

# New Zealand misery all in the past for India's Rohit as semi-final looms

India captain Rohit Sharma emphasizes the current team's focus ahead of World Cup semi-final clash

● Rohit also acknowledged the threat posed by New Zealand, beaten finalists at the last two World Cups

AFP | Mumbai

India captain Rohit Sharma insisted his side's record of big game defeats by New Zealand was "all in the past" as they prepared to face the Black Caps in a World Cup semi-final.

Tournament hosts India head into Wednesday's showpiece match at opening batsman Rohit's Wankhede Stadium home ground as the outstanding side of the 10-tem event, having won all nine of their round-robin games to qualify for the knockout phase in style.

But four years ago a team featuring several of the same players, including Rohit and star batsman Virat Kohli, were members of an India side that suffered an agonising 18-run defeat by New Zealand in a rain-affected World Cup semi-final spanning two days in Manchester.

New Zealand also defeated In-



India's Rohit Sharma (L) during a practice session (file photo)

dia in the inaugural 2021 World Test Championship final.

The Wankhede was the venue when India defeated Sri Lanka in a 2011 final to win their second World Cup title following a 1983 triumph in England under captain Kapil Dev.

The build-up to Wednesday's game has seen much speculation about whether Rohit's men can join those celebrated teams as World Cup champions of whether New Zealand, who gave India

a run for their money before going down by four wickets in pool play, will prove their downfall once again.

Rohit, however, insisted his focus was firmly on the here and now.

"That's the beauty of this team," he told a pre-match press conference yesterday.

"None of the guys were born when we won our first World Cup and then, when we won our second World Cup in 2011,



Despite India's strong lineup, Rohit acknowledged New Zealand's disciplined and smart cricket, highlighting their threat

half of the guys were not even playing the game."

He added: "This current crop of players is very much into what is happening today, what can happen tomorrow...The focus is on how they can get better as a player, what they can bring to the team and the things they can improve."

#### 'Mandatory pressure'

Rohit said while a semi-final was a high pressure situation, his side were always under intense scrutiny in cricket-crazy India.

"If you are an Indian cricketer, then whatever the format, whatever the tournament, there

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ROHIT SHARMA

is always pressure. Because you hear the same voice from everywhere that we have to win the match tomorrow...So, I think in terms of pressure, it becomes mandatory for Indian cricketers.

"There is pressure, but we have tried so hard in all these years to keep that aside and focus more on our game, strategy,

and the way we play," he added. Before this World Cup, Rohit spoke about having "unfinished business", with the 36-year-old saying Wednesday: "Now it's just about business, the pure business of getting the job done for the team."

Kohli, who now needs just one more century to surpass the record of 49 one-day international hundreds he shares with former India team-mate Sachin Tendulkar, is this tournament's leading batsman with 594 runs -- and Rohit is not far behind on 503.

India also boast a formidable fast-bowling line-up in Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj and Mohammed Shami, and two fine spinners in Ravindra Jadeja and Kuldeep Yadav.

But Rohit said he was well aware of the threat posed by New Zealand, beaten finalists at the last two World Cups.

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson is coming into form after injury and the Black Caps' attack will be led by experienced left-arm fast bowler Trent Boult.

"They are probably the most disciplined team, they play their cricket very smartly, they understand the opposition very well," said Rohit.

## Williamson relishing 'special' India semi-final

AFP | Mumbai

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson said his side's experience of playing in front of partisan crowds would serve them well when they face hosts India in a blockbuster World Cup semi-final.

A capacity crowd of over 33,000 is expected at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium -- the home ground of India captain Rohit Sharma -- for Wednesday's clash.

New Zealand, losing finalists at the last two World Cups but yet to lift the trophy, knocked India out at the semi-final stage in a rain-affected two-day clash in Manchester four years ago.

Bad weather, however, is unlikely to be an issue in Mumbai and while India had plenty of support at Old Trafford, star batsman Williamson knows that will be as nothing compared to the passionate backing they'll have on Wednesday.

When a reporter told Williamson during a pre-match press conference yesterday that the capacity of the Wankhede is 33,108 and "33 of them will be in blue (India's colour)," he jokingly replied: "There'll be more than that."

Williamson, who knows India well from playing in the lucrative Indian Premier League, added: "We're expecting a fairly blue crowd that will be supporting their team."

"We remember over the years, a number of different crowds that we've had that haven't always been your own fans."

"We have got a small country that doesn't always fill out the stadiums but you still appreciate the atmosphere it brings."



New Zealand's Kane Williamson (R) interacts with coach Gary Stead during a practice session

India defeated New Zealand by four wickets in a hard-fought pool match in Dharamsala last month but Williamson played down the impact of that fixture and the 2019 semi-final ahead of Wednesday's clash

"Not many people get that opportunity, cricket in India, playing against India in a World Cup semi-final, is special and something to appreciate and look forward to."

Williamson is particularly glad to be involved after fearing he might not make it to the World Cup before a freak injury threatened to cut short his participation.

After spending nearly seven months out with a serious knee injury, he missed New Zealand's opening wins over champions England and the Netherlands.

He marked his comeback with

78 not out during an eight-wicket victory over Bangladesh in Chennai only to suffer a broken left thumb following a wayward throw while running between the wickets.

The 33-year-old then missed several more games before returning with 95 against Pakistan in Bengaluru.

#### 'Frustrating'

"An interesting journey for sure," said Williamson.

"From sort of it not being a chance (of playing at the World Cup) to getting close and it becoming a reality and something to target...Then to get back and then break my thumb. It was quite frustrating and testing."

But a 10-team round-robin event gave Williamson hope he could still feature later on in the tournament.

"I still felt it hadn't ruled me out, so I was grateful for that and it's nice to be sitting here."

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We remember over the years, a number of different crowds that we've had that haven't always been your own fans. We have got a small country that doesn't always fill out the stadiums but you still appreciate the atmosphere it brings. Not many people get that opportunity, cricket in India, playing against India in a World Cup semi-final, is special and something to appreciate and look forward to

KANE WILLIAMSON

month but Williamson played down the impact of that fixture and the 2019 semi-final ahead of Wednesday's clash.

"They (India) are a side that's been playing extremely well, but we also know come finals time, everything sort of starts again."

Williamson was more forthcoming about New Zealand rising star Rachin Ravindra, with the 23-year-old left-handed opener having already scored three hundreds at his debut World Cup.

"He's burst onto the scene and in a big way," said Williamson.

"It's not just the volume of runs that he's achieved so far, but how he's been scoring them and how it's been geared towards trying to move the team forward."

## Tsitsipas quits ATP Finals with back injury



Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas (R) shakes hands with Denmark's Holger Rune

AFP | Turin

Stefanos Tsitsipas pulled out of the ATP Finals yesterday after a back injury led to him retiring from his match with Holger Rune early in the first set.

Sixth seed Tsitsipas was trailing the opening set 2-1 when he was forced to quit the Green Group match, handing Finals debutant Rune his first ever win in the season-ending tournament.

"My apologies to all the fans and the crowd who came to support me today. Really I'm gutted that I wasn't able to finish the match," Tsitsipas, 25, told reporters.

"My doctors and the countless visits that I had in the last few days suggested that I play... Unfortunately I felt terrible on the court. I did what I could do in best possible way to be ready and fit for this match,

But it didn't work out for me."

Hubert Hurkacz will now step in to play Tsitsipas' final match against Novak Djokovic with no chance of progressing to the semi-finals following two defeats for the Greek.

Tsitsipas said after pulling out that he had felt problems during his warm up and that once on the court he felt too much pain to complete the match.

"The pain was very big," he added.

"I've gone through pain during matches in the past... But this was clearly too much to handle and I had to take the difficult decision to do what I did."

He had insisted that there was nothing wrong with him physically after Sunday's straight-sets defeat to Jannik Sinner, playing down reports of an elbow injury which curtailed practice ahead of his tournament opener.