



Proving his credentials: Rohit Sharma justified the team management's faith to back him as Test opener. ■K.R. DEEPAK

# Rohit rains runs on opening debut before Nature takes over

His determined, unbeaten century puts India in a position of strength; Mayank proves an able ally; Proteas made to sweat

SA IN INDIA

**S. DINAKAR**  
VISAKHAPATNAM

There is a maturity about Rohit Sharma these days that reflects a calmness of mind. And when this happens, the muscles are relaxed, the feet move freely and the focus is fierce.

Rohit had a lot riding on his innings on the opening day of the first Freedom Test here on Wednesday. The team-management had backed him for the Test opener's slot and he had to justify the faith.

**Resolute Mayank**  
Rohit responded with an unbeaten 115 of sunshine on a day of cloud cover and rain. Giving him support was a resolute Mayank Agarwal, batting on 84.

India was on a strong 202 for no loss shortly before tea at the ACA-VDCA Stadium before a goodly crowd when a sharp spell of rain ended play for the day. For the beleaguered South Africans, this was a reprieve.

India's latest opening Test pair survived a testing early phase when Kagiso Rabada and Vernon Philander were a threat. There was some seam movement as well and both Rohit and Mayank were beaten.

Rohit, rightly, was circumspect at the start after Virat Kohli elected to bat. Once he found his timing, he was a different proposition.

Rabada was square-driven, and when Philander provided some width outside off, he was put away ruthlessly.

Rohit's bat-speed is his strength. When he combines this with nifty footwork and a still head, the bowlers are up against it in Indian conditions.

After 15 innings in 10 Tests [both unfinished] Rohit averages a Bradmanesque 98.22 in India. These figures reveal his dominance in these conditions and struggles on foreign soil.

His innings was laced with moments of brilliance. Like when Rohit eased Philander between short cover, extra-cover and the sweeper, stroking the ball gloriously through the eye of the needle.

Given the nature of his game, the bowlers were always in with a chance. His half-century came through a top-edged sweep off debutant left-arm spinner Senuran Muthusamy, eluding a diving square-leg.

**Growing in confidence**  
Rohit grew in confidence; Rabada was pulled and spinners Keshav Maharaj and Dale Piedt were cut or rous-

ingly struck on the waltz between the straight-field and square-leg.

At the other end, Mayank combined a solid defence with clever strokeplay. Temperament is the lad's strength.

Mayank, in his first Test innings in India, was fortunate early on when he attempted to whip Rabada only to see the edge rocket between third slip and gully.

But the right-hander also essayed some compelling strokes.

A cover-drive off Rabada screamed for attention.

Philander was off-driven with ease and fluency. An inside-out six off Maharaj over covers revealed deftness of feet and timing.

Mayank is a vastly different batsman from what he was about three years back. Those were the days when he had a pronounced shuffle forward, and this, consequently, affected his balance, the most crucial ingredient of batting.

He also had trouble getting on to the back foot. The committed Mayank worked on that, curbed a tendency to hit balls on the up and was able to shift his weight to the rear foot. His rather elaborate back-lift also was now straighter.

**Mentally stronger**  
Mayank became a lot tighter

on or around the off-stump and under the legendary Rahul Dravid emerged mentally stronger.

For South Africa, the lion-hearted Rabada operated with some speed and venom, but received little help from the pitch.

Philander, a lesser force once the ball lost its shine, was accurate but could not extract deviation after the initial overs.

Leader of the spin pack, Maharaj, was quicker through the air but there was not enough bite or turn in his bowling. Off-spinner Piedt, who doesn't quite get his body into his action, failed to impress.

Perhaps, South Africa should have included an additional paceman in Lungi Ngidi or Anrich Nortje for a third spinner and played to its strength irrespective of the surface.

The signs are ominous for the visitor.

SCOREBOARD	
<b>INDIA — 1ST INNINGS</b>	
Mayank Agarwal (batting) 84 (183b, 11x4, 2x6), Rohit Sharma (batting) 115 (174b, 12x4, 5x6); Extras (lb-1, nb-2): 3; Total (for no loss in 59.1 overs): 202.	
<b>SOUTH AFRICA BOWLING</b>	
Philander 11.1-2-34-0, Rabada 13-5-35-0, Maharaj 23-4-66-0, Piedt 7-1-43-0, Muthusamy 5-0-23-0.	
<b>Toss:</b> India	

# Mentally I was ready to open: Rohit

Learnt from my first day that you need to compete every ball, says Muthusamy

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
VISAKHAPATNAM

Rohit Sharma revealed he had been "prepared" for the last two years to open in a Test for India.

He said after his unbeaten hundred — his fourth in Tests and first as an opener — here on Wednesday, "The talk was on for a long time about me opening the innings. In the West Indies they told me clearly that it's going to happen now. So mentally I was ready for it."

The graceful right-hander observed, "Opening the batting in red-ball cricket is a different ball game compared to limited overs. You have to train your mind more than anything else. Technically, yes, you have got to look into it, certain aspects of batting. I was clear what I wanted to do. There was no confusion in my mind."

Opening the innings in Tests was a huge opportunity for him, said Rohit.

"When you are playing international cricket, you al-



The perfect blend: Mayank Agarwal combined solid defence with clever strokeplay. ■K.R. DEEPAK

ways look for opportunities. Yes, there will be a lot of challenges ahead but I'm not focussing on all of those. It's pretty important for me to stay in the present and think about what I need to do today. I was very clear in my mind."

He added, "The initial period will be tough. You have

to focus on the basics. Playing close to your body, leaving the ball. In India, after the early overs, the ball doesn't swing."

On his unbeaten double century opening partnership with Mayank Agarwal, Rohit said, "Me and Mayank, we always spoke between the overs, about how we

need to try and find those little gaps and place the ball between those two fielders and try and rotate the strike because that is very important on a pitch where it's slower and lower."

**India connection**  
South African debutant and left-arm spinning all-rounder Senuran Muthusamy said, "Of course, it [debut] is very special.

"My forefathers are from the South of India, Tamil Nadu. But it is one of the things, I am firmly South African, a few generations down the line. But yes, no getting away from that."

He added, "I learnt from my first day [in Test cricket] that you need to compete every ball. You need to plug away and thereby try to take control."

About the pitch here, Muthusamy said, "It is going to deteriorate like any wicket in the sub-continent.

"From a left-hander's perspective, that's a part of the game."

# Our bowlers need to make adjustments: Pollock

**S. DINAKAR**  
VISAKHAPATNAM

Shaun Pollock's astonishing debut and seam movement coupled with his languid and graceful strokeplay made him a true blue all-rounder.

The great South African, with 421 Test scalps at 23.11 and 3781 runs at 32.31, was as

influential as they come.

After the first day's play on Wednesday, he shared his thoughts with *The Hindu*.

**Not lacking experience**  
Pollock said since Vernon Philander, Kagiso Rabada and Lungi Ngidi had combined well over the last two

years, the pace attack was not lacking in experience.

He said, "Perhaps, the conditions are not suiting our bowlers here. They have to think out of the box, apply all their experience to be effective in these conditions."

On the secret to success in India for visiting pacemen,

the 46-year-old Pollock said, "There are moments in the game when you need to cash in. It is vital when you have the new ball in your hand, you got to make it count.

"Later, you have to get the ball to reverse. And you have to be clever when you bowl at different batsmen."

On the manner Rabada and Philander operated here, he said, "They beat the outside edge, asked an awful lot of questions in the first 10 overs in particular. But they needed to make early inroads." Pollock noted, "Our bowlers need to make adjustments. Our last Test was in February-March. You just don't walk into Test cricket and find your length and rhythm."

The South African great felt the team could have gone with a third paceman.

Ngidi, Pollock said, would be his preferred third seamer. "Nortje has got some skill, some real pace and if he is harnessed really well, he can be a central person but he is new to the subcontinent. I would go for Ngidi."

About Rohit Sharma's future as a Test opener, he noted, "Given his Test career, he has always done a brilliant job in India. His biggest challenges will come when he has to go overseas."

Pollock conceded he missed watching Jasprit Bumrah in this series.

"I would have loved to see Bumrah. I am disappointed he is not playing. I have really been impressed by Bumrah."

STAT SPHERE

1 Rohit is the first Indian, and eighth overall, to score a hundred in all three formats as an opener. The others are: Gayle, McCullum, Guptill, Dilshan, Shehzad, Watson and Tamim

2 Rohit is the second batsman to score 50-plus runs in six Test innings on the trot in India, after Dravid (1997-98)

3 Rohit and Mayank's unbeaten 202-run partnership is the third highest by an Indian opening combination in its first time together

410 Sehwag-Dravid vs Pakistan, 2005-06

289 M. Vijay-Dhawan, 2012-13

4 Rohit is the fourth to make a century in his maiden innings as Test opener for India

187 Shikhar Dhawan vs Aus, Mohali, 2012-13

110 K.L. Rahul

vs Aus, Sydney, 2014-15

134 Prithvi Shaw vs WI, Rajkot, 2018-19

115\* Rohit Sharma vs SA, Visakhapatnam, 2019-20 \* in progress

For Dhawan and Shaw, it was their Test debut too

Fourth Test hundred by Rohit and all have been scored at home

Mayank is the seventh Indian to make a 50-plus in his first Test

innings, both at home and away.

- He had scored 76 against Australia in Melbourne in 2018.
- Rusi Modi, Surinder Amarnath, Arun Lal, Sourav Ganguly, Suresh Raina and Hardik Pandya are the others to achieve the feat

Number of tosses South Africa has lost consecutively in Tests in the sub-continent

**Rohit in Tests at home and away — contrasting study**

	HOME	AWAY
TESTS	10*	18
INNINGS	15	33
RUNS	884	816
AVERAGE	98.22	26.32
CENTURIES	4	
HS	177	79

\* INCLUDING THE CURRENT TEST

213 Virender Sehwag and Wasim Jaffer's opening stand in Chennai in 2008, the last time a double century association came against South Africa in Tests

Only three countries have managed 200-plus opening stands against South Africa - five times each by England and Australia and thrice by India. After the Proteas' return to the Test fold in 1992, India has done it thrice, Australia twice and England once

# Pakistan wins series 2-0

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
KARACHI

Pakistan beat Sri Lanka by five wickets in the third and final ODI on Wednesday, taking the three-match series 2-0. After Danushka Gunathilaka carried Lanka to 297 for nine, Fakhar Zaman (76) and Abid Ali (74) shone for the host.

**The scores:** Sri Lanka 297 for nine in 50 overs (Danushka Gunathilaka 133) lost to Pakistan 299 for five in 48.2 overs (Fakhar Zaman 76, Abid Ali 74, Haris Sohail 56).

# CoA calls for BCCI GBM

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
NEW DELHI

The Committee of Administrators (CoA) on Wednesday officially called for BCCI's General Body Meeting (GBM) on October 23 but made it clear that only 'compliant' members will be allowed to attend.

**Kapil resigns**  
Kapil Dev has tendered his resignation from the Cricket Advisory Committee in the wake of Conflict of Interest notice served by Ethics Officer D.K. Jain.

# Poonam gets her wrong 'uns right

Has been the star performer in the T20I series against South Africa

SA-WOMEN IN INDIA

**P.K. AJITH KUMAR**  
SURAT

Poonam Yadav was beaming when she met reporters on Tuesday night. The leg-spinner had just won the Player-of-the-Match award in India's 51-run victory over South Africa, finishing with three for 13 from three overs.

For the second game in a row, the 27-year-old from Uttar Pradesh had come close to performing a hat-trick, picking up two wickets in as many balls.

**In the thick of it**  
Poonam, who now has 79 scalps in T20Is and 63 in ODIs, has spearheaded the Indian spin attack in the series, taking five wickets so far. She said there was some help for the spinners from the pitch.

"It is a sporting wicket," she said. "It is assisting the batters as well."

She, however, sounded disappointed that she could not complete the hat-trick in either match. "I had tried hard to get that third wicket on both occasions but could



On a string: Poonam's loop and variations have bamboozled the South Africans. ■VIJAY SONEJI

not," she said.

"As for this game, I had taken all my three wickets with googlies, but I didn't want to give away a boundary with

my hat-trick ball. So I had to bowl accordingly."

She said it felt great to play in front of big crowds. "There was so much noise

# Lyles leads an American gold rush

**IAAF World Athletics Championships**  
**DOHA2019**  
بطولة العالم للالعاب القوى - الدوحة

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**  
DOHA

Noah Lyles led a triumphant night for the United States on Tuesday at the World athletics Championships just hours after the sport had been rocked by the suspension of controversial coach Alberto Salazar.

Lyles produced a courageous performance to win the 200m title, whilst Donovan Brazier — who was part of the Nike Oregon Project that Salazar ran — became the first

Indians in action

- Men's shot put, qualification round, Group 'B' (Tajinderpal Singh Toor, 11.10 p.m., IST)
- Men's 1500m, heats (Jinson Johnson, 1.05 a.m.)

American to win the 800m World crown.

Sam Kendricks came out on top in men's pole vault and joined Sergey Bubka in being the only men to successfully defend the title.

**Annu finishes eighth**  
India's Annu Rani finished

eighth in women's javelin.

P.U. Chitra clocked a personal best of 4:11.10s while finishing eighth in her 1500m heats but it was not enough to fetch her a semifinal berth.

**The results: Men: 200m:** 1. Noah Lyles (USA) 19.83s, 2. Andre De Grasse (Can) 19.95, 3. Alex Quinonez (Ecu) 19.98. **800m:** 1. Donovan Brazier (USA) 1:42.34, 2. Amel Tuka (BIH) 1:43.47, 3. Ferguson Rotich (Ken) 1:43.82. **Pole vault:** 1. Sam Kendricks (USA) 5.97m, 2. Armand Duplantis (Swe) 5.97, 3. Piotr Lisek (Pol) 5.87.

**Women: Javelin:** 1. Kelsey-Lee Barber (Aus) 66.56m, 2. Liu Shiying (Chn) 65.88, 3. Lyu Huihui (Chn) 65.49; 8. Annu Rani (Ind) 61.12.



Running to glory: Noah Lyles eases past the finish line. ■GETTY IMAGES