

The 2025 season was, in many ways, a test of the 4th XI's resilience, humour and ability to find positives in adversity. Competing in Hampshire Cricket League Division 6B, representing Hythe & Dibden Cricket Club, we faced a campaign shaped as much by availability challenges as by performances on the pitch. Fielding a settled XI proved difficult at times, and with five conceded fixtures across the summer, we never quite found the consistency needed to climb the table. Nevertheless, those who did pull on the shirt each Saturday did so with commitment, good spirit and no shortage of stories to tell.

There were, despite the challenges, some standout performances. With the bat, Jamie Fletcher led the way with 319 runs, providing much-needed stability and a highest score of 84 in a season where partnerships were sometimes assembled as late as Friday evening selection calls. Shaun Moss contributed a valuable 189 runs, combining grit with a composure that, pleasingly, extended beyond the boundary rope – even when Fawley attempted to bait him into “round two,” Shaun demonstrated admirable restraint. Whether that's maturity or simply conserving energy for the bar afterwards remains open to debate.

The season's most headline-grabbing performance came courtesy of Jonjo Stovell's extraordinary 167* against Redlynch & Hale III. It was an innings of such dominance that it allegedly prompted an official league email reminding clubs about the “appropriate deployment of quality players in lower divisions.” We can neither confirm nor deny that Jonjo's name was mentioned in that correspondence, but we do note that he has not been seen quite so frequently on a 4th XI teamsheet since. His 148* partnership with Fletcher set a new 5th wicket record and briefly had us wondering whether Division 6B was ready for such theatre.

In the bowling department, Zac Moss led the attack with 11 wickets, persistently asking questions of opposition batters even when the answer often seemed to be “that's gone through cover.” Sam Page's outstanding 6–29 against Dorset Indians was the spell of the season, while Bailey Whittaker's 3–20 on senior debut was a genuine highlight and a reminder of the pathway developing beneath us.

And then, of course, there was the return of Mark “The Shark” Callow. Emerging from the depths to don whites once more, he struck visible concern into the hearts of opposition batsmen – and, if we're honest, mild apprehension among our own colts during warm-ups. The legend remains intact: prowling in from the boundary with menace, dispensing advice with the confidence of a man who has seen it all before, and

reminding us that experience is priceless (even if the hamstrings occasionally disagree).

Ultimately, 2025 will not be remembered for silverware, but it will be remembered for character. A small but loyal group turned out week after week, stepping into unfamiliar roles, encouraging younger players, and ensuring the 4th XI remained competitive and good-humoured throughout. In a season where depth was tested, spirit never was.

We close the year realistic about where we finished, but optimistic about what lies ahead. If we can pair the talent shown in flashes this summer with a little more availability – and perhaps slightly less league scrutiny of our team sheets – there is no reason why the 4th XI cannot look forward to a stronger 2026.