

The Narail Express

CRICINFO, undated



Bangladesh's youngsters are suddenly the talk of the tournament. Their fearless mob of merry-makers showed such talent and chutzpah in their victory over India in Trinidad, one wonders what they might be capable of when they reach their full maturity. Of the 11 men who played in that game, only two -- the captain, Habibul Bashar and the senior spinner, Mohammad Rafique -- had even crossed their 25th birthday.

It wasn't always thus. Around the time of the last World Cup, when Bangladesh lost humiliatingly to Canada in their opening match at Durban, the team was in such a state of disarray and depression, it was hard to shrug off the demands that they be stripped of their Test status. Up until that time, Bangladesh had lost 16 out of 17 Tests (with one rain-affected draw), 11 by an innings. Whatever talent that may have existed was being drowned in a tide of perpetual failure.

It is all the more extraordinary, therefore, that the man who will be leading the Bangladesh line in Saturday's showdown with Australia in Antigua is Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, a fast bowler who bobbed to the surface even as the rest of his country seemed to be sinking around him. Mortaza has endured more trials and tribulations in his 23 years than many pace bowlers are put through in a lifetime. As if the pain of dual knee surgery is not enough, he has had to pick himself up from back and ankle injuries, as well as the agony of incessant defeat. The experience has made him stronger, tougher, and much, much better.

"He's a very strong lad," his captain, Habibul Bashar, told Cricinfo. "He's had two knee reconstructions and he still comes hard. He's the kind of person who is ideal for a captain, because he'll always do his best. Whether he's fit or not fit, if I ask he gives me 150%. That makes him a captain's dream and a much-winner, because he does the right things at the right time."

Every enterprise requires a

pioneer. When Mashrafe was plucked from obscurity as an 18-year-old on the recommendation of the former West Indian fast bowler, Andy Roberts, he entered his maiden Test against a Zimbabwe at Dhaka without even the experience of a first-class debut to fall back on. His maiden figures of 4 for 106 included the wickets of Grant Flower and Heath Streak, and even at that early stage of his development, all the signs were in place that a genuine talent had been unearthed. The pace, the aggression, the thrusting whiplash bowling action. But he was an anomaly -- a discovery that had been made in spite of the system,

not because of it.

Things are different now. Under the astute guidance of Dav Whatmore, and in the secure knowledge that nothing can be achieved without considerable and painstaking investment, a system is being put into place that will eventually channel every prospective Bangladeshi Test cricketer into the national melting pot. Age-group cricket and the academy programme has already delivered the core of the current squad; the nascent first-class and one-day

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PHOTO: AFP FILE

TALK OF THE ISLANDS: Bangladesh fast bowler Mashrafe Bin Mortaza sends down a thunderbolt.

Control pleases coach

AFP, St John's



New Zealand coach John Bracewell believes his attack are starting to reap the rewards of their work with bowling guru Dayle Hadlee as they bid to reduce their extras count at the World Cup. During the course of their seven-wicket win against the West Indies on Thursday, the Black Caps sent down just three wides and not one no-ball.

This was a marked improvement on the 24 no-balls delivered in their three previous games.

With the set-up of one-day cricket favouring batsmen thanks to over limits on bowlers, fielding restrictions and frequently shortened boundaries, former New Zealand off-spinner Bracewell knows his attack can't afford to donate runs.

Dayle Hadlee, the brother of New Zealand great Sir Richard and a former Test cricketer himself, has

been working with the Black Caps attack primarily to cut down on their illegal deliveries.

"I was really pleased with the way we held our discipline -- it was a team effort that went through to our bowlers in particular, try to string those dot balls together and put them under some sort of pressure," Bracewell told reporters here Friday as he reflected on the victory over the World Cup hosts.

The new-ball duo of Michael Mason and Shane Bond put West Indies openers Chris Gayle and Shivnarine Chanderpaul under pressure right from the start.

Brian Lara's side never broke free and were bowled out for 177 before an unbeaten 80 from medium-pace all-rounder Scott Styris saw New Zealand home.

"Led by Mike and Shane it set a good standard for us. Parts of the team capitalised on the fact we started so well," Bracewell explained.

"Our bowling performance had more discipline than most of them. It's something the guys addressed well in those six days we had leading into the game."

Only James Franklin, whose three overs cost 29 runs, was expensive. The left-arm seamer quick can be vulnerable if the ball is not swinging but Bracewell insisted Franklin, fortunate not to be hit on the head by a fierce Gayle straight drive, would bounce back.

"He was attacked, Chris Gayle decided the way to get a target on that wicket was to bully it," said the coach.

"I don't think James bowled particularly badly. That was their strategy.

"That's the beauty of this team -- we can bounce out of those situations, shift to a B plan quite seamlessly with Scotty Styris (who dismissed star batsman Lara) and things like that and adapt to the wicket.

"James will get the conditions that suit him at some point and he'll come through and someone else might get tonked.

"A lot of his spells that have been valuable to us have been in the

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Ponting wants WI to stay

AFP, St John's

Australia captain Ricky Ponting fears the already small crowds at the World Cup will be further reduced if hosts West Indies go out in the second round Super Eights.

Only 9,000 people turned up at the 19,000 capacity Sir Vivian Richards Stadium for the first day of Australia's rain-interrupted 103-run win against the West Indies on Tuesday for what was one of the showpiece games of the tournament.

This was just the latest low turnout during a World Cup where vast numbers of empty seats have become a commonplace sight at grounds across the Caribbean.

And with West Indies struggling to make it to the semifinals after losing to New Zealand by seven wickets on Thursday, Ponting fears the situation is about to get worse.

"I guess it would be great for the Caribbean if the West Indies could make it through to the final stages of the tournament," said Ponting.

"They (the West Indies) have made it pretty hard for themselves now, losing two in a row.

"One thing I haven't understood either is the crowd support throughout the venues the last couple of games. I couldn't believe there wasn't a full house for the West Indies-Australia game here the other day.

"I'm not sure what the reason was for that. But then, if the West Indies do go out, there probably won't be much support around the grounds at all which will be disappointing in a World Cup."

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All's well with McGrath

AFP, St John's

Being criticised by an angry fast bowler is not most people's idea of fun.

But so long as Glenn McGrath is nagging away at Ricky Ponting, the Australia captain knows all is well with his champion quick.

McGrath heads into Saturday's Super Eight game against Bangladesh just one victim away from equalling Pakistan great Wasim Akram's World Cup record of 52 wickets and, although this is his last tournament before retirement, the 37-year-old New South Welshman's standards have shown no signs of slipping.

In world champions Australia's last match, a 103-run over the West Indies on Wednesday, McGrath took three for 31 and his figures for the tournament overall now stand at nine wickets for 140 runs at a typically miserly average of just over 15 apiece.

"He's bowled very well since we've been here," Ponting said of McGrath at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium here Friday.

"He's a very proud man, Glenn. He's probably his own harshest critic. He's pushing himself to the limit at the moment and he wants to get everything out of these last few games that he possibly can.

"He actually had a dig at me the other day for not bowling him at the tail against the West Indies because he wanted a couple more wickets."

McGrath, the most successful fast bowler in the history of Test cricket with 563 wickets from 124 matches, bowed out of the five-day game after Australia's 5-0 Ashes clean sweep of England was completed in January.

So too did Australia leg-spin legend Shane Warne, who tops the all-time Test bowling standings with 708 wickets in 145 matches.

Although a more reserved character beyond the boundary than the colourful Warne, Ponting said the two players similar attributes

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Ian Thorpe tested positive!

AFP, Paris

Former Olympic champion Ian Thorpe of Australia tested positive for testosterone and a banned hormone in 2006, according to French newspaper L'Equipe's website on Friday.

The 24-year-old, who retired in November, was a major star of the sport, winning five Olympic crowns and eleven world titles, while also setting 23 world records.

But according to L'Equipe, he tested positive for abnormally high levels of testosterone and luteinizing hormone.

L'Equipe said the Australian Sport Anti-Doping Authority (ASADA) decided to close Thorpe's case after studying the evidence.

However, the International Swimming Federation (FINA) appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in an effort to reopen the file.



PHOTO: AFP

YOU'RE IN: Ireland batsman Niall O'Brien successfully makes his ground to complete a quick single during the World Cup Super Eights match against England at the Guyana National Stadium in Georgetown on Friday.

Colly carries England

AFP, Georgetown



England rode on Paul Collingwood's fighting half-century and four wickets by Andrew Flintoff to beat Ireland by 48 runs in their Super Eights match here on Friday.

Collingwood hit an 82-ball 90 to help England overcome early wobbles to put up a respectable 266-7 in their allotted 50 overs after electing to bat at the Guyana National Stadium.

Flintoff then grabbed 4-43 as Ireland found the going tough against the English attack and managed 218 in 48.1 overs with Niall O'Brien fighting a lone hand with a gritty 63.

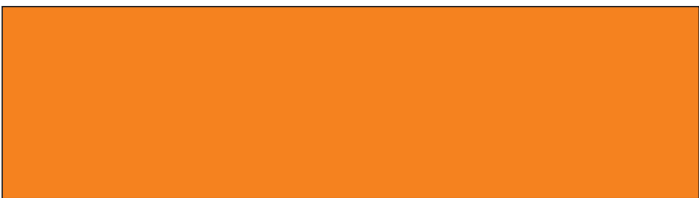
England, who were without any carry over points, achieved their desired result and now face Sri Lanka at Antigua on April 4, while Ireland, who upset Pakistan to reach the second round, gave a good account of themselves despite losing.

Chasing a formidable target,

Ireland lost opener Jeremy Bray (nought) and Eoin Morgan (two) early in their innings before Niall O'Brien added 61 for the third wicket with William Porterfield (31) to raise

some hope for their team.

Niall O'Brien then put on another 44 for the fourth wicket with Andre Botha (18) before left-arm spinner Monty Panesar derailed the innings



IGLAND V IRELAND SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the World Cup Super Eights match between Ireland and England at the Providence Stadium in Guyana on Friday:					
ENGLAND	R	M	B	4s	6s
Joyce b Rankin	1	5	5	0	0
Vaughan c O'Brien b Rankin	6	27	13	1	0
Bell c N O'Brien b K O'Brien	31	92	74	2	0
Pietersen c Porterfield b McCallan	48	91	47	5	0
Collingwood run out	90	118	82	8	3
Flintoff b Johnston	43	64	62	4	0
Nixon c Morgan b Botha	19	23	15	1	1
Bopara not out	10	9	5	1	0
Mahmood not out	0	1	0	0	0
Extras: (lb-2, w-13, nb-3)	18				
Total: (For 7 wickets in 50 overs)	266				

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Vaughan form 'patchy'

AFP, Georgetown



England captain Michael Vaughan has conceded he will have to work hard to regain his form ahead of the remaining

World Cup Super Eights matches.

Vaughan has been opening the innings in the Caribbean, but is still without a half-century in four matches -- three in the group and one in the second round.

"My form at the moment is pretty patchy," said the England skipper, who contributed just six in his team's 48-run victory over Ireland here on Friday.

"I have to work hard in the next

few days and make sure I go into the next game against Sri Lanka full of confidence."

Ireland may have lost the match but they earned respect with their good performance, with Vaughan saying they deserved a lot of credit.

"It was a sort of banana-skin game. We needed two points and Ireland were playing without fear. They have improved tremendously in the last few years and they deserve a lot of credit," said Vaughan.

Ireland put England under pressure in the initial overs when they reduced their opponents to 23-2 before losing their way in the last 10 overs, which yielded 94 runs.

"We are happy to get two points, but obviously we need to improve," said Vaughan, who side scored 266-7 before restricting Ireland to 218.

"We played some good cricket to get to 260 and then bowled well in the middle period. For the five-six overs we lost track, but pulled it back. We always felt we could score 250 or 260."

The England captain was all praise for all-rounder Paul Collingwood, who was named man of the match for his impressive 90 off just 82 balls.

"They came out and bowled well on a wicket that helped them early on, but was also good for batting," said Vaughan.

"Collingwood has continued his great form. Andrew Flintoff came in with runs and the tail wagged to get us to a decent total."

Vaughan hoped the top-order batsmen would also score big in the remaining games against Sri

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Pakistan holds Bob memorial service today

AFP, Lahore

A memorial service will be held for murdered Pakistan cricket coach Bob Woolmer in the eastern city of Lahore on Sunday, a Pakistan Cricket Board official said.

The service will be held at Sacred Heart Cathedral to pay tribute "to the great services Woolmer rendered to Pakistan cricket," board director of communication Ahsan Malik told AFP on Saturday.

Woolmer was found strangled in his Jamaican hotel room on March 18, one day after Pakistan were dramatically ousted from the cricket World Cup following a defeat to minnows Ireland.

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Lara, Murali lick lips

AFP, Georgetown



Sparks are bound to fly when West Indies skipper Brian Lara bats against ace Sri Lankan off-spinner Muttiah Muralidaran in a World Cup Super Eights match here on Sunday.

The pair were involved in an engrossing duel in a three-Test series in Sri Lanka in 2001, with Lara proving why is considered one of the best batsmen against spin in modern cricket.

If there was any West Indian batsman who succeeded in dominating the Sri Lankan spinner, it was Lara who plundered 688 runs in three matches with three centuries on slow turning pitches.

But it was never easy upstaging champion spinner Murali, who kept probing the batsmen with his subtle variations to play a big role in his team's 3-0 series victory with 24 wickets.

Muralidaran has already described Lara as "more classy" than others and the "most danger-

ous left-hand batsman I have ever bowled to in my career".

Lara has already earned lavish praises from retired Australian leg-spin wizard Shane Warne.

"(Sachin) Tendulkar and Lara are the two best batsmen of my era," Warne said.

"I think these two guys have been the toughest at the international level. Lara because of his placement. I can't believe it. It's just amazing. He can dominate a game, no matter who's bowling."

Lara, quick to spot error in line and length, uses his feet remarkably well against spinners and never gives them a chance to find any rhythm.

Pakistani leg-spinner Danish Kaneria was at the receiving end in a home Test series last year as he was never allowed to settle by Lara. "I don't think getting hit by the world's number-one batsman is a failure on my part. I am actually happy that a player as great as Lara hit me around. I learn from that, but he has hit everyone from around the world," said Kaneria.

"He is a fantastic timer of the ball. He sees the ball from my hand and reads it so well which is the sign of a great player. I wanted to

trap him but he was thinking ahead of me."

Lara is in form in his last World Cup, having already scored 195 runs in four innings with one half-century. He is also the only West Indian with more than 10,000 runs in one-day internationals.

Muralidaran also didn't take time to find his rhythm in the ongoing tournament, beginning with two wickets against Bermuda. He was at his best in big matches against India and South Africa.

The Indian batsmen, considered the best against spin, looked uncomfortable against the Sri Lankan who took three wickets for 41 runs off 10 tight overs.

He also bagged three wickets against South Africa and was instrumental in keeping the batsmen silent in the middle overs.

Muralidaran has the ability to turn the ball on any surface and is likely to pose a threat to the West Indies on a pitch which is expected to favour slow bowlers.

The Sri Lankan is the second-highest wicket-taker in the shorter version of the game with 441, behind only retired Pakistani left-arm fast bowler Wasim Akram (502).



Children admire huge bird-shaped kites during the Kite Festival at the NSC Tower yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR