

Geniuses apart

INTERNET, undated
As the World Cup unfolds for die-hard cricket lovers and four-yearly friends alike, special things will be hoped for from special players.

reached the semifinals on their home turf in 1996. The Indian folk hero scored at an average of 87, with two hundreds and three 50s.



THAT'S MY TROUSERS! England paceman Stephen Harmison (L) jokingly tries to pull down the trousers of teammate Andrew Flintoff as the players prepare for the official photo session at Cape Town yesterday.

Hosts lucky?

AFP, Cape Town
Shaun Pollock's South Africa begin their World Cup campaign here on Sunday aiming to break the jinx that has never seen the host nation win the title.

the preliminary round itself.
"The pressure of being the host is always enormous and it tends to be a problem throughout the event," said Imran Khan, Pakistan's World Cup winning captain in 1992.

Last survivor

INTERNET, Johannesburg
When the World Cup gets under way, only one surviving captain from the last tournament will lead his country out -- Stephen Fleming.

captain has since been taken by Nasser Hussain.
Similarly Steve Waugh has been replaced by Ricky Ponting, but Waugh failed to make the Australian squad altogether despite leading his country to the title in 1999.

Mbeki smells a rat

AFP, Johannesburg
South African President Thabo Mbeki hinted Friday that England and New Zealand's refusal to play cricket in Kenya and Zimbabwe were part of a carefully orchestrated campaign against an African-hosted World Cup.

drive to discredit the region ahead of the World Cup.
"Given what has now happened with regard to Zimbabwe and Kenya, it may very well be that the false 'travel alerts' about South Africa were intended to convey a global message of general African insecurity, to prepare for the campaign against Zimbabwe and Kenya, and therefore the African-hosted Cricket World Cup," he said.

Final hurrah

INTERNET, Johannesburg
Jonty Rhodes has punished his body more than most in forging a reputation as cricket's best fielder. At his fourth and final World Cup, he doesn't plan on letting up.

mates," Rhodes said. "He spends most of his time clicking my neck back in."
Since playing the first of 243 one-day internationals at the 1992 World Cup, the 33-year-old South African has made his name diving like a soccer goalkeeper and throwing like a baseball pitcher. He's taken 105 catches and saved hundreds of runs.



JONTY RHODES

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HOW THE PAKISTANIS AIM TO FLY! Pakistani kite-lovers carry a big kite decorated with the World Cup slogans on a cart pulled by a donkey during the 'Basant' annual kite-flying festival in Lahore on February 7.

Eng fix Zim issue today

AFP, Cape Town
England's cricketers have put off until Sunday a decision about whether or not to play their controversial World Cup opener against Zimbabwe in Harare on February 13.

Better safe than sorry

INTERNET, Johannesburg
Top teams competing in this year's CWC are not taking any chances especially when it comes to the fairer sex in their run-up to capturing the CWC championship title.

team have reached the super six phase.
Pakistan have also adopted a wait-and-see strategy before giving wives and girlfriends the green light to pack their bags for South Africa.

Haunted history

INTERNET, Johannesburg
It was the defining image of the 1999 World Cup in England.
Lance Klusener and Allan Donald walking disconsolately off the field after they contrived a run out while needing only one run in the semifinal against the Australians at Edgbaston.

even though he constantly speaks of only focusing on the next game, everyone knows that the Aussie challenge is in the back of his mind.
When asked about losing that semifinal, Pollock always reminds people that they did not lose.

Saurav sick

AFP, Cape Town
India's cricket captain Saurav Ganguly gave World Cup teammates a scare on Saturday when he woke up with a viral infection and sore throat five days before their first match.

But Ganguly braved the fever to attend the traditional meeting of managers and captains of all 14 teams called by the International Cricket Council (ICC) to discuss tournament rules.
"Saurav looked quite bad when he got up this morning, but insisted he will attend the meeting," team official Amrit Mathur told AFP.

Dangerous as usual

INTERNET, Johannesburg
A leading South African newspaper declared on Thursday that Pakistan were looking good and dangerous for the 2003 ICC Cricket World Cup that begins Sunday.
"Pakistan have looked outstanding in two matches against Gauteng sides in the last few days. Their batsmen seem in reasonable form and the bowlers have done little wrong and they even appear to be behaving themselves off the field," commented Stuart Hess while writing in Johannesburg's The Star newspaper.

at Lord's by eight wickets.
"The Waqar Younis-Wasim Akram new ball partnership is back in harness, and the two players of such massive experience will definitely play key roles in their team's performances."
"Whatever could be of interest will be the form of fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar, whose knee problems are reportedly a thing of the past. The management will be keeping a close eye on his stamina, although by all accounts, he has been bowling very quickly in the nets," the newspaper said.



YOU SURE WE'VE COME HERE FOR CRICKET? Pakistani superstar Wasim Akram walks along the quayside of a South African Navy ship where all the teams' players gathered for official photographs in Cape Town yesterday.



WORLD CUP IS IN THE AIR: An Australian cricket fan checks in at Cape Town airport on February 7.

PHOTO: AFP