

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Team Captains Report – 2023 Season

We're extremely fortunate to have had Nick Whitton score for us again this year. I can't begin to describe the pressure a scorer takes off a captain, not just in knowing that you don't have to keep geeing up players to do the book, but also how consistency and attention to detail gives you the ability to look back at an innings, especially in a season where I've moved up for a games or taken a week off. The same is said of an umpire and we have again been fortunate that we have had Andy Milner, John Macdiarmid and Nick Williams to help with this throughout the season, so a warm thank you to all four.

And again the work of the committee. The club isn't fortunate enough to just exist. It is kept running by some extremely hard working people, passionate about the club, it's future and it's successes to keep putting themselves forwards to do the unseen work that means 55 people get on an outfield on a Saturday and that countless juniors have matches and training laid on throughout the entire week. Most of this work is faceless, most of it unnoticed and unthanked but without the dedication of this group of people who put themselves forward to keep the club on the front foot.

For the threes, a mixed season for us in every aspect. Performances and results didn't quite hit the standards we had seen the previous season, with us seemingly hitting the season slightly undercooked and suffering from both the lack of pre-season due to weather and an earlier start to league fixtures in later April, along with having been gifted the most wonderful of starts by the DCB, with a trip to play the just relegated Dorchester 2's – on paper our toughest game of the season.

May brought probably our best spell of form, weather that depleted the entire cricketing calendar (bar one game) washed out Bere Regis at Home, before victories away to Abbotsbury with Graeme Overy starring with the bat and wickets shared between Ben Rayner and Nitish Sharma as the opposition folded just after drinks. Another comprehensive win over Cattistock 2's followed as Sam Leaton, Nitish set about their top order, and Jack Boyd demolished their tail before Matt Hobbs and Graeme made swift work of the visitors total.

A baron run would then ensue, losses to Shillingstone, Winton, Broadstone, Kingston Lacy, Royal Challengers, Dorch followed before rain again interrupted a promising game position against Bere. Losing to these sides carries no shame, they are easily our equals or better, but collectively we seemed to lack a sparking performance in tight games that would see us home. Not helping in this run was losing two players of the quality of Nick Williams and Sam Leaton to season ending injuries along with a few suffering losses of forms and confidence, along with an allergy to catch a ball that went through the entire side. Summed up no better than Scott Thompson who when bowled for a duck against Winton, many would have backed this senior player to turn things around quite quickly not to get another three in succession, including a first baller dropping to 4's for "confidence". A painful run to endure, but as ever form is temporary – class is finding the edge to get off the mark through third man for four and going on to make 65.

Going back to the season, victories over Abbotsbury and a strong Shillingstone side book ended more rained off fixtures to ensure we would be safe in Division 3 for the following season, before a tough run through August seeing the game v Winton called off half way through the first innings, much to Andy Milners delight (it really should never have started ..... ) and losses Broadstone, Lacy and Royal Challengers.

For all the tribulations of the season, there were highlights as always.

Ben Rayner came into the club as a fairly new cricketer and was lifted immediately into the threes. He's a player that's given me headaches every week in selection. For him the fours was the ideal environment to learn and have opportunity with the bat and ball, but when called upon to play threes always found a way to take wickets.

Youngsters Oli Thorne and Jeremiah Edy both show their promise, it's no surprise to see Oli winning the 4<sup>th</sup> team player of the season, and I'm sure he was pushed hard for this in votes by Mini Edy. Both showed terrific skillsets that at times were leant on heavily by the side. Oli showing command and shot making ability with the bat, and Jeremiah showing heart and courage with the ball, especially when being tossed the ball to finish off the innings in the victory over Abbotsbury at home. Both also showed maturity off the field when discussing the timings to bring them up from the 4's. James Bice, for all his bearded appearance I will still claim to be a youngster, seeing him to continue to develop into a fine batsman, and the maturity he displayed when handing over the gloves to a younger talent to help them develop summed him up, and summed up the environment of the third team and the collective desire for us all to do well.

The person the gloves went to, Ben Walsh showed the class that has long been discussed within the club setting regarding his wicket keeping, but has to work on his chat the quantity is relentless (even when not keeping and you're just trying to watch) but we're all about quality fella. He also showed all of the fundamentals required to be a solid batsman at the top end of the club, but this will come with patience. It's labelled as "Most Improved Player" but it is more a case of being the best junior in the threes this year.

Looking at the end of the side that drags the average age up just a touch, Graeme Overy and Andy O' Sullivan were solid additions to the team – Graeme's innings against Abbotsbury away summed up everything that had been rumoured, can time the life out of a ball and made batting on a rogue deck look easy. I was also delighted to see Jack Wills return to the club after leaving following his spell as a junior, but another person who's talents that show off the work done in the junior section, returning with a 5 fer against Winton. We were also pleased to gain Matty Williams back at the end of his stint at Uni, he's a understated, unassuming guy who I genuinely hope knows his value within a side (and that it's more than running into a Whitecliff breeze.

Not last, Not Least – Hobbsy. On the cricketing side – seeing someone top the third team run scoring charts from only six games shows his potential. I was delighted to see him get an extended run in the twos and show that it's not just about the third team feeding talented juniors into the twos and above. The 6 innings included scores of 47, 48, 66 and arguably the biggest bottling of a hundred seen at Whitecliff when scoring 97 before getting worried by a few dark clouds. Admittedly it looked like the clouds would bring enough water to flood the harbour, but alas – bowled under spitting conditions before everybody came off for a ten minute break. Away from the cricketing side, I couldn't have asked for a better vice-captain, this season or across my three seasons. Always giving the opinion that was needed, whether it was supportive or critical it was always honest. Those sentiments are shared with Dave Spencer and Chak, and also Nick Williams.

This year our player of the season was almost unanimous, and deservedly so. Comfortably our highest wicket taker, pushed Hobbsy close for top run scorer – although maybe if his captain would have moved him up the order sooner rather than hiding him lower down he might have surpassed him. 247 runs that included an 83 red inker against the leagues best bowling attack of Dorchester and 20 wickets that included a 4 for 21 away to Abbotsbury in a spell that caused a genuine collapse around drinks. He's a quiet, humble guy but it was unsurprisingly Nitish Sharma rewarded with the votes of his peers.

Along with the end of season report, this is an end of captaincy report. Hopefully, and despite not going out with our most successful season on paper, it's a period that can hopefully be seen as a successful one with the side finishing ranked the highest placed third team in Dorset and showing an ability to mix it up with second teams of Dorset Premier Sides most weeks and that falls on the collective atmosphere of the side. I'm grateful to everyone who pulled on shirt, and while it would be impossible to say every single one of the 66 players to step out on a Saturday enjoyed every minute, I hope that everyone who did pull on a shirt enjoyed the majority of it.

For the most, it's a bunch of eleven adults and kids that have backed themselves, that have believed in their ability both individually and collectively and looked to play good, hard cricket and have some unbelievable laughs with only a few tears (mainly non-cricket related). We've supported each other, helped kids grow (and grow up), and helped people improve, cricket wise and beyond. It's often misunderstood by those who don't sit in it, but the right changing room solves so many problems without realising it. When things are tough at work / school / home 10 other people ready to put a smile back on your face, most of the time without even knowing it, mean the world. When things are good at work / home / school it can help to hear. It's also been an atmosphere that has helped many to step up levels to the second and first teams above and be ready to contribute. While questions have been raised about whether or not the standard of cricket is that much higher than the divisions in which the fourth and fifth team have played, the players coming up who have experienced cricket since our promotion in 2022 will steadfastly say that it is, and the ability of the majority of the players who have done that proves the hard work that goes on through the club to promote junior talent, my main aim when stepping forward to skipper the threes. While the league restructure will no doubt dilute the standard of Division 3, it will still be a tough league.