

# Wright backs Kiwi aggression

AFP, Wellington

New Zealand coach John Wright has praised his team's aggressive approach ahead of Tuesday's World Cup semifinal against Sri Lanka in Colombo.

Wright brushed aside criticism of New Zealand's conduct in its shock quarterfinal win over South Africa on Friday, when several Black Caps clashed with Proteas batsman Faf du Plessis at the end of the 28th over.

"I liked the aggression of the team," Wright told New Zealand media on Sunday. "They were very aggressive, particularly in the field. I think that's important. The odd thing happened but these things happen in international sport. I really like players who play with aggression and passion."

Wright, who has turned around one of the worst form slumps in New Zealand's history since his appointment last December, was more concerned by his side's batting performance.

With the Black Caps forced to defend a

below-par 221 against South Africa, Wright said an improvement against Sri Lanka was crucial.

"We have to bat well, that's the key for us," he said.

"I think the boys are learning -- you need those wickets in hand going into the last overs and you set those targets.

"We'll look inwards and focus very much on trying to get better as a unit."

The International Cricket Council slapped New Zealand skipper Daniel Vettori and pacer Kyle Mills with heavy fines over the ugly bust-up with du Plessis, while the South African batsman was also penalised.

Mills, who was not part of the playing eleven and only on the field as a drinks carrier at the time, has since been ruled out of the rest of the tournament with a leg injury.

The New Zealand Herald said the altercation was a "black mark" against the national side, marred by a gutsy win from the underdogs.

"The New Zealanders need to ensure they don't look infantile when milling around goading the opposition. It resembles bullying," the newspaper said.



Sri Lanka's spin legend Muttiah Muralidaran (R) has announced plans to travel overseas to drum up funds to build a sports complex for war-displaced civilians.

PHOTO: AFP

## 'India have an edge in batting'

PTI, Kolkata

The two-time World Cup winning West Indies team captain Clive Lloyd on Monday said that Yuvraj Singh has come up from his 'water boy' image in this World Cup and should make a big impact in sustaining India's billion dreams.

"I think I have read sometime ago that he has been considered as a 'water boy'. But the fact is that 'water boy' has started drinking water from the fountain.

"He is batting very well at the moment. He should consider on the one-dayers so that it helps him get back into the Test mould," the 1975 and 1979 World Cup winning captain told reporters on the sidelines of a promotional event here.

Stating that India's bowling attack is their weakest link, the legendary cricketer said the hosts would have to bat Pakistan out of the semifinals when the two arch-rivals clash in Mohali on Wednesday.

## Pak minister warns against fixing

AFP, Karachi



Pakistani Interior Minister Rehman Malik has warned the country's cricket team against match fixing and said they were under surveillance for Wednesday's highly charged World Cup semifinal against India.

Pakistan cricket has been rocked by match fixing allegations, with three top players handed lengthy bans by an International Cricket Council anti-corruption tribunal.

"I had given a warning yesterday (Sunday) that there should be no match fixing. This time I am watching it very closely. If any such thing happens we will take action," Malik told reporters in Karachi Monday.

The high-profile encounter between the South Asian rivals will be played in Mohali, India, amid tight security.

The clash which has overshadowed the World Cup final will be watched by Pakistan's Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani on an invitation from his Indian counterpart Manmohan Singh.

It will be the first game between the two teams on Indian soil since the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks that left 166 people dead and stalled a fragile four-year peace

process between the nuclear-armed South Asian rivals.

Malik said the team was being monitored closely.

"I should not have revealed but we have put them under strict surveillance, like who are the people meeting our players, with whom they are talking by telephone," he said.

"It was necessary after what had happened in London. We cannot take any chance," he said and described the current members as clean.

"I am sure that our current team members are very clean and I hope that they will not disappoint the nation."

Pakistan cricket has been hit by match fixing allegations which saw players Salman Butt, Mohammad Aamer and Mohammad Asif banned on charges related to fixing during last year's Lord's Test against England.

Malik advised the players to concentrate on the game.

"They should continue the practice and go to bed early, rise up according to their schedule and dedicate themselves to the game for Pakistan."

Malik welcomed reassurances from his Indian counterpart P. Chidambaram on providing full security for the Pakistani players.

## Kiwi PM to miss semi

AFP, Colombo

New Zealand Prime Minister John Key was "delighted" with an invitation to witness his country play Sri Lanka in Tuesday's World Cup semifinal, but logistics will keep him away.

Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapakse, who invited Key on Sunday, said the New Zealand premier was keen to visit, but he had just returned to the capital and there was no possibility that he could make Sri Lanka by Tuesday.

"He has said that he was delighted with the invitation, but he is unable to make it in time due to logistical problems," the president told foreign correspondents at his residence Monday.

The 1996 champions will tackle New Zealand on Tuesday for a place in the final. The Black Caps had knocked South Africa out of the World Cup by defeating them by 49 runs on Friday.

Sri Lanka will meet New Zealand for a second time in the current World Cup after their 112 run victory over the Black Caps in their Group A match in Mumbai on March 18.

The winner of Tuesday's semifinal will meet the winners of Wednesday's clash between India and Pakistan.

## Mohali workers baton charged

AFP, Mohali

Police baton-charged on Monday a crowd of workers demonstrating near the venue for the showpiece World Cup semifinal between India and Pakistan.

The protest rally by temporary Punjab government employees seeking permanent jobs took place in a nearby park but then headed towards the Punjab Cricket Association Stadium in Mohali.

Amid extremely tight security, police officers dispersed the crowd as it approached the stadium, hitting some protesters with bamboo canes, an AFP reporter witnessed.

"The incident had nothing to do with cricket," local cricket administrator G.S. Walia told AFP.

Police were in huge numbers at the stadium to keep a check on the fans who were crowding outside in the hope of getting tickets to the high-profile clash on Wednesday.

"They (the protestors) also thought that it would be a good way of getting some attention, so they chose the stadium for their protest," said a machine gun-wielding police officer. "The situation is under control."

## Murali's noble mission

AFP, Colombo



Sri Lanka's legendary bowler Muttiah Muralidaran plans to travel overseas to drum up funds to build a sports complex for war-displaced civilians.

Muralidaran, who holds the world record for 800 Test and 538 one-day wickets, wants to build the centre in northern Sri Lanka to build a new life for thousands of children in the former war zone.

"Financially we are not a wealthy country. But we have to help these people to rebuild their lives. I plan to travel abroad and talk to people, to raise money to build the facility," he said.

The million dollar project will be the second for Muralidaran's charity, the Foundation of Goodness, after having set up a similar project in a tsunami-hit southern coastal village of Seenigama.

The two-year project in Mankulam, 300 kilometres (187 miles) north of Colombo,

aims to build a sports centre, a school, English and IT training centres and an Elders' Home.

Muralidaran, who will quit international cricket after the World Cup, said he is reaching out to cricketers overseas to contribute.

"Cricket unites communities, and we can use the game to reach out and help those who are less privileged than us, to make their lives a little bit easier," the 38-year-old said.

His Seenigama project raised funds from cricketers and administrators in England and Australia. Canadian pop-star Bryan Adams donated a swimming pool.

The government restricted access to the war zone during the decades-long ethnic conflict with Tamil Tiger rebels that ended in May 2009.

He said the lack of access meant people living overseas are still unaware of the suffering and hardship war-displaced civilians are going through, to rebuild their lives.

Sri Lanka estimates some 300,000 civilians were displaced during the final months of the conflict.

## CA sets Ricky deadline

AFP, Sydney



Under-fire Australia captain Ricky Ponting was given just three days to decide his future Monday as selectors said the next one-day squad would be announced on Wednesday.

Ponting, who let slip Australia's 12-year grasp on the World Cup last week -- just three months after their heavy Ashes defeat -- has already hinted that he may step down.

Cricket Australia said a squad for next month's three-match one-day tour of Bangladesh was expected to be announced on Wednesday, effectively setting a deadline for the veteran skipper.

Ponting, 36, returned home on Sunday following Australia's quarterfinal exit from the World Cup at the hands of India, saying he was considering his position this week.

"I'll have the opportunity over the next couple of days to reflect on where things are headed for me and certainly what direction I feel things are heading for the betterment of Australian cricket," the Test and one-day captain told reporters.

"I have to really decide what I think is right for me and the team going forward."

Australia play three one-day matches against Bangladesh on April 9, 11 and 13, with Ponting previously stating that he wanted to lead the team on the tour.

But Ponting has since suggested he could quit as captain, saying he was prepared to play on under the likely leadership of his deputy Michael Clarke and bat anywhere in the order.

"I see myself as a leader around the group, simple as that, whether I'm captain or not I still think I've got a lot to offer as far as leadership qualities go," he said.

Though heartened by support of teammates and senior officials, Ponting said he was "absolutely" prepared to drop down the order and step down as captain "if that's what they (CA) and I believe is the best way forward".

Ponting, who has been under attack since the 3-1 Ashes series defeat to England, scored a fighting 104 but it was not enough to prevent India from knocking the champions out in last Thursday's quarter-final in Ahmedabad.

## Tait retires from ODIs



PHOTO: AFP

I have already stretched to the limit. Now it's time to quit.

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

Australia fast bowler Shaun Tait on Monday announced his retirement from one-day cricket to concentrate on the Twenty20 form of the game.

Tait, 28, who has just returned from the World Cup on the subcontinent, said he will step down from the national and South Australia one-day teams in an attempt to prolong his career.

"I have decided to retire from one-day cricket for both Australia and the South Australian Redbacks," Tait said in a statement released through

Cricket Australia.

"This is not a decision I have taken lightly, but I believe it is one that will help me to prolong my cricketing career through the many Twenty20 avenues available.

"In reality, playing all year round for Australia and South Australia is not allowing my body to stand up as I would like and I do not want to be forced into retirement through career-ending injuries."

Tait said his goal was to help Australia retain the ICC Cricket World Cup, currently underway in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

"However, with our involvement

now finished I feel it is the perfect time to move on in a new direction," said Tait, who was a member of Australia's 2007 World Cup-winning side.

Cricket Australia's General Manager Michael Brown said Tait had been an important contributor to Australia's shorter version of cricket over the last few years.

"Bowling at the speeds he generates places an unusual strain on his body and Cricket Australia respects the decision he makes today," Brown said.

Tait only played three Tests but in 35 ODI appearance he captured 62 wickets at 23.56.

## 'Proteas lacked composure'

Cricket

AFP, Johannesburg

Coach Corrie van Zyl admitted Sunday that South Africa lacked the composure to go all the way after a shock 2011 Cricket World Cup quarterfinals loss to New Zealand.

Set 222 to win in the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka, the hotly fancied Proteas were bundled out for 172 and 'Choker' headlines littered weekend Johannesburg newspapers.

"Horrible! Super chokers do it again', 'What a choke' and 'Chokers' made painful reading for the likes of all-rounder Jacques Kallis, who queried whether journalists knew the meaning of the word before the World Cup.

Defeat to New Zealand was the latest in a long list of failures by captain Graeme Smith and his team which

boasts some of the best cricketers on the international scene but has never won a world title.

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