



TIMELY TON: Sri Lankan batsman Marvan Atapattu plays a cover drive against Zimbabwe at Buffalo Park in East London yesterday.

Atapattu takes SL into semis

AFP, East London

Marvan Atapattu made an unbeaten century as Sri Lanka defeated Zimbabwe by 74 runs here on Saturday to qualify for the semi-finals of the World Cup.

Chasing Sri Lanka's 256-5, Zimbabwe were bowled out for 182 in 41.5 overs with star batsman Andy Flower suffering a disappointing end to his international career when he was given out leg before wicket for 38 despite seeming to get an inside edge.

Sri Lanka take on reigning champions Australia in Tuesday's first semi-final at Port Elizabeth, while India play Kenya in the second semi-final at Durban on Thursday.

Zimbabwe were on course for a win which would have denied Sri Lanka their place in the last four, and lifted New Zealand instead, when Flower was at the crease with his brother Grant.

They took the total to 140 in the 29th over before Andy Flower was out.

His dismissal started a collapse in which Zimbabwe lost their last seven wickets for 42 runs.

Sri Lankan captain Sanath Jayasuriya, braving a chipped thumb in his bowling hand, took three for 30.

Earlier, Atapattu carried his bat through with an unbeaten 103, his tenth one-day international century.

It was a restrained innings and at one stage it seemed unlikely Sri Lanka would make a competitive total as they adopted a cautious approach, scoring only 140 off the first 35 overs.

Sangakkara lifted the scoring rate by hammering 35 off 25 balls after being dropped at deep midwicket by Douglas Hondo off Sean Ervine when he had six.

Sri Lanka struggled at the start of their innings against steady

bowling by Zimbabwe captain Heath Streak and Andy Blignaut, who bowled throughout the first 15 overs while Sri Lanka laboured to 52 for the loss of Jayasuriya.

Atapattu and left-hander Avishka Gunawardene, who was picked ahead of out-of-form Mahela Jayawardene, put on 83 for the second wicket to provide a solid foundation for the innings.

Atapattu shared stands of 53 with Aravinda de Silva (25) and 52 with Sangakkara before reaching his century off the third ball of the final over of the innings after facing 125 balls.

Atapattu gave his only chance when he skied Hondo off the last ball of the innings but was dropped by wicketkeeper Tatendu Taibu.

Streak was Zimbabwe's most successful bowler, taking two for 40 in ten overs.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the World Cup Super Six match between Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe Lanka at Buffalo Park on Saturday:

SRILANKA				
Atapattu not out	103			
Jayasuriya c Taibu b Streak	22			
Gunawardene c and b Marillier	41			
De Silva c Taibu b Ervine	25			
Sangakkara c G Flower b Streak	35			
Arnold c G Flower b Hondo	1			
Vaas not out	11			
Extras: (lb-3, w-15)	18			
Total: (For 5 wks in 50 overs)	256			
Fall of wickets: 1-41, 2-124, 3-175, 4-227, 5-233				
ZIMBABWE				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Streak	10	0	40	2
Blignaut	8	0	40	0
Friend	2	0	13	0
Hondo	5	0	36	1
G Flower	10	0	44	0

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Andy Flower

PHOTO: STAR FILE

Bye now, see you soon

AFP, East London

Zimbabwe batsman Andy Flower on Saturday confirmed his retirement from international cricket and thanked those who supported him during his 13-year career.

Flower, 34, issued a statement during his final match, a World Cup Super Six clash against Sri Lanka here at Buffalo Park.

He made it clear he was leaving Zimbabwe with his family but said he hoped to return "in years to come."

"For the last 13 years it has been an honour and a privilege to represent my country. The decision to bring my international career to an end has been a difficult and sad one to make."

"However, it is now time for my family and I to move on. Perhaps,

in the years to come, I will be able to play a role in the cricketing fortunes of Zimbabwe."

"To all Zimbabweans who have supported me from my debut until today I want to say thank you."

Flower's wife and three children have already moved from Zimbabwe to England where he will play county cricket for Essex this year.

Flower and teammate Henry Olonga won worldwide praise when they donned black armbands during the country's first World Cup match against Namibia in Harare to protest against the Zimbabwe government.

Flower went into Saturday's match with a Test record of 4,794 runs in 63 matches at an average of 51.54.

He had also made 6,685 runs in

211 one-dayers at an average of 35.18.

"I have no regrets about what I have done at this tournament," the batsman said on Wednesday.

Flower, came under intense pressure to abandon his anti-Robert Mugabe protest, also said he will play once again for Essex in the English county championship later this year.

Furthermore, he revealed that wife Rebecca, children, Jamie, four, Sam, two and one-month-old Danielle had already left for England.

"I always find it strange when people say they have no regrets about what they have done in the last 20 years," said Flower.

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Rich Indians

INTERNET, Kolkata

India's cricketers are set for huge financial rewards if they win the World Cup in South Africa.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has promised the team a collective bonus of 75 million rupees (1,574,000 dollars) if they lift the trophy after the March 23 final in Johannesburg.

If all goes according to plan, each member of Saurav Ganguly's 15-man squad stands to make about 5 million rupees (105,000 dollars).

But the team has already earned 18 million rupees (378,000 dollars) for reaching the semifinals.

"Each team member is already richer by 1.25 million rupees (26,244 dollars) and another 26, 244 dollars will be added if they reach the final," said BCCI treasurer Kishor Rungta.

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Cricket Academy in Fatullah

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board is going to build a modern academy around Fatullah Stadium.

Board president Ali Asghar disclosed this after a leading consulting firm, SMEC, presented the cricket boss with a formal letter proposing the preparation of a preliminary masterplan for the new academy at a reception yesterday.

The reception was hosted by the Australian High Commissioner, Lorraine Barker, to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the SMEC's operations in Bangladesh.

The high commissioner, on

behalf of the SMEC Foundation, handed over two cricket bats signed by Australia one-day captain Ricky Ponting to two promising Bangladeshi cricketers, Ziaur Rahman and Mohammed Nazim Uddin. The bats were also accompanied by a personal letter from Ponting, who is a supporter of the foundation.

Speaking at the function, the High Commissioner pledged to continue her country's support for the fledgling Test-playing nation. The two boards signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the game's management and

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Quips & Quotes

AFP, Johannesburg

Who's saying what at the World Cup:

"It was just another win for us, but there were other factors involved as we want Sri Lanka to play Australia in the first semifinal at Port Elizabeth. I think Sri Lanka have a very good chance to beat the Aussies on that slow Port Elizabeth wicket."

India skipper Saurav Ganguly on his tactical planning.

"We could have been more positive in all areas. We have to learn to put in steady performances even on our off days. It's all or nothing with us."

Frustrated New Zealand skipper Stephen Fleming after the defeat to India had put

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Maestro will be missed

AFP, Johannesburg

Cricket will lose one of its most charming batsmen after the World Cup when Aravinda De Silva quits the scene after two decades of glorious service to Sri Lanka.

The 37-year-old may, or may not, realise his dream of winning the title for his country, as he had done in 1996, but he goes out a contented man having proved to the selectors they treated him shabbily.

Sri Lanka's hopes of making the semifinals rest on India defeating New Zealand at Centurion later on Friday. A Kiwi win will knock De

Silva's team out of the reckoning.

De Silva has not forgotten the bleak period three years ago when the selectors dropped him from the Sri Lankan team, saying he was overweight and unfit for international cricket.

"I think I was at my peak then and to be treated so badly really hurt," De Silva recalled.

"I could have called it quits then but I am not a person to give in so easily. I worked hard on my fitness, lost 12 kilos and scored a lot of runs so that the selectors had to call me back."

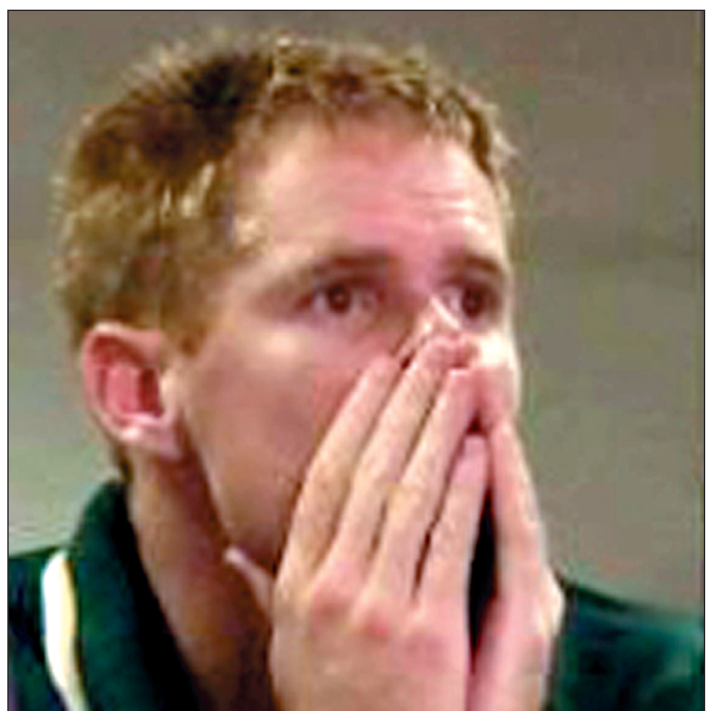
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Aravinda De Silva

PHOTO: STAR FILE

Shaun may be shunned



Shaun Pollock

PHOTO: STAR FILE

AFP, Johannesburg

Shaun Pollock's future as South Africa captain was in doubt on Saturday with reports here that he would be forced out as punishment for the team's humiliating World Cup flop.

The United Cricket Board of South Africa (UCBSA) were forced to quash speculation that Pollock had already jumped before being pushed as the selectors met to pick a squad for tournaments in Bangladesh and Sharjah.

"Shaun has not resigned," said Omar Henry, the convenor of selectors after a meeting Friday with the skipper as well as coach Eric Simons.

However, the Johannesburg Star newspaper reported that many high-ranking figures want Pollock out following the team's failure to make it past the first round of the World Cup after starting the event as co-favorites with defending champions Australia.

The paper said that there would be a "night of the long knives" in which Lance Klusener and Nicky

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Problematic pitch

AFP, Durban

Australian wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist has become the latest member of the reigning champions' World Cup squad to express concerns over the state of the Port Elizabeth pitch where Ricky Ponting's men are due to play their World Cup semifinal on Tuesday.

Australia have had two narrow escapes on the St George's Park strip edging England by two wickets and surviving a six-wicket burst from New Zealand's Shane Bond before recording a 96-run Super Six win.

The pitch is being reviewed by the tournament organisers and Gilchrist has said using another part of the square may be the way to get more pace and bounce into the surface.

"I think the wicket we played South Africa on last year was on a different side of the square," said

Gilchrist.

"It might be that that side of the wicket is more conducive to a one-day game and better suited to a showpiece occasion such as the World Cup semifinal."

Gilchrist's teammate Darren Lehmann, following on from criticism of the strip by skipper Ponting, said urgent action was required.

"The authorities had better have a good look at the Port Elizabeth pitch. Against New Zealand, it was a slight improvement on the strip on which we played England but it was still substandard," Lehmann said.

"We are playing a semifinal there and for everyone's sake not least the crowd who want to see 250-plus scores we're hoping for a big improvement," the middle-order batsman told the BBC.

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We'll like Lanka

AFP, Johannesburg

Indian captain Saurav Ganguly rejoiced at his team's seven-wicket triumph over New Zealand on Friday, then hoped Sri Lanka will play them in the World Cup final.

The Indian win virtually knocked the Kiwis out of contention and gave Sri Lanka a chance to enter the semifinals if they defeat Zimbabwe, already eliminated, at East London on Saturday.

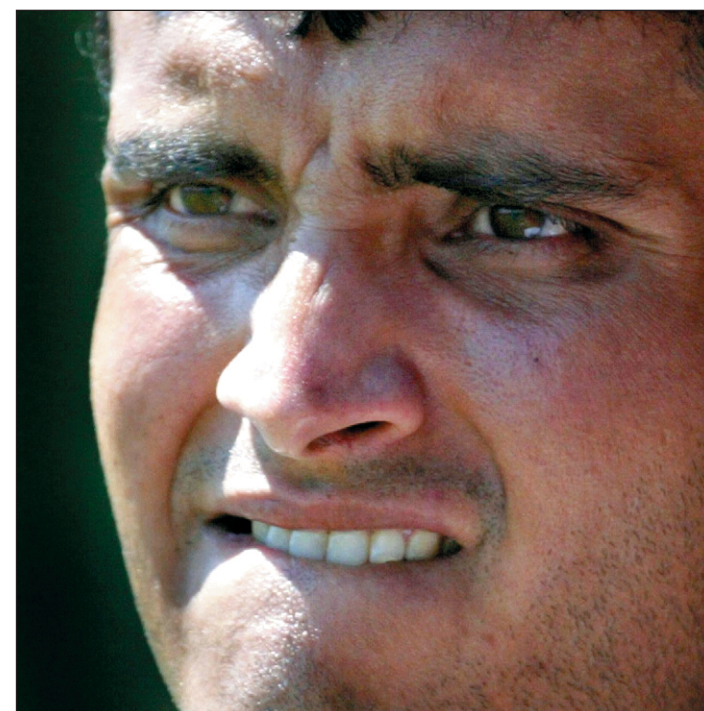
"It was just another win for us, but there were other factors involved as we want Sri Lanka to play Australia in the first semifinal at Port Elizabeth," said Ganguly, whose team play Kenya in the other semifinal at Durban on Thursday.

"I think Sri Lanka have a very good chance to beat the Aussies on that slow Port Elizabeth wicket."

"Frankly, we would rather face Sri Lanka in the final than Australia, but the Sri Lankans will have to beat Zimbabwe first and then Australia."

Ganguly said the win over the Kiwis did not settle scores of the 2-0 rout in the Tests and the 5-2 defeat

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Saurav Ganguly

PHOTO: STAR FILE