



## Runaway favourites: Defending champions India begin quest for third title with match against USA

**MUMBAI, FEB 07:** The biggest party in the cricket world kicks off with the ICC Men's T20 World Cup beginning in India and Sri Lanka on Saturday.

Two-time winners India will look to make a hat-trick of titles, a feat that has not been achieved so far. No team has been able to defend its title successfully—not even on home ground.

But the Suryakumar Yadav-led team seems set to create history. India have been the most successful side with a 51-8 win-loss record in T20Is since October 2023. India have won all their nine bilateral series in the run-up to this biennial tournament.

Experts say the competition against India is ridiculously lop-sided; critics agree that this India team is better than the one which won the title in 2024.

In-form India playing in home conditions make them the overwhelming tournament favourites ahead of South Africa, England, Australia and New Zealand.

India captain Suryakumar Yadav acknowledged that there will be pressure of playing in front of the home crowd but it is an opportunity very few players get in their lifetime. "I have shared my experiences of the 2023



ODI World Cup with the players before adding that 'yes, there will be pressure playing in front of the home crowd but if you see the positive side, there will be lots of cheers and encouragement'. They (fans) have seen us play a certain brand of cricket for the last two years. I have told the boys, 'let's entertain and give them a good time', he said.

The 10th edition of this biennial tournament has 20 teams from as far as Americas, Europe, Australia, Middle East, and Africa. Italy makes an appearance for the first time after shining in the European qualifiers.

But India's immediate neighbours Bangladesh and Pakistan have stirred up

controversies off the field. Bangladesh have been replaced by Scotland after their refusal to play in India. Pakistan, who were initially uncertain about their participation in the tournament, have boycotted their match against India. They start their campaign against the Netherlands in Colombo on Saturday.

In cricket, India vs USA is a no-brainer. It is only the margin of victory for India that is of importance. But make no mistake, it is a match in which India have everything to lose and USA have everything to win. If India win, they hardly get the credit. If they lose, they will get the brickbats and a blemish on their record.

Suryakumar said there are no weak opponents in the World Cup, even unfamiliar ones like the USA and Namibia. "I don't see any weak teams. A couple of bowlers or batsmen can do the job. There is no strong or weak team in this format. All are good," he said.

The USA team comprises of immigrants from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and South Africa.

Saurabh Netrawalkar, Harmeet Singh, Milind Kumar and skipper Monank Patel have played cricket in Mumbai. The pitch at Wankhede Stadium has a reputation of being batting friendly. Dew is likely to make an impact on the game.

## Brook hopes focus to shift to on-field action as formidable England face Nepal in T20 World Cup

**MUMBAI, FEB 07:** An embattled Harry Brook will hope England hit the top gear and the focus shifts from the incident at a Wellington club to cricket when the two-time champions take on Nepal in their T20 World Cup opener, here on Sunday.

Brook is at the helm of a formidable England side which has had a successful run in the T20I format, but the talk around the camp has also been around the incident at the nightclub where the English captain was reportedly involved in an altercation with a bouncer during a night out in the pre-Ashes tour.

The England captain fielded a question related to the incident during the Captains' Press Conference along with his peers, while all-rounder Will Jacks too had to confront those in their pre-match media commitment here on Friday.

"I wasn't actually in New Zealand, so I don't know anything about it. It's just one of those things that he obviously made a wrong decision and he accepted that. He has went out trying to move forward in a positive direction with that," Jacks said.

"He knows what he has done and there's nothing you can change about that, so there's no point focusing on it too much. On his per-



spective, he wants his cricket to do the talking," Jacks added.

Away from the off-field episode, England have had a perfect build-up to the World Cup and will be one of the teams to beat in the competition.

Placed in Group C along with debutants Italy, Nepal, Scotland and the West Indies, England know they will have to hit the top gear from the word go.

England won 11 out of their 17 T20Is while losing only two last year and the team has tremendous firework across the board to pile up, or even chase bigger totals.

However, bowling in dewy conditions would be a challenge and England will

need their experienced campaigner in Adil Rashid to come up with solutions.

For Nepal, it is another opportunity to make a strong dent on the world stage. In the last edition, they almost got the better of South Africa with the Proteas winning by a mere one run and Bangladesh were shot out for 106.

Among their most recent achievements is a 2-1 victory over two-time T20 World Cup winners the West Indies, a feat that would certainly fuel Nepal's fire.

Nepal also have fared well in the past, making the final of a tri-series last June which involved the Netherlands and Scotland. They had also made the summit clash of a T20I Quadrangular.

Match starts at 3:00pm IST.

England: Harry Brook (c), Tom Banton (wk), Jos Buttler (wk), Ben Duckett, Phil Salt (wk), Jacob Bethell, Sam Curran, Liam Dawson, Will Jacks, Jamie Overton, Rehan Ahmed, Jofra Archer, Adil Rashid, Josh Tongue, Luke Wood.

Nepal: Rohit Paudel (c), Aarif Sheikh, Aasif Sheikh (wk), Dipendra Singh Airee, Basir Ahamad, Kushal Bhurtel, Sudneep Jora, Lokesh Bam, Gulsan Jha, Karan KC, Sompal Kami, Sandeep Lamichhane, Sher Malla, Lalit Rajbanshi, Nand Yadav.

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Earlier, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had congratulated the Under-19 team for its stupendous showing at the World Cup.

**NEW DELHI, FEB 07:** The Board of Control for India (BCCI) announced Rs 7.5 crore as reward money for the Indian Under-19 cricket team after they secured the 2026 Under-19 World Cup by defeating England in the finals on Friday. BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia expressed pride in India's Under-19 team for winning the 2026 Under-

19 World Cup, remaining undefeated, and defeating England in the final. He announced that the BCCI will award the team a cash prize of Rs 7.5 crore. The BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia, while speaking to ANI, said, "The whole country and BCCI are proud of our Under-19 side on their Under-19 World Cup 2026 victory."

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