

# Ruthlessly superior India holds all the aces

Battered South Africa wondering how to turn things around and redeem some pride

## SA IN INDIA

SHREEDUTTA CHIDANANDA RANCHI

It will perhaps be truly appreciated only with the passage of time, but India's home record is something of a marvel. Since the start of 2013, on its own patch, the team has won 25 Test matches and lost only one: that is a win-loss ratio of 25, a figure that makes a mockery of the very idea of a win-loss ratio. The next best home record, over the same period, has been New Zealand's: 17 wins to three defeats.

With the result in Pune, India made it a record 11 straight series victories on home soil: another reminder, if it were required, that this was the hardest place in the world for a touring side.

Unlike South Africa's previous visit to this country, when only one of the four Tests went beyond the third day (the second Test was washed out), there can be no complaint about the nature of the pitches this time. India's demolition of the opposition, on fairly anodyne surfaces, has ensured there can be no explanation for the result but India's ruthless superiority. Virat Kohli's men are ranked No. 1 for a reason.

### No mood to relent

India will be in no mood to ease up when the third and final Test begins at the appealingly-designed JSCA Stadium, with its airy, canopied stands and grass banks, here on Saturday.



Relentless: The Indian batsmen are in no mood to relax ahead of the final Test. ■ RAJEEV BHATT

After his side had taken an unassailable 2-0 lead in Pune, Kohli insisted there would be no taking his foot off the gas with World Test Championship points on offer. It is not as if India would have treated this third Test like a Diwali vacation otherwise, but one thing the ICC's new competition has succeeded in doing is to imbue dead rubbers with greater meaning. Forty more points will take India's tally to 240 on the WTC table, stretching what is already a formidable lead.

South Africa will wonder how it might turn things around. Its pace bowlers, who would ordinarily be considered their side's strength, have endured a torrid tour. Kagiso Rabada aver-

ages 50 over the two Tests, and Vernon Philander 77.5. They have been thoroughly outperformed by Mohammed Shami (20) and Umesh Yadav (9.83) in the same conditions.

South Africa's batsmen, who showed a willingness to fight in Visakhapatnam, disappointed in Pune. If not for lower-order resistance from Keshav Maharaj, who is now ruled out of the series with an injury, and Philander, things would have been worse. Aiden Markram has flown home after fracturing his wrist, leaving his side looking for another opener now.

### Contrasting picture

India's batsmen, in contrast, have all been among the

runs. Mayank Agarwal, only four Tests old at the start of this series, has battled with an extraordinary assurance. Kohli looked unstoppable in Pune. Rohit Sharma scored hundreds in both innings of the first Test.

The JSCA Stadium – to get to which the team buses have to drive past open fields, where buffalo graze and a weekly market does brisk business – has hosted one Test match before: an engrossing game two years ago, when Australia battled to a draw on the final day.

India perhaps felt the pitch did not break up enough on that occasion; things might be different this time, with the playing surface a dark brown on match-

## Nadeem for Kuldeep

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT RANCHI

Shahbaz Nadeem will replace Kuldeep Yadav in the India squad for the third and final Test against South Africa in Ranchi starting on Saturday.

The decision to add Nadeem was made on Friday after Kuldeep complained of pain on the left shoulder.

Nadeem, who hails from Jharkhand, has been a prolific performer on the domestic cricket, and has been a regular with the India-A squads too.

said; spin and reverse swing, he felt, would be factors in the game. India will not be complaining.

### The teams (from):

**India:** Virat Kohli (Capt.), Ajinkya Rahane, Mayank Agarwal, R. Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Mohammed Shami, Cheteshwar Pujara, Rishabh Pant, Wriddhiman Saha, Ishant Sharma, Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, Hanuma Vihari, Umesh Yadav, Shahbaz Nadeem, and Kuldeep Yadav.

**South Africa:** Faf du Plessis (Capt.), Temba Bavuma, Theunis de Bruyn, Quinton de Kock, Dean Elgar, Heinrich Klaasen, George Linde, Senuran Muthusamy, Lungi Ngidi, Anrich Nortje, Vernon Philander, Dane Piedt, Kagiso Rabada, and Zubayr Hamza.

**Umpires:** Richard Illingworth, Nigel Llong (both on-field), and Chris Gaffaney (TV). **Referee:** Richie Richardson.

# Pant and I share a good rapport: Saha

‘We talk to Sridhar on how to keep on different wickets’

SHREEDUTTA CHIDANANDA RANCHI

After a spectacular performance behind the stumps in the first two Tests, Wriddhiman Saha has quickly banished all doubts about who India's best wicketkeeper is.

Virat Kohli labelled him the world's best while Umesh Yadav, who watched Saha grab two stunning catches off his bowling, felt the 'keeper deserved to be credited with those wickets.

Before the start of this series, it may have seemed that Rishabh Pant was India's first-choice wicketkeeper; now, there is little doubt about Saha's status as the No. 1 in home conditions.

### Strange rumblings

But there still linger strange rumblings about Saha's batting, as if it were a weakness. The Bengal gloveman may not possess Pant's range of shots, or his explosive power, but he is no bunny.

For evidence, Saha may point to his performance in India's last Test at the JSCA Stadium. The home side was 328 for six in the first innings, in reply to Australia's 451, when out walked Saha. He scored a resolute 117 as India eventually went past 600, putting it in the driver's seat. Had Australia not salvaged a draw, Saha's innings might have been recalled more readily.

"I see every Test as an opportunity to contribute with



Wriddhiman Saha. ■ RAJEEV BHATT

the bat," he said here on Friday. "I remember how I approached that innings and made 117. I am always looking to contribute with the bat. I try to build a partnership and score a 50 or a hundred. Everyone tries. Sometimes it doesn't happen and it's natural."

Before the Visakhapatnam Test, Saha had not played for India for over a year and a half, with injury playing a part in his absence. "I was out of the national side for a while but good performances for Bengal and India-A put me back in the Indian team," he said. "My preparation process remained the same during this period and nothing has changed."

### Part of preparation

On Friday, as Kohli batted, Saha watched from behind the nets. It was part of his preparation, he revealed. "I was just trying to have a feel

of the bounce off the wicket," the 34-year-old said.

"It definitely helps. Wicket-keeping is tough, irrespective of the surface. Everybody thinks just because wicketkeepers wear gloves, we can catch all the balls. We prepare according to the nature of the wicket. I adjust to the variations and the bounce of both Ravindra Jadeja and R. Ashwin and keep accordingly."

The rivalry for the wicket-keeper's slot with Pant had not affected their relationship, Saha stated. "We discuss a lot," he said. "We both talk to fielding coach R. Sridhar on how to keep on different wickets. When I am sitting out, like it happened in the West Indies, I observe his wicketkeeping and give him feedback during the practice sessions. Our rapport is really good. He points out my mistakes whenever he observes them."

It is tough, it is tough when you're losing. We're very, very competitive people, so it does take a dent out of your confidence

We can't expect things just to happen. They won't happen, because India is a very powerful team

DU PLESSIS, South Africa skipper

## Ganguly can improve Indian cricket: Saha

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT RANCHI

Wriddhiman Saha has welcomed Sourav Ganguly's election as the president of the BCCI, believing that the former India captain's taking charge will help cricketers.

"With Dadi bagging the BCCI's top post, I hope all the talented cricketers in the country are benefited," said Saha, when asked a direct question about Ganguly's imminent coronation.

"Dadi was a successful player, representing India for a long time and also dominating as a captain. So he will understand the demands of the players and even what team India needs. So he can look into those aspects of Indian cricket that need improvement and he can bring in a change in those aspects."

## Rijiju responds to Nikhat's letter

Y.B. SARANGI KOLKATA

Union Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju on Friday responded to boxer Nikhat Zareen's plea for a trial for the Asian Olympic qualifier, saying he would convey her grievance to the Boxing Federation of India (BFI).

In reply to Nikhat's letter for 'fair play', Rijiju took to the Twitter to send the message, but with caution.

"I'll surely convey to Boxing Federation to take the best decision keeping in mind the best interest of the NATION, SPORTS & ATHLETES. Although, Minister should not be involved in the selection of the players by the Sports Federations which are autonomous as per OLYMPIC CHARTER," said Rijiju on twitter.

# ‘No Ranchi without Dhoni’

SHREEDUTTA CHIDANANDA RANCHI

It is difficult to escape M.S. Dhoni's presence in his hometown. On the road out of Birsa Munda Airport, he is on a mural on the wall, positioned next to the three ICC trophies he won as captain.

At the JSCA Stadium, his name is on the southern stand. And if you care to ask, on every street corner there is someone who claims to have played tennis-ball cricket with Ranchi's favourite son.

"Today, if people have heard of Ranchi, it is because of Mahi bhai," said Shwetabh Upadhyay, one of the several

local bowlers called to assist in India's nets session on Friday. "I have met him. He is completely down to earth. To us, he is Bhagwan (God). What else can I say?"

Dhoni's name also came up in Friday's pre-match press conference, although for entirely different reasons.

With Sourav Ganguly, the BCCI's president-elect, stating recently that he would discuss Dhoni's future with the selectors, Wriddhiman Saha was asked what he made of the matter. "It's Dhoni's personal choice," he said. "It's not for me to decide."



Strong connect: Talk of Dhoni's retirement stirs up emotions in Ranchi. ■ REUTERS

Talk of Dhoni's retirement quickly stirs up emotions in Ranchi. "We can't think of him quitting," said the former Bihar captain Adil Hussain, who also led a young Dhoni at Central Coal Limited in the Ranchi League.

"When people from here travel to different cities and say they are from Ranchi, the usual response is, 'Oh, you are from Dhoni's land.' There is no Ranchi without Dhoni. He still has a lot of cricket left in him."

Hussain's most recent meeting with Dhoni was in January last year, when the former's mother was ailing. "My house was crowded. Relatives and friends all came home just to meet him. But he spoke to everyone with so much humility. He sets an example on how a celebrity should behave," he said.

### Special guest

On Saturday, Dhoni is expected at the JSCA Stadium, for some part of the opening day's play in the third Test. It was also rumoured that he would host his India teammates at dinner sometime.

At a practice ground inside the stadium complex, Upadhyay expressed his anger at the speculation around Dhoni's future.

"Who are we to say to him when to retire?" he asked. "The experts who are saying he should go... how many trophies did they win for India?"

## Kiptanui wants to be king, not kingmaker

ANANT KAUR NEW DELHI

Fresh from helping Eliud Kipchoge become the first person to finish a marathon in under two hours, star pacemaker Eric Kiptanui will run in his first Airtel Delhi Half Marathon (ADHM).

Kiptanui started as a 1500m runner in 2016 but has now progressed to long-distance running.

"As I was preparing for ADHM, pacemaking excited me because I wanted to get back into rhythm. Kipchoge is a legend and doing it for him was special for me. He has been running for a long time," said Kiptanui.

He stepped in three times for Kipchoge in the marathon last week.

"In pacemaking, you are the one who is controlling



The showpiece: An array of overseas participants pose ahead of the Airtel Delhi Half Marathon. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

the race and there is a lot of pressure on you. The hard work I put in while training helps me in achieving my goals. I am planning to run in marathons next year," said the captain of the pacemakers group for Kipchoge in Austria.

About his future, he said, "I am progressing now to

marathon running. I want to be the king and not the kingmaker. I know someday the son of the king becomes the king. So when he (Kipchoge) goes I want to become the king. No man is limited."

The defending champions from Ethiopia, Andamlak Belihu and Tsehay Gemechu, are also back.

# All set for the ultimate battle

Dabang, Warriors armed with big-match experience



All set: Maninder Singh and B.C. Ramesh (coach) of Bengal Warriors with Krishnan Hooda (coach) and Vishal Mane of Dabang Delhi at the pre-final press conference. ■ VIJAY SONELJI

## PKL

NANDAKUMAR MARAR AHMEDABAD

Two first-timers come face to face in the ProKabaddi League Season-7 final. However, Dabang Delhi and Bengal Warriors come armed with a wealth of big-match experience in the face-off for the title.

Dabang defender Vishal Mane will be playing the fifth final of his pro career. Donning U Mumba colours in the first three seasons, the burly tackler tasted victory in Season-2, ended up on the losing side in seasons one and three and celebrated again in Season-4 with Patna Pirates.

Warriors defender Jeeva Kumar is playing his second final (three times with U Mumba and winning once), while teammates Sukesh

Hegde and K. Prapanjan are gearing up for their second final (Gujarat FortuneGiants in seasons five and six respectively).

"Patience is the most important quality," says Mane. "The team that waits for opportunities to score has won." Dabang is in secure hands, with him and captain Joginder Narwal to calm any nerves.

Hegde is more forthright: "I lost a final as captain in the Season-5 with Gujarat FortuneGiants, this is another chance to lift the title. If I cannot achieve that, might as well retire and make way for younger players."

"I was not among the players in demand at the auction, Bengal Warriors chose me at the last minute, otherwise my career was in trouble. I have to win the title for them," he added.

Amidst this hard-earned experienced heads is young Naveen Kumar (Dabang).

"My job is to see my team do well. And, if my team is winning, another Super 10 may happen," said Naveen, who has 21 Super 10s to his collection.

Team coach Kishan Hooda, asked about thoughts on final eve, said: "I cannot predict the outcome, but can promise a contest which will make fans happy."

Warriors coach B.C. Ramesh, who guided Bengaluru Bulls to the title last season, agreed that raiders and catchers in both camps were of the highest class. Errors will decide the result, he says.

Ace raider and Warriors first-choice captain Maninder Singh is awaiting medical advice to play Saturday night's final.

# Rupinder returns to the squad

UTHRA GANESAN NEW DELHI

Rupinder Pal Singh, who had an impressive tour of Europe, has been named in the 18-member squad for the Hockey Olympic Qualifiers.

The Indian men's and women's squads for the competition were announced on Friday. Birendra Lakra and Kothajit Singh from the 20-member side that toured Europe have been dropped.

"We have chosen a well balanced side with a number of flexible options. We now need to focus on strategies against Russia, and ensure we are at our best when we step onto the field on November 1 and 2," chief coach Graham Reid said.

Rupinder's inclusion takes the number of penalty-



In a happy place: India men's coach Graham Reid and captain Manpreet Singh at the team announcement. ■ BISWARANJAN ROUT

corner experts in the side to four, in addition to Varun Kumar, Harmanpreet Singh and Amit Rohidas. With the team's conversion rate taking a dip in recent times, the

team would be hoping Rupinder's experience comes in handy.

The women's squad, however, remains the same as the one that toured England

## Sarfraz sacked as Test, T20I skipper

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA KARACHI

Sarfraz Ahmed was on Friday sacked as Pakistan's Test and T20 captain with Azhar Ali and Babar Azam elevated to leadership roles for the upcoming tour of Australia.

In an official announcement on Friday, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said that experienced batsman Azhar Ali would lead the Test side in the two Tests in Australia while Babar Azam would be the captain in the three T20 matches down under.

The PCB said the squad for the Australian tour would be announced on October 21.

## India, Britain play out draw

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA JOHOR BAHRU

The Indian junior men's hockey team and Britain played out an entertaining 3-3 draw in their final round-robin match of the 9th Sultan of Johor Cup here on Friday.

The final will be played between the same two teams on Saturday.

**The result:** India 3 (Shilanand Lakra, Mandeep Mor, Sharda Nand Tiwari) drew with Britain (Joan Wall, Andrew McConnell, Matthew Renshaw).

for preparatory matches. While the men remained undefeated on the tour, the women lost just one game.

**The squads: Men: goalkeepers:** P.R. Sreejesh, Krishan Pathak; **defenders:** Surender Kumar, Gurinder Singh, Rupinder Pal Singh, Amit Rohidas, Harmanpreet Singh, Varun Kumar; **midfielders:** Manpreet Singh, Nilakanta Sharma, Hardik Singh, Vivek Sagar Prasad; **forwards:** Lalit Upadhyay, Mandeep Singh, Akashdeep Singh, Ramandeep Singh, Simranjit Singh, S.V. Sunil.

**Women: goalkeepers:** Savita, Rajani Etimarru; **defenders:** Deep Grace Ekka, Gurjit Kaur, Reena Khokhar, Salima Tete; **midfielders:** Sushila Chanu, Nikki Pradhan, Monika, Neha Goyal, Lilima Minz, Namita Topop; **forwards:** Vandana Katariya, Navneet Kaur, Navjot Kaur, Lalremisami, Sharmila Devi, Rani.