

ICC T20 World Cup 2026: Defending Champions India Start as Favourites at Home

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Defending Champions and Co-Hosts India kick off their 2026 ICC T20 World Cup campaign on February 7 against the United States of America, who are currently mired by the suspension of USA Cricket ahead of the mega-event in India.



T20 World Cup 2026: Defending Champions India Favoured at Home

After winning the 2024 T20 World Cup held in the USA and the West Indies, India bid adieu to Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, and Ravindra Jadeja as the experienced trio walked away from the shortest format of the game at the international stage.

With Gautam Gambhir taking charge of the Men in Blue, Suryakumar Yadav was appointed as the captain of the Indian team in T20Is, as Abhishek Sharma, Tilak Varma, and Varun Chakravarthy stamped themselves as ever-presents for India.

The Suryakumar-led side has since then grown leaps and bounds as India has solidified their spot at the top of the ICC T20I rankings. Abhishek and Tilak have grasped two of the top three spots in the batters' rankings, while Varun Chakravarthy is ruling the roost in the bowlers' list.

Placed in Group A alongside arch-rivals Pakistan, the USA, Namibia, and the Netherlands, the Men in Blue should be one of the favorites to reach the Super Eight stage. Let's have a look at how India heads into the tournament and whether their preparations are up to the mark as they will be defending the coveted trophy in front of their fans:

India's record since the 2024 T20 World Cup Triumph

Indian cricket fans would have expected a topsy-turvy start to their new era, but Gambhir and Suryakumar have quashed their doubters by winning every T20I series in the build-up to the 2026 ICC T20 World Cup.

Suryakumar kicked off his captaincy era with a bang against Sri Lanka and Bangladesh as the Men in Blue clean-swept both

of their neighbors. While India won all three matches against Sri Lanka, including a win in the Super Over, the Men in Blue completely annihilated Bangladesh in all three fixtures, especially the 133-run win in the dead rubber, courtesy of a Sanju Samson century.

While India got off to a good start to the Suryakumar era, their real test was yet to come as Gambhir's men travelled to the rainbow nation to face South Africa for a 4-match T20I series.

Both Samson and Tilak scored two centuries each to help India register a 3-1 win in the series, where they were expected to be heavily challenged by the Proteas. Chakravarthy scalped 12 wickets in 4 matches, including a 5-wicket haul in the only match India lost, as the seamers failed to support the spinners on a sluggish surface.

England then toured India in January 2025, and the Men in Blue were clinical yet again, winning the series 4-1. After India had already wrapped up the series 3-1, Abhishek Sharma's blitz of 135 runs off 54 balls helped India win the dead rubber by an emphatic margin of 150 runs.

After winning the England series, India's next T20I assignment came in September as the Men in Blue won the Asia Cup, defeating arch-rivals Pakistan thrice in a span of two weeks to lift the coveted trophy.

After winning the Asia Cup, the Men in Blue went down under and defeated Australia in their own backyard, followed by a 3-1 win against South Africa at home and are now on course to win the New Zealand series as well, which is the last stop on

the road to the 2026 ICC T20 World Cup.

Squad

Abhishek Sharma, Sanju Samson (wk), Ishan Kishan (wk), Tilak Varma, Suryakumar Yadav ©, Shivam Dube, Hardik Pandya, Rinku Singh, Axar Patel (vc), Washington Sundar, Harshit Rana, Arshdeep Singh, Varun Chakravarthy, Jasprit Bumrah, Kuldeep Yadav.

Key Players for India

The Men in Blue have the privilege of the playing XI being packed with a plethora of match-winners, with the likes of Shreyas Iyer and Kuldeep Yadav failing to break into the playing XI.

#1 Abhishek Sharma

The left-hand batter is mentored by Yuvraj Singh, the hero of India's 2007 ICC T20 World Cup and 2011 ICC Cricket World Cup triumphs. It would be fair to say that Abhishek Sharma has emerged as the most prominent player in the last two years, smashing 1199 runs at a strike rate of more than 190.

The ability to smack the ball out of the ground, maximum after maximum, has hurt opposition sides in the last two years, showcased by Abhishek's stats of 2 centuries and 7 half-centuries. When we look at Sharma's numbers in India, the average and strike rate both improve massively as the southpaw has scored 501 runs in 13 innings at a strike rate of 206.17.

#2 Hardik Pandya

Hardik Pandya is the most experienced T20I player in the side.

The vice-captain of the Indian team in the 2024 ICC T20 World Cup triumph was arguably left high and dry as the captaincy armband was passed on from Rohit Sharma to Suryakumar Yadav after Gambhir's appointment. Nonetheless, Hardik Pandya has proved to be undroppable with his crucial ability to score runs at a fast pace in the middle overs and often provides the finishing touches as well.

Pandya enjoyed a memorable 2024 year in T20I cricket and has often been deployed as the second seamer in the run-in to the 2026 T20 World Cup. The all-rounder's capabilities of taking the new ball and swinging it both ways has often proven to be a masterstroke, especially against left-hander opening batters.

#3 Varun Chakravarthy

Varun Chakravarthy was made the scapegoat of the embarrassment handed to India in the 2021 ICC T20 World Cup as the Kolkata Knight Riders' mystery spinner failed to adjust to the pitches on offer in the United Arab Emirates.

Since then, the former architect has developed a couple of new variations in his mystery spin bowling and has also improved the fielding and batting aspects of the game, becoming more than a single-trick pony as he was often called back in 2021.

The spinner has scalped 55 wickets in 28 matches since the end of the 2024 T20 World Cup at a brilliant average of less than 13. The KKR spinner would be ready to unleash havoc with India playing its matches across the spin-friendly pitches of Colombo and Chennai, while bowling in Mumbai or Delhi could prove to be a challenge for the No. 1-ranked bowler in T20Is.

Predicted Playing XI

India: Abhishek Sharma, Sanju Samson (wk), Tilak Varma/Shreyas Iyer, Suryakumar Yadav ©, Shivam Dube, Hardik Pandya, Rinku Singh, Axar Patel, Arshdeep Singh, Varun Chakravarthy, Jasprit Bumrah.

Contributed by- Mohak Arora, Parimatch Sports analytics expert

