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SHAUN SHUNS STEVE: South African speedster Shaun Pollock starts celebrating the fall of Australian skipper Steve Waugh at Edgbaston yesterday. —AFP photo

## Black Caps can hold their heads high

MANCHESTER, England, June 17 (Reuters/AFP): Former All Black rugby captain John Graham does not like losing.

Yet there were no complaints from Graham, now manager of the cricket side, after New Zealand team lost to Pakistan 3-2 wickets in Wednesday's World Cup semifinal.

"We're a small country," Graham reflected. "And at least we didn't just roll over."

The reality is that qualifying for the semifinals ahead of West Indies, England and India was a triumph for a team of modest ability whose sum was far greater than its parts.

"Would any New Zealander get into the South African side?" Graham asked rhetorically. "No. In the Australian side? No. In the Pakistan side? No."

"Geoff Allott might get in the Indian team but he'd be the only one."

Allott was one reason New Zealand got as far as they did in the tournament.

The lively left-arm pace bowler troubled all opening batsmen in the competition until Wednesday when he looked innocuous against Pakistan's openers Saeed Anwar and Waqar Hussain.

The other major contributor was left-hand batsman Roger Twose, an expatriate Englishman who was never in contention for a place in the England side during his time with Warwickshire.

New Zealand's chief attribute, one that also characterises the All Blacks, was unselfish team spirit and a willingness to battle until the final ball had been bowled.

"A lot of teams have fallen by the wayside," said captain Stephen Fleming. "We have scrapped well and played well."

"We got in the top four without playing the well. And we have created a star in Allott."

New Zealand now prepare for a four-Test series against England and a different set of challenges.

To guarantee regular tours to the home of cricket they must perform more consistently at the international level and a series win over England, who were knocked out in the first round of the World Cup, would be an ideal start.

Graham, who had a distinguished career as a secondary school headmaster after retiring from international rugby 35 years ago, was recruited to instill some discipline into the side three years ago.

During his period in charge New Zealand have won home series against Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe and India without seriously threatening the likes of Australia and South Africa.

The top order batting failed consistently in the World Cup, revealing some worrying technical flaws. Opener Nathan Astle garnered just 80 runs in nine innings.

Astle didn't even manage to

get an average in double figures as he concluded his tournament in the same wretched fashion that he began it.

In his first Cup innings, against Bangladesh, the right-hander had made four on Wednesday, against Pakistan, he got to three. Before Shoaib Akhtar sent a high-speed delivery through his defence.

Regarded as New Zealand's top one-day player, Astle's loose technique outside the off stump was exposed. He batted nine times, reached double figures three times, had a top score of 26 and finished with an average of 8.8.

Matthew Horne, his partner, managed 74 against India but not much else of note on his way to an average of 24.87.

Number three Craig McMillan, touted as dangerous, pugnacious and a man to watch at the World Cup, finished with an average of just under 17.

McMillan, unable to indulge in his powerful front-foot strokeplay after being pinned back by the quicks, played what they call a "nothing shot" to fall caught behind off Wasim Akram.

For McMillan, it has been a nothing World Cup.

Fleming did at least give his team a total to defend by hitting 41 against Pakistan. But the elegant left-hander knows a tournament average of 26 is not good enough for a number four.

New Zealand's collective



Pakistan batsman Ijaz Ahmed asking pitch invaders to back off during the closing moments of the semifinal against New Zealand. —AFP photo

## Sorry Youhana

OLD TRAFFORD, England, June 17: Injured Pakistani star Yousuf Youhana was facing a World Cup heartbreak today after his captain all but ruled him out of the final, reports AFP.

Wasim Akram said he doubted that the young batsman, an automatic choice at the start of the tournament, would be fit for Sunday's final — then suggested he would not be risked even if he were.

Akram said: "I don't think he will be fit...hamstrings are such a problem that it occurs again and again."

He hoped the 24-year-old right-hander would make it, only to add that he was not really concerned since his side were playing so well.

Akram said the pressure was off the batting at last, with Ijaz Ahmed finally finding form in the nine-wicket romp over New Zealand here on Wednesday.

Ijaz only played a cameo role of 28 not out after the World Cup record first-wicket stand of 194 between Saeed Anwar and Waqar Hussain, but Akram said the way he played was important.

Ijaz is looking good. He was brilliant today and that is a relief to me," he said.

The Lahore-born Youhana played in the opening games, impressing at number six. He played important innings

against the West Indies and Australia, as well as an 81 against Scotland.

But he then missed out with a hamstring injury. On his return against South Africa, he again damaged the same muscle.

That led to Akram changing the balance of his side, first trying pinch-hitter Shahid Afridi up the order, then drafting in Wasti as a specialist opener.

Akram seemed to hint that Wasti's success — he scored 84 in the semi-final virtually ruled

out a return for Youhana, even if he recovers in time.



## Sultan of speed

OLD TRAFFORD, England, June 17 (AFP): Pakistan World Cup strike bowler Shoaib Akhtar has re-written cricket's one-day rules by showing that genuine pace can play a key part in the game, according to his captain.

Wasim Akram, speaking after Shoaib Akhtar took three wickets to claim the match of the match award in Pakistan's semi-final victory over New Zealand on Wednesday, said: "He showed pace does matter in one-day cricket."

The right-arter, who has confirmed his status as the quickest bowler in the world during the tournament, took a wicket in each of his three spells to keep New Zealand's innings in check.

Akram said the 23-year-old was still "in a learning process", but added: "He played his heart out."

Earlier in the tournament, Akhtar had blamed his protegee for "costing" Pakistan their match against South Africa.

Akram said Akhtar had sacrificed control for pace, thus giving away a crucial 17 runs in one over to lose the match.

On Wednesday against New Zealand, he was also costly at the end of the New Zealand innings, his 10 overs costing 55.

But he bowled at speeds of up to 94-miles-per-hour, a speed unmatched by any other bowler at the World Cup, and Akram

continued to encourage him because of his constant wicket-taking threat.

Most leading pace bowlers, South Africa's Allan Donald, Glenn McGrath of Australia and Akram himself among them, rein back their speeds in the one-day game, looking to balance the chance of wickets with the need for containment.

The lack of close fielders in the limited-over format, as captains defend the boundary, also makes all-out attack less successful.

Akhtar — who Akram said had not been able to sleep on Tuesday night because he was so excited — saw at least one chance go through the vacant area between third and fourth slip.

His speed could not have been more in contrast with New Zealand's bowling attack, largely based of slow-medium pacers bowling accurate line and length while taking the pace off the ball to try and force batsmen to do the work.

Defeated New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming, who became one of Akhtar's victims when his leg stump was sent cartwheeling by a perfect yorker, however, agreed with Akram.

"He's quick and when the ball is swinging it's very hard to score. He creates pressure situations. It's vital to have someone of that ability," he said.

## Kiwi skipper looks back

OLD TRAFFORD, England, June 17: New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming was left with bitter-sweet memories here on Thursday after his side's exit from the World Cup following a nine-wicket defeat to Pakistan, reports AFP.

Fleming refused to accept that Wednesday's game at Old Trafford had been as one-sided as the score suggested and refused to accept that the Kiwis were boring.

He said: "We have reached the top four and still not played that well. From that point of view, it's a good boost for New Zealand cricket."

"For our cricket as a whole, it was important to achieve well."

"We think we can play attractive cricket. We want to prove to a few people that we can play attractive cricket," he said.

New Zealand, dubbed the most uncharismatic team in the world by the editor of the cricketing bible 'Wisden', scored a respectable 241 for seven on Wednesday but their attack was torn to shreds by Saeed Anwar and Waqar Hussain Wasti during a 194-run opening stand.

Fleming did accept, however, that medium-pace Gavin

Larsen and slow-medium bowler Chris Harris had not set the game alight with their safety-first style.

"Larsen and Harris may not be attractive but they can create pressure by making it hard for batsmen to score," he said.

Looking forward to the upcoming Test series with England, Fleming added: "They are a good side, perhaps spoilt with options."

"I think we can beat England if we play to our potential."

He said the World Cup could not be a pointer to Test form but added: "It's a morale booster, going into the Test series. We haven't played to our potential."

He praised Geoff Allott, who took a record 20 wickets in the tournament, and Roger Twose, who averaged almost 80 with the bat, while admitting that he and top-order batsmen Nathan Astle and Craig McMillan had "not really performed."

Wasim Akram said that New Zealand, who have said throughout the tournament that they were happy to "understate and over-achieve", were short of one class bowler, adding: "That weakness came out against us."

It was New Zealand's fourth semi-final defeat in the seven World Cups.



Jubilant Pakistan fans gather on the Old Trafford pitch after the semifinal victory against New Zealand. —Internet photo

## Party time in Pakistan

KARACHI, June 17: Thousands of youth thronged the streets in jubilation Thursday after Pakistan trounced New Zealand and qualified for the prestigious World Cup final, reports AFP.

Groups of youths danced to drum beats and exchanged hugs and greetings after opener Saeed Anwar scored the winning shot for Pakistan against the Kiwis.

Chasing 241, Pakistan pulverised New Zealand with a resounding nine-wicket victory in the semi-final.

Fans celebrated the victory by blowing horns, blasting fire crackers and firing in the air amid all-night revelry. Many

said they were confident that "Pakistan will lift the 1999 World Cup."

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, himself a cricket fan, congratulated skipper Wasim Akram and the rest of the team for their victory.

Praising them for bringing "glory" to the country, Sharif said he hoped the side would demonstrate the same skill and spirit in the final at Lords on Sunday.

If Pakistan succeed it will be their second World Cup finals triumph, after Imran Khan led the side to their first victory in the 1992 World Cup when they beat England in Australia.

Pakistan will play the win-

ner of the second final, between South Africa and Australia on Thursday.

Fans celebrating the win over the Kiwis said they believed the Pakistani side was strong enough to achieve the goal.

"Now our batting line up has clicked and we have proved that we are good chasers as well," one supporter Ahmed Shah said. "Only a conspiracy can defeat us now."

Pakistani fans have a love-hate relationship with cricketers, who are idolised after a win and accused of match-fixing after defeat.

See page 14

## Interesting Internet

LONDON, June 17 (AFP): Whatever else it is remembered for, the 1999 World Cup will go down as the cricket tournament with a record number of hits.

Internet page 'hits', that is. By the time the last ball is bowled in next Sunday's final, millions of cricket lovers will have followed the ins and outs of the five-week tournament on the handful of web pages saturated in statistics, scores and, occasionally, satire.

Cricket fiends the world over used to face two major problems in following live matches. Fans based in countries with little cricketing pedigree have always been stumped by sporadic or non-existent local television and radio coverage.

Secondly, matches like this week's World Cup semifinals tend to stretch through at least part of the working day, a state of play which used to leave the fan-at-work fumbling furiously with the radio dial when the boss wasn't looking.

Not any more. Worldwide web spinners say there is something about the game, its leisurely pace and literary tradition, that lends itself perfectly to the deskbound diaries.

Add in the geographical gaps in television and radio broadcasting footprints, which have, for example, deprived the 1.5 million Indians living in the United States of traditional coverage, and a potentially huge market emerges.

"There aren't many other sports that fit as well as cricket on the net," said Ron Victor, who maintains the [www.worldcupscore.com](http://www.worldcupscore.com) site with the help of four colleagues based in Silicon Valley, California. Visitors get real-time scores and can order live-updates by email.

"It has continuous action through the whole day and there is sufficient interest globally, with people watching in geographies where the event is not available live on TV."

For Alex Balfour, chief operating officer of the popular [www.cricinfo.org](http://www.cricinfo.org) site, the internet medium is perfect for cricket's time-honoured traditions of wry commentary and transpottier-type statistics.

"The pace of the game suits the medium," Balfour said. "You can render the action in text format and there is a deeply loved tradition of cricket commentary. It's a game with a literary sensibility."

With its cheeky asides and exhaustive database, Cricinfo now claims to be the world's

biggest single-sport site. With more than eight million hits during last week's passionate encounter between India and Pakistan, it is a serious claim.

The site lures visitors with its wickedly facetious reflections on the action, noting everything about a match from a bowler's boot to the length of sideburns sported by a fielder.

"People are streaming into

See page 14



DEADLY DONALD: Champion fast bowler Allan Donald is elated after finding the edge from Darren Lehmann yesterday. —AFP photo



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