JACQUES KALLIS

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EXIDE INVATUBULAR
THE ULTIMATE INVERTER BATTERY

South Africa start off low on the radar; spotlight on India and England

South Africa's low-profile in the build-up to the tournament has worked strongly in their favour although all that will change as soon as the opening match starts – there will be nothing and nobody flying below the radar when the hosts and favourites take the field in front of a global audience of hundreds of millions of cricket lovers.

I played in all five of my World Cups with the team featuring, to a greater or lesser degree, amongst the favourites. It affected us, in some way, every time. Not always negatively, but everybody was aware of it. In hindsight, I know it played a part in how we performed on the field – and not always negatively. Occasionally it was a good thing.

But I know Faf du Plessis and his team have enjoyed seeing the spotlight and attention shining more brightly on England and India and it has allowed them the time and space to focus on the details of their own game and strategies for each match. Their two warm-up games were also successful, even though the second one was rained off after Hashim Amla made his second consecutive half century.

Hash had a tough time personally in the months before the squad was selected but the speculation that he might not be included in the 15 was premature and a bit ridiculous. He could easily be crucial to SA's chances with his experience and the fact that he is obviously highly motivated to do well in what will probably be his final ICC event.

Dale Steyn will be missed for the first couple of games but I also see him playing a big role if he gets back to his best, which I'm confident he will. It may have been said a thousand times before, but having the experience of Hash and Dale in the dressingroom makes a world of difference to the younger players. Even if they are not playing, it gives the other guys the confidence and determination to give it everything they have.

Although I empathise with the cricket lovers who would like more underdogs in the tournament, I like the format. It allows teams to recover after a slow start or a couple of defeats and, by the time everyone has played each other over nine matches each, I don't think there will be much doubt that the best four teams over the course of five weeks will be in the semi-finals.

I also think it will be a high scoring tournament which means, ironically, that it isn't necessarily the best batting teams which will have the advantage but the best bowling teams. Variety in attack and the ability to take wickets will provide the best, most consistent opportunities to win games.

JACQUES KALLIS

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EXIDE
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THE ULTIMATE INVERTER BATTERY

Bangladesh defeat South Africa; upsets expectations!

There is no point pretending that South Africa's defeat to Bangladesh was just a 'blip' on the radar, a bump in the road. It was far more serious than that and the tournament has now become a whole lot more difficult for Faf du Plessis and his men.

Bangladesh played excellent cricket from the moment they were asked to bat first. Soumya Sarkar took the game to the fast bowlers early on and counter-attacked in tremendous style. Mashrafe Mortaza said before the game that they would "fight fire with fire" and they were as good as promised.

Worryingly, South Africa's bowlers didn't appear to have a 'plan B' once it became obvious that the Bangladesh batsmen were not going to be bounced out. The pitch was obviously not the quickest and the batsmen were obviously not intimidated. In fact, they were scoring runs comfortably against the short ball.

I was waiting for the fast bowlers to change tactic and bowl fuller, attacking the stumps, but it never happened. Very few runs were scored between mid-on and mid-off. If the short ball isn't working, you have to get the batsmen driving. Still, I'm sure the Proteas will have discussed their shortcomings and will learn from their mistakes against India on Wednesday.

That game now becomes critical for South Africa. If they lose to India they will need to win all of their six remaining games to be sure of a semi-final place – and they will have to win eight in a row to win the World Cup! If they lose to India, their tournament could effectively be over after India have played just one game.

Virat's team will be well prepared. The IPL has left all the players extremely 'cricket fit' and now they have had a decent rest period after their two warm-up matches. Along with England, they are extremely well balanced with back-up and cover in every department.

I always had India as one of my predicted semi-finalists along with England and Australia. I thought it would be a bun fight between three or four teams for the final semi-final place but I had South Africa as my 'dark horse'. They have become a very dark horse now. I can see any of Pakistan, New Zealand or the West Indies reaching the last four although I won't give up on the Proteas until the last mathematical chance has gone.

I expect Dale Steyn will have to play against India, even if he is not a hundred percent fit. Lungi Ngidi won't recover in time and South Africa desperately need a win. It might be a gamble to play Dale but that is what the tournament has come to for Faf, already.

JACQUES KALLIS

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EXIDE
INVATUBULAR
THE ULTIMATE INVERTER BATTERY

South Africa disappoints but not out of reckoning

Almost everybody outside the squad itself appears to have written South Africa off at the World Cup and, to be honest, that's understandable. They have under performed in their first three games and have shown little sign that they can turn it around.

But I spent over a decade and a half as part of the Proteas squad and I know how strongly the fire burns. The rest of the world may have given up on them, and unfortunately many of their supporters believe there is no hope, but I would be very wary of giving up on Faf du Plessis and his squad.

I know they are up against it and I'm not suggesting they are likely to reach the semi finals, let alone have a good chance of doing so, but I would be very surprised if they don't find their best form very soon and start to win games.

Meanwhile, some other teams are looking ominously strong and the tournament has made a fantastic early impression. I spent the first 10 days travelling around the country and it's obvious that the cosmopolitan nature of the British population makes for the best crowds in the world. Enthusiastic, knowledgeable and fair – there are supporters for all for ten countries.

Mind you, there are more Indian supporters than any other – even more than there are for England from what I could see. The atmosphere at the Oval for yesterday's match between India and Australia was incredible – a sea of blue shirts in the 25,000+ crowd which must have represented at least 90% of the support. India were awesome against South Africa getting the job done with the minimum of fuss. I loved the way Rohit Sharma went about his work, eliminating risk and making ruthlessly sure of the two points for the win.

Australia are also looking strong as are New Zealand and the West Indies. And I would never discount Pakistan although they are outsiders.But as I said at the start of the tournament, there is nothing to suggest England and India aren't still the runaway favourites.

JACQUES KALLIS

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EXIDE
INVATUBULAR
THE ULTIMATE INVERTER BATTERY

India, England, Australia look ominously good; fourth place up for grabs

It's crunch time for South Africa – five consecutive knockout matches and, even if they win them all, they aren't assured of a place in the semi finals. But that is for us to speculate about, not Faf or his players.

Like a marathon runner a third of the way into the race, Faf cannot afford to think too far ahead – never mind the finish line. One match at a time, one over at a time, even one ball at a time.

I played many 'minnow' games in my career and I never found them particularly easy. In truth, I'm not even sure that Afghanistan should be called 'minnows'. In a ten-team World Cup you don't find too many easy games, and that is just the way it should be.

Afghanistan haven't played their best cricket so far and I'm sure they will improve. I tipped them for a couple of wins before the tournament started and I still think that could happen, especially if it ever stops raining and their three world-class spinners come into play on frier pitches! I just hope they don't come good against the Proteas.

The South African camp also had to deal with the off-field distraction caused by the news that AB de Villiers had offered to return to international cricket before the World Cup. My sense is that it was a much, much bigger story for the media and the fans than it was for the captain and the squad. They had spoken about the situation before they left South Africa and had discussed the possibility that the news might 'break' during the tournament. They were prepared.

It would have been nice to have AB in the team for the World Cup but not at such late notice when the squad had already been selected.

I'm even more confident that my three 'firm'predictions for semi final places will get there. England and India are looking ominously good and the Australians will have benefitted greatly from winning two closely contested matches against the West Indies and Pakistan.

The fourth semi final spot would appear to be a race between New Zealand and the West Indies at this stage with the Black Caps enjoying a significant advantage.

I'd love to think the Proteas can get there, I will never write them off, but I suspect it will be a bridge too far now. And besides, the bridge might get washed away in this weather!

JACQUES KALLIS

Published 18.6.19

EXIDE
INVATUBULAR
THE ULTIMATE INVERTER BATTERY

South Africa needs to rise; four games in a row

It's time for South Africa's biggest players to rise to the occasion - four times in a row. I played in five World Cups so I've been through the full spectrum of responsibility from junior players to senior players and I know that it is up to the captain and his more experienced players to lead from the front.

The Proteas need to beat New Zealand today and then Pakistan and Sri Lanka before facing Australia in their final group and they need to win them all just to stand a chance of reaching the semi finals and then net run rate might even come into it.

At least they know what they need to do and will still believe – for now, their fate is in their own hands. That's where guys like Faf du Plessis, Quinton de Kock, HashimAmla, KagisoRabada and Imran Tahir will have to be at their best.

It is not a question of trying harder or concentrating more than usual because the best international players give everything in every game. All of those players have done it in the past and I'm backing them to do it again.

It has been a difficult time for Hashim recently, both on and off the field, but he still desperately wants to be there in the heat of battle and, although he is coming towards the end of his career, I can see the determination still burns bright. He finally spent some decent time at the crease in the last game against Afghanistan.

South Africa and New Zealand have quite a history at World Cups with the Black Caps having knocked the Proteas out of the last two events at the quarter final (2011) and semi final (2015) stages. They are always a strongly bonded team and they are masters at rising to the big occasion. New Zealand know they have a double incentive today – win the match and they are probably just one victory away from guaranteeing their own place in the last four but also they have the chance to complete a hat-trick of knockouts against South Africa.

Two men who I did not mention above who might have a leading role to play for Faf du Plessis are Lungi Ngidi and Chris Morris. I understand Ngidi is fit and is likely to play – he has a habit of taking early wickets and they often have a strong influence on the result of a match. Morris is a match-winner with both bat and ball.

New Zealand, however, are one of the best teams in the tournament and are superbly led by Kane Williamson. They, too, are packed full of match-winners. Hopefully this horrible rain stays away!

JACQUES KALLIS

Published 21.6.19

EXIDE
INVATUBULAR
THE ULTIMATE INVERTER BATTERY

India team to watch; Afghanistan disappoint

It may have felt like doom and gloom for most of South Africa's supporters after the loss to New Zealand but it's at times like these we need to remember that winning and losing is part of the sporting process whether you are playing or watching.

South African teams have enjoyed great success for many years and our enjoyment of those triumphs has been enhanced by a few defeats along the way. The World Cup has not been kind to us for over a quarter of a century but our time will come – for a different generation.

Sure, there were moments when the game against New Zealand might have turned our way. A sharp catch, a possible run out and then the missed review when Kane Williamson appeared to have edged Imran Tahir to the wicketkeeper. But overall the Proteas were not good enough on the day and have not been good enough throughout the tournament.

It is quite obvious that the best teams in the competition are occupying the top four places and they will almost certainly stay there until the semifinals take place next month. The major point of interest will be who India and England will play in their knockout games – and whether they will avoid each other.

It was a huge disappointment for the whole cricket playing world when the India-Pakistan match was washed out but we all say enough of ViratKohli and his team to know what a great team they are. Rohit Sharma was awesome and, like all the great players dominated the grandest of occasions.

Although it was deeply unfortunate for ShikharDhawan when he was ruled out of the squad there does seem to be some justice that Rishabh Pant will take part in the World Cup.I know I was not alone in my surprise when he was originally omitted. Talent like his deserves to be displayed on the biggest stage.I fear what he might do if he is unleashed against Afghanistan, although perhaps it is too soon to include him in the starting XI.

Afghanistan have been the biggest disappointment of the tournament, even more than the weather. I was pretty confident that they would be competitive and even win a couple of games. But as the bigger teams have got stronger, the minnows have wilted.

South Africa and Pakistan play the tournament's first game at Lord's which is a great honour in itself. They have not done themselves justice so far but Sunday will be an opportunity to put that right.

JACQUES KALLIS

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EXIDE
INVATUBULAR
THE ULTIMATE INVERTER BATTERY

Semifinals an open field

It still seems strange that India are two matches behind the rest of the countries but that may give them the chance to build even more momentum leading into the semifinals. On the other hand, having a more congested itinerary couldlead to injuries. All the players are IPL-fit, of course, but sometimes they just need a few extra days to recover from niggles.

Although it was difficult for anyone to predict England's stumble, nobody is suggesting that India will not breeze into the semifinals. Seeing Mohammad Shami's performance under pressure against Afghanistan gives you an idea of the strength in depth of Virat's squad. I sense they are just warming up - watch out everybody else!

A few years ago, we could have written off a West Indies team with nothing to play for but this team, under Jason Holder, are a very different version of Caribbean cricketers. I expect they will give India a fearless run for their money. Either that of the game will be over in 30 overs!

There were plenty of ups and downs during my international career with South Africa, many good times as well as some bad times. Unfortunately many of the bad times seemed to be associated with the World Cup!

As Faf du Plessis said after the last defeat against Pakistan, now is the time for strong leadership, not despair. The campaign has gone horribly and that cannot be undone but, if lessons can be learned from it then it will not have been wasted. But really learned. I have suggested that the Proteas use the opportunity reinvent the way they play 50-over cricket. It doesn't necessarily have to be a complete change of tactical approach but perhaps a different mindset.

Every team has to use its assets wisely - you can't change a player physically - but you can change the way they feel about the game. There were times when the batsmen looked sluggish and the bowlers didn't seem to have alternative plans. Adaptability is the key to consistent success.

South Africa's next game is the ultimate contest between a team with nothing to play for and one with everything to play for. Sri Lanka will be bristling with determination after their fantastic win against England, a victory which not only kept their own hopes alive but actually kept the tournament alive.

Last week I thought the four semi finalists were all but confirmed. I did not foresee England's stumble. Now it seems like the most interest will be in whether India and Australia can avoid each other in the semi finals - and whether England can even reach them!

JACQUES KALLIS

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EXIDE
INVATUBULAR
THE ULTIMATE INVERTER BATTERY

England impresses in must-win games; India and Australia on watch

Enough has been said about South Africa's performances at this World Cup but Saturday presents a final opportunity to provide a fitting farewell to international cricket for Imran Tahir and JP Duminy - and maybe one or two others.

Tahir has transformed the Proteas since he belatedly started his international career eight years ago. When he first came into the squad the selectors were still asking whether we should play a spinner before each game.Now the question is whether we should play two spinners or one. He made himself a fixture in the XI and he will be desperately missed. His teammates know how important he has been but I'm not sure the majority of fans do - there will be some difficult times ahead without his wickets.

England faced the daunting prospect of two 'must win' games in a row and they were extremely impressive. They played with complete freedom against India and New Zealand and the confidence they will have gained is immense.

The hosts have effectively already faced the pressure of two consecutive semifinals so when they come to the real semifinal, I believe they will have a significant advantage. India, Australia and the Black Caps have not yet felt the weight of expectation which comes with a knockout game.

Having said that, India and Australia have proved themselves in these situations over the course of many years and I don't believe there will by any problems with nerves at the big stage.
All of the semifinalists have had injury problems and the depth of their squads has been tested. They have all responded well, as they should with the best players available.

India's batting approach is obviously affected without the extra batting of RavinderJadeja or Bhuvneshwar Kumar at number eight but Shami has been so effective since his return to the starting XI that they are probably happy to stick with four specialist bowlers and just one all-rounder in Pandya.

It has been an excellent tournament which was kept 'alive' by a couple of surprising results but, as I suggested two weeks ago, the best four teams have undoubtedly reached the semifinals and now it is time - almost- for the business end of the World Cup.

Forget big totals or records, forget playing to the crowd or hitting sixes. Now is the time for calm thinking and clear decision-making. Now is the time for winning, however you need to do it.They cannot afford to lose early wickets or concede 30 in three overs - such spells might prove fatal.May the best teams contest the final and may the best team win.

JACQUES KALLIS

Published 10.7.19

EXIDE
INVATUBULAR
THE ULTIMATE INVERTER BATTERY

Incredible drama as India loses to New Zealand in semis

Incredible drama is what cricket lovers expect from the World Cup and that is exactly what India's semifinal against New Zealand delivered – across two days. It was still unclear until the penultimate over who would win but, having been 5-3, it was great credit to ViratKohli's team that they even managed to drag themselves back into contention.

There was plenty of speculation about the reasons why MS Dhoni didn't bat at number five or six but decisions like that are made by the captain and coach for very good reasons and, although everybody else has the right to question them, the experience and knowledge of men like Ravi Shastri and Kohli should be respected.

Most tactical decisions include an element of risk – they don't always succeed – but as long as the best people are making the choices for the right reasons then supporters and commentators should be careful with their criticism, especially if it is made with the advantage of retrospect.

I particularly enjoyed the innings played by Kane Williamson and Ross Taylor on the first day when they assessed conditions brilliantly and refused to buckle under the pressure that inevitably comes when the scoring rate was actually getting slower as the innings progressed.Williamson is not only a brilliant batsman but also an excellent captain surrounded by a supportive group of senior players who are always there to offer advice or an opinion. His decision to bat first was a brave one but it was obviously based on plenty of research and not just a gut feel.

It can be difficult to trust your own judgement on a pitch which was so different to expectations and most other pitches that we have seen during the tournament, but Williamson and Taylor refused to be pressured by a scoring run rate of less than four an over for much of their partnership. It also showed great faith in the bowlers to use the conditions to their benefit.

I know how deep the level of disappointment will be. India is close to my heart and a large part of me will share the pain of the players and the millions of supporters. It will take some time to digest the reality but, as I know from personal experience, time does heal the pain.

But a great deal of credit must go to the Black Caps who lost a couple of games before the semifinal and were commonly thought to have lost form. We can only hope we get half as much drama and entertainment from the second semifinal between England and Australia today.

JACQUES KALLIS

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EXIDE
INVATUBULAR
THE ULTIMATE INVERTER BATTERY

England's performance inspirational; India can go back proud

All of the 'favoured' teams at the start of the World Cup had a similar view – just get to the semi finals and then 'anything can happen.' Unfortunately for India, that 'anything' did happen but they can still be very proud of their campaign and the many brilliant individual performances it contained. Man for man India is a better team than New Zealand but I don't believe anybody reaches the World Cup final by 'accident'. They played a brilliant game of cricket in the semi final and, despite being 30 runs short of a par total, managed to defend the score. It does not make them a better team than India but they fully deserve their place in the final.

At 5-3 India's run chase was virtually crippled – very few teams recover from situations like that and we saw it again in the second semi when Australia were reduced to 14-3. Early wickets have made a critical impact throughout the tournament – as have big opening partnerships.

England's performances in their last three matches have been inspirational culminating in the humbling of Australia. The host team have now effectively played three semi finals in a row and their performances have just got better and better. Naturally they are favourites to win their first World Cup – but I can see several ways in which they could be upset by the Black Caps.

I expect New Zealand to once again play a cautious, tactical game of cricket in which they try to keep risk-taking to a minimum. They have some explosive cricketers – with bat and ball – but I see them as being 'smart' rather than destructive. In a boxing match, they would win on points rather than a knockout.

I will be particularly interested to see how Jason Roy and Jonny Bairstow approach the innings if they bat first. They have been dynamic throughout the tournament and they were thrilling against against Australia – but they were only chasing 224. The World Cup final will be the sternest test of their 'aggressive attack' approach they will ever encounter. No doubt England will have every intention of playing the same, bold form of cricket which has made them the best team in the world for the last 2-3 years but, on an occasion as big as this, the mind may be willing but the body develops a will of its own!

A number of big players have lived up to the reputations and expectations – in fact, most of the best players have performed on the big stage. But one young man who has exceeded expectations and shown the world that he is the real deal and not just hype is Jofra Archer. What a cricketer he will be for England for many years.

Enjoy the final, cricket fans. Neither of these teams has won the World Cup so history will be made whatever happens today.