



## Williamson reveals rugby's impact on his team

SPORTS REPORTER from Chennai

Bangladesh and New Zealand, two countries with very different levels of popularity and cricketing fervour, will square off in today's World Cup match in Chennai.

Despite having finished second in the last two ICC World Cups, New Zealand cricketers still long for the deserving attention from their home fans. In Bangladesh, though, fans prepare themselves to experience a downpour of emotions whenever the Tigers are in action.

As the national sport of New Zealand, rugby naturally grabs the limelight there. New Zealand's rugby team, known as the All Blacks, have acquired that reputation by winning three Rugby World Cups – tied for most with South Africa – and more than 77 percent of Test matches – more than any other men's side.

It appears that even after seeing their cricket team commence the ongoing World Cup campaign with consecutive wins – including a convincing nine-wicket triumph over the defending champions England –

New Zealand sports enthusiasts are far more intrigued about their rugby team's World Cup quarterfinal match against Ireland on Saturday than the Bangladesh clash.

New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson, who led his side in both 2015 and 2019 World Cups, was asked about the extent of influence their rugby side has on them.

"We love the All Blacks. Coming from New Zealand, obviously Rugby is our number one game," Williamson told reporters yesterday.

"I think when we were growing up, we all wanted to be All Blacks and that couldn't happen so we tried something else. And we're here as a cricket team."

New Zealand's two wins in two so far came without Williamson, who recovered from his knee injury suffered during the Indian Premier League in March. Williamson, however, played in the warm-up fixtures.

"We've had some really enjoyable times recently and got pretty close [in the last two World Cups], but you still have to start again. And there's been some good performances so far. We come to another venue where challenges could be a little bit different and so it's important to play by keeping our focus intact. That would give us the best chances," added the 2019 World Cup's player of the tournament.

Williamson stated that the New Zealand cricket team seek to emulate the evolution of their rugby side.

"I think something that you do hear often about their side is their

culture, their environment, and their ability to keep moving forward as a team and adapting to what's in front of them, whether that's the movement of the game and how that keeps changing and evolving," added the 33-year-old.

"So yeah, I mean we just want to keep getting better as a side, keep growing as a side and that's our focus."



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In-form all-rounder Mehedi Hasan Miraz and other Bangladesh batters will have to be on top of their game to handle New Zealand's balanced spin unit, including leggie Ish Sodhi, when the Tigers take on the Kiwis in a World Cup game in Chennai today.

## BANGLADESH VS NEW ZEALAND STATS

▶▶ Bangladesh have won 10, lost 30, and saw one match yield no result in their 41 ODIs against New Zealand.

▶▶ However, the Tigers have not been able to win an ODI against the Kiwis for more than six years, losing nine games in this period.

▶▶ Bangladesh's memorable five-wicket triumph over New Zealand in Cardiff in the 2017 Champions Trophy was the last time the Tigers beat Kiwis in the format.

▶▶ Bangladesh are yet to win a game against New Zealand in the ICC ODI World Cup. The Tigers have come across the Kiwis in five editions of the mega event, losing every time.

▶▶ Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan is the most successful with the ball in hand against the Kiwis. With 37 wickets in 22 matches, Shakib is on top of the wicket-takers' list in Bangladesh-New Zealand ODIs.

▶▶ Mahmudullah Riyad leads the chart for most runs scored in New Zealand-Bangladesh ODI encounters among the active players. Riyad scored 746 runs in 29 ODIs against the Kiwis.

▶▶ The only ODI Bangladesh played at the MA Chidambaram Stadium Chennai was back in 1998 when they lost to Kenya by 28 runs in a triangular series involving hosts India.

▶▶ Winning the game today will see New Zealand begin their World Cup with three consecutive wins for the third consecutive editions of the World Cup, having done so in 2015 and 2019. The Kiwis had similar runs in the 1992 and 2007 editions as well.

# 'Freedom' key for batters to do well

MAZHAR UDDIN from Chennai

When Bangladesh vice-captain Najmul Hossain Shanto came to the pre-match press conference at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Thursday on the eve of their third ICC World Cup clash against New Zealand, the majority of the questions towards him were regarding the concerns over the 'Tigers' opening spot after the failure in the first two matches.

At one point, Shanto insisted on not thinking about the opening position at all soon before holding himself back and saying that the openers would be back amongst the runs in the next game.

"I think we should stop thinking about the opening spot as I think the players who bat at the top order are taking good preparation. I think one or two good innings can help the batters gain confidence as I think none of us in the team are relaxed or that we are not trying to give our best for the team. I hope we will be able to see our top-order scoring runs in the coming matches," Shanto told the media yesterday.

However, the opening spot will remain a huge concern for the 'Tigers' think tank after young Tanzid Hasan Tamim failed in both the World Cup

games so far, scoring five and one. But Shanto believes that the young left-hander will be able to bounce back if he is shown trust and belief towards him.

According to Shanto, there was no negativity in the dressing room after the huge 137-run defeat against

I think everyone is skillful in the team and if we are able to play with such freedom then it's possible to do well. We have been given that freedom from the coaching staff and the team management," he said.

Meanwhile, the Chepauk stadium pitch will remain the center of discussion for both teams as the venue has historically produced spin-friendly surfaces. Shanto said that if the pitch behaves anything similar to the way it did in the India-Australia game, which saw Indian spinners rule the roost, it would aid the Bangladesh spinners today.

New Zealand also have some quality spinners in their ranks, with left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner remaining prolific for the Kiwis in recent matches. The

Tigers, however, have their plans sorted for tacking the Kiwi spin threat.

"I think he [Mitchel Santner] is one of the best bowlers. We have a plan for him as we have three left-handers in our top order. But we are not thinking much about him rather focusing on getting a good start and play some good cricket," said Shanto.

England. Instead, according to the left-handed batter, it will be important how they are able to bounce back from a difficult situation. He also mentioned that one batter from the top four must play a big knock if the Tigers want to post a big total.

"One thing that I felt is how courageously we can bat or will bat in the middle. It is also important for us to bat with freedom. If we look at the batters of the other teams, they seem to score quite easily so it's important to bat freely with freedom.



## Indo-Pak hysteria grips Ahmedabad

Fans throng hospitals for overnight stay

REUTERS, New Delhi

Cricket fever has gripped Ahmedabad ahead of Saturday's World Cup group stage clash between arch-rivals India and Pakistan and a visit to the hospitals near the venue of the match in the western Indian city clearly shows the degree of excitement.

Quite a few of the hospitals have seen a sudden influx of patients booked in for check-ups involving a night's stay to coincide with the most anticipated match of the World Cup.

Several doctors told local media the rush for check-up 'packages' was an ingenious way to find affordable accommodation as hotel costs have soared up to 20-fold ahead of the match.

"We have come across some cases of people coming to watch the India-Pakistan match also taking an appointment for health check-ups and staying in hospitals," Tushar Patel, President of the Ahmedabad Medical Association, told Reuters.

The Ahmedabad Hospitals and Nursing Homes Association has discouraged its members from accommodating such fans.



"We have asked our members not to entertain such requests. Hospitals are not meant for non-patients," its president Bharat Gadhavi told Reuters.

India and Pakistan head into the showdown having both won their opening two matches at the tournament.

The first batch of tickets for Saturday's game were sold out within an hour of going on sale in August, prompting the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to release another 14,000 earlier this month.

Ahmedabad resident Hemish Patel and his friends, after several days of failed attempts, grabbed four tickets, each costing 6,000 Indian rupees (\$72.15).

"We logged into the site with multiple devices," he said. "We constantly kept on refreshing the site and were able to book within 10 minutes after the sale of tickets began."

Patel was one of the lucky few. Tickets are fetching up to 25 times face value on resale and city police arrested four youths on Tuesday for selling fakes.

Airfare has surged up to four times and Indian railways will run a pair of super-fast trains linking Mumbai and Ahmedabad.

The 134,000-capacity Narendra Modi Stadium, which hosted former US President Donald Trump in 2020 and Australia Prime Minister Anthony Albanese earlier this year, looks a perfect arena for cricket's fiercest rivalry.

The city has been declared a 'no-drone zone' on Saturday, and 11,000 security personnel will be deployed for the high-profile match, Ahmedabad police commissioner GS Malik said. On their first tour of India since the 2016 T20 World Cup, Pakistan were accorded a warm welcome in Hyderabad, where they played their first two matches.



South Africa opener Quinton de Kock continued his purple patch in the ongoing World Cup as he celebrated scoring his second consecutive hundred in the mega event, helping his side amass 311 for seven against five-time World Champions Australia in Lucknow yesterday. The 30-year-old, who will retire from international cricket after the tournament ends, was batting in familiar surroundings at the Ekana Stadium where he played for the Lucknow Super Giants in Indian Premier League.

PHOTO: AFP

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