



England take on New Zealand in shadow of 2019 classic

AGENCIES



Two years since going toe-to-toe in a thrilling 50-overs World Cup final, England and New Zealand will again seek to deliver a knockout blow when they face each other in the semi-finals of the Twenty20 global showpiece in Abu Dhabi today. The clash

pits contemporary cricket's most dominant white-ball team England against arguably the most consistent cross-format side New Zealand, who have reached the final of three of the last four major global tournaments. The most dramatic of those finals was at Lord's in 2019 when Eoin Morgan's England were crowned 50-overs world champions via a now-scrapped boundary countback rule after the match ended in a tie. Kane Williamson's team

finally shed their bridesmaid's tag by winning the inaugural World Test Championship earlier this year and, like England, are now bidding to become reigning champions in two formats. "If England and New Zealand provide a fraction of the drama they did on a glorious afternoon at Lord's in July 2019, then the T20 World Cup might get the spark it desperately craves this week," former England captain Mike Atherton wrote in The Times.



Morgan plays down 'favourites' tag

REUTERS, Dubai

England captain Eoin Morgan has kept the lid on who will move up to partner opener Jos Buttler and dismissed suggestions his side would be "strong favourites" against New Zealand in the semi-final of the Twenty20 World Cup on Wednesday.

The 2010 champions will have to rejig their top order after opener Jason Roy's tournament was cut short by a calf injury during their final group match against South Africa.

"Within the group we've made a decision. Not willing to share that, unfortunately," Morgan said ahead of what will be a rematch of the 2019 ODI World Cup final.

While many expect Jonny Bairstow to partner Buttler, Morgan believes England are spoilt for choice within the squad.

"We are blessed with guys who can bat at the top of the order and actually who want to bat at the top of the order," said Morgan, who led England to their maiden 50-overs World Cup title two years ago.

"So I think we're in a very good position that we have a number of guys to choose from."

Armed with an explosive batting lineup, England could also be tempted to include bowling all-rounder David Willey to strengthen their attack against New Zealand.

Morgan said a final call would be taken after assessing the pitch at Abu Dhabi's Zayed Cricket Stadium.

"When we turn up and look at the wicket, depending on if it's a really good batting ... we might need the extra bit of bowling. If it's not, you might need the extra bit of batting."



STATS

NEW ZEALAND

Road to semi-final: Lost to Pakistan by 5 wickets, beat India by 8 wickets, beat Scotland by 16 runs, beat Namibia by 52 runs, beat Afghanistan by 8 wickets.

Top scorer: Martin Guptill – 176 runs.

Top wicket-taker: Trent Boult – 11 wickets.

ENGLAND

Road to semi-final: beat West Indies by 6 wickets, beat Bangladesh by 8 wickets, beat Australia by 8 wickets, beat Sri Lanka by 26 runs and lost to South Africa by 10 runs.

Top scorer: Jos Buttler – 240 runs.

Top wicket-taker: Adil Rashid – 8 wickets.

T20s head-to-head: England wins: 13 (includes one win on super over after tie), New Zealand wins: 7, No result: 1.

Last T20 International meeting: In scenes reminiscent of the 50-over World Cup final, it took a super over to separate the two sides in their Twenty20 series with England coming out on top in Auckland four months earlier.

'Emperor' Babar ready to conquer world

AFP, Dubai

He was the fresh-faced 15-year-old who stared down Shoaib Akhtar in the nets, became the highest-ranked T20 batsman in the world before being elevated to national hero after masterminding a rare Pakistan victory over India.

In the breathless aftermath of that 10-wicket win over their fiercest rivals at the World Cup, the national cricket captain was even likened by one commentator to 'emperor Zahiruddin Babar' who conquered India in the 16th century and founded the Mughal Dynasty.

Fortunately for Pakistan, the unassuming 27-year-old Babar Azam has his feet firmly on the ground.

He has guided his team to five wins in five games at the T20 showpiece and a semi-final clash against Australia in Dubai on Thursday.

Along the way, he has piled up a tournament-leading 264 runs. On Sunday, against Scotland, he hit his fourth half century of the competition.

It all started with a brilliant unbeaten 68 against India. That



innings, in tandem with fellow opener Mohammad Rizwan's 79 not out, gave Pakistan their first win over their arch-rivals in 13 World Cup matches.

He then scored 51 against Afghanistan and 70 against Namibia -- innings that helped him regain the number one spot in the international T20 rankings.

"Obviously it's a proud moment," said Babar. "The focus on the goal and hard work are behind this and I want to improve day by day."

In April this year, Babar also ended Indian maestro Virat Kohli's three-year tenure as number one ODI batsman with scores of 103, 32 and 94 in a three-match series in South Africa

which Pakistan won 2-1.

Babar has risen from modest beginnings but was a YouTube hit at 13.

Acting as a ballboy at Lahore's Gaddafi stadium in October, 2007, he confidently pounced a six from South Africa's JP Duminy which had been launched over long-on.

The slow motion replays and praise from the TV commentators who hailed his nonchalance gave Babar surprise airtime.

His talents were obvious but his father Azam Siddique was determined that the teenage Babar didn't get too far ahead of himself.

"It's a blessing for me that my father supported me so much," he said. "To be honest, he still scolds me if I don't play well or get out by playing a rash shot."

From the under-15 to under-19 levels, his strokeplay caught the eye.

Former Pakistan opener Mudassar Nazar was particularly impressed when he was head of the national cricket academy in 1999.

"I was in the Under-15 camp and one day they (the national team) invited us for practice and Mudassar was very kind to select me to face Shoaib's bowling," recalled Babar.

Shoaib Akhtar, the erstwhile 'Rawalpindi Express', famously bowled the fastest recorded delivery -- 161.3 km/h -- at the 2003 World Cup.

"Shoaib looked surprised but still encouraged me," said Babar.

"He told me 'kid you have to defend the ball. I will bowl it up'. After two or three deliveries, I drove him."

"He got slightly offended and asked for a new ball and bowled a bouncer. I ducked and watching from the side, Mudassar called me back (from out of the nets)."

Former Australian all-rounder Tom Moody, who has coached in the Pakistan T20 Super League, believes Babar will become a bigger star than even India skipper Virat Kohli.



Forgoing captaincy won't slow down Kohli

AFP, Dubai

Virat Kohli on Monday said it had been an "honour" to captain India's Twenty20 side as he ended an otherwise disappointing World Cup campaign on a winning note.

Kohli, who will continue to captain India in Test and ODI cricket, took over the T20 captaincy from MS Dhoni in 2017 and said it is time to manage the workload.

"It's been an honour, but things have to be kept in the right perspective. This was the right time for me to manage my workload," Kohli said.

"It's been six-seven years of intense cricket every time we take the field and it takes a lot out of you."

But the 33-year-old said his intensity on the field will remain the same. "That's never going to change. If I can't do that I will not play anymore," said Kohli.

"Even when I wasn't captain before I was always keen to see where the game is going. I'm not going to stand around and do nothing."

He has led the team to great heights in Test and white-ball cricket but critics have always pointed at his failure to land a World Cup triumph in either T20 or ODI cricket.

Earlier this year they were also beaten by New Zealand in the first ever World

Test Championship final. The superstar batsman said his deputy Rohit Sharma had been overseeing matters going into the game.

"I was given the opportunity and I tried to do my best. But it's also time to create some space and move forward. I've been immensely proud of how the team has played."



Head coach Ravi Shastri also bid adieu to the team after working alongside Kohli for five years. Shastri, a former India all-rounder, said he believes the current side are "one of the greatest" of all time. "Sometimes in life, it's not about all you accomplish, it's about what you overcome," Shastri told Star Sports.



TODAY'S MATCH

England Vs New Zealand
8pm (BST)

Rohit replaces Kohli as India's T20 captain

AFP, NEW DELHI

Rohit Sharma has been named the new captain of India's T20 side, replacing Virat Kohli, the cricket board said Tuesday after the side were dumped out of the T20 World Cup.

The Board of Cricket Control of India tweeted that the 34-year-old opening batsman was "named the T20I Captain for India" as it announced the squad for an upcoming tour by New Zealand.

Kohli, who took over T20I captaincy in 2017, had announced his decision to step down in September, citing his "immense workload". He remains the skipper of the one-day and Test teams.

The announcement follows news that former batting legend Rahul Dravid was replacing Ravi Shastri as coach for all formats following the World Cup, where India failed to qualify for the semi-finals.

Kohli was also not named in the T20 squad for the New Zealand tour, to begin on November 17, in order to give the batsman time to rest.