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'Genuine hero' Rohit eyes greatest triumph

AFP, Ahmedabad

Rohit Sharma will carry a billion hopes when he leads India out for the World Cup final today, the pinnacle of a journey which began in poverty but which has led to a personal fortune of around \$25 million and the high pressure captaincy of the national cricket team.

The swashbuckling 36 year-old opener, nicknamed "Hitman" for his ability to get big scores quickly, has accumulated 550 runs at the tournament in a chart led by teammate Virat Kohli (711) ahead of Sunday's showdown with Australia in front of around 130,000 fans.

But Rohit's selfless approach with the bat to give the team attacking starts and allow the likes of Kohli and the middle-order to build has won him praise in a near-perfect campaign for two-time World Cup winners India.

"The impact he's had has been



Cummins and Co aim to 'silence' hostile home crowd

AFP, Ahmedabad

Australia captain Pat Cummins has urged his side to "embrace" the challenge of facing a hostile crowd when they play in-form hosts India in Sunday's World Cup final in Ahmedabad.

A capacity crowd of around 130,000 is expected to roar on India.

The hosts are bidding for a third World Cup title and second on home soil after their 2011 triumph.

But five-time champions Australia are a team full of big-match performers who also know what it's like to play in cricket-crazy India from their time in the Indian Premier League.

"I think you've got to embrace it, the crowd's obviously going to be very one-sided," Cummins told a pre-match news conference on Saturday.

"But also in sport, there's nothing more satisfying (as an opposition player) than

ROAD TO FINAL

INDIA

India cruised through the group stage, finishing top on a maximum 18 points having won all nine of their matches. India's net run rate of 2.570 was far and away the best in the group stage.

In the semifinal against New Zealand, Rohit Sharma led a blazing start with the bat, rocketing with fellow opener Shubman Gill, before Virat Kohli cruised to his 50th ODI century, passing Sachin Tendulkar. Posting an imperious 397, New Zealand showed some respite largely through a century from Daryl Mitchell, only to fall 70 runs short.

unbelievable because he sets the tone for the batting, he is the one who is sacrificing his wicket so that others could come and score the runs," former India captain Sunil Gavaskar told TV channel India Today.

"He is taking the attack to the opposition in the first 10 overs. Demoralising the opposition attack at the start. He has got out in the 40s three or four times already. As a leader he has shown the template."

Rohit smashed 47 off 29 balls laced with four fours and four sixes in India's 70-run over New Zealand in the semi-final in Mumbai on Wednesday.

Former England captain Michael Vaughan called Rohit a "genuine hero" and the "man who has changed the culture" of the team, which stands at the cusp of a third World Cup title.

Rohit took over the captaincy of the white-ball team in 2021 and a year later became the all-format leader in the cricket-crazy nation's quest for a global title.

Rohit was part of the team's inaugural 2007 T20 World Cup triumph under Dhoni but was not selected in the 2011 World Cup squad, an absence that left him "heartbroken".

But come Sunday and Rohit will not only have a shot at leading his team to cricket's biggest prize but also to answer his critics with what he does best -- bat and lead.

Five key match-ups to ANTICIPATE

ICC

In the biggest stage of all, two of the best teams in the competition are going up against each other with the World Cup up for grabs. Here are five potential match-ups that could swing the momentum of today's final.

Josh Hazlewood v Virat Kohli

Virat Kohli, fresh off a record 50th ODI ton, has a massive negative match-up to counter in the World Cup final in Ahmedabad. In 88 balls against Hazlewood in ODIs, Kohli has been dismissed five times, including once in the league match between these teams at this World Cup.

With the Indian maestro in this kind of form, having reeled off eight fifty-plus scores in 10 innings, it's vital for the Aussies to break the Kohli barrier to access that strong middle-order early. Hazlewood, whose stunning new-ball spell left South Africa in a mess in the semi-final, could be the key for Australia.

Rohit Sharma v Mitchell Starc

In his ODI career, Rohit has been dismissed 33 times by left-arm pace, and 22 of those have come within the first 10 overs.

Mitchell Starc and the Aussies know the prominent threat Rohit poses in the Powerplay. The Indian skipper has swung matches in the first 10 overs, scoring at a stunning rate of 133.08. If they're to send Rohit back early, Starc could be the key.

Glenn Maxwell v Kuldeep Yadav

Maxwell may not be spinners on one leg every day, but his dismissal in the semi-finals against South Africa had an eerily familiar tone to it as he attempted a wild, across-the-line



Australia are the most successful nation in the history of the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup and would make it six wins should they triumph in India.

After 150 ODIs involving the two sides, Australia earned 83 victories against India's 57. In World Cups, Australia lead India 8-5 after 13 games.



Tournament hosts India are eyeing a first major ICC global tournament win in 12 years, and will have the crowd on their side on home soil, as they did in 2011.

Head-to-head results in India are on level terms after their tournament opener, with 33 victories for either team in 71 clashes.



hoick, only to be cleaned up by the South African wrist spinner, Tabraiz Shamsi.

On a similar turner against India in Chennai, Maxwell fell in the exact same fashion to Kuldeep Yadav, another left-arm wrist spinner.

If Ahmedabad throws up another two-paced wicket, Maxwell will probably be wary of the massive turn Kuldeep gets and the threat it poses.

Steve Smith v Ravindra Jadeja

Overall, Jadeja has dismissed Smith five times in 2023 alone across formats. The last of them, and arguably the best, came in the league stage game in Chennai, when the left-arm spinner ripped one past Smith to bowl him.

Smith's ODI record against Jadeja is, however, stupendous. He scores at a rate of over 100 against him and has only been dismissed twice in over 200 balls. But that'll count for little if the ball is throwing up puffs of dust in Ahmedabad on Sunday.

Mohammed Shami v David Warner

Every seventh ball on an average that Mohammed Shami balls to a left-hander this World Cup has been a wicket. If there's one player who'll not be bogged down by such numbers, it is David Warner. The Aussie has countered right-arm pacers with fire this tournament, but it has also brought about five dismissals against them.

The Aussies have their only two left-handers in the top seven, Warner and Travis Head, batting at the top two positions. Thus, instead of Mohammed Siraz, Shami might be entrusted to operate with the new ball alongside Jasprit Bumrah.

ROAD TO FINAL

AUSTRALIA

Australia bounced back from defeats to India and South Africa in their opening matches, and sitting in last place on the table, before going on to win the remaining seven matches, and qualify with 14 points.

Pat Cummins' side were slight underdogs in their re-match with South Africa come semi-final time, though the Aussies made an emphatic start, holding South Africa to 24 for four. David Miller's century gave the Proteas hope, though it was Cummins and Mitchell Starc who would wield their bats aloft in victory, holding on in a tense three-wicket win.

hearing a big crowd go silent and that's the aim for us tomorrow."

And while he accepted the dimensions of Sunday's match would be different to any his side had experienced before, Cummins said: "We play over here in India a lot so the noise is not something new.

"I think on this scale it's probably bigger than we would have experienced before but it's not something totally foreign to what we've had before."

"Everyone deals with it slightly differently -- you see Davey (Warner) probably dancing and winning the crowd over, other guys just staying in their own bubble -- it should be good."

"Victory on Sunday would cap a remarkable 2023 for Australia that saw them narrowly lose a Test series in India before defeating India in a World Test Championship final in England, where they also went on to retain the Ashes after a drawn campaign."

"It's been a huge year," said Cummins. "These are four marquee events."

"Some of the guys probably spent less than a couple of weeks in their own bed since the end of the Aussie summer," added Cummins, also the skipper of Australia's Test team.

"The guys have been awesome. They're so up for every game they play. To put ourselves in this position, it (winning the World Cup) would just top off an incredible year."

Hasan Murad the new face in Shanto-led Test squad

SPORTS REPORTER

Najmul Hossain Shanto was assigned the captaincy for Bangladesh's upcoming two-match Test series against New Zealand starting on November 28 at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

The 25-year-old left-handed batter will become the 13th player to captain Bangladesh in Tests, with regular skipper Shakib Al Hasan still out with a finger injury. Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced the decision yesterday, naming a 15-member squad which saw left-arm spinner Hasan Murad receiving his maiden national call-up.

In seven innings in the recently concluded National Cricket League, Murad placed eighth on the wicket-takers' charts with 19 wickets, while off-spinner Nayeem Hasan, who made a return to the side, topped the chart with 34 scalps in 11 innings.

BCB made several changes, most of them



Squad: Najmul Hossain Shanto (Captain), Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Zakir Hasan, Shadman Islam, Mominul Haque, Mushfiqur Rahim, Nurul Hasan Sohan, Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Tajul Islam, Naeem Hasan, Khaled Ahmed, Shoriful Islam, Hasan Mahmud, Shahadat Hossain Dipu and Hasan Murad.

being forced, as it brought in opener Shadman Islam, wicketkeeper Nurul Hasan Sohan, pacer Hasan Mahmud along with Murad and Nayeem in place of Tamim Iqbal, Liton Das, Taskin Ahmed, Ebadot Hossain, and Mushfiqur Hasan. The exclusion of Taskin, Ebadot and regular skipper Shakib was due to injury. As for Tamim, however, BCB is yet to sit down with the former captain to sort out his future following a dramatic run of events that saw him opt out of the World Cup.

Liton, who captained the Tigers in the one-off Test against Afghanistan earlier this year, was granted a one-month paternity leave. According to sources, the board had

asked the right-handed batter to play in at least one match since the series is taking place at home but its request was turned down by the 29-year-old, who wanted to sit out the entirety of the series.

Selector Habibul Bashar rued the forced changes the selection panel had to make as Bangladesh start off the latest cycle of the ICC Test Championship with the New Zealand series.

"It would've been ideal for us if we could've played our regular side as we are going to start off the new cycle of the ICC Test Championship with this series. The changes we made were forced owing to injuries," Bashar told The Daily Star.

Bashar admitted that the absence of Shakib is a blow considering the balance he provides but pointed out that losing Taskin and Ebadot -- both of whom have been regular starters in Tests -- has largely depleted the strength of the Tigers' pace unit.

The first Test will run from November 28 to December 2 before the action moves to Dhaka for the second Test running from December 6 to 10.



Fans paint on a wall outside Narendra Modi Stadium, offer prayers for India's victory at a temple in Amritsar, while a boy writes a message on a fan wish wall at the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport in Ahmedabad yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS/AFP