

BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

Caught Napping....

SHAKIL KASEM



....because I was napping. Well, fact and figuratively a bit more than a nap because I missed the whole match. Let me explain, if you are in the mood for it. Having got back from Moses where a whole lot of issues were addressed and many of the world's problems were solved, although those were a different set of stories, I had settled down comfortably for the afternoon matinee, namely WI v Ban. As an arm-chair critic my comfort levels are important to me. So like a reclining Buddha I was comfortably, and as it turned out though, a bit too comfortably, not too relaxed mind you at that point, in a state of considered preparedness for the Bangladesh innings. Just in time though to catch Kayes being caught low down in front by the keeper. Ignore the unintended pun, please. Tamim I had missed altogether because I was a little late on the draw with the remote, but he was not, as was quite apparent I later learnt, courtesy of several complimentary slowmos. And then, total black out.

I zonked out just as Junaed Siddique was trying to make some sort of a statement, something to the effect that the Windies pacemen could be handled. On that reassuring note I drifted off. The flipside was that I missed out on the real life nightmare. When I was eventually woken (a bit rudely, I might add) by my somewhat bemused and shocked offspring, who is in turn yet to recover from the Man United debacle against Chelsea and hence still a bit jaundiced about happenings around him, particularly relating to cricket, I was to put it as mildly as possible, flabbergasted, for want of a more unambiguous term. Although I knew in my heart of a dodgy heart, this match would not be an easy one, I found it difficult to reconcile fact and figures relating to the case at hand. In the end I had performed, to let Kris Kristofferson explain myself to me; there was darkness in the shadows and the canyons of my soul.

Not so much because the match turned out the way it did. It is possible, as countless cricket matches over the years bear testimony, for teams to have their collective periods on a day when it is expected they should be bright eyed and bushy tailed. It is possible that the cricket ball may talk incoherently on a certain day which batsmen are unable to fathom. That too has happened before. It is possible too for bowlers to have one of those days when anything they try and do put Midas to shame. A day of collective hara kiri by batsmen is a rare instance, but not unheard of. Case in point West Indies late sixties, all powerful and all conquering but bowled out by the Irish (no less) for 27. India bowled out for 43 at Lords. There is an unending list. They have all bounced back and made the others pay, over the years. Bangladesh will too, at some point in time.

This match merely serves as a wakeup call (please ignore the pun again), for the team surely, but more and I stress, more importantly for the multitudes of its fans across the country. For no explicable reason expectations have been stacked higher and higher with each passing day on what the team is likely to achieve. For the most part these expectations are not born of any cricketing logic or merit. Cricket matches are not won or lost on jingoistic fervour of millions of green clad hyper ventilating masses in war paint. Cricket unfortunately is a game which is also a great leveler. It is merciless and cruel because there are too many variables involved with it for the ordinary human mind and body to come to terms with. It is a funny game, but it should not be made funnier still by expecting the impossible from it. This result means many things to many surely, but at the end of the day it was just a cricket match. Can Bangladesh make it to the next round? Time will tell, but even if they do not, would the skies come tumbling down? Lets still stand by the team for there are more things in heaven and earth Horatio, than one errant result of a cricket match.



Gearing up for another masterful knock? India's batting legend Sachin Tendulkar gets ready to bat in nets at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium yesterday ahead of today's clash against Ireland.

PHOTO:
AFP

INDIA V IRELAND: BANGALORE

'Minnows' eye big fish

AFP, Bangalore

Giant-killing Ireland have vowed to play aggressive cricket in Sunday's World Cup match against India as they attempt to add the host nation to their list of scalps.

The non-Test-playing nation provided the shock of the tournament to stun England by three wickets on Wednesday and all-rounder John Mooney said they would adopt the same fearless approach in Bangalore.

"Our expectations going into the India game will be the same and we will go all out. Every game we play, we play to win," said Mooney, who took four wickets and scored a crucial 33 not out against England.

"As it was against Bangladesh, it will be the same against India too. It didn't happen in the first outing, but we went out with the same attitude against England and the approach will be the same against India."

"We have our own expectations and we don't want to put pressure on ourselves."

Ireland, who lost a close opening match against Bangladesh, have two points from as many games and a win over India would be a major step towards reaching the quarterfinals.

They owed their victory to powerful batsman Kevin O'Brien, who hammered a 50-ball hundred -- the fastest in World Cup history -- as they overhauled England's imposing 327 for eight.

India, with three points after two matches, including a dramatic tie against England, may be struggling to find the right bowling combination but O'Brien said the hosts had the resources to keep pressure on his team.

"A couple of bad matches won't make them a bad bowling attack. I've seen the likes of [paceman] Zaheer Khan and [spinner] Harbhajan Singh and they're very good bowlers," said O'Brien, who turned 27 on Friday.

"It's going to be a difficult game on Sunday. I'm looking forward to it as it's not every day that you play in front of 50,000 screaming fans. If I'm playing on a flat wicket, I'd try to hit the ball if it is there to hit."

The track has favoured batsmen in

the past two matches -- England v India and Ireland v England -- as each team topped 300 runs.

India need to back up their batting with tight bowling and fielding against Ireland, who showed the depth of their batting against England as lower-order batsmen Alex Cusack and Mooney made crucial contributions.

The hosts' batting looked formidable in their two matches so far, with Virender Sehwag and Virat Kohli cracking centuries against Bangladesh and Sachin Tendulkar scoring 120 against England.

But India's bowling has left a lot to be desired despite trying out different combinations as they conceded 283 runs against Bangladesh and could not defend 338 against England in the tied match.

Former India captain Sourav Ganguly said the hosts needed to be at their best against Ireland, who have "some outstanding players".

"India will have the chance to review their bowling attack as to whether they go with three fast bowlers or continue with two spinners and two seamers, which I don't think is the way forward," said Ganguly.

"India are the better side, but they must be ready and up for the challenge that Ireland will provide them with. India will have to be up and ready for it."

INDIA V IRELAND

Match: 1
India win: 1
Ireland win: 0
No result: 0
Only meeting: June 23, 2007, Belfast -- India won by

Afridi a fan of UDRS

AFP, Colombo

The use of technology to enable teams to challenge decisions by umpires at the World Cup is proving controversial, but Pakistan skipper Shahid Afridi wants reviews to be doubled.

The Umpire Decision Review System (UDRS) is being used for the first time at a World Cup, with some backing its use and others raising serious doubts.

But one player who does not need to be convinced is Afridi.

"I think UDRS is good," said Afridi after Pakistan's win over Canada on Thursday, when Pakistan picked up three dismissals with the use of the system after umpires Daryl Harper and Nigel Llong gave batsmen not out.

"I think one decision can change the whole match, so I think UDRS should be there. It should be raised to four from

two, because two are proving less for us and in bigger matches this would be beneficial," said Afridi.

Two unsuccessful appeals mean you lose the right to any further challenges during an innings.

Canadian captain Ashish Bagai was left fuming after the Pakistan match.

"There was a bit of controversy over the use of it. Some go your way, some don't," said Bagai, who escaped an lbw decision before becoming a victim of the system when Afridi referred it to review.

"They [umpires] have kept a mantra of relying on technology blindly and that is their decision. We got a couple today that we were boggled with but that's what they have chosen, can't do anything about that now," said Bagai.

The most vociferous opposition to the UDRS has come from India, who have resisted its use in its home and away series. The use of the system requires the consent of both teams.



Dhoni doesn't want O'Brien to repeat it

AFP, Bangalore



India skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni hailed Irish master-blaster Kevin O'Brien as "unbelievable", but hopes there's no repeat of his pyrotechnics when the two sides clash on Sunday.

O'Brien smashed the fastest World Cup century off 50 balls, and went on to make 113 off just 63 deliveries, in a remarkable exhibition of power-hitting as Ireland stunned England on Wednesday for an historic victory.

When asked whether his team had made plans to stop the Irishman in Sunday's Group B match, Dhoni said: "As far as strategies are concerned, every day is different and accordingly you have to plan based on how a batsman is playing."

"It was an unbelievable innings. We really enjoyed O'Brien's innings. As it was not against us we can always be a spectator and enjoy each and every hit. It was really impressive to see him change gears at the end."

Dhoni added that India will bank on their batting strength to counter Ireland's threat.

"What is good for the side is everybody is scoring runs and it's more about a battle for the slots. We are still more inclined to play with seven batsmen as you should always back your strength," the Indian skipper said Saturday.

India's batting clicked in their previous two matches as they scored a massive 370-4 against Bangladesh and 338 against England, with Virender Sehwag, Virat Kohli and Sachin Tendulkar all scoring centuries.

The hosts need to make sure they put enough runs on the board again to give their under-fire bowlers a chance to defend the total, especially after Ireland's amazing run-chase on the same pitch.

The Indian skipper said no team could afford to take Ireland lightly after their superb show against a strong England side.

"There is no weak side in the World Cup. We have memories of getting beaten by Bangladesh in the 2007 World Cup and we won't make that mistake again," Dhoni said, referring to India's first-round exit in the Caribbean.

"It depends on each particular day and there are individuals in every team who can score at an amazing strike-rate of maybe 150 or 200 and that can change the course of the game. The preparation level remains the same and the intensity should remain the same."



PHOTO: REUTERS

EASY AS THE ROLL OF THE BAT: Kevin O'Brien, Ireland batsman and holder of the record for the fastest World Cup hundred which he set against England the other night, gets ready for another roll against India today.

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