

SPORT



Meet the fantastic four as they eye for glory

MAZHAR UDDIN FROM DUBAI



The four semi-finalists have already emerged in the form of Pakistan, England, Australia, and New Zealand as the ICC T20 World Cup approaches its climactic stage with some action-packed cricket in the coming days.

The curtains of the mega event's knockout stage will be raised with hot-favourites England taking on New Zealand on November 10 in Abu Dhabi, followed by high-flying Pakistan locking horns with Australia in Dubai on November 11. The world cup's Super 12 stage had witnessed a lot of intense, dramatic duels where apart from Pakistan, the only Asian representative and the only unbeaten side in the semis, the other three teams had to wait till the last moment to confirm

their semi-finals berth. It has been a phenomenal tournament so far for the Babar Azam-led Pakistan side as they kicked off their campaign with a thumping ten-wicket win over India and in the process had secured their maiden win against their archrivals in the shortest format at a world event.

The Men in Green, who had their home series against New Zealand and England canceled due to security reasons prior to the mega event, played a ruthless brand of cricket throughout their group stage matches and thus proved a point to the world, in accordance to how the Pakistan Cricket Board chief Ramiz Raza alongside country's Prime Minister Imran Khan and cricket legends had urged.

New Zealand qualified behind Pakistan in Group 2 and had also displayed brilliance to confirm their semi-final spot on their

last group stage game against Afghanistan with a win, which had forced the exit of big guns of India out of world cup for the first time before the knockout stages, and consequently had turned their final group match against Namibia into a dead rubber. The two successive defeats at the hands of Pakistan and New Zealand did all the damage for Virat Kohli and his troops from the onset, and despite big-margin wins against Afghanistan and Scotland in the latter matches, there was no turning back for the Men in Blues.

In Group 1, England never looked like settling for a runners-up place from day one and they eventually topped the group ahead of the Aussies, who edged past South Africa, all on the basis of net run-rate.

England, the number one ranked side in the world, had displayed sheer dominance so far while riding on their modern, aggressive

brand of cricket, with their opener Jos Buttler adding the cherry on top after striking the only century of the ongoing event against Sri Lanka. The wicket-keeper batsman is now the only English batter to have scored three figures in all three formats. Eoin Morgan and his troop, however, have some injury concerns where pacer Tymal Mills is unlikely to take part in the semi-final and opener Jason Roy already ruled out with a torn calf muscle.

Last but not the least, Australia also have been no less than impressive by any means, aside from their thumping defeat over England. Aaron Finch-led Aussie side went on to register convincing wins over South Africa and Sri Lanka and were a class apart against West Indies and Bangladesh, the two games which elevated their net run-rate and eventually confirmed the once-mighty Aussies for a chance at glory.

Will stopgap 'power-hitting' solution steady the ship?

SPORTS REPORTER

In the aftermath of most debates, Bangladesh Cricket Board typically comes up with something out of the blue and the latest being the search for power hitters after Bangladesh failed miserably in the ongoing T20 World Cup. 'Power-hitting' has been the buzzword after the Tigers' lacklustre batting display in the power plays, and especially in the latter stage of their

[Khaled Mahmud] mainly on range-hitting and bat swing. If the team want me to play the role of a power hitter, then I'll try to prepare myself accordingly, even though I'm not a power hitter as I want to play in all three formats," said Yasir.

According to the 25-year-old, the lack of aggressive batters had placed Bangladesh behind teams like England and Australia in the shortest format



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

innings, throughout the mega event.

Apparently, the BCB is looking to hire a power-hitting coach, a seemingly unusual move at face value. Since Khaled Mahmud has been assigned the role of the team director for the upcoming Pakistan series, set to begin on November 19, the former captain has already started working with some of the young players at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

Batter Yasir Ali, who faced the media yesterday, informed that the power-hitting aspect is a priority for the upcoming days.

"We are working under Sujon sir

and the need to work on this aspect is important, in order to compete with the best teams. He also expects that the pitch for the upcoming series against Pakistan will be a true surface, which assists both batters and bowlers.

"I think it's important for a batter to have courage, otherwise it's difficult to clear the boundaries," Yasir added.

It will be interesting to see whether the incentive of integrating power hitters brings the national team back on the right track or will there be some other new areas that the Tigers' think tank would prioritise in the foreseeable future.

'Pakistan-Australia battle should be a fantastic match-up'

REUTERS

Australia all-rounder Mitchell Marsh says his team were always confident of doing well at the Twenty20 World Cup despite going into the tournament on the back of a poor run of form.

The Australians, who struggled on tours of the West Indies and Bangladesh ahead of the competition, finished second in their group and play Pakistan in the semi-finals on Thursday.

"Our form lines pre-World Cup probably suggested that we were going to struggle," Marsh told reporters on Monday.

"But I think, when you look down our line-up when we're a full-strength side, with the amount of experience, exciting players, some of the best T20 players in the world inside this team, we were really confident.

"There's a lot of dangerous teams in T20 cricket but we were confident and now we're in the finals anything can happen."

A depleted Australia lost eight out of 10 T20 matches in the West Indies and Bangladesh but won four of their five Super 12 games at the World Cup to finish second in Group 1 behind England.

"As a team we've just come over here, we've gelled really well together and I think that's really important throughout a World Cup," Marsh said.



"There's good vibes in this team right now. We've gained a bit of momentum going into the semi-finals and that's what you need, so hopefully that can continue for us."

Marsh was one of Australia's stand-out performers on Saturday, hitting 53 in a 124-run second-wicket partnership with David Warner as the Australians handed the West Indies an eight-wicket defeat to confirm their place in the last four.

Pakistan were the only side in the competition to have won all five Super 12 matches and Marsh acknowledges the Australians face a tough task to reach Sunday's final.

"Everyone knows how dangerous Pakistan are, they've got great experience, great depth in their bowling," he said.

"They're a very all-round side. But in saying that I think we are too. We've got great experience, we've got plenty of depth with both bat and ball, so it should be a fantastic match-up."



AFP, Dubai

From four wickets in four balls to the Quinton de Kock kneeling affair to India's elimination, there were plenty of talking points in the first round of the T20 World Cup.

AWESOME FOURSOME

Fast bowler Curtis Campher took four wickets in four balls to help Ireland thrash Netherlands by seven wickets in a first week qualifier.

Campher claimed a hat-trick and then struck again to return figures of 4-26 as Netherlands were dismissed for 106.

Campher became only the third bowler in T20 International history to claim four wickets in four balls after Afghanistan's Rashid Khan and Lasith Malinga of Sri Lanka in 2019.

PAKISTAN END INDIA JINX

Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan smashed unbeaten half-centuries as Pakistan crushed India by 10 wickets to register a first win over their arch-rivals in a T20 World Cup.

Chasing 152 for victory, Babar (68) and Rizwan (79) steered their team home with 13 balls to spare in Dubai.

Left-arm quick Shaheen Shah Afridi set up victory -- Pakistan's first against their neighbours in six attempts in the tournament -- with figures of 3-31 that restricted India to 151-7 despite a valiant 57 from skipper Virat Kohli.

DE KOCK MAKES A STAND

Quinton de Kock withdrew from South Africa's match against the West Indies after refusing to take the knee.

The 28-year-old's shock decision came just hours after Cricket South Africa (CSA) had ordered all of their players at the tournament to take part in the anti-racism gesture.

De Kock apologised two days later and said he would be happy to join the rest of the team in making a stand.



HASARANGA -- A STAR IS BORN?

Sri Lanka may have been knocked out in the Super 12 stage but their youthful team caught the eye and are already being talked of as potential champions at the 2022 World Cup in Australia.

Wanindu Hasaranga, their leg-spinning all-rounder, stood out with 16 wickets at an average of under 10. The 24-year-old took his wickets total for 2021 to 36, the year's best at the time of his country's elimination.

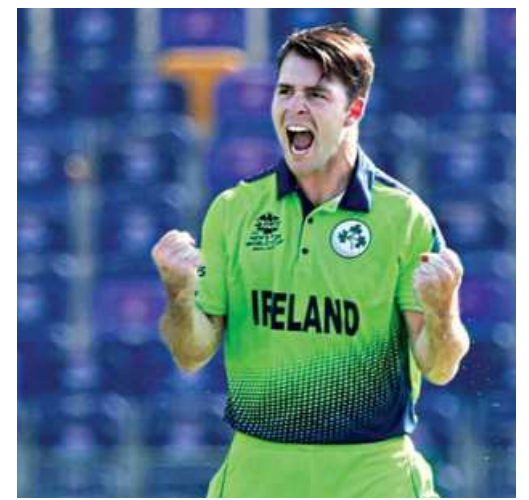
"Hasaranga is a special cricketer," said coach Mickey Arthur.



KOHLI ANGER AT 'SPINELESS, PATHETIC' TROLLS

India captain Virat Kohli launched a blistering attack on "spineless" and "pathetic" fans, reserving particular vitriol for the trolls who blamed Mohammed Shami, the only Muslim player in the squad, for the loss to Pakistan.

"There's a good reason why we are playing on the field and not a bunch of spineless people on social media that have no courage to actually speak to any individual in person," said Kohli.



"Attacking someone over their religion is the most pathetic thing that a human being can do."

BUTTLER SERVES MASTERCLASS

England made it four wins in four after Jos Buttler hit the first century of the World Cup in a 26-run victory over Sri Lanka.

Buttler's unbeaten 101 -- his maiden century in 86 T20 internationals -- steered England to 163 for four. Buttler smashed six fours and six sixes in his 67-ball knock as he achieved the feat of making centuries in all three formats.

'END OF WINDIES GENERATION'

West Indies skipper Kieron Pollard lamented the "end of a generation" as Dwayne Bravo brought the curtain down on his international career with Chris Gayle almost certain to join him in calling it quits.

Both Bravo, 38, and 42-year-old Gayle - who played in the 2012 and 2016 T20 title-winning teams -- were given a guard of honour by the Australian players in Abu Dhabi.