



South Africa's David Miller will be hoping to bring stability to the Proteas' middle-order as they move into the semifinal against New Zealand. PHOTO: FILE

'Best four in last four'

AFP, Auckland

There can be no argument about the make up of the World Cup semifinals, with the best four teams still alive, New Zealand coach Mike Hesson declared Sunday.

New Zealand were the last confirmed semifinalists when Martin Guptill's stunning 237 not out set up a lop-sided 143-run victory over the West Indies in Wellington on Saturday.

They meet South Africa in Auckland on Tuesday in the first semifinal with Australia playing India in the second semifinal two days later in Sydney.

New Zealand's demolition of the West Indies was hailed in the local news media, led by calls from one radio station for a national holiday next Tuesday so the whole nation can watch their semifinal against South Africa.

But while the New Zealand fans celebrated their side getting through to the semis, and extending their unbeaten run to nine matches, coach Hesson said they deserved to be among cricket's ODI elite.

"The best four teams are in the semifinals and I don't think many people could disagree with that," he said Sunday as New Zealand flew to Auckland for their showdown with South Africa.

"South Africa on their day are exceptional, [but] put them under pressure and see what happens.

"The two sides are playing good cricket and it's going to be a heck of a show."

Hesson said New Zealand were "confident as a group" and he rated Guptill's heroics with the bat against the West Indies as one of the finest innings he had seen.

"The way he paced the innings by setting the tone early, playing straight, adapting to the conditions and timing everything from ball 30 on. It was pretty surreal," he said.

"There were a lot of high fives and huddles [in the team room]. It was an amazing innings which we were immensely proud to watch."

In addition to Guptill's 237, the highest score ever in a World Cup match, a four-wicket haul for Trent Boult and an outstanding leaping catch by Daniel Vettori were significant elements in the win over the West Indies.



MIKE HESSON

7th time lucky? Proteas prepared for the journey into unknown

AFP, Auckland

New Zealand will hope it's a case of seventh time lucky when they face South Africa at Auckland's Eden Park on Tuesday, as all six of their previous World Cup semi-finals have ended in defeat.

Below AFP Sport looks back at the Black Caps' litany of last-four woes:

The Oval in 1975
New Zealand 158 (G Howarth 51; B Julien 4-27) lost to the West Indies 159-5 (A Kallicharran 72, G Greenidge 55) by 5 wkts

Old Trafford in 1979
New Zealand 212-9 (J Wright 69) lost to England 221-8 (G Gooch 71, M Brearley 53) by 9 runs

Auckland in 1992
New Zealand 262-7 (M Crowe 91, K Rutherford 50) lost to Pakistan 264-6 (Inzamamul Haq 60, Javed Miandad 57 no) by 4 wkts

Old Trafford in 1999
New Zealand 241-7 lost to Pakistan 242-1 (Saeed Anwar 113 no, Wajahatullah Wasti 84) by 9 wkts

Kingston in 2007
New Zealand 208 (M Muralidaran 4-31) lost to Sri Lanka 289-5 (M Jayawardene 115 no, U Tharanga 73) by 81 runs

Colombo in 2011
New Zealand 217 (S Styris 57) lost to Sri Lanka 220-5 (T Dilshan 73, KS Sangakkara 54) by 5 wkts

AFP, Auckland

South Africa batsman David Miller believes his side are ready for a journey into the "unknown" when they face New Zealand in a World Cup semifinal in Auckland on Tuesday.

Since being allowed into cricket's showpiece event in 1992 ahead of the collapse of apartheid, South Africa have failed to get past the semifinal stage on three occasions and are still awaiting a maiden World Cup final appearance.

New Zealand's record is even worse, with the Black Caps having lost all six of their previous World Cup semifinals.

Yet it is the Proteas who carry the unwanted tag of 'chokers', a label they went some way to removing with a thumping nine-wicket win over Sri Lanka in the quarterfinals -- South Africa's first victory in the knockout phase of any World Cup.

"It's something that's the unknown," said Miller on Sunday of the prospect of playing either Australia or defending champions India, who meet in the second semi in Sydney on Thursday, in the March 29 final at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

"It's a very exciting time. In eight days we could be world champions but it's just one step at a time, take things slowly as they come," Miller added.

Tuesday's semifinal takes place at Eden Park.

Better known as a rugby venue, the ground's short straight boundaries were expected to lead to a glut of fours and sixes during the World Cup.

However, Eden Park has staged two low-scoring thrillers during the tournament -- New Zealand's one-wicket win over fellow co-hosts Australia and Pakistan's 29-run defeat of South Africa.

Nevertheless, the big-hitting Miller

is aiming to cash in any way he can.

"Hopefully, I can mishit a few straight sixes," he said. "That's just the way the field is and it's cool to be playing on it."

The 25-year-old Miller, appearing in his first World Cup, started the tournament with a career-best 138 not out in a win over Zimbabwe in Hamilton.

The left-hander has made two subsequent 40s, but he fell for a duck at Eden Park during the loss to Pakistan in pool play.

However, Miller said he hoped his previous experience of Eden Park would prove beneficial.

"It's my first time in New Zealand so it's good to have already played a game here and just to get the feel of the ground itself, the dimensions of the field," he said.

"It's just something to get used to and obviously the feel of the crowd. It's going to be huge on Tuesday."

Rameez wants Wahab as ODI captain

CRICINFO, Adelaide

Former Pakistan batsman Rameez Raja has called on the national selectors to appoint fast bowler Wahab Riaz as the country's next one-day captain.

Speaking to ESPNcricinfo, Rameez said that after watching Wahab bowl in the quarterfinal defeat against Australia, he was convinced Wahab can make it "big as a leader" because of the "aggression, passion and emotion" he showed. Pakistan will need to find a replacement for Misbahul Haq, who had announced his retirement from ODIs after the World Cup, and Rameez urged the selectors to groom a youngster for the job.

"It's a difficult one because Pakistan have not yet trained a youngster," Rameez said. "What I saw of him [Wahab] against Australia convinces me that he's got it in him to make it big as a leader because he showed aggression, passion and emotion and that is what is required right now to put Pakistan cricket back on track."

Wahab was among the few standout performers for Pakistan at the World Cup, finishing as one of the tournament's highest wicket-takers with 16 scalps at an average of 23.00 and an economy rate of 5.56.



WORLD CUP COCKTAIL

When the call came I just about jumped out of my skin. "Do you want to face an over from Shane Warne over at the MCG?" You better believe I do.

The MCG's National Sports Museum currently has two Oculus Rift virtual reality headset, that let you pick up a 'bat' and take guard against digital Warne.

The 'bat' is a small hand-held remote control. Attempts were made to bury the sensor inside a real piece of willow, but the propensity of players to tap the bat on the ground in their stance caused calibration issues.

Warne was motion-captured for the simulation: the swagger, the run-up, the bowling action are all very authentic. He sledges, too. As soon as that headset comes on, the software loads and you're suddenly in the middle of the MCG. Standing down the pitch is Warne, slim, blonde, tanned and staring intently at you. "Ready? Right, let's go," he says. A quick description of the ball he's about to deliver gives you some clue as to what's coming. The first six balls are gentle, they don't turn much and they are hittable. The next six balls are at 'real' speed.

Fans can bid for World Cup history

The ICC is giving cricket fans across the world an opportunity to bid for an official piece of the 2015 World Cup history in the form of the toss coins from each of the 49 matches during the prestigious tournament which is being co-hosted by Australia and New Zealand.

SE Products, as the ICC's memorabilia and collectables licensee, released a similar programme for the World Cup 2011 with great success. Fans relished the chance to bid for the official coin used in the matchday coin toss and SE Products is looking forward to making more official memorabilia available for the upcoming event.

Limited edition coins have been specially produced for the 2015 tournament. Each and every coin includes the specific

dates used from the official match.

In a first for cricket fans worldwide, the official scorecard is also available for auction for each match of the World Cup. Furthermore, a match-used ball from each of the four quarter-finals, two semi-finals and the final are also up for auction.

Guptill's mysterious gesture

There are a lot of rumours going around that Martin Guptill had gestured with two of his fingers during his innings today because he has only two toes on his left foot after being involved in a forklift accident during his younger days.



However, the 28-year-old was actually gesturing to Craig McMillan, who is the current batting coach of the New Zealand cricket team.

He was pointing two fingers to McMillan because on the previous ball, he became only the second batsman to hit the top of the roof at the Westpac Stadium, Wellington. The only batsman to have done it before was McMillan.

Guptill's six, which came off the bowling of Andre Russell in the 50th over, was measured at a distance of 110m, which is easily the biggest six hit in the ongoing cricket World Cup. The stadium known as 'Cake Tin' has some of the shortest boundaries in international cricket, but it would be fair to say that this hit would have cleared any boundary in the world.

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