

# Rohit cut out to open, says Shastri

India coach all praise for Shami's resilience; feels Bumrah's work load has to be astutely managed

## EXCLUSIVE

S. DINAKAR  
VISAKHAPATNAM

Ravi Shastri enjoyed the panoramic view through the hotel window as the sun bounced off the Bay of Bengal as he pondered the questions put to him.

The India coach's answers – in an exclusive conversation with *The Hindu* – were sharp, precise and honest.

The big positive for you from the Test here?

A fast bowler taking five wickets in the fourth innings in India.

Your impressions on Shami. To bounce back from personal issues and bowl the way he did was remarkable. He is relentless, very skilful and at you all the time. I would have hated to face him.

How concerned are you about Bumrah's stress fracture in the back?

Very concerned. Because he is precious, special, different, and a match-winner. They are taking opinions on whether he needs surgery. We have to be careful about his workload because he plays all three formats.

Hardik Pandya too underwent a surgery for a back injury recently. His surgery was successful. We will know in two weeks' time. Ideally we want him in every format.

Rohit Sharma was great in his first Test as opener. I would hate to see a player of his quality sitting in the reserves.

In the West Indies I was very clear that he should open and had a chat with



Settled unit: Ravi Shastri says Team India has progressed well with the bowlers capable of picking up 20 wickets in a match. ■K.R. DEEPAK

Kohli about it. This was his opportunity.

Opening is about the mindset. You got to respect the new ball. A lot of guys in India should have opened in the last 20 years for the sake of team balance, but they didn't have the stomach for it.

Similarities between Rohit and Sehwa?

Both destroyers, both with the ability to score very big given their tempo.

How impressed were you with R. Ashwin's bowling in his comeback Test?

He's world class. A top-class off-spinner. But the demands of the game are such that you cannot afford to rest on your laurels.

[Dhoni] one of our greatest players... whether he wants to come back, that's for him to decide

Ravindra Jadeja has been making strides, with the bat and the ball.

Excellent team-man. Has realised his potential, which is never easy. He has arrived after that astonishing innings in the World Cup semifinal. With the ball, he's accurate. If it starts spinning, he is lethal.

India now has a varied attack that can sting.

We have the variety to take 20 wickets. Runs are important. But 20 wickets are most important.

Does the team have an open mind about M.S. Dhoni returning to the shorter formats?

He will go down as one of our greatest players, very, very high up the list.

Whether he wants to come back, that's for him to decide. I have not met him after the World Cup. He has to first start playing and let's see how things go.

Winning the Test series in New Zealand, never easy, will be India's next major challenge.

As the No. 1 side we like to go and play against tough teams in their backyard. We are confident against New Zealand. Didn't we beat Australia down under after 71 years?

India has to find a stable No. 4 in the shorter formats with the World Twenty20 next year?

It is very easy for us to drop Kohli to No. 4. Then you will have the best No. 4 in the world. But it takes time.

Shreyas Iyer has been excellent in recent months. He can be a really good No. 4.

What convinced the team-management to pick Wriddhiman Saha in the Test eleven?

Saha is the best 'keeper in the world, and at home, where the bounce can be variable, his 'keeping is invaluable. Pant is still young and has the time to improve his 'keeping.

## Hoping for the skies to remain clear

AMOL KARHADKAR  
PUNE

The South Africans slogged it for well over four hours in the searing heat at the Maharashtra Cricket Association (MCA) stadium on the outskirts here. Rishabh Pant toked net bowlers later in the afternoon during India's optional training session. But all through, both camps – and the groundstaff – kept staring at the skies, hoping for the heavens not to open up.

With the city experiencing incessant showers in the lead-up to the match, and thunderstorms predicted ahead in the week too, MCA's Riyaz Bagwan did his best to put any doubts to rest, stressing on the sand-based outfield that dries in no time and the pitch preparation being on course.

Considering the rain, it didn't come as a surprise that the pitch had a tinge of live grass less than 48 hours before the start of the game. But just when wondered whether the venue could reverse the poor rating it received for producing a rank turner against Australia in February 2017, the groundstaff swiftly moved into action.

Soon after a member of India's support staff had a close look at the pitch, the groundstaff was seen scrubbing it and mowing the grass.

With curator Pandurang Salgaocar keeping a close watch, it would be interesting to see if the 22-yard strip changes its complexion by the time of the toss on Thursday morning.

# Our bowlers pretty good at reverse swing, says Arun

AMOL KARHADKAR  
PUNE

The nature of Test surfaces in India have been starkly different under Virat Kohli and his predecessor M.S. Dhoni. While Dhoni exploited the home advantage with tracks that assisted the spinners, Kohli, after following that tradition early on, has adopted a fair use policy. This has helped India's pacers come into play in a big way.

Arun, India's bowling coach, stressed that the pacers have the skillset to succeed in varied conditions.

"I think there is a chance for the pacers on any track provided they have the necessary skills.

"Our fast bowlers have done quite well abroad and in India. On Indian wickets, when the ball spins, it also becomes conducive for reverse swing, and all our bowlers are pretty good at reverse swing," said Arun on Tuesday.

The second Test against South Africa begins here on Thursday.

While the Proteas pacers failed to restrict India, Ishant and Shami overshadowed Kagiso Rabada and Vernon Philander.

Doing it better

Arun felt that plying their trade in domestic cricket had helped the host pacers reverse it better.

"Our bowlers are pretty skilful at reverse swing because when we play domestic cricket, the wickets are



B. ARUN. ■K.R. DEEPAK

| India pacers at home                  |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| FROM NOVEMBER 2008 TILL DECEMBER 2014 |  |
| Matches: <b>28</b>                    |  |
| Wickets: <b>152</b>                   |  |
| Average: <b>33.61</b>                 |  |
| 5W/10W: <b>4/0</b>                    |  |
| FROM JANUARY 2015 TILL DATE           |  |
| Matches: <b>24</b>                    |  |
| Wickets: <b>132</b>                   |  |
| Average: <b>28.21</b>                 |  |
| 5W/10W: <b>3/1</b>                    |  |

flat. Sometimes the outfield is also not great. For a bowler to be successful, one needs to learn to reverse the ball," said Arun

"I think domestic cricket contributes a lot as you can see that most exponents of reverse swing come from the sub-continent because they need to adapt."

Given the weather conditions in Pune, it would be interesting to see if the pacers would be forced to succeed against the odds, or get favourable conditions.

# Confident India ready for the ODIs

Mithali is back, will lead the side; Smriti out with toe fracture

## SA WOMEN IN INDIA

ASHWIN ACHAL  
VADODARA

Having recorded a comfortable 3-1 win in the T20Is a few days ago, the Indian women appear confident heading into the three-match ODI series against South Africa here. The home team, however, has to deal with a big injury concern.

Elegant opening batter Smriti Mandhana is out for the first ODI – at a minimum – after suffering a toe fracture during training.

The full extent of the injury and lay-off period will become clear only after a full assessment is done at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru.

Timeline not possible

"Smriti needs to get an MRI. She still has some swelling, which has to subside before an MRI can be done. It is difficult to put a timeline (on her possible return)," India head coach W.V. Raman said



Mithali Raj. ■FILE PHOTO

Three-match schedule

■ Oct. 9, Oct. 11 and Oct. 14

but for 23-year-old Priya Punia.

"Priya has scored consistently in domestic circuit. This is her chance," captain Mithali Raj said.

Mithali, meanwhile, wears the national jersey for the first time since announcing her retirement from T20Is.

The skipper will hope to build on her terrific ODI form, which has seen her score at an average of 105.25 in her last nine knocks (dating back to April 2018).

South Africa, meanwhile, can take heart from the resounding 105-run win notched up in the fifth and final T20I.

Boost for South Africa

Openers Lizelle Lee (84, 47b) and Sune Luus (62, 56b) came good in great style, lifting the spirit of a struggling

side. The arrival of experienced players Marizanne Kapp and Trisha Chetty to the ODI squad serves as another boost.

International women's cricket returns to the Reliance Stadium, nearly 18 months after big crowds created an exciting atmosphere for the India-Australia ODI series.

The Baroda Cricket Association officials are hopeful of a large turnout once again. Entry is free.

The squads:

India: Mithali Raj (Capt.), Jemimah Rodrigues, Harmanpreet Kaur, Punam Raut, Deepti Sharma, Taniya Bhatia, Jhulan Goswami, Shikha Pandey, Mansi Joshi, Ekta Bisht, Poonam Yadav, D. Hemalatha, Rajeshwari Gayakwad and Priya Punia.

South Africa: Sune Luus (Capt.), Tasmin Brits, Trisha Chetty, Nadine de Klerk, Shabnim Ismail, Ayabonga Khaka, Lara Goodall, Marizanne Kapp, Lizelle Lee, Nonkululeko Mlaba, Tumi Sekhukhune, Nondumiso Shangase, Mignon du Preez and Laura Wolvaardt.

Match starts at 9 a.m.

# Tendulkar's fangirl has arrived with a bang

The 15-year-old Shafali Verma gets to live her dream

P.K. AJITH KUMAR  
JAIPUR

Shafali Verma was nine when she made that short journey to Lahli from her home in Rohtak, along with her father. She wanted to see her idol, Sachin Tendulkar, playing his last Ranji match.

The Master Blaster didn't disappoint her. He smashed an unbeaten 79 in the second innings to guide Mumbai to a four-wicket victory against host Haryana, in 2013. She came back home, determined: she wanted to play in front of such a crowd one day. A few days ago, her dream came true.

Plenty to cheer about

Not only did she play in front of a crowd of over 15,000 at the Lalbhai Contractor Stadium in Surat, she also gave them plenty to cheer about too. In only her second international match, she smashed 46 off 33 balls to star in India's 51-run win over South Africa in the fourth T20I.

And she did this at the age of 15 – one year younger than



Packing a punch: Shafali Verma has impressed one and all. ■VIJAY SONEJI

what her idol was when he made his international debut. "I was determined to see off the opening overs and wanted to make a good score in the match," Shafali told *The Hindu* at Surat a few days ago. "I want to play more such innings for India."

To play for India had been a dream all along for the Shafali, who packs quite a bit of power into her shots. "I was hoping that I would get a chance in this series," she

said. "I had also felt that I could be selected for the Women's T20 Challenge at Jaipur a few months ago."

And it was at Jaipur that she announced her arrival. She hit 34 off 31 deliveries, and was immediately hailed as a future star. "I enjoyed that experience at Jaipur," she said. "Playing against foreigners and India seniors helped me greatly."

She said she loved playing alongside Mithali Raj at Jaipur, for Velocity. "I am also happy that I have been part of the Indian team that had Harmanpreet Kaur and Smriti Mandhana," she said. "Those three are great batters."

Favourites

Among the batsmen, A.B. de Villiers is her favourite. "I also like Virat Kohli," she said. "I have always had great respect for attacking batsmen, like Virender Sehwag."

She had, of course, grown up watching Tendulkar. "The television would be switched off at our home when he got out," she said. "My father and brother are also big cricket fans and used to play too."

But, the people in Rohtak were not enthused by the idea of a girl taking up cricket. "They would ask: what could a girl do?" she recalled. "I had long braids at that time; I chopped them off, and for a couple of months they probably did not realise that I was a girl as I trained with boys."

# Curtain set to fall on drama that went on longer than necessary



BETWEEN WICKETS  
SURESH MENON

The most coveted job in Indian cricket is not that of the coach or captain, it is the President of the Board of Control for Cricket in India. In recent years, the incumbent has automatically become the most powerful man in the game, respected and hated in equal measure from Mumbai to London and from Cape Town to Sydney. India is where the money is, where the television audience is the largest, where a domestic tournament like the IPL has made millions of players around the world.

When Jagmohan Dalmiya and then N. Srinivasan were Presidents, they were criticised for placing their ambitions and India's needs above what was seen as the game's requirements. But it meant that the BCCI emerged as the most domi-

nant ruling body in the game, more powerful than even the International Cricket Council. As Tiger Pataudi once said, "If the International Cricket Council is the voice of cricket, the BCCI is the invoice of cricket."

This is partly because more money passes through the President's hands - theoretically speaking - than through those of any other office-bearer or player anywhere else. There is too the enormous media coverage which can be monetised by businessmen and usually reinforces a political career.

The power, prestige and pelf associated with the job often attracts politicians, which is hardly surprising. Already there is talk of Home Minister Amit Shah's son throwing his hat into the ring. Another possibility is Rajat Sharma, President of the Delhi and Districts Cricket Association whose nomination has provoked complaints from his own association. The clear picture will emerge later this week. If a politician from the ruling party is in the fray, then it is unlikely that a cricketer will contest. Sourav Ganguly, former India captain, has been quoted as saying that if he is to take over, then it will have to be a unani-

mous decision. At 47, he is young, has been President of the Cricket Association of Bengal and head of the board's technical committee and brings with him a wealth of experience as a cricketer person as opposed to a politician for whom the post is likely to be a mere stepping stone to something else.

Objections

According to reports, BCCI's electoral officer has received over a hundred objections from various associations on different issues including the naming of representatives to the general body meeting. The number probably indicates a range from the ridiculous to the sublime, but each will have to be dealt with satisfactorily before the elections can proceed.

A couple of decades ago, when Indian cricket was down in the dumps, with a captain (among others) accused of match-fixing, it was Ganguly, the new captain who lifted the team from despair to delight with victories at home and abroad and placed the team on the route to the number one ranking. And now he gets another opportunity to raise the image of administration in In-

dia, shaken by corruption and personality clashes and for three years now administered by a team appointed by the Supreme Court.

Ganguly once famously said when he was captain that he had the second toughest job in the country (after the Prime Minister's); he might discover that given the circumstances, the job of the board president might deserve that ranking. He didn't shrink from a challenge then, and is unlikely to shrink from one now. His relative youth and the fact that he has been in continuous touch with the game since he last played the IPL in 2012, make him the kind of candidate the Lodha Commission (on which the Supreme Court based its rulings) had in mind when it suggested that more players should be encouraged to take up administration in a country where the officials often appear out of touch with the times.

Whichever way it goes, there will be enormous relief in cricketing circles. Uncertainty is never a good companion in sport, and, hopefully a new-look BCCI will have taken on board recent lessons. Even old wine in old bottles will come with a fresh set of instructions.

Murray shown the door

Federer gets past Ramos-Vinolas

Crowd favourite: Roger Federer was cheered on by his band of local supporters. ■AFP

SHANGHAI MASTERS

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE SHANGHAI

A ruthless Roger Federer claimed victory in his Shanghai Masters opener on Tuesday while Andy Murray went down scrapping in a bruising three-set defeat to 12th-ranked Italian Fabio Fognini. Federer put it across Spain's Albert Ramos-Vinolas 6-2, 7-6(5).

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# Murray shown the door

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Ramos-Vinolas put up a better fight in the second set, forcing the tie-breaker

and taking a 2-0 and 4-1 lead.

But cheered on by his band of local supporters, who held aloft banners proclaiming their hero "superhuman", Federer won the tie break – and the match – with a forehand smash.

The results (second round): Fabio Fognini bt Andy Murray 7-6(4), 2-6, 7-6(2); Nikoloz Basilashvili bt Benoit Paire 6-4, 1-6, 6-1; Roger Federer bt Albert Ramos-Vinolas 6-2, 7-6(5). Doubles: Rohan Bopanna & Denis Shapovalov bt Karen Khachanov & Andrey Rublev 6-1, 6-4.