

Babar ‘more excited than nervous’

AFP, MELBOURNE

Captain Babar Azam told his rejuvenated Pakistan side on Saturday to ride the wave of four consecutive victories and win the Twenty20 World Cup final.

The 2009 champions suffered last-ball losses to India and Zimbabwe to start their tournament but bounced back to surge into Sunday's final against England at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

"I'm more excited than nervous... it is no doubt that pressure exists, but it can only be suppressed with confidence and belief in ourselves. And for good results it is important that one must do so," Azam said.

Pakistan are slight underdogs against Jos Buttler's England, but Azam is banking on the strength of his fast bowlers to give them an edge, particularly in the six-over powerplay.

"England is a competitive team, their (10-wicket) win to reach the finals against India was a proof of that," he said. "Our strategy is to stick to our plan and use our pace attack as our strength to win the finals."

"Utilising the powerplay to grab as many wickets will be essential for the match."

Buttler looks to new era of English cricket

REUTERS, MELBOURNE

Securing England's second Twenty20 World Cup title would be a triumph for a team in transition but captain Jos Buttler says more success can be reaped by his seasoned squad.

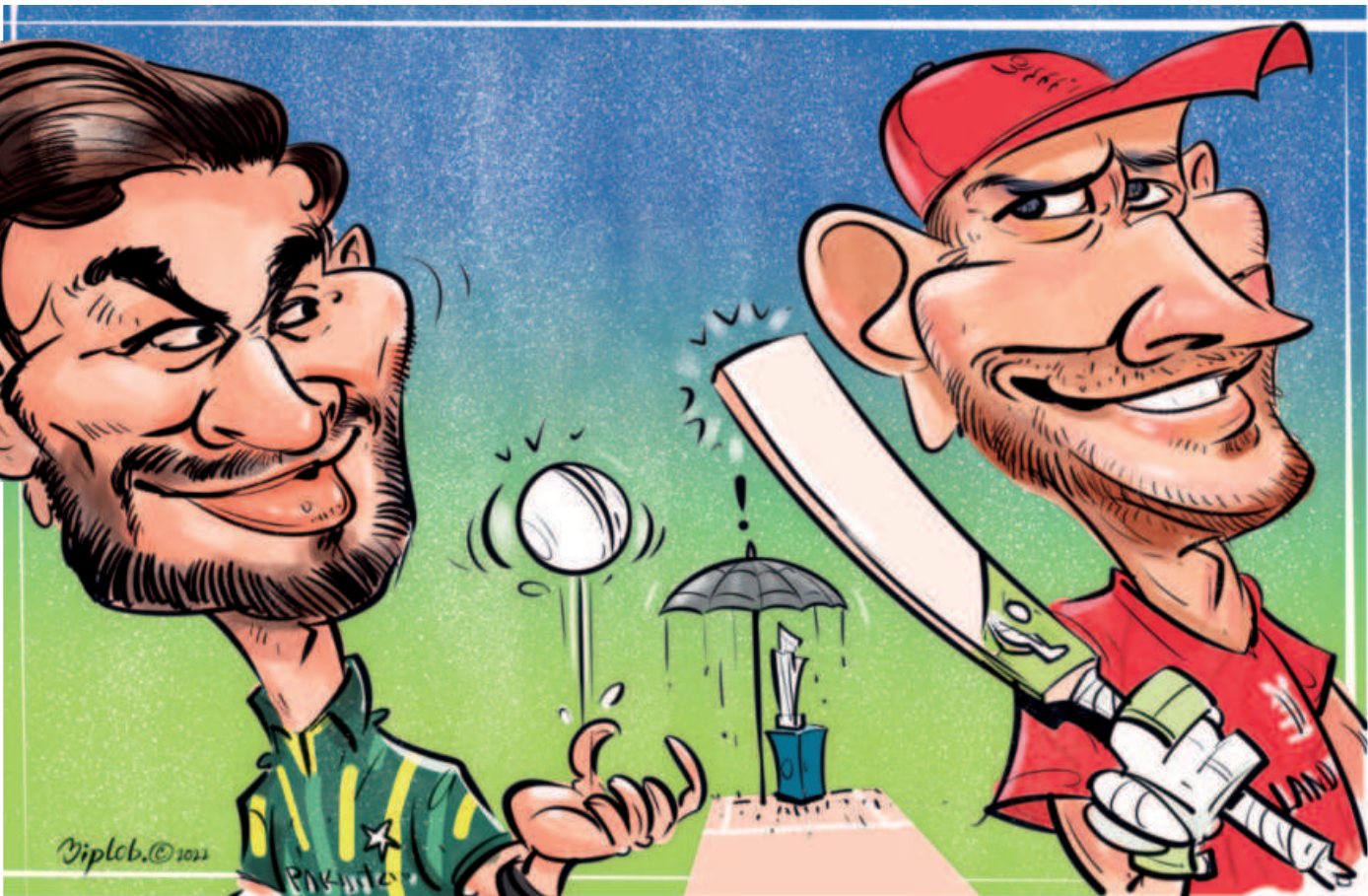
The England team battling Pakistan for the trophy at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Sunday will be laden with players in the back end of their careers, including 33-year-old opener Alex Hales and 35-year-old all-rounder Moeen Ali.

Buttler will be 33 when the 50-overs World Cup rolls around in 2023, while spin bowler Adil Rashid will be 35. Though England may need to regenerate to maintain the standards set by former captain Eoin Morgan, Buttler said he felt the current squad was only at the beginning of a new era for English cricket.

"Of course the chances are going to be fewer and fewer when you're a bit older. But that just gives you that added determination and drive to try and make it happen," he told reporters at the MCG on Saturday.

"Hopefully I've got more time ahead myself as a captain and with (head coach) Matthew Mott we can hopefully shape the next, as I say, era of English white-ball cricket."

"Of course we're still reaping the rewards of Eoin Morgan's tenureship and the changes that have happened in the white ball game in England."



Unstoppable England vs Immovable Pakistan

Jos Buttler-inspired England and a Babar Azam-led Pakistan will be squaring off at the iconic Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) on Sunday, hoping to lift their second T20 World Cup title and keeping an eye on the heavens, wishing for its doors not to open and ruin the title decider. Pakistan, England or rain – who will steal the spotlight? As we head towards the mouth-watering contest, let's take a gander at some interesting facts and hope the finale lives up to the billing.

FINALS SINCE 2007

India won the inaugural edition of the T20 World Cup in 2007, beating arch rivals Pakistan by five runs in an enthralling final. India's Joginder Sharma defended 13 runs in the final over, finishing proceedings with the dismissal of Pakistan's last wicket, Misbah-ul-Haq, at the Wanderers Stadium.

Two years later, Pakistan made sure to make it count in the final as they beat Sri Lanka by eight wickets to clinch the T20 World Cup at Lords.

The following year, England won their first ICC trophy as they took home the T20 World Cup, beating arch rivals Australia by seven wickets at the Kensington Oval.

The 2012 T20 World Cup saw hosts Sri Lanka play West Indies in the final in Colombo. The Windies won the contest by 36 runs and all-rounder Marlon Samuels was adjudged the player of the final; He is the only player to have achieved the feat twice (2012 and 2016).

Sri Lanka, however, washed away their 2012 sorrows by beating India by six wickets in the 2016 final in Mirpur.

The post-Covid World Cup in 2021, staged in the UAE, was won by Australia by eight wickets against neighbours New Zealand in Dubai.



TRIVIA

Pakistan, after heartbreak in the 2007 final against arch rivals India, made sure to get the job done in 2009 as they beat Sri Lanka by eight wickets in a low-scoring final at Lords to clinch their first and only T20 World Cup title.

England, champions of the 2010 edition of the tournament, dominated the final in a seven-wicket win over arch rivals Australia at the Kensington Oval.

There remains a 100 percent chance of showers and even severe thunderstorms for the final on Sunday. The weather is also expected to be bleak on Monday, the reserve day for the final.

A minimum of 10 overs per side is needed to constitute a game, compared to five during the group stages. If the match starts on Sunday but isn't finished, it will resume on Monday from where it was

halted.

In the worst-case scenario where play on both days are washed out, the World Cup will have joint winners for the first time.

England and Pakistan have never won at the MCG, with the English losing four times, including a loss to Ireland in the ongoing edition, while Babar Azam's troops came out second best twice at the same ground.

The two finalists have faced each other 28 times in T20Is. England lead the head-to-head chart, winning 17 times. Pakistan won nine while one match was tied and another ended without a result.

Pakistan's score of 232-6 in the first T20I during their tour of England in 2021 is the highest team total achieved in T20Is between the two sides. The men in green also hold the record for the lowest total as

they were bundled out for 89 in the second T20I during Pakistan's tour of England in 2010.

Pakistan skipper Babar Azam has amassed the most runs against England as the batter boasts 560 runs in 15 matches at a strike-rate of 142.85 while averaging 50.90, including a best score of 110 not out, which is also the highest individual score between batters of both teams.

In the bowling front, England's Graeme Swann and Adil Rashid have scalped 17 wickets each against Pakistan, the most amongst two teams.

Saeed Aijal's 4-23 in the third T20I during England's tour of the UAE in 2012 remains the best bowling figure amongst the two sides. Adil Rashid came close to toppling it but gave away 35 runs for his four wickets in the third T20I of their tour of Pakistan in 2021.

Sajida, Jafirah, Moumita win bronze

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's Sajida Haque, Jafirah Chowdhury and Moumita Riya clinched bronze medal in women's (youth) 10m air rifle event of the 15th Asian Airgun Championship in Daegu, South Korea yesterday.

The Bangladesh team scored 612.8 points to beat Uzbekistan to fourth position by 1.1 point. India (626.3) and South Korea (624.6) won gold and silver medals respectively.

Bangladesh's Kamrunnahar Koli, meanwhile, missed out on an individual bronze medal in women's 10m air rifle event, losing against her Kazakh opponent by 0.3 points.

Bangladesh team will compete in men's 10m air rifle event today and in 10m air rifle mixed event tomorrow.



Independence Cup kicks off today

SPORTS REPORTER

Independence Cup gets underway today in two venues as record three-time champions Mohammedan take on Bangladesh Navy, one of the two qualified teams for this season's curtain-raising event, at the Bishreshtha Ft Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj.

The second match of the day will see one-time champion Sheikh Russel take on Fortis FC, a newcomer in Bangladesh Premier League, at the Shaheed Dhirendra Nath Dutta Stadium in Cumilla.

The third venue of the tournament is the Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni Stadium in Gopalganj.

A total of 16 teams are taking part in the 12th edition of the tournament, including 11 outfits of the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League alongside two qualifiers – Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Air Force, and three automatic qualifiers from the BCL – BFF Elite Academy, Azampur FC Uttara and Youngmen's Fakirerpool Club.

Split into four groups, the 16 teams will play each other in their respective groups before the two semifinals, a third position match and the final take place.

The final will be held in Cumilla on December 5.

WHAT TO WATCH

T SPORTS & GTV

T20 World Cup

Final

Pakistan vs England

Live from 02:00 pm

STAR SPORTS SELECT HD 1

EPL

Brighton vs Aston Villa

Live from 08:00 pm

Fulham vs Manchester United

Live from 10:30 pm

Players being pushed past acceptable limits, says Fifpro

AGENCIES

Footballers are being "pushed past acceptable limits" by a saturated schedule to allow for a mid-season World Cup, players' union Fifpro said, warning that the unique circumstances of the Qatar World Cup have created an unprecedented risk of injury during the tournament. With the final fixtures in leagues including the Premier League taking place only a week before the tournament, a lack of preparation time will be a key factor in putting players at risk, according to the union.

Fifpro's comments are part of a report that will be published next week looking into player workload and how it has been impacted by the 2022 World Cup. The key findings unearthed that in many regions, additional fixtures had been crammed into an already saturated early part of this season, exposing players to increased risk. Meanwhile, in other regions, players have been underloaded due to inadequate planning.

Significantly reduced preparation and recovery periods before and after the World Cup pose an ominous threat to player

health and hinder performance optimisation.

The report highlights Tottenham and South Korea forward Son Heung-min, who played more than 600 minutes of football in October with games every three or four days. It says he completed more than 146,000km of international travel with club and country since the beginning of last season, crossing 132 time zones.

The report also highlights that, since the beginning of last season, Senegal striker Sadio Mane played 93 competitive matches for Liverpool and Bayern Munich before he suffered a knee injury against Werder Bremen on Wednesday, putting his World Cup participation in doubt.

Other concerning findings were related to top European players, such as the fact that Harry Kane had started every competitive fixture for Spurs this season and Kylian Mbappe has played 75 per cent of his minutes in "back-to-back matches", where players miss out on the recommended five-day break between games.

"The number of players speaking up shows the degree of

concern players have and there will be many, many more in dressing rooms who just don't publicly speak about it," said Fifpro general secretary Jonas Baer-Hoffmann. "There is a lot of concern."

There has also been criticism of the lack of recovery time for players after the World Cup.

The final takes place on 18 December, two days before the English domestic season resumes with the Carabao Cup fourth round. The Premier League returns on 26 December.

"Something definitely worth mentioning is the mental effect, particularly for the players who are playing in the latter stages of the World Cup where there is high pressure and high states," said Darren Burgess, a Fifpro consultant former performance director at Arsenal, Liverpool and Australia.

"[It could] potentially be between eight and 15 days from their last World Cup game and first club game and that is absolutely not enough time to mentally recover and digest and process the experience they have had at the World Cup. It will undoubtedly lead to a lot of mental stress."



Argentina fans Matias Villarreal, Silvio Gatti, Leandro Blanco and Lucas Ledezma cycled 10,500 kilometers across Africa to reach Doha "The dream behind cycling this whole route is that Argentina will win the World Cup and that Leo [Messi] will lift the trophy on December 18," said Blanco. "The emotion we feel here is immense, we spent six months cycling through Africa and the Middle East, to be here in Doha today and for this party. We have a lot of faith and a lot of hope, that's why we have done all this craziness, so we are starting to live this beautiful World Cup here in Qatar."

PHOTO: AFP