

# Thunder Down Under, but is it cricket?

by Shakil Kasem

To me, sentimental fool that I am, cricket in the World Cup this year has crossed the boundary's edge. It has transcended the game that we played and knew it to be and has degenerated into an exercise in jingoistic fervour.

Cricket regrettably enough is now being marketed in Australia as a perishable commodity; all stops pulled and discounts offered willy nilly to clear the shelves. No longer is it just Slam-bang. It is now more of the slam-bam-thank you-man variety. Sad really.

For a start, why should a competition comprising teams from all over the world have at its core the ubiquitous white ball? Especially since it is not used by any cricketing country other than Australia and New Zealand? Will World cup soccer in the USA be played with an oblong ball?

The white ball has been the product not just of cricketing technology, but also a sociological need. Back in the seventies Kerry Packer had decided to take upon himself the responsibility of providing entertainment for the masses. And since unlike countries elsewhere in the world, where a rather lax code of work ethic permitted people to sit out during the day at cricket grounds, the Australian answer was to play at night. It was a novel and revolutionary concept to say the least. People could get back from work, have an early dinner and hit the WACA, or the Gabba with family in tow. All good fun till bedtime.

But cricket under lights? The red ball could not be sighted. Ergo the white. White

ball against the conventional cricket attire? Problems posed for all umpires squinting extra hard for lbw decisions. Enter coloured clothing. The rest as they say is history.

Packer lost millions in his world series cricket and went back to his conventional business ventures. But the cricket world, however, was never the same. The Australian Cricket Board decided then that if you can't beat them, give up. White balls, coloured clothing, black sight screens were here to stay. Cricket treasurers were a happier tribe since then.

Visiting teams to Australia had to suffer the indignity of decking out in colours like shocking pink to do their stuff under the lights for the benefit of a beer sloshed clientele, who were not overly particular about cricket grammar. They would have packed the grounds anyway, irrespective of what game was being played.

The reservations on the use of white balls in international competitions arise only when a primarily Australian preoccupation is extended to involve other cricket teams playing for the most coveted trophy in the world. Limited over cricket has changed dramatically over the years, as it is without it having to feel the effects brought about by the use of the white ball.

As earlier mentioned, the white ball is a phenomenon peculiar only to Australia and New Zealand. It is machine made unlike the conventional red variety. It is infinitely harder with more pronounced seams and have a minimum of nine layers of lacquer on it. All of these mean that this ball bounces and swings much

more than the red ball customarily used. In a short limited over format (50 overs as opposed to 60 overs in the first three World Cups) that too played on Australian wickets, the character of the white ball assumes potent characteristics. This is particularly relevant because of the other changes that have been incorporated in the limited over format.

With the limit on fielders outside the 30 yard circle and the clamping down on short-pitched deliveries and deliveries even marginally outside the line of the stumps, the white ball has to be bowled with a considerable degree of control. Add to it the fact that two balls are used for each match (because the white ball gets dirty rather quickly) and you really have a different ball game altogether.

Any game played with white balls puts undue emphasis on the quick bowlers, and the game consequently is livened up for a far from discerning crowd; by the sight of quick bowlers running in from a distance and digging the ball in towards the batsman's throat; it is either fended unganily or belted over the infield towards the outbacks. Fielders torn between saving singles and taking catches fling themselves across the turf while batsmen scamper through like scared rabbits. Is it necessary that cricket at the World Cup level should come to this?

Gone are the days when the world's best nations could put together the world's best players in their type of expertise. Because of the format of the game in Australia in this tournament, the orthodoxy of spinners in the mid overs is a concept thrown out through

the window. Ordinary medium pacers bowl throughout the innings because the ball can only be 25 overs old. Repetitive dull stuff. No technique required from the batsmen other than getting some part of the bat to the ball. There is something grossly wrong with the game when a side manages 250 odd for 2 in 50 overs and then loses the match by one wicket.

The commentary too leaves everything to be desired. Compare the description of the South African fielding ("The way these South Africans are hurling themselves on the ground and gaiting up in one motion reminds me of those balloon men in filling stations"), to the one of John Arlott describing many moons ago the field setting for a spinner. He spoke of the field scattering like pearls across the floor. On another occasion, the field according to Arlott, spread wide like missionaries across the world.

To me, pining away from afar for the old fashioned 60-over game with a red ball, a lush green outfield, speckled with figures in white, the sight of coloured clothes and slap bang cricket is almost an anathema.

The irony is further compounded when the high tech razzmatazz (complete with stump camera) is seen to be applauded and ostensibly enjoyed by back to nature freaks with bare and protuberant beer bellies displayed for the world to see. At 5 in the morning such a sight beholding the eyes is a distinct affront to the sensibilities.

Sadly, the world of cricket has changed, so much so indeed that it is cricket no longer.

## Soccer resumes tomorrow

Sports Reporter

The First Division football league which came to a standstill because of the non-availability of police protection will restart from tomorrow, March 19, at the Dhaka Stadium.

The First Division league committee of DMFA, at its meeting yesterday evening, decided to hold one match, instead of two, everyday, starting at 6:45 pm.

Arambagh Krira Sangstha will face BJMC Sporting Club on the day.

There will be no match on March 26, Independence Day, while the league programme will remain suspended from April 3 to 9 in view of holy Eid-ul-Fitr. After the Eid vacation, two matches will be played daily at 5 and 7 pm respectively at the same venue.

## Fight for survival

Sports Reporter

A crucial tie of the Navana Premier Division Cricket relegation league between Lalmatia Club and Kalabagan Krira Chakra will be played today at the Dhaka Stadium.

The losers of the tie will be relegated to the Milnars First Division Cricket league, along with the already relegated teams—Agrani Bank and Wari Club while the winners will earn a fresh lease of life in the top division—at least for another season.

## Nat'l cricket from Mar 22

Sports Reporter

The national cricket championship will begin on March 22 at different zonal venues across the country.

Sixty teams will contest in the first phase of the championship, to be played at nine zonal grounds.

The hosts of the first phase are: Sylhet, Chandpur, Faridpur, Tangail, Barisal, Jessore, Pabna, Thakurgaon and Dhaka DSAs.

The first phase matches will begin simultaneously at all the zonal venues. The final round will be held in Dhaka in April.

Meanwhile, the Independence Day Cricket tournament organised by Bangladesh Cricket Control Board (BCCB) begins here from Saturday.

Organised by the BCCB, six teams—split into two groups—will participate in the meet.

The teams are Damal Summer and Victory Day Cup winners Abahani Krira Chakra, Navana Premier Division league champions Mohammedan Sporting Club, Brothers Union, Bangladesh Biman and Victoria Sporting Club and Udit Club.

## Milnars cricket

The play-off match between Victoria Sporting Club and Udit Club to decide the championship of the 1991-92 Milnars First Division cricket league will be held on March 20 at the Dhaka Stadium, said a BCCB press release.

## Hockey league

The Green Delta First Division hockey league which remained suspended since Sunday last for want of adequate security personnel will resume from March 20 at the Hockey Stadium.

Wari Club will meet Bangladesh Railway Sporting Club at 1:45 pm while defending champions Abahani Krira Chakra will clash with Ajax Sports Club at 3:15 pm on the day.



Rukhsana Gulshan Nikkon (L) makes a move on way to beating defending national women's chess champion Tanima Parveen at the National Sports Council yesterday. — Star photo

## A draw will give Rani the title

Sports Reporter

Defending champion Tanima Parveen suffered a serious setback in her bid to retain the national women's chess title when she lost to her less fancied opponent Rukhsana Gulshan Nikkon at the National Sports Council chess room yesterday.

The result left eight-times former champion International Woman Master Rani Hamid needing only a draw in her last game today to regain the title and become the new chess queen of the country.

In one of the two matches carried over to yesterday's rest day, Tanima was forced to resign in the 35th move by Rukhsana Nikkon and must hope that current leader Rani Hamid also loses her last round match today to her own conqueror. Of course, Tanima herself shall have to win her last game of the nine-round robin league (and not Swiss league, as was erroneously reported on this page before) against Zakia Sultana of

Narayanganj. If Rani loses and Tanima wins then the teenaged schoolgirl from Chittagong, who is representing Bangladesh Biman in the tournament, will retain the title she won last year by beating a stiff challenge from Shabana Parveen Nipa. Both Rani and Tanima would then have six and a half points each from nine rounds but Tanima would be deemed the winner of the tie break by virtue of having beaten Rani in their contest earlier in the meet.

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Playing white Nikkon made a d4 Queen's pawn opening of the irregular variation. Tanima, quite unlike her character,

made a silly blunder on her 14th move. She played b6, a move which forced her to sacrifice a pawn without compensation. Nikkon took full advantage of this strike of luck and never allowed Tanima to retrieve the situation, ultimately forcing the reigning champion to resign in 35 moves.

The win took Nikkon's tally to five points from eight games.

The other match of the day saw Afroza Khanam Babice easily beating Masuda Begum of Barisal in 52 moves. Babice made a d4 Coley system opening against Masuda and the girl from Barisal never had the answers to the intelligent play of her more experienced opponent. Masuda's collection remains on four and a half points.

In other concluding round matches today, Shabana Parveen Nipa who has five points, faces Masuda Begum, her younger sister Afana Parveen Nira takes on Hamida Rahman and Afroza Khanam Babice meets Jahanara Huq Rana.

## Liu Jun's great leap upward

Federation (IBF) world rankings at the end of next month.

Zhao, the world number one, brushed aside allegations and said: "Liu won because he played well."

IBF President Arthur Jones said: "I would not really like to comment on particular allegations. All I would say is it's a very dangerous and risky thing to do. I would think it is a very tricky thing for people to try to manoeuvre."

A semifinals at last year's World Championships, Liu beat four seeds including number two Ardy Wiranata of Indonesia, who leads the Grand Prix rankings with 670 points, 150 more than the Chinese player.

Liu's wins over two competitors brought accusations from at least one team that they had manoeuvred their players to procure the maximum quota of places at the Barcelona Olympics.

Each country will have only two players at the Olympics unless three finish in the top eight of the International Badminton

Table with 2 columns: Rank, Name, Points. Lists world rankings for badminton players like Ardy Wiranata, Liu Jun, Wu Wenkai, etc.

## Title retained

MEXICO CITY, Mar 17: Mexican Ricardo Lopez retained his World Boxing Council (WBC) straw-weight boxing title on Monday when he beat Vilipino Domingo "Pretty Boy" Lucas on a unanimous points decision, reports Reuter.

It was his third successful defence of the title.

## Evergreen earn promotion

Sports Reporter

Evergreen Club earned promotion to the First Division cricket league from the Group A of the Rank-Xerox Second Division league beating Shantinagar Club B by eight wickets in the play-off held at the Dhaka Stadium yesterday.

Evergreen will now take on Dhanmondi Club, the First Division league qualifier from the Group B on March 20 at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium to decide the champions and runners-up of this year's Second Division league.

The play-off match between Evergreen and Shantinagar B became inevitable since both teams jointly topped the points-table with six from four super league outings each.

Navana Premier Division cricket league champions Mohammedan coach Osman Khan played for Shantinagar B while veteran Jogesh took part for Evergreen.

Sent into bat, Shantinagar B were dismissed for a paltry 93 in 25.3 overs.

Taleb, the most successful Evergreen bowler, took four wickets for 24.

In reply, Evergreen needed only 21.3 overs to score 97 with eight wickets to spare.

Russel remained unbeaten on 44 while Azad made 23 and Asif 10 not out to pave the path for Evergreen's victory.

## Quiet passes the ideoes of march

By Chandrashekhar

March is one month of associations. The fifteenth day, or the ideoes of March as they used to say in Roman history reminds us of Julius Caesar's rather overweening remark 'the ideoes of March is come' and the soothsayer's persistence with the warning but it is not gone. Caesar was killed on that day, or Shakespeare made sure he was, but the ideoes of March has got etched in the collective post-Shakespearean literary consciousness.

With cricket's biggest bonanza unfolding itself in its fullest splendour Down Under, things like the ideoes of March keep crowding one's mind.

The ideoes of March was one day of sitzkrieg with none of the participants having any clashes on any front, spread over Australia and New Zealand. The contest is, however, hotting up with the knockout stage only three matches away. Pakistan's hope of making it to the semis, is the thinnest, to say the least. They have to beat as mighty an opponent as the Kiwis and have to keep their fingers crossed over the result of the classic West Indies-Australia clash. A West Indian victory at the MCG will put paid to the glimmer of the Pak hopes.

Pakistan's resurgence under the astute leadership of Imran Khan can be termed as some kind of awakening of the renevants. No one gave them a chance after their two humiliating defeats to the West Indies and India. Specially the prestigious encounter against their neighbours was deemed by many as the nadir of Pakistan's defference. Weather put another spoke in their wheel at Brisbane in the match against South Africa but they returned from the edge of the precipice by beating hosts Australia and then joined the race by beating Sri Lanka, at Perth.

The prospects of the two subcontinental neighbours seemed to be inversely proportional as India gradually faded into oblivion, while Pakistan succeeded in keeping themselves in the reckoning. After their two resounding victories against Pakistan and Zimbabwe, with the latter taking place in the rain affected match in Hamilton, it looked like a return with a vengeance for a side that had been dogged by bad weather. The two subsequent losses to West Indies and the metamorphosed New Zealanders nipped any such fancy as the 1983 World Cup champions bowed out of the tournament to ensure the maiden entry of secluded South Africa into the semi final. For the still segregated South Africans, it's

been an extra-ordinary achievement to join New Zealand and England, the other two semi-finalists.

England pulled off a thrilling win against South Africa in Melbourne but went down rather tamely to New Zealand. West Indies defeated India and Sri Lanka to shake off the night-mares of the New Zealand, South Africa matches. Sri Lanka were quietened after a brief flutter and Zimbabwe with just one match left in hand against England look certain to finish the World Cup campaign empty handed.

The difference in the fortunes of the two co-hosts—Australia and New Zealand—is as stark as that between the tragedy of Aeschylus and the dialectics of Socrates. While the reigning champions under the battle-scarred Allan Border have so far been through the most despairing spell, their less illustrious and 'junior' partners in the hosting business are currently on a 'high trip', sweeping everything away on their way. Australia have to beat many odds and a rejuvenated West Indies at Melbourne to keep their chances of title fight alive. The phoenix that spread its wings at the Eden Gardens seem to have turned into ashes again, eh?

It was a big win, said McEnroe. Anytime you beat a top ten player, it's big. That's what I was hoping for. To be able to compete with the top players.

"After 5-4 (in the third), he played the best tennis I ever saw him play against me," said Ivanisevic, who holds a 3-2 winning edge over McEnroe. "I had my chances, he was better. I lost, what can I do?"

On the women's side, top seeded and defending champion Monica Seles needed only one hour to beat Latvian Larisa Savchenko-Neiland 6-0, 6-4.

Second-seeded Steffi Graf of Germany and Spain's Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario, seeded fourth, won easily by identical 6-2, 6-2 scores. Graf disposed of Italian Raffaella Reggi-Concato and Sanchez-Vicario defeated American Ginger Helgeson.

## Volleyball meet

Sports Reporter

An inter-district volleyball tournament under the aegis of the Bangladesh Volleyball Federation (BVF) gets under way today at the Outer Stadium volleyball court.

The meet, which is being sponsored by Incontrad, is named after its sponsors.

Meanwhile, the MV Eagle Independence Day volleyball championship under the joint auspices of the Eagle River Transport Ltd and the BVF will be held on March 26 at the same venue.

Teams interested to take part have been advised to complete their entries by March 22 with the BVF office.

## Edberg suffers a shocking defeat

KEY BISCAIYNE, Florida, Mar 17: A tentative and sluggish Stefan Edberg, seeded second, suffered a shocking 6-3, 3-6, 6-4 defeat at the hands of qualifier Robbic Weiss, ranked 289th in the world, at the 2.8 million dollar Lipton International Players Championships on Monday, reports Reuter.

Jimmy Connors was dealt a more expected loss by fourth-seeded fellow American Pete Sampras, 6-3, 6-2, and top seed and world number one Jim Courier flirted with disaster before beating 52-year-old Andres Gomez 6-4, 6-7 (6-8), 4-3 when the Ecuadorian had to retire with an ankle problem.

But 33-year-old John McEnroe succeeded where the 39-year Connors failed, clawing his way to a 6-7, 7-5, 7-5 victory over fifth-seeded Goran Ivanisevic of Croatia.

In other third-round upsets on Monday, Italian Diego Nargiso defeated seventh-seeded Czechoslovak Peter Korda 6-2, 7-6 and American qualifier Jon Stark beat ninth-seeded Spaniard Sergi Bruguera 6-3, 6-4.

But third-seeded Boris Becker won a hard-fought battle with Dutchman Paul Haarhuis, 6-4, 7-6 (7-4).

Weiss, 25 and the lowest-ranked player Edberg has lost to in his career, twisted his right ankle in October 1990 and underwent shoulder surgery in February 1991, keeping him out of action until August 1991. His match

on Monday marked only his fourth main-draw appearance since the ankle problem.

Despite his lack of match play, Weiss was completely unfazed by his famous opponent and capitalised on numerous errors and poor play by the 25-year-old Swede.

"I'm playing some of the worst tennis in many years, since I can't remember how long," Edberg said of the past four weeks. "It's frustrating."

"It's fun to play for them," he said. "I know most of them. I'll have a drink with them afterwards."

Defending champion Courier considered himself lucky to advance to Wednesday's quarterfinals.

"I was worried about every point I was playing," he said. Despite the loss, Edberg still has a chance of regaining the world number one ranking during this event. If Courier does not reach the finals here, Edberg is back in command.

"I don't deserve to get up there," said Edberg, when told of the possibility.

Connors, whose serve was broken seven times in a row late in the match, looked to be feeling fatigue from his 2½-hour match the previous day against young Spaniard Tomas Carbonell.

Connors admitted to feeling stiff, and it showed in his match with Sampras, the 1990 US Open champion.

McEnroe, struggling to regain his past form, was happy to still be competitive against a top player like the seventh-ranked Ivanisevic.

terrible," Courier said. Gomez said he has been bothered for three months by tendinitis in his ankle, and it became worse as his match with Courier progressed.

"I decided to retire instead of trying to win the match and maybe getting a worse injury," Gomez said.

A section of the stadium filled with boisterous His panics encouraged the unseeded South American with chants of "We love it, we love it."

Gomez loved it. "It's fun to play for them," he said. "I know most of them. I'll have a drink with them afterwards."

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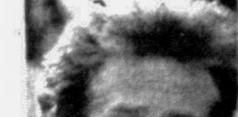
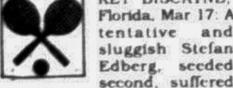
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STEFAN EDBERG

The more I try, the worse it gets.

"It feels awesome," said Weiss, enjoying by far his biggest career win. I can't believe it. At the end it was a blur. That last forehand felt like it was two hours getting there. When I saw it go by him, I truly couldn't believe it."

Gomez had a shot at an upset. He retired while serving and trailing 4-6, 7-6 (8-6), 3-4, 15-30.

Courier blew several chances to win the match in the second set.

"I choked flat-out. I was

## CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words. Includes a solution time of 24 mins.

## CRYPTOQUIP

SGS XURNX, "NHRO VNGLRO GVVWHJP UX JW VLOSUP PW WHL SGHRNPOLX." Yesterday's Cryptoquip: MANUFACTURER OF EXCELLENT EXHAUST FANS COULD BE A BLOWHARD.

Today's Cryptoquip clue: V equals C

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.