

Australia lock in WC squad

ICC

Australia named a preliminary squad of 18 players for the 50-over showcase last month, but reduced that to 15 yesterday with the start of this year's event in India now less than one month away.

The unlucky trio to miss the final cut were all-rounder Aaron Hardie, pacer Nathan Ellis and young spinner Tanveer Sangha, with selectors instead opting for experience with the majority of their final 15. Test star Marnus Labuschagne also misses out on making the trip.

Fast bowler Pat Cummins will once again lead the side - with experienced quicks Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc providing him support with the new ball - while Sean Abbott is preferred over Ellis for the final spot in the squad as back-up pacer. Ashton Agar and Adam Zampa provide the spinning options.

There were few surprises among the batters, with David Warner, Steve Smith and Travis Head likely to be used among the top-order and all-rounders Mitchell Marsh, Glenn Maxwell, Marcus Stoinis and Cameron Green adding some depth to a high-quality batting line-up.

SA seek to attain balance ahead of WC

REUTERS, BLOEMFONTEIN

South Africa are looking to balance giving returning players a chance to find their form with trying to gain some team momentum as they begin a five-match ODI series at home against Australia today.

Just one month away from the start of the World Cup, South Africa captain Temba Bavuma is seeking to use the series to clean out a few cobwebs as well as building the team's confidence for the tournament in India from Oct. 5 - Nov. 19.

"Our World Cup preparations started from the beginning of this year, where we saw a couple of new faces coming into the team, guys who we envisaged playing certain roles within the team. Some guys have stayed, some guys, unfortunately, are not here," Bavuma said yesterday.

South Africa have included spinner Keshav Maharaj and seamer Sisanda Magala in their World Cup squad, which was announced on Tuesday, after the pair overcame fitness concerns.

"It's our last series before the World Cup. So, I guess there's a lot more of a significance behind it but I think in terms of everything that we've done our prep started a long time ago and for us it's just a matter of continuing and challenging ourselves," Bavuma added.

South Africa were thrashed by Australia last week in a three-match T20 series and Bavuma admitted building confidence would be important before arriving in India.

"Confidence is a big thing. That's what we lean on as players."



An innings full of unforced errors from Bangladesh batters in their first Super Four fixture of the Asia Cup against Pakistan in Lahore yesterday saw opener Mohammad Naim throw his wicket away again despite a promising start at the top. After forging a 100-run stand, Shakib Al Hasan and Mushfiqur Rahim did renew hope for the Tigers but the two seasoned campaigners triggered their own demise with hasty shot selections against the run of play, resulting in the Tigers crumbling to 193 all out inside 39 overs.

PHOTO: AFP

Flawed game-reading proves disastrous yet again

SPORTS REPORTER

When it works, it works like a charm. Otherwise, it appears to be a poorly put together batting plan. At the heart of it, however, is the failure to bat according to the match scenario which unfolded yet again for Bangladesh in their Asia Cup's Super Four fixture against Pakistan at Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium yesterday.

Bangladesh only managed to play 38.4 overs on a flat batting surface. The ball came into the bat very well and a lightning-fast outfield meant the ball was travelling fast. Bangladesh's task looked challenging at first, given the form that Shaheen Shah Afridi, Naseem Shah and Haris Rauf are carrying.

In essence, the idea then should have been pretty simple for Bangladesh: contain the pace attack by not giving away wickets, as the ball would move around, zip off the seam and come at pace in the first 10 overs.

The Tigers started badly when Naseem struck with his very first delivery, removing makeshift opener Mehedi Hasan Miraz, who had struck an important ton in the first game.

Liton Das, who joined the side after his fever came down, looked naturally elegant, cracking a few boundaries through the off side. Then Shaheen produced a delivery that took off from nowhere. Liton was drawn slightly forward; the ball leaving him at an angle before Liton waddled his bat around to nick it through to the wicket-keeper.

While Miraz and Liton could be excused for the nature of their dismissals, most of

the latter batters would have little to say about the quality of deliveries.

With two wickets gone, Mohammad Naim's task was to see off the early Shaheen and Naseem spell along with Shakib Al Hasan. He was in no position when he tried to pull Rauf and gave away his wicket cheaply, unable to fulfil the task that should have been set from the team management.

Tawhid Hridoy might have been rattled

In the last 12 months, Bangladesh's top three batting position's average is 28.61 in ODIs which is the lowest among sides that will play the 2023 ODI World Cup in India.

In the last 12 months, the Tigers have played 18 ODIs and played 10 different openers -- the highest among sides that will play the upcoming World Cup.

by Rauf's raw pace but Shakib alongside Mushfiqur Rahim put together a 100-run stand. When things were going well, Shakib miscued one from Faheem Ashraf after a 57-ball 53. On Shakib's part, the ball was indeed there to be hit.

Mushfiqur would soon notch his fifty with Shamim Hossain looking set at the other end.

The match scenario was set with the score at 174 with five wickets remaining after 34 overs. The two batters at the

crease along with Afif Hossain to come, had to ensure at least 250 first before making a reach for something bigger. The fragility of the lower order was shown but more acute was the failure to judge risk and rewards according to the run of play. Instead of ensuring 250 first, they went after quality bowlers without heeding the scenario.

Shamim skied one, showing he had not understood what was required as he fell for 16 to part-time bowler Iftikhar Ahmed. Mushfiqur is a veteran of just over 250 ODIs but in the 38th over, he charged Pakistan's best pacer in the game in Rauf, got a thick outside edge, and departed for 64. Despite playing a major role in rebuilding and with only Afif as the only other established batter, Mushfiqur's shot showed a lack of impetus to understand the scenario. The Tigers at that point were still scoring at over five per over.

Alif soon replicated Mushfiqur's reading of the match scenario. With the tail exposed early, the last four Bangladesh wickets thus fell in the space of eight deliveries and three runs.

If one excludes the home series against Ireland, a side not yet well equipped for subcontinent, the Tigers have batted first eight times since the start of England series and were bundled out without playing fifty overs five times. Four times they have been bundled out under 200, which happened twice in this Asia Cup. But when talks about batting disaster comes, the lack of application in match scenario reading keeps becoming acute. What instructions the batters get during matches then become something interesting.

Spain's gaffe over WC winner

REUTERS

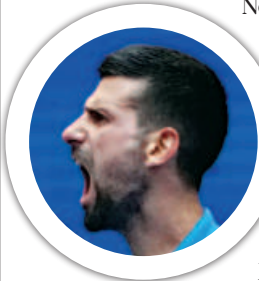
The Spanish Government mistakenly honoured celebrity Ivana Icardi, sister of Argentinian footballer Mauro Icardi, instead of Women's World Cup winning captain Ivana Andres, with the country's Royal Order of Sports Merit, Spain's National Sports Council (CSD) confirmed on Wednesday.

CSD issued an official apology for the "human error" which they "deeply regret" after the blunder was published in Tuesday's edition of Spain's Official State Gazette (BOE).

A correction was made on Wednesday's edition, honouring the correct Ivana, who lifted Spain's first Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand last month.

Djokovic keen to have fun

REUTERS



Novak Djokovic blew off some steam following Tuesday's U.S. Open win by belting out a rendition of a Beastie Boys classic and the second seed said he was trying to enjoy his time on court despite the pressure he faces to keep winning.

The 36-year-old, who is looking to match Margaret Court's all-time record of 24 Grand Slam titles, powered past American Taylor Fritz 6-1, 6-4, 6-4 at Arthur Ashe Stadium to reach a record 47th major semi-final.

Appearing more relaxed in his post match interview, Djokovic sang, 'You Gotta Fight for Your Right (to Party)' with fans in the stands joining along. "I'm trying to enjoy the moments on the court, but there's so much stress and pressure going on that it's hard to have fun, so to say, on the court," Djokovic told reporters.

"It's really about finding a way to navigate through the match and win a match for me, you know. "But off the court, in terms of the actual journey of still being a professional tennis player and going around the world, travelling with my coaching team, we try to keep things light and have fun and enjoy life."

U-23s lose 2-0 against Malaysia

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's bid to qualify for the final round of the AFC U-23 Asian Cup got off to a bad start as they conceded two late goals in a 2-0 defeat against their Malaysian counterparts in their Group H opener at Chonburi Stadium in Thailand yesterday.

From the word go, Bangladesh under-23s fought bravely against their superior opponents and could have even taken the lead in the 15th minute had forward Raliquil Islam not headed narrowly over the crossbar inside the box.

But after resumption, the game was mostly played in Bangladesh's half and the men in red and green defended well until Aliff hammered a sudden left-footer from 30 yards out to beat Bangladesh goalkeeper Mehedi Hasan Sraban in the 82nd minute. Substitute Fergus Tierney then wrapped up Malaysia's victory with a powerful diagonal shot four minutes into stoppage time.

2026 WC QUALIFIERS

‘Liberated’ Messi and Co up against Ecuador

AFP, Montevideo

After a dazzling start to his career in Major League Soccer, Lionel Messi returns to international duty with Argentina this week as South America's long qualifying road to the 2026 World Cup kicks off on Friday morning (6am, BST).

Messi and Argentina's qualifying journey gets under way with a home fixture against Ecuador at the Estadio Monumental in Buenos Aires.

Inter coach Gerard "Tata" Martino, the former Argentina and Barcelona player, says Messi has been "liberated" by finally leading Argentina to the World Cup last year after several agonising major championship near-misses.

But the question hanging in the air as South America's qualifying campaign gets under way this week, is whether Messi will be around when Argentina aim to defend their title in 2026, when the tournament is co-hosted in the United States, Canada and Mexico.



Messi appeared to pour cold water on that prospect in comments made in June, saying he did not expect to play in the 2026 finals.

Argentina's World Cup-winning manager Lionel Scaloni, however, is certainly in no mood to force the issue.

"The door will always be open. He is happy on the pitch and it would be very nice for us," Scaloni said in January.

While the questions may continue to swirl around Messi's future in future, there is less uncertainty about Argentina's prospects for qualification for the World Cup.

The expanded 48-team finals in 2026 mean that six of the 10 teams competing in South American qualifying, which will be completed in September 2025, will qualify automatically for the finals. The seventh-place team will advance to a playoff.

Given Argentina's strength, it would take an upset of mammoth proportions for them to fail to qualify automatically for 2026.

Booters eye improvement and victory

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will look to improve and get a victory against Afghanistan in the second FIFA friendly match at the Bashundhara Kings Arena today, with the match kicking off 5:00pm. The two sides are playing the FIFA friendly matches as preparation for October's pre-qualifiers of the World Cup and Asian Cup, and both teams are focused on fine-tuning their squads and fi-

nalising strategies.

The first match ended in a goalless draw with both sides creating a few of chances but none of them could take those home. Both sides were seemingly satisfied with sharing the spoils of a draw, but both coached want to end the two-match series on high note by winning the

second match.

"We are in the process to prepare and improve as much as we can to play against Maldives and we need to do it which is a must. Obviously, we will be focusing on the improvement and hopefully winning the match too," Bangladesh coach Javier Cabrera told reporters.

Jamal Bhuiyan and Co were in jovial mood in a training session at the Bashundhara Sports Complex yesterday ahead of today's second FIFA Friendly fixture against Afghanistan.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

