

Final showdown

AFP, Johannesburg

Defending champions Australia will decide on Sunday morning whether or not batsman Damien Martyn will be fit to play in the World Cup final against India.

Martyn, who has a fractured finger, has been a doubt for the match at The Wanderers after sustaining the injury while fielding in the Super Six match against Kenya last week.

Seamer Andy Bichel has a sore right shoulder but practised in the nets on Saturday and is expected to play.

"It's still up in the air," Ponting told reporters here at The Wanderers on Saturday about the duo's participation.

"They've done everything we asked of them. Martyn's had a good hit. If he's 95 per cent right he'll play.

"Bichel's come in off his long run and everything seems okay. We'll rest them up as much as possible."

Ponting, one of five players in the current Australia team who won the World Cup in England four years ago, said that experience could be invaluable against India, who have not been in a final since they won the trophy for the only

time back in 1983.

"It definitely helps. Some of the guys have played in two finals (Australia lost to Sri Lanka in 1996). They know what it takes to win a World Cup final," said Ponting, whose team thrashed India by nine wickets in a group match last month.

Australia's top order has collapsed in recent matches and

Ponting admitted that was worrying.

"It has been a concern," Ponting conceded. And the Tasmanian batsman, who said he'd been impressed by India's left-arm quicks Zaheer Khan and Ashish Nehra added: "The new ball in this game will be a huge factor."

"We haven't played our best yet, hopefully that comes out on

Sunday," said Ponting.

And he insisted that critics predicting an end to Australia's dominance they go into Sunday's match looking to extend a world record 16-game winning streak had got it wrong.

"We've been challenged throughout this World Cup. We haven't just turned up in the final."

"But the good thing is we have come through really well and got ourselves out of those tight periods and ended winning the game very comprehensively."

"I don't understand where people are coming from if they say they'd be disappointed if we won."

India skipper Saurav Ganguly famously got under the skin of Steve Waugh, Ponting's predecessor as one-day skipper and still Australia's Test captain.

But Ponting said he had no problems with Ganguly. "Not unless he's got something up his sleeve for Sunday," he joked.

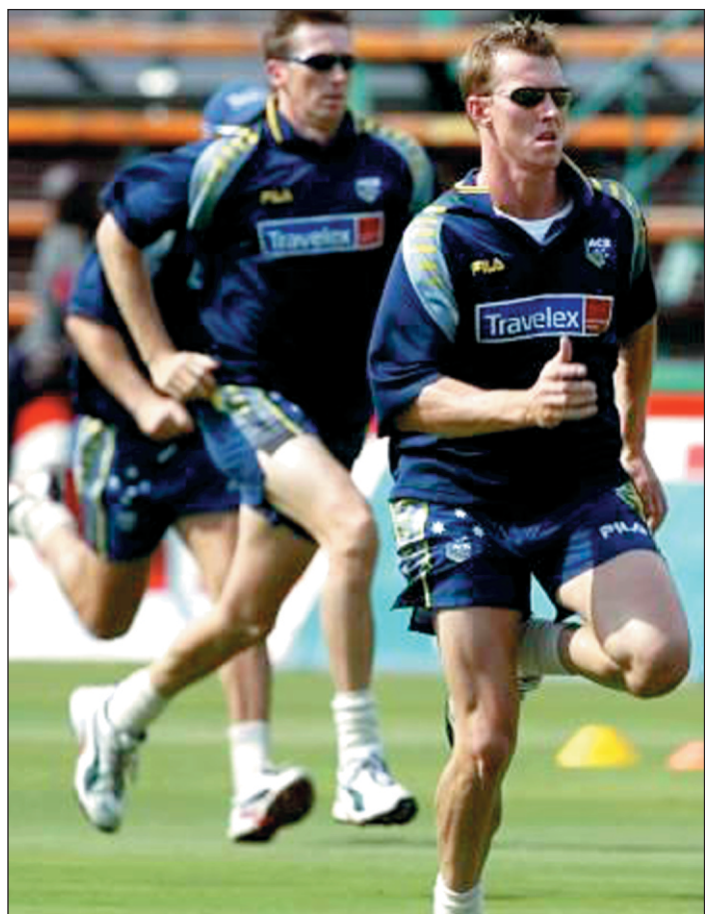
Ganguly on the other hand on Saturday said, just getting to the World Cup final will not be enough for him.

"It's a big achievement for us, a

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IS THAT THE WORLD CUP OVER THERE? Indian skipper Saurav Ganguly (L) and Rahul Dravid look at something during practice yesterday.



I'M THE FASTEST! Brett Lee sprints ahead of Glenn McGrath and other teammates during practice at the Wanderers on March 20.

HEAD TO HEAD

India v Australia

AFP, Johannesburg

Recent head-to-head records for Australia v India ahead of the World Cup final at the Wanderers here on Sunday:

Feb 15 2003	Australia won by 9 wickets	Centurion
April 6 2001	Australia won by 4 wickets	Goa
April 3 2001	Australia won by 93 runs	Visakhapatnam
Mar 31 2001	India won by 118 runs	Indore
Mar 28 2001	Australia won by 8 wickets	Pune
Mar 25 2001	India won by 60 runs	Bangalore
Oct 7 2000	India won 20 runs	Nairobi
Jan 30 2000	Australia won by 4 wickets	Perth
Jan 26 2000	Australia won by 152 runs	Adelaide
Jan 14 2000	Australia won by 5 wickets	Sydney

Tourney 'too long'



Ali Bacher

AFP, Johannesburg

World Cup supremo Ali Bacher admitted on Saturday the 44-day tournament was "too long" even though he supported adding more non-Test playing nations to the fold.

"I think there is a scope to add two more teams although I personally feel the tournament was too long," Bacher told Sky Sports ahead of Sunday's final between Australia and India at the Wanderers here.

"Kenya making the semifinals has signalled the game is growing in Africa with more black people taking up the sport."

"When I met former Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke during the Sydney Olympics, he asked me

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ROAD TO FINAL

AFP, Johannesburg

How Australia and India reached the World Cup final to be played at the Wanderers here on Sunday:

AUSTRALIA	INDIA
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 12: beat the Netherlands by 68 runs at Paarl (India 204 in 48.5 overs; S Tendulkar 52; T de Leede 4-35; and the Netherlands 136 in 48.1 overs; D van Bunge 62; J Srinath 4-30)
Feb 15: beat India by nine wickets at Centurion (India 125	Feb 15: lost to Australia by nine wickets at Centurion

BATTLE WITHIN BATTLE

AFP, Johannesburg

Key duels to look for during the World Cup final between Australia and India at the Wanderers here on Sunday:

SACHIN TENDULKAR V BRETT LEE

Sparks are bound to fly when the deadly Lee bowls his thunderbolts to the world's best one-day batsman.

Tendulkar, who has scored more one-day runs (12,215) and more centuries (34) than any batsman, has been in terrific form scoring a record 669 runs in the tournament.

Lee has led his country's attack, equalling Shane Warne's Australian record of 20 wickets in a single World Cup. He has worked up fiery pace even on the unusually slow South African wickets.

Tendulkar will be trying to hit Lee out of the attack just as he

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Prince vs punter

AFP, Johannesburg

One appeared destined for the captaincy, the other turned from bad boy to head boy.

But India's Saurav Ganguly and Australia's Ricky Ponting are united by their burning desire to succeed and neither will give an inch in Sunday's World Cup final here at the Wanderers.

Ganguly, 30, dubbed the 'Prince of Calcutta' by former England opening batsman Geoffrey Boycott, was born into a wealthy family and his sometimes aloof manner has not always made him popular with fans and opponents alike.

He even managed to get under the skin of such a hardened competitor as Steve Waugh.

The Australia captain was annoyed at being kept waiting at the toss by Ganguly during the 2000-01 Test series in India which the home team won 2-1.

But, crucially, Ganguly has his team-mates' respect, the support

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GIVE ME A SIGN! Australian captain Ricky Ponting draws someone's attention at practice yesterday.

Quips & Quotes

AFP, Johannesburg

Who's saying what at the World Cup:

"He may not be with us, but he is with us in spirit and we want to win the World Cup for him and those who have gone home."

Australian batsman Darren Lehmann hoping for a victory to dedicate to banned spinner Shane Warne.

"So far in this World Cup, India have been predictable almost to the point of being paranoid with their selection, but they need to change that pattern for the final against Australia."

Ian Chappell advising Saurav Ganguly to play Anil Kumble in Sunday's final.

"The thing that has stood out for me is their fast bowling and that has done some damage."

Australian captain Ricky Ponting on the danger posed by India's pace attack.

"Every team has a bit of a weakness. If the top order gets out quickly it exposes the middle-order. But in every game one of them has stood up."

Indian skipper Saurav Ganguly on Australia's strengths.

"I have never broken my finger, but have told Ricky I will not jeopardise the final by playing with an injury."

Damien Martyn on the injury that could destroy his hopes of playing in Sunday's final.

Of unforgettables

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Five memorable previous one-day internationals between Australia and India:

1987 World Cup, Madras: Australia won by one run.

A resurgent Australia under Allan Border launched their ultimately successful campaign with victory against the defending champions. They scored 270 for six, opener Geoff Marsh top-scoring with 110 and sharing in a 110-run opening stand with David Boon (49). India openers Krishnamachari Srikkanth (70 from 83 balls), the usually dour Sunil Gavaskar (37 from 32 balls) and Navjot Sidhu (73 from 79 balls) took India past 200 in good time but quick bowler Craig McDermott took four wickets to trigger a collapse as India lost six wickets for 49 runs to slump to 256 for eight, two run outs adding to the drama. India needed two runs from two deliveries but Steve Waugh trapped last man Maninder Singh lbw to clinch victory.

1996 World Cup, Bombay: Australia won by 16 runs.

The eventual finalists scored 258 all out in 50 overs and bowled out India for 242 in 48 in a game remembered as much for Mark Waugh's heroics as local boy Sachin Tendulkar's. Waugh made a stylish 126 in a 103-run opening stand with captain Mark Taylor (59), although Australia lost their last four wickets in the final over. Tendulkar then smashed 90 of the first 143 runs in the first day-night game on his home ground. Taylor turned to Waugh's off-breaks and he had Tendulkar stumped with a clever wide ball. Paceman Damien Fleming finished with five for 36. It was Australia's first win in India for nine years.

1996, Titan Cup tri-series, Bangalore: India won by two wickets.

Australia scored 215 for seven and India reached 216 for eight with seven balls to spare. Taylor hit 105 but none of the other batsmen managed to cross 50. Tendulkar made 88 from 111 balls, but Australian bowlers chipped away at the other end. It looked all over when Steve Waugh trapped Tendulkar to reduce the hosts to 164 for eight. But local men Javagal Srinath and A n i s i

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Elusive tickets

AFP, Johannesburg

Tickets for Sunday's World Cup final between Australia and India were being sold on the black market for 1,875 dollars as thousands of fans made a last-minute scramble to watch the big game.

In newspaper classifieds this week, one ticket was being sold for 15,000 rand (1,875 dollars) while there have been some odd requests in the run-up to the high-profile final at the Wanderers.

"Four guys from India came this week and offered to pay 1,000,000 rand each (125,000 dollars) for a suite taking about 34 people," said Alan Kourie, the chief executive of Gauteng Cricket Board which runs the Wanderers.

"They said money was no object but all 192 suites at the stadium are full and we had to turn them away."

Most of the demand for tickets is from Indians, who have flown in not only from across South Africa to watch Sachin Tendulkar taking

on the Australians but also from various parts of India.

South African Airways and Air India laid on special flights to ferry the fans from India, many of them arriving without match tickets.

Kourie said the "Bullring", as the 30,000-capacity Wanderers is known, would be at its "absolute fullest" on Sunday.

Wanderers receptionist Wady Adams told the Star newspaper that the switchboard was still "absolute chaos" with people desperately searching for tickets which had been sold out two weeks ago.

With Indian fans converging in large numbers, Johannesburg restaurants specialising in Indian food were doing brisk business.

"We've never had it so good, but alas it is all coming to an end," said Manoj Vaid of the Bombay Blues restaurant in the Rosebank suburb of the city.

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Only Aussie obstacle

REUTERS, Melbourne

Leg-spinner Shane Warne, who was the key to Australia's 1999 World Cup win, believes India's Sachin Tendulkar is the only man standing between Australia and victory in Sunday's final.

Warne, 33, was man-of-the-match for Australia in their 1999 World Cup final win over Pakistan but missed this year's Cup defence after testing positive to a banned diuretic and receiving a 12-month doping suspension.

"There is only one thing that stands between Australia and back-to-back World Cups and that is the Little Master, Sachin Tendulkar," Warne wrote in the Herald Sun newspaper on Saturday.

"He is, and has been in my time, the best batsman in the world. He's savage on the quicks if they stray with their line and length and he can dominate and intimidate the spinners."

"That's why it has always been a challenge and a privilege to bowl to

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AUSTRALIA'S ENEMY NUMBER ONE: Indian superstar Sachin Tendulkar tosses the ball during nets at the Wanderers yesterday.