



South Africa face test of nerves and Afghanistan

REUTERS

South Africa's bid to lift a first major cricket trophy could come down to whether they can finally shed the unwanted tag of "chokers" and the latest test of their nerves will be against Afghanistan in Wednesday's Twenty20 World Cup semifinal.

The Proteas have competed in seven semifinals over both short format World Cups but have never reached a title match, although they will be happy to avoid Australia this time around having lost to them three times in the last four.

together for that semi-final."

After stunning Australia in their penultimate Super Eight match, the plucky Afghans ensured the 2021 champions were sent packing from the tournament with a dramatic eight-run win over Bangladesh on Monday.

Afghanistan's maiden World Cup semifinal appearance is a sign of how much the sport has grown in the war-torn country and skipper Rashid Khan's side, who also upset New Zealand earlier in the tournament, will target another statement victory.

They failed to register a single win

India's knockout hurdle against holders England

REUTERS

India can take a huge step towards winning their first major title in over a decade and bury any doubts about their backbone in the knockout rounds when they face defending champions England in the Twenty20 World Cup semifinals on Thursday.

Despite being backed by the world's richest cricket board, success on the biggest stage has largely proved elusive for India and their 2013 Champions Trophy triumph is the most recent of their five global titles.

Rohit Sharma's team, however,

However, this time India look in fine fettle with both bat and ball. Rohit has scored 191 runs in six matches, while pace bowler Jasprit Bumrah has 11 wickets and spinner Kuldeep Yadav has claimed seven in three games.

England's campaign has stuttered with losses to Australia and South Africa in the group stages and they only made the Super Eights by virtue of having a better net run rate than Scotland.

Now, however, they stand only two victories away from becoming the first team to retain the T20 World Cup

- The Afghanistan-South Africa semifinal in Tarouba has a reserve day, on June 28. However, an extra 60-minute will be allocated on the first day and another 190 minutes on the reserve day for an outcome.
- South Africa and India are the only two ICC full-member sides Afghanistan have not beaten in international cricket so far.
- The Proteas have won a total of seven matches so far – most by any team in one edition of the tournament.

- In this T20 World Cup, Afghanistan openers Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Ibrahim Zadran have starred in four fifty-plus stands – most for any team in one edition of the tournament -- including three hundred-plus stands -- most by any opening pair in the history of the competition.
- Afghanistan bowlers have dominated the powerplay in this T20 World Cup, taking 20 wickets at an economy rate of 7.19 during this phase.

- India are unbeaten in this T20 World Cup, winning six matches with the group-stage game against Canada getting washed out.
- India hold a slender advantage in head-to-head T20I meetings with England, winning 12 of their 23 encounters. England have won 11.
- In T20 World Cups, however, it is all square at 2-2 between the two sides, with England winning by 10 wickets in their recent-most meeting in the 2022

- T20 World Cup semifinal.
- No reserve day has been set aside for this semifinal, meaning, if the game in Guyana gets washed out then India would go through to the final -- courtesy of Rohit Sharma's men winning more Super Eight matches than defending champions England.
- However, an extra 250 minutes have been allotted for this game in order to aid an outcome.

The perennial under-achievers of international cricket are on a hot streak, with solid bowling displays helping them power through the group and Super Eight stages.

South Africa will be encouraged by how several players have stepped up in tense situations to keep their 100% record intact after seven matches so far.

"We haven't played our best game of cricket yet," Markram said after his team ended the campaign of co-hosts West Indies in a shootout for a semifinal spot on Sunday. "So we'll try and put our best game of cricket

in the last edition of the tournament but were still tipped to make the last four this time around by West Indies great Brian Lara, after whom the Tarouba venue for the semi-final is named.

Rahmanullah Gurbaz has been a key player for Afghanistan, leading the scoring table with 281 runs, while Fazalhaq Farooqi leads the bowling charts with 16 wickets. "Being in the semi is big for us," Rashid added. "But we have to go with a very clear mind and know what we have done so far. Keep things simple for ourselves and make sure we enjoy that big occasion."

head into the clash with England in Guyana on a six-match unbeaten streak in the tournament and determined to emulate the title success of the 2007 side in the inaugural edition.

Rohit, who along with fellow stalwart Virat Kohli could be playing at a last World Cup, returned to form with a 41-ball 92 in a thumping win over Australia in the Super Eight stage and said his side would continue being aggressive.

Indian fans will still be anxious given their team's shaky displays in the latter stages of big tournaments.

trophy.

England's failure to defend the ODI World Cup last year heaped pressure on skipper Jos Buttler and coach Matthew Mott and they will hope West Indies born pacers Jofra Archer and Chris Jordan can continue their good form in the knockout rounds.

Buttler is England's top scorer with 191 runs while opener Phil Salt has 183 and the pair's form could prove crucial if they are to advance.

Awaiting India or England in the title clash will be the winner of the first semifinal between South Africa and dark horses Afghanistan.

Women booters to play Bhutan in July

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's football team are set to play two more FIFA international friendly matches against Bhutan to utilise the July window and prepare for the upcoming SAFF Women's Championship.

The women in red and green will fly out to Thimphu on July 8 and be in action on July 11 and 14, before returning home on July 15. The decision was made at the meeting of Bangladesh Football Federation's (BFF) women's committee yesterday.

"We were supposed to play a four nation tournament involving hosts Lebanon, Jordan, Nepal and Bangladesh, but the situation in Lebanon did not permit it. So, we wanted to utilise the July window and arranged Bhutan matches following no response from other countries," BFF executive member Mahfuza Akhter Kiron, who presided the meeting, told The Daily Star, adding that they had also proposed Nepal, who, however, expressed their inability to make necessary arrangement within a short time.

"Playing Bhutan will also be a part of preparation ahead of the SAFF Women's Championship [running from October 17-30], but we are also trying to arrange more friendly matches in the September window," she further informed.

Earlier this year, Bangladesh women's team played two home matches against Chinese Taipei in the May-June window, where they suffered 4-0 and 1-0 defeats.



Messi may skip Peru clash

REUTERS

Lionel Messi may sit out Argentina's next Copa America game against Peru to rest a sore thigh with his team already qualified for the next round after two wins.

Messi, who turned 37 this week and has been suffering muscle niggles, required brief medical treatment on his thigh during Argentina's 1-0 victory over Chile at the U.S.-hosted tournament.

But he completed the 90 minutes, shaving the post with one long-range shot and was at the heart of Argentina's attacks.

"It bothers me a bit, but I was able to stay on until the end. I hope it's nothing serious," he said, acknowledging it might be wiser to sit out the Peru game on Saturday.

"Let's see how the next few days go, how I recover. We've taken an important step to qualify and be relaxed," added Messi, saying he had also suffered from a sore throat and fever before the Chile game.

With a 2-0 win over Canada also under their belt, world champions and tournament favourites Argentina are looking comfortable in the early stages of the Copa America. They top Group A with six points, ahead of Canada on three.

Coach Lionel Scaloni would not say whether he would rest Messi against Peru, to keep him fit for the quarterfinals, but Argentine football commentators assumed he would do just that.

Sabitzer puts left foot forward for Austria

REUTERS, Berlin

Austria's historic 3-2 win over Netherlands to top Group D at Euro 2024 on Tuesday will go down as one of the greatest moments in the country's sporting history, especially considering the unlikely source of their triumph - Marcel Sabitzer's left foot.

The 30-year-old is well known for his thunderous strikes from distance with his right boot, but Tuesday's winner - rattled into the roof of the net from a tight angle - came from his less-heralded left to secure a famous victory.

"I got the ball deep, I looked up to see if someone was free in the middle, but I got the impression that they (the Dutch) had more men there. In the past, the left foot has often helped me, so I thought that was the moment I could give it a try," Sabitzer told reporters.

"As soon as the ball left my foot, I knew it

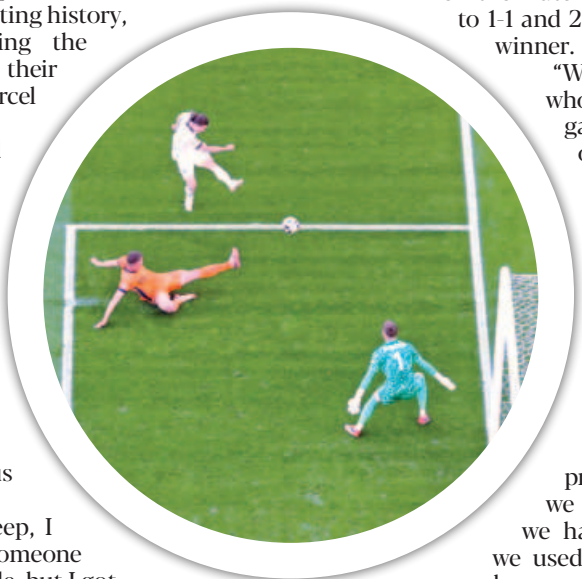
could be good."

The midfielder, who received the man of the match award for his performance, shared the credit with his team mates after a game in which the Dutch pegged them back to 1-1 and 2-2 before he got the winner.

"We are all footballers who want to win games, and that is our objective in every game. And if you have moments where things are a bit more difficult and it goes back and forth, then the question is how does the team react to that," he said.

"You can be proud of the unity we have, the mentality we have on the pitch ... we used our strengths, the goal was very nicely worked. So many Austrians who watch us in the stadium trust us, and we want to give them something back."

Austria will find out their last-16 opponent when the final round of group games is completed.



Slovenia's Jaka Bijol and Vanja Drkusic celebrate with goalkeeper Jan Oblak after qualifying for the Round of 16 of Euro 2024 following a goalless draw against England in their last Group C match at Cologne Stadium on Tuesday. The Central European nation drew all three of their matches and qualified for the knockout rounds for the first time in their history in only their second appearance in the continental competition.