



# SPORT



New Zealand batsman Ross Taylor has been in fine form throughout the tournament and was focused in training yesterday ahead of their second consecutive World Cup final on Sunday. However, Taylor insisted that this final would be different to the one in 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

## 'It's bloody tough'

### Guptill opens up on criticism

AGENCIES, Auckland

Out-of-form opener Martin Guptill says it has been impossible to ignore the criticism of his batting, but remains confident he can step up when it matters most for the Black Caps.

Apart from the opening Cricket World Cup game against Sri Lanka, Guptill has been horribly out of sorts, averaging a paltry 11.75 in his last eight innings.

The outside noise has grown with each failure and the 32-year-old did not try and hide the fact it had taken a toll.

"It's bloody tough," Guptill told 1 News. "You try not to read what people are writing and hear what people are saying but it's hard to tear away from it all."

"In this tournament it's all encompassing. It is hard and the hard work probably goes unseen."

The good thing for Guptill is he still has one more opportunity to make a vital contribution. And it just happens to be on the biggest stage of all when New Zealand meet England in the Cricket World Cup final at Lord's on Sunday.

Guptill described his struggles at the crease as a "catch 22", saying: "I've felt a little late on the ball in quite a few games, which is hard to deal with. You don't want to move early because then you get stuck."

But he has seen promising signs in the nets of late and will take a positive mindset into the final.

"The last couple of nets I've probably felt the best I have since I've been here,"

he added on 1 News. "I've put a lot of time in and for it not to be working out in the middle it's frustrating. People can say they're frustrated with me but no one is more frustrated than what I am."

"I'm just trying to carry on with what I've been doing, work hard in the nets and hopefully in the next game it all comes together."

Guptill cut a forlorn figure in the stands after being dismissed for just one in the semifinal against India. That was in complete contrast to the end of the match, as he ended up playing a pivotal role with his run-out MS Dhoni all-but sending the Kiwis into the final.

Reflecting on his moment of brilliance, Guptill revealed he was late to the ball but felt the throw would hit the stumps.

"When it first came off the bat I thought it went straight up so I didn't actually move straight away," he said.

"So I let the handbrake off and tried to get there as quick as possible, clean pick up and when the ball was halfway to the stumps I thought it's not missing."

"Direct hits are always close so we knew we were in with a shot. Luckily for us it was a matter of inches."

Meanwhile, Guptill's batting partner for the last two matches, Henry Nicholls, is being monitored for a tight hamstring.

If Nicholls is ruled out that will most likely result in a reprieve for Colin Munro. However, Black Caps batting coach Craig McMillan said he expects New Zealand to have a fully fit squad for the final.

## Why this final is different

AGENCIES, Auckland

They admit to being overawed in the 2015 Cricket World Cup final, but the Black Caps believe that those experiences can lead them to lifting the trophy in 2019.

After taking the tournament by storm in 2015, the Black Caps fell at the final hurdle, with a journey across the ditch to play Australia at the Melbourne Cricket Ground proving to be a trip too far for their aspirations of World Cup glory.

There's no need for them to take flight this time around, with a bus trip to Lord's all that was required as preparation began to take on England.

Black Caps batsman Ross Taylor believes it will be much more familiar experience, four years on. "It was strange last time. We played so well throughout the tournament but then jumped on a plane and played in a country we hadn't played in for the whole tournament."

"I'd be lying if I said we weren't a bit overawed by the change of

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Trent Boult  
New Zealand pacer

scenery. I think we know what to expect, the pressures that come with it, we've been there before.

"You just have to enjoy it, it's the Home of Cricket, I can't think of a better place to play a final."

Trent Boult still hasn't quite got over the 2015 defeat, but believes the loss will now at least ultimately have some belated benefits.

"To fall short in 2015 against Australia, it still hurts to talk about it," Boult said. "The World Cup final is a unique experience, obviously having a taste of it in 2015, 97,000 people at the MCG was pretty crazy. I'm sure that will put us in good stead."

"Here, playing on grounds we're

not really used to, wickets are responding differently, that's been a challenge - but the side's been together a long time, we've played enough to know what works well."

"Don't get carried away – keep it simple to what we know works well, and I think we're good enough to beat anyone on the day. We can't wait to have another crack at it. It would mean everything for us."

The Black Caps aren't planning on reinventing the wheel going into the final, with batting coach Craig McMillan – preparing for his final game with the team – stressing the need to keep things simple and stick with what got them to this point.

"You don't change too much – why do you want to change things that have been successful up to a point – just because there's one more game to go?"

"We'll continue doing things we've done well, we won't change too much. Yeah, there's some big stakes at the end of this match, but at the end of the day it's another cricket match and you break it down as simply as that."

As for comparisons to 2015, McMillan believes that flying further under the radar than four years ago could prove profitable.

"It's a very different team in terms of members, in terms of experience. But one thing about this side is it's got a lot of character, they keep fighting, we find ways to win when people write us off."

"I hope people keep writing us off, it seems to be [what] people have done throughout the tournament – we'll keep doing our thing, fly under the radar and hopefully at the end of it we've got something special to celebrate."



New Zealand opener Martin Guptill (L) has struggled with the bat so far, but both he and coach Gary Stead are confident he will turn it around. PHOTO: REUTERS

## 2019 World Cup shatters audience records

ICC

The ICC today released TV and digital viewing figures for the World Cup group stage and semifinals, setting new records and becoming one of the world's most watched sporting events.

Across ICC's digital and social platforms during the group stage, there have also been an unprecedented 2.6 billion video views.

The semifinal between India and New Zealand set a new world record by delivering the highest ever concurrent views on Hotstar with a peak of 25.3 million. The previous record was at 18.6 million.

In the UK, the event has now reached a unique audience of 20 million people. The semifinal between England and Australia became the third most watched match for the event on Sky Sports after England v India and India v Pakistan, attracting 465,000 new audience.

Through ICC's Global Broadcast Partner, Star Sports, and ICC's Broadcast Partners the event has been televised into over 220 territories on 46 separate TV channels and the group stages were watched by more than 675 million unique viewers.

## Roy championing the cause for fearless England

AFP, Birmingham

Eoin Morgan has often spoken of the "fearless" cricket that has propelled England to the top of the one-day game and Jason Roy is the embodiment of that spirit at the World Cup.

The opening batsman has been a key figure in taking England, who have yet to win the 50-over trophy, to their first final for 27 years.

Roy was missed badly when he was out for three games earlier in the tournament as England stumbled, suffering group-stage defeats to Sri Lanka and Australia in that period.

On both occasions the pressure of a run-chase appeared to overwhelm them, with James Vince, Roy's replacement at the top of the order, making scores of 14 and nought.

It was little wonder that England, who have set such store by aggressive batting since their miserable first-round exit at the 2015 World Cup, were so desperate to get 28-year-old Surrey star Roy back into their side.

And the powerful Roy has not disappointed, hitting three consecutive fifties in victories against India, New Zealand and Australia. The first-wicket partnership Roy has formed with Jonny Bairstow has been pivotal in England's progress to the final against New Zealand at Lord's on Sunday. They average nearly 70 as an opening pair in ODIs.

To put that into context, the next-best first-wicket duo in ODI cricket, with at least 30 innings together, is the celebrated West Indies pairing of Gordon Greenidge and Desmond Haynes, with an average of 52.55.

But the way Roy, a fundamentally orthodox if powerful strokeplayer, bats is about more than statistics.

There is also the galvanising effect he has on his teammates – and the demoralising impact he can have on the opposition. Thursday's semifinal against Australia at Edgbaston provided a brilliant example of Roy's worth to England.

The host nation were faced with a potentially awkward chase of 224 to win against a world-

class attack and the temptation might have been to treat Australia spearhead Mitchell Starc with caution at the start of the innings.

Yet Roy's response to a full leg-stump ball from Starc in just the sixth over was to hoist the left-arm quick for six over deep fine leg with a late flick of the wrists.

He was even more cavalier when Nathan Lyon came on to bowl, smashing the off-spinner's first delivery for a huge six over long-off.

He went on to make 85 off 65 balls, including nine fours and five sixes.

Australia captain Aaron Finch, a county colleague of Roy's, said: "He definitely goes

hard, having played with him for a few years now for Surrey."

"He's a player that when he's on he can be so damaging to an opposition and in such quick time as well."

Greenidge and Haynes, in addition to their ODI exploits that included featuring in the West Indies' 1979 World Cup final win over England, also formed one of Test cricket's best opening partnerships.

Roy has yet to play Test cricket but, with the Ashes next month, some pundits believe he could be the solution to England's ongoing problems at the top of the order in the five-day game.



## 'I made no demands'

### AB defends offer to return

REUTERS, Cape Town

AB de Villiers said he did not expect to be included in South Africa's squad for the World Cup after telling captain Faf du Plessis that he was available, as he clarified his role in a selection drama that blew up in England.

South Africa endured a miserable tournament, exiting with only three wins from their nine pool matches. Their cause was not helped when it was reported that De Villiers, who had retired from international cricket in May 2018, had spoken to Du Plessis about making himself available on the eve of the teams squad announcement.

That led to accusations that De Villiers had been selfish in trying to force his way back into the squad.

"Now the Proteas' World Cup campaign is over, and the team cannot be distracted, I would like to respond to unjustified criticism of me during the tournament," De Villiers said in a statement on Friday.

"I announced my retirement from international cricket in May 2018 because I wanted to reduce my workload and spend more time with my wife and young sons. Some have insisted I was motivated purely by money. They are wrong."

De Villiers said that immediately after his retirement he was asked if the door was open for a return to the team, and he confirmed he would consider it. In a phone-call to long-time friend Du Plessis during this year's IPL, he repeated the door was open "if I was needed."

"I had been in decent form during the IPL and casually repeated what I had said when asked a year earlier, that I was available if required ... but only if required."

"I made absolutely no demands at all. I certainly did not try to force my way into the squad on the eve of the tournament, and did not expect to be included."

"Elements of our private conversation were disclosed to the media, and distorted to cast me in the worst possible light," he says. "The story was not leaked by me, or anybody associated with me, or by Faf. Maybe someone wanted to deflect criticism. I don't know."

"As a result, I was unfairly described as arrogant, selfish and indecisive but, with all humility, my conscience is clear. I am not angry with anybody."