

# India keep an eye on Shami's fitness, look to extend lead against England

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**PTI, CHENNAI:** Unruffled by the lingering fitness concerns surrounding Mohammed Shami, the well-oiled machine that is India's T20 team will be eyeing an encore of its opening game performance against a stunned England in the second game of a five-match series, here, on Saturday.

India lead the rubber 1-0 after a facile seven-wicket victory at the Eden Gardens on Wednesday. The hosts would certainly want to see Shami in action but his inclusion in the 11, as things stand now, will depend on further evaluation of his fitness. The 34-year-old was expected to feature in the first game and he was actively involved in the nets too, but his comeback was postponed possibly because the management wanted to take a deeper look at his readiness.

However, India did not miss Shami much in Kolkata where pacer Arshdeep Singh, with the new ball, and spinner Varun Chakravarthy, in the middle phase, wrecked England, producing impressive spells.

The Eden pitch had enough help for both quicks and their slower colleagues but the corresponding 22-yard trampoline here could offer more assistance to the spinners, as it often has been the case in the past.

India would not be complaining whatever be the nature of the track. The home side boasts of quality and variety in a line-up consisting Varun, vice-captain Axar Patel and Ravi Bishnoi.

From England's perspective, they would require



India's captain Suryakumar Yadav (left), Axar Patel (center) and Nitish Kumar Reddy during a practice session ahead of the second T20I match against England, at the MA Chidambaram Stadium, in Chennai, on Friday

## We need to put constant pressure on India to come back: Harry Brook

**CHENNAI:** Top-order batter Harry Brook said on Friday that England will have to apply constant pressure on India if the visitors want to recover from the seven-wicket drubbing at Kolkata and level the series. India are leading the five-match series 1-0 after their victory at the Eden Gardens.

"We're pretty chilled. India is a very good side, so, we knew what they were gonna hit us with and yeah, they played an exceptional game," Brook said on the eve of the second T20I here.

"We just need to keep pushing, the same messaging Baz (Brendon McCullum) has been saying throughout.

We need to look to put pressure on their bowlers, and try to take wickets throughout their innings. You've always got a go a little bit above and beyond to exceed," he added.

Brook hoped to take some cues from skipper Jos Buttler's fine fifty at the Eden Gardens — a 44-ball 68.

"Yeah, he is obviously very experienced in India. He's done exceptionally well in the IPL and whenever he's played for England here."

"So, it's really nice to watch him go out there and go about his busi-

ness. It was a pleasure to watch him from the other end for a little bit." Brook hoped that he can contribute more significantly towards a potential England victory at the Chepauk on Saturday.

"It was not an ideal start. But it was just one game. It would be (his aim) is to contribute to wins. The only thing I really think about is trying to be a match-winner and if I win one or two games out of this series here, I'll be very happy with it," he noted.



much better contributions from experienced spinners Adil Rashid and Liam Livingstone to challenge

the Indians. Apart from pacer Jofra Archer, none of the other English bowlers could survive the onslaught

of Abhishek Sharma and the mini cameo of Sanju Samson in the first match. Since coming together in

hope for a fiery start from their openers to clinch early momentum, as Phil Salt and Ben Duckett jointly made

the T20Is last year, Samson and Abhishek have had considerable success, often giving India a flying start.

The desired double-barrel firing has been occasional, but at least one of them has produced the goods rather consistently.

In Kolkata, Abhishek hurt England with a brutal knock, striking at over 230.

Samson has three hundreds in the last six innings, and it would not be unrealistic to imagine these two as the first-choice openers once India hit the road to next year's T20 World Cup at home. They also offer that rare right-hand-left-hand combination at the top.

Here too, the Indian openers will have to give their side a solid start considering the tricky nature of the pitch. England too will

just four runs off seven balls.

It's not a matter of grave concern yet but skipper Suryakumar Yadav will be mindful of the fact that he has just two fifties in the previous 11 innings after the T20 World Cup final last year.

India might not ring in many major changes considering the series is just one-match old, and if Shami is indeed fit to make his international comeback since the 2023 World Cup final, then Nitish Kumar Reddy could make way for him.

Keeping in mind the character of Chepauk pitch, England might look to reinforce the spin department, adding young leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed.

## SQUADS

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

**England:** Jos Buttler (c), Ben Duckett, Philip Salt (wicketkeeper), Jamie Smith (wicketkeeper), Harry Brook, Liam Livingstone, Jacob Bethell, Jamie Overton, Brydon Carse, Jofra Archer, Adil Rashid, Mark Wood

Match starts at 7 pm

## sportspopup

### Injured Djokovic exits to boos, Sinner sets up Zverev final

**MELBOURNE:** Novak Djokovic retired injured from his Australian Open semi-final against Alexander Zverev on Friday and left the court to boos, with defending champion Jannik Sinner to face the German for the title. Top-ranked Sinner blew past Ben Shelton 7-6 (7/2), 6-2, 6-2 despite some late cramp in the second semi-final in Melbourne to set up a meeting between the Italian and second seed Zverev. The Rod Laver Arena crowd jeered Djokovic, who played with a heavily taped leg, when he called it a day after losing a gruelling first set against Zverev, leaving his bid for a record 25th Grand Slam crown in tatters. The 37-year-old Serbian great shook hands after going down 7-6 (7/5) and said he had been hampered by a muscle tear.

### Abhishek suffers ankle injury scare during training

**CHENNAI:** India opener Abhishek Sharma faced an injury scare ahead of the second T20I against England as he twisted his ankle during the catching drill at nets here on Friday. Subsequently, Abhishek was checked by team physiotherapist on the field before retreating to the dressing to give rest to his ankle. He was seen slightly limping while walking back to the pavilion and did not bat at nets either. The 24-year-old spent more than half an hour with the physio in the dressing room. If Abhishek has to sit out of the match on Saturday here, India have the options of fielding Washington Sundar or Dhruv Jurel in the 11. In that event, Tilak Varma can move up the order to open with Sanju Samson.

### Mandhana, Deepti in ICC women's ODI Team of the Year; no Indian in men's side

**DUBAI:** Star batter Smriti Mandhana and all-rounder Deepti Sharma were on Friday named in the ICC women's ODI Team of the Year 2024 but none of their male counterparts found a place in the men's side that was dominated by Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The women's all-star team has three players from England, two Australians, two South Africans and one each from Sri Lanka and West Indies, besides the two Indians. South African batter Laura Wolvaardt, who scored 697 runs in 12 matches in 2024, was named captain of the ICC team. The men were, however, absent from the ICC XI and that can be attributed to lack of ODI engagements for the country last year. India played only three ODIs -- an away series against Sri Lanka --, losing two of them while the third one ended in a tie.

### Bumrah, Jadeja and Jaiswal named in ICC Test Team of the Year

**DUBAI:** Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, veteran all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja and young opener Yashasvi Jaiswal deservedly found a place in the ICC's Test Team of the Year 2024 that featured four Englishmen with Australian Pat Cummins as its captain. The team also had two New Zealanders, including the redoubtable Kane Williamson. ICC Test Team of the Year 2024: Pat Cummins (c) (Australia), Yashasvi Jaiswal (India), Ben Duckett (England), Kane Williamson (New Zealand), Joe Root (England), Harry Brook (England), Kamindu Mendis (Sri Lanka), Jamie Smith (wk) (England), Ravindra Jadeja (India), Matt Henry (New Zealand), Jasprit Bumrah (India).

**Walbrue**