



DANCING WITH THE STARS: Australia batsman Matthew Hayden raises his arms in joy after reaching his third century of the World Cup in the Super Eights match against New Zealand at the Grenada National Stadium in St George's on Friday. He joined Sachin Tendulkar and Mark Waugh in scoring three centuries in a World Cup.

Ponting chalks out spin plan

AFP, St George's



Australia captain Ricky Ponting believes spinner Brad Hogg will play a key role when the champions take on South Africa in Wednesday's World Cup semifinal in St Lucia.

Left-arm wrist-spinner Hogg took four for 29 as Australia thrashed fellow last four side New Zealand by a massive 215 runs in the trans-Tasman rivals' final Super Eights match.

Only Australia fast bowler Glenn McGrath (22) has taken more than Hogg's 19 wickets at this World Cup.

And having already defeated South Africa by 83 runs in a group match last month, Ponting was confident former postman Hogg, and the likes of part-time spinners Michael Clarke and Andrew Symonds, could help deliver another victory against the Proteas, known for a weakness against slow bowling.

"South Africa probably won't play a spinner in their side. Those conditions and the way our spin bowlers are going, probably give us a bit of an edge," Ponting said.

Meanwhile, Ponting added that New Zealand were fooling no one but themselves in their attempts to downplay the impact of Friday's defeat.

Kiwi skipper Stephen Fleming tried to minimise the impact of the largest reverse ever inflicted upon a Test nation at the World Cup, saying the Black Caps would just "wipe it off" ahead of a possible final meeting with the double-defending champions in Barbados on April 28.

"I'd rather be in our dressing

room than theirs," said Ponting after a win which topped England's 202-run victory against India at Lord's in the inaugural 1975 World Cup.

"I'm sure they will be having all sorts of meetings over the next few days to talk about today's (Friday) game.

"If they don't think that's going to affect them at all, then how is any psychological edge ever gained in any game of cricket? If we don't take something out of today's game, nobody ever can."

"We've just beaten New Zealand by 215 runs in a World Cup game, so they've got a lot of thinking to do."

Friday's win also ended a run of three straight defeats against the Black Caps when an under-strength Australia side were whitewashed 3-0 in February's Chappell-Hadlee Trophy in New Zealand.

Australia's imposing total of 348 for six, against a New Zealand attack missing sidelined pace bowlers Shane Bond and Jacob Oram, was built around Matthew Hayden's 103, the left-handed opener's third century of the tournament equalling the record for the most hundreds at a single World Cup.

With Ponting (66) he shared a second-wicket stand of 137 before Shane Watson, returning after three matches out with a calf muscle injury, stopped a nascent New Zealand recovery in its tracks with a blistering 65 not out featuring four sixes and four fours.

"We knew they'd have a weakened attack going into the game. We knew if we kept our partnership going we'd get a lot of bad balls."

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Fleming stands firm

AFP, St George's



Stephen Fleming is adamant New Zealand will bounce back from their record-breaking defeat by Australia as they head into the World Cup semifinals.

New Zealand, without sidelined bowlers Shane Bond and Jacob Oram, conceded 348 for six, with Matthew Hayden making 103, before being bowled out for 133 as they suffered a 215-run defeat - the largest ever inflicted upon a Test nation at a World Cup.

One consolation for New Zealand captain Fleming was that his side were already in the semifinals, where they play Sri Lanka in Jamaica on Tuesday.

"If there is a positive, we haven't wasted a good performance," said Fleming after Friday's loss 137-6, opener Peter Fulton's 62 was the lone notable score in an innings that barely lasted 25 overs.

"We haven't wasted anything at all really - we're just going to get up, wipe it off and look forward."

"Now it comes down to two games, and if we start analysing too much we won't look forward to what is coming up - we have an opportunity to win two games for the World Cup."

During their 3-0 whitewash of an under-strength Australia during February's Chappell-Hadlee series in New Zealand, Fleming's men posted two of the largest totals to win batting second in one-dayers - 340 for five in Auckland and 350 for nine in Hamilton.

But with the likes of fast bowler Mark Gillespie's six wicketless overs costing 67 runs and left-arm quick James Franklin, whose three wickets came at an expensive 74

runs in eight overs, Fleming said it was unrealistic to expect the batsmen to keep chasing down such huge scores.

"We were just totally outplayed. Once again, we've gone for more than 340. It is a concern. It happened twice in New Zealand, and again here."

"If you keep going for that many runs, the flip side is at some point you are going to get bundled out cheaply."

However, Fleming said he expected Bond, who has taken 12 wickets at under 13 apiece this

Lara exit saddens Hayden

AFP, St George's

Brian Lara's batting heroics were all the more impressive given the weakness of the West Indies side he played in, said one of the few men able to judge him from the standpoint of someone approaching an equal.

Australia captain Ricky Ponting, bracketed with West Indies skipper Lara and India's Sachin Tendulkar as the best batsmen currently in world cricket, paid a generous tribute on the eve of his old rival's final international appearance, against England, in Barbados on Saturday.

"I've always thought he and Sachin (Tendulkar) have been the two greatest batsmen I've ever played against, probably for different reasons," Ponting said after champions Australia's dominating 215-run World Cup Super Eights win against fellow semifinalists New Zealand here Friday.

"Brian has got the ability to turn it on when he wants and take an attack apart and Sachin has been the most technically correct player I've seen."

"The thing a lot of people don't think much about with Brian Lara, is that he's basically had the weight of that whole team on his shoulders for the best part of 10 years and had to carry their batting and win them games almost by himself."

"That sort of pressure going into every game, for him to be able stand up and perform is something that should never be overlooked."

Lara, 37, holds the world records for Test and first-class scores.

He smashed an unbeaten 400 against England in the Antigua Test in 2004 and an unbeaten 501 for Warwickshire against Durham in the English county championship in 1994.

He is the highest scorer in Tests with 11,953 runs in 131 matches with 34 centuries and the fifth-highest in one-dayers with 10,387 in 298 games.

But his 17-year international career has coincided with a sharp decline in West Indies cricket, his captaincy receiving renewed criticism as the hosts failed to qualify for the World Cup semifinals.

However, his batting ability has never been in doubt.

Australia opener Matthew Hayden, who topped Lara's then Test record score of 375 by making 380 against Zimbabwe at Perth during the 2003-04 season, said his fellow left-hander's exceptionally high backlift made him stand out.

"Brian is probably unheralded as far as batting technique goes. He's got an unusual, unorthodox technique, which makes bowlers look embarrassed at times. I love the way he manipulates the ball."

"It's a pretty sad day for cricket

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McGrath plans his end

INTERNET, undated



Glen McGrath clearly remembers the few words Curly Ambrase uttered to him after his last Test in Australia 10 years ago. "He walked off the WACA and said to me, 'Next time you see me, I'll be on the beach'."

The next time you see McGrath, he might be fishing with his son, James, or relaxing with his family at their property near Bourke in outback NSW or getting his helicopter licence.

There will be at least one, hopefully two, World Cup games to play before then, games that might provide a fitting end to the career of one of the world's greatest bowlers. But when an e-mail lobbed in his inbox this week detailing Australia's commitments for next summer, he clicked the delete button without a second thought.

"To be honest, I was ready to retire a few months ago but this World Cup was that extra incentive to keep going. That I'm the leading wicket-taker at the moment means I'm not just going through the

motions," he said.

With 563 Test wickets and, before the overnight game against New Zealand, 375 one-day scalps, he has nothing to prove in his final outings and has sailed past one of his heroes, Wasim Akram, as the most successful bowler in World Cup history. But deep down, McGrath knew he was ready to walk away as long ago as last November.

After eight months' compassionate leave while his wife, Jane, fought a recurrence of cancer, he made a remarkable comeback with 6-50 in the first Ashes Test in Brisbane.

As a new generation of Englishmen went into therapy and the world hailed the return of a champion who, as he liked to say, felt fitter than ever, McGrath privately realised "it wasn't important anymore".

"I look back to the most important decisions I've made in my life - moving to Sydney, when I asked Jane to marry me, things like that. It hasn't been something that's slowly crept up on me. If I'm asleep I will just wake up and I'll know, bang, it's the right time. This was no different."

In some ways the 37-year-old

who leaves the game this month isn't very different from the skinny Narromine kid whose cricket trousers finished above his ankles when he first appeared for his state 15 years ago. He still follows the same, simple plan. He still has an unwavering belief in his own ability, and he still loves his teammates and every minute he spends on the field with them. Asked about the secret of his success, he simply said: "I knew my action and I knew myself."

In other ways, he is different. On the field, McGrath is a much mellow character than the periodically grumpy fast bowler whose disciplinary indiscretions included the infamous altercation with Ramnaresh Sarwan in the Caribbean four years ago. Off the field, the time between games and away from home feels longer.

"Everything that has happened off the field and what Jane and I have gone through, it puts a lot of things in perspective. Becoming a father also makes you grow up. The longer it has gone on I've thought, 'The one thing I didn't want to be remembered for is being a guy who went over the top sledging or doing this or that'. I felt that wasn't who I was."

"You don't want people saying to your kids, 'Your father is a bastard'. I'm playing cricket because I love it, and if I'm out there getting angry all the time that's not what it's about. The times when I did blow up I used to regret it afterwards ... I don't really hide my emotions too well, so maybe what you see is what you get."

Budding fast bowlers often ask McGrath how he has been so successful. He does not possess prodigious pace or mean swing, so what's his secret? They are generally overwhelmed to hear that 90 per cent of his wickets come from building pressure by consistently attacking the top of off stump, and the other 10 per cent from laying a game plan and bowling to it. He also attributes many of his wickets to the pressure applied at the other end by his long-time bowling partners Shane Warne and Jason Gillespie. Then there is the steaming bounce, which Kevin Pietersen recently discovered can still crack ribs. "You look at Mike Atherton. The two bowlers who got him most were myself and Ambrose."

The former England captain was the most hapless victim of

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TRALIA V NEW ZEALAND SCOREBO

Scoreboard of the World Cup Super Eights match between Australia and New Zealand at the National Cricket Stadium in Grenada on Friday:

AUSTRALIA	R	M	B	4s	6s
Gilchrist c Gillespie b Franklin	1	7	2	0	0
Hayden c & b Styris	103	150	100	10	2
Ponting c Taylor b Patel	66	96	70	7	0
Clarke c Franklin	49	59	46	7	0
Hussey c Styris b Franklin	37	75	44	2	0
Symonds c Mason b Patel	11	20	16	1	0
Watson not out	65	44	32	4	4
Hogg not out	0	3	0	0	0
Extras: (lb-1, w-5, nb-10)	16				
Total: (For 6 wickets in 50 overs)	348				
Did not bat: Bracken, Tait, McGrath.					
Fall of wickets: 1-7, 2-144, 3-216, 4-233, 5-257, 6-334.					
Bowler	O	M	R	W	NB/W
Mason	3	0	27	0	nb-1, w-1
Franklin	8	0	74	3	nb-5, w-1
Patel	10	0	48	2	nb-1
Vettori	10	0	60	0	nb-2
Styris	10	0	50	1	w-2

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'Fletcher will be back'

BBC ONLINE, undated



England captain Michael Vaughan expects Duncan Fletcher to take a new coaching position in a few months time, after his resignation from the England job.

Saturday's World Cup match against West Indies is Fletcher's last in charge of Bangladesh and is thought to be keen on the India post.

And Bennett King's future with West Indies is also in doubt after their poor World Cup performances, although his contract runs until October.

Fletcher, who has a home in Cape Town, could move into first-class cricket in England, South

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DRESSED FOR THE OCCASION: Indian legend Sachin Tendulkar (R) and his wife Anjali Tendulkar leaves the residence of filmstar Amitabh Bachchan after attending the marriage ceremony of Abhishek Bachchan and former Miss World Aishwarya Rai in Mumbai on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP