

The day Sri Lanka Cricket hit peak form...

Flashback

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- Aravinda classic 107 not out and is named 'Man of the Match'
- Favourites Australia beaten by 7 wickets

SRI LANKANS TRANSFORMED INTO ONE-DAY KINGS



Celebration time... Sri Lanka skipper Arjuna Ranatunga and Vice captain Aravinda De Silva hug each other and other team members led by Muttiah Muralithan display their joy when Sri Lanka beat Australia by 7 wickets to win the World Cup at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore on that memorable night - March 17, 1996

LAHORE, Pakistan, March 17 (Reuter) - SRI LANKA completed their stunning transformation from cricketing outcasts to one-day world champions on Sunday by crushing favourites Australia in a final which underlined the game's shifting balance of power.

The Sri Lankans, ignoring the history books which dictated the only way to win a World Cup final was to bat first, cruised past Australia's total of 241 for seven in 50 overs with 22 balls and seven wickets to spare.

After months dominated by civil war, bombs and forfeited matches, not to mention allegations of ball-tampering and a "chucking" controversy, it was a triumph no-one could begrudge the island nation and few previous champions can have felt such a sense of satisfaction.

"This is one of the best times in my whole life," said captain Arjuna Ranatunga, who hit the winning runs and shared an unbroken fourth wicket stand of 97 with century-maker and man-of-the-match Aravinda de Silva.

"I think it has done a lot for the country. We just wanted to win, whether it was Australia or England or whoever," he added.

Manager Dulcep Mendis, who like Ranatunga has been associated with Sri Lankan cricket since the team was granted test match status 15 years ago, was similarly euphoric.

"I have dreamt about it but now it has become a reality," he said, having seen his team join previous winners West Indies, India, Australia and Pakistan as one-day cricket's undisputed kings.

After their stormy recent tour of Australia, when off-spinner Muttiah Muralitharan was no-balled for throwing and relations between the two sides became increasingly strained, the result could hardly have been sweeter for Ranatunga's men.

Australian captain Mark Taylor admitted his team were "outplayed" in every department, not least in the field where half-a-dozen chances of varying difficulty went begging.

● Good chance

Asanka Gurusinha had at least three escapes on the way to 65, but de Silva's 107 not out from just 114 balls was a superb effort which Ranatunga described as "one of the best innings I've ever seen."

"When we won the toss we thought we had a very good chance if we could keep them to 250 or 260," added the captain. "I'm not a person who looks at history and we knew we could win batting second."

Ranatunga said there had been "one or two minor incidents" out in the middle, but otherwise claimed the match had been conducted in a reasonable spirit in the wake of Australia's decision not to play their group game in Colombo last month because of safety fears.

"We are brought up in a different way in our culture. We don't take revenge from anyone," he said, adding he hoped Australia would fulfil their commitment to tour Sri Lanka in August.

Taylor was more guarded, preferring to look ahead to three months holiday away from cricket. "We'll have to wait and see. I'm not going to make any comment on that at the moment," he said.

When Australia review a match which was threatened by rain before the start and marked by floodlight failure during the mid-innings break, their captain's 74 from 83 balls will stand out in an otherwise ordinary display.

● Warne blasted

Shane Warne, hindered by a greasy ball, disappeared for 58 runs in his 10 overs after watching the gentle off-spin of de Silva snare three wickets for 42, and many of his team mates also failed to rise to the occasion.

Stuart Law was guilty of the most glaring dropped catch, fumbling a skier from Gurusinha when the batsman had made 53, and the combined experience of over 1,000 one-day international appearances in the Sri Lankan order did the rest.

They needed 95 off the last 20 overs, then 51 off the last 10 and in the end reached their target with ease to ensure it was Ranatunga who collected the trophy from Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.

The Sri Lankan lap of honour had to be abandoned because of the number of fans who forced their way onto the ground, and heavy rain ironically began to fall within moments of the final delivery.

Among those in the official attendance of 28,500 at the Gaddafi Stadium were Imran Khan and Mick Jagger, two men who know all about playing to an audience. Australia could get no satisfaction, but for Sri Lanka the result could easily be described as Emotional Rescue.

Key moments in Cup final

LAHORE, Pakistan, March 17 (AFP) - KEY MOMENTS during the World Cup final between Sri Lanka and Australia here on Sunday:

● Sri Lankan captain Arjuna Ranatunga elects to field despite knowing that no team batting second has won the previous five World Cups.

● Australia's in-form batsman Mark Waugh makes 12 before flicking Chaminda Vaas uppishly to square-leg where Sanath Jayasuriya makes no mistake.

● Mark Taylor and Ricky Ponting add 101 for the second wicket before the Australian skipper is snapped up by Jayasuriya at square leg off Aravinda De Silva.

● De Silva catches Steve Waugh and Stuart Law and clean bowls Ian Healy as Australian lose six wickets for 58 runs to be reduced to 205 for seven by the 45th over.

● Michael Bevan makes an unbeaten 36 as he and Paul Reiffel put on 32 in the last five overs.

● Jayasuriya falls victim to a close run out decision in

the second over, and Romesh Kaluwitharna goes in the sixth over - for edging a ball off Damien Fleming.

● New batsman Asanka Gurusinha survives a first-ball shooter from Fleming which takes the edge and misses both the stumps and a diving Healy. In the fifth over, Gurusinha escaped being run out as Michael Bevan's throw just eludes the wickets at the non-striker's end.

● De Silva is missed by wicket-keeper Ian Healy off Mark Waugh before he had settled in. The batsman goes on to make an unbeaten 107.

● Gurusinha is dropped twice by Fleming and Stuart Law during his 125-run stand with De Silva for the third wicket.

● Ranatunga guides the second ball of the 47th over to the third man fence to bring up Sri Lanka's maiden World Cup triumph. Light rain falls on the Gaddafi stadium soon after the match.