

Sports

Starc says India defeat the World Cup turning point for Australia

N Zealand's Boult takes World Cup hat-trick against Australia

LONDON: Mitchell Starc said the lessons learnt from a defeat by title rivals India were behind champions Australia's impressive surge to the semi-finals of the World Cup. Aaron Finch's side had already booked their place in the last four ahead of an 86-run thrashing of New Zealand—the team they beat in the 2015 final-at Lord's on Saturday.

Australia were in trouble at 92-5 after winning the toss on a used pitch before a stand of 107 between Usman Khawaja (88) and Alex Carey (71) propelled them to a competitive 243-9, for all Trent Boult took a last-over hat-trick. Jason Behrendorff, as he had done in the midweek defeat of England, then struck up front before fellow left-arm quick Starc, the leading bowler at this World Cup, took his tournament tally to 24 wickets with 5-26 as New Zealand slumped to 157 all out.

Australia's only reverse in eight group matches at this World Cup was a 36-run defeat by India and Starc, the player of the 2015 World Cup, said: "There's a calmness around the whole group, even when things aren't happening for us."

"Since India, we've taken wickets in the middle regularly. We were all a little off in that India game. "We didn't start well today but to scrap to a good score was fantastic for the middle order," added the 29-year-old. "I'm stoked

to be playing a part in this World Cup. "Our chances are as good as any team, always spoke about peaking ahead of the tournament. "We've got guys who are ready to go at different stages of the bowling innings," said Starc. "Jason has been fantastic in the past two innings, he's taken his opportunity with both hands."

"We're finding ways to win. I think a big part of that is our calmness and I think that's probably led by Finch (skipper Aaron Finch). He's been fantastic as a captain." After Saturday's match, where his haul included the prize wicket of New Zealand captain Kane Williamson, Starc admitted: "It was a worn wicket, so we probably had the rub of the conditions bowling second on that."

"It's a great result today but one win isn't going to win the World Cup." Starc's return is also the best haul of the tournament. Australia have a week off until their final group game against South Africa, by which time the wife of David Warner—the tournament's leading run-scorer—should have given birth to the couple's third child in Britain.

Starc said: "He packed his bag pretty quick. "I think he's out there enjoying the win, and tomorrow (Sunday) he'll be a dad for the third time. "Good luck to the Warners and I think when we see him in Manchester, he'll have his hands full again." — AFP



LONDON: Australia's Mitchell Starc (C) appeals successfully for the wicket of New Zealand's Ish Sodhi for five during the 2019 Cricket World Cup group stage match between New Zealand and Australia at Lord's Cricket Ground in London. — AFP

Vettori urges NZ not to panic after World Cup blow

LONDON: Former New Zealand star Daniel Vettori insists his country are still World Cup contenders despite their recent stumbles. New Zealand suffered their second defeat of the tournament against Australia at Lord's on Saturday, losing by 86 runs against the holders after a defeat to Pakistan in their previous game.

The Black Caps are not assured of a semi-final berth with one game left against title rivals England next week. But Vettori remains confident the 2015 World Cup runners-up will stay calm ahead of the England clash and should be capable of advancing to the knock-out stages.

"I still definitely feel that this New Zealand side can make history and win it all," Vettori said in an ICC Media column. "Two losses at this stage will be tough to take but they have been so good for so long and have so many experienced players that I am sure they will pull through."

"It is a bit tighter now, but I still think they will feel pretty confident. Even if every result goes against them, their net run rate should still put them into the semi-finals. "The nature of this New Zealand team for an extended period of time now has been to stay pretty constant, to not panic."

Vettori says New Zealand have been playing well enough not to lose faith in their game-plan. "They will understand that they have played some really good cricket in this tournament," he said. "They will need to call on all their nous to get through against the hosts."

"But even if they don't win against England and go through via net run rate, or other results going their way, I still think they will walk into the semi-finals thinking they can beat anyone on their day." Vettori's main concern is New Zealand's ability to score enough runs to put opponents in trouble on slow pitches, with the Black Caps yet to reach 300 in the tournament.

"The only question mark for them will be the surfaces they were playing on. It looks like across the board the surfaces are getting lower and slower," he said. "That makes it more difficult for batting and those partnerships are going to become more important, I am sure that will be a big focus against England." — AFP

ICC chief happy with 'sporting' WCup pitches

BIRMINGHAM: International Cricket Council chief executive David Richardson yesterday said he is happy with the World Cup's "sporting pitches", insisting they have provided good balance between bat and ball.

Hosts England posted a tournament high of 397 for six against Afghanistan on June 18, but teams have struggled to get past 250 in the second innings of matches. The 10-team competition has seen sublime hundreds by the world's top batsmen including Australia's David Warner, New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson and Joe Root of England.

Afghanistan's Naib defends costly decision to bowl

LEEDS: Afghanistan skipper Gulbadin Naib defended his disastrous decision to bring himself on to bowl towards the end of a gripping match against Pakistan on Saturday—a move that cost 18 runs in a single over.

Pakistan edged home by three wickets with two balls to spare at Headingley but the contest turned in the 46th over, bowled by Naib. Spinners Mohammad Nabi (2-23), Mujeeb Ur Rahman (2-34) and Rashid Khan (1-50) had restricted Pakistan, who desperately needed to win to keep up their push for a semi-final place.

Pakistan, with four wickets in hand, needed 46 runs from 30 balls to win the match at the end of the 45th over but the complexion of the game was completely changed after man-of-the-match Imad Wasim smashed three fours and scrambled some more runs. Naib also bowled a wide.

Suddenly Pakistan needed just 28 runs from 24 balls and held their nerve to edge home. Seamer Naib, who conceded 73 runs in 9.4 wicketless overs, said a hamstring injury to paceman Hamid Hassan after he had bowled just two overs was the turning point in the match.

"We had the feeling they weren't targeting every bowler," said Naib, who was controversially appointed captain in place of the successful Asghar Afghan two months before the World Cup.

"Every team has their plans and I thought the crucial point is for the 46th over that I bowled and 18 runs, it's not really good." "If Hamid was there maybe I didn't bowl

But the bowlers have made their presence felt with Australia paceman Mitchell Starc leading the wicket-takers chart with 24 scalps in eight matches. Richardson said the ICC's only direction to the pitch curators was to prepare sporting tracks.

"During our playing days a score of between 220 and 260 was a good score but not now. So our only direction to the curators was to prepare sporting tracks," the former South African wicketkeeper-batsman told reporters in Edgbaston.

"And what's heartening to see in this tournament is how the bowlers have had a say and we have seen some exciting cricket. "Of course in ODIs you will not see as many close games as in Twenty20 cricket but the matches have gone deep and that's important."

Defending champions Australia were the first team to book their semi-finals berth and now have seven wins from their eight league matches. The semi-final race opened up after England's shock loss to Sri Lanka last week, with six of the 10 teams fighting for the remaining three spots.

"Even during the South Africa-India game, I believed for a while the Proteas will get a few more wickets but it didn't happen," he said. "So that's what I mean when I say that the tournament has lived up to expectations and only improved over the years."

Fan violence in Leeds on Saturday marred a World Cup match between Pakistan and Afghanistan as police were forced to intervene after fighting broke out between supporters of the two teams. Richardson said that incidents like these only make the ICC more "aware" and "prepared".

Meanwhile, Richardson lauded the ICC's work in spreading the game to different parts of the world and also contributing to society as they partnered with UNICEF to raise money for children.

ICC and UNICEF got together for the 'One Day for Children' campaign in Birmingham with a special celebration at the England against India match. The money raised will support UNICEF's work for children in cricket-playing nations across the world. — AFP

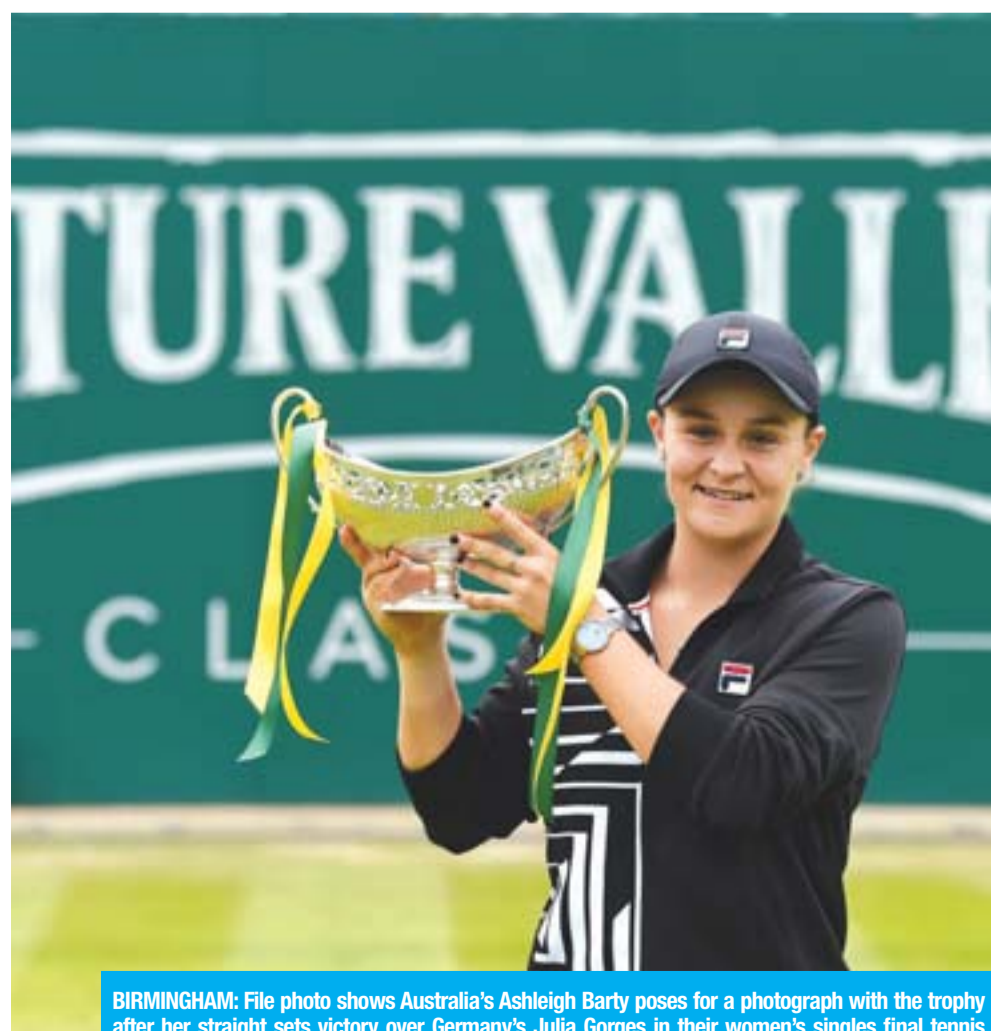


LEEDS: Afghanistan's Mohammad Nabi (R) is watched by Pakistan's Mohammad Hafeez as he plays a shot during the 2019 Cricket World Cup group stage match between Pakistan and Afghanistan at Headingley in Leeds, northern England. — AFP

more than three or four overs because I do not have enough speed for this kind of surface," he added.

But Naib gave credit to Pakistan. "I think the pressure was on the Pakistan side. But credit goes to them, how

they played and how they finished the game," he said. Afghanistan, who have lost all eight of their World Cup matches, play West Indies in their final match at Headingley on July 4. — AFP



BIRMINGHAM: File photo shows Australia's Ashleigh Barty poses for a photograph with the trophy after her straight sets victory over Germany's Julia Gorges in their women's singles final tennis match at the WTA Nature Valley Classic tournament in Birmingham. — AFP

Barty seeks to end long Aussie drought with women's Wimbledon crown

LONDON: Ashleigh Barty goes into Wimbledon buoyed, unlike her predecessor Naomi Osaka, by being world number one and with several of her major rivals struggling. The engaging 23-year-old Australian—who emulated compatriot Evonne Goolagong Cawley by becoming number one last weekend—has yet to get beyond the third round at Wimbledon.

However, by winning the Birmingham tournament last weekend Barty showed she has the strengths to add the grass court Grand Slam to the French Open she won on clay and become the first Australian women's champion since Goolagong Cawley's second success in 1980.

With 37-year-old seven-time champion Serena Williams finally showing signs of age, Osaka looking exposed through poor form and two-time Wimbledon singles champion Petra Kvitova still easing back to top form after an arm injury, defending champion Angelique Kerber may be the biggest threat to Barty.

Barty, who took an unconventional route to becoming world number one by taking a time off to play cricket, insists she feels no pressure. "The only pressure is that that I put on myself," she said. "To make sure that I do everything correctly and prepare as best that I can to try and play a good tennis match, try and play well, to enjoy myself."

Barty, who says the arm problem that forced her withdrawal from the Eastbourne tournament has cleared up, admits Wimbledon is unique among the Grand Slam events in having so few lead-up events on the surface.

"Wimbledon isn't a normal event," she said. "It's a little bit bizarre coming into Wimbledon having only played one grass court tournament. "We feel like we've been striking the ball really well, we're comfortable with the grass under our feet." Whilst Barty says she did not know what else the draw held for her,

Williams claimed not to even know the Australian was number one. The American legend could perhaps be forgiven her ignorance given how often the top spot has changed since her era of dominance ended. Nevertheless Williams—who claims she is over the knee woes that saw her pull out of her match with sister Venus at the Italian Open and then make an early French Open exit—believes Barty could be in for a long run as number one.

"I think so," said Williams. "I think she has a great game. "I think she's really even-tempered. She's just really chill. She's had a really good year."

'TAKE THE POSITIVE'

Williams is still chasing the elusive 24th Grand Slam title that would put her alongside Australian Margaret Court, but she was not talking up her chances. "I just haven't had enough match play, quite frankly," she said. "I finally feel like I found some good results in Paris. "I'm just going to do the best that I can now that I'm here," she said, adding with a smile: "I know how to play tennis." Osaka, for her part, says she is much more in the frame of mind she was when she won the Australian Open earlier this year than the stressed-out player who exited the French Open in the third round.

The 21-year-old says the number one spot she held earlier this year had been a millstone round her neck: "Mentally it was way more stress and pressure than I could have imagined." Despite a second-round defeat at the Birmingham tournament she insists she is in good shape going into Wimbledon, where she has yet to get past the third round.

"Actually in Australia I felt like normal," she said. "I felt like how I am now. "I feel like it (grass) should be good for me because it's very heavily reliant on the first serves, being the first person to be aggressive."

Kerber may have lost in the Eastbourne final to Karolina Pliskova but the German will be delighted if like last year that is the launching pad to winning at the All England club. Last year she lost in the Eastbourne semi-final only to go on and win Wimbledon.

"I will try to take the positive things from the whole week, from the last two weeks before going to Wimbledon now," said the 31-year-old German. — AFP