



South Africa skipper AB de Villiers stretches his arms a bit, indulging in some bowling during a training session at the Sydney Cricket Ground yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

We won't choke, vows de Villiers

AFP, Sydney

South Africa captain AB de Villiers insisted his side will not choke when they try to end their World Cup knockout misery in a Sydney quarterfinal with Sri Lanka on Wednesday.

The Proteas have never won a World Cup knockout match since their tournament debut in 1992, with a series of near-misses leaving them with the unwanted tag of "chokers".

But for de Villiers, history really is all in the past.

"All I can say is we're not going to choke tomorrow. We're going to play a good game of cricket and come out on top. Simple," he told reporters at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Tuesday.

"How do we approach it? We think we've just got to try and play a good game of cricket," the in-form batsman, whose last appearance at the SCG saw him score a stunning 162 not out against the West Indies in the pool stage.

"I think it's important to focus on what we've been doing well and try and do that tomorrow. We have certain strengths we like to focus on and not focus too much on the opposition.

"We've got to (keep things) as simple as

possible. Strike with the new ball, try and bowl them out, if we bat first get a big total and put them under pressure."

South Africa, like Sri Lanka, won four and lost two of their pool matches, with the Proteas beaten by 130 runs by defending champions India and going down by 29 runs to Pakistan.

"I don't believe we've been awful, I feel we've had had a pretty decent tournament so far, finished second in the log (Pool)," said de Villiers.

"We had a tough game against India, where things could have been different, I believe.

"That's about it. Other than that, we've played some good cricket. Against Pakistan, I wasn't too upset about that except for the fact we didn't show enough fight with the bat. But we bowled exceptionally well.

"We have to win tomorrow. We've lost two games (but) we are pretty much on track.

"That's what it comes down to, no one is going to ask us if we played exceptional cricket when we win the World Cup. We are just going to say that 'we won the Cup'.

"So we just want to find a way to win the game tomorrow."

Hesson's money on Lanka SA get 'fear expert'

AFP, Wellington

New Zealand coach Mike Hesson suspects Sri Lanka could be too good for South Africa in the opening World Cup quarterfinal in Sydney on Wednesday, but much will depend on the toss.

There is intense interest in the outcome as the winner will play the victor of the New Zealand-West Indies quarterfinal in Wellington on Saturday.

South Africa were one of the World Cup favourites, but have a reputation as chokers.

Sri Lanka, meanwhile, were beaten 4-2 by New Zealand before the tournament but have worked their way into commanding form since.

"That's a massive game," Hesson said. "We are on the same side of the draw, so it'll be interesting at Sydney. I think winning the toss and batting

over there's generally pretty important if it's going to turn.

"I think Sri Lanka are dangerous in those conditions and South Africa are going to have to play well."

New Zealand assembled in Wellington with Hesson stressing there was more to the West Indies than charismatic slugger Chris Gayle whose batting exploits draw most attention in the Caribbean camp.

"We've got lots of information," Hesson said before taking his bowlers through their scouting report on the West Indies batting line up.

"We won't be spending our time on just one player. We'll be making sure we prepare as well as we can for everyone."

The West Indies believe Gayle, who missed their final pool match against United Arab Emirates after the flare-up of a back complaint, will be fit for

Saturday while New Zealand welcomed back express bowler Adam Milne.

Milne pulled out of New Zealand's last match with a shoulder problem but Hesson said he was now "fully fit to take a part in training."

While New Zealand went through Pool A unbeaten, the West Indies were the bottom qualifier in Pool B with three wins and three losses.

But Hesson said the way they comprehensively beat Pakistan by 150 runs showed they were "a dangerous side.

"When you think they're down, one of their players comes out and plays an explosive innings or bowls a spell that can take you out of the game.

"Sometimes it's easier to play a side that's a bit more predictable whereas the West Indies on their day are exceptional."

AFP, Sydney

South Africa have turned to a grizzled adventurer, who has explored the Amazon and trekked to the North Pole, to help them navigate their path to a maiden World Cup.

Coach Russell Domingo drafted in South Africa-born adventurer Mike Horn to help put Wednesday's quarterfinal against Sri Lanka in perspective.

Horn has plenty of experience working with sports teams, having spoken to the India squad during their victorious 2011 World Cup campaign. He also worked with the Proteas in 2012 and advised the Germany team before they won football's World Cup in Brazil last year.

South Africa captain AB de Villiers said of Horn: "He brings great energy to the team. He'll have a bit of a chat to us. He had a chat to the Germans who won the World Cup, things that worked for them. We can learn a bit from that."

Horn, explaining his philosophy, said: "I don't lose a match, I lose a life and my commitment is completely different. I don't just play, I play to win, I have to win.

"If you have that mindset where losing is no longer an option and the whole team believes in it and you can create the team that helps each other to move forward and everybody is willing to give more than what's asked for, then you can create a dynamic that the Germans have," he added.



HEIMLICH MANOEUVRE EXPERT? Explorer and motivator Mike Horn will be looking to rid the South Africans of their nerves.

PHOTO: AFP

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'Losing Irfan a huge setback'

AFP, Adelaide

Giant Pakistan fast bowler Mohammad Irfan was ruled out of the World Cup Tuesday because of a stress fracture to his pelvis, an injury which captain Misbahul Haq described as a "huge setback".

The 32-year-old first felt the hip injury in the 129-run win over the United Arab Emirates two weeks ago when he bowled just three overs.

The injury is a major blow to the 1992 champions' chances of defeating four-time winners Australia in the quarterfinal at the Adelaide Oval on Friday.

"Irfan was one bowler who was different to all the others in the competition," Misbah told AFP. "It is a huge setback for us but we have to live with it."

Irfan, at seven-feet one inch, the tallest man to play international cricket, took eight wickets in the five matches he played at the World Cup.

"It's difficult because we lost two bowlers to suspension before the World Cup," said Misbah of ace spinner Saeed Ajmal and spinning all-rounder Mohammad Hafeez.

"We also lost two good quality pacemen -- Umar Gul and Junaid Khan -- also to injury. Now just when we have started to perform well this injury hits us badly."

WORLD CUP COCKTAIL

New Zealand pace bowler Adam Milne was expected to take a full part in training this afternoon as he completes his recovery from a shoulder injury.

The 22-year-old missed last Friday's Pool A victory over Bangladesh in Hamilton after he took a knock to his shoulder while taking a catch in the outfield during New Zealand's previous game against Afghanistan in Napier.

It wasn't thought to be serious and Black Caps coach Mike Hesson said the fastest bowler in his squad was recovering well and he would return to training.

Pietersen-Swann showdown

England might be out of the Cricket World Cup but they still provide the combatants for potentially the tournament's biggest flashpoint, with arch-enemies Kevin Pietersen and Graeme Swann set to come face to face in the BBC commentary box.

Pietersen will work alongside Swann for the first time at the Auckland semi-final.

And the confrontation between the ex-England team-mates, whose relationship disintegrated in the fall-out from the 2013-14 Ashes whitewash, has been given spice with the possibility Pietersen might now return to county cricket and the national team.

Swann has accused Pietersen of "upsetting people wherever he goes", says the ECB were "justified" in terminating his England contract and calls Pietersen's autobiography a "work of fiction".

Despite the history, TMS producer Adam Mountford is hopeful there will be no trouble between the pair on the day, saying:

A matter of faith

The Human Rights Commission has received a complaint of alleged unlawful discrimination on the grounds of religion on the wearing of kirpan, a religious dagger carried by Sikhs bound by a religious commandment, at World Cup venues.

A commission spokeswoman said the complaint was being assessed and referred

to the parties. Seven Sikh cricket fans were refused entry to Eden Park to watch a World Cup match between India and Zimbabwe last Saturday because they had kirpans.



New Zealand Prime Minister John Key said the ICC rightly set the rules of what could be brought into venues but he believed it was wrong in barring kirpans.

Inzi backs 10-team WC

Former Pakistan captain Inzamam-ul-Haq has thrown his considerable weight behind a 10-team World Cup, saying, "There's talk of a 10-team ICC World Cup in 2019 and I am all in favour of it.

For Associate teams like Ireland, what the ICC needs to do is to arrange regular One-Day International series against Test nations, say minimum of 10-12 ODIs in a year, instead of just organising international matches among the associate countries. It could help lower-ranked sides, especially Ireland, to be in the top eight of the ICC Rankings and qualify directly for the ICC Cricket World Cup 2019."

Akram excited by Starc

Wasim Akram can't wait to see five left-arm seamers when Australia and Pakistan clash for a World Cup semi-final spot, but admits Mitchell Starc is his favourite.

"It excites me to no end. When I used to play there were very few left-armers. I will be the most excited person at Adelaide Oval." "To me Starc is the best. He has height and he swings the ball and that is why he is so successful," said Wasim.

Wasim also praised New Zealand's Trent Boult who has 15 wickets in six games.

—COMPILED