



**ANTI-CORRUPTION INVESTIGATION**  
**UMAR AKMAL SUSPENDED**  
 The Pakistan Cricket Board suspended batsman Umar Akmal on Thursday pending an anti-corruption inquiry.

# NZ favourites, but 320 a good score for India: Rahane

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
 WELLINGTON, FEBRUARY 20

A FIRST innings total in the range of 320 on a bouncy Basin Reserve track is what India vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane is aiming for despite calling New Zealand favourites going into the first Test starting on Friday.

"I think New Zealand are favourites in their home conditions. I feel the host country remains favourite because they know what to bowl and batsman are aware of what shots to play. As a unit, we need to learn and adapt quickly as New Zealand grounds have different angles," Rahane said on a cautious note on the eve of the Test.

India's 2014 win at Lord's and the 2018 victory in Adelaide had come with first innings scores of under 300 (295 at Lord's and 250 at Adelaide), a template that can be executed in Wellington also, feels the Mumbaier.

"When you bat first, your mindset is always positive, not saying that it's not when you bowl first. If you get 320 to 330 outside India in the first innings, it's a very good total. All the matches if you see we won (in England and Australia), we got around 320 to 350 on the board in the first innings," said Rahane.

While 320 may not be a big score, Rahane's confidence is based on India's world-class pace attack, which has shown its ability to pick 20 wickets in overseas conditions.

"We know that our bowlers can take wickets in any conditions but suppose you lose the toss and have to bat first, you should know that you are in the right kind of mindset to actually go out there and tackle those situations. Keeping the mindset right in seaming conditions even if you lose the toss is really important. The same goes for bowlers who should keep their mindset right on flat wickets. They should actually have the belief to take 20 wickets on flat tracks," said the veteran of 63 Tests.

While he called the home team favourites, Rahane and his teammates are enjoying a phase where the current batch under Virat Kohli is expected to win Test series outside the sub-continent following their historic triumph in Australia last year.

"There is no awe about conditions anymore. Every conditions is home conditions for us. Irrespective of victory or defeat, expectation is bound to be there. As a team, we want to enjoy this phase where people feel that we are favourites wherever we go," the confident deputy of Kohli said.

It is more or less clear that Ravichandran Ashwin will be preferred over Ravindra Jadeja and Rahane reckons there will be some turn on offer due to the moisture underneath the surface.

"It might spin a bit because of the moisture and dampness of the wicket, may be during the first session every day. I am not sure about the other sessions. New Zealand tracks generally after two days become good to bat on. Spinners' role will be crucial because both Ashwin and Jadeja are wicket-takers. If any of them gets an opportunity, they will do well," expects Rahane.

The Basin Reserve brings happy memories as Rahane hit his first Test hundred here back in 2014. "That was a really special moment for me, getting that first hundred. I keep watching my maiden hundred," he fondly recollected. I remember that my back-lift was changing because of the wind and that was a challenge to control it. This is a new challenge playing after 4-5 years. That team was a comparatively young team."

While Mayank Agarwal and Prithvi Shaw's relative inexperience is being talked about, Rahane — just like his skipper — feels the two youngsters will succeed because of their positive approach.

"They both are comparatively young, but are naturally attacking player. Their attitude is very good in general about cricket. I don't think they would need much of advice."



**EXPRESS IN NEW ZEALAND**

SANDIP G  
 WELLINGTON, FEBRUARY 20

LEAFING THROUGH the 2001 yearbook of the Palmerston North Boys High School, one stumbles on Ross Taylor's photograph twice. Page 36: Taylor wears a broad smile while being with the school cricket team. Page 52: Taylor standing in the back row, with a stiff, obedient-boy expression on his face.

Underneath the photographs are micro-profiles of Taylor and his teammates. The one on the cricket page describes him thus: Ross has continued on from where he had left off last summer. He rarely fails. He hits the ball long and hard. He is a true match-winner. He continues to work on strategies, his off-spin has real potential. And he's an outstanding slip catch.

All of these are virtues that still shine in Taylor, who nearly two decades later is set to play his 100th Test, making him the first cricketer to reach the milestone in all three formats.

But it's his catching that's still stamped on the mind of the school's physical education teacher and Taylor's mentor Paul Gibbs. "In that particular match, he took four-five wickets with his off-spin, and then took a couple of sharp catches at first slip that made me sit up and think, 'wow this boy is special.'" He wasn't supposed to play that game, but for a vacancy left by a senior player who went vacationing with his parents. The story goes that he never got the spot back.

The profile under the hockey team photo reads: Ross Taylor. Strike Forward, 21 goals. Adjudged the best forward in the John Dentice Cup. Raw talent and skill are the first words that come to mind. Ross has awesome speed and acceleration. He has often out-run opposition players while dribbling the ball. If Ross makes the mental and tactical adjustment to play more as part of the whole team, he will be a better player.

The last sentence was another way of putting that Taylor was a selfish player but Gibbs words it differently. "He was lazy, but had good pace and because of the cricket swing, he used to hit the ball really hard. I didn't want to be the goalie then," admits Gibbs, chucking. When the cricketing dream began to burn brightly than ever, he ditched hockey for good.

The century-old school, a lovely neo-Victorian structure lined with swinging trees and spacious courtyards, is crammed with Taylor memorabilia. In Gibbs' room, there is a cartoon of Taylor with arms folded and a sanguine expression and Mike Hesson, in umpire's clothes, with a raised index finger. "This happened during the Hesson-Taylor episode (in 2012), when Taylor was the captain and Hesson wanted him to resign," says Gibbs.

There is a framed Royal Challengers Bangalore jersey - "He wants to be back there. I don't know why he went unsold in the auction. He'll surely get there." There is another one with Jacob Oram, Taylor, Matthew Sinclair and Jamie How — all old boys of the school playing together in Tests.

But more than the photographs and trophies that suffocate the cabinet, it's Taylor's memories that swirl in the quiet corridors of the school. Gibbs takes you to the ground, sprinkled with kids playing rugby and football, flanked by the school on one side and the boys' hostel on the other. He points out to an ash-coloured, wooden window, from the centre of the wicket at deep-midwicket, and says: "This was his room and he used to hit a lot of sixes in that region." He still does in international cricket.

The hostel days, he says, have a special place

# Triple centurion

Nothing came easy for Ross Taylor, who mastered the game on the go to become the first man with 100 appearances in all three formats



The Wellington Test match will be Ross Taylor's 100th. Old boys (L to R) Jamie How, Jacob Oram, Taylor and Matthew Sinclair.

**For a boy of that age, it was remarkable. Not a single edge, everything off the middle. I was not half as good as he was at this age. I was so impressed with him, that I talked to a few people around the Central Districts age-group system about getting the boy some better cricket."**

MARK GREATBATCH,  
 ON A YOUNG ROSS TAYLOR

ting time goals. You can whack these guys around, but you need to be there during lunch, you need to set us up for the afternoon session, I would tell him. Then he would get out two overs before lunch, but would have a hundred. What do you tell him? "Ross, you didn't get your goal?" He was a busy accumulator of runs and his influence on the game was not just a time thing," he recalls.

In his early international days, Gibbs would get slightly twitchy watching him. These days, he sits back and enjoys him. With a satisfactory grin, he says: "The greatest feeling for a

teacher is to see the students doing extremely well in life. So whenever I watch him on the ground, I just sit back and enjoy him," he says. And sometimes, he would leaf through the glossy pages of the year-book and get overwhelmed with a sense of pride.

In the last year of his first-class career, Mark Greatbatch stumbled on a shy boy, who asked him whether he could do the drinks duties on the ground for free. Slightly bemused, he granted the boy's wish. "It was the strangest request I've ever heard, so for a moment I was shocked. But later, I realised that the boy might be really interested in the game," he says.

After the day ended, he took him aside and queried more about him. "Do you play?" And he said: 'yeah.' And I said: 'well, bring your gear down'. So he did a day's work with us in the dressing room and he was great and a good kid. Then I went out after the day's play with him and his gear and started throwing some balls to him. And this 12-year-old started hitting them back rather firmly so I thought I better go back three or four yards and I ended up having to do that another couple of times."

Two technical aspects registered in Greatbatch's sharp eyes. His firm front-foot stride and his timing. "For a boy of that age, it was remarkable. Not a single edge, everything off the middle. I was not half as good as he was at this age. I was so impressed with him that I talked to a few people around the Central Districts age-group system about getting the boy some better cricket."

He got him into the Central Districts U-13 cricket team, but soon he was playing for the U-15s and smashing kids around. "Almost every match, he got a hundred. With a bit more polish, I thought he would play for the first-class team. But I wanted his progress to be steady rather than push him straight-away into the big boys' league."

So Greatbatch decided to find him a good school with cricketing background. And in a few months' time, he found himself at North Palmerston High School, from where his career soared. "Back then, I never thought the boy would go on to become one of the greatest cricketers of our country," he says.

Soon after quitting first-class cricket, Greatbatch took up coaching duties of the Central Districts team. He would occasionally watch U-15 games to trace Taylor's progress. "I used to go there with a notebook to list down my observations. Then after a while, I would throw the notebook away. It was so good to watch him bat," he says. Even now, each time he watches him, Greatbatch sees in front of him the shy boy who came up and requested to ferry the drinks.

New Zealand, as a country, doesn't indulge in deification. Even their greatest, Richard Hadlee and Martin Crowe, were never placed on a superhero pedestal. They see them as heroes, but humans too, prone to flaws and fallible. In that sense, Taylor conforms to their concept of heroism, though the faces of New Zealand's surge in the post-aughts era would be Brendon McCullum and Kane Williamson.

But in a different way, Taylor's narrative is more compelling than either of them. For cricketing fulfillment, he had to travel to different parts of the country, from Wellington to Napier to Palmerston. He also had to fight self-doubts and cop knee-jerk criticism. He also fought injuries and had to undergo multiple surgeries.

Taylor mastered the game on the go. Unlike Kane Williamson, who inherited a side closer to reaching its prime, Taylor found one in transition. That he outlasted his setbacks is a testament to his will. In that sense, he's a more everyday hero than most heroes of this country.

## RANJI TROPHY QUARTERFINAL

# Anustup ton bails out Bengal as Odisha let it slip

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY  
 CUTTACK, FEBRUARY 20

ANUSTUP MAJUMDAR scored a brilliant unbeaten century to lead Bengal's fightback. Shahbaz Ahmed once again showed resolve lower down the order to stitch an unbroken 167-run seventh-wicket stand with Majumdar. But the biggest talking point of the first day of the Ranji Trophy quarterfinal at the DRIEMS College ground, Tangi, was how Odisha let it slip, when they should have grabbed the game by the lapels.

The good work that the hosts did in the first hour-and-a-half to reduce Bengal to 46/5, after winning the toss, gradually lost its value because poor cricket replaced the initial surge. The pitch eased out all right, but Odisha also committed silly errors.

Majumdar stood at least three feet outside the batting crease to neutralise the movement in the air and off the deck. The Odisha seamers bowled at military medium but 'keeper Rajesh Dhuper refused to walk up to the stumps to disallow the leeway to the Bengal batsman.

Bengal bounced back to finish the day on 308 for 6, with Majumdar batting on 136 and



Anustup Majumdar during the first day of the quarterfinal against Odisha.

Ahmed on 82 not out. It was Majumdar's eighth century at this level and his first since the 132 not out against Gujarat in 2017-18.

Earlier, Abhimanyu Easwaran once again

got out cheaply, caught down the leg side off Suryakant Pradhan. His opening partner Koushik Ghosh lobbed a catch to Poddar at first slip against Mohanty. Out-of-form Abhishek Raman played from the crease and missed a straight delivery from Pradhan to be trapped leg-before. Amab Nandi couldn't handle the extra bounce from debutant seamer Kanwar Singh Chohan and Manoj Tiwary got a good ball from Debabrata Pradhan — it broke back late off the seam — to be caught plumb in front.

Bengal were staring down the barrel and would have lost Shreevats Goswami before lunch if Dhuper hadn't dropped a regulation catch behind the stumps. The visitors were on 82 then, with Goswami on 15. He went on to score 34, adding 95 runs for the sixth wicket with Majumdar.

Ahmed came and played fearlessly. Odisha barely had a close-in fielder in front of the wicket. And their 'keeper was still standing so far behind that a few edges didn't carry to the slips. Ahmed is a street-smart cricketer, who revels under pressure. His emergence has given Bengal the required balance.

**Brief scores:** Bengal 308/6 (Anustup Majumdar 136 not out, Shahbaz Ahmed 82 not out) vs Odisha

describes him as a "quiet, respectful, cheerful boy, always acknowledges you, saying good day even to people whom he didn't even know too well. He was a good, reliable young guy. Nice sense of humour." He runs out of superlatives in describing him.

The only instruction he didn't follow used to be the time goals he set. "I remember set-

## PARTHIV GOES BIG

**Valsad:** Skipper Parthiv Patel led from the front with his 27th first-class century and helped Gujarat reach 330 for four on the first day against Goa. **Brief scores:** Gujarat 330/4 (Parthiv Patel 118 not out, Bhargav Merai 84) vs Goa.

**SAURASHTRA STRUGGLE**  
**Ongole:** Vishvarajsinh Jadeja, Chirag Jani and Sheldon Jackson helped Saurashtra reach 226 for 6 against Andhra. **Brief scores:** Saurashtra 226/6 (Vishvarajsinh Jadeja 73, Chirag Jani 53 batting, Sheldon Jackson 50; Prithvi Raj Yarra 3/51) vs Andhra.

**J&K SCALP TWO IN 6 OVERS**  
**Jammu:** Karnataka were wobbling at 14 for 2 after only six overs were possible due to bad light. **Brief scores:** Karnataka 14/2

# Chawla to be interrogated at Tihar only, till Feb 28

PRITAM PAL SINGH  
 NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 20

THE DELHI High Court on Thursday allowed Delhi Police to interrogate bookie Sanjeev Chawla at Tihar jail only and that too only till February 28, in connection with the 2000 cricket match-fixing scandal involving late South Africa captain Hansie Cronje.

Modifying the trial court's February 13 order, remanding Chawla to 12 days of police custody, Justice Anu Malhotra said, "order of the trial court, granting police custody remand of 12 days of the petitioner, is modified to the effect that the petitioner during the entire stage of pre-trial detention, trial and conviction, if any, would continue to be lodged at the Tihar jail complex".

The court observed that in adherence with the terms of the Letter of Assurances given by the Indian government to its UK counterpart, Chawla "cannot be allowed to be taken out of the Tihar jail complex for the purpose of investigation or interrogation in police custody, though the investigating agency in the matter is permitted to conduct the interrogation of the petitioner at the Tihar jail complex only".

The court also clarified that the interrogation period should not exceed 15 days from

the date he was produced before the court, February 13.

"...which period would thus end on February 28, 2020 at 2 am, whereafter no further interrogation of the petitioner in relation to the FIR, can be granted nor is granted," it added.

The High Court, in its 76-page order, noted that the investigating agency may resort to video conferencing as submitted by Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Sanjay Jain, appearing for the home ministry, for conducting the investigation and interrogation.

"The investigating agency shall, however, take care to ensure that the petitioner is treated with dignity during the investigation and interrogation conducted," it said, adding that the Tihar jail superintendent shall adhere to the Letter of Assurances issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs "in letter and spirit".

The order came after senior counsel Vikas Pahwa and advocates Vineet Malhotra and Hemant Shah, appearing for Chawla, approached the Delhi High Court appealing against the trial court's February 13 order remanding him to 12 days of police remand. The High Court, however, in its interim order the next day, had cancelled the trial court's remand order and sent Chawla to judicial custody at Tihar, till its further order.