



Ireland players celebrate with the winners' trophy after beating Canada in the final of the 2011 ICC World Cup qualifier tournament at Centurion in South Africa on Sunday.

'This Ireland is greatest ever'

AFP, Johannesburg

Manager Roy Torrens on Monday hailed the Ireland team that won the 2011 Cricket World Cup Qualifier tournament in South Africa as the best to represent the country.

"They are even better than the side that shocked Pakistan and Bangladesh at the last World Cup," said the man involved for 40 years with the national team as a player, selector, official and manager.

So serious were Ireland that the players readily accepted a ban on alcohol and carbonated drinks during the 19-day tournament and there were daily breathalyser tests on the team bus en route to matches and training.

"Not one player failed a test. All they drank from the start of the tournament until after the final was still water and it obviously worked wonders," Torrens told AFP.

Ireland finished the five-match first phase of the Qualifier with a 100 per cent record, topped the second-stage Super 8 table, and crushed Canada by nine wickets in the final on Sunday.

The Irish were also the first country to clinch a ticket to the World Cup in Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka with Canada, Netherlands and Kenya following 48 hours later.

Torrens said there was no secret behind the "green machine" success, just 100 per cent commitment from the 15 players, West Indian coach Phil Simmons and the back-up staff.

As the last winter approached in Ireland and temperatures plummeted, the 10 part-time squad members vowed to leave their families and friends each weekend and attend two-day camps.



Did U Know?

The javelin, which was thrown in the ancient Greek Olympics, became a modern men's Olympic sport in 1908 and a women's event in 1932.



TALK TURKEY

management to pay special attention to fitness and performance of these players so that they are mentally and physically prepared to play if they are called up in the national T20 squad. Because you might need an experienced opener like Hannan or pacer like Tareq if someone suffered an injury," he added.

The selected players with the exception of captain Mohammad Ashraf and his deputy Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who are now in South Africa for the Indian Premier League, have been asked to report to coach Jamie Siddons today at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur by 8.30am.

The focus will be on the fitness and skill for the first few days' training and then the players will play three T20 matches against Bangladesh A team and three T20 games against Maharashtra Cricket Association.

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(World No. 1 tennis star)
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After winning the Monte Carlo Masters title on Sunday.

Irish triumph



AFP, Centurion

William Porterfield and Trent Johnston shone as Ireland crushed Canada by nine wickets in the 2011 Cricket World Cup Qualifier tournament final on Sunday.

Opener and skipper Porterfield finished unbeaten on 104 after a 164-minute stand at Centurion Park as Ireland made 188 for the loss of only one wicket after Canada were all out for 185 six balls short of their allotted 50 overs.

Seamer Johnston delivered a career-best 5-14 in a 10-over spell that included four maidens to set up a second victory for Ireland over Canada after winning a first-round clash by six wickets two weeks ago.

"We were beaten in the final by Scotland four years ago and wanted to go one step further this time. The way the guys have played over the past 19 days has been fantastic," said Porterfield.

"When Trent came on he was magnificent. He has been a great performer for us, not just over the last few weeks but for years now, and deserves all the plaudits he gets."

"He had a niggle coming into this match and was in pain after a couple of overs, but the way he fought through that and bowled as well as he did was inspirational."

VB is back

FROM PAGE 17

Imtiaz and AFC's administrator of Vision Asia Department Yogesh Desai are on a two-day visit to Dhaka to restart the VB programme which was first planned to be launched in 2002.

The BFF has nominated two district FA's (Football Association) to start with. The two FA's, which are Narayanganj and Chandpur, will serve as models for the rest of the country's districts to follow.

"The Vision Bangladesh programme was set to start in 2002-2003 but it did not happen for various reasons. But the current executive committee of the BFF has come forward for kick-starting the programme once again and they have assured us of full cooperation," said Imtiaz.

New Zealand is unlikely to host a full cricket series against Pakistan at the end of the year to replace a scheduled tour of the country. New Zealand Cricket chief executive Justin Vaughan said Monday.

However, it would be keen to host a Test series in December, with one-day matches being rescheduled to another time, Vaughan told the New Zealand Press Association.

New Zealand does not want to go ahead with the planned tour to Pakistan in November and December after the terror attack on the Sri Lankan team in Lahore early last month, which killed eight Pakistanis and injured seven members of the touring squad.

Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Jiaz Butt said Sunday after meeting Vaughan in Dubai that New Zealand was offering to host the series.

"We have discussed the series but have yet to reach a final decision on it," Butt told AFP.

"At the moment New Zealand are averse to touring Pakistan. So among the options available, the best is to play in New Zealand."

Vaughan said likely weather.

Camp begins

FROM PAGE 17

team's momentum, leading to a loss against Delhi Daredevils.

"We had the momentum and we had seven and a half minutes to lose it," Moody said. "It was the perfect time for Daniel Vettori to come on and secure the momentum back in favour of Delhi. But there are going to be days in this tournament when it works in our favour too."

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Full Pak tour in NZ unlikely



AFP, Wellington

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While Vaughan said the one-day matches could be played in the United Arab Emirates in November, he added that the one-dayers and Test matches did not necessarily have to be played together.

"Pakistan and New Zealand both have relatively uncluttered schedules over the next year or two, so the one-dayers could be deferred until a later stage, if that was necessary to play it in the ideal venue," he said.

BFF seeks

FROM PAGE 17
looked into with due attention.

Besides, the BFF president has also requested the finance minister for waiver of 15 per cent value added tax its sponsors have to bear.

Vice-president Kazi Nabil Ahmed, general secretary Al-Musabir Sadi and member Anwarul Huq Hela accompanied the BFF president during their visit to the finance minister's office.

Sachin doesn't like it

FROM PAGE 17
team's momentum, leading to a loss against Delhi Daredevils.

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turn of events. We missed him for his all-round skills, although Thushara did bowl in his opening spell."

The other disappointments for Chennai was the catch dropped by Mathew Hayden at slip to let off Sachin Tendulkar off Andrew Flintoff and the three sixes hit by Abhishek Nayar in another Flintoff over. "Tendulkar was dropped early and later, Abhishek Nayar got stuck into Freddie," Chandrasekhar wrote. "A little more planning was necessary for local players and that is an area to be addressed with greater care. Nayar's cameo gave them a competitive score. These factors, combined with a bad start to our chase when we lost a couple of early wickets, put us quickly in a catch up mode especially as Hayden [Hayden] couldn't dictate terms to Bhajji."

Meanwhile, Chandrasekhar wrote: "Morkel's omission was a key reason for Chennai's 19-run loss to Mumbai. "A last minute change to the side was to prove costly for us as Albie landed here sans his gear. The airline had lost it in transit from Johannesburg where he had played the last ODI game against the touring Aussies," he wrote. "Albie was very disappointed and stressed at the sad

Safina sits on top

AP, London

Dinara Safina officially took over the top ranking on the WTA Tour on Monday, making her and older sibling Marat Safin the only brother-sister duo to have been No. 1 in professional tennis.

Safina, who has yet to win a Grand Slam title but twice reached a major final, is the 19th woman to top the rankings since they were introduced in 1975. She is also the second Russian woman after Maria Sharapova to reach No. 1.

Safina replaced Serena Williams at the top, even though the American beat her in the Australian Open final this year. Last year, Safina lost to Ana Ivanovic in the French Open final.

In the latest standings the 22-year-old Safina moves up to 8951 points, with Williams in second on 8272.

Marat Safin was ranked No. 1 on the men's tour in 2000, the same year he won the first of two Grand Slam singles titles.

"He has two Grand Slams," Safina said of her brother in a video posted on the WTA's Web site. "He's still much better than me, so I have to catch him."

Safina won four titles last year.

Canada struggled from the start with the bat at the Test venue between Pretoria and Johannesburg and were staring at humiliation at 92-7 before Umar Bhatti and Havar Baidwan added 39 runs.

After Baidwan (14) was trapped leg before, Bhatti found an even more prolific partner in Khurram Chohan and they added 54 runs to spare some Canadian blushes.

Bhatti was run out for 46 and Chohan made 26 while Boyd Rankin also impressed with the ball for Ireland, claiming 2-34 in his 10 overs that included three maidens.

Porterfield has been an inspirational leader during the final qualifying tournament for the World Cup in Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka and punished Canadian bowling and fielding that left much to be desired.

His half-century came up in 80 balls and with able support from Gary Wilson (38) and Niall O'Brien (38 not out) the outcome was never in doubt on a hot, clear autumn day.

Netherlands defeated Kenya by six wickets to finish third, Afghanistan won by 89 runs against Scotland to claim fifth spot and United Arab Emirates triumphed by five wickets against Namibia to come seventh.

Ireland, Canada, Netherlands and Kenya qualify for the World Cup and the quartet plus Afghanistan and Scotland earn ODI status for the next four years and automatic places in the 2009-2010 Intercontinental Cup.

MGH Infocomm Ltd has urged Bangladeshi TV viewers to watch the Indian Premier League (IPL) live and exclusively on "SetMax".

MGH Infocomm is a sister concern of leading business house MGH Group, who are the only authorised nationwide legal distributor of Sony and SetMax networks.

Sony Entertainment Television earned the broadcasting rights of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) backed IPL for 10 years starting from April 2008, winning the bid for 1.026 billion dollars.

MGH Infocomm Ltd is expected to make IPL coverage available up to 65-70 per cent Bangladeshi TV viewers through its authorised 170 cable operators.

"As legal distributor of Sony and Set Max, Discovery and the Star Group, we are paying taxes to the government treasury regularly so we request the country's cricket lovers to watch IPL live only through the legal cable operators," said MGH Group marketing manager Farhan Rashid at a press conference on Sunday.

The second edition of the IPL, covering 34 days of exciting cricket with eight teams playing 56 matches, began on Saturday in Cape Town, South Africa with top international cricketers from across the world participating in it.

"Pakistan and New Zealand both have relatively uncluttered schedules over the next year or two, so the one-dayers could be deferred until a later stage, if that was necessary to play it in the ideal venue," he said.

IPL '09 loses viewership!

PTI, New Delhi

The much-hyped Indian Premier League's (IPL) second season is struggling to attract eyeballs, with viewership tracking agencies reporting lesser numbers this year as it tries to overcome rain-curtailed and low-scoring matches, over and above competition from elections.

According to viewership research agency aMap, the first match of IPL managed only 3.6 per cent ratings against 4.3 per cent last year. However, it reported better viewership on the second day at 3.9 per cent and 3.5 per cent as against 2.9 and 3.4 last year.

Similarly, according to another viewership rating agency TAM, the TRP for the two matches on the first day of IPL II was at 5.55 per cent and 5.54 per cent, as against 8.21 per cent last year (only one match was played on day one of IPL 2008).

"There could be two-three factors why the rating has gone down. There are lots of other activities like the general election happening besides the IPL. This to an extent distracts the audience. Apart from that, there was novelty value of the first season," aMap CEO Amit Verma told PTI.

A TRP official, however, said it is too early to say why the rating has gone down.

Prisoners
FROM PAGE 17
Monday, Sharma said.

IPL matches, which star the best Indian and international cricketers playing in the popular Twenty20 format, started on Saturday and finish on May 24.

Clarke happy to be playing Pakistan



AFP, Dubai

Australian captain Michael Clarke said Sunday his team was looking forward to facing Pakistan in the forthcoming limited-over series, to be played in the United Arab Emirates for security concerns.

"All of us are very happy to be playing Pakistan," Clarke told a news conference after his team arrived for the series of five one-day and one Twenty20 match, to be played in Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

"We are playing Pakistan after all, after a long time, so we want to make the most of this opportunity on a wonderful ground here," said Clarke of Dubai Sports City's stadium, where the first one-day will be played Wednesday.

The second match will also be played here, on Friday, before the teams move to Abu Dhabi for three ODI matches, on April 27, May 1 and 3. The only Twenty20 match will be played in Dubai on May 7.

Younis full of hope



CRICINFO, undated

Just days after another sad chapter pushed them further onto the margins of the cricket world, Pakistan glimpse a rare opportunity to make a significant on-field statement. They take on Australia in a five-match ODI series followed by two Twenty20 internationals in Dubai and Abu Dhabi from Wednesday, a contest captain Younis Khan believes offers Pakistan the chance to begin another era on a brighter note.

As an indication of just how much Pakistan have faded away from the field in recent years -- and Australia's reluctance to tour Pakistan -- Wednesday's game will be the first ODI between the two sides since February 2005. In fact, the two sides have only met once in any format since then: at the World Twenty20 in September 2007, when Pakistan trumped them on the way to the final.

Much has changed since then -- four players from each side remain -- not least the fortunes of both sides, but Younis believed that good performances here may well lead to a repeat of Pakistan's last successful era, which began around the time the two sides last met.

"This is a very big series for several reasons," Younis told Cricinfo. "If we play well -- not necessarily win -- but play well then we can become like Inzi [Inzamamul Haq] and Bob Woolmer's sides in 2005 and 2006," he said. "If

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