



South Africa all-rounder Jacques Kallis shadows a throw with gloves in his hands during a training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday. The Proteas will meet New Zealand in the quarterfinal on Friday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Variety the flavour of Proteas

SAKEB SUBHAN

South Africa enters the quarterfinals of the World Cup with a lot of momentum behind them, having won five of their six group matches to finish top of group B. They would be desperate to do well, given their poor record in the global tournaments where they have largely flattered to deceive in the past. This time though they have something they could not boast of before -- a truly varied bowling attack. There is of course their traditional strength, pace bowling, but also a spin attack comprising three quality bowlers, leg-spinner Imran Tahir, left-arm spinner Robin Peterson and off-spinner Johan Botha.

Also the vice-captain of the Proteas, Botha was glowing in his praise for the South African bowling attack when he sat down for a media conference at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Dhaka yesterday after practice, ahead of their quarterfinal against New Zealand here on Friday. "The three spinners are very different to each other," Botha said, "Imran (Tahir) is an attacking bowler, and he's gotten us many wickets in the tournament, so has Robin (Peterson). I have been controlling the game from one side, trying to keep the runs down. Then we've got world class seamers (Morne Morkel and Dale Steyn) who've been doing pretty well."

Botha himself has often been thrust into the unfamiliar role of opening the bowling ahead of the pace stalwarts. He thought that his role was to dry up the runs from one end, while the other bowlers picked up wickets from the other. "You do want to pick wickets in the first few overs, the best way to stop the run rate," Botha said, and added, "I am

probably doing more of a holding job and controlling the bowling from one side and they have all been taking wickets from the other."

Their opponents on Friday will be New Zealand, who have a batsman, Ross Taylor in red-hot form. Botha said that the Proteas will talk about their players over the intervening days.

"He is in very good form, has played really well so far in the World Cup. We will look at a few things over the next day or two. He's obviously a key player for them, and Brendon McCullum is also a key player. Scott Styris has got a lot of experience," he added and gave his opponents their due, "We know we are up against a quality side, and its going to be a tough match."

"Daniel Vettori is the big player for them -- world class bowler, in the top few in the rankings. He's done so well over a long period. We respect him highly, and I'm sure he'll give anything to play in this game," said Botha of the New Zealand skipper, who missed two games because of injury. "I think it will be a good contest, because our guys have played spin really well in this tournament."

Both teams have had recent experience of playing in Dhaka, although for New Zealand it has been largely unhappy. Botha thought that both teams will be happy with playing here.

"I think both teams are happy. They have played here a bit before the World Cup, and its probably why they sort of came to tour Bangladesh at that time (October 2010)," he said. "We have had the one game and we have played here two years ago. Both teams know the venue well. On their day they can beat anyone, and I think it will be a good match."

Aravinda's anxiety

AFP, Colombo

World Cup winner Aravinda de Silva believes Sri Lanka's misfiring middle-order could be the weakest link in Saturday's quarterfinal clash against England.

De Silva, who is now the team's chief selector, also said the day-night match at the R. Premadasa stadium will be "tough", with the toss playing a vital role when the dew factor kicks in, told the state-run Daily News.

De Silva, who played in the 1996 World Cup-winning team, said Sri Lanka's main concern so far has been the inconsistency in the batting department. "He was very critical of the middle order which has not yet performed up to expectations," the report said quoting de Silva.

He said England were comfortable playing quality spinners and have the batsmen to make big scores.

"They [England] have the potential to upset any side on that particular day," said de Silva.

Waugh thinks highly of SA

AFP, New Delhi



Former Australia captain Steve Waugh says old rivals South Africa are no longer the brittle team of the nineties and have emerged as the standout team of the

World Cup. Waugh was the captain of the team that beat South Africa in a must-win Super Six match of the 1999 World Cup en route to their title triumph over Pakistan at Lord's.

The game at Leeds against South Africa is still remembered for a dropped catch off Waugh and the way the Proteas crumbled to hand the Aussies a key win.

Waugh had made 56 when he flicked a Lance Klusener delivery to midwicket where Herschelle Gibbs took the catch but in his anxiety to celebrate, dropped the ball.

The Australian skipper, who went on to

make a match-winning 120 not out, reportedly told Gibbs "You've just dropped the World Cup mate".

Waugh said the current South African side appeared one of the strongest contenders for the coveted crown.

"They [South Africa] had one 'choke' game against England, but since then, have not put a foot wrong," Waugh wrote in the Times of India newspaper.

"They have prospered away from the limelight and favourites' tag, and displayed some skill in areas that have not been their forte.

"Significantly among these is spin. They have used the slow bowlers well and, starting with Imran Tahir and continuing with Robin Petersen, the Proteas have proved they can go all the way in the sub-continent."

South Africa will take on New Zealand in the quarterfinals in Dhaka on Friday.

Jade just happy to be English

AFP, Colombo



Fast bowler Jade Dernbach may have become the fifth South African-born player to form part of the England

squad, but he insisted on Tuesday that his dream is an English World Cup triumph. Dernbach, who was called up as a replacement for the injured Ajmal Shahzad, joins fellow South African-born teammates -- skipper Andrew Strauss, Matt Prior and Jonathan Trott -- preparing for the quarterfinal against Sri Lanka.

Missing from the squad now is Kevin Pietersen, another South Africa native, who was forced out of the tournament two weeks ago.

"I was born in South Africa but that's no more my home. I have not done anything in South Africa," said Johannesburg-born Dernbach, whose family moved to England when he was 14.

"I was just born here but my whole cricket career is based in the UK and the UK is my home and I want to give everything I can for England because that's my country and I love it."

The 24-year-old Surrey pace bowler was flown in from the Caribbean where he was playing for the England Lions in the West Indies regional event after Shahzad suffered a hamstring injury.

"It was a very pleasant surprise, a nice wake up call in the Caribbean," said Dernbach of his surprise selection over Chris Woakes, who had been part of England one-day set-up in Australia last month, and Liam Plunkett.

"I can't think of anything better," added Dernbach of his chances of playing in Saturday's last-eight clash against Sri Lanka.

"Any opportunity to play for your country you need to grab with both hands."

The right-arm medium pacer is the third replacement in England's World Cup squad after Pietersen and Stuart Broad were also forced out.

Dernbach hoped his stint at the Dennis Lillee pace bowlers academy in Chennai will help him on the sub-continent wickets if he gets an opportunity to play.

"I know these wickets are challenging, but that's why we play the game, to challenge ourselves and I hope I am able to share my skills out there if I get a chance," said Dernbach.

Need inspiration? Look to Richie

AFP, Dhaka



Struggling West Indies need look no further than their manager Richie Richardson for inspiration when they clash with buoyant Pakistan in the World Cup

quarterfinal on Wednesday. Richardson was captain when the West Indies overturned the form book in the 1996 quarterfinal in Karachi and stunned South Africa, who had come through the league phase unbeaten.

Brian Lara smashed 111 off 94 balls to fashion a 19-run victory and a similar effort from Chris Gayle, Darren Bravo or Kieron Pollard could upset Pakistan's appellation. "Anything can happen in the knock-outs, you don't get a second chance," said the 49-year-old Richardson, who took over as manager for a two-year term in January.

"Every one starts on an equal footing." Darren Sammy's men will need a desperate last fling at a time when they seem to be falling apart after two inexplicable defeats against England and India from dominant positions.

They were on the brink of victory against England when, chasing a modest target of 244, they were comfortably placed at 222-6 before losing their last four wickets for three runs.

Against India on Sunday, they caved in again as eight wickets fell for 34 runs after they were 154-2 and lost by 80 runs.

The West Indies, who have now lost 18 successive matches against the leading nations, cannot afford another defeat.

All is, however, not over yet for the West Indies.

They return to the Sher-e-Bangla stadium in Dhaka where they shot out Bangladesh for their lowest one-day total of 58 in the league to romp home by nine wickets in a match that ended in under two hours.

Gayle and key fast bowler Kumar Roach are set to return after missing the India game, the former with an abdominal strain and Roach due to illness.

Pakistan, in contrast, have been the revelation of the tournament by topping Group A with five wins in six matches.

Shahid Afridi's Pakistan broke three-time defending champions Australia's unbeaten streak of 34 World Cup matches with a four-wicket win in Colombo on Saturday.

It was just the tonic Pakistan needed after being stripped of big-time cricket at home due to security concerns in their volatile nation and tainted by an unsavoury spot-fixing scandal.

The absence of former captain Salman Butt and pace spearheads Mohammad Aamer and Mohammad Asif due to the controversy was not felt as the team rallied superbly under their inspirational captain.

All-rounder Afridi is the tournament's leading bowler with 17 wickets with his fastish leg-breaks, while seamer Umar Gul has kept the pressure on at the other end with 13 wickets.

Afridi may have failed with the bat so far with just 65 runs in six games, but young guns Umar Akmal and Asad Shafiq have shone brightly in their first World Cup.

Akmal has scored 211 runs at 52.75 and Shafiq averages 124 in the two games he has played so far, while seasoned seniors like Misbahul Haq and Younis Khan have lent solidity to the middle-order.

Team manager Intikhab Alam, who was coach when Pakistan won the 1992 World Cup under Imran Khan, was delighted with his side's performance so far.

The former captain attributed the success to "self-belief, fitness and high energy levels."

"We are peaking at the right time," Intikhab said.

Reality check for Smith

AFP, New Delhi



It is not easy for a 21-year-old to be compared to two legends of the game but Australia's Steve Smith seems destined to carry the burden.

The baby-faced leg-spinning all-rounder was hailed as the next Shane Warne when he made his Test debut last year and even before he could come to terms with the early comparison, he was then labelled as the future Steve Waugh.

"I think he's definitely got captaincy potential," says Dave Gilbert, a former Australian Test bowler and chief of Cricket New South Wales.

"He won't be the next Warne, but in time he will be a very good leg-spin bowler. When he came into the NSW first XI, he reminded me of Steve Waugh."

"I played with Steve Waugh in his debut first-class game against Queensland in 1984. He had this belief in his ability and Steve Smith is the same."

"They are both quiet, they don't make waves and rock the boat, they do the job and their self-belief is what takes them a long way."

Once Smith was named in Australia's World Cup squad, the clamour around him increased, only to be silenced as the tournament progressed.

Smith struggled with the ball so much in the league matches that skipper Ricky Ponting did not give him a single over in their final group game against Pakistan.

The leggie picked just one wicket at the cost of 139 runs in the five innings leading up to the Pakistan game, which the three-time defending champions went on to lose by four wickets.

His form with the bat has been equally unimpressive, managing 53 runs from three stints out in the middle.

Ponting is likely to show little tolerance while picking his eleven for the high-profile quarterfinal against India in Ahmedabad in Thursday, given Smith's current slump.



PHOTO: REUTERS

England pacer Jade Dernbach relaxes by the poolside at the team hotel in Colombo yesterday. The pacer has been called in as replacement for the injured Ahmad Shahzad prior to their quarterfinal clash against Sri Lanka on March 26.