

**Tacna Tour, Sat 13<sup>th</sup> & Sun 14<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2010**  
**by Julian Walter**

As the *Lima Llamas* girded their loins for the rigours of high-performance cricket against the *Tacna Tigers*, realization dawned that this may be the first time inter-provincial cricket had ever been played in Peru, outside of Lima. The venue was Tacna on Peru's southern border with Chile, a place that has been at the centre of many a dispute between the two countries, usually with Peru coming off second best.

Tacna is known by most expats in Peru as the place you go to get your tourist visa extended by crossing the border into Chile and then coming back again.

It is known by most Limeños for the *Zona Franca* (Duty Free Zone), where you can buy second-hand cars from Japan at knock-down prices. The snag is that the steering wheel has to be moved from right to left, making it a nightmare to work out which way your indicators actually indicate or how on earth the electric window works, assuming you can find the button.

Tacna is also a popular destination for Chilean medical tourists: 6,000 a weekend at the last count. In fact, Peru is well-known as the place for excellent dentistry and opticians at bargain-basement prices.

We cricketers knew it as a place where there are a few Pakistanis who are handy with bat and ball, mostly employed in the second-hand car industry (see above), and who have been coming to play against Lima, often with their Indian cohorts, every year since records officially began 12 years ago.

So it was with not-a-little excitement that the merry crew headed down south, made up of the following:

Miles Buesst (Captain)  
Chris Hodgson (Tour Manager)  
Harry Hildebrand (*Cricket Peru* President)  
Rob Champion  
Peter Biese,  
Tony Sanford  
Julian Walter  
Sergio Aparco  
Tim Nicholls  
Vishal Vadya (*Cricket Peru* Development Officer)  
Spencer Bailey  
Hiro Hiralal  
Juliet Solomon (*Cricket Peru* Scorer)

On Saturday morning, we boarded the bus to Tacna's Zona Franca, where the 'Tape-Ball Test' was to take place. Not since Faucett's 1898 expedition to the Amazon had such a

motley band of brothers headed off into the unknown with such an unusual assortment of skills tucked into their trousers!

We arrived at the pitch, which was more like car park than a pitch as such, and not a very oval-looking car park at that; more of a road really. But, to be fair, a wide road with yellow kerbs to indicate the long-on and long-off boundaries, as well as shrubby areas, complete with a resident sheep to keep the grass short, to the leg and off. Behind third man was a car park with endless rows of Corollas (Toyota taxis-in-waiting) poised to create more gridlock in Lima. Behind to leg was a warehouse.

Various local rules had to be explained: anything into the Corollas was a dead ball and anything into the warehouse would be bowled again also. Yellow kerb and over was a 6 and an imaginary line to the mid-off and midwicket areas made up the remaining boundaries.

The Tacnites (not to be confused with the 'Tacnashites') had parked their high-rolling Mitsubishi's and Nissans in that menacing Essex-boy fashion, which meant if the ball went that way it would be quite annoying to retrieve the ball from under the car. There was no LBW (that confused a fair number of us at first), which made it good policy to stand squarely in front of your stumps at all times. No leg byes either. The wickets closely resembled my old school radiators, which you would touch in the madly optimistic hope that they were actually on during the coldest winter nights. They were also at least 50% wider than normal wickets. Innings were eight overs with bowlers permitted up to two overs each. The wicket offered little for our spinners to work with and the tape ball moved rather predictably, neither swinging nor dipping. The wicket also had a ridiculous camber which provoked much discussion amongst the Limeños as to where the ball should be pitched (pre or post camber?).

On to the action. We were informed that an average score was 90 to 100 runs off eight overs. Tacna got off to a flyer largely thanks to Amir. He came in to face Tony Sanford, who was feeling pretty good about the world, having bowled a dot ball and taken a wicket, with his first two deliveries. The next four balls were 6, 6, 6 and 6, in that order. After managing to contain them to 110 odd, we scratched about with bats akin to the ones Matthew Hayden is making popular in the IPL. Distant relatives several times removed of oars would be a more apt term. Miles, our regal skip, made a golden duck - and promptly went and chucked up in a bush. Tim got something whose chemical sign is Au and goes quack. We were rubbish.

In fact, we were really rubbish in all three games and were literally taken apart by a team who knew their road better than they knew the insides of their palms! Their only hiccup came in the final match when we had managed score 68 odd and then had them at 2 for 3 after Vishy had dismissed what was probably their batting order in reverse ... except for the player who had demolished Tony in the first match and whose foot had finally failed to stop the ball hitting the stumps. However, after a bit more projectile vomiting from Miles, the Hulk arrived and promptly smacked us all over the [car]park (yours truly's over went for 20 odd) allowing Tacna to consolidate their third win. Tim Nicholls should also be mentioned in dispatches for making 24 and 40 odd in thongs...

You might think that Lima would be dejected; but no, we were joyous for a number of reasons: first, Hiro had scored some beers, though strangely Miles was not imbibing; second, we were playing cricket outside of Lima for the first time; and, third, we were away from Lima where the grey and damp rather gets to you after a while. The oppo on the other hand seemed a bit miffed we weren't the least bit put out by the shellacking we had just received. Ah, it was all about the camber and, as Hodgson said, "This was no place for sheep."

Options afterwards were a massage, medicinal pisco sours, or a kip, prior to dinner at one of our gracious hosts' houses. 10% opted for the massage, 30% for pisco, 30% kip, and the other 20% still hadn't arrived from Lima. After a delicious barbecue, and once the whole tour party was together, most of us headed into Tacna keen to (re)try the nightlife. Let's just say: mistakes were made.

So, after an eventful Saturday night, the big day rolled around and we set off at 10am on Sunday morning to the *Jorge Basadre National Stadium*, to the supposedly 2,000 odd adoring fans, the mayor, the local Minister for Sport and other local dignitaries. When we got there it was bloody hot and there were certainly not 2,000 people but, short of one of the big cricket playing nations, are you ever going to get such a big crowd? In fairness there were about 300 fans that came to spectate at different times during the day. This included the players themselves.

After quite a lot of dignitary glad-handling, such as special photos of both teams, teams together, teams apart, 25 different photos of the mayor with various members of both Lima and Tacna Communities, photos with team WAGs, photos with team mascots, we eventually went out to look at the mat that had been laid out in the middle of the pitch. Mattress companies would have been proud of the softness of the wicket. But hey-ho we were here in Tacna and playing cricket.

A quick motivational speech from Miles, who had now recovered somewhat from Friday evening's shenanigans, and has finally turned his losing toss streak around (3 wins out of 4), and after throwing the first ball to the mayor to hit, we got underway. Chris and Harry opened and it was not pretty. Due to the slowness of the pitch our boys found it even harder than usual to time the ball. When the ball was hit in the outfield it rarely travelled along the ground further than ten yards, aerial attack was very dicey as hitting the ball into the air required Bradmanesque timing. So the net result: most of our boys got out either giving catching practice to the ring of fielders around the bat or playing and missing.

Vishal Vadya held us afloat. Prior to him coming in we were worrying about whether Tacna could actually finish us off in one over! Vishy managed to score 32 valuable runs.

After marching to 88 runs and a quick turnaround, we managed to get a couple of breakthroughs but our score was never enough and they achieved the target in 20 odd overs. It was pretty disheartening because if we had managed to score another 40 odd runs

we may have had enough to play with as it was such a difficult wicket. But that's life and we'll never know!

Speeches followed, Harry avoided his Fidel Castro style overtures and once again thanked all the Tacnites for having us and hoping that this was the beginning of something great for Peru.

Chicken and rice, and exchange of shirts later, we were on the minibus back to the centre of town to wait four hours until our flight back to Lima. These four hours were what a cricket tour is all about. With pisco sours in hand and exhausted after putting our bodies and minds through the ringer, we dissected life. The level of conversation hit rock bottom fairly quickly!

In summary what did we learn from going to Tacna?

- That we weren't very good at playing tapeball in the Zona Franca.
- Miles Buesst, nor many of us, are young men anymore and Cuba Libre and beer don't mix.
- Chris Hodgson doesn't need a clipboard.
- Spencer Bayly is a Berserker in disguise.
- Harry Hildebrand could be a stand up comedian, if he wanted to be.
- Rob Champion smiled for the whole weekend.
- Juliet Solomon was admirable in all she did.
- Julian Walter is no longer Peter's master.
- Tony Sanford did brilliantly with his entire family there.
- Tim Nicholls and Vishy returned with their heads held up with pride to Lima.
- Sergio Aparco was a Peruvian stalwart.
- We could have done with a few other better players.
- This is a perfect remedy for a hangover: bottle of Inca Cola, mixed fruit juice, coffee, ham and eggs, dry toast and two ibuprofen.
- We didn't practice enough.
- A great tradition has been started.
- They need a better pitch.
- We need to invent our own version of crazy cricket and thrash Tacna at it!

Extracted from Julian Walter's Peruvian cricket blog: <http://perucricket.blogspot.com>