

Double Whammy

While Indian men were condemned to their worst T20I defeat ever, women lost from a winning position
Crushed by 80 Runs

India slumped to their worst defeat ever in T20 Internationals as New Zealand outclassed the visitors in all departments to win the first match of the series by a comprehensive 80-run margin on Wednesday. Batting first, unheralded keeper-batsman Tim Seifert took the Indian bowling apart blasting 84 off 43 balls as New Zealand posted a commanding 219 for six. With the crack opening pair of skipper Rohit Sharma and Shikhar Dhawan departing within the Powerplay the chase became a difficult one and India were all out for 136 in 19.2 overs.

MS Dhoni did play his part but it was always an impossible chase with wickets falling at regular intervals at the other end. India had never lost a T20 International by 50 or more runs prior to this match. India's previous worst was a 49-run loss to Australia back in 2010. "We failed to get a good partnership. 200 was never going to be easy to chase," said Rohit in the post-match presentation. New Zealand bowlers kept the pressure on Indian batsmen, especially the two spinners — left-arm orthodox Mitchell Santner and leg-spinner Ish Sodhi. Senior pacer Tim Southee had the best figures among the bowlers and the best delivery of the match was bowled by Lockie Ferguson, who yorked Dhawan. "They kept the batsmen under tight check and for some like World Cup aspirant Rishabh Pant, it was a frustrating little stay in the middle and he simply couldn't get going. On a pitch where Indian spinners

Yuzvendra Chahal and Krunal went for plenty, the Black Caps slow bowlers literally tightened the noose on the visitors. While Pant didn't do his chances any good, Vijay Shankar impressed during his little cameo but would need to do more in order to book a place in that World Cup bound squad. The Pandya brothers — Krunal and Hardik — endured a contrasting day. While Krunal (he also scored 20 off 18 balls) had an okay outing, Hardik would quickly like to forget the nightmare (2/51 in 4 overs and 4 runs) before India play the second match of the series in Auckland on Friday. Earlier, Seifert, whose previous best score in T20 Internationals happens to be 14, was promoted to open alongside Colin Munro and they added 86 runs in only 8.2 overs in a whirlwind start. Seifert's knock had seven fours and

half a dozen sixes, setting the tone for a big total. Seifert showed the intent straightaway as he gave Bhuvneshwar Kumar the charge, picking the knuckle ball early, dispatching it over mid-wicket for a six. The next shot was a four as he stood and hammered past the bowler. With Munro hitting Khaleel Ahmed for two successive sixes, New Zealand were off to a blazing start scoring 44 off the first four overs. Seifert was lucky to survive when Dhoni dropped a sharp chance after the batsman had edged one off Krunal. But he promptly put the next delivery into the stands, moving across towards off and sweeping it over backward square leg. There weren't any signs of overt footwork but he shuffled enough inside the crease to make room for the big shots and in the process disturbed the line and length of the bowlers. When Hardik drifted on the leg stump, he was flicked behind the square and when he pitched wide outside off-stump, he was lofted over the cover-point region. In Hardik's next over, Seifert again hit the bowler for a boundary and a flicked

six. In between, his elder brother Krunal was switch hit for a boundary. The elder Pandya finally got a breakthrough when Munro was caught in the deep off Vijay Shankar. But Seifert never let the momentum drop and hit two more sixes off Krunal, who just kept on pushing the ball through a flatter trajectory.



Shikhar Dhawan was yorked by Lockie Ferguson

INDIA'S BIGGEST T20I DEFEATS (by runs)

MARGIN	OPPOSITION	GROUND	YEAR
80	New Zealand	Wellington	2019
49	Australia	Bridgetown	2010
47	New Zealand	Nagpur	2016
40	New Zealand	Rajkot	2017
31	Australia	Sydney	2012

From 102/1 to 136 All Out

Smriti Mandhana remained an unstoppable juggernaut with a record-smashing half-century but the Indian women's cricket team failed to make it count, going down by 23 runs in the opening T20 International against New Zealand on Wednesday. Mandhana held the record for the fastest fifty by an Indian before the match and she bettered it by a ball during her 58-run knock at the WestPac Stadium. The 22-year-old faced 34 balls in all but reached the 50-mark off 24 deliveries. However, New Zealand pacer Lea Tahuhu played a decisive role with three scalps off her four overs to derail India's pursuit of a 160-run target which was going smoothly till the time Mandhana was at the crease. India eventually folded for 136 in 19.1 overs. Leg-spinner Amelia Kerr (2/28)

clinched the crucial wickets of Mandhana and Indian captain Harmanpreet Kaur to wreck the visitors' chances. Off-spinner Leigh Kasperek also picked up a couple of wickets. "Obviously we didn't get the start we wanted but it was pretty good to come back and win. It's just about keeping calm," said Tahuhu, who was adjudged player of the match for her performance. Harmanpreet, on the other hand, blamed India's loss on a poor batting effort, especially in the last 10 overs. "I think bowlers did really well as we expected. We didn't bat well in the last 10 overs. That is only area where we are always struggling," she pointed out. Mandhana and Jemimah Rodrigues (39 off 33 balls) combined for a 102-run second-wicket stand that should have been a solid foundation for



...I have to bat till 20 overs, that is the best option. The more I bat till 18 overs, we won't collapse because if the top three or four batters can bat till the 18-20th overs then the rest can revolve around them
SMRITI MANDHANA

the rest of the line-up. But India collapsed in the face of an inspired performance by Lahuhu. From 102/1, the visiting team was down to 117/6 in a matter of five overs that turned the match on its head. Harmanpreet (17 off 15 balls) played out a small cameo, including a massive six off Kerr, but couldn't steer the team home, failing to find any support

at the other end. Earlier, opening batswoman Sophie Devine smashed a 48-ball 62 in an enterprising innings to take New Zealand women to a challenging 159 for 4 from 20 overs after being put into bat. The next game of the series is scheduled to be held in Auckland on Friday.

PTI
We were outplayed in all three departments. We didn't start well and we knew that 200 wasn't going to be an easy chase. We have chased such (big) targets in the past and that is why we played with eight batsmen. But we didn't have (even) small partnerships and that made it tougher
ROHIT SHARMA

1 Bigger T20I totals against India than New Zealand's 219. West Indies' 245 for 6 in Lauderhill in August 2016 is the highest total against India

2-7 India's win-loss record against New Zealand — their worst against any team. They are yet to win a T20I in New Zealand in three attempts

42 career runs for Tim Seifert in seven T20Is innings before his 84-run knock in this match. This was the first time he had opened in T20Is

SCORECARD
NEW ZEALAND 219/6 (Seifert 84, Munro 34, Williamson 34; Hardik 2/51, Chahal 1/35, Krunal 1/37) beat **INDIA** 139 (Dhoni 39, Dhawan 29, Shankar 27; Southee 3/17, Ferguson 2/22, Santner 2/24, Sodhi 2/26) by 80 runs

MITHALI DROPPED
Veteran Mithali Raj, who captains the Indian ODI side, was dropped from the match. "We are looking to give chance to young girls, that is the only reason," said Harmanpreet when asked about Mithali's absence from the line-up and whether her experience would have been handy here.

FASTEST T20I FIFTIES FOR INDIA WOMEN
Smriti Mandhana, 25 balls vs NZ, 2019
Smriti Mandhana, 25 balls vs ENG, 2018
Harmanpreet Kaur, 29 balls vs SL, 2018

SCORECARD
NEW ZEALAND 159/4 (Devine 62, Satterthwaite 33, Martin 27, Deepti 1/19) beat **INDIA** 136 (Mandhana 58, Rodrigues 39, Tahuhu 3/20, Kasperek 2/25) by 23 runs

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RANJI TROPHY FINAL
Vidarbha on Cusp of Retaining Title
Saurashtra started down the barrel after Cheteshwar Pujara's second successive failure that put defending champions Vidarbha on the brink of an encore after a stirring fourth day of the Ranji Trophy final in Nagpur on Wednesday. Left-arm spinner Aditya Sarwate once again turned out to be star batsman's nemesis as he was trapped leg before for nought with Saurashtra tottering at 58 for 5 in their pursuit of 206. Sarwate (3/13 in 10 overs) bamboozled the Saurashtra batsmen after being handed the new ball on a track that offered turn and variable bounce. Saurashtra were best chasers during the knockout stage but their reliable batsmen came a cropper in the most-important clash. Going into the final day, Saurashtra who have ended runners-up twice in the past, need to score 148 more runs on a tricky track with Vishvaraj Jadeja (23) and Kamlesh Makvana (2) set to resume the chase. **BRIEF SCORES** Vidarbha 312 and 200 (Sarwate 49, Dharmendrasinh 6/96) lead Saurashtra 307 and 58/5 (Vishvaraj 23, Makvana 2, Sarwate 3/13) by 148 runs



Pochettino if not Solskjaer: Rooney
Manchester United caretaker manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer deserves the chance to take over as permanent boss while Tottenham Hotspur's Mauricio Pochettino is the best alternative, according to former club captain Wayne Rooney. Solskjaer replaced Jose Mourinho in December and has guided United to seven wins and a draw in the Premier League to make a compelling case for his appointment. "It'd be nice to see Ole Gunnar continue with this form and get a shot at the job on a permanent basis," Rooney, United's all-time record scorer, told CNN World Sport. "But if not, if the club go to choose from somewhere else, then I think Pochettino would be the right guy."

FIFA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION
Infantino Sole Candidate
FIFA president Gianni Infantino is set to serve a second term after world football's governing body said on Wednesday he would be the only candidate for June's vote. The 48-year-old has been in charge of FIFA since February 2016, after succeeding the disgraced Sepp Blatter following the corruption scandal which rocked the organisation. The election will take place on June 5 in Paris ahead of the women's World Cup. Former Tottenham defender Ramon Vega had announced his intention to stand against Infantino, but failed to garner the required support of five of FIFA's 211 member federations.

Chennai City Rope in FC Basel
I-League leaders Chennai City FC on Wednesday signed a deal with Swiss champions FC Basel, which has nurtured current Liverpool star Mohamed Salah, to sell 26 per cent of its share, becoming the first Indian side to do so with a foreign club. Established in 1893, FC Basel has been Swiss national champions 20 times and have qualified for the group stages of the UEFA Champions League more times than any other club of Switzerland. Both Chennai FC co-owner Rohit Ramesh and FC Basel President Bernhard Burgener refused to divulge the financial aspect of the deal but said the partnership will focus on co-operation for setting up of, among other things, a residential Youth Academy in Coimbatore and rolling out of football schools across Tamil Nadu in Phase-1.

5 Factors That Will Decide the Title Race

PREMIER LEAGUE Will City defend their crown, or can Liverpool hang onto their lead at the top of the table?

With just 13 matches remaining this season, Liverpool currently lead Manchester City at the top of the Premier League by a slender three points. At the start of last month, an unbeaten Liverpool had the chance to extend the gap at the top to a huge 10 points when they travelled to the Etihad. But goals from Sergio Aguero and Leroy Sane saw City run out 2-1 winners, blowing the title race wide open. Since

then a stuttering City have lost to Newcastle, only for Jurgen Klopp's side to fail to take advantage, with successive draws against Leicester and West Ham. And are Tottenham back in contention? Spurs may be without the likes of Harry Kane and Dele Alli, but they have won three on the bounce and now sit just five points behind league leaders. A look at the five factors which could decide this title race.

CITY'S MANY COMMITMENTS
Pep Guardiola's admirable aversion to ever fielding a second string line-up means that Manchester City are still involved in all three cup competitions this season; something that could potentially work against them. City, still involved in the FA and League Cups, have already played five more games than their direct rivals, Factor in final against Chelsea and potentially four more matches in the FA Cup, and that jumps up to 10 — that's without taking the Champions League into account.

THE MONTH OF MAY
This week, Pep Guardiola predicted that this title race will go down to the wire. "I'm pretty sure the winner will be the last fixture or the last two," he said. Should the teams really be neck and neck come May, it is Liverpool who have the easier fixtures. They travel to relegation-threatened Newcastle on May 4, before finishing the season at home to Wolves. They beat both of those teams comfortably earlier on in the league season. Manchester City meanwhile host Leicester before a trip to Brighton. They also face Tottenham late into their campaign, on April 20.

TOTTENHAM'S TWO LONDON DERBIES
...speaking of Spurs, news flash: successive draws for Liverpool mean that Mauricio Pochettino's battered and bruised Tottenham Hotspur are only five points behind the league leaders, back in third. Considering how many injuries have had to contend with, that's quite the achievement. That's not to say Spurs are back in the title race, exactly. Whether they can keep themselves in the title mix or not at the business end of the season largely depends on a pair of London derbies. Take four points away to Chelsea and then at home against Arsenal, and they will still be in contention with a much needed three week break from the Premier League on the horizon. Drop more than three points, and they are all but finished.



TWO TRIPS TO OLD TRAFFORD
Manchester United, winning 9 of their 10 matches under Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, are the jokers in the pack approaching the final few weeks of the season. Liverpool travel to Old Trafford on February 24, the weekend after the first leg of their Champions League Round of 16 tie against Bayern Munich. City now sit just three points behind them with a superior goal difference. Assuming both sides win this weekend, then defeat to United would hand City the opportunity to go top. City meanwhile travel across town on March 16, the weekend after their second leg against Schalke. It's surely a better time to play United — particularly as they could already have their Champions League tie wrapped up by that point.

SQUAD DEPTH AND INJURIES
So far, Liverpool have had better luck than City with injuries this season. Kevin de Bruyne, City's most important player, has started just 10 Premier League matches this season, while they've also been without Benjamin Mendy. However the tables could be about to turn. Both Mendy and De Bruyne are close to being fully fit. Liverpool, however, are beginning to feel the squeeze of a long and demanding campaign. They currently have six players out injured and are particularly stretched at the back, with Dejan Lovren (hamstring), Trent Alexander-Arnold (knee) and Joe Gomez (ankle) all sidelined. They also lack the squad depth of Manchester City, one of the richest clubs in the world. Liverpool's bench looked particularly thin in this week's draw with West Ham, with the likes of Alberto Moreno, Divock Origi, Curtis Jones and Rafael Camacho helping to make up the numbers.

Ronan Murphy
Mohamed Salah waited at the penalty spot. He had just been knocked to the ground by Sokratis Papastathopoulos to win a penalty for Liverpool against Arsenal. But rather than stroke home his 14th goal of the season to take the lead in the Premier League top scorer chart, the Egyptian forward handed the ball to team-mate Roberto Firmino, who bagged his hat-trick. In the month since, Salah has added another three goals. Sadio Mane three and Firmino two as Liverpool's attack continue to be one of the most potent in Europe, finishing each other's chances to help the Reds close in on their first ever Premier League title. The trident have the perfect chemistry, creating goals for each other, with each happy to unselfishly lay the ball off to one of the other two rather than take all the glory for themselves. Salah is the Premier League's top scorer with 16 goals, with Mane sixth and Firmino just one goal off the top 10, with 42 of Liverpool's 56 goals scored by one of the trio. Liverpool's triple threat have played a total of 96 games between them to get to this figure. They have just two more goals than Eintracht Frankfurt's forward line, who have managed their tally in far fewer matches (74). In total, Liverpool's players have combined for 42 goals and 15 assists, less than Frankfurt's 58 goal contributions (40 goals and 18 assists). Like Salah, Luka Jovic currently holds the lead in the top scorer race in his league, with 14 goals in 18 Bundesliga games this season. One of Frankfurt's forwards is also challenging to be the top assister, with Sebastian Haller just behind Jadon Sancho on eight assists in the Bundesliga. In a total of 28 games across all competitions, the Frenchman has racked up 14 goals and 11 assists — almost as impressive a combined total as Salah's 19 goals and eight assists in 2018-19. Haller has reached his

Best Trio Plays for Frankfurt, Not Liverpool

Move over Salah-Mane-Firmino, they have been outscored and out-assisted by Jovic-Haller-Rebic



world-class striker." Haller is not worried about being labelled "world class." He just wants to score goals and help his team-mates score goals, especially in Europe where Frankfurt won all six games in their Europa League group against Lazio, Marseille and Apollon Limassol. "I have no interest in being the centre of attention. I do not care if there is a star and who that is. I do not want to be a star," he told the FAZ. "I like my peace away from the place. And when I'm in the field, I want to score goals. Everyone knows that the most important thing is to work well as a team. We have all developed a winning mentality together." Rebic has been linked with clubs such as Manchester United and Bayern Munich. Jovic has gotten attention from Barcelona, while Haller has had to play down talk of a move to the Premier League. The 24-year-old is enjoying life in Frankfurt, especially with his attacking team-mates, but he knows he might not last forever. "The three of us are doing very well in Frankfurt, we and the whole team have a lot of fun together. It's an enjoyable time," he admitted. "Nobody knows what's going to happen in the football business. Luka and Ante have certainly gotten the attention of other clubs. If an offer were so good for them that they had to leave because of it, everyone here would be happy for them." As of now, the trio remain together. Much to the dismay of Germany and Europe's best defences, they're scoring and assisting at a rate that betters even Liverpool's. They are all younger than Liverpool's trident too. Their best could still be yet to come.

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