



Blues blitz the Vics

Katich smashes unbeaten 136 to lead NSW to comfortable victory

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Australian cricket's man of the moment, Simon Katich smashed an unbeaten 136 to lead the NSW Blues to an emphatic seven-wicket victory over Victoria at Bradman Oval yesterday.

Batting at the top of the order, Katich carried his bat as NSW scored 3/246, to pass Victoria's total of 9/244.

Fittingly it was the crafty left-hander who hit the winning runs, pulling a short ball from Andrew McDonald to the square leg fence, emphatically silencing some of the critics, which questioned his selection in the Australian Test team.

Victorian coach David Hookes was one of the most outspoken critics and Katich said it felt good to score a bucket load of runs against the Bushrangers.

"I guess I'd be lying if I said nothing was said, but exactly what I can't really say," Katich said of the side's reaction to Hookes' comments that NSW players are rushed into the test squad.

"It was a bit of motivation but I think we don't really need anything like that to motivate us and that's probably why we've won the last three years.

"We've got a pretty competitive side, with a lot of proven performers."

Katich's 136 runs came off 129 balls and included 14 fours and five sixes, which had the 5000 odd spectators lining the Bradman Oval, ducking for cover a number of times.

In what has been a big week and half for the former Western Australian, yesterday's hundred comes on top off both his maiden Test half century and five wicket hauls in the second Test against Zimbabwe.

Katich puts his blistering early season form down to his stint in English country cricket with Hampshire.

"I can't complain about the start," he said. "It just feels things have gone along from

England and playing over there has really helped me start the season well.

"So I guess I've got to thank Hampshire for giving me the chance to play with them."

Katich's unconquered ton stole the limelight from another big effort on the day, with Victorian batsman Brad Hodge compiling a well-made 101 for the Bushrangers.

Hodge's century came in 115 balls, but the experienced right hander kept the Vics' innings together after they slumped to 4-55 after 15 overs.

Hodge combined with John Moss (64) for a 116 run partnership for the fifth wicket, before he was bowled by Stuart Clark for 101 in the 48th over.

Clark (2-35) and his new ball partner Don Nash (3-34) were impressive, as was new Blues recruit Matthew Nicholson (3-60), who was a little expensive.

When NSW came out to bat there were a few raised eyebrows when Katich and Dominic Thornely walked out to open the innings.

The pair started off slowly, but soon picked up the pace before Dominic Thornely was out for 33 with the score at 77 in the 16th over.

Crowd favourite Steve Waugh then joined Katich at the crease and the pair set about smashing the Victorian attack to all parts of the ground.

Waugh took a back seat to the rampaging Katich in their 85 run partnership before youngster David Hussey picked up the Test skipper for 38.

Phil Jaques then came in for an entertaining cameo innings of 31 off 30 balls before he was dismissed six runs short of the victory target.

The last six runs didn't come easy for the Blues though, with Michael Slater (two not out) blocking out a maiden from Moss in the 46th over when only four runs were needed.

But on the last ball of the next over, Katich hit his 14th boundary to end the match.



CENTURION: Victorian batsman Brad Hodge plays the ball off his pads and scoots off for one of the many singles he scored in his well compiled century at Bradman Oval yesterday.