Oscar Ress | 04/09/2026 at 18:35: **The Cricketer Magazine**

Kia Oval (day three of four): Yorkshire 185 & 82, Surrey 83 & 187-9 - Surrey won by one wicket.

"No one can accuse Blake of not showing the necessary fight for a relegation battle".

There was a loud roar from the Surrey faithful when Dan Worrall skewed the winning runs into the offside.

It was relief and joy in equal measure from a crowd that lived every minute of their team dicing with defeat and victory, relegation and safety on a thrilling final day against Yorkshire.

But most importantly, it was a palpable recognition of the fight shown by their players and a welcome change in mindset from delusional title-chasers to relegation scrappers full of fight and grit at long last.

Well, at least on the field.

While Surrey, in this case their head coach Gareth Batty, continue to keep one eye on whether three more wins might win them the title, one of their own, Josh Blake, shed his ego and battled his team to victory.

No one can accuse Blake, who earned a professional deal at 23-years-old after impressing Batty in a net and knocking the door down with runs for Sutton Cricket Club in the Surrey Championship, of not showing the necessary fight for a relegation battle.

His 43 not out off 183 balls in a winning cause would be impressive in isolation, but given the context of his boyhood club's predicament, it was a masterful representation of grit and determination.

And that is before you factor in that he is only in the side because of international call-ups for Dan Lawrence and Jamie Smith and an injury to Ryan Patel - Blake was a mid-game replacement against Nottinghamshire - as well as the fact that he is out of contract at the end of the season.

Faced with 185 runs to win in the fourth innings, having been bundled out for 83 and skittling out Yorkshire for 82, there was a feeling that the home side might just subside.

In fact, it felt like the game that would define their relegation this season. It was when the fear of their predicament engulfed and debilitated them.

But instead, it could well be the result that hauls them to safety. These 19 points, coupled with perhaps one more favourable result, would probably be enough to stave off the very real threat of the drop.

And it was built, especially on the last day, with the type of stomach required for this fight. Sure, it arrived at this late stage, but at least it came.

Maybe that is because the reality of the situation has finally dawned on Surrey. They have spent so much of the last few weeks talking about the idea of looking up, not down the Division One table.

Even after defeat against Nottinghamshire two games ago, which reinforced the gulf in quality between the teams, their captain Rory Burns, in conversation with The Cricketer, **dismissed the reality of their predicament**.

He insisted: "With that looking up, looking down, looking around you. I don't think that really helps in terms of where you're trying to go."

Before that Notts game, and the start of a gruelling final Championship block, **Worrall** and **Ryan Patel** had separately spoken to The Cricketer and insisted that the aim of the season was still to win the title.

Clearly, it was a specific tactic, designed, it seems, to inject confidence back into a group that severely lacked it.

In truth, the aim of the title challenge and the relegation battle are the same: win games of cricket. The mental approach, however, must be different.

It would be the first sign of madness, coupled with an arrogant sense of entitlement, to continue with a method that garnered one win in seven games and expect it to produce, for example, five wins in six. Surrey have obviously recognised that changes were required.

Ben Foakes clearly understood the true assignment of the season in the last game against Essex at Chelmsford when he dug in to produce **one of his best hundreds for Surrey** and save the game in the process.

And so did Blake, with admirable support from Matt Fisher, to drag his side, kicking and screaming, over the finish line on the final day of this game.

At times, it looked a lot like he was costing his team the game. The inability to score any runs or transfer any scoreboard pressure allowed bowlers to bowl unchallenged and appeared to be making life harder for his teammates.

In the end, every maiden, every leave and all the stubbornness were justified by the result.

It should be said that this was not about a failure to walk towards danger in a Bazball sense. But you cannot, in this situation, merely go down without throwing some punches.

Ollie Pope, for example, in the second innings, flicked his second ball for six before hitting another. Those were, however, his only scoring strokes as he was dismissed for 12 off 18 balls.

At the other end of the scale, Blake struggled at times to even get a single. There had to be something in between.

In Fisher, he found that. There was controlled aggression, especially after sustaining a nasty blow to the helmet from George Hill, but also a significant amount of patience, control and some glorious strokes.

Together, they whittled down the runs and frustrated a tiring Yorkshire attack.

There is something in that as well. After all, Ben Coad, Jack White and George Hill bowled all but two of the 73.2 overs. Jonny Bairstow, perhaps understandably, was unwilling to throw the ball to either of his two spinners, Kuldeep Yadav or Dom Bess, nor was Matthew Revis trusted with much of the burden.

And when Fisher was caught in the slips with 15 to get, and Auqib Nabi skied a chance with two runs left, that perseverance was justified. Even the maiden delivered by Hill to Blake with two to get was spectacularly good and could have been match-winning.

But, as it proved, it was not enough for victory. With the home support cheering every run, Surrey limped to a much-needed second victory of the Championship season. Blake will reward himself tomorrow with a trip to Earlsfield, London, to watch his beloved Sutton take on Spencer CC with a chance to win the title.

Surrey's relegation fight is far from over, but it will be greatly enhanced if they can reconcile with the severity of their situation and show the same fight Blake did today. Only then can they contend with the fear rather than be governed by it.