

Openers have fixed positions, but everyone else needs to be flexible about batting slots: Axar



Axar Patel

India will start their campaign against England in a five-match T20I series at the Eden Gardens on Wednesday

PTI, KOLKATA: Openers are the only ones with a fixed slot in the Indian T20 line-up and the batting order that follows will be made up of "multiple floaters", new Vice-Captain Axar Patel said on Monday while spelling out the team's strategy ahead the five-match series against England.

India will start their campaign against England in a five-match T20I series at the Eden Gardens on Wednesday.

Asked about being a floater in batting order, the all-rounder replied: "...it's not just about me; it applies to everyone in the team."

"Right from the start of 2024, we had decided to have a fixed opening slot, and from No. 3 to No. 7, everyone has been told to be flexible based on the situation, combinations, and match-ups."

Axar, who is now a part of the team management for the series, spoke in a manner that reminded one of Rohit Sharma's interaction before the 2023 ODI World Cup where he called for flexibility in the

“Right from the start of 2024, we had decided to have a fixed opening slot, and from No. 3 to No. 7, everyone has been told to be flexible based on the situation, combinations, and match-ups. There is no fixed position where a particular batter will always play...it's the same for everyone in that range (between Nos 3 to 7), depending on who is having a great day, which we assess during practice sessions. In T20 cricket, it's all about utilising the right batter in the right situation

— Axar Patel, India Vice-Captain

middle-order.

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There is not much that changes for Axar as Suryakumar Yadav's deputy except for the fact that he will now also be a part of certain hard calls that are taken by the team management.

"It's been only one day. Yes, we (skipper Surya, head coach Gautam

Gambhir and myself) have had a discussion. There is an extra responsibility on the leadership group. There is not much of a change. Obviously, we have a settled T20 side, there is not much pressure."

"When you come into the leadership group, obviously you have to take some harsh decisions. Those also we have spoken about. It is about having a genuine opinion and keeping trust on each other."

This is the national team's first game after the Test debacle in Australia and the all-rounder doesn't want to fret on the bygoners.

"Hum yeh bhi baat karte hain ki, jo ho gaya woh ho gaya, woh wapas

nahin aanevala (Let bygones be bygones). It is about taking the positives into our next series," he said.

Axar also welcomed veteran pacer Mohammed Shami's return to the national set-up for the first time since ODI World Cup final on November 19, 2023. Shami had been struggling with a knee niggle after recuperating from an ankle surgery.

"It's a very positive thing for the team. The last time he (Shami) played was in the ODI World Cup final, and since his recovery, he has performed well in both the Syed Mushtaq Ali and Vijay Hazare tournaments," he said, referring to Shami's recent comeback in the domestic circuit.

"Whenever a senior player makes a comeback, it gives a big boost to the team. We all know what Shami bhai brings to the table, whether it's with the new ball or in the death overs."

"His presence, especially with the new ball, is a huge advantage for the team. Hopefully, he continues the same form he showcased in the World Cup."

Mbappe stars as Real go atop

AFP, MADRID: Kylian Mbappe struck twice and produced a brilliant performance to power Real Madrid to a 4-1 win over Las Palmas and take the reigning champions top of La Liga on Sunday.

Los Blancos enjoyed a perfect weekend, overtaking Atletico Madrid by two points after their neighbours slipped up with a shock defeat at Leganes on Saturday, while Barcelona, third, could only draw at Getafe.

Mbappe has hit top form in recent weeks after an inconsistent start to life at Real Madrid following his dream switch from Paris Saint-Germain last summer. The 26-year-old reached 12 league goals with his brace, becoming the Spanish league's second top-scorer behind Barcelona's Robert Lewandowski, with Brahim Diaz and Rodrygo Goes also on target.

Mbappe has 18 goals for the season in 30 appearances across all competitions, and is looking increasingly crucial for his side in attack.



Real Madrid's forward #09 Kylian Mbappe celebrates after scoring team's third goal with defender #17 Lucas Vazquez during Spanish league match against UD Las Palmas at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid

With Vinicius Junior suspended, the spotlight was on the French forward at the Santiago Bernabeu and he delivered with a sparkling performance.

Madrid were thrashed by Barcelona last week in the Spanish Super Cup final, leading to some whistles for the team when they played at home in midweek in the Copa del Rey.

Mbappe posted on social media network Instagram to encourage the fans to stick together and support the team.

"I think we have to be united, and like that, we can go for all the trophies," he explained.

SPANISH LA LIGA RESULTS

Celta Vigo 1 (Alvarez 74) Athletic Bilbao 2 (Berenguer 62, Vivian 71), Real Madrid 4 (Mbappe 18-pen, 36, Diaz 33, Rodrygo 57) Las Palmas 1 (Silva 1), Osasuna 1 (Garcia 59) Rayo Vallecano 1 (Camello 19), Valencia 1 (Duro 26) Real Sociedad 0. Saturday: Girona 1 (Martinez 36) Sevilla 2 (Saul 59, Lukebakio 88), Leganes 1 (Nastasic 49) Atletico Madrid 0, Real Betis 1 (Rodriguez 28) Alaves 3 (Garcia 11-pen, 80, 84), Getafe 1 (Arambarri 34) Barcelona 1 (Kounde 9).

Debutants Nigeria register historic win over NZ

PTI, KUALA LUMPUR: Nigeria is little-known for its cricketing prowess, but the West African country did the unimaginable by stunning formidable New Zealand by two wickets to register a historic win in the ICC Women's U-19 T20 World Cup, here, on Monday.

Nigeria scored 65-6 batting first, before producing an energetic display in the field that continued to add pressure on New Zealand's run chase.

The Kiwis were 57-5, needing nine runs, with one over to go, and tight bowling from Lilian Ude got them over the line, finishing two runs shy of Nigeria's total.

Football and athletics are the popular sports in Nigeria, unlike in the south of the continent (South Africa, Zimbabwe) where cricket has a big fan following.

But the Nigerian girls brought their nation into cricketing limelight by becoming the first West African country to qualify for

a global tournament and then, produced the biggest shock by upsetting an ICC full member nation in a Group C match.

Making their ICC Women's U-19 World Cup debut, the Nigerians were left to wait for an opportunity after their contest with Samoa on Saturday was abandoned due to rain.

Wet weather again threatened the proceedings in Sarawak, but the African nation made the most of their chances once it was confirmed there would be play, albeit a reduced contest of 13 overs each.

Meanwhile in another match of the day, Australia beat Bangladesh by two wickets in a tense Group D match and all but secured their progression to the next stage.

USA also announced itself as a World Cup force after stunning Ireland in Johor, winning by nine wickets and drastically improving their net run rate position in Group B.

WOMEN'S U-19 T20 WORLD CUP

Pant named LSG captain

PTI, KOLKATA: Dynamic keeper-batter Rishabh Pant was on Monday named the captain of Lucknow Super Giants for the upcoming IPL and he vowed to give his "200 percent" to win the team's maiden title.

Pant was picked at the mega auction for an IPL record Rs 27 crore by the franchise owner Sanjiv Goenka.

"I will give my 200 percent. That's my commitment to you. I will try whatever is



there in my power to repay the faith. I am really excited and looking forward to new beginning and new energy. And have a blast out there with lot of fun," Pant told mediapersons after being unveiled as the new skipper.

"We start with new hope and aspirations. And most importantly, new confidence.

I wanted to introduce you all to our new captain Rishabh Pant," Goenka said. This is Pant's second stint as a leader in the IPL.

Learnt from Rohit how to care for a player: Pant

KOLKATA: Newly-appointed Lucknow Super Giants skipper Rishabh Pant has not only learned leadership skills from India captain Rohit Sharma but also from other senior players in the national team.

As LSG embark on a new journey, they have placed their trust in Pant, known for his fearless batting and dynamic presence on the field. Having made his debut under the Virat Kohli in 2017, Pant has also played alongside the inspirational Mahendra Singh Dhoni. "Yes, I've learned from a lot of captains, and a lot of my seniors because I feel you just don't have to only learn from your captain," said Pant after being named captain of the Lucknow franchise.

"There are a lot of senior players who have experience of the game, the way game is

moving forward. There's a lot you can learn from all the seniors, not just the captain." Drawing inspiration from his experience under Rohit's leadership, Pant highlighted the importance of care and trust while captaining a side. "It's difficult to be very specific. With Rohit bhai, I have learned how to care for a player. And I feel the same as a captain when I captain a side. I feel if you give confidence and trust to a player, he will do things which you can't even imagine for you and for the team. And that's the kind of ideology we like to have."

Pant, outlined his vision for the team. "We'll back the players. We'll try to give them trust. We'll have a clear communication," said Pant, who has captained Delhi Capitals in the IPL.

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