

Men in Blue set to spin web on Kangaroos for final berth today

Four spinners a tempting combination after Varun's effort, says Rohit

PTI, DUBAI: India captain Rohit Sharma did not commit to following the four-spinner template in the Champions Trophy semifinal against Australia, but said Varun Chakravarthy's splendid effort against New Zealand has made that option very "tempting".

India played with Chakravarthy, Kuldeep Yadav, Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel and the quartet wrecked the Kiwis, sharing nine wickets among them in their team's 44-run win here on Sunday.

"We really need to think, even if we want to play four spinners, how we can squeeze four spinners. The reason I say it is because we are very much aware of the conditions here and we know exactly what works and what doesn't work," Rohit said in his pre-match press conference.

"So, we will think about it, what is the right combination to go with, but it is tempting," he added.

Chakravarthy, who came in as a replacement for rested pacer Harshit Rana, was excellent while returning with the figures of 5/42, and Rohit said the spinner is certainly in the team management's thoughts.

"He just showed what he is capable of. Now, it is up to us to think and see how we can get



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that combination right. He got a game, and he did everything that was asked for."

"He has got something different about him and when he gets it right, he knocks people over and he takes 5-5. So, it is very tempting to think about what to do, which is a good headache to have. We will also assess the Australian batting lineup to see what kind of bowling options will work against them," he detailed.

During the course of his match-winning effort against the Kiwis, the Tamil Nadu spinner had also rinsed away the memories of his mod-

est outing against Pakistan in the 2021 T20 WC at this stadium.

Rohit explained the improvements Chakravarthy has made in the interim.

"He has become more accurate now from the last time he played for India in 2021. There was a little bit of inexperience in him as well because he hadn't played a lot of cricket."

"But right now in the last two or three years he has played a lot of cricket whether it's domestic cricket, IPL and now for India in T20s and now the ODIs as well. So, he understands his bowling really well," he said.

The Mumbai man said Chakravarthy has put in a lot of hard yards into his craft of late, which is now reflecting in his wicket column.

"You know, some of our batters also couldn't figure that (variations) out, which is always nice. His pace variation now is su-

perb. When you have a little bit of mystery, you don't want to be a one-dimensional bowler and bowl with the same speed."

"You need something different, the pace variation and the accuracy as well. So, he has worked on both and now you see that he is getting a lot of wickets which is a good sign for us as a team," he added.

Drafting Chakravarthy into India's Champion Trophy squad ahead of players like Yashasvi Jaiswal and Mohammed Siraj had raised some questions.

Rohit explained the rationale.

"It is just the talent. If there is something really special about that particular player, you want to fast track him. Certain formats require a certain skill set and whenever we look at these kinds of players, if the talent is there, then you don't want to shy away from bleeding them."



TEAMS

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

Australia: Steve Smith (c), Sean Abbott, Alex Carey, Ben Dwarshuis, Nathan Ellis, Jake Fraser-McGurk, Aaron Hardie, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Spencer Johnson, Marnus Labuschagne, Glenn Maxwell, Tanveer Sangha, Adam Zampa, Cooper Connolly

Match starts at 2.30 pm IST

It's going to be a challenge to play against Indian spinners on a dry wicket: Smith

PTI, DUBAI: Australia captain Steve Smith indicated a larger role for spinners on a dry pitch, here, and said his side's fortunes in the Champions Trophy semi-final on Tuesday depend on how they negate the Indian slow bowlers.

India employed four spinners against New Zealand in their final Group A match here on Sunday, and choked a capable Kiwis batting unit to register a 44-run win.

"I think not just Chakravarthy, I think the rest of their spin has quality as well. So I think for us, the game is probably how we play their spin. Yeah, it's going to be a challenge," Smith said on Monday, on the eve of the last-four match against India.

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— Steve Smith, Australia captain

added.

In that context, Smith hoped that opener Travis Head, India's Voodoo man in knockout matches, will fire once again against his favourite opponents.

"There's pressure every time you play in a big game. But as we know, Travis has stood up in many of those in the past. You know, he looked in great touch the other night against Afghanistan."

"I'm sure he's going to be looking to come out here and play the same way he's played for a long time with good intent, good aggres-

sion. Hopefully, he can get away in that power play and get results from that."

Smith hoped that their net sessions in Dubai would be good enough for them to counter a strong Indian side, which played all its matches here.

"India obviously played all the games here. So they've seen what the pitch is doing. I don't know if it is an advantage. Obviously, the whole square block is pretty dry. So, we've seen how the wickets are played."

Australia arrived in Dubai after their rained off last league match against Af-

ghanistan, and had to wait for India's match against New Zealand to know their eventual semi-final venue.

Smith saw it as a blessing in disguise.

"So, yeah, ideal to be here and have a couple of days' preparation. I think, had we stayed and waited for last night's result, we would have had to fly here today and play tomorrow, not get a chance to train on the surface, get used to the conditions that we have at the academy," he added.

The New South Welshman also hoped that the spin options in their ranks would do the job for the team.

"We do have plenty of options there. We've got Maxwell. (Matthew) Short's obviously out now. It was a bit



Axar finds 'self-belief' as the key to transformation

PTI, DUBAI: Axar Patel is quickly positioning himself as an useful all-rounder in white ball formats, and for him "self-belief" is the key ingredient in that transformation.

In the latest instance, Axar made a handy 42 and then claimed the prized wicket of Kane Williamson with his left-arm spin to play an important role in India's 44-run win over New Zealand.

"I was not able to click earlier and it was in the back of the mind that I was not able to show my talent. Maybe, I was putting more pressure on myself back then, despite knowing that I have the talent," Axar said in a mixed zone interaction with reporters here.

But an unbeaten 35-ball 64 against the West Indies at Barbados in 2022 unlocked his mind. The knock helped India chase down a daunting 312.

"After that match against the West Indies, I knew I could finish games. As soon as I gained that self-belief, I didn't think much about whether I wanted to show batting to anyone or not."

"I know that I have it and if I give my 100 per cent, I can be confident of doing well continuously," he said. Axar also said his promotion to No. 5 batting slot in white ball formats helped his growth as an all-rounder.

Was nervous ahead of first spell, but chat with seniors calmed me down: Varun

PTI, DUBAI: Varun Chakravarthy erased his painful Dubai memories with a match-winning five-wicket haul against New Zealand but the India spinner admitted feeling "nervous" ahead of his opening spell due to the "emotions" running through his mind.

The 33-year-old had figures of 4 for 33 in a 10-wicket drubbing by Pakistan during the 2021 T20 world Cup here, but four years later he registered 5 for 42 as India defeated New Zealand by 44 runs in the Champions Trophy to top group A here on Sunday.

"In 2021, I didn't have a great tournament here. But it looks good right now. I was a little nervous ahead of my first spell (vs NZ). The emotions were playing (in mind) because of whatever happened three years before at this ground," said Chakravarthy in the post-match press conference.

Chakravarthy, who replaced rested Harshit Rana in the playing eleven, said a chat by the senior pros helped him to "calm down."

"They (emotions) were playing with me

and I was trying to keep it down, control it. But Virat bhai, Rohit and Hardik, were telling me to calm down. They were coming and talking to me. That really helped," he added.

Once settled down, Chakravarthy, who made his ODI debut against England last month, had to find a way to shift through the spells unlike in T20Is where he largely bowls four overs on the trot.

"In T20s, my sequencing of balls as in how I construct an over is totally different compared to the 50-over format. I was able

to figure it out when I played the last two years in the Vijay Hazare Trophy.

"It really helped me to understand when I can bowl my incoming delivery or outgoing delivery or the straighter one or the top spin. It is completely different from what I do in the T20s," he said. The DICS pitch had considerable assistance for spinners, and Chakravarthy said he was judicious in using his bottomless bag of tricks.

"It was not a rank turner which people were projecting it to be. But definitely it was holding on a bit, and it was deviating a little bit just to create the doubt."

"So, basically, you had to play around it. I would also dedicate my five wickets to the other bowlers as the way they bowled helped me pick wickets," he noted.

Patience was another key component for Chakravarthy while bowling on such pitches. "It is a patience game. You just need to wait on such slow wickets as the ball doesn't turn fast. So, you need to wait," he said.



Connolly replaces injured Short in Australia's squad

PTI, DUBAI: Young spin-bowling all-rounder Cooper Connolly on Monday replaced injured Matthew Short in the Australian squad for the knock-out stage of the ongoing Champions Trophy.

Top order batter Short was ruled out of the ICC event, being held in Pakistan and Dubai, due to a calf injury sustained during the match against Afghanistan on Friday.

The 21-year-old Connolly, who made his ODI debut in England last year, was initially named as a travelling reserve for the tournament.

The ICC's Event Technical Committee has approved his inclusion in the Australian squad early on Monday. Connolly has thus far featured in six internationals for Australia, of which three have been ODIs. He's a left-handed batter, who bowls left-arm spin as well.

Short injured his calf on Friday while fielding and appeared hindered when making a quickfire 20 at the top of the order before the match was abandoned due to rain in Lahore.

"I think he'll be struggling," Australia captain Steve Smith had said of Short's injury status.

"I think we saw tonight he wasn't moving very well and I think it's probably going to be too quick between games for him to recover."

sportspopup

WPL: Beth smashes 96 not out as all-round Gujarat Giants thrash UP Warriorz by 81 runs

LUCKNOW: Beth Mooney smashed an unbeaten 96 as an all-round Gujarat Giants thrashed UP Warriorz by 81 runs in a one-sided Women's Premier League match, here, on Monday. Mooney missed out what could have been the first century for any player this WPL season but her 59-ball unbeaten knock with 17 fours powered Gujarat Giants to a formidable 186/5, against which the hosts crumbled without any resistance. Chasing a target of 187, UPW could only make 105 from 17.1 overs as the Giants climbed up from the fifth spot to the second in the points table. UPW, who were placed third before the game, are now fifth. UP Warriorz slipped to 36/5 in the eighth over following a disastrous start and none of their batters could put up any resistance against the Giants' bowlers, who wrecked havoc on an under-pressure batting line-up. Earlier, Mooney was left stranded on 96 not out as Gujarat Giants scored 186 for five. Mooney cracked as many as 17 boundaries from only 59 balls in her innings but with 10 runs needed to reach a triple-digit score in the last over, she could only manage five.

Prague Masters: Praggnanandhaa draws

PRAGUE: Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa played out a draw with fellow Indian Aravindh Chithambaram as the two stayed a full point ahead of nearest challengers after the fifth round of Prague Masters chess tournament here. With 3.5 points in their kitty, Aravindh and Praggnanandhaa are now followed by top seed Wei Yi of China, Anish Giri of Holland, Quang Leim Le of Vietnam and Vincent Keymer of Germany, who all have 2.5 points apiece. Sharing the sixth spot are the remaining four contestants, Czech duo of David Navara and Nguyen Thai Dai Van, Sam Shankland of United States and Gurel Ediz of Turkey. There are four more rounds remaining in the 10-players round-robin tournament. The day provided just one decisive game with Wei Yi cashing in on his new-found form to beat Shankland. Anish played out a draw with Dai Van, David Navara came back from a much worse position to hold Keymer, while Le signed the peace with Gurel Ediz.

Legendary Mumbai spinner Padmakar dies

MUMBAI: Legendary Mumbai spinner Padmakar Shivalkar died, here, on Monday due to age-related issues. He was 84. Considered one of the best spinners to have never played for India, Shivalkar featured in a total of 124 First-Class matches and claimed 589 wickets at 19.69 between 1961-62 to 1987-88. The left-arm spinner made his debut at the age of 22 in Ranji Trophy and continued playing until he was 48 and took 361 wickets in India's premier domestic competition including eleven 10-wicket hauls. Shivalkar also played 12 List A matches and took 16 wickets. He was honoured with the CK Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award in 2017 by the Indian cricket board. "Mumbai cricket has lost a true legend today. Padmakar Shivalkar Sir's contribution to the game, especially as one of the finest spinners of all time, will always be remembered," said Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) president Ajinkya Naik. "His dedication, skill, and impact on Mumbai cricket are unparalleled. His passing is an irreplaceable loss to the cricketing fraternity. May his soul rest in peace," he added.



Ajinkya Rahane appointed Kolkata Knight Riders captain

NEW DELHI: India batter Ajinkya Rahane was on Monday assigned captaincy of defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League after a remarkable run in the domestic T20 competition. The 36-year-old Rahane, who has played majority of his international cricket in whites, has reinvented himself in the shortest format which was evident in the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 Trophy wherein he emerged as the leading run getter with 469 runs at a strike rate of 164.56. In the IPL, the right-handed batter had also given a good account of his transformation while playing for Chennai Super Kings. Rahane replaces Shreyas Iyer as KKR skipper, with the latter set to lead Punjab Kings this season. Iyer and KKR had surprisingly parted ways after a triumphant campaign in the last edition. Venkatesh Iyer, who was also in the reckoning to lead KKR, has been made Rahane's deputy.

Rishabh Pant nominated for Laureus World Comeback of the Year Award

NEW DELHI: Indian cricket team's swashbuckling batter-keeper, who returned to action after surviving a horrific car accident in December 2022, has been nominated for the prestigious Laureus World Sports Award 2025 in the comeback of the year category. The awards ceremony will take place in Madrid on April 21. Pant suffered the near-fatal car accident on December 30, 2022 while driving from Delhi to his hometown Roorkee. After undergoing initial treatment at a hospital in Dehradun, Pant was airlifted to Mumbai where he was under the care of the BCCI's specialist consultant. Once the surgeries to reconstruct all three ligaments in his right knee were performed, Pant did his rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru. The 27-year-old made a remarkable recovery and returned to action for his then IPL franchise Delhi Capitals against Punjab Kings last year in Mullanpur.

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