



Sri Lanka cricketers Lasith Malinga (L) and Mahela Jayawardene take a breather during the team's practice session in Hambantota yesterday. Sri Lanka meet Canada in a World Cup match here today.

PHOTO: INTERNET

NEW ZEALAND V KENYA: CHENNAI

Kiwis want form reversal

AFP, Chennai

Struggling New Zealand will be keen to resurrect their fortunes and start their World Cup campaign with a victory against underdogs Kenya on Sunday.

The Black Caps go into their tournament opener in Chennai low on confidence, having lost 14 of their last 16 one-day internationals, amid suggestions of trouble brewing among players, coaches and selectors.

Their woeful run prompted the cricket board to organise a major reshuffle ahead of the recent Pakistan series with John Wright named as coach and an independent selection panel put in place.

Semifinalists in two of the three previous World Cups, the Kiwis have had little to cheer about after arriving in the sub-continent.

They scraped to an unconvincing win over lowly Ireland despite scoring 311 before a 117-run thrashing at the hands of India in their two warm-up games.

Ross Taylor, deputising as captain for the injured Daniel Vettori in the India match, accepted that the team

needed to lift their game in all the departments.

"Our spinners are not known as big turners," he said. "We yielded big runs to the Indians. We need to find ways to score runs quickly and also find the boundary options."

"When chasing that big a total, you got to get runs by boundaries. You need to do that otherwise you get eliminated. Hopefully, we can improve our performance in the World Cup."

Vettori, nursing a hamstring strain, is expected to be fit in time for the day game at the Chidambaram Stadium.

A major headache for the Kiwis has centred around where to play attacking batsman Brendon McCullum.

McCullum was promoted as an opener on the tour of India late last year but was shunted up and down the order

NEW ZEALAND V KENYA

Matches: 2
New Zealand win: 1
Kenya win: 1
First meeting: Feb 2, 2003, Nairobi - Kenya won by default
Last meeting: March 20, 2007, St Lucia -- New Zealand won by 148 runs

during the Pakistan series, reflecting an uncertainty in the ranks over his batting position.

As for the player himself, he would rather open the innings and make up for his disappointing run in the past two World Cups where he scored just 152 runs from 10 innings.

"The previous two World Cups I played down the order where you've got reasonably limited opportunities to create an impact," said McCullum.

"That's why I'm absolutely determined to play a role at the top of the order. Coming to India the best time to bat is when the ball is new."

Kenya have their own issues to deal with, although they must be eyeing their chances of an upset win against their under-achieving rivals.

The Kenyans slipped into oblivion after their surprise semifinal appearance in the 2003 World Cup with the sport at home hit by political intrigue.

During the World League for non-Test playing nations in the Netherlands last year, the team finished last without winning a match.

They were duly drubbed by the West Indies and the Netherlands in their two warm-up games in Colombo, raising doubts about their ability to stretch top-rung teams.

Chelsea crash out

AFP, London



Holders Chelsea were sent crashing out of the FA Cup here on Saturday after losing a dramatic fourth round replay against Everton 4-3 on penalties.

Chelsea looked to be on course for a place in the fifth round when midfielder Frank Lampard fired them 1-0 up in the first half of extra time at Stamford Bridge.

Mikel Arteta scored for Everton to level at 2-2 and when Ashley Cole missed

Leighton Baines, the Everton left-back curling in a free-kick from 25 yards, took the game to penalties.

Even then Chelsea appeared to be on course for victory, when Lampard and Didier Drogba buried their opening spot-kicks either side of a miss by Baines to put the Blues 2-0 up in the shoot-out.

Phil Jagielka kept Everton in it with a clinical penalty before Nicolas Anelka saw his effort palmed away by Tim Howard.

Mikel Arteta scored for

Everton to level at 2-2 and when Ashley Cole missed

Chelsea's fifth spot-kick -- sending his penalty blazing over the bar -- it was left to Everton skipper Phil Neville to blast home the winner.

Victory was especially sweet for Everton, who face Reading in the next round, as the Merseysiders had been beaten by Chelsea in the 2009 final.

The defeat leaves Chelsea's domestic season in tatters. They trail Premier League leaders Manchester United by 12 points and their only realistic chance of silverware lies in the Champions League.

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Past inspires Kenya

AFP, Chennai



Kenya will go into their opening World Cup game against New Zealand drawing confidence from stellar past performances at cricket's showpiece event, captain Jimmy Kamande said Saturday.

The rank outsiders pulled off an upset win against the West Indies in the 1996 World Cup and followed it up with a victory over Sri Lanka in 2003 on way to the semifinals.

"We want to do what we normally do," Kamande told reporters in Chennai ahead of their opening clash against the Black Caps on Sunday.

"We have improved our batting and on the bowling side, we are coming together. We want to play to our potential and allow the result to take care of itself."

Kamande said his side would not be cowed by the bigger nations at the World Cup.

"We know that the top 14 countries in the world are competing and no team can be taken lightly. Our result will talk about our performance at the end of the day."

"We are going to play our brand of cricket that we know best. We are geared up to get good results. We are well organised and prepared. We will enjoy ourselves and not copy any other team."

Kenya have been placed in Group A with defending champions Australia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, New Zealand, Canada and Zimbabwe, with the top four making it to the quarterfinals.

Kenyan coach Eldine Baptiste sounded equally upbeat about his side's chances.

"Looking at our group, I have no doubt in my mind that we can cause a few upsets," he said. "We will give 110 per cent in batting, bowling and fielding and we can beat anyone in this tournament."

Kenya's newly appointed fielding coach, former South African cricketer Jonty Rhodes, said fielding would be key to the team's fortunes.

"The Kenyans are natural athletes and they could be the best team in terms of fielding."

"The conditions will also suit them. If anybody is going to benefit from these conditions here they will be the Kenyan guys."

Chelsea -- who had been held to a 1-1 draw by Everton in the first match at Goodison Park -- had the upper hand throughout normal time but were unable to convert a plethora of scoring opportunities.

Everton keeper Howard made a string of stunning saves as the Londoners laid siege to Everton's goal.

Shakib

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last twelve months and I am sure they'll come back strongly," he hoped.

Despite the defeat the Bangladesh skipper was impressed by his team's batting performance in the match.

"We thought we could win the game by chasing. For our openers the plan was simple -- play the cricketing shots -- and they did that properly. Tamim [Iqbal] tried to do exactly that. We almost got to 300, which is really encouraging," said Shakib.

The outcome however pleased Sehwag most as he lived up to his promise by taking revenge on Bangladesh, but he also praised the Tigers.

"Revenge? I think so. But Bangladesh are a good side, and they are capable of disappointing any side," said Sehwag who also praised young Virat Kohli, who once again proved his ability as the new star in the Indian batting line-up by making an unbeaten hundred on his World Cup debut.

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SRI LANKA V CANADA: HAMBANTOTA

Lanka await the unknown

AFP, Hambantota


Kumar Sangakkara admitted his knowledge of Canada is confined to ace batsman John Davison, who once scored the fastest World Cup hundred, but that does not bother the Sri Lankan captain.

He is also unfazed by playing in the Hambantota stadium -- venue for the home team's opening match on Sunday -- which is being used for the first time for an international fixture.

"I know Davison, who scored the fastest World Cup hundred and not too much," said Sangakkara when asked what he knew about his opponents.

Davison smashed a 67-ball hundred against Bangladesh in the 2003 World Cup in South Africa, a record broken by Australian Matthew Hayden four years later.

"I don't think when we go to play sides that we haven't played much that we should worry because in those games it's all about us, how well we do and how well we play our cricket," said Sangakkara.

He said Sri Lanka had the firepower to beat Canada, adding: "I think we

don't need to be negative and we must make sure that we beat them without problems."

Sri Lanka, runners-up in the 2007 World Cup in the Caribbean, go into the tournament in good shape after comfortable wins in their two warm-up matches.

All of the side's batsmen -- except for Mahela Jayawardene -- had good workouts in the build-up and are likely to relish the inexperienced Canadian bowling attack.

Lasith Malinga, Nuwan Kulasekara and Angelo Mathews will lead the pace attack but Muttiah Muralitharan's off-spin is likely to cause the most problems for the Canadian batsmen.

The leading wicket-taker in one-day internationals, Muralitharan, with 519 wickets in 341 matches, has fully recovered from knee problems.

Canadian captain Ashish Bagai admitted his team faces a big chal-

lenge.

"Obviously Muralitharan and Malinga are the big threats but if we can get through a couple of their bowlers we have a good chance," said Bagai, who also played down the issue of the new venue.

"It is a new venue, even they won't know what to expect, so it's going to be tough for both the team," said Bagai of the ground, built at a cost of nearly \$8 million.

Consistent rain has given little time for the pitch to settle down but it is likely to help slow bowlers.

Besides Bagai and Davison, Rizwan Cheema and Sri Lankan-born Ruvindu Gunasekera lead the batting in the 15-man squad, which includes players born in India, Pakistan and Uganda among other nations.

But whether Davison, who initially walked away from the squad because two experienced players were excluded, can find his top form at the age of 40 remains to be seen.

The two countries have only met once before, with Sri Lanka mauling Canada, dismissed for 36 -- still the lowest total in a World Cup match -- by nine wickets at Paarl in the 2003 World Cup.

Leonardo upset

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan coach Leonardo took a swipe Friday at those who questioned the standard of Serie A after defeats for Italian clubs in the Champions League this week.

"It upsets me, because I'm starting to hear that Inter are finished...despite being the reigning champions!"

The Italian press have gone to town on the decline of the Italian league after AC Milan went down 1-0 to Tottenham on Tuesday in Milan and AS Roma's 3-2 home defeat to Shakhtar Donetsk 24 hours later.

Hold up

FROM PAGE 16

Another man arrived in front of the passport office where policemen intercepted his rickshaw. That man, looked in his late 40s, was holding his furniture and begging that he was a resident of the New Colony just at the other end of the road. He was shown no mercy. He had to carry home his belongings on foot in two-three trips.

These were few common incidents in that area yesterday, the first World Cup match day in Dhaka.

Now the question is who this World Cup is for. Is it for 25,000 car owners who can make their way to the venue without walking?

If otherwise, how will commoners like Khokon or Wasim get to the venue?

Or can we put it simple? A grandmother will not visit her ailing granddaughter on match days, because it's World Cup.

OPINION

Times (of India) out of tune

BY SHAYAN S. KHAN

The opening ceremonies that precede major sporting events, by their very nature, are usually quite drab affairs. Sport is an arena for thrill underpinned by suspense, the ebb and flow of emotions you are no longer in control of. Au contraire, these lavish opening ceremonies only provide an opportunity for some pomp and pageantry, at best a coming-out party, at worst unnecessary.

But in today's world, the economics of hosting a major sporting event mean they are a reality. It is nothing short of foolish really, to expect them to touch the heights of say, a Broadway play in terms of artistic quotient, or a Pink Floyd concert for the sheer euphoria it can induce. But every now and then, there comes along one that has something to say. Think of Beijing 2008, through which China inexorably announced its new-found gravity in world affairs.

Thursday's opening ceremony for cricket's World Cup in Dhaka had a much humbler message, but it had one none the less, and that alone made it an occasion to remember, even savour. Cricket's showpiece event, I care to wager, has never had one so discernibly meaningful, that meant so much to those who hosted it. Cricinfo editor Sambit Bal's use of the adjective "stirring" was apt. Too bad the Times of India, our neighbourly behemoth's paper of record, missed it.

Their report from the opening ceremony ("World Cup opens with sweet and sour show"), penned by a man called Sumit Mukherjee, was half-baked to say the least. It was brought to my attention by two friends who attended proceedings on Thursday, and thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Mukherjee's very first dig compares the ceremony to "overcooked biryani". The culinary analogy is suitably vague about

what he's actually trying to say, but for a dish being cooked by three chefs, Mukherjee should hardly have expected anything medium-rare. Okay, enough hiding behind meaningless analogies to say nothing.

It is one of the great dangers of journalism to let expectations colour your account of subsequent events. But Mukherjee's entire report reeks of his misplaced expectations being unmet. Expectations that would have been better served covering some Bollywood premiere, or indeed, the Bryan Adams gig at the BICC on Friday night. Not an opening ceremony that has been roundly praised by almost the entire world's media for being "dazzling" (Hindustan Times), for being "the party of a lifetime" (the UK's Daily Mail), and perhaps most tellingly by Cricinfo, for "giving cricket back its soul".

The Cricinfo report also mentions how there were journalists at the ceremony who had covered cricket and football World Cups, the Olympics and the Asian Games, and yet swore "they have never seen anything like this." One wonders who all Mukherjee was hobnobbing with. Certainly not the members of the crowd, who he says "had every reason to feel let down" after paying between Tk 1000-10,000 for tickets. It would be nice if he could actually point out someone who was, because nobody else has been able to find thousands who would have happily paid 20k to be there. But the truth is he can't, because his report is hardly based on facts. It is in tune with only one thing, and that happens to be his own preconceived notions. It can hardly affect anything over the next six weeks. But it is a disservice to his readers, and a travesty of journalism.