

# Doping slur irks Dilshan

AFP, Pallekele



Sri Lanka's record-setting batsman Tillakaratne Dilshan insisted on Friday he is the victim of a smear campaign after he was wrongly accused of having failed a dope test.

The 34-year-old said it was not the first time he had suffered from such allegations and that he was not even selected for a random test after last weekend's rain-ruined match against Australia in Colombo.

"On Wednesday, there were reports that I had failed a dope test," Dilshan told the BBC.

"It is not the first time these kind of allegations have surfaced - they have done so after every recent tournament I have played in.

"I feel like there is an attempt to distract my game but I am not worried. I try to ignore the reports and concentrate on my game instead.

"What actually happened is the International Cricket Council randomly selected Ajantha Mendis and Chamara Silva to give blood samples after our game against Australia.

"They did not even take my blood sample so I simply don't know where these reports have come from."

Dilshan smashed a brilliant 144 during a record World Cup first-wicket stand of 282 with Upul Tharanga (133) to lift Sri Lanka to 327-6 before taking a career-best 4-4 to help bowl Zimbabwe out for 188 on Thursday.

Sri Lanka's comfortable 139-run win lifted them to the top of Group A, with seven points from five matches, making them the first team to reach the quarter-final stages.

But Dilshan said the doping allegations had not spurred him on to his breathtaking efforts.

"I was not trying to reply to my critics, or to those reports. I was not under any pressure, nor was I angry. But it is not pleasant when attempts are being made to distract you, especially when you are playing in a World Cup."



**TIGERS ARE ROARING:** The Tigers fans were never short of enthusiasm during the first World Cup match played in Chittagong at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium yesterday between Bangladesh and England.

PHOTO:  
STAR

# Pakistan back under-fire Kamran

AFP, Pallekele



Vice-captain Misbahul Haq Friday vowed Pakistan would support Kamran Akmal after his horror show against New Zealand, saying the fumbling wicketkeeper was mentally tough.

New Zealand batsman Ross Taylor benefited from two astounding let-offs by the 29-year-old keeper to hit a career-best 131 in their Group A match in Pallekele on Tuesday.

"I think everyone should support him. He had three good matches but dropped two against New Zealand, so he is trying hard now and we are confident that he will make a good comeback," said Misbah.

After Kamran's hiccups, Pakistan were considering handing the gloves to Umar Akmal, Kamran's younger brother, who has kept in the past.

But Umar hurt his finger during practice on Thursday, although team management said it was not serious as scans had revealed no fracture.

Misbah said Kamran has faced such problems in the past. "He has faced such situations before too. Our full support is with him because the wicketkeeper is a key member of the team and we are sure he will do better," said Misbah.

Pakistan have six points from four matches and a win over Zimbabwe on Monday would guarantee their place in the quarterfinals.

"I think the main thing at the moment is to keep focused on our next game. We must restore our confidence level which was shaken in the game against New Zealand, and I have every hope from my team to make a comeback," said Misbah.

Besides the wicketkeeping woes, Pakistan are also trying to address batting problems, mainly affecting the top order.

"We are especially focused on the top order in practice because they got out early in the previous games and didn't get much practice with the new ball."

Pakistan are also considering the option of using Kamran as opener and including Asad Shafiq in the middle order.

# SL eye final surge

AFP, Pallekele



Tillakaratne Dilshan hopes Sri Lanka's record-breaking surge into the World Cup quarterfinals will provide the spark for a second world title to add to the country's 1996 triumph.

The 34-year-old hit a brilliant 144 during a record World Cup first-wicket stand of 282 with Upul Tharanga (133) to lift Sri Lanka to 327-6 before taking a career-best 4-4 to help bowl Zimbabwe out for 188 on Thursday.

Sri Lanka's comfortable 139-run win lifted them to the top of Group A, with seven points from five matches, making them the first team to reach the quarter-final stages.

They play their last group game on March 18 against New Zealand in Mumbai with Dilshan keen to keep the momentum going into the business end of the tournament.

"After March 18 we have to play our best cricket. We cannot afford to make mistakes with the quarter-final and semi-finals coming up," Dilshan said.

"We know we have qualified but we can't take it easy for the next few matches. We have to play with 100 percent commitment from the New Zealand match."

Dilshan hopes he can be key to his country's hopes.

"I am happy with my batting and bowling," said Dilshan, who along with Tharanga, missed the record in all ODIs for an opening partnership by just four runs.

Tharanga had featured in that record stand along with Sanath Jayasuriya against England at Leeds five years ago.

"We have no regrets about missing out on the world record. What is important is that since we are playing good cricket and everything is going our way we must keep this performance and momentum intact," said Dilshan.

"We needed a good partnership for a big total and I am happy that we provided that to the team."

Dilshan also came close to a hat-trick by

dismissal Sean Ervine and Greg Lamb off successive deliveries only for Mahela Jayawardene to drop a catch off his third ball in the slips.

Dilshan said he was concerned with missing out on another landmark.

"I am very happy with my performance. Missing a hat-trick with Mahela dropping a catch happens in the game. Before that ball he took a great catch and brought me closer to a hat-trick," said Dilshan.

The opener just missed Aravinda de Silva's highest World Cup score of 145 by a Sri Lankan.

"After I got out somebody told me in the dressing room that had I got one more run I would have matched that record, but I was never in the hunt for records, I always play for my team to the best of my ability," said Dilshan.

Dilshan said the whole team looked forward to playing their last group match against New Zealand in Mumbai on March 18.

"We are happy to play in Mumbai, it's a good opportunity because if we qualify for the final it's a match before the final so that's a good opportunity," said Dilshan.

Zimbabwe skipper Elton Chigumbura said his side had buckled under the pressure of the run chase.

"Chasing a bigger score is always hard besides maintaining the run-rate, especially with our team. But it's something we can work on. Our openers played pretty well and putting on a 100-plus partnership is a positive," he said.

Brendon Taylor (80) and Regis Chakabva (35) put on a solid first-wicket stand of 116, before Zimbabwe crumbled to 188 all out.

Zimbabwe, with two points after four matches, still have an outside chance of reaching the quarter-finals.

They need to win both their matches and improve their net run-rate, as well as hoping other results go in their favour.

Their last match is against Kenya on March 20.

# BD-Ned tickets collection from today

SPORTS REPORTER

Tickets of the ICC CWC 2011 match between Bangladesh and Netherlands scheduled for 14 March 2011 at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong, will be available for collection at AK Khan Textile Gate on Anlankar junction, from 12 March 2011. Opening hours of the ticket collection centre is from 10am to 6pm. Spectators who have selected venue and banks as their pick-up point during purchase, can collect their tickets, which will be distributed on presentation of the document provided from the banks.

# Vettori targets SL return

AFP, Mumbai

Injured New Zealand captain Daniel Vettori said he is targeting a return against Sri Lanka in the Black Caps' final World Cup group match on March 18 after seeing specialists Thursday.

Vettori left the field during his team's win against Pakistan on Tuesday after injuring his right knee while attempting to take a catch and had to leave the field for the remainder of the game.

A scan showed he had a mild strain of his post cruciate ligament and he is likely to play later in the tournament.

# Hussey eager to prove

AFP, Bangalore



Michael Hussey is planning to use the hurt he felt at being left out of Australia's World Cup squad to good use now he finds himself back with the champions in the subcontinent.

And the man nicknamed 'Mr Cricket' stressed that, unlike Australia captain Ricky Ponting, who has quit Twenty20 internationals, he had no intention of retiring from shorter formats of the game in order to prolong his Test career.

"It took me so long to get just one game for Australia, so I don't want to pull up stumps on anything too soon," Hussey, who had to wait a decade before making his Test debut in 2005, said on Friday.

The experienced left-handed batsman was omitted from Australia's squad that travelled to the World Cup despite telling the under-fire selectors he would be fit following hamstring surgery. He had been in the original 15.

A panel chaired by former Test batsman Andrew Hilditch felt they could not take the risk, despite Hussey's assurances. However, a tournament-ending injury to fast bowler Doug Bollinger allowed Australia to call up a surprised Hussey, who averages nearly 52 in 151 ODIs, as his replacement.

"I found it pretty difficult to take for a while, but I then used all that energy and emotion to rehab and get better as fast as I could," Hussey said.

"We thought that if there was an injury, I couldn't be the one to come in and replace."

"I pretty much thought I wouldn't get another chance to play in a World Cup," said the 35-year-old Hussey, a member of the Australia team that triumphed in the Caribbean four years ago.

"When I was ruled out it was a pretty bitter pill to take but, unbelievably, I find myself here, so it's great news."

There had been a perception among several sides that if a player originally selected in a 15-man squad was withdrawn, he could not return.

However, the International Cricket Council (ICC) issued a clarification saying a player in that situation could return in place of an injured team-mate.

Australia, unbeaten at the World Cup since 1999, are bidding for a fourth straight title and fifth in all.

# Dilshan, Murali praised

AFP, Pallekele



Sri Lankan captain Kumar Sangakkara praised "magic" team-mate Tillakaratne Dilshan and "champion" Muttiah Muralidaran for firing his team into the World Cup quarterfinals.

Man-of-the-match Dilshan scored 144 runs off 131 balls as part of an opening stand of 282 with Upul Tharanga, helping his side to a challenging 327-6 against Zimbabwe in Pallekele.

When Sangakkara threw him the ball in the 19th Zimbabwe innings, Dilshan returned the astonishing figures of 4-4, only missing out on a hat-trick because Mahela Jayawardene dropped a regulation chance at slip.

Muralidaran, playing his final match in front of his home fans in Kandy before his international retirement, broke Zimbabwe's dangerous opening partnership, dismissing Regis Chakabva (35).

He finished with 3-34 as Zimbabwe were bowled out for 188 to give Sri Lanka a 139-run win.

"It's great to play at home. This is where I'm from and it's a magnificent ground, very picturesque and a fitting tribute to Murali," said Sangakkara.

"We managed to cover all areas and with that opening stand managed to put the match beyond the Zimbabweans," he said.

Speaking about Dilshan, the skipper said: "He's got that magic touch with the bat, with the ball and even on the field

so he's been one of most important players over the last 10 years.

"And today again he showed how well he can come back from quite a couple of tough weeks for him."

Speaking about the performance of Muralidaran, the highest wicket-taker in ODIs and Tests, Sangakkara said: "He's a champion and that's why he's always rated the best in the world. When the tough times come along he steps up."

"I think for Murali this last game would hold very happy memories."

Muralidaran himself said he was happy with the way Sri Lanka came back after not bowling well at the start of the Zimbabwe innings, adding: "(Brendan) Taylor (80) played well but I think we came back strong."

"It's a sad moment for me but a happy moment for the team because we've qualified for the next round," he said, referring to his last game in Kandy.

Dilshan said it had been a good pitch to bat on and he was relieved to make a big score once set.

"I'm really disappointed that for a few matches I got the start but didn't capitalise," he said, adding he was positive about Sri Lanka's chances in the tournament.

Disappointed Zimbabwe skipper Elton Chigumbura praised his opening batsmen.

"Taylor and Chakabva played well in the first 20 overs. I thought we were in the game from there but I guess you need skill to chase 325."



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