

KUMAR SANGAKKARA

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The ICC World Cup was kick-started by a blistering performance from England, the pre-tournament favourites for most pundits. They are also in my top four for the tournament and showed why with a clever and clinical performance against South Africa.

South Africa are not a bad team, indeed they have some real match winners, but some of the teams in this World Cup are so strong that it's going to be tough for any team that is not a complete all-around unit with top-class in-form players in all positions.

While my heart beats for Sri Lanka, and I hope things click and we build up some momentum with a collective effort, my predicted top four at the start are England, India, Australia and then either New Zealand or West Indies.

We also saw West Indies in action on Friday and they started with a captivating performance full of pace and aggression from their fast bowlers. Great to see "Dre" Russell back for them in ODI cricket; if he stays fully fit, he could light up this World Cup with bat and ball.

Sri Lanka in their warm-up games have played average cricket. It's not been too bad, but neither has it been especially good. Their batting has been steady, and it has been good to see Dimuth (Karunaratne) scoring some runs. As the new captain with very little ODI cricket experience in the recent past, he needs to lead from the front with the bat and be tactically smart on the field.

If Sri Lanka are able to pull off a win early against New Zealand, then they have a chance to build-up some confidence and momentum with our next games against Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

India are exceptionally strong and well-balanced. Their biggest advantage is the pace bowling unit led by Jasprit Bumrah, the best pace bowler in ODI cricket in the world right now. They are also blessed with the swing, genuine pace and all-round ability of Hardik Pandya.

Their batting is strong with great experience and, except for the first warm-up game, everyone including MS Dhoni and KL Rahul have contributed.

Opponents will definitely be trying to target Rohit Sharma with the ball nipping back into him and then against Virat (Kohli) I expect them to bowl a little wide of off-stump with two slips and a gully. He has shown a slight weakness in that channel, but then again he is such a brilliant player and intelligent batsmen that he might be able to adapt and thrive.

India's spin bowling is also strong with Yuzvendra Chahal, Kedhar Yadav and Ravi Jadeja. Yadav took some stick in the IPL but he has the ability to comeback strongly and really improve the penetration of their bowling.

KUMAR SANGAKKARA

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One-week into this World Cup and it's already proving to be a fascinating tournament with lots of fantastic cricket and also some unexpected results, Pakistan's upset against tournament favourites England being the most eye-catching.

Pakistan were trounced in their first game by the aggressive West Indians, but they were a completely different team at Trent Bridge against England, fixing with energy and fight as they piled-up a big total and then bowled skillfully, especially their left-armers Wahab Riaz and Mohammad Amir.

England remain tournament favourites, but no team can afford to be complacent in this World Cup. The other favourites – India and Australia, who underlined their growing credentials with a good win against West Indies – also look in good shape as we enter the second week.

India looked excellent against underperforming South Africa after they finally started their campaign. They have a good team balance, top-class spin bowling, and Jasprit Bumrah was exceptional.

South Africa, meanwhile, have been very poor in terms of tactics and that has shown. From team selection to situational adaptability, they have been found wanting. I did not understand them not playing David Miller in the first game and then their approach with all-rounder Chris Morris, treating him as an optional back-up player initially, was puzzling.

Their one bright light has been Kagiso Rabada, whose bowling has been inspirational with genuine pace, control and heart. That heart and courage is what South Africa need more of now after three straight losses.

India play to their strengths and Virat Kohli has been the opposite of Faf du Plessis, who needs to score runs and be more tactically astute. Kohli is inspirational, thinks out of the box, is passionate and proud. That rubs off on his team and he gets the best out of his players.

Sri Lanka had to battle hard against Afghanistan for their first victory. It was a relief to win, settling some nerves, but we made it tough for ourselves.

The adjustment of the batting order, promoting Kusal Perera to the opening position, worked for a while with Kusal and Karunaratne putting on 92. That should have helped us to a big total but then we had a familiar collapse. The batsmen showed a lack of situational awareness, energy and intent. The dismissals were soft and bad running contributed. Afghanistan adjusted very well to the conditions after the first 12 overs and bowled with aggression and guile, but we should have done better.

Sri Lanka's gamble with the five fast bowlers ultimately worked, helping them out of trouble as Nuwan Pradeep and Lasith Malinga picked up wickets, but I feel we made a mistake by not playing Jeevan Mendis – he is a good player of spin and his leg spin is needed to give us variety.

KUMAR SANGAKKARA

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The famously fickle British weather has dominated the past week of the Cricket World Cup, rain and cold winds interrupting the summer and ruining several games, halting the momentum of a tournament that had started so positively.

Everyone hopes that the sunshine will return from this weekend, but the wet summer has clearly impacted the conditions and some teams have faced more challenges than others.

It's obvious that drainage efficiency in the different venues varies greatly. In Bristol, we saw the game between Pakistan and Sri Lanka being called off in sunshine due to wet patches on the outfield while the match between England and West Indies in Southampton was played despite heavy rain throughout the week.

It's the luck of the draw, but harder for some teams to take, especially when we are also seeing a surprising variation in pitch conditions. We have seen some noticeably green pitches, apparently to hold the pitch together, but then browner pitches also at the very same venue.

Uniform neutral pitches are a key requirement for a global tournament like this and that has unfortunately not always been the case. Sides have to adjust, but the disgruntled murmurs emanating from some team camps can be understood.

It's a shame that it's not practical to cover the entire playing area like is the norm in Sri Lanka. That effort requires huge manpower but it has become something of an art form for us and helps protect cricket from some of the monsoonal downpours we have to contend with.

For Sri Lanka, the forward strategy is a pretty simple one: bat well and build totals the bowlers can defend; or work out how to chase down the totals set. There is a need to get back to basics in terms of building long partnerships.

Angelo Mathews and Kusal Mendis need to carry the middle order through. Both need to score effective runs and need more spark and energy in their approach. Their body language has been a bit defeatist and they need to inspire that dressing room, with help from Lasith Malinga, for Sri Lanka to compete.

They need to take games deep and keep challenging themselves to rise to difficult occasions. They have the ability to do that and I believe deep-down they have the belief.

For India, the injury to Shikhar Dhawan is a big blow. His record in big tournaments is phenomenal. He has had a great start to this World Cup and his partnership with Rohit Sharma has been the foundation upon which India builds its imposing totals and allows the freedom to the other batsmen.

That is a reason why India, understandably, will allow Dhawan every possible opportunity to recover and postpone a full replacement even though that replacement is the brilliant Rishabh Pant.

This gives them the opportunity to strengthen their all-round abilities by selecting Ravindra Jadeja or Vijay Shankar, or instead go with the full batsman in terms of experience and class in Dinesh Karthik.

Whichever way they go, it will be looked on as an opportunity by their passionate and fantastic captain Virat Kohli, and especially by KL Rahul who will probably be promoted to open the innings.

The weather forecast for their epic clash with Pakistan looks reasonable and it should be a fantastic contest. India will be favourites to extend their fine record in World Cups against Pakistan and their unbeaten run in this tournament.

However, Pakistan are very dangerous when things click and we will just have to see which Pakistani team turns up on the day.

South Africa, meanwhile, are struggling to break free from the AB de Villiers selection controversy after news broke that he had made a last-minute offer to play in the World Cup despite previously retiring from international cricket.

My view is that AB has been plagued with indecision in the recent past and has struggled to balance out the requirements of playing lucrative franchise cricket with the sacrifice that comes with playing for your country.

The reasons for this are complex, and possibly not entirely of his own making, but if he wanted to return to the international fold a sacrifice was in turn required well ahead of time to prepare and reintegrate fully to the South African side.

The decision to refuse his offer of a comeback for the World Cup must have been a hard one, especially in light of the expert skill he brings to the side and his clear match-winning ability, however it seems a decision taken after much thought.

The issue would have been better served if it were public knowledge before the tournament began rather than being disseminated once South Africa lost a few games.

KUMAR SANGAKKARA

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Just when we feared this World Cup was getting dominated by the top four teams and marred by wet weather, Sri Lanka roared back to life with a stunning performance against England that opens up the entire competition.

Nobody expected Sri Lanka to beat England at Headingley on Friday. The hosts are a well-oiled unit, blessed with enormous experience and clarity of purpose after four years of meticulous planning.

Sri Lanka, meanwhile, have been struggling in nearly all aspects of their campaign. Our biggest hope stemmed from a proud and hard-earned tradition of rising to the occasion at World Cup tournaments.

I thought it was a good toss to win on a flat, dry pitch that was always likely to slow down later and take some turn. A par score was 280 and not the 232 that Sri Lanka were ultimately able to cobble together.

Avishka Fernando, playing his first game in the tournament, responded with a brilliant counterattack after Dimuth Karunaratne and Kusal Perera went early. Fernando displayed all key components that define a top-class batsman: steady head position, good foot movement, ability to be balanced while driving through the off or straight, and ability to pick up the short ball quickly.

Again, though, the middle order was tested. Kusal Mendis looked good but couldn't construct a long innings and, as the pitch got more difficult to bat on, Angelo (Matthews) showed why he is the best batsman in the side by adapting and holding the batting unit together. It was an outstanding innings from Matthews and he was the architect of the winning total.

With the ball, Lasith (Malinga) needed to lead the charge if we were to stand any chance of defending the 233-run target. He had been bowling safely with good economy thus far, but he needed to take wickets with the new ball and through every spell and he did just that.

It was a great team effort by the bowlers, led by Lasith but supported by everyone. Sri Lanka can enjoy this win, but there remains much work to be done.

Rishabh Pant's call-up is exciting for the youngster and a great opportunity for him to show what a talented player he is. I am not sure whether he will play but it will definitely be exciting to watch him if he gets the chance.

KUMAR SANGAKKARA

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Sri Lanka's resurgent performance against England, a brilliant upset that created a huge dogfight for the fourth qualification spot, was unfortunately followed by very mediocre performance against South Africa. Hosts England will have been scratching their heads as they watched South Africa stroll home with nine wickets and 11.4 overs to spare – was this the same team that derailed our campaign last Friday?

Asked to bat first by South Africa, Sri Lanka had an opportunity to put a decent total on the board on a new pitch and then defend with the ball, traditionally our strongest strategy.

Losing Karunaratne in the first over was a dreadful start, but the brisk and entertaining 67-run partnership between KusalPerera and Avishka Fernando created early promise of a competitive total. Avishka once again showed some real class, confirming him to be a future player of immense potential for Sri Lanka. He bats with lots of time and is very balanced.

The challenge for him is to pace his innings with greater intelligence and learn how to shift back and forth on the gears. He likes to keep going at the bowlers, which makes him a dangerous match-winner when things all go his way, but he would benefit from sometimes pulling back and managing his risk-taking more shrewdly.

His wasteful dismissal, as he tried to loft over mid on for another boundary, sparked a mini collapse against some disciplined medium pace from Dwaine Pretorius. Perera also made a mistake against a ball that cramped him for room.

Angelo Mathews showed all his experience against England, holding the innings together with intelligent and skilful batting, and he tried to play a similar innings but eventually ran out of patience against Chris Morris.

That dismissal was another match-turning moment left Sri Lanka in deep trouble on 100 for 4. The middle order tried to repair the damage, but no one, despite several making good starts, was able to go and play a definitive innings.

For Sri Lanka to win defending a 204-run target it needed somethings really special with the new ball. Malinga dismissed the dangerous Quinton de Kock with a beautiful delivery, but he was unable to repeat his heroics against England.

South Africa were very short of confidence after a terrible World Cup performance, but the experienced HasimAmla and Faf du Plessis settled those nerves with a clinical 175 run partnership.

This leaves Sri Lanka facing likely elimination. Statistically there is still hope, but we have to win against West Indies on Monday and India next weekend and then hope that England, Pakistan and Bangladesh all self-destruct.

They need to take it game by game and just focus on the West Indies match. If they can regroup and return for that game with the same intensity and passion that was on display against England then we can definitely beat a dangerous but dispirited West Indies team.

Beating India is another matter; they are looking very strong despite a real wobble against Afghanistan. The loss of ShikarDhawan at the top of the order has left a small weakness that teams are keen to exploit, hoping that KL Rahul makes an early mistake, but with ViratKohli and MS Dhoni both in excellent form their batting order looks formidable.

India's game against England on Sunday is a huge game in Birmingham and it is absolutely crucial for an England team that is now on the ropes after three failed run chases.

England started this tournament as the well-deserved favourites, but they have not been able to play with the same dominance during the past two weeks that has propelled their white ball cricket in recent times.

They look under pressure and they are clearly missing Jason Roy at the top of the order. They will be desperate for him to play against India and help reinvigorate their batting with his positive energy and intent.

KUMAR SANGAKKARA

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Rohit Sharma's astonishing World Cup continued against Sri Lanka. His record-breaking five centuries has lifted India to the top of the table and left them looking the strongest team heading into the semi-finals. Rohit has been brilliant for some time for India and Mumbai Indians, but this has been a tournament that will define him and safely secure his legacy as one of India's finest white-ball batsmen.

His stroke play has been beautiful to watch and against Sri Lanka he was imperious at times. What is special is that this run of centuries has come in English conditions against a variety of opposition in a high-pressure tournament. He has a chance to continue this rich vein of form in the coming week and break more records. Should he do so, providing India with rock solid platforms for match-winning scores, India are going to be very tough to beat.

Sri Lanka's World Cup journey has ended without qualification. Few predicted they would reach the semi-finals and their final mid-table position represents a decent performance in the circumstances. Nevertheless, it was ultimately a disappointing campaign.

In hindsight, it feels like we could and should have done better and could have competed harder for the fourth qualification spot secured by New Zealand. Sri Lanka were dogged by the inability to balance out the side with a specialist spinner, injuries, and the presence of players with no or little ODI experience within 18 months of the World Cup.

The final week of a long group phase saw England regain their mojo after a mid-tournament wobble with two powerful performances against England and New Zealand. They will approach their semi-final next week with confidence.

New Zealand were in the end quite fortunate to qualify with their net run rate and also the weather both working in their favour. They started the tournament very impressively, but then petered out with some lacklustre and unimaginative performances, especially against England and Australia.

Pakistan will consider themselves unlucky with the weather, but they paid for their inconsistency. Bangladesh also had some bright moments in this tournament with Shakib Al Hasan the clear stand-out performer. They also challenged for qualification and return home with their heads held high.

We were left with two mouth-watering semi-finals clashes this week. Difficult to say who the favourites are at this stage given its now knock-out cricket. England will be buoyed by home support, India have a really balanced team, and Australia have been impressive since the start.

All eyes will be on the toss, especially in the England game as they have a clear preference batting first. With the weather heating, this is likely to be the preferred strategy of all teams and I expect that trend to continue.

KUMAR SANGAKKARA

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England are going into today's ICC World Cup final full of confidence. They have backed up their pre-tournament's favourites tag with some brilliant cricket in their last three must-win matches. They have played their best cricket under pressure and, buoyed by home support, they look the strongest team.

New Zealand can be very proud of their semi-final performance against India, inflicting a massive upset with some exceptional fast bowling. However, if England play to their current top form, the Black Caps will be hard-pressed to find ways to beat them. To spring another upset they will need to recover from that emotional and physically draining semi-final and take more inspiration from their excellent leader Kane Williamson. New Zealand had limped through qualification and going into semi-finals they looked far from the well-drilled unit that started the tournament so efficiently. But they regrouped to play a well-planned and restrained brand of cricket that harked back to their pre-McCullum days.

Back in the 2015 World Cup, New Zealand were in their prime, playing red hot cricket under Brendon McCullum's buccaneering leadership and they were expected to reach the finals. In this edition, they were not so highly tipped, but they have battled their way through nonetheless. Much credit for that is due to Williamson for his shrewd and calm leadership. He has absorbed the twin pressures of being New Zealand's leading run scorer and captain so well. His contribution on Sunday will be critical and England will be concerned about his big-match pedigree.

The England-Australia game promised much. Even though Australia had injury replacements, led by the incisive form of Mitchell Starc, they looked the more equipped side to win the second semi-final. England though have played their best form under pressure. The return of Jason Roy and his sublime form has been critical to their revival after a shaky middle-tournament. He has allowed Johnny Bairstow to play with great freedom and confidence.

I was surprised that Australia decided to go with Philip Handscomb over the left-handed Matt Wade, who has been in excellent form for Australia A. He is confident free-flowing player with a focus on run accumulation rather than technique. Handscomb needs a lot of things to fall into place mentally and technically. Australia won what we thought was an important toss, but England's bowlers responded brilliantly, executing their plans with precision and ruthlessness.

Joffra Archer has been a revelation for England. He has learned quickly and developed so much during this tournament. His talent and pace was never in doubt, but his temperament and maturity has been outstanding. His accuracy, subtle variations and extreme pace has been fantastic to watch.

KUMAR SANGAKKARA

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The 2019 Cricket World Cup may not have lived-up to all the pre-tournament hype, failing to be the six-hitting carnival some had hoped for and dampened for a while during the group stages by poor weather, but no previous edition has witnessed such an amazing finale.

It was a vintage final that gripped all those present at Lord's with unbearable, nail-shredding tension. The MCC benches in the Pavilion – filled with some who will have also watched the 1975, 1979, 1983 and 1999 editions – were overflowing like never before. Those that attended will probably never witness a game like it again.

England were the eventual winners of an intriguing see-sawing contest played in testing conditions that provided bowlers of skill with some encouragement. New Zealand, runners-up for the second time in a row, battled so bravely and must have been shattered afterwards by losing by the thinnest of margins.

I know what it feels like to lose consecutive finals: we did so in 2007 and 2011 and in between in the World T20's of 2009 and 2012. As a player, it was very tough. However, New Zealand's players must not blame themselves. Unlike in 2015 where Australia dominated, here they rose to the occasion and did all they could.

England's triumph though was well-deserved. They were widely considered the favourites in this tournament and they recovered from a mid-tournament wobble to play their best cricket under pressure. They are an exceptional team with a clear vision on how they want to play – a positive and exciting brand of cricket.

Their journey in the last four years since humiliation in the 2015 World Cup is an example to any ambitious cricket nation that wants to build and plan for the future. They identified the brand of cricket that they believed was necessary to win the 2019 World Cup and they identified the leader and players able to deliver that.

Sri Lanka need to follow a similar journey in the next four years as they prepare for the 2023 World Cup in India. The conditions will be more favourable to us than this edition and there is clearly the talent available. We need to plan carefully and build a core squad well in advance.

England's win was also a triumph of leadership for Eoin Morgan. He captained the side brilliantly both during the actual tournament and in the previous four years. He gives the players confidence, trusting them to play their own way, and the enormous respect for him throughout the team was obvious.

Kane Williamson was also an exceptional leader. He soaked up the pressure of being New Zealand's main run scorer and also leading the team superbly, shrewdly guiding his workmanlike team to the brink of a remarkable victory. He truly deserved to be the Player of the Tournament.