



## Shaken Australia face stern NZ test

REUTERS, Melbourne

Australia captain Aaron Finch will hope Saturday's debacle against Zimbabwe has served as the perfect wake-up call for his team heading into the three-match one-day international series against a formidable New Zealand on Tuesday.

The Chappell-Hadlee series between the trans-Tasman rivals could not take place in the last two years because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the travel restrictions that came with it.

Kane Williamson's New Zealand, currently the top ranked ODI team, arrived with a full-strength squad and having lost just one of their 12 Super League matches.

Finch's Australia are still smarting from Saturday's five-wicket loss in Townsville, which denied them a series sweep against Zimbabwe.

"They're a fantastic unit, they have been for a long time," Finch told reporters on Monday.

"They continue to be one of the benchmarks in world cricket in all three formats of the game and the fact that they're number one in ODI cricket at the moment is testament to that."

Few would have more at stake in the series than the Australia captain who finds himself in the middle of a prolonged slump in form.

The opener aggregated 21 runs in the series against Zimbabwe and aggregates 164 runs in 11 one-day innings that include a fifty.

"Obviously the performances personally haven't been there in terms of the output of runs, but still feel like I'm a pretty good player," he said.



## Sabina's old mate in her way

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh captain Sabina Khatun and her Maldivian counterpart Aminath Leeza once shared the field as teammates in the Maldives Women's Futsal Fiesta. Seven years later, they will meet in different colours in the SAFF Women's Championship, which will get underway in Kathmandu today through the opener between Bhutan and Nepal.

Leeza stood under the bar for Maldives Police Football Club while Sabina attempted to get the better of opposing goalkeepers with her goal-scoring abilities in 2015. This time around, Leeza will be busy attempting to thwart Sabina as Maldives attempt to get something from their game against Bangladeshi on Wednesday.

"Sabina was my colleague; we played together in Maldives. Now we will face each other. I think Sabina is a good player and I will try my best to stop her," the Maldives captain said at the official pre-tournament conference in Kathmandu yesterday.

"We have a blend of experienced players, less experienced players and inexperienced players who have never played at this level. However, we are lucky to have experienced coaches and I believe their experience will help us in this tournament," Leeza added.

Sabina was upbeat about Bangladesh's prospects and relishing the match-up.

"We respect all teams but we are ready to play, ready to fight," Sabina said. "The positive is that Maria and Monica are a package and they are now part of the national senior team. You will see the different scenes in Kathmandu than in our campaign in Biratnagar in 2016."



Bangladesh's Test and T20I captain Shakib Al Hasan speaks to the anchor at the MoU signing ceremony of the Bangladesh Champions Trophy, a proposed franchise hockey league, during a programme at a hotel in the capital yesterday. Alongside him are the organisers as well as Bangladesh Hockey Federation president and Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Shaikh Abdul Hannan. Shakib's e-commerce company Monarch Mart along with Acme, Saif Powertech, Walton and Rupayan Group will own five of the six franchises of the league, which is expected to begin in the third week of October.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Old king with new eyes

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Dubai

"He is back," one India fan exclaimed to this reporter during the innings break of the India-Pakistan game on Sunday. There had been lots of criticism about Virat Kohli's form in recent times, but his innings of 60 made it appear he was ready to resume normal services.

Yet, there was a difference this time after the Asian powerhouses began the Asia Cup. Is Virat Kohli answering his critics? Having come back from a break of over a month, there was something about Kohli that even surprised Indian journalists covering the event. They are used to the former India captain retorting sharply to questions posed by local media. Something must be off, one suggested.

Kohli had recently opened up on mental health struggles, saying that he had a realisation that he was faking intensity. "For the first time in 10 years, I didn't touch my bat for a month", he had said in a recent interview.

Allowing himself a break allowed things to come to the surface and his realisation was that the volume of cricket he had endured made it very easy to ignore things within himself. "I have tried to keep up to the demands and the expectations, not really felt my inner being completely, which this phase [away

from the game] allowed me to do," he had added.

Thus, despite India's defeat to Pakistan, Kohli argued criticism was not something he was paying attention to. His new feeling was to find himself.

"I've never paid attention to these things [external criticism], to be honest. I've played for 14 years, that doesn't happen by chance. My job is to work hard on my game, something I'm always keen to do. That's



something I'm going to continue to do," he said at the press conference after the Pakistan game.

His coach Rahul Dravid reiterated a day before the game that he was not bothered about how many runs Kohli would score. Kohli too felt he needed to find that excitement in his game.

The batter had recently been seen pumping fists and arguing with Jonny Bairstow during the

tour of England. Whether being away from such confrontation is part of the new approach remains to be seen, but he was not paying heed to the expectations that hound him simply due to the surreal career he has had.

"People have their opinions and that's absolutely fine, that doesn't change my happiness as a person. I've taken some time away, put things in perspective. It's given me relaxation... this isn't the be-all-and-end-all of life, I need to enjoy the game. I can't put myself under so much pressure due to expectations that I am unable to express myself. That is not why I started playing this game," he said.

ThrongsofPakistani and Indian journalists surrounded Kohli to get a selfie, with the former India captain calm enough to oblige. Is this a new Kohli? You never know.

What we do know is that India have an important assignment today against Sri Lanka. The start of the Super Four stage has not quite gone according to plan. With Afghanistan to come after Sri Lanka, India will be hoping to clinch all their remaining games.

If Kohli needed a bit of excitement to get himself going, a final berth against archrivals Pakistan is still a possibility and could provide the fuel to light the fire heading into a World Cup.



## Kyrgios happy to 'look like an idiot'

REUTERS, New York

Just when tennis fans thought Nick Kyrgios had run out of ways to surprise them, the Australian came up with another bizarre shot during a rally against Daniil Medvedev at the U.S. Open on Sunday.

The ever-entertaining Wimbledon finalist elicited cheers from some and quizzical looks from others in the Arthur Ashe Stadium crowd when he ran around the net to volley a mock winner on Medvedev's side of the court. Kyrgios continued his run past his Russian opponent with his forefinger in the air and a big grin on his face, only to be called for a foul point by umpire Eva Asderaki-Moore as Medvedev's ballooned shot had still technically been in play.

It cost the Australian a break point but he was able to see the funny side after beating the world number one for the second time in a few weeks and reaching the quarterfinals at Flushing Meadows for the first time.

"I still can't believe the boneheaded play I made over here. I thought that was legal to be honest," he said, laughing, in his on-court interview.

"That's going to be everywhere ... so I'm going to look like an idiot. That's alright," he added.

Other than that, Kyrgios mostly kept to more orthodox shots, with the exception of one attempted under-arm serve that went long.

## Nawaz savours all-rounder role

AFP, Dubai

Mohammad Nawaz wants to be a "proper all-rounder" after his batting blitz set up a thrilling win for Pakistan against arch-rivals India in the Asia Cup Super Four.

Chasing 182 for victory, Pakistan achieved the target with one ball and five wickets to spare in Dubai after Mohammad Rizwan hit 71 and Nawaz made 42.

Nawaz, a left-arm spinner who usually bats at eight but was promoted to number four, joined Rizwan when the score was 63-2 and the two put on a key stand.

The 28-year-old Nawaz smashed six fours and two sixes in his 20-ball knock to put the chase on track.

Nawaz, who returned bowling figures of 1-25 in India's 181-7, also took three catches and was named man of the match.

"To play such an innings in a high-pressure game has definitely given me confidence," Nawaz told reporters after Sunday's victory in the regional T20 tournament which acts as a tune-up for the World Cup in October.

"I have got the opportunity to grow as a player and I will try my best to live up to the rising expectations. I will work hard and try to perform better as a proper all-rounder for the Pakistan team."

Nawaz fell in the 16th over and soon Rizwan was out after his second successive half-century. Khushdil Shah (unbeaten 14) and Asif Ali (16) hauled Pakistan over the line as they avenged their loss to India earlier in the tournament.



(From L-R) Kylian Mbappe, Marquinhos, Lionel Messi and Neymar take part in a training session in Paris on Monday ahead of Tuesday's Champions League fixture against Italian giants Juventus. (R) Defending champions Real Madrid's Karim Benzema and Antonio Rudiger pose for a photograph after boarding a flight to Scotland, where they will face Celtic.

PHOTO: TWITTER

