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THE PRIMARY CLUB CASUALS - 2005 IN REVIEW

The Primary Club's recreational cricket team review a season that saw them go
undefeated - in both matches

The Primary Club Casuals, a motley crew of entirely "social" youngish cricketers who wanted to help further the aims of the Primary Club, formed as a cricket team in 2004. Following a sole inaugural fixture in that season, 2005 saw the Casuals play two games, raising awareness of the work of the Primary Club, selling Primary Club memberships and raising money through tea sales, raffles and auctions. After the scheduled season opener was rained off, the team assembled for the first time on the afternoon of the Edgbaston Ashes Test, for a game against West One CC in Wimbledon. It was frankly a miracle that the team made it all, following a host of late departures following a morning of nerve-wracking tension that no doubt many readers can associate with, but make it they did, and were soon fielding after losing the toss.

Being very much a part-time team, the Casuals always consider themselves underdogs, and after losing the toss on a hot day and playing on a road of a pitch this seemed a reasonable position to take, especially as West One got off to a good start with the bat. But a period of pressure from the opening bowlers Jivaka Jayasundera and Tom Hanson triggered a piece of magic from Ross Williamson in the field. Fielding a pull at mid-on that was hit with such venom that he was knocked over backwards, Williamson was alert and agile enough to sit up and throw down the stumps at the non-striker's end with the batsman well short. This gave the Casuals - with no less than 8 debutants - a lift and more excellent bowling and fielding kept the pressure on the West One batsmen, who continued to succumb when looking well set. The wickets has been shared fairly equally until the late-arriving Tom Harries put the "art" into "part-time off-spin" by winking out the tail with 4 wickets for 5 runs in 3.2 overs. This included the first golden duck in a Casuals game, with a West One batsman so distraught with missing a straight one that he declined to take his bat with him when walking off! West One's innings closed on 138 all out. Williamson opened the batting with captain Euan Spence and the pair were going well before Spence, fresh from playing in the Primary Club Golden Jubilee match at Beckenham, was given out by umpire Harries for 20. Maybe it was guilt after the ruthless ending of West One's innings, but Harries was certainly generous to the bowler as Spence inside-edged onto his pad after a good stride down the track! Number 3 Sam Taylor played well for 22, but when he and Williamson fell in quick succession and a minor collapse followed, until a patient knock by Hanson with the tail saw the Casuals home for their first ever victory, by three wickets.

The Casuals' second and last game of the season was against Newport's Inn, in the Hampshire village of Braishfield. The club had kindly played the inaugural fixture against the Casuals in 2004, running out winners in a thoroughly enjoyable affair, and a good crowd gathered for the rematch. The Casuals bowled first, betraying a concern with the depth of the batting line up for the day. Once again, the Casuals bowled tightly and continued the knack of picking up wickets from seemingly well-set batsmen. Special note must go to the Casuals' answer to Shane Warne (in terms of wily leg-spin and not off-field antics), Primary Club volunteer Allan Guild, who finished with 2-45. Opposition captain Light top-scored with 40 as Newport's Inn finished on 165-9 declared at tea, Mike Jenkins taking 3-23. During tea, sold to players and spectators alike for the benefit of the Primary Club, Chairman Robert Fleming spoke and presided over a raffle and auction that helped bring in over £500 on the day. This is testament to the fabulous organisation of the Newport's Inn club in laying on such a great day. After the fun, it was back to business as Spence, accompanied by Ross Rogers, went out to bat. They got off to a bright start, reaching 50 for no loss before Rogers was dismissed. But Harries came and went quickly, and after Spence went for 55 to be followed by Gough and Luke Living cheaply, the long Casuals' tail made Newport's Inn favourites. Alan Clarke held things together for a while, but when he fell for 32 the writing appeared to be on the wall. However, wicketkeeper-non-batsman Neil Sebba and Jenkins had other ideas, accumulating tidily including a Caribbean-style back-foot square drive for four by Sebba that left his colleagues astounded. This brought the Casuals to the brink of victory, and only 5 were required from the last over with 4 wickets remaining. Sebba was unable to make contact with the first 4 deliveries however, and after a scampered bye to the 'keeper off the penultimate ball Jenkins was only able to get 3 from the last ball, leaving the match drawn with scores level. An epic encounter reached a fitting conclusion!

"We've had a lot of fun this year, and we're already looking forward to next season," said Euan Spence, Captain of the Primary Club Casuals.

"These matches have immediately become great club events," added Robert Fleming, Chairman of the Primary Club. "I would particularly like to thank everyone at the Newport Inn club for making us all so welcome."

For 2006, the Casuals so far have 2 games arranged, and would love to hear from Primary Club members who would be interested in arranging a game against their local club. We are truly a "recreational" side, but are keen to work with the host club to raise funds for the Primary Club where possible through making a day of fixtures, attracting a small crowd, and holding some fundraising activities such as selling teas, raffles or a post-game barbecue. Please contact Luke Living, fixtures secretary, at fixtures@primaryclub.org if this would be of interest.

(1003 words)

About The Primary Club (www.primaryclub.org)

The Primary Club is a currently celebrating 50 years of raising money for sporting and recreational activities for blind and partially sighted children.