



Australia paceman Brett Lee laces up his shoes as he prepares for Thursday's quarterfinal clash against India at the Sardar Patel Stadium in Ahmedabad yesterday. The speedster will be looking to continue his excellent form to counter India's batting might.

PHOTO:  
AFP

## This quarterfinal is mini-final: Nielsen

REUTERS, Ahmedabad



Australia are treating Thursday's World Cup quarterfinal against India as a "mini-grand final", coach Tim Nielsen said on Tuesday.

"The adrenaline will certainly be flowing and playing in front of their home crowd in Ahmedabad will be exciting and a challenge for us. We've got no fear now; we know we're in the knockout stage," Nielsen told reporters.

"It's exciting...a mini-grand final in itself. If you came here and thought, 'What would be the best result? It would be great to make the final against India'. Well, we've got our final against India in the next few days."

The 42-year old English-born coach said the home crowd would add to the pressure on India.

"I'm sure if we're on our game, they won't necessarily be looking forward to playing against us. That's something in our favour," he said.

"It's [playing at home] a huge factor for them. There's some pressure there and if we can start the game well and maybe quieten the crowd that will play on the mind of the Indian team."

"The media and the public scrutiny will also be so great that you'd expect India to have most of the pressure on them."

Nielsen said Australia's best chance of gaining an upper-hand would be by making

early inroads into the Indian batting.

"The importance of a quarterfinal and the stature of a match will mean they are switched on," he said.

"But if we can make some early inroads into their batting [Virender] Sehwag, [Sachin] Tendulkar, Virat Kohli and [Gautam] Gambhir have played really well for them -- we'd like to think that would be a benefit for us."

Senior Australia batsman Mike Hussey jumped to the support of out-of-form captain Ricky Ponting and said he would prove his mettle in Thursday's quarterfinal.

Ponting has now gone 17 ODI innings without hitting a century and has not even hit a 50 since June last year.

The 3-1 Ashes drubbing at the hands of England and the end of the 34-match World Cup winning streak against Pakistan on Saturday have only compounded Ponting's problems.

Accordingly the 36-year old, chasing a hat-trick of World Cup titles as captain, faces his most challenging days as the national skipper.

But Hussey is still ready to bet on his captain finding his form soon.

"Ricky's got our 100 per cent support," Hussey said.

"He's such a class player. It's amazing, it seems like he's been coping criticism over very minor things. Things have been blown way out of proportion from our point of view."

## India up against raw pace

REUTERS, New Delhi



India's top-order batsmen will need to find an effective counter to Australia's fast bowlers in Thursday's World Cup quarterfinal if they are to sustain a billion dreams.

There is every possibility that Australia would unleash a three-pronged pace attack in Ahmedabad to exploit India's perennial weakness against the fast, rising deliveries that was so cruelly exposed in Chennai on Sunday even by the modest pace of West Indian Ravi Rampaul.

Compared to West Indies, Australia possess a much more potent attack comprising Brett Lee, Shaun Tait and Mitchell Johnson who would crank up the maximum pace they can and direct most of their deliveries to the rib cages of the Indian batsmen.

Both the Indian openers, Sachin Tendulkar and Gautam Gambhir, fell to rising deliveries in Chennai and Yuvraj Singh, who struck his 13th ODI century to power India to victory, survived one when he was dropped by West Indies skipper Darren Sammy at point.

India would be naive to believe that Australia skipper Ricky Ponting did not watch and make a note in his diary.

Yuvraj, however, was quick to dismiss the suggestion.

"I don't think there is an issue with the short ball," he said.

"If you have an issue with the short ball, you won't be number one test team and number two one-day team... Definitely we know they have pace and they get wickets with that. We will be prepared for them."

India believe in Virender Sehwag, they have a batsman who can blunt the Australian pace attack single-handedly and no ploy would work if the opener gets going.

Sehwag missed the match against West Indies with a knee problem but is certain to open the innings on Thursday with Tendulkar, who is on the verge of yet another personal milestone -- his impending 100th international century.

Off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin also gave a good account of himself, opening the attack against West Indies and Virat Kohli's return to form also augurs well for the side which has shown a recent tendency to squander strong foundations and collapse at the

most inopportune time.

Australia would expect their pacemen to force another great Indian collapse in Ahmedabad in front of a full-house at the Sardar Patel Stadium.

Unlike the co-hosts, four-times champions Australia have already played a match at Ahmedabad where they crushed Zimbabwe by 91 runs with Lee, Tait and Johnson claiming seven of the 10 wickets.

Lee has been regularly among the wickets with 12 scalps from six outings, while Tait and Johnson have 10 apiece. Smarting from the defeat by Pakistan that also snapped their 34-match unbeaten run in World Cups dating back to 1999, Ponting is not happy with the batsmen.

He was particularly annoyed with the sluggish start provided by Shane Watson and Brad Haddin against Pakistan which, he felt, put avoidable pressure on the middle order.

"They ate up too many balls, played too many dot balls and that cost us," Ponting wrote in a newspaper column.

Incidentally, he himself has not really set alight the tournament with the bat so far and his highest score in the tournament being the 36 he scored against Kenya.



WHEN GREAT HEADS CONVERGE: India's master batsman Sachin Tendulkar (R) and captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni seemingly chalk up their plans to thwart quarterfinal opponents Australia in the break of a practice session at the Sardar Patel Stadium in Ahmedabad yesterday.

PHOTO:  
AFP

## Ricky's days numbered?

AFP, Sydney



Ricky Ponting could be in the final week of his nine-year reign as captain after a troubled build-up to the World Cup, a report said Tuesday, citing a Cricket Australia official.

The Sydney Morning Herald said there was stiff opposition at boardroom level to the 36-year-old retaining the job for next month's tour of Bangladesh, although his position as a player was not in jeopardy.

"We need to be looking at the future. It's time for us to make a change," the newspaper quoted the official as saying.

Ahead of the World Cup, Ponting earned the dubious distinction of becoming the only Australian skipper to fail to win the Ashes three times, putting him under enormous pressure.

He has also done himself no favours in India, taking a reprimand from the Inter-

national Cricket Council after smashing a dressing-room TV in a fit of fury after being run out during Australia's World Cup win over Zimbabwe.

He was also criticised for angrily throwing the ball to the ground after colliding with teammate Steven Smith during their victory over Canada.

Then his sportsmanship was questioned when he failed to walk in Saturday's defeat to Pakistan.

"We're waiting for the next thing to blow up," the official said. "We don't go a game without there being some issues with him."

Michael Clarke, who led Australia to an emphatic 6-1 one-day series victory over England to give them a boost after the post-Ashes despondency, is seen as favourite to take his job.

The Australians face India in Thursday's World Cup quarterfinal in Ahmedabad.

## Tickets gone in 90 minutes!

REUTERS, Colombo



Angry Sri Lankan fans criticised local organisers after tickets costing just 2.72 dollars for a World Cup semifinal that could feature Kumar Sangakkara's men sold out in just 90 minutes on Tuesday.

Around 25,000 fans had queued up from the early hours of Tuesday morning outside the 35,000-capacity R Premadasa Stadium desperate to get their hands on a 300-rupee ticket for the March 29 semifinal, which will feature the co-hosts provided they beat England on Saturday.

"We were here since before dawn but now they say no more tickets are available. We can only get

them on the black market and they cost above 2,500 rupees or 3,000 rupees," a 16-year-old student, who identified himself only as Insan, told Reuters.

"[Sri Lanka] Cricket Board is responsible for this mess up. We come to watch a match because we love the game but we were unable to buy a ticket."

Demand of tickets for matches featuring the three co-hosts, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, have far outstripped supply.

Last month the official online ticket website crashed due to 10 million people chasing just 1,000 tickets for the April 2 final in Mumbai.

While supporters clashed with police in Indian cities when tickets sold out in various stadium box offices, in Sri Lanka "Most of the people who came here were businessmen who want to resell the tickets. Those were not cricket fans and real

cricket fans could not get the tickets," a 49-year-old photographer named Wickramage said.

Sri Lanka's World Cup director Suraj Dandeniya said it was impossible to meet the demands of the cricket-loving public.

"We had to close the ticket counters within 1-1/2 hours as all the tickets were sold out," Dandeniya told Reuters.

"We sold only up to 9,500 tickets but there were around 25,000 people queued up for the tickets and, unlike earlier matches, we restricted one ticket per person."

The organising committee decided to sell 25,000 tickets to the public with a maximum price of 7,500 rupees per ticket.

The majority of tickets were priced at 300 rupees.

**SPORTS POLL**  
Which big team will miss out in the World Cup quarterfinals?

Bangladesh	53.5%
England	30.3%
West Indies	16.1%

**TOTAL VOTES: 155**

**WEEKLY QUESTION**  
Who has been the best performer in the World Cup's first round?

Visit the sports page of [www.thedailystar.net](http://www.thedailystar.net) to cast vote

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**What to WATCH**

**BTV/STAR Sports/STAR Cricket**

ICC Cricket World Cup  
First Quarterfinal  
Pakistan v West Indies  
Live from 2:30pm  
**ESPN**

Sportscenter India  
Sports News  
Live from 11:30pm

**DAY'S EVENT**

**National Cricket League**  
(Four-Day Match, Day-3)  
Rajshahi v Khulna at Sylhet  
Chittagong v Dhaka at Rajshahi  
Barisal v Sylhet at Bogra

**BOMBAY SWEETS**  
To know it... You have to eat it !!

**IN A WORLD CUP MATCH WHICH PLAYER HIT 6 SIXES IN A OVER?**

**Potato Crackers** **BOMBAY FRIES**

**SCRATCH AND WIN ATTRACTIVE BOMBAY CRICKET CARDS**

For answer... see tomorrow's newspaper Yesterday's answer... 2003 World Cup, 8th World Cup