

# Ponting can't wait

AFF, Gros Islet



Australia skipper Ricky Ponting admitted that he couldn't wait for Saturday to come when his all-conquering team take on Sri Lanka in the World Cup final.

The Bridgetown title showdown will be two-time defending champions Australia's fourth successive final appearance and they will start as overwhelming favourites after beating South Africa by seven wickets in the semifinal here on Wednesday.

"I'm looking forward to Saturday, it can't come round quickly

enough," said Ponting whose team have won all 10 matches at the World Cup and have not lost a game in the tournament overall since 1999.

"It's a fantastic feeling to be in the final again. It's been a great day."

South Africa were 27-5 at one stage after winning the toss as Shaun Tait, with four wickets, and Glenn McGrath, with three, dominated proceedings with Graeme Smith's men bowled out for 149.

"Full credit to the bowlers," said Ponting. "They executed everything well."

McGrath, playing in his last World Cup, set another record when he took his tournament haul to 25 wickets, the best ever performance in a World Cup.

"It's coming out well," said

McGrath who took 3-18.

"The breeze allowed me to swing the ball and I was lucky enough to get a few edges."

"We have bowled every team out at the World Cup except Bangladesh and that was a 22-over game. That's a great feeling to take into the final."

"Tait, Bracken are bowling well and Brad Hogg is playing a big part like he did at the last World Cup."

South Africa skipper Graeme Smith admitted his team had been outplayed.

"The top order have been good in the tournament but today (Wednesday) we had problems. Their bowlers put us on the back foot and we couldn't seize the initiative," he said.

"Australia were the better team

today and congratulations to them.

"It's been an up-and-down tournament for us but I can't doubt the effort the players have put in. At times we haven't played our best cricket."

"I know there will be a lot of disappointed people at home but I hope that in four years' time we can pay them back for their support."

Michael Clarke saw Australia home with an unbeaten 60 and paid tribute to the team's bowlers.

"The bowlers did a fantastic job and if we keep bowling like that I don't think we will have to chase too many runs," said Clarke.

"I feel like I am hitting the ball well and it's great to get another 50 and reach another World Cup final. But my job has been made a lot easier by the top order playing so well."

# Stage-fright blamed

AFF, Johannesburg



The latest chapter in South Africa's sorry World Cup history was put down to a case of stage fright by former stars Wednesday as the Proteas once again suffered semifinal heartache at the hands of Australia.

The much-vaunted South African top order, including Jacques Kallis and Graeme Smith, were all back inside the pavilion within the first 10 overs as they collapsed to 27-5 in a sequence that left some of their former team-mates stunned.

"The first hour was some of the craziest cricket South Africa have ever played," said former batsman Daryl Cullinan.

South Africa's convener of selectors Haroon Lorgat said the wickets had been "very poor, very soft dismissals".

"Nobody was up to it today

(Wednesday)," he said on SuperSport television.

Lorgat feared the team had been undone by nerves despite claims by coach Mickey Arthur they were taking everything in their stride rather than be weighed down by past failures, including their 1999 semifinal exit to Australia.

"I wonder how much tension was in them despite what Mickey was saying about their calmness because I just did not see what I was expecting to see," he said.

His view was echoed by one-time skipper Kepler Wessels who suspected current captain Graeme Smith's pre-match confidence was all a show.

"You're always going to be uptight, nervous. That would have been a common thread, to put on a united front but everyone would have been pretty tense."

Wessels, who also played for Australia when South Africa were frozen out of international cricket during the apartheid era, called for a major rethink of the Proteas' whole approach to one-day cricket.

The Proteas have been widely criticised for their lack of a match-winning spin bowler and once again took on the Australians with an all-pace attack that showed little sign of penetration.

While Australia's pace bowlers did most of the damage, their spinner Brad Hogg conceded only 24 runs in his 10 overs.

"The Australians outplayed us in every department," said Wessels.

"We cannot continue to play such predictable cricket. It's so easy to play South Africa."

South Africa had gone into the tournament as the number one ranked team in the world but Lorgat was among the first to acknowledge they had been completely outplayed by the side they had dislodged from the top spot.

"Today we were just flat, just completely nowhere in the game."

Former batsman Adam Bacher said the gap between the two teams was almost embarrassing.

"It was boys against men," he said on public television. "They taught us a cricket lesson."

## Chappell attacks Tendulkar

PTI, New Delhi

Ian Chappell, who received considerable flak in India when he suggested recently that Sachin Tendulkar should retire, has said that the Indian master batsman was now playing the game for "wrong reasons".

Players should be in the game to win but Tendulkar is now playing for wrong reasons, the former Australian captain said on Sony Max TV during the coverage of the second semi-final of the World Cup between Australia and South Africa last night.

Answering questions about when great players should retire, the blunt Australian said cricketers should call it a day when fans ask, "why" and not "when".

He pointed out that another great batsman of this era Brian Lara had announced his retirement. So had two of Australia's greatest bowlers Shane Warne and Glenn McGrath, both of whom had still a great deal of cricket left in them.

In Chappell's view, great batsmen should not be seen struggling to make runs or great bowlers struggling to take wickets in the autumn of their career.

In a newspaper column last month, Chappell had written that during the last three or four years, Tendulkar had been a shadow of his former self.

It was for Tendulkar to take the call and decide his future plans, Chappell said standing by his earlier statement that if the Indian player looked into the mirror and asked if he should retire, the answer would be in the affirmative.

## No place for Inzy in Tests?

PTI, Karachi

Having recently retired from one-day cricket, Inzamam-ul Haq's future in Pakistan's Test team now looks in jeopardy with a top PCB official indicating that he would be dropped for the home series against South Africa.

The Cricket Board official said it had almost been decided in principle not to retain Inzamam in Pakistan's Test squad for the September-October series.

"The people forming the PCB think-tank are more or less convinced that Inzamam should not be a part of Pakistan's Test squad," he was quoted as saying by the 'The News' on Thursday.

The 37-year-old player, who announced his retirement from

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WATCH AND LEARN: Australia batsman Michael Clarke drives the ball perfectly through mid-off during the World Cup semifinal against South Africa at Beausejour Cricket Ground in Gros Islet on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

# 'Bring on Murali, Vaas'

AFF, Gros Islet



Australia captain Ricky Ponting insists his world champions are ready to face down Sri Lanka's vet-official indicating that he would be dropped for the home series against South Africa.

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The 37-year-old player, who announced his retirement from

wicket win over South Africa.

"There's no doubt Sri Lanka are a good team, but we are very confident after what we've done in the last seven weeks. Winning games with big margins gives us a lot of confidence."

"I think we executed our gameplan very well the last time we played them. They had their full batting line-up and we bowled them out."

"We know Murali will do what he does. Lasith Malinga is bowling well and Vaas is a good bowler with the new ball."

Australia have won all of their 10 matches so far in the Caribbean and are unbeaten in their last 28 Cup matches, a run stretching back to the 1999 tournament in England.

Saturday's showdown in Barbados will be a repeat of the 1996 final when the islanders beat Mark Taylor's Australians by seven wickets in Lahore.

Ponting's confidence is further

boosted by the manner of Australia's win over South Africa.

Proteas skipper Graeme Smith won the toss, chose to bat but inside 10 overs his team were 27-5 before they were finally bowled out for just 149.

The Australia skipper hailed it as the best performance so far, but believes they can top it in the final.

"We are not saying we are unbeatable. We certainly can be beaten if we don't do things well," said Ponting.

"No doubt it was our best performance of the tournament today (Wednesday) and getting them out for that total was definitely our best."

"South Africa are a very good team, and we think we have got some improvements to come. But when the bigger games come, the Australian team stands up. We did that and I hope we will do it in the final."

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## Clarke excites Buchanan

PTI, Melbourne

Australian coach John Buchanan has tipped upcoming young batsman Michael Clarke to become captain after Ricky Ponting's time was up if he made right choices in that direction.

Buchanan, who has worked with Steve Waugh and Ricky Ponting in his eight years as the team's coach, said Clarke, nicknamed "Pup", could be the top dog once Ponting's time was up.

"I see him growing as a person. He is obviously performing pretty well on the field," Buchanan said.

Ponting, 32, probably has up to four years left, by which time Clarke should have played about 70 Test matches and 200 one-day internationals and would be ready for the most prized role in Australian sport.

The 54-year-old coach, who will guide the World Champions for one last time in the Saturday's World

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PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea midfielder Joe Cole (R) slides in the winner as Liverpool goalkeeper Jose Reina fails to save during their Champions League first-leg semifinal at Stamford Bridge in London on Wednesday.

# Chelsea take slim advantage

AFF, London



Joe Cole scored the only goal of the game as Chelsea emerged from the first leg of their Champions League semifinal with a 1-0 advantage over Liverpool to take to Anfield.

After generating enough chances to put the tie beyond doubt, particularly in a first-half they comfortably dominated, Jose Mourinho's side were put under sufficient pressure after the break for Liverpool to head home believing they can turn things around in front of their own supporters.

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho praised his players especially for their first-half display, though, he regretted them not taking a greater advantage into the half-time break.

However, Mourinho returned to his present pet subject of Chelsea not being awarded penalties and was incensed that referee Markus Merk had not given one in the first-half against Alvaro Arbeloa for handball, though, he was clearly outside the box when the alleged

offence took place.

"I don't understand why we don't have penalties," said the Portuguese.

"I just feel and I know for a fact and I don't think anybody can say it wasn't a penalty."

"I don't know why."

Mourinho's counterpart Rafa Benitez said he was happier with the second half performance as he saw his side slide to their first defeat in five Champions League matches between the two sides.

"The game was made up of two different parts," said the ever-cagey Spaniard.

"The first-half we were not controlling it at all but the second a little bit better."

"In the second leg we have to be mindful that Chelsea like to counterattack."

"We just need to score one goal in the second leg and if we can score two like we did in the Premiership against them then we can win."

"Why was I on the touchline in the first-half? Because we were giving the ball away, we needed to be a bit more compact and were doing foolish things in the first-half."

Cole's 29th-minute winner, a close-range effort created by Didier

Drogba's power-packed run and astute pass, was a fine goal.

Drogba's well-established capacity for ruffling the composure of the Liverpool defence was underlined as early as the eighth minute, the Ivory Coast striker's knockdown from Ashley Cole's cross teeing up Frank Lampard on the penalty spot.

The England midfielder managed to get his foot over the bouncing ball but his shot was too straight and Jose Reina was able to make a good block.

A minute later, Andriy Shevchenko curled a shot narrowly over the angle of post and bar and Liverpool were relieved again when Drogba failed to pick out an unmarked Joe Cole in the middle after John Arne Riise's slack back pass had sent him sprinting clear through the inside right channel.

Twenty minutes had elapsed before Liverpool managed to muster a shot on the Chelsea goal, Bolo Zenden's wayward effort only adding to the frustration of the increasingly agitated Rafael Benitez on the touchline.

Dirk Kuyt finally gave Petr Cech something to do shortly afterwards, although a kindly deflection off Ricardo Carvalho ensured his

header flew straight to the midriff of the Czech goalkeeper.

Chelsea were soon threatening again and, after Drogba had failed to connect with Joe Cole's inviting cross, Lampard sent a 25-yard free-kick fizzing inches outside the base of Reina's right-hand post.

The pressure finally told in the 29th minute as Chelsea took the lead with a move launched by Carvalho on the edge of his own area.

The Portuguese carried the ball out to the edge of the centre circle before spreading the ball wide to Drogba, who muscled past Daniel Agger and advanced into the area before pulling the ball back behind Jamie Carragher.

Cutting in from the opposite flank at pace, Joe Cole was able to get in front of Alvaro Arbeloa and finish the move with the most straightforward of finishes from eight yards out.

"We'll see the importance next week," said Cole of his effort.

"Disappointed not to go in with more goals at half-time."

"Fatigue set in in the second-half but it was a good battling performance."

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