

LNZCC v Gents of Cambridge

4 June 2023

Match report by Andrew Haines

The Gents' motto is *Per otia ad astra* (Through leisure to the stars), an appropriate sentiment for a side that started out playing exclusively on Thursday afternoons. It was an absolute pleasure for them to invite us back to Cambridge after a well-contested (and well-catered) inaugural match in 2022.

This year's fixture was hotly anticipated, with 16 players on the LNZ roster at one point. In the end, several players graciously stepped aside to allow others to enjoy the opportunity (and alleviate my selection headaches), and so we arrived at King's College sports ground with a strong-looking team of 12. We were also happy to be joined by club umpire Martin Conway, who was making his first LNZ outing of the season after recovering from a broken humerus sustained in an ill-fated rugby tackle-height law demonstration.

Opposition skipper Gavin Ayliffe, resplendent as always in his unorthodox cricket whites of wing-collared dress shirt and traditional moleskin trousers, produced a (replica) 1652 shilling for the toss; a cunning move, in that said coin lacks a head. We wandered out to the pitch, which we were pleased to note was unoccupied, unlike the last time he and I had played together on the adjoining Queen's College ground when we were surprised to witness an amorous couple spend the entire afternoon performing acts that were decidedly "just not cricket" in the middle of the King's square. I promptly lost the toss (tails does indeed fail when there are two of them) and Ayliffe had no hesitation in batting first on a flat-looking deck.

Once again this season we enjoyed the spectacle of two debutants opening the bowling for LNZ in Kurt Richards and Hector Perry. Richards' relatively short run-up belied the pace at which his first ball would whistle past the off stump, sending the cordon scampering back a few yards for ball two. It transpired that when Richards had described himself as having played at "a reasonable standard", he meant "Central Districts". By ball five, Richards had his first scalp, drawing an edge which was tidily caught behind by Jacob Vanner, sending the GOC opener back for a duck.

Perry and Richards continued to bowl well in tandem. Richards responded appropriately to getting slashed for four by last year's centurion Temoor Khan, tucking him up with a shorter one for Vanner to take his second catch of the match. Meanwhile, George Moore was setting the tone in the field, chasing down anything and everything hit out

towards the long boundary and unleashing a bullet arm that is surely wasted in his usual role behind the stumps.

A double bowling change at the 10-over mark saw the introduction of Shaun Raumatī's inswingers and Hamish Falls-Anderson's off spin. The pair also bowled tightly and although there was not a great deal of turn on offer, Falls-Anderson utilised his variations well to clean-bowl the GOC number 4 in the 16th over.

The GOC went to drinks at 75/3 on the back of a very solid bowling and fielding performance from LNZ. Afterwards, things came a bit unstuck as Paramjeet Paramjeet and Doyl D'Silva made the most of the short boundary, putting the bowlers under real pressure. Falls-Anderson threw in the towel after getting carted for six by Paramjeet, bringing Ben Fulton to the bowling crease to send down some flighted wronguns. After a tough first over, Fulton came back strong and made the crucial breakthrough, trapping D'Silva LBW and ending the partnership at 87 runs after only 64 balls.

Raumatī completed his eight overs on the trot (no mean feat given he had been in doubt for the match due to illness), unlucky to remain wicketless with 0-46 after drawing several false shots that didn't manage to find a fielder. He was replaced by Adam Khanbhai, who bowled better than his figures of 0-25 from two would suggest, having been set the tough ask to bowl at the increasingly-belligerent Paramjeet.

Falls-Anderson returned to the field after giving himself a stern talking-to in the pavilion and was immediately back on form, bowling the GOC number 6 with his first ball of his second spell. Fulton then removed their number 7 with a sharp caught-and-bowled, and a couple of tight overs from the spinners led to the key wicket of Paramjeet, who holed out off the bowling of Fulton, failing to clear the LNZ skipper on the cover boundary. His 103 off 101 balls included five sixes, the pick of which punched a hole straight through the sight screen.

Falls-Anderson finished with figures of 2-49 off his eight overs while Fulton returned 3-43 off his six, at which point the opening bowlers returned to mop up the tail. Richards (now bowling in a pair of black trainers after his spikes gave him blisters) collected the GOC number 9 for a first-ball duck with a savage yorker, nicked off the number 10 to be caught behind by Vanner, and finally beat the defences of Ayliffe, taking the top of off and completing his five-for. Perry was unfortunate not to be rewarded for his efforts, finishing with 0-35 off six.

As we headed to tea, the GOC had set a total of 216, which seemed about par. Ayliffe then wheeled out a superlative home-cooked feast consisting of platters of roast beef

with horseradish and a large pot of spicy mutton keema with chapatis, all to be washed down with (thankfully non-alcoholic) IPAs. I contributed a sweet course in the form of Anzac biscuits and lolly cake, which were rapidly demolished.

In reply, LNZ faltered early, losing Nick Ratcliffe in the third over LBW for 2. I followed shortly thereafter for 9, hanging the bat out to nick off to first slip, and then Moore was also adjudged LBW for a quickfire 17. Looking shaky at 31/3, it fell to Vanner and Khanbhai to steady the ship, and their solid partnership of 54 saw us through to drinks with Khanbhai regrettably being caught behind for 11 on the final ball of the session from the bowling of Paramjeet.

At this point the game was very much in the balance, with batting all the way down to 11 but plenty of work still to be done. Josh Wright found himself on gear bag duty, bowled for a duck in the first over back. From that point on, the GOC bowlers were difficult to get away, doing very well to restrict our scoring and prevent us from exploiting the short boundary as their batters had done so effectively.

After Fulton was trapped LBW for 2, Richards and Vanner put on another 45 for the seventh wicket before Richards was finally bowled for an enterprising 20. Tony Penman joined Vanner in the middle but with the required run rate climbing into double digits and victory looking increasingly improbable, the focus became whether Vanner would complete his century. Unfortunately, despite Penman haring between wickets to the point that he suffered a nasty quadriceps injury, Vanner was stranded on 97* at the close of play with Penman 8* at the other end, LNZ falling short by 34 runs at 182/7.

As in 2022, it was a well-contested match played in great spirits, and the sting of losing was abated by a fine selection of New Zealand craft beer put on by Ayliffe. We awarded Paramjeet man of the match for his century, tidy spell of 1-10 off four, and slip catch, but Ayliffe was the beneficiary of the accompanying bottle of Martinborough pinot noir as thanks for his excellent hospitality (Paramjeet having left already, and in any case being teetotal). On our side, the bottle went to Richards for his superb 5-17 off seven on debut, while the fielding points were shared between Moore, for his tireless chasing and rocket arm, and Vanner, for his excellent glovework including three catches.

Many thanks to everyone who provided transport, saving teammates from the rail replacement buses; to our esteemed umpire Marty (welcome back!); to Suzie, Cate, and Jake, who turned out to support us; and most of all to Gav and the Gents for another fantastic day of cricket and camaraderie. We look forward to doing it again next year!