

LNZCC v Army Masters

25 June 2023

Match report by Hamish Falls-Anderson

After a multi-year hiatus, the fixture against the esteemed Army Masters finally came back to fruition. The match had been postponed in previous years due to inclement weather and the COVID-19 pandemic, but this year, the conditions couldn't have been more perfect, with not a single cloud in the sky.

As the Surrey regiment of LNZ members playing comprising of Haines, Brooks, and Falls-Anderson made tracks towards Tidworth, the LNZ match day group chat went into a frenzy of nearly every man, his dog, cricket kit, and club blazer informing us of their expected late arrival. Unlike many others thanks to Hainsey's well-executed timings we even had time for a spot of pre-match lunch, which was rather unfortunately not an LNZ classic of a roast at some nearby pub likely with a cricketing connotation in its name but merely the lunch offering was the food cabinet at Little Waitrose, by the time of our pitstop it was suggested by captain Barkle that we may have no other option to bat first in order in get the game underway at a reasonable hour.

Upon arriving to see Shekhar Aryan and his son Shayan there before us, given they had made a 5-hour pilgrimage down from Leeds there really became no excuse for anyone travelling from the home counties to be late, however, that wasn't the case and we were very light on the ground. When taking into consideration that many of the LNZ squadron would be headed back to the capital post-match where is no light journey is incurred play got underway just after 1:15 pm with if I counted correctly 7 LNZ members present it was mutually agreed the men in their Nottman caps would bat first.

Cormac Hodson was offered to open the batting however upon Cormac sighting the Army Master's incredibly ominous-looking pace bowling crew who looked like they knew their way around a gym to say the least Cormac slid down the order and Dave Coutts strode out to the middle with none other than club dual double-centurion Andrew Haines, this was a special moment for Haines and Coutts who used to bat together for the University of Cambridge CC. Unfortunately, it was not to be for Hainsey as he wore one on the stickers only to be caught at Mid-On, LNZ 2 for 1. Shayan Aryan strode to the crease looking to resurrect things following the early wicket and along with Coutts they very much did with some glorious stroke play through the covers, unfortunately for Shayan who doesn't quite bear the long levers of a Mr D. Coutts he was targeting the uphill boundary so he could by no means stand and admire any of his flowing drives race to the fence but had to pin the ears back and scamper through to earn his runs.

Despite both getting off to nice starts Coutts and Aryan Jr fell in quick succession leaving LNZ 42 for 3.

These two wickets saw Hodson and Brooks enter the battlefield. Much like myself Cormac unfortunately did not trouble the scorers on his LNZ debut so was immensely determined to open his run-scoring account for the club, he did this superbly with an elegant punch through the covers, and once getting off the mark Hodson made batting look effortless out there with some sublime stroke play to all parts of the ground. After sticking around for a while and keeping some very tidy bowling and bay Brooks was undone with a superb delivery that took the off-peg. With the score at 62 for 4

Bayern Munich Ultra Aryan Snr entered the fray determined to outscore his young pup and have the bragging rights for the car ride home. Aryan Snr and Hodson combined to keep the scoreboard ticking over, Hodson and his long levers opted for a brute force approach while Aryan settled for more deft touches - both styles proving effective. Following a well-compiled and much-needed innings of 35 from Hodson, he was caught with the score at 82 for 5.

Having reduced the match to a 35-over affair following the delayed start we became aware that the run rate was dawdling along a bit too much and it was time to up the ante. Dion Laban-Jeffries and Aryan put together a superb partnership which was by no means easy going with the Army Masters giving very little away by bowling a tight stump to stump line. Dion added some glorious power hitting down the ground while Aryan continued with his deft touches before being dismissed for a very valuable and hard fought 17. Ian Souness then joined Laban-Jeffries and despite attempting perhaps one too many scoop shots was cleaned out. By the time Laban-Jeffries was run out in the final over he had added an invaluable 28. Barkle scampered through for a single and saw LNZ through to a defendable total of 148. At no point was batting easy out there 148 was something to be proud of.

In the back end of the batting innings, a sumptuous smell began to waft out of the dining room so we were all immensely excited to tuck into lunch, bar John Dennis was probably still upset following the demise of his beloved Chiefs so settled from some very miserable looking ham sandwiches while the rest of us were treated to a sensational Indian buffet comprising of 4 different curries all cooked to perfection, naan bread and poppadoms! While all enjoying (Bar JD) the restaurant quality Indian we became acutely aware we were about to embark on a fielding effort and no one wanted to be sprinting off mid-innings and clearing their bowel passages following a heavy hand of lamb korma so second helpings were avoided.

Post curry buffet and Fanta LNZ took to the field, while entering the playing arena I was abused and called 'Sam Martin Jnr' for wearing an LNZ vest in 26 degrees but after explaining it must be a College or 'Syrup' thing as many of you who were not educated within the grounds on Rolleston Avenue like to call it, play got underway. Fresh off his batting heroics Laban-Jeffries and Brooks got things going and took the new ball, The Army Masters got off to a fine start it could be said batting intelligently and picking the gaps well, or really in truth just hitting the ball to the slowest fielder on the ground and running hard while I took an age to get the ball back in.

Once finding their rhythm these two bowled in a superb partnership creating many chances and bowling in some treacherous areas. Laban-Jeffries opened his wicket account for the club by cleaning out their opener and best batsman, given The Army Master's positive start this wicket was vital. Unfortunately, thanks to some ill-fated catching by Aryan Snr and the El Capitano in the cordon paired with horrendously slow ball chasing in the outfield from myself - perhaps the vest weighed me down?? Brooksy's figures by no means do him justice and he bowled a superb spell. Coutts replaced Laban-Jeffries and this change soon proved effective when Coutts bowled a full-ish ball that reared up off a length racking the batsman on the glove and ballooning to Haines behind the stumps with gloves on, only for Hainsey to pop the ball up like a 'set' in Volleyball however upon the ball dropping back down he pouched it comfortably.

The Army Masters now two down continued to tick the score over well and LNZ were in need of another wicket, so spin was introduced with Ian Souness. Early into his spell, Souness bowled the other opener with a superb arm ball that clattered the off stump. With Coutts steaming in from the other end and Souness bowling tightly we began to ask questions of The Army, The Army Masters that is, not the Barmy Army although one young gentleman did drive by the ground and grace us all with a Barmy Army chant out of his car window! As pressure mounted, Souness claimed his second, yet again taking the off peg. At this stage, the Army Masters found themselves 78 for 4.

As spin was proving fruitful from one end in the form of Souness, Hamish Falls-Anderson entered the attack at the other end to see what could be added with his off breaks. These two Cantabrian spinners asked many questions of the opposition's defences, and soon broke through when Falls-Anderson got the Master's No.5 through the gate with a well-flighted delivery. Now 5 for 84 the match was in the balance, if anything we may have had the upper hand. It appeared the Army Master's may have had a call to action as their remaining batsmen didn't seem interested in accumulating the required runs but wanted to reach our total in as few balls as possible with some wild swinging across the line.

Unfortunately for Souness, one of these 'wild swings' caught the inside edge and raced to short back-ward square where Souness attempted a dive to stop the ball only to land on his shoulder blade and certainly get up a weakened man. At the advice of Barkle, Ian headed off to ice his shoulder. This allowed John Dennis to finally enter the attack who hadn't been best pleased with Mr. Souness throughout the duration of the day, firstly because Ian's train was late and making JD who picked him up also late. Then to make it worse, JD who had travelled all the way up from the south coast in an effort to ply his spinning trade and get a few balls down the other end learnt that Ian also bowled left arm orthodox meaning the two of them would be competing for overs.

Falls-Anderson and Dennis complimented each other superbly in their spinning partnership and this proved fruitful as Dennis claimed his first wicket which was superbly caught at mid-off by none other than Aryan Snr who instantly redeemed himself for his earlier drops. Everyone was elated to see another wicket fall however it was noted that Brooks was no doubt thinking "You can hang onto that screamer, what the f**k happened to the two sitters off my bowling". As it often does in a spin partnership one wicket brings two or in this case 3, as after Aryan's heroics Falls-Anderson picked up two more wickets both in the form of extremely adjacent LBWs. Upon 'The apprentice vest wearer' finishing his spell Aryan Snr entered the attack and his efforts proved a dark over for LNZ as not only was it carted for 16 but one of Shekhar's deliveries that missed the outside edge struck Hainsey on the wrong part of the finger and now he's got 6 weeks to wait until his next cricket match.

133-8 and the match on a knife edge, Laban-Jeffries re-entered the bowling attack in a bid to close out the match and despite bowling superbly he was unable to capture the much-needed two wickets, after a few heaves across the line made their way to the rope. With the scores level at 148 for 8 we expected the game would be gone so Barkle brought the field right up, their no.10 falling right into the trap and chipping the ball to Brooksy who held on, now with the scores at 148 a piece and 1 wicket in hand by-crikey did we have a game on our hands.

After a long conversation between the set batsman and the non-striker's end and the incoming no.11 who shaking in his boots Dennis strode in, and absolutely destroyed the batsman's back pad instantly everyone going up to appeal only for the umpires hands' to be glued to his sides, JD just about on the ground in disbelief. Next ball, JD flights one high into the Wiltshire sky, the Army Masters' batsman eyes light up and he tried to be the hero and clobber the ball over the rope only for an almighty top edge to be taken, the ball goes straight up in the air, swirling around and getting lost in the clouds above, the game on the line Aryan Snr goes continues his fielding heroics and safely hangs on - The Army Master's are all out! A TIE!!!

What a game of cricket! We all march off to shake their hands and thank them for the superb day.

Post-match speeches were had and wine was awarded Laban-Jeffries came away with the Man of the Match honours for his fine bowling and batting displays. Despite a couple of distraught Army Master's players who were desperate to have come out on top, a superb day was enjoyed by all! Some noted it was possibly even their most enjoyable day for LNZ to date.

Unfortunately, their pavilion was only adequate for curry offerings and didn't specialise in hydration so one and all headed to the nearest pub for a Neck Oil or two while we all discussed how one extra run could've been scored or saved and would've won us the match!

All in all a sensational day and a huge thanks to Barkle for his organisational efforts!!!