

5 facts

Since winning a semifinal at the 2006 ICC Champions Trophy, West Indies have lost 16 one-day internationals out of 18 against South Africa, winning just once with one tie

AB de Villiers has faced 29 balls from Jason Holder in ODIs and scored 62 runs without being dismissed, hitting five fours and six sixes

De Villiers averages 66.1 in ODIs against West Indies, the highest average of any batsman against a team, minimum 1,000 runs scored

De Villiers and Hashim Amla have batted together four times against West Indies, putting on an aggregate of 466 runs

Chris Gayle (79 per cent) has hit the highest percentage of runs in front of square since January 2014 in ODIs between Test-playing nations, minimum 200 balls faced



After a demoralising defeat against India, it is time for South Africa captain AB de Villiers to grab the next opportunity against West Indies in Sydney today.

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SOUTH AFRICA V WEST INDIES

Time for turnaround

AFP, Sydney

South Africa face a revitalised West Indies at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Friday in a match they need to win to breathe life back into their faltering World Cup campaign.

The Proteas, who have yet to win a World Cup, were outplayed by defending champions India, losing by 130 runs at the Melbourne Cricket Ground last Sunday.

That left AB de Villiers's team with just two points after two games and trailing India, the West Indies and Ireland in Pool B.

While the South Africans mastered the West Indies 4-1 in a home series last month they confront a Caribbean team full of confidence after their 73-run win over Zimbabwe.

Opener Chris Gayle bounced back to his destructive best with the highest ever individual World Cup score of 215 containing a record-equalling 16 sixes, while Marlon Samuels scored an unbeaten 133 in an all-time ODI record stand of 372.

The South Africans cannot afford to lose to the West Indies as they would then have to beat Ireland, Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates to ensure they finish near the top of their pool and secure an advantageous quarterfinal draw.

South Africa have won three of their five World Cup encounters with the West Indies, including the last two in Delhi and Grenada.

The Proteas will also have to show that they are genuine World Cup contenders after reaching the semifinals of the 1992, 1999 and 2007 tournaments.

The Export Leader

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A big part of South Africa's hopes rests with premier paceman Dale Steyn's contest with record-breaking West Indian opener Gayle.

Steyn has only taken two for 119 in his two matches so far at the tournament from a win over Zimbabwe and the crushing loss to India.

Gayle has roared back to form with his sensational 215 off 147 balls against Zimbabwe in Canberra on Tuesday, the first-ever double century at a World Cup

'Apply right pressure'

AFP, Sydney

Skipper AB de Villiers says the West Indies will crumble if South Africa apply the right pressure in their crunch World Cup Pool B game at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Friday.

De Villiers says the Proteas's confidence took a "bit of a slap" in their 130-run mauling by India last Sunday, but they were ready to bounce back against the West Indies.

South Africa cannot afford to lose as they would then have to beat Ireland, Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates to ensure they finish near the top of their pool and secure an advantageous quarterfinal draw.

The West Indies are coming off a spectacular 73-run victory over Zimbabwe with opener Chris Gayle back to his destructive best with the highest ever individual World Cup score of 215 containing a record-equalling 16 sixes, while Marlon Samuels scored an unbeaten 133 in an all-time ODI record stand of 372.

"They're a dangerous cricket team. I believe if you put enough pressure on them like any other cricket team they can crumble," de Villiers told reporters at the SCG on Thursday.

"We haven't played well in the last game so we've got to make sure we look after our side.

"They do have weaknesses in the team and it's important to push those buttons, especially in the pressure situations."

De Villiers, who was run out for 30 at a crucial stage of South Africa's abortive run chase after India's 307, said the Melbourne defeat had not changed anything for them.

"Nothing's changed with our approach except our confidence might have taken a bit of a slap in the last game which is maybe not a bad thing," he said.

"It's maybe a good thing for us to make sure we keep our feet on the ground.

"We've got nowhere to go now. It's only upwards otherwise we're going to stumble out of this tournament."

De Villiers argued against the perception that South Africa were traditionally too tense and uptight in big tournaments and carried a bloated support staff.

"We are in a very good place. It's very easy to say a lot of things about our team after our previous performance," he said.

"Look, I'm also disappointed about what happened there. We only have got the one extra consultant in Michael Hussey. Gary Kirsten has been around the team for a long time as have all the other guys.

"We don't have a psychologist that we normally have in the World Cups.

"I really believe the team is in a good space, we have got the right amount of management here. Every single person knows his role, we didn't do those roles well in the last game and we are hoping to do it better tomorrow."

Gayle absence no issue

AFP, Sydney

West Indies captain Jason Holder Thursday played down Chris Gayle's absence from training on the eve of the team's crunch World Cup Pool B match with South Africa at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Gayle, who has a chronic back complaint, hit the highest-ever individual World Cup score of 215, containing a record-equalling 16 sixes, in Tuesday's thumping win over Zimbabwe in Canberra.

Holder said 35-year-old Gayle was being nursed through the tournament to ensure he was in the best possible shape to play.

"In terms of Chris's fitness, obviously he's been struggling over the past with his back. So we're trying to monitor him as best as we possibly can," Holder told reporters at the SCG.

South Africa skipper AB de Villiers laughed off talk about Gayle's absence from training.

"He doesn't train often. I played with him in Bangalore, and you don't often see him in the nets," he told reporters.

"His body is quite old for his age, I think. He needs to look after himself to make sure he gets on the path with all the games."

Gayle said he has had the back injury since January last year and was managing it.

"It's the same back injury. I've had it since last January. It can't seem to be solved, to be honest with you," he said this week.

"It's a bit of a mind thing, I try and do a lot of massage. I'm a person that likes to go to the gym, and I've been restricted from that for a couple of months, as well."

Holder, 23, who was pitched into the hot seat as captain of the notoriously fractious Windies team, said Gayle exerted a big presence in the dressing room.

"We've always rallied around Chris. Chris is one of the most jovial people in the dressing room," Holder said.

"He brings a different atmosphere. He brings a lot of fun. He's a big team man, and his presence is pretty much felt in the dressing room."

"It was a really good feeling not only to see him get a hundred, but going on to get a double hundred. He's broken records, and he's set the path in world cricket in a sense."

"I think it's important that his success is crucial to our overall success. We love him."

De Villiers knows what a dangerous threat Gayle poses to his side in Friday's SCG showdown.

"The fact that he scored runs is definitely not a surprise. It's not a surprise to see him bat like that," he said.

"It's a matter of making sure you make your plans against him. He's a world-class player and he can win games for his team in almost any situation."

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WORLD CUP COCKTAIL

JP Duminy is a doubtful starter for South Africa's World Cup group game against West Indies after suffering a slight strain and will undergo a fitness test on the morning of the match to determine his availability. South Africa are already without Vernon Philander, who is four days into a 7-10 day recovery period after sustaining a hamstring strain.

Not only does Duminy prop up the middle order but he offers a bowling option as well. His off spin, which fulfills South Africa's fifth-bowler duties, may be handy on the SCG pitch and could be crucial in ensuring AB de Villiers does not commit another over-rate violation which would see him banned.

South Africa are deciding between Wayne Parnell or Kyle Abbott to replace Philander and may now need to look at a replacement batsman as well.

Tim Southee injured

New Zealand cricket has been rocked by another "underarm" incident, as friendly fire left spearhead Tim Southee nursing a shoulder injury less than 48 hours out from the World Cup blockbuster against Australia.

The tournament's leading wicket-taker was struck on the point of his right shoulder when fast bowling stable-mate Adam Milne lobbed an underarm throw which accidentally hit Southee when he wasn't looking during a fielding drill.

New Zealand great Daniel Vettori earlier warned Australian fast bowler Mitchell Starc not to bounce him at Eden Park, but that was before the Black Caps realised they should be more worried about hurting themselves.

Word out of the New Zealand camp is he will be fine, but contrary to his teammate's initial reaction, the sight of Southee strewn on the ground in pain was no laughing matter.

Samuels escapes sanction

West Indies batsman Marlon Samuels will not be sanctioned over a "throat-slitting" gesture he made in his team's World Cup win over Zimbabwe, a source told AFP on Thursday.

Samuels appeared to run his thumb from one side of his throat to the other to mark his century in Tuesday's 73-run victory.

"The match officials have seen the incident and have decided not to lay a charge," said a source.

However, it's understood that the match referee did have an informal talk to the West Indian regarding the matter.

Samuels made an undefeated 133 and shared a 372-run stand with Chris Gayle, who became the first double centurion in World Cup history, in the Pool B game at Canberra's Manuka Oval.

'NZ are favourites' – Steve Waugh

The Black Caps are at the peak of their powers and will be favourites to beat Australia in Saturday's World Cup Pool A match, Steve Waugh says.

"New Zealand will be probably entitled to favouritism in this game, the way they've played," Australia's former skipper Waugh said.

"They've played three games so they're in the groove. They're probably confident and relaxed, at the peak of their powers.

"It will be a parochial home crowd in Auckland. It's very difficult place to play and win over there. Australia probably would be slight underdogs. I know the Kiwis would hate to think they're favourites but I think they're probably slight favourites for this game."

"They always like being the underdogs and coming from nowhere, so it would be nice to see them under a bit of pressure with the expectation to beat Australia and see how they handle that."

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KUMAR SANGAKKARA

400th match at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and what does Sangakkara do? Hammer his way to magnificent ton. True, he was dropped twice and the Bangladeshis seemed overwhelmed by his presence on the field; but one can't deny the class act. His 105 off 76 balls wasn't just all boundaries; there were plenty of doubles and triples. He managed to do that despite the fact that Mashrafe Bin Mortaza had seven fielders in when Sangakkara had arrived at the crease. The deft touches and classic 'inside-out' drives were a treat for the 35,000-odd spectators present at the MCG.