

'Future is bleak'

Outgoing South African cricket captain Graeme Smith feels the immediate future of the team is bleak in the wake of its shock World Cup ouster and a lot of work lay ahead for the new skipper and coach. New Zealand beat the South Africans by 49 runs in the World Cup quarterfinals, a match in which the last eight Proteas wickets fell for just 64. It was a rude shock for Smith's men, who won five of their games leading up to the quarterfinals, including a nail-biting encounter against India in Nagpur.



New Zealand batsman Ross Taylor pulls a ball while batting in the nets during the team's practice session in Colombo yesterday, ahead of tomorrow's semifinal clash against Sri Lanka.

PHOTO: AFP

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Mashrafe, Kapali back

Shuvagato new face for Aus series

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Pacer Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and middle-order batsman Alok Kapali have been recalled for next month's three-match ODI series against Australia when the Bangladesh Cricket Board yesterday declared a 14-member squad for the home series.

The Rafiqul Alam-led selection committee have also included a new face in Shuvagato Hom as they axed top-order batsman Junaed Siddique, all-rounder Naeem Islam, pacer Nazmul Hossain and ace batsman Mohammad Ashraful, who is set to lead the Bangladesh A side in next month's away series against South Africa, from the squad that played the World Cup at home. The dropped Siddique was also drafted into the Ashraful-led A team which will tour South Africa.

It has been learnt that the BCB technical committee headed by Enayet Hossain Siraj played a key role in selecting the squad as they had a long meeting with the selection committee yesterday before announcing the squad.

It's also learnt that the selection committee had another meeting among them after the discussion with the technical committee. Chief selector Rafiqul Alam did not respond to phone



SHUVAGATO HOM

SQUAD

Shakib Al Hasan (captain), Tamim Iqbal (vice captain), Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Imrul Kayes, Shahriar Nafees, Roqibul Hassan, Alok Kapali, Shuvagato Hom, Mushfiqur Rahim (wicketkeeper), Mahmudullah, Abdur Razzak, Suhrawardi Shuvo, Rubel Hossain and Shaiful Islam.

calls despite repeated efforts and kept all in dark about the inclusion of Kapali, Shuvagato and Mashrafe.

Bangladesh pace spearhead Mashrafe had missed the World Cup due to his knee injury sustained during a Premier Division League match at BKSP in December last year.

Now, the ace pacer is returning to international cricket after three months which is still a short period when compared to Kapali who has not donned national colours since leaving to join the rebel Indian Cricket League (ICL) in 2008.

Kapali last played against Australia at Darwin in September 2008 but his poor form in two successive series against Zimbabwe and Australia kept him out of the squad and the batsman from Sylhet joined ICL in the same year. He, along with 13 other players was banned for 10 years before he made his comeback to mainstream cricket.

Shuvagato Hom, a middle-order batsman, has been representing the Bangladesh A team for a couple of years and the inclusion of Kapali and Shuvagato might be an effort to steady

SEE PAGE 17 COL 1

Taylor dreams big

MOHAMMAD ISAM from Colombo

Moments after Daniel Vettori had enacted the last act of their disastrous Bangladesh tour (the series-ending press conference) in October, a fellow journalist quipped that New Zealand could end up losing everything before the World Cup but like the Germans in the football World Cup (twelve times semifinalists), they would be in the semifinals come what may.

New Zealand lost 4-0 to Bangladesh in October, conceded the next two one-day and Test series in India and at home to Pakistan but on Tuesday, they will be the only team outside the sub-continent to be in the last four.

At the P Sara Oval Ground here in Colombo, New Zealand's appearance was as improbable as it was for anyone finding out that Sir Don Bradman's only appearance in the sub-continent was at this very venue. But call it luck or the "John Wright effect", Vettori's men have made it to their country's sixth semifinal in the World Cup after 1975, 1979, 1992, 1999 and 2007.

One might say that New Zealand were fortunate to face South Africa in a knockout game or that Wright's appointment was vital, but only the most optimistic, like that reporter in Mirpur, would have thought of this day.

"We are proud of our history of making semifinals. This team would like to make history and go the furthest and into the final. We genuinely

believe we can do that and we want to make it on Tuesday," said Ross Taylor after New Zealand's training yesterday. Wright was keen to stress on unity more than his appointment as the New Zealand coach as the reason behind this sudden (but hardly surprising) rise into the semifinals.

"I think it is teamwork more than anything else. We often have to play against teams with higher quality bowling and batting so we have to rely on teamwork," said Wright.

The team's No 1 batsman at the moment, Taylor, added that it was the experience in these conditions since October that really helped their cause in this campaign. Be it the heat, the turning slow tracks or the opposition, New Zealand spent most time in the sub-continent than even India before the World Cup began. Though they lost everything in sight, the Black Caps' underdog status became more firm as, according to Taylor, teams started to take the team even more lightly.

"We didn't play as well as we'd have liked but there was belief in the team. We knew we could win. I don't think a lot of other people gave us a chance. It probably made other teams take us lightly than they did normally. That played into our hands," said Taylor.

"We had full belief. We didn't play as well as we'd have liked back then. We are learning from our mistakes. I believed we could have come this far," he added.

Taylor, who blasted a 124-ball 132 against Pakistan in the first round in an aggressive display only a few have

shown in this tournament, said that the match's magnanimity puts both New Zealand and Sri Lanka in equal footing ahead of the game, though he believed they carried momentum from their surprising 49-run win over South African at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. "It is a sudden death game. We will take a lot of confidence from our last game against South Africa. We have the advantage of playing against Sri Lanka in the preliminary stages and we did a few things wrong. Hopefully we can rectify that," he said.

Taylor and the Kiwis arrived in Sri Lanka on Saturday evening but the batsmen in the Black Caps camp took heart from Jonathan Trott's 86 and especially the way he tackled the home team's trump card. "I saw bits of it but not the whole game. We can take some positives out of that. I think the way Trott batted was something we can take a leaf out of with our bat. The way they played Murali, because obviously he's a big factor in the way Sri Lanka beat us in the last match," said Taylor.

Unlike Germany in football, New Zealand have been the perennial underdogs in this sport but have continuously defied odds (small population, injuries, etc) over the years. Taylor confirmed that it is a tag they enjoy.

"Most of the time New Zealand plays, we are the underdogs. It is something that we almost enjoy and we expect when we play it. Lot of teams expects to beat us and we enjoy the underdog tag," he said.

A nation of openers

SPORTS REPORTER from Colombo

England didn't give Upul Tharanga enough runs to break his own world record. It might sound easy but given Sri Lanka's tradition of big opening stands and of course England's ineptitude, another 50-odd runs in eleven overs looked easier than a cruise.

Tharanga's last of his dozen boundaries took him to a hundred and completed a famous demolition of England in front of a packed R Premadasa Stadium in the last quarterfinal of the World Cup on Saturday.

Dilshan also scored a superb century, his tenth in ODI cricket, but what really stood out was the desire shown by the pair. But this is nothing new.

Tharanga was Sanath Jayasuriya's opening partner in 2006 when they added 286 against England in Leeds, a world record not yet broken.

Eleven different batting pairs have more than 2,000 runs in partnerships for Sri Lanka in one-day cricket with ten 200-plus stands in total. Skipper Kumar

SEE PAGE 17 COL 2

Cricket lover's paradise

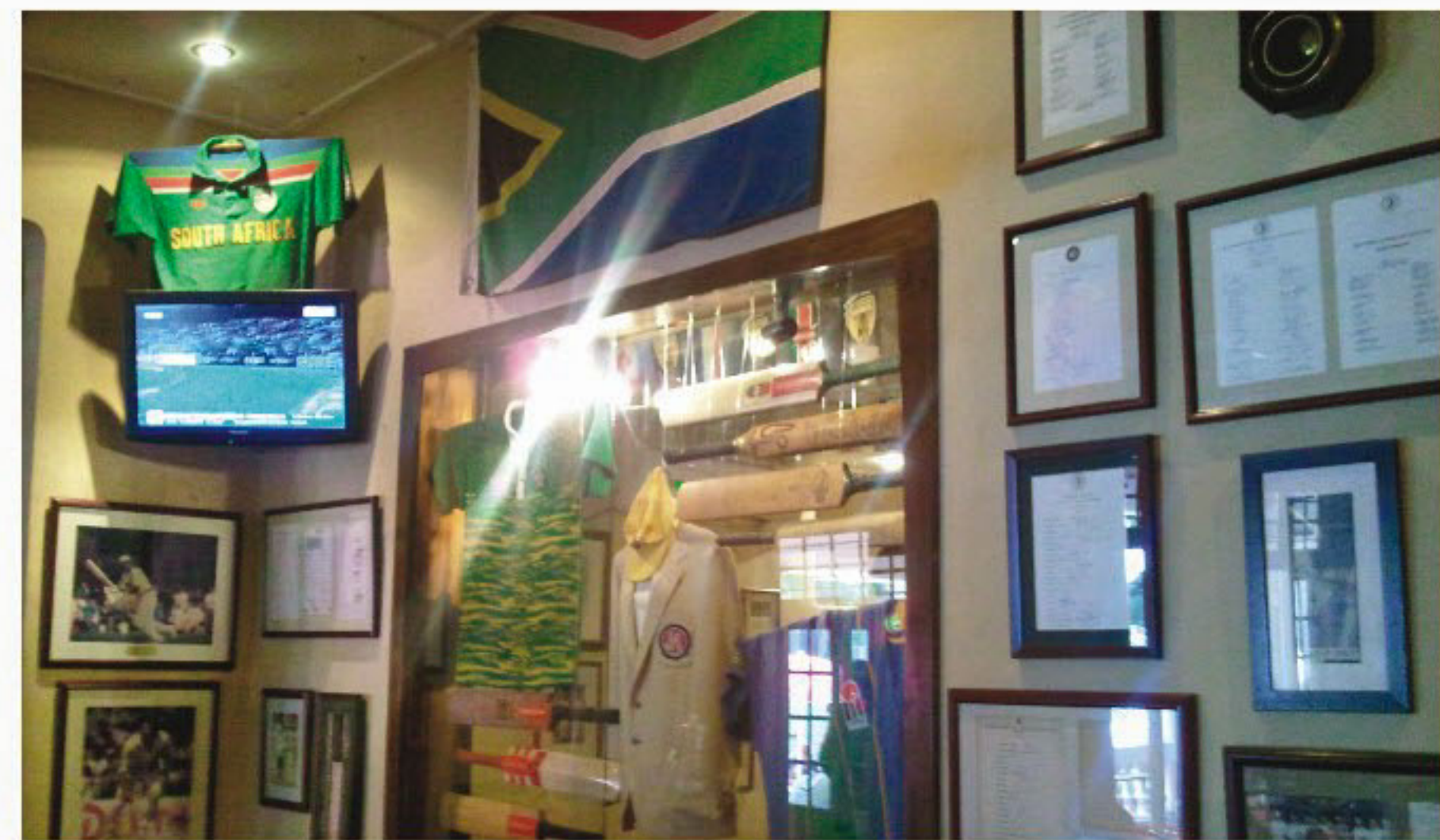


PHOTO: STAR

This wall is a sample of the delights on offer for cricket lovers at the Cricket Club Café in Colombo, which is full to the brim with cricket memorabilia and souvenirs.

MOHAMMAD ISAM from Colombo

Tucked within a quiet street in Colombo is a cricketing wonderland, a dream for cricket lovers of all ages. Mere words will fall short for a genuine follower upon entering this place, a refuge for geeks who talk nothing but cricket and those who take pleasure in knowing, sharing and watching the game.

It is the ultimate place to gaze at cricket history but the Cricket Club Café is much more than just that. It represents taste, heritage, an old-world feel, humour as well as a calm air that can only be found in Colombo and in this sport.

Established in 1996 by Australian James White and his wife Gabrielle, the themed

restaurant is set in a one-storied building on Queen's Road and is steeped in cricketing touch. As you enter, you will be informed of different stadiums around the world like a road sign. As you walk inside, four rooms greet you with walls filled with memorabilia, paper clippings, jerseys, autographed bats, sweaters, bats and balls. Pictures of famous cricket moments of Sri Lanka and the rest of the world are also framed in every wall.

There are two large rooms for the restaurant and a Bradman Bar as well as a separate room for England items that include Test match shirts, gloves given by Mike Gatting as well as Ian Botham's tracksuit.

SEE PAGE 17 COL 2



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