

Legends League Cricket get off to a royal start as India Maharajas win benefit match

Kolkata, September 16, 2022: When Kolkata's Maharaj Sourav Ganguly gave away the winning trophy to India Maharajas at the majestic Eden Gardens on Friday, it royally kickstarted the Legends League Cricket 2022 that is being held in India for the first time.

The City of Joy witnessed a thrilling special benefit T20 match between the India Maharajas and the World Giants. The Maharajas, captained by Harbhajan Singh, chased down a 171-run target in 18.4 overs and won the match by six wickets. Tanmay Srivastava and Yusuf Pathan starred with the bat for the Maharajas with half-centuries, while Pankaj Singh rolled back the years with his medium pace bowling, taking 5/26.

The proceeds of the match, a part of the celebrations of 75 years of India's Independence, will go to Kapil Dev's Khusii Foundation, which supports girl child education. While former India captain and BCCI president Sourav Ganguly gave away the trophy to the winning captain Harbhajan, Match Commissioner and former India coach Ravi Shastri presented the Legend of the Match Trophy to Pankaj Singh.

“It was so special to play in Eden Gardens. I was a bit apprehensive about playing after so long. But, in the end, it all came out good. I am so happy to see so many legends playing,” Harbhajan said after the match.

Though it was a special benefit match, make no mistake, it was a breathtaking affair, true to the T20 mood. The performance of the players, who were not ready to yield an inch without a fight, added to the charm of the contest.

Be it Kevin O'Brien's daredevilry or Pankaj's measured bowling or Yusuf turning back the clock with his muscular hits, it seemed the stars are still absolutely ready to walk into any top T20 side in the world. It was also an indication of what is in store for the fans once the league stage gets underway on Saturday, with a match between Gautam Gambhir's India Capitals and Sehwag's Gujarat Giants at the Eden.

The Maharajas' chase did not begin on a great note as Sehwag was out in the very first over. They lost their first three wickets cheaply, but once Yusuf came to the crease, he changed the complexion of the match.

The elder of the Pathan brothers joined hands with the left-handed Tanmay to unleash a flurry of strokes as the Maharajas trotted towards the target.

Eventually, Yusuf and Irfan, finished off the chase in clinical fashion. Irfan hit three sixes, one of them bringing the winning runs, during his fiery unbeaten innings of 20 off 9 balls. Yusuf stayed not out on 50 off 35 balls with five boundaries and two sixes.

The World Giants, electing to bat first, got the perfect start with their openers — O'Brien and Henry Masakadza — putting on a 50-run partnership within the Powerplay overs. O'Brien hit nine boundaries and a six in his 31-ball innings.

But the real drama was reserved for the last over of the Giants innings. After 19 overs, the Giants were 170/5, all set to go for the big shots off the last six balls.

But former India pacer Pankaj had other plans. He scalped three wickets without conceding a single run to hurt the Giants' ambition of a bigger total.

What more do you need from a T20 match!

Brief scores: World Giants 170/8 in 20 ovs (Kevin O'Brien 52, Denesh Ramdin 42 n.o.; Pankaj Singh 5/26). India Maharajas 175/4 in 18.4 ovs (Tanmay Srivastava 54, Yusuf Pathan 50 n.o.). Maharajas won by 6 wickets.