



'Happy with hattrick'

AFP, Georgetown



Sri Lanka fast bowler Lasith Malinga nearly gate-crashed South Africa's party when he became the first bowler in one-day history to grab four wickets off successive balls.

The paceman with the low-slung round-arm action, bleach-blond hair and eyebrow ring dismissed Shaun Pollock, Andrew Hall, Jacques Kallis and Makhaya Ntini to raise his team's hopes of an incredible victory in a World Cup Super Eight match here on Wednesday.

South Africa, chasing a modest 210 to win, were cruising at 206-5 before being nearly blown away by Malinga's magic spell.

Graeme Smith's side heaved a collective sigh of relief when Robin Peterson edged Malinga past the slip for a winning four.

"I'm feeling bad because we lost the game, but I'm happy that I took a hattrick," said Malinga, only the fifth bowler in the Cup history to achieve such a feat.

"The old ball was reverse-swinging and I got the wickets. I tried to get five-in-a-row, but unfortunately couldn't. I think we didn't have enough runs."

Other hattrick bowlers were India paceman Chetan Sharma (v New Zealand in 1987), Pakistan off-spinner Saqlain Mushtaq (v Zimbabwe in 1999), Sri Lanka pace-

man Chaminda Vaas (v Bangladesh in 2003) and Australia fast bowler Brett Lee (v Kenya in 2003).

"He's amazing. With an action like that, he still manages to keep the ball straight in line and the right length all the time. He is a magnificent bowler and I like him," said former West Indies fast bowler Colin Croft.

"He is going to surprise a lot of batsmen. He will become better and stronger in time."

Batsmen in the ongoing tournament have been finding it difficult to read the 23-year-old Malinga.

He had already taken three wickets each in his first two group matches in Trinidad against debutants Bermuda and Bangladesh before threatening to alter the course of the match against South Africa.

"That spell at the end from Malinga really tested us," South Africa captain Graeme Smith said after his team's one-wicket victory.

Malinga's action caused New Zealand's batsmen a lot of problems in a Test series in 2005.

New Zealand skipper Stephen Fleming admitted most of his batsmen found it difficult to sight the ball, which was coming virtually in front of the umpires and missing the sight-screen.

"We asked the umpires to change the colour of their trousers. There's a period there when he's delivering when it gets lost against the trousers," Fleming said.

The umpires didn't change their

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MALINGA PIPS THE LOT

SPORTS REPORTER

Sri Lanka paceman Lasith Malinga became the first bowler to take four wickets in consecutive balls in one-day international cricket. He also became the fifth bowler overall to have claimed a hattrick in World Cup tournaments.

World Cup hattricks (player, team, opponents, venue, date):			
Chetan Sharma (Ind)	New Zealand	Nagpur	1987
Saqlain Mushtaq (Pak)	Zimbabwe	London	1999
Chaminda Vaas (SL)	Bangladesh	Pietermaritzburg	2003
Brett Lee (Aus)	Kenya	Durban	2003
Lasith Malinga (SL)	South Africa	Georgetown	2007

*Malinga took four wickets in four balls

THE NEW MAGICIAN: Sri Lanka fast bowler Lasith Malinga takes off to celebrate his fourth wicket, that of Makhaya Ntini, during their World Cup Super Eight match against South Africa at Guyana National Stadium in Georgetown on Wednesday.

SA almost choke

AFP, Georgetown



match before South Africa scrambled a one-wicket win in a World Cup Super Eight match at Providence here on Wednesday.

"It was pretty stressful," admitted South Africa captain Graeme Smith. "I even caught one or two of the guys having a cigarette!"

South Africa were heading for a comfortable win, with four runs needed and five wickets in hand to reach a target of 210 when Malinga yorked Shaun Pollock with the fifth ball of his eighth over.

Andrew Hall then scooped a catch to cover off the next ball.

Jacques Kallis took a single off the next over from Chaminda Vaas but was then caught behind for 86 off the first ball of Malinga's ninth over.

Makhaya Ntini had his stumps scattered by a fast yorker as Malinga became the first bowler in one-day international history to take four wickets off successive balls.

Charl Langeveldt, who earlier took a career-best five for 39 as Sri Lanka limped to 209 all out, scrambled a single off Malinga before Robin

Peterson edged a boundary to clinch a crucial win for South Africa.

Smith said his team had dominated 95 overs of the match.

"We always knew it was going to be a difficult chase. It was a very good effort on our part to restrict them to 209 and then chase the way we did. Bar the last five overs I think we were very

good today (Wednesday)."

The win relieved some of the pressure on South Africa, whose 83-run defeat against Australia in St Kitts Saturday meant they entered the Super Eight phase without any points.

It also ensured that South Africa would collect a 150,000-dollar

bonus as the world's number one-ranked team as they cannot be topped by the April 1 cut-off for the International Cricket Councils championship ratings.

Sri Lanka captain Mahela Jayawardene was philosophical about the defeat, his team's first in the tournament.

"The way we battled wasn't very pleasing. We didn't deserve to win. But Malinga's heroics showed that we don't give up."

Jayawardene, who delayed taking the final power play until the 45th over, when Malinga took his first two wickets, admitted that Sri Lanka were not in the game until the wickets started to fall.

"We never had a chance. So when he took his wickets I just told him to enjoy it and not put a lot of pressure on himself."

Smith said that despite the late collapse it was a key win for South Africa.

"We have won a tight game and in the last while we have been in tight games a number of times and have won them. It hasn't always happened that way for South African teams in World Cups," said the skipper.

Off-spinner Muttiah Muralidaran had appeared the only major obstacle to South Africa's win.

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Pollock form a concern

AFP, Georgetown

Shaun Pollock was South Africa's star bowler during his country's home one-day international season but his World Cup form is a worry for captain Graeme Smith.

In two successive matches, the normally miserly Pollock has "travelled", in Smith's words, after being targeted by opposition batsmen.

Against Australia in St Kitts Saturday, Pollock was hammered for 42 runs in an opening spell of five overs. He finished with a career-worst none for 83 in ten.

The pattern was similar against Sri Lanka at the Guyana National Stadium here on Wednesday when Smith had to take his star bowler out of the attack after he conceded 32 runs in four overs.

"It's something we were going to have to look at," said Smith.

"I think most teams are probably going to look to target him up front. He's a key bowler for us when he bowls well."

Australia went on to win Saturday's match but South Africa beat Sri Lanka by one wicket, largely because Pollock's fellow bowlers performed well.

"I think he was backed up superbly today (Wednesday) by the rest of the guys," said Smith.

Pollock, 33, arrived at the World Cup in the best form of his life.

After he took five for 23 against

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Kumara tells India to be sporting

AFP, Georgetown



from their island neighbours.

Sri Lanka beat India on their way to the World Cup second round Super Eight.

India, meanwhile, crashed out and went home to face the unrelenting fury of fans let down by a team many considered to be potential World Cup winners in the Caribbean.

"I feel sorry for India's cricketers," said Sangakkara.

"They'll now face a torrent of criticism and abuse in the coming weeks. Fanatical fans will no doubt be burning effigies. The huge expectation places their players under enormous pressure. And when that expectation is raised a degree or two, it can easily have a

crippling effect.

"In Sri Lanka, the public seem to have a more easy-going perspective. Most Sri Lankans are passionate about sport, especially cricket, but we also seem to understand that sport is sport."

"I am not sure whether that more balanced attitude is the product of two decades of civil war, or merely reflects the more happy-go-lucky style of an island nation."

"The attitude of our fans makes it easier for us. We still get our fair share of criticism. But our houses are not stoned when we lose and we can still walk down the street without fearing for our safety. I'm grateful for this and really don't envy the situation of India and Pakistan's top cricketers."

Sangakkara admitted that the World Cup felt strange without India and Pakistan.

India also lost to Bangladesh in their group games while Pakistan suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of part-timers Ireland. They also lost to the West Indies.

"It leaves the tournament with a degree or two, it can easily have a

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ICC happy with wired-up ump

AFP, Georgetown

The International Cricket Council (ICC) believes that having umpires wired-up and in tune with the latest technology can only improve on-field decision-making.

All World Cup umpires from the ongoing Super Eight stages can listen into the stump microphones, a facility which the ICC hopes will have a positive effect on the game in the future.

"It is not an innovation in the sense that it was tried before in the 2004 Champions Trophy in England," said David Richardson, the former South Africa wicketkeeper and now the ICC Manager (Cricket).

"The new facility is aimed at helping umpires listen for thin edges that may not easily be detectable in windy stadia or where the noise of the crowd may drown out such faint sounds in caught-behind appeals."

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Mahela remains strong

AFP, Georgetown



Cup Super Eight defeat against South Africa at the Guyana National Stadium Wednesday.

Jayawardene said the fact that his team came so close to winning after a poor batting performance showed the ability and the fighting spirit of his players.

"We don't give up. From any situation we believe we can win matches," he said.

Looking ahead to Sunday's match against hosts West Indies at the same venue, Jayawardene said: "We are a very professional unit and we know exactly where we went wrong. The guys will make sure that

we come back very strong on Sunday."

For the Sri Lankans it will be a second opportunity to take advantage of conditions which Jayawardene admitted were akin to those found in their native country, with a slow pitch providing plenty of help for the spin bowlers, spearheaded by Muttiah Muralidaran.

It was Muralidaran who kept Sri Lanka in with a slight chance Wednesday, bowling superbly to take three for 34 before unorthodox fast bowler Lasith Malinga gave them an unexpected sight of victory by becoming the first bowler to take four wickets in four balls in a one-day international.

From needing only four runs with five wickets in hand, South Africa found themselves with their last pair at the crease and three still needed. A four by Robin Peterson settled South Africa's nerves.

Jayawardene said Malinga, who finished with four for 54, could be a

big force in the World Cup.

"He usually picks up a few early wickets and he can be a handful for the lower middle order and the tailenders. I can use him at any stage. He's something special that we have in this team."

Jayawardene says there is no special action needed to spruce up the batting which failed to click on Wednesday after he had won the toss and elected to bat in the first international match to be played at the new stadium at Providence on the outskirts of the capital Georgetown.

"We batted really well in the first three games we played here (in the World Cup)," said the captain whose side made it through from the first round with a perfect three wins out of three.

South Africa captain Graeme Smith endorsed Jayawardene's view of Sri Lanka's prospects.

"Sri Lanka in these conditions are going to be a tough team to beat," he said.



UNLIKELY HEROES: South Africa tail-enders Robin Peterson (R) and Charl Langeveldt exchange high-fives after the former struck the winning runs against Sri Lanka in the World Cup Super Eight match at Guyana National Stadium in Georgetown on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP