

Superb bowling and team spirit drive Swiss U17s to record 5th place

30th July 2010, Castletown, Isle of Man - The Swiss Under 17s cricket team return from the Isle of Man today with a record 5th place in the European rankings following an exciting and high-quality ICC European Championships, Division 2.

It all looked unlikely when the tournament began on Saturday 24 July, with an unfancied and inexperienced Swiss side boasting seven players from the Under 15s age group.

There were early signs of promise against Spain – who were ranked 3rd from the 2008 championships. Early wickets from Himesh Parikh (3-34) and 14 year old George Gaillet (3-27) reduced Spain to 51-4. However, a counterattack from the Spanish batsmen and persistent drizzle led to a number of fielding mistakes. No less than nine catches went down as the ball became like a bar of soap and nerves grew. Ross Cameron, though, continued to bowl superbly throughout finishing with 3 for 21 as the Spaniards closed on 176.

The Swiss team lost regular wickets in reply but kept up with the required run rate. Ross Cameron (16) and Ali Saleem (43) were edging the Swiss side to victory with a 7th wicket partnership of 42. However, once Saleem was run out going for a quick single the innings collapsed to accurate fast bowling, leaving the Swiss 38 runs short at 138.

Taking on the Isle of Man hosts and eventual champions the next day was a daunting task. The fielding was once again a weak point, though Henry Greenhalgh added youthful athleticism on his debut. Nevertheless, the bowling continued to look good. Cameron was miserly giving away just 22 runs off eight overs for a solitary wicket. Midhun Lal took 3-33 and was on a hat-trick in his last over. The Isle of Man's final score of 204-7 did not do justice to the quality of the team's bowling. However, the all-round strength of their opponent's bowling attack was far too good for the dejected young Swiss side. Luca Illien contributed 20 and the ever-dependable Ali Saleem 16 in a final score of 111 for 9. A sign of better things to come, however, was in an eighth wicket partnership of 32 between Harry Vines (41) and 13-year-old Simon Henderson. Although he scored only 5, he played all bowlers with bravery and his fielding throughout the competition was an example to many older players.

After two defeats in two the team realised they needed to reassess tactics, personnel and their approach in the field in order to avoid coming out of the tournament in last place. They did this in remarkable fashion.

From the very first ball of the match against Austria the next day a new Swiss side appeared. They were superbly led by captain Trystan George, excelled in the field and looked ever dangerous with the ball. One event also helped to turn their whole tournament. Austria were progressing smoothly on 23 for none when Midhun Lal ran in for his second delivery. Three balls later a memorable hat-trick comprising two clean bowleds and a catch to the keeper saw them reduced to 23 for 3. George Gaillet followed up with another wicket the following over and now the Swiss side had a stranglehold on the match which they never let slip. The Austrians finished with 113 with Lal taking 4 for 29 and Gaillet 3 for 18 and Saleem, Cameron and Illien shared one wicket apiece. Joe Boucher kept the pressure up from one end giving away just four runs in three accurate overs. Keeper Harry Vines took five catches, as all the bowlers swung the ball.

Lal was back in the thick of things with the bat, scoring an unbeaten 68 as the Swiss youngsters completed a comfortable six wickets victory with 11 overs to spare. Nikhit Nanjungud made yet another valuable batting contribution helping the side over the line.

Switzerland won its first toss of the tournament the next day and chose to bat in damp conditions in order to avoid bowling with a wet ball and to nullify the German team's leg spinners. For the first half of the match it looked to be a big error. While Ali Saleem once again top-scored with 41, no one else was able to stay with him and the innings fell away to 108 all out. This turned out to be easily enough as the Swiss team completely overpowered Germany in the field. Ali Saleem took 3 for 6 in 7 overs, Ross Cameron 1 for 11, George Gaillet 1 for 7 and Midhun Lal, who was on a hat-trick for the third game in a row, 3 for 16. Two runs, including a direct hit three-quarters of the way back to the boundary from Trystan George, completed a brilliant performance. Germany, all out for just 44, lost by a comprehensive 64 runs.

Now the Swiss team were in with a chance of qualifying for the 3rd and 4th place play-off. Spain lost to Germany on the last ball the next day, but they just managed to squeeze through on run rate.

So Switzerland were left to face reigning champions Belgium to decide on 5th and 6th place. By now the team were rampant and were playing as well as the best teams in the tournament. The Belgians had no answer to the Swiss bowling and fielding. Midhun Lal took 4 for 23 to finish the tournament as joint top highest wicket-taker with 14 and remarkably he was on a hat-trick for the fourth game in a row. The catching and fielding was superb with Trystan George (2), Arjun Vinod, Joe Boucher, Himesh Parikh and Harry Vines all snaffling chances with aplomb. Keeper Vines' catch was as good as anything you could see, swivelling back from off to leg side to take an inside edge with one hand. Ali Saleem was excellent throughout taking 3 for 18, Ross Cameron took 2-37 and Himesh Parikh nipped in for the final wicket without conceding a single run. Belgium were all out for just 98.

The Swiss reply became just a little nervous at 42 for 4. Skipper Trystan George had endured a wretched tour until now with the bat, but he finally came good taking his team to within one shot of victory scoring 40. It was left to Harry Vines to hit the winning runs, securing a 5 wickets victory and 5th place – easily the best performance by a Swiss side in an international youth tournament. In doing so, they finished above three sides who have affiliate membership of ICC Europe and ample funding.

The squad was well supported throughout by a large group of siblings, parents and even grandparents, which created a wonderful atmosphere.

Manager Ray Boucher explained the success, saying "preparation for the tournament was excellent. Not only did we tour north-west England in May to prepare for the conditions and the grass wickets, but also playing in the adult league – although sometimes a brutal experience – was absolutely the best thing for them."

Coach Michael George added "The lads and all of the accompanying supporters created a fantastic team spirit and they had a belief in themselves which manifested itself on the field."

"Given that more than half of the squad is qualified to play in the tournament in 2012, the prospects for the team are bright if we continue to put in the hard work and receive the right moral support."