



Hathurusingha vows to stay on

AFP, Colombo

Chandika Hathurusingha insisted Monday he would remain Sri Lanka's cricket coach despite pressure to step down after their World Cup exit, but official sources said a shake-up was planned.

Sri Lanka started the tournament as outsiders and finished sixth of the nine teams, registering one of their three wins against the world's top-ranked one-day international side, hosts England.

Local media reported that Sri Lanka sports minister Harin Fernando was unhappy with Hathurusingha's performance and that he would be asked to step down.

But Hathurusingha told reporters on landing back in Colombo that though he had expected better from the team, he would still see out his contract as coach.

"I have another 16 months," Hathurusingha said. "I hope to remain until my contract runs out." Asked if accepted responsibility for Sri Lanka failing to qualify for the semi-finals, Hathurusingha said the entire team management should share the blame.

"All of us must accept responsibility for what happened. I think we expected better performance... We have to think. We must learn from this and move forward. I think I have done to the best of my ability." A top cricket official said the board expected to carry out a major overhaul of the coaching department within three months.

"We are looking at a three-month period to complete the changes," said the official, who asked not to be named. He said contracts of fielding coach Steve Rixon, batting coach Jon Lewis and fast bowling coach Rumesh Ratnayake will be allowed to lapse and will not be renewed.

Sri Lanka lost four and won three matches at the World Cup, with two abandoned due to rain.

"If the head coach refuses to step down, we can't force him out, but we can appoint another above him," Fernando was quoted as saying in the mass-circulation Lankadeepa daily.

The Sri Lanka cricket was in crisis when Hathurusingha was appointed in December 2017 after a successful three-year spell in charge of Bangladesh, during which he presided over Test wins against England and Australia.

Sri Lanka at the time had just been hammered in Tests by India, and had played poorly in ODIs.

Numbers behind the success

And then there were four. The ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2019 group stage has exposed 10 nations to every possible pressure, examining every nook and cranny of their method in the 50-over format. India, Australia, England and New Zealand have ridden the wave and reached the final four on the strength of clear plans and outstanding individuals. With the semi-finals looming, we look at the numbers behind their success and areas of weaknesses that could prove their undoing in the knockout stages.

INDIA

Outstanding seamers

Spin has been outshone at this World Cup. No team's aggregate spinners have taken wickets at better than 40 runs apiece.

Afghanistan took the most, with 27 wickets at 41.59, but they finished bottom of the standings after the round-robin stage. It has been left to seamers to pick up the slack.

India have led the way in this regard. Led by Jasprit Bumrah, their quicks have snaffled 51 wickets at 23.50, the best average of any team.

Solid starting strategy

Virat Kohli's side have lost only four wickets in the entire competition in the first 10 overs, showing an unstinting commitment to reducing risk.

India's run rate of 4.65 in the first Powerplay was well below the tournament average of 4.93, scoring 28 against England and 32 against South Africa.

Keeping their cool and with record-breaking Rohit Sharma to the fore, Indian wicketkeepers have cost 93 runs on average, leaving Sharma and Kohli to wreak havoc at the end of the innings.

Tail too long

That said, when teams can dislodge their top three, India continue to find it difficult to score quickly in the death overs.

Since the 2015 World Cup, none of the 10 teams' tail-enders – taken as numbers eight to 11 – have scored slower than India, whose

collective run-rate stands at 4.71 an over.

Lower-order batsmen scored at a strike rate of 120 or higher 28 times in the group stage – only Hardik Pandya's 46 against West Indies was that swift.

AUSTRALIA

Openers vital

A fascinating factor over the course of the league stage was the influence held by the success of opening partnerships – or the lack of it.

Australia averaged 55 for their first wicket, with wins over England, Pakistan and Bangladesh buttressed by the dovetailing of Aaron Finch and David Warner.

Across the group stage, losing teams only had three opening partnerships of more than 50 in total, whereas winning teams had 12 century stands and 10 more over 50.

With Australia's batting line-up set to be rejigged after the loss of Usman Khawaja to injury, separating Finch and Warner early will be high on England's agenda on Thursday.

The Big Show

In Glenn Maxwell, Australia boast by far the quickest starter to an innings at the 2019 World Cup.

The 30-year-old struck at 195.45 in the first 15 balls of his innings in the group stage – only Pandya comes close – with Sri Lanka and Bangladesh bearing the brunt.

Indeed only Jos Buttler had a lower dot ball percentage (27.84%) than Maxwell,

who scored from two-thirds of the deliveries he faced.

England's middle-overs bowling has been mixed so the work of Maxwell and Alex Carey, who has broken out with three half-centuries, takes on even greater significance in the semi-final.

Lack bowling depth

Australia's all-rounders have underperformed with the ball, meaning they haven't quite added up as a bowling unit yet at this World Cup.

Maxwell has bowled 32 overs without taking a wicket and while Marcus Stoinis has taken seven victims, his overall economy rate comes in at a shade over a run-a-ball.

This has forced the likes of Finch and Steve Smith to turn their arm over and piled pressure on Jason Behrendorff, four of whose ten ODI appearances have come at this tournament.

It's a sore spot that will have England's powerful middle-order salivating.

ENGLAND

A force first up

Put simply, no-one does it quite like England with the bat in the Powerplay.

They averaged 54.22 for the first wicket in the group stage but crucially scored at 5.43 runs an over, faster than every team other than Sri Lanka, who shed wickets early on.

Jonny Bairstow and Jason Roy hold the key as the highest averaging ODI opening pair of

all time to have batted more than 20 times together.

They keep on coming

It's not just in the early stages that England throw caution to the wind – they only have eyes for the boundary throughout the 50 overs.

Only West Indies (10.7%) had a higher boundary rate in overs 11-40 than the hosts in the group stage, who hit 10.3% of balls they faced in that crucial period for four or six.

And with their tail scoring at a higher run-rate than any team in the world since the last World Cup – 6.19 an over – they are an irresistible force with the bat in the right conditions.

Brittle with the ball

Cutting edge with the ball is the main area in which England lag slightly behind the other three contenders to lift the World Cup.

They bowled more overs than any other semi-finalist and their strike-rate of 35.2 was dwarfed by India's 33.3, New Zealand's 33.8 and Australia's 33.9.

And chasing totals has been a chink in the armour of Eoin Morgan's men at this tournament – having won 17 consecutive run chases at home, they fell short three times in the group stage.

NEW ZEALAND

Williamson picks up the slack

The Black Caps have failed where others have succeeded with the bat early on, losing 13 wickets in the Powerplay at just 23.38 each –

the worst in the competition.

With Colin Munro and Henry Nicholls misfiring, the onus has been on Kane Williamson to provide top-order impetus.

He's stepped up to the plate with 481 runs – but this has formed 28.73% of New Zealand's total haul, suggesting an unhealthy dependence.

Mean in the middle

Williamson's side have refused to let teams get away from them in the middle-overs, doing a superb containing job with the ball in that phase.

Between overs 11 and 40, Kiwi bowlers were the most economical of all, conceding just 4.74 runs per over, and had the best bowling average by far, taking wickets at 28.63 apiece.

Colin De Grandhomme has proven tough to get away and Lockie Ferguson's pace

packs a punch, so India's customary gradual acceleration might be stunted at Old Trafford.

Spin falling flat

Spin has struggled throughout but with only seven wickets in the group stage, New Zealand's twirlers were the most impotent of any semi-finalist.

Mitchell Santner bowled particularly well against Pakistan in helpful conditions but has been too consumed with stopping the flow of runs to pose a true wicket-taking threat.

And with playing spin second nature to India, Williamson will have to manage his bowlers carefully in Tuesday's crunch contest.

Is toss weighing too heavy on World Cup semifinalists?

AFP, Manchester

The World Cup semifinals might be loaded with star power, but the battle for places in the final could turn on a crucial toss of a coin before the action has even started.

There were just a handful of successful run chases in the World Cup group stage, a trend that suggested winning the toss and batting first will be potentially decisive in the semifinals.

India and New Zealand will put that theory to the test when they meet in the first semifinal at Old Trafford on Tuesday, followed by hosts England facing holders Australia in Birmingham on Thursday.

All eyes will be on the coin flip after a group stage notable for teams failing to chase targets in excess of 260 on all but two occasions.

Most infamously, Pakistan captain Sarfraz Ahmed was slammed for ignoring Prime Minister Imran Khan's advice to bat first after winning the toss against arch rivals India.



India skipper Virat Kohli, whose team chased down 265 in their last group game against Sri Lanka at Headingly on Saturday, said handling pressure is key to batting second.

Four teams, including New Zealand, have won toss at Old Trafford and gone on to win

the game, but Kiwi coach Gary Stead does not read too much into the stats.

"I think again that's part of being at the World Cup and being a high-scoring ground, runs on the board can count for that as well," said Stead.

"We were in a cliff-hanger here ourselves (against the West Indies, who lost by five runs) and that could have gone either way. It doesn't concern me, I think it's a good surface out there."

England, with their powerful batting line-up, have scored over 300 in six of their nine outings – five of which have come batting first.

England had lost to Australia at Lord's in the group stage after failing to chase down the holders' total of 285-7.

But coach Trevor Bayliss is confident the hosts will not be afraid to chase a total.

"Over the past four years we have won 14 of the last 17 times we have batted second," he told the BBC. "So batting second doesn't scare our guys."

Root remains calm amid 'spicy' Australia talk

AFP, Birmingham

Joe Root is determined the "spicy" nature of England's latest clash with Australia won't be a distraction when the arch rivals meet for a place in the World Cup final.

Australia's Nathan Lyon insisted it's England's World Cup to lose". But Root told reporters at Edgbaston on Monday: "Nathan has a lot to say, a lot of the time, so you just take it with a pinch of salt."

"It might be a way of taking pressure off himself and his team. I try not to get too involved to be honest. I think there have been times within games when it has got a bit spicy and there have been a few exchanges on the field."

"But generally we will go about things in our own way and just get ourselves ready as best we can," added Root, who was involved in an infamous altercation with Australia's David Warner in a Birmingham bar during the 2013 Champions Trophy.



"There has been a lot made of the fear factor of playing against Australia, but I think this group of players over the last four years, their experiences against Australia are very positive," said Root. "It's a great chance and a great week, it does feel special."