Comeback-man Shami in focus as India eye fresh start against England

All-rounder Axar will debut as India's vice-captain in T20I format; the white-ball rubber, comprising five T20Is and three ODIs, presents an ideal platform for both the teams to experiment with combinations and assess form before next month's Champions Trophy

PTI, KOLKATA: Fit-again pacer Mohammed Shami's comeback would be keenly watched when the Suryakumar Yadav-led Indian T20 team takes on an evenly-matched England in a five-match series starting, here, on Wednesday, aiming to make up for the recent Test disasters that have caused considerable turmoil and heartbreak.

The white-ball rubber, comprising five T20Is and three ODIs after that, presents an ideal platform for both the teams to experiment with combinations and assess form before next month's Champions Trophy.

Shami, despite missing four matches, emerged as India's leading wicket-taker in the ODI World Cup 2023 with 24 scalps, including a sensational 7/57 in the semi-final against New Zealand at the Wankhede.

Interestingly, the pacer has claimed the same number of wickets -- 24 at an average of 29.62 -- in his limited T20I career and will aim to improve on that while proving his fitness.

Shami was sidelined after the lost final against Australia on November 19, 2023 due to an ankle injury that required surgery. The recovery from that was followed by swelling on his left knee during the domestic comeback some weeks back.

Following his inclusion in India's Champions Trophy squad, Shami's return will garner national attention.

With pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah nursing a back injury and his Champions Trophy participation doubtful, Shami's comeback assumes greater significance. The 34-year-old made his competitive return in the Ranji Trophy for Bengal, guiding them to their first win of the season with a seven-wicket haul.

He followed it up with impressive performances in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (11 wickets) and the Vijay Hazare Trophy (five wickets).

Shami's T20I career has been sporadic, with just 23 appearances since his debut in 2014. His last outing in the format was against England in the 2022 T20 World Cup semi-final.

With the Rohit Sharma-led Indian Test set-up still reeling from a horror tour of Australia, a good performance from the T20 side has become imperative especially after the Board had to step in to reinforce diktats on team discipline.

All-rounder Axar Patel will debut as India's vice-captain in the T20I format. He has been rewarded for his stellar all-round contributions in India's triumphant T20 World Cup campaign in the Caribbean last year.

The Gujarat player has already outlined his vision for India's middle order, emphasising a flexible approach with players floating between No. 3 to 7 depending on match situations.

All eyes will also be on Kerala's Sanju Samson, who faces another critical juncture in his career after being omitted from India's Champions Trophy squad.

Promising all-rounder Nitish Reddy, who scored his maiden Test century against Australia in December at Melbourne, has also earned a spot in the squad, giving the team another option pace-bowling all-rounder along with the redoubtable Hardik Pandya.

For the Jos Buttler-led England, the series marks a new chapter under head coach Brendon McCullum, who signed a three-year contract following Matthew Mott's resignation following their T20 World Cup exit.

Known for revolutionising Test cricket with his aggressive 'Bazball' approach, McCullum will now seek to replicate that success in the limited-overs format.

It would not be a new territory for the New Zealand great, who was also at the helm of Kolkata Knight Riders after playing for the franchise in the inaugural IPL.

England will miss key players Reece Topley, Sam Curran, and Will Jacks, but promising 21-year-old Jacob Bethell, who impressed in the ODI series against the West Indies last year, will look to shine.

Bethell has averaged 57.66 and struck at 167.96 in his seven T20I appearances. Test opener Ben Duckett has been given the position in the shortest format for the first time in six years.

Like Shami, England's fiery pacer Jofra Archer will be under the spotlight as he returns from injury to lead their pace attack ahead of the Champions Trophy.

The playing XI finalised for Wednesday also includes pace bowler Mark Wood, who has recently recovered from a right elbow injury.

But conditions in India, with the possibility of heavy evening dew, could pose a challenge for bowlers. After Wednesday's game, the series would move to Chennai for the second T20I (January 25), followed by matches Rajkot (Jan 28), Pune (Jan 31) and Mumbai (February 2).

The ODI leg will start in Nagpur on February 6, followed by Cuttack (February 9) and Ahmedabad (February 12).

Team India during a training session on the eve of the first T20 match of the series against England, at Eden Gardens in Kolkata, on Tuesday

TEAMS

INDIA: Suryakumar Yadav (c), Axar Patel (vc), Abhishek Sharma, Sanju Samson (wk), Tilak Varma, Hardik Pandya, Rinku Singh, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Harshit Rana, Arshdeep Singh, Mohammad Shami, Varun Chakaravarthy, Ravi Bishnoi, Washington Sundar and Dhruv Jurel (wk).

ENGLAND: Jos Buttler (c), Harry Brook (vc), Phil Salt (wk), Jacob Bethell, Liam Livingstone, Jofra Archer, Gus Atkinson, Ben Duckett, Jamie Overton, Adil Rashid, and Mark Wood.

Match starts: 7 pm

Vaishnavi's record 5/5 powers India to 10-wkt win

PTI, KUALA LUMPUR: Debutant left-arm spinner **Vaishnavi Sharma** recorded astonishing figures of 5/5, including a hat-trick, as India demolished Malaysia by 10 wickets in an utterly one-sided U-19 Women's T20 World Cup match that was done and dusted in less than 18 overs, here, on Tuesday.

U-19 WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

Vaishnavi's figures are the best ever in the tournament's history as Malaysia were bundled out for a paltry 31 in 14.3 overs. Fellow left-arm spinner Ayushi Shukla (3/8) also chipped in as India bowlers ran through Malaysia's batting line-up without much ado.

India barley batted an eyelid while chasing down the target in 2.5 overs, reaching 32 for no loss. G Trisha made an unbeaten 27 off 12 balls with five fours. The lowest total in a women's T20I, however, is 6 -- shared by Maldives and Mali.

In the men's game, Ivory Coast has held the record since being bowled out for just seven runs in a 264-run defeat by Nigeria in Lagos last year.

Now, India are on top of their group with four points, same as Sri Lanka but the former has better Net Run Rate +9.1 to Lanka's +5.5.

But that easy chase was the fruit borne out of Vaishnavi's impeccable spell. There was appreciable turn and bounce on offer in the pitch here, and she used it to the hilt as the home side batters had no answers to her guile.

Nur Ain Binti Roslan, Nur Isma Dania and Siti Nazwah were her hat-trick victims, and she achieved the feat in the 14th over, that saw Malaysia further stumbling from 24 for six to 30 for nine.

Earlier, she had the wickets of Malaysia skipper Nur Syuhada and Nuriman as none of the home side batters were able to reach double digits. In fact, India had bowled 10 wides and Malaysia's scoreboard would have been even more anaemic if those runs were not there.

SCOREBOARD

Malaysia: Nur Aliya Hairun run out (Parunika Sisodia) 5, Nuni Farini Safry lbw b Joshitha V J 0, Husna b Aayushi Shukla 5, Nur Dania Syuhada c Niki Prasad b Vaishnavi Sharma 1, Nur Izzatul Syafiqa c Parunika Sisodia b Aayushi Shukla 0, Nuriman Hidayah b Vaishnavi Sharma 2, Suabika Manivannan not out 3, Nur Ain Binti Roslan lbw b Vaishnavi Sharma 3, Nur Isma Dania lbw b Vaishnavi Sharma 0, Siti Nazwah b Vaishnavi Sharma 0, Marsya Qistina Abdullah c Sanika Chalke b Aayushi Shukla 1. Extras: 11. Total: 31 for 10. Fall of Wickets: 4-1, 12-2, 13-3, 13-4, 22-5, 24-6, 30-7, 30-8, 30-9, 31-10. Bowling: Shabnam Shakil 2-0-8-0, Joshitha V J 2-1-5-1, Aayushi Shukla 3.3-1-8-3, Parunika Sisodia 3-0-5-0, Vaishnavi Sharma 4-1-5-5.

India: Gongadi Trisha not out 27, G Kamalini not out 4. Extras: 1. Total: 32 for no loss. Bowling: Suabika Manivannan 1.5-0-16-0, Nur Dania Syuhada 1-0-15-0.

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