



West Indies fans were in high spirits in Nottingham ahead of their World Cup opener against Pakistan at Trent Bridge yesterday, dressing up in colourful ensembles to cheer on their team. Their presence worked wonders, inspiring the Calypso Kings to a dominant seven-wicket win. PHOTO: AFP

INFO ZONE

HEAD TO HEAD IN WORLD CUP

AFGHANISTAN	AUSTRALIA
0	1
1	0
0	0
0	0

HEAD TO HEAD IN ODIS

AFGHANISTAN	AUSTRALIA
0	2
2	0
0	0
0	0

LAST MEETING
March 4 2015 at W.A.C.A. Ground in Perth. Australia won by 275 runs.

KEY PLAYERS



AFGHANISTAN	AUSTRALIA
Rashid Khan	David Warner
22.80/15.33	Bat Avg 43.43/-
101.26/23.5	Bat Strike Rate 96.55/-
4	50s 17
0	100s 14
60"	HS 179
798/125	Runs 4343/0
0, 0/31	Last Match 15

Smith, Warner hungry as Australia launch campaign against Afghanistan

Steve Smith and David Warner will seek redemption on the biggest stage as they re-launch their one-day international careers for Australia against Afghanistan at the World Cup on Saturday.

The star batsmen were both banned for a year for their roles in a ball-tampering scandal but they have found form on their return to the international set-up.

Warner was the top run-getter in the recent Indian Premier League while Smith struck a hundred in a warm-up victory against England last weekend.

The defending champions have endured a tumultuous past year but the Aaron Finch-led side are peaking at the right time and are considered one of the favourites in the 50-over showpiece event. After edging out hosts India 3-2

in a five-match ODI series in March, Australia welcomed back Smith and Warner with open arms. But they are not expected to be given an easy ride by English fans, with former captain Smith being booed and called a "cheat" during the England warm-up game.

Former Australian paceman Brett Lee expects the pair to make big contributions but has warned they might need thick skin playing in front of the English crowds.

"I don't think they have got a point to prove, they will just be happy to be back playing for Australia," said Lee, who won the tournament with Australia in 2003.

"They have been welcomed back to the team with open arms, and I reckon they have a shot at winning.

"You have got the Barmy Army, you have got guys like Kevin Pietersen

chirping at me already. They are going to cop some sledging, but you need thick skin," he added.

Australia also boast a potent pace attack led by Pat Cummins and

Mitchell Starc, ably supported by Jason Behrendorff, Nathan Coulter-Nile and Kane Richardson.

Spinners Adam Zampa and Nathan Lyon lend variety to the bowling that combined to get the better of England and Sri Lanka in warm-up games.

The five-time champions will start as overwhelming favourites in Bristol against an Afghanistan side only playing their second 50-over World Cup.

Afghanistan's rise from associate-nation status to cricket's elite has been nothing short of a fairytale.

The minnows witnessed a captaincy change two months before the start of the World Cup, with little-known

Gulbadin Naib named leader of the ODI side in place of Asghar Afghan, a move that did not go down well with some senior members of the team.

But the team have now settled to focus on their World Cup campaign.

"Gulbadin has said he'll make use of

Asghar's experience (at the World Cup). They are a united front now," said chief selector Dawlat Khan Ahmadzai.

"Changes do happen, like Sri Lanka did with their captaincy."

Star spinner Rashid Khan carries the team's hopes with his ability to run through opposition batting -- he tops the world Twenty20 bowling rankings and lies third in the 50-over standings.

Afghanistan, who beat Pakistan in a World Cup warm-up match, are setting their sights high.

"There was no Rashid or Mujeeb (ur Rahman) in 2015 so this time we are aiming for a semi-final berth. With the team composition we have, we can definitely surprise a few teams," said Ahmadzai.

"We have identified teams we can beat but obviously I can't tell you which teams."



MR EFFICIENT

When the oil is lite, LIFE IS A DELIGHT

A deadly Oshane Thomas spelled doom for an unsettled Pakistan when he scalped the wicket of Baber Azam in the 14th over to see Sarfaraz Ahmed and his troops reeling on 62 for four. The right-arm quick then ripped through the remainder of Pakistan's line up and picked up three more wickets to finish with figures of four for 27 in 5.4 overs.

INFO ZONE

HEAD TO HEAD IN WORLD CUP

NEW ZEALAND	SRI LANKA
4	4
6	6
0	0
0	0

HEAD TO HEAD IN ODIS

NEW ZEALAND	SRI LANKA
48	48
41	41
1	1
8	8

LAST MEETING
January 8 2019 at Saxton Oval in Nelson. New Zealand won by 115 runs.

KEY PLAYERS



NEW ZEALAND	SRI LANKA
Ross Taylor	Thisara Perera
48.34/-	Bat Avg 20.44/31.25
83.37/-	Bat Strike Rate 112.29/31.9
47	50s 10
20	100s 1
181"	HS 140
8026/-	Runs 2147/170
69	Last Match 0, 1/46

New Zealand begin World Cup charge against Sri Lanka

New Zealand are happy to go under the radar as they prepare to launch their campaign for World Cup glory against Sri Lanka in Cardiff on Saturday.

The Black Caps reached the final four years ago for the first time after six semifinal defeats, only to be soundly beaten by Australia in Melbourne.

Kane Williamson has replaced the swashbuckling Brendon McCullum as captain but the core of the team that came so close in 2015 remains.

Since the last World Cup, New Zealand have risen as high as second in the world rankings but have also been beaten at home by South Africa, England and India.

New Zealand beat fancied India in their opening World Cup warm-up game before going down to the West Indies.

Former Kiwi paceman James Franklin is confident Williamson's side can claim their first World Cup trophy.

"New Zealand are in a sweet spot. No one's talking about us too much," he said at the opening party of the 12th edition of the 50-over tournament. "We're forever the underdogs and that suits us quite well.... If we can get some form going over the next few weeks, there's no reason why New Zealand couldn't go on and win the World Cup."

Taylor has been in breathtaking form in recent years in the one-day game, averaging over 60 in ODIs in



2017 and more than 90 last year. Williamson, ranked 12th, and Martin Guptill, ranked 10th, are the other main dangers in the New Zealand batting line-up. Meanwhile, Trent Boult leads an impressive bowling attack, with Colin de Grandhomme and Tim Southee for company. Spinners Ish Sodhi and Mitchell Santner offer useful variety.

The Kiwis start clear favourites in their opener against 1996 winners Sri Lanka, a side that has slumped to ninth in the ODI rankings.

Newly appointed captain Dimuth Karunaratne, who has returned to the ODI fold after four years away, has been handed the responsibility of lifting a team that have lost eight of their past nine ODIs.

But Sri Lanka have an impressive World Cup record, with one title, two

runners-up finishes and one semi-final appearance.

"Sri Lanka always find a way to do well in World Cups," said former captain Mahela Jayawardene. "Yes, there have been some different changes to the set-up. The captain himself hasn't played one-day cricket for a while but he's a wonderful player."

"They are trying to bring a bit more stability into the group. You still have some exciting talent -- Angelo Mathews, Kusal Perera, Kusal Mendis. There are matchwinners in that unit."

"Four/five wins can get you a semi-final berth and Sri Lanka would be looking at that option and try and execute each game at a time. I still feel they have got a very good chance."

'I expect Proteas to bounce back'

THE EXPERT OPINION

|| FROM JACQUES KALLIS ||

It was never going to be easy playing England in the first game but I've seen nothing to change my mind that South Africa can go deep in this tournament.

They will be hard on themselves when they look back on the game, there were too many soft dismissals, but there was nothing wrong that cannot be rectified.

This format allows you to make a slower start, it's a long tournament and playing everyone evens things out. Having three games in six days has pros and cons -- with the Dale Steyn injury they'd have probably wanted a bit more space. But it also gives them the chance to establish some early momentum. When you've lost, you want to get straight back out there as soon as possible and it's great they've got Bangladesh on Sunday.

Get a win there and they will go into the match with India with their confidence up and then they've got a good few days to recover.

They didn't let England have it all their own way. It was obviously a massive toss to win and throwing the spinner the ball was the perfect start.

This England side doesn't fold easily and after Jonny Bairstow went, they never panicked, dug in and played some really good cricket.

Obviously, Ben Stokes's catch will get the headlines and rightly so, it was absolutely magnificent, one that will certainly live long in the memory.

I thought Faf du Plessis made some really good bowling choices and the variations they bowled were pretty good, I think England would have considered themselves 20 short in a perfect world, which is a positive for us.

England have won here but the pressure of being favourites will only increase with every match. They are a pretty fearless team but it will be interesting to see if they carry on playing the way they have been with that freedom, especially as the tournament gets more tense.

