

Viv picks India

PTI, Kolkata

West Indian legend Vivian Richards feels that Indian have improved in the fielding department in recent times and that increases the chance of Mahendra Singh Dhoni's men lifting the World Cup.

"India have improved in the fielding department recently. I see change in psyche among the Indian players. Today the players are more committed on the field. People like [coach] Gary Kirsten should be given credit for that," Richards said.

"I think a good fielding unit will win this World Cup," said Richards, considered the most destructive batsman of modern cricket.

Richards praised Dhoni for leading from the front. "If you are a leader, you have to perform. And Dhoni is leading the side from the front."

Former Australian captain Steve Waugh also agreed with Richards on the best fielding side having the highest chance of winning the February 19-April 2 event.

"Fielding is going to be an important factor in this World Cup. Catching, run-outs will play important roles. The best fielding side has the most chance of winning," said Waugh.

"India have a good chance to win the World Cup. Another favourite is Australia. Brett Lee brings a lot of aggression to the Australian attack," he said.

Waugh said he is "sad" that Eden Gardens will not be hosting an India match during the World Cup.

"I've special feelings for Eden Gardens... some great memories about this ground. We won the 1987 World Cup here and there is that 2001 Test," he said.

Former India captain Sourav Ganguly, who was also present on the occasion along with 1983 World Cup winning skipper Kapil Dev, talked about this World Cup being an open one and said it is unlikely a rank outsider can make it to the quarterfinals.

"I am not a believer of the term, favourite in any sport. I think the sides led by Clive Lloyd (West Indies of 1975 and 1979) and Steve Waugh (1999) could have been favourites but there was none after that. I think all the good teams will reach the quarterfinal."



Sculptures of eleven cricketers in various poses have been erected at Chittagong's Nimtoli junction as part of the city's beautification measures ahead of the 2011 World Cup.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Not enough love for Fatullah

ANISUR RAHMAN



Both Dhaka and Chittagong have almost been ensured beautiful cities ahead of the ICC World Cup through newly carpeted roads, hawker-free footpaths, freshly painted buildings, and decorative lighting across different roads.

But in stark contrast, the real scenario of the country is exposed on way to the back-up venue of Fatullah which is also a part of the 14-nation cricket extravaganza.

The Khal Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah under Narayanganj district is almost ready to host its two World Cup practice matches; the first between Canada and England on Wednesday and the second between England and Pakistan on Friday.

Hence, the Tk 62.81 crore renovation works at the venue is now in the final stage.

But there are some real problems, the first of which is accessing the stadium from the capital. There is an unusual traffic scenario in the road between Sayedabad and Shanir Akhra, most of which is created due to the construction of a flyover in that zone, ironically to ease that very burden. Additionally, both sides of the Chittagong-Dhaka highway were also strewn with gar-

bage, as recently as yesterday.

And while you feel the vibes of the World Cup in the capital, such a feeling is completely absent on way to the Naryanganj venue as even the highway in front of the stadium was undergoing repair work till yesterday. The surroundings of the stadium was no better as the main entrance looks like a dust-bowl while the tree-plantation on the approach road was still going on yesterday.

It might be that the authority concerned has given less importance to Fatullah because it is hosting only two practice matches and there is almost no chance of foreign spectators to watch the two matches there.

Yet it is easy to forget that all three of England, Pakistan and Canada will all play there.

The story however, is more encouraging inside the venue. Although the ground may not give off the lush look of Mirpur, the stadium has still taken on a totally new look after installations of chairs all-around the 18,000 capacity stadium.

A giant screen on the West side, tri-vision site screens, floodlights, sheds on club houses and international galleries have also been set up and new indoor facilities has also been prepared apart from eight practice pitches and 11 match pitches that have been laid.

Liu finishes 3rd again

AFP, Karlsruhe

China's former Olympic champion and world record holder Liu Xiang again finished third in the 60m hurdles on Sunday at the Karlsruhe indoor meet.

Liu finished behind David Oliver of the United States, who clocked 7.40sec, and France's Dimitr Bascou of France, who ran a personal best of 7.53sec.

The 27-year-old Chinese superstar Liu timed 7.55sec, only 0.13 off his personal best of 7.42sec set in February 2007.

This was his second race of the weekend after also coming third in Duesseldorf on Friday where he finished behind Petr Svoboda of the Czech Republic and America's Kevin Craddock.

US hurdler Kellie Wells ran the fastest time in the world for the 60m hurdles when she clocked 7.82sec and Kenya's Mercy Njoroge ran a world lead time of 8min 42.75sec for the women's 3000m.

What to do with Chawla?

AFP, Bangalore



India skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni was grappling with a selection puzzle Monday after a match-winning performance by leg-spinner Piyush Chawla in a World Cup warm-up game against Australia.

Chawla, who returned to the one-day side during a recent series in South Africa after a three-year break, was a surprise inclusion in a World Cup squad already including specialist spinners Harbhajan Singh and Ravichandran Ashwin.

With part-time spinners Yuvraj Singh, Virender Sehwag and Yusuf Pathan further bolstering the slow bowling department, Chawla's selection sparked a debate.

But the baby-faced bowler forced the Indian team management into a serious rethink on their playing eleven after picking off four wickets for 31 runs to fashion India's unlikely 38-run win in Bangalore on Sunday.

"A leg-spinner can really trouble batsmen," Dhoni said after the match. "Chawla turns the odd one and has a very good run. He is consistent with line and length. Also, it gives you more options in bowling."

"One of the reasons for his selection was our need to have a spinner who can bat a bit. If he could contribute 15-20 runs then it would be good for the side."

"It's a bit of headache whom to play and whom not to play with the kind of talent we have in the team but it is good for the team."

Chawla said his warm-up

Pak trio sacked

PTI, Karachi

Banned Pakistani cricketers Salman Butt, Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Aamer have been sacked by their employer -- National Bank -- one of the leading teams in the country's domestic circuit.

The three players had their contracts terminated by the bank in backdate recently.

"Their contracts ended on 31st December, 2010 and we waited until February 5 for the decision of the International Cricket Council (ICC) anti-corruption tribunal to come out before sacking them in backdate," said Iqbal Qasim, a former Test spinner and sports head of the bank.

Qasim said the bank had waited until the decision came from the ICC tribunal before releasing them.

"Once they were found guilty of being involved in spot-fixing we had no choice but to release them from their contracts," he said.

performance could work in his favour once the tournament starts on Saturday with an India-Bangladesh match in Dhaka.

"We have a few good spinners in the squad," Chawla, 22, said. "If the pitch is slow and offers some turn I will have a good chance to make it."

"When I came to bowl in the first powerplay, the ball was turning a bit and all I needed to do was pitch the ball in the right areas."

Chawla, who made his one-day debut against Bangladesh in 2007, has picked 28 wickets from 22 ODIs.

Sarwan wants to silence critics

AFP, Colombo

Recalled West Indies batsman Ramnaresh Sarwan declared Monday that his side was determined to silence critics who have predicted an embarrassing World Cup flop.

"We are not too concerned about what people say," the 30-year-old told reporters after a team practice session in Colombo.

"We are focused on what we have to do, and that is to play well as a team, and if we do that everything will take care of itself."

The experienced Sarwan notched a match-winning 123 to guide the West Indies to a comfortable 61-run victory in a warm-up match against Kenya on Saturday after losing four early wickets.

They now take on Sri Lanka in their last warm-up match on Tuesday before the World Cup -- jointly hosted by India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh -- starts on February 19.

The West Indies are placed in Group B of the 14-team competition and open their campaign with a tough match against South Africa, in New Delhi, on February 24.

"We are a good team, so discounting us doesn't bother us, we have to play well as a team and everything will be settled with that and I am sure we have the ability to do well," said Sarwan, who hails from Guyana.

Sarwan last played for the West Indies in a one-day series at home against South Africa in May and June 2010.

He was subsequently dropped due to fitness issues and indifferent form on the domestic circuit and wasn't offered a West Indies central contract.

Trott banks on purple patch

ATIQUE ANAM



When everyone would be expecting Andrew Strauss or Kevin Pietersen to share the burden of England's hopes in the World Cup, an unsung batsman in Jonathan Trott could actually play a pivotal role in their endeavour to win the coveted trophy for the first time.

The 29-year-old batsman has hit a purple patch off late, scoring a staggering 375 runs in the recent one-day series against Australia with two hundreds and 90-plus score.

From the team's perspective though it wasn't a great tour as they lost 6-1, but Trott feels the hard work of the last 18 months is bound to pay off in the World Cup. In fact, this is the first time this since 1992 World Cup that England are being considered one of the favourites for the title.

"We are obviously disappointed with the way the series went in Australia, but we had a very good 18 months leading up to that," said Trott when he faced the media in England's open media session in Hotel Sheraton yesterday. "We won one-day series against Pakistan, Australia at home and against Bangladesh. So hopefully we can peak in the World Cup and we do have a very good chance of winning it actually."

The South Africa-born batsman has been sort of a calming influence on the England batting line-up and has made the No 3 position his own in his short tenure. An average of 53 makes him the ideal candidate to play the anchor role with the likes of Pietersen and Collingwood slotted in later, and he acknowledges the importance of being in good nick.

"I'm in pretty good form right now. And it will only get better if I can continue in that vein. The best thing would be if I can contribute with my form to winning the World Cup," said Trott.

But he knows that getting past the group stages won't be an easy job, as there are teams like South Africa, West Indies and co-hosts India and Bangladesh in the same group. Trott takes a cautious approach on that point: "You have got to respect every team in this tournament. It's a very close competition at this level, so you really can't take any team lightly be it a Test playing nation or not."

And given England's record in the last four World Cups where they failed to get past the quarterfinal stages, a first round exit could not be ruled out altogether. Trott was not in a mood to entertain that sort of thought. "England will go a long way this time. But if we go out early, I won't be watching the tournament at all. I won't be watching it for sure," stressed Trott.



PHOTO: STAR

JAMES ROONEY? England fast bowler James Anderson attempts a 'Rooney' during practice at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

This is his Priority

MOHAMMAD ISAM



Matt Prior's selection as the sole wicketkeeper in England's 15-man World Cup squad was a bit of a surprise but he remains the pragmatic choice.

After his brilliant success in the just-concluded Ashes down under, it was evident that the 28-year-old had improved by leaps and bounds behind stumps. But as he had only played three games of one-day cricket for England last year -- that was during the tour of Bangladesh, it came as a surprise to him as well.

"It was a big surprise. I thought I would get a couple of months off and watch the games on the television," said Prior with a smile on his face when few of the England players met the reporters at Sheraton Hotel yesterday.

"I am very excited to be playing the World Cup and that too in the sub-continent where the passion is high. The whole team is full of energy as you can see," he added.

Steve Davies was the England keeper for most of last year but Prior's return is a tribute to both his wicketkeeping and batting capabilities. "I prefer batting in the top-order in the sub-continent as the ball comes on to the bat nicely. It is a very exciting role to play," said Prior, adding that he wasn't exactly sure where he'd bat.

"I am not sure where I'll bat as there is a bit of a situation with the injury of Eoin Morgan. I will know in the next few days," he said.

Wicketkeeping, especially while standing up to the seamers, would be an added test.

"I have to stand up to the seamers as well as the spinners in these low wickets. Coming from Australia where the ball flies around, it would be a good challenge. One good catch or stumping will change the game," said Prior, who fell into a trough soon after picked in the World Cup squad.

"Two ducks in a row would put any player under pressure but I did make 67 in Adelaide so that gave me a lot of confidence," he said.

But with England's wicketkeeping role akin to a musical chair competition, it would be paramount that Prior reinforces himself into the role, and what better time to do that.

"Now is the time. I have to grab this opportunity because you can only get chance for England so many times. I want to be the No. 1 wicketkeeper in both Tests and one-day cricket," he said.