

PROTOTYPE HELMET UNVEILED

A British manufacturer has unveiled a new cricket helmet designed to prevent another tragic death like that of Phillip Hughes. The prototype, created by Hampshire-based company Masuri, features a clip-on "StemGuard" made of plastic and military-specification foam that protects the back of the neck. Masuri began investigating a possible redesign after Hughes' death and design consultant Alan Meeks believes the new attachment is strong enough to prevent serious injury, but light enough so as to not distract or inhibit batsmen. — INTERNET



Odd one out

BISHWAJIT ROY from Melbourne



As usual, music, colours, diversity of cultures as well as fireworks marked the opening ceremony of the 2015 cricket World Cup. It was a five-minute walk from the Melbourne Cricket Ground to the venue; the Sidney Myer Bowl and at that time many had enthusiastically said, "Oh! you were going to have some fun there."

In the end, the two and a half hour ceremony hardly produced anything spectacular in front of 10,000 people other than some fun.

In this ordinary show, the Bangladesh part too was ordinary when it came to show their identity. The program started with the official Indigenous Elders welcome and then it was turn to showcase the participating countries cultures and traditions.

All 14 participating countries displayed their tradition except Bangladesh ahead of the cricket's flagship event.

England had a beautiful "Beatles Concerto", India performed traditional "Dhating Naach", Ireland had a traditional "Siuil A Run", Pakistan put on "Jazba Junoon", Scotland their traditional music of "Scotland the Brave", "A Hundred Pipers". "Cock of the North" and "The Black Bear", South Africa came up with "Gumbo Dance", Sri Lankans danced to the music of "I Dream of you Sri Lanka", UAE sang "Khaliji", West Indies tuned in with "Lord Invader and Lionel Belasco Morey Amsterdam", Zimbabwe performed traditional "Kwayedza" and Taqi Khan sang the song of Kabul for Afghanistan.

One could easily understand the cultures and traditions of the respective countries by seeing their dresses and listening to the music, but it was hard to identify Bangladesh, whose red and green jerseys were the indication of who they were. The boys and girls, who are living here to study, wore jeans and Bangladesh jerseys and danced to the rhythm of "Cholo Bangladesh", sung by Habib Wahid, which failed to portray the rich culture of Bangladesh.

The star of the show however was a giant dubbed "The Don". The 5.5m puppet produced the defining sequence of the event. Rising to his feet while the orchestra played around him, the puppet represented cricketers around the world, taking the audience on a journey from the dressing room to the crease. The 150kg cricketer ended with a big six that sparked with the lights.



An opening ceremony is predominantly a display of one's culture and rich heritage. But what some Bangladeshi youths (above) demonstrated during the World Cup opening ceremony at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl in Melbourne yesterday hardly reflected our culture. On the contrary our South Asian neighbours (L-R) India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan lived up to their true heritage.

'Our morale is shattered'

BISHWAJIT ROY from Melbourne



Nobody knows better than Mashrafe Bin Mortaza how to cheer up the boys, especially during bad times. But even the

Bangladesh captain was looking for answers after his side's defeat to Ireland yesterday.

"We should have won the last match. It was really disappointing and I believe everybody got hurt by this defeat but we should improve quickly. We have few more days in hand before the first match and I hope everything will be okay by then, so we can play our best cricket against Afghanistan," said a dejected Mashrafe, while talking to this reporter after the opening ceremony.

"Batting is a big concern. I think boys now understand what they need to do. In my opinion we are yet to adjust to the conditions so the next five days will be important for us. We are working hard and now need to implement that in the middle," said Mashrafe, adding that it was very difficult to defend 189 runs.

He was not ready to make any excuses for the defeat, but he still believes they were yet to play with the best combination. "You see we are experimenting and trying different combinations and that was the reason in-form Riyad was given rest. We wanted to see everybody. I am hopeful that everything should be okay very soon because the players who have settled themselves in their position in last two years will play in the same position," he hoped.

Mashrafe was also looking to his big guns. "I think our best players like Shakib (Al Hasan), Mushy (Mushfiqur Rahim) are yet to give their best. I am hopeful everybody will play their part in the main tournament so that we can make our dream come true," he said.

"We proved against Pakistan that we have got the ability as we made around 250 runs against Pakistan's bowling attack, but we need to be consistent in our performances. It could have been fantastic if we could win the match against Pakistan but the defeat against Ireland definitely shattered our morale," added Mashrafe.

Et tu, Ireland!

SPORTS REPORTER



If there were any hidden fears surrounding Bangladesh's first World Cup encounter against Afghanistan they were all vividly revealed on social media yesterday, as the

Tigers went down to Ireland by four wickets in an unexpected defeat at the Blacktown Olympic Park in Sydney.

It was exactly the kind of start -- a four-match winless streak -- that Bangladesh wanted to avoid ahead of the mega event. Going down to the Irish, who were thumped by 179 runs in their first warm-up against Scotland, has also rung the warning bells with regards to Bangladesh's match against the Scots at Nelson.

Having been bowled out for just 189, it was quite obvious that it was Bangladesh's batting that spoiled the party. According to those in the stadium, the batsmen played too many shots in the air and paid the price. There weren't any demons in the wicket either; most of them fell due to wrong shot selections.

Soumya Sarkar's run-out was also a key moment in the game. The youngster, who was looking good with the bat, made the long trip back to the pavilion in the 29th over after a 51-ball 45. A few hits from the tail helped them near 200.

The bowlers, on the contrary, did well to stretch the game till the 47th over. Captain

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza led from the front with miserly figures of none for 13 in eight overs with three maidens. Even Taijul Islam, who had struggled in the earlier games, did well with figures of 2 for 29 in eight overs.

While they successfully managed to remove the top order half-way through -- the Irish were poised at 78 for 4 in 25 overs -- a gritty 63 not out from Andy Balbirnie eroded any hopes Bangladesh had of finding a win.

Earlier pacers John Mooney and Max Sorensen had taken three wickets each to run through Bangladesh's batting order.

Anamul Haque, who failed to get among the runs in the first three matches, scored a painstakingly slow 25 off 72 deliveries. Mominul Haque and Shakib Al Hasan, were both dismissed for eight while Mushfiqur Rahim (26) gave away his wicket to slow left-armer George Dockrell after settling in.

Bangladesh will travel to Canberra on Friday to prepare for their World Cup opener against Afghanistan.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH: 189 all out in 48.2 overs (Anamul 25, Soumya 45, Mushfiqur 26, Sabbir 20, Mashrafe 22; Mooney 3-32, Sorensen 3-31)

IRELAND: 190-6 in 46.5 overs (Porterfield 24, Joyce 47, Balbirnie 63 not out, K O'Brien 23; Taijul 2-29)

Result: Ireland won by 4 wickets.

MASHRAFE'S nightmare down under

SPORTS REPORTER from Melbourne



Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza endured a thoroughly bad day yesterday. If the four-wicket defeat against Ireland in the last warm-up game was not depressing enough ahead of the big challenge in the tournament proper, losing his favourite sunglass shortly afterwards made his mood more sombre.

He lost the sunglass while he was travelling from Sydney to Melbourne to attend the opening ceremony yesterday. And the first time helicopter ride was also not pleasant one for the lionhearted cricketer.

"Taking a ride in a helicopter can be exciting for people who love to see a city's icons or the beauty of natural landscapes, but it was nerve wracking for me as, honestly speaking, I got scared," said Mashrafe.

"Anyway losing the match and then losing my favourite sunglass on way to Melbourne made it abundantly clear that it was not going to be my day," he added.



It could have been easier for Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza to hide his emotions had he not lost his sunglass.

PHOTO: AFP



An Irish fan enjoys his time with his son ahead of the World Cup opening ceremony at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl in Melbourne yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

8 Pakistan players punished

AFP, Sydney

Eight Pakistan players, including maverick former captain Shahid Afridi, have been fined 300USD for breaching a team curfew ahead of their crucial World Cup game against India, sources told AFP on Thursday.

They have also been warned that a repeat offence will see them kicked out of the tournament which starts on Saturday.

The team management, headed by manager Naveed Cheema, a former military man, claimed the players arrived 45 minutes late after a night out.

"These players went with their friends for dinner but came back late," said a team source.

The players are understood to have apologised and have promised not to repeat the offence.

Pakistan play their first group game against arch-rivals and title-holders India in Adelaide on Sunday.



WORLD CUP COCKTAIL

On Khurram Khan's many previous visits to Melbourne as a flight purser, he stayed across the road from the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Khan, 43, is the captain of UAE and he deliberately avoided going into the world's largest cricket arena.

"I never walked into the stadium, because I always wanted to play there. I always thought, if I'm going into the stadium it should be to play," Khan said.

That finally came true this week.

He was practicing there on Tuesday, preparing to play for the United Arab Emirates against Australia the next day, in a warmup for the Cricket World Cup, where he will be the tournament's oldest player.

"The last couple of years have been the best in my life, since I have been playing cricket," said Khurram, who sometimes kept up his fitness by doing pushups between in-flight meal services.

Super fan spends \$6000

Adam Berry once skipped school to see one game of 1992 World Cup, now he's spent \$6000 for seven of them.

The 12-year-old sat on Lancaster Park's now long-gone concrete terraces in awe of Paddy Greatbatch smashing around Wasim Akram and Imran Khan.

He chanted, "Goodbye Australia", as

Pakistan beat New Zealand to eliminate Australia from the tournament.

Those halcyon days gave Mr Berry a life-long passion for the nation's summer game. And so when it was announced that New Zealand would co-host with Australia the ICC Cricket World Cup 2015 tournament, the now 35-year-old vowed to be there.

The self-confessed "cricketing tragic" has tickets to seven matches.

"It just had to be done," Mr Berry said.

Clarke out of opener



Australia captain Michael Clarke was Thursday ruled out of Australia's World Cup opener against rivals England after battling to fully shake off his hamstring problems.

Coach Darren Lehmann confirmed that Clarke would not play at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Saturday but should feature in Australia's second game against Bangladesh in Brisbane on February 21.

"He's not playing Saturday," said Lehmann. "We're really happy with his progress. We're going to stick with the plan and he's going to play against Bangladesh." -- COMPILED

Scots lose narrowly to WI

AFP, Sydney

West Indies narrowly avoided an embarrassing World Cup warm-up defeat at the hands of minnows Scotland on Thursday, just hanging on to claim a three-run win.

The West Indies were mauled by nine wickets by England in their last warm-up but looked on course for a comfortable afternoon against the Scots when they piled-up 313-9 in 50 overs.

Despite losing Chris Gayle and Marlon Samuels for one run between them, the Caribbean side then saw Denesh Ramdin (88) and Lendl Simmons (55).

SCORES IN BRIEF

WEST INDIES: 313 for 9 in 50 overs (Smith 45, Bravo 43, Ramdin 88, Simmons 55, Sammy 36; Evans 3-63, Davey 2-55)

SCOTLAND: 310 for 9 in 50 overs (Coetzer 96, Berrington 66, Coleman 34, Cross 39; Roach 2-59, Russell 2-32, Benn 2-47)

Result: West Indies won by 3 runs.