



Will the home team WIN AGAIN?

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Forecasting on the eve of a tournament is a risky affair. Technicians crunch historical and current data to find patterns. Diehards look through a crystal ball and identify with a shared historical and emotional experience.

On the eve of the 13th ICC ODI World Cup [WC], statistical and emotional forecasting seem to meet after roaming in a barren desert for more than a decade. This time, it must be time for India.

In 2015, Australia entered and won the ODI WC as the No 1 ODI team at the time. In 2019, England did the same, by the barest of margins. India are overwhelming favourites this time. They enter the 2023 ODI WC as the No 1 team across all three formats. If history is the indicator, the next champions must be India.

Patterns in history are almost always fluid.

An ODI WC has been held in South Asia three times so far. Each time a unique victor raised the WC at a unique venue. In 1987, it was Australia in Kolkata. In 1996, it was Sri Lanka in Lahore. In 2011, it was India in Mumbai. In 2023, the final is in Ahmedabad. By this indicator of history, the victor this time is anybody's guess.

Returning to the present. The 2023 ODI WC is unique. India is the sole host for the first time in South Asia. Could it really be India's time this time?

In 2021, Hardik Pandya declared, 'India can pick two more teams and win any competition in the world.' The first part is factually correct. Today's India are the West Indies and Australia of the past. India are spoiled for choice. Players can be rested or replaced almost like for like. This will be crucial this year. Although too much bench testing before a WC makes it difficult to find

the best combination, it does give India the luxury of a cushion other teams don't have to fall back on.

India are playing at home. They have one of the best, fittest and freshest teams in the tournament. They have done wonderfully well in home bilaterals in recent years. They will enjoy the support of maybe the most dedicated legion of followers in the history of the game, both inside the stadiums and on social media. However, every drama must have a demon. The demon of India's ICC cricket drama is no silverware for a decade.

This year, in the group stage, teams will have several cushions. They can win a match riding on bowlers only, batters only, or even through astonishing fielding. Teams can identify less important or crucial matches. Teams can make comebacks if they have hiccups. Once a team qualifies for the semifinals and the final, they have only one chance to win. Victory in

knockouts 'usually' requires a team effort. This is where India's Achilles heel lies.

The 2013 Champions Trophy was the last ICC Tournament India won when they defeated England by five runs. Since then, India have been knocked out of a tournament eight times in the knockout stages.

A pattern is observed. In crucial knockout matches, one of India's departments collapsed.

In the 2014 T20 WC final, India lost to Sri Lanka. India failed to convert a good start. In the 2015 ODI WC semifinal, India lost to Australia by 95 runs. Chasing 328, India lost their first wicket at 76. India were bowled out for 233 in 46.5 overs. In the 2016 T20 WC semifinal, India lost to the West Indies by seven wickets. Virat Kohli's unbeaten 89 was the only notable innings in the batting department. In the 2017 Champions Trophy final, India lost to Pakistan by 180 runs.

Chasing 339, India were bowled out for 158 in 30.3 overs. In the 2019 ODI WC semifinal, India lost to New Zealand. Chasing 240, India were all out for 221 with three balls remaining. In the 2022 T20 WC semifinal, India lost to England by 10 wickets. England chased 169 in 16 overs. India reached the first two finals of the World Test Championship in 2021 and 2023. They lost to first New Zealand, and then to Australia because of batting collapses in their second innings of both Tests.

One thing is for certain. India will feel the pressure of home advantage the most. If India can fight their demons in knockouts and fight as a team in all departments, they will win. If not, the question will become louder and louder, when?

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FACT FILE

BANGLADESH

WORLD RANKING: 8
LEADING RUN-SCORER IN SQUAD: Mushfiqur Rahim: 7,406 runs, highest score 144, average 37.03, Hundreds 9, Fifties 46
LEADING WICKET-TAKER IN SQUAD: Shakib Al Hasan: 308 wickets, best bowling 5-29, average 29.32
PREVIOUS WORLD CUP APPEARANCES: 6
BEST PERFORMANCE: Quarterfinals (2015)



"I think we have got a very good team. I think we will be a dangerous side in the World Cup."
Shakib Al Hasan

SRI LANKA

WORLD RANKING: 7
LEADING RUN-SCORER IN SQUAD: Kusal Mendis: 3,215 runs, highest score 119, average 32.15, Hundreds 2, Fifties 25
LEADING WICKET-TAKER IN SQUAD: Dhananajaya de Silva: 44 wickets, best bowling 3-32, average 39.38
PREVIOUS WORLD CUP APPEARANCES: 12
BEST PERFORMANCE: Champions (1996)



"We have a good batting line-up. I think the pitches will be a challenge. Bowling will be a challenge. The margin of error is very low."
Dasun Shanaka

NEW ZEALAND

WORLD RANKING: 6
LEADING RUN-SCORER IN SQUAD: Kane Williamson: 6,554 runs; highest score 148; average 47.83; Hundreds 13; Fifties 42
LEADING WICKET-TAKER IN SQUAD: Tim Southee: 214 wickets; best bowling 7-33; average 33.60
PREVIOUS WORLD CUP APPEARANCES: 12
BEST PERFORMANCE: Runners-up (2015, 2019)



"It's one of those games [2019 World Cup final] which, no doubt, you'll look back on and really have appreciated being involved in it."
Kane Williamson

AUSTRALIA

WORLD RANKING: 3
LEADING RUN-SCORER IN SQUAD: David Warner: 6,397 runs; highest score 179; average 45.04; Hundreds 20; Fifties 31
LEADING WICKET-TAKER IN SQUAD: Mitchell Starc: 220 wickets; best bowling 6-28; average 22.23
PREVIOUS WORLD CUP APPEARANCES: 12
BEST PERFORMANCE: Champions (1987, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2015)



"We want to try out a few combinations, a few different players but ideally, we have structured the combination we want to go about."
Pat Cummins

INDIA

WORLD RANKING: 1
LEADING RUN-SCORER IN SQUAD: Virat Kohli: 13,083 runs; highest score 183; average 57.38; Hundreds 47, Fifties 66
LEADING WICKET-TAKER IN SQUAD: Ravindra Jadeja: 204 wickets; best bowling 5-36; average 36.95
PREVIOUS WORLD CUP APPEARANCES: 12
BEST PERFORMANCE: Champions (1983, 2011)



"A person can't change overnight with his success or failures. I don't think one result or one championship can change me as a person."
Rohit Sharma

PAKISTAN

WORLD RANKING: 2
LEADING RUN-SCORER IN SQUAD: Babar Azam: 5,409 runs; highest score 158; average 58.16; Hundreds 19; Fifties 28
LEADING WICKET-TAKER IN SQUAD: Hasan Ali: 91 wickets; best bowling 5-34; average 30.36
PREVIOUS WORLD CUP APPEARANCES: 12
BEST PERFORMANCE: Champions (1992)



"There are eight other teams, and it's not only India, and only if we beat them then we will make it into the final."
Babar Azam

SOUTH AFRICA

WORLD RANKING: 4
LEADING RUN-SCORER IN SQUAD: Quinton de Kock: 6,176 runs; highest score 178; average 44.75; Hundreds 17; Fifties 30
LEADING WICKET-TAKER IN SQUAD: Kagiso Rabada: 144 wickets; best bowling 6-16; average 27.75
PREVIOUS WORLD CUP APPEARANCES: 8
BEST PERFORMANCE: Semifinals (1992, 1999, 2007, 2015)



"The confidence that we have gained from this series [against Australia] is something which we can't lose."
Temba Bavuma

AFGHANISTAN

WORLD RANKING: 9
LEADING RUN-SCORER IN SQUAD: Rahmat Shah: 3,269 runs; highest score 114; average 36.22; Hundreds 5; Fifties 23
LEADING WICKET-TAKER IN SQUAD: Rashid Khan: 172 wickets; best bowling 7-18; average 19.53
PREVIOUS WORLD CUP APPEARANCES: 2
BEST PERFORMANCE: Group Stage (2015, 2019)



"There is a lot of expectation back home during big events. People back home are expecting a lot from us, they want us to win."
Hashmatullah Shahidi

ENGLAND

WORLD RANKING: 5
LEADING RUN-SCORER IN SQUAD: Joe Root: 6,246 runs; highest score 133 not out; average 48.79; Hundreds 16; Fifties 36
LEADING WICKET-TAKER IN SQUAD: Adil Rashid: 184 wickets; best bowling 5-27; average 32.41
PREVIOUS WORLD CUP APPEARANCES: 12
BEST PERFORMANCE: Champions (2019)



"We're blessed with so many good cricketers in the white-ball game at the moment but in a World Cup, you can only take 15."
Jos Buttler

NETHERLANDS

WORLD RANKING: 14
LEADING RUN-SCORER IN SQUAD: Scott Edwards: 1,212 runs; highest score 86; average 40.40; Hundreds 0; Fifties 13
LEADING WICKET-TAKER IN SQUAD: Logan van Beek: 34 wickets; best bowling 4-24; average 33.41
PREVIOUS WORLD CUP APPEARANCES: 4
BEST PERFORMANCE: Group Stage (1996, 2003, 2007, 2011)



"The opportunity to play in a 10-team World Cup, it is massive for us. We will lap it up and hopefully put in some good performances there."
Scott Edwards