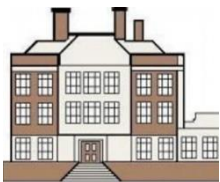


Dowley's Team-by-Team Premier Review and Analysis 2024

Frankton (12th)



Frankton Cricket Club

Perhaps many people will look at the table, see Frankton's final position, and say that was predictable. But in actual fact for the large part of the season they were safely ensconced above the relegation zone – indeed at the halfway stage they were looking up with 4 wins and just 5 losses. Sadly, the white-ball format really found them out and 10 defeats in the last 11 games sealed their fate, which means a swift return to Division One. Batting was a problem all year as the team experienced some huge collapses at times, with just Ryan Kruger getting past 400 runs. Of the rest, only captain Tom Welte got to 300. With the ball, only Stuart Lammie reached 30 wickets. On the three occasions I saw them their fielding and catching were rather disappointing, while its hard to quantify if this made a big difference it can't have helped. But let's be positive, they are always strong in Division 1 so could well come again, and they play the game the right way. Finally Hardwick Park is a loss to the Premier Division as the best ground in the league (imo).

"Little by Little": Tom Welte performed well with bat and ball but it wasn't quite enough to save his team.

Oswestry (11th)



OSWESTRY
CRICKET CLUB

A tricky season at Morda Road ended with an 11th-place finish and almost certain relegation down to Division One for the first time in their history. It all started pretty positively with 4 winning results in their first 6 games. But they were very inconsistent – the first team to beat Quatt, but lost at home to Frankton, they beat Shelton, Ludlow and Wem but had 2 losses to Shrewsbury. None of it really made sense. I watched them on 3 occasions and was impressed every time because they looked a decent mid-table side. The captain was officially Alex Huxley but he only played 8 games, and a lot fell on Josh Darley and overseas Shak Marshall, both of whom had great years. Marshall scored 500 runs and took 49 wickets, the perfect benchmark season for an overseas pro. Joe Monk led the attack well, but they were short of seam bowling, turning to veteran Ian Davies in the early weeks and he let nobody down. Henry Walker is a promising player, as are a few others, so it may actually help them to go down and regroup a bit. Time will tell

"Where did it all go wrong": I am really not sure but Josh Darley with over 700 runs can hold his head high

Shrewsbury 2nd XI (10th)



It's always difficult for a 2nd team to survive in the Premier Division, and to their credit they have given it a good go again. Having Zane Beattie in as overseas and Rob Foster play a full season gave them real stability, and it was no surprise there was a drop-off after Beattie returned home. The bowling attack has been their main issue; what would they have given to have someone like Foster bowling in his prime. Thomas Richards (300 runs and 21 wickets) is a promising cricketer who could push onto bigger things, and Dan Walker had some good knocks but was inconsistent for a player of his ability. One cannot be too critical because they came very close to surviving (*late edit and may yet do so).

"Force of Nature": Rob Foster's 555 runs averaging over 40 held it all together.

St Georges (9th)



If I seemed to mention their "fighting spirit" with monotonous regularity, that's because for a team that lost its first 6 games and only won 1 of the first 12, to be even in a position to have a good chance of surviving represents an incredible turnaround. That they ended up with 7 wins and came 3rd in the white-ball table is a huge tribute to the leadership of Sam Morgan, who managed to foster a never-say-die attitude among his side, and was allied to some outstanding individual and team performances. Overseas pro Faizan Khan was a massive success with 879 runs and several judges believe he is the finest keeper in the Shropshire League since Derek Ashley, while Muhammad Khattak had his best season yet, nearly reaching 500 runs and taking 28 wickets. Others like Faisal Khan, Mike Myatt and Azaad Rafiq all chipped in too. It was a pity they didn't get much out of Alex Johnson in the second half owing to work commitments. But all in all they would have snapped your hand off for 9th place back in June.

"The Masterplan": Sam Morgan hit on a winning formula in the White Ball and could well be the best captain in the league.

Madeley (8th)



They got off to a flyer and while it was no real surprise they couldn't keep that up, it was still a steady season for the 1st team at Park Street as they always kept themselves just above the relegation dogfight. It was great to see Martin Boyle back playing a full season at this level and he was pretty much at his best. The captain took 35 wickets, while Sri Lankan overseas Mithun took 44 and veteran Nad Ahmed weighed in with 32 victims. Batting was more of an issue, the overseas never scored more than the 49 in the first game and most innings were built around the solidity of Salim Ahmed. Oli Davies showed some promise getting past 300 runs, and I am sure Madeley will be looking to him and his brother Sam to kick on next year. Perhaps for 2025 a batting allrounder would probably be more useful as an overseas than a bowler who bats a bit.

"Wonderwall": Salim Ahmed channelled his best Rahul Dravid, he is a proper old-school batsman who values his wicket.

Allscott Heath (7th)



A 7th-placed finish would have been at the upper end of expectation in April, and there is no doubt the contribution of Kuldeep Devatwal played a huge part in achieving that – it would be churlish to suggest otherwise. But they were far from being a one-man band, with other players stepping up, notably Jason Summers who had a simply outstanding season with 487 runs and 49 wickets, and Callum Starling nabbing 40 victims too. Max Ferrington had a good first year at this level, and Matthew Hutchings bowled some quick spells – if he can improve his control he could be a big player next year. So there are reasons to be optimistic for Allscott. They will look to maintain their position next year in what will probably be a stronger renewal, and are in a good place both figuratively and literally to attract new players and add more depth to the squad.

"Rock and Roll Star": Kuldeep Devatwal after a fantastic 1168 runs and 45 wickets.

"Don't Look Back in Anger": Jason Summers has toyed with retirement in the past but has proven he's still a great cricketer with plenty to offer.

Sentinel (6th)



This has been a successful season, given their captain and best player James Shaw has been injured for most of it, and they also lost Steve Gray, George Cheshire and Shane Gwilt for differing reasons. So they will be delighted to finish in the top half. What looked an ageing side just a couple of years ago has been quietly transformed and they now have a good balance of youth and experience. Their recruitment policy of picking up promising lower-division players again worked well and Oliver Wilson's bowling was decent. But they would have been disappointed to lose Charlie Rogers back to Condover after only a few weeks. Perhaps he was thrown in too early to the firsts as it's a big step from Division 4.

Ed Ashlin was a calming middle-order presence who churned out runs most weeks, while Tom Griffiths has improved with bat and ball and is now established at this level as has Connor Cheshire who is a very accomplished keeper/bat and Jacob Binnersley enjoyed a huge breakthrough season. You would hope they could keep him for another year or two before a bigger stage comes calling, but time will tell. No doubt they will be again scouting the lower divisions for up-and-coming talent with a spinner probably top of their wish-list. But all in all they have plenty to be positive about.

"Boy with the Blues": 17-yr-old Jacob Binnersley, 400+ runs and 23 wickets, has become very important for the team and may pick up several awards.

"Some Might Say": Oliver Wilson taking 39 wickets was a great return on debut season at this level.

Ludlow (5th)



Tipped here as genuine title contenders, in truth a bad start soon put paid to any notion of winning the league, and despite them coming with a strong run in the white ball, they then faded again after one of the performances of-the-season when turning Whitchurch over. Jason Oakes had his 2nd-best year in his four seasons at Ludlow; 778 runs and 38 wickets topped both charts, with the vast majority of those runs coming with the white ball. Luke Miles delivered another superb season with bat and ball, over 700 runs and his 29 wickets coming at a low average and economy, but their bowling otherwise lacked depth with Louis Watkins largely absent and Joe Williams not quite at his best although still performing well. Will Sparrow's retirement leaves a big hole to be filled, but no doubt chairman Phil Parker and his team will be hoping to recruit in the winter and perhaps tapping into that Herefordshire-border talent pool. Good news is that Oakes is confirmed for next season.

"Supersonic": Luke Miles averaged 48 with bat and 13 with ball. He has star quality at this level and probably beyond, and would be my choice for player of the year.

Shelton (4th)



Shelton
CRICKET CLUB

To be ranked the 9th-best team in Shropshire (and probably 8th in reality) marks a fine achievement for the west Shrewsbury side, who seemingly go from strength to strength in all aspects of their club. On the field they were one of the few to utilise the new rule regarding an additional overseas player, albeit the mid-season signing of Antonio Morris in addition to Nathan Sealy did raise a few eyebrows (it remains to be seen if that rule stays in place next year). More significantly was the form of captain Simon Jones, whose haul of 50 wickets @13 were only bettered by the Wem and Quatt overseas. Sam Griffiths offered good support with 28 but his brother Ross, who continues to be underrated by some, went even better with 36 victims. With Sealy providing runs and wickets during his 12-game stay, the batting took care of itself at times. Saleh Ahmed and Ben Matthews both averaged over 30 and Viv John and Pabel Saha each had their moments. A finish of 4th suggests a level of consistency, but in actual fact they were the most inconsistent team in the division. Their white-ball form in particular was all over the place, with runs of LWLWLWLWL in the last 9 games exemplifying a problem they will be keen to address in 2025. If they manage that they could push on to greater success.

"Champagne Supernova": Simon Jones had another great season and has more wickets than any other seam bowler in the SCCL over the last 5 years.

Wem (3rd)



For most teams a 3rd-place Premier Division finish would be a cause for satisfaction if not celebration, but in truth this isn't a season that will live long in the memory for the Souldon Road outfit as they finished around 100 points behind the top two. Injuries and loss of collective batting form have hampered them, the latter being a strange one as historically they have batted very deep. Harry Chandler had a good season as did Sam Peate, but the rest of the batting probably underperformed their talent. Tom Astley (44 wickets @13) was exceptional with the ball and really carried the attack at times, but with Danny Cohen injured for most of the season they were at least one bowler light and not able to fiddle enough good overs from their batsmen. Irfan wasn't quite the huge success he was in 2023, although still did very well with 53 wickets @8 and 400 runs, and will be hard to replace if he doesn't return as seems unlikely. If not they could probably do with a top-order bat as overseas who can bowl some overs, while they definitely need to sign a couple of bowlers or promote from their title-winning second team. Martyn Davies has been missed both for his runs and his competitive nature, although the loss may have been worth it looking at the bigger picture. A side in transition perhaps ??

"Lord Don't Slow Me Down": Tom Astley bowled rockets all year, and he's done it in both the Birmingham League and SCCL. How he has never had a sniff of a Shropshire call-up is a mystery.

Quatt (2nd)



Jed Edwards's side was probably the luckiest team in the SCCL this year. The trouble was it was all bad. A pre-season points deduction meant they were immediately playing catch-up, and they also suffered two more abandonments than their rivals. Allied to another 5 points off for ill-discipline and a season-ending injury to key man Chris Miller, it all meant that despite winning their first 12 completed games they were unable to get more than a win ahead of Whitchurch. And when the pressure then hit, they stuttered and their rivals reeled them in. Their batting was strong throughout, Tom Whitney (who kept wicket superbly too) and Oli Plank both passing 500 runs and Ryan Wheldon nearly getting there too. Although Kuldeep Diwan underperformed with the willow, he made up for it with the ball, taking 65 wickets at 8 apiece. Alex Biddle and Scott Furber both got plenty of victims also. That said, their seam attack is slightly underwhelming for a side trying to win the league and chairman Howard Sanders will be trying to strengthen that area in particular. This was a 6th runners-up position in 9 years, and this one will be painful for all concerned.

"He's Electric": Kuldeep Diwan bowled some magical spells, but did he do it in the big games?

"Married with Children": New dad Jed Edwards is passing on the captaincy baton, with Alex Biddle the favourite for the job

Whitchurch (champions)



After losing 2023 captain Mike Robinson to Shifnal in the winter and then Maz Hasnain stepping down after 2 losses from 2, few would have predicted the astonishing run of success under Dan Bowen who won 18 games from the next 20 to deliver a first title since 2017. Even in his first game in charge they were 8-4 at St Georges and managed to defend 90, and there were several similar outcomes over the course of the season as wins against Shrewsbury, Shelton, Wem, Ludlow, Quatt, and Oswestry could on another day have gone the other way. But the quiet understated leadership of Bowen clearly benefitted a side that has always had a lot of talent, and he was able to get the best out of them by trusting them to perform while giving them a steely determination to never give up. Of course it helps having a superb bowling attack led by himself (37 wickets @14), bolstered by the perhaps-belated introduction of Alex Heath who has genuine pace, with Adan Hussain having a superb year too. Shabbir Khan was always exceptional, while Maz Hasnain, Muhammad Fahim and Shaf Ahmed played some high-pressure knocks at times. Moving forward, the age of the team will be a concern, but no doubt they will be looking to bring on some more of their excellent 2nd team talent sooner rather than later, depending on which division they are in next year.

"Roll with It": Shabbir Khan's 48 wickets @9 and had a stunning economy rate for a leggie.

"Definitely Maybe": Is Maz Hasnain probably the best player in the history of the league? The supporters at Heath Rd believe so with some justification after he added 877 runs to his huge career total.

Finally, having seen each team at least 3 times and visited every ground, bar Ludlow (sorry Phil), here is my unofficial team of the year (the awards sub choose the official one).

1. **Maz Hasnain (Whitchurch)**
2. **Tom Whitney (wk) (Quatt)**
3. **Luke Miles (Ludlow)**
4. **Josh Darley (Oswestry)**
5. **Kuldeep Devatwal (Allscott Heath)**
6. **Rob Foster (Shrewsbury 2nd XI)**
7. **Jason Summers (Allscott Heath)**
8. **Tom Astley (Wem)**
9. **Dan Bowen © (Whitchurch)**
10. **Shabbir Khan (Whitchurch)**
11. **Simon Jones (Shelton)**

12th man Alex Biddle (Quatt)