

2026 SCCL Premier Division end of season review - Part 2

By Jamie Dowley

Following my verdict of the teams finishing in positions 12 to 7 in part 1, now we look at those teams that finished in positions 6 to 1.

Whitchurch - 6th with 296pts

An improvement of three places on 2025 and an appearance at Finals Day gives some justification for saying this was a decent season at Heath Rd. But 6th is never a position a club the size of Whitchurch can be happy with. If ever there was a team that illustrated the “two tier” nature of the Division, it is Mike Robinson’s side. Utterly ruthless against the bottom half with 11 wins and a washout in the 12 games, while against the teams above, it was a different story as Wem, Allscott, Quatt and Wellington all did the double over them. Ironically the best team St Georges failed to beat them home and away which frustratingly shows what they are capable of. On the batting front Robinson was good, when he really gets going as witnessed against Newtown and Ludlow he is on another level although he will be a tad disappointed with just 3 x 50 and 1 x 100 in a 21-game season. He rarely failed though and the same goes for Kunal Dabas who was ultra consistent and topped the averages. The stylish Iftikhar Khan was good for 569 runs @ 30 and even ended up captain for the last 4 games when Robinson took a sabbatical. Their lack of lower order runs highlighted pre-season wasn’t that bad in the end as the likes of Kash Hussain and Alex Heath chipped in a few times but in the big games they were often blown away.

The bowling was led by the “magic man”, Shabbir Khan, as he showed once again why he is probably the best leg spinner we have ever seen in the SCCL and his 53 wickets @ 12 topped the divisional charts. Kash Hussain always bowled with skill and heart, is never injured and he can be pleased with his 38 wickets. Other players had mixed seasons, Alex Heath had some good days but perhaps didn’t bowl with the consistency required and at one stage had a week in the 2nds which was a strange one, but 16-year-old all-rounder Ollie Dyson stepped into the big shoes of Shafiq Ahmed and shone with some really good moments in taking 26 wickets, the same as Heath. You feel there is a lot more to come from both those two and they would be well advised to stay at Whitchurch to further their development.

Rating 6.5/10. They will be frustrated they couldn’t quite break into the title shake up, but it was never really on when push came to shove. They could do with a high grade overseas if they are to compete again at the top, but that would require a different strategy to their current one.

Allscott Heath - 5th with 330 pts

Once again they can be delighted with their season, mixing it with the big boys, that now after three years at this level they can be considered one of the big boys themselves. A favourable early fixture list meant they hit the ground running in superb style with 6 straight wins and from that point they were always in the mix. What followed though was a mini disaster, 3 straight losses including one at bottom club Shrewsbury 2nd XI, a beating in the KO and a points deduction for an unsatisfactory pitch. You felt at that stage the season could implode but to their credit they bounced back with another 6 straight wins and were not without a shot at the title in the closing weeks. Kuldeep Devtawal enjoyed another stellar season, over 1000 league runs at 73 and 43 wickets at 11, he can once again claim to be the best pro in the division, although he faces stiff competition for that accolade. Maz Hasnain was never not going to score runs, he only played 14 games due to injury but still averaged mid 40s and made 2 centuries. Others like Luke Thornton with 422 runs @ 30 and Jason Summers added to the sense that they are far from a one-man band.

Summers and Thornton were also excellent with the ball, 35 and 27 wickets between them with the latter's 6-32 at Wellington on Bank Holiday Monday the best piece of bowling I saw live this season. Callum Starling, (24 wickets @19) had a frustrating time with injury, missing several games in the second half but was very consistent, rarely if ever bowling a bad spell, while the same goes for another injury hit player Brad Thornton with 22 wickets @ 15. All in all though it's another solid season, and if it hadn't been for that nightmare 3 weeks in June, they could well have grabbed a first ever title.

Rating 8/10

It's another really strong season for Callum Starling's side, that they were 5th and not 4th or 3rd is neither here nor there, 15 wins and over 330 points is a club record on both scores at this level and they can be very pleased. If ever they have ambition to kick on again they will need to add 2/3 new players as they are still over reliant on a core group but they will be well aware of that.

Wem - 4th with 334pts

They struck gold with their pro Abhishek Reddy, the Indian was off to a flyer as he single handedly defeated title rivals Quatt and Wellington in the opening 2 rounds. When he followed it up with a 3rd straight century in week 3, the record books were being checked but after that he reverted to being a very good pro rather than a world beater. His absence for the whole of June would have frustrated his club, but they won 3 of the 4 matches he missed in that period although a home defeat to Ludlow was very avoidable. Harry Chandler was the only other player to pass 500 runs, but he averaged under 30 which was below the level of his obvious ability, although he didn't seem to have a lot of luck. Sam Peate and Matt Cohen can be pleased with their body of work, both were around the 450 run mark, and the tail did wag in some games with Tom Astley and Alex Ollerenshaw both contributing to crucial wins.

The seam attack didn't quite fire and Astley and Ollerenshaw have both had better seasons, while the eye-catching signing of Dan Bowen hasn't borne fruit yet due to injury and captain Jim Astley left himself out on a few occasions. The standout performer with the ball was Ralph Davies, many questioned whether he could follow his breakthrough season of 2025, but the 15 year old put any such debate to one side with a highly consistent year. He played every game and ended on 39 wickets, his red ball bowling in particular being highly skilled. They introduced several other younger players during the campaign with others waiting in the wings and it's clear they are approaching something of a transition. How they manage that in the next 2-3 years will be critical to the future standing of the club.

Rating 7/10. You always felt they were just a fraction short of a title challenge maybe through desire as much as ability. Perhaps they relied on Reddy too much by the end as he batted, bowled and captained the side, but he was a joy to watch at times, his performance at Finals Day will live long in the memory.

Quatt - 3rd with 353pts

Tipped up here to finally end their title hoodoo, they once again were in the box seat before they fell away, losing to all their 4 main rivals in the second half of the season. Like other teams at the top, they were clinical at dispatching the bottom half but when the pressure was really on in those big games there was something missing. Their pro Nipun had a poor start but with 2 centuries in the last 2 games ended up with 741 runs @ 46, but the Quatt hierarchy would have been expecting more and he didn't match up to their rivals pros. He only found real success when he took over at no1 from Ryan Wheldon in the second half and thereafter he made nearly 500 runs. Ironically the results then took a downturn. Tom Whitney had his best ever season at number 2, his 790 runs meant they were rarely in trouble early, but the rest of the line up chopped and changed and they weren't a settled unit in terms of batting position. New signing Todd Henderson passed the 500 run mark @45 and

rarely failed, Alex Biddle was solid as was Wheldon who batted in every position after he lost his top spot. In the big games their tail failed to wag compared to Wellington and St Georges who could always be relied on for a strong rearguard.

Captain Jamie Lunn had a superb year with the ball, taking 44 wickets at 10, and will take his place in the TOTY but arguably under-bowled himself in several games as he only got through 144 overs. Todd Henderson was possibly over bowled as he got through 164 overs by comparison for 10 less wickets at double the average of his skipper but was still a serious all round player. Dan Handley looks like he will continue to improve, he has all the raw materials to be a serious strike bowler and took 25 wickets at a decent rate. Their slow bowling is a concern as Scott Furber wasn't at his best, but he still has credit in the bank although Gaz Jones did well when called upon. They will know the areas they need to strengthen, certainly another top order batter is one area and if they change pros they will want one who gives them some overs too, preferably of spin.

Rating 6/10. Perhaps I am being harsh as they entered the final hour of the season still in with a chance of winning the league but they seem to have become the South Africa of the SCCL. There will be an overriding sense of frustration that they have fallen short once again, it's happened so many times you have to wonder if it is as much psychological as physical. I backed them to finally get over the line but once again I have done my money (I owe you a fiver Perce).

St Georges - Runners Up with 364pts

The Dragons led by Faisal Khan assembled perhaps the best side we have seen in the last 25 years of the League. Starting with a hefty points deduction always made it a tough task to land a first league title since 2003 but they certainly gave it a go and even late on the last afternoon of the season they were favourites to do so. Sadly for them it wasn't to be, but their 2nd place, allied to KO glory made it a season to remember at Church Rd. The side they landed with by the start of June went unchanged for 3 months and was almost perfectly balanced, that it was no surprise they went on an incredible run of form. Mohammed Aqeeb (484 runs) invariably got them off to a solid start before Charitha Kumarasinghe (597) and Amritpal Singh (647 @ 92) laid a platform for star man Ashish to destroy attacks, he topped the Divisional run charts with 1037 runs including 5 centuries. They even had the luxury of everyone's favourite player Zab Safi to come in and wreak havoc at the death as the big hitter struck 520 at just under 200 SR. Then it was over to the bowlers, and the 3 man pace attack utilising the height of Shah Faiz, the raw speed of Ali Mustafa and the superb swing of Ashish as the trio shared 122 wickets virtually equally. There was even room for Babar Khan to provide exquisite control with 36 wickets at less than 3 an over. This all equated to a powerhouse unit that won 17 games out of 21 with just 2 defeats all year in league and cup. The big question is where do they go from here? I've no doubts that this same side would be virtually unstoppable next season if it is retained, and it would be a shame for the league and the neutral if they didn't come again, they have provided great entertainment as well as raising the standard of the division.

Rating 9.5/10 I can't give them a 10 because they didn't win the league, but other than that they have been a huge success and have put St Georges CC back on the map after over a decade in the doldrums.

Wellington - Champions with 375 pts

This is going to sound sycophantic but if anyone was designing a perfect cricket club from scratch they would do well to use Wellington as the template. Therefore, it is no surprise that they have made it effectively 3 league titles in a row using a vast majority of home grown players who have stayed loyal when some of them could easily have chased the coin elsewhere. Under the leadership of Dan Vaughan they are a very strategic side, they train hard and plan and execute their methods and once again they have come up trumps. Having been "Reddyed" by Wem in week 2, they won the remainder of their completed WL matches in the first section but then had a sticky start in the WDL. They received a bit of criticism for only going for 20 pts in their opening WDL match against Newtown, while a change of tactic in the next 2 games brought 2 draws that

took them further behind the leaders as did defeat to St Georges . They then reverted to type as a bowl first side in all conditions and Vaughan set them the task of winning their last 10 games knowing they would win the league. That they achieved it despite a plethora of scares is testament to the batting depth and never say die spirit they have in the camp. Vaughan was top of the run charts with 739 runs @39, while Jason Oakes made just over 600, but perhaps that was less than his employers would have hoped for. Their other star player brought in, David Laird made a brilliant hundred on debut, but after that let his bowling do the bulk of his work. He was unplayable in back to back August wins over rivals Allscott Heath and Quatt that really made the difference, something you need from your paid players and he was leading wicket taker with 33. Last year's SCCL player of the year Matt Simmonds wasn't at his 2025 levels, but had his moments with 400 runs and 26 wickets, while Ollie Smith (28 wickets), Josh McDonald, and Hugh and Matthew Morris all played their part with bat and ball at crucial times. You cannot beat having batting depth all the way to number 11 and that's not forgetting Morgan Ward who wasn't always available due to school commitments but who is a serious talent with bat and gloves and they will be very keen to keep hold of him for next year, regardless of which division they are in.

Rating 9.5/10. Their aim at the start of the year was to go one better and make it to the Birmingham League, and right now that looks pretty unlikely. But they did everything they needed to retain their Premier title as other team's deductions are beyond their control.

So that's a wrap. An incredible 2026 season that went down to the final hour with 3 teams still in contention but it's congratulations to Wellington CC

Coming tomorrow my official Premier Division Team of the Year

