

Kohli’s men should get their act together

There will be no dearth of support for the Caribbean crusaders

WI IN INDIA

AMOL KARHADKAR
MUMBAI

“It’s coming home” was the theme song for the 2018 FIFA World Cup, but by the time England started living up to the tag of ‘favourites’, it had been adopted as the unofficial theme song for the ICC World Cup earlier this year.

The fans in the Maximum City, while entering the Wankhede Stadium for the deciding rubber of the three-match T20I series between India and West Indies, could well be humming the same song. Not just in anticipation of India’s series triumph but even with multiple “home” connect the match offers, from both the teams.

Three Indian players – vice-captain Rohit Sharma, middle-order dasher Shreyas Iyer and the new kid on the block Shivam Dube – are Mumbaikars.

Quiet series

While Dube will be keen to continue in the same vein after making his promotion to No. 3 count in Thiruvananthapuram, Rohit and Shreyas will hope to turn things around on their home turf after a relatively quiet series so far.

Thanks to the Indian Pre-



Ready to fire: Rohit Sharma, second from left, and Shreyas Iyer, right, will hope to turn things around on home turf. •VIVEK BENDRE

mier League (IPL), though, support will not be limited to the home team. With Kieron Pollard – who has spent more years in the Mumbai Indians (MI) camp than captain Rohit – leading the West Indies, there will be no dearth of support for the Caribbean crusaders come Wednesday night. Pollard isn’t the lone

member in the opposition camp with a strong local connect.

Lendl Simmons, the opener who repeated his World T20 semifinal heroics on Sunday by anchoring a perfect chase, has been a star performer in one of MI’s four IPL title-runs. So has Evin Lewis, whose twin knocks so far would have reinvigorated interest among IPL franchises for the auction after being released by MI.

If Simmons and Lewis can stage an encore of the strong foundation they laid on Sunday, the Men in Blue will have to play out of their skin in order to avoid the ignominy of conceding the series.

make drastic improvement in their performance to avoid the series from slipping away.

In an effort to build the squad with an eye on the T20 World Cup, India may be giving a long rope to some of the fringe players. It has resulted in errors – not just with bat and ball, but more worryingly in the field – at inopportune times.

If India is to enjoy a home run at the Wankhede, such basic mistakes will have to be eliminated. Otherwise the fans will have to sing “it’s coming home” to praise Pollard instead of Kohli.

The teams (from): India: Virat Kohli (Capt.), Rohit Sharma, K.L. Rahul, Shreyas Iyer, Manish Pandey, Rishabh Pant, Shivam Dube, Washington Sundar, Ravindra Jadeja, Yuzvendra Chahal, Kuldeep Yadav, Deepak Chahar, Mohammed Shami, Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Sanju Samson.

West Indies: Kieron Pollard (Capt.), Lendl Simmons, Evin Lewis, Shimron Hetmyer, Brandon King, Nicholas Pooran, Jason Holder, Keemo Paul, Khary Pierre, Denesh Ramdin, Sherfane Rutherford, Hayden Walsh Jr., Fabian Allen, Sheldon Cottrell and Kesrick Williams.

Umpires: Nitin Menon and Nandan; **Third umpire:** C. Shamshuddin; **Fourth umpire:** Anil Chaudhary; **Match referee:** David Boon.

Match starts at 7 p.m.

Masters of the chase

India has won nearly 70% of the T20 matches in which it batted second while West Indies has managed a win % of just above 40 in games it has chased

Team	Matches	Matches batting 2nd	Wins batting 2nd	% wins batting second
India	125	62	42	67.7
West Indies	118	60	25	41.7

AMOL KARHADKAR
MUMBAI

It is among the most dominant outfits in world cricket in longer formats, but when it comes to the shortest avatar, the Men in Blue have been consistently inconsistent. One of the major issues to have plagued Virat Kohli and Co. in the last 12 months is the inability to win while batting first.

As much as India’s reputed batsmen have failed to put up a formidable total while batting first, as opposed to chasing down gargantuan totals, its bowlers have faltered in defending moderate to sizeable totals.

Vice-captain Rohit Sharma stressed that while he prefers to assess the conditions before starting to play shots, batsmen have to execute the roles assigned to them.

“It also depends on how your partner is batting. It’s very, very important that you complement your partner and specific role has been given to all our batters. We try and stick to that role and yes at times, you need to be different and we all are prepared to do that.

“When we need to approach differently, we are prepared to do that. But the situation should provide us to do that. My game doesn’t change when we bat first or bowl first,” Rohit said.

Rohit was non-committal whether Shivam Dube’s promotion – the left-hander batted at No. 3 in the second T20I – will be persisted with.

“I don’t know if it’s going to be a long-term plan or just for one game, but everything depends on the composition, what are the bowling options they have.

“Just to change the momentum we did that in the last game. You never know if it will happen in this game or not,” Rohit said.

Pollard is a smart leader: Rohit

Proactive with all players, says Windies coach Simmons

G. VISWANATH
MUMBAI

These are early days for Kieron Pollard as captain of the West Indies’ white-ball cricket team.

After an undistinguished start, losing the Twenty20 series 2-1 to Afghanistan in Lucknow recently, the 32-year-old Trinidadian led his team to a 3-0 win in the ODI series.

All along, the all-rounder, who has lit up many an IPL match, knew that the bigger challenge was to come against India.

Pollard, presently the most popular West Indian among fans in India, especially Mumbai, has made a fine impression as captain in the two matches so far.

This was readily acknowledged by his Mumbai Indians captain Rohit Sharma here on Tuesday.

“The West Indies plays well as a team and now is under the leadership of Kieron Pollard whom I know really well.

“As a leader I know what



In control: Kieron Pollard’s captaincy skills has come in for appreciation. •VIVEK BENDRE

he expects from his team. Pollard is a smart player.

“When it comes to MI, he has always been part of the leadership group. He’s a very smart thinker of the game. He has great knowledge about the game and this helps him handle situations on the ground pretty well,” Rohit said.

West Indies coach Phil Simmons pointed out that Pollard is proactive with all players.

“He lets them know exactly what he wants from them. He’s been good in the sense that they know that he’ll give everything for the team. That’s where he’s started,” said Simmons.

‘Don’t mess around with Dhoni’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

India coach Ravi Shastri says no one can “mess around with” Mahendra Singh Dhoni if he decides to be in contention for next year’s T20 World Cup but the former captain would “never impose himself” on the team.

“That (Dhoni) guy is a legend. The last thing he will want is to impose himself on an Indian team, having known him. He is wanting to take a break but he is going to play the IPL,” Shastri said on the show ‘The Inspiration’ to be telecast on India Today TV.

Asked if he isn’t ruling out a comeback by the 38-year-old, Shastri answered, “The amount of sport he has played... if he puts himself in contention... if he feels after the IPL that ‘I am good enough to play for India’, don’t mess around with that.”

Dhoni had recently stated “don’t ask anything till January.”

National selection committee chairman M.S.K. Prasad has, however, made it



Understanding professional: Ravi Shastri says that M.S. Dhoni will never impose himself on the Indian team. •FILE PHOTO: R.V. MOORTHY

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.

Russian star Lasitskene slams officials over ban

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MOSCOW

One of Russia’s top athletes, three-time World champion high jumper Mariya Lasitskene, on Tuesday called sports officials to account after her country was banned for four years from international competition.

In her open letter published by *Championat.com* sports website, Lasitskene, a long-time critic of Russian sports officials, demanded to know who has been punished over the country’s doping scandal and the fact that she cannot compete under the Russian flag.

Lasitskene missed the 2016 Rio Olympics because of the doping crisis and had threatened to leave Russia so as not to miss the Tokyo Olympics in 2020.

“Have we done an internal investigation?”



Lasitskene. •FILE PHOTO

Who was punished?” Lasitskene asked.

In Paris, Russian President Vladimir Putin slammed the decision as a “politically motivated” ruling that “contradicted” the Olympic Charter.

“There is nothing to reproach the Russian Olympic Committee for and if there is no reproach towards this committee, the country should take part in competitions under its own flag,” Putin said.

The man who dignified and illuminated the craft

Neville Cardus learnt the importance of lacing his reports with humour



BETWEEN WICKETS

SURESH MENON

Is Neville Cardus relevant today? That’s a question asked often. Just the fact that it is being asked is testimony to his significance. As Alan Gibson, writer and commentator said: “All cricket writers have been influenced by Cardus, whether they admit it or not, whether they have wished to be or not, whether they have tried to copy him or tried to avoid copying him.

Changed the course of writing

“He was not a model, any more than Macaulay, say, was a model for the aspiring historian. But just as Macaulay changed the course of the writing of history, Cardus changed the course of the writing of cricket. He showed what could be done. He dignified and illuminated the craft.”

The pioneer never loses relevance.

Now, over four decades after his death, Duncan Hamilton has written a superb biography of this fine writer who just happened to focus on cricket and music. *The Great Romantic: Cricket and the Golden Age of Neville Cardus* earned Hamilton his third William Hill Sports Book of the Year award. Biographer and subject are well matched; Hamilton is the mod-

ern stylist who writes with enviable flow.

Cardus-assessment has veered between hagiography and peremptory dismissal, getting closer to the latter thanks to increasing number of formats and instant communication. Reading cricket reports for their style and elegance is not as popular as getting the running scores on the phone.

Here’s Cardus on left-arm spinner Wilfred Rhodes’ bowling: “Every ball a decoy, a spy sent out to get the lie of the land; some balls simple, some complex, some easy, some difficult; and one of them – ah! which? – the master ball.”

What, nothing about ‘dot’ balls or strike rates?

Well researched

Hamilton’s is a modern biography: definitive, well researched, sympathetic, and with a profound understanding of the times Cardus lived in and wrote about. Cardus aspired to literature; the sport needed that ambition.

In his debunking essay, *Cardus and the Aesthetic Fallacy*, Derek Birley upset legions of Cardus-worshippers; yet even he admitted that “The hankering after aesthetic significance is harmless and often enjoyable.”

Hankering after significance is human, after all. No one likes to believe that what he is doing is of no import whatever. To ensure that his work be seen as important, Cardus had to first show that what the cricketer did was important. Performer and recorder

(or critic) need each other more than either is willing to admit.

Witty and intelligent

Cardus may not have planned it that way, but he could not have been unaware of its advantages. His players often came across as witty and intelligent because he was witty and intelligent. It gave heroes a new dimension and drew into the game thousands who might not otherwise have cared for it.

Cardus was self-taught, worked his way up from the slums where he was born to a prostitute. His fans included Bradman and Wodehouse, Pinter and Beckett. The novel of a person of that background going on to receive a knighthood might have been rejected by publishers.

As Hamilton writes, “He managed to transform himself so successfully into the figure he wanted to be all along – a gentleman writer – that the figure he had once been all but vanished...throughout his early life, Cardus purposefully dusted over the tracks of his upbringing even when pretending to come clean about it.”

He put words into the mouths of his characters that “god intended to,” said Cardus when challenged about some of his quotes. This was perhaps necessary to elevate the craft from the basement of sportswriting to its attic. In his centenary year, I wrote that Cardus was the Dickens of cricket writing, bringing to it characters and dialogues the novelist might have.

Hamilton has dug much deeper. From Dickens, he says, Cardus learnt prolificacy. He learnt how to exploit plot; to create and develop characters. He learnt the importance of lacing his reports with humour. “No one can understand Cardus’s approach to cricket writing without also understanding his absorption in Dickens.”

Impressionist painter

Commenting on Cardus’ description of fast bowler Ted McDonald, Hamilton says, “He admired him in paragraphs that were almost heart-shaped with love.” Cardus was an impressionist painter – not a documentary photographer. Anyway, as John Arlott said, Cardus hadn’t made up nearly as much as he was accused of.

The reason Cardus didn’t go to Australia to report on the Bodyline series was not because “I knew trouble was brewing,” but, as Hamilton points out, it was because he had become infatuated with a woman and couldn’t bear to stay away for so long.

“He had his cricket friends, his music friends, and his girlfriends,” said Arlott, “and he stored them in different rooms.” Hamilton’s book provides the key to two of those rooms. The music room generally remains locked.

This book might lead to a Cardus revival. Or not. Hamilton has achieved the difficult task of humanising an icon while clearing the rubbish away from the pedestal on which he stands.

India signs off with a record haul of 312 medals

Six Indian boxers emerge victorious on the final day



Champion: The triumphant squash team of Tanvi Khanna, Sanya Vats, Urwashi Joshi and Sunayna Kuruvilla. •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

SAG

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KATHMANDU

India ended its South Asian Games campaign with a best-ever medal haul of 312 and finish on top for the 13th time in a row, in the regional multi-sporting event, here on Tuesday.

India collected 174 gold, 93 silver and 45 bronze after 10 days of competitions to surpass the 309 it had won in the previous edition at home in 2016.

But the number of gold In-

dia won this time was 15 less than the previous edition.

Sri Lanka was a distant second with 251 medals while Nepal finished with 206.

On the concluding day, India added 18 medals (15 gold, 2 silver and 1 bronze) by the boxers fetching six gold and 1 silver.

Overall, the country’s pugilists won 12 gold, 3 silver and 1 bronze.

The Indian cagers fetched both the men’s and women’s gold by defeating Sri Lanka (101-62) and host Nepal (127-46) in their respective sum-

mit clashes.

Mixed luck

In squash, India won gold and a silver in the women’s and men’s team events respectively.

Prominent medalists: Boxing: Gold: Men: Vikas Krishan (69kg), Sparsh Kumar (52kg), Narender (+91kg). **Women:** Pinki Rani (51kg), Sonia Lather (57kg), Manju Bamboriya (64kg). **Silver:** Varinder Singh (men’s 60kg). **Squash: Gold:** Women; **Silver:** men. **Basketball: Gold:** Men & women.