

## Sports

# Pakistan to summon spirit of 2009 for T20 title, says Afridi

**KARACHI:** Shahid Afridi, the box office trail-blazer of Pakistan white ball cricket, believes his “unpredictable” nation can summon the spirit of 2009 and win a second T20 World Cup. Afridi was man of the match in a nail-biting seven-run semi-final win over South Africa in the tournament 12 years ago where he made 51. He then starred again in the eight-wicket rout of Sri Lanka in the final at Lord’s where he smashed an undefeated 54.

Rawalpindi.

Three days later, England also withdrew its men’s and women’s teams from visiting Pakistan. “This is Pakistan cricket for you, never ever a dull day,” added Afridi ruefully. “Pakistan can surprise any team in the world. Rule them out at your peril.” In his 22-year international career, Afridi was at the heart of Pakistan’s “topsy-turvy” ride in limited overs cricket.

## Heartbreak and drama

Afridi anchored Pakistan’s run to the final in the inaugural Twenty20 World Cup in South Africa in 2007, taking 12 wickets which earned him the player of the tournament award. Pakistan, however, lost twice against arch-rivals India — including the final. “Pakistan gave the best entertainment in the first T20 World Cup,” insists Afridi. “We lost to India in the group match after a bowl-out, which was something very new for us.”

Pakistan then lost the final with Misbah-ul-Haq falling to an injudicious shot off the third ball of the final over, with just six needed for a win. “Misbah brought Pakistan into the game but then we lost by the barest of margins,” said Afridi.

Under Afridi, defending champions Pakistan then lost in the semi-final of the 2010 edition in the Caribbean when Michael Hussey clobbered 39 runs in the last two overs to give Australia an unlikely win.

“T20 suits our character,” added Afridi. “We have the talent, approach and aggression required for this rapid format. It is a format which is loved throughout Pakistan. We won against every team and then every team adopted that style. Bowling is now full of variety and new batting techniques have developed.”

Afridi insists Pakistan can once again spring a few surprises in the UAE. “The current Pakistan team is very talented although they lack experienced players. But, as we all know, never underestimate a Pakistan team!” — AFP

“**Never underestimate a Pakistan team!**”

Pakistan’s victory came just three months after the terror attack on the Sri Lanka team in Lahore, an incident which sparked a shutdown of international cricket in the country. “We had that issue of the Sri Lanka attacks on our minds,” Afridi told AFP. “The whole nation was disappointed and frustrated so that win was very much needed. The win gave the whole nation happiness and some unforgettable moments.”

Afridi famously stormed onto the scene in 1996 when he broke the record for the fastest century in ODI cricket, reaching his hundred from 37 balls. It was a record which stood until 2014. Afridi, who played 99 T20 Internationals for Pakistan, thinks recent setbacks can again inspire Babar Azam’s team in the 2021 T20 showpiece.

A month before the mega-event, head coach Misbah-ul-Haq and bowling coach Waqar Younis resigned, apparently believing new board chairman Ramiz Raja would sack them anyway. Then New Zealand abandoned their tour of the country just minutes before the first ODI in



**BIRMINGHAM:** This file photo taken on July 13, 2021 shows England’s Ben Stokes reacting after being bowled out during the third one day international (ODI) cricket match between England and Pakistan at Edgbaston cricket ground in Birmingham. — AFP

## England eye World Cup glory without talisman Stokes

**LONDON:** Eoin Morgan’s England will become double world champions if they win the T20 World Cup — but they will have to do it without talisman Ben Stokes. The all-rounder played a pivotal role in England’s first 50-over World Cup triumph in 2019, scoring an unbeaten 84 and then hitting vital runs in the Super Over in the final against New Zealand.

He cemented his place in England folklore the following month when he almost single-handedly beat Australia by smashing an unbeaten 135 at Headingley in the third Ashes Test. But the 30-year-old has not pulled on an England shirt since July, taking time out of the game to focus on his mental health and a troublesome finger injury.

It means he will miss out on his chance for redemption in the United Arab Emirates and Oman. The Durham player had a point to prove after he was humiliated by Carlos Brathwaite in the 2016 final — the West Indian smashed four consecutive sixes off his bowling to clinch the title.

England will also be without another 2019 World Cup hero in Jofra Archer after the fast bowler underwent surgery for an elbow injury earlier this year. But Morgan’s side remain one of the tournament favorites as they seek their first T20 world title since 2010 and aim to become the first team to hold both limited-overs trophies at the same time.

## England firepower

England are top of the Twenty20 rankings and boast a number of global white-ball stars including captain Morgan, Jos Buttler, Jason Roy and Dawid Malan, who is the number one batsman in T20 cricket. Liam Livingstone adds a certain X-factor to England’s fearsome batting line-up, boasting a strike rate in T20 internationals of 167 runs per 100 balls.

The 28-year-old all-rounder dazzled for Birmingham Phoenix in the Hundred this year and smashed England’s fastest-ever international century — a 42-ball blitz against Pakistan — in a T20 match in July. Multi-format all-rounder Chris Woakes is in the squad, having made his return to T20 international cricket earlier this year after a gap of more than five years. And left-arm seamer Tymal Mills is back in the England fold for the first time in almost five years after impressing in the Hundred, helping to offset the loss of Archer. Buttler admits that the absence of Stokes and Archer is a big drawback but believes England have the firepower to compete.

“We will focus a lot on ourselves, playing to the best of our ability and if we do that I think we’ll go a long way,” he said. “To become double world champions would be a huge achievement and it won’t be easy, I think we all understand that.” Buttler says some of the new players will be valuable additions to the England squad. “Liam had a fantastic summer,” said the wicketkeeper-batsman. “The century against Pakistan and the Hundred — he was the poster boy of that — so he will go into the tournament full of confidence. We have a number of match-winners and Liam is another one of those. I enjoyed watching the Hundred and it was great to see Tymal operating.” — AFP



**MOHALI:** This file photo taken on March 24, 2016 Pakistan’s captain Shahid Afridi batting during a training session at the Punjab Cricket Stadium Association Stadium in Mohali, ahead of their World T20 Cricket tournament match against Australia. — AFP