

Inevitably when we come to think of the 2017 season we will remember the relegation of the 1st XI, but, as I have stressed on numerous occasions, Bury Cricket Club is more than just the 1st XI. Even so, as a club, we can treat the relegation of the 1st XI as a disaster or we can see it as an opportunity. We can decide we weren't good enough and maybe never will be good enough or we can look at what we could have done better and where we can improve and put processes in place to achieve that improvement. Whilst you can be in no doubt that we will be aiming to return to the premier division at the first attempt failure to achieve this will not be a disaster providing we as a club can see progress.

In fact despite the relegation it could be argued that the 1st progressed this year. They won the same number of games as last year, reached the cup final and were generally much more competitive throughout the year. Once again Karl did an admirable job in difficult circumstances. It is a mark of how competitive the GMCL Premier Division is that a side with 7 wins can go down in next to bottom place. We were unfortunate to lose at Woodbank, the coin toss at Walshaw was probably decisive and we were well on top against Bamford when rain ended the game. Had any two of those results come out differently then we would have survived. In the cup final Egerton ran out worthy winners having posted a challenging first innings total which we were unable to match. Disappointingly we used 22 players in the 1st XI this year and we found it difficult to select a settled side. I will return to this point later.

Jamal once again led the way with the bat racking up over 818 runs. Our professional Kasun chipped in with 543 runs which was a disappointing return and he never really imposed himself on the opposition or around the club. That being said he was a delightful individual and we wish him well. Alex and Jon both also contributed nearly 500 runs. Bowling wise Alex and Mukthar both performed with the ball picking up 39 and 37 wickets respectively. We perhaps missed a third seamer to help them with Kasun and Casmond contributing 50 wickets between them.

There will be some changes to the first team next year as already alluded to Kasun and Casmond will not be returning. Unfortunately Jamal will also be playing elsewhere this coming season. All three players leave with our best wishes and we hope to see them back soon. Karl has indicated that he would

like to take some time out to recharge his batteries and spend time with his family. Once again thank you to Karl for his sterling efforts. Finally, Jordan has come to grief on the football pitch and will be unable to play this year. We welcome Matt Donnelly from Greenmount to fill the wicket-keeping vacancy and Asif Iqbal makes a return to the club after a number of years. Ben Gorton from Read joins us and will also be involved with coaching. Our overseas amateur this year will be Gustav a 19 year old opening bowler from Pretoria, South Africa, Our professional will be Innocent Kaia a Zimbabwean batting leg spinner with UK experience.

The 2nd XI once again had a solid season under Chris's leadership. ELPM and Roe Green looked to be the strongest teams in the division at the start of the season and despite our best efforts this proved to be the case as we finished a creditable though a little distant third. Usama Akram was our most effective run getter with 450, though the undoubted highlight was Mumtaz's 160 against Egerton. The ever dependable Arshad Raza picked up 38 wickets and was well supported by Usman and Majid with 32 and 27 wickets. The 2nds picked 30 players during the season and not one player was available for every fixture. On the positive side this did allow a number of juniors to get exposure to 2nd XI cricket and there were many pleasing performances which can only bode well for the future. I congratulate Chris on his ability to juggle player availability so adeptly. On another note the 2nd XI do need a regular umpire for next season. If anyone knows of one, or would like to do it, or just umpire a few games, please see me after the meeting.

The 3rd XI had a mixed season with some very good performances both collectively and individually. On the whole the club fielded a very young 3rd XI and this showed in the inconsistent performances. Despite this going into September the 3rds had an outside chance of winning the title but a combination of poor weather and a couple of defeats put paid to that. It was noticeable that the standard of opposition was somewhat erratic ranging from some poor sides to some stronger sides containing players who were emphatically not of a 3rd XI standard. Nevertheless, what other clubs do is up to them. We will continue to use the 3rd XI as a showcase for our junior talent, rotating them in and out to give opportunities to as many players as possible, and including senior players to provide experience. Inevitably, given the

rotation policy a large number of players featured. Jon Stackhouse scored the most runs with 185 and Suliman Sarosh led the wicket taking with 10. Highlights that spring to mind include Ali Hassan's 100 in the first game of the season and Joe Mitchell's 5 for and 49 not out at Newton, and of course who could forget Jon Stackhouse coming to grief outside the Co-op. Where appropriate for next season we will try to run a friendly XI alongside some 3rd XI games to provide more opportunities for our juniors. However, we do require senior players to support this so as to avoid mismatches and provide the necessary guidance (and in some cases transport).

A theme of this evening has been player availability and to some degree commitment. At the end of the season we had a player's meeting where this was discussed. There was a full and frank exchange of views and if I am honest more heat than light was generated. Some things were poorly expressed and I would once again like to apologise for anyone who was upset by this. On the positive side it was clear how much passion there is for the club. In a perfect world we would have a squad of 40 players across our 3 teams who were available across twenty of the twenty two weeks. For whatever reasons we are miles away from achieving this and I doubt we ever will. I also doubt that there are many clubs in the country who can boast this. Nevertheless we should try to make every effort to improve our availability. I would also like a greater (off field) commitment from the players. Last year I talked about the level of subs being unsustainable at their present level if you, the players, did not bring in more money through ball sponsorship and fundraising. Regrettably the response was underwhelming and the new committee will undoubtedly have to revisit this. Even more regrettably we had to cancel the annual dinner due to low numbers. A number of regular (non-playing) attendees were not available but the number of players who would have been in attendance was frankly pathetic. I believe that the annual dinner is a great tradition and one of the things that makes this club special, evidently I am in the minority. It might well be that the Annual Dinner has had its day, if so what do we replace it with?

One of the things to come out of the players meeting was the setting up a players committee. I believe there has been a preliminary meeting where a players' code has been discussed. Over time I hope this can develop into an

important function of the club as it is vital that the club develops in the way that you the players want not the way we the committee think you want. I understand the committee will eventually look at social events and I would urge players to get involved or at least contribute ideas to the group. Please would you contact your new captains in the first instance. I recognise that for several reasons selection has not worked as it should and we need to revisit this as a matter of urgency. I would hope that the players' committee has some input into this.

I think we can all agree that the outfield work has been a success. There are still some final sand banding to be completed but I feel that we played games that previously we would not have done. It has been a long hard road and hopefully we will reap the benefits for years to come. As part of the plan we have bought some new machinery which should hopefully see improvements to the quality of the square. We have also put in place a new maintenance regime. Additionally, thanks primarily to the work of Jon Wiggans we have a nice picket fence running across the top of the ground. We have also gained a grant that will be put to use tidying up the area around the side of the pavilion. Work in that area will begin once the weather improves. A number of saplings have been planted on the reverse slope of the "mound" and hopefully in time they will add to the aesthetic of the club. These incremental improvements are part of our agreement to provide you with the best facilities we can afford.

Last year we engaged Sam Holt as cricket coach and whilst we may not have got the full benefit from him we are more than happy to re-engage him. I would urge players to attend practice sessions and make use of his undoubted expertise. If there are elements of practice sessions that you are unhappy with let us hear what they are rather than not turn up or practice on different nights. Sam and the committee want practice sessions that work for you. I would caution that quality coaches are as rare as hen's teeth and whilst we cannot please all of the people all of the time we want to build a long term relationship with Sam and hopefully attract players through this structure.

We have engaged a new junior coach, Maddie White, and we plan to do some coaching in schools. As a club we want to put the right structure in place for juniors and create a clear and permanent pathway for youngsters to join our club and therefore secure our future. Last year we took part in the All Stars

programme aimed at 5 to 8 year olds and will be doing so again. Thank you to Matthew and Fraser for taking this on. Thanks to Dom and Jordi for the assistance on the coaching front. It was heartening to see the ground so well used on Friday practice nights. In terms of junior coaching we are always looking for people to offer their time and experience and I would urge you to help out when you can. If anybody who wishes to formalise this arrangement we will of course help you find and pay for coaching courses. We want Bury CC to be recognised as somewhere where a child will get a good cricketing education and parents looking for a club will choose us over others. Again, this is something we need your help with; wherever possible please spread the word about the good work we are doing. It would be remiss of us as a club not to look at developing a women and/or girls section. We cannot be blind to the opportunities that have sprung from having a successful and high profile England Womens team. This year we intend to hold a women's soft ball festival in conjunction with the LCB. At this stage that is the extent of our plans but not of our ambition.

At the junior level whilst it is nice to have winning teams and future stars it is more important to see children enjoying themselves, participating in our sport and conducting themselves in a manner that brings credit to themselves and the club. I am pleased to report that our junior teams achieved this last year. At opposite ends of the age spectrum we had some success. Our U9s went through the season unbeaten and our U18s were cup runners up. Our U11s, U13s and U15s were all competitive. Thank you to the respective team managers; your teams reflected well upon you. I know it was not always easy trying to arrange fixtures with clubs whose only concern is getting their strongest team out. Hopefully this season there will be stronger guidelines from the league and more fixtures in general. My thanks once again go to Paul our non-Junior non-Coordinator for his behind the scenes work.

I would like to acknowledge the work of our scorers James, Freddie and Josh who have continued their good work on CricHQ. We are now providing live streaming of all our games and there is a highlights package available which can be viewed through our website. Can I also thank Roger for his work on social media and publicising the club. Please take a look at the club website, www.burycc.co.uk. It is still a work in progress and we would be happy to

receive any constructive criticism you may have, or for that matter news or articles for the website. My thanks are also due to the outgoing committee members. Alan has once again provided a steady hand on the tiller ensuring our administration runs smoothly and keeps our finances in check. Wayne as always has worked tirelessly for the benefit of the club; he is forever spending time talking to people to gain insights that ultimately he can use for the benefit of the club. The counter is a major source of revenue for the club and Sue has provided sterling work once again. We all owe her a big debt of gratitude.

I sometimes wonder whether as a committee we appear to be a closed shop, that we don't want help, or that we don't give people the responsibility to develop and run with their ideas. If this is the impression we give out then it is the wrong one. We want your help, whether that is a Sunday afternoon running the counter, filling in a grant form or running a fundraising event; in whatever way we would welcome it. Also give us your ideas; it is your club after all. Do not presume that the committee has the monopoly on good ideas. Please do not be put off bringing your ideas forward because you may not be able to deliver that idea on your own. If it is a good idea it is a good idea and together as a club we might bring it to fruition.

Our golf day continues to go from strength to strength and will take place this year on Friday 11th May at Pike Fold. Your support is welcome. Last year's tour was a great success and was enjoyed by all. I believe we are awaiting confirmation of a date from Rydal School but unless Wayne is going to tell us differently the tour week will be the same as last year with games against Bangor on Tuesday 24th July, Llandudno on the Wednesday, before finishing at Colwyn Bay on the Thursday. Having banged on about commitment it was good to see a healthy attendance at the Derby School last Sunday for nets and I look forward to seeing you there again this Sunday.