

## Sports

# Lehmann tips Smith and Warner to shine for Australia in World Cup

## Watson 'gave blood' for Chennai during IPL final

MELBOURNE: Former Australia coach Darren Lehmann expects Steve Smith and David Warner to play a big role in their title defence on their return to international cricket at the World Cup. Smith and Warner have returned from year-long bans following a ball-tampering scandal in South Africa which also prompted Lehmann to step down as coach of the side in March last year.

The top order duo made impressive return from elbow surgeries for their respective franchises at the Indian Premier League Twenty20 tournament and Lehmann was convinced they will shine at the World Cup in England and Wales.

"Smith at number three or four, he'd be exceptional at the World Cup," Lehmann told Macquarie Sports Radio. "People are worried about the break they've had with 12 months out, but you see them in the IPL performing and making runs."

"David Warner is an excitement machine, at the top of the order, he can set it alight. "If he has a really good tournament, he set us on the road to winning a lot of games in the last World Cup. If he does it again at the top of the order with Aaron Finch, they'll be hard to stop." Warner, who will never captain Australia for his role in the scandal in South Africa, looked particularly impressive at the IPL finishing as its leading scorer with 692 runs from 12 innings that included nine 50-plus scores.

In his absence, Finch and Usman Khawaja have formed a steady opening partnership for Australia but Lehmann expected Warner to slot back at the top of the order. "Opening with Finch and Warner, I think that's a certainty," the former Australia all-rounder said. "And

then there's Khawaja or Shaun Marsh at three I'd think and Smith at four - this is your top four."

Meanwhile in Hyderabad, there were bloodstains on the leg of Shane Watson's trousers during the IPL final as he scored a blistering 80 for Chennai Super Kings were revealed yesterday to be from a cut that needed six stitches when he finished.

The 37-year-old Australian batsman was on the losing side in the end, but teammate Harbhajan Singh hailed Watson's courage in continuing to play despite suffering a gashed knee while diving for a catch.

"Respect brother what a LEGEND @srwatson33 given sweat, blood and everything for the team.. INSPIRING," Singh wrote on Instagram.

The Indian off-spinner posted a picture of Watson with blood-stained yellow trousers while batting in the Twenty20 final against the Mumbai Indians, and said the opener needed six stitches after the valiant innings.

"Can you guys see the blood on his knee.. He got 6 stitches after the game," Harbhajan wrote. "Got injured while diving but continue to bat without telling anyone," the bowler added.

Watson smashed 80 off 59 deliveries only to see his team lose by one run. Watson was run out going for an unlikely second in the final over, and Mumbai paceman Lasith Malinga denied Chennai the two runs needed off the last ball to win the game and a record fourth title.

Watson's return to the IPL next season remains uncertain. He has already bid farewell to Australia's Big Bash T20 tournament, and Chennai captain M.S. Dhoni indicated he would make changes to the batting lineup for next year. — Agencies



HYDERABAD: In this file photo taken on May 12, 2019 Chennai Super Kings cricketer Shane Watson (L) plays a shot — with blood staining his uniform behind his pads on his left knee — during the 2019 Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 final cricket match between Mumbai Indians and Chennai Super Kings at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in Hyderabad. —AFP

## International cricket gets first woman match referee

NEW DELHI: The International Cricket Council yesterday named G.S. Lakshmi as the first woman on the international panel of match referees, making her eligible to take control of men's games. The 51-year-old Lakshmi, who first officiated as a match referee in domestic women's cricket in 2008-09, has overseen three women's one-day internationals and three Twenty20s.

Her appointment came just after Australia's Claire Polosak became the first woman umpire in a men's ODI last month. "To be selected in the international panel by the ICC is a huge honour for me as it opens up new avenues," Lakshmi said in an ICC statement. "I have had a long career as a cricketer in India and also as a match referee."



G.S. Lakshmi

"I hope to put my experience both as a player and as a match official to good use on the international circuit." Meanwhile, Australia's Eloise Sheridan has joined Polosak on the ICC's umpires development panel, taking the number of women on the

body that provides umpires for all internationals to eight.

Lauren Agenbag, Kim Cotton, Shivani Mishra, Sue Redfern, Mary Waldron and Jacqueline Williams are the other women on the panel. — AFP

## Lillard, Blazers aim to give Warriors a battle

OAKLAND: Damian Lillard hopes to close down his hometown arena on his own terms when the Portland Trail Blazers take on the two-time defending champion Golden State Warriors in the Western Conference finals, a best-of-seven series that tips off tonight in Oakland, Calif.

Lillard, who is rapidly ascending the list of most accomplished Oakland High graduates that currently boasts of David Carradine, Jackie Jensen, Jack London and Bill Rigney, bombed in a game-winning 3-pointer on what many believed would be his final shot at Oracle Arena in a one-point overtime win in December.

It was part of a 113-point, four-game season series the Oakland native had against the Warriors, the most points scored against Golden State in the regular season.

But now, perhaps fittingly, he must return in a postseason series that will be the last for the Warriors in Oakland should they fail to advance to their fifth straight NBA finals. Golden State will move into the Chase Center in San Francisco next season.

"He can score the ball with the best of them," Warriors forward Draymond Green gushed of Lillard earlier in the postseason. "Dame has a chip on his shoulder. Has since the day he walked into this league. He play like a guy from Oakland, with a chip on his shoulder. A guy who's been doubted forever."

Lillard and CJ McCollum, hero of Sunday's Game 7 win at Denver that propelled the Trail Blazers into their first Western finals since 2000, will go head-to-head with Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson in the marquee matchup of the series.

Unless there's a clear winner in the duel of two of the NBA's premier backcourts, the series could turn into a battle of attrition in the front court, where five key players have different degrees of injuries.

The only certainty among the five is that Portland center Jusuf Nurkic, who suffered a broken leg in March, won't play in the series. He contributed double-doubles to two Portland wins over Golden State this season, and added a third in a December loss.

Meanwhile, Nurkic's counterpart, DeMarcus Cousins, has expressed a desire to return from a torn quad at some point in the series for Golden State. If Cousins could return and in what capacity loom as two super-sized question marks.

Then there's Kevin Durant (strained calf), Enes Kanter (separated shoulder) and Rodney Hood (hyperextended knee). Durant already has been ruled out of Game 1, but the Warriors' star will be re-evaluated Thursday, while Portland's Kanter and Hood are expected to continue to play, but probably not at 100 percent.

Hood is the biggest uncertainty. He had an MRI exam on his left knee on Monday. It was negative, which is exactly what the super sub had been expecting to hear after a postgame exam Sunday. "They checked my knee and everything is stable. Major relief," Hood told reporters after the game. "Hopefully the pain goes down. Hopefully it's feeling better by Tuesday. I'm going to try to shoot for Tuesday, if possible."

The teams split four games in the regular season, including a two-game, playoff-type, home-and-home series in December that began with Lillard's heroics in Oakland.

Two nights later, the Warriors went to Portland and extracted a measure of revenge, with Thompson (32), Curry (25) and Durant (25) combining for 82 points in a 115-105 win.

The teams have met twice in the playoffs in the last three seasons, with Golden State prevailing 4-1 in the Western semifinals in 2016 and 4-0 in the first round in 2017. —AFP

## Dutch F1 Grand Prix returns at 'iconic' Zandvoort next season

PARIS: The Dutch Grand Prix will return next season at Zandvoort after a 35-year absence. Formula One organisers announced yesterday. A deal to stage the race at the historic seaside resort circuit near Amsterdam has been signed for at least three years.

"I am pleased to see that Zandvoort will be part of the proposed calendar... and thankful for the hard work of Formula 1 to bring the sport back to the Netherlands", Jean Todt, president of the sport's ruling body the FIA, said.

Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen, born 12 years after Niki Lauda took the last chequered flag in a McLaren in 1985, hailed the prospect of lining up in his home race. "It's just an iconic, historic track," Verstappen said in a team statement.

Formula One chief executive Chase Carey said the return of racing to the Netherlands was in line with their twin policy of "respecting the sport's historic roots in Europe" whilst also looking for new venues.

"Next season therefore, we will have a brand new street race that will be held in the Vietnamese capital of Hanoi, as well the return to Zandvoort, after an absence of 35 years," Casey said. "In recent years, we've seen a resurgence of interest in Formula 1 in Holland, mainly due to the enthusiastic support for the talented Max Verstappen, as seen from the sea of orange at so many races."

Zandvoort will now be modernised to bring it up to the F1 world championship standards. If none of the existing venues drop out the addition of Hanoi and Zandvoort would mean a record 23-race season in 2020.

But five races in Britain, Germany, Italy, Mexico and Spain are out of contract next year, with reports that two or even three of these group could be ditched. A deal to continue the Italian Grand Prix at Monza until 2024 is waiting to be signed, and Silverstone say they are close to securing a new contract. — AFP

## Afridi lambasted over sexist remarks in autobiography

KARACHI: Former Pakistani all-rounder Shahid Afridi batted away accusations of misogyny this week as critics lashed out at the cricket star's admission that he refuses to let his daughters play outdoor sports.

The remarks were just the latest controversy stemming from Afridi's tell-all autobiography "Game Changer" - released in Pakistan and India last week. "It's for social and religious reasons that I've made this decision regarding my daughters not competing in public sporting activities and their mother agrees with me," wrote Afridi.

"The feminists can say what they want: as a conservative Pakistani father, I've made my decision," he added. In the book, the cricketer also unleashed withering criticism against old teammates including erstwhile World Cup captain and current Prime Minister Imran Khan and admitted to being slightly older than previously reported, drawing accusations he was not the youngest player to set the record for scoring 100 runs in an international.

However, his comments about his four daughters - who are aged between 10 and 20 years old - may have proven to be the most galling to the public with social media users labeling the all-rounder a "misogynist" and "hypocrite".

## From street cricket to world's best spinner: Pakistan hails Sana Mir

KARACHI: Pakistan showered praise this week on Sana Mir, the former women's cricket team captain who rose from bowling in the streets to become the most successful spinner in women's one-day international history.

The 33-year-old took her 147th wicket in her 118th game when she dismissed South Africa's Sune Luus in the third one-day international (ODI) of the ICC Women's Championship in Benoni on Sunday. That took her past Anisa Mohammad of the West Indies and Australia's Lisa Sthalekar - both at 146 wickets - to the pride of Pakistanis, who hailed the achievement with joy on social media and in proud newspaper editorials.

"Congratulations, @mir\_sana05!" the ICC tweeted, as Pakistan's largest English-language newspapers - Dawn and the Express Tribune - both published editorials Tuesday celebrating the feat in a deeply patriarchal country where women's sport has long been marginalised.

"Kudos to you girl!" tweeted the German embassy in Islamabad. "Makes us all proud," added Maleeha Lodhi, Pakistan's ambassador to the UN. Mir recalled the obstacles against her in an interview published by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB).

"The journey started by proving at every street, where I played cricket, that girls could play this sport. We didn't have any role models, girls taking part in cricket

"Afridi is no better than a typical middle-aged average Pakistani guy, who wouldn't mind hanging out with someone else's daughters but would balk if his own did the same," tweeted Salman Siddiq.

"His daughters, his decisions? Really?? So the girls' voices and choices don't matter? Not even when they're adults? Because #FatherHasSpoken," added Asha Bedar on Twitter.

Pakistani author Bina Shah also roasted Afridi, telling the BBC his decision was an example of "Pakistani macho culture that says I am the father, I can say what my daughters are going to do and not do, and there is not a thing that you can do to stop me."

Others pointed to the examples set by other athletes on the issue, including Egyptian football star at Liverpool Mohamed Salah who has advocated for the equal treatment of women in the Islamic world. Salah made headlines over the weekend after a viral video showed him proudly celebrating as his four-year-old daughter scored a goal ahead of Liverpool's last game of the season at Anfield.

But back in Pakistan, Afridi pushed back at the criticism. "I don't judge anyone or meddle in people's life," Afridi tweeted on Sunday. "I expect the same too from others. May Allah bless my daughters and daughters/women all over the world! Let people be. My daughters are very precious to me! My life revolves around them."

Afridi retired from professional cricket in 2016 but he continues to be a mainstay on Pakistani television, frequently starring in commercials while also attending high-profile sporting events. — AFP

was not that common," she was quoted as saying.

"From street cricket to playing on the grounds and moving to stadia donning the Pakistan kit were moments of immense pride." Former Pakistan captain and current chief selector Urooj Mumtaz congratulated her former colleague, calling her an inspiration for women.

"Sana has been a great role model for our cricket, in fact, world cricket, her hard work, dedication and humility is absolutely admirable," said Mumtaz. The pride was underscored as former Pakistani all-rounder Shahid Afridi batted away accusations of misogyny as critics lashed out at the cricket star's admission in his autobiography "Game Changer" that he refuses to let his daughters play outdoor sports.

"The feminists can say what they want: as a conservative Pakistani father, I've made my decision," he wrote in the book, unleashing the fury of many Pakistanis. Afridi later tweeted his congratulations to Mir, prompting further accusations of hypocrisy.

Mir took six wickets, including a match-winning 4-11, in three one-day internationals against South Africa to help Pakistan square the series 1-1, with one match tied. She is now third on the all-time list of most successful bowlers in women's cricket, behind fast bowlers Jhulan Goswami of India (218) and Australia's Cathryn Fitzpatrick (180). — AFP