



Andy Bichel

Brilliant Bichel

REUTERS, Johannesburg

If Australia win the World Cup on Sunday, Andy Bichel deserves to be one of the first players to hold the trophy aloft.

The Queensland fast bowler arrived for the tournament as a back-up player. Indeed, no Australian had been 12th man in more Tests in the history of the game.

However, after claiming the place in Ricky Ponting's first eleven vacated by the injured Jason Gillespie, Bichel has emerged as one of the players of this World Cup.

His figures make amazing reading: Three innings of 34 not out, 64 and 19 not out, with each run scored at a crucial time; and 15 wickets at 9.33 runs each, including seven for

20 against England, the second best figures in World Cup history.

The powerfully built 32-year-old was at it again in Tuesday's rain-affected semifinal against Sri Lanka, his 19 runs forming part of a vital, unbroken eighth-wicket

stand of 37 with Andrew Symonds that took the side to 212 for seven.

Then, when he came on to bowl, Bichel ran out leading batsman Aravinda de Silva with a brilliant pick-up and throw in his follow-through before sending down ten overs for 18 runs.

That spell did much to ensure Australia retained their stranglehold on the match after fine opening spells by Brett Lee and Glenn McGrath.

Along with Lee, Bichel has been more responsible than any other player for Australia's ten-match winning streak in the tournament and Ponting was happy to heap praise on him after the match against Sri Lanka.

"Andy has just taken his chance with both hands," he told reporters. "He wasn't in the side at the start of the tour but since he got in he has just got better and better."

"He is bowling very well as we saw in Port Elizabeth (against Sri Lanka) and as for his batting late in the order, well, you almost treat him like a batsman."

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Cairns

At different crossroads

INTERNET, Christchurch

New Zealand's two most recent cricketing heroes are heading in the same direction, to play for English counties, but they were at different crossroads of their careers on their return home yesterday.

Bond, 27, enhanced his reputation as one of the game's fastest and most feared bowlers when he blasted his way through the Australian and Indian batting at the World Cup in South Africa, Cairns, 32, and no longer able to perform such bowling feats because of injuries, fell considerably short of his own goals when playing primarily as a batsman.

During his time with Warwickshire, Bond intends to continue the rapid advance which has propelled him from obscurity in his mid-20s to a level where Australian captain Ricky Ponting acknowledges he is one of Bond's

"bunnies".

In contrast, former child prodigy Cairns will be giving deep thought to his cricketing future when he rejoins Nottinghamshire.

First, there is next month's New Zealand tour of Sri Lanka.

Bond has a full release clause in his county contract but Cairns is permitted only a 21-day release and will restrict himself to the one-day series.

They were in unison when admitting to some frustration during the World Cup, Bond as he watched the batting crumble after his New Zealand-best bowling analysis of six for 23 against Australia, and Cairns from his own performances.

"Obviously, I was a little frustrated. But you know the work the guys have done in the nets.

They're SEE PAGE 14

No war break in Cup final

AFP, undated

Cricketer's World Cup final will go ahead as planned here on Sunday despite the opening of hostilities in Iraq, a tournament spokesman told AFP on Thursday.

However, the match will take place against a background of heightened security with more police on duty at the game which takes place at the Wanderers ground here.

"Everything is on track and the final goes ahead as planned," said Rodney Hartman, the World Cup organising committee's communications director.

"There are no plans to change the schedule but the match will take place with a heightened security awareness."

Both the final, as well as the semifinal on Thursday in Durban between India and Kenya, will see more South African police on duty.

However, there are no plans yet to post soldiers at the two venues.

"There will be an increased awareness of security in both the public and private sectors," added Hartman.

The winners of Thursday's day-night semifinal will face defending champions Australia in Sunday's final.

Meanwhile, safety concerns over a threatened United States military assault upon Iraq and possible terrorist retaliation wiped out Major League Baseball openers

planned in Japan while others pondered postponements.

Bud Selig, Major League Baseball commissioner, called off a two-game Tokyo series between Seattle and Oakland scheduled March 25 and 26 so families would not fear for loved ones overseas at a time of uncertainty.

"It would be unfair and terribly unsettling for them to be half a world away from their families at this critical juncture," Selig said.

The United States is on a high alert for possible terrorism and Americans overseas could be considered possible targets.

"We may as well have big targets SEE PAGE 14

Wasim left out

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan on Thursday sacked eight senior players, including veteran Wasim Akram and fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar, after the disastrous World Cup campaign.

Instead, the selectors picked a new-look 16-member team under Rashid Latif for the three-nation tri-series against South Africa and Sri Lanka scheduled to be played in the Gulf emirate from April 1 to 10.

However, it remains uncertain if the tournament will go ahead following heightened tension in the Gulf over the US-led strikes on Iraq.

Besides Wasim and Shoaib, other senior players axed are deposed skipper Waqar Younis, Inzamamul Haq, Azhar Mehmood, Saeed Anwar, Shahid Afridi and Saqlain Mushtaq.

The 36-year-old Wasim was the first man to break the 500-wicket barrier in one-day cricket, but even his efforts failed to take the team

past the first round of the World Cup.

The seven players who were retained from the World Cup squad were new captain Latif, opener Taufiq Umer and Saleem Elahi, Yousuf Youhana, Younis Khan, Abdul Razzaq and Mohammad Sami.

Former Test captain Javed Miandad returns as coach after the South Africa-based Richard Pybus resigned.

Latif will be Pakistan's seventh captain in the last five years. Miandad will be the 11th coach in the same period.

SQUAD: Rashid Latif (captain), Yousuf Youhana (vice-captain), Taufeeq Umer, Mohammad Hafeez, Saleem Elahi, Misbahul Haq, Younis Khan, Naved Latif, Faisal Iqbal, Abdul Razzaq, Rana Naveedul Hasan, Shoaib Malik, Mohamad Sami, Umar Gul, Danish Kaneria, Mohammad Zahid.

Coach: Javed Miandad.

Scott the 'Wanderman'

AFP, Johannesburg

When Chris Scott sits down to watch the World Cup final at the Wanderers on Sunday, few people will realise what a big part this virtually unknown man has played in the outcome of the game.

For 32 years, except for a three-year break from 1996, Scott has been the groundsman at Wanderers and there is nothing he does not know about the famous venue.

"I know just about every blade of grass here," said Scott.

His face is weather-beaten by hours under the harsh African sun and his numerous pictures of famous tussles between South Africa and arch rivals Australia, bears testimony of his commitment to prepare a perfect pitch.

"I like to think of these grounds as a stage. The players are the actors, and I am a stage manager. Once play starts, however, I stay in

the background," he said.

At Wanderers there are 10 pitches, with different wickets having been used for the five World Cup games which have already been played.

Made from a special clay and compacted by hours of rolling, the preparation of the middle is an exact science.

One of the most important aspects is to get the moisture content just right.

"If the moisture content is too high, you get a soft pitch, which gets damaged by the batsmen, the bowlers and the ball. If it's too dry, it can crack, giving the ball an uneven bounce," said Scott.

The amount of grass growing also plays a huge roll on how it will perform.

More grass favours bowlers, which allows the seam of the ball to bite into the pitch, causing it to swing while little or no grass at all

favours the batsmen with straight-forward and slower balls.

Wanderers has traditionally been a fast pitch, favouring medium and speed bowlers.

For the final, however, Scott is planning a batsman's pitch which he hopes will produce total scores in the region of between 250 to 280 runs.

"I want to give the 32,000 spectators and the 1.25 billion people watching on television a batting spectacular," he said.

Long hours of work have gone into the preparation of cricket's premier battleground, often under difficult conditions and often long after the spectators have returned home.

South Africa has 12 official groundsman, at least four of them black, said Scott.

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Proteas undecided over Gulf trip

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa's participation in the Sharjah Cup was on the verge of being called off on Thursday as a result of the escalating war in Iraq.

South African cricket chiefs were holding talks with government officials to discuss the trip to the troubled region where the tournament, which also features Pakistan and Sri Lanka, is due to be held from April 1-10.

The talks were called as South African nationals were advised not to visit the Persian Gulf.

"We wish to advise South Africans not to visit the Gulf region in this period," said foreign ministry spokesman Ronnie Mamoepa.

The South African team is due to leave for Sharjah on March 28 and

were due to discuss the issue when they met for a training camp in Pretoria on Monday.

"The United Cricket Board of South Africa (UCBSA) and the government are discussing the situation and we will take their advice very seriously," a spokesman for the UCBSA said.

A decision on the trip is expected to be made later Thursday.

The South African team, under new skipper Graeme Smith, are also due to play in another three-nation contest in Bangladesh immediately after the Sharjah event followed by two Test matches against the hosts.

It is understood that talks will also be held between Sharjah organiser Abdul Rehman Bukhatir

and UCBSA chief executive Gerald Majola when the two attend the World Cup semifinal between India and Kenya in Durban later on Thursday.

Regardless of South Africa's reservations, the Pakistan team still intended to travel to Sharjah.

"As far as we are concerned the tournament is on and we are preparing for it," Pakistan Cricket Board spokesman Samiul Hasan told AFP from Lahore.

"In fact, we have today announced the team for the tournament."

Despite the hostilities in Iraq, the World Cup final will go ahead as planned on Sunday, a tournament spokesman told AFP.

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Wasim Akram

PHOTO: STAR FILE

Aussies plan quick kill

AFP, Johannesburg

Defending champions Australia, having survived the slow torture of Port Elizabeth, are now aiming for a quick kill on the fast track of the Wanderers in Sunday's World Cup final.

Ricky Ponting's men defended a meagre 212 in their semifinal with Sri Lanka on Tuesday, and now the skipper is confident that on a pitch more suited to their style, they will wrap up their second successive World Cup title.

"The Wanderers is generally one of the faster, bouncier wickets in South Africa, which will play into our hands," said Ponting who is still waiting to discover the identity of his team's opponents with India and Kenya not playing their semifinal in Durban until Thursday.

"When we played Pakistan at the ground in the first round, there was

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Olonga still in hiding

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Zimbabwean World Cup cricketer Henry Olonga has said he will remain in hiding in South Africa because of threats to his safety before reaching a decision on his future.

But the fast bowler, who made a World Cup protest with teammate Andy Flower over what they perceived as human rights abuses in Zimbabwe, said he could not confirm

reports that the Zimbabwean secret police were searching for him.

"I don't know what the facts are," he said in an interview with the South Africa Broadcasting Corporation, to be aired on Wednesday.

Olonga said he had been told police officers had been invited to Zimbabwe's last World Cup game against Sri Lanka on March 15 in East London in South Africa, add-

ing: "I think it was true.

"I must be wise about my movements, about my location, you can't rule anything out.

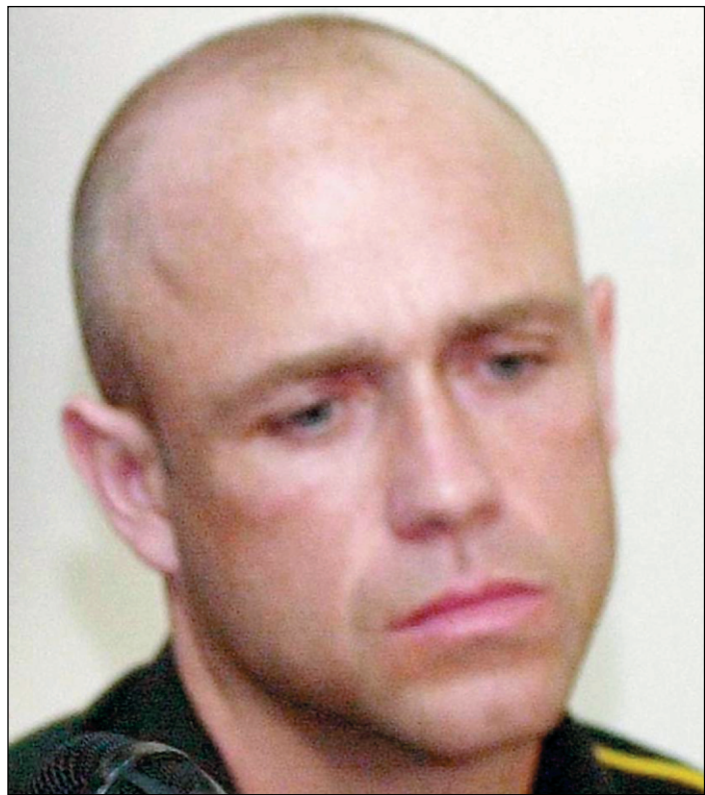
"I'm keeping low. It's hearsay but they are warnings and I have taken them seriously."

Olonga, 26, and Flower wore black armbands and wristbands "to mourn the death of democracy" in Zimbabwe's first two Cup matches before being asked to desist by the international cricket authorities.

The first black player to represent Zimbabwe, Olonga said he had received three "very direct, very clear" that emails containing threats or warning of threats after the protest.

A couple of them were from individuals "who work with people in positions of power".

Olonga, who has been sacked by SEE PAGE 14



Richard Pybus

PHOTO: STAR FILE

Pybus no fan of Latif

AFP, London

Former Pakistan coach Richard Pybus said Wednesday he believed veteran Rashid Latif would prove only to be a temporary captain and batsman Younis Khan would have been a better choice.

Pybus also paid tribute to former captain Waqar Younis, who was sacked on Wednesday and replaced by Latif following their failure to make the Super Six stage of the World Cup.

Pybus, who stepped down from his post after the end of the World Cup campaign, laid the blame for their failure squarely at the feet of the players, whose splits climaxed when out of form batsman Inzamamul Haq clashed with ironically Younis Khan in a football kick-about.

"In the circumstances, Waqar did an incredible job keeping the

team together," Pybus told the BBC Sport website.

"There was a general lack of desire to go out and fight and I doubt if there is anything that Waqar could have done to change that," Pybus added.

Pybus said Younis Khan would have been a much more inspired choice as captain rather than the 34-year-old Latif, who had a moderate World Cup and is best known as the whistleblower on the match-fixing scandal in 1994 when he walked out of the tour of South Africa and Zimbabwe, accusing then captain Salim Malik of being involved with bookmakers.

"I can see Younis Khan taking over in time," Pybus said.

"He is a thoughtful, highly professional cricketer who expects

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Same old Gujrat

AFP, Ahmedabad

Eight people, including two policemen, were injured in riots that broke out overnight in India's communally sensitive western state of Gujarat over a dispute about betting on cricket results, police said Thursday.

A spokesman said the violence occurred in the Gomatpur area of Ahmedabad, the commercial capital of Gujarat.

"It started off with an argument over betting on (World Cup) cricket results and later took a communal twist as Hindu-Muslims clashed, resorting to arson and vandalism," said Satish Verma, Additional Commissioner of Police for Ahmedabad.

"Police lobbed 46 tear gas shells to control the rioting mob," he said, adding that five shops and several vehicles were torched the windows of many houses were smashed.

"We have (detained) 11 persons from the site," said Verma.

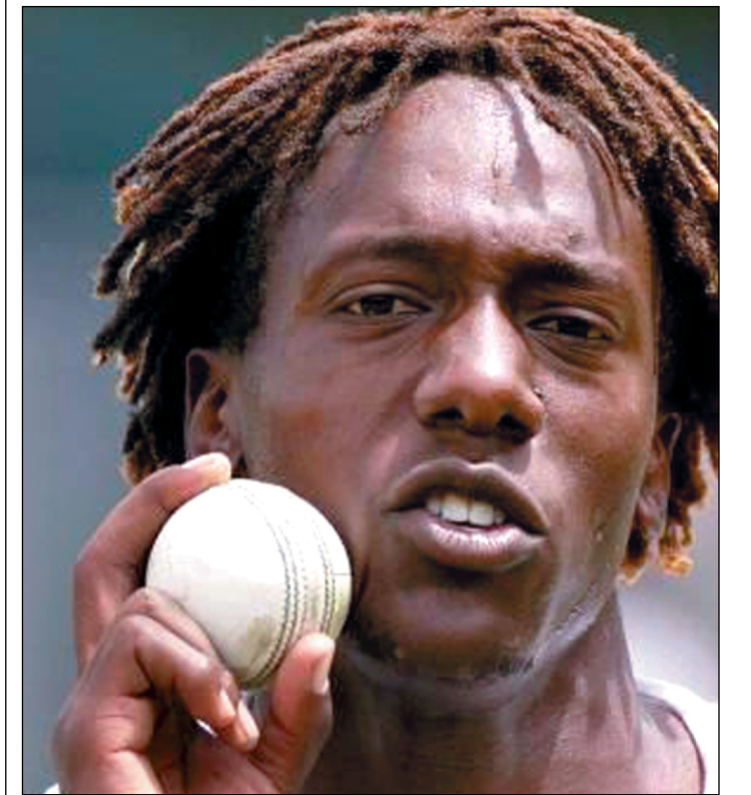
In another area of the city, Muslims attacked police when they asked stall owners to close their stalls at midnight, he said.

"A police van was attacked by a mob of 150 to 200 Muslims in Shahpur area when they went to ask stall-owners of close shops after midnight," Verma said. "Police fired 23 tear gas shells to disperse the crowd."

Gujarat has been in the grip of communal violence since February 27 last year, when 59 Hindus were torched alive in a train carriage in Godhra, more than 100 kilometres (62 miles) east of here.

Subsequent rioting in the state killed more than 2,000 people, mostly Muslims.

Since then communal unrest been plaguing Gujarat, with the slightest provocation leading to sectarian riots.



Henry Olonga

PHOTO: STAR FILE