

Topic: The Great Indian Cricket Show

Topic  
Introduction

The finals hoodoo has been broken. Sri Lankan supporters can finally smile. Their golden generation of cricketers, Mahela Jayawardene, Kumar Sangakkara, Tillakaratne Dilshan and captain for the last three matches Lasith Malinga have something to show for their efforts. After coming second-best in the last four ICC finals, the Islanders managed to grab their hands on the big prize by winning the fifth edition of the ICC World T20 with a six-wicket win over India at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium on Sunday. They got there with 13 balls to spare. Set to chase a modest 131, Lanka were guided by Kumar Sangakkara, who struck a majestic, unbeaten 52 (35 balls; 6x4, 1x6) to see them home. Man of the Match Sangakkara, playing his last T20 International, was well assisted by Thisara Perera, who belted 21 not out in 14 balls (1x4, 2x6) as the duo added 54 runs in 5.2 overs on a wicket that wasn't easy to bat on, with the ball stopping on the batsmen. Perera was drafted into the side at the expense of leg-spinner Sekkuge Prasanna, and what a call it turned out to be.

India, who were unchanged from the side that beat South Africa in the semis, looked to be back in the game when Amit Mishra dismissed Lahiru Thirimanne caught behind for just two. At that stage, Sri Lanka were 78 for 2 needing 53 runs off 45 balls. Sangakkara's wicket then could have swung the game in India's favour but the experienced southpaw held one end up and as the target drew closer, started hitting out. Perera carted a few big ones too. Credit should also be given to another great servant of Sri Lankan cricket, Mahela Jayawardene, who too was playing his last T20 International. He soaked in the pressure after the early loss of Kushal Perera and hit a run-a-ball 24 ensured they got some stability back in the innings.

The Indian spinners R Ashwin and Amit Mishra bowled well, but with only 130 to defend, their threat was negated as it was always about a couple of good overs and one decent partnership for Sri Lanka. India's dream of becoming the first team to win the World T20 twice was shattered by a clinical display from their opponents. Earlier, the game began 40 minutes late after a sharp shower delayed proceedings. India, after being put in to bat, could score just 130 for 4 despite an electric knock from Virat Kohli 77 (58b; 5x4, 4x6). Kohli survived a dropped chance from the Sri Lankan skipper Lasith Malinga at mid-wicket off Rangana Herath when he was on 11. He capitalized on that and smashed Herath for two sixes and hit two more off Kulasekara.

However, Yuvraj Singh struggled to get going and his 11 (21 balls) affected the momentum of the Indian innings. MS Dhoni too seemed to be under pressure because of that knock and instead of giving the well-set Kohli more of the strike, he attempted wild slogs and swishes and failed to connect any of them as he scored 4 not out (7 balls). Kohli, named Man of the Tournament for his tally of 319 runs, would have traded the prize for the trophy as an Indian victory would have made him the first cricketer to have won all ICC events - the Under-19 WC (2008), ICC World Cup (2011), ICC Champions Trophy (2013) and the ICC World T20 (2014).

*Sachin Tendulkar stood firmly behind his former team-mate Yuvraj Singh, saying that the batsman "is down but far from being out." He also backed him to make it to the 2015 World Cup squad.*

### **WHAT HURT INDIA IN THE FINAL**

- \* Virat, who was going great guns, faced only 8 balls in the last four overs as Yuvraj and Dhoni failed to rotate the strike
- \* Yuvraj, Dhoni together played 28 balls for 15 runs at a stage when India needed fours and sixes
- \* Indian innings had as many as 48 dot balls
- \* Amit Mishra, who had an off day, could not make any inroads in the middle overs when India needed wickets.

### **The Other side**

This was a team that had not won anything at all in any format on its two winter tours and was beaten by Sri Lanka and Pakistan in the Asia Cup. They had come close, of course, they had competed, but that winning feeling had last come for them against West Indies at home in November last year. Yes, Bangladesh is much closer to home for the Indians compared to South Africa and New Zealand - home is just a "forty-minute flight away" as MS Dhoni said - but a winless environment is not what you want to take with yourself into a world tournament. Yes, the conditions played a big part, but India have to be lauded for putting in such a commanding performance all the way to the final that somewhere along the way, they became title favourites.

This time, not only did India win consistently in Dhaka, they won every game convincingly till the final, so convincingly that the victories started to look formulaic. Bowl first, bowl aggressive wicket-taking spin, restrict the opposition, and hunt down the modest target with ease. This approach worked to perfection in their first three games against Pakistan, West Indies and Bangladesh, and made them the first team in the tournament to qualify for the semi-finals. They wanted to bat first in their final group game against Australia, were put in and recovered to post a decent total before the spinners, led by R Ashwin, demolished the opposition.

India can take credit for showing in this World T20 that it is possible to play formulaic cricket in the shortest format in familiar conditions and develop a measure of consistency in winning, something thought to be nearly impossible in T20. *Almost all their wins were one-sided.* Their matches lacked the kind of chaotic thrill a crowd expects from a T20. This lack tells you a lot about their dominance in a format which, due to its ultra-condensed nature, produces nail-biters almost by rote. The man who had fallen one match short of becoming the first captain to hold the World Cup, the Champions Trophy and the World T20 at the same time, was satisfied with how India had performed in Bangladesh. "Overall if you see the whole tournament we played really well," Dhoni said after the final

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