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Man of the moment

LONDON, June 10 (AP): Neil Johnson was delighted to become the first Zimbabwean to score a century at Lord's but said it was a "downer" coming in Wednesday's World Cup Super Six loss to Australia.

The hallowed turf at the game's headquarters spurred the 29-year-old left-handed batsman, whose strokeful century highlighted what South Africa had missed by allowing Zimbabwe's prodigal son to return home.

Johnson, who returned to Zimbabwe — the country of his birth — last year after failing to impress the South African se-

lectors, complimented his mentor, former Test cricketer Kepler Wessels.

In his rare moment in the spotlight, Johnson lauded Wessels' contribution in shaping his first-class career.

"I'd say, Kepler (Wessels) is one of my big mentors," he said. "He started me in first-class cricket... he's a superb man, a hard man."

Wessels was among those who persistently backed Johnson during his stint with Eastern Province before he moved on to Natal.

Johnson said scoring a century was a great occasion for him but losing the game was "a downer."

"I suppose it (scoring a World Cup century) is one of the best things I've done but it's no good losing the game... that's a bit of a downer," he said. "I'd have loved to have gone and won it for the boys."

Johnson primarily a middle-order batsman who has turned into an opener for Zimbabwe, moved to South Africa at the age of 10 when his parents immigrated.

Making a mark as a young cricketer, Johnson was picked for South Africa 'A' side's tour to Zimbabwe in 1994-95 but subsequently went into an oblivion.

He played English County cricket for Leicestershire for one year but his hopes of making the Test side did not materialize.

During this period, Johnson got invited back of Zimbabwe by Denis Streak, father of Zimbabwe test cricketer Heath, but did not accept the offer immediately.

Johnson waited for the South African selectors to notice him again before realizing he had a better future in Zimbabwe.

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Saber slams Greenidge

President of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and Deputy Minister for LGED and Cooperatives Saber Hossain Chowdhury yesterday termed Gordon Greenidge's remarks as being "unacceptable and desperately disappointing," reports BSS.

Commenting on Bangladesh cricket former coach of Bangladesh cricket team Gordon, in an interview with The Sunday Times of London, said, "Bangladesh is a poor country and they feel under pressure."

"This reference to poverty and the portrayal of Bangladesh as a poor country has infuriated many," Saber Chowdhury said, adding, "BCB officials were also visibly upset at this latest derogatory comment of Gordon about Bangladesh and its cricket."

The BCB president went on to say "our cricket team has proved to the world we are one of the richest nations in terms of spirit, self belief and courage and what Gordon may or not say will not change this."



SWASHBUCKLING: South African skipper Hansie Cronje in smashing form against New Zealand at Edgbaston yesterday.

— Internet photo

Asians take a break

From Nizamuddin Ahmed

EDGBASTON, June 10: It is a fairly legitimate question what was a Bangladeshi doing at a South Africa-New Zealand match at Birmingham? I circled the entire Edgbaston ground, home to the Warwickshire County, but could not locate one beside myself. Not even any other of the about a dozen in the Bangladesh press entourage.

On an overcast day, with forecast of brighter weather ahead, there were a few Indian supporters as gathered from their blue and yellow tops, and a few Pakistanis. The Indians, fresh from Azharuddin's third consecutive triumph over Pakistan in the World Cup, sported T-shirts and caps to give them away; the Pakistanis seemed to have gone into hiding. Or they could have been wise to miss an uninteresting match.

Most of the fans, who betrayed their preference, were wearing the South African rugby shirt. There were some with the All Blacks T-shirt of the New Zealand rugby team. But, the colour and the noise that is seen in a match involving the sub-continent teams were not there. The mood was too sombre for our kind of cricket.

This was surprising as Birmingham has a very large concentration of Indians and Pakistanis. But, as there was virtually no interest for either, tickets bought by them must have been sold to those more interested bulk of them South Africans, a few New Zealanders, and the English who wanted to

see a good game.

Pravin from London, an Indian supporter, was with her friend. Her interest in the game was to see South Africa win but also to see India qualify.

So if New Zealand could do us a favour he let out with seriousness.

What was she doing in this match? It's the structure of the World Cup. You have to buy the Super Six tickets in advance, and you do not know which teams are going to qualify. So you are stuck with what you got, frustration showing all over her face.

But all was not futile as she came to see his favourite player Lance Klusener to do some damage in the end.

Pravin and her friend have not given up hope on India's chances, although they admitted they were very slim.

Other Indian presence in and around the ground included sand sculptor Sudarsan Pattnaik from Puri. He was busy outside the stadium sculpting Lord Krishna from sand. His visit was part of the publicity campaign by Indian tourism industry to lure tourists in the new millennium.

Sudarsan, who has been into this art form for the past five years dreams of establishing a permanent Sand Sculptures Village on the Puri beach. Having flown all the way from India and working away on the doorsteps of Edgbaston, he would however not be watching the cricket match inside. Not even if India were playing, he said. His interest obviously was in the higher spheres.

Lahore A. Ahmed found the match very boring as he too was stuck with a ticket. He seemed angry. You could not blame him for tickets cost sixty pounds each. He seemed to have no interest whatsoever in the going-on and was wandering outside the stadium after ten overs of the match. He had a Pakistani shirt on, the only one that could be spotted.

Briton Mathew Carrington was a New Zealand fan. He had been following all their matches, but this was the first one he had come to watch. Why was he here?

"I have been to New Zealand. It's my day-off, so I thought I would come and watch the game, said the tall fellow wearing a Kiwi T-shirt."

Mathew thought the game would be tight but he predicted a New Zealand win as South Africa were struggling a little bit at the moment.

New Zealanders hopes must lie on the failure of the South African top order in the tournament. "Klusener can not do it every time, can he?" Asked Mathews friend. Only they did not know then, the topmost order was doing very well.

Warwickshire fans had a completely different reason to come to the match. They had come to see the duel between two of their sons of the early 1990s, as it were. — Allan Donald and Roger Twose. Who would knock whom that was their question.

Kevin Murphy and his girlfriend have come all the way from South Africa. You could

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Mark Waugh in the slips fails to gather an edge from Zimbabwe opener Grant Flower at Lord's on June 9.

— AFP photo

Steve stands by Shane

LONDON, June 10: Australian cricket World Cup captain Steve Waugh today hit back at Shane Warne's detractors, predicting the leg spinner will prove a match-winner in the make-or-break game against South Africa, reports AFP.

Doubts over Warne's form, however, reached new levels before Sunday's Super Six match at Headingley. Defeat could see Australia knocked out before the semi-finals.

"Bowling, Warne!" has been one of cricket's enduring mantras over recent years but it was conspicuously absent at Lord's against Zimbabwe on Wednesday.

Australia won, but Warne, once the jewel of their bowling line-up, was hammered for 55 off nine overs.

Waugh, however, said he was confident Warne would emulate team-mate Glenn McGrath by rediscovering his form.

"You have to back your bowlers," he said. "He'll come good when the time is right, he'll bowl his best when the game hangs on his 10 overs."

"I'm not worried. They played pretty well and he went for a few. I don't read too much into it."

"South Africa's a big game and a pointer to who will win the tournament. They certainly won't give us anything — to beat them we will have to keep our intensity up."

Waugh's defence of Warne, however, left many unconvinced as Australia's bowling attack comes under increasing scrutiny, from critics and opposing batsmen alike.

Zimbabwean Neil Johnson, who hit an undefeated 132, including four boundaries off a Warne over, said: "he gave me a bit of width ... he gave me a few bad ones."

"He wasn't turning it," Warne, once regarded as the world's best bowler but still short of his best following shoulder surgery last year, has taken 10 wickets in the World Cup.

For most, that would be a dropping offence. Waugh argued in mitigation that Warne had been brought into the attack early on Wednesday, when fielding restrictions were still in place.

"It's not easy for a spinner in the first 15 overs," he said.

But staunching run-flows and dismissing dangerous batsmen is exactly what Warne is selected to do.

The portly 29-year-old Victorian was dropped for the first time in seven years from the Test team earlier this year, replaced by rival leg spinner Stuart MacGill.

Now his one-day form is under scrutiny.

Sunday's match against South Africa is vital for both Warne and Australia. Australia desperately need the points. Warne needs to make one.

Waugh stressed his confidence in Warne's ability and pointed out that McGrath, the architect of wins over West Indies and India, had made a slow start to the tournament.

He said the Zimbabwe batsman had played Warne well on what he described as the best batting pitch of the tournament.

"He's got a bit of a sore shoulder but he will be okay. He would have liked to bowl better but the whole game wasn't hanging on his 10 overs."

Against the Test-playing teams, however, his record is six for 209, at an economy rate of 4.6 an over.

In the two games in the Super Six second stage matches that really matter, according to Waugh — he has taken one for 104 off 15.2 overs, conceding almost seven every six balls.

Warne, struggling for spin

and I've worked on a few things

in the nets to hopefully my luck

will improve during the rest of

the tournament.

"We've played quite well so

far, but there have been a few

players we have relied upon

over the last few years who

haven't hit form so far in the

tournament and if they click as

well we can really move up a

gear."

"I think it's important to

look at things like that positively,

some of the guys haven't

gone as they'd like to but they

are good enough players and

they are working hard enough

on their game and it's only a

matter of time before it clicks."

— Internet photo

Star South African batsman Jacques Kallis follows through

on a full blooded lofted drive against New Zealand.

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Klusener conquered



LONDON, June 10 (Internet report): World record holder Lance Klusener's unbeaten run in one-day international came to an end against New Zealand at Edgbaston today.

Bowled for just four by Gavin Larsen, Klusener scored 400 runs without dismissal in one-day international to overhaul Javed Miandad's 16-year record of 395.

Below are all his 10 innings from today's dismissal stretching back to his last:

Date	Venue	Opponents	Score	How out
Feb '99	Christchurch	New Zealand	0	c Twose b Allott
Feb '99	Auckland	New Zealand	103*	
Mar '99	Napier	New Zealand	35*	
Mar '99	Auckland	New Zealand	13*	
Mar '99	Wellington	New Zealand	35*	
May '99	Hove	India	12*	
May '99	Northampton	Sri Lanka	52*	
May '99	The Oval	England	48*	
May '99	Amstelveen	Kenya	dnb	
May '99	Chelmsford	Zimbabwe	52*	
Jun '99	Trent Bridge	Pakistan	46*	
Jun '99	Edgbaston	New Zealand	4	b Larsen
Total runs (10 innings)			400	