India has its back to the wall again

Loss in Mumbai may force a rethink in Kohli's batting spot; Rahul to continue to don 'keeper's gloves

AUS IN INDIA

AMOL KARHADKAR

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. The idiom fits India captain Virat Kohli perfectly, switching his batting position from No. 3 to No. 4. In order to accommodate all three specialist openers in the team, Kohli demoted himself from his favourite – and most successful - batting position. And the move backfired in the series-opener in Mumbai on Tuesday as not only did Kohli not fire but India also ended up putting on a below-par total.

With Aaron Finch and David Warner helping Australia cruise to a 10-wicket win, India for the second time in as many months finds itself needing to bounce back in a three-match ODI series. If Kohli's cavaliers have to show the resilience they showed against West Indies last month, it's time the captain regains his customary position.

Kohli's admission

Kohli – who has scored 36 of his 43 ODI hundreds at No. 3 - admitted after the loss at Wankhede that India had to "rethink" about the batting order. "We've had this discussion many times in the past. Because of the way K.L. (Rahul) has been batting, we have tried to fit him in the



Batting strategy: With Virat Kohli's experiment of dropping down the order failing in Mumbai, he might revert to his usual slot. ■ VIJAY SONEJI

batting line-up," Kohli said. "Having said that, I don't think it's quite gone our way whenever I've batted No. 4 so we'll probably have to rethink about that one."

Come Friday and India's quandary over the batting line-up will still continue, considering Rishabh Pant's unavailability for the game. The wicketkeeper has been

ruled out of the must-win game after being hit on the helmet. As a result, Rahul who donned the gloves during Australia's chase – is set to continue behind the wicket. It will thus be interesting to see if Kohli and Rahul

swap batting positions. Pant's injury also means that it will be a toss-up between Manish Pandey and Kedar Jadhav at the No. 6 slot.

High on confidence

Australia, meanwhile, will enter the game high on confidence. Century makers Warner and Finch will hope to give yet another cracking start to the visiting outfit on yet another belter at the Saurashtra Cricket Association

never separated at Wankhede meant Marnus Labuschagne was deprived of having a hit in his much-anticipated ODI debut. The in-form batsman will be looking forward to prove his mettle in the shorter version on Friday.

That the opening duo was

It remains to be seen if Australia brings on Josh Hazlewood in place of Kane Richardson as the third seam-Considering Richardson fared pretty well at Wankhede, it is unlikely that coach Justin Langer will tinker with the winning combination for the sake of it.

The teams (from):

India: Virat Kohli (Capt.), Rohit Sharma, Shikhar Dhawan, K.L. Rahul (wk), Shreyas Iyer, Manish Pandey, Kedar Jadhav, Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Yuzvendra Chahal, Kuldeep Yadav, Navdeep Saini, Jasprit Bumrah, Shardul Thakur, Mohammed Shami.

Australia: Aaron Finch (Capt.), Ashton Agar, Alex Carey (wk), Pat Cummins, Peter Handscomb, Josh Hazlewood, Marnus Labuschagne, Kane Richardson, D'Arcy Short, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, Ashton Turner, David Warner, Adam Zampa

On-field umpires: Richard Kettleborough, Virender Sharma; Third umpire: Michael Gough; Fourth umpire: K. Srinivasan. Match referee: Madugalle.

Match starts at 1.30 p.m.

No central contract for Dhoni

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Mahendra Singh Dhoni is the most prominent omission from BCCI's central contracts list for 2019-2020 released on Thursday.

His exclusion from the list of cricketers with an annual retainer is yet another indication that perhaps the three-time ICC trophy-winning captain may not don the India Blues again.

The contracts for the October-September cycle are awarded by a three-member committee consisting of the BCCI president, secretary and chief selector based on the performance during the last cycle. Dhoni hasn't played competitive cricket since India's World Cup semifinal exit.

While chief selector M.S.K. Prasad has said the selection committee has decided to "look beyond" Dhoni, head coach Ravi Shastri has maintained Dhoni may come back into the T20 World Cup contention based on how he fares for Chennai Super Kings in the Indian Premier League.

The man himself, however, has maintained a conspicuous silence. Last month, at a promotional event in Mumbai, Dhoni had said he would not say anything till January.

In and out

Emerging Cricketer of

Marnus Labuschagne

Kyle Coetzer (Scotland)

Spirit of Cricket Award:

Virat Kohli (for stopping the

fans booing Steve Smith at

Associate Cricketer of the Year:

(Australia)

the Oval)

Besides Dhoni, who was placed in Grade-A last year with a contract worth ₹5



Out of favour? As a portent of things to come, M.S. Dhoni has been excluded from the BCCI's central contract list. • PTI

crore, three other cricketers Dinesh Karthik, Ambati Rayudu and Khaleel Ahmed have also been excluded.

The new entrants in the 27-player list include Navdeep Saini, Deepak Chahar, Shardul Thakur, Shreyas Iyer and Washington Sundar.

Mithali downgraded

Mithali Raj, who has announced her retirement from T20Is, has been moved from Grade-A to B in the women's contracts for 2019-20. Shafali Verma, 15, has become the youngest to be awarded the annual retainer.

Central contracts 2019-2020:

Men: Grade A+ (₹7 crore): Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and Jasprit

Grade-A (₹5 crore): R. Ashwin,

ICC Test Team of the Year:

Marnus Labuschagne, Virat Kohli (captain), Steve Smith, Ben Stokes, B-J. Watling

Mayank Agarwal, Tom Latham,

(wicketkeeper), Pat Cummins,

Rohit Sharma, Shai Hope, Virat

Kane Williamson, Ben Stokes, Jos

Buttler (wicketkeeper), Mitchell

Starc, Trent Boult, Mohammed

Shami and Kuldeep Yadav

Kohli (captain), Babar Azam,

Mitchell Starc, Neil Wagner

ICC ODI Team of the Year:

and Nathan Lyon

Kumar, Cheteshwar Pujara, Aiinkva Rahane, Shikhar Dhawan, Mohammed Shami, Ishant Sharma, Kuldeep Yadav, Rishabh Pant and K.L. Rahul.

Grade-B (₹3 crore): Umesh Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Hardik Pandya, Wriddhiman Saha and Mayank Agarwal.

Grade-C (₹1 crore): Kedar Jadhav, Manish Pandey, Hanuma Vihari, Navdeep Saini, Deepak Chahar, Shardul Shreyas Iyer and Washington

Women: Grade-A (₹50 lakh): Harmanpreet Kaur, Smriti Mandhana and Poonam Yadav. Grade-B (₹30 lakh): Mithali Rai. Ekta Bisht. Jhulan Goswami, Shikha Pandey, Deepti Sharma, Jemimah Rodrigues, Taniya Bhatia and Radha Yadav. Grade-C (₹10 lakh): D. Hemalatha, Anuja Patil, Veda Krishnamurthy, Mansi Joshi, Arund-Reddy, Rajeshwari

Gayakwad, Pooja Vastrakar,

Harleen Deol, Priya Punia, Pu-

nam Raut and Shafali Verma.

Zampa spots Kohli's Achilles heel

Says the Indian skipper finds leggies hard to line up early on

AMOL KARHADKAR

There is more to Adam Zampa than his six-wicket haul in the Indian Premier League. The Australia leg-break bowler has been one of the most consistent wicket-taking bowlers in white-ball cricket, especially in ODIs. It is reflected in the fact that he dismissed Virat Kohli for the fourth time in 11 innings on Tuesday, which was one of the turning points of the series-opener.

On the eve of the second ODI, Zampa admitted that Australia finds Kohli vulnerable against leggies at the start of the innings. "We bas ically just find that Virat finds leg-spinners hard to line up early in his innings, to be honest. He's such a great starter, even the other day he was 16 off 14 or whatever it was; how much energy he brought to the crease. his running between the



Having fun: Australian players train on Thursday. ■VIJAY SONEJI

wickets, some of the cover drives he played off the quicks," Zampa said on Thursday.

Gameplan

"I think it's important to try and have a gameplan for him. So we figured that for the last game it would be good to start with leg-spin to him. It might be different next game. As it's been mentioned, I've got him out four times in the last year or so. It's nice to have that confidence to bowl to him at the start of his innings."

Even before the start of the series, Kohli had praised Zampa for his character during Australia's five-match series in India last year.

Terming it as a "big compliment" Zampa stressed he is "not the most skillful legspinner in the world, that's for sure". "One of the most important things I have always tried to do is have a strong character. To be a wrist-spinner in one-day cricket in the middle overs is not easy at all."

Staging a comeback

India has its back to the wall but middle-order batsman Shreyas Iyer said the team believes in staging a comeback, like it did against West Indies. "We have seen that in the past as well, we were 0-1 down against the West Indies. Its not as if we have lost the series. We can still come back strong and that's what we discussed in the dressing room." Shrevas said.

"We need to back and believe in ourselves and also in our teammates that in a pressure situation somebody will stand up and see the team through. We didn't do well that well in all three departments. We need to work on a lot of areas.'

ICC Men's Cricket Awards

Sir Garfield Sobers **Trophy for Best Cricketer** Ben Stokes (England)

Test Cricketer of Pat Cummins (Australia)

ODI Cricketer of the Year: Rohit Sharma (India)

T20I Performance of the

Deepak Chahar

(India, 6-7 v Bangladesh) The last 12 months have been the best

in my career, and I believe what we attained will be the catalyst to achieve further success over the next few years







I'm surprised that I have got it, after many years of being under the scanner for the wrong things. It is part of camaraderie that have with each 0 other. booing someone is not in the spirit of any sport, I don't

Bhuvneshwar undergoes surgery

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

Bhuvneshwar Kumar has undergone a sports hernia surgery in London and will begin his rehabilitation at the NCA after returning to the country, the BCCI said on Thursday.

The Board did not specify any timeline for his recovery but it is learnt that he will return to action during the IPL, which is scheduled to start on March 29. Bhuvneshwar plays for Sunrisers Hyderabad in the T20 event. He was not named in the T20 squad for the upcoming tour of New Zealand due to the injury.

Shaw completes rehab

The BCCI said Prithvi Shaw has left for New Zealand to join the India A team after completing his rehabilitation for a shoulder injury.

Bennett recalled

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA WELLINGTON

New Zealand on Thursday recalled medium-pacer Hamish Bennett into the national team after more than two-and-half years as injury ruled out Trent Boult and Lockie Ferguson from the upcoming Twenty20 series against India. The squad: Kane Williamson (Capt.), Hamish Bennett, Tom Bruce, Colin de Grandhomme, Martin Guptill, Scott Kuggeleijn, Daryl Mitchell, Colin Munro, Ross Taylor, Blair Tickner, Mitchell Santner, Tim Seifert, Ish Sodhi, Tim Southee.

Ireland stuns WI

ST. GEORGE'S (GRENADA): Ireland rode a career-best 95 from Paul Stirling to pull off a four-run win over West Indies in the first of a three-match T20 series on Wednesday.

The scores: Ireland 208/7 in 20 overs (P. Stirling 95, K. O'Brien 48) bt West Indies 204/7 (E. Lewis 53, K. Pollard 31; Josh Little 3/29). AFP

Ashwin for Yorkshire

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

R. Ashwin will play for Yorkshire during this year's **English County Champion**ship, the club said on Thursday. Ashwin, who will play for Delhi Capitals in the IPL, will be Yorkshire's main overseas spinner.

W.V. Raman's *The Winning Sixer* launched

Experience punishes you first and teaches you later, says former India opener

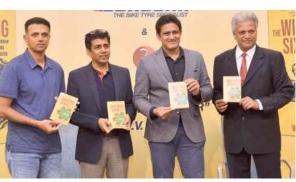
SHREEDUTTA CHIDANANDA BENGALURU

It should come as no surprise that W.V. Raman has authored a book. The former India opener has always been one of the shrewdest voices on cricket, forthright and informed in his opinion and never shy of expressing it. In The Winning Sixer, released formally by Anil Kumble here on Thursday, Raman has drawn on his own experiences, and those of other athletes, to derive leadership lessons from sport.

Raman, the current head coach of the national women's team; Kumble, a former India captain; and P. Mad-Executive havan.

Vice-President, TVS Tyres, engaged in a lively conversation on the subject of leadership, holding in rapt attention an audience that included G.R. Viswanath, Roger Binny, Rahul Dravid, Ajinkya Rahane, Narendra Hirwani and Mithali Raj.

"I don't think anyone is a born leader," said Kumble. "You just throw them in the deep end and see how they swim. As far as Indian cricket goes, you just learn on the job. I don't think there is any rule that so and so will be a perfect leader. You need to be able to step back from your personal goal and look at the team in a larger context."



Personal account: Anil Kumble releases the book The Winning Sixer along with author W.V. Raman, Rahul Dravid and P. Madhavan, Executive VP, TVS Tyres. • v. SREENIVASA MURTHY

Fans want five-day Tests, says Kumble

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Anil Kumble has stated that it is "very obvious" that modern-day cricket supporters prefer five-day Test matches to a four-day version. Kumble, who is chairman of the ICC Cricket Committee – which in March is set to discuss the proposal to shorten Tests – was speaking at an event to launch W. V.

spinner did not take sides, been clear. "There's a debate on [whether the duration of a Test should be] four days or five days," he said. "The current that is very obvious."

Raman agreed. "Expeyou are trying to achieve and rience is a tough teacher," he said. "It punishes you first and teaches you later. You need to know the end result

Raman's book The Winning The former India leg-

but pointed out that public opinion on the matter had generation certainly wants five days. That's something

then follow that path." Kumble recalled the turbulent Australia tour of 2007-08, when his capabili-

ties as a leader were tested to the limit. "You need a core group of players to support you. I was lucky that I had Rahul, Sourav, Sachin, and Laxman," he said. "The game is bigger than any individual. If you think that is the final outcome you want to get to, then things fall in place. When those issues happened... as a captain you are never trained to deal with off-field issues. The support I had from the players then was immense."

Common purpose

As a captain, what did he want in a team, Kumble was asked. "It was all about having a core set of players who would contribute to the common purpose," he said. "As a team, how well can you disguise your shortcomings? That is the critical aspect. No team can be complete. It's very difficult to get a complete team. If you have it, that's great, but it's very unlikely you are going to get that. How well can you make sure that you throw your punches at the right time? That's what matters.'

Getting all players to pull in the same direction was key, Kumble pointed out. "It all boils down to communication and respect. If you have those two things, it's not hard to align people with the common goal."

England 224/4

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

ENGLAND IN SA

PORT ELIZABETH

Ben Stokes survived three reviews by South Africa as he and Ollie Pope regained the initiative for England on the first day of the third

cricket Test on Thursday. England was 224 for four at the end of an attritional

England was 148 for four

came together, in danger of failing to capitalise on batting first on a placid pitch. But the pair added 76 without being parted and were able to lift a slow scor-

ing rate after England

scored only 117 for two in

when Stokes and Pope

58 overs before tea. Stokes was unbeaten on 38 at the close while Pope was 39 not out.

SCOREBOARD

England - first innings: Z. Crawley c van der Dussen b Nortje 44, D. Sibley c Elgar b Rabada 36, J. Denly lbw b Maharaj 25, J. Root b Rabada 27, B. Stokes (batting) 38, O. Pope (batting) 39, Extras (lb-8, nb-3, w-4): 15; Total (for four wkts. in 90 overs):

Fall of wickets: 1-70, 2-103, 3-134, 4-148.

South Africa bowling: Philander 11-5-15-0. Paterson 15-1-46-0, Rabada 17-3-48-2, Nortje 15-4-52-1, Maharaj 32-11-55-1.

Runaway favourite India eyes fifth title

UNDER-19 WC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA CAPE TOWN

Cup starting on Friday.

A few precocious talents, hardworking teenagers and a chunky lot which might fall by the wayside in times to come will form a 16-team mix in the melting pot called ICC Under-19 Cricket World

Defending champion In-

dia will be the overwhelming favourite to win the junior global meet for the fifth time with at least six players, including skipper Priyam Garg having played senior cricket - First Class, List-A or T20. Four players – Garg, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Ravi Bishnoi, Kartik Tyagi - have already landed fat contracts in the IPL.

Team to beat

India has been the team to beat on the junior circuit since Virat Kohli's men dominated the proceedings in the 2008 edition.

While there will be future stars in Pakistan, Australia, England and New Zealand, the presence of Japan and Nigeria will certainly have its own curiosity value.

Japan is clubbed with In-

dia, New Zealand and Sri Lanka in Group D. The Japanese team has

mostly South Asian expats



■ FILE PHOTO: K MURALI KUMAR

with names like Tushar Cha-

turvedi, Yugandhar Rethare-

kar, Ishan Fartyal and Debasish Sahoo helping out the likes of Kazumasha Takahashi, Masato Morita and Shu Noguchi. Local flavour Nigeria, which is clubbed

with Australia, West Indies and England, has more local flavour in the presence of Sylvester Okpe, Oche Boniface, Ifeanyichukwu Uboh and Olayinka Olaleye. The tournament starts

with South Africa taking on Afghanistan in Kimberley on Friday, followed by Australia's game against West Indies on Saturday. Australia has number of

players who have already played senior level cricket with one prominent name being Ian Harvey's nephew McKenzhie Harvey, who has played two List-A and 13 T20 games.

A BM-BME

