

Sport

Kiwis have their pride at stake

CHRISTCHURCH, Mar 17: Too much pride will be at stake Wednesday for New Zealand to contemplate anything other than victory in their World Cup game against Pakistan, though defeat would arguably serve them better, reports AFP.

There is little chance the New Zealanders will seek to lose just to guarantee themselves a home semi-final match.

Besides which the team have a personal score to settle with Pakistani captain Imran Khan.

If New Zealand win they will play the fourth ranked nation in the semi-finals and a possible candidate for the place will be Australia, though they have to beat the West Indies on the same day.

If they do, New Zealand will play their semi-final in Sydney, against Australia, rather than in Auckland before a home crowd.

There seems no chance of the Kiwis throwing the match because the Pakistanis' game has taken on the character of a grudge game.

The Pakistanis' 1989 tour was ill-tempered and full of

complaints while in 1990 Imran Khan refused to play against the New Zealand tourists in Pakistan, claiming they were a "B" team not worth facing.

That was the infamous tour in which the Kiwis accused Pakistanis of scuffing the ball, and during which there were complaints about biased umpiring.

New Zealand lost the Test and one-day series 3-0 but returned feeling that at least one Test and one of the internationals could have been won but for other influencing factors.

The bulk of what Imran Khan called the "B" team is now leading the World Cup and there will be a lot of pride at stake.

Crowe claims he doesn't mind who he plays in the semi-finals, although he admitted Australia were the hardest challenge for New Zealand.

"Australia was the toughest game for us because we just hadn't won a game until that match," he said.

"If we go to Sydney that's fine. If we beat Australia in Sydney and then go on and win the World Cup then we deserve to win the World Cup."

"I suppose then everyone would turn around and say 'Yes they did deserve to win the World Cup.'"

"If we didn't play Australia in Sydney, and we only played our games in New Zealand, then I suppose people would say it wasn't a fair win."

"So that's all fine with us, the better the challenge, the better it is if we come through."



IMRAN KHAN



MARTIN CROWE

Imran is all praise for Crowe

CHRISTCHURCH, Mar 17: Two years ago Pakistan captain Imran Khan refused to play against a New Zealand side, claiming it was too weak, but today, on the eve of their World Cup match here, he was hailing his rival skipper Martin Crowe, reports AFP.

Imran said he was "astounded" by New Zealand's unbeaten World Cup form, and congratulations were due to Crowe for a superb performance.

"No one expected New Zealand to perform that well," he said. "Mark Greatbatch, Dipak Patel, Crowe, have all played well. Really we've all been astounded. We must congratulate them. That's a brilliant performance."

He said Pakistan were unable to see all of New Zealand's performances in Australia. "We watched a bit, but unfortunately they showed only a little bit, because they're televising mostly Australian matches."

"We saw a couple of the New Zealand games. We haven't had much chance to see a lot of them."

Pakistan manager Intikhab Alam said he was expecting an honest game Wednesday with both sides playing to win. There were no problems now between the two teams in the wake of the 1990 tour.

"It's all past, forgotten, finished," Intikhab said.

"Everything is all right."

Aussies to change game plan

MELBOURNE, Mar 17: Australia's cricket team is set to break with its traditional limited-overs plan of batting first in Wednesday's crucial World Cup qualifying match against the West Indies at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, reports AP.

Allan Border's side is locked in a battle of action and mathematics to steal the fourth semifinal spot from the West Indians on run-rate, if it can win Wednesday.

The Australians need to win by between 33 and 35 runs if they bat first, depending on their total, or score a victory in about 43 overs if they bat second.

The wild card in the picture is Pakistan, who will finish ahead of Australia, no matter what, if they can beat New Zealand in Christchurch earlier Wednesday.

Australia's recent one-day success has been built around batting first and then defend-

ing a total. But Border said he would prefer a run-chase Wednesday so his men would know the exact target needed to slip into fourth spot on the ladder behind New Zealand, England and South Africa.

"Once the statistics are there, we know exactly what we have to do," Border said. "I would think it's easier to bowl first and knock them over and then score the runs in what-ever order."

The New Zealanders are undefeated in the tournament and Border said he did not expect the Kiwis to throw the match against Pakistan to keep Australia out of the semifinals.

"I think it would be a disaster if you start toasting games," Border said. "You lose a bit of momentum if you do it."

The West Indians need only to win to secure their spot in the last four, and captain Richie Richardson said that was the only option his side had considered.

"It's a very crucial match and we want to make sure we win," Richardson said. "Even though we haven't been doing all that well, people at home still believe the World Cup belongs to us."



ALLAN BORDER



RICHIE RICHARDSON

Imran, Crowe trust their spinners

SYDNEY, Mar 17: High-flying New Zealand's World Cup cricket match against improving Pakistan in Christchurch on Wednesday brings into conflict two teams whose captains have used spinners with imagination and success, reports Reuters.

Martin Crowe has led New Zealand to seven consecutive wins, and the top of the nine-team standings, with off-spinner Dipak Patel as one of the key elements in their record-breaking Cup sequence.

Imran Khan, Crowe's counterpart in their confrontation at Lancaster Park, has consistently put his faith in the leg-spin of Mushtaq Ahmed, who has responded by helping to give Pakistan an outside chance of reaching the semifinals.

Mushtaq has occasionally bowled in tandem with fellow wrist spinner Iqbal Sikander, providing a rare sight in limited overs cricket, and he has won praise from Pakistan manager Intikhab Alam.

Intikhab, whose experience as a Test leg-spinner dur-

ing the 1960s and early 1970s gives him an ideal insight into Mushtaq's merits, said "He's justified our faith in selecting him for the World Cup and he will take a lot more wickets".

Mushtaq, 21, has a relatively rapid action and possesses a good top-spinner

against Australia and two for 43 against Sri Lanka, both on the quick, bouncy Perth pitch, were his most significant performances.

Kenyan-born Patel's value to New Zealand offers a contrast to the Pakistani leg-spinner in that economy is the hallmark

Patel has taken a total of seven wickets for 170 runs, but the vital statistic in his record is that he has conceded an average of only 2.00 runs per over.

No batsman has cast off the shackles imposed by Patel, who was at his miserly best with a return of on for 19 from 10 overs against the West Indians and also produced a fine stint of two for 26 in Sunday's game against England.

Among the other teams, 44-year-old off-spinner John Traicos has given worthy service to minnows Zimbabwe.

Traicos, the oldest player in the Cup who won three Test caps for South Africa before their isolation, has battled to salvage a measure of pride for a Zimbabwe wide who have lost all seven games so far.

It was former West Indies off-spinner Lance Gibbs who first showed that a quality slow bowler had a place in limited overs cricket, notably against England at the Oval in a one-day match at the end of his team's 1973 tour.

Patel, Mushtaq and Traicos are proudly carrying the message into the 1990s.



MUSHTAQ AHMED



DIPAK PATEL

which has troubled a number of batsmen in the tournament.

Although his wickets have occasionally been costly by one-day standards, one of his assets has been the knack of breaking through at crucial moments. His three for 41

of his consistently effective performances.

Crowe's decision to use Patel as an opening bowler in five of their seven games has proved one of the most successful aspects of his innovative captaincy.

Injury worries for Windies

MELBOURNE, Mar 17: West Indies face a number of injury worries ahead of Wednesday's crucial day-night showdown against holders Australia which will decide who snatches the last World Cup cricket semifinal place, reports Reuters.

The most serious concern is over veteran paceman Malcolm Marshall, who has an ankle injury, and captain Richie Richardson said on Tuesday a final decision would not be made until shortly before the game begins.

"Everybody is carrying niggling injuries and nobody is really 100 per cent fit" said Richardson, who is himself still suffering from a cracked finger.

"But we all have to play with injuries at some stage. As professionals, you have to learn to play with injury."

Australia have their own worries over left arm paceman Mike Whitney, who has been one of their few consistent players in the tournament.

He is suffering from a neck injury and has been undergoing intensive treatment but

physiotherapist Errol Alcott said he was confident Whitney would play.

"One advantage is we will know the result in New Zealand early in our game" said



MALCOLM MARSHALL

performances which have brought criticism from their own fans.

"At home, a lot of things have been said because we have been inconsistent and we need to get through to the semifinals to prove ourselves," said Richardson.

"We had been winning easily for a long time. Now other teams have improved a hell of a lot and we've fallen a bit behind."

With Australia needing to win by around 35 runs or with at least seven overs in hand, Border said he would probably put West Indies into bat if he won toss.

"I would think it probably best to bowl first and try and knock them over," he said.

Net run rate will decide the fourth semifinalist if both West Indies and Pakistan lose, and Border will almost need a calculator to work out how Australia are progressing.

Richardson is not concerned with such niceties.

"I'm not interested in mathematics. We just want to win," he said.

Both teams practised in cold, gloomy conditions and similar weather was forecast for Wednesday.

Referendum worries SA cricketers

SYDNEY, Mar 17: World Cup organisers and players closed ranks behind the South African cricket team here today as fears mounted about the consequences of a possible 'No' vote in the referendum at home, reports AFP.

The West Indies said they would play South Africa in the tournament's final if the two sides won through, though they cast doubt on a future planned Test match.

New Zealand cricket Chairman Peter McDermott had earlier raised the prospect of South Africa's expulsion from the tournament, only weeks after their return to world cricket, if the country's white voters rejected their government's programme for dismantling white minority rule.

"If the referendum fails, it is obvious there is going to be a huge reaction from the world and it might be appropriate that South Africa is not there," McDermott said.

But late today Malcolm Gray, chairman of the Australian side of the Cup's organising committee, said in Melbourne, "I don't think

there would be a knee jerk reaction from the other countries."

"The way the South African team has been welcomed back into the cricketing community has been too harmonious. It has exceeded all expectations."

"The matter of South Africa withdrawing from the Cup if the vote fails has been raised, but it is highly unlikely."

Gray also said it was unlikely any team would refuse to play South Africa in the finals should the 'No' vote carry the day.

However, Geoff Dakin, president of the mixed race United Cricket Board of South Africa, repeated the warning he made Monday.

Speaking in Adelaide, he said today: "If there is a feeling of hurt from any country, if they don't want to play us because there's been a 'No' vote

and they find that adherent, then it would only be honourable for me to talk to my colleagues back in South Africa and suggest the team withdraw."

That way South Africa would "not force some other team out of the competition," he said.

However, Dakin added, "I don't think we should get too alarmed about the situation. I think the vote is going to go 'Yes' and all of what we're saying today will just pale into insignificance."

Captain Kepler Wessels, also in Adelaide preparing for the weekend's semifinals, said he did not expect south Africa would have to withdraw.

His players were still very focussed on their cricket, leaving the issues of politics to "our administrators and politicians to sort out."

Team coach and former Test fast bowler Mike Procter

said he was confident there would be a "Yes" vote, but admitted his team would be devastated if they could not finish the competition.

South Africa, who have exceeded all expectations by reaching the semifinals on their World Cup debut, also received widespread support from their previous harshest critics.

In Christchurch, respected Pakistan captain Imran Khan defended their right to complete the tournament.

"It would be awful if South Africa, for some reason, are ruled out because there is a 'No' vote in the country," said Imran.

"They deserve to be in the semis and they must go right through."

"We all want to see South Africa in international cricket. It's added new dimensions," he said.

Australian skipper Allan Border said, "It would be an absolute tragedy if they withdrew."

"It would put us back another 20 years," he said, referring to the past two decades of South Africa's sporting isolation because of the country's racial policies.

West Indies Cricket Board of Control president Clyde Walcott said today his team would play South Africa again if the two sides won through to the March 25 final at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

However, it was virtually certain their historic first-ever Test Match, set for next month in Barbados, would have to be abandoned.

"We have a contract to play in the World Cup and that contract will be upheld," Walcott said in Melbourne. "A vote may well affect the Barbados Test. That would have to be further discussed."

Barbados Prime Minister Erskiner Sandiford has warned that his country would ban sporting contacts with the republic if the reforms were not approved.

West Indies captain Richie Richardson said he had no problems with the South African players and had enjoyed playing against them during the World Cup.

"We got on very well," he said. "I went into their rooms after our match in Christchurch and I couldn't get out because they were taking a lot of photographs and signing autographs."

Gooch to play against Zimbabwe

ALBURY, Australia, Mar 17: England cricket captain Graham Gooch says he will risk his suspect hamstring to play Wednesday's World Cup match against Zimbabwe at the Layington Sports Club, reports

Gooch is one of five injury troubled players in the England team which is assured of a place in the semifinals. Zimbabwe have yet to win a match and has no chance of advancing.

Gooch has missed England's previous two matches, including Sunday's loss to New Zealand, but says he feels ready to resume playing.

"This morning it went very well. Our physio, Laurie Brown, strapped my hamstring, and so far so good," Gooch said. "I haven't felt anything, so if it's like this tomorrow I'll be OK."

England have more pressing injury problems with all-rounders Derek Pringle and Dermot Reeve out of the Zimbabwe game and paceman Chris Lewis also in doubt with a side injury.

England coach Mickey Stewart says he only has nine fit players available but hopes the team's troubles begin to clear before the semifinals starting March 21.

Pringle has a torn rib cartilage, Reeve has a spur on his hip, Lewis has yet another side strain and Neil Fairbrother has a stomach virus.

Vengsarkar calls it a day

BOMBAY, Mar 17: Indian cricketer Dilip Vengsarkar called it quits Tuesday, saying he had run out of the motivation to play any more after 18 years in the game, reports AFP.

Vengsarkar, who in his heyday was rated as one of the world's finest Test batsmen but whose career was now clearly on the decline, said he was retiring from first class and international cricket.

"I have played enough cricket and there is no motivation left in me to play," said the tall 35-year-old right-hand-

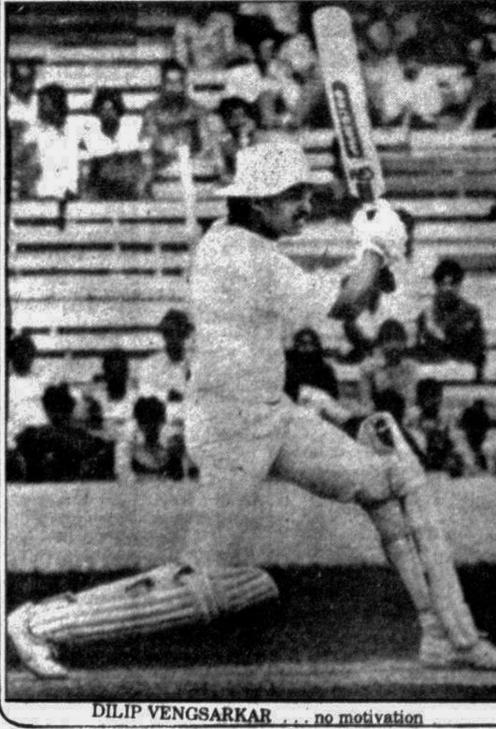
der, a former skipper who made his debut in New Zealand in 1976.

In 116 Tests, he scored 17 centuries and made 6,868 runs—the most for India after the legendary Sunil Gavaskar.

At his best, his fluent front-foot play delighted fans and his immense patience to build an innings frustrated opponents.

But in recent years, Vengsarkar's form has been indifferent and on the recent tour of Australia, he could just manage 158 runs from nine Test innings.

He was dropped from the one-day games and omitted from India's World Cup squad.



DILIP VENGARKAR... no motivation

Mendis slams Lankan showing

COLOMBO, Mar 17: Sri Lanka's cricket manager Dulce Mendis has compared his team's miserable performance at the World Cup to "village green cricket", a state-owned newspaper here reported Tuesday, reports AFP.

"No excuses, it was a performance by the Lankans that resembled village green cricket," The Daily News Quoted Mendis, a former Test captain, as saying. He said the players lacked discipline and courage to produce runs.

Sri Lanka failed to make it to the last four in the World Cup after losing five matches, two of them by massive margins to England and the West Indies in the past week.

However, they posted wins over Zimbabwe and South Africa while sharing a point with India after rains washed out their match earlier in the tournament.

"If I had played... I could have performed better than some of the batsmen... I am ashamed of their performance. Some of them should pack their bags and go home," the newspaper quoted Mendis as saying.

Mendis is one of the few world cricketers to have represented his country in all of the first four World Cup tournaments and was a prolific run-getter for Sri Lanka in Tests and one-day internationals.

Barbados may refuse SA

BRIDGETOWN, Barbados, Mar 17: Prime Minister Erskine Sandiford warned Monday that if South Africa does not approve a referendum on political reform, this Caribbean country will consider banning sporting contacts with Pretoria, reports AP.

South Africans vote Tuesday on the crucial motion.

"If there's any reversal of the process and the momentum towards the dismantling of apartheid ceases, Barbados would have to reconsider its position in relation to sporting contacts with South Africa," Sandiford said.

He said that could include next month's proposed visit to Barbados by a South African cricket team for a historic Test match against the West Indies.

The South Africans are due to play the first ever official Test match against the West Indies on April 18 to 23 in Barbados.



South African captain Kepler Wessels seen practising at the Adelaide Oval yesterday. — AFP photo