

## Smaller WC a backward step: Grant

AFP, Ahmedabad

The International Cricket Council's proposal to trim the next World Cup to 10 teams is a step "backward", Zimbabwe batting coach Grant Flower said on Saturday.

"I don't agree with that," Flower said of the decision.

"I think these [smaller] nations need exposure to develop. Obviously, there are pros and cons for that decision. If it does happen I see it as things going backward and not forward."

ICC chief executive Haroon Lorgat said on Friday the World Twenty20 would be increased to 16 teams instead of 12, while the 50-over World Cup would be cut to 10.

A total of 14 teams are involved in the 2011 World Cup -- tipped to be the most open in years -- including the Netherlands, Ireland, Kenya and Canada -- but the ICC wants to cut the numbers because it has grown too unwieldy.

"We have felt in the past few years that Twenty20 is the best format to develop the game worldwide and it provides a better environment for competition," Lorgat said.

"The 50-over format is more skill-based and suitable for the top teams."

### SPORTS POLL WEEKLY QUESTION

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India batsman Virat Kohli leaps in the air after scoring a century on his World Cup debut against Bangladesh at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

# Sehwag the plunderer

MOHAMMAD ISAM



Virender Sehwag's bat laughed off the big occasion, expectations, threat of an upset and history. The right-hander's 140-ball 175 was testament to his fondness to prove everyone wrong and play according to his own formbook. He made sure he took his revenge on the Tigers after the Port-of-Spain defeat haunted him for the last four years.

After Shakib Al Hasan let India bat first after winning the toss, it was only a matter of time for the Indian openers to throw themselves at Bangladesh's pace attack. And Sehwag took guard, saw the bowler and flashed the ball through the covers to launch his all-out assault on the Tigers, who saved their best for the first game of the tournament after months of promise.

It wasn't the highest made by an Indian in one-day cricket or in a World Cup game but Sehwag's second World Cup century (and 14th overall) equalled Kapil Dev's famous 175\* made against Zimbabwe in the 1983 edition. But it was his highest score in ODIs and the highest-ever by a batsman against Bangladesh as well as at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

"I am happy and honoured to have the same score as Kapil Dev so when people know that he got 175, they will also know that I got 175. But it is too early to tell if we will (have the same result as in 1983)," he said during the post-match press conference.

Man-of-the-match Sehwag joined Dennis Amiss, Gordon Greenidge, Allan Lamb, Javed Miandad, Martin Crowe, Nathan Astle and Brian Lara as the eighth batsman to reach hundred in a World Cup opener and easily, it was the highest among these batsmen.

Shafiqul Islam bore the brunt of Sehwag's blade initially before Abdur Razzak became the prime target; the left-arm spinner giving away a whopping 57 runs off the 33 balls he bowled at the Indian opener. Sehwag found the left-arm spinner's length to his liking, smashing everything down the ground and hardly going back to cut the ball. He smashed Razzak for three of his five sixes, making sure the Tigers' most experienced bowler was constantly under pressure.

The 32-year-old struck 81 runs on the off-side, latching onto anything short and wide and there were plenty from the Tigers who made a meal of their captain's decision.

Sehwag moved from 49 to 55 with his first six off Razzak before his 100 came off just 94 balls. He eventually fell in the 48th over when India were well and truly set up for a victory.

Before the tournament started, Sehwag talked about batting all 50 overs and yesterday, he said he was happy with his effort.

"My strike rate was 100 throughout the innings. I was thinking that for once in my career I would bat 50 overs and today I batted for 47," he said. "As far as the number of overs played, I am satisfied."

The only blemish in his innings would be the mix-up that cost Sachin Tendulkar's wicket, Sehwag admitting it was his mistake.

"We discussed it after I got back. We had planned to take it easy on the singles. I took my eye off for a fraction of a second but he said it's okay," said the dashing right-hander.

The century also paved the way for Virat Kohli, as the 22-year-old (also from Delhi) looted the Tigers with a maiden World Cup ton off only 83 balls.

The Tigers would hope the force of Sehwag's 175 doesn't hurt their confidence and the nation's spirits. The coming days will give a clearer picture.



# Watto knows his job

AFP, Ahmedabad



Australian all-rounder Shane Watson said Saturday he had "big shoes to fill" but vowed to do his best to get his team off to flying starts in their quest for a fourth successive World Cup.

Watson, who opens the innings for the defending champions, excelled in the limited time he had at the crease at the 2007 World Cup, when big-hitting pair Matthew Hayden and Adam Gilchrist opened the batting.

"It is a much bigger responsibility opening the innings and trying to lay a great platform for the team, like Hayden and Gilchrist did, especially in World Cups," said Watson, who batted lower down the order in the Caribbean.

"They are big shoes to fill because they have always performed well."

Watson, 29, emerged as the key opener after the retirements of Hayden and Gilchrist, hammering back-to-back centuries against England and New Zealand to help his side win the 2009 Champions Trophy in South Africa.

He was also in top form during Australia's recent one-day series win over England at home, scoring 306 runs with one hundred and two half-centuries.

Watson is expected to play a major role in Australia's World Cup campaign not only as a hard-hitting opener, but also as a disciplined seamer.

"I know it is a big responsibility. It is a great challenge," said Watson, who has scored 3,353 runs with five centuries and taken 127 wickets in 123 one-day internationals.

"I now have a lot more role (playing a long innings and then coming to bowl perhaps 10 overs) within the team. It will be good to play that role for team."

Watson said he was confident of delivering as an all-rounder, especially after having given a good account of himself against England.

"Even in the World Twenty20, I'd had an important role to play with the ball. I come behind bowlers who have a good bit of pace and my job is to keep the scoring rate down and pick up a few wickets as well," he said.

"I definitely have more of a role within the team and during the last few months I have been in a good place as a bowler, especially in the one-day series against England and I hope to continue that."

Australia lost both of their warm-up matches against India and South Africa but Watson said he was not fretting about those results.

"Hopefully, not too much should be read into them. They were practice matches and we were trying to find the right balance," said Watson, who rated India, South Africa and Sri Lanka as the danger sides.

"Everyone is jumping out of their skins because it is not too often you get an opportunity to play in a World Cup. The team that deals with pressure better will be the winners," he said.

Australia, who have not lost a match in the past two World Cups under Ricky Ponting, open their campaign against Zimbabwe in Ahmedabad on Monday. They have lost just one of their 27 one-dayers against the African side.

ATIQUE ANAM



The biggest advantage of watching a game from the stands alongside the faithful and not encased in an air-conditioned press box is that you miss nothing of the buzz, the collective heartbeat of the thousands who are inside the stadium egging on their own to do better and bigger things.

So it turned out to be a rather refreshing and reinvigorating experience for this reporter to renew ties with the gallery and it will remain a memorable one as there couldn't have been a bigger occasion than the opening match of the World Cup 2011 between Bangladesh and India.

The intensity of the atmosphere, the intensity of the emotions kept building throughout the morning as all roads in Dhaka seemingly led to a common destination: the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

For a radius of more than a kilometre either side of the stadium, vehicular movement was restricted. But that did very little to dampen the festive mood of the fans. The thousands were not in a mood to complain,

they were unbothered about the stringent security measures that on instances even amounted to being hassled. They were in a mood to celebrate; to celebrate the advent of the World Cup, and on a bigger note, to celebrate cricket.

Palash, a student from Shajahanpur, was holding his shirt in his hand as he had painted his body in green. Proudly he said: "I will not wear a shirt today, I will be painted in green and support the Tigers."

But it wasn't only Bangladeshis. There were several Australians on their holiday and Europeans too living in Dhaka who chose the day to adopt the Tigers as their own.

There were Indian fans too out there among the mass, but not as vocal as the local ones. Ratish, an IT student from Chennai, came with three of his friends to Dhaka just to watch the match. When I asked him who the favourites were for the match, he provided an ambiguous reply: "Hopefully it's India, but I'm not too optimistic. Tigers are a very dangerous side and it's their own backyard," he said.

Inside Sher-e-Bangla, the modern and imposing home of Bangladesh cricket, the

atmosphere reached fever pitch. First it was the national anthem and then when the coin smiled for the Tigers.

But the decision by Shakib Al Hasan to field first was taken with suspicion initially which turned into frustration as Virender Sehwag and co stamped their authority on the game.

But to live up to the good name of the Dhaka crowd, they were appreciating every good stroke played by the Indian batsmen.

The popular songs played on the loud speakers kept all the dull moments in the breaks between overs at bay. The occasion caught up so much with everyone present, that a former Indian cricketer and presently a Hindi commentator did his best rendition of a Tagore song when on a round of the elaborate press box.

Sehwag departed for the pavilion for an authoritative 175-run knock and by the time he had left the crowd grew into such a generous mood that they almost felt sorry for the Nazafgarh man for not reaching a double hundred. And the mood changed little afterwards in the game as people chanted and shouted well into the night.



GREEN MANIA: A group of supporters donning the red and green lend their voice to Bangladesh's cause during the opening game of the ICC Cricket World Cup 2011 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## Zim bank on spinners

AFP, Ahmedabad

Zimbabwe batting coach Grant Flower said Saturday he is looking forward to a disciplined performance from his spinners in their opening World Cup match against Australia.

"Our main strength is spin. There are a lot of good players of spin in the Australian side, so it will be a good test. Hopefully, we will bowl in the right areas," Flower said ahead of Monday's day-night clash.

Zimbabwe have a clutch of spinners, Raymond Price, Prosper Utseya and Graeme Cremer, who are capable of exerting pressure on batsmen with a tidy line and length.

Australia, aiming to win a fourth successive World Cup, struggled against spin on slow pitches, losing both of their warm-up matches against India and South Africa.

Although Zimbabwe lost a one-day series in Bangladesh recently, Flower said the experience was likely to be valuable.

"We have worked hard on our game (since the Bangladesh series) and they (batsmen and bowlers) are aware of what is needed in the sub-continent," he said.



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