



CONCENTRATE GILLY, CONCENTRATE: Australian wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist (L) practicing in the nets with a coach at Port Elizabeth yesterday.

Last pitch attempt

AFP, Port Elizabeth

Groundsmen at St George's Park hit back on Monday at growing criticism over their pitches ahead of Tuesday's World Cup semifinal clash between Australia and Sri Lanka.

Defending champions Australia, who struggled in their last two matches here on slow, low surfaces against England and New Zealand, have made no secret of their anger over the wickets.

However, staff here have been quick to point out that the pitch also yielded 462 runs when the West Indies and New Zealand met in a first round match.

In an attempt to reassure the Aussies, the World Cup's head of grounds Hilbert Smith visited the venue as a review was launched.

"His feeling is that it's not the preparation, it's in the actual surface, which is pretty old," said stadium manager Andrew McLean.

England's matches here, against Namibia and Australia, and the Australia-New Zealand fixture, were all played on old pitches.

"We call the pitch soil 'bully' and it traditionally comes from a town about two hours from here," McLean told the BBC.

"But our new pitches are laid with bully from Natal, and it is exactly the same as what's used in Durban.

"So far in this World Cup the first two pitches I was very happy with. The third one was a bit slow, we acknowledged that.

"The last one was slightly too moist. Had it been harder it would have been fine.

"It's like baking a cake, a combination of science and art, except a cake is baked in an oven, which is a controlled environment. Here we often have gale force winds for two days before a match."

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Turbanator backs SL

AFP, Durban

Harbhajan Singh believes Sri Lanka can pull off an upset and defeat reigning champions Australia in their World Cup semifinal on Tuesday if the spinners bowl well.

"The Australians are very good players, there's no doubt about it," the Indian off-spinner said.

"But when it comes to playing spin, they play too many shots.

"Sri Lanka have a very good chance. They are playing with Muttiah Muralitharan, Aravinda de Silva is bowling well and they also have Sanath Jayasuriya, three good spinners."

New Zealand's Scott Styris, who hit 141 off 125 balls against the Sri Lankans, earlier in the World Cup, believes Muralitharan can be thwarted by taking an off-stump guard.

"You can't dominate Murali. You have to aim for the gaps," Styris told the BBC.

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Harbhajan Singh

PHOTO: STAR FILE

Bowler's bad dream

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Sanath Jayasuriya is a rarity. He may, indeed, be unique. How else to describe a man who manages to be modestly macho, while outrageously thrilling, all in a quiet, understated sort of way?

He is also popular. Sri Lanka and Australia, who meet in the World Cup semifinal on Tuesday at Port Elizabeth, have had an uneasy relationship in recent years but it is hard to imagine Jayasuriya raising his voice to anyone.

If he sledges, it is surely done at fine leg or long on and in a whisper, to make sure no one could possibly be offended.

His batting, though, is overtly offensive.

The 33-year-old left-hander has been offending bowling statistics for the past seven years, since re-inventing the one-day game almost single-handedly.

He had begun his career as an understated sort of left-arm spinner, batting quietly at number seven.

Just before the 1996 World Cup,

however, someone had the idea of transforming him into an opening pinch-hitter to take advantage of new laws which forced more fielders into attacking positions for the first 15 overs.

The stocky, Popeye-forearmed Jayasuriya, helped by some flat batting tracks, proceeded to make a name for himself -- 82 runs off 44 balls against England in the 1996 quarterfinals, 53 off five overs with the help of Romesh Kaluwitharana against India in the semifinals -- as Sri Lanka lifted the trophy.

Jayasuriya, a devout Buddhist, had continued in like fashion ever since.

While he can take care and time over his craft -- he took more than 13 hours to paint a Test 340 against India in 1997 -- he is better known for one-day caricatures and doodles.

They remain valuable collector's items nonetheless.

Sixteen times he has scored one-day centuries and only once have Sri Lanka ended on the losing side. The 16th came against New Zealand earlier in the tournament.

The most exciting must have been the 134 not out off 65 balls against Pakistan in April 1996, an innings including 11 fours and 11 sixes, although his 189 off 161 balls against India in October 2000, just five off the world record, also deserves mention. Ask Jayasuriya about his batting, though, and he will glance the conversation adeptly towards teammate Aravinda de Silva's fine form, or to Muttiah Muralitharan's off-spin. Or, indeed, to the weather or towards anything but himself. It's his way.

The Australians will certainly be talking plenty about him before Tuesday's game.

Ricky Ponting said as much after the side's first meeting in the World Cup, when Brett Lee sent the Sri Lanka captain to hospital with a chipped thumb bone and a badly bruised forearm.

"You don't want to see anybody seriously hurt and hopefully he isn't," Ponting said. "But it's a World Cup and we are trying to bowl where proved

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Unusual suspect

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Unexpected World Cup semifinalists Kenya have made a habit of confounding easy assumptions.

The East Africans flourished while co-hosts South Africa and the troubled Zimbabwe side floundered, progressing to a semifinal against India in Durban on Thursday. Defending champions Australia play 1996 champions Sri Lanka in the other semi in Port Elizabeth on Tuesday.

New Zealand left for home after the conclusion of the second round on Saturday convinced they would have clinched a semifinal place if they had gone ahead with their first round game in Nairobi. The New Zealanders forfeited four points when their governing board decided it was unsafe to play in Kenya.

In retrospect, though, a New Zealand win was by no means certain. Kenya defeated 1996 champions Sri Lanka with home advantage and the Kiwis' batting and support bowling in the Super Sixes proved

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GOTTO LOOK GOOD TOO! Indian superstar Sachin Tendulkar takes time off to do some shopping at Durban's Gateway shopping mall on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Betting bonanza

AFP, New Delhi

India's vast but illegal betting industry, which has already made a killing on the World Cup despite stepped-up police crackdowns in the cricket-crazy country, expects to hit a jumbo jackpot on the final, officials said Monday.

According to an estimate by privately-run Zee Television, a staggering 300 billion rupees (6.25 billion dollars) worth of wagers has exchanged hands since the start of the 14-nation tournament on February 8.

The figure was three times higher than the amount national police agencies had initially estimated would be wagered during the tournament.

The TV station, quoting experts and some of India's shadowy bookmakers, said the finals of the World Cup on March 23 was likely to see frenzied betting and rake in five billion rupees (one billion dollars) or more.

"The World Cup saw the phenomenon of large betting networks shifting base to small towns and

districts which we think was a result of our relentless drive," a senior official from the Central Bureau of Investigation said.

"And what makes detection tough is that the bookies this time have a technological edge on us with mobile telephones and SMS (Short Message Service) to conduct their trade," the official from the federal agency conceded.

A total of 202 major bookies have been arrested separately from the cities of Bombay, Jaipur, Madras and the Indian capital since the beginning of the World Cup in South Africa.

New Delhi police, who had already launched seven crackdowns in which computers, illegal telephone exchanges, TV sets and millions of rupees were seized, struck lucky again on Sunday with the arrests of four wanted bookies.

Secret diaries recovered from the now-imprisoned punters have offered names of some of the rich and powerful men and women from

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Twist of fate

AFP, Cape Town

Two months ago, Western Province skipper Graeme Smith found himself on the wrong end of a foul-mouthed confrontation with the South African national team as Shaun Pollock's side played a World Cup warm-up match at Greenpoint.

Four weeks later, all was forgotten as the 22-year-old Smith was called-up to replace the injured Jonty Rhodes for the World Cup.

Now, a further four weeks down the line, Smith has come full circle by being named successor to Pollock who was unceremoniously dumped following the country's failure to get past the first round of the tournament.

It was in that warm-up match, however, where Smith showed the sort of battling qualities and tough skin which he will need if he is to rescue his country from the doldrums.

He stood his ground when he was dismissed that day because he claimed the field restrictions were being ignored and that the delivery

should have been called no-ball.

Pollock and his men were not impressed as they pointed him towards the pavilion while angry swear words were exchanged between them.

That incident was pushed to one side when Smith came back to the World Cup squad where he eventually played three matches scoring 121 runs.

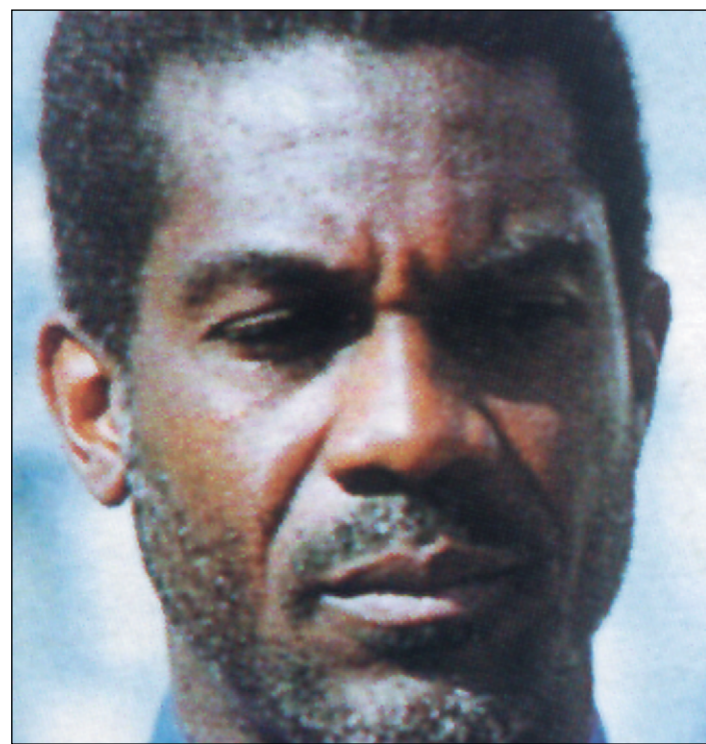
When reminded that he had clashed with some of his teammates, Smith pointed out that when he played cricket, he always played to win, regardless of the opposition.

"Cricket is a game you have to play at 100 per cent all the time, even if it means getting into fights with your teammates," he said.

Smith was widely regarded to have been extremely unlucky to have missed out on the original 15-man squad as the selectors carried through their intention of picking five non-white players.

But Rhodes' broken hand gave

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Michael Holding

PHOTO: STAR FILE

Holding Kenya

AFP, Durban

West Indies great Michael Holding gave Kenya little hope of pulling off an upset when they meet India in their World Cup semifinal here at Kingsmead on Thursday.

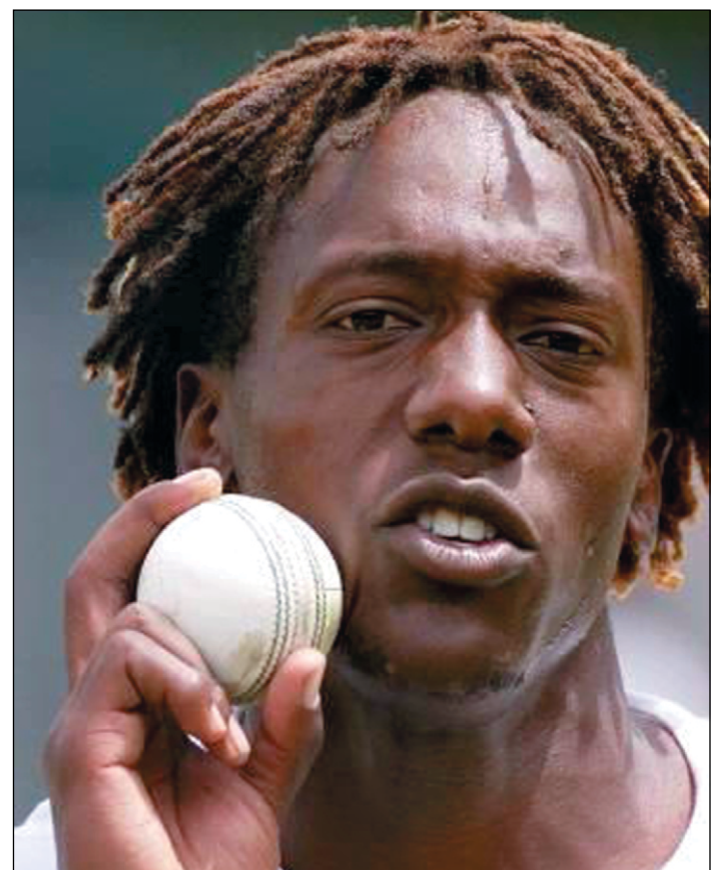
"I expect India to win," the legendary fast bowler told AFP despite Kenya's valiant fight during the five-wicket defeat against Australia here on Saturday.

"Kenya have done well so far in beating three Test teams (Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe) but the Test teams they have beaten are not the strongest.

"India are playing well and are full of confidence so I won't be putting my hand in my pocket and any money on Kenya.

"But Kenya beat the West Indies at the 1996 World Cup in Asia so you never know, anything can happen in one-day cricket," Holding, commenting on the tournament for television, said.

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Henry Olonga

PHOTO: STAR FILE



THE MESSIAH? Newly appointed South African cricket captain Graeme Smith speaks at a press conference in Cape Town on Sunday.

Topsy-turvy Africa

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Zimbabwe's undistinguished exit from the World Cup, coupled with the sacking of South Africa skipper Shaun Pollock, completed an upside-down tournament for Africa.

Only a few weeks ago, main hosts South Africa tantalised themselves with the notion of becoming the first team to win the Cup on home territory.

Instead, they were the first team from the continent to be eliminated.

Co-hosts Zimbabwe, helped by match forfeits and rain, reached the Super Sixes before falling away. Kenya, so-called minnows without a team sponsor and not considered good enough to play Test cricket, are still in the tournament and preparing for a semifinal against India in Durban.

Cricket in all three countries is likely to face tumultuous times in the months to come.

In South Africa and Zimbabwe, the changes have already begun.

South Africa's next test series will see a 22-year-old in charge, who has played just eight matches, all at home, and was not considered good enough for the original World Cup squad.

Pollock, found guilty of not being able to read the Duckworth-Lewis scoring tables, will play on under Graeme Smith, but fellow fast bowler Allan Donald and Jonty Rhodes retired from the international scene during the Cup. Gary Kirsten joined them on Sunday Zimbabwe, meanwhile, have lost their one true world-class player in Andy Flower. He announced his retirement on Friday and is heading for Essex and English county cricket.

"A player of that quality is going to leave a huge void in any side," captain Heath Streak said.

Henry Olonga, the first black player to represent the country and who joined Flower in a World Cup protest over human rights abuses in Zimbabwe, and Guy Whittall have also called time on their international careers. More are expected to follow.

Losing all-rounder Neil Johnson (now playing in South Africa) and batsman Murray Goodwin (now playing in Australia) after the 1999 World Cup was bad enough but the current exodus could seriously undermine the team's competitiveness at the top level.

South Africa's long-term future has also been questioned.

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Quips & Quotes

AFP, Johannesburg

Who's saying what at the World Cup:

"I never met Hansie Cronje. I never played with him or against him. He was a good leader but in the end he tarnished the game. We are starting afresh."

New South Africa skipper Graeme Pollock making a clean break with the past after succeeding the sacked Shaun Pollock.

"Ever since the Hansie issue there's been an effort to make sure the captain wasn't given too much power and shared responsibility was the approach they wanted. Unfortunately, that hasn't worked out from my perspective."

Pollock who was sacked following his team's first round exit.

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Going back to rock 'n' roll?

AFP, London

Zimbabwe fast bowler Henry Olonga is hoping to begin a new career in music after retiring from international cricket at the weekend.

Olonga, who claims his life is in danger if he returns home following his high-profile anti-Robert Mugabe protest during the World Cup, has also been offered a contract to join fellow exiled teammate Andy Flower playing county cricket with Essex.

But the 26-year-old told The Times newspaper that he wanted to explore new avenues.

Olonga, who has already released a CD in Zimbabwe, is keen to build a singing career and is hoping to link up with composer Barrington Pheleung, who wrote the score for the highly-rated television series Inspector Morse.

"Barrington offered me a contract to work with him on our last tour of England in 2000 after he'd heard me sing on the BBC," Olonga said.

Olonga quit international cricket on Saturday following Zimbabwe's

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