

## Sports

# England faces their day of destiny in World Cup final against New Zealand

## The challenge for England is to embrace the hype

**LONDON:** England face New Zealand in the World Cup final today knowing years of planning come down to a single day at Lord's. When England exited the 2015 edition with an embarrassing defeat by Bangladesh, few were tipping them as potential champions in four years' time.

As England captain Eoin Morgan put it: "If you had offered us the position to play in a final the day after we were knocked out of the 2015 World Cup, I would have laughed at you." One person not laughing was Andrew Strauss, the former England director of cricket.

Drafted into the newly created role, Strauss set about an overhaul that saw the former England captain appoint Australia's Trevor Bayliss as coach, and place greater emphasis on white-ball cricket.

The worth of all that work showed when Morgan's men, now top of the one-day international rankings, thrashed reigning champions Australia by eight wickets in the semi-final at Edgbaston on Thursday. Many of the elements that made England the pre-tournament favorites were on show in Birmingham. Pacemen Jofra Archer and Chris Woakes reduced Australia to 14-3, leg-spinner Adil Rashid took wickets in the middle and the dynamic duo of Jason Roy and Jonny Bairstow — statistically the most successful opening pair in ODI history — launched the run chase with a blistering century partnership.

### 'Fearless' cricket

The challenge for England is to embrace the hype surrounding today's fixture without letting it inhibit them from playing their brand of "fearless" cricket. By reaching the final, England have guaranteed an international match will be shown live on free-to-air television in Britain for the first time since the iconic 2005 Ashes series — a chance to inspire a new generation.

"I think Sunday's not a day to shy away from, it's a day to look forward to," said Morgan, an outsider in English cricket in becoming an ODI specialist when the steely Dubliner realised his Test career had stalled. It is perhaps appropriate that England are facing New Zealand in a final between two sides who have yet to win the World Cup.

For it was the Black Caps who showed England how to play the modern one-day game at the 2015 edition in Wellington four years ago. They shot out England for just 123 and then overhauled that total in a mere 12.2 overs. "It was as close to rock-bottom as I've been," said Morgan. "Certainly as a captain and as a player, being beaten off the park like that was humiliating."

England gained a measure of revenge with a 119-run thrashing of New Zealand in a group-stage match earlier in this World Cup. But that is unlikely to count for much today. All tournament long, the same comment has been made about New Zealand — they boast a well-balanced attack led by left-arm quick Trent Boult but are over-reliant on captain Kane Williamson and fellow senior batsman Ross Taylor for their runs.

The polite Kiwis have responded by continuing to "scrap", in the phrase of fast bowler Lockie Ferguson, their way to wins as demonstrated by their dramatic 18-run semi-final victory over India. Boult and Matt Henry reduced one of the world's most powerful top orders to 5-3, before left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner, aided by superb fielding, backed them up after Williamson and Taylor had made battling fifties on a tricky pitch.

While many members of the home side were not even born when England made the last of three losing appearances in a World Cup final in 1992, the Black Caps have the experience of their heavy defeat by co-hosts Australia in the climax of the 2015 edition in



**BIRMINGHAM:** England's captain Eoin Morgan (R) and England's Joe Root celebrate victory at close of play during the 2019 Cricket World Cup second semi-final between England and Australia at Edgbaston. — AFP

Melbourne to call on. "I'd be lying if I said we weren't a bit overawed by the change of scenery," said Taylor as he looked back to New Zealand's first and only match on Australian soil in that tournament. "I think

we know what to expect, the pressures that come with it, we've been there before. You just have to enjoy it, it's the 'Home of Cricket', I can't think of a better place to play a final." — AFP

## Omens point to NZ winning the World Cup: Hansen

**WELLINGTON:** Celebrated All Blacks mentor Steve Hansen believes New Zealand's loss to England in the group stages of the Cricket World Cup will be to their advantage in today's final. The coaching maestro, who is bidding for a third rugby World Cup success with the All Blacks this year, said when teams play each other twice in a tournament it is a psychological disadvantage to win the first match.

"The advantage is held by the team that loses because I think mentally it's very hard not to subconsciously think, 'well, we've beaten these guys before', so you soften yourself a little bit, subconsciously, it's not a deliberate thing," he told Radio Sport yesterday. England beat New Zealand by 119 runs to make the semi-finals and then downed Australia by eight wickets to make the final. New Zealand, who only scraped into the semis on a superior run rate than Pakistan, then beat tournament favorites India by 18 runs to reach the final "England played Australia (in the group stages) and Australia thumped them. So, you start getting a little bit ahead of yourself and start thinking about stuff you shouldn't," Hansen said.

In the 2015 World Cup, New Zealand beat Australia in the pool stages then lost to their trans-Tasman neighbors in the final. Hansen, an assistant coach when the All Blacks struggled to an 8-7 win over France in the 2011



**LONDON:** New Zealand's captain Kane Williamson (C) speaks with his players as they take part in a training session at Lord's Cricket Ground. — AFP

World Cup final in Auckland, added that hometown pressure was also a factor which could count against England in cricket's showpiece at the famous Lords ground.

"If you're not used to that kind of pressure it can overwhelm you. So probably, advantage to New Zealand, because no one is expecting them to win in England ... it takes all the pressure off you. Are they capable of winning it? I think they are." Hansen was also an assistant coach of the All Blacks when they started as red-hot favorites in the 2007 World Cup only to be bundled out in the quarter-finals.

He said the lesson from that shock loss was the same as it was for India captain Virat

Kholi when the Black Caps beat them in the cricket semi-final. "He made a pertinent point that 'we've played outstanding cricket in this tournament, apart from 45 minutes, and that's the reason why we're not going,'" to the final.

"If you're in a knock-out tournament, as (the All Blacks) found out in 2007, if you don't get it right in the 80 minutes, for us, and the 45 minutes, for the Indians, then you go home." His advice for both sides facing the pressure of a final was not to focus on what will happen if they lose but to think about what will happen if they win. "Immediately, if you say that to yourself, there's a different feeling. Your eyes light up, there's a smile on your face." — AFP

## England v New Zealand: Three key World Cup battles

**LONDON:** Hosts England face New Zealand in the World Cup final at Lord's today, with both nations seeking their first win in cricket's showpiece event. Eoin Morgan's England humbled holders Australia to reach their first final since 1992 while the Black Caps finished as runners-up in 2015. AFP Sport looks at three key battles in the match:

### Morgan v Williamson - Eyeing history

Eoin Morgan and Kane Williamson both have the chance to become national heroes by leading their teams to World Cup glory for the first time. England have enjoyed a dramatic revival in fortunes since their limp first-round exit in 2015 with Morgan at the helm, infusing his side with a fearless approach. The 32-year-old batsman, who scored an unbeaten 45 in the hosts' humbling of Australia on Thursday, has urged his side to seize their moment.

"I think Sunday's not a day to shy away from, it's a day to look forward to," he said. Williamson, whose team lost heavily to England in the group stage, tried to keep his players calm after New Zealand's stunning victory over India in the first semi-final on Wednesday. "Anybody can beat anybody," he said. "It's important that feet are on the ground and we look forward to that challenge." With two centuries and two fifties in his eight innings, Williamson has led by example with his elegant batting and sharp reading of the game. Batting great Sachin Tendulkar said Williamson's

"captaincy and composure" played a key part in the victory over India.

### Roy v Guptill - Opening gambit

Jason Roy set the tone as England tore into the Australian bowling with relish on Thursday, dominating an opening stand of 124 with in-form partner Jonny Bairstow. Roy, who has been involved in four successive century partnerships with Bairstow, missed three group games due to a hamstring injury. England have won all three of their matches comfortably since his return to the side and he averages an impressive 71 at the tournament.

New Zealand's Martin Guptill has struggled badly in England and Wales, eking out just 167 runs in nine innings, a sharp contrast from 2015, when he finished as the top runscorer in the tournament, hitting an unbeaten 237 against the West Indies. He has proved his prowess in the field, hitting the stumps with a direct throw to run out India's MS Dhoni in the semi-final but New Zealand desperately need his runs at the top of the order on Sunday.

### Henry v Woakes - First blood

Matt Henry destroyed India's illustrious top order in a ferocious opening spell of fast bowling on Wednesday and a repeat performance would set New Zealand on the way to their first World Cup triumph. His figures of 3-37 included the key wicket of Rohit Sharma and, sharing the new ball with senior partner Trent Boult, the paceman has now claimed 13 wickets in eight games.

Chris Woakes was England's star performer at Edgbaston as he dismantled the Australia top-order including taking the big wicket of David Warner to return figures of 3-20. He has combined with Jofra Archer to give the England pace attack a sharper edge, with the new-ball pair claiming a combined 32 wickets together in 10 matches. — AFP

## Morgan hails McCullum influence ahead of final

**LONDON:** England captain Eoin Morgan paid tribute to former New Zealand skipper Brendon McCullum ahead of his side's World Cup final against the Black Caps at Lord's today. Four years ago, a New Zealand side led by McCullum shot out England for just 123 in a World Cup group match and then overhauled that total in a mere 12.2 overs, leaving Morgan feeling as "close to rock bottom as I've been".

New Zealand went on to finish runners-up to co-hosts Australia while England crashed out in the group stage. McCullum has since retired from international duty and now Morgan finds himself leading England against New Zealand in the World Cup final. Morgan has long acknowledged England's debt to New Zealand for their one-day international revival and, speaking to reporters at Lord's on Saturday, he had warm words for McCullum. "We are close mates and he's taught me a lot about leadership," he said. "I think in 2015 the way that New Zealand played, they proved to everybody that you can perform at the highest level and get to the top by being yourselves and not trying to be somebody else, or a different team."

### 'Last-chance saloon'

England, like New Zealand, have never won the World Cup, with the last of their three losing appearances in the final back in 1992. "It means a huge amount to me and to everybody in the changing room," said Morgan when asked about the magnitude of Sunday's match. "It's the culmination of four years of hard work and dedication, a lot of planning."

England played close to the perfect game in defeating reigning champions Australia in a lopsided semi-final at Edgbaston on Thursday. Asked if they would need to hit similar heights against a New Zealand team who upset the odds to beat India by 18 runs in their last-four clash, Morgan replied: "I think we will — New Zealand were the best team in the group stage."

Back-to-back group-stage defeats by Sri Lanka and Australia effec-



**LONDON:** England's captain Eoin Morgan addresses media representatives during a press conference at Lord's Cricket Ground in London yesterday, ahead of the 2019 Cricket World Cup final against New Zealand. — AFP

tively left England playing knockout cricket before the semi-finals but they got their campaign back on track with impressive group-wins over India and New Zealand, who they overwhelmed by 119 runs at Durham's Chester-le-Street headquarters. "I think it has helped us because it's lent itself to actually being more positive and aggressive and a bit smarter about how we play and it's sort of been the last-chance saloon since Durham, which has been nice in a way," explained Morgan.

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson has been in superb form with the bat during the tournament, scoring 548 runs at an eye-catching average of 91.33. But he was unluckily run out for just 27 against England when bowler Mark Wood deflected a drive on to the stumps at the non-striker's end. Morgan, asked if star batsman Williamson had a weakness, replied to laughter from the assembled media: "His backing up, I think." — AFP

## Twenty20 sensation Rashid Khan named Afghan cricket captain

**KABUL:** The Afghan Cricket Board (ACB) named leg spinner Rashid Khan captain across all the major formats Friday, despite a disappointing World Cup for the Twenty20 sensation. Asghar Afghan was also appointed vice-captain, the ACB said in a statement announcing the decision. Khan came into the World Cup as cricket's hottest property after catching the eye with his leg spinners for minnows Afghanistan.

But the Twenty20 star, who played a leading role for many sides in franchise cricket across the globe, claimed only six wickets in nine games as the Afghans returned home without notching up a single win. At a news conference announcing his new role, Khan acknowledged the responsibility on his shoulders and expressed hopes for the team's future. "We all play as one team and play only for the country. Whatever

I am today, is because of this country and this team," Khan said, according to the ACB.

Gulbadin Naib, who skipped Afghanistan for the World Cup, defended his premier spinner after their final loss to West Indies, saying "he gives 100 percent". The 20-year-old Rashid, who is number one in the T20 rankings, set the cricket world abuzz when he became the fastest bowler to take 100 ODI wickets, in 44 matches. Afghanistan is one of the fairytale stories of modern sport, with cricket introduced to the war-torn country by returning refugees who had learnt about the game in camps in neighboring Pakistan. But their second ever World Cup was chastening, and while they headed home with more experience under their belts, there are also major questions over their batting strength and lack of quality seam bowlers. — AFP