

## Central West reclaims the Western Conference Championship

*By Vinod Periagaram - DreamCricket Correspondent*

In a tournament that provided all the twists and turns that you would expect to see in a National contest, the hosts, Central West nosed ahead of their rivals from the west coast to win back the Western Conference title after being runners up the previous year in LA. For once, both the last day's games had tremendous significance in determining the final outcome.



*Central West squad (left to right) standing- Sathish Patil, Charan Gowda, Majid Rizvi, Fayyaz Sarwar, Ahmed Jedly, Sudharshan Chavva, Arun Vittala, Sushil Nadkarni, Orlando Baker, Rahul Kukreti, Andre Rowe. Sitting - Vinod Periagaram, Nadeem Haroon, Owen Brown, Mustafa Rehman, Damodar Bhat*

Central West had to beat Central East with a significant margin and then hope that the South West beat their North West opponents to win the tournament and that's exactly what happened with southpaw Sushil Nadkarni ensuring that the hosts took care of business by scoring a belligerent 223 runs in 102 balls for CW to post a massive 420/8 in their 50 overs. Sushil's inning broke several batting records on the way. In one over he hit 5 sixes in a total of 22 hits out of the park. He had excellent support from skipper Rahul Kukreti who scored a fluent 68 with Charan Gowda providing the finishing touches with 39 off just 16 balls. In reply Central East was bundled out for 120 with Vinod Periagaram claiming 4 wickets to ensure that the margin of victory was a humongous 300 runs.

**(CW 420/9, Sushil Nadkarni 223, Rahul Kukreti 68, Charan Gowda 39\* def CE 120 all out, Vinod Periagaram 4/25, Carl Thompson 2/33, Sudharshan Chavva 2/19 MOM - Sushil)**



*Nadkarni after a record breaking batting performance*

As it turned out, the South West team had to defeat the North West by a margin of 114 runs to move ahead of them in the net run rate and qualify for the National Championships as the runners up. They opted to bat first and looked like they would post a massive total with Ritesh Kadu and Tarun Bhoomireddy going after the bowling from the very first ball. However it was not to last as the scoring rate continued to be great, they kept losing wickets in the hunt for a 300 plus total and were eventually bundled out for 196 which meant that they needed to restrict the North West to an improbable 82 runs.

The task on hand might have caused most teams to drop their shoulders but then most teams do not have Franklyn Rose, a former West Indies fast bowler, opening the attack. Frankie bowled his heart out to take 5 wickets in a 10 over spell and at one stage the North West were 80/8 and it was getting too close for comfort. Eventually North West were bowled out for 86 and had managed to just squeeze through to the National Championships by 4 runs as runners up of the Western Conference.

**(SW 196 all out, Mandeep Dhillon 35, Mehul Dave 33, Ritesh Kadu 30, Saurabh Verma 4/27, Bilal Khan 3/38, Vijay Beniwal 2/26 def NW 86 all out, Franklyn Rose 5/33, Jignesh Desai 3/3 MOM - Franklyn Rose)**



*Franklyn Rose - deadly and lethal*

Earlier in the tournament, on day 1, defending champions, SouthWest took on the hosts under overcast conditions. CW batting first was in deep trouble after a quick burst from Franklyn Rose that left CW at 20/3. Nadeem Haroon and Damodar Bhat steadied the innings before Damodar was caught behind for well compiled 40 resulting in another mini collapse with the score reading 120/6. Nadeem Haroon then played the innings of a lifetime with some support from the lower order to take the team to a respectable 229/9.

SW after losing an early wicket kept scoring at a tremendous rate and looked to be knocking the stuffing out of the opposition at 80/1 in 13 overs. Sudharshan Chavva then came on from one end and started bowling a dream spell getting wickets in a bundle. Sudharshan used every weapon in his armory to fox the SW batsmen as they could not believe what was happening as one after the other a top order batsman was falling to Sudharshan's guile. At the other end, Vinod Periagaram entirely choked the flow of runs by giving away just 8 runs in 7 overs and picking up 2 wickets and SW kept losing their way. in the end Orlando Baker ripped through the SW tail with some quick stuff as SW had lost their last 9 wickets for just 50 runs.

**(CW 229/9, Nadeem Haroon 91, Damodar Bhat 40, Franklyn Rose 3/54, Jignesh Desai 3/42, Abhimanyu Rajp 2/17 def SW 129 all out, Jignesh Desai 31, Sudharshan Chavva 4/26, Orlando Baker 4/49, Vinod Periagaram 2/8 MOM - Nadeem Haroon)**



*Nadeem Haroon - great knock under pressure*

At the other game North West had their way with the Central East team with Arjun Thyagarajan scoring 94 runs to help his team to a massive total of 329. 15 year old Abhijit Joshi picked up 4 wickets for the Central East. In reply, Central East could only manage 103 runs.

**(NW 329/9, Arjun Thyagarajan 94, Hassan Amin 61, Srikanth Sundaragopalan 40, Abhijit Joshi 4/76 def CE 103 all out, Wahab Syed 33, Shantanu Divekar 3/24, Nirosh Desilva 3/35 MOM - Arjun Thyagarajan)**



*Arjun Thyagarajan*

On day 2, SouthWest won the toss and surprisingly elected to field first even though they needed to increase their net run-rate against the weak Central East team. Things didn't go exactly as per plan as Franklyn Rose and the other seamers were easily negotiated by the 15 year old Abhijit Joshi and 17 year old sensation Saminda Siriwardena. The first wicket partnership of close to 100 runs was finally broken by Aditya Thyagarajan who then quickly ran through the side picking up 5 wickets. Saminda continued his lone vigil from one end and scored a magnificent century and was given a standing ovation for his knock by even his opponents. CE was bowled out for 184. Southwest openers quickly went about the task of chasing down the runs with Ritesh Kadu going berserk scoring 84 runs to take South West ton victory by 9 wickets in 25 overs.

**(CE 184 allout, Saminda Siriwardena 105, Aditya Thyagarajan 5/21, Jignesh Desai 3/35 def by SW 188/1 Ritesh Kadu 78\*, Tarun Bhoomireddy 54, Ravi Timbawala 35\* MOM - Ritesh Kadu)**



*Tournament best bowler - Sudharshan Chavva*

Day 2 also provided the best game of the tournament between North West and the hosts. Sudharshan Chavva again dominated with a deadly opening spell that had NW in tatters at 18/6. Sudharshan became the only player to get a hat-trick when the first 3 balls of his 3rd over went through the entire top order of the NorthWest team. His deadly first spell was 4 overs 12 runs and 5 wickets. From 31/7 NW fought back with Saurabh Verma chancing his arm and courtesy of a few dropped catches to take NW to a total of 130. Saurabh finished with 45 before his luck ran out. In reply Central West was 94/3 at the drinks break after 20 overs and looked to be cruising with Orlando Baker batting well on 40. The break saw NW regroup and fight it out and wickets started falling quickly and panic set in the CW camp. Saurabh Verma with his mixed bag of leg-spinners and googlies took 4/12 as CW fell 3 runs short with 18 overs to spare. It was a tremendous comeback from the NW team that showed plenty of character to not give in to a seemingly impossible situation. As a just reward for their performance in that one hour on the field they earned the right to play for the National Championships in October this year.

**(NW 130 all out, Saurabh Verma 45, Sudharshan Chavva 5/21, Nadeem Haroon 2/33 def CW 127 all out, Orlando Baker 40, Saurabh Verma 4/12, Bilal Khan 3/40, Nirosh Desilva 2/33 MOM - Saurabh Verma)**



*Saurabh Verma receiving the MOM award from Nabeel Ahmed USACA 1<sup>st</sup> VP*

The results over the weekend mean that Central West will take on the Atlantic Region and the North West will take on New York in the super league stage of the competition with the winners competing for the coveted USACA National Championship. This phase of the tournament will be held in Florida in October.



*CW Management lift the cup - HCL president Fayyaz Sarwar, CW Chairman Arun Vitalla, CW manager and director Ahmed Jeddy, skipper Rahul Kukreti, USACA 1<sup>st</sup> VP Nabeel Ahmed and CW vice Captain Sushil Nadkarni*

The tournament as a whole was a great success thanks to the organizing committee lead by Houston League President Fayyaz Sarwar, Sean Chapman and Nanda Kumar. The facilities at Tom Bass Park were ideal for a National level tournament and everyone left in praise of the efforts of the management team. It is a shame that some of the best cricket grounds in the country at Tom Bass Park will be converted to a Dog Park from November of this year denying cricket players all over the country to play at such a great facility.



*Ritesh Kadu - tournament MVP 137 runs and 9 dismissals behind the wickets*

**Awards -**

**Champions - Central West captained by Rahul Kukreti**

**Runner up - NorthWest captained by Vijay Beniwal**

**Best Batsman - Sushil Nadkarni 233 runs**

**Best Bowler - Sudharshan Chavva 11 wickets**

**Best Fielder - Ritesh Kadu 5 catches and 4 stumpings**

**MVP - Ritesh Kadu 137 runs and 9 dismissals**