

St Pius X 2nd XI 127 defeated St Patricks College 125

(J Furlan 34, D Hall 24, N Slack 2/11, L May 2/15)

It takes a strong story to keep an audience attentive when the ending is the first page the read.

How did we get here, why will this game be written into the history books by both schools, why will the players and spectators keep this memory deep in their hearts and emotions forever. I will try and explain.

St Patricks College were the team to play against in the Grand Final, having met twice in the regular season each team had won at home. Both games were played hard and fair and were games to watch in their own right.

Arriving early at a sensational Chaplin Oval (Ronny, seriously don't you have other things to do), the players' composure was tested pre-game with team photos and a significant audience of parents, junior players and the attendance of the 1st XI. The seconds XI don't normally garner such a spotlight but it was both very welcome and an interesting challenge to handle.

The toss won by Captain Ventura granted our batsmen the chance to control the game from the front, Ventura and Nick McLachlan took guard with a recovering Graffeo slipping down to a less vulnerable #4. The loss of Ventura (5) in the 5th over was not part of the main plan but Josh Rayner (15) arrived and maintained a calm approach to building a platform. At the first drinks break 2/30 was a solid start for the conditions, a road like looking pitch hid a subtle sponginess and fluctuating cloud cover was enough to keep the bowlers interested.

Alex Graffeo(14) showed his class with clean stroke play but an unfortunate run out saw McLachlan's opening stint come to an end in the 22nd Over. The run rate rarely climbed past the 2 per over wall, as Kelleher (8) and then Jordan Furlan (34) joined the fray. Furlan adapted well to the conditions, his quick hands and even quicker eye controlled an end that saw SPX to the second drinks break 5/70. A serious final session was needed to gain a defendable total, batting to 11 has been the theme all season and this where it would be needed the most.

Oscar Sheehan(9) and Furlan navigated to the 40th over without further loss, a springboard to reach 120+ that would be very tough to chase, confidence on the sideline was up. St Pats had other ideas, Jack Burt returned for his second spell, the opening bowler taking 3/5 and creating a runout to have SPX in hole at 9/92. Dan Hall (24) is an unassuming character, a tall man with presence he is yet to fully understand. Furlan had words in the centre, he may have mentioned we still had 5 overs and had time to get settled, they did that as Hall's first nine balls returned only 2 runs, turning the strike over to Furlan.

The last 10 balls faced by Hall saw him score 22 runs including 2 fours and 1 six. Furlan very maturely fed Hall the strike on all but one of his last 8 balls faced. The two batsman strode off after Hall was finally caught in the last over to applause of the crowd, a game turning innings if the faces of the St Pats players was any reference.

An outstanding lunch disappeared as quickly as it was served with players already focusing on the final innings of the season. The belief that 127 was enough was evident in the team

briefing, it required confidence, sense and a bucket load of team work but everyone was on the same page.

Hall (10:3:1:23) fresh and still pumping opened the bowling with Nick Slack (8:3:2:11), they have bowled well together all season and today was no different. Accurate pace making the batsmen jump around the crease matched with classic swing playing with the mind, a lethal combination which got them both results 2/10 at the 10 over mark. A team runout off Rayner (6:0:0:13) brought the first drinks break early with Tim McLachlan's (6:0:1:19) left arm spin snaring the fourth wicket shortly after. At 4/25 St Pats were looking shaky, however the experience of their team reminded us they also bat to 11, both previous occasions we took 9 wickets.

Alex Bain(5:1:1:7) delivered 3 tidy overs and the fifth wicket, a very firmly struck drive aimed directly at Alex Graffeo's left hand at short cover which TV replays could maybe explain how it stuck. Captain Ventura was well aware St Pats knew our spinners could close the game, bringing Oscar Sheehan (5:2:1:17) paid a dividend in his second over with a catch taken at Gully by the irrepressible Lachlan May. 6/40 at the halfway mark and 127 looked a long way off for SPC.

St Pats batsman Jackson Le Claire had very different ideas, playing the same role as Jordan had he guided his team from 40 to 117 with a determined 38. Attacking our spinners was something they declined to do in our last meeting, the pressure created the one bad ball which was then duly punished to the boundary.

Ventura adapted, ten bowlers allows variation. Hall returned with Lachlan May(6:1:2:15) 2/3 of 2 overs saw St Pats at the final drinks break of the season 8/84. 2/42 off 16 overs, too close to call who would have the answer.

Whilst Le Claire remained St Pats were on top, spin had been dispatched, raw pace seemed to suit him more. With 5 over to go in the game, St Pats needed 11 runs to win. The field was silent. Players on both teams were on a knife edge. Ventura tossed the ball to his team mate of 5 seasons, together they'd won thrillers before, together they'd created near medical emergencies on the sideline - a few times. Slack's first ball of his 7th over, the 46th of the game, was as defining as Furlan & Hall, as classic as Graffeo's catch. A length ball encouraged Le Claire to drive but a swing bowler is part magician, what you see is not always where you see it. Slipping a ball late inside the bat to take middle stump, the pitch erupted, crowd went wild, heart break for Le Claire but the game was still not over.

Alex Bain returned to finish the other end with Slack, their task to hold a 9 run lead or burgle the last wicket. Several run out chances went begging as St Pats edged and parried 2 an over. Slack had averaged less than 2 an over, If Bain can give him 4 to work with together they can do it, St Pats were of the same mind and at 125 they tried one too many sneaky singles of Bain. A ball struck short towards Ventura he pounced and threw in one fluid motion, the bails exploded, the umpire's finger was raised and suddenly what emotion was left in the tanks of the players and spectators, exploded into celebration.

Humble in defeat and gracious in victory, cricket was witnessed in all its glory on the 11th March 2017. No single player stood out from the rest, but they all stood proudly head and shoulders above their opponents.

Mr Alex Slack (Ass. Coach)