



CRICKET

Classy Blues make light work of the Bushrangers in Cup opener

Hookes' barbs inspire Katich

By EDEN HARRINGTON

SIMON Katich reaffirmed the faith national selectors placed in him when he guided the NSW Blues to an ideal start to the season yesterday.

Their bid to secure a historic fourth successive ING Cup began in the leafy surrounds of Bowral's Bradman Oval but there was nothing quaint about the Blues' performance.

Led by Katich, NSW dealt Victoria a knock-out blow.

The Victorians had no answer to the left-hander as he carved an unbeaten 136 from only 129 balls.

Fresh from a scintillating Test against Zimbabwe where he struck 52 runs and collected bowling figures of 6-65, Katich was the heart of a NSW outfit which comfortably amassed 246 for the loss of only three wickets, reeling in the Bushrangers' total of 244 in the 47th over.

It proved to be a clear debunking of David Hookes' theory that Blues players unfairly have a saloon passage into the Australian side when opportunities present themselves.

Bowler Nathan Bracken — currently on tour in India — was the focus of the Victoria coach's attack but Katich was tainted and responded in emphatic fashion.

"There was a bit of motivation there from what [Hookes] said," Katich admitted. "He has his opinions and he's entitled to them (but) at the end of the day we just wanted to play well."

Katich's innings overshadowed suggestions Victoria might speak with ING after batsman Brad Hodge struck one of the legs of the ING sign with a punishing pull shot off left arm off-spinner Aaron O'Brien.

A successful strike of the ING sign is a guaranteed \$50,000 bonanza and former Australian captain Mark Taylor intimated the Victorians might have a strong case.

But a review of the fine print of ING's contract indicated Hodge's strike had to hit either the logo or framing surrounding the logo, not one of the posts.

Sluicing drives and deft touches

ING Cup

NSW v Victoria
at Bradman Oval, Bowral

Victoria Innings

M ELLIOTT c Pilon b Clark	12
M JEWELL c Pilon b Nash	4
B HODGE b Clark	101
A McDONALD c Nicholson b Nash	1
D HUSSEY c Pilon b Nicholson	14
J MOSS b Nash	64
C WHITE c Pilon b Thornely	1
B JOSELAND c Pilon b Nicholson	23
D BERRY not out	18
S HARWOOD c Thornely b Nicholson	0
M INNES not out	1
Sundries	5
NINE for	244
Fall: 9, 29, 30, 55, 171, 174, 213, 230, 235	
Bowling: S Clark 10-2-35-2 (1w), D Nash 10-1-34-3, D Thornely 10-0-50-1 (1w), M Nicholson 9-0-60-3, S Katich 6-0-31-0, A O'Brien 5-0-31-0	

NSW Innings

D THORNELY bow b White	33
S KATICH not out	136
S WAUGH c McDonald b Hussey	38
P JACQUES bow b Harwood	31
M SLATER not out	2
Sundries	6
THREE for	246
Fall: 77, 162, 239	
Bowling: S Harwood 10-0-49-1 (2w), M Innes 10-2-31-0 (1w), J Moss 4-1-27-0, C White 10-2-42-1 (1w), A McDonald 4-0-22-0, D Hussey 5-0-7-1, B Joseland 4-0-36-0	
Man-of-the-match: S Katich	

punctuated Katich's innings which included 14 fours and five sixes and indicated his standing as a leader in an outfit burdened by talent.

Victoria missed a stumping opportunity against the left-hander when he was on 100, an over later he pointed out the folly of such a mistake when savaging David Hussey with successive sixes and a four.

"It was just nice to start the season well," Katich said.

"I wanted to do well for the team." Katich believes the outstanding start to his season is as a result of playing a season of county cricket in England, but it was the entire Blues outfit which looked assured from the time they strode on to the famous oval.

Don Nash and Stuart Clark were at the helm of a bowling blitzkrieg



Matchwinner . . . Simon Katich hits out on his way to an unbeaten century for the Blues yesterday against Victoria at the scenic Bradman Oval, Bowral (below).
Pictures: MARK EVANS

which tore four wickets off the visitors for only 55 runs in the opening 15 overs.

Hodge, along with Jon Moss (64 off 73 balls), arrested NSW's stranglehold on the game to provide some longevity to a batting attack which was being picked off with unerring ease.

Hodge's 101, manufactured from only 115 deliveries, also enhanced his standing in the domestic cricket record books, seeing him overtake one of Victoria's favourite sons, Dean Jones, as the leading run scorer for the state.

Clark removed the free-swinging Hodge in the final overs and proved to be an able foil for the venomous Nash, who worried the Bushrangers in both his spells before finishing with 3-34 off his 10 overs.

