

Analysis on India's Middle Order Conundrum in World Cup 2019

After a splendid start to the world-cup by winning 7 out of 8 group matches played and topping the table, team India were clear favourites to win the world-cup before their do or die semi-final clash against New Zealand. It looked like team India dominated the group stage and quit comfortably reached the semi-finals. But the analysis might show a different story if you compare the overall performance of the squad. Winning a world-cup is definitely not an easy task, a team must have solid openers, dependable middle-order, match-winning finishers and break-through providing bowlers to win the big trophy. India had fabulous top 3 as Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and KL Rahul who were in-form scored most of the runs literally in every game for them and gave a solid platform for the middle-order batsmen to just come and hit their shots to finish the innings with a bang. India managed to score to 300+ runs on three occasions against mighty Australia, Pakistan and England and comfortably chased down the opposition's total while batting second. Only defeat in the group stage game against England when India was chasing 337 where after losing opener KL Rahul quickly, the middle-order was exposed to finish the game off but unable to do so.

The middle-order position is often regarded as the backbone of the team with the team is heavily reliant on them to either finish a match after a good start or control the innings after fall of early wickets. In all the previous world champions there were one or two solid match-winners who played a vital role in the victory like Ben Stokes in 2019, Steve Smith in 2015, Yuvraj in 2011, Steve Waugh in 99, Aravinda De Silva in 96 and players like De Villiers, Dravid, Kallis, Lara, Williamson who never won the world cup but was influential to the performance of their side for reaching final or semi-finals. Team India came into the world cup without settled middle-order with the middle-order places of no 4 and no 5 were left hanging and undecided even after landing in England. Ambati Rayudu, an experienced, dependable middle-order batsman and potential match-winner with the ability of playing long innings under pressure were surprisingly dropped from the squad and Vijay Shankar, with very international experience under his belt, was picked in place of Rayudu on the basis of his all-round abilities. Vijay Shankar flopped in the world-cup and injured himself in training in the middle of the tournament replaced by Rishabh Pant. Selectors, the coach and the captain as well looked short of ideas on who should be playing in the middle order and kept chopping and changing between KL Rahul, Vijay Shankar, MS Dhoni, Kedar Jadhav (KL Rahul moved to the opening position later on after the injury to Shikhar Dhawan) and later on with Rishabh Pant and Dinesh Karthik who arrived as injury replacements. No matter who played in that position, no one looked like playing a match-winning innings throughout the tournament.

Analysis using Excel for runs scored by no. 4 and no. 5 batsmen in first 10 matches of World Cup:

Teams	Match 1	Match 2	Match 3	Match 4	Match 5	Match 6	Match 7	Match 8	Match 9	Match 10	Total Runs	Average
India	60	75		27	57	21	77	48	11	38	414	24.08
England	146	22	99	10	150	103	93	80	53	94	850	53.91
New Zealand		82	61		2	81	4	44	85	86	445	28.79
Australia	22	73	70	43	119	49	50	26	29	50	531	31.243

Fig: Table on runs scored and average of combined no.4 and no.5 batsmen by top 4 teams

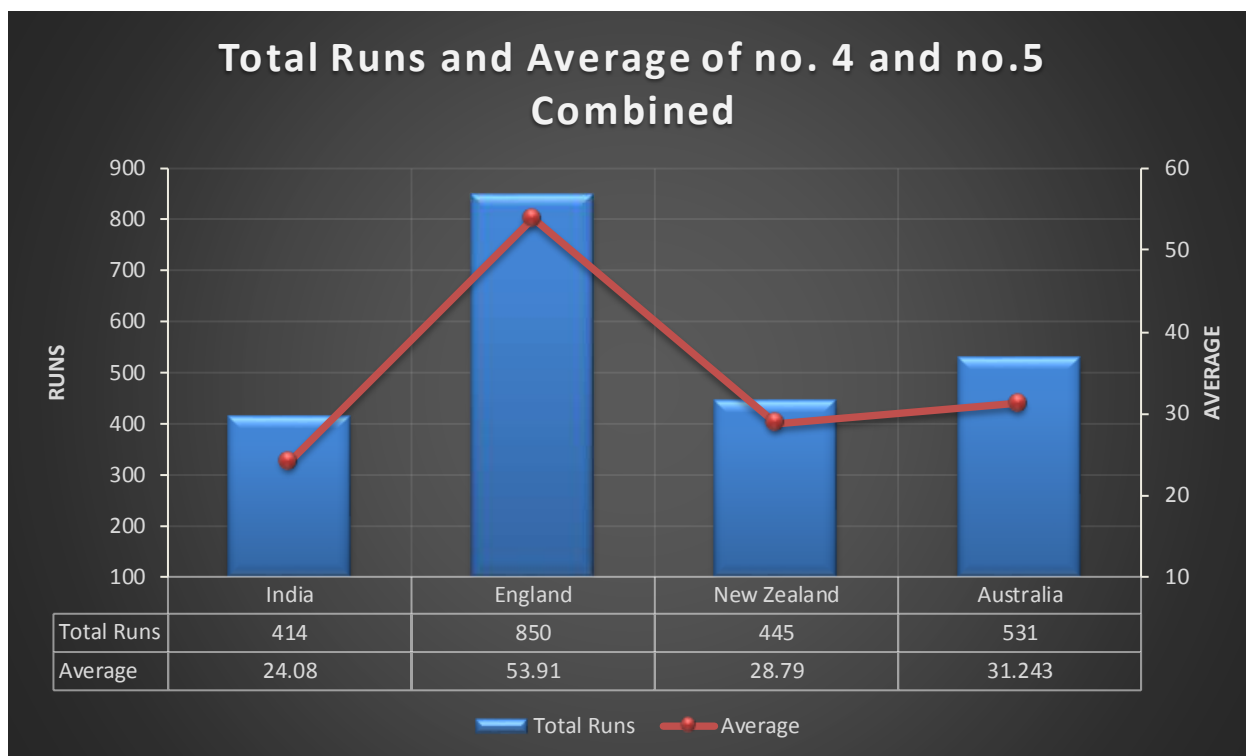


Fig: Graph on comparison of runs scored and average of combined no.4 and no.5 batsmen by top 4 teams

If you compare the middle order performance of India with other teams it is quite conspicuous that India seriously underperformed with lowest runs scored and the average among all top 4 teams. Look at world champion England's runs scored and average by middle order and comparing with India, you will see that England has scored more than twice as much runs and average as India did. The area where we certainly lacked the solid performance and it came back to haunt us in the must-win semi-final where we lost our high scoring top 3 cheaply after scoring 1 run each. The middle-order was clearly exposed in that match where India was chasing a target of 240 runs. Although, in modern days 240 is not that high target but considering the pressure of semi-final it proved too much to handle and India was crushed out of the tournaments by underdog Kiwis.

From the the table below we can mark that throughout the world cup, none of the Indian no. 4 or no. 5 batsmen had managed to score a 50+ score where every other semi-finalist has many 50+scores and that is a sad fact. No team can win such a hard-fought and much sought-after tournament with such a sorry looking statistic. Hence, we can say that if team India badly missed the regular run-scorer in the middle order who could have stepped up to the mark and played according to a situation of attacking or controlling the innings.

Teams	Match 1	Match 2	Match 3	Match 4	Match 5	Match 6	Match 7	Match 8	Match 9	Match 10	Total Runs	Average
England	57	9	64	10	148	21	4	1	11	45	370	46.25
India	26	48		26	29	14	32	48	4	32	259	28.78
New Zealand		82	48		1	69	3	30	28	74	335	41.88
Australia	18	73	42	20	73	32	38	5	7	4	312	31.2

Fig: Table on runs scored and average no.4 batsman by top 4 teams
*** Blue boxes indicate player was not out in that match*

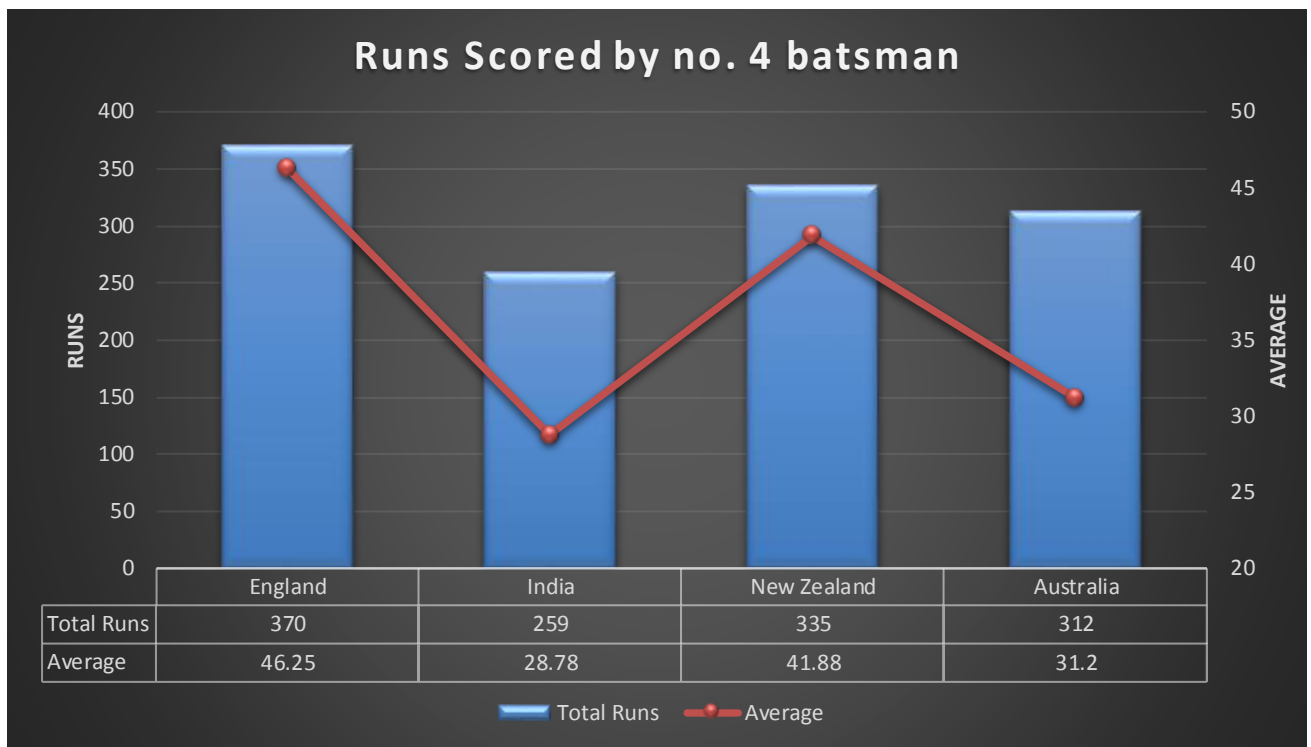


Fig: Graph on comparison of runs scored and average of no.4 batsman by top 4 teams

Teams	Match 1	Match 2	Match 3	Match 4	Match 5	Match 6	Match 7	Match 8	Match 9	Match 10	Total Runs	Average
England	89	13	35		2	82	89	79	42		431	61.57
India	34	27		1	28	7	45	0	7	6	155	19.38
New Zealand		0	13		1	12	1	14	57	12	110	15.71
Australia	4	0	28	23	46	17	12	21	22	46	219	31.29

Fig: Table on runs scored and average no.5 batsman by top 4 teams

**** Blue boxes indicate player was not out in that match**

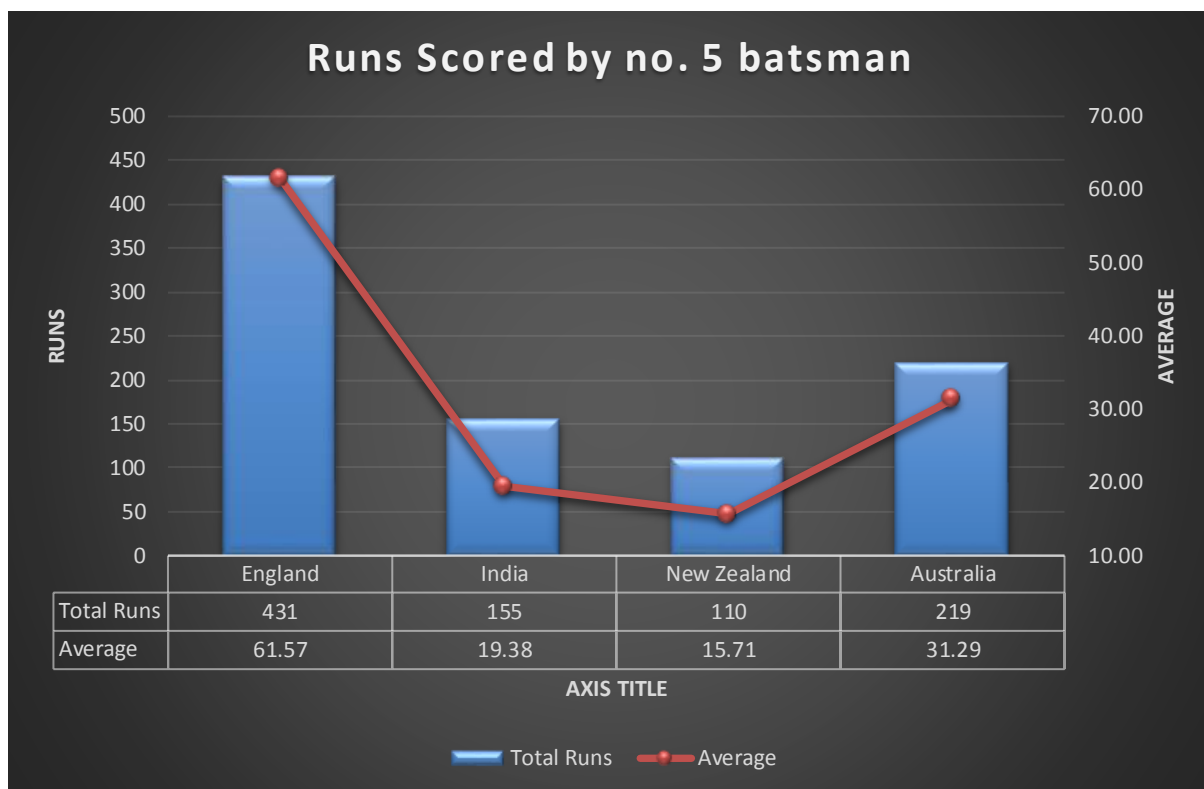


Fig: Graph on comparison of runs scored and average of no.4 batsman by top 4 teams

If you see the pie-charts below, the difference of runs scored top 3 batsmen and the rest of the team is just staggering. One might argue that in some cases middle order or late middle-order batsmen did not get the chance of batting that much but still, that could be the case here. But the differences are just too much to support that case, apart from the semi-final match where top 3 miserably failed and Pant and Pandya got out in the '30s, Dhoni made 50 in 72 balls and Jadeja with almost a match-winning score of 77(59). The conclusion is India needed to have a dependable and consistent run-scorer in the middle order to have a chance to win the cup. India was heavily reliant on top 3 which is demonstrated in the pie-charts and table below and that caused us massively.

	vs Saf	vs Aus	vs Pak	vs Afg	vs WI	vs Eng	vs Ban	vs SL	vs NZ	Total Runs	Average
Runs Scored by Top 3	148	256	274	98	138	168	207	248	3	1540	171.11
Runs Scored Rest of the Team	82	96	62	126	130	169	107	17	218	1007	111.89
Total Runs	230	352	336	224	268	337	314	265	221	2547	
Top 3 Runs %	64.35 %	72.73 %	81.55 %	43.75 %	51.49 %	49.85 %	65.92 %	93.58 %	1.36 %		

Fig: Table on comparison of runs scored by top 3 and rest of the team

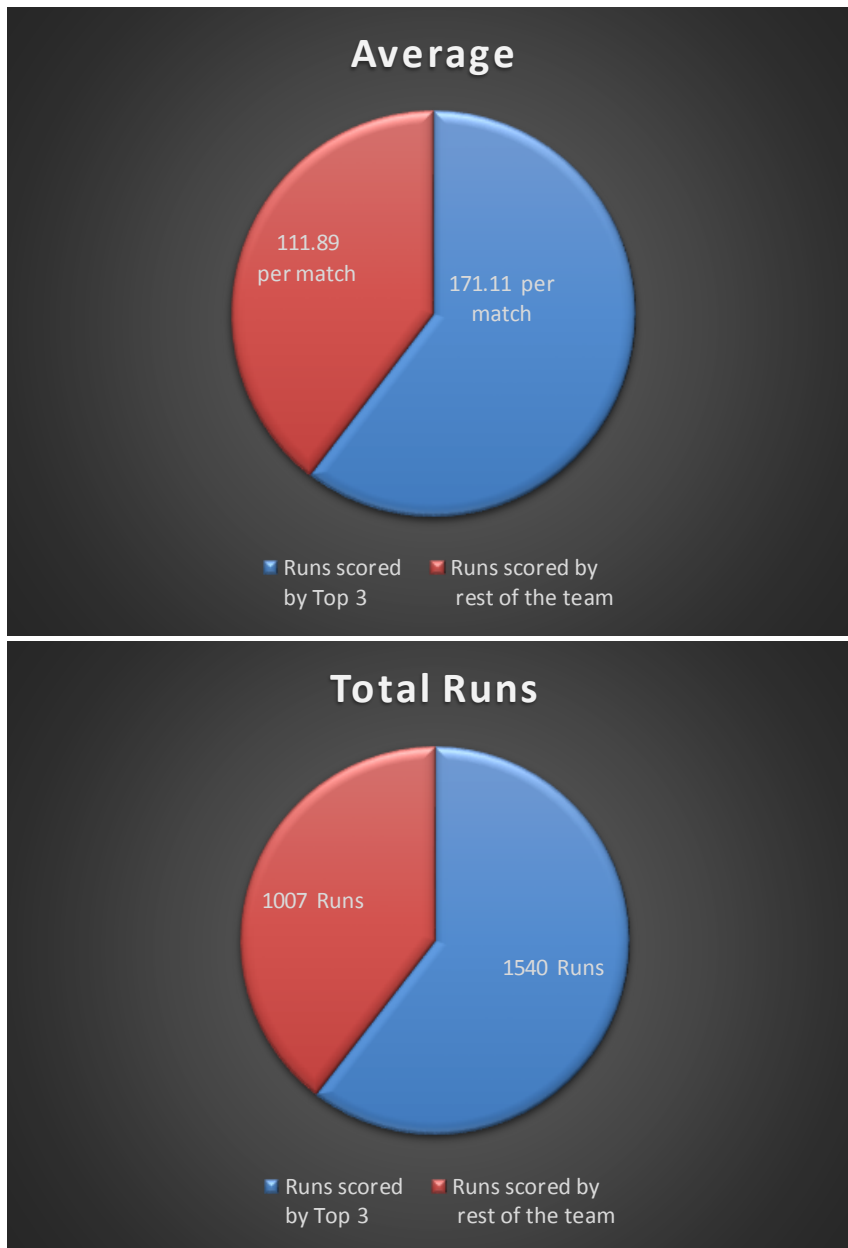


Fig: Pie-Charts on comparison of runs scored and average by top 3 and rest of the team

2011 World Cup:

When India won the world cup last time in 2011, the planning was started 10 months before the start of the tournament with all the batting order was decided before the world cup. Openers were Sachin and Sehwag, one down will be Gambhir, no. 4 and no. 5 will be Kohli and Yuvraj respectively and MS Dhoni after that. Finisher would be either Raina or Yusuf Pathan depending upon the form, pitch and opposition. Team India kept the same players throughout the tournament apart from one or two changes due to injury. Contrary to this in 2019 WC, nothing was planned and after landing in England for the world cup itself, the captain and coaching staff decided the batting order. On the other hand, England who eventually became champions had properly planned and settled team. They looked like having an idea and game plan on how to pursue each game even after there one or two players unavailable due to injuries or tactical reason unlike India.

