

Chetan Narula Mt. Maunganui

Awfully Easy

India register third consecutive win against New Zealand to seal series 3-0 without breaking a sweat

INDIA IN NEW ZEALAND



Virat Kohli guides a ball towards third man during his 60-run knock on Monday

In any World Cup year, a significant value is attached to every single ODI. There are permutations and combinations, chopping and changing, different players given varying roles to test their skill and ability, so on and so forth.

It is tough, therefore, to assign specific value to bilateral achievements. Take, for example, India's ODI series win in Australia — it was a close affair, closer in fact than most people thought it would be in the absence of Steve Smith, David Warner, Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood. While India were simply shrugging off rustiness as they won 2-1, Australia were a work in progress, and will be until the very last moment before the World Cup.

Alternately, New Zealand were hosting Sri Lanka, and pummeled them into submission with three successive 300-plus scores. The gap in performance could only outline a probable gap in standing come the World Cup. How can you not consider the Kiwis contenders for a grasp at that elusive trophy?

A week later though, every assumption stands shattered, for India have come and washed upon these shores like a cricketing tsunami. In the space of seven days, the Black Caps have been handed a thrashing — 8-wicket loss in Napier, followed by 80-run and 7-wicket twin defeats in Mount Maunganui. That win over Sri Lanka seems ages ago, and even India's slow start in Australia is a distant memory on the horizon.

World Cup contenders, you said? India have hammered home a 3-0 advantage in three games, and without breaking into third gear. To an extent, even the Men in Blue seem surprised.

"Looking at the first three games, we were looking to win at least two and to set up the series well. But the fact that we have won (all) three is an outstanding achievement," said Virat Kohli, after India wrapped up the series with two games to spare.

His words reflect on two pointers. First, in a series such as this, there is a lot of planning and some semblance of ambition as well. For India to just hop across

the Tasman Sea, and stun the high-flying Kiwis is a measure of their confidence at the moment.

The second pointer herein is that the think tank allowed for some margin for error: They divided this five-match series into two halves, hoping to gain an early advantage and set it up for a nice finish. This thinking perhaps took into account India's preparatory hiccups and New Zealand's strength playing at home.

As such, the former aspect didn't make

an appearance — India hardly seemed in any bother whatsoever, despite not a single hundred in three matches.

The latter, well, New Zealand were so mired in their own set of problems that competing in the series, it seems, simply escaped their mind. This was well encapsulated with how the third ODI on Monday progressed. Bamboozled by the two wrist spinners, the Kiwi batsmen were too circumspect in the middle overs, allowing India a vice-like grip on

their scoring. They had given away too many wickets to Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal previously, and were guarded in their approach on Monday, thus presenting a below-par total (never mind an improved batting effort).

India's bowling is the standout differentiator between these two sides. For the Men in Blue, on an already long tour, to come and take to conditions like fish to water is a marker of their adaptability. It stands to reason why this Indian team

Rayudu Suspended from Bowling

Ambati Rayudu has been suspended from bowling in international cricket for a suspect action. The ICC says Rayudu "didn't elect to submit a test of his bowling action within the stipulated 14 days of being reported for suspect action."

NZ Recall Neesham, Astle for Final 2 ODIs

SQUAD Kane Williamson (C), Todd Astle, Trent Boult, Colin De Grandhomme, Lockie Ferguson, Martin Gupthill, Matt Henry, Tom Latham, Colin Munro, Jimmy Neesham, Henry Nicholls, Mitchell Santner, Tim Southee, Ross Taylor

has won ODI series in South Africa, Australia, Sri Lanka and West Indies since the 2017 Champions Trophy, whilst going unbeaten at home simultaneously. Only England have beaten this Indian side in the past 20 months.

If the two wrist-spinners were nearly unplayable, Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Mohammed Shami made their presence felt with wickets early on, in the middle overs and at the death. A final piece of this jigsaw fell into place when Hardik Pandya arrived and bowled with intensity as if to prove a point. And he wasn't the only one. Take Ambati Rayudu, or Dinesh Karthik, for that matter. In a World Cup year, with spots still up for grabs, it was almost a case of individuals proving their worth, but in a collective, coherent manner.

On a day of attrition, New Zealand tried their best to pull one back. This staggering loss is a reflection indeed, but less on their own form and preparation for the 2019 World Cup. Instead, it underlines the gap in limited-overs cricket at the moment.

SCORECARD

NEW ZEALAND 243 (Taylor 93, Latham 51, Shami 3/41, Pandya 2/45) lost to **INDIA** 245/3 (Rohit 62, Kohli 60, Boult 2/40) by 7 wickets

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India Women Aim to Seal Series

INDIA VS NEW ZEALAND A dominant India will look to seal the three-ODI series and consolidate their position in the ICC women's championship table when they face New Zealand in the second ODI on Tuesday. The Indian women's team put behind off-field controversies by making a superb start to the three-ODI rubber — part of the ICC Women's Championship series — thrashing New Zealand by nine wickets in the opening match.

What Manchester United are going to look like next season with or without me, it doesn't really matter. I'm here as part of that to prepare the team for next season. That means doing well now

OLE GUNNAR SOLSKJAER wants to prepare Man United for next season regardless of his own future with the club

Djokovic on Top Federer Slides

Novak Djokovic strengthened his grip at the top of the men's ATP tennis ranking Monday following his destruction of Rafael Nadal in the Australian Open final.

ATP Rankings

1 Novak Djokovic	10,955 pts
2 Rafael Nadal	8,320
3 Alexander Zverev	6,475
4 Juan Martin Del Potro	5,060
5 Kevin Anderson	4,845
6 Roger Federer	4,600

Osaka First From Asia to Be No. 1

Australian Open champion Naomi Osaka is the first player from Asia to top the men's or women's tennis rankings — and the youngest woman to make her debut at No. 1 in nine years.

WTA Rankings

1 Naomi Osaka	7,030 pts
2 Petra Kvitova	6,290
3 Simona Halep	5,582
4 Sloane Stephens	5,307
5 Karolina Pliskova	5,100
6 Angelique Kerber	4,965

MISSING THE POINT?

Pochettino dismisses winning a trophy as an ego-trip but Tottenham fans are entitled to feel aggrieved

Jack Pitt-Brooke

It might have been politically easier for Mauricio Pochettino, in the aftermath of defeat at Selhurst Park, to admit how devastated he was that Spurs were out of another competition. They're now likely facing another trophy-less season, depending on what happens in the Premier League and the Champions League, after going out of both domestic cups in the space of four days.

There're plenty of people who think

that Pochettino needs to win a trophy to complete his work at Spurs. And if he had agreed with them, and admitted his despair, then it might just have bought him some sympathy overnight. Pochettino may have failed again, but at least he knows the rules of the game.

But Pochettino didn't pay lip-service to the importance of the domestic cups. He didn't feign crocodile tears over Spurs' two exits in four days. Instead, he doubled down. He made clear, in stronger terms than ever before, how he sees his job. And that means making

Spurs as strong as possible, as judged by the Premier League and Champions League. Not by bending over backwards to try to win a cup.

"We're going to create a debate that to win a trophy is going to help the club," Pochettino said. "I don't agree with that. That only builds your ego."

Pochettino's point is that consistent top-four finishes are ultimately more valuable and more lasting to the club than the one-off buzz of lifting a trophy. He has pointed in the past to Wigan Athletic, who won the FA Cup in 2013 before sinking down to League One. In a rational sense he is right: consistent top-four finishes pay for new stadiums, domestic trophies do not.



WATCH OUT! TONIGHT
PREMIER LEAGUE
1:15am Arsenal v Cardiff City
1:30am Man United v Burnley
1:30am Newcastle v Man City

But Pochettino must also know that plenty of fans don't see it that way. And that for them the possibility of trophy is still what football is all about. Rather than the long-term financial health of

the club. And to write a trophy off as an ego-trip is to miss the point.

Pochettino argues that winning a cup isn't a true merit test, that it comes down to so many other factors, like the draw, or injuries, or how much rest a team has before a big game. A club like Spurs, stretching every sinew to stay in the top four with far richer teams, never has the spare capacity to make the difference in a cup. As the recent examples of Chelsea, Manchester United and Arsenal show, the best way to win the cup is to have a big squad and an off-year in the league.

"In the last few weeks I was listening a lot about winning titles," he said. "To win a title here in England like the FA Cup or Carabao Cup is about being lucky, not only about quality in your squad."

Of course this is true: the cup doesn't always go to the best team. For Spurs to

do what they do in the league with their squad, and then to deliver a cup on top of it, would add an element of acrobatics to their balancing act.

But football fans are entitled to be irrational and there are plenty at Spurs who would just like their manager to care more about winning even a minor trophy. No-one disputes his argument about the success of the last four and a half years since he took over.

"In reality, the most important thing is being consistently in the top four and playing Champions League," Pochettino said. "That is going to help the club to achieve the last step. Today the club is doing fantastically, it's so successful. In the last four or five years, we've been fighting in different ways to achieve what the club needs, to be in the level of Chelsea, United, City or Arsenal or Liverpool."

All of which is true, and any analysis of spending, salaries and Premier League points since 2014 would vindicate Pochettino. But sometimes fans just want to have their egos stroked.

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