
A Match I Will Never Forget

The monsoons had set in and it was drizzling throughout the day. The ICC Prudential World Cup matches were going on in England. India had started well, unexpectedly winning against the formidable West Indians in their first match. They won the second match against Zimbabwe too but lost the next two against Australia and the return game with the West Indies. Given India's track record in one-day matches, no one was under any delusion even after the victory against the West Indies, that India had much further to go. But hope had definitely been kindled... of India qualifying for the playoffs. To do that, India had to win today's match against the Zimbabweans at Tunbridge Wells. It was 18 June 1983.

Waiting for the last encounter with the Australians was much of an option. I had gone to my ancestral home in South Karnataka and was fiddling with the transistor long before the match started. The BBC was on strike and there was no telecast. That was just as well because there was no television in rural India back in 1983. India had won the toss and elected to bat. That was always welcome because, if things did not go well, we could go to sleep. Matches played in England could extend up to 12 midnight in India. And that is exactly what happened. India lost the two openers without scoring. In no time India was 5 wickets poorer with the score at 17 runs. Kapil Dev was due in next. I switched off the transistor and walked over to where my cousins were taking apart a jackfruit. Though the remaining batsmen were no rabbits when it came to batting, things had gone far out of hand and not much could be expected. No Indian had even scored a century in a one day game till then. More than an hour later, not able to hold out, I switched on the radio.

Roger Binny was out and Ravi Shastri followed immediately. The score was 78 runs for seven wickets. Even a score of 150 runs looked distant. Madan Lal was the next batsman in with Kirmani and Balwinder Singh Sandhu to follow. What followed thereafter was akin to a blizzard. Kapil Dev decided to attack the bowling. With Madan Lal and later Kirmani, staying awake at the other end, Kapil Dev plundered a hitherto unheard-of 175 runs off the Zimbabwean bowlers. Kirmani played particularly well and ensured that India reached 266 for 8 wickets, a competitive score. The score, however, was not unassailable in a sixty over match which it was then. But after a good start, Zimbabwe lost two batsmen to runouts early. Though there were some partnerships the wickets fell regularly and in twos. India finally won the game by 31 runs but not without some anxiety. Kapil Dev's innings was one that would be remembered for a very long time, not only in India but all over the cricketing world. India went on to win all their subsequent games and the World Cup, vanquishing the mighty West Indies again in the finals. What makes this match the most memorable of my life? Although I did not think about the match that way 35 years ago, I now feel that I was witness to a momentous event. I believe that this was the match that gave the Indian team the self-belief that they could win the world cup that year. That changed the cricketing scene in India phenomenally. Later Tendulkar was to Indian cricket to greater heights. But it was this match that ignited the spark to make Indian cricket what it is today. I humbly submit my memories for your perusal as my entry to "the most memorable match of my life" contest of this month.