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'Look down at surface, not up' the mantra for Proteas

REUTERS

South Africa flew into the Cricket World Cup a little under the radar but the awesome range of their power hitting has seen the side post the top three scores in the tournament, which stand-in captain Aiden Markram puts down to their adaptability.

South Africa amassed 428 against Sri Lanka, 399 versus England, and 382 in Tuesday's 149-run win over Bangladesh that leaves the side second in the table at the midway point.

"I think it goes without saying you obviously do need wickets in hand but we haven't spoken about a blueprint as a (batting) unit," Markram told reporters.

"No definitive roles given, but everyone kind of knows what they need to do to help this batting unit peak at their best.

"We keep saying to look down at the surface and not up at the scoreboard and play exactly what's in front of us on the pitch."

Opener Quinton de Kock, who will retire from ODIs at the end of the tournament, has smashed three centuries in five games and leads the run-scorers' list with 407 at an average of 81.40.

"We all know Quinton to be a free-spirited guy, but he actually has a fantastic cricket brain. He assesses conditions really well and communicates that to us off the field even before we've walked out to bat," Markram said.

South Africa have batted first in four of their five matches and won them all. On the one occasion they had to chase, it went horribly wrong in a shock 38-run loss to the Netherlands.

They have lost four of their previous six games in which they were set a target, compared with winning the last seven in a row when they have batted first.

"I think it's quite easy to get that mantra of 'they're a bat-first team'," Markram says.

"But we're a team that is happy to chase."

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England skipper Jos Buttler looks a bit tensed during training, most likely due to the way the defending world champions underperformed this edition. Meanwhile, Kusal Mendis of Sri Lanka, a team that also suffered a similar fate, keeps on doing the hard yards ahead of their clash against England today.

PHOTO: AFP/REUTERS

'Everything is must-win now'

AGENCIES

England will enter their clash with Sri Lanka in Bengaluru today barely above the bottom of the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup standings with just 0.005 in net run rate separating the 2019 champions and last-placed Bangladesh.

Out of form and now without their leading wicket-taker at the tournament after Reece Topley broke a finger against South Africa, England are already at serious risk of falling out of the race for a semifinal spot.

A fourth loss in the tournament would most likely end their title defence before it truly began, and with India, Australia, and Pakistan among those still to come, this looms as a must-win fixture for England.

Moeen Ali, who is England vice-captain but was dropped after the opening defeat to New Zealand and has been sidelined since then, said Wednesday that "everything is a must-win now" as faltering defending champions England face a Cricket World Cup day of reckoning.

"We know we've been in this position before although probably not to this degree, but we know everything is a must-win," said Moeen.

England's lone win came against equally hapless Bangladesh.

They have lost to New Zealand, suffered a shock defeat to Afghanistan and then slumped to a 229-run thrashing at the hands of South Africa, conceding their

highest total in a one-day international of 399.

Moeen believes England need to resort to the aggressive spirit of 2019 which took them to their memorable World Cup triumph over New Zealand at Lord's.

However, he insists he is not advocating adopting 'Bazball', the free-wheeling style of play which has virtually revolutionised

we know we can be."

The M. Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru is familiar territory for Moeen as it is where he plays franchise cricket for Royal Challengers Bangalore in the IPL.

"It's one of those grounds where scoring is quick and batting deep makes a big difference. If I get the nod, then I'm really looking forward to playing."

Injury-hit Sri Lanka have been just as underwhelming and have the same 1-3 record in this World Cup as England ahead of this high stakes clash as the luckless outfit continue to be hit hard by injuries.

Star spinner Wanindu Hasaranga was ruled out before the tournament started, captain Dasun Shanaka has since been injured, and it has now been confirmed that emerging quick Matheesha Pathirana will also remain on the sidelines.

Veteran Angelo Mathews has been called into a squad that was in desperate need of experienced reinforcements and will boost the batting line-up if pulled straight into the starting XI.

Both sides have multiple issues to overcome to keep their faltering semifinal hopes alive, but with this essentially the first in a long stretch of do-or-die battles, time is running out for both teams to find the form that will be needed for a late surge.

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Test cricket in England.

"Bazball is in Test cricket. One day cricket's different and we've been playing different all the time," he said.

"We've been playing aggressive cricket since 2015 and done it quite well.

"I think probably the lack of that way of cricket has probably cost us a little bit in this tournament.

"We haven't been playing that way in my opinion and I think we need to play that way, but without slogging the ball, but just be that really aggressive side that

● England hold a slight edge in head-to-head records in ODIs against Sri Lanka with 38 wins to the Lankans' 36 in 78 meetings, with one encounter ending in a tie and three matches producing no results.

● The Three Lions also have the upper hand in World Cup meetings with a 6-5 advantage but haven't been able to beat the Lankans in the tournament in their last four contests since the 1999 World Cup. This includes knocking England out of the quarterfinals in 2011 and a shock win over the eventual champions in the 2019 edition.

● England have played five times at the M.Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru. They have won twice and seen as many losses, including the three-wicket loss against Ireland in the 2011 World Cup, at the venue. The Three Lions also recorded a tie at the ground with India in the same edition of the tournament.

● Meanwhile, the Lankans lost their only match at the venue in 1982 against India.

● Jos Buttler needs 90 runs to enter the 5000-run club in ODIs, while Joe Root needs 70 to complete 1000 runs in World Cups.



Bangladesh clinched a five-wicket win in the first of the three T20Is against Pakistan, thanks to left-arm spinner Nahida Akter's career-best bowling figures of five for eight in just 3.4 overs in Chattogram yesterday.

PHOTO: BBC

What to WATCH

- Live from 2:30 pm
- Sony Sports 2
- UEFA Europa League
- Olympiacos vs West Ham
- Live from 10:45 pm
- Liverpool vs Toulouse
- Live from 1:00 am (Friday)
- Sony Sports 1
- Brighton vs Ajax
- Live from 1:00 am (Friday)

WORLD CUP TIDBITS

'Wasn't expecting it'

Glenn Maxwell hit the fastest World Cup century in 40 balls to power Australia to a mammoth 399-8 in a record 309-run win against the Netherlands at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in Delhi on Wednesday.

Maxwell's knock bettered the record of South Africa's Aiden Markram who blasted a century off 49 balls against Sri Lanka earlier in the tournament at the same venue in New Delhi.

He smashed Bas de Leede for two fours and three sixes on successive balls to achieve the feat before departing on 106 off 44 balls with nine fours and eight sixes.

Speaking during the innings break, Maxwell said he was not expecting to hit a record century.

"It feels pretty good. I have been pretty cooked today so I wasn't expecting much but it probably cleared my head a little bit to be able to go out there and play," said Maxwell.

It was also the fourth fastest century in all ODIs.

A record margin win

Maxwell's carnage and another David Warner ton propelled Australia to a staggering 309-run win -- the largest margin win in terms of runs in World Cups and the second largest win overall in ODIs -- against the Dutch.



The record for the largest-margin victory in ODIs -- a 317-run win -- was set by India in a game against Sri Lanka in Thiruvananthapuram in January this year.

Warner goes level with Tendulkar

Meanwhile, it was Warner's sixth World Cup century to pull level with batting great Sachin Tendulkar.

Warner, who clubbed 163 last time out against Pakistan, reached his second successive ton off 91 balls with 11 fours and three sixes and made 104 to set the tone for his team's dominance.

Warner pulled level with India batting great Sachin Tendulkar with six World Cup centuries.

India skipper Rohit Sharma recently surpassed compatriot Tendulkar's

record of World Cup tons to lead the race with seven hundreds.

Maxwell, Cummins at it

But it was Maxwell who stole the show. He also stitched a record stand with Australia skipper Pat Cummins.

Maxwell and Cummins stitched together a 103-run seventh-wicket stand off just 44 deliveries -- the highest-ever partnership for Australia for the seventh wicket or lower in World Cups.

Maxwell, who smashed a total of nine boundaries and eight maximums, scored more than 90 percent of the runs during this stand as the all-rounder scored 91 and Cummins added eight.

Maxwell surpasses Watson

Maxwell also surpassed former Australia all-rounder Shane Watson and moved third in the list for most sixes hit in ODIs by an Aussie.

Following yesterday's innings against the Dutch, Maxwell now has hit 138 maximums in 123 ODI innings.

Only former Australia skipper Ricky Ponting and former wicketkeeper-batter Adam Gilchrist are ahead of Maxwell on the list. Ponting leads the chart with 159 maximums in 365 ODI innings while Gilchrist is second with 148 sixes in 279 innings.



David Warner celebrates after scoring his second straight century in the World Cup against the Netherlands in Delhi yesterday. Warner's 93-ball 104, laced with 11 fours and three sixes, was his 22nd ODI ton and helped Australia to 399 for eight. This was the sixth instance that a team has scored a 350-plus total while batting first in the ongoing edition of the tournament. Australia won the game by a record 309-run margin.

PHOTO: AFP

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