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Murali not worried over World Record

by Rex Clementine

Sri Lankan off-spinner Muttiah Muralitharan told *'The Island'* yesterday that more than the World Record for the most number of wickets in ODI cricket, the form of his team bothered him and insisted that his focus will be solely on today's must win third One-Day International against India at R. Premadasa Stadium under lights.

Muralitharan started the series requiring three wickets to overtake Wasim Akram as the highest wicket taker in the world in ODIs. The 36-year-old picked up one wicket in the first ODI in Dambulla and failed to pick up a wicket in the second ODI at R. Premadasa Stadium, although he bowled exceptionally well conceding only 32 runs in his ten overs including a maiden during the death overs.

"Honestly I am not thinking of taking those two wickets much. The important thing is to win this game. We can not afford to lose this one. As for the record I am going to keep playing one-day cricket and it will come some day," the senior Sri Lankan cricketer told *'The Island'* in an exclusive interview.

Muralitharan also said that the Sri Lankans should not put any undue pressure on themselves leading up to crucial ODI and was confident the team will bounce back. "The main thing is that we need to think that this is just another game. You shouldn't be

putting any undue pressure on yourself. It's important to remain positive and play your natural game. We have a lot of experience and I am confident we will come good."

He outlined the team's poor batting as the main reason for the poor performance in ODI cricket, especially at home. Until Sanath Jayasuriya scored a hundred in the first ODI, no Sri Lankan batsman had scored a hundred at home for almost three and half years. "We are not playing well. Our batting has been a huge concern for us. But having said that these guys are quality players and

Batting has been the main reason for the team's poor run and Sri Lanka suffered a first ever home series defeat to England in 2007 and the next year were beaten by India for the first time on Sri Lankan soil in a five match series. Last month, the team was also beaten by Bangladesh in a tri-nation tournament match and was badly placed in the final against the same opposition before Muralitharan bailed the side out with his clean hitting down the order.

"Although we lost successive home series, we didn't lose badly. The score line says we lost 3-2,

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they have proved themselves over the years. We had a few players retiring and those slots have been filled by some new ones and as a result we have shifted some places. So these things can happen," Muralitharan who has been representing the country for the past 16 years said.

both against England and India. I am sure we will be alright. We will improve and get back to our winning ways. Don't forget that India is one of the best sides in the World right now and it's a challenge beating them."

Sanath Jayasuriya and Muralitharan are the two senior



Sri Lankan bowler Muttiah Muralitharan, left, chats with Indian cricketer Suresh Raina during a practice session in Colombo. The third ODI between Sri Lanka and India gets underway today at the R.Premadasa Stadium. (AP)

most players in the side at the age of 39 and 36 respectively. The off-spinner paid tribute to his former captain by saying his knocks were extremely crucial for the team. During the first ODI in Dambulla,

Jayasuriya became the oldest player to score an ODI hundred at the age of 39 years and 212 days surpassing Geoffrey Boycott. "He's one of the greatest players the game has seen. The things that

he has achieved for Sri Lankan cricket is amazing. We do well when Sanath scores and it's important for us that he gets a big one tomorrow," Muralitharan said.

Sri Lanka prepared for must win games

by Rex Clementine

There's very little Sri Lanka can afford to do wrong in the remaining three One-Day internationals against India, as all that the tourists need is to win one of the games to secure the series.

Mahendra Singh Dhoni's side leads the five match series 2-0 after a six wicket and 15 run win in Dambulla and R. Premadasa Stadium respectively.

Mahela Jayawardene's side needs to win all three remaining games to avoid another series defeat against the Indians, who beat them 3-2 in August last year.

Speaking to journalists ahead of the third ODI, Jayawardene said that the team had been in similar situations before and are prepared for the challenge against the tourists. "We know if we lose tomorrow we lose the series. We have been in this situation before and you don't have to tell the boys to raise their performances. They understand the mistakes they have made in different areas of our game. We have to be a bit more consistent with our all-round game," Jayawardene told journalists, yesterday.

He also stressed the need for consistency,

a factor that has been lacking in both batting and bowling. "Batting has been good and bowling has been good too. But the problem is we are making a few mistakes. The guys understand that if we can be consistent with our line and length and keep the pressure on and if our batsmen consistently bat through certain periods, we could come off well," Jayawardene added.

Jayawardene further said that the difference between the two sides was that India's confidence has been high leading into the series after convincing wins against Australia and England, whereas the Sri Lankans have struggled in recent months in ODIs. "There's not much of a difference between the teams, but confidence-wise, their's is pretty high because they have been consistent in the past few months. That's probably something that we lack."

Malinga to play fourth ODI?

There's also talk of fast bowler Lasith Malinga making a comeback in the final two ODIs. Since undergoing knee surgery, on his return to domestic cricket, the 25-year-old has done reasonably well. The selectors have named the squad only for the first three ODIs and Malinga's firepower could come in handy for the hosts in the last two ODIs, although the series may have been already decided by then.

"Lasith is making steady progress. It's up to the selectors to see whether he's ready for it or not. His progress has been very good and it's very good news for us," Jayawardene said when asked

about the paceman's availability.

Jayawardene's Indian counterpart M. S. Dhoni, meanwhile, has warned his team against complacency. India have enjoyed the upper hand against the Sri Lankans in recent ODIs, but Dhoni has insisted that his players should not relax against the hosts.

After a lackluster performance in Dambulla, where Sri Lanka lost what looked like a one sided contest, the hosts did extremely well to fight back against all odds thanks to an unbeaten 93 by youngster Thilina Kandamby, playing only his ninth ODI. The local spectators will be hoping that the team gets back into the series by winning the crucial third ODI.

Sri Lanka (From):

Sri Lanka (from): Mahela Jayawardene (Capt), Kumar Sangakkara, Sanath Jayasuriya, Upul Tharanga, Chamara Kapugedera, Jehan Mubarak, T. M. Dilshan, Thilina Kandamby, Muttiah Muralitharan, Ajantha Mendis, Farveez Maharoof, Dilhara Fernando, Nuwan Kulasekera, Thilina Thushara Mirando and Angelo Mathews.

India (from): M. S. Dhoni (Captain), Gautam Gambhir, Ravindra Jadeja, Zaheer Khan, Praveen Kumar, Pragnan Ojha, Lakshmipathi Balaji, Irfan Pathan, Yusuf Pathan, Suresh Raina, Virender Sehwag, Ishant Sharma, Rohit Sharma, Sachin Tendulkar and Yuvraj Singh.

Umpires: Brian Jerling (RSA) and Kumar Dharmasena (SL)
3rd Umpire: Gamini Silva (SL)

Match Referee: Chris Broad (ENG)

SL runners train in Nuwara Eliya for Hong Kong Marathon

by Reemus Fernando

Sri Lankan marathon runners Manjula Kumarasinghe and Ishan Kumara Wijethilaka who will anchor the final leg of the Standard Chartered Greatest Race on Earth Marathon series in Hong Kong in a few days time said they are getting accustomed to the cold weather by training at Nuwara Eliya.

Cold weather is one of the biggest obstacles the two athletes born and bred in tropical conditions have to face when they run in the Hong Kong marathon which will be held on Sunday.

Currently the two athletes are training at Nuwara Eliya along with country's top marathon runners. "The temperature at Nuwara Eliya was low. And I have been training in this condition for quite a few weeks. I think this experience has driven out worries of battling out cold weather in Hong



Kong," Manjula Kumarasinghe told *'The Island'*.

"We trained in two sessions, one in the morning and one in the evening. The temperature is low on both occasions. I don't think the conditions in Hong Kong would be much different to the one we experience here in Nuwara Eliya," Kumarasinghe said.

"The four marathons are conducted in four different weather conditions. And I think we are taking part in one of the toughest marathons of the four. The weather conditions in Hong Kong will be tough for us. Cold weather is just one part of the

challenge we will have to face. The training at Nuwara Eliya has helped me get accustomed to the conditions there," Wijethilaka told *'The Island'* in a telephone interview.

Nuwara Eliya is currently experiencing an average of 20 Celsius during day time and 7-8 Celsius at night and the temperature in Hong Kong is expected to range from 19 to 17 Celsius on the race day.

The two runners will anchor the last leg of the marathon series which had its first three legs in Nairobi, Singapore and Mumbai respectively.

Colombo Super League Basketball

Moratuwa and Wennappuwa emerge winners

by Manjula D. Phillips

Moratuwa BC had it easy against St. Joseph's O.M.I. Seminary, Kohuwala in a one-sided game that they won by a convincing 38 points in the ongoing Colombo Super League Basketball Tournament at Nugegoda on Sunday.

The seminarians were leading 12-6 earlier, but lost

momentum and trailed 23-46 in the first half. The final score was 93-55.

Grecian Anthony with 37 points and Sanitha de Mel with 20 points did most of the scoring for the winners while Saman Fernando with 18 points and Charles Kumar with 14 points excelled for the seminarians.

Meanwhile Wennappuwa BC beat Air Force 73-59 in an

'A' Division encounter played later in the day.

Wennappuwa were leading 37-29 at half-time. Virantha Bastian with 26 points and Rusiru Ranatunga with 10 points did most of the scoring for Wennappuwa while K.T.M. Wijesena and Ravi Dodangoda with 21 and ten points respectively excelled for the losers.

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