



ONE LAST CHANCE: Australia captain Ricky Ponting (L) throws the ball while India's master batsman Sachin Tendulkar (R) fixes his trademark Panama hat as they prepare for today's mouth-watering World Cup quarterfinal at Sardar Patel Stadium in Ahmedabad.

PHOTOS: AFP

INDIA V AUSTRALIA: AHMEDABAD

Awesome batting v fiery pace

AFP, Ahmedabad

India go into their World Cup quarterfinal against champions Australia on Thursday ready to face some fiery fast bowling.

The co-hosts go into this game on the back of an 80-run victory over the West Indies in Chennai.

Australia's previous match saw the end of their 34-game unbeaten World Cup run courtesy of a four-wicket defeat by fellow quarter finalists Pakistan.

However, the way West Indies fast bowler Ravi Rampaul took five wickets, including the prize scalp of Sachin Tendulkar with a lifting delivery, has revived the debate about India's ability to handle short-pitched bowling.

Australia almost have no choice but to see if the old cliché holds true given an attack built around the fast bowling trio of Brett Lee, Shaun Tait and Mitchell Johnson.

Johnson is looking forward to taking on Virender Sehwag having claimed the opener's wicket nine times from 18 games.

"I don't mind bowling up into his rib-cage to be honest," said Johnson. "He seems to struggle with that a bit. It's always a good challenge to bowl to someone like that, he doesn't really use his feet but he can hit the ball hard. It will be a pretty good start to the game if we can get him early."

Yuvraj Singh, whose century against the West Indies followed on from a trio of fifties earlier in the tournament, said it was clear where Australia's bowling strength lay.

"They have pace and get wickets with pace. We have to be prepared for it and we'll see what happens in the quarterfinal."

Yuvraj, also a handy left-arm spinner, said it was a myth India batsmen were especially vulnerable when the fast bowlers dug the ball in.

"I don't think there's an issue with the short ball. If you have an issue with the short ball you won't be the number one Test team and number two ODI (one-day international) team in the rankings."

Australia captain Ricky Ponting admitted there is no secret to their attack.

"We're more reliant on fast bowlers, they are more reliant on spinners," he said.

"We expect to be facing 30 overs of fast bowling, those are the strengths of both teams."

Ponting goes into the match having had to fend off speculation that he was ready to quit international cricket after the World Cup.

However, the 36-year-old rubbished that suggestion.

"I've never even thought about or contemplated retiring at the end of this World Cup. You'll hopefully see me playing a lot in the next few years."

India, who beat Australia by 38 runs in a warm-up match in Bangalore, have got themselves into several good positions in this tournament only for their batsmen to throw

it away. For example nine wickets were lost for 29 runs in defeat by South Africa while seven went for 50 runs against the West Indies.

"We've noticed how they've had crashes towards the end of the innings and the differences in their career records and their records against Australia," Ponting said.

But if fast-scoring opener Sehwag, set to return from a knee injury, gets going India's middle-order may not be an issue.

Australia have batting problems of their own with both Cameron White and Ponting, who scored a blistering century in the 2003 World Cup final win over India in Johannesburg, struggling for runs.

Ponting managed just 102 runs at 20.40 in six Group A matches and he hasn't made an international century for 13 months.

"I might watch the 2003 (final) video today. Especially if you are struggling, it doesn't hurt to do that every now and then," Ponting said.

"But I know that I and the team have both played our best games when we've needed to."

INDIA V AUSTRALIA	
Matches:	104
Australia wins:	61
India wins:	35
No result:	8
First meeting:	Dec 6, 1980, Melbourne - India won by 66 runs
Last meeting:	Oct 20, 2010, Vishakhapatnam - India won by five wickets

India sweat on Sehwag fitness

AFP, Ahmedabad



India face a nervous wait to find out if opening batsman Virender Sehwag will be fit to face Australia in Thursday's World Cup quarter final at the Sardar Patel Stadium.

Sehwag missed India's final group match, an 80-run win over the West Indies in Chennai last week after suffering an allergic reaction to a painkilling injection in his right knee.

India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni said Wednesday the dynamic run-scorer's fitness was still an issue.

"We are taking a call on Viru in the evening or maybe tomorrow morning before the start of the game," Dhoni said. "Apart from that, all the others are fit."

Sehwag has scored 7,707 runs including 14 hundreds in 233 one-day internationals at an average of 35.35.

But a strike rate of over 104 is arguably the most telling statistic, as it is evidence of his consistent ability to get the innings off to a blistering start that leaves the opposition on the defensive.

"It's really good to have Sehwag opening the innings, because if the deliveries are short and to the body or somewhere else, he's the kind of batsman who can make the most of that kind of bowling," Dhoni explained.

Dhoni, himself a hard-hitting middle-order batsman, added: "He can play an aggressive game, change the course of a match in the first five overs and give your team the kind of momentum that is needed."

However, Sehwag has never made an ODI hundred in 27 matches against Australia and he averages a modest 22.65 against the world champions.

If Sehwag is ruled out, India are set to retain Suresh Raina, brought in against the West Indies, and keep Test opener Gautam Gambhir at the top of the order to partner Sachin Tendulkar.

Sledgers no more

AFP, Ahmedabad

Australia captain Ricky Ponting said Wednesday that his famously combative side are not the sledgers of old.

"Maybe we've just learned to keep our mouths closed a bit more. A lot of that chat hasn't really happened since (Glenn) McGrath and (Shane) Warne went out of the team," he said to laughter from reporters.

"Hopefully, our cricket will do the talking on the field tomorrow."

Australia tackle India in the World Cup quarterfinals on Thursday.

Ricky wants Sachin to wait

AFP, Ahmedabad



Australia captain Ricky Ponting praised India great Sachin Tendulkar ahead of their World Cup quarterfinal clash, but joked they both might need wheelchairs to play in the 2015 edition.

Ponting goes into Thursday's match in Ahmedabad with his position as skipper and future as an Australia player being called into question.

However, he has won the World Cup three times -- triumphing in the last two editions as captain.

Tendulkar, for all his achievements, has never won the World Cup with India's lone success coming back in 1983.

"The way he (Tendulkar) is going he

could play in another World Cup yet," said Ponting.

"Hopefully tomorrow I can get myself in the sort of form to play in another one," added Ponting, who managed just 102 runs in six group matches at this event and who hasn't made an international century for 13 months.

"But we'll probably both be in wheelchairs by then," he joked.

"I'll be 40 and he'll be 42, so it will be interesting to see our running between the wickets."

Tendulkar has a record 99 international hundreds (51 in Tests and 48 in one-day internationals) and Ponting said: "It's an amazing record, an amazing achievement."

"We hope the 100th one doesn't come tomorrow. He'll be doing everything to make sure it's the case, we'll

be doing everything to make sure he stays on 99 for a bit longer."

Ponting stressed the match was more than a battle between two of cricket's all-time great batsmen, highlighting India left-arm quick Zaheer Khan as a potential dangerman.

"I think he's got the majority of his wickets in the tournament when people have really tried to go after him and attack him," said Ponting.

"We could really try and put it on him and take him out of the game, because we know he's their main man, or we can go the other way and make sure we don't give him wickets and try and get to the other guys, some of the part-timers, a bit more."

"How well he starts tomorrow or how well our batters start might dictate the way we play him."

What to WATCH

BTV/STAR Sports/
STAR Cricket
ICC Cricket World Cup
Second Quarterfinal
India v Australia
Live from 3:00pm
ESPN
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 11:30pm

DAY'S EVENT

National Cricket League
(Four-Day Match, Day-4)
Rajshahi v Khulna at Sylhet
Chittagong v Dhaka at Rajshahi
Barisal v Sylhet at Bogra



Indian children get their faces painted with the Indian tri-colours at Hyderabad yesterday, in an expression of support for their team in today's quarterfinal clash against Australia.

PHOTO: AFP

'Home crowd to inspire us'

AFP, Ahmedabad

India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni insists playing in front of a sell-out crowd will inspire his side when they face Australia in the World Cup quarterfinals on Thursday.

The Sardar Patel Stadium has a capacity of over 48,000 and there will be few spare seats to be had when co-hosts India play the defending champions.

Dhoni is well used to shouldering the burden of the hopes of billions of India supporters and the wicketkeeper-batsman said he would draw strength from the fanatical support.

"It is a big advantage," said Dhoni. "You have 30,000-40,000 people coming to the ground to cheer for you. If they are cheering for you then it definitely makes a difference."

"The pressure of expectation has always been a big part of the Indian cricket team. On most occasions the level of expectation level is not set by you as an individual but is set by others."

Matches between India and Australia have produced some of cricket's most thrilling contests in recent times.

"In the last two to three years we have seen that India-Australia series are among the most viewed which means that the players are more intense on the field and they want to give their best," Dhoni said.

"They know that the whole world is keeping a keen eye on the contest between the players."

"That's a big positive for both sides because you want your key players to perform and being intense also helps you perform."

Australia's fast bowling trio of Brett Lee, Shaun Tait and Mitchell Johnson are all set to test the notion that India's batsmen are vulnerable to short-pitched bowling.

However, Dhoni said: "They definitely they have got good fast bowlers. But don't forget we have won a Test match at Perth (which historically has produced one of world cricket's quickest pitches), the last time we won at Durban (against an impressive South Africa pace attack)."

"People have been talking about short-pitched stuff a lot. It's not new to us. It always follows us."

SPORTS POLL
WEEKLY QUESTION

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

Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast vote

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www.twitter.com/dssport



India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni waits for his turn to bat at the nets during practice at the Sardar Patel Stadium in Ahmedabad, ahead of today's quarterfinal against Australia here.

PHOTO: AFP

BOMBAY SWEETS

To know it... You have to eat it !!

WHICH WORLD CUP IS KNOWN AS THE LOWEST SCORING WORLD CUP SO FAR?

Potato Crackers
BOMBAY FRIES
SCRATCH AND WIN ATTRACTIVE BOMBAY CRICKET CARDS

For answer... see tomorrow's newspaper
Yesterday's answer... Herschelle Gibbs