



A grim-faced Sri Lanka spinner Muttiah Muralidaran (C) speaks during a press conference as his captain Kumar Sangakkara (R) looks on after their arrival in Colombo yesterday, a day after their six-wicket defeat against India in a thrilling World Cup final in Mumbai.

PHOTO:
AFP

Murali disappointed on farewell

AFP, Mumbai

Sri Lanka star Muttiah Muralidaran admitted his last international appearance had been a letdown following a six-wicket World Cup final defeat by India.

The record-breaking 38-year-old, the sole survivor from Sri Lanka's 1996 World Cup final-winning team, was not the force of old with injuries appearing to hamper him as he bowled a wicketless spell of eight overs for 39 runs.

They were respectable enough figures but hardly the kind of astounding analysis that became commonplace in Muralidaran's career, which yielded 800 wickets in

133 Tests and 534 in one-day internationals, both world records.

"It was a little bit disappointing because my main aim was to win the World Cup," said Muralidaran on his return to Colombo on Sunday.

"But unfortunately we couldn't do that because India was a better side on the day."

Sri Lanka, who made 274 for six on the back of Mahela Jayawardene's unbeaten century, saw fast bowler Lasith Malinga strike twice early on to remove openers Virender Sehwag (nought) and Sachin Tendulkar (18).

However both Muralidaran and fellow off-spinner Suraj Randiv (none for 43) were able to follow-up.

"We got enough runs on the board -- 274 was a good score. Malinga took two vital wickets but

after that we couldn't crack their side especially in the middle part. The spinners didn't take enough wickets, that was the main reason.

"If I or Suraj took a few wickets then the story would have been different. These things happen in cricket so you have to move on and I'd like to wish the team well for the future. Hopefully, in 2015 they'll bring home the Cup."

Sri Lanka captain Kumar Sangakkara, speaking after the match, had defended his decision to play Muralidaran despite the talismanic bowler's knee, hamstring and groin problems.

"It's one of those rare days where he hasn't really done the job for us, but that's maybe one in 100 games that happens," Sangakkara said.

"He's our best bowler, even half

fit. But he was fine, he was almost at full fitness. I don't think it was an issue."

"We're going to miss him terribly. Unfortunately, we couldn't give him a great send off but that's the way it goes. We were out-played and we have to accept that."

India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni, who made a man-of-the-match winning 91 not out, said it was because of his familiarity with Muralidaran that he'd promoted himself above man-of-the-tournament Yuvraj Singh in the batting order.

"I have played a lot with Murali and I know his doosra well," said Dhoni, a teammate at IPL side Chennai Super Kings. "He knows it too. I put pressure on him."

India toast in national pride

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA from New Delhi



Delirious Indians broke into unprecedented celebrations across the country, setting off fireworks, jamming main thoroughfares with vehicles and partying hard on the streets savouring glory as India won the cricket World Cup.

Indian President Pratibha Patil and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh led the nation in hailing the Indian cricket team's World Cup triumph saying it is a testimony to the hard work of the players and the astute leadership of MS Dhoni.

In a message to Dhoni, President Patil said "the road to success has been long and hard. You and your team were tested at every stage.

"All of you truly deserve the thanks of a billion plus Indians today," she said.

The Prime Minister said "the hard work and the effort of MS Dhoni and his men have been rewarded".

The President of India's ruling Congress party Sonia Gandhi, a high-security political leader, joined thousands of ecstatic fans near ITO Crossing in central Delhi at around midnight. She reached out to the people and shook hands with the large number of fans who were dancing and singing there.

The crowd went into raptures and what would have been a brief stopover stretched to about half-an-hour.

"Congratulations to everybody. We have won," Sonia was saying to everyone. While leaving, she told the bikers who were overexcited to see her, "Drive safe and all the best." Long after she left, the message seemed to have been lost on the bikers. They began doing stunts at the crossing, holding up the traffic and causing a nuisance. But such was the euphoria and the festive atmosphere no sooner Dhoni struck a huge six to post India's historic six-wicket triumph.

From the mega cities of Mumbai, Kolkata and New Delhi to India's rural hinterland, where entire villages had gathered around television sets to watch the final, this cricket-obsessed nation went into delirious meltdown as they celebrated the country's regaining the World Cup after a 28-year wait.

It was also an outpour of nationalistic spirit as the streets of metropolitan cities and smaller towns turned into a sea of dancing and cheering Indian fans waving the national

flag and singing the national anthem.

Motorbikes with pillion passengers waving the saffron, white and green Indian tricolor roared up and down Mumbai's sweeping Marine Drive promenade along the Arabian Sea, the thoroughfares around Delhi's landmark India Gate and Kolkata's Park Street, the most popular address for entertainment, weaving in and out of the traffic, as cars hooted their horns in accompaniment.

"This night will never be forgotten", said Raj Kumar who stays in a neighbourhood of Dhoni.

It was Diwali, the festival of light, once more on the streets of Mumbai, the venue of the final, as fireworks lit up the night sky and the playing of musical instruments like drums reverberated throughout the city as the "biggest party on the planet" began.

It was a special moment for many young fans who had not watched India's previous World Cup triumph in 1983.

"Many of us were either not born in 1983 or were not grown up to watch Kapil Dev winning against the West Indies. We have grown up hearing the Kapil Dev's story from our parents.

"We waited through years, and six editions of World Cups passed by. The moment has come now," said 18-year-old Neha Keshri in Mayur Vihar locality of Delhi.

"Celebration has just begun... It will go on and on. We will not stop", said Bijay Dubey, a 33-year-old fan in Mandi House.

REWARDS RAIN IN FOR INDIAN STARS

Cash awards and other freebies today rained in for the Indian cricket team which won the cricket World Cup.

The Indian cricket board announced Rs one crore for each member of the team and Rs 50 lakh for every member of the support staff while Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit said Rs two crore would be given to team captain MS Dhoni and Rs one crore each for four Delhi-based players of the team--Virender Sehwag, Gautam Gambhir, Virat Kohli and Ashish Nehra.

Uttarakhand state government has decided to give two houses free of cost to batting maestro Sachin Tendulkar and Dhoni in the hill resort town of Mussoorie.

While Mussoorie is a favourite hill station of Tendulkar, along with his family, it is home to Dhoni's in-laws.

Yuvraj inspired by Sachin

AFP, Mumbai

India all-rounder Yuvraj Singh ended a nationwide guessing game by revealing the identity of the driving force behind his World Cup heroics - Sachin Tendulkar.

After steering India to a World Cup quarter-final victory against champions Australia with an impressive all-round display, Yuvraj hinted there was a special person in his life inspiring his fine form.

He refused them to reveal the identity of the person concerned but promised to reveal all if India made it to the final where on Saturday they defeated Sri Lanka to win the world title.

"I'm very sorry to disappoint you guys. It was not for my girlfriend but for Sachin Tendulkar," said Yuvraj.

Yuvraj was echoing the wishes of millions of India fans, who'd been desperate for 37-year-old star batsman Tendulkar to fulfil his dream of winning a first World Cup title at his sixth, and probably last, attempt.

But Tendulkar was not the star of this show, with Yuvraj topping India's tournament batting averages with 362 runs at 90.50 including a century and four fifties.

He also collected 15 wickets with his left-arm spin at a respectable 25.13 apiece.

India fined for slow over-rate

AFP, Mumbai

India have been fined for maintaining a slow over-rate in their six-wicket World Cup final win over Sri Lanka, the International Cricket Council (ICC) announced Sunday.

India, who fielded first after losing the toss at the Wankhede Stadium on Saturday, were found to have been just one over short of the target for bowling its overs by match referee Jeff Crowe, the former New Zealand captain, at the end of the fixture when time allowances were taken into consideration.

Under ICC rules that meant Mahendra Singh Dhoni, India's captain who made a man-of-the-match winning 91 not out, was fined 20 percent of his match fee in his role as skipper, while his players received 10 percent fines.



PHOTO: AFP

BASKING IN GLORY: India all-rounder Yuvraj Singh is all smiles with the glittering piece of glory at the Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai yesterday.

Not that long ago the 29-year-old Yuvraj, who ended the final on 21 not out after taking two wickets for 49 runs, was out of the India side and struggling for fitness and runs.

"Last year there were too many injuries and my form was not great," said Yuvraj.

"I was building in the (domestic) Ranji Trophy games and my form came at the right time."

Yuvraj, the son of ex-India international Yograj Singh, paid tribute to former India captain Sourav Ganguly and current skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni for the influence they'd had on his career.

"When I started my career Sourav was the captain and he supported me a lot. When I went through ups and downs 'Mahi' (Dhoni) supported me.

"Mahi' has been a great captain. Whatever he touches turns into gold."

Dhoni, named man-of-the-match in the final for a superbly paced unbeaten 91, said he always believed Yuvraj could be a game-breaker.

"What we wanted was to keep him going, as we know once he keeps going he goes throughout the tournament and his bowling also improves."



PARTY TIME: Indian cricket fans are seen partying on the famous Park Street of Kolkata after their national team's six-wicket triumph against Sri Lanka in an absorbing World Cup final at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai of Saturday.

PHOTO:
AFP

'WINDIA!' scream Indian press

AFP, New Delhi



Indian newspapers revelled Sunday in the national team's World Cup cricket victory, hailing skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni's men as heroes for a new generation.

"The World At Our Feet" crowed the front page headline in the Times of India, above a picture of the team celebrating with the trophy after seeing off their South Asian rivals Sri Lanka on Saturday in Mumbai.

"The wait has ended and a new legend has been born," the Times said, putting Dhoni's squad on the same pedestal as the last Indian team to win the World Cup back in 1983.

The Hindustan Times did not even bother with a headline, covering its front page with a picture of the

joyous Indian players behind a huge hoarding in the Wankhede Stadium bearing the slogan "Champions".

India became the first team to win the World Cup on home soil, after successfully chasing down the largest run-target ever set in a final.

"Men who make history defy all the odds," the Hindustan Times said, labelling the win "a resounding announcement of India's official coronation as the world's best team."

"Windia!" was the banner headline in the Indian Express, while the Mail Today ran "Cup of Joy" over a picture of champagne bursting over the players' heads as they held up the trophy.

Like many newspapers, the Mail singled out the role of skipper Dhoni, who hit the winning runs in style with an imperious six into the

packed stands.

"Hail Mahendra Singh Dhoni," the newspaper said. "On a night when the heat inside the Wankhede Stadium could have left you breathless, the inspirational leader showed what it is to lead from the front."

There was special praise too for the "instrumental" efforts of India's coach, former South African Test player Gary Kirsten, who has been credited with reviving the team's fortunes after a turbulent era under Australian coach Greg Chappell.

And most newspapers ran special articles to honour star batsman Sachin Tendulkar who, at 37, was almost certainly appearing in his last World Cup tournament.

Tendulkar, playing in front of his home crowd, failed with bat, scoring just 18 runs, but still ended up shedding tears of joy once victory was

assured.

"For very long, cricket has been synonymous with Tendulkar all over India," said the Indian Express.

"But home is where the heart lies, and no other ground in India, or the world, could have provided a more emotional platform for the batting maestro."

Praise and congratulations poured in from all quarters, including Indian President Pratibha Patil.

"All of you truly deserve the thanks of a billion plus Indians today," she said in a message to the team, while Prime Minister Manmohan Singh thanked the players for having "made India proud."

The tone was very different in Sri Lanka, where the state-run media blasted everything from the preparation of the national team to the squad selection.