Cricket last thing on my mind at the moment, says Shastri

Advocates cultivating fighting spirit to overcome any adversity

VIJAY LOKAPALLY
NEW DELHI

"Stay indoors people. Crucial phase this. Only thing flying around the world like a tracer bullet is this bloody Corona (COVID-19). Stay in before the bugger gets you #IndiaFightsCorona." A tweet typical of the man!

Speaking to *The Hindu* from his home in Mumbai, India cricket coach Ravi Shastri said, "there is total gloom at the moment. The thing (virus) is flying everywhere. It would be foolish to talk about cricket in these times. It should be the last thing on your mind at the moment. Safety of the people is most important. Whatever precautions have to be taken should get priority, as said in no uncertain terms by the Prime Minister. We need to understand the gravity of the situation."

Known for his positive approach in cricket, Shastri said, "You have to be pretty aggressive in your thinking that you can do the job. Failure should be the last thing on your mind. Don't think of failure, think instead 'I'm going to do it!' That's the mindset that allows you to do what you want to do, what you can do."

The phase between 1982 and 1983, when I got a hundred in Pakistan (Karachi, 1983), and then on to 1992, I did literally everything

He recalled some challenging moments from his career to drive home the point. "The phase between 1982 and 1983, when I got a hundred in Pakistan (Karachi, 1983), and then on to 1992, I did literally everything. Went from No. 10 to No. 1 in the batting line-up. Batted in the top three. Got wickets. Tasted success at the 1983 World Cup, 1985 WCC, 1985 Rothmans Cup, Asia Cup. All because I remained positive. Playing with SMG (Gavaskar) and Jimmy (Mohinder Amarnath), I was like a sponge. Absorbing what I saw and heard. Keeping ears and eyes wide open," Shastri said.

Fighting fire

Shastri, who was never ever struck on the head during his career, also remembered some frightening spells. "The spell in Antigua (in 1983). Dilip (Vengsarkar) and Malcolm (Marshall) were having a few exchanges just before the second new ball, towards the end of the day's play. Marshall was spitting fire. He hit Dilip on the helmet. I remember the helmet rolling almost to wicketkeeper Jeff Dujon. Marshall got him hooking. I was the non-striker. Marshall gave it everything," recalled Shastri.

On India's recent loss in New Zealand, Shastri was candid. "It was a cycle (of so much cricket). It was decided four years ago. We left India in May for the World Cup last year and finished in March this year. Most of the boys were home for just 15 days during those 10 months. There was so much that we went through. You could see towards the end – injuries, mental fatigue, but they hung in despite missing some key players. It was hard but the guys bit the bullet and soldiered on."

Expanding the mind

Catching up on lots of things at home now, Shastri counselled, "It's a good opportunity to expand your mindset. Read a lot, try different things. Basically, slow down the pace of your life. I have not had a break for 40 years. During this fight against the virus, I am not going to be negative. I know India as a nation will beat it. We have to be together in supporting the government," he said.

Catching up: Having been on the road for long, Ravi Shastri says now is a good opportunity to expand the mindset and slow down the pace of life. ▪ GETTY IMAGES

Laxman's 281 among Chappell's all-time great knocks against spin

Says Doug Walters battered the tweakers into submission

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MELBOURNE

Former Australia captain Ian Chappell has picked his two all-time favourite innings against high-quality spin bowling and one of those is V.V.S. Laxman's iconic 281 at the Eden Gardens in 2001.

Thanks to Laxman and Rahul Dravid (180), India went on to win the game against Australia after following-on.

"The absence of any cricket gives me an opportunity to reflect on an aspect of the game I enjoy: watching a batsman utilise good footwork to combat top-class spin bowling. Two innings stand out: one played by India's V.V.S. Laxman, the other by Doug Walters of Australia," Chappell wrote in a column for *ESPNcricinfo*.

Defining innings: Laxman consistently hit the ball along the ground in the Eden Gardens Test of 2001 against Australia and that was the clue to his success, says Chappell. ▪ FILE PHOTO: V.V. KRISHNAN

In awe

Laxman and Dravid shared a marathon 376-run stand to engineer an unforgettable victory for India. Chappell was simply in awe of Laxman's batting as the wristy Indian toyed with the likes of Shane Warne.

"Laxman's incredible 281 at Calcutta in 2001 is the best I've seen against top-class leg-spin. At the conclusion of that exhilarating series, I asked Shane Warne how he thought he bowled.

"I don't think I bowled that badly," he replied. "You didn't," I responded.

"If Laxman comes three paces out of his crease and hits an unbelievable on-drive against the spin and you then flight the next delivery a little higher and shorter to invite another drive and instead he quickly goes onto the back foot and pulls it, that's not bad bowling. That's good footwork.

"Laxman regularly did this during his 452-ball stay, in which he hit 44 boundaries. Therein lies a clue to Laxman's success: he consistently hit the ball along the ground," said Chappell, also praising Laxman's temperament.

Doug Walters. ▪ THE HINDU ARCHIVES

Laxman's incredible 281 at Calcutta in 2001 is the best I've seen against top-class leg-spin

Walters was the best player of off-spin bowling I have seen; he didn't just survive against the very best, he occasionally battered them into submission

Talking about fellow Australian Walters, Chappell called him the best player against spin.

Quick runs

"Walters scored a Test century in a session three times. There are no complete records regarding this feat but I suspect only Sir Donald Bradman did it more often.

"Walters was the best player of off-spin bowling I have seen; he didn't just survive against the very best, he occasionally battered them into submission. He scored a sublime hundred on a Madras minefield in 1969, facing the off-spin wizardry of Erapalli Prasanna, clubbing 14 fours and two sixes in the process," said Chappell.

Signs suggest summer dates for 2021 Olympics

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TOKYO

Tokyo Olympic organisers seem to be leaning away from starting the rescheduled games in the spring of 2021. More and more the signs point toward the summer of 2021.

Organising committee president Yoshiro Mori suggested there would be no major change from 2020.

The games are meant to be in summer, so we should be thinking of a time between June and September, Japanese news agency Kyodo reported Mori saying on Saturday.

International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach, after the postponement was announced in Switzerland on Tuesday, left open the possibility of spring dates.

Mori suggested some decisions could be made as early as this week when the organising committee's executive board meets.

Any final decision will be made between local organisers and the IOC, and hundreds of sponsors, sports federations and broadcasters.

Athletes have been left in limbo by the postponement. Many have been forced to stop training because of the spreading coronavirus. Even those who can train have no idea about how to schedule training to reach peak fitness at the right time.

Enormous cost

Mori and organising committee CEO Toshiro Muto have both said the added cost of rescheduling will be enormous. Early estimates put those costs at between $2-3 billion with the several levels of Japanese governments likely to foot most of the bills.

The day you wish it was, and isn't

When the IPL didn't start and Dhoni didn't take strike

Missing out: Fans were not able to watch a scene akin to this on Sunday because of the coronavirus pandemic affecting the scheduled start of the IPL. ▪ FILE PHOTO: R. RAGU

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

In an ideal world, crowds in Mumbai would have trudged out of a busy Churchgate station, mostly in Blues, with a liberal sprinkling of canary yellow among them making their presence felt.

But this was not an ideal Sunday, as it's not an ideal world. It's the COVID-19 world where life doesn't have life anymore as people struggle for existence.

There wasn't be any IPL at 8 p.m., there wasn't a Mahendra Singh Dhoni ambling across the Wankhede turf with a disarming smile, and Rohit Sharma wasn't pulling a fast bowler with nonchalance.

What would have been...

This IPL would have been Dhoni's comeback tournament after eight and a half months. He would have again led the side, face giving away nothing but unbridled joy when Chennai Super Kings does something.

This would, perhaps, have been the last year with CSK's 'Dad's Army', with a lot of players like Suresh Raina, Harbhajan Singh, Shane Watson unlikely to feature in yellow next year.

This was probably Dhoni's chance to get back into the groove and show the world why Rishabh Pant and K.L. Rahul can still be asked to wait for one more global tournament.

If the IPL doesn't happen, and the World T20 is held this year (subject to normalcy), will we see Dhoni in India blues again? His fans may not like it, but the likes of Sunil Gavaskar, Virender Sehwag and Kapil Dev believe he won't – not without reason.

You will miss Virat Kohli's agony and ecstasy with Royal Challengers Bangalore.

The capacity crowd at Eden Gardens would have screamed its lungs out. Some for the players, and some for Shah Rukh Khan sitting on the lower tier of the Club House balcony.

Airborne David Warner's fist pumps can't be enjoyed with Paradise's famous biryani, and Hyderabad's own *double ka meetha*.

We probably won't get to know how good Anil Kumble's third stint as a mentor/coach (after MI and India) would have been, with a passionate owner like Preity Zinta watching every Kings XI Punjab performance.

Pant, on his part, would have liked to rock the IPL stage – something that he had made his own in past few years, with those audacious hook shots even when he is off-balance.

How well would have Steve Smith captained Rajasthan Royals? Good enough to force Cricket Australia selectors to hand back the captaincy to him from Aaron Finch? We might never know. It was 8 p.m. on Sunday and IPL didn't start. Deal with it, folks.

COVID-AID

Asian Para Games champion Sharad Kumar gives ₹1 lakh

NEW DELHI

Double Asian Para Games high jump champion Sharad Kumar has donated ₹1 lakh to the PM CARES Fund for the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Kumar won a gold in the high jump T42 category in the 2014 Asian Para Games before climbing the top of the podium again in 2018 in Jakarta, Indonesia in T42/

63 category. He is also a 2017 IPC World Championships silver medallist.

KSCA and HCA also chip in with contributions

BENGALURU

The Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) has contributed ₹50 lakh each to the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (CARES) Fund and the Karnataka Chief Minister Relief Fund COVID-19, the KSCA announced on Sunday.

"The outbreak of the coronavirus is first and foremost a public health emergency, and the KSCA is firm to support and assist in this regard," said KSCA treasurer Vinay Mruthyunjaya.

The Hyderabad Cricket Association is also contributing ₹50 lakh to the Prime Minister's fund.

"With the world going through a tough time because of the virus, we feel it is our minimum responsibility to chip in our own little way for the Fund. The amount will be directly deducted from the BCCI annual subsidy," said HCA secretary R. Vijayanand.

Ajinkya Rahane pledges ₹10 lakh

MUMBAI

India's Test team vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane has donated ₹10 lakh to the Maharashtra Chief Minister's Relief Fund for the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Teenaged cricketer Richa Ghosh donates ₹1 lakh

KOLKATA

Sixteen-year-old all-rounder Richa Ghosh, who represented India in the women's T20 World Cup, has donated ₹1 lakh to the Bengal Chief Minister's relief fund for the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. PTI

COVID-19 IMPACT

CA defers announcement of contract list

MELBOURNE

The announcement of Cricket Australia's players contract list has been deferred by at least a month. According to a report in *Sydney Morning Herald*, CA had "planned to bring forward the announcement of contracts from May to April this year, in a bid to provide more certainty to the states given the flow-on effect." PTI

Heather Knight joins NHS as a volunteer

LONDON

England women's cricket team captain Heather Knight has joined the National Health Service (NHS) as volunteer to help the healthcare system fight the pandemic in the United Kingdom. The 29-year-old will help in transporting medicines and spreading awareness about the pandemic.

"My brother and his partner are doctors. I signed up to the NHS' volunteer scheme as I have a lot of free time on my hands and I want to help as much as I can," Knight wrote in her column for BBC. AFP

Juventus, Ronaldo agree to forgo €90m in wages

ROME

Cristiano Ronaldo and his Juventus teammates along with coach Maurizio Sarri have agreed to forgo €90 million in wages to help the club during the coronavirus crisis.

The club said the money amounted to four months worth of wages, a third of players' salaries.

The first agreement of its kind in Serie A since play was halted three weeks ago means Ronaldo will give up €10 million euros (more than $11 million). AFP

Squash great Azam Khan dies of coronavirus

KARACHI

Pakistani squash great Azam Khan, 95, died of coronavirus at London's Ealing Hospital on Saturday, his family has said. Azam, younger brother of the legendary Hashim Khan, won the British Open title successively between 1959 and 1961. PTI

ICC lauds Joginder Sharma

NEW DELHI

The International Cricket Council (ICC) has hailed India's cricketer-turned cop Joginder Sharma for doing his bit in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Joginder is a DSP in Haryana Police. "In his post-cricket career as a policeman, India's Joginder Sharma is among those doing their bit amid a global health crisis," the ICC tweeted along with Joginder's photos as a cricketer and cop.

The 36-year-old played four ODIs and as many T20s between 2004 and 2007. He joined the police service after retirement from the game. PTI