

# Hockey: India lose the battle, win the war to book Tokyo berth



India lost the match to USA 4-1, but qualified on aggregate (6-5).

**MIHIR VASAVDA**  
BHUBANESWAR, NOVEMBER 2

BEFORE INDIA rose and rejoiced, they sank and suffered.

In the space of 120 mind-numbing minutes, spread over two matches in two evenings, they were dead, revived, dead again before resurrecting themselves one last time. Somehow, at the end of it all, they were still standing. Never had one goal in a 4-1 rout mattered so much. Never had a defeat felt so important.

Perhaps it was fate that a loose ball, which should've been cleared by the defence, landed at the stick of Rani Rampal in the 48th minute. At that moment, the India captain – who suffered a heartbreaking loss to the same opponent in the 2008 Olympic qualifiers – did not over-think. Just hit the target. And hit it hard. She did both. Her unstoppable shot found the roof of the USA net. It restored India's lead on aggregate. And revived the Tokyo dream, which appeared to be in tatters seconds ago.

India began the second Olympic qualifier with a 5-1 lead over the US, a team they had never beaten in International Hockey Federation tournaments before Friday. It was a freakish scoreline, which USA's coach

Janneke Schopman and Kathleen Sharkey had said was possible for them to reverse. No one took them seriously; probably they themselves did not believe in those words. But it happened.

The USA needed just 28 minutes to wipe out the deficit. It was absurd. It was agonising. The kind of implosion you rarely see on a hockey field. "I was like, 'what is going on here?'" coach Sjoerd Marijne said.

What was going on, in fact, was just what had gone on the day before – the US massacring Indian defence with Sharkey single-handedly orchestrating the play from the midfield. The only difference tonight was that US converted the chances they created – scoring four from the six shots on goal in the first two quarters.

This is an experienced Indian squad – just two out of the 18 players have less than 150 international appearances. But none had experienced anything like this. Marijne, a professional motivational speaker, has made several inspiring speeches at half-time breaks. This time, he needed something special, for several lines were at stake. Heck, the future of women's hockey itself seemed doomed.

Would Hockey India still persist with Marijne as coach? If he did stay on, would he have the same players? Would Rani, with her

sore muscles and broken body, continue playing if India did not qualify for the Olympics? Where would the women play next year, given they do not feature in the Pro League as well?

These questions and many more floated in the air as the teams disappeared into the dressing room at half time. Marijne chose to give the girls some space, using minimum words. "It's 0-0," he told the players. "It's your moment. Go with your head up."

Those words were enough to generate response from his players. The third quarter was cagey, both teams careful not to fall behind. Then, in the final 15 minutes Marijne made a tactical switch, employing a full-court press, which meant his players had to run a lot more and thus not thinking about winning or losing.

A couple of years ago, it would've been unimaginable to see such high work-rate from an Indian women's team in the final few minutes. Marijne and physio Wayne Lombard's obsessive push to improve the team's fitness was now reaping rewards.

India harried USA with their high pressing, which forced an error from an American defender who was shown a yellow card in the 48th minute, leaving the visitors a player short in the closing stages of the game.

Seconds later, Rani – who was absent the whole match – scored the goal that put India ahead 6-5.

Before they qualified for the 2016 Games, the women had to wait for 36 years. Now they have made it two in two.

## Men's team make it, too

After an unconvincing 4-2 win in the first match, men's coach Graham Reid gathered his players in the centre of the pitch. "I just asked them, who can play better tomorrow?" Reid says. "Of course, they all put their hands up."

On Saturday, they were better. But only marginally. The men's team sealed their Olympic berth but the 10-3 aggregate win over Russia raises more questions than answers about the path the team is on. Russia, a hockey nobody, shed the tag of being the whipping boys of international hockey and showed character as they gave India a few anxious moments in the first half before the wheels came off in the second.

Russia exposed India's defensive fragility in the first quarter and took a 1-0 lead, to reduce the overall deficit to 4-3. Ultimately, India's experience and skill were too much for them to handle and half-a-dozen goals in the next 45 minutes ensured a safe passage to Tokyo for India.

## It took Virat 3 seconds to give his consent to D-N match, says Sourav

**SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY**  
KOLKATA, NOVEMBER 2

VIRAT KOHLI took "three seconds" to agree to play day-night Tests when he met Sourav Ganguly after the latter took charge as the BCCI president. Following the interaction between the India captain and Ganguly, it was decided that Eden Gardens would host India's first-ever pink-ball Test, against Bangladesh from November 22. On Saturday, during a promotional event in Kolkata, Ganguly expressed his surprise at the Indian team's reported reluctance to play a day-night Test in Adelaide last year.

"I don't know what's the reason they didn't want to play (Adelaide day-night Test). I met Virat, met him for an hour and the first question was that we need to have day-night Test cricket. The answer in three seconds was, 'yes let's go ahead and do it.' So I really don't know what's happened in the past. What's the reason and who was involved in the decision. But I found him absolutely acceptable to play day-night Test matches. He realises that empty stands in Test matches is not the right way forward," Ganguly said.

Last winter, when India toured Australia, the BCCI refused to play a day-night Test at the Adelaide Oval. The venue had hosted pink-ball Tests for the past three seasons, but the BCCI's refusal forced Cricket Australia (CA) to convert the Test series opener to a day game. As per the ICC playing conditions, a day-night Test can be organised only in agreement with the "Visiting Board".

Before that, during the last home season, plans to hold a day-night Test against West Indies at Rajkot didn't materialise.

Ganguly also spoke about hard-selling the long-form. "Test cricket needs to be marketed a lot more than what we do at the moment. I couldn't believe that Australia were hosting India in a Test match at Adelaide, and the Big Bash was going on in another part of the country at that time. It's poor organisation. I know T20 cricket brings crowds, you see the IPL. But I think proper management of Test cricket will bring it back to where it was."

He added: "Hopefully it's (day-night Test) a start for India. It's (Eden) the place to play the game in the world. With the fans, attention and love, and with this I think Test cricket will be back on its feet."

Ganguly yet again stressed the fact that time has changed and the game must adapt accordingly. "When India went to Australia, my 100th Test match was a Boxing Day Test at the MCG. There were 70,000 people watching the game. You should see the Ashes... When Australia play England, not one seat is empty. When India played Australia in 2001 at Eden Gardens, there were 100,000 people watching. Now people's life has changed, society has changed. You can't leave offices to watch Test matches, so adaptability is most important. Most number of times, change is good. Sometimes when you are forced to change and come out of your comfort zone, it's better."

The Bangladesh skipper said, going into World T20, they need to achieve consistency in batting. "We have been exposed every now and then. We can give enough runs or foundation to the bowlers to prove themselves," he said.

"made a mistake" but at the same time believes that his longtime teammate "has not committed a crime".

The skipper now wants the younger lot should raise their hands and perform.

"That's an issue that has gone by. We are focussing on playing tomorrow and win the game. Probably, it will be a proper opportunity for the younger guys to show up and stand up for the Bangladesh team," he said.

Shakib is likely to miss the World T20 in Australia too because his ban will not be over before the flagship event begins in Australia next year. Shakib's ban ends on October 29, 2020 while the marquee event begins on October 18.

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any authority at events conducted by the university games federation. As a result, no SFI official can be present at the competition. We can go and officiate at such an event only if we are invited, which we rarely are," Monal said.

The secretary general, however said that the results at the inter-university meet don't matter when it comes to national team selection conducted by the SFI. "The timings from these meets are not counted for national or international records because we know it's not reliable, and by no means do these results make a difference when it comes to selecting swimmers for international meets. At best winners can get a few extra marks in the university examinations."

# India's outstanding skipper

Kohli's absence, in theory, should give opposition hope; but Rohit leading in T20 can't be an encouraging sight for any rival captain

**VISHAL MENON**  
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 2

"IN T20s, you need a lot of strategy, planning and an understanding with your players on what they can offer."

Addressing the press at Feroz Shah Kotla on eve of the series opener against Bangladesh, India's stand-in skipper Rohit Sharma, who has led Mumbai Indians to a staggering five trophies (four IPLs and 1 Champions League), gave insights into captaining a side in T20.

"That is the most important thing for a captain to understand. That is something I have probably executed at the Mumbai Indians with the help of the support staff we have."

Rohit is in the midst of a stellar run as a batsman – from notching up five centuries at the World Cup in England to making the seamless transition as a Test opener against the Proteas. Amidst all the plaudits he has been receiving for his batsmanship, Rohit's captaincy is an area that often gets overlooked. Incumbent Virat Kohli's incredible success as captain has meant that Rohit's leadership role in international cricket is limited. Rohit has never publicly expressed his desire to lead India full-time. However, every time he gets the opportunity, Rohit leaves a mark. A case in point: India's Asia Cup triumph last year.

"Captaining India is a huge honour, be it for one match, 10 matches or 100 matches. When we were younger, the dream we had was of playing for India, not of leading India. I never think 'why did they make me captain for just one series or two series. Why not for a full year?' I don't think or even talk about these things. Whenever I get these opportunities, I happily shoulder the responsibility and try to set an example," he said.

While the opportunities in international cricket have been sporadic, it is in the Indian Premier League where the 32-year-old has really blossomed as leader. Taking over the reins from Ricky Ponting in 2013, Rohit, who didn't have any substantial experience as captain at any level, made Mumbai Indians the most successful IPL franchise in seven seasons. Those associated with Mumbai attribute his incredible success-rate to his technical nous backed by meticulous planning that involves data crunching and exploiting weaknesses in the opposition.

Mumbai's 2019 IPL triumph under Rohit had moments of individual acts of brilliance. However, it was the cool, calculated mind of their captain that helped them tilt the scales during crunch matches. Like when he had asked Lasith Malinga to bowl short from around the wicket to Kolkata Knight Riders' talisman Andre Russell. With Malinga's unorthodox slinging action and pin-point precision, Mumbai ultimately saw the back of their arch nemesis. Another example of Rohit's ingenuity was the manner in which he utilised his bowlers in the Powerplay of the IPL. Qualifier against Chennai Super Kings. In that match, Rohit employed five bowlers inside the first six overs to stifle Chennai's batsmen. The rationale behind this move was to keep their batsmen guessing and not let them get used to one particular bowler. The smooth execution



Rohit Sharma has led Mumbai Indians to five T20 trophies – four in the IPL and one in Champions League T20 – in seven years. Praveen Khanna

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of that plan meant Rohit's team would defeat MS Dhoni's outfit for the third consecutive time in the season.

Virat Kohli seems to have taken a leaf out of his deputy's book and has used this ploy on a couple of instances in bilateral T20Is. Even when he is not leading the side, Rohit chips in with valuable inputs. Like when he had asked Jasprit Bumrah to unleash a vicious slower delivery that trapped Shaun Marsh on Day 1 of the MCG Test.

"When I was bowling in the first session, the wicket had become really slow and nothing was happening. So, during the last ball before lunch, Rohit was at mid-off and he told me 'you can try a slower ball like you do in ODI cricket,' Bumrah had said about his Mumbai Indians captain.

Rohit has a simple, uncluttered view to leadership: Let the rest of his 10 team-mates take control of the proceedings.

"When you captain your side, you are not such an important person. The other 10 players are the most important players because you want to get the best out of those 10 players. Of course, your performance will matter but I don't like to consider myself at the forefront. The other 10 guys become important and I have to focus on them and give them that confidence and freedom where they can come out and express themselves," he elaborates. It's a method radically different to Kohli's who likes to stamp his presence on the game.

For the moment, Rohit has his hands full. He knows that a Bangladesh team without the services of talisman all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan and star batsman Tamim Iqbal can still surprise. "Bangladesh is a very good team," Rohit said. "Over the years, we have seen how they have performed not just at home but also away whenever they have gone out. Especially against us, they have always put us under pressure. There is no way we look at this team differently."

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## Shakib will be welcomed with open arms, says Mahmudullah

**PRESS TRUST OF IPL**  
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 2

SHAKIB AL HASAN remains a loved character in Bangladesh cricket and will be welcomed back with open arms, T20 captain Mahmudullah Riyad said on Saturday.

Shakib was banned by the ICC for two years (one year suspended) for not reporting multiple corrupt approaches from an alleged Indian bookie. However, Bangladesh is not yet ready to shun its favourite son.

"Let me tell you. We loved Shakib, still love Shakib and will continue loving Shakib. And when he comes back, he will be welcomed with open arms," Mahmudullah told reporters ahead of first T20 against India. "When he enters the dressing room, we will all give him a tight hug."

Mahmudullah said that Shakib indeed

ate Srihari Natraj, the national record-holder in the 50 metres and 100 metres backstroke, the results were being rigged to suit swimmers from universities in Punjab. Automatic touch pads were not being used at the inter-university meet – the norm in most competitions – and officials were relying on manual time keeping.

Natraj, who was representing Jain University, said officials were turning a blind eye to false starts.

"LPU swimmers were making false starts. Normally that means immediate disqualification, but here they were allowed to continue in the race," Natraj said. "And when the timings came out, people who you could see

finished the race a few strokes behind the leader were adjudged the winner. It was clear that the organisers were being biased towards the host university," the national champion added.

In the 4x100m freestyle relay, three of the four LPU swimmers made false starts, Natraj claimed.

Natraj said that Jain University came first with a time of 3 minutes and 32 seconds and the LPU team was behind them. "When they finally published the timings, LPU was declared winner with a time of 3:31 minutes," Natraj says. "That didn't make any sense. Earlier this year I was a part of the Karnataka team that won the national title with a tim-

ing of 3:31 minutes. How could LPU get the same time?"

### 'Mistakes being rectified'

Association of Indian Universities (AIU) secretary general Pankaj Mittal said that corrective measures had been taken to ensure undeserving swimmers were not awarded medals. "The mistakes are being rectified and results are being updated. AIU has already taken action," Mittal, who is in Coimbatore, said. "Normally there are AIU observers in such meets and players can submit their protest to the concerned officer," Mittal added.

Sahil Chopra, who represented LPU, said that organisers had rectified mistakes. "There

were technical errors and clerical errors. Results have been revised," Chopra told *The Indian Express*.

Swimmers also talked about how the schedule was announced at the last moment but was given to local participants much earlier.

A top Swimming Federation of India official said that this is not the first time results at inter-university meets have been changed to suit the hosts.

"This happens almost all the time every year, and the results always benefit the host university," says Chokshi Monal, secretary general of the SFI. "But there's nothing the SFI can do because we don't have a mandate or