

"I'm over it. I've left what happened at the ground and I've moved on."

JOFRA ARCHER  
ON RACIST ABUSE HE RECEIVED

## Dhoni adds to speculation about his future

PTI/ENS  
MUMBAI, NOVEMBER 27

FORMER CAPTAIN MS Dhoni pre-empted questions about his retirement at an event by stating straightaway "Don't ask me till January". However, he didn't elaborate further. This a day after IANS quoted Ravi Shastri as saying that Dhoni's performance in the IPL and what others who are vying for the spot do will be key to planning the line-up for the World T20 later next year.

"It all depends on when he starts playing and how he is playing during the IPL," Shastri had told IANS.

"What are the other people doing with the wicketkeeping gloves or what is the form of those players as opposed to Dhoni's form. The IPL becomes a massive tournament because that could be the last tournament after which more or less your 15 is decided."

On Tuesday, a source close to the former India captain said he will take a call on his future after next year's Indian Premier League (IPL). Dhoni has been on a sabbatical since India's semifinal exit from the ODI World Cup in England in July. He has missed the tour of the West Indies and the home series against South Africa and Bangladesh.

The 38-year-old, who captains Chennai Super Kings in the IPL, will miss the limited-overs home assignment against the West Indies starting December 6 and comprising three T20 Internationals and an equal number of one-dayers.

National selection committee chairman MSK Prasad has already made it clear that the panel has "moved on" and Dhoni is aware of its intent to blood youngsters such as Rishabh Pant keeping in mind next year's T20 World Cup in Australia.

Dhoni was seen training with Jharkhand's under-23 team in Ranchi some days back, triggering a fresh round of speculation on a possible comeback.

BCCI President Sourav Ganguly has stated that Dhoni will get the respect that a player of his stature deserves and had ruled out an immediate retirement by the celebrated wicketkeeper-batsman.

"You know champions don't finish quickly," he had stated when he took over as the Board President last month.

### 'Pant should not try to be Dhoni'

Chief selector MSK Prasad feels the struggling Rishabh Pant is putting himself under undue pressure by trying to prove himself as the rightful heir to the great M S Dhoni and he should rather back his "unbelievable talent" to bounce back.

Not so long ago, Pant was India's number one wicketkeeper batsman in all three formats but has endured an erratic run of form for some time now.

With Wriddhiman Saha back in the team, he has now lost his place in the Test eleven and his place in the limited-overs format has also been questioned for lack of runs and his poor work with the gloves.

However, the team management and selectors continue to back him.

Rohit Sharma even urged his critics to leave him alone and let him play with freedom while the legendary Sunil Gavaskar says pressure is bound to be there when one is playing for India.

"With regard to the point raised regarding pressure, Rishabh should definitely realise that pressure is part of this game at this level and the one who comes out of this pressure is a true champion. He has live examples in front of him in Virat and Rohit."

Prasad, who was appointed as the selection committee chief in 2016, said Pant should never try to fill Dhoni's big boots.

"Rishabh should also realise that he has his own identity and he should never compare himself with MSD which I feel is working on his mind. MSD has built his career and image playing for over a decade and half. His confidence stems from his stellar performances both at domestic and international levels.

# An opening to Team India

Shikhar Dhawan's injury and his below-par strike rate could present contenders with an opportunity

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY  
KOLKATA, NOVEMBER 27

SHIKHAR DHAWAN is out of the upcoming T20 international series against West Indies. The gash he suffered on his left knee during a Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy game against Maharashtra last week hasn't healed completely and the latest assessment by the BCCI medical team suggested the opener "needs some more time for his stitches to come off". Sanju Samson has been included in the squad as Dhawan's replacement for the three T20Is.

Given the indifferent form that the left-hander is going through of late, his unavailability is not a big blow to the Indian team. KL Rahul is in the squad and he will open with Rohit Sharma. For Dhawan, however, the injury came at a wrong time. The bench strength of this Indian team keeps almost every player on his toes, unless he is a Virat Kohli, Rohit or Jasprit Bumrah.

From that point of view, repeated injuries have been making the job a little difficult for Dhawan. One assurance that Dhawan has from the medical team is that this is not a big injury to be worried over. But it is learnt that the selection committee and the team management are more concerned about his form, strike-rate to be precise. "His strike-rate (in T20Is) has dipped from 140s to 110s. It's still ok for 50-over cricket, but in T20s, when you are batting at the top, with the advantage of Powerplay, you expect better strike-rates from an opener," said a source.

Dhawan has featured in eight T20Is after the World Cup, scoring 194 runs at an average of a little over 24. Contribution-wise, it's not bad. In the Caribbean tour though, his strike-rate was 96.42. Against South Africa at home, it improved considerably to 135.71. But against Bangladesh, where Dhawan had a bigger responsibility, with Kohli rested, his strike-rate once again came down to 107.05.

To be fair, Dhawan has been unlucky with injuries. He scored a scintillating hundred against Australia at the World Cup. But a fractured thumb then abruptly cut short his tournament. Both team management and the selection committee are of the view that the stop-start stint is affecting his rhythm. For any cricketer it's not easy to get into the groove straightaway after coming back from an injury. The selectors and the team management are hoping that Dhawan gets his rhythm back. At the same time, they understand that it would be difficult for him until he is playing a continuous series of matches - Dhawan is not a part of the Test squad. Ideally, the next year's IPL is the tournament that should help the 33-year-old regain his mojo, for he will get the opportunity to play a series of high-intensity matches at a stretch. Given Dhawan's record in big tournaments, he firmly remains the most preferred choice to partner Rohit at the top in the next year's T20 World Cup in Australia.

The Indian Express understands that Dhawan would be available for the three-match ODI series that follows the T20Is. The T20I series is commencing on December 6 at Hyderabad, while the first ODI at Chennai is on December 15. However, Dhawan might have to play a domestic game for Delhi before the ODI series to prove his match fitness. "This selection committee has always maintained that process. In Wriddhiman Saha's case also, he had to play domestic cricket for Bengal before returning to the Test side," said the source. With the Ranji Trophy starting from December 9, Dhawan could be asked to play Delhi's first match against Kerala before joining the ODI squad.

### Iyer, long-term No. 4

It is also learnt that the selectors and the team management have identified Shreyas Iyer as the long-term No. 4. Both are happy to see that the Mumbai batsman is "slowly settling down" into that role. The dressing-room looks at him as a game-changer in the shorter formats. The final T20I against Bangladesh



Shikhar Dhawan is out of the T20 series against India because of a gash on his left knee. File

at Nagpur was a case in point. In the 15th over, with the hosts going at a modest run-rate of a little over seven per over, Iyer had changed the complexion of the game with three consecutive sixes against Afif Hossain. It was a must-win game for India and that 20-run over was a turning point.

No. 4 had been a problem area for the team in limited-overs cricket, so much so that it eventually cost India the World Cup. Efforts intensified to find a proper No. 4 after the ICC event and Iyer's performance in the ODIs in the West Indies encouraged the team management and the selectors to identify the 24-year-old as the long-term No. 4, both for T20Is and the 50-over format.

Iyer scored 136 runs in two innings in the Caribbean, batting at No. 5. Rishabh Pant batted at No. 4. Iyer has earned the promotion by dint of his performance. "This confidence has come from those knocks in the West Indies," said the source. According to him, the No. 5 slot in the home series against West Indies will rotate between Manish Pandey and Pant.

### Young ones

Going ahead, the selection committee has identified the back-ups for the opening slot as well and Prithvi Shaw and Shubman Gill, this paper understands, are in the list. Gill is widely considered to be the future of Indian batting. With regards to Shaw, a BCCI functionary said: "Shaw is a top talent. At the moment, he is not in the best of shape physically. If the period of ban that he has served is not changing him, then there's something seriously wrong."

### Saha undergoes surgery

Meanwhile, Wriddhiman Saha has undergone surgery after sustaining a fracture on his right ring finger during the pink-ball Test against Bangladesh at Eden Gardens. The BCCI has informed that the wicketkeeper "will soon commence his rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy". Given that India's next long-form assignment is in the third week of February, Saha is expected to be fit for the two-Test series in New Zealand.

## Shaw versus Gill: Audition to open beside Rohit

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 27

THE MUMBAI-PUNJAB Syed Mushtaq Trophy Super League match was far from an inconsequential fixture between two teams that were already out of semifinal contention. With two of the finest young opening batsmen in the country around, Prithvi Shaw and Shubman Gill, and the selectors looking for options beyond Dhawan, India could be hunting for an opening partner for Rohit Sharma in the T20s. The narrative of the match converged to the two young men. Shaw, two-Test-old and a centurion, and two-ODI-experienced Gill.

Both didn't disappoint. Shaw was on show first, and he pleased the sparse crowd at the Lalbhai Contractor Stadium with audacious strokeplay. It was a typical Shaw innings, with hefty leg-side shots and blazing drives through the covers, brutal on anything that erred on the fuller or the shorter side. Gill is cut off a different cloth.

He doesn't rely so much on power as he does on timing. He began with a flurry of gorgeous drives through covers, before expanding his canvas, unfurling one stroke after the other from his prolific repertoire, matching Shaw stroke for stroke. Only that he had little support from his colleagues and ended up on the losing side, though their respective teams crashed out.

It was an extension of a fine season, wherein he had ticked most boxes. Runs in domestic cricket; runs with the A teams, runs at home, runs abroad, runs across formats—he has undisputedly established himself as the finest of the GenNext, equipped with both technical mastery and temperamental soundness to make an impact at the inter-

national level.

Shaw has already illustrated his quality with a fine hundred on debut against the West Indies, only for his career to be stalled by injuries and a doping-ban. But he has put he travails behind him to make a sparkling return to the fold. His scores after his return read thus: 63, 30, 64, 30, 43, 248 runs at a strike rate of 170.21.

Gill's corresponding numbers 163 runs at 142.98. Both have thus filed timely reminders of their sparkling potential, as the selectors look to find a suitable opener to pair up with Sharma in the future. Though Shikhar Dhawan is still around, his propensity to pick uncanny injuries and the waning influence in the shortest format, has made his position shaky, forcing the selectors to audition fresher faces, alongside a resurgent KL Rahul.

With the World Cup in Australia scheduled towards the end of next year, there had been an added significance to the domestic tournament. **BRIEF SCORES:** Mumbai 243/3 (Shreyas Iyer 80 not out, Suryakumar Yadav 80; Harpreet Singh Brar 2-43) beat Punjab 221/6 (Shubman Gill 78, Abhishek Sharma 47, Tushar Deshpande 2-35, Shubham Ranjane 2-40) by 22 runs.

### Delhi's campaign ends

Delhi ended their campaign in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy with a two-run defeat against Rajasthan in the Super League here on Wednesday. It was Delhi's third loss in four games, sending them out of the tournament. **BRIEF SCORES:** Rajasthan 133/7 (Deepak Chahar 55 not out, Rajesh Bishnoi 36; Subodh Bhati 2-20) beat Delhi 131/9 (Rishabh Pant 30, Lalit Yadav 30; Arjit Gupta 3-12, Khaleel Ahmed 2-20) by two runs.

## Railways wants BCCI to pay their coaches

DEVENDRA PANDEY  
MUMBAI, NOVEMBER 29

THE RAILWAY Sports Promotion Board (RSPB) will be requesting Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to help them pay their coaches across age-groups. As per policy, Railways doesn't pay any professional fees to its coaches, trainer, and physiotherapist since they happen to be their employees. All they are entitled is daily allowance.

RSPB's secretary Railway Board, Premchand Lochab, confirmed that his organisation's coaches had requested him to take up the matter with BCCI president Sourav Ganguly. "Railways take care of 29 sports which is the largest in the country. We give more jobs than anyone else. As far as cricket is concerned, we don't get any subsidy from the BCCI like state associations. We make our own arrangements. Even the fees paid to players is given by the board. We had an internal discussion and coaches were of the view that Railways should request the BCCI to pay them professional fees. Their contribution is as crucial, they work as hard as players," Lochab told The Indian Express.

Former Mumbai and Railways pacer Santosh Saxena, who is the coach of under 23 team with Railways said, the amount they earn from coaching is very nominal compared to other state association teams.

"They have qualified coaches in Railways, we have physios who have a degree from UK. We are as good as others. We have requested BCCI that like they helped North Eastern cricket teams, they should consider us also," Saxena stated.

### U19 team disbanded

BCCI has suspended Railways under 19 for last season, reason being players need to be permanent employees with the Railways. The Indian board technical committee last year took a decision to disband the team. In the past, the Indian board had received complaints on how only children of Railways employees got picked for Railways under 19s.

## Afg all out for 187 as Cornwall takes 7 for 75

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
LUCKNOW, NOVEMBER 27

Burly off-spinner Rakheem Cornwall picked up a career-best seven-wicket haul to help West Indies bowl out Afghanistan for a paltry 187 and give his side the upper hand on the opening day of the lone Test here on Wednesday. Cornwall (7/75) spun a web around the Afghanistan batsmen on a turning track to shoot them out in 68.3 overs after West Indies won the toss and opted to field. At stumps, West Indies were 68 for two in 22 overs, still trailing Afghanistan by 119 runs. Sent into bat, Afghanistan started cautiously with the pair of Ibrahim Zadran (17) and Javed Ahmadi (39) stitching 28 runs off 12.2 overs. Cornwall gave West Indies the breakthrough by removing Zadran.

Afghanistan lost two more wickets before lunch to be placed at 90 for three in 30.4 overs. Thereafter, it was all a Cornwall show as the off-spinner wreaked havoc by picking up the wickets of Rahmat Shah (4), Asghar Afghan (4), Nasir Jamal (2) and Afsar Zazai (32) to reduce Afghanistan to 165 for eight at tea.

West Indies skipper Jason Holder (2/22) also contributed two wickets with his medium pace by removing his counterpart Rashid Khan (1) and Amit Hamza (34). **BRIEF SCORES:** Afg 1st Innings 187 all out in 68.3 overs (Javed Ahmadi 39, Amir Hamza 34; Rakheem Cornwall 7/75) lead West Indies 1st Innings 68 for 2 in 22 overs (John Campbell 30 not out; Rashid Khan 1/24) 125 runs.

# 10 encounters, 7 wickets and a boast

Is Yasir Shah Steve Smith's nemesis, or is it just a coincidence that the Pakistani leggie is the joint-most successful bowler against him?

**THE PREAMBLE:** Yasir Shah might live to regret his gesticular indiscretion after casting Steve Smith in Brisbane—as Smith was walking past him, he put seven fingers up to convey the number of times he had dismissed him, the joint highest with Stuart Broad, though in half as many face-offs (10 as opposed to 26). He might have only succeeded in "waking up the beast", as the Australian batting colossus has responded with these words: "I am motivated, particularly after he put his fingers up... that he got me seven times."

He further pointed out that on several instances he was in pursuit of quick runs—cheap wickets, as he puts it, and perhaps the reason he was surprised that he had dismissed him so frequently—but it doesn't deflect from the fact that the Pakistani leggie has been the most successful bowler against Smith. While Smith has generally looked comfortable in handling him—as he has against all assortments of bowler—he has had his troubles in negotiating the skidding top-spinners, like it was at the Gabba.



Yasir Shah signals seven to indicate the number of times he has dismissed Smith.

**GABBA EVIDENCE:** Smith was slightly lazy, he didn't shuffle across as much as he often does. A half-front-foot stride, marginal shuffle, and he tried to whip the ball through the leg-side. It's his staple shot, only that he gen-

erally doesn't attempt the shot so much away from the body as he had here. Usually, the back-leg covers the angle, the head is under the ball—the head here for a change was flickering—and shot tends to be more fluid. He

ended up looking to have misjudged the drift of the ball, and consequently the line, or maybe, he mistook it for a googly that tends to turn more than the top-spinner that scudded on and went straight on.

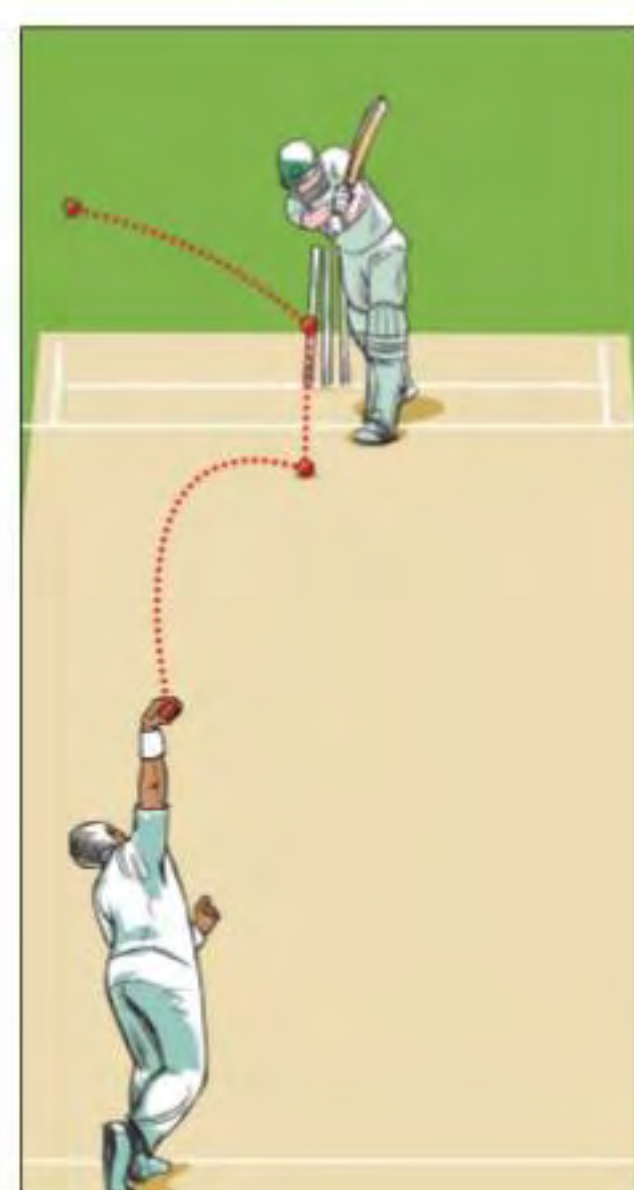
Maybe, it was just that he tried the shot a tad too early in the innings, he had just faced 10 balls. Maybe, he was a bit overconfident, having smeared the previous delivery for a boundary with a similar stroke, albeit differently executed. On that occasion, he has shimmied down the surface and met the ball almost on the full. It seemed a momentary misjudgment than a tangible flaw, though it's not the first time Yasir's top-spinner had consumed him.

**SUCCESSFUL, RELATIVELY:** Like all great batsmen, Smith doesn't have a specific weakness, he has meticulously ironed out whatever he had. He's unique in that sense, looks fallible, yet infallible. But the top-spinner has reaped a fair deal of success against him. Shah had him dismissed once in Dubai with a ball that slid in and hurried into his

pad. So had his leg-spin predecessor Danish Kaneria, twice in a Test, though Smith's batting evolution was at its nascent stage.

Likewise, left-arm spinner Zulfiqar Babar too had trapped him in front with the slider. In fact, of the 13 times he had gotten out against Pakistan, 10 were authored by spinners. It probably says something about the type of attack that's likeliest to succeed against him. Not that he's uncomfortable against the away-going spinner's slider—he still averages 55 against Pakistan, and 68.77 in matches Shah has featured—but based purely on numbers, the particular delivery holds a better chance of getting him out.

**WHAT LIES AHEAD:** Smith is not someone who is easily provoked, but he clearly was watching Shah's ebullient celebrations. And he promised a better shift next time round: "I'm not overly worried about him but playing with a bit more discipline this week and hopefully will score some runs. I spoke to JL and I was like 'how should I go about this, should I just take it on'. He said 'just go out and entertain them, do what you want'." Now this is bad news for Pakistan, the last thing they required in their bid to salvage the series. But the Smith-Shah contest—even though the protagonists in the day-night Test could be seamers—could enliven what has looked an unequal contest. A narrative thread for what has looked like a monologue. **SANDIP G**



Steve Smith played the wrong line to a Yasir Shah top-spinner and fatally tried to whip the ball away from the body.