

10 facts

This is the first World Cup semifinal between these teams. Previous World Cup knockout stage matches have produced one win apiece (Australia won the 2003 final, India a quarterfinal in 2011)

Australia have won their last 12 completed one-day internationals on home soil

Aaron Finch has been the subject of six lbw appeals in the tournament, more than anyone else -- his dismissal against Pakistan was the first time in 28 dismissals that he fell lbw

Shane Watson is one of two players to score at least 500 World Cup runs at an average of at least 50 and a strike rate of 100-plus (AB de Villiers is the other)

Glenn Maxwell has scored 77 runs from the 54 balls Ravichandran Ashwin has bowled to him in ODIs, hitting four fours and seven sixes. He has been dismissed once

Maxwell (30.5 per cent) has the lowest dot ball percentage in the tournament, minimum 50 balls faced -- he has hit 301 runs from 164 balls

Rohit Sharma has hit 124 runs from the 108 balls James Faulkner has bowled to him in ODIs, without being dismissed

Mohammed Shami (69 per cent) and Mitchell Starc (68 per cent) have the two highest dot ball percentages in the tournament, minimum 50 balls bowled

Starc has the lowest ODI bowling average (17.4) and strike rate (22.5) in Australia, minimum 50 wickets taken

Watson has reached 50 in three of his last four, and four of his last six, ODI innings at Sydney



India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni (L) and his Australia counterpart Michael Clarke are the two most aggressive leaders in contemporary cricket. But only one will be standing after today's blockbuster semifinal at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

PHOTOS: AFP

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Same if it spins or seams

AFP, Sydney

India will go into Thursday's World Cup semifinal against Australia in Sydney confident of success irrespective of whether the wicket took turn or assisted fast bowlers, opener Rohit Sharma said.

The wear and tear at the end of a long season was evident when the covers were removed at the Sydney Cricket ground on Wednesday, revealing a dry, brown pitch that would gladden India more than their rivals.

South African spinners Imran Tahir and JP Duminy shared seven wickets to bowl out Sri Lanka for 133 in the quarterfinal at the SCG last week, setting up a nine-wicket win for the Proteas.

But the bat dominated the ball in previous World Cup games at the venue, with Australia piling up 376 for nine against Sri Lanka and South Africa smashing 408 for five off the West Indies' attack.

Australian coach Darren Lehmann predicted a high-scoring game, but Sharma said India were not sweating over the nature of the wicket.

"It does not worry us what sort of wicket we get because we are confident of doing well on any surface," said Sharma, who scored a century in the quarterfinal against Bangladesh in Melbourne.

"We have taken 70 wickets in seven matches, bowled out the opposition every time, so we know what we need to do.

"Our seamers have done well and so have the spinners. We are ready for anything that we get."

Mahendra Singh Dhoni's men have confounded critics by recovering from a winless bilateral tour of Australia before the World Cup to brush aside all-comers in the tournament.

Starting with two wins against Pakistan

and South Africa, India won all six group matches to top Pool B and then downed spirited Bangladesh by 109 runs in the quarterfinals.

Besides bowling out their rivals in all games, India have piled up 300-plus scores every time they have batted first.

India have beaten Australia just once in 35 years in a one-day international at the Sydney Cricket Ground and the hosts have won all six semifinals they have contested since the inaugural event in 1975.

But Sharma, who hit a record one-day score of 264 against Sri Lanka last year, said the past will have no bearing on Thursday's result and insisted Australia were not unbeatable.

"Of course we can win, no question about it," he said. "Australia is a good batting side but they struggled against good quality bowling when they played New Zealand or Pakistan.

"They have also bowled well, but then we have batted well too."

Australia were shot out for 151 by New Zealand in Auckland and it was only a six-wicket haul by Mitchell Starc that saw the Black Caps lose nine wickets before surpassing the modest target.

Pakistan's left-arm fast bowler Wahab Riaz had the Australian batsmen hopping with short-pitched deliveries in the quarterfinal in Adelaide before the hosts won by six wickets.

Sharma, who had heated on-field exchanges with David Warner during the preceding tri-series, said he expected a fiery contest between two strong rivals.

"Look a bit of sledging is okay as long as boundaries are not crossed," he said. "The Indian team will not cross the line, but we will not back down either."

India shut out fans

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

When AB de Villiers said his team was playing for everyone in South Africa, it was hard not to think he meant it, but you could be forgiven for being sceptical if any Indian player said the same thing.

Team India continue to treat their huge army of passionate supporters with contempt.

They again locked out their fans at training on Wednesday, forcing many to peep through a gate on Driver Avenue to get a glimpse of their heroes, in contrast to Cricket Australia, who keep open the gates to the public.

India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni was again a no-show at the match-eve press conference, instead sending Rohit Sharma, who, it must be said, spoke out-standingly.

Midge to step in in 2 Ws' place

AFP, Sydney

Australia captain Michael Clarke expects temperamental opener David Warner to be on his best behaviour in Thursday's World Cup semifinal against India, but Mitchell Johnson is ready to step up the sledging war.

Warner, who has already been warned twice for on-field verbal sledges, faces suspension from the final, should Australia qualify, if he is found guilty of another misdemeanour at the Sydney Cricket ground.

"David will be fine," Clarke told reporters on Wednesday. "He knows the rules, as we all do, and his rules are no different than the rest of ours."

But fast bowler Johnson said he did not expect any let up in Australia's aggressive approach, and was even willing to take the lead if Warner did not sledge.

"I heard Davey [Warner] say he was not going to get involved in all that stuff," Johnson told Fox Sports. "Someone has got to do it and I think I might put my hand up. It's part of the game."

Meanwhile all-rounder Shane Watson accepted he too was on thin ice after being fined for exchanging words with Pakistan paceman Wahab Riaz during Australia's quarterfinal victory.

"I don't want to get fined again or get suspended so I know I'm going to have to be even more diligent with what I say, when I say it and how I say it," Watson said.

"Based on my last fine, I am just about on

my last warning. "It's definitely going to be very hard-fought out there and we're going to have to be very careful not to step over the line."

Warner has kept a lid on things since being fined for demanding Rohit Sharma speak English in a one-dayer at the MCG, where the right-hander insulted the Australian in Hindi.

Sharma, who scored a century in his side's quarterfinal win over Bangladesh, promised there would be no let-up in India's aggressive approach.

"If there is a bit of banter going around, so be it," Sharma said. "It's part of the game."

Clarke agreed there would be sledging in the match, but noted it wasn't a focus for his side.

"It's really important we focus on what's important and that is playing our best cricket," he said.

The International Cricket Council faced criticism for being heavy-handed in fining both Wahab and Watson, but chief executive David Richardson insisted they had done the right thing.

"I enjoyed the competitiveness ... it was just a pity it extended later in the game to something you wouldn't want your kids to see," said Richardson.

Brian Lara and many other pundits have questioned the fines handed down to Watson and Riaz after their entertaining duel last week.

SEE PAGE S-4 COL 5

Taskin: The toast of teenagers

NAIMUL KARIM

The deafening sound of the firecrackers; the music blaring at full volume and the motorbikes honking to glory amidst a group of youngsters dancing on the street; at a first glance you would have thought this was just another wedding in the arena. Minutes later, though, a six-foot figure, with a sheepish smile, steps out of a car to the joy of the roaring crowd and reveals the true reason behind the emphatic celebrations.

Almost every cricketer from Bangladesh's World Cup squad received overwhelming response after returning to Dhaka. But few can beat the ovation that 19-year-old Taskin Ahmed got in the street right outside his house.

One of those boys even carried him up by the knees so that the entire neighbourhood could get a glimpse of their hero; it was their local boy after all and he had done them proud by claiming the most number of wickets for the Tigers.

"It was a completely different kind of feeling. I did expect some kind of a welcome but nothing of this sort. My friends and younger brothers in his neighbourhood really surprised me. I have never seen this kind of a response" Taskin, who had earlier posted a video of those festive moments on his facebook page, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Believe me; I haven't managed to get a good night's sleep after I returned on Sunday. My friends have barely left me alone. They have been crazy! All of them! I did manage to sleep a bit late at night but then I get up early in the morning due to jetlag," a happily tired Taskin said yesterday.

And that was something that was clearly evident from the constant interruptions that the pacer had to deal with in between the interview. There were a few tricks that his friends didn't try. From making plenty of noise at the back to even answering a few questions

for him, it was chaos; but at the same time revealed just what Taskin's achievement meant to them. It compelled the lanky bowler to apologise a number of times. As opposed to the joy of his friends though, Taskin wasn't satisfied with his performance in the mega event.

"I personally think that I could have done a lot better. If you ask me then I'll tell you that I am not happy. This is the first time that I played such a big tournament and there were so many big players here... hopefully I can do much better in the future," analysed Taskin.

While the bowler did manage to pick wickets, there were moments in the games which saw him go for plenty of runs. Against Sri Lanka, he gave away 82 runs while against India he was smacked for 69. However, the most impressive thing about the bowler was his ability to come back in the new

SEE PAGE S-4 COL 5



At just 19 years of age, Taskin Ahmed appears to be an ordinary boy. But his penchant for taking wickets has landed him firmly in the limelight, especially after his performances in the World Cup.

PHOTO: AFP FILE



TODAY'S MATCH

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