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De Kock bowling out his own way

AFP, Mumbai

If the World Cup represents Quinton de Kock's farewell to ODIs, then the South Africa opener is bowling out in style and in his own way.

De Kock is currently the tournament's leading batter with 407 runs, including three hundreds, from just five matches at an average of over 81 heading into South Africa's game against Pakistan in Chennai on Friday.

Scores of 100 and 109 powered the Proteas to wins over both Sri Lanka and Australia, with De Kock's superb 174 on Tuesday the cornerstone of South Africa's 149-run rout of Bangladesh in Mumbai.

But having already called time on his Test career last year, the wicketkeeper-batter announced before the World Cup he would be leaving the ODI stage after the 50-over game's showpiece event in India.

A star of the lucrative Twenty20 franchise circuit, the left-hander may still be available for the 2024 T20 World Cup in the West Indies and United States.

Yet now aged 30, a time when many cricketers are approaching their peak, the end of De Kock's international career is in sight.

"I've played a lot of cricket already," said De Kock, a veteran of 54 Tests and almost three times as many ODIs, prior to the World Cup.

Even the way he marked his 150th ODI, with a commanding 140-ball innings, including 15 fours and seven sixes, against Bangladesh failed to provoke much obvious excitement in the gifted shotmaker.

"I am a bit more tired than satisfied," said De Kock, off the field for the entire Bangladesh innings after a bout of cramp.



But Aiden Markram, stand-in skipper of South Africa in Temba Bavuma's absence, had no trouble afterwards paying tribute to both De Kock's talent.

"You never want to clip really. You just want to let him fly," Markram said.

De Kock's determination to plough his own furrow was evident early on, with reports of the 15-year-old's debut for provincial side Gauteng against a touring Durham team saving the precocious teenager had faced England fast bowlers Stephen Harmison, Liam Plunkett, and Graham Onions without a thigh pad.

That single-mindedness was also evident when he missed a match during the 2021 T20 World Cup in the United Arab Emirates after refusing to obey a last-minute edict by Cricket South Africa to "take the knee" in sympathy with the Black Lives Matter movement.

Not only the single-mindedness but also it's his unique way of approach both on and off the field that sets De Kock -- who has now scored more than 12,000 runs across all international cricket -- apart from anyone.

"I basically play what's in front of me," he said. "You can look at videos, but it's not the same as being in the middle."

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Pakistan skipper Babar Azam will hope for his bowling unit to live up to its 'world-class' tag as they face a high-flying South Africa, boasting in-form batters like Aiden Markram, Rassie van der Dussen among many others, in a crucial World Cup game at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai today.

PHOTO: AFP, FACEBOOK

Pakistan believe 'miracles can happen'

South Africa have a 21-game advantage in ODI head-to-head records as they have won 51 matches against Pakistan's 30 in 82 meetings, with one encounter seeing no results.

The Proteas also hold the upper hand in World Cup meetings, with three wins to Pakistan's two which have come in the past two editions of the tournament.

In three outings at the Chhapauk, Pakistan have won two and lost one, while South Africa are unbeaten at the venue with two wins in two matches.

South Africa have posted three of the six 350-plus totals in the ongoing World Cup. On all six occasions, the teams have batted first.

Mohammad Rizwan is five runs short of completing 2000 ODI runs, while pacer Hasan Ali needs one more wicket to reach 100 ODI wickets.

Aiden Markram needs 70 runs to reach 2000 runs in ODIs.

AGENCIES

If Pakistan envisage reaching the semifinals at the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup then they simply must find their best form and defeat a surging South Africa at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai today.

Pakistan all-rounder Shadab Khan insisted Thursday that his under-performing teammates believe "miracles can happen" as the former champions enter a "do-or-die" battle to rescue their faltering World Cup campaign.

Miraculous turnarounds are very much consistent with Pakistan -- the only time they lifted the trophy under the leadership of a courageous Imran Khan in 1992 was only made possible after they got a lifeline and performed a stunning turnaround.

Pakistan have shown glimpses of their best so far with two wins from five matches, but have yet to have all aspects of their game peaking at once. After starting brightly with wins over the Netherlands and Sri Lanka, the 1992 champions have been well beaten by India and Australia before being humiliated by neighbours Afghanistan last time out.

On Friday, they face another test of their resources against free-scoring South Africa.

"We have under-performed in all three departments -- batting, bowling, and fielding," said Shadab.

"We have not played good cricket but have

bounced back from such situations."

With four group games to play, Pakistan can still make the semifinals but there is little margin for error.

They will need to be firing on all cylinders against a powerful South Africa outfit who have been one of the most impressive teams in India with four wins and just one blemish to their name thus far.

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That loss was a shock defeat at the hands of the Netherlands and it is no coincidence that was the only time that the Proteas' strong batting order didn't click.

With Quinton de Kock, Heinrich Klaasen, Aiden Markram, Rassie van der Dussen, and David Miller all in good touch, opposition bowlers have struggled to contain South

Africa's batters and this is what Pakistan's bevy of quicks will need to do in Chennai.

Shaheen Afridi and Haris Rauf, who has had an overly disappointing campaign so far, will be key factors with the ball for Pakistan, and the pair must claim early wickets while the ball is swinging or yet another high-scoring encounter will be likely.

Also, as well as victory on Friday, Pakistan will also be looking to improve their -0.40 net run-rate which could prove to be the tie-breaker in the race for semifinal spots. Being able to do this against a ruthless Proteas will definitely be very tricky but Shadab said his teammates believe in miracles.

"If you have belief, miracles happen," said Shadab, the deputy to skipper Babar Azam.

"We have not played like we were playing before the World Cup but from tomorrow we have to start a winning streak."

He added: "When you are in a do-or-die position then I think the pressure is less because you have nothing to lose."

Shadab has been one of many in the Pakistan squad who has yet to fully fire.

He was dropped for the match with Australia before being recalled to face Afghanistan.

"When you don't do well the criticism is valid but there are ups and downs in a player's performance so I am confident that I will improve," Shadab said.

Long way short of our best: Buttler

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending world champions England's hope of clearing the group stage of the ongoing World Cup was all but dashed when Sri Lanka claimed a dominating eight-wicket victory at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru yesterday.

England are now lingering at number nine on the 10-team table, and with just one win in five games and a net run-rate of -1.634, Jos Buttler and Co will need to win the remaining five group games and also hope for some sort of miracle.

"There's no clear answer at the moment," Buttler was lost for words during the post-match presentation trying to figure out how they depleted to such a plight from being one of the highly-regarded pre-tournament favourites.

"Can't really fault the boys' efforts but we're playing a long way short of our best. It starts from the front, as a captain, you want to lead from the front and play well and I've been a long way short of my best," Buttler added.



"Not really, to be honest," Buttler denied his troops lost confidence. "There are a lot of experienced cricketers in the room, who've been through a lot. You don't become a bad player overnight, you don't become a bad team overnight. I think that's probably the biggest frustration, that we've been so far short of our best, and for no obvious reason. Just can't put my finger on it at the moment."

England were bundled out for 156 in 33.2 overs and saw Sri Lanka assail the target with ease as they had 146 balls to spare. The win makes it five out of five for Sri Lanka against England in World Cups since the 2007 edition.

It is also the first time England lost three consecutive matches in a World Cup edition since 1996.

Buttler admitted that all they probably have left to play for is their pride in the rest of the matches in the tournament.

"The biggest thing is personal pride, whatever happens in the rest of the tournament, we want to give a good account of ourselves going forward. Whatever will be will be," he said.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Former Sri Lanka skipper Angelo Mathews, who was called up to replace the injured Matheesha Pathirana after initially being left out of the World Cup squad, made an instant impact against England in Bengaluru yesterday. Bowling in an ODI for the first time since March 2020, Mathews had Dawid Malan caught behind with just his third delivery in the mega event. He then effected the run out of Joe Root before also claiming the wicket of the recalled Moeen Ali as the Lankans had England bundled out for just 156 in 33.2 overs.

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