



2ND T20I: IND VS NZ W Mithali Question Looms Large as India Look to Save Series

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Indian batting is prone to collapses, especially from a position of strength. Chasing 160, India were going strong at 102 for 1 but Smriti Mandhana and Jemimah Rodrigues' dismissal proved fatal for the visitors who collapsed to 136 all out, bringing back memories of their inexplicable surrender in the 2017 50-over World Cup final against England.

Mithali's years of experience could have come in handy in the series opener on Wednesday but she was dropped from the eleven.

Debutant Priya Punia opened with Smriti Mandhana but lasted just five balls while another youngster Dayalan Hemalatha too could not do much at number four.

Mithali was not picked as the team management is looking to build a squad for the 2020 T20 World Cup in which the senior player is unlikely to feature. However, the youngsters did not deliver and she could be back for the second game considering that the series is on the line.

New Zealand on the other hand are riding high on momentum, having beaten India comprehensively in the previous two contests, the final ODI and the first T20.

The team is reliant too much on Mandhana's contribution at the top.

Skipper Harmanpreet would be itching to produce a match-winning effort, something she has not done so far on the tour. The situation was tailor made for her in the previous game but failed to take the team past the finishing line.

—PTI

INDIANS VS NEW ZEALAND
2nd T20I, Auckland
LIVE on Star Sports Network
11.30am onwards

0 T20I matches India have won in New Zealand. They have played three T20Is in the country so far.

2-7 India's win-loss record in T20Is against New Zealand

NEW ZEALAND'S T20I RECORD AT EDEN PARK, AUCKLAND

MATCHES	17
WON	6
LOST	9
TIED	2

1 win for New Zealand in their last 5 T20I matches at Eden Park

3 wins in last 5 T20I matches for the team batting first at Eden Park

It doesn't happen every day and hope we can keep the momentum through the series having set the tone," he said.

The dangerous opening duo of Colin Munro and Seifert put the Indian pacers under tremendous pressure early on in the innings and dismissing them cheaply will be crucial for the visitors' chances.

Coming back into the side after playing just one ODI against India, veteran Tim Southee proved his immense value with tidy figures of 17 runs in four over including three wickets.

The spinners, Ish Sodhi and Santner, too were on top of the Indian batsmen, sharing two wickets apiece.

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—PTI



LIVE on Star Sports Network
7.30am onwards

Advantage No One

COPA DEL REY First of three El Clasicos leaves all options open for Barcelona and Real Madrid



Neither claimed a clear advantage but Barcelona and Real Madrid each had cause for optimism following a frantic 1-1 draw in the first leg of their Copa del Rey semifinal.

"The result does not point to any clear favourite," Barca coach Ernesto Valverde said after Wednesday's match.

"The tie is open," said Madrid's Santiago Solari. "Anything can happen."

Barcelona will have Lionel Messi available again for the return on February 27, after their captain was deemed fit enough only for 27 minutes of a compelling opener at Camp Nou.

The thigh strain he sustained against Valencia last weekend is considered minor, with Valverde hopeful he will be able to start against Athletic Bilbao on Sunday.

"It is okay to play, he will but if he isn't right, he won't," Valverde said. "But we hope he will be fine."

Ousmane Dembele could also be back at San Mames and, along with Messi, the duo's availability for the first of two Clasicos in four days at the end of the month would certainly make Barcelona stronger.

They were sloppy for the best part of half an hour on Wednesday and Madrid might have taken the tie away from them had Vinicius Junior and Karim Benzema shown the same precision as Lucas Vazquez, who had nipped in at the front post in the sixth minute.

Instead, Barca kept the deficit to one and then took hold of the contest, their mid field seizing control before a nervy last 10 minutes.

The only surprise was that Malcom's equaliser shortly before the hour had not come sooner but Valverde's side saved their best for the second leg in each of the previous rounds, and he will feel they are well-placed.

"The season is long," Gerard Pique said. "We will try to win the second leg but there are many competitions before then and the league and Champions League are more important. We will try to reach the final."

Madrid will take heart, too, from a purposeful early spell that rattled Barcelona and then an extended show of resilience, the kind that was absent in their 5-1 hammering on the same turf in October.

"Comparisons are unhelpful," said Solari. "But it shows how hard the team have worked."

A draw feels a long way off revenge but there was a measure of redemption at least for a side who can tag their results to six victories in eight games, the only blemish a second leg defeat to Leganes in the quarter-finals, when the tie was already all-but won.

With an away goal secured and home advantage to come at the Santiago Bernabeu, Madrid's only regret might be that they could not

15 Real Madrid have scored in each of their last 15 away games against Barcelona in all competitions (26 goals), their best scoring run away from home in El Clasico history

STATOSPHERE

Barcelona		Real Madrid
57	Possession %	43
11 (3)	Shots (on goal)	11 (2)
611	Passes	451
16	Fouls	17
4	Yellow Cards	2
0	Red Cards	0
3	Offsides	2
3	Corner Kicks	3
1	Saves	2

Body from Wreck of Sala Plane Taken to Britain

Investigators recovered a body from the wreckage of a plane carrying Argentine footballer Emiliano Sala in the Channel and transported it to Britain on Thursday for identification.

Britain's Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AIB) also said that bad weather meant they were not able to recover the plane and it was therefore closing down the operation. The light aircraft was carrying the 28-year-old footballer to his new Premier League team Cardiff City when it disappeared near the British island of Guernsey on January 21, along with 59-year-old pilot David Ibbotson.

—AFP

Experiment or Survival?

After the Wellington thrashing, India need to balance their ambition of trying out players with bid to stay alive in the series

A strong comeback will be expected from India after the hammering from New Zealand in the series-opener when the two teams square-up in the second T20 International at Eden Park in Auckland on Friday.

After suffering their biggest loss in T20Is in terms of runs on Wednesday night, India don't have a lot of time to introspect with just 24 hours separating the two games.

It was the kind of day when nothing went right for India who let New Zealand amass 219 before surrendering meekly in the steep chase.

Opener Tim Seifert took the Indian bowlers to cleaners with a 43-ball 84 and visitors must have a plan to contain him on Friday.

Noteven the seasoned Bhuvneshwar Kumar was spared as he, alongside Hardik Pandya and Khaleel Ahmed, leaked 12 runs a over.

The team could replace Ahmed with either Siddharth Kaul or Mohammad Siraj, who warmed the bench on Wednesday.

The spinners, Krunal Pandya and

Yuzvendra Chahal, did alright but the team management will also consider including chinaman Kuldeep Yadav.

The lack of tight in the run chase was a big disappointment, as mentioned by captain Rohit Sharma in Wellington. Despite having eight batsmen in the eleven, India lost by 80 runs.

"As a team, we have been good at chasing down targets which is why we play with eight batsmen. We believe that whatever the target is in front of us we can chase it down, but we just couldn't do it tonight," said a disappointed Rohit after the game.

He himself would like to lead from the front after scoring 1 on Wednesday and a significant contribution will also be expected from Rishabh Pant, who is in the running for a World Cup berth.

He could not do much in Wellington, getting four off 9 balls before spinner Mitchell Santner bowled him with a fast yorker.

All-rounder Vijay Shankar was promoted to number three and did alright with a 18-ball 27. It remains to be seen if he gets another shot at the same position or the team brings in Shubman Gill, who would be desperate to perform after the two failures in ODIs.

While it is a must-win game for India, another victory will seal the series for the hosts who were outplayed 1-4 in the preceding ODIs.

Captain Kane Williamson could not be more happy with the showing in the first T20 but wants his team to fully focus on the job at hand.

"It was a complete performance that

India need to bowl to their strengths which did not reflect during the (first) match. India should look at attacking New Zealand with two regular spinners - Kuldeep (Yadav) and (Yuzvendra) Chahal - in the upcoming matches

ANIL KUMBLE, former India spinner and Test captain

TWICE OVER

RANJI TROPHY FINAL Vidarbha win second straight title, Saurashtra third time unlucky

Vidarbha lifted their second successive Ranji Trophy title with a 78-run win over Saurashtra in the final, proving that their maiden triumph last year was no "fluke".

On the fifth and final day, Vidarbha needed five wickets to defend their title while Saurashtra, in a chase of 206, required 148 runs for their maiden title.

"Everyone thought it was a fluke when we won last year and were under pressure to retain the title. But our focus was process, we never bothered about reputation," Vidarbha's talismanic coach Chandrakant Pandit said.

The fiercely fought final swung gearily on but Vidarbha went into the final day with a tight hold on the proceedings and bundled out the visitors for 127 with more than two sessions to spare.

Overnight batsmen Vishvaraj Jadhav (82) and Kamlesh Makvana (44) batted resolutely for the first hour but once the partnership was broken, the end was inevitable for Saurashtra.

Man of the match left arm spinner Aditya Sarwate claimed three of the five wickets that led to Thursday's end with a career-best match figures of 11/57. He took 6 for 89 in the second innings, it was his maiden 10-wicket haul in a first class match. He had scalped five in the first innings. Sarwate was the star of the match for Vidarbha as he not only took 11 wickets, his 49-run knock in the second innings played a key role in his side setting the target of 206-run target.

RANJI TROPHY CHAMPIONS

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CHANDRAKANT PANDIT, Vidarbha coach

1	Vidarbha	42
2	Gujarat	38
3	Rajasthan	35
4	Uttar Pradesh	32
5	Rajasthan	28
6	Rajasthan	25
7	Rajasthan	22
8	Rajasthan	18
9	Rajasthan	15
10	Rajasthan	12
11	Rajasthan	10
12	Rajasthan	8
13	Rajasthan	7
14	Rajasthan	6
15	Rajasthan	5
16	Rajasthan	4
17	Rajasthan	3
18	Rajasthan	2
19	Rajasthan	1
20	Rajasthan	1

Ranji Trophy 2018-19 CHAMPIONS

Mirabai Wins Gold on Return

World champion Indian weightlifter Saikhom Mirabai Chanu on Thursday notched up a gold medal at the EGAT Cup in Thailand, making a strong comeback from the lower back injury that kept her out of action for more than half of 2018. According to the information received, Chanu won the 49kg category gold with an effort of 192 kg in the silver level Olympic qualifying event, the points from which will come in handy when the final rankings for Tokyo 2020 cut are done.



FIFA Rankings: India Out of 100

The Indian football team on Thursday slipped out of the top 100 in the latest FIFA rankings following their group stage exit from the AFC Asian Cup in the UAE. Sunil Chhetri and Co. slumped six places to be ranked 103 with 1219 points. India also dropped out of the top 16 in the AFC rankings, plummeting to 18th. India will now need to play friendlies in March against higher-ranked countries to improve their ranking ahead of the draw of the second round of 2022 FIFA World Cup Qualifiers, which is likely to be held in April.

Starc Ruled Out of India ODI Series

Australia fast bowler Mitchell Starc has been ruled out of the ODI series in India after sustaining a pectoral muscle injury during the second Test win over Sri Lanka. Kane Richardson will take his place in the 15-man squad for the tour, which includes two T20I and five ODIs later this month.

SQUAD: Aaron Finch (captain), Usman Khawaja, Shaun Marsh, Peter Handscomb, Glenn Maxwell, Ashton Turner, Marcus Stoinis, Alex Carey, Pat Cummins, Nathan Coulter-Nile, Jhye Richardson, Kane Richardson, Jason Behrendorff, Nathan Lyon, Adam Zampa, D'Arcy Short

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