

KOHLI, WILLIAMSON look to make history

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

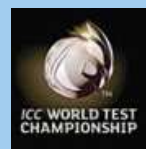
The top nine Test teams were originally scheduled to play six series each over two years, with the top two making the showcase final. But after the Covid-19 pandemic halted the game last year, the governing International Cricket Council decided to rank teams based on percentage of points (PCT) earned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



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

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 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 showpiece 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-armed 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.



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 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 Division T20 Cricket League also would come to an end with this game, with the top six to play the Super League.

On a drizzly day at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, Prime Bank Cricket Club played out a 10-over-a-side affair against Khelaghar SKS, who managed just 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 have been struggling during fielding and while running between the wickets. I consulted

with doctors and BCB medical staff and they advised that it would be better to not continue playing in this condition," Tamim said in an audio message yesterday.

"I need to be in far better shape to be fit to play international games. I hope that I will recover before the Zimbabwe tour and will be fit to play the first Test. In order to do that, I need to do whatever is necessary. I am trying to maintain all the procedures the medical team advised me," added Tamim.

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.

In the day's last game, Gazi Group (116 for 3 in 11.1 overs) beat Mohammedan (149 for 9 in 20 overs) by seven wickets in D/L method.

De Bruyne inspires Belgium to victory

REUTERS

Denmark scored the second-fastest goal in European Championship history but Belgium advanced to the knockout stages after Kevin de Bruyne orchestrated a 2-1 comeback victory in their Group B match on Thursday.

Denmark had the perfect start when midfielder Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg intercepted the ball to feed an unmarked Yussuf Poulsen, who arrowed a right-footed shot into the bottom corner with 99 seconds on the clock.

Belgium equalised nine minutes into the second from a counter-attack as De Bruyne, who squared the ball for Thorgan Hazard to score with a tap-in.

De Bruyne then broke Danish hearts when he gave Belgium the lead in the 70th minute.

Belgium have a maximum six points while Denmark are bottom of the group.

'I like Bangladeshi culture'



PHOTO: COLLECTED

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 Nobobarsha 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 Bangladesh 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.

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.



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