



South Africa captain AB de Villiers (L) and his New Zealand counterpart Brendon McCullum will leave no stones unturned at Auckland today to create a small piece of cricketing history for their respective nations -- a victory and a place in the World Cup final for the first time.

PHOTOS: AFP

## 'Sledging to be fast & furious'

AFP, Sydney

Rival captains Mahendra Singh Dhoni of India and Michael Clarke of Australia may have their hands full trying to keep frayed tempers in check during a potentially explosive World Cup semifinal on Thursday.

The two teams have shared a tumultuous relationship both on and off the field in recent years and another flare-up cannot be ruled out in front of a packed Sydney Cricket Ground.

It was at the same venue in 2008 where the infamous 'Monkeygate' incident involving Australian all-rounder Andrew Symonds and Indian spinner Harbhajan Singh took place and almost saw a Test series being called off.

Harbhajan was suspended for three matches for allegedly calling Symonds a "monkey", but the ban was overturned when India threatened to walk out of the tour, claiming the off-spinner was wrongly accused.

The bad blood continued during India's Test and one-day series in Australia prior to the World Cup when heated on-field exchanges led to several players being penalised.

Three Indian players, Virat Kohli, Ishant Sharma and Shikhar Dhawan, and Australian left-arm fast bowler Mitchell Starc were charged for a breach of the International Cricket Council's Code of Conduct.

Australian opener David Warner was the worst offender,

## Milne's World Cup is over

AFP, Auckland

New Zealand fast bowler Adam Milne has been ruled out of Tuesday's World Cup semifinal against South Africa at Eden Park.

Coach Mike Hesson said Monday that a left heel injury had forced Milne out of the remainder of the tournament and the International Cricket Council cleared Matt Henry to join the New Zealand line up "for the knockout stage of the tournament".

Milne was an automatic choice as the third quick behind Tim Southee and Trent Boult, with Mitchell McClenaghan preferred ahead of Kyle Mills when a shoulder injury kept Milne out of the Bangladesh match.

Milne, who bowled Chris Gayle for 61 in New Zealand's 143-run quarterfinal victory, has taken five wickets for 199 in the tournament.

Henry, who has only played eight ODIs, has impressive career figures of 21 wickets at an average of 15.42.

Milne felt discomfort following New Zealand's comprehensive quarterfinal win against the West Indies on Saturday and a scan showed significant swelling around the heel.

"It's certainly serious enough to rule him out of the tournament from a playing perspective. We've certainly got more tests to do in terms of the extent of it but we're thinking more in weeks than longer than that," said captain Brendon McCullum.

## 'No one can stop us'

AFP, Auckland

After years of South Africa being lumbered with the "chokers" tag, captain AB de Villiers boldly declared Monday the World Cup was theirs for the taking this time.

De Villiers was in a confident mood on the eve of the semifinal in Auckland against New Zealand with neither side having made a World Cup final before.

Ahead, lies a date next weekend in Melbourne with the winners of Thursday's second semifinal between defending champions India and former winners Australia.

"We have a lot of confidence behind us. I feel the team is in a really good space at a really good time. We have a lot of reason to be confident," de Villiers said.

"If we play to our full potential, no one is going to stop us in this tournament."

In a brief series at the start of the New Zealand summer, South

Africa came out on top 2-0 before New Zealand won a warm up match days before the World Cup started.

In previous World Cups they have met six times with New Zealand holding the edge 4-2, including the last three encounters.

However, de Villiers was not interested in looking back. All that mattered to him was how his class of 2015 performed.

"There has been a lot of emphasis on our past and South Africa not doing well at World Cups. I have gone through the whole package of emotions, fighting it, accepting it, then fighting it again," he said.

"I honestly am not putting emphasis on that at all."

"We know if we play a good game of cricket we will come out on top. We are that confident in our abilities as a cricket team."

"We have been through a lot of hardship in the past with our World Cup games but we feel very fresh and are very excited for tomorrow."

The semifinal may be a high-stakes game, and New Zealand have talked about the hours spent analysing the South Africans, but de Villiers was not concerned about the New Zealanders nor the injury that has ruled out speedster Adam Milne.

But de Villiers was pleased with the intelligence learned from having played at Eden Park when losing a World Cup thriller to Pakistan where South Africa were dismissed for 202 when chasing a revised target of 232 in 47 overs.

Learning the angles of the field, and knowing its history of low scores despite having some of the shortest boundaries in international cricket provided valuable information.

"I don't think anything over 230 has ever been chased down here in an ODI," he said.

De Villiers said the XI to play New Zealand has not been finalised but he did not rule out changes.

### The Export Leader



having been reported both in the Test and one-day series, and was publicly told off by Cricket Australia boss James Sutherland to "stop looking for trouble".

Warner risks missing the World Cup final should Australia qualify if he is found guilty of a third breach of the Code of Conduct on Thursday.

Australia all-rounder James Faulkner predicted that the sledging will be fast and furious at the SCG.

"There are going to be words said and it's going to be a really tough contest," Faulkner told reporters on Monday.

"I think there is always sledging in the game. If there is not, you've got problems. It's the nature of the game. It's a semifinal. Cut throat. Neither team will be backing down."

Australian teammate Glenn Maxwell is certain that Warner, who squared up to Rohit Sharma during the Test series telling the batsman "to speak English", will not get into trouble again.

"He is fine," the all-rounder said. "He does not say much -- anymore."

All-rounder Shane Watson will be another one under the radar of Sri Lankan match referee Ranjan Madugalle, who fined him 15 per cent of his match fees for a heated exchange with Pakistan's Wahab Riaz during tense moments of Friday's quarterfinal in Adelaide.

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## 'India hold spin edge'

PTI, Sydney

Former Australian captain Ian Chappell said Ravichandran Ashwin will get purchase from the SCG wicket and that spin would be a "big advantage" for India when they square off against the Michael Clarke-led side in the cricket World Cup semifinals here on Thursday.

"Sydney Cricket Ground always turns. They talked about the pitch not turning much when Sri Lanka played there, but there were only slow bowlers, there were no spinners. Ashwin puts something on the ball, he will get some turn out of it. I think if India really had a high-class left-arm orthodox spinner that could have troubled Australia. Australia have had some problems with orthodox left-arm spinners.

"I think spin bowling is a big advantage to India. I would say quick bowling, advantage Australia, batting about even. I would give this game even money at this stage," Chappell told NDTV.

The Indian bowling has made its presence felt after picking all the opposition wickets in the matches gone by and West Indian legend Brian Lara is impressed with the Mohammed Shami-led attack.

"I think it [good fast bowling conditions] is going to help the Australian fast bowlers but

## WORLD CUP COCKTAIL

Mumbai man Jignesh Sanghrajka, 28, entered a Facebook competition conducted by tournament sponsor Emirates last month, the Indian newspaper Mid-Day reports. After correctly predicting that India would beat Pakistan in Adelaide in a pool game on February 15, Sanghrajka was informed by the airline on February 24 that he was the lucky winner of the trip for two. The prize included two economy-class return tickets to Melbourne, match tickets for the World Cup final and three nights' hotel accommodation at a five-star hotel.

Jignesh chose his older brother Mehul as his travel companion and they requested a detour via Adelaide to visit their sister to complete a dream trip. But after applying for an entry visa with relevant documents and a supporting letter from the International Cricket Council, the brothers were shocked to learn that their application had been rejected.

According to Mid-Day, Sanghrajka received a letter which stated: "Regarding your financial circumstances, I note that your income as per the income tax documents is not significantly high and therefore, I am not satisfied if such an income/occupation would constitute an incentive for you to return. Considering this, I am not satisfied that a genuine visit is intended."

Mehul, 41, an investment consultant and insurance agent, insists he has been paying substantial income tax for years and had provided details of savings and house valuations.

A spokesperson from the Australian High Commission in India told Mid-Day: "We're looking into it and will contact the applicants to see what can be done."

### McCullum encourages employers to give leave

A letter explaining your leave of absence, from none other than the captain of your national cricket team - that is what the bosses at the companies in Auckland have been getting, ahead of the first semi final between New Zealand and South Africa.

In a bid to garner as much home-support for his team, New Zealand captain



Brendon McCullum has written a letter to all the company bosses, to give their employees a day off, on Tuesday.

With the home crowd behind them, and undefeated in this World Cup so far, New Zealand would be the favourites to win the semi final.

### Dhoni Aces Raina

While one batsman practiced in the net allocated for pacers, one for spinners and other for throwdowns, Raina was at the extreme left net with coach Fletcher in tow with a tennis racquet and a ball in hand. To everyone's surprise, Raina batted against Fletcher's service.

The concept for using a tennis racquet and tennis serve is simple: a tennis serve on a grass turf will kick up considerably (as opposed to a leather ball) thereby ensuring that the batsman gets good practice against short deliveries.

Fletcher was seen aiming at Raina's body as the left-hander was trying to play the hook shot. He connected a few, missed a few and miscued some. While Fletcher did this for 15 minutes, the coach felt the need for someone who could impart more power on those tennis serves. In came skipper Dhoni and started unleashing some booming serves for Raina, who didn't look comfortable at all. Once in between the serves, Dhoni was seen summoning Raina for a mid-pitch discussion. --COMPILED