

Afghans show Three Lions the door

Zadran 177, Omarzai fifer lead Afghanistan to 8-run win, England knocked out of Champions Trophy

PICS: AFP



Afghanistan's Ibrahim Zadran celebrates after scoring a century during the ICC Champions Trophy One-Day International match against England at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore on Wednesday. (Right) Afghanistan's Azmatullah Omarzai (left) celebrates after taking a catch to dismiss England's Jamie Smith

PTI, LAHORE: Ibrahim Zadran's majestic 177 and pacer Azmatullah Omarzai's fifer trumped Joe Root's masterful hundred, as the brave Afghanistan registered a thrilling 8-run win to knock a largely-insipid England out of the Champions Trophy, here, on Wednesday.

England are winless after two matches and in their last league match in Group B they will face South Africa, who already have three points along with Australia. Afghanistan now have two points and will have to beat the Aussies in their final group match to entertain the hopes of reaching the last eight.

For a long time, England's chase merely rattled along as the dismissal of Phil Salt and Jamie Smith jolted them early. They were 30 for two then, and eventually ended up at 317 all out with a ball to spare as pacer Omarzai (5/58) struck at crucial junctures.

But Root (120, 111b, 11x4, 1x6) brought stability to England's innings through two alliances, adding 68 runs with Ben Duckett (38), who was dropped on 29, for the third wicket and then an 83-run stand with skipper Jos Buttler for the fifth wicket. They were not really blazing partnerships but kept England afloat, keeping them in the vicinity of the asking rate.

But the jettisoning of Duckett and Buttler prematurely curtailed those blossoming joint ventures, as Root had to shoulder the burden all by himself.

Root's was a clever innings, as he hardly hit any ball in anger but still managed a strike-rate close to 100, and at times above 100. But there those little flourishes which are so central to a Root innings such as a reverse sweep four off wrist spinner Noor Ahmad or a scooped six behind wicketkeeper off Fazal-

haq Farooqi. He brought up his 17th ODI hundred with a single off Rashid Khan, and looked to stay on. But a rather tired ramp off pacer Omarzai



ended in the gloves of keeper Rahmanullah Gurbaz.

But England had another willing soldier in Jamie Overton (32, 28b), who added precious 54

runs for the seventh wicket, but a feeble heave off Omarzai ended his stint. It also marked the end of England's journey in this tournament.

Earlier, Zadran's remarkable innings helped Afghanistan pile 325 for seven.

Zadran, whose daddy hundred came off 146 balls (12x4, 6x6), had solid support from skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi (40, 67b, 3x4), with whom he raised 103 runs for the fourth wicket, and Azmatullah Omarzai (41, 31b) with whom he milked 72 runs for the fifth wicket.

Later, he plundered 111 runs for the sixth wicket with Mohammed Nabi (40, 24b) to put England through the wringer.

But Afghanistan's start to a must-win game was way off the mark after they elected to bat first. Jofra Archer's (3/64) pace and accuracy put them under considerable strife inside

the first 10 overs on an absolute batting beauty.

Rahmanullah Gurbaz dragged an Archer delivery back onto his stumps while attempting a drive, Sediqullah Atal was trapped in front and Rahmat Shah pulled one straight to Adil Rashid at square leg as the Afghans slumped to 37 for three inside the Power Play.

Zadran began the repair work in the company of Shahidi and they were understandably circumspect.

But once he reached 50 off 65 balls, Zadran opened up more and smoked Jamie Overton for a couple of fours to signal the shifting of gears. However, Shahidi was dismissed when he tried to reverse sweep leg-spinner Rashid, whose front-of-the-arm delivery crashed onto the stumps.

But Zadran flourished in the company of Omarzai as England felt the heat of double-barrel firing.

SCOREBOARD

Afghanistan: Rahmanullah Gurbaz b Archer 6, Ibrahim Zadran c Archer b Livingstone 177, Sediqullah Atal lbw b Archer 4, Rahmat Shah c Rashid b Archer 4, *Hashmatullah Shahidi b Rashid 40, Azmatullah Omarzai c (sub) Banton b Overton 41, Mohammad Nabi c Root b Livingstone 40, Gulbadin Naib not out 1, Rashid Khan not out 1. **Extras:** 11. **Total:** 325-7. **Fall of wickets:** 11-1, 15-2, 37-3, 140-4, 212-5, 323-6, 324-7. **Bowling:** Jofra Archer 10-0-64-3, Mark Wood 8-0-50-0, Jamie Overton 10-0-72-1, Adil Rashid 10-0-60-1, Joe Root 7-0-47-0, Liam Livingstone 5-0-28-2.

England: Philip Salt b Omarzai 12, Ben Duckett lbw b Khan 38, Jamie Smith c Omarzai b Nabi 9, Joe Root c Gurbaz b Omarzai 120, Harry Brook c and b Nabi 25, *Jos Buttler c Shah b Omarzai 38, Liam Livingstone c Gurbaz b Nabi 10, Jamie Overton c Nabi b Omarzai 32, Jofra Archer c Naib b Farooqi 14, Adil Rashid c Zadran b Omarzai 5, Mark Wood not out 2. **Extras:** 12. **Total:** 317-10. **Fall of wickets:** 19-1, 30-2, 98-3, 135-4, 216-5, 235-6, 287-7, 309-8, 315-9, 317-10. **Bowling:** Fazalhaq Farooqi 10-0-62-1, Azmatullah Omarzai 9.5-0-58-5, Mohammad Nabi 8-0-57-2, Rashid Khan 10-0-66-1, Noor Ahmad 10-0-51-0, Gulbadin Naib 2-0-16-1.

Man-of-the-match: Ibrahim Zadran

Pak to play for pride against Bangla

PTI, RAWALPINDI: Their dreams of defending the Champions Trophy title at home shattered, an under-fire Pakistan team will seek to play for pride when it faces an equally insipid Bangladesh in a dead rubber, here, on Thursday.

PREVIEW

With the tournament offering very little margin for error, Pakistan crumbled to suffer heavy defeats to New Zealand and arch-rivals India, which left them on the brink of elimination before the Kiwis confirmed it with their win over Bangladesh.

Disgruntled fans are now calling for sweeping changes in the country's cricket structure starting from the

very top of the pyramid, days after the first global tournament in Pakistan in 29 years got underway.

This marks the third straight time Pakistan has bowed out in the group stages of a global white-ball tournament, following early exits in the 2024 T20 World Cup and 2023 ODI World Cup.

Poor shot selection, sub-standard fielding, and untimely injuries have only deepened Pakistan's woes.

The loss of game-changing opener Fakhar Zaman to injury left a huge void at the top, and his replacement, Imam-ul-Haq, failed to make an impact. Babar Azam and captain Mohammad Rizwan have also fallen short of expectations.

Kohli spends extra time with spinners as bowling coach Morkel rejoins India squad

Under the watchful eyes of Morkel, all bowlers looked sharp and geared up to take up the New Zealand challenge. Morkel had to leave the Indian camp a couple of days before the team's Champions Trophy opener against Bangladesh on February 20. The former South Africa pacer was seen having a long chat with head coach Gautam Gambhir as the players did their warm-up drills at the ICC Academy

PTI, DUBAI: The Indian cricket team had a strenuous training session here on Wednesday with talismanic batter Virat Kohli spending a lot of time facing spinners even as bowling coach Morne Morkel rejoined the side after attending to a personal emergency back home.

Virat not only faced the likes of Kuldeep Yadav, Axar Patel and Ravindra Jadeja during the training session but also spent more than half an hour plying the net bowlers ahead of the clash against New Zealand on Sunday.

Pace bowling stalwart Mohammed Shami too was seen bowling at full tilt, swinging the ball both ways and rapping Kohli twice on his pads, while Harshit

Rana and Arshdeep Singh too looked determined to give their best during the session.

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erred from an illness and trained on Wednesday with the rest of the squad.

India enjoyed a couple of days off after outplaying Pakistan in their second group game. They have already reached the semifinals from Group A alongside New Zealand.

Both teams will face each other in their last group match here on March 2.

India, who last won the Champions Trophy in 2013, are favourites to lift the title considering their spin-heavy squad combination and the way they have played thus far in the tournament.

India play all their games in Dubai where the pitch has been slow and aided the spinners so far.

Gill consolidates top spot in ICC ODI rankings, Kohli re-enters top five



PTI, DUBAI: India opener Shubman Gill on Wednesday consolidated his position atop the ICC ODI Batting Rankings after playing a big role in his team's qualification for the semifinals of the Champions Trophy.

Gill, who scored a match-winning 101 not out against Bangladesh and 46 against Pakistan in Group A matches played in Dubai this past week, has gained 21 rating points and moved up to 817 rating points, increasing the gap with second-placed Babar Azam from 23 to 47 points.

Virat Kohli's unbeaten 100 against Pakistan has helped him overtake Daryl Mitchell of New Zealand to fifth position while KL Rahul has moved up two places to 15th position after notching an unbeaten 41 against Bangladesh.

New Zealand batters Will Young (up eight places to 14th) and Tom Latham (up 11 places to 30th) have moved up after scoring centuries against Pakistan while Rachin Ravindra's ton against Bangladesh has lifted him 18 places to 24th. Glenn Phillips is another Kiwi batter to gain, up 12 places to 28th position.

Australia duo of Alex Carey (up four places to 50th) and Josh Inglis (up 18 places to 81st), plus Bangladesh's Towhid Hridoy (up 18 places to 64th) and Jaker Ali (up 64 places to 94th) have also moved up in the latest weekly rankings update that considers performances till Tuesday.

In the bowling rankings, Keshav Maharaj and Matt Henry break into the top five while Adam Zampa has moved into 10th position after picking up two wickets against England in their thrilling Group B match.

WPL: Sciver-Brunt, Matthews power MI to 8-wkt win

PTI, BENGALURU: Nat Sciver-Brunt and Hayley Matthews smashed commanding fifties after a superb bowling effort as Mumbai Indians hammered UP Warriorz by eight wickets in their Women's Premier League match, here, on Wednesday.

Sciver-Brunt continued her sensational form, finishing with figures of 3/18 as MI restricted UPW to 142/9 after opting to bowl first.

The England all-rounder then played a match-winning knock of 75 not out off 44 balls, including 13 fours, forming an 82-ball 133-run second-wicket partnership with Matthews (59 off 50 balls) to guide MI to victory in just 17 overs. MI's third consecutive win propelled them to the top of the standings with six points, while UPW remained in fourth place after their fourth loss in six encounters with MI.

MI's chase started quietly, with Matthews being dropped by Ecclestone early.

After seven dot balls, Yastika Bhatia was dismissed off Deepti Sharma's bowling, leaving MI at 6/1 in the 4th over. Matthews then responded with a four and a six, before Sciver-Brunt took charge, smashing three consecutive fours off Saima Thakor in a 15-run over, as MI ended the power play at 33/1.

Sciver-Brunt continued her explosive hitting, striking consecutive fours off Chinelle Henry in a 13-run over. Ecclestone came next, and the England batter blasted three more fours in the 13th over to bring up her fifty off just 29 balls.

In the 16th over, Matthews joined the fun, smashing a six off Grace Harris before adding two more fours in a 22-run over. She too brought up her fifty off 45 balls. Although Matthews was dismissed by Ecclestone in the 17th over, the damage had already been done, and MI reached the target with ease.

sportspopup

Absence of Fakhar and Ayub did impact us: Aaqib Javed

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan's interim head coach and national selector Aaqib Javed on Wednesday said that injuries to Saim Ayub and Fakhar Zaman adversely impacted the national team's campaign in the Champions Trophy. Aaqib said that despite being out of the semi-finals contention, the team was very much focussed on ending its tournament campaign on a winning note. "There is no worry about lack of motivation for the players," he said. Aaqib also defended the selection of the squad for the Champions Trophy insisting the best available players were picked. The team management and selectors have faced a lot of backlash over the selected squad. Aaqib noted that except for three changes, the Pakistan squad was the same that had won ODI series in Australia, Zimbabwe and South Africa before the Champions Trophy. "Certain players who are crucial for the team in specific games were missing. For example, players like Saim and Fakhar create a positive impact in matches. When they are unavailable, we have to select the team accordingly," he said. He also said that fans and experts tend to mix up T20 and ODI performances.

IOC provisionally recognises World Boxing as federation for Olympics

LAUSANNE: The International Olympic Committee on Wednesday provisionally recognised the recently created World Boxing as the body to oversee the sport at future Games. The IOC severed links with the International Boxing Association (IBA), the long-standing ruling body of amateur boxing, over financial, governance and ethical concerns and took over the organisation of the sport at last year's Paris Olympics. The IBA is chaired by the Kremlin-linked Russian Umar Kremlev. World Boxing was founded in 2023 and boasts 78 members led by the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Australia and Brazil. IOC president Thomas Bach had warned that boxing's national federations needed to find a new and "reliable" international partner if it wanted to ensure that the sport features on the programme at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

Atletico hold Barca in 'crazy' eight-goal Copa del Rey semi-final first leg

BARCELONA: Atletico Madrid conceded a two-goal lead then fought back from two down in a wild 4-4 draw with Barcelona in a Copa del Rey semi-final first leg thriller on Tuesday. After Diego Simeone's side scored twice in the opening six minutes through Julian Alvarez and Antoine Griezmann, Barca raced through the gears in a high-octane performance. The superb Pedri Gonzalez pulled one back with Pau Cubarsi, Inigo Martinez and Robert Lewandowski going on to score for the Catalan giants. Marcos Llorente netted for Atletico before Alexander Sorloth struck in the 93rd minute to leave the tie perfectly poised ahead of the second leg at the Metropolitan stadium on April 2. Copa del Rey result: Semi-final first leg: Barcelona 4 (Pedri 19, Cubarsi 21, Martinez 41, Lewandowski 74) Atletico Madrid 4 (Alvarez 1, Griezmann 6, Llorente 84, Sorloth 90+3)



Actor Sonu Sood (left) with former cricketers Herschelle Gibbs (centre) and Wasim Jaffer (second right) and others during the launch of jerseys of the India Corporate T20 Bash, in New Delhi, on Wednesday

Chelsea thrash Southampton, Villa beaten by Palace in race for Champions League

LONDON: Chelsea moved into the Premier League's top four with a 4-0 demolition of hapless Southampton, but Aston Villa's hopes of Champions League football next season diminished after a 4-1 defeat at Crystal Palace. After a run of three consecutive defeats, Chelsea badly needed a response against bottom-of-the-table Saints, who are set for an immediate return to the Championship. The Blues duly delivered with three first-half goals through Christopher Nkunku, Pedro Neto and Levi Colwill for just a third league win 11 games. Marc Cucurella rounded off the scoring with a calm finish from teenager Tyrrique George's cross. Victory takes Chelsea two points above Manchester City into fourth. English Premier League results: Brighton 2 (Pedro 12-pen, Welbeck 75) Bournemouth 1 (Kluivert 61), Chelsea 4 (Nkunku 24, Neto 36, Colwill 44, Cucurella 78) Southampton 0, Crystal Palace 4 (Sarr 29, 71, Mateta 59, Nketiah 90+1) Aston Villa 1 (Rogers 52), Wolves 1 (Gomes 18) Fulham 2 (Sessegnon 1, Muniz 47).

Liverpool manager Arne handed two-match touchline ban for confronting match officials

LONDON: Liverpool manager Arne Slot was handed a two-match touchline suspension on Wednesday for his conduct toward match officials after the Merseyside derby against Everton. Slot admitted to a charge that he "acted in an improper manner and/or used insulting and/or abusive words and/or behavior towards both the match referee and an assistant referee" after the 2-2 draw at Goodison Park on Feb. 12, the Football Association said. The FA said Slot has also been charged 70,000 pounds (\$90,000). Slot was shown a red card for his post-match conduct and has since said he regretted his actions. Liverpool's next two domestic games are against Newcastle on Wednesday and Southampton on March 8, both in the Premier League and at Anfield. Liverpool leads the league by 11 points.

Australia spinner Matthew's bowling action cleared by ICC

MELBOURNE: Australia's left-arm spinner Matthew Kuhnemann, who was reported for an illegal bowling action during the second Test against Sri Lanka last month, has been cleared by the ICC after undergoing extensive testing in Brisbane. The development means Kuhnemann will be able to resume playing for Australia in the Test tour of the Caribbean scheduled later this year. "Kuhnemann's action has now been deemed to be legal and the left-arm spinner will continue to bowl in international cricket," the ICC said in a statement. The 28-year-old Kuhnemann had undergone an independent bowling assessment at the National Cricket Centre in Brisbane, where it was revealed that the amount of elbow extension for all his deliveries was within the 15-degree level of tolerance permitted under the ICC Illegal Bowling Regulations, the apex body said.