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Zverev battles past Alcaraz in ATP Finals opener



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Australia 'peaking at right time' at World Cup, says Starc



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SPOTLIGHT

Lusail Circuit set to host Qatar's first-ever MotoGP sprint race

The high-octane weekend of racing, takes place from Friday, November 17 to Sunday, November 19

Anticipation is building across the region as the MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar 2023 gets set to return to Lusail International Circuit (LIC) this weekend.

The high-octane weekend of racing, taking place from Friday, November 17 to Sunday, November 19, will see motorsport teams and fans from all over the world descend on Qatar for an adrenaline-fueled weekend of motorsport.

And that's not all - for the first time ever, Qatar will play host to MotoGP's new sprint race, a thrilling new Saturday afternoon addition to the 2023 racing calendar.

Adding a new level of excitement for riders and spectators alike, the fast and furious sprint battle sees competitors going head-to-head in a race which runs half the distance of Sunday's Grand Prix. The top nine finishers will be competing for up to 12 world championship points. Grid positions for the sprint are based on the results of the morning's two qualifying sessions, with Sunday's main race also set to feature the same grid.

HOW DOES RACING BREAK DOWN ACROSS THE THREE-DAY WEEKEND?

Friday: Free Practice 1 (45 mins) followed by Practice (60 mins) where riders are timed for entry into Q2.

Saturday: Free Practice 2 (30 mins); Qualifying 1 (15 mins); Qualifying 2 (15 mins); MotoGP Sprint.

Sunday: Warm Up (10 mins), Grand Prix.

ARE THE TECHNICAL RULES DIFFERENT FOR MOTOGP SPRINT RACE?

While most current regulations will remain in place for the sprint race as they would for the main Grand Prix, there are some differences for superfans to be aware of: Fuel loads will be limited to an allowance of 12 litres for the sprint instead of the 22 litres allowed for the grand prix.

Track limits rules have also been adjusted for the sprint race, with the number of allowed infringements before a penalty, being cut from five to three. Any penalty awarded in a sprint race that cannot be served immediately will be carried into the main Grand Prix.



Reigning world title-holder Francesco Bagnaia of Italy has a 14-point lead on Spain's Jorge Martin heading into the race in Qatar. (Reuters)

LUSAIL CIRCUIT TO WITNESS THRILLING TITLE BATTLE

The MotoGP weekend in Qatar is set for a thrilling battle between title rivals Francesco Bagnaia and Jorge Martin. Bagnaia finished third at the Malaysian GP on Sunday to extend his narrow world championship lead with two races left, with Martin finishing a distant fourth.

Reigning world title-holder Bagnaia of Italy now has a 14-point lead on Spain's Martin heading into the race in Qatar this

weekend. The factory Ducati rider Bagnaia is favourite to retain his crown but the championship looks set to go right down to the final race of the season in Valencia, with Qatar set to provide a crucial stop for two contenders.

Bagnaia said he was "satisfied" with his efforts at the Malaysian Grand Prix but doesn't feel his 14-point lead over Martin is "enough". Reflecting on his showing in Malaysia, Bagnaia said: "I'm satisfied with the work, but not completely the re-

sult because I prefer to be more in front. But we have to be happy because we ended the weekend a point further ahead than we started and the feeling was back."

Fans can be a part of the action by purchasing tickets available in the Main Grandstand or General Admission with access to Lusail Hill. For attendees wanting to take their race weekend experience up a notch, premier hospitality packages are available with various unique opportunities like Pit Lane walks and Paddock

access. Tickets and hospitality packages can be purchased online for the entire race weekend, two-day access or for single-day access on the official Lusail International Circuit website. Tickets allow access to the MotoGP Fan Zone with its host of activities for adults and children, access to MotoGP merchandising outlets, use of complimentary return shuttles between Lusail Metro Station to the circuit as well as easy access to free parking and taxi pick-up and drop-off zone.

FOCUS

Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show on November 17 and 18

Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show is set to take place under the esteemed patronage of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, embodying a significant milestone for the Arabian Show Horse industry in Qatar and the wider region.

Scheduled to take place on November 17 and 18, this prestigious event promises an unforgettable experience of elegance & beauty at the iconic Al Shaqab indoor and outdoor arena.

With a vision to elevate the Arabian Show Horse sector locally and globally, this pioneering event aims to contribute to the development and promotion of purebred Arabian horses, emphasising the rich cultural heritage of owning these majestic creatures within the Qatari community.

It is anticipated that the show will attract around 250 horses from both within and outside Qatar, promoting the uniqueness of purebred Arabian horses on both local and international levels, further endorsing Qatar's rich Arabian heritage.

Moreover, the organisers envision that the 1st edition of the Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show will mark the beginning of the international competi-



tion season in Qatar. This strategic timing will enable horse owners from around the world to prepare their horses for the world championship, a historic event set to take place outside Paris for the first time.

Al Shaqab remains committed to fostering the growth of the Ara-

bian Show Horse industry in Qatar and beyond, with this event poised to leave a lasting impact on the equestrian community. It's worth mentioning that a portion of the show proceeds will be donated to Palestine through Qatar Charity and the Qatar Red Crescent in solidarity with Palestine.

Duhail beat Markhiya in Ooredoo Cup



Al Duhail defeated Al Markhiya 1-0 in a Group B match of the Ooredoo Cup at the Saoud bin Abdulrahman Stadium in Al Wakrah yesterday. Isaac Lihadi's deflected goal in the 47th minute separated the two sides in the highly-entertaining encounter. With the result, Al Duhail now lead the table with nine points, while Al Markhiya remained on seven points.

TENNIS

Zverev battles past Alcaraz in ATP Finals opener

'Against Carlos I'm not going to win a lot of baseline rallies so I knew that I had to serve well'

AFP
Turin, Italy

Alexander Zverev got off to a winning start in his ATP Finals campaign yesterday by battling back from a set down to beat Carlos Alcaraz 6-7 (3/7), 6-3, 6-4. Germany's Zverev, a two-time winner at the year-ending tournament, put on a powerful display to see off world number two Alcaraz who is not on top form after returning from injury at the end of last month.

Wimbledon champion Alcaraz struggled with lower back and left foot problems which had kept him out of action since the Shanghai Masters in early October. He was then dumped out early at the Paris Masters by Russian qualifier Roman Safullin and flagged towards the end of a bruising contest with giant Zverev, the number seven seed in Turin.

Zverev is tough opposition on hard courts like the one at the Pala Alpitour and made full use of his height and power to see off Alcaraz and take the lead in the Red Group. The 26-year-old rattled off 16 aces and was only broken once over the course of an impressive win in which he hit more winners and made significantly fewer unforced errors than out-of-sorts Alcaraz.

"Against Carlos I'm not somebody who's going to win a lot of baseline rallies so I knew that I had to serve well, to hit a lot of aces, I knew that I had to make a make a lot of first serves... it paid off in the end," said Zverev.

Alcaraz claimed the first set after breaking back to love in game six to level at 3-3 and took the lead in the next game after saving three break points. The set was then taken to a tie-break when Zverev saved three set points on his own serve in game 12, but Alcaraz's class shone through to claim a set which lasted well over an hour. Zverev bounced back though and rattled off three games in a row to set up a straightforward second-set victory as Alcaraz was rocked back by his opponent's service game. And



Germany's Alexander Zverev whips a forehand during his group stage match against Spain's Carlos Alcaraz at the ATP Finals in Turin, Italy, yesterday. (Reuters)

Zverev pushed on to claim the honours, sealing the win in trademark style with two whopping serves which Alcaraz – who had been at advantage – simply couldn't handle. "I'm one of the player show has played most matches on tour... I feel good physically," insisted Alcaraz. "I don't think I need more matches (to be in top condition)."

Later last night, 2020 champion Daniil Medvedev was facing fellow Russian Andrey Rublev in the day's other Red Group match.

DJOKOVIC SECURES TOP SPOT IN YEAR-END WORLD RANKINGS

Before Zverev's win, Novak Djokovic was presented with the trophy for finishing the season as world number one, a position he secured after winning his thrilling Green Group opener with Holger Rune on Sunday night, a match which lasted more than three hours. Djokovic is red-hot favourite to claim his seventh Finals title which would put him out of his own as the record winner, one ahead of retired great and old rival Roger Federer.

The 24-time Grand Slam champion needed just one win or a defeat Alcaraz in order to secure top spot in the ATP rankings for 2023 and prevailed in a three-hour Green Group clash with spirited debutant Rune. Djokovic, on a run of 19 straight wins, has had an age-defying year, winning three Slams to become the all-time record winner of major titles. The 36-year-old came into the Finals in Turin off the back of his seventh triumph at the Paris Masters, his 40th victory at a Masters 100 event.

Home hope Jannik Sinner got off to a near-perfect start by beating Stefanos Tsitsipas in straight sets, 6-4, 6-4, delighting the crowd in Italy's northwest. Sinner has had the best season of his career to date, winning four tournaments and is set to become the first Italian ever to finish a season in the ATP top five.

The 22-year-old comfortably dealt with 2019 champion Tsitsipas in front of an enthusiastic crowd, not dropping a service game nor facing a break point in the whole match.

ICON

Thousands line Manchester streets to bid final farewell to Charlton

AFP
Manchester, United Kingdom

Thousands of people lined the streets of Manchester yesterday to pay their final respects to Manchester United and England great Bobby Charlton, with Alex Ferguson and Prince William among the mourners. The 1966 World Cup winner, widely regarded as one of England's greatest players, died on October 21 at the age of 86 after a fall at his care home.

Crowds clapped warmly and held banners as the funeral cortege drove past United's Old Trafford ground on its way to a private funeral service at Manchester Cathedral to celebrate Charlton's life. The hearse passed the famous "United Trinity" statue immortalising Charlton, Denis Law and George Best as members of the club's under-18 and under-21 squads formed a guard of honour.

High on the glass wall of the East Stand were two huge black and white photographs, one of Charlton in his playing days and the other showing him as an elder statesman, flanking the words "Sir Bobby Charlton, 1937-2023. Forever Loved".

Around 1,000 guests including former United manager Ferguson, England boss Gareth Southgate and Prince William, the Football Association president, arrived for the service, along with current

and former players. Former United captain Bryan Robson, speaking before the service, said: "For a player to win the World Cup, win the Champions League and have such a long and successful career you've got to be a fantastic player to be able to achieve that. But Sir Bob wasn't just a great player, he was a great person and had time for everybody."

Former teammate Alex Stepney said Charlton remained humble despite his success. "It was about winning and that was what Bobby Charlton was all about," he said. "A humble guy, a great family man. It never went to his head."

Former United chief executive David Gill gave a eulogy during the service, describing Charlton as a "legend, an icon and a very dear and loyal, much-loved colleague and friend". "Football is a tribal sport but Bobby was universally admired," he said. The funeral ended with the chiming of bells as Charlton's coffin, covered in white flowers, was carried out by pallbearers.

Ferguson described Charlton, who played a key part in his appointment as manager at Old Trafford, as a "tower of strength" during his trophy-laden 26-year spell as manager. "It was a sombre occasion. The speakers were fantastic, especially his grandson," he said. "He was magnificent. It's not easy to go up and speak. Bobby Charlton was a wonderful, humble man and I was at Manchester United be-

cause of Bobby Charlton."

Former England captain Gary Lineker said the service was "emotive and meaningful", describing Charlton as "more than just a footballer in many ways". "He was synonymous with the word 'football'," he said. "You could go anywhere in the world, even places where they didn't speak English and they'd say one thing to you and that was 'Bobby Charlton' and that shows his fame but it also shows how much respect and love he has around the world."

Charlton was a key member of England's victorious 1966 World Cup team, alongside his late brother Jack. He won 106 caps for England, scoring 49 goals.

He also enjoyed great success at club level with United, who became the first English club to win the European Cup in 1968, a decade after he survived an air crash in Munich, which killed eight of his teammates.

He played 758 games and scored 249 goals for United between 1956 and 1973. Both were long-standing club records until they were broken by Ryan Giggs and Wayne Rooney. Charlton, who won the Ballon d'Or in 1966, returned to the club with which he had made his name as a director in 1984 and remained a major figure at Old Trafford until his later years. In 2020, it was announced he had been diagnosed with dementia and as the disease took hold he stopped attending matches.

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Chelsea's Palmer gets England call-up for Euro 2024 qualifiers

Cole Palmer has been rewarded for his Chelsea form this season with a late call-up to Gareth Southgate's England squad for the team's final two Euro 2024 qualifiers. Southgate has added Palmer, Aston Villa centre-back Ezri Konsa and Manchester City defender Rico Lewis to his group for matches against Malta and North Macedonia following the withdrawals due to injury of James Maddison, Lewis Dunk and Callum Wilson.

Chelsea forward Palmer, who scored a stoppage-time equaliser from the penalty spot in Sunday's thrilling 4-4 Premier League draw with Manchester City, was part of the England team that won the Under-21 European Championship in July. The 21-year-old made a surprise £42mn move from City to Chelsea in September in search of regular first-team football.

He has impressed at Stamford Bridge, scoring four goals so far for his new club. England, who have already qualified for the Euro 2024 finals in Germany, host Malta at Wembley on Friday before facing North Macedonia away three days later.

SUAREZ RETURNS TO URUGUAY SQUAD FOR ARGENTINA CLASH

Uruguay's record goalscorer Luis Suarez yesterday received his first call-up under new coach Marcelo Bielsa who named the 36-year-old in his squad to face Argentina this week in a 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifier. Suarez, with 68 international goals to his name, has been in superb form for Brazilian club Gremio with 16 goals in 29 games but has not featured for Uruguay since Bielsa took over in May.

Thursday's match against Argentina will be his first for the national team since they were eliminated from the World Cup in Qatar in the group stages last year. Edinson Cavani, who has 58 international goals to his name, was left out after picking up an injury playing for Boca Juniors.

If he plays, Suarez is likely to come up against his former Barcelona teammate Lionel Messi who scored both goals in



Chelsea's Cole Palmer (left) celebrates after scoring against Manchester City during the Premier League match on Sunday. (Reuters)

the qualifier against Peru last month that ended 2-0. Argentina has won all four of its qualifiers so far, topping the table with 12 points, five clear of Venezuela, Brazil and Uruguay. Six teams from the continent will qualify for the FIFA World Cup 2026 hosted by Canada, Mexico and the United States.

INJURED LOCATELLI OUT OF ITALY'S EURO QUALIFYING DECIDERS

Manuel Locatelli is injured and out of Italy's final Euro 2024 qualifiers against North Macedonia and Ukraine, coach Luciano Spalletti said. Spalletti told reporters that "Locatelli has left" without specifying what injury had led to the Juventus midfielder being forced to depart the Azzurri training camp.

Locatelli joins AC Milan captain Davide Calabria, Napoli goalkeeper Alex Meret and Atalanta defender Rafael Tolo on the treatment table, leaving Spalletti with 25 of the 29 players he initially called up for the Group C deciders. Italy are third, three points behind Ukraine who occupy the second automatic qualifying spot in Group C but have played a game more than the European champions.

Spalletti's team host North Macedonia, who dumped Italy out of the last World Cup at the play-offs, in Rome on Friday night before taking on Ukraine

in Leverkusen the following Monday. Four points from those two matches will give Italy the chance to defend their title at next summer's tournament in Germany. Locatelli recently signed a long-term deal with Juventus which will keep him at the Serie A club until 2028.

FABREGAS BECOMES INTERIM COMO COACH IN MANAGERIAL BOW

Cesc Fabregas was given his first senior coaching role yesterday after being made interim manager at Italian second-tier team Como. Former Spain midfielder Fabregas, a World Cup winner in 2010, takes over at Como after Moreno Longo was sacked, with the club saying it was looking for a new man to take the permanent job. Fabregas had been managing Como's youth team after hanging up his boots in the summer, and had been tipped to eventually take over the first team of a club finely attuned to international marketing. The 36-year-old signed for lakeside outfit Como, owned by Indonesian tobacco giants Djarum, last year.

Como's CEO is former Chelsea captain Dennis Wise and Fabregas is also a shareholder in the club alongside former Arsenal teammate Thierry Henry. Como are currently sixth in Serie B, six points away from the automatic promotion positions, and won 1-0 at Ascoli on Saturday.



A hearse carrying the coffin of England World Cup winner and Manchester United legend Bobby Charlton is driven past Old Trafford stadium ahead of his funeral in Manchester yesterday. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Zampa pushes Australia towards another triumph

Reuters
Kolkata

Most cricketers would argue that good preparations make for good World Cup campaigns but after an injury-plagued buildup and a string of other setbacks Australia spinner Adam Zampa might have a different take.

Zampa, who heads into Thursday's semi-final against South Africa as the tournament's leading wicket-taker with 22 victims, picked up a glute injury in the one-day series against India in the lead-up, which left him hobbled in Australia's opening World Cup defeats against the hosts and the Proteas. With Ashton Agar ruled out of the tournament with a calf problem, Australia's physios were desperate to get 31-year-old Zampa, the only specialist spinner left in the squad, back to full fitness.

His next injury was self-inflicted, the legspinner cutting his face open by crashing into the wall of the hotel pool in Chennai while swimming. Remedial work on the glute injury triggered back spasms

We all know the skills and the variations Zampa has, but his ability to actually just land the ball on the spot time and time again gave most teams limited chances to attack him

prior to the match against Sri Lanka but Zampa went out and took four wickets anyway, despite feeling woozy from "too much pain relief".

Zampa then dragged himself out of his sick-bed after suffering a fever before the Pakistan match to take another four-wicket haul and help Australia to a second win. Dubbed 'Lazarus' by his captain Pat Cummins, Zampa has not looked back, helping Australia remain undefeated since the early South Africa loss.

His two-wicket haul against Bangla-

desh over the weekend saw him become his nation's most successful spinner at a 50-over World Cup, moving past Brad Hogg's previous mark of 21 wickets at the 2007 tournament in the West Indies.

Another two wickets at this World Cup would see Zampa leapfrog Muthiah Muralidaran's all-time record of 23 from a single tournament, also set in 2007. Zampa's ODI career average of 27.69 from 164 wickets stands in contrast to his more modest average of 46.78 in 17 matches against South Africa.

But the Proteas may face a different Zampa in Kolkata to the injury-hampered one they plundered 70 runs from in Lucknow. Australia's spin coach Daniel Vettori said he had never seen Zampa able to exert so much control over the ball.

"We all know the skills and the variations, but his ability to actually just land the ball on the spot time and time again gave most teams limited opportunities to attack him," Vettori told reporters at the weekend. "It is all about the length of control for him, because all the other skills are there. But when you combine them with that aspect of his game as well, he's almost unplayable."

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FOCUS

Australia 'peaking at right time' at World Cup: Starc

Five-time champs face South Africa in the semi-final on Thursday

AFP
Kolkata

Mitchell Starc yesterday said Australia have lived up to their reputation of "peaking at the right time" after overcoming a shaky start to win seven straight World Cup matches. The five-time champions take on South Africa in the second semi-final in Kolkata on Thursday after the two teams ended on 14 points each in the group stage.

Australia lost a one-day series in South Africa followed by a series defeat to India ahead of the World Cup. They then suffered opening defeats at the tournament to the hosts by six wickets and the Proteas by a huge 134 runs.

"It's been quite busy, the guys who were in Africa as well, I think we counted it's like our 15th flight since we've been in India," Starc said on the gruelling schedule. "For the guys who were in Africa as well, it's been a jam-packed 10 or 11 weeks. It's a World Cup, it's what we play for. We seem to be peaking at the right time which Australia tend to do in tournament play."

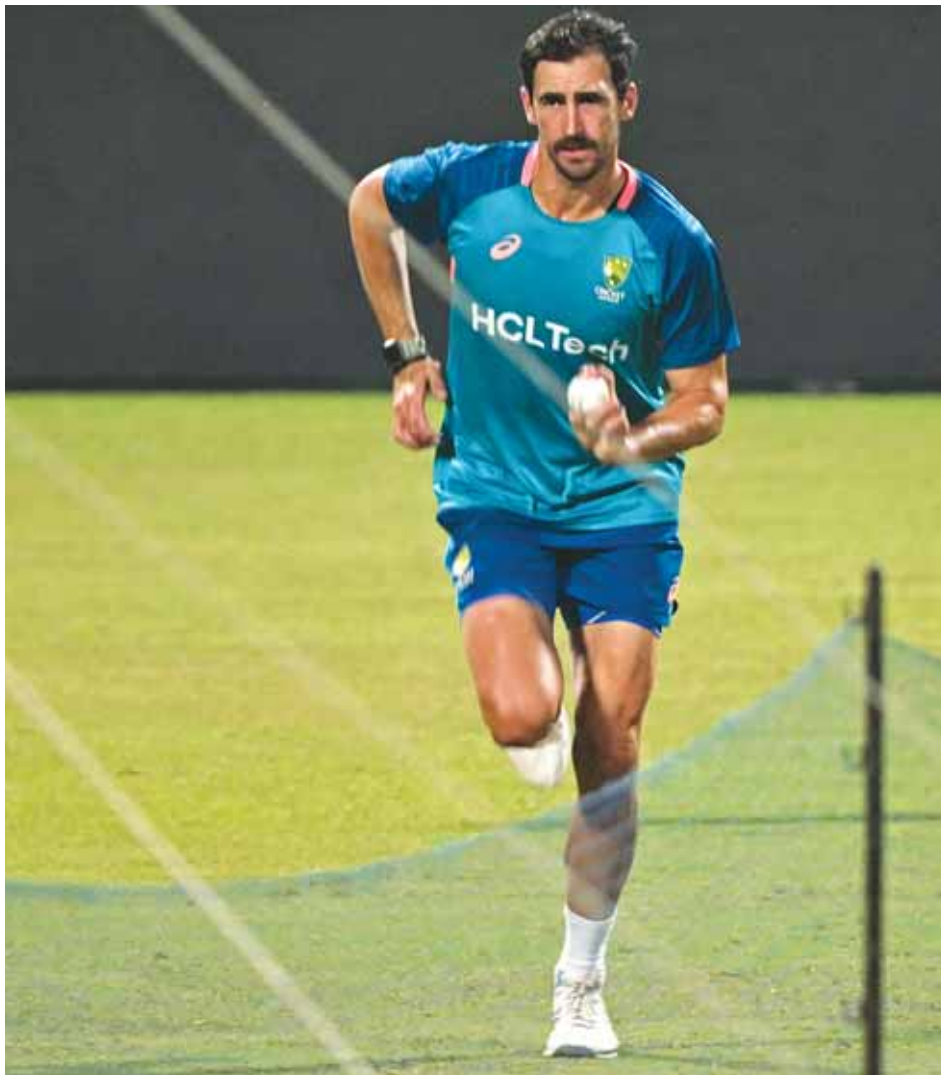
The left arm-quick added: "Whilst we didn't start the way we wanted to, we've certainly had good contributions from individuals along the way and we find ourselves in another World Cup semi-final."

Australia have been the most successful team in the World Cup with title wins in the 1987 (India), 1999 (England), 2003 (South Africa), 2007 (West Indies) and 2015 (Australia and New Zealand) editions. They were runners-up in the inaugural edition in 1975 and then again in 1996, reached the quarter-finals in 2011 and lost to eventual winners England in the 2019 semi-finals.

Starc, who was part of Australia's 2015 ODI and 2021 T20 World Cup triumphs, said the experienced team will not be overawed by Thursday's occasion at Kolkata's iconic Eden Gardens. "Whether it's goosebumps or not, it's just another game," he said. "I've played a lot of one-day cricket... (performing in big matches) is not something that's really spoken about. It's a very calm group, this one, and fairly experienced with a couple of younger, less experienced guys gelling in really nicely."

Australia have beaten South Africa twice in World Cup semi-finals in 1999 and 2007. Both times they went on to win the title. Starc, 33, and a veteran of 119 one-day internationals, was the leading bowler in the World Cups of 2015 and 2019 with 22 and 27 wickets respectively. In all, he has 230 wickets in the format.

He and fellow quick Pat Cummins have 10 wickets each in the tournament so far with



Australia's Mitchell Starc bowls in the nets during a practice session yesterday, ahead of the World Cup semi-final against South Africa at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata. (AFP)

teammate and leg-spinner Adam Zampa leading the bowling charts with 22. The lack of reverse swing, due to two balls being used in each innings at the World Cup, appears to be one of the factors for Starc's lack of wickets.

"There's a lot of contributing factors," he said. "The wickets have certainly been two very different wickets, what gets through the day and through the night. Speed is not the be-all and end-all over here in India as well. How you go about that tactically, and whether it's variations or what time you bowl through a game, or whether you win or lose a toss (can

affect potency). I certainly haven't been at the level that I would have liked. But now there's a chance at the pointy end to make the biggest impact."

Starc, who missed a lot of cricket after the Ashes due a shoulder and groin injury, did not reveal the reason for sitting out the last match against Bangladesh.

"If I only played when I was 100 per cent, I would have probably played 10 games," he said. "All bowlers around the world deal with stuff, we just don't have to talk about it like batters do."

Australian club cricketer takes six wickets in six balls to win match

Sydney: An Australian club cricketer took six wickets in an incredible final over to clinch victory in a one-day game over the weekend, describing the rare feat as "surreal". Facing almost certain defeat in the Gold Coast's Premier League Division 3, Mudgeeraba captain Gareth Morgan opted to bowl the last six balls himself with

Surfers Paradise needing five runs to win with six wickets in hand.

They dramatically collapsed with Morgan removing opener Jake Garland for 65 then dismissing the next five batters for golden ducks. "It is funny, the umpire said to me at the start of the over that I needed to take a hat-trick or something to win the game," Morgan said

after his exploits attracted national attention. "When it happened he just sort of looked at me."

He added that it was "very surreal". "I remember thinking after I got the hat-trick - I don't want to lose this game now," he said. "Then it just went crazy. When I saw the stumps go back on the last ball I couldn't believe it, I've

never seen anything like it."

The first four dismissals were all caught, while the final two were bowled. The most wicket in an over in professional cricket is five, achieved by New Zealand's Neil Wagner (2011), Bangladesh's Al-Amin Hossain (2013) and India's Abhimanyu Mithun (2019), according to ABC.

EARLY EXIT

Pakistan bowling coach Morkel quits after World Cup flop

AFP
Lahore

Bowling coach **Morne Morkel** yesterday became the first man to quit Pakistan's backroom staff following the team's exit from the World Cup in India. The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said the 39-year-old has tendered his resignation. "Morkel has resigned as the bowling coach of the Pakistan men's team," said a PCB release. "He was given a six-month contract in June this year."

PCB said his replacement will be announced before the team's three-Test tour of Australia starting next month. Pakistan's team director Mickey Arthur said that Morkel had enjoyed his brief stay in the job. "Morne was only contracted until January 2024 but his work with other leagues does not allow any more time unfortunately," said Arthur. "He loved his time with us and is very sad that he can't continue."

The best period with respect to Morkel's role came during the series against Afghanistan and the early part of the Asia Cup in Sri Lanka, where he was in charge of three of the best and most in-form fast bowlers in the world. Shaheen Afridi, Naseem and Haris were all at the top of their game, combining to form a formidable three-man attack, memorably showcasing their potential in an ultimately washed-out game against India where they took all ten wickets after ripping through the Indian

top order. Pakistan crashed out of the World Cup following a 93-run defeat against England in Kolkata on Saturday, failing to reach the semi-finals with five defeats and four wins.

Skipper Babar Azam and Arthur are also under fire for the poor show of a team which was ranked as the world's top ODI side before the tournament.

This is the fifth time in the last six World Cups that Pakistan failed to reach the semi-finals. Arthur's contract as head coach was not renewed after Pakistan's failed campaign in 2019. He is back in a second spell, this time as team director.



Key says he takes responsibility for England's poor show

Mumbai: England's managing director Rob Key said his decision to prioritise test cricket over one-day internationals played a role in the side's dismal World Cup campaign, adding that coach Matthew Mott has his "full backing".

Defending champions England, led by captain Jos Buttler, suffered six defeats in their first seven matches of the tournament and failed to qualify for the semi-finals, finishing in seventh place in the points table. The early exit puts a sour note on an otherwise promising year for England, whose highly entertaining and aggressive "Bazball" approach in test matches has earned them plaudits.

"It's hard for me to be critical of Jos Buttler and Matthew Mott when I'm the one who, every single time the decision has been made for whether or not we focus on 50-over cricket, test cricket or T20, I've always chosen test cricket," Key told reporters on Sunday. "I made the mistake of think-

ing that actually it will be all right when we get there and that's not been the case. You sort of made the assumption that, without playing lots of 50-over cricket, actually this is such a good team that will just slip into old habits and away we go."

Key added that white-ball coach Mott, who was appointed in May last year, needed to get the team "playing to their potential". "We'll have some pretty honest conversations and say, 'right, what are you going to do to improve this?'" But he gets my full backing and an opportunity to try and turn it around," Key said of Mott.

"This actually should be the making of those two as a partnership," he said, referring to Mott and Buttler. If it isn't, it isn't, and you move on but we have to make sure some good comes out of what has been a very poor World Cup." England next face the West Indies in a multi-format series featuring three ODIs from Dec. 3-9 and five T20s from Dec. 12-21.



SPOTLIGHT

Dominant India set for New Zealand clash at 'pointy end' of World Cup

Win over Netherlands left hosts with a perfect played nine, won nine record

AFP
Mumbai

India may be the outstanding team at the World Cup but coach Rahul Dravid has warned tomorrow's semi-final against New Zealand in Mumbai represents the "pointy end in a tournament".

Sunday's 160-run defeat of the Netherlands left hosts India with a perfect played nine, won nine record – the first time any side had achieved such a feat at a World Cup featuring a round-robin format. India are well-stocked in all departments, with star man Virat Kohli the tournament's leading batsman with 594 runs and captain Rohit Sharma not far behind on 503.

The experienced duo have scored three hundreds between them, while the likes of Shreyas Iyer and KL Rahul both appear to be coming into form at the right time following their centuries against the Netherlands. Meanwhile, India boast a formidable fast-bowling line-up in Jasprit Bumrah, Mohamed Siraj and Mohamed Shami.

If successful teams are fortunate as well as good, then India certainly had a lucky break when an injury to all-rounder Hardik Pandya paved the way for Shami's return, with the experienced seamer having since taken 16 wickets in five matches at a stunningly low average of under 10. In addition spinners Ravindra Jadeja and Kuldeep Yadav are also capable of taking wickets without being flogged for runs.

And yet the fact remains India have been waiting since a 2011 triumph over Sri Lanka in Mumbai to win a third World Cup title, while their last major piece of silverware was the 2013 Champions Trophy.

Four years ago, New Zealand defeated India by just 18 runs in a rain-affected World Cup semi-final in Manchester that spanned two days, with the Black Caps also beating India in the inaugural 2021 World

“There is going to be certain amount of pressure but I think the way we have responded to the pressure so far gives us a lot of belief”



India are well-stocked in all departments, with star man Virat Kohli (centre) the tournament's leading batsman with 594 runs and captain Rohit Sharma (second left) not far behind on 503. (AFP)

Test Championship final.

Five of the India side who featured in the 2019 semi-final – Rohit, Kohli, Rahul, Bumrah and Jadeja – are set to be involved again tomorrow. “You're at a pointy end in a tournament now,” said Dravid. “There is going to be certain amount of pressure but I think the way we have responded to the pressure so far gives us a lot of belief.”

Dravid's argument is supported by the manner of India's four-wicket win against New Zealand in the group stage at Dharamsala last month. Despite Daryl Mitchell's 130, India held New Zealand to 273, with Shami taking 5-54 before Kohli made 95 and Jadeja, demonstrating his big-match temperament, a valuable 39 not out.

Tomorrow's match takes place at Rohit's Wankhede Stadium home ground, where India bowled out Sri Lanka for just 55 to

win by 302 runs in the group stage, with the aggressive 36-year-old opener leading from the front at what could be his last World Cup.

“Rohit has certainly been a leader, without a doubt,” said India batting great Dravid. “He's cracked open games for us. We've talked about playing in a particular way. You cannot do that unless your leader really buys in and actually shows by example.”

New Zealand, in contrast to India, are in the semi-finals despite losing four of their nine group games. But they now have a clean slate, with captain and key batsman Kane Williamson, following an injury-plagued tournament, returning to form with 95 on his comeback against Pakistan. A proven pace trio of Trent Boult, Tim Southee and Lockie Ferguson are capable of succeeding against even the strongest bat-

ting line-up, with miserly left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner (16 wickets at under 25) an often under-rated threat.

Runners-up at the last two World Cups, New Zealand also boast a break-out rising star in Rachin Ravindra, with the 23-year-old left-hander having already scored 565 runs. The son of Indian-born parents, Ravindra is also the first New Zealander to compile three hundreds at a single World Cup, with his century on tournament debut against England followed by further three-figure scores against Australia and Pakistan.

“You dream of playing against India and a full crowd at the Wankhede, a ground with so much history,” said Ravindra. “We'll stay level, we'll try our best. We know we can't win every game of cricket...but we'll see how it plays out.”

Kuldeep expects tough pitch for bowlers in Mumbai



Bengaluru: Indian spinner Kuldeep Yadav expects the bowlers to have a tough time at Mumbai's batsman-friendly Wankhede Stadium when the hosts take on New Zealand in their World Cup semi-final tomorrow.

South Africa posted 399-7 against England and 382-5 against Bangladesh while India made 357-8 against Sri Lanka at the venue before Glenn Maxwell smashed an extraordinary double century as Australia chased down 291 against Afghanistan last week.

“It's a difficult venue to bowl in. The bounce is true and batsmen often dominate there. Unlike in Twenty20, the bowlers have plenty of time to come back into the game,” Kuldeep told reporters on Sunday after India beat the Netherlands. “But yes, you need a couple of early wickets to get on top of the game and the opponents.”

New Zealand will be looking to repeat their 2019 feat of knocking India out in the semi-finals. “We've played a lot of bilateral series after that,” Kuldeep said. “Our preparation has been good and we've been able to play good cricket throughout the tournament. “We expect to continue in the same vein in the next match.”

Kuldeep has claimed 14 wickets during India's run of nine straight victories at the tournament. “I just work on my rhythm and strengths and focus on how the batsmen are trying to play me. My aim is to land the ball on the good length area as much as possible,” he said.

HONOUR

Sehwag, De Silva and Edulji go into Cricket Hall of Fame

AFP
New Delhi

India's Virender Sehwag, Sri Lankan batsman Aravinda de Silva and pioneering Indian women's captain Diana Edulji have been inducted into cricket's Hall of Fame, the game's governing body announced yesterday.

They will be honoured at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai during the World Cup semi-final between India and New Zealand tomorrow. The International Cricket Council has recognised 109 players in the ICC Cricket Hall of Fame since its launch in 2009.

De Silva, 58, enjoyed a 19-year international career for Sri Lanka, playing a starring role in their memorable World Cup triumph in 1996. In 93 Tests, he scored 6,361 runs at an average of 42.97 and collected 9,284 runs from 308 ODIs while taking 106 wickets. De Silva made

his Test debut at Lord's in 1984, and a year later scored 75 as Sri Lanka recorded its first-ever Test win against India. In 1991, he struck a then-national record individual score of 267 against New Zealand at Wellington.

Sehwag, 45, played a key part in India's World Cup winning campaign at home in 2011, and scored over 17,000 runs in international cricket during a stellar 14-year career. He transformed the opener's role in Test cricket through his trademark explosive approach to batting.

Edulji, who became the first Indian woman to be inducted into the Hall of Fame, played a pioneering role in establishing the most successful domestic team in Indian women's cricket history. A right-handed batter and slow left-arm bowler, Edulji took 109 wickets in Test and ODIs. When she retired after the World Cup in 1993, she had taken more wickets in international cricket than anyone except Australia's Lyn Fullston.



FROM LEFT: Aravinda de Silva, Diana Edulji and Virender Sehwag.

FOCUS

New Zealand's Ferguson says 'we all start from zero' in India semi-final

AFP
Mumbai

Lockie Ferguson insisted New Zealand's rocky road to a World Cup semi-final against in-form India in Mumbai tomorrow was of no concern as “we all start from zero again”.

Tournament hosts India have been the form side of the 10-team event, winning all nine of their group matches, as they bid for a third World Cup title and second on home soil following their 2011 final triumph over Sri Lanka in Mumbai.

New Zealand by contrast, won their opening four games of the round-robin stage only to lose the next four before ending pool play with a five-wicket victory over Sri Lanka.

The Blackcaps may not have yet won a men's one-day international World Cup but they are proven tournament performers, having reached both the 2015 and 2019 finals, with tomorrow's match their ninth semi-final appearance in the 13-edition history of the competition. “We had a couple of close games I guess that didn't quite go our way,” New Zealand fast bowler Ferguson told reporters at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium yesterday. “And a rain-affected one (where New Zealand were beaten on the DLS method by Pakistan despite scoring over 400 themselves).”

He added: “But I guess from our point of view those nine games have got us to this position and we kind of all start from zero again. So come Wednesday, it'll be a good challenge.”

India have steamrollered several opponents on their way to a last-four clash



New Zealand's Lockie Ferguson (centre), Devon Conway (left) and Rachin Ravindra play football during practice in Mumbai yesterday. (AFP)

at captain Rohit Sharma's home ground. But they were made to work for their four-wicket win over New Zealand, with Daryl Mitchell scoring 130 in a total of 273, before India made 274-6 in reply to win with two overs to spare.

New Zealand might have scored over 300 had it not been for in-form paceman Mohamed Shami's return of 5-54. “It's a strong attack,” said Ferguson, who played alongside Shami at Indian Premier League side Gujarat.

But Ferguson, top of New Zealand's tournament bowling averages with 10 wickets at under 24 apiece, said: “I think all four teams in the knockout stages (Australia and South Africa meet in Thursday's second semi-final in Kolkata) have got a very good pace attack, with good spinners.

He added: “It was a hard-fought game (against India). Playing India, there's a lot of ebbs and flows. It's not going to be any different come this game. We've just got to tighten up as much as we can.”

New Zealand caused India's World Cup downfall in England four years ago, winning by just 18 runs in a Manchester semi-final spanning two days because of rain. “I've never played a one-day game over two days, it was literally not even in the title,” said the 32-year-old Ferguson, one of several survivors from that match who are set to be involved in this week's last-four clash. “That was obviously very pleasing for us at the time but four years have gone past, we've played a lot of cricket in between and both teams I'm sure are raring to go come Wednesday.”