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Talented Pakistan wicketkeeper-batsman Umar Akmal will choose the amateurs from the UAE to get back among the runs in Napier today.

PHOTO: AFP

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RELIEVE THE MOMENT OF THE DAY

PAKISTAN V UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Pak eyes on run-rate

AFP, Napier

Pakistan will target a huge improvement in batting to boost their net run-rate in the World Cup Pool B match against minnows United Arab Emirates in Napier on Wednesday.

Pakistan's long standing batting woes have continued in the tournament as they lost their opening game against archrivals India by 76 runs and went down by a big 150-run margin in their second to the West Indies.

The 1992 champions finally opened their World Cup account with a scrappy 20-run win over Zimbabwe in Brisbane on Sunday and skipper Misbahul Haq warned his team cannot afford any more slip-ups.

"From now on we have to play every game as it is a knock out match," said Misbah whose team also face a tough game against in-form South Africa in Auckland [March 8] and a dangerous Ireland in Adelaide on March 15.

Pakistan were 1-4 against the West Indies

at Christchurch in the worst-ever start in all one-day internationals, while they were 4-2 against Zimbabwe with Nasir Jamshed and Ahmed Shehzad failing on both occasions.

Pakistan struggled to score 235-7 against Zimbabwe, a total Misbah believed will not help against South Africa.

With two points in three games Pakistan

The Export Leader

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are likely to fight the West Indies (two wins in four matches) and Ireland (two wins in two and who face South Africa on Tuesday) for a place in the quarterfinals.

Pakistan have won their two one-day internationals against UAE -- both by nine wickets -- the first in Sharjah in 1994 and the second at Gujranwala in the 1996 World Cup.

5 facts

Both previous one-day internationals between these teams ended in nine-wicket victories for Pakistan (in 1994 and at the 1996 World Cup)

Misbahul Haq has 40 scores of 50-plus in ODIs, but no centuries. The next highest number of half-centuries without a ton is 25 by New Zealand's Andrew Jones

Against Zimbabwe last time out, Misbah became the first player to score two World Cup half-centuries at the age of 40 or more

Misbah needs 72 runs to become the 12th player to score 5,000 ODI runs for Pakistan

UAE seamer Manjula Guruge (74.4 per cent) has the highest dot ball percentage of any bowler in the tournament -- 58 of his 78 deliveries have not been scored off

5 facts

Australia won the only previous one-day international between these teams, by 66 runs in August 2012. That was Afghanistan's second ODI against a Test-playing nation.

Shane Watson has reached 50 once in his 11 ODI innings since the start of last year; his averages of 23.6 in 2014 and 20 in 2015 are his two lowest across his 14-year career.

Afghanistan's Nawroz Mangal has scored 18.2 per cent of his runs in the tournament in boundaries, the lowest percentage of anyone scoring at least 10 runs.

Australia fast bowler Mitchell Starc has bowled 76 dot balls out of a total of 108 he has bowled in this tournament, the second highest percentage of all bowlers (70.4 per cent).

Of bowlers with at least 50 ODI wickets, Starc has the lowest strike rate (24.1).

AUSTRALIA V AFGHANISTAN

Afghans' biggest test

AFP, Perth

Afghanistan face their toughest test of the World Cup so far when they play four-time champions Australia in Perth on Wednesday.

Afghanistan have been the 'Cinderella' story of this World Cup, with their maiden win -- a thrilling one-wicket victory over Scotland in Dunedin last time out -- one of the highlights of the competition so far.

But the pace and bounce of the WACA pitch is unlike any surface Afghanistan have experienced before and, in such fast bowlers as Mitchell Johnson and Mitchell Starc, Australia have the attack to exploit the conditions.

It may well have been with this match in mind that International Cricket Council chief executive David Richardson told AFP on Friday: "I'm pleased with the performances of the qualifiers so far, but the bigger tests are still to come."

The following day the amateurs from the UAE were skittled out for just 102 at the WACA by defending champions India, whose pace attack is nothing like as intimidating as that of Australia.

"As everyone knows the UAE has been our home ground due to security reasons and the pitches in UAE are slow and favour spin," said Afghanistan captain Mohammad Nabi.

However, Afghanistan's last Pool A match against a Test nation saw them reduce Sri Lanka to 51 for four before Mahela Jayawardene's hundred restored the status quo.

Furthermore, the likes of fast bowler Hamid Hassan and left-arm quick Shapoor Zadran, who starred with bat and ball against Scotland, could find the WACA to their liking.

For Australia, it is the classic 'no-win' situation in that anything less than a huge victory, never mind a defeat, will be regarded with dismay by their supporters.

Australia need points on the board after their 111-run opening win over England was followed by a no-result washout against Bangladesh and last weekend's thrilling one-wicket defeat by New Zealand in Auckland.

Australia captain Michael Clarke's lament about his side's inability to play swing bowling, after they slumped to 151 all out against New Zealand in Auckland, was interpreted in some quarters as a criticism of coach Darren Lehmann's training methods.



Hard-hitting Australia opener Aaron Finch will certainly relish a battle with the impressive Afghan battery of fast bowlers at the WACA in Perth today.

PHOTO: AFP

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FAF du PLESSIS

Faf du Plessis left no stone unturned to display as to what yesterday's century meant to him. He raised both arms and flexed his muscles; almost announcing his arrival in the mega event. It was important because the batsman had gotten starts in his last two innings. He scored 55 against India and 62 against the West Indies. While those efforts were commendable, he failed to continue and get a big one. Yesterday, though, was different. Guided by the calm and experienced Hashim Amla at the other end, du Plessis rolled to a run-a-ball 109. While his strike-rate was the second lowest in the South African side yesterday, the innings provided a much needed rigidity at the top, especially after Quinton de Kock departed early.

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WORLD CUP COCKTAIL

Leg spinning all rounder Seekkuge Prasanna will be flown to Australia as cover for the injured Rangana Herath.

"Rangana's wound is expected take 7-10 days to heal," an official release said. "Seekkuge will be sent to Australia only as a precautionary measure."

The injury puts Herath in doubt for the match against Australia on Sunday, but he is not necessarily ruled out yet. Prasanna's forthcoming arrival in Australia will not affect the squad unless Herath's injury is serious enough to rule him out of the tournament. Prasanna cannot, for example, come into the squad for the Australia match.

Smith struck on hand

Star Australian batsman Steve Smith is still a chance to feature against Afghanistan on Wednesday despite copping a hit to his hand on Tuesday.

Smith was in pain after being struck on his left hand while batting in the WACA Ground nets.

The 25-year-old iced his hand in the team's esky, before returning to batting duties.

Captain Michael Clarke said he didn't expect any lingering issues with Smith.

"Smithy got hit on the hand facing a spinner, and he went back in the nets, so I think he's fine," Clarke said.

Australia will wait until Wednesday before naming their team.

Tahir's run-in with crowd

Tahir again had a run-in with fans on the Manuka boundary, as he did there back in November last year when South Africa played Australia. Fielding on the boundary, someone yelled at Tahir, "Why don't you go stroke your pet camel?"

On Tuesday night, after hearing abuse from the crowd, the Pakistan-born Muslim alerted security to a man, who warned the spectator but allowed him to watch the rest of the game.

Witnesses in the crowd said the fan was "loud and annoying", but that the abuse wasn't racial.

A South Africa spokesperson also didn't think it was of a racial nature and said no official complaint would be made.

Kohli hurls abuse at journalist

India's premier batsman and team's vice-captain Virat Kohli today suddenly lost his cool after the training session as he hurled abuses at a journalist before the side's group league game against West Indies at the WACA on Friday.



It didn't occur to anybody that something of this sort will happen. Once Kohli was done with his training and was returning to the dressing room, he saw a scribe of a national daily in front of him.

To the horror of that journalist, Kohli started using filthiest of language and it went on for some time before he stormed off and some of the Indian team members looked amazed as to what exactly had happened.

The particular journalist also seemed clueless but once Kohli cooled down, he told someone about an article that had appeared about him and his girlfriend Anushka Sharma in a national daily and he thought that it was that particular journalist, who had written the story.

When he was told that he has mistaken this particular reporter as someone else, Kohli called one of the journalists and through him apologised for the incident.

According to reliable sources, Team Director Ravi Shastri has personally spoken to Kohli and advised him to keep his cool as it is unbecoming of a future India captain to behave in this manner publicly.

--COMPILED