

Lorgat backs smaller WC

AFP, Chennai
Ireland's dramatic giant-killing World Cup win over England could be repeated in future despite a decision to reduce the event to 10 teams, world cricket's top administrator said Saturday.

As there are only 10 Test-playing countries, many second-tier or Associate Member nations such as Ireland fear they could be frozen out by the move.

Ireland created one of the great World Cup shocks by beating England by three wickets in Bangalore on Wednesday, with Kevin O'Brien scoring the fastest hundred in the tournament's history.

International Cricket Council (ICC) chief executive Haroon Lorgat said provided there was a "sufficiently robust qualification process", future upsets could still be possible.

"It's a balance we're trying to achieve in top-class competition, the opportunity for developing nations and to have the 10 best teams at the World Cup," Lorgat said.

He said the qualification system would be discussed at the next ICC executive board meeting in April.

"If there is a qualification process that is robust enough, no doubt any team could come through.

"It's not at all related to the question of getting funds from the event. It's the balance we try to achieve between excellent competition and the development of the game.

"We are blessed with three formats. We believe the Twenty20 format is the one we could use primarily to develop the game. We've expanded that to 16 teams.

"We believe that if qualification was the route through to the World Cup, that would make for a far better World Cup from a competitive point of view."

Ireland have just one more ODI, against England in Dublin in August, to play this year after the World Cup. Lorgat said the global governing body had urged the Test elite to pay more attention to those in the second tier.



A colourful crowd egg on the Sri Lanka team during their match against Australia at the Premadasa Stadium in Colombo yesterday. That cheer and joy however was soon to give way to gloom as rain played the spoilsport leading to the abandonment of the match.

PHOTO: AFP

Boost MOMENT OF THE DAY

ENGLAND V SOUTH AFRICA: CHENNAI

The Group B big game

AFP, Chennai

South Africa captain Graeme Smith said that he expected to face a fired-up England following their humiliation by Ireland, when the Test rivals met in a World Cup match on Sunday.

Andrew Strauss's team were victims of one of the greatest upsets in World Cup history when Ireland, inspired by Kevin O'Brien's record-breaking 50-ball century, chased down a 328-run winning target in Bangalore on Wednesday.

It was a victory that threw the race for quarterfinal places from Group B wide open.

England have a win, one defeat, as well as their memorable tie against India from their three matches while South Africa have two wins in two games after comfortable victories over West Indies and the Netherlands. However, England have a good recent record against the Proteas, winning seven out of their past eight completed one-day internationals against South Africa.

"I think England-South Africa's always a big game," Smith told reporters at the

Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Saturday.

"It's very competitive and it's a game you look forward to."

As for England's response after the Ireland loss, Smith said: "They are a very proud team and have had some good ups over the last few years.

"They have the ability to play really well tomorrow and as a team we know that. We expect them to bounce back.

"The Ireland result will have hit them. It was terrific for the World Cup to watch them [Ireland] get the victory. Tomorrow will be a very different game."

England off-spinner Graeme Swann urged his teammates to hold their nerve.

"If we start panicking and thinking we're the disgrace that half the people on Twitter thought we were on Wednesday night, there's no point in us playing," he said.

"But to win three-

quarters of the game [against Ireland] and throw it away so catastrophically, that's the sort of thing that can ruin momentum."

It is in the field where England have problems.

They went into the Ireland match keeping faith with senior seamer James Anderson and fit-again Stuart Broad in place of Ajmal Shahzad.

They persisted with Anderson despite the fact the swing specialist had conceded 91 runs against India -- the most by an England bowler in a World Cup match.

It seemed their faith was being rewarded with a tight

early spell but Anderson ended up conceding 49 runs in 8.1 overs.

Those figures were miserly compared with Broad's none for 73 and with South Africa boasting the world's two leading ODI batsmen in Hashim Amla and AB de Villiers, England face a dilemma over the composition of their attack.

Amla and De Villiers both made hundreds Thursday in a crushing 231-run win over the Netherlands, with de Villiers's ton his second in as many matches following his hundred against the West Indies.

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OPPOSITE ENDS OF THE SPECTRUM: (L) Kevin Pietersen, a South Africa born English batsman and South Africa allrounder Jacques Kallis (R) find themselves at the opposite ends of the spectrum ahead of today's clash at the Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai. While the Africans top the group with maximum six points from three matches, the English find themselves teetering with just three points from as many matches.

PHOTOS: AFP

Hair chucks once more!

AFP, New Delhi

Defending champions Australia faced Sri Lanka in a mouthwatering World Cup clash on Saturday dramatically spiced up by new 'chucking' allegations over record-breaking spinner Muttiah Muralidaran.

Retired Aussie umpire Darrell Hair, who caused a storm in the international game when he first called the Sri Lankan star for an illegal action in 1995, said that many current match officials share the same doubts.

However, he insists that some umpires are scared to intervene, content to see the 38-year-old enjoy his World Cup swansong before slipping into international retirement.

"A couple of current umpires have said to me, 'something is wrong', but they prefer to let it go," Hair, who quit in 2008, told Australian media on Saturday.

"There is still a lot of doubt about his deliveries.

"A few have told me, 'there is definitely something wrong with his action, but I'm not going to call him'."

Muralidaran has been cleared by the International Cricket Council (ICC) after undergoing biomechanical tests on his controversial action.

But the debate continues to polarise opinion.

"I watched a few of his deliveries against Pakistan and I noticed the last few overs when he was really getting some turn on the ball, those wouldn't have complied under scrutiny," claimed Hair.

"But this is his last World Cup, he's going to bow out with a lot of fanfare and no umpire will be bothered by it."

Muralidaran, who has a record 523 ODI wickets and 800 Test victims, lined up against Australia at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo in Saturday's crucial Group A match.

Champs Trophy could get lost

AFP, Chennai

The Champions Trophy could be axed as part of a reorganisation of the global cricket calendar, International Cricket Council (ICC) chief executive Haroon Lorgat said on Saturday.

The one-day tournament, which started in 1998, and has usually been held every two years since, may be squeezed out by the new Test World Championship, set to be played in England in 2013.

Lorgat said the ICC wanted to create a "pinnacle" in all three formats with a Test world championship, the 50-over World Cup and World Twenty20.

He added it was difficult to see where the Champions Trophy, currently held by Australia, would fit into such a schedule.

"What we're trying to work towards is a pinnacle event in each format," Lorgat said. "So if we're looking to our next cycle we might think definitely about (losing) the Champions Trophy."

Eng have recovered: Collingwood

PTI, Chennai

England have recovered from the shock loss to minnows Ireland in a World Cup match and the team is confident of beating title favourites South Africa in tomorrow's must-win match, insisted all-rounder Paul Collingwood.

"Of course we got a disappointing result against Ireland. But this team usually bounces back from disappointments very fast and immediately. We want a good result on Sunday," Collingwood said last night on the sidelines of a function to launch Slazenger sports products, for which he is one of the brand ambassadors.

On tomorrow's match, a must-win for England, Collingwood conceded that South Africa are a top team and very strong in all departments.

"But we are a very strong side ourselves. In the past two years, we have played against South Africa a fair bit and actually have a good record. We won the one-day series against them.

Outgoing Biff at peace

AFP, Chennai

South Africa captain Graeme Smith said on Saturday he hoped his decision to stand down from the one-day leadership after the World Cup would inspire his team's quest for the trophy.

The 30-year-old was thrust into the captaincy of both Test and one-day teams in 2003 following a disastrous World Cup, where hosts South Africa exited before the second phase.

Smith, who has already stepped down as South Africa's Twenty20 skipper but remains as Test captain, said he was "at peace" with his decision.

"It's not affecting us at all," the left-handed opening batsman said at the Chidambaram Stadium, where South Africa meet England in the World Cup on Sunday.

"It was a personal decision and I've been in the job for eight years which is more than most other captains tend to last these days.

"From my perspective I'm very proud of what I've done and I wanted to give myself the best chance of a World Cup knowing I've given it my best shot with the team and the players," added Smith, who was South Africa's youngest captain when appointed aged just 22.

"I just want that opportunity to have it all out here and get on that aeroplane knowing I've done what I wanted to," explained Smith, who in 2008-09 led South Africa to their first Test series win in Australia.

And as for rescinding his decision, he said: "I'm at peace with it now and I'm very focused on the World Cup -- that's my priority."

South Africa have looked one of the form teams of the tournament thus far, with convincing wins over the West Indies and the Netherlands, while England struggled to beat the Dutch, tied with India and were

then sensationally defeated by Ireland in one of the great World Cup upsets on Wednesday.

Asked if South Africa were a better all-round side than England, Smith replied: "We hope so but the key for us is to carry on playing as a unit.

"We just have to come out tomorrow, be solid, consistent and perform our roles. Hopefully, we can be one step ahead of England."

The England side is set to feature two players in batsmen Jonathan Trott and Kevin Pietersen who both learned their cricket in South Africa, while captain Andrew Strauss and wicketkeeper Matt Prior were both born in the country.

Smith, who has the nickname Biff, though played a straight bat when asked if he found it annoying that England had so many 'South Africans' in their side.

"It's probably the 50th time I've tried to find an answer to this question. It's not a thing for us anymore -- that's the reality.

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ICC Cricket World Cup
England v South Africa
Live from 10:00am
English Premier League
Liverpool v Man United
Live from 7:25pm
Wolves v Tottenham
Live from 9:55pm
BTV/STAR Sports/STAR Cricket
ICC Cricket World Cup
India v England
Live from 3:00pm
TEN Action
Primera Liga
Racing v Real Madrid

DAY'S EVENT
Bangladesh League
Arambagh v Farashganj
Time: 3:00pm
Sk Jamal v Mohammadan
Time: 5:30pm
Venue: Kamalajar Stadium