

Kallis blasts critics

AFP, New Delhi

Jacques Kallis Tuesday said he was fully fit for the opening World Cup clash against the West Indies and blasted critics for hanging the "chokers" tag around South African necks.

"Everything has gone according to plan," said Kallis ahead of Thursday's match.

"I am 100 per cent fit for the match. In fact, all the guys in the team are fit. All 15 are available for selection."

Kallis, 35, injured his ribs during the recent Test series against India at home and did not bowl in South Africa's two World Cup warm-up games against Australia and Zimbabwe.

Kallis, the number one all-rounder in one-day cricket with 11,002 runs and 259 wickets from 307 matches, said it was unfair to suggest that South Africans crumbled under pressure.

"A lot is made in the media about the choker thing. We don't even think about it. I think the media uses this tag far too often, in fact every time the team loses a match," he said.

"They should go and look up the meaning of chokers in the dictionary first. This tag does not haunt us. Eleven of our 15 players will be playing their first World Cup so it's not something we are even thinking about."

South Africa have yet to win one-day cricket's top prize despite making it to the semi-finals three times.

Kallis said his team will be on top of their game against the West Indies.

"They are a dangerous side," he said. "They have a few players who can change the game on their day. We have been on top of them recently and played some good cricket."

"And that's what we will look to do again. Play well and put the pressure back on them."

Kallis also defended packing their World Cup side with three specialist spinners.

"We know that the wickets are going to help the spinners. Having three specialists gives us an advantage and a variety to choose from."

"We have not had a leg-spinner in our squad for a long time, the last time we had one was Paul Adams. A leg-spinner brings something different with him. We also have an off-spinner and a left-arm spinner."

"So we have a good variety which can be used differently according to the conditions. We have covered all bases and we just need to deliver the goods now."

Kallis dismissed suggestions that his side may be rusty after having to wait for nearly two and a half-weeks in India before playing their first game.

"Our preparation has been very good. In fact, we have never been as well prepared before at any World Cup. The guys are relaxed and raring to have a go. We are used to the conditions."

'One of those days'

AFP, Nagpur

A jubilant Ryan ten Doeschate said it had been "one of those days" after lashing 119 runs against England to get the Netherlands' World Cup campaign off to a flying start on Tuesday.

The Dutch came into the match in Nagpur as underdogs but with confidence after a win against England at the 2009 World Twenty20.

South African-born ten Doeschate, who owns the highest ODI average in international cricket, took the ragged England attack apart, striking nine fours and three sixes in a devastating show of power.

"For the past six weeks I've struggled with the bat but I've worked really hard in the last two weeks and it was just one of those days," said the batsman who helped his team to an impressive 292-6.

"It is a really good deck and I picked up the ball pretty early and it was one of those days when everything came naturally."

Ten Doeschate said the team had done well to score quickly in the last 10 overs to build on their solid start, adding: "If we bowl well we'll have a chance of winning the game."

The Essex all-rounder, snapped up by Indian Premier League side Kolkata Knight Riders, for 150,000 dollars, had scored 1,234 runs at a formidable average of 68.55 coming into the England match.



EVEN THE MANNEQUINS: The World Cup fever has spread to inanimate objects, as mannequins usually seen donning fashion items are seen wearing the Tigers' jersey near the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Aus spinning it out

AFP, New Delhi

Australia captain Ricky Ponting is optimistic his batsmen will solve the spin puzzle ahead of bigger matches in a quest for winning a fourth successive World Cup.

"I think the more we play and the more we get accustomed to these conditions the better our performance will be against spin," said Ponting, under whose captaincy Australia have not lost a match in the last two World Cups.

Defending champions Australia opened their campaign with a 91-run victory over Zimbabwe in a day-night match in Ahmednagar on Monday, but their performance against spin left a lot to be desired.

In-form opener Shane Watson (79) and Michael Clarke (58 not out) hit impressive half-centuries to guide Australia to 262-6 but most of the batsmen struggled to score freely against Zimbabwe's slow bowlers.

Australia have been finding it difficult to dominate spin on low, slow pitches since they lost their opening warm-up game against India in Bangalore.

They face another spin test when they clash with trans-Tasman rivals New Zealand in their second match in Nagpur on Friday, with their opponents having quality spinners in Daniel Vettori and Nathan McCullum.

"We know that spin factor will be a big one in this tournament. We know these conditions and know how to play in India or Sri Lanka," Ponting said after Australia's 24th successive win in the World Cup.

"We need to play better (against spin). We need to be at the top of our game as the tournament progresses and I think are not there quite yet."

Australia, who managed just 28 in the opening 10 overs on Monday, will need a brisk start from Watson and Brad Haddin against New Zealand who may also open the attack with a spinner, like Zimbabwe.

Off-spinner McCullum did it in New Zealand's crushing win over Kenya in Chennai on Sunday, giving away just 15 runs in his four overs.

"Hopefully, we can get off to a much better start next time and take pressure off the middle order," said Watson, named man of the match against Zimbabwe.

The Australian skipper, who described the victory over Zimbabwe as "solid" rather than "spectacular", had reasons to be satisfied with the performance of his pace trio of Mitchell Johnson, Shaun Tait and Brett Lee.

The pacemen bowled their hearts out to virtually reduce the match to a no-contest with their sharp performances as Zimbabwe were dismissed for 171. Johnson was the pick of the bowlers with 4-19 off 9.2 overs.

When asked what was the main feature of their pace attack, Ponting said: "The variations that we have in our attack. (Left-arm paceman) Johnson and Tait were more consistent."

"Tait, with his slinging action, swings the new ball and reverses the old one, and this was probably one of the best spells I have seen Johnson bowl in one-day cricket."

"I thought Johnson was outstanding and Tait's just working up to match fitness so to get eight or nine overs out of him was a real bonus. The attack has variations and the ability to break partnerships."

Tait, bowling in short spells, finished with 2-34 while Lee took one wicket. Both of them have recently returned to one-day side after recovering from injuries and their form augurs well for Australia.

WI bank on IPL skill

AFP, New Delhi

West Indies are determined to prove their World Cup doubters wrong, with vice-captain Dwayne Bravo saying the experience of playing in the Indian Premier League could be crucial.

Bravo said exposure to the IPL Twenty20 competition had helped a number of squad members become accustomed to sub-continental conditions, especially the slow nature of pitches they will face in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

"We have got five to six players in our current World Cup squad who took part in the Indian Premier League and are still associated with it," said Bravo, according to the Press Trust of India.

"They know the sub-continental conditions, so that exposure will come into play here in India," Bravo said after a practice session at the Feroz Shah Kotla stadium in New Delhi ahead of Thursday's clash with South Africa.

"The South Africans have also got players like captain Graeme Smith and JP Duminy who have featured in the IPL so they also know about it (conditions)."

Players in the West Indies squad who have experience of playing in the money-spinning IPL include Bravo and Kieron Pollard, Chris Gayle and Shivnarine Chanderpaul.

"We know each ground in India is different and each venue is going to be different. But the track will support spinners and slow bowlers in the middle," said the 27-year-old all-rounder.

New Cup, new Proteas

AFP, New Delhi

South Africa are determined to prove themselves on the big stage and shed the unwanted tag of chokers as they take on an unpredictable West Indies side in their World Cup opener on Thursday.

The South Africans have perplexed their fans, showing an ability to play top-notch cricket except when it matters most -- leaving them still waiting for their first World Cup.

Graeme Smith's men are set on rewriting the script this time around and believe that having 11 squad members playing their first World Cup, unscathed by previous disappointments, could count in their favour.

South Africa's failure to qualify for the second round at home in 2003 cost Shaun Pollock the captaincy and his successor, Smith, led a largely lacklustre campaign in the West Indies in 2007.

Although South Africa reached the semifinals for the third time in the Caribbean, it was no surprise when they were beaten by a strong Australian team.

"We know that tag [as chokers] haunts us quite a bit but there are a lot of new faces in the team," said the young JP Duminy.

"Hopefully that tag won't bother us too much in going all the way in this tournament. It's a young-looking side but it's not necessarily a bad thing."

"We've been putting building blocks in place before the first game and we are looking forward to the challenge."

South Africa's chances in the tournament rest heavily on the form and fitness of world number one all-rounder Jacques Kallis, coming back after a rib injury.

Kallis plays a key role with the bat at the crucial number three position and his shrewd medium-pace bowling could work wonders in sub-continental conditions.

The stocky right-hander did not bowl in South Africa's two World Cup warm-up games, probably more as a precaution ahead of the real action, but was solid with the bat.

The Proteas also boast a surprise weapon in Pakistan-born leg-spinner Imran Tahir, who gave a good account of himself in the practice matches.

The West Indies will have their task cut out against an in-form team brimming with quality batsmen and bowlers.

With two of their first-choice players ruled out due to injuries, the Caribbean side will look to the experienced members of the squad to inspire them to an upset win.

If the attacking Chris Gayle can give the side a flying start, it will make the job of Shivnarine Chanderpaul and Ramnaresh Sarwan down the order a lot easier.

"The key is to get a good start," said Gayle. "We are playing one of the favourites in South Africa and they are a top quality side in both batting and bowling."



Netherlands hard-hitting batsman Ryan Ten Doeschate pulls a ball during his 119 against England in a WC match against England at Nagpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR