

Better Late than Never!

Well, seeing though at one stage it looked like there would be no cricket played in Poole Park in 2020, the Dorset Cricket League did a cracking job in setting up the NHS Thank you League.

The League were regionalised which meant that the first eleven were in the same group as Bournemouth Seconds, Parley (both special guest invitees) Broadstone, Christchurch and Wimborne & Colehill. A tough group! To make matters worse a few of our key players decided that they would have the summer off!

On a glorious summers day at the start of August we began the league season with a game against Parley in Poole Park. Even with all the social distancing taking place (thanks for all your help Nick Heckford and Nick Williams) it was just great to be back!

With Joe Wilson at the helm the first team included a couple of debutants: Andrew Leonard, having not played for about 15 years, was the ideal man to take over behind the stumps and bat at number 3 and Chris Mitchell was due to bat at number 5 (after I had seen him net twice about 5 years ago). With Jamie Thomas making a more than welcome return after a few years away from the game and young speedster Sam Crisp being available we were all set to go!

With Poole batting first Badrul Alam (an excellent 69) and Aryan Mehta (18) got Poole off to a solid start. Andrew Leonard then made a fine 25, and with Richard Armstrong (32 not) showing glimpses of his undoubted ability, Poole's innings closed on 212 (40 overs). Despite Kirk taking an early wicket Parley were ticking along nicely until the introduction of Sam Crisp. Bowling with great accuracy and pace Crisp simply blew away the Parley top order to finish with outstanding figures of 5-23. Well bowled young man! The heart had been ripped out of Parley and the two JW's finished off the Parley innings with a couple of wickets each as Parley were all out for 125 and beaten by 87 runs.

Despite Crisp declaring himself unavailable for the rest of the season Poole's confidence was high, especially with the introduction of Bournemouth University all rounder Luc Kear. However, things started to go wrong in the warm up with Armstrong managing to hit Andrew Leonard in the face with a ball that lifted sharply (if you have seen Armstrong bowl before you can understand why Leonard was completely taken by surprise). Somehow Armstrong had managed to break not only Leonard's nose but also his finger! Having been collected by his doctor wife Leonard was gone for the rest of the season and we were one short. Nobody could think of any decent replacement wicket keepers so someone suggested that we give Dave Miller a call to see if he could help out. After a lot of arm-twisting Dave agreed to play (in his shorts!). Wimborne did not have to agree to this late replacement but once they realised Miller was the man they were more than willing to let him play.

Poole batted first again and we lost Aryan early on. Kear (20) came in and played a nice cameo before Alam (56) and Armstrong (50) put together a 68 run partnership. Marais and Mitchell played a few shots at the end of the innings and we finished on a below par score of 177. Wimborne's openers got them off to a flyer and despite 3 wickets from Alam, Poole were always chasing the game. As a result Wimborne got over the line, winning by 5 wickets with just over 2 overs left. A big disappointment really.

The rain came the following week which meant that the must anticipated game against Bournemouth was cancelled.

Next up was Christchurch at Poole Park. With Miller and Kear unavailable Alex Allum (ex Bournemouth) and Tom Robinson (a welcome return) came into the side and Mitchell took over the wicket keeping duties. Once again Poole batted first but we were soon in trouble at 42-3. An excellent partnership of 96 between Armstrong (63) and Robinson (37) gave great pleasure both to the watching public and team mates alike. Lewis Marais (24) then played what can only be described as a "Lewis Marais" innings, with both brilliant and dreadful shots in tandem! A score of 170-5 was decent but we would have to bowl and field well. Thankfully all the bowlers stepped up with Alam (4), Kirk (2) and Wilson (2) sharing the wickets between them, and Armstrong contributing a very useful run out. Christchurch were all out for 131 and Poole won by 39 runs.

If we were to win the group and go through to the final then we would have to win (and win well!) at Broadstone. Dan Jackson (ex- Bournemouth) came into the side to play his first game for over 8 years and Luc Kear was back from a place called Wales. Poole elected to field and once again we bowled and fielded superbly. Broadstone were blown away by Wormington (4), Kirk (2), Alam (2) and Jackson (1) and were all out for 94. Poole don't often do things the easy way and we lost Allum without a run on the board. An excellent 63 run partnership between Aryan (34) and Alam (27) helped to settle nerves and some big hitting from Kear (20) helped to see us home. However we did not know if a 6 wicket win would be enough to see us through to the final. The following morning we received a message from Alan Graham that as Bournemouth seconds and Poole had both finished on the same points the league would be decided by net run rate. Poole's net run rate was 0.62 and Bournemouth's was only 0.61. So, by the narrowest of margins Poole were in the final!

The final was played away at Dorchester with no team changes for the first time this season. Poole lost the toss and were asked to bat first in front of a sizeable crowd. An excellent partnership of 42 from Allum (17) and Aryan (29) got us off to an excellent start and at 66-1 we were well set for a good score. Even when we were 89-3 I felt that we would go on and post 150+. What do I know? We lost wicket after wicket to end up all out for 101. A major disappointment to say the least.

We regrouped during a socially distant tea and went into the field determined to do ourselves justice. The subsequent bowling and fielding effort was one of the best performances I have been involved in at Poole. We gave Dorchester nothing and made them scrap for every single run. At 51-4 the game was in the balance and despite every effort, things just didn't go our way. Despite this we never gave in and Dorchester crept over the line to win by two wickets with 3 and a half overs remaining. All the bowlers well bowled and took wickets, especially Kirk (3-9) and Wilson (1-8 off 8 overs). We walked off the pitch a beaten but proud side.

Despite the season being so short I think there were several plus points that we can take forward into 2021. The team's pride and passion shone through in that fielding display at Dorchester. Alam and Armstrong showed their class during the season. Well batted fellas! Aryan Mehta started to come of age and his undoubted potential was evident to everyone, especially in his quality innings at both Broadstone and Dorchester. All the bowlers performed excellently over the season and there will be some interesting selection decisions next year!

It was great to see Jambo playing again and it was as if all the newcomers- Leonard, Mitchell, Allum and Jackson- had played for Poole all their lives. I know they will all have a part to play for Poole in 2021. A big thank you to all the backroom staff including Nick Heckford, Nick Williams and Phil Quinn. We couldn't quite win the league for Dooks memory but we gave it a bloody good go!

In the T 20 Cup Poole played Broadstone in the first round at the Delph. Under the captaincy of Luc Kear Broadstone batted first and were bowled out for 140. All the bowlers took wickets including Wilson (4), Jackson (2), Dameth (1), Armstrong (1) and Wormington (1). Mainly thanks to an opening partnership of 91 between Kear (61) and C Quinn (37) Poole won easily by 8 wickets with over 5 overs to go.

Sherborne conceded which meant that we played Martinstown in the semi final in Poole Park. Steady scoring by all of the batsman (Jay Van Wyk 25, Mitchell 21) saw Poole's score close on 124. Once again Poole's bowlers turned it on and Martinstown innings closed at 86 off their 20 overs. The wicket takers included Wilson (4), Jackson (2), Kirk (2) and Bradley Currie (1).

Due to rain the final, due to be played at Poole Park against Dorchester, will now be played in April at a date to be confirmed.