

SOUTH AFRICA V WEST INDIES: NEW DELHI Game of advantage

AFP, New Delhi

South Africa will bank on their recent form and fitness of key player Jacques Kallis when they take on an unpredictable West Indies in their opening World Cup clash on Thursday.

The South Africans enter this Group B match on the back of 11 consecutive one-day wins against Ottis Gibson's side and a 3-2 series victory over India at home.

With Kallis declaring himself fully fit and ready to resume his all-round duties, South Africa appear a formidable side.

But what Graeme Smith's men should avoid is trying too hard to prove that they

have left behind the baggage of their past and were capable of delivering the goods in crunch situations.

The South Africans have perplexed their fans, showing an ability to play top-notch cricket but still leaving them waiting for a first World Cup.

South Africa's failure to qualify for the second round at home in 2003 cost Shaun Pollock the captaincy and his

SOUTH AFRICA V WEST INDIES Matches: 50 South Africa win: 37 West Indies win: 12 No result: 1 First meeting: March 5, 1992, Christchurch - South Africa won by 64 runs Last meeting: June 3, 2010, Trinidad - South Africa won by 1 wicket

successor, Smith, led a largely lacklustre campaign in the West Indies in 2007.

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

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 work cut out against their in-form opponents 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.

Gayle's confidence likely stems from West Indies' record against South Africa on the big stage. The West Indies shocked South Africa in the 1996 World Cup quarterfinals and have done so twice in the Champions Trophy.

The day-night match will be played at the Feroz Shah Kotla ground, hosting its first international after being banned in 2009 for producing a dangerous pitch during an India-Sri Lanka one-day.



South Africa batsman Hashim Amla (R) cuts the ball during a training session in New Delhi on Monday. South Africa take on the West Indies in a World Cup Group B match today.

PHOTO: AFP

India think

FROM PAGE 19 "If they are looking to use Sreesanth up the order, then he has to get them wickets, otherwise, they need to rethink their strategy."

Chawla, 22, has emerged a strong contender for a second spinner's slot after his match-winning performance against Ricky Ponting's Australians in a warm-up game in Bangalore where he grabbed 4-31 off nine overs.

The leg-spinner, who returned to the one-day side in South Africa after more than two years out, has already earned lavish praise from his skipper.

"A leg-spinner can really trouble batsmen. Chawla turns the odd one and has a very good 'wrong'un'. He is consistent with line and length. Also, it gives you more options," said India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

"One of the reasons for this selection was our need to have a spinner who can bat a bit. It's a bit of headache whom to play and whom not to play with the kind of talent we have in the team."

Chawla, who made his one-day debut against Bangladesh in 2007, has so far grabbed 28 wickets in 22 matches.

India also have good part-time slow bowlers in Yuvraj Singh, Yusuf Pathan and Virender Sehwag.

India are expected to go into the match with only two specialist seamers -- Zaheer Khan and Munaf Patel.

Cricket

FROM PAGE 18 knew what high fives were and the only sign of animation on our part on taking a wicket was to hitch up the trousers for no apparent reason, a la Jim Laker. The only circle we were concerned with was the boundary rope, not what was inside it. When we heeded anything and everything that the umpires did or signalled. UDRS? Neutral umpires? The dictionary definition of the word umpire, means someone who is neutral. This was an afternoon for oxymorons, for sure.

But reality is not to be sniffed at, and Kaiser and I were back to the nuts and bolts of what World Cup 2011 is all about. It is about the diktat that cricket must follow henceforth, as indeed it had been for the last decade or so. Perhaps this great and noble game if it is to survive needs to avoid the pitfalls of time warped thought processes such as of these two forlorn Dhaka Club members. Indeed the game is much bigger than what we can ever comprehend. Endangered species that we are, and soon to be extinct, let us wish this game a long and healthy life, in whatever shape and form. Within acceptable limits, of course. I am off the firewater these days, but raise a toast for me Kaiser when the bar opens.

Windies want to end losing streak

AFP, New Delhi

West Indies captain Darren Sammy said his team's miserable 11-match losing streak against South Africa will mean nothing when the sides clash in the World Cup on Thursday.

The West Indies are on a woeful run of form, having not defeated a Test side in a one-day international since June 2009 and slipping to a dismal eighth in the rankings.

"We are aware that we have a lot to play for here," said Sammy, 27, ahead of the match at the Feroz Shah Kotla ground.

"If we play to our full potential and take it step by step, who knows what could happen? We just have to believe in our ability and go out and execute our plans. It does not matter if you are number one

or number nine.

"You still have to go out and do what you have to in order to come out victorious."

Sammy was confident he had a team which was capable of giving the more favoured sides a run for their money in the tournament.

"If you look at our team combination, it is quite good. We have a lot of potential match-winners. If we can put all that together on the field for 100 overs, it will give us the result that we want."

"We have a quiet confidence in our team, the guys are well aware of what is at stake and we intend to show that once the action begins."

Sammy dismissed suggestions of ego clashes in a squad which features four former captains, three of whom can boast over 20,000 ODI runs between them.

"It is a good thing. The experience that these players bring to the side is helpful to me as a young captain. The younger players in the squad look up to them. So it's a plus for me to have these guys."

Sammy said his team realised the importance of winning a World Cup at a time when the game was struggling back home.

The West Indies won the first two World Cups in 1975 and 1979, becoming the undisputed kings of the one-day game, but have since struggled to make a mark on cricket's showpiece event.

"Fans back home want to see the West Indies go out there and play with pride and passion. They want us to show the same fight and passion that we had back in the eighties."

"If we can give our best out there, it will really make them happy."

Schiavone, Peer exit

AFP, Doha

The cull of seeded players continued in Doha with Francesca Schiavone and Shahar Peer crashing out of the WTA Qatar Open in one-sided matches here on Wednesday.

Italian Schiavone, the third seed, became the biggest casualty yet at the tournament when she was ousted by China's Peng Shuai 7-5, 6-3 in the second round, while the eighth-seeded Peer, who had beaten two-time Grand Slam champion Svetlana Kuznetsova on Tuesday, was thrashed by Frenchwoman Marion Bartoli 6-1, 6-0.

The sixth seeded Victoria Azarenka was beaten by Slovakian Daniela Hantuchova on Tuesday.

South Africans

FROM PAGE 16

by birth, Mumbai to be precise. Two Pakistan-born cricketers are also playing in the Netherlands side (Adeel Raja and Mudassar Bukhari). Being the greatest exporter of the tournament, you would have been forgiven for thinking that all of their 15-member squad was local born and bred but of course, they too couldn't resist picking a foreign talent.

Imran Tahir, journeyman professional, is the Lahore-born leg-spinner who recently qualified to play for the Proteas. He has played for 12 first-class sides ranging from Yorkshire to Sui Gas Corporation of Pakistan, as well as Pakistan A.

Isn't it apt that South Africa (choker, exporter and all) had to pick Tahir?

Match of Kotla's own

AFP, New Delhi

New Delhi's historic Feroz Shah Kotla ground will come under scrutiny on Thursday when it hosts a high-profile World Cup match between South Africa and the West Indies after an international ban.

The ground was banned from hosting international matches in December 2009 when a one day international between India and Sri Lanka was abandoned after just 23.3 overs due to the "dangerous" nature of the playing surface.

It has hosted Indian Premier League matches since but with no World Cup warm-up game at the stadium, it is unclear how the pitch will behave.

Star South African all-rounder Jacques Kallis said he was not losing sleep over the track for their opening Group B encounter at the stadium, named after the 14th-century Mughal emperor of Delhi, Feroz Shah Tughlaq.

"I haven't had a look at the wicket. I have seen it during the IPL and it wasn't too bad. "Probably it's not going to be a 300-350 wicket. We do have the balance in the team that can play on any type of wicket."

Local cricket officials appeared deter-

mined to avoid a repeat of the 2009 embarrassment and have been going the extra mile to ensure the track comes up to scratch.

"I am not overly concerned but I will be able to sleep peacefully only after Thursday," said Delhi and District Cricket Association vice-president Chetan Chauhan.

"We did not lose [out] much on cricket, but the stigma of having been banned was tough to come to terms with. We have worked hard on the wicket and I am sure we will pull it off without any glitches," added the former India Test opener.

International Cricket Council pitch consultant Andy Atkinson has also been in New Delhi since last Friday.

"Yeah, the pitch preparation is my responsibility," Atkinson told the Mail Today newspaper.

"I am sure it will behave well this time. I am here till February 28 to see the second match [between the West Indies and Holland] through."

Atkinson's efforts took a slight knock with unseasonal rains in New Delhi but he is pleased to see the sun shining again.

"The sun is out but it's like lacking the warmth. I wish it shines brightly because it is winter and the grass doesn't grow here in winter."

Confined Irish finding

FROM PAGE 16

Barry, however, admitted at having seen the heavy traffic situation in and around the capital and said that he had two friends who were living in Bangladesh with whom he had gone to visit local cafes and indulged in some shopping.

The Irish media manager also mentioned that all the people he had come across have been very cordial and that many people had greeted and waved to them on way to venue and hotel.

Niall O'Brien, who writes for website CricketIreland said on one of his articles that they have found plenty of ways of relaxing away from the cricket and he was writing and listening to Luke Kelly in his hotel room.

On the first off-day on Sunday, four cricketers (Wilson, John Mooney, Paul

Stirling and Ed Joyce) went to play golf and they were also impressed on their visit to Plan International, an Irish-funded NGO which provides street children a sort of haven for them to enjoy arts, craft and play games.

"Seeing them was very humbling and they were very happy to have us there," said Wilson.

And about their chances for the big match with hosts Bangladesh on Friday, Wilson felt that the underdogs tag that the Irish were coming into the game with would give them an advantage to provide an upset.

"No one in the press or TV media have given us a chance, but hopefully we will be able to prove them wrong and make a repeat of the 2007 World Cup result against Bangladesh," he said.

Niggling

FROM PAGE 16

overs for one wicket. On Imrul Kayes injury, Henry said: "He didn't wear his argumard which he should have. It was a bruise and of course it is not going to stop him from playing. It is a bit sore and he had anyway finished his batting session".

BCB's physician Dr. Debashish Chowdhury also said that both the players are okay to play the next match against Ireland.

"The cases were not referred to us that meant the injuries are not serious and it's manageable," said Debashish.

Gifts bring

FROM PAGE 19

Directors of the company Ruslan Nasir and Mahreen Nasir presented Titu two tickets for the Bangladesh-Ireland match and also offered cash assistance. Telecom giants Robi also did their bit, as an official provided him with a mobile phone.

Titu, who lost his legs in a road accident a couple of years back, expressed his gratitude to all of his well-wishers and said that these gifts would help him to survive in a better way.

Titu, who lives in a slum, behind the Film Development Corporation (FDC) in Karwan Bazar, supports two siblings on his daily earnings. After being infected with the World Cup bug, he had saved two days' earnings to purchase a Bangladesh team shirt.

After receiving the gifts, Titu prayed that the Tigers performed their best in the World Cup.

Sri Lanka bans

FROM PAGE 16

Rajapakse heard the Sinhalese and Tamil mixed song and wanted it taken off all state-run radio and television channels, an official close to the president told AFP.

He also censured sports authorities for allowing the "insulting" lyrics.

"The president was appalled that the song was allowed in the first place," the official said.

"He felt the song was in poor taste. What he wants is a song to inspire the team and fans and not insult other nations."

The president saw a video clip of the song when he turned up to watch Sri Lanka play Canada at their opening game at Hambantota on Sunday when the home side won by 210 runs.

A Sri Lankan cricket official said the song was the initiative of a private company which was sponsoring the national team. Several private radio and television channels have also accepted that the song was in poor taste and stopped broadcasting it.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words.

Cryptquip puzzle with letters G F Y P R W W R X G M F Q D M A S K J A Y D M W X M S K L G F O K L D G T X W R T X D J J X D G W W G F O T X D G Q T Y M D X M M P M F O X G F T J P G X G T.

Cryptquip puzzle grid with letters G F Y P R W W R X G M F Q D M A S K J A Y D M W X M S K L G F O K L D G T X W R T X D J J X D G W W G F O T X D G Q T Y M D X M M P M F O X G F T J P G X G T.

Yesterday's Cryptquip: IF A COLORFUL, CHATTY BIRD SAYS SOMETHING SATIRICAL, I GUESS THAT MIGHT BE A PARROTY PARODY. Today's Cryptquip Clue: M equals O