

India seeks maiden spot in the final

After a string of superlative performances, Women in Blue meet England in last-four clash

T20 WORLD CUP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SYDNEY

Firm title-contender after a sensational unbeaten run in the group stage, India will have to ensure a solid all-round performance to defeat a formidable England in the semifinals of the ICC women's T20 World Cup here on Thursday.

India has been the best side so far and it is seeking a maiden final appearance in the showpiece's history.

India has come up with a string of superlative performances. It began with a win over defending champion Australia and since then has gathered strength with every match, beating Bangladesh, New Zealand and Sri Lanka to top Group A with eight points from four matches.

England's 100% record

The Indians are in red-hot form, but history favours England as it has won all the five matches played between the two sides in this tournament. The last time the two teams met in a T20 World Cup, England won by eight wickets in the semifinals in the West Indies. Before that, India lost in 2009, 2012, 2014 and 2016 editions – all in the group stage.

"After losing the last semifinal, we realised we have to work as a unit. We are not reliant on just one or two players," India captain Harmanpreet Kaur said.

Seven players of this Indian team played in that semifinal and they would be looking to turn the tables on England. India will also take confidence from the victory against England in the tri-series in Australia ahead of the World Cup.

Most of the Indians are in top form with teenage sensation Shafali Verma being the



Pumped up: The Indians will hope to take their good form into the semifinal against England. • AP

No reserve day: ICC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SYDNEY

The International Cricket Council (ICC) has turned down Cricket Australia's (CA) request to have a reserve day for the semifinals of the Women's T20 World Cup here on Thursday.

CA chief Kevin Roberts on Wednesday revealed

that the apex body declined the request under tournament rules.

"We've asked the question (on a reserve day)," Cricket Australia chief Kevin Roberts was quoted on the radio station SEN. "It's not part of the playing conditions and we respect that," he added.

leading batter with 161 runs from four innings. With an average of 40.25, the 16-year-old is the third highest run-getter in the tournament.

No. 3 Jemimah Rodrigues has made useful contribu-

tions, though she has not scored big so far, with 34 being her highest.

The middle order has also stepped up whenever needed, with Veda Krishnamurthy, Shikha Pandey and Rad-

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—HARMANPREET

ha Yadav making their presence felt. Harmanpreet and opener Smriti Mandhana – the two most experienced players – have, however, not lived up to the expectations and the semifinal could be their big comeback.

In bowling, leg-spinner Poonam Yadav is on top of the charts with nine wickets from four matches. She has been ably supported by Shikha Pandey (seven from four).

For England, which quali-

fied for the last four after finishing second in Group B with three wins and one loss, the strength has been its batting.

The teams (from): India: Harmanpreet Kaur (Capt.), Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Smriti Mandhana, Shikha Pandey, Poonam Yadav, Deepti Sharma, Veda Krishnamurthy, Taniya Bhatia (wk), Radha Yadav, Arundhati Reddy, Harleen Deol, Rajeshwari Gayakwad, Richa Ghosh and Pooja Vastrakar.

England: Heather Knight (Capt.), Tammy Beaumont, Katherine Brunt, Kate Cross, Freya Davies, Sophie Ecclestone, Georgia Elwiss, Sarah Glenn, Amy Jones (wk), Natalie Sciver, Anya Shrubsole, Mady Villiers, Fran Wilson, Lauren Winfield and Danni Wyatt.

Match Starts at 9:30 a.m. IST.

'Shafali has brought positivity'

When batting with her she's motivating you: Harmanpreet

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SYDNEY

Teenager Shafali Verma has not only lit up the ICC Women's T20 World Cup with her explosive batting but also added immense happiness and positivity to the Indian team off the field, feels captain Harmanpreet Kaur.

Ahead of Thursday's semifinal showdown against England at the Sydney Cricket Ground, her captain acknowledged what the fresh-faced 16-year-old has offered India behind the scenes.

"She's very naughty, gets so much happiness and positivity to the team, always wants to enjoy it," Harmanpreet said.

"When batting with her, she's motivating you and releasing the pressure, that kind of player you need in your team. Whoever is playing, wants to give their best, she's enjoying for the team."

Harmanpreet insisted that everyone is being handed out their roles to ensure



Harmanpreet. • GETTY IMAGES

Teenager heads T20I rankings

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SYDNEY

Shafali Verma on Wednesday rose to the top spot in the ICC women's T20 International rankings.

Shafali takes over from New Zealand's Suzie Bates, who had been the top batter since October 2018.

Poonam Yadav is up four places to eighth.

that the team continues to perform well.

"Right now, what we are trying to do is give individual roles so that everyone can come and perform for the team."

this team has been together for a long time, we learn a lot from each other, learn a lot of cricket. It makes it easier for players such as Shafali because when anybody enters the team, they see everyone is working together. They also feel nice and try to do what others are doing."

Harmanpreet insisted that everyone is being handed out their roles to ensure

Tackling Poonam will be the key: Knight

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SYDNEY

England captain Heather Knight feels tackling spinners, particularly the in-form Poonam Yadav, will be crucial to her side's chances of upstaging an unbeaten India in the semifinals of the Women's T20 World Cup here on Thursday.

"We've practised for her a lot, I thought we played her outstandingly in the last T20 World Cup and that was due to the preparation we had," Knight said.

"We don't have (assistant coach) Ali Maiden anymore, who bowled brilliant leg-spin, but we've got a few coaches who have bowled it brilliantly and we've been really clear on how we're going to do things against her."

Poonam's ability to de-



Ready for the challenge: Heather Knight feels Poonam is a threat for her team. • RYAN PIERSE/GETTY IMAGES

ceive on Australian pitches has forced Knight to take note ahead of their crunch match.

"She's a massive threat for them and is an improved bowler since the last World

Cup, so for us to be successful, we're going to have to play her and all their spinners well.

"That's going to be key in the game," the England skipper said.

No one does it better than the Kiwis

A smorgasbord of seamers ambushed India

S. DINAKAR
CHRISTCHURCH

Much like Carly Simon's chart-buster 'Nobody Does It Better' from the James Bond superhit, the Spy Who Loved Me, nobody pulls off a strategy better than New Zealand on the cricket field.

The seamers dismantled the 'strong' Indian batting. And here the New Zealand think-tank of skipper Kane Williamson and coach Gary Stead went back to an old Kiwi attribute – planning and execution.

Yes, nobody does it better!

Bowlers win matches and Williamson's smorgasbord of seamers, diverse with different strengths, ambushed India in conditions that assisted swing and on pitches that offered bounce and seam movement.

Sorting out Kohli

Just look at the manner New Zealand sorted out Virat Kohli in the series. They had seen videos of the Indian captain, knew he could be vulnerable to deliveries that move either way from the third or fourth stump, and plotted his downfall.

Kohli had run into problems against Southee in the past. So the experienced right-arter was employed against the Indian skipper and he ruthlessly exploited the chink by pitching the ball up and forcing Kohli to play the ball.

Kohli kept dragging his front foot across off-stump and succumbed to deliveries leaving him or darting in.

But the icing on the cake for the Kiwis was how they got Colin de Grandhomme, with his medium-paced swing, to scalp Kohli in the second innings at Christchurch.

The plan was the same but Kohli, aware of the Southee threat, might just have dropped his guard a tad against Grandhomme. But then the ball seamed in, and Kohli was gone.

The Kiwis bowled in partnerships. Cheteshwar Pujara



Chin music: On pitches favouring the pacers, the Indian batsmen like Hanuma Vihari were found wanting. • AP

has an issue with deliveries nipping back; his defence had been pierced in the past.

And Trent Boult, among the finest left-armers in the business, went round the wicket to swing the ball into him. Pujara, after his conquests in Australia, walked back a defeated man after Boult hooked him up in the second innings at the Hagley Oval.

The Jamieson factor

And the Kiwis, with cricketing nous, disrupted the footwork of the Indian batsmen. There was Kyle Jamieson, all of 6'8", pushing the batsmen on to the back-foot with his extra bounce.

And after getting the batsmen to travel back with his lift, Jamieson struck with his fuller length deliveries; the batsmen pegged back by bounce, were caught at the crease.

According to Kiwi sources, as soon as Jamieson troubled India in the ODI series with his line, lift and movement, a decision was made to play him in the eleven against India. His batting was a bonus. And Jamieson's four and five-wicket hauls in the Indian first innings at both Wellington and Christchurch opened the Tests for New Zealand. The breach had been made.

New Zealand's right and left-arm seamers were all

brilliant in a key aspect. Using the crease and creating the angles. And on the field, the brilliant Williamson had the angles covered.

Indeed, the combination of accurate bowling from both ends and flexible and quickly changing fields with aggressive intent – there were men in the cordon, at short-legs, and fielders for the miscued drives and hooks, created the pressure.

The Kiwi pacemen also psyched out the Indian batsmen with short-pitched bowling in the first Test.

The short stuff's key exponent Neil Wagner was missing in Wellington but Boult and Southee contained and struck with lifting deliveries from different angles. The Indian batsmen went into a shell.

So much so that the Indians decided to hook and pull everything thrown at them in the second Test where the surface was quicker than in Wellington.

They fell hook, line and sinker into the Kiwi trap. Though the shot fetched the Indians some runs, it let them down at critical moments of the game; Hanuma Vihari and Pujara, in the first, and Prithvi Shaw and Ajinkya Rahane, in the second, being key examples.

And Williamson might have been humming the Carly Simon song!

Joshi and Harvinder named selectors

The former, most-capped Test cricketer among the five, will chair the committee

AMOL KARHADKAR
RAJKOT

Former India left-arm spinner Sunil Joshi and his contemporary pacer Harvinder Singh emerged as dark horses in the race for the two vacant national selectors' posts. While Joshi, on the basis being the most-capped Test cricketer, will chair the five-member panel in place of M.S.K. Prasad, Harvinder comes in for Gagan Khoda.

Joshi and Harvinder's appointment was announced by the BCCI secretary Jay Shah in a statement after the Cricket Advisory Committee (CAC) interviewed five shortlisted candidates at the BCCI headquarters in Mumbai on Wednesday. The other candidates who appeared in person were L. Sivaramakrishnan, Venkatesh Prasad and Rajesh Chauhan.

First task

The rejigged selection panel's first task will be to pick India's squad for three ODIs at home against South Africa, starting March 12. *The Hindu* understands that the selection committee meeting is likely to be convened on March 6 (Friday).

N. SUDARSHAN
BENGALURU

The newly appointed chairman of the senior national cricket selection committee, Sunil Joshi, said that utmost in his list of priorities was to keep both the team management and committee members on the same page.

"I know there are a lot of challenges," he said. "I have to take up the job formally first, and see how best I can get the group along."

"I will do everything in my capacity to ensure that the team management and committee members are on



Bracing up: Sunil Joshi, Harvinder Singh and Rajesh Chauhan arrive for the interview in Mumbai. • PTI

CAC chief Madal Lal, former World Cup-winner and India coach, clarified that of the 40-plus candidates who had applied for the two posts, "we only considered those guys – one from South and one from Centre". This confirmed that the BCCI office-bearers, despite president Sourav Ganguly stating that the zonal policy will be discontinued, made a volte-face.

The BCCI statement also

confirmed that Joshi and Harvinder have been offered "one-year" contract which will be reviewed by CAC, while the other three survivors in the selection committee will be replaced "later this year" since their tenure is expiring in September.

Priority

According to Rudra Pratap Singh, Lal's colleague in CAC along with Sulakshana Naik, "Those who played Test

matches were given priority" while shortlisting candidates for the interview.

Besides his significant two-decade stint in domestic cricket for Karnataka, Joshi's 15 Test and 69 ODI caps are more than the combined number of his four colleagues in the panel – Harvinder (3 Tests, 16 ODIs), Jatin Paranjape (4 ODIs), Sarandeep Singh (3 Tests, 5 ODIs) and Devang Gandhi (4 Tests, 3 ODIs) have a tally of 10 Tests and 28 ODIs together.

While Lal stressed that neither president nor secretary interfered in the selection process, it is understood that Joshi emerged favourite once the BCCI office-bearers were a divided lot on the other two candidates from South Zone and Harvinder pipped Chauhan following a recommendation of a former influential BCCI office-bearer.

Have to see how best I can get them along: Joshi

the same page for the betterment of Indian cricket."

The former left-arm spinner from Karnataka, who in the last two years has had stints with Bangladesh and the United States as spin bowling consultant, thanked CAC members for reposing faith in him.

'Honour'

"I feel it an honour and privilege to serve our beloved country again."

"I thank CAC members Madan Lal, R.P. Singh and Sulakshana Naik for choosing me as the chairman of selectors," said Joshi.

Ngidi, Malan star for SA

AUSTRALIA IN SA

REUTERS
BLOEMFONTEIN

Opener Janneman Malan struck a sparkling unbeaten century to guide South Africa to a six-wicket win over Australia in the second ODI here on Wednesday which sealed 2-0 victory in the three-match series.

Australia, which chose to bat, was all out for 271 as Lungi Ngidi completed career-best figures of six for 58. Malan anchored the South African reply, taming his usual swashbuckling style to score 129 not out off 139 balls and led the home side to victory with nine



Lungi Ngidi. • AFP

balls to spare.

The scores: Australia 271 in 50 overs (A. Finch 69, D. Short 69, M. Marsh 36, D. Warner 35, L. Ngidi 6/58) lost to South Africa 274/4 in 48.3 overs (J. Malan 129 n.o., H. Klaasen 51, J. Smuts 41, D. Miller 37 n.o.).

West Indies beats Sri Lanka

REUTERS
KANDY

West Indies all-rounder Kieron Pollard (34, 15b) became the first player to play 500 T20 matches and only the second player to amass 10,000 runs in the format during the 25-run win over Sri Lanka in on Wednesday.

Skipper Pollard, who had 9,966 career runs across both international and franchise cricket prior to this game, joined compatriot Chris Gayle (13,296 runs) in the 10,000 runs club.

West Indies scored 196 for four in its allotted 20 overs while Sri Lanka was bundled out for 171, with fast bowler Oshane Thomas picking up five wickets to give the visitor a 1-0 lead in the two-match series.

The scores:

West Indies 196/4 in 20 overs (L. Simmons 67 n.o., A. Russell 35, K. Pollard 34, B. King 33) bt Sri Lanka 171 in 19.1 overs (K. Perera 66, W. Hasaranga 44, Thomas 5/28).

Rutuja, Ankita win it for India

FED CUP

SPORTS BUREAU
DUBAI

Rutuja Bhosale and Ankita Raina helped India take a 2-0 lead over Uzbekistan in the second league match of the Fed Cup Asia-Oceania group-1 women's tennis tournament on Wednesday.

Rutuja fought her way past Akgul Amanmuradova 2-6, 6-2, 7-5 in the first rubber, and Ankita overwhelmed Sabina Sharipova 7-5, 6-1 in the second rubber, after having trailed 3-5 in the first set.

China beat Indonesia 3-0, while Chinese Taipei beat Korea 2-1.

The results (league): India leads Uzbekistan 2-0 (Rutuja Bhosale bt Akgul Amanmuradova 2-6, 6-2, 7-5; Ankita Raina bt Sabina Sharipova 7-5, 6-1).