

‘Minnows’ send a reminder

AFP, Adelaide

The Twenty20 World Cup in Australia has produced a series of shocks and the so-called minnows warn there are going to be more at future tournaments.

The last in a string of stunning upsets came on Sunday and was arguably the biggest of them all.

Scott Edwards' Netherlands knocked South Africa out of the World Cup at the Adelaide Oval with a surprise 13-run victory on the final day of the Super 12.

Coupled with wins for Pakistan and India over Bangladesh and Zimbabwe respectively, the Dutch will get direct entry into the expanded 2024 World Cup in the West Indies and United States.

Ireland, with wins over two-time champions the West Indies and England, were also giant-killers. As were Zimbabwe, who defeated Pakistan.

The first match of the tournament was a taste of things to come when Namibia thrashed Asian champions Sri Lanka by 55 runs.

Speaking on the eve of their match against the Proteas, South African-born Dutch bowler Roelof van der Merwe said these were no flukes.

"You look at the different formats and then you look at T20 cricket, and the shorter the format is, the closer the teams are," he said.

"Ten years ago there would have been one (upset) a tournament.



"You're seeing it more and more happen now. Teams are getting more clued up in how they want to prepare and what needs to be done in winning games.

"That's definitely something that's evolved in the last 10 years or so. Teams are getting closer to the guys at the top.

"It's good for cricket."

Renowned commentator Harsha Bhogle said that the lesser lights of world cricket have shown they deserve more exposure.

"Irrespective of what happens next, the Netherlands, Zimbabwe, Ireland, even Namibia and Scotland have demanded more opportunities in T20 cricket," he wrote on Twitter.

"This World Cup should lead to a greater democratisation of our game."

But will it? The International Cricket Council, the sport's ruling body, is keen to push the game's growth beyond traditional cricketing countries.

But the leading nations are often so busy playing each other that they have no time for the supposed minnows.

Series against lower-ranked sides do not bring the money in like a blockbuster India versus England one would. Lucrative T20 leagues also pack an already congested calendar. The smaller nations often end up playing against each other, except when they get their chance at global tournaments such as a World Cup.

"The better idea would be for the 'A' teams of India or Australia or England to go and play these countries," senior Indian sports journalist R. Kaushik told AFP.

He agrees that the T20 format lends itself to shocks, but added: "Also these are indications that cricket in these countries is moving in the right direction."

Ireland skipper Andrew Balbirnie bristled at the notion that their wins over the West Indies and pre-tournament favourites England were upsets at all.

"We might not be recognised because we don't play as often as other teams on the big stage or in front of the cameras as often," he said.



Hasan Mahmud, Liton Das were ready and packed while Mustafizur Rahman was busy with his phone as Bangladesh team exited their team hotel in Adelaide following their T20 World Cup campaign, which ended with a five-wicket defeat to Pakistan in their last Super 12 fixture on Sunday. The Tigers are expected to arrive in the country in the wee hours of Tuesday.

PHOTO: BCB

Shakib's form 'became a big factor'

SPORTS REPORTER

There were particular areas of concerns regarding Bangladesh's performances that resurfaced during the T20 World Cup in Australia and, among them, Shakib Al Hasan's lacklustre performance, especially with the bat, stands out given how unexpected it was.

While performances of captains such as Temba Bavuma and Aaron Finch have come under fire during this World Cup, Bangladesh's star all-rounder and skipper Shakib surprisingly did not feel the heat for his own performances. Shakib's lack of runs, however, came at the most inopportune moment in the World Cup. And even as expectations off the team going into the event had been low, Shakib's form had been one of the high points before the showpiece event.

Shakib was phenomenal during the 2019 World Cup but the collective did not produce such lofty performances. Then captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was heavily criticised for not lifting the team with his own performances, and it remains to be seen whether fingers will similarly be pointed this time around.

Ahead of the ongoing World Cup, Shakib was handed captaincy as the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) could not find an alternative ahead of the World Cup. Thus, a few within the BCB hierarchy are likely to turn a

blind eye to the scenario.

Shakib's mentor, Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, felt that the skipper's form became a factor during the tournament, and it did not allow the team to find stability in key scenarios.



"I think it [Shakib's form] became a big factor. His performances didn't approach anything close to what we come to expect from him. Perhaps the team would be a bit more stable if he had performed," Fahim said while talking to The Daily Star yesterday.

Taskin Ahmed was immense with the ball at the World Cup, while Mustafizur Rahman was able to support that new-ball effort in death overs. On the batting front, however, very little happened in terms of contributions from the middle-order. While Shakib did not

perform at the top, the middle-order did not offset the skipper's lack of runs.

"Barring two of [Najmul Hossain] Shanto's knocks and one from Liton [Das], there was no other notable performance with the bat. We won two games because of the bowlers but we could have done better if we could use other players' abilities," Fahim opined.

"If management had been unsatisfied with these performances, I would have liked that," the veteran coach said, alluding to the fact that the team management rated the performances greatly.

Fahim further opined that management planned at the last moment and it did not help Bangladesh's cause.

"Our preparation for the World Cup was not good. Responsibility to lead the side was handed to someone at the last moment. I'm talking about the technical consultant. It's very hard for someone to get the big picture about players when appointments are given in a very short time.

"That's how opening with Sabbir [Rahman] and Mehedi [Hasan Miraz] came about. I don't know how much he [Sridharan Sriram] was involved with such decisions, but it was a very poor idea and it wasted valuable time. We already didn't have much time [to sort the side] and we ended up spending time on such plans," Fahim concluded.

PSG face Bayern in last 16

AFP, Paris

Liverpool will have the chance to avenge last season's Champions League final defeat at the hands of Real Madrid after they were drawn on Monday to face the holders again in the last 16.

Meanwhile, Paris Saint-Germain were drawn to play Bayern Munich in a repeat of the 2020 final which was won by the German club.

Manchester City will play RB Leipzig and 2021 winners Chelsea also drew German opposition in the shape of Borussia Dortmund. Tottenham Hotspur were given a tough draw against Italian champions AC Milan.

Inter Milan will play Porto and Eintracht Frankfurt take on Napoli, while Benfica will play Club Brugge of Belgium.

The first legs of all last-16 ties will be played in February with the return matches in March.

Football influencer in Brazil squad!

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil coach Tite made a surprise early announcement for his World Cup squad Sunday, naming football influencer and internet sensation Luva to his team, in a gag video that went viral on social media.

Tite, who is due to announce his squad Monday -- a task he recently admitted is making him lose sleep -- lightened the mood with a video naming the 20-year-old Brazilian funnyman "the first member of the World Cup team."

"The rule is we have to select 27 players," the veteran coach says in the 30-second video posted on Luva's social media accounts, which have more than 40 million followers.

"Now we only have 26 spots, because one has just been named: Luva de Pedreiro," he says with a grin, handing him the iconic yellow jersey of the five-time champions.

The self-described "best football influencer in the world" reacts with one of his trademark over-the-top celebrations.



'Crazy feeling' to beat Djokovic, says Rune

REUTERS

Holger Rune said beating Novak Djokovic in the Paris Masters final on Sunday was the icing on the cake in a week where he bagged his first Masters title and became the first Danish man to crack the top 10 of the ATP rankings.

The 19-year-old rallied from a set down to overcome Djokovic 3-6, 6-3, 7-5 and deny the Serb a seventh title in the tournament, capping off a spectacular run in which he also beat four other top-10 players.

"To beat Novak. To be able to beat him in such occasion ... in the final is probably the best feeling of this whole week," said Rune.

"It was also important for me to beat Felix and Alcaraz and these guys. But still, to be able to beat Novak ... he's probably one of the greatest we have ever had in this sport."

"It's a crazy feeling."

Rune, who climbed to world number 10, will now head to Turin as the first alternate at the season-ending ATP Finals, which begins on Sunday.

"Of course I'm going to go to Turin. I'm one out. I mean, I wish all the players that I'm not going to play, because I wish them to be healthy, but at the same time it would be awesome if I got to play," Rune said.



Bagnaia claims MotoGP world title

AFP, Valencia

Francesco Bagnaia claimed the MotoGP crown in the season-ending Valencia Grand Prix on Sunday to pull off the greatest title turnaround in the championship's history.

The Ducati rider, who trailed outgoing champion Fabio Quartararo by 91 points mid-season, completed his astonishing comeback with ninth place behind race winner Alex Rins.

"World champion - it sounds good" beamed Bagnaia, universally known as 'Pecco'.

"That was the hardest race of my life," the 25-year-old added.

"I was struggling. My aim was to be in the top five, but I started to struggle after a few laps, but the most important thing is we are world champions."

Among those rushing to congratulate him was his mentor, Italian motorcycling legend Valentino Rossi, the last Italian to win the MotoGP title in 2009.

Also on hand was Giacomo Agostini, who was the last Italian to take the championship on an Italian bike 50 years ago.



Bangladesh striker Sauravi Akanda Prity celebrates one of her goals against Bhutan in their SAFF U-15 Women's Championship encounter at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday. Prity scored six goals as the hosts won the match 9-0. Nepal will take on Bhutan tomorrow before the hosts take on Nepal in the decisive last match of the tournament on Nov 11.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED