

Commanding Pope guides Surrey home

By Richard Spiller

OLLIE Pope confirmed his love affair with the Hampshire bowling by guiding Surrey to a precious win at the Kia Oval.

His commanding 122no – dominating a partnership of 193 with opener Dominic Sibley (79no) – ensured the hosts gambolled to victory by nine wickets with a massive 16.4 overs to spare in a match where the two sides had gone toe-to-toe over the first three and a half days.

Following a high-scoring draw against Lancashire at Old Trafford, it was a signal of intent for Surrey, who won the LV County Championship Division One title last year.

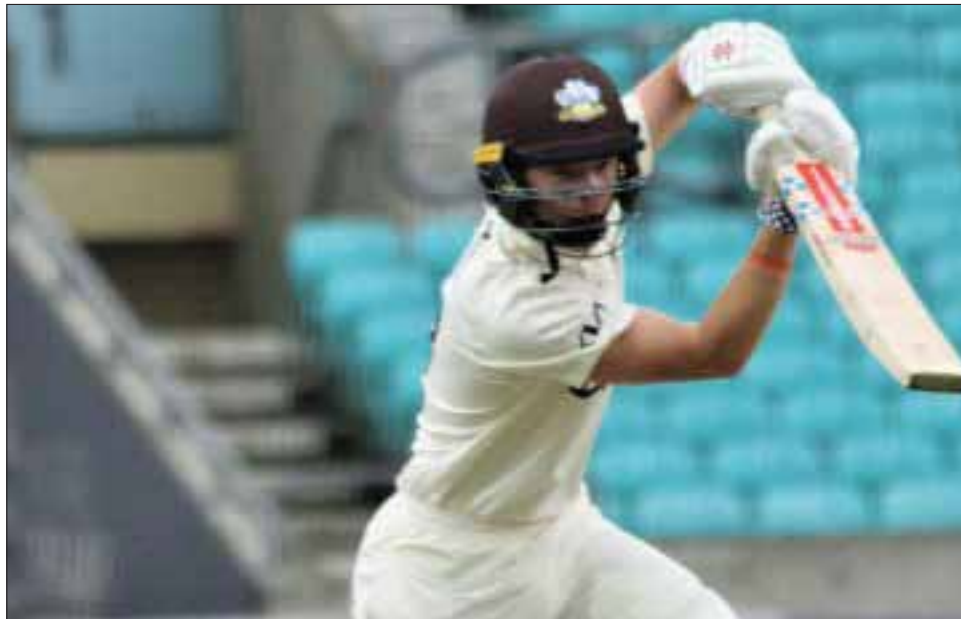
Pope has now scored 1,133 runs at 125.88 against Hampshire, 871 of them on his home ground at an eye-watering 174.20, which includes five centuries.

Surrey set out needing 243 from 72 overs on the final afternoon in a match where batting had rarely been straightforward. England number three Pope had been forced to fight all the way for the 91 he made in the first innings, frequently interrupted by bad light and rain. It was the centrepiece of his team's innings as they replied to Hampshire's 254 all out, of which Ben Brown hit 95.

But for a stirring unbeaten 52 from 40 balls from Australian all-rounder Sean Abbott at the end, the hosts would have fallen behind rather than take a slender lead of 16, Pakistani seamer Mohammad Abbas using the conditions perfectly to claim 6-64.

Nick Gubbins (84) and Ian Holland's unbeaten 46 ensured Hampshire kept their hosts waiting through much of the final morning before being finished off by Dan Worrall's 5-40, youngster Tom Lawes adding two wickets to his four earlier in the match.

With the new ball crucial, skipper



Ollie Pope in action for Surrey CC

Picture: Mark Sandom

Rory Burns (35) and Sibley patiently set about the chase in adding 54 but it was Pope who increased the tempo. Sibley, back from a five-year spell at Warwickshire, showed doubters that he can move through the gears but it was impossible not to be outshone by Pope. His 14 fours and three sixes turned steady accumulation into outright hostility, the highlight flicking a James Fuller bouncer way into the pavilion.

"I'm very happy with the way I played and it was nice to bat with Dom in that partnership," said Pope. "He also played superbly and he will get many more scores of 50 and above this season."

"It was tough work in the first innings in the overcast conditions against their attack and although I was annoyed to get out for 91, it was ok once I got back into the dressing room. I felt chilled because I played well overall."

And he added: "Our fast bowlers were brilliant in this match and it was their efforts which gave us a chance to chase down that total. There is a lot of talent in our dressing room and everyone is really pleased that we've managed to come out on top in this game."

Victory left Surrey second in the nascent table, two points off their next opponents – Warwickshire – who they visit from April 27 following a week off.

National Road Relays

By George Mallett



HERCULES Wimbledon Athletic Club saw record performances as two teams headed up to Sutton Coldfield for the annual English Road Running Association Men's 12 Stage

Road Relay Championships held in Sutton Park this Saturday.

The race sees the best in Britain compete over six short legs of 5.05km and six long legs of 8.6km with a host of Olympians competing in a deeply competitive field.

The Senior Men A team were ninth overall, seventh out of the English clubs with the B team coming 32nd, a club record performance.

The race was won by Central AC of Scotland, with the top three clubs (Highgate Harriers and Kent AC) all going inside the previous course record.

Indeed Hercules may count themselves unlucky to finish as low as ninth seeing as their A team's time of 4.17.38 was just 38 second outside their club record set last year to finish sixth.

The A team was kicked off by Archie Walton, whose 26.55 would go on to be Hercules' second fastest of the day. Such was the quality of the opposition that this only earned 26th on the opening leg. Henry Silverstein, running for the B's ran 27.42 to leave the team in a very impressive 37th.

For the first of the short legs Charlie Wylie ran 15.39, moving up 10 places as the A team reached 16th. Andrew Merry, running 17.14 handed over in 39th for the B's.

The outstanding run of the day has to go to Andrew Penney who's 25.59 lifted Hercules as high as 5th. Not only was it a club record but it was the 19th fastest of any athlete on the day.

With Charlie Eastaugh taking over and running the 9th fastest short leg of the day Hercules even found themselves in the podium positions with a third of the contest run as his 15.26 lifted the A team to third. That time is Hercules' quickest ever over the short legs.

Meanwhile for the B team Hercules continued to make steady progress, James Stockings running 28.52 to move to 37th with Austin Hall handing over in 38th after a 17.51.

Alex Robinson was next up for the A team, running 27.24 to pass over to Oli Carrington in sixth. Carrington's 15.57 maintained this position, in the process extending the gap to Tonbridge in seventh.

For the B's Sam Todd's 28.59 lifted the club to 37th, with Tom Maloney gaining one more thanks to a 17.16 clocking. George Mallett took over for the A team on leg eight running 27.20 but being unable to prevent Hercules slipping to eighth, before brother Ed regained one place thanks to a 16.05 finish.

Chris McIlroy (29.25) and Liam White (17.23) continued the B team's ascent to 35th.

Fred Slemek has spent the last two weeks taking care of newborn Kella but shrugged off the sleepless nights to run 27.20 again as a loaded leg saw Hercules dip to 10th.

GB International Stu McCallum, running 16.01 maintained that position with Ben Toomer's 27.29 closing the gap to then ninth place Bedford & County.

For the B's Dave Grima (30.56), Justin Reid (18.17) and Joe Clark (29.44) cemented Hercules' 35th place position.

Grandstand finishes were seen for both the A's and B's. Finn Johnson comfortably overtook Bedford to lift the team to 9th, their second-best position in the last 40 years, as he clocked 16.04.

Hector Revill, recorded the B teams' best short leg in 16.42, as Hercules gained three places on the final leg.

Their 32nd place finish is a club record for the B team and saw them beat a host of A teams from throughout the 57 teams competing.

Blues agony goes on and more may follow

WITH two tough London derbies in the space of four days, Frank Lampard's stop-gap return to management at Stamford Bridge is proving more difficult than even he imagined.

There has been little evidence of any bounce or honeymoon in the Premier League, with last weekend's 2-1 home defeat by Brighton underlining the problem.

Chelsea simply cannot score. The one goal Conor Gallagher

By Tim Harrison

did manage to get past the Seagulls to edge the Blues ahead after 13 minutes only looped into the net because of a huge deflection.

It was really no great surprise that Brighton scored twice – including a goal-of-the-month contender from sub Julio Enciso – to

snatch the points, leaving Chelsea grateful that they are high enough in the table not to worry about an end-of-season scrap at the bottom.

Next week, the Blues host Brentford in midweek before travelling to Arsenal for what is expected to be a harsh lesson in finishing from a side who have been having a remarkable season.

Lampard is very much seen as a caretaker until a permanent

replacement is announced next month, but even he has been disappointed that results have not been going his way.

To be fair, there have been glimmers of encouragement in the intensity of attack, and the willingness to shoot at goal, but long spells of each match are still spent in Potteresque back-passing. That's all well and good if you're seeing a winning position through to the final whistle, but not if you need an equaliser.

Sun shines bright on cup final day



Gold Cup winners, Wandle Thunder celebrate their triumph

THE sun was out on cup final day. Up first was the Bronze Cup final between Beddington Cyclones and Grange Lightning.

Whenever these two teams meet, it is a close affair full of commitment and camaraderie – and this match was no different.

It was a moment of magic by Momin Abubakar, who slotted in a free kick just outside the box to the goalkeeper's bottom right-hand corner to put the Cyclones one up.

By Patrick Hutchison

The Cyclones held on to the lead for the remainder of the first half and looked fairly at ease until Grange won a penalty, coolly despatched by Harry Humphreys.

Nothing could separate the two despite playing out extra time and the match went to penalties, Grange Lightning prevailed 4-3.

Wallington Torandos against

Hackbridge Hurricanes was the next match up in the Silver Cup semi-final.

Another impossible match to call, with both teams having beat each other domestically. The match was end to end but ultimately the defences stood strong.

After standard and extra time, the scoreline remained 0-0. In the harshest of ways to decide a game, the Tornados won 3-2 on penalties.

The final cup final game of the

day, and match of the 2022/23 campaign, was the Gold Cup final between Wandle Thunder and Beddington Park Blizzards.

It was a cagey affair with Wandle Thunder happy to soak up pressure and counter on the break.

A beautifully struck free kick from Harry Phillips nestled in the top corner to put Wandle ahead.

Despite a late onslaught, Wandle Thunder held on for the clean sheet to claim the Gold Cup.