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The ICC T20 World Cup 2024 started in the West Indies and the United States of America.

The top teams are competing to lift the trophy. India are one of the favourites, with Rohit Sharma leading the challenge. The Men in Blue lifted the World Cup in 2007, but since then, it has been a story of failures year after year.

However, the cricket pundits feel the current India team can go all the way in 2024. The sub-continent team has several match-winners who can come good in crunch situations. Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Rishabh Pant and Suryakumar Yadav will be crucial in the batting department. Jasprit Bumrah is the spearhead of the bowling department, but he will need support from the other bowlers to win matches for the nation. He has been terrific in international cricket. The Indian contingent is likely to face stiff competition from

Australia, England and Pakistan. England are the defending champions, and the presence of big hitters makes them a dangerous unit in this format. They have what it takes to lift their third T20 World Cup trophy. When it comes to the ICC tournaments, Australia are the best team in the world. You can't count them out in any format of the game. They are fresh from the success of the 2023 ODI World Cup



India are one of the favourites, with Rohit Sharma leading the challenge.

triumph, and their never-say-die attitude could once again help them to achieve success. Several Aussie players were a part of the Indian Premier League 2024 and were among the top contributors. This could also help them. Predictions go for a toss when it comes to Pakistan. They are unstoppable at times, but their performance goes down low when it matters the most. They lost to Australia in the semi-final of the

T20 World Cup in 2021, while the same team fell short against England in the final next year. Pakistan have the best fast bowling line-up in the world, but they need consistency to become world champions. Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan are world-class batters and are expected to be among the top run-getters. However, others also need to step up on the world stage. West Indies, South Africa, and New Zealand can stop any team, but their habit of crumbling under pressure could once

again trouble them in the competition. It will be interesting to see how they adapt to the slow tracks. Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh have a lot to prove, as they have been playing regularly. The minnows and first-timers occupy the rest of the spots. They could upset one of two big teams, but don't expect miracles from them. Enjoy the action-packed edition of Cricket Today.

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WINNING SMILE: Yuka Saso holds the tournament trophy after winning the U.S. Women's Open golf tournament at Lancaster Country Club. 17th season.



CELEBRATION TIME: Real Madrid's Nacho kisses the Champions League trophy at the Cibeles square during a trophy parade in Madrid, Spain. Real Madrid won against Borussia Dortmund 2-0.

THE WEEK THAT WAS



SENSATIONAL DRIVING: Ferrari driver Charles Leclerc of Monaco celebrates on the podium after winning the Formula One Monaco Grand Prix race at the Monaco racetrack.



THE RISE OF ORANGE ARMY: Netherlands' Max O'Dowd is congratulated by Nepal's wicketkeeper Aasif Sheikh for his team's victory by 6 wickets during an ICC Men's T20 World Cup cricket match at Grand Prairie Stadium in Grand Prairie.



AFGHAN SHOW: Afghanistan batsmen Ibrahim Zadran and Rahmanullah Gurbaz bump gloves while batting against Uganda during an ICC Men's T20 World Cup cricket match. Afghanistan won the game by 125 runs.



RETURN TO FORM: South Africa's Anrich Nortje reacts after bowling his last over during the ICC Men's T20 World Cup cricket match against Sri Lanka. He took four wickets and was named the Player of the Match.

Cricket Buzz



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"If I were with West Indies, I would have taken Brandon King to task"

- Irfan Pathan slams opening batter



“

"Rishabh Pant is better than Sanju Samson"

- Sunil Gavaskar on India's number-one wicket-keeper



NO INTEREST IN T20 WORLD CUP

Dynamic batter Riyan Parag wasn't considered for India's ICC T20 World Cup 2024 squad despite his impressive IPL 2024 campaign with Rajasthan Royals. When he asked on Sunday to predict the semifinalists for the ICC tournament, the young player refused to answer. Parag admitted he had no interest in watching the T20 World Cup and would have only cared about the potential top-four teams if he had made it to the squad. "My prediction will obviously be biased, I must admit that I have no desire to watch the World Cup. I'll simply check the final result and be satisfied. However, when I participate in the World Cup, I'll certainly give my prediction," said Parag. This 22-year-old player enjoyed a standout IPL season, amassing 573 runs at an impressive average of 52.09 and a blistering strike rate of 149.21.



PERKS OF BEATING INDIA

Pakistan defeated India in the group-stage match of the ICC T20 World Cup in 2021. It was the Men in Green's first and only win over the arch-rivals in the history of World Cups to date. India has thumped Pakistan seven times in the global tournament of the shortest format, while the tally stands at eight in the fifty-over World Cup. The 10-wicket win over India in Dubai was celebrated across Pakistan. Mohammad Rizwan recalled how the then PCB chairman Ramiz Raja had prepared the team for the vital clash. The wicket-keeper batter disclosed that people won't take money from him when he goes shopping. "People celebrated our win across Pakistan. They won't take money from me when I go shopping after our famous win over India."



FORMER COACH BACKS 'SHREWD TACTICIAN' GAMBHIR

Gautam Gambhir has expressed his desire to coach the Indian national team in the future. He has now received strong backing from another World Cup-winning coach to take over the coaching role from Rahul Dravid. Dravid, the current India head coach, has confirmed that he will not reapply for the high-profile job. The ICC T20 World Cup 2024 will mark Dravid's final assignment as the head coach of Rohit Sharma's team. Former India coach Lalchand Rajput, who guided MS Dhoni's team to a historic T20 World Cup title in the inaugural edition, also feels Gambhir should be the next head coach. Rajput spoke to PTI and stated Gambhir is an astute strategist and a no-nonsense individual and would be ideal for the job.



KEDAR JADHAV ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT

Kedar Jadhav has announced his retirement from all forms of the game. He took inspiration from MS Dhoni and revealed the decision on social media. Jadhav represented India in 73 ODIs and 9 T20Is between 2014 and 2020 and shared a Dhoni-styled retirement message on Instagram. He posted, "Thank you all for your love and support throughout my Career from 1500 hrs. Consider me retired from all forms of cricket." Jadhav scored his maiden ODI century against Zimbabwe, finishing his career with 1389 runs at an impressive average of 42.09, including six half-centuries and two centuries. Jadhav's retirement comes just two days after fellow Indian cricketer Dinesh Karthik also announced his retirement from the sport.



TRIBUTE TO RAHUL DRAVID

Rahul Dravid's association with the Indian team will end after the ICC T20 World Cup 2024. The head coach of the Men in Blue refused to reapply for the job, making the ongoing global tournament his last assignment with the national team. Team India captain Rohit Sharma has paid an emotional tribute to the outgoing coach. Rohit worked closely with Dravid across formats in international cricket. The two played a crucial role in the success of the young players. "Dravid was my first international captain. He is a role model and has done a lot for the Indian team over the years. I have personally tried to convince him to continue as Team India's head coach. I will not be able to see him go," Rohit Sharma said.

ICC T20 WORLD CUP 2024: CAN SPIN- HEAVY INDIA TURN UP?

The ICC T20 World Cup 2024 is starting from June 1. The event will be held in the West Indies and USA until June 29. 20 teams are set to take part, and all eyes will be on India under the leadership of Rohit Sharma. India are placed in Group A alongside...



BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

The ICC T20 World Cup 2024 is starting from June 1. The event will be held in the West Indies and USA until June 29. 20 teams are set to take part, and all eyes will be on India under the leadership of Rohit Sharma. India are placed in Group A alongside hosts USA, Canada, Ireland and Pakistan. One expects India to reach the Super 8s, where the actual action will begin before the knockouts. India have done reasonably well in ICC tournaments of late but what the trophy is elusive. India lost the 2023 World Cup final (50 overs), and fans hope the side will go the distance this time around.

This is the ninth T20 World Cup and India have been part of two finals (2007 and 2014). They won the inaugural edition but lost to Sri Lanka in 2014. The last World Cup edition in 2022 saw India lose in the semis.

Earlier, India picked up a decent 15-member squad for the T20 World Cup. One major question was the absence of a fourth seamer. India left out pacers Avesh Khan and Khaleel Ahmed as standbys and didn't go with any unique additions looking at the 2024 Indian Premier League season. Another hard-hitting call was the presence of Hardik Pandya and the absence of Rinku Singh. India opted for a heavy-spin attack, with skipper Rohit admitting that it was his call. Fair to say India have made their assumption on the surfaces in WI and the USA.

A LOOK AT INDIA'S 15-MEMBER ICC T20 WORLD CUP SQUAD

SQUAD: Rohit Sharma (captain), Hardik Pandya (vice Captain), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Suryakumar Yadav, Rishabh Pant (wk), Sanju Samson (wk), Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Arshdeep Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohd. Siraj.

Reserves – Shubman Gill, Rinku Singh, Khaleel Ahmed and Avesh Khan

YUZVENDRA CHAHAL CAN BE INDIA'S TRUMP CARD

Team India has three left-arm spinners, Yuzvendra Chahal being the only right-arm spinner. Chahal, who was overlooked for the 2023 World Cup and warmed the bench in the 2022 T20 WC, should be given the license to attack. The wrist-spinner can not only form an able combination with Kuldeep Yadav, but he could also dominate the scenes in terms of wickets. Chahal is India's highest wicket-taker in T20Is and is closing in on 100 scalps. He is the top wicket-taker among





Indians in T20s with 350-plus scalps. He is IPL's top wicket-taker with 200-plus scalps, and notably, he owns most wickets for both RCB and RR in the competition. Chahal is a match-winner and can be India's trump card.

STRENGTHS OF THE INDIAN CRICKET TEAM

Virat Kohli enjoyed another fruitful IPL season, where he scored 741 runs at 61.75. To have your best batter in prime form heading into a global event is massive. What stood out was Kohli played with intent and purpose. He struck at 150-plus for the second time in an IPL season. He also clobbered 38 sixes, equalling his 2016 heroics. So Kohli ticks off the right boxes, which is the ideal bet to open alongside Rohit. They have done so for India in the past in T20Is. Rohit will play his natural game and look to go hard. He had a decent IPL 2024 season. Rohit is a big tournament player, and it would bode well for India if he could turn up and hit those sixes.

India are spoilt for options in batting. Suryakumar Yadav is the sure-shot customer with his 360-degree approach and versatility. India could be tempted to play Suryakumar at number four so that he can handle the important part of the innings. This could lead to Sanju Samson getting his due at number three. Samson has been terrific in IPL 2024, with over 500 runs and five fifties under his belt. Rishabh Pant presents a solid backup for Samson. The DC skipper did reasonably

well on his return from an accident after 14 months. India will put their money on Shivam Dube. The southpaw can be massive with his six-hitting prowess at number five. Dube can provide India with the license to score those extra runs. Alongside SKY, the number four and five make India look gigantic on paper.

India's strength is spin, and so are the all-rounders. Ravindra Jadeja remains a safe bet as the primary number seven. He will be backed as the finisher, in addition to his left-arm spin and agile fielding. In Kuldeep Yadav and Chahal, India have what it takes to go hard at teams. These are genuine wicket-takers. Axar Patel is a decent choice to have in the side.

Jasprit Bumrah leads India's pace attack, and he is the key. He has been sensational in the T20 format, and a solid IPL 2024 will back his confidence. With Arshdeep Singh in the house, India have two well-drilled death bowlers. This is a win-win scenario.

WEAKNESSES OF THE INDIAN CRICKET TEAM

Hardik Pandya's form can be scratchy. Pandya is seen as the third pacer in the starting XI. So it's crucial for him to dig out the necessary overs and look to be impactful. Pandya struggled to find a balance with both bat and ball in IPL 2024. He claimed only 11 wickets at 35.18, and his economy rate was a dismal 10.75. With the bat, Pandya struggled, scoring 216 runs at 14. India



have taken a big risk in including Pandya, who isn't in the best of form. He is India's nucleus, and pressure will be huge given failure will lead to imbalance. Rohit needs Pandya, the player, to come out and perform well on the big stage.

Mohammed Siraj, the genuine pacer on the bench, is a weak link. Siraj averaged over 36 in IPL 2024, and his economy rate is on the highest side. He is also not an option at the death. So Avesh Khan or even Harshal Patel could have been a better fit than Siraj in the T20 scheme of things. Siraj hasn't quite dominated the format.

Finishing can be India's weak point. With no Rinku Singh, the onus is on Pandya and Jadeja. The latter is still bankable but looking at Rinku's stats for India, he is a sheer miss. He could have taken the attack to the cleaners. This leaves Pandya also to go out and finish games. And given his form, it's a worry.

AUTHOR'S VIEW: INDIA ONE OF THE CONTENDERS FOR A SEMI-FINAL PLACE

India have what it takes to reach the semis at least. A lot will hinge on their performance in the Super 8s. However, if India's batting fire with Kohli and Suryakumar as the match-winners, it's a tempting tale. With the ball, expect Bumrah and the spinners to dominate the show. India have a decent squad with players banking on experience so it automatically presents a chance where they can be one of the favourites to go and strike. However, looking at India's performance in key knockout matches, India may miss the cut beyond a semis place.

PLAYERS TO WATCH OUT FOR

Virat Kohli: The 35-year-old has dominated the scenes in ICC T20 World Cups, being the top scorer with 1141 runs at 81.50 from 27 matches. Kohli has smashed 14 fifties. Kohli is also the top scorer in T20Is with over 4000 runs. He also comes to the tournament as the leading scorer in IPL 2024. Kohli became the first player in IPL history to smash 8000 runs with his 29th run in the Eliminator.

Jasprit Bumrah: A genuine match-winner, Bumrah can set the ball rolling both in the power play and at the death. He looks destined to hand India the perfect start with the ball. He will need Arshdeep to come out and support him. Bumrah is India's 3rd-highest wicket-taker in T20Is.

INDIA'S SCHEDULE FOR THE T20 WORLD CUP

June 5, India vs Ireland - Nassau County International Cricket Stadium, New York (8:00 PM IST)

June 9, India vs Pakistan - Nassau County International Cricket Stadium, New York (8:00 PM IST)

June 12, USA vs India - Nassau County International Cricket Stadium, New York (8:00 PM IST)

June 15, India vs Canada - Central Broward Regional Park Stadium Turf Ground, Lauderhill, Florida (8:00 PM IST) ■

ICC T20 WORLD CUP 2024: POWER HITTERS CAN PROPEL ENGLAND TO DEFENDING TROPHY

Defending champions England should not be taken lightly at the ICC T20 World Cup 2024 starting from June 1. The ninth edition of the T20 World Cup is set to be held in the West Indies and USA until June 29. 20 teams are set to take part, and all...



BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

Defending champions England should not be taken lightly at the ICC T20 World Cup 2024 starting from June 1. The ninth edition of the T20 World Cup is set to be held in the West Indies and USA until June 29. 20 teams are set to take part, and all eyes will be on England under the leadership of Jos Buttler. The Three Lions have been placed in Group B where they will face Australia, Oman, Namibia and Scotland. England are expected to reach the Super 8s where things will get tighter. Buttler's England had a poor outing in the ICC 2023 World Cup in India, and they will want to come hard after learning from the mistakes committed.

England have been three-time finalists of the tournament. They won in 2010, beating Australia. In 2016, the West Indies beat England at Eden Gardens. The 2022 edition saw England overcome Pakistan at the MCG. England would want to become the first side to lift three T20 World Cups.

Earlier, England picked up a strong 15-member squad for the T20 World Cup. It's safe to say the squad is power-packed across departments, and there are not many holes. It's the batting that is England's main strength, with power hitters everywhere. There is plenty of experience riding, given the majority of the players are accustomed to global T20 leagues. The biggest decision was to include Jofra Archer, who returns to international cricket for the first time in more than a year. His last appearance for England was in March 2023. He has been on the road to recovery from an elbow injury that required surgeries.

Here are the complete details of England's squad.

A LOOK AT ENGLAND'S 15-MEMBER PROVISIONAL ICC T20 WORLD CUP SQUAD

SQUAD: Jos Buttler (c), Moeen Ali, Jofra Archer, Jonathan Bairstow, Harry Brook, Sam Curran, Ben Duckett, Tom Hartley, Will Jacks, Chris Jordan, Liam Livingstone, Adil Rashid, Phil Salt, Reece Topley, Mark Wood

JOFRA ARCHER CAN BE ENGLAND'S WEAPON IF HE STAYS FIT

England have the desired resources in pace attack and the presence of Archer is an icing on the cake. If he stays fit, Archer will lead England's attack and be a threat to opposition teams. The path back from injury hasn't been easy for Archer. Since 2021, he has faced a lot of hardships, including stress fractures, elbow problems, and surgery due to a freak fish tank accident. However, Archer is doing well and bowling at a rapid





pace. Skipper Buttler is happy to have Archer back and feels the Pakistan series ahead of the World Cup will serve as a road to success.

STRENGTHS OF THE ENGLAND CRICKET TEAM

England have their bases covered in batting. The side is spoiled for choices. One expects to see the dangerous Philip Salt open the innings alongside Buttler. The former had replaced Jason Roy in the Kolkata Knight Riders squad for the 2024 edition of the Indian Premier League, and he came out with flying colors. KKR will want to keep him for a long time now. His keeping also deserves praise. Salt, who bossed the power play, held the key in giving England fast starts. With a celebrated figure like Buttler alongside, England boast of a great opening combination. Buttler smoked two centuries in IPL 2024 and he can take up the role to bat as much as possible.

Will Jacks fits straight into number three. The RCB player impressed with his range of shots. The 25-year-old strikes at close to 160 in T20s and owns four tons. Moeen Ali comes to the scheme of things by lending his voice in that middle order. A veteran all-rounder, Moeen has the range to go big and keep the scoreboard moving. In Harry Brook, England have a versatile batter capable of playing either at the top or in the middle. Brook, like Salt and Jacks, can clean sides.

Liam Livingstone is another massive big hitter in the ranks. He will be crucial in that lower middle order and showcase his prowess as a finisher. Sam Curran will provide him company in this regard. England also have Jonny Bairstow as a solid backup on the bench alongside the left-handed Ben Duckett. Bairstow can fit anywhere in that unit, and he, too, adds firepower in terms of going big. Duckett brings an option if England want a left and right-handed combination at the top.

England are well stocked in spin and pace. With Moeen and Livingstone in the playing XI, you get quality options in the playing XI alongside main spinner Adil Rashid, who will be key for the side. Jacks too has experience as a spinner. He owns over 50 T20 scalps. So, the team can work on four options in this department.

The pace department has two genuine fast bowlers in Archer and Mark Wood. With a solid pace on offer, they can rip teams apart. Wood has a solid average in the format. Curran, with his left-arm pace, is a decent hand as a bowling all-rounder. Reece Topley has plenty of pedigree and can be a crucial force alongside the experienced Chris Jordan, who made a comeback.

WEAKNESSES OF THE ENGLAND CRICKET TEAM

The bowling is slightly a weakness despite England



having all bases covered well. Archer's fitness remains a question mark. England have taken a gamble. If Archer comes out unscathed and impresses against Pakistan, that's a big bonus. Handling pressure will be important. If one takes Archer away, England can struggle a bit with the bowling. However, take Archer away and one might feel this England side could be targeted. Therefore, Wood and Topley need to step up. Curran can always give away aplenty despite being a wicket-taker. Tom Hartley is highly inexperienced. Therefore, Rashid and Moeen need to stick things out and handle the spin attack.

England are a right-handed heavy batting unit. So if Bairstow plays, we might not see Curran or Moeen in that XI. Having Moeen could get England the better option. England may also choose Ben Duckett, as he plays spin well. So, this is a selection headache in terms of the right balance.

AUTHOR'S VIEW: ENGLAND REMAIN CONTENDERS TO WIN THE TOURNEY

England have done well in the West Indies and know the conditions. They will want good pitches for effective stroke play. England are a serious side with massive hitters who can take the game away in a flash. Buttler has the resources to get the right blend. Archer is central to England's chances of winning the tourney. So he needs to stay fit. Pitches will play their part, and

slower surfaces will have England slightly on the back foot. It remains to be seen how the batters apply themselves. High-scoring venues will see England find joy as batters can scale new heights.

PLAYERS TO WATCH OUT FOR

Phil Salt: Having gained plenty of exposure this season with KKR, Salt was explosive, striking at 182. He scored 435 runs from 12 matches. Salt has done well for England, scoring 600-plus runs at a strike rate in excess of 165. He has already smashed two centuries. Salt has smoked 33 sixes for England in T20Is.

Jofra Archer: As mentioned above, Archer is a glue for England that needs to stick. Archer has only played 15 T20Is for England, claiming 18 wickets at 24.66. Overall, he has 169 T20 scalps from 135 matches at 23. He has a sound economy rate of 7.71.

ENGLAND'S SCHEDULE FOR THE T20 WORLD CUP

June 4, England vs Scotland - Kensington Oval, Bridgetown, Barbados (8:00 PM IST)

June 8, Australia vs England - Kensington Oval, Bridgetown, Barbados (10:30 PM IST)

June 13, England vs Oman - Sir Vivian Richards Stadium, North Sound, Antigua (12:30 AM IST)

June 15, Namibia vs England - Sir Vivian Richards Stadium, North Sound, Antigua (10:30 PM IST) ■

ICC T20 WORLD CUP 2024: PACE-HEAVY PAKISTAN WILL NEED THEIR BATTERS TO PERFORM

Pakistan have finally announced their 15-member squad for the 2024 ICC T20 World Cup to be held in the West Indies and USA. Pakistan will see as many as five players play in the T20 World Cup for the first time. Meanwhile, the likes of Mad Wasim....



BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

Pakistan have finally announced their 15-member squad for the 2024 ICC T20 World Cup to be held in the West Indies and USA. Pakistan will see as many as five players play in the T20 World Cup for the first time. Meanwhile, the likes of Mad Wasim and Mohammad Amir, who had recently taken back their retirements to be included in the national side, got to keep their spots for the T20 World Cup as well. It's a strong squad for Pakistan but there are holes as they hope things work out fine. Notably, there are no reserve players named. Abrar Ahmed, Azam Khan, Mohammad Abbas Afridi, Saim Ayub, and Usman Khan will make their maiden appearances in a T20 World Cup. The notable absentee was pacer Hasan Ali. Pakistan also received a boost with Haris Rauf declared fit. He adds dimension to this side. Babar Azam will want to lead from the front and hope his side responds well. Pakistan are drawn with India, the USA, Canada and Ireland in Group A. Babar's side is expected to reach the Super 8s, where the real test begins. Pakistan have done well at the T20 World Cup. Across eight editions before this year's event. The Men in Green have won the 2009 title. They have been runners-up in 2007 and 2022 in addition to reaching the semis on three occasions.

Here, we analyze Pakistan's squad for the T20 World Cup.

A LOOK AT PAKISTAN'S 15-MEMBER SQUAD

SQUAD: Babar Azam (c), Saim Ayub, Mohammad Rizwan (wk), Fakhar Zaman, Azam Khan (wk), Usman Khan, Iftikhar Ahmed, Imad Wasim, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shadab Khan, Mohammad Amir, Abbas Afridi, Naseem Shah, Haris Rauf, Abrar Ahmed.

SHAHEEN AFRIDI IS PAKISTAN'S BEST BET

Left-arm pacer Shaheen Afridi can be the match-winner for Pakistan. Shaheen is enjoying a good run of form with the ball. He has all the tricks and variations to get batters puzzled. Shaheen, with his pace, will test the best, and one expects him to be among the top wicket-takers in the tournament. With Amir and Rauf in support, Shaheen will be charging in. As per ESPNcricinfo, Shaheen has taken 273 T20 scalps at an average of 20.44. His economy rate of 7.91 is decent. For Pakistan, the lanky pacer has claimed 88 scalps at just 20.42. These are serious numbers.

STRENGTHS OF THE PAKISTAN CRICKET TEAM

Pakistan have always been a side that excels in pace,





and their main set of bowlers will be threatening. Led by Shaheen, Pakistan have what it takes to have things go on bright from the start. His yorkers, short balls and swing will ask questions to batters. In 13 T20 World Cup games, Shaheen has impressed with 18 scalps at 18. This will be his 3rd T20 World Cup after 2021 and 2022.

Amir is a seasoned customer and he will lend his experience. In 17 T20 World Cup games, Amir has managed 17 scalps. The left-arm pacer owns 330 T20 wickets, including 64 for the national team in T20Is. He will bring character at the death. In overs 16-20, Amir has claimed 134 scalps in T20s at 18.58 (ER: 8.80).

Then you have Haris Rauf, who has done an able job with 249 T20 scalps at 22.62. His economy rate is 8.26. Right-arm pacer Rauf can ball really fast, and he owns six four-wicket hauls and one fifer in the format.

Naseem Shah has the pedigree on offer. The youngster can make his presence felt and look to be nippy. He, too, has a solid pace and can be rotated alongside Rauf. And lastly, Abbas Afridi has made good strides in the early part of his career. He impressed versus New Zealand and Ireland in recent times and owns 78 T20 scalps at an impressive 19.65.

Pakistan's spin department also has the character. Shadab Khan will lead the attack. He remains Pakistan's highest wicket-taker in T20Is. Shadab has been there for a long time and his experience is massive. Imad will be key as well. He has returned to the scheme of things and there will be hunger in the utility player's mind. Usama Mir can be a crucial force. He was the leading wicket-taker in Pakistan Super League 2024. He owns over 130 T20 scalps. 25-year-old Abrar Ahmed will lend his voice from the bench. He had a solid PSL campaign and has started well in T20s.

In batting, Babar Azam leads the pack. Babar can be massive with his calm personality. He owns a truckload of runs in T20s and is a consistent force. Mohammad Rizwan can be Pakistan's match-winner. He can play those useful knocks. Like Babar, Rizwan is pretty consistent. Fakhar Zaman is another player who has the character to go big. Fakhar will be a clutch figure in that number four position. Iftikhar Ahmed, Usman Khan, and Azam Khan are the big hitters in the Pakistan side. They have a huge role to play. All eyes will be on Usman Khan who will fight for a place with Saim Ayyub at the top. He owns four T20 hundreds.

WEAKNESSES OF THE PAKISTAN CRICKET TEAM

Batting can be an issue for Pakistan. They need to find the right balance and positions. Rizwan and Ayub are likely to open with Babar at three being the fulcrum. Pakistan are dependent largely on Babar and Rizwan for the fireworks. Ayub remains a weak link up front.



He is yet to hit a 50 or 100 in 20 matches for Pakistan. In Fakhar, you get a makeshift middle-order player who is primarily a top-order batter. Iftikhar and Azam have big responsibilities up their sleeves. Pakistan don't have the ideal finishers. Azam lacks the experience and athleticism, so a lot depends on bowling all-rounders Shadab and Imad at number seven and eight, respectively. And then you have three pacers. So, one gets five bowling options, with Iftikhar being asked to chip in. In matches where Pakistan will use a prominent spinner like Usman or a fourth pacer, Azam will be sacrificed. Another weakness is the lack of experience of players like Usman, Abrar, and Azam. Can they step up on the big stage when called up?

AUTHOR'S VIEW: PAKISTAN'S BATTING COULD LET THEM DOWN

Batting can let Pakistan down. In matches where 200-plus scores will be the norm, one can see the side struggle. Both Babar and Rizwan need help from the others with the aggression part, and you scratch your head as to who will turn up. Bowling is Pakistan's strength, but the batting is a bit shy. Finishing remains a worry as well. So, keeping this in mind, one expects Pakistan to get ousted from the Super 8s and miss out on a semis berth.

PLAYERS TO WATCH OUT FOR

BABAR AZAM: The star batter is a sheer T20 stalwart, with runs being the face of his cricket. Babar improved his strike rate in the PSL 2024 season and needs to take a bit more risks. He has plenty of experience riding. The tally of 90 fifties and 11 tons tells his story in T20s. Babar will head into the tournament on the back of 300 T20 matches.

SHADAB KHAN: Spin sensation Shadab is a valuable figure. He owns 107 T20I scalps for Pakistan and over 300 wickets in the 20-over format. Shadab is also closing in on 3000 T20 runs. With 12 fifties under his belt, he brings immense value to any side. Shadab will need to stand up and deliver.

PAKISTAN'S SCHEDULE FOR THE T20 WORLD CUP

June 6, United States vs Pakistan – Grand Prairie Stadium, Dallas (9:00 PM IST)

June 9, India vs Pakistan – Nassau County International Cricket Stadium, New York (8:00 PM IST)

June 11, Pakistan vs Canada – Nassau County International Cricket Stadium, New York (8:00 PM IST)

June 16, Pakistan vs Ireland – Central Broward Regional Park Stadium Turf Ground, Lauderhill, Florida (8:00 PM IST) ■

AUSTRALIA'S T20 WORLD CUP SQUAD BOASTS STAR POWER AND BALANCE, AIMS FOR SECOND TITLE

The Australian cricket team led by Mitchell Marsh will be hoping to win its second ICC T20 World Cup 2024 title. The Australian cricket team led by Mitchell Marsh will be hoping to win its second ICC T20 World Cup 2024 title. Australia, who are a global force...



BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

The Australian cricket team led by Mitchell Marsh will be hoping to win its second ICC T20 World Cup 2024 title. The Australian cricket team led by Mitchell Marsh will be hoping to win its second ICC T20 World Cup 2024 title. Australia, who are a global force when it comes to ICC tournaments, last won the coveted T20 World Cup trophy in 2021. They head into the 2024 T20 World Cup, having won the 50-over event in India last year. Most of Australia's white-ball stars form the crux of the 20-over team. Australia are waiting on the progress of Marsh, who had to leave the IPL 2024 season following a hamstring tendon injury. He is recovering and is expected to be fit. Australia will want the best from their skipper, who would be raring to have a crack. David Warner also suffered an injury in the IPL and had to sit out of several games. But he is fine now and in what will be his last tournament in national colours, expect the southpaw to come good. Australia have a powerful squad with superb balance and are one of the favourites. Australia have been one-time runners-up at the event in addition to winning one title and reaching two semi-finals. They have been ousted in R1 once and R2 on three occasions. At the 2024 event, Australia are paired alongside the likes of England, Namibia, Scotland and Oman. They will use these games to tune in for the Super 8s and flex their

muscles after that.

Here, we analyze the Australian squad for the T20 World Cup.

A LOOK AT AUSTRALIA'S 15-MEMBER SQUAD

SQUAD: Mitchell Marsh (c), Ashton Agar, Pat Cummins, Tim David, Nathan Ellis, Cameron Green, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Glenn Maxwell, Mitchell Starc, Marcus Stoinis, Matthew Wade, David Warner, Adam Zampa.
Travelling Reserves: Jake Fraser-McGurk, Matt Short

TRAVIS HEAD CAN BE THE TRUMP CARD FOR AUSTRALIA

Travis Head had the license to kill in the Indian Premier League 2024 season at Sunrisers Hyderabad. He had a dream tournament before misfiring in the playoffs. Smh lost the final to KKR but Head was one of the tournament giants. Head scored 567 runs in the IPL 2024 season at a strike rate worth 191.55. He smashed a ton and four fifties at 40.50. Australia would be wanting to utilise his firepower and hand him the freedom to be aggressive upfront.

STRENGTHS OF THE AUSTRALIAN CRICKET TEAM

The pace-bowling unit of Australia is well sorted. IPL's





two most expensive signings ever in, Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins can form a superb combination. Starc started the IPL 2024 season on a poor note but grew in stature as the tournament progressed. He delivered when it mattered most and put in match-winning performances in the playoffs. He was adjudged the Player of the Match in the final. KKR pacer Starc claimed 17 wickets on his IPL return. Starc can be menacing in the power play, and he claimed 11 scalps in IPL 2024 during this phase.

Cummins led SRH to the final before suffering a defeat. He was solid in the tourney and made his presence felt with 18 wickets. Cummins will hope to utilize his pace and extract bounce. The confidence in leading SRH can work wonders.

Josh Hazlewood will support the duo. With his nagging length and lines, Hazlewood is a traditional force. With his Test match-like approach, he can make things count in the shortest format. He will hit those hard lengths.

Nathan Ellis will lend his voice from the bench. He has a lot of pedigree and experience. With 167 scalps in T20s at 23.62, Ellis is an able performer.

Australia are blessed with able all-rounders in the side. Marsh can fit in as the fourth seamer if required. He will also be keen to play his aggressive brand of cricket in that top order. In Marcus Stoinis, Australia get a fifth

option in bowling. Stoinis owns 127 T20 scalps at 26.72. Cameron Green can provide impetus with both bat and ball. His medium pace is another bonus for the side. Australia's options are far too many and that's a blessing.

Glenn Maxwell is another option with some handy spin on offer. He can chip in as the second spinner. Then there is Ashton Agar, who is relatively smart with his all-round exploits. His left-arm spin is valuable.

Adam Zampa will spearhead Australia's spin department. The star leg-spinner is one shy of 300 T20 wickets. He averages a neat 22.71 in T20s.

Head and Warner will lead the batting department. Warner can stick through, allowing both Head and Marsh to play aggressively. This can hand Australia a good platform. In the middle, there is Green and Maxwell. Both players can send the ball out of the park effortlessly and can bat at several positions.

Matthew Wade will keep and can provide the finishing touches with Stoinis there alongside. Australia also have a solid cover in the versatile Josh Inglis. The reputed white-ball specialist can cover up for Warner or Marsh when needed.

WEAKNESSES OF THE SOUTH AFRICA CRICKET TEAM

Australia don't have that many weaknesses as all bases



are covered well. However, the form of certain key players is questionable. Marsh struggled in IPL 2024 before heading home. If he doesn't recover fully, Australia have an issue. So one between Jake Fraser-McGurk and Matt Short will come in.

Warner struggled as well and was short of runs. The injury bothered him as well. So, it remains to be seen how he turns up in his farewell tournament. A poor run of form can see Inglis come in for the legend.

Maxwell suffered big time in IPL 2024. He averages less than six and registered four ducks. He also took a short break in between owing to mental health. Australia need a ready Maxwell and there cannot be any lapses. If his batting doesn't improve, this will hurt the side.

AUTHOR'S VIEW: AUSTRALIA ARE THE TOURNAMENT FAVOURITES

Australia have what it takes to win major tournaments and the ICC 2023 World Cup was the latest testament. They always find a way to peak at the right time. With Starc, Cummins, and Head firing in IPL 2024, the confidence will be upbeat. These are all big-game players and know how to get the best out of themselves. Australia are spoilt for options and the more the merrier. They can rotate and mix things around. Australia can bat up to number eight and will have at least eight bowling options in the playing XI. That's a massive ploy.

PLAYERS TO WATCH OUT FOR

MITCHELL STARC: The experienced left-arm quick showed why he is the best in business by flooring SRH in Qualifier 1 and then in the final. Starc was at his absolute best when it mattered. He got swung and bowled with a lot of pace, forcing mistakes. Starc owns 188 T20 scalps at a splendid 20.31. Starc owns 27 wickets at the T20 World Cup at 24.44.

ADAM ZAMPA: The right-arm spinner is one of the best in business. Zampa is a wicket-taking bowler like Yuzvendra Chahal of India. He is Australia's top wicket-taker in T20Is. Zampa has 92 scalps at 22.63. His economy rate of 7.28 is highly impressive as well. Zampa has an excellent record at the T20 World Cup. He has 23 scalps at just 13.30. His economy rate is 6.12.

AUSTRALIA'S SCHEDULE FOR THE T20 WORLD CUP

June 6, Australia vs Oman – Kensington Oval, Bridgetown, Barbados (6:00 AM IST)

June 8, Australia vs England – Kensington Oval, Bridgetown, Barbados (10:30 PM IST)

June 12, Australia vs Namibia – Sir Vivian Richards Stadium, North Sound, Antigua (6:00 AM IST)

June 16, Australia vs Scotland – Daren Sammy National Cricket Stadium, Gros Islet, St Lucia (6:00 AM IST) ■

ICC T20 WORLD CUP 2024: HOSTS WEST INDIES ARE IN THE FRAY WITH A SERIOUS CHANCE

The West Indies cricket team cannot be taken lightly at the 2024 ICC T20 World Cup. West Indies, under the leadership of Roman Powell, look a serious side with plenty of power performers in the mix. This side has some serious talent, with the majority...



BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

The West Indies cricket team cannot be taken lightly at the 2024 ICC T20 World Cup. West Indies, under the leadership of Roman Powell, look a serious side with plenty of power performers in the mix. This side has some serious talent, with the majority of players being celebrated T20 specialists across the globe. With the event to be held in the USA and the West Indies, it's an extra boost for the Men in Maroon to come out and express themselves. After missing out on the ICC World Cup 2023, there will be hunger and motivation in the camp to go out and play their brand of cricket. Despite missing some of their prized assets in the bilateral series against South Africa, the home team sealed the three-match series, which is a curtain-raiser ahead of the World Cup. West Indies won the first two T20Is convincingly and this will help them gain plenty of impetus and confidence.

Placed in Group C with New Zealand, Afghanistan, Uganda, and Papua New Guinea, the Windies will hope to seal the Super 8 berth and then take it from there. West Indies have won the ICC T20 World Cup on two occasions and are the only side alongside England (2) to win multiple honors. They have also been two-time semi-finalists. With some top figures in the squad this time, one hopes the Windies will seize the opportunity.

A LOOK AT WEST INDIES' 15-MEMBER SQUAD

SQUAD: Rovman Powell (c), Alzarri Joseph, Johnson Charles, Roston Chase, Shimron Hetmyer, Jason Holder, Shai Hope, Akeal Hosein, Shamar Joseph, Brandon King, Gudakesh Motie, Nicholas Pooran, Andre Russell, Sherfane Rutherford, Romario Shepherd

ANDRE RUSSELL IS WEST INDIES' TRUMP CARD

Andre Russell can be West Indies' match-winner in the coveted tournament. The big-hitting all-rounder has had an excellent IPL 2024 season with the Kolkata Knight Riders, scoring valuable runs and picking up regular wickets. Russell is a T20 legend with his all-round heroics. He owns 446 wickets at 25.30 in addition to scoring 8431 runs with the bat. Russell owns a total of 684 sixes and can demolish teams with ease. He has worked hard to be fit and the performances have followed.

STRENGTHS OF THE WEST INDIES CRICKET TEAM

West Indies have plenty of hard-hitters and all-rounders, which makes them an interesting side. When we talk of serious batters who can cause carnage, Russell leads the pack. His strike rate of 169.80 in T20s is incredible. Russell can float around and come





in as the situation demands. Then you have Nicholas Pooran, who had a defiant IPL 2024 season with Lucknow Super Giants. Pooran is another excellent figure in that middle order. The southpaw can take bowlers to the cleaners with his versatile shot-making.

In Brandon King, West Indies get a sturdy opener who can score runs in a flash. He impressed in both the T20Is versus South Africa. He can set the tone of the innings alongside Johnson Charles, who owns over 6500 T20 runs and is highly experienced at 35 years of age. Shai Hope is a classy figure and can be another top-order option. He was recently seen in the IPL. Hope can bat long and the others can revolve around him.

In Shimron Hetmyer, the West Indies get a quality finisher. He is another player who can be lethal. In the last four overs in T20s, Hetmyer's strike rate is a staggering 197.01. This shows the kind of impact he can have. Roman Powell can leave a solid impact as well. He will hope to lead the side from the front. Another power-hitter, Powell adds to the lost of finishers alongside Russell and Hetmyer.

West Indies have several utility all-rounders in the form of Sherfane Rutherford, Romario Shepherd and Jason Holder. We all saw Shepherd's big-hitting heroics for Mumbai Indians against Delhi Capitals at

the Wankhede in IPL 2024. He owns over 1000 T20 runs, hitting 83 sixes in that tally. Shepherd also owns 127 T20 wickets at 24.26. Rutherford owns over 2100 T20 runs, having slammed 138 sixes. He can ball medium pace as well. Holder is the most experienced of this lot. The giant West Indian has claimed 244 T20 scalps, and he also owns over 2200 runs to highlight his case. Then there is Roston Chase, who owns over 1300 T20 runs and 50-plus wickets. His right-arm off-break will be handy. He is also a valuable middle-order batter.

Coming to the bowling, Gudakesh Motie can be useful. The spinner has done well of late and will lead the Windies. He owns 46 T20 scalps at 22.17. Alongside Chase, the two can handle the spin show. Then there is Akeal Hosein, who brings quality with his left-arm spin. He owns 136 wickets in T20s. So the spin department of Windies has its merits.

WEAKNESSES OF THE WEST INDIES CRICKET TEAM

West Indies' key all-round players solve many issues on the side. So, the balance is always going to be there with like-for-like replacements. It will zero down on the right personnel and how they go about the business. You need calm and mature heads to see the team through in different situations and that can be a



bit challenging at times in this Windies side.

Johnson Charles is a bit of a weak link in that opening slot. The team could have included the more expansive Kyle Mayers in his place. Charles' strike rate of 124.43 in powerplay overs of T20s isn't attractive enough.

Shamar Joseph, who started his Test career with a bang, was a surprise inclusion in the squad. He has little to no experience in this format and warmed the bench in both PSL and IPL recently. Joseph can also prove to be costly and leak runs. He is the biggest weak spot in that 15-member squad.

AUTHOR'S VIEW: WEST INDIES CANNOT BE TAKEN LIGHTLY

West Indies are not the favourites for the World Cup with other top sides in with a better chance. However, WI will be happy to go into the tourney as the underdogs. There will be expectations at home but WI know they have to play consistently a productive brand of cricket to make it through. With the presence of star all-rounders, the Windies have what it takes to go long and strong. So therefore, one cannot take them lightly and they are a side with some serious chance to cause an uproar and stake claim to a semi-final place.

PLAYERS TO WATCH OUT FOR

NICHOLAS POORAN: The star left-handed batter will back himself after an intense IPL. He scored 499 runs for LSG at 62.37, and his strike rate was 178.21. With 7000 runs scaled in T20s, Pooran is close to completing 500 sixes. He is a rare breed with plenty of charisma and vision. Pooran is also closing in on to become the top scorer for West Indies in T20Is.

GUDAKESH MOTIE: Motie was superb for WI against SA in the first two T20Is, claiming three wickets in both games. The left-arm spinner will hope to wrap up the series on a strong note individually and stake his claim as WI's main spinner at the World Cup ahead of Hosein. Motie averages under 18 with the ball for WI in T20Is. It's a good start for the talented spinner.

WEST INDIES'S SCHEDULE FOR THE T20 WORLD CUP

June 2, West Indies vs Guyana – Providence Stadium, Guyana (8:00 PM IST)

June 9, West Indies vs Uganda – Providence Stadium, Guyana (6:00 AM IST)

June 13, West Indies vs New Zealand – Brian Lara Stadium, Tarouba, Trinidad (6:00 AM IST)

June 18, West Indies vs Afghanistan – Daren Sammy National Cricket Stadium, Gros Islet, St Lucia (6:00 AM IST) ■

ICC T20 WORLD CUP 2024: EXPERIENCED NEW ZEALAND CAN GIVE A FAIR SHOT

New Zealand will be one of the desired teams at the 2024 ICC T20 World Cup in West Indies and the USA in June. The Kane Williamson-led side would fancy themselves going the distance with a settled and experienced squad on offer. One should...



BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

New Zealand will be one of the desired teams at the 2024 ICC T20 World Cup in West Indies and the USA in June. The Kane Williamson-led side would fancy themselves going the distance with a settled and experienced squad on offer. One should back this Kiwi side to come out trumps and play a solid brand of cricket. All eyes will be on skipper Williamson who suits better in the New Zealand set-up than a four-player foreign aspect in the Indian Premier League. His leadership attributes will help the Black Caps immensely. What makes New Zealand an exciting side is their spirit and proper attitude. The Kiwis have their bases covered across departments and one feels the options of some big T20 guns will enhance their reputation. New Zealand have done well in ICC tournaments of late but the trophy is something that has been missing. So this is the area Williamson and his men will focus on and take things as they come.

NZ will open their campaign against Afghanistan in Group C. All of their group-stage games are in the West Indies (Guyana and Trinidad). On slower surfaces, New Zealand cannot be taken lightly. They are a strong side on pitches where things slow down a tad bit. In 2021, they reached the final in UAE before losing to Australia. New Zealand are a well balanced side and there are hopes riding on them. One expects them to have a fair shot at the trophy this time around.

A LOOK AT NEW ZEALAND'S 15-MEMBER ICC T20 WORLD CUP SQUAD

SQUAD: Kane Williamson (c), Finn Allen, Trent Boult, Michael Bracewell, Mark Chapman, Devon Conway, Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Daryl Mitchell, Jimmy Neesham, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Mitchell Santner, Ish Sodhi, Tim Southee.

TRAVELLING RESERVE:
Ben Sears

MITCHELL SANTNER IS NEW ZEALAND'S

TRUMP CARD

Star spin all-rounder Mitchell Santner can make the difference for New Zealand. He is a complete player. He fits into the side handing them four definite overs of quality spin. Santner can bat as well, and this is a positive for NZ, given they can use him at number six or seven. Santner has played 192 T20 matches, claiming 195 wickets at 24.01. His economy rate of 7.03 stands out. With 2188 runs scored, Santner provides meat in this side. He strikes at 132-plus and averages 23-plus.

STRENGTHS OF THE NEW ZEALAND CRICKET TEAM

Devon Conway will be raring to have a crack at the top. Conway missed the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024 season with an injury. He is a quality scorer and has proved his mettle across formats. An average of 41-plus and over 5500 runs makes Conway the right player to lead the line. Finn Allen can open alongside Conway to bring that left-right hand combination. Allen strikes close to 170 in T20s and can be the aggressive player at the top. In Williamson, New Zealand got a pedigree. He will play to his tune and with several aggressors around him, the mindset will be to play himself in and work as per the situation. Williamson is a class player and is New Zealand's second-highest scorer in T20Is with 2500-plus runs.

Mark Chapman, Daryl Mitchell and Glenn Phillips make up that strong middle order. Chapman enjoyed a strong run of form in the T20Is against Pakistan recently. With over 3100 T20 runs, Chapman will back himself to provide impetus. With Mitchell, NZ got another big personality. He can go big and play his shots. Mitchell can also lend his voice with a few overs if needed. He was recently seen in the IPL 2024 season for Chennai Super Kings. In Phillips, New Zealand has versatility. He owns over 6000 T20 runs and strikes more than 140. Phillips can don the role at number six. His athleticism and ability to chip in with the ball makes him stand out.

In Jimmy Neesham, Michael Bracewell, and Rachin Ravindra, New Zealand get three all-round options. Bracewell and Neesham are both finishers. Ravindra is Conway's backup at the top for the Kiwis.

Santner and Ish Sodhi are NZ's primary spin options. Sodhi is his side's second-highest wicket-taker in T20Is whereas Santner follows suit. They





can be clutched on surfaces which can aid slowness. Both possess a bundle of experience. NZ's three-man pace attack in the starting XI will be Trent Boult, Matt Henry and Tim Southee. Left-arm pacer Boult can strike big in the power play. Henry has quality under his sleeve. Southee is the leading wicket-taker in T20I history and his experience will be a handful. Lockie Ferguson is New Zealand's fourth option in the pace department. He was seen playing for RCB in the IPL 2024 season.

WEAKNESSES OF THE NEW ZEALAND CRICKET TEAM

It's pretty hard to find any flaws in this New Zealand side. One minor weak link can be Conway not playing much cricket in recent times, given the injury. GT hardly used Williamson in the IPL and he could be a bit rusty. So Allen and Chapman have to work more in this aspect with the top four in batting in mind. Ravindra is a promising gun but is T20 his forte? He is

shier compared to Conway's quality.

The bowling of NZ is strong, and barring Henry's economy rate in T20s (death overs), everything else looks well-oiled. You have Boult setting up the power play with Santner-Sodhi duo taking over the middle overs. Two of Ferguson, Henry and Southee will have to take the responsibility at the death.

The Finish looks decent too. Phillips is the key figure here. Then there is Bracewell as well, both as a cover or a main asset. Santner is the fulcrum and holds the load. NZ are one of the sides that can go big and get you the 200-plus totals and also work things to perfection on slower surfaces. So the balance is there.

AUTHOR'S VIEW: NEW ZEALAND CAN UNSETTLE TEAMS WITH THEIR BALANCE

New Zealand are the most balanced side heading into the T20 World Cup. Their bowling is as good as the



batting. You have champion performers in Boult, Southee, Sodhi and Santner with the ball. And then the utility all-rounders hand the side plenty of options. The batting has its merits. It's not a one-dimensional batting unit. You have the presence of left-handed batters like Conway, Chapman and Santner in the top 7. Neesham and Ravindra are lefties, too, on the bench. So, the combination factor works perfectly. You also have replacements so that is a major bonus that works for the team. So with the balance on offer, NZ can unsettle sides and cause issues.

PLAYERS TO WATCH OUT FOR

KANE WILLIAMSON: The star batter cannot be shut down. With 2547 runs in T20Is at a healthy average of 33.96, Williamson can bat with ease, allowing the players around him the time to go big. Williamson can bat deep and find the gaps for his runs in addition to rotating the strike well. With 6400-plus T20 runs, Williamson remains a crucial player. His

captaincy can make a real difference.

TRENT BOULT: The Kiwi magician with the new ball – Boult – will be tremendous in the first six overs. As per ESPNcricinfo, Boult owns 98 wickets in the power play, and his economy rate is 7.16. Overall, Boult owns 254 T20 wickets at 26.13. His economy rate is 8.10. Boult averages 21.44 in overs 16-20. He can chip in here as well.

NEW ZEALAND'S SCHEDULE FOR THE T20 WORLD CUP

June 8, New Zealand vs Afghanistan – Providence Stadium, Guyana (5:00 AM IST)

June 13, West Indies vs New Zealand – Brian Lara Stadium, Tarouba, Trinidad (6:00 AM IST)

June 15, New Zealand vs Uganda – Brian Lara Stadium, Tarouba, Trinidad (6:00 AM IST)

June 17, New Zealand vs Papua New Guinea – Brian Lara Stadium, Tarouba, Trinidad (8:00 PM IST) ■

SOUTH AFRICA'S ICC T20 WORLD CUP 2024 SQUAD: A LOOK AT THEIR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

The South African cricket team will have its task cut out in the 2024 edition of the ICC T20 World Cup 2024 to be played in the West Indies and USA. South Africa will come into the tournament on the back of a 3-0 series defeat against West Indies...





BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

The South African cricket team will have its task cut out in the 2024 edition of the ICC T20 World Cup 2024 to be played in the West Indies and USA. South Africa will come into the tournament on the back of a 3-0 series defeat against West Indies. The Proteas were outplayed by the hosts and there were few positives for the visitors. Despite a few key players missing, the manner in which they lost the series is telling. South Africa will be led by Aidan Markham, who played for Sunrise's Hyderabad in the 2024 Indian Premier League season. SRH lost in the final. South Africa have named a quality squad with several interesting assets in the mix. Quinton de Kock and Heinrich Klaasen are the forces with the bat for the side. SA will hope to have a fit, Kagiso Rabada, who suffered an injury during the IPL 2024 season and had to return home. SA are a team that have a powerful batting line-up but there are shortcomings as well. Across eight editions of the T20 World Cup, the Proteas have managed to reach two semi-finals (2009 and 2014). However, they have suffered round 2 exits in the remaining events (Super 8s, Super 10s and Super 12s). In each of the last three editions. In the 2024 edition, SA are clubbed in Group D alongside Sri

Lanka, Bangladesh, Netherlands and Nepal.

Here, we analyze the South Africa squad for the T20 World Cup.

A LOOK AT SOUTH AFRICA'S 15-MEMBER SQUAD

SQUAD: Aidan Markram (c), Ottniel Baartman, Gerald Coetzee, Quinton de Kock, Bjorn Fortuin, Reeza Hendricks, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, David Miller, Anrich Nortje, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tabraiz Shamsi, Tristan Stubbs

HEINRICH KLAASEN IS SOUTH AFRICA'S TRUMP CARD

Heinrich Klassen has matured into a fine cricketer who is one of the best in business. Unlike the start of his career, Klaasen has grown to understand and tune his game accordingly. He can go bonkers and his approach against spin makes him one of the lethal batters out there. A finisher, Klaasen puts a price on his wicket. He has impressed in the IPL across the last two editions. His stocks in ODIs have also increased. Klaasen can make a real difference for the Proteas.

STRENGTHS OF THE SOUTH AFRICA CRICKET TEAM



South Africa's desired top-six batting can challenge any side and give them a run for their money. The experienced Reeza Hendricks and Quinton de Kock will open the innings. Hendricks recently surpassed 6,500 T20 runs and is a quality figure. With four tons and 49 fifties, there is a player with an eye for big scores. His strike rate is 128-plus.

De Kock is the main batter in that top order. He has been in the scheme for things for a long time. With over 9600 runs, he remains one of South Africa's best players. He has six tons and 61 fifties. De Kock owns close to 400 sixes (376) and 1000-plus fours (SR: 137.92). He is South Africa's highest scorer in T20Is and is closing in on 2500 runs.

Markram comes in at number three for South Africa. This is a crucial position for Markram as he needs to be the fulcrum of the side. He owns a decent average of 38-plus and his strike rate is healthy (150-plus). Tristan Stubbs can be the answer at number four. The youngster has a lot of pedigree and could be one of the emerging players of the tournament. He comes into the picture with a quality run in the IPL.

Klaasen and David Miller are the two of the finest finishers. They will don the number five and six positions. Klaasen owns close to 4500 T20 runs and his strike rate is over 150. As per ESPNcricinfo, his strike rate is 196.42 in the last four overs in T20 cricket. As mentioned, he is an able player of spin. His strike rate is 158.93 versus spinners and he averages 37.41.

Miller can come in at number six. He owns a truckload of runs (10276). He averages 35-plus and his strike rate is close to 139. Miller has smoked over 450 sixes. In the last four overs, Miller has over 3500 runs, and his strike rate is 184.43. He is the only batter with over 100 sixes for South Africa in T20Is.

SA also have Ryan Rickelton as an option with the bat. He is an impressive figure and owns over 2200 runs with a strike rate close to 137.

SA have a quality spin attack on offer. Keshav Maharaj is their main spinner. He can be highly accurate and have control in terms of conceding runs. The left-arm spinner owns 132 scalps. Tabraiz Shamsi has a lot of experience. He owns 294 T20 wickets and is SA's wicket-taking bowler. Bjorn Fortuin has over 150 scalps and can come in whenever needed.

SA's pace attack has depth. Kagiso Rabada and Gerald Coetzee are the best bets. They can purchase help and be amongst the wickets. SA have three more pacers in the mix. Anrich Nortje, Marco Jansen and Ottniel Baartman are decent options. They can be rotated as per the situation.

WEAKNESSES OF THE SOUTH AFRICA CRICKET TEAM

South Africa don't have quality all-rounders who can stake a claim and make things happen. They need to play six batters and go in with five bowlers. This makes Marco Jansen's case crucial. He needs to deliver in that



number seven position. Jansen has played just four T20Is for South Africa. If the left-arm pacer is ignored, then Maharaj can be the option. The left-arm spinner owns 700-plus runs from 161 T20s. His strike rate is 115 which is worrisome. So the five bowlers SA will go with aren't key figures in terms of giving those extra runs with the bat. This is a worry. The load, therefore, is on the front six players to go about and do the job. SA can also struggle with the bat on slower surfaces. A bit like England, they are powerful on batting surfaces but could fumble a bit when the ball comes a bit slower. In the pace department, barring Rabada, one can see Nortje struggle as he came from the IPL conceding aplenty. Coetzee can also be plucked for runs. A bit of depth in batting is also missing in this SA side especially when you look at the bench. These factors could undermine South Africa in the upcoming World Cup.

AUTHOR'S VIEW: SA COULD HEAD OUT IN SUPER 8s

SA doesn't have that balance. They are well stocked with their front six and a quality five-man attack but in between, things look murky. Do they have a bowler who can go out and give you wickets aplenty, like Shaheen Afridi or Jaspreet Bumrah? The answer is no. SA need to have the belief and play their brand of cricket but there are sides who are better placed and will be ahead in the pecking order. SA could head out in the Super 8s.

PLAYERS TO WATCH OUT FOR

TRISTAN STUBBS: The promising batter impressed one and all in the IPL 2024 season, where he played all 14 matches for Delhi. Stubbs had an impressive average of 54 and he scored 378 runs at an impressive strike rate of 190.90. He hit three fifties. Stubbs smoked 24 fours and 26 sixes. Overall, in T20s, Stubbs has over 1800 runs, and his strike rate is 151-plus.

KAGISO RABADA: The SA fast bowler needs to lead the bowling attack. Rabada is SA's best bet and he will need to provide the fireworks. In 201 T20s, Rabada has 251 wickets at 23.86. His economy rate is 8.12. In the first six overs, Rabada owns 69 wickets at 32.20. He would want to be more destructive. The last four overs have seen him pick 101 scalps at 17.22. He will be crucial at the death.

SOUTH AFRICA'S SCHEDULE FOR THE T20 WORLD CUP

June 3, Sri Lanka vs South Africa – Nassau County International Cricket Stadium, New York (8:00 PM IST)

June 8, Netherlands vs South Africa – Nassau County International Cricket Stadium, New York (8:00 PM IST)

June 10, South Africa vs Bangladesh – Nassau County International Cricket Stadium, New York (8:00 PM IST)

June 15, South Africa vs Nepal – Arnos Vale Ground, Kingstown, St Vincent (5:00 AM IST) ■

ICC T20 WORLD CUP 2024: EXPERIENCED SRI LANKA CAN LAND A FEW PUNCHES



The Sri Lankan cricket team led by Wanindu Hasaranga is pretty much a balanced side with quality batters and bowlers alike. The squad is blended with a lot of experience, and it can prove to be useful during the ICC T20 World Cup 2024, to be held...

BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

The Sri Lankan cricket team led by Wanindu Hasaranga is pretty much a balanced side with quality batters and bowlers alike. The squad is blended with a lot of experience, and it can prove to be useful during the ICC T20 World Cup 2024, to be held in the West Indies and USA. After a disappointing ICC World Cup 2023 in India, the Asian side would hope to make its presence felt in a format which can be receptive to the players to enhance their skills. Sri Lanka's bowling somehow pips the batting in terms of personnel. Look out for the Lankan Lions with the ball. They can be pretty nagging with the versatility on offer. On a bit slower surfaces, the Lankans can hurt oppositions. And then you would also want the batters to come out and express themselves. The big guns on the side need to be delivered and have a plan.

Sri Lanka have been one-time winners of the ICC T20 World Cup. They won the prized trophy in 2014, beating India in the finale. The Lankans have also been two-time runners-up in 2009 and 2012. They also reached the semis in 2010. The last three editions have seen the Lankans suffer R2 exits. They also suffered an R2 exit in the inaugural season in 2007. SL is placed alongside South Africa, Nepal, Bangladesh and the Netherlands. The Lankans are the favourites, alongside South Africa, to reach the Super 8s.

Here, we analyse the Sri Lanka squad for the T20 World Cup.

A LOOK AT SRI LANKA'S 15-MEMBER SQUAD

SQUAD: Wanindu Hasaranga (c), Charith Asalanka, Kusal Mendis, Pathum Nissanka, Kamindu Mendis, Sadeera

Samarawickrama, Angelo Mathews, Dasun Shanaka, Dhananjaya De Silva, Maheesh Theekshana, Dunith Wellalage, Dushmantha Chameera, Nuwan Thushara, Matheesha Pathirana, Dilshan Madushanka.

TRAVELLING RESERVES: Asitha Fernando, Vijayakanth Vijayakanth, Bhanuka Rajapaksa, Janith Liyanage.

WANINDU HASARANGA IS SRI LANKA'S TRUMP CARD

Skipper Wanindu Hasaranga is Sri Lanka's key asset in the side. He has all the abilities to do well for the Lankans and spearhead the team. His leadership skills will be crucial. Hasaranga is an ace T20 bowler. He has snapped up 243 wickets from 175 matches at a splendid average of 16.77. His economy rate is 6.76. Hasaranga is the most successful spinner for Sri Lanka with 104 scalps. He averages 15.56, and his economy rate is 6.84. Sri Lanka will get massive help from the right-arm spinner's four overs in games.

STRENGTHS OF THE SRI LANKAN CRICKET TEAM

The pace-bowling unit of Sri Lanka is strong. In Matheesha Pathirana, one can expect high-quality bowling at the death. He has been an able player for Chennai Super Kings in the IPL. Pathirana owns 71 wickets in T20s at 19.28. In the last four overs, the pacer has a knack of picking wickets. He owns 38 scalps at just 14.23 with a brilliant economy rate of 8.54.

Nuwan Thushara showed his skills for Mumbai Indians in the 2024 edition of the IPL. Bowling with a different action, the pacer took eight scalps from seven matches at 32.12. Thushara can be key for Lanka in the powerplay overs. He owns 31 T20 scalps in this phase at 21.74. His economy rate is 7.92.

Dushmantha Chameera is the experienced figure in the pace unit. He was there with the KKR side in IPL 2024, and despite being limited to one game, the experience he gained was





massive as KKR won the trophy.

Overall, Chameera has claimed 118 wickets at 28.77 (ER: 8.03). In the first six overs, Chameera owns 37 scalps at 29.86. In the last four overs, he has 30 scalps at 29.46.

If Sri Lanka want variety, Dilshan Madushanka with his left-arm pace can be useful. He is pretty new to the format, with 34 games under his belt. But his slower balls and cutters will help the Lankans. Dasun Shanaka is the fifth pace-bowling option in the side. Fitting in as an all-rounder, Shanaka owns 76 wickets at 26.31. He can come in as the fourth bowling option in the playing XI. Led by Hasaranga, Sri Lanka are well versed in spin. Hasaranga will be impactful in overs 7-16.

As per ESPNcricinfo, he averages 18.78 in this phase and owns 142 wickets (ER: 6.65). In Theekshana, the Lankans get another massive spinner who hardly gives anything away. In 145 matches, Theekshana owns 150 T20 scalps at 24.55. His economy rate is 6.68. So Sri Lanka can utilise eight overs through Hasaranga and Theekshana, keeping the opposition quiet.

Dhananjaya De Silva can come in when required. The batting all-rounder owns 49 scalps at 25.04. He can be utilised as the third spinner in the side. Charith Asalanka is there as well. He can bowl a couple of overs if needed.

Dunith Wellalage will lend his voice from the bench. He is Sri Lanka's left-arm spinner and averages 20.14.

Pathum Nissanka is Sri Lanka's main batter at the top. The classy player is closing in on 2500 T20 runs. He owns over 50 sixes and 250 fours. Nissanka will need to bat longer and expect the others to revolve around him. Kusal Mendis will open with Nissanka and he needs to be aggressive. He owns 3880 runs with a strike rate worth close to 140. Mendis can hand his side the desired starts.

Kamindu Mendis, Sadeera Samarawickrama, Charith Asalanka and Dhananjaya form the compact set of batters. You have enough experience riding. Kamindu is closing in on 1500 T20 runs. Asalanka owns over 2200 runs in T20s. Sadeera has played over 100 T20 games and owns over 2500 runs. Dhananjaya has over 2300 runs under his belt.

Veteran Angelo Mathews can be used from the bench.

WEAKNESSES OF THE SRI LANKAN CRICKET TEAM

Sri Lanka have a few holes. The batting lacks a genuine power-hitter. You look at the team, and nobody can put their hands up and say they own massive strike rates. You need a couple of explosive batters and Lanka could be in for some trouble if other teams get to big totals



against them.

Sri Lanka will at least want to go with six batters with Dhananjaya the key option with the ball in this segment. Two bowling all-rounders in Shanaka and Hasaranga will fill up number seven and eight. The Lankans have no other choice but to depend on these two for pinch-hitting at the death. Theekshana and two more pacers will slot in. So three pacers and three spinners form the look of this side who need cushion with the bat.

Another concern is that there is no reliable top-order player in place of Nissanka and Mendis. So, if needed, it will be a makeshift option.

AUTHOR'S VIEW: SRI LANKA WILL MAKE IT TO THE SUPER 8s

Sri Lanka can keep themselves in the mix with sound bowling on offer. If pitches suit them, this side can land a few punches and be party spoilers for other big teams. However, the batting is a concern, and one cannot see them going past the Super 8s unless there are mishaps from the other sides. In terms of bowling, there are few sides with an excellent spin department. Lanka tops the show in this regard. Shanaka needs to have a solid tournament, as he is the fulcrum in that crucial number seven berth.

PLAYERS TO WATCH OUT FOR

MAHEESH THEEKSHANA: The quality spinner will aid someone like Hasaranga as the spin partner. Theekshana is brilliant and is a sensational reader of the game. He will be difficult to put away. His economy rate of 6.72 for the Lankans in T20Is is significant. In overs 7 to 16, Theekshana has 50 scalps in T20s (ER: 6.93). Notably, he can tune in during the power play. He owns 47 wickets (ER: 6.86).

KUSAL MENDIS: The experienced batter has to deliver in the power play. He owns 1450 runs in this phase (SR: 128.88), having been dismissed 46 times across 100 innings. Mendis is one of the three SL players with 1500-plus T20I runs. His strike rate of 135-plus is decent, but it can shoot upwards with more intent.

SRI LANKA'S SCHEDULE FOR THE T20 WORLD CUP

June 3, Sri Lanka vs South Africa - Nassau County International Cricket Stadium, New York (8:00 PM IST)

June 8, Sri Lanka vs Bangladesh - Grand Prairie Stadium, Dallas (6:00 AM IST)

June 12, Sri Lanka vs Nepal - Central Broward Regional Park Stadium Turf Ground, Lauderhill, Florida (5:00 AM IST)

June 17, Sri Lanka vs Netherlands - Daren Sammy National Cricket Stadium, Gros Islet, St Lucia (6:00 AM IST) ■

ICC T20 WORLD CUP 2024: BOWLING-HEAVY AFGHANISTAN OUT TO MAKE AN IMPRESSION

The Afghanistan cricket team would be out to make an impression in the ICC T20 World Cup 2024 to be held in the Caribbean and USA. Afghanistan put up a fighting show in the 50-over World Cup in India last year, and they will try to take a leaf out...





BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

The Afghanistan cricket team would be out to make an impression in the ICC T20 World Cup 2024 to be held in the Caribbean and USA. Afghanistan put up a fighting show in the 50-over World Cup in India last year, and they will try to take a leaf out of that and put up sturdy performances. Led by Rashid Khan, the Afghanistan side boasts of several key performers in both batting and bowling departments. Several factors will need to come to life if the Afghans are to go out and reach the Super 8s. A few players were seen in the 2024 edition of the Indian Premier League. The experience will prove to be handy. Most importantly, the character of 2024 IPL trophy winner Rahmanullah Gurbaz can push the Afghans. Gurbaz had personal family issues and came back from Afghanistan later on to play match-winning knocks for KKR and help them win the trophy.

Afghanistan made their T20 World Cup debut in 2010 and has enjoyed successive appearances since then.

They suffered group-stage exits in 2009, 2012 and 2014. In 2016, they reached the Super 10s. In 2021 and 2022, they made it to the Super 12s. In the 2024 edition, the Afghans are placed in Group C with New Zealand, the West Indies, Papua New Guinea, and Uganda. Can the Afghans trump one of New Zealand or West Indies to reach the Super 8s?

Here, we analyze the Afghanistan squad for the T20 World Cup.

A LOOK AT AFGHANISTAN'S 15-MEMBER SQUAD

SQUAD: Rashid Khan (c), Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Ibrahim Zadran, Azmatullah

Omarzai, Najibullah Zadran, Mohammad Ishaq, Mohammad Nabi, Gulbadin Naib, Karim Janat, Nangyal Kharoti, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Noor Ahmad, Naveen-ul-Haq, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Fareed Ahmad Malik.

RESERVES: Sediq Atal, Hazratullah Zazai, Saleem Safi.

RAHMANULLAH GURBAZ IS AFGHANISTAN'S TRUMP CARD

Gurbaz won hearts, having done remarkably well in Qualifier 1 and the final versus Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL 2024 season. With Phil Salt as the preferred keeper-batter, Gurbaz warmed the bench before attending to his mother in Afghanistan. He came back after Salt's departure and delivered in both these games. He scored 62 runs at 31 and filled the void left by Salt. Overall, in T20s, the dashing opener has clocked 4047 runs (SR: 148.40). He owns over 250 sixes (257). He is a special talent.

STRENGTHS OF THE AFGHANISTAN CRICKET TEAM

Seasoned T20 stars in this Afghanistan side are the biggest strengths. The spin bowling unit looks proper and is Afghanistan's biggest strength. Skipper Rashid Khan will be keen to impress after an ordinary IPL campaign. He is the second-highest wicket-taker in T20 cricket. He owns 574 scalps from 425 matches at an average of 18.44. His economy rate is 6.12. Rashid is also the 3rd-highest wicket-taker in T20Is. The wrist-spinner has also impressed in the ICC T20 World Cups, collecting 23 scalps from 15 matches at 16.17.

Mohammad Nabi has played 394 T20s. The veteran all-rounder owns 347 T20 scalps. He will be utilized as a key spin option. With the bat, Nabi has scored a total of 5811 runs. There is a lot riding in terms of experience. He was seen in the IPL recently.

Left-arm spinner Noor Ahmad has played consistently for Gujarat Titans in the IPL. The youngster will support Rashid as the second spinner. He is closing in on 100 T20 scalps (96). In Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Afghanistan have another top spin option. Mujeeb skipped IPL 2024 and will be fresh. The right-arm spinner has over 250 T20 scalps under his belt. 20-year-old all-rounder Nangyal Kharoti will lend his voice from the bench. The rookie owns 23 scalps and has scored 150 runs.

The pace-bowling unit can count upon

Fazalhaq Farooqi and Naveen-ul-Haq. Both players had a decent run in the IPL. Naveen owns 218 T20 wickets at 24.10. In the power play overs, Naveen owns 64 wickets. The last four overs in T20s have seen him claim 94 scalps at 19.77.

Farooqi has seen his stocks rise. He is closing in on 100 T20 scalps at 21.07. A solid economy rate of 6.86 is impressive. 34 of his wickets have come in the overs 17-20 at 20.73. Afghanistan have two strong candidates both at the start and in the end to provide security.

Azmatullah Omarzai is a proper pace-bowling all-rounder. He will fit in as the third pacer in the side. He owns over 80 wickets at 25.57. Then there is Gulbadin Naib. He is another quality player, who can produce the goods with his pace bowling. He owns over 70 scalps at 28.04.

Then there is 25-year-old Karim Janat.

He owns 110 wickets with his

medium pace and is a decent

presence with the bat too. He owns

over 2000 runs. Fareed Ahmad Malik

is another pacer in the squad. He owns 71

wickets. Afghanistan have decent finishers in batting. Rashid Khan is well known for his exploits. He can get going and hit those boundaries at the death. In overs 17-20, he strikes at 162.24. Nabi is another player who will be required to chip in. He is a big-hitting player and owns a strike rate of 179.06 in over 17-20.

So, the backend of the innings will see these two players don the role. If Naib gets an opportunity, this will benefit the side further. He is another pinch-hitter. Naib has struck in excess of 160 in the last 4 overs.

In batting, Gurbaz is their best player in the ranks. He will be responsible for the starts Afghanistan desire. He owns over 2100 runs in the first six overs, and his strike rate reads 144.38. In Ibrahim Zadran, there is a settled opening combination on offer. Ibrahim will look to bat longer. He has a solid average of 33-plus. Ibrahim's presence will allow Gurbaz to play more aggressively.

Najibullah Zadran is another massive strength in batting for Afghanistan.

He owns over 4100 runs in T20s with a decent strike rate of 137-plus. He is a glue whose approach will be essential to keep Afghanistan floating. Meanwhile, Omarzai is another vital presence with the bat in that middle order alongside Jamat.

WEAKNESSES OF THE AFGHANISTAN CRICKET TEAM

Afghanistan do not have the depth in batting. Barring the four main players mentioned above alongside





Janat, Afghanistan lack the basic touch. They will be dependent on their bowling all-rounders. 19-year-old Mohammad Ishaq has been called up. He lacks experience, having played just a handful of matches. He owns an average of under 15.

To get a better balance, the team could be forced to play all their pinch-hitters in Rashid, Naib and Nabi. With Noor, Naveen and Fazalhaq, you already get six bowling options. Add to that Omarzai and Janat, there are eight options with the ball. Afghanistan are tilted in this regard. The bowling supersedes the batting. They would have liked another quality batter in that middle order.

Perhaps they could be forced to play Ishaq and take a risk. He was seen in the Ireland T20Is. Also, they could have got a batter in place of an extra pacer in Fareed Ahmad Malik. Afghanistan are a bowling-heavy unit and lack firepower in batting.

AUTHOR'S VIEW: AFGHANISTAN WILL GO OUT IN THE GROUP STAGE

Afghanistan will provide the fight given their solidity in bowling and the all-rounders present. If Gurbaz, Ibrahim, and Najibullah get going, they can be potent enough upfront. However, with New Zealand and West

Indies having better sides and the desired balance, one expects Afghanistan to bow out in the group stage. One would rather hope Afghanistan can cause a surprise and throw themselves in the hat. This is due to their performance in the 50-over World Cup last year.

PLAYERS TO WATCH OUT FOR

RASHID KHAN: The experienced young campaigner is a celebrated T20 legend across the globe. Rashid, with all his expertise, can lead by example. He will be massive in the middle overs. Afghans will need wickets from Rashid. He is their best man to deliver quality overs.

AFGHANISTAN'S SCHEDULE FOR THE T20 WORLD CUP

June 4, Afghanistan vs Uganda – Providence Stadium, Guyana (5:00 AM IST)

June 8, New Zealand vs Afghanistan – Providence Stadium, Guyana (5:00 AM IST)

June 14, Afghanistan vs PNG – Brian Lara Stadium, Tarouba, Trinidad (6:00 AM IST)

June 18, West Indies vs Afghanistan – Daren Sammy National Cricket Stadium, Gros Islet, St Lucia (6:00 AM IST) ■

ICC T20 WORLD CUP 2024: BANGLADESH NEED ANSWERS AFTER BEING HANDED REALITY CHECK

The Bangladesh cricket team suffered a new low when they lost the recently concluded T20 series against Associate Nation USA. Ahead of the ICC T20 World Cup to be held in the Caribbean and USA, Bangladesh's defeat on US soil...



BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

The Bangladesh cricket team suffered a new low when they lost the recently concluded T20 series against Associate Nation USA. Ahead of the ICC T20 World Cup to be held in the Caribbean and USA, Bangladesh's defeat on US soil highlighted the shortcomings. Ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan said it's a wake-up call for his men as they need to take more responsibility as a unit. For skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto, he needs both Shakib and fellow experienced campaigner Mahmudullah to provide their impetus with the World Cup in focus. Bangladesh have issues and they need to fix them ahead of their opener against Sri Lanka. The batting order needs fluidity, being starved of momentum. Death bowling is another problem for the Tigers as they seek ideas to curb down their mistakes and in offerings. Bangladesh cannot just walk in and expect miracles. They have been underwhelming and one hopes to see a better performance in the coming month.

Bangladesh are placed in Group D with South Africa, Sri Lanka, Netherlands and Nepal. If Bangladesh spring up and join the party, they could make it through. However, if the body language remains abysmal, Shanto's men can even finish below tricky opponents Netherlands. So it's that sort of a scenario

for Bangladesh. The Asian side has never made it to the knockouts across eight editions. They have either faltered in the group stage or at the Super 8, Super 10 or Super 12 stages.

A LOOK AT BANGLADESH'S 15-MEMBER SQUAD

SQUAD: Najmul Hossain Shanto (c), Taskin Ahmed, Litton Das, Soumya Sarkar, Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Shakib Al Hasan, Towhid Hridoy, Mahmud Ullah Riyad, Jaker Ali Anik, Tanvir Islam, Mahedi Hasan, Rishad Hossain, Mustafizur Rahman, Shoriful Islam, Tanzim Hasan Sakib.

TRAVELLING RESERVES: Afif Hossain, Hasan Mahmud.

SHAKIB AL HASAN IS BANGLADESH'S TRUMP CARD

Shakib Al Hasan is Bangladesh's ace all-rounder. The left-arm spinner is one of the finest all-rounders to play across formats. Shakib remains the highest wicket-taker in T20 World Cups and is eyeing to become the first bowler to clock 50 scalps. He is the second-highest wicket-taker in T20Is (most among spinners). He is the 5th-highest wicket-taker in T20 cricket. Shakib also remains a vital cog with the bat, and his presence in the middle order is massive for Bangladesh.





STRENGTHS OF THE BANGLADESH CRICKET TEAM

Mustafizur Rahman and Taskin Ahmed remain two major strengths for the Tigers in the bowling department. Mustafizur claimed a six-wicket haul against the USA in the final match. Before that, he did well for Chennai Super Kings in the 2024 IPL season. He is the in-form player. The left-arm pacer has collected 320 T20 scalps at 27.76 (ER: 6.79). As per ESPNcricinfo, 68 of Mustafizur's wickets have come in the powerplay overs. He will be influential at the death, having claimed 165 wickets in the last four overs at 16.82.

Taskin's comeback will be a massive boost. He owns 183 scalps at 23.27 in T20s. Taskin brings plenty to the table and is also effective at the death, picking 57 wickets at 19.89. Bangladesh will need to use these two bowlers largely in the final 4-5 overs as they remain key performers in this phase.

Shoriful Islam has 131 scalps at 23.05. The experienced pacer can be utilized alongside Taskin and Mustafizur. The right-arm pacer has done a decent job in the power play, picking up 41 scalps in this phase. Tanzim Hasan Sakib is learning the trades and looks decent. He seems to be an option from the bench. He did an able job with the ball against the USA.

Shakib Rishad Hossain and Mahedi Hasan are the key spinners. Shakib with his intelligence will lead the attack. Shakib will be influential in overs 7 to 16. His economy rate of 6.40 between these overs show his

quality. He owns 220 wickets. 21-year-old Rishad has been a regular feature of late for Bangladesh. He has been impressive, chipping in with wickets and decent performances overall. Mahedi owns 124 scalps with an economy rate of 6.92. He averages 26.20. He lends enough support from the bench.

Soumya Sarkar is one of Bangladesh's main assets with the bat upfront. A lot depends on how he goes about his business. Soumya has close to 4000 T20 runs. He will look to bat through and look for support from elsewhere. Skipper Shanto needs to find his form. At number three, he remains a vital figure. With over 3200 runs in T20s, Shanto has to lead his side from the front.

In the middle order, Towhid Hridoy can be influential. He has scored 2197 runs at an average of over 31. Hridoy holds the bet in his side's middle order at number four. Shakib and Mahmudullah are the main assets in that middle order. With close to 5900 runs, Mahmudullah at number six can handle the need for acceleration. In the last four overs, he owns close to 1500 runs and strikes at 162-plus. Shakib is an able player of spin. His impact in the middle overs will be massive. The southpaw has 7267 T20 runs under his belt.

Jaker Ali has the right potential as a pinch-hitter. He can rotate alongside Mahmudullah at six or seven, depending on the match scenario.

WEAKNESSES OF THE BANGLADESH



CRICKET TEAM

Bangladesh can struggle upfront. Soumya is good, but his T20 strike rate is a worry. One between Tanzid Hasan and Litton Das will open alongside Soumya. The latter, in particular, has struggled to find any rhythm in his game of late. Tanzid is a decent pick but a strike rate of 122 is sub-par as an opener. So, getting to those fast starts will be an issue for the Tigers.

Shanto, too, is struggling for form. In his last 15 T20I innings, he owns a solitary fifty. He owns six single-digit scores in these last 15 innings. He struggled for consistency in the home series against Zimbabwe earlier this month. Shakib, too, has struggled to find any rhythm with the bat. He cannot afford to continue in the same vein as the Tigers are heavily reliant on his services.

Consistency is a factor that is plaguing the Bangladesh batting unit. Players are not playing according to the situation. Often, when big hits are required, the inability kicks in. On other occasions, players are forcing issues when proper running between the wickets is the need of the hour. Bangladesh batters haven't quite cracked the T20 code. They just don't have that tempo to be dominating. Also, the over-batting strike rate of the players is way low as per the modern-day demands. As a bowling unit, Bangladesh look fine, but they have to stick to the plans and execute them.

AUTHOR'S VIEW: BANGLA TIGERS WILL FAIL TO ROAR

Bangladesh are an inconsistent side. The likes of South Africa and Sri Lanka are the favourites to progress from the group. Bangladesh lack the bite with the bat. One doesn't see them in the game if the target is 200 or 220-plus. Similarly, on slow surfaces, Bangladesh can be found wanting. Lack of form, poor strike rates, no desired tempo, and a sloppy fielding unit, the Tigers could go home quickly without roar.

PLAYERS TO WATCH OUT FOR

Mustafizur Rahman: The bright spot in this Bangladesh set-up, Mustafizur can put in a shift and lead by example. He will be keen to deliver the goods. His slower balls, cutters, and yorkers make him a bowler with a lot of variety and panache. That six-fer against the USA will pump him up.

BANGLADESH'S SCHEDULE FOR THE T20 WORLD CUP

June 8, Sri Lanka vs Bangladesh – Grand Prairie Stadium, Dallas (6:00 AM IST)

June 10, South Africa vs Bangladesh – Nassau County International Cricket Stadium, New York (8:00 PM IST)

June 13, Bangladesh vs Netherlands – Arnos Vale Ground, Kingstown, St Vincent (8:00 PM IST)

June 17, Bangladesh vs Nepal – Arnos Vale Ground, Kingstown, St Vincent (5:00 AM IST) ■

FOUR SEMI-FINAL PICKS FOR ICC T20 WORLD CUP 2024

The excitement surrounding the 2024 ICC Men's T20 World Cup is palpable as cricketing nations worldwide prepare for the much-anticipated event. Co-hosted by the West Indies and the United States, this edition, scheduled from June 1 to 29, 2024...

BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

The excitement surrounding the 2024 ICC Men's T20 World Cup is palpable as cricketing nations worldwide prepare for the much-anticipated event. Co-hosted by the West Indies and the United States, this edition, scheduled from June 1 to 29, 2024, holds particular significance as it marks the first time matches will be played in the USA in ICC World Cup

history. With defending champions England eager to defend their title, anticipation is at an all-time high for what promises to be a historic tournament. Featuring a record 20 teams, the competition is poised to deliver unparalleled thrills and drama as teams vie for supremacy in the shortest format of the game. Amidst the excitement, four teams emerge as frontrunners for potential semi-final berths, each brimming with talent and resolve to leave an indelible mark on the global cricketing landscape.



1. INDIA:

India, with its storied history in ICC tournaments, emerges as a formidable force in the 2024 T20 World Cup. Under the seasoned leadership of Rohit Sharma, the team presents a potent mix of youth and experience. Surprise inclusions like Rishabh Pant and Sanju Samson inject freshness and unpredictability into the squad. Despite enduring a title drought since their 2013 triumph and falling short in the 2023 World Cup finals, India's track record and talent pool position them as perennial contenders. With a favourable fixture list, India holds a strategic advantage, further bolstering their campaign. As they embark on their quest for glory, the weight of expectations and the hunger for redemption fuel India's determination to reclaim their ICC crown. With a balanced lineup and a steely resolve, they are poised to make a strong push for the semi-finals and beyond, reaffirming their status as cricketing powerhouses on the global stage.



2. ENGLAND:

England, as the reigning champions, radiate confidence heading into the 2024 T20 World Cup. Under the leadership of Jos Buttler, they showcase a rejuvenated side brimming with youthful vigour. Their squad boasts an infusion of promising talents, with players like Phil Salt and Will Jacks adding dynamism to their lineup. A revamped bowling attack signals England's intent, with an emphasis on versatility and adaptability. The team's abundance of all-rounders further strengthens their depth, providing tactical flexibility in all facets of the game. With a winning mentality ingrained in their approach, England stands as a formidable contender for a semi-final berth. Their blend of experience and fresh talent, coupled with a hunger to defend their title, positions them as a force to be reckoned with in the quest for T20 supremacy. As they embark on their title defence, England's resolve and resilience will be critical as they aim to extend their dominance on the global stage.



3. SOUTH AFRICA:

South Africa arrives at the 2024 T20 World Cup with renewed determination, having shed the infamous 'chokers' tag and showcased their potential by reaching the semi-finals in the previous edition. Led by the dynamic Aiden Markram, who brings both leadership and success from his domestic endeavours, the team exudes confidence and hunger for redemption. With a talented squad at their disposal, South Africa possesses the firepower to compete with the best on the global stage. Motivated by past disappointments, they are driven to make amends and carve out a path to success in the tournament. As they set their sights on securing a semi-final spot, South Africa's resolve and resilience will be put to the test, but their unwavering determination suggests they are ready to rise to the occasion and assert their presence among the elite in T20 cricket.



4. WEST INDIES:

The West Indies, though absent from recent ICC tournaments, emerge as formidable contenders in their home country for the 2024 T20 World Cup. Under the leadership of Rovman Powell, they harbour a deep desire to reclaim their former glory after disappointingly missing out on the last two ICC tournaments. Bolstered by a rejuvenated core, the team exudes determination and hunger to make their mark on the global stage once again. The support of the home crowd further amplifies their resolve, creating an electrifying atmosphere that fuels their competitive spirit. With a potent blend of experience and youthful exuberance, the West Indies pose a significant challenge to their opponents and cannot be overlooked as dark horses in the tournament. As they strive to reignite the passion and flair synonymous with West Indian cricket, they stand poised to surprise and inspire, reaffirming their status as a force to be reckoned with in T20 cricket.

As the cricketing world eagerly awaits the commencement of the tournament, these four teams emerge as frontrunners for semi-final berths, each fueled by their aspirations of T20 glory. With thrilling encounters and fierce competition on the horizon, fans can anticipate a spectacle of cricketing excellence

as these teams showcase their skills and determination on the global stage. As the battle intensifies and the stakes rise, the quest for a place in the coveted semi-finals promises to deliver unforgettable moments and highlight the sheer brilliance of T20 cricket at its finest.

ICC T20 WORLD CUP 2024: KEY ANALYSIS OF THE LESSER-KNOWN TEAMS

The 2024 edition of the T20 World Cup features an expanded 20 teams from 16 in 2022. For the first time, Canada and Uganda qualified for the men's T20 World Cup. Meanwhile, the United States...

BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

The 2024 edition of the T20 World Cup features an expanded 20 teams from 16 in 2022. For the first time, Canada and Uganda qualified for the men's T20 World Cup. Meanwhile, the United States is participating for the first time as a co-host.

Namibia and Uganda qualified at the expense of Zimbabwe via the Africa Qualifiers. From Asia, Nepal and Oman made the cut. Canada made it through after the Americas Qualifier. Papua New Guinea made it from the East Asia-Pacific Qualifier. Ireland and Scotland came via the Europe Qualifier. The likes of Afghanistan and Bangladesh qualified on the basis of ICC Men's T20I Team Rankings.

India, Australia, South Africa, England, Sri Lanka, New Zealand, Pakistan and the Netherlands made entry after being the top 8 teams from the previous tournament. Lastly, USA and West Indies entered

as hosts.

Here we analyse the lesser-known teams ahead of the T20 World Cup 2024.

IRELAND

Ireland are playing in their 8th successive T20 World Cup. The Irish have several key performers in the ranks. Paul Stirling leads the side. Alongside Andrew Balbirnie and Lorcan Tucker, it's a strong front three. Harry Tector, Curtis Campher and George Dockrell make up a settled middle order. Ireland also have quality bowlers like Craig Young, Mark Adair and Barry McCarthy. The presence of all-rounders makes things interesting. Ireland have a reasonable bench.

SQUAD OF IRELAND:

Paul Stirling (c), Mark Adair, Ross Adair, Andrew Balbirnie, Curtis Campher, Gareth Delany, George Dockrell, Graham Hume, Josh Little, Barry McCarthy, Neil Rock, Harry Tector, Lorcan Tucker, Ben White, Craig Young



KEY PLAYERS:

Adair will lead the bowling for Ireland. An experienced player, he has 119 T20I scalps at 19.33 from 83 matches. Ireland are placed in Group A alongside India, Pakistan, USA and Canada.

SCOTLAND

Scotland won all of their six matches at the Europe Regional Qualifier. This is the sixth time Scotland would be featuring in the global T20 tournament. In the Qualifier, skipper Richie Berrington led from the front, scoring 248 runs at 62. Bradley Currie was superb with the ball, taking 12 scalps.

SQUAD OF SCOTLAND:

Richie Berrington (c), Matthew Cross, Brad Currie, Chris Greaves, Oli Hairs, Jack Jarvis, Michael Jones, Michael Leask, Brandon McMullen, George Munsey, Safyaan Sharif, Chris Sole, Charlie Tear, Mark Watt, Brad Wheal.

KEY PLAYERS:

With over 2000 T20I runs, Berrington is Scotland's

key asset. He averages 31-plus. Overall, the 37-year-old owns 2600-plus T20 runs. Scotland are placed in Group D alongside England, Australia, Namibia and Oman.

NETHERLANDS

The Netherlands are set to play in their sixth edition and fifth in succession. They reached the Super 12 stage in 2022 and finished 4th in their pool. They stunned South Africa in the Super 12 stage. Scott Edwards leads the Dutch side in the 2024 edition. It has quality performers like Bas de Leede, Paul van Meekeren and Logan van Beek to name a few. The side will look up to top scorer Max O'Dowd for the runs. Meekeren holds the key with the ball.

SQUAD OF NETHERLANDS:

Scott Edwards (c), Aryan Dutt, Bas de Leede, Kyle Klein, Logan van Beek, Max O'Dowd, Michael Levitt, Paul van Meekeren, Ryan Klein, Saqib Zulfiqar, Sybrand Engelbrecht, Teja Nidamanuru, Tim Pringle, Vikram Singh, Viv Kingma, Wesley Barresi.

Travelling reserve: Ryan Klein.



Key players: Pacer Meekeren will want to be impactful with the ball. He owns 69 T20I scalps and is the top wicket-taker for the Dutch. He is also closing in on 100 T20 scalps. Netherlands are in Group D alongside Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, South Africa and Nepal.

USA

The USA are one of the exciting teams to feature. Playing in their first tournament, there will be a lot of excitement and hunger. USA showed they are a top side after stunning Bangladesh in the recently concluded bilateral series at home. The USA have Corey Anderson in the ranks. He earlier played for New Zealand. The team is being led by Monank Patel.

SQUAD OF USA:

Monank Patel (c), Aaron Jones, Andries Gous, Corey Anderson, Ali Khan, Harmeet Singh, Jessy Singh, Milind Kumar, Nisarg Patel, Nitish Kumar, Noshtush

Kenjige, Saurabh Nethralvakar, Shadley Van Schalkwyk, Steven Taylor, Shayan Jahangir. Reserve Players: Gajanand Singh, Juanoy Drysdale, Yasir Mohammad.

Key players: Corey Anderson is the natural attraction of this side. The 33-year-old owns over 3000 T20 runs. He played 31 T20Is for NZ and scored 485 runs. He has played five matches for the USA. USA are placed in Group A alongside India, Pakistan, Ireland and Canada.

NAMIBIA

Namibia became the first team from the Africa Region Qualifier to book a spot at the 2024 T20 World Cup. Namibia will play in their third T20 World Cup (also 2021 and 2022). Nikolaas Davin was the star of the show in the Africa Region Qualifier, scoring 241 runs from six matches.



SQUAD OF NAMIBIA:

Gerhard Erasmus (c), Zane Green, Michael Van Lingen, Dylan Leicher, Ruben Trumpelmann, Jack Brassell, Ben Shikongo, Tangeni Lungameni, Niko Davin, JJ Smit, Jan Frylinck, JP Kotze, David Wiese, Bernard Scholtz, Malan Kruger, PD Blignaut

Key players: 39-year-old David Wiese is a massive figure. He played for South Africa earlier and made his presence felt across global T20 leagues. He has scored over 4200 T20 runs and owns 300-plus wickets. Namibia are placed in Group D alongside England, Australia, Scotland and Oman.

UGANDA

Uganda joined Namibia in qualifying for the 2024 men's T20 World Cup after they beat Rwanda in the last round of matches in the Africa Region Qualifier. Alpesh Ravilal Ramjani was a key figure for Uganda, claiming 12 wickets in the tournament.

SQUAD OF UGANDA:

Brian Masaba (c), Simon Ssesazi, Roger Mukasa, Cosmas Kyewuta, Dinesh Nakrani, Fred Achelam, Kenneth Waiswa, Alpesh Ramjani, Frank Nsubuga, Henry Ssenyondo, Bilal Hassun, Robinson Obuya, Riazat Ali Shah, Juma Miyaji, Ronak Patel. Travelling Reserves: Innocent Mwebaze, Ronald Lutaaya.

Key players: 32-year-old Dinesh Maganiai Nakrani will be influential. He took nine wickets in the Qualifiers and has claimed 67 scalps in T20Is for Uganda. Uganda are in Group C with New Zealand, the West Indies, Afghanistan and PNG.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

PNG are playing in their second T20 World Cup (also in 2021). They won all of their six matches in the East Asia-Pacific Qualifier to gain qualification this time. 34-year-old Tony Ura and 36-year-old Asadollah Vala shone with 182 and 181 runs, respectively. Youngster



John Kariko was impressive with 10 scalps.

SQUAD OF PNG:

Assadollah Vala (c), Alei Nao, Chad Soper, CJ Amini, Hila Vare, Hiri Hiri, Jack Gardner, John Kariko, Kabua Vagi Morea, Kipling Doriga, Lega Siaka, Norman Vanua, Sema Kamea, Sese Bau, Tony Ura

Key Players: Norman Vanua had a solid qualifying campaign, taking 10 scalps for his side. The 30-year-old owns 63 scalps for PNG in T20Is at 19.23. PNG are in Group C with New Zealand, the West Indies, Afghanistan and Uganda.

CANADA

Canada is set to play in its maiden T20 World Cup. In the Americas Qualifier, Canada finished top of the four-team table. They were level on points alongside Bermuda, but NRR separated the two. Aaron Johnson

was solid with the bat for Canada in the tournament.

SQUAD OF CANADA:

Saad Bin Zafar (c), Aaron Johnson, Ravinderpal Singh, Navneet Dhaliwal, Kaleem Sana, Dillon Heyliger, Jeremy Gordon, Nikhil Dutta, Pargat Singh, Nicholas Kirton, Rayyankhan Pathan, Junaid Siddiqui, Dilpreet Bajwa, Shreyas Movva, Rishiv Joshi.

Reserves: Tajinder Singh, Aaditya Varadharajan, Ammar Khalid, Jatinder Matharu, Parveen Kumar.

Key players: Kaleem Sana was magnificent for Canada in the Americas Qualifier. He claimed a stunning 15 scalps at just 4.60. He took three scalps in his side's final match. Canada are placed in Group A alongside India, Pakistan, Ireland and USA.

NEPAL

Nepal are set to play in just their second T20 World



Cup. The Himalayan outfit come into the tournament with an off-field issue over Sandeep Lamichhane and his visa. In the Asian Regional Qualifier, Nepal claimed three wins, one tie and a defeat.

SQUAD OF NEPAL:

Rohit Paudel (c), Aasif Sheikh, Anil Kumar Sah, Kushal Bhurtel, Kushal Malla, Dipendra Singh Airee, Lalit Rajbanshi, Karan KC, Gulshan Jha, Sompal Kami, Pratis GC, Sundeeep Jora, Abinash Bohara, Sagar Dhakal, Kamal Singh Airee

Key players: Kushal Bhurtel is Nepal's best bet. He shone in the Asian Regional Qualifier, scoring 185 runs from five matches. He owns over 1000 T20I runs for Nepal. Nepal are in in Group D alongside Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, South Africa and Netherlands.

OMAN

Oman have played two T20 World Cups before this (2016 and 2021). Oman finished the T20 World Cup Asia Qualifier as winners. They beat finalists Nepal via a Super Over after the game was tied.

SQUAD OF OMAN:

Aqib Ilyas (c), Zeeshan Maqsood, Kashyap Prajapati, Pratik Athavale, Ayaan Khan, Shoaib Khan, Mohammad Nadeem, Naseem Khushi, Mehran Khan, Bilal Khan, Rafiullah, Kaleemullah, Fayyaz Butt, Shakeel Ahmad, Khalid Kail. Reserves: Jatinder Singh, Samay Shrivastava, Sufyan Mehmood, Jay Odedra

Key players: 37-year-old Bilal Khan owns 106 T20I wickets for Oman. Overall, the pacer has 134 T20 wickets. He was the top wicket-taker in the Asian Regional Qualifier (11). Oman are placed in Group D alongside England, Australia, Scotland and Namibia. ■

7 INDIAN BOWLERS WITH MOST T20 WICKETS AS YUZVENDRA CHAHAL COMPLETES 350 WICKETS

Rajasthan Royals spinner Yuzvendra Chahal claimed one wicket in his side's loss against Delhi Capitals in Match 56 of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024 season on Tuesday. Chahal's 1/48 from four overs saw him become the first...





BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

Rajasthan Royals spinner Yuzvendra Chahal claimed one wicket in his side's loss against Delhi Capitals in Match 56 of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024 season on Tuesday. Chahal's 1/48 from four overs saw him become the first Indian bowler to pick 350 wickets in T20 cricket. Chahal, who is the IPL's leading wicket-taker, also boasts of the most T20I scalps for Team India. It was a massive feat for the right-arm wrist-spinner, now the 11th bowler in T20 history, to claim 350-plus scalps. Notably, he is also the 5th spinner to reach the milestone after Rashid Khan, Sunil Narine, Imran Tahir, and Shakib Al Hasan.

On Tuesday, DC scored a staggering 221/8 in 20 overs, riding on fifties from openers Jake Fraser-McGurk and Abishek Porel. For RR, R Ashwin claimed 3/24, his side's pick of the bowlers. In response, Sanju Samson fired for the Royals with a valiant 86, but it wasn't enough, as his side suffered a 20-run defeat. RR managed 201/8 in their 20 overs.

Here, we present Indian bowlers with the most T20 wickets.

YUZVENDRA CHAHAL (350 WICKETS)

As per ESPNcricinfo, Chahal now owns 350 wickets from 301 T20 matches at an average of 23.65. His economy rate is 7.70. Besides nine four-wicket hauls, the ace spinner owns two fifiers. 201 of his wickets have come in the IPL from 156 matches at 22.24. He is the only bowler with 200-plus IPL scalps. Chahal became



the second-highest wicket-taker for RR (62 scalps at 22.17). He is only behind Siddharth Trivedi (65). Chahal remains the highest wicket-taker for former side RCB in the IPL, claiming 139 wickets from 113 matches at 22.03. Chahal owns 96 wickets for India in T20Is at 25.09. He will next be seen in the ICC T20 World Cup 2024.

PIYUSH CHAWLA (310 WICKETS)

Piyush Chawla recently became the 2nd-highest wicket-taker in IPL history, surpassing Dwayne Bravo (183). In 293 T20 matches, the veteran spinner has 310 scalps under his belt at 24.77. His economy rate is 7.52. He has three four-wicket hauls in T20s. In the IPL, Chawla has raced to a total of 187 scalps from 190 matches at 27.01. The Mumbai Indians spinner has 31 wickets for the franchise. Earlier, he claimed 66 IPL scalps for KKR and 84 wickets for Punjab Kings.

RAVICHANDRAN ASHWIN (306 WICKETS)

Ravichandran Ashwin is next on the list with 306 wickets from 319 matches at 26.57. The veteran finger spinner owns an economy rate of 7.05. He has four four-wicket hauls. For the Indian cricket team, Ashwin has the fifth-highest number of wickets (72 at 23.22). His economy rate is 6.90. In the IPL, Ashwin owns a total of 176 scalps from 207 matches at 29.77 (ER: 7.10). For the Royals, Ashwin has claimed 31 wickets from 40 matches at 39.03. The right-arm off-spinner picked 20 scalps for DC, 25 scalps for PBKS, 10 scalps for RPS, and another 90 wickets for Chennai Super Kings in the IPL.

BHUVNESHWAR KUMAR (297 WICKETS)

Sunrisers Hyderabad pacer Bhuvneshwar Kumar is the leading wicket-taker among Indian pacers in T20s. He has claimed a total of 297 wickets at 24.97 from 281 games. The right-arm pacer has five four-wicket hauls and five five-wicket hauls. His economy rate is 7.28. Bhuvneshwar is also the highest wicket-taker among Indian pacers in the IPL, with 179 scalps at 26.78.



Notably, 155 of his wickets have come for SRH at 26.29. The remaining of his 24 scalps came for the now-defunct Pune Warriors. He is also the second Indian bowler with 90-plus scalps for Team India in T20Is (90 at 23.10).

AMIT MISHRA (285 WICKETS)

Amit Mishra owns a total of 285 wickets in T20s at 22.28. He has 2 five-wicket hauls and five four-wicket hauls. The veteran leg-spinner, who made his IPL debut in 2008, has a total of 174 scalps at 23.82. His economy rate is 7.37. Chawla currently represents Lucknow Super Giants and remains the top wicket-taker for the Delhi Capitals with 106 wickets. Mishra represented Team India in 10 T20Is, claiming 16 scalps at an average of 15.

JASPRIT BUMRAH (278 WICKETS)

Mumbai Indians stalwart Jasprit Bumrah is one of the best pacers in world cricket. Bumrah owns a total of 278 T20 scalps from 224 matches at 21.05. His

economy rate is 6.97. Bumrah has two four-wicket hauls and two fivers. 163 of his wickets have come in the IPL at 22.55 (ER: 7.28). He is currently the Purple Cap holder in the IPL 2024 season (18 scalps). For the Indian cricket team, the right-arm pacer has 74 scalps (3rd-highest) from 62 matches at 19.66. His economy rate is 6.55.

HARBHAJAN SINGH (235 WICKETS)

Former IPL and Team India ace Harbhajan Singh went on to finish his career with a tally of 235 wickets in T20 cricket at 26.35. His economy rate was 6.79. Harbhajan claimed three four-wicket hauls and a fiver. 150 of his T20 scalps came in the IPL from 163 matches at 26.86. Bhajji remains the most successful spinner for Mumbai Indians, with 127 wickets from 136 games at 26.65. Bhajji managed 23 scalps from 24 matches for CSK at 25.30. The premier off-spinner managed 25 scalps from Team India from 28 matches at 25.32. He won the inaugural ICC T20 World Cup 2007 for India. ■

BOWLERS WITH THE MOST IPL WICKETS AT A VENUE AS SUNIL NARINE MAKES HISTORY

Kolkata Knight Riders all-rounder Sunil Narine could be handed the Most Valuable Player of the Indian Premier League 2024 season. Such is his impact for the KKR team that there's hardly stopping the West Indian ace...





BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

Kolkata Knight Riders all-rounder Sunil Narine could be handed the Most Valuable Player of the Indian Premier League 2024 season. Such is his impact for the KKR team that there's hardly stopping the West Indian ace. In match 47 involving KKR versus Delhi Capitals at Eden Gardens, Narine bowled a solid four-over spell, claiming a wicket and conceding 24 runs. Narine stopped the flow of runs, and alongside fellow spinner Varun Chakravarthy, the duo turned things in KKR's favor. Narine made history with his wicket, becoming the most successful bowler at a venue in the IPL. He went past the long-standing record of former Mumbai Indians pacer Lasith Malinga.

DC, who chose to bat first against KKR, scored 153/9 in 20 overs. KKR did an excellent job keeping DC under the cosh on a suitable surface. Phil Salt and Narine led the foundation in response as KKR claimed a 7-wicket win. Shreyas Iyer played a captain's knock for KKR, who remain second in the 10-team table.

Here, we analyze the bowlers who have the most wickets at a venue in the IPL.

SUNIL NARINE (69 SCALPS AT

EDEN GARDENS)

KKR maestro Narine has graced the IPL since the 2012 season. One of the finest T20 spinners, Narine raced to 69 IPL wickets at KKR's home ground Eden Gardens. Narine got to 69 scalps from 58 matches at Eden Gardens, averaging 19.94. His economy rate is 6.32. He has three four-hers and a fifer at this venue. Against DC on Monday, Narine claimed 1/24 from his four overs. Overall, in the IPL, the right-arm mystery spinner owns 174 wickets from 171 matches at 25.57. His economy rate is 6.74. In the 2024 season, Narine has claimed 11 wickets from nine games at 22.45. His economy rate is a splendid 6.86.

LASITH MALINGA (68 WICKETS AT WANKHEDE)

Former Mumbai Indians legend Lasith Malinga left a lasting impression. One of the most successful pacers in the cash-rich league, Malinga was a champion performer and dictated the show for MI, helping them win laurels. The Sri Lankan pacer was solid at MI's home ground - Wankhede. In only 43 matches at the iconic stadium, Malinga scalped 68 wickets at just 17.33. His economy rate was 7. Malinga took three four-wicket hauls here. Overall, the right-arm pacer finished his IPL career with a total of 170 wickets from just 122 matches at 19.79. His economy rate was 7.14.

AMIT MISHRA (58 WICKETS AT ARUN JAITLEY STADIUM)



Veteran spinner Amit Mishra has gone on to play for several sides in the IPL. In 162 matches, the right-arm leg-spinner owns 174 scalps at 23.82. His economy rate is 7.37. The current Lucknow Super Giants spinner played most of his IPL matches for Delhi Capitals. Mishra owns 58 wickets at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in Delhi, averaging 19.39. His economy rate is 7.21. He has one four-wicket haul and a fifer here. Notably, 53 of his wickets at this venue have come for Delhi at 19.18. Overall, the veteran spinner collected 106 of his IPL wickets for DC at 23.65.

YUZVENDRA CHAHAL (52 WICKETS AT M CHINNASWAMY STADIUM)

IPL's first bowler to claim 200 scalps, Yuzvendra Chahal, spent most of his time at Royal Challengers Bengaluru. He moved to Rajasthan Royals before the IPL 2022 season and has enjoyed his time here. Chahal

was a crucial asset for RCB during his time there. In 42 matches at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru, Chahal owns a total of 52 scalps at 21.55. His economy rate is 7.72. He has two four-wicket hauls here. Notably, Chahal took 51 scalps here for RCB from 41 matches at the Chinnaswamy, averaging 21.43.

Overall, the ace wrist-spinner owns a total of 200 IPL wickets from 154 matches at 21.81 (ER: 7.75). He has six four-wicket hauls and a fifer. For RCB, Chahal collected 139 wickets at 22.03. 61 of his wickets have come for RR.

HARBHAJAN SINGH (49 WICKETS AT WANKHEDE)

Former IPL legend Harbhajan Singh played for two major successful teams - Mumbai Indians and Chennai Super Kings apart from spending a season at KKR. He



spent the majority of his IPL career at MI. Harbhajan had a solid impression at the Wankhede, picking up 49 wickets from 49 matches at 24.73. His economy rate is 7.08. All of his 49 scalps came for MI from 47 matches.

Overall, the off-spinner claimed 127 wickets for MI at 26.65. His economy rate was 6.95. Harbhajan finished his IPL career with 150 wickets from 163 matches at 26.86 (ER: 7.07).

JASPRIT BUMRAH (48 WICKETS AT WANKHEDE)

Mumbai Indians pacer Jasprit Bumrah has claimed 48 wickets at MI's home ground, averaging 24.60 from 40 matches. His economy rate is 7.52. Bumrah is eyeing to become the second bowler at this venue after Malinga to take 50-plus wickets.

Overall, Bumrah, who has represented MI in all of his IPL career, owns a total of 159 wickets from 129 matches at just 22.75. His economy rate is 7.33. In the IPL 2024 season, Bumrah has scalped 14 wickets so far.

R ASHWIN (48 WICKETS AT CHEPAUK)

Former CSK ace R Ashwin has played for several IPL sides, including RPS, Punjab Kings, Delhi Capitals, and now Rajasthan Royals. In 41 matches at the Chepauk (CSK's home), Ashwin owns 48 wickets at just 19.70. His economy rate of 6.08 is magnificent. For CSK at this venue, Ashwin managed 43 wickets from 37 matches at 19.53. His economy rate of 6.02 stands out.

Overall, the right-arm finger spinner has claimed 173 scalps from 205 matches at 29.94. In IPL 2024, the veteran spinner has managed just two wickets at 139.50. ■

TOP STORIES



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“You gave me incredible emotions. It's tough to realize that it's the last time I'm feeling this”

- Alizé Cornet on her retirement from tennis

CHELSEA HIRES ENZO MARESCA

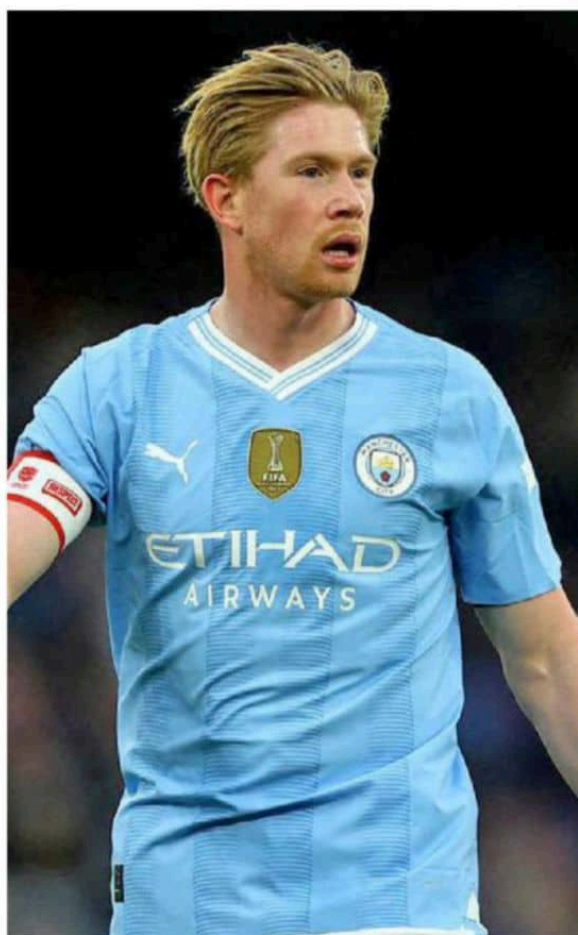
Enzo Maresca, a former assistant to Pep Guardiola, was hired as Chelsea head coach, just weeks after leading Leicester back to the Premier League. The 44-year-old Italian signed a five-year deal as the replacement for Mauricio Pochettino, who left by mutual consent at the end of the season, and is Chelsea's fourth permanent manager since the club came under American ownership midway through 2022. “We are delighted to welcome Enzo to Chelsea. He has proven himself to be an excellent coach capable of delivering impressive results with an exciting and identifiable style,” Chelsea co-sporting directors Laurence Stewart and Paul Winstanley said. Maresca is four years into a coaching career that has included two spells at Manchester City.



“

“If it's the last time that I played here. I am at peace with myself”

- Rafael Nadal after losing to Alexander Zverev in French Open's first round



DE BRUYNE OPEN TO LUCRATIVE SAUDI ARABIA MOVE

Kevin De Bruyne is talking with his family about possibly moving to Saudi Arabia as a free agent next year, the Manchester City playmaker said. The Belgium star will have just turned 34 and completed 10 seasons at the English Premier League champion when his contract expires next June. “You’re talking about incredible sums of money during what might well be the twilight of my career,” De Bruyne told Belgian daily Het Laatste Nieuws when asked if he would consider moving to a Saudi club. “We are increasingly having such conversations as a family,” he said, noting that his 8-year-old son “only knows England. He is also asking how long I will play for City.” Saudi officials have said they want to focus on signing more young players at the peak of their careers, but an exception would surely be made for a generational talent like De Bruyne.

TRIAL FOR ALLEGEDLY CAUSING BODILY HARM BEGINS

German tennis player Alexander Zverev's trial for allegedly causing bodily harm to a woman began. The prosecution accuses Zverev of pushing his ex-partner against a wall and choking her during an argument in Berlin in May 2020. The trial comes after Zverev contested an earlier penalty order issued Oct. 2, including a requirement for Zverev to pay fines amounting to 450,000 euros (\$488,000). Penalty orders are used in Germany as a means of resolving some criminal cases without going to trial, if the suspect does not contest the order. Zverev has previously denied the allegations. The 27-year-old Zverev was a finalist at the U.S. Open in 2020, won the men's singles Olympic gold medal in 2021 and is fourth in the rankings. He won his second-round match at the French Open.



MBAPPÉ DECLARES 'IMMENSE PLEASURE' AT JOINING REAL MADRID

Kylian Mbappé spoke of his "immense pleasure" at finally joining Real Madrid and felt his time at Paris Saint-Germain came to a sad end. Madrid has reached a widely expected deal with the France star, bringing together a prolific scorer and a record 15-time Champions League winner. "Finally, it's official, I am going to be a Real Madrid player for the next five years. It's an immense pleasure, a dream coming true, a lot of emotions," Mbappé said. "I'm very, very happy (and) relieved, very proud to be joining a club where I've always dreamed of being." Mbappé's seven years at PSG came to a somewhat difficult end, and his final season started and ended amid tensions. Mbappe was dropped from the squad for the opening league game of the season and feared he would not be playing at all.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC WITHDRAWS FROM THE FRENCH OPEN

Novak Djokovic pulled out of the the French Open with an injured knee, an abrupt end to his title defense and to his current stay at No. 1 in the rankings. "I am really sad to announce that I have to withdraw from #rolandgarros," Djokovic posted on social media. "I played with my heart and gave my all in yesterday's match and unfortunately, due to a medial meniscus tear in my right knee, my team and I had to make a tough decision after careful consideration and consultation." The tournament said the extent of the injury was found during an MRI exam. Djokovic was hurt during a fourth-round victory against No. 23 Francisco Cerundolo on Monday that lasted five sets spread across more than 4 1/2 hours. It was his second consecutive five-setter, with his total time on court across the two exceeding 9 hours.



HOW PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN WON A RECORD 12th FRENCH LEAGUE TITLE

Paris Saint-Germain produced one of the most dominant seasons in the history of the French league despite clinching a record-extending 12th league title in an anticlimactic fashion. Second-place Monaco's 3-2 loss at Lyon gave PSG an unassailable 12-point...





BY STAFF WRITER

Paris Saint-Germain produced one of the most dominant seasons in the history of the French league despite clinching a record-extending 12th league title in an anticlimactic fashion. Second-place Monaco's 3-2 loss at Lyon gave PSG an unassailable 12-point lead with just three rounds left. PSG had wasted the chance to celebrate with its supporters at home by drawing 3-3 with struggling Le Havre. For the first time in years, PSG this season looked like a genuine team on the field instead of relying on flashes of brilliance from its superstars. But splashing the cash again played a big role in PSG's success. The Parisian club's budget this season is as large as the budgets of Marseille, Lyon and Monaco combined.

Here's how PSG did it:

LUIS CAMPOS

The dominant season bears the fingerprints of PSG strategic adviser Luis Campos, the mastermind who previously helped Monaco and Lille build winning squads as their sporting director. PSG lost the league title to Monaco in 2017 and Lille in 2021. Campos was sitting next to PSG president Nasser Al-Khelaifi to watch Saturday's game at Parc des Princes.

"I am very pleased with our professional and personal relationship. I would like to be at the club for many years with Luis Campos," PSG coach Luis Enrique said through a translator. "We talk about the present and the future on a daily basis."

Instead of signing superstars, PSG focused on adding more depth to the squad. In the past, PSG had more



stars but a weak bench, which became a problem when some key players got injured.

YOUNGER AND VERSATILE

In its transfer strategy, PSG ruthlessly rebuilt its squad by replacing declining stars with younger players. There was an emphasis on signing French players to remove any time needed to adapt to a new country. The club also targeted players who can operate in several positions, making it easier for the coach to rotate the team. At the back, PSG upgraded on Juan Bernat in the left back position by signing Lucas Hernandez and replaced veteran Sergio Ramos by signing center backs Milan Skriniar (a player in his prime) and Lucas Beraldo (a promising prospect). In midfield, PSG offloaded the disappointing Leandro Paredes and the underperforming Marco Verratti and Georginio Wijnaldum to sign Manuel Ugarte and Lee

Kang-in, and the more experienced Marco Asensio.

In attack, PSG opted to replace soccer greats Neymar and Messi with different types of players. The club hired French wingers Bradley Barcola and Ousmane Dembele, who provided more natural width whereas Neymar and Messi often drifted infield to combine in tight spaces. PSG also sent out on loan Hugo Ekitike to Eintracht Frankfurt while signing more physical center forwards in Goncalo Ramos and Randal Kolo Muani.

IMPROVED DEFENSE

PSG pipped Lens to the post by just a point last season but cruised to the title this season, thanks in large part to PSG's improving defense. Luis Enrique has turned PSG into a team harder to beat, conceding 0.93 goals per game compared to 1.05 last season. The new champion has lost only once in 31 games in the



league this year — compared to seven defeats last season. Having young, hungry forwards press high up the pitch helped protect the backline.

SUPPORTING CAST

PSG has scored slightly more goals per game than last season despite the departures of Neymar and Messi. Replacing Messi and Neymar was always going to be a difficult task, especially since they each had goals and assists in double digits, combining for 29 goals and 27 assists in the league last season. On paper, this put more pressure on star striker Kylian Mbappe to score goals. But a different approach helped PSG spread the goals and assists around with Ramos, Kolo Muani, Dembele, Barcola and Asensio combining for 27 goals and 22 assists. pppppThe midfielders also stepped up with Vitinha, Zaire-Emery and Lee combining for 11 goals and 10 assists.

NO SERIOUS RIVAL

It took time for the team to gel. PSG only won three of its first seven league games. But it then reached its cruising speed by winning eight straight league games, snatching the top spot in November. Monaco, Nice and Brest swapped the lead in the early rounds but couldn't match PSG's pace. PSG got a five-point lead at the halfway stage and extended it to 13 points over Brest in mid-February. In the end, what made PSG's title run so comfortable was the lack of persistent, credible challengers. Lens overachieved last season and didn't have a squad deep enough to compete both in the domestic league and the Champions League. Marseille and Lyon created problems of their own by changing managers and making some erratic signings. And Monaco was in a rebuilding phase and lacked a strong bench to really contend. ■

EMOTIONAL KLOPP BIDS FAREWELL TO LIVERPOOL

For the last time as Liverpool manager, Jurgen Klopp ran over to The Kop and delivered those repeated fist pumps that have been his signature during his transformational spell at Anfield...



BY STAFF WRITER

For the last time as Liverpool manager, Jurgen Klopp ran over to The Kop and delivered those repeated fist pumps that have been his signature during his transformational spell at Anfield. The Liverpool fans — many with tears in their eyes, just like some of the team's players — responded with a series of deafening roars, and then cheered Klopp as he did a circuit of the field.

Soon enough, he had disappeared out of view down the tunnel.

Gone, but never forgotten.

"I'm one of you now — I love you to bits," Klopp said among his last words as he addressed the crowd inside Anfield after his final game as Liverpool's manager, a 2-0 win over Wolverhampton on Sunday.

The match on the final day of the Premier League season doubled as a tribute to a German coach who led Liverpool to seven major trophies in his nearly nine years at Anfield and forged such a connection with the city that he has been compared to Bill Shankly — the club's legendary manager from 1959-74. No wonder Klopp looked emotional throughout an afternoon that Liverpool fans never wanted to come.

They lined the streets outside Anfield to welcome Klopp and his players, and then produced a paper mosaic of the word "JURGEN" in the stand opposite the dugouts as he emerged for the game.

"People are calling it The Last Dance. So let's dance," Klopp told Sky Sports just off the field before kickoff — and Liverpool obliged by strolling to one final victory for Klopp thanks to goals by Alexis Mac Allister and Jarell Quansah.

In some ways, it was business as usual for Klopp. He touched the "This is Anfield" sign in the tunnel on the way out to the pitch. He patrolled the middle of the field with his hands behind his back during the warmups, watching his own team — and then, with

that trademark glare, his opponents. He waved to fans behind the Liverpool dugout and tapped his heart just ahead of kickoff, before soaking in an emotionally charged rendition of the club's anthem, "You'll Never Walk Alone."

"This morning I woke up," Klopp said before the game, "and I was completely in game mode."

The farewell party really started after the final whistle, which he marked by embracing each member of his backroom staff and also Wolves manager Gary O'Neil. Liverpool captain Virgil van Dijk was in tears as he hugged Klopp near the center circle. The goodbye celebrations reached a crescendo as Klopp walked back out onto the field about 45 minutes after fulltime, wearing a red hoodie with the words "Thank You Luv" on the front and "I'll Never Walk Alone" on the back, to speak to the crowd one last time.

"It doesn't feel like an end. It feels like a start," Klopp said. "Because I saw a football team full of youth, full of creativity, full of desire."

"For a few weeks, I got too much attention and it feels really uncomfortable but this time I realize a lot of things. People told me I turned them from doubters into believers. That's not true. Believing is an act. You had to do it yourself. You did it. And nobody tells you now to stop believing."

With Liverpool right back Trent Alexander-Arnold now in tears, Klopp continued in his speech to the home fans: "Because we have you, the super power of world football."

He followed it up by chanting the name of Arne Slot, his likely successor.

"Arne Slot, la la la la," Klopp sang, to the tune of "Live is Life" by Austrian band Opus.

Liverpool finished third in the standings, nine points behind champion Manchester City, but at least won a trophy in Klopp's final season — the English League Cup. ■



NOVAK DJOKOVIC IS WORLD SPORTSMAN OF THE YEAR

Spain's first Women's World Cup triumph last year earned two more major plaudits at the Laureus World Sports Awards. Spain was chosen world team of the year for 2023 and midfielder Aitana...





BY STAFF WRITER

Spain's first Women's World Cup triumph last year earned two more major plaudits at the Laureus World Sports Awards on Monday. Spain was chosen world team of the year for 2023 and midfielder Aitana Bonmatí was picked as the best sportswoman.

Novak Djokovic received the sportsman of the year at the ceremony in Madrid, and American gymnast Simone Biles was given the comeback of the year award. Real Madrid forward Jude Bellingham earned the breakthrough prize, and Rafael Nadal won the sport for good award thanks to his foundation.

The Spanish women's World Cup breakthrough last August in New Zealand and Australia was tarnished in the following weeks because of an unwanted kiss of forward Jenni Hermoso by then-federation president Luis Rubiales after the final.

Laureus rewarded Spain as the first all-female team to win the team award. Before the World Cup, Bonmatí also helped Barcelona win a second Women's Champions League. She's the first female soccer player

to win the Laureus, after also receiving the Ballon d'Or and FIFA best player award.

"I want to thank all my teammates and the staff of my club and national team who have helped me a lot, and because of them I am here today," Bonmatí said.

Djokovic won his record-equalling fifth Laureus sportsman award — tying Roger Federer — after titles at the Australian Open, French Open and U.S. Open to reach a record 24 Grand Slam singles triumphs. NFL great Tom Brady presented Djokovic the award.

Biles made a record-breaking return to competition last year when she won four gold medals at the world championships, including a record sixth all-around title.

Nadal's foundation was rewarded for helping more than "1,000 vulnerable young people in Spain and India," according to Laureus. Teenager Arisa Trew won the action sportsperson award after becoming the first female skateboarder to land a 720 in competition.

Dutch wheelchair player Diede de Groot was selected as the sportsperson of the year with a disability after winning her third straight calendar tennis Grand Slam. ■

IS MAN CITY'S PREMIER LEAGUE DOMINANCE MAKING SOCCER'S MOST POPULAR LEAGUE BORING?

A fourth straight Premier League title for Manchester City marks an unprecedented period of dominance by one team in English soccer. A sixth in seven seasons underlines City's superiority in a league that is widely regarded as the most competitive...





BY STAFF WRITER

A fourth straight Premier League title for Manchester City marks an unprecedented period of dominance by one team in English soccer. A sixth in seven seasons underlines City's superiority in a league that is widely regarded as the most competitive — and certainly the most popular — in the sport. But does City's pre-eminence mean England's top division is in danger of becoming a turn-off for billions of fans around the world?

Pep Guardiola doesn't think so.

"It's boring? It's not. It is so difficult," the City manager said last week as his team closed in on another title.

City's run of success bares comparison to the likes of Germany where Bayern Munich had turned the Bundesliga into a one-horse race until its 11-year winning streak was ended by Bayer Leverkusen this season. Paris Saint-Germain has won 10 of the last 12 titles in France. Celtic has won all but one of the last 13 in Scotland.

None of those leagues are as popular as England's top flight and a lack of competition could be a reason why.

That is not City's problem. But if four in a row becomes five, six, seven, it could be a problem for all of England's leading clubs if it impacts on the revenues generated by the sale of global broadcast rights.

BORING?

The competition is what makes the Premier League such box office entertainment. And, for now, that competition is still evident. City needed to win its final game of the season against West Ham to finally hold off the challenge of Arsenal and clinch the title by two points. It was the third time Guardiola's team had been taken to the final day of the campaign before being crowned champion, having twice been pushed all the way by Liverpool. While the headline figure tells the story of City's near unbroken rule over the past seven seasons, the detail shows just how closely they were challenged, with Liverpool missing out by just one point in 2019 and 2022.

RAISING STANDARDS

Liverpool amassed totals of 97 and 92 points in those campaigns - more than any team that hasn't gone on to win the title. A total of 97 points would have been enough to win the title in all but two other Premier League seasons - in 2018 when City set a new record of 100 points and in 2022 when Liverpool ended its 30-year wait to be champion with 99. That is a measure of the heights City has had to reach to stay ahead of the rest. Even last season it had to overcome



an Arsenal team that spent 248 days at the top of the standings — the most for any team that hasn't gone on to win the title. This season Arsenal set a new club record for wins (28) and goals (91) in the Premier League — even surpassing its last title-winning team from 2004, which went an entire league campaign unbeaten.

“Before it was Liverpool to push our limits and now it was Arsenal,” Guardiola said. “We got the message from Mikel (Arteta) and his players. We have to make the right decisions in the next years because they are here to stay.”

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

City's dominance has certainly been underpinned by the fabulous wealth of its owners, having been bought by Abu Dhabi's ruling family in 2008. Since then some of the world's finest players have been lured to the Etihad Stadium at a cost of around \$2 billion along with arguably the greatest manager of his generation in Guardiola. Yet City is not alone in being able to spend big and its Premier League rivals are among the richest clubs in the world.

“They spend much more in the last five years than us. They should be there but they are not,” Guardiola said. Manchester United have consistently splashed out to try to keep pace with City — spending an estimated

\$1.5 billion since Guardiola's arrival in England in 2016. In that time Liverpool has set new transfer records for a defender in Virgil van Dijk and for a goalkeeper in Alisson. Chelsea has spent around \$1 billion over the past two seasons since being bought out by U.S. investor Todd Boehly and Clearlake Capital. Before that it was bankrolled by Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich. And Arsenal was able to sign Declan Rice for a then-British transfer fee of \$138 million last summer to strengthen its title challenge.

DREAM TEAM

United and Chelsea are examples of what can happen when money isn't spent well, with both teams assembling expensive squads that have drastically underperformed. It is now 11 years since United last won the title in 2013. In that time it has repeatedly missed out on Champions League qualification — this season included — and has never been closer than 12 points off the eventual winner. Chelsea, meanwhile, has endured a dramatic slump since winning the Champions League in 2021 and has failed to qualify in each of the past two seasons. City had already won two titles by the time Guardiola took over, but he has turned it into a super power. It is the perfect combination of spectacular wealth and managerial genius that has made City a near-unstoppable force in the Premier League.



AFTER GUARDIOLA

How City will manage the post-Guardiola era is unknown. United appeared totally unprepared for life without former manager Alex Ferguson and hasn't managed to win a title since he retired in 2013. Arsenal, too, took time to reorganize after Arsene Wenger and that was from a much lower base. Liverpool faces an uncertain future without Klopp. While City has the players, the money and the executives to give it the best chance of continuing to be a winning machine, Guardiola is the X-factor.

"If you put any other manager in that club, they don't win the league four times in a row. That's down to him and his team," Klopp said last week.

Guardiola's contract runs through the end of next season and he has been coy about his future.

"The reality is I'm closer to leaving than to staying," he said. "It's eight years, will be nine. Right now my feeling is I want to stay next season.

"I will stay and during the season we will talk when calm."

ERAS END

While City is the first English team to win four topflight titles, it is certainly not the first to enjoy a prolonged period of success. Liverpool dominated from

1973-90 — winning 11 titles, four European Cups and a host of other trophies. United ruled the Premier League era under Ferguson, with 13 titles from 93-2013. He also led the club to two Champions League trophies and United became the first club win a treble of the Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup. It is up to a rival to step up and end City's run.

THE RIVALS

With Klopp stepping down at Anfield and set to be replaced by Arne Slot, it is not known how Liverpool's rebuilt team will develop without the German, who looked like he might go out on a high with another title before the Merseyside club fell away late in the season. It would be a lot to expect Slot to immediately make Liverpool title contenders in his first season in charge after leaving Feyenoord in the Netherlands. United looks set for another period of upheaval following the arrival of new co-owner Jim Ratcliffe who is overhauling the club's soccer operations. Erik ten Hag's position has been in question for much of the season and even winning next week's FA Cup final against City might not be enough to save him after United recorded its lowest Premier League finish ever — eighth.

Arsenal looks like being the main contender for a third year running and if Arteta can strengthen his squad with a prolific striker, it could prove the difference next time around. ■

8 WATCHES OWNED BY F1 GREAT MICHAEL SCHUMACHER FETCH MORE THAN \$4 MILLION

Eight watches belonging to auto racing icon Michael Schumacher sold for nearly 4 million Swiss francs (\$4.4 million) at a Geneva auction. The top piece in the sale, organized by Schumacher's family, was a watch given to the German racing superstar by former...





BY STAFF WRITER

Eight watches belonging to auto racing icon Michael Schumacher sold for nearly 4 million Swiss francs (\$4.4 million) at a Geneva auction.

The top piece in the sale, organized by Schumacher's family, was a watch given to the German racing superstar by former Ferrari CEO Jean Todt as a Christmas present in 2004. The hammer came down at a price of 1.2 million francs, or 1.5 million including the buyer's commission.

That was well within the pre-sale estimate range of 1-2 million francs.

The custom-made platinum timepiece from F.P. Journe, the Vagabondage 1, features 18-carat white gold, a red watch face and images of a Ferrari logo, Schumacher's racing helmet and a "7" — to honor his seven World Championship victories.

Remi Guillemin, head of watches for Europe and the Americas for auction house Christie's, declined to identify the buyer, but said that five watches in the Ruthenium collection — a boxed set — were purchased

by the same buyer.

While most of the eight watches sold within the pre-sale estimates, an Audemars Piguet featuring a Ferrari prancing horse emblem, sold for a hammer price of 330,000 francs — well above the top of the expected range at 250,000.

The sale of Schumacher watches, which garnered a total of more than 3.1 million francs at the hammer price, was timed for the 30th anniversary of his first Formula One Drivers Championship win in 1994.

The watches, which were taken to New York and Taipei for showings before the sale, were part of a larger auction of luxury timepieces to go under the hammer at Christie's in Geneva.

Schumacher, who retired from F1 in 2012, shares the record for most F1 titles with British driver Lewis Hamilton. In December of the following year, Schumacher fell while skiing in the French Alpine resort of Meribel and suffered a near-fatal brain injury.

Since being transferred from the hospital in September 2014, he continues to be cared for privately at a family home in Switzerland. ■

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