

As the 100-day countdown to the 2019 ICC World Cup has begun, **Boria Majumdar** looks back at the ODI performances of all the teams in the last one year and analyses where they stand today

CRICKET CORNER

Don't Go Crazy About Left-Armer: Zaheer

Indian team management's fascination for a left-arm pacer in its ranks is well-known but the country's best ever practitioner of the trade Zaheer Khan feels that one shouldn't go "crazy or overboard" if the bowler in question is not ready for the challenge. In the past few years, India have tried a number of left-arm fast bowlers, including Barinder Sran and Jaydev Unadkat, the latest being Mohammed Khaleel, who has been dropped after an indifferent series in New Zealand. "If you have that variation (left-arm), it's certainly an advantage but you don't have to go crazy about trying to find a left-armer. It is all about contributing to team's cause. Left-arm pacers are natural talent and you don't have control over when you will get one," Zaheer said on Wednesday.

Harmanpreet Ruled Out of England Series

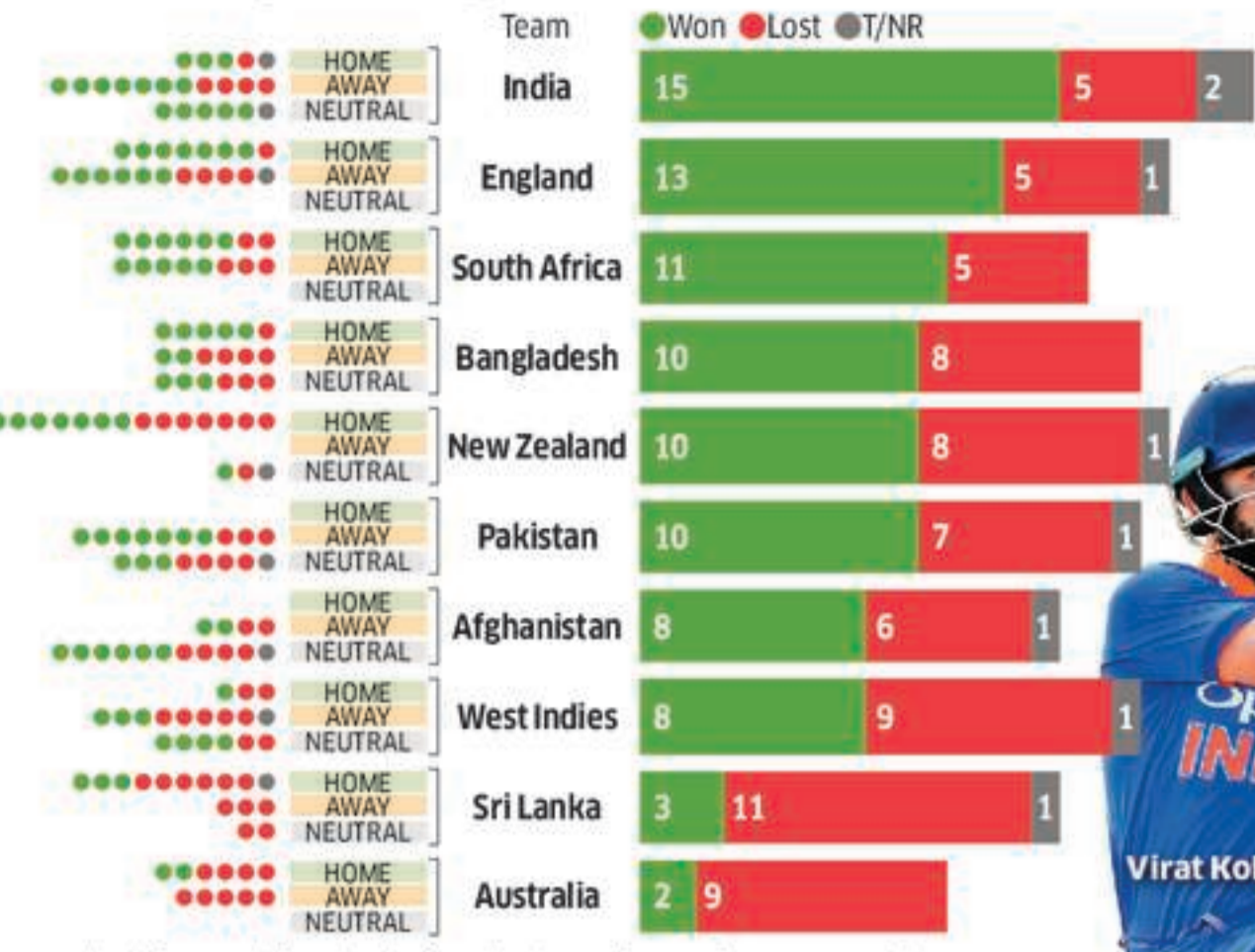
Indian women's team was dealt a big blow after vice-captain Harmanpreet Kaur was ruled out of the upcoming limited overs series against England with an ankle injury. India will play three ODIs in Mumbai starting February 22, followed by three T20 Internationals in Guwahati from March 4. Rookie Harleen Deol, who played two warm-up games against English women, got her maiden berth in the squad. The ODIs are a part of ICC Women's Championship and points will be carried forward. If Harmanpreet fails to get fit in time for the T20Is, then Smriti Mandhana will be leading the side.

WATCH OUT! TODAY

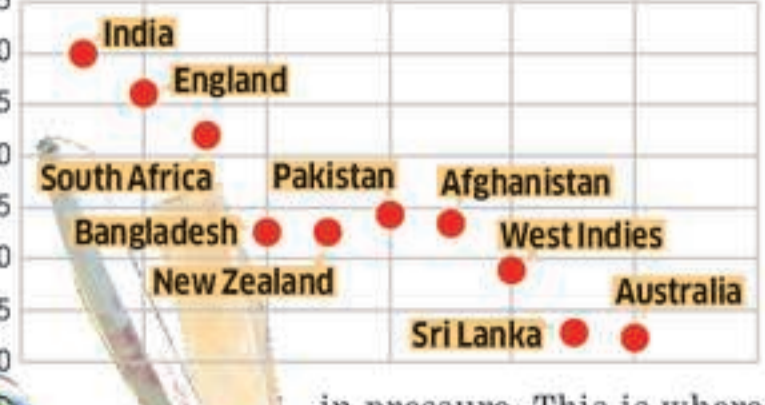
- FOOTBALL**
- EUROPA LEAGUE: 11:25pm Arsenal v BATE Borisov
 - 11:25pm Napoli v FC Zurich
 - 1:30am Chelsea v Malmo FF
- INDIAN SUPER LEAGUE**
- 7:30am Bengaluru FC v FC Goa
- CRICKET**
- TEST: 1:30pm South Africa v Sri Lanka
 - T20I: 6:30pm Afghanistan v Ireland

TAKING STOCK

World Cup Participants in ODIs in Last One Year



WIN/LOSS RATIO



With the 100-day countdown having started and all teams putting finishing touches to their World Cup squads, it is perhaps a worthwhile exercise to take stock of their preparedness. There are two ways to do it — quantitative and qualitative. And the best approach would be to take both parameters into account. Quantitatively, India lead the pack with a win-loss ratio of 3 in the last 12 months, while England are a close second with a win-loss ratio of 2.6. More importantly, England are the only team to have not lost an ODI series in 2018. Statistically speaking, these are the two teams who look runaway favourites approaching the World Cup. Qualitatively, however, the story is a little different. With Steve Smith and David Warner suspended and the Australians opting to preserve Mitch Starc, Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins for Test cricket, it comes as no surprise that Kangaroos had a poor ODI record in last year. It does not mean, however, that Australia will be an easy run over in the 2019 World Cup. "With Smith and Warner in the side (if selected) and with Starc and Cummins leading the bowling attack, it will be a very different Australia in England," says Sourav Ganguly. "I would say it is England, India, Australia and Pakistan at this point," he states before adding, "Don't yet rule out the West Indies."

The tournament is England. With Ben Stokes, Chris Woakes, Moeen Ali and David Willey, England look the most complete side. In Jonny Bairstow and Jason Roy, England have serious firepower at the top and with the best contemporary wicket-keeper batsman in Jos Butler to close things out, England look set to mount their best-ever challenge for the silverware in 2019. Virat Kohli's India too are really well prepared. While the Indian top three are arguably the best in the world, they also have a potent bowling attack going into the tournament. "Each of the Indian bowlers has the ability to take wickets and that's what makes this team so effective. The moment you see a captain trying to make up for a few overs you know there is a problem," says Ganguly before going on to suggest, "Even Kedar (Jadhav) picks up wickets in almost every game. This is because there is relentless pressure from the other end. As long as bowlers keep picking wickets, India will be in with a major chance." "The other thing about this Indian side is that they play both pace and spin well. Unless you pick wickets

against them at the start of an innings they will make you pay and with a bowling attack that has Kuldeep (Yadav) and (Yuzvendra) Chahal they can easily defend a decent total. "If they get the middle-order right there is no reason why they can't win the world cup," concludes Ganguly. The team least spoken about in the build up discourse is Pakistan. Suffice to say, however, they are as good as any other team with three months to go. In Shaheen Afridi, Usman Shinwari and Hasan Ali they have a handy pace attack, which is backed up by Faheem Ashraf and Shadab Khan. And with Babar Azam starting to match Virat Kohli in consistency, Pakistan is the dark horse that we need to keep an eye on. The other point is that best teams don't always win the World Cup. Belgium and Spain may have had the best teams on paper ahead of FIFA World Cup 2018 but neither of them went on to win the tournament. In big tournaments it is also about the ability to soak

up pressure. This is where India and Australia stand a yard above the rest. While Shikhar Dhawan, Rohit Sharma and Kohli have always loved the big stage and have very good records in ICC tournaments, Australia have been the most dominant World Cup team. The final caveat, which can impact the hierarchy of favourites, is the issue of players' fitness. While most teams have asked players to assemble at home by May 5, allowing them a period of rest leading to the Cup, Indian players will be on IPL duty till May 13. Each of the bowlers remaining in peak fitness as the team goes to England may well determine India's fate and that's where the BCCI and the IPL franchises need to see eye to eye.



The best days of the current Bayern Munich are behind them, but a scoreless draw at Liverpool pushed back the end

Rory Smith

Bayern Munich's time has passed. This incarnation of Bayern Munich, anyway, this team that has taken up residency at the summit of the Bundesliga, this team that has been such a fixture and a force in the final rounds of the Champions League. The wear and tear has been showing a little more with every passing season: Pep Guardiola left, and Jupp Heynckes could not be persuaded to stay; Philipp Lahm and Xabi Alonso retired. Bayern, this Bayern, were creaking, though it was not always possible to hear, not with the pop of Champagne corks as another title was sealed, or the roar of the crowd as another Champions League semifinal sailed into view.

The End is Near



Change, everyone agreed, was not only necessary but overdue. The season itself bore witness to that: Bayern, winner of the last six German championships, have spent much of the season behind Borussia Dortmund, at one point dropping as low as sixth in the Bundesliga table. Results have ticked upward since the winter break, though performances have been sluggish to follow suit. Dortmund's lead is down to only three points; it is a measure of Bayern's competitive spirit that when news of Dortmund's 0-0 draw at Nürnberg on Monday made it to the Liverpool restaurant where Hoenes and the board were dining that night, there was a rousing cheer; and a little singing. Whether a seventh consecutive title will follow or not, this will be the last season of

wasted enough time on emotion. Change was needed, and it is coming. None of that was changed by a goalless draw against Liverpool at Anfield on Tuesday in the first leg of a Champions League round of 16 series. None of that should be dismissed because Bayern held out against a Liverpool team without their three first-choice central defenders. Reports of Bayern Munich's demise have not been greatly exaggerated. They may, though, have been misinterpreted. This Bayern team had not been to Anfield before: Individual players had visited, of course, but never en masse. There had been no competitive meeting between these clubs since 1981. Lewandowski, for one, acknowledged in the days before the game that he was eager to sample it, to tick another iconic stadium off the list. The German news media focused on little energy indulging the (occasionally overblown) lore of Liverpool's home, bolstered by the host's run to the final of this competition last year. And yet not for a second did a single Bayern player seem fazed or unnerved or overawed by the location, by the occasion. Even in the first few minutes, as Liverpool tried to build up a head of steam, scratching and searching for a single stray doubt, Bayern played with an ease, a composure, a control. Liverpool carved out a handful of openings, half chances and snatched chances and glimpses of goal, and the crowd surged, sensing possibility, and Bayern did not blink. Neuer kept on playing disdainful passes on the edge of his box, unruffled by risk. Thiago Alcantara glided around the midfield. James Rodriguez floated into vacated space. It is true that this Bayern team has passed its peak. It is also true that, once that point is reached, the descent tends to be steep. It is not, though, consistent, and it is not immediate.

Firing Blanks

Barcelona's Suarez is under scrutiny after European away goals drought

Richard Martin

Barcelona forward Luis Suarez is under scrutiny for his pitiful scoring record in European away games stretching to more than 25 hours without a goal after a 0-0 draw in their Champions League last-16 first leg at Olympique Lyonnais on Tuesday. The Uruguayan is the second top scorer in Spain with 15 Liga goals but hasn't found the net in a Champions League away game since a 1-1 draw at AS Roma in September 2015, firing blanks in 16 consecutive foreign trips. He lacked sharpness and speed of thought in Lyon, spurning Barca's clearest chance in the second half and frequently losing possession, interrupting Barca's flow on a night when he had 25 shots on goal but only hit the target five times. "Suarez is not enjoying his best form, he hasn't scored in four league games and his performances have clearly dipped since 2019 began," wrote Spanish newspaper Marca. "Being Suarez, he's still scoring goals but his slump has not gone unnoticed at Barca, who are struggling as a result. Despite 25 shots in Lyon, they left empty handed." Catalan daily Sport meanwhile gave Suarez a rating of four out of 10, the lowest of Barca's players, saying he looked "anxious". His meagre return on the continent reflects that of his team, who have not won away in the Champions League knockout stage for



over three years, scoring three times in six games on the road since a 2-0 victory at Arsenal in February 2016. **'SCORING CURSE'** Barca's poor away record in Europe has played a big role in their failure to hurdle the quarter-final stage since they last lifted the trophy in 2015. "Barca left Lyon off the hook and seemed to be suffering from a goalkeeping curse," wrote Mundo Deportivo. Failing to score in Lyon means Barca must win the second leg at the Nou Camp on March 13 and they'll be vulnerable should the French side, who like the Spaniards are unbeaten in this season's competition, grab an away goal. Suarez could at least count on the support of his coach Ernesto Valverde and team mates after the game. "It would worry me if he wasn't getting chances, which is what you ask for from a striker, and he is creating chances too," Valverde said. "Opponents are still frightened of him, and players go through spells of scoring and not scoring." Reuters

ICC Hands UAE-Based Coach 10-Year Ban for Corruption

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Wednesday banned UAE-based coach Irfan Anisari for 10 years after he was found guilty of making a "corrupt approach" to Pakistan captain Sarfaraz Ahmed in 2017. Anisari had approached Ahmed during the Pakistan series with Sri Lanka in the UAE in October 2017 with a "view to engaging him in corrupt practices by soliciting information from him". The matter came to light after Ahmed reported the approach immediately following which ICC ACU started an investigation.

Taylor Surpasses Fleming to be NZ's Highest ODI Run-Getter

Ross Taylor became New Zealand's highest scorer in one-day internationals on Wednesday as he helped his side secure an 88-run victory over Bangladesh in Dunedin in their final official ODI before the World Cup. The 34-year-old top-scored with 69, his 47th ODI half century, to move to 8,026 career runs and ahead of former captain Stephen Fleming's 8,007 as New Zealand scored 330 for six at University Oval. Tim Southee then took three wickets in his first two overs with Sabbir Rahman's maiden one-day century not enough as Bangladesh were dismissed for 242 in 47.2 overs to give New Zealand a 3-0 series sweep. Southee finished with 6-65.

BFI Chief to Head AIBA's Foundation for Better Boxing

Boxing Federation of India (BFI) chief Ajay Singh has been elected as president of the Foundation Board for Better Boxing (FBBB) of the world governing body of the sport, AIBA. The FBBB was constituted by the AIBA in the last meeting of their executive committee to address future development of the sport globally. Singh was elected to the post on Tuesday and he will have a tenure of four years.

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Heavyweight Champion on Fighting a Bigger Man: 'Just Beat Him Up'

In the fractured world of modern boxing, **Anthony Joshua** has become something of a rare bird: a heavyweight champion who holds three of the four major belts. In Britain, his native country, he is a sporting hero. At 22-0 with 21 knockouts, including a marquee win over long-time heavyweight champion Wladimir Klitschko in 2017, Joshua seems poised to break through to stardom on a more international level. He will fight professionally for the first time overseas June 1 at Madison Square Garden in New York City, against Jarrell Miller, a brash Brooklyn native and a 5-1 underdog. "People call me the underdog, but that's all right," Miller, 30, said Tuesday. "I want to be the underdog. I wasn't born with a silver spoon." The only major belt Joshua doesn't hold is the World Boxing Council's, which remains the property of unbeaten American Deontay Wilder. They each point fingers at the other to explain why a unification bout has not taken place, and Wilder has been distracted by the possibility of a rematch with Tyson Fury, whom he fought to a draw in December. **To have no hatred in my heart for up-and-coming heavyweights. Watch them and not be bitter. I love the sport. I want that person to beat my record. I want them to do better than I did** **LEGACY HE WANTS TO LEAVE BEHIND**



England boxer Anthony Joshua

A Joshua-Wilder bout, should it happen, could set off a full revival of the heavyweight division. Joshua, 29, talked with reporters and editors of The New York Times on Tuesday. Their conversation has been edited and condensed. **Your opponent, Jarrell Miller. He is a big guy. They all are!** But he's like 300-plus pounds. (Joshua is generally around 250.) Is there a strategy you need to use for someone that large? Just beat him up. There's no real complicated stuff when it comes to boxing. Just. Beat. Him. Up. You hit them hard, and you earn their respect. What happens is, their spirit is like 100 percent, then you've got to take them down to 80, to 60, to 40, to 20, until they got nothing left. And then—if he stays in there—it's how much heart he has. Yeah, he's a big guy. It's a bigger target. He's obviously going to be firing back, so I have to be on my A game. **The other thing about Miller is that he's got a mouth on him.** Yeah, but that's just verbal. I do physical. **Does it bother you when he pops off?** June 2 he'll be irrelevant. So he's relevant for the next 14 weeks. And then when it's all done, I'll move on to looking at Wilder, Fury or Luis Ortiz. **Did you watch the Wilder-Fury fight?** They were on too late. In the U.K., it's like 5 in the morning. I'm focused on my training,

Shooting Visa Controversy: Pakistan Wants 2 Quotas Dropped from World Cup

Denied visas in the wake of the Pulwama terror attack, the Pakistan's shooting federation on Wednesday wrote to the international body asking it to drop the two 25m rapid fire pistol quotas for 2020 Olympics, in the season-opening World Cup in New Delhi. The terror attack had cast a doubt on Pakistan shooters' participation in the tournament, starting Saturday. "The ISSF has received a letter from the Pakistan federation, requesting it not to offer quota places in the events their shooters were scheduled to participate," a National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) official said. Pakistan had applied for visas for two shooters—G M Bashir and Khalil Ahmed—in the rapid fire category as the event in New Delhi also serves as a qualifier for the 2020 Olympic games. Both International Shooting Sport Federation president Vladimir Lisin and secretary general Alexander Ratner are here for the mega event. While Lisin could take up the matter with Sports Minister Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore, Ratner said the decision to allot quota places depend on the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The top two officials of the ISSF were at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range on Wednesday evening, even as the global body termed the situation urgent. "The ISSF and the Organizing Committee of the competition are taking all efforts to solve the situation to avoid the discrimination of the Pakistani team. Besides that, the ISSF and the Organizing Committee are discussing the possible consequences for India as a host country for future international competitions, in all sports," the global sports body said in a statement. -PTI