

SPORT

What to WATCH

T Sports and Nagorik TV
T20 World Cup
Italy vs Scotland
Live from 11:30 am
Oman vs Zimbabwe
Live from 3:30 pm

Canada vs South Africa
Live from 7:30 pm
BTV
Odommo T20
Final
Live from 6:00 pm



Opener Tim Seifert struck a blistering 65 off 42 balls, ensuring that history didn't repeat for New Zealand in the T20 World Cup on Sunday. The five-wicket win over Afghanistan marked the start of their campaign against a side who had knocked them out early in the previous edition in 2024. Seifert's innings, supported by 42 from Glenn Phillips, propelled New Zealand to their highest-ever run chase in a T20 World Cup, successfully chasing Afghanistan's total of 182-6 with 13 balls to spare in Chennai. New Zealand's previous best chase in the tournament was 167 against England in the 2021 semifinal.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK

Not here 'just to participate'

NABID YEASIN

England took their time. Sam Curran, entrusted with the crucial final over with 10 runs to defend, first consulted skipper Harry Brook before conferring with the experienced wicketkeeper Jos Buttler.

Few would have predicted such scenes – that the two-time champions would be forced into a mid-over huddle during their T20 World Cup 2026 clash against Nepal at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday. Nepal eventually lost by just four runs, but the message of the tournament so far has been clear: neither Nepal nor any of the other eight associate nations are at the 20-team marquee event merely to make up the numbers.

"I think full credit to Nepal. They were absolutely brilliant. We saw that it was tricky when we batted, but they played against us really well and took us right to the edge. They played brilliantly," player-of-the-match Wil Jacks said, relief evident in his voice.

Even Jacks realised the tournament, which is yet to see an upset but already bore witness to the heavyweights being pushed to the brink a few times only on the second matchday, is only going to test England's mettle even more in the coming days.

"They've obviously pushed us right to the edge there. If the surfaces continue to behave like that, it's going to be crucial going forward [in this tournament]," Jacks added.

On the opening day of the 10th edition of the T20 World Cup, the Netherlands first gave 2010 champions Pakistan a massive scare in Colombo before the USA stretched defending champions and co-hosts India.

Scepticism was rife when the ICC expanded



the tournament to 20 teams two years ago to give associate nations a greater platform. But the signs were already there then – co-hosts USA beat Pakistan to reach the Super Eights, while Nepal came agonisingly close to defeating a full member nation, falling short by just one run in the group stage.

It was once again a close-margin agony for Nepal, but more than being heartbroken, they seem adamant to be closing the gap.

Chasing England's 184 for seven always looked daunting, but Jofra Archer conceding 22 runs in the 18th over swung momentum back Nepal's way and fuelled belief among a nation backed by a cricket-crazy fanbase.

Lokesh Bam struck two sixes and Aarif Sheikh added another in that over, each blow greeted by a sea of red and blue in the stands that roared every run and wicket.

"The whole of Kathmandu, Nepal came here to support us. I think all of Nepal will be proud of us," skipper Rohit Paudel said.

Paudel's words also carried a warning for the established powers.

"We had belief when we came to this World Cup. We didn't come here just to participate," he said, adding that Nepal will only "improve from here".

And judging by how close they pushed England, that promise no longer feels distant.

Markram banks on WTC boost

AGENCIES

South Africa captain Aiden Markram said on Sunday that his team enters the T20 World Cup with renewed confidence, buoyed by their historic World Test Championship (WTC) triumph last year.

Runners-up in 2024, the Proteas will kick off their campaign against Canada on Monday at Ahmedabad's iconic Narendra Modi Stadium, the world's largest cricket venue.

South Africa shed their "chokers" tag in June 2025 when they beat Australia in the WTC final, claiming their first major ICC trophy. That victory, Markram said, has had a lasting impact on the team's mindset.

"The belief, confidence, monkey off the back – all of that plays a role in the language and behaviour within the camp," he told reporters. "It definitely helps. But we know we still have to be at our best."

Drawn in Group D with New Zealand, Afghanistan, UAE, and Canada, the Proteas aim to turn last year's heartbreak in the T20 final against India into a championship journey.



Football-mad Italy make historic cricket World Cup debut

AGENCIES

There are three fixtures in today's T20 World Cup: Italy face Scotland, Zimbabwe meet Oman, and South Africa take on Canada. But among them, Italy's match deserves special attention.

While Italy are four-time football World Cup champions, in cricket they are minnows, making a historic debut among the game's elite. The Italians play Scotland at Kolkata's famous Eden Gardens on Monday and will be the lowest-ranked team in the competition.

"How did we get to the World Cup? In Italy we say 'miracolo Italiano', an 'Italian miracle'," said Riccardo Maggio, development officer with the Italian Cricket Federation. Maggio has spent a lifetime helping cricket grow on the fringes of the football-obsessed nation.

"We're coming to the World Cup, and believe me, we're not coming just once for appearance," he said. "Passion and the Italian way of doing things make us the miracle that we are."

Italy beat Scotland in the qualifiers, and facing them again would be a "huge honour," said skipper Wayne Madsen. "Captaining Italy is not something I take lightly," the South Africa-born Madsen, 42, who has played English county cricket, told AFP. Italy are in Group C and also face England, the West Indies and Nepal.

The challenge is huge, but Maggio has faith. The 56-year-old played for Italy in a

six-wicket victory over an England Cricket Board XI in 1998, a match that the ICC said "shocked" cricket. "I was on the field that day and we had to play out of our skins," he said, voice trembling. "And now we're playing England at the World Cup. I'm sorry, but I'm going to cry."

Italy's federation says it has about 1,800 players and around 100 clubs. "Football will always be huge in Italy, that's just the reality," Madsen said, adding that playing in the World Cup will be a "massive" boost. "When people see Italy competing on a global stage, it sparks interest and belief."

Cricket actually has a long history in Italy. In 1793, English naval hero Horatio

Nelson organised the first recorded game in Naples. An English-born colonel, Francis Maceroni, later introduced the game there in the 1810s. The Genoa Cricket and Athletic Club was founded in 1893, and AC Milan began as the "Milan Football and Cricket Club" in 1899.

Today's squad is diverse, featuring players from Australia, South Africa, and the Asian-Italian community. Madsen himself once played field hockey for South Africa, while former Proteas T20 player JJ Smuts now represents Italy. "What matters most," Madsen said, "isn't where you were born, but how much it means to you to wear this badge."



Kamindu's late blitz powers Sri Lanka past Ireland

Sri Lanka's 11th-hour decision to draft in Kamindu Mendis proved a masterstroke as the left-hander produced a match-turning cameo to set up a 20-run win over Ireland in their T20 World Cup opener at Colombo's R. Premadasa Stadium yesterday. Kamindu's blistering 44 off 19 balls, featuring four fours and two sixes, provided the late surge Sri Lanka desperately needed to post 163-6. The hosts had slumped to 86-4 in 13.5 overs before a rapid 67-run stand between Kusal Mendis (56 off 43 balls) and Kamindu carried them past the 150 mark. The spin trio of Maheesh Theekshana (3-23), Wanindu Hasaranga (3-25) and Dunith Wellalage (1-28) then ran through the Irish middle order, combining for seven wickets to seal a comfortable victory.

PHOTO: AFP



City beat Liverpool 2-1 to rekindle title hopes

Erling Haaland's stoppage-time penalty handed Manchester City a dramatic 2-1 victory over Liverpool at Anfield on Sunday, cutting Arsenal's lead at the top of the Premier League back to six points. City appeared destined for defeat with six minutes remaining before Bernardo Silva cancelled out Dominik Szoboszlai's stunning free-kick to ignite a breathless finale. Haaland then converted from the spot to put City ahead, and the visitors thought they had added another before it was ruled out. In the same passage of play, Szoboszlai was sent off following a VAR review.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK

Hair we go! One win away from the barber

STAR SPORTS DESK

Frank Ilett's mop of hair has lasted longer than a Manchester United rebuild, a couple of managers and most people's New Year's resolutions.

But after 491 days of unchecked growth, the scissors are finally circling.

The 29-year-old, Oxford-born United diehard who lives in Spain swore back on October 5, 2024 that he would not cut his hair until his troubled team managed five wins in a row. At the time Erik ten Hag was still in charge. Days later, he wasn't.

What followed was a managerial merry-go-round and a lot of conditioner.

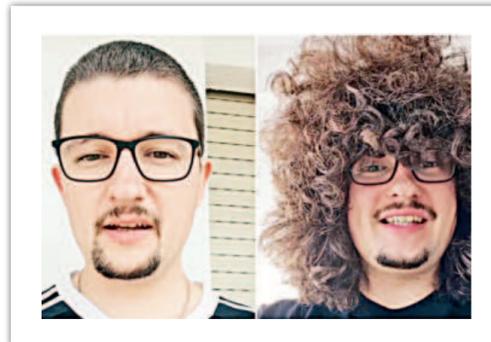
Ruben Amorim came and went without ever stringing more than three victories together – a feat he managed just once. Meanwhile Frank's locks went viral, helping him rocket past one million followers on Instagram.

Now, thanks to interim boss Michael Carrick, the miracle of basic grooming is within touching distance. The scissors are in sight.

United have rattled off four straight wins – against Manchester City, Arsenal,

Fulham and, most recently, a 2-0 victory over Tottenham Hotspur at Old Trafford on Saturday. Only West Ham and 90 minutes on Tuesday stand between Frank and a long-awaited reunion with a barber.

After beating Spurs, he could barely contain himself.



"This hair is going soon. Four out of five done. This is the first time it's been four in a row since I started the challenge. This time, it is happening. Thank you so much to Carrick," he said.

"Carrick is at the wheel, this hair is going

soon, West Ham next, four out of five done – this is the first time it's been four in a row since I started the challenge.

"This time it's happening! Thank you so much to Carrick – thank you, thank you, thank you.

"There will be a watchalong for the fifth game against West Ham. Some exciting plans coming up – more details to come."

If United oblige against the relegation-threatened East London side, Frank has promised to donate his flowing tribute to the Little Princess Trust, the UK charity that provides wigs for children who lose their hair through illness.

Meanwhile, Saturday's result ended a six-game league winless run against Tottenham, pushed United to 44 points from 25 games – four clear of Chelsea in fifth – and left Spurs 14th on 29.

It is also United's best winning streak since February 2024 under Ten Hag, and eight league games unbeaten, their finest such sequence since Ralf Rangnick managed the same in February 2022.

So, one more victory and Carrick gets the praise, Fernandes gets the numbers, and Frank finally gets... a haircut.