



Bangladesh fans flash the V-sign prior to the start of Tigers' clash against Ireland in a World Cup Group B match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Joy & unabated celebration

ATIQUÉ ANAM & ANISUR RAHMAN



Once again the vivacity of the crowd at the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium in Mirpur yesterday proved the ultimate winners. The packed thousands saw their beloved Tigers initially bite the dust yet kept singing, dancing, drumming and cheering as loud and as long as they could. And in the end saw their undying fervor bore fruit as the Tigers ran home with a 27-run victory against Ireland in an utterly pulsating encounter.

If you were not here to witness it, you missed a hell of a party.

"I cannot tell you how glad I am tonight. It was my birthday, and I could not have wished for a better gift than this. This will remain one of the most memorable occasions of my life," said an elated Mahmud, a chartered accountant from Shyamoli, who was one of those 25,000 fortunate to witness a memorable win by the Tigers.

Long after the victory, the jubilant supporters thronged the street outside the stadium, honking horns, beating drums, and shouting at the top of their voice: Go, Tigers go.

"I thank Shafiqul (Islam) for the way he tilted the match in our favour with those four wickets. In fact, I knew all the way that we would win once the Tigers had scored 205 runs. I'm sure they will win more matches with performance like this one," shouted Roksana Munni from Dhaka University.

But the rapturous celebration was not just restricted to Mirpur. In Karwan Bazar, hundreds took to the streets with Bangladesh flags as people in cars and on motorbikes zoomed past, honking their approval at the win. Till the filing of this report, many were still thronged on the numerous over-bridges along the Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue.

The victory was a testament to the sporting crowd that seemingly egged the Tigers on throughout this nerve-wrecking encounter. Not for a moment did the crowd give in, or let desperation creep in.

The crowd had two things on their mind as they entered the stadium in the morning; firstly they were expecting a repeat of the sensible batting display the Tigers had put up against India. Secondly they wanted to believe that Barbados was only an upset and a distant memory, and nothing of that sort could be reenacted here in Mirpur.

"Everything is in our favour here. We will play in our own conditions where even the Test-playing nations struggle. I am expecting Bangladesh to win easily today," said Rasel Biswas, a Dhaka College student with red and green painted on his face before the start of the game.

But in reality it turned out to be a very close affair, a nail-biting contest that swung in either direction right to the end before the Tigers had the last roar.

A brisk start was undone when the Tigers started doing all the wrong things one could ask for -- an unnecessary run out, a set batsmen playing shots as if it was school cricket and the captain, of all people, playing profligate, not once but twice.

Yet the crowd kept believing in the Tigers. Every single run was cheered on by the crowd as if it was the winning run, every opposition appeal was boisterously disapproved of as if the campaign was at stake.

"We know Bangladesh were beaten twice by Ireland, but we are not counting those and don't want to give those defeats a place in the mind," was the conviction of Adil who came from Shantinagar.

It was a desperate situation indeed for the Tigers. A lot depended on the result, the onus of proving that the 2007 defeat was an upset and also to justify that they are one tier above their Associate counterparts on merit. Probably that pressure of delivering and the nerves of proving their status on the big stage had a bearing on their performance.

The essence of the occasion, the emotion of the moment was perhaps captured most ironically by the DJ who kept playing the song "Viva La Vida" every time a Bangladesh wicket fell.

The theme of the song speaks about the fall from grace of a mighty emperor. Mighty may not be the Tigers, but still they were the big brothers against their Associate counterparts. So they had the onus to restore that pride and restore it they did.

Tigers' 'walk of fools'

MOHAMMAD ISAM

Anxiety had been writ large on Shakib Al Hasan's face the day before and his body language on Friday was hardly any different. After Tamim Iqbal and Imrul Kayes provided the prerequisite 50-plus partnership and that too in a dominating manner, it was essential for the captain to guide the innings. But the most assured member of the side felt trapped by uncertainty, when all that was required was a calm knock to stamp the home team's authority in a crucial World Cup game.

But it was the overwhelming desire to hog the strike against a less pacy attack, overconfidence in their ability to pick out a single from the hand of a close mid-off fielder (twice) and the unashamed lack of responsibility that had the Tigers mobbed by disciplined visitors who gave a fine account of their professionalism, that too at the highest stage.

What the Tigers displayed was a terrible case of impudence. Whether it was due to the ranking of the opposition or their slow rise as a team in the past year or so is up for debate but the major

concern should be the Bangladesh cricket team's inability to be humble in dire situations. The doubt over selection of the final eleven even on the morning of the game added to their woes

but even a blazing start of 50 in 5.4 overs couldn't shake off the nerves.

Ireland weren't special with their skills, neither were they extraordinary with the ball in hand. Boyd Rankin's

first two overs were belted far and wide and the wily Trent Johnston seemed to have lost his length quite early. But as most professional units do, they had a Plan B and the minute Niall O'Brien stepped up to the stumps, silly cricket followed as if on cue. Imrul, who blasted the Indian pacemen for a while in the opening game, began in the same vein but the left-hander's split second carelessness cost the team dear. Tamim immediately slowed down, in fact not hitting any more boundaries as Junaed Siddiqui joined Imrul in the 'walk of fools'. The Rajshahi left-hander called Tamim out of the crease, hared down the wicket and had he dived, Ed Joyce's pinpoint throw would not have mattered but Junaed didn't dive, probably he never does.

Shakib gave an account of rare clumsiness, slamming his bat on his pads whenever he found a fielder in his 20-ball 16. Two balls after he was dropped by Porterfield, Shakib popped it straight

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Boycott bats for his sandwiches

AFP, New Delhi

Former England opening batsman Geoffrey Boycott, renowned for his rock-solid defiance in his playing career, needed to defend his humble box of sandwiches with equal determination at the World Cup.

Boycott, in New Delhi working as a commentator, fell foul of Indian security when he tried to enter the Feroz Shah Kotla ground for the South Africa v West Indies clash with his lunch tucked under his arm on Thursday.

"I don't eat curries, which is what they normally give you. So I bring sandwiches. Anything which is spicy just burns," Boycott, who has suffered from throat cancer, was quoted as saying by cricinfo.

After being told he would have to leave his sandwiches outside the ground, Boycott stood firm.

"I said: 'I want to speak to the general or the brigadier, whoever's in charge, 'cause I'm taking my bloody sandwiches in'."

An International Cricket Council official came to his aid and he was allowed to take his sandwiches with him.

An Irishman in Mirpur

ATIQUÉ ANAM & SAKIB SUBHAN



The Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla Stadium was once again turned into an ocean of green yesterday as Bangladesh took on Ireland in a crunch match of Group B in their World Cup campaign. Amidst the green ocean there were a tad few dots of a paler shade of green, the ones supporting the Irish team. One such supporter was Adrian Lynch, an Irish cricket fan who works here for Tesco and came to the stadium yesterday along with a couple of friends to cheer on the Irish side.

The 40ish old from Northern Ireland says even though he was supporting his home side in this match, he has a liking for Bangladesh cricket and supports them whenever they are playing against any other side.

"I like to see Bangladesh play well, but definitely not today. Not only Bangladesh, I support all the lesser nations in cricket, and it feels good when teams like Nether-

lands play well," said Lynch as he found ample reason to smile midway through Bangladesh innings.

An avid cricket follower, Lynch says he has been following Irish cricket for the last ten years, long before the national side shot to fame in the 2007 World Cup.

"Although cricket is an English invention, it is now a global game. In the end it is a great sport. I have played cricket when I was in school. I even played cricket in Morocco, where I used to play with expatriate Indians and Pakistanis."

Lynch comes from the northern part of Ireland, where cricket has a bigger hold than in the south, even though nothing compares to the popularity of Gaelic football or rugby. But he believes that cricket is catching on since their glorious performances of four years ago.

"The passion for cricket in Ireland is rising as Ireland gets more chances to play in international cricket. I would love to see Ireland play Test cricket one day."

SRI LANKA V PAKISTAN: COLOMBO

Battle of the giants today

AFP, Colombo

Pakistan know their World Cup match against Sri Lanka here on Saturday is one of their most crucial in Group A, but will not be overawed by the home team's bowlers or the partisan fans.

A sell-out crowd of 35,000 will be on hand to see world-record spinner Muttiah Muralidaran and slinging seamer Lasith Malinga attempt to put the brakes on Shahid Afridi's Pakistan team.

Sri Lanka, who were champions in 1996, and Pakistan, the 1992 winners, enjoyed flying starts with convincing victories against minnows Canada and Kenya, and are primed for their first big match.

Afridi said his team was ready for the challenge.

"We know the importance of the match and I am confident that we are up to the Sri Lankan challenge, whether it's Malinga or Muralidaran," said Afridi.

Muralidaran, who has a world record 521 wickets in 342 one-day internationals, has a tally of 95 against Pakistan in 64 matches, and is even more dan-

gerous in home conditions.

"In Sri Lankan conditions and pitches, he (Muralidaran) is always very dangerous and he could probably turn the ball on a marble. He has so much experience, knows conditions well and that's why he is the best," said Afridi.

Afridi said Malinga, renowned for his slinging action, would find it tough after missing the Canada match due to a back strain.

"Malinga is a very good bowler but he is coming back from an injury, so let's see how strong he is and how much he can adjust to the conditions," said Afridi.

Malinga didn't bowl during practice on the advice of physio Tommy Simsek but team management said the fast bowler will be fit for the match.

Afridi hoped the game would be entertaining in a World Cup that desperately needs a blockbuster clash.

"It will be a good game. If we bowl well, bat well and go in with positive body language, we will handle every pressure."

Pakistan have never lost a World Cup match against Sri Lanka in six previous attempts, but they all took place before Sri



Pakistan captain Shahid Afridi (L) walks to nets while his Sri Lankan counterpart Kumar Sangakkara (R) skips during their respective training sessions at the R. Premadasa Stadium in Colombo yesterday on the eve of their World Cup encounter. Pakistan have never lost against Sri Lanka in six previous World Cup games.

PHOTOS: AFP

Lanka became one of the top sides in the world.

Pakistan beat Sri Lanka in the final to win the second edition of World T20 in 2009, but Kumar

Sangakkara's side defeated them in last year's Asian Cup and in the last two one-day series -- away (in Pakistan) and at home since 2009.

Pakistan will look to improve

on their starts both in batting and bowling.

"If the openers give us a good platform then we have in-form batsmen like Misbahul Haq,

Kamran Akmal, Younis Khan and Umar Akmal," said Afridi, of the quartet who all hit half-centuries during their 205-run win against Kenya.

Sri Lanka have Mahela Jayawardene, Sangakkara, Tillakaratne Dilshan and Upul Tharanga in good form with the bat.

Sangakkara said his team will keep the basics right.

"The biggest fear at home is losing. The worst thing is that you are nervous and afraid to go out and do what you know what you can do, so it's the biggest thing we have to be careful of," said Sangakkara.

"If you play as well as you know how to play you obviously make it that much harder for the opposition to beat you," said Sangakkara, whose team has lost the last two matches against Pakistan at Premadasa Stadium.

SRI LANKA V PAKISTAN

Matches: 120
Sri Lanka wins: 46
Pakistan wins: 70
No result/Tied: 4
First meeting: June 14, 1975, Nottingham - Pakistan won by 192 runs.
Last meeting: June 15, 2010, Dambulla - Sri

PCB punishes Hameed

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan cricket authorities on Friday banned and fined batsman Yasir Hameed for accusing his teammates of match-fixing and spot-fixing after last year's controversial Lord's Test against England.

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) spokesman Nadeem Sawar said that Hameed had been banned from first-class competition and fined 300,000 rupees (about 3,500 US dollars) for his spot-fixing allegations against some national players in a newspaper interview last year.

He did not specify the length of the ban.

Two days after three Pakistani players -- Salman Butt, Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Aamer -- were accused of spot-fixing in the Lord's Test by British tabloid the News of the World, Hameed told an undercover reporter that his teammates had been involved in fixing for years.

The three players received bans of between five and 10 years from the International Cricket Council's anti-corruption tribunal earlier this month.