

# Rohit, Kohli in focus as India eye series win over England

Visitors' success will depend on their attacking template against hosts' spinners

**PTI, CUTTACK:** The barren run of skipper Rohit Sharma and the selection conundrum that Virat Kohli's possible return poses are the towering obstacles in India's quest for a series win against England in the second ODI, here, on Sunday.

India had taken a 1-0 lead after their four-wicket win at Nagpur, but Kohli getting rested owing to a "sore right knee" had raised concerns about his fitness ahead of the Champions Trophy later this month.

However, Vice-Captain

## 2ND ODI: INDIA VS ENGLAND

Shubman Gill had indicated that Kohli could be back for the second match, which will be played at a venue where the latter made a match-winning 85 against the West Indies in 2019.

Kohli had also travelled to Cuttack along with his teammates and he looked relaxed. The Indian team will certainly welcome that sign, but it also raises a challenge in terms of selection.

Shreyas Iyer, who came in for Kohli at the last minute by his own admission, made a rollicking 36-ball 59 that has made dropping him an almost unthinkable act.

If the past norms are followed, then Kohli will walk in for Shreyas, but it is more likely that Yashasvi Jaiswal could be the one who will have to make for the batting icon.

It means that Gill might rejoin Rohit at the top, and



Indian cricketers Kuldeep Yadav, Varun Chakravarty and Arshdeep Singh during a training session on the eve of the 2nd ODI match against England, at the Barabati Stadium in Cuttack, Odisha, on Saturday

### TEAMS

**India:** Rohit Sharma (c), Shubman Gill (v-c), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul (WK), Rishabh Pant (WK), Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja, Washington Sundar, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Harshit Rana, Mohd. Shami, Arshdeep Singh and Varun Chakravarty

**England:** Jos Buttler (c), Harry Brook, Ben Duckett, Joe Root, Philip Salt, Jamie Smith, Jacob Bethell, Brydon Carse, Liam Livingstone, Jamie Overton, Jofra Archer, Gus Atkinson, Saqib Mahmood, Adil Rashid and Mark Wood

Match starts 1.30 pm

Jaiswal did not have a blazing match either at Nagpur.

It remains to be seen how the team think tank led by Gautam Gambhir, which has shown a penchant for left-right combination, navigates this situation.

Combination questions apart, Koli too is in need of runs, and he will need a good outing here if he indeed makes a return.

Kohli's form has been under scrutiny in recent months, especially after his struggles in Australia,

where he repeatedly nicked deliveries to the slip cordon or wicketkeeper. His last competitive outing - for Delhi in the Ranji Trophy - too was a low-yielding one, managing just six before getting bowled by Railways pacer Himanshu Sangwan.

But One-day cricket is Kohli's staple format, and the 36-year-old needs just 94 runs to become the third batter to reach 14,000 runs in the format after Sachin Tendulkar (18,426) and Kumar Sangakkara (14,234)

Having played 283 ODI innings, Kohli can also become the fastest to this milestone ahead of Tendulkar (350 innings) and Sangakkara (378).

Rohit's struggles continued as he perished for just two in the first ODI, failing to shake off the disastrous run in the Test series against Australia.

His dismissal -- a mistimed lofted shot off Liam Livingstone that ballooned to midwicket -- reflected his desperation for runs. The

Mumbai man has not scored a fifty in any format since August last year when he made 64 against Sri Lanka in Colombo in the third match.

If Rohit fails to get going in these two ODIs against England, it could raise deeper concerns about his form and future. India's bowling attack looks settled with fit-again pacer Mohammed Shami gradually settling in following his international comeback.

Having started off with a maiden, Shami slowly got into the scheme of things in Nagpur and dictated the terms in the middle overs, returning with a fine 1/38 from his eight overs.

Debutant Harshit Rana was taken apart by Phil Salt initially, and the young pacer ended up as the most expensive bowler at Nagpur, but he made crucial strikes, dismissing Ben Duckett and Harry Brook in the same over to turn the momentum in India's favour.

With fitness concerns lingering over lead pacer Jasprit Bumrah, Rana has an outside chance to push for his case with another fruitful outing.

For Jos Buttler's men this would be a make-or-break match as they might look to change their downright aggressive batting approach with a much more sensible one.

England's success will depend on how their attacking template holds up against India's quality spinners, on a track here that could offer them appreciable help.

## Kohli bats in the nets

**PTI, CUTTACK:** Star batter Virat Kohli took center stage on the eve of the second ODI against England, batting for nearly an hour in the nets and putting to rest any doubts about the knee injury that had ruled him out in Nagpur.

Kohli arrived quietly, went through his warm-up routine, and headed straight to the nets, kit bag slung over his shoulder. Once there, he was in full flow, confidently taking on Odisha Cricket Association net bowlers alongside his Indian teammates.

His timing was exquisite, and his intensity unwavering as he continued to bat relentlessly for nearly an hour, much to the delight of a packed crowd that chanted 'Kohli, Kohli'.

The sight of Kohli dominating the nets was a reassuring one for Indian fans, especially after his struggles in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against Australia, where he was repeatedly dismissed by edging to the slip cordon. Kohli had scored a match-winning half century against West Indies, when he last played an ODI the Barabati Stadium in Cuttack in 2019.

Indian batting coach Sitanshu Kotak may have remained tight-lipped about whom Kohli would replace, but all signs pointed toward Shreyas Iyer potentially missing out despite. Iyer was notably absent from the optional practice session, along with several key first-choice players, including Shubman Gill, Mohammed Shami, Hardik Pandya, and Harshit Rana.

With the Gautam Gambhir-led think tank favoring a left-right opening combination, debutant Yashasvi Jaiswal is likely to retain his place at the top alongside skipper Rohit Sharma, pushing Kohli to No. 4.

## sportspopup



Belinda Bencic of Switzerland kisses her daughter while holding the winning trophy during award ceremony after winning against Ashlyn Krueger of United States 4-6, 6-1, 6-1 in the Women's single final match of the Mubadala Abu Dhabi Open tennis tournament, in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on Saturday

## PSG extends contracts for coach Enrique and key players Hakimi, Vitinha and Nunes

**PARIS:** Paris Saint-Germain extended the contracts of coach Luis Enrique and three key players on Friday. Enrique extended his deal until 2027, while goal-scoring right back Achraf Hakimi, creative midfielder Vitinha and speedy left back Nuno Mendes all signed on to 2029. PSG also renewed 18-year-old defender Yoram Zague's contract until 2028. PSG remains on course to defend its Ligue 1 title and is still involved in the Champions League and the French Cup.

## 'Improving' Kane hits brace as Bayern beat Bremen to move nine clear

**MUNICH:** Harry Kane said he was still "improving" after scoring two penalties as Bayern Munich beat Werder Bremen 3-0 on Friday to go nine points clear of Bayer Leverkusen in the Bundesliga. There were few chances in the first half but Kane signalled his intent 30 seconds after the break, rattling the crossbar with a shot from outside the box. Kane was key in winning Bayern's first penalty and breaking Bremen's stubborn resistance. The England captain tussled with defender Anthony Young and headed a chipped cross unsighted against the Bremen man's arm, which was slightly extended. The England captain stepped up and converted the spot kick, sending goalkeeper Michael Zetterer the wrong way. Leroy Sane tapped in a Konrad Laimer cross from close range for Bayern's second in the 82nd minute. In stoppage time, Young was again at fault and penalised for a foul on Jamal Musiala. Kane stepped up and converted, bringing his penalty streak to 29 in a row for club and country. The former Spurs striker has 21 goals in 19 league games for Bayern this season, including nine penalties.

## Kolo Muani double saves Juve at Como

**COMO:** Randal Kolo Muani shot Juventus into Serie A's Champions League positions after netting a brace, including the late winning penalty, in Friday's 2-1 win at Como. France forward Kolo Muani took his Juve tally to five goals in three matches as he begins his loan spell from Paris Saint-Germain in fine form. After ramming home Juve's 34th-minute opener from a tight angle Kolo Muani was cool from the penalty spot with a minute remaining after Federico Gatti was cluttered by Como goalkeeper Jean Butez. Thiago Motta's side are only one point ahead of Fiorentina and Lazio who face Inter Milan and Monza this weekend, with Inter coming to Turin next weekend. Kolo Muani became the first player since Roberto Baggio in 1990 to score in his first three Serie A matches for Juve when he smashed home from a tight angle. But another winter window signing levelled the scores for the hosts on the stroke of half-time when Assane Diao headed in Patrick Cutrone's pinpoint cross. Como, who are just two points above the relegation zone and brought in a host of players over the last few weeks, were at times the better team at the Stadio Giuseppe Sinigaglia. Italian Serie A result: Como 1 (Assane Diao 45) Juventus 2 (Kolo Muani 34, 89-pen).

## Man City files new legal challenge against Premier League over financial rules

**LONDON:** Manchester City has registered another legal challenge against the Premier League over rules about "associated party transactions." The British Press Association reported Friday that City is contesting amendments made to the APT rules voted by Premier League clubs last November. Those changes were forced on the league by an earlier legal challenge by the defending champion. APT rules are designed to ensure fair market value is applied to commercial deals with organizations closely aligned to club owners. The rules are intended to prevent deals such as sponsorships from being artificially inflated, which could undermine the league's financial rules. The league introduced the rules in December 2021 after Newcastle was bought by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund. The new filing means there are now three legal cases between City and the league. City faces more than 100 charges of alleged financial breaches from the league.

## Selectors to review squad: PCB chief

**LAHORE:** Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Mohsin Naqvi said that the selection committee "will review" the national squad picked for the Champions Trophy even as he defended the controversial selections of pacer Khushdil Shah and all-rounder Faheem Ashraf. The PCB top boss statement was in complete contradiction to skipper Mohammed Rizwan's assertion that no change is warranted in the 15-member squad. Every cricket board has time till February 12 to make any changes to their provisional squads picked for the ICC event which will be held in Pakistan and United Arab Emirates. "The selectors have the right to review any squad they announce. Khushdil Shah and Faheem Ashraf have been included in the squad with the right intentions," he replied to a question. The selectors have come under fire from many former players and analysts after they recalled Khushdil and Faheem for the Champions Trophy even though the duo had not played international cricket for a while. While Faheem, who has a batting average of 10 and bowling average of 47, played last of his 34 ODIs in September, 2023, Khushdil, who has failed to score even a single half-century in his 10 ODI appearances, has not played for the national team since August, 2022.

## Australia on brink of Lanka Test series sweep

AFP



Australia's players celebrate after the dismissal of Sri Lanka's Angelo Mathews during the third day of the second Test match at the Galle International Cricket Stadium in Galle on Saturday

**AFP, GALLE (Sri Lanka):** Australia are two wickets away from ending Sri Lanka's second innings in the second Test Saturday, with the hosts reeling at 211-8 at stumps on day three in Galle.

With Sri Lanka leading by only 54 runs, Steve Smith's side will be eager to mop up the tail early Sunday and seal a 2-0 sweep. Angelo Mathews was the linchpin of Sri Lanka's innings, holding things together as wickets tumbled at the other end.

But just 15 minutes before the close of play, he swept Nathan Lyon straight to square leg, where Beau Webster pocketed a sharp chance. The 37-year-old warhorse had dug deep for a fighting half-century, but Sri Lanka needed a marathon knock, not his well-compiled 76.

Mathews finds himself

in the crosshairs, with just one fifty in his last eight innings. Ahead of this Test, the selectors had made it clear -- unless he starts churning out big runs, his spot in the next cycle of the World Test Championship was not fixed.

His sixth-wicket partnership with Kusal Mendis worth 70 runs was a lifeline for Sri Lanka, preventing an innings implosion and ensuring the game stretched into a fourth day.

## 2ND TEST: SRI LANKA VS AUSTRALIA

There was an unusual moment in the afternoon session when a delivery from Lyon drifted down the leg-side. It clipped the helmet placed behind the wicketkeeper for a close-in fielder, and triggered an

automatic five-run penalty for Sri Lanka, a rare bonus in a match where runs were hard to come by.

With the picturesque Galle Fort providing a natural grandstand, hundreds of Australian supporters perched themselves atop the historic ramparts to enjoy a commanding performance from their side.

The fans celebrated as off-spinner Lyon became only the third Australian to claim 550 Test wickets, joining the exalted company of Shane Warne (708) and Glenn McGrath (563).

Lyon was well-supported by Matthew Kuhnemann, sharing seven wickets between them. With Sri Lanka on the ropes and Australia poised for the knockout punch, day four promises high drama.

## Hamstring injury jeopardises Ferguson's participation in CT

**PTI, DUBAI:** Barely 11 days before their Champions Trophy opener against Pakistan, New Zealand's leading pace bowler **Lockie Ferguson** has been rendered doubtful for the ODI tournament after suffering a hamstring injury during an IIT20 match in the UAE.

New Zealand will play their opening Group A match in the marquee event against Pakistan at the National Stadium in Karachi on February 19. Coach Gary Stead confirmed the key bowler has undergone scans to know the extent of the injury and the



preceding tri-series that also involves South Africa. "Lockie had a scan on Thursday in the UAE," Stead was quoted as saying by ICC ahead of the start of the tri-series

match against Pakistan in Lahore on Saturday.

"We've got the images here and (we are) waiting for our radiologist to give us a report on the extent of it," said Stead. Stead said a call on Ferguson's replacement can be taken after the advice of the specialists.

"Small hamstring injury, by the look of it, so we're just waiting on a timeline of advice around that before we make a decision on whether Lockie travels here (Pakistan) or whether we do have to replace him for the Champions Trophy," added Stead.

## Maguire heads late winner, Man Utd beat Leicester

AFP



Manchester United's English defender #05 Harry Maguire celebrates after scoring the team's second goal during the English FA Cup fourth round match against Leicester City at Old Trafford in Manchester, England

**AP, MANCHESTER:** Harry Maguire scored a controversial injury time winner as Manchester United came from behind to beat Leicester 2-1 and move into the last 16 of the FA Cup on Friday.

United went behind to a Bobby De Cordova-Reid goal four minutes before halftime. Joshua Zirkzee equalized in the 68th minute and Maguire grabbed the late winner.

There was a heated debate over whether the Eng-

land center half was in an offside position but there is no VAR in the FA Cup and the goal stood.

The result marked the first time in United's history that the club has won three times at home against the same team in the same season. United beat Leicester 5-2 in the League Cup and 3-0 in the Premier League at Old Trafford.

The result was a boost for new coach Ruben Amorim and a bitter letdown for Van Nistelrooy, who was the interim manager at United before being moved on and taking charge at Leicester.

**ENGLISH FA CUP RESULTS**  
**Manchester United 2 (Zirkzee 68, Maguire 90+3) Leicester 1 (De Cordova-Reid 42)**

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## Phillips, Santner lead Kiwis to 78-run win over Pakistan

**AFP, LAHORE:** Glenn Phillips cracked a maiden century and Mitchell Santner grabbed three wickets to help New Zealand overpower Pakistan by 78 runs in the opening match of a tri-nations series in Lahore on Saturday.

Phillips hit 106 not out from 74 balls, with seven sixes and six boundaries to help the tourists post an impressive 330-6 in 50 overs before Santner's 3-41

helped dismiss Pakistan for 252 in 47.5 overs.

South Africa are the third team in the series, a warm-up event for the Champions Trophy from February 19 to March 9 in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates.

Phillips also added the prized wicket of Pakistan opener Fakhar Zaman who top-scored with a 69-ball 84 including four sixes and seven boundaries.

Fakhar and Babar Azam,

promoted to open the innings, had given Pakistan a solid start of 52 before Michael Bracewell broke through with the wicket of Azam who made just 10.

Brief scores: New Zealand 330-6 in 50 overs (G. Phillips 106 not out, D. Mitchell 81, K. Williamson 58; Shaheen Shah Afridi 3-88, Abrar Ahmed 2-41) v Pakistan 252 in 47.5 overs (Fakhar Zaman 84, Salman Agha 40; M. Santner 3-41).