

# 'Wonderful bowlers'

REUTERS, Sydney  
The transformation of India's bowlers at the World Cup has been "wonderful to watch" and the reigning champions will have a great chance of reaching the final if 10 Australian wickets tumble on Thursday, says Virat Kohli.

India's bowlers were hammered all over Australia from the start of December to mid-February as the team lost a Test series 2-0 and failed to win a single match in the following Tri-series, which also featured England.

Fast bowlers Mohammed Shami, Umesh Yadav and Mohit Sharma have upped their game considerably at the World Cup, however, and have combined with the strong spin-bowling department to forge a potent attack.

With the help of a sprinkling of run-outs, the Indian bowlers have dismissed the opposition in all seven matches on their way to the semifinals.

Kohli, the leading light in the much-vaunted Indian batting line-up, said everyone was aware of the areas where improvement was required and he was gratified by

the way the pacemen had responded. "The way the bowlers have reacted and the way they have performed with the composure and the confidence and the aggression all together, it's been wonderful to watch," he told Cricket Australia's website.

"So we expect the bowlers to step up if you want to beat quality sides in the world and the way they have done this in this World Cup has been commendable.

"We've played the right kind of cricket and the difference now is how our bowling attack has come into play in this World Cup taking 70 wickets in seven games.

"That's probably been the difference, and if we continue to do that we have a great chance come game day."

India have not beaten Australia in any format since they arrived Down Under in late November but Kohli thinks Thursday at the Sydney Cricket Ground is the perfect opportunity to break that cycle.

"There couldn't be a better time for us," he said. "It's an opportunity for us to do justice to the way we've played so far in Australia, and we haven't had the results."



Rohit Sharma, one of the key components of India's batting juggernaut, is all smiles while he attends the pre-match briefing ahead of today's blood-and-thunder World Cup semifinal against co-hosts Australia.

PHOTO: AFP

# Elliott eclipses Munro's feat

NEW ZEALAND HERALD

Is it something in the water? Tuesday, March 24 was a day to remember not just for Grant Elliott and the Black Caps, but a Kiwi cricketer who smashed a world record innings far away from the floodlights and 40 thousand-strong crowd.

In the shadow of the World Cup clash, Auckland Aces batsman Colin Munro set an all-time record for sixes in a first class innings.

Munro, like Elliott, a South Africa-born Kiwi, belted 23 sixes in Napier on Tuesday against the Central Stags in the Plunket Shield. No Test, one-day international, county or provincial player has ever done better.

With all eyes on the semifinal and Elliott's unbeaten Eden Park 84 guiding New Zealand to victory over the Proteas, Munro hammered away to little fanfare.

But when the sun came up again on Wednesday -- just as a gutted, reflective Proteas captain AB de Villiers Tuesday night promised it would -- it was to news of Munro's staggering feat at McLean Park.

The magnitude of the Napier knock was still dawning on the cricket world on Wednesday.

Munro, 28, didn't just edge his way past the previous record of 16, he destroyed it.

"Colin Munro rapid by nature as he breaks record for sixes in an innings," the Times reported.

"BM Ticker and Doug Bracewell bore the brunt of the damage, going for 229 runs in 37 overs," Cricinfo said.

A left-handed batsman born in Durban, Munro was not selected for the Black Caps World Cup squad.

But with the quality of his knock, punters might fancy the Aces star to win selection for the national team later this year.

His age can hardly be a barrier, considering Elliott and Vettori, both 36, guided the Black Caps to triumph.

# Exodus costs SA dearly

AFP, Auckland

Kevin Pietersen may be South African cricket's most high-profile expatriate talent, but Grant Elliott's World Cup showstopper left the Proteas once again cursing another of their lost sons.

Elliott, born in Johannesburg and schooled at the same St. Stithians College in the city which also nurtured England's Cape Town-raised Jonathan Trott, dealt the blow that killed off South Africa's latest attempt to win a World Cup in Tuesday's semifinal epic in Auckland.

The 36-year-old Elliott, known to teammates as "Shunt" and "Magic", left his home country in 2001 and seven years later made his Test debut for New Zealand.

His Test career has since stalled -- the last of his five caps came back in 2009 -- but he has thrived in one-day internationals even if his selection for the World Cup came as a surprise for those expecting the more flamboyant Jimmy Neesham to get the nod.

"I came for a lifestyle change and also for my cricket. As soon as I arrived in New Zealand and made it my home, I had aspirations of playing international cricket for New Zealand," Elliott told local media when he was first called into the squad.

"It's a really tough move because you always grow up thinking you're going to be a Springbok or one of Proteas."

Elliott's undefeated 84, topped with the match-winning six off the penultimate ball of the last over at Eden Park, gave the Black Caps a four-wicket win and a spot in Sunday's final against either Australia or defending champions India in Melbourne.

Whereas other South Africans have left to pursue international cricket under a different flag because of the quota system in operation, Elliott insists his move to New Zealand was purely contractual.

"I always wanted to play international cricket," Elliott told. "I wasn't enjoying my cricket that much there, and I just needed a lifestyle change."

"I played for Gauteng, I had a contractual dispute with them, so that triggered me to look elsewhere as well."

In recent years, Elliott has been one of a number of South Africans to play for New Zealand.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Kruger van Wyk, who played first-class cricket for Northern, left for New Zealand after realising that he would never depose Mark Boucher as the Proteas' man behind the stumps.

Van Wyk figured in nine Tests for

the Kiwis in 2012 but has not played at the international level since.

Left-arm fast bowler Neil Wagner, born in Pretoria, has appeared for the Black Caps in 16 Tests since making his debut in 2012, taking 58 wickets.

He did break into the South Africa set-up on two occasions but only on the margins -- he was summoned to carry out 12th man duties in two Tests at Centurion.

BJ Watling, who was born in Durban but has lived in New Zealand since childhood, is New Zealand's first-choice Test wicketkeeper having played 29 matches since his 2009 debut.

New Zealand skipper Brendon McCullum summed-up Elliott's sudden breakthrough to national hero status on Wednesday when he revealed that when 20 players were sent to the scout the Melbourne Cricket Ground in October last year, the all-rounder wasn't even included in the group.

McCullum said Elliott reminded him of the omission after Tuesday's cliffhanger.

"He did say when I saw him at the end 'does this mean I get to come to Melbourne?', said the captain.

"There's a bit of irony there, I suppose. He's shown how he important he is to us so I'm sure he is looking forward to Melbourne."

# McGrath hails thinking Starc

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

Former Australian fast bowler Glenn McGrath hailed Mitchell Starc before Thursday's World Cup semifinal against India for his use of the yorker, saying he was one of the few pacemen in the Twenty20 age to use it as a weapon.

Starc has enjoyed a sensational tournament, taking 18 wickets in six matches at 9.77.

McGrath was impressed the 25-year-old had not allowed the tactics employed by bowlers in Twenty20 to cloud his approach.

"I look at T20 cricket and it has increased the skill level of batsmen but it has decreased the skill level of bowlers," said McGrath.

"Bowlers seem to think, through T20, that they have to bowl six different deliveries ... slower balls, short balls ... but the most dangerous delivery is still the yorker."

"If you can [bowl] that yorker really well on a consistent basis you'll get wickets, and that's what Mitchell Starc has done brilliantly during this World Cup."

"Other guys have tried it and because they haven't practised it enough they're not confident enough to bowl it; they'll opt for a bouncer or a slower ball, which just opens up the whole field."

"If they could really [nail] the yorker it'll cut down the number of shots a batsman can play ... yes, they can play the 'lap' and the other things they do now ... but the risk factor [for a batsmen] increases."

"I think the fact Mitchell Starc can do that is brilliant, and that's why he has been so effective. He's bowling at 150km/h as well, and it's part of the reason why I think he has been the standout bowler."

McGrath, who coaches at the world-renowned MRF Pace Foundation in India, said bowlers needed to change the way they were bowling yorkers at training if they were to maintain what he fears could become a lost skill.

"Because bowlers don't practice it properly in the nets, it's hard for them to do it during a game," he said. "When they bowl yorkers in the nets they step so far over [the crease] they find the length is entirely different in a match."

Meanwhile, McGrath said he expected the Australian selectors would have agonised over selecting either Josh Hazlewood or Pat Cummins for the semifinal, but he suggested Hazlewood's last outing could not be ignored.

"Josh has a little more control, probably a little more bounce as well, but not too much," he said.



## WORLD CUP COCKTAIL

As part of ICC Cricket World Cup's commitment to supporting community causes, Australian all-rounder Shane Watson has launched a children's book to promote reading.

Watson has been named the star in a children's book that has been published by Room to Read, a global non-profit organisation that promotes literacy and gender equality in education across Asian and African countries, together with the ICC.

The book will be published in Bangla, with an initial print-run of 2,500 copies and distributed to schools across Bangladesh and will be available for reprint in future years for additional schools.

This children's title, entitled Dream Big, is about a young boy who dreams about meeting his hero Shane after seeing him on television. The book inspires children to Dream Big and recognises that great things are possible with perseverance.

"Reading is an important tool in a child's overall development, I encourage children to read more and develop an all-round personality. My message to children worldwide is to Dream Big and never stop chasing your dream. Big dreams can lead to bigger things in life and this is what this book strives to do," Watson commented at the book's launch in the Sydney Cricket Ground.

### Raina's fiance's village gets holiday for semi

The village of batsman Suresh Raina's fiance in Bannauli here is gearing up for the ICC World Cup semifinal today and announced an undeclared holiday as India face their toughest test taking on a formidable Australia.

Head of the Panchayat Kalu Singh said the village is proud of Raina, who set to tie the knot to Priyanka Chowdhury a resident of the village.

"It is the matter of pride that we are getting son-in-law like Raina. The

decision to remain off from respective duties and watch the match, was taken unanimously yesterday. Also the entire village prayed at Hanuman temple for victory of the Indian team," Singh said.

Everyone will watch the semifinal on a big screen which will be installed in the village.

The Panchayat has also decided to hold a party for the village if India win the World Cup.

### Kohli fans only salvation

India's sustained disrespect for their legion of fans continued on Wednesday with supporters locked out of the SCG and captain MS Dhoni refusing to fulfil his media obligations on the eve of a World Cup semi-final.

But Virat Kohli at least made some



efforts to acknowledge the people that make him and his teammates such stars, signing a few autographs through the fence for the dozens shut out on Driver Avenue. The rest of his teammates simply retreated back to the dressing rooms.

A whopping 70 per cent of today's capacity crowd are estimated to be Indians, not that captain Dhoni would care.

Asked why his skipper was absent from his obligatory pre-match press conference, his unwitting replacement Rohit Sharma was unable to provide a plausible explanation.

Asked if there was anything wrong with Dhoni, Sharma replied:

"He's fine." At least on the field, India is confident of giving their fans their money's worth.

### Riaz invites Lara to Pakistan

Floored by the praise showered on him by Brian Lara, pacer Wahab Riaz has invited the West Indian legend to Pakistan.

"I feel really proud and honoured that legend @BrianLara wants to meet me. I invite the great man 2 Pakistan n would be honoured 2b his host," Riaz said.

The left-arm pacer's fiery spell against Australia earned him widespread praise from former and present players and Lara was upset when the International Cricket Council decided to fine Riaz for his verbal showdown with Australian Shane Watson.

Lara had said he would love to meet Riaz and termed the ICC's decision to fine him "uncalled for". He also offered to pay for it himself.

"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," Lara said on an Indian channel.

"It was above the 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," Lara said.

Riaz said he was happy that his bowling had been appreciated by so many people but would have loved to see Pakistan win the quarterfinal.

"We all did our best but we couldn't win the quarterfinal and I don't think anyone can be blamed. But I am happy I was able to step up for Pakistan and bowl well," he said.

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