

A flop show by India batsmen

All three designated openers come a cropper. Vihari and Pujara the saving grace

INDIA IN NZ

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
HAMILTON

Hanuma Vihari's gutsy hundred and the seasoned Cheteshwar Pujara's 92 were the bright spots in an otherwise dreadful batting performance by India on the first day of their warm-up game against New Zealand XI here.

All the three designated openers – Mayank Agarwal (1), Prithvi Shaw (0) and Shubman Gill (0) – failed the seam and bounce test, falling cheaply.

With skipper Virat Kohli opting for an intense net session over the warm-up game, India managed only 263 with none apart from Vihari (101 ret'd. out) and Pujara able to score even 20 runs on a Seddon Park track that had liberal grass covering.

Worrying factor

What would worry the Indian team management was failure of all the three openers. Shaw and Gill were undone by the extra bounce while Mayank failed to counter to seam movement.

Ajinkya Rahane (18) was out by the end of the first hour, edging one to the slips, before Vihari and Pujara stemmed the rot and got a 195-run stand.

Seeing off Kuggeleijn

Once they saw off Kuggeleijn's first spell and the skiddy Blair Tickner, batting became easy in the second and



Quite at ease: Hanuma Vihari was equal to the challenge of countering the seaming conditions and notched up the lone century of the innings. •FILE PHOTO

third session. When the spinners were introduced, Pujara pulled Ish Sodhi over long-leg for a six while Vihari also hit three down the ground off left-arm spinner Ravindra.

India lost the last six wickets for 30 runs but what stuck out like a sore thumb

was another shot selection by Rishabh Pant when he tried an ugly hoick off Sodhi's bowling only to be caught by the man at extra-cover.

The scores: India – 1st innings: Prithvi Shaw c Ravindra b Kuggeleijn 0, Mayank Agarwal c Cleaver b Kuggeleijn 1, Cheteshwar Pujara

c Cleaver b Gibson 92, Shubman Gill c Seifert b Kuggeleijn 0, Ajinkya Rahane c Bruce b Neesham 18, Hanuma Vihari (ret'd. out) 101, Rishabh Pant c Kuggeleijn b Sodhi 7, Wriddhiman Saha c Cleaver b Gibson 0, R. Ashwin lbw b Sodhi 0, Umesh Yadav (not out) 9, Ravindra Jadeja c Allen b Sodhi 8; Extras (b-8, lb-7, nb-9, w-3): 27;

Total (in 78.5 overs): 263.

Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-5, 3-5, 4-38, 5-233, 6-245, 7-246, 8-246, 9-250.

New Zealand XI bowling: Scott Kuggeleijn 14-2-40-3, Blair Tickner 15-3-37-0, Daryl Mitchell 7-1-15-0, Jimmy Neesham 13-3-28-1, Jake Gibson 10-1-26-2, Ish Sodhi 14.5-0-72-3, Rachin Ravindra 5-1-30-0.

Ready to open if needed, says Vihari

'Knew we had to bat long and that's exactly what we did'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
HAMILTON

Hanuma Vihari, on Friday, said he won't mind taking up the opener's role if the team management asks after India's inexperienced opening options were technically exposed by a second-string New Zealand attack on the opening day of the warm-up game here.

The trio's performance raised doubts about its ability to face the likes of Neil Wagner, Trent Boult and Matt Henry.

Not informed

"As a player, I am prepared to bat anywhere. As of now, I've not been informed anything. As I said before as well, if the team requires me to bat wherever, I am ready to bat," said Vihari, who retired after scoring 101.

The Andhra player has delivered whenever given a chance. Does he feel bad about not getting to play four successive Tests after the series-opener against South



In good nick: Pujara was the only other India batsman to come good, apart from Vihari. •FILE PHOTO: K.R. DEEPAK

Africa at Visakhapatnam last year in October?

"Sometimes you have to understand the team combination as well. You can't get disheartened by it. I understood when you are playing at home, we play five bowlers. It's obvious that one batter has to miss out."

Vihari was surprised by the extra bounce on offer on Friday but is happy to have countered the challenge in the warm-up game which provided him with an opportunity to prepare well.

"Initially, I thought the extra bounce surprised us. (In) the couple of matches I

played against New Zealand-A, the pitch didn't do as much as what it did in the morning today.

"Once we adjusted, me and Puji (Pujara), we got our eye in, then we knew we had to bat long and that's exactly what we did," Vihari said after the end of day's play.

Sangakkara returns to Pakistan attack scene

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LAHORE

Sri Lankan Kumar Sangakkara will relive his fateful 2009 journey to Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium on Friday after returning for the first time since the deadly attack which plunged Pakistan into cricket isolation.

Sangakkara is captaining England's MCC for four games in Lahore, where he was wounded in a militant attack on the Sri Lankan team. Sangakkara, 42, suffered shrapnel wounds to his shoulder and narrowly escaped a bullet which whistled past his head as the Sri Lankan players lay pinned down on the floor of the team bus.

But Sangakkara, who is also the president of the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), said Pakistan was slowly restoring its reputation as a safe destination for visiting teams.

Smriti No. 4 in rankings



Moving up: Smriti Mandhana rose three rungs in the latest ICC women's T20I rankings for batters. •GETTY IMAGES

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DUBAI

India star Smriti Mandhana on Friday rose three rungs to fourth but Jemimah Rodrigues dropped to seventh in the latest ICC women's T20 International rankings for batters.

Harmanpreet Kaur has remained static at ninth in the same list.

Among the bowlers, Poonam Yadav dropped six places to fall out of the top 10 and take the 12th position.

Although Suzie Bates, New Zealand's No. 3, retained her top spot, there were other movements in the top 10, with Bates' teammate and captain Sophie Devine rising four spots to no.2, the ICC said in a statement.

Australia opener Beth Mooney and Mandhana, who made two half centu-

ries during the tri-series, both made upward movements, while Meg Lanning, despite dropping three positions, hung on to the top five.

Among the bowlers, Ellyse Perry's golden run with the ball gave her a jump of four places into the top 10, to No.7.

England fast bowler Anya Shrubsole tumbled six places to fall out of the top 20. Anuja Patil and Delissa Kimmince lost out big as well, falling 11 places to 31, and 14 places to 33 respectively.

Among all-rounders, Devine claimed the top spot after gaining one position, while Nat Sciver also jumped one place to round out the top three.

Hayley Matthews dropped down a position to four, while South Africa captain Dane van Niekerk completed the top five after gaining one position.

Warner expects hostile reception

Opener and Smith to tour S. Africa after 'Sandpapergate'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SYDNEY

Australia opener David Warner is braced for a hostile reception but hopes fans will show "respect" as he and Steve Smith return to South Africa for the first time since the 'Sandpapergate' ball-tampering scandal that rocked world cricket.

The last time the pair played in South Africa, almost two years ago, it was sent home in disgrace for attempting to alter the ball with sandpaper during a Cape Town Test. It cost the two 12-month suspensions and for Warner, a lifetime leadership ban.

Forgiven at home

They have since resurrected their careers and are all but forgiven at home, with Warner this week winning a vote by players, officials and media to claim Australian cricket's highest honour, the Allan Border Medal – with Smith placed second.

But both players were constantly booed and jeered during last year's one-day World Cup and Ashes series in England, and they are ex-



Will they be booed? David Warner and Steve Smith will hope the South African fans show some respect. •FILE PHOTO

pected to receive similar treatment in South Africa.

The batsmen are both in the Australian squad for three T20Is and three ODIs beginning February 21. The T20 on February 26 will mark the visitors' first match at Newlands since the 2018 scandal.

"For me personally, it won't be hard at all," Warner told Sydney radio station 2GB this week. "I just go there and I've got a job to do and that's to score runs and win games for Australia and put us in a good position."

But he added that "ob-

viously, it's going to be very hostile".

Australia will be using the tour to fine-tune preparations for the T20 World Cup on home soil in October – the only major cricket trophy the men's team has not won.

Equally dangerous batsman and wrist-spinner D'Arcy Short, who has been overlooked for a year, has replaced him in both formats.

"If you look at our squad selections over the last couple of months, it's all been pretty consistent," said skipper Aaron Finch.

Indian men edge out Thailand

Enter semifinals of Asia Team Championships



Equaliser: Lakshya Sen's straight-game win over Suppanyu Avihingsanon brought India back on level terms. •FILE PHOTO: RITU RAJ KONWAR

BADMINTON

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MANILA

The Indian men's team assured itself of a medal after progressing to the semifinals with a thrilling 3-2 win over Thailand at the Badminton Asia Team Championships here on Friday.

After K. Srikanth and B. Sai Praneeth faced reversals in the first two singles ties, India fought back to win the next three ties to set up a last four meeting with two-time defending champion Indonesia.

Sai Praneeth started the proceedings, but his gallant

effort ended in a 21-14, 14-21, 21-12 loss to world No. 12 Kantaphon Wangcharoen. In the second singles, Srikanth went down 22-20, 21-14 to Kunlavut Vitidsarn.

In the hunt

The pairing of M.R. Arjun and Dhruv Kapila kept India in the hunt with a 21-18, 22-20 win over Kittinupong Kedren and Tanupat Viriyangkura in the first doubles.

Lakshya Sen, who had a stellar run in 2019 with five titles, then registered a 21-19, 21-18 win over world No. 45 Suppanyu Avihingsanon to bring India back on level terms.

It then all boiled down to the makeshift pair of Chirag Shetty and Srikanth and the Indian duo dished out a superb game to outwit the pairing of Manepong Jongjit and Nipitphon Phuangphua-pet 21-15, 16-21, 21-15 in the deciding second doubles tie.

"It is an incredible result for us considering the fact that we didn't have Satwiksairaj (Rankireddy) and we generally depend on the singles to get us the win. But after we lost the first two singles, the way we got that doubles win and then Lakshya brought us back to level, it was a complete team effort," Chirag told PTL.

Paes and Ebden combo scrapes through to title round

CHALLENGER

ASHWIN ACHAL
BENGALURU

Leander Paes and Matthew Ebden kept their run going with a scrappy 6-4, 3-6, [10-7] win over Jonathan Erlich and Andrei Vasilevski in the doubles semifinals of the \$1,62,000 Bengaluru Open ATP Tennis Challenger here on Friday.

Paes and Ebden were not at their best, but managed to keep cool in the match tie-breaker to sneak through. It was Ebden who kicked into top gear first in the tie-breaker, making a reflex volley to get the pair level at 2-2. Paes then made a brilliant chipped backhand service-return winner to get a 6-5 lead. A couple of awkward kick serves from Paes closed the show in grand style.

Paes-Ebden will face the Indian pair of Purav Raja and Ramkumar Ramanathan in the final. Raja-Ramanathan reached the summit clash after Saketh Myneni and Matt Reid were forced to retire due to an injury to Reid.

In the opening game of the second set, Reid sprinted back to retrieve a lob and landed on his knee. The Australian sought medical help



Perfect tango: Leander Paes and Matthew Ebden upped their game in the tie-breaker to sneak through to the final. •V. SREENIVASA MURTHY

in an attempt to continue playing, but was unable to sufficiently recover.

In the singles quarterfi-

nals, Italian Julian Ocleppo edged out 13th seed Ilya Ivashka of Belarus 7-6(4), 6-7 (3), 6-4 in a gruelling outing

which lasted 2 hours and 40 minutes. Ocleppo was down 2-5 in the first set, before making a terrific comeback

to wrap it up 7-6(4).

Neither player gave an inch, and it went down to the wire. Ocleppo, the World No. 231, will take on gritty Australian James Duckworth in the semifinal on Saturday.

Fourth-seed Duckworth, in great form in recent months, knocked out ninth-seed Thomas Fabbiano (Ita) 6-7(5), 6-0, 6-2 in another last-eight match.

Unseeded Frenchman Benjamin Bonzi upset third-seed Yuichi Sugita of Japan 6-7(5), 7-5, 6-4, while Stefano Travaglia took out fluent Slovenian southpaw Blaz Rola 6-4, 4-6, 6-2.

The results: Singles (quarterfinals): Julian Ocleppo (Ita) bt Ilya Ivashka (Blr) 7-6(4), 6-7(3), 6-4; James Duckworth (Aus) bt Thomas Fabbiano (Ita) 6-7(5), 6-0, 6-2; Stefano Travaglia (Ita) bt Blaz Rola (Slo) 6-4, 4-6, 6-2; Benjamin Bonzi (Fra) bt Yuichi Sugita (Jpn) 6-7(5), 7-5, 6-4.

Doubles (semifinals): Matthew Ebden (Aus) / Leander Paes (Ind) bt Jonathan Erlich (Isr) / Andrei Vasilevski (Blr) 6-4, 3-6, 10-7.

Line-up: Singles semifinals (2 p.m. onwards): Ocleppo vs Duckworth; Bonzi vs Travaglia.

Doubles final (6.30 p.m. onwards): Paes / Ebden vs Raja / Ramanathan.