

5 facts

Australia have won 13 of their last 15 ODIs against England played in Australia

Australia have lost their last two World Cup matches, after winning 32 of their preceding 33 (one tie). They have not lost three consecutive World Cup games since 1979 (last two games of 1975 tournament and first of 1979)

A win for England on Saturday would be their 50th in ODIs against Australia. They have lost 76 and tied two so far

Australia have won nine of their last 11 ODIs at Melbourne. England have lost eight of their last 11 against Australia at the venue

Brad Haddin needs four runs to become the 18th player to score 3,000 ODI runs for Australia



PHOTO: AFP



'We need to perform for the people'

SPORTS REPORTER

Following their disappointing defeat to Ireland, the Bangladesh team reached Canberra yesterday, where they will be taking on Afghanistan at the Manuka Oval on Wednesday. The match is expected to be played in front of a full-house and it will be something that the Tigers will be used to going by the reception that they generally get at home.

Despite the series of defeats, opener Anamul Haque, who spoke to the Sydney Morning Herald yesterday, believed that the Tigers could turn their fortunes around.

"Losing is always disappointing, but we hope that we learn something from every game. The first game against Afghanistan is very important and we're excited there is going to be a big crowd."

"The World Cup is very important because the people of Bangladesh are crazy about cricket. When we win, everyone is very happy and laughing, and when we lose, people are crying and disappointed, so we need to perform for the people," said Anamul.

Anamul, who top-scored in the Under-19 World Cup in Australia back in 2012, hoped that his previous experience would help him contribute.

"Expectation is quite big. We need to be performing at the right place. We have Shakib Al Hasan, we have Tamim Iqbal, so we have good experience for our team. We need to show that the Bangladesh team can play at the next World Cup. It's very important for our country to show what we can do," he said.

Bangladesh and Afghanistan are in Pool A along with Australia, England, New Zealand, Scotland and Sri Lanka.

PREVIEW: AUSTRALIA V ENGLAND

Old enemies renew rivalry to kick-start the show

BISHWAJIT ROY From Melbourne

It looked like a lonely place. The veteran guides were roaming with the visiting groups, as though it was just another day, to show the fine points of MCG -- the iconic Melbourne Cricket Ground. There was not any special buzz; rather the routine work around the venue continued as per schedule.

Unlike Bangladesh's training sessions, where a host of journalists wait out till they get the opportunity to speak to the players, there wasn't much fuss regarding Australia and England's sessions. The press meets ahead of one of the biggest matches of the ICC World Cup were not as crowded as one would anticipate.

The environment did not complement the fact that the game's oldest rivals were about to go neck and neck on the first day of the mega event. But then again this is Friday's story. On Saturday, things are expected to be completely different.

The world will feel the beat of the sports-loving nation today as the big bowl, which will also host the final on



March 29, is expected to become a human sea with about 90,000 spectators.

Plenty of predictions have been made, analysts punched in their numbers; the last few months have been dominated with talks regarding the strategies that the different stars would use; and now it's time to put all that in the middle.

Given the intense emotions that come to the fore when these teams meet, it comes as no surprise that the opening

attendance has the chance of breaking the previous record. The MCG saw a record crowd last summer as 92,112 piled into the ground on Boxing Day to witness the same opponents take the field. The best-attended match during the 1992 World Cup was the final between England and Pakistan, which drew a crowd of 87,789.

It was a factor also dominated the pre-match press conference yesterday. The Barmy Army will no doubt be in the stands to cheer the English cricketers, but James Anderson still expects his side to receive a wild welcome in the stadium today; a prospect which got Australia skipper George Bailey excited.

"I certainly feel like we've been ready cricket-wise for a long time. So I think it's just the anticipation and excitement. Obviously there has been a lot of talk about a big crowd, big tournament, and a big clash to kick it off. The boys are just very, very excited about," was what Bailey said when asked as to how it would feel to play in front of 90,000 people.

SEE PAGE S-4 COL 1

heated with Anderson during the first Ashes Test at the Gabba in 2013.

The ICC slapped Clarke with a Level 1 code of conduct charge after he was overheard on stump microphones telling Anderson to "Get ready for a broken fucking arm" when the England number 11 was batting.

Warner was twice fined by the ICC for verbal clashes with India during the recent Test and one-day series and in an incident which created headlines he punched England batsman Joe Root in a nightclub before the 2013 Ashes series in England.

SEE PAGE S-4 COL 8

'Here for playing, not for sledging'

AFP, Melbourne

Wily paceman James Anderson says England have no intention of provoking a sledging war with Australian firebrand David Warner in Saturday's high-profile World Cup opener.

Anderson, who has a reputation of getting under the skin of Australian players, played a straight bat to questions over whether or not he would be targeting Warner during the tournament opener at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Warner is skating on thin ice with his disciplinary transgressions this season with the International Cricket Council (ICC) warning of a crackdown on aggressive sledging during the World Cup.

Anderson said there were no England plans to trigger more disciplinary problems for the explosive Warner.

"Having played against him [Warner] in the past, I don't think he needs too much encouragement," Anderson told reporters on Friday.

"We're going out there to concentrate on what we do, we're going to try to be aggressive with the ball up front all the way through the innings and try and take wickets.

"Our main job is to get them out, not to rile them up, so we'll be concentrating on that."

Anderson has a history of disciplinary trouble and last year was cleared of a serious misconduct charge following an incident with India's Ravindra Jadeja in the Trent Bridge pavilion, thus avoiding a possible four-game ban.

Australia Test captain Michael Clarke lost 20 percent of his match fee after tensions became



Australia coach Darren Lehmann (L) and stand-in captain George Bailey try to ease the World Cup nerves by sharing a light moment at the Melbourne Cricket Ground during their practice session yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

THIRD EYE

Can Mash make the difference?

NAIMUL KARIM

Make no mistake. The Tigers are a nervous bunch right now. Having lost all their warm-ups nobody knows how they are going to turn up against the Afghans next Friday. This is how they probably felt in 2014 when they lost 12 consecutive ODIs.

So low was their confidence back in the day that they failed to kill matches that were handed to them on a platter. That terrible run spoilt the ICC World Twenty20 for the Tigers.

A competition which was supposed to help take Bangladesh to the next level ended up nothing short of a disaster.

While that was almost a year ago, one can't help but raise the issue yet again. Will the four warm-up defeats, especially the disappointing loss to Ireland, lead to a similar World Cup for the Tigers?

With the Afghans and Scots notching wins and pumping in 300-plus scores in their warm-up games, there are many who are feeling the chills down the spine. However, if one were to look closely at this Bangladesh setup and compare it to the side that went through the torrid time in 2014, it would reveal a difference. And that difference is in the form of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza.

While Mashrafe, the last post-match press conference, reflected how much control he had over the team.

In the case of Mashrafe, the last post-match press conference showed exactly how different his approach was. After Bangladesh lost to Ireland, Mashrafe questioned the players' commitment in the practice matches and even warned them in a delicate manner. If he was so upfront with the media, one can only imagine the conversations in the dressing room.

In a tactfully handled press conference, Mashrafe pointed to the root of the problem and in a way displayed his aggression; and for Bangladesh to make a turnaround, one would hope that his message gets across to the players fine.

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