

Peru Juniors' Fantastic Sixes

A *Cricket Peru* junior team delighted onlookers at *Lima Cricket & Football Club* on 26 April, 2015 with a surprise third-place finish in the men's Fantasy Sixes tournament.

The inclusion of a development side, placed outside the usual auction process, represented the biggest twist to the 2015 edition of the traditional end of season gala.

The side was afforded one important concession - they were allowed to top up their squad with *Cricket Peru's* Head of Development, Steve Hallett, and stalwart junior coach, John Bell. Neither has qualified as a junior since days of yore.

Drawn in the group stage alongside Lawrence Hill and Chris Emmott's teams - both pre-tournament favourites - few gave the side much chance of beating the odds.

And Lawrence Hill's 'Black Craps' did see off the Juniors, somewhat cruelly named 'Wallett's Young Boys', in the group opener. Bowling first, Young Boys allowed no one to get away, but let themselves down with regular wides to concede a score of 55.

In response, Juniors' opener, Joaquin Salazar batted with both resolve and occasional flair for an unbeaten 26. Diego De La Puente also endured to the final over for his 15, before being bowled by a deceptively speedy Praveen.

They ultimately fell 14 runs short, to win respectability, if not glory.

But Young Boys more than lifted for their meeting with Emmott's side - producing the upset of the tournament in their second game. De La Puente and Salazar were again key. They batted out all but the final balls in the first inning, and scored all juniors' runs off the bat, in a final score of 52.

From there, it took a fantastic all round performance to see off the favourites. Billy Halstead bagged two wickets with his whippy pace, including the prize of ex-Peru captain, Miles Buesst, caught behind.

De La Puente, Christian Cannock, and Salazar all got a wicket of their own. The collective effort was enough to seal the win - Emmott's men all out for 44.

But the defeated side proceeded to stage their own comeback. They edged Black Craps by 9 runs in the final group game, leaving all teams level on one win.

It took a confusing, much-delayed, but ultimately celebrated edict from *Cricket Peru* President Harry Hildebrand to determine that Black Craps would go through as winners, with Young Boys just edging out Emmott's side as group runners-up.

Young Boys had won universal praise in navigating their way out of the group, though faced a tough assignment from all-Indian franchise Youngistan the semi final. Batting first, Juniors were forced to navigate Youngistan's fast bowling armada. Whilst they were far from out of their depth, a lowish score of 37 always looked vulnerable.

Youngistan's big hitters ensured the story would end at the semi final stage - chasing down the total in the third over and losing only Jaghit Kalsi on the way.

There was to be no fairytale, then. But Juniors still walked away with third place, more than a little pride, and thoroughly enhanced reputations all around. And neither Hallett nor Bell proved a star turn amongst their up-and-coming teammates.

Looking ahead, the national team has, of course, traditionally leaned heavily on short to mid-term import players. But this Sixes performance suggests the future is certainly bright and, perhaps no less importantly, more Peruvian than ever.

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30 April 2015