

## Kohli, Williamson look to make history

AGENCIES



India and New Zealand face off in the inaugural World Test Championship (WTC) final at Southampton starting today, with a host of modern-day cricket's best red-ball players on show. The match could have a profound influence on cricket globally.

New Zealand are looking to shed the bridesmaids tag in big finals, having finished runners-up at the last two 50-overs World Cups. They were particularly unlucky in 2019 when England won the title via a now-scraped boundary-count rule after the final ended in a tie even after a Super Over. The WTC final presents them with another opportunity.

On the other hand, India are yet to win an ICC trophy under skipper Virat Kohli.

India captain Kohli and New Zealand counterpart Kane Williamson are also two of the finest batsmen of their generation. Both skippers have scored more than 7,000 Test runs apiece, with each averaging over fifty -- the mark of enduring excellence.

Kohli has the better record in England, however, having made two Test hundreds during a 2018 series.

The duo presents a fascinating contrast in styles with Williamson's serene demeanour at the crease and understated leadership seemingly ideally suited to New Zealand's needs.

Meanwhile, Kohli's aggression

### HOW THEY QUALIFIED

The top nine Test teams were originally scheduled to play six series each over two years, with the top two making the showcase final. But after the Covid-19 pandemic halted the game last year, the governing International Cricket Council decided to rank teams based on percentage of points (PCT) earned from completed matches, instead of total points, to determine the finalists. India



topped the WTC standings with 72.2 PCT after collecting 520 points. New Zealand were second at 70 PCT with 420, pipping England, who collected more points (442) but had a lower PCT (61.4).

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WINNER: \$1.6 MILLION  
RUNNER-UP: \$800,000



and demanding desire for personal excellence has improved both India's overall fitness levels and helped instil in his side a will to win every bit as fierce as his own.

Williamson's men won out when the teams last met in a showpiece ICC event in England by coming through a tense 2019 World Cup semi-final at Old

Trafford.

And while both sides have shown they can win without their skippers, India triumphing in Australia without Kohli earlier this year, and New Zealand completing a series win over England last week in Williamson's absence, the two captains could yet have a major influence on the final.

Both teams have exceptional attacks, although New Zealand should have an edge in match fitness after all their leading quick got game time during their recent 1-0 win in a two-match series away to England.

All of India's likely bowlers in the final are in the top 20 of the ICC rankings, off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin leading the way at number two while Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammad Shami and Ishant Sharma form a pace trio who can all move the ball off a good length.

But in Tim Southee and Trent Boult, New Zealand have a proven new-ball combination with Boult's left-arm angle an all the more useful variation when allied to his late swing. Such are their resources that Matt Henry, who took six wickets at Edgbaston, could miss the showcase match should both Southee and the towering Kyle Jamieson return.

India would appear to have the edged when it comes to spin, although New Zealand left-arter Ajaz Patel will be keen to impress against the country of his birth after edging Mitchell Santner out of the squad following an encouraging display against England at Edgbaston.

## 'I like Bangladeshi culture'

ANISUR RAHMAN



"I like Shuvo Noboborsho [Bengali New Year]. I think it is unique and special the way it is celebrated all over country," Nigeria-born footballer Eleta Kingsley said as he was reacting to receiving his Bangladesh passport on Wednesday.

After coming to Bangladesh in 2011 and marrying Liza Jafar in 2012 just one-and-a-half months into their relationship, Kingsley has time and again praised the friendly nature of Bangladeshis.

There may be many reasons for him to choose to live away from Nigeria, but it is his love for Bengali culture, especially Bengali New Year, that has carved out a special place in his heart.

"To me, the celebration of Noboborsha looks like Eid day. Every country has some special culture in Asia and I like Bangladeshi culture," Kingsley told The Daily Star yesterday.

Upon receiving the Bangladeshi passport from the president of Bashundhara Kings, Kingsley however ecstatic as his long wait was finally over and now he can go ahead with his dream of playing football for Kings and the Bangladesh national team.

Kingsley was awarded Bangladeshi citizenship in March and since then has been waiting to be eligible for domestic competitions as a local player. Now he has fulfilled the basic criteria and can play domestic competitions as the first naturalised Bangladeshi citizen.

"I feel very, very good and happy after receiving the Bangladeshi passport. I celebrated this moment with my family members," he said, adding: "I can't wait to represent the Bashundhara Kings. I have been with them for a long time and I'm very excited to come back."

Kingsley's availability has also led many to believe that the goal-scoring problem in the national team can be solved if he is called up.

"Of course, I want to represent Bangladesh at international level. I can't tell you that I'm very confident because the

national team have a lot of good players, who are playing in top clubs. I respect every player playing for the national team. We all have to fight together to make it a team. We can do more than we can individually and make a difference," said Kingsley.

"The most important thing is the formation you want to play. I think it is very important for the national team. If we all put it together, the problem would be solved," said a confident Kingsley, who became the most valuable player of the inaugural Sheikh Kamal International Club tournament in Chattogram after scoring five goals.

Although Kingsley is now eligible for domestic competitions, he still needs to clear some formalities to play international matches either for the club or the Bangladesh national football team.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

### EURO 2020 HIGHLIGHTS

## 'Manuel played a great match'

REUTERS

Manuel Locatelli timed his run into the Italy team almost as well as he timed his run for the Azzurri's opening goal against Switzerland on Wednesday.

The midfielder swept a volleyed pass out to the right wing to Domenico Berardi, before racing half the length of the pitch to get on the end of his Sassuolo team mate's cross and fire home.

Locatelli followed that up with a superb left-footed strike from the edge of the box in the second half to top off a night in which he announced himself to a global audience.

"Two goals for a midfielder are not easy at all and not a given," Roberto Mancini said. "Manuel played a great match. His action in the first goal was great." Of all the talented youngsters in Mancini's side, Locatelli has benefited most from Euro 2020 being postponed by a year.

The midfielder earned his first Italy cap in September last year, after the tournament was originally scheduled to take place.

He soon became a central part of Mancini's plans as his international form matched the progression he was showing under Roberto De Zerbi for his club.

Since his debut, in a 1-0 Nations League win over the Netherlands, Locatelli has featured in 11 of Italy's 13 games.

"The pandemic helped me a bit, then with work and determination I got here," Locatelli said after the game.

Major tournaments tend to throw up unexpected heroes and Locatelli has already achieved that status with his brace against the Swiss that helped Italy to become the first side into the last-16 of Euro 2020.

His emotional reaction after the opener even earned comparisons with Marco Tardelli's iconic 1982 World Cup final celebration.

It was unexpected mostly because Locatelli is not known for his goalscoring prowess, and this was the first brace of his career.

Locatelli, who won the 'star of the match' award, has now given Mancini a selection conundrum.



Italy's Manuel Locatelli celebrates after scoring their second goal during a 3-0 victory over Switzerland at the Stadio Olimpico on Wednesday. Italy became the first side into the last-16 of the European Championship. PHOTO: REUTERS

## No Shakib, Tamim in Super League

SPORTS REPORTER



On a good day, the lofted shot Shakib Al Hasan played as he looked to go over mid-off would easily have cleared

the fielder. But he tried to force the issue on the first delivery of the over and his innings ended rather tamely as he found the fielder following a return from a three-match suspension in Mohammedan's match against Gazi Group.

That summed up Shakib's form this season in the Dhaka Premier Division T20 Cricket League as he tried, often strenuously, to find his form with the bat. The ace all-rounder's tournament came to an end as he will not feature in the Super League phase, having been granted permission by Mohammedan to not play any further part for the remainder of the league.

"He has been granted leave on humanitarian grounds and will not play the Super League phase," Mohammedan cricket committee chairman Masud Uz Zaman informed The Daily Star.

The long sequence of bio-bubbles has not been easy, along



Mohammedan's Shakib Al Hasan, who returned to Bangabandhu Dhaka Premier Division T20 League yesterday after serving three-match ban, is seen in pleading gesture right after Gazi Group's Mahedi Hasan hit him for a six in Mirpur. Shakib, however, did bowl Mahedi out in the next delivery. Gazi won by seven wickets (D/L method). PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

with the separation from newly-born child and family. Shakib is expected to leave the country in the wee hours of Friday morning for USA and, according to BCB sources, will likely join the national team in Zimbabwe on the 29th.

The first phase of the Bangabandhu Dhaka Premier

68. Prime Bank overtook the target in 9.1 overs with Rony Talukdar's 18-ball 39 to top the table with 18 points.

Prime Bank's Tamim Iqbal too will not play any further part in the tournament due to leg pain and would like to be fit ahead of the Zimbabwe assignment.

"I felt severe pain in my leg in the last few games. I need to be in far better shape to be fit to play international games," Tamim said.

Jaker Ali's 52 and Sabbir Rahman's 35 took Legends of Rugganj to 162 for five, but Mohammad Naim's unbeaten 19-ball 39 helped Abahani to a five-wicket win in the afternoon match at Mirpur as they secured second spot.

All three matches at BKSP were cancelled owing to rain but the match between Brothers Union and Sheikh Jamal would stand out for the former's skipper Mizanur Rahman's 65-ball 100, laced with 13 fours and three sixes -- the first ton in this season's DPL. Prime Doleshwar, Mohammedan, Sheikh Jamal and Gazi make up the other spots in the top six while Rugganj, OLD DOHS and Partex Sporting will play the relegation league.

## Ukraine boost knockout hopes

REUTERS, BUCHAREST

Andriy Yarmolenko grabbed a goal and an assist as Ukraine edged out North Macedonia 2-1 on Thursday to boost their chances of reaching the European Championship knockout stages, leaving their opponents' hopes hanging by a thread.

Yarmolenko put Ukraine ahead from a corner in the 29th minute and then Ukraine's captain helped double the lead five minutes later. Ezgjan Alioski dragged North Macedonia back into the match from a 57th-minute penalty after Karavaev fouled Goran Pandev. Georgiy Bushchan saved the spot kick but the ball rebounded straight back to Alioski who fired home his second attempt. Ukraine were awarded a late penalty but Dimitrievski batted away Ruslan Malinovskyi's effort from the spot.

The defeat means North Macedonia, who lost 3-1 to Austria in their first game in Group C, need Austria to beat Netherlands later on Thursday if they are to extend their stay at their first major tournament.

## Can Argentina end win drought?

AGENCIES



Argentina and Uruguay square off in Copa America action on Saturday (6am, Bangladesh Time), in a clash between the two favourites to qualify out of group B.

Group B is a tricky group, with the likes of Chile, Uruguay and Paraguay, making it complicated for Lionel Messi and Co. as they are one of the favourites to put in a fight for the trophy.

Argentina, who saw each of their game so far in June ending in stalemates after taking early leads, kicked off their campaign with a slightly disappointing 1-1 draw with Chile, while their opponents are yet to play, and will look to begin with what would be a huge win.

Their group opener on Sunday against Chile started with Lionel Messi scoring a screamer from freekick and several clear-cut chances followed. But Chile strike back immediately after the break and Lionel Scaloni's men looked



Argentina's Lionel Messi is seen in action during a training session in Buenos Aires. PHOTO: AP



Argentina's Lionel Messi is seen in action during a training session in Buenos Aires. PHOTO: AP

clueless thereafter.

Uruguay too have a bad month in June. The two World Cup qualifying games leading up to Copa America ended in goal-less stalemates and that too against the likes of Venezuela and Paraguay.

Luis Suarez, fresh from La Liga title win with Atletico Madrid started both games but failed to score. Oscar Tabarez will be positive with the return of Edinson Cavani after completing his two-match ban following the red-card against Brazil in November last year. He had a

brilliant season with Manchester United and look hungry for goals at the age of 34.

"With Leo I have a friendship," said 34-year-old Suarez. "But, obviously, on the pitch there is no friendship. It's the same as when I had to face him playing against Barcelona and against Argentina."

The teams last played in a friendly in 2019 and settled for a 2-2 draw. Both Suarez and Cavani found the net for the Celeste while Aguerro and Messi scored the equalising goals.