



Sri Lanka captain Mahela Jayawardene (C) walks along with coach Tom Moody in the rain after the press conference at the Guyana National Stadium in Georgetown on Monday.

Smith knows everything

REUTERS, Georgetown

Players were kept informed of developments in cricket's match-fixing underworld, South African captain Graeme Smith said on Monday.

Asked at a news conference if match-fixing was still rife in the game, Smith said, "The anti-corruption unit and the International Cricket Council are doing a great job at monitoring it."

"They communicate with the team frequently. I can only speak for my team, but we have been kept up to date with what they are doing."

Match-fixing has been mentioned in connection with the murder of Pakistan coach Bob Woolmer in Jamaica on March 18.

South Africa were at the centre of the match-fixing storm in 2000, when former captain Hansie Cronje's involvement was exposed.

Australia beat South Africa by 83 runs in their Group A match in St Kitts on Saturday, and Smith knew the pressure was mounting on his team ahead of their first Super Eights clash with Sri Lanka in Georgetown on Wednesday.

"Sri Lanka are a top team, and I know it sounds like a cliché but we are really taking every game as it comes," Smith said.

South Africa's scoring momentum was disrupted on Saturday when Smith had to leave the field with severe cramp after scoring a quickfire 72.

He returned once his condition had improved but by then Australia had established a hold on the match and Smith scored just two

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Mahela wants brutality

AFP, Georgetown



ICC Cricket World Cup
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win that many matches abroad. As a team we have realised that we have to compete harder and we have to be ruthless."

Jayawardene said his team now had the talent and confidence to win matches from tight situations.

"At home, you feel you can win a match from any situation. If you can take that when you are playing away from home and believe that you can win from any situation and that's what ruthlessness is, it's that self-belief," he said.

"You just have to focus harder. Once you have the opposition down, you have to finish off the games. If we can do it at home, I am sure we can do it away from home as well."

Jayawardene said coach Tom Moody had played a big role in making the side a highly competitive unit. His team looked the most impressive in group games, giving no chance to India, Bangladesh and Bermuda.

"Tom has brought something new to the table for us," he said.

"He has pushed us from our comfort zones and pushed us to be better players. Mentally he wanted us to be much tougher as a group."

Sri Lanka have already carried two crucial points in the second round, but Jayawardene said his team were aiming to win more than half of their matches to ensure a place in the semifinals.

"In group matches, we wanted to win every game. It's the same here. You have to win every game you play and that will give you a lot of

confidence and it will give you a lot of momentum," he said.

"It's tough to say how many wins we need in the Super Eights to make it to the semifinals. The top six teams are battling for four places. I reckon you have to win at least half of those games, but that's minimum."

"If we win more, we can be in a comfort zone. The earlier you get those wins under your belt, the easier for you going forward. We have to make the most of the opportunities we get because things like rain could be a factor."

When asked whether it was possible to win 11 games in a row – three in the group stage, six in the Super Eights, the semifinal and final – the Sri Lankan captain said: "Yes, it's possible if you play good cricket."

"I am sure most of the teams who are unbeaten till now will be thinking of that. That's the only way because the more games you win, the better for your confidence. The opposition also fears you. It's all about momentum."

Sri Lanka may have lost to South Africa in the Champions Trophy in India last year, but Jayawardene said his team were looking forward to earning points against Graeme Smith's side.

"We do carry points (in the Super Eights), but we are not taking them into account," he said.

"Taking early points against South Africa will definitely benefit us, so it's a very big game for us. This is probably our turn now to win now."

"We win pretty well at home and we have that ruthless instinct, but we never seemed to have that kind of edge when we travelled. Over the last 15-16 months, we have developed that," he said.

Sri Lanka, who open their Super Eights campaign against South Africa here on Wednesday, won 5-0 in England last year before sharing a one-day series in New Zealand.

"We have now managed to take that ruthlessness when we are playing abroad as well. This was something we wanted to do and now it has come into our game," said the Sri Lankan skipper.

"We always had the talent to perform well, but we just could not

Yousuf, Younis arrive home

AFP, Karachi

Two key Pakistani players have arrived home while most of the rest of the team are due late Tuesday or overnight as the probe into the murder of coach Bob Woolmer continues, officials said.

Vice-captain Younis Khan and star batsman Mohammad Yousuf arrived in the southern port city of Karachi late on Monday, a Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"Younis and Younis have arrived while some other players including skipper Inzamamul Haq are due late Tuesday or early Wednesday," the official said.

Younis was met by friends and family at Karachi airport while Younis took a connecting flight, thought to be for the eastern city of Lahore.

Younis refused to comment as he was driven away, witnesses said. "I am crazy about cricket but although I knew it was Younis, I did not take his autograph because the team have disappointed us," said Sheraz Ahmed, 16, who waited through the night at Karachi airport.

Inzamam and the team arrived in London on Sunday and have been staying at a hotel near the capital's Heathrow airport for a pre-arranged stopover en route home after their doomed trip to the World Cup in the Caribbean.

Pakistani police said they had taken security measures for the players in order to avoid any problems with angry fans on their return to their cricket-obsessed homeland.

The team went out in the first

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Police checking laptop

Many potential suspects: Shields

AFP, Kingston



Investigators probing the murder of Pakistan cricket coach Bob Woolmer are analysing the hard drive of his computer, but have found no reference to match-fixing at this stage, police said on Monday.

Deputy police commissioner Mark Shields said he was looking at the possibility the killing was connected to match-fixing, but stressed he was keeping all lines of inquiry open.

"We have Bob Woolmer's computer. We are looking at what is on the hard drive," Shields said at a news conference in Kingston's Pegasus hotel, where the 58-year-old coach was found unconscious in his room on March 18, and declared dead hours later. Police say

Woolmer was strangled.

Woolmer's death came just one day after a stunning defeat to debutants Ireland knocked Pakistan out of the World Cup.

"We're exploring the possibility of match-fixing, but that's only one line of inquiry," said Shields.

Shields said earlier he would also look into the betting odds given before minnows Ireland beat former champions Pakistan by three wickets in the Group D match on March 17.

Investigators were poring over hotel security footage frame-by-frame in what Shields described as a slow, arduous process.

"At the end of it, it might be that we might identify a suspect or suspects," he said.

A former senior Scotland Yard detective, Shields said he spoke to his colleagues in Britain who offered full cooperation if needed.

He said police were interested in taking DNA samples from anyone who was at the hotel at the time of the killing.

and that investigators might travel to other Caribbean islands to interview Cricket World Cup players, officials and spectators.

"The reality as I've said before is that there are many potential suspects in this investigation and even more potential witnesses, and we are nowhere near the stage of being able to start naming names in terms of suspects," Shields said.

But he also said he did not "feel any frustration" at having allowed the Pakistani team to leave the island on Saturday. The Pakistanis were questioned by police and gave DNA and fingerprints.

He told the Times of London earlier that holding the team in Jamaica "would have caused a significant diplomatic incident and had an extremely adverse effect on the World Cup."

Team spokesman Pervez Mir, meanwhile, complained the "visibly disturbed" players were not being given enough information about the investigation into a

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Pak team set to leave London

AFP, London



The Pakistan cricket team were set to leave for home Tuesday after a two-day stopover in London during which they have kept a low profile amid the furor over the murder of their coach Bob Woolmer.

Captain Inzamamul Haq was seen leaving the team hotel near the capital's Heathrow airport, driving off in a car towards the airport itself. Batsman Imran Nazir also briefly emerged from the hotel.

The Pakistan team arrived in London on Sunday for a pre-arranged stopover en route home after their doomed trip to the

Caribbean.

The players, said to be devastated at Woolmer's death hours after they were dumped out of the World Cup by minnows Ireland, have made little or no comment during their London stay.

Reports suggested they would issue a statement before leaving London, but this could not immediately be confirmed.

According to informed sources, the Pakistani team were due to leave London later Tuesday in three groups, all of them heading initially for Dubai. It was unclear if they were to fly from there to Pakistan.

The Pakistani cricket captain's flight was due to leave around 1600 GMT, after an early afternoon flight and before another leaving mid-evening, the source said.

Their planned departure came

The three reportedly were close to the players and appeared with them at press conferences and after matches. The paper said they are believed to have left Jamaica shortly after Woolmer was found dead on March 18.

Reports from Islamabad add, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chief Tuesday promised legislators that players will get legal aid if they are summoned to Jamaica for questioning over the murder of coach Bob Woolmer, a senator said.

PCB chairman Naseem Ashraf was also asked when he appeared

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PHOTO: AFP

England, Italy seek fixes

REUTERS, London



World Cup winners Italy and beleaguered England return to the Euro 2008 campaign trail on Wednesday with both their coaches feeling the heat of qualifying.

Roberto Donadoni's Italy take on a Scotland side who remain the surprise leaders of Group B after beating Georgia 2-1 on Saturday, while Steve McClaren's England need to make up lost ground in Group E against lowly Andorra.

Other sides looking to make amends are Group G leaders Netherlands, 2004 European champions Greece and Javier Clemente's Serbia, the victims of Kazakhstan's first competitive win since joining UEFA five years ago.

Donadoni has vented his anger at Italian press criticism of him and his side, telling reporters on Monday: "I don't know why people are being put on trial when nothing has happened."

"Scotland won on Saturday, but it seems as though Italy lost. I would just like to remind people, in case they hadn't realised, that Italy didn't play that day."

Italy are fourth in their group with seven points from four games, two points behind Ukraine. Scotland and France on 12 points apiece, have each played a game more.

McClaren is under fire after a

Saturday that cast his side three points adrift of Russia and five behind group leaders Croatia.

England's worst run for 26 years, with only one goal and no wins to show for their last five international matches, has triggered a hostile reaction from media and many fans alike.

A repeat of their 5-0 win over Andorra last September would clearly lift morale, up to a point.

However, the relative weakness of the opponents means it would do little to ease worries over England's qualifying prospects later in the year.

The Dutch were held to a disappointing goalless draw by Romania at the weekend but are still top of Group G by three points going into their game in Slovenia.

The team coached by Marco van Basten, who said he would not be rushed into making changes, have 11 points on the board. Bulgaria and Romania both have eight and a game in hand.

Greece's 4-1 home defeat by Group C leaders and old rivals Turkey on Saturday will have been a particularly painful one, but a game against a modest, albeit improving Malta side should ease that pain.

Second in the group and still on course for the finals, Greece midfielder Stelios Giannakopoulos has already sounded the rallying cry, telling reporters: "This is the time that we must be strong."

Serbia could well live to regret that historic defeat by Kazakhstan, with Euro 2004 hosts Portugal being their next opponents in Group A.

Buoyed by a 4-0 drubbing of Belgium at the weekend and inspired by on-form winger Cristiano Ronaldo, who scored twice, the Portuguese are likely to be a handful in Belgrade.

Unforgiving weather

REUTERS, Georgetown

The Super Eights matches in Guyana are likely to be disrupted as thunderstorms are forecast for the next eight days.

South Africa are scheduled to clash with Sri Lanka on Wednesday but it appears that the players will have to come back on the reserve day at the newly-built Providence Stadium to get a result.

The rain may have a significant impact on teams such as England, who are entering the stage without any points, as they will be pinning their hopes on beating debutants Ireland on Friday.

According to the website www.weather.com, the temperature in Guyana's capital Georgetown will be around 87 F into the middle of next week and a daily downpour is expected.

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Muralidaran gets top Wisden award

AFP, London

Sri Lanka's star off-spinner Muttiah Muralidaran was named on Tuesday as the Wisden Almanack's "leading cricketer in the world."

He is the fourth recipient of the title since it was inaugurated, following Australians Ricky Ponting and Shane Warne and England all-rounder Andrew Flintoff.

The award differs from the traditional five cricketers of the year, as it can be won more than once by the same player.

"Muralidaran is a truly great cricketer," said Wisden's Simon Barnes. "Those that cannot go along with such a sentiment have something lacking in their souls. The spirit of cricket, perhaps."

The Sri Lankan enjoyed another prolific year with the ball and is closing in on 700 Test wickets.

The arrival of England's left-arm spinner Monty Panesar in international cricket is recognised as he is named as one of this year's five, as is Paul Collingwood's development into a top-class all-rounder.

Surrey's Mark Ramprakash also receives the accolade for his phenomenal domestic season -- in which he scored 2,278 runs -- while Sri Lanka captain Mahela Jayawardene and Pakistan run machine Mohammad Yousuf are the other recipients.