

WATSON TO RETIRE AFTER WORLD T20

MOHALI: Australian all-rounder Shane Watson announced yesterday he would retire from international cricket after the ongoing World Twenty20 in India, bringing to an end a sterling career spanning 14 years. Watson, 34, shared his decision to call it quits with teammates in Mohali, where Australia take on Pakistan in a World T20 group match today, Cricket Australia said.

"It's been over the last week that it's really become clear that now really is the right time to retire from all international cricket," Watson said in a statement issued by the national cricket body. Watson had retired from Test cricket at the end of last year's Ashes tour of England and has not played one-day internationals since September.

Watson, who is also retiring from first-class cricket, would however remain available for lucrative T20 leagues around the world. Other players such as the West Indies' Chris Gayle have also stopped playing Tests in order to earn big bucks in tournaments like Australia's Big Bash or the Indian Premier League.

An opening batsman and a reliable pacer, Watson scored 5,757 runs from 190 ODIs. He also took 168 ODI wickets and holds the Australian record for the highest ODI score, an unbeaten 185 against Bangladesh in Dhaka in 2011. Always a dangerous player in the shortest format, he has scored 1,400 runs from 56 T20 internationals so far while taking 46 wickets.

Watson was the last surviving player of the Australian golden era, having played along with the likes of Glenn McGrath, Shane Warne, Ricky Ponting and Adam Gilchrist. "I really enjoyed my time being back in the Australian squad but, it is quite different," Watson, a father of two, said. "None of the other guys that I played with growing up are here anymore."

'Homework' saga

Watson was part of Australia's World Cup triumphs in 2007 and 2015 and also starred during the team's winning campaigns at the Champions Trophy finals of 2006 and 2009. A key member of Australia's 2013-14 Ashes whitewash of England, Watson has had to battle niggling injuries but he managed to defy the critics each time.

Watson had mulled quitting Test cricket in 2013 after a disastrous tour of India that saw him being suspended and sent back home for failing "to do his homework" as the vice-captain. "That was a time I certainly was considering my future within the Australian team because at that point in time I certainly wasn't enjoying the environment at all," Watson said in yesterday's statement. "The thing that really shone through at that point in time was how much I do love the game and realizing that was absolutely living the dream.

"I just had to get through that period of time having faith that there was light at the end of the tunnel and there certainly was." Batting great and former Australian skipper Ponting took to Twitter to thank Watson for "wonderful memories" while former player turned commentator Tom Moody also lavished praise on the retiring player. "Congratulations on an outstanding international career, you've captivated us all with your all-round skills," Moody tweeted. With more time on hand, Watson said he would try his hand at coaching. "It's no secret I do love coaching and that's one thing I will be doing in my time off." — AFP



MOHALI: Australia's Shane Watson plays a shot in the nets as he participates in a training session at The Punjab Cricket Stadium Association Stadium. — AFP



BANGALORE: Indian players including Hardik Pandya (L) and captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni (C) celebrate the wicket that led to the victory of India by 1 run during the World T20 cricket tournament match between India and Bangladesh at The Chinnaswamy Stadium. — AFP

DHONI: MANAGING CHAOS KEY TO NAIL BITING WIN

BANGALORE: Mahendra Singh Dhoni said India's nail biting one-run win over Bangladesh to keep their World Twenty20 dream alive was all about holding their nerve and being able to "manage chaos". India survived a rollercoaster match in Bangalore on Wednesday night that saw Bangladesh come tantalizingly close to chasing down India's total of 146 for seven, only to lose three wickets in the last three balls.

India finally scraped home when wicket-keeping skipper Dhoni ran out Mustafizur Rahman off the last ball of the match, after earlier taking two critical stumpings. With two wins and one losses, the victory gives India much-needed momentum as they gun for a place in the semi-finals, with only Australia left to play in the group stages.

Dhoni paid credit to his side for keeping cool and recovering from mistakes in the pressure-cooker atmosphere of a packed Chinnaswamy Stadium after showing similar resolve on Saturday in a win over Pakistan. Dhoni, known as "Captain Cool" and the brains behind India's onfield strategy, said it was important to listen to all voices in those situations, and then come to your own conclusions quickly.

"In a situation like this, it's literally chaos. What you are trying to do is you're trying to manage chaos," Dhoni said after the match. "Everybody will come and he'll have his own opinion. Often the opinion of a batsman is very different to the opinion of a bowler. "If I am convinced that this is something I want to do, I will go ahead with it but definitely having an open mind at that point of time really helps because at times in situations like these under pressure, that's where the input of others comes in. "But you have to assess everything and it has to happen in a very short span of time."

Dhoni singled out his younger charges including 22-year-old paceman Jasprit Bumrah for overcoming some shaky fielding, including a miss-field turned boundary and a

dropped chance off Bangladesh star batsman Tamim Iqbal, to produce some solid bowling. "These are the games that really make you better players because it pushes you to think in a different way, it pushes you to have that confidence in your strength at the time when it's really needed."

Surviving scares

The veteran skipper has survived many scares over the years including a slow start in 2007 before winning the inaugural World Twenty20. India's prospects also looked grim in the 2011 ODI World Cup after their first two matches against the game's big guns, before going on to clinch the trophy on home soil. The possibility of a Bangladeshi win evoked nasty memories for Dhoni of the 2007 50-over World Cup, when India were

eliminated in the first round after losing to the Tigers. Dhoni could still remember the pain of that defeat which came in the early days of his international career. "That's something that was very harsh on us, especially on me, I feel that was the point where I felt life was very tough," he said.

Mashrafe Mortaza hailed his bowlers for keeping India's batsmen in check, as Bangladesh bow out of the tournament after three straight losses and only in-form New Zealand left to play. "I think (our) bowlers have done a great job. We were on top till last three balls," the disappointed captain said. Bangladesh powered through the preliminary matches, but hit a wall in the group stage, and suffered a major blow when two of their best bowlers were suspended for illegal actions. — AFP

AFGHANS STAY PHILOSOPHICAL AFTER GOING DOWN FIGHTING

KABUL: Afghans rallied behind their defeated national cricket team yesterday after Asghar Stanikzai's side went down fighting at the World Twenty20 in Delhi, crashing out of the tournament despite giving England a scare. The third straight loss came despite Afghanistan's slow bowlers making England sweat on Wednesday, reducing them to 85 for seven only to have their batting let them down, falling just 15 runs short of victory.

"We lack experience, we are an inexperienced side. We played very well against England," Aziz Gharwal, a cricket board official said. "We restricted England to a decent total, but our batting has let us down.

"I think the more we play against top teams, the more we will gain experience

from them," he said.

The result sent Afghanistan out of the hunt for a semi-final spot after they also lost to Sri Lanka and South Africa in the Super 10 stage, though they will still play against the West Indies on March 27. Afghanistan had beaten Zimbabwe comprehensively in the qualifiers in mid-March to storm into the Super 10s, a remarkable feat for the only non-Test team left in the tournament—a team who have to play all their matches away from their war-torn home.

Afghan fans on social media took the loss in their stride. In 2012 England defeated Afghanistan by 116 runs. "Yesterday, we got beaten by 15 runs. Big improvements," said fan Naimatullah Khan on Facebook. — AFP