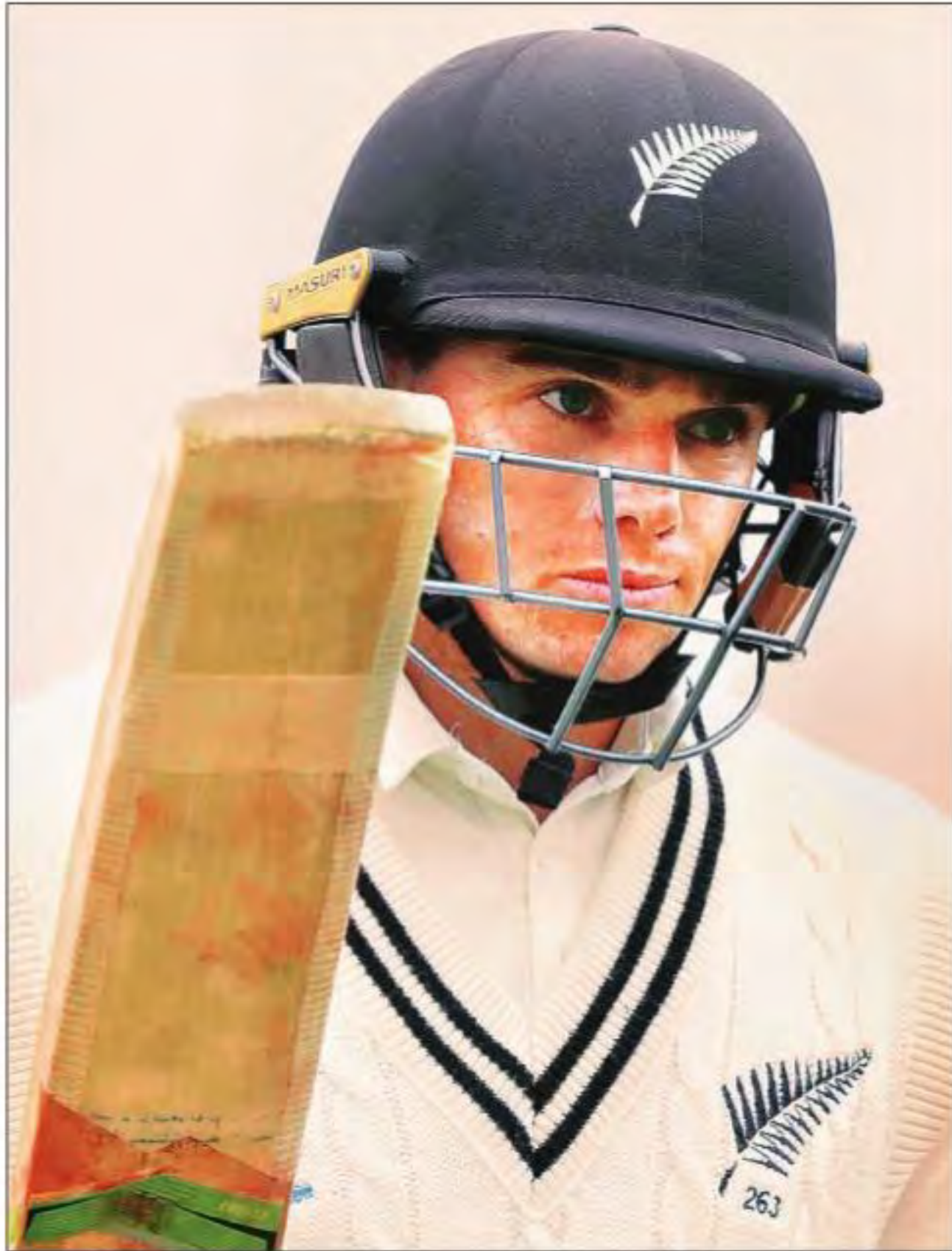




PANDYA IN OVERDRIVE

On a comeback trail, India all-rounder Hardik Pandya smashed his way to a sensational 105 in just 39 balls for Reliance 1 in the DY Patil T20 Cup in Navi Mumbai.

Best performances in a supporting role



EXPRESS IN NEW ZEALAND

Opener Tom Latham and all-rounder Colin de Grandhomme are not stars, but vital cogs in the New Zealand team. Latham is the old-school battler against the new ball, while de Grandhomme is a utility cricketer with a golden arm and the ability to clear the rope.



Colin de Grandhomme was born in Zimbabwe and moved to New Zealand after Paul Strang convinced his father about the advantages.

Tom Latham's numbers are not mind-boggling but he has been a steady influence at the top with 11 hundreds in 52 Tests.

Youngster who took on Bond

SANDIP G CHRISTCHURCH, MARCH 3

TOM LATHAM was barely 15 when he walked out to face the fastest-ever New Zealand bowler, Shane Bond, in a club game. By then Bond had lost much of his frightening pace, but Latham's club coach Neil Fletcher was hesitant to send him as an opener. So before the game started, he told the teenager to bat down the order. But the fresh-faced Latham — he retains the freshness even now — didn't flinch.

"Don't worry coach, one day or the other I have to face bowlers as fast as him," he told him. The coach was still reluctant, before Tom's father Rod, a former international opener himself, assured him: "Let's see if he's got the stuff... If he's not good enough, maybe, he needs to rethink his future."

A few minutes later, Latham was shadow-batting in the middle, stretching his limbs and crouching to get the blood flowing. As Bond and Co. entered the field, one of the fielders began sledging him. Remembers Fletcher: "Something like, have you carried enough nappies or do you have a feeding bottle, some silly stuff. But Tom hardly listened to all this rubbish. He was just waiting for the biggest moment of his life. He even snatched the strike from his senior partner."

The first ball was full and beat his forward defense. The second was back of a length, and he hung back and defended: "The perfect back-foot defensive," Fletcher gushes. The third ball was full and straight.

"He just extended his bat and pushed it straight back. Four runs. I thought well, he's a seriously tough bloke. Has the guts," Fletcher says. Latham finished the match 92 not out, replete with several straight drives and pull shots, and a wowed Bond gave him an autographed ball.

He then had a chat with Rod. "Brave lad, I'm sure he will be a Black Cap like you."

In fact, an upgrade on his father, who was a bit-part player in the strictest sense.

Twelve years on, Latham has not only materialised Bond's prophesy, but also emerged as an indispensable cog in Kane Williamson's resurgent side. His credentials — 3,726 runs at 42.34 in 52 Tests — are among the finest among contemporary openers at a time when there's a noticeable shortage of quality in that role. Yet, he slips into anonymity. There is no flash about him like Ross Taylor, or the aura of Kane Williamson.

His stroke-play neither awes nor thrills, not ungainily but not eye-catching either. He compiles his runs through drives down the ground, feisty pulls, nudges, clips and glides. The team is not built around him, yet he's one of the stubborn blocks that make this team. He scored just 122 runs in the Test series against India, but take out the pair of 52s he made on a tacky Christchurch surface, and the story of the match could have been different. He saw through tricky spells from Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami, shrugged off the instances the ball beat him, and hung around weathering the storm and punishing the loose balls.

Fletcher is not surprised. "He's always had a great understanding of the game. Nothing fazes him. Every level he goes up, he seems to take it in his stride. He's quite a humble person and a very good team man; the guys in club and school really looked up to him and he just lets his bat do the talking," he observes.

The Williamson cheer-group, Steady The Ship, gave him a nickname, Dave Franco after the Hollywood actor, who Latham resembles. Also like Franco, Latham is the support actor whose work goes under-appreciated. Not at home though. "Sometimes, he tells me 'dad shut up, I've got more runs than you,' as a joke. But I tell him, 'still you couldn't play my wobbles,'" says his father.

Though Latham's father was an opener and a part-time medium pacer, he didn't thrust cricket on him. "It just happened. So after retiring from international cricket, I began working at a sports shop in Christchurch and when he was around 4-5, my employer presented Tom with a cut-down cricket bat.

I was surprised he picked it up left-handed. He had the left-hander's cow corner slog fairly early on. It wasn't too cultural at the start," Rod says.

A refined version of the slog sweep he unfurls in the subcontinent, where he has enjoyed considerable success, hundreds in Abu Dhabi and Colombo, besides half-centuries in India. The refinement happened at the Burnside West University under Fletcher. And the coach swears he had never seen a more hardworking kid in his coaching career. "He's always had a really good understanding of his own game. At an early age, that was quite visible ahead of players his own age. And he hits more balls than anyone. There's no secret to his success," he says.

Latham senior was careful not to interfere in his coaching. "Being the son of a former player is always difficult and the expectation is more than most. So I've always stayed in the background and his coaches are his coaches. He comes to me every now and then and asks what I think. I'll give him my thoughts and he'll do what he needs to do. I've always stayed at arm's length and let him make his own way in sport," he says.

When he's not playing cricket, Latham tags along with his father to the Harewood Golf Club. Apart from bowling, it's the only spectrum where the father dominates the son. "He's a decent player, but will take sometime before he reaches my level," the father chuckles. Jokes aside, he says: "As a cricketer, he has far exceeded my achievements and there are many more years left in his career. He has achieved what I could not have even dreamt of," he says.

Fletcher too is assured of his greatness. "He's too good, the world will one day understand him fully."

But Latham's hardly bothered of recognition or accolades. He's content, like the archetypal Kiwi batsmen, to sink into the background and quietly complete his shifts. More John Wright, his father's opening ally, than Martin Crowe, his father's captain. The Dave Franco of the team.

Big man with a high utility value

SANDIP G CHRISTCHURCH, MARCH 3

In a rare trip to the city of his birth in 2005, former Zimbabwe cricketer Paul Strang, who by then had migrated to New Zealand and begun coaching at a club in Auckland, stumbled upon a robust-built teenager at the Harare Cricket Club. He knew how difficult it was back then for a white cricketer to burst onto the national scene. So he queried him whether he was interested in shifting to Auckland. First, he had to convince the boy's father, who aspired for his son to don Zimbabwe colours. Over a few meetings, he succeeded and Colin de Grandhomme was on his maiden flight. "I was very scared. I was flying for the first time and to a distant place," he once told *New Zealand Herald*.

Strang was struck by the big man's shyness. So was his then club coach Dipak Patel when he first met him. "He was a quiet, shy boy who hardly spoke. But he was bloody hardworking, rarely went out drinking with the boys, and was ready to do anything for the team," he recalls.

It's what he does for his team as well. Plugging in relentlessly with the ball as a reliable stock bowler and chiming in with useful contributions down the order. His clean hitting has made him a cult hero on the county circuit, where he plays for Warwickshire, though in the New Zealand set-up, his role as a batsman is more akin to Ravindra Jadeja's. In another era, or another team, he would have been labelled as the conventional Black Cap all-rounder, a bit-part player, who wouldn't have merited a placed on singular skill in a Test XI.

De Grandhomme bowls what might be described as right-arm Kiwi orthodox, medium-pace wobble. But underestimate him at your peril. On his Test debut, he picked six for 41 against Pakistan in Christchurch, the first Black Caps debutant to take half-a-dozen wickets since Alex Moir took six for 155 against England way back in 1951. A few

months later, he smacked his maiden — and till date only — Test hundred against West Indies in Hamilton. Twenty-four games into his career, he averages 37 with the bat including that hundred and eight 50s. He has picked just 37 wickets at 31.13.

Modest numbers, but his utility could not be gauged through numbers. For instance, in this series, his 43 in the first innings in Wellington and 26 in the first innings in Christchurch turned out to be precious for his team. Add to that the wicket of Virat Kohli in the second innings of the Christchurch Test, his workmanlike figures of 16-5-28-1, 11-5-12-1, 9-2-31-0 and 5-3-3-1, and his contributions have been as spectacular as their frontline bowlers. Explained Trent Boult: "His thrift gives bowlers the freedom to attack. His energy gives us the time to recover between spells. He's like a bowling machine." Take him out of the eleven, and the Kiwis becomes an incomplete force.

However, he still remains shy and elusive. His rationale, as he explained to a radio station in a rare interview: "Just never been my thing. Talking in front of a crowd and just talking in front of heaps of people is pretty tough for me. I would rather face a 150kmh pacer," he says. Then in a rare instance of humour, he says: My dictionary doesn't have as many words as other people."

Among Kiwi jourmos, he's known as the five-word Colin. For there was a press conference — in fact, the only one he has ever given — wherein he spoke just five words. But his all-round efforts speak more than the words. There's no shortage of nicknames. Dutchie for his Dutch accent, Mo-man for the thick moustache he spotted on debut before he shaved it before the World Cup, Magnum for his striking resemblance to Tom Sellick's famous character Thomas Magnum from *Magnum P.I.*

Then Big House, because his New Zealand teammates thought his French surname Grandhomme meant Big House, whereas it actually means Big Man. But Grandhomme hasn't cared much about correcting names or changing perceptions.

BEFORE COLIN, THERE WERE OTHERS TOO

NZ has always had bits-and-pieces players in their ranks.

JACOB ORAM During the 2002-03 series, Oram ran through India's famed batting line-up. He picked up 11 wickets and finished with a bowling average of 11.81. With the bat, he scored a crucial unbeaten 26 in the second innings of the final Test in Hamilton that helped the Black Caps eke out a four-wicket win and seal the series 2-0.

CHRIS HARRIS

As a batsman, Chris Harris did not have the potential to survive the rigours of five-day format, and his gentle seam-ups made Geoffrey Boycott famously quip: "Even my mom can hit him." Despite these glaring limitations, he featured in 273 ODIs, in a career spanning close to a decade.

ROD LATHAM

His career spanned only 4 years, in which Rod Latham — opener Tom's father — featured in four Tests and 33 ODIs. In the 1992 World Cup, he opened with Mark Greatbatch and then teamed up with Gavin Larsen to stifle oppositions with the ball.

SCOTT STYRIS

He bowled with decent pace and could swing the ball before a knee injury. He turned into a batting mainstay, especially in ODIs, and had a sensational 2007 World Cup in the Caribbean (499 runs). ENS

Australia star Perry ruled out of T20 World Cup

REUTERS SYDNEY, MARCH 3

DEFENDING CHAMPIONS Australia suffered a major blow ahead of the knockout stage of the Women's Twenty20 World Cup when all-rounder Ellyse Perry was ruled out of the remainder of the tournament on Tuesday.

The twice ICC women's cricketer of the year hobbled off the field in tears after suffering a right hamstring injury during Monday's four-run victory over New Zealand that sealed their place in Thursday's second semi-finals against South Africa.

"Ellyse sustained a high-grade right hamstring injury that is expected to keep her out of the game for a significant period of time," team doctor Pip Inge said in a media statement. "We are currently exploring management options and will continue to support Ellyse through her recovery."

The team said Perry would not be replaced in the squad. "Ellyse is a key member of our squad and has been for a long period of time and on a personal level we're disappointed that she won't have the opportunity to finish the tournament," coach Matthew Mott said. "We're confident that we have enough depth in the squad to cover her batting and bowling and know whoever gets an



ELLYSE PERRY

opportunity will make a strong contribution."

South Africa finished top of Group B after their final group match against West Indies at the Sydney Showground Stadium was washed out on Tuesday. They finished ahead of inaugural 2009 champions England who will play India, the only team to win all four group matches, in Thursday's first semi-finals. The final takes place at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Sunday.

Thailand signed off from their maiden Twenty20 World Cup in style on Tuesday, claiming a point after their final Group B match was abandoned because of rain.

Electing to bat, Thailand posted a strong 150-3 after openers Nattakan Chantam (56) and Nattaya Boochatham (44) gave them a flying start. But steady rain poured cold water on their hopes of an upset and the match was abandoned after the innings break during which the Thais entertained the crowd with an impromptu dance-off. "We want to be here and I think we've made a statement that we're good enough to be here," Thai captain Sommarin Tippoch said. "We are the role models for the (Thai) girls and boys who want to play cricket. We will be preparing for the next World Cup."

India to play England

PTI adds: India will take on England in the Women's T20 World Cup semifinals, it was decided on Tuesday following the rained-out game between South Africa and the West Indies in Sydney. The abandoned game meant South Africa and West Indies shared a point each which was enough to push the former to the top spot with seven points, leaving England second. England, who finished with three wins and a loss in the group stage, face India on Thursday in a repeat

semifinal of the 2018 edition. Back then, England had beaten India before losing the final to Australia.

India, who are aiming to make their maiden final, topped the group stage with four wins in as many games. The second semifinal between South Africa and four-time champions Australia will also be played on Thursday at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Former Australia pacer Brett Lee foresees a "different" looking India making their maiden T20 Women's World Cup final and attributed their rise to the emergence of star players like 16-year-old Shafali Verma. Besides opener Shafali, experienced leg-spinner Poonam Yadav has been the other match-winner for India in the competition. The Harmanpreet Kaur-led side topped the group stage with four wins in as many games and play their semifinal here on Thursday.

"They've never reached the final but this is a different India team from the one they've seen before. They've combined match-winners in Shafali Verma and Poonam Yadav with consistent players with both bat and ball," Lee was quoted as saying by ICC.

SEMIFINAL LINE-UP India vs England, Sydney, March 5; 9:30 am Australia vs South Africa, Sydney, March 5, 1:30 pm

Kapil's reading: Kohli's reflexes have slowed down

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

KAPIL DEV feels slowing down of reflexes could be the reason behind Virat Kohli's struggles in New Zealand and the Indian skipper needs to "practice more" to overcome the age factor.

The 31-year-old Kohli managed just 38 runs in the two Tests at an average of 9.50 in New Zealand. In the preceding limited overs series, he managed to score 180 runs including a half century, making it a forgettable tour for the India skipper.

"With every big batsman there comes a phase. This is the age, after turning 30 everyone says there is a dip in the eyesight and that takes 6 months to a year to get used to it," Dev told *ABP news*. "I think he (Kohli) needs to adjust his eyesight a bit. When big players start getting bowled or LBW to incoming deliveries then you have to tell them to practice more," he added.

The World Cup winning Indian captain said that several batsmen like Virender Sehwag, Rahul Dravid and cricket legend Vivian Richards have faced similar difficulties. "It shows that your eyes and your

"When your eyesight weakens then you have to work on your technique. The same ball which he used to pounce on so quickly, he's getting late on it now. The IPL will help him as the more he plays the better understanding and idea he'll get on how to deal with it."

reflexes have slowed down a bit and in no time your strengths turn into your weaknesses. From 18-24, your eyesight is at the optimum level but after that, it depends on how you work on it."

"Sehwag, Dravid, Viv Richards all faced similar difficulties in their career. So Kohli needs to practice more."

Dev feels Kohli needs to tighten his technique and practice more and said playing in the IPL will help the 31-year-old to adjust to the development.

"When your eyesight weakens then you have to work on your technique. The same ball which he used to pounce on so quickly, he's getting late on it now. The IPL will help him as the more he plays the better understanding and idea he'll get on how to deal with it."