



TEAM AUSTRALIA: Members of the all-conquering Australian cricket team in Perth yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Welcome home heroes

ICC Cricket World Cup SOUTH AFRICA 2003

REUTERS, Melbourne

Australia's media on Tuesday hailed their World Cup-winning team as the best side ever to have played limited-overs cricket.

"Best Ever" said the back-page headline in Melbourne's Herald Sun newspaper, while national daily The Australian newspaper's main sports headline said simply: "The Unbeatable."

Australia, who went unbeaten in the tournament in southern Africa, crushed India by 125 runs in Sunday's final to comfortably defend the title they won in 1999.

"Is this Australian side the best one-day cricket team ever to take

the field?" the Herald Sun newspaper asked in its editorial. "Their World Cup clean sweep ensured the game's longest winning streak (17 matches), making it hard to dispute."

Former Australia batsman Dean Jones, rated by Wisden as the fourth best batsman in one-day history, told the Herald Sun: "It was the most compelling, destructive cricket performance I have ever seen."

Comparisons were drawn with Don Bradman's "Invincibles" Australia side, which toured England in 1948 and won the test series 4-0 in what is still regarded as one of Australia's greatest performances in any sport.

"Ricky Ponting's all-conquering team has even seemed invincible, to use a word that resonates in the Australian cricketing psyche," the Sydney Morning Herald said.

Batsman Darren Lehmann, who hit the winning runs the 1999 final and took the winning catch on Sunday, said the Aussies had taken a step back in time to the free-spirited days of the Ian Chappell-led side in the 1970s.

"We would win a game and go out and have a beer. We took it back to the 1970s and 1980s in that respect," Lehmann was quoted as saying in the Herald Sun.

Earlier, thousands of fans paid homage when the champions arrived home.

Under a sunny autumn sky, the 15 players were feted in Forrest Place, in the heart of the Western Australian capital, by a colorful crowd estimated by police at about 5,000.

Thunderous cheering echoed across the city as Australian captain Ricky Ponting stepped forward

on to a stage to raise the trophy aloft.

Tired, but elated, the players waved back to the crowd in the only public appearance to be made by the team in Australia before they go into training for a four-Test tour of the West Indies.

Western Australian Premier Geoff Gallop told the team they were the pride of Australia after glittering green and gold streamers rained down on the squad.

There were joyous reunions with wives and families for the three Western Australian members of the side -- vice-captain Adam Gilchrist, Damien Martyn and Brad Hogg.

All three were in the eleven which overwhelmed India by 125 runs in the Sunday final in Johannesburg.

Waugh adds spirit

REUTERS, Perth

Test specialists Steve Waugh and Justin Langer will add enthusiasm to Australia's squad for the four-Test tour of West Indies starting next week, World Cup-winning skipper Ricky Ponting says.

Ponting, who will be Steve Waugh's vice-captain in the Test series, returned with his triumphant one-day squad to Perth airport on Tuesday after an unbeaten run at the World Cup in southern Africa which culminated in a 125-run win over India in Sunday's final.

The Australians have been playing international cricket almost non-stop for seven months and have less than a week's break before heading to the Caribbean on Monday for four tests and seven one-day internationals.

"There is no doubt that everyone here would like to have a few more days at least at home to see their families and friends," Ponting told reporters on Tuesday.

The West Indies tour of 1999 was Waugh's first series as Test captain and ended in a 2-2 draw.

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Ponting aiming higher

ICC Cricket World Cup SOUTH AFRICA 2003

AFP, Perth

Australia's cricketers are focused on winning the world cup for a record-breaking third time in a row, captain Ricky Ponting said here Tuesday as his triumphant team returned home.

"There is no reason why we cannot win again in four years," Ponting said at Perth airport after the team arrived from South Africa where they crushed India by 125 runs in Sunday's one-sided final in Johannesburg.

This triumph followed an overwhelming victory over Pakistan in the final in England four years earlier.

"I would like to have this group of guys around for the next one, if that was possible," said Ponting, who hit a memorable 140 not out against India in the showdown.

"What we have seen in this tournament is that we have really had our depth tested.

"All-rounder Shane Watson went out with injury just before

the tournament, fast bowler Jason Gillespie was injured during the tournament and then we lost Shane Warne."

Warne, the world's greatest leg-spin bowler, flew back to Australia after testing positive to drugs and was later disqualified from playing for a year.

"The guys who have stepped in have really played some great cricket, so there is no reason why we cannot produce these players and having them step in and play great cricket when it is required of them," Ponting said.

He said it had not been hard to captain a side as good as the Australian squad.

"I said that from the word go when I took over (from Test captain Steve Waugh a year earlier). With the talent we have in this side, that certainly makes my job a fair bit easier."

"We have played some great cricket during this campaign, in which we were undefeated.

"We were tested at certain times, but when we got into trouble one of the bunch put a hand up and made sure we got over the line.

"It wasn't smooth sailing all the time, but the final was a very good ending for us."

Ponting said when the competition started he believed the side were good enough to survive the tournament undefeated.

Australian coach John Buchanan said that, while he had no doubt Australia's side was the greatest at the moment, it was too difficult to answer whether it was the best of all time.

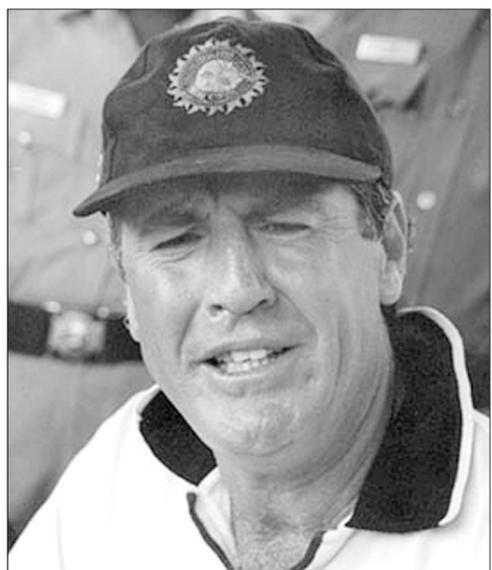
Buchanan offered no comfort to countries hoping they may be able to topple Australia in the next World Cup in the West Indies in four years time.

"I think we can still improve in every area," he said.

"There is time for us to do that now. Now we start on the next four years. Really, we can look across every aspect of our game."

"Every aspect can improve. If we couldn't improve, we would just stagnate."

Australian players have several days at home with their families before leaving for the West Indies to compete in a four-Test series.



John Wright

PHOTO: STAR FILE

I want to stay

ICC Cricket World Cup SOUTH AFRICA 2003

REUTERS, Johannesburg

John Wright, coach of World Cup runners-up India, would like to continue in the job if the national board agrees to renew his contract.

"I like my job and I have enjoyed it very much," Wright told reporters on Monday, a day after India's Cup final defeat by Australia.

Wright took on the post in October 2000. His contract ended with the World Cup and there has been speculation about whether will continue.

He said: "From both sides there are a number of things to consider. I would like to keep working with the team but that's not my decision to make."

"It has been a tremendous experience. It is a pity we could not pull it off yesterday," he added.

Wright said he was leaving South Africa to visit his family in New Zealand and would wait for

the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to announce its decision.

India had raised hopes of a second title by reaching the final for the first time since their 1983 victory, but lost by 125 runs against the defending champions.

BCCI secretary Karunakaran Nair told Reuters the board would announce its decision on Wright soon.

"Our management board will review his performance, get the feedback from the captain and team manager and decide. It will be latest by next month."

India next play a one-day tri-series in Dhaka starting on April 11, also involving hosts Bangladesh and South Africa.

They do not play again for another five months when they host New Zealand for a test and one-day series.

Wright has been credited with India's improved performance in the last two years in both tests and one-dayers, although the team has not won a Test series outside the Indian sub-continent since 1986.

Eng arrive Oct 8

SPORTS REPORTER

The England cricket team will be arriving in the capital in October 8 for a maiden tour of Bangladesh. During their five-week visit, they will play two Test matches and three one-day internationals against Bangladesh.

The tour will start with a three-day practice match in Dhaka on October 12 and will end with the third ODI in Dhaka on November 12.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board released details of the itinerary yesterday.

ITINERARY

Date	Event
Oct 8	Arrive
Oct 12-14	3-day v BCB President XI
Oct 16-18	3-day v BDA
Oct 21-25	1st Test at Dhaka
Oct 29-Nov 2	2nd Test at Chittagong
Nov 5	1-day v BCB Dev Squad (Ctg)
Nov 7	1st ODI at Ctg
Nov 10	2nd ODI Dhaka (day/night)
Nov 12	3rd ODI Dhaka (day/night)

BFF okays election date

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) elections as per Asian Football Federation (AFC) guidelines will be held on April 25. The executive committee of BFF took the decision in a meeting on Monday night.

The meeting also appointed the joint-secretary (administration) of Ministry of Sports as the chief election commissioner and the secretary of National Sports Council (NSC) as the returning officer and senior assistant secretary Abdur Razzak Howlader of Ministry of Sports as the election commissioner.

A total of 128 councillors, who will be nominated by districts, divisions, education boards and Dhaka-based clubs by April 7, will take part in the polls that is destined to elect a president in the federation for the first time.

The new committee will be a 21-member committee.

Before the election, the new councillors will get together in the form of an annual general meeting.

Although a media release claimed the decisions were taken

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Tigers dwell at bottom

REUTERS, London

Latest ODI Championship standings issued by the International Cricket Council (ICC) after the 2003 World Cup:

Team	Matches	Rating
1. Australia	46136	
2. South Africa	53123	
3. Pakistan	45110	
4. Sri Lanka	57108	
5. India	54103	
6. West Indies	3599	
7. New Zealand	4598	
8. England	3498	
9. Zimbabwe	4063	
10. Kenya	2230	
11. Bangladesh	196	

Note: The ICC ODI Championship ratings are calculated based on results of all one-day international matches played over the previous two to three years. Greater reward is given for beating higher ranked opponents and greater importance is given to more recent results, with older matches being dropped every 12 months.

WI pick new setup Sunday

REUTERS, St John's

The West Indies Cricket Board is to choose a captain, manager and coach on Sunday to take charge of the side for home series against Australia and Sri Lanka, the WICB said on Monday.

All the posts became vacant following the World Cup and the WICB has already held interviews for the manager and coach jobs, which had been held by Ricky Skerritt and Roger Harper.

A Selection panel, headed by Viv Richards, will make suggestions about who should be captain and vice-captain and put these to the board at their Sunday meeting in Barbados.

West Indies, under captain Carl Hooper, failed to make it past the first round of the World Cup which finished on Sunday with victory for Australia over India in South Africa.

Mashud steps down

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh captain Khaled Mashud has tendered his resignation to BCB president Ali Asghar on Monday.

"I have sent a letter to the Board president asking him to relieve me of my duties as captain," Mashud told the Daily Star Sport over phone last night.

"I took the decision so that the Board could get sufficient time to find a replacement before the tri-series and Test matches against South Africa next month," he said.

While Board officials confirmed that Mashud had sent a letter to the president but they are yet to know the contents since the BCB president was out of the country. He is expected to return from South Africa today.

"I have enjoyed every moment on the field as Bangladesh captain, but I did not enjoy anything off the field," he said.

"Let me give you an example, the chief selector (Aliul Islam) announced two teams for an exhibition match tomorrow, but he never liked talking to me about it," he explained.

The jovial Rajshahi stumper has

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Khaled Mashud

PHOTO: STAR FILE

One off-day cost Cup

ICC Cricket World Cup SOUTH AFRICA 2003

AFP, Mumbai

India skipper Saurav Ganguly denied Tuesday his decision to field first was the reason for his team's defeat in the World Cup final against Australia, saying his players had an "off-day" in the big match.

"There was dampness in the pitch and I knew there was something in it for seam bowlers," Ganguly said, defending his decision after a batch of Indian players arrived here to a warm welcome.

Ganguly's decision to field first after winning the toss in Sunday's

final at Johannesburg boomeranged as Australia virtually batted India out of the game by posting a massive 359-2.

Australia then dismissed India for 234 to win the one-sided final by 125 runs and claim the World Cup for a record third time.

"We had one off-day which shattered our dreams of winning the World Cup," said the Indian skipper.

Ganguly praised fast bowlers, especially veteran Javagal Srinath who came out of retirement to finish with 16 wickets in 11 matches.

"I wanted him to play in the World Cup since I knew he could contribute with his experience. He did not let me down," Ganguly said, adding it was now up to the

fast bowler to decide whether he wanted to continue or retire.

"It should be his decision. It's his career and let him decide about it," he said.

Left-arm seamers Zaheer Khan and Ashish Nehra also struck it rich in the tournament, sharing 33 wickets. But none could deliver in the final as the trio went wicketless, conceding 211 runs in 27 overs.

Ganguly also denied that his team had missed a fifth specialist bowler in the final.

"I don't think we missed the fifth bowler," said Ganguly whose team had gone into every game with just four regular bowlers -- three pacemen and one spinner (Harbhajan Singh).

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IT SEEMS SAFE: India captain Saurav Ganguly (L) and teammate Virender Sehwag wait anxiously for their luggage after arriving at Mumbai Airport yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Refreshing reception

ICC Cricket World Cup SOUTH AFRICA 2003

REUTERS, Bombay

The Indian cricket team returned home on Tuesday to a grand welcome despite their 125-run defeat by Australia in the World Cup final in Johannesburg.

Thousands of cricket-crazy fans, who normally slam the team after any loss and often vent their anger with street demonstrations, flocked instead to Bombay airport early in the morning waving national flags and chanting, "Long live India."

The loudest cheers were reserved for local hero Sachin Tendulkar, who was voted man-of-the-tournament after scoring 673 runs in 11 matches.

"Our team gave a tremendous performance and has done the country proud," Jagmohan Dalmiya, president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), told reporters.

"They played to their full potential and entered the final in

a majestic way. Yes, we haven't won but on that day probably Australia were the better team on the field."

India won nine of their 11 matches in the tournament, including a celebrated victory over arch-rivals Pakistan.

"We're definitely disappointed," captain Saurav Ganguly said. "But we're happy we have played well overall in the tournament."

Last month, fans across India were burring effigies of the leading players following the team's early nine-wicket loss in the group stage to Australia.

Ganguly was given a mock funeral in Calcutta and black paint was hurled at middle-order batsman Mohammad Kaif's house in the northern city of Allahabad.

But India came back strongly to silence all critics.

"The team has given us a lot of good memories from this World Cup. They may not have won, but they played like champions," said Bombay cricket fan Anurag Saxena.

Schools Handball Viquarannessa victorious

SPORTS REPORTER

Viquarannessa Noon School and College stamped their authority in girls' handball when they lifted the 13th Bata Schools Handball title at the Sultana-Kamal Women's Sports Complex yesterday.

The reputed educational institution defeated Scholastica 6-4 in an exciting final to annex the crown for the 12th consecutive time.

Siddeshwari Girls' School won the inaugural edition in 1988.

While Viquarannessa ruled the roost in the girls' section, the boys' section saw Bandura Holy Cross High School retain their title at the handball court adjacent to the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

The Bandura boys defeated Narinda Government High School 21-10. The winners led the first half 11-6.

State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resource AKM Mosharrif Hossain later gave away prizes among the winners.