

Kiwis hope to beat hosts' jinx

AUCKLAND, Mar 20: New Zealand face Pakistan again here Saturday in the semifinals of the cricket World Cup, with their worst enemy the feeling they have done the main job by removing deadly rivals Australia from the competition, reports AFP.

Australia never recovered from their opening match defeat at the hands of Kiwis, and their slim chances of making the semifinals were eradicated when New Zealand lost to Pakistan in the final round-robin game on Wednesday.

Having beaten Martin Crowe's men once, Pakistan captain Imran Khan can feel confident of doing the double, though New Zealand still have some advantages, including that of familiar turf at Eden Park.

whose deadly googlies last Wednesday left him floundering.

The youngster is well supported by left-arm fast bowler Wasim Akram, but New Zealand are not without some reply in the form of right arm off spinner Dipak Patel, whose



MUSHTAQ

the team had played the way supporters always expected. Crowe also holds Imran in awe. "I admire Imran because he's a good leader, he knows the strengths and weaknesses of batsmen. He's always trying things."

"He's virtually coached his bowlers so he knows exactly



GREATBATCH

what he wants from them," he said.

A record crowd is expected at Eden Park, but the weather for forecasts for both Saturday, and the Sunday reserve day, are for gales and rain.

STRANGE RULES

Under special semifinal rules both sides must play a minimum 25 overs each for there to be a result. But if weather wrecks the match, New Zealand as table toppers will go through automatically to the finals in Melbourne.

But if the match goes on, New Zealand should remember the last World Cup, when Pakistan were also the first to qualify for the semifinals, then lost their next game and the semifinals.

CONFIDENT KIWIS

An AP report adds: New Zealand is relaxed and confident of becoming the first host nation to win the World Cup, captain Martin Crowe said Friday.

Crowe said there was no chance the New Zealanders would crumble under the pressure of expectation from their home fans.

"We want to go out and enjoy the day and just let those natural instincts flow like they have been for the last month," Crowe said.

Pakistan captain Imran Khan has suggested New Zealand was in the same position as his team at the last World Cup when Pakistan was the first team to qualify for the semifinals, then lost its final first round match and its semifinal.

"I know that the pressure

mounts at this stage," Imran said.

"They realised they could drop a game and get through then the pressure wasn't there."

"It's not as much pressure as they are suddenly going to face in the semifinal."

The New Zealand players looked relaxed and confident as they went through their final workout on Friday.

"We've played well. We are confident of doing well," Crowe said.

"We've actually been thinking about this game for 10 days whereas they were probably thinking about it for 24 hours."

Imran said his team had become immune to pressure after having to win its final three first-round games to qualify.

"It feels a little strange now, since we've been hanging on for dear life for most of the World Cup really, and suddenly we're in the semifinals."

"This is probably the least amount of pressure we've felt throughout the tournament."

"That's the feeling we've got and it's better because we've been playing under extreme tension."

"We could have been eliminated in any of our last three games."

Imran said Pakistan was unlikely to make any changes to the team which played on Wednesday.

"We've got a winning team, we don't want to change it," he said.

"It gives us a lot of strength in our batting where Ijaz (Ahmed) bats seven with Wasim (Akram) at eight."

Crowe said he believed the expected 39,000 sellout crowd would favour New Zealand.

"I also think the slow pitch will suit us," he said. "We know how it is playing. We've had three or four games on it already this year."

The winner of the New Zealand-Pakistan game will play either South Africa or England in the final in Melbourne on March 25.

TEAMS

NEW ZEALAND (From): Martin Crowe (Captain), Rod Latham, Mark Greatbatch, John Wright, Andrew Jones, Ken Rutherford, Chris Harris, Chris Cairns, Ian Smith, Dipak Patel, Gavin Larran, Danny Morrison, Willie Watson, Murphy Su'a.

PAKISTAN (From): Imran Khan (Captain), Aamir Sohail, Rameez Raja, Injamm-ul-Haq, Javed Miandad, Salim Malik, Moti Khan, Ijaz Ahmed, Wasim Akram, Aaqib Javed, Mustaq Ahmed, Zahid Fazal, Iqbal Sikander, Wasim Haidar.

Azhar blames selfishness for team's debacle

HYDERABAD, Mar 20: Many of the Indian cricketers were playing for themselves and not for the team after the first two Tests in Australia, according to the team captain, Mohammed Azharuddin, reports PTI.

Travel-weary Azharuddin, who slipped into the town virtually unnoticed yesterday along with spinner Venkatapathy Raju, conceded to reporters here last night it was difficult to motivate the team all the time.

"One could point out a mistake to a player once or twice but not repeatedly," he said when the discussion turned to his leadership, seen by critics as being not assertive enough.

"We were just not able to get it all together for most part of the tour. Our batting let us down. And when the batsmen picked themselves up, the bowlers struggled a bit," Azharuddin said.

The skipper accepted that the team played very badly.

"The least we could have done was to make the semifinals of the World Cup." He said in reply to a pointed question if he owned up moral responsibility for his side's dismal showing over the last four months.

India lost four of the five Tests against Australia, just about made it to the finals of the triangular World Series competition where they lost 0-2 to the home side before watching their World Cup campaign come a cropper.

"I've had a cortisone injection and there is more pain now which should show it is working," Pringle said on Friday.

"I'll have a test bowl tomorrow and then we'll see how it is."

The remainder of the England squad had a lengthy workout on Friday, including fielding practice under the Sydney Cricket Ground floodlights ahead of the day night contest.

Fast bowler Chris Lewis, another of England's injury worries because of a strained abdominal muscle, bowled and batted in the nets and looked to be moving easily.

Lewis has bowled in only two of England's last six matches but coach Micky Stewart has said that if he is selected on Sunday he will definitely bowl.

Captain Graham Gooch, himself still recovering from a hamstring injury, said the team would not be selected until Sunday.

After a fine start to the tournament, England have slumped to two successive defeats, the last at the hands of unranked Zimbabwe.

"It will not be the last time a major side is beaten by a minor one," Gooch said. "I know we haven't had a good week,

which would be left out. I'd said South Africa had played really well to reach the semifinal stage on their World Cup debut.

"They will provide very stiff opposition. They are very keyed up," said Gooch, who captained the first rebel English team to South Africa 10 years ago in breach of international sporting boycotts

and afterwards played there for Western Province.

"I spent two very enjoyable seasons playing in South Africa but I never thought I would play against them in an official match," he added.

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Pringle is England's only worry

SYDNEY, Mar 20: Seamer Derek Pringle is still hopeful of playing for England in Sunday's World Cup cricket semifinal against South Africa despite a rib cartilage injury which had looked certain to sideline him, reports Reuter.

but you have to overcome these disappointments.

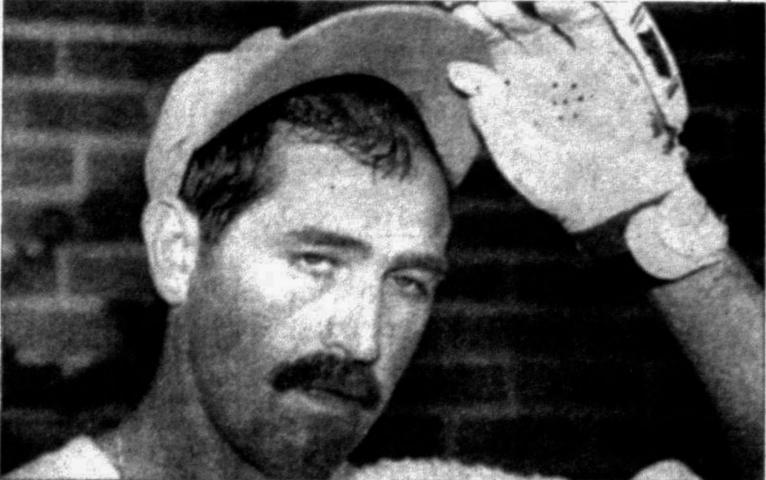
"Now we are just one match away from the final and we have got to make sure we get it right on Sunday."

Gooch said it was unlikely England would include both left-arm spinners, Phil Tufnell and Richard Illingworth, but he refused to be drawn on

and afterwards played there for Western Province.

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England's Captain Graham Gooch answers a reporter's question regarding injured players who may not be able to participate in the World Cup semifinal against S Africa on March 22 at Sydney. —AFP photo

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DEREK PRINGLE

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Spotlight is on Kirsten, Crowe

SYDNEY, Mar 20: Run-hungry Peter Kirsten and Martin Crowe, two of the tournament's leading batsmen, will be under the spotlight in the World Cup cricket semifinals this weekend, reports Reuter.

Kirsten, South Africa's "Mr Consistency", seeks to extend his rich vein of form in the day-night clash with England in Sydney on Sunday.

New Zealand captain Crowe boasts an average of 121.66 as he faces the match against Pakistan at Eden Park, Auckland on Saturday.

Veteran Kirsten has failed only once in seven Cup innings while piling up 399 runs at an average of 79.80. He has the highest aggregate in the tournament.

Scores of 49 not out against Australia, 90 vs New Zealand, 47 vs Sri Lanka, 56 vs West Indies, 62 not out vs Zimbabwe, 11 vs England and 84 vs India have turned the Cup into a personal triumph for 36-year-old Kirsten.

Crowe has achieved his staggering average with the aid of five not outs in eight innings. He has a total of 365 runs with 100 not out against Australia, 74 not out vs Zimbabwe, 81 not out vs West Indies and 73 not out vs England as his best scores.

introduction into the action in the second over has been this Cup's greatest tactical ploy.

Then there is Chris Harris who has taken the most wickets, 15, in the tournament to date with an average of 18.

Crowe is in outstanding form with the bat and must be regarded as a top prospect for the star player-of-the-Cup award, to be announced here during Saturday's game.

Pakistan's Rameez Raja, who last week had an undefeated 119, will also be a threat especially on an Eden Park likely to favour batsmen.

Imran feels he has the upper hand, noting that Pakistan faced sudden death in their last three matches. After beating New Zealand on Wednesday they still had to wait for Australia to beat the West Indies to know they were through.

"Now we are under the least pressure we have felt during the whole tournament," Imran said. "Just like someone who comes out after thinking he was dead, we are just happy to be alive."

Imran has no worries over Eden Park's infamous slow and low pitch, carefully doctored to favour the home team. Pakistan play on pitches like that at home, and they welcome it.

Crash leg-spin course for Kiwi batsmen

AUCKLAND, Mar 20: New Zealand's batsman practised against local leg-spinners today to prepare for the menace of Pakistan's Mushtaq Ahmed in Saturday's World Cup cricket semifinal, reports Reuter.

The amateur wrist spinners put the New Zealanders through a hard test in the nets, but Pakistan captain Imran Khan warned that a few overs' practice against leg spin and googlies might not be enough.

"A half-hour crash course is never enough. You need more time," Imran said at the Eden Park nets.

Mushtaq bamboozled New Zealand's normally belligerent batsmen in the final round-robin match in Christchurch on Wednesday, taking two for 18 in his 10-over spell.

Pakistan won that game by seven wickets, handing New Zealand their first defeat in the eight-match preliminary series.

Crowe's side lost on the quick Lancaster Park pitch, but on Saturday the semifinal will be played on the same, slow track that confused West Indies two weeks ago in a con-

test New Zealand won comfortably.

Crowe said Wednesday's defeat would sting his team into action, and added that Mushtaq might be given a torrid time by the like of explosive opener Mark Greatbatch, who scattered spectators during his spell in the nets facing a young leg spinner.

"You've got to practise what you're going to come up against. He's young and inexperienced. It'll be an interesting contest," Crowe said of the prospective duel with the Pakistan wrist spinner.

The diminutive Mushtaq said

Saturday's pitch suited him fine.

"We've got lots of wickets like that at home. It's a good wicket and their batsmen are not reading me very well," he said.

Crowe indicated he might once again swap openers on Saturday, bringing in the experienced John Wright to replace Rod Latham. Wright has had problems regaining his place since being injured early in the competition.

"We could bring in John Wright and Chris Cairns," Crowe said, suggesting Cairns might replace paceman Danny

Morrison, New Zealand's only successful bowler in Christchurch.

Imran said he had no injury problems and indicated the team would probably be the same that played on Wednesday.

The charismatic Pakistani captain this World Cup meant more to him than any of the other four he played in because of his commitment to building a cancer hospital in Lahore.

"My main obsession in life is to get this cancer hospital set up in Lahore and we need to win to get funds for it," he said.

"We had poor accommodation at the first venues," Howell said.

"It was not unusual to find a frog in your shower, or cockroaches, lizards, and other bugs in your room."

"The illnesses would manifest themselves as fevers, diarrhoea, and lethargy. Fieldsmen, and sometimes a batsman, would have to suddenly leave the field."

"It did not help to have hot buses, poor food, overnight trains with toilets you would not let your dog near."

"People say you would accept such conditions," Howell said. "But it is hard to walk down a street and see beggars on every side, and children sleeping under pieces of cardboard on the footpath. It got to the guys."

Passing of a great bowler

LONDON, Mar 20: Test batsmen around the world can sleep a little easier following Malcolm Marshall's decision to retire from international cricket, reports Reuter.

With 376 Test wickets, 81 caps and 12 years of top-class performances, the 33-year-old West Indian proved himself long ago to be among the most feared quick bowlers of his generation.

Few bowlers in the game's history have combined such speed, swing, craft and guile as the Barbadian, who enjoyed the admiration of colleagues and opponents alike during the West Indies' domination of world cricket in the 1980s.

Pakistan captain Imran Khan was one of his fans. "He is a natural athlete. His main weapon is an unusual skidding bouncer which does not get up much but keeps coming at the batsman... he is an intelligent bowler who quickly assesses a batsman's weakness."

South African batsman Jimmy Cook, belatedly exposed to Marshall's skills in English county cricket, said it was a privilege to bat against such a fine bowler.

But many others, including ex-England captain Mike Gatting, have more painful memories of him after being struck by one of the vicious short-pitched balls Imran described.

Marshall was certainly a different proposition from the previous, West Indian Test wicket record-holder, off-spinner Lance Gibbs.

Marshall overtook Gibbs on his home ground in Bridge town with his 310th wicket, and retires with a remarkable Test bowling average of 20.94.

Marshall also captured more than 150 wickets in 130 one-day internationals and struck six first-class centuries.

His best bowling figures in Test cricket were the seven for 22 he collected against England at Manchester in 1988, but he will also be remembered for his remarkable seven for 53 at Leeds in 1984 when he bowled with a broken left thumb.

More recently, at reduced pace, he has continued to be a fine example to the younger breed of West Indian fast bowlers.

"I did not have to keep providing to myself I was the fastest in a macho sort of way," he once said. "I took wickets as much by swing and guile as sheer speed."

His departure follows that of other modern West Indian greats Viv Richards, Gordon Greenidge and Jeff Dujon as the Caribbean cricket scene shifts towards a different beat.

Marshall still intends to play county cricket for Hampshire for two more seasons but, with the World Cup over, his horizons are narrowing.

"There are a lot of youngsters coming through," he said. "At some stage in your life, you have to decide when you have had enough and when it is time to quit."



MALCOLM MARSHALL None of the select band of players to take 200 Test

Appalling apology

WELLINGTON, Mar 20: New Zealand's best emerging cricketers who have just completed a tour of India were made to suffer umpires whose qualities fluctuated between inconsistent and downright atrocious, a top cricket official here said today, reports AFP.

John Howell, the national director of Coaching and Development who managed the team, said their accommodation were terrible as well.

"The youth team won one and lost two of their limited-over internationals, were victims of controversial umpiring in the first Test and might have won the other but for vital absences through illness."

"We were as good if not better than India, but the umpiring was appalling in the first Test. It was not cheating, just plain incompetence," he said.

"The bad decisions went against us 10-3. That is not sour grapes, just fact. They cost us the game."

Illness hit most of the New Zealanders.

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"It was not unusual to find a frog in your shower, or cockroaches, lizards, and other bugs in your room."

"The illnesses would manifest themselves as fevers, diarrhoea, and lethargy. Fieldsmen, and sometimes a batsman, would have to suddenly leave the field."

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and afterwards played there for Western Province.

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