

In six editions of the T20 World Cup, Sri Lanka have made it to the finals thrice, the most by any team, and were crowned champions in 2014 after beating India in Dhaka. Unfortunately, despite such a dominant, rich history in the tournament, the Lankans head into the seventh edition of the T20 World Cup in Oman and the UAE with little or no hype surrounding their side. Ranked 10th in the ICC T20I rankings, Sri Lanka must play the qualifiers in order to proceed to the Super 12 stage of the tournament. Placed in Group A of the Round 1, Sri Lanka will begin their journey against Namibia on October 18 in Abu Dhabi. The Islanders even had issues naming a squad for the World Cup. Although the deadline for submitting the squad was on September 10, the Sri Lankan Cricket (SLC) officially announced their squad on September 12 as it had to await the sports minister's approval, a procedure which is mandatory by law in the nation. Their announced squad was also not free of controversies. Bhanuka Rajapaksa's inclusion created an uproar as, according to the Lankan media, it had more to do with his social media reputation than actual cricketing performances. The SLC also had to leave out the likes of Niroshan Dickwella, Kusal Mendis, and Danushka Gunathilaka, who were banned for a year for breaking Covid-19 protocols on a recent tour of England. With what has been going on in Sri Lankan cricket, this World Cup could be a chance for them to start rising again and regain their old status.

The only major omissions from the squad were Niroshan Dickwella, Kusal Mendis and Danushka Gunathilaka, who were banned for a year for breaking Covid-19 protocols on their tour of England in July. Bhanuka Rajapaksa's inclusion in the Lankan squad was also questioned given his recent lack of form. Meanwhile, they included 21-year-old mystery spinner Maheesh Theekshana.

Despite losing nine of their 12 T20Is this year, Sri Lanka's top order remained fairly consistent considering the dismal nature of performances lower down the order. The Lankans will be hoping the likes of Kusal Perera, Dinesh Chandimal and Avishka Fernando keep providing decent starts in the UAE and Oman. A further boon for Sri Lanka is the recent form of leg-spinner-cum-all-rounder Wanindu Hasaranga. The number-two ranked bowler in the ICC T20I rankings, Hasaranga was pivotal in all three of Sri Lanka's T20 wins this year, picking up a total of eight wickets in those games.

The prime concern for Sri Lanka heading into the World Cup is their fragile middle order. In 12 T20Is this year, they employed 13 different batters at number four, five and six, who yielded runs at an average of just 18.16. Another worry could be their inadequate pace-bowling options. With just three frontline pacers -- Chamika Karunaratne, Nuwan Pradeep, Dushmantha Chameera -- Sri Lanka may find themselves in a precarious situation in what could be a long tournament if they make it to the Super 12s.

Dasun Shanaka (C), Dhananjaya De
Silva, Kusal Janith Perera, Dinesh
Chandimal, Avishka Fernando,
Bhanuka Rajapaksa, Charith
Asalanka, Wanindu Hasaranga,
Kamindu Mendis, Chamika
Karunaratne, Nuwan Pradeep,
Dushmantha Chameera, Praveen
Jayawickrama, Maheesh Theekshana,
Pathum Nissanka, Minod Bhanuka,
Ashen Bandara, Lakshan Sandakan,
Ramesh Mendis.

Lahiru Kumara, Binura Fernando, Akila Dananjaya, Pulina Tharanga.

FORM GUIDE

Sri Lanka T20 World Cup Appearances: **6**
Best Result: **Champion** (2014)

Leggie Wanindu Hasaranga is currently second in ICC T20I bowling rankings, owing to his extraordinary exploits this year. Playing 12 T20Is in 2021 so far, Hasaranga picked up 20 wickets and also recorded his career-best figures of four for nine against India in July.





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