

Ragged Proteas will look for WTC points

The senior players are trying to keep the guys motivated, says Elgar

SA IN INDIA

SHREEDUTTA CHIDANANDA RANCHI

There wasn't a great deal of resistance from South Africa's top order in Pune. It cannot have been easy in the first innings, to field for nearly two full days in the Indian sun, watch the runs pile up interminably, and then face down a hungry bowling attack as it tore in.

By the third afternoon, it was clear that the match – and the series – was only headed one way. It can be dispiriting for touring sides when things unravel at that pace. The muscles are sore, tempers are fraying, and it can seem that there is nothing left to play for.

Unenviable position

At 2-0 down in the series, against this rampaging Indian team, South Africa is in an unenviable position ahead of Saturday's third Test at the JSCA Stadium here.

"We're trying to keep positive," said Dean Elgar, after the travelling party had arrived in this eastern, industrial town. "It's immense [to stay positive], especially in the subcontinent. It's a challenging tour. You get stretched as a person, you



Raring to go: Ajinkya Rahane and Ishant Sharma wait for their turn at India's optional training session on Thursday. ■ RAJEEV BHATT

get stretched as a cricketer. You get to know yourself quite a lot as a person when you come to the smaller places where the hotels are maybe not as good and you get challenged on the field. It's always a good learning curve coming to India. It's the one place I find that they're very streetwise and

clever with the touring teams. They push your boundaries and they test you."

Not despondent

Despite the state of the series, the South African camp was in no way despondent, the opener insisted. "The senior players are trying to keep the guys motivated.

We're still representing our country, which is an immensely proud moment for every player. It has been a challenging few weeks but it's not doom and gloom for us. We're still pretty upbeat. The morale in the camp is pretty good. We still have one game. We can actually change quite a lot within the

ranks of South African cricket. We're still pretty hopeful and pretty positive going into our last Test," he said.

The series may have been decided, but there are still 40 ICC World Test Championship points to play for in the third Test. This lent the game context, felt Elgar. "Back in the day, this was always a bit of a dead-rubber, but now, with the World Test Championship, we still have points to play for," he said.

Cannot neglect

"We can still get 40 points by following our process against India. That's something we can't neglect.

"We could have had that 'one foot on the plane' syndrome, which would've happened in the past, but hopefully it doesn't happen in this Test."

Elgar spearheaded South Africa's fightback in the first Test with a doughty 160, but he has since been dismissed for scores of 2, 6 and 48.

"We neglected our pointers while batting in the second Test," he said. "It's not acceptable, not having guys stretch our innings like we did in the first Test. Hopefully we can go back to the basics of the game and put up a good performance."

It will take much doing.

Markram out with self-inflicted injury

Punched an object in frustration after getting out in second Test

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT RANCHI

Aiden Markram has been ruled out of the third Test after injuring his wrist while punching an object in frustration during the second match in Pune.

The South African opener hurt himself after lashing out following his dismissal in the second innings, when he was adjudged lbw for nought. Replays showed that the ball would have missed the stumps but Markram chose not to review the decision.

"In a moment of frustration with his own performance, he lashed out at a solid object, resulting in his injury," a Cricket South Africa release stated, without specifying what that object was.

Wrist bone fracture

The South Africa team doctor, Hashendra Ramjee added that Markram had suffered a fracture involving the wrist bones. The 25-year-old batsman left for home on Thursday morning, with South Africa choosing not to name any replacement.

A contrite Markram said:



Aiden Markram. ■ FILE PHOTO: K.R. DEEPAK

"It's sad to be going home on this note and I completely understand what wrong I've done and take full accountability for it. It's unacceptable and to let the team down is what hurts me the most. We understand in sport that emotions run high and sometimes the frustration gets the better of you as it did for me, but like I said, it's no excuse. I've taken full responsibility for it, I have apologised to the team and hopefully I can make it up to them and the people of South Africa soon."

Markram endured a miserable tour, making scores of 5 and 39 in Visakhapatnam before bagging a pair in Pune.

'It's rebuilding time for South Africa'

Amla says he has no plans to come out of retirement

V.S. ARAVIND ABU DHABI

The Proteas are fast sinking in India, but the team has found backing in South African batting great Hashim Amla.

"It's time for rebuilding of the South African team," said Amla during the Abu Dhabi T10 League draft.

When asked if he would reconsider his decision and come out of retirement, given the fact that he is still fit and actively participating in professional cricket, Amla said: "No, I don't think I will do that.

"As I said earlier, I have enjoyed my journey with the South African team and I am really happy with my decision. It's time for youngsters.

"A few of us who have played for almost 10 years have walked away from the international scene. So it was always going to happen that the team will take time to rebuild.

Transitional phase

"If you look back, all teams go through a transitional phase and we are going through that," said Amla, who remains the only South



Hashim Amla. ■ FILE PHOTO

African cricketer to score a triple century in Test cricket.

While the South African bowling has been toothless, the performance of the batting group has been equally concerning.

"Given the backing and support and confidence of the current players the team will find its feet again and be a quality team. As it is they are," Amla said, reassuring South African fans that a fightback is round the corner.

Youngsters need time

Amla, however, believes that

The lovely thing about T10 is that you cannot afford to leave a ball outside off-stump. You have to hit every ball

the youngsters should be given time.

"International experience is such a thing that you can only get that type of knowledge after two or three years. You've got to afford those players the time," said the South African who scored more than 18,000 runs across formats with 55 centuries in 349 matches.

Wednesday night saw a constellation of cricketing stars descending here for the players draft and Karnataka Tuskers roped in Amla as its icon player.

"I grew up watching all the legends present here. The lovely thing about T10 is that you cannot afford to leave a ball outside off-stump. You have to hit every ball. It is mind-boggling to have a 90-minute match," Amla said.

(The writer is in Abu Dhabi at the invitation of the Abu Dhabi T10 League)

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

Welcoming the introduction of the World Test Championship (WTC), Brian Lara, the legendary batsman, has stressed the WTC should have started much earlier.

"Yes I think (it should have started earlier). For someone, who has played for 16-17 years and over 100 Tests, you felt that it became monotonous, you just keep travelling and cracking up the numbers, you win or lose a series, it mattered," said Lara, who at the time of his retirement in 2006 was the highest run-getter in Test cricket.

"In terms of Test Championship, where there is an end, it culminates into a team becoming champion, that is something that should have happened a long time ago and happy to see it now.

More excitement

"Even if you play against Afghanistan and Bangladesh, it means something and I feel it will create more excitement with spectators knowing that this is not another series and leads to something.

"Credit must be given to ICC for introducing this. This



Legends: Jonty Rhodes, Virender Sehwag, Tillakaratne Dilshan, Sachin Tendulkar, Brian Lara and Brett Lee during the Road Safety World Series launch on Thursday. ■ EMANUAL YOGINI

was important, but a little late."

After a prolonged delay, the first cycle of the WTC finally got underway.

Although the format is convoluted, along with the points system, the introduction of a competition to adjudicate the World Test champion has been welcomed by virtually every stakeholder.

Lara was speaking at the launch of Road Safety World Series – a veterans' T20 league that will see five international teams vie for honours in Mumbai and Pune

next February. Lara will lead the Caribbean team.

Sri Lanka's Tillakaratne Dilshan stressed on the need to stick to the traditional format of Test cricket.

"I don't think you should play day-night Tests.

"Test cricket should be played only in daylight and in full whites, without numbers on the back. That's a personal view.

"We should keep it simple. It's the main format. I feel Test cricket should be played in the traditional way, just like a gentleman's

game," Dilshan said.

Sachin Tendulkar, who will double up as the RSWS and India captain, expressed confidence that Sourav Ganguly, the BCCI president-elect, will work in his new avatar as passionately as his playing days.

"The way he (Sourav) has played his cricket, the way he has served the nation, I have no doubt that he will serve the nation in the same manner, with the same passion and same focus. That is what I know of him," said Tendulkar.

Nikhat writes to Rijiju, seeks a trial

Y.B. SARANGI KOLKATA

Asian championships bronze medal-winning boxer Nikhat Zareen has written to the Union Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju seeking a trial in the women's 51kg category for the Asian Olympic qualifying event to be held in Wuhan, China, in February.

Nikhat, a former World junior champion, cited two instances to highlight her plea.

"On August 6 and 7, I was invited to a trial in Delhi for the selection (of boxers) for the World Championships. To my utter dismay, the trial was cancelled and Mary Kom was sent," Nikhat wrote in the letter.

"After this decision, the BFI announced that the gold and silver medallists from the World Championships will be exempted from Olympic (qualifier) trials. Today, I have been reliably informed that the rule is now being changed to accommodate my senior, Mary Kom, without trial."

Right now the old rule stays. We will take a decision in about 10 days.

— R.K. SACHETI
BFI executive director



The fight is on: Nikhat Zareen cited two instances to highlight her plea for a bout.

■ RITU RAJ KONWAR

On the first instance, following a request from Mary Kom, the BFI had decided to exempt the legendary boxer owing to her consistent performance in international events. Lovlina Borgohain (69kg), too, got an exemption.

In the latest episode, BFI president Ajay Singh reportedly said that, like men, all women World Championships medallists would get a direct entry to the Olympic qualifier.

However, the federation

rule allowed the special concession only to gold and silver winners.

The medal winners

Two Indians – Mary Kom (51kg) and Lovlina (69kg) – bagged the bronze medals in Olympic weights, while two others – Manju Rani (48kg) and Jamuna Boro (54kg) – secured a silver and a bronze in non-Olympic weights in the recently concluded World Championships in Ulan-Ude, Russia.

Nikhat, 23, a self-pro-

claimed Mary Kom fan, underlined the importance of fair play. "Even the Olympic gold medallists have to fight again to qualify and represent the country," said Nikhat, who received support from different sportspersons on social media.

BFI executive director R.K. Sacheti said a decision would be taken after the return of the BFI president from the United States. "Right now the old rule stays. We will take a decision in about 10 days," said Sacheti.

Praggnanandhaa's potential to the fore

Ends Batsuren's resistance in 44 moves to join two others at the top

WORLD JR. CHESS

RAKESH RAO NEW DELHI

R. Praggnanandhaa never ceases to surprise. The ease with which the 14-year-old sacrifices his rooks for bishops, like he did during his wins in the second and fourth rounds of the World junior chess championship, underline his deep reading of the given positions.

Finishing touches

After being shockingly held by England's Ravi Haria in the morning round, Praggnanandhaa unleashed a rare twin rook-sacrifice before putting the finishing touches with his queen and bishop-pair to end Mongolian Dambasuren Batsuren's resistance in 44 moves.

With seven of the top eight boards ending in draws, Praggnanandhaa joined Ukraine's Evgeny Shtembuliak and Spain's Ruiz Miguel Santos in the lead at 3.5 points from four rounds.

Walkover

In fact, the double-round day saw the stronger players

recover in varying degrees from the setbacks of the last two days.

There was also an unusual 'walkover' from 11th seed Iranian Aaryan Gholami when pitted against Israel's Alexander Zlatin in the fourth round.

Since there have been many occasions in chess a contest between players of these two countries have remained non-starters, Gholami took nothing to chance and even produced a medical certificate to prove his 'indisposition'.

Among the girls, Arpita Mukherjee blew away a golden chance to win and take

the lead against N. Priyanka but settled for a draw.

Important results: Open:

Fourth round: Ruiz Miguel Santos (Esp, 3.5) drew with Evgeny Shtembuliak (Ukr, 3.5); Semen Khanin (Rus, 3) drew with M. Karthikeyan (3); Shant Sargsyan (Arm, 3) drew with Ravi Haria (Eng, 2); R. Praggnanandhaa (3.5) bt Dambasuren Batsuren (Mgl, 2.5). P. Iniyen (3) drew with Zhandos Agmanov (Kaz, 3); Dmitriy Kollars (Ger, 2.5) drew with Sammed Shete (2.5); Aronyak Ghosh (2.5) drew with Harsha Bharathakoti (2.5).

Third round: Haria (2.5) drew with Praggnanandhaa (2.5); M. Karthikeyan (2.5) bt Aaryan Varshney (2); R.K. Srihari (2) drew with Kollars (2); Vid Do-

Lara praises India's pace attack

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

With India's pacers continuing their good work against England, Australia and West Indies even in the not-so-friendly conditions at home, Lara reiterated that the attack reminds him of the Caribbean quartet of the 1970s and 80s.

"Unbelievable!

Jasprit Bumrah – who isn't playing now – I saw him in the West Indies and I don't know where it is coming from. I must say, what I was accustomed to in the past – in the 1990s – this is pretty special and exceptional. When you look at the quality – Shami, Bumrah, Umesh – it is unbelievable," he said.

"Then there are guys who are on the sidelines. It reminds me a little bit of what the West Indies had. The reserve strength is very important to ascertain a team's ability. India's reserve strength is very good.

"Bhuvn and all these guys are sitting on the sidelines, that means your attack has quality."

Sindhu and Sameer knocked out

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ODENSE

India's P.V. Sindhu was knocked out of the Denmark Open badminton after a straight-game loss to An Se Young of Korea in the second round here on Thursday. Young won 21-14, 21-17 in a 40-minute clash of the BWF World Tour Super 750 event.

In the men's section, Sameer Verma and the doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty also went down in the second round. Olympic champion Chen Long of China put it across Sameer 21-12, 21-10 while Satwiksairaj and Chirag suffered a 21-16, 21-15 defeat at the hands of sixth seeds Han Cheng Kai and Zhou Hao Dong of China.

Kento Momota of Japan beat B. Sai Praneeth 21-6, 21-14 while fourth seeds Chan Peng Soon and Goh Liu Ying of Malaysia downed Pranaav Jerry Chopra and N. Sikki Reddy 26-24, 13-21, 21-11 in men's doubles.



Calm and collected: Praggnanandhaa unleashed a rare twin rook-sacrifice to leave Batsuren stunned. ■ COURTESY CHESSBASE INDIA