Malinga threat looms over struggling SA

AGENCIES, Chester-le-Street

A win today would keep Sri Lanka alive as competition tightens for the three remaining semifinal spots, but for that they have to get past a South African side with nothing to lose.

Sri Lanka are currently seventh, but two points would take them straight up to fifth, just below England, who are themselves in a fight to make the last four now. Of course, any gain on the points table is only momentary as teams continue to scrap hard and displace each other, but it is precisely for that reason that every point from here on out matters.

Sri Lanka were 'slung' into the semifinal mix by Lasith Malinga's match-winning performance against England in their previous match, a week ago. He blazed in and took four wickets as England were bowled out for 212 in chase of a 233-run target.

He might have lost some pace with age but Lasith Malinga makes up for that with his guile and remains a big threat as the Englishmen found out. In Malinga, Sri Lanka have a bowler confronting the limitations of age and fitness with wisdom and the odd dose of magic.

Still evident, it's the special gift that has made him such a wonderful cricketer for the best part of 15 years. And his performance showed why only fools write off a team with Malinga in it. The break since that England game will have refreshed him for another herculean effort and all eyes will be on the pacer.

The spellbinding effect Malinga

exercises on the field is almost commensurate to the swing he generated, an average of 1.1 degrees in his opening spell, against England. Not only did he outswing Mark Wood and Chris Woakes, his spell of bowling was a demonstration of what South Africa have lacked throughout. Accuracy, relentless

consistency, and the fabled "something different".

This was the man that Sri Lanka deemed to not be selectable for seven months in 2018, and his feats against England were complemented by the efforts of Angelo Mathews, who scored a gritty unbeaten 85 to take Sri Lanka to a defendable total.

On the other side will be the Proteas; battered, bruised and ashamed, but looking to regain some semblance of pride from their remaining games.

South Africa have had their worst campaign ever at the World Cup. This is only the second time since their debut in the competition, in 1992, that they have failed to go past the first round. But there is nothing more dangerous in a multiteam tournament than a team with nothing to lose, and South Africa will be eager to prove just that by picking up wins in their last two matches and upset the teams that still stand a chance.

JP Duminy, who is yet to play a game in his final World Cup, came out to the pre-match press conference and confirmed that the team were 'ashamed' but would be looking to

come back stronger from here on out.

"I think the most disappointing part has been our team performance and I think it will be amiss of me not to mention how disappointed we are particularly letting all our fans down back home," Duminy said yesterday.

"I think we've put in a lot of effort in terms of our preparation, in terms of our strategy, going out there with a good mindset, a strong mindset. But, unfortunately, we haven't been

plans and that's been the most

including myself."

"When you put in performances like that, you know, you in a way almost feel ashamed of that. But we know that it's not all lost, even though yes, it's a World Cup and I believe that this team will come back stronger. There will be some sort of introspection around where we have gone wrong, and that's going to be some conversations ahead post-World Cup and, as I said, I believe that we will come back stronger."



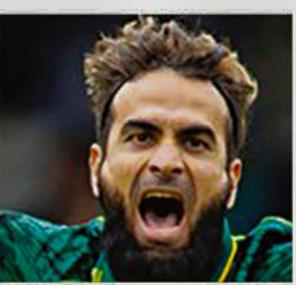
INFO ZONE

HEAD TO HEAD IN WORLD CUP SOUTH AFRICA SRI LANKA WON LOSS TIE

HEAD TO HEAD IN ODIS SOUTH AFRICA SRI LANKA LOSS

LAST MEETING March 16 2019 at Newlands in Cape Town. South Africa won by 41 runs (D/L method).

KEY PLAYERS





OUTH AFRICA		SRI LANKA
MRAN TAHIR		LASITH MALING
24.43	BOWL AVE	28.90
31,5	BOWL STRIKE RATE	32.4
4.64	ECON	5.34
7/45	BBM	6/38
172	WICKETS	330
2/41, 1*	LAST MATCH	1, 4/43

Hathuru wary of 'fearless' Proteas

ICC

Sri Lanka are wary of a South African side who have nothing to lose in their final matches at the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup, according to their coach Chandika Hathurusingha.

South Africa have lost five of their seven matches in the group stage and are ninth on the table and are out of contention of making the semi-finals, while Sri Lanka lie

seventh. Victory for Sri Lanka in all three of their remaining matches will see them in with a strong chance of making the final four,

but Hathurusinga knows that they have to overcome a wounded South Africa to keep their campaign alive.

"When you have no pressure of qualifying, you can play fearless cricket. At the same time, you could turn up and just want to go home," Hathurusingha said.

Recently, Sri Lanka have known a South African side that has looked more like the former. In March, South Africa beat Sri Lanka 5-0 in an ODI series at home, and leg spinner Imran Tahir was the highest wicket-taker.

While Hathurusingha acknowledged Tahir's dominance, he also pointed to the

players who missed that series but are at the World Cup as being among those who could be the difference in Friday's match.

"Our guys play spin okay. Tahir is a world-class performer. I am looking at some of the players who were not in South Africa like Angelo Mathews and Kusal Perera and Dimith Karunaratne. They are in form."



Mathews and Perera both suffered from hamstring injuries in the South Africa series while Karunaratne had not been selected.

Currently, Karunaratne is Sri Lanka's top run-scorer at the tournament with 180 runs from four innings while Mathews is coming off a stunning 85 not out from 115 balls in Sri Lanka's win over England. Mathews, in particular, earned the coach's praise for his heroics in taking the home side down. "Mathews showed a lot of mental resilience in that innings. He was under pressure, the team was under pressure and he showed a lot of character," Hathurusingha said.

Mathews was also involved in 71-run stand with Kusa Mendis and 57-run partnership with Dhananjaya de Silva, which was crucial to ensuring Sri Lanka posted a competitive total.

They reached 232/9 and bowled England out for 212 which Hathurusingha said spoke to Sri Lanka's bowling talent.

He added: "De Silva wasn't batting as well as we know he can but still had a very good partnership with Mathews. It is key for us to put partnerships together.

"Although we didn't play our best cricket to win the game in terms of batting, we had a perfect bowling display in terms of defending. I think we have enough talent and skills to compete with South Africa tomorrow."

It was relatively early when India skipper Virat Kohli had walked onto the pitch. After losing Rohit Sharma in the sixth over, Kohli went on to make partnerships of 69, 28, 14 and 40 runs with KL Rahul, Vijay Shankar, Kedar Jadhav and MS Dhoni respectively. Although he kept on losing partners at the other end, the India skipper scripted a much needed 82-ball 72, featuring eight boundaries, before being dismissed in the 39th over.

When the oil is lite,

LIFE IS A DELIGHT



Must keep cool heads, says Root

AFP, Birmingham

Joe Root expects emotions to run high against India on Sunday in a game England may have to win to reach the World Cup semi-finals in their home tournament.

A heavy defeat by Australia at Lord's on Tuesday was England's third defeat of the tournament and leaves their hopes of reaching the knockout stage in the balance.

England are in fourth place in the 10-team table but are now just one point ahead of Bangladesh and Pakistan and two clear of Sri Lanka. The top four sides qualify for the semifinals.

Winning their last two group games would secure a semi-final spot but seeing off both India and New Zealand would require a sharp improvement from a side who have lost their way since starting the campaign as clear

favourites.

When they walk out at Edgbaston this weekend, swathes of fans from Birmingham's big British Asian community will be backing India, heaping the pressure on the home side.

"I personally think we have to be very calm about how we approach the next couple of games because the games themselves might get quite emotional, especially with the atmosphere at Edgbaston," said Test captain Root.

"We believe we're still more than capable of qualifying for the semi-finals and when that happens, it doesn't really matter how you got there because that's when the tournament really starts to kick in," he added.

"We'll see these two games as quarterfinals if you like, which in a way when it comes round to the knockout stage should serve

you well.

"You're going to have to win big games at some stage in the tournament if you're going to go on and win it, so it may be that ours have come just a little bit sooner than we anticipated."

Root also admitted that England had failed to adapt to the pitches at the tournament, saying that the difference between the pitches at the World Cup and during ODI series were quite different.

"If you look at some of the par scores throughout this tournament, they have been very different to when we have played in bilateral series. We have turned up to some venues in this tournament and things have been quite different to when we have played one-day series there in the past.

"We haven't necessarily adapted as well as we could have. It is frustrating and very disappointing that we have played in the manner we have in the last two games. There are a number of things we

could have done slightly better. "I just don't think we have played as well as we can. We have made some basic errors that we want to put right in the next two games. But I strongly believe we are more than capable of qualifying for the semi-finals. We have played both these opposition in the recent past and had huge success. So we have got to look at that, the other stuff we have done well throughout the competition and put it all together."

Rashid was pragmatic over the prospect of a hostile crowd, at the same ground where his close friend Moeen Ali was booed during an India game in 2014.

"People will enjoy themselves, have some fun and banter," he said. "We will not be fazed by that."

FACTS

South Africa wicketkeeper-batsman Quinton de Kock has scored 1104 runs --the most by any player in the two sides' current World Cup squads -- in the 23 matches he played against Sri Lanka.

South Africa skipper Faf du Plessis smashed a 141-ball 185 -- his career best ODI score -- against Sri Lanka back in 2017 in Cape Town. This remains the highest individual score in a match by any player between the two sides.

Sri Lanka's Angelo Matthews is the highest run getter for Sri Lanka among the players in their current squad to have faced South Africa. The all-rounder has scored 481 runs in the 18 matches he played against the Proteas.

Sri Lanka's Isuru Udana has an average of 55.00 -- the highest by any player on the current Sri Lankan squad -- in the three matches he played against South Africa. He has a high score of 78 against the Proteas.

Imran Tahir has scalped 33 wickets -- the most by any bowler in South Africa's current World Cup squad -- in the 14 matches he played against the Islanders.

Lasith Malinga has scalped 36 wickets -- the most by any bowler among the two sides' current World Cup squads -- in the 23 matches he played against South Africa.