

Mixed bag on minnows



PHOTO: STAR FILE

John Davison...ball-bashing Canadian.

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Although the cricket World Cup still has three weeks to run, the debate over whether the minnow nations deserve a place in the big pool in the West Indies in 2007 has already begun.

The arguments are simple enough. Should cricket's pretensions to becoming a global game be given priority over consumer patience?

Canada, the Netherlands, Namibia and Kenya line up with the International Cricket Council (ICC) on one side of the argument.

Spectators and pundits frustrated with one-sided first-round matches are on the other.

Two teammates and their wildly contrasting contributions at South Africa 2003 personify the dilemma perfectly.

John Davison, an off spinner and lower-order batsman for South Australia but who qualified for Canada after spending the first five weeks of his life there, marched out at

Centurion against West Indies on February 23 and unexpectedly hammered the fastest century ever seen in a World Cup.

The 32-year-old, who reached his 67-ball mark with a six, could barely believe it. "It sent a shiver down my spine," he said.

Nor could the crowd and nor could West Indies captain Carl Hooper. His side recovered to win but Hooper spoke for the cricket public at large when he said: "When I woke up this morning the last thing I thought was that a Canadian would have batted like that."

That day, everyone loved the minnows. Opener Ishwar Maraj presented the other side of the coin in East London, with an innings almost as memorable for its tedium.

A tortoise to Davison's hare, he batted out Canada's full 50 overs

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Bigger the better

AFP, Johannesburg

World Cup executive director Ali Bacher called Wednesday for even more teams to take part in the next edition of the tournament in the West Indies in four years' time.

This year's World Cup has been the biggest ever with 14 nations taking part, including Canada, Namibia and the Netherlands who are all associate members of the International Cricket Council (ICC).

"My personal viewpoint is that their participation did not devalue the integrity of this event," Bacher told a press conference.

"In fact they brought a freshness to this World Cup and I just hope that the ICC proceed further with the enlargement of the number of teams that participate in the World Cup."

Canada caused one of the tournament's biggest upsets by beating

Bangladesh, the weakest of the 10 Test nations but otherwise the three minnows were involved in some fairly one-sided encounters, the Dutch's lone victory coming against the Namibians and the Africans not winning at all.

But Bacher said having more teams at the tournament, which at six weeks long is three times the length of an Olympic Games, could actually shorten the event.

"If you had 16 teams, that would be four pools of four which would mean fewer matches (per group)."

This year's format was two groups of seven.

South Africa's first-round exit has prompted fears that the patriotic fervour which has engulfed the World Cup will evaporate and public support decline.

But Bacher said: "With regard to the exit of South Africa from the

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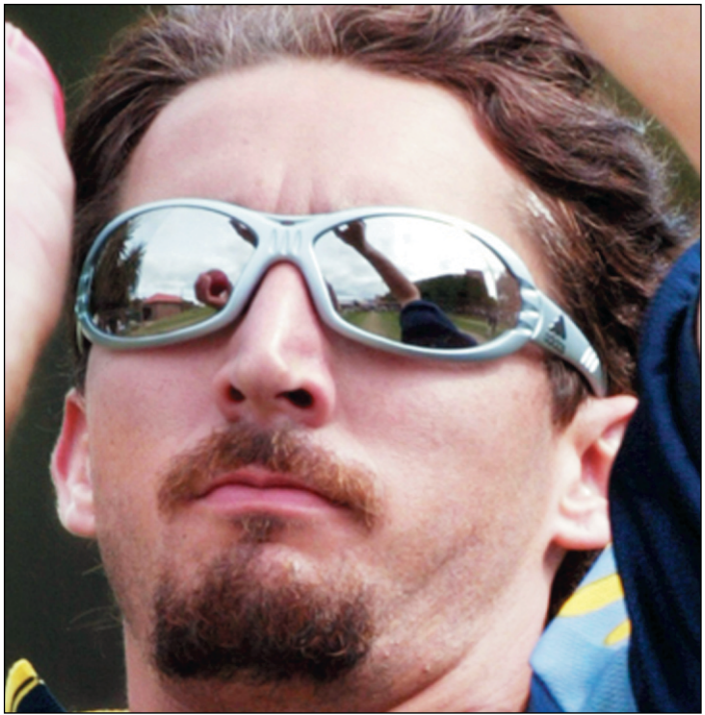


PHOTO: STAR FILE

Jason Gillespie

Gillespie out, Bracken in

REUTERS, Centurion

Australia suffered their second major World Cup blow on Wednesday when injured fast bowler Jason Gillespie withdrew from the tournament. Gillespie had a scan on his right heel on Tuesday after missing the world champions' last two Pool A games.

"I'm shattered and disappointed but these things happen," he told reporters.

"It's very disappointing it's happened to me but I'll be okay. I'm lucky it's not too serious, that's a positive."

The injury-plagued Gillespie has strained a tendon running alongside the Achilles tendon.

Left-arm Nathan Bracken, who has played 11 one-dayers, was called up to replace him.

"It's a load-bearing part of my body...being a fast bowler it takes a lot of weight," Gillespie said. "But, on a positive note, I'm relieved it's not my Achilles. That could have been a lot more dangerous."

"Injuries are just part and parcel of being a fast bowler. I've had my fair share."

It is Gillespie's second World Cup disappointment after he was forced to miss the 1999 tournament in England when Australia lifted the trophy.

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No sympathy for Pollock

AFP, Sydney

Steve Waugh says he has little sympathy for South African cricket captain Shaun Pollock following a communication breakdown that led to the Proteas' exit from the World Cup.

South Africa was knocked out of the tournament when Mark Boucher was told the incorrect revised total his side needed to beat Sri Lanka in a rain-affected game at Durban.

But Test skipper Waugh pulled no punches on Wednesday, saying there were no excuses.

"As a captain, you get the print-out at the end of the innings so you know exactly what the situation is," Waugh told reporters here.

"I think you can get it ball-by-ball so I find it hard to believe that they had a mix-up on that one."

"It was obviously a breakdown of

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Elite duo dropped

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa's David Orchard and Zimbabwe's Russell Tiffin, two of the International Cricket Council's elite panel of umpires, were dropped Wednesday from further World Cup matches after failing to impress in the group stages.

But England's Peter Willey, who refused to officiate in Zimbabwe on safety grounds, has been retained for the Super Six stage of the competition which will feature three Australians: Daryl Harper, Darrell Hair and Simon Taufel.

ICC general manager David Richardson admitted mistakes had been made.

"What we've taken into account is the form of the umpires. There might be one or two who have missed out for the rest of this tournament not because they are necessarily bad umpires but simply because they might not be in

the best of form," he said.

"Mistakes have been made, they will always continue to be made. I'm sure. And in this respect I'd like to compliment the players for their



RUSSELL TIFFIN

behaviour which we think has been excellent throughout the tournament thus far."

He said the only incident the disciplinary committee had been



DAVID ORCHARD

forced to deal with was when Australia's Adam Gilchrist accused fellow keeper Rashid Latif of Pakistan of racial abuse. Latif was not found guilty.

"But apart from that I don't think I can recall seeing one nasty incident on the field of dissent or verbal abuse and I think the players deserve some sort of credit in that regard," Richardson added.

Richardson said umpires were judged on captains' reports, match referees' reports and reviews carried out by the ICC management at Lord's, assisted by retired Australia umpire Tony Crafter.

"We get the captains' reports and we encourage them to be as objective as possible. In the past you tended to find the winning captain

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We're ashamed

AFP, Johannesburg

Pakistan cricket chiefs on Wednesday ordered an inquiry into a disappointing World Cup campaign which left the players "ashamed, disappointed, sad and heartbroken."

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) appointed a three-member committee comprising two former Test players, Naushad Ali and Aaqib Javed, and Sultan Rana to probe the debacle.

Pakistan, runners-up four years ago and one of the favourites here, secured victories only against minnows Namibia and the Netherlands and were knocked out in the first round with 10 points.

Worse, Pakistan lost the high-profile game against India by six wickets, their fourth World Cup defeat in a row to their arch-rivals.

"We are ashamed, disappointed, sad and heartbroken after letting the nation down," an extraordinary statement released

by the squad said.

"We knew that we were carrying the hopes of millions of our fans and have failed to live up to expectations."

"We tried our level best, we trained extremely hard and did



WAQAR YOUNIS

everything within our reach.

"But things didn't work the way we would have liked to and we have no excuses to offer."

"We played poor cricket throughout and don't deserve to be in the next round," captain Waqar Yousif said.

"We will sit down and work out what we lacked. There is a lot of cricket coming up so we have to study our failings quickly."

In a bid to cool frayed emotions at home, the statement added: "We know that tempers are high back home and rightly so because we have not played the cricket we were capable of."

"The anger of the fans is justified because they are the ones who made us the heroes and have every right to criticise us for our failures."

"In the end, we express our apol

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Hussain's resignation accepted



PHOTO: INTERNET

END OF THE ROAD: Nasser Hussain grimaces during a press conference at Port Elizabeth on Tuesday.

REUTERS, London

England's first-round exit from the World Cup was treated with resignation by British newspapers on Wednesday, with most accepting that Nasser Hussain was right to quit as one-day captain.

"His (Hussain's) feisty quality could not turn a group of worthy, but basically workmanlike cricketers into world beaters as a record of 19 defeats in 34 matches since the start of last year suggests," the Daily Express said.

The Daily Telegraph added: "You can see from his deportment on the field that he doesn't intrinsically enjoy the one-day experience. Quite apart from the physical hardship, he is keenly aware now more than ever, that one-day captains are chiefly hostages of fortune."

"As a captain, Hussain likes scope to express himself. In one-day cricket there is little or none," the paper said.

Hussain stood down on Tuesday but will continue as England's Test captain.

England's failure to beat Australia when in a winning position

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Give up Test job too: Botham

AFP, London

England legend Ian Botham has called on Nasser Hussain to resign as England Test captain after the Essex right-hander stepped down from international one-day cricket.

The 34-year-old resigned his limited-overs captaincy after England were knocked out of the World Cup in South Africa.

"Nasser's done a great job, but England now have an opportunity to rebuild," Botham told Sky TV on Wednesday.

"When he took over with Duncan Fletcher they brought England up to the right level. It doesn't mean Nasser can't play in the side, we just need a different attitude."

Hussain's decision to employ the inexperienced James Anderson instead of the veteran Andrew Caddick in the penultimate over of Sunday's clash with Australia was identified by Botham as the moment England's World Cup challenge faltered.

"We should have won that game and you only have to look at the expressions on the Australian faces and the English faces," he said.

"They couldn't believe it."

Another of Hussain's predecessors, Mike Gatting, reckons having two captains is not a practical solution.

"It has happened in Australia where Steve Waugh is Test captain

Black Caps born for big occasions

INTERNET, undated

New Zealand can set themselves for phase two of their World Cup bid having nothing to fear.

While their entry into the Super Six was a last-minute affair, there seems to be a general consensus that their effort in beating South Africa and the West Indies was sufficient for them to warrant their place.

They now face Zimbabwe on Saturday, Australia on Tuesday and India on Friday.

New Zealand might have a poor overall success rate in one-day internationals of only 42.75 per cent, but there seems to be something in the air in World Cup play where its winning percentage lifts to 56.25.

And its winning percentage at neutral venues is even slightly better at 56.66.

More particularly, in World Cup matches, New Zealand has a 3-0 win line over Zimbabwe, with one no result.

Against Australia, in the five games they have contested at World Cup level, the scoreline favours Australia 3-2.

India and New Zealand have

met six times in World Cups with New Zealand holding the win advantage 4-2.

One feature of captain Stephen Fleming's New Zealand team has been its ability to knock over the record books.

Reputations don't necessarily matter to this side.

They were the team who won New Zealand's first international tournament, the ICC KnockOut in Kenya in 2000. They recorded New Zealand's first victory at Lord's and The Oval, in 1999. They were the first team in the world to win successive Tests in Zimbabwe. They achieved the highest fourth innings total to lose a match (outside of timeless Tests) with 451 against England at Jade Stadium last year. They became the first New Zealand team to win a Test series in the West Indies. They were the first New Zealand team to complete a 5-0 one-day series sweep, against the West Indies in 1999-00. They were the first New Zealand team to shut Australia out of their annual tri-series.

They like re-writing history.

Some of these features might

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PHOTO: STAR FILE

Chris Cairns