

Taylor eyes to build on it

AFP, Pallekele

2011
Ross Taylor admitted he owed Kamran Akmal a slap-up meal after Pakistan's blundering wicketkeeper gifted him two World Cup lives, but now the century-maker wants to feast on more runs.

Akmal missed two chances to dismiss the New Zealand vice-captain in the same Shoaib Akhtar over when he was on nought and eight.

Taylor went on to smash a career-best unbeaten 131 off 124 balls which lifted New Zealand to 302-7 before they restricted Pakistan to 192 for a 110-run win.

"It's been well documented back home that I haven't been in the greatest form of my life. It's been frustrating for myself, and probably a lot of others as well," said Taylor, who hit his century on his 27th birthday.

"When you're out of nick you need a bit of luck and I got that.

"Over the last few months I've been trying to search for the perfect game and today, and even the last couple of games, I've just tried to keep things as simple as possible and just watch the ball. Today was my day."

Taylor jokingly admitted he owed Akmal a free meal for his unwitting help in setting up his birthday treat.

"Whatever Kamran wants, I think I owe him dinner or something," said Taylor after Tuesday's match which put New Zealand on top of Group A with six points from four matches and a better net run-rate than second-placed Pakistan.

Taylor, who ended the night deputising for Daniel Vettori after the skipper limped off with a knee injury while attempting a catch, said he had received a series of good wishes messages.

"I didn't get any presents, so that was a pretty good present [two dropped catches]. I was on my emails and Facebook and Twitter this morning and I had a lot of birthday wishes.

"A lot of them said it would be good to get a hundred on your birthday. More often than not that doesn't come, but today it did," said Taylor, whose last hundred came against Bangladesh in October 2008.



ALL-ROUND SHOW: India player Yuvraj Singh successfully appeals for a leg-before decision against a Netherlands batsman, before taking India home with an unbeaten 51 during their World Cup match in New Delhi yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

One more record for Tendulkar

AFP, New Delhi

Indian superstar Sachin Tendulkar Wednesday became the first batsman to score 2,000 World Cup runs, reaching the mark by hitting three consecutive fours in front of legions of fans in New Delhi.

Tendulkar opened the batting with Virender Sehwag at Feroz Shah Kotla stadium, and they put on 69 for the first wicket in reply to the Netherlands' total of 189 before Sehwag was out for 39.

Tendulkar was dismissed for 27 off 22 balls, caught near the long-off boundary by Bradley Kruger off the bowling of Pieter Seelaar.

The 37-year-old, playing his 40th match at his sixth World Cup, made his bow at cricket's showpiece tournament in 1992.

Before Wednesday's match he had hit five centuries and 13 fifties in World Cups.

The next player on the list is Australian skipper Ricky Ponting, who has 1,577 runs in 42 matches.

S Africa in Tahir scare

AFP, Nagpur

South Africa suffered a World Cup injury scare on Wednesday when in-form leg-spinner Imran Tahir fractured his left thumb.

"Imran injured himself during the game against England while attempting the caught and bowled, which dismissed Jonathan Trott," said Proteas manager Mohammed Moosa.

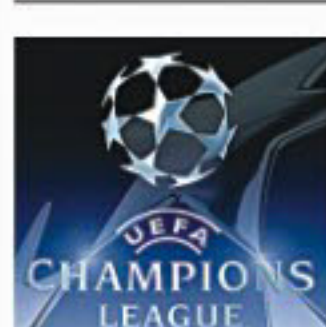
"The X-Ray revealed a small undisplaced fracture in his left thumb. The images have been sent home to Cricket South Africa's medical committee and we are waiting for the hand specialist, Dr Mike Solomons, to give us an opinion.

"His thumb has been splintered and immobilised and a decision on what happens further will be made in the next two days."

Tahir is the tournament's second-highest wicket-taker with 11 victims in three matches.

Messi brace dumps Gunners

AFP, Barcelona



A Lionel Messi brace helped Barcelona to a 3-1 victory over 10-man Arsenal on Tuesday to put them into the quarterfinals of Champions League on a 4-3 aggregate.

The Argentine World Player of the Year was the difference as Barcelona produced another outstanding display of attacking football which left the Arsenal defence stretched from beginning to end.

The Catalan side needed just one goal after losing 2-1 at the Emirates and Messi put them ahead in first-half stoppage time.

An own goal by Sergio Busquets

put Arsenal back on level terms but the game turned Barca way by the sending off of Robin van Persie two minutes later.

Xavi Hernandez levelled the tie at 2-1 and then Leo Messi scored the decider with a penalty.

Whether it was a case of mind games or just a speedy recovery Van Persie was on the team list to start. Ruled out last week by manager Arsene Wenger he was a last minute inclusion on the plane and passed a late fitness test.

The attention before the game was on local youth product Cesc Fabregas who chose to abandon his home-town team at the age of 16 by the lure of a first-team opportunity at Arsenal.

Fabregas was also ready to play

from Barca's trident attack led by Messi.

Arsenal suffered a set-back when keeper Wojciech Szczesny was forced off with a wrist injury and Manuel Almunia stepped into the fray. Barcelona looped ball after ball behind the Arsenal defence who most of the time were chasing shadows.

Koscielny made another important intervention and Johan Djourou made a tackle on Xavi Hernandez who burst into the box but Barca began to get frustrated as the goal did not appear to be coming.

The players remonstrated with the referee for what they saw as time wasting and in a heated spell Van Persie was booked for pushing Dani Alves in the face.

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Clarke back to Chinnaswamy

AFP, Bangalore



Australia vice-captain Michael Clarke returned to the Chinnaswamy Stadium on Wednesday hoping for yet more success on the ground where he scored a century on his Test debut.

Australia, bidding for a fourth straight World Cup title and fifth in all, continue their campaign in Bangalore against minnows Kenya and Canada on Sunday and a week on Wednesday respectively.

It was at the Chinnaswamy in 2004 where Clarke, batting at No 6, made a memorable 151 on his Test debut against an India attack featuring Zaheer Khan, Harbhajan Singh and now retired leg-spinner Anil Kumble as Australia won the opening match of that series by 217 runs.

"I obviously scored a hundred on my Test debut here," said the 29-year-old Clarke on Wednesday.

"I've also got a one-day hundred but I've had some low scores too.

"Hopefully, I continue to play well here. There are a couple of photos of me in the changing room with my family when I scored my hundred on debut. It's a very special ground for me."

Australia have been boosted by the arrival of experienced middle-order batsman Michael Hussey late on Tuesday.

The left-hander, named in Australia's original 15-man squad, was controversially omitted when selectors refused to accept his assurances he would be fully fit following pre-tournament hamstring surgery.

However, he has now been called-up as a replacement for injured fast bowler Doug Bollinger and Clarke said the squad were delighted to have the noted one-day 'finisher', who averages nearly 52 in limited overs internationals, back in their squad.

"I've seen Huss this morning and he was very excited to be here," Clarke said.



Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi (Top R) is the toast of his teammates after scoring one of his two goals against Arsenal during their Champions League second round encounter at Nou Camp on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

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