

New-look Windies search for winning formula

AGENCIES

After a rousing start in Group A over the weekend, the action at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2022 shifts to Group B on Monday with two-time winners West Indies taking on Scotland in Hobart in their first match of the tournament.

It has been anything but smooth sailing for West Indies in the recent past. The squad that arrived in Australia have found the going tough, losing a T20I series against the hosts, and just about managing to see off a spirited UAE side in one of the warm-up games. Having underperformed in the previous edition, skipper Nicholas Pooran has his task cut out as he tries to rebuild West Indies as the powerhouse of T20I cricket, which they were, not so long ago.

The current Windies squad lacks the stardust and depth of Daren Sammy's teams that went on to lift the cup twice. It also remains to be seen how much Shimron Hetmyer's absence, having missed his flight before subsequently being dropped, will affect the side. Hetmyer and his big hits will be sorely missed but the former champions have enough in the tank to start proceedings with a win. West Indies and Scotland's previous warm-up games were washed out due to rain. There aren't too many punters betting on Pooran's side going all the way in the tournament but they are expected to progress to



the Super 12s.

Scotland, meanwhile, come into the game on the back of a win against Netherlands. Richie Berrington's side had a memorable outing last year and will fancy their chances as West Indies have looked shaky with bat and ball in recent times. The Windies still have a bevy of big hitters, including captain Pooran himself but their inexperienced bowling attack will still have to do very well to go far in the T20 World Cup.

Since the 2021 T20 World Cup, Scotland haven't played much cricket and were comfortably outplayed when they clashed against New Zealand in the run-up to the tournament. They barely scraped through a win against the Dutch and will have to rely on Berrington, Josh Davey and Brad Wheal. Bowling remains a concern for the Scots and they will have to be on top of their game if they have to pull off a giant-killing act.

Meanwhile, Zimbabwe and Ireland will lock horns in the second match of the day, to get underway at 2:00pm Bangladesh time.

Having defeated Afghanistan in a T20I series two months ago, Ireland would be high on confidence. Zimbabwe, on the other hand, will certainly have a point to prove as they couldn't qualify for last year's T20 WC.

The venue has hosted three T20Is so far with the first-innings score being 182. As the numbers suggest, the track is fruitful for batters. The bowlers will have a job in hand.

The two sides have crossed swords in eight concluded T20Is so far with the head-to-head record being 5-3 in Ireland's favour.

Ireland must fancy their chances of qualifying for the Super 12 stage as they played some quality cricket against Afghanistan. Skipper Andrew Balbirnie, Paul Stirling and, George Dockrell are veterans of this format and their numbers are impressive as well.

Zimbabwe can't be taken lightly either as they also enjoy services of some potent players. Sikandar Raza will pose the biggest threat to Ireland.



Netherlands players celebrate a UAE dismissal during the two Group A teams' T20 World Cup match in Geelong yesterday, where the Dutch edged past their opposition in a low-scoring affair as they chased a 112-run target with three wickets and a delivery to spare. PHOTO: ICC



SCORES IN BRIEF

SRI LANKA V NAMIBIA

Namibia: 163 For 7 In 20 Overs (Frylinck 44, Smit 31 not out, Baard 26; Liyanagamage 2-37)

Sri Lanka: 108 all out in 19 overs (Shanaka 29, Rajapaksa 20; Wiese 2-16, Frylinck 2-26)

Result: Namibia won by 55 runs

Player-of-the-match: Jan Frylinck

UAE VS NETHERLANDS

UAE: 111 for 8 in 20 overs (Waseem 41, Aravind 18, Daud 15; de Leede 3-19, Klaassen 2-13)

Netherlands: 112 for 7 in 19.5 overs (O'Dowd 23, Ackermann 17, Edwards 16 not out; Siddique 3-24)

Result: Netherlands won by 3 wickets

Player-of-the-match: Bas de Leede

170-180 are good scores here, says Siddons

SPORTS REPORTER

Jamie Siddons, the Bangladesh batting coach, opined that scores of 200 will be rare and he hoped that Bangladesh bowling attack would be good enough to restrict opponents to 170-odd scores. The team management, however, remained hopeful someone would score big with two warm-up matches providing the launch pad to find the required groove, and Siddons maintained they are close to finding the final batting order.

Bangladesh's highest score of 173 for six in the recently concluded tri-nation series in New Zealand was usurped by Pakistan, with seven wickets and one delivery to spare. Thus, whether the Tigers are just below-par with the ball or with the bat, is highly debatable.

The Tigers moved to Brisbane on Saturday and had their first practice session in Australia the day after, hoping everything falls into place as they prepare for today's World Cup warm-up fixture against Afghanistan. While the bowlers had their separate net session on death-bowling skills, they also batted a bit.

"They had a long flight yesterday, so didn't want to work them too hard," Siddons said regarding the net sessions yesterday while talking to the media.

"Well, they had a good bat. Lately they haven't had to bat with the top-order doing well up till the 10th over. We gotta keep working

on them cause, at some point, we are gonna need them," he said about the tail-enders getting some sessions in with the bat.

Bangladesh top-order is, however, the likeliest position to make or break the Tigers in this World Cup. While skipper Shakib Al Hasan and batter Liton Das have carried form to the warm-up matches, much is expected of the likes of Soumya Sarkar, Yasir Ali, Mosaddek Hossain, and Nurul Hasan. Soumya returned to the



national setup after a long time while Yasir and Nurul, returning from injuries, have yet to establish consistency.

The team had experimented with the batting order recently but Siddons said they are close to finding the right setup.

"We will see next two games and we will get a lot closer to the final batting order. Having a team which haven't won a lot of T20s, we're still looking for the best mix and the best batting spots. We're getting very close."

Soumya was going through

the gears with coach Sridharan Sriram yesterday. The left-hander had impactful starts at the 2019 World Cup in England and the management is now looking for big scores from the top-order.

"Soumya hasn't made fifties or sixties but so didn't Sabbir [Rahman], so we're hoping that once these next two practice matches and the World Cup comes along, everyone is in good form," Siddons remarked.

"I think they [players returning after a gap or injuries] are going well. We've brought in some new players that haven't been in the team for a while, as you probably know. So, they are finding that it will take a little bit of time to get up to speed with international cricket again, but today is an example of how they are going and they are going really well," the Australian said.

The average first score at grounds like Brisbane was just above 162 in the Big Bash League (BBL) while at Sydney it was 182.

"I don't think we're going to need 200 here. You won't need 200 tomorrow or at the World Cup very often. 180 or 170 are good scores. If we make 170, we are very happy. Our bowling attack will keep them to 170. Have a look at Big Bash, average scores, not 200. Very, very, very rare," he said but for that, Tigers' bowling unit will have to turn up much better performances than they have done recently.

Benzema tipped to win Ballon d'Or tonight

AFP, Paris

Karim Benzema is the overwhelming favourite to win the men's Ballon d'Or at a ceremony in Paris on Monday and thereby become the first Frenchman to claim the most prestigious individual prize in football since Zinedine Zidane almost quarter of a century ago.

There are 30 nominees, but the Real Madrid striker is the outstanding candidate after his remarkable performances last season helped his club win the Champions League and La Liga.

Benzema scored an astonishing 44 goals in 46 games for his club including 15 in the Champions League.

His exploits included a hat-trick in 17 second-half minutes against Paris Saint-Germain in the last 16, and another away to Chelsea in the quarter-final first leg. He also scored three more goals over both legs of the semi-final against Manchester City.

Benzema was named the UEFA player of the year in August, and he is living a marvellous twilight to his career with the World Cup to come.

Formerly a pariah, frozen out of the France team for five and a half years because of his involvement in a blackmail scandal over a sextape involving teammate Mathieu Valbuena, Benzema has put that behind him and is playing the best football of



his career with his 35th birthday approaching the day after the World Cup final.

"What is most important to me is to win collective trophies. If you do things well on the field, individual awards will follow," Benzema pointed out recently.

His victory at the Chatelet Theatre in the French capital seems an inevitability.

"If they don't cancel it then he's probably going to win this Ballon d'Or," said Barcelona striker Robert Lewandowski this week.

That was a joke by the Pole, who would surely have been crowned in 2020 had that year's award not been cancelled due to the pandemic.

Normal service was restored last year when Lionel Messi won the Ballon d'Or for the seventh time, but he is not even nominated this time after a disappointing season at Paris Saint-Germain.

Cristiano Ronaldo is nominated but there is no Neymar on the list.

Benzema aside, there are four other members of Real's Champions League-winning side: Vinicius, the evergreen Luka Modric, goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and midfielder Casemiro, now of Manchester United. Kylian Mbappe, Erling Haaland, Lewandowski and Kevin De Bruyne feature too, but Benzema stands out by a distance.

If Benzema wins, he will be the fifth Frenchman to do so, following in the footsteps of Raymond Kopa in 1958, Michel Platini (1983, 1984, 1985), Jean-Pierre Papin (1991) and Zidane (1998).



Chelsea's Mason Mount celebrates after shooting a freekick during their English Premier League fixture against Aston Villa at Villa Park in Birmingham on Sunday. The English midfielder scored twice as the visitors ran out 2-0 winners. PHOTO: REUTERS

Hull City goal posts get the chop

REUTERS

Hull City's goal posts were literally cut down to size with the help of a buzz saw after they were found to be two inches taller than the regulation eight feet before Sunday's Championship match against Birmingham City.

Kickoff was delayed as officials used measuring tape to determine that the goal at the MKM Stadium was too big and that they would need time to reduce its size before recalibrating the goal line technology.

"The match officials have informed the club that the goal posts need to be readjusted and HawkEye recalibrated before the match can start," Hull City said in a statement.

Different-sized goals had helped Cardiff City beat Wigan last weekend when their third goal in the 3-1 win came off the underside of the crossbar, which was also two inches too high.

WHAT TO WATCH

T SPORTS & GTV

T20 World Cup
West Indies vs Scotland
Live from 10:00 am
Zimbabwe vs Ireland

Live from 02:00 pm

TEN 1 & TEN 2
Ballon d'Or 2022
Live from 12:30 am
(Tuesday)