

Isis Cricket Club AGM

2022 Season – Captain's Report – 15th November 2022

I am very pleased to report that Isis C.C. enjoyed a full and successful season in 2022. Not since 2009 have we completed as many as 42 fixtures, and I cannot find a season among my records in which we only lost 2 games to cancellations. We won 51% of the games we completed and lost only 41%, with three games ending drawn or tied. Of course, regardless of the pleasure I take from our cricket, the season was marred by the tragic loss of one of our members, Felix Roper, who suddenly and unexpectedly passed on 31st August. We knew Felix for many years as a Wytham player, but after he introduced his nephew Hamish to Isis C.C. in 2018, he too joined and has been a member ever since. He was a kind and decent bloke and we will miss him both on the cricket field and the golf course. His loss is sad indeed.

For some of us, statistics are important so I thought I would start my report by comparing this season to that of 2019, which was the last season unaffected by the pandemic and one in which we also completed 42 games. In that season we only won 38% of matches, so what was the difference? In 2019 we scored 4,619 runs for the loss of 242 wickets. In 2022 we scored 5,509 runs for the loss of 209 wickets. So, was batting the key? Looking at the bowling, we took 256 wickets for 5,542 runs in 2019, whereas in 2022 we took 5 less wickets for 6,145 runs. So what about fielding? In 2022 (despite £81 being collected as dropped catch fines) we took 7 more catches, 2 more run outs and the same number of stumpings as we did in 2019. So it looks like our 2022 batting was the key, with the top 5 batsmen scoring nearly 600 more runs in 2022 than their counterparts in 2019. There were 3 more centuries and 8 more individual half-centuries in 2022 too. So well done to Rich Stephenson, Jon Ponsford, Luke Bowles, Olly Walter and Alex Beavan, who all scored more than 500 runs in the season, Rich winning the long-handle award with 781 runs at an average of just over 43 in 20 innings. The bowling award in 2022 was keenly contested, with five of us taking more than 30 wickets, compared to three of us in 2019. That I was able to lift that particular trophy is nothing short of miraculous, given I started the season not expecting to bowl at all. So congratulations to Keith Ponsford, Nick Wyatt, Jon Ponsford and Allan East for their worthy contributions. And special congratulations to Jon Ponsford for featuring in both of those analysis, the worthy winner of his player of the season award.

Another pleasing aspect of 2022 was the intake of new players and we welcomed Tom Hornsey, Suk Pehley, Luke Hames-Brown, Jon Bishop and Josh Rose to the Isis ranks in 2022. But at the same time it was a shame that as many past-stalwarts of the club played only 2 or fewer matches in 2022. Nevertheless, there were only a handful of occasions when we struggled to raise eleven men from our 28 members and only 9 places were filled by guests throughout the season. I would also like to mention William Wyatt here, who made his first full appearance as a 13-year-old as a guest in a difficult match against Swindon Nomads, and fielded and bowled very well; I am sure it was the first appearance of many to come. 17 of our 28 members played more than 10 games for the club during the season, which was especially fantastic to see, and made selection all the more easy. So my thanks go out to both Matt Stanbury and Keith Ponsford, who both helped to introduce new members and fill some of those guest spots when we needed them. And of course my thanks to the three vice captains, Olly, Luke Blatchford and Matt, who all stepped up when I was unavailable. And well done too to Joe Walter and Allan East who both joined me at the top of the appearances table, playing 34 out of our 42 matches.

Traditionally in his report, the captain comments on some of his favourite games of the season. Selecting specific games was not easy, but I will at least comment on a draw, a tie and three wins.

- The first game at Greys Green was memorable for a beautiful setting, our first time at this ground which is near to Henley-on-Thames. A beautiful early-May afternoon saw us contest a timed game for the first time in ages and after good top-order batting from Luke Bowles, Olly, Alex and Matt we put on 205 in 2.5 hours. As it turned out we took 7 wickets in reply, with Jonners taking a very economical 4-for. But a resolute performance from their best all-rounder left us 3 wickets short of a win and the game concluded in a draw.
- The tie against St Clements Strollers was memorable for a topsy-turvy affair in which we saved defeat in the final over. Setting 148 for the loss of 1 wicket, Alex playing a lovely attacking innings and carrying his bat for an unbeaten 78. Strollers are a nomadic outfit and there were plenty of Oxford C.C. shirts on display, and it was no surprise that they went after our total hard. But after some economical bowling from Jonners and Nick and a couple of important wickets from yours truly it came down to Strollers needing 11 to win from the last Ravi Kella over. The first three balls went for 2 each, one of which would have been a four but for a diving stop from Joe. Paul Jacobs then took a very good stumping off of the fourth ball to bring back hope for Isis. Then Ravi, under pressure, bowled a horrible ball that gifted Strollers 4 extras, so that they needed 1 to win from the last ball. He redeemed himself by fielding a straight shot, juggling a bit before knocking over the stumps to secure a run out and leave the scores tied. A brilliant evening.

My favourite wins included two games in July played on the Brasenose pitch against Bartlemas and Appleton, and the penultimate game of the season against Ipsden.

- We played Bartlemas on one of the hottest evenings of the year, and after winning the toss we batted first and put on 148 for 3, with Alex, Olly and Rich all batting nicely and forcing Bartlemas to resort to 8 men on the boundary. Temperatures dropped to about 28° when we took the field, and an unlikely attack of myself, Pete Wiblin, Jon Ponsford, John Bishop and Easty restricted their reply to 124 for 7, with a great all-round fielding display. A pop-up bar was set up which saw us celebrate late into the evening.
- The Appleton game played later that month saw the visitors put on 149 in the first innings, largely thanks to a quick-fire half-century from Ed Gilkes that nearly took the game away. But Rich, Tom Hornsey and Jon Ponsford batted brilliantly, the latter passing his half-century when scoring the winning runs after only 17 overs.

I think those two stand out for me because our midweek form wasn't so good having won only 7 out of 17 of those matches that we completed. But, for me the icing on the cake for the season was our weekend match in September against Ipsden.

- This one stands out for me not only because we won, but because the outcome looked uncertain until the end of the game. Plus it was Ipsden, right, and we always have good games against them. Isis had been in the box seat with Rich and Olly putting on a hundred for the first wicket, until Dan Houseman's spell saw the run rate slow, before Jonners contributed 40 runs and helped us to put on 181 from our 35 overs. All was looking good in our defence with Roy, KP, Nick and Jonners all bowling well, but that man Houseman then came in and pounded me and Alf into near-submission and the writing was on the wall. But then Jonners was brought back into the attack, and he picked up Houseman to a Keith Ponsford catch at deep gully and we went on to take the final two wickets with Ipsden 16 runs short. There was a sombre start as we stood in silence after the passing of the Queen, but the game was then played in a lovely spirit and, like I said, it was Ipsden, right?

I could go on from here and talk about the great tour we had, the number of catches dropped in the first half of the season, the embarrassing defeat by Wytham early doors, in which I re-discovered bowling, leaked 87 runs from 8 overs and saw 7 catches go down along the way, our midweek form in which we won 7 but lost 9, the lovely charity match against Clapham, Joe dropping a simple catch to deny me a 5-for against Eynsham, Nick's fits of pique one or two (or more) times (earning him this season's duck award), and of course my magnanimous gesture in putting Easty above me in the order only for him to run me out without facing a ball in the last game of the season. But, I guess I have already gone on long enough now, besides which some of those things are now club lore anyway, which we will remember fondly in the future while enjoying a beer or two together.

In my honorary position as captain of the golf society, I can't leave this report without mentioning the brilliant efforts of our team in the annual match with FFTMCC, rebranded the Felix Roper Memorial Trophy. The platform for an emphatic victory was set in the pairs, where we took 3^{1/2} points out of 4, but then followed that up with another strong showing over the back-9 singles, winning another 5 points out of 8. All in all, a very satisfying victory of which I am very proud.

And so, it only leaves me to thank all of you, the members of Isis Cricket Club, for your support and contribution to a great season, which I hope you enjoyed as much as I did. And finally, assuming the members attending the AGM are happy for me to continue to serve as the club captain, I am just letting you know here that I am willing to stand for another term of office (especially as I have one or two scores to settle).