

India's World Cup Hopefuls Will Look To Get In The Groove In First T20I Against Australia Today

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Visakhapatnam: The countdown has begun. In less than 100 days, the World Cup will be upon us and the teams are keen to get the permutation right before they head to Old Blighty. Some like India and Australia would want to enhance their credentials in the show-piece event, where they have been the last men standing on more than one occasion.

Doubts, though, persist over whether India will play in the World Cup and how the rest of the cricketing world will react if India take the extreme step in the aftermath of the Pulwama terror attack. The jury is still out on the issue, though, with the BCCI's Committee of Administrators (CoA) only expressing concerns about the safety and security of the team.

While the officials weigh the pros and cons, for the real stakeholders — the players — it will be business as usual on Sunday. With the hills of the Eastern Ghats forming a picturesque backdrop, the ACA-VDCA Stadium will be the battleground as India return to action after the two-week break following their highly successful tour Down Under. Especially for some like skipper Virat Kohli, who have enjoyed a longer break.

The Indians look a settled lot and the return of KL Rahul, one of the three Indians with a century in this format, will fuel further debate over his position in the 50-over batting order. The recent T20Is featuring India have seen Rahul and Kohli juggling positions 3 and 4, while Karthik and Rishabh Pant have batted at No.6.

All eyes will be on Vijay Shankar and Krunal Pandya and their ability to measure up to the challenge. Hardik Pandya's injury-enforced absence will, however, upset the team's balance. Kuldeep Yadav has been rested for the series but the Aussies are unlikely to get any respite, what with the threat of Jasprit Bumrah looming large.

The Big Bash League (BBL) would have prepared the Aussies well for the arduous challenge here. Even without David Warner and Steve Smith, they have firepower in the form of skipper Aaron Finch, Usman Khawaja, Glenn Maxwell and Marcus Stoinis. Shaun Marsh is expected to join the team midway through the ODI series.

HOME STRETCH



GOING TOP TO-TOP: Virat Kohli will be back in action after taking a break from the matches in New Zealand

KOHLI ON INDO-PAK TIE: WILL STICK BY BCCI & GOVT DECISION

Visakhapatnam: With calls for a total boycott of Pakistan growing in the aftermath of the Pulwama terror attack, it was skipper Virat Kohli's turn on Saturday to clarify the team's position regarding India's World Cup tie against Pakistan in June. "Our stand is simple. We (will) stick by what the nation wants to do and what the BCCI decides to do. That is basically our opinion, whatever the government and the board decide, eventually we will go by that and respect that. That is our stand on this particular issue," Kohli said. "Our sincere condolences to the families of the soldiers who lost their lives. We're really shocked about what happened and sad about the incident that happened." **TNN**

STAR SPORTS NETWORK, 7:00 PM

INDIA AUS

ICC T20 RANKINGS

2 5

HEAD TO HEAD

11 WIN 1 NR 6 WIN

GROUND

Runs will be there for the taking for batsmen willing to take risks.

WEATHER

It should be a pleasant evening and fans can look forward to an entertaining game as temperatures will hover around the mid to late 20s. There's little chance of rain affecting play.

ODDS: INDIA 5/10; AUSTRALIA 12/10

2 Sixes required by Rohit Sharma (102) to overtake the tally of 103 each by Chris Gayle (WI) and Martin Guptill (NZ) and set a record for the most sixes by a batsman in T20I cricket.

1 In the only T20I played at the Dr YS Rajasekhara Reddy ACA-VDCA Cricket Stadium, Visakhapatnam, India (84/1) beat Sri Lanka (82) by 9 wickets on February 14, 2016.

50 Jasprit Bumrah (48 wkts @20.47 in 20 matches) needs two more wickets to become the first Indian speedster and the second bowler after R Ashwin (52 @ 22.94 in 46) to complete 50 wickets in T20Is.

'Would have been logical to play more ODIs before World Cup'

KOHLI WARNS PLAYERS: BE WARY OF BAD HABITS THAT MIGHT CREEP IN DURING T20Is, IPL GAMES

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Visakhapatnam: The T20Is are fine, but India skipper Virat Kohli would rather have had more 50-over games ahead of the World Cup, given that India head into the tournament immediately after the IPL.

"That (playing more One-day matches) would have been ideal, more, I would say, logical, but you know that's the way series are compiled nowadays," Kohli said here on Saturday. "Because we are playing so

much T20 cricket in the IPL, a couple of more ODIs would have been more beneficial for both the teams, not just us. But we have to utilise what's in front of us and look to get into the right kind of frame of mind as a team," he added.

Kohli also hoped that players in the scheme of things for the World Cup would not develop habits in the T20s that would hurt the team in the 50-over format. "All the people who are going to be part of the World Cup squad, they have to make sure that

their games don't go too much away from the One-day mould of things. We will have to be wary of the bad habits that might creep in during the IPL. From a personal point of view, I would look to continue in the same way that I have in all formats over

the years and not do anything fancy, because frame of mind is the most important thing getting into the World Cup. "We need 15 people who are confident and mentally happy about where their game is at that particular moment. That will take a consistent effort from all the players during the IPL, to keep a check on that. The moment we enter the nets and create bad habits, and you lose momentum, you lose batting form, it is very difficult to get it back in a tournament like

the World Cup. So from that point of view, everyone will have to protect that mindset and be aligned towards what the team requires of them."

Workload management will be something the players need to be mindful of, Kohli said. "With the amount of travel during the IPL and the number of games in different conditions, in different temperatures, it is going to be challenging.

"But as a cricketer, you have to map out how many practice sessions you really need. I think those things need to be kept in mind. If your team is in a great position during the tournament, you don't mind taking 2-3 games off also. It all depends on how you feel physically, but everyone has to be really honest about it to themselves and accordingly see how they feel and not push themselves to a limit that might hamper the Indian team later on. I think we will all have to take responsibility for that."

Lions break free

Oshada Fernando, Kusal Mendis Star As Unheralded Sri Lanka Become First Team From Asia To Win Test Series In South Africa

Port Elizabeth: Oshada Fernando and Kusal Mendis propelled Sri Lanka to an eight-wicket win over South Africa on the third day of the second Test at St George's Park on Saturday, clinching an historic 2-0 series triumph. The unheralded Sri Lankans became the first team from Asia to win a Test series in South Africa.

Unlike their dramatic, unexpected one-wicket win in the first Test in Durban, the Sri Lankans surged to victory as Fernando and Mendis shared an unbeaten 163-run third wicket partnership studded with crisp, authoritative strokes. Fernando made 75 not out off 106 balls and Mendis scored 84 not out off 110 deliveries as Sri Lanka chased down a victory target of 197, reaching the mark by lunch. Resuming at 60 for two, Fernando and Mendis batted positively from the start of play, scoring nine runs off the second over of the day, bowled by Kagiso Rabada.

No South African bowler was able to settle into a consistent rhythm. Dale Steyn was brought

into the attack after 36 runs had been scored off the first eight overs of the morning. Mendis struck three boundaries in the first over from South Africa's all-time leading wicket-taker.

Left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj extracted some sharp turn from a pitch which otherwise offered nothing to the bowlers despite the extraordinary events of the first two days when 31 wickets fell. But the batsmen used their feet against Maharaj, who conceded 23 runs off four overs, including a straight six by Fernando, before being taken off.

Mendis was dropped on 70 when a leaping Hashim Amla at first slip could only get his fingertips to a slash against Duanne Olivier. By then, though, only 31 runs were needed.

Sri Lanka's series win was one of the biggest upsets in recent history. South Africa had won their previous seven series at home and had won 16 out of 19 home Tests, with only two defeats, before losing in Durban. Sri Lanka, by con-



TWICE IN A ROW: Kusal Mendis (right) celebrates after the 2nd Test victory

TEST SERIES VICTORIES IN SOUTH AFRICA BY ALL VISITING SIDES



trast, had lost six and drawn one of their previous seven Tests before arriving in South Africa with their team seemingly in disarray.

The selectors had made wholesale changes, including the dropping of captain Dinesh Chandimal, several players were missing because of injuries, while coach Chandika Hathurusingha was stripped of some of his powers. Yet

the Sri Lankans heeded the call of Dimuth Karunaratne, who was announced as 'interim' captain, to "compete in every session" and to play with a smile on their faces. **AN**

Scores: SL 154 (Dickwella 42, Rabada 4-38) and 197/2 (Mendis 84*, Oshada 75*, Olivier 1-46) beat South Africa 222 (De Kock 86, Vishwa 3-62, Rajitha 3-67) and 128 (Du Plessis 50*, Lakmal 4-39, de Silva 3-36) by eight wickets

1 Sri Lanka have created history by becoming the first team from the subcontinent and the third team after England and Australia to register a Test series win against South Africa in South Africa. Also for the first time, they have won two successive Tests in South Africa — by one wicket in Durban and by eight wickets in Port Elizabeth. Their only Test triumph before the present series was by 208 runs in Durban in Dec 2011.

1 At least one of the Asian sides have now won a Test series in every Test-playing country. India became the first Asian side to win a Test series in Australia six weeks ago, followed by Sri Lanka's feat on Saturday.

52.23

Kusal Mendis' average in the fourth innings, while aggregating 679 in 15 innings, including a hundred and five fifties — his highest in any innings of Tests. Among the Sri Lankan batsmen with 500 runs or more in the fourth innings, his average is the highest.

163

Unbroken 3rd-wkt partnership between Mendis and Fernando, Sri Lanka's highest for any wicket in a winning cause vs SA. **—Rajesh Kumar**

Cottrell, Hetmyer star as Windies level series

Bridgetown: Sheldon Cottrell marked his return to the West Indies team with a five-wicket haul as the home side snatched a series-leveling 26-run victory over England in the second ODI of a five-match series at Kensington Oval in Barbados on Friday.

Dropped for the curtain-raiser two days earlier, where the English cantered to a six-wicket win in a high-scoring fixture, the 29-year-old Jamaican left-arm fast bowler returned figures of 5/46 as the top-ranked visitors lost their last six wickets for 35 runs to be dismissed for 263 in response to what looked a comparatively modest West Indies total of 289/6.

"You need options in this day and age and Cottrell gave us that extra bit of variation with the ball," said West Indies skipper Jason Holder of his match-winning bowler amid the victory celebrations. "I love his energy. His is one for the future. It's really good to see so many of these players stepping up."

Shimron Hetmyer's unbeaten 104 gave a labouring West Indies innings late impetus when they batted first but it looked to be in vain with England seeming to have the match well in control at 228/4 in the

This is a step in the right direction. It's just about us believing more in our abilities. Anything is possible. **—Shimron Hetmyer**

40th over with Ben Stokes and Jos Buttler entrenched. Earlier, Cottrell had an immediate impact with the ball when he removed openers Jonny Bairstow and Jason Roy, man of the match in the first ODI, in his first two overs. He also accounted for England captain Eoin Morgan for a well-played 70, although it seemed at that stage the tourists' batting depth was more than enough to take them to the target.

For all of Cottrell's heroics, it was Holder who turned the match on its head with ten overs left. He had Stokes caught behind for a top score of 79 and then removed Butler in his next over. Earlier in the day, it was Hetmyer's impetuous aggression which gave the West Indies a measure of respectability to the final score. **AFP**

Scores: WI 289/6 (Hetmyer 104*, Gayle 50) beat Eng 263 (Stokes 79, Morgan 70, Cottrell 5-46) by 26 runs

ACTION TODAY

CRICKET: India vs Australia first T20I, 7 pm (Live on Stars Sports network)

BASKETBALL: NBA: Golden State vs Houston, 7 am (Live on Ten 1); **FOOTBALL:** EPL: Arsenal vs Southampton, United vs Liverpool, 7.30 pm (Live on SS Network); La Liga: Atletico vs Villarreal, 8.30 pm (Live on Ten 1); Serie A: Bologna vs Juventus, 7.30 pm; Parma vs Napoli, 10.30 pm; Fiorentina vs Inter, 1 am Monday (Live on Ten 2);

I-LEAGUE: Arrows vs Kashmir, 2 pm; Chennai vs Bagan, 5 pm (Live on SS Network); ISL: Pune vs Delhi, 7.30 pm (Live on SS Network)

SHOOTING: World Cup: 50m 3P men's final, 12.30 pm; 10m Pistol men's final, 2.30 pm; 25m Pistol women's final, 4 pm (Live on Ten 2)

TENNIS: ATP 500 Rio, final, 1 am Monday (Live on ESPN)

Zazai tears Ireland apart with 162* as Afghanistan post record T20I total

Dehradun: Hazratullah Zazai smashed the ball to every corner of the ground, and even out of the stadium, as Afghanistan racked up a world record T20I International score of 278/3 in a crushing demolition of Ireland on Saturday. The 20-year-old Zazai's unbeaten 162 off 62 balls included 16 sixes and 11 fours, delighting Afghan fans here on Saturday.

His haul of sixes was another record, as was his stand of 236 with fellow opener Usman Ghani and the 22 sixes scored in all by Afghanistan's players. Ireland captain Paul Stirling also hit a six off the first ball of his side's innings as they chased a mammoth 13.95 runs an over to keep up. But they ended on 194/6 and Afghanistan won by 84 runs to wrap up the three match series with a game to spare. "It was a pretty disappointing night," said Stirling. "We need to regroup now."



Hazratullah Zazai in action on Saturday

The night of cricket fireworks belonged to Afghanistan — who overtook Australia's 260-3 against Sri Lanka in 2016 — and Zazai, who plundered his giant innings off just 62 balls.

"I just wanted to play my natural game and today was my day," he said. "The wicket was good for batting."

After managing just seven runs from their first two overs, Zazai and Ghani flailed the Irish bowlers, who from then barely managed an over without conceding a six.

Zazai made his century off just 42 balls — the second quickest in T20 internationals — completed with the ninth six of his innings. Four of the sixes came off Kevin O'Brien in the 17th over which reaped 28 runs in all.

One giant hit off Shane Gelkate went over the stands and out of the ground. Zazai's stocks have risen dramatically despite missing a place in the Indian Premier League this season were dashed. **AFP**

Brief scores: Afghanistan 278/3 in 20 overs (H Zazai 162*, U Ghani 73; Rankin 1/35) beat Ireland 194/6 in 20 overs (Stirling 91, K O'Brien 37; Rashid Khan 4/25)

HIGHEST T20I INNINGS TOTALS

- 278/3: AFGHANISTAN vs Ire; Dehradun, 23rd Feb, 2019
- 263/3: AUSTRALIA vs SL; Pallekele, 6th Sept, 2016
- 260/5: INDIA vs SL; Indore, 22nd Dec, 2017

HIGHEST INDIVIDUAL T20I SCORES

- 172 Aaron Finch (Aus) vs Zimb; Harare, 3rd July, 2018
- 162* Hazratullah Zazai (Afg) vs Ire; Dehradun, 23rd Feb, 2019
- 156 Aaron Finch (Aus) vs Eng; Southampton, 29th Aug, 2013

MOST SIXES IN A T20I INNINGS:

- 16 Hazratullah Zazai (Afg) vs Ire; Dehradun, 23rd Feb, 2019
- 14 Aaron Finch (Aus) vs Eng; Southampton, 29th Aug, 2013
- 13 Richard Levi (S. Africa) vs NZ; Hamilton, 19th Feb, 2012

Sachin wants two points vs Pak, I want World Cup: Ganguly

Kolkata: Reacting to Sachin Tendulkar's comment that he would "hate" to see India concede two points to Pakistan by not playing them in the upcoming World Cup, former India captain Sourav Ganguly on Saturday said he would rather want the coveted crown and not worry about losing two points.

"He wants two points against Pakistan, I want the World Cup. Whichever way you look at it," Ganguly told reporters on Saturday.

Ganguly had called for severing all sporting ties with Pakistan like his former teammate Harbhajan Singh. India skipper Virat Kohli had said earlier in the day at Visakhapatnam — where India take on Australia in the first T20 — the team would abide by the government and the BCCI decision. "I think that's the only way forward. He doesn't control all these things and for him what he can control is the way they have played and the way they will play," Ganguly said. Ganguly said with the new format, it will be an interesting World Cup. "It will be a good World Cup. This is a different kind of World Cup. Ten teams and everybody will play everybody. It will be a competitive World Cup." **IANS**