



**Burden on BCCI If No Tax Exemption**

The Indian cricket board has been asked by the ICC to bear a tax liability to the tune of \$21 million (₹150 crore) for conducting future global events like the 2021 World T20 and 2023 ODI World Cup. The BCCI representatives have apparently asked for time till the completion of general elections. The ICC gets tax exemption from member nations for conducting global events but it didn't get any for the 2016 World T20 as Indian tax laws don't allow any such leeway. It has been learnt that ICC chairman Shashank Manohar has told the BCCI that as per its rules, the Indian board will have to pay the tax liability in case it is not able to get tax exemption.

**NZ Beat Bangladesh by an Inns & 51 Runs**

New Zealand overcame grim resistance from Soumya Sarkar and captain Mahmudullah to beat Bangladesh by an innings and 51 runs in the first Test on Sunday to take 1-0 lead in the three-match series. Bangladesh faced a 481-run deficit after New Zealand amassed 715/6 in reply to their first innings of 234. Undaunted, Soumya compiled 149 — his maiden test century — and Mahmudullah 146 in a 235-run partnership which delayed New Zealand's push for victory for much of the fourth day.

**Al-Sabah Re-Elected as OCA Chief**

Kuwait's Sheikh Ahmad al-Fahad al-Sabah was re-elected president of the Olympic Council of Asia on Sunday despite forgery charges that forced him to step aside from the International Olympic Committee and other duties. Sheikh Ahmad, considered a major powerbroker in world sport, won a new five-year term until 2024, the OCA said, extending a reign that started in 1991 over the body that controls the Asian Games and other regional events.

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Among the oldest cricketers around, Dhoni and Gayle are showing that age is just a number

# Old is Gold



Boria Majumdar

Contrasting fifties by Chris Gayle (39 years) and MS Dhoni (37) on Saturday, albeit in different parts of the world, showed how the two icons of the modern day game continue to reinvent themselves and defy conventional stereotype associated with contemporary cricket. While Dhoni's India were already one of the favourites to win the World Cup 2019, Gayle's comeback from oblivion has made the followers of the game to sit up and take notice of the West Indies. All of a sudden, Jason Holder's side appear to be the dark horse of the quadrennial event.

The two, however, are profoundly different from each other. While Dhoni still sprints for every single run, Gayle believes in dispatching balls over the fence with a combination of brute force and timing. Fifty off 17 balls against England's excellent new ball attack is far more than a statement of intent — it is a testimony that all of a sudden the World Cup is far more competitive and entertaining.

In Dhoni, India has cricket's equivalent of Roger Federer. Federer, also 37, and who has just won his 100th title in Dubai, was written off multiple times by critics in the last few years. With the younger Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic taking centerstage, Federer's 100 titles appeared a figment of the imagination. Federer, however, was unphased. Dhoni is much in the Federer mould. There were talks about Dhoni refusing to take singles in first T20 against Australia recently and some felt the runs refused by him may have cost India the match. To Dhoni, however, none of this has any significance. He knows that his captain and coach understands and appreciates his value and that's all that matters to him. If the Australia series in January and the match on Saturday is anything to go by, he has got his mojo back as a finisher. He may not be able to hit sixes like he did in the past but truth be told that's not his job anymore in this Indian team. Hardik Pandya, Kedar



Kedar and Vijay Shankar are there to play the big shots allowing Dhoni the extra time he needs to settle and control the game. On days that the Indian top order fails, a rejuvenated Dhoni at No. 5 will be hugely critical for India in the World Cup.

Gayle, on the other hand, can get going from ball one. Except in the first match of the just concluded ODI series against England where he wasn't comfortable against the new ball that start with, Gayle was dominance personified. In the fifth game, which the West Indies won to level the series-2, Gayle pummeled every ball he faced in a manner only he can. His ability to

hit good balls for six is freakish and the success rate scary.

Clearly, Gayle wants a last hurrah and is capable of transforming a team sport into an individual one.

Few would have imagined that the West Indies would draw the series 2-2 against the world's No. 1 ODI side. Even fewer would have expected Gayle to score over 400 runs and lead the charts. The very same can be said of Dhoni. That Dhoni at 37 can still take charge at 99 for 4 and steer the run chase to a nicely hardly seemed possible. But it happened and importantly for India it has started to happen fairly regularly yet again.

What's common between Dhoni and Gayle is their unwavering self-belief. Both have this innate ability to cocoon themselves from the outside world and pursue their goals. They may be playing a team sport but at one level they are gladiators locked in

**What's common between Dhoni and Gayle is their unwavering self-belief. Both have this innate ability to cocoon themselves from the outside world and pursue their goals**

## Minor Goal Achieved, Major Goal Remains

After becoming world No.1 ODI batter, Smriti Mandhana now wants to win the World Cup

A goal already achieved, Indian women's team opener Smriti Mandhana has now set her sights on winning a World Cup title with the national team. Mandhana became the number one ODI batter in the ICC Women's Rankings last month following her exemplary run off form.

Mandhana, who will lead India women in the three-match T20 series against England starting in Guwahati today, said her goal now is to stay at the top and win a World title. "As a kid when you start playing, you always think of winning the World Cup. Obviously, there are individual targets like, getting to ICC world no.1 spot. And reaching there was really pleasing but now I have to work even harder. To stay there is much more important than getting there," said Mandhana, who replaced injured Harmanpreet Kaur as the T20 captain.

"As a batter the most important thing is to reach the ICC world no.1 position. Definitely it was one of the small goals for me, but my major goal is definitely to win the World Cup," she added.

The upcoming series will provide Indian women's team a chance to finalise a core group of players ahead of the T20 World Cup early next year but Mandhana

said their primary aim is to win the series, which in turn will throw up new players.

"Definitely we are looking to win the series and not just trying out new faces. We really have a very exciting team. It is important for us to believe that we are going into the series to win it rather than experimenting," the skipper said.

"First goal is to win the series and if

we can achieve that we will definitely be able to find new faces for the World Cup. It would be much easier rather than thinking the other way."

The ICC Women's T20 World Cup will be held in Australia from February 21 to March 8 next year.

Mandhana said they have already started their preparations for the T20 World Cup and a fair bit of idea about the composition of the side will come in next 6-8 months.

"Me and Raman sir (coach W V Ramesh) have spoken about the things which we lacked in New Zealand tour and the way our batting order will be shaping for the next World Cup.

"So, it's a really exciting time because we have such a young side. We will have to wait for 6-8 months to see where all the players are," she said.

**WATCHOUT! TODAY**  
1ST T20I  
11am India (w) v England (w)  
LIVE on Star Sports



**As a batter the most important thing is to reach the ICC world no.1 position. Definitely it was one of the small goals for me, but my major goal is to win the World Cup**

SMRITI MANDHANA

**DAN KOLOV-NIKOLA PETROV TOURNAMENT, BULGARIA**

## Bajrang Dedicates Gold To Abhinandan

Punia overpowers Jordan Oliver of USA 12-3 in the men's 65kg freestyle final, Vinesh settles for silver

Indian wrestler Bajrang Punia won the gold medal at the Dan Kolov-Nikola Petrov tournament in Ruse, Bulgaria and dedicated the victory to Indian Air Force (IAF) Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman.

Punia, a World Championship silver medalist, overpowered Jordan Oliver of USA 12-3 in the men's 65kg freestyle final to begin the season on a resounding note in the Bulgarian city.

However, Asian Games gold medalist Vinesh Phogat lost her women's 53kg final to China's Qianyu Pang 2-9 to settle for a silver on her debut in the United World Wrestling ranking series, which is also her first tournament since moving from the 50kg category.

Down 0-3 before scoring 12 straight points, Punia also secured the maximum ranking points from the tournament.

"I want to dedicate my gold to Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman. He has inspired me. I want to meet him one day and also shake hands with him," Punia tweeted after his victory.

The IAF pilot Varthaman returned to India from captivity in Pakistan on

## ICC Turns Down India's Request

Severing cricketing ties with nations not in its domain, ICC tells BCCI

The International Cricket Council has turned down the BCCI's request to sever ties with countries from which "terrorism emanates", saying the ICC has no role to play in matters like these.

In the wake of the Pulwama terror attack, the BCCI urged the world body and its member nations to sever ties with countries which harbour terror.

"There was no chance that anything like that would have happened. The ICC chairman made it clear that the decision to ostracize a nation is taken at the government level and ICC had no rule. The BCCI knew it all along but still took a chance," a BCCI official said on conditions of anonymity.

The BCCI letter didn't make a specific reference to Pakistan. The issue came up during Saturday's ICC board meeting chaired by chairman Shashank Manohar but not much time was spent on it.

The BCCI was represented at the board by acting secretary Amitabh Choudhary. "So many players from member nations play the Pakistan Super League and they would have never entertained such a request. Yes, security was a concern and it had been duly addressed," the Board official added.

The Indian cricket team is scheduled to play Pakistan in the World Cup on June 16. There have been calls to boycott the clash in the wake of the heightened diplomatic tensions between the two countries following the Pulwama attack.

The demand has been made by some of the biggest names in Indian cricket such as Harbhajan Singh and Sourav Ganguly.

However, the Committee of Administrators (CoA) running Indian cricket has so far not taken any decision on the matter, saying that it will seek the government's view. **PTI**

a ring fighting their own battles. Proud athletes with massive fan followings, they are massive draws for the forthcoming World Cup. Just like Rio 2016 was the last time we could see Usain Bolt and Michael Phelps in action, World Cup 2019 is the last major occasion when Dhoni and Gayle will entertain and inspire.

And for the record, Bolt and Phelps both signed off in style in Rio!

## Real a Fading Force?

EL Clasico Barcelona move 10 points clear at the top of La Liga with a 1-0 victory over Real Madrid



Barcelona forward Lionel Messi (L) argues with Real Madrid defender Sergio Ramos

**Mark Doyle**

Barcelona boss Ernesto Valverde insisted Saturday's Clasico wouldn't decide who wins La Liga. He was right — but at least now we know who won't win the title: Real Madrid.

Barca's 1-0 victory has put 12 between the Liga leaders and their third-placed opponents.

Furthermore, the Catalans now lead their great rivals in Clasico wins (96-95) for the first time since 1932.

Real's only hope of reclaiming the advantage this season would be a two-legged meeting with Barca in the Champions League. But would this Madrid team really want that?

Saturday's game was merely the latest damning indictment of the expanding gulf in class between the two sides. Granted, it was no 5-1 or 3-0 rout but this latest Clasico defeat made it painfully clear that Real are not, as former boss Jose Mourinho put it, "ateam with great belief or self-esteem".

Where Barca are consistent and controlled, Real are erratic and reckless, a fading force, just like their captain, Sergio Ramos.

The defender was involved in the game's principal talking points but not for any of the right reasons. He lost Ivan Rakitic for the game's only goal. Then he lost his head, lashing out at Lionel Messi at every opportunity.

He felled his Barca counterpart with a deliberately trailing leg before then leaving Messi with a bloody mouth with a flailing arm.

By the end, Ramos had been reduced to throwing himself to the ground in the Barca area in the dying stages in the desperate hope of rescuing his side from defeat with a penalty.

Captain, leader, legend — pathetic. Just like Madrid's performance, really. They could have closed to within four points of Barca with a win here. Instead, they are out of the running, after another toothless display.

At least in the Copa del Rey semifinal second leg at the Bernabeu on Wednesday, they could blame profligacy for their 3-0 defeat.

Here, though, they had no such excuse. Gareth Bale took a free-kick inside the opening three minutes and that was it. Karim Benzema's most noteworthy contribution was a horrible miscue while stood in an offside position. Toni Kroos was terrible and Luka Modric again looked nothing like a Ballon d'Or winner.

Inevitably, only the 18-year-old Vinicius Junior offered any hope for the future. But he went without a goal once more. Real had 17 shots in total yet never went close to scoring; indeed, only three hit the target.

Barca, by contrast, always looked capable of scoring and, in truth, they should have scored more. In the end, though, Rakitic's wonderfully worked goal proved sufficient.

The Croat insisted on the eve of the game that he no longer pays any attention to the constant speculation surrounding his future now that Frenkie de Jong's summer arrival has been confirmed.

"Staying at Barcelona is perfect for me," he told DAZN. With his mix of technique and industry, he remains perfect for Barca, as his goal so beautifully illustrated.

**Goal.com**

**96-95** for the first time since 1931, Barcelona have overtaken Real Madrid in head-to-head victories

**3** Clasicos in a row without conceding a goal at the Santiago Bernabeu for Barcelona — first time ever in all competitions

**1** Santiago Solari is the first Real Madrid coach to fail to win against Barca in his first three meetings in all competitions (D1 L2) since Leo Beenhakeer in 1987 (D2 L2)

**6** Real Madrid have lost each of their six Clasicos at the Santiago Bernabeu in all competitions when Gareth Bale has featured

**It was not the performance of a happy team, of a team with great belief and self-esteem**

**JOSE MOURINHO, on Real Madrid's loss**

Rakitic drove forward, cleverly drew Ramos out of defence, and then passed to Sergi Roberto.

The midfielder then surged past the Madrid skipper, collected his teammate's precisely measured pass before chipping the ball coolly over Thibaut Courtois and into the net.

Ramos, clearly enraged at being so horribly exposed, decided to take his frustration out on Messi, throwing his hand into the forward's face just before the break.

Messi was irate and the pair squared up. Ramos, predictably, insisted the contact wasn't deliberate.

Just like his booking against Ajax in Amsterdam a couple of weeks ago.

And the two-footed lunge that put Levante's Nacho Rodriguez out of action for six months with ligament damage in 2010.

And the barge that led to Alvaro Vazquez suffering a near-identical injury in 2011.

We could go on... Ultimately, Ramos was only booked for a second-half body-check, predictably on Messi. As Gary Lineker quipped online, it was his first yellow of the season; it should have been his third!

By that stage, though, Messi had calmed down, with Ramos now a minor irritant, left powerless to prevent Real's title hopes of slipping away for another season.

Indeed, there was a disturbing air of inevitability about the defeat that will inevitably concern Santiago Solari, who is the first Blancos boss since Beenhakeer to win one of his first three Clasicos.

Barca, too, have now become the first side to win three consecutive games away games against Real Madrid in all competitions. The end result: La Liga is now theirs to lose.

The Catalans are 10 points clear of Atletico and while Diego Simeone's side have a game in hand, they still have to travel to Camp Nou in April.

"The Clasico Kings now look certain to retain their Liga crown too. Ramos' Real are mere pretender to the throne.



**We've entered a golden age of Test fast bowling, with runs per wicket at their lowest point this century**

## What 24 Hours in Cricket Tell Us About the Direction of the Sport?

Cricket's three formats have never been so thrillingly distinct — so why is the England cricket board hell-bent on inventing a fourth?

**Jonathan Liew**

One day, three games of cricket. At 9am local time on Wednesday, the West Indies win the toss and put England into bat in the fourth ODI at Grenada. It's a smart move. Since the last World Cup, everything else being equal, you're about 4 per cent more likely to win chasing a total than you are setting it.

At exactly the same moment, nine thousand miles away, Virat Kohli and Aaron Finch are shaking hands ahead of the second T20I between India and Australia.

Frequently, you see the 50-over and 20-over games bundled together in the guise of "white-ball cricket". But as the two matches progress, the increasing differences between them become apparent. The modern ODI

has an epic, gladiatorial quality to it: England pile up 418-6, with Jos Buttler striking 150 from 77 balls. It's an innings of levels and layers: a brisk but guarded start, an hour to get himself set, and then an astonishing outburst of sustained hitting towards the end. For bowlers and fielders, it's a test of stamina as much as skill: a four-hour examination of mettle and muscle.

The T20 game, meanwhile, has its own discrete and particular brand of jeopardy. From start to finish, the margins are paper-thin. Every ball is freighted with significance. Games can be won and lost in minutes. Defending a strong total of 190, India look well set. But then Glenn Maxwell snatches the game single-handedly, taking 12 off the 113 over and 18 off the 18th, finishing on 113 not out and seeing them home with two balls to spare. India have gone from being favourites to being beaten, in rough

ly the time it takes to fry a steak.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, a Test match is breaking out. It's 17 time zones from the sun-drenched islands of the Caribbean to the green pastures of New Zealand, where the first Test is about to begin in Hamilton. Kane Williamson has no hesitation in bowling first on winning the toss, and this too is a smart decision, albeit for different reasons. If short-form cricket has been tilted in favour of batsmen and big hits, in Test cricket, for the time being at least, bowlers reign supreme.

Quietly, we've entered a golden age of Test fast bowling, with runs per wicket at their lowest point this century, and world-class opening batsmen notable only by their rarity. The widening gulf between five-day and one-day cricket has seen a minor resurgence of the classic skills for which the shorter formats have little or no time. Slip catching. Swing and reverse swing. Long spells of spin bowling with fielders around the bat. After a fine start, Bangladesh collapse to 234 all out shortly after tea, and grimly



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steel themselves for two long days in the field.

Three games of international cricket, in three different continents, each with their own unique rhythms and maxims, their own specialists and skillsets, their own particular context and feel. Never before in the history of the game have its three formats felt quite so distinct from each other. An innings of 70 off 70 balls will swing the momentum in a Test match, lay a solid platform in an ODI, and lose you a game of T20. A wide yorker is a crucial part of a bowler's armoury in the scale of things. For the whole point of The Hundred is not to create a new sporting product, but to repackage and force-feed us an existing one.

It takes a certain turkey-headed stupidity to look at the remarkable success of T20 — not only the most lucrative format in the history of cricket but also the lifeblood of the evening grassroots game — and think: "Nah, not for us". But this is where the ECB currently has us: a marketing wheeze, a cynical rebranding exercise, cricket in clown shoes and a blue wig and presented by John Bishop. Its success would euthanise the domestic game and its failure would impoverish it.

Often the debate over The Hundred is portrayed as one of modernisers versus traditionalists. But this has always been a dishonest framing. As events from Grenada to Bangalore to Hamilton have proven, the ECB's new format displays a disdain not just for cricket's past, but its present and future as well. And quite sensibly, the rest of the world seems to have concluded that it rather likes what it already has.

will not be radically different from T20 in any sporting sense. A pars score may well be 160 rather than 200, and the shift from six-ball over to ten-ball ends will introduce certain tactical subtleties, but these are fairly minor distinctions in the scale of things. For the whole point of The Hundred is not to create a new sporting product, but to repackage and force-feed us an existing one.

At which point: enter the England and Wales Cricket Board, who for some reason have decided that a fourth format is necessary. It's important to note that for all its bells and whistles, The Hundred