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Even though their last meet-up this World Cup ended up being a one-sided affair, a semifinal clash involving Australia and South Africa still promises a lot of excitement. Proteas' Quinton de Kock and David Miller will look to pile on the runs while the Aussies will back Glenn Maxwell and others to fire.

PHOTO: REUTERS

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- On Wednesday, India's Virat Kohli scored a record 50th ODI ton in the World Cup semifinal against New Zealand in Mumbai to break the record of 49 ODI hundreds he had shared with Sachin Tendulkar.
- Kohli also became the first batter in World Cup history to surpass the 700-run mark in a single edition of the tournament. He has now scored 711 runs at a staggering 101.57 average in 10 matches this World Cup so far. In doing so, he surpassed Tendulkar's record of 673 runs in 11 matches in the 2003 World Cup.
- Kohli, who notched his eighth fifty-plus score in this World Cup yesterday, also surpassed Tendulkar and Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan's joint record for most fifty-plus innings (7) in a single edition of the World Cup.
- Kohli, who batted in his 279th ODI innings yesterday, has now scored 13794 ODI runs, surpassing Ricky Ponting (13704 runs in 365 innings) to become the third-highest run-getter in ODIs.



Babar steps down as Pak captain

AFP, Lahore



Babar Azam said Wednesday he was resigning as Pakistan captain in all three formats following the team's Cricket World Cup flop but will continue playing for the national team.

"Today, I am stepping down as the captain of Pakistan in all formats," Azam announced on X, formerly Twitter, after meeting Pakistan Cricket Board chief Zakar Ashraf in Lahore. "It's a difficult decision but I feel it is the right time for this call. I will continue to represent Pakistan as a player in all three formats."

Babar has been the multi-format Pakistan captain since 2020, taking on the ODI and Test roles a year after he took charge of the T20 side.

Not long after Azam's announcement, an announcement was made from Pakistan Cricket's official X account, mentioning Shan Masood as Test captain and Shaheen Shah Afridi as T20I skipper.

WHAT TO WATCH

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ICC Cricket World Cup Semifinal

Australia vs South Africa

Live from 2:30 pm

SONY SPORTS 1

European Qualifiers

Cyprus vs Spain

Live from 11:00 pm

SONY SPORTS 2

European Qualifiers

Liechtenstein vs Portugal

Live from 1:45 am

(Friday)

Aussies count on 'big moment' experience against Proteas

AGENCIES

While South Africa insist they will not be burdened by scarring from their chequered record in World Cup knockout matches, Australia are counting on having experienced World Cup winners giving them a boost when the two old rivals face off in a much-anticipated semifinal in Kolkata on Thursday.

The Proteas have made four semifinal appearances in the showpiece - in 1992, 1999, 2007 and 2015 - but have fallen to defeat every time, twice losing to Australia.

In 1999, they lost to Australia after a dramatic tie at Edgbaston which saw their rivals go through due to a better group stage finish.

Kolkata's Eden Gardens, however, could be the stage for redemption for South Africa who made the semifinals by winning seven of their nine league matches.

The Proteas have won their last four meetings with Australia, including a 134-run thrashing in the league stage in Lucknow four weeks ago.

"A lot of people believe that this could be the year that we see ourselves in the final," South Africa skipper Bavuma, who remains doubtful to play the semifinal due his hamstring injury, told reporters.

"We'd like nothing better than that."

Despite South Africa always carrying

the 'chokers' tag with them and also their sombre past against Australia in the tournament, Bavuma urged that the mindset of his team remains confident ahead of the knockout contest.

"From a skill point of view, from a physical point of view, the guys are quite confident [than others]," said Bavuma.

"I think we'll take a lot of confidence

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with our performances up until this point." Meanwhile, Australia skipper Pat Cummins said his players will draw on experience from previous title wins for today's game.

"You start from scratch every time you play," Cummins, however, dismissed being complacent due to Australia's boastful World Cup record.

"I think what helps us is we've got a lot

of guys that have been in this situation before that have won the one-day World Cup, T20 World Cup, various other tournaments in big moments. So, I think that really helps. You can draw on that in the middle of the contest."

At this World Cup, Australia began with two losses including a defeat to India in their opener but have been on a roll since and Cummins takes inspiration from the winning streak.

"You can either build it up as the most important game of your life, or you can business as usual, really," Cummins said.

"You draw back on those past wins but you also just draw back on the last few weeks and know that us at our best is good enough."

Australia have witnessed some brilliant individual performances including an unbeaten 201 from Maxwell in their dramatic win over Afghanistan and a match-winning 177 not out from Mitchell Marsh against Bangladesh.

"As a team you grow an extra leg because you feel like you can win a match from anywhere and having someone like 'Maxi' in your team....he's a superstar, he's a freak, he can win a game from anywhere. Pretty glad he's in our team."

Rain is threatening the contest with downpours forecast in the eastern city on Thursday and during Friday's reserve day.

In 109 ODIs between Australia and South Africa, the Proteas won 55 with 50 victories for the Aussies while three encounters resulted in ties and one match yielded no result.

Both Australia and South Africa won three each and saw one match result in a tie -- the famous 1999 semifinal -- in their seven encounters in World Cup.

24 years ago, South Africa suffered an agonising defeat in one of the most dramatic semifinal in World Cups against Australia. A horrible mishap between Lance Klusener and Allan Donald while running between the wickets for the winning run saw Donald being run out, resulting in the match being tied as Australia advanced to the final after finishing higher on the Super Six table.

Australia's Mitchell Starc (59) needs one more wicket to become the third bowler in the history of the World Cup to take 60 or more wickets. Others are -- Glenn McGrath (71) and Muttiah Muralitharan (68).

David Warner is just nine runs shy of becoming the second Australian batter to surpass the 1500-run mark after Ricky Ponting (1751) in World Cups.

South Africa were bundled out for 83 -- the Proteas' lowest-ever World Cup total and their second-lowest in ODIs -- earlier when they faced hosts India at the Eden Gardens, the venue for today's semifinal, this World Cup.

Booters hoping for a fight against Soccerroos

SPORTS REPORTER

Even though Bangladesh coach Javier Cabrera is eager to show improvement of his charges, the men in red and green will probably look to avoid embarrassment in their opening World Cup Qualifiers fixture against Australia at the AAMI Park in Melbourne today.

The match will get underway at 3:00pm Bangladesh time.

The Soccerroos, 27th in FIFA ranking and 156 places ahead of Bangladesh -- are in superb form as they made it to the World Cup Round of 16 last years before losing 2-1 to eventual champions Argentina.

The only question before this uneven battle between is whether Bangladesh can salvage respectability against a team that had beaten them 5-0 and 4-0 during the Russia World Cup Qualifiers in 2015.

In quest of acclimatising with the chilly weather in Melbourne, the men in red and green reached Australia five days before the match. Cabrera prepared his charges to function in low-and-mid-blocks in a bid to foil attacks from the physically and technically superior Australia side, and if possible, attack on the break.

"Obviously for teams like us it is a huge challenge, so hopefully we will be able to

fight. Hopefully we will be able to not give away too many corners-kicks or free-kicks. We have prepared but we will see tomorrow [Thursday] how we manage," Cabrera said at a pre-match press conference.

"Hopefully we will get some chances. I think we have to try to be ourselves as much as possible. That idea of playing is what brought us here and to take this opportunity and I don't think we will get anything from changing that just for a



game," the 39-year-old coach said.

Bangladesh have been performing well under Cabrera since the SAFF Championship in June-July, and the coach's desire is to carry the inspiration from Australia match into matches against Lebanon and Palestine.

Despite knowing the challenge, captain

Jamal Bhuiyan is optimistic about performing well and producing a good result in front of Bangladeshi expats.

"I know it is going to be tough for us but we want to produce a good result," Jamal said. "Anywhere we play in the world, the Bangladeshi fans make us happy to be honest because they come long way and do everything they can and give us extra motivation. So it is a crucial game and we want to prove that Bangladesh is a good team and have good players."

Even though Graham Arnold did not get his full squad to train together until the eve of the match, the Australia coach is confident about continuing the standard they have set.

"We have set our own standards. You know it is a mentality and the mindset of going out there with that mentality to perform. When you put on that Soccerroo shirt or the Australian national team shirt, it is about

performing at your best because you only get limited occasions or times to do that. So as soon as we go out there tomorrow night and we are playing for the nation. We threat every opposition the same," Arnold said at the pre-match press conference.



India's Mohammad Shami continued his purple patch, standing out with crucial wickets in the World Cup semifinal against New Zealand at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday. Shami gave India two crucial breakthroughs with the new ball, removing openers Devon Conway and Rachin Ravindra. He fumbled an easy catch of Kiwi skipper Kane Williamson but redeemed himself by removing Williamson and Tom Latham in the 33rd over to swing back the momentum in India's favour.

PHOTO: REUTERS