

SPORT

New Zealand dash Indian dreams

REUTERS, Dubai



New Zealand crushed a billion Indian dreams and breezed into the semi-finals of the Twenty20 World Cup with an eight-wicket victory against Afghanistan in a key Super 12 match on Sunday.

The fates of three teams were tied to the outcome of the match, each fancying their chances of becoming the second side from the pool, behind Pakistan, to make it to the last four.

An Afghan victory would have suited 2007 champions India, who have the best net run-rate among the trio with a match to spare, while New Zealand had to simply win the game to advance, which they did in style.

Najibullah Zadran smashed a career-best 73 to rescue Afghanistan from a top order collapse and post 124-8 at the Zayed Cricket Stadium in Abu Dhabi.

New Zealand romped home with 11 balls to spare to join England, Australia and Pakistan in last four.

"Strong performance, we know how dangerous this Afghanistan side is," New Zealand captain Kane Williamson said after



anchoring their chase.

"It's nice for us to be able to set the tone with the ball first up, take some wickets early and then restrict them to below-par total. It was a 150-155 surface."

Afghanistan captain Mohammad Nabi won the toss but the strong start he expected from his team did not materialise.

They were reeling at 19-3 in the sixth over, a mini-collapse that started when Devon Conway

took an acrobatic catch behind the stumps to dismiss Mohammad Shahzad.

Zadran rebuilt their innings with his stroke-filled knock but his stay was cut short by another stunning catch, this time by a diving Jimmy Neesham at long-off.

Trent Boult dismissed Karim Janat in the same over for his third wicket and New Zealand put on a catching masterclass to restrict their opponents to a below-par total.

Off-spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman dismissed Daryl Mitchell (17) in the fourth over and Rashid Khan sent back Martin Guptill (28) but it was not enough to test New Zealand's batting strength.

Williamson oversaw New Zealand's chase with an assured 40 not out while Conway was unbeaten on 36.

New Zealand finished their group campaign with eight points, four ahead of India, who play Namibia in their final match on Monday, and Afghanistan.

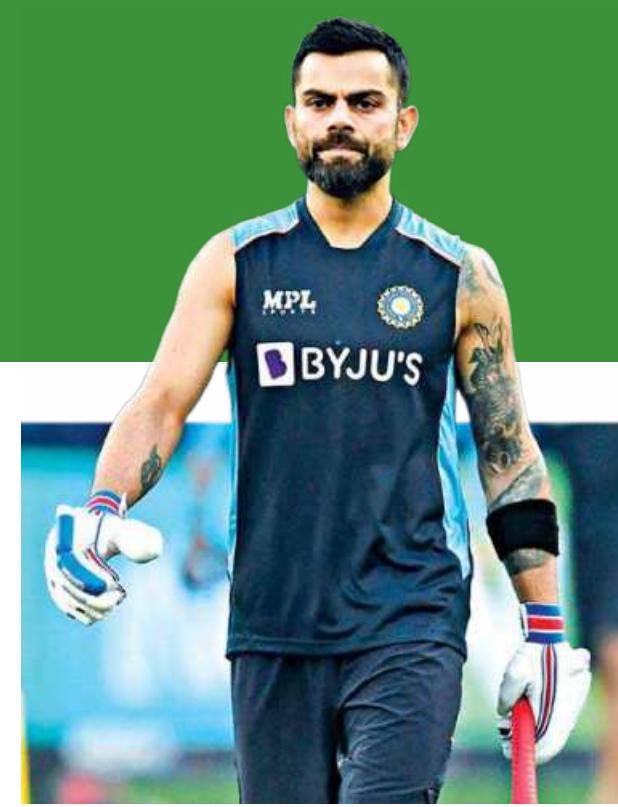
"We didn't start well," Nabi said after Afghanistan signed off with their third loss in five matches.

"We played good cricket in the tournament, and we will take a lot of positives. We need to correct the mistakes we made with the bat."



TODAY'S MATCHES
India Vs Namibia
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India take on Namibia in dead rubber

AGENCIES

India did their best to overturn their nightmare start to the Twenty20 World Cup in the UAE, but they will go into today's last Super 12 fixture against Namibia in Dubai knowing they are already out of the competition.

New Zealand's victory over Afghanistan in Abu Dhabi on Sunday meant the 'host' nation will not reach the knockout rounds of a major men's ICC event for the first time since 2012.

India's campaign got off to the worst possible start in this year's T20 World Cup as the Men in Blue lost to arch-rivals Pakistan by 10 wickets before New Zealand handed them an eight-wicket thrashing in the next game.

India bounced back and won their next two games on



SCORES IN BRIEF

AFGHANISTAN
124 for 8 in 20 overs
(Najibullah 73, Gulbadin 15; Boult 3-17, Southee 2-24)

NEW ZEALAND
125 for 2 in 18.1 overs
(Williamson 40 not out, Conway 36 not out; Mujeeb 1-31, Rashid 1-27)

RESULT
New Zealand won by 8 wickets.

Player-of-the-match
Trent Boult.

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FINANCE

the trot by big margins to ensure they remain alive in the race for a spot in the semis. However, that was not enough in the end, thanks to Afghanistan's defeat to New Zealand.

But Virat Kohli, who will be captaining the India team for the last time in this format, will want to lead the side to a strong finish to the campaign. Namibia, meanwhile, have provided plenty of punchy opposition for the sides they have met in the Super 12s and will be wanting to end their campaign well.

They will be aiming to give a good account of themselves and not get outplayed like Scotland. They have a decent team and are learning the trades quickly. Namibia have a stiff test ahead of them against an Indian team which has now peaked. Keeping the Indian openers at bay upfront will be challenging. Albeit a dead rubber, Namibia cannot let India run away with the game.

'Australia can be the best team in the world'

REUTERS



Australia coach Justin Langer believes his team can re-establish themselves as the best in the world as they prepare for a potential semi-final showdown with Pakistan at the Twenty20 World Cup this week.

Langer's team booked their place in the last four on Saturday as David Warner's unbeaten 89 steered the Australians to an eight-wicket win over the West Indies that secured a second spot in Group 1 of the competition's Super 12 phase.

"Not that long ago we were the best team in the world and some of that cricket shows we can be the best team in the world," Langer told reporters.

"I think England are leading the way at the moment and we've got exciting prospects."

"We're taking great lessons from this tournament on how we can continue to play T20 cricket now, for this tournament, and moving forward."

The Australians made a strong start in the competition before suffering a heavy eight-wicket defeat against England that left the Aaron Finch-captained side uncertain about their place in the knockout rounds.

But comprehensive wins over Bangladesh and the West Indies ended those doubts and the Australians are likely to face Pakistan, who lead Group 2 with their final match against Scotland to be played on Sunday, in Thursday's semi-finals.

"It was brilliant again last night, I think our last few games have been outstanding cricket," said Langer.

"The boys have really stepped up. It was quite a sobering experience against England. We knew we had to do some work and the way the boys responded to that has been brilliant, so it's nice to be in the semi-final."

"You can't win it unless you're in the semi-final. It's nice to be sitting here, knowing we're in a semi-final on Thursday."

Pakistan have been the dominant force in Group 1, winning all four of the matches to date, and Langer looks forward to the clash in Dubai.

"They've got a good all-round team, like we have, and they're well-led," he said.

"Their captain, Babar Azam, is a superstar of the game. They've some good pace bowlers and they've a couple of good spinners, so they're a well-balanced side like we are, so it should be a great game of cricket."



Bangladesh ODI captain Tamim Iqbal smashes one during a practice session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday ahead of their home series against Pakistan, starting from November 19. The Tigers will play three T20 Internationals, followed by two Tests but the left-hander reportedly will not be available for the T20I series. [Inset] Khaled Mahmud, who has been appointed team director for the upcoming Pakistan series, talks animatedly with coach Mohammad Salauddin, who reportedly has been offered the role of assistant coach for the Tigers.

PHOTO: STAR

Schadenfreude in the form of a discount

MAZHAR UDDIN from Dubai

More than anywhere else in the world, you can find the fanbases of Pakistan and India on an equal footing in the UAE, although now it may have slightly shifted.

The intensity among the Pakistani fans here in Dubai has reached stratospheric levels as Babar Azam's side have already sealed a place in the semi-final of the ICC T20 World Cup with four wins from as many games in Group 2.

But when it comes to Indian fans, they have endured a tough time in the flagship event, starting with an already-famous ten-wicket defeat to archrivals Pakistan in their opening Super 12 game. An eight-wicket defeat to New Zealand in the next game raised concerns over an early exit for Virat Kohli's side.

You will witness the unique ways in which fans support the two Asian powerhouses in Dubai.



This reporter hopped on a taxi and was greeted by Mohammad Imran from the city of Peshawar in Pakistan, who has been driving a taxi in Dubai for the past nine years.

Dirham discount for the ride.

"Ever since the ten-wicket win over India in the first game of the World Cup, I have been looking for Indian supporters to take on a ride. I don't reveal my nationality initially. I only ask if they know the result of the game between India and Pakistan. You can imagine the reaction to that question because they are furious about the defeat. When the passengers reaches their destination, I reveal my nationality and gave them a discount of ten dirhams in memory of the famous ten-wicket win."

Although India managed to bounce back in their next matches with two big wins against Scotland and Afghanistan to raise hopes of reaching the semifinal, Indian fans who were desperately hoping for Afghanistan to beat New Zealand in yesterday's encounter were left disappointed as the Kiwis thrashed Afghans by eight wickets

and qualified for the semifinal, condemning India to an early exit.

"We were hoping to face Pakistan in the final and avenge the ten-wicket defeat. But let the Pakistanis enjoy this time around. The fact is they have beaten India for the very first time in a World event. So, we can understand the outpouring of joy from our neighbors. They hardly ever get this feeling," said Avishek Mishra, an Indian who works as a sales manager in Dubai. "As Indians, we will keep supporting our team no matter what happens in the future. And we will wait to meet Pakistan in the future and take revenge."

The rivalry among India and Pakistan may be seen as an intense battle of pride for both nations, but Indian and Pakistani fans in Dubai hope the rivalry remains on the field and they continue to live in harmony off it in the coming days as well.