

Tigers beyond borders

QUAZI ZULQUARNAIN ISLAM

Even as Shafiqul Islam's fiery disposition and Mahmudullah Riyad's ice-cool head dragged Bangladesh over the finish line at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday, the collective will of a few hundred million surely played the role of the invisible hand that provided that last push that Bangladesh required in their crucial World Cup tie against England.

If we were up just for fun, Bangladesh would surely have coasted to victory just on the force of numbers alone. Alas, cricket is an equitable game and out on the pitch it was the eleven against eleven. That did not stop celebrations though, as sporadic parties and gatherings spurted out across both the port city of Chittagong and the capital of Dhaka and elsewhere across the country.

This immediately makes you spare a thought for the millions in the Bangladeshi diaspora who populate cities as far and wide as Melbourne in the east to Toronto in the west, if not beyond. Watching the game itself is an ordeal for most of them, considering steep pay-per-view or satellite charges. The alternative is shaky, unreliable streams or ball-by-ball text commentary on cricinfo. But that hardly dampens excitement and it just goes to show how much enthusiasm there is about the game amongst Bangladeshi circles that people overcome these odds to follow the Tigers.

Most in the diaspora live fragmented lives and hardly find other Bangladeshis to share the moment with.

Samai Haider, a young Bangladeshi, living in England and working at the Treasury, spoke of how she was the only Bangladeshi on her floor following the game amidst a slew of Englishmen and women egging the Three Lions on.

"At time I felt like tearing my hair out, considering how close the game was," says Samai in a stark display of emotion. "But in the end, I was the only one in the room pumping my fists while my English colleagues looked on in despair."

Tahseen Anam, who also works in London shared a similar story, "I was so scared as the game unfolded in the last few overs, but what a feeling it was to be able to be the only one in my floor celebrating at the end," she said.

Sabin Rahman, a masters student in Coventry and her husband Zaheen Islam watched the game at a friend's house with six other Bangladeshis. By the end of the game they had shouted themselves hoarse and were so frustrated at a lack of options to celebrate the win that they resorted to another noble Bangladeshi pursuit.

"Since there isn't too much to do in Coventry, we spontaneously decided to cook some biriyani. Biriyani back home always equates to celebration!"

"Then we ate it and watched every single post match analysis we could manage," she added.

Zeehan Anika and her husband Zunaed Rabbani were glued to a shaky stream in their office in London watching the drama of the last few overs unfold.

"On Friday's, my floor is usually free, so I took that opportunity to watch the game without anyone noticing," she cheekily added.

There were interesting stories too in Brick Lane, long regarded as the most Bangladeshi street in all of London. Home to thousands of immigrants Brick Lane understandably celebrated Bangladesh's famous victory with aplomb.

And one butcher did it in more style than others.

"A local butcher from Brick Lane went to the mosque and paid out ten pounds for sweets and special prayers," added Samai.

But the common feeling that all shared is that it would have been a thousand times better to have celebrated this win with their countrymen back at home.

While the Tigers now live to fight on another day, for many in this group it will be back to work on Monday when Bangladesh play Netherlands. But that will do little to break the spirit and most will surely find devious solutions of watching and cheering on their beloved cricket side. What more, really, can the Tigers ask for?



Tearaway South Africa paceman Dale Steyn appeals against Virender Sehwag during their World Cup match at the Vidarbha Cricket Association Stadium in Nagpur yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



Ricky won't call Tigers minnows

AFP, Bangalore

Australia captain Ricky Ponting refused to gloat over England's World Cup misfortunes on Saturday despite their Ashes conquerors facing elimination from the tournament.

England slumped to a two-wicket defeat to Bangladesh in Chittagong on Friday, a defeat which could spell the end of their campaign which has seen wins over Netherlands and South Africa, a tie with India and defeat to Ireland.

But Ponting isn't ready to put the boot in just yet. "If you are talking about the tournament being exciting, every game they've played has been pretty much one that could have gone either way," said the Australia captain.

"No doubt they will be disappointed to lose last night given the position they were in [Bangladesh were 169 for eight chasing 226 for victory] and the Ireland game was quite a remarkable one and so was the India game.

"They've had their ups and downs so far." Ponting knows what it's like to be on the receiving end of a shock defeat by Bangladesh, having seen the Tigers tame his world champions by five wickets in a one-day international in Cardiff in 2005.

"They've never been classified as a 'minnow', they beat us in Cardiff a few years ago and with all their [group] games at home, there was always a chance they could cause a couple of upsets and last night was probably one.

"They let one slip against the West Indies [Bangladesh were bowled out for 58] with a bit of an abysmal performance, but in their conditions they are a very competitive team."

Before the World Cup began, former Australia captain Allan Border summed up what many felt about an event where four teams each from two lopsided pools of seven would reach the last eight.

"The way the tournament's structured, you're going to have to play like absolute drongos [idiots] not to get through to the quarterfinals," Border, who led Australia to victory over England in the 1987 World Cup final, said.

'Akmal's injury true this time'

AFP, Pallekele

Pakistan manager Intikhab Alam denied on Saturday that Umar Akmal had faked a finger injury in a desperate bid to save his blundering brother Kamran's place in the team.

Umar, who has been tipped to take the wicketkeeping gloves from his elder brother for Monday's World Cup match against Zimbabwe, hurt the index finger on his right hand in practice two days ago.

But some sections of the Pakistani media have accused him of feigning injury to save Kamran.

Team management accused Umar of feigning injury after the infamous Sydney Test against Australia in January 2010, a Test in which Kamran missed three catches off century maker Michael Hussey and a run out of Shane Watson.

Then, Umar reportedly refused to play if his brother was dropped.

Abdul Raqeeb, who was team manager on that disastrous tour, mentioned the incident in his report which eventually led to fines for both Kamran and Umar.

But Alam insisted there is nothing sinister in 20-year-old Umar's World Cup injury.

"There is no such thing and we will wait and see how the injury heals," said Alam.

Kamran came under fire for his sloppy work behind the stumps against New Zealand on Tuesday when he missed two chances off Ross Taylor before the Kiwi batsman went on to smash a match-winning century.

Strauss stands by Swann

AFP, Chittagong

England captain Andrew Strauss defended Graeme Swann after the spinner flew into a rage over the damp playing conditions during Friday's World Cup defeat to Bangladesh.

Swann was furious that the night-time humidity at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium produced dew that made it difficult for bowlers to grip the ball.

On Saturday, the ICC fined Swann 10 per cent of his match fee after being found guilty of breaching the game's code of conduct.

Strauss defended Swann's on-field swearing, which forced one television commentator to apologise on air for the language used.

"Graeme was obviously very frustrated, because the dew meant he could not grip the ball," the captain said.

"He felt he had a big role to play in the game. It was frustrating for him, and all of us, that the ball got as wet as it did. I told Graeme to calm down and get on with it -- and he did so."

ICC match referee Jeff Crowe said that Swann had accepted the sanction.

AUSTRALIA V KENYA: BANGALORE

Another Aussie hop?

AFP, Bangalore

Defending champions Australia can reach the World Cup quarterfinals with a victory over hapless Kenya on Sunday in what threatens to

be one of the most lopsided matches of the tournament.

Australia, unbeaten at the World Cup since 1999, have recorded dominant wins over Zimbabwe and New Zealand before rain washed out what promised to be their first major test of this competition, against

Sri Lanka, last weekend.

One of the few things that appears to be standing in the way of another crushing display will be if they decide to alter the batting line-up so as to give their underexposed middle-order much needed match practice.

There is set to be at least

one change with Michael Hussey, a late replacement for injured fast bowler Doug Bollinger, having himself recovered from a hamstring problem, in line to play his first match of the tournament.

This may be Kenya's fifth successive World Cup but it has so far been a desperately

disappointing event for the 2003 semifinalists.

Hammered by New Zealand, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, they then suffered an even more humbling five-wicket loss to fellow Associates Canada on Monday.

Australia captain Ricky Ponting has repeatedly questioned the worth of non-Test nations at the World Cup and has backed the International Cricket Council's decision to reduce the 2015 edition to 10 teams from the present 14.

Sunday's match, where a win for Kenya would surpass Bangladesh's shock victory in



Australia captain Ricky Ponting carries his batting equipment during the team's training session in Bangalore yesterday, as they gear up for the match against Kenya to be played today.

PHOTO: AFP

AUSTRALIA V KENYA	
Matches:	4
Australia win:	4
Kenya win:	0
No result/Tied:	0
First meeting:	February 23, 1996, Visakhapatnam -- Australia won by 97 runs
Last meeting:	March 15, 2003, Durban -- Australia won by 5 wickets

Cardiff in 2005 and at least equal Zimbabwe's 1983 triumph at Trent Bridge in the annals of stunning Australia one-day defeats, seems certain to strengthen Ponting's case.

If any match looks like being a good one for Australia to mix-up their batting order, it is surely this encounter.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Which has been the most exciting team in this World Cup so far?

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ESPN

ICC Cricket World Cup
Canada v New Zealand
Live from 10:00am

BTV/STAR Sports/
STAR Cricket
ICC Cricket World Cup
Australia v Kenya
Live from 3:00pm

TEN Action
Primera Liga
Sevilla v Barcelona
Live from 2:00am (Monday)



Bangladesh League
Ctg Abahani v Sk Jamal
Time: 3:15pm

Venue: Cox's Bazar Stadium
Abahani v Mohammedan
Time: 5:00pm

Venue: Kamalapur Stadium

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