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'Fires, please do not dim Dale's drive'

CRICINFO, Canberra  
Cold water was poured on Dale Steyn's preparations for the Ireland game, his 100th in ODIs, when he learned of mountain fires raging in Cape Town, close to his home.

"Massive fire behind my house in Stonehurst! Plz be safe and watch out for the mountain animals trying to escape it, porcupines, tortoises..." he posted on Twitter. "These little animals will also need ur help! Hope the homes don't get hit!"

Stonehurst Estate is located on the Muizenberg Mountains where multiple blazes sprung on Sunday night, forcing the closure of three main passes and evacuation of people from their home. By Monday morning, South African fire-fighters and volunteers were still trying to control the spreading flames.

Vernon Philander and Morne Morkel also live in Cape Town along with Faf du Plessis, the other player to tweet his concern, having recently purchased property close to Steyn's.

"Crazy mountain fire near my new house. Hope they can stop the fire before it does more damage," he tweeted.

Steyn has yet to hit top gear at the tournament, having taken just a wicket a game so far. He has battled sinusitis and Shikhar Dhawan, before finding some of the inner mongrel against West Indies.

But Steyn is a big-match player and South Africa are banking on him to step up later in the tournament. "I faced him a few times in the domestic scene, and it's not fun facing Dale Steyn when he's at full tilt," teammate Farhaan Behardien said. "His fire and his energy that he brings to the bowling unit are awesome."



South Africa run-machine AB de Villiers is all about innovation and he has showed plenty of unconventional shots in this World Cup.

PHOTO: REUTERS FILE

IRELAND V SOUTH AFRICA  
**Danger de Villiers**

AFP, Canberra

Ireland go into Tuesday's World Cup clash against South Africa in Canberra faced with a question that even fanciful Test nations have struggled to find an answer for.

How does one tame the rampaging AB de Villiers before he destroys the rivals' bowling attack, dents their morale and leaves them dumbstruck by what just hit them?

The West Indies once more suffered at the hands of the South Africa captain who, despite a stomach illness, smashed an audacious 162 off 66 balls with 17 boundaries and eight sixes in Sydney on Friday to fashion a 257-run win.

It was against the same team that de Villiers smashed the fastest one-day century off 31 balls at home in January, prompting former Australian dasher Adam Gilchrist to call him the "most valuable cricketer on the planet".

The Proteas, one of the pre-tournament favourites, needed the brutal attack by their 31-year-old captain to steady the ship after they were stunned by India by 130 runs at the Melbourne Cricket Ground a week ago.

De Villiers was run out for 30 in that match by a brilliant throw from the deep by Mohit Sharma, which must make Ireland wonder if that is the only way to see the back of him. But the proud Irish, whose cricket has developed rapidly under their West Indies coach Phil Simmons, will look to run the mighty Proteas closely after winning their first two games in the tournament.

Ireland chased down a challenging West Indies total of 304-7 at Nelson with four wickets and 25 balls to spare on the back of half-centuries from Paul Stirling (92), Ed Joyce (84) and Niall O'Brien (79 not out).

Simmons, the former West Indies opening batsman, insisted the result was not an upset because his team was now capable of matching skills with the more established teams.

"It excited me the way we played against the West Indies," said Simmons. "They played four fast bowlers, thinking we would not be able to cope with the speed. It's the best I've seen the team play and it augurs well for the future."

Ireland overcame wayward bowling in their next game in Brisbane to allow the United Arab Emirates to pile up 278-9, but the batsman kept their nerve to win in the final over with the ninth-wicket pair at the crease.

If other results go their way, even one win from their four remaining games against South Africa, India, Pakistan and Zimbabwe could see Ireland qualify for the quarterfinals.

However, past records favour South Africa against the Irish, who progressed from the first round in their inaugural appearance at the World Cup in 2007 but were knocked out in the group stages four years later.

Ireland have lost all three one-day internationals against South Africa so far. In their last meeting at the 2011 World Cup at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata, the Proteas thumped them by 131 runs.

Still, the Irish can be expected to blast away at the batting friendly Manuka Oval wicket where West Indies opener Chris Gayle hammered a World Cup record score of 215 against Zimbabwe last week.

**Irish ain't afraid of Proteas**

AFP, Canberra

Ireland captain William Porterfield is confident his team will not be overawed by the mighty South Africans in Canberra on Tuesday, saying they had made good plans to contain AB de Villiers's side.

Ireland's hopes will rest largely on how they keep the rival batsmen quiet, especially de Villiers.

Porterfield admitted it will be a challenge to bowl to the South Africa captain and other batsmen like Hashim Amla and Faf du Plessis, but added the task to contain them was not impossible.

"You can sit all day and talk about him and different theories and plans and whatever, but you've got to stick with your best ball and how you go about things," he said.

"The bowlers have got to back

themselves and back the field that's been set. We have individual plans for each of their batters, and hopefully we'll see the back of them early."

Ireland have won both matches so far in the tournament, chasing down the West Indies' 304-7 with four wickets and 25 balls to spare before edging past the United Arab Emirates in a final-over thriller.

If other results go their way, even one win from their four remaining games against South Africa, India, Pakistan and Zimbabwe could see Ireland qualify for the quarterfinals.

Porterfield said his team will take the confidence of those two wins into Tuesday's game.

"South Africa are a great side and we have to be on the money again," he said. "We're taking each

game as it comes and it's not going to be any different for tomorrow's game.

"It's about going through the same processes and being in the same mindset and getting yourself prepared for the start of ball one tomorrow."

Porterfield said he was not surprised by the support the Associate nations like his have got after the International Cricket Council announced tentative plans to reduce the next World Cup from 14 to 10 teams.

"I think it was always going to be a talking point coming into this tournament," the captain said. "You've got to grow the game and I don't see why it [the World Cup] has to be cut down."

"We are improving, every nation out here is improving. We've just got to go out there and play well to

make a statement."

South African all-rounder Farhaan Behardien said his team rated Ireland highly and looked forward to Tuesday's clash.

"Look, every game is a big game and Ireland are not ones to be taken lightly," he said. "We have done a good analysis on them...like we do for every other team."

South Africa have won two of their three games so far and former captain Graeme Smith hoped the bench strength will be tested against both Ireland and UAE.

"I don't foresee either Ireland or the UAE causing too many problems," Smith wrote on the tournament website. "I am certain the entire squad will be given an opportunity to play over these two games also allowing for key players to rest."

**For Faulkner World Cup begins late**

AFP, Perth

Australia all-rounder James Faulkner said Monday he was raring to go against Afghanistan after fearing his World Cup might be over before it had started.

Last month, Faulkner suffered a side strain while bowling during Australia's 112-run tri-series final win over England in Perth - a match where he smashed a 24-ball 50 not out featuring four fours and as many sixes -- and left the field at the WACA visibly in pain.

But now the 24-year-old Tasmanian hopes the same ground will witness his 2015 World Cup debut against tournament newcomers Afghanistan on Wednesday.

"I'd be lying to say I wasn't frustrated at the start," Faulkner told a news conference at the WACA on Monday. "Any time you get injured it's a shocking feeling."

"And to do it at the time it happened, it was obviously quite hard to take at the start."

"But it has given me some time to freshen up and get my body feeling good again."

"Hopefully it holds me in good shape come the end of this tournament."

Faulkner bowled several overs in the WACA nets on Monday and, provided there are no ill-effects, he should be available to face Afghanistan.

**WORLD CUP COCKTAIL**

Former Pakistan pacer Sarfraz Nawaz has accused the ICC of favoring the Indian team in the ongoing cricket World Cup by providing the defending champions pitches tailor made to suit their strengths.

"You look at the matches played so far in this World Cup that where India has played the pitches have been prepared to suit their strengths," Nawaz said on a TV channel show.

The outspoken and often controversial pacer said that in contrast Pakistan was being made to play on pitches which were not easy for them.

"Look at the match against Zimbabwe the pitch was double paced and had lot of bounce which goes against our strengths. I would ask the Pakistan Cricket Board to take up this issue with the ICC and find out what is going on," he said.

**Luck of the Irish**

Ireland's Kevin O'Brien almost lost the record of fastest century in World Cup history when South Africa's AB de Villiers was throttling the West Indies' attack at the SCG last Friday afternoon.

De Villiers reached his 100 off 52 balls and his 150 came off 64. That's the fastest 150 in one-day internationals, but his 52-ball hundred fell two balls shy of equalling O'Brien's 50-ball century against England in the 2011 World Cup.

"I was having a little afternoon nap and I woke up and he was on 78 off 41 or something like that and I thought 'Oh no!'," O'Brien told cricketireland.ie.

"Thankfully he slowed up towards the end and didn't quite make it!"

**Mooney's helmet boost**

Ireland fast bowler John Mooney has delved into medieval history to improve his own batting helmet at the World Cup in the aftermath of the Phillip Hughes tragedy, Irish media reported on Monday.

The 33-year-old Dubliner designed an attachment, which he calls a "gorget", to protect the neck at the back and side of the head.

A "gorget", from the French word for throat, was a crucial part of suits of armour worn in the Middle Ages that protected the neck and throat.

"It's a very simple idea and it's designed to attach to existing helmets," Mooney told the Irish Independent.

"Safety is something I was very aware of before what happened to Phil."

Mooney, who sported the new design in the World Cup win over the United Arab Emirates in Brisbane last week, hopes to have the gorget approved and in production within a few months.



**Murali pleads for Herath recovery time**

Sri Lanka great Muttiah Muralidaran pleaded on Monday for key spinner Ranjana Herath to be kept on ice for the World Cup quarter-finals after suffering a nasty injury to his finger.

The 36-year-old Herath needed four stitches in the spinning finger of his left hand after he tried to stop a full-blooded drive from England's Jos Buttler in Wellington on Sunday.

Muralidaran believes Herath can safely be rested for the remaining pool games against Australia and Scotland.

Should Herath be ruled out, as is likely, the main spinning duties will pass to Sachithra Senanayake who was included in the squad after his bowling action was cleared by the ICC.

"An injury like the one he has picked up to his spinning finger needs time to heal so I would allow him the maximum time to recover."

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