

ICC T20 World Cup 2022

Friday, 21 October 2022

Hobart, Tasmania, Australia

Bellerive Oval

Zimbabwe

Dave Houghton

Post Match Media Conference

Zimbabwe - 133/5, Scotland - 132/6

THE MODERATOR: Good evening to you all. Thank you for joining us for this press conference with Zimbabwe coach Dave Houghton.

Q. A year ago Zimbabwe weren't even allowed to play in the ICC T20 World Cup because they were suspended. Now ten months on, they top the group in the first round, in a group that also included the West Indies. Sum up how you're feeling at the moment.

DAVE HOUGHTON: Obviously we're over the moon. When I took over in June or so for the qualifiers in Bulawayo, the biggest and main objective was to get here. We got ahead and won five of those games, and they were as pressurised as any game because each game was like a cup final.

So we had some sort of experience of playing a game with as much on it as this one is like today. But still it's great getting here and getting through.

I did say to the guys when we left home, it's nice we qualified to get here, but that's not our main objective. Our main objective is to get through and then cause as much damage in the next trials as we can.

Q. You also said in an interview, a lot of interviews really, there's no consequences for playing aggressive shots as long as the intent behind them was right. At times maybe it looked like Zimbabwe played a few too many aggressive shots against the West Indies, so I just wonder how you struck the balancing act today.

DAVE HOUGHTON: We didn't really talk a lot about the West Indies. I summed up that game against the West Indies, and I'm sure a lot of people watching could sum it up the same way. That was some of the best fast bowling we'd played. Joseph and the big, tall man whose name escapes me at the moment -- yeah, (Jason) Holder. They bowled very well. They hit the stump seven times, six of those with toe breaking yorkers.



I thought we played well in West Indies. I thought we did well in the field, and they won the game with their bowlers.

Going into today's game, I wanted us to play the same way. I'm excited by the fact our players will continue to do it. Win or lose in a cutthroat game like today, we could be going home at 6:00 tomorrow morning or be staying in the hotel overnight and prepare for the next round.

So it was a tough game, and our guys are happy to keep playing that way, and I want us to keep playing that way. It's the only way we'll improve.

Q. You also said recently that you didn't want to be drawn in on Zimbabwe's long term plans because you're right now focused on this World Cup. What sort of impact do you think this has on Zimbabwe the next 12 months, 24 months?

DAVE HOUGHTON: I can tell you the last four months already has had a huge impact. The fan base at home, I get back home, and I'm back two or three hours on my phone answering messages of congratulations, which we got after the Ireland game and we got again after the West Indies game even though we lost.

So the impact it has at home is huge anyway. We've got a base coming up nicely, and we've got a very good professional first class system going, which is going very well at the moment. So there's scope for us to become a much better and stronger side over the years.

If I take us a bit back to the end of my playing career and maybe the next few years afterwards, around about the turn of the century, we had a decent side, but we had absolutely nothing behind it. When that side folded away in 2003 and '4, it was a massive rebuild of everything to do with Zimbabwe cricket to try to get us back to where we are now.

Where we are now, once we start climbing the ladder a little bit and playing against the big sides more regularly, I think you'll find us sustaining our cricket abilities for a lot longer.

Q. Is it too early to start talking about your ambitions in the Super 12?

DAVE HOUGHTON: No, I'm happy to talk about our ambitions. I don't want to be unrealistic with the



ambitions. Obviously everybody would sit there and say we want to win it. We want to cause some damage. If we could take home a couple of big scalps as well, that would be great. If we could get into the semifinals, even better, but I'm just looking at one game at a time now.

Q. If you look at the two groups who got through, yourselves and Ireland, at this time 12 months ago, both were in pretty poor positions. Ireland has just got demoted. It was mentioned where Zimbabwe were. Ireland changed their team a lot. You guys haven't. If you look at the names who are performing, Raza, a lot of these guys, more experienced players. The one thing that's changed is you've come in.

I'm wondering what have you brought to the programme that's maybe a little bit different? When you came in, what was your approach in terms of trying to unlock the best of these players?

DAVE HOUGHTON: The first thing is regarding our team, we don't really need to change it at the moment. We've got a really nice blend of experience and youth. Raza and today Craig Ervine, the captain, really stood up to be counted through this tournament at the right time. Reggie has done it recently as well. They are our senior players, and of course Chatara was our best bowler today. These are our senior players. All the rest are ranging from 19 to 24, so we've got years of them to come.

A lot of people have asked me what I've brought to the team, and I don't really know the answer to it, to be quite honest, because only thing I've done to the guys is said "you have the freedom to play, and there will be no repercussions if you make mistakes," because I don't believe you can grow as a cricketer if you're in fear of your own shadow and in fear of playing a bad shot or bowling a bad ball or something. You just can't grow. That's the only thing I've really done.

The other thing I've done is changed our practicing schedules. Zimbabwean guys have worked really hard to get techniques to compete at this level, but they'll over practice. If I leave them to their own devices, they'll practice from 08:00 to 16:00 every day of the week. The problem with that is by day 2 the practicing becomes mundane and boring and nobody is actually going forward.

So I've really cut back on our practises. Our practises are a bit shorter and with a bit more quality, and there's days where I won't let them practise at all because I think energy on the field is more important than a few balls in the nets.

Q. Your approach as a coach, especially in the shorter format, do you consider yourself an

analytical coach? Obviously you're quite a freeing coach in terms of how you get your players to go about things, but I wonder if you could expand a little bit on your general philosophy.

DAVE HOUGHTON: I like to combine both. I would consider myself a more tactical coach than an analytical coach, but I like the combination. There are some statistics that are very relevant and important to me. But I think at the end of the day, I'm trying to encourage the guys to use the best computer on the field, which is the one on their shoulders.

If they're living too much off the computer and the stats man and everything like that, we can't cross the field with them. Then they've got to think for themselves, and then they're out of their comfort zone.

For me, we do some work most days on the opposition and literally keep it to half an hour at a time for the batter and half an hour for the bowlers, where we'll just have a look at what we're up against. Then we talk a little bit about our own tactics and keep it as simple as possible.

Actually we don't have that many team talks.

Q. Is that something that was an issue before? The way you said it, you hinted maybe there was a little bit of over analysis going on.

DAVE HOUGHTON: I think a bit of over analysis. I think a bit of over practising. I think a bit of repercussions. If they played badly, the guys were hauled up in front of each other in the changing room and picked at. It's not a recipe for a good side. There's a little more freedom in the squad now so the blokes can express themselves, and they've got good skills.

Q. Just want to ask you, you spoke a little bit about like the over practising and almost like these repercussions that were there. What sort of mental state did you find Zimbabwe in? I mean, we can all see that they seem like very happy and very confident now. How difficult is it to get guys to go from wherever you found them in to what they are now?

DAVE HOUGHTON: I don't think it was too difficult. Nobody wants to be unhappy. So to get them to go from unhappy to happy is not that difficult at all.

Honestly the first thing we did when they appointed me as coach is I put them on the bus and going to a game park, and we had a nice sunset looking at the game and having a few beers, and we sat down and we talked a little bit.

Once they realised that I'm not going to be a person who's going to be standing there pointing fingers and

shouting at them all day, I think immediately there was a change in attitude.

Of course from there we went to Bulawayo for those qualifiers, and the same thing happened with practise. I wouldn't let them practise for more than two hours. Suddenly they found themselves with more energy and enjoyment for the game again. So it wasn't a difficult turnaround.

Q. And how do you think you've managed Sikandar Raza from here? He's obviously overflowing with passion and seems to be giving everything. What does he need to do to pace himself for the rest of the tournament?

DAVE HOUGHTON: Look, Raza is a fantastic cricketer, and he likes to be on a big stage to show people what a fantastic cricketer he is. I hope a lot of people around the world in franchise tournaments are looking because he's a fantastic T20 cricketer.

I think he wishes he was three or four years younger so he could have more fun, but I can tell you, the way he's playing at the moment, we'll keep him going as long as he wants.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports