

## **NTCA rise above the competition in Central west Championships**

After 2 frustrating years where the Central West Championships had been marred by bad weather, the Gods allowed some bright sunshine and provided ideal conditions for cricket to be played in Austin. For the first time in years all teams looked to be evenly matched and it would be performances on the given day that would decide the eventual champions. As the events unfolded, NTCA under the able leadership of USA wicketkeeper/batsman, came on top in every department of the game and regained the coveted Central West Cup after 4 years.

The first round saw NTCA(Dallas) take on Colorado Cricket League(CCL) at the Round Rock ground. Rahul Kukreti elected to bat after winning the toss and Orlando Baker and Hemant Jetti seemed to be a good job of seeing the new ball off when Hemant was run out by a direct hit against the run of play. Rahul(20) joined Baker(34) and the two set out to rebuild the innings. At the 15 over drinks break NTCA were well placed at 55/1. Right after the break NTCA collapsed losing 5 quick wickets mainly due to some controlled swing bowling by Rajesh Solanki of Colorado. NTCA were in big trouble at 90/6 after 25 overs when 19 year old Kartik Vittala and the experienced Vinod Periagaram started the rebuilding process. Kartik played an innings that showed tremendous maturity blocking everything that was thrown at him while Vinod played his shots freely as though there was no pressure. Just as the momentum was shifting, at 151/6 after 40 overs, Vinod(36) was caught brilliantly by Sunny Ramesh at short midwicket off CCL skipper Swadeep Pagadulla. Swadeep then brought CCL back in the game by getting two more wickets including Kartik(19). From 155/9, Bilal Zahid hit a couple of huge sixes to take the NTCA total to 177 before his third six was thwarted by a diving Rajesh Mosur at deep midwicket who took an astounding catch to end the NTCA innings. Swadeep had bowled an excellent spell to grab the last 4 NTCA wickets. However with the pitch not playing true and the quality of the NTCA bowling, CCL would have to bat well to get to the total.

The CCL innings started disastrously when Hemant Jetti threw down the stumps with just one stump to aim at from point to send back CCL opener Ganesh Sanap. Bilal Zahid then bowled a fiery spell to send back CCL's best two batsmen, Rohit Ramkumar and Sunny Ramesh, in quick succession. Carl Thompson got one to stay low and bowled the other opener Misbah as CCL were looking down the barrel at 20/4. Rajesh Mosur and Vamsi Khathyam did a good job in rebuilding the innings to take the score to 57/4 after 15 overs. After the break Nadeem Haroon applied the breaks with his leg spin and got Rajesh to hit one straight back to him. Vamshi continued his lone vigil from one end as wickets started falling at regular intervals. Nadeem ended up with 3 wickets and Vivek Inampudi got two wickets with his offspinners as Vamshi(44) was the last man dismissed at 127, 50 runs shy of the NTCA total. Bilal Zahid was awarded the man of the match for his all round efforts.

The other game of the day saw the pre tournament favorites HCL (Houston) take on the hosts CTCL(Austin) at the beautiful Hill Country Cricket Ground. HCL batsmen seemed to have their way with Austin scoring a massive total of 291/9 in their allotted 50 overs. The only bowler to make an impact for Austin was the young 21 year old sensation Supratim who got 4 wickets. Sushil Nadkarni, the vice captain of the US National team topscored with 60 and received good support from Jaam Ali and Owen Brown who also got fifties.

In response at 36/3, Austin looked down and out. Some determined batting by Supratim saw Austin slowly but surely eat away at the Houston total but the task on hand seemed to be getting bigger and bigger with over 100 runs remaining with just 3 wickets in hand in just under 10 overs. Supratim was eventually run out for a well made 55 but in came Satish Patil who simply clobbered the bowling to all parts of the ground. Satish's heroics saw CTCL claw back in the game from an impossible situation to finally tie the match up. Since both teams had lost 9 wickets each, the tournament rules specified that a toss would be used to determine which team would go through to the finals. The hosts won the toss and Houston were left to rue on what turned out to be a shocking result. Supratim was awarded the Man of the Match award for his all round performance. He will be a player to watch out for in the future at the National level.

The 3/4 place game between Houston and Colorado played at Round Rock was again a low scoring close fought game with Houston scoring 211 all out. Jaam Ali was the top scorer with 40. In response Colorado were in the hunt requiring just about a run a ball with 8 overs to go and wickets in hand but the Houston spinners came good on day two as they wrapped up the proceedings as Colorado were bowled out for 178. Niraj Shah, Sushil Nadkarni and Mustafa Rafique grabbed 3 wickets each.

The final match between NTCA and CTCL turned out to be a one sided affair with CTCL winning the toss and electing to bat. The fast bowlers from NTCA ripped through the Austin batting order. Carl Thompson bowled some really testing short stuff hitting a couple of helmets and having the batsmen hop on to the backfoot on numerous occasions before getting both the openers wickets. Sudharshan Chavva ran in against the wind and bowled a great spell of seam bowling getting the ball to move both ways. He got 4 wickets on the trot including the dangerous Supratim caught brilliantly by a diving Rahul Kukreti behind the wickets. Carl Thompson had the lower middle order for Austin running for cover with pace and bounce and quickly snapped up the remaining 4 wickets as he ended up with a 6 wicket haul. The dominance of the NTCA pacemen was so devastating that only 3 bowlers had to be used as CTCL were bowled out for a mere 69 runs in 24 overs.

The game looked like it could get interesting when Orlando Baker was caught at midoff on the very first ball of the run chase and then both Anoop Nigam and Hemant Jetti betting their stumps pegged back in quick succession as NTCA were struggling at 15/3. Supratim Srinivasan was not going down without a fight and was bowling with a lot of venom. However the experience of Rahul Kukreti(32\*) and Nadeem Haroon(25\*) saw things off with a flurry of boundaries as the target was reached in the 14th over itself. NTCA had won the Central West Championships by 7 wickets by lunch time. Carl Thompson was declared the man of the match for his 6 wicket haul and Sudharshan Chavva was also recognized for his mesmerizing spell of seam bowling.

The CTCL organization committee had done a wonderful job in ensuring that the tournament went ahead with no hiccups. Tournament director Jarrar Jaffari, Central West Chairman Arun Vittala, National Director Ahmed Jeddy, USACA treasurer John Thickket and CTCL president Ram Narayan were all present at the event and provided support and help to ensure the success of the tournament. The tournament also saw the emergence of two very good young umpires for the National level in Hemant Lalwani and Jay Shah which is a very encouraging sight for US cricket.

The Central West region can take away many positives from this tournament. The emergence of the young all rounder Supratim Srinivasan should fill in the void left by the absence of Afan Sheriff from the squad last year. Orlando Baker would be another great inclusion in the regional squad with not only his batting but also his athletic fielding and quick bowling. In addition, Kartik Vittala and Misbah Rehman, both teenagers from the region proved that they belonged with the big boys and graduated to the next level. They should also be players to watch out for in the coming years. Over the last few years, camaraderie has been built between players from the different leagues and the games were played in very good spirit as these players have played more and more against and with each other. All this bodes well for CW cricket and they should remain a force to reckon with at the National level.