

Gill gets the nod; Rohit to open in Rahul's place

It is unfortunate that some of these players have gone out of the side purely on form: Prasad

INDIA SQUAD

UTHRA GANESAN
NEW DELHI

Shubman Gill got his long-awaited Test call-up and K.L. Rahul was asked to get back among the runs as the BCCI named its 15-member Test squad for the upcoming three-match series against South Africa here on Thursday.

The selectors also decided to try Rohit Sharma as opener in the longer format, a slot that has seen quite a few claimants being tested and falling short in the last couple of years. Rohit will be also leading the Board President's side in the warm-up game ahead of the series.

"Rohit has been opening in white ball cricket for more than a decade now and we all think he has the ability to bat up the order. He was keen and we also want to give him some opportunities to bat up the order in Tests and see where he stands."

Big boost

"If he can do that in red ball also nothing like that, and since we have a lot of Tests coming up, it will be a boost to the side," chief selector M.S.K. Prasad said.

Rohit's inclusion comes at the cost of Rahul, who has



Hard work pays: Shubman Gill has been in good nick and has been rewarded with a place in the Test squad. •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

his task cut out, but Prasad was clear that the change was not merely for experimentation. "It is unfortunate that some of these guys (Shikhar Dhawan, M. Vijay) have gone out of the side purely on form."

"Everyone was given a fair run, so was KL. He is an exceptional talent, but unfortunately his form has dipped. With seniors like Shikhar also not there you cannot change

both the openers in the side constantly and that helped him get more opportunities. But Rahul was delivering only in patches, not consistently," Prasad clarified.

Prasad was also hopeful of Gill proving himself. "He has done well, both as an opener and in the middle-order, so he can be a backup for both slots. But as he keeps playing, he will get more opportunities because he is a

player for all three formats," Prasad added.

Pressure on Pant

While the likes of Umesh Yadav and Hardik Pandya found themselves out of the side purely because of the team's requirements at home — with only two seamers likely to play — it may not be easy for Rishabh Pant to retain his place. While refusing to comment on who would be the

first choice wicketkeeper in the series, Prasad put the onus on the team management.

"Rishabh is definitely (main) to begin with but let's leave it to how the team management thinks. We need a 'keeper with some more skills while playing at home,'" was all he said, indicating that the youngster needed to work a lot more on his game.

Asked about the road

India squad for South Africa Test series

Virat Kohli (Capt.), Mayank Agarwal, Rohit Sharma, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Hanuma Vihari, Rishabh Pant (wk), Wriddhiman Saha (wk), R. Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohammed Shami, Jasprit Bumrah, Ishant Sharma, and Shubman Gill

The dates

Oct. 2 to 6, Visakhapatnam

Oct. 10 to 14, Pune

Oct. 19 to 23, Ranchi

ALL MATCHES START AT 9.30 A.M.

ahead for the likes of Vijay or Rahul, Prasad was categorical. "When V.V.S. Laxman was dropped, he went back to domestic cricket, got 1400 runs, returned to the side and never looked back. That's it." The first Test will be played at Visakhapatnam from October 2.

Board President's XI squad against South Africa XI (Sept. 26-28): Rohit Sharma (Capt.), Mayank Agarwal, Priyank Panchal, Abhimanyu Easwaran, Karun Nair, Siddhesh Lad, K.S. Bharat (wk), Jalaj Saxena, Dharmendrasinh Jadeja, Avesh Khan, Ishan Porel, Shardul Thakur and Umesh Yadav.

A belated birthday gift

Getting into the Test squad is a big thing for any youngster, says Gill

M.R. PRAVEEN CHANDRAN
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

For Shubman Gill, the biggest and most valuable birthday gift came after four days — the call-up to the Indian Test squad for the series against South Africa.

The 20-year-old Punjab batsman celebrated his birthday on the eve of his Test debut against the visiting South Africa-A, on Sept. 8.

Dream debut

Gill had a dream debut as captain, leading India-A to a seven-wicket win against South Africa-A. But even after the victory, the youngster had looked a tad disappointed for having missed out on a century. It is now a thing of the past as he has broken into the Test squad for the first time.

"Getting selected for the Test squad is a big thing for any youngster like me. I am excited. I wouldn't say I wasn't expecting it. But these are things you don't want to bother about when you are playing. Honestly, I was focused on what I was doing on the cricket field," he said.

The India-A captaincy was a big honour for me. I have been learning all the time. This has been a new experience for me. I should thank the selectors for having faith in me

SHUBMAN GILL

he said.

"The India-A captaincy was a big honour for me. I have been learning all the time. This has been a new experience for me. I should thank the selectors for having faith in me," he added.

India-A coach Sitanshu Kotak wasn't surprised by Gill's selection. "The selectors had something in their mind when they made him the captain of the 'A' side. "He did a good job and showed maturity as captain. I would be lying if I say I am surprised at his selection. "He has been scoring runs in all forms of the game, so he deserves it," the former Saurashtra batsman said.

All this talk about Dhoni retiring has no basis, says M.S.K. Prasad

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

It all started with an innocuous tweet from Virat Kohli, and soon blew up into yet another round of speculation about whether M.S. Dhoni had decided to call it a day. It took a categorical dismissal from the Indian selectors to be put to rest.

"A game I can never forget. Special night. This man, made me run like in a fitness test" Kohli tweeted, tagging Dhoni in a photograph. It was a throwback to a World T20 game against Australia in Mohali in 2016 when Kohli and Dhoni shared an unbeaten 67-run stand for the fifth wicket. But it ended up creating a virtual buzz around whether Dhoni had informed the Indian skipper about his future plans.

"This was as much news to us as anyone else. We opened our phones and suddenly we saw all this talk about Dhoni retiring, which has no basis."

Where did it start?

"Even we are keen to know where it all started in the first place," said chief selector M.S.K. Prasad. "We were wondering how it happened because as far as we know, nothing of this sort has taken place," Prasad added.

Speculation about Dhoni's future has been rife ever



The picture of many words: Kohli's throwback to the game against Australia in which he shared an unbeaten 67-run stand for the fifth wicket with Dhoni triggered an 'avalanche'. •KOHLI/TWITTER

'It's called rumours!' Dhoni's wife Sakshi's tweet in an apparent reference to the development

since the team bowed out of the 50-over World Cup in England in July. He quit Tests in 2014. The selectors and BCCI had been bombarded with similar queries after Dhoni made himself unavailable for the West Indies series.

Dhoni, however, had already made it clear that he would not be available for the Caribbean tour and South Africa series at home — he had joined the Indian Army for a training stint.

Dhoni has nothing left to achieve: Anand

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOLKATA

Viswanathan Anand says it is totally M.S. Dhoni's prerogative to take a call on his retirement and the former captain can go out a contented man after having achieved everything in his career.

"He (Dhoni) knows what's the right decision for him. But I think nothing is left behind or on the table for him," Anand told PTI. "He has a phenomenal

fan following. He had achieved everything which he had set out to achieve. He has won India two World Cups (2007 World T20 and 2011 ODI World Cup) as captain. He has been a great captain. No one can decide (when to quit) better than him.

"He is obviously in the best position to know what he wants to do... He has had a remarkable career," the five-time world champion said.

Seven-wicket victory for India-A

SA-A IN INDIA

M.R. PRAVEEN CHANDRAN
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Shivam Dube strode up to the wicket and struck two consecutive sixes off Dane Piedt to signal India-A's seven-wicket win over South Africa-A in the first unofficial Test here on Thursday.

Needing 48 to lead the two Test series, India-A achieved the target in 9.4 overs, losing three wickets.

But before Dube hit the winning runs, South Africa-A made the hosts earn their runs. Captain Shubman Gill (10) began with an elegant cover drive. He was unfortunate as the rival bowlers appear to have reserved their best deliveries for him.

Ngidi's impressive spell

Gill was bowled by a peach from Lungi Ngidi. The ball swung in late and eluded the opener's defensive blade to disturb the timber. The big South African bowled an impressive spell and had Ankeet Bawane (6) edging to Senuran Muthuswamy at third slip.

Ricky Bhui, who was promoted as opener for Rituraj Gaikwad (ill), was defiant at the other end.

K.S. Bharat (5) top-edged a sweep off Piedt and was caught by Wiaan Mulder running back at short fine-leg. Shivam Dube then walked in and thwacked two sixes to end the struggle.



Player of the match: Jalaj Saxena scored an unbeaten 61 in the first innings and picked up two wickets in South Africa-A's second essay. •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Earlier, the South African innings lasted just 3.5 overs. Shardul Thakur cleaned up Lutho Sipamla (8) as the visitors were all out for 186.

The scores

South Africa-A – 1st innings: 164.

India-A – 1st innings: 303.

South Africa-A – 2nd innings: Pieter Malan b Siraj 4, Aiden Markram c Bharat b Shardul 4, Zubayr Hamza c Bhui b Gowtham 44, Khaya Zondo c Bharat b Nadeem 10, Senuran Muthuswamy lbw b Nadeem 4, Heinrich Klaasen c Shardul b Lalaj 48, Wiaan Mulder run out 46, Dane Piedt c Bharat b Lalaj 1, Marco Jansen c Gaikwad b Nadeem 0, Lutho Sipamla b Shardul 8, Lungi Ngidi (not out) 4; Extras (nb-2, w-1, b-8, lb-2):

13; Total (in 58.5 overs): 186. **Fall of wickets:** 1-4, 2-14, 3-38, 4-52, 5-94, 6-168, 7-169, 8-170, 9-178.

India-A bowling: Siraj 11-1-36-1, Shardul 8.5-2-32-2, Nadeem 16-4-21-3, Dube 4-0-14-0, Gowtham 11-1-52-1, Lalaj 8-2-22-2.

India-A – 2nd innings: Shubman Gill b Ngidi 5, Ricky Bhui (not out) 30, Ankeet Bawane c Muthuswamy b Ngidi 6, K.S. Bharat c Mulder b Piedt 5, Shivam Dube (not out) 12; Extras (b-1): 1; Total (for three wks. in 9.4 overs): 49.

Fall of wickets: 1-10, 2-24, 3-37.

South Africa-A bowling: Ngidi 5-1-22-2, Piedt 4.4-0-26-1.

MoM: Jalaj Saxena. *India-A won by seven wickets to lead two-match series 1-0.*

'Will tap Miller, de Kock's IPL experience'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DHARAMSHALA

Vice-captain Rassie van der Dussen, on Wednesday, said that a new-look South African team will be relying a lot on IPL regulars Quinton de Kock and David Miller to put up a competitive performance against formidable India in the T20I series beginning here on Sunday.

De Kock will captain the team in the absence of Faf du Plessis, who will be in India for the Test series. Van der Dussen, who impressed in the 50-over World Cup in an otherwise forgettable tournament for the Proteas, has been elevated as vice-captain less than a year after he made his debut.

"Quinton and David have played a lot of cricket in India. We will look to feed off them and ask them a lot of questions about the conditions, the kind of bowlers we would be facing so we can quickly adapt against a strong side like India," van der Dussen said.

"We have had two tough training sessions since we came here and two more are coming up. It has been pretty hot and humid, pretty much like Durban. It's definitely an advantage that we came a week before the first game."

England's batting frailties exposed again

Root's chancy fifty, Marsh's four-for and Buttler's counter-attack highlight opening day

THE ASHES

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

Jos Buttler saved England's blushes on Thursday, counter-attacking against Australia to lift his side to 271 for eight after it collapsed on the opening day of the fifth and final Ashes Test.

The host, desperate to level the series at 2-2, struggled to find consistency and contributed to its own downfall at the Oval, slipping from 170 for three to 226 for eight.

But Buttler, who struggled early on, dipped into his white-ball playbook, smashing paceman Josh Hazlewood for successive sixes as Jack Leach dug in at the other end.

Australian all-rounder Mitchell Marsh claimed four wickets on his return to the side while Pat Cummins and Hazlewood were again impressive for the tourists.

After Australia captain



Making it count: Joe Root made the most of Australia's sloppy catching. •GETTY IMAGES

Tim Paine put the home side in under grey skies, his counterpart Joe Root enjoyed astonishing good fortune as England reached 170 for three.

The skipper was dropped three times but failed to

make the most of his lucky escapes, comprehensively bowled for 57 by Cummins shortly after tea. Root has reached fifty 61 times in Tests but has gone on to reach three figures on just 16 occasions.

Joe joins 7,000-run club

Root crossed 7,000 Test runs in his 158th innings, becoming the 12th England batsman to reach the milestone. Only three of them — Hammond (131), Pietersen (150) and Cook (151) — have taken fewer innings to achieve the feat

Root's tally stands at 7,022 after the first innings of the fifth Test

Cook leads the country's charts with 12,472 runs, followed by Gooch (8,900)

Youngest to 7000 Test runs

27y, 346d: Cook

28y, 193d: Tendulkar

28y, 256d: Root

SCOREBOARD

England – 1st innings: Rory Burns c Marsh b Hazlewood 47, Joe Denley c Smith b Cummins 14, Joe Root b Cummins 57, Ben Stokes c Lyon b Marsh 20, Jonny Bairstow lbw b Marsh 22, Jos Buttler (batting) 64, Sam Curran c Smith b Marsh 15, Chris Woakes lbw b Marsh 2, Jofra Archer c Paine b Hazlewood 9, Jack Leach (batting) 10; Extras (nb-2, b-3, lb-6): 11; Total (for eight wks. in 82 overs): 271.

Fall of wickets: 1-27, 2-103, 3-130, 4-170, 5-176, 6-199, 7-205, 8-226.

Australia bowling: Cummins 22.5-5-73-2, Hazlewood 21-7-76-2, Siddle 17-1-61-0, Marsh 16.1-4-35-4, Lyon 4-0-12-0, Labuschagne 1-0-5-0.

Toss: Australia.

hooked Cummins for six but was dismissed for just 15.

Earlier, opener Rory Burns (47) and Ben Stokes (20) were guilty of throwing their wickets away with careless shots as England's top order struggled again.

CHESS WC

SPORTS BUREAU
KHANTY MANSIYSK (RUSSIA)

Aravindh Chithambaram scored a memorable 4.5-3.5 win over the highly experienced British Grandmaster Michael Adams to join four other Indians in the second round of the World Cup chess championship here on Thursday.

After Surya Shekhar Ganguly, Abhijeet Gupta, S.P. Sethuraman and S.L. Narayanan failed to advance, Aravindh broke the sequence of five drawn games in the tie-break to win the sixth, over reduced time control, by clinching a king-pawn ending in 69 moves.

The format

As per the format, to break the tie, two games with a time control of 25 minutes, with a 10-second increment per move, are scheduled. Should the tie persist, two more games with a time control of 10 minutes, with a 10-



Aravindh Chithambaram.

FILE PHOTO

second increment are played.

In case the scores remain equal, two games with a time control of five minutes are played, with a three-second increment per move. If the deadlock remains, an Armageddon game will be resorted to. Here, the player with white pieces gets five minutes on the clock and black four minutes, with a two-second increment per move from move 61.

The player with white pieces needs to win to advance while a draw is enough for the player with black.

The results (first round, after tie-break games): Vladimir Fedoseev (Rus) bt Surya Shekhar Ganguly 4-2 (the first two games rapid games were drawn and Fedoseev won the next two); David Anton Guijarro (Esp) bt S.L. Narayanan 2.5-1.5 (the first rapid game was drawn, Guijarro won the second); Amir Nabaty (Isr) bt S.P. Sethuraman 3-1 (Nabaty won both rapid games); Aravindh Chithambaram bt Michael Adams (Eng) 4.5-3.5 (the first five tie-break games were drawn before Aravindh won the sixth); Anton Korobov (Ukr) bt Abhijeet Gupta 4-2 (Abhijeet won the first and Korobov the next three).

Second round pairings (involving Indians): P. Hari Krishna v Vladimir Fedoseev (Rus); Vidit Gujrathi v Aleksandr Rakhmanov (Rus); B. Adhiban v Yu Yangyi (Chn); Nihal Sarin v Eltaj Safarli (Aze); Aravindh Chithambaram v Evgeny Tomashevsky (Rus).