



Up the ladder

KL Rahul's two impressive knocks in the recently concluded T20 series against Australia helped him climb to fifth in the latest ICC Rankings

DECCAN CHRONICLE



They shouldn't be expecting too many pats on the back over there.

— Ricky Ponting says Steve Smith and David Warner will be in spotlight during the World Cup

SHORT TAKES

Williamson may delay IPL departure

Wellington: Injured Kane Williamson could sit out the third Test against Bangladesh beginning Saturday in Christchurch and might have to delay his departure for the Indian Premier League (IPL), New Zealand said on Tuesday. Captain Williamson suffered a shoulder injury while fielding in Bangladesh's first innings of the second Test in Wellington, which New Zealand won on Tuesday by an innings and 12 runs. Coach Gary Stead said scans had detected a tear to Williamson's left pectoral minor muscle in his shoulder. "There's obviously irritation and a wee bit of bleeding, it's not a major injury," Stead said. "We're hopeful that he will recover quickly, and the thing for us is to make sure he doesn't aggravate it any more. He will come to Christchurch and we will make an assessment there on whether he plays." With the series already won, Stead said New Zealand would take a "safety first" approach, particularly with this year's World Cup on the horizon. — AFP

ACT extends tie-up with Super Kings

Chennai: Fiber broadband internet service provider ACT Fibernet on Tuesday has extended its partnership with IPL champs Chennai Super Kings. Under the tie-up, ACT Fibernet would provide wi-fi connectivity during the matches of Chennai Super Kings scheduled to be held here. "Through this partnership, our aim is to elevate the in-stadium experience for fans and players," said ACT Fibernet's COO Sandeep Gupta said.

IPL tickets sale from March 16

Chennai: Sale of tickets for the opening match of IPL-12 between defending champion Chennai Super Kings and Royal Challengers Bangalore to be played on March 23, will commence on March 16. Online sales of tickets will be start at 11.30am on March 16 and would continue till the tickets are sold out. Book My Show (in.bookmyshow.com) is handling CSK's entire ticketing for home matches. Counters for sale of tickets will open at TNCA at 11.30 AM on March 16. The details of ticket sales for the remainder of CSK's home matches would be announced at a later date. Tickets have been priced at ₹1,300 (C, D and E lower tier), ₹2,500 (C & E upper tier) and hospitality tickets at ₹5,000 and ₹6,500.



Cheteshwar Pujara walks back to the pavilion after scoring a century on his TNCA first division league debut. — DC

Australia skipper Aaron Finch is a picture of composure during a training session in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI



THE DELHI DECIDER

■ The winner-take-all contest has more than series at stake

New Delhi, March 12: India will have to quickly put behind a massive bowling failure, sloppy fielding and tactical mistakes to tame a resurgent Australia in the series-deciding fifth ODI here on Wednesday.

The cricketing world has applauded India's current bowling attack as one of its most potent but the failure to defend a mammoth total in Mohali came as a reality check for it. Even the ever-reliable Jasprit Bumrah was taken to cleaners by Ashton Turner with ease, though the way captain Virat Kohli handled his quota of overs did leave many perplexed. Kohli and the Indian team definitely missed the calming presence of Mahendra Singh Dhoni, whose understanding of game situations has been helpful in pressure situations.

Without doubt, the PCA stadium pitch was flat, offering nothing to the bowlers but a world-class attack was expected to defend a 350-plus total. The blazing knock by Turner, who was helped by the Indian team's butter-fingered fielders helped Australia turn it around.

In Ranchi the team bowled first and in Mohali, Kohli opted to bat first, taking the dew into consideration but on both days, the opposite happened. It was dry when India chased in Ranchi but dew helped Australia's chase in the fourth ODI with the Indian bowlers struggling to grip the ball.

At the Feroze Shah Kotla ground, the wicket is usually low and slow but the team would not like to be surprised in the



Former Australia opener Matthew Hayden (left) and vice-captain Alex Carey.

key game which makes the toss crucial. Not many runs have been scored in the last two ODI matches played here with India losing to New Zealand by six runs in October 2016 and winning against West Indies by 48 runs in October 2014.

The Twenty20 games have been full of runs, though. The hosts can heave a sigh of relief with

standout performer in the series. "I think if you look across the board everyone has performed at times. For Usman Khawaja, to back up his hundred with a score of 90 (91) was impressive to see," the wicketkeeper-batsman said. "...I can go across the whole side and say that everyone's improving." — AFP

Live on TV
India vs Australia
1:30 pm
On Star Sports 1, HD

Shikhar Dhawan striking form. The Delhi left-hander managed to silence critics who had been after him due to a prolonged lean patch. At his home ground, he would look to get some more runs but it remains to be seen if the batters get a surface which assists stroke-play.

Going by history, the surface should be ideal for wrist spinners Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal as the slow bowlers have done well in the previous games. Usman Khawaja has been the man for Australia this series. His stellar show at the top has been instrumental in the visitors' turnaround in the series. Getting him early would be crucial to India's chances.

With skipper Aaron Finch, Peter Handscomb and new sensation Turner contributing in the team's good run, this Australian side is definitely on the right track to regain its status as one of the most formidable sides. — PTI

1 New Zealand are the only team to beat India in the last 11 years at this ground. They won by six runs on October 20, 2016.

19 Number of ODIs India have played at the Kotla. They have won 12 of them.

As a player in the Australian cricket side we have been working hard in the last 12-18 months. Some success has started to come our way. We are really confident moving with the squad we take to the World Cup
— ALEX CAREY, Australia's vice-captain

Unfair to compare Pant with MS: Arun

New Delhi, March 12: India bowling coach Bharat Arun on Tuesday defended under-fire Rishabh Pant, saying it is unfair to compare the young wicket-keeper batsman with the great Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

Delhi boy Pant faced criticism after a shoddy job behind the stumps during the fourth ODI in Mohali on Sunday.

"Unfair to compare Pant and Dhoni. Dhoni is legend, his work behind the stumps is exemplary. When Virat needs someone to talk to, he is a huge influence on the team," said Arun ahead of the series decider here Wednesday.

Arun was all praise for all-rounder Vijay Shankar, who has become a serious contender for a World Cup spot with some standout performances with both bat and ball. "Vijay has gained in confidence. He has batted brilliantly at (different) positions given to him. He bated at number four, six and seven. The confidence he has gained with his batting is rubbing onto his bowling as well. He was bowling at 120-125, now he is touching 130. He is a huge positive for the team," added Arun.

'Solidarity with Army'
The Indian cricket team wanted to show "solidarity" with the country's Army in the wake of the Pulwama terror attack, bowling coach Bharat



Bharat Arun

Arun said defending the decision to wear camouflage military caps during the third ODI in Ranchi.

All the Indian players came out wearing the caps handed over to them by former skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni, who is also an honorary Lieutenant Colonel with the Territorial Army. "We did what we really felt, we needed to do it for the country, in solidarity with what Army has done for the country. In some we wanted to show we appreciate the cause," Arun said on the eve of the fifth and final ODI.

The gesture was not well received by the Pakistani politicians, who demanded an ICC action, calling it politicisation of the game. "It's beyond us what PCB is saying, beyond our control. The BCCI has done well to take permission from the ICC," Arun said. — PTI

Australia confident of pulling off a stunner

New Delhi, March 12: Vice-captain Alex Carey said on Tuesday that Australia are confident of sealing what would be a stunning one-day international series victory in India after two wins on the trot.

Having been two down to the hosts, Australia bounced back to win the third and fourth ODIs to level the series, including

with a record 359-run chase on Sunday. "We were put under pressure early in the series. It is obviously really exciting going into tomorrow with the series on the line," Carey told reporters on the eve of the fifth ODI in New Delhi.

"Obviously (we are taking) some momentum from the last game. The boys are feeling confi-

dent," he said. If Aaron Finch and company win, it would be the only Aussie team to win a five-match ODI series after losing the first two matches either at home or abroad. Australia, who swept the two-match Twenty20 series to kick off their limited-overs tour of India on a strong note, have posted two 300-plus scores in their last two

outings. Ashley Turner was an unlikely hero in the previous match in Mohali when the middle-order batsman smashed an unbeaten 84 off 43 deliveries to lead Australia's highest-ever ODI chase. Finch, Usman Khawaja and Peter Handscomb have also all contributed in a big way, and Carey believes it would be hard to name a

standout performer in the series.

"I think if you look across the board everyone has performed at times. For Usman Khawaja, to back up his hundred with a score of 90 (91) was impressive to see," the wicketkeeper-batsman said. "...I can go across the whole side and say that everyone's improving." — AFP

INDIA-AUSTRALIA AT KOTLA

Date	Result
1986	India won by 3 wickets
1987	India won by 56 runs
1998	Australia won by 4 wickets
1999	India won by 6 wickets

My best is yet to come: Pujara

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR | DC CHENNAI, MARCH 12

Away from the hustle and bustle, the VB Nest cricket ground in the outskirts of Chennai presented a tranquil setting for Cheteshwar Pujara to make his debut in the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association first division league on Tuesday. The quiet probably worked even better for the studious run machine Pujara as he slammed 163 for the R. Ashwin-led Mylapore Recreation Club.

TNCA allows two outstanding players to feature in a side. Knowing the stature of the league, Pujara didn't think twice when Ashwin came up with a request. "The main reason is to get some match practice and be in touch with the game. I have been hearing good things about the league

from Saurashtra and Karnataka players. Ashwin also said it is an important game for the team. Before an international match or first-class season, sometimes you need match practice, so this is the right platform for some games," said Pujara.

"After a long season, I have been trying to manage my workload. When you are playing good cricket, you need to play an odd match and then take a few steps forward," added the Saurashtra batsman.

Amassing 521 runs including three centuries, Pujara was the chief architect in India's historic triumph Down Under. He faced a staggering 1,258 balls in the four-match series. Pujara said the 2018-19 season helped him gain a lot of confidence, but insisted that his peak form was yet

I am batting well and enjoying my game. But there have been instances where I have played some exceptional innings in domestic cricket and I want to do that in international cricket as well.

— CHETESHWAR PUJARA

to come. "There have been instances where I have played some exceptional innings in domestic cricket and want to replicate that in international cricket as well. Australia was a prime example. After the success

Down Under, I have realised my game even better. I have been scoring runs but there was a phase when I didn't score much in Test cricket," said Pujara.

Pujara who recently scored his maiden T20 hundred in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy believes the knock changed people's perception.

"Sometimes it is difficult to accept things but I am someone who moves on. I am not worried about what people think. But the perception is changing now. I think IPL franchisees will also realise that soon. If I can repeat such performances, I can be a good T20 player. At the same time, my priority will always be Test cricket. Whenever I have free time and whenever there is an opportunity to play shorter format, I would like to play," he said.

Wagner runs through Bangla in rain-hit Test

Wellington, March 12: Short-ball specialist Neil Wagner engineered an innings win over Bangladesh in what New Zealand called "an ideal two days" in the rain-shortened second Test to wrap up the series with a game to spare.

After the first two days were washed out, the match finished in the first session of the final day as New Zealand completed a fifth consecutive series win for the first time. In the face of Wagner's relentless bouncer barrage, Bangladesh were all out for 209 to give Kiwis victory by an innings and 12 runs to go with their innings and 52-run win in the first Test. "It was an ideal two days," said Tim Southee. — AFP



Neil Wagner

BRIEF SCORES

Bangladesh 211 & 209 in 56 overs (M. Mithun 47, Mahmudullah 67, Boult 4/52, Wagner 5/45) lost to New Zealand 432/6 dec.