



Will familiarity aid subcontinental powerhouses?

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All participants in the 2023 World Cup in India are well aware that in big events, teams tackle the conditions just as much as they play their opponents and the pressure posed by the competition.

A World Cup, on the other hand, is nearly always unpredictable. Despite their experience, England have only won the competition once: the last ODI World Cup in 2019, which they hosted. Will India and other subcontinental teams have a competitive edge this time?

"Subcontinental teams always have a better chance of playing with the conditions. India and Pakistan would be commendable sides while Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan can be dark horses and do something. You never know," said Sri Lanka's spin wizard Muttiah Muralitharan while making a prediction on a recent YouTube show with CricketNext.

"Outside of Asia, the two strongest sides are



have warranted such scrutiny. India, though, is astoundingly large and the designated venues have varied qualities despite being subcontinental tracks. In Sri Lanka for instance, wickets take turns in almost all the venues. In Pakistan, the wickets produce a lot of runs and are flat in nature.

When it comes to India, Dharamsala for instance, is known to procure swing and seam for pacers. On the other hand, venues such as those in Kolkata, Ahmedabad or Chennai have been known to produce big runs. There are others where the ball holds up, helping spinners, while some see big turns. Thus, the ability to play spin would be handy but not being prepared for different conditions can be disastrous.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) has a few standards for how wickets should be in ICC events. Thus, sporting tracks would also come into the equation here. But talks of conditions favouring certain sides cannot be ignored. After all, it took over two decades for India to win their second title -- in Sachin Tendulkar's swansong in 2011 when the tournament was jointly hosted by India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka -- after their first triumph in 1983.

With five World Cups in the bag, Australia are the dominant force in ODI's grandest spectacle. And yet, four of their titles since 1999 came outside of the subcontinent -- in conditions more suitable to their merits. Their last win came in 2015, when they co-hosted the tournament with New Zealand. Sri Lanka's only World Cup triumph till date also arrived in the subcontinent in 1996.

India's players know every inch of the

venues this time around and are well used to the evening dew that makes the ball slippery in the second innings.

However, courtesy of India's T20 franchise tournament, the Indian Premier League, many stars from outside of the subcontinent will not find the conditions as tricky as they did in previous eras.

According to analysts and cricket authors Ben Jones and Nathan Leamon, who wrote 'Hitting against the spin', three factors back teams who succeeded at World Cups: average scoring rates 24 months before the event, winning form of the past two years and a good match-experience distribution throughout the 15-member squad.

England pack a punch with scoring rate this time around while Pakistan boast the best win-rate. England had dominated the experience category at the 2019 event, having had nine players with over 75 caps in the squad. This time, they have seven. India, on the other hand, are the most-experienced side at the 2023 edition with eight such experienced campaigners in their ranks.

England also boast the best scoring rate in both Powerplay and 11-40 overs phases while South Africa lead the death-over phase with more than 8.5 runs in the last 10. England also top the best scoring-rate against spin in the 11-40 overs period leading up to the World Cup. Yet, they do not lead in all categories. Thus, that unpredictability remains.

Too many factors to wrap one's head around? Perhaps it would be wise to just sit back and savour what happens as another major event unfolds over the next month and a half.

Tigers spoilt for choice over pacers

MAZHAR UDDIN

From a team that only ever tried to 'spin to win', Bangladesh have now evolved into a pace-centric attack heading into the ICC World Cup in India.

This rise of the pace unit in recent years has emboldened the team management to bet on the fast bowlers and name five specialist quicks in the 15-man World Cup squad.

Bangladesh will now be looking towards the likes of Taskin Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Shoriful Islam, Hasan Mahmud and young Tanzim Hasan Sakib, who replaced an injured Ebadot Hossain, to make an impact in the mega event in India.

The last time Bangladeshi pacers had delivered in a major way for the team in a World Cup was in the 2015 edition in Australia.

The pacer who was the X-factor of the Bangladesh team in that World Cup was Rubel Hossain.

Rubel's fuller delivery uprooting the stumps of James Anderson and then him celebrating like a man possessed after taking the team to the quarterfinal of a World Cup for the very first time is one of the most iconic moments in the history of Bangladesh cricket.

Rubel has faith in the current lot of fast bowlers and believes they can look into the eyes of the other top pace attacks in the world and provide more of such iconic moments in the coming World Cup.

"I think we are going to witness some interesting



battles among the pacers of different teams in this World Cup and I would like to see our pacers put their hands up and deliver," Rubel told the Daily Star.

"There are teams like Pakistan, Australia and India who have got some quality pacers but I expect our pacers to deliver this time around. If the batters can post enough runs on the board and give something for the bowlers to defend, I am confident our bowlers have the ability to restrict the opponent batters," he added.

Rubel's faith on the pace attack is backed by stats as in the 20 ODIs Bangladesh have played in 2023, the pacers have picked up 85 wickets whereas the spinners have claimed 50 scalps.

Taskin has been the highest wicket-taker for Bangladesh in ODIs this year as the seamer has bagged 21 wickets in 11 matches and has shown great consistency with the ball.

Hasan has picked up 17 wickets and left-arm pacer Shoriful has 16 wickets to his name in the same period. Tanzim, who made his ODI debut in the series against India, has a couple of wickets in two ODIs while the experienced Mustafiz has taken 15 wickets in 2023.

Rubel is also excited by the variety in the Bangladesh attack and feels that captain Shakib Al Hasan will be spoilt for choices in terms of pacers in the World Cup.

"I think we have a good balance in the team and our pace department has been doing really well in recent times. All the pacers have proved what they are capable of and I think we have good variety in our attack," said the 33-year-old.

"We have bowlers like Taskin who can bowl fast and attack the batters, Mustafiz brings in a lot of experience in the bowling unit and I think he will have a big role to play in Indian conditions with his variations.

"The likes of Hasan, Shoriful and Tanzim have also impressed with their slower deliveries and yorkers. They are all unique in their own ways which provides the captain the luxury to utilise his options according to the demand of the situation," Rubel concluded.

VENUES

Narendra Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad

The largest sports stadium in the world will host the tournament opener between England and New Zealand on October 5, India v Pakistan fixture on October 14, and the final on November 19. Capacity: 132,000.

M Chinnaswamy Stadium, Bengaluru

With boundary sizes of around 65 metres, high scores are expected. Capacity: 40,000

MA Chidambaram Stadium, Chennai

On the Indian Ocean, the ground will likely be the most humid across all venues. Capacity: 38,000

Arun Jaitley Stadium, Delhi

A venue steeped in cricketing history, the pace of the wicket in India's capital has sped up,



suggesting higher scores than numbers may suggest. Capacity: 55,000

Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association (HPCA) Stadium, Dharamsala

With its picturesque views of the Himalayan mountains in the distance, the ground is on the smaller side and should see high-scoring encounters. Capacity: 23,000

Eden Gardens, Kolkata

The ground is known for its lively pitch and breezy conditions next to the Hooghly River. Capacity: 66,000

BRSABV Ekana Cricket Stadium, Lucknow

A newer ground, Lucknow's stadium is largely unknown on the international front, though the venue has seen marked use

in the T20 format through the Indian Premier League. Capacity: 50,000

Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai

The distinct red-soil pitch will no doubt play its part in the tournament, most notably in one of the semi-finals on November 15. Capacity: 32,000

MCA International Stadium, Pune

The stadium in the outskirts of Pune has hosted international play for over a decade, and boasts five matches, including an intriguing New Zealand v South Africa fixture on November 1. Capacity: 42,700

Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium, Hyderabad

The stadium will host three matches, all within the first seven days of the tournament. Capacity: 40,000