



Australia captain Pat Cummins celebrates with Marnus Labuschagne after pulling off a fantastic back-pedalling catch to dismiss South Africa batter Quinton de Kock, who tried to loft a good length delivery of Josh Hazlewood but ended up mistiming it, during their ICC World Cup semifinal at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata yesterday. The ball went very high up and Cummins, who was stationed at mid-on, ran backwards, kept his eye on the ball all the time and grabbed a stunner.

PHOTO: AFP

Underachievers NZ to keep 'pushing the boundaries'

REUTERS, Mumbai

New Zealand are confident they have the foundations in place to continue to compete with the elite at the World Cup even if they could be without Kane Williamson and a few other generational talents when the next edition comes around.

Skippers Williamson had no complaints about how the Blacks Caps were manhandled out of the semifinals by India on Wednesday, possibly bringing to an end his hopes of ever raising the oldest limited-overs World Cup trophy.

The batting great, who has played in four World Cup semi-finals and two finals, will be 37 when southern Africa hosts the quadrennial 50-over showpiece in 2027, while strike bowlers Tim Southee and Trent Boult will be 38.

Williamson laughed when the matter was raised at his post-match press conference -- "Are you going to talk about how old we are?", he joked -- before saying he saw signs that the ageing world class talents were bringing along younger players.

"It's been an ongoing effort as a side to keep trying to get better and push the boundaries of where we can get to as a team and all those people are part of that," he said.

"You can only hope that, as we experienced from some of our leaders as young guys, that we can continue to bring players through."

"Some good signs, certainly, in this last period of time. It's not over just yet, but that's where the focus is."

Despite losing five of their last six matches at the tournament, Williamson was proud of what the Black Caps had achieved in India and accepted that they had simply been beaten by a better team at the Wankhede Stadium on Wednesday.

He refused to look for excuses in the injuries that restricted him to four matches, robbed the Black Caps of quick Matt Henry for the last two weeks and also hampered all rounders Jimmy Neesham and Mark Chapman.

While New Zealand's bowlers did not produce their best in tricky conditions for seamers, Rachin Ravindra and Daryl Mitchell were the tournament's third and fourth highest run-scorers after Wednesday's match.

"For me now it's trying to make the most of playing for New Zealand for as long as I can and keep trying to move this Silver Fern forward," he told reporters.

"We've got a number of world class players. I'm sure many of the boys will keep doing it for a while yet."

ASHFAQ-UL-ALAM

Having a bowling average of 15.71 in World Cups, the best among all bowlers with at least 20 wickets in the showpiece event, should be enough to guarantee a player a place in the teamsheet in every match.

But in the case of Mohammed Shami, it wasn't.

The 33-year-old pacer was left out of the first four matches of the tournament. The reason for his omission was tactical, as the Indian think tank wanted someone who could chip in with the bat at number eight and hence chose Shardul Thakur over Shami.

However, not getting picked regularly in World Cup matches in spite of his good record is nothing new for the pacer.

In the previous World Cup in 2019, Shami was picked in only four out of India's 10 games.

He made most of his limited chances, claiming 14 wickets which included a five-wicket haul against eventual champions England. It seemed that Shami would have warmed the benches for most of this World Cup after the pacer got overlooked in India's first four matches.

But all that changed after India's match against Bangladesh in Pune, where all-rounder Hardik Pandya's ill-fated attempt to block a straight drive from Tanzid Hasan Tamim with his foot opened the doors for Shami as India opted for a wicket-taker in the aftermath.

Shami's wicket-taking spree has taken him to number six in the all-time World Cup wicket-takers' list, just one wicket behind the great Wasim Akram, having played 21 matches less than the Pakistani left arm seamer.

Seeing Shami surpassing himself



matches since then, bagging 23 wickets to sit at the top of the wicket-takers' list in the tournament.

Shami's stats in this World Cup have been staggering to say the least as the quick on average has struck in every 11 deliveries and has conceded a little over nine runs for each wicket.

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in World Cups with every appearance, it's hard to believe how close the right armer was from calling it quits almost five years back.

In 2018, Shami had hit rock-bottom. His personal life was in disarray after his now estranged wife filed a case against him and he lost his place in the India squad after failing a fitness test.

Shami told the then Indian team director Ravi Shastri that he was seriously contemplating quitting the game entirely. Shastri convinced him not to retire and instead redirect all his frustration towards improving his game.

The pep talk did the trick as it didn't take Shami too long before he returned to the India squad and quickly became one of the go-to pacers in all three formats.

Three years later, Shami faced a different sort of challenge when he became the target of disgruntled Indian fans on social media after India's 10-wicket defeat to Pakistan in the ICC Twenty20 World Cup.

Shami had a bad day at the office, like all the other Indian bowlers. But the treatment he received off the field was exclusive. The outside noise was loud enough that the team's captain Virat Kohli came out in his support, blasting the online trolls.

But all these challenges only strengthened Shami's resolve and fueled him on his way to becoming a World Cup great.

Will first-class cricket's value be realised?

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Rudderless performances at the World Cup have raised questions over Bangladesh team's planning and other facets but the biggest takeaway has been the lack of quality across the squad compared to international standards.

There has been an acute lack of interest in the country's longer version format, and many believe it has been at the heart of the issue of lack of quality.

Against the backdrop of Bangladesh's World Cup debacle, the preparations for the upcoming Test series against New Zealand -- scheduled to kick off from November 28 in Sylhet -- is set to begin with the sixth round of the National Cricket League (NCL), slated to begin from November 18.

Without Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal available for the upcoming series, the Tigers would have to plug the holes left by veterans. Taskin Ahmed is also unavailable due to a shoulder injury and has been prescribed rest.

Liton Das, too, has asked for a leave and sources say it remains up to the board on whether he will be granted a leave. BCB cricket operations chairman Jalal Yunus could not be reached over phone yesterday to make a comment on Liton's availability for the Tests.

While the Test side has a separate set of players compared to the ODI side, many of the players move across formats when need arises. There are players who enjoy the longer version but in the national team periphery, there remains those that have often shown an aversion to red-ball cricket.

"The decision to opt out of longer-version cricket should not be left to some of the talented but young cricketers. Ultimately their careers don't progress without red ball cricket," a team management source said on conditions of anonymity.

Former India captain Sourav Ganguly had said

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in a recent interview how playing longer-version cricket goes hand-in-hand with building skills and resistance rather than playing shorter-version like the IPL.

NCL's match fees have been increased over the years. Champion team players get Tk 1 lakh match fee, runners-up team players get Tk 80 thousand, with the lowest being Tk 50 thousand for the two bottom placed teams. The salaries are also based on the players' performances. Players like Mosaddek Hossain are yet to play in this year's NCL, whereas pacer Mustafizur Rahman too has not been very keen on first-class matches over the years.

With only Khaled Ahmed and Shoriful Islam now available from the pace pack for the New Zealand series, the likes of Hasan Mahmud may have to fill in.

Selector Habibul Bashar feels that longer-version first-class is key to building endurance. "If you don't play first-class cricket, you would suffer in one-day games and your cricket won't improve and you won't build that kind of fitness," he said.

Yet, the last round of NCL will be in focus for squad selection with head coach Chandika Hathurusingha also expected to attend games. However, if cricketers do not understand the value of first-class games, the country's cricket will keep lagging behind and in the short-run effect squad building for the New Zealand series amidst key absences.

SONY SPORTS 2

European Qualifiers

Denmark vs Slovenia

Live from 1:45 am (Saturday)

SONY SPORTS 1

Poland Czech Republic

Live from 1:45 am (Saturday)

Shami's ascent to World Cup greatness

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2026 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

Booters 'completely outplayed' by Australia

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh kicked off their World Cup Qualifiers campaign with a thumping 7-0 defeat to mighty Australia in Group I fixture at AAMI Park Stadium in Melbourne yesterday, with substitute Jaime Maclareen stealing the show.

The men in red and green thus suffered their second-largest defeat in World Cup Qualifiers, having previously lost 8-0 to Japan during the 1994 United States World Cup Qualifiers and to Jordan during the 2018 Russia World Cup Qualifiers.

Australia, ranked 156 places higher than Bangladesh in the FIFA Rankings, dominated from the get go until the final whistle. A comfortable 4-0 lead in the first half was followed by three more goals in the 'David and Goliath' battle.

Despite parking the bus from the onset, the charges of Javier Cabrera were unable to display the improvements they desired to demonstrate against a vastly superior side.

Bangladesh had some good recent



performances, with the backline playing a crucial part, but stopping the Socceroos proved a daunting task. The home side's left wingbacks periodically pierced both wings, exposing Bangladesh's error-prone backline.

Before the game, Bangladesh captain Jamal

team are stronger than the one that competed in the Qatar World Cup, and Graham Arnold's Australia demonstrated how cruel they were on the field by refusing to relax even after netting their seventh goal in the 84th minute.

Cabrera, on the other hand, had warned his players about set-pieces because of the

superior physique of the Australians, who inevitably set the game's tone after Leicester City's towering defender Harry Souttar's easy header off a Charig Goodwin free-kick gave Australia a fourth-minute lead. Afterwards, Brandon Borrello, Mitchell Duke and Maclareen added their names to the scoreboard.

Bangladesh had a handful of counters in both halves, but they were unable to trouble Australia. "It was a very tough day for the boys, something that was to be expected," Cabrera said. "We expected to be a little more competitive, and we probably could have performed better in the first half. But we were completely outplayed, and we didn't even show our characters."

"We were more like ourselves in the second half in terms of building up, but there were occasions where the physical, not just technical, but physical superiority [of Australia] was absolutely massive," claimed the Spaniard, adding that his charges are still mentally strong and that the result against Australia will have no bearing on their encounter against Lebanon on November 21.