

Selectors on Dhoni, to Dhoni: We’re moving on

Signalling end of the road for the former India skipper, chief selector MSK Prasad says his committee will instead focus on Risabh Pant; Samson is back-up

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY
OCTOBER 24

CHIEF SELECTOR MSK Prasad on Thursday made it clear that his selection committee has “moved on” from Mahendra Singh Dhoni and the former India captain no longer figures in their scheme of things. Prasad also reiterated that Rishabh Pant will continue to be India’s first-choice wicketkeeper in limited-overs cricket, while Sanju Samson has been brought back to the fold as his back-up.

The chief selector’s assertion assumes significance, for he dropped a not-so-subtle hint on Dhoni’s international future after meeting with BCCI president Sourav Ganguly. India captain Virat Kohli, who was rested for the upcoming three-match T20I series against Bangladesh, his stand-in Rohit Sharma and cricket board secretary Jay Shah were part of the meeting as well. The selectors picked a 15-member T20I squad, bringing in uncapped Mumbai all-rounder Shivam Dube and bringing back Samson. Dhoni, who hasn’t played any cricket after the World Cup, continued to be absent.

“...I have been very, very clear on this that after the World Cup we have started backing Rishabh Pant and we will still back him and see that he progresses well. He might not have had the best of matches, but we can only make a player (grow) by backing him. We are very, very confident that he will come out successful,” Prasad told reporters after the selection meeting in Mumbai.

Asked if Dhoni was not in the selectors’ scheme of things anymore, Prasad said: “That’s what I made clear that we are moving on and giving opportunities to youngsters and see that they establish themselves in the side. With Rishabh Pant doing so well and even Sanju Samson coming into the side, I’m sure you will understand our thought process.”

Pant, though, hasn’t yet made an impact in white-ball cricket, scoring just 20 runs in three ODIs and 92 runs in five T20Is after the World Cup. And this is a reason why Samson has been included in the squad as his back-up. “With regards to Sanju, he has done exceptionally well for India A, he has done well in the recent Vijay Hazare Trophy. He has a fantastic domestic season. He is basically a batsman who can ‘keep and he will definitely be a back-up to Rishabh Pant. (At the moment) we are focusing on Rishabh and we will monitor his progress,” Prasad later told *The Indian Express*.

And yet, according to sources, it would be premature to completely write-off Dhoni unless the veteran ‘keeper-batsman hangs up his international boots. It is learnt that the team management’s message to the ex-skipper is to not to take a decision in a hurry, for it still needs to be seen how the Pant experiment pans out. The next World T20 in Australia is only a year away and the chances of Dhoni’s return aren’t completely ruled out. In 2016, then selection committee had brought back Ashish Nehra to the India fold ahead of the World T20 after a five-year hiatus.

Dhoni, however, has a mind of his own and it would be interesting to see what he decides about his future. This paper had reported that he went to the World Cup carrying a back ngle that got aggravated during the course of the tournament. Also, during the World Cup, he picked up a wrist injury. Dhoni is expected to be fit by November.

Samson returns

The diminutive Kerala ‘keeper-batsman made his T20I debut four years ago, against Zimbabwe at Harare. He hasn’t played for India since. Only about a fortnight ago, he scored 212 not out against Goa in a Vijay Hazare Trophy fixture at Alur. “I’m a very big believer that everything turns up at the right time,” Samson told this paper after the innings. Now that he has been given another opportunity to prove his mettle in international cricket, the 24-year-old will have to grab it.

Prasad addressed Samson’s inconsistency issue at the press conference. “His problem was inconsistency, but he is more consistent now, that is why we thought of drafting him into the squad,” the chief selector said, adding that Samson, if he plays, would bat in top-four.

Kohli rested for T20Is

After playing almost non-stop cricket over

Kohli looking forward to ‘healthy discussions’ with Ganguly

Mumbai: India captain Virat Kohli said on Thursday he expects a healthy and professional discussion with Sourav Ganguly, a day after the newly appointed board chief termed the batting mainstay the “most important man” for the game in the country.The 47-year-old promised full support to Kohli to make India the best team in the world and said he will sit down with the captain to chart the way forward.

“I am going to meet him now,” Kohli told reporters at a promotional event in Mumbai. “I have met him before to discuss a lot of things. I am looking forward to a good discussion. He is someone who has played a lot of cricket before, who knows the situation we are in, what the team needs, the requirements of Indian cricket,” Kohli said. “So you need a good, professional, high-level discussion. It will be a healthy discussion because I am playing currently and he has played before, there will be a understanding of these things. I have had good discussions in the past with him and I expect the same this time.” **REUTERS**



Mahendra Singh Dhoni last played for India in the ODI World Cup semi-final against New Zealand in July. *PTI*

the past seven-odd months, Kohli was given a deserved break. The skipper would be back for the two-Test series against Bangladesh. “With the World Test Championship on, resting a premier player is risky and each Test is very important heading towards the Test Championship (final),” Prasad said.

New all-rounder

With Hardik Pandya out injured and Vijay Shankar not selected, the selection committee decided to have a look at the Mumbai all-rounder, who boasts of a first-class batting average of 48.19 and a bowling average south of 25.

Jasprit Bumrah, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Navdeep Saini weren’t considered, as they have been recuperating from injuries. Yuzvendra Chahal returned to the T20I squad.

Nadeem left out

Left-arm spinner Shahbaz Nadeem, who replaced the injured Kuldeep Yadav for the final Test against South Africa at Ranchi and returned with four wickets, has been left out of the Test squad for the Bangladesh series. The three T20Is against Bangladesh would be played in Delhi, Rajkot and Nagpur on November 3, 7 and 10 respectively, while Indore hosts the first Test from November 14 and Kolkata is the venue for the second Test from November 22.

SQUADS
<p>T20IS: Rohit Sharma (c), Shikhar Dhawan, KL Rahul, Sanju Samson, Shreyas Iyer, Manish Pandey, Rishabh Pant, Washington Sundar, Krunal Pandya, Yuzvendra Chahal, Rahul Chahar, Deepak Chahar, Khaleel Ahmed, Shivam Dube, Shardul Thakur</p>
<p>TESTS: Virat Kohli (c), Rohit Sharma, Mayank Agarwal, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Hanuma Vihari, Wriddhiman Saha, Ravindra Jadeja, Ravichandran Ashwin, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohd Shami, Umesh Yadav, Ishant Sharma, Shubman Gill, Rishabh Pant.</p>

Vijay Hazare final: Focus on India stars as K’taka face TN

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BENGALURU, OCTOBER 24

THE SPOTLIGHT will be on India players Mayank Agarwal, R Ashwin and KL Rahul when the evenly-matched Karnataka and Tamil Nadu lock horns in the title clash of the Vijay Hazare Trophy here on Friday.

The Manish Pandey-led Karnataka were convincing in their victories in the knockout games but Tamil Nadu, who dominated the league phase, were a tad lucky as the rain rule allowed them to go past Punjab in the quarter-finals before young M Shahrulkh Khan guided them home in the semifinal against Gujarat. The two sides are equally matched, with a formidable batting line-up and a set of quality bowlers, though the presence of R Ashwin gives the TN attack more experience and variety.

The Friday’s clash will be decided by how the two bowling attacks perform given that both teams have a lot of depth in batting.

The home side has been well served by out-of-favour Test opener K L Rahul (546 runs in 10 games), who has come into his

Dube-smash: Shivam pips Shankar

DEVENDRA PANDEY
MUMBAI, OCTOBER 24

SHIVAM DUBE, the 26-year-old Mumbai all-rounder famous for his hard-hitting prowess, calls Hardik Pandya an inspiration, someone whose work ethic and intensity on the field has left a lasting impression on him. It was fitting that on Thursday when Dube received his first call up to the Indian team, for the three-match T20I against Bangladesh, he was taking the spot of an injured Pandya.

For the all-rounder slot, Dube edged out Vijay Shankar, who has played 12 ODIs and nine T20s for India. Chief selector MSK Prasad was clear about the utility-value the burly Mumbai player brings to the table.

“If you see, in our earlier T20 team, we had Hardik Pandya. Then we tried Vijay Shankar. All of us, along with captain Rohit (Sharma), felt that for the role Shivam Dube fits in much better. He bats aggressively and his performances in the India ‘A’ series in West Indies and also against South Africa ‘A’ in the One-dayers was phenomenal. He has gone up by leaps and bounds with regards to his skill set and we are very much convinced about him,” Prasad said on Thursday.

Two of Dube’s recent innings stand out. A 79 off 60 balls against South Africa ‘A’ after India ‘A’ were 206 for 6 one stage. It was his partnership with Axar Patel which helped India post 327. During the Vijay Hazare Trophy, in a league game against Karnataka, he smashed 118 off 67 balls, an innings which comprised 10 sixes. Mumbai were 166 for 5 one stage, chasing a total 313. Though the team fell short by nine runs, Dube’s whirlwind knock was impressive.

The ability to clear the fence is one of Dube’s strengths and has earned him a reputation on the domestic circuit. Royal Challengers Bangalore were convinced of this talent and spent Rs 5 crore on him last season. A day before he made a windfall at the auction, Dube had hit five sixes in an over



Shivam Dube got his maiden call-up on the back of some impressive knocks against South Africa ‘A’ and in the Vijay Hazare Trophy. *PTI*

‘Kohli told me “people remember only those who win matches for the team. So focus on becoming a match-winner”. Those words have stayed with me.’

against Baroda at the Wankhede Stadium.

It was during the first edition of the T20 Mumbai League when Dube’s ability to hit the big shots caught the attention of the fans and selectors. He subsequently made it to the Ranji Trophy squad. Chandrakant Pandit was one of the first to witness Dube’s power-hitting when the youngster had enrolled at an academy run by the former wicket-keeper. “Dube ji, *aap apne bete ko kya khilate ho* (what do you feed your son), he hits such big sixes!” Pandit is said to have told the cricketer’s father, Rajesh.

Dube was at the gymnasium when the team was announced. “I was hopeful because everyone was saying that I would be picked.

It feels so good that the call has come. It looks like all the hard work has paid off not only just mine but my father’s too. He had the dream of seeing me play for India,” Dube said.

The path to getting an India call-up has had its share of ups and downs. For five years, between the age of 14 to 19, Dube had given up the sport. He does not want to elaborate why but says it was because of “personal reasons”. Finally, it was his father who convinced him to get back to cricket. To ensure his son remained focused, the father also made a cricket pitch near their house. When Dube wanted to train, his father was always by his side giving throw downs. “My father took care of my fitness regimen and my diet in addition to being involved in my training,” Dube says.

Dube hopes to make it count when he gets a chance to play. He recalls a line RCB captain Virat Kohli told him during the IPL. “Kohli told me ‘people remember only those who win matches for the team. So focus on becoming a match-winner’. Those words have stayed with me,” Dube says.

be expected to lead from the front in the final. All-rounder Vijay Shankar and young Shahrulkh Khan have made crucial contributions with the latter putting his hand up in a tricky chase on Wednesday.

The Karnataka bowling has seen an unlikely hero emerge with V Kousik picking up four wickets in the semifinal demolition of Chhattisgarh while the pacers -- experienced Abhimanyu Mithun and Prasidh Krishna -- and the spinners K Gowtham, Shreyas Gopal and Praveen Dube among the wickets. The host bowlers will be up against a confident Tamil Nadu batting line-up and stopping it will hold the key to success.

Off-spinner Ashwin and leg spinner Murugan Ashwin will be aware that the Chinnaswamy stadium with its small boundaries can be tough on the bowlers and have a huge task of containing the likes of Rahul, Mayank. The final offers Tamil Nadu a chance for redemption after the horror run in the previous two seasons while Karnataka which hasn’t had a great 2018-19 season will also look to start with a bang with a title win.

I’m at peace with my flaws, says Samson

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 24

Sanju Samson has experienced so many lows in his career that he has learned to embrace them. Back in the Indian team after a four-year gap, Samson is at peace with his flaws and doesn’t try to be the “perfect batsman” that he wanted to be for the longest time.

Samson played his sole match for India — a T20I — in July 2015 when a second-string team toured Zimbabwe. He was 19 then. Since that high, it has been a roller-coaster ride for the wicketkeeper-batsman. He has not been consistent enough, has had fitness issues but every now and then, he came up with an innings befitting his rich batting talent. One such knock happened earlier this month — an unbeaten 212 — the highest individual score in the history of Vijay Hazare Trophy.

“If you have a very safe and easy career there are very less things you will learn. I have learnt a lot in the last four to five years. If you you have failed a lot of times then you know how to rise up and how to succeed. I have failed a lot of times in my life so I know how to stand up and perform. That has been a blessing,” Samson, 24, said on Thursday.

The resurgence of Dinesh Karthik and the emergence of Rishabh Pant also played a part in him being out of India’s limited overs set-up in the last two years. With Kohli being rested from the T20 series against Bangladesh, Samson is likely to play as a specialist batsman with Pant standing behind the stumps.

Like others, Samson too had high expectations from himself but not anymore. He also has no hard feelings about getting just one international game so far to prove himself.

“I don’t have any regrets. As I said I have gone through a lot of ups and downs. I had lots of high expectations about myself that I should have performed much better than what I did... That I should have got into the team much before, but lately, I understood that everything has its own time and you have to be patient for your turn. I have been doing that and have become a better person in the process. Have really enjoyed my tough times, to be honest. I have understood who all are with me genuinely and who are not.”

As a batsman, Samson feels he is in a really good space. “Mentally and technically many changes have happened in the last five years. I have understood my game a lot more, a lot about myself as a person. I have worked on my strengths and not tried to be the perfect batsman that I tried to be for a long time. I understood that no one can be a perfect batsman. Now I keep it simple and enjoy my cricket.”

During the 2016-2017 Ranji Trophy season, Samson had left the dressing room in the middle of the game and was subsequently dropped from the Kerala team. Following the 2018 IPL, Samson was left out of the India A team after he failed the yo-yo test. Samson said he has been working hard on his fitness.

“I have been following my fitness like religion for the past two-three years. I was going about my fitness in a special way, but I got a niggly in the IPL (2018), and after that I never got the time to recover before the yo-yo test, and I didn’t communicate to the physio as I thought I would clear the test, but I didn’t. It was never a case of fitness being an issue.”

I've worked on my strengths and not tried to be the perfect batsman that I tried to be for a long time. I understood that no one can be a perfect batsman. Now I keep it simple.”

SANJU SAMSON
AFTER HIS INDIA RECALL

What’s ICC without BCCI, asks board treasurer Dhumal

New Delhi: INDIA NOT having a “say” in the ICC is a major concern for newly appointed BCCI Treasurer Arun Dhumal, who has questioned the very relevance of the world body if it doesn’t have the country in a prominent role. “Could we have ever imagined that BCCI will not have a say in ICC’s roadmap? It was never imagined. What is ICC without BCCI?” asked Dhumal, referring to India’s absence from the ICC’s newly created working group to chalk out a fresh governance model. He also made it clear that BCCI is not on board with the ICC as far as the Future Tours Programme (FTP) for the 2023-2031 cycle is concerned. “We are not agreeable to the new proposal of the ICC with regards to increase of tournaments,” he said.

Dhumal said cutting down on unnecessary expenditure would be high on his priorities. He would look to use that money to improve the financial position of first-class cricketers. **PTI**