

Aus odds-on favourites

Grand final against New Zealand today

AFP, Johannesburg

New Zealand will adopt a familiar role of underdogs when they confront title-holders and hot favourites Australia today in the ICC Champions Trophy final.

Form and tradition are stacked against the 'Black Caps', but that will not concern skipper Daniel Vettori and his warriors ahead of the 50-over-a-side contest for a record two-million-dollar first prize in Centurion.

While New Zealand once again boxed well above their middleweight status to oust Pakistan by five wickets in the semifinals, the match never scaled the heights of 24 hours earlier when Australia crushed England by nine wickets.

The 247-run Australian batting masterclass starring unbeaten Shane Watson and skipper Ricky Ponting surpassed the totals of Pakistan or New Zealand and sent a chilling message.

Australia have long been a Champions Trophy bogey team for their neighbours across the Tasman sea, winning the three previous meetings in the mini-World Cup with something to spare.

The victory margin was 164 runs seven years ago in Sri Lanka, seven wickets in

England in 2004 and 34 runs in India three years ago when the tournament was last staged.

Not that records will concern Ponting, who passed the 12,000 ODI run mark in the rout of England and lies third behind a cricketer he admires so much, Indian Sachin Tendulkar, and Sri Lankan Sanath Jayasuriya.

The 34-year-old Tasmanian is a team man first and last and says he will reflect on personal achievements in a game he has graced for a decade and a half only when father time decides the bat must give way to a rocking chair.

"Respect every ball," Ponting warned his teammates ahead of the England slaughter and it will be no different against New Zealand at SuperSport Park just off the Johannesburg-to-Pretoria highway.

While resurgent Watson beamed after his 136 runs against England, the facial reactions of Ponting did not portray a man who had struck 111 and featured in a record Australian one-day stand.

It was great torturing old enemy England, but the mission was incomplete. Winning finals is what counts in the hyper-combative world of Ricky Thomas Ponting and he has two World Cups and a Champions Trophy to boast of.

Vettori is a great captain, too, and after

a timid surrender to South Africa his team upset Sri Lanka by 38 runs, England by four wickets and Pakistan to reach their second final having beaten India in the 2000 Nairobi climax.

What the 'Black Caps' deliver is often far more than the sum of their parts and reached the final despite losing bowlers Daryl Tuffey and Jacob Oram and batsman Jesse Ryder to injury.

Australia had to reshuffle their pack as well after vice-captain Michael Clarke and star bowler Nathan Bracken caught the injury bug, but those left appear to have another all-round strength to celebrate tonight.

TEAMS

AUSTRALIA (from): Ricky Ponting (captain), Doug Bollinger, Callum Ferguson, Nathan Hauritz, Ben Hilfenhaus, James Hopes, David Hussey, Michael Hussey, Mitchell Johnson, Brett Lee, Tim Paine, Peter Siddle, Adam Voges, Shane Watson, Cameron White.

NEW ZEALAND (from): Daniel Vettori (captain), Neil Broom, Iain O'Brien, Shane Bond, Ian Butler, Brendon McCullum, Brendon Diamanti, Grant Elliott, James Franklin, Martin Guptill, Gareth Hopkins, Kyle Mills, Jeetan Patel, Aaron Redmond, Ross Taylor.



WHO'S GOING TO HOLD IT TONIGHT? New Zealand captain Daniel Vettori (L) and his Australian counterpart Ricky Ponting pose with the Champions Trophy at SuperSport Park in Centurion yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

LOCAL SNIPS

SPORTS REPORTER



Did U Know?

A Formula One driver tends to lose weight due to dehydration in a race in the hot weather. He can lose up to 1.5 liters of water from his body.



Barack Obama

(US President)

"I do want to congratulate Rio de Janeiro and the nation of Brazil for winning the 2016 Olympics. I think this is a truly historic event as these will be the first Olympic Games ever to be held in South America."



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STAR Sports

English Premier League Aston Villa v Man City Live from 2:00am (Tuesday)



Day 3 rained off in Pune

SPORTS REPORTER

No play was possible on the third day of the 4-day match between Bangladesh A and hosts Maharashtra Cricket Association due to rain at the Poona Club Limited ground in Pune on Sunday. Bangladesh A were in a precarious position at the end of day two as the hosts were leading by 280 runs with nine second-innings wickets remaining.

Lee targets 400 double

CRICINFO, undated

Brett Lee has set his sights on regaining his Test spot and becoming the first Australian bowler to take 400 wickets in both major forms of the game. In his last ten ODIs, Lee has taken 16 wickets to move to 321 overall and he felt the form was good enough to merit a recall to the Test side.

Lee was forced to sit out all five Ashes Tests with a side strain but made a comeback on the one-day leg of the England tour, saving his best performance of 5 for 49 in the series-winning match. When Lee takes the field on Monday for the ICC Champions Trophy final it will be his 11th ODI in a month and he felt it was the way forward in accomplishing his goals.

"I'd like to be the first Australian ever to take 400 one-day and 400 Test wickets, that to me is a milestone that 10 or 12 years ago I would never have dreamed about," he told AAP. "To think that one day you might be a chance -- might, I say -- because it's going to take a lot more hard work ... it is certainly not off the limits if I play a couple of years of good cricket."

After the performances of Peter Siddle and Ben Hilfenhaus during the Ashes, along with the presence of Mitchell Johnson, Lee is facing a challenge to resume his Test career but it is one he relishes. Stuck on 310 Test wickets having missed Australia's last nine games, Lee said he wanted the ball back. "I see this next

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Russel crush Farashganj

Beanibazar win group

SPORTS REPORTER

What to WATCH

Citycell Federation Cup '09

Newcomers Beanibazar SC and Sheikh Russel KC both moved into the quarterfinals of the Citycell Federation Cup after their respective Group C matches at Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Sheikh Russel handed an easy 3-0 defeat to 10-man Farashganj SC to put a goalless draw against Bangladesh Army to emerge as group champions.

Mohammad Yousuf struck twice after Mobarak Hossain opened the account for Sheikh Russel, who earlier beat Bangladesh Army in 8-1 goals.

Knowing well that Beanibazar would play the quarterfinals as the group champions, Sheikh Russel went into the game with a must-

win-situation as Bangladesh Army finished with four points from three outings.

The new powerhouse didn't waste too much time to go ahead as winger Mobarak drove past Farashganj goalkeeper Titumir Chowdhury in the 19th minute after his first attempt came off the post.

Then a header from Ripon unsettled the Farashganj backline and Mohammad Rony, who struck the tournament's first hattrick against Army, got into a great position but failed to beat the goalkeeper at the half-hour mark.

Five minutes later Sheikh Russel doubled the lead when Yousuf headed a right-side Abdullah Parvez Chowdhury cross home to go into the breather with a comfortable 2-0 lead.

Farashganj had their first shot on the target five minutes into the second half when national midfielder Mezbabol Haq Manik forced goal

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Now officials go 'missing'

SPORTS REPORTER

Three officials of the Bangladesh Boxing Federation were reported to have gone 'missing' in Italy as they yet to come back home, four days after their scheduled return home after joining a world boxing seminar in Milan.

Two of the missing are BBF executive committee members Syed Mohiuddin and Abdur Razzak and another is judge Awlad Hossain.

This is a unique incident in the country's sports as for the first time sports officials have reportedly gone missing on foreign soil while there had been countless incidents where players fled sports camps or villages while taking part in sports events.

BBF treasurer Jahir Chowdhury said that the federation would wait for another month for those three 'missing' officials to return as

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Collingwood in buttock niggle

CRICINFO, undated

Paul Collingwood could miss the Delhi Daredevils' campaign in the inaugural Champions League Twenty20 after the England batsman picked up a buttock injury during the semifinal defeat against Australia in the ICC Champions Trophy. He will undergo a medical check-up when he returns to England from South Africa.

"We have a contract with the IPL about making our players available, however Collingwood has picked up a

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Nathan played thru' pain

CRICINFO, undated

Nathan Bracken, the Australian medium-pacer, has said the knee injury that forced him to return home before the start of Australia's ICC Champions Trophy defence in South Africa had reached a stage where he "couldn't go on any more". He felt it had strained his bowling and hoped that surgery would allow him to bowl more freely in the future.

"I've played in pain since January 2007," Bracken told the Sun-Herald. "From the first day I reported to Cricket Australia I had pain in my knee, I haven't played in a game without pain ... it has reached the point where, physically, I can't go on any more. I couldn't guarantee my captain I could finish the series or even a game for that matter."

"It reached the point that when I went off the field during a drinks break I couldn't put weight on my legs to go up and down the stairs. Yet, I needed to bowl my three remaining overs. On that, the advice was for me to come home and get it fixed."

Bracken said there were aspects of his bowling that were affected by the problem. "I lost a

Ponting happy with form

INTERNET, undated

Australia captain Ricky Ponting believes the Champions Trophy holders have peaked for the defence of their title on Monday.

Ponting's team continued their domination over England with a crushing nine-wicket victory in Friday's semifinal at Centurion. It was Australia's seventh win against England in eight attempts and means they head into the showpiece match in fine touch.

"At the start of the England series we were talking about being well prepared for the Champions Trophy and getting into a position where we could play our best cricket," said Ponting. "To have this group of relatively young guys make it through to a final is a great achievement in itself but we won't be happy until we peak on Monday. We will need to play our best game in a month in the final."

Ponting's 28th one-day hundred for his country in the match against England also saw him become the first Australian to 12,000 runs in this format.

Without vice-captain Michael Clarke, injured alongside fellow limited-overs regular Nathan Bracken, more onus has been on Ponting to guide his young team.

"I was particularly keen to get out there," added Ponting. "When the Australian team took the field, we had a different sort of energy about us than we have had for a while. That's a really good sign."

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Beanibazar's Guinean striker Lamine Soumah (R) vies for the ball with a Bangladesh Army defender during their Citycell Federation Cup match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

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Younus rues dropped catch

AFP, Johannesburg

Pakistan captain Younus Khan has conceded that a dropped catch against New Zealand cost his team the Champions Trophy semi-final on Saturday.

The match was evenly poised when Younus dropped Grant Elliott in the covers off teenage fast bowler Mohammad Aamer in the 40th over, with the New Zealand batsman then on 42 in his team's total of 165-4.

New Zealand needed 69 to win at that stage with six wickets in hand, but Elliott steered