

Week 1 Lords SCCL Premier Division Roundup

By Jamie Dowley

Wem have a REDDY made superstar, while Dyson cleans up Sentinel to get Whitchurch firing...

On a glorious opening day of the season, the headline acts were in the north of the county where Wem and Whitchurch both recorded exciting home victories.

I was at Saulton Rd where the game of the day on paper looked to be the heavyweight clash between **Wem** and **Quatt** and the sizable crowd were treated to an enthralling contest that lived up to expectations.

Batting first, Quatt opener Tom Whitney was lucky to survive an unfortunate drop from home captain Jim Astley early in his innings and made his opponents pay with an excellent 76 that was the bedrock of his side's score. There were other contributions from Alex Biddle (28), debutant Todd Henderson (25) and Scott Furber (24), but the home bowlers plugged away well and a total of 228 was perhaps 25 shy of where it threatened to be at the halfway point, although still very competitive. Jim Astley recovered well from missing Whitney to end with 3-44, while overseas pro Abhishek Reddy bowling off spin really impressed with 3-23. In reply, the pre-season hype over new Quatt signing Henderson looked to be justified as the former Pelsall man steamed in with the new ball, taking the prize scalp of Harry Chandler, which bought Reddy to the crease, the Indian who arrived only on Thursday took a while to find his feet but slowly started to score well. However, when new Quatt captain James Lunn took 3 quick wickets to reduce Wem to 105-5, the visitors were in the box seat. Veteran Martyn Davies, while not without a number of injuries, still has a high level of performance in his locker and his 32 in cahoots with Reddy got the score up to 181 the Indian placing the ball expertly across all areas of the ground, before late wickets threatened to derail Wem. It was all left to last man Jim Astley to stay calm and leave it to the pro, who finished the game with another clean 4, to end on a magnificent 140no and a superb 1 wicket victory.

Afterwards I spoke with a delighted winning captain **"We were a bit concerned coming in as we have had no warm up cricket, but we stuck at it well in the field as it looked like they were on for 260/270. We thought the pro would be decent and he looks quite good (!) and has really fitted in well with the group. Beating a tough side like Quatt is a good result but we won't be getting carried away"**

Quatt Chairman Howard Sanders "we are disappointed to come away with a defeat as we played some excellent cricket but the innings from Reddy was as good as anything I've seen in all my years. With my League hat on it's exciting to have a player of that calibre in the SCCL and it augurs well for the season ahead"



Wems Abhishek Reddy lifts his bat to the acclaim of the Wem players and supporters.

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Just up the A49 **Whitchurch** hosted **Sentinel**, a place where the visitors have found little joy in recent years. Batting first, Mike Robinson struck an aggressive 24, but then Jonny Evans and overseas Nick Bateup took charge to reduce the hosts to 62-5. However, Kunal Dabas was still at the crease and he received excellent support from Shaf Ahmed, Azaad Rafiq and Alex Heath (who each made exactly 18), before Dabas departed for 52 as his side were bowled out for 195 with over 10 overs remaining. Evans finished with 4-39, Bateup 2-39 and there was also a brace for Jacob Binnersely but Sentinel captain Ed Ashlin would have been concerned at the 44 extras conceded. Overseas all rounder Bateup shone with the bat as well in reply, batting with the aid of a runner he reached a half century and at 109-4, the visitors were probably slight favourites. The game then turned when Robinson gave the ball to 16 year old Ollie Dyson, the talented off-spinner dismissed both dangermen Ashlin and Bateup (59) in his first 2 overs, and with Shabbir Khan (2-26) controlling things at the other end he then returned to mop up the tail ending with a first senior 5 wicket haul taking 5-14 as Whitchurch won by 30 runs.

Mike Robinson “**Very pleased with the result which showed we do have some batting depth lower down. Ollie Dyson bowled with great skill and came on in a pressure moment when the game was in the balance, well supported today by Kash and Shab. Really positive signs going into next week at Quatt.**”



Ollie Dyson (left) receives the match ball from delighted Whitchurch chairman Iain Marsh

Champions **Wellington** are off to a winning start but didn't have it all their own way at the Burway against **Ludlow**. Indeed, they were in a spot of trouble at 113-5 with Jason Oakes out cheaply on his return. That put pressure on another debutant in the shape of much travelled David Laird, the classy allrounder launched a counterattack and found a willing partner in Hugh Morris, as the pair put on 120 for the 6th wicket before Morris fell for 30. Laird continued to dominate the bowlers finishing on a brilliant undefeated 126 as his side reached 302-7. Captain Dan Vaughan then gave Laird and Matthew Morris the new ball ahead of last season's regular pair Hugh Morris and Ollie Smith and his decision was rewarded with both striking in their first overs including the big wicket of Luke Miles for a duck. At 40-3 it was hard to see a way back for the hosts but Will Sparrow initiated a counter attack of his own, his 88 off 55 balls threatened at stages to get his side back in it, but the champions were able to close it

out, with Oakes having the last laugh with 2-14, while overall Matthew Morris was the pick of the bowlers with 3-25.

Dan Vaughan "We were in a bit of a sticky situation, but Lairdy batted superbly with great support from Hugh. It was a rusty performance in patches so on reflection it was good to post 20 points and to make 300 without our top 5 making a significant contribution is satisfying. There is a lot more to come from the lads"

After a 3rd place finish last time, **Allscott Heath** are primed to go again and they started with the biggest win of the day, a 207 run pummelling of **Shelton**. It was written in the stars that Maz Hasnain would get runs on his debut and his 78 paved the way for Kuldeep Devatwal to enter the stage and the Indian superstar duly delivered another outstanding performance as a 70 ball 149no including 9 sixes left the Shelton attack wilting in the heat. Supporting Devatwal were also Luke Thornton (40), Jason Allen (30) and Austin Rowley (22) to give a total of 359-5 that was always unlikely to be chased down. With Callum Starling striking twice early on to reduce the reply to 4-2, it was then left to the experienced Will Savage (41) and overseas Navindu Vithanage (48) to make the scorecard respectable, but with Brad Thornton taking 3-42 it was over to who else but Devatwal to wrap up the game, his 3-4 ended the innings on 152.

Callum Starling "it was a superb start for us, where everything clicked and nobody put a foot wrong. Maz set it up perfectly for KD to come in and destroy the bowlers and was well supported by Jason, Luke and Austin. Fantastic spell from Brad in the heat and Luke was unlucky to pick up wickets in a quality opening spell. We never took our foot off the gas and the result speaks for itself"

Newtown captain Ben Price gets the award for the first SCCL century of the season, a run a ball 104 set up his side's 141 run win at **Madeley**. Price received excellent support from Jordan Baijnath (43) and Tom Leslie (32no), as the Welshmen amassed 275-6, while for the hosts Martin Boyle and Shahzaib each took a brace of wickets. With Dave Anthony back to take the new ball after a season out with injury, Price could be confident of defending that total and after Anthony struck twice early on, the result wasn't really in doubt. It was then over to Nathan Smith and Sam Baugh to carry on where they left off last season, although while

Madeley pro Mithun was at the crease the visitors couldn't rest too easily. Mithun eventually left for 55, at which stage the game was done, Smith the star bowler this time with 5-45 while Baugh the more economical with 2-25.

Ben Price "it was a really strong day for us overall, Madeley weren't at their best with the ball by their own admission and 275 was way too big a score. It was great to have Dave Anthony back and he bowled really nicely upfront and the spinners then controlled it well"

Finally, it was a baptism of fire for **Shrewsbury 2nds** on their return to the Premier Division as they suffered a quickfire defeat at **St Georges**. It always looked a tough opening fixture for Rob Foster's side, and after a positive start having reached 29-0 their innings quickly subsided. Ali Mustafa was highlighted preseason, and the paceman proved his worth with a fiery spell taking 4-29, and then it was over to Ashish Ashish (2-14) and Kasjuan Sullivan (2-8) to wrap up the Shrewsbury innings after just 20 overs with 76 on the board. There is nothing Zab Safi likes more than chasing down a small target in short order and his 37 off 22 balls with 31no from Mohammed Aqeeb meant the Dragons could enjoy the sunshine, the game all wrapped up before 4pm.

So a fantastic opening day of the season, next week the big games keep coming as Wem travel to Wellington and Whitchurch make the long trek down to Quatt, while the county town is spoiled for action as all 3 teams are at home.