

Ankle injury, 'personal views' kept Starc out of Champions Trophy

The 35-year-old was a surprise omission from a depleted Australian squad, also missing injured strike partners Cummins and Hazlewood



Mitchell Starc

AFP, SYDNEY: Australian pace spearhead Mitchell Starc Thursday said a sore ankle was the main issue that kept him out of the ongoing Champions Trophy, but "personal views" also factored into the decision.

The 35-year-old was a surprise omission from a depleted Australian squad, also missing injured strike partners Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood, for the 50-over tournament in Pakistan and UAE.

Cricket Australia attributed Starc's absence to unspecified "personal reasons".

Speaking for the first time since his withdrawal, Starc said his primary concern was fitness after experiencing ankle pain during Australia's two-Test series in Sri Lanka this month.

But he admitted it was not the only factor.

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There are a few different reasons, some personal views, had a bit of ankle pain through the (Sri Lanka) Test series. So I just need to get that one right. Obviously, we have the (World Test Championship) final coming up and a West Indies tour after that. There is some IPL cricket as well. But the main one at the top of my mind is the Test final. Get my body right, play some cricket in the next couple of months and then be ready to go for the Test final

— Mitchell Starc, Australian pace spearhead

the Willow Talk podcast, which was co-hosted by his wife, Australia captain Alyssa Healy.

He did not expand on what his

"personal views" were around the tournament, which is being played under strict security measures.

"I had a bit of ankle pain through the (Sri Lanka) Test series," Starc added.

"So I just need to get that one right. Obviously, we have the (World Test Championship) final coming up and a West Indies tour after that."

"There is some IPL cricket as well." "But the main one at the top of my mind is the Test final. Get my body right, play some cricket in the next couple of months and then be ready to go for the Test final."

Starc was the only member of Australia's "Big Three" fast bowling unit to play all of Australia's last seven Tests against India and Sri Lanka and he has a busy calendar ahead.

He is set to play for Delhi Capitals in the Indian Premier League next month before the WTC final at Lord's against South Africa in June, followed by a three-Test tour of the West Indies.

Match called off due to rain

Pakistan's campaign ends on a winless note

PTI, RAWALPINDI: Pakistan's campaign in the Champions Trophy ended on a winless note after their match against Bangladesh was called off without a ball being bowled due to incessant rain, here, on Thursday.

The match was effectively a dead-rubber, with both teams already out of contention after failing to secure a win in their two previous matches. Pakistan, hosting an ICC tournament for the first time in 29 years, had hoped for a strong finish but ended their disastrous campaign without a victory.

Persistent downpour left the ground soaked, with covers in place and puddles forming around the field. With weather not improving, match officials called off the game nearly two hours after the scheduled start time. The gloomy weather prevented even the toss from taking place.

As a result, the two teams shared one point each, though both Pakistan and Bangladesh finished the tournament winless.

This is the second match in Rawalpindi to be called off without a ball being bowled, following the washout between South Africa and Australia earlier this week. The rain-induced abandonment left the home fans frustrated, as they hoped for play at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium.

Pakistan have faced criticism for their poor showing in the tournament, having suffered defeats to New Zealand (by 60 runs) and India (by six wickets).

"We wanted to do well and perform well in front of our nation. The expectations are very high. We didn't perform well and it is disappointing for us," Pakistan captain Mohammad Rizwan said. Reflecting on the road

CAPTAIN TALK

We wanted to do well and perform well in front of our nation. The expectations are very high. We didn't perform well and it is disappointing for us. We are next going to New Zealand and, hopefully, we can perform there and the mistakes that we did against New Zealand here in Pakistan, we can learn from that. And we will do better in New Zealand

— Mohammad Rizwan, Pakistan captain



I am very disappointed. We really wanted to play this match, but can't do anything about the weather. The way we held the game for long periods was very inspiring for us in the two matches. We hope we can learn from our mistakes. We will make a proper plan and execute the plan

— Najmul Hossain Shanto, Bangladesh captain



ahead, Rizwan said: "You can learn from your mistakes. We have made mistakes in the last few games. Hopefully, we can learn from these."

"We are next going to New Zealand and, hopefully, we can perform there and the mistakes that we did against New Zealand here in Pakistan, we can learn from that. And we will do better in New Zealand."

Bangladesh, who also ended their tournament winless, will return home with much to reflect on after losing to India by six wickets and New Zealand by five wickets.

"I am very disappointed. We really wanted to play this match, but can't do anything about the weather. The way we held the game for long periods was very inspiring for us in the two matches," Bangladesh captain, Najmul

Hossain Shanto said.

"We hope we can learn from our mistakes. We will make a proper plan and execute the plan."

Talking about their bowling unit, Shanto said: "We have always struggled with our fast bowling unit, but in the last few years a lot of fast bowlers are coming through."

"Some of the fast bowlers back home are doing very well. The likes of Taskin, Rana coming in. Fizz is there. We have a very good bowling attack. I hope they will do the job and do the best for the team."

Pakistan's Assistant Coach Azhar Mahmood, who hails from the city, attributed his team's poor show in the tournament to injuries to key players, and the fact that the team took too much pressure against India.

Australia, Afghanistan eye semis berth

PTI, LAHORE: Eyeing a semi-final spot, Australia's historic pedigree in cricket's biggest tournaments will count for nothing when they run into an Afghanistan side that is fast cementing its place in the game's top table, in the Champions Trophy here on Friday.

Basking in the afterglow of their memorable win over England at the Gaddafi Stadium on Wednesday, Afghanistan have a realistic chance of making their second successive semi-finals of a global event, less than a year after their entry into the last four stage of the T20 World Cup in the Americas.

Two-time winners Australia are seeking to regain the Champions Trophy title after a gap of 15 years. They had won back-to-back titles in 2006 and 2009 but have failed to reach the finals in the 2013 and 2017 editions, after which the event was discontinued.

In the absence of their big fast bowlers, Australia know that their strength lies in batting with the likes of Travis Head, Steve Smith, Marnus Labuschagne and Glenn Maxwell capable of inflicting plenty of damage on the opposition bowling attack.

While there is no doubt the absence of regulars has weakened the team, it has also provided an opportunity for the young turks to impress, cement their place in the side, and carry forward the rich Australian legacy in marquee events.

Australia are expected to produce a strong performance with the bat but for people like Ben Dwarshuis, Spencer Johnson, Nathan Ellis, and Adam Zampa, who will shoulder the responsibility with the ball in challenging conditions, they are aware that they will have to put their best foot forward if they are to progress from the group stage.

Match starts at 2.30 pm (IST)

from injury to clinch Manchester City's victory at Tottenham as the troubled champions moved into fourth place.

Haaland had missed City's previous two defeats against Real Madrid and Liverpool with a knee injury suffered against Newcastle on February 15.

The Norway star showed no rust with the first-half winner in north London as City climbed one point above fifth-placed Chelsea.

It was Haaland's 28th goal in all competitions this season, with 10 of those coming in his last 11 games to silence the critics after a barren spell earlier this season. After four defeats in their last six games in all competitions, this was a much-needed victory for City, who started strongly but rode their luck as Tottenham missed a series of second-half chances.

Harry Maguire earned Manchester United a hard-fought win at Old Trafford, easing Patrick Dorgu's embarrassment after his part in a calamitous Ipswich

sportspopup

WPL: Gardner 50 seals Gujarat Giants win

BENGALURU: Ashleigh Gardner led from the front with a blazing 58 off 31 balls as bottom-placed Gujarat Giants snapped their losing streak with a dominant six-wicket win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the WPL here on Thursday. Opting to bowl, GG put on a disciplined bowling display, with Deandra Dottin (2/31) and Tanuja Kanwar (2/16) restricting RCB to a below-par 125/7. The offspin allrounder Gardner also chipped in with 1/22 in a tidy spell. GG took just 16.3 overs to seal victory, with Gardner smashing three sixes and six fours in her third fifty of the tournament. She raced to her half-century in just 28 balls, bringing it up in style with back-to-back sixes—a slog-sweep over long-on followed by a powerful hit over deep midwicket. GG's top order faltered, with Beth Mooney (17), Dayalan Hemalatha (11), and Harleen Deol (5) falling cheaply, but Gardner took charge. She broke free in Prerna Rawat's over, plundering 19 runs -- pulling one to fine leg, driving another through cover, and finishing with a six over deep square leg.

Boxer Boora lodges FIR against husband alleging dowry harassment

CHANDIGARH: Arjuna Awardee and former world champion boxer Saweety Boora has lodged an FIR against her Asiad bronze-winning kabaddi player husband Deepak Hooda, accusing him and his family of assaulting her for dowry. The two got married in 2022. Boora has lodged the FIR against Hooda, also an Arjuna awardee, in Haryana's Hisar. "An FIR dated February 25 has been lodged based on the complaint given by Saweety Boora against her husband Deepak Hooda," Seema, SHO of women police station, Hisar, said on Thursday. When asked if Hooda has been asked to present his side, the SHO said, "We gave him notice 2-3 times, but he did not turn up." When PTI reached out to Hooda, he defended his absence by citing his health that has "taken a beating due to the trauma."

Asia Cup likely to be staged in September

NEW DELHI: Asia Cup, which will serve as a preparatory event for the 2026 T20 World Cup, is likely to be held in September this year at a neutral venue though the hosting rights are with India. The last Asia Cup was held in the ODI format ahead of the 2023 50-over World Cup in India. "The tournament will be held in September. India has the hosting rights but it will be played in UAE or Sri Lanka," said a source in the Asian Cricket Council. The highlight of the event will be the India-Pakistan contest and if they reach the final, both teams could play each other as many as three times. India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, UAE, Oman and Hong Kong will be the eight participating teams. Though BCCI has the hosting rights, it could go for a neutral venue with Pakistan unlikely to travel to India given what transpired in the ongoing Champions Trophy. The next T20 World Cup is in India and Sri Lanka with the arch-rivals expected to play the marquee game in the island nation. India are the most successful team in the continental event, capturing as many as eight titles across the two white-ball formats.

David Boon appointed to Cricket

Australia Board, steps down from ICC

SYDNEY: Former Test batsman David Boon was appointed to the Cricket Australia Board Thursday, stepping down as an ICC match referee to take up the position. The 64-year-old, who played 107 Tests and 181 ODIs for Australia, will finish up with the International Cricket Council after the ongoing Champions Trophy in Pakistan and Dubai. "I'm absolutely delighted that David will bring his vast experience as a player and cricket administrator to the CA board," said CA Chairman Mike Baird. "David is an iconic figure in Australian cricket universally respected for his accomplishments on the field and, more recently, through his impressive contribution to Tasmanian, Australian and international cricket." Boon was an Australian selector for more than a decade from 2000 following his retirement as a player in 1999, before becoming an ICC match referee in 2011. He has been Cricket Tasmania director since 2014 and chair since 2022.

India hockey players credit Pro League success to McCann's expert guidance

NEW DELHI: The Indian men's hockey team has credited its impressive performance in the FIH Pro League to a week-long camp with legendary Australian forward Michael McCann, with players vouching for his cutting-edge techniques that helped them dominate the rivals in Bhubaneswar. The Paris Olympics bronze-medallist side, led by Harmanpreet, won five of the eight Pro League matches in the home leg, losing one game each to Spain, Germany and England before beating them in the return matches. India also thrashed Ireland 3-1 and 4-0. India are currently third in the table on 15 points behind England and Belgium, who have 16 points apiece. India have the most number of wins, followed by England, Belgium and fourth-placed Germany, who have four victories each after eight games.

LOCAL BEAT

Sporting Club of Davorlim in semis

RAIA: Sporting Club of Davorlim pipped Cuncolim Union 1-0 to move into the semi-finals of Vaidya Family Memorial Cup organised by Cuncolim Union at Cuncolim ground, on Thursday. Veliston Coloco of SC Davorlim netted the match winner. Veliston Coloco of Sporting Club of Davorlim was awarded the man-of-the-match by club member Dieraj Shrivant.

Nuvem Veterans in quarters

RAIA: Nuvem Veterans blanked Goa Police Veterans 2-0 in the inaugural match to enter into quarter-finals of 10th Fatorda Veterans football tournament organised by Fatorda Veterans at Don Bosco Oratory ground, Fatorda, on Thursday. Joe Rose Olivera of Nuvem Veterans scored a goal each in the both sessions of play. Fr Leo Pereira, director of Don Bosco Oratory, Fatorda, presented the man-of-the-match to Nuvem Veterans' Joe Rose Olivera.

Liverpool move a giant step closer to title with win

AFP, LONDON: Liverpool moved a giant step closer to the Premier League title with a ruthless 2-0 win against Newcastle, while Arsenal's challenge is in tatters after a 0-0 draw against Nottingham Forest on Wednesday.

With suspended boss Arne Slot watching from the Anfield stands, Liverpool opened up a massive 13-point lead over second-placed Arsenal thanks to goals from Dominik Szoboszlai and Alexis Mac Allister. In Wednesday's other action, Manchester City won 1-0 at Tottenham, while 10-man Manchester United held on to beat lowly Ipswich 3-2.

But it is Liverpool who continue to hog the Premier League spotlight as an almost-flawless campaign approaches a memorable climax.

The Reds look certain to win the Premier League for the first time since 2020, which will move them level with Manchester United on a record-equalling 20 English titles. Having won 2-0 at fading

champions City on Sunday 24 hours after Arsenal lost to West Ham, Slot's men kept their foot on the gas.

Szoboszlai netted with a clinical finish in the 11th minute and Mac Allister's fine strike in the 63rd minute made it 20 wins and just one defeat from 28 league games this term.

In his first season after replacing Jurgen Klopp, Slot has made an astonishing impact, which could yet include Champions League and League Cup glory as well. The Reds play Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League last 16 first leg next week and face a rematch with Newcastle at Wembley in the League Cup final on March 16.

The Gunners have a game in hand on Liverpool, but Arteta may have to accept the stalemate at the City Ground was the final nail in the coffin for Arsenal's attempt to win a first title since 2004.

The toothless Gunners, playing without a recognised striker, managed just one shot on target at the



Liverpool's Argentinian midfielder #10 Alexis Mac Allister celebrates scoring the team's second goal during the English Premier League match against Newcastle United at Anfield in Liverpool, England

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS
Brentford 1 (Wissa 45+4) Everton 1 (O'Brien 77), Liverpool 2 (Szoboszlai 11, Mac Allister 63) Newcastle 0, Manchester United 3 (Morsy 22-og, De Ligt 26, Maguire 47) Ipswich 2 (Philogene 4, 45+2), Nottingham Forest 0 Arsenal 0, Tottenham 0 Manchester City 1 (Haaland 12)

City Ground, with Riccardo Calafiori hitting the post in the first half.

Third-placed Forest's surprise challenge for

Champions League qualification has also hit the rocks after just one win from their last five matches.

Erling Haaland returned