

The Canal Annals. Central American Championship, Panama City, March 2015

By Ian Roughton

Under the captaincy of teenage prodigy, Nick 'Babe' Myers, hopes were high of a strong showing as Peru sent a powerful squad to Panama. The relative youth of Spry (37) and Soulsby (36) was nicely balanced by the experience of Sanford (53) De Witt (52) and 300 (300).

Placed in the 'group of death' along with The MCC, Brazil and Panama A, this gave us the chance to retake the Amistad Cup, with many of the squad still smarting from the defeat in Colombia back in October. De Wit and Sanford were also looking to avenge the defeat by Pelham-Warner's MCC side in 1927.

Day One.

The ground was on an old US Army base ... and the outfield looked like it had recently been used for bombing practice. A more serious problem arose when tour manager Hallett informed us that it was a 'dry' ground, and the hosts might be offended if we drank. The kit bag was duly emptied of kit and filled with beer from a local petrol station.

The MCC batted first and made 200. Peruvian highlights were limited to Matthew Spry's near hat-trick and figures of 3 for 23 off 4.

In reply we were all out for 81. The only bright spots for us were debutant Emmott's first ball six – for which he won an MCC Spirit of Cricket t-shirt – and the MCC Tugger-in-Chief ("I've bowled Michael Vaughan, both Waugh's" etc.) going for 25 off his 2 overs.

Spry was awarded the prized 'Llama of the Match' Cap, and we settled down to an afternoon of rehydration, watching Brazil get humped by Panama A – the highlight being Nick Jones' golden duck.

Day Two

The Amistad Cup. The ... big ... one.

Under the glare of the world's press, the Spork was placed back in the holy Thermos of Santiago, and these two giants of South American cricket took to the field.

Tight bowling from James and Sandford saw The Brazilians start slowly. James had Caisley caught on 8; and then Soulsby caught Featherstone on the midwicket boundary. We'd got half way across the field to congratulate him, before we realized his celebration was actually a 'six' signal. He went on to make 59.

The Brazilian lower order struggled; Jones' fine form continued, lbw to Roughton for 3, and Rick Avery was clean bowled off what he insisted was a 'wide' and an 'inside edge' ... and I refer to as 'The Ball of the Century'. They finished on 141 for 7.

Peru started strongly with Wallet and Soulsby looking set for the day, but a fine spell of bowling from Freddy Brunt saw quick wickets fall and Peru looked to be in trouble.

Enter Buesst. No doubt due to his session with the team psychologist the night before, he brought his Kiteflyer batting onto the international stage. Ably assisted by the gazelle-like sprinting of Dave Chaplin at the other end, he saw us home with three balls to spare. Buesst ended up with 35 not out and The Cap. 300 had a long lie-down.

The much-maligned Panamanian lager was transformed by being drunk from the Thermos; Pisco was passed around the bus; and a recovering 300 bought a round of cigars in a lovely little bar we found 200 yards from the hotel. I'm still not sure how it took me 2 hours to walk those 200 yards home, but I was glowing with pride to see Emmott lying face down in the lobby on my eventual return.

Day Three

Having taken no chances with hydration issues before Saturday's two matches in 35 degree heat, it was a slightly disheveled-looking Peru side who took the field against Panama A. After his 12th man heroics of the day before, there was no sign of Emmott.

Thankfully we batted first. And pretty well, considering. Fine knocks from Soulsby (39), Myers (29) and Buesst (35) saw us make a respectable 146.

Panama A started strongly and raced to 90-odd from the first 10 overs, with Big Lad making a quick 51, before being brilliantly stumped by Wallet, standing up to Alex James.

Gradually, a rapidly sobering up Peru began to claw their way back into the game. Tight bowling from Sargent (1 for 6 off 2), Roughton (2 for 4 off 2) and The Frampton Strangler, Matthew Spry, (1 for 6 off 4) saw doubt creep into Panamanian minds and hope soar in the hearts of Peruvians everywhere.

Alas, it wasn't to be. They needed 8 off the last over and they got them. A very disappointed Peru side trudged back to the tent to prepare for Costa Rica.

After winning or losing the toss, we went out to bat. Soulsby (31) Myers (26) and James (19) were the only batsman to make double figures, as an exhausted Peru limped past 100. A one bounce four over mid-wicket from Sanford off the last ball raised spirits, though, as did a bearded Mexican with a bottle of Mescal, and we finished on 111.

In reply, a limping James bowled with great hostility, roared on by an angry Wallet "That's it, right in his face!"; and Sanford was his usual accurate self, picking up a couple of wickets.

The captain, who later confessed to having suffered a blackout and tunnel vision during this stage of the match, marshalled his lame fielders superbly, and the Costa Ricans edged slowly towards their target.

At about 60 for 2 off 10 the game was in the balance. Myers brought Spry on and, perhaps feeling the after effects of the blackout, Roughton at the other end. Spry was his metronomic self and picked up a couple of wickets for sod all. That left what we were starting to realize was rather a long tail to try and hit the runs at the other end.

Miles took a good catch at midwicket, two batsmen ran themselves out fleeing to the safety of the non-striker's end (a great diving stop from Matt O'Connor needs mentioning) and one was bowled offering no stroke.

Nine wickets down and 20 runs short, their number 3 finally got back on strike after having been a helpless spectator at the other end for the previous couple of overs. He duly edged the first ball of the over to Wallet and we finished on a high.

Roughton took The Cap after the Costa Rican tail made him look unplayable.

We headed back to the hotel for the newly traditional end-of-tour box-drinking session by the pool - with entertainment provided by the James and Sargent marching band – and then out to the Old Town.

Day Four

A cracking final saw Panama beat the MCC, but you can read about that elsewhere.

Player Ratings

Mike Soulsby 91 runs, avg. 23.

His return from retirement shocked the cricketing world, and sent Hodgson scurrying to Manhattan to see his shrink. Would have got 'Husband of the Year' were it not for Emmott. Left a 6-week-old baby at home, sacked the nanny and got on the plane.

A complete and utter anchor of the Peruvian innings, despite playing almost no cricket in the last year or so. Also a great roommate whose wash bag saved the hotel a fortune on the toiletries I'd have stolen.

Steve Hallett 46 runs, avg. 12

As tour manager he led from the front, taking five hours to check into the hotel. Great batting against Brazil, great keeping throughout, and his rage at the Costa Ricans was surely a factor in their headless charging to the non-striker's end.

Nick Myers 79 runs, avg. 20

In a team of old men, he was the teenage prodigy of the team. Led the team superbly on and off the pitch. Obviously sick of wearing the hat, he bowled like a cunt.

Miles Buesst 86 runs avg. 25 2 wickets for 119 off 14 overs

After promising so much, finally came good with the bat. Great death batting against the Brazilians and a good knock against Panama A. His usual entertaining self off the pitch. Bowled shite.

Ian Roughton 28 runs avg. 7 7 wickets for 43 off 8.1 overs

Was looking set for a huge innings against the MCC when he was run out by Buesst. Generously let Soulsby get a good night's sleep on the Friday by only spending 2 hours in the room, after getting lost crossing the road. Cleared up the Costa Rican tail.

Alex James 38 runs avg. 13 3 wickets for 103 off 16 overs

Flew out on his wedding anniversary, after spending the previous night getting pissed with James Blunt. Fantastically aggressive bowling throughout (roared on by Wallet), valuable runs against Panama and Costa Rica, a marching display round the pool, and generously

lent me his (prescription) sunglasses to field in. Kept going to the end on one leg and, mercifully, didn't bring any 60% rum with him.

Gary Sargent 6 runs avg. 2 1 wicket for 6 off 2 overs (wides not recorded)

A man to stand up and take responsibility, rather than rely on others to do the job for him, he stood in a field and bollocked himself for three days. Great marching, and mentoring of promising youngster Matt O'Connor.

Hans De Wit 1 run avg. 0.5

As is often the case, the figures don't tell the full story of what this five-star legend brings to the team. A huge barrier in the field, stood at point against Brazil like a King Penguin guarding his young. Rock solid under the high ball. So solid there were those of us who feared he'd nodded off against Brazil.

Dave Chaplin 11 runs not dismissed

Undefeated. A fantastic partnership with Miles to win the game against Brazil. Some great 12th manning, bought a round of cigars, had a great beard and even found time to help the disadvantaged youth of Panama City. A great tour all round.

Matthew Spry 6 runs avg. 3 8 wickets for 61 off 16 overs

The Frampton Strangler. Bowled superbly. Deserved more wickets. And claimed them. Drank well, was as entertaining as ever, and is one of the few men to have worn a cape and an MCC blazer on the same night.

Tony Sanford 5 runs, not dismissed 5 wickets for 89 off 13.3 overs

Despite being unable to avenge the defeat to Pelham-Warner's MCC, got over his disappointment to open the bowling superbly. Fielded with his usual intensity and raised spirits with his last ball 4 against Costa Rica. Was reportedly seen wearing a pair of trousers at the MCC's hotel - although we await photographic evidence.

Matthew O'Connor 0 runs avg. 0

A hugely successful debut from Peruvian Cricket's first American. Great fielding throughout, including the champagne moment against Costa Rica, and some top 12th manny, too. Also managed to fit in about 15 dates.

Chris Emmott 10 runs avg. 10

Many doubted he could make the step up, after years in the cricketing backwater of Chile, but he looks to have nailed down the 12th man spot for the SAC in Santiago. I'm sure the

sight of Emmott dragging his own bodyweight in lager back from the petrol station was what inspired Miles and 300 to get us over the line against Brazil. On the field, he hit a six from his first ball against the MCC. That was pretty much it.

Having spent tens of thousands of dollars on fertility treatment, Chris brought his wife on tour to take advantage of the 'window'. He then spent every night out drinking with the team until 3 in the morning. He is available for financial advice.