

# MEN IN BLUE AIM TO GET RID OF 12-YR-OLD BLUES

India will have to rise above traditional bugbear New Zealand and a rigmarole of emotions surrounding stalwarts Virat and Rohit to reclaim the Champions Trophy

PTI, DUBAI: Successful in keeping opponents and vitriol at bay so far, India will have to rise above traditional bugbear New Zealand and a rigmarole of emotions surrounding stalwarts Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma to reclaim the Champions Trophy after 12 years, here, on Sunday.

India have always found the resilient Kiwis a tall mountain to surmount, as the latter hold a 10-6 lead over their Asian rivals across all the ICC tournaments.

If curated further, New Zealand have a 3-1 edge over India in the ICC knockout matches. It's a disturbing loop for them.

A section of the cricketing world has been vilifying them for the whole of last fortnight for having an unfair advantage because of their extended stay in Dubai.

Now, this argument will not have much merit to it because the Kiwis have already tasted the conditions here. India might still entertain a greater sense of comfort going into the title match, courtesy a spin quartet that showed enough nous to exploit a sluggish DICS deck.

In all probability, India will retain the four spinners and two pacers combination for the championship match.



Virat Kohli, Rishabh Pant and other players during a practice session ahead of the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 final cricket match between India and New Zealand, in Dubai, UAE, on Saturday

## 'Big match pressure' on India: Gill

Says no discussion on Rohit and Kohli's retirement

PTI, DUBAI: Speculation is rife on the ODI future of skipper Rohit Sharma and senior batter Virat Kohli after the Champions Trophy but vice-captain Shubman Gill on Saturday said the Indian dressing room is not discussing retirement of the two modern-day greats.

Kohli and Rohit are still batting strong in the format but it is being discussed in cricketing circles that if India wins the ICC showpiece, both the batters or at least one can call time on his career.

"There is no talk about retirement in the dressing room, now," Gill said during the pre-match press conference ahead of the Champions Trophy final against New Zealand here on Sunday.

Gill conceded that there is "big match pressure" on India ahead of the title clash, but was confident

"There is no talk about retirement in the dressing room, now. There is 'big match pressure' on India ahead of the title clash, but we are confident of winning the coveted 50-over title that eluded the team during the 2023 World Cup. The big-match pressure is always there. The last time (2023) we couldn't do it, but we will try to do it this time. In a big match, the team that takes the pressure out of the equation has a better chance of winning

— Shubman Gill, India vice-captain

of winning the coveted 50-over title that eluded the team during the 2023 World Cup.

"The big-match pressure is always there. The last time (2023) we couldn't do it, but we will try to do it this time. In a big match, the team that takes the pressure out of the equation has a better chance of winning," he said.

Gill cited the example of some of the best teams from the history of cricket to underline his argument.

"This is the reason why we talk about big teams of

(in the world) and Virat, we need not tell about him. But our team has depth in batting and that allows the top order to bat with a bit more freedom," Gill, India's most prolific 50-over batter in the last two years, said.

The elegant opener said playing a match here earlier against New Zealand does not give them any extra advantage.

However, he conceded that the team will feel motivated after winning all their previous four matches at the DICS.

"Obviously, we can talk about someone in the top 3-5 firing that would give us a better chance to chase a big total or put up a big total."

India ended a long barren run in ICC tournaments when they won the T20 World Cup last year, and Gill said the triumph has freed up the team a bit.

## THE SPIN BATTLE

Varun Chakravarthy and Kuldeep Yadav, the right-hand and left-hand wrist-spinners, have bamboozled the opponents like illusionists.

But Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel have been the metro-nomes in this Indian bowling unit, tying down the batters in a matrix of accuracy and boredom while leading them to self-destruction. If the final is indeed going to be played on the surface that is used for the game between India and Pakistan, then those four bowlers can put New Zealand in a spin, literally.

Their biggest hopes of countering these Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse will be Kane Williamson and Rachin Ravindra, the most competent batters against slow bowlers in their line-up. However, Kiwis will also be quietly confident that their own set of spinners skipper Mitchell Santner, Michael Bracewell, Ravindra and Glenn Phillips can do a similar job here. The Kiwi spinners had performed the act of destruction against India last year, albeit in a Test series and an encore will be welcomed as they are in search of their first ICC ODI title since 2000. Incidentally, they had beaten India in the final of the Knockouts tournament in Kenya by four wickets 25 years ago.

## TIME FOR 2ND-LINE TO DELIVER

While knocks of substance from Kohli and Rohit will add gravitas to the occasion, India would not want to leave it to the veterans alone. They will eye a fine effort from vice-captain Shubman Gill, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul and Hardik Pandya.

Gill and Shreyas had their moments, while Rahul and Pandya joined them with backend cameos against Australia in the semi-finals. Now, it's time for India to gather all these elements together once more to crown an emphatic campaign. After all, fairytales are an intrinsic part of the Arabian lands.

## 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.

**NEW ZEALAND:** Mitchell Santner (c), Michael Bracewell, Mark Chapman, Devon Conway, Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Tom Latham, Daryl Mitchell, Will O'Rourke, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Nathan Smith, Kane Williamson, Will Young, Jacob Duffy.

Match starts at 2.30 pm IST



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