



15 DAYS TO GO

Anyone can win: Sobers

AFP, Mumbai

West Indian great Garfield Sobers said on Friday the World Cup starting on his home turf next month would be a thriller, with the winner difficult to predict.

Sobers, widely regarded as the greatest all-round cricketer in history, told reporters that the top six or seven teams, including the hosts, were good enough to win the sport's biggest prize.

"It's wide open," said the 70-year-old, who is touring India to promote the tournament, which opens on March 13 and ends with the final in his native Barbados on April 28.

"There are six or seven teams that can win the cup. The West Indians under Brian Lara are right up there with the best.

"Three years ago if you asked me if we could win, I would have said no. But now we have turned the corner. We will be very hard to beat."

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Did U Know?

Sri Lankan wicketkeepers Brendon Kuruppu and Romesh Kaluwitharana both scored hundreds on their Test debut.



Aravinda de Silva

(Sri Lanka cricket legend) "I honestly feel this side have a better chance than we had in 1996. When you compare the eras, I feel this team have got a better combination. We didn't have experience in 1996, but this team have." On their chances of winning the World Cup in West Indies.



ESPN
English Premier Football League
Fulham v Man United
Live at 6:40 pm
Charlton v West Ham
Live at 8:55 pm
STAR Sports
English Premier Football League
Liverpool v Sheffield United
Live at 8:55 pm
Watford v Everton
Live at 11:10 pm
Primera Liga
Atletico Madrid v Real Madrid
Live at 2:55 am (Sunday)



DAY'S EVENT
Bangladesh A v England A
3rd day, First Four-Dayer
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium



PHOTO: STAR

England A batsman Michael Carberry whips the ball towards mid-wicket as Bangladesh A wicketkeeper Sahagir Hossain and first-slip Nasiruddin Faruq look on during the second day's play at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

Visitors on top



SPORTS REPORTER

The visiting England A batsmen were in subdued mood, unlike their Bangladeshi counterparts, hardly playing any shots during the course of play on way to consolidating their position at the end of the second days' play in the first four-day at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

Michael Carberry was the only batsman to score a half-century in their innings on the second day as the left-hander honed in on his warm-up match hundred to make 70. But almost all the other batters chipped in with significant scores as the tourists finished the day on 288-6, a 59-run first innings lead.

From the home team's perspective, the two left-arm spinners Enamul Haque and Mosharraf Hossain revived hopes by taking

two wickets each to bounce back from disappointing batting before Alex Loudon (25) and Tim Bresnan (21) took away the initiative with an unbroken 48-run seventh wicket stand.

If the top-order batting let Bangladesh A down in the first session of the first day then new ball bowlers Dollar Mahmud and Mohammad Sharif frustrated most on the following day although the former regained his rhythm in the second spell as he trapped opener Nick Compton lbw with a beautiful full-length delivery.

Captain Tushar Imran however was not entirely displeased with his bowler's effort on the batting-friendly pitch. "There is still nothing on the pitch which can give the bowlers an extra advantage. I am happy with my team's bowling effort because the batsmen hardly gave any chances. While we tried to play too many shots they simply showed their temperament," he said.

Enamul gave the first breakthrough after England A resumed their innings without any score when Will Jefferson tried to clear the long-on boundary only to reach at the hand of Sharif while Dollar added another to see the visitors go into launch on 97-2.

The tourists added 108 more runs in the second session with the loss of skipper Mike Yardy (34), victim of a run out, and Steve Davies (37), who was dismissed after wicketkeeper Sahagir dived down the leg to take a brilliant catch off left-arm spinner Mosharraf Hossain.

In the third session lanky left-arter Mosharraf also picked up the prize wicket of Carberry, who smashed seven boundaries and a midwicket six against Enamul during his 157-ball essay, after the batsman offered a simple return catch.

Mosharraf captured two wickets for 62 runs in 26 overs while

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Lee blow for Aussies

AFP, Sydney



drawal of pace spearhead Brett Lee Friday.

On the back of five straight one-day defeats, Australia will leave for the West Indies next week minus their strike bowler and amid mounting concern over whether they can successfully defend their title.

Lee's pull-out with damaged ligaments in his left ankle is a shattering blow for the Australians, whose World Cup-strength bowling attack was plundered by New Zealand in the recent 3-0 Chappell-Hadlee Trophy series loss.

Stuart Clark, who was a controversial omission from the original 15-man squad named last week, is Lee's replacement.

Australian team doctor Trefor James said following a review by an orthopaedic specialist it was decided that Lee's damaged ankle ligaments would keep him out of

cricket for two to three months. Lee had been optimistic of making a miraculous recovery after going over on his ankle in training ahead of the first Chappell-Hadlee Trophy match in Wellington.

"To get told that you can't be a chance to play in the World Cup is really disappointing," Lee told reporters Friday.

"I couldn't undergo the exercises,



BRETT LEE

there's too much pain there.... There was absolutely no chance of me playing in the World Cup."

Chairman of selectors Andrew

Hilditch said in a Cricket Australia (CA) statement Friday that he had been advised that Lee's ankle injury was more serious than first expected.

"It is a great disappointment for Brett Lee that he is unable to take his place in the Cricket World Cup and is a significant blow for the planning and preparation in place for the tournament," Hilditch said in the CA statement.

"However, it does give a tremendous opportunity for Stuart Clark to join the 15-man squad.

"Stuart was extremely unlucky to miss out on initial selection and despite the unfortunate circumstances surrounding his inclusion we strongly believe that Stuart is primed to seize his opportunity.

"Though Brett's injury is disappointing from a personal and team perspective, we strongly believe we are taking a squad of players more than capable of winning a third successive Cricket World Cup.

"Every other nation would take heart from what has happened over the last couple of weeks. But who knows? We won't know until the end of the World Cup how it affects us," Hilditch said.

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PHOTO: AFP

A Sri Lankan man holds a first day cover of two new stamps released to mark the forthcoming Cricket World Cup in Colombo yesterday.

Ctg hang on for draw

SPORTS REPORTER

The remaining two seventh round games of the Ispahani Mirzapore Tea 8th National Cricket League ended in draws yesterday as Chittagong battled throughout the day to nullify Dhaka's hope of an outright victory at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.

Dhaka however managed four points by virtue of a first innings lead to improve their tally to 28 points, four adrift of table toppers Rajshahi who won their seventh round game by an innings and four-runs against Sylhet with a day to spare on Thursday.

In the days' other match, Khulna finished on 226-5 in their second innings in reply to an improbable victory target of 379 against Barisal at the Khulna Divisional Stadium. But Barisal's first innings advantage awarded them four points to leapfrog Sylhet in the table to secure the fourth place with 16 points.

Chittagong kept third place with 18 points after securing two points from the drawn match while Sylhet and Khulna bagged 14 points each after the seventh round.

DHAKA-CHITTAGONG
Chittagong resumed their second innings in a precarious position of 6-2 on their way to saving the innings defeat. But Nazimuddin joined overnight batsman Nafis Iqbal to almost ensure the match's fate.

The pair contributed 109 runs for the third wicket stand before Anwar Hossain stumped out-of-favour Nafis off left-arm spinner Arafat Sunny. Nafis scored 49 runs off 126 balls with the help of seven boundaries.

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PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan fast bowlers Shoaib Akhtar (L) and Mohammad Asif arrive for practice at Gaddafi Cricket Stadium in Lahore yesterday.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammad Moniruzzaman was declared the best swimmer in the Bangladesh Police Swimming competition in Uttara yesterday.

Inspector general Nur Mohammad distributed prizes among Monir and other winners.

BURDIF TO LEAD

SHEIKH RUSSELL

Moroccan recruit and defender Burdif Mohammad has been given the captain's armband for B.League side Sheikh Russell Krira Chakra. Striker Maksudul Alam was named as his deputy.

UNDER-19 HANDBALL TOURNAMENT

Sunnydale crushed Aga Khan School 10-0 in the opening match of the Beximco Pharma Under-19 handball competition at the Dhanmondi Women's Complex.

Aga Khan's day got worse after they lost to Valkyries Skyliners 12-2 while Valkyries Skylas were awarded their match after Playpen School failed to show up.

NATIONAL WOMEN CHESS

The selection phase of the 28th National Women Chess Championship began at the federation hallroom. Sharmin Sultana, Farjana Hossain, Kishwara Shairin

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Down The World Cup Lane

1975: Windies draw first blood

NADER RAHMAN

At The Oval, the West Indies won the most eagerly awaited game of the tournament by seven wickets against Australia. West Indies swept to victory with 14 overs to spare after Kallicharran and Fredericks had severely mauled the Australian fast bowlers. Julien claimed McCosker in his first over, the ebullient Boyce disposed of both the Chappells in the space of six balls, Greenidge ran out Walters with an amazing piece of fielding and Australia were tottering at 61 for five. Not for the first time they had cause to be grateful for the coolness of Edwards and the never-say-die approach of Marsh. This pair put on 99 for the sixth wicket before Richards, an occasional off-spinner, bowled Edwards. They folded for 192 in reply Fredericks was after them before they had time to settle to a length or line, cutting and hooking like a man inspired. Walker did manage to remove Greenidge at 29, but Fredericks and Kallicharran then added 124, cheered on by supporters near to ecstasy at such stroke play. Kallicharran hit a 6 and thirteen 4's in his 78, an innings which had an amazing climax, and he scored 35 off his last ten balls from Lilee to seal the deal.

With the calculations done Australia, New Zealand, England and the West Indies had made the semis. It would be England against Australia and the West Indies against New Zealand. At Headingley on June 18 Australia, in search of 94 runs needed to

win, lost six wickets for 39 runs. Gasps, groans, or cheers, followed every ball.

Australia had no hesitation about putting England in to bat as left-arm bowler Gilmour ripped through the England batting. Bowling a full length, over the wicket, he not only swung the ball in the heavy atmosphere, but he moved it both ways after pitching. Bringing the ball back after pitching on the off stump he had Amiss, Fletcher, Hayes and Knott lbw - Fletcher without playing a shot - and all played back. He bowled Wood with a perfect yorker and had Greig caught one-handed by

Marsh. In his 12 overs, bowled in one spell, Gilmour took six wickets for 14 runs. England came in for lunch at 52 for eight. Denness and the tail took the score to 93. Not until the eighth over with the new ball did England meet success and then Snow and Old ripped into the Australian batsmen as dramatically as Gilmour had treated England. Then came Gilmour as a batsman. With Walters he shared an unbroken

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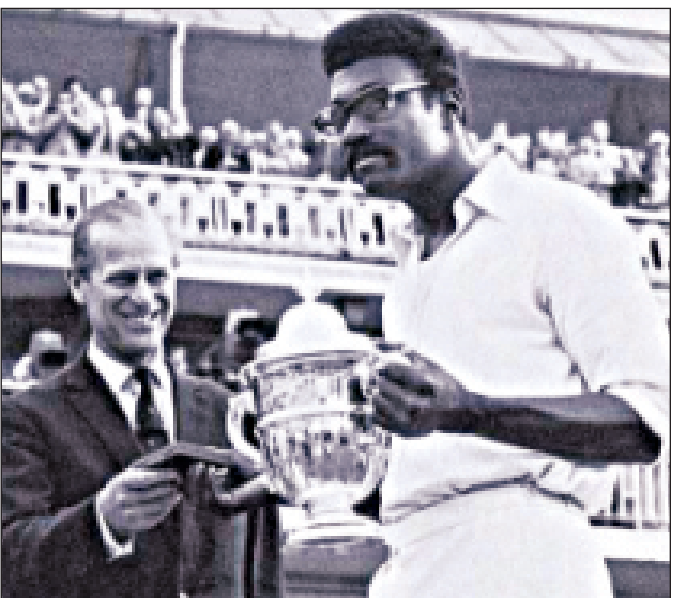


PHOTO: INTERNET

West Indies captain Clive Lloyd (R) receives the first World Cup trophy from Prince Philip at the Lord's balcony in London on June 21, 1975.

Akhtar, Asif hinge on test

AFP, Karachi



Caribbean for the World Cup if they fail to take a dope test.

Pakistan completed tests on 13 of its 15-man squad and five reserves this week but Akhtar and Asif have yet to feature, raising media speculation they might skip the event starting on March 13.

"Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Naseem Ashraf has a zero tolerance on the use of banned substances so any member of the team going for the World Cup has to pass the screening, the in-house dope testing," PCB director operations Salim Altaf told AFP.

"The chairman has directed that nobody can go on the tour if this screening is not done."

Akhtar was banned for two years and Asif for one year in November after they tested positive for the steroid nandrolone.

But the new-ball pair's bans were controversially overturned by a PCB appellate committee in

December, on the grounds they did not take the banned substance knowingly.

Experts have warned that Akhtar and Asif may still have banned substances in their systems after testing positive last year and face life bans if they test positive again.

Altaf brushed aside speculation over the dope tests on Akhtar and Asif.

"Everybody will feature otherwise nobody can go and that is the instruction of the chairman and we hope all speculations die down after this," said Altaf, a former fast bowler.

He also rejected suggestions the PCB was risking life bans for the pair if they test positive for a second time.

"If they failed tests which took place in September 2006 and this is now February 2007, the process is the same for everybody," he said.

Akhtar said he still hopes to be fit for World Cup despite battling to recover from knee and hamstring problems.

"I am going for another reassessment of my knee and hamstring injury in England later this week and only after that I am able to know about my chances of playing in the World Cup," Akhtar told AFP.

Asked when he was due to

appear for testing, Akhtar refused to comment and said his first priority was to get over his injury.

"Right now I want my injury to heal and only after that I am going to think about anything else," said the 31-year-old.

Asif meanwhile also had an assessment in England last week after a recurrence of an elbow injury before returning home on Wednesday.

"Both Akhtar and Asif are consulting the specialist over their injuries and once these problems are overcome they will feature in the tests," said Altaf.

Altaf said all the squad members will have to pass fitness tests as well.

"Before the departure of the team to the Caribbean all 15 players are going to be subjected to a fitness test by a medical panel of the PCB," said Altaf.

Pakistan has until March 2 to replace any injured player in their squad. After the deadline only the International Cricket Council's technical committee is entitled to allow a injury replacement.

Pakistan also has ICC permission to replace any player who tests positive.

The Pakistan squad was due to start a World Cup tune-up camp in Lahore from Friday.