

'A treat to watch'

AGENCIES

An unbeaten 82 from Virat Kohli led India to a stunning last-ball win over Pakistan to supercharge their bid for a first Twenty20 World Cup crown since 2007 in front of 90,000 fans at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Sunday.

India, the world number one-ranked side, restricted their fierce rivals to 159-8 and scraped home by four wickets after a few remarkable final overs, with superstar Kohli emerging as the hero.

It looked to be going badly wrong for India as they struggled to just 45-4 off 10 overs, halfway through their chase.

But Kohli and Hardik Pandya (40) launched an incredible fightback with a century stand that left India needing 16 off the final over from a nervous Mohammad Nawaz, who peppered it with wides and no-balls to help them to their target.

India great Sachin Tendulkar led the praise of Kohli's masterclass in Melbourne.

"It was undoubtedly the best innings of your life. It was a treat to watch you play, the six off the back foot in the 19th over against Rauf over long on was spectacular!" Tendulkar twitted.

"The game of nerves today but we had it on our side by 95% and then Kohli showed what a world class match winning innings looks like. Well played by both teams, great match!" former Pakistan skipper Shahid Afridi twitted.

"Geeze I don't think I can ever recall a better game of T20 cricket than what we've just seen at the MCG. Amazing stuff from both teams. Virat's dig one of a kind," former Australia batter Mark Waugh took to social media.

"When you have guys like those batting in the middle you always believe that you're going to get the scores," said India captain Rohit Sharma.



Bangladesh players enjoying a light moment during their practice session in Hobart yesterday. Despite the favourites tag in their tournament opener today, pressure on the Tigers is still immense since a loss against a spirited Netherlands could send them off to a slippery slope in the T20 World Cup.

PHOTO: BCB



SCORES IN BRIEF

Sri Lanka vs Ireland

Ireland: 128-8 in 20 overs (Tector 45, Stirling 34; Thieekshana 2-19, Hasaranga 2-25)

Sri Lanka: 133-1 in 15 overs (Mendis 68 not out, de Silva 31, Asalanka 31 not out; Delany 1-28)

Result: Sri Lanka won by nine wickets.

Player-of-the-match: Kusal Mendis.

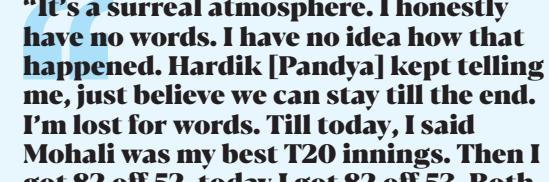
Pakistan vs India

Pakistan: 159 for eight in 20 overs (Shan 52, Iftikhar 51; Arshdeep 3-32, Hardik 3-30)

India: 160 for six in 20 overs (Virat 82, Hardik 40; Haris 2-36, Nawaz 2-42)

Result: India won by four wickets.

Player-of-the-match: Virat Kohli.



"It's a surreal atmosphere. I honestly have no words. I have no idea how that happened. Hardik [Pandya] kept telling me, just believe we can stay till the end. I'm lost for words. Till today, I said Mohali was my best T20 innings. Then I got 82 off 52, today I got 82 off 53. Both are just as special. All these months when I was struggling, you guys [the crowd] kept me going. Thank you so much."

VIRAT KOHLI

"It was probably one of the best I've witnessed, the partnership, and obviously Virat was brilliant. It's not easy when you have to bowl the last over when you're a spinner," he continued.

A deflated Pakistan captain Babar Azam also paid tribute to Kohli. "Our bowlers bowled really well. We had a chance, we tried to stick to our plans. But credit to Virat Kohli."

Victory was critical in a group that includes South Africa, Bangladesh and qualifiers Zimbabwe and the Netherlands, with only the top two making the semi-finals.

India have largely dominated Pakistan since the late 1990s but had lost two of their three previous clashes including by 10 wickets in the group phase at last year's T20 World Cup and the recent Asia Cup.

But India had been in good recent form, winning home series against Australia and South Africa, riding on the success of their batting line-up.

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Bangladesh's T20 World Cup campaign last year had gone off the rails after things were said in the media by members of the board and the players following a defeat to Scotland, which created tension inside the dressing room. Ahead of their first Super 12 match against the Netherlands, it appears a curtain has been drawn around the Bangladesh squad as skipper Shakib Al Hasan was in no mood to divulge much on their plans a day ahead of the game.

Media reports have recently suggested that even members of the team management were not keen on talking to the media. Whether it is escapism from past hassles, leading to media backlash, is not certain but Shakib clearly had a plan of action for his side on how to go about their business.

There have been rumours, media briefs and news that become sensational, and in the past such things have boiled over and created issues that could have been avoided. This in part could have been why a certain distance with the media has now come to pass, the other more reasonable facet is to galvanise the side.

Portuguese football coach Jose Mourinho believed in a 'us against them' policy for a major portion of



his coaching career. He would rile up oppositions on and off the pitch and would rile his players on to feel a certain rivalry with everyone concerned in order to make them push past their limits. During his days at Real Madrid, he could create divisions within the club to tick his own boxes. This tendency often saw him provoke the kind of aggression that he needed from his troops on the pitch.

While this is merely conjecture, Shakib might have come to the press conference hoping to soak up all the attention while in the meantime galvanising his players to a mentality of the world being against them.

Bangladesh's recent record already establishes the fact that improvements are needed in all departments to get any kind of result at this World Cup. To a particularly pointed question from an English-speaking contingent of journalists attending the event on whether the first three games against the Netherlands, South Africa and Zimbabwe are 'simpler' than the last two against Pakistan and India, Shakib's reply was sharp.

"We never thought like that, every match is equally important to us. There are two points to grab and we will look to win every game we play. No easy or big team at this World Cup. As you saw in the qualifiers, teams that maybe you guys thought will win, didn't win. Maybe it's a perception you are putting in us but we never prepared our team like that," Shakib said yesterday and his response to the same question from the local media had been similar.

He was also asked if the media was 'overreaching' regarding the tension between players and the media. "You can judge that and let the people judge that. I don't like judging and my focus is on the team and hopefully the players' focus is on the match tomorrow," he laid it on.

Mourinho's principle had drawbacks too in the long-term. Shakib meanwhile, appears busy being a battering ram for the team.

'It is high-class batting'

AGENCIES

Kusal Mendis grabbed another half-century as Sri Lanka trounced Ireland by nine wickets at the T20 World Cup in Hobart on Sunday to build confidence ahead of a potentially pivotal Super 12 clash against champions Australia.

Opener Mendis, who blasted 79 in a qualifying win over the Netherlands last week, fired Sri Lanka to victory with an unbeaten 68 as his team mowed down Ireland's 128 for eight with 30 balls to spare in the clash of qualifiers at Bellerive Oval.

Since a shock first-up loss to Namibia during qualifying, the 2014 champions Sri Lanka have now won three matches in succession.

"Really happy the way we played. That is the kind of cricket we want to play," Sri Lanka skipper Dasun Shanaka said. Shanaka praised Mendis. "He is being consistent and playing according to situation most of the time. That's why he has improved. It is high-class batting," said Shanaka.



Sri Lanka opener Kusal Mendis whacks one over the boundary during his unbeaten 68-run knock against Ireland in the T20 World Cup match at the Bellerive Oval in Hobart yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

All-Africa affair as SA face Zimbabwe

SPORTS REPORTER

South Africa begin their T20 World Cup campaign in Australia as they take on their African counterparts Zimbabwe at Hobart's Bellerive Oval today.

The Proteas arrive at the marquee event with mixed form, having comprehensively won a T20I series 4-1 against hosts England but failed to follow it up by suffering a 2-1 series defeat against India earlier this month.

In the batting department, in-form middle-order David Miller and Rilee Rossouw are expected to complement explosive opener Quinton de Kock and, bowling-wise, South Africa have one of the strongest set-up in the tournament.

Meanwhile, Zimbabwe, have already produced some brilliant displays to seal their maiden Super 12 berth as they beat Ireland and Scotland in Round 1.

On the back of nine wins out of the last 11 matches and considering the momentum gained, Zimbabwe are likely to pose a hefty challenge to South Africa with all-rounder Sikandar Raza in red-hot form, especially with the bat.

WHAT TO WATCH

T SPORTS

Bangladesh vs Netherlands
Live from 10:00 am
South Africa vs Zimbabwe
Live from 02:00 pm

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1

West Ham vs Bournemouth
Live from 01:00 am (Tuesday)