

Sports

Finch hopes washouts don't hurt Australia's World Cup

Australia call-up Mitchell Marsh after Stoinis's side strain

TAUNTON: Australia captain Aaron Finch hopes the holders don't become the latest World Cup team to be derailed by bad weather. Heavy rain has forced two no-results in the World Cup so far and Finch has been anxiously eyeing the forecast to see if Australia could be the next victims when they face Pakistan at Taunton today.

Pakistan's match against Sri Lanka was washed out on Friday before the clash between South Africa and the West Indies was abandoned after less than eight overs play on Monday. There is rain predicted in the Taunton area today and Finch conceded luck with the weather could play a role in who makes the semi-finals from the 10-team group stage.

"I think it (weather) might play a huge part in the next few days," Finch told reporters yesterday. "Next week it starts fine and looks good across the country for the remainder of the tournament. "So it's important that you get early wins on the board because you don't want to be on the wrong end of a couple of washouts that might leave you just outside that top four."

Australia failed to qualify for the semi-finals of the 2017 Champions Trophy in England following their rained-off matches against New Zealand and Bangladesh before they lost to England on D/L method.

If the match does get underway, Finch expects unpredictable Pakistan to provide a stern test. They lost to the West Indies by seven wickets in their opening match, but shocked tournament favourites England

with a fine performance.

"I think Pakistan are obviously a very dangerous side," Finch said of Pakistan, who have only won one of their last 14 matches against Australia. "We've seen consistently throughout, especially ICC tournaments, that they win a lot of games and they get themselves in a position to win the tournament.

"They had a great Champions Trophy. So regardless of what kind of form Pakistan go in with, they're always incredibly dangerous." Pakistan survived a defeat against India in their opening game of the 2017 Champions Trophy before crushing their arch rivals in the final, leaving Finch a firm admirer of several of their players.

"They've got some world-class players. Obviously Babar (Azam) is in great touch batting at No. 3 and holding their batting together," Finn said. "(Mohammad) Amir coming back and he looks to be back to his best. He's swinging the ball again. Wahab (Riaz) has been fast and aggressive. Shadab (Khan) is a great bowler.

"Hasan (Ali) had a great Champions Trophy as well," said Finch of the pace bowler who was the player of the Champions Trophy with 13 wickets in 2017. "When you look down their side there's no player that you can disregard. They've got a lot of experience on their side. They've got a lot of match winners."

Meanwhile, Australia are flying Mitchell Marsh to England as cover for Marcus Stoinis after his fellow all-rounder suffered

a side strain that ruled him out of today's World Cup match against Pakistan in Taunton.

Stoinis sustained the injury during champions Australia's 36-run defeat by India at the Oval on Sunday. Australia, however, will wait to decide whether to bring in Marsh as a permanent tournament replacement for Stoinis—a decision that will require the approval of the World Cup's event technical committee.

International Cricket Council regulations allow injured players to be replaced during the World Cup but they cannot then rejoin their squad if they regain full fitness later on in the tournament. "Stoinis has a bit of a side strain," Finch told reporters in Taunton yesterday.

"He won't be available for tomorrow. So we're going to have to juggle around especially that all-rounder spot and have got Mitch Marsh flying over just as a bit of a precaution. "(We're) not exactly sure on how many games he'll miss," added Finch. "It's still being assessed. Over the next couple of days we'll have a clearer picture on what that looks like.

Finch, explaining how Stoinis had been injured, added: "It was towards the back end of his second spell (against India), and he came back and bowled two overs at the death. "He was in some discomfort, it wasn't ideal, but he still managed to bowl a couple of overs."

Stoinis, 29, was out for a duck against India but took two for 62 with his lively



TAUNTON: Australia's captain Aaron Finch speaks at a press conference at The County Ground in Taunton, southwest England yesterday, ahead of their 2019 World Cup match against Pakistan. — AFP

medium pace including a superb and caught bowled to dismiss MS Dhoni. Marsh was not included in Australia's original 15-man squad for the World Cup but is a member of the Australia A side which will begin a tour of England in the run-up to the Ashes Test series that starts after the one-day international showpiece event.

"He (Marsh) was meant to fly over with the Australia A side on Friday. He's just coming a couple days early as a bit of precaution," said Finch. "Australia have two

wins from their three World Cup matches so far, having beaten both Afghanistan and the West Indies before losing to India.

They are now fourth in the table with four points. Pakistan have three points after a win, a defeat and a no-result washout. All 10 teams play each other once in the round-robin group stage, with the top four qualifying for the semi-finals. New Zealand now lead the standings with six points following three wins from as many matches. — AFP

Amir aims for another Taunton triumph as Australia await

TAUNTON: Mohammad Amir will hope to enjoy another landmark occasion at Taunton when Pakistan face Australia there in a World Cup match today. The group fixture at southwest county Somerset's headquarters sees Amir back at the ground where he made his return to first-class cricket in England three years ago. Amir was the rising star of world cricket when his career came to a stunning halt during a Lord's Test in 2010 after both he and new-ball partner Mohamed Asif were caught bowling no-balls on the orders of then Pakistan captain Salman Butt as part of a newspaper sting operation.

The trio all received five-year bans from cricket and jail terms. That same 2010 season had seen Amir produce a superb display of swing bowling in taking three for 20 as Pakistan dismissed Australia for just 88 on the first day of a 'neutral' Test at Headingley.

Those skills remained intact as Amir marked his 2016 return to the first-class game in England in 2016 with a haul of three for 36 against Somerset at Taunton. All three wickets—including that of former England opener Marcus Trescothick—owed much to late swing.

The intervening years have not been easy for Amir, however, and he almost missed what is his first World Cup after taking just five wickets in 14 matches before a recent one-day international series in England.

Amir did not bowl in the washed-out first match against England and missed the last four games with chicken pox. England won the series 4-0. But having been left out of Pakistan's preliminary squad for the World Cup, the 27-year-old made it into the final 15.

His World Cup debut was a rare Pakistan highlight after they slumped to 105 all out against the West Indies, with Amir taking three for 26 in a seven-wicket loss at Trent Bridge. He was in the wickets again at the Nottingham ground, but this time in a winning cause, with two for 67 as Pakistan surprisingly beat tournament favourites England by 14 runs last week. But Pakistan's progress was checked by a total washout against Sri Lanka at Bristol. Pakistan have won just one of their last 14 matches against champions Australia, the five-times World Cup winners. That vic-



NOTTINGHAM: File photo shows Pakistan's Mohammad Amir (C) celebrates after taking the wicket of England's Jos Buttler during the 2019 Cricket World Cup group stage match between England and Pakistan at Trent Bridge in Nottingham, central England, on June 3, 2019. — AFP

tory was inspired by Mohammad Hafeez's 72 at Melbourne in January 2017. And it was Hafeez's 84 that laid the foundations for an impressive total of 348 for eight against England. "We have not won many matches against Australia but we had not won too many against England either," said Pakistan captain Sarfaraz Ahmed.

"But we have finally beaten England and that has given us a lot of positives. "We will go with the aggressive approach we showed against England." The wicket-keeper expects to face an Australia side stung by a 36-run loss to India last weekend—their first defeat of this World Cup following wins over Afghanistan and the West Indies. "We know Australia will try to come back and with (Steve) Smith and (David) Warner back they are at their best again," said Sarfaraz. "We respect all our opponents and

are ready for them."

Australia will hope opener Warner, for all he has already scored two fifties this World Cup, is back to his destructive best at Taunton. Warner's 56 off 84 balls against India—of which 48 were dots—helped contribute to a slow run-rate that left Australia with too much to do at the end of their innings.

The left-hander was also involved in the run-out of Australia captain and opening partner Aaron Finch. But Finch backed Warner, who along with Smith is playing in his first major tournament for Australia since serving a year-long ban for ball-tampering.

"They (India) bowled very well to Warner and he needs some more time. He's a world-class player and will get us off to a flyer," said Finch. — AFP

Thumb injury leave India star Dhawan's World Cup in doubt

NOTTINGHAM: India's Shikhar Dhawan is set to discover the extent of a thumb injury that threatens the opening batsman's ongoing participation at the World Cup. Dhawan led India to their second straight win of the 50-over tournament with a 109-ball 117 against reigning champions Australia at the Oval on Sunday but took a hit to his left thumb during the course of his innings.

Team physio Patrick Farhart is due to make a decision on the extent of Dhawan's injury later Tuesday but reports in the Indian media have suggested the 33-year-old has fractured his thumb.

The left-handed batsman suffered the injury as a result of a nasty blow from a rising delivery by Australia paceman Nathan Coulter-Nile but still went on to complete his 17th one-day international century. Dhawan, however, played no further part in the match after his dismissal, with substitute Ravindra Jadeja taking the field in his place as India comfortably defended their total of 352 for five to complete a 36-run victory.

The Virat Kohli-led side are up against New Zealand in Nottingham on Thursday before taking on arch-rivals Pakistan in the showpiece match of the 10-team round-robin group stage in Manchester on Sunday. — AFP

ICC won't change bails after WCup wicket problems

LONDON: The International Cricket Council have ignored pleas from World Cup stars to resolve the bail controversy that threatens to spoil the tournament. India captain Virat Kohli and Australia skipper Aaron Finch joined forces to condemn the "unfair" problem on Sunday.

Australia's David Warner avoided being bowled early in his side's unsuccessful run-chase against India when he deflected Jasprit Bumrah's delivery onto the wicket via his boot.

Not for the first time in this tournament, the ball struck the stumps but failed to dislodge the bails, meaning Warner earned an unexpected reprieve. It was the fifth incident in the tournament of the 'zing' bails, which contain lights that flash when the ball hits the wicket, failing to come off when hit.

But despite calls for a change to the bails from Kohli, Finch and former England captains Michael Vaughan and Nasser Hussain, tournament organisers have no plans to make a switch back to the traditional wooden style.

"We wouldn't change anything mid-event as it would compromise the integrity of the event - the equipment is the same for all 10 teams across all 48 games," the International Cricket Council, the sport's global governing body, told Sky Sports in a statement yesterday.

"The stumps have not changed in the last four years. They have been used in all ICC events since the 2015 Men's Cricket World Cup and in a range of domestic events. "This means they've been used in more than 1000 games—this is a statistical anomaly.

"This issue has always been part of the game, with the accepted concept being that it requires some force to disturb a batsman's 'castle'." — AFP

Bangladesh-S Lanka washout sets World Cup record

BRISTOL: Sri Lanka's World Cup match against Bangladesh was abandoned without a ball being bowled due to rain in Bristol yesterday. The umpires' decision left tournament organisers with the unwanted record for the most number of abandoned games at a World Cup, surpassing the two each at the 1992 tournament in Australia and New Zealand and the 2003 edition in southern Africa.

It was the second successive World Cup match at Bristol that had fallen victim to bad weather, with Sri Lanka's group game against Pakistan at southwest county Gloucestershire's headquarters on Friday another no-result washout that did not witness a single delivery. Rain has also been forecast for today's match between Australia and Pakistan in Taunton. No reserve days have been scheduled for the 10-team round-robin stage, despite the well-known risks of rain during a British summer.

Asked whether there should be reserve days in the group phase, Bangladesh coach Steve Rhodes, a former England wicket-keeper, said: "Yes, I would (have them). "I know logistically it would have caused problems. But we can put a man on the moon, so if we have to travel a day later, so be it." — AFP

Mack flops at Aussie trials

BRISBANE: Olympic champion Mack Horton was ruled out of the individual races at next month's world championships when he finished third in the 800 metres at the Australian trials yesterday. Emma McKeon, Australia's most successful swimmer at the Rio Olympics, held off rising star Ariarne Titmus to book her spot in the 200m freestyle next month in South Korea.

But Horton, who had already missed out in his pet event, the 400m, and the 200m, completed an unwanted treble when he was beaten in the 800m.

Horton, who beat China's Sun Yang for gold in the 400m at Rio, came third in the 800m behind Jack McLoughlin, who touched in 7:46.79, a new personal best. Only the top two in each final earn selection for individual races at the world championships, and only if they swim under the designated qualifying time.

No one made the grade alongside McLoughlin, who also edged out Horton in the 400m on Sunday. The strapping 24-year-old announced himself last year, claiming 1500m gold at the Commonwealth Games before upsetting a top field to win the 400m and 800m at the PanPacs in Tokyo. "That was all right. I kind of wanted to go faster," he said of his best-ever 800m time. "But I'm pretty happy with how it is going so far."

He swims the 1500m on the penultimate day of the trials on Thursday. McKeon, who shared silver with American superstar Katie Ledecky behind Italian great Federica



Mack Horton

Pellegrini at the last worlds in Budapest, came out of the blocks first and never looked back, hitting the wall in a personal best one minute 54.55 seconds.

It was fractionally outside the Commonwealth record set by teenager Titmus last year, setting the pair up as serious challengers for gold next month.

"I haven't done a PB in that race for quite some time. I think I lost a bit of confidence for a bit," said McKeon, who collected a gold, two silver and a bronze at the 2016 Rio Olympics. "I'm usually out pretty fast... I just focus on my stroke count and timing."

McKeon has also qualified for the 100m butterfly, while Titmus fired a warning shot to Ledecky with a new Commonwealth record in the 400 metre freestyle this week. In other racing yesterday, David Morgan qualified in the 200m butterfly. — AFP