

ODIs AGAINST AUSTRALIA 'WARM-UP' FOR SA



Proteas head coach Shukri Conrad.
/Ben Whitley

● Priority for Proteas this summer is Tests, says Conrad

By **STUART HESS**

SA is the only team that holds a winning record against Australia in One Day Internationals (ODI) – one they'll maintain even if Pat Cummins' team sweeps the three-match series that starts in Durban tomorrow.

It's a record worthy of praise: 57 wins, 52 losses, three tied games and one no-result in 113 ODIs. But it's also a statistic that grinds with South Africans – players and fans alike.

Having a winning record against Australia is great, but in the period SA have played ODIs, their World Cup trophy count is

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zero. Australia's is five.

Three times Australia have ended the Proteas' World Cup hopes – famously doing so on one occasion by not even beating them.

This year's series, which includes the Pink ODI that raises awareness for breast cancer at the Wanderers on Sunday, and a match in Potchefstroom next Friday, takes place amid the backdrop of a high-stakes Test series between the two teams and a World Cup in a year's time.

Both teams want to win, but have acknowledged there are bigger goals to target. The Proteas have suffered two major blows, with Kagiso Rabada and Lungi Ngidi forced to miss the series, a fate that also befell Ottneil Baartman.

After initial doubts about Rabada's

involvement in the Test series, which starts on October 9, Proteas head coach Shukri Conrad has expressed optimism about the progress the Proteas spearhead has been making. “It's going quite nicely, the rehab and the programmes that he's on. I'd be very surprised if we didn't see him during the Test series,” Conrad said.

“He's such a huge player for us, and he seems to reserve his best for Australia. So I'm pretty confident that we'll see 'KG' There's still a little bit of work to be done.”

Conrad has been clear that despite next year's World Cup and the importance that event, which will be hosted across southern Africa, holds for SA, the priority for the Proteas this summer is Test cricket.

The ODIs are almost a warm-up for the Test matches. Australia have made it apparent through their selections that they think the same.

Neither Cummins nor Mitchell Starc were part of the recent ODI series in Zimbabwe, but are in the squad to face the Proteas. From a batting perspective, Conrad's counterpart Andrew McDonald wants some of his young batters to get a feel for the conditions and the SA bowlers, with an eye on Test selection.

Australia's Test batting certainly appears vulnerable, with recent struggles at home against Bangladesh causing further angst among supporters and the always vocal group of ex-players.

Cooper Connelly and Josh Inglis are part of both Australian squads in SA and their recent success with the bat in Zimbabwe has raised the possibility they could come into the reckoning for Marnus Labuschagne's Test place.

“Coop hasn't played a lot of first-class cricket, so his experiences are quite narrow,” McDonald told cricket.com.au

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