

5 facts

West Indies look for a change of luck in New Zealand having lost their last 10 completed ODIs in Australia

Since hitting 109 against Sri Lanka in June 2013, Chris Gayle has scored 234 runs in 17 ODIs, at an average of 13.8. He has reached 50 once in this time

Kemar Roach needs two wickets to reach 100 in ODIs. He would be the third fastest West Indian to the landmark if he achieves that feat in this game (in his 64th innings), after Curtly Ambrose and Ian Bishop (both 61 innings)

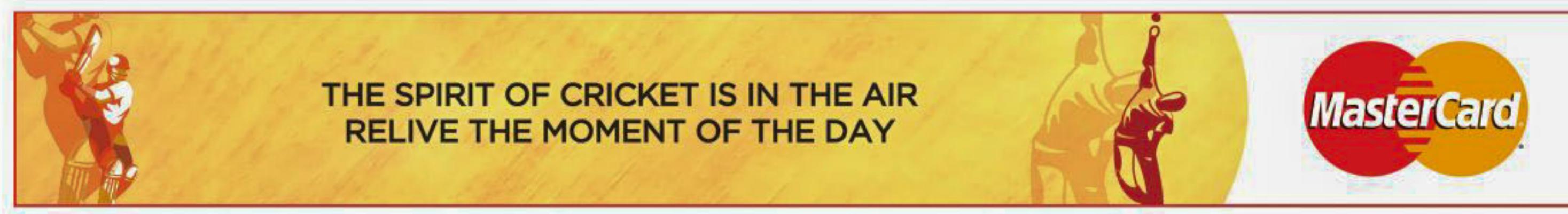
Paul Stirling (70.1 per cent) had the highest boundary run percentage at the 2011 World Cup -- minimum 100 balls faced

Gary Wilson (twice) is the only player to reach 50 more than once in the four previous ODIs between the two teams



West Indies captain Jason Holder will hope to hold his side together and ease them to a win over Ireland at Nelson today. On the contrary, Ireland buoyed by their win against Bangladesh in a warm-up, will hope to cause the competition's first upset.

PHOTO: STAR FILE



IRELAND V WEST INDIES

Possibility of a run-fest

APP, Nelson

Traditional giant-killers Ireland and under-pressure West Indies possess all the ingredients for a high-scoring clash in their opening World Cup match in Nelson on Monday.

Both sides feature quality batsmen but relatively inexperienced bowling line-ups for a match they have each targeted as ripe for getting immediate points on the board.

The West Indies and Ireland are leading contenders to fill the fourth quarter final spot along with South Africa, India and Pakistan from Pool B which also includes Zimbabwe and United Arab Emirates

Ireland are no strangers to knocking over teams from cricket's elite top eight. At the 2011 World Cup they pulled off an historic win over England and four years before that they stunned Pakistan.

In the lead up to this tournament they beat ninth-placed Bangladesh who sit just one spot behind the West Indies in the International Cricket Council's one-day international rankings.

New ball bowlers John Mooney and Max Sorensen snared three wickets each and Andy Balbirnie chimed in with an unbeaten 63 in the four-wicket win.

The West Indies meanwhile suffered a morale damaging nine-wicket loss to England last week when they were all out for 122 in 29.3 overs, and just managed to beat Scotland with three balls to spare.

The West Indies, winners of the first two

The Export Leader

CROWN CEMENT
FOR SOLID FOUNDATION

World Cups in 1975 and 1979, have a reputation for being able to play sublime cricket.

However, their glory days were some years ago and in recent times the quality performances have been few and far between.

They have only won two of their past 10 ODI series, beating Ireland in a one-off match and sweeping a three-match contest against Bangladesh

In Chris Gayle, playing in his fourth World Cup, they have a batsman who can turn a game in an over and along with Marlon Samuels, and Darren Sammy don't lack for muscle nor depth in the batting department.

But there is a lack of experience among their bowlers not helped by the absence of spinner Sunil Narine

Led by recently appointed skipper, the 23-year-old Jason Holder, the West Indies' last full series was a 4-1 loss to South Africa during which Proteas captain AB de Villiers exposed the bowling deficiencies with a world-record century off 31 balls.

Holder became the youngest-ever West

Indies captain when he took over from Dwayne Bravo who along with Kieron Pollard was dropped after the players' strike during their India tour last year.

"Not having them would be a huge loss to any side. But it's beyond our control and we have to accept it and move on," Holder said, putting an optimistic spin on the Caribbean side's chances.

"We've been inconsistent and not played to the best of our abilities but we have some world-beaters in our team. It's all about putting it all together."

"Obviously, the bigger picture is for the team to do well in this World Cup and starting the World Cup well and carrying the momentum through."

Ireland will be banking on Kevin O'Brien to anchor their innings, recalling his World Cup record century off 50 deliveries in their shock win over England four years ago.

His brother Niall O'Brien, along with William Porterfield and Ed Joyce add batting depth, but there is a question mark over their bowling although Craig Young offers promise after his five for 46 on debut against Scotland five months ago.

Former England international and now Scotland coach Paul Collingwood believes the benefits Ireland have from several players performing in English county cricket will make them tough to beat.

"They're a well-drilled unit, and a lot of their players have county experience, so you know they are going to cause teams problems," he said.

Home away from home

BISHWAJIT ROY from Adelaide

Woke up early in the morning yesterday to catch the Adelaide flight from Melbourne and almost immediately felt the fever of the India-Pakistan match. "It does not matter if India wins the World Cup, I want to see the boys win today. This is a final for me," taxi-driver Mohit Sharma excitedly gasped.

Mohit however, didn't get a chance to join the fervour along with his fellow Indian mates. "Asians have to work hard here. I worked for the last 15 hours and will get a break of just four hours now. So there's no chance. I do have FM radio though," said Mohit, who came from Punjab and kept us entertained on the way to the Melbourne International Airport.

Also traveling to Adelaide to catch the blockbuster action was legendary Australian fast bowler Glenn McGrath and the Indian fans at the airport ensured that they didn't waste this opportunity as they stormed in to take selfies. Australians though rarely stopped him.

After landing at Adelaide we were greeted by Yassin, a taxi driver from Eritrea. While to him sports meant football and athletics, he was aware of the big match yesterday. "Oh yes! India and Pakistan are big rivals aren't they? Is it a one-day match or are they playing for five-days," he obliged.

A half-an-hour drive later we were welcomed by chanting slogans, cheers, jeers and claps from both side's supporters on the streets next to the venue. Indians were the majority but still, Pakistani fans made a match out of it by screaming and whistling as loudly as possible.

"I don't mind if my team fails to win the Cup, we just need to win this match to end Pakistan's curse against," said hoped Pakistan supporter Javed Khan.

The atmosphere and hot weather gave it a perfect sub-continent flair and made it feel like a home away from home.

Wait for Malinga: Murali

APP, Christchurch

Sri Lankan legend Muttiah Muralidaran insists Lasith Malinga will still be a factor at the World Cup despite the sling-arm fast bowler enduring a nightmare return to action after six months out.

Malinga was smashed to all parts of the Hagley Oval on Saturday in his team's 98-run loss to New Zealand, ending with figures of none for 84 off his 10 overs as the Black Caps piled up 331 for six.

It was the 31-year-old's first international match since undergoing ankle surgery in September.

But Muralidaran, who retired in 2011 after taking 534 ODI and 800 Test wickets, believes Malinga will have benefitted from his brutal treatment.

"Although Lasith Malinga's figures look like a horror show with none for 84 from his 10 overs, he will have benefited from the outing," Muralidaran told the ICC website.

"We have to be realistic about him, after all. He is coming into the tournament off the back of no cricket since his ankle surgery last September and it will take time for him to get back to his best."

"And the chance to get more overs under his belt against Afghanistan and Bangladesh [in their next two games] will be good news for him and for Sri Lanka."

Malinga, who has 271 ODI wickets and is seen as his team's go-to death bowler, starred at the 2007 World Cup in the Caribbean where Sri Lanka finished runners-up to Australia.

He took 18 wickets at an average of 15.77, including four wickets in four balls against South Africa in Providence, Guyana -- the first time a bowler had taken four wickets off successive deliveries in international cricket.

Sri Lanka batsman Lahiru Thirimanne, his team's top scorer with 65 against New Zealand, also backed Malinga to bounce back.

"I don't think this is Lasith's best bowling effort," said the opener. "We believe he'll come back strongly in the next few matches, but I think he bowled really well in the death overs."

"That's a positive for us, so hopefully he'll be back with good performances."



Roger Federer is ecstatic after unwrapping an India cricket team jersey from a gift box.

PHOTO: TWITTER

MR. EFFICIENT



JP DUMINY

It's not everyday that an innings that has a strike-rate of 115 is described as a sedate knock. However, when you compare it to David Miller's bashing, it would seem as though Duminy played the role of a grafter, giving the strike to Miller. However, that does not take anything away from his 100-ball 115. They acted like the wheels of a four-wheel drive with Duminy making sure that he held one end up. Towards the end though, he joined the fun as well and hammered three sixes and nine fours.

TRIVIA

Kemar Roach needs two wickets to reach 100 in ODIs and Dwayne Smith, if selected, will play his 100th ODI

The last ODI hundred by an Ireland batsman was William Porterfield's 112 against England at Malahide in 2013

WORLD CUP COCKTAIL



Battered England captain Eoin Morgan has paid New Zealand a big compliment ahead of their clash in Wellington on Friday.

Thrashed by Australia by 111 runs at the MCG, Morgan's troops now decamp across the Tasman and the captain warned things would get no easier for his team.

"We've got a tough challenge," Morgan said. "We said the first two games of the tournament would be the toughest in our group and to come out of those games with results would give us huge confidence."

"I'm hoping there will be a higher level of skill produced [against New Zealand]."

While New Zealand travel south to Dunedin for a clash with associate side Scotland, England have all week to stow on a substandard outing.

"The most frustrating thing is we made errors we haven't been making this trip."

"Australia played well but we had the opportunity to take the game to them but we didn't take it."

England are brainless'

Geoff Boycott is having a torrid time after criticising captain Eoin Morgan before the World Cup but he is typically standing firm.

"Some people forget that it is my job as a commentator or writer to be honest. I am not in Australia to be England's cheerleader. My moderate ability as a one-day batsman has no relevance to any opinions I give on the current England team," Boycott wrote.

"How are we ex-players supposed to give encouragement and praise when our team is so bloody stupid? We want England to win but they are making our job harder by being brainless."

Morgan directly responded to Boycott's comments and they have caused an outcry in England and internationally.

Mommenslams

World Cup cut

Scotland captain Preston Mommens has criticised plans to reduce the number of teams at future World Cups, saying it would be a backward move for the global game.

Sides such as Scotland have the chance to compete if they qualify for the World Cup as one of 2 qualifying teams, but Mommens argued reducing the number of teams would hinder efforts to "grow the game".

"You may as well call it the Champions Trophy No.2," he said of proposals for a slimmed-down World Cup.

'Watson still the best'

Mitchell Marsh starred in the win over England on the weekend with five wickets and a handy 23 from 20 balls, about as convincing an audition as he could have hoped for to be in the thick of the action.

Marsh is set to feature again on Saturday against Bangladesh in Brisbane and for the immediate future while James Faulkner bides his time

on the sidelines.

If and when Faulkner returns one of Australia's four all-rounders almost certainly won't make the cut. A patient Marsh doesn't believe Watson - whose presence appears to stand between the West Australian and a place in the first-choice XI - will be dropping out despite edging his way to a first-ball duck against England. "I don't think so, to be honest," Marsh said. "I think Shane is still the premier all-rounder in our team and is such a vital cog for us going forward in this World Cup. All of us know how important he is for us."

"The best thing about this squad is we've got 15 blokes who don't really care what the XI is."

Manuka Oval beefs security

The Manuka Oval has ramped up protection for the pitch and anti-corruption protocols by employing a guard to stand by the pitch 24 hours a day more than five days before Bangladesh play Afghanistan in the first of three World Cup matches in Canberra.

Curators from around Australia were told they would no longer be allowed to give detailed information about their pitches before matches. It is designed to limit the information being fed to bookmakers as part of a wider strategy to stamp out match-fixing and spot-fixing.

-- COMPILED

BleedBlue Federer

APP, Sydney

India recruited a superstar supporter for their World Cup clash against Pakistan on Sunday in the shape of tennis legend Roger Federer.

The Swiss great, a winner of 17 Grand Slam titles, was pictured on his Facebook page admiring an Indian team shirt which he had unwrapped from a gift box.

"Dressing up for a Gentleman's game today #BleedBlue," wrote the 33-year-old.

Federer would not be a complete stranger to cricket as his mother Lynette was born in South Africa, a country which has high hopes of a first World Cup title in the sport.

Federer and Indian batting legend Sachin Tendulkar are known to be close with the 'Little Master' a regular visitor to Wimbledon each year to see the Swiss play.

Virat Kohli, who made a century for India on Sunday, also met Federer in Sydney in January, describing the tennis player as an "absolute legend" in a captioned picture he posted on his Twitter site.