

India aim for history

Fourth ODI against SA today

Cricket

PTI, Port Elizabeth

Having gained a 2-1 lead after registering back-to-back victories in the last two games against the Proteas, India go into the fourth one-day here on Friday seeking to clinch their first-ever ODI series triumph on South African soil.

The Indians have never won a limited-overs series in South Africa and Mahendra Singh Dhoni and his young bravehearts will leave no stone unturned to achieve thefeat at the St. George's Park.

After not-so-impressive batting performances in the first two matches, India, riding on Yusuf Pathan's batting prowess, managed to get the better of the hosts by two wickets in the third one-day in Cape Town.

In a close encounter, Pathan was the difference between the two sides as he scored a superb 50-ball 59, including three big sixes in one over off Johan Botha to turn the tide in India's favour. He also chipped in with a wicket and a catch to bag the man of the match award.

But barring Pathan's knock in the previous game, an injury-hit India's batting line-up has not shown much teeth, with the form of the top order batsmen continuing to be a cause of worry for the team.

Sarwan gets call-up

AFP, St John's

Veteran batsman and former skipper Rammareesh Sarwan was recalled by the West Indies for the World Cup on Wednesday.

The 30-year-old was dropped from the tour of Sri Lanka last year and hasn't played for the national team since the home series against South Africa in June 2010.

Sarwan, who took over the captaincy from Brian Lara after the 2007 World Cup before being succeeded by Chris Gayle, is one of the West Indies' most experienced players having featured in 156 ODIs, scoring 5,098 runs.

Although indifferent form in 2010 meant he missed out on a central contract, he possesses a formidable record in India where the West Indies will play five of their six group games.

He has hit five fifties in the country and averages over 57 in 50-overs cricket.

The West Indies will be captained by Darren Sammy who took over from Gayle when the former skipper refused a West Indies Cricket Board contract.

Fellow rebels Dwayne Bravo and Kieron Pollard are also included in the 15-man squad for the February 19-April 2 tournament being played in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

The squad sees a debut for Andre Russell while Carlton Baugh, who hasn't played

The batting has come a cropper in all the three matches so far and the visitors managed to pull off an incredible one-run victory over South Africa in the second game mainly because of the efforts of the bowlers, especially pacer Munaf Patel.

Going into the fourth one-day, India would not only want to win the series here but also be keen to see their talented batting line-up, which has been a disappointment so far, show some character on the pacers of South Africa.

With seniors like Sachin Tendulkar, Virender Sehwag and Gautam Gambhir missing from the ranks, the youngsters, who have done well in the recent past, have not been able to cope with the conditions.

However, except in the first game, even the South Africans have not been too impressive with the bat.

In Friday's match, the likes of Yuvraj Singh, Virat Kohli and Suresh Raina, who have shown mere flashes of brilliance so far, would need to fire if the visitors hope to take an unassailable lead.

It is also high time that captain MS Dhoni produce something valuable with his bat.

Besides, Murali Vijay, who got into the side due to the absence of regular openers -- Sehwag and Gambhir -- must also score some runs to show his worth in the limited-overs format. Lack

of solid starts has put undue pressure on India's middle order.

The visitors would need to sort out this problem in Friday's game if they want to counter the home team, who are expected to play out of their skins to level the series.

South African batsmen, in the absence of veteran all-rounder Jacques Kallis, lack the required balance in the side and even as captain Graeme Smith, Hashim Amla, AB de Villiers, JP Duminy and new comer Faf du Plessis have all chipped in with runs, they simply could not make up for the lost sheen so far in the tournament.

The hosts would be required to put in a great effort in all departments of their game if they wanted to overcome a confident and spirited Indians in Friday's encounter.

TEAMS

INDIA: Mahendra Singh Dhoni (captain), Murali Vijay, Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Yuvraj Singh, Suresh Raina, Yusuf Pathan, Harbhajan Singh, Zaheer Khan, Munaf Patel, Ashish Nehra, S Sreesanth, Ishant Sharma, R Ashwin, Piyush Chawla, Parthiv Patel.

SOUTH AFRICA: Graeme Smith (captain), Hashim Amla, Johan Botha, AB de Villiers, Jean-Paul Duminy, Faf du Plessis, Imran Tahir, Colin Ingram, David Miller, Morne Morkel, Wayne Parnell, Robin Peterson, Dale Steyn, Lonwabo Tsotsobe.

Bagai to lead Canada in WC

AFP, Toronto

Wicketkeeper-batsman Ashish Bagai will lead a 15-man squad named by Cricket Canada on Thursday for the ICC Cricket World Cup 2011.

Also named in the squad are two other survivors of the Canada team from the ICC Cricket World Cup 2007, paceman Henry Osinde and all-rounder John Davison. Both Bagai and Davison also played in the 2003 edition.

The rest of the players will be playing in their first World Cup. There are as many as seven players who have come through Cricket Canada's Youth Programme. Nitish Kumar, Hiral Patel, Ruvindu Gunasekera and Parth Desai were members of the Canada U-19 squad at the ICC U-19 Cricket World Cup in 2010.

Also making debuts for Canada in a World Cup squad are Tyson Gordon, Karl Whatham, Balaji Rao, Harvir Baidwan, Khurram Chohan, Rizwan Cheema and Amarbir Hansra.

The team leaves for a pre-tournament training camp in Dubai on 26 January 26 and will head to Bangladesh on 8 February for warm-up matches against Bangladesh and England before opening the tournament on 20 February against co-hosts Sri Lanka.

TEAM
Ashish Bagai (captain), Rizwan Cheema, Harvir Baidwan, Khurram Chohan, John Davison, Parth Desai, Tyson Gordon, Ruvindu Gunasekera, Amarbir Hansra, Nitish Kumar, Henry Osinde, Hiral Patel, Balaji Rao, Zubin Surkari, Karl Whatham.

SQUAD
Darren Sammy (captain), Adrian Barath, Carlton Baugh Jr, Suleiman Benn, Darren Bravo, Dwayne Bravo, Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Chris Gayle, Nikita Miller, Kieron Pollard, Ravi Rampaul, Kemar Roach, Andre Russell, Rammareesh Sarwan, Devon Smith.

Coach: Ottis Gibson.

Hussey's to wait longer

AFP, Melbourne

Veteran Australian batsman Mike Hussey's chances of playing at the World Cup will remain shrouded in uncertainty for at least two more weeks.

A month from Australia's first match of their defence, Hussey is battling to be fit for the showpiece event after suffering a severe hamstring injury in Sunday's six-wicket win over England at the MCG.

Hussey was this week named in Australia's 15-man squad for the tournament, which they are attempting to win for the fourth time in succession, although selectors conceded a final decision on his fitness would have to be delayed.

The Australians are banking on Hussey being available for the quarterfinals of the tournament, being held in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The last-eight ties are a month into the event.

But Australia's physiotherapist Alex

Kountouris admitted they were unsure how long it would take the left-hander to recover from surgery to reattach his damaged hamstring tendon.

The 35-year-old has returned to Western Australia.

"He will now undergo intensive rehabilitation over the coming weeks and how he progresses through this rehabilitation period will ultimately determine his return to cricket," Kountouris said.

"As this is an unusual injury in cricket we will be closely monitoring his progress and making appropriate progressions."

"As yet we have not determined a fixed time for his return to cricket training and playing. This will become clearer in the next two or three weeks."

Australian captain Ricky Ponting is also battling to be fit for the World Cup, as he recovers from a broken finger suffered during the recent Ashes Test series.

Left-arm paceman Mitchell Johnson is suffering from a throat infection and will

First phase finishes

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117-ball knock while Forhad clobbered four boundaries.

In reply, Orient were bundled out for 112 in 38.2 overs. Anhur Newaz made team highest 31.

Forhad picked up three wickets for 27 runs while Mehrab Hossain captured two for 17.

GAZITANK-CCS

Nasir Hossain kept his cool during an unbeaten knock of 41 off 48 balls after Shahriar Nafees's 48 as Gazi Tank managed an exciting one-wicket victory against CCS at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.

In reply to CCS's 174, Gazi lost their ninth wicket with 15 runs still required to win and Nasir took the charge by hitting two fours and two sixes to take his team home in 46.3 overs.

Nafees, who has been drafted into the 15-

member World Cup squad, added 48 off 88 balls that featured six boundaries.

Earlier leg-spinner Sabir Rahman and Naeem Islam claimed three wickets each as CCS were bowled out for 174.

VICTORIA-BKSP

In a low-scoring match, Victoria posted three-wicket victory against BKSP at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

Monir Hossain grabbed four wickets for 35 runs and Arsalan Meer claimed three wickets for 33 runs to wrap up the BKSP innings on 184 runs.

Shoumya Sarkar made team highest 58 off 74 balls.

In reply, Victoria rode on Myshukur Rahman's 50 to reach the target of 185 for the loss of seven wickets in 49 overs.

Habibur Rahman was the other notable

scorer with 32 runs.

7-member

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February 1.

The team comprised three boys and three girls. They are Wai Mong Marma, Delwar Hossain, Delwar Hossain, Sajal, Jhilik Chakma, Ishita Afroz and Ayesha Shultana.



Spanish world no.1 Rafael Nadal hits a powerful return during his second round singles match against Ryan Sweeting of the US on the fourth day of the Australian Open in Melbourne yesterday.

Top guns sail smoothly

AFP, Melbourne

australian open

The Grand Slam of Asia/Pacific

World number one Rafael Nadal stepped up his bid for a fourth straight Grand Slam title with a crushing win, as leading seeds Andy Murray and Robin Soderling had trouble-free passage at the Australian Open Thursday.

Nadal, chasing a non-calendar year Grand Slam, overcame American qualifier Ryan Sweeting 6-2, 6-1, 6-1 to set up an intriguing third round match with exciting Australian teenager Bernard Tomic.

While Nadal continued to march on, fourth seed Soderling again did not drop a set in disposing of Gilles Muller of Luxembourg, 6-3, 7-6, 6-1.

British fifth seed Murray

cruised past Illya Marchenko of Ukraine 6-1, 6-3, 6-3 to also progress to the last 32.

Nadal, the Spanish nine-time major winner, is satisfied with his form, saying his serve had greatly improved from his opening round encounter with Marcos Daniel.

"I think I played solid match. A few mistakes with the backhand, that's all," Nadal said. "My serve improved a lot since the first day, so I am happy with that.

"My backhand had a few more mistakes than usual and maybe I will have to play a little bit more aggressively, more inside the court. But in general I am happy."

Nadal stretched his Grand Slam winning streak to 23 matches going back to the French Open last June and taking in his victories at Wimbledon and the US Open.

He is also chasing his

second Australian Open title and 10th Grand Slam title overall. At last September's US Open he became the youngest man in the Open Era to achieve a career Grand Slam.

"I am very happy about what I have done. That's given me a lot of calmness," he said. "I have probably less pressure right now after last year's season, winning all."

Tomic, 18, will have the home crowd behind him when he takes on Nadal after he eliminated Spanish 31st seed Feliciano Lopez, 7-6, 7-6, 6-3.

The Australian teenager, who is playing with a wild-card, lines up for the biggest match of his emerging career against Nadal.

Nadal said he was also looking forward to facing Tomic in an expected night match on Rod Laver Arena

on Saturday.

Frenchman Jo-Wilfried Tsonga needed 2hr 30min to put away the 51st-ranked Andreas Seppi, 6-3, 7-6, 7-6 and is seeking to repeat his 2008 final appearance where he lost to Novak Djokovic.

Other winners included Russian 10th seed Mikhail Youzhny and 15th seed Marin Cilic of Croatia, while Canadian Milos Raonic hit the fastest serve of the tournament so far -- 230 kilometres (143 miles) per hour -- during his upset of French 22nd seed Michael Llodra.

Argentina's 27th seed David Nalbandian retired suffering from exhaustion while trailing Lithuania's Richard Berankis 6-1, 6-0, 2-0.

Nalbandian was coming off a gruelling five-set win over Australian Lleyton Hewitt in almost five hours in Tuesday's opening round.

Waqar asked to explain

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan cricket authorities have asked national coach Waqar Younis to explain himself after his comments on the delay in naming a World Cup captain, a cricket board spokesman said Thursday.

Under the Pakistan Cricket Board's code of conduct, players and team officials are barred from criticising official decisions.

"Waqar has been served a notice to

explain his comments on the captaincy issue since he is under contract with the board and his statement comes under violation of the code of conduct," PCB spokesman Nadeem Sarwar told AFP.

Pakistan Tuesday announced a 15-man squad for next month's World Cup -- to be jointly hosted by India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh -- but stopped short of naming a captain as they consider both one-day captain Shahid Afridi and Test captain Misbahul Haq.

Waqar, speaking after Pakistan drew

the second Test against New Zealand at Wellington on Wednesday, expressed surprise at the delay.

"I am surprised that the board has delayed announcing the captain. I don't know the reasons for this but personally I think the captain should have been named with the team," Waqar said after Pakistan's 1-0 win in the series.

The board's delay has also come under severe criticism from former players such as Wasim Akram and Iqbal Qasim who said it was "damaging for the team" before the World Cup.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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