



We'll keep playing cricket the way we do as Kiwis and hopefully the rest of the world can respect us and how we go about our day-to-day life, not only on the field but off it as well.

New Zealand batter Daryl Mitchell



What type of pitch awaits the final?

AGENCIES

All of a sudden, all the focus turned to the type of pitch that is going to be used for the all-important World Cup 2023 final between hosts India and five-time World Champions Australia at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Sunday.

With reports claiming that the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) switched pitches, opting for a used surface, for India's semifinal against New Zealand, the curiosity among fans and experts regarding the type of surface for the final has only intensified.

However, despite the raging pitch-switch controversy, India dominated proceedings in the semifinal as they cruised to their fourth World Cup final, and first since 2011, with a convincing 70-run win over the Kiwis.

So, what's in store for Sunday's final?

The Narendra Modi Stadium, the largest cricket venue, boasts 11 pitches, each unique in its composition. Pitches 1-5 are crafted from the local black clay soil, known for providing better bounce, and commonly favoured for shorter formats.

On the other hand, pitches 6-11 are hewn from red silt soil from Mumbai, ideal for longer formats as it tends to dry quickly, creating conditions conducive for spinners.

However, the surfaces in Ahmedabad have generally been a treat for the batters, but have also aided disciplined bowlers. They also have had something in store for seamers in the initial overs and something for spinners in the middle overs.

A similar kind of wicket could be laid out for the final showdown. Some reports, however, have suggested a used surface that could turn as the game progresses could be used for the World Cup 2023 final.

Out of the last five matches played at the venue in Ahmedabad, three have been won by teams bowling first.

Four matches have been played in Ahmedabad during the World Cup 2023, with the pitches displaying diverse characteristics.

This was the venue for the World Cup opener between defending champions England and New Zealand. The match was a relatively high-scoring contest with the Kiwis having no trouble chasing down a 283-run target with nine wickets and 82 balls to spare.

However, the following three games witnessed relatively lower scores -- including India skittling out archrivals Pakistan for 191 in their seven-wicket victory.

The recent match between South Africa and Afghanistan showcased a sporting pitch that didn't favour spinners much. With an average first-innings score of 260, the ground tends to favour chasing teams.



India skipper Rohit Sharma on Friday inspects the pitch at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad, the venue of Sunday's World Cup 2023 final also featuring Australia. Following a lot of hullabaloo regarding the pitch-switch controversy in India's semifinal game in Mumbai, a lot of curiosity will be surrounding the type of pitch used for the all-important final.

PHOTO: AFP

A spark that flourished into fire

MAZHAR UDDIN from Kolkata

Long before Mohammed Shami became the pivotal player in India's impressive journey to the final of the ongoing World Cup, the pacer was sharing his early struggles with Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and a few reporters over a friendly chat at the team hotel during the 2017 ICC Champions Trophy in England.

Shami recalled riding his bicycle for 25 kilometres every day from his hometown of Amroha to Sonakpur Stadium in Moradabad to train under the supervision of his childhood coach, Badruddin Siddique.

The then 27-year-old had also provided some advice for the Bangladeshi quicks, the most essential of which was, "You know it's important as a fast-bowler to act like a maniac, only then will you be able to bring the aggression out of you. Don't be content with your accomplishments and always remain hungry."

Shami may have moved on from his struggle to represent India by 2017, but he continued to overcome further hurdles, both on and off the field, to emerge as a world-class bowler and a key player in India's pursuit of World Cup glory, having bagged 23 wickets before Sunday's grand finale.

How Shami luckily got an opportunity in India's playing eleven in the mega event -- with Hardik Pandya's injury against Bangladesh opening the door after he



warmed the bench for the first four games -- has already been widely discussed, unlike the phase in his life when he was nowhere near the limelight.

"Shami's father had brought him to Sonakpur Stadium in 2002. He was keen to learn with a huge passion to become a fast bowler. I witnessed the urge to give his best in every delivery that he bowled that day. The intensity remained the same till he bowled the last one. I immediately realised the boy has a spark in him," Badruddin told The Daily Star over phone.

Despite coming from a small town in Uttar Pradesh, Shami's aspirations were larger than life. He understood how to turn his limitations into strengths, and the only thing he knew was to work hard.

Shami, who stands no taller than 5'8", does not have the luxury of using his height to his advantage like other elite pacers, but he focuses on seam movement with impeccable control and consistency.

And even when there was little assistance off the surface at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium on Wednesday, Shami was able to extract purchase, moving the ball both ways to grab seven wickets during India's 70-run semi-final triumph over New Zealand.

"I think his ability to bowl seam-up delivery is phenomenal. It's important to have stamina as a pacer, which makes Shami stand out from the others. He is a gutsy bowler and never shies away from coming hard at you even if he gets smashed for a boundary. He is very consistent with his line and length which makes a fast-bowler deadly," Badruddin added.

Shami's comeback story could serve as an inspiration for Bangladeshi pacers, according to Badruddin, who feels that the Tigers pacers can also attain new heights.

"I think you guys have the quality and it's just a matter of time they start believing in themselves. No matter where you come from, you can reach the top but for that you need to have the fire in you like Shami does."

Hafeez, Wahab feature in PCB's latest overhaul

AGENCIES

Pakistan Cricket Board's (PCB) major shake-up following their World Cup debacle has seen former fast bowler Wahab Riaz being roped in as chief selector, the PCB confirmed yesterday.

Wahab's appointment comes after Inzamam-ul-Haq stepped down amidst allegations of having a conflict of interest in his role.

After winning their first two games in the World Cup, Pakistan lost five of their next seven matches, including a seven-wicket drubbing at the hands of archrivals India, and finished fifth in the table with eight points as they failed to cement a semifinal spot.

ODI skipper Babar Azam, who also led the Test and T20I side, blew hot and cold managing 320 runs in the nine matches at an average of 40.

It is natural that a team would opt for an upheaval after a disappointing World Cup campaign and the PCB seems to be in no mood to waste time.

Significant changes have been in order as Babar stepped down from captaincy in all formats last Wednesday. Former Pakistan all-rounder Mohammad Hafeez was also appointed as the national team's director on the same day.

It was later announced that Hafeez, who replaced Micky Arthur as director,



would also assume the role of head coach for the upcoming tours in Australia (from December 14 to January 7) and New Zealand (from January 12 to 21) respectively as part of PCB's aim to merge the role of team director and head coach.

Meanwhile, the PCB announced that left-handed batter Shan Masood will lead the Test side, while star pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi will take the reins of the T20I team. The PCB is yet to make an announcement on the ODI captain.

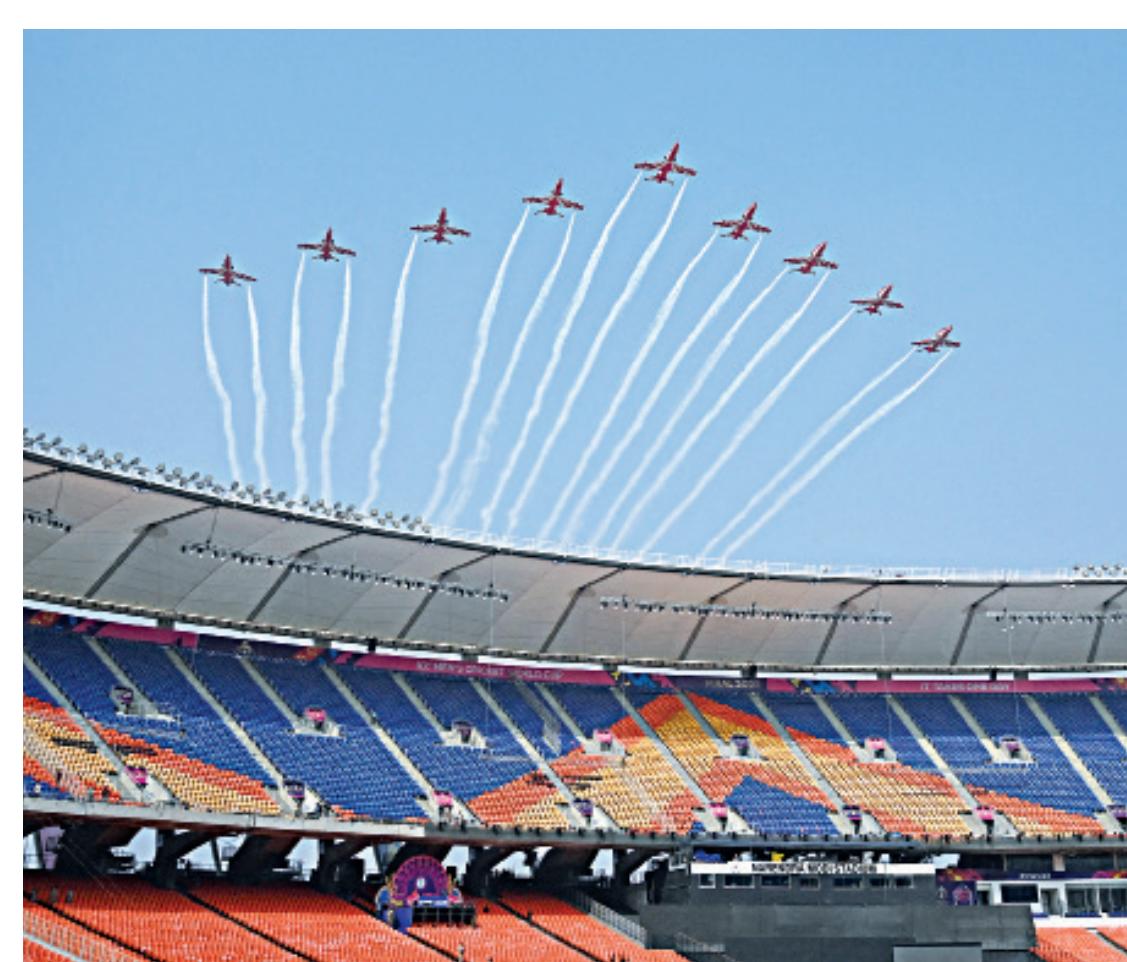
The foreign coaching panel consisting of bowling coach Morne Morkel, and head coach Grant Bradburn have also resigned.

Pakistan cricket is never far away from the next controversy and moving

from one crisis onto another has been a common theme in management as well.

Amidst the latest overhaul, former Pakistan cricketer Rashid Latif went onto provide a year-by-year breakup of Pakistan's performance in big tournaments, and this included several controversies involving the national team, including the revolt against former batter Younus Khan, who had revealed a couple of years back that seniors in the team then were unhappy with his captaincy style and strong attitude.

Latif also went onto mention the 2010 spot-fixing scandal in England, for which the trio of Salman Butt, Mohammad Amir and Mohammad Asif were arrested and banned, and the sacking of several captains and PCB chiefs over the years.



With Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi likely to attend the World Cup 2023 final between hosts India and Australia at Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad along with several other celebrities on Sunday, the Suryakiran acrobatic team of Indian Air Force held a rehearsal on Friday at the venue for the air show ahead of the final.

PHOTO: AFP

'De Kock will go down as one of the legends'

ICC

Quinton de Kock's ODI career has come to a close with South Africa's defeat in Thursday's ICC Men's Cricket World Cup semifinal against Australia at Eden Gardens in Kolkata.

The South African opener had announced prior to the tournament that his campaign in India would be his last in ODIs.

"He would have wanted to end things on a different note, but he'll remember the type of innings and fight we showed as a team," South Africa's captain Temba Bavuma said of De Kock after the semifinal loss to Australia.

"Us as players, we've enjoyed playing with him through all the years. In South Africa, he will go down as one of the legends of the game," he added.

De Kock's tournament saw him score 594 runs in ten innings at an average of 59.40, with only Virat Kohli scoring more runs than him.

Across his 155 ODIs the left-hander hit 6770 runs at an average of 45.74, setting the standard for South Africa and racking up 21 centuries.

Unfortunately for De Kock, his final appearance didn't see the best of him as he dropped two crucial but tough catches and could only score a 14-ball three.

De Kock's South Africa career is far from over, however, with a T20 World Cup on the horizon in 2024.

Aussie quicks pick up pace just in time

REUTERS

Australia head into their World Cup decider against India with all pieces in place following a devastating return to form of their vaunted pace attack in the South Africa semifinal.

Powerplay wickets had proved elusive for the five-times champions but the withering opening spells of Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood were decisive against the Proteas.

Along with captain Pat Cummins, the fire and ice duo of Starc and Hazlewood had previously been left in the shade by legspinner Adam Zampa and his 22 victims at the tournament.

On Thursday, however, the quicks grabbed eight of the 10 wickets between them for a handy confidence boost before the ultimate test against India's peerless batting machine.

"It's probably not been the tournament I would have liked from the get-go," Starc told reporters. "But nice to step up in a big game."

Pace has never failed to be a factor in Australia's white ball triumphs and proved key when Aaron Finch's squad won the nation's maiden T20 World Cup in the United Arab Emirates in 2021.

For all rounder Glenn Maxwell, the glow in the Australian dressing room is akin to the squad's ebullience during the UAE tournament where they peaked at the right time.

Australia's quicks will again be looking to make early inroads in Sunday's final against India, who racked up 397 for four in their semifinal against New Zealand.

"It's huge, and the bigger the game the more important it becomes," said Hazlewood of capturing early wickets.

"So we know the blueprint now if we're bowling first, and hopefully go again on Sunday."