Geniuses apart

As the World Cup unfolds for diehard cricket lovers and four-yearly friends alike, special things will be hoped for from special players. Few will carry as much weight of expectation as two rated among the best batsmen in history.

India's Sachin Tendulkar and West Indian Brian Lara will be hot topics in southern Africa, one because of the way he has illuminated the tournament in the past, the other because his fans are stil waiting.

While Tendulkar has proven himself on the one-day game's biggest stage, Lara will be seeking to atone for some less than fulfilling results, particularly in 1999, in what is likely to be his last World Cup. He will also be burning to put behind him the frustration of missing half of last year to injuries and illness.

Lara, then captain, was an abject failure four years ago in England, scoring only 106 runs in five matches, with a top score of 36, as the West Indies failed to make the last six. He fared a little better in 1996, with 269 in six matches, but his highest-scoring cup remains his first, in 1992, when he amassed

By contrast, Tendulkar holds the record for runs in a World Cup, through his glorious contribution of 523 in seven games when India

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.

The 29-vear-old failed to reach those heights last time, with 253 runs from seven matches in England, slightly less than the 283 he made in his first cup in 1992.

Comfortably one-day cricket's highest scorer, with 11,546 runs in 303 matches. Tendulkar also needs just 24 runs to become the highest scorer in World Cup cricket. While Pakistan's Javed Miandad made his 1083 runs in 33 matches, Tendulkar's 1059 have come from only 22.

The right-hander, who averages a century every nine one-day matches, will equal Mark Waugh's record of four World Cup hundreds if he scores one more.

The little master also boasts the second best World Cup batting average of those to have played 20 matches or more, his 58.83 sitting behind Viv Richards's 63.31.

Still, Tendulkar will be hoping to make amends for some recent results and injuries that have dropped him to a lowly 14th place on the one-day batting rankings, and which have his adoring Indian public fretting. Their main concern is that he has not passed 16 in his past eight one-day internationals.



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.

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. Fleming led New Zealand at the

1999 tournament Fleming skippered New Zealand in England back in 1999 and retains his position in South Africa for the

six-week tournament. "It's an honour because leading your side in two World Cups is something special," said Fleming,

the first Kiwi to achieve the feat. Of the 12 other captains, 11 of them have either retired, been sacked or become regular players in

their national sides. England were led in 1999 by Alec Stewart, whose role as one-day

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.

Former South African captain Hansie Cronje is the most controversial absentee

Cronje led his side to the semifinals four years ago but was later banned after confessing to taking money from bookmakers to alter the course of matches. Last year he was killed in a plane

Mohammad Azharuddin failed to garner much success as Indian captain last time around and, like Cronje, was stripped of the cap

Mbeki smells a rat | Final hurrah

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.

"To the best of our knowledge, these governments have provided no information to the International Cricket Council (ICC) indicating that the security of the players is threatened." Mbeki wrote in the African National Congress internal newslet-

He said recent "travel alerts" issued by the British and Australian governments to warn their citizens against terrorist threats in South Africa, could have formed part of a

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 nsecurity, to prepare for the campaign against Zimbabwe and Kenya, and therefore the Africanhosted Cricket World Cup," he said.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) will discover later Friday whether or not their final appeal to have their February 13 World Cup match against 7imbabwe in Harare switched to South Africa has been successful.

The England team want the match moved because of fears over their safety in the Zimbabwe capital. Meanwhile, New Zealand have

pulled out of their World Cup game

reputation as cricket's best fielder. At his fourth and final World Cup, he doesn't plan on letting up. "The chiropractor and I are good

Jonty Rhodes has punished his

body more than most in forging a

INTERNET, Johannesburg

mates," Rhodes said. "He spends most of his time clicking my neck

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.

In the one-day format of the World Cup, which starts Sunday in Cape Town, cutting off shots headed for the boundary can have as big an influence on a match as taking wickets. Choking the flow of runs, particularly on South Africa's smaller pitches, also adds to the pressure on the batting team. Rhodes's agility, as much as his batting, has won matches for his

country "Jonty gave a new dimension to

Eng fix Zim issue todav

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

England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) chief executive Tim Lamb and chairman David Morgan will continue discussions throughout Saturday with the players and their representatives, said an ECB "There will be no further public

comment on this issue today. At this stage, it is envisaged that a media conference will be held Sunday

morning," said the statement. Players and officials are in Cape Town for the opening ceremony of the World Cup due to be held later in the day. Earlier Lamb told reporters that a decision on Thursday's match in Harare was "unlikely" Saturday.

On Friday, World Cup commissioner Justice Albie Sachs of South Africa rejected England's appeal on safety grounds to relocate the

Better safe than sorry

INTERNET, Johannesburg

CWC are not taking any chances especially when it comes to the fairer sex in their run-up to capturing the CWC championship title.

most teams not to have their loved ones with them, particularly during their first round of matches. They might distract them or make them lose concentration in achieving that all-important aim, namely to reach the final on March 23.

ones will be allowed to be with their men for four days this month.

SA team media manager Gerald de Kock said on Friday players' wives and girlfriends would be allowed to accompany them between February 16 and 19, but won't be allowed to share their

Australian captain Ricky Ponting said his team's wives and girlfriends would join them later in the tourna-

loved ones would only be allowed to join them in South Africa once the

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

New Zealand vice-captain Chris Cairns is an exception among the foreign players. His loved ones are already in the country. He is engaged to South African Carin van de Berg of Johannesburg. The couple has a son Thomas.

The English team have nothing to look forward to: When they arrived in the country, captain Nasser Hussain made it clear that their loved ones would not accompany them at all.

Test champs

AFP, Cape Town

Hosts South Africa received a morale-boster ahead of the World Cup when they were officially crowned the champions of Test

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cricket here on Friday. South Africa displaced Australia "Pakistan have looked outstand-



Hosts lucky?

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 pressure of playing before nome crowds obviously took its toll n the previous seven editions of cricket's greatest event, but Pollock hopes it will be different this time.

"I know we carry the whole nation's expectations but we must not be haunted by the fact that no host has ever lifted the cup," Pollock said ahead of Sunday's opener against the West Indies.

"If we play up to potential we could be the first.

"We don't underestimate our opponents and in recent months the West Indies have played good cricket but I hope the boys will be right up there at the start.' England hosted the first three

World Cups, their best finish being the runners-up spot in 1979 when they lost to the West Indies in the When Asian rivals India and

Pakistan co-hosted the next tournament in 1983, they bowed out in the semifinals.

Australia won the title in India in 1987 and Pakistan followed suit when the next edition was held in Australia and New Zealand four

Sri Lanka beat the world when the tournament returned to the Indian sub-continent in 1996, but strictly speaking Ranatunga's men played the final in Pakistan, not at nome in Colombo.

England, which hosted the last edition in 1999, were knocked out in 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.

Former South African captain Kepler Wessels is, however, confident the "ghost of the host" will not haunt Pollock's men.

"Under that kind of pressure you can get tentative, but South Africa has the best combination in the tournament and that is not going to happen," Wessels said

The Proteas have the example of their rugby team to encourage them -- Francois Pienaar's men won the rugby World Cup which South Africa hosted in 1995

Former South African all-rounder Pat Symcox is confident South Africa are brave enough not to succumb. "You have to be brave and the

players we have picked are thosekind of players, and we hope the pressure of being the hosts will not affect their performance," said Symcox.

India's captain Saurav Ganguly, however, gives little importance to history. "History does not matter when

you go out there," he said. "It all boils down to how well you play on that particular day." Veteran Pakistani Wasim Akram, preparing for his fifth World Cup,

"If they don't win I will feel the ghost of hosts has bitten them from

believes winning the first game will

be crucial for South Africa.



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.

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.

ing 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. Pakistan have been billed as one

of the four semifinalists while some of the pundits here have predicted a Pakistan vs New Zealand final at the Wanderers on March 23. Pakistan's matches against

Australia, England, India and Zimbabwe are completely sold-out. But for the moment, it is their match against Australia that is the talk of the town.

"It's hard enough trying to predict Pakistan's form at the best of times. which makes trying to read their form in a bunch of warm-up matches even harder. But as an indication as to whether they will beat Australia when the two sides meet at the Wanderers on Tuesday, none of those performances against Easterns at Willowmoore Park will offer much," the newspaper said.

Pakistan defeated Australia in the 1999 World Cup preliminary round match but lost a lopsided final

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

"What 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 eve on his stamina, although by all accounts, he has been bowling very quickly in the nets," the newspaper

Pakistan is probably the best selling team in South Africa after the local side despite a poor recent tour to this part of the country. Not only the Indian Muslims plan to come on Tuesday in huge numbers to pump the confidence of Pakistan, the locals are also said to be joining hands in boosting the confidence of Pakistan. The local cricket fanatics want Pakistan to beat Australia at every cost.

Australian captain Ricky Ponting also fancied his team would be on the wrong side of local crowds when they take to the field and believes Pakistan will be the crowd favour-

"I don't think we can expect to much support from the South

African crowd here," he admitted.

It was the defining image of the 1999World 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. And as the South Africans prepare for another onslaught on cricket's most glittering prize -- this time at home -- they have to prove

INTERNET, Johannesburg

that afternoon's mistakes have been The South Africans start their campaign against a rejuvenated

West Indies side at Newlands in Cape Town tomorrow. It has been something of a man-

tra for the South Africans ever since. While they have consistently beaten all sides they have played against, the Australians seem to have a mental stranglehold on the Proteas

In 2001-2002. Steve Waugh's side won five of the six Tests they played, while they also dominated the one-day series in South Africa. Captain Shaun Pollock is always asked about the Australians, and

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. 'We tied the match," he said this week, "don't forget that ... we only lost on a technicality.

Which is strictly true, even if it is a

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.

Haunted history

moot point. The South Africans knew going into the match that in the event of a tie, the Aussies would go The one player who has to prove

beyond all others that he has moved past that fateful day is Klusener. He was named player-of-thetournament last time around for Herculean exploits with both bat and

ball, but since then has struggled to

Since the end of 1999, he has only managed five scores over 50, compared to the 13 50s and two hundreds he scored before and in

He scored a run-a-ball 60 not out against Sri Lanka in Benoni towards the end of last year, but that is the

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

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. "In fact, manager Jyoti Bajpai had prepared vice-captain Rahul Dravid to go for the meeting, but the

captain wanted to go himself."

will be fit to play India's first match against the Netherlands at Boland Park, Paarl on Wednesday, Mathur The World Cup officially gets underway later on Saturday with a two-hour opening ceremony at

Newlands, the venue of Sunday's

first match between hosts South

Africa and the West Indies.

Ganguly was also confident he

Top teams competing in this year's

This is evident from a decision by fear the players' wives or girlfriends

The South African players' loved

India have decided their players'

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