

Glory Gardens Cricket Club: The Big Test

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Cricket Commentary

About the Author

Also by Bob Cattell

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About the Book

It really doesn't look like Hooker's season. Not only does he spend the first match of the league suffering a dropped-catch jinx but now there's civil war in the team over the selections. Sometimes captaining Glory Gardens Cricket Club isn't the fun you might think. It's not the matches that prove the most trouble for poor Hooker - it's the infighting. He has one solution that might work. But making Ohbert captain in his place? That's not strategy - that's suicide.

The *Glory Gardens* series is the perfect read for cricket fans of all abilities. Diagrams, scoresheets and terrific top tips throughout each action-packed story, plus a glossary of cricket terms - you'll be stumped without them!

Recommended by the English Schools Cricket Association

The BIG TEST

BOB CATTELL
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Illustrations by
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Chapter One

“THIS IS IT,” said Frankie. “No one’s going to stop us this year.”

“Oh yes? So what about Wyckham and Old Courtiers?” said Marty. Marty is the team’s pessimist but, for once, he had a point. Looking at the fixture list it was hard to see a single easy match. If Glory Gardens was going to finish the season as champions of the Under 13s League we’d have to be brilliant in every game.

COUNTY UNDER 13s FIXTURES

- Week 1* Glory Gardens v Stoneyheath & Stockton
Wyckham Wanderers v Old Courtiers
Waterville v Arctics
Brass Castle v Croyland Crusaders
- Week 2* Arctics v Wyckham Wanderers
Waterville v Glory Gardens
Old Courtiers v Croyland Crusaders
Stoneyheath & Stockton v Brass Castle
- Week 3* Old Courtiers v Brass Castle
Croyland Crusaders v Wyckham Wanderers
Arctics v Glory Gardens
Waterville v Stoneyheath & Stockton
- Week 4* Wyckham Wanderers v Waterville
Brass Castle v Arctics
Stoneyheath & Stockton v Croyland Crusaders
Glory Gardens v Old Courtiers
- Week 5* Croyland Crusaders v Waterville
Glory Gardens v Brass Castle
Wyckham Wanderers v Stoneyheath & Stockton
Arctics v Old Courtiers
- Week 6* Waterville v Old Courtiers
Stoneyheath & Stockton v Arctics
Croyland Crusaders v Glory Gardens
Brass Castle v Wyckham Wanderers
- Week 7* Glory Gardens v Wyckham Wanderers
Old Courtiers v Stoneyheath & Stockton
Brass Castle v Waterville
Arctics v Croyland Crusaders

“Oh but, what a lot of games,” said Ohbert who’d suddenly noticed what everyone was looking at and was peering over Azzie’s shoulder.

“I shouldn’t worry, Ohbert, you won’t be playing in many of them,” said Marty cruelly.

“Course he will. We always win when Ohbert plays,” said Frankie. “You’d be the first choice in my team, Ohbert.” Ohbert grinned his stupid grin and then his eyes glazed over as he went back to listening to his Walkman.

Ohbert’s not everyone’s idea of a cricketer – in fact, he’s not *anyone’s* idea of a cricketer – but he was in the first Glory Gardens team and, for some reason, he’s been with us ever since. Sometimes he even takes a catch or scores a run but, like everything else he does, it’s probably by mistake.

The fixture list is twice as tough this year because the North County and East County Leagues have been combined. Croyland Crusaders won the East League last season, so they have to be one of the favourites – along with our arch enemies, Wyckham Wanderers, Old Courtiers and us.

We’re Glory Gardens Cricket Club – Frankie calls us ‘the fastest improving team in the world’. Frankie’s always saying things like that but even Marty would have to admit there’s a bit of truth in it. Two years ago we hadn’t even dreamt of playing together as a team and look at us now – we’re almost professional looking . . . apart from Ohbert.

Cal, Marty, Tylan, Erica, Frankie, Azzie, Ohbert and I were all in the very first Glory Gardens team. I’m Hooker Knight, the captain and all-rounder; Marty’s vice captain and he opens the bowling with Jacky, and our two best batsmen are Azzie and Clive. Cal, Erica and Mack are all-rounders like me. Frankie – he’s the one in the back row holding the cardboard ears behind Ohbert’s head – is our wicket-keeper. And Ohbert – as you know – is the worst

player in the team and probably the worst in the history of cricket.



*Back Row: Frankie, Marty, Tylan, Cal, Clive, Matthew and Mack
Front Row: Ohbert, Jo, Erica, Hooker, Jacky and Azzie.*

Next to Ohbert, with ‘Gatting’, our mascot, on her knee, is Jo. Jo doesn’t play for Glory Gardens, but she is one of the most important people in the club. She’s our scorer and secretary which means she organises everything. Without her, Glory Gardens would probably just fall apart. Of course, Frankie wouldn’t agree with that, but then he’s Jo’s brother and they never agree. Except perhaps about one thing . . .

“You’d better all start believing that Glory Gardens is the best team in the League,” said Jo.

“Best in the Universe!” said Frankie.

“And this year we’re going to win everything, aren’t we?”

“Everything in sight. Hardly worth the other teams showing up. Glory Gardens for the League!” Frankie began to chant, “Glory Gardens for the League . . .” but Jo looked sternly at him and he shut up.

“Well, if we’re that good, we don’t need to bother with practising,” said Azzie.

“Great,” said Clive who’s funny about Nets even though he’s just as mad about playing cricket as the rest of us. “Let’s go home then.”

“Get your pads on,” I said. “I’ll show you how much practice you need.”

Net practice is always on Saturday mornings at the Eastgate Priory ground. We don’t have many rules but one rule is that you must come to Nets each week. Kiddo comes along to coach us – he’s the opening bat for the Priory First Team. Kiddo helped us start Glory Gardens in the first place. We should really be called ‘Eastgate Priory Under 13s’ but Jo insisted on ‘Glory Gardens’ and, as usual, no one argued. The name comes from the recreation ground at the back of my house where most of us started playing.

Kiddo’s a brilliant cricketer – on the other hand he’s also a teacher at our school. He’s teaching us French this year but he knows a lot more about cricket than he does about French. His real name is Peter Johnstone – but he calls everyone at school ‘kiddo’, probably because his memory’s giving up and he can’t remember their real names.

“Come on, let the duck see the rabbit, kiddoes,” said Kiddo – he often says incomprehensible things like that. He strode over to the wicket and took guard. “I’m going to show you the most important shot in cricket. What do you think it is?”

“Straight drive?” said Azzie.

“Forward defensive?” suggested Matthew.

“Must be the hook,” said Frankie, swinging his bat wildly over his shoulder and just missing Ohbert’s head.

We came up with every cricket shot we could think of and still Kiddo kept shaking his head.

“All right, we give up,” said Cal.

“Well, it’s this.” And he played a little push shot on the leg side.

“Oh yeah, what’s that called then?” asked Frankie sounding unimpressed.

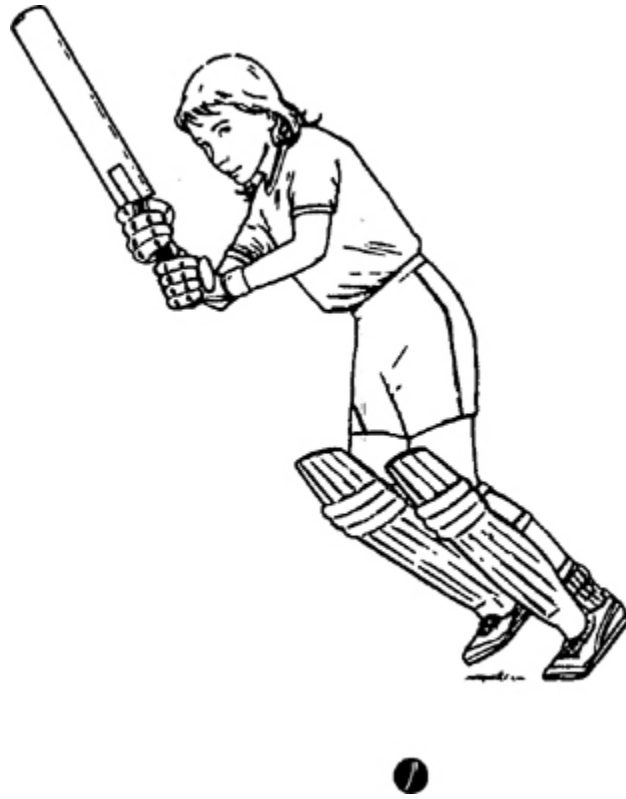
“I call it my start-up shot,” said Kiddo. “You see, most batsmen get out early in their innings playing attacking shots before they’ve got their eye in. But you don’t want to play endless defensive shots either and let the bowler get on top.”

“Not unless you’re Matthew,” said Frankie. Matt scowled – he gets teased a lot for being a boring batsman and a slow scorer but he hardly ever lets us down – a lot of our biggest scores have been built round a steady innings from Matthew.

“Look,” continued Kiddo. “If you’ve got a reasonable technique, you should find it as easy as falling off a log to play. Wait for the bowler to pitch one up on your legs and . . . thank you very much, an easy single. And no risk.”

He got us all practising the shot. Erica was best at it; her timing was perfect.

There aren’t many girls playing Under 13s league cricket. In fact I don’t know any in the sides we play against. I wouldn’t mind a few more in my team if they were as good as Erica. She’s not just a good bat – she’s one of the best economy bowlers in the side, too. One or two of the opposition players sometimes sneer about us having a girl in the team – until they see her play. The only Glory Gardens player to worry about it was Jason Padgett, but he soon grew out of it. Jason doesn’t seem to be very interested in cricket these days. He spends all his time playing chess – it’s a shame because he used to be quite good.



Erica plays a forcing shot off her legs. The ball is going fractionally down the leg side and she waits for it to come on to her bat and then turns the face to help it on its way. Keep your head over the ball and it won't go in the air.

After Nets the selection committee - Marty, Jo and I - got together and picked the team for our first League game. It didn't take long because we only had 12 to choose from and we just dropped Ohbert. Jo said we ought to pick him for the next game though, otherwise it wouldn't be fair. Marty laughed, but I sort of agreed with Jo. In a funny way Glory Gardens wouldn't be the same without Ohbert.

Of course, Ohbert didn't even notice when I pinned up the team on the notice board. He was off in 'Ohbert-land', listening to his Walkman in his own little world. When I told him he was twelfth man he didn't say a word. I wasn't completely sure he'd heard me but he did grin and nod his head. Sometimes you just have to agree with Frankie's theory that Ohbert was put on earth to prove that not everything has a purpose.

This was the team for Wednesday's game against Stoneyheath.

(in batting order)

Matthew Rose	Mack McCurdy
Cal Sebastien	Tylan Vellacott
Azzie Nazar	Frankie Allen
Clive da Costa	Jacky Gunn
Erica Davies	Marty Lear
Hooker Knight	Twelfth man: Ohbert Bennett

It was our strongest side and we definitely needed to be at our best. To win the League we needed a good start and Stoneyheath would be no pushover.

"Do you really think we can win it?" Cal asked me as we walked home together after Nets.

"Don't see why not. We beat Old Courtiers and Wyckham last year, didn't we?"

"Yes . . . and then we went and lost to all the rubbish teams."

"Well, there aren't any rubbish teams this year so we're bound to beat them all."

"You're beginning to sound like Frankie," said Cal with a grin. He ran off towards Glory Gardens Rec. "Come on, there's time to bowl a few overs at me before lunch."

Chapter Two

WE STARTED THE game against Stoneyheath with only 10 players; Ohbert didn't arrive on the pitch until the end of the fourth over.

Why was Ohbert playing at all? Well just before the game Tylan had a bad asthma attack and Kiddo had to take him home. Ohbert was twelfth man but, of course, he'd forgotten his kit, and, by the time he'd been home to fetch it and changed, Marty and Jacky had bowled two overs each and Stoneyheath were 13 for none. Worst of all, I'd dropped a hard, low chance at gully off Jacky's bowling.

"Take your time, Ohbert. We've got all day," said Frankie as Ohbert wandered on to the pitch still wearing his Walkman.

"Oh but . . ." began Ohbert - that's how he usually begins, which is why we call him Ohbert.

"He must have grown over the winter," said Cal with a laugh. Either that or Ohbert's clothes had shrunk. His shirt and cricket trousers didn't meet in the middle and the trousers stopped half way between his knees and his ankles. They were stretched so tight in every direction it was difficult to see how he could breathe . . . or move. He looked as if he was about to burst.

"Come on Ohbert. You'd better field at short-leg," said Frankie.

"Or silly point," suggested Cal.

Ohbert opened and closed his mouth like a goldfish. "Oh but, I couldn't find my new cricket things," he said.

I told him to take his Walkman off and go to third man - or, to be exact, I pointed to the place where I wanted him to stand because Ohbert doesn't know the difference between

third-man and the man in the moon. And, at last, the game started again.

I decided to rest Marty so that he'd have two overs left at the end of the innings, and I came on myself at his end. All the League games we play are 20 overs a side and no one is allowed to bowl more than four overs - which means you need at least five bowlers. Losing Tylan was a big blow because he was our top wicket taker last year - he bowls leg spin and he turns the ball quite a lot. It still left me plenty of bowlers to choose from although Cal was the only spinner.

My second ball was driven hard back at me head high and I got both hands to it but it bounced straight out. I tried to hold on to the rebound but I just finished up sprawling on the ground with the ball bouncing away from me. The batsmen ran a single. I must have taken my eyes off it at the last moment. I couldn't believe it. Nor could Frankie.

"Two dropped catches *and* he loses the toss. Which side are you on, Hooker?"

He was joking as usual but I wasn't amused. To make things worse Frankie took a brilliant one-handed catch next over off Jacky's out-swing.

"See that, Hooker? Now that's how you do it." Frankie threw the ball straight at me at gully and I dropped it. Everyone laughed.

I was trying really hard to concentrate on my bowling but I kept thinking I'd let the team down. How could I inspire them to win the game when I was the one dropping the catches?

"The opener's hitting everything on the leg side," said Cal. "Keep it outside the off-stump and we'll have him." It's good to have Cal to talk to - especially when things are going wrong. He usually comes up with some good advice.

"You'd better go in the gully then," I said.

“Yes - at least when you’re bowling you can’t field there as well.”

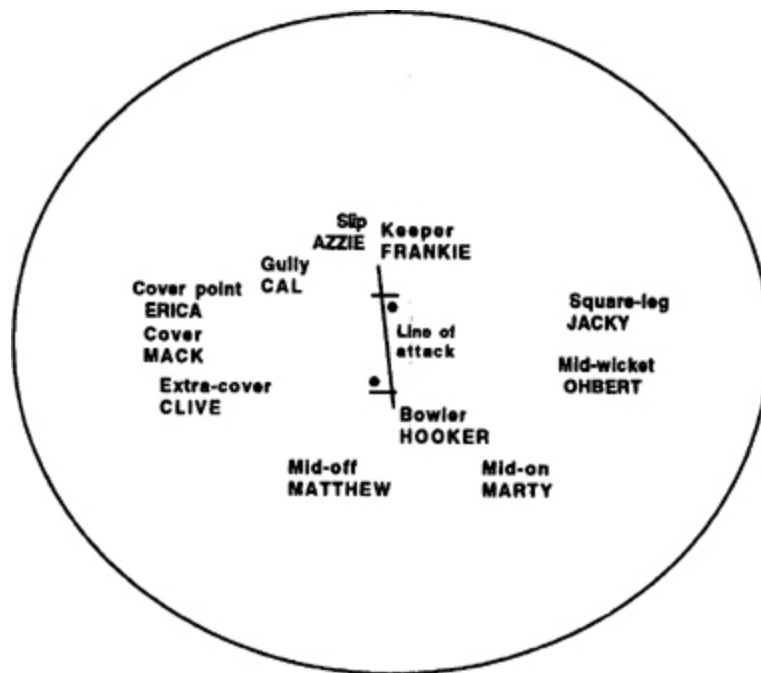
“Give it a break.”

Cal laughed. “You could bring Erica over into the covers.”

“What about all the gaps on the leg side?” I said.

“Tempt him,” said Cal. “If you’re bowling outside off-stump, he’ll have to swing across the line to hit to leg . . . and sooner or later he’ll give a catch.”

This was the field I set.



I tried to concentrate on getting my line right - just wide of the off-stump. At first, I was pathetic. I bowled a wide about three feet off the target. Then, trying to get straighter, I sent one down the leg side which the opener swung away for two over Ohbert’s head. At last, with my sixth try, I bowled the ball I wanted: the out-swinger pitching on off-stump. It was just short of a length and the batsman swung at it as it left him and he got a nick. The ball flew waist high to Azzie at slip and he took it easily and threw it up in the air.

“I knew you’d get there in the end,” said Cal.

We got another wicket in Jacky’s last over. The batsman played a ball off his legs straight to Mack at mid-wicket and set off for a single. You don’t mess about like that with Mack; he’s the best fielder in the side and he was on the ball in a flash. “No!” came the shout from the non-striker’s end, but it was too late. Mack’s throw was flat and low and Frankie only had to take the ball over the stumps and remove the bails. It was out by miles.



Like most left-arm medium pace bowlers, I bowl over the wicket and my standard delivery cuts across the right-hand batsman. If you can get the ball to swing a bit towards the slips, you’ve got a good chance of a catch. For the left-arm bowler’s out-swinger the seam should point towards first slip. As you deliver the ball, keep your fingers behind it with your wrist firmly locked. Push the ball towards first slip and follow through with your arm coming down your left side, instead of across your body.

That’s the advantage of having Mack in the side. His fielding’s always worth half a dozen runs and often a wicket or two. He’s so quick to the ball and his enthusiasm rubs off on the rest of the team. If you watch him fielding in the covers you know that he expects every ball to come to him every time. He simply can’t wait to pounce on it and hurl it in to the keeper. Mack’s Australian. He’s been in England for a year now and he started playing for us last season. Frankie calls him ‘our best signing’.