

2ND SEMIFINAL: AUSTRALIA V SOUTH AFRICA

SA hope to be 2nd time lucky

AFP, Gros Islet



South Africa's Graeme Smith on Wednesday confronts a riddle that no captain has so far unravelled — how to beat Ricky Ponting's Australians in the World Cup.

Smith has already failed once when his team were thrashed by Australia in a group match at St Kitts last month, but he hopes to be second time lucky when the two sides clash in the semifinal at Beausejour.

Defending champions Australia are unbeaten in their last 27 Cup matches with their last defeat coming against Pakistan at Leeds in the 1999 edition.

South Africa are the only team that came close to beating Australia during this impressive run when they tied their semifinal in 1999 before bowing out on inferior net run-rate.

Smith said his side would have to raise their levels from the 83-run defeat in St Kitts.

"Australia have played good cricket throughout the World Cup and I don't think we're expecting them to play a bad game," he said.

"We're hoping to beat the best Australian team and that's the way we are preparing and we're putting things into play."

Ponting began the tournament

with a hundred against Scotland in a group game and went on to reel off four half-centuries to emerge his side's second-highest scorer after Matthew Hayden with 480 runs in nine matches.

It was a tribute to his skilful leadership that Australia succeeded in maintaining their lofty standards just when it seemed that the opposition had found ways to stop the juggernaut.

Australia had entered the tournament with five successive defeats — two against England in a triangular home one-day series and three in New Zealand despite posting big totals.

But in the Caribbean, Australia have been unbeaten and have looked unbeatable with nine wins in nine matches.

Hayden, the tournament's leading scorer with 580 runs, said: "I think we are just running our own race at the moment. We are playing our own cricket. We are demonstrating that we are very dominant."

Hayden smashed the World Cup's fastest ever century in the match at St Kitts making 101 off 68 balls as Australia piled up 377-6.

South Africa were then bowled out for 294 despite Smith and AB de Villiers giving them a flying start with a 160-run opening stand.

Hayden believes Australia have the mental edge.

"Last time we played better

than them and you could tell by the looks on their faces they were intimidated by us," said the burly opener.

A lot of credit for Australia's Caribbean supremacy goes to Ponting.

He may not have had the services of key all-rounders Andrew Symonds and Shane Watson in all the matches, but he hasn't let it affect his team's performances.

Ponting was in a similar situation in the 2003 edition in South Africa when he lost leg-spinner Shane Warne, who failed a drugs test, and then paceman Jason Gillespie after a couple of matches.

But his team still went on to win a third World Cup.

Like Ponting, Smith also has been in good form having scored 441 runs in nine matches with five half-centuries.

Smith was the youngest South

African Test captain at 22 when he took over from Shaun Pollock after the hosts' disastrous 2003 Cup campaign which saw them bow out of the tournament before the Super Six stage.

The left-handed opener is convinced Australia can be beaten.

He set up his team's incredible chase with a 55-ball 90 in the fifth and final one-day last year in Johannesburg where the hosts surpassed a massive Australian total of 434-4 with one wicket and one ball to spare.

TEAMS

AUSTRALIA (from): Ricky Ponting (captain), Adam Gilchrist, Nathan Bracken, Michael Clarke, Brad Haddin, Matthew Hayden, Brad Hodge, Brad Hogg, Michael Hussey, Mitchell Johnson, Stuart Clark, Glenn McGrath, Andrew Symonds, Shaun Tait, Shane Watson.

SOUTH AFRICA (from): Graeme Smith (captain), Jacques Kallis, Loots Bosman, Mark Boucher, AB de Villiers, Herschelle Gibbs, Andrew Hall, Justin Kemp, Charl Langeveldt, Andre Nel, Makhaya Ntini, Robin Peterson, Shaun Pollock, Ashwell Prince, Roger Telemachus.

Umpires: Aleem Dar (Pakistan) and Steve Bucknor (West Indies).

HEAD-TO-HEAD

Total meetings	66
Australia win	35
South Africa win	28
Tied	3
No Result	0
IN WORLD CUP	
Total meetings	4
Australia win	2
South Africa win	1
Tied	1
No Result	0

Gibbs can set it right

AFP, Gros Islet



It is South African Herschelle Gibbs's misfortune that he is remembered not so much for a century as for a dropped catch that gave Australia a lifeline in the 1999 World Cup.

Australia captain Steve Waugh was on 56 when he offered a catch to Gibbs who held the ball before dropping it in premature celebrations in the Leeds encounter.

Waugh went on to score a century which helped his side win the Super Six match by five wickets and march into the semifinals. It was virtually forgotten that Gibbs made a century in the same game.

Gibbs gets a chance to make amends when South Africa clash with defending champions Australia in the semifinal here on Wednesday.

"You talk about '99, but how many guys get a second chance?" South Africa captain Graeme Smith said ahead of the second Cup semifinal between

the two countries.

"Herschelle is looking forward to the opportunity and I really believe he's up there for Wednesday. He looks very determined going into this game."

Gibbs is one of three players who figured in that Super Six game, others being wicketkeeper Mark Boucher and Shaun Pollock.

South Africa had lost an opportunity to knock Australia out of the competition as Waugh's side entered the Super Six without a point and a defeat would have sent them back home.

Whether Waugh ever told Gibbs that the South African had "dropped the World Cup" with that catch blunder will remain a mystery.

"Hey, Herschelle do you realise that you've just cost your team the match?" the Australian captain was to write later in his autobiography "Out of my comfort zone".

Waugh also revealed that it was leg-spin magician Shane Warne who had said in a team meeting that "don't walk straight away when Herschelle catches you because he has a habit of show boating".

It was not the only engrossing South Africa-Australia match in the 1999 World Cup as the two

were involved in a famous tied semifinal at Edgbaston in the same tournament.

South Africa needed nine to win off the last over, with Lance Klusener at the crease. It became one to win off the last four balls when Klusener hit paceman Damien Fleming for two successive fours.

No run came off the third ball. Klusener connected the fourth and charged for a single, but Allan Donald apparently did not hear the call.

Donald responded late, dropped his bat on the way and was yards out of the crease when wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist broke the stumps.

The two teams have so far met in four Cup matches, with Australia winning two and losing one. The other match was tied.

The first clash was in 1992 when South Africa returned to international cricket after more than two decades of isolation due to apartheid.

Kepler Wessels's South Africans were comfortable winners by nine wickets against Allan Border's Australians at Sydney. After the two famous matches in 1999, Australia beat South Africa in a group match of the ongoing tournament.



TIMBER: Champion Sri Lankan opener Sanath Jayasuriya is being bowled by New Zealand left-arm paceman James Franklin (not in picture) during the first semifinal of the World Cup at the Sabina Park in Kingston, Jamaica yesterday.

SL Academy stay in contention

SPORTS REPORTER

All three teams finished the first round with one win each after Sri Lanka Academy's four-wicket win over Pakistan Academy yesterday in the triangular series.

Sri Lanka, who lost their opener to Bangladesh, banked on a blistering start to reach 216-6 with 15 balls to spare in reply to Pakistan's 215-7.

The match at BKSP was reduced to 39 overs a-side after a delayed start due to wet ground and the inserted Pakistan recovered from early losses.

Reduced to 28-2, opener Khurram Manzoor's 93-ball 91 featuring seven fours and a pair of sixes steadied the innings. Shahid Yusuf's half century (52 off 59 balls) helped them to put on a decent total in the end.

The Lankans, however, swung the match their way with openers Veraj Perera (37 off 33 balls) and Ian Daniel (70 off 78) rattling 70 runs in eight overs.

Daniel, the skipper who hit five fours and two sixes, added further 89 runs with one-down Paranavithana (61 off 71 balls) as they survived a late hiccup to overhaul the target.

The three teams play each other twice before the top two meeting in the final.

SCORES IN BRIEF

Pakistan Academy: 215-7 in 39 overs (Manzoor 91, Yusuf 52, Fawad 33, Raza 14, Sarfaraz 12, extras 7, Zoysa 2-23).

Sri Lanka Academy: 216-6 in 36.5 overs (Perera 37, Daniel 70, Paranavithana 61, Kulasekara 13 n.o., extras 15, Junaid Zia 3-34).

Result: Sri Lanka Academy win by four wickets.

AFP, Gros Islet



team gear up to face the defending champions in Wednesday's semifinals.

South Africa bowed out of the tournament eight years ago after their epic semifinal ended in a tie against Steve Waugh's Australians, who advanced to the final on better net run-rate in the Super Six.

"The 1999 game was a game in history. It doesn't get mentioned much within the set-up," Smith said.

"Obviously, it was disappointing for the country as we finished on the losing side, but it's a game that you learn from. It's a separate game on Wednesday and it's a tough game. What's happened before means nothing."

Australia are the only unbeaten team in the tournament and look poised to complete a hat-trick, having won the world title in 1999 and 2003.

Smith said his side, who have already lost to the Australians in a group game in this tournament, would have to raise their performance.

"They've played good cricket throughout the World Cup and I don't think we're expecting them to play a bad game," he said.

"That's not how we're going into this game. We're hoping to beat the best Australian team and that's the way we are preparing, mentally preparing, and we're putting things into play."

The South African captain said his team were confident of taking on a formidable Australia, especially after posting an emphatic

nine-wicket victory over England in a Super Eight match in Barbados.

"Hopefully, we can make our luck on Wednesday. We certainly can create it by playing good cricket. We have the opportunity to win the game and move into the final," he said.

"The guys are training well and are in good spirits. We're confident as the game against England gave us a big boost. We're looking forward to the game. Hopefully, we peak at the right time."

Smith also backed top-order batsman Jacques Kallis, who came under fire for his slow batting during his team's 83-run defeat against Australia in St Kitts last month.

"Me feeling about Jacques is that he's a world-class player and a team player. He's won many games for South Africa. I think over the last couple of months and maybe years he's had a look at his one-day game," he said.

"Maybe with the game changing, he's had to reassess a few things, but he's an integral part of our team and I'm sure he's going to play a massive role in the semifinal."

The South Africa skipper said Herschelle Gibbs also could play a big role.

"I think Herschelle is one guy that Australia will fear. He's unpredictable, has shots all around the wicket and he's played well throughout the tournament. He looks very determined going," he said.

"You talk about 1999 and how many guys get a second chance. He's looking forward to the opportunity. I really believe Herschelle is up there for Wednesday."

Gibbs has bitter memories of the 1999 edition when he dropped Australia skipper Steve Waugh at a crucial stage in a Super Six game. He held the ball but let it slip in

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Did U Know?

Mark Waugh of Australia was the only batsman to hit three centuries in the 1996 World Cup.



Duncan Fletcher (Just-resigned England cricket coach)

"I want to coach. I enjoy coaching. There's no way I'm falling short of ideas. I still think my ideas should have been implemented and could be implemented, but you can't implement them overnight. It takes time."

While resigning last week.



BTV & SET Max
ICC World Cup 2007 (Second Semifinal)
Australia v South Africa
Live at 7:30 pm

TEN Sports
UEFA Champions League
Chelsea v Liverpool
Live at 12:00 am (Thursday)



B.League
Arambagh v Sk Russel (4:00 pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium



BASKING IN THE SUN: Star South African batsman Herschelle Gibbs is all smiling during his team's training session at Beausejour Cricket Ground in St. Lucia yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP