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The Netherlands skipper Scott Edwards has led from the front and a charismatic Rashid Khan of Afghanistan remains the dangerman for his side as the two teams, who surprised many by committing giant-killings throughout the tournament, face off today in Lucknow with a top-four finish in mind.

PHOTO: AFP

Afghanistan hold a 7-2 advantage over the Netherlands in nine ODI meetings but the two sides have never met before at a World Cup.

Afghanistan leg-spinner Rashid Khan tops the ICC ODI Bowling Rankings and is accompanied by compatriots Fazalhaq Farooqi, who sits seventh, and Mujeeb Ur Rahman at ninth.

Netherlands captain Scott Edwards, who is his side's highest run-getter in the tournament with 225 runs, averages 69.33 against Afghanistan.

Rashid and Mujeeb average 16.50 and 14.28 with the ball against the Dutch.

Netherlands lost their only match at the Ekana Cricket Stadium in Lucknow when they succumbed to a five-wicket defeat against Sri Lanka in the ongoing tournament, while Afghanistan lost all three of their encounters at the venue.

A battle of the SURPRISE PACKAGES

AGENCIES

Not many would have predicted that Afghanistan, who held the record of just a solitary win in World Cups prior to this edition, and the Netherlands, the only associate nation in the tournament, would be vying for a semifinal berth this deep into the mega event.

However, to the surprise of many, the surprise packages Afghanistan and the Netherlands are still in the race to reach the knockout stages of the World Cup following early triumphs over top-four contenders and clinical wins in their last start.

A fourth victory here for Afghanistan would have them draw level on eight points with both Australia and New Zealand in third and fourth place, and firmly in the mix for a spot in the knockout stages.

But with only two wins so far, the Netherlands have a trickier path to the semifinals but could give their chances a huge boost with two points from this crunch clash.

The Dutch will aim to build momentum after their win over Bangladesh last time out and are banking on their knowledge of the conditions in Lucknow to help when they face the Afghans, all-rounder Colin Ackermann said on Thursday.

The Dutch climbed off the bottom of

the table into eighth spot with an 87-run victory over Bangladesh on Saturday and are familiar with the BRSABVE Stadium heading into Friday's clash at the venue having lost narrowly to Sri Lanka there.

"Obviously, we've got some momentum from our previous game against

unit not firing consistently.

"We know our middle order and lower order are very capable of scoring runs towards the back end," Ackermann said.

"I think if we can set the game up as a top-order - the top three-four batters ... It takes two guys to form a good partnership."

Ackermann, who bowls offspin, also played down the threat posed by Afghanistan's spin kings - leggie Rashid Khan, all-rounder Mohammad Nabi, and mystery spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman.

The Dutch have shocked mighty South Africa before taking down Bangladesh.

Afghanistan have three wins after seeing off defending champions England, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan, and three losses. They are two points ahead of the Dutch in what is shaping up to be a tense race for the last four.

Key for the Afghans will be their world-class spin attack.

"They've obviously got very good spinners that have been successful in T20 cricket but this is a different format," said Ackermann.

"You don't have to go after the spinners from ball one. I think the teams that have done well against them have kind of taken the game deep and not given them any wickets in the middle overs."



Bangladesh," Ackermann told reporters. "I think we're pretty lucky that we've played here before at this venue.

"I don't think Afghanistan have played here before. So we're familiar to the conditions from our game (with) Sri Lanka. Hopefully, that will give us a few positives leading into tomorrow."

Ackermann also said they were yet to play the perfect match with their batting

Shami credits the pack in dominating win

SPORTS REPORTER

India pacers were in a lethal mood, with Mohammed Shami the destroyer-in-chief, as the hosts became the first team to confirm a semifinal spot with a crushing 302-run win over hapless Sri Lanka at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday.

Shami made a number of records in a dominating display by India that saw them record the second-largest margin win (in terms of runs) in ODI World Cups yesterday. Only Australia's 309-run win over the Netherlands earlier in this tournament bettered yesterday's win margin in the mega event's history.

"Our bowling is in good shape and with the kind of rhythm (talking about the form of the pacers) that we are in, everyone is enjoying and everyone is happy for each other's success and more importantly, we are bowling as a unit and that's the result you are getting to see," said Shami, who ended with his career-best figures of five for 18 yesterday.

It was Shami's fourth five-for in ODIs, most by an Indian, surpassing Javagal Srinath's three ODI fivers.

Shami also overtook former India pacer Zaheer Khan to become his country's top wicket-taker in World Cups. Following yesterday's game, Shami now has 45 wickets

in 15 matches as he surpassed Zaheer, who had scalped 44 wickets in 23 matches for India.

"[On becoming India's highest WC wicket-taker] Yeah, I am trying (to do my best), as always, trying to pitch the ball in the right areas and trying to find the right rhythm, because in big tournaments, if you lose the rhythm, it's very difficult to get it back," said Shami, adding that he would keep on doing this in the coming matches as well. "So right from the start, the attempt has been to focus on the right areas and right lengths, and it's working, so why not try to repeat it?"

Shami also became just the second bowler in ODI history to bag three consecutive four-plus wicket hauls more than once. This is his second such streak after having returned 4/40, 4/16 and 5/69 in three consecutive innings at the 2019 World Cup. Only Waqar Younis has achieved this feat more often - three times.

India, who had bundled out Sri Lanka for only 50 when batting first in the Asia Cup final in their 10-wicket win in September, once again steamrolled the Lankans in similar fashion yesterday.

The Lankans could add five more to their Asia Cup final total, getting bundled out for 55 in 19.4 overs in chase of a 358-run target. This was also the lowest by a full-member team in World Cups.



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Marsh returns home

AFP, Sydney

All-rounder Mitch Marsh has returned home because of personal reasons and is out of World Cup indefinitely, Cricket Australia said Thursday.

His absence is another blow ahead of the weekend clash with England in Ahmedabad after Glenn Maxwell was ruled out with concussion following a fall from a golf cart.

"A timeline on his return to the squad is to be confirmed," Cricket Australia said on Twitter. It is not clear whether a replacement will be called up to the 15-man squad.

With both in-form Marsh and Maxwell out, Marcus Stoinis or Cameron Green look set to face Jos Buttler's struggling England.

"He's got a family issue going on and we all know, family is very important," Stoinis told Cricket Australia.

"He sent me a message last night saying, 'I'll be home for a little bit and then I'm coming back to win this World Cup' so that speaks to his mindset I think." Maxwell is unavailable under concussion protocols after falling off the back of the buggy in the dark after playing a round of golf on Monday.

Kiwis call up Jamieson

AFP, Pune

New Zealand have called Kyle Jamieson into their World Cup squad as cover while fellow pace bowler Matt Henry awaits the results of a scan on a hamstring injury.

Jamieson, previously with the squad in India as cover for Tim Southee, will arrive in Bengaluru late on Thursday ahead of Saturday's pool game against Pakistan.

New Zealand coach Gary Stead said that with Henry awaiting the results of a scan on his right hamstring and fast bowler Lockie Ferguson recovering from an Achilles injury, the Black Caps had to summon cover. They have two group games remaining and a place in the semifinals still up for grabs.

"The severity of Matt's injury, combined with a short turnaround to Pakistan, meant we couldn't risk being a bowler down for Saturday," Stead said.

Stead was confident it would not take long for Jamieson to re-adjust to Indian conditions.

Kohli still one shy of Tendulkar's record

AFP, Mumbai

Virat Kohli made 88 in a World Cup match against Sri Lanka on Thursday to leave him still one century shy of equalling fellow India great Sachin Tendulkar's all-time record of 49 ODI hundreds.

Following a shaky start, which saw Kohli dropped on 10, the current India batting star looked increasingly assured as he completed a run-a-ball fifty on the retired Tendulkar's Wankhede Stadium home ground as his former team-mate looked on from the stands.

But 12 runs shy of equalling the ODI century record of Tendulkar, the 34-year-old Kohli was deceived by a Dilshan Madushanka cutter that he could only chip to cover-point, where Pathum Nissanka held a simple catch.

His exit silenced a near-capacity crowd, who were all set to celebrated his impending landmark.

Kohli, along with Tendulkar a member of the India side that defeated Sri Lanka in the 2011 World Cup final at the Wankhede, faced 94 balls, including 11 fours.

India batter Shreyas Iyer hits one of his six maximums against Sri Lanka in their ICC World Cup encounter in Lucknow yesterday. The right-handed batter notched up his second half-century of the tournament, scoring a 56-ball 82 to help his side post 357 for eight. Iyer was the third batter to miss out on a century yesterday, with Shubman Gill and Virat Kohli scoring 94 and 88, respectively, but it was Iyer's rapid knock in the latter stage of the innings that saw India cross 350.

PHOTO: REUTERS