

UNITED MANAGER SOLSKJAER WARNS TEAM AGAINST COMPLACENCY AFTER BURNLEY SCARE | 26

LEFT-RIGHT COMBO WILL SERVE INDIA WELL, FEELS DAVIS CUP CAPTAIN BHUPATHI | 24



DOUBLE TON IN HAMILTON

Don't consider IPL form for WC spots

In Rohit's Milestone Match, India Could Field Reserves At Seddon Park

Hamilton: His penchant for hitting double hundreds is universally acknowledged and skipper Rohit Sharma will be eager to make his 200th appearance for India a memorable one with a solid performance against a below-par New Zealand in the fourth ODI here Thursday. With the series already sealed, Rohit, who has a good record as stand-in captain and has three double hundreds in ODIs to his credit, would aim to tighten the noose around New Zealand in what could be another batting friendly track at Seddon Park.

A 40 lead will be India's biggest series win (across formats) in their 52 years of touring New Zealand, having

first visited the country back in 1967. For India, the two remaining matches give the side an ideal platform to once again test the bench strength and give the younger men a feel of match situations.

The status of MS Dhoni's hamstring injury is not known but according to team sources, there is nothing much to worry about. A decision on Dhoni's availability will be taken before the toss on Thursday.

In case Dhoni is available and the team management avoids tinkering with the combination, he will walk in as Virat Kohli's replacement. Kohli has been rested for the remainder of the tour:

However, if the visitors opt for a like-for-like replacement, then Indian fans could get a glimpse of the immensely talented Shubman Gill in the senior team jersey.

Billed as one for the future, many experts have found a striking similarity in the 19-year-old Gill's strokes with the ones that Kohli plays effortlessly. "I wasn't even 10% of what he (Shubman) is, when I was 19," Kohli had said after the third ODI.

Following Kohli's effusive praise, Shastri and Sharma might just give Gill a go and check if he can also be an option at No 4, where Ambati Rayudu has done a decent, if not spectacular, job so far.

In case both Gill and Dhoni are included, Dinesh Karthik could well be rested.

The bowling department also looks settled with Kuldeep Yadav (8 wickets

in 3 games) and Yuzvendra Chahal (6 wickets in 3 games) accounting for 14 wickets so far in the series.

But Mohammed Shami, who has won two Man of the Match awards, could be given some rest as he has been playing non-stop cricket since the start of the Australia Test series.

In case Shami is rested, Khaleel Ahmed or Mohammed Siraj could be given another chance to stake their claim for the reserve pacer's slot available in the World Cup squad.

For New Zealand, everything seems to have gone haywire since the start of the series and skipper Kane Williamson has agreed that they have been completely outplayed by India.

Their biggest problem has been the inability to read Kuldeep and Chahal, who have inflicted the maximum damage on the home team. Shami has also been pretty lethal in his first spell.

NUMBERS GAME

2 Number of hundreds registered by Indian batsmen at Hamilton. 125 not out by Virender Sehwag vs New Zealand on March 11, 2009 and 100 by Shikhar Dhawan vs Ireland in a World Cup fixture on March 10, 2015. For the Kiwis Ross Taylor (3) has scored most tons here.

5 Number of matches contested between India and New Zealand at Seddon Park. India have lost four and won just one by 84 runs (D/L method on March 11, 2009.



EXPERT OPINION

INDIA'S feat in Australia was fantastic but I think beating New Zealand at home is an even greater achievement, especially since they had not won a single ODI against the hosts since 2009! The captain again led from the front. His presence on the field, his attitude, the way he plays rubs off on to the whole team and you can see the confidence in the boys.

The great thing about this team is the combination. India have a variety of bowlers who can be used in different conditions, and against different sides, too. Chahal and Kuldeep contribute to the bowling strength. You don't find bowlers like them anywhere in the world.

The way India are playing is reminiscent of the confident and superior West Indies

of the 1980s and 90s. This is showing in the way they are dominating, controlling, and beating their opponents.

Overall, this is fantastic preparation for the up-coming World Cup. India have tried out quite a few players and they've all done well. So the selectors are going to have a bit of a headache while choosing the final squad for England. However, they must remember that after the Australian series in India, there will be a gap of a couple of months before the World Cup begins.

Yes, the IPL will be played in between but players' form in this tournament should not be taken into consideration when the team is being selected for the Cup. It should be on the basis of what they have achieved in the international arena.

Resting Virat for the next two ODIs against New Zealand is a wise decision. It's a good move to give him some time off and give opportunities to others. **GAMEPLAN**

LIVE ON STAR SPORTS, 7.30 AM

INDIA NZ

ICC ODI RANKINGS

2 3

HEAD TO HEAD

54 44

ODDS: INDIA 4/10, NEW ZEALAND 6/4

DON'T WANT SITUATION WHERE RESERVES ARE NOT MATCH-READY FOR WC: SRIDHAR

Hamilton: India's fielding coach R Sridhar is expecting some of the reserve players to get much-needed game time during the next few ODIs as the team management wants every player to be match-ready going into this year's World Cup. "Winning is a habit that you want to continue and don't want a let down on intensity but we need to give game time to our reserves with just seven games remaining before the World Cup," Sridhar said on the eve of the fourth ODI.

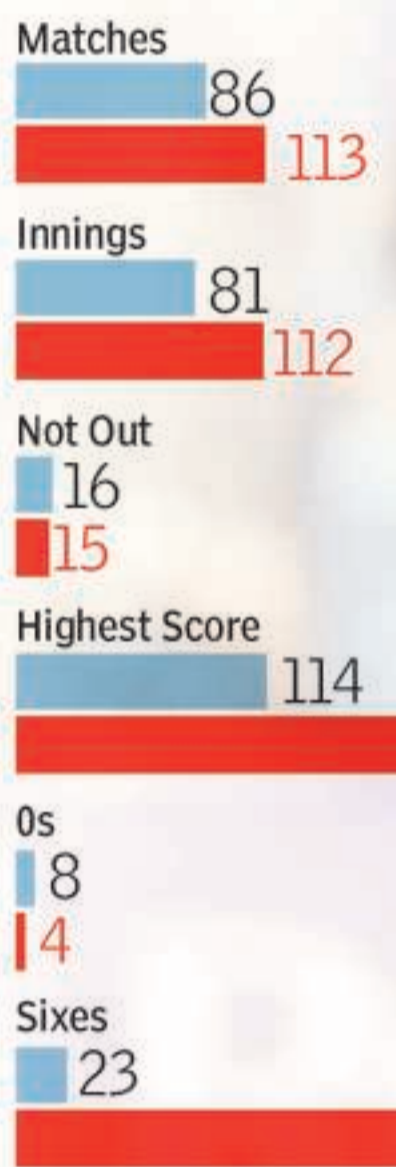
Often a situation arises where the first XI picks itself and the reserves suddenly look rusty having not played matches before being suddenly thrust into a pressure situation.

"We shouldn't be in a situation going into the World Cup where the main XI has played and the reserves have not got enough game time when they have to suddenly play a crucial game." ❧

BRACE FOR HITMAN'S 200TH ODI

ROHIT IN ODIs

■ First phase (2007-2012)
■ Second phase (2013-2019)



Rohit Sharma will become the 15th Indian player and the 80th overall to appear in 200 ODIs when he plays against New Zealand at Seddon Park, Hamilton today (Zaheer Khan had played 194 matches for India and six for Asia XI). Having led India in eight ODIs, this will be the opener's ninth match as captain. **TOI** takes a look at his remarkable journey so far...



KEY MILESTONES

One of the two captains to have recorded a double hundred in ODIs - 208 not out vs Sri Lanka at Mohali on December 13, 2017. The other is Virender Sehwag - 219 vs West Indies at Indore on December 8, 2011

Aggregated 491 (ave. 122.75) in six matches vs Australia in 2013-14, the highest run-aggregate by any batsman in a bilateral series vs Australia in ODIs

Only batsman in the world to have averaged 50-plus for six successive years - 2013 to 2018 (minimum 500 runs). Even this year, he is averaging fifty-plus (57.50)

Hit 16 sixes during his innings of 209 vs Australia at Bengaluru on November 2, 2013 - a world record he shares with AB de Villiers and Chris Gayle

Only batsman in the world to post seven innings of 150-plus in ODIs

GALLERY

Rahul in India 'A' squad for Lions 'test'

New Delhi: Opener KL Rahul will be playing for India 'A' in their first unofficial Test against England Lions to be held in Wayanad from February 7-10. The 14-member India 'A' squad, led by Maharashtra's Ankit Bawne, also features Jharkhand fast bowler Varun Aaron, who last wore national colours in 2015 in a rain-marred Test match against South Africa in Bengaluru. **Squad:** Ankit Bawne (c), KL Rahul, AR Easwaran, Priyank Panchal, Ricky Bhui, Siddhesh Lad, KS Bharat (wk), Jalaj Saxena, S Nadeem, Mayank Markande, Navdeep Saini, Sharadul Thakur, Avesh Khan, Varun Aaron.

NZ bring in two rookies for T20I series against India: New Zealand picked two uncapped players in all-rounder Daryl Mitchell and pacer Blair Tinkler for the three-match T20 International series against India starting February 6 here. Regular skipper Kane Williamson was Wednesday named captain of the 14-strong squad after skipping the one-off T20 against Sri Lanka. The Black Caps are currently competing in a five-match one-day series against India and have conceded a 0-3 lead. **Squad:** Kane Williamson (c), Doug Bracewell, Colin de Grandhomme, Lockie Ferguson (games 1 & 2), Martin Guppitt, Scott Kuggeleijn, Daryl Mitchell, Colin Munro, Mitchell Santner, Tim Seifert (wk), Ish Sodhi, Tim Southee, Ross Taylor, Blair Tinkler (game 3). **AGENCIES**

ACTION TODAY

BASKETBALL: NBA: Minnesota v Memphis, 6.30 am; Portland v Utah, 9 am (Live on Sony ESPN & Ten 1)

CRICKET: New Zealand v India 4th ODI, 7 am (Live on Star Sports 1); West Indies v England 2nd Test Day 1, 7.30 pm (Live on Sony TEN 1)

FOOTBALL: ISL: Delhi v Kerala, 7.30 pm (Live on Star Sports 3)

Dravid proposes plan to facilitate alternate careers for young cricketers

Plan B: Emphasis On Enhancing Life Skills And Introducing Vocational Courses

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New Delhi: Life after retirement is one of the biggest anxieties facing professional sportsmen the world over. In India, with youngsters today being encouraged to take up sport as a career, and the simultaneous drying up of public sector employment, the drop-out rates, particularly in cricket, continue to remain high. The budding cricketers in the 17-21 age-group would be worried about life beyond the ropes if you fail to succeed.

Understanding this uncertainty and seeking a more holistic development of young cricketers, the Indian cricket board (BCCI) is mulling a concept where it would play a facilitator for cricketers to get jobs outside the sport. The idea was first mooted by former India captain Rahul Dravid at a recent meeting with board officials, where he emphasized the need to enhance life skills of young cricketers outside of the sport. With the cut-throat competition prevalent in cricket today, the thoughtful former batsman recognized that emerging players have very little time to focus on their education, with a lucrative sport and the promise of riches often proving a mirage.

Dravid has been in charge of the India U-19 and 'A' teams for over three years now, making him a voice closest to such realities. And recognizing the immediacy of his suggestions, the National Cricket Academy (NCA) COO Tufan Ghosh and the board officials are working on a structure to



WIDE VISION: Rahul Dravid

give this idea on imparting life education a shape.

The officials are seeking out placement agencies and other firms to help in training young cricketers and offering them alternate career options if they struggle to continue with the game. "Dravid and the other coaches here had pointed out the need to start such a process. We are working towards formulating a structure before it is sent to the higher authorities in BCCI to get things going," Ghosh told **TOI**.

TOI EXCLUSIVE

The overall idea itself is not new, with the BCCI taking a leaf from a similar system at the National Institute of Sports in Patiala where trainee athletes complete their primary education through open school examinations. "Right now we can't be teaching them like what happens in NIS, but Dravid has emphasized on life education," said Ghosh, adding that Dravid has felt the need to develop other virtues of a cricketer to prepare the person beyond the riches in Indian cricket. As a start, the board will be targeting players between the age of 17 and 21 for vocational training.

"Most of the cricketers these days are so engrossed in playing the game that

Dravid and the other coaches here (NCA) had pointed out the need to start such a process. We are working towards formulating a structure before it is sent to the higher authorities in BCCI to get things going

Tufan Ghosh | NCA COO

they don't look at any other aspect of life," Ghosh said. "It has been observed a lot of these young players quit cricket by 21. Then it's a struggle for them to lead a stable life. We are looking at life coaching, internships with companies and training in other vocational courses and then facilitating jobs for the youngsters."

Of course, there are logistical issues in spreading this concept across a cricket-crazy nation, but the NCA is hopeful. "We will try to align the state bodies and academies. And if the players from various state bodies feel the need to avail this facility then they can do that easily," Ghosh said. "We are looking at roping in a good number of companies," added Ghosh. The primary target, it appears, would be tapping the hospitality sector. To start with, the facility will target the trainees that come to the NCA.

Dravid has already been devoting a lot of time to his wards and holding frequent sessions to develop their personalities. Before the last two U-19 World Cups, lectures were organized on various aspects. Psychologists were brought in to speak to the players along with workshops on building roles of responsibility. These lectures are already part of the NCA curriculum.

De Kock fires South Africa to series win over Pakistan

Cape Town: Opener Quinton de Kock smashed a 58-ball 83 (11x4, 6x3) to give South Africa a comfortable win over Pakistan in the fifth ODI here on Wednesday. The hosts, who won by seven wickets, also clinched the five-match series 3-2.

Chasing a target of 241, South Africa faced little resistance once de Kock started firing on all cylinders. Later, captain Faf du Plessis and Rassie van der Dussen put an unbeaten stand of 95 for the fourth wicket as the target was achieved with 10 overs still to go.

Earlier, opening batsman Fakhar Zaman hit an aggressive 70 before Pakistan's innings stalled. With the series at stake, Pakistan made 240 for eight after being sent in to bat at Newlands. While Zaman was at the crease, Pakistan were on course for a big total. He was fourth out after a 73-ball innings when the total was 128 in the 25th over. But the scoring

rate slowed after his dismissal, with only 49 runs scored in the next 15 overs.

Imad Wasim, batting at number eight, gave the innings late impetus, hitting 47 not out off 31 balls. He hit sixes off Dale Steyn and Kagiso Rabada in the last two overs.

Brief scores: Pakistan 240/8 (Fakhar 70, Imad 47*, Phehlukwayo 2-42, Pretorius 2-46) lost to South Africa 241/3 in 40 overs (de Kock 83, du Plessis 50 n.o., van der Dussen 50 n.o.).

Sarfraz accepts mistake, says he's learnt lesson

Karachi: Accepting his "mistake" after being banned for his racial remarks against a "black" South African cricketer, banned Pakistan captain Sarfraz Ahmed on Tuesday said that he has learnt a lesson from the unsavoury episode. "It was a mistake and I have learnt from it," Sarfraz told reporters. **AGENCIES**

Windies women happy over revival of cricket in Pakistan

Karachi: West Indies skipper Merissa Aguilera on Wednesday called for cricket nations to return to Pakistan as her squad arrived in the country ahead of a three-match Twenty20 series.

The 31-year-old from Trinidad & Tobago is leading the 13-member side that landed in Karachi early Wednesday, amid tight security for the first visit to Pakistan by a non-Asian women's team in 15 years.

Even as security dominated the day's discourse, the team was able to enjoy the finer sides of Pakistan's largest city, including a camel ride along Cliff

ton beach.

"I think right now we are heading in the right direction when it comes to bringing back the cricket in Pakistan," said Aguilera at the trophy unveiling ceremony.

"I really believe that the other teams should really be thinking about it (touring Pakistan) because it's not just about teams, it's about cricket and when you look at the fans they are so happy that we are here.

"I am so thankful to God that we can really bring back cricket to Pakistan," Aguilera added. **AFP**