

Kohli, Rohit not safe as India ponder overhaul

AFP, New Delhi

Virat Kohli and skipper Rohit Sharma could be victims of wholesale change to India's Twenty20 team after the catastrophic World Cup semi-final defeat to England.

England romped to a 10-wicket victory on Thursday at the Adelaide Oval, chasing down the 169-run target with four overs to spare to set up a final on Sunday against India's arch-rivals Pakistan.

Openers Alex Hales (86 not out) and Jos Buttler (80 not out) did the damage against a muted Indian bowling attack lacking both fire and fury.

Cricket is by far the most popular sport in the world's second most populous country, but India have not won a global title since the 2013 Champions Trophy and the painful wait goes on.

The thrashing was met with disappointment, anger and demands for heads to roll.

Reports on Friday said the T20 squad will start undergoing a major transition in the coming days, with prominent senior players including Rohit, Kohli and Ravichandran Ashwin being gradually eased out.



One of the protagonists of England's crushing 10-wicket victory over India in the T20 World Cup semifinal, Alex Hales, was all smiles as he arrived at the Melbourne airport on Friday for their final against Pakistan tomorrow at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. (Inset) Meanwhile, Pakistan skipper Babar Azam and opener Mohammad Rizwan were also in a jovial mood as they completed a training session yesterday after having arrived in Melbourne a day before.

PHOTO: AFP

Rain threat looms over Sunday's final

REUTERS, Melbourne

Heavy rain is expected for Sunday's T20 World Cup final between Pakistan and England at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Rain also threatens the reserve day on Monday as a multi-year La Nina weather phenomenon continues to drench much of eastern Australia.

While the forecast could put a dampener on the crowd at the MCG, organisers will plough ahead with the starting time of 7 p.m. (0800 GMT) on Sunday and hope each side can squeeze 10 overs in, the minimum required for the final.

If Sunday is completely washed out, the match will start at 3 p.m. on Monday, with the teams on notice to be ready to linger well into the evening if the weather forces it.

In the worst-case scenario where Monday is also washed out, then the World Cup will have joint winners for the first time.

Shanto banks on Aus lessons for next WC

SPORTS REPORTER

Against all odds, Bangladesh had the golden chance to qualify for the semifinals of the ongoing T20 World Cup after the Netherlands stunned South Africa to blow the Group 2 wide open, but another dismal batting display led the Tigers down against Pakistan in their last Super 12 clash.

Another surprise from Bangladesh was that their opening batter, Najmul Hossain Shanto, ended up as the highest run-getter for his side in the flagship event.

Shanto had been on the receiving end of immense criticism over his inclusion in the Tigers' World Cup squad ahead of the marquee event since he underwent a sustained lean patch, but the left-hander ended up tallying 180 runs in five games, including two fifties against Zimbabwe and Pakistan.

Despite Shanto ending up as the Tigers' leading run scorer, it was the approach of the left-hander that added fuel to the fire. However, Shanto informed that his focus was more on the game rather than what critics were saying about him.

"There have been a lot of talks about me but to be honest I did not think about such things as I was more focused on my game and training," Shanto told reporters yesterday following the arrival of the Bangladesh team last week.

However, skipper Shakib Al



Hasan did not accompany the side as he left for the United States from Australia.

"Alhamdulillah, it went well, but I feel that I could've done much better than what I did," said Shanto.

Although the Tigers won two games but the team management would be worried over the fact that Bangladesh lost momentum in crucial stages in their encounters against superior opponents on paper, most notably during their five-run defeat against India.

"We had a big opportunity to do well in this World Cup. We will keep that in mind so that we can do better in the next World Cup. We still have two years in our hand and we will try to prepare ourselves accordingly. If we can train accordingly, it is possible to do well in the next World Cup," he said.

The Bangladesh middle-order portrayed a sordid display throughout the tournament, being able to reach 150 only once in the five matches played.

Bangladesh's batting may have been the biggest disappointment, but their bowling unit, especially the pace battery led by Taskin Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, and Hasan Mahmud, remained instrumental behind the two wins.

Taskin bagged eight wickets in five games and was the leading wicket-taker for Bangladesh, while experienced Mustafizur kept runs in check throughout the tournament.

"I think our bowling unit did really well in almost all the games. The other thing is that we stuck together as a unit and backed each other in tough situations. Personally, since this was my first World Cup, I felt that we played as a team," Shanto added.

Bangladesh's next assignment is against India at home next month, where the Tigers are slated to play two Tests and three ODIs.

Pakistan seek inspiration from '92 World Cup

AGENCIES

Pakistan have soaked up stories from the landmark 1992 Cricket World Cup final win over England in the lead up to Sunday's Twenty20 decider and hope to share their own tales of triumph in years to come, team mentor Matthew Hayden said on Friday.

Imran Khan's side beat England by 22 runs at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in that 50-overs tournament to claim their first World Cup trophy in a landmark moment for Pakistan cricket.

Hayden said Pakistan board chief Ramiz Raja, who opened the batting and took the final catch that sealed victory in the 1992 final, had addressed Babar Azam's team on Friday morning.

"He was reliving some of those stories around the '92 World Cup," former Australia opener Hayden told reporters at the MCG.



CBrazil fans throng the streets of Doha, displaying Neymar cardboard cut out outside the National Museum of Qatar, as the middle eastern nation prepares for the FIFA World Cup 2022.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Analysts tip Brazil for Hexa

REUTERS

Brazil are tipped to claim the World Cup for the sixth time in the tournament that kicks off Nov. 20 in Qatar, according to a Reuters poll that last successfully predicted the champions in 2010.

The global survey of 135 football following market analysts worldwide agreed with the bookmakers that Brazil would triumph for the first time since 2002.

Almost half of respondents expected Brazil to win while 30% were evenly split between France and Argentina. Germany, England and Belgium scored in high single digits.

"We assign a probability of 17% to Brazil winning the tournament, which translates into odds of 5-1," wrote Peter Dixon, head of EMEA country risk at Fitch Solutions in London. Dixon put Germany second at 11% and France third at 8%.

"And I think that's great, because that's why you play the game. These boys their careers will be but a blink and they'll be looking back on this tournament.

"And they'll tell these stories around campfires in their villages, in media conferences like the one we are here and it will be an important chapter of Pakistan cricket - as the '92 campaign was."

For some, it might be difficult to fathom how the stars aligned for Babar and Khan in Australia three decades apart.

For instance, both Babar and Khan lost their opening round games at the MCG; arch-rival India got the better of them in 1992 and 2022. Pakistan went on to win their last three games ahead of the semifinals on both occasions, but both Babar and Khan had to bank heavily on the results of other games to go through to the knockout stage on the last day of the group stage.

New Zealand were the opponent in both semifinals, with the Kiwis batting first both times.

There are also differences, of course. For a start, skipper Babar Azam is not 39 years old.

England, who won the last 50-overs World Cup in 2019 on home soil, are rated clear favourites by bookmakers to win on Sunday after humiliating India by 10 wickets in Thursday's semi-final at Adelaide Oval.

Hayden, however, felt Pakistan's attack would be a good match for the English and particularly their captain Jos Buttler and Alex Hales, who chased down 169 for victory in an unbroken partnership to embarrass India's bowlers.

"I think the bases are covered," said Hayden.

"I think both sides actually have got very equal set-ups.

"It's just 'even-stevens'. At the start of this tournament I always thought that England was going to be a huge threat.

"And here we are on the edge of a final."