Why Afghanistan might qualify directly to ODI World Cup 2023 and South Africa won't

If the World Test Championship has allowed for more context to the Test series, the ICC ODI Super League has done for ODI bilateral series. The system which was introduced and put into place in 2020 is a pathway to the World Cup 2023. Some of the teams will qualify directly for the big event in India in 2023, however, the path to achieving that for South Africa seems a little bumpy. At this point, if you take a look at the ODI Super League table, South Africa is ranked 13th (last) with nine points from three matches. To further understand what it means for the Proteas, we have to first address how the ODI Super League actually works. It starts with 32 nations engaging in several cricket series and tournaments in order to become one of the 10 teams at the 2023 World Cup.

What is Super League and how does the format work?

The 32 teams have been divided into three leagues – Super League, League 2, and Challenge League. From the Super League, top seven teams plus hosts, India will directly qualify for the World Cup. The rest of the five teams will go to the ICC World Cup qualifier to find a spot in the World Cup. The 13 teams consist of all the 12 Test-playing nations along with the Netherlands, who won the ICC World Cricket League Championship (2015-17) to qualify for this cycle of the Super League. Interestingly, the 13th ranked team at the end of the Super League will also be relegated to League 2. Talking about the format and points systems, each of the teams will play a total of 24 ODIs in the Super League. They will engage in four away ODI series (three matches each) and four home ODI series (three matches each). Every win gives a team 10 points with a loss meaning zero points while a tie or draw means five points. Who is South Africa facing and who is facing Afghanistan? The thing with South Africa is their scheduling. They lost 2-1 to Pakistan at home. On top of that, they reduced their points to 9 from 10, due to a slow over-rate. The four opponents that they won't play during the cycle have yielded more points for them than the matches which they will play. South Africa will not play series against New Zealand, Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, and West Indies. They would have fancied winning all these series except for the one against New Zealand maybe. Instead, they will have their work cut out against teams like India, Australia, and to an extent even Bangladesh. On the other hand, we have Afghanistan, who have started their league with a 3-0 win against Ireland. They will not be playing against England, New Zealand, South Africa, and West Indies. Instead, their next round series are against Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka, and the Netherlands, all of these three series are matches where they would fancy themselves. They still have to play against Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Australia. If Afghanistan is able to beat Bangladesh in one match, their path for a direct qualification could be set.

Rank	Team	Matches	Won	Lost	Tied	No result	Points	NRR	Per
1	England	13	7	5	0	1	75	0.863	
2	Bangladesh	9	5	4	0	0	50	0.013	
3	Australia	6	4	2	0	0	40	0.347	–
4	Pakistan	7	4	3	0	0	40	-0.107	
5	New Zealand	3	3	0	0	0	30	2.352	–
6	Afghanistan	3	3	0	0	0	30	0.527	–
7	West Indies	6	3	3	0	0	30	-0.876	–
8	India	6	3	3	0	0	29	-0.252	1
9	Netherlands	3	2	1	0	0	20	-0.049	
10	Ireland	9	2	7	0	0	20	-0.614	–
11	Sri Lanka	9	1	7	0	1	13	-0.5	2
12	Zimbabwe	3	1	2	0	0	10	-0.741	–
13	South Africa	3	1	2	0	0	9	-0.08	1

Chris Eubank pays tribute to his son Sebastian who has been found dead in Dubai

Chris Eubank says he is "devastated" by the death of his son Sebastian who has been found dead in Dubai.

The 29-year-old had followed his father and brother Chris Eubank Jr into the ring, starting a professional boxing career with two victories.

Eubank senior paid tribute to his son, saying he was a "deep thinker who liked to challenge and accepted wisdom".

He said in a statement: "Never did I ever imagine I would write these words or experience the feeling I now have at the loss of my son. My family and I are devastated to hear of the death of Sebastian just days before what would have been his 30th birthday.

"He leaves his wife Salma, his son Raheem born just a month ago, his mother Karron Meadows, brothers Nathanael, Chris, Jr, Joseph, one sister Emily and countless relatives and friends.

"Sebastian grew up in Hove in England but in the last few years made his life in Dubai where he had a wide circle of friends and was a leader in the adoption of a healthy lifestyle and of alternative therapies.

"As well as being a personal trainer and professional boxer, Sebastian was also a deep thinker who liked to challenge accepted wisdom. He was loved and respected by all who knew him and will be forever in the thoughts of friends and family.

"As a family we now kindly ask to be given space and privacy to celebrate his life and remember the son, the brother, the husband, the friend."

Mark Cavendish equals Eddy Merckx's all-time record by claiming 34th stage victory

Mark Cavendish matched the Tour de France stage wins record as he collected the 34th of his career in Carcassonne.

Cavendish moved level with Eddy Merckx as he took victory ahead of his own lead-out man Michael Morkov, with Jasper Philipsen third at the end of the 220km stage 13 from Nimes, giving Cavendish his fourth win of this year's Tour.

The 36-year-old has enjoyed a remarkable return to form and capitalised on an unexpected selection for Deceuninck-QuickStep squad, winning his first stages in the race since 2016.

Cavendish moves level with the Belgian Merckx, a five-time overall winner of the Tour, who took the last of his stage wins in 1975.

If he can stay safe through the mountain stages to come, the Manxman should have two more opportunities to take the record outright, first on stage 19 into Libourne and then on the final day on the Champs-Elysees in Paris.

Friday's stage had been tipped for a breakaway - Carcassonne, hosting a stage for the 11th time, had never previously seen a sprint finish - but Cavendish's Deceuninck-QuickStep team worked well to mark the early moves before allowing a three-man move to get up the road.

The race came back together later on - a tense finish marked by a significant crash with 65km to go - but Cavendish's team-mates bossed the road in the citadel to position him for victory.

Philipsen tried to come around the outside inside the final 100 metres, but Cavendish once again proved the strongest to extend his advantage in the points leader's green jersey.

Cavendish looked exhausted as he collapsed to the floor after the finish before being mobbed by his team-mates.

"I went so deep there," he said. "The boys were incredible. I can't believe it. A lot of the day it didn't feel like it (was going to happen) but it had to happen because I had the guys riding like they were.

"I was so on the limit there."

Asked about the record again, he added: "I haven't realised it. It's still just another win on the Tour de France. It's like my first one. I've won a stage of the Tour de France. It's what I dreamed of as a kid and it's what I dream of now.

"I've worked so hard for it. We've seen such a growth, especially in the UK, of cycling since I've started racing here at the Tour de France.

"If any one of my wins can inspire the kids to ride the Tour de France or the Tour de France Femmes from next year when they grow up, that's what means the most to me I think."

On Thursday, Cavendish said Marianne Vos "has been an inspiration on so many levels" after she won a 30th career stage victory at the Giro d'Italia Donne.

Cavendish said on Instagram: "Until we finally have the privilege of @letourfemmes next year, the Giro d'Italia Donne is the greatest stage race for our female colleagues.

"And @mariannevosofficial has just won her 30th stage of the race. This NEEDS to be big news. 30 is such a milestone.

"She's been my inspiration on so many levels, for so many years. The absolute GOAT."

Tokyo 2020 Olympics organisers 'sorry' to let fans down

A senior Japanese official has apologised for not allowing any fans at the Olympic Games venues in certain parts of Japan as the Olympic torch relay reached the host city to a muted reception.

Tokyo 2020 senior director of ticketing, Hidenori Suzuki, expressed his feelings on Friday for fans who will not be able to watch the games in Tokyo and the three neighbouring prefectures of Saitama, Chiba and Kanagawa.

"I feel really sorry that we couldn't meet the expectations of those who had been looking forward to the 2020 Games," he said.

"We wanted to hold a successful Olympics with you all, one that gives lifetime memories to as many children and young people as possible. It would be great if people could understand that we had been working with this mentality."

Suzuki said the committee will continue working hard for spectators who can watch the games at venues in Shizuoka, Ibaraki, Fukushima, Miyagi prefectures where the number of fans will be capped at 10,000, or 50 percent of seating capacity.

On Thursday, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga announced a state of emergency would go into effect on Monday and last through August 22.

The games are scheduled to take place from July 23 to August 8.

Following the state of the emergency aimed at containing rising COVID-19 infections in Tokyo, no spectators will be allowed at the Olympic venues in the capital.

Torch on final journey

Meanwhile, the Olympic torch began its final phase before the lighting of the Olympic cauldron at the opening ceremony.

Under a grey sky, organisers held a small ceremony at the almost empty Komazawa Olympic Park with Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike in attendance.

Koike highlighted that the torch had found its way to Tokyo despite the difficult situation and named the relay a "way of hope".

The torch relay, usually an anticipation-building moment before the Olympics, is limited due to coronavirus measures, and organisers failed to generate enthusiasm among the Japanese public, many of whom are against the Olympics going ahead.

Since the relay began at the end of March, the torch has made its way through Japan's 47 prefectures but was banned from public roads in many areas.

It now faces the same treatment in Tokyo due to surging coronavirus infections. Except for a few areas, the torch relay is banned from the public streets of the Japanese capital.

The original plans would have seen 100 runners carry the Olympic torch through the Setagaya district and three districts in the western suburbs on Friday. Instead, runners will take part in a ceremony without spectators in Machida, a city in the western part of the greater metropolitan Tokyo area.

Harry Kane ready for 'biggest game of all our careers' as England look to replicate success of Bobby Moore and the boys from 1966

Harry Kane says it serves as great motivation to think he could follow in the footsteps of legendary England captain Bobby Moore by lifting the nation's second piece of major silverware at Wembley on Sunday.

Captain Kane, who is two goals away from finishing as top scorer at Euro 2020, says Sunday's final against Italy is too close to call and will be the biggest game of his career.

It has been 55 years since Moore lifted the World Cup at Wembley, and Kane knows how much it means to the nation to have an opportunity to end that barren run on Sunday.

The Tottenham striker says he and his team-mates will be fighting for all those players that have come before them, but fallen short in the quest to win silverware for England when they play Italy on Sunday.

"Whenever your name is mentioned in the same company as players like that, it only gives you motivation, gives you confidence," said Kane.

"It will be an incredible achievement, we've all waited so long as players as public as people to see us in the final. These are the opportunities to grab with both hands.

"We have an amazing chance to win our second major trophy as a country. The players we've had over the years and produced, we feel proud to be representing them as well.

"We've got to be excited for it, we've got to enjoy it. We're all winners here, we all want to win. And we're going to need every bit of that to get the job done on Sunday."

Kane admits winning any silverware with England would surpass any achievement he could have at club level because of the long wait for success this nation has had to endure.

The Spurs striker has experience of a major European final, losing the 2019 Champions League to Liverpool in Madrid, and is focused on ensuring this time he wins the first major trophy of his career.

"It's the biggest game in my career so far," added Kane. "Probably the biggest game of all our careers.

"Doing something special with England would probably surpass anything at club level just because of the magnitude, the long wait for a final, the long wait to win a trophy.

"At the moment, it doesn't feel too different.

We've come back to camp, pretty much in the same routine we have been for the last few games. A bit of nerves, a bit of excitement. As the game gets closer, you're more focused."

Sky Sports News reporter Rob Dorsett says England have no time for celebrating their win over Denmark and have already switched their attentions to recovering in time for Sunday's final against Italy.

Thursday was all about recovery from an England perspective. They split the squad down the middle with the 13 who hadn't featured against Denmark out on the grass.

The 13 that had went through a recovery session indoors, whether in the gym or the hydrotherapy pool, had massages and physio.

Gareth Southgate has been very keen to make sure there was an emotional recovery for those players as well. The 120 minutes in the semi-final had an emotional as well as a physical drain on the players.

Friday is all about preparation and is the first time they are looking ahead and planning specifically with Italy in mind. It's going to be a really tough challenge against a team that hasn't lost an international match in 33 games. It's a really quick turnaround for England, the quickest they've had in the tournament.

Southgate will have only two training sessions with the full squad available - Friday and Saturday - to get his tactical plan in place. Most people agree, myself included, that Italy have been the best side throughout this tournament, and this will be the biggest challenge that Southgate has faced in his managerial career.

It's certainly the biggest game the England players will have ever been involved in - even those who have been involved in Champions League finals recently.