



Easy win for Irish

AFP, Port-of-Spain

Paceman Dave Langford-Smith grabbed four wickets as debutants Ireland thrashed Canada by seven wickets in a World Cup warm-up match here on Thursday.

Ireland virtually wrapped up their last practice game when they dismissed Canada for a paltry 115 in less than 33 overs, with Langford-Smith (4-41) doing the maximum damage.

The Canadian total was too small to put pressure on Ireland, who scored 116-3 to emerge winners with more than 23 overs to spare.

"We bowled in good areas and were rewarded. It was good to be in a position like we were after bowling," said Irish skipper Trent Johnston.

"Langford-Smith worked very hard after a tournament in Kenya. He is running in well, bowling well and his confidence is sky-high after getting seven or eight wickets in the first two games."

Irish opener Jeremy Bray was the match's top scorer with 41, while Andre Botha contributed an unbeaten 22.

The Canadian batsmen earlier faltered against Langford-Smith, with opener Geoff Barnett (27), Qaiser Ali (17) and Ashif Mulla (11) only reaching double-figures.

"It sure is a big disappointment. They bowled in good areas and never allowed us to play shots. I think our preparations, minus Thursday's outing, for the World Cup are pretty well," said Canadian captain John Davison.

Langford-Smith, who took three wickets against South Africa in the opening practice game, was well-supported by Kyle McCallan who grabbed two scalps for no run.

BRIEF SCORES

CANADA: 115 in 32.5 overs (Geoff Barnett 27, Qaiser Ali 17, Ashif Mulla 11; Dave Langford-Smith 4-41, Kyle McCallan 2-0).

IRELAND: 116-3 in 26.5 overs (Jeremy Bray 41, Andre Botha 22 not out).

Result: Ireland win by seven wickets.

Lara sounds warning

AFP, Kingston



Record-breaking Brian Lara delivered the news all bowlers feared on Friday -- he intends to keep playing into his 40s.

The 37-year-old West Indies skipper has already announced he will quit one-day internationals once the World Cup has finished, but insists he still has unfinished business.

"I'm only 37 -- a lot of players stretch their careers into their 40s, and I just think there's a lot of work to do to get West Indies cricket back on track," said Lara.

"I think Shane Warne and Glenn McGrath had the luxury of bowing out at the top of their game, but also of leaving a team that was the best in the world."

"That's an ideal situation, though, and unfortunately it's not the same with me. Now is not the time to talk about details such as the infrastructure of the game and funding -- that will come later -- but all I can do is play my part on the field."

Lara has been the backbone and inspiration for a West Indies side that has struggled in recent times.

In an international career which has spread over 16 years, he has 11,953 Test runs to his name and 34

centuries as well as the world record Test score of 400.

Now he sees his task as two-fold -- spark a renaissance of West Indies cricket and to captain the first home nation to win a World Cup.

"What we have to do is create a greater number of matchwinners and spread the responsibility," Lara told Sport magazine.

"Over the years, we have depended on three or four individuals, but we need to develop a larger group of players who can pull us through to a World Cup win, because the team that wins is going to be a team of players who can get them out of trouble if they lose their core performers."

"Australia have matchwinners throughout their line-up -- any team that wants to compete with Australia will have to have that strength in depth."

"I'm quietly confident we can win it, and I think the players are confident of their ability to perform at such a huge event."

"We know that the host nations haven't had a great record when it comes to winning, but we know the whole West Indian experience is very unique and we're going to play on the fact that we're accustomed to it."

"Let's just say I'm confident that we are going to have a very good World Cup."

Lara still believes that Australia, despite the world champions' recent

slump, will start the seven-week long tournament as favourites.

"Australia are favourites, and understandably so, but in the one-day game that doesn't guarantee anything," he said.

"They're not invincible, as we saw with England in the recent triangular series. I don't think they're guaranteed to get any further than the semi-finals, which is still two big, big matches away from winning the final."

Lara believes England should not be underestimated as they will be buoyed by their recent tri-nations win over the Aussies.

"The fact they took something away from the Australian tour, even if it wasn't the Ashes... well, it augurs well for the World Cup," he said.

"They beat Australia in Australia, so they'll go into the World Cup with huge confidence. If Kevin Pietersen can return and Michael Vaughan is back and fully fit, England are capable of competing with and beating the very best in the world. You'd be stupid to ever write them off."

"They have players in their team capable of dismantling any team in the world -- Pietersen, Flintoff, Panesar."

Kenya captain Steve Tikolo (R) celebrates the wicket of Dutch batsman Bas Zuiderent (not in picture) with Nehemiah Odhiambo during their WC warm-up game in Trelawny on Thursday.

Eng A win

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Yardy after the match. "There was nothing wrong with the pitch. Our batsmen just did not play well," admitted Tushar.

The final match on Sunday now turns into a mere formality.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH A: 177 all out in 45.5 overs (Mehrab 0, Junaed 6, Nazimuddin 58, Tushar 43, Nadif 3, Sahagi 3, Forhad 6, Manzurul 20, Dollar 12, Nazmul 8 not out, Enamul 1, extras 17; Broad 3-33, Kirley 1-18, Gidman 5-42, Yardy 1-32).

ENGLAND A: 180-4 in 36.5 overs (Carberry 0, Jefferson 40, Compton 64, Prior 34, Gidman 21 not out, Yardy 5 not out, extras 16; Dollar 1-37, Manzurul 1-34, Forhad 2-36).

RESULT: England A won by six wickets.

Sean shines

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mainstay of Bermuda's 136 after they'd collapsed to 31 for four inside 15 overs following skipper Irving Romaine's decision to bat.

Pace bowler Anthony Ireland did the damage with an opening spell of three wickets for 10 runs in six overs, including catching Glamorgan's David Hemp for nought off his own bowling. He finished with three for 22 in eight overs.

Bermuda gave themselves hope when Vusi Sibanda was caught and bowled by Kevin Hurdle for two before Duffin, Zimbabwe's other opener, was held in the slips by Clay Smith off Saleem Mukudmen for one.

But, ultimately, Bermuda's bowlers did not have enough runs to play with.

Zimbabwe's next match is in Jamaica where they play Ireland on March 15 in a Group D also featuring hosts West Indies and Pakistan.

Bermuda, in Group B, play Sri Lanka in Trinidad on March 15 before facing India and Bangladesh.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BERMUDA: 136 all out in 50 overs (Tucker 52; Ireland 3-22).

ZIMBABWE: 137 for 4 in 29 overs (Williams 72 no)

RESULT: Zimbabwe won by six wickets.

Dark night

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adding a second after Moussa Dembele had seen his penalty saved by Shay Given.

"The tie is very finely poised because they've got two away goals so a 2-0 win will see them go through," Dyer said.

"But we've got the pace to frighten them and I fully expect us to cause them problems in the second leg."

Robbie Keane score twice as Tottenham beat Sporting Braga 3-2 in Portugal.

The Irish international had opened the scoring in the 57th minute before Steed Malbranque doubled the lead in the 72nd.

Paulo Jorge and Ze Carlos had pulled the Portuguese back level before Keane found the target again in injury time to put Spurs in sight of the quarterfinals.

France, whose Champions League interest ended when both Lyon and Lille were knocked out on Wednesday, salvaged some pride when Lens and PSG defeated Bayer Leverkusen and Benfica 2-1 respectively.

However, the German and Portuguese clubs will be confident of overturning the deficits at home in next week's second legs.

Tikolo stars for Kenya

AFP, Daniel Town



Kenya captain Steve Tikolo stole the show with an impressive all-round display which gave his side a nine-run victory over the Netherlands in a World Cup warm-up match here Thursday.

First, Tikolo revived his side's innings with a vital half-century that lifted them to 274 for five from their allocation of 50 overs.

The 35-year-old Tikolo then returned to claim five wickets for 48 runs from 10 overs and trigger a collapse with his clever off-spin that restricted the Netherlands to 265 for nine in their 50 overs.

The Netherlands were within reach of victory, when they cruised to 215 for three in the 44th over, but things fell apart, and they lost six wickets for 49 runs in the space of 36 balls.

Darron Reekers was caught at deep mid-wicket off Peter Ongondo in the 34th over, and Alex Kervezee was run out for a duck, when he failed to beat Collins Obuya's direct hit at the bowler's end.

Ryan ten Doeschate revived the Dutch side's chances with 50 off 46 balls which included two fours and one six.

He put on 46 for the fourth wicket with Daan van Bunge, and the Netherlands seemed to be back on track only to throw it all away with some ill-advised strokes.

Kenya dipped to 21 for three inside the first five overs, after Reekers and Mark Jonckman put them under early pressure with accurate swing bowling on a helpful Trelawny Stadium pitch.

Tikolo entered and started to repair the early damage with Tony Suij.

The pair added 104 for the fourth wicket and played some handsome

strokes, both sides of the wicket.

Three wickets, all to van Bunge, in the space of 30 balls set Kenya back on 141 for six.

Thomas Odoyo, whose 73 from 49 balls was the top score, added a crucial 62 for the seventh wicket with Collins Obuya, who was caught at mid-on off Peter Borren for 33.

Odoyo then took the attack to the Netherlands bowlers, and collected three fours and four sixes in a late flurry to beef-up the total of the African side before he was dismissed off the last ball of the innings, caught at mid-on off Dutch captain Luuk van Troost.

Van Bunge was the Netherlands' most successful bowler with three for 41 from 10 overs, and Jonckman took two for 26 from 5.1 overs.

BRIEF SCORES

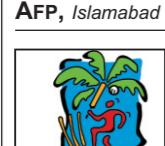
KENYA: 274-7 off 50 overs (Odoyo 73, Tikolo 51; Daan van Bunge 3-41)

NETHERLANDS: 265-9 off 50 overs (Reekers 75, Zuideren 65, ten Doeschate 50; S. Tikolo 5-48).

Result: Kenya won by nine runs.

Akhtar going thru' hell

AFP, Islamabad



Disgruntled Pakistan paceman Shoaib Akhtar Thursday said his failure to make it to the World Cup in the Caribbean had caused him great pain.

"I am going through hell. I can't describe it in words what it means to miss an event like the World Cup," Akhtar told AFP, a week after he was withdrawn from Pakistan's squad on fitness grounds.

The Pakistan Cricket Board claimed that the duo were withdrawn on fitness grounds.

But several newspapers last month reported that private tests, carried out while Akhtar and Asif were having their injuries reassessed in England, revealed they still had banned substances in their systems.

Pakistan had to withdraw them from the Champions Trophy in India in October last year after both tested positive for banned steroid nandrolone.

Akhtar was subsequently

banned for two years and Asif for one year by an anti-doping tribunal in November. A month later both were exonerated by an appeal committee on the grounds that they did not take the substances knowingly, he added.

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) challenged the ban overturn in the Court of Arbitration for Sport, which is yet to announce a date for the hearing.

Akhtar said it was not new that people doubted his injury.

"I have always played to the best of my abilities but people have doubted my integrity. My injuries are always doubted as if I am feigning it and I always had to prove that I am unfit."

"People don't understand. Why would I not play the game I love? I wanted to be in the Caribbean and I wanted to help my team win but unfortunately my injury forced me to miss the big event and the chance will never come again," he said.

Akhtar was subsequently

Tamim 'faces'

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world's fastest bowlers, Shane Bond, to make 46 from 48 balls and help the Tigers to a famous two-wicket win over New Zealand in a World Cup warm-up match.

"I was facing the ball," said Tamim on how he coped with the Bond menace.

"I came to the World Cup with my mind made up. I told myself I have to be strong and brave. I just have to play my natural game and do what I know I can do."

Bangladesh skipper Habibul Bashar, who made 57 on Thursday to lead his team to a second win of the week, this time against Scotland, believes players like Tamim and all-rounder Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, a relative veteran at the age of 24, will be key to their campaign.

"Before we came here for the World Cup nobody gave us a chance," said Habibul.

"That's fine for people to say, but we are looking at getting to the second round. With Tamim and Mortaza playing so well, this is a great boost for the World Cup. Their contributions were brilliant."

Sheva ambushed?

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the deteriorating relationship between Mourinho and Chelsea's billionaire Russian owner Roman Abramovich.

"It is no secret that I was more on the wish list of Mr Abramovich than the coach's,"