

OCTOBER 2025

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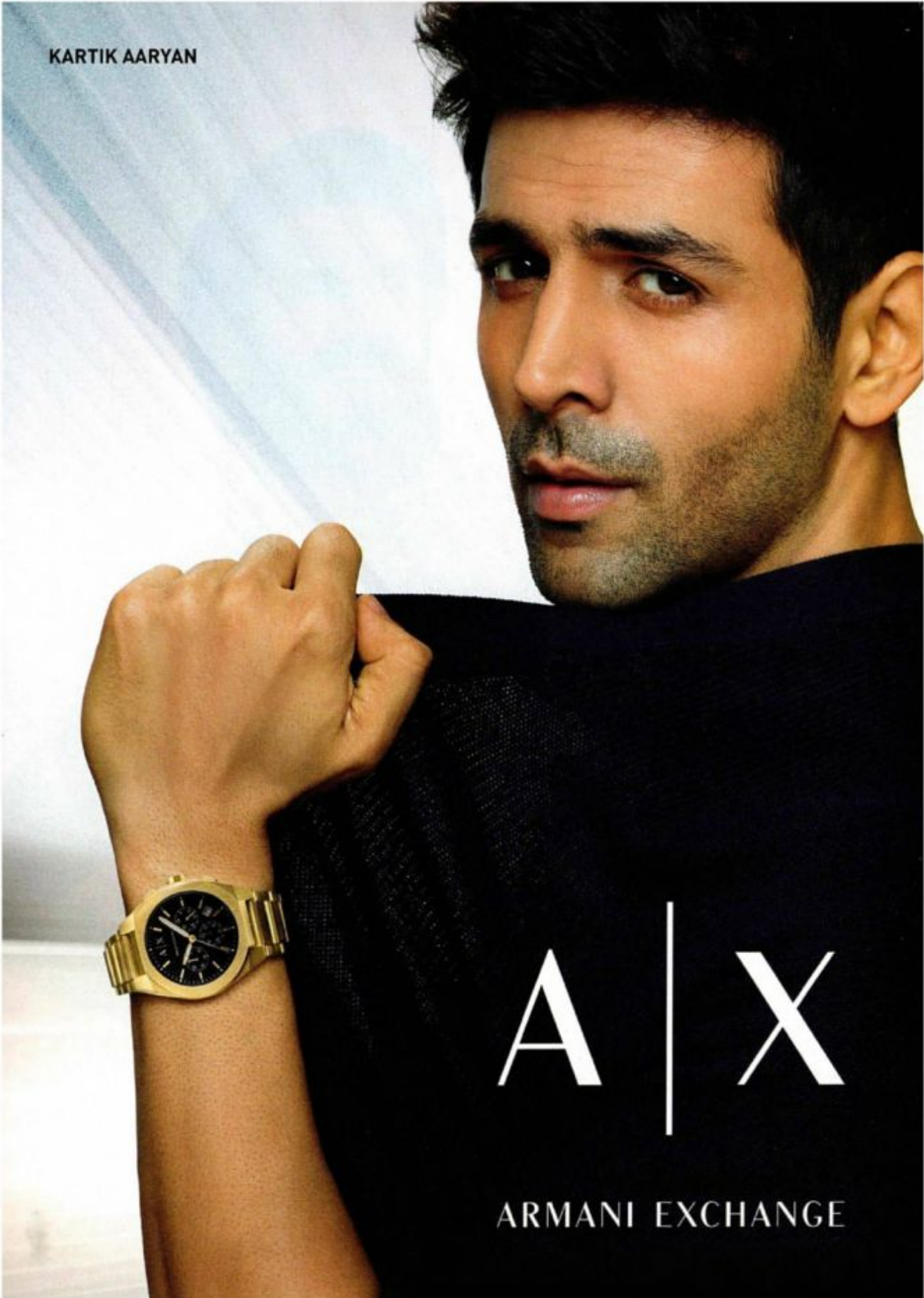
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Cricket today

Asia Cup 2025 was never about cricket, as it was organised to settle political scores. From start to finish, the headlines were about handshake snubs, controversial gestures, complaints to the ICC and the celebration without the silverware. Although India won the tournament, they didn't get the trophy after ACC and PCB chief Mohsin Naqvi decided to take it and the medal away after the Men in Blue refused to take the cup from him. The BCCI slammed Naqvi for his act, but he didn't change his stance and clearly told the Indian Cricket Board that Indian captain Suryakumar Yadav can collect the Asia Cup Trophy from his office in Dubai. India will appeal to the International Cricket Council to take action against the Pakistani official for breaking the rules and regulations.

The scheduled meeting in November is going to see heated arguments between the BCCI and PCB after the controversial incidents during the Continental Cup. Meanwhile, when it comes to the on-field action, India were the best team in the competition and defeated Pakistan thrice to pick the Asia Cup for the record ninth time. India won seven consecutive matches, including the final, to be crowned champions of Asia. Abhishek Sharma and Kuldeep Yadav were the top performers and won matches for their team. The



Asia Cup 2025 was never about cricket, as it was organised to settle political scores.

Women's World Cup 2025 is in full swing with Australia trying to defend its crown. England are playing with full force and are one of the top contenders for the title. India, the co-hosts, have brilliant players, but their habit of crumpling under pressure couldn't impact their title challenge. Harmanpreet Kaur and her teammates will have to come out of their comfort zone if they want to lift the trophy for

the first time. New Zealand and South Africa are also capable of upsetting the big three and making it to the knockout stage. Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are competing to gain experience. They have good players in their squads, but the lack of genuine match-winners will impact them. French footballer Ousmane Dembele won the Ballon d'Or for leading Paris Saint-Germain to its first Champions League title. He is the sixth Frenchman

to win it after Raymond Kopa, Michel Platini, Jean-Pierre Papin, Zinedine Zidane and Karim Benzema. Dembele was once benched by PSG coach Luis Enrique for disciplinary reasons. However, he became a scoring machine after getting repositioned as a No. 9. Dembele amassed 35 goals and 16 assists in 53 official matches last season, and was involved in 14 goals (8 goals, 6 assists) in the Champions League in 15 appearances. Enjoy the action-packed edition of Cricket Today.

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THE WEEK THAT WAS



BATTING MASTERCLASS: Yashasvi Jaiswal celebrates after scoring 150 runs in the second cricket Test match between India and West Indies at the Arun Jaitley Stadium.

**THE WEEK
THAT WAS**



LEADING FROM THE FRONT: India's captain Shubman Gill celebrates after scoring a century in the second and last Test against the West Indies.

THE WEEK THAT WAS



SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN: Coco Gauff of the United States celebrates with her trophy after defeating her compatriot Jessica Pegula in the women's singles final at the WTA Wuhan Open in Wuhan.

THE WEEK THAT WAS



WINNING CELEBRATION: Valentin Vacherot of Monaco kisses his girlfriend Emily Snyder after winning the final of the Shanghai Masters tennis tournament, defeating Arthur Rinderknech of France.

THE WEEK THAT WAS



MASTER OF TRACK: Mercedes driver George Russell of Britain celebrates after winning the Singapore Formula One Grand Prix at the Marina Bay Street Circuit in Singapore.

**THE WEEK
THAT WAS**



TOP PERFORMER: Xander Schauffele reacts before posing for a photo with his trophy as he won the Baycurrent Classic golf tournament at the Yokohama Country Club in Yokohama.

INDIA CLINCH NINTH ASIA CUP TITLE

Tilak Varma scored 69 not out for India off 53 balls, including a crucial six against Haris Rauf in the 20th over. Rinku Singh hit the winning runs with a four — the only ball Singh faced in the entire tournament.





BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

India held its nerve in the last over to win cricket's Asia Cup for the ninth time with a five-wicket victory over archrival Pakistan in the final with only two balls remaining. In the final twist of an occasionally troubled tournament, the Indian team declined to receive the trophy and winners' medals from Mohsin Naqvi — head of the Pakistan Cricket Board and Asian Cricket Council, and also Pakistan's interior minister — and the tournament ended without either presentation.

Tilak Varma scored 69 not out for India off 53 balls, including a crucial six against Haris Rauf in the 20th over. Rinku Singh hit the winning runs with a four — the only ball Singh faced in the entire tournament. Put into bat, Pakistan had earlier collapsed from 113-1 to 146 all out in 19.1 overs at Dubai International Cricket Stadium. That looked like being enough after defending champion India's terrible start to its innings, dropping to 20-3 after four overs, including the prized wicket of Abhishek Sharma (5). But Varma and Shivam Dube (33) led the recovery as India reached 150-5 in 19.4 overs. Varma added 57 off 50 balls with Sanju Samson (24) but the game-changing partnership was between Varma and Dube (33 off 22 balls). The duo added 60 off 40 balls to snatch the game out of Pakistan's hands. It was India's second T20 Asia Cup victory after 2016, and ninth overall since 1984, across formats. This was the first India-Pakistan final in Asia Cup history, which started in 1984. The two sides had already met twice earlier in this tournament — in group play and Super Four — both won comfortably by India.

India's cricketers refused to shake hands with Pakistan after both those games and there were no handshakes at Sunday's toss or at the end of the game.

VARMA'S RESCUE ACT UNDER PRESSURE

India's chase got off to the worst possible start with a rare failure for aggressive opener Sharma. He was out caught for five off Faheem Ashraf. Ashraf struck again to send back Shubman Gill for 12, while Shaheen Afridi got rid of skipper Suryakumar Yadav for just one. Yadav's miserable tournament ended with a total of 72 runs, while Sharma finished as the top run-scorer — 314 runs in seven innings at average 44.85 and strike-rate 200.

"It was not easy breaking into a T20 World Cup-winning team, but I backed myself," Sharma said. "More importantly, the captain and coach have backed me." But India was in deep trouble at 36-3 in the powerplay. Varma and Samson calmly rebuilt the innings without taking unnecessary risks. Samson faced 21 deliveries and only hit one six.



FINAL OVER, 10 RUNS NEEDED

Samson was out in the 13th over, caught off spinner Abrar Ahmed, leaving India still needing another partnership. Varma and Dube met the challenge. Dube hit two sixes and two fours, while Varma reached 50 off 41 balls. Overall, Varma hit three fours and four sixes. He stayed calm even when Dube was out in the penultimate over. Rauf bowled the final over with India needing 10 more runs for victory, and Varma got eight of them off the first two balls – including his fourth six. Singh then finished off with two balls to spare.

“It was a pressure situation but I just wanted to bat till the end,” Varma said. “They were mixing up the pace and bowling well. Sanju (Samson) was fantastic and Shivam (Dube) was helpful under pressure. I was backing my game and wanted to finish for my country.”

KULDEEP STARS AS PAKISTAN COLLAPSES

Earlier, Pakistan fumbled a great start and lost its last nine wickets for 33 runs in 39 deliveries. Sahibzada Farhan (57 runs in 38 balls) and Fakhar Zaman (46 in 35) had given Pakistan a solid start at 84-0 but No. 3 Saim Ayub (14) was the only other Pakistan batter to reach double figures. Farhan hit five fours and three sixes. Left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav took 4-30 in four overs. Jasprit Bumrah, Varun Chakravarthy and Axar Patel claimed two wickets each.

Bumrah claimed the last wicket as Pakistan’s innings ended in 19.1 overs. Pakistan had enjoyed the powerplay – scoring 45 without loss – and was 87-1 at the halfway point.

Kuldeep Yadav broke the back of Pakistan’s innings,



dismissing Salman Agha (8), Shaheen Afridi (0) and Ashraf (0) as the lower-middle order wilted under pressure. The turning point had come when Zaman was out caught in the 15th over against Chakravarthy.

NO HANDSHAKES, NO TROPHY PRESENTATION

The presentation ceremony was delayed for an hour after the final ball. The Pakistan team collected its individual medals. Tilak Varma and Abhishek Sharma collected their individual awards – player of the match and tournament, respectively – but not from Naqvi. However, the Indian team did not reappear for the trophy presentation.

“**Ladies and gentlemen**, I have been informed by the ACC that the Indian cricket team will not be

collecting their awards tonight. So that does conclude the post-match presentation,” presenter Simon Doull announced. Later, BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia said that the team had refused to accept the trophy from Naqvi. Instead the Indian team celebrated on the ground and posed for photographers – without their medals or the trophy.

The Asia Cup has marked a resumption of cricket ties between India and Pakistan only months after the neighboring countries were engaged in a tense border situation in May that disrupted the IPL and the Pakistan Super League. There were no handshakes at Sunday’s toss where India skipper Suryakumar Yadav spoke with former India cricketer-turned-broadcaster Ravi Shastri and Pakistan captain Agha talked with former Pakistan cricketer-turned-broadcaster Waqar Younis. ■

ASIA CUP 2025: A PLATFORM TO SETTLE POLITICAL SCORES

A statement on the ACC website had stated on Saturday that Naqvi would hand over the trophy to the Asia Cup winners. However, it is understood that the Indian team did not want to receive the trophy from him...





BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

Simmering political tensions between India and Pakistan have intensified on the cricket field with the India team refusing to accept the Asia Cup trophy from a senior Pakistani official, having already declined handshakes with their archrival for three consecutive matches. Tilak Varma's nerveless half-century helped India beat arch rivals Pakistan at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium on Sunday and claim its ninth Asia Cup – second in the T20 format. But it at the post-match presentation ceremony where tensions reached boiling point. The ceremony was first delayed for unclear reasons for over one-and-a-half hours. The Pakistan team, led by captain Salman Agha, then arrived late for the ceremony. However, there was a further delay as the Indian team refused to accept the trophy from Asian Cricket Council (ACC) chief Mohsin Naqvi, who is also the chief of Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) and the Interior Minister of Pakistan. India's Twenty20 skipper Suryakumar Yadav claimed that his team was denied the chance to lift the 2025 Asia Cup trophy.

“**This is** one thing which I have never seen since I started playing cricket, started following cricket – a champion team is denied a trophy, that too a hard earned one,” said Yadav in the post-match media conference. “I feel we deserved it. And I can't say

anything more.”

“**If you** tell me about trophies, mine are sitting in the dressing room, all 14 guys with me, the support staff – those are the real trophies throughout this journey in the Asia Cup.”

A statement on the ACC website had stated on Saturday that Naqvi would hand over the trophy to the Asia Cup winners. However, it is understood that the Indian team did not want to receive the trophy from him – in line with their refusal to shake hands with the Pakistan team in any of the three matches the two sides played during the tournament, both at the coin toss and at the end of the match. While the Indian team had refused to accept the trophy from Naqvi, he reportedly refused to step down from the presentation ceremony altogether. Before the ceremony began, an official also removed the Asia Cup trophy from the presentation podium. No explanation was provided from the ACC for this action.

“**Ladies and gentlemen,** I have been informed by the ACC that the Indian cricket team will not be collecting their awards tonight. So that does conclude the post-match presentation,” Simon Doull, former New Zealand cricketer and broadcaster, announced. This was after Tilak Varma and Abhishek Sharma had collected their individual awards – player of the match and tournament, respectively. India





wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav also collected an award for his bowling performances through the tournament. All three received their awards from sponsor representatives, and did not acknowledge or shake hands with Naqvi on the presentation stage. The Pakistan team received its runners-up medals from Aminul Islam, the Bangladesh Cricket Board president, and the check from Naqvi. Eventually, the Indian team celebrated without the trophy or its individual winners' medals.

INDIA TEAM TO LODGE PROTEST

"We have decided not to take the Asia Cup trophy from the ACC chairman, who happens to be one of the main leaders of Pakistan," BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia told Indian news media outlet, ANI. "But that does not mean that the gentleman will take away the trophy with him, along with the medals. So it is very

unfortunate and we hope that the trophy and the medals will be returned to India as soon as possible. "There is an ICC conference in November in Dubai. In the next conference, we are going to launch a very serious and very strong protest against the act of the ACC chairperson." The Asia Cup marked a resumption of cricket ties between India and Pakistan only months after the neighboring countries were engaged in a tense border situation in May that disrupted the IPL and the Pakistan Super League. India's cricketers refused to shake hands with Pakistan after their first and second games at the Asia Cup. Pakistan even threatened to quit the tournament over the "handshake controversy", which ultimately came to naught.

Suryakumar was reprimanded for his statements after the first game, while Haris Rauf was penalized for his on-field antics during the second game. There were



no handshakes after Sunday's final either, or earlier at the toss. Skipper Yadav spoke with former India cricketer-turned-broadcaster Ravi Shastri, while his counterpart Agha talked with former Pakistan cricketer-turned-broadcaster Waqar Younis.

INDIA VERY DISRESPECTFUL: AGHA

It was quite evident that India was not going to accept the trophy from Naqvi when Agha stood alone beside the winner's cup after Suryakumar refused to attend the trophy photo shoot before the final. The Pakistan skipper believed the Indian team not only disrespected Pakistan players by not shaking hands, but they disrespected cricket. "Good teams don't do what they did today (by refusing to accept the trophy from Naqvi)," Agha said. "We went to pose with the trophy on our own because we wanted to fulfil our obligations. We stood there and took our medals. I don't want to

use harsh words but they've been very disrespectful."

Agha claimed the Suryakumar shook hands with him privately before the tournament started three weeks ago when they met each other during the pre-tournament press conferences and in the referee's meeting. "But when they're out in the world in front of the cameras, they don't shake our hands. I'm sure he's following the instructions he's been given, but if it was up to him, he'd shake hands with me." Agha said what the Indian team did during the tournament with Pakistan sent a poor message to the youth of both countries. "If a kid is watching in India or Pakistan, we're not sending them a good message," he said. "People think of us as role models, but if we're behaving like this, we're not inspiring them. What happened shouldn't have happened, but you should ask the people (India) responsible for this rather than me." ■

ICC WOMEN'S WORLD CUP 2025: CAN TEAM INDIA MAKE HOME COMFORT COUNT?

Playing at home is a major boost for India. The team is familiar with the conditions, pitches, and crowd expectations. Historically, home advantage has played a significant role in boosting team performance...





BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

The ICC Women's ODI World Cup 2025 is all set to start from Tuesday, September 30 onward. All eyes are on Team India, who will be playing on home soil. India are co-host of the tournament alongside Sri Lanka. With a strong mix of experienced players and emerging stars, India are considered one of the contenders for the title. However, it will take a Herculean effort from Harmanpreet Kaur's side to turn the tide in its favour. This is the 13th edition of the ICC Women's ODI World Cup. India, who have never won the tournament, are set to make their 11th appearance. The Indian women's cricket team has been 2-time finalists, alongside finishing third once and reaching the semis on two occasions.

INDIA'S PERFORMANCE TOURNAMENT WISE	
1973: DNP	2000: SF
1978: 4th	2005: 2nd
1982: 4th	2009: 3rd
1988: DNP	2013: 7th
1993: 4th	2017: 2nd
1997: SF	2022: 5th

Earlier this month, India saw Yashika Bhatia get ruled out of the tournament owing to an injury to her left knee during the preparatory camp in Vizag. Uma Chetry was selected in the India squad for the marquee tournament.

INDIA SQUAD

Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Smriti Mandhana (vc), Pratika Rawal, Harleen Deol, Jemimah Rodrigues, Richa Ghosh, Uma Chetry, Renuka Singh Thakur, Deepti Sharma, Sneha Rana, Sree Charani, Radha Yadav, Amanjot Kaur, Arundhati Reddy, Kranti Gaud.

RESERVES

Tejal Hasabnis, Prema Rawat, Priya Mishra, Minnu Mani, Sayali Satghare

STRENGTHS OF THE INDIAN WOMEN'S CRICKET TEAM

Playing at home is a major boost for India. The team is familiar with the conditions, pitches, and crowd expectations. Historically, home advantage has played a significant role in boosting team performance, and with enthusiastic local support, India could make things count. Harmanpreet Kaur is leading India for the first time in a World Cup, and in a recent captains' meet, she was confident of getting the job done. "I have often been asked what this World Cup means to me and the Indian cricket team. My answer to that question is straightforward – It's a chance to create history," said the Indian skipper. India will count on a formidable batting lineup featuring players like Smriti Mandhana, Harmanpreet Kaur, and Jemimah



Rodrigues, all of whom are capable of turning matches on their own. The depth in batting, including other talents like Deepti Yadav and Richa Ghosh, can give India the edge. Mandhana has been in dream form and was a force in the recently concluded Women's ODI series against Australia. She owns 4888 runs at 47.92 with 32 fifties and 13 hundreds. Recently, she smashed the 2nd-fastest hundred in WODIs. In the Women's World Cup, she has 559 runs from 16 matches at 37.26. She owns 5 fifty-plus scores. 25-year-old Pratika Rawal is playing her maiden ODI WC. She has so far impressed in her career, scoring 802 runs from 17 matches at 50-plus. Alongside Mandhana, she can set the tone. Rodrigues at number three provides experience. In 51 matches, she has 1457 runs with two tons and 7 fifties. This is her maiden World Cup. At number 4, Harmanpreet is massive. With over 4100 WODI runs, the Indian skipper, alongside Mandhana, are the two most clutch batters in this side. In 26 World Cup games, Harmanpreet has 876 runs at 51-plus (50s: 4, 100s: 3). Harleen Deol and Richa Ghosh added firepower to this batting. Both players are appearing in their maiden World Cup. Deol owns 881 runs at 32.62. Meanwhile, wicketkeeper batter Richa owns 910 runs at 27.57.

The presence of Deepti Sharma lifts India. She is a world-class all-rounder. She owns over 2500 WODI runs and has picked 140 wickets. In the World Cup,

she has 278 runs and 14 scalps. India's bowling has its strong points. Radha Yadav and Sneha Rana are capable customers in the spin department. Playing at home, this could prove to be a decisive factor. Yadav, who owns over 100 T20I wickets, has played only 11 WODIs and owns 9 wickets. Despite not having much experience in this format, she can use her exploits from T20Is to gain confidence. 31-year-old Rana is another big gun in this side. She has 50 WODI scalps at 29.26. 10 of her wickets have come in the World Cup. In backup, India have Shree Charani. She has 9 scalps from 9 matches. She is a work in progress. In pace, Arundhati Reddy and Renuka Singh offer power. Reddy owns 15 WODI wickets, whereas the reliable Renuka has bagged 38 scalps at 23.10.

India can also rely on Amanjot Kaur as an all-rounder. She lends a notable voice from the bench.

WEAKNESSES OF THE INDIAN WOMEN'S CRICKET TEAM

While the top order is strong, India's middle order has often struggled with consistency, especially under pressure. India have often faltered in high-stakes matches due to sudden collapses, particularly in knockout games, as seen in previous ICC events or even in recent times. India is overdependent on Mandhana, Rodrigues, Harmanpreet, and Deepti for the batting finesse. The rest of the side can be a bit



shaky. India will also miss the firepower of Bhatia. So this puts immense pressure on Richa and Deepti to provide the finishing touches. India's pace attack lacks the same firepower as some of the top international sides like Australia or England. While Renuka has shown promise, the pace department remains a concern, particularly on flatter pitches that offer little assistance. India's bench strength is a worry. Barring Amanjot and the promising Charani, the likes of Kranti Gaud and Uma Chetry are weak links. India's fielding has shown signs of improvement, but still lags behind top-tier teams. Dropped catches, misfields, and slow ground coverage have cost India. India's performances in crucial knockout games such as the 2017 World Cup final and 2022 Commonwealth Games final have exposed a psychological barrier. This is something they need to address if they reach the semis.

PREDICTED STARTING XI OF INDIA

Smriti Mandhana, Pratika Rawal, Jemimah Rodrigues, Harmanpreet Kaur, Harleen Deol, Deepti Sharma, Richa Ghosh (wk), Radha Yadav, Arundhati Reddy, Sneha Rana, Renuka Singh.

PLAYERS TO WATCH OUT FOR

Smriti Mandhana: The star attraction of this Indian side is Mandhana. Her exploits will be of massive help. Mandhana can set the tone with her big presence and responsibility. She is a glue in this batting department

and can help her side in posting strong totals.

INDIA WILL MAKE IT TO THE SEMIS

With the World Cup being hosted in India, this is a golden opportunity for the women's team to win their maiden ODI World Cup title. A semi-final appearance is something one can back India to achieve. India enter the ICC Women's ODI World Cup 2025 as one of the strongest contenders, thanks to a decent squad, home conditions, and growing experience at the highest level. However, overcoming historical weaknesses and mental barriers will be key to clinching the title.

SCHEDULE OF INDIA IN THE WORLD CUP

Sep 30: India vs Sri Lanka, Guwahati (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 5: India vs Pakistan, Colombo (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 7: India vs South Africa, Vizag (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 12: India vs Australia, Vizag (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 19: India vs England, Indore (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 23: India vs New Zealand, Navi Mumbai (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 26: India vs Bangladesh, Navi Mumbai (3:00 pm IST) ■

FEATURE

ICC WOMEN'S WORLD CUP 2025: WILL HEAVYWEIGHTS AUSTRALIA ADD MORE GLOSS TO THEIR TROPHY CABINET?

Australia have a strong batting unit at their disposal. The dangerous Alyssa Healy leads the charge. She owns an impressive 607 runs from 17 ODI World Cup matches at 50.58. She has three tons and two fifties with her strike rate being 108.97.





BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

Like the men's team, the Australian women's cricket team has a habit of making it big in ICC tournaments, and the upcoming ICC Women's World Cup could be another platform for them to add more silverware to their rich cabinet. Australia are seven-time winners of the ICC Women's ODI World Cup. Apart from being 7-time winners, the Aussie Women have been two-time runners-up. They have finished 3rd once, 4th once and another time they reached the semis.

AUSTRALIA'S PERFORMANCE TOURNAMENT WISE:

1973: 2nd	2000: 2nd
1978: 1st	2005: 1st
1982: 1st	2009: 4th
1988: 1st	2013: 1st
1993: 3rd	2017: Semis
1997: 1st	2022: 1st

Australia suffered a blip with all-rounder Grace Harris getting ruled out of the tourney recently. She has been

replaced in the squad by Heather Graham. The player is a fast bowling all-rounder with six international appearances. The 8-team tournament will see everyone play each other, and the top four sides from the table will make it to the last four (semi-finals). Australia, who warmed up for the tournament by beating the Indian women's cricket team 2-1 in a three-match ODI series, will be up for it.

AUSTRALIA SQUAD

Alyssa Healy (c), Darcie Brown, Ash Gardner, Kim Garth, Heather Graham, Alana King, Phoebe Litchfield, Tahlia McGrath, Sophie Molineux, Beth Mooney, Ellyse Perry, Megan Schutt, Annabel Sutherland, Georgia Voll, Georgia Wareham

STRENGTHS OF AUSTRALIA

Australia have a strong batting unit at their disposal. The dangerous Alyssa Healy leads the charge. She owns an impressive 607 runs from 17 ODI World Cup matches at 50.58. She has three tons and two fifties with her strike rate being 108.97. Alongside Georgia Voll, Healy will be a solid prospect in the opening department. This is Voll's maiden ODI World Cup. She will be keen to express herself. Voll has played 5 WODI matches to date. She has amassed 254 runs at 63.50 with one ton and one fifty.

Australia also have Phoebe Litchfield in the top order. They can choose between Voll and Litchfield as one of the openers. Like Voll, she is also set to play her maiden ODI World Cup. In 29 WODIs, she owns 983 runs at 39.32. She is 17 shy of 1000 runs. She has 2 tons and 7 fifties under her belt. The likes of Ellyse



Perry, Beth Mooney and Ashleigh Gardner constitute the fulcrum of this Aussie batting unit. Perry is an ODI World Cup legend. She has played 25 matches in the Women's World Cup, scoring 673 runs from 56.08. She has hit 6 fifties. Mooney recently smashed the joint-3rd fastest ton in Women's ODIs. Across two World Cup events, she owns 562 runs from 17 matches at a sound 51.09. She owns 4 World Cup fifties. In Gardner, the Aussie Women get a star-studded all-rounder. She is a crunch asset on this Australian side. With 1326 runs and 104 WODI scalps, Gardner brings immense value. She has 134 runs from 15 World Cup matches (9 innings) at 16.75. With the ball, she has 18 wickets at 27.05. With Harris ruled out, the job of Tahlia McGrath becomes all the more important. Another top-notch all-rounder, McGrath brings stability to this Aussie unit. She has played only the World Cup (2022), scoring 100 runs from 8 matches (5 innings). With the ball, she picked 5 wickets at 42.40.

Annabel Sutherland should come into the playing XI for Harris. With 864 WODI runs at 43.20 and 43 wickets with the ball, Sutherland brings plenty to the table. Sutherland has featured in the 2022 World Cup and scored 48 runs from 6 matches (2 innings). She was unbeaten in both. With the ball, she picked 3 wickets from 4 innings at 38.66. Lending a lot of voice in the bowling apart from the all-rounders is Georgia

Wareham. The pacer owns 46 scalps at 28.26 in Women's ODIs and is 4 shy of 50. This will be her maiden World Cup. Leg-spinner Alana King has picked 59 WODI wickets at 19.49. King has experience of 9 matches in the Women's ODI World Cup. She has picked 12 wickets from 9 matches at 24.50. In the pace department, Kim Garth will be a solid force. In 58 WODIs, she owns 59 wickets at 24.49. She can also be a key figure with the bat if needed. She owns 544 runs from 44 innings at 18.13 with 2 fifties. Then you have the OG in Megan Schutt. In 102 matches, Schutt has picked 140 wickets at 23.69. She also has a World Cup pedigree. In 23 World Cup games, she has managed 34 wickets at 25.91. Australia's bench strength has a key spinner in Sophie Molineux, the left-arm spinner, who has bagged 23 wickets at 14.39 from 13 matches to date. With 28 wickets from 24 matches, pacer Darcie Brown is a reliable fallback. She averages 25.10 and owns 2 four-fers in WODIs. As mentioned, Australia can try out one between Litchfield and Voll in their opening slot alongside Healy.

WEAKNESSES OF THE AUSSIE SIDE

Australia have a few weaknesses. With Harris getting ruled out, Australia named Heather Graham as her replacement. She is just one WODI old and lacks experience. Yes, she has played 5 T20Is for AUS Women, but this is the World Cup, and she might just



have to warm the bench throughout. Australia are short of a backup middle-order batter. Yes, the batting overall is strong and there are powerlifters with sound all-rounders in the mix, but a middle order option rather than two pacers in the bench would have been ideal. Also, the team is over-reliant on their front 4 for delivering the goods with the bat. Perry can be a massive all-rounder with her exploits with the ball. She has 166 scalps. However, a hip injury in early 2025 and a previous back stress fracture have not allowed her to bowl of late. If she stays away from the same, this will hurt Australia.

PREDICTED STARTING XI OF AUSTRALIA

Alyssa Healy (c & wk), Georgia Voll, Ellyse Perry, Beth Mooney, Ashleigh Gardner, Tahlia McGrath, Georgia Wareham, Annabel Sutherland, Alana King, Kim Garth, Megan Schutt.

PLAYERS TO WATCH OUT FOR

Ellyse Perry: The star attraction of this Aussie side is Perry. Her exploits will be of massive help. Perry can set the tone with her big presence and responsibility. She is a glue in this batting department. It remains to be seen whether she can bowl as she has adjusted her bowling due to injuries.

AUSTRALIA ARE FAVOURITES TO WIN

AN 8th TITLE

Australia have plenty of bowling options and they will rely on pace to hunt down the opposition. They also boast meaty all-rounders, who can pack a punch. Australia are also well stocked with quality in the batting department. With the experience of going big in ICC tournaments, Australia can kill teams.

SCHEDULE OF AUSTRALIA IN THE WORLD CUP

Oct 1: Australia vs New Zealand, Indore (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 4: Sri Lanka vs Australia, Colombo (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 8: Australia vs Pakistan, Colombo (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 12: India vs Australia, Vizag (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 16: Australia vs Bangladesh, Vizag (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 22: Australia vs England, Indore (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 25: Australia vs South Africa (3:00 pm IST) ■

ICC WOMEN'S WORLD CUP: CAN ENGLAND MAINTAIN THEIR STRONG RUN IN THIS TOURNAMENT?

England boast a solid batting order filled with match-winners and experienced campaigners. Players like Nat Sciver-Brunt, Tammy Beaumont, and Heather Knight bring both class and composure to the middle.



BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

The England Women's cricket team heads into the ICC Women's World Cup 2025 as one of the favourites. England have a distinct legacy in the tournament's history and therefore expectations are riding high. The England squad has a blend of experience and emerging talent. As former world champions with four titles under their belt (1973, 1993, 2009, 2017), they are always among the top contenders. Apart from being 4-time winners, they are also 4-time runners-up. They were beaten in the final at the 2022 World Cup by Australia.

ENGLAND'S PERFORMANCE TOURNAMENT WISE	
1973: 1st	2000: 5th
1978: 2nd	2005: SF
1982: 2nd	2009: 1st
1988: 2nd	2013: 3rd
1993: 1st	2017: 1st
1997: SF	2022: 2nd

With the tournament being held in India and Sri Lanka, England will be demanding tactical flexibility from themselves, knowing spin can be a massive factor.

"That's a blueprint that we work with, especially when we're bowling, making sure the spinners in the middle are doing a really good job for us and making it really hard for people to get away. I think that has been a really good strength of ours for a number of years. We've got a brilliant spin attack," England skipper Nat Sciver-Brunt said in a pre-match press conference.

ENGLAND SQUAD FOR THE ICC WOMEN'S WORLD CUP 2025

Tammy Beaumont, Amy Jones (wk), Nat Sciver-Brunt (c), Heather Knight, Sophia Dunkley, Danielle Wyatt-Hodge, Charlotte Dean, Sophie Ecclestone, Linsey Smith, Lauren Filer, Lauren Bell, Em Arlott, Sarah Glenn, Alice Capsey, Emma Lamb.

STRENGTHS OF THE ENGLAND WOMEN'S CRICKET TEAM

England boast a solid batting order filled with match-winners and experienced campaigners. Players like Nat Sciver-Brunt, Tammy Beaumont, and Heather Knight bring both class and composure to the middle. Sciver-Brunt, in particular, has been one of the world's most consistent all-rounders in recent years, capable of anchoring innings or accelerating





when needed. With 4092 WODI runs, the England skipper boasts pedigree. She has 25 fifties and 9 tons. In 18 World Cup games, Sciver-Brunt has 805 runs at 57-plus (50s: 2, 100s: 4). With the ball, she has 79 WODI wickets. Beaumont owns over 4500 runs in WODIs at an average of 41.16. She owns 12 centuries and 23 fifties. 687 of her WODI runs have come at the World Cup at 38.16 from 18 games.

Meanwhile, Knight owns 656 World Cup runs from 25 matches at 34.52. Overall, she has scored 4037 runs with 26 fifties and 2 tons. With dynamic options like Sophia Dunkley and Alice Capsey coming through the ranks, England's batting is versatile and deep. Dunkley has played 9 World Cup matches, scoring 291 runs at 36.37. Overall in WODIs, she has 981 runs from 40 matches. She is 19 shy of 1000 WODI runs. Danni Wyatt-Hodge is solid and owns over 2000 runs at 23.42 with 5 fifties and 2 tons. At the World Cup, she has 470 runs from 21 matches at 27.64. With the ball, she owns 7 WC wickets at 18. Overall, she has 27 wickets. Meanwhile, Capsey is a decent all-rounder. She owns 12 WODI wickets at 23.58 from 26 matches. With the bat, she has 343 runs from 20 innings. Playing in India means spin will play a pivotal role, and England are well-equipped in this department. They have frontline spinners and spin-bowling all-rounders in the mix. Ecclestone is widely regarded as the best left-arm spinner in the women's game, and her control and

variations can be decisive. The veteran spinner has grabbed 125 wickets from 75 matches at 19.79. At the Women's World Cup, she has 21 wickets from 9 matches. Ecclestone is well-supported by the likes of Sarah Glenn and Charlie Dean, providing variety in line and trajectory. Dean owns 76 WODI wickets. Glenn has picked 23 wickets from 18 matches. Then there is Emma Lamb as well. She can roll in a few overs if needed. She is a sound batter. This gives England the flexibility to adapt their bowling attack according to pitch conditions and opposition strengths.

Sciver-Brunt can prove to be a sound skipper. She is also well supported by senior players like Knight and Wyatt, the team. The England team also carries plenty of international experience and past World Cup knowledge. Several of the squad members have played in high-pressure knockout matches, including finals. This knowledge and experience can prove to be decisive. England's squad includes several players who can contribute in multiple roles. All-rounders like Capsey and Sciver-Brunt give the team the ability to play an extra batter or bowler without compromising balance. Their depth allows for more tactical freedom, especially in adapting to different playing conditions across Indian venues. In pace, Lauren Bell is a leader of the attack. The pacer has taken 38 wickets from 24 WODIs to date.

WEAKNESSES OF THE ENGLAND



WOMEN'S CRICKET TEAM

As mentioned, England are an experienced unit. However, England can sometimes appear overly dependent on a handful of key players—particularly in the batting department like Sciver-Brunt, Knight and Beaumont. If their mega stars have a rare off day, it can expose the middle and lower order, especially under scoreboard pressure. Although England possess a competent pace attack, they lack a standout seamer. Players like Bell and Kate Cross have shown promise, however, the pace unit hasn't always been as effective on subcontinental pitches. If the seamers fail to strike early, the team may struggle to control scoring. Several of England's inexperienced players lack the cutting edge in the sub-continent. This is one area which needs addressing if they are required to be called upon.

PREDICTED STARTING XI OF ENGLAND

Amy Jones (wk), Tammy Beaumont, Heather Knight, Nat Sciver-Brunt (c), Sophia Dunkley, Danni Wyatt-Hodge, Alice Capsey, Sophie Ecclestone, Charlie Dean, Em Arlott, Lauren Bell.

PLAYERS TO WATCH OUT FOR

Nat Sciver-Brunt: The star attraction of this England side is Sciver-Brunt. Her exploits will be of massive help. She can set the tone with her big presence and responsibility. She is a glue in this batting department and can help her side in posting strong totals.

ENGLAND WILL CHALLENGE FOR THE TITLE

The England women's cricket team enters the ICC Women's World Cup 2025 as genuine contenders. Their blend of seasoned professionals and rising stars, combined with a spin attack well-suited to Indian conditions, makes them a dangerous side. However, issues around consistency, pace bowling, and over-dependence on senior figures must be addressed if they are to lift the trophy again.

SCHEDULE OF ENGLAND IN THE ICC WOMEN'S WORLD CUP 2025

Oct 3: England vs South Africa, Guwahati (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 7: England vs Bangladesh, Guwahati (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 11: Sri Lanka vs England, Colombo (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 15: England vs Pakistan, Colombo (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 19: India vs England, Indore (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 22: Australia vs England, Indore (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 26: England vs New Zealand, Vizag (11:00 am IST) ■

FEATURE

ICC WOMEN'S WORLD CUP 2025: SOUTH AFRICA WILL BE OUT TO MAKE THINGS COUNT

One of South Africa's biggest strengths lies in its pace bowling attack. Led by the experienced all-rounder Marizanne Kapp, and supported by the likes of Ayabonga Khaka, Masabata Klaas, and Nonkululeko Mlaba...



BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

The South Africa Women's cricket team enters the ICC Women's World Cup 2025, opening their campaign against 4-time winners and 8-time finalists England. The Proteas Women have transformed from underdogs into consistent performers in major ICC tournaments. Although they are yet to win a global title, their strong squad depth, disciplined bowling, and emerging young talent make them a team to watch closely in this year's tournament. South Africa are appearing in their 8th World Cup. They have been three-time semi-finalists, including the last 2 events.

SOUTH AFRICA'S PERFORMANCE TOURNAMENT-WISE:

1973: DNP	2000: SF
1978: DNP	2005: 7th
1982: DNP	2009: 7th
1988: DNP	2013: 6th
1993: DNP	2017: SF
1997: QF	2022: SF

With the tournament being held in India and Sri Lanka, South Africa will be wanting to take one game at a time and focus on progressing to the last 4.

SOUTH AFRICA SQUAD FOR THE ICC WOMEN'S WORLD CUP 2025

Laura Wolvaardt (c), Tazmin Brits, Annerie Dercksen, Marizanne Kapp, Anneke Bosch, Sinalo Jafta (wk), Chloe Tryon, Nadine de Klerk, Ayabonga Khaka, Masabata Klaas, Nonkululeko Mlaba, Sune Luus, Tumi Sekhukhune, Nondumiso Shangase, Karabo Meso.

STRENGTHS OF THE SOUTH AFRICA WOMEN'S CRICKET TEAM

One of South Africa's biggest strengths lies in its pace bowling attack. Led by the experienced all-rounder Marizanne Kapp, and supported by the likes of Ayabonga Khaka, Masabata Klaas, and Nonkululeko Mlaba, the Proteas have a disciplined and lethal seam bowling unit. Kapp's ability to swing the new ball and bowl economically in death overs makes her a valuable asset in all conditions. In 153 matches, Kapp has picked 169 WODI wickets at an impressive 24.52. Mlaba has managed 38 wickets from 37 matches at 37.23. Meanwhile, Khaka is a star. In 15 WC games, she owns 17 wickets at 32.76. Overall in WODIs, she has 136 wickets from 112 matches. With 81 scalps from 82 matches, Klaas is another key element in this side. In an era where many teams rely on spin, South Africa





stand out with pace dominance. Even in subcontinental conditions, their fast bowlers have shown the ability to create pressure with disciplined lines and effective short-pitched deliveries.

The Proteas Women also benefit from a solid core of experienced players. Kapp, Khaka, Wolvaardt, and Sune Luus have been part of several global tournaments and know what it takes to compete at the highest level. Their experience brings calmness to the side, especially in high-pressure matches. Wolvaardt, in particular, is a pillar of the batting lineup. Technically gifted and temperamentally sound, she provides solidity at the top and often anchors the innings with maturity beyond her years. She owns 757 World Cup runs from 15 matches at a sound 58-plus. Overall, she has managed 4651 runs from 110 matches at 48.95. Kapp has 3303 runs at 35.51 (100s: 4, 50s: 15). 451 of her runs have come at the Women's World Cup. Luus is a promising figure. She is 11 shy of 2500 runs. She averages over 25. 351 of her runs have come at the World Cup. Tazmin Brits, Annerie Dercksen, and Chloe Tyrone offer depth in batting. Brits has scored 1419 runs from 39 matches at 38.35. She has hit 6 tons and 2 fifties. In 5 WC games, she has 52 runs. In 115 matches, Tyrone has scored 2116 at 26-plus. She has hit 13 fifties to date. 239 of her runs have come at the World Cup.

South Africa are among the best fielding units in

women's cricket. Their fitness levels, ground coverage, and catching standards often give them an edge in close games. This is another big strength for the side.

WEAKNESSES OF THE SOUTH AFRICA WOMEN'S CRICKET TEAM

Despite having some world-class individuals, South Africa are still a bit reliant on a small group—particularly Kapp and Wolvaardt. If either fails, the team could struggle to recover. There are also a few consistent match-winners in the middle and lower order, which is a concern heading into a long tournament. Batting is an area where South Africa need work. Barring Wolvaardt and Kapp, the rest of the batting lineup lacks consistency. Players Tryon, Sinalo Jafta, and Anneke Bosch have shown promise but often lack the regular impact needed in international cricket. The inability to post or chase big totals under pressure has hurt the team in key matches. Meanwhile, middle-order collapses have been an issue, especially when early wickets fall. Another issue is that the side lacks the finishing power and strike rotation in the lower middle order. The Spin department of South Africa isn't one of the best. Unlike other top teams, South Africa lack a match-winning spinner. While they have options like Nonkululeko Mlaba, the consistency and variation needed to succeed on Indian and Sri Lankan pitches may still be a work in progress. On turning tracks, their spin unit could be



targeted by more experienced players.

Although their pacers are class, slow subcontinent pitches could diminish their effectiveness. If the ball doesn't swing or seam, South Africa might struggle to take wickets up front, allowing opponents to build big scores. Their relatively weaker spin attack may also come under pressure, particularly against subcontinent sides.

PREDICTED STARTING XI OF SOUTH AFRICA

Laura Wolvaardt (c), Tazmin Brits, Sune Luus, Marizanne Kapp, Annerie Dercksen, Chloe Tryon, Sinalo Jaftha (wk), Nadine de Klerk, Nondumiso Shangase, Nonkululeko Mlaba, Ayabonga Khaka.

PLAYERS TO WATCH OUT FOR

Marizanne Kapp: The star attraction of this Proteas side is Kapp. Her exploits with both bat and ball will be of massive help. She can set the tone with her big presence and responsibility. She is a glue in this batting department and can help her side in posting strong totals. With the ball, she is solid.

SA WILL PUSH FOR A PLACE IN THE SEMIS

The SA women's cricket team enters the ICC Women's World Cup 2025 with promise. Although they aren't

favourites, they can be a genuine contender for a semi-final berth. With a potent pace attack, an experienced core, and a hunger to succeed, they have all the tools to mount a serious challenge. However, they must address their batting inconsistencies, spin vulnerabilities, and leadership clarity if they are to go the distance.

SCHEDULE OF SOUTH AFRICA IN THE ICC WOMEN'S WORLD CUP 2025

Oct 3: England vs South Africa, Guwahati (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 6: New Zealand vs South Africa, Indore (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 9: India vs South Africa, Vizag (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 13: South Africa vs Bangladesh, Vizag (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 17: Sri Lanka vs South Africa, Colombo (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 21: South Africa vs Pakistan, Colombo (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 25: Australia vs South Africa, Indore (3:00 pm IST) ■

FEATURE

ICC WOMEN'S ODI WORLD CUP: CAN SOPHIE DEVINE & CO. BE A POTENT CHALLENGER?

New Zealand boast of a solid core with players being part of countless high-stakes battles. Captain Sophie Devine, at 36, brings tactical acumen from four prior World Cups. She boasts a key all-round prowess which will help the team...



BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

All eyes will be on the New Zealand women's cricket team ahead of their ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2025 clash on October 1. The White Ferns, led by Sophie Devine in her farewell 50-over tournament, will be keen to impress largely. The New Zealand side has plenty of key figures in the side who can form a crunch impact. Apart from being a one-time winner in 2000, the New Zealand Women have been three-time runners-up. They have finished 3rd on 4 occasions, and another time they reached the semis. The last three World Cups have seen them not being able to impress as much as one would have liked.

NEW ZEALAND'S PERFORMANCE TOURNAMENT-WISE

1973: 3rd	2000: 1st
1978: 3rd	2005: SF
1982: 3rd	2009: 2nd
1988: 3rd	2013: 4th
1993: 2nd	2017: 5th
1997: 2nd	2022: 6th

The New Zealand side is riding high on the euphoria of clinching the 2024 T20 World Cup. Ranked fourth in Women's ODIs, New Zealand's squad features a mix of several veterans and many debutants, promising a campaign that can be interesting.

NEW ZEALAND SQUAD FOR THE ICC WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

Sophie Devine (c), Suzie Bates, Eden Carson, Flora Devonshire, Izzy Gaze, Maddy Green, Brooke Halliday, Bree Illing, Polly Inglis, Bella James, Amelia Kerr, Jess Kerr, Rosemary Mair, Georgia Plimmer, Lea Tahuu.

STRENGTHS OF THE NEW ZEALAND WOMEN'S CRICKET TEAM

New Zealand boast of a solid core with players being part of several countless high-stakes battles. Captain Sophie Devine, at 36, brings tactical acumen from four prior World Cups. She boasts a key all-round prowess which will help the team. The veteran is closing in on 4000 WODI runs. She has 3990 runs at 31.66. 669 of her runs have come in the World Cup (100s: 2, 50s: 2). With the ball she has 107 wickets. Suzie Bates, New Zealand's all-time leading WODI run-scorer with 5896 runs across 171 matches, forms a key space in this side. Bates, appearing in her fifth World Cup, provides stability and mentorship. The champion performer has 5896 runs in WODIs. She has hit 13 tons and 37 fifties. She averages 39.83. Bates has 1179 runs in the Women's ODI World Cup at 56.14 (100s: 4, 50s: 5).

Another key figure in this side is all-rounder Amelia





Kerr. The 24-year-old leg-spin sensation, stands out as a genuine match-winner. With 2167 runs and 99 wickets in just 77 ODIs, she will be immense for this team. Apart from these three players, Amelia's sister Jess Kerr, adds seam-bowling bite with her ability to swing the new ball. She has 276 runs from 39 matches at 12. With the ball, she has picked a total of 52 wickets at 23.96. Lea Tahuhu, who is set to appear in her fourth World Cup, offers seasoned pace. The veteran is set to complete 100 matches (97). She owns 115 WODI scalps at 29.08. As many as 26 of her wickets have come in the Women's World Cup. Maddy Green and Brooke Halliday further bolster the middle order with handy contributions, ensuring balance in a format that rewards adaptability. In 40 WODIs, Halliday has amassed 876 runs, including 6 fifties, with a best of 86. She averages 26.36. She owns 8 wickets with the ball. Meanwhile, In 81 matches, Green has scored a total of 1708 runs at 28. She has a key role to offer with 7 fifties and 2 tons.

Then their is top order batter Georgia Plimmer. In 24 WODI matches, Georgia owns 396 runs from 19 innings at 22, She has hit 4 hundreds and 10 fifties. In subcontinental conditions, their main spin options are Eden Carson and Kerr. In 17 matches, Carson has picked 16 wickets for New Zealand at 38.93. Subcontinental conditions favour their spinners.

Meanwhile, Players like Plimmer, with her aggressive opening style, and wicketkeeper Polly Inglis could solidify the batting, while Bella James and Rosemary Mair add pace variety.

WEAKNESSES OF THE NEW ZEALAND CRICKET TEAM

Despite their pedigree and key players in the mix as mentioned above, New Zealand grapple with an ageing nucleus that's showing cracks. The team has leaned heavily on Devine for stability and it remains to be seen how she comes up in what is her farewell tournament. Fellow star player, Bates, at 37, brings plenty to the table. However, the strike rate has dipped, and finding a successor remains elusive. Batting inconsistency plagues the New Zealand lineup beyond the stars in Devine, Bates and Kerr. The middle order is over reliant on sporadic bursts from Green and Halliday. The team has often faltered in pressure situations, as seen in their sixth-place finish at the 2022 World Cup which also mirrored their 2017 exit with just three group-stage wins. New Zealand's bowling is okay with some key figures in the mix. However, both in batting and bowling, their bench strength poses questions. Can they come in step up if needed? Also some players in the playing XI are not top quality. New Zealand's WODI record over the last



two years is middling. They were beaten 3-0 by Australia in late 2024. New Zealand have also had a six-month international drought—no ODIs since March 2025—leaves them rusty. It remains to be seen how they come up against spin bowling, a glaring Achilles' heel on Indian decks. The White Ferns left out Fran Jonas and favoured the less-tested Flora Devonshire. This shift highlights a gamble that could backfire. The team has six World Cup debutants and they need to fire when called upon.

PREDICTED STARTING XI OF NEW ZEALAND

Suzie Bates, Georgia Plimmer, Amelia Kerr, Sophie Devine (c), Brook Halliday, Maddy Green, Isabella Gaze (wk), Jess Kerr, Eden Carson, Lea Tahuhu, Rosemary Mair.

PLAYERS TO WATCH OUT FOR

Suzie Bates: The star attraction of this NZ side is Bates. Her exploits will be of massive help. She can set the tone with her big presence and responsibility. She is a glue in this batting department.

NEW ZEALAND CAN MAKE IT TO THE SEMIS

New Zealand have potent options and they will rely on their experienced stars to hunt down oppositions.

They also boast key all-rounders, who can pack a punch. NZ need to step up and provide the goods. They will be out to make an impression with a few of their seasoned stars going into the end of their careers.

SCHEDULE OF NEW ZEALAND IN THE WOMEN'S WORLD CUP 2025

Oct 1: Australia vs New Zealand, Indore (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 6: New Zealand vs South Africa, Indore (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 10: New Zealand vs Bangladesh, Guwahati (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 14: Sri Lanka vs New Zealand, Colombo (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 18: New Zealand vs Pakistan, Colombo (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 23: India vs New Zealand, Navi Mumbai (3:00 pm IST)

Oct 26: England vs New Zealand, Vizag (11:30 am IST) ■

FEATURE

WOAKES RETIRES FROM ENGLAND DUTY

The dependable fast bowler was left out of England's squad for the upcoming Ashes series Down Under after failing to fully recover from the dislocated shoulder injury he sustained during the fifth and final test against India in August. That led to those remarkable scenes...

BY STAFF WRITER

Walking out to bat with his arm in a sling in a courageous, last-ditch attempt to win a test match for England proved to be the final act of Chris Woakes' international career. The 36-year-old Woakes announced his immediate retirement from international cricket, after 62 test matches and World Cup titles in the ODI and Twenty20 formats.

The dependable fast bowler was left out of England's squad for the upcoming Ashes series Down Under after failing to fully recover from the dislocated shoulder injury he sustained during the fifth and final test against India in August. That led to those remarkable scenes at The Oval where Woakes emerged from the





dressing room to a hero's welcome from the crowd in his whites, left arm in a sling, to bat at No. 11. He did not face a ball but ran four runs — in obvious agony — before England fell to a six-run loss and drew the series 2-2.

“The images of Chris walking out to bat with his arm in a sling to try and win a test match this summer reflected how much he cared about playing for his country and being the best teammate he could be,” Richard Thompson, chairman of the England and Wales Cricket Board, said.

“He has been a gentleman off the field, with the skills and fierce determination to win on it, regularly rising to the occasion on the biggest stage with bat as well as ball,” Thompson said. Woakes was part of England's World Cup-winning teams at Lord's in 2019 in the ODI format and in Melbourne in 2022 in the T20 game. In test matches, he collected 192 wickets at an average of 29.61, hit one century and was player of the series in the 2023 Ashes series after helping England come from 2-0 down to draw 2-2. He took 173 wickets in ODIs and 31 in 33 T20s. Woakes had been hoping to make it

into the Ashes squad but was overlooked, and has decided that “the time is right for me to retire from international cricket.”

“Playing for England was something I aspired to do since I was a kid dreaming in the back garden,” Woakes posted on social media, “and I feel incredibly fortunate to have lived out those dreams.

“Representing England, wearing the Three Lions and sharing the field with teammates over the last 15 years, many of whom have become lifelong friends, are things I'll look back on with the greatest pride.” Woakes said he would continue to play county cricket and explore “more franchise opportunities.” Rob Key, managing director of England men's cricket, said Woakes is “one of the finest people to have played the game.

“An extraordinary career carved out alongside two of England's greatest ever bowlers,” Key said, referencing recently retired pacers James Anderson and Stuart Broad. “A man who helped every team he played in, even before he walked onto the field.” ■

FEATURE

NATALIE NAKASE VOTED WNBA COACH OF THE YEAR

The announcement came ahead of Golden State's home game against the top-seeded Minnesota Lynx. Nakase was recognised by Commissioner Cathy Engelbert at SAP Center, where the team hosted Game 2 of the best-of-three series...



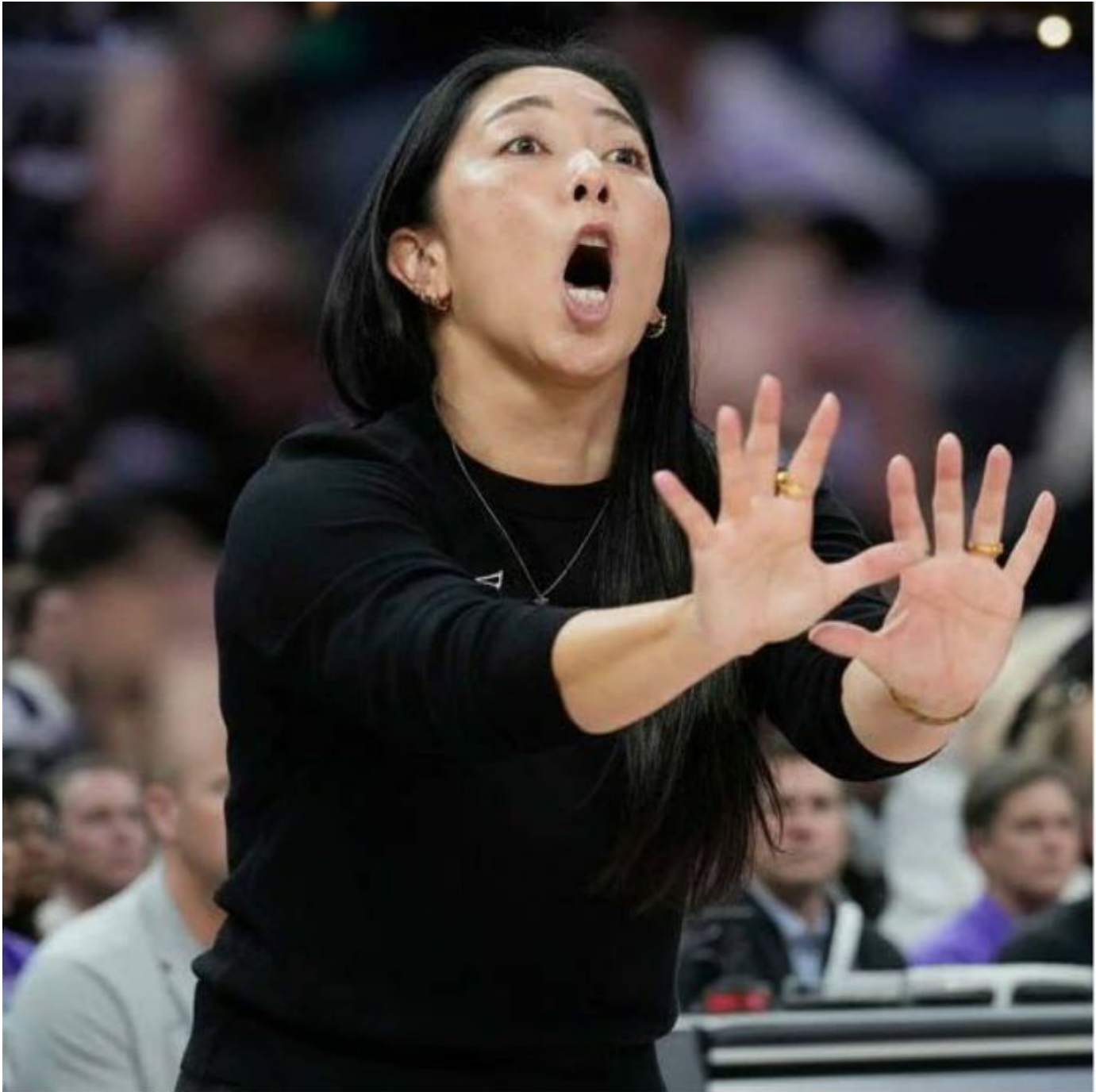


BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

Natalie Nakase won over Golden State Valkyries owner Joe Lacob with her fire in a matter of two hours when they sat down last year for a formal interview. Now, the entire WNBA understands why. Nakase was voted WNBA Coach of the Year on Wednesday after leading her team to the playoffs. The franchise became the first-year franchise to reach the postseason.

The announcement came ahead of Golden State's home game against the top-seeded Minnesota Lynx. Nakase was recognised by Commissioner Cathy Engelbert at SAP Center, where the team hosted Game 2 of the best-of-three series because the 18,064-seat capacity Chase Center in San Francisco was previously booked by the Laver Cup tennis event.

"I never aimed for this type of award, and my dad taught me that early on, that it's all about winning," Nakase said. "And that's why I took this job, because Joe was like, 'If you take this job, we've got to win a championship in five years.' That's the goal, so I just



wanted to start with that. But what this does is it reflects on (our) whole organisation. It starts at the top.”

The 45-year-old Nakase received 53 of 72 votes from sports writers and broadcasters around the country. She also received AP Coach of the Year. Golden State's 23 wins were a record for an expansion franchise, and the Valkyries sold out all 22 of their games at Chase Center. Nakase recently shared how late father Gary's influence has stayed with her since he died in 2021, and how she has learned “that I do need to care about my mental health as well.”

“**There have** always been moments where I've always wanted to call my dad,” she said before her team's

Sept. 4 playoff-clinching win over the Dallas Wings. “So I am a little bit proud that I've been able to survive, because I usually tear up, I do cry, I still miss my dad. But there are moments where I've been able to hang in there and talk to my dad out loud, where I usually break down. So I'm really starting to build thicker skin as I go through this healing process.

“... **I wish** my dad was here, especially for my first job and being a head coach, and his was part of my dream with him and a goal.”

Nobody else was close to Nakase for this honour. Atlanta Dream coach Karl Smesko was runner-up with 15 votes, while Las Vegas Aces coach Becky Hammon



and Minnesota Lynx coach Cheryl Reeve tied for third. Lacob, also owner of the NBA's Golden State Warriors, said he realized Nakase was the right choice from the first time he sat down with her over brunch in Las Vegas last year during summer league. At that point, Lacob had three finalists, but with Nakase, an assistant with the Aces, he just knew.

"I knew right then and there, 100%," Lacob said. "I was sold, done, deal done. I loved her personality. First of all, I knew about her a lot because we had known of her for a long time. She was with the Clippers for 10 years, so we knew we liked her. We were trying to bring her here many years ago in another capacity on the Warriors side. ... She's a fireball. I love her story, I love

her style, I love her intensity. She's fantastic.

"Nakase credited everyone in the organisation — "I wouldn't have gotten this award if everyone didn't do their job to the best of their ability, and that's why this award is so important." From Day 1, Nakase appreciated how her players believed in her approach and intense style as a first-year coach and stuck with the defence-first system.

"The players allow me to cuss at them, to yell at them, to push them past their limits," she said. "Again, without them, we wouldn't have had a winning season, and we wouldn't be where I am today, now in the second game of a playoff run." ■

FEATURE

OUSMANE DEMBELE WINS THE BALLON D'OR

The award capped a remarkable turn of fortune for Dembele, who was snubbed by PSG coach Luis Enrique for disciplinary reasons at one point last season. However, once repositioned as a No. 9, he became a scoring machine...



BY CT CONTRIBUTOR



usmane Dembele won the Ballon d'Or for leading Paris Saint-Germain to its first Champions League title, and Aitana Bonmatí received the women's award for a third successive year. Dembele succeeded Manchester City midfielder Rodri in becoming the sixth Frenchman to win it after Raymond Kopa, Michel Platini, Jean-Pierre Papin, Zinedine Zidane, and Karim Benzema.

Bonmatí won ahead of her Spain teammate Mariona Caldentey. She's only the third player in the award's history to win three in a row after Platini (1983–85) and Lionel Messi (2009-12).

The award capped a remarkable turn of fortune for Dembele, who was snubbed by PSG coach Luis Enrique for disciplinary reasons at one point last season. However, once repositioned as a No. 9, he became a scoring machine and was inspirational in PSG's historic Champions League campaign. The French club also completed a quadruple last season. Dembele was praised after the Champions League final for contributing to PSG's pressing and his ability to defend during the 5-0 rout of Inter Milan. He delivered 35 goals and 16 assists in 53 official matches last season and was involved in 14 goals (8 goals, 6 assists) in the Champions League in 15 appearances. Dembele received the Ballon d'Or from former winner Ronaldinho and teared up during his acceptance speech, in which he asked his mother to join him on the stage.

"It's incredible to win a trophy like this," he said in French. "I worked for the team to help win PSG's first Champions League (...) To then be rewarded with an individual trophy like the Ballon d'Or is truly exceptional."

Dembele won ahead of teenage star Lamine Yamal. The forward, who turned 18 in July, helped Barcelona win La Liga and the Copa del Rey last season and reach the Champions League semifinals. Yamal was given the Kopa award for the best under-21 player for the second straight year.



"I need to keep on working to win other awards in the future," Yamal said through a translator. Dembele was injured and was able to attend the ceremony in Paris while his team lost at Marseille 1-0 in the French league. He was one of nine PSG players nominated for the men's award, including goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma, forward Désiré Doué, who scored twice in the Champions League final, and winger Khvitcha Kvaratskhelia. Although Bonmatí lost to England in a penalty shootout in the Women's European Championship final last summer, she was named the best player of the tournament, which she began just days after being hospitalized by viral meningitis. Bonmatí's spot kick in the shootout was one of two saved by England's Hannah Hampton, who was voted the best women's goalkeeper.

"Third time in a row here and I still can't believe it," Bonmatí said, "I owe Barcelona everything, this is the club of my life."

She won a domestic treble with Barcelona and also reached the Champions League final. Barcelona has won the last five women's awards, but it was expected an Englishwoman would win for the first time. England won the Euros, and Arsenal took the Women's Champions League.

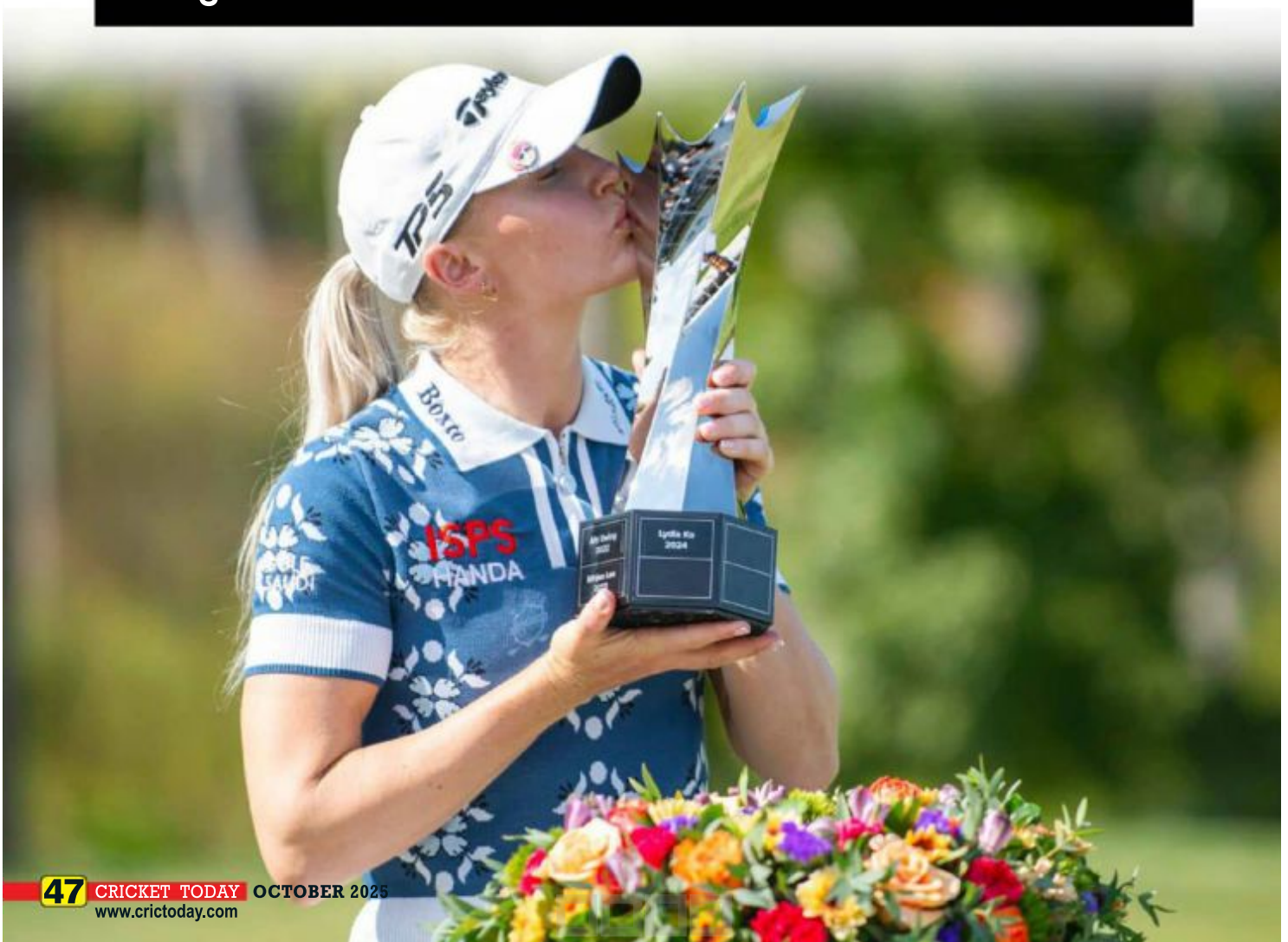
But with five England players among the women's top 10 nominees, the highest-placed was Alessia Russo, who came in third.

OTHER TROPHIES

Barcelona forward Vicky Lopez won the women's Kopa trophy, and Sarina Wiegman, who led England to European victory, took the Johan Cruyff award for best women's coach. On an excellent night for PSG, Luis Enrique won in the men's category. PSG was voted the best men's club, and Donnarumma received the Lev Yashin award for best goalkeeper. Donnarumma, whose shot-stopping in the knockout stages proved crucial to PSG's success, left for Manchester City during the offseason. Hampton was crowned the best women's goalkeeper. The men's and women's Gerd Müller trophies for the top scorers went to Barcelona's Ewa Pajor and Viktor Gyokeres. After a prolific season, they joined Arsenal this summer from Sporting Portugal. ■

CHARLEY HULL WINS KROGER QUEEN CITY TITLE

Thitikul matched Hull with a 68. The Thai star, who won in May at Liberty National in New Jersey, missed a chance to become the first multiple winner on the tour this season. Lottie Woad of England...





BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

Charley Hull took advantage of top-ranked Jeeno Thitikul's final-hole putting meltdown to win the Kroger Queen City Championship. Thitikul — a stroke ahead after Hull bogeyed the par-4 17th — four-putted the par-5 18th from about 50 feet, missing a 5-footer and a 3-foot comebacker. Hull two-putted from about 30 feet, making a 2-footer for the victory.

“I wasn’t really watching her putt for birdie because I thought she was going to hole it,” Hull said. “Then, yeah, I guess it’s not over until the fat lady sings, but I was shaking over that last putt because I just didn’t expect it.”

Fighting ankle and back issues, Hull closed with a 4-under 68 to finish at 20-under 268 at TPC River’s Bend. The 29-year-old English player won her third LPGA Tour title and first since 2022. She also has four victories on the Ladies European Tour.

“I tore the ligament completely in half on my foot in a car park the week after the British Open at a golf event. Got told it could be up to nine weeks that I could be out. I was like, ‘Wow!’ I turned it round in three weeks and played last week. Had an MRI on my back as well because I’ve picked up a box a couple of months before

Evian, and I think I tore something in my back because it never got better.”

Thitikul matched Hull with a 68. The Thai star, who won in May at Liberty National in New Jersey, missed a chance to become the first multiple winner on the tour this season. Lottie Woad of England was third at 18 under after a 66. Miyu Yamashita (69) was 17 under, and second-ranked Nelly Korda (70) followed at 15 under with Nasa Hataoka (65), Chisato Iwai (71), Sei Young Kim (69), Jennifer Kupcho (67), Mary Liu (70), and Maja Stark (69). Hull was coming off a runner-up finish in Houston last week as part of the Aramco series on the European tour.

“It’s been a rocky couple of months,” Hull said. “Obviously, fainting at Evian, doing my back, and then tearing the ligament in my ankle. I sound like a bit of a car crash. I don’t know. I suppose pain is just a weakness of the mind. It probably does me a bit of a favour sometimes because I end up doing too much, too much gym work, too much practice, and overthinking. It’s given me time to chill, and that’s probably what I needed.” She worked hard to get her game back in shape.

“I’ve just been absolutely grinding hard at home after I had 14 days off because of my injury, and then the last week, hitting so many golf balls and practising hard,” Hull said. “Hard work pays off, and it has, and I just feel good at the moment.” ■

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