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WORLD CUP

New Zealand misery all in the past for India captain Rohit

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MOTOGP QATAR AIRWAYS GRAND PRIX OF QATAR 2023

Local organisers issue spectator guidelines

Lusail International Circuit gets ready to welcome MotoGP fans

By Sports Reporter
Doha

MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar 2023 is set to be held this week! As fans and teams prepare to participate in the spectacle, Lusail International Circuit (LIC) has shared essential guidelines and recommendations for attendees to ensure a smooth and memorable experience throughout the race weekend.

Fans have been urged to be aware that information and timings are subject to change, so it's advisable to stay updated by downloading the LIC APP (available on both AppStore and Google Play store) and checking the LIC social media channels for real-time updates.

The full schedule to the weekend track activities can be accessed online which includes details of all practice and qualifying sessions, support races, press conferences and special events.

The Venue gates will open gates will open as follows:

Friday: 1:00PM - 9:00PM
Saturday: 12:30PM - 9:00PM
Sunday: 2:00PM - 9:00PM

Arriving at the Lusail International Circuit

Metro: The public transportation system has been thoughtfully designed to ensure that attendees reach their destination with ease. A free shuttle service will be available from Lusail Metro - QNB Station (red line) to Lusail International Circuit and vice versa. The shuttle service from the metro station to LIC will operate at the following times.

Friday: 2:00PM - 9:00PM
Saturday: 12:30PM - 9:00PM
Sunday: 2:00PM - 9:00PM

The estimated travel time on the shuttle is approximately 20 minutes. The free shuttle bus service will be conveniently located on the East side of the metro station.

Personal vehicle: Free parking spaces will be available, but ticket holders are advised to come early to avoid traffic congestions. Fans are also encouraged to use public transport and carpool to reduce traffic congestion. For spectators requiring accessibility support, designated parking spaces will be available in compliance with the disability parking permit. Attendees are requested to use Exit 29B and follow the Spectators signs to reach the designated parking area. Please note that access to LIC will not be allowed from Al Khor Coastal Road.

To conveniently reach the parking area, download the LIC APP and view the Maps tab where attendees can follow recommended parking directions based on the ticket category from their location.

Taxi: Uber and Karwa taxi will be available at designated drop off and pick up points near the venue entry gates until 9:00PM and after taxis can be requested via Karwa or Uber applications.

Security, ticket check and scheduling

Before entering the circuit, all attendees are required to undergo a security check to ensure the safety of everyone attending. It is essential



Young MotoGP fans attend a press conference at the Lusail International Circuit (LIC) in this photo. **Below:** A young fan enjoys a bike ride at the Fanzone.



to review the list of prohibited and restricted items before planning your arrival to avoid having any items confiscated. Restricted items can be safely stored in designated offices for collection after the event.

Furthermore, please ensure that your mobile phone is fully charged, and you have sufficient cellular data, as you will need to display your ticket's QR code at the venue gates. Ticket scanning is mandatory each time you leave venue security perimeter to avoid re-entry denial. It is important for attendees to ensure that the ticket is valid; all ticket sales are made through the official Lusail circuit website and ticket sales will not be available at the venue. Additionally, unauthorised purchases of tickets from third-party sellers is prohibited.

Fanzone activations

All spectators holding a valid ticket can access and enjoy activities in the Fan Zone. Organising teams and signs will be present to guide



attendees in the designated areas seamlessly. The Fan Zone promises to offer entertaining activities and games, suitable for families and children. Food and beverage vendors will also provide a wide variety of international and local flavours. There will be something for everyone to experience at the fanzone. Some activities include giant puzzles, an opportunity to meet your favourite rider, face painting, 3D doodle, build your lego, simulators, electric motorcycles for kids, and 360-degree video booths.

Additionally, the spectators will also be able to enjoy cultural experiences at the venue, such as Arabic coffee tasting, oud and bakhoor display, henna, and date palate adventure. Spectators will also be able to visit booths of exhibitors and partners to enhance their overall race experience.

Additional recommendations to ensure your comfort throughout the event:

LIC is dedicated towards making the race weekend a seamless experience for everyone. Therefore, it is recommended that attendees wear comfortable shoes and stay hydrated considering the length and expansive offering of the event.

For parents with children, consider heading to the Info Point located behind the Main Grandstand to obtain bracelets with your contact details labelled with them to facilitate the search for missing kids.

Please adhere to the no-smoking policy, as lighters are among the prohibited items. Smoking is permitted only in designated smoking zones and is strictly prohibited in grandstands, food and beverage areas, and certain activation areas.

The venue will practice a no-tolerance policy towards attendees whose conduct is deemed to be inappropriate at the venue. It is requested for all spectators to respect the guidelines and be mindful of others attending.

QATAR OLYMPIC TEAM TO FEATURE IN INTERNATIONAL FRIENDLIES IN SAUDI ARABIA

Doha: The Qatar Olympic football team will take part in the U-23 international friendlies to be held in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) from November 18-21, as preparation for the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) U-23 Asian Cup Qatar 2024, to be held from April 15 until May 3, a Paris 2024 Summer Olympics qualifier. The Qatar Football Association (QFA) announced on social media today the squads match programme, in which team Qatar

will face team Australia on Saturday, whilst team Saudi Arabia will play its Jordanian counterpart, details showed yesterday. The second match, to be held on November 21, will see Team Qatar face team Jordan, whilst team Saudi Arabia meets its Australian counterpart on the same day. Matches will be held at the Prince Saud



Bin Jalawi Sport City Stadium in Al Khobar. (QNA)

SPOTLIGHT

'Hayya' application wins gold award at MENA Digital Awards



QNA
Doha

The "Hayya to Qatar 2022" mobile application won the gold award as best mobile application at the MENA Digital Awards 2022, as the application, which was developed by the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SC), played an effective role during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and formed an essential part in achieving a successful hosting of the global event.

The application provided a digital platform for about 3.4 million fans, including 1.4 million fans who came from outside Qatar to attend the tournament's matches. The application allowed fans to enter the Qatar World Cup 2022 stadiums. It was also a source of information about activities as well as key entertainment and cultural events that accompanied the World Cup in Qatar. It also played a role in introducing fans to the tourist attractions in Qatar.

The application worked in parallel with the official website of the tournament's host country to provide fans with a unified and seamless digital experience for the user.

The gold award for the best mobile application was received by the Executive Director of Hayya in the SC Mohamed Abu Aqla, and the Director of Hayya Operations in the SC Saeed al-Kuwari, in a special ceremony held in the United Arab Emirates.

Mohamed Abu Aqla stressed that Hayya to Qatar 2022 has set new standards related to the role of digital tools in supporting mega sporting events.

He said that the Hayya to Qatar 2022 application allowed the SC to provide a seamless digital experience to millions of fans, including a large number who came to Qatar and the region for the first time. The digital platform included a

lot of useful information that fans need. It also provided a set of key services that were provided by various local partners in an unprecedented manner.

He added that the Hayya to Qatar 2022 project has contributed to laying solid foundations for a permanent digital infrastructure that can be used in major sporting events hosted by Qatar in the future, and it also provides a model that can be used all over the world.

The mobile application represents a clear guide for the significant development in the digital transformation scene in the State of Qatar. It is also considered an important milestone worthy of pride by the team that worked hard to develop it and present it to users.

For his part, who managed the operations of the Hayya digital platform during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, pointed out the importance of the application and its role in achieving a successful hosting of the global football event.

He said that the SC is proud to say that the application has achieved great success and it was seen how it was a constant companion for all fans on their way to the stadiums, or while using the Doha Metro station network to reach the Fan Festival, as fans relied on the "Hayya" application to guide them through all stages of the World Cup to enable them to reach the necessary services, ensuring a very easy and smooth experience that will last in everyone's memory.

Digital transformation is a major axis in the Qatar National Vision 2030, which aims to achieve economic and social growth in the country.

The "Hayya" digital platform remains the official portal for visitors to Qatar, and is also part of the operational plans for Expo 2023 Doha and the upcoming Asian Cup 2023.

TENNIS

Tsitsipas quits against Rune at Turin ATP Finals

'I DID WHAT I COULD DO TO BE READY AND FIT FOR THIS MATCH'

Reuters
Turin

Stefanos Tsitsipas retired after just three games of his Green Group clash against Holger Rune at the ATP Finals yesterday, handing the Danish debutant his first victory in the event.

Greek world number six Tsitsipas looked stiff and uncomfortable as he trailed 2-1 and after consulting with a doctor at the changeover he decided that he could not continue.

Tsitsipas, who lost in straight sets to Jannik Sinner in his opening match on Sunday, shuffled off the court to a few jeers from the large crowd inside the Pala Alpitour and later confirmed it was a problem with his back.

As a consolation for the ticket holders, alternates Taylor Fritz and Hubert Hurkacz were due on court to play an exhibition match, although it will not count for the tournament.

"I'm really gutted that I wasn't able to finish the match. It's a shame also not to give that spot to someone else to at least try and do something with it," Tsitsipas said.

"My doctors and the countless visits that I had in the past few days suggested that I play, gave me the green light to go and try it for myself. Unfortunately, I felt terrible on the court. I did what I could do to be ready and fit for this match, but it didn't work out



Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas (right) shakes hands with Denmark's Holger Rune after withdrawing from his group stage match at the ATP Finals in Turin yesterday. Tsitsipas is set to quit the ATP Finals after retiring from his match with Rune early in the first set. (AFP)

for me." Had Tsitsipas withdrawn before the match, first reserve Hurkacz would have played Rune in a live match with the Pole still having a chance to progress in the tournament. "I hate retiring from matches," added Tsitsipas, who claimed the biggest title of his career at the event in 2019.

"I'm not the kind of person that likes leaving mid match. It

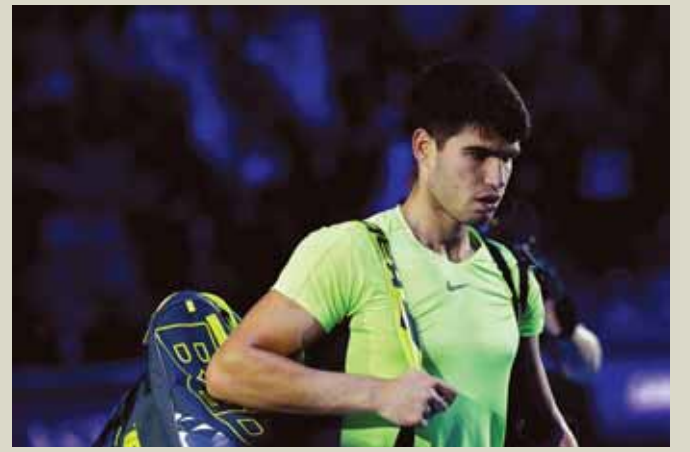
kills me not to be able to finish this tournament. But this is tennis. This is not darts. For me, it's important to be fit and feel good with my back. The pain was very big."

He also pulled out injured in 2021. The 20-year-old said he "knew something was off" in the opening game of a match lasting only 15 minutes. He will go in to

his clash with Sinner in confident mood after pushing Djokovic close in a near three-hour duel on Sunday. "I have never played that well in my life and lost," Rune said on court. "That's how good Novak is."

Djokovic, who is assured of finishing year-end world number one for an eighth time, faces Sinner later.

ALCARAZ SLOW DOWN INEVITABLE, SAYS MEDVEDEV



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz leaves the court after losing his first round-robin match against Germany's Alexander Zverev at the ATP Finals in Turin on Monday. (AFP)

Turin: When Carlos Alcaraz beat Novak Djokovic to win Wimbledon in July it seemed the Spaniard's stratospheric career trajectory was limitless and he would take a stranglehold on men's tennis.

A few months later, however, 24-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic has re-asserted his authority and Alcaraz is experiencing the first slump of his career. The 20-year-old bemoaned the fast playing conditions in Turin after a surprise loss to Germany's Alexander Zverev in his opening match at the ATP Finals on Monday.

Daniil Medvedev, whose defeat of Alcaraz in the US Open semi-final exposed some cracks in the Spaniard's game, says that a dip was to be expected at some point.

"If you would ask me two or three months ago, for sure (I would be surprised)," the Russian told reporters after his opening victory against compatriot Andrey Rublev.

"Now? You know, tennis is a very, very tricky sport. And at this moment, for whatever reason, we feel that Carlos plays just a little bit slower. He does not have the same confidence he had throughout the whole year. This can happen to everyone. This even happened to Novak when he was younger. The question is, how fast is he going to

recover? Is it going to be in this tournament or next year?" Alcaraz will face Rublev in Red Group today when defeat could end his hopes of reaching the semi-finals.

He is looking to become the youngest ATP Finals champion since Pete Sampras in 1991. While Alcaraz's recent defeats have raised eyebrows, fellow Spaniard Alex Corretja, an analyst for Eurosport, says those reading too much in to his form are mistaken. "I think the summer, it was too demanding for him and it was difficult for him to deal with all the expectations and all his motivation maybe to finish number one knowing it was a high expectation," he said. "But nothing is wrong with Carlitos. Carlitos is great."

Raducanu delays comeback after 'challenging year'

Emma Raducanu's "challenging year" suffered another hiccup after the former US Open champion pulled out of her scheduled comeback at an exhibition tournament next month in Macau. The Briton, who turned 21 on Monday, has not played since April after undergoing operations on both wrists and also an ankle. She had targeted the Macau Tennis Masters on December 2-3 for her return but her name was missing when the final field was announced on Monday.

QATAR TRAIN FOR AFGHANISTAN CLASH



Qatar players attend a training session ahead of their FIFA World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 Joint Qualification game against Afghanistan to be played at Khalifa International Stadium tomorrow. Qatar, coached by Carlos Quieroz, have been training at Aspire Academy since last Thursday to prepare for the two qualifying matches including a game against India on November 21 in Bhubaneswar.



SPOTLIGHT

Parisians lose enthusiasm ahead of the Summer Olympics in 2024, reveals poll

Reuters
Paris

Almost one in two Parisians believe hosting the 2024 Summer Olympics is a 'bad thing,' with transport and security their biggest concerns, according to a poll eight months before the event.

Some 44% of Paris region residents expressed a negative opinion while 65% of French residents said having the Olympics in Paris from July 26-Aug. 11 was a 'good thing,' the Odoxa poll for Winamax and RTL showed.

Some 1,207 Paris region residents, and 1,005 French residents were polled. Two years ago, only 22% of Parisians had a negative opinion of the Paris Olympics while more than half of them are now considering leaving the region for the duration of the event.

By contrast, 64% of Parisians are confident that the opening ceremony on the Seine river will be a success.

Meanwhile Valarie Allman's Olympic title defence will come

down to that extra "one-to-three percent," the discus gold medallist said as she prepares for the Paris Games hungrier than ever.

The American took top spot on the podium in Tokyo but missed the World Championships title in Eugene and Budapest, with third and second-place finishes in 2022 and 2023 respectively.

"The biggest thing for me that I want to change going into this one is coming in with the mindset of really going for it," 28-year-old Allmann told reporters.

"I am proud of my performance (in Eugene and Budapest), but I fell short of that top spot on the podium. And I know that if that's the goal, that you have to have a fearlessness of really pushing yourself.

"So for me, it's all about trying to figure out how I can go for that one-to-three percent that tries to set me apart from the competition."

Allman was seemingly cruising to the world title in August when her teammate Lauauga Tausaga obliterated her personal best on her fifth throw to scoop up the crown.

Allman, who will compete in



Olympic rings to celebrate the IOC official announcement that Paris won the 2024 Olympic bid are seen in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France, in this September 16, 2017 file photo. (Reuters)

Eugene next year for Olympic qualifying, said she was honoured

to be with her compatriot on the podium amid an American hot

streak in the women's field events over the last two years.

But the doggedly determined, six-foot Allman said that second place also gave her more motivation.

"I may be the defending Olympic champion, but I'm not the defending world champion," she said. "Budapest was a big challenge. But I think in my heart I believe it's going to prepare me to take on new and maybe even bigger goals."

Allman, an Asics-sponsored athlete, would have a much different Olympic experience in Paris compared to Tokyo, with a party atmosphere expected after the Covid-affected 2020 Games, which were held a year later due to the pandemic.

It is a welcome change for fans and athletes that will require her razor-sharp mental discipline to be in full effect.

"Balancing how do I stick to the plan that we're setting out and not let those distractions take away from what we're trying to achieve is going to be a challenge," said Allman.

"I think when you get onto the competition floor, if that's something that I'm able to do, it's going to be electric."

PREVIEW

South Africa are keen to shed choker's tag against Australia

'Now we're at a stage where all 15 guys have played the games. You've got to give up something'

Reuters
Kolkata

South Africa sense an opportunity to finally get rid of the choker's tag but the onerous task entails getting the better of the most successful team in the history of 50-overs World Cup, Australia, in Thursday's semi-final in Kolkata.

Hurt by a combination of bad luck and nerves in the business end of showpiece event, South Africa are pitted against a powerhouse who thrive in those big moments as Australia have demonstrated with five titles.

The Proteas need to be in control of their nerves to be in control of their destiny, and barring the batting meltdown against India, they have looked formidable finishing second in the group stage behind the hosts.

There is plenty of firepower in their top order and Australia got their fingers burnt when Quinton de Kock's rapid hundred secured the Proteas' comprehensive victory in a group match in Lucknow.

South Africa, who have never progressed beyond the last four, are fretting over the availability of skipper Temba Bavuma, who is nursing a hamstring strain.

"We will continuously assess his progress through the management plan towards giving him the best chance to play on Thursday," the team said in a statement.

Should he miss the semi-finals, Aiden Markram would lead the side, while Reeza Hendricks is likely to open along side de Kock, who has smashed four hundreds in his final ODI tournament.

They have looked more comfortable setting targets than chasing one though, and they will expect more penetration from their bowlers against a resurgent Australia. Regardless of how their group stage campaign ebbed and



South Africa's captain Temba Bhavuma adjusts his cap during a practice session at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata ahead of their ICC World Cup semi-final against Australia. **Right:** Australia's Pat Cummins during practice in Kolkata, India, yesterday. (AFP/Reuters)



HEAD-TO-HEAD RECORD		
Last 10 meetings		
DATE	VENUE	RESULT
06/07/2019	Manchester	South Africa won by 10 runs
29/02/2020	Paarl	South Africa won by 74 runs
04/03/2020	Bloemfontein	South Africa won by 6 wickets
07/03/2020	Potchefstroom	South Africa won by 6 wickets
07/09/2023	Bloemfontein	Australia won by 3 wickets
09/09/2023	Bloemfontein	Australia won by 123 runs
12/09/2023	Potchefstroom	South Africa won by 111 runs
15/09/2023	Centurion	South Africa won by 164 runs
17/09/2023	Johannesburg	South Africa won by 122 runs
12/10/2023	Lucknow	South Africa won by 134 runs
Overall		
Australia wins:	South Africa wins:	Tied: 3
50	55	No result: 1

flowed, it came as no surprise when Australia hurled towards the knockout stages by stringing together seven wins in a row following that defeat by South Af-

rica. Travis Head's return from a hand injury has rejuvenated their batting lineup, allowing others to play with more freedom, which has been evident in their subse-

quent group matches. Glenn Maxwell's sensational double hundred against Afghanistan and Mitchell Marsh's unbeaten 177 off 132 balls against Bangladesh are the top two individual scores in this year's tournament.

For large part of that incendiary knock, Maxwell batted on one leg and had to be rested for their last group match against Bangladesh.

The 35-year-old, who has also played the second spinner's role to perfection, will return for the semi-final replacing either all-rounder Marcus Stoinis or batter Marnus Labuschagne.

"It will be tough (call)," Australia captain Pat Cummins told reporters yesterday. "Now we're at a stage where all 15 guys have played the games."

"You've got to give up something. So it's kind of 'what do you want to give up?' and the good thing is it's whatever way you go I don't think there's any wrong answer."



South Africa's Tabraiz Shamsi bowls during a practice session at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata yesterday. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Australian opener Head says arm injury caused by pacer Coetzee was a 'blessing in disguise'

AFP
Kolkata

Australia opener Travis Head made a late entry into the World Cup after recovering from a fractured hand but yesterday said the injury was a "blessing in disguise".

Five-time winners Australia take on South Africa in the second semi-final in Kolkata tomorrow where Head will renew his rivalry with fast bowler Gerald Coetzee, whose ball caused the damage.

A Coetzee rising delivery struck Head on the left arm in the third one-day international of Australia's tour of South Africa in September and scans revealed a fracture.

Head was in danger of missing the World Cup but Australia kept him in the squad until he was fit to play in the team's sixth league match where he hit a match-winning century against New Zealand.

Reminded about facing Coetzee, who has claimed 18 wickets in seven matches at the tournament, Head said injuries are part and parcel of sport.

"I said to Gerald at the time I'm sure he



Australia's Marcus Stoinis (left), Travis Head (centre) and Sean Abbott attend a practice session ahead of their ICC World Cup semi-final against South Africa at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata. (AFP)

didn't mean to hit me in the hand. It was probably aimed a little bit higher than that," Head, a left-hand batsman, joked.

"But that's all part of the game. So I take a relaxed approach to all that sort of stuff whether it's performance or injuries."

He said: "He did me a favour, I got four

weeks at home with the family, so I got refreshed to come back. And hopefully I can be refreshed and energised and can perform at the back end of the tournament. It might be a blessing in disguise." Head smashed a 67-ball 109 in the must-win match against New Zealand but misfired in the next three with scores of 11, 0 and 10. Head, 29, said his style is not all-out attack. He is just as content playing the waiting game as well.

"I feel like I try and give myself the best chance to score off balls that I feel like I can and respect the ones in between," he said. "I think you have to do that. It's international cricket, so I don't think it's all guns blazing every time. So it's a balancing act. I feel like I'm in a good mindset to give myself the best chance to be as positive as I can be."

Australia won seven straight matches in the league stage and remain two wins away from their sixth title.

"I'm sure everyone has thought about that," Head said.

"It hasn't really been spoken about as a group, but we know what's at the end of this tournament and what's up for grabs."

Head has played 62 ODIs for Australia since his debut in 2016 and scored 2,194 runs.

Cummins unsure of future as ODI skipper, eyes IPL return

Kolkata: Pat Cummins is unsure whether he will continue as Australia's one-day international captain after the World Cup but is looking to return to the Indian Premier League (IPL) next season in preparation for the Twenty20 showpiece.

Test skipper Cummins, who will lead Australia into their semi-final against South Africa tomorrow, took on the ODI role with an eye firmly on the World Cup when Aaron Finch retired from the format last year.

The paceman said he was "potentially" interested in staying on after the tournament but that the decision would rest with coach Andrew McDonald and head selector George Bailey's assessment of his workload and Australia's priorities.

"We've been pretty open, me and Andrew and George around different times in the year you're going to have different priorities," Cummins told reporters in Kolkata.

"After here, the focus shifts back to Test cricket for a fair while.

Probably like we've done in the past, at times white-ball cricket is going to have to shift so we fully focus on Test cricket. So yeah, there's no end date in sight.

"I feel like I've been managed really well and looked after, albeit in a really, really busy year where you don't really want to give up any cricket."

The captaincy of the T20 side was vacated when Finch retired from all international cricket in February but Mitch Marsh is favourite to claim that role ahead of the World Cup in the Caribbean and US next June.

Cummins is keen to play a full part in that tournament, however, and signalled a return to the IPL next year after skipping it this year because of his busy schedule. "I feel like I haven't played a heap of T20 cricket and in some ways I feel like I haven't played my best T20 cricket for a little while," Cummins added. "I'm really excited, I'm probably going to go into the IPL auction for next year to try to get some games before that World Cup."

Australia feeling 2021 vibes ahead of semi-final: Maxwell

Mumbai: Australia head into tomorrow's World Cup semi-final against South Africa with the same excitement in the dressing room that propelled them to their maiden triumph in the T20 World Cup in 2021, Glenn Maxwell said.

Maxwell was part of Aaron Finch's groundbreaking squad in the United Arab Emirates in 2021 and scored an unbeaten 28 in the final against New Zealand. Coming off an incredible match-winning double-century against Afghanistan last week, the mercurial all-rounder said his team had a huge boost from the victory over the South Asian side and were well-placed to carry on and claim a

record-extending sixth ODI World Cup title.

"The excitement of that match has given us a whole new belief going forward," Maxwell said in an interview with Australian broadcaster Fox Sports.

"It reminded me of the T20 World Cup in 2021. The same sort of feeling.

"The feeling around the group was energetic, electric, exciting and everyone felt they were heading towards the same end goal. "And who knows, it could be the same thing here."

Having battled a full body cramp when batting against Afghanistan, Maxwell guided Australia to victory



Australia's Glenn Maxwell looks on during a practice session ahead of their ICC World Cup semi-final against South Africa. (AFP)

with an unbeaten 201 off 128 balls, relying mostly on his hands and reflexes to smash the bowlers around the ground.

The astonishing onslaught by Maxwell for Australia in Mumbai, brought him the 11th double-century in one-day internationals - but the first in a chase, as the other 10 were all scored by openers in the first innings of the match.

The knock was quickly branded the greatest ODI innings of all-time by a slew of former players and pundits. With five runs left to win and to bring up Australia's first double-century in ODIs, Maxwell said he was absolutely certain that

he would score a six off spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman to achieve both targets. He duly clobbered Mujeeb over the deep midwicket fence, his third six of the over.

"It may sound arrogant and over-confident but (it was) because I knew I had the short boundary, because I knew Mujeeb," he said. "We've played against and with each other. I've spent a whole IPL training with him, having little contests and spending a lot of time with him."

"And I'd faced most of his overs he'd bowled at that stage. I just felt like, 'I've got this...I know I don't have to hit it out of the middle to get a six.'"



PREVIEW

New Zealand misery all in the past for India captain Rohit as semi-final looms

'This current crop of players is very much into what is happening today, what can happen tomorrow'

AFP
Mumbai

India captain Rohit Sharma insisted his side's record of big game defeats by New Zealand was "all in the past" as they prepared to face the Black Caps in a World Cup semi-final.

Tournament hosts India head into today's showpiece match at opening batsman Rohit's Wankhede Stadium home ground as the outstanding side of the 10-team event, having won all nine of their round-robin games to qualify for the knockout phase in style.

But four years ago a team featuring several of the same players, including Rohit and star batsman Virat Kohli, were members of an India side that suffered an agonising 18-run defeat by New Zealand in a rain-affected World Cup semi-final spanning two days in Manchester.

New Zealand also defeated India in the inaugural 2021 World Test Championship final.

The Wankhede was the venue when India defeated Sri Lanka in a 2011 final to win their second World Cup title following a 1983 triumph in England under captain Kapil Dev.

The build-up to today's game has seen much speculation about whether Rohit's men can join those celebrated teams as World Cup champions of whether New Zealand, who gave India a run for their money before going down



India's Rohit Sharma (right) speaks with coach Rahul Dravid during a practice session at the Wankhede Cricket Stadium in Mumbai ahead of their ICC World Cup semi-final against New Zealand. **Right:** India's Virat Kohli bats at the nets at the Wankhede Cricket Stadium yesterday. (AFP)



by four wickets in pool play, will prove their downfall once again.

Rohit, however, insisted his focus was firmly on the here and now.

"That's the beauty of this team," he told a pre-match press conference yesterday. "None of the guys were born when we won our first World Cup and then, when we won our second World Cup in 2011, half of the guys were not even playing the game."

He added: "This current crop

of players is very much into what is happening today, what can happen tomorrow...The focus is on how they can get better as a player, what they can bring to the team and the things they can improve."

Rohit said while a semi-final was a high pressure situation, his side were always under intense scrutiny in cricket-crazy India.

"If you are an Indian cricketer, then whatever the format, whatever the tournament, there is always pressure. Because you

hear the same voice from everywhere that we have to win the match tomorrow...So, I think in terms of pressure, it becomes mandatory for Indian cricketers.

"There is pressure, but we have tried so hard in all these years to keep that aside and focus more on our game, strategy, and the way we play," he added. Before this World Cup, Rohit spoke about having "unfinished business", with the 36-year-old saying yesterday: "Now it's just about business, the

pure business of getting the job done for the team."

Kohli, who now needs just one more century to surpass the record of 49 one-day international hundreds he shares with former India teammate Sachin Tendulkar, is this tournament's leading batsman with 594 runs - and Rohit is not far behind on 503.

India also boast a formidable fast-bowling line-up in Jasprit Bumrah, Mohamed Siraj and Mohamed Shami, and two fine spin-

ners in Ravindra Jadeja and Kuldeep Yadav. But Rohit said he was well aware of the threat posed by New Zealand, beaten finalists at the last two World Cups.

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson is coming into form after injury and the Black Caps' attack will be led by experienced left-arm fast bowler Trent Boult. "They are probably the most disciplined team, they play their cricket very smartly, they understand the opposition very well," said Rohit.

SPOTLIGHT

Williamson is relishing 'special' India semi-final

AFP
Mumbai

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson said his side's experience of playing in front of partisan crowds would serve them well when they face hosts India in a blockbuster World Cup semi-final.

A capacity crowd of over 33,000 is expected at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium - the home ground of India captain Rohit Sharma - for today's clash

New Zealand, losing finalists at the last two World Cups but yet to lift the trophy, knocked India out at the semi-final stage in a rain-affected two-day clash in Manchester four years ago.

Bad weather, however, is unlikely to be an issue in Mumbai and while India had plenty of support at Old Trafford, star batsman Williamson knows that will be as nothing compared to the passionate backing they'll have today.

When a reporter told Williamson during a pre-match press conference yesterday that the capacity of the Wankhede is 33,108 and "33 of them will be in blue (India's colour)," he jokingly replied: "There'll be more than that."

Williamson, who knows India well from playing in the lucrative Indian Premier League, added: "We're expecting a fairly blue crowd that will be supporting their team."

"We remember over the years, a number of different crowds that we've had that haven't always been your own fans."

"We have got a small country that doesn't always fill out the stadiums but you still appreciate the atmosphere it brings."

"Not many people get that opportunity, cricket in India, playing against India in a World Cup semi-final, is special and some-



New Zealand's Kane Williamson (right) interacts with coach Gary Stead during a practice session at the Wankhede Cricket Stadium yesterday. **Below:** Tim Southee of New Zealand during nets. (AFP)



thing to appreciate and look forward to."

Williamson is particularly glad to be involved after fearing he might not make it to the World Cup before a freak injury threatened to cut short his participation.

After spending nearly seven months out with a serious knee injury, he missed New Zealand's

opening wins over champions England and the Netherlands.

He marked his comeback with 78 not out during an eight-wicket victory over Bangladesh in Chennai only to suffer a broken left thumb following a wayward throw while running between the wickets. The 33-year-old then missed several more games before returning with 95 against Pakistan in Bengaluru.

"An interesting journey for sure," said Williamson.

"From sort of it not being a chance (of playing at the World Cup) to getting close and it becoming a reality and something to target...Then to get back and then break my thumb. It was quite frustrating and testing."

But a 10-team round-robin event gave Williamson hope he could still feature later on in the tournament.

"I still felt it hadn't ruled me

out, so I was grateful for that and it's nice to be sitting here."

India defeated New Zealand by four wickets in a hard-fought pool match in Dharamsala last month but Williamson played down the impact of that fixture and the 2019 semi-final ahead of Wednesday's clash.

"They (India) are a side that's been playing extremely well, but we also know come finals time, everything sort of starts again."

Williamson was more forthcoming about New Zealand rising star Rachin Ravindra, with the 23-year-old left-handed opener having already scored three hundreds at his debut World Cup.

"He's burst onto the scene and in a big way," said Williamson.

"It's not just the volume of runs that he's achieved so far, but how he's been scoring them and how it's been geared towards trying to move the team forward."

HEAD-TO-HEAD RECORD

Last 10 meetings

DATE	VENUE	RESULT
05/02/2020	Hamilton	New Zealand won by 4 wickets
08/02/2020	Auckland	New Zealand won by 22 runs
11/02/2020	Mount Maunganui	New Zealand won by 5 wickets
25/11/2022	Auckland	New Zealand won by 7 wickets
27/11/2022	Mount Maunganui	No Result
30/11/2022	Christchurch	No Result
18/01/2023	Hyderabad	India won by 12 runs
21/01/2023	Raipur	India won by 8 wickets
24/01/2023	Indore	India won by 90 runs
22/10/2023	Dharamsala	India won by 4 wickets

Overall

India wins:	New Zealand wins:	Tied: 1
59	50	No result: 7



New Zealand's Tom Latham prepares to take a catch during a practice session at the Wankhede Cricket Stadium yesterday. (AFP)

Joker Williamson climbs press conference 'Everest' at World Cup

Mumbai: New Zealand captain Kane Williamson proved as adept at facing tricky deliveries off the pitch as he is on it after a chaotic start to a Cricket World Cup semi-final press conference yesterday.

With New Zealand facing unbeaten hosts India in today's last-four clash in Mumbai, the star batsman was confronted by dozens of reporters at Wankhede Stadium eager to hear his views.

But the press conference started in unusual fashion with a question referencing the first recorded ascent of Mount Everest, the world's highest peak, in Nepal by New Zealand's Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay.

"On May 29, 1953, about 70 years back..." said a reporter. But before he could finish his question, Williamson, who was born 37 years later in 1990, interjected "I remember", prompting a roar of laughter from the assembled journalists and broadcasters.

Williamson, who knows India well from his time playing in the Indian Premier League, started to answer the question only to be interrupted again by more technical problems.

While officials took several minutes to resolve the issue, the 33-year-old Williamson played sound engineer, prompting further laughter by saying: "Hello mic check, mic check, mic check".