

## FINAL: AUSTRALIA V SRI LANKA

# SL playing for the world

AFP, Bridgetown



Sri Lanka have the chance to prove that international cricket is not simply a case of Australia and the rest

when they face the double-defending champions in Saturday's World Cup final here at Kensington Oval.

Such has been Australia's overwhelming dominance in the Caribbean during their quest for a third straight World Cup title and fourth overall, that West Indies great Vivian Richards, when asked about the best way to beat them earlier this month, suggested "food poisoning".

It is not difficult to see why Ricky Ponting's men, unbeaten in 28 World Cup matches, are such strong favourites to extend their run.

With opener Matthew Hayden, who tops the tournament list of run-scorers with 621 at an average of nearly 78, and Ponting, third in the standings with 502 at just under 72, Australia have a powerful batting line-up where a once challenging score of 300 is now regarded as the bare minimum if they bat first.

Meanwhile, Australia's attack, with the exception of an over-reduced clash against Bangladesh, have bowled out

every opponent in the West Indies. Three of the tournament's five leading bowlers are Australians with veteran quick Glenn McGrath, who retires after Saturday's match, leading the way.

The 37-year-old has 25 wickets — a record for a single World Cup — while spearhead quick Shaun Tait is joint-second with 23 and left-arm wrist spinner Brad Hogg third with 20.

It is that combination of variety and excellence which makes batting against Australia so challenging and that's without considering impressive left-arm quick Nathan Bracken.

When the finalists met recently in the Super Eights in Grenada much was made of Sri Lanka's decision to rest bowlers Chaminda Vaas and Muttiah Muralidaran, two survivors from the side that beat Australia in the 1996 final.

With unorthodox quick Lasith Malinga, who has yet to play a one-day against Australia, injured for

that game, it looked as if Sri Lanka had hidden their three strike bowlers from Ponting's team.

But the fact Australia dismissed a full-strength Sri Lankan batting line-up for 226 that day may be just as significant.

"I thought they had a chance to make a bit of a statement against us and they chose not to by resting three of their best bowlers," Ponting said.

"But they had their full complement of batsmen in and we bowled them out for 226. We just have to pick them to pieces again."

And Ponting even said the likely pitch conditions on Saturday would favour Australia.

"The wicket in Bridgetown, if it has some pace and bounce as it has in some other games, it should suit us beautifully."

But Australia, like any side, are vulnerable to individual brilliance and Sri Lanka are a team overflowing with flair.

As Malinga showed in his comeback match against New Zealand in the semifinal, he can combine sheer speed with excellent accuracy — a combination the Australia top order have yet to face this tournament.

Tait, while an exciting wicket-taker, can be wayward and any short-pitched deliveries could be seized on by experienced opener Sanath Jayasuriya.

And as Upul Tharanga (73) and



CAN'T SHARE THIS: Australia captain Ricky Ponting (L) and his Sri Lankan counterpart Mahela Jayawardene pose with the World Cup trophy at the Needham's Point beach in Bridgetown on Thursday. PHOTO: AFP

### HEAD TO HEAD

Australia v Sri Lanka World Cup head-to-head record ahead of the World Cup final at Kensington Oval here on Saturday:  
Total World Cup meetings: 7  
Australia wins: 5  
Sri Lanka wins: 2  
Tied: 0  
No result: 0

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### Arjuna Ranatunga

(Sri Lanka's World Cup winning captain)

"He is a sharp-shooter who can take wickets with both new and old ball. He has really added edge to the bowling attack."

On Lasith Malinga.

## Slings take stage

AFP, Bridgetown



They're the youngest slingers in town, but Shaun Tait and La-sith Malinga know that Saturday's World Cup final shootout can produce only one winner.

Malinga has never played a one-day against Tait's Australians.

But if the defending champions want information on how dangerous the Sri Lankan fast bowler can be, all they have to do is ask South Africa.

The Proteas had been starting the celebrations when, after four incredible deliveries, they turned to find themselves in deep trouble in a World Cup Super Eights game against Sri Lanka last month.

The cause of their unexpected pain was Malinga, the bleach-blond paceman with the distinctive, low-

slung round-arm action and eyebrow ring who grabbed four wickets off successive balls to almost engineer an unlikely victory in Guyana.

On Saturday, he will meet Tait, the Australian tyro with his own slinging brand of delivery who has defied the sceptics at the World Cup by taking 23 wickets.

Malinga is 23 and Tait 24.

But both have been troubling batsmen with their pace and variations on their maiden Cup appearance. They are the second-highest wicket-takers in their respective sides.

The Sri Lankan has already made history when he became the first bowler in one-dayers to take four wickets off consecutive balls in that clash in Guyana.

South Africa looked set to complete a formality when they were 206-5 chasing a 210-run target before slipping to 207-9 and eventually winning the match by just one wicket.

Sri Lanka coach Tom Moody

believes that facing Malinga in the nets would help his batsmen prepare against Tait.

"They might find adjusting to Tait's line and trajectory a little bit easier given they are used to facing Malinga in the nets," said Moody, a World Cup winner as a player with Australia.

Tait has so far grabbed 23 wickets in 10 matches, behind only veteran paceman Glenn McGrath (25).

He may be sometimes expensive and sending down more wides than expected, but his captain is not complaining.

"Whenever I called on him to get us a wicket he's done that. He's still finding his feet in international cricket, but he has been a wicket-taker in middle overs. He has been very impressive," said Ricky Ponting.

The South Africans were the latest to face the fury of Tait, who captured four wickets to set up his team's emphatic seven-wicket

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## Eleven reasons...

AFP, New Delhi

Australia are the favourites to win another World Cup title on Saturday.

But here eleven reasons — some serious, some not — are listed as to why Sri Lanka must defeat the Aussies in the final, a feat they achieved 11 years ago in cricket's showpiece event:

- To justify the International Cricket Council's insistence on having a 51-match, 47-day marathon when they could have chosen the easier option — hand the trophy to Australia at the start itself.

- To provide a grand finale to the least-watched cricket World Cup in history. TV viewership dropped nearly 40 percent compared to the 2003 edition, according to industry estimates.

- To delight the rest of the cricket world and billions of passionate fans from Kingston to Karachi and Manchester to Mumbai who support Sri Lanka.

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## Mahela's time

AFP, Bridgetown



When Mahela Jayawardene played his last World Cup match in 2003, he never thought that four years later he would be aiming to become the first captain to stop the Australian juggernaut.

The Sri Lankan had a nightmare tournament in South Africa and his future as a one-day batsman looked uncertain after he scored 21 runs in seven Cup innings, failing to reach the double-figures even once.

That he resurrected his career and became an integral part of the team in the coming years was a tribute to his mental toughness. His biggest test comes when his side clash with a formidable Australia in the 2007 World Cup final here on Saturday.

Jayawardene is trying to do what

only one Sri Lankan captain has so far done in the history of the tournament. Arjuna Ranatunga remains the only one who succeeded in stopping Australia when his side won the 1996 title at Lahore.

The task is not easy because many captains have failed to taste success against Ricky Ponting's Aussies, including South African Graeme Smith, New Zealand's Stephen Fleming and England's Michael Vaughan.

But Jayawardene remains optimistic.

"To win the Cup, you have to beat the best. We've been prepar-

ing for that day for some time. The '96 guys changed the face of Sri Lankan cricket. They paved the way for us."

It was Ranatunga who played a key role in changing the face of Sri Lankan cricket with his aggressive and intelligent captaincy. He backed and inspired his players to perform big deeds.

Jayawardene may not be as aggressive a captain as Ranatunga, but is second to none when it comes to tactics. He is a shrewd reader of the game and quick

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### What to WATCH

#### BTV & SET Max

ICC World Cup 2007 (Final)  
Australia v Sri Lanka  
Live at 7:30 pm

#### ESPN

English Premier Football League  
Everton v Man United  
Live at 5:40 pm  
Wigan v Man United  
Live at 7:55 pm  
Primera Liga  
Valencia v Recreativo De Huelva  
Live at 1:55 am (Sunday)

#### STAR Sports

English Premier Football League  
Chelsea v Bolton Wanderers  
Live at 5:40 pm

### DAY'S EVENT

#### B.League

Ctg Mohammedan v Brothers Union (3:45 pm)  
Venue: M A Aziz Stadium, Chittagong  
Mohammedan v Farashganj (4:00 pm)  
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

## Murali hopes for war wounds

AFP, Bridgetown



Muttiah Muralidaran hopes that a Sri Lanka victory in Saturday's World Cup final against Australia can help heal the war wounds of his strife-torn country.

The star off-spinner, one of three survivors from the team that beat Australia in the 1996 final, said a victory would be a timely boost as violence on the island escalates between government troops and Tamil Tiger rebels.

Muralidaran, who has taken 23 wickets at this tournament compared to his seven in 1996, said: "It helps all the country rather than anything else. We have all nationalities in our team and peace as well because we get together and play."

"We are going through a bad situation in our country but this could achieve something different."

During Sri Lanka's semifinal win against New Zealand in Jamaica on Tuesday, there was a temporary ceasefire in Sri Lanka and no attacks were reported on either side.

The hope is that Saturday's final will also see a suspension of hostilities with the island, despite the time difference, set to come to a standstill as fans gather round TV sets and radios to follow their heroes' progress.

Sri Lanka's cricket team has been hailed as an example of how

religious and racial differences can be put to one side for a common purpose in the ethnically divided country.

Murali himself is a Tamil Hindu, opening batsman Sanath Jayasuriya a Sinhala Buddhist, pace bowler Farveez Mahroof a Muslim, batsman Russel Arnold a Tamil Catholic and left-arm quick Chaminda Vaas a Sinhala Catholic.

Rebels in Sri Lanka have been fighting for a separate state for the Tamil minority in a bloody war that has claimed more than 60,000 lives since 1972.

Meanwhile, the 35-year-old Muralidaran also believes victory on Saturday would cap his stunning and colourful career.

"This will be the biggest moment in my life," Murali said.



Sri Lanka master spinner Muttiah Muralidaran is on his delivery stride during a practice session in Bridgetown on Thursday ahead of their World Cup final against Australia. PHOTO: AFP

## Prayers in earnest

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka is agog with World Cup fever with even Buddhist monks, Hindu and Catholic priests and Muslim clerics rallying to seek spiritual support for the home team.

Multi-religious ceremonies of all faiths have become common ever since Sri Lanka romped to Saturday's final against world champions Australia in Barbados.

The local governing body of the sport, Sri Lanka Cricket, held its own multi-faith service to bless the team.

"It is about the power of the mind," said Buddhist monk Delduwe Gnanasumana, Sri Lanka Cricket's regular spiritual guru who blessed the cricketers before they left for the World Cup.

Gnanasumana says his concept of "Viswa Shakthi," or the power of the universe, should help the Sri Lankans with powers of concentration, determination and courage to

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"I had moments in 1996, I was very young and I didn't know much about it. Now I know about what it takes to win a World Cup."

"This may be my last World Cup so if we can win it will be the greatest moment in my life rather than my individual records," added Muralidaran who is set to line up alongside fellow 1996 winners Jayasuriya and Vaas at Kensington Oval here Saturday.

However, the entire team face a daunting task if they are to stop Australia, unbeaten at the World Cup since 1999, from winning a third straight title but Murali said the team's batsmen could hold the key to success.

"We have batsmen of the calibre of Jayasuriya, (Mahela) Jayawardene, (Kumar) Sangakkara, and (Upul) Tharanga," he said.

"If they click, the way we played in England, we had total domination (Sri Lanka whitewashed their hosts 5-0 in a one-day series last year) and I only played in two matches."

"If our batsmen get set we will be more dangerous than any other team in the world because we can play more shots than any other players."

And he said Sri Lanka's professional pride was just as strong as Australia's.

"We have to win, that's the motivation. If you want to keep your job, you have to perform," Murali, closing in on Wasim Akram's record of 502 one-day wickets, said.