

Cricketing Senior Moments - December 2008, Huddersfield Examiner

The Almondbury Casuals Cricket Club was formed in 1949 at The Woolpack Hotel, Almondbury.

P A Haigh (chairman 1952-1960), on his return from the war, decided the discipline of league cricket was not for him and gathered together men with similar views.

The head at King James lent the school pitch to get them started and a cricket club was born. They called themselves Almondbury Occasionals, which soon collapsed to The Almondbury Casuals.

The Casuals have attempted to play cricket every summer Sunday since.

They have no property, other than kit and rely on the availability of a local league club ground for their home fixtures, graciously considering any reasonable invitation to travel away.

Membership tends to be on the mature side and, though skill with bat or ball helps, match availability is preferred. The Casuals are thus a refuge for the older cricketer with two left feet - senior moments waiting to happen.

Here is a selection from the last four years: Accidents happen. Against The Retreat at York Railway Institute, Ian Cooper was caught down by the midwicket boundary. As he trudged to the pavilion he was floored by the fielder's return throw. He limped into the changing room with blood soaked trousers, soon to emerge wearing an arm sling that looped over his head and around his lower jaw, in the manner of an old cartoon character with toothache. It was all they had in first aid. Whatever happened to keeping your eye on the ball?

People get lost. The year before we played The Retreat on a lazy sunny Sunday afternoon beside the Ouse at York - courting couples strolling along the riverbank, the smell of new mown grass and coxswains encouraging their crews. They were batting first when we heard a car drive up on the other side of the boundary hedge. The engine stopped and a car door opened and closed. We heard some muffled mumbling. Then a frank curse as Rupert Wilson's red face appeared on top of the hedge, 'How the so-and-so do I get over there?' He'd arrived in the public park next door.

There's incompetency. Stainborough have a very large middle order batsman, unfit at the best of times, dire for first game of the season. He fended one into the off side and called for a run.

Dominic Ford swooped on it. The non-striker sent Jumbo back and he was stranded. It's not clear what took place then, but, despite Dom's perfect underarm throw, the ball finished on the floor, the wicket remained intact and Jumbo made his ground. Loud hooting and cackling emerged from the home dressing room. Greg Smith lay down at mid off and beat the ground. Bill Crossland, the current chairman, looked to the heavens in disbelief while the rest of The Casuals were incontinent. Apart from me that is, the crestfallen keeper.

Misinterpretations occur. Take Will Ward against The Jesters at Thongsbridge. After tea, he was approached by their plumpish fourteen year old number four batsman in a 'Rhinos' baseball cap, 'Can you tell me where the toilets are, please?' 'Yes, round the back,' replied Will, indicating the whitewashed open-air stone box behind the pavilion, next to the river. A long intake of held breath is recommended. 'I need the ladies.' Innocent Will, dismayed at this violation of accepted convention, 'Isn't it a fair assumption that the opposition will be male most of the time?' he asked. Not any more it seems.

Finally I have a personal poignant moment. The night my sixteen year old son did not attend his local village club up to collect the player of the year award. A promising cricketer, he has not picked up a bat or ball in anger since. No guesses as to how I felt.

Over forty years ago, I also gave up at his age. I don't remember how my dad reacted, but in the sixties playing sport was not his idea of making a living. So I felt sad three times over - for two sixteen year olds who could play a bit and for an elderly dreamer with two left feet.

There's still hope. The Casuals are 60 next year.