

## 6 A TASTE FOR MORE

Leaving Sabina Park after the game against Zimbabwe the boys were enjoying their first taste of big time cricket – and we wanted more. The twenty-minute bus ride back to the hotel saw *Ireland's Call* sung several times and I gave my customary loud rendition of *Aru Cha Cha*. Arriving back at the team hotel and I continued what had developed into a routine of shaking hands with our security man, Big D, and he would reply 'Respect, One love'.

Sky Sports, RTÉ, Newstalk and a huge sub-continental press contingent were there: 'Can you guys win this group?', 'Is this a flash in the pan?', 'What's next for Ireland?', 'Will the team party hard tonight?' Once it was over I sat down just in time to watch the highlights of the Zimbabwe game. While I had been involved in televised games before it was very strange watching myself on the replay, possibly because of the amount of camera time that I was given. It made an impression on me and from then on I was more cautious about my on-field behaviour. That night, JB and I had a couple of beers watching the highlights of our game again, as well as those of Sri Lanka v Bermuda. Poor Bermuda were given a lesson, losing by 243 runs. Mahela Jayawardene and Kumar Sangakkara had gone to town on their attack, while the Sri Lankan bowlers looked like they were playing against club cricketers. It wasn't a great advertisement for the so-called 'minnows'. It was also disappointing to hear the commentators criticising Dwayne 'Sluggo' Leverock. I have played against Bermuda on two occasions and although he's about twenty stone this guy can really bowl. I hoped that

he would make those commentators eat their words later in the competition but it never happened.

The next morning started with a call to Vanessa and the kids. Vee told me that there had been great celebrations back at Ocho Rios the previous night. Mum was also in fine spirits, but the word on the street was that Dad may have been led astray by Matt Dwyer's little brother, Willie. After the call I headed down to breakfast. You couldn't keep the smiles off our faces and it was great to see the guys march one-by-one into the dining room. We looked at each other and laughed like schoolboys. I had a swim after breakfast and took it easy as our practice was to be a light one, as Adi and Matt only wanted a fielding session in the afternoon. I spent most of the morning flicking between England v New Zealand and South Africa v Netherlands. The Dutch fell victim to some record setting that day: Herschelle Gibbs hit 6 sixes in an over off Daan Van Bunge and Mark Boucher hit the fastest 50 in World Cup history. The Proteas ended up with 353-3 in a rain-reduced 40 over game. In the other fixture, Ed Joyce got a duck and England struggled to pass 200, never enough against a strong New Zealand team.

We boarded the team bus for Sabina Park and Big D was there at the steps with his hand outstretched. Even though our World Cup had only just kicked off you could tell the Jamaican public were warming to us and our style of cricket. They were waving at us and shouting: 'GO IRIE-LAND GO'. Peter Gillespie loved this and lapped up every moment, as did we all. I knew that I had damaged my shoulder when I had attempted to catch the second last ball against Zimbabwe. I had dived to my left and landed sharply on my armpit. I had semi-dislocated the same shoulder in the ICC Trophy in 2005 but hadn't had a problem with it until that moment. It was definitely sore, but for the time being I kept it to myself.

Adi and I had our usual press conference on the eve of a game. There were no particularly tough questions but there was growing interest in our performance. The world's media had by now featured Ireland on

either front or back pages, sometimes both, and we were generally the leading televised sports story. It was great to see, but we knew we had only scratched the surface. I took part in training that day but only to hit a few balls. I iced the shoulder and got treatment from Knoxy, and by now we both knew we had an issue on our hands. Watching the boys field and catch during this session you would have thought the Aussies had put the shamrocks on for an hour or so. We just looked like a team that belonged in the World Cup, definitely not the 'minnows'. Adi was really pleased with what he saw and the training session was cut short. 'Well done boys, team meeting at 7.00', were his last words before we headed back to the hotel for a shower, food and more TV cricket.

Adi, Matt and I met at 6.30pm to discuss the team for the Pakistan game. With the wicket looking so green we discussed bringing in another seam bowler and leaving out Whitey. It would have been hard to drop a guy who had just got 28 runs and bowled the last over to get us home against Zimbabwe. Andy White and his room mate Kyle McCallan are very similar beasts, on and off the field, and for this reason they are known as the Spin Sisters. Andy is a bit of a practical joker, usually in tandem with Kyle. Their pranks are usually irritating things like nicking mobile phones and hiding shoes – the sort of stuff you don't need at the end of a game. We had our revenge in Namibia a couple of years ago when they came back to their room to find it completely bare – beds, bags, everything had been moved onto the balcony or into the bathroom. Peter 'Polish' Gillespie (his other nickname is Bubba the Love Sponge) filmed the guys doing it, although they wore pillow cases as hoods. The Spin Sisters reckoned it was Conor Armstrong and Paul Mooney and on the last morning retaliated in style. Somehow Kyle McCallan got a key of the Mooney/Armstrong room and kept it for three days, and finally sneaked up and took everything out of their bags, mixing their clothes and gear around.

Andy has batted from 1 to 10 in the order and would usually do a job for me with his gentle off-breaks. Whitey has become known as 'The

Finisher' as he was usually the man to bring us home in the big games. He moved to Northants to chase the dream as a professional cricketer and although he spent two years there, the combination of lack of opportunity and his love for playing for Ireland brought him home. He is as quiet as a church mouse off the field but sees the red mist when he crosses the white rope. Whitey is up for a battle against anyone and fears nobody.

We finally decided to go for the same team; unfortunately, John Boy had just missed out again. The team meeting went well, with input from Adi, Big Phil and Matt Dwyer. Matt gave his life to playing, developing and promoting Irish cricket. He made his debut for Ireland at the ripe old age of thirty-nine, and once he got the chance he proved why it should have come far earlier. He won 51 caps and took 62 wickets at a great economy rate of 3.8 per over, which are terrific stats for a spinner. When his international career ended he offered to help Adi as his assistant and made a huge contribution to the success we achieved. After we all had spoken it was left to Knoxy to remind the guys to manage their water intake in preparation and throughout the game. After the meeting I went to Knoxy's room for some more treatment and to stock my fridge full of fluids.

On the morning of the Pakistan game I entered the foyer to see a couple of familiar faces from my old club, Clontarf. Doctors Tom and Mary Coghlan were there with their son, Bill, and Roger McGreal and his son, Jack. They were pumped up after our performance against Zimbabwe and it was great to see some more supporters. Tom and Roger headed off to their hotel up the road to watch the last game of the Six Nations, which Ireland won only to see France steal the Championship with a last minute try. But my focus quickly switched from those guys to the big game. If we were ever going to beat the team ranked fourth in the world, then St Patrick's Day was always the day to do it. The bus trip was like a royal motorcade with the locals screaming and waving and Peter Gillespie again hung out the window soaking it

up. Polish is one of my true friends in the Irish team and second only to Kyle in the list of Irish caps. His 47 ball hundred against the MCC in 2005 was the highlight of his career, but he has been awesome in games against the English counties in the last couple of seasons. He found it difficult to cement his spot in the Caribbean but continued to work hard on his game.

Before going out to warm up I dropped into the umpires' room to say 'Hi' to Brian Jerling and introduce myself to Billy Bowden, the umpire from New Zealand. Billy is a very funny guy and treated me just the same as he would Ricky Ponting or Rahul Dravid.

Knoxy always places four blue cones in a square in the middle of the field and we are told 'blue box, 8.25am'. We came together from our various warm-up activities at that time and Adi and I each said our usual bit about giving it our all, playing with passion, giving something back to the supporters and never giving up. The pitch was not a typical Caribbean one, as it was green and looked more like an English-style surface in late April. I knew if we were going to have any chance I had to win the toss. Roy knew this too, and at 8.45am he tapped me on the shoulder and said, 'it's time for you to win the toss mucker.'

At 9.00am I had my first encounter with Inzamam ul-Haq, a giant of the game with a record to match. Chris Broad, the match referee, spoke to us very briefly as did the broadcaster Rameez Raja, who would conduct the interviews at the toss. I tossed the coin and Inzi called 'tails', but heads it was. Without hesitation I said we would bowl. It was to be a crucial factor in the game. We could tell that Pakistan were not happy with the conditions as on a green seaming pitch the gap between the teams would inevitably close, especially with Ireland getting first use. When Bob Woolmer expressed his amazement at the state of the track I knew we had a real chance! Back in the dressing room I remembered I had to make a call to my Clontarf team mate, Bill Coghlan, to tell him where I'd left his tickets. Since the match-fixing scandal mobiles are not permitted and have to be switched off as soon as you got on the bus. The

ICC had an anti-corruption officer who would pop his head in now and again and walk through the dressing room to check we weren't on the phone or surfing the web. I had to talk to Bill, so I asked Roy to stand at that door to head off the ICC guy.

As DLS bowled the first over I positioned myself at mid-on. But four balls into the game I was in the doctor's room having my shoulder looked at. I had dived to stop a ball driven in my direction and landed on it again. The doctor on duty gave me a pain-killing injection in my backside. It certainly worked, as I could not feel my buttocks for twenty-four hours. But my shoulder was still in tatters.

From the start we were getting some terrible abuse from a group of Pakistani supporters, who suggested that we should stay in the pub. 'You guys are rubbish, just go and have a Guinness' was the mildest of their insults. DLS bowled a great ball that pitched on off stump and moved away from Hafeez, and Niall did the rest. Pakistan were now one down and, to our amusement, their obnoxious supporters promptly abandoned us and started on their own side. Younis Khan came and left when Andre took a great catch off a good ball from Big Boyd. The 6'8" giant from Bready is our fastest bowler and got near 140kph a few times in the World Cup. He first entered the scene a few seasons before but then disappeared to Middlesex, where he didn't make the breakthrough. After Boyd was released the former Irish coach, Mike Hendrick, invited him to Derbyshire and he was brought back into the Ireland squad towards the end of 2006. He took 2-23 against Italy in the European Championship and was then selected in the World Cup squad. During the training camp in South Africa, 'Stankin' really grew as a bowler, largely due to his intensive work with Hendo. His career really took off in the ICC Intercontinental game against UAE: in the second innings his pace and bounce even had me hopping at first slip and he finished with 4-56. He had a terrific World Cup, taking 12 wickets and causing real problems to some quality batsmen. His only problem is accuracy, but if he can reduce the extras and continue his progress he will have a huge future.

Then Nazir and Mohammed Yousuf put together a good partnership of 40, before I bowled a wide half volley and Porty did the rest at backward point. I was struggling with the shoulder but Mohammed had helped me out!

Pakistan lost four quick wickets for 16 in no time and we were well and truly in the game with the score reading 72 for six. Andre's spell was in the top three I have ever seen; 8 overs, 4 maidens, 5 runs, 2 wickets, it was in the Glenn McGrath or Shaun Pollock class. As we huddled for a drinks break, I reminded the team that, 'we were here against South Africa two weeks ago and we let them out of jail, we cannot let this happen today, we must stay focused'. Kamran Akmal came in and attempted to start a fightback. Akmal had scored four test hundreds and three in the one-day format, and I remember wishing he wouldn't do an 'Andrew Hall' on us. I also wondered where were those cricketing gods that Adi had promised us, because now would be a good time for them to show up.

Looking around the ground I soaked up the large emerald green patches in the stand – our fans, wild with excitement. I could even see the 6'5" leprechaun, Adrian Raftery, leading the conga in the Party Stand. It would have been easy to get caught up in the excitement, but we had to continue to focus. Akmal and Azhar Mahmood had started to build a steady partnership before Boyd and myself came together. Boyd ran in and struck Azhar on the shoulder, which really shook him up. I ran up to Boyd and told him to do it again. He did as I asked, Boyd ran in with his next delivery and bounced Azhar and he only hit as far as the 30m circle, straight up in the air to me at mid wicket. The dangerous Akmal was still there, but Boyd gave me more and dug another ball in short. Akmal took the bait and mistimed a hook shot, which I somehow managed to clutch running back and diving to my left. As fate would have it, I landed on my ailing shoulder. Kevin was first to reach me and I just lay there and told him, 'get Knoxy, get him out here'. I nearly ripped Iain's shirt off as he applied an ice pack to my shoulder. Pakistan were now 105 for eight but

we knew that we had to finish this quickly because they had a top quality bowling attack. Kyle came on to bowl and removed Mohammad Sami before the substitute, John Boy, took the final wicket of Umar Gul off a skyer in front of the Party Stand. The fans went berserk and the Cayman Islands GAA fans were impressed when John soloed the ball back to the middle – Gaelic football style.

I remember walking off the ground, looking up at the scoreboard to see confirmation that we had just bowled Pakistan out for 132. I wondered if I was dreaming, but then I remembered seeing Bill Coghlan earlier that day – Bill would never feature in my dreams (he is a young twenty year old I played club cricket with for three years). If I had to criticise our performance that day it was that we gave away too many extras – Boyd had bowled 13 wides and altogether we had given Pakistan a total of 29 extra runs in a score of 132. It would have been a terrible injustice if we had lost the game by 2 or 3 runs.

Lunch came and went very quickly. I knew that 132 on that wicket could be enough for Pakistan, given the quality and experience of their bowling attack. Adi talked about the importance of getting off to a good start, as the ball would still be doing a little. He told the openers not to worry about the overs but simply to try to keep the scoreboard ticking over. Wickets in hand would be crucial. I turned to a group of players and asked them individually to consider the implications of not winning this game. I asked DLS and Andre did they want to return to delivering John Deere tractor parts the following week. I asked Kenny if he was ready to go back to sorting and delivering post, I even asked Kyle if he was ready to go back to the classroom, because I knew for sure that I wasn't ready to go back to selling fabric. For the first time I really felt that I had the squad's full attention: no one wanted this dream to end!

We got off to a bad start when JB was given out leg before wicket to a big in-swinging ball from Mohammad Sami, who then removed Eoin Morgan for 2 with a similar ball. We ourselves were now 15 for two, just as Pakistan had been a few hours previously. Eoin went into the World Cup

with huge expectations placed on him by the media and the Irish fans. He had a disappointing time by his high standards but, like Jeremy, he got some good balls from some world-class operators. I believe Eoin Morgan is the best cricketer I have seen come out of Ireland. His concentration and temperament at the crease belie his youth and I am sure that he will play test cricket for England – and I would love to watch him do it, as long as its not against Australia. He is a real thinker about cricket and has the potential to score 5,000 Test runs. He works hard at his game and is always the last to leave the nets with his mate Porty. I enjoy playing cricket with this kid and I hope that we still have a few years left together on the field.

Happily, Porty and Niall O'Brien then put together a brilliant stand of almost fifty, denting the new ball and keeping the score moving. Porty was finally removed by the fifth bowler used, the off spinner Mohammad Hafeez. It was an unlucky dismissal as the ball was played onto the stumps. The fall of Porty's wicket brought Sami back into the attack, and saw probably the worst dismissal I have ever seen in any form of cricket. Andre Botha was given out caught at bat pad off Sami despite his bat being the width of the pad away from the ball. From the first ball the Pakistan team had appealed aggressively and exerted a great deal of pressure to get rid of Andre. Brian Jerling is a very good umpire, but the atmosphere out on the field that day was intense.

For the second time in this game the O'Brien brothers (Niall and Kevin) came together to set up our victory. The next 10 overs had it all – boundaries, sixes, unplayable balls, missed chances and rain, but the Railway boys stood firm. Niall probably played the innings of his career and truly broke the back of Pakistan. When I first saw Nobby back in 1995 I knew – and so did he – that he could be a very special cricketer if he could just stay out of trouble. The exposure to county cricket and four hard seasons in Sydney grade cricket, with two of my old clubs, made Niall into one hell of an all-round cricketer. A very tough and gritty batsman, Niall can also mix it with the best glovemen in the world. The

two hundreds he scored were a big factor in our success in Namibia in 2005. If he can translate his energy off the field to his on field performance he will have another ten years at the top level.

The only shame about the Pakistan match was that Niall wasn't there at the end. We had been off for an extended rain delay and at that stage the Duckworth-Lewis rule would have seen us home. It was hard not to get excited as it was extremely dark and looked unlikely that we would take the field again. We did get back out, and the D/L calculations meant we had five runs less to get, but three overs fewer to get them. Niall raced past fifty and was on 72 after he hit the part-time off-spin of Shoaib Malik for six. But he tried to repeat the shot next ball, missed it and was stumped.

Andrew White and Kyle fell to successive balls from Iftikhar Anjum, which left us at 113 for seven, which meant we needed 20 runs and we had 12 overs in which to get them. While wickets fell around him Kevin O'Brien stood firm. This was an uncharacteristic role for Kev to play, as he is normally a run-a-ball batter. When I joined him at the crease he was as cool as a cucumber, and I knew if I could just stay with him we would bring this game home. The reduction in overs, due to rain, was significant as it also restricted the bowlers' allocation. Inzy had to take wickets and that meant using his front line bowlers. I turned to umpire Billy Bowden and said, 'this sure beats working for a living,' to which he replied, 'just don't throw it away, you've done so well.' Thankfully Kev saw off Sami's last 6 balls, and with Gul and Iftikhar already finished I knew we had it won. Even though they had the experienced Azhar Mahmood, Hafeez was bowling from the Pavilion End and wasn't troubling us at all. Azhar then came on from the Headley Stand end with six overs remaining and six needed to win. We just had to be patient. Even though DLS and Boyd can both hold a bat, it was up to Kev and me to finish off this job. Azhar bowled a slower delivery out of the back of his hand, which I picked up very early and swung through the ball. It hit the middle of the bat and disappeared over mid-wicket for six. I watched

it hit the signage in front of the Party Stand and leapt high in the air. The only thing I recall after that was being attacked by Whitey, Eoin and Peter. All I really wanted to do was give Kev a hug and congratulate him on his performance, but I couldn't even get to him.

We were ecstatic and everyone was beaming. I had never imagined that we could enjoy a lap of honour more than the one we had completed two days earlier, but this was it. I ran over and hugged one of our selectors, Willie Wilson, and saw familiar faces from Belfast and the North West. Looking around the stands there were Malahide and Clontarf flags, our new friends from Digicel were there from all over the Caribbean, and most of all our family and friends. Adi came over to me and told me to hold out my hand, into which he slipped the match ball that I had just hit for six. Ian 'Gunner' Gould, the fourth official, had walked around the stadium to retrieve it and had handed it to Adi, saying, 'give this to TJ,' After the post-match presentation we turned to our supporters and shared a chorus of *Ireland's Call*. I try not to make the same mistake twice, so before the press conference, I tucked away a couple of beers for afterwards. The team weren't going to leave me dry a second time!

The press conference went really well and at this stage I was beginning to enjoy them. After the Zimbabwe match I had described the feeling as 'surreal', and on St Patrick's Day the same journalist asked me to describe this victory in a word. I told him that I hadn't done very well in English at school so I could struggle to find one for him. At this stage all I wanted to do was rejoin the lads and get on a bus to Ocho Rios. When I finally returned to the dressing rooms the celebrations were in full swing. They had to be cut short though as we had a long coach journey to join our friends and family. We packed our kit, dropped it back to the hotel and hit the road north. We picked up some refreshments at the Pegasus and with the songs flying the two-hour trip went quickly.

We arrived at the resort to a heroes' welcome. In the lobby of the

hotel was a smiling wall of green. A few of us had decided to stay in our playing kit too, and although the smell wasn't great, no one seemed to mind. It took me just under an hour to make it from the bus to the check-in desk. With the press looking for interviews, supporters chasing autographs and families looking to congratulate us – it was an incredibly moving experience. I finally got to see my parents and cousin, Debbie, who were as excited as I was. Vanessa was upstairs trying to settle the kids, so I just dropped off my bag and joined the party.

The management at the Sunset Jamaica Grande had invited the squad to join their annual 'JamPatrick's Day' party, and we were delighted to do so. We were brought on stage, one by one, and introduced to a crowd of more than 400 supporters. Lanky did his Ferret Dance, which sent the crowd into hysterics. Roy took the microphone and thanked the resort and our family and friends for their support over the past three days and the last three months. He did a great job, as it would have been easy to forget someone with all the excitement of the day. Roy has given everything to Irish cricket and has at this stage occupied nearly every role possible: player, President, selector and team manager. He played 30 games for Ireland over a period of 18 years, which proves it's hard to keep a good man down. He gave a lot to the team and copped a fair bit of flak at times, but he still came back for more because he loves the game. It will be a sad day for Irish cricket when he hangs up his blazer.

When the formalities were over I got to spend some time with my parents. It was hard not to feel reflective about the journey that had taken me to Ireland and to this World Cup. There had been disappointments and risks along the way but that night in Jamaica it all felt worthwhile. I made a tactical decision to get Dad to do the drinks run as it was taking me on average half an hour just to reach the bar as everyone wanted to talk to me about the day. The support was fantastic but I really wanted to savour the moment with my family, and especially my Dad, who I hadn't seen for so long. A plot was underway to get James Fitzgerald – the former *Irish Times* cricket journalist and now ICC

communications officer – into the pool. He was looking out of place in his ICC blazer, shirt and tie, which made him a sitting duck. In the pool he went, accreditation and all, although he just about had time to palm off his mobile, wallet and Blackberry. I suspected that I might be next, so decided to take the situation in hand and jumped in – having missed out on the post-game shower it was probably a wise move!