



Indian cricketers warm up before a training session at the Sydney Cricket Ground yesterday, ahead of Thursday's blood and thunder semifinal clash against co-hosts Australia.

PHOTO: AFP

## 70% of SCG tickets bought by Indians

AFP, Sydney

India fans are likely to outnumber their Australian counterparts when the two teams clash in the World Cup semifinal in Sydney on Thursday -- much to the annoyance of the home captain.

Australia skipper Michael Clarke and teammate David Warner sent out identical tweets, saying: "I call on all Australian cricket lovers to paint the SCG gold on Thursday. We need your support. #goldout"

The hashtag, referring to the Australian team colours, has ironically caught the fancy of more Indian Twitter users than Australian.

Organisers believe that 70 per cent of tickets at the sold-out 42,000-capacity Sydney Cricket Ground have been bought by India fans, threatening to create an environment reminiscent of the frenzied atmosphere of Eden Gardens in Kolkata.

If the pitch suits spinners, as has been the case at the SCG in the past, co-hosts Australia may well feel as though they have been kicked out of their own party.

Kartik Ayyalasomayajula, one of the founders of the Swami Army -- India's version of England's Barmy Army supporters group -- forecast the Australian team would be in for a hard time from fans on Thursday.

"It will be very loud, very intimidating," Kartik told the Sydney-based Daily Telegraph newspaper. "It will feel like an away game for them."

"The drummers will be going around the ground and people will be dancing, singing and cheering every run India score, every wicket they take. People will be going nuts."

Kartik, a Melbourne-based IT professional, said the tweets by Clarke and Warner pleading for Australian support at the match indicated how much the home team were worried.

"I think those tweets definitely say they're going to be outnumbered," he said.

"I would have thought that would be a standard expectation for the Aussie fans without their heroes going on Twitter to plead with them."

"They're really scraping the barrel there. I think it's a message in itself."

"India versus Australia in a World Cup semifinal, it doesn't get much bigger than that."

Australian all-rounder James Faulkner said the team was prepared for a hostile response from Indian fans.

Asked if the match will feel like an away fixture, Faulkner said: "We were talking



about it last night at dinner, the last game we played here it definitely felt like that."

"The passion the Indian fans show towards their cricket team is sensational, so we're definitely expecting that."

"The last game we played against India here [a tri-series match] was a washout and the fans were unbelievable in the way they supported."

Swami Army's Kartik said those Australians who turned up at the SCG on Thursday would get another taste of what cricket means in South Asia.

"This country won't have seen this level of support or atmosphere for cricket games," he said.

"You have to go to the sub-continent to get that kind of feel, so we are effectively bringing that atmosphere to Sydney. It's going to be a spectacle."

Kartik said fans were still looking for tickets as they looked to cheer on the defending champions.

## Where's Tom?

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

Tom Parker, the unassuming Sydney curator, has become the most wanted man at the SCG in the lead-up to Thursday's semifinal. The interest in what brand of pitch Parker will produce for the blockbuster -- and whether Australia's wishes for a nice cover of grass on game day will be realised -- has the large Indian media contingent infatuated.

So much so that on Sunday, while the Super Rugby game was on between the Waratahs and Brumbies inside Allianz Stadium a couple of touring reporters went in pursuit of Parker down the tunnel underneath the SCG. They told ground staff they had been given permission by the ICC to interview him, which given the gov-



erning body's stance against just about anyone officially speaking publicly, ever, was obviously

not true, and they were duly booted out.

On Monday, as the Australian and Indian teams began training in Sydney, there was more hype over the appearance of the ICC's pitches consultant Andy Atkinson at the SCG. It's been made clear, though, that this will not be Atkinson or the ICC's deck to prepare; that is Parker's responsibility alone, and his intention is to simply produce [and these are our inverted commas, not his] "a traditional SCG wicket".

The good news, for the Australians, is there was some grass on it on Monday. The bad news is they're not playing on it until Thursday. There's plenty of rolling to be done between now and then. The other factor, though, is the showers forecast for Tuesday.

## No complaints, says Ashwin

REUTERS, Sydney

Ravichandran Ashwin may not be India's highest wicket-taker in the World Cup but the lanky off-spinner is not complaining.

Fast bowlers Mohammed Shami (17) and Umesh Yadav (14) have taken more wickets than Ashwin as holders India, traditional spin powerhouses, have focused their attack on pace.

In five of their six group matches, the quick men ensured the longest India had to wait for their first wicket was the fifth over, allowing Ashwin and his fellow spinners the luxury of dominating the middle overs.

"As far as the spinner is concerned, when I come in, I've got that little bit more freedom," Ashwin told reporters ahead of the semifinal against Australia.

In claiming 12 wickets, Ashwin has proved more economical than the pacemen, no mean feat for a spinner in a format in which rules and conditions favour batsmen so heavily.

The 28-year-old from Chennai has also relished the challenge of bowling to the best batsmen in the tournament, particularly in the powerplays.

"I think the batting powerplay is a very good time to attack because you don't give a lot of singles and it is pretty much about boundaries and wickets," he said.

"I like to throw myself in the middle and try and see how much of an impact I can make in a game against Chris Gayle or AB de Villiers."

"I look to get them out in the middle because once you get them out the game is going to go your way."

Temperament-wise a pace bowler in a spinner's disguise, Ashwin's control of his craft has been astounding, something he underlined with three maiden overs in India's high-pressure tournament opener against archrivals Pakistan.

"Ashwin is someone I have always loved to have in my side," captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni said after the win over Ireland.

## Khanjanpur clinch school hockey title

SPORTS REPORTER

Khanjanpur High School of Joypurhat stunned Armanitola Govt. High School of Dhaka to clinch their first ever national school hockey championship title yesterday. The Joypurhat school beat the Armanitola school, regarded as a breeding ground of hockey players of Dhaka, by 2-1 goals in a keenly contested final of the First Security Islami Bank National School Hockey Championship at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium in Dhaka.

The school from Joypurhat stormed back in the second half, having conceded a ninth-minute goal from Armanitola's Shihab, by scoring twice within nine minutes, thanks to strikes from Fahim Faisal and Manik Uddin. They held on to the slender lead to win a paycheque of Tk 3 lakh.

Joypurhat also grabbed the best midfielder and best defender awards while the best striker and best goalkeeper awards went to the losing finalists, who received a paycheque of Tk 2 lakh. JM Sen School of Chittagong finished third in the championship, which started on December 17 across 11 venues of the country.



Former Australian prime minister Bob Hawke made a brief appearance at the SCG yesterday. Here the 85-year-old is seen speaking to members of the Australian team ahead of Thursday's semifinal against India. Hawke was a decent wicketkeeper in his playing days. Hawke, as PM, famously quipped after the Australia II victory in the America's Cup in 1983 that any employer who sacked a worker for not turning up that day was "a bum".

PHOTO: SMH

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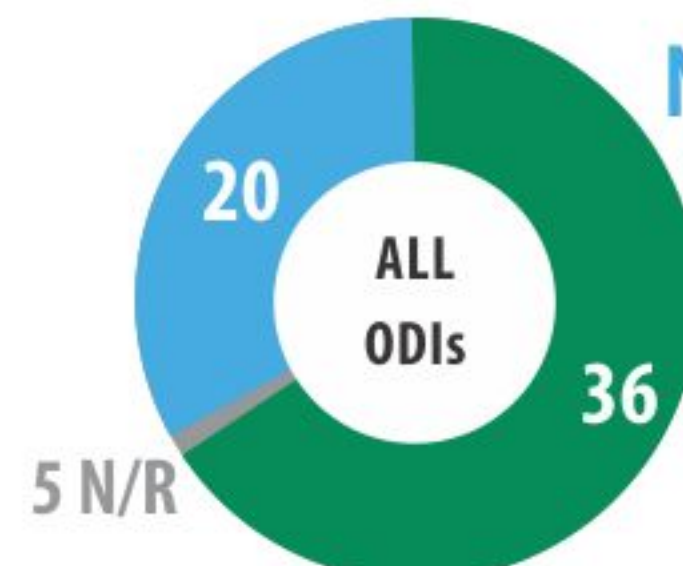
Players of the Joypurhat Khanjanpur High School celebrate their victory over Armanitola Govt. High School of Dhaka in the final of the First Security Islami Bank National School Hockey Championship at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## INFO ZONE

1<sup>ST</sup> SEMIFINAL

NEW ZEALAND v SOUTH AFRICA



HEAD TO HEAD  
LAST MEETING

27 October 2014 at Seddon Park, Hamilton:  
No result.



KEY PLAYERS



**BRENDON McCULLUM**

30.57  
216  
93.95  
30  
5  
166  
12

BATTING AVG.  
INNINGS  
5/R  
50s  
100s  
HIGHEST SCORE  
LAST MATCH

**AB de VILLIERS**



53.21  
178  
98.87  
45  
20  
162\*  
DNB