

PSCC win final ball thriller to setup final against UCC

By Mark Jones

On a tense day of cricket at the RMIT Oval, UCC and PSCC prevailed to ensure that there will be a new name on the Dr. Laurie Hayward Memorial Trophy this year. However, the sides clinched their final spots in differing styles with UCC producing a fantastic all-round performance in a one-sided game whereas PSCC survived a real scare to beat ISCS by 2 runs on the last ball of the game.

In the first game, SSC's Skipper won the toss and elected to field first. As this strategy had proven successful for the lions on their previous 2 meetings this year, it was the obvious choice, especially as UCC would've inserted Joel's men in. This decision seemed to be the right one in the early overs, with some tight bowling causing an early breakthrough. Davis (9) who has been in supreme form this year was castled by a superb full delivery from Chandana (22-1). With their tails up and plenty of positive chirp in the field, Joel's men sensed more wickets and almost got another when Dormer middled a rising drive to the Sri Lankan skipper's right. He got a hand to the ball, but spilled it. He dived, got it again, but agonisingly for the men in blue, it was turfed on impact with the ground. This reprieve saw Dormer (42* off 31) and Aspin (40* off 24) launch a counter attack, scoring 49 in the four overs before drinks. Upon Dormer's retirement, Chetan came to the crease and continued the assault with 3 huge sixes to play his way back into form with his 40* coming off 24 deliveries. Despite losing Meikle, UCC compiled 169/2 off their twenty overs with Malone (7*) and Toseef (15*) running a bounty of twos to keep the scoreboard moving. The pick of the Sri Lankan bowlers were Chandana and Joel (25-1) who stood out in an attack who bowled well with little reward. In fact, so disciplined were their lines that they only conceded 13 extras.

However, their innings started in disaster. With the dangerous Bertram yet to get off the mark, a mix up with Hiran (16) led to a run-out at the beginning of the 3rd over. Malone swooped at point, threw to Vijesh who threw the ball as hard as he could from a yard away to run-out one of Sri Lanka's danger-men. So hard was the throw that it ended up on the boundary rope. Like their SSC counterparts, UCC kept the bowling tight and were rewarded when Priyantha (2) first and then Hiran were both bowled by Malone (23-2). With the lions in trouble at 34/3 (5.3 overs), it was left to Sumedha (18) and Dileepa (16) to rebuild the innings. Sumedha in particular started to look dangerous hitting Bala (1-25) for a couple of powerful boundaries through off-side. However, just after the drinks break he holed out off Meikle (4-4) with Aspin taking a nice catch on the boundary. With this came Sri Lanka's last chance with Skipper Joel striding to the crease. Bala tested him with a short ball early and

was duly clubbed over long-on for a mighty 6. Unfortunately, for SSC, he was clearly in discomfort from the attempted catch earlier in the UCC innings. Not only that, but his side was facing a climbing run rate of 12 an over. Despite their best efforts, and some extremely tight bowling from Pankaj (4 overs for 22) in particular, the batsmen couldn't find the big overs they required and it wasn't a surprise when Bala bowled Joel who had no choice but to try to hit big. With this brought a collapse with the final 5 wickets falling for only 5 runs. Meikle bowled impressively and took 3 wickets from 4 balls from what turned out to be the penultimate over. When Davis threw to Pankaj who calmly removed the bails to run-out last man Jeewantha, UCC's famous chant deafened the RMIT Oval. The men in purple will be looking to win the Cup for the first time after suffering final defeats in 2012 and 2014.

However, PSCC will have something to say about that...

In their game, PSCC batted first with the familiar sight of Sofi and Ahmed striding to the crease. Sofi has been in especially good form over the last three years, with everything coming off the middle of the bat and if his performance in this match is anything to go by, UCC will need to remove him early. His partner, Ahmed, is probably the most exciting batsman to watch as you always know he'll hit out first ball and get either a rapid 40, or nothing. This time, it was the later as he skied his first ball off Sri Ram (1-32) to Pratap who rarely drops anything. With this, newly-wed Suleman (26) came to the crease hitting 2 massive sixes in adding 67 with Sofi for the 2nd wicket. But, he fell, again, hitting a high ball which was this time caught by Syam. Sofi (43*) played a chanceless innings comprising of 2 fours and 2 sixes and retired shortly after drinks. This left Sarfaraz (5) and Zaki (11) to play the support act to Parvez (45*) who set about dismantling the ISCS bowling hitting 4 sixes in his knock with PSCC reaching 165/5 off their allotted 20 overs. The wicket takers for ISCS were the captain Sri Ram, Pratap (2-33) and Syam who only bowled two overs for his 2-13.

Any team would be happy setting 165 in a semi-final and for the majority of the innings it seemed like a safe score, but there was a late twist in the tale which very almost saw ISCS's keeper snatch an improbable victory for his side with some incredible hitting. Despite the early loss of club stalwart Munish, Rubal and Pratap set out establishing a platform for the middle order to launch from. Pratap looked in impressive touch, hooking his first ball for four. With both batsmen looking to attack, they were scoring at about a run a ball. At the end of the 8th over, Rubal (23) was caught in the deep by the safe hands of Ahmed with the scoring not far off the asking rate at 61/2. After drinks, Sofi (2-21) was given the ball and took two wickets in his first over having Sri Ram and Jagdesh caught going for big shots and ISCS's innings was looking to be derailed. This looked even worse when Ahmed returned to the bowling attack to dismiss Pratap (22) with a fantastic caught and bowled and when Robin knicked behind off Naeem (2-30) ISCS's tally stood at 97-6 off 14.1 overs. However, cometh the time, cometh the men and Santosh (22) and Lal Shah (30) started an incredible counter attack. Santosh nudged the ball around nicely to score at a run a ball but Lal Shah's innings was truly spectacular. With 4 enormous sixes, he got to 30 off only 10 balls and

suddenly ISCS required only 15 off the last two overs. However, PSCC skipper still had two aces up his sleeve and called on Parvez and Sofi to bowl the final 12 deliveries. Parvez removed the big hitting keeper with the first ball of the 19th over but with Arul and Santosh still there, hope remained and some good running saw ISCS need 7 from the last over. This pressure over was to be bowled by Sofi. Pressure? What pressure. In an impressive over he bowled tightly, and held his nerve to run-out Santosh and Arul. With 4 required to tie off the last ball, Syam could only manage 2 and PSCC made it to their first grand final.

In what promises to be a great game, who will be crowned champions this year? Can UCC stop Sofi, Parvez, Suleman and Ahmed? Can PSCC find a way to end a run of 5 defeats against UCC? In a battle that is likely to come down to UCC's bowlers ability to stem the runs of PSCC's explosive batting potential, the RMIT Oval is the only place cricket lovers in Saigon should be on Sunday.