

Unstoppable India target Olympic gold after making World Cup history

Captain Suryakumar eyes 2028 Olympic gold after back-to-back T20 World Cup triumphs

● **Champions maintain “fearless” attacking style**

● **Coach Gambhir focuses on team legacy**

● **Fans flood streets in celebration**

AFP | Ahmedabad

Captain Suryakumar Yadav said gold in 2028 on cricket’s return to the Olympics was India’s next big aim after extending their T20 domination with back-to-back World Cup titles.

Co-hosts India hammered New Zealand by 96 runs in the final in Ahmedabad on Sunday to be the first team to retain the T20 world crown and first to win it three times.

It was also the first time a team have won the title on home soil, and they did it with a brand of fearless, attacking cricket.

“It has been very special,” Suryakumar told reporters at a celebratory midnight press conference, as fans across the



India’s players celebrate with the trophy

country flooded into the streets. “And definitely the next goal is Olympics, Olympic gold and also the T20 World Cup that year.”

Los Angeles 2028 will see cricket return to the Olympics for the first time since 1900.

Led by then captain Rohit

Sharma, India won the T20 World Cup two years ago in Barbados for their first major title since the 2013 Champions Trophy.

Rohit and fellow stalwart Virat Kohli retired from the shortest format after the final against

South Africa and Suryakumar took over as captain.

“I think that drought ended in 2024 after a really long time and from there we never looked back,” said the 35-year-old.

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SURYAKUMAR YADAV

we understood how this team needs to work (going) forward. “And it’s been a wonderful journey since then.”

Suryakumar added: “We wanted to do something special in front of the home crowd. We want to continue doing that... and never stop.”

India won the 50-over World Cup in 2011 at home under M.S. Dhoni, who led the team to a T20 World Cup in the inaugural edition in 2007.

After that was a comparative drought in the biggest events by India’s sky-high standards.

Two-time World Cup winner Gautam Gambhir, who succeeded Rahul Dravid as coach after

YOU KNOW WHAT

India’s 2024 T20 World Cup win under then-captain Rohit Sharma ended a major title drought dating back to 2013, setting the stage for the current dominant run under Suryakumar’s leadership

the 2024 World Cup win, wants to carve out his own legacy.

“I don’t believe in inheriting anything, I believe in creating something,” said Gambhir, who has not always been universally popular with fans and pundits as the coach.

“And hopefully we’ve created something which probably all of you guys could be proud of, that the kind of brand of cricket we’ve played.”

Premier League teams are faster: Atletico’s Simeone on Spurs clash



Atletico Madrid’s players react during a match (file photo)

AFP | London

Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone highlighted the speed of Premier League sides’ play yesterday ahead of the Champions League last 16 tie against Tottenham Hotspur.

Despite becoming embroiled in a relegation battle in the English top flight Spurs finished fourth in the league phase of Europe’s top competition.

Five English sides finished in the top eight while six have reached the last 16, compared to three Spanish sides, the next most represented country.

“(English teams) have a faster pace. I don’t know why, I can’t quite put my finger on it,” Simeone told reporters before Tuesday’s game at the Metropolitan stadium.

“Some say the referees let the game flow more, I don’t know if it’s the tactics or the pre-game preparation, but it’s true that the speed is faster.”

“When you watch it on television, you can see that the speed is faster than in Spain, Italy, Germany... it’s the fastest league.”

Despite that Simeone said that “technical quality” would also play its part in deciding the game, and that Tottenham could not win “just by intensity”.

The Argentine coach did not agree that Atletico were favourites going into the match, even though Igor Tudor’s side have lost five straight matches.

“When you step onto the pitch, you don’t remember where you are in the standings or what moment you’re in,” continued Simeone.

Laporta stopped Messi Barca return to avoid power struggle: Xavi

AFP | Barcelona

Former Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez said the club’s president Joan Laporta scuppered the return of all-time great Lionel Messi in 2023 to avoid a power struggle.

The eight-time Ballon d’Or winner left Barca for Paris Saint-Germain in 2021 and then two years later moved to MLS side Inter Miami.

“Leo was signed in January 2023 after winning the World Cup, we got in touch and he told me he wanted to come back,” Xavi told Spanish newspaper La Vanguardia late on Sunday.

“We had the green light from LaLiga (financially), but it was the president who threw it away...”

“Laporta told me, word for word, that if Leo came back he was going to wage war against him and that he couldn’t allow that. And then suddenly Leo



Lionel Messi reacts during a match (file photo)

stopped answering my calls because he’d been told that it couldn’t be done.”

Xavi said everything was ready for Messi’s return, there was “no doubt” in a football sense and “we were going to do

a last dance, like (former NBA star Michael) Jordan’s”.

Laporta, who resigned as president a few weeks ago to run for re-election this week, suggested yesterday former coach Xavi was bitter and said Messi’s

father and agent Jorge had told him the superstar had decided not to come back.

“With Xavi I saw we were going to lose and with (current coach Hansi) Flick that we will win,” Laporta said at a presidential debate yesterday.

“I understand that (Xavi) is hurt – with the same players Flick wins.”

Laporta said he sent a contract to Jorge Messi who later came to his house and told him that “here there would be too much pressure” if the forward returned.

Messi is Barcelona’s all-time top scorer with 672 goals and won a club-record 34 trophies at Camp Nou.

Laporta also claimed Barca rejected a €250 million (\$288 million) offer from PSG for teenage superstar Lamine Yamal, reported to have been made in the summer of 2024.

Real Madrid’s Carreras to miss Man City game, Mbappe not training

AFP | Madrid

Real Madrid defender Alvaro Carreras will miss Wednesday’s Champions League match against Manchester City, while superstar striker Kylian Mbappe did not train yesterday with his team-mates as he recovers from a knee sprain.

Madrid’s top goalscorer Mbappe is not expected to feature at the Santiago Bernabeu against Pep Guardiola’s side



Alvaro Carreras

because of the knee problem which has bothered him since last December.

Carreras “has been diagnosed with a muscle injury in the calf of his right leg”, Madrid said in a statement yesterday, without specifying how long he is expected to miss.

Los Blancos have several absences ahead of the clash against Man City, with Jude Bellingham, Eder Militao, Rodrygo Goes, Dani Ceballos and David

Alaba all recovering from injuries.

The biggest worry for Madrid is Mbappe’s likely absence, without a clear timeline for when the France captain will be back in action, although Spanish media say he is targeting the return leg next week.

Mbappe has missed Madrid’s last three matches and recently went to Paris for tests and treatment on his knee.