

# India the ‘real chokers’?

AFP, Ahmedabad

Cricket-obsessed India was left grappling for answers Monday after the team’s devastating defeat to Australia in the final of their home World Cup extended a drought in global tournaments.

A much-fancied India team led by skipper Rohit Sharma went into Sunday’s final in front of nearly 100,000 fans in Ahmedabad undefeated and favourites to capture the one-day crown.

But they were outplayed by Pat Cummins’ Australia, going down to a six-wicket defeat and leaving players, fans, and pundits with a familiar feeling of disappointment.

“You can’t deny the fact that it’s been more than 10 years since they won a global title,” Indian sports journalist R. Kaushik told AFP on Monday.

“If you look at the semifinal losses then there is a pattern, maybe there is something wrong in the planning,” he added.

“You can interpret that as, ‘Yes, they freeze on the big stage’, or you can say that, ‘On that day they were not good enough’. But it’s hard to say they freeze mentally.”

India’s record makes for painful reading for its hundreds of millions of fanatical supporters.

Their last global title came a decade ago with the 2013 Champions Trophy.

Sunday was also India’s second loss to the Australians in a final in five months, after they went down in the World Test Championship decider in June.

India won the one-day World Cup in 1983 and 2011 but then faltered at the semifinal stage in 2015 and 2019.



“India are the real chokers, they are the new chokers,” fan Abir Saini, wearing a Virat Kohli Indian jersey, fumed as he trudged away from the world’s biggest cricket stadium.

“They play well but fall at the final hurdle.”

Fans had turned anticipating an Indian triumph after the hosts stormed into the final with 10 straight victories in the lead-up matches.

But it was Australia who went on to win a record-extending sixth World Cup crown, with Travis Head hitting a sparkling 137.

India coach Rahul Dravid appeared as baffled as anyone at his team’s inability to get over the line.

“I mean, I guess if I knew the answer, I would say that,” Dravid, who was appointed coach in 2021 until this year’s World Cup, told reporters.

“I just think we haven’t played really well on the day,” he said of India’s succession of near-misses.

The former captain said that “there’s not one particular reason you can pin it down to”, adding that on Sunday “we didn’t bat well enough”.

Indian media attempted to look on the bright side.

The Hindustan Times said in a headline: “Champions, nonetheless.” But it noted there were some “harsh lessons”, prime among them lack of depth in the batting department. “Don’t despair, let’s celebrate this India team,” said The Times of India, highlighting several memorable moments during the six-week tournament -- including an emphatic win over Pakistan.

India’s dire record when it really counts is in stark contrast to Australia’s, who have won six of the eight ODI World Cup finals they have contested.



Australia skipper Pat Cummins poses with the coveted trophy at the Atal Pedestrian Bridge on the Sabarmati river in Ahmedabad on Monday, a day after leading his side to their sixth World Cup triumph with a convincing six-wicket win over hosts India at the Narendra Modi Stadium.

PHOTO: ICC

## What to WATCH

T SPORTS  
FIFA World Cup Qualifier  
Bangladesh vs Lebanon  
Live from 5:45 pm  
SONY SPORTS 2  
European Qualifiers

Greece vs France  
Live from 1:45 am  
(Wednesday)  
SONY SPORTS 1  
Croatia vs Armenia  
Live from 1:45 am

(Wednesday)  
SONY SPORTS 5  
Gibraltar vs Netherlands  
Live from 1:45 am  
(Wednesday)

## PRAISES POUR IN FOR CUMMINS AND CO

The decisions he [Pat Cummins] made today, his tactics were absolutely spot on. His ability to be able to galvanise his team and whatever they did to turn things around after that second game, the coach, the support staff and Pat Cummins in the leadership group of the Australian team, whatever they did, they really turned it around and turned it on.

– World Cup winner and former Australia all-rounder Shane Watson

To win another World Cup in the manner and circumstance they have is one of the finest victories in our sporting history I reckon. – Australia’s former World Cup-winning wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist

– The Sydney Morning Herald said in a headline

This is another wonderful achievement by Pat Cummins and his team who have performed brilliantly in testing conditions and against strong opposition throughout the tournament.

– Cricket Australia’s chief executive Nick Hockley

# How keeping a cool Head paid off

ASHFAQ-UL-ALAM

“It’s a lot better than seeing the World Cup on the couch at home,” said Travis Head as a smile crept across his face.

Head said this on Sunday, soon after he was named the player of the final for his defiant 137 off 120 balls against India that powered Australia to their sixth World Cup title.

Even as a fielder, Head created one of the most memorable moments when he took a stunning catch to dismiss Rohit Sharma, a wicket that flipped the momentum of the match.

However, the man lying on the ground after completing the vital catch could’ve very easily been lying on his back on some couch in Adelaide watching the final on a screen, had the Australian management not gambled on him.

In fact, when Australia began their campaign on October 8, Head was still in Adelaide, rehabbing his fractured left hand.

Head suffered the injury while batting in an ODI against South Africa in September, which made him unavailable for the first two weeks of the World Cup.

The Australian team had two options, either look for Head’s replacement or carry him with the squad and play him when he is fit.

The Aussie team management did neither.

Yes, Head remained a part of the squad, but he didn’t have to travel with the team from one city to another with an injured hand as he was allowed to remain at home to complete his rehabilitation.

Australia took a massive gamble on Head as there was always a chance that he would reinjure his hand

or might lose his form after the enforced break from competitive cricket.

But the Aussies took this gamble because they realised the importance of having a player like Head in the latter half of the tournament.

The Australian management anticipated that as the tournament progressed, pitches in India would get slower, making it difficult to score runs against the softer ball in the latter part of the innings.

In such conditions, scoring quick runs at the top of the order could prove vital and Head, who has a strike rate in excess of 100 in ODIs, was the ideal guy for the role.

Moreover, his gentle off-spin would give Australia another spin bowling option alongside one genuine spinner in Adam Zampa.

That’s why, even when Head was almost 5000 miles away from India, he was still very much a part of Australia’s plans.

After missing the first five matches of the tournament, Head finally began his World Cup campaign with a match-winning 67-ball 109 against New Zealand.

In the semifinal against South Africa, he stifled the opposition’s momentum by claiming the wickets of Heinrich Klaasen and Marco Jansen in consecutive deliveries.

With the bat, he plundered a 48-ball 62, giving Australia a headstart in the 213–run chase.

Then came the final and Head, once again, was the difference maker.

Head’s brilliance in the knockout stage was a direct result of Australia’s long-term planning. They knew who were the players they needed to go all the way in the competition and will now fly back home with the biggest prize in ODI cricket as their reward.



# Brazil take on world champions Argentina

AGENCIES

One of the most sought-after contests in world football will take place amongst two of the fiercest rivals as Brazil square off against world champions Argentina in a FIFA World Cup Qualifier contest at the iconic Maracana Stadium, kicking off at 6:30 am [Bangladesh Time] on Wednesday.

Both sides are coming off the back of defeats but are at opposite spectrums considering their positions on the table.

Lionel Messi’s Argentina top the table with four wins and a loss, while Brazil have blown hot and cold, winning just two and losing as many fixtures in five matches.

Argentina had registered four wins on the trot before being put to the sword in a 2-0 loss against Uruguay in their last game, while Colombia’s Luis Diaz netted a brace to put down Brazil in a 2-1 defeat.

Injury threatens Brazil’s ranks, having lost Vinicius Jr in the Colombia encounter. Forwards Neymar and Richarlison were already ruled out and interim coach Fernando Diniz would be desperate to welcome back striker Gabriel Jesus up front along



with Rodrygo and Gabriel Martinelli. As for the Albiceleste, only centre back Lisandro Martinez is the major absentee.

Nothing would work better for fifth-placed Brazil to bring their hot and cold run back on track than a win against their archrivals in their final game of the year. The top six teams in a 10-team table will directly qualify for the 2026

edition of the mega event from South America.

As things stands, a win against Messi and Co would be a daunting task as Argentina have won two and drawn one of their last three internationals against Brazil, including a famous 1-0 success in the final of the Copa America in July 2021. Their last meeting on Brazilian soil, two years ago, was abruptly ended by Covid health officials.

In overall records, Brazil have the upper hand on Argentina with 46 wins against the Albiceleste’s 41. Twenty-six encounters ended in a draw.

Brazil forward Endrick, who is unlikely to start against Argentina, had nothing but praise for eight-time Ballon d’Or winner Messi. The 17-year-old Palmeiras striker, who will join Spanish giants Real Madrid next summer, cherished the chance of meeting Messi up close.

“Messi is phenomenal, he is the best in the world today and to be able to play against him, to see him up close, will be a wonderful experience,” he told at a news conference.

“What matters to me is that the team wins and, if I get to play, I want to help,” he said.

## MESSI’S 2022 WC jerseys to go up for auction

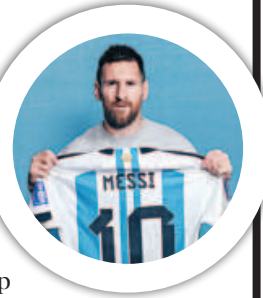
AFP, New York

A set of six jerseys that Lionel Messi wore during Argentina’s triumphant 2022 World Cup run will be auctioned in December, Sotheby’s announced yesterday, estimating their value at \$10 million.

The football star donned these shirts during the first halves of the group-stage rounds against Saudi Arabia and Mexico, as well as latter games against Australia, Netherlands, Croatia, and France.

If the jerseys indeed fetch above \$10 million, that could make the sale the most valuable collection of sports memorabilia ever auctioned off, Sotheby’s said.

The most expensive individual jersey ever sold at auction was one that basketball legend Michael Jordan wore during his NBA finals run with the Chicago Bulls in 1998. It sold for \$10.1 million last year.



## Booters shrug off Melbourne mauling to focus on Lebanon

SPORTS REPORTER

Leaving the disastrous performance against Australia behind, Bangladesh are looking forward to securing three points against Lebanon in their home match of the World Cup Qualifiers at the Bashundhara Kings Arena today.

The match will kick off at 5.45pm, with sports channel T Sports telecasting live.

Coach Javier Cabrera tried to get the players refocus on the game and motivate them since the team’s return from Melbourne three days ago. The 39-year-old coach believes the experience against Australia will have a positive impact on today’s performance.

“Definitely we had a lot of positive things to take from the match against Australia. From the beginning, I told the players that we had no interest in the score [against Australia] at all because we knew this could happen,” Cabrera said at the pre-



match press conference yesterday.

“7-0 to me has zero value or 4-0, I don’t care. The team competed till the end in a very difficult contest and I am absolutely convinced that that is going to have a positive impact in the next game,” Cabrera added.

Bangladesh put up a brilliant fight against Lebanon five months ago in the SAFF Championship where they eventually lost 2-0. However, the current Lebanon squad have only 10 players from that campaign, with new coach Nikola Jurcevic taking charge last month.

“We are very excited about tomorrow....We are convinced that we are going to give our best for Bangladesh and its people so won’t see any difference between the two teams. We are absolutely convinced that we can play with them and we can fight to get three points,” said Cabrera, however admitting that Lebanon will have a physical advantage while Bangladesh will enjoy home advantage.

In the two meetings prior to the SAFF Championship, Bangladesh and Lebanon had one win each, with the men in red and green winning 2-0 at home after suffering a 4-0 away defeat during the 2014 World Cup pre-qualifiers.

Captain Jamal Bhuiyan said that they have to forget the result against Australia and move on.

“Before the start of the World Cup Qualifiers, I said that we have chances to get some points against Lebanon and Palestine and things remain the same. We know if we can beat Lebanon, then everyone will talk about the win in the next five months, not about the defeat against Australia. I can say that we are ready for tomorrow’s match.”

“On paper, we are favourites but I told my players that the favourite team doesn’t always win. We must show on the pitch. The match will be very difficult for us but our players are motivated and we will try to do everything to win the game,” Jurcevic said.