fun, and may even have helped our cricket. But most importantly I think they've been an integral part in incorporating our new members, senior and junior, into the club. A few "bonding" pints in The Crown followed afterwards, and, on one glorious evening, a well attended BBQ.

Looking at our performances, I'll deal with the three main areas in turn.

Fielding: we had a mixture of "Jonty" and "Monty" days: some very good, some very sloppy. That said our catching was good (67 in the outfield and 15 behind the stumps. Well done Nigel -aka The Cat - Allsop, who also took 9 stumpings and was rightly awarded the Fielding Cup.) We do need to improve on our disciplines, such as walking in with purpose as the ball is being bowled, and backing up on throws, and we will include that in our Friday evening nets sessions this next season.

Batting: This was dominated by a fantastic season by Olly, who scored just under 750 runs, most of them very quickly! His pre-season session at the MCC school was clearly worth the investment. He thoroughly deserved to win the Batting Cup. Jez was his usual dependable self scoring just under 500 runs, and John, who started the season with a ton against Coopers, threatened to do something spectacular but got a bit lost mid-season, and then recovered toward the end. Nathan also scored his first ever 50, and Ben came very close. Paul had a couple of very good knocks, and Jay showed welcome obduracy as an opener. In fact pretty much everybody made a contribution at some point, and there's really nobody who cannot bat if they get the chance and put their minds to it.

Bowling: it was a bowler's year in some ways, given the manner of some of our victories. We are now blessed with a plethora of bowlers, even to the extent it's hard to get every one of them in the game. Virtually all of our youngsters bowl, and indeed all had their good days, and are showing good promise for the future. I must mention Tom's efforts in the game against Highmoor, where they needed 6 off the last over to win, and Tom held his nerve to deny them. For me, that was a real champagne moment! Ashley began to get his line and length together and took some good wickets, Olly got through a lot of overs and took 25 wickets, and Neil was as metronomic as ever. Jez was allowed the occasional outing. We didn't see as much of Andy and Dan as we would have wished, but they were seriously effective when they bowled. Dan in particular deserves special mention, having taken 31 wickets and, it seems expecting to get a wicket with every ball he bowls. He was a worthy winner of the Bowling Cup. One observation - we have relied on spin to win or contain matches to a huge extent this year, which just goes to show what kind of bowling most club cricketers don't like to face.

Which leads me on to the finishing point, the pleasure it's been seeing our youngsters play for Stonor, enjoy their cricket, and contribute to the vitality of the club. Their parents deserve mention also for the support and encouragement they give and their own contribution to the Stonor family, as well as the taxi services they provide. So too do the senior players who have made the lads welcome, integrated them into the club, and coached where they can. I hope the Club has aptly shown our youngsters our appreciation of their contribution and potential by awarding them a coaching session at the Lords' Indoor School in April. The ongoing challenge is to balance the encouragement of the youngsters with the recognition that there are a number of senior players who continue to show great loyalty to the club and need to get their opportunities too.

Thanks must go to a number of people for their contribution to another rewarding and enjoyable Stonor season:

- To Tony for his ceaseless devotion to giving us the best cricket ground anyone could wish to play on.
- To Olly for his creation and upkeep of our entertaining, informative, and very professional website.
- To all the Match Managers for getting team availability in good time, and, as appropriate, to their partners for providing wonderful teas for us.
- To Nigel for all the unsung off-season work done in his capacity as Fixture Secretary, creating a full and enjoyable schedule of matches for us.
- To Peter for his energetic work as Chairman, and, behind the scenes, Grumpy's Go-fer.
- And finally to all our players who gave their best efforts to the team, and supported me through all my mistakes!

Martin Fennell,

Captain.

Saturday 30th December 2006

Dear All,

It has been very strange spending the festive season here in the sunshine and warmth of the southern hemisphere, but I have done my best to focus on the job at hand and not get distracted by the thought of you all huddled by log fires, eating mince pies, and watching England being demolished by the Aussies. Indeed, as the attached photo illustrates, I have been training and practising ceaselessly, to the point of exhaustion. I am also working hard on my tan so that, if my selection for the team becomes debatable on the grounds of diminished competence, I will be able to qualify on the quota system adopted by the United Cricket Board of South Africa.

The good news is that the days will soon begin to lengthen around the hallowed Stonor cricket ground and the new season is only.....hmmm, actually it's still a long way off, but I'm sure you'll all be washing your kit, oiling your bats, and replacing your worn spikes in early preparation. And indoor Nets will be starting in February I think, so that's not too far off.

Until then, I wish you and your families a happy and prosperous 2007 and I look forward to seeing you all again in April for the pre-season rituals of pavilion cleaning and ground preparation.

Best wishes,

Martin.

Sunday 22nd October 2006

The 2006 season has now been well and truly put to bed with completion of the Awards Dinner. We had a record attendance - over 30 people - so thank you to all who made it such a great evening, and to Marc in particular for the organisation and execution on the night.

Congratulations to the Award winners, who were as follows:

Batting Cup - Olly

Bowling Cup - Dan

Fielding Cup - Nigel

Most Improved Player - Olly

In addition, Tony was given a gift of 2 tickets to the West Indies Test Match at Lords next May, and our 6 young players were awarded a 2 hour coaching session at the MCC Indoor School next April.

We ended the season with an equal number of wins and draws (9), and only 5 losses. I don't think any of us are disappointed with that, and we can look forward to next season with the goal of continual improvement and continued enjoyment.

Winter well - see you in April!

Martin.

Friday 1st July 2006

We are approaching the halfway point of our 2006 fixture list, and it is already apparent that this is a different season than ones we have had recently.

Firstly we have had only 2 wins and 3 losses, along with 5 draws. On reading, that is disappointing, but we have had very few opportunities to field our "A" team. Family and work commitments are taking their toll, and a few injuries have had an impact. The good news is that despite this, we have put out a full side for every match (actually, in one instance we fielded 12!). This is mainly due to the enthusiastic support we are getting from our young* players (and of course their parents) who have been represented in every game this season and who are all showing great promise for the future. So we are a very much less experienced team nowadays and that will inevitably have an effect on our results in the short term, but I don't think anyone doubts that we are going to have some very good young cricketers playing for Stonor in the years to come.

One other point that needs to be highlighted is the success of our Friday evening nets. Even in the miserable days of May we never missed a session, and as well as being supported by the senior stalwarts, it is again very encouraging that these are so regularly attended by the young players. These are always rounded off by a few beers at the Crown so keep on coming!

Still plenty of cricket left and plenty of opportunities for us to hit a good winning streak. (Maybe the English cricket team can do the same?)

Good luck to all for the rest of the season.

* Glossary of Terms..."young" has now been redefined from under 25 to under 16. Some change!

Martin.

Monday 20th March 2006

It's time to get the kit bag out of the garage/loft/car boot!

Although the weather isn't exactly beckoning the new season, our first of, I believe, 29 fixtures is on Sunday April 23rd.

Jez has booked nets at the Castle Leisure centre at 1pm for the next 3 Sundays, so you have a few opportunities to get some practice in before the season starts. Even those of us who were lucky enough to participate in the Stonor Kites tour to Cape Town will by now require some rust removal!

So, please try your best to attend 2 out of the 3 sessions so that we get the 2006 Season off to a successful start.

More to come later.....

Martin.

Saturday October 22nd 2005

The end of another season has arrived. The square has been put to bed, kit bags can now be cleaned out and you'll find that missing sock....actually it has probably walked out by itself. While you're at it, take out your bat, give it a cleanup and a light coat of oil. And go and buy the Ashes DVD to keep your cricket brain alive during the winter months!

It's been a good one. Of the 23 games played we won 11, lost 2, and drew 10. Though seldom at our fullest strength, for the most part we were able to field a competitive side, and we were lucky to have the services of four young players (Henry Gibbs, Stuey Slade, Nathan Hopkins, and Tom Marshall) when some of our senior players were unavailable. I'm sure we all hope we'll see more of them next season, and they will continue to develop as they get more accustomed to playing senior cricket. Our best XI is a tough proposition to beat, and if injuries and work commitments aren't too intrusive next year, we should have a great season.

Our bowlers did a great job this year. Neil was his usual miserly self (conceding less than 2 ½ runs an over), and picked up 29 wickets. Andy really came on this year, picking up 35 wickets, bowling with good aggression, and is maturing into a very effective strike bowler. As an opening pair he and Neil have been fantastic. John came back strongly this year, picking up 19 wickets....and the Bowling Cup! Dan was the master of flight and guile as usual, collecting 32 puzzled scalps, and continues to develop as an attacking spin bowler. Many others made their own contribution - some to the batting side! - and gave good support to the main bowling unit.

Our batting was dominated by an outstanding performance from Jez, who, with over 830 runs to his name at an average of 80+, was the clear winner of the Batting Cup. Our record would have been much the worse without his huge contribution. John was another key performer, scoring over 500 runs, and willingly filling the key opening slot when requested. In the small number of games he was able to play Paul batted very well too. Skip came good in the latter part of the season after a wobbly start. It would be fair to say, however, that overall we didn't bat as well as we can, and that's something we need to work on when the 2006 approaches.

Fielding was a strong point: very few catches were dropped, and ground fielding showed good commitment. Of course there was the odd dud performance, but that's the nature of our kind of cricket! Congratulations to Dan for winning the Catching Cup with 9 catches. Wicket-keeping was largely shared between Gary and Nigel, both doing an excellent job, and backed up when necessary by Dan, John, and on one occasion Steffen.

The other awards went to Andy (Most Improved Player...again!) and to Jez (Players' Player...again!). Many congratulations to all the 2005 Award Winners.

And let's not forget one of the season's highlights: Tony playing achieving the milestone of a fiftieth season with Stonor, and taking 3 wickets, holding - in his words - a blinding catch, and holding out in the last over to deny victory (which they probably deserved!) to the opposition!

We all acknowledge the work done by Tony to make Stonor just the best place to play cricket, and in this year we especially thank him and Peter for the really hard work they put in last winter to give us the fantastic net facilities we are now able to enjoy.

My thanks to Nigel for his assistance as Vice Captain, and to everyone, thanks for another enjoyable season.

Winter well!

Martin.

Monday 3rd January 2005

The Winter Solstice is behind us, even if the worst of the winter weather may yet lie ahead, and 2005 has opened its innings. It won't be too long before we start indoor Nets at The Castle Leisure Centre, Wallingford (provisionally first Sunday in February...to be advised), and Tony will soon be giving the square his pre-season attention. It already looks fantastic, and we must all be looking forward to enjoying its continuous improvement in the new season. Most notably there has been fantastic progress with the construction of the new nets, largely due to Tony and Peter, and there are some new pictures available for you to see. At the appropriate time we'll figure out how we should inaugurate them.

On the immediate horizon, please note that Burns Night is coming up towards the end of January, for which details will be sent to you very shortly. We had a cracking evening two years ago, so please make sure you come along this time around.

Please also note that the draft proposal for the Tour to Cape Town in February 2006 is now on the web site. The fixtures shown are suggestions right now, and all details will be firmed up once we have committed to go ahead. The cost is approximately £1000 per person. Given the logistical challenge of arranging such a tour, I will need to know if we have a viable touring party within the next couple of months: we need 13 or 14 cricketers, and as many partners and camp followers as possible!

For now, best wishes to you and your families for 2005, and, in particular, may it be another successful and enjoyable year for Stonor Cricket Club.

Martin.

Monday 27th September 2004

The 2004 season has finished on a high note. After a very enjoyable and successful Quiz Night on Saturday, we closed our season on a glorious autumn afternoon with a memorable win over Harpsden.

I think this was a metaphor for our entire season: another good team performance (all), some excellent bowling (Neil, Dan, Andy), some terrific fielding (John, Andy), some purposeful batting (Jasper, Olly), and to cap it all, an amazing match winning innings from Neil, all played competitively but in good spirit.

And we had our now customary, and very welcome, support from families and other club members. Furthermore our hosts and opposition enjoyed the game, and we look forward to hosting them at home next year, and showing off our ever improving ground and facilities.

Our tally for the season is 9 matches won, 9 drawn, and 3 lost. I think we all should be proud of that, particularly as we were not at full strength for many of the matches.

When I was invited to be Captain I said I would try to ensure that everyone felt they'd been involved in the game. I learned that is easy to say but harder to do, but I hope that intent has been upheld as much as reasonably possible. I have had fantastic support from all the players, and have enjoyed every minute of every game. I thank you all for that, and hope you have enjoyed your season as much as I have mine.

Next season we will have in place our new practice net and it will be something to be proud of, unmatched by any of the clubs we play against. As well as providing a facility for regular players, it should also enable us to attract some youngsters to some practice sessions, and lay the foundations of the next generation of Stonor players.

On 15th October we will have the Awards Night Curry, in the Pavilion, and I hope every player will attend and celebrate the achievements of both the individual winners and of the whole team, and especially the spirit of Stonor Cricket Club.

After that, cricket unfortunately drops off the agenda for the winter months, but indoor nets will, as usual, start in February, the 2005 season will come around, and we'll be in a great position to further the strength of the club.

Details of the winter training and dietary programs will be published on the website.

Best wishes,

Martin.

Sunday 22nd August 2004

Ah, the nights are drawing in and we've only got 5 matches left. Let's hope the weather holds through to the end of the season. Our record to date is very respectable: played 16, lost 2, drawn 8, and won 7.

Notably our record against Turville remains intact, and they must be wondering how on earth to beat us. I thought our performance last Sunday against them was superb in every department - a true team effort.

In fact throughout the season, people have chipped in with bat, ball, and in the field at the right times, and the team spirit is hugely enjoyable to be part of. Injuries and unavailability have bugged us this season, with Nigel being the latest victim - a knee injury of unknown severity at this point - and Mac having decided to, literally, go fishing this season. Paul is no doubt keenly watching the women's beach volleyball in Athens as I write. It's good to see Olly back now from his shoulder injury. Despite all we have managed to field a side for every fixture and performed competitively in almost every case. Fortunately most of us are supremely dedicated athletes who take great care of our bodies so further mishaps are unlikely.

Looking at the ground, nobody can fail to have been impressed by both the square and the outfield. Stonor has never looked or played better. Ironically that's probably made life a bit harder for the bowlers, but given that most batsmen eventually get themselves out in our level of cricket, that's not an excuse that will get much sympathy. Tony, as ever you are doing a fantastic job: thanks!

A notable feature this year (it seems to me) is that every match we have had support from family members, and it's great to see new offspring running around the pavilion. The next generation is already coming along! Anyway, it all lends a wonderful family atmosphere to the cricket and has an immensely civilising influence on batsmen returning to the dressing room somewhat earlier than they may have wished! I can't remember when I last heard John's gloves bouncing off the walls of the home dressing room.

I think it's also in order to mention the dedicated efforts of our official team Scorer, who has therefore relieved us of doing this chore ourselves. The scorebook has never looked neater! Thanks Alice!

So, as we look towards the close of this season, it would be nice to achieve the simple objective of 5 more wins! Let's see if we can do that? Our last fixture is against Harpsden on Sunday 26th September.

On the previous evening (25th) we will hold the Quiz Night: support from all the players is requested for this fun social event, so please note the date in your diaries.

Martin.

Saturday 29th May 2004

After mixed weather at the start of the season caused some early cancellations, we have enjoyed some glorious cricketing days of late and are now (amazingly) a quarter of the way through the fixture list.

Despite not being at full strength (a situation compounded by John Powell managing to break a finger in the first game), we have managed to put out a competitive team on each occasion, and we have been fortunate to welcome newcomers Peter Adams, Robin Bennett, Dave Cox, Henry Gibbs, and Gary Oleinik. After drawing our first 2 matches, we have now won 3 on the trot, with particularly convincing performances against Coopers and Ipsden.

The batters have all shown some early form, with 50's so far notched up by Paul Kelso and Gary Oleinik, and all-round contributions from the bowlers. Just as importantly, I hope everyone feels that they have been able to play a part in every game they've played in, and had a good time doing so.

Anyone who has played at Stonor this season must be impressed with the way the track is playing and the overall quality of the ground, enhanced by the addition of the sight screen at the "Stonor" end, and the 400 metres of boundary rope! We are very fortunate to play our cricket in such surroundings. As we approach the beginning of June, thoughts turn to the forthcoming local derby against Turville, so let's hope we can maintain both form and good weather. We also begin to approach holiday season, so I would encourage match managers to check on availability of players well ahead of their game.

On a closing note, the efforts to raise money for our new Net continue, thanks to Peter's hard work, and I encourage you all to make whatever contribution you can so that we can continue to enhance the facilities, and thus the appeal, of our club. To those who have already done so, thank you.

Martin.

Wednesday 11th February 2004

When does a new season begin? Not to be intimidated by splutterings from the distaff side ("I didn't notice the last one had ever ended"), the resumption of pre-season nets allows me to declare the 2004 season awakened if not exactly up and about. Turnout at "The Castle" has been good so far, and if you haven't been along yet, please try to make it to a couple of sessions (details on website). My impression is that Curtley, our favourite bowling machine, has not had much of an off-season, unlike those at the receiving end. More than one big toe is a bit bruised from those 70mph in-swinging yorkers.

On a personal note, I'm honoured to be entrusted with the captaincy of Stonor Cricket Club, and will do my utmost to maintain the friendly yet competitive spirit in which we play the game. We have a challenge ahead of us to achieve the same success on the field as we did last season (a well timed exit Paul!), but I'm sure we'll rise to it, and we'll certainly have fun trying. We have a full fixture list which will ensure there's plenty of cricket for everyone. In fact, we could well do with a few more playing members, so please be alert to recruiting opportunities (particularly young fit ones!)

Our first games are scheduled for the weekend of April 17th /18th, and, although at the moment we are alternately wallowing in mud or freezing in frosts, I have every confidence the sun will shine and a gentle zephyr will be blowing little white puffy clouds high in the sky. On the other hand, don't pack away your thermal underwear just yet: remember last year?

Best wishes to us all for a successful and enjoyable 2004 season! Martin.

Tuesday 22nd April 2003

Chaps,

Sitting here by the fire, bandaging my frost-bitten fingers and picking the icicles from my eyebrows, it occurs to me that while the weather was not perfect, the first weekend of the season was as successful as we could have hoped.

At times Saturday's match against Britwell more closely resembled the ordeal of Shackleton's crew on the ice cap than a cricket match, but there was much to enjoy amid the chill blains. Unfortunately most of it involved James Hunt - if he carries on like that Turville are in for a good season.

It was not a one-man show however. Nicholson, O bowled with great control I thought despite wearing a muffler and mittens, and Brownny turned in a typically miserly spell, conceding half of his 20-odd runs in overthrows courtesy of the captain. (I was just pleased to discover I could still throw it far enough to reach the boundary.)

A historic day on Sunday as the new square got its first test - more than 300 runs scored suggests it's going to be a good one. Hats off to Tony for all his hard work - the ground was immaculate - and for a spell of 10-2-2-18 that nearly won us the game. Martin carried his bat for 66 not out, a great effort from a man who is currently also carrying his wife up and down the stairs.

Fennell Minor was on the spot too, and the fielding was a revelation. The screamer pouched by Nigel at gully was as good a catch as we'll see all year. Not to say there won't be more opportunities for people to take catches off long-hops...

On that front we are likely to be without Jim for much of the season, so please keep your eyes peeled for strapping seam bowlers with their own transport.

Yours in long johns,

Paul.

Tuesday 18th June 2002

Dear chaps,

As the longest day approaches, time to reflect on the first half of the season. From where I've been sitting (in the pub or the doctor's waiting room) it has been an excellent season.

Of the 10 fixtures we've started, half have been won, four drawn and just the one lost. We've even dominated the draws, only once being in any danger of losing. At the same stage last season we'd lost three, drawn three and won one. It doesn't take a tactical genius to see why we've improved so much (though fortunately we've got one just in case). Put simply - and forgive me if you've heard this before - the batsmen have scored runs and the bowlers have taken wickets. Add a positive attitude and some decent ground fielding and you have the secret of our success.

With the bat we have average 139.6 for 6.2, which is formidable given that we have batted first only four times, and only once have we been bowled out. The secret of this consistency has been solid opening partnerships backed up by runs from the middle order. Jeremy Mayo has emphasised his class once more, and John has contributed vital runs further down. (He's patented the Powell Punch this season, a sort of cuff-cum-hoik over midwicket that, if he was the bowler, he would really, really hate.)

More important though have been the additions to the bowling department. Our youthful left-armers Jim Whittington and Dan Fennell have at last taken some pressure off Brownny, who's been excellent as ever. Jim has improved with every game, and Dan is simply the best slow bowler we've had since a certain T Fisher was in his prime (which lasted from 1956 to 1998). Both Jim and Dan have taken nearly 20 wickets each already, and they will win us more games as the season goes on.

The performance against Turville said it all: a hefty total followed by a good bowling performance, and all played in the right spirit. You can't ask for much more than that (apart from the win our dominance deserved). So, there's only one conclusion I can draw: you didn't miss me at all. Not even a little bit. Not. At. All. I think I can feel my shoulder flaring up again....

Sulking,

Paul.

Tuesday 7th May 2002

Dear chaps,

For those of us restricted to sitting in the pub on Sunday afternoon rather than standing in a howling gale watching an opposition opener score a century, one of the delights of the season so far has been this website. Every Monday morning I've been able to log on and discover how we got on at the weekend, right down to the scorecards. Hats off to Olly for all his efforts on that front.

While we're on the subject of Nicholson O, it seems that in addition to being an all-rounder, an able captain and a top talent spotter (excellent to see Whittington emerging with respectable figures from the carnage of the Sons of Bacchus innings) he also shows more than a little journalistic promise. You will have noticed that the homepage of the site says "Stonor fall short of a third consecutive win". I eagerly clicked to read details of a nail-biter, only to discover that "fall short" actually describes a deficit of 93 runs ... rest assured, if the IT doesn't work out, this man has a future in journalism, if not politics.

Joking aside, in the circs a draw was as good as a win, and holding out in Arctic conditions in the face of such a massive total was no mean feat. Played 3, lost 0. Coppid Hall will be shaking in their boots.

See you when the shoulder's healed (or when the weather improves), Paul.

Tuesday 30th April 2002

Dear chaps,

If there's one thing worse than missing the start of the season, it's not being missed. But if captaincy means putting in the odd spell of umpiring in between cream teas while the side steamrolls its way to victory, I could get used to it.

Under the astute stewardship of Nigel 'Clean Shave' Allsop and Martin 'New Ball' Fennell, we have made a magnificent winning start to the 2002 season.

In the opening fixture Sonning Common were dismissed for a paltry 60-something, with Neil Brown, Dan Fennell and some bloke from Turville called Hunt among the wickets. In reply John Powell chipped, nurdled, poked and hoiked his way to a quick 21, while Jeremy Mayo began his defence of the batting cup with a handy 30-odd (not out, naturally).

The Hambleden fixture saw a debut for left-armer Jim Whittington (welcome), who took a wicket as the visitors posted a more competitive 104. Once again it was not enough to keep the Stonor run machine at bay. Mac Lambert, New Ball and Powell (again) made the required with a handful of overs to spare. Next up are Sons of Bacchus, usually a youthful outfit who could pose our stiffest test so far. But if I may be so bold, bring 'em on.

Yours in traction,

Paul.

Tuesday 16th April 2002

Dear lads,

I've heard it said that in any decent side the captain only complicates things. Like most bosses, they are fine in principle, but the last thing you need is them trying to tell you how to do your job. After all, you don't try and tell them how to make their really difficult decisions - like choosing "heads" or "tails" - do you?

So as the 2002 season gets underway take comfort from the fact that this captain is going to keep well out of the way - for now. I'm typing this one-handed after I lost an argument with an Alp while skiing and suffered a type II dislocation of my left acromio-clavicular joint. In English, I've knacked me shoulder. A crack medical team has been working flat out on the gammy wing ever since, only taking time out when David Beckham's metatarsal snapped in sympathy. Like Becks's foot, it's coming along fine, but not quick enough for the opening fixtures.

In my absence, I leave you in the more than capable beard, sorry hands, of Nigel Allsop. A Yorkshireman from the soles of his size 10s to the top of his head, he'll suffer no fools and expect the bowlers to bowl, the batsmen to bat and the fielders to catch. It really is as simple as that, and if we do it all year we will win more games than we lose.

One final thought. As I trek home to London on summer Sunday evenings I often ask myself what I got out of the day. I think we should all ask ourselves that question. Just because we play our cricket with a smile there is no reason why we can't get better at it. Why stand still? Bowlers can learn to bat, batsmen can learn to bowl, and we can all learn to catch. Wouldn't it be nice to look at the averages at the end of the season and see the proof that you're a better player than you are today?

Paul.

PS Stop press.... I've just been declared fit to attend the first match, as long as I restrict myself to light umpiring and cake eating duties. See you there.

PPS For anyone with an unhealthy interest in shoulders (or those who might want a bowl later in the year) I recommend the following fascinating website:

<http://www.mwicks.com.au/Acromio-clavicular%20joint.htm>

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