



EVEN BETTER THAN THE REAL THING! Two young ladies are attracted to a cardboard cut-out of England captain Nasser Hussain (C) flanked by Bangladesh captain Khaled Mashud (L) and Indian star Rahul Dravid during a promotional event in Cape Town on February 7.

What's eating Ashrafu?

AL-AMIN, from Cape Town

The fate of Bangladesh's most naturally talented batsman hangs in the balance as the Tigers prepare for their first World Cup game against Canada.

Mohammed Ashrafu may be considered as the most exciting prospect in the Bangladesh squad but it will come as no surprise if the team management drops him from the opener at Kingsmead on February 11.

It was learnt that the Bangladesh think-tank was happy to field the same XI that played in the last lead-up game against Kwa-Zulu Natal and Ashrafu's estranged approach has only contributed to him falling out of favour.

The grim face of the usually jovial 18-year at the Holiday Inn hotel on Friday gave credence to the rumors surrounding Ashrafu and even captain Khaled Mashud and manager ASM Faruque indicated that something was definitely wrong with him. It is also being said that so bad is his mental condition that he is in urgent need of shrink-aid.

"He is not scoring runs. Apart from that, he is repeating the same mistakes even after being told repeatedly not to play pull shots and flashy square cuts. Gordon Greenidge had also tried to instill

some sense into him but with little result," said a frustrated Mashud.

Faruque on the other hand observed that something was not quite right with him psychologically.

"We are trying hard to inject a bit of confidence in him. But apparently his head is not ready to accept it. I

Ashrafu's problems and many feel that too much pressure is being put on the youngster unfairly.

His lack of runs against Namibia and Natal could be attributed to the fact that he is in his first tour to this part of the world. Even Habibul Bashar, Hannan Sarker and Tushar Imran, who had been to South Africa before, are struggling on the pacy and bouncy pitches here.

Regarding his technique, pull shot and square cut are his natural strokes and Ashrafu plays them better than any of his teammates because of his gifted reflex. These are the two most productive strokes on South African pitches and Ashrafu is a lesser player without them.

Expectation of Bangladeshi fans will always skyrocket when the youngest centurion in Test cricket goes out to bat because of the manner in which he plays. Ashrafu is probably the only Bangladeshi with the ability to take the attack to any opposition. Time to time his youthful-exuberance will cost him his wicket but if he is there in the middle for a significant period, he can decide a match on his own. Hopefully the team management will give that thought a serious consideration before finalising the starting line-up for February 11.



MOHAMMED ASHRAFU

have talked to South African psychologist Clinton Greyward about it and he has agreed to have a special session with Ashrafu," said Faruque.

Greyward conducted ten sessions with each player during his association with the Bangladesh team which ended in Namibia.

However, it is debatable whether going to the mind-doctor would end

Proteas' Calypso test

AFP, Cape Town

The West Indies will provide a stern test for hosts South Africa in the first match of the 2003 World Cup under the Newlands floodlights Sunday.

"I think the pressure's going to be on the South African side," said West Indies captain Carl Hooper.

Hooper, who took over as captain of the Caribbean outfit for their home series against South Africa in the West Indies two seasons ago, believes his team have turned the corner after more than a decade of disappointing results.

Since losing a thrilling match against South Africa in the ICC Champions Trophy in Sri Lanka in September, when the contest was decided off the last ball, the West Indies have won away one-day series in India and Bangladesh.

"The last time we played South Africa, in all fairness we should have won," said Hooper.

Not surprisingly, South African captain Shaun Pollock disagreed.

"The West Indies are a quality outfit but so are we," said Pollock.

"They have been playing on low, slow wickets on the sub-continent so they will have to adapt to South African conditions."

The final preparations of both teams were disrupted by unseasonal rain in Cape Town Friday but fine weather is expected Sunday for the game which gets underway at 1430 local time (1230GMT).

A key factor will be the condition of the pitch and outfield.

A 32-ton stage was placed over the pitch area for Saturday's opening ceremony and the outfield, which was to be used by a cast of 5000 during the ceremony, was covered with agricultural matting which enables the grass to stay healthy.

"If there is no more rain, the field should be fine," said groundsman Christo Erasmus, who predicted a surface that would be fair to both teams.

Erasmus believes he has been able to eliminate what used to be a Newlands syndrome which favoured the team batting first in

day-night matches.

"The pitch used to freshen up in the evening but I have managed to make it a fairer contest by taking off most of the grass. It has made the pitch a little slower but it means conditions stay very similar in both innings."

South Africa have greater depth in all-rounders but the West Indies batting is not as fragile as it has been in recent years.

Left-handed opening batsmen Chris Gayle and Wavell Hinds are capable of giving their side a quick-start to provide a platform for a strong top order which includes

Brian Lara, who has not played international cricket since returning from the ICC Trophy with hepatitis.

Hooper, Shivnarine Chanderpaul and Ramnaresh Sarwan are all high-quality batsmen with the West Indies line-up boasting four left-handers in their top six.

South Africa's new ball bowlers, Pollock and Makhaya Ntini, both have good records against left-handers but veteran Allan Donald has sometimes struggled to find the right line.

Their strength is in their all-

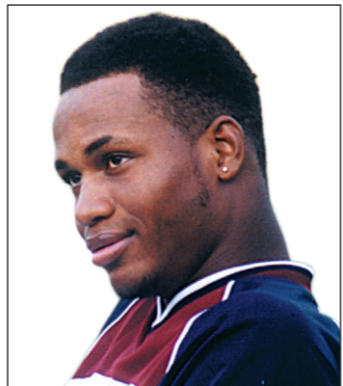
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Samuels cleared

AFP, Johannesburg

West Indies batsman Marlon Samuels was on Friday given the all-clear to play in the World Cup after being reinstated by the tournament's technical committee.

The 22-year-old Jamaican was set to fly out from Kingston later on Friday and will be available for his



MARLON SAMUELS

team's day-night opener against hosts South Africa in Cape Town on Sunday.

The fast emerging Samuels was axed from the squad and replaced by all-rounder Ryan Hinds when selectors feared his suspect knee would not stand up to the rigours of the six-week tournament in South Africa.

But he made a rapid recovery after treatment in the United States and doctors cleared him to play last month.

Samuels, who has played 15 Tests and 39 one-day games, had said he was always sure to play but he had been so angry at the original decision that he immediately said he would play for Jamaica against the Leeward Islands in a domestic fixture to prove the selectors wrong.

"At no point did I have any doubt about my fitness or my ability to play at the highest level," Samuels told the Nation newspaper in Barbados.

"The conclusions of the doctors only proved what I knew all along -- that I could play as long as I continued to understand the nature of my problem knee."

"That I would be cut from the 15-man squad for the World Cup had never been a consideration in my mind", the batsman said earlier Friday.

"So when (chairman of selectors) Viv Richards broke the news to me, I was absolutely floored."

"My decision to play for Jamaica was never intended to thumb my nose at the selection committee or the West Indies Cricket Board (WICB)."

"I would never do anything to jeopardise my career. But I felt that to sit home and watch cricket while I was in playing condition would be unfair to myself, my country and many fans."

SA-WI HEAD-TO-HEADS

AFP, Cape Town

Head-to-head record in last 10 one-day internationals between South Africa and West Indies ahead of their World Cup meeting at Newlands on Sunday:

Sept 13, 2002	South Africa won by 2 wickets	Colombo
May 16, 2001	West Indies won by 6 wickets	St Vincent
May 12, 2001	South Africa won by 53 runs	Trinidad
May 9, 2001	South Africa won by 7 wickets	Barbados
May 6, 2001	South Africa won by 8 wickets	Grenada
May 5, 2001	South Africa won by 132 runs	Grenada
May 2, 2001	South Africa won by 8 wickets	Antigua
Apr 28, 2001	West Indies won by 3 wickets	Jamaica
Feb 7, 1999	South Africa won by 50 runs	Centurion
Feb 5, 1999	South Africa won by 114 runs	Bloemfontein

Total matches played: 26
South Africa 18 wins; West Indies 8 wins

FORM GUIDE

AFP, Cape Town

Last ten one-day internationals played by South Africa and the West Indies ahead of their World Cup clash at Newlands here on Sunday:

SOUTH AFRICA (won eight, lost two)		Newlands
Dec 18, 2002	bt Pakistan by 34 runs	Paarl
Dec 16, 2002	bt Pakistan by 9 wickets	East London
Dec 13, 2002	bt Pakistan by 62 runs	Port Elizabeth
Dec 11, 2002	lost to Pakistan by 182 runs	Kingsmead
Dec 8, 2002	bt Pakistan won by 132 runs	Bloemfontein
Dec 6, 2002	bt Sri Lanka by 6 wickets	Kimberley
Dec 4, 2002	bt Sri Lanka by 8 wickets	Benoni
Dec 1, 2002	lost to Sri Lanka by 7 wickets	Centurion
Nov 29, 2002	bt Sri Lanka by 177 runs	Wanderers
Nov 27, 2002	bt Sri Lanka by 6 wickets	
WEST INDIES (won six, lost three, one NR)		Dhaka
Dec 3, 2002	bt Bangladesh by 86 runs	Dhaka
Dec 2, 2002	bt Bangladesh by 84 runs	Chittagong
Nov 29, 2002	No Result	Vijayawada
Nov 24, 2002	bt India by 135 runs	Vijayawada

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Everything Australia

INTERNET, Johannesburg

Australia should win the World Cup. It's that simple.

Ricky Ponting is the captain who, when players from all nations are paraded at Newlands in Cape Town tomorrow night for the opening ceremony, will have the most faith in the 14 surrounding him.

Australia has some of the best bowlers: Glenn McGrath, Brett Lee, Jason Gillespie and Shane Warne.

"I think we stack up very well with the other countries very well," said McGrath.

"We've got all areas covered. Very good fast bowlers, very good spinners, very good medium pacers, we've got all bases covered. We're very happy with what we've got."

They have the best line-up of batsmen: Matthew Hayden, Adam Gilchrist, Ponting, Damien Martyn, Michael Bevan, Darren Lehmann and Jimmy Maher.

"We probably couldn't be much happier with the bat," said Ponting. Some of the best fielders: Ponting, Andrew Symonds, Brad Hogg.

"The one-day game is a chance to show your skills, dive around in the field -- Ricky is the best in the world and other blokes in our side are exciting to watch. I enjoy watching them from first slip," said Warne.

The best wicketkeeper-batsman: Gilchrist.

"We really don't know and understand how good Adam Gilchrist is to keep for that long and at that standard, which is outstanding, then come out and flay attacks like he does with a minimum of fuss," said Maher.

Arguably the best tacticians:

Ponting, Warne, Gilchrist, coach John Buchanan.

"We talk tactics normally a night or two before the game," said McGrath.

"We sit down and have a team meeting, a planning session. We look at certain players and discuss plans we have for each opposition batsman and also how we're going to face each bowler."

"It's very well planned and thought out these days, most of it on computer."

"We can type in any ball, any shot, anything we want to see."

"We can find out the results of every possible delivery. If there's a short ball outside off stump, we can see where it goes more often than not from a particular batsman."

"Video technology plays a big part in getting us ready."

The coolest head: Bevan.

"All I try and do is ... make sure I give myself options," he said.

"I guess I know what works for me, the shots that I can play, the shots I can't."

"Just having a clear objective in the tight stages of matches is important."

And they have the wood on every other nation, especially the hosts.

"We've definitely got a psychological hold over South Africa," said Warne.

"The results prove that in all the different forms and the major games we've played against them."

"When it's got to the crunch, we've managed to beat them or they've been in a winning situation and we've come back to win."

There's an easy way to win a World Cup and a hard way.

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A TASTE OF THINGS TO COME? Australian captain Ricky Ponting holds the World Cup trophy during a promotional event in Cape Town on February 7.



A TOP SECURITY WICKET! A Zimbabwean policeman keeps guard as workers prepare the pitch at the Harare Sports Club yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP