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PEP GUARDIOLA'S MAN CITY LOOK TO REVIVE TITLE BID AGAINST ARSENAL | 24

'Middle order has delivered more often than not'

Wellington: India's assistant coach Sanjay Bangar believes India's batting collapse in the fourth ODI was an "aberration" and reposed faith in the middle-order, saying it has mostly delivered whenever put in a tough situation. India's batting came a cropper in the Hamilton game as they were dismissed for their seventh lowest total of 92.

However, Bangar said it was a one-off failure.

"The middle order has risen to the occasion many times and delivered. Yes, some situation has been trying but it is not that the middle order hasn't performed," Bangar said. "When required, more often than not whenever it has been put in a situation, it has delivered. Maybe the last game was an aberration," he added.

Bangar explained his point by giving example of games - Cuttack (India vs England, Jan 2017), Indore (India vs SA, Oct 2015) and MCG final (India vs Australia, Jan 2019) - where the middle order contributed to win matches. "If they (top order batsmen) are batting well then the middle order doesn't get the opportunity required to maintain the groove," he said. "It is also one of those series where our top order hasn't got a hundred, so it has given a lot of time to the middle order to play situations." ■



SEEKING A HIGH ON MSD

3 Number of ODIs contested between the two teams at this venue. India and New Zealand have won one each while the third saw no result due to rain.

His (Dhoni's) record speaks for itself. He is a fantastic player. I know there were some noises in the Indian media if he should be in the World Cup squad or not. He has got that calm demeanour in the middle-order. When you are bowling to him, you know you have not got the game won until you get him out.

-Jimmy Neesham, NZ ALL-ROUNDER

BACK IN THE MIX: M S Dhoni is fit and will play the final ODI

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An unbeaten career-best knock off 163 balls played by Martin Gupthil vs West Indies at Westpac Stadium, Wellington on March 21, 2015. It is the highest by a New Zealand batsman in ODIs apart from the highest in the history of the World Cup. It is the only double century hit in ODIs on New Zealand soil.

110 Runs needed by Ross Taylor (7890 runs at an average of 48.10 in 214 matches) to become the second New Zealand batsman after Stephen Fleming (8007 at 32.41 in 279) to complete 8000 runs in ODIs.

82 Virat Kohli's innings off 78 balls on January 31, 2014 in a losing cause is the highest individual score by an Indian batsman at this venue. -Stats Rajesh Kumar

Dhoni Boost For India As Visitors Hope For Improved Batting Show To Cap Off NZ ODIs

Wellington: Pushed out of their comfort zone by some incisive swing bowling in challenging conditions in the previous game, a joint India will gain confidence from Mahendra Singh Dhoni's return as they aim to finish the five-match ODI series against New Zealand on a high.

India's most experienced ODI player was out with hamstring injury during last two matches and his return couldn't have been timed better after their inexplicable collapse for 92 in Hamilton. A 4-1 margin will look much better than 3-2 but it will be easier said than done at the Westpac Stadium in Wellington.

The windy conditions here could just be the catalyst that Trent Boult would need as he again marks his run-up.

And that's where Dhoni's presence will be a factor in that middle order which still isn't rock solid when skipper Virat Kohli isn't around.

Assistant coach Sanjay Bangar confirmed that Dhoni is fit and available for the game.

"Yes, he is fit and will be playing the fifth ODI," Bangar told reporters on the eve of the game.

Dhoni's calmness in anchoring the innings will be priceless and young Shubman Gill might make way in the playing XI as the World Cup preparations hit full swing.

The Hamilton match was an eye-opener where Ambati Rayudu, Kedar Jadhav and Dinesh Karthik failed to prove a point that they can stand up and be counted if Rohit Sharma and Shikhar Dhawan fail on a given day and Kohli is also not around.

However, Bangar said it was a one-off failure.

Rohit has already described it as 'one of the worst batting performance' by the team and he would like to lead by example by quickly getting over the disappointment with another fiery opening stand with Shikhar Dhawan on Sunday.

New Zealand are likely to miss opener Martin Gupthil who suffered a back injury during practice. ■

LIVE ON STAR SPORTS, 7.30 AM

INDIA NZ

ICC ODI RANKINGS

2 3

HEAD TO HEAD

54 45

GROUND

The Westpac stadium pitch may aid seamers a bit.

WEATHER

It will be bright and sunny.

ODDS: INDIA 5/10, NEW ZEALAND 6/4

MANDHANA IS NO. 1 ODI BATSWOMAN

India opener Smriti Mandhana moved up three places on Saturday to become No. 1 in the ICC women's ODI rankings, joining men's team skipper Virat Kohli at the top of the standings. Mandhana was player of the three-match ODI series against New Zealand.

SMRITI IN ODIs

	M	I	NO	Runs	HS	Ave.	100	50	SR
Overall	47	47	4	1798	135	41.81	4	14	83.78
Last 15 inns	15	15	3	865	135	72.08	2	8	93.11

TOP FIVE BATSWOMEN IN THE LAST ONE YEAR

(Since Feb 1, 2018)

Player	For	M	I	NO	Runs	HS	Ave.	100/50	SR
Smriti Mandhana	Ind	15	15	3	865	135	72.08	2/8	93.11
Sophie Devine	NZ	10	10	3	585	117*	83.57	3/2	105.78
Lizelle Lee	SA	14	14	2	565	117	47.08	1/4	80.25
Suzie Bates	NZ	11	10	1	531	151	59.00	2/2	96.37
Dane van Niekerk	SA	13	11	2	500	95	55.55	0/4	74.07

Dogged Bravo gives Windies vital lead

Antigua: Darren Bravo's ultra-patient half-century extended the West Indies first innings lead to 119 as the home side were eventually dismissed for 306 on the third morning of the second Test against England on Saturday.

Trailing in the three-match series after suffering a 381-run defeat in the first Test in Barbados, England openers Rory Burns and debutant Joe Denly survived four overs in reaching nine without loss at the interval at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in Antigua.

Bravo was the lone West Indies batsman to fall in both innings of the match at Kensington Oval and made amends in a manner completely against his nature, his even 50 coming off 216 deliveries, the slowest ever by a West Indies batsman in Test cricket in terms of balls faced.

In stark contrast to the watchful defiance which typified his near six-hour occupation of the crease, the left-hander was last out when he charged down the



TOUGH GRIND: Darren Bravo scored the slowest ever Test fifty for West Indies

pitch at Moeen Ali to be stumped.

It was the off-spinner's third wicket of the innings. Stuart Broad, England's outstanding bowler on the second day when he picked up three wickets, was left empty-handed on the third morning as

opening partner James Anderson finally got among the wickets to limit the West Indies quest for a sizeable first innings advantage after he resumed at 272 for six.

He first removed Jason Holder, who contributed 22 to a 45-run seventh-wicket partnership with Bravo, via a catch to stand-in wicketkeeper Jonny Bairstow.

England team officials have confirmed that although regular keeper Ben Foakes suffered no fracture when struck on the hand while batting on the first day on Thursday, Bairstow will do duty behind the stumps for the rest of the match.

Local boy Alzarri Joseph's arrival at the crease was greeted with hearty and sympathetic applause from the fans at the ground as the 22-year-old decided to continue to playing in the match despite his mother, Sharon, passing away earlier in the morning. **Brief scores:** England 187 & 9/0 trail West Indies 306 (Bravo 50, Brathwaite 49, Broad 3-53, Moeen 3-62) by 110 runs



JAFFER

10 Wasim Jaffer, who has participated in nine wins (eight for Mumbai and one for Vidarbha) in nine Ranji Trophy finals between 1996-97 and 2017-18, is all set to appear in his 10th final. Just one player has played in more Ranji finals - 12 by Ashok Mankad (Mumbai) between 1963-64 and 1982-83.

6 Just six wickets are required by Aditya Sarwate (44 at 21.02 runs apiece in ten matches) to become the first Vidarbha bowler to complete 50 wickets in a Ranji Trophy season. Akshay Wakhare holds the record with 49 wickets at 26.63 in nine matches in 2015-16.

52 Wickets captured by Dharmendrasinh Jadeja at 27.38 runs apiece in 10 matches this season to become the first and only Saurashtra bowler to capture 50 wickets in a Ranji Trophy season.

Big duel: Umesh, Pujara square up in Ranji final

Nagpur: The battle between India stars Cheteshwar Pujara and Umesh Yadav will be made for an intriguing chief sub-plot when Saurashtra make one more attempt to win their elusive Ranji Trophy title against the defending champions Vidarbha in the final starting Sunday.

The battle lines are drawn and the summit clash will not just be about Pujara and Umesh only but also about Wasim Jaffer, who is a domestic doyen in every sense of the terms.

At the age of 40, the reflexes may have gone down but sheer class and improved fitness has ensured that Jaffer remains a force to reckon with in domestic cricket with 1003 runs to his name before the final.

Statistically, he is only second to Milind Kumar (1331), who freelanced for Sikkim but if things are put in perspective, in spirit he has again been the premier performer in the national championship.

Saurashtra do have an edge with

Pujara in their line-up but Jaffer's flair has the power to negate it. He has been Vidarbha's batting mainstay this season with four hundreds, including a double ton.

India's hero during the Australia Test series, however downplayed his presence. "It's not that Saurashtra will have edge because of my presence. This team has got some exciting youngsters like Harvik (Desai) and Arpit (Vasavada). This team has done well for some time as a unit," Pujara said after a net session.

"If we play like the way we did in the quarterfinals and the semifinal, we have a good chance," said Pujara, whose anchored two tough chases against Uttar Pradesh in quarter-finals and Karnataka in the semi-finals.

The final will be a test of batting depths as both sides have capable willow wielders till No 9.

Saurashtra coach Sitanshu Kotak and captain Jaydev Unadkat echoed the same sentiment, player has ■

SAURASHTRA IN RANJI TROPHY FINAL

SEASON	VENUE	TEAMS AND SCORES	RESULT/MOM
2012-13	Mumbai	Saurashtra 148 & 82 Mumbai 355	Mumbai won by an innings & 125 runs - Wasim Jaffer (M) 132
2015-16	Pune	Saurashtra 235 & 115 Mumbai 371	Mumbai won by an innings & 21 runs - Shreyas Iyer (M) 117

VIDARBHA IN RANJI TROPHY FINAL

SEASON	VENUE	TEAMS AND SCORES	RESULT/MOM
2017-18	Indore	Delhi 295 & 280 Vidarbha 547 & 32/1	Vidarbha won by 9 wickets - Rajneesh Gurbani (V) 6/59 & 2/92

LEAGUE PROMOTER

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