

ICC TROPHY – THE INDIAN CHANCES AND ANALYSIS

The ICC trophy begins with India not in the best of colors. There is no Tendulkar, Sehwag undergoing a severe loss of form, bowlers not performing consistently, in a nutshell the team India appears to be an ailing unit with twinkling stars.

It is believed to be one of the strongest team, there is little respect that India commands at the start of the ICC Champions Trophy. A serious threat to the archrival Pakistan is a far cry, chances of emerging champions are very bleak indeed.

One can not hope much with India's current streak of poor display. However, India can still pull a string or two if they play as a unit. Everyone must understand and adopt to their assigned roles in the coming fortnight.

If India want to eat the cake they must discipline themselves a bit, take a couple of hard decisions, and never say die before the match is really over.

What the cricket doctor has to suggest. Well, if the job was assigned to me I would stick to a game plan that suits India most. They emerged as a strong side since Dravid took up the role of Keeper. I would prefer to stick to that plan though it would be injustice to the

talented Kartik. Harbhajan, Pathan and even Nehra (if he could keep himself fit) have proved to be different bowlers on English wickets.

The Indian batsman might not have performed all at the same time. Sehwag and Dravid have donned the Indian batting when Sachin and Saurav failed. Kaif and Yuvraj also pulled up a victory or two from the jaws of defeat.

The Indian pace bowling options had never been so rewarding as in the last one year, that India could win some games despite failure of frontline bowlers. Kumble not proving what his figures and potential suggest, Harbhajan, not fit and not doing justice when actually fit. The ability of Sehwag and Yuvraj to perform cameos with their kind of spin, has been an upside of Indian bowling. Alas, has not yet been exploited enough by the Skipper.

The strong point in favour of India is the presence of Kaif and Yuvraj in the field. Together they save not less than fifty to sixty runs. Sehwag and few others have supported well.

Few cautions: one can not take the Kenya lightly, Pakistan are on path to regain their old vigour, and all the teams are

almost equal barring the minnows Kenya, US, and Bangladesh.

India should open with Sehwag and Ganguly, with the suggestion to feel free to play their natural game. Dravid, Kaif and Yuvraj should make up the top five batsman in the side. Dinesh Kartik has done extremely well to retain his cap, should atleast be played against Kenya. Pathan, Harbhajan and Nehra select themselves. The two slots could be filled depending on the needs of the hour. Kumble could be preferred in the semifinal.

If India makes it to the final India would be required to field their more experienced batting and bowling lineup. However, one honest and humble suggestion or rather request to the skipper - If Sehwag and Yuvraj can perform with the ball does it mean that they should be handed the ball at the toughest moments of the match or not at all and abruptly discontinued despite good effort (economical) is not wright either. If main bowlers do not get their quota in one or two matches it is no crime. Judge the situation and make bowling changes accordingly. Set pattern of captaincy is not always the best path to victory. The expectations are that Australia, South Africa, India and England would top their

pools. Of course, Pakistan, Srilanka, West Indies and even Zimbabwe could give the semifinalists a run for their money. What appears to be good about this tournament is that the archrivals India-Pakistan, Australia-Newzealand and South Africa- West Indies make up three of the four possible pools. Any of the three teams of the fourth pool could qualify for the semifinals.

If it is a fair tournament based on current strengths, it could well be an India versus Australia final. Australia have had enough of their HIGH it could well be grounded this time. However, if England and not Australia qualify, it will be rather tough for India.

This could well be the tournament of Andrew Flintoff, Dravid, Harmison, Pathan, Muralidhran and team Australia. Of course Akhtar, Lara, Sehwag, Sangkara, Gibbs and team Zimbabwe could all prove to be the worldbeaters on a given day.

I am afraid Ravi, you have unknowingly erred. I read in one column that you said there is only a remote possibility of an India- Pakistan final. I believe this is not true, there is absolutely no such possibility. Either India or Pakistan goes into semifinal if I have understood the schedule well.