



SUSSEX CRICKET MATCH REPORT



Sussex CCC v. Middlesex Specsavers County Championship Division Two The 1st Central County Ground, Hove, Friday 4th – Monday 7th May 2018

Day One

Sussex seamer Ollie Robinson produced his best figures in Championship cricket with 7-58 as Middlesex were bowled out for 230 at The 1st Central County Ground on Friday.

It was the second time this season that Robinson had taken seven wickets in an innings – last month he enjoyed a career-best return of seven for 23 against Loughborough MCCU on the same ground.

But Middlesex hit back when Tim Murtagh took two wickets in successive overs to leave Sussex 5-2 in the fifth over. And then James Harris also struck twice to leave the match in the balance with Sussex 60-4 at the close.

Middlesex had won the toss before this Specsavers County Championship Division Two fixture but their batsmen were made to work hard against a spirited attack on a lively pitch. At lunch they were 81-5 before a damage-limiting unbeaten 84 from former England Under-19 captain Max Holden gave their bowlers something to work with in a compelling day's cricket.

Robinson broke through in the fifth over when he removed Nick Gubbins' middle stump as the batsman played all round a straight one. That was the the 24-year-old right-arter's 100th first class wicket in his 32nd match.

He dismissed the other opener, Sam Robson, in his next over, as the batsman nibbled at a fine delivery that moved away from him. It was a very clever bit of bowling from Robinson, who had been tailing the ball into the former England batsmen consistently beforehand.

Steve Eskinazi wasn't able to make Sussex pay for dropping him twice. He was lbw to Robinson for and the same bowler then had Hilton had Cartwright caught in the slips for four. Just before lunch, Robinson secured the fourth five-wicket haul of his first- class career when he trapped Dawid Malan in front for 13.

After the interval Holden and John Simpson added 56 in 18 overs for the sixth wicket before Simpson was caught on the deep midwicket boundary off Danny Briggs.

It was soon 135-7 when Harris was caught at point off the same bowler for a single. Ollie Rayner was then lbw, half-forward, to give Robinson his sixth wicket.

That left Middlesex in a very ordinary position at 169 for eight. But Holden, dropped on 28, found late order support from Murtagh and the pair put on 51 for the ninth wicket.

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Murtagh finally played a poor stroke and was caught by Luke Wright at mid-off. Robison completed his demolition job when he plucked out Tom Barber's off stump to leave Holden stranded.

Middlesex fought back valiantly in the evening session. Murtagh had Luke Wells and Salt well caught in the slips before Harris struck. First, he had Stiaan van Zyl caught by Eskinazi at third slip and then he bowled Luke Wright, shouldering arms, for nine.

Day Two

Harry Finch's maiden County Championship hundred put Sussex in a good position against Middlesex after an absorbing second day at The 1st Central County Ground.

The 23-year-old from Hastings scored 103 as Sussex recovered from 127-6 to 323 in response to Middlesex's 230.

A first-innings lead of 93 could prove crucial on a pitch which continued to provide assistance for the bowlers and Sussex's position looked even better when Ollie Robison took his eighth wicket of the match and David Wiese struck five balls later to reduce Middlesex to 9-2.

But skipper Dawid Malan and Nick Gubbins batted down the hatches, taking their team to 64 for 2 at stumps.

Sussex had resumed on 60-4 before Finch shared important stands of 77 with nightwatchman Danny Briggs and then 96 with Michael Burgess until he was eighth out with the total on 242.

Australian Hilton Cartwright pinned Briggs in his first over for 23 and then took out Ben Brown's off stump before ending the Finch-Burgess alliance shortly after lunch courtesy of a brilliant reflex catch by Sam Robson at first slip. Ollie Rayner at second slip had parried a thick edge from Burgess into the air and Robson dived to take a one-handed catch from the rebound.

Burgess struck the ball nicely through the off side in his 45 while at the other end Finch relied on steady accumulation although he did go on the attack when he pulled Tom Barber for six to reach his fifty.

His century came up with a boundary off Ollie Rayner, the off-spinner, and he had faced 201 balls, with 13 fours, when he was out to a ball from James Harris which was virtually impossible to defend as it nipped back and kept horribly low.

Sussex's lead was only 12 runs at that stage but Robison, who had taken 7 for 58 on the first day, enhanced his all-rounder credentials with a rumbustious innings of 52 from 57 balls which included six fours.

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It enabled the last two wickets to put on 81 precious runs with last man George Garton contributing a career-best 22 not out including a six to get off the mark.

James Harris picked up the last three wickets to finish with 5-86 but Sussex had momentum and they carried it into Middlesex's second innings.

Briggs pulled off a smart catch at mid-wicket to remove Sam Robson (4) in the second over then Steve Eskinazi feathered an edge off Wiese in the next.

But Malan and Gubbins batted carefully through the remaining 18 overs of the day and will resume tomorrow 29 runs in arrears.

Speaking at the close, Finch had this to say about his achievement: "I'm so pleased - my first Championship hundred is a day I won't forget in a hurry.

"When I got into the 80s it was definitely playing on my mind but I stuck to my processes and I guess there was a bit of relief too when I got there. I have played 30-odd first-class matches so to get a Championship hundred is definitely a weight off my shoulders.

"It's been a good day for us. There are periods when the pitch is flat and it's quite easy to score but there is always a ball that does a lot.

"Jason Gillespie places a lot of importance on runs down the order and we might not know the value of that lead we got until the last day but I think we're in a good position, especially if we can get early wickets tomorrow."

Day Three

A Middlesex batting collapse, in which they lost eight wickets for 79 runs, set up a potentially thrilling finish to the Specsavers County Championship Division Two match at The 1st Central County Ground.

Middlesex were bowled out for 322, with Danny Briggs and David Wiese both returning figures of 4-70, to set Sussex a challenging target of 230 to win on a pitch offering some assistance to both pace and spin. At the close of the third day Sussex were 35-2, needing another 195.

Middlesex had resumed on 64-2, still 29 runs behind. Dawid Malan and Nick Gubbins dominated the morning session and at lunch the score was 171-2; 78 runs ahead with eight wickets in hand. Sussex had spurned their only chance when Ben Brown, diving in front of first slip, had spilled a difficult catch when Gubbins was on 35.

By mid-afternoon the match appeared to be slumbering in the warm sunshine. Malan (119) and Gubbins (107) had each scored commanding centuries and put on 234 for the third wicket. But then

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Briggs took three wickets in the space of five deliveries to inspire hopes of a first championship victory of the season for the home side.

Briggs and fellow spinner Luke Wells were bowling while Sussex ticked down the overs to the new ball. Briggs had Gubbins caught low down at short leg by Phil Salt. And the slow left-armers struck twice in his next over. He put himself on a hat-trick when Malan was stumped as he walked down the pitch and three balls later Hilton Cartwright edged to Harry Finch at first slip.

Shortly after tea, Middlesex lost three wickets in nine balls with the score on 303. John Simpson and Max Holden had added a crucial 58 for the sixth wicket when the former, attempting to drive a wide delivery from Wiese, chopped on to send his leg stump flying. In the next over Holden swept a legside delivery from Briggs onto his stumps and then James Harris was lbw to Wiese.

Middlesex were looking to Ollie Rayner and Tim Murtagh to strike some lusty blows. But Rayner, playing forward defensively, was beaten and bowled by Wiese and finally Tom Barber was run out after some neat fielding collaboration between Stiaan van Zyl and Finch on the boundary.

When Sussex batted in the long shadows of the final hour they soon lost Wells, who was caught in the slips off Harris for ten, and Salt was lbw to the same bowler for 12. Van Zyl and Briggs then saw Sussex through to the close to leave the game tantalisingly poised ahead of the final day.

Speaking at the close, Briggs said: "We had to work hard before we picked up some wickets halfway through the day. Both Dawid [Malan] and Nick [Gubbins] batted sensibly and patiently. It's a good cricket wicket. There's a bit of nip in it and some cracks have also opened up.

"With weather like this spinners can get wickets. It's going to be hard batting on day four but the target is achievable."

Day Four

Skipper Ben Brown made an unbeaten half-century to steer Sussex to a thrilling three-wicket victory over Middlesex as his side claimed their first win of the season in the Specsavers County Championship.

Four fluctuating days in which neither side held the ascendancy for too long ended with Ollie Robinson hitting James Harris to the long leg boundary to seal the win before he was embraced by his delighted captain.

Middlesex had taken four wickets for 15 runs before lunch to reduce Sussex to 128-6 but Brown and Michael Burgess put together a match-winning stand of 87, and although Burgess was dismissed for 22 the target was down to 15 runs and Sussex were on course for their first win under new head coach Jason Gillespie.

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They had resumed on 35-2 in pursuit of a target of 230 and for the first hour on the final day Stiaan van Zyl and night-watchman Danny Briggs made comfortable progress, extending their third-wicket stand to 89 with Briggs looking comfortable against seam and spin, hitting James Harris for three fours in an over.

But on 39 he drove Ollie Rayner to short extra-cover and Middlesex sensed an opening. It was the first of four wickets in nine overs with Australian Hilton Cartwright picking up two from successive balls. Frustration got the better of van Zyl on 45 when he edged a delivery angled across him to slip and Cartwright took a low catch in his follow-through from Luke Wright's checked drive off the next delivery.

Middlesex were favourites again when Harris came back for the last over before lunch and Harry Finch, who made a century in the first innings, was caught behind to leave his side still 102 runs away from victory.

But Brown found a staunch ally in Burgess after the interval and although Middlesex captain Dawid Malan rang the changes in an effort to get a break through – bringing himself on at one stage – the Sussex pair dug in and chipped away at the target. Burgess offered a chance on 13 when Sam Robson at slip got a hand on a flying thick edge but couldn't cling on.

The seventh wicket pair had added 87 in 25 overs when Malan pinned Burgess in front for 22, but Brown clipped the first ball of the next over from Harris to the fine leg boundary to get the target down to single figures and was unbeaten on 65 from 92 balls with seven fours when Robinson pulled Harris for the winning runs.

A jubilant - if somewhat drained - Brown had this to say at the close: "It was probably one of the best Championship games I have played in. A good cricket wicket, tough opponents who kept coming at us for all four days and we've managed to get over the line at the end.

"To get our first win of the season is a massive confidence boost and there have been some great individual performances throughout from the likes of Harry Finch and Ollie Robinson, two of our young guys who are really stepping up for us now.

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"The mood wasn't great at lunch when we were six down still needing 102 but in those situations I prefer to be out there trying to control our destiny. It was nice to get us home but I hope people don't underestimate Michael Burgess's contribution. He only made 22 but he played a really big part for us."

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