

I would like to keep team secure, happy: Gill

A transitional India will search for maiden Test series victory in England since 2007 and the first match is scheduled to take place at Leeds on June 20; wants to follow the path of his predecessor Rohit, who had always put the team ahead of individuals



PTI, LONDON: Someone who never dreamt of leading the national cricket team, India's new Test skipper **Shubman Gill** has set himself the goal of creating a team culture where every player is "secure and happy".

A transitional India will search for their maiden Test series victory in England since 2007, and the first match is scheduled to take place at Leeds on June 20.

"It was like, not even in my dreams, I thought I wanted to be the captain of the Indian cricket team. So, apart from all the silverware and trophies aside, I really would like to build a team culture where everyone is very secure and happy," Gill told Skysports.

But Gill knew that the task was easier said than done. "I know it can be a very difficult environment, especially with all the competition and the number of matches that we play, different squads coming in. But if I'm able to do that, I

“It was like, not even in my dreams, I thought I wanted to be the captain of the Indian cricket team. So, apart from all the silverware and trophies aside, I really would like to build a team culture where everyone is very secure and happy. I know it can be a very difficult environment, especially with all the competition and the number of matches that we play, different squads coming in. But if I'm able to do that, I

—Shubman Gill, India's new Test skipper

think that would be my goal," he added. "So, keeping a secure environment and making the player feel secure in his abilities and his capabilities I feel is one of the most important things that a leader has to do."

Gill acknowledged that Rohit Sharma, who retired from Test cricket on May 7, had laid out a clear path for him. "It can seem like he is not aggressive, but Rohit is very aggressive in terms of his tactics. He is someone who is very clear with his communication prior to the matches, during the series and even after the series,

what he wants from the players."

Gill said he wanted to follow the path of his predecessor Rohit, who had always put the team ahead of individuals.

"The kind of environment Rohit bhai kept, even if Rohit bhai is swearing at you, you would not take it to your heart. That's just kind of his personality. I think that's a great trait to have."

"He's firm, but even if he's being hard on you, you know that it's not coming from his heart. It's coming from a team perspective," added Gill.

The 25-year-old said he had a conversation with Rohit on the road ahead for the team.

"This is a conversation that I've had with Rohit bhai a couple of times that ideally in the next 5, 7 or 10 or 15 years, where would we want the Indian cricket team culture to be?"

Gill also said he learned so much from the proactive leadership of Virat Kohli.

"When I played under Virat, I think his proactiveness in Test matches with the field or with the ideas or with his thinking was something that I liked and that I picked up. If he thinks that, okay, this plan is not working, he would immediately have another plan, communicate to the bowler what he wants from them," he noted.

Gill also provided a gist of his conversation with head coach Gautam Gambhir and chief selector Ajit Agarkar before taking up the leadership role.

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"They just want me to be able to express myself as a leader. I mean, that's what they have told me, there are no expectations. They are not expecting me to, you know, to do something that I'm not capable of."

"But you definitely have some kind of expectations from yourself as a leader and as a player. So those are the expectations that I have from myself," he added.

Gill also revealed that he hid all the captaincy talk even from his father, his biggest source of support in his career.

"I don't even think he (father) dreamt of me being the Indian Test captain, like even myself as well. All I remember when I was young, all my dreams were to play for India and win matches."

"So yeah, he called me when the news broke out, I think a couple of days before. But I knew sometime before (the news flashed), but I didn't tell him because I wanted to tell him when it's official. But we had a very heartfelt conversation once he got to know that I've been named the captain," he said.

Gill already has a taste of Gambhir's style of coaching from his days at the Kolkata Knight Riders in the IPL, but he was confident of adjusting to him in the national environment.

"Gautam bhai is very determined, very committed. And he's also very clear with his communication, what he

wants from the players and what kind of mindset that he would want the players to have."

"Gautam bhai focuses more on the kind of attitude or the mindset that he requires from the team or the players."

Gill's crisis management ability will be put to test when he will have to decide on the workload of premier pacer Jasprit Bumrah.

Chief Selector Agarkar had already made it clear that it's highly unlikely that India will have the services of Bumrah throughout the series.

"It's more based on match to match and see how much workload there has been on him. That's what we are trying to look at. You need to see how much workload he had in this particular match."

"We don't want to have a predetermined mindset. Okay, these are the matches that he would want to play because there are so many factors that cannot go in your favour in determining whether he is going to play the next match or not," he explained.

Gill said he has not decided upon any plan to counter England's Bazball method of cricket in the series.

"I don't want to have a preconceived notion of how I would want to go about things. There might be a case, you know, they can come out playing aggressive cricket and can lose a few wickets," he said.

Looking good for spinners thus far: Kuldeep on pitch expectations in England

PTI, BECKENHAM: Now that one half of the seasoned spin duo is not part of the Indian Test team, **Kuldeep Yadav** is spending more time with Ravindra Jadeja on the tour of England and the initial assessment of the pitches has made him more confident going into the series beginning on June 20.

The retirement of R Ashwin has put more responsibility on Jadeja, who has played 12 Tests in England. The sole specialist spinner in the squad, Kuldeep Yadav, has only bowled nine overs in his sole Test appearance here.

Experts have tipped Kuldeep to play a crucial role as India eye their first series win in England since 2007. If not the series opener at Leeds, the spinners are expected to get help at other venues including Birmingham, Lord's and the Oval.

"The wickets are looking good for spinners. It has been good for batting (in Intra Squad game here). First day there was moisture, seamers got help but as the game progressed, spinners got in the game," Kuldeep said on the sidelines of the Intra Squad game here.

The wrist spinner said he hopes to get some assistance from the surfaces over the course of the five games. "There is bounce for spinners on

this surface. Today is day three, I am yet to bowl. The ball is turning a bit and I hope it is the same in the series as well," said Kuldeep.

The Kanpur cricketer misses Ashwin in the dressing room but his retirement has led to him spending more time with Jadeja.

"Playing alongside Jaddu bhai is an honour. Jaddu and Ash have been brilliant for India. When I made my debut they helped me a lot."

"I am now having regular chats with Jaddu bhai on how to bowl to certain batters. I am spending a lot of time with him both on and off the field. It

helps me a lot tactically wise. We have been talking about field placements and he has given me clues as well."

India are playing India A in the four-day game. Asked about the main objectives from the sole practice game ahead of the Test series, Kuldeep said: "Volume is very important for a bowler. We have played a lot of T20 cricket in the last four-five months."

"Fast bowlers are told to bowl at least 15-20 overs for the Test match build up. Same for spinners, the more they bowl the better for them."

"I am excited about playing in overseas conditions. Mindset becomes important

here. I have always had an attacking mindset. If there is a bit of help for spinners and the sun is shining, we can get into the game. I don't worry much about conditions at the same time," he said.

He has also been left impressed with the conduct of new captain Shubman Gill.

"Shubman knows how to lead. He has worked with a lot of captains, especially Rohit bhai, and learned from them. What I have seen so far is that he is very motivated. He is focusing on lifting the spirit of the team. He is ready for the job," he added.



Messi denied late winner in Club World Cup opener

AFP, MIAMI GARDENS (United States): Lionel Messi and Inter Miami were held to a 0-0 draw by Egyptian side Al Ahly on Saturday as FIFA's new 32-team tournament got off to a smooth start in front of 60,927 fans in Florida.

CLUB WORLD CUP

Messi was denied a storybook stoppage-time winner when he saw his curling shot from 20 yards out tipped on to the bar by Mohamed El Shenawy as Miami piled on the pressure in the final minutes of the game. Al Ahly, who were cheered on by over 10,000 of their supporters, were left to rue a first-half penalty from Egypt international Trezeguet which was saved by Miami's Argentine keeper Oscar Ustari.

But the Egyptians also had El Shenawy to thank for another fine save in the dying seconds to keep out a header from Maxi Falcon as Miami pushed for three points in the Group A clash.

For organisers FIFA, who have faced heavy scepticism over the necessity for the tournament, the ab-



Al Ahly's Egyptian midfielder Marwan Attia and Inter Miami's Argentine forward Lionel Messi fight for the ball during the Club World Cup Group A match at the Hard Rock stadium in Miami

sence of a goal was the only disappointment on a night that delivered everything else that their president Gianni Infantino had hoped for from the opening night.

Fears of a low crowd for the opener eased as the seats in the 64,000 venue began to fill up with the

Gattuso named Italy coach

AP, FLORENCE (Italy): Former hard-tackling midfielder Gennaro Gattuso was named Italy coach on Sunday, tasked with reviving the country's already-flagging World Cup qualifying hopes.

Gattuso replaces Luciano Spalletti, who was fired last week after Italy lost its opening qualifier 3-0 at Norway to spark fears that the four-time champion will fail to qualify for a third straight World Cup. Gattuso lifted one of those World Cups as a player, in 2006.

"Gattuso is a symbol of Italian soccer, the blue shirt is like a second skin for him," Italian soccer federation president Gabriele Gravina said. "His motivation, his professionalism and his experience will be fundamental to best face the national team's next matches."

"Aware of the importance of the objective we want to achieve, I thank him for the willingness and total dedication with which he accepted this challenge."

Claudio Ranieri was the Italian soccer federation's top choice to replace Spalletti but he turned down the offer.

Cummins flags Australia shake-up after WTC defeat as Ashes loom

AFP, SYDNEY: Australia could shake up their batting after crashing to South Africa in the World Test Championship final, with captain **Pat Cummins** saying a "reset" was needed ahead of three Tests in the West Indies and a home Ashes series.

The five-wicket defeat at Lord's on Saturday, after posting a 74-run first-innings lead, has renewed focus on Australia's top order which has struggled since opener David Warner retired 17 months ago.

The elevation of out-of-form Marnus Labuschagne as Usman Khawaja's fifth opening partner since Warner bowed out did not work, while the experiment of Cameron Green at three flopped.

The 38-year-old Khawaja is also under the microscope, scoring nought and six as his lean spell against pace continued.

Green made four in the first innings and lasted only two balls before departing for a duck in the second as the new-look top three managed a total of 49 runs in the match.

Australia's batting woes were laid bare, particularly



in the second innings, when only a plucky unbeaten fifty from fast-bowler Mitchell Starc and 43 from wicket-keeper Alex Carey gave the Proteas a tough chase.

"There's probably quite a few people in the line-up that wish they could have done a little bit more," Cummins told reporters.

"The top three was an obvious one in this game."

With the 2027 WTC cycle kicking off when Australia travel to the West Indies for a three-Test series beginning in Barbados on June 25, the skipper admitted "it does feel like a little bit of a fresh start".

"We've got a couple of

weeks before the first Test in the Windies, so we'll sit down and have a bit of a think after we digest this game," he said.

"But for me, I think a new WTC cycle in some ways does feel like a bit of a reset."

"It's probably more for the selectors and for me to sit down and map it ahead."

Compounding Australia's woes, veteran Steve Smith, who hit a majestic first innings' 66, is doubtful for the first West Indies Test after dislocating his finger.

If he is ruled out, gung-ho teenager Sam Konstas, who played two Tests against India last summer before

being dropped, could slot back in alongside Khawaja.

That would allow Labuschagne to drop back to three, should he survive the axe after averaging just 25.63 in Tests during the 2024/25 season.

There is also the option of Josh Inglis, who was in the WTC squad, as an opener. Australian media made it clear that change was needed, with The Australian newspaper calling the defeat a "wake-up call" with the five-Test Ashes series against England beginning in November.

"Father Time is undefeated and selectors must now be decisive over key calls for the future," it said.

Cummins acknowledged all cards were on the table with only five months to go until the first Ashes Test in Perth beginning on November 20.

"Coming to this match, you've got guys like Sam Konstas and Scotty Boland and Josh Inglis, all those guys were right on the fringes," he said.

"So I think again, after this Test match, everyone gets thrown back into the conversation."