

Sixes bring Twists, Turns, and plentiful Tonk to Lima

The 2015 Cricket Peru Fantasy Sixes more than lived up to its reputation on Sunday - the single day tournament bringing big hits, upsets, and one very sorry looking car to Magdalena del Mar.

The traditional season closer employed a familiar format. Six teams faced off in two groups of three. Group winners then played the runner up of the alternate group in semi finals, with the winners proceeding to the decider. With just six players per team and five overs per innings, and an unforgiving three runs for wides and no balls, no quarter was offered to bowlers.

And of course, Cricket Peru's 'best and brightest' were auctioned off by nominated franchise heads in a million dollar fantasy auction before the big day. Only Steve Hallett was able to field a predetermined side, comprised of a junior squad and fellow cricketing sage John Bell.

Lawrence Hill's 'Black Craps' and Chris Emmott's unmentionable franchise, rechristened 'The Fat Gentlemen' here, were hotly favoured in pre-Sixes banter. They were drawn together in Group A alongside Hallett's development squad, expected to provide scant competition to the big guns.

The Black Craps did see off the development side - titled, no less unfortunately, 'Wallet's Young Boys' - in the Group A opener. The juniors leaked sundries in the first innings, and fell 14 runs short of the 55 set for them.

But Young Boys more than rallied, producing the upset of the tournament in match 2. Openers Diego de la Puente and Joaquin Salazar set Fat Gentlemen an impressive 52, before a fantastic team performance in the field had Gentlemen all out for 44.

Gentlemen were bruised - their egos looking particularly black and blue - but certainly not beaten. They staged their own comeback to edge the Black Craps by 9 runs in match 3, leaving all Group A teams level on one win.

It took an edict from Cricket Peru President Harry Hildebrand, contested by many and understood by none, to determine that Black Craps would go through as winners, with Young Boys runners up. Fat Gentlemen had shockingly fallen at the first hurdle, with only their Pilsens and novelty hats to console them.

Group B provided a more definite hierarchy, though equally silly attire. Henry Harris' 'Cobras' made a strong impression early with their matching, bikey style uniforms and coordinated hisses.

Atif's 'Youngistan' turned far more heads on the field. Batting first in both group games, they set Cobras a colossal 95, and Gary Sargent's 'Go the Red' 66. Openers Ismael and Jaghit Kalsi were nothing less than brutal with the bat on each occasion, and neither opponent seriously tested Youngistan in the chase.

That said, Go the Red was scarcely less gentle with Cobras in what turned out to be the battle for second. Wickets to Sonu, Alex James, and Tom Mortimer in the opening three overs had Cobras reeling early. They finished all out for 22; Sonu and James needed just 12 balls to ease Red to a winning score.

An early and not entirely undesired trip to the bar for Cobras, then, and onto the semi finals.

Young Boys won universal praise in navigating their way out of the group, though faced a tough assignment from Youngistan in semi final 1. Batting first, they did well to navigate Youngistan's fast bowling mostly unscathed, but a score of 37 always looked vulnerable. Kalsi was merciless in response, sending three sixes out of the ground en route to a comfortable win for Youngistan. One six made a stopover on the roof of a four wheel drive - another outright shattered the windscreen of a poorly positioned hatchback.

The second semi final proved a more cagey affair. Go the Red lost just one wicket in their five overs, but failed to punish any Black Craps bowler. Their 36 would take some defending. In the end, some very stingy bowling saw Red take the game to the last over. But Ian 'Body' Roughton's cool sweep for four had Black Craps home with three balls to spare.

Despite flying under the pre-tournament radar, Youngistan's three crushing wins had them firmly established as favourites for the final.

They seemed to vindicate that with 64 in the first innings of the decider. Kalsi was again amongst it, sending another delivery onto the street in the midst of a pulsating 6-6-4 sequence of boundaries.

Few gave the Black Craps much chance in the chase. But this format breeds upsets, and the moment of the tournament had not arrived just yet. Efficient all day with the ball, Praveen stood tall as opening bat when Black Craps needed it most. He scored from every ball he faced, and was only forced off retired for 30. Most telling was the first delivery of the final over - the last he faced. Needing 17 to win, he calmly sent a front foot no ball from Kalsi - so good besides - across his pads for six. In other words, a nine run shot, still the full over to come, and the game squarely on its head in just a single moment. Body stepped in to play the Faulkner role once again, mopping up the remaining runs and sealing a come from behind triumph for the Black Craps.

Praveen was also seen collecting a Player of The Tournament medal in the frenetic celebrations, overseen by the oddly voluptuous winners' trophy, that followed.

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