

## A trial by Murali

AFP, Port Elizabeth

The shadow of Muttiah Muralitharan looms over reigning champions Australia as they prepare for Tuesday's World Cup semifinal against Sri Lanka on a wicket tailor-made for the star off-spinner.

Muralitharan, voted by cricket's bible Wisden as the best Test bowler of all time, could not have asked for better conditions to stop the rampaging Australians from recording a 15th consecutive one-day victory.

The low bounce of the St

George's Park wicket is ideally suited for Muralitharan and Sri Lanka's other two spinners, captain Sanath Jayasuriya and veteran Aravinda de Silva.

It was on the same surface that Australia faced their toughest World Cup matches against England and New Zealand, both of which they won after the top order struggled to get the runs.

Australian captain Ricky Ponting was so worried about the wicket that World Cup organisers were forced to call in pitch experts to ensure a high-scoring semifinal.

"I think on that pitch we can win

it," said a confident Jayasuriya after his team sneaked into the last four by defeating Zimbabwe on Saturday.

"It's a pitch which will suit us. Anything can happen on the day and we will be playing hard cricket just like we have done in the past."

Ponting, however, played down the Muralitharan threat despite the way Kenya's Asif Karim embarrassed his middle order at Durban on Saturday.

Karim, a 39-year-old left-arm spinner, had figures of three wickets for two runs in his first eight overs during Australia's five-wicket

win. But Ponting, asked how he planned to tackle Muralitharan, said: "Did you see the game last week (Australia beat Sri Lanka by 96 runs at Centurion with Muralitharan taking one for 47)?"

"I thought we played very well against Muralitharan and hopefully we'll do the same again."

Ponting, whose team are still unbeaten in the tournament, conceded the slower pitch expected at St George's Park could favour Sri Lanka.

"It's pretty well known Sri Lanka

SEE PAGE 15



LOOK AFTER YOUR HEAD THIS TIME: Sri Lankan captain Sanath Jayasuriya (L), manager Dilip Mendis (C) and Marvan Atapattu (R) have a conversation during practice at Port Elizabeth yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

### ROAD TO SEMIS

AFP, Port Elizabeth

How Australia and Sri Lanka reached the semifinals of the 2003 World Cup:

#### SRI LANKA

**Feb 10:** beat New Zealand by 47 runs at Bloemfontein (Sri Lanka 272-7; S Jayasuriya 120, H Tillakaratne 81; and New Zealand 225 in 45.3 overs; S Styris 141)

**Feb 14:** beat Bangladesh by 10 wickets at Pietermaritzburg (Bangladesh 124 in 31.1 overs; C

#### AUSTRALIA

**Feb 11:** beat Pakistan by 82 runs in Johannesburg (Australia 310-8 in 50 overs; A Symonds 143, R Ponting 53; and Pakistan 228 in 44.3 overs; B Hogg 4-54, I Harvey 4-58)

**Feb 15:** beat India by nine wickets at Centurion (India 125

SEE PAGE 15

### HEAD TO HEAD

Australia v Sri Lanka

AFP, Port Elizabeth

Recent head-to-head record of matches between Australia and Sri Lanka ahead of their World Cup semi-final at St George's Park here on Tuesday:

March 7 2003	Australia won by 96 runs	Centurion
Jan 21 2003	Australia won by 9 wickets	Melbourne
Jan 15 2003	Australia won by 4 wickets	Brisbane
Jan 9 2003	Sri Lanka won by 79 runs	Sydney
Dec 22 2003	Australia won by 142 runs	Perth
Sept 27 2002	Sri Lanka won by 7 wickets	Colombo
Aug 31 1999	Sri Lanka won by 8 wickets	Colombo
Aug 26 1999	Australia won by 27 runs	Colombo
Aug 22 1999	Australia won by 50 runs	Galle
Feb 7 1999	Australia won by 43 runs	Melbourne

## Spinners staring at St. George's



DEVIL IN DISGUISE! Sri Lankan superstar Muttiah Muralitharan smiles during practice at Port Elizabeth yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

AFP, Port Elizabeth

Muttiah Muralitharan and Brad Hogg are as different as chalk and cheese. One is a proven off-spinner, the other a left-arter just learning the trade.

Yet both could play a key role when Sri Lanka take on reigning champions Australia in Tuesday's World Cup semifinal on the slow St George's wicket regarded as ideal for the twerkers.

Rival captains Ricky Ponting and Sanath Jayasuriya both believe the wicket is not conducive to strokeplay because it has played slow and low.

Yet, in the four World Cup matches played here, spinners have taken just four wickets two by England's Ashley Giles and one each to New Zealand's Daniel Vettori and West Indian Chris Gayle.

The semifinal may be the time for spin to take the front seat, but will it?

Experts have worked hard to repair the turf after it was criticised by Ponting and World Cup organisers pledged to produce a surface that will fetch plenty of runs.

The Australians have played down the threat from Muralitharan, rated by cricket bible Wisden as one of the best bowlers of all time.

"Did you see the game last week," Ponting said, referring to the Super Sixes match between the two sides at Centurion when Muralitharan went for 1-47 as the Australians won by 96 runs.

"I thought we played very well against Muralitharan and hopefully we'll do the same again."

It does not worry Muralitharan if the wicket is a spinner's delight or a batting beauty. He can make the ball turn on a glass top.

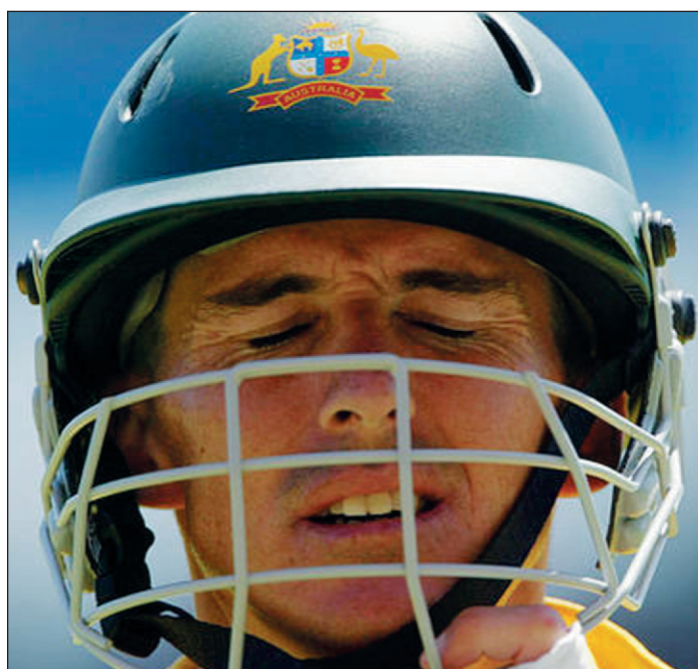
"My job is to take wickets and I hope to do the same in the semifinal," said the Sri Lankan star who has 321 one-day wickets and 17 in the current World Cup.

Hogg, in contrast, has a career haul of 23 wickets from 25 matches, and eight so far in the World Cup.

The smiling left-arter may not have played in the tournament if Shane Warne had not tested positive for a banned diuretic.

But Warne has not been missed

SEE PAGE 15



THE PRETENDER: Australian leg-spinner Brad Hogg.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

## Martyn blow

AFP, Port Elizabeth

Australia's plans for their World Cup semifinal clash against Sri Lanka suffered a setback on Monday when batsman Damien Martyn was ruled out because of a broken finger.

The 31-year-old Martyn suffered the injury in his right index finger while fielding in the five-wicket win against Kenya on Saturday in Durban.

Martyn, one of just four players to have figured in all of his team's nine matches so far, needed an X-ray on his finger after Saturday's Super Six game in which he didn't bat.

"He's out of Tuesday's game and thereafter we will have to see how it is," said Aussie coach John Buchanan after Monday's practice here.

"In all likelihood we will go with a form batsman to replace him, but we'll have a look at the conditions in the morning and finalise the team then."

Australia have already lost leg-spinner Shane Warne (drugs test) and fast bowler Jason Gillespie (heel injury) from their World Cup squad, but Sri Lankan coach Dav Whatmore didn't think the absence of Martyn would make that much difference.

"He's a steady player and a good fielder, but there've been other

changes to their squad without making any difference," said Whatmore.

Martyn's injury means a recall



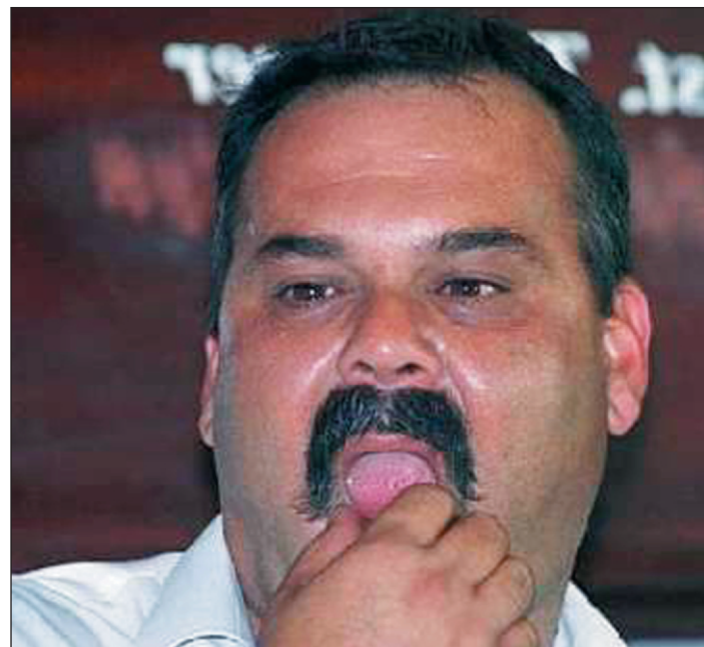
DAMIEN MARTYN

for Michael Bevan, who missed the five-wicket win over Kenya with a back strain.

It also looks like solving a tricky selection headache for skipper Ricky Ponting who was facing having to drop either Andrew Symonds or Ian Harvey to accommodate Bevan.

Martyn has scored 235 runs for his side during the tournament at an average of 47.0 with a best of 67 not out against the Netherlands in the first round.

## Get strong mentally



Dav Whatmore

PHOTO: STAR FILE

AFP, Port Elizabeth

Sri Lanka's Australian coach Dav Whatmore insists his team will have to be mentally strong if they are to beat the reigning champions in Tuesday's World Cup semifinal.

Australia go into the game at St George's Park having won all their nine matches so far, while Sri Lanka sneaked through to the semifinals with considerable help from Asian neighbours India.

Whatmore, who guided Sri Lanka to the World Cup title in 1996, said the task ahead was difficult, but not impossible.

"Australia are a very good side," the 49-year-old said. "They are clearly the form team and the favourites."

"What brings them back to the field is the surface we are going to play on. But that's one thing. Our guys have got to be ready for it mentally more than anything else."

Whatmore believes the slow wicket at the St George's Park gives him confidence for the key match.

SEE PAGE 15

## The war-plan

REUTERS, Port Elizabeth

Tactical analysis of the World Cup semifinal between Australia and Sri Lanka on Tuesday.

Australia and Sri Lanka seem certain to adopt directly contrasting approaches on Tuesday.

Australia want a quick pitch, a quick game and a quick finish.

Sri Lanka would favour a slower, true track, and a long game.

The onus may be on skipper Sanath Jayasuriya to try something new after losing by 96 runs against Australia at Centurion 10 days ago.

#### AUSTRALIA BOWLING, SRI LANKA BATTING

When bowling, Australia will rely heavily on Brett Lee and Glenn McGrath to bowl straight and fast and to take early wickets. A disciplined bowling line will be crucial. They will look to tuck up the Sri Lankan stroke-makers, and the strong-forearmed Jayasuriya in particular, who is magnificent when offered any width. Jayasuriya can expect a barrage of Lee deliveries aimed at his ribcage (and at that left forearm which Lee almost broke in their last meeting).

Ricky Ponting will attack constantly, with test match slip cordons for as long as possible.

When batting, Sri Lanka have two options. They could try to curb their instincts, as they did in the teams' last meeting, and try to survive the early

SEE PAGE 15

## Go for sledging

AFP, Port Elizabeth

Australian captain Ricky Ponting unveiled a menacing formula to defeat Sri Lanka in the World Cup semifinal here on Tuesday.

Play with intent and intimidate the opposition.

A troublesome pitch at St George's Park and Sri Lanka's unpredictable ability to raise their game stand in the way of Ponting's team and a place in the World Cup final at Johannesburg on Sunday.

"We used a few words at the start of the tournament which were 'intent and intimidate'," Ponting told the Australian Associated Press (AAP).

"And most meetings we've had since those words have come up again."

"They're words we have used and have worked pretty well. I wouldn't have thought we would get too funky."

Australia's destructive skills with bat and ball are complemented by a ruthless streak which is also

SEE PAGE 15



Ricky Ponting

PHOTO: STAR FILE