

I was focused on field placements, not ton: Gill



AGENCIES, NEW DELHI: After steering India to a four-wicket win over England in the ODI series opener with a calm 87, top-order batter Shubman Gill said he was not focused on getting his century, and was just looking at the field placements set for him at the VCA Stadium in Nagpur.

"No, I wasn't thinking about my century. I was focused on the field placements and played my shots accordingly. I wanted to dominate the bowler, and I would have played the same shot even if I was in my 60s"

— Shubman Gill, India top-order batter

"No, I wasn't thinking about my century. I was focused on the field placements and played my shots accordingly. I wanted to dominate the bowler, and I would have played the same shot even if I was in my 60s," said Gill told mediapersons.

He also shared his thoughts on adjusting to batting at No. 3 after playing all the time as an opener. "I play at No. 3 in Tests, so it

wasn't a big adjustment. It's always a challenge at that position because you have to adapt to the game situation. If the team loses quick wickets, you need to play sensibly. If the team starts well, you need to carry the momentum. My approach was simple-play according to the situation."

Talking about his partnership with Shreyas Iyer, who made 59, Gill said, "We lost two early wickets, but the plan was to play according to the field and not hold back. After a few overs, the line and lengths became predictable, which helped us score faster."

Asked about younger Indian batters frequently using the sweep and reverse sweep against spinners, Gill said, "It's an individual choice, not a team strategy. Every batsman has a plan to target specific areas. Many players are practicing sweeps and reverse sweeps in the nets to have more options while batting."

Gill concluded by reassuring everyone that Virat Kohli, who missed the first ODI due to knee swelling, will be back for the second game at Cuttack on Sunday.

"It's nothing serious. He was fine during yesterday's practice, but he woke up with some swelling in his knee this morning. He'll definitely be back for the second ODI."

Injured Saim ruled out of CT

PTI, KARACHI: Young Pakistan opener **Saim Ayub** has been ruled out of the ICC Champions Trophy after being prescribed a rehabilitation period of at least 10 weeks to recover from an ankle injury.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said on Friday that Saim, who sustained the injury in South Africa in January, is "progressing well in his recovery from the ankle fracture and will continue his rehabilitation in England." "Following comprehensive MRI scans, X-rays, and medical assessments, Saim has been ruled out for 10 weeks from the date of injury (3 January)," the PCB said in a statement.



"His availability for the New Zealand tour will be subject to clearing all fitness tests and medical requirements."

Saim had sustained the injury while fielding on the first day of the second Test against South Africa in Cape Town. Pakistan will tour New Zealand for five T20Is and three ODIs from March 16 to April 5, which will be followed by the Pakistan Super League starting on April 8.

The 22-year-old south-paw opener emerged as Pakistan's top batsman on tours to Australia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, where he scored back-to-back hundreds in ODIs in South Africa and also a T20 century in Zimbabwe.

Liverpool rout Tottenham 4-0, face Newcastle in final



Liverpool's Uruguayan striker #09 Darwin Nunez battles for the ball with Tottenham Hotspur's Welsh defender #33 Ben Davies (second right) during the English League Cup semi-final second leg match at Anfield in Liverpool, England

AP, LONDON: Liverpool will play Newcastle in the English League Cup final after routing Tottenham 4-0 on Thursday.

A rampant performance overturned Spurs' 1-0 lead from the first leg of the semifinal and sealed a 4-1 aggregate victory that keeps Arne Slot's team in contention for an unprecedented quadruple of trophies in his first season in charge.

LEAGUE CUP

Mohamed Salah, Dominik Szoboszlai and Virgil van Dijk all struck after the break in a one-sided semifinal second leg.

Liverpool will play Newcastle in the final at Wembley Stadium on March 16 for the chance to retain the trophy it won last year.

It could be just the first title in what is shaping up to be a special debut season for Slot after succeeding Jurgen Klopp last year.

His team is top of the Premier League, into the

round of 16 in the Champions League and also in the FA Cup. Such a humbling defeat for Tottenham, meanwhile, will likely lead to more speculation about the future of manager Ange Postecoglou, with his team languishing 14th in the league and having won just four of its last 13 games in all competitions.

For the first time under Postecoglou, Spurs failed to get a shot on target in a game, according to stats provider Opta. The League Cup had felt like a lifeline for the Australian and the chance to lift Spurs' first trophy since it won the same competition in 2008. Tottenham was overwhelmed by a Liverpool team that is sweeping aside all-comers this term.

Gakpo's first-time finish with his right foot leveled the tie on aggregate in the 34th minute and Liverpool took complete control after the break.

Salah fired a penalty high into the top corner in the 51st after Darwin Nunez

was brought down by Spurs goalkeeper Antonin Kinsky in the box and Szoboszlai ended a slick Liverpool attack with a low finish in the 75th. Van Dijk headed in Liverpool's fourth from a corner five minutes later.

For Newcastle, the final marks another chance to end its 70-year wait for a major domestic trophy. Its last trophy was the now-defunct Inter-Cities Fairs Cup in 1969 and the most recent domestic title was the FA Cup in 1955.

Despite being bought by Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund in 2021, it is still waiting to end that trophy drought. But a 4-0 aggregate victory over Liverpool's closest title rival Arsenal is evidence of the threat posed by Eddie Howe's team in the final.

LEAGUE CUP RESULT

Semi-final: Liverpool 4 (Gakpo 33, Salah 51-pen, Szoboszlai 75, Van Dijk 80) Tottenham 0. Liverpool won 4-1 on aggregate.

Smith, Carey tons put Australia in the lead



Australia's captain Steve Smith (right) celebrates with teammate Alex Carey after scoring a century during the second day of the second Test match against Sri Lanka at the Galle International Cricket Stadium in Galle on Friday

AFP, GALLE (Sri Lanka): Commanding centuries from Steve Smith and Alex Carey gave Australia a dominating lead at stumps on day two of the second Test against Sri Lanka in Galle on Friday.

Australia, leading by 73 runs at 330-3, were poised to post a mammoth first-innings total, with Smith and Carey stitching together an unbroken 259-run stand for the fourth wicket.

Sri Lanka's bowlers showed some early flair but the spinners struggled

to get the same fizz off the surface once the ball lost its bite, and Smith exploited the gaps.

The Australian skipper made a scratchy start and his innings could have been cut short on 24,

when he was judged lbw to Nishan Peiris. However, a timely review saved him and Smith never looked back.

Smith tightened his grip

on the contest with elegant cover drives and precise pull shots.

He took a few calculated risks and, with Sri Lanka lacking a substantial total to defend, the field was soon spread out to cut off boundaries rather than hunt for wickets.

That didn't deter the Australian captain, who pierced the gaps with ease in dispatching nine fours and a six. He brought up his 36th Test hundred in style, pulling part-timer Kamindu Mendis to the mid-wicket boundary.

Carey was promoted to number five in place of Josh Inglis, who was off the field nursing a sore back, and grabbed his chance, racing to his half-century in 68 deliveries.

His hundred came with a well-timed sweep to the boundary, taking just 118 balls to reach the milestone, and finished with a career-best 139 off 156 balls that included 13 fours and two sixes. Sri Lanka were earlier bowled out for 257, having resumed on their overnight score of 229-9.

Kusal Mendis played a lone hand with a spectacular 85 not out but he ran out of partners as the Australian bowlers wrapped up the innings after some late resistance.

2ND TEST: SRI LANKA VS AUSTRALIA

Buttler lauds 'mature' Bethell despite England defeat

AFP, NAGPUR: England captain Jos Buttler praised 21-year-old batsman **Jacob Bethell** for his maturity under pressure despite defeat in the first One-Day International against India.

The left-handed Bethell stood out with a composed 51 off 64 deliveries in England's 248 all out.

In just his ninth ODI, and with England on 111-4, Bethell stuck it out with Buttler in a 59-run stand that raised hopes of a fighting total. "I was



watching him bat and saying 'I couldn't remember how to bat at 21', it took me till I was about 28, I

think. I'm really pleased for him," the 34-year-old Buttler said.

"He didn't find it easy at the start, but he was very mature, measured, soaked up some pressure and came through it."

"It was a really mature innings from him, he'll learn a lot from this, it's a really good experience."

Bethell bowled three overs of his left-arm spin to claim a wicket for 18 runs.

The second ODI is on Sunday in Cuttack.

Torres treble powers Barca into Copa del Rey semis



FC Barcelona's Spanish forward #07 Ferran Torres (centre) celebrates with teammates after scoring their first goal during the Spanish Copa del Rey (King's Cup) quarter-final first leg match against Valencia CF at Mestalla Stadium in Valencia

AFP, VALENCIA (Spain): Ferran Torres hit a hat-trick as Barcelona routed Valencia 5-0 on Thursday to cruise into the Copa del Rey semi-finals.

Fermin Lopez and Lamine Yamal were also on target for the record 31-time Spanish Cup winners as they swaggered to victory at an upset Mestalla stadium.

Earlier Real Sociedad

progressed with a comfortable 2-0 win over 10-man Osasuna, joining Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid in a strong final four.

Former Valencia forward Torres took the plaudits with his treble inside 30 minutes, taking full advantage of Barca coach Hansi Flick's decision to rest striker Robert Lewandowski.

"We thought that it would be a very difficult game,

because here at Mestalla is always a hard ground to play," Torres told TVE.

"We had the luck that we scored goals early and in the end that sunk them."

COPA DEL REY RESULTS

Quarter-finals: Real Sociedad 2 (Barrnetxea 21, Mendez 31) Osasuna 0, Valencia 0 Barcelona 5 (Torres 3, 17, 30, Lopez 23, Yamal 59).

BCCI calls SGM on March 1

PTI, NEW DELHI: The BCCI has convened a Special General Meeting (SGM) in Mumbai on March 1 to appoint a new joint secretary after the position was left vacant following the elevation of Devjit Saikia to the post of the board's secretary.

Assam Cricket Association's (ACA) Saikia had succeeded Jay Shah in the secretary's position last month, after the latter took over as the chairman of the International Cricket Council on December 1.

The BCCI sent out the SGM notice to the state associations with a single-item agenda. "Notice is hereby given for a Special General Meeting (SGM) of the BCCI which will be held at 12 pm on March 1, at BCCI headquarters at Mumbai," the apex board said.

ICC unveils CT song Jeeto Baazi Khel Ke

AGENCIES, DUBAI: The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Friday released the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 official song 'Jeeto Baazi Khel Ke', sung by renowned Pakistani playback singer and songwriter Atif Aslam.

With 12 days to go until the unmissable ICC Men's Champions Trophy, the release of the song will build further excitement for the 15-match event taking place from February 19 to March 9 in Pakistan and the UAE.

"I am very fond of cricket and I always wanted to be a fast bowler. Having the passion and understanding of the game - I feel connected to the adrenaline of the crowd, their cheers and the feeling of being a fan. I used to wait for matches in particular the India versus Pa-

kistan game which was always full of emotions and sentimental value. And that is why I am very excited to have been a part of the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 official song," said Aslam.

The official song for the event is produced by Abdullah Siddiqui, with lyrics penned by Adnan Dhool and Asfandiyar Asad. The music video is a visual celebration of the diverse culture of Pakistan from the streets to the markets to the stadium and represents the love and enjoyment of the game.

The thrilling two-week competition will see the world's top eight teams put it all on the line in 15 intense matches across 19 days, with every match counting in the pursuit of the iconic white jackets.

sportspopup

Ponting surprised with Iyer not finding a permanent spot in India's white-ball line-up

CUTTACK: Australian legend Ricky Ponting finds it incredulous that Shreyas Iyer has not been given a permanent slot in India's white-ball side, given his magnificent form and the ability to dominate spinners on slow sub-continental pitches. "I've been a little bit surprised that he's been out of India's side in the last couple of years. He had a terrific World Cup back in India (2023) where he played beautifully in the middle-order and I actually felt then that he'd almost cemented that spot and made that his own," opined Ponting on ICC Review. "Then he had those couple of injuries, obviously injured his back and went out of the side, but his domestic season this year has been brilliant." "It sort of coincided with what he's done since around (IPL) auction time going forward in domestic cricket, he has been pretty much outstanding," said Ponting about the right-hand batter, who guided Kolkata Knight Riders to their third IPL title last year after missing the 2023 edition due to a serious back injury. Ponting feels Iyer will thrive in the Champions Trophy.

IPL is leader of franchise cricket and we can only learn from them: SA20 Commissioner

JOHANNESBURG: SA20 commissioner Graeme Smith has pledged to make it the second best league in the world after admitting that the IPL remains the leader of franchise cricket, from where they can "only learn" to get better. The third season of SA20 is currently underway across venues in South Africa. "BCCI and IPL have been amazing in supporting us and guiding us in every decision we have made. IPL is the leader in franchise cricket by far and we can only learn from them," Smith told PTI Bhasha in an exclusive interview here. IPL veteran Dinesh Karthik this year became the first Indian player to feature in SA20 by appearing for Paarl Royals, who lost the second qualifier against two-time champion Sunrisers Eastern Cape in Centurion on Thursday. When asked about the possibility of having more Indian players in future, Smith said they would love to have them if they were available, but nothing of that sort is in the pipeline as of now.

Amorim reveals reasons why things didn't work out with Rashford at Man United

MANCHESTER: Manchester United manager Ruben Amorim let Marcus Rashford leave the club because he couldn't convince the forward to follow his methods. "I couldn't put Marcus to see the way you're supposed to play football and to train the way I see it," Amorim said in quotes published late Thursday. "Sometimes you have one player that is really good with one coach, and the same player with another coach is different," Amorim said. "I just wish the best to Rashford and to (Villa manager) Unai Emery, and they can connect because he's a very good player." Asked whether Rashford said that he did not agree with Amorim's ideas about soccer, Amorim said: "You know, like me, that it's not the way that occurs. It's something that you feel as a coach and as a player. It's quite normal. It happened with a lot of coaches. The important thing is that I'm here saying that was my decision."

Record January transfers in men's soccer valued at \$2.35B with almost 6,000 deals

ZURICH: Fueled by England and Saudi Arabia, clubs spent a record \$2.35 billion on international transfer deals in a booming January trading period for men's soccer, FIFA said on Friday. The 5,863 international transfers — those between clubs in different countries that are processed by FIFA — also was 900 more than the previous highest, which was recorded last year. In January 2024, only one transfer — Gonçalo Ramos confirming a permanent move to Paris Saint-Germain from Benfica — was reportedly valued at more than 30 million euros.