

## 2026 SCCL Premier Division end of season review - Part 1

By Jamie Dowley

In what was the ultimate two-tier Division, the separate but equally enthralling mini leagues produced an absorbing season that gave almost every team something to play for going into September. The standard at the top end was very high, in my eyes better than ever, and the games between those teams in their own section produced some classics. But the wide gap between Whitchurch in 6<sup>th</sup> and Sentinel in 7<sup>th</sup> of an eye watering 110 points meant that there were too many mismatches at times. To illustrate the point, of the 72 games between the bottom six and the top six only 2 (yes 2!) ended in a positive result for the lower half team. Here I give my verdict on each team, the success stories and the weaknesses and give an overall rating out of 10 starting with positions 12-7.

### Shrewsbury 2nd XI - 12<sup>th</sup>

So endeth the county town 2nd team's 3rd spell in the Premier Division in 6 years. Although a bottom placed finish with just 3 wins (all in the WDL format) tells some of the story, they weren't uncompetitive at times but a bowling unit that was the weakest in the division, meant a failure to take wickets and high economy rates put added pressure on a batting group that actually did pretty well. Kieran Gill had an excellent first half and ended with 585 runs @ 39, while Rob Foster held it together on many occasions also making over 500 runs. Wilf Peers and Ed Prideaux both had their moments too but by stark contrast the bowlers struggled with just George Jenkins and Ryan Fernando taking over 20 wickets with 23 and 22 respectively. The season all hinged on a low scoring defeat at home to Madeley when I was surprised they didn't strengthen their team from above, and from that point they failed to win another game to end below 150 points. The final game saw them put in an excellent display that should have deprived Wellington of the title, but they couldn't quite get the job done when in prime position, which perhaps summed things up.

***Rating 4/10 It's getting to become a familiar tale, a side too good for Division One, but not able to survive in the Premier, something that perhaps raises questions over the future of 2nd teams in the top flight as it's such a tough ask to compete. They may be back in 18 months time but will the outcome be any different?***

### Newtown - 11<sup>th</sup>

The Welshmen return to Division 1 after a two year stay but can hold their heads high that they gave it their best shot but ultimately lacked the quality to be really competitive. Losing arguably their two best players from last year in David Laird and then Sam Baugh after a few games meant they were severely up against it, while Ben Price gave up the captaincy mid-season to concentrate on his batting, as David Anthony took over the reins. The overseas was decent, Jordan Baijnath managed 500 runs and 30 wickets while Nathan Smith carried on his fine debut season last time with 35 wickets this. Another player who showed glimpses of his undoubted ability was Griff Davies, his brilliant hundred against Sentinel was the standout performance of the season but their seamers just couldn't keep a check on their opponents scoring as they all went at over 5 an over. This added extra pressure to a batting order that relied on the pro and Ben Price (438 runs) as only 5 players averaged over 12. They could have done with Mike Bellamore who in a somewhat bizarre situation continued to plunder runs and wickets for fun in their 2nds title win in Division 4 but didn't make a single appearance in the 1sts, something that doesn't seem right from the outside looking in. Just 4 wins against rival teams was not quite enough as they were unable to gain any traction against the top half sides and their fate was sealed in an abandoned game against Wem

***Rating 5.5/10 The fact they at least took it down to the last game of the season is to their credit, but ultimately there just wasn't enough quality and depth in the squad to keep their heads above water.***

## **Ludlow - 10th**

Before a ball was bowled the new captain Luke Miles was aiming for top 5 again, but sadly for one of the nicest guys in cricket the season was one of toil. The first half wasn't too bad, they reached the end of June with 4 wins, including a superb victory at Wem and quickly followed it up with 48 points against rivals Madeley and Sentinel. 117 points was mid table form and by this stage overseas Nathan Englebrecht was really finding his form, he was to end with 700 runs @ 47. The trouble was that the end was after 16 games, by which stage they were fully entrenched in a relegation scrap with 3 teams possibly going down. A run of 9 straight losses, including crucial defeats to Newtown, Madeley and Shrewsbury meant that by the time they beat Sentinel in the final round, they were relying on results elsewhere, results that failed to materialise. As well as the overseas, they were reliant on the runs of Sam Edwards who had a fine year with 550 runs but Miles and Deon Patel both had difficult seasons with the willow.

On the bowling front a lot rested on the shoulders of Miles and star bowler Joe Williams, the left armer managed 36 wickets which was a bit down on recent years, but he did turn himself into a handy all rounder with 269 runs. The Bowen brothers stepped up to the plate with wickets most weeks although they like most of the bowlers found it difficult to keep a lid on the economy rates. So, they end in 10<sup>th</sup>, and await their fate to be decided next week. If their 57 seasons stay as founder members of the top division of Shropshire Cricket does come to an end it will be a sad day. But I have no doubts they will be back sooner rather than later.

***Rating 3/10 Sounds harsh but 16 defeats out of 21 games is a really bad season for a club who finished 5<sup>th</sup> the last 2 seasons and were champions only 4 years ago. Its hard to pinpoint the exact reasons but their pro going home with 6 games to go has to be a major contributory factor. But are they really the 3<sup>rd</sup> worst team? Some people will say the table doesn't lie, but I'm not sure in this case.***

## **Madeley - 9th**

Many people's pre-season favourites to be relegated defied gravity once again by picking up 6 wins against their rivals. It therefore mattered little that they were on the receiving end of several serious beatings by the top half sides. Their underlying numbers were not great, but in Mithun they had a captain and overseas pro who knows his game and that of his squad that they were able to perform consistently in the winnable games and were less worried about the others. His 620 runs @32 topped the list, while 5 other players, Salim Ahmed, Joe Buttery, Oli Davis, Bas Ahmad and Anil Kumar averaged around 20 which was enough to be competitive when it mattered.

It was similar with the bowling, Martin Boyle took 28 wickets, while Mithun and Salim went one better with 29 apiece. Moving forward their squad depth looks a real problem, in the last few years their once competitive 2nds have fallen off a cliff, so it will be interesting to see if they can recruit this winter. They can certainly bask in a job well done but real concerns remain at their long term future at this level, and you get the feeling if they do ever get relegated, they will struggle to bounce back.

***Rating 7.5 /10. If this was based on XG, Madeley would have been cut adrift at the bottom, so you must give them real kudos for staying up with a game or two to spare, unlike many of their rivals.***

## **Shelton - 8th**

This was more of a struggle than it perhaps should have been. Starting with a points deduction didn't help but after opening with two heavy defeats they then went on a run of 4 wins in 6 games. It should have been 5 out of 7 when they looked certain to beat Wem requiring just 25 runs with 7 wickets in hand, but a complete implosion lost them that one and they

never fully recovered for the rest of the season, requiring a final day win against Madeley to be 100% safe. Overseas pro Navindu Vithanage was a steady performer, but 600 runs and 23 wickets was probably at the lower end of expectations, although he was still well clear of a batting unit that failed to put up any meaningful numbers and they didn't score a century all season. Saleh Ahmed was well down on his 2025 runs although he missed a few games while Dan Walker was the only other player above 300 runs.

The bowling was better, Sam Griffiths had an excellent year with 40 wickets at 16 and is in the mix for TOTY, while Simon Jones didn't hit the heights of recent years but still got through the most overs of seam in the division and took 33 wickets at a decent economy. Jack Morris in his first year as captain held things together well, he was one of 3 ever presents with Jones and the pro and although their availability was better than previous years it was still probably the worst in the division.

***Rating 6/10. I fancied them pre-season to do pretty well, but it just never happened for them mainly because of a poor year batting wise. This campaign won't go down as a memorable one, but they live to fight another day and that's the main thing.***

## **Sentinel - 7th**

A 7<sup>th</sup> placed finish disguises what was a disappointing campaign at Albert Rd. Just 1 positive result in the first 13 games meant they entered the final two months of the season in real trouble but with three big 24-point wins in the space of a month they were able to have enough in the bank to be safe with one game to go. A disastrous early defeat to Madeley followed by a rain off when they were ahead at Shrewsbury meant from that point they were under the pump and its testament to the calming leadership skills of Ed Ashlin who had a disappointing campaign with the bat that they were able to find a path through.

Overseas Nick Bateup was a popular addition to the squad and shaped up pretty well with bat and ball, 681 runs and 28 wickets were acceptable numbers although he had plenty of starts without kicking on. Tom Griffiths was excellent as he passed 500 runs although nearly 400 of these were in the red ball format, a strange anomaly that keeps repeating itself. Veteran Muhammad Zaheer did nothing until the final 6 weeks when he really hit his straps and scored 267 crucial runs that went a long way to the team staying up, he can be pleased with his contribution, while Connor Cheshire was ultra consistent with bat and gloves and is the first name on the team sheet. The rest of the batting was all rather below par, some talented players not performing with any consistency. The bowling by contrast was pretty decent, Alex Johnson topped the wickets with 34, while a late run from Matty Cliffe, talked up here pre-season as one to watch, meant he topped the averages with 21 wickets @ 19. Jacob Binnersley also took 21 wickets and bowled with vigour. They missed James Shaw who only played 4 games and did little in them, if they could get him back on the field more regularly next season it would be a bonus.

## **Rating 4/10**

***They were a team who were less than the sum of their parts which I guess could be taken as a positive or a negative moving forward. I would expect them to try and recruit in the winter with an opening bowler and a steady batter to slot in at 3 or 4 surely a priority. I am not sure there are many in the 2<sup>nd</sup> team ready for the step up just yet so they may look down the leagues, a pathway that has proven very successful in the past for them, but they really will not want another tough season like this one.***

***Coming tomorrow are teams 1-6 where perhaps the mood will be a bit more upbeat, and then my official Premier Division Team of the Year.***