

Beware the well-drilled minnows

SAKEB SUBHAN

As the debate rages on about the place of minnows in future World Cups, Ireland yesterday, and Netherlands a few days earlier, proved the value of the participation of the so-called lesser teams in the World Cup.

Yesterday's match started in the manner many would have expected with Tamim Iqbal blazing away at the start to make batting seem easy. 41 runs came off the first four overs, with each boundary greeted raucously by a rabid home crowd, and Ireland seemed to be in for some leather-chasing that would see them chasing a steep total against the more-fancied Bangladesh. A little under three hours later, Bangladesh were made to look like minnows, floundering at 173 for 8, and finally folding for 205.

Ireland bore the brunt of the initial onslaught, and then displayed a priceless attribute. It wasn't oodles of talent, but an ability to absorb pressure and come out fighting that gave them the advantage over their Test-playing opponents.

After the wickets of Tamim and Imrul Kayes, who were brilliantly stumped down the leg side, the Irish took control of the game by the ball. They saw how Boyd Rankin, their fastest bowler, was taken first two overs, and knew that the best way forward was to make the batsmen go hard at the pitch. Trent Johnston started bowling slower, so did Andre Botha, and it paid dividends with Shakib Al Hasan being caught and bowled after he played early at a Botha delivery.

The two runouts in Bangladesh's innings may have been instances of bad calling, but equally they were brought about by brilliance on the field from the Irish. Junaed Siddiqui and Rokibul Hasan were both sent packing courtesy of direct hits, highlighting how important it is to do the little things well.

It is here that the Associate nations bring value to tournaments like the World Cup. They do not have the reservoirs of skill and flair that the bigger nations do, and they will start most matches as underdogs. There was not a single bowler who flummoxed the Bangladeshis, but the whole Irish team. Their fielding was that of a well-oiled unit, with all stoppable boundary-bound hits chased and saved at the boundary and the relay throwing working like clockwork.

In a sport that all too often focuses on the strength of individuals, minnows like Ireland and Netherlands remind

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Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal glances one on the on-side during his quickfire 44 against Ireland. He also took a magnificent catch in the crucial Group B World Cup match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Aussies abase Black Caps

AFP, Nagpur



Reigning champions Australia overpowered New Zealand by seven wickets for a 25th straight World Cup victory in a dominant display at the VCA Ground here on Friday.

Australia's fast bowlers, with Mitchell Johnson taking four wickets, led the way as New Zealand were bowled out for just 206 with nearly five overs of their innings left.

Left-arm Johnson finished with four for 33 and Shaun Tait three for 35.

That New Zealand even had the remotest chance was down to a battling fifty from Nathan McCullum and skipper Daniel Vettori's 44 with the duo combining well in an eighth-wicket stand of 54.

The Black Caps had earlier been in dire straits after their top order collapsed to 73 for six against the quicks from 66 for two.

Australia finished on 207 for three with a mammoth 16 overs to spare with Michael Clarke (24) and Cameron White (22) the not out batsmen as Australia also won the Chappell-Hadlee Trophy.

Opener Shane Watson top-scored with 62.

"It was a good game for us. New Zealand are a very good one-day side, a very competitive team and for us to win as well as we have today is pretty satisfying," said Australia captain Ricky Ponting.

"Things worked out well. The fact that we got early wickets meant that I could keep attacking with the quick bowlers."

Vettori admitted his team had suffered a disappointing performance.

"We got off to not a bad start but losing three or four wickets in that clump really hurt us. We were fortunate that Nathan McCullum (52) played the innings he did to give us a chance," he said.

"We are going to have to move past this result pretty quickly. We've got Zimbabwe in about seven or eight days so maybe a good break is a good thing for us. We can get our heads around a must-win game."

Australia opens Watson and Brad Haddin were rarely troubled during a century first-wicket stand.

Haddin, a fluent strokemaker, brought up his fifty in 39 balls with eight fours while

Watson went to the landmark in 52 balls including a six off a Nathan McCullum off-break.

New Zealand's day appeared to be summed up when substitute Kane Williamson, at deep mid-wicket, dropped Watson on 59 off left-arm spinner Vettori.

But the Black Caps gave themselves a glimmer of hope when 133 without loss became 136 for two when fast bowler Hamish Bennett removed both openers in the space of three balls in the 19th over.

Haddin (55) hooked a looping bouncer to James Franklin and then Watson (62) inside-edged an intended square-cut onto his stumps.

Ponting meanwhile could only manage 12 before he was brilliantly stumped down the legside by Brendon McCullum off Southee.

In a match played out against the backdrop of the Christchurch earthquake, Ponting won the toss and chose to field in overcast conditions.

Tait, following the economical Brett Lee, removed dangerous Brendon McCullum for 16 when an attempted carve over the covers flew straight to Jason Krejza at third man.

Jesse Ryder hit six forceful fours but Johnson took two wickets in four balls in the 14th over to have the left-hander and Franklin edging to wicketkeeper Haddin as they both pushed limply at good length deliveries.

Tait then had Scott Styris caught behind for a duck and yorked Ross Taylor, who struggled to make seven off 22 balls.

One concern for Australia coming out of this match though would have been the way Nathan McCullum milked rival spinners Krejza and Steven Smith -- whose combined 18 overs yielded just one wicket for 91 runs.

Nathan McCullum top-scored for the Kiwis, completing a 72-ball fifty including three boundaries before he was lbw to Johnson for 52.

SCORES IN BRIEF

NEW ZEALAND: 206 all out in 45.1 overs (Guptill 10, McCullum 16, Ryder 25, How 22, McCullum 52, Vettori 44; Tait 3-35, Johnson 4-33)

AUSTRALIA: 207 for 3 in 34 overs (Watson 62, Haddin 55, Ponting 12, Clarke 24 not out, White 22 not out; Bennett 2-63)

Result: Australia won by seven wickets.
Man-of-the-match: Mitchell Johnson.

Bollinger out of WC

AFP, Nagpur

Australia fast bowler Doug Bollinger has been ruled out of the remainder of the World Cup with a left ankle injury and is returning home, it was announced on Friday.

"Doug Bollinger has been experiencing increasing left ankle pain since arriving in India," Australian team physiotherapist Alex Kountouris said in a statement.

"Unfortunately the pain is now significantly affecting his ability to bowl and he will not be playing any further part in the tournament."

"Doug will now return to Australia and seek specialist opinion to determine the best course of management for this injury."

In honour of quake victims

AFP, Nagpur



Australia and New Zealand paused in the middle of their crucial World Cup clash on Friday to remember the victims of the devastating Christchurch earthquake.

Shortly before world champions Australia began their quest for the 207 runs they needed for victory in Nagpur, players from both sides stood shoulder to shoulder, forming a circle on the outfield.

At least 113 people have been killed following Tuesday's 6.3-magnitude earthquake which caused widespread destruction in the New Zealand city.

Both teams wore black armbands and before the match started there was a traditional minute's silence as fans and players remembered the victims of the tragedy.

But there were barely a couple of hundred people inside the VCA Ground for the start of the game between the

trans-Tasman rivals in another example of the administrative chaos that has dogged this event so far.

As television cameras panned around the ground they found a small knot of Kiwi fans with one spectator holding aloft a simple message on a plain white piece of paper that said: "Thinking of you Christchurch."

New Zealand captain Daniel Vettori had previously summed up the mood of the squad.

"It has been difficult but I suppose when we put it into perspective, it's nothing compared to what the people back home in Christchurch and all over New Zealand are going through."

"The whole country is hurting immensely and the team feels exactly the same way."

The Australian support staff joined the players in taking the field for the pre-match ceremony.

"As an Australian team, we've all been extremely saddened by what we've seen happen in Christchurch in the last few days," Ponting said earlier.

"We are neighbours and we treat each other as brothers," he added.

Smith hails spinners

AFP, New Delhi



South African skipper Graeme Smith said it had been "one of those days" after his decision to field a three-pronged spin attack paid rich dividends with an opening World Cup win over the West Indies.

Off-break bowler Johan Botha opened the bowling and grabbed two wickets for 48 on Thursday but the star performer with the ball was debutant leg-spinner Imran Tahir, who took 4-41 as South Africa cruised to a seven-wicket win.

South Africa have kept Pakistan-born Tahir under wraps in the lead-up to the tournament and their strategy paid off against the West Indies.

"He bowled really well. We tried to use him in short spells and obviously tried to get the timing right for when we used him. I think that was good. He responded superbly well," Smith said.

"He picked up key wickets for us. Every time he came on he made an impact for us so that was terrific. I think the guys bowled really well around him and created good pressure for him."

"Sometimes when you come up with things and they work out it's a great feeling. They don't always do that but today it was one of those days," said Smith.

Aplea

AFP, Bangalore

India's World Cup cricketers have appealed to the country's demanding media to halt their endless demands for interviews ahead of Sunday's clash with England.

"Members of the media are requested to refrain from constantly contacting the members of the Indian team on phone/SMS for interviews as players would like to concentrate on the ongoing World Cup," said N. Srinivasan, secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), in a statement.

India, regarded as favourites to win a first world title since 1983, are subject to intense scrutiny in the passionate cricket nation with even the slightest injury niggles treated as breaking news on television channels.







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