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CRICKET

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QATAR MASTERS CHESS

Carlsen bounces back with win to stay in title hunt

World No 3 Nakamura drew with 28th-ranked Vokhidov

By Sports Reporter
Doha

World No 1 Magnus Carlsen bounced back from his defeat in the second round as he outplayed India's Muthaiah A L at the Qatar Masters Open Chess Championship yesterday. The Norwegian, who had confessed he was "completely crushed" by 327-point-lower-rated Alisher Sulaymurov of Kazakhstan, was back in form in the third round. He had blamed his failure to concentrate on his opponent wearing a watch in contravention of the usual anti-cheating rules. Yesterday, the players were banned from wearing watches at the Lusail Multipurpose Hall and Carlsen, a winner of Qatar Masters in its previous edition held in 2015, was back to his best. The 2839-elo rated star, wrapped up his win after 53 moves playing with white pieces against Muthaiah, who has 2470 rating points.

Meanwhile, American Hikaru Nakamura, ranked third in the world, drew with Uzbek Shamsiddin Vokhidov, ranked 28th in the tournament. The result dropped Nakamura to sixth place in the tournament's points table.

Nakamura said that it was still early to predict the tournament's winner, with six rounds remaining. "My main goal is to participate and winning the title is a top priority for me," Nakamura said. Nakamura also shared his delight in participating in the tournament, his second time in Qatar after the 2016 World Championship.

Meanwhile, World No 7 GM Anish Giri also played out a draw against his 17-year-old Indian opponent Aditya Mittal, ranked 30th. Mittal managed to create slight pressure with the black pieces, both in the clock and the position. But Giri held solid to draw the game.

GMs S L Narayanan and Arjun Erigaisi are the only two Indians with a perfect 3/3 points. Narayanan won a very nice game with the white pieces against 'Carlsen slayer' Sulaymurov, while Erigaisi took down GM Vugar Rasulov with the black pieces. Erigaisi, expressed his satisfaction with his performance, and said he is hoping to continue his winning streak in the upcoming six rounds.

The 17-year old Javokhir Sindarov of Uzbekistan also has a perfect score in the tournament after he defeated US GM Gregory Kaidanov for his third win. Kazakh Rinat Jomabiev also secured his third point by defeating German Robert Baskin, ranked 72nd to jump to the fourth spot in the points table. Dutchman Robby Kevlishvili, who beat Khazakh Jakhongir Vakhidov in another contest between GMs, completed the top five at the conclusion



Norway's Magnus Carlsen beat India's Muthaiah A L in third round of the Qatar Masters Open Chess Championship at the Lusail Multipurpose Hall yesterday.



Indian GM Arjun Erigaisi took down GM Vugar Rasulov of Azerbaijan to top the points table.

of three rounds. Nakamura is sixth, while the five-time world champion Carlsen is down at 21st spot following Thursday's stunning loss.

Qatar's sole competitor in the main event, International Master Husain Aziz, yesterday achieved his first victory in the tournament by defeating India's Aayush Bhattacherjee, ranked 77th in the tournament.

Meanwhile, in the Qatar Masters B Champi-

onship, 14-year-old Erfan Mohamad Firdaus of Qatar clinched his first win yesterday. He defeated India's Nikhilesh Karthick. Qatar's Fahad al-Mansouri (beat Kuwait's Nasser al-Subaie), Kholoud al-Khelaifi (beat compatriot Ahmed Ali al-Khanji), Layan al-Qassabi (beat Qatar's Asma al-Hammadi) and Hammad al-Kuwari (beat India's Sendhil Parmesh) were also among the winners on Day 3.

FOCUS

Cricket approved by IOC for 2028 Los Angeles Olympics



International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach gestures as he speaks during a news conference, ahead of the 141st IOC Session in Mumbai yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP
Mumbai

Cricket's more than 100-year Olympic exile moved closer to ending after the sport was approved for inclusion at the 2028 Los Angeles Games by the International Olympic Committee's executive board yesterday.

IOC president Thomas Bach, speaking after the second day of an executive board meeting in Mumbai, said officials had accepted a proposal by LA organisers for Twenty20 cricket to be included as one of five new sports together with baseball/softball, flag football (non-contact American football), squash and lacrosse.

But the final choice of which sports are on the 2028 programme will be voted on Monday at the IOC session in Mumbai, one of the hotbeds of cricket, as India hosts the men's 50-over Cricket World Cup.

"For the IOC, it is a great opportunity to engage with new athlete and fan communities," said Bach. "We see the growing popularity of T20 cricket and we look forward to welcoming the world's best players to the US in 2028," he added.

Los Angeles chiefs have proposed a six-team event, in both men's and women's T20 cricket, with the United States set to field sides as the host nation. But no firm decision on the number of teams or how they are qualified will be taken unless and until cricket receives formal ratification on Monday.

Cricket last featured at the 1900 Paris Olympics, when a team from Britain beat a side representing France. The sport has made moves towards a return to the Games for more than a decade, with the encouragement of the Olympic movement. Adding cricket to the Olympic programme is an obvious move, financially speaking. It would tap into the lucrative south Asian market, attracting fans in countries such as India and Pakistan.

T20 cricket is the sport's shortest international format. The Indian Premier League, featuring cricket's global stars, has helped India become the unquestioned economic driving force of the sport, thanks to legions of fans and lucrative broadcasting deals in a nation where the game is almost a religion.

'WIN-WIN SITUATION'

Cricket, which originated in England, developed as a global sport via the growth of the British Empire, with its leading established nations including Australia, New Zealand, India and South Africa.

But Bach said were cricket to be included at the Olympic Games it would strengthen its appeal beyond the sport's traditional nations. "This is a win-win situation," he said. "This will give cricket an opportunity to grow beyond traditional territories and nations."

Bach added the proposed new sports were well-suited to what will be the first Summer Olympics staged in the United States since the 1996 Atlanta Games. "The choice of these five new sports is in line with the American sports culture and will showcase iconic American sports to the world, while bringing international sports to the United States," he said.

"These sports will make the Olympic Games LA28 unique."

Modern pentathlon, featuring obstacle racing rather than horse-riding, and weightlifting have also been restored to the programme.

IOC sports director Kit McConnell said the proposed schedule would see LA 2028 exceeding the IOC's previously announced limit of 10,500 athletes - a quota imposed to limit the host nation's costs in staging a Games.

McConnell added the IOC aimed to "limit the increase, but limit the impact on the existing sport".

Meanwhile, the status of boxing at the 2028 Games remains uncertain after the IOC stripped the International Boxing Association of its recognition following a dispute over how the sport is governed.

Boxing has been part of every Olympics since 1920 and will feature at next year's Paris Games.

But in June, the International Boxing Association was effectively expelled from the Olympic movement following a bitter dispute between Games chiefs and its Russian president, Umar Kremlev.

This following concerns over the credibility of IBA sanctioned tournaments as well as the boxing governing body's finances and governance.

"We want boxing on the programme," said Bach. "We have no problem, with boxing or boxers - we have a problem with the governing body."

Qatar edge Iraq in shootout at four-nation tournament



Qatar beat Iraq 6-5 on penalties after both the teams had played a goalless draw in regulation time at the Jordan four-nation friendly tournament in Amman yesterday. In the penalty shootout, Al Annabi goalkeeper Mishal Barshem was the star as he saved two shots. Hassan al-Haydos, Ahmed Suhail, Akram Afif, Sultan al-Breik, Jassim Jaber and Mustafa Meshal scored for Qatar in the shootout, with Ahmed Fathi and Ahmed Alaa missing. For Iraq, Dorsey, Ali Adnan, Ahmed Ali, Amir al-Ammari and Robin Sulaqa scored, while Ali al-Hammadi, Muhammad Ali and Bashar Resin were off target. Qatar next take on the winner of the contest between hosts Jordan and Iran in the final on Tuesday.

TENNIS

'Spiritual' Dimitrov to face Rublev in Shanghai semis

'I tried to not make the same mistakes today and I did really well'

AFP
Shanghai

Grigor Dimitrov said he was playing some of the best tennis in his career as he marched into the Shanghai Masters semi-finals yesterday and a clash with Andrey Rublev.

The 18th seed from Bulgaria did not face a single break point in defeating big-serving Nicolas Jarry of Chile 7-6 (7/2), 6-4 in their quarter-final. The 32-year-old Dimitrov, whose last ATP title was six years ago, faces Rublev in the last four after the Russian swept past France's Ugo Humbert 6-2, 6-3 in 90 minutes.

Today's other semi-final is between Poland's 16th seed Hubert Hurkacz and 26th-seeded American Sebastian Korda. Dimitrov defeated top seed Carlos Alcaraz in the last 16 and the draw has opened up, with Rublev the only player in the world's top 10 still left.

Asked if he was playing his best since 2017, when he won four titles including the season-ending ATP Finals, Dimitrov replied: "I think one of the best seasons, absolutely, no doubt about that."

A philosophical Dimitrov has been in China for a month, having also reached the semi-finals in Chengdu and quarter-finals at the China Open in Beijing. The extended time away has meant a lot of time on his own to think.

"I can definitely say that this trip for me has been not only special, but I think almost spiritual for me on so many different levels, on and off the court," he said.

"Throughout the amount of emotions that I've gone through in that month has been something I've never experienced in my life, and I feel like a big growth from it."

In front of the watching Roger Federer, who was back at the tournament he won twice for a fan event, fifth seed Rublev made fairly light work of 32nd seed Humbert. Rublev is two victories away from a second Masters title of the season, having clinched the Monte Carlo crown in April.

The 25-year-old is yet to drop a set in four matches in Shanghai but he is wary of the in-form Dimitrov, someone he describes as a friend. Rublev was irritated by spectators he said were more busy watching Federer in the stands than the match.

But the Russian was more enthusiastic about his dismissal of Humbert, who was always on the back foot and lost the last four games in a row as he tumbled out of the tournament with a whimper.

It was a measure of revenge for the efficient Rublev, having lost to the Frenchman in three sets in the China Open last 16 a fortnight ago. "I tried to analyse what I did



Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov hits a return against Chile's Nicolas Jarry during their quarter-final at the Shanghai Masters yesterday. (AFP)



China's Zheng Qinwen hits a return to Ukraine's Anhelina Kalinina during their quarter-final at the WTA Zhengzhou Open yesterday. (AFP)

wrong that match," he said. "I tried to not make the same mistakes today and I did really well. I am happy to win in straight sets."

QINWEN MAKES 'BIG STEP' TO ZHENGZHOU LAST FOUR

Zheng Qinwen called it "a big step" after advancing to her third semi-final of the year with a 6-3, 6-2 win over Ukrainian Anhelina

Kalinina at the Zhengzhou Open yesterday. The 21-year-old rising Chinese star is fresh off a statement summer during which she lifted a maiden WTA trophy and reached a first Grand Slam quarter-final at the US Open. Up next is a rematch with Jasmine Paolini, who lost to the world number 24 in the Palermo final in July. "It's been a long time I didn't

arrive to the semi-finals at a WTA 500 tournament so this is a big step for me again," said Zheng, who won Asian Games gold this month. "It was a tough match against Paolini in Palermo, I think she's really difficult to beat. She's a good fighter."

Facing Kalinina for the first time at tour level and third time overall, Zheng dropped just four points behind her first serve en route to grabbing the 41-minute opening set. A marathon third game in the second set saw Kalinina save six break points but she faltered on the seventh to hand Zheng a 2-1 advantage. That was all the home favourite needed to cruise to victory. Paolini defeated Germany's Laura Siegemund 6-0, 7-5 in one hour and 44 minutes to reach her second WTA semi-final of the year.

"I'm feeling good, I'm playing a good level and I'm very happy to be in the semi-finals," said Paolini, who knocked out sixth seed Caroline Garcia in the previous round and is competing at her highest ranking of 31.

Former French Open champion Barbora Krejčíková spent just 45 minutes on court before securing passage to the semi-finals when Lesia Tsurenko retired after dropping the first set 6-3.

The Ukrainian qualifier was suffering a back problem. Krejčíková will square off with eighth seed Daria Kasatkina for a place in the Zhengzhou final.

Kasatkina was handed a walk-over into the last four after the withdrawal of her Tunisian opponent Ons Jabeur, who pulled out of the tournament citing a knee injury. Jabeur will not be competing at her home tournament in Monastir and is in a race to be fit for the WTA Finals in Cancun at the end of this month.

MOTORSPORT

Espargaro clocks record Indonesia MotoGP lap, Bagnaia struggles

AFP
Pertamina Mandalika International Street Circuit, Indonesia

Aleix Espargaro produced a late flash of brilliance to set a lap record for the Indonesia MotoGP at yesterday's crash-marred second practice, in which championship leader Francesco Bagnaia finished outside the top 10.

The Aprilia rider coped with the hot and humid conditions to snatch a lap record of one minute 30.474secs from VR46-Ducati rider Marco Bezzecchi, who had broken the record himself despite an earlier crash a week after surgery for a broken collarbone.

The Spaniard's lap - which came before a crash - was nearly two-tenths of a second clear of teammate Maverick Vinales in second and Bezzecchi in third.

Jorge Martin, who sits second in the overall standings, was 0.400sec back in fifth but he outgunned his championship rival Bagnaia.

The championship leader never got going and the Italian finished more than a second back in 16th.

Martin's pace will be of concern to the reigning champion, with just three points separating them heading into today's sprint race and the main event

tomorrow. The second session was filled with crashes, with Augusto Fernandez and Brad Binder colliding just several laps in, while Jack Miller crashed twice.

In the first practice session, Martin secured the fastest time, again showing his pace over Bagnaia, who was 0.759sec back in sixth.

Marco Bezzecchi, third in the standings, crashed in the first session but still finished fifth, 0.741sec behind Martin.

The top 10 from practice are joined as usual by the fastest two riders from the first qualifying run today, to determine the first four rows of the grid for both Saturday's sprint race and Sunday's main event.

Indonesia is hosting the 15th of the 20 MotoGP races this season.

TOP 10 TIMES FROM THE SECOND PRACTICE SESSION

1. Aleix Espargaro (ESP/Aprilia) 1 min, 30.474sec, 2. Maverick Vinales (ESP/Aprilia) at 0.154, 3. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 0.170, 4. Brad Binder (SAF/Red Bull KTM) 0.288, 5. Jorge Martin (ESP/Pramac Ducati) 0.400, 6. Marc Marquez (ESP/Honda) 0.632, 7. Miguel Oliveira (POR/RNF) 0.725, 8. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Gresini) 0.733, 9. Jack Miller (AUS/Red Bull KTM) 0.742, 10. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 0.755.



Aprilia Racing's Spanish rider Aleix Espargaro crashes during the free practice session of the Indonesian MotoGP at Mandalika International Circuit in Kuta Mandalika, Central Lombok, yesterday. (AFP)

Spalletti defends decision to allow Tonali and Zaniolo to leave Italy squad

Italy manager Luciano Spalletti defended the decision to allow Sandro Tonali and Nicolò Zaniolo to leave their training camp after the players were told of their involvement in an investigation by Turin prosecutors. Italy's football federation (FIGC) said on Thursday the players were notified of the probe by prosecutors while at the national team's training centre in Coverciano, ahead of Euro 2024 qualifiers against Malta and England.

The FIGC did not specify what the investigation was about. Spalletti spoke to Sky Sports on Friday, and while he did not say who had taken the decision to allow the players to leave the camp, it is one that he supports. "It's not nice to say who decided, it's enough to say that it's the correct decision," Spalletti said. "We can't bring two guys who have been shocked like that to play a game. Now let's think about playing, we lose two champions but we remain a very strong team."

Reuters contacted Tonali's and Zaniolo's agents for comment on Thursday. The Italy manager, whose side take on Malta tomorrow, said it had been a testing time for the squad. "It was a difficult night, when you have to get results there is always anxiety, but this was a different night, with a lot of bitterness over what happened," he said. "The whole squad is close to Tonali and Zaniolo, we're very sorry for them. We will continue to be close to them even afterwards. For now, they have the spotlight on them. "We must try to help them defend themselves, but it's also right that justice takes its course and if irregularities have occurred, then it will be right to pay."

Turin prosecutors said on Wednesday they were investigating another Italian footballer, Nicolò Fagioli, for alleged illegal betting activities. Federico Chiesa has left the Italy squad after yesterday training session because of injury. The forward missed Juventus's last game with a muscle injury and the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) confirmed he will return to his club stronger, reach, weight. This will be an early night, I promise you." (Reuters)

FOOTBALL

Nagelsmann banks on experience as Germany's Euro 2024 reboot begins

AFP
Berlin

Julian Nagelsmann, the youngest Germany coach for almost a century, has turned to veterans as he hopes to rebuild the fallen giants nine months out from hosting Euro 2024.

Hansi Flick became the first coach in Germany history to be sacked in September, having overseen a run of five matches without a win after a second-straight group stage exit at the World Cup in Qatar.

Germany will take on the United States in Connecticut today evening German time and Mexico in Philadelphia early on Wednesday morning.

Stepping into the role in October, Nagelsmann said his selections would be guided by form, rather than reputation or potential.

Nagelsmann named World Cup winners Thomas Mueller and Mats Hummels, both 34, in the squad, the latter last played for Germany at the Euros in 2021.

With 12 members of the 26-man squad aged 30 or over, Nagelsmann - who himself is only contracted with the German FA until the end of next summer's tournament - has clearly gone with experience in

the hope of winning now. In leaving Hummels out of his Qatar World Cup squad in 2022 for 20-year-old centre-back Armel Bella-Kotchap, Flick said his decision was "not against Mats, but in favour of younger players".

Bella-Kotchap did not see a minute of action in Qatar, sitting on the bench as Germany crashed out. Nagelsmann on the other hand said Hummels was selected "due to his experience".

"He's also a good coach (and can) lead the other guys with his tactical understanding."

Even Nagelsmann's debutants have been picked with the present in mind. Alongside in-form midfielder Chris Fuehrich, 25, Nagelsmann picked journeyman striker Kevin Behrens, 32, and midfield enforcer Robert Andrich, 29.

The manager also stuck with Flick's decision to give the captain's armband to Barcelona midfielder Ilkay Gundogan, 32, rather than Joshua Kimmich, 28, who Nagelsmann made captain at Bayern Munich.

Jonas Hofmann, 31, who has impressed with four goals and four assists in seven league matches since moving from Borussia Moenchengladbach to Bayer Leverkusen in the summer, said age



Coach Julian Nagelsmann looks on during a training session of the German team in Foxborough, Massachusetts, yesterday. (AFP)

should not be a factor.

"For me, there's only good and better, not old or young. The best players should be on the pitch.

"Experience is good for a team and can

give a lot," Hofmann said. "But we can also learn something from the younger ones, be a little freer in our heads and more enthusiastic."

Normally accustomed to meticulous

control, German fans have seen their side become prone to lapses of concentration, throwing away good work with clumsy errors and making repeated mistakes. Gundogan, fresh from winning the treble with Manchester City last season, said experienced players bring "a little calm, a little patience".

"I know that when you're young, you might not have a feel for certain situations on the pitch, then sometimes you make decisions that aren't well thought out."

The reigning German player of the year warned of "the danger, if you are younger and have not been in these situations so often, that you will make the wrong decision".

Hosting the tournament next summer brings extra pressure, Nagelsmann told ESPN on Thursday.

"I feel a lot of responsibility because you have to be good," he said, adding victory would be the only way to revive the German public's passion for the national team, after almost a decade of sub-par performances.

"We have to win to get the special mood," Nagelsmann told ESPN. "It's always like that in football. When you win the game everything is good and well, when you lose, everything is shit."

FOCUS

Williamson leads New Zealand to win, suffers new injury worry

'It got a bit fat and colourful straight away. I'll have a scan tomorrow'



New Zealand's captain Kane Williamson (left) and Daryl Mitchell run between the wickets during the World Cup match against Bangladesh at the M A Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Chennai

Kane Williamson marked his return to the World Cup with an undefeated 78 as New Zealand cruised past Bangladesh by eight wickets yesterday but the captain was forced to retire hurt with a thumb injury.

Williamson had been sidelined with a serious knee injury picked up during the IPL and sat out New Zealand's first two wins at the World Cup. Chasing 246 to win, the 33-year-old, playing his first ODI since January, had reached his 43rd fifty in the format off 81 balls and was looking well set for a century.

He moved on to 78 with eight fours and a six when he had to call it quits after a throw from the deep rapped him painfully on the glove, jamming his thumb against the bat handle.

In discussion with the medical team, and with the Black Caps only 46 runs short of victory, it was decided to take Williamson out of the game.

"Not sure just yet," said Williamson when asked about the gravity of the injury.

"It got a bit fat and colourful straight away which made holding the bat difficult. I'll have a scan tomorrow and hopefully it's okay." New Zealand comfortably wrapped up their third win with 43 balls to spare.

Williamson had put on a second-wicket stand of 80 with opener Devon Conway (45) and then 108 with Daryl Mitchell who raced to his 50 off 43 balls.

Mitchell did it in some style with a giant heave for six off Bangladesh seamer Shoriful Islam.

Mitchell finished undefeated on 89 off just 67 deliveries, with six fours and four sixes under his belt.

New Zealand, runners-up at the 2015 and 2019 World Cups, had already defeated defending champions England as well as outsiders Netherlands in India.

Bangladesh defeated Afghanistan and then lost to England. Earlier, Mushfiqur Rahim hit a fine half century to lead Bangladesh to 245-9 while veteran Black Caps fast bowler Trent Boult claimed a 200th one-day international wicket.

Mushfiqur made 66 off 75 balls with six fours and two sixes, tak-



New Zealand's Trent Boult (right) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Bangladesh's Towhid Hridoy during the World Cup match against Bangladesh at the M A Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai yesterday. (AFP)

ing his number of fifties in the format to 48 having also hit a half-century against England three days ago.

The 36-year-old, playing in his 259th ODI, shared a crucial 96-run fourth wicket partnership with skipper Shakib Al Hasan (40) to help their team recover from 56-4.

BOULT'S 200TH WICKET

Mushfiqur was eventually clean-bowled by Matt Henry as he attempted to pick up the scoring rate after Shakib had perished, caught by wicket-keeper Tom Latham off Lockie

Ferguson after top-edging an attempted pull shot.

Shakib ended his innings suffering from cramps in the sweltering heat and batting without a helmet or cap against the spinners. After the game, teammate Najmul Hossain Shanto said Shakib "has gone for a scan" without specifying the injury concern.

"We'll then know what's happened to him," said Najmul.

Mushfiqur's brother-in-law Mahmudullah, batting at number eight, added a valuable undefeated 41.

Boult, meanwhile, became the

sixth New Zealand player to take 200 ODI wickets.

The 34-year-old reached the personal landmark when he dismissed Towhid Hridoy, caught at extra cover by Mitchell Santner for 13, in the 38th over.

Playing in his 107th ODI, Boult also dismissed opener Liton Das off the first ball of the match.

Liton was celebrating his 29th birthday but any hopes of a big score to mark the occasion were shattered when he shuffled down the wicket to confront Boult only to sky the ball to a grateful Henry who pocketed the chance at fine leg.

SCOREBOARD

Bangladesh

L. Das c Henry b Boult 0
T. Hasan c Conway b Ferguson ... 16
M. Hasan Miraz c Henry b Ferguson 30
N. Hossain Shanto c Conway b Phillips 7

S. Hasan c Latham b Ferguson.... 4
M. Rahim b Henry 66
T. Hridoy c Santner b Boult 13
Mahmudullah not out 41
T. Ahmed c Mitchell b Santner 17
M. Rahman c Latham b Henry 4
S. Islam not out 2

Extras (lb1, nb4, w4) 9
Total (nine wkts; 50 overs) 245

Fall of wickets: 1-0 (Liton Das), 2-40 (Tanzid Hasan), 3-56 (Mehidy Hasan Miraz), 4-56 (Najmul Hossain Shanto), 5-152 (Shakib Al Hasan), 6-175 (Mushfiqur Rahim), 7-180 (Towhid Hridoy), 8-214 (Taskin Ahmed), 9-225 (Mustafizur Rahman)

Bowling: Boult 10-0-45-2 (2w), Henry 10-0-58-2 (1nb), Ferguson 10-0-49-3 (2w, 2nb), Santner 10-1-31-1, Phillips 2-0-13-1 (1nb), Ravindra 7-0-37-0, Mitchell 1-0-11-0

New Zealand

D. Conway lbw b Shakib 45
R. Ravindra c Mushfiqur b Mustafizur 9
K. Williamson retired hurt 78
D. Mitchell not out 89
G. Phillips not out 16

Extras (lb1, w10) 11
Total (2 wkts; 42.5 overs) 248

Fall of wickets: 1-12 (Ravindra), 2-92 (Conway), 2-200* (Williamson, retired hurt)

Bowling: Mustafizur Rahman 8-0-36-1 (3w), Shoriful Islam 7.5-1-43-0 (3w), Taskin Ahmed 8-0-56-0 (3w), Shakib Al Hasan 10-0-54-1, Mehidy Hasan Miraz 9-0-58-0 (1w)
Result: NZ won by eight wickets.



Bangladesh's Mushfiqur Rahim reacts after playing a shot against New Zealand yesterday. (AFP)

Who said what at World Cup

"I don't focus on the past. Let's focus on the thing to come as we know records are meant to be broken."
- **Pakistan captain Babar Azam on attempting to end his country's 7-0 losing World Cup record against India when the rivals meet in Ahmedabad today.**

"It's not pressure. We have played at big stadiums like at the MCG (Melbourne Cricket Ground). But, yes, all the support in Ahmedabad will be for India. It would have been better had Pakistan fans been allowed."
- **Babar Azam on facing a 132,000 crowd where only a handful of Pakistan voices will be heard.**

"I don't think there is a favourite or an underdog."
- **India skipper Rohit Sharma on today's game.**

"It was pretty hard not to think about the 200th wicket when it was coming up on the screen every

day before the match. It's nice to tick it off."
- **New Zealand fast bowler Trent Boult on taking his 200th ODI wicket in Friday's game against Bangladesh.**

"Not just yet. It got a bit fat and colourful straight away which made holding the bat difficult. I'll have a scan tomorrow and hopefully it's okay."
- **New Zealand captain Kane Williamson on suffering a thumb injury in the eight-wicket win over Bangladesh. Williamson made 78 on his first appearance at the tournament having been sidelined with a long-standing knee injury.**

"I really want to watch this match, just this one, and tried online on multiple devices for nine consecutive hours but failed to get any ticket."
- **17-year-old school student Fenil Patel tells AFP of his struggles to secure a ticket for Saturday's game between India and Pakistan.**

AL-MARRI BAGS FIRST MEDIUM TOUR WIN OF NEW HATHAB SEASON



Rashid Towaim al-Marri started his new season with a bang as he took the top two positions in the Medium Tour at the Qatar Equestrian Tour Longines Hathab yesterday. At the Qatar Equestrian Federation's indoor arena, al-Marri topped the timesheets of the 135cm class with Navaronne in 31.01 seconds. He then clocked 31.40 secs with Van Gallettana Z to finish second. Hamad Nasser al-Qadi, on Happy Tina, was third in a time of 33.22 secs. The Medium Tour team title yesterday was won by Alfardan, which had Nasser al-Ghazali, Mohamed Khalifa Albaker and Mohamed Saeed Haidan in its lineup. Mohamed Dhafi al-Marri emerged triumphant in the Small Tour with Sandro Girl. Khalifa Abdulla al-Khaldi (Graffiti De Lully CH) was second, followed by Mohamed Nasser al-Qadi (Uppsala Du Theil) in third.

In the Future riders class (for 6 to 12 years age), Mohamed Abdulla al-Marri made a clean sweep winning all three podium positions. The Future riders class (for 12 to 16) was won by Yousuf al-Muftah, followed by Hadi al-Shahwani and Jana Sas.





PREVIEW

Gill may return for Pakistan clash, India mull 3 spinners

'I BELIEVE BOTH TEAMS START EVEN. THERE WILL BE NO FAVOURITE OR UNDERDOG'

Reuters
Ahmedabad

India opener Shubman Gill is in the frame to return for today's World Cup blockbuster against Pakistan and the hosts are also open to playing three spinners at the Narendra Modi Stadium, skipper Rohit Sharma said yesterday.

Gill is the leading run-getter in one-day internationals this year but missed India's victories against Australia and Afghanistan as he continued his recovery from dengue.

The elegant right-hander returned to the nets on Thursday and Rohit was optimistic of having his opening partner back for the tournament's most anticipated match.

"99% he's available," Rohit said of Gill without elaborating even after being pressed.

In Gill's absence, Ishan Kishan opened with Rohit and scored a duck against Australia in Chennai and 47 against Afghanistan in New Delhi.

India fielded a three-pronged spin attack in Chennai where they bowled out Australia for 199 and Rohit would not rule out repeating the combination by bringing back Ravichandran Ashwin.

"Depending on what kind of conditions we face, if there is a change or two we need to make, we will be ready with that and the guys have been informed well in advance about these kind of changes," he said.

"I don't think it's going to be any issues for the players. If the requirement is there for us to play three spinners, we will play three spinners."

India boast an unblemished 7-0 record against Pakistan in the 50-overs World Cup but Rohit warned against underestimating their "quality opponent".

"I'm not a person who looks into those stats. You got to play good cricket on that particular day to win the game," he said.

"That is what we'll be focusing on - how we can play good cricket, which is understanding the conditions, what is required from the team's perspective, and things like that."

India thumped Pakistan in an Asia Cup match last month but



India's Shubman Gill warms up during a practice session yesterday, on the eve of the World Cup match against Pakistan in Ahmedabad. (AFP)

Rohit did not think they would carry any psychological advantage from that outcome. "I don't believe in these things," the opener said.

"As a team, we can't be focusing on past. It will be a fresh day, a fresh contest, against a quality opposition."

"I believe both teams start even. There will be no favourite or underdog tomorrow."

The western Indian city of

Ahmedabad is in firm grip of a cricket fever and more than 100,000 fans, including celebrities, are expected to turn up for the game's fiercest rivalry on Saturday. Rohit played down the hysteria around the contest, saying his players would not be swayed by it.

"We'd treat this match just like we treated the previous two matches and how we'd treat our remaining matches. No more, no less."

Gladiatorial Pakistan keen to break India jinx in Ahmedabad colosseum

Pakistan would be forgiven for feeling like gladiators thrown into the Colosseum when they face an India team edged on by 100,000-plus fans in today's World Cup blockbuster, but skipper Babar Azam sees the match as a chance to end a jinx against their arch-rivals.

Two-time champions India have a perfect 7-0 record against Pakistan in the 50-overs World Cup and are also the top-ranked ODI team, who have won both their games in the tournament so far.

But Pakistan have also won their opening two matches, and Babar is approaching the tournament's most-anticipated clash at the Narendra Modi Stadium, the world's largest cricket venue, with a complete disregard for the past.

"I don't think about the past, I'd rather focus on future," Babar told reporters with a wry smile on his face.

"All records are meant to be broken, and we'll try to break this record tomorrow."

"It boils down to how you perform on the day of the match. We have done pretty well in the first two matches, and I have full belief we'll do well in the next match as well."

Part of how they perform will depend on how his team mates manage to deal with the pressure of the game's fiercest rivalry played out in the den of their cricketing foes.

Babar said his message to his team mates was to see it as an opportunity to perform well and etch their

names into the memories of those watching back home.

"India-Pakistan match is a big game, a high-intensity contest. I've told my boys it's a great opportunity - give your best, execute your plans and believe in yourself," he said.

"It's a massive stadium, and there would be big crowd. This is a golden opportunity for us to perform in front of such a big crowd."

Pakistan's fortunes could depend on pace spearhead Shaheen Afridi, who has troubled India's top order in recent encounters between the rivals.

His workload has increased after his new-ball partner Naseem Shah was ruled out of the tournament with a shoulder injury but Babar has faith in Afridi.

"He's our best bowler, a champion bowler," Babar said of the left-arm quick.

"I believe he's a big-match bowler, who always gives his best on big occasions."

"For us, it does not matter if he does not get wickets in a match or two, it does not put a question mark against him."

With this year's tournament producing several high-scoring contests, Babar said he had reminded the bowlers of the need to be accurate.

"We are seeing mostly high-scoring matches and there's little margin for error for the bowlers. If you are straying from the stumps line, the margin is less."

"I just told my bowlers to hit the right length and bowl stump-to-stump."

HEAD-TO-HEAD RECORD

Last 10 meetings

DATE	VENUE	RESULT
5/06/2013	Birmingham	India won by 8 wickets
01/03/2014	Dhaka	Pakistan won by 1 wicket
15/02/2015	Adelaide	India won by 76 runs
04/06/2017	Birmingham	India won by 124 runs
18/06/2017	The Oval, London	Pakistan won by 180 runs
19/09/2018	Dubai	India won by 8 wickets
23/09/2018	Dubai	India won by 9 wickets
16/06/2019	Manchester	India won by 89 runs
02/09/2023	Pallekele	No Result
10/09/2023	Colombo	India won by 228 runs

Overall

Pakistan wins:	India wins:	Tied: 0
73	56	No result: 5



Pakistan's captain Babar Azam (left) and Iftikhar Ahmed view the pitch during a practice session yesterday. (AFP)

Four key India-Pakistan battles

Arch-rivals India and Pakistan meet in a blockbuster clash at the World Cup today. AFP Sport takes a look at four key battles that could decide the eagerly-awaited contest at the world's biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad.



Rohit vs Shaheen - India skipper Rohit Sharma has struggled against Shaheen Shah Afridi's left-arm pace in the few outings the two teams have had in recent times. Shaheen rattled Rohit's off stump in their first Asia Cup match in Pallekele last month when the opener's lack of footwork saw him bowled for 11. The duel began at the T20 World Cup in 2021 when Shaheen trapped Rohit lbw for a duck in the first over in Dubai with his pace and swing. But Rohit came back prepared when the rivals next met in Colombo and remained cautious against the quick despite hitting a six off his first over.





Kohli vs Rauf - The stakes were high when Virat Kohli came up against Haris Rauf in a challenging chase at the T20 World Cup in Melbourne last year. India needed 31 off the last 18 balls while chasing 160 when Kohli held his nerve to smash Rauf for two sixes to bring the house down at a packed MCG. The first was a length ball which Kohli dispatched straight down the ground and he flicked the next to over fine-leg en route to victory. Kohli later said the sixes were "instinctive", but it began a great battle with the Pakistan quick which awaits another showdown in Ahmedabad.





Bumrah vs Azam - Jasprit Bumrah experienced the Pakistan captain's ability at the 2021 T20 World Cup in the United Arab Emirates. Azam took on the Indian attack including Bumrah, a yorker king, with ease as he and Mohamed Rizwan steered the team to a 10-wicket victory in Dubai. But two years later Bumrah and company seemed to have learnt their lessons when they bowled out Pakistan for 128 in a crushing 228-run win in an Asia Cup Super Four clash. Bumrah beat the bat of Azam on a few occasions in Colombo before Hardik Pandya got the prized wicket.





Kuldeep vs Iftikhar - Iftikhar Ahmed is a middle-order batsman who can play anchor or go after the bowling with equal ease but at the Asia Cup last month, India spinner Kuldeep Yadav cut short the batsman's knock, taking a smart catch off his own bowling. Kuldeep, a left-arm wrist spinner, claimed 5-25 in that game as India claimed a 228-run win. Iftikhar's task today will be to tackle the spinners in the middle overs and also accelerate the scoring.



Miandad's six to Jadeja blitz: Six great India-Pakistan ODIs

Cricketing powerhouses India and Pakistan renew their rivalry in the most hotly-anticipated match of the World Cup in Ahmedabad today. AFP Sport looks back at six memorable ODI matches between the bitter rivals ahead of their latest clash.

Miandad six (April 18, 1986 - Sharjah) - Javed Miandad's last-ball six at the desert venue arguably remains the most dramatic ODI outcome between the two sides as Pakistan clinched a one-wicket victory. Pakistan needed 246 to win in 50 overs and Miandad walked in at 61-3 to hit an unbeaten 116 off 114 balls. With four needed off the final delivery, Indian fast bowler Chetan Sharma bowled a full toss and Miandad blasted the ball into the crowd to trigger wild celebrations among the Pakistan team and fans. Miandad was later presented with a golden sword for his heroics.

Imran stings (March 22, 1985 - Sharjah) - Imran Khan's best bowling figures of 6-14 were in a one-day international against India but for the flamboyant Pakistan fast bowler it was all in vain. Imran ripped through the Indian batting line-up at Sharjah to send the opposition packing for 125. But Pakistan's own batting imploded, skittled for just 87 with Ramiz Raja, top-scorer with 29, one of only four batsmen in double figures. Imran, a former Prime

Minister who now languishes in jail over corruption charges he denies, was still the man of the match in the low-scoring battle.

Jadeja fires (March 09, 1996 - Bangalore) - India's Ajay Jadeja blasted a 25-ball 45 in a late blitz that helped India knock out holders Pakistan in a highly-charged World Cup quarter-final. Jadeja was severe on Pakistan's Waqar Younis as he hit the pace bowler for four fours and two sixes in the final few overs to propel the total to 287-8. In reply, Pakistan were sailing along when opener Aamir Sohail smashed India's Venkatesh Prasad for a boundary before sledging his opponent. But Venkatesh got the left-handed batsman bowled on the next ball to bring the house down and Pakistan lost their way to lose by 39 runs.

Ganguly ton (January 18, 1998 - Dhaka) - Sourav Ganguly hit a match-winning century to trump Saeed Anwar's 140 in a deciding best-of-three final of Bangladesh's Silver Jubilee Independence Cup in Dhaka. Ganguly's knock of 124 was laced with 11 fours and one six as India chased down their victory target of 315 with one ball to spare. The left-handed Ganguly was named man of the match but lesser-known Hrishikesh Kanihtkar stole the show in the end when India needed three on the final two balls and he hit a boundary on the

penultimate delivery. The chase was a world record at the time.

Tendulkar rules (March 1, 2003 - Centurion) - Sachin Tendulkar won many matches for India but his 98 against Pakistan at the 2003 World Cup remains special due his duel with fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar. Tendulkar stood tall in his 75-ball knock that guided India in their chase of 274 against a Pakistan bowling line-up boasting Wasim Akram, Waqar and Akhtar. He upped court one of Akhtar's express deliveries to a delightful six over third man - a shot that became iconic in Tendulkar's career. Akhtar later got Tendulkar's wicket but the damage had been done and India won by six wickets.

Zaman special (June 18, 2017 - London) - Pakistan came in as underdogs in the Champions Trophy final, but stunned India by 180 runs with a top performance from bowler Shoaib Akhtar. Akhtar later got Tendulkar's wicket but the damage had been done and India won by six wickets.