

Astle gets into his old stride

AFP, Bloemfontein

Nathan Astle's first World Cup hundred in seven years, which guided New Zealand to a Super Six victory over Zimbabwe here on Saturday, was the kind of innings the hard-hitting batsman aims to play every time he steps up to the crease.

Astle's unbeaten 102 at Goodyear Park saw New Zealand to a six-wicket win with 16 balls to spare and kept the Black Caps' hopes of a semifinal spot very much alive.

It was a remarkable innings as the 31-year-old went into the match suffering from a hernia problem as well as tendinitis in his left knee, both of which will require post-World Cup surgery.

"I was pretty sore but the adrenaline kicks in after a while and if you're playing well you tend not to feel anything."

Asked if he had consciously tried to make sure he finished the innings, Astle said: "I try to do that very time. If I stay in or get a hundred we usually win."

"I just tried to build partnerships and I had a big one with Chris Cairns."

Astle and all-rounder Cairns' fourth-wicket stand of 121 in 151 balls ensured a Kiwi victory in a high-pressure contest.

And Astle, New Zealand's leading run scorer in one-day internationals, said the context of his 13th limited overs hundred gave him particular pleasure.

"We need to win two of our three games to get to the semifinals. It was a must win game at the World Cup and we won it."

Since making a hundred against England at the 1996 World Cup in Ahmedabad, Astle has struggled to shine at the showpiece event.

His subsequent 15 World Cup innings yielded just 89 runs before he started to find his form at the tournament with 46 against West Indies and an unbeaten 54 against South Africa.

"My record is not something you can get away from. I've struggled in my World Cups but cricket is a funny game and it was my day today," said Astle.

"It was an excellent pitch to bat on, it got better as the day went on. There was a bit of life early on but it was a good cricket wicket."

His knock was praised by New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming.

"Like Nathan says if he stays in we usually win and his hundred was definitely one of the good things to

See page 14 come out of today's game."



PHOTO: AFP

JUST IN TIME: New Zealand ace Nathan Astle ondrives during his superb hundred against Zimbabwe at Bloemfontein on March 8.

Incredible hitting

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Final-over flurries are what one-day cricket is all about. But Heath Streak and Sean Ervine took the art from the improbable to the virtually impossible on Friday.

It had taken Zimbabwe 282 balls 47 overs to get to a sensible 190 for seven at Bloemfontein after recovering from an early collapse.

In the final absurd 18 deliveries, Streak and Ervine added 62, including three sixes and eight fours.

If Zimbabwe had managed to score at that rate throughout their innings, they would have totalled 1,033.

That might have been enough. Instead New Zealand, with Nathan Astle making a polished unbeaten century, paced their innings to perfection to win by six wickets with almost three overs to spare. No flurry was required.

Kiwi all-rounder Andre Adams was the man to suffer most at Zimbabwe hands on Friday but he had it coming to him.

New Zealand's slow-medium bowler Chris Harris, after a fine nine-over spell of one for 22, had disappeared for 23 more runs in the 48th over, Streak initiating the blood-letting

with two muscular sixes to mid-wicket off the first three balls. Ervine finished the over with two fours.

Left-arm spinner Daniel Vettori

then saw Streak, a man who would surely have developed into a world-class all-rounder if he had not had to carry the Zimbabwean attack on his broad shoulders, produce two drives over and through the covers as 13 came off the 49th over.

That was to look like miserly bowling six balls later. Adams is one of only three current batsmen in the world scoring at more than a run a ball in one-day internationals, so perhaps he deserved to find himself on the wrong end of the next 26 runs for once.

His fast-medium swing bowling disappeared to all parts as Ervine fizzed to 31 off 14 balls by the close. Streak ended on 72 not out, just shy of his one-day best.

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PHOTO: AFP

BAT LIKE THE WIND! Heath Streak and Sean Ervine return after their fireworks.

Ponting laughing up his sleeve

REUTERS, Port Elizabeth

Australia captain Ricky Ponting is confident his unbeaten world champions can counter whatever plans New Zealand hatch up for them in their World Cup Super Six meeting on Tuesday.

New Zealand won three out of four matches when the sides met in a 2002 tri-series and a key to that success was the way their bowlers restricted the Australia top-order with strategies for each player.

Ponting, however, believes his side, with seven successive wins in this World Cup, will be well prepared this time in Port Elizabeth.

"We will know pretty much what to expect," Ponting told Reuters.

"What they have used against us

in the past has worked for them so I am sure they will be looking to do the same again."

New Zealand's success in that 2002 event meant Australia missed out on the finals for only the third time since the tournament began in 1979-80.

That failure ended the one-day careers of Stephen and Mark Waugh.

Ponting, who subsequently took over as captain, gave New Zealand credit for that series but added: "It was not so much what they did then, it was more what we did."

"They had some pretty good plans for a lot of our players but we did not react or cope very well and we behaved poorly."

Flemo not bothered

AFP Bloemfontein

New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming has insisted he is ready for anything Australia can throw at him when the teams meet in their World Cup Super Six clash at Port Elizabeth on Tuesday.

After employing Brett Lee to target Sri Lanka skipper Sanath Jayasuriya in their opening second round game on Friday, Australian captain Ricky Ponting confessed that he wouldn't think twice about using the same tactic against Fleming.

"We've heard it all before. They're just following on from Steve Waugh. I'm Australia's first captain but not keeper, a member of their one-day squad) who was very good at using the media."

After the world champions' 96-run thrashing of Sri Lanka at Centurion on Friday, Ponting admitted his bowlers had targeted Jayasuriya as a means of undermining the confidence of the team.

Hit on the forearm by a Brett Lee special, Jayasuriya was forced to retire hurt and his participation in the rest of the tournament is still in doubt.

"I've always wanted to see any body getting seriously injured, but in the World Cup and in Super Sixes it's not scoring runs, then the bowlers there, admitted Ponting.

Australia are well-known for singling out the opposition captain and their opening batsman, believing that if they fall the rest of the team will follow.

"We need to put pressure on Stephen Fleming. He made a sensational century against South Africa," said Ponting, promising to be up in his team's efforts to place a place in the semifinals already being assessed.

"He's playing well at the top of the order. New Zealand have played some good cricket and we have a rivalry with them."

Not that the Black Caps leader, who unlike most captains has experience of sporting the all-conquering Aussie, was impressed.

Invited by a journalist to reply with a similar threat, given the Black Caps have express quick Shane Bond in their team, a disdainful Fleming

replied: "It's just a waste of breath, really."

Fleming added he was looking forward to the challenge of derring Australia who are unbeaten at the tournament.

"The next game will be a tough game. Australia are playing well. But, like I said before the South Africa game, this is the World Cup. You want to test yourselves against the best."

Reflecting on his side's six-wicket win over Zimbabwe here on Saturday which kept their semifinals hopes alive, Fleming said his only major concern was the way in which his attack was savaged for 62 runs in the final three overs.

Asked if anything went wrong, Fleming replied: "Not until the 47th over. It went a little bit pear-shaped then."

Nevertheless, the skipper, who has said his team can win the World Cup, was happy with the way his side were progressing.

"We're not flashing our name up in neon lights, we're going along quietly. We've got room to improve which is exciting."

"So far we're doing the business and business is going well."

Campbell called to pad up

REUTERS, Bloemfontein

Zimbabwe have asked Alistair Campbell to put down his television commentator's microphone and join their injury-ridden World Cup squad.

Campbell, a shock omission from the original 15-man squad but who has not picked up a bat for six weeks, told Reuters: "I was out here to commentate and the team management have contacted me and asked me to come in for the last two matches."

"I'm still contracted to them. I suppose I'm going from behind the mike across the boundary."

Zimbabwe want Campbell to

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Of a quiet achiever

REUTERS, Port Elizabeth

Australia batsman Damien Martyn is the quiet achiever of the world champions' line-up and is happy to stay that way.

While other players grab headlines, the 31-year-old Martyn goes about his business in an unassuming way.

But he still plays a pivotal role in the success of a side now unbeaten in seven matches during the tournament.

The Western Australia right-hander was at it again on Friday against Sri Lanka, crafting 52 from 58 balls while his captain Ricky Ponting, with 114, and vice-captain Adam Gilchrist, who passed 5,000 one-day runs on the way to scoring 99, took the plaudits.

Almost unnoticed, Martyn has scored three fifties as part of his haul of 204 runs at an average of 51.

"We do joke about it in the dressing room, about certain players grabbing the headlines all

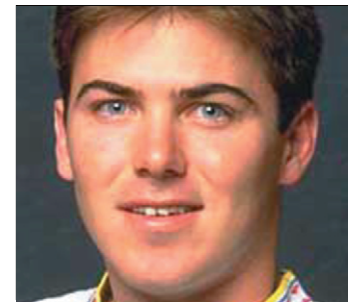
the time," he said on Saturday.

"I guess it could frustrate you as batting is my craft, you try to do it well and you don't get too many hundreds or significant scores in your career."

"But the way the likes of Matthew Hayden, Adam Gilchrist and Ricky Ponting have been batting, you just can't compete with that so it really doesn't bother me."

"The way I see it, you could be in the press for making a hundred or a negative thing but if you are not there at all then you are just in the background, being quiet and everyone's leaving you alone."

In a side of big names, Martyn is a player who has mastered the art of



DAMIEN MARTYN

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PHOTO: STAR FILE

Ricky Ponting



PHOTO: STAR FILE

Stephen Fleming

Loyal Kallis

REUTERS, Johannesburg

South African cricket received a welcome shot in the arm on Saturday following their early World Cup exit when Jacques Kallis committed himself to playing for his country for the foreseeable future.

Kallis, one of the world's few genuine all-rounders, had a modest World Cup but scotched rumours that he was about to pursue his career abroad.

Kallis has been linked with several English counties and, more recently, with Western Australia.

Kallis, though, said: "If there has been any talk, it certainly hasn't reached me."

He said: "I would hope I have at least a couple of good years at international level left in me, hopefully more."

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Fate in Mahela's own hands

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Sri Lanka coach Dav Whatmore says it is up to Mahela Jayawardene to wrench himself out of his World Cup form slump.

The leading 25-year-old batsman has endured a miserable tournament, with 16 runs from five innings including a three-ball duck against Australia at Centurion on Friday.

Whatmore said that he and his coaching staff had worked hard on the problem but the key lay within

the player.

"He has to come out of it himself," Whatmore told reporters as he reflected on Sri Lanka's 96-run loss to the world champions.

"We have been giving him as much help as we can and he has batted in every net session."

"He is more disappointed than anyone else but that is the way it goes sometimes. He is a special player and his contribution has been sadly missed."

Whatmore said that Jayawardene, averaging more than

47 in tests and more than 30 in his 138 one-day internationals, was handling the situation well.

"His confidence is pretty low but he's a realist, he's not emotional about something like that."

"Nevertheless, you sometimes wonder where the next run is coming from, although every batsman goes through that patch."

Sri Lanka could drop Jayawardene against India, with batsmen Jehan Mubarak and Avishka Gunawardene in reserve.

Cairns happy, looking ahead

INTERNET, Bloemfontein

New Zealand all-rounder Chris Cairns said beating Zimbabwe had given the Black Caps a huge chance of making the World Cup semifinals.

Cairns said the team had pinpointed the match as a must-win game and they did the job, beating Zimbabwe comfortably by six wickets in Bloemfontein on Saturday.

They now face defending champions Australia on Tuesday and India on Friday.

Cairns said: "We identified the fact we need two wins out of the three games to go through."

"We have got a big match next against the Australians."

"They are playing very, very well so we are going to have to be at the top of our game."



CHRIS CAIRNS

Cairns, who hit 54 and took two wickets for 16 runs, said he was pleased to put in a good performance with both bat and ball.

He said: "It's been a while coming but it's nice to be getting the rewards

for a lot of hard work in practise."

"It was nice to be back in the bowling crease."

He also praised Nathan Astle, who hit his 13th one-day century.

New Zealand had wobbled when 97 for three but Astle and Cairns put on a 121-run partnership to guide them to a workmanlike win.

Cairns said: "It was crucial for us to have a partnership and Nathan and myself managed to do that in the middle of the innings."

"Nathan played superbly well for his hundred."

Captain Stephen Fleming said Zimbabwe had given them a fright when the final three overs had gone for 62.

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Split captaincy

REUTERS, London

Nasser Hussain has reiterated his desire to stay on as Test captain despite quitting as skipper of the one-day side on Tuesday.

Speaking in his column in the Sunday Telegraph a weary Hussain also said it was time that the separate captains were appointed for each form of the game citing the increased pressures of the job as the chief reason.

Hussain stood down as one-day captain after rain washed out Zimbabwe's match against Pakistan, ending any chance England had of reaching the World Cup Super Six.

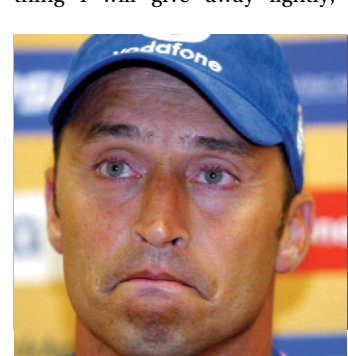
The 34-year-old admitted that the tournament, and his own form, had been a major disappointment.

"The three main reasons I came to the difficult decision were, firstly, that I believe a younger core of players should be selected to take the one-day side on to the next World Cup," Hussain said in the report.

"Secondly, I did not warrant a place in the team any more, and

thirdly I want to preserve my enthusiasm for carrying on in Test cricket, if possible as captain."

"The England captaincy in any form of cricket is something I have been very proud of and not something I will give away lightly."



NASSER HUSSAIN

added Hussain, who took over as England captain in 1999.

Hussain believes splitting the captaincy will make both jobs easier,

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Windies for Woolmer?

INTERNET, Port Elizabeth

Bob Woolmer could become the new West Indies coach at the end of the World Cup.

The former South Africa coach has confirmed he was interviewed by the West Indies' four national selectors including Sir Viv Richards early last week in Kimberley.

"I had been told by good friend and Dr Rudi Webster (former Warwickshire bowler and director of the West Indies academy) the job would soon be vacant and he asked whether I wanted to submit my CV, which I did," Woolmer told the BBC Sport website.

"I had a two-and-a-half hour meeting with the West Indies selection panel in Kimberley early last week."

"I am not sure what will come of it. It is up to them to call me now. But it goes without saying, for the



PHOTO: STAR FILE

Bob Woolmer

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