

SL president consoles team

Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapakse Sunday consoled skipper Kumar Sangakkara after his team lost the cricket World Cup to India and urged them to do better next time. "We can be proud of the team and Sri Lanka will stand by them to move forward," the president was quoted as saying in a message to the team who returned Sunday morning after Saturday's defeat in India.

— AFP



Mash still not a 100 per cent

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza feels it would be wise to stay away from the April 7 practice match against Australia.

The country's leading paceman believed that given the visitors' level of professionalism, if he does take part in the game at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium, his undercooked status would be found out and taken advantage of.

"If I play in the team then I don't want to play against Australia in the practice match. They are very professional and in very little time they will be able to read me and my weaknesses," he said after training at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

"I know if I play I will have to play with limited strength and if I play in the practice match then they can read it very quickly, so it's better for me to practice like this," he added.

The Narail Express heartbreakingly missed the World Cup through a knee injury which he claims still hasn't fully healed. In fact, he found out during training that there is still trouble with the injured area due to lack of strength.

"In the last warm-up match the run up was good but I lacked pace and today I felt that I was gaining a bit of pace. Actually it will take time to recover fully.

"I think I am lacking strength. If I could continue the gym, then this problem could have been solved. I don't think I am having a huge difference as far as my bowling is concerned but still I feel I am lacking strength," he explained.

He believed that extra sessions in the gym helps, something he did immediately after getting injured before the World Cup.

"I am trying my level best but I think I need to do extra gym. But I can't do it because of personal problems, still I am trying. I still feel that if I don't have any physical constraints my bowling will not be that bad."

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PROUD POSSESSION: India captain MS Dhoni keeps the World Cup as close to his chest as possible during a photo call at the Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai yesterday. Dhoni led his side to a magnificent six-wicket victory over Sri Lanka in the World Cup final at the Wankhede Stadium on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

We won it as a team: Dhoni

BISHWAJIT ROY from Mumbai

Saturday's stupendous feat in the World Cup final made Mahendra Singh Dhoni India's most successful captain in limited-overs cricket, having won both the World Twenty20 and the World Cup for the cricket-mad country. So, hardly could he hide his emotion. Usually self-reliant, the Indian skipper was as delighted as he could be though he laughed nervously at times at a post-match briefing in the underground media conference room of the Wankhede Stadium. Most of his answers were either long or like skipping the question with a joke, and his motto was: Enjoy the night first.

Putting aside all his rivalry with the media, the strong man along with man-of-the-tournament Yuvraj Singh, who climbed onto the dais by calling out loudly to the journalists: "badhaiyaan ho, badhaiyaan ho [congratulations, congratulations]", arrived at the conference room waving hands; definitely a unique scene for the Indian media who has a bitter-sweet relationship with their team. And during the nearly half-an-hour session, the two traded jokes to share the joy with everybody, but the Indian skipper was articulate when he was pointing out that success did not come overnight, rather it was the result of a well thought out long-term plan.

"There had been a plan which was born

about 18 months ago and it was a result of methodically resting and rotating players, so that we could get our best players fresh. We wanted to win the World Cup for each other first," said Dhoni.

He also added that they were able to keep the dream live in the team and tried to win the trophy first for the team because they were well aware of the fact that everybody will have their share if they achieve their target. "Rather than trying to expand the number of people for whom the World Cup could be won, the team thought 'okay let's concentrate and keep it small. If you do well and win the World Cup, the whole country will have a share in it'."

Dhoni described the strains his team had been going through during the six-week World Cup and said his boys were now relaxed after the mission had been accomplished.

"The pressure we felt throughout the tournament was huge. If you ask the players, they were not eating well because of anxiety. It's not actually pressure, but anxiety. There would be food in front of you but you wouldn't feel like eating it... just think that."

He praised his teammates for successfully dealing with the pressure throughout the tournament, which began with an 87-run victory against Bangladesh at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on February 19.

"We said: avoid it, do this, do that but the

strain was always felt. However, everyone in the squad had eventually coped well. The kind of extra responsibility that each and every member of the squad undertook was enormous. This is what we wanted to achieve; we had set our eyes on it one-and-a-half years ago."

When asked to explain what actually was the key behind his success, Dhoni laughed and said: "I'm lucky. I always get good players. The players have responded to me even if it's a Test side, where there were senior players who have been part of the side even before I started playing for India. Then, the youngsters coming in, have contributed a lot, they have been willing to give more than hundred per cent. It's the characters of the individuals of the team that helped us win this trophy," observed a confident World Cup-winning skipper.

After whacking the winning six, the wicketkeeper batsman found himself at the middle of the pitch with Yuvraj at the other end and then he ran over to his own end to pull out the stump and after that Yuvraj jumped on him and pulling him into a bear hug and the question was asked of what actually was going through his mind.

He spoke simply: "Emotionally, I was confused; I wanted a wicket [stump]". I thought hug-vug we will do later, first pick the wicket. It was an emotional moment. I was confused, I didn't know what to do at the time, how to show my emotions."

Energy from the people

BISHWAJIT ROY from Mumbai

What was dubbed as the "People's World Cup" ended in the best possible way.

The enthusiasm was immeasurable all through the tournament whatever it was in India, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka and there was no exception after India's six-wicket victory over Sri Lanka in the exciting final. It was a long journey due to the fixture but the fans never felt dull with the tournament. Someone must have said that this edition will be remembered for the quality of the matches had been played during six-week long time but the cricket-mad people in the subcontinent must also deserve some praise for their active involvement with the game. It gave the impression again why a senior writer called it the People's World Cup after the opening ceremony.

This World Cup shows the world again how passionate the sub-continent fans are with the game especially Bangladesh as a new host hogged the spotlight not only because of their prowess of hosting a tournament of this kind of magnitude but the sporting fans also won many hearts.

It all started with a magnificent opening

ceremony which was held at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on February 17. There was hardly anybody who could debate with the fact that it was the most entertaining opening event in the history of the competition and that's why it was said that "the World Cup gets back its soul".

The ball also rolled first into the ground in Dhaka when India played the opening match against Bangladesh at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on February 19.

The excitement in Bangladesh even didn't dry up after Bangladesh's early exit from the tournament. There was a full-house crowd in the two quarterfinal at Mirpur, each and every game was played in front of a capacity crowd in Bangladesh. That was however not the case for the other two host nations where the stadiums only jam-packed with the match involving the host team.

It was almost an incident-free tournament.

From an organising point of view, the tournament was highly successful but there was also no shortage of excitement on the field. Except few matches, especially involving Kenya, most of the games entertained the people and there had been some

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Aussies arrive in town today

SPORTS REPORTER

The Australia cricket team will arrive this evening for a 10-day trip.

A part of the squad including new vice-captain Shane Watson, Brett Lee, Brad Haddin and Steven Smith are expected to arrive at eight o'clock while the rest are set to land at 10:40pm.

Michael Clarke will lead the team to a three-match one-day series against the Tigers that begins on April 9.

The visitors will also play a practice game at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium on April 7.

The first one-dayer will be held on April 9 followed by the second and third on April 11 and 13 respectively.

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India deserved it: S'kara

SPORTS REPORTER from Mumbai

Kumar Sangakkara missed a "once in a lifetime opportunity" to become a hero after great Arjuna Ranatunga, but the Sri Lanka skipper showered praise on his opponents by saying that India deserved the trophy after the way they had played throughout the showcase event.

"India deserved the Cup after the way they played throughout the tournament," said Sangakkara after his side's six-wicket defeat to favourites India in the exciting final of the ICC Cricket World Cup at the Wankhede Stadium on Saturday.

Sangakkara also highly praised his counterpart's leadership quality. Mahendra Singh Dhoni has his own way of thinking and he never compromised with that. Dhoni's calm and smart leadership under pressure has

come in for praise in this mega event and the Lankan skipper joined in by saying that: "Dhoni has been the epitome of captain cool. He's intelligent, very smart in the way he does things."

Sangakkara said that it was an added advantage for the Indian team to play the final at home and in front of a partisan crowd.

"It's a combination of various factors that has helped them win in different conditions. We also have played very well against them, but playing at home they took that inspiration that one step further," observed the Lankan skipper.

After Mahela Jayawardene's classy hundred, pacer Lasith Malinga struck early to remove openers Virender Sehwag and Sachin Tendulkar to give Sri Lanka an upper hand to spoil the Indian party, but Indian vaunted batting line-up proved their point to take away the early Sri Lankan initiatives and Sangakkara believed that the runs they put on the scoreboard was not

enough for them to defend against such a strong batting line-up.

"Batting first and putting those runs up on the board was never enough the way the Indians batted. Their batting is unbelievable. They probably have the best top seven in ODI cricket."

It was left-handed batsman Gautam Gambhir who along with his skipper took the charge to take away the Lankan initiatives but Sangakkara pointed out that his bowlers failed to apply enough pressure.

"After we got the first two wickets, we weren't really tight enough with our bowling. We bowled quite a few loose balls and Gambhir and [Virat] Kohli made us pay for that. MS really stuck it out there and saw through the tough periods. Once they matched, they then went past the asking-rate, it was very difficult to come back to the match.

"It was a great pitch, it lasted throughout. It turned a little in the

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A photo taken on February 17 shows India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni arrives at the Bangabandhu National Stadium in Dhaka on a rickshaw during the opening ceremony of the 2011 Cricket World Cup.

PHOTO: STAR FILE