

ICC Europe Division 2 Guernsey 2008

PREVIEW

Guernsey Press

'Batting needs a quick fix ahead of Euro tournament' by Aaron Scoones
Guernsey go into next week's ICC European Division Two Championships with something of a headache. From Monday to Saturday the island is hosting and taking on Jersey, Germany, France, Croatia and Gibraltar to find out who will get promoted to the top flight of European cricket and join the likes of Scotland, Ireland and The Netherlands.

The problem in question arises when the Sarnians hold a piece of willow in their hands. The bowling and fielding displays by the Greens this year have generally been top notch. But that has not been the case when batting. That was exemplified in Saturday's inter-insular defeat when they were bowled out for a miserable 119 runs on a tricky Grainville wicket. Jersey also found it a struggle as they reached their target for the loss of seven wickets.

Island manager David Hearse acknowledged that work had to be done on the batting before next week but he pointed out that Lee Savident and Tim Ravenscroft will feature for Guernsey in the tournament and that will make a difference. "We've got a few things to think about before the European competition like how to shore up the batting" said Hearse. "But with Savs and Tim in the top six, there's an element of class and a bit of technical skill too, so hopefully that alone will give us the batting we need. These players haven't become bad overnight".

Guernsey's record with the bat this season speaks for itself. In nine innings they have managed to get over 200 runs only three times. In their first outing of the year, an away friendly against Jersey in April, they chased down 210 for the win. They were also toasting success over the Caesareans the next day after they posted 154 and the Reds fell just one run short in a real nail-biter. The next time they stepped onto the pitch in May was the second time that they racked up 200. This was against the Bahamas at Port Soif when they notched up a massive total of 276. They went on to win by 153 runs that day. The day after defeating the Bahamas they were undone by a very competent Nepal bowling attack. Chasing 203 they were dismissed for 136.

In the following match against the MCC they suffered probably their worst loss when they were bowled out for 173 and the tourists knocked it off with four wickets to spare.

Then followed their trip to the UK that saw them come unstuck against three quality opponents – Kenya, Sussex Academy and Sussex Cricket League XI. Chasing Kenya's 194 they were all out for 122.

Against the Academy side they fell 75 runs short going for an impossible target of 299. Again it was a similar story when they took on the League XI as they could muster only 181 in the face of 275. The problem is Guernsey lose too many early wickets. The top order crumble and do not build partnerships. In all their defeats the top four batsmen together have not contributed more than 80 runs.

It is not a question of replacing the present incumbents as there simply is not anyone else who is knocking on the door. But with the likes of Will Thompson, Jonny Clark and Robbie Le Corre growing in stature and looking to join fellow under-17 batsman Ravenscroft in the island set-up in the near future a competition for places is only a good thing.

But what is clear is that the top batsmen in the island are not facing the top bowlers. With Cobo supplying nine of Guernsey's inter-insular XI, the batters Matt Oliver, Stu Le Prevost and Jeremy Frith, do not take on the best bowlers – Blane Queripel, Jamie Nussbaumer, Gary Rich and Frith – in competitive scenarios as they all play together. They are not being challenged enough. It was especially evident when Guernsey played Kenya, who had a couple of quick, accurate bowlers, that our batsmen found it a struggle to accumulate runs when under pressure.

But the issue does not just lie with Cobo. The weekend league is just not competitive enough, nobody is really getting challenged and the standard is the worst it has been for a number of years. Cobo's dominance has come about because they have nurtured a number of promising juniors such as Queripel, Nussbaumer and Kris Moherndl to go with their established stars, Le Prevost, Oliver,, Frith and Rich.

And it also because other clubs have lost a good number of talented imports over the last few years such as Ami Banerjee, Ryan Bishop, Andre Van Rooyen, Divan van den Heever, Nick Derbyshire, Glenn Milnes and Justin Scriven, who all made the league a more challenging affair.

There are a number of possible answers. One is to forcibly split up Cobo, which is a non-starter as it is incredibly unfair on a team that has worked so hard to reach the top. However, it seems that the GCB are hoping that certain

Cobo players take the issue into their own hands and move clubs. But the answer has to be raising the standard of the island's cricket.

The GCB have already spoken to their opposite number in Jersey about expanding the Channel Island league from next season, which would see four teams or even just three from Guernsey taking on four or five Jersey sides in a round-robin format. This would certainly help as would allowing clubs to have a professional each, which is another idea being bandied about.

Following the Kenya and Nepal defeats, some critics argued that Guernsey have reached their peak on the world stage. This is certainly not true as Kenya, for example, reportedly have fewer registered cricketers than Guernsey does and yet in 2003 they reached the semi-finals of the World Cup. Guernsey has a brilliant development programme that is producing a crop of very promising young cricketers. But what is required is a competitive domestic league that is as high a standard as possible so that there is not such a leap up to international cricket for the island's best players. A better domestic league would result in better performances on the international stage. It may be too late for next week's tournament but let's hope that is not the case for the years to come.

'Winner-takes-all climax is the aim' by Aaron Scoones

The smart money must be on Jersey to reign supreme at next week's ICC European Division Two Championship. Held in Guernsey from Monday through to Saturday the competition will see the Caesareans battle it out against the hosts, Germany, France, Croatia and Gibraltar.

Jersey were runners-up in the World Cricket League Division Five which they hosted in May. After defeating the USA in the semi-final they narrowly lost to favourites Afghanistan. That performance saw them promoted to Division Four and they head to Tanzania in October to compete in that tournament with the likes of Afghanistan, Hong Kong, Italy, Fiji and the hosts.

They also came runners-up at the last Division Two championship in Glasgow two years ago, after having lost to champions Norway in the final.

And they are on a roll as well after getting the better of Guernsey at the weekend to retain the inter-insular crown. Jersey captain Matt Hague believes his team will be there or thereabouts come the end of the week when they meet on the final day.

"I don't know (if we are favourites) but I suppose Jersey and Guernsey will be looking to be unbeaten until the last game', said the Australian. 'If we get to the last game being unbeaten, that will be a pretty good effort, Saying that, with these tournaments the first game is so important to get a win under your belt and then you're away. If you don't get that win, it's hard to play catch-up."

One thing going against Jersey is that they will be without the Carlyon brothers – opening batsman Steve and all-rounder Tony. Also not involved is talented Australian left-hander Dean Morrison, who does not meet the eligibility criteria, while Ben Stevens is another absentee. The 16-year-old left-arm spinner made quite an impression on his inter-insular debut on Saturday taking three for 13, but his rise to prominence came too late to be named in the squad, which had to be finalised a few weeks ago.

But other big players such as Hague, Ryan Driver and Pete Gough are all featuring. They have also named in the squad young up-and-coming players Antony Kay, Sam de la Haye and Sam Dewhurst.

"They (the Carlyons) are going to be missed, and we've got a bit of a younger squad," said Hague, "but it should be good to have a look at them. They've all got a lot of talent."

Another team to watch are Germany. Predominantly an Asian ex-pat side, they gave Guernsey a bit of a surprise at the 2006 championship when they got the better of the Greens by 58 runs at a damp Clydesdale Cricket Club. Farooq Ahmed, who hit 53 that day opening the batting, much to the delight of his teammates on the boundary who enthusiastically cheered every run, is returning for the German side as are top order batsman Abdul Bhatti, Rana Javed Iqbal, Mian Latif and Mohammad Pasha.

Wicketkeeper batsman Pasha scored 44 quick runs in that game as well and was outstanding behind the stumps to be named man of the match. Germany came third in the tournament. However, the rest of the squad is different from the 2006 one, so they are something of an unknown quantity.

France are also bringing quite a changed squad from the one they had in Glasgow. When Guernsey met France in the fifth and Sixth place play-off, which was something of a dead rubber, the Greens came out on top mainly thanks to a brilliant 136 from Lee Savident. The innings earned the former Hampshire professional the player of the tournament accolade. In reply, France's best batsman, Arun Ayyavooraju, struck 90. The tall and elegant

right-hander is featuring for the French again next week and is one to look out for.

On the other hand, Gibraltar's squad has hardly changed from 2006. On a sticky wicket at Weirs Cricket Club, they were dismissed for just 97 by Guernsey who went on to knock them off for the loss of three wickets. But due to a higher run rate, the Gibraltarians ended up finishing above Guernsey in the competition in fourth. It will be a surprise if they turn in a better performance this year.

The only side to feature next week who were not in Scotland are Croatia. The Adriatic state made the second division after they defeated Israel in a third division play-off in Tel Aviv last year and they are the only team not to have associate membership. They have played in various tournaments for the lower echelons of the European cricket since they formed a national side in 2000. Four of their squad – John and Paul Vujonich, Ivan Bellic and Jasen Butkovic – have been involved since the beginning. This will be their hardest test to date and they are not expected to cause too many ripples.

'Hearse backs his batsmen to perform' by Aaron Scoones

Dave Hearse is confident that Guernsey will put their recent batting woes behind them in the ICC European Division Two Championship which begins today. The island side have been less than impressive with the bat this season. It culminated in the inter-insular at Grainville, where the Greens were bowled out for just 119, which Jersey knocked off to retain the trophy.

But Guernsey manager Hearse said his side would score runs in the tournament which is being held in the island. 'We've got a good team,' he said at the weekend. 'We've had a dip in form with the bat, but I'm 100% sure that that will be turned around next week.'

Croatia, France, Germany, Gibraltar and Jersey are the other teams battling it out in the week-long round-robin competition. Jersey look favourites to win outright after their inter-insular victory and after they finished runners-up in World Division Five earlier in the summer, which saw them promoted to Division Four.

'Jersey go in as favourites,' said Hearse. 'Having said that, I don't think there's too much difference between our top team and their top team. Approach to the game will be the key.'

At the last Division Two tournament in 2006 in Glasgow, Guernsey were defeated by Germany but got the better of Gibraltar and France, who they also beat in a round-robin competition in Jersey last year. 'As for the other teams, it's difficult to say because they've changed from two years ago,' said Hearse. 'We lost to Germany and we want to put that right. We beat France a couple of times last year, but I'm sure they will be stronger this time. All the teams are going to have three or four good players and it's a matter of working them out quickly and to back themselves.'

The tournament will help decide where teams will be placed when the World Cricket League expands next year. Hearse said his teams were going for the silverware. 'The aim is to win it, but we've got to shore up our batting.'