

# Star SPORT

DHAKA SATURDAY APRIL 14

## Higuain's timely return

Real Madrid striker Gonzalo Higuain, who had been ruled out for the rest of the season after having back surgery in January, has been included in the club's squad to face Sporting Gijon on Saturday. The 23-year-old Argentine international underwent the operation to treat a slipped disc that had sidelined him since the end of November. "It looks like he made the right decision in having the operation in the United States. His recovery has gone very well. It has been a surprise," Real coach Jose Mourinho told a news conference on Friday.



India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni (L) and his Sri Lanka counterpart Kumar Sangakkara pose with the coveted ICC World Cup Trophy at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday on the eve of the final match to be played today.

PHOTO: AFP

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## MS staying in the moment

BISHWAJIT ROY from Mumbai



The onus is on Indian skipper MS Dhoni. The excitement, expectation and hype surrounding the final of the ICC Cricket World Cup has mainly been focused on the Indian side, especially as they are going to play the big match at home. They have also been tagged as favourites to win the final, and expectations have peaked after the 29-run victory over Pakistan in the high-voltage semifinal at Mohali.

The cricket-mad Indian people are not ready to believe that Dhoni's boys will frustrate them after the way they have progressed to the last stage since starting the campaign as a 'hot favourite'. India are now very near to achieving a unique feat by winning the World Cup at home, but captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni played down the hype when speaking at a pre-match press conference at the Wankhede Stadium yesterday, on the eve of the highly anticipated all-Asian final. But there was no shortage of confidence about his team's chance to lift the trophy for the second time in their history after the 1983 triumph of Kapil Dev's outsiders.

"Pakistan game was a big game and you saw the guest list, so there was further pressure. But what we know as a team is not the hype or expectations. In a sport you may be at your best, but the opposition can outplay you," said Dhoni when he was asked about the high expectation with the final.

"We did not have a long break between semifinal and final; that however helps not to think too much ahead of the final. You however must be in the present when you want to do well in a tournament like this in India. Every game was a challenge for us. We had to be at our best. We did not think too much about our result; how to increase our intensity is the issue," said Dhoni.

"It's not about quarters or semis but the final, how you turn up to the field and what you do till the end is important. Full stop does not come if the sentence is not complete. We

## ROAD TO FINAL

SAKEB SUBHAN

### INDIA

**India vs Bangladesh, Dhaka:** Sehwag hit the first ball of the World Cup off Rubel Hossain for four, and the match went only one way after that. Sehwag scored 175 and Virat Kohli an unbeaten 100 as India reached 370 for four. Bangladesh could only manage 283 in reply.

**India vs England, Bangalore:** The match of the tournament. Sachin Tendulkar scored a sublime 120, but India lost their way after looking like posting a total in excess of 350 to post a still-monumental 338. England captain Andrew Strauss ruined the host's party with an innings that outdid Tendulkar's, and the match was tied amid much drama.

**India vs Ireland, Bangalore:** The match was supposed to be a cakewalk for India, but proved marginally tougher as Yuvraj Singh won his first of four man-of-the-match awards with an unbeaten 50 as the hosts chased down 207 for the loss of five wickets against a spirited Ireland team.

**India vs Netherlands, Delhi:** Zaheer Khan claimed three wickets India shot Netherlands

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# Sangakkara preaches controlled aggression

SPORTS REPORTER from Mumbai



It may be the biggest occasion in world cricket, but ahead of the World Cup final against India at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai, Sri Lanka captain Kumar Sangakkara was as calm and philosophical as he could be.

The dream of a billion souls was fulfilled when India beat arch-rivals Pakistan in the semifinal in Mohali to book their Mumbai ticket, but everyone in the cricket-mad country has now taken fresh guard ahead of the big battle. One thing is for sure; there will be no shortage of cheering from the stands for the home team.

But the question is whether it will be an inspiration or pressure for the home team?

"It cuts both ways I think. Playing in front of your home crowd adds to the excitement, the passion and the pride that you feel but the weight of expectation, when you feel that crowd looking at you to do everything right is also tough," said Sri Lanka skipper Sangakkara at a crowded press conference yesterday. "We'd love to have played at home but that's not the way it is and we've accepted that and we'll try to make use of whatever conditions are out there for us and I'm sure the Indian crowd are always going to be appreciative of a good game of cricket," added a diplomatic Sri Lankan skipper.

The wicket-keeper batsman played safely throughout the press conference but assured

everybody that his side is ready to face the Indian challenge although he bracketed their opponents as favourites for the final.

"It's hard to pinpoint any weak link of the Indian team. They're a pretty good side. They've obviously been the favourites to win this tournament and they've got to the final and everyone will be looking to the Indians to keep doing that and keep playing as well as they have.

"But I don't think we're underdogs as such I think we're a pretty good unit. But we have to understand the fact that India, for the last year or two years, have been tagged as the favourites by almost everyone to win the World Cup. I'm sure they'll be looking at themselves as favourites too.

We're just going to come and play as well as we can," said Sangakkara.

It seemed that the special innings of Australian great Adam Gilchrist four years back in the 2007 World Cup final in West Indies has been still haunting the Sri Lanka team and Sangakkara said that they will try their best to avoid a repeat of that kind of scenario.

"Four years ago we were outdone by a fantastic innings from Adam Gilchrist. Hopefully we won't allow a repeat of that but even if that does happen, we've got to have the mental attitude to adjust and get back into the game. It's a lot to do with how we approach it and what our attitude is going to be tomorrow," he assured.

When asked about his team's mood with the toughest challenge in hand, Sangakkara said: "Everyone's excited but it's nice to see that it's a kind of controlled excitement. Everyone's relaxed, having a laugh. But also you can see there's a kind of steely determination behind all of that, knowing what a big job comes out of the way tomorrow. World Cup finals are huge occasions, so it's pretty tough to try and do too much really. We just want to hold on to what we have and do what we know we can do.

"I think it's just to use the occasion to lift yourself. The World Cups bring out the best in players, sometimes the worst, I think for us tomorrow is going to be about controlled aggression, not being too emotional, trying to

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**TODAY'S MATCH**

Match	Time	Venue
India v Sri Lanka	3:00pm	Mumbai

## INDIA-SRI LANKA ENCOUNTERS

	MATCHES	INDIA WON	SRI LANKA WON	NO RESULT
World Cup	7	2	4	1
Overall	128	67	50	11

**Highest total:** India 414-7 in 50 overs in Rajkot (December 2009)  
**Lowest total:** India 54 all out in 26.3 overs in Sharjah (October 2000)  
**Biggest margin:** Sri Lanka won by 245 runs in Sharjah (October 2000)  
**Smallest margin:** India won by 1 run in Colombo (July 1993)  
**Most matches:** Sanath Jayasuriya (89)  
**Most matches (as captain):** Arjuna Ranatunga (43)  
**Most runs:** Sachin Tendulkar (2,965 runs in 78 matches)  
**Highest score:** Sanath Jayasuriya (189 runs in Sharjah, October 2000)  
**Most hundreds:** Sachin Tendulkar (8)  
**Most ducks:** Sanath Jayasuriya (7)  
**Biggest partnership:** Saurav Ganguly and Rahul Dravid (318 in Taunton, May 1999)  
**Most wickets:** Muttiah Muralidaran (74 wickets in 62 matches)  
**Best figures:** Muttiah Muralidaran (10-1-30-7 in Sharjah, October 2000)  
**Most catches:** Mahela Jayawardene (29 catches in 67 matches)

know our strengths, weaknesses, and what we need to do on the field. It is a big game for all of us," he said adding that it's important how a team prepare for this kind of battle.

India won their previous games quite comfortably, though many believe that their vaunted batting line-up is yet to click at their best, and Dhoni also said that there is plenty to come from his side.

"If you just talk about potential as to what we can do, there is plenty to come. We have done quite well in the tournament, won games with runs in the pocket and quite a few wickets left when we chased. If we do everything to the best we can, it will be a very interesting game," said the keeper-batsman, adding: "Irrespective of what the result is, I am very proud of the team."

"We gained momentum slowly and it was important because we were too focused from the start and to keep the

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India - Sri Lanka

The top order of both the teams dominate the run scoring charts. Sri Lanka have their top three batsmen in the Top 5 run scorers of this World Cup, with Tillakaratne Dilshan (467 runs) leading the tally. Kumar Sangakkara (417 runs) and Upul Tharanga (393 runs) at numbers four and five respectively. For India, Sachin is once close to being the leading run scorer as he is three runs behind Dilshan (464 runs). India have two more batsmen in the Top 10, with VirenderSehwag (380 runs) and Yuvraj (341 runs) at number six and eight respectively. The Sri Lankan top order have stunning averages Sangakkara topping the league with 104.25, and Dilshan (66.71) and Tharanga (65.50) not doing badly either. The fact shows it will be a batmans match.

Mehedi Hasan Suhan

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