



PHENOMENAL CUMMINS leads by example

AFP, Ahmedabad

Pat Cummins may be an unusual captain, but on Sunday he played a role described as "phenomenal" as he led Australia to their sixth World Cup triumph in a victory over India.

Cricket teams are often reluctant to appoint fast bowlers such as Cummins as their skipper because of concerns the extra workload will distract them from taking wickets.

But Cummins, thrust into the captaincy just days before the start of the 2021/22 Ashes after Tim Paine's shock resignation following a 'sexting' scandal, still led Australia to a 4-0 series win over England.

Then in June this year, Cummins oversaw Australia's 209-run thrashing of India in the World Test Championship final at The Oval.

Cummins, 30, also doesn't fit the

'macho' image of an Australia captain established by abrasive skippers such as Ian Chappell, Allan Border, and Steve Waugh, although the paceman was accused of plotting the downfall of the similarly gritty former coach Justin Langer.

Following a defeat by India in the second Test in Delhi this year, Border said: "I'd be playing with a harder edge... The Kiwis (New Zealand), they are the ones that play the goodie two shoes."

Cummins' membership of the 'Cricket for Climate' group, meanwhile, led to suggestions he had influenced Cricket Australia to abandon a sponsorship deal with energy company Alinta -- an accusation both he and his bosses denied.

He has been labelled "woke" by some critics. "I don't even know what



'woke' means," Cummins told the Sydney Morning Herald in January. "It's a label, it means nothing."

But few opponents would call Cummins, an outstanding bowler with 239 wickets in 55 Tests at 22.94 apiece and 141 in 88 one-day internationals at 28.66, a soft touch.

His steel was evident when he refused to withdraw an appeal after Jonny Bairstow was controversially given out stumped during an Ashes Test at Lord's in July, despite the England batter thinking the ball was dead.

Australia won that match and retained the Ashes in a series drawn 2-2. Cummins knows about resilience given injuries meant he endured a six-year wait for a second Test appearance after a debut as an 18-year-old.

And Cummins, a shining light following the 2018 ball-tampering

scandal in South Africa that cost Steve Smith the captaincy, has now led his country to a record-extending sixth World Cup title -- despite defeats in their opening two matches.

"Pat Cummins was phenomenal, I think he's been phenomenal all tournament with his decision-making," said teammate Mitchell Starc on Sunday.

Cummins has also demonstrated calmness when required.

That was evident when, with Australia having collapsed to 91-7, he held up an end as Glenn Maxwell's spectacular double century sealed a remarkable three-wicket pool victory over Afghanistan in Mumbai.

He also then held his nerve with the bat in a tense semifinal run chase against South Africa.

"We've had to fight for every win, but we've found a way to win," he said.

India 'not good enough' on the day

AFP, Ahmedabad

India captain Rohit Sharma admitted his team were "not good enough" after slumping to a six-wicket loss to Australia in the World Cup final in Ahmedabad.

The hosts, who came in undefeated into the title clash with 10 wins, were bowled out for 240, a total Australia overhauled in 43 overs with Travis Head smashing 137 in Ahmedabad.

The result shattered India's dreams of ending a global title drought stretching back to the 2013 Champions Trophy.

"I mean the result hasn't gone our way and we know that we were not good enough on the day. But proud of the team," Rohit said after the loss.

"It wasn't supposed to be. Honestly, 20-30 more runs would've been good. I thought when

KL (Rahul) and Virat (Kohli) were batting, we were looking at 270-280 at that point and we kept losing wickets."

Rohit hit a quickfire 47 before Australia hit back with wickets and bowled out the hosts in 50 overs despite fifties from Virat Kohli (54) and KL Rahul (66).

Australia slipped to 47-3, but the left-handed Travis Head stood firm and put on 192 runs with Marnus Labuschagne, who made an undefeated 58.

"With 240 on the board, we wanted early wickets but credit to Travis Head and Marnus," said Rohit.

"They put us completely out of the game and I thought the wicket got better to bat under lights. I mean we knew under lights, it would be better but don't want to give that as an excuse."



Italy promise to take risks against Ukraine

AFP, Berlin

Luciano Spalletti and his Italian team pledged to continue a high-risk approach in Monday's high-stakes clash with Ukraine in Leverkusen, despite the danger of missing yet another major tournament if they lose.

Italy beat North Macedonia 5-2 on Friday to overtake Ukraine to move to second in the group. Italy needs only a draw to secure automatic qualification for Euro 2024.

"We are more positive under Spalletti," said Federico Chiesa who scored twice. "We take a few more risks in defence." "We want to play against Ukraine with this mentality."

The Euro 2020 champions have failed to qualify for the past two World Cups and a loss to Ukraine would see the war-torn Eastern European nation qualify for the Euros, leaving Italy facing a playoff tournament in 2024 to have a shot at defending their title.

While keeping a clean sheet would book the Azzurri a ticket to Germany for next year's tournament, Spalletti's attack-minded side have pledged not to sit back and defend like Italian teams of the past.

Despite a flattering scoreline against North Macedonia, the two-time European Champions left the door open for their bogey team.

Leading 3-0 at half-time, Italy conceded two second-half goals to Jani Atanasov, allowing North

Macedonia back into the match.

The attack-minded approach is typical of Spalletti, who masterminded a fearsome offensive machine at Napoli last season as they won the Scudetto for the first time since the days of Diego Maradona.

Winger Chiesa was dangerous throughout and scored a first-half brace. He was not concerned about



his side's defensive performance.

"The important thing is that we won" said Chiesa.

"We are more positive under Spalletti, and that means we take a few more risks in defence. We showed that we wanted to dominate the play and we deserved to win."

Chiesa praised Spalletti's attacking approach



Kylian Mbappe celebrates one of his three goals as France broke a European qualifying record with a 14-0 thrashing of Gibraltar in Nice on Saturday. An Ethan Santos own goal started the rout as Marcus Thuram, Warren Zaire-Emery, Jonathan Clauss, Kingsley Coman, Youssouf Fofana, Adrien Rabiot, Ousmane Dembele and Olivier Giroud also got on the scoresheet.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Al Ittihad appoint Gallardo

AFP, Paris

Saudi champions Al Ittihad announced on Saturday they had hired Marcelo Gallardo, who led River Plate to two Copa Libertadores titles, as coach.

The Argentine replaces Nuno Espirito Santo who took Al Ittihad to the Saudi title last season.

The Portuguese former Tottenham and Wolves manager was fired earlier in November following a run of bad results and amid reports of a difficult relationship with star striker Karim Benzema, who joined the club in June.

Gallardo, started as a midfielder with River Plate in his native Buenos Aires, where he won the Copa Libertadores. He won a Ligue 1 title during a four-year spell playing for Monaco.

saying conceding goals was "part of the beauty of attacking football."

Chiesa promised more of the same on Monday.

"We want to play against Ukraine with this mentality and win in Leverkusen. We must not miss this goal."

Italy's second-half wobble was also of little concern to Spalletti after Friday's match.

"It was a great Italy, both in terms of character and the quality of the game.

"I expected us to suffer, to freeze up and try to hang on. Instead we got back to charging up the pitch, putting moves together and scoring goals. Along with the two that we did score, there were several other big opportunities." Spalletti called the match against Ukraine a "final."

"Whoever has the better of the match will go to the Euros," he said. Ukraine's journey through the qualifiers has been nothing short of remarkable, considering the team has had to take home games on the road due to the ongoing conflict.

Despite playing almost 2,000 kilometres from Kyiv, Ukraine are likely to enjoy a home atmosphere in Leverkusen. The German Federal Office for Migration estimates that more than one million refugees have fled Ukraine for Germany since February 2022.

Ukraine have lost just one of seven fixtures dating back to March, although that defeat did come at the hands of Italy who beat Serhiy Rebrov's men 2-1 in Milan.



'NOT IN MILLION YEARS'

AFP, Ahmedabad

Travis Head hailed his "amazing day" as he smashed a World Cup final century and grabbed a spectacular diving catch to inspire Australia to a six-wicket win over India on Sunday.

Head, 29, hit 137 off 120 balls with 15 fours and four sixes as Australia coasted to a sixth world title.

"Not in a million years did I think that would happen," said Head who was also man of the match when Australia defeated India by 209 runs in the World Test Championship final at The Oval earlier this year.

Head had scored 163 in that match.

"What an amazing day. I'm just thrilled to be a part of it."

Head's century was only the seventh in a final in the 48-year-history of the World Cup, but third by an Australian following match-winning efforts of 149 by Adam Gilchrist in 2007 and 140 not out by Ricky Ponting in 2003.

Head's innings, which followed his valuable 62 in a tense three-wicket semi-final win over South Africa, was all the more impressive as he was in danger of missing the tournament completely after fracturing his hand in South Africa in September.

"It is a lot better than being sat on the couch at home (nursing his injury)," added Head who put on 192 for the fourth wicket with Marnus Labuschagne (58 not out).

"I'm very lucky that everything went well and I was able to get back and the support that the boys showed, I didn't think this would happen."

He added: "I was nervous in the first 20 balls but Marnus batted brilliantly and it is great to bat with him. It was an amazing partnership."

Head had also played a key role in keeping India down to a modest total of 240.

India captain Rohit Sharma had raced to 47 off just 31 balls with four fours and three sixes.

With his team sitting pretty on 76-1 in the 10th over, Rohit launched the ball high into the off side where Head, running back from cover, dived to take a spectacular catch.

"Rohit Sharma was probably the unluckiest man in the world," admitted Head.

"I do work hard on my catching but I couldn't imagine holding onto that. It is a nice thing I'll be able to look back on later in my life."