

BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

Mind Over Matter

SHAKIL KASEM



Forgive me for being the killjoy here. Somehow the sight of a Test playing country being stretched to its very limits by an associate member and barely being able to stumble groggily across the finishing line was not a pleasant spectacle. Understandably the national fever surrounding the match was worthy of medical attention, but there ended all pretensions of what should have been a cut and dried affair for the Tigers. But it was not to be.

Taking the day off from this column enabled the mind's eye to replay a few unpleasant memories of the Bangladesh-Ireland match. For a start other than the fact it was a battle of wills rather than of wits, what else was of significance? As a contest it was top drawer, but really it was just poor cricket triumphing over even poorer cricket. Ireland had their chance for some vertical mobility in this competition but blew it conclusively. Bangladesh after all the hype and hoopla about its team and its supposed prowess, stood the risk of being sued for deception.

Our inordinately high level of national cricketing innocence and naivete notwithstanding, a not very palatable picture is likely to emerge after the dust of nationwide euphoria subsides. A very poor batting display was only overshadowed by another even poorer version from the Irish. It was because of some phenomenal reserves of guile and will from bowlers of both sides that only 383 runs were scored in the whole day, all 20 wickets fell and the full complement of 100 overs could not be completed.

A typically knee jerk reaction to the national hue and cry over the controversial decision with the toss the previous outing, meant the team went diametrically the opposite direction this time. But the rest alas, was not history. The openers blazed away in what is becoming a customary practice for Bangladesh, and then proceeded to throw it away. Two moments of individual brilliance ensured Bangladesh would be pegged on to the back foot; the stumping by Niall O'Brien and the run out by Joyce. Bangladesh continued to struggle until put out of misery at 205. It took the combined efforts of the two mature and balding heads of Johnston and Botha, and the looping left arm spin of the young Dockrell to put the shackles around any batting pretensions of the locals.

In turn the Bangladeshi spin quartet received support from an unexpected quarter, in the form of Shafiqul to snuff out any semblance of Irish challenge. The Ash x-factor remained inconclusive and the jury must surely be still out for his role in the side. But to his credit he got more wickets than runs, which in a perverse way further complicates matters for the next match. The Irish must surely consider themselves desperately hard done by. They almost did everything right, but it was the present and not the past that caught up with them. The major bane of contention for teams such as Ireland remains the fact they hardly get to play any matches of significance against the big boys throughout the year. Once in 4 years on the big stage is not likely to help these teams get the results they want. Under the sort of pressure with which they are not familiar with, the stakes being so high, they cracked predictably. In no uncertain manner. True they do not suffer from stage fright, but I do not see them winning an Oscar this time.

Back to the drawing boards for Bangladesh if they are to make a fist of it in the coming matches. Of all the teams in the competition Bangladesh is the only one not venturing out of the comfort zone of playing all their matches on home soil. So far the team has not shown much indication that it has been able to take any advantage of this favour done to them. Sterner tests lie ahead but at least the banana peel has been safely avoided. But only just. Ours is a complicated mindset, because we are easily satisfied by the simple and the mundane. Cricket for the nation was not so much the issue here, it had more to do with pride and vengeance and the assorted mental baggage of proving a point. As opposed to just playing normal cricket and acquiring two points on the table(sic). And because cricket transcends the subconscious, the conscious mind devises ways and means to keep the cricket Houdinis in business. And so it was, just another case of mind over matter.



Pakistan batsman Misbahul Haq (R) reverse sweeps one during his sensible knock of 83 not out in their World Cup encounter against hosts Sri Lanka at the R. Premadasa Stadium in Colombo yesterday.

PHOTO:
AFP

SL taken over by cricket

AFP, Colombo



Cricket fever swept through Sri Lankan capital Colombo on Saturday as fierce South Asian rivals Sri Lanka and Pakistan clashed in a blockbuster World Cup sell-out.

Roads were closed and shops shuttered near the R Premadasa Stadium as around 3,000 police officials were deployed for the Group A match.

Hundreds of Pakistani fans were in Sri Lanka to witness their first World Cup match after missing their team's first game against Kenya at Hambantota, which they won by a huge 205-run margin.

"I am in Colombo to back my

team and it's a great atmosphere to be in," said Mazhar Qayyum, a marketing executive at a Pakistani bank, accompanied by his son Shaheer.

Rehan Khan, Askari Naqvi and Imran Rasheed, also from Pakistan, were relishing the festive atmosphere outside the stadium.

"It's great to be in Colombo for a World Cup match," said Naqvi, from Sindh province. "We sort of had fun with Sri Lankan fans. Whoever plays well should win, but I will shout for Pakistan."

Inside the stadium the atmosphere was fully charged hours before the match started, with fans

blowing vuvuzelas, the plastic horn that earned fame at last year's football World Cup in South Africa.

"I have never seen this big a crowd at Premadasa," said Thilini Nadeeshani, holding a blue-and-yellow Sri Lankan flag.

World Cup mascot Stumpy was in action inside and outside the stadium, challenging fans to match his dance steps and win tickets -- a competition set up by the local organisers.

One lucky winner was Nishantha Peiris, who danced with Stumpy.

"I am thrilled," said Peiris, from Moratuwa. "It's a double treat for me

and I will come to watch the Sri Lanka-Kenya match for free."

There were many disappointed fans milling around outside the ground in the hope of getting free entry.

But their bid looked hopeless, with the stadium packed before the toss.

"I bought my ticket last week and did double duty on Friday," said rickshaw driver Mohammad Shahabuddin, who was in a fix as to who to support -- his Muslim brothers from Pakistan or the home team.

"My country comes first, but my Muslim brothers are also my favourites, so I am happy whoever wins," said Shahabuddin. "This should be the spirit."

Butt, Aamer appeal ban

AFP, Islamabad

Former Pakistan Test captain Salman Butt and pace-man Mohammad Aamer have lodged appeals against their bans for corruption at the Court of Arbitration for Sport, lawyers said Saturday.

"We have filed a statement of appeal in the Lausanne-based Court of Arbitration for Sport against the ban by the International Cricket Council anti-corruption tribunal," Butt's lawyer Yasin Patel told AFP by email.

Opening batsman Butt and fast bowlers Mohammad Asif and Aamer were all banned on charges of corruption relating to last year's Lord's Test against England.

Butt was banned for 10 years, with five suspended. Asif was banned for seven years, two of which were suspended, with Aamer handed a five-year penalty. All three players are also facing criminal prosecution in Britain.

Butt confirmed his lawyer had appealed.



Two Sri Lankan fans cheer on their team during their World Cup match against Pakistan yesterday at the R. Premadasa Stadium in Colombo. They had to return dejected in the end though as Pakistan ran home easy winners.

PHOTO:
REUTERS

Windies lose Bravo

AFP, New Delhi



West Indies' World Cup hopes suffered a major body blow on Saturday when key all-rounder Dwayne Bravo was ruled out of the rest of the tournament with a knee injury.

Bravo, a veteran of 110 internationals, suffered the injury while bowling in his team's opening defeat against South Africa at the Feroz Shah Kotla Stadium in New Delhi on Thursday.

He was initially ruled out for the remainder of the league stage, but is now flying back to the Caribbean for treatment on the damaged left knee.

A scan revealed the 27-year-old, who made 40 in the seven-wicket defeat to South Africa, had sprained his anterior cruciate ligament and torn his knee cartilage.

"This is a blow for us. Dwayne is our vice-captain and one of the key members of our

team," said coach Ottis Gibson.

"He has been showing good form with the bat and batted well against South Africa.

"He is also a livewire in the field and a reliable bowler. We wish him a speedy recovery and hope he gets back on the field soon."

The West Indies lost opening batsman Adrian Barath and wicketkeeper Carlton Baugh to injury before a ball was bowled in the World Cup, with Kirk Edwards and Devon Thomas called in as replacements.

Fast bowler Tino Best, who has played 14 Tests and 12 one-day internationals, is the third reserve on the West Indies World Cup list.

But the 29-year-old is under a disciplinary cloud having been banned for Barbados's recent match against the England Lions following a training session bust-up with coaching staff.

Former champions West Indies tackle the Netherlands in New Delhi in their next Group B game on Monday.

Ponting awaits stern Lanka

AFP, Nagpur



Australia captain Ricky Ponting believes Sri Lanka will provide his side with a severe examination of their World Cup credentials when the champions next take the field.

Ponting, bidding for an unprecedented third straight World Cup title as captain, led his side to a crushing seven-wicket win over trans-Tasman rivals New Zealand on Friday.

But he is expecting a tougher encounter against co-hosts and 1996 World Cup winners Sri Lanka in Colombo when Australia continue their group campaign on March 6.

"We expect Sri Lanka to be a very tough contest," said Ponting, after the Chappell-Hadlee Trophy win over New Zealand that extended

Australia's World Cup-winning streak to 25 straight matches.

"I think they'll be our toughest contest to date in this tournament. They're a good one-day side.

"But in saying that I think they rely on a few, certainly on the batting side of things. If you look at Tillakaratne Dilshan, Kumar Sangakkara and Mahela Jayawardene as the three that they rely on the most, they all had a pretty good start to the tournament.

"It's an interesting one with their conditions, because I think we're playing them on a wicket that's a new one and has been relaid.

"The first game they had there was a really high-scoring one, and didn't really favour the spinners as much as they would like."

Australia's fast bowlers, led by a

four-wicket haul from left-arm quick Mitchell Johnson, dismissed New Zealand for a mere 206.

The Kiwis were in dire straits at 73 for six only for their tail to wag as Australia off-spinner Jason Krejza and leg-break bowler Steven Smith managed just one wicket between them for 91 runs in 18 combined overs.

Ponting though insisted: "I thought our spinners were good. Krejza's figures probably don't reflect how well I thought he bowled. He ended up with none for 47 off nine overs, and I thought he bowled a bit better than that.

"I thought Steve Smith was very good. He had a couple of loose deliveries towards the end of his spell but otherwise I thought he bowled very well," the captain added.

"We've still got Dave Hussey and Michael Clarke up our sleeve as well, as far as the slower bowlers are concerned. Things are going along nicely for us."

Although Australia said farewell to Doug Bollinger on Friday as he departed the tournament without playing a game because of an ankle injury, Ponting still has plenty of pace bowling options in Brett Lee, Shaun Tait and first-change Johnson, all of whom played against New Zealand.

"I don't know if we've invested heavily in pace," Ponting said. "Most teams are going to be playing at least three seamers, it's just we've got three guys who bowl close to 150kph. That's just where we're probably a bit luckier than most other countries around the world at the moment."

'Ireland will come back'

AFP, Dhaka

Ireland captain William Porterfield vowed to bounce back in the World Cup after gifting a 27-run victory to Bangladesh in their first match on Friday.

The leading non-Test nation messed up their chase of Bangladesh's modest 205 all out and were dismissed for 178 in 45 overs in the day-night game at the Sher-e-Bangla stadium.

"It's not hard to work out where we lost this game, we let ourselves down with the bat," said Porterfield, 26, who plays for Gloucestershire in English county cricket.

"After 50 overs it was pretty good and we did really well to claw back after the first five or six overs with the ball.

"You can't afford that many soft dismissals throughout a tournament, let alone an innings, but we've just got have to bounce back from this, we can't get too down.

"We've got a lot of cricket still to play in this tournament. We've showed glimpses of what we can do and we've batted well in the two warm-up games coming into this tournament.

"We have to leave the batting here and move on to Bangalore," the captain said ahead of the next Group B match against England on March 2.

Porterfield refused to blame the defeat on the partisan support for Bangladesh from 25,000 fans in the packed stands.

"We were never short of runs, we just kept losing wickets," he said.

"We have never played in front of such a big crowd, but I don't think that had an effect on our performance."

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