

'Best chance for SL to win WC'

With the team's quarterfinal and semifinal matches scheduled at home, Sri Lanka have the best chance to win the ongoing World Cup after a hiatus of 15 years, feels former captain Arjuna Ranatunga.

"The fact that we will be playing our quarterfinal and semifinal fixtures at home will be a huge advantage," said Ranatunga, the man who led Sri Lanka to their only World Cup title way back in 1996.



Pakistan's Mohammad Hafeez (C) is the toast of his teammates after dismissing yet another West Indies batsman in the first World Cup quarterfinal at the Sher-e Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. The off-spinner took two wickets and then struck an unbeaten 61 as Pakistan romped to a 10-wicket win.

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

AFC CHALLENGE CUP QUALIFIERS

Booters beat Myanmar

 Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh kept their AFC Challenge Cup Qualifiers campaign alive upstaging hosts Myanmar 2-0 at the Youth Training Centre in Yangon yesterday.

An eleventh-minute strike from Shakil Ahmed gave Bangladesh an early lead before Abdul Baten Mojumder Komol sealed the victory two minutes before the end of regulation time.

The win against their fancied neighbours served as a boost for the boys of Croatian coach Robert Rubcic after their defeat against Palestine by the same margin in their opening match on Monday.

The win now puts Bangladesh on second place with three points, one behind leaders Palestine who drew goalless with Philippines in the earlier match of the day.

Philippines have two points from as many matches while hosts Myanmar have a single point to show.

It was Bangladesh's first victory under Rubcic who took charge of the side in September last year.

Bangladesh will play their last match against Philippines tomorrow. Two teams from each of four groups will advance into the finals.

Prior to this match, Bangladesh had only beaten Myanmar twice and drew once in nine meetings.

In the last two meetings, Bangladesh lost to Myanmar by the odd goal in three. This win will certainly inject some fresh air after a disappointing international campaign for the last one year, when they failed to win a single game.

Pakistan delighted

Seniors disappoint Gibson

BISHWAJIT ROY

Mere spectators they were, but as boisterous as ever, appreciating the cricket. They did not have their own team to support, but left no space empty at the 25,000-seater Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

A good and competitive game would have been a real feast for the full-house crowd but the first quarterfinal of the ICC Cricket World Cup 2011 turned into a one-sided affair, which a clinical Pakistan won by a comfortable 10-wicket margin against the hapless West Indies, who have frustrated the cricket crazy fans of the country in many ways in this tournament.

Pacer Umar Gul set the tone in Pakistan's favour as early as the third over by removing dangerous Chris Gayle after West Indies skipper Darren Sammy decided to bat first in the day-night contest. The Caribbean side never recovered from the early hiccups as their poor batting continued to hit new lows in the tournament to produce what turned out to be a poor game of cricket indeed. The West Indies batsmen had no answer to the Pakistani slow bowlers led by captain Shahid Afridi -- the tournament's leading wicket-taker with 21 -- who claimed

four wickets to destroy their opponents' middle-order.

Many might have singled out the poor batting of West Indies behind this meek surrender, but Pakistan coach Waqar Younis said that one should also give credit to his boys who maintained their impressive run in the tournament by making it to the semifinals for the first time in 12 years.

"One should give credit to Pakistan team for this convincing victory. The bowling has been outstanding throughout the tournament. Our bowling has not been an issue throughout and we have done a decent job also today. We had problems with the batting but we finished the game with command," said Waqar, the great former Pakistan pace bowler, in a lively post-match conference.

The Pakistan coach also spoke highly of Mohammad Hafeez, who got the man-of-the-match award for his all-round show as the off-spinner bowled with the new ball and took two important wickets before playing a stroke-filled innings of 61.

"I am more than happy with the openers. It was pleasing to see Hafeez get the runs. He played superbly and bowled outstandingly. He is a very smart cricketer and has got the self-belief to perform well," said Waqar.

"It was a pressure game with a lot of

talk around the team but that actually gave us the boost. After we got Gayle out, it gave us confidence. I think the pressure got the best out of us," he added.

The Pakistan victory signalled the prospect of a mouthwatering clash in the semifinal between the two bitter rivals of the sub-continent, and that was the reason why everyone was curious about whether the Pakistan team was anticipating the much-desired clash in Mohali.

"I am not really fussed about the opponents of the semifinals. We will watch the game tomorrow (between India and Australia) closely. We have 6-7 days and by then we will have a new strategy," said Waqar, who was diplomatic in all his answers.

However, at one stage the former Pakistan skipper said: "But I would love an India-Pakistan match because there is a huge, huge interest about this match."

The Pakistan coach also believed that their success brought massive enthusiasm among the cricket fans in their country.

"I am happy that there was no load-shedding in our country. I heard it today and I think it was great that everyone could see the game. They prayed for us definitely. We went

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New Zealand focused

SPORTS REPORTER

Before the start of the ICC World Cup, the sub-continent had been a nightmare for New Zealand, having lost 11 matches out of 12 on their tours of Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh. But the Kiwis seemed to have coped with the setback well after having won four matches to qualify for the World Cup quarterfinals.

The Kiwis, who have the tag of semifinal regulars in World Cups after playing that stage five times in the previous nine editions, now look forward to extending the feat of reaching the semifinals as the Black Caps practised yesterday at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah in a cheerful mood.

They almost spent half-an-hour on playing football and catching practice, after which the top order batsmen made their way to the nets to prepare for Friday's quarterfinal match against South Africa.

Nevertheless, it will be an uphill task for Black Caps to overcome the tournament's most consistent side, who skittled out co-hosts Bangladesh for 78 on the Mirpur surface with an army of three spinners-- John Botha, Robin Peterson and Imran Tahir -- who together grabbed five wickets.

The New Zealand batsmen also struggled against Bangladesh on the Mirpur surface while being crushed 4-0 last year and they were also seen struggling against

spinners Muttiah Muralitharan (4/25) and Ajantha Mendis (2/24) in their last group match against Sri Lanka.

"We are confident against the three-spin attack of South Africa because we can play spin well," said Nathan McCullum, the New Zealand off-spinner after a three-hour practice session in Fatullah.

McCullum, however, said that the team were more focused on themselves rather than thinking too much about the opponents.

"We have to prepare as best we can and not worry too much about the opponents, and take the opportunities we are given," said the elder brother of New Zealand's dazzling opener Brendon McCullum.

The New Zealanders, however, may find confidence in the way they beat Pakistan, a subcontinent side, in a group match and McCullum believes their bilateral series against Bangladesh and India before the world cup helped them a lot.

"We've toured India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka recently so we know the conditions and things have been changed.

"We have also played in quarterfinals and semifinals of the World Cup but haven't made it to the final. So this time, hopefully we will make it through the quarters and then semis and see what happens," said the off-spinner.

The southern-hemisphere side have also got a good record against South Africa in

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TODAY'S MATCH

Match	Time	Venue
India v Australia	3:00pm	Ahmedabad

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India - Australia

India started the tournament as the favorite due to the home ground advantage and pressure of batsman such as Sachin Tendulkar and Virender Sehwag in the lineup, but that has changed a little with some dramatic collapses in crunch games. In this match all focus will be on Sachin as he has a chance to complete 18000 run landmark and 100th century. Defending champion Australia tasted its first defeat since the 1999 World Cup group stage when it went down by four wickets to Pakistan on Saturday. The pace trio of Brett Lee, Shaun Tait and Mitchell Johnson is sure to test the Indian batsmen, who need to fire to cover perceived weaknesses in the bowling and fielding departments.

Anwarul Islam

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