

Villa surpasses Raul's record

David Villa's double saw him become Spain's all-time top marksman and sent the Czech Republic packing to preserve the world champions' flawless record in Euro 2012 qualifiers on Friday. Villa fired home twice in five minutes to floor the Czechs 2-1 in Grenada after Jaroslav Plasil had given the visitors a shock lead. Villa claimed his 45th and 46th goals for La Furia Roja in quick succession to surpass Raul in the goalscoring charts. Raul scored his 44 goals in 102 matches but Villa has outdone him in just 72 appearances.



England batsman Jonathan Trott plays a reverse sweep on his way to a crafty half-century as Sri Lanka captain Kumar Sangakkara looks on during their quarterfinal match at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

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On the Trott

MOHAMMAD ISAM from Colombo



For England, Jonathan Trott is as invaluable to their batting stocks as Eoin Morgan, Andrew Strauss and Ian Bell.

This claim will obviously be debatable (just like any other cricketing proclamations) but Trott's worth, especially after his 86 in the World Cup quarterfinals against Sri Lanka at the R Premadasa Stadium yesterday, should have doubled as his innings, for the third time in the tournament, put England in a position of strength from the depths of despair.

That he did it with the most unique innings would probably add more fuel to the claim that he was indeed England's best batsman during this World Cup.

For the record, Trott struck just two boundaries (and no sixes) in his 115-ball 86, the most by a batsman with two hits to the fence.

Of course there is Adam Parore who made 96 off 138 balls (against India at Vadodara in 1994) without hitting a single boundary. Zaheer Abbas of Pakistan (84 vs Australia), Kim Barnett of England (84 vs Sri Lanka), Desmond Hayes of West Indies (76* vs Australia) are some of the other 29 batsmen to score an ODI half century without a boundary excluding those who hit sixes but no fours.

On Saturday the noisy surroundings did very little to throw him off as the right-hander slowly rebuilt England's innings after the early dismissals of Andrew Strauss and Ian Bell at 31 for two in the ninth over.

Trott does a few things very well. Firstly, he scores without anyone noticing him. Both Eoin Morgan and

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Mashrafe returns against Aussies?



SPORTS REPORTER

Pace spearhead Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is all set to make a return to the international cricket.

Sources said that the 'Narail Express' has been included in the team for next month's three-match one-day series against Australia at home.

The Rafiqul Alam-led selection committee submitted the team to the board and the team is likely to be announced today as the Tigers are scheduled to be back to business tomorrow to prepare for the Aussie series. Australia are scheduled to arrive in Dhaka on April 3.

Mashrafe missed the World Cup due to injury. The leading paceman had sustained an injury on his right knee during a Premier Division Cricket League match at BKSP in December last year.

There is likelihood of seeing few more changes in the team from the World Cup squad as all-rounder Alok Kapali has a good chance to get a nod. It is confirmed that Mohammad Ashraf will be dropped from the team as the experienced batsman has already been selected to lead the Bangladesh A team on the upcoming South Africa tour.

There is every chance that coach Jamie Siddons's stint with the Tigers will be over after the coming series, but Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB's) media committee

chairman Jalal Yunus informed that they didn't discuss the issues of the support staff in yesterday's board meeting.

"Jamie [Siddons] had an exclusive meeting with the BCB president [AHM Mustafa Kamal] today and he submitted a report on the team's performance. We will discuss the coaches' issue in our next board meeting. Right at the moment the coaching staff will continue with their responsibilities till the next home series against Australia," informed Yunus after the meeting.

He also said that before the board meeting the technical committee met with the national players to take their opinions about the World Cup result. They especially inquired about the batting debacle in two games against West Indies and South Africa at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur that virtually shattered the Tigers' dream of playing the quarterfinals.

"Except Tamim Iqbal and Abdur Razzak, we met all the national players for their opinions. Most of the players said that they didn't understand why they crumbled under pressure. Everybody shared their views with us and we will prepare a report on the basis of their opinions to give it to the board," said Yunus.

"In the board meeting we passed a resolution where we highly praised the authorities concerned for their sincere efforts to make the World Cup a success in our country," he added.

India move on, boozing goes up!

AFP, Mohali

India's progress in the World Cup is proving intoxicating in more ways than one, with a survey claiming it has led directly to a rise in alcohol sales.

And the trend is particularly apparent in Chandigarh, the main city near Mohali where India face arch-rivals Pakistan in a hugely anticipated World Cup semifinal on Wednesday.

According to a nationwide survey of 3,500 Indian fans aged 16-45, Chandigarh cricket lovers have come second only to those in the capital city of New Delhi when it comes to the consumption of alcohol.

The Chandigarh Times quoted the survey as saying chilled beer is the favourite drink of at least 45 per cent of the city's youth.

Research found that fans in the 16-20 age group who used to consume one to two litres of beer a week have now started to drink two to four litres when day/night matches are in progress.

Fixtures featuring India boost consumption levels by three to five litres.

Security up in Mohali

Media hail Manmohan's 'cricket diplomacy'

AFP, Mohali



Around 3,000 police will patrol Wednesday's high-profile India-Pakistan World Cup semifinal, the first match between the two arch-rivals on Indian soil since the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

Some 2,000 security personnel are expected to be deployed in and around the 30,000-capacity PCA Stadium on matchday. An estimated 1,000 police have already descended on the luxury Hotel Taj in nearby Chandigarh where both teams are staying, a force which includes Indian army commandos.

The game, which takes place in the border state of Punjab, has already sparked a flurry of diplomatic activity.

India Prime Minister Manmohan Singh engaged in a little "cricket diplomacy" on Friday by issuing an invitation to the match to his Pakistani counterpart Yousuf Raza Gilani and President Asif Ali Zardari.

The invitation comes while relations between the two nations are still tense following the attack by Pakistan-based Islamist militants on Mumbai in 2008 that left 166 people dead.

It would be the first visit to India

by a Pakistani head of state or government for a decade, while even the presence of Singh alone creates an additional security problem.

"I propose to be at Mohali to watch the World Cup semifinal match," said Singh in his invitation.

"There is huge excitement over the match and we are all looking forward to a great game of cricket, that will be a victory for sport," he added.

"It gives me great pleasure to invite you to visit Mohali and join me and the millions of fans from our two countries to watch the match."

It was not immediately known whether the Pakistani leaders will attend the match but Islamabad has welcomed the invitation.

Elsewhere, the race was on to secure scarce tickets and hotel rooms.

Fans continued to queue at the ground on Saturday even though the local Punjab Cricket Association (PCA) had insisted as early as Tuesday that the 14,000 available tickets at the 30,000 capacity stadium had been sold, with the rest in the hands of the International Cricket Council (ICC).

But some supporters simply refused to believe tickets were no longer available.

Meanwhile, with most local hotels already booked out and the

Airports Authority of India inundated with requests from the country's super-rich to land their private jets, there are concerns as to how Pakistani fans, scrambling for visas, will be supervised.

Officials are anxious to avoid a repeat of incidents in 2005 when some Pakistan fans in India disappeared only to be arrested for alleged involvement in terror activities or overstaying their visa.


Reports from New Delhi add, Indian media on Saturday hailed the country's invitation to Pakistan's president and prime minister to watch the arch-rivals' clash as "cricket diplomacy".


"PM bats for peace," proclaimed the Hindustan Times newspaper in a front-page headline.

The Indian Express dubbed the invitation "cricket diplomacy" while the Times of India declared Singh "prepares the pitch to boost Indo-Pak ties."

The Indian Express said the decision to invite the Pakistani leaders was taken by the prime minister without consultations with the Ministry of External Affairs.

Singh has pushed strongly for "greater engagement" with Pakistan to address issues of mutual concern.






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