

SPORT



India skipper Virat Kohli (L) will be sure to throw everything in his arsenal to get a victory in the title-holders' Champions Trophy opener against archrivals Pakistan, while his counterpart Sarfaraz Ahmed will be hoping to handle whatever may come his way today.

PHOTOS: REUTERS/AFP

Infighting India face 'calm' Pakistan

AFP, Birmingham

Title-holders India will look to put an off-field row behind them when they face archrivals Pakistan in their Champions Trophy opener at Edgbaston on Sunday. The build-up to what is arguably cricket's most anticipated fixture has been dominated by reports of a falling out between India captain Virat Kohli and coach Anil Kumble. There were fears India may not even get the chance to defend the title they won at Edgbaston four years by beating hosts England in a thrilling final reduced by rain to 20 overs per side, after the BCCI hinted at a boycott of the 50-over tournament as a result of a revenue-sharing dispute with the International Cricket Council (ICC). The India captain leads a powerful batting line-up, backed up by a bowling attack which is set to include seamers Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Mohammad Shami as well as the spin duo of Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja. But Pakistan are not without hope and boast proven performers in the likes of skipper Sarfaraz Ahmed, as well as a big-hitting rookie in Faheem Ashraf. "We have nothing to lose, we just want to play our natural game," Sarfaraz said last week. We are very hopeful of playing well in this tournament and we want to win it. Yet for all that players on both sides have tried to label Sunday's clash as "just another game", the fact is someone always has something to lose in an India-Pakistan match, a

fixture that commands the attention of billions round the world let alone in the two cricket crazy sub-continent. India have never lost a 50-over World Cup or Twenty20 showdown against Pakistan, and a win on Sunday would put them in good stead in a tough group also including Sri Lanka and South Africa. But Pakistan have won two of their three Champions Trophy show-downs against India. Pakistan coach Mickey Arthur insisted his side were "completely calm" ahead of the opener. Arthur, after seeing Pakistan train Saturday, told reporters at Edgbaston: "They have topped their skills up, and they're ready for a big game. Our changing room was completely calm. It's amazing. It's the outside noise that there is. "Within the dressing room, it is unbelievably calm, unbelievably focused and very, very excited for the challenge that presents itself tomorrow [Sunday]." Arthur, appointed Pakistan coach in May last year, added: "When we started this, the players would go and hit balls and hit balls and wouldn't really know when to stop. "Today, we were short, we were sharp. People got exactly what they wanted out of

the training nets. They're ready for a big game. Our changing room was completely calm. It's amazing." Pakistan, captained by Sarfaraz Ahmed, one of the world's leading wicket-keeper/batsmen, have plenty of variety in their attack. Arthur was convinced that would be key to their chances against a powerful India top order. "I think the team that's going to win this competition is the team that can strike," he said. "Gone are the days of just containing through the middle, gone are the days of just soaking up pressure. "You've got to be able to take wickets. We always say you pick an attack to take wickets, and that's what we're trying to do tomorrow [Sunday]. If you look, we've got a left-arm swinger [Mohammad Amir], could have left-arm pace [Wahab Riaz]. We've got the swing and hustle and end swing of Hasan [Ali]. "We've got a left-arm spinner [Imad Wasim]. We could have a leg-spinner [Azhar Ali]. We've got an off-spinner [Shoaib Malik]." "We've got everything at our disposal tomorrow to allow Saf (Sarfaraz) to pull the strings to make sure we can try to bowl India

out, because that's got to be priority number one. We can't just sit back and let them score. We've got to attack them and we've got to look to bowl them out." Meanwhile, India captain Virat Kohli was adamant he had "no problems" with coach Anil Kumble. "There have been a lot of speculations and a lot of things being written by people without actually being a part of the changing room, which is very strange," he said. "There are no problems whatsoever. If something is put in place as a process, I don't see why people are creating so many speculations about it. It's been followed last time as well, and I didn't see any issues being created last time. It's the same process. "It's just happening after 12 months. And there are no issues whatsoever. The team is totally focused on the Champions Trophy." The star batsman insisted: "I don't even want to know anything of this sort. In a tournament that is in focus so much, and it's such a big stage, a lot of people like to find a lot of rumours flying around, especially before the start of the tournament. "They're doing their job, they're trying to create a nice livelihood. That's all we can say. We're focused on our livelihood, which is on the field and that's all that we're going to focus on." Meanwhile Pakistan's Mickey Arthur compared the relationship between a coach and captain to that of a marriage. "We don't know what's going on," Pakistan coach Arthur, also speaking at Edgbaston, told reporters. That's India's problem, to be honest."



Title race going down to the wire

Doleshwar post massive 97-run win over MSC

SPORTS REPORTER

Prudent batting from Shahriar Nafees and Marshall Ayub was ably supported by the bowlers as Prime Doleshwar SC registered a glittering 97-run win over Mohammedan SC yesterday to ensure the Premier Division League title would be settled at BKSP in the last Super League round tomorrow. Doleshwar improved their tally to 22 points to draw level with Abahani, whose dream was shattered by Gazi Group Cricketers in the last round, while Gazi Group remain on top with 24 points. Doleshwar will first need to beat Gazi Group in tomorrow's last match and also finish with a superior run-rate than their opponents to clinch the title. In the current scenario, Gazi have a net run rate of 0.687 and Doleshwar 0.532, so it may be enough for Doleshwar to win the match only. In yesterday's crucial match, Doleshwar made a cautious start as they reached 29 runs in 10.4 overs when they lost their first wicket of Jaker Ali. The experienced Shahriar Nafees then anchored the innings, sharing 79 for the second wicket with Imtiaz Hossain, who scored 48. The former then added a further 51 runs with in-form Marshall, who hit his third consecutive half-century as Doleshwar posted a

fighting total of 264 for six in 50 overs. Left-handed Nafees hit 70 off 103 balls, smashing six boundaries, while Marshall's 50 came off 60 balls. Rajat Bhatia (37 off 32) and Forhad Reza (20 off 12) were the other notable contributors in helping their team cross the 250-mark. In reply, Mohammedan made a disastrous start as they were reduced to 24 for 2 in the fifth over before Shamsur Rahman and Bipul Sharma contributed 69 for the third wicket. Bipul scored a team-high 48 off 47 balls with five fours and two sixes and it was his dismissal which triggered a slide in their innings. Mohammedan collapsed to 103 for six from 93 for two and they never quite recovered thereafter, being bowled out for 167 in 34.5 overs as Sajedul Islam's 31-run knock ultimately had little impact. Off-spinner Sharifullah took three for 32 in seven overs, while Forhad, Delwar Hossain and Rahatul Ferdous took two wickets each.

SCORES IN BRIEF

PRIME DOLESHWAR: 264-6 in 50 overs (Nafees 70, Marshall 50, Imtiaz 48; Sajedul 2-35)
MOHAMMEDAN: 167-10 in 34.5 overs (Bipul 48, Sajedul 31, Shamsur 26; Sharif Ullah 3-32, Rahatul 2-21, Delwar 2-23)
Result: Prime Doleshwar Sporting Club won by 97 runs.
Player-of-the-match: Shahriar Nafees.



South Africa batsman Hashim Amla became the fastest to 25 ODI centuries, reaching the landmark in his 151st match, during their Champions Trophy Group B encounter against Sri Lanka at The Oval yesterday. Amla's ton powered the Proteas to a 96 runs win.

PHOTOS: REUTERS

'Not worried about bowling'

SPORTS REPORTER



Many reasons were identified after Bangladesh's massive eight-wicket defeat against hosts England in the opening match of the ICC Champions Trophy at The Oval despite posting 305 runs. The Tigers also slipped to number seven in the ICC ODI rankings after the defeat, but some of the most discussed issues were Bangladesh falling a few runs short, and lacking one bowler after they opted to play with eight batsmen. The bowling especially came under scrutiny as the Tigers failed to defend a 300-plus total against Pakistan in the second warm-up match and then again versus England. Was the failure to defend those big totals a worrying factor ahead of Bangladesh's must win group game against Australia tomorrow? Batsman Sabbir Rahman exuded confidence while he was talking to reporters yesterday. After a day's break following their defeat in the first match, the Tigers returned to business at the Fulham Football Club Foundation ground ahead of their vital clash against Australia. "We are not worried at all because we have been playing good cricket since the New Zealand tour. It's true that we could not defend 300 runs, but England also played good cricket and took the home advantage and even picked out the good balls for boundaries," said a confident Sabbir. "We are ready for the second game and we are not looking back at what happened in the first game. Our batsmen are in good form, so we are confident we can continue it," he continued. He apparently conveyed the teams' sentiment regarding the criticism of playing with eight batsmen. "It was not a problem that we played with eight batsmen and there is also no point in making changes to the combination. You have to think both ways. We batted first but if we needed to chase 350-plus then we had a need for eight batsmen, that's it," he defended. Sabbir was also not bothered about his batting position after he was demoted from the number three position in the order. "I always prefer the team's desire and always want to contribute for my team. To me it's not a problem where I will bat because I can adjust to any position," he said. He added that he was always ready to contribute with the ball and that was why he does a lot of bowling practice.



Bangladesh's ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan (L) looks intently at Soumya Sarkar's bat, perhaps wondering how to get back into his batting rhythm and, to some extent, his bowling rhythm as well.

PHOTO: CBC

SA-SL SCOREBOARD

SOUTH AFRICA		R/B	45/65		
Amla run out	103/115	5/2			
de Kock c Dickwella b Pradeep	23/42	2/0			
du Plessis c Chandimal b Pradeep	75/70	6/0			
de Villiers c Kapugedera b Prasanna	4/4	0/0			
Miller c Prasanna b Lakmal	18/22	1/1			
Duminy not out	38/20	5/1			
Morris run out	20/19	3/0			
Parnell not out	7/8	0/0			
Extras: (lb-1, w-10)	11				
Total: (For six wickets in 50 overs) 299					
Did not bat: Rabada, Morkel, Tahir.					
Fall of wickets: 1-44, 2-189, 3-194, 4-226, 5-232, 6-277					
Bowler		O	M	R	W
Malinga	10	0	57	0	
Lakmal	10	0	51	1	
Pradeep	10	0	54	2	
Gunaratne	10	0	64	0	
Prasanna	10	0	72	1	
SRI LANKA		R/B	45/65		
Dickwella c Parnell b Morkel	41/33	5/1			
Tharanga c Miller b Tahir	57/69	6/0			
Mendis c de Villiers b Morris	11/10	2/0			
Chandimal run out	12/21	1/0			
Kapugedera lbw b Tahir	0/1	0/0			
Perera not out	44/66	5/0			
Gunaratne c Parnell b Tahir	4/13	0/0			
Prasanna lbw b Morris	13/20	0/1			
Lakmal run out	0/3	0/0			
Malinga b Rabada	1/2	0/0			
Pradeep c Duminy b Tahir	5/12	1/0			
Extras: (lb-6, w-8, nb-1)	15				
Total: (all out in 41.3 overs)					
Fall of wickets: 1-69, 2-94, 3-116, 4-117, 5-146, 6-155, 7-191, 8-191, 9-192, 10-203					
Bowler		O	M	R	W
Rabada	8	1	46	1	
Parnell	10	0	54	0	
Morkel	6	0	31	1	
Morris	7	0	32	2	
Tahir	8.3	0	27	4	
Duminy	2	0	7	0	
Result: South Africa won by 96 runs					