



## Desperate India take on Australia in do-or-die Women's T20 World Cup clash

**LONDON, JUNE 27:** With a place in the Women's T20 World Cup semifinals on the line, a fallible India will be desperate to overcome their fielding and batting woes when they take on six-time champions Australia in their final Group A clash here on Sunday.

The day's two matches will determine the semifinal lineup from the group, with South Africa (six points) taking on Bangladesh (four) at Lord's before India (six) meet unbeaten Australia (eight).

Given South Africa's overwhelming head-to-head (9-2 in 12 matches) record against Bangladesh, India's clash against Australia is expected to become a virtual quarterfinal.

If the Proteas, who are the last edition's finalists, win as anticipated, India will have to beat Australia to qualify, while a defeat would end the hopes of the reigning ODI world champions.

Australia, on the other hand, can still afford a loss and progress courtesy their eight points and a far superior net run rate of 4.724.

However, an unlikely Bangladesh upset would ease the pressure on India as even in defeat, Harmanpreet Kaur's side could still sneak into the last-four if their net run rate of 2.268 remains superior to South



Africa's current 0.734.

But it will be no less than a test of character for Harmanpreet Kaur's side who have battled one issue after another throughout this campaign.

India's tournament began with the form of their openers being a concern.

But even as Smriti Mandhana (167 runs) and Shafali Verma (145) responded well, India's middle-order comprising skipper Harmanpreet (85) and Jemimah Rodrigues (58) came up short repeatedly.

While grappling with that problem, India's fielding nose-dived, particularly in the last two games where they have collectively dropped six catches.

India lost one of those matches - against South Africa - while they beat Bangladesh by five wickets to remain afloat even after spilling four catches.

The Indian think tank, led

by Harmanpreet and head coach Amol Muzumdar, would thus know no such errors may allow them a chance to comeback in the contest against a rampant Australia, who are on a roll with their unbeaten run.

There is no particular explanation to why India's fielding has been as poor as it has been in the last two games.

Radha Yadav, who has generally been an excellent fielder, has dropped three of those six catches including two against South Africa.

India will undoubtedly draw inspiration from their victory over Australia in the ODI World Cup's semifinal, in which an innings of a lifetime from Jemimah helped them overcome the final frontier and set them on the path for their first-ever global title win.

Shree Charani's form, who has taken 12 wickets in four matches so far, makes

India reliant on the left-arm spinner but the team would also want the others to bowl well around her, which again has been a talking point with the bowlers not clicking together.

On their part, Australia will be assured of their skills and have one eye on the semifinal when they take the field against India.

Australia are also likely to get a boost in form of Phoebe Litchfield's return for this contest, who in particular enjoys batting against India, after missing three games in this World Cup due to a calf injury.

Teams (from):

India: Harmanpreet Kaur ©, Smriti Mandhana (vc), Yastika Bhatia (wk), Richa Ghosh (wk), Jemimah Rodrigues, Bharti Fulmali, Shafali Verma, Deepti Sharma, Kranti Gaud, Renuka Singh Thakur, Prema Rawat, Arundhati Reddy, Nandani Sharma, Shree Charani, Radha Yadav. Australia: Sophie Molineux ©, Phoebe Litchfield, Beth Mooney (wk), Georgia Voll, Tahlia McGrath (vc), Ashleigh Gardner, Kim Garth, Lucy Hamilton, Grace Harris, Alana King, Ellyse Perry, Annabel Sutherland, Nicola Carey, Megan Schutt, Georgia Wareham.

**Match starts at 7:00pm IST.**

## India seek improved batting show to square Ireland T20I series

**BELFAST, JUNE 27:** India's star-studded top order will be under pressure to make amends when they take on a buoyant Ireland in the second and final T20I here on Sunday, with Shreyas Iyer's men aiming to level the series after a shocking defeat in the opener.

Playing their first match since their T20 World Cup triumph, the reigning champions were handed one of their biggest upsets as Ireland defended 182 to bowl them out for 148 and register their maiden international victory over India here on Friday.

It was hardly the start Iyer would have envisioned on his return to T20Is after 963 days, and his first assignment as India's T20 captain.

With a five-match series against England beginning at Chester-le-Street on Wednesday, Iyer, who has replaced India's T20 World Cup winning skipper Suryakumar Yadav, would be eager to sign off their brief Ireland tour on a winning note.

The biggest concern from the opening game was India's batting collapse.

Sanju Samson, India's World Cup hero three months back, lasted just four balls before becoming debutant Jai Moondra's maiden international wicket. Ishan Kishan and Iyer too fell for single-digit scores inside the powerplay as India slipped into early trouble.

At the other end, Abhishek Sharma carried on in his usual explosive manner, striking the ball cleanly at the top, but lacked support from the other end. His dismissal after the powerplay derailed India's chase. Ireland's two debutant



pacers, Moondra and Matt Hollard, exposed India's top order brilliantly.

While Moondra removed Samson with his very first delivery in international cricket, Hollard dismissed Kishan and Iyer before claiming Washington Sundar to finish with three wickets.

With run-rate pressure mounting, Tilak Varma, Washington, Shivam Dube couldn't consolidate. The outcome of the second contest, thus, could hinge on how India's batters tackle the inexperienced but confident Irish pace duo could once again.

The team management is unlikely to press the panic button after one defeat. Teen sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, who was anticipated by many to make his international debut in the opener, is expected to remain on the sidelines again as India are unlikely to tinker top order after one defeat.

Accommodating the left-hander would require a reshuffle, possibly pushing Samson down the order at

the expense of Washington. The bowling unit, on the other hand, offered several positives.

Harshit Rana made an impressive comeback after a four-month layoff due to a knee injury, using his variations smartly to return figures of 3/24.

Arshdeep Singh and Axar Patel also bowled well, especially at the death.

However, Iyer's decision to front-load his pace attack left India short of options in the closing overs.

Washington leaked 19 runs in the 16th over before Prasadidh Krishna endured another forgettable outing, conceding 27 in the 17th and finishing with 0/57.

Those expensive overs allowed Ireland to add around 20-30 crucial runs, which eventually proved decisive. Ireland's innings on the other hand, was built around captain Lorcan Tucker's composed half-century.

After crawling to five off his first 11 balls, Tucker accelerated brilliantly to reach his fifty off 35 deliveries, while Gareth Delany's 49

off 32 provided the perfect support as the hosts posted a competitive 182.

Having already scripted history with their first international win over India, Ireland will be brimming with confidence.

India, on the other hand, will have a little choice but to produce a far more complete performance if they are to avoid losing the series and restore momentum before the England assignment.

Teams (from):

India: Shreyas Iyer ©, Tilak Varma (vc), Ravi Bishnoi, Abhishek Sharma, Suryansh Shedge, Prasadidh Krishna, Sanju Samson, Axar Patel, Harshit Rana, Ishan Kishan, Washington Sundar, Arshdeep Singh, Shivam Dube, Prince Yadav, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi.

Ireland: Lorcan Tucker (c&wk), Ross Adair, Ben Calitz, Gareth Delany, George Dockrell, Stephen Doherty, Matthew Humphreys, Gavin Hoey, Matthew Hollard, Liam McCarthy, Jai Moondra, Harry Tector, Tim Tector, Reuben Wilson.

## Shafali backs simple approach as India prepares for Women's T20 World Cup clash against Australia

**LONDON, JUNE 27:** Explosive opener Shafali Verma believes that keeping the game plan simple is the best way for India to get the better of Australia in their must-win Women's T20 World Cup clash.

The Sunday's two matches will decide the semifinal lineup from Group A, with South Africa (six points) taking on Bangladesh (four) before India (six) face unbeaten Australia (eight).

If South Africa defeat Bangladesh, India will have to beat Australia to qualify for the last four. The Aussies can progress even after a defeat because of their eight points and a vastly superior net run rate.

"Everyone knows Australia are a world-class team. But it's not like we haven't beaten them before. We recently beat them in a T20 series in Australia, and that gives us confidence," Shafali said on JioStar's 'Adidas Match Centre Live'.

India had beaten Australia 2-1 in a three-match T20I series in the lead-up to the World Cup and Shafali feels familiarity with their opponents will help Harmanpreet Kaur's side.

"We have been playing against them for years now. We know their bowlers, and their plans. So, we will keep things straightforward, which is important, and back our own strengths. The more you overthink, the harder it gets."

Shafali has rediscovered her touch after changing her approach following the match against Pakistan.

The aggressive opener, who has two fifties in the last three innings, admitted she was guilty of overthinking early in the tournament before deciding to trust her instincts.

"A lot of things have improved in my batting. Before



the Pakistan match, I was overthinking. I was planning too much, how I would play the first ball, what shot I would play off the second ball," she said.

"But after that game, I realised that I don't need to complicate things. I just need to keep it simple. When I bat, I watch the ball and react. I don't plan too far ahead. That has helped me score runs more freely."

"Because of that change, I think I am getting good scores now. I am not putting too much pressure on myself. I will try to continue this approach in the must-win game against Australia as well."

The opener said learning to rotate strike instead of searching for boundaries every ball has been another important lesson.

"If my shots are not coming off, I don't force them. I take singles and keep the scoreboard moving. I think batting is all about not complicating things. Keep it simple, take singles, rotate the strike, and play along the ground when needed."

"If the ball is in my hitting zone, I go for it. Otherwise, I respect the good deliveries and look for ones and twos.

That is the approach I have learned over time. Don't try to hit every ball. Stay calm, watch the ball, and react. Whatever I have learned so far, this is what I have understood." Shafali with new ball

Apart from her batting, Shafali has also played an important role with the ball.

The part-time off-spinner has bowled with the new ball in recent matches and returned figures of 1/22 against South Africa, including the key wicket of Tazmin Brits.

Earlier, she had claimed an impressive 3/20 against the Netherlands.

Shafali credited skipper Harmanpreet for clearly defining her role.

"Harman di has kept my role very clear. She told me that I will have to bowl in the powerplay. So, I work on that in the nets as well. I bowl with the new ball, focus on hitting the right areas, and try to keep the ball around the stumps."

"As an opener, I know that if you bowl outside the stumps, you give the batter room to score. So, I always try to bowl according to what I would expect as an opener, what line and length

would trouble me. I bowl keeping that in mind; tight lines, stump-to-stump, and making the batter work for runs," she said.

Fielding blues

India's fielding has been a major concern in the tournament, with dropped catches threatening to derail their campaign. However, Shafali backed her teammates, insisting the mistakes were not due to a lack of preparation.

"Everyone is thinking of giving their 100 per cent. No one is dropping catches or misfielding on purpose. Sometimes it's just not your day, the ball doesn't stick, the timing is off, or the bounce surprises you."

"But we always back the player who is having a tough day, both on and off the field. Our preparation has been good. We had two days of practice before this match against Bangladesh. We did fielding drills together as a team, half an hour of focused catching and ground fielding."

"So, I will not say that we are not preparing well. We are doing everything we can. It's just about the day. Some days things click, some days they don't."

## Dominant India thrash Pakistan 7-1 in FIH Pro League

**LONDON, JUNE 27:** The Indian men's hockey team produced a dominant display to thrash arch-rivals Pakistan 7-1 in the reverse fixture of the FIH Pro League's London leg.

After conceding an early goal, India stormed back through strikes from Sukhjeet Singh (20th), Harmanpreet Singh (26th), Hardik Singh (34th), Jugraj Singh (35th), Abhishek (41st), Raj Kumar Pal (44th) and Dilpreet Singh (54th) to register an emphatic victory at the Lee Valley Hockey and Tennis Centre here on Friday.

The contest began at a frenetic pace, with India earning the first penalty corner inside 90 seconds following a sharp baseline run by Mandeep Singh. Pakistan, however, looked dangerous on the counter and won a penalty corner in the 13th minute.

After India lost a video referral, Pakistan captain Abu Bakar Mahmood converted the ensuing drag-flick to put his side 1-0 ahead.

India seized control in the second quarter with quick ball movement and accurate long passes that stretched the Pakistan defence.

Pakistan suffered a setback in the 18th minute when Ahmad Nadeem was struck on the face by a deflected pass from teammate Ali Ghazanfar and had to leave the field.

India capitalised almost



immediately. Harmanpreet's powerful drag-flick from a penalty corner was deftly deflected home by Sukhjeet in the 20th minute to restore parity.

Six minutes later, the Indian skipper found the top-left corner with another drag-flick from a penalty corner to hand India a 2-1 lead at halftime.

India extended their dominance after the break. Consecutive penalty corners in the 34th minute led to a penalty stroke, which Hardik calmly converted to make it 3-1.

Pakistan earned two penalty corners in quick succession but the Indian defence stood firm.

Moments later, India launched a swift counter-attack after repelling Pakistan's second penalty corner. Dilpreet combined brilliantly with Sukhjeet before setting up Jugraj, who finished clinically in the 35th minute to make it 4-1.

India's relentless attack continued as Sukhjeet set up Abhishek, who scored on the run in the 41st minute.

Towards the end of the third quarter, India won

four successive penalty corners, with Raj Kumar Pal reacting quickest to tap in the rebound off Harmanpreet's drag-flick and extend the lead to 6-1.

India remained disciplined at the back in the final quarter while continuing to press forward. Dilpreet completed the rout with the seventh goal in the 54th minute.

Pakistan earned two late penalty corners, but veteran midfielder Manpreet Singh produced crucial blocks to ensure India's commanding 7-1 victory.