

All's not well with Team India

It seems that old habits die hard as India once again snatched defeat from the jaws of victory in its second match against the Sri Lankans in the ongoing four match series in Rajkot.

The men in blue virtually handed the match to the Lankans with what could be best described as a ridiculous performance. Starting off strong the Indians were at one point cruising to an inevitable victory when Sachin Tendulkar and Sourav Ganguly had put up a 100 run partnership during the Indian run chase. Earlier the Indian bowlers had done a relatively decent work of restricting the visitors to a manageable total of 257. But soon Tendulkar and Ganguly both perished after scoring their half centuries and there isn't a single good thing that can be said about the rest that followed. Returning to the team Sehwag looked ordinary and the swash buckling Mahinder Singh Dhoni was never really his dominating self. It seemed that steam had completely run out of the batting order by then and the final proposition was 11 runs of the last over, a position we shouldn't have been in to begin with. However a bludgeon by Dhoni to the boundary did rekindle hopes of a dramatic close win but soon he too was caught in the outfield by Farveez Maharoo. In the end the men in blue came up short by 5 runs.

In contrast the Lankans showed great determination and composure to come back into the game from a disastrous 58 for four. Kumar Sangakkara showed the way with his brilliant knock of 110, ably supported by Tillakaratne Dilshan and his knock of 56. The Indian bowlers could not capitalize on their initial momentum and were simply unable to finish off the Lankans. Knocks by Sangakkara, Dilshan and a small cameo by Farveez Maharoo (17) ultimately helped the visitors to post a respectable total.

The Indian run chase started off with ominous signs as opener Robin Uthappa (7) and Captain Rahul Dravid (5) both perished with single digits to their names. After that Sourav and Sachin did steady the ship with their third wicket partnership but that was it.

A day before the selection committee meets to discuss and finalize the Indian World Cup squad, the Rajkot tie would have surely put the management in a dilemma. Not to mention the fact that some of the players would be having a sleepless night. One among them is Virender Sehwag whose performance today definitely left a lot to be desired. Another would be paceman Irfan Pathan, who due to injury could not even figure in the match. Dinesh Kartick is another doubtful candidate for the World Cup; he just doesn't seem to be confident in the middle order. The biggest problem for the selectors would be to decide whether to go in with a 7 batsmen and 4 bowlers combination. For it is clear that the tail will simply not hold up in a tough run chase. In this regard I am surprised that someone like Mohammad Kaif is not even being considered given the fact that he has helped India with several tough run chases. Plus he is a great fielder. I guess the argument against that would be he is simply not in form. But so isn't Sehwag. But the selectors don't seem to mind persisting with him.

In any case this defeat puts a lot of pressure on the Indian team before the World Cup. Clearly there are a lot of things that need to be pondered about and sorted out. I seriously think that Mohammad Kaif should be given another look because at the moment, with an unfit Yuvraj, that middle order is looking a little brittle. I guess the whole of India and a couple of players will surely be keeping their fingers crossed for this one.

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