

SPORT

What to WATCH

TSPORTS
T20 World Cup
Ireland vs Oman
Live from 11:30 am
England vs Scotland
Live from 3:30 pm
New Zealand vs

South Africa
Live from 7:30 pm
SONY SPORTS 2
FA Cup
Liverpool vs Brighton
Live from 2:00 am
(Sunday)



"It is a huge win for us. There are fans who have come all the way from Zimbabwe and they have enjoyed the game and it is a special feeling today to get a win here."

Zimbabwe opener Brian Bennett, who scored 64 not out

PHOTO: AFP

An upset, delivered with DOMINANCE

On paper, Zimbabwe beating Australia in any format is usually considered a shock. But in yesterday's T20 World Cup group-stage clash in Colombo, the African side's 23-run victory over the 2021 champions never looked like a contest between the world's second-ranked team and the side placed 11th. Despite the huge gap in rankings, Zimbabwe dominated throughout, losing just two wickets on their way to setting a 170-run target, before bundling out Australia for 146 in 19.3 overs to register the biggest shock of the tournament so far.

- Zimbabwe are the only team with a 100 percent win record against Australia in T20 World Cups, having won both encounters so far -- including their victory in the inaugural 2007 edition.
- This was also the fifth instance of Zimbabwe beating Australia in any format, with the other three victories coming in ODIs.
- It marked Zimbabwe's fourth win over a Full Member side in T20 World Cups -- two against Australia and one each against Pakistan (Perth, 2022) and Ireland (Hobart, 2022).
- Player-of-the-match Blessing Muzarabani registered career-best figures

of 4/17 -- also the best bowling figures by a Zimbabwean in a T20 World Cup match. It is also the second-best bowling figures against Australia in the tournament's history, behind Ravichandran Ashwin's 4-11 in Mirpur in 2014.

➤ With two wins from two matches, Zimbabwe are second in Group B, just behind co-hosts Sri Lanka, who have also won both of their games. Zimbabwe are now on the verge of qualifying for the Super Eight stage, while Australia -- third in the table with one win from two matches -- must defeat both Sri Lanka and Oman in Pallekele to ensure safe passage to the next phase.

Proteas, Black Caps eye Super Eight spot

AGENCIES

South Africa will have little time to breathe after their heart-stopping escape against Afghanistan as they face fellow high-flyers New Zealand in a Group D clash of the ICC T20 World Cup at the Narendra Modi Stadium today.

Both teams have two wins from two and look primed for safe passage into the Super Eights, with the winners of the contest set to progress today. With pre-tournament seedings already determining the next-round groups, Saturday's contest carries limited jeopardy -- beyond



- New Zealand are winless in four T20 World Cup matches against South Africa.
- However, New Zealand have won all three T20Is between the sides in this decade.

momentum, fine-tuning and bragging rights. Yet context gives the meeting bite.

New Zealand are winless in four T20 World Cup matches against South Africa, including one- and two-run heartbreaks in 2009 and 2014. However, they have won all three T20Is between the sides in this decade, and more than 10 years have passed since their last clash at the global showpiece in 2014.

The Proteas may draw comfort from familiarity. Both their victories -- over Canada and Afghanistan -- came in Ahmedabad. The 57-run win against Canada was under lights, offering valuable lessons about handling dew. Should they progress, they are slated to play two of their three Super Eights matches at this venue.

There are, however, wrinkles to smooth out. Lungi Ngidi's slower balls in the Powerplay have made him an unlikely leader of the attack but pace ace Kagiso Rabada has struggled for rhythm. His two no-balls in the final over against Afghanistan dragged the game into the Super Over, and he leaked 1 for 40 from four overs against Canada. Since 2025, Rabada averages 34.55 with an economy of 9.82, though injuries and workload have limited him to nine T20Is.

New Zealand's pace unit tells a similar story. An injury-hit Lockie Ferguson has struck early, while top-ranked Jacob Duffy has looked off-colour. Spin has been tidy rather than decisive. South Africa average 51 in overs 7-15 in this tournament; New Zealand 79. Keshav Maharaj and Mitchell Santner have just one wicket apiece, and at a ground where pacers have 17 wickets to spinners' eight, their challenge only stiffens.

Expect fireworks with the bat. Tim Seifert and Finn Allen are fresh from an unbroken 175 in a 10-wicket hammering of the UAE, while Quinton de Kock and Ryan Rickelton smashed 114 off 61 balls against Afghanistan here.

Someone's unbeaten start will end. Who blinks first may be all that separates them.

Meanwhile, in the day's other two fixtures, England will face Scotland in Kolkata, while Ireland will take on Oman at the SSC Cricket Ground in Colombo.

Sharma, Sohaib spark UAE revival

AFP, New Delhi

Half-centuries from Aryanah Sharma and Sohaib Khan rescued the UAE from a shaky chase as they sealed a thrilling five-wicket win over Canada in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup on Friday in New Delhi.

Chasing 151, UAE were struggling at 66-4 in the 13th over before Sharma (74*), playing the anchor, and Sohaib (51) added 84 to reach the target with two balls to spare. Sohaib counterattacked with four fours and four sixes, raising his fifty off 28 balls, before falling in the final over, leaving Muhammad Arfan to hit the winning run.

Pacer Junaid Siddique starred with 5-35 to restrict Canada to 150-7 and was named player of the match.

"In the first innings, we thought they might be going for 160 or 170," Siddique said. "We bowled very well in the last few overs and knew that 150 was a chaseable total."

Canada spinner Saad Bin Zafar impressed with 3-14.

The win lifted UAE to third in Group D ahead of winless Afghanistan. New Zealand and South Africa lead with two wins and meet in Ahmedabad on Saturday, with the winner sealing a Super Eights spot.

Will politics spill onto the pitch again?

ASHFAQ-UL-ALAM

After an eventful buildup, ripe with cricketing diplomacy and geopolitical implications, perennial enemies India and Pakistan are set to face off in Colombo in their Group A match of the ongoing ICC T20 World Cup tomorrow.

However, questions remain whether politics will stay out of the field during the India-Pakistan encounter this time or will it find a way to creep in, like it did in last year's Asia Cup T20.

In that tournament in the UAE, both teams faced off thrice, with India coming out on top in all three. The first two victories were straightforward ones, but the third, which was also the final, went down to the last over, with India reaching home with two balls to spare.

After a considerable while, an India-Pakistan encounter had produced a close finish like that. But by the end of the night, the biggest talking point was not the game. It was India's refusal to receive the trophy from Asian Cricket Council (ACC) president and Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Mohsi Naqvi, who, in return, decided to end the ceremony without handing over the silverware.

Political tensions were palpable in all three matches, with Indian players refusing to shake hands with Pakistani opponents, and players from both sides taunting opposing teams and fans with gestures hinting at the recent military

clashes between the countries.

The entire episode left a sour taste in the mouths of all cricket fans, and the ethereal 'Spirit of Cricket' took a hiding.

Around five months have passed since then. The Asia Cup trophy is still collecting dust in the ACC offices, as both sides are again set to face off following an extremely rocky buildup.



The fate of this group-stage meetup was up in the air for weeks, and was finally given the green light on last Monday when Pakistan government reversed its decision to boycott the match following multilateral discussions and requests from different stakeholders.

Bangladesh was a key factor in the turmoil, as Pakistan issued the boycott in solidarity with Bangladesh after they were replaced by Scotland in the T20 World Cup by the ICC for refusing to play in India over security concerns.

Perfect 10 for Rajshahi Stars

SPORTS REPORTER

Debutants Rajshahi Stars completed a remarkable unbeaten campaign to lift the Bangladesh Women's Football League title, defeating Bangladesh Army 3-0 to seal the crown with a perfect 10 wins from 10 matches. While they required only a draw to become champions, Rajshahi chose to finish in emphatic fashion, underlining both their authority and the growing competitiveness of this year's league.

Speaking after the match, Bangladesh captain and Rajshahi skipper Afeida Khandaker stressed how different this edition had felt compared to previous seasons. "Compared to the last three years, this year the league has been more competitive. Previously, the national team players were in one team or maybe two teams. This time, the national team players have been distributed across almost all teams, which has made the league more competitive."

That redistribution of talent meant that even an eventual 3-0 win in the decisive match did not come without tension. Defender Sheuli Azim reflected on the challenge posed by Army, saying: "Football is unpredictable. No matter how good a team is, any team can be stopped. We saw in the World Cup that Argentina were stopped by Saudi Arabia. We kept that in mind when we took the field."

Rajshahi's flawless record might suggest dominance, but players insisted the

campaign was far from straightforward. Winger Ritu Porna Chakma pointed to structural changes in the competition as a key factor behind the higher standard. "Yes, that was a positive aspect. Previously, the national team players were all in one team, so there was not much competition. After introducing the pool system and distributing players, the league became more competitive."



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Beyond the title celebrations, attention quickly turned to the upcoming continental assignment. Bangladesh will soon compete in the AFC Women's Asian Cup, where they are scheduled to face heavyweights including China and North Korea. For Afeida, the timing of a demanding domestic season could prove vital.

"It has been very beneficial because we

have the Asian Cup ahead. If we can stay within matches and get game time, we can learn from our mistakes in matches -- where we are making errors -- and correct them to prepare ourselves for the Asia Cup," she said. On the challenge awaiting in Australia, she added:

There have been comparisons with India's more extensive preparations, but Azim dismissed suggestions of regret.

"I would not call it a shortcoming. Considering our country's context and economy, we cannot compare ourselves with India -- they are ahead of us in many ways. They have been able to arrange those matches, which is good on their part. If we could have done it, that would have been good too. But we have no complaints. The authorities are doing what they can for our benefit."



ALVAREZ ENDS DROUGHT AS ATLETICO HAMMER BARCA

Atletico Madrid delivered a dominant display as Julian Alvarez ended his 11-game scoring drought in a 4-0 demolition of holders Barcelona in the Copa del Rey semifinal first leg at the Metropolitan on Thursday. An Eric Garcia own goal gave Diego Simeone's side an early lead before Antoine Griezmann, Ademola Lookman, and Alvarez struck to hand Atletico a commanding halftime advantage. Garcia was sent off late on for Barca, with Atletico carrying their significant edge over the record 32-time winners into the second leg at Camp Nou on March 3.

PHOTO: AFP