



Fever pitch

Despite the arrival of T20, the 50-Over World Cup remains one of the most intriguing events on the quadrennial sports calendar, with Australia, New Zealand and hosts India vying to take the trophy from defending champions England

After 241 runs each in 50 overs, and 15 runs each in the first ever Super Over, 2019 hosts England and 2015 runners-up New Zealand were tied in the closest ICC Cricket World Cup Final of all time four years ago.

New Zealand opening batsman Martin Guptill's run out on the final ball of the Super Over – as he attempted to grab victory – meant England won on the boundary count-back rule, having scored 26 boundaries to New Zealand's 17. England were Cricket World Cup winners for the first time – and on home soil.

It was the greatest World Cup Final match of all time – arguably the greatest One Day International (ODI) in the history of the sport, although it may be the 2011 tournament that is on the minds of the world as we approach the start of India 2023 – the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup – this October.

Indian cricket's favourite son Sachin Tendulkar bowled out as a World Cup-winning champion on home turf in a fairytale finish in 2011. It was his sixth and final tournament, and the Little Master was finally able to get his hands on the trophy as India

chased down Sri Lanka's total of 274-6 with 10 balls to spare. The veteran batsman was carried around the Wankhede Stadium, his home ground in Mumbai, with heir to throne Virat Kohli capturing the moment, via Cricket Country: "Tendulkar has carried the burden of the nation for 21 years. It is time we carried him on our shoulders."

No player has managed more than Tendulkar's tally of 2,278 runs in World Cup action, and now the 13th ICC Cricket World Cup is finally almost upon us, with the quadrennial tournament set between October 5th and November 19th.

Originally scheduled for February and March this year, before the global pandemic disrupted qualification, this tournament marks the first time India has played sole host, having shared the honour in 1987, 1996 and 2011.

The tournament is made up of 10 nations, who all play each other in a group stage, with the

top four sides qualifying for the semi-finals and the resulting winners meeting in the final.

With the qualifying Super League Tournament complete, the first eight qualified teams for the World Cup consists of India (hosts), Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, England, New Zealand, Pakistan and South Africa.

West Indies, Netherlands, Ireland, Zimbabwe, and Sri Lanka will face off in World Cup Qualifiers in Zimbabwe against Scotland, Oman, Nepal, the UAE and the USA.

Former champions Sri Lanka and the West Indies are favourites to join them, having finished just

Above: The Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) in Australia hosted the final of the 2015 ICC Cricket World Cup between Australia and New Zealand, with hosts Australia beating their neighbours by seven wickets – knocking over the 183 run target in just 33 overs

outside the top eight at the conclusion of the Super League Tournament.

With Australia winning the tournament a record five times, and currently being ranked as the number one ODI nation in the world, the green and gold are well placed to contend yet again in 2023 with a star-studded player pool, including the highest ranked ODI bowler Josh Hazlewood and number three Mitch Starc among a plethora of modern-day cricket's elites.

India currently sit in third in the ODI team rankings, and having won the tournament twice in the past, combined the hometown support could be enough to push all the way. A strong side, which includes highly ranked ODI bowler Mohammed Siraj, will be a highly favoured side at this year's tournament.

Pictured: Cricket is India's numer-one national sport, with the game supported and played fanatically in the streets, parks, and anywhere a wicket, ball and bat can be fashioned



Defending champions England will be eager to complete back-to-back World Cup triumphs in 2023. Currently ranked number five in the ODI team rankings, and boasting a strong team, with batsmen Joe Root highly ranked for long-form Test cricket, it's difficult to see England not near

the top come the business end of the tournament.

Other sides to watch for include Pakistan and New Zealand, who both share strong representation in both the ODI team and player rankings.

Like the fixtures, the venue list is unconfirmed at this stage,

with the Narendra Modi Stadium the only confirmation, with the 132,000-capacity stadium to host the final. The remaining venues and fixtures are likely to be confirmed in the coming weeks. Tickets can be purchased from the official website. cricketworldcup.com ■

