

England, New Zealand to battle it out for the long-elusive crown

It promises to be a gripping contest between Williamson's bowlers and Morgan's big-hitters on the hallowed Lord's turf



Who'll lift it? Eoin Morgan and Kane Williamson will go all out to lay their hands on the coveted trophy. •COURTESY ICC



K.C. VIJAYA KUMAR
LONDON

England, cricket's birthplace, seeks its biggest moment under the sun very appropriately at a venue steeped in history. Lord's has its iconic red-brick pavilion and even the walls have gravitas and feature stunning lines, like the following one from W.G. Grace: "The great thing in hitting is, not to be half-hearted about it; but when you make up your mind to hit, to do it as if the whole match depended upon that particular stroke."

The 'home of cricket', as Lord's is referred in brochures, nameplates and its Twitter account, has its quirks ranging from a turf that gently slopes besides a ghastly

space-ship styled press box which doesn't blend with the prevailing aesthetics. There is irony too as one of its access points has a black and white picture of Sunil Gavaskar and this after the great opener was once barred entry at the Grace Gates by overzealous Marylebone Cricket Club stewards!

Advantage England
In this theatre, largely ancient in spirit with some modern influences, Eoin Morgan's men will take on New Zealand in the ICC World Cup final on Sunday. It is also heartening that in a nation where football reigns, this particular clash, marinated in overwhelming expectations, will be beamed live on free-to-air channels and the common man can savour it with his favourite beverage and some fish and chips at home.

This is an epic contest which is England's to lose. After a splendid start before a series of losses forced it into a 'win or perish' zone within the league phase, the host

THE FACE-OFF					
ENGLAND vs NEW ZEALAND					
LORD'S					
HEAD-TO-HEAD					
	Mat	ENG	NZ	Tied	NR
Overall	90	41	43	2	4
World Cup	9	4	5	0	0

LIVE ON STAR SPORTS 1, 2 & SELECT 1 (SD & HD), 3 P.M.

found a pulsating tail-wind and qualified for the semifinals where old foe Australia got hammered. The return of Jason Roy after he recovered from a hamstring injury, has turned out to be the x-factor and his pulverising bat found a mirror image in opening partner Jonny Bairstow.

Strong batting line-up
The relatively sedate Joe Root has hit the straps, Morgan found key runs against Australia and England bats deep as Ben Stokes and Jos Buttler are around to either rescue an innings or indulge in a biff. The bowling crew has its varied shades of pace and swing, be it through Jofra Archer or a

Chris Woakes and Adil Rashid is present in the spin-stakes.

In the opposite corner, New Zealand awaits with a chuckle. It is a pretty relaxed unit, aware of its strengths: dogged batting embellished through skipper Kane Williamson's authoritative blade, plus a fast attack led by left-armers Trent Boult and Matt Henry, while spinner Mitchell Santner does a holding job. This joust's fate primarily hinges on the battle between Williamson's bowlers and the home squad's fire-spewing willow wielders on a pitch with its tinge of green.

On match-eve here on Saturday, just before they trained, the Black Caps sat in

ROAD TO THE FINAL

ENGLAND

LEAGUE STAGE

- Beat South Africa by 104 runs, The Oval
- Lost to Pakistan by 14 runs, Trent Bridge
- Beat Bangladesh by 106 runs, The Oval
- Beat West Indies by 8 wickets, Southampton
- Beat Afghanistan by 150 runs, Old Trafford
- Lost to Sri Lanka by 20 runs, Headingley
- Lost to Australia by 64 runs, Lord's
- Beat India by 31 runs, Edgbaston
- Beat New Zealand by 119 runs, Chester-le-Street

SEMIFINAL
Beat Australia by 8 wickets, Edgbaston

NEW ZEALAND

LEAGUE STAGE

- Beat Sri Lanka by 10 wickets, Cardiff
- Beat Bangladesh by 2 wickets, The Oval
- Beat Afghanistan by 7 wickets, Taunton
- Match abandoned vs India, Trent Bridge
- Beat South Africa by 4 wickets, Edgbaston
- Beat West Indies by 5 runs, Old Trafford
- Lost to Pakistan by 6 wickets, Edgbaston
- Lost to Australia by 86 runs, Lord's
- Lost to England by 119 runs, Chester-le-Street

SEMIFINAL
Beat India by 18 runs, Old Trafford

LEADING RUN-SCORERS

Name	Runs	HS
Joe Root	549	107
Jonny Bairstow	496	111
Jason Roy	426	153

LEADING WICKET-TAKERS

Name	Wkts	BBI
Jofra Archer	19	3-27
Mark Wood	17	3-18
Chris Woakes	13	3-20

INDIA HAD LOST ONLY TO ENGLAND AND NEW ZEALAND, THE TWO TEAMS THAT ARE CONTESTING THE FINAL OF CWC2019

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths: A remarkably strong opening partnership of Bairstow and Roy that has yielded four century stands. A superb new-ball pair of Woakes and Archer. Wood's pace and Root's consistency

Weaknesses: No obvious ones. The only one perhaps is an over-reliance on the openers

Opportunities: Play out Boult and Henry and attack the other bowlers. With the ball, get rid of Williamson early

Threats: Boult and Henry. If they strike early, like they did against India, the situation could turn irredeemable, no matter how deep a team bats

Strengths: The fast-bowling trio of Boult, Henry and Ferguson. They have accounted for 48 wickets, with none of them going above five per over

Weaknesses: The batting. A total over-reliance on Williamson, who has scored 548 runs and is the only centurion

Opportunities: Get rid of England's

openers early. Go after Woakes and Archer, the way Pakistan did, to great effect. Force England to look for alternative plans – something the team is not good at

Threats: England's strong batting unit could put the game beyond the Kiwis if they fail to take early wickets

Morgan aware of challenges of a summit clash

New Zealand is an extremely tough side: England skipper



Ready for it: A relaxed Ben Stokes, Jonny Bairstow, Joe Root and Eoin Morgan, at a practice session on Saturday. •REUTERS

K.C. VIJAYA KUMAR
LONDON

Nasser Hussain stood behind the assembled correspondents, near the jostling bunch of television cameramen and listened. The former England captain, now a commentator and columnist, is acutely conscious that the World Cup has been an elusive holy grail for the Old Blighty since the championship was first played in 1975.

Perhaps, he wanted to gauge the mood in the home team's camp while history beckons and out at the high table, current skipper Eoin Morgan held centre-stage in the pre-final press conference at Lord's here on Saturday. It helps that Morgan has met Rudyard Kipling's twin impostors 'triumph and disaster', while duelling with New Zealand.

Miserable defeat
During the 2015 edition, England suffered a miserable

defeat against New Zealand at Wellington, with the former scoring a measly 123 and the latter getting those runs with Brendon McCullum leading the way. Cut to the current World Cup, England paid back with cumulative interest and thumped the Black Caps by 119 runs in the league game at Chester-le-Street.

But a summit clash is a different beast and Morgan is aware of the challenges. "It's a culmination of four years of hard work and it presents a huge opportunity to try and win a World Cup. We are going to enjoy the game and try and take in as much as we can, it's a World Cup final and we are not going to shy away from that."

Kiwi bowlers' threat
While exuding confidence, Morgan remained wary of the opposition. "New Zealand is an extremely tough side, with a lot of experience and skill." He then added:

"Through the tournament, the scores have been lower than they previously were and Lord's isn't a high-scoring ground so it (final) will be a bit of a battle. They (New Zealand bowlers) offer threats throughout with the ball."

Morgan, who is close to McCullum, revealed that he has learnt a lot from his Kiwi friend. "I think in 2015, the way New Zealand played, it is very similar to what they are playing now. They proved to everybody that you can perform at the highest level and get to the top by being yourselves and not trying to be somebody else."

And has he dreamt about lifting the World Cup? Morgan nodded in the negative and quipped: "I haven't allowed myself to think about lifting the trophy. "Cricket, and sport in particular, is very fickle. If you ever get ahead, it always seems to bite you in the backside."

WORLD CUP FINALS - A TIMELINE

 1975, Lord's: West Indies beat Australia by 17 runs	 1979, Lord's: West Indies beat England by 92 runs
 1983, Lord's: India beat West Indies by 43 runs	 1987, Kolkata: Australia beat England by seven runs
 1992, Melbourne: Pakistan beat England by 22 runs	 1996, Lahore: Sri Lanka beat Australia by seven wickets
 1999, Lord's: Australia beat Pakistan by eight wickets	 2003, Johannesburg: Australia beat India by 125 runs
 2007, Bridgetown, Barbados: Australia beat Sri Lanka by 53 runs (D-L method)	 2011, Mumbai: India beat Sri Lanka by six wickets
 2015, Melbourne: Australia beat New Zealand by seven wickets	

- **Most titles:** Australia 5
- **Highest total defended:** Australia 359 (2003); **Lowest total defended:** India 183 (1983)
- **Highest total chased:** India 277 (2011)
- **Most finals without title:** England 3 (1979, 1987, 1992)

'Anybody can beat anybody regardless of the breed of dog'

Williamson, however, concedes that England is favourite



Handling pressure: Ross Taylor, centre, will look to put his experience to good use in the final. •AFP

K.C. VIJAYA KUMAR
LONDON

Absorbing pressure and having a laugh about it seems second-nature to Kane Williamson. The New Zealand captain conceded that England is the favourite ahead of the World Cup final, during a press-conference at Lord's here on Saturday but in the same breath, insisted that anything could happen.

Witty and relaxed, he also made fun of the 'under-dog' tag bequeathed to New Zealand: "England rightly deserves to be the favourite. But whatever dog we are, it's just important that we focus on the cricket that we want to play and we have seen over the years that anybody can beat anybody regardless of the breed of dog."

Looking forward
When another correspondent queried whether New Zealand would love to be England's party-poopers at

Lord's, Williamson smiled and said: "Party-poopers? You talking about dogs again, hey? (smiling) under-dogs? Look, we are really looking forward to the occasion and when you go into any match, you have to deal with a number of different things, be it pressure or momentum."

England has relished its adrenaline-dripping starts unleashed by openers Jason Roy and Jonny Bairstow and Williamson admitted the threat but felt that there was no need to be overwhelmed. "Those two have been fantastic throughout this competition and prior as well."

"There is a huge amount of respect for the match-winners that England has, obviously the top of the order and throughout. But the focus for us is very much about the cricket that we want to play and we have seen throughout this compe-

titution that anybody can beat anybody."

Try to learn
Probed about how he deals with wins and losses, the visitor's skipper revealed his equanimity: "I prefer winning than losing. That is probably the best way to say it."

"Any experience is an opportunity to learn and sometimes tough experiences, being on the wrong side of results, can slap you in the face and give you a glaring lesson and if you ignore that, I don't think that is a positive thing, so treating both the outcomes with respect and trying to learn from them is the best part."

But is the pressure entirely on England? Williamson, impish smile in place, countered: "We are quite keen on winning as well. There are different bits of pressure on anybody, whether you are favourites or not."