

Champions Trophy SWOT analysis: Bumrah's absence to hurt India

Rohit's team is one of the title contenders alongside South Africa, Pakistan

PTI, NEW DELHI: Pace talisman Jasprit Bumrah's absence will certainly hurt India big time, but quality of batting and spin bowling will make Rohit Sharma's team one of the title contenders alongside South Africa and Pakistan.

India will play Bangladesh on February 20 followed by Pakistan on February 23 and New Zealand on March 2.

Here's a SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat) analysis of India's opposition in group stages

BANGLADESH

Strength: This is the format where Bangladesh are the strongest. They have been Asia Cup finalists, 2015 World Cup quarter-finalists. With seasoned players like Mahmudullah and Mushfiqur Rahim still around, the 'Tigers' can't be taken lightly.

The biggest strength is the number of multi-utility cricketers in their ranks like Soumya Sarkar, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, vice-captain Mehidy Hasan Miraj to name a few.

Weakness: Consistency has always been Bangladesh's bane against better oppositions. Someone like Litton Das couldn't make it to the Champions Trophy squad due to non-performance. With his ability to take the game back to the opposition, Litton would have been an asset in Powerplays but he misses out.

Shakib Al Hasan's prowess has been on the wane, but as they say, there is no substitute for experience. But after being suspended from bowling due to a suspect action, he couldn't have found a place just on



Winners of the upcoming Champions Trophy will walk away with a whopping USD 2.24 million cash reward after the International Cricket Council (ICC) announced a 53 per cent hike in its prize money pool for the eight-team tournament starting February 19

his batting, which has deteriorated a bit.

Opportunity: Against India in Dubai, if the tracks are a bit on the slower side, then Bangladesh's spinners Mehidy and leg-break bowler Rishad Hossain will have a role to play. Not to forget Mustafizur Rahman, who has enough variations up his sleeve to trouble the batters.

Threat: Bangladesh have lost five of their last six ODIs against Afghanistan and the West Indies. They are also coming into the Champions Trophy after playing the BPL, which at best can be called sub-standard among all the T20 Leagues across the globe.

Bangladesh's top-order including their talented skipper Nazmul Shanto haven't exactly set the international stage on fire. They don't have too many x-factor players who can turn the game from a difficult position.

PAKISTAN

Strength: There has been criticism about team selec-

tion, but they do have players, who can be destructive on their day. Fakhar Zaman had bled India in the 2017 Champions Trophy final. He, perhaps, could be more dangerous than their most celebrated batter Babar Azam. Skipper Mohammed Rizwan and designated finisher Salman Ali Agha are in fantastic form that augurs well for them.

Weakness: Saim Ayub's untimely injury has pegged Pakistan back but there would be concerns about Babar's form as well. Even in the tri-series involving New Zealand and South Africa, the returns (10, 23 and 29) have been underwhelming. Kamran Ghulam, Khushdil Shah and Tayyab Tahir will have to pull their socks up on big days.

Khushdil and Faheem Ashraf are the weak links in this squad. The effectiveness of their pacers can be compromised on the flat decks at home.

Opportunities: Playing at home is certainly an advantage for Pakistan. They

have a potent pace attack but there needs to be something in tracks at Karachi and Rawalpindi for the troika of Shaheen Shah Afrid, Naseem Shah and Harris Rauf to come good.

Agha's form in the middle-order is a big plus and also he can bowl tight off-breaks in the middle overs. Agha will be Pakistan's 'X Factor' going into the tournament.

Threat: Having just one specialist spinner in Abrar Ahmed is a risky ploy. The only other player, who can slow down things is Salman but he at the best is a part-timer or a batter, who can bowl.

All-rounder Faheem Ashraf's batting average or bowling economy rate doesn't inspire confidence. In the tri-series, both Shaheen and Naseem have been plundered for runs.

NEW ZEALAND

Strength: The Kiwis are one of the most compact sides with a lot of players who have enough

experience of playing white ball cricket in the sub-continent. In Devon Conway and Tom Latham, they have two dependable openers and in 50-over format, Kane Williamson can control the proceedings. There is fire-power in the middle-order as Daryl Mitchell and Glenn Phillips can take the game away in a jiffy.

Weakness: After a long time, New Zealand are going into an ICC event where they won't have the peerless duo of Tim Southee and Trent Boult. Even Lockie Ferguson is highly unlikely and the fast bowling department looks a bit short on experience. The skill-sets to bowl on sub-continental and Dubai pitches could be different from SENA countries.

Opportunities: New Zealand is always a candidate to be in the top four and it doesn't change even this time round. In Mitchell Santner, they have a steady skipper, who is doing well and with Glenn Phillips and Daryl Mitchell for company, they can control the game in middle overs which will possibly decide the outcome of this tourney.

Threat: It will be interesting to find out how New Zealand play out the opposition spinners during the middle overs. In Test matches in India, Will Young showed the perfect blend of defensive and attacking technique on tracks that aided spinners. The conditions will be way flatter in Pakistan and the UAE, but playing against Indian spin troika, or Bangladesh's Rishad and Pakistan's Abrar would require special skills in ODIs.

Porto draw with Roma in Europa League play-offs

AFP, PARIS: Porto and Roma drew 1-1 in the first leg of their Europa League knockout phase play-off Thursday, while Jose Mourinho's Fenerbahce took a big step towards the last 16 with a 3-0 win over Anderlecht.

Zeki Celic gave 2023 runners-up Roma the lead in first-half stoppage time in Portugal, but Porto defender Francisco Moura's deflected strike ensured the teams will head to Italy next week with the tie finely poised.

Roma played the final 18 minutes a man down after Bryan Cristante was sent off for two yellow cards, with coach Claudio Ranieri fuming at the final whistle.

In Turkey, Former Premier League duo Dusan Tadic and Edin Dzeko scored in the first half for Fenerbahce before Morocco international Youssef En-Nesyri headed in a third for Galatasaray to give them full control.

Mourinho won the competition with Porto in 2003 and again with Manchester United in 2017, also reaching the final when he was in charge of Roma two years ago.



FC Porto's Portuguese forward #70 Goncalo Borges and Roma's Italian defender #23 Gianluca Mancini (right) fight for the ball during the UEFA Europa League knockout phase play-off first leg match at Dragao stadium in Porto

EUROPA LEAGUE RESULTS

Knockout phase play-offs, first leg - Ferencvaros 1 (Abu Fani 23) Viktoria Plzen 0, Fenerbahce 3 (Tadic 11, Dzeko 42, En-Nesyri) Anderlecht 0, Midtjylland 1 (Buksa 38) Real Sociedad 2 (Mendez 11-pen, Kubo 31), Union Saint-Gilloise 0 Ajax 2 (Rasmussen 59, Morkio 71), AZ Alkmaar 4 (Mijnans 12, Parrott 37-pen, Clasie 57, Moller Wolfe 66) Galatasaray 1 (Sallai 20), PAOK 1 (Samatta 21) FC SB 2 (Gheorghita 50, Dawa 60), Porto 1 (Moura 67) Roma 1 (Celik 45+5), Twente 2 (Ltaief 5, Van Wolfswinkel 90+5) Bodo/Glimt 1 (Berg 85)

Lanka hammer Oz in record 174-run rout

AFP, COLOMBO: Sri Lanka spinner Dunith Wellalage took four wickets to give a hapless Australia their lowest ever total in Asia with a 174-run loss in Friday's second and final One Day International.

Chasing a target of 282 in Colombo, a much-changed Australia testing their lineup for next week's Champions Trophy were bundled out for a meager 107.

The spectacular collapse saw them lose their last seven wickets for just 28 runs.

Clinical New Zealand win tri-nations final

AFP, KARACHI: Pace bowler Will O'Rourke claimed four wickets while Daryl Mitchell and Tom Latham hit half centuries as New Zealand defeated Pakistan by five wickets to clinch the tri-nations series final on Friday.

O'Rourke's 4-43 helped the tourists dismiss Pakistan for 242 in 49.3 overs before Mitchell's 58-ball 57 anchored the chase as the Black Caps finished on 243-5 in 45.2 overs at Karachi's National stadium.

The victory gives the

New Zealanders a timely boost ahead of the Champions Trophy opener against the same opponents at this venue on Wednesday.

New Zealand lost opener Will Young in pacer Naseem Shah's first over for five before Devon Conway (48) and Kane Williamson (34) steadied the chase with a second wicket stand of 71. Williamson lost his wicket while charging down the wicket against spinner Salman Agha while Naseem returned for his second spell to dismiss Conway.

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