



While Australia captain Michael Clarke (L) will try to make his final ODI appearance a memorable one, New Zealand skipper Brendon McCullum will try to do the honour for Daniel Vettori in the first trans-Tasman World Cup final at the MCG today.

PHOTOS: AFP

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# 'Oz at their best can beat New Zealand'

AFP, Melbourne

Michael Clarke is adamant about Australia's chances of winning a record fifth World Cup, claiming on Saturday: "I believe if we play our best, we can beat New Zealand tomorrow."

Bookmakers have installed the Aussies as 9-4 ON favourites to win the tournament decider at the Melbourne Cricket Ground with the Black Caps playing in their first World Cup final.

The Kiwis have been the form team, winning all of their eight matches, including a nerve-tingling one-wicket win over Clarke's team in Auckland in the pool stage, but now they must play their first game in the tournament away from home.

"I believe if we play our best, we can beat New Zealand," Clarke told reporters Saturday. "I don't buy into the favourites or not favourites."

"New Zealand have been the form team of the competition. New Zealand have beaten us once in this tournament. But I'm confident if we play our best, we can beat them tomorrow."

Clarke, who dropped a retirement bombshell by announcing that Sunday's World Cup final will be his 245th and last one-day international for his country, said winning was about the team and not for his circumstances.

"It's a special game, no doubt about it, but it needs to be about the team and I want it to be about the team," he said.

"I've just said it to my teammates. And I've been the one to come out and say, it's not emotion, it's skill that helps you win major games and major tournaments, and tomorrow will be no different."

"It's a wonderful opportunity for every single player in that change room to walk out onto the MCG in a World Cup final. It's a very special event. But yeah, it's no more special because it's my last game."

Clarke said his wanted his teammates to go

out before an anticipated 90,000 full house in a high-stakes game and play with freedom.

"I've been fortunate enough to play in two previous World Cups and win one of those. So I know what the feeling is like," he said.

"Even when I think back to 2007, there was such a build-up about the World Cup final, but the emotion and the adrenaline and the feeling didn't hit me until after the game when we were celebrating together as a team."

Given his decision to retire from ODIs, Clarke said he was unaware if other senior teammates, notably Shane Watson and Mitchell Johnson, were also contemplating quitting the shorter form of the game.

"I think everybody in that dressing room has a lot more cricket left in their body. That's for sure," said Clarke.

"If the desire is still there and they're playing for the right reasons, then I don't see any reason why they would stop."

"I haven't spoken to any of them about their individual decisions, how they feel, what they're going to do."

"My main focus has been making sure everyone is fit and healthy and feeling good about this tournament. If they want to continue, I think it'll be left up to them."

WORLD CUP FINALS			
Year	Venue	Teams	Champions
1975	Lord's	West Indies v Australia	West Indies
1979	Lord's	West Indies v England	West Indies
1983	Lord's	India v West Indies	India
1987	Kolkata	Australia v England	Australia
1992	Melbourne	Pakistan v England	Pakistan
1996	Lahore	Sri Lanka v Australia	Sri Lanka
1999	Lord's	Australia v Pakistan	Australia
2003	Johannesburg	Australia v India	Australia
2007	Bridgetown	Australia v Sri Lanka	Australia
2011	Mumbai	India v Sri Lanka	India
2015	Melbourne	Australia v New Zealand	?

ROAD TO FINAL				ROAD TO FINAL			
AUSTRALIA				NEW ZEALAND			
Date	Venue	Opponents	Result	Date	Venue	Opponents	Result
Feb 14	Melbourne	England	Win by 111	Feb 14	Christchurch	Sri Lanka	Win by 98 runs
Feb 21	Brisbane	Bangladesh	no result	Feb 17	Dunedin	Scotland	Win by 3 wickets
Feb 28	Auckland	New Zealand	Lost by 1 wicket	Feb 20	Wellington	England	Win by 8 wickets
March 4	Perth	Afghanistan	Win by 275 runs	Feb 28	Auckland	Australia	Win by 1 wicket
March 8	Sydney	Sri Lanka	Win by 64 runs	March 8	Napier	Afghanistan	Win by 6 wickets
March 14	Hobart	Scotland	Win by 7 wickets	March 13	Hamilton	Bangladesh	Win by 3 wickets
<b>QUARTERFINAL</b>				<b>QUARTERFINAL</b>			
March 20	Adelaide	Pakistan	Win by 6 wickets	March 21	Wellington	West Indies	Win by 143 runs
<b>SEMIFINAL</b>				<b>SEMIFINAL</b>			
March 26	Sydney	India	Win by 95 runs	March 24	Auckland	South Africa	Win by 4 wickets (D/L)

## 10 facts

New Zealand have reached their first World Cup final -- they are the seventh different team to make a final appearance

Australia are four-time champions winning the World Cup in 1987, 1999, 2003 and 2007

Australia have lost the toss in six of their last seven completed ODIs against New Zealand on home soil, but have won five of these seven meetings

The Black Caps are attempting to record their 300th ODI victory. They have lost 339 and tied six

Shane Watson has scored 86 runs off the 85 balls Tim Southee has bowled to him in ODIs, without being dismissed

Brendon McCullum has scored 308 of his 329 tournament runs in the mandatory power play, hitting 59 boundaries in the 150 balls he has faced

Ross Taylor has been dismissed three times by off-spinners in the tournament, more than any other player. He has also fallen once to leg-spin

15 of Trent Boult's 21 wickets in the tournament have been taken by batsmen at numbers 1-4; this percentage of 71.4 per cent is the highest of anyone taking at least 10 wickets

Michael Clarke (62.6) and Martin Guptill (61.1) have the respective third and sixth highest all-time World Cup averages, minimum 10 dismissals

Steve Smith's last 12 ODI innings in Australia have produced 81.2 runs at an average of 81.2 and a strike rate of 96.4

# Baz excited, not scared

AFP, Melbourne

New Zealand captain Brendon McCullum said he was excited, not intimidated, at the prospect of leading his country in their first World Cup final when they face old foes Australia at the gigantic Melbourne Cricket Ground today.

"We are not intimidated, we are excited," McCullum said Saturday. "This has been the greatest time of our lives. We dreamed right from the start and to reach the final is an amazing achievement."

New Zealand crossed the semifinal hurdle for the first time in seven attempts to leave an enthralled rugby-mad nation backing their cricketers to take home cricket's biggest global prize.

"We've had some tremendous support back home and also from around the world," said McCullum. "The brand of cricket that we've played has really touched a lot of people and endeared ourselves to a lot of people who follow this game."

"Hopefully, if we play well we'll be

smiling at the end of the day and be able to look back on a fantastic campaign and something which would hopefully invigorate the game and New Zealand."

McCullum said the expected full house of 90,000 at the MCG would see a keen contest between two evenly-matched teams.

"We will play well tomorrow," he said. "It does not guarantee us anything and it does not mean that Australia won't beat us. But we will turn up and display our skills just as we have done throughout the tournament."

"There is no challenge which is insurmountable with a lot of hard work, a lot of heart, a lot of belief and making sure that everyone's heading in the same direction."

"We will play an aggressive brand of cricket with bat and ball. We will play with the humility which we've played with throughout this campaign."

"And hopefully the

big fella upstairs shines on us when the pressure situations come into play."

McCullum insisted that his team were not overawed by the prospect of playing at the famous amphitheatre, where New Zealand have won three of their last five matches against Australia.

"I guess this is the ultimate game for us," he said. "A 100,000 people in Australia's backyard, MCG and its history and traditions and against a very good Australian."

"I'm sure some guys will be nervous tomorrow morning. There is some excitement about us going out there tomorrow and putting our skills against the best in their backyard."

"That certainly whets the appetite and creates the greatest stage we can ask for. It is certainly going to be a special day."

McCullum added he hoped his team could win the World Cup for 36-year-old Daniel Vettori, who is likely to end his international

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**TODAY'S MATCH**  
Australia v New Zealand  
FINAL  
Time: 9:30am

# Today or really never!

AFP, Melbourne

Terminally ill Martin Crowe admits that today's World Cup final between his beloved New Zealand and Australia could be the last game he'll ever see.

Known as one of the game's most stylish batsmen, the 52-year-old Crowe has been battling a rare blood disease, double-hit lymphoma.

"My precarious life ahead may not afford me the luxury of many more games to watch and enjoy. So this is likely to be it. The last, maybe, and I can happily live with that," wrote Crowe in his column.

"I will hold back tears all day long. I will gasp for air on occasions. I will feel like a nervous parent."

Crowe will be in the final at the Melbourne Cricket Ground hoping to

see Brendon McCullum's New Zealand win a first World Cup title after previously falling at the semifinal hurdle on six occasions.

"I will, like so many Kiwis making the short trek across the Tasman, feel this, as McCullum has stated clearly, to be the greatest cricketing time of our lives. Four million dare to believe, while 11 [and backup] dare to achieve."

Crowe played in 77 Tests, averaged 45.36 and scored 16 centuries which still stands as a New Zealand record.

His highest score of 299 at the Basin Reserve in Wellington against Sri Lanka in 1991 stood as a New Zealand best until McCullum scored 302 against India on the same ground last year.

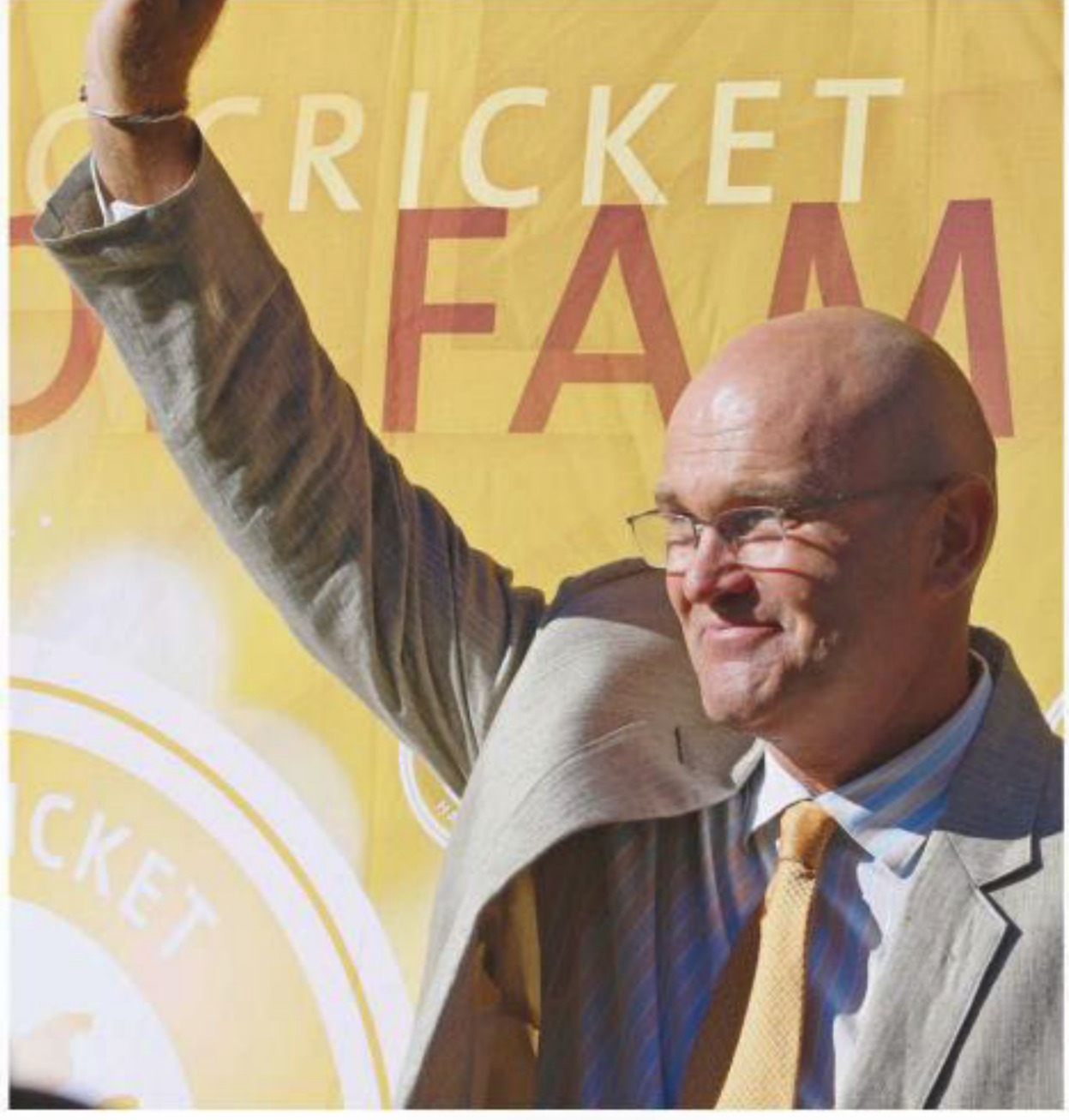
McCullum said he had read Crowe's

article and revealed how the former captain, whose team lost to Pakistan in the 1992 World Cup semifinals in Auckland, had been involved in preparing the current squad for the tournament.

"We had him involved in the group, and not long ago he came and spent time with the team and it was great," the captain said.

"He has been instrumental in helping some of our guys on the team peel back their games and really focus on being able to develop individually but also buy into the team collectively."

"He's been a really big asset. I think what he's going through at the moment is incredibly difficult. We just hope that he's able to find some peace in the time that he's got left."



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