

Washout propels India into summit clash

Leaves England dejected; Women in Blue will be up against defending champion Australia



Gloomy sight: All rain and no play — not the ideal way to decide a semifinal — but the Indians weren't complaining. • IICC



Contrasting moods: For Knight and Harmanpreet, it must have meant agony and relief respectively. • GETTY IMAGES

T20 WORLD CUP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SYDNEY

An unbeaten run in the group stage propelled India into its maiden Women's T20 World Cup final after its last-four clash against England was washed out here on Thursday. India will take on holder Australia — which defeated South Africa by five runs in another rain-hit semifinal — in the final on Sunday which happens to be International Women's Day.

Persistent rain

Persistent rain since morning delayed the toss and eventually the semifinal was called off without a ball being bowled, leaving England

players in tears. "Really frustrating. Not how we wanted the World Cup to finish for us. No reserve day, no chance of getting play, and ultimately that loss against South Africa cost us," a dejected England captain Heather Knight said.

Harmanpreet Kaur also agreed that the semifinals should have had a reserve day, a request which was made by host Cricket Australia but turned down by the ICC. "Unfortunately we didn't get a game, but there are rules and we have to follow it. Having reserve days in the future will be a great idea," said Harmanpreet.

Paying the price

Knight said her team paid the price for not starting the

tournament well. "It's all very English isn't it?," talking about the weather and getting knocked out. "It felt that we gained a bit of momentum in the last few games and we were pumped up for the semifinals," she added.

England had ended runner-up in the previous edition. India had topped Group A with four victories in as many matches while England had finished second in Group B with three wins and a defeat.

"From day one, we knew we have to win all the games because in case the semis don't happen, that would be hard for us. In that sense, credit to the team for winning all the games," said Harmanpreet. "Everybody is looking in great touch — Sha-

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HEATHER KNIGHT
England captain

fali (Verma) and Smriti (Mandhana). They are giving us good starts, and that helps. Me and Smriti are trying to spend more time in the nets," she added reflecting on her and Smriti's so far indifferent form.

"We are looking more positive now. Unfortunately we haven't come up with big innings, but our teammates are, and at the end of the day it's a team game."

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HARMANPREET KAUR
India captain

In the earlier seven editions, India had never reached the final but this time, they have emerged as serious title contender after a string of superlative performances.

The final

March 8 (Sunday),
India vs Australia,
Melbourne, 12.30 p.m. (IST)

Sixth straight final for Australia

South Africa falls short by five runs under DLS method

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SYDNEY

Four-time champion Australia used its rich big-match experience to surpass a spirited South Africa by five runs in a rain-hit semifinal here on Thursday, setting up a title clash against first-timer India. This is Australia's sixth successive final out of the seven editions held so far.

There were fears that the second semifinal between Australia and South Africa at the SCG too will be washed out like the India and England match earlier in the day. But the weather improved just enough to get a game albeit a curtailed one.

Leading from the front

Australia skipper Meg Lanning led from the front with unbeaten 49 off as many balls to take her team to 134 for five in 20 overs. Rain re-

turned during the innings break and South Africa was set a revised target of 98 runs in 13 overs as per the DLS method.

South Africa ended at 92 for five despite a fighting 41 not out off 27 balls from Laura Wolvaardt.

South Africa was reeling at 24 for three before Wolvaardt and Sune Luus (21) brought their team back in the game with a quickfire 47-run stand. Wolvaardt, who smashed three sixes and two fours, had too much to do on her own.

Host Australia, which did not have the services of injured star allrounder Elyse Perry, was ecstatic after Jess Jonassen was able to defend 19 runs in the final over with South Africa getting only 13.

"It was extremely tense. Even in the last couple of balls it just wasn't safe. They

needed 19 off the last over and we knew we had to nail it. But that's T20 cricket for you," said skipper Lanning.

Class side

On the final against India, "India are a class side, they have been playing excellent cricket. We are going to have to play really well. We have been improving each day, it hasn't been an easy road," she said.

South Africa skipper Dane van Niekerk said her team tried its best. "... we have to give credit to Australia for the way they bowled and we just came six short."

The scores: Australia 134/5 in 20 overs (Meg Lanning 49 n.o., Beth Mooney 28, Nadine de Klerk 3/19) bt South Africa 92/5 in 13 overs (Laura Wolvaardt 41 n.o., Megan Schutt 2/17). **Revised target:** 98 in 13 overs under DLS method.



Ecstatic:The Aussies' joy knew no bounds after they emerged on the right side of a tight finish in the semifinal against South Africa. • IICC

Kohli congratulates women's team

Former players also applaud the side for making the T20 World Cup final

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

India's men's team skipper Virat Kohli congratulated the Harmanpreet Kaur-led women's side for reaching its maiden final of the T20 World Cup in Australia, saying the outfit's performance is something to be "proud" of.

The Indian women's team advanced to the summit clash owing to a superior group stage record, after the semifinal clash against England was abandoned without a ball being bowled at the Sydney Cricket Ground due to persistent rain.

"Congratulations to the Indian Women's team on qualifying for the



Kohli says he is proud of the Indian women's team. • REUTERS

@T20WorldCup final. We are proud of you girls and wish you all the luck for the finals," Kohli tweeted.

Former India opener Virender Sehwag also took to Twitter to wish the Indian side luck for the final which

is scheduled to be played in Melbourne on Sunday.

"...A reward for winning all the matches in the group stage. Congratulations @BCCIWomen and wishing you glory this Sunday #T20WorldCup," Sehwag said.

Former India Test specialist V.V.S. Laxman hailed the side for its unbeaten record in the tournament so far.

"Would have been great to see the match, but many congratulations to @BCCI-Women for making it to the finals of the #T20WorldCup. A reward for winning 4 out of 4 in the group stages. Wishing the girls the very best for the finals on #WomensDay"

Go out and give your best: Tendulkar

Says women's team has inspired so many youngsters



Driving home: Sachin Tendulkar has advised the women's team members not to take any pressure. • PTI

SHAYAN ACHARYA
MUMBAI

As the Indian women's cricket team gears up for its maiden T20 World Cup final, it has a piece of advice from Sachin Tendulkar — stay in the moment and be positive.

"Go out and give your best — that is what my message to them [is]. Don't take any pressure, though it is easier said than done.

"I genuinely want to tell them that just stay together, you don't need to spend time with outside world. If you are in the company of each other, keep talking positive things because good things have happened to our team," Tendulkar said.

"I have been following

their performances and they have inspired so many youngsters... It is about bringing laurels to our nation and you can come back (with the trophy). So many athletes in different fields have brought laurels to our nation, this would be another one. Go and enjoy yourself..." he said.

The former India captain was in Australia recently, when he met some of the players — including Shafali Verma. Reminiscing that meeting, Tendulkar said: "Coincidentally, I was there next to the trophy, and few members were there from our women's team. I said it would be nice to see you with this trophy in India."

India decides to keep out Nagal

Prajnesh, Ramkumar for singles; Bopanna to partner Leander

DAVIS CUP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Indian team sprang a surprise by keeping its No. 1 player Sumit Nagal out of action, at least for the opening day, of the Davis Cup World Group qualifier to be played on indoor hard courts in Zagreb.

In the opening rubber, the 132nd-ranked Prajnesh Gunneswaran will play the 277th-ranked Borna Gojo. That match will be followed by the 182nd-ranked Ramkumar Ramanathan against the former World No. 3 Marin Cilic, who had helped Croatia win the trophy in 2018.

On the same page

"It is our strategy for the tie, and in the best interests of the team. The team is on the same page. It is not about individuals," said Rohit Rajpal, captain of the Indian team, after the draw.

India will field Rohan Bopanna and Leander Paes in doubles against the pair of Franko Skugor and Mate Pavic.

It may be recalled that the 46-year-old Leander had won three matches in India's shock victory over Croatia in 1995, when he outlasted Goran Ivanisevic in five sets. That has been the only meeting between the two teams in Davis Cup.

"It's a big honour to represent the country, and a

big responsibility. I am looking forward to playing with Rohan. We have had some good wins," said Leander.

Bopanna said playing Davis Cup always meant "playing with a big heart, and playing to win." He added that he was looking forward to playing his friends on the professional tour.

Full of confidence

Ramkumar, who was happy to get an opportunity, said he was confident of delivering the best.

"I am really happy and excited. The conditions are good for me," he said.

The 127th-ranked Nagal may have been kept out, but could play in the tie, if needed, as there is a provision to

replace the players.

The matches will be played on a best-of-three format.

Live on Dsport

The tie between India and Croatia will be telecast live by Dsport from 7.30 p.m. IST on Friday.

The second day's play on Saturday, featuring the doubles and followed by two singles, will be also start at 7.30 p.m.

The draw: **March 6:** Borna Gojo vs Prajnesh Gunneswaran; Marin Cilic vs Ramkumar Ramanathan. **March 7:** Mate Pavic & Franko Skugor vs Rohan Bopanna & Leander Paes; Marin Cilic vs Prajnesh Gunneswaran; Borna Gojo vs Ramkumar Ramanathan.



Battlelines drawn: Ramkumar and Cilic will match wits on the opening day. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Sania-Ankita combo powers India past Korea

FED CUP

SPORTS BUREAU
DUBAI

Sania Mirza stepped on court to help India beat Korea 2-1 in the third league match of the Fed Cup Asia-Oceania group-I tennis tournament on Thursday.

It was India's second win. After the loss against top seed China in the first match, it had defeated Uzbekistan 3-0.

India will meet Chinese Taipei on Friday, and Indonesia on the final day. The top two from the six-team league will qualify.

Former World No. 1 in doubles and six-time Grand Slam champion, Sania combined well with Ankita Raina to script a win for India.

Sania, who had made her Fed Cup debut in 2003, last played in the team competition in 2016. Sania, who has a 13-5 record in singles, improved her doubles record to 12-5 after this win.

Earlier, Ankita had lost the second singles rather tamely. She was unusually subdued and could win only four games against Han Na-Lae.

Rutuja gives 1-0 lead

Rutuja Bhosale had given the Indians a bright start, battling past Jang Su-Jeong 7-5, 6-4.

The results (league): India bt Korea 2-1 (Rutuja Bhosale bt Jang Su-Jeong 7-5, 6-4; Ankita Raina lost to Han Na-Lae 4-6, 0-6; Sania Mirza & Ankita Raina bt Han Na-Lae & Kim Na Ri 6-4, 6-4).

Ashish in quarterfinals

BOXING

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AMMAN (JORDAN)

Ashish Kumar (75kg) sailed into the quarterfinals of the continental Olympic Qualifiers for boxing with a thumping win over fourth seed Kyrgyz Omurbek Bekzhigit Uulu in the last-16 stage on Thursday.

Ashish won 5-0 to set up a clash with Indonesia's Maikhel Roberrd Muskita, who

defeated New Zealand's Ryan Scaife in his pre-quarterfinal bout.

Making the semifinals would assure Ashish of his maiden spot in the Olympics this year.

Up against a spunky rival, who he defeated in the Asian quarterfinals last year, Ashish played the waiting game to perfection.

Ashish's powerful and precise right hand served him well in the final three minutes.

Bindra backs shooters to do well at Tokyo Olympics

Says they have to rise to the challenges

SHAYAN ACHARYA
MUMBAI

It's that time of the year when India's top athletes usually train abroad, to get into the groove ahead of the Olympics. But With the spread of coronavirus

wreaking havoc on the athletes' preparations for the Tokyo Games, Abhinav Bindra, India's only Olympic gold medalist in shooting, makes it clear that they need to deal with such situations.

"Performing at the highest level in sports require adaptability. Coronavirus or no, they are going to the Olympics. When they go to the Olympics, some dynamics will change.

"This is a situation which is new for everybody and they need to adapt to it and

try and prepare to the best of their abilities. Then wait and watch how things pan out," Bindra said at the launch of Boria Majumdar and Nalin Mehta's book, Dreams of a Billion.

International Olympic Committee (IOC) chief, Thomas Bach, had earlier encouraged athletes to continue their preparations at 'full steam'. And Bindra is of a similar opinion.

"The Games are being prepared to be on scheduled as the IOC chief said yesterday. The best experts are monitoring the situation, there will be a time when there will be clarity. No point in speculating on whether Games will be postponed," Bindra said.

He is also confident of In-

dians faring well in Tokyo. "The current lot of athletes are young and fearless. I think that's a very happy space to be in," said Bindra, revealing that some of them do seek his advice.

"I don't even tell them what to do. What I can tell them is my experiences, things that I did wrong, things that I learnt. At the end of the day, they have to find their way.

They just can't follow me and copy what I did. If they have to succeed, they have to find their path," Bindra said.

"I am very open if they seek my opinion. I will not actively try to put something into their minds. But if I am asked, I am more than happy to share my experiences."



Icons: Bindra, Tendulkar and Bhanupathi during the book launch of *Dreams of a Billion*. • AADESH CHOUDHARY