



BRACE FOR
THE ASIAN
BATTLE



PERFORMANCE AFTER 2018 ASIA CUP					
Team	Matches	Won	Lost	Tied	No Result
India	84	52	28	1	3
Bangladesh	66	39	25	0	2
Pakistan	57	30	24	1	2
Sri Lanka	71	31	37	0	3
Afghanistan	44	18	24	0	2

A grand platform ahead of **THE WORLD CUP**

BISHWAJIT ROY

The 16th edition of the Asia Cup is set to provide a solid platform for the South Asian nations to fine-tune themselves for the ICC World Cup, which will also be hosted in the region beginning Oct 5.

The event itself, however, has turned into a significant fixture on the international cricket calendar, and the fans always show tremendous fervour for it. The competition has grown to the point that the rivalry between India and Pakistan no longer encapsulates it. Instead, the evolution of Bangladesh in the ODI format, the influx of new

players in Sri Lanka, and the ascent of Afghanistan give the tournament a genuine gravitas to savour.

Who is the favourite to win the trophy on September 17 at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo? "I think there is no basis to ask this question," former Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar said, refusing to even entertain the subject.

Bashar even only partially agreed with former India captain Sourav Ganguly, who said picking a favourite will be very difficult as anyone can win the title.

Bashar and senior coach Nazmul Abedeen Fahim both agree that "this

Asia Cup will be wide open." Only a win by Nepal, who qualified for the first time, could cause a shock among the six teams.

As long as history goes, India are the most successful team in the competition, having won it seven times. Sri Lanka are second, having won five times, and Pakistan have also won the Asia Cup twice. Bangladesh can consider themselves unlucky for having tasted defeat in the finals on three occasions.

Afghanistan cannot be discounted either, with Pakistan captain Babar Azam recently saying, "The

Afghanistan team is on the rise, and

they have some good bowlers."

Fahim reckons India have an advantage for a specific reason, that being their mix of seasoned and emerging talents as well as the ability to regularly play strong cricket in big events.

Can Pakistan win the Asia Cup after an 11-year wait? "Pakistan appears to be a very sound and happy team under the leadership of Babar, which I believe is their main strength. However, I want to see if they can deliver under pressure," Fahim opined.

"Sri Lanka have the quality to play all-out cricket, and as a unit they can beat any team," Bashar remarked,

while Fahim feels the Lankans can repeat their success from the T20 Asia Cup last year.

And Bangladesh, according to Fahim, are "no longer a team that wins a match on a particular day. "In ODI cricket, you cannot dismiss Bangladesh's chances. But it's a big issue to have a good and sound atmosphere before any competition. I'm not convinced about this because what recently happened involving the squad is pathetic."

Bashar thinks Bangladesh have a balanced squad except for the opening batter's position due to the absence of Tamim Iqbal.

Both Bashar and Fahim, however, opined that the impact of T20 cricket over the previous four years, since the 50-over Asia Cup in 2018, changed the complexion of ODI cricket. "I believe that the ability to score 300-plus runs will determine the fate of this year's Asia Cup," Bashar stated.

The stage is well set to put one's mettle to the test. As a worthy forerunner to the World Cup, this continental cricket spectacle will undoubtedly continue bestowing unforgettable moments of sublime brilliance -- apart from befittingly setting the tone for the global tournament.

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