



Maxwell for green SCG

AFP, Sydney

Australia batting star Glenn Maxwell wants the Sydney Cricket Ground to be mean and green for Thursday's World Cup semifinal against India despite the pitch's reputation as a spinners' paradise.

Maxwell believes home field advantage could be key as the co-hosts look to end the defending champions' seven-match winning streak at the tournament, an impressive run which has seen them bowl out the opposition in every match.

"Hopefully we get a fast one [pitch]. It has been a pretty good wicket this year and hopefully there is a bit of grass there as well," said Maxwell, who is desperate for a track which will play into the hands of an attack which boasts fast bowlers Mitchell Starc, Mitchell Johnson and Josh Hazlewood.

India have a woeful record at the SCG where they have triumphed just once in 14 ODIs against Australia -- with their only win coming back in 2008.

"They haven't won a game against us all summer, hopefully we can make the most of that," said Maxwell in reference to Australia's dominance in the Test and ODI series which preceded the World Cup.

"Hopefully that is pretty clear in their memories. We've been dominant all summer in the ODI format. Hopefully we can continue that."

The Victorian now looms as an even more important figure in the semifinal because of his bowling. "I've taken a couple of wickets this tournament which has been nice, and I feel like I've been doing the job that Michael Clarke has been asking of me whenever I've come to the crease," Maxwell said.

Kohli is about to score a big one, says Dhoni

REUTERS, Sydney

By his own lofty standards, Virat Kohli has had a modest World Cup so far.

But his Indian teammates all think the elegant stroke-maker will live up to his reputation as a big-match player when it matters.

And few games matter more than Thursday's semifinal against Australia. For Kohli, it's a golden opportunity to get back amongst the runs.

"I don't think he has batted badly. When he has got an opportunity he has scored runs," India's World Cup captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni said.

"It's not that he has scored a century every time he has gone out to bat. But everybody is relating his performance with the Test series and expecting a hundred in every innings from him."

Kohli's lean run at the World Cup has been puzzling, partly because of his great record in one-day internationals and his great form this summer.

He has scored 22 ODIs, averages almost 52 from 157 matches in the format and is among India's best batsmen.

He replaced Dhoni as Test captain for India's last match against Australia in Sydney in January and scored four hundreds in the series and averaged over 86.



The intensity on Virat Kohli's face is clear as India head into the semifinal against Australia.

PHOTO: FILE

But his form in ODI has fallen away. He made a century in India's opening World Cup match against Pakistan but hasn't made a fifty since.

Known equally for his silken touch with the bat and a penchant for run-ins with opposition players, Kohli also found himself embroiled in controversy after swearing at a journalist over a story

about his personal life.

The batting mainstay was censored by the Indian board for his ugly outburst against the travelling Indian journalist in Perth and advised to maintain his cool.

After his 107 against Pakistan in Adelaide, he has scored 46, 33 not out, 33, 44 not out, 38 and 3 and Dhoni backed him for a big one soon.

"I don't think there has been any poor shot selection. He is a dominant batsman who likes playing his shots when he goes in to bat," Dhoni said.

"It's quite difficult but at the same time I feel it is important to keep focussing on the process. It's just around the corner and big players always score in big games."



Lara wants to pay for Riaz!

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

It was a display of high-voltage fast bowling and theatrics that won't quickly be forgotten -- particularly by its target Shane Watson -- and the fact it cost Pakistan's Wahab Riaz half of his match fee has been slammed by one of modern cricket's greatest players.

Brian Lara is in Australia for the World Cup, and was disappointed to see his West Indies crash out in their quarterfinal against New Zealand on Saturday.

What also got his goat over the weekend was the fine handed out to Riaz for the air kissing and mock clapping he directed towards Watson when he had the Australian No. 5 on toast. Watson, who ended up guiding Australia out of trouble and into the semis, also had 15 per cent of his match fee subtracted but the sanctioning of Riaz incensed Lara.

"It's ridiculous what the end result is. We are all entertainers. That to me was one of the highlights of the World Cup. A guy running in bowling at 150kmph plus and Watson looked like he was at school," Lara told India's NDTV.

"It's just unbelievable that that's the end result ... both were fined. I don't know what the ICC is thinking. It's just uncalled for. We need this in a sport that people are running away from, especially 50-over cricket. I loved the exchange. It was above board as far as I'm concerned and I can't wait to meet him. I want to meet with [this] Riaz guy. I'll pay the fine."



Farewell to Sanga & Afridi

SAABER SHOYEB

Sri Lanka's defeat against South Africa in the first quarterfinal of this World Cup signaled the end of the ODI career of one of the greatest wicketkeeper-batsmen of the game, Kumar Sangakkara.

The elegant left-hander is said to be one of the most humble cricketers ever, and the esteem he is held in by his peers was apparent after the match ended, as the South African players took their time to shake hands and share a hearty hug to bid farewell to this great cricketer.

"Retiring from cricket is not about form," Sangakkara said after the match. "I'm sure I can play maybe a year or two more, but like I said before, it's time and

place, and I feel that the time is now and it's right."

Asked how he would like to be remembered in cricket, he said: "If anyone can say that they've enjoyed playing against me and playing with me, I'll be more than happy."

It might seem unfortunate that Sanga, despite playing in two World Cup finals, has never gone on to win the ultimate silverware. Another cricketer retiring without having won the World Cup in his career is the dynamic Pakistani all-rounder Shahid Afridi.

Stealing the headlines ever since he made a bursting introduction into world cricket with a 37-ball century in 1997 against the then World champions Sri Lanka, Afridi will be remembered for his

flair with both bat and ball. With an attack-every-delivery style of batting, Afridi always kept fans, opponents and supporters wondering what his next move would be. This unpredictability led him to become a true entertainer in all formats of the game. He has already retired from Tests, but will continue playing T20s.

We want to remember these players for being a part of the game and in their fans' hearts for so many years: Sangakkara, the ever-calm and humble wicketkeeper-batsman, and the fiery, flamboyant all-rounder Shahid Afridi. We hope that the new generation of cricketers all around the world will find valuable insights from the long and illustrious careers of these two legends.



Who says Gayle's going?

AFP, Wellington

Chris Gayle intends to keep playing international cricket with his eyes on the 2016 World Twenty20 but admitted his back injury will sideline him from next month's Test series against England.

The 35-year-old Jamaican hit a typically flamboyant 33-ball 61 as West Indies slumped to a crushing 143-run defeat to New Zealand in the World Cup quarterfinals on Saturday with many in the game expecting Gayle to end his rollerco

aster relationship with the national team.

But the veteran of 103 Tests and 269 ODIs intends to keep playing and is keen to help West Indies to the World T20 in India next year where they'll look for a second title to add to their 2012 triumph.

"Definitely want to play the T20 World Cup next year for West Indies, there's no doubt about that," Gayle told www.espn.com.

"I've got a few concerns and a few injuries to try and solve. I'll give myself some time and hopefully look back at it and see how well I can actually progress for West Indies cricket at this point in time."

But the left-handed opener, who hit a World Cup record score of 215 at the World Cup until it was

bettered on Saturday by New Zealand's Martin Gupthill with 237, will not play in the three-Test home series against England in April and May to rest his back injury.

"I'm actually out of the Test series, the back won't hold up for that format at this point in time. But I haven't retired from any format as yet. As I go on I will keep informing the West Indies Cricket Board about my progress in the future with West Indies cricket."

On Saturday, and with the West Indies having to chase 394 at the Westpac, Gayle hit 56 of his 61 runs in boundaries, including eight sixes, as he was reduced to walking pace between the wickets.

But he put that down to a groin strain rather than his troublesome back.

"The back actually held up well, to be honest with you, in the outfield for 50 overs and then opening the batting," he said.

"It wasn't too bad, slight scare again with a niggle in the groin, so all that was happening, and you have to take the conditions into consideration, it was a bit cold and you're feeling some pain."

Gayle said he was looking forward to working with former international all-rounder Phil Simmons, who will take over as West Indies coach next month after signing a three-year deal with the WICB.

"I know Phil well," Gayle said. "He's a good man, he has done well with Ireland and he's one of us as well, so there's no doubt about it. We know how we can actually become a stronger unit."

'Rohit a la Aravinda'

IANS, Sydney

Former Australia skipper Ian Chappell on Sunday said that Indian Rohit Sharma's match-winning innings of 137 against Bangladesh in the World Cup quarterfinal reminded him of Sri Lankan batting great Aravinda de Silva.

"Throughout his excellent innings, I was reminded of the discipline displayed by Aravinda de Silva in the 1996 World Cup final," Chappell wrote in a column for a website.

"Aravinda scored a century of class and determination to help his team win the trophy, and although he denied himself any expansive shots, he still scored at a run rate near 90."

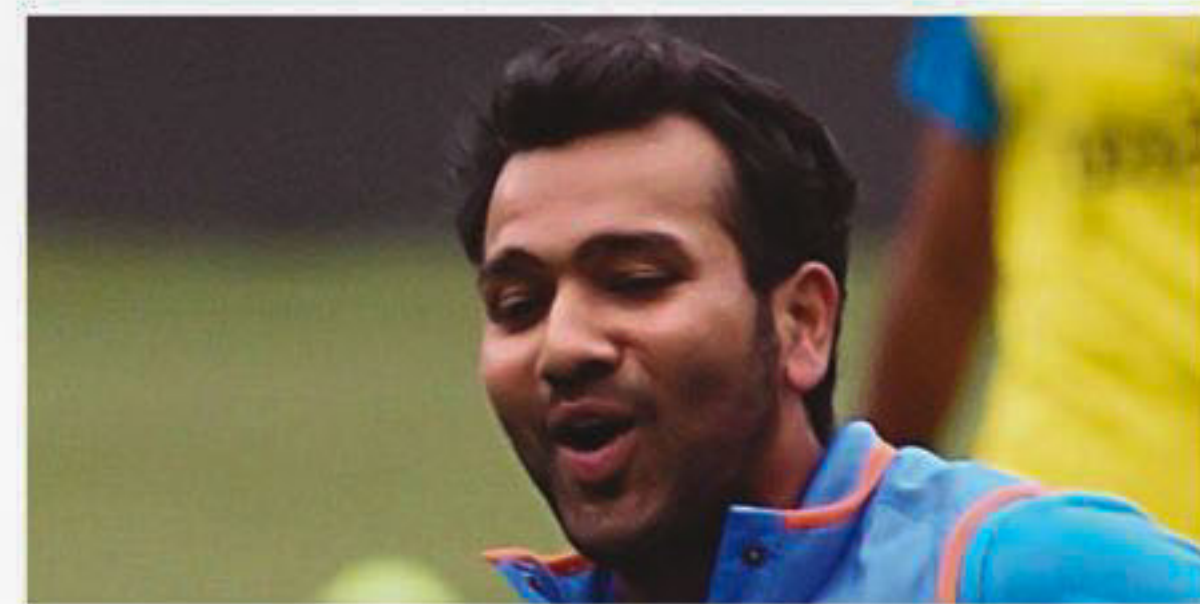
"It was one of the great innings of self-restraint played by a batsman who could be extravagant, bordering on reckless at times," he said of the Indian right-hander.

The 71-year-old praised opening batsman Rohit for playing a disciplined innings and not hitting a careless uppish shot during his stay at the crease that so often brings one of his promising innings to a premature halt.

"Rohit was every bit disciplined, and mostly denied himself the signature lofted shots into the stands or the careless uppish shot through the infield that so often bring one of his promising innings to a premature halt," Ian said.

Ian, who had played 75 Tests and 16 one-day-internationals (ODI) for Australia, also came up in appreciation for Suresh Raina for playing a supportive role at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG).

"As much as Rohit was the star and Suresh Raina was good who played a strong supporting role," he said.



He also heaped praise on Indian bowling attack which took 70 wickets in seven consecutive World Cup games to silence critics after a disastrous Test and ODI Tri-Series Down Under.

"Six weeks ago you wouldn't have dreamed the Indians would claim all 70 wickets in their first seven World Cup matches."

"Nevertheless, that's exactly what the bowlers have achieved, and it's a credit to their persistence and resilience that they have been able to click into gear when it has really mattered," he said.

Indian's sparkling fielding effort in the mega event has also impressed the legend.

"The final component in India's World Cup resurgence has been the fielding. It was athletic and safe, with the occasional brilliant intercept at the MCG."

"It helps if all the chances created are accepted, and this also helps to build the confidence of the bowlers," Ian concluded.

