

Men's Seniors Playing Report

The 2020 cricket season will go down in history as one of the strangest! At many stages it looked like there would be no cricket, in the end to get just short of half a season was quite remarkable and one we can look back on with happiness and frustration!

As lockdown began in March 2020 pre-season fitness sessions had been completed and nets were underway at South North CC. Deon Billington, a 19-year-old off-spinning all-rounder from Perth, Australia was engaged as Overseas Amateur. As the severity of Covid-19 increased and lockdown ran into April and May we had to put up with weekly recaps on social media as the closest we could get to some cricket. As a club it was great to reconnect with former West Indian Professionals Ian Bishop & Courtney Walsh on social media as we waited for the season to begin!

The great work done by ECB with DCMS saw small training bubbles begin at the back end of May and into June and then the news came we were all waiting for, games were allowed from July! Thanks to the NTCL Executive Committee for acting swiftly a regional format was drawn up, to get match ready we held an internal game and a friendly v Stocksfield. To continue the thanks, it must be said Davy Evans and his ground staff had the whole ground in perfect condition throughout lockdown and the season.

With almost everything ready to go not even a visit from some Irish friends in their caravans could stop the momentum!

On to the season... The first XI looked to bounce back from the disappointment of 2019 and missing out on promotion to the NEPL in the final game of the season. With the AGM in March 2020 cancelled a special mention should go to Matthew Scott who on the back of a fantastic 2019 season won many trophies with the most prestigious picked up just before lockdown for the North East Emerging Cricket of the Year.

The 2020 season for the first XI could best be described as a number of previous seasons 'so near yet so far', without a League or Cup trophy since 2014 for the large part of the season 2020 looked like it could end the drought only to fall at the final hurdle. However, the first XI did pick up the Maurice Miller Trophy, a trophy created between Tynedale & Stocksfield following Maurice's death in early 2020.

Six wins out of seven in the group stages saw the first XI qualify for the semi-finals. Comprehensive home wins v Consett and Whickham were sandwiched in between closer victories away at Annfield Plain, Stocksfield, Ryton & Lintz. The final game of the group with a semi-final placed already secured saw the first XI lose to neighbours Corbridge. Another strong showing at home in the semi-finals v Alnmouth & Lesbury saw the team progress comfortably through to the Final, only a 10th wicket partnership giving the scores some closeness.

In the final the first XI were well beaten on the day v an experienced Swalwell team and another learning opportunity for a young team away from the flat pitches of Priors Flat. There were numerous strong individual performances throughout the season and in particular it was great to see Sam Peter return after an injury hit 2019. More can be expected of him in 2021 in what should be a breakout year for the all-rounder.

The top three did the bulk of the run scoring. Captain Tom Cant led the way with 437 runs, opening partner Dan Parker with 224 runs saw the pair regularly get the team off to strong starts and Dan's absence in the final was felt. Oliver Fletcher who also took the gloves for the season also contributed

with the bat to finish with 217 runs. The middle order of Messrs Mannion, Rainford, Stephenson & Crichton all made contributions and will be looking to find that big score in 2021.

There was a first, first XI wicket for juniors Adam Newton, Nico Sykes, Zak Old and Jake Robson. Jake in particular stepped up and played the whole of the shortened season in the first XI. Two very promising quick bowlers led the way though with Sam already mentioned and Matthew Scott finishing with 20 wickets each. Sam Mannion developed his quick bowling and 2021 will hopefully see him go on to become an effective all-rounder.

The second XI after promotion in 2019 should have been competing in Division 4 for the first time under new Captain Ben Griffiths. With new additions in Craig Barber, Archie Fletcher, Will Marrow and Dan Toward they also had a strong season making it to the semi-finals of their regional format. The drama of the final day of the group stage was incredible as two other teams lost their final game and the seconds winning of the final ball of their game with 4 byes to achieve their semi-final place as the best runner up which was only confirmed the following day!

The semi-final was a step too far against a Blyth 1st XI team who in 2019 had been competing three divisions higher but showed the progress of the second XI and they go into 2021 full of confidence. Winning five of their seven group games, losing only to the first XI's at Allendale and Kirkley showed the talent and depth within.

The runs were shared out with five players scoring a 50 including a first senior 50 for Adam Newton. Nathan Byerley led the way with 251 runs, well supported by Craig Barber with 215. With the ball Dan Toward in his first season at the club having made the move from neighbours Hexham Leazes finished leading wicket-taker with 12. Nathan Byerley continued his fine season to take 11 wickets with Archie Fletcher and James Percival taking seven wickets each. Will Marrow completed his first senior season at the club behind the stumps with a number of solid performances.

The under 18's team which is used to give extra match practice to the juniors already in the senior set up but also give the next generation of juniors coming through a flavour of playing with older players. A shortened season saw the team go unbeaten with four comprehensive victories, another game conceded and two rained off. The games rained off v Lanchester and Burnopfield would have given the team their toughest opposition.

Opportunities were shared throughout the season, four players scoring 50 retired with Captain Oliver Fletcher leading the way with three and not being dismissed in his four innings. Jake Robson showed his all-round ability to finish as second top run scorer. With the ball eleven players took at least one wicket and it was under 12 Ted Fletcher, Seth Robbie and Archie Fletcher who all finished with five wickets.

At the time of writing and on the back of yesterday's Government update (March 29th pencilled in for outdoor team sports) we can be confident of a more 'normal' structured season. With ECB & DCMS guidelines to follow on changing rooms, teas and sanitisation! It is looking like the first and second XI's will be similar in personnel and numbers for 2020. No doubt there will be clashes with other sports such as football and rugby in the early parts of the season so we can expect 2021 to be a challenging but exciting year.

The junior and women's playing report will also show the stable position the club finds itself in on the field. I hope that the current vacancies on the General Committee can be filled and more people step up to help the club continue to move forward on and off the field.

Tom Cant, 23/2/2021