

Farveez stakes claim

AFP, St George's



Seamer Farveez Maharoof gave Sri Lanka a World Cup semifinal selection headache on Wednesday when he claimed four victims in his team's Super Eights eight-wicket win over Ireland.

Maharoof, playing in the side because of an injury to Lasith Malinga while Dilhara Fernando was rested, made a strong case to retain his place for next Tuesday's semifinal in Jamaica with a blistering performance with the ball.

He also ran out Ireland skipper Trent Johnston as Sri Lanka bowled out their opponents for just 77 before wrapping up victory comfortably before the lunch break at the Grenada National Stadium.

"It's a good headache to have," said Sri Lanka captain Mahela Jayawardene when quizzed if the 22-year-old Maharoof would start the semifinal which is likely to be against New Zealand.

"Everyone in this squad has put their hands up when it comes to performing. It would be a worse headache if we were not performing."

"We have achieved our goal of making the semifinals. When we left Sri Lanka we knew we had to concentrate hard, we knew we had the talent to make the last four but we just had to execute our plans. That was the hardest thing."

Maharoof finished with four for 25 in 10 overs, a spell that saw the pace bowler take three wickets in four balls in his first over.

Muttiah Muralidaran also took four wickets as Ireland were dismissed for just 77 -- the sixth lowest total in the competition's history.

The result was a disappointing end for Ireland's debut World Cup campaign which had peaked with famous wins over Pakistan and Bangladesh but had also seen a nine-wicket defeat to champions Australia.

But they at least had the comfort of knowing that their performances had put them into 12th place in the international one-day rankings.

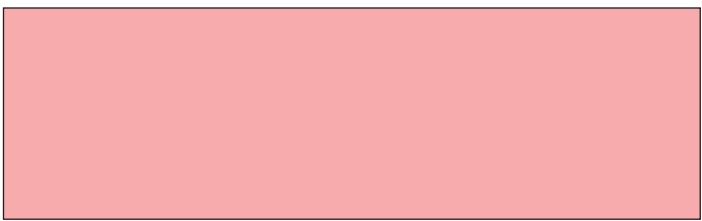
"It was another tough game,"

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PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lanka captain Mahela Jayawardene pulls one to the boundary during their World Cup Super Eights match against Ireland at the Grenada National Stadium in St George's on Wednesday.



AND V SRI LANKA SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the World Cup Super Eights match between Ireland and Sri Lanka at the National Cricket Stadium at St George's in Grenada on Wednesday:

	R	B	4s	6s
IRELAND				
Jeremy Bray c Russell Arnold b Farveez Maharoof	20	29	4	0
William Porterfield c Sanath Jayasuriya b Farveez Maharoof	17	51	1	0
Andre Botha c Kumar Sangakkara b Farveez Maharoof	0	2	0	0
Eoin Morgan c Kumar Sangakkara b Farveez Maharoof	0	1	0	0
Niall O'Brien c Kumar Sangakkara b Muttiah Muralidaran	4	28	0	0
Kevin O'Brien c Sanath Jayasuriya b Muttiah Muralidaran	2	4	0	0
Kenneth Carroll b Muttiah Muralidaran	0	2	0	0
Trent Johnston run out (Farveez Maharoof)	0	4	0	0
Kyle McCallan lbw b Muttiah Muralidaran	0	9	0	0
Dave Langford-Smith lbw b Chaminda Vaas	18	21	2	1
Boyd Rankin not out	7	17	1	0
Extras: (leg byes 5, wides 2, no balls 2)	9			
Total: (All out in 27.4 overs)	77			
Fall of wickets: 1-28 (Bray), 2-28 (Botha), 3-28 (Morgan), 4-46 (Porterfield),				

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Pak triumph on Trent's mind

AFP, St George's

Ireland captain Trent Johnston said not even an eight-wicket World Cup defeat by Sri Lanka could erase the memories of the reception his team received after their win against Pakistan.

Johnston's largely amateur side bowed out of their first World Cup tournament by being skittled out for 77 -- the lowest score of this tournament and the sixth lowest in the competition's history -- at the Grenada National Stadium here Wednesday in their final Super Eights match.

But the 32-year-old Australian born all-rounder, who hit the winning runs in a three-wicket defeat of Pakistan in Jamaica last month in a stunning St Patrick's Day win that knocked the 1992 champions out of the World Cup, said he would never forget what happened afterwards.

"When we hopped off the bus after the Pakistan game and went to visit our family and friends in Ochos Rios, that was the highlight for me, without a shadow of a doubt," Johnston said.

"The reception we got... I probably walked about two metres in 50 minutes just with people congratulating me, people wanting to talk to you and sign things."

"That's never been seen before with Irish cricket and that was definitely the moment for me of the whole tournament. Spending time with our families, because they've sacrificed a lot for us to be here, it was a great thing."

It was a different story in Grenada where Ireland never recovered after losing three wickets in four balls in pace bowler Farveez Maharoof's opening over.

Maharoof finished with four for 25 while Muttiah Muralidaran claimed four for 19 after the off-spinner was recalled following his controversial omission from the seven-wicket defeat by world champions Australia here Monday.

"We started quite well, 28 off seven overs. But then lost three wickets in one over and we never really recovered from that," Johnston.

"Then you bring the best spin bowler in the world on, who we've never seen before, and you've got a recipe for disaster and that's prob

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Jinx is still on

AFP, Bridgetown



It appears that the best way to win the World Cup is not to host it.

The West Indies became the latest prey to the curse of the hosts after failing to qualify for the semifinals even before they had finished their Super Eights engagements.

The hosts will take on Bangladesh and England in their last two matches, but defending champions Australia, New Zealand, Sri Lanka and South Africa have already made it to the last-four.

The Cup has been a jinx for the hosts ever since it was launched in 1975. England, India, Pakistan, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa had all tried to change the trend, but failed.

The burden of expectations, a flash of individual brilliance or a pure mathematical error are some of the reasons for the home teams leaving the party earlier than expected.

The West Indies raised their

fans' expectations after qualifying for the second round with an all-win record here -- only to dash them with their below-par performances in the Super Eights.

"We are all disappointed and we are very sorry for the way we have performed in this World Cup," said West Indies skipper Brian Lara who is quitting one-day cricket after the tournament.

The World Cup has always been cruel to home captains.

England's one-day experience came to nought in big matches when they hosted the first three editions, their best coming in 1979 when they finished runners-up to Clive Lloyd's West Indians.

They were blown away in the 1975 semifinal by Australian all-rounder Gary Gilmour, a left-arm paceman who grabbed six wickets on a seaming Headingley track to bowl the hosts out for a meagre 93.

England were very much in the game when they reduced Australia to 39-6, but again ran into Gilmour who scored a vital 28 not out to see his team home.

The hosts looked the best prepared team in 1979 till the final against the West Indies. It was the

combined excellence of Viv Richards and Collis King that knocked England out.

Richards hammered an unbeaten 138 and shared a century stand with King (86) to help his side post a challenging 286-9 off their allotted 60 overs.

England made a solid start when skipper Mike Brearley and Geoff Boycott put on 129 for the opening wicket, but consumed more than half of their stipulated overs before being restricted to 194.

They were the third time unlucky in the 1983 semifinal against eventual winners India, but not because of an outstanding show from an individual. It was a combined Indian effort that saw England lose by six wickets.

When the Cup arrived in the sub-continent in 1987, India and Pakistan left millions of fans in shock and disbelief after failing in the semifinals.

Those waiting for the India-Pakistan final at the Eden Gardens in Calcutta had no option but to watch a young Australian side beat England in a close match.

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Malik made captain



AFP, Lahore

Pakistan Thursday appointed Shoaib Malik as captain of the national cricket team, hoping the young all-rounder can revive the country's fortunes after their dismal World Cup.

The 25-year-old Malik was unveiled at a press conference here as the successor to Inzamam-ul-Haq, who quit as skipper after Pakistan exited the tournament in the first round.

"He is a unanimous choice. He is the best man to lead the team," Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman Nasim Ashraf told reporters, flanked by Malik himself.

"Malik is the personality to get the best from players both senior and junior," he added.

Malik will be the captain of both

the Test and the one-day side until at least the end of 2007, but no decision has been made on a vice-captain, Ashraf said.

"I am very motivated. I will give 110 percent," Malik told the press conference.

Talat Ali was appointed manager of the Pakistan cricket team for two years, Ashraf said.

The appointment of the relatively inexperienced Malik came after senior batsman and former vice-captain Younis Khan refused to assume the leadership role for personal reasons.

PCB sources said they opted for the right-handed batsman and useful off-spinner over more established names like master batsman Mohammad Yousuf because they wanted a fresh start for the team.

Malik is likely to face pressure to deliver and command a team which has several captaincy hopefuls including Yousuf, flamboyant pacer

Shoaib Akhtar and mercurial all-rounder Shahid Afridi.

Pakistan, the World Cup winners in 1992, were knocked out of the current edition in the Caribbean after losing to minnows Ireland on March 17 in one of the biggest upsets in the tournament's history.

The following day coach Bob Woolmer was found murdered in his Jamaica hotel room. An overwhelmed Inzamam announced his retirement from one-day cricket and relinquished the captaincy soon afterwards.

Malik, from the industrial town of Sialkot near the Indian border, has played 18 Tests and 137 one-day internationals with a batting average of 37.64 since making his debut against Bangladesh in 2001.

His bowling action has been reported twice, once in 2005 and then again in 2006, forcing him to

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Mushy bowls away misery

AFP, London

Mushtaq Ahmed, last seen sobbing over Bob Woolmer's death at the World Cup, returned to the familiar surroundings of sleepy Hove on Wednesday and did what he does best -- bamboozle batsmen.

The 36-year-old Mushtaq, the assistant coach in Pakistan's doomed Caribbean campaign, celebrated the opening of the English county season by taking 6-74 as champions Sussex bowled out Kent for 216.

At stumps, Sussex were 138-1 in reply.

Mushtaq revealed on the eve of the new season how returning to play for Sussex, for the fifth year, was helping him recover from the trauma of Woolmer's murder.

"Every time I think about Bob and what happened to him it depresses me, it is very hard to talk about it," the veteran leg-spinner told The Argus newspaper.

"I had great feelings for him. He was part of our Pakistan cricketing family and a great man."

"As a coach, to take the Pakistan team from seventh in the world rankings to third in three-and-a-half years was a great achievement."

"He was the best coach I ever worked with. All I hope is that they discover what happened to him as quickly as possible."

"It has been a very difficult month for me. But things are slightly better now that I am back with the Sussex family."

"Going out on the field and doing my best for Sussex is my chance to escape from all the other things."

"To be honest, what has happened in the past few weeks has given me even more hunger for playing cricket. Playing is my bread and butter and when I'm out there in the middle that's all that I'm thinking about."

Mushtaq's haul on Wednesday took his career county toll to 373 wickets, but he may not be the only Pakistan spinner who will have an impact on Sussex this season as international compatriot Saqlain Mushtaq is also qualified to play for the champions.

Saqlain and Mushtaq haven't played together since Pakistan met New Zealand in a Test match in Auckland in 2001.

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Messidona!



AGENCIES, Madrid

FC Barcelona forward Lionel Messi has drawn further comparisons with Diego Maradona by scoring a near replica of the former Argentina captain's most famous goal.

On Wednesday, Messi emulated Maradona's winner against England in the 1986 World Cup quarterfinals in scoring Barcelona's second goal in a 5-2 win over Getafe in the Copa del Rey semifinals.

Maradona's feat -- four minutes after he had scored the notorious "Hand of God" goal -- featured a long, dribbling run which left numerous England defenders and goalkeeper Peter Shilton in his wake.

Nearly 21 years later, the 19-year-old Messi dashed from his own half past five Getafe players before rounding goalkeeper Luis Garcia and scoring from a narrow angle in the 29th minute at the Nou Camp.

Messi agreed his goal was "similar to Diego's" but added he could "never be compared" with the former Argentina star.

"I saw the space, I had a gap and I went forward," Messi told Barcelona's TV station. "I did well. I took the goalkeeper on and scored. My aim was the goal and to finish the move off. I saw that Samu (teammate Samuel Eto'o) was there, but there were two defenders heading back. I saw the gap and went for it."

Messi, who made his international debut for Argentina at 18 and appeared at last year's World Cup, added another first-leg goal in the 45th to boost Barcelona's hopes of winning Spain's knockout competition for the first time since 1998.

He is enjoying his best season since joining Barcelona as a junior. In March, he scored a hat-trick in the

3-3 draw with Real Madrid.

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard, who gave Messi his league debut on Oct. 16, 2004 when the forward was 17, described Messi's goal as "a work of art."

"Messi is a great talent. He has scored a brilliant goal. It's true that it is very like Diego Armando Maradona's, but I think Messi accelerated even faster," Rijkaard said.

Messi's teammate, Portugal midfielder Deco, said it was "the greatest goal I have seen in my life."

However, Getafe coach Bernd Schuster blamed his team for not halting Messi as he began his run.

"We should have fouled him, he can't be allowed to reach the area like that," Schuster said.

Former Argentina international Jorge Valdano, who played with Maradona against England in 1986, highlighted differences in the two goals.

"Diego played with pauses and acceleration. Messi's was down to break-neck speed and acceleration," Valdano was quoted as saying by El Pais. "It's impossible not to compare Messi's goal with Maradona's, but the comparison doesn't turn Messi into Maradona."

Spanish newspapers on Thursday, however, said Messi was now the new Maradona.

Sports daily Marca referred to the Barcelona player as "Messidona," while national El Pais said Messi was "the modern version of Maradona."

"Messi's soccer takes up where Maradona's left off," the newspaper added.

Maradona, 46, is currently hospitalized with a bout of hepatitis blamed on alcohol abuse. It the eighth time he has been in hospital since he retired in 1997.



(Anti-clockwise from bottom left) Barcelona sensation Lionel Messi slaloms past the sliding lunge of Getafe defender Belenguer; the last of the five players he beat, before taking the ball past goalkeeper Luis to score his side's second goal in their Copa del Rey match against Getafe at the Nou Camp. Spanish daily Marca highlights his achievement by saying - "Exactly 20 years, 10 months and 26 days to the day, Barcelona forward Lionel Messi repeated 'The Maradona goal' (Diego Maradona's famous goal against England in World Cup 1986). The Argentine wonderkid ran 60 meters in 12 seconds, took thirteen touches, skinned 5 defenders and the goalkeeper before slotting it into an empty net from an acute angle."

PHOTOS: AFP/INTERNET