

FIRST SEMIFINAL

Afridi, Vettori hold key

CRICINFO, undated

This is a clash of Pakistan flair versus Kiwi functionality. Although New Zealand have again more than held their own, they owe their passage to the semi-finals on India, after their 37-run win against South Africa dumped the home side out on net run-rate and allowed Daniel Vettori's side to sneak in.

"I didn't actually watch any of it," said Vettori. "I was trying to avoid it as much as possible because we knew what it was going to be like. In the end it was a little bit tense and there was relief from the guys."

Pakistan have reached the last four playing their typically blend of aggressive cricket, despite a stuttering display against Bangladesh, under the guidance of their new coach Geoff Lawson. Some of the permutations for the final are mouth-watering; a Trans-Tasman clash, a replay of the 1999 World Cup final, or the ultimate match-up, an India-Pakistan showdown.

Pakistan's top order has failed to fire throughout the tournament; their first four matches brought scores of 50 for 3, 47 for 4, 33 for 3 and 46 for 4 before the middle order led recover-

Pakistan's attack is packed with variety. Afridi has bagged the wickets,

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Wicketkeeper Dinesh Karthik hugs India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni (L) as Harbhajan Singh joins them after they beat South Africa in their crucial Super Eights tie in the ICC Twenty20 World Championships at Kingsmead in Durban on Thursday.

SECOND SEMIFINAL

Big guns ready

AFP, Durban

 Captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni and key batsman Yuvraj Singh will play in Saturday's Twenty20 semifinal against Australia after recovering from injuries.

Yuvraj missed Thursday's crucial encounter against South Africa due to tendonitis in his left elbow sustained against England the previous day in which he hit Stuart Broad for six sixes in an over.

Dhoni, suffering back pain, handed the wicket-keeping gloves to Dinesh Karthik in the 37-run win over South Africa which propelled India to the top of group E in the Super Eights round.

"I am still smiling so I will hopefully play the next match," said Dhoni.

"It was just a strain in the lower back, on the right hand side. I had the luxury of having Karthik in the side, who is a specialist keeper.

"I did not want to aggravate the injury. I think hopefully it will be fine before the semifinal."

Dhoni said Yuvraj also will be fit against the formidable Australians, adding the left-hander was rested against South Africa as a precautionary measure.

"Yuvji had a bit of a problem with his elbow but he should be ready for the next match as well," the Indian captain said.

"It was decided to leave out Yuvji at the last moment. We wanted to assess his condition and see what exactly the situation was. We wanted to save him for the rest of the season."

"There is no point playing someone who is not fit just for the sake of the team, because throughout the year we play cricket."

An inspired India, restricted to 153-5 in a game they had to win to stay afloat, hit back to stop South Africa to 116-9 in a rousing finish at the Kingsmead on Thursday night.

India, South Africa and New Zealand finished group E of the Super Eights on four points each, but India took the Kiwis along into the semifinals due to superior net run-rates.

While India await Australia at the Kingsmead here on Saturday night, New Zealand meet group F leaders Pakistan at the Newlands in Cape Town the same afternoon.

Left-arm seamer Rudra Pratap Singh led India's charge with 4-13 from his four overs while Shanthakumaran Sreesanth and Harbhajan Singh claimed two wickets each.

India, who elected to bat after winning the toss, were struggling on 61-4 before Rohit Sharma hit 50 and skipper Mahendra Dhoni 45 to turn the innings around with a stand of 85.

Dhoni said his team's display against the South Africans gave him hope for the semifinal.

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Ashraful admits mistakes

SPORTS REPORTER

 Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraful said careless mistakes have dashed his side's hopes of playing in the semifinals of the ICC World Twenty20 Championship in South Africa.

The Tigers lost their final Super Eights game, which only had an academic interest for both the teams, against Pakistan by four wickets on Thursday in Cape Town to complete their bittersweet journey of the inaugural event.

Bangladesh will return home on Sunday.

Ashraful's men fulfilled their pre-tournament target of reaching in the second round with a six-wicket victory over West Indies, their first success against the Caribbean in any form of the game, but they could have hardly justified their berth and rather gave the impression that it was a flash in the pan.

"I think we made small mistakes here and there and that probably cost

us a place in the semifinals. This has been a great education for all the boys and everyone has learnt something," the Tigers skipper was quoted as saying in TigerCricket.com.

Bangladesh lost all three of their Super Eights matches besides the last Group A game against South Africa, mainly because of their same old thick-headed batting and that was the reason the 23-year old skipper, who for another occasion showed inconsistency, highlighted his team's bowling when asked to comment on the positives from the competition.

The only high point in the end was the batting of young left-handed opener Zunaed Siddique, who spent most of his time on the bench because of poor planning by the team management despite the fact that the opening pair didn't click, who took the opportunity on debut with a 49-ball 71 which brought him the man-of-the-match award.

"The bowling has been superb. Special mention should go to (Abdur) Razzaq, (Syed) Rasel and Shakib (Al Hasan). (Mahmudullah)

Riyad played the last two games and bowled really well. Aftab (Ahmed) was the most consistent scorer for us. I must also thank Zunaed (Siddique) for an outstanding innings. Nazimuddin was brilliant in the lead up matches but was unlucky here," he explained.

No doubt the performance of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was the most frustrating episode for him as the deputy agonisingly failed to serve the side although the Bangladesh skipper had considered him as the 'trump card'.

Ashraful however was mainly disappointed for the lost opportunities in the tournament and he believed that his side could have finished the tournament with a win.

"I felt we had a chance (against Pakistan). The wicket was not easy to bat on, especially against the spinners. We had three slow bowlers and if Riyad had taken the Imran Nazir's catch with 25-odd to get, then anything could have happened. We also missed opportunities against South Africa and

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"It has come as an enormous surprise to all the players.

"In the past few weeks the coach was unhappy because of our bad results but we were all working together towards a solution."

According to several reports Chelsea's top striker Didier Drogba is "furious and upset" at Mourinho's exit.

If true, it could alert a number of top clubs who are already interested in the Ivoirian striker, Chelsea's top scorer last year with 33 goals.

Mourinho meanwhile insisted he was looking forward to returning to football, telling The Times: "I am waiting for the phone calls.

"I want to enjoy my life but I want to work."

The Portuguese coach has agreed a contract settlement with Chelsea thought to be worth around

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SA Games budget a concern

SPORTS REPORTER

The authority seemed to be a bit worried about the huge budget of hosting the 11th South Asian Games in Dhaka next year.

While attending the Bangladesh Special Olympics team's farewell party at BKSP yesterday, Sports Adviser Tapan Chowdhury told reporters that they were thinking about the budget.

"We are under financial pressure, so we have to think seriously about the estimated budget of Tk 126-crore for the SA Games because we have to give subsidy to different sectors, especially after the recent flood situation," he said.

"We have to think about the everyday necessities of people. But it doesn't mean that we are not concerned about sports."

While replying to a question, the sports adviser, however, mentioned that they were not yet considering deferring the Games.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

Enamul Hossain Rajib won his second match in the VI Asian Individual Chess Championships in Cebu City, Philippines.

In the third round yesterday, the Bangladesh International Master defeated Balagan Bayaramanah of Mongolia to increase his collection to two points in the qualifying event for the World Cup Chess Championships.

GM Wang Hao of China, Indonesian GM Susanto Megarana and IM GN Gopal of India were leading the table with maximum three points.

Rajib will face local IM Richard Bitton in today's fourth round clash.

DIV 3 SOCCER

PWD and Lalbagh SC recorded comfortable and identical 3-1 wins in the Third Division Football League at the Outer Stadium.

Kader scored a brace after

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They remain chokers

AFP, Durban

 One word -- guaranteed not to have been uttered by anyone in the South Africa team -- haunted their entire innings. No prize for guessing that word was "choke". Going in to this match today, South Africa were the only unbeaten team in the tournament, and it counted for nothing. It almost seemed make the result all the more inevitable.

"Choke" was almost the first word of the end-of-match press conference, and it elicited an embittered response from Graeme Smith, who sniped at the South African journalist: "I guess I expected that question from you," before conceding, "I guess we do find ways to get out of these tournaments... It's very disappointing knowing you've lost only one game in the tournament and you're out... That does seem a little bit weird."

It shouldn't feel too weird to three members of the team. Herschelle Gibbs, Mark Boucher and Shaun Pollock were there at Edgbaston in 1999, and at Headingly one match earlier, when Steve Waugh dryly told Gibbs that he'd just dropped the World Cup.

Gibbs's urge to celebrate catching Waugh was premature -- he never had the ball under control -- setting off the chain of events that culminated in that infamous run-out muddle involving Lance Klusener and Allan Donald. The match was tied, and South Africa, from a position of strength, had succumbed to a side that had needed to win every one of their remaining games to stay in the tournament.

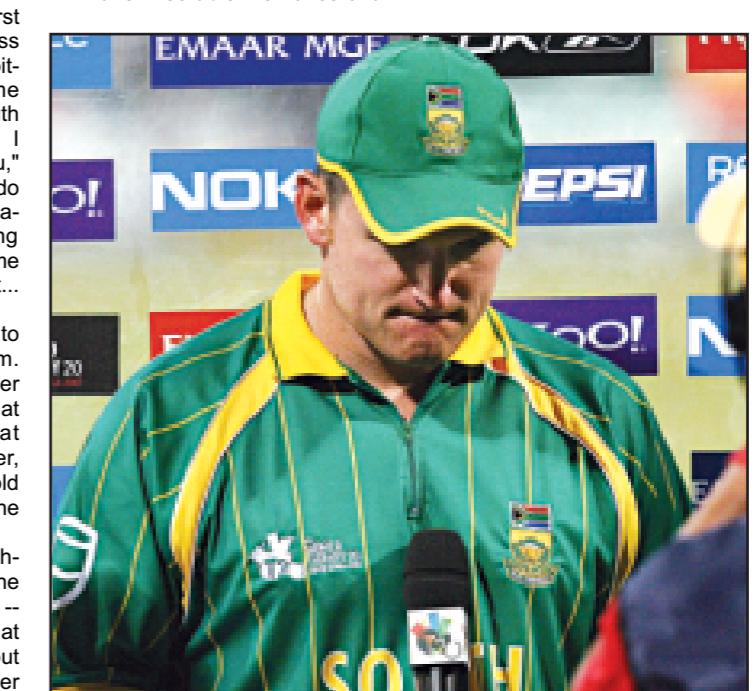
The same trio were there -- as well as Smith, de Villiers and Kemp -- when Australia humiliated South Africa at the 2007 World Cup semi in St Lucia. That game was never South Africa's: they had been psych'd out before play began, and there was no way back from 27 for 5.

Unhappily for South Africa, the litany goes on. At Durban in the

September night in Colombo.

"When you lose like that it's really difficult to make excuses," mulled Smith at Kingsmead tonight. "As a team we've got to take these losses and try to come back better people. Yeah, it was disappointing."

Smith kept coming back to the word "disappointing". There might have been another, uglier word at the back of his mind. He couldn't say it: it would have caught in his throat.



PICTURE TELLS THE STORY: South Africa captain Graeme Smith looks crestfallen as he waits for the presentation ceremony to begin after his side lost to India in a crucial Super Eights tie in the ICC Twenty20 World Championships at Kingsmead in Durban on Thursday.

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TODAY'S MATCHES

| Teams | Time | Venue |
|------------------------|---------|-----------|
| New Zealand v Pakistan | 5:00pm | Cape Town |
| India v Australia | 10:00pm | Durban |

AD

Community rues Jose exit

Football

AGENCIES, London

Big-spending Chelsea could face a player backlash following the shock departure of controversial but popular coach Jose Mourinho.

The Portuguese coach sensationally left Stamford Bridge on Thursday by "mutual consent" after the club revealed there had been a "breakdown" in his relationship with the Chelsea hierarchy.

But Mourinho's influence is still huge at the English Premier League club, which attracted many top players because of Mourinho's reputation as a professional with a track record for winning.

His exit has left many players shocked ahead of this weekend's clash with champions Manchester United, ahead of which former Israel

coach Avram Grant has been appointed as first team coach.

Defender Ricardo Carvalho, who arrived from FC Porto where he won the Champions League under Mourinho, was shocked and sad, and expressed his belief that the former manager was unsurpassed as a coach.

Carvalho said: "It is a very sad day for me and the team. I had a big offer from Real Madrid but I stayed at Chelsea because of Mourinho."

He added in the The Daily Mail: "For me there is no doubt, Jose Mourinho is the best coach in the world and I cannot believe that we have lost him."

"I never thought he would leave Chelsea without finishing his work, without achieving everything he wanted to."

The Portuguese coach has agreed a contract settlement with Chelsea thought to be worth around

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Chelsea fans gather outside their home ground Stamford Bridge in London on Thursday protesting Jose Mourinho's resignation as Chelsea's manager.

PHOTO: AFP