

Gill steps in for Kohli at 4

PTI, HEADINGLEY: India vice-captain Rishabh Pant on Wednesday confirmed that Shubman Gill will bat at No. 4 in the Test series against England, while he will follow the skipper at the No. 5 slot.

BATTING SHUFFLE

The retirement of Virat Kohli had made it mandatory for India to find a new batter at No. 4, and Gill is now going to bat at the pivotal position.

"I think there is still discussion going on about who is going to play 3. But 4, 5 are definitely fixed. I think Shubman is going to bat at 4 and I am going to stick to No. 5 as of now, and rest we are going to keep on discussing that," he said.

Pant also said he maintains a wonderful relationship with

Pant to stick with No. 5 role



Gill on and off the field.

"I think me and Shubman have a really good camaraderie off the field. If you're good friends off the field, it eventually comes on the field as well. That is something I've always believed," he noted.

"Me and him, we gel really well together. We keep on having conversations and the kind of comfort zone we have with each other, I think that is really going to be special for us.

England too will be without their retired veteran

pacers James Anderson and Stuart Broad.

Pant said it was a relief to see the legendary pair missing from England line-up but was not ready to underestimate the current bunch.

"Definitely, it feels so good when both (Anderson and Broad) are not there. Because coming from the last two tours, they've been there for England for so many years and I've only come for two tours. But at the same time, they have enough ammunition as an England bowling line-up.

"We don't want to take anyone lightly because our team is also young. They're still looking to develop themselves. But at the same time, we've got to play our cricket and respect the bowlers and opposition where it needs it," he explained.

England pick Pope over Bethell, Woakes returns at No. 8

PTI, LEEDS: Experienced pace bowling all-rounder Chris Woakes returned to the England line-up while Ollie Pope was preferred over Jacob Bethell as the hosts on Wednesday named their playing XI for the opening Test against India.

OPENING TEST

Woakes, who missed the previous two Tests due to an ankle injury, replaces Sam Cook, while Brydon Carse comes in for Gus Atkinson, who is sidelined with a hamstring issue.

Woakes' inclusion at number eight adds valuable all-round strength, allowing England to field Jamie Smith as a specialist wicketkeeper-batter at No.

TEAM

Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Ollie Pope, Joe Root, Harry Brook, Ben Stokes (c), Jamie Smith (wk), Chris Woakes, Brydon Carse, Josh Tongue and Shoaib Bashir

7 while maintaining a deep batting line-up.

The hosts also named vice-captain Ollie Pope at number three, opting for experience over youth as 21-year-old Bethell was sidelined.

Pope keeps his place despite a modest average of 22.05 from 18 combined Tests against India and Australia -- a figure well below his career average of 35.49.

It's going to be a shame not to play against Virat, says Stokes

PTI, LEEDS: England captain Ben Stokes says not getting to face a competitor like Virat Kohli in a blockbuster Test series is a "shame" and feels the maestro's absence will deprive the Indian team of his fighting spirit and desire to win.

Kohli announced his retirement from the game's traditional format last month, few days after his longtime India teammate Rohit Sharma too decided to call it a day, leaving the BCCI to send a team in transition to the UK under the leadership of Shubman Gill.

In a video released by England Cricket, Stokes reflected on what India will miss following Kohli's retirement.

"What India will miss will be his fighting spirit out in the game, his competitiveness, and his desire to win," Stokes said.

"He has made number 18 his, hasn't he? It'll be a bit weird not seeing number 18 on the back of anyone of any Indian shirt, but he has been class for them for a long period of time."

Kohli has been one of the biggest ambassadors of Test cricket during the course of his magnificent career, and the purists of the game were too happy to see him voicing his support for the traditional format at a time when the sports shortest version --



T20 -- dominated the cricketing landscape.

Stokes, who has also explicitly expressed his preference for the five-day game, said he texted Kohli after the latter announced his retirement.

"I did text him, saying it's going to be a shame not to play against him because I love playing against Virat. We both love playing against each other because we have that same mindset when we are out in the field that it's a battle," Stokes said.

Kohli retired as India's fourth-highest run scorer in Test cricket, having amassed 9,230 runs at an average of 46.85 in 123 matches.

He recorded 30 centuries and 31 half-centuries.

India to open Women's T20 WC 2026 campaign against Pakistan

PTI, DUBAI: India will take on arch-rivals Pakistan in their opening match of ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2026 at Edgbaston on June 14.

The ICC and hosts England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) on Wednesday announced the full schedule of the tournament, featuring 12 teams.

The 24-day long tournament will be held from June 12 to July 5 next year and will consist of a total of 33 matches to be played across seven venues in England.

The 12-team competition will have two groups of six teams each. The Group 1 consists of six-time winners Australia, South Africa, India, Pakistan and two qualifying teams.

The Group 2 consists of New Zealand, West Indies, Sri Lanka, hosts England and two qualifying teams.

BCCI asked to pay Rs 538 crore to Kochi Tuskars

AGENCIES, MUMBAI: The Bombay High Court has dismissed the petitions of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) challenging arbitral awards of over Rs 538 crore in favour of the now-defunct Indian Premier League franchise Kochi Tuskars Kerala.

In the order passed on Tuesday, Justice R Chagla said there is no "patent illegality" in the arbitral awards that requires the court's intervention.

The Kochi Tuskars Kerala franchise had been awarded to a consortium led by Rendezvous Sports World (RSW) and later operated by Kochi Cricket Private Limited (KCPL).

The team participated in the IPL in 2011, but their contract was subsequently terminated by the BCCI.

The dispute revolved

around the BCCI's decision to end the agreements on the grounds that KCPL and RSW allegedly failed to furnish a requisite bank guarantee.

The KCPL and RSW initiated arbitration proceedings in 2012, calling the termination wrongful.

Other contentious issues included matters concerning stadium availability and a reduction in the number of matches.

An arbitral tribunal ruled in their favour in 2015.

It directed BCCI to pay KCPL Rs 384.83 crore, along with 18 per cent interest from September 19, 2011, and Rs 72 lakh towards arbitration costs.

For RSW, it ordered BCCI to return Rs 153.34 crore, the amount of a "wrongfully" encashed bank guarantee, with 18 per cent interest from the date of contract termination.

shorttakes

Suryakumar flies to England for sports hernia treatment, may undergo surgery

NEW DELHI: India's T20 skipper Suryakumar Yadav has flown to England to consult a specialist for treating a sports hernia related injury, and, if necessary, he could undergo surgery. Surya, 33, had a terrific IPL for Mumbai Indians scoring over 700 runs, and also played the Mumbai Premier League T20 soon after. It is not known if the pain aggravated during the Mumbai T20 league as Surya had a gruelling three months of travelling and playing at a stretch. "Surya is suffering from Sports hernia on right side lower abdomen. He has gone to the UK for consultation. If required, he will be going under the knife," a source close to the cricketer told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

2-time Wimbledon champ Kvitova gets a wild card for this year's tournament

LONDON: Petra Kvitova is returning to Wimbledon after the 2011 and 2014 champion was awarded a wild card Wednesday for this year's tournament. Kvitova last played at the grass-court Grand Slam tournament in 2023, and became a mother for the first time when her son was born during last year's Wimbledon tournament. Kvitova made her return to the WTA Tour in Austin, Texas, in February after 17 months away from the court and is currently ranked 572nd.

Alcaraz wins testing Queen's opener, Fritz, Shelton out

LONDON: Carlos Alcaraz came through a testing first-round match against Adam Walton at Queen's on Tuesday as the top seed returned to action for the first time since his dramatic French Open triumph. But two of the world's top 10 crashed out as Americans Taylor Fritz and Ben Shelton lost to French duo Corentin Moutet and Arthur Rinderknech respectively. Alcaraz, back on grass for the first time since winning his second Wimbledon title last year, beat his 86th-ranked opponent 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) on a sweaty day in west London.

Goalkeeper Garcia joins Barca from local rivals Espanyol

BARCELONA: Barcelona announced on Wednesday they had signed Espanyol goalkeeper Joan Garcia for \$31 million on a six-year deal. Garcia, 24, had originally joined Barca's local rivals as a teenager and kept eight clean sheets in 38 appearances last season. He becomes the Catalans' first summer signing after Hansi Flick's side won four trophies last season including La Liga. "He has just completed a fantastic campaign in La Liga, playing a key role in Espanyol's survival," Barca said.

Fighting India women lose again to Argentina in FIH Pro League

LONDON: A poor display in penalty shootout cost the Indian women's hockey team dearly as it lost 0-2 to Argentina after the Salima Tete-led side came back from two goals down in a FIH Pro League match here on Wednesday. The Indians wasted chances galore to suffer their fourth consecutive defeat in the European leg of the league.

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