

BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

Silence Of
The Lambs?

SHAKIL KASEM



Well not quite, since the match on Wednesday was totally to the contrary. England against India was like a golfer cruising along with a two shot lead on a Sunday, till the 17th, when the unspeakable happens; in the rough off the tee, then barely managing the safety of the fairway, following up with a shank into the bunker and not quite up and down from there. Three putting the 8 footer downhill, a classic case of being bit around the ankles when least expecting. Against Ireland, England were scandalous to the extent even Tiger Woods's indiscretions would have been forgiven.

Ireland to their credit bounced back from their Bangladesh debacle in a manner England could not from theirs against India. Which throws this group wide open for gatecrashers and adds that extra dimension of significance to whatever is about to happen in Mirpur tonight. When was the last time any team worth its reverse swing allow anyone, least of all a purple haired batsman from an associate member category to help himself to a 100 off just 50 deliveries? Correct, never ever. England had scraped through against Netherlands, could not against India and were positively dumped by the way-side by the Irish. Not the sort of campaign that can be mentioned in any charitable manner in the dispatches home. Kevin O'Brien gives new meaning to the term understatement if one were to consider his innings to be the highpoint of this tournament. From 111 for 5 Ireland barely looked anything but winners. England were unable to put the finger in the dyke and the unmentionable was only there for the asking.

Which actually puts Bangladesh in a bit of a predicament today. West Indies are not quite the pushovers the Tigers encountered in the Caribbean. Sans the Gayles, the Sarwans and the Chanderpauls West Indies were but a shadow of their actual selves then. Not quite the same as what they are now. With their unwavering faith in the time tested theory of relying only on their quick bowlers, still in vogue, as it has been for as far back as one can remember, the chase and counterchase of the hunter and hunted at Mirpur will be decided by sheer speed. The batting will of necessity rely heavily on the old firm of Gayle, Chanderpaul and Sarwan who have been in this business for long enough to cope with whatever is coming their way. For my money the Windies may just be better at chasing than defending.

Bangladesh has been a mixed bag so far. The batting really has not clicked as of yet. Exactly who among the big guns would stand up and be counted remains the unanswered question. So far no one among the top order have been big enough to be of any difference to the outcome of their matches so far. The quick bowlers likely to be on view today would be by far and away the most penetrative than those of India and Ireland. Which is of concern really for putting together a score of any significant proportions. Much will depend therefore on the spinners, who have been the main strengths of this team. An over reliance on the spinners however have made them somewhat predictable as an attacking option. As a defensive proposition I am not certain they have quite displayed the temperament and equanimity required thereof. This match is a test not just of skills but even more of resolve.

So far in this competition there have been very few sheep in wolves clothing meandering about. Would it be akin to heresy in the ranks if one were to be cautious in expectations and reticent about what the Tigers may achieve tonight? However, two-time world champions and a team from a proud cricketing heritage up against a team somewhat lacking in pedigree yet keen to prove a point, may just give cricketing contests a new meaning.

NEW ZEALAND V ZIMBABWE

Kiwis eye on quarters

AFP, Ahmedabad



New Zealand will be desperate to boost their World Cup quarterfinal hopes with a convincing win over Zimbabwe in a crunch clash on Friday.

The Kiwis cantered to a 10-wicket victory over lowly Kenya in their opening match before going down to Australia by seven wickets in a manner unworthy of their reputation as a doughty one-day side.

Zimbabwe suffered a 91-run defeat at the hands of holders Australia but regrouped in time to thrash Canada by a 175-run margin in their second Group A clash on Monday.

With one defeat and a win apiece, New Zealand and Zimbabwe are tied on two points and trail Pakistan and Australia who have four points each from two matches.

Sri Lanka also have four points but they have played three games, winning two and losing one.

Zimbabwe thrived on fine performances by their spinners against Canada and will look to rattle the spin-wary

Kiwis with a similar plan.

The African nation is one of the few teams in the competition with a spin-heavy attack which has come good so far on the sub-continental wickets.

Led by the veteran Raymond Price, Zimbabwe spinners did well to restrict Australia to 262-6 and bowl out Canada for 123 off 42.1 overs.

NEW ZEALAND V ZIMBABWE

Matches: 28
New Zealand wins: 19
Zimbabwe wins: 7
No result: 2
First meeting: Oct 10, 1987, Hyderabad - New Zealand won by 3 runs
Last meeting: Aug 31, 2005, Harare - New Zealand

"Australia attacked us with pace and we are going to see a lot of spin in this game," said New Zealand captain Daniel Vettori. "So it is an exciting challenge for us, but one we have to win."

"It's important for us to counter all their spinners. Price does a good job at the start and we've got to be ready for it. The fact that we have not played them

for a long time is probably a little bit of disadvantage for us.

"But what we have seen of them in the last two games we are pretty sure of what we will come up against."

New Zealand will also be keen to nail their final team combination ahead of potentially tougher games against Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

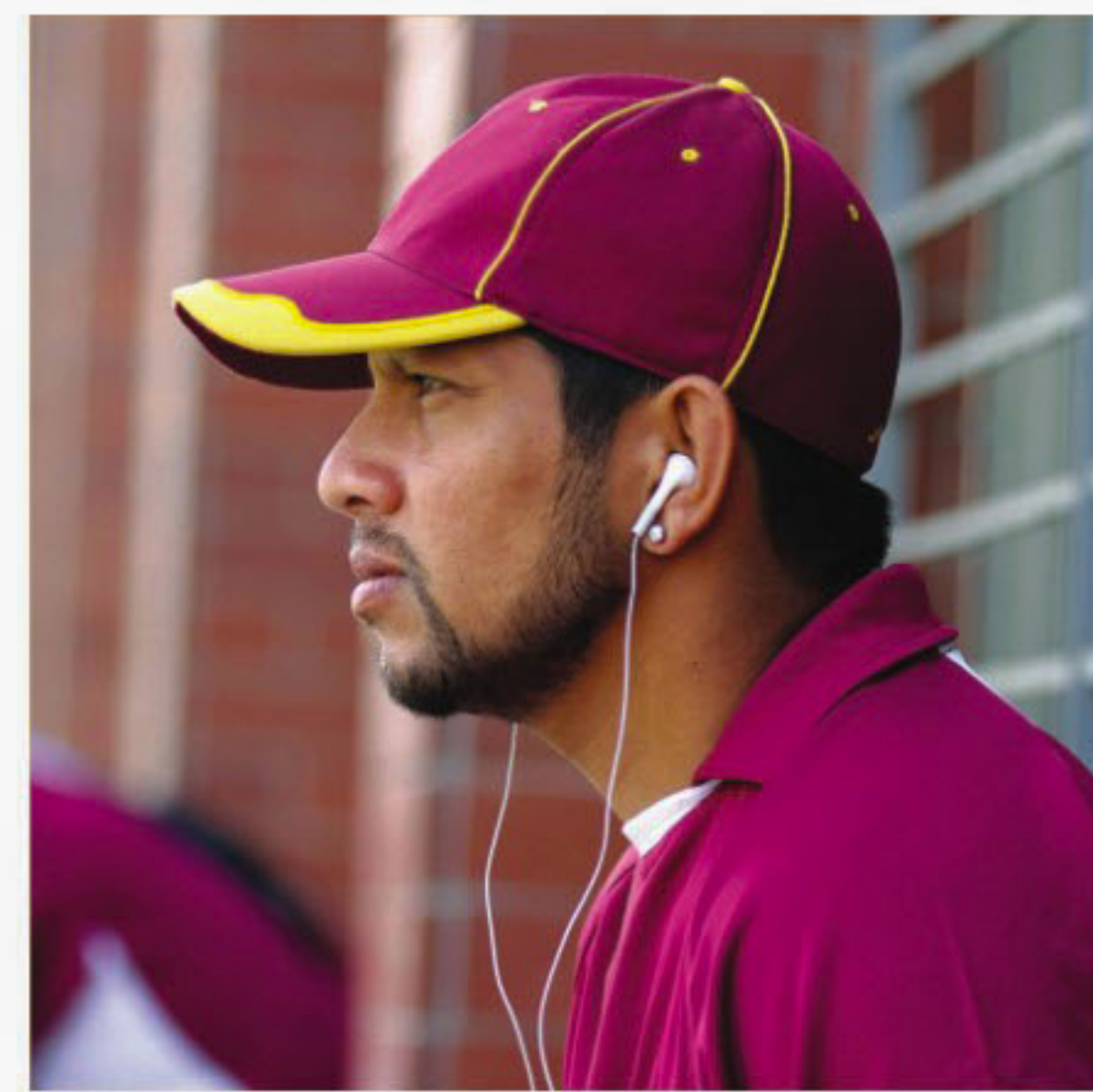
The Kiwis erred in their selection against Australia, picking young Hamish Bennett ahead of a fit Kyle Mills and bringing opener Jamie How down at number seven in place of proven all-rounder Jacob Oram.

Bennett picked up two wickets but was carted for 63 runs in seven overs and How managed 22 in a below-par New Zealand batting performance.

Apart from selection woes, New Zealand have also their batting to worry about.

Among the top six batsmen, only Jesse Ryder showed some character in making 25 off 31 balls as New Zealand collapsed to 73-6 against Australia before a late rally by Nathan McCullum and Vettori took the total to 206.

"It wasn't a good performance," said New Zealand coach John Wright.

Sarwan back
where it all
began

The last time Ramnaresh Sarwan came to Bangladesh was in 2002 when he was a young man burdened with a huge load on his shoulders. At that time, the impressive Guyanese hadn't scored an international ton for two years after his debut and promptly in his second game in Dhaka, Sarwan struck a sublime 102, touching the magic figure with a last-ball four off Tapash Baisya.

Now part of another West Indies side, Sarwan is one of only two players to have been part of that tour. This time too, the classy right-hander has to share the burden of the middle-order. He spoke to The Daily Star Sport's Mohammad Isam yesterday during training at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

Daily Star Sport (DSS): Dhaka must be bringing back some great memories for you...

Ramnaresh Sarwan (RS): Of course. I scored my first international hundred here and it is always good to come back to the place where you scored your first century. I got a lot of support from the people of Bangladesh, and I will try and do my best in the match.

DSS: You have had a bit of a break from playing international cricket recently. How are you feeling as you make a return?

RS: It is always great to be representing the West Indies. I was out for about six or seven months but nevertheless, I am happy to be back and happy to be contributing to the team.

DSS: Having become a senior player, has your role changed in the team?

RS: My role has always been to help the younger guys. We have always had a bunch of young and senior guys and I always try to help as much as I can, whether they are new to the team or not. I haven't really changed much to be honest; it is part of my career.

DSS: You have always averaged well in the sub-continent. How much does that benefit the team?

RS: I'm not too sure about my average in this part of the world, but I always try to do the best of my ability.

DSS: Do you enjoy playing in the sub-continent?

RS: I do enjoy. There is a rich heritage here of course. This is also where my folks come from and the support in this part of the world is tremendous.

DSS: Have you seen the wicket for tomorrow's (Friday's) match against Bangladesh?

RS: No I haven't.

DSS: Do you look at the wicket before matches?

RS: I do sometimes but haven't had the opportunity because it has been covered (smiles).

DSS: You have captained against Bangladesh in the past and have seen them over the years. Do you see any areas where Bangladesh is ahead of the West Indies?

RS: (Laughs) You rightfully say that they have come a very long way. I think in this tournament you cannot take anyone for granted. Bangladesh has improved in the past two years and have been doing extremely well, especially in the series win over New Zealand at home. It is hard to compare and pinpoint anything as I have not followed them too closely. I have just seen the news coverage in the websites.



New Zealand batsman Martin Guptill slides during fielding practice in Ahmedabad yesterday, ahead of today's World Cup match against Zimbabwe.

PHOTO: AFP

Murali eyes revenge

AFP, Colombo



Sri Lanka's legendary spinner Muttiah Muralidaran is desperate for a revenge World Cup victory over Australia on Saturday, four years after his country's final heartache.

Sri Lanka lost the controversial 2007 title match in Barbados, when Australia celebrated a third successive triumph, in a match which ended in darkness and ruined the occasion as spectacle.

"They (Australia) have won in all conditions. They have won the last three World Cups. They are the team everybody wants to beat. Everyone in the team is upbeat. We are anxious to beat them," Muralidaran said.

Sri Lanka have won just 23 of their 72 one-day encounters with Australia, but clinched the series in Australia in November for a morale-booster ahead of Saturday's Group A clash at Colombo's R Premadasa Stadium.

Muralidaran, who is playing in his fourth

and final World Cup, said that Australian batsmen are capable of dealing with spin and fast bowlers on sub-continent tracks.

He expects the newly-laid Premadasa wicket to be batting-friendly, a little slow with some help to spinners.

But he did not expect Saturday's high-pressure game to be a high scoring one like the ones in neighbouring India, where a series of totals have exceeded 350.

"If you are really batting well, you can score more than 300. But in Indian conditions, smaller grounds, fast outfields, 350 is achievable. In Sri Lankan conditions, 280 or 290 is a good score."

Muralidaran, who has a world record 800 wickets in Tests and 523 wickets in one-day internationals, will bow out of international cricket after the World Cup, following his retirement from Tests in July last year.

Sri Lanka, 1996 winners and 2007 finalists, have said they would like to win the World Cup for Muralidaran.

Top five WC
upsets

AFP, New Delhi

Five famous upset victories in the cricket World Cup after Ireland stunned England by three wickets in Bangalore on Wednesday:

1983
- Outsiders India beat holders West Indies by 43 runs to win the tournament at Lord's. Mohinder Amarnath (3-12), Madan Lal (3-31) and Balwinder Sandhu (2-32) were India's bowling stars as the West Indies collapsed to 140 chasing a modest 183.

1983
- Non-Test playing nation Zimbabwe beat 1975 runners-up Australia by 13 runs at Trent Bridge, with Duncan Fletcher (69 not out and 4-42) being the star performer with an all-round show.

2007
- Associate nation Ireland

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Awestruck by O'Brien

GUARDIAN/AFP



The cricketing world has been stunned by Kevin O'Brien's miracle innings against England in their World Cup match at Bangalore on Wednesday. All talk has revolved around Ireland's record-breaking win, and particularly, the man of the hour:

'Used to play like that in the garden'

If England were stunned, how do you think Kevin O'Brien felt? After hitting the fastest century in the history of the World Cup, O'Brien said he was speechless at what he had just done. He had only just stepped off the pitch, after all, and was as shocked as everyone else.

"That's a long way the best innings I have ever played," he began. And then he thought again. "In fact, I think everybody is going to struggle to beat that innings. I will take a few fines for saying that, a few raps back home but I'll keep saying it all night. A hundred off 50 balls. In a World Cup. In front of a billion people and against England under lights, it just doesn't get any better."

He paused and grinned: "I used to try to play

like that in the back garden with my brother Niall but if I hit it like that back then I was out."

King Kevin dreams of IPL

Kevin O'Brien hopes his record-breaking World Cup century against England could pave the way for a lucrative Indian Premier League contract.

O'Brien scored the fastest-ever World Cup century, off just 50 balls, as Ireland completed a stunning three-wicket win over England to revive their hopes of a quarter-final berth following an opening loss to Bangladesh.

The 26-year-old, who made a whirlwind 113 off 63 balls, currently plays for Irish club side Railway Union following a brief spell with English county side Nottinghamshire in 2009.

"Who wouldn't (want to play in the IPL)? A lot of people have said that Twenty20 suits me, the way I swing the bat and hit a few sixes," said O'Brien.

"If something comes of that, even better. If not, I'll just concentrate on Sunday's game against India and see what happens."

Wrong jersey, right result

Proud father Brendan O'Brien lived his dream

among the motley crowd that cheered underdogs Ireland in their epic World Cup clash against England on Wednesday.

Brendan O'Brien, who played 11 times for Ireland in his 15-year career, watched son Kevin smash the World Cup's fastest century at the Chinnaswamy Stadium where the Irish stunned England by three wickets.

"It's a hugely proud moment for me and I'm delighted for him," said Brendan after Kevin's heroics with the bat.

"He had a couple of ducks recently. It is a hard game and he has come back well."

The only downside for the jubilant dad was that he was wearing an Irish jersey with Niall's name on it.

"My wife (Camilla) wore a Kevin jersey, I promise to swap it with her for the next game," laughed Brendan.

Ireland sets tongues wagging

Who's saying what about Ireland's shock World Cup win over Ireland:

"There's two proud people in the stands and probably four million proud people at home."
- Kevin O'Brien.

"Our bowling could have been better....we weren't reckoning on an outstanding innings



PHOTO: AFP

PHENOMENAL KEVIN: Ireland miracle worker Kevin O'Brien (R) congratulates teammate John Mooney, who completed the job of toppling England that O'Brien nearly finished himself with a 63-ball 113 at Bangalore on Wednesday.

from Kevin O'Brien. It was pretty brutal."
- Shell-shocked England captain Andrew Strauss.

"Ireland's cricketers exemplified all the best qualities of our nation, playing with courage and pride and showing that seemingly insurmountable odds can be overcome."

- Irish prime-minister-in-waiting Enda Kenny.

"England were left looking like a pub side."
- The Sun newspaper

"Bold and brash, raw and uninhibited, it was the equivalent of a snarling, two-fingered salute to the mainstream."

- The Times paying tribute to O'Brien's innings and its impact on the International Cricket Council's decision to exclude teams like Ireland from future World Cups.