

Glory Gardens 5 League of Champions

Bob Cattell

Random House Children's Books

Contents

Cover

About the Book

Title Page

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Twelve

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Seventeen

Cricket Commentary

About the Author

Also by Bob Cattell
Copyright

About the Book

Glory Gardens C. C. are back and this time the stakes are high as they play to win in the League of Champions! Hooker and co have got to get their act together fast if they're to make it through the early rounds to the final of the knock-out competition. And let's face it, with Ohbert on the team it's not as straightforward as it might seem. As the competition progresses, the pressure builds and the team realise they are going to have to pull out all the stops if they want to make it all the way to the top ... and Edgbaston!

League of CHAMPIONS

BOB CATTELL
.....

Illustrations by
David Kearney

RED FOX

Chapter One

UNTIL JO SHOWED up at nets that morning we all thought the season was over for Glory Gardens.

It had been our best year ever. We'd won the North and East County League and then beaten the "Rest of the World" in the "World Cup" - that's what Frankie called our international knock-out competition - earlier this month. We beat Griffiths Hall School from Barbados in a nail-biting final. And we'd lost only one game all season - a fluke win by Mack's Australian team in the World Cup.

But all that seemed history now. Azzie, Marty and I are still playing for the County Under 13s Colts; Clive would be too but he's had a row with Liam Katz, the captain of the Colts, and he's been dropped for the next game. Clive's still sulking and it was no surprise to us that he hadn't turned up for nets - he's never been very keen on practising. Clive's one of the most talented batsmen in the team: like Azzie he's a real natural. But there are times when he has what Kiddo calls 'a bit of an attitude problem'.

No-one was taking practice too seriously that Saturday morning. Frankie was out of control as usual; Tylan bowled more full tosses than he'd bowled all year and all the batsmen were just trying to knock the leather off the ball. Kiddo was disgusted with us. Kiddo's our coach - he's one of the best too - we would never have had so much success without him. But it's hard to forget that he also teaches us

French at school and when he gets impatient the teacher in him really comes out.

“Oh for heaven’s sake, Frankie Allen,” he shouted. “Take that stupid towel off your head and go and have a cold shower.”

Frankie grinned wickedly; he was keeping wicket in a sort of home-made turban. “It’s this tropical heat,” he protested. “I’m protecting my brain.”

It was at that moment that Jo arrived.

But before I tell you about it, I’d better introduce the team properly. That’s us in the picture.



Back row: Marty, Tylan, Cal, Jacky, Erica, Mack Front row: Jo, Matthew, Hooker (capt), Azzie, Clive In front: Frankie, Ohbert.

I’m in the middle, the one holding the League Cup. My name’s Hooker Knight and I’m captain of Glory Gardens C.C. and the team’s leading all-rounder. The rest of our bowling attack is standing in the back row; Marty Lear’s our fastest bowler and Cal’s the slowest – he bowls off-

breaks. Clive and Azzie, on my left, are the side's star batsmen. In front of them is Frankie, our wicket-keeper and unofficial team clown and next to him is Ohbert. Ohbert is ... well, you'll find out soon enough.

Jo - she's sitting just behind Frankie on the left of the row - is our scorer, team secretary, fixtures organiser ... in other words she does everything except play. And, although you'd never guess it, she's also Frankie's sister.

Jo walked over to where Kiddo was standing and glared at her brother. "Francis, get that thing off your head immediately." Frankie looked round sheepishly and unwrapped the towel. He usually obeys when Jo's in one of her serious moods.

She turned to Kiddo. "I've just received this, Mr Johnstone," she said handing him a letter. While Kiddo read it Jo started to explain the 'Champions League' to us. It was the first we'd heard about it.

"It's a knock-out competition for all the county champions in the country," she said. "Because we won the league, we qualify to play in it."

"The final's at Edgbaston on the test match ground," said Kiddo growing increasingly interested. He read the letter again and then looked up at Jo. "And it seems to me you've already entered Glory Gardens for the competition."

Jo went red. "Yes. There wasn't much time so I wrote off immediately."

"So you've got a game here on Wednesday," said Kiddo.

"Yes," said Jo uncertainly. "I ... I hope that's all right."

"Hurray. Who are we playing?" said Frankie swinging his towel over his head and catching Ohbert round the ear. Ohbert's Walkman went flying and wrapped itself round his neck.

"Saracens," said Kiddo.

"Who are they?"

"They won the South and West County League," explained Jo. "So it's the county play-off. If we beat them

we're into the last 16 of the competition."

"But we can't play on Wednesday," said Azzie.

"Why not?"

"We've got a Colts game."

I'd just remembered it, too. We had a big game against Middlesex Colts on the County Ground. Marty, Azzie and I would be playing.

"They'll have to postpone the game," said Marty.

"Don't be silly," said Jo. "It's all organised. If we don't play on Wednesday we forfeit the game and Saracens will go through."

"Never mind, Mart," said Cal with a smile. "We'll just have to manage without the stars for once." Cal's my best friend. He lives next door to us; he's always the first person I turn to if I have any problems with Glory Gardens - which is quite often. We all think Cal ought to be playing for the Colts, too. He opens our batting with Matthew and he was our top wicket-taker in the league. And he knows more about cricket than any of us.

"Who's going to be captain, then?" asked Jacky.

"If you all insist, I'll do it," said Frankie.

Jo stared at her brother coldly.

"On second thoughts, I nominate Cal," said Frankie. No-one argued with that and Cal said shyly that he'd be pleased to be reserve captain.

"But how are you going to put out a team with only nine players?" Marty, as usual, was quick to spot all the problems.

"And that's including Ohbert," said Frankie.

"Don't worry, Mart," said Mack. "I've got plenty of reserves to call on."

"We don't want any of your Aussie friends playing for Glory Gardens," said Marty.

"Oh sorry, does it say something in the rules about no overseas players?" asked Mack sarcastically.

“Not as far as I can see,” said Kiddo with a smile. “Who have you got in mind?”

Mack is Australian through and through – but his family has been living here for some time and he’s played for Glory Gardens since the middle of last season. He’s a good cricketer and easily the best fielder in the side. He reminds me a bit of Jonty Rhodes, especially when he picks up and throws in the covers; as often as not he hits the stumps direct.

“I think Kipper Hawkes might be interested,” said Marty. “And Kris Johansen, too.”

Both of them had played against us in the World Cup. Kris is a good, quickish bowler; she’d given all our batsmen plenty to think about. And Kipper’s a fair left-arm spinner although he doesn’t look like one – he’s twice as fat as Frankie, if that’s possible.

“Great,” said Frankie. “You three go off and enjoy yourselves and we’ll do the business, won’t we, Ohbert?”

Ohbert didn’t hear Frankie because his Walkman was turned up to full volume but he saw us all looking at him and gave a big toothy grin.

“We’ll need some snacks to keep Kipper going through the game,” said Frankie. “Three dozen hamburgers to start with ...”

“No chance,” said Cal. “We all know who’d eat them. You’re slow enough behind the stumps already.”

By now everyone had forgotten about Nets. Kiddo started telling us everything he knew about Saracens; it wasn’t much but as usual it took him a long while to say it. Half way through his speech Gatting began to snore loudly. Gatting’s Kiddo’s dog. He’s rather old and fat these days and he smells a bit strange but everyone’s very fond of him – he’s Glory Gardens’ team mascot. Frankie, standing beside Gatting, started snoring in time with him and it was difficult to keep a straight face as Kiddo droned on. Then Frankie snatched Ohbert’s Walkman, put it on and broke

into a little dance pursued by Ohbert. At last Kiddo stopped talking.

“I think some of the Saracens players were in Dad’s team when we played them,” said Azzie. Mr Nazar had picked a strong team for the World Cup and we’d only just beaten them.

As everyone got excited about the competition I began to feel more and more disappointed that I wouldn’t be playing. I almost felt like dropping out of the Colts game and playing for Glory Gardens instead, but I knew I couldn’t. I was quite pleased that Clive had been dropped by the Colts. Glory Gardens needed all the batting we could find on Wednesday.



Walking home with Cal after Nets I couldn’t get the Champions League out of my mind. “I wonder why we didn’t get more notice of it?” I said, thinking aloud.

“Jo says she only got the entry form last week,” said Cal.

“Why didn’t she tell us then? We might have been able to rearrange the Colts game.”

“You know Jo. She keeps things to herself until she’s certain about them,” said Cal. He grabbed me round the shoulder. “Don’t worry, we won’t let you down. You’ll see.”

Chapter Two

OHBERT IS GLORY Gardens' secret weapon but no-one is quite sure whether he's for us or against us. He has played for Glory Gardens right from the start and no-one can deny that he's part of the team but one of the great mysteries is why he bothers to play cricket at all.

Ohbert is completely hopeless at nearly everything, especially cricket. If ever a person was born without a single atom of ball sense it's Ohbert. He's so bad that he'd probably get in the Guinness Book of Records as the worst No. 11 of all time.

But that's only half the story. Because, on top of that, Ohbert is unfathomable - that's Cal's word for him. I think it means that no-one knows what he's going to do next and we certainly don't - but then neither does the opposition. So when Ohbert's fielding he'll let the simplest ball run between his legs, but he'll also sometimes take the most unbelievable catch you've ever seen just by sticking out his hand with his eyes closed. His batting is just as peculiar; no bowler can set a plan for him. I've seen him play a forward defensive to a bouncer and get four leg-byes as the ball flew off the top of his head. Jo says he ought to wear a helmet but I don't think much damage can be done to Ohbert's brain that hasn't already happened.

Between games of cricket and sometimes during them, Ohbert listens to his Walkman. He and his headset are almost inseparable - Frankie thinks he sleeps and showers

with it on. With all the weird sounds which are injected straight into his ears, Ohbert doesn't have much communication with the world as we know it. So we weren't totally surprised when he turned up with his dad to watch the Colts game at the County ground.

"Ohbert," said Azzie spotting him first. "Shouldn't you be somewhere else?"

"Oh but ... where?" said Ohbert, pulling his Walkman out of one ear so that he could half listen.

"You're playing for Glory Gardens, you idiot," said Marty.

"No, but I can't be. I'm here," said Ohbert.

"Precisely," said Azzie.

Eventually I managed to explain to Ohbert's father, which is almost as difficult as talking to Ohbert, that he had to get Ohbert and his kit to the Priory ground fast because the match against Saracens was starting in half an hour.

Ohbert wasn't my only problem that afternoon. Liam Katz was sick and I'd arrived at the ground to discover I was captain. That meant we had to win. Liam Katz is a brilliant bat and not a bad captain but he thinks the Colts side revolves around him. If we lost he'd never stop telling everyone it was because he wasn't playing. It didn't help to know that Middlesex are one of the strongest Under 13 teams in the country - unbeaten all season.



Azzie plays the sweep shot to a well-pitched-up ball just outside leg stump. His left pad is thrust down the line of the ball so that it covers the stumps if he misses. When you play the shot try and hit down at the ball in a sweeping motion without aiming too hard - the sweep shot is all about timing and placement.

“Who’s going to open the batting in Katzy’s place?” said Azzie.

“Do you fancy having a go?” I asked. Azzie leapt at the chance and, after I’d won the toss and opted to bat, he and Olly Sheringham walked out to open the Colts innings.

Try though I did to concentrate on the game my mind kept drifting off to the Priory. Who would Cal bowl first? Probably Jacky and Kris Johansen. Mack had managed to get both Kris and Kipper Hawkes to play for us. That meant we had plenty of bowling but the batting was seriously weak. Cal told me he was going to open with Matthew and himself as usual but that meant Mack would be batting at No. 3 and Frankie at 6.

This was the batting order he’d shown me:

1 Matthew Rose	7 Kipper Hawkes
2 Cal Sebastien	8 Tylan Vellacott
3 Mack McCurdy	9 Jacky Gunn
4 Clive da Costa	10 Kris Johansen
5 Erica Davies	11 Ohbert Bennett
6 Frankie Allen	

A lot was going to depend on how well Erica and Clive batted. I couldn't wait to discover how they got on.

Meanwhile we had Middlesex to beat. Olly and Azzie saw off their quickies and the Middlesex captain brought on his two spinners. Instantly Azzie went on the attack. He's so light on his feet and quick to pick up the flight of the ball that, on his day, Azzie will massacre even the best spin attacks.

At the end of the first hour we had 67 on the board; Azzie had scored 40 of them. He'd been dropped on 28, a difficult low chance at cover point, but otherwise he hadn't put a foot wrong.

Two of his four boundaries came from perfectly timed sweep shots that gave their fielder at long-leg no chance at all.

With the score on 75 Olly Sheringham was caught behind. That only seemed to spur Azzie on to further heights. He reached his 50 with a lofted pull over mid-wicket and then, when the quickies came back, he hit three perfect drives for four off successive deliveries.

By the time he finally went on 88 - given out lbw trying to hit a slower ball down the leg side - we were completely on top.

"145 for three," said Marty to me as he clapped Azzie in. "When are you going to declare?"

It was a time game, not limited overs, so the normal thing was to declare at tea which was at 5 o'clock but if we could knock another 50 runs in the next half-hour I could declare early and have a few overs at them before the break. I told Youz Mohamed who was next in to push the

score along. Our fourth wicket fell on 170 and I joined Youz for the final dash. Four overs later Youz holed out with exactly 200 on the board and I declared. I'd got 17 which included an edge over the keeper and a drive back over the bowler's head which fell only inches short of a six.

By tea we had them on the back foot at 13 for two. Marty clean bowled the opener for a duck in the first over and then they made a complete mess of an easy single and finished up with both batsmen at the same end arguing about which of them had been run out.

"I didn't expect to be enjoying tea quite this much," said Marty. "I hope Cal's doing the same."

"It's a pity Azzie couldn't play both games," I said.

"Perhaps he could rush over to the Priory and bat instead of Ohbert," suggested Marty.

After tea Middlesex went on the defensive. It was soon obvious that they'd decided to block everything and kill the game. A bit negative, I thought, to go for the draw so early. I brought on the spinners and offered them lots of gaps to play their shots but still they played defensively. So I crowded the bat as much as I could. I was at forward short-leg and the umpires kept telling me to get back because the rules say you mustn't field closer than 11 yards from the bat in front of the wicket.

At last Youz Mohamed got the breakthrough with an lbw and a caught and bowled in the same over. Three more wickets fell and Middlesex had slumped to 46 for seven at the beginning of the last twenty overs.

Youz and Marty bowled brilliantly in tandem for the next ten overs without taking a wicket. There were lots of oohs and aahs and appeals for lbw and for bat-pad catches, but no wickets.

"Bowl as slow as you can and give it loads of air," I told Youz. It nearly worked but silly mid-on spilled a relatively easy chance. In desperation I came on at Marty's end and I gave Olly Sheringham a bowl at the other. With five overs