



Australia look to ace Windies Test

REUTERS, Perth

Australia's summer of cricket starts in earnest on Wednesday as the top-ranked Test side begin a two-match series against West Indies, albeit amid little fanfare after three months of continual white-ball matches across the country.

An eighth ranked opposition and midweek start are unlikely to help draw crowds to the 60,000-seat Perth Stadium, staging its first test since 2019. But for the hosts it represents an opportunity to put behind them a failed home Twenty20 World Cup campaign in which they crashed out before the semi-finals.

A slew of uneventful and unattended bilateral series bookended the popular T20 showpiece, which England won earlier this month, creating an unusual situation whereby the pinnacle of the Australian cricket season came and went before the summer had really started.

"There's a lot of cricket, it's hard to follow as a spectator. It's very hard to keep up with it," former Australia captain Steve Waugh told SEN radio.

"I think the public has almost overdosed on cricket... It's hard to follow the Australian side because every time they play they've got a different team on the field."

Batsman Steve Smith, 33, averages 166 from five Tests against West Indies and can fill his boots again, showing signs of his best form in a recent ODIs against England.

Pace spearhead Pat Cummins has yet to play the islanders in a Test, but the skipper will be hoping for a clinical first outing to shift focus away from ex-coach Justin Langer, who last week said unnamed "cowards" in the team had criticised his coaching style via the media but later denied a rift between the pair.

The Caribbean outfit return to Australia after their own World Cup prospects ended in a humiliating first-round exit. Although Kraigg Brathwaite's Test squad contains only a handful of players scarred from the T20s, his side's prospects remain dim.

One potential bright spot is uncapped 26-year-old Tegenarine Chanderpaul, son of former world number-one batsman Shivnarine, who put forward his case for Test selection with knocks of 119 and 56 against a Prime Minister's XI during a tour match which ended in a draw on Saturday.

Another is fiery quick Alzarri Joseph, who will want to push Australia's batting unit -- and the speed gun -- to its limit on Perth's pace-friendly deck.

"He's probably going to be the guy we ask to be the enforcer and be a little bit more aggressive," warned all-rounder Jason Holder.

Australia have not lost at home to the West Indies since 1997.



Portugal midfielder Bruno Fernandes (R) celebrates the first of his two goals against Uruguay with Cristiano Ronaldo during their match on Monday. Giving the veteran forward's celebration, initially it was thought that Ronaldo had got the last touch on the ball but replays eventually confirmed that the ball found its way into the net directly from Fernandes' feet. PHOTO: REUTERS

Fernandes steps out of Ronaldo's shadow

REUTERS, Lusail

Portugal's Bruno Fernandes has long played second fiddle to team mate Cristiano Ronaldo but on Monday he stepped out of the superstar's shadow by scoring two goals to steer his team past Uruguay and into the World Cup Round of 16.

The 28-year-old's career has been inextricably linked to Ronaldo, having played for Sporting, the club where his Portugal captain started his illustrious career before moving on to bigger things.

He then moved to Manchester United in 2020, another club where CR7 had left his mark in the past. Having developed into a key player for the English side, the Fernandes then saw Ronaldo return last year to once again hog the spotlight.

Fernandes does not possess the speed, power or goal-scoring prowess of CR7 but he did what was needed to get Portugal through in a game where Ronaldo failed to get on the score sheet.

Fernandes' whipped cross flew past Ronaldo's head and into the back of the net even

though his more celebrated team mate initially claimed the goal for himself.

He then added another with a second half stoppage time penalty before rattling the post seconds later in his attempt for a hat-trick.

The biggest cheers

Whether at Sporting or at United, Fernandes was condemned to playing a supporting role to Ronaldo even though he is among the highest scoring midfielders in Europe.

After Manchester United abruptly ended Ronaldo's

Playing in his second World Cup, compared to Ronaldo's fifth, Fernandes will be hoping it will also be Portugal's most successful one.

Meanwhile, Fernandes said he thought Cristiano Ronaldo had scored Portugal's opener even though he was credited with the goal.

"I celebrated as if it had been Cristiano's goal, it seemed to me that he had touched the ball, my aim was to cross the ball for him," Fernandes said.

"What's important is that we were able to go to the next round and (secure) a very important win against a very tough opponent."

Fernandes warned that Portugal would have to be at their best in their final group match on Friday against South Korea, with a point enough to guarantee them top spot in Group H.

"We know we will find a very organised team in front of us with a huge skill-set, as we've seen in their last matches," added Fernandes.

"We've played at different times and that has allowed us to watch South Korea play. Our objective is to win every match, and we have one ahead of us."



throughout the game were reserved almost exclusively for Ronaldo from the fans in the 88,000 capacity Lusail stadium.

Fernandes, however, left the pitch a happy man, knowing on the biggest of international stages there were now two big names in the Portuguese squad.

second stint at Old Trafford following his scathing criticism of the club, Fernandes refused to take sides.

"It was a dream come true to play with Cristiano.. but nothing lasts forever," he said at the time with a video of their icy encounter at the Portugal team base ahead of the World Cup quickly becoming viral.

THE LATERAL VIEW

Neymar crucial to Brazil's Hexa mission

IRESH ZAKER



When the book is closed on the current generation of footballers, no individual player will have generated greater debate than Neymar. Very few who have a modicum of understanding about

football would dispute his talent. Yet, in spite of scoring over a hundred goals for three separate clubs and being two goals shy of becoming Brazil's all-time leading scorer, many feel that he doesn't always apply himself fully to the sport.

Many cannot forgive him for not being able to cement his place alongside Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo as one of the three greatest players of his generation. Many criticise his theatrics after being fouled, and his penchant for 'diving'.

I am not sure which side of the debate I am on or whether I care enough to get into the debate to begin with.

What I am sure about after watching Monday night's game, however, is that, despite protestations from many Selecao fans and detractors to the contrary, Brazil need Neymar back if they are to go

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the distance in this tournament. Regardless of what the real and pseudo pundits say, the opposition cannot afford to ignore Neymar when he is on the pitch. This allows his teammates to express themselves fully, and Brazil to play a more effective and exciting brand of football.

I have to admit that I was a little harsh on the African teams for their failure to score in the beginning of the tournament. It is safe to say that any concerns that I may have had on that front

Regardless of what the real and pseudo pundits say, the opposition cannot afford to ignore Neymar when he is on the pitch.

have been decisively alleviated by the boys from Morocco, Ghana, and Cameroon. I do hope that one of these teams make a deep run in Qatar. Given the abundance of talent in Africa, it is sad that no team from the continent has ever made it past the quarterfinals in the World Cup.

Meanwhile, the Asian drought threatens to continue. Who would have thought after Iran's four-goal defeat against England that they would be best poised to progress among all the nations from our continent? But here we are. It all hangs on their encounter with the USA -- a fixture made fascinating by an abundance of stories, both on and off the field.

Desert complex makes WC affordable for some

REUTERS, Al Wakrah

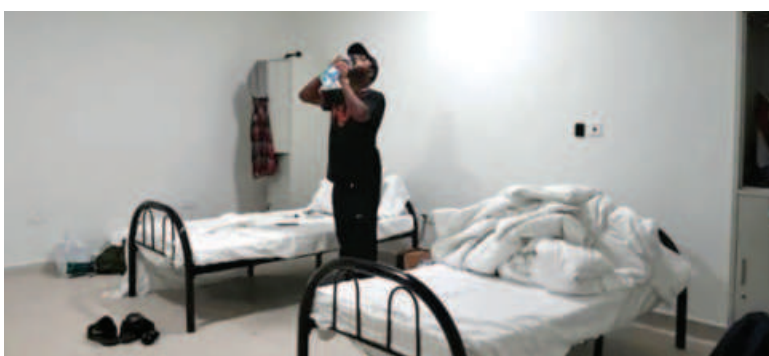
For tens of thousands of World Cup fans, home base in Qatar is a concrete complex on the edge of the desert, next to a slaughterhouse and a set of high-voltage electrical wires.

Barwa Barahat al Janoub, a two-hour metro and bus journey from the farthest stadiums, lies in stark contrast to the glitzy opening ceremony put on by the wealthy Gulf state but, at \$84 a night, it's the most affordable accommodation in Qatar.

The new complex, which features 1,404 clusters of three-storey buildings laid out in a grid of narrow streets, was designed to house some 67,000 low-income workers - a group that makes up the majority of Qatar's 3 million population - who are expected to move in some time after the World Cup.

"You get what you pay (for) and we pay very little," Emiliano Carrascal from Argentina said as he sat on the sidewalk tucking into a plate of biryani from a restaurant newly opened to cater for the influx of visitors.

Carrascal and his neighbours opted to stay "in the middle of nowhere" to be able to support their teams in person given sky-high prices in Qatar, the first Middle East nation to host soccer's biggest global event.



Prefabricated cabins closer to Doha go for \$200 per night while rooms in a shared apartment are advertised on Airbnb ABNB.O for \$500 and some cruise ship cabins cost several thousand dollars.

Rooms at Barwa Barahat are basic - steel bed frames, metal lockers, fluorescent lights, bare walls and tile floors.

Soccer-themed murals decorate some walls and a patch of astroturf lies beside a temporary supermarket where residents gather to watch matches on a big screen.

"I made many sacrifices to come here. I was saving money since like the last two years," said Sandipan Bhowmick from India, who is attending his first World Cup.

Splitting the nightly fee with a roommate from Britain, Bhowmick said he can afford to stay for 18 nights. They share a small kitchenette with Spanish fans.

Sombrero-toting Mexicans, flag-draped Moroccans and a group of Brazilians singing "Ole, Ole, Ole" emerge from buses and taxis.

Fans say the atmosphere is cordial even among those from rival countries but that the party scene is muted given the closest venue serving alcohol is 40 minutes away by bus.

"Technically, you cannot bring (alcohol) in from the outside but a lot of people (are) doing that," said Agustin from Buenos Aires, who said he had no idea how they were doing so.

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