

## **“Well Done Champions...Well Done Pakistan”**

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Imagine a team; deprived of international cricket, playing 7 tests and 50 ODI in 2 years. Ponder at the 17 year old pursuit of a multi-nation title. And then, visualize a new picture that formed headlines in the newsprint. Team Pakistan came back to the international circuit after nearly 2 years and took on the world title. It might have continued haunting another generation if Pakistan would have lost; adding another scar to the countdown of disappointments which started when Akram's men gave it away in 99.

Playing as the tournament's underdogs, team Pakistan began with an unsteady start. Call it Afridi's outstanding catch against the Kiwis or Gul's destructive reverse swing that triggered the team but the rise to glory from darkness wasn't as easy as it appeared. Emerging from the ashes like a phoenix re-born, conquering not just the game but also their nation. The Greens were crowned Champions in front of an ecstatic Lords on Sunday; winning a major title after nearly two decades, having pulled it off in style.

After scrapping the Protease at Trent Bridge, Younis' men sent a clear message to the Lankans that they are not to be taken lightly. The weather was perfect, crowd jubilant and the pitch conditions favored the batsmen.

Sangakkara's decision to bat first didn't come as a surprise, but the fall of Dilshan to the ever-so-accurate short-length bowling of Mohammed Ameer was a shocker. Ameer's plan against the mighty Dilshan; who had destroyed some of the cleverest bowling lineups, was executed perfectly and he unsettled the tournaments highest scorer in just four balls. The fifth ball beckoned Dilshan to the pavilion for a duck as he attempted to scoop Ameer to short fine leg but ended up scooping his own wicket. The return of any bowler to international circuit after two years is critical especially when he is struggling with fitness issues and pace. But the magnificent all-rounder rose up to the second innings of his career confidently and proved the critics wrong.

The Ameer-Razzaq duo reminded cricket present of the consummate Imran Khan and the young Wasim Akram who exploded Gooch's batting order in the 92's with awe-inspiring reverse-swing combined with pace. Razzaq became the destroyer-in-chief after he removed Jehan Mubarak on duck; proving his promotion to top order as bad luck for the Lankans.

Jayasuria looked dangerous after hitting Razzaq hard for a boundary and a six in consecutive deliveries but the ex-skipper's luck only lasted 10 balls before falling a victim to Razzaq's clever bowling as he attempted to drive again but dragged it on as the stumps went loose. Jayawardene followed next and attempted a back cut too early but Younis' plan worked and Misbah made no mistake.

The score-card was shocking; 32-4 and the Sri Lankan fans were stupefied. With 2 balls remaining to mark the end of power-play, Lords was on-fire and so were the Pakistanis.

The Lankan skipper was stunned, resembling a commander watching his lieutenants disposing one after another from the other end.

The batsmen crawled to 67 when Afridi struck yet again with his outstanding wrong-one, beating Udana completely. Gul, for the first time looked unsettled and proved a bit-expensive. But the damage was immediately repaired when he removed Chamara and provided Pakistan a break-through after 50-runs partnership.

The real rescue mission started after the 6th wicket when the skipper Sangakkara showed tremendous temperament followed by a fine shot selection and a cool approach. His deputy did not let him down as the Lankans rose up to a tight but defendable total of 138 and Pakistan went wicket less; the bowlers giving more than the Lankans deserved in the death overs.

The start of Pakistani innings was confident and Akmal was ruthless against the Sri Lankan pacers. For the first time in tournament they completed the power-play without the fall of wickets. Openers calculated and well-timed shots frustrated the famous 3 M's - Mendis, Malinga and Murlitharan - and forced Sangakkara to rotate the bowlers so often that no bowler bowled two over spell. Skipper's decision to bring in a sixth bowler proved right and Jayasuria dismissed Akmal after he raised Pakistan to 48 in 7 overs.

19 year old Shahzaib; quiet during Akmal's innings, started firing boundaries off the mystery spinner Mendis' deliveries. The joy was short-lived as Murali's magic worked and Shahzaib's miscalculated sweep resulted in a top-edge straight into Jayasuria's hands.

The required run-rate hit 8 an over and suddenly the Lords was quiet. But Afridi's smashing of Murlitharan reminded that the Greens were in-control and Lankans needed something extra-ordinary from their bowlers. Sangakkara's tactics started working when Pakistan required 26 off last three overs. The atmosphere at the green bench was tensed as 3 batsmen were padded up waiting.

Sangakkara saved two off his best bowlers for the last couple of overs; the decision being un-smart in front of Afridi. The plan back-fired and Afridi; taking full advantage of Udana, nailed a six and four on consecutive deliveries. From that moment Younis un-padded himself, he and the Greens knew they had done it after 17 years of waiting.

At that moment everything was forgotten, sweets were dispensed from person to person in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad, fireworks followed and the Pakistanis celebrated. Lords was deafening, London was painted red and Pakistanis around the world was celebrating. A mid-pitch hug between Afridi and Shoaib and a row of heads of the cricket team touched down on the ground kneeling in obedience and thankfulness to the Almighty. The 'cornered tigers' marched the centre of Lords scripting their tour de force into the history books. Lords was a sea of roaring green and the champs received a standing ovation from the crowd and the officials.

Younis' retirement from the 20/20 circuit after winning the cup was somehow expected; the skipper followed the steps of his role-model Imran Khan. He too had announced retirement at the peak of his career, having guided the team to their first major international title. The 'cornered tigers', as someone titled the greens in '92, had struck again and in style, having risen from the underdog status and traversing in the champions' lane.

The journey was not easy. But then, all the tales of greatness have sacrifices and struggle written upon them. They say "All is well when the end is well."

For many, the fall of the curtains will be a relief and they would try to forget the ICC 20/20; having lost the title to the acclaimed underdogs. However, the champions - the men in green, and the ones who witnessed them making history at Lords would not let the effect dilute.

Today, the nation celebrates because these milestones neither are not attained everyday nor are the champions created.

Well Done Champions.

Well Done Pakistan.