

# 22 SPORT

## NZ coach takes a break, draws flak



GARY STEAD

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
HAMILTON, FEBRUARY 5

NEW ZEALAND Cricket (NZC) has defended the under-fire national team's head coach Gary Stead, who is drawing flak for taking a break in the middle of the ongoing home series against India, saying his "week off was planned six months ago".

Stead is under criticism for taking a holiday at a time when the Black Caps are enduring a form slump. Following a 0-3 Test series hiding in Australia, New Zealand were white-washed 0-5 by India in the Twenty20 series on home soil. They are currently engaged in a three-match ODI series against the visitors.

But NZC chief executive David White has supported Stead, stating that the coach's mid-season break during the ongoing three-match ODI series was pre-planned. "Of any sport in New Zealand, cricket has the most demands for time," White told reporters. "These guys are away from home for a long time and we must manage their workload."

Critics have come hard on Stead for his break with cricket legend Jeremy Coney all but accusing him of deserting the team in its hour of need. "This is probably the most important season we've had for 10 years, with no Zimbabwe, Bangladesh and West Indies to feast on," Coney told Radio Sport Breakfast.

"We're facing the three big boys (Australia, India, England) - they were marmalised in Australia and it's now five-zip at home. Wouldn't you think the main coach and selector would be there. Can you see Steve Hansen leaving the All Blacks after they are one-nil down against the Lions, and taking a week off before the second test? This is the job and this is the main part of the season. It's ridiculous this is happening at this crunch time," he added.

Cooney stopped short of suggesting that if Stead was missing his family, he should be replaced before the T20 World Cup later this year. "You don't take your captain away from the helm when you are wanted most, when the ship is stuck amongst the rocks," he said. "Would you call it desertion or would you just say it's really bad look fellas? If I was (chief executive) David White I would say to myself, no I'm sorry Gary, you can wait a week. If you are really finding it tough and have to be away from the family, let's have a chat and find another coach for the T20 format."

### Indian team fined

**Hamilton:** The Indian cricket team was on Wednesday fined for maintaining slow over for the third successive time after Virat Kohli's side was found four overs short of the target during the opening One Day International against New Zealand here. India lost the match by four wickets, giving the hosts a 1-0 lead in the three-match series.

Chris Broad of the Emirates ICC Elite Panel of Match Referees fined Indian cricketers 80 per cent of their match fee after the visitors were ruled to be four overs short of the target after time allowances were taken into consideration. In accordance with Article 2.22 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which relates to minimum over-rate offences, players are fined 20 per cent of their match fees for every over their side fails to bowl in the allotted time.

Earlier, the Indian team was docked 40 per cent and 20 per cent of its match fee for slow over-rate in the fourth and fifth T20 International against New Zealand on February 1 and February 3 respectively.

## MATCH-WINNING 109\* FROM 84 BALLS

# Taylor swift

Veteran's blitz overshadows Iyer's maiden ton as NZ chase down 348 with four wickets, 11 balls to spare



Ross Taylor hit his 21st One-Day International century in Hamilton to help New Zealand break an eight-match losing streak across formats. AP

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY  
FEBRUARY 5

NEW ZEALAND failed to get over the line in three successive T20 games and Ross Taylor was hard on himself. After all, he was out in the middle at the crunch and as the most experienced player in the side, expected to take his team home.

The veteran came good and anchored the Kiwis' highest successful ODI chase (348) with his 21st ton, with the four-wicket win ending an eight-game losing streak across formats.

On a highway-like Hamilton pitch, Taylor and Shreyas Iyer all but cancelled each other with hundreds. KL Rahul and Tom Latham made almost similar impact, batting at No. 5 for their respective teams. But New Zealand eventually triumphed, because their bowlers performed slightly better in the middle overs, while India were let down by Kuldeep Yadav and Shardul Thakur.

It was India's first loss after winning seven limited-overs matches on the spin. This is just a minor blip, as on the night the hosts played better cricket. But the Indian team management would be worried about Kuldeep's loss of form which has had an extended stretch. Over the past 12-odd months, his bowling average has shot up to 37 in ODIs, a significant deterioration from his career average of a little over 26. On Wednesday, he conceded 84 runs for two wickets. Batsmen picked him with consummate ease, accounting for 10 fours and a six off his 10 overs.

New Zealand lost their first two wickets in quick succession. Till the 17th over, they were going well below the required run rate. Then, the spinners came and Henry Nicholls,

in particular, took the opportunity to up the ante. Kuldeep gave away 13 runs in his first over and although he snapped up debutant Tom Blundell with a break-back, he lost the plot when the charge was on. In fact, his fourth over saw the momentum swing, when Nicholls and Taylor took three fours against him. To make matters worse, Kuldeep dropped Taylor off Ravindra Jadeja when he was on 10 and he went on to make the decisive contribution.

Taylor had been under pressure after failing to take his team over the line in the T20Is. A response was due. Following the reprieve, he grew into the game. Some fabulous shots wowed the fans. A six against Thakur over long-on was arguably the best of the lot.

Coming back to Kuldeep, his travails of late offer a throwback to Lakshman Sivaramakrishnan, who now aspires to become the next chief selector. A whizz-kid in 1984-85, the leg-spinner faded quickly, his prodigious talent notwithstanding. By early 1986, his Test career was over. Kuldeep is into his third season in international cricket and seemingly has lost his ability to keep batsmen guessing. Head coach Ravi Shastri saw Sivaramakrishnan's rapid rise and fall at close quarters as his team-mate. He could be the best person to help Kuldeep regain his mojo.

The Indian team management's decision to pick Thakur over Navdeep Saini was probably based on having a bowling all-rounder in the lower order. In Rohit Sharma's absence, batting needed some extra cushion. As it turned out, on a featherbed, it was surplus to requirements. In the home ODI series against Australia last month, Saini played the last two ODIs after Thakur had been taken to the cleaners in the series opener. India had rallied to win the series 2-1.



Shreyas Iyer at No.4 made 103 off 107, his first international hundred. AP

Today also, the New Zealand batsmen targeted Thakur during the back-end of the innings and at times, the medium pacer looked clueless against the onslaught. Both Taylor and Latham were severe on him. After a pretty decent first spell - 5-0-27-1 - Thakur finished with 80 runs from nine overs. Yes, the pitch became a little too batting-friendly as the match progressed and only a bowler of Jasprit Bumrah's class could maintain an economy rate of under six runs per over. But Thakur paid the price for bowling too many

boundary balls - six fours and four sixes were taken off him.

Amid a batting slam, there was a moment of spark, when Kohli swooped in from cover and flicked underarm, his body in the air, to catch Nicholls short of his ground. The ICC's official Twitter handle was quick to draw a Jonty Rhodes analogy.

But it wasn't India's day. In the last three T20Is, the Kiwis had pressed the panic button after losing a few quick wickets. Here, they didn't bung the chase despite losing Jimmy Neesham and Colin de Grandhomme in the same over. Chasing down such an imposing total with 11 balls to spare was a fantastic effort.

### Ton-up Iyer

Earlier, Iyer scored his maiden ODI hundred and anchored India's innings, which was important because the visitors had lost Kohli in the 29th over. After a rollicking half-century, the India captain was done in by an Ish Sodhi googly, which went through the gate. Kohli probably didn't expect the ball to turn so much.

Iyer had to keep one end tight, which was a reason why he was a little hesitant initially to press the accelerator. He saw out the tough periods and opened up when run-scoring got easier. Still, at No. 4, he would be a touch disappointed with a sub-100 strike rate.

The show-stopper in the Indian innings was KL Rahul's 64-ball 88 not out. In at No. 5 because India decided to open with two debutants - Prithvi Shaw and Mayank Agarwal - Rahul, at times, toyed with the bowling. Consecutive sixes off Sodhi asserted total control. He provided the boost which helped India post what seemed like a competitive total.

## SCORECARD >> New Zealand vs India

1st ODI | Hamilton | Toss: New Zealand

INDIA		347/4 IN 50 OVS
P Shaw	c †Latham b de Grandhomme	20 (21b, 3x4)
M Agarwal	c Blundell b Southee	32 (31b, 6x4)
V Kohli	(c) b Sodhi	51 (63b, 6x4)
S Iyer	c Santner b Southee	103 (107b, 11x4, 1x6)
KL Rahul	† not out	88 (64b, 3x4, 6x6)
K Jadhav	not out	26 (15b, 3x4, 1x6)
■ Extras: (1b 7, nb 1, w 19) 27		
Fall of wickets: 1-50 (Prithvi Shaw, 76 ov), 2-54 (Mayank Agarwal, 8.4 ov), 3-156 (Virat Kohli, 28.4 ov), 4-292 (Shreyas Iyer, 45.3 ov)		
■ Bowling:		
T Southee		10-1-85-2
H Bennett		10-0-77-0
C de Grandhomme		8-0-41-1
J Neesham		8-0-52-0
M Santner		10-0-58-0
I Sodhi		4-0-27-1

NEW ZEALAND 348/6 IN 48.1 OVS		
M Guptill	c Jadhav b Thakur	32 (41b, 1x4)
H Nicholls	run out (Kohli)	78 (82b, 11x4)
T Blundell	st †Rahul b Kuldeep	9 (10b, 1x4)
R Taylor	not out	109 (84b, 10x4, 4x6)
T Latham	(c) †c M Shami b Kuldeep	69 (48b, 8x4, 2x6)
J Neesham	c Jadhav b M Shami	9 (14b, 1x4)
C de Grandhomme run out (Iyer/Kohli) 1 (2b)		

M Santner	not out	12 (9b, 1x4, 1x6)
■ Extras: (nb 1, lb 4, w 24) 29		
Fall of wickets: 1-85 (Martin Guptill, 15.4 ov), 2-109 (Tom Blundell, 19.1 ov), 3-171 (Henry Nicholls, 28.3 ov), 4-309 (Tom Latham, 41.4 ov), 5-328 (James Neesham, 45.2 ov), 6-331 (Colin de Grandhomme, 45.6 ov)		
■ Bowling:		
J Bumrah		10-1-53-0
M Shami		9.1-0-63-1
S Thakur		9-0-80-1
R Jadeja		10-0-64-0
Kuldeep Yadav		10-0-84-2
■ New Zealand won by 4 wickets		

**348** Wednesday's chase was the biggest target New Zealand has successfully overcome, bettering their previous best of 347 against Australia in 2007. New Zealand's highest chase against India prior to this was 281 in Mumbai in 2017

**3** Ross Taylor has scored centuries in three of the top four successful chases by New Zealand in ODIs. Along with his unbeaten 109 on Wednesday, Taylor contributed 117 (337 vs Australia in 2007) and 181 not out (336 vs England in 2018). Taylor has also excelled in chases against India with two hundreds and a ninety in the top three chases.

**Today Shami bowled exactly the same ball and I inside edged down to fine leg or the keeper. Small margins, it could have been two different results but that is cricket. I guess that's why we love the game. Just little things - it went our way today and didn't in the T20s.**

ROSS TAYLOR

## Rahul at No.5 fits like a glove for India

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
FEBRUARY 5

INDIA MIGHT have lost the game but the Hamilton ODI scoresheet showed that they have learnt from the mistakes they made at the World Cup last summer. The line-up with no specialist keeper, had part-timer KL Rahul behind the stumps this time, and more importantly, he was batting at No.5. Having burnt their fingers, resulting in the World Cup slipping out of their hands last year, the decision-makers didn't think short-term again.

Considering Rahul's phenomenal form in T20s as an opener, the team management would not have been tempted to give him the same role in ODIs, more so with the experienced Rohit Sharma injured.

But India went with the untested pair of Prithvi Shaw and Mayank Agarwal.

History of ODI cricket shows opening the innings isn't quite the most difficult job. With fielders inside the circle and scoreboard pressure not having yet set in, the No.1 and 2 have it easy. Meanwhile, batsmen squeezed into the No.5 to 7 slots need to be highly skilled.



KL Rahul made an unbeaten 88 off 64 at No.5. AP

Every international country has deep reserves when it comes to openers, but the batsmen who deliver down the order are a rare commodity.

They also are required to have the perfect temperament to soak in the pressure.

Every international country has deep reserves when it comes to openers, but the batsmen who deliver down the order are a rare commodity. India had struggled to get the right balance in their line-up, and often lacked the fulcrum who could control the innings when the Top 3 failed. It was something that was spectacularly exposed during the World Cup. To understand how India missed a trick at the World Cup, consider India's batting line-up in the last two games against New Zealand.

■ **India vs NZ (World Cup semi-final, 2019)**  
KL Rahul, Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Rishabh Pant, Dinesh Karthik, Hardik Pandya, MS Dhoni

■ **India vs NZ (1st ODI, Hamilton, 2020)**

Prithvi Shaw, Mayank Agarwal, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul, Kedar Jadhav, Ravindra Jadeja

Read these two batting line-ups - slowly and thoughtfully - to discover how India's near-miss in England last year wasn't only because of the wrong man walking in at No.4. Seven months back in that heart-breaking game against New Zealand at Manchester, except for opener Sharma and No.3 Kohli, all other batsmen were either misfits in their batting positions in the Playing XI or in the squad of 15.

Back then India, hampered by the injury to in-form opener Shikhar Dhawan, drafted in three wicket-keepers - Pant, Dhoni, and Karthik - in the Top 7.

However, the bigger mistake, rather the monumental error, was asking Rahul, who had made himself comfortable down the order, to be Dhawan's replacement as opener.

With Rohit, Dhawan, and Virat at the top and Shreyas Iyer and Rahul to follow, India look more secure. Regardless of the result of the game, Rahul should stay at No.5.

## Bavuma hits out at transformation debate

REUTERS  
CAPE TOWN, FEBRUARY 5

TEMBA BAVUMA hopes his eye-catching innings in South Africa's seven-wicket victory over England in the first One-Day International at Newlands on Tuesday will end the debate over whether he deserves his place in the side.

Batting at number three, Bavuma's excellent 98 comes after a difficult month in which he was temporarily dropped from the Test side for a home series against England that South Africa lost 3-1.

His axing stirred debate on social media about whether his place in the team was deserved or whether he was only being picked because of efforts to redress imbalances from the country's apartheid era.

Cricketer South Africa targets the inclusion of two black African players and four from the mixed-race and Indian communities in each team, averaged through the year. "It has

been hard. It's not so much the dropping part, all players get dropped, everyone goes through slumps of not scoring well," Bavuma told reporters.

"The awkwardness and discomfort from my side is when you are thrown into talks of transformation. Yes, I am black, that's my skin. But I play cricket because I love it. I'd like to think the reason I am in the team is because of performances I have put forward in my franchise side, and also for the national team, whenever I have been able to."

The 29-year-old, who has been a top performer across all formats in domestic cricket over the past few years, has hit out at what he saw as double standards in the transformation debate. "The one thing that irks me is when you are seen through the eyes of transformation," he said. "When you do well, transformation is not spoken about but when you do badly transformation is thrown at the top of the agenda. I have a serious problem with that. We've got to be able to take the good with the bad."