



ALREADY? Indian fans wearing masks of their favourite cricketers pose with a replica of the World Cup trophy in Madras on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

It's not a fairytale

AFP, Durban

Kenya captain Steve Tikolo said here Monday that the unheralded Africans' achievement in becoming the first non-Test nation to reach a World Cup semifinal was no fairytale in his eyes.

"Everybody has their own theories as to why we've done well," Tikolo told reporters at Kingsmead ahead of Thursday's day-night semifinal against India.

"But to us it's no fairytale. We've worked hard for this and now that's paying dividends."

Tikolo, who has been suffering with tonsillitis, declared himself fully fit ahead of the big match.

"I'm feeling much better," he said, adding the team's other injury worries were also gone.

These included wicketkeeper Kennedy Otieno who was struck a painful blow on the elbow in the process of being bowled by

Australia speedster Brett Lee on Saturday.

"Kennedy has no fracture. Yesterday his arm was a bit numb but he's fine now," said Tikolo, adding that Maurice Odumbe and Thomas Oduyo were also fit to play.

Kenya coach Sandeep Patil said his side, who have beaten three nations Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe and Bangladesh so far in the World Cup, could spring one more upset.

"We've come far and we'd like to go further. We have played good cricket and we have tremendous confidence. The boys will give it their best shot on Thursday," Patil said.

Patil, a member of India's World Cup winning team in 1983, said no team will ever take Kenya lightly again.

"I don't know if other teams have taken us lightly; they are not taking us lightly."

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SAVING THE LAST DANCE? Kenyan captain Steve Tikolo at a training session.

PHOTO: INTERNET

India in fear of fans

REUTERS, Durban

No team playing in a World Cup semifinal could ever be described as being in a no-win situation but India may feel they will come close to it against Kenya on Thursday.

Fear of defeat, indeed, might be as strong a motivation as India's desire to contest their first final since 1983.

Saurav Ganguly's side know they simply cannot afford to lose. Their fans, who have already shown how volatile they can be during this tournament, would never forgive them.

The Kingsmead day-nighter should be no contest.

India, with Sachin Tendulkar in ominous form and their three-pronged pace attack as confident as they have been impressive, have won seven matches in a row. Kenya

are among their victims.

An eighth consecutive win would equal India's record.

Kenya, meanwhile, are a non-Test side full of 30-somethings, none of whom would get in the India starting line-up. Good fortune, enthusiasm and a couple of fine performances have taken them to the last four but it would be unthinkable for the east Africans to reach the tournament climax.

"Playing Kenya is better than facing any other side," India captain Saurav Ganguly said. "But we want to be up for the game because Kenya have surprised quite a few teams."

Earlier in the tournament Tendulkar called on Indian fans to have patience after they pelted batsman Mohammad Kaif's house with paint and burnt an effigy of Ganguly following the team's

mediocre start to the tournament.

There will be another doubt lurking at the back of Indian minds.

The Indian cricket board attempted without success to convince World Cup organisers to reschedule the semifinal as a day game, arguing that the toss had already had a big influence on previous Cup day-nighters in Durban.

Almost all of the matches under lights at Kingsmead and at Newlands in Cape Town had led to teams winning the toss going on to win the game after batting first.

India broke that trend by beating Kenya in Cape Town in their first day-night confrontation on March 7 despite losing the toss.

But they were given a few scares on the way as they were reduced to 23 for three in reply to Kenya's 225 for six before Ganguly produced a

well-constructed century.

Kenya gave world champions Australia a similar scare at the same venue on Saturday after batting first, again in a day-nighter.

Asif Karim, a 39-year-old left-arm spinner back from retirement and without a wicket in his previous two matches in the World Cup, looked a world-beater in the evening conditions as he took three for seven in 8.2 overs.

India, though, who won the World Cup in 1983, know deep down they should reach the final again after missing out at the same stage in 1987, against England, and in 1996, against eventual winners Sri Lanka.

They have only lost to Kenya twice in 11 one-day meetings.

Kenya coach Sandeep Patil

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Patil questions Indian mindset

INTERNET, Durban

Kenya coach Sandeep Patil believes India have a "defensive mind-set" which his team can exploit in Thursday's World Cup semifinal.

The Africans have exceeded even their own expectations by reaching the last four, and are eager to continue their run all the way to the final.

Patil believes India's policy of playing seven batsmen and only four specialist bowlers could backfire.

"I do not understand this seven batsmen logic."

"If Sachin (Tendulkar) and Sehwag, Saurav (Ganguly) and Kaif, Dravid and Yuvraj are not going to win you the World Cup, Dinesh Mongia is certainly not the one to do it," he commented.

Kenya plan to focus on their own strengths and hope the importance of the occasion will affect the Indian team, concentrating on a tight off stump line with the ball and backing the bowlers up in the field.

"We must be one of the best fielding units in this World Cup. Certainly, we are streets ahead of India in the fielding department," Patil told the Press Trust of India.

India beat Kenya by six wickets in the Super Six round of the competition, chasing down a target of 226 with more than two overs in hand.

Patil acknowledges that his side must make early inroads into India's top order to have a chance of victory.

"Our biggest concern will, of course, concern Sachin Tendulkar. If we get him, the rest of the batting

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Ominous odds

AFP, Durban

World Cup shocks don't come around very often but, when they do, the effect can be seismic.

So India should beware when they face Kenya in Thursday's semifinal in Durban especially since they've already had firsthand experience.

They were on the receiving end of the first ever World Cup shock in 1979 when they faced Sri Lanka at Old Trafford in Manchester.

Like Kenya now, Sri Lanka were then a non-Test playing nation but that didn't prevent them from pulling off a stunning 47-run win.

Due to the infamous Manchester climate, the game took two days to complete but it must have seemed like a lifetime for India as the Lankans, inspired by Sidath Wettimuny's 67, and man-

of-the-match Duleep Mendis' 64, made 238-5.

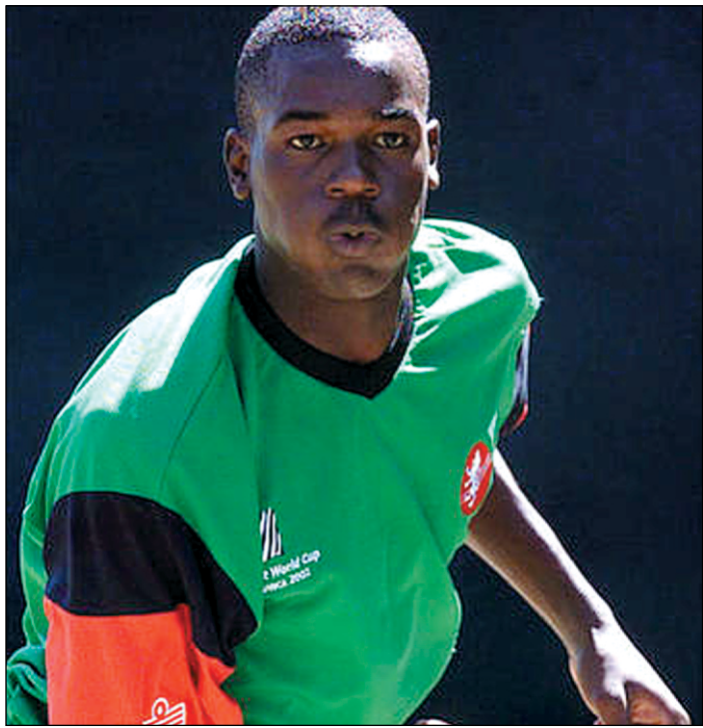
India reached 119-2 but then collapsed to 191 all out.

For their part, Kenya have already knocked over Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe in the 2003 tournament; they've been there, done that in the past as the West Indies found out to their cost in the 1996 tournament in India.

A disorganised and disunited Windies were ripe for the picking when they came up against the Africans in Pune on February 29, 1996, having moped from venue to venue and having started their campaign in controversial circumstances by refusing to play in Colombo.

Kenya struggled to make just 166 in their first innings.

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Collins Obuya

PHOTO: STAR FILE

A refreshing change

INTERNET, Johannesburg

Whatever happens to Collins Obuya and Kenya, they will never forget the 2003 World Cup. The sentiment will be wholly reciprocated.

It is not just the image of Obuya's hugely turning leg-spinners ripping through the heart of Sri Lanka's batting in Nairobi that will endure. They may also be the catalyst that eventually propels Kenya into the Test arena.

Obuya can still barely believe what has happened in the past month as he and the team have progressed to the tournament semifinals (and that feeling is also mutual).

"We did not expect anything like this," he said.

"I did not know what to expect. All I wanted to do was to play in the

World Cup like my brother."

There are three Obuya boys in the Kenya squad, Kennedy, 30, David, 24, and Collins, 21. It was Kennedy's appearance in the 1996 competition he made a stirring 85 against

Australia which first spurred Collins. "The Aga Khan club was near our home, and because it was there we started playing," he said.

"I began playing properly when I was 12, and when Kennedy played in the World Cup I decided I wanted to as well."

Like thousands of youngsters, his wrist was flexible enough to bowl leg-spin, unlike thousands he was encouraged to do so, and he had a hero in Shane Warne. He stunned the world by taking 5 for 24 against

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Sandeep Patil

PHOTO: AFP

Afridi aims to fight back

REUTERS, Karachi

Pakistan all-rounder Shahid Afridi has vowed to win back his place in the national team after being banned from a tournament in Sharjah in April.

"I will let my bat do all the talking now. I intend to use my time with Derbyshire to prove my critics wrong and win back my place in the team," Afridi said.

Pakistan cricket authorities banned the 21-year-old from next month's Sharjah Cup and fined him half his match fee against India for sledging Indian batsmen Virender Sehwag and Sachin Tendulkar and umpire David Shephard during a World Cup match.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) reported Afridi to the

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), accusing him of verbally abusing the players and Shephard in his native Urdu language.

But even before the incident, Afridi's place in the Pakistan team was in doubt after a string of recent failures.

"I know my performances have been a big let-down for my supporters and fans. I also accept the PCB decision. I think the time has come for me to change my approach to the game and be more responsible," Afridi said.

"And I think the time I spend with Derbyshire will be a learning process for me to evolve into a more responsible player," he added.

Afridi is among several Pakistan players who have signed up by

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Captain sensible

INTERNET, Port Elizabeth

India begin the build-up for their semifinal against Kenya having reaped the benefits of a captain who refused to make panic changes after a disappointing build-up and start to the World Cup.

Installed as one of the favourites for the tournament following their NatWest Series triumph in England just over a year ago, India's highly-talented line-up appeared to have peaked too soon and suffered a 5-2 series loss in New Zealand before suffering a comprehensive nine wickets defeat at Centurion in only their second match.

The obsessive cricket followers in the sub-continent demanded changes with former New Zealand batsman Martin Crowe even suggesting Saurav Ganguly be replaced as captain before the start of the tournament.

Seven successive victories later, most recently a seven-wicket demolition of New Zealand with nearly 10 overs to spare at

Centurion on Friday, and India are regarded as the most in-form team left in the tournament with purists hoping for a showdown with Australia in the March 23 final.

But regardless of India's fate in the remainder of the tournament, Ganguly's decision to back himself and his squad despite fierce criticism from home is almost vindication enough for his efforts in cajoling and guiding his team into the last four.

"We'd just started the tournament and we lost the first game to probably the best team in the world so the panic buttons were being pressed," explained Ganguly.

"We realised that it was just the beginning of the tournament and we had the capabilities to beat most of the sides.

"We just needed to get focussed, get a grip and play to the best of our potential. I always thought when we lost to Australia it was just the beginning and was too early for all the reactions all the feelings that all was lost because it was just the start."

He has been helped in that success by the emergence of a superb three-strong new ball attack with the experience of Javagal Srinath superbly complementing the growing development of left-arm seam pair Ashish Nehra and Zaheer Khan. Ganguly has also discovered the knack of succeeding almost immediately with his bowling changes.

His batsmen have also responded with Ganguly claiming two centuries, Sachin Tendulkar emerging as the tournament's top scorer while Rahul Dravid has provided the vast experience in the middle order which has helped younger players like Mohammed Kaif and Yuvraj Singh.

It is the team spirit which has gradually emerged from the depths of despair in New Zealand, though, which Ganguly believes has enabled them to progress on their unbeaten run knowing they are one performance away from

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Quips & Quotes

AFP, Johannesburg

Who's saying what at the World Cup:

"Naturally I'm disappointed, but the finger's pretty sore at the moment and there's not much movement there, so it's probably a wise move that I sit this one out. Should we get through the match, I will be doing my utmost to get it right ahead of Sunday's final in Johannesburg."

Injured Australian batsman Damien Martyn.

"Everybody has their own theories as to why we've done well. But to us it's no fairytale. We've worked hard for this and now that's paying dividends."

Kenya skipper Steve Tikolo.

"You have to remember that the ANC and Zanu-PF are bed-fellows. I'll only feel completely safe once I get to England."

Exiled Zimbabwe fast bowler Henry Olonga on his desperation to get away from southern

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Karim can't believe it

AFP, Durban

Kenya veteran Asif Karim admitted on Tuesday his own extraordinary World Cup return against reigning champions Australia had stunned him.

"I've been playing cricket for my country for 20 years," the 39-year-old left-arm spinner explained. "I came out of retirement for this World Cup and what's happened has been fantastic."

Kenya face India in a day-night semifinal here under at Kingsmead on Thursday.

Although they were beaten by five wickets against Australia in Saturday's 'dead' Super Six match at Kingsmead, Karim had remarkable figures of 8-6-2-3 at one stage.

"I'm just starting to come to terms with what happened," said Karim, an insurance broker, who retired from international cricket after the last World Cup in 1999.

"When you are playing against the world champions, to have a spell like that must be the envy of many others bowlers in the world that day."

Looking ahead, he admitted a Kenyan victory against India would be a huge upset.

"For us to win we'll have to play a few notches up and they'll have to play a few notches down," said Karim, who was Kenya's skipper when they first beat India in a one-day international at Gwalior in 1998.

"Our aim when we got here was just to get to the Super Six and maybe upset one Test nation."

Instead, the East Africans have beaten three Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe.

Karim said the rise of Kenya, the

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TURNING BACK THE YEARS: Kenyan spinner Asif Karim at practice on Tuesday.

PHOTO: INTERNET