



What to WATCH

T SPORTS AND GTV
ICC Cricket World Cup
Australia vs South Africa
Live from 2:30 pm
SONY SPORTS 2
European Qualifiers
Latvia vs Armenia

Live from 10:00 pm
Spain vs Scotland
Live from 12:45 am (Friday)
SONY SPORTS 5
Croatia vs Turkey
Live from 12:30 am (Friday)

Another high-scorer as AUSSIES MEET PROTEAS?

STAR SPORTS DESK

South Africa may have come into this World Cup as one of the outsiders for the title but their emphatic victory over Sri Lanka in their opening match has many already tipping them for a deep run in the tournament – something which has been very rare in the recent editions of the showpiece event.

The Proteas, who have never managed to make it to the final of this competition in eight attempts – often incredibly losing crucial matches that they should have won – are enjoying their time out of the limelight as they head into a clash against five-time champions Australia today.

The match in Lucknow, which gets underway at 2:30pm Bangladesh time, will be Australia's second too – their first ending in a six-wicket defeat against India in Chennai. With Australia coming into this match in a difficult position and South Africa with full of confidence, the Lucknow clash promises to be a blockbuster like the two teams have produced in both World Cups and bilateral



series over the years.

Australia, who were bowled out for 199 by India on a turning Chepauk wicket, will be buoyed by the return of all-rounder Marcus Stoinis from a hamstring injury. Captain Pat Cummins said he expects a high-scoring game in Lucknow.

"I think chatting to Stoinis and a couple of other guys, it's probably in a bit of a different condition to what it is for the IPL. The wicket looks really good so yeah, he's someone we'll look at pretty closely," Cummins said on

Wednesday.

"When it's a good wicket which that looks like – most of the games have been 300 plus," Cummins said. "I haven't had a look at it today, but last night it looked really good, really even. Maybe a bit of pace and bounce. We'll see how it is tomorrow."

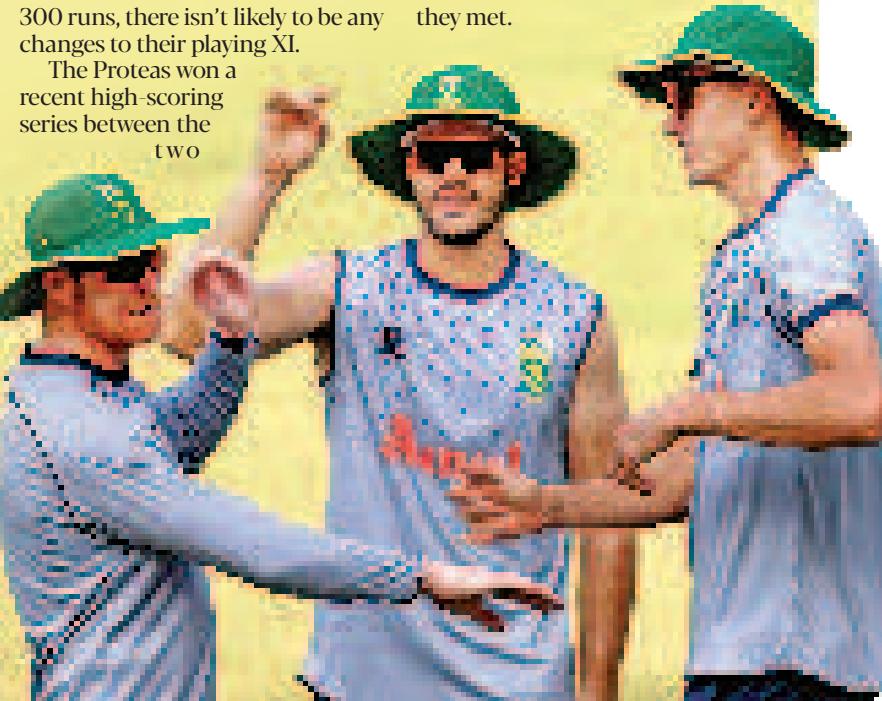
Australia will, however, continue to be without opener Travis Head, nursing a hand injury.

The five-times champions will be wary of South Africa, who smashed 428-5 in their opening

win over Sri Lanka. Three of their top-order batters – Quinton de Kock, Rassie van der Dussen and Aiden Markram – got centuries in that match, with Markram smashing the fastest in the history of the World Cup.

Although the bowling attack allowed Sri Lanka to score well over 300 runs, there isn't likely to be any changes to their playing XI.

The Proteas won a recent high-scoring series between the two



teams 3-2 after trailing 0-2 and they also lead the head to head record between the two sides by 54-50. Although Australia have the edge when it comes to World Cup meetings, it was the defeat against the Proteas that knocked the Aussies out of a semifinal contention the last time they met.

AUSTRALIA-SOUTH AFRICA STATS

Overall ODI head-to-head gives South Africa the edge with 54 wins against Australia's 50 in 108 meetings. Three contests have ended in a tie, while one encounter saw no result.

In World Cups, however, the five-time champions lead with three wins in six fixtures. South Africa won two while one contest was tied.

Australia's David Warner has scored the most runs amongst active players in their contests, with the left-hander having accumulated 1213 runs in 28 matches, averaging 43.32. Following his 122 in the 2019 edition, Warner also leads the chart for the highest individual score in the apex event.

Despite having explosive openers, South Africa's middle-order has managed to score runs at the highest rate (6.4) over the last four years in ODIs, and their average of 44.6 is the best in that time. In comparison, Australia averaged 29.9 at a run-rate of 5.40 over the same period.

In the bowling scheme of things, the Proteas' Powerplay average is 43, at an economy rate of 6.6, which is the worst, while Australia's bowlers average 40.7 but have an economy rate of 5.4 in the first 10 overs of the innings.



Kane targets Euro 2028, cites Messi, Ronaldo as inspiration

REUTERS

Harry Kane says he is hoping to be in top shape for another eight or nine years and wants to help England win the European Championship on home soil in 2028.

England's top scorer, who will be a month shy of 35 when the 2028 Euros kick off, said it would be a "dream come true" to win the tournament having lost the 2020 final to Italy at Wembley.

"The perception in sport or football is that you hit 30 and people start to think it's the end," the Bayern Munich striker said after the UK and Ireland were named Euros hosts. "But the way I am looking at it is that I almost have the second half of my career now."

"I've had nine or 10 years at the highest level and I'm hoping for another eight or nine years."

"With recovery, sports science and the way the game has adapted, it has allowed players to play for longer," added Kane, who turned 30 in July.

Kane cited Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi as examples of players who were still performing at the highest level in their thirties.

"When you look at a lot of the top-level players – Ronaldo, Messi, (Robert) Lewandowski, (Zlatan) Ibrahimovic – they have almost got better as they hit 30," he added. "Everything is maybe settled in your personal life, family, kids. You are comfortable with your body and you are comfortable mentally, where you are at. That just allows you to focus on the football."

Nadal to play Australian Open

AFP, Melbourne

Rafael Nadal will return to Grand Slam action at the Australian Open in January, tournament director Craig Tiley said Wednesday, for what will almost certainly be the Spaniard's farewell to Melbourne.

The 22-time major winner has not played since his second-round loss to American Mackenzie McDonald at the Australian Open in January this year because of a hip injury.

The 37-year-old has twice undergone surgery during his long rehabilitation and said last month that he was still aiming to finish his career in 2024.

"Our 2022 champion Rafa Nadal has been working hard on his rehab for most of this year," said Tiley, who also expects home favourite Nick Kyrgios to return from injury.



Argentine superstar Lionel Messi is again a doubtful starter for his side in the World Cup qualifying match against Paraguay, starting on Friday at 5am (Bangladesh time). The Argentina captain scored the decisive goal in their qualifier opener against Ecuador but skipped the Bolivia fixture last month, which Argentina won 3-0, due to muscular pains that went on to sideline him from several matches for Inter Miami. Meanwhile, Brazil superstar Neymar jokes with Richarlison as teammates Rodrigo and Vinicius Junior look on during a training session in Cuiaba ahead of qualifying match against Venezuela on Friday at 6.30am (Bangladesh time).

PHOTO: REUTERS



SHAFIQUE accustomed to making instant impacts

AFP, Hyderabad

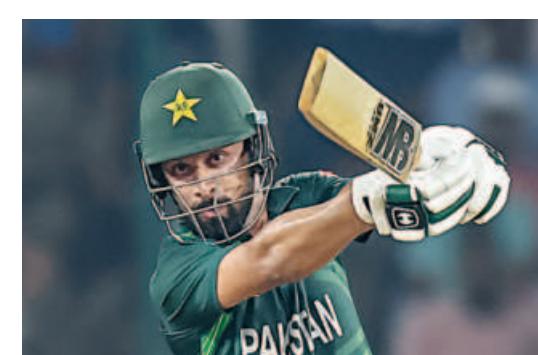
Abdullah Shafique has a habit of making great first impressions, the latest of which came on Tuesday when he became the first Pakistan batsman to make a century on his World Cup debut in an epic pursuit against Sri Lanka.

Called up to replace the out-of-form Fakhar Zaman, the 23-year-old opener clubbed 113 and with a cramping Mohammad Rizwan (131 not out) helped Pakistan reach their 345-run target, the highest successful run chase in World Cup history.

"The way Abdullah built the innings in the beginning, the kind of shots he hit, made it easy for us to chase the score," said Rizwan.

Shafique had scored a hundred on his domestic Grade-II debut (non first class), notched another century on his first class debut in 2019 and a year later achieved the same feat in Twenty20 cricket.

Shafique is only the second batsman in the world to have hit a hundred on first class and T20



debut, along with India's Shivam Bhambr.

His talents for the big stage were spotted early on by former Pakistan player Mansoor Rana, a former Pakistan team manager.

"We selected him for Under-19s as I saw enormous talent in this boy," said Rana.

"He is better than anyone technique-wise but the problem was he didn't score runs initially," explained Rana, the son of former international umpire Shakoor.

After his T20 debut hundred, the then head coach Misbah-ul-Haq selected him in the shortest format but Shafique failed with four successive ducks. He was backed despite his failures, making him a target for critics who accused him of receiving preferential treatment.

"I noticed that this boy had good technique and temperament. He has a repertoire of shots for every pitch," said Misbah.

"At his age, Shafique has superb qualities and that is why I backed him." Shafique finally came good in Tests, hitting a hundred against Australia and England, and two against Sri Lanka including a double ton in July this year.

Shafique benefitted from regular chances. During Covid he worked very hard indoors and that period allowed him to improve," said Rana.

Barely a month out from the World Cup, Shafique was not even in the squad.

However, with concerns over Zaman's lack of runs, the Pakistan team management select him as a back-up.

Next up for Shafique, another first – facing old rivals India in Ahmedabad on Saturday.