

BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

Run, rabbit run

SHAKIL KASHEM



Even as early as the third day of this World Cup, life for the minnows of this competition reflects a certain Hegelian truth; nasty, brutish and short. Sadly, for these teams it does not promise to get any better.

The ICC, in the form of Haroon Lorgat has taken on the role similar to those trying to protect them from harms way by denying them further access to this mother of all competitions in future. He may have a case.

The three matches that the minnows have played so far must have given them the rude realisation that Davids are really mythical characters long extinct, and Goliaths are nonsense behemoths with little sense of humour. True, all the teams on display, Kenya, Canada and Zimbabwe are actually no strangers to this competition. In fact Canada even had some fleeting greatness thrust upon it when it put paid to Bangladesh's nascent aspirations in a previous World Cup. It was a result that resounded loudly in the cricket world, and as a shock registered very highly on the Richter scale in Bangladesh, if we all remember. In John Davison, Canada possessed a player of genuine class, who has one of the fastest hundreds in this competition, that too against one of the prima donnas of the game. But Davison is 41 now, and life in the fast lane is probably not for him or his team any longer.

Spare a thought for Kenya, fact and figuratively certainly the dark horses of this competition last time it was played in the subcontinent. Beating the mighty West Indies was one of the signature performances they had as Kenya stormed into the semifinals, no less! But the Odumbes, and the Obuyas and the studious Asif Karim with his deceptive left arm spin are a distant, albeit pleasant memory of a team that had all the credentials for rubbing shoulders with the big boys of cricket. Only Steve Tikolo remains of that elite generation, but the senior statesman is finding it difficult to be the old soldier as well. The young ones in his watch are nowhere near his class.

The saddest spectacle in international cricket must surely be the slow decline and demise of Zimbabwean cricket. A team that beat the Australians in 1983, and had India on the rack at 25 for 5, before Kapil Dev's 175* bailed out the eventual champions, Zimbabwe oozed class every time they took the field. Players like Duncan Fletcher, Dave Houghton, Neil Johnson, the Flower brothers, Murray Goodwin, Paul Strang, Heath Streak, Alastair Campbell, Andy Pycroft to name a few would have walked into most sides of the world. Zimbabwe were worthy opponents for any team that crossed their path in both Test and ODI's. It pains the cricketing soul to watch such a side now playing the sad role of just bringing up the numbers on the global stage. This was a team that delivered more than what others of their ilk only promised.

But, it is clear now that perhaps this will be last we shall see of these gallant cricketers who tried hard to fit into the greater scheme of world cricket. Sadly for them, the game has moved on quite a few notches higher than they can ever aspire to reach. Perhaps, in a way Lorgat has a point. Perhaps it is best the minnows are taken away from the shark infested waters around them. Who knows, nurtured and fed on a diet of cricket

of their own choice may enable them to stage a comeback at some stage. A prospect that should be more appealing than that of being bullied by all and sundry. They are unfortunately, as far as this competition goes, like rabbits caught in the glare of the headlights. Run, rabbit run!



Jamie Siddons, the Bangladesh coach, seemingly has some special words for talented batsman Mohammad Ashraful during a practice session at the GP BCB National Cricket Academy Ground in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO:
STAR

Ashraful might be the answer

SAKIB SUBHAN



Bangladesh have embarked on their World Cup journey with a performance that, at least with the bat, is encouraging. To be able to score 283 while under the pressure of chasing the huge total of 370, hints at some maturity among the batsmen. What cannot be glossed over, however, is the team's obvious Achilles' heel -- the Powerplay. In a global tournament every advantage must be seized upon, and the batting Powerplay is one such that cannot be let go of when playing the crunch games.

In the opening match, the team managed 30 runs for the loss of three wickets during the five overs of the batting Powerplay. The match may have been lost by then, but such poor returns can make all the difference in matches to follow.

As this problem has been present for some time, it might not be a bad idea to look outside the current playing eleven for an attempt at a solution.

Mohammad Ashraful is widely

acknowledged to be one of the most, if not the most, frustrating cricketers of his generation for his obvious talent and even more obvious waste of it. However, he is in the squad, and must at one point be an option. Also, one of his biggest limitations is his apparent inability to plan an innings. The muddled thinking he has been displaying in his recent exploits at the crease points to a player unsure of his role in the team. Forming the basis of the frustration of most of the cricket world is that Ashraful is also one of the best, most breathtaking strokeplayers in the game -- it is just that the world gets to witness it on the rarest of occasions.

Perhaps what he needs, and what the Tigers also need, is for him to be given a role that allows full expression to his most valuable asset, the seminal and inventive strokeplay that gave the world 'The Ashraful' -- a scoop-flick over short fine leg that was at first synonymous with the mercurial Bangladeshi. The lower order, with the batting Powerplay in mind, might be the perfect position for him because he will enter the game with only one objective. In

other words he will not have to worry about how to pace his innings, just about getting as many runs from the death overs as possible.

His fans, and there are a huge number of them, often advocate his selection saying that he can be used as a 'bonus' player so that if he clicks, he may well win the game, and if he doesn't it will not be much of a loss because as a bonus player he is not central to team strategy. Also, it makes more sense that a bonus player be used in the lower half of the batting than at the top, where failures are more damaging to the team's prospects. Additionally, the top five in the batting line-up have been performing well and it would be foolish to tinker with the balance there.

Also, his inclusion would not hamper the balance of the team as he has shown recently that he is capable of bowling a few tidy overs of off-spin. The Powerplay situation is screaming for a solution, and one has to be found, if only for the duration of this World Cup, and when it comes to strokeplay it is no secret that Ashraful is second to none.

ENGLAND V NETHERLANDS: NAGPUR Dutch are dangerous

AFP, Nagpur



England captain Andrew Strauss warned his side to beware of the Netherlands when they take on the 'minnows' in their World Cup opener here on Tuesday.

England will be overwhelming favourites just as they were when they faced the Dutch in the opening match of the 2009 World Twenty20 at Lord's.

However, the Netherlands went on to clinch a shock four-wicket win off the last ball.

Strauss, asked how relevant that result was to the

ENGLAND V NETHERLANDS

Matches: 2

England win: 2

Netherlands win: 0

No result: 0

First meeting: Feb 22, 1996, Peshawar

-England won by 49 runs

Last meeting: Feb 16, 2003, East

World Cup opener, said on Monday: "Let's hope not but it underlines the point that you can't under-estimate sides like Holland."

"If we are 10 per cent off and they have a good day, we are in trouble."

England wicketkeeper Matt Prior knows Dutch batsman Bas Zuiderent from the time the duo spent together at county side Sussex.

And with the Dutch effectively frozen out of future World Cups by the decision of the International Cricket Council to reduce the number of teams in subsequent editions from 14 to 10, Prior knows how fired up the Netherlands, who have several county players in their squad, will be for Tuesday's match.

"I've played a lot of cricket with Bas Zuiderent at Sussex," said Prior.

"We're very good mates, and then there's Ryan ten Doeschate at Essex."



England batsman Kevin Pietersen (top) is in a joking mood with teammate Paul Collingwood as they arrive for a training session at the Vidarbha Cricket Association Stadium in Nagpur yesterday. They meet Netherlands in the World Cup here today.

Dubai Open Wozniacki's

AFP, Dubai

Caroline Wozniacki, who takes over from Kim Clijsters as world number one again in Monday's new WTA ranking list, celebrated with the 13th title of her career, the Dubai Open, on Sunday after outplaying Svetlana Kuznetsova 6-1, 6-3.

Denmark's Wozniacki turned in her fifth solid performance of the week against Kuznetsova, even though the former US and French Open champion had previously been showing signs of revival after more than six months in the doldrums.

Wozniacki broke serve at once for 2-0, and although she played one indifferent game, broke twice more to capture a one-sided first set in only half an hour.

Kuznetsova only briefly threatened a fightback as she broke serve when Wozniacki tried to close the match out at 5-2.