



Australia paceman Glenn McGrath (C) celebrates with teammate Michael Clarke after dismissing Sri Lanka batsman Kumar Sangakkara during the World Cup Eights match at the Grenada National Stadium in St George's on Monday.

A virtual quarter

AFP, Bridgetown



England captain Michael Vaughan and his South African counterpart Graeme Smith will be hoping to fire in a crucial World Cup Super Eights match here on Tuesday.

England and South Africa expect their captains to lead from the front in a match they need to win to stay in contention for the semifinals. South Africa have six points from six matches and England four from five.

Defending champions Australia and New Zealand have already qualified for the semifinals with 10 points. Sri Lanka are also through leaving just one place up for grabs.

A stiff test awaits struggling Vaughan and Smith on a Kensington Oval track having pace and bounce as both teams boast of quality fast bowlers capable of probing the best on helpful pitches.

England have been struggling for big starts as Vaughan is looking out of form at the top of the order. He has scored only 113 runs in seven matches and is still without a half-century.

The South African captain started on an impressive note when he smashed four successive half-centuries, but lost his way in the Super Eights. He has scored only 20 in his last three games.

A solid start will be required to seize the initiative on the pace-friendly pitch, and the onus is now on Vaughan and Smith to put their teams' campaigns back on the tracks.

"It is a mixture of reasons for the struggle at the top of the order and definitely form is one of those. We need to spend some time in the centre. We have to improve in some areas," said Vaughan.

England have been performing inconsistently in the second round as they have beaten only debutants Ireland and Bangladesh, and a

defeat on Tuesday will end their chances of reaching the semifinals.

They hardly looked at their best even during victories, especially against Bangladesh when they struggled to chase a modest 144-run target against left-arm spinners.

England have been relying on a couple of batsmen, with Kevin Pietersen, Ian Bell and all-rounder Paul Collingwood doing the bulk of scoring in most of the matches.

Andrew Flintoff's batting form only adds to England's problems ahead of the pressure match. The free-stroking batsman looked much below his best in the previous games, scoring 72 in six matches.

England have the satisfaction of finding Flintoff in an excellent bowling form as the paceman is his team's leading wicket-taker with 11. With fast bowlers James Anderson and Sajid Mahmood also enjoying success, England are expected to keep pressure on the South African batsmen.

Like England, South Africa also have been struggling for consistency in both batting and bowling departments. Their worst came when they suffered a shock defeat against Bangladesh in Guyana.

It seems South Africa have yet to recover from the shock as they yet again failed to lift their performance against New Zealand, losing by five wickets in a low-scoring match in Grenada on Saturday.

"It is a crunch game for us and it always was going to be. We'll bounce back. We have a lot of experience and we've got a lot of big players looking forward to the England game," said Smith.

South Africa's batting crumbled for the second time in three matches when they scored 193 against New Zealand, with Herschelle Gibbs alone acquitted himself well with a half-century.

Jacques Kallis is the lone batsman performing with consistency, having scored 463 runs in eight matches. But South Africa need more from other specialist batsmen in this game.

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Graveney backs Vaughan up

BBC ONLINE, undated

Chairman of selectors David Graveney says captain Michael Vaughan is not in danger of being left out by England.

Vaughan has yet to record a fifty in seven matches in the World Cup thus far and has made four single figure scores.

"He is the captain in both forms of the game," Graveney said. "He has been honest about his form but is a quality player and will look to turn it round."

Regarding Duncan Fletcher's future, he said: "He is an outstanding coach and continues to do an outstanding job."

Graveney, who has been chairman for 10 years, admits the team have failed to perform to their potential in the competition.

"We have certainly got to play better than we have in the past," he said. "That is not to say we cannot."

"I have watched the guys practice

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Irish belong here

AFP, Bridgetown



said Johnston after his team's 74-run win over Bangladesh here on Sunday.

Bangladesh themselves forced their detractors to eat their words by upstaging India in the first round and then inflicting a humiliating 67-run defeat on South Africa in the Super Eights.

"People said we shouldn't be in the Super Eights but again it gave us more motivation. We took those comments on board and it was like a mini World Cup for us against Bangladesh," said the Australian-born Johnston.

Ireland, who qualified for the World Cup by finishing runners-up in the ICC Trophy in 2005, were regarded as minnows whose presence here among the top nations was scoffed at in some quarters.

However, they silenced the critics by dumping Pakistan out in the first round with a shock three-wicket win before playing a tied game against Zimbabwe to unexpectedly qualify for the second round Super Eights.

"People are entitled to their opinions but that sort of thing plays a large part in giving us motivation to do something special which we did,"

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"Bangladesh beat Australia in 2005 and have beaten South Africa here. Kenya made it to the semis in the last World Cup, so we had to prove a point and turn around Friday's disappointment," added Johnston of a nine-wicket mauling from Australia.

"We set ourselves some serious goals against Bangladesh and the first was to win the toss which I did, and then see off the new ball," said Johnston whose openers laid the foundation of their 243-7 total with a stand of 92.

The good work of William Porterfield (85) and Jeremy Bray (31) was further boosted by Kevin O'Brien (48) and Johnston (30). SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

England quash Flintoff scare

BBC ONLINE, undated

England have dismissed concerns over Andrew Flintoff's health ahead of Tuesday's crucial World Cup clash against South Africa in Barbados.

Flintoff has had a chest infection for the last 10 days but tests for glandular fever proved negative and the 29-year-old trained on Sunday.

"Freddie is fine and has taken a full part in practice," England media spokesman Andrew Walpole told the BBC.

"He had an upper respiratory infection for several days in Antigua."

Walpole confirmed that the blood tests for glandular fever were taken purely as a precautionary measure.

Flintoff has had problems on and off the field during the competition.

He had made only 72 runs in five innings and twisted his ankle during

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KP has all to play for

AFP, Bridgetown



only century in the ongoing tournament against defending champions Australia in a Super Eights game.

England hope he continues in the same vein in a match they need to win to sustain their hopes of qualifying for the semifinals.

If South Africa win, they will be in the last four.

But lurking beneath the surface is a bitter relationship between Pietersen, who was condemned as an opportunist when he decided to qualify for England after protesting against the quota system in South Africa, and Proteas skipper Graeme Smith.

The two have been engaged in a torrid war of words for two years.

"I think everyone knows we don't get on for whatever reasons, but that's gone. It's not about myself, Smith, Andre Nel or Michael Vaughan on Tuesday, it's about producing a big team performance," said Pietersen.

"I wouldn't say that it is the game that matters to me more than the

others because the match against Australia is big as well, but it's an important game for me and I look forward to it.

"It's going to be a big game with a lot of need. I don't know why there is need between the two sides other than there are some really world-class players on both the sides."

Smith was furious when Pietersen switched allegiances.

"I'm patriotic about my country, that's why I don't like Kevin Pietersen -- the only reason that Kevin and I have never had a relationship is because he slated South Africa," Smith has said in the past.

Pietersen described Smith as a "muppet" and added: "I don't talk to Smith. It's a waste of breath because I don't have any respect for him."

The controversial Pietersen on Monday tried to diffuse a potential explosive situation.

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Ballack secures dream final

AFP, Manchester



Michael Ballack is sure Chelsea kept their date with Manchester United for the first FA Cup final at the new Wembley on a heart-breaking afternoon for Blackburn at Old Trafford on Sunday.

The Germany captain's strike, four minutes into the second period of extra-time, was enough to give his side a 2-1 win and keep alive their dream of a clean sweep of all four tournaments they have entered this season.

But it was a close-run thing for Jose Mourinho's men, who almost paid a heavy price for their failure to make more of early dominance and had reason to be grateful for a man-of-the-match performance by goalkeeper Peter Cech.

After Jason Roberts had cancelled out Frank Lampard's opener, Blackburn might easily have claimed victory in the closing stages of regulation time, when their Norwegian winger Morten Gamst Pedersen directed a free header wide from barely six yards out.

Instead, it fell to Germany's captain to settle the contest, sweeping the ball home from 12 yards after Stephen Warnock had blocked

Salomon Kalou's attempt to get on the end of Shaun Wright-Phillips' cutback from the byline.

Mourinho was relieved to have seen off Blackburn's spirited challenge and he said: "It is a very special feeling because the game was amazing. It was the kind of game when you win you are crazy with happiness, but you have a lot of feelings for the other team."

"They fought like heroes like we did. Normally heroes are only the winners, but I have good feelings for them because they were amazing."

Mourinho insisted the prospect of facing United in show-downs for the Premiership and now the FA Cup underlined how good both teams have been this season.

"It is a big, big final. It is a final between first and second in the Premiership, it is final between two semi-finalists in the Champions League."

"Independent of what happens for the rest of the season, we could win everything, they could win everything or even if we both win nothing, Chelsea and Manchester United are two unbelievable teams."

Blackburn manager Mark Hughes was convinced his team had done enough to win and he said: "We deserved to go through today. In the second half we were outstanding and there was only one team that tried to affect the game."

"We showed real belief and that was the key. They are an excep-

tional team but we made them look ordinary today. Their keeper was outstanding and that tells the story."

Cech added: "We never give up. We always believe we can make it in the last seconds and we did the same today."

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Hughes's decision to opt for Roberts in attack at the expense of the more lightweight Matt Derbyshire suggested a belief that Chelsea could be bludgeoned into conceding chances.

Instead it was Chelsea's superior cutting edge which provided the dominant theme for most of the first half.

The first clear sight of goal fell to Ashley Cole, who forced a good save from Brad Friedel after combining with Joe Cole, who was making his first start since November.

By that stage, a Chelsea opener was beginning to look inevitable. But it still required errors from both Blackburn centrebacks to allow them to take the lead with just over a quarter of an hour played.

First Christopher Samba allowed Drogba the time to bring Peter Cech's goal-kick under control and lay the ball off to Ballack.

Then, when the Germany captain rolled a pass through the inside



Chelsea midfielder Michael Ballack exults in joy after scoring the winner in extra-time during their FA Cup semifinal clash against Blackburn at Old Trafford on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP