

COVERSTORY

MATCHES TO
LOOK OUT FOR

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In any other year, February 14 would see an explosion of faux-love bought forward by a corporation driven marketing culture. This year though, true love takes precedence – the cricket World Cup kicks-off Down Under.

For the first time since 1992, when coloured clothing was still seen as a passing fad and T20 was just a bad dream to be had in the midst of the deepest REM sleep, the World Cup returns to its southernmost extremity.

With wanton political strikes threatening to overcome Bangladesh, the one positive to be drawn from this is that if you are one of the lucky few to be afforded 'work from home' you can spend your time fairly effectively working in front of the TV since the Trans-Tasmanian location means that games are generally going to be held in the mornings.

The World Cup comes around once every four years so you might as well tune into as many games as you can, but that said there are still a number of real highlights on show.

Australia v England. 14 Feb 9.30am

The World Cup kicks off its first day with its most ancient and storied rivalry hosted in perhaps its most iconic location. In the late nineties and the early noughties, the Aussies had a vice-like grip over the World Cup. They will be looking to reassert that with Michael Clarke, Shane Watson and master blasters Glenn Maxwell and David Warner looking to make an impression. But a home game on opening day against a tricky English side fuelled by James Anderson could prove a potential banana skin.

India v Pakistan. 15 Feb 9.30am

On to day two and things only keep getting better. The defending World Champions are back on show and even though they have actively promised that they #wontgiveitback, they will soon realise that holding on to glitzy trophies is much harder than imagined.

A first match against arch-rivals Pakistan will be the perfect game to light the torch

paper for the World Cup. India have perhaps the best team in the world, but Pakistan's seemingly ceaseless talent pool and given the favourable conditions Down Under, it might be a clever time to bet on a first ever World Cup loss for the holders to their arch-rivals. Hartal or no hartal, expect many sick call-ins that Sunday.

Afghanistan v Bangladesh. 18 Feb 9.30am

The last time the World Cup was held Down Under, Bangladeshis cheered on their adopted teams. This time, though we are participants, front and centre and holding onto hope of qualifying even for the second phase, it won't be easy, despite having the world's best all-rounder in the side. Shakib has been playing the Big Bash League and that should help his acclimatisation. But the acid test will be a first game against Afghanistan which could set the tone for the whole tournament. Win and a country hopes,

lose and 160 million people hope even more.

South Africa v West Indies. 27 Feb 9.30am

It's hard to remember a World Cup in which South Africa were not favourites. It's also hard to remember a World Cup in which West Indies were not exciting, unfulfilled or otherwise. Hence, a clash of cricket's two polar opposite teams presents us with a potential humdinger, especially if recent events are something to go by. All you need to know is that this is the game that pits AB De Villiers against Chris Gayle. It should really be required watching.

By Quazi Zulquarnain Islam

Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed

Model: Dipto, Sakib, Rabbi, Raihan, Sohan, Hritika, Arin

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