



Australia opener David Warner leaps into the air to celebrate his 46th international century during the second ODI against South Africa in Bloemfontein yesterday. With his second-fastest hundred, which came from 85 balls, the left-hander became the first Australian opening batter to reach 20 ODI centuries. Courtesy of Warner's 109 and Marnus Labuschagne's 124, the Aussies posted their third-highest total, 392 for eight, in the format. PHOTO: REUTERS

A tactical call that made sense

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's pace battery kept on giving to capture the lion's share of Sri Lanka wickets in their crucial Super Four fixture in Colombo yesterday, but they were aided by the contribution of a certain fresh face in the ODI setup who remained an unsung hero on the day despite having remained wicketless.

The previous matches of this Asia Cup installment saw Bangladesh field five specialist bowlers. The trade-off, to compensate for the lingering batting vulnerability, thus posed quite a challenge for captain Shakib Al Hasan to make sure all his five specialist bowlers deliver.

With talks over adding an extra bowling option surrounding ahead of the match, the team management finally opted for an extra bowling option.

The sluggish surface at the R Premadasa Stadium was likely considered as well and, as a result, misfiring batter Afif Hossain made way for Nasum Ahmed, playing in his eighth ODI match.

The left-arm spinner brilliantly did justice to his reputation and kept the Lankan batters on a tight leash since his introduction in the 10th over after Shakib opted to bowl.

Sri Lanka, though, did find themselves on the front foot at one stage, with scoreboard reading 108 for one in 23 overs. However, Shakib did not seem to be in a spot of bother



as he and Nasum combined to operate in miserly fashion, often in tandem, paying the way for the quicks to bowl aggressively in the middle overs, in search of breakthroughs.

The cricketer from Sunamganj ended up conceding just 31 runs from his full quota of

overs while Shakib gave away 44 runs from his 10 to frustrate the hosts.

"Nasum usually is a good bowler with the new ball inside the Powerplay. But yes, since he bowled mostly in the middle overs yesterday, the plan was to bowl as many dot

balls, dry up the boundaries, and unsettle the batters on a tough wicket. I think he bowled really well," local spin-bowling coach Sohail Islam to The Daily Star.

Pacers Hasan Mahmud, Taskin Ahmed and Shoriful Islam combined to scalp eight wickets for 167 runs in 27 overs. They remained on the expensive side, largely due to a blistering 72-ball 93-run knock from Sadeera Samarawickrama who led the charge in Sri Lanka accumulating 257 for nine in 50 overs.

The Premadasa had registered an average first-innings score of 268.65 in last ten years, but interestingly it came down to 246.8 in the last five matches, which might have prompted the team management to make the tactical call.

"Look, definitely it was the plan since there was some advantage for the spinners on the surface. But I think it was a collective approach from the bowling unit. We need to understand the reason behind including Nasum and Sheikh Mahedi in the squad despite the presence of Shakib and Miraz," said Sohail.

"Previously the Premadasa pitch offered assistance to the seamers but in the IPL recently we have seen the spinners coming into play more often. I think this flexibility will allow Bangladesh to form the playing eleven according to the demand of the surface and opponent in the coming days."

India, Pakistan rekindle rivalry

AFP, Colombo

Pakistan skipper Babar Azam said Saturday his side will have an edge over India in their Asia Cup Super-Four clash, with a bowling line-up ready to win matches and tournaments.

The arch-rivals meet again in Colombo on Sunday after their group match was abandoned due to rain, which has played havoc with the 50-over tournament that



» India have the edge over Pakistan after 14 Asia Cup fixtures played in the 50-over format, having won seven times with two matches yielding no result.

» Overall ODI head-to-head outcomes, however, paints a different picture as Pakistan boast a win percentage of 54 against their archrivals following 133 encounters.

» The outcome of the first-ever clash between the two sides, played in a 40-over contest in 1978, went in India's favour by a mere four-run margin.

» After three matches in Colombo, India are yet to defeat Pakistan who won the 2004 encounter. Both the first fixture in 1997 and the latest one in the ongoing Asia Cup's group stage did not produce an outcome.

» The only time India won against Pakistan in Sri Lanka happened in Dambulla in 2010, a last-ball thriller where Harbhajan Singh arrived as the unlikely hero with the bat.

is a precursor to the ODI World Cup in India.

An India-Pakistan clash remains one of the most hotly anticipated matches in world cricket because the two South Asian neighbours only play each other in multi-nation tournaments due to political tensions.

Pakistan won their opening match of the Super Four stage against Bangladesh and a second win will further enhance their chances of making the final on September 17.

But rain in the Sri Lankan capital is expected to play spoilsport again in the match, for which a reserve day has been kept aside.

"You can say we have the edge, as we have played back-to-back cricket here (in Sri Lanka) and in Pakistan," Azam told reporters.

"It has been two-and-a-half months in Sri Lanka including the Test series, Lanka

Premier League, Afghanistan series and now the Asia Cup. So, you can say it will be advantage (for us)."

Pakistan's pace trio of Shaheen Shah Afridi, Naseem Shah and Haris Rauf have stood out, with 23 wickets between them so far.

Shaheen, a left-arm quick who leads the bowling, rattled India with his opening burst in the group match, taking the key wickets of skipper Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli.

Azam said the team believes their bowlers can win them titles.

"Proud to have the fast bowlers that we have. One of the best (in the world)," said Azam.

"Fast bowlers win you tournaments and matches and I have total belief (in) them. The line-up that we have including Naseem and Faheem (Ashraf) is the best lot that we have."

India opener Shubman Gill said not

playing Pakistan regularly made it tough to gauge the opposition.

"We all know that their bowling attack is quite good and when you don't play against such attacks often it makes a bit of difference in main tournaments," said Gill.

Gill, who was bowled by Rauf for 10 in Pallekele last week, and the Indian batsmen have been facing a left-arm specialist in their training to counter Shaheen. He said the variation "helps".

India managed to post 266 all out after they slipped to 66-4 against Pakistan last week and Gill said the team has taken confidence from the fightback.

"Openers need to make a good start and need to dominate them from the beginning," he said.

"In the league match, our top order did not click much, still we made a competitive total...so, it was a good sign."



The coaches and captains of Bangladesh and India pose with the SAFF U-16 Championship trophy at the Changlimthang Stadium in Thimphu yesterday. Bangladesh, who began their campaign with a 1-0 defeat against India, will square off against the same opposition in today's final. PHOTO: SAFF



Lamine Yamal became Spain's youngest international and goalscorer aged 16 years and 57 days when he scored the seventh goal for his team during a 7-1 thrashing of Georgia in a Euro 2024 qualifier on Friday. The winger broke the previous record of Barca teammate Gavi, who was 17 years and 62 days when he made his debut in 2021. Yamal is also now the youngest player to score in Euro qualifying, taking the record from Wales legend Gareth Bale (17 years and 83 days). PHOTO: REUTERS

NEYMAR BREAKS PELE'S GOAL-SCORING RECORD

Neymar has overtaken Pele to become Brazil's all-time men's top scorer, netting twice in his national team 5-1 win in a World Cup qualifying match against Bolivia in the Amazon city of Belem.

"I never imagined reaching this record. I want to say that I am not a better player than Pele. I always wanted to make my own story, write my name in the history of Brazilian football and the national team. And today I did that."

Neymar

| COMPARISON BETWEEN PELE AND NEYMAR | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|-------|---------|--------------------|-----------------------|-------|---------|
| Pele (1957-1971) | | | | Neymar (2010-present) | | |
| Matches | Goals | Assists | Competition | Matches | Goals | Assists |
| 66 | 51 | 18 | Friendly | 70 | 46 | 30 |
| 14 | 12 | 8 | World Cup | 13 | 8 | 4 |
| 6 | 6 | 3 | Qualifier | 25 | 16 | 17 |
| 6 | 8 | 3 | Copa America | 12 | 5 | 4 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | Confederations Cup | 5 | 4 | 2 |
| 92 | 77 | 32 | Total | 125 | 79 | 57 |

Medvedev determined to deny Djokovic's 24th

REUTERS

Daniil Medvedev expects Novak Djokovic to be in top form at Sunday's US Open final, but the third-seeded Russian adds that he will try to produce his "best-ever version" to beat the record-23-time Grand Slam champion.

Medvedev prevailed 7-6(3), 6-1, 3-6, 6-3 in a fascinating encounter that ended top seed Carlos Alcaraz's reign as Flushing Meadows champion, with the 27-year-old setting up a rematch of his triumphant 2021 finale against Djokovic.

Djokovic, 36, is hunting a fourth U.S. Open title that would see him equal Margaret Court's record haul of 24 Grand Slams and a good measure of revenge on Medvedev.

"He (Djokovic) is always better than the previous time he plays. For example, I beat him in the U.S. Open final, he beat me in Bercy (Paris Masters) in a great match. Carlos beat him in Wimbledon, he beat him in Cincinnati," Medvedev told reporters.

"Novak is going to be his best version on Sunday, and I have to be the best-ever version of myself if I want to try to beat him.

"Novak, when he loses, he's never the same after... It's just a different mentality...

So, I have to use it knowing that he's going to be 10 times better than he was that day. And I have to be, if I want to still beat him, 10 times better than I was that day."

Djokovic battled past American Ben Shelton in straight sets on Friday to set up a rematch with Russia's Medvedev, who denied him a rare calendar Grand Slam two years ago.

The memory of that bitter defeat was still fresh in his mind, as Djokovic told reporters he was trying not to focus on the significance of a 24th major title that would match Margaret Court's all-time singles record.

"(I don't) think about the history too much in this sense, you know, because when I did that in the past, like, '21 finals here I was maybe overwhelmed with the occasion and the opportunity and I underperformed," said Djokovic.

"So, I don't want this to happen again, and I'll try to, you know, just focus on what needs to be done and tactically prepare myself for that match."

Djokovic won the Australian Open and hoisted the trophy at Roland Garros already this year. He had a chance to collect his 24th major title in Wimbledon but was denied in the finale by Spain's Carlos Alcaraz.

