

BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

The Importance of Staying Alive

SHAKIL KASEM

There was more than a sense of urgency in the manner that both teams went about their respective business at Chennai. England with a batsman having a name like Strauss, not improbably went on a blitzkrieg early on in the day. Smarting from their recent defeat in Chittagong and running the risk of being discarded from the tournament itself, England very much had a most obvious agenda at hand. Not leave anything to chance and do the needful under its own steam. The toss was won and batting first was a formality. The start was ideal although to no one's surprise the first wicket to fall was that of Prior.

No one in the team reached fifty, as indeed no one else did during the rest of what was an engrossing topsy-turvy day of cricket. The stakes for this match were far too high for England, as also for a few other stakeholders with prurient interest still left in the World Cup. In a match where batting should have been the key, both sides faltered in the face of some belligerent bowling and fielding throughout the day. England's knack of digging deeper and deeper holes for themselves was very much in evidence again. That in the end they actually managed to extricate themselves from the tangle they wove around them was more due to an unlikely source of off-spin, and the resurgence of calypso cricket, which we had long thought to have become extinct.

Not so. The present band of West Indians took all cricket lovers on a joyride of what West Indian batting used to be in the halcyon days of the swinging sixties and seventies. Uninhibited and carefree to the extreme, with a total disregard of what the likely implications of such an approach might be, West Indies wasted little time in surging headlong into their certain doom. For England it was a question of falling back on the basics, which was to strive manfully and try and fashion an outcome to a match of which the existential outcome was so blatantly obvious. It boiled down to the most banal of intentions, that of simple denial of anything and everything to the adversary. The name of the rest of the game was attrition, played to perfection by the English.

That in the end West Indies fell short by twenty-odd runs merely reinforced the unpredictability of this side. The traits of character long entrenched in the Caribbean psyche surfaced once again, at very much the wrong juncture of the competition. All of which is of small comfort to a Bangladesh team which is now left with the challenging task of getting past the Proteas to lay any further claim to attention in the remainder of whatever is in store for the public at large.

A 9.30am start to the game today opens up a rather lengthy issue to be addressed prior to the toss, which will have very different set of implications. The Tigers are on a roll with two back-to-back victories and are doubtless confident of their plans in place for this final day of reckoning. The Proteas have been their imposing selves throughout this competition and are likely to be brusque and certainly their hostility in pace will not be incipient. Will the Tigers' spin have a bearing on this match or will the batting ensure that it is high time for it to leave that graffiti on the wall? This group of death waits to see if there is reason still for the Tigers to stay alive.



The Tigers are lined up for the national anthem with an excited crowd in the background. This has been a common scene during the World Cup games.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

Pride in the anthem

MOHAMMAD ISAM

Some moments need not be captured, memorised without end in the corner of the mind. If it is a moment we want to forget, it keeps coming back, but sweet memories are wicker. It hardly pops up, and least of all when you need them to.

The last month or so has given us a lot to remember, moments that have less to do with cricket and more to do with our emotions. It has been chaotic mostly and yet it has made us all sit back and notice that celebrations alone don't bring out passion. Moments strung together, say a decade from now, will make sure that this World Cup will be remembered fondly, but since the opening ceremony, this cricket tournament has also given this country a chance to stand up, sing a song and then have their fingers crossed.

If you've been at the matches for even once (and went in at least 15 minutes early), you would know what it means to sing a national anthem with 25,000 people. It is clear who they support, decked in all shades of red and green, and it is hard to miss the singular heartbeat.

Standing on top of the media centre on match days, the breathtaking panoramic view takes time to register but then when the national anthems are played (first the visitors' and then the host country's), the pent up emotion is let loose.

Every Bangladeshi, from the players who line up to the journalists inside the press box to the young boys and girls who have their cheeks painted on, the beloved song *Amar Shonar Bangla* penned by the great poet Rabindranath Tagore in 1905 and later adopted as the anthem of Bangladesh in 1972, is sung exuberantly.

As the recorded piece plays quite loudly, the roar from the stands takes over. Some mouth the

words, some sing quietly but the majority sings it out loud. You also tend to gauge the emotion of the person standing next to you.

Tamim Iqbal, the Tigers vice-captain, says that he feels like he's "going to war". He makes sure he absorbs the emotion from the people he's facing during that time.

"I look at the people when the anthem is being played and one look at them and you can see how they feel when they sing the anthem," said Tamim, who like millions of children across the country, first came across the anthem during his school days.

"I recently saw a picture where a young guy was singing with such gusto. I was very touched because of his age. We usually hear that young people are not devoted enough but they sometimes can take a lot of pride in their country," he said.

Like Tamim, pacesman Shafiul Islam is reminded of his Bogra Police Line School days, a time when it was routine to sing the anthem.

"I remember my school days when we used to sing it together. Back then I never felt much about it, but now it comes from the heart and I really feel good after I sing it," he said.

Jingoism still divides opinions but somehow, during moments of unanimity, people tend to forget the divide and cricket certainly brings the country together. Freedom fighter Quazi Ziaul Islam believes that it is a refreshing change at times. "It is not played often, which is a good thing because there would've been fatigue. So it is nice that it is played during the match," he said. The first time he heard it was when the flag was first hoisted before the 1971 War of Independence.

"After that I heard it when it was recognised as the national anthem," he added, then smiled when asked how he feels when he sings it nowadays. "Of

course I feel great. I still feel the same as I did back then."

Batsman Rokibul Hasan, like his teammates, gets worked up when he stands outside to sing the anthem. "I get goosebumps when I hear it these days. I am eager to do well for the country after I hear it," he said.

"It reminds of the Independence War, how people sacrificed for us. You know, we wouldn't be able to sing an anthem if it wasn't for them. They brought it to us," said Rokibul.

For those Bangladeshis living across the globe, it brings out a number of feelings. For some it is pride but for University of Melbourne student Aritro Abedin, the reaction is quite different. "When it plays I wish I could remember all the words, but I only remember the first four or five lines. I am also not one for nationalistic pageantry and find myself a bit averse to the en masse singing of national anthems," he said.

"But mainly I feel a certain sense of guilt for not knowing all the words."

At the ground, nationalism seeps from every pore and it is a chance for the youth to express themselves since occasions for such are few and far between. Iftekhar Alam, a 22-year-old NSU student, sings it out loud like most.

"It was the first game and everyone got emotional. I am reminded of the Independence War and how we could have been singing a different anthem had there not been the War."

"So yes, it is a great feeling to be singing, and I sang out loud," he said.

Today the South Africans will sing their national anthem in five different languages -- Xhosa, Zulu, Sesotho, Afrikaans and English -- yet it does enough to unite them. We sing in Bangla and from the first word, a sort of personal pride takes over and you are carried on in the crest of a wave.

Ponting hails Akhtar

AFP, Colombo

Australia captain Ricky Ponting on Friday hailed Shoaib Akhtar, saying the Pakistani pacesman was the fastest bowler he has ever faced.

"Congratulations to him for being an outstanding cricketer," Ponting said of Akhtar who on Thursday announced he will retire after the World Cup.

"I had some great duels with Shoaib over the years. To this day I always said he is the fastest bowler I have faced in international cricket," added Ponting of Akhtar who broke the 100mph barrier in 2003.

SPORTS POLL
WEEKLY QUESTION

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BTV/ESPN
ICC Cricket World Cup Bangladesh v South Africa Live from 9:30am
English Premiership Tottenham v West Ham Live from 7:00pm
Man United v Bolton Live from 9:00pm
Everton v Fulham Live from 11:30pm
STAR Sports/ STAR Cricket
ICC Cricket World Cup Australia v Pakistan Live from 3:00pm
TEN Action+
La Liga Barcelona v Getafe Live from 1:00am (Sunday) Atletico Madrid v Real Madrid



ICC Cricket World Cup
Bangladesh v South Africa
Time: 9:30am
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National

AUSTRALIA V PAKISTAN: COLOMBO

Braced for a Pak challenge

AFP, Colombo

Australia captain Ricky Ponting is relishing the challenge of locking horns with Pakistan, the last team to beat the defending champions at a World Cup, when they meet on Saturday.

Australia have not lost a single game at the sport's showpiece since defeat to Pakistan at Leeds in the 1999 World Cup, a streak which the defending champions have stretched to 34 matches with a win over Canada on Wednesday.

Ponting admitted facing Pakistan is a stiff challenge and Australia's first real test in the tournament at which they are bidding to win a fourth consecutive title.

"It's always a great challenge playing against Pakistan because, as everybody knows, you're just never really sure what they're going to turn up and do on the day," said Ponting.

"They can be a very, very good side one day and, as we saw against New Zealand, they can be very, very ordinary the next. They have that sort of unpredictability about them."

"The last game they played in Colombo was against Sri Lanka and they upset them there so they'll know the conditions pretty well. So it will be our first big test," said Ponting.

The skipper admitted Australia's pace trio of Brett Lee, Shaun Tait and Mitchell Johnson had not been at their best so far.

"Against better teams and deeper batting orders, we have to make sure we don't let teams get off to that sort of start," said Ponting, speaking about Canada's brisk start against the Australians.

Ponting said he hoped frontline spinner Jason Krejza would benefit



Pakistan spinner Abdur Rehman (L) delivers a ball as skipper Shahid Afridi looks on during a training session at the Premadasa Stadium in Colombo yesterday. Pakistan will play their last group match against Australia today.

PHOTO: AFP

AUSTRALIA V PAKISTAN
Matches: 85
Australia wins: 52
Pakistan wins: 29
No result/Tied: 4
First meeting: June 7, 1975, Leeds - Australia won by 73 runs.
Last meeting: Jan 31, 2010, Perth - Australia won by

from his experience at the tournament so far.

"For someone like him to have that exposure, get 10 overs under his belt (against Canada) he should be better for the run," said Ponting.

The match comes after Pakistan pacesman Shoaib Akhtar Thursday announced he would retire from international cricket after the World Cup, a decision captain Shahid Afridi believes will not affect the team.

"It's his own decision but I don't think it will affect the team. We will go into the Australia match with a positive frame of mind and we know we have the capability to beat Australia and break their unbeaten run," said Afridi.

"It is a very important match for us in the tournament and will determine our position in the group, so players know they have to win the match," said Afridi, who believes the Australians are yet to peak.

"If you look at their matches, they have shown vulnerability in both batting and bowling so we have to make sure we can exploit their weaknesses and if we can do that we can win," said Afridi.

Pakistan have won three and lost four of their seven World Cup matches against Australia, including a crucial win on their way to the 1992 World Cup triumph Down Under.

Australia have made only one change in their five matches, bringing in Michael Hussey in place of younger brother David, and are expected to play the same line-up that beat Canada by seven wickets.

Pakistan may bring in Umar Akmal, who has recovered from a finger injury, for opener Ahmed Shahzad, who has disappointed so far, as the only change. They are likely to keep rusty pacesman Akhtar on the bench.

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