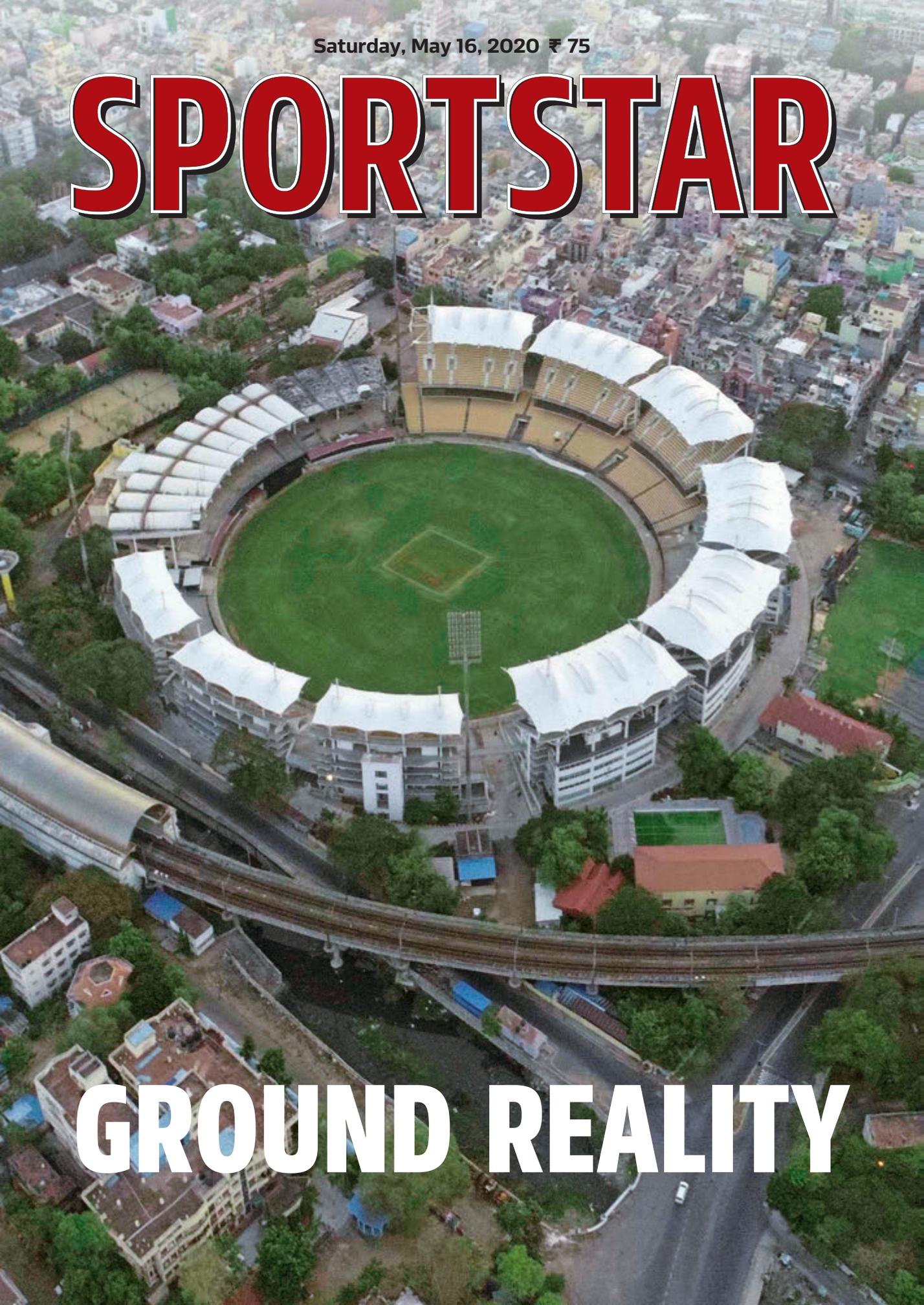


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SPORTSTAR



GROUND REALITY



11 “Pitches dictate the trend of cricket we see. Good pitches will produce good Test cricket.” Sachin Tendulkar’s advice to revamp the longest format. An interview.



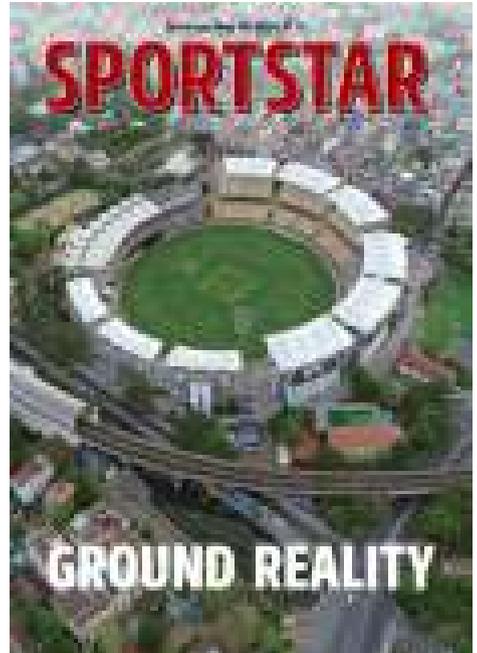
16 An incorrigible cricket romantic, Bishan Singh Bedi has always accommodated requests from Sportstar, and in an interview he shares his views on various aspects of the game.



26 Chinaman Kuldeep Yadav usually doesn’t have much time to devote towards painting, but the unexpected break because of the coronavirus pandemic has opened up a window of opportunity.



70 Chuni Goswami received accolades and recognition from every possible platform. But the main accolade came from the common man on the road, writes Raju Mukherji.



4 Fringe players are hit the hardest by the coronavirus lockdown. Not the cricketers, but those who work on the peripheries of the game — groundsmen and broadcast professionals — are among the most affected during the pandemic.

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Fringe players hit the hardest

Not the cricketers but those who work on the peripheries of the game – groundsman and broadcast professionals – are among the most affected with the pandemic bringing the game to a standstill.



Tough times: A cameraman shoots an exhibition cricket match played under newly installed floodlights at the ACA-VDCA stadium in Visakhapatnam, to test the light intensity. While a majority of Indian cricketers – international and first-class – are planning on how to keep themselves fit during the lockdown, most of those who work tirelessly on the peripheries of cricket are struggling to stay afloat. K. R. DEEPAK

AMOL KARHADKAR

Naresh Manjrekar has been a constant at cricket stadia whenever the Men in Blue – or in whites – take the field for a high-profile cricket match in India. You may have never seen Manjrekar – or most of his colleagues in the broadcast crew – on camera but all of us enjoy a game of cricket live on television through their eyes.

Manjrekar is one of the top 20-odd cricket broadcast camerapersons in India. Having worked in the entertainment industry for more than two decades, Manjrekar

has settled into cricket broadcast for the last 10 years. Not just because of his “passion” for cricket but also considering finances.

“All the cameramen are freelancers, be it films or serials or sports. The difference between then and now is when you work for a reputed production house like the BCCI, payments are prompt. Not once do you have to wait or remind them,” says Manjrekar.

But for the last six weeks, ever since he returned from Lucknow after India’s ODI series against South Africa was abandoned,



Longing for action: Naresh Manjrekar, one of the top 20-odd cricket broadcast camerapersons in India, in action. Manjrekar’s concerns – despite him having been a well-travelled professional – are perfectly understood with the world at large, especially India, heading into an economic downturn. Manjrekar is among the 100 to 150 broadcast professionals involved in high profile cricket telecast in India.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

cricket – or angles – is not top-most on his mind. As he tries to relax at his family home in Madh Island, a fishermen’s grove off the coast of Mumbai, he can’t help but think of how to settle the last few pending instalments of an apartment he has bought in Mira Road, a far-off western suburb in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region.

“Since I am a freelancer, I didn’t want to even try for a home loan so I planned for it with whatever little investments I had. Since the possession is due in August, I had planned to settle the dues after being paid for the IPL, but now with IPL definitely not happening before August, I am not sure what I am going to do,” adds Manjrekar.

The 58-year-old is not alone. While a majority of Indian cricketers – international and first-class – are planning on how to keep themselves fit during the lockdown, most of those who work tirelessly on the peripheries of cricket are struggling to stay afloat. Be it an experienced cameraperson like Manjrekar or a groundsman – *maali*, for that matter – at Gorer Math, the iconic Kolkata maidan which has been a breeding ground for budding cricketers for more than a century – those who strive to make cricket happen are among the hardest hit due to the pandemic.

With the COVID-19 outbreak forcing India into a lockdown, sport in itself has come to a standstill. Be it a choc-a-bloc IPL game at Chepauk in Chennai or a summer vacation intra-family serious game of cricket at Azad

Maidan in Mumbai, all of it has come to a halt.

Manjrekar’s concerns – despite him having been a well-travelled professional – are perfectly understood with the world at large, especially India, heading into an economic downturn. Manjrekar is among the 100 to 150 broadcast professionals involved in high-profile cricket telecast in India. Most of these personnel, however, work as freelancers, just like thousands of *maalis* at cricket grounds across the length and breadth of the country.

While the curators and groundsman who are employed by their respective state associations have been taken care of during these turbulent times, it’s the daily wagers who mow the grass, water the wickets while living in tents of clubs who are severely affected. Most of them in metros are migrants. While some are paid a fixed monthly remuneration which is meagre, most rely heavily on the tips they receive from those who book the grounds for a friendly or competitive club game.

“It’s these groundsman who are struggling like anything,” stresses Nadim Memon, a veteran curator who is also an elected member of the Mumbai Cricket Association’s apex council. “Some of them could leave for their respective hometowns just before the lockdown started, so for the last month or so, we at the MCA have been trying to help the clubs by roping in a few daily-wagers to keep the grounds in shape.



Not a pleasing sight: Groundsmen do their best to keep the ground match ready during a Ranji Trophy encounter between Bengal and Delhi at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata. While the curators and groundsmen who are employed by their respective state associations have been taken care of during these turbulent times, it's the daily wagers who mow the grass, water the wickets while living in tents of clubs who are severely affected. RAJEEV BHATT

But now with the inter-state movement having begun, it will be difficult to find daily-wagers and keep maidans in shape.”

Thankfully, with the BCCI having stressed on the state associations to give financial security to curators and groundsmen, the top rung of the groundsmen's ladder is yet to be affected. Samandar Singh Chauhan, the head curator at the Madhya Pradesh Cricket Association, raves as to how the MPCA officialdom and administrators have ensured that those who are employed by the state association are taken care of. In a state as large as Madhya Pradesh, the state association looks after the daily maintenance of at least a dozen grounds across the state. “Barring the Holkar Stadium in Indore, all the other grounds are in areas that are unaffected. But to ensure our main stadium is maintained properly, the MPCA has given passes for a few of us to come and go freely,” Chauhan says from Indore, one of

the most severely-hit cities in India.

“And the association has even disbursed advance salaries for all the groundsmen to help them have cash at disposal. From the little information I have about other states, most associations have been taking care of their groundsmen and curators very well nowadays.”

That's been one of the welcome changes in Indian cricket over the last decade. With the IPL's broadcast deals resulting in the share of the state associations hitting the roof, most associations offer permanent jobs and other facilities, including provident fund and health insurance, to its curators and groundsmen. Since the benefits don't trickle down to those on the maidans, most of those at the bottom of the pile are struggling to make ends meet.

The scene is no different in the broadcasting arena, admits Aakash Chopra, one of the busiest cricketer-turned-commentat-

ors. “Some of the commentators do have long-term or contracts based on a minimum number of days per year, but most of the commentators — just like others in the broadcast team — work on freelance basis,” Chopra says.

“Obviously, it’s going to be painful for everyone, but I would say we are still the blessed ones, being fairly high on the food chain. I can understand the plight of some of those in the society and in our broadcast team, those who work for at least a day before the match and after a game to ensure it’s televised properly, all of them are freelancers. When there is no game, they don’t get paid. All of us are going to suffer and it’s all going to be about how much ability you have to take a hit.”

While some have created alternate avenues — Chopra, for instance, has struck a deal to commentate for an online cricket game — other professionals at the top of the pile are being forced to relax. Hemant Buch — a leading cricket producer and director across the globe — for instance was concerned about hardly spending any time at home in Gurugram this year.

After a gig as a consultant in the first quarter, Buch was committed to be involved with the IPL (March-May), Sri Lanka’s home season (July-September) followed by the Caribbean Premier League (September), the T20 World Cup in Australia (October-November) and Mzansi Super League in South Africa (November-December).

“It was supposed to be such a busy sporting year, not just cricket but even other sport, with big events lined up virtually all through the year. But now we just don’t know when we will be able to leave home, forget about working,” says Buch, one of the most experienced cricket broadcasters.

With huge money at stake for live sport, broadcasters across disciplines and across the globe are desperate to resume live, albeit without any spectators. Even cricket administrators across the globe have been contemplating resumption of international cricket before the year-end to cater to the television audience and retain their commercial interests.

But Buch isn’t sure if it would be wise to resume international sport before the vaccine comes into place. “If you have to start any time before a vaccine, we will have to find new measures to work. Obviously, masks and gloves will be the new normal. People are also saying that A/c or cold may



Stating the obvious: “Obviously, it’s going to be painful for everyone, but I would say we are still the blessed ones, being fairly high on the food chain. I can understand the plight of some of those in the society and in our broadcast team, those who work for at least a day before the match and after a game to ensure it’s televised properly, all of them are freelancers. When there is no game, they don’t get paid. All of us are going to suffer and it’s all going to be about how much ability you have to take a hit,” says Aakash Chopra, one of the busiest cricketer-turned-commentators. PTI

also contribute (for virus’ spread); that’s something that we will have to look at carefully because whatever you do, with the kind of equipment involved, air-conditioning is a must in a broadcast environment,” he says.

Besides, he underlines that logistical costs — with airline tickets likely to be way too costlier with the reduction of passengers in an aircraft and the possibility of self-isolation after landing overseas — it would lead to budgets escalating way too much. While he terms the current scenario as a “science fiction with nobody knowing what’s lying ahead”, he has a word of caution before resuming sport.

“The only practical possibility till a vaccine comes in is to do a franchise-based tournament — like an IPL or a Big Bash — without overseas players, with one venue and one hotel and try and organise the logistics accordingly. Even then there will be a risk, but that’s the only possibility as of now, with limited broadcast professionals.”



Taking care: A general view of the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai. “We have a few *maalis*, who stay close to these grounds, so twice or thrice a week, they go and water the grounds. That’s how we have been managing so far,” Mumbai Cricket Association secretary Sanjay Naik says. PRASHANT NAKWE

Keeping it match-fit!

SHAYAN ACHARYA

As per the original plan, the BCCI was supposed to begin its domestic season in August, but even that looks uncertain now.

Usually, around this time of the year, the state cricket associations get busy in planning for the coming domestic season. The top officials make sure they chalk out a budget, come up with a proper strategy and also start preparing the grounds for the long season ahead.

That’s how it has always been for all the affiliated state units of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). While the eight venues — Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Kolkata and Mohali — remain busy with the Indian Premier League, the other grounds across the country get ready for the domestic season. But this time, things are different. With the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic bringing the world to a standstill, all cricketing activities, too, have come to a grinding halt. However, most of the associations are trying their best to ensure that the grounds are looked after on a regular basis, albeit with minimal staff.

As one of the seasoned groundsmen mentioned, it is ‘absolutely necessary’ to

water the ground regularly, so that things are ‘at least’ under control. And the associations are taking efforts to keep things rolling.

Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) secretary Snehasish Ganguly, however, admitted that the extended lockdown has made it extremely difficult for the state association to take care of all its local grounds in the Maidan. He, however, insisted that the CAB has done everything possible to take care of its three major grounds — the Eden Gardens, the Jadavpur University ground in Salt Lake and the CAB Academy in Kalyani.

“As far as the Eden Gardens, Jadavpur University ground and Kalyani are concerned, things are very much under control. The *maalis* stay on the (premises), so that’s not an issue. The major issue is with the grounds where we play our domestic league cricket. As these are open grounds in the Maidan, none of the *maalis* are allowed to go there due to restrictions,” Snehasish, a former Bengal cricketer and the elder brother of BCCI chief Sourav Ganguly, told

Sportstar.

The CAB usually conducts its local tournaments around this time. But with the grounds out of bounds, there are clouds of uncertainty over these tournaments. “We normally have the playoffs for the local tournaments. The relegation round matches are also played around this time. But now, everything has come to a halt and we don’t know how things will pan out,” Snehasish said.

Things are quite similar in Rajkot. With the groundsmen stuck at home, the Saurashtra Cricket Association (SCA) has roped in security guards to help at the SCA Stadium in Khandheri. “There is total lockdown. We are not even getting our groundsmen at the stadium, so we are managing things with the help of our security personnel,” SCA secretary Himanshu Shah said. “We have two or three security personnel who just water the ground. The groundsmen live in nearby villages and towns, and we are also not encouraging them to travel this far. It is important to stay safe,” Shah said.

The SCA was supposed to host the second edition of the Saurashtra Premier League in May-June. But there is no clarity on that front as well. “We will wait for the government and the BCCI’s guidelines,” Shah said, not elaborating further.

The Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) has three facilities — the Wankhede Stadium, the MCA-Bandra-Kurla Complex and the Sachin Tendulkar Gymkhana in Kandivali. “We have a few *maalis* who stay close to these grounds, so twice or thrice a week, they go and water the grounds. That’s how we have been managing so far,” MCA secretary Sanjay Naik said. The other iconic grounds — Azad Maidan and Shivaji Park — are being looked after by the local clubs.

“We have got our groundsmen at the Chinnaswamy Stadium, so we are watering the ground and taking care of basic things for now,” Karnataka State Cricket Association treasurer Vinay Mruthyunjaya said, making it clear that it is necessary to water the ground regularly, “except when it rains.”

After early jitters due to the lockdown, the KSCA has been able to take care of things in both its grounds — at the Chinnaswamy Stadium and also at the facility in Alur.

Even the Punjab Cricket Association (PCA) had initial troubles, but now it has managed to ‘at least’ keep a few personnel to turn on the sprinklers. “We have a new stadium coming up, so most of the groundsmen

are there only and things are being taken care of,” PCA secretary Puneet Bali said.

The association has pledged to offer the I. S. Bindra International Stadium facility to the state government in case of any emergency. “The officials are advised to visit the stadium only if it is absolutely necessary. It is a challenging time, but we need to be prepared,” Bali said.

Chennai’s M. Chidambaram Stadium, the Motera Stadium in Ahmedabad and the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium in Hyderabad have groundsmen who stay there, so that has allowed the respective associations to take care of things. Even centres like Jaipur or Indore have managed basic upkeep and maintenance. However, some of the seasoned administrators fear the consequences if the lockdown is further extended.

While the state bodies are hoping for brighter days, the BCCI, too, is monitoring the situation. “Once we have a clarity on the window available for the domestic season, post lockdown, we will be able to take a call,” BCCI treasurer Arun Dhumal told this publication. As per the original plan, the BCCI was supposed to begin its domestic season in August, but even that looks uncertain now. “For now, the state bodies are not too sure when they will be able to resume fully. We are in constant touch (with the state associations), and once we have a clearer picture, our team (BCCI’s cricket operations team) will work in tandem with all the stakeholders,” Dhumal said.

With a long and packed domestic calendar, how much of a challenge will it be for the BCCI to get things in place?

“It’s quite a big challenge. We organise close to 2,500 games. With this current lockdown, we have to ensure that the (grounds) are properly maintained to host (matches) post lockdown. That will require huge manpower. In case the grounds are not in shape, it’s a big task to restore them. If it’s regularly maintained then that’s not a problem, but otherwise, it’s a major challenge for the ground staff as well,” Dhumal said.

Last season, the BCCI conducted a record 2,035 games across age groups in the men’s and women’s categories. This time around, with the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be a challenge for Indian cricket’s ruling body to accommodate so many fixtures in a rather limited window.

The stakeholders would hope the grass turns greener soon! ❧

“
We normally have the playoffs for the local tournaments. The relegation round matches are also played around this time. But now, everything has come to a halt and we don’t know how things will pan out.

— Snehasish Ganguly, secretary, Cricket Association of Bengal.





Unsung hero: Cricketer-coach-curator Daljit Singh brought dignity to the profession of pitch-making and ground upkeep. “They were addressed as *maalis* (gardeners). Now they are called curators and groundsmen. They are an integral part of the game. Without them you can’t have cricket,” he says.

AKHILESH KUMAR

17 pitches to look after

VIJAY LOKAPALLY

Even in this exacting period of lockdown, there are some dedicated ground staff members who are silently going about their job.

They have mostly remained unsung and the hard work put in by the ground staff is not a priority for most cricket administrators. If they don’t work, the match does not happen. It is as simple as that.

Even in this exacting period of lockdown, there are some dedicated ground staff members who are silently going about their job. “We don’t know what will happen to the 2020-21 season, but we have to keep the preparations going,” noted cricketer-coach-curator Daljit Singh told *Sportstar*.

The board may have put a stop to his services, but the veteran curator continues to look after the stadium in Mohali with the same passion that has marked his more than two-decade old tenure with the game as a “groundsmen.”

Daljit brought dignity to the profession of pitch-making and ground upkeep. “They were addressed as *maalis* (gardeners). Now they are called curators and groundsmen. They are an integral part of the game. Without them you can’t have cricket,” he emphasised.

Daljit, with proper permission from the

authorities, reports every evening at the stadium. “I go alone, make observations, and leave instructions to the staff (6 men at a time) to be carried out the next morning. They maintain social distancing and wear masks. We have 17 pitches in all to look after with proper watering, brushing and grass mowing. It is a laborious exercise even though we have the equipment. Sports fields and nurseries need daily attention.”

Daljit confirmed that some associations like Mumbai, Kerala and Kolkata are striving to attend to the ground work at their respective stadiums. “At the most you need six people and they can come in batches. In any case, there is no match preparation, no match-pitch preparation, no pitches for the nets. We are concentrating on watering and periodic mowing of the grass.”

The worst-placed is Delhi where the association has not taken any steps on working on the pitch and the field.

As Daljit explained, “this period is known as the growing season. In June, we have to mow the field ahead of the season. The outfield has to be mowed twice a month and the pitch shaved four times a month. Summer cricket is mostly local cricket, but we have to be ready for domestic cricket. The IPL (Indian Premier League) has been postponed but there is domestic cricket to look ahead.”

As an alternative to natural turf, Daljit suggested the use of artificial surfaces. “If you ask me, artificial pitches can be a very good option. They give reasonable bounce and there is no deterioration factor. You get perfect deliveries and perfect shots. Yes, it can be a different experience, but it can be considered in these extraordinary times. There is no maintenance cost involved once you lay an artificial pitch. It costs anything between ₹2.5 lakh and ₹3. Even the ICC (International Cricket Council) uses artificial pitches to promote the game in smaller countries.”

Daljit would not mind cricket returning to matting surfaces. “Why not? We have had Test matches on matting pitches. A lot of first-class cricket in the 1950s was played on matting surfaces. Believe me, matting can be great for junior cricket, I would recommend matting pitches.”

At 80, Daljit displays the same admirable passion that has marked his more than two decades of work with the stadium in Mohali. “I remain a student of the game and cricket, for me, is a way of life,” he says.

A master batter who feels for the bowlers

The bowlers also want to be on top, but that won't happen if they don't get sporting pitches.

VIJAY LOKAPALLY

Sachin Tendulkar was flooded with requests for interviews ahead of his 47th birthday. That he managed to oblige more than 30 media personnel only speaks for his popularity even seven years after his retirement.

Like always, Tendulkar found time to speak to *Sportstar* on various aspects of cricket, at a time when there is uncertainty regarding the playing of the game in the near future.

Don't you think that the approach of the openers has become far more aggressive than it was when you arrived on the international scene?

We all know Mark Greatbatch started the trend of aggressive batting by openers in the

1992 World Cup. I followed it up in 1994 when I started opening the innings. I think I managed a similar strike rate.

Sanath (Jayasuriya) and (Romes) Kaluwitharana took it a notch higher at the 1996 World Cup. It had become the norm to go and slam the ball from the first delivery. It has stayed since for batsmen to launch into aggression from the beginning.

How about the same trend in Test cricket?

Yes. The trend continued with batsmen like Matthew (Hayden), Viru (Virender Sehwag), Chris Gayle, (Adam) Gilchrist. They played at the same pace in Test cricket too.

I remember Gayle started by playing big shots in Test cricket.

In a Test in South Africa, it was the fourth or the fifth over of the innings when the field set for Gayle had a long-on and a deep square leg.

The field was well spread with just one slip. Gayle carried on with the aggressive style even as we wondered how long he would succeed in hitting the ball over the top. But he did it relentlessly.

At one stage, David Warner also batted in a similar manner in Test cricket (against India at Perth in 2011).

Do you believe the days of defensive openers are over?

Cricket is seeing a lot of changes due to the T20 format, but if you have a solid technique you can score runs in difficult situations also. And more consistently.

You can't go into every match with a slam-bang theory in mind. You can't just always throw your bat around.

The batsman slotted at number three should also

Shedding light:

Former Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar spoke on various aspects of cricket, at a time when there is uncertainty regarding the playing of the game in the near future. AFP





Pioneer: Mark Greatbatch started the trend of aggressive batting by openers in the 1992 World Cup.

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feel confident when the openers are batting. Can he be standing on the steps with the feeling that he may be required to walk in at any time because the batsmen in the middle were looking to hit every ball? It doesn't work that way always.

We have had some splendid batsmen who have left the ball well, blocked the ball well.

And then if a loose delivery came along, they were able to put them away.

Do you think there is a decline in fast bowling? Or a decline in international bowling overall?

I think a lot of it has to do with the pitches. I won't generalise international bowling and say it has declined.

There will always be factors behind the rise and fall of certain aspects of the game. The pitches were different when I started. They were different as my career progressed. We could also see changes towards the end of my career.

Would you say pitches define cricket in any era?

You can say so. Pitches do dictate the trend of cricket we get to see. I am sure if you have good pitches you can produce entertaining Test cricket.

Much of the talk has been around Test

cricket. There is talk that Test cricket is dying and suggestions as to how to revive it.

How do you look at it?

Can we reduce the number of days? Is that the solution? It is not the quantity (lesser number of days), but the quality that we need to improve. If you reduce the number of days for Test cricket I would look at it as a longer version of a limited overs match. What we should do is produce good sporting tracks for the bowlers. That to me is the most critical part of dealing with five-day cricket.

Why do you say that?

Because in T20 and limited overs cricket the batsmen are constantly attacking the bowlers. Remember, in both the formats there is a restriction on field setting. The hands of the bowlers are tied. So there has to be one format where you give the bowlers something to look forward to. The bowlers also want to be on top, but that won't happen if they don't get sporting pitches.

What kind of pitches would you suggest?

We can have seaming tracks. We can have tracks that allow the ball to turn. Look, you can't prepare a flat track and expect good cricket. It would be rare that you would get



entertaining Test cricket on flat tracks. We have two formats that are in favour of the batsmen, so why can't we have one format in favour of the bowlers? You have to balance it out. The new generation is watching T20 and ODI cricket more. In T20, the batsmen look to make the best out of every ball. In ODI cricket a total of 300 is no more a winning score. It's a just about okay total. The game has tilted too much in favour of the batsmen with two new balls and no reverse swing. An extra fielder has also been brought into the circle.

Are you suggesting that cricket is increasingly loaded in favour of the batsmen?

What is there for the bowlers to feel encouraged about? How much more pressure are you going to put on the bowlers? Somewhere, I feel, let the batsmen feel some pressure. Let them also experience some testing pitches. Let a batsman make runs on pitches that test his skills. Let him survive when the ball is seaming or turning. I would love to see such a contest that challenges your skills. On a dead track the batsman knows very well he won't get out unless he

plays a stupid shot. The bowler also doesn't look to explore because he knows it would prove expensive. So, the competitive flavour goes out and it becomes an uneven playing field. The bowler then looks to adopt a negative line because he too has to survive and keep his place in the team.

How is it impacting Test cricket?

If Test cricket is dying it is precisely because of the lack of sporting pitches. It is imperative for the survival of Test cricket that you create conditions where a bowler is constantly looking to get a batsman out. You want to see something thrilling off every ball.

You want to see how differently the bowler is going to respond. When a batsman looks to score runs even as he tries to survive will produce challenging Test cricket. I have played that kind of Test cricket. If you leave a little bit of life in the pitches, very few of the matches would go to the fifth day. Why do you want to worry about reducing the number of days for Test cricket? Just give them sporting pitches!

Can you recall one such sporting pitch

Batting for the bowlers: A dejected South African Dale Steyn squats on the ground as New Zealanders Grant Elliott (right) and Daniel Vettori celebrate victory in the semifinal of the 2015 World Cup. The game has tilted too much in favour of the batsmen. The bowlers also want to be on top, but that won't happen if they don't get sporting pitches, feels Tendulkar. AFP



Coming on top: “A perfect example of a sporting pitch was the one at (Headingley) Leeds in 2002. We won the match by an innings,” recalls Tendulkar. REUTERS

in a Test match?

Of course. The one at (Headingley) Leeds in 2002. We won the match by an innings. We had centuries from myself, Rahul (Dravid) and Sourav (Ganguly). Believe me it was a difficult pitch.

We got runs but we did not allow England to score runs. The seamers (Zaheer Khan, Ajit Agarkar, Sanjay Bangar) got wickets and the spinners (Anil Kumble and Harbhajan Singh) did well too.

It was a complete package of good Test cricket. You watched good batting and equally good bowling. I want to see such

pitches more and more in Test cricket.

Should junior cricket become more competitive? Maybe have matting pitches?

No. Just make them play on good pitches that test their skills. Everything boils down to keeping a good surface. I have a suggestion to improve junior cricket. I have said it earlier too. We need to introduce 14-a-side cricket in schools and junior colleges. What it ensures is that batsmen don't make runs against part-time bowlers and bowlers don't boost their tally by taking out tail-



Hoping for the best: On cricket's fate after the lockdown is over, Tendulkar had this to say: "It will be competitive once cricket returns to the ground. Personal hygiene would be paramount. We will see if saliva can be applied to the ball. We will see if the huddle would be removed. And whether the high fives will happen or not."

REUTERS

enders. Of course, you will take 10 wickets but then those 10 wickets will be of good batsmen. Similarly, you score runs off the best bowlers in the opposition. The batsmen get to play a variety of bowlers – left-arm spinner, off-spinner, leg-spinner. In normal circumstances, one of them may have to sit out or maybe a seamer may have to miss the game.

What is the essence of your interesting suggestion?

What I am suggesting is that let them all get to bowl in this 14-a-side cricket. To me what is important is that each young aspirant should get an opportunity to showcase his talent in a competitive match. If a batsman gets a century, he would have faced a right-arm fast bowler, a left-arm fast bowler and three varieties of spinners. The batsmen will not be facing tired bowlers at any point and the bowlers will also be up against charged up batters. At all times there will be 11 men on the field and the coach will decide who will bowl when. I am sure it will improve the standard of cricket.

What will be cricket's fate after the

lockdown is over?

It will be competitive once cricket returns to the ground. Personal hygiene would be paramount. We will see if saliva can be applied to the ball. We will see if the huddle would be removed. And whether the high fives will happen or not. I don't know if it will reduce the swing of the ball or increase it if you don't apply saliva. It will impact the movement to some degree. How much precisely I don't really know. Let us not be speculative. It will be inappropriate for me to say at this moment if the ball will swing or not, it will bounce or not.

Your views on coping with the lockdown?

It is the need of the hour to stay within your house, maintain hygiene and not put pressure on the authorities by flouting instructions on social distancing. I have not stepped out even once since the Lockdown was announced. These are exceptionally challenging times and we have to support the authorities, the police, the health workers and those engaged in delivering the essentials. We have to be together in the fight against COVID-19. ☞



Cricket's Wordsworth... an incorrigible romantic!

The purity of this game is to be protected and the onus is on the players to keep this purity alive. Otherwise, you are wasting time playing this great game.

VIJAY LOKAPALLY

Among the greats: Bishan Singh Bedi... one of the most artistic spinners the game has seen.

R. V. MOORTHY

Mike Brearley, the scholarly English cricket captain, has just one word to describe Bishan Singh Bedi's bowling... "Beautiful." One of the most aesthetic sights on the cricket field while bowling, Bedi, not the best of athletes in terms of agility or speed, was an epitome of elegance. He would amble to the bowling mark, turn in a languid manner, quickly absorb the field set to trap the batsman, and get into a delightful motion, an artist at work, to produce guile unmatched. The batsman stood bewitched, the fielders ever alert to grab the edge and the wicket-keeper anticipating action every ball. It was cricket at its best.

How one created dream contests between Bedi and Gundappa Viswanath or Gary Sobers, poetry at both ends! Bedi the crafty spinner, Viswanath the master of breathtaking strokeplay. A contest made for the Gods! Cricket was divine when Bedi bowled to Viswanath, Sunil Gavaskar, Ian

Chappell. They teased and tested each other without once showing disrespect to the other's capacity to make a mark. Have you ever heard a bowler saying he "loved" being "punished" by a batsman? Bedi takes pride in telling us in this interview how he was delighted at being punished by some batsmen.

One of the most artistic spinners the game has seen, and fondly called "Bish" by the cricket fraternity, he reveals his admiration for Gavaskar in this interview. When I told him, "You have never spoken like this about Gavaskar," his reply was so typical... "Was never asked and there never arose an occasion either."

A great raconteur, Bedi's love for the history of the game is so infectious. He is surrounded by 15 to 20 books at a time in his home, the best way to deal with Covid-19, apart from staying indoors. "I don't know which book I may want to read at a given time," he explains. "Have you read that

book? What new book are you reading? You must read this new one,” mark the beginning of most of our conversations. Cricket literature, to Bedi, is the elixir of life. And, of course, his spirituality lessons, the sessions devoted to conversations with himself and the “Almighty.”

I have grown to respect the game and its history thanks mainly to the hours of conversations with this great student of the game. He insists “I am still learning.” The man’s humility is an example for the current generation of cricketers who revel in boorish and abusive behaviour on the field. “Nobody has the right to bring cricket to disrepute,” Bedi, 73, fumes when Match Referees are needed to intervene.

An incorrigible cricket romantic, Bedi has always accommodated requests from *Sportstar*, and here he shares his views on various aspects of the game.

Does cricket still retain the aspect of romance?

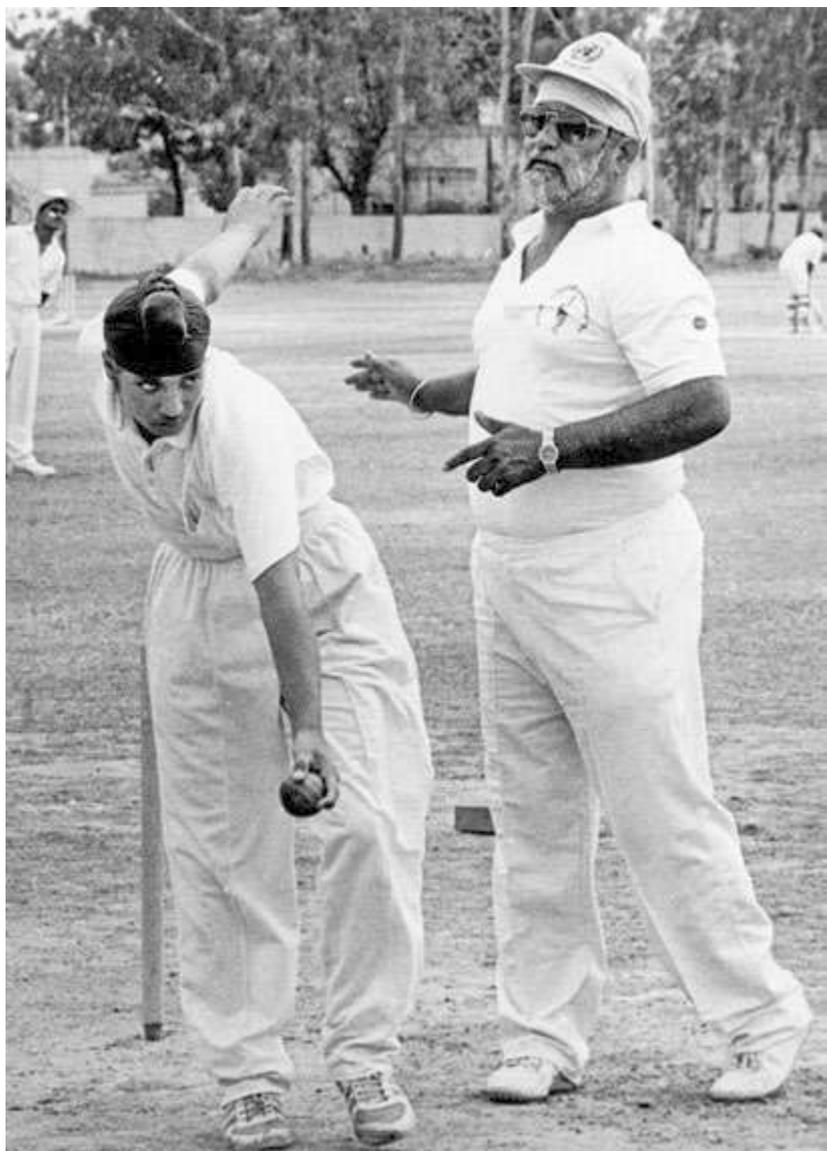
I was very fortunate that I played this game. Minus cricket, I would have been a big zero because I have no other qualifications to rely upon or to lean on. The romance of cricket that you refer to has always been there. Sometimes, out of sheer frustration or disgust, we tend to think it is terribly old-fashioned, quite redundant. But then the romance of cricket can never die. If the romance of the game dies, romance itself dies. That will never happen or at least I hope that will never happen. Not during my lifetime.

Would you agree that cricket is a very different sport now?

We tend to compare cricket with other activities, which have a fair amount of body contact. In the modern context, this urge to win at any cost, is so prevalent. Cricket is the only sport which teaches us honesty, uprightness and integrity. No other sport does. But this game has sometimes been corrupted and maligned by the players and the bookies. This is reflective of a degeneration of our lives in general.

How do you view the state of cricket today?

We are going through a bad phase right now. The whole world is in a lockdown. Whether you play this game or not, we are in the same boat of Coronavirus. Nature has taught the entire mankind a lesson. Cricket



is also a big sufferer. I may sound terribly biased because of my connection with the game but it has given me a lot of time to introspect.

What did you learn from cricket?

Cricket is directly related to humanity. It is a deep connection. It’s all about being upright, about honesty. I would like to put cricket and my spirituality on the same pedestal. Cricket has always come to my generous aid, to calm my nerves, calm me mentally and physically and teach me how to accept life as it comes. This is what cricket teaches you. In the broader picture of romance of cricket, it teaches you how to accept life as it comes. Whether willingly, or unwillingly, we have learnt to accept it

Imparting knowledge: Bedi teaches a youngster the importance of follow through at his cricket clinic in New Delhi in 1993.

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Golden days: Ajit Wadekar, Bedi and Sunil Gavaskar call on the Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1971. "He is the original little master. I cannot see another person who is better than Gavaskar," says Bedi.

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graciously. I have been very fortunate to have had a great learning process.

What are your early memories of cricket?

The advantage of growing up in a small town (Amritsar) was that the chances of getting influenced by the distractions that we are facing today in the world were much less. We would just play and play. We had nothing else with us, nothing else to do. Cricket was the only thing. I remember for entertainment there was just 'Binaca Geet-mala' (radio show on film music) every Wednesday by Ameen Sayani. Otherwise, spending 6 to 8 hours at the ground, just keep bowling, was all we did. My guru Gyan Prakash, who I worship, never told me anything about basic cricket technique. But he gave me lessons on cricket etiquette. Cricket etiquette was very important. I may sound outdated, I don't mind being irrelevant or redundant, but I think it is too late in my life to change my thought process.

Has the game changed a lot?

I would still like to associate myself with this game the way it was played. In certain quarters, it is still played the same way. But largely, the change has occurred only because of the romance of the game. Whether it is cricket or romance in life generally, the romance has to be very innocently ama-

teurish. In life it has to be an amateur philosophical activity.

Is there a connection between spirituality and cricket?

Why do you say, 'This Is Not Cricket?' Cricket is one sport which is directly integrated with uprightness. This does not mean there is no dishonesty in cricket. There is a lot of it. That dishonesty is there in our spirituality also.

What do you tell your students about cricket?

Normally, I first ask my students why they play cricket. Their usual answer is, 'we love the game.' Then I ask, 'You love this game, but does the game love you?' because love is a two-way traffic. You love somebody and that person also has to love you back. It cannot be one-way traffic. I tell them if you love the game and want to win its love, you need to make huge efforts. Only then will the game love you.

What is your philosophy of cricket now?

It's not business for me. It is like this. If I am seeking alms, then I am only expecting returns. I am not giving away anything. I am only receiving. But if I want the game to do well, then I have to give and not take. What does the Almighty do? Only keeps giving.



This is where I feel cricket came in handy in my case at least. Until we are able to do that, that realization will not happen, will not occur.

How would you compare cricket with life?

I am reminded of 1967, in Australia, at the official dinner and Sir Robert Menzies (Australian Prime Minister) was talking. He said the world would have been a much better to place live had America and Russia played cricket. The game teaches you to look at life differently, with compassion and respect. What is happening today is a lesson for us from nature. All these years we took nature for granted. In a similar way, you cannot take the game of cricket for granted. You experience the ups and downs of life everyday. That is what happens on the field of cricket. That is why cricket is the only sport that is compared to life. No other sport is, not hockey, not football, not tennis, not golf.

How did you feel when the game you love so much was brought to disrepute?

In Bodyline (infamous Australia-England

series in 1932-33) it was players. In the match-fixing saga it was players. There have been financial scams by officials too. They hurt the game so much.

As a bowler, what is your reaction to the two bouncers per over rule brought in to curb aggressive instincts?

I still believe that the bouncer is a legitimate weapon of the fast bowler and it should not be confined to just one or two per over. But then the umpire has to see the intention of the bowler too.

Have you felt a change within you over the years?

I'm trying to recollect what I said 10 years ago. I may not agree with that view today because I think I have mellowed. I have stopped reacting to situations. Now I respond. That is the vast difference.

In his recent book, Mike Brearley (former England captain) has praised you very much?

He sent me the book (*On Cricket*) with a note saying he has done a chapter on Muttiah Muralitharan also. He wanted my reaction

Legends meet:

Former Indian cricketer G. R. Viswanath (left) and Bedi looking at photographs at a function to honour former Karnataka cricketers by Karnataka State Cricket Association in Bangalore in 2007. "If I was to pay to watch somebody play, it would be Viswanath. He was artistry on the field," says Bedi.

K. BHAGYA PRAKASH



Admiring the greatest: Bedi with Sir Don Bradman. “He was the ultimate cricket figure you could imagine. I remember asking him why he did not turn a professional. He worked in an office before the game. He worked in an office after the game. Why not become a professional then? He said, ‘I did not want to lose out on the fun of the game.’ He was murdering bowlers all over and talking about not losing out on the fun of the game!”

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on the chapter on Murali. I told him I have stopped reacting at my age and I only respond (laughs). He said there is an innate difference between reaction and response and remarked, ‘the call should have come from me and not you. You are not the psychoanalyst, I am.’

Would you tell us about your relationship with Ajit Wadekar and Sunil Gavaskar..

I had my views on (Sunil) Gavaskar and (Ajit) Wadekar. As a captain, what do I need from Gavaskar? His batting. With Wadekar I had purely cricketing differences. Even with Gavaskar, purely cricketing differences. Nothing else. But I don’t want to take those differences to my grave because of my deep-rooted association with cricket. This again because of the romance of cricket. I was fortunate to have played this game. It is different today. They (current cricketers) behave as if they are sustaining the game, they are telling the game be grateful that I am representing you. As if the game is grateful that they are gracing the field.

How would you respond to the divine sight of you bowling to Gundappa Viswanath, poetry at both ends?

It is a wonderful anomaly. You can say that. Because if I was to have somebody bat for

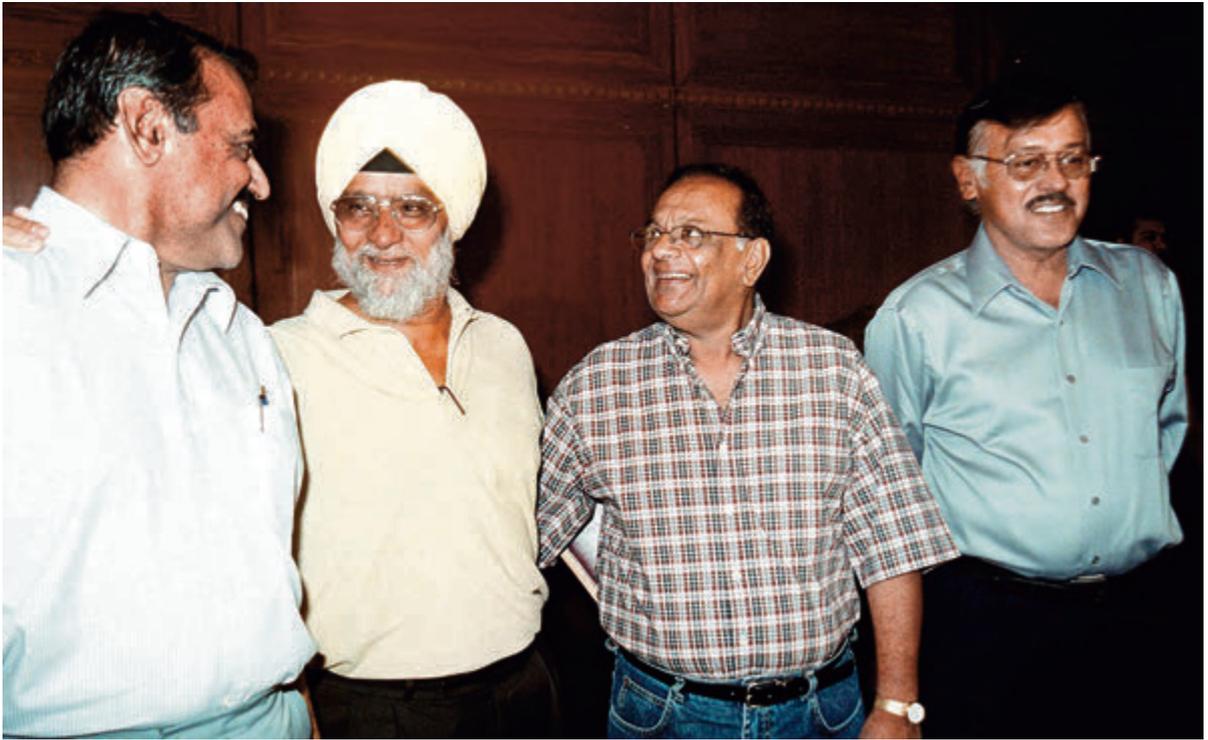
my life it would be Gavaskar. If I was to pay to watch somebody play, it would be Viswanath. He was artistry on the field. Gary Sobers was artistry on the field. He had everything. There would be 11 men on the field but all eyes would be on Sobers. Vishy is a champion artist. He is an equally fantastic human being. He is so lovable and honest. I have not come across a person critical of Viswanath. Remember, it’s a batsman’s game. People come to watch the batsmen, but then bowlers win you the matches. As far as I’m concerned, it was a delight to be punished by Sobers and Viswanath. Down the line you wished to get their prized wicket, but it was their magic, their artistry that held your attention. Whether it was playing with them or against them, it was something to be always enjoyed.

Why would you want Gavaskar to bat for your life?

He is the original little master. I cannot see another person who is better than Gavaskar. Honestly. I saw so much of him from very close quarters. I don’t have the capacity to write about him as Jack Fingleton wrote about Sir Don Bradman in *Brightly Fades The Don*. Gavaskar was the most complete batsman we ever had. I have seen his correctness and his determination and his will to defy all attacks in all conditions. I still remember (at The Oval in 1979), at the nets, he just sat holding his head after finishing his batting stint. I asked him what the issue was. He replied, ‘Yaar Bish, I don’t know where my off-stump is.’ Can you imagine this coming from such a great player? I just said, come on, let’s hit the nets. We wanted runs from Gavaskar’s bat. From Viswanath’s bat. I bowled to Gavaskar from a shorter distance. This was at The Oval. 1979. This is where he made 221. India is the only team which has made 400 in the fourth innings on three different occasions – won at Trinidad (1976), lost at Adelaide (1978) and drew at The Oval (1979). And Gavaskar had a role on all the three occasions. Viswanath too.

None of my conversations with you end without you mentioning the names of Don Bradman, Gary Sobers, Tiger Pataudi, Frank Worrell...?

I am so grateful that thanks to the game of cricket I could come in contact with them. They signify the romance of the game.



There won't be another Bradman or Sobers. God made them when he had a lot of time at His disposal. Bradman, Sobers, Richie Benaud, Tiger Pataudi, they are such beautiful parts of the game.

It is said you revere Don Bradman.

He was the ultimate cricket figure you could imagine. I remember asking him why he did not turn a professional. He worked in an office before the game. He worked in an office after the game. Why not become a professional then? He said, 'I did not want to lose out on the fun of the game.' He was murdering bowlers all over and talking about not losing out on the fun of the game!

The first cricket book you bought?

It was *The Art of Cricket* by Bradman, which in today's context, some of the youngsters may say is very old. It is the best from a technical aspect. Those days cricketers had little idea of the technique of the game. *The Art Of Cricket* is mainly about batting, but it is also about bowling. In the book, there is no mention of reverse swing.

You once mentioned a discussion you had with Alec Bedser...

There was not a bigger swing bowler than Alec Bedser. I once asked him about reverse swing. He said it was 'bullshit.' It is either

in-swing or out-swing. Reverse swing is mainly trickery. You are 'making' the ball, using spit. I have believed that right from the time humanity came into existence, it has been hurt by the basic human instincts to cheat and diddle others. Cheating and crime were always there. Why are the jails bursting at the seams? Because criminals find their ways and it is nothing strange if it has been happening in cricket. But, as a lover of the game, I will say that cricket can do without this.

Any other aspect of the game which makes cricket different?

Look at the toss. Why did the Match Referee start accompanying the captains for the toss. Why? Because of the distrust that happened between two captains. Now the talk is the toss may be abolished.

How do you look at the future of cricket?

This game will survive because of its romance. Those who understand the game will associate themselves with the romance of the game. They may be fewer, but they will matter even if in minority. To me, they are in a majority of one. The purity of this game is to be protected and the onus is on the players to keep this purity alive. Otherwise, you are wasting time playing this great game. ❧

Spin quartet: Talk of spin and one instantly recalls the exploits of the Indian spinners (from left) B. S. Chandrasekhar, Bedi, E. A. S. Prasanna and S. Venkataraghavan.

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Witness to a wonder: Saqlain Mushtaq bowls during the Delhi Test in which Anil Kumble took 10 wickets in the second innings.

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‘Elder brother’ Kumble to the aid

Former Pakistan spinner Saqlain Mushtaq reveals how Anil Kumble helped him correct his vision by recommending a doctor to him.

SHAYAN ACHARYA

Saqlain Mushtaq belongs to a generation of international cricket teams with spinners of good quality. If Pakistan had Mushtaq Ahmed and Saqlain in its ranks, India had superstars in Anil Kumble and Harbhajan Singh.

While they enjoyed rivalry on the field, the cricketers across the borders were friends off the pitch. In an Instagram Live chat with *Sportstar*, Saqlain revealed how Kumble helped him immensely in his career.

“We were in England and I told Anil *bhai* that there are not many good opticians back home, so I am struggling and if he could suggest some ophthalmologists. So, he suggested that I go to Dr Bharat Rugani. He said that he and (Sourav) Ganguly consult him often. He gave me the (contact) number of the doctor and I visited him in Harley Street (in London),” Saqlain said.

“The doctor checked my eyes and gave me lenses. I had cataract, the vision power was cylindrical and also the eyes were weak. I had consulted many doctors in Pakistan and none could treat it. So, it was Anil *bhai* who would help me get in touch with the doctor. It was because of him that I could recover. He is a gem of a person,” the Pakistan spin ace said.

Before undergoing the treatment, Saqlain would struggle with his vision. “If I (stood) on the boundary while fielding, my



Making history: The Indian team rejoices after Anil Kumble takes his 10th wicket in Pakistan's second innings at the Feroze Shah Kotla in New Delhi on February 7, 1999.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

anticipation power was zero. That's why I would be slow and would react late. Now I can see everything clearly," Saqlain said.

Elder brother

"Our culture has taught us to respect elders and Anil *bhai* is just like my elder brother. Whenever we meet, we have good chats. Even during playing days, you could walk up to him and seek suggestions in middle of a series. He would help you with necessary tips and would never misguide it. I have a lot of respect for him," the 43-year-old said. Saqlain still remembers how the entire Pakistan dressing room was in awe of Kumble's 10-wicket innings haul against Pakistan at the Feroz Shah Kotla in 1999. Saqlain rued that he never got a chance to play together with the Indian spin legend. "We have played against each other, but never together. I wish I could play at least one match, where both of us could have been in the same team," he said.

"I have played together with Muttiah Muralitharan in MCL (Masters Champion League in the United Arab Emirates) league

matches, and it was super fun. I hope someday we can perhaps play in some veterans' match where Anil *bhai* and I will be in the same team," Saqlain said.

Having thoroughly enjoyed the India-Pakistan cricketing rivalry in his long and illustrious career, Saqlain believes that it is important for the bilateral series to resume. "I recently read two articles about having an India-Pakistan charity match to raise funds for COVID-19. While Shoaib (Akhtar) batted for it, Kapil (Dev) *paaji* had a different view. Well, at this time, we all are same. Patriotism is essential, but we are human at the basic level," he said.

"Why just this charity match? All cricket, trade equations between India and Pakistan should resume. This pandemic has taught that we are humans, who feel things the same way on either side – be it India or Pakistan. We should renew our relationships and should develop a strong equation with everyone and be united. That's the need of the hour," Saqlain said, hoping that things will improve in the near future. ☞

Going strong: At 85, Salim Durani's movements are a bit restricted, but even then, in normal circumstances, he loves travelling to Rajkot and meeting his old friends. These days, however, he is confined to his home in Jamnagar. K. MURALI KUMAR



Enjoying long phone calls with his old friends

Former India Test cricketer Salim Durani, a crowd-puller during his playing days, speaks about his routine during the ongoing lockdown.

SHAYAN ACHARYA

Salim Durani misses a few words as he speaks over the phone. "Come again..." he says, requesting the person on the other end to repeat the words. This time, he listens carefully, laughs out loud and replies wittily: "Yeh kya ek nayi bimaari aayi hai, aapne suna tha iska naam pehle? (What's this new disease that has come, did you hear its name earlier?)"

The point of reference here, of course, is the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which has brought the entire world to a standstill. And as the country

faces an extended lockdown, Durani — like every other citizen — is stuck at home, hoping for better times.

At 85, Durani's movements are anyway restricted, but even then, in normal circumstances, he loves travelling to Rajkot and meet his old friends. These days, however, he is confined to his home in Jamnagar.

Having suffered an asthma attack in December, Durani had to be admitted to the hospital, and even after returning home, there are a few restrictions that he needs to follow.

While medicines and regular health check-ups have become part of his routine, the former India cricketer still enjoys long phone calls with his old friends.

"Health-wise, I am better now. But it is difficult to stay at home the whole day. I can't even step out due to the coronavirus," he said. "But it is also important for all of us to stay home and be safe. The government has issued a few guidelines, which we need to follow. I am also abiding by the rules," he said.

These days, he spends time watching old cricket matches on television or reading books. But there are moments when it gets difficult to while away the time.

"At times, it feels like you have done some crime and that's why you are being punished like this," he joked. "But then, what else do you do? In times like these days, you have to be careful and stay disciplined," the former batsman added.

Living in a joint family, a lot of time is also spent with the children at home. "These days, even friends can't come over, so I spend time with the kids. I tell them stories of cricket and also walk down the memory lane," he said. Some of his old friends, who include former cricketers, too, dial him up. "We mostly end up talking about cricket and the days bygone. We talk about the playing days and share stories about Dilip Sardesai, Chandu Borde and how enjoyable our times were," Durani, who featured in 29 Tests for India, reminisced.

In his 13-year international career, Durani developed a strong bonding with fans, who once protested with placards and slogans, which read: "No Durani, no Test".

This was after he was dropped for the Kanpur Test against England in 1973. "Those are the memories I still cherish."

Even though he can't step out of home, he keeps a tab on what's happening in the world of sports.

"Now, all sporting activities have been suspended. And the time is not right to resume cricket. After all, it is a team game, so at a time when social distancing is very important, there is no question of resuming cricketing action anytime soon," he explained.

"It will take some time, but eventually, it will start once the situation improves. The players need to be mentally strong and stay positive. It is tough for sure, but they need to be patient," the former cricketer stated.

His niece, Neena — who is fondly re-



ferred to as Fauzi by Durani — looks after him and makes sure that he maintains a strict routine.

"The doctor has advised him a regular dose of medicines. He has some asthma problems, so for that we need to be careful. Even during the lockdown, we have arranged for his medicines, so that's not a problem," Neena said.

For someone like Durani who loves meeting people, it is not easy to stay confined at home. "We are about five people at home, so *maamu* (Durani) spends time with us. He starts his day early, and also sits out to soak in the sun and then his friends call to check on him. At times, he gets restless, but things eventually ease out," Neena said.

The doctors have issued some health restrictions too, and one of the major points is no smoking. "He was once a chain smoker, but now due to his health, it has completely stopped. And, he has also come to terms with it. It's a good thing," Neena said.

A 'Prince Charming' in his time, Durani could change the course of a match — either with the bat or the ball. But now, as the world grapples with the pandemic, it's those memories that keep the yesteryear superstar going. ☺

Moment to cherish: Durani with his Arjuna Award. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

Painting and training indoors

Chinaman Kuldeep Yadav usually doesn't have much time to devote towards painting, but the unexpected break has opened up a window of opportunity.

SHAYAN ACHARYA

A canvas, some paintbrushes and different shades of colours are keeping Kuldeep Yadav busy these days. Stuck at home due to the nationwide lockdown, the Indian spin ace is pursuing his 'old passion' of painting, quite seriously.

"Since childhood, I have loved painting. And now that I have got some time, I am making the most of the opportunity," Kuldeep told *Sportstar*.

Between tours and training, Kuldeep usually doesn't have much time to devote towards painting, but the unexpected break has opened up a window of opportunity.

"We are all at home, so painting takes away a lot of time and I am quite enjoying it. Apart from that, I am spending quality time with my family and doing a bit of training indoors. That's

how life is, these days," the 25-year-old said.

It's that time of the year when cricketers usually remain busy with the Indian Premier League. But this time around, things are different. With the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, sporting action, too, has come to a halt.

"Usually, we play the IPL around this time. But this year, we aren't. It's a different feeling really, because in the IPL, you always tend to be under pressure. But this time, we are just staying at home, relaxing. It is quite unbelievable," Kuldeep, who plays for Kolkata Knight Riders, said.

However, he has been strictly following the guidelines issued by the Indian team's trainer Nick Webb.

"We are in touch with the trainer and following his suggestions. He (Webb) sends us

Bogged down:

"Usually, we play the IPL around this time. But this year, we aren't. It's a different feeling really, because in the IPL, you always tend to be under pressure. But this time, we are just staying at home, relaxing. It is quite unbelievable."

Kuldeep, who plays for Kolkata Knight Riders, said.

G. P. SAMPATH KUMAR



the programme per week, so that's helping us a lot. We are actually communicating very well. But for now, we are not thinking about playing any matches. It's important that we take care of ourselves and fight the coronavirus pandemic," he said. "Maybe we will start playing again in July or August, once the situation improves."

Times like these could actually be tough for a cricketer and Kuldeep agrees that it is a challenge to stay positive. "In these times, we can't even hit the ground, neither can we train outdoors. So, indoor training is the only way out. There are no skill work involved. I am doing all the drills at home, sweating it out at the treadmill and working a bit on the bowling action, just to keep myself ready and fit..."

Ever since breaking into the Indian team in 2017, Kuldeep has had a fair amount of success, featuring in six Tests, 60 ODIs and 21 T20Is, and scalping a total of 167 wickets. But last year, he looked off-colour and had quite a disappointing IPL season for Kolkata Knight Riders, where he was dropped from the final XI in the middle of the season.

"Last year, my (performance) was not up to the standard. When I returned from New Zealand, I realised that I was having issues with the basics, so I went to my coach (Kapil Pandey) and we worked together for 20-25 days. I was gearing up for the ODI

series against South Africa," Kuldeep said.

However, the outbreak led to the cancellation of the three-match ODI series. "In those 25 days of training with my coach, I really worked on the basics and I realised that I was missing the rhythm. During the training, I tried to fix that and even now, I am working on a few areas," he said.

This unexpected long break has also helped Kuldeep in a way. While he is spending maximum time with the family, he has got a chance to reassess his performances. "I knew something was missing, and it was important to rectify the odds. Now, I am in a much better shape as compared to last year. I was missing the rhythm last year, and now, things look much better."

Staying at home for this long is not easy, but Kuldeep believes that it is important for everyone to stay indoors and follow the government's guidelines. "For now, we are not thinking of cricket. We need to be careful for another 20-25 days and after that, things will slowly come to normal. Maybe then we can at least think of starting the training," he said.

But what about the IPL? "Just like any other cricketer or cricket fan, even I am definitely waiting for the IPL to happen at a suitable time. We are missing the IPL for sure, but now, the focus should be on ensuring that we can tackle COVID-19. We must be careful." ❧

Passion: "Since childhood, I love painting. And now that I have got some time, I am making the most of the opportunity," says Kuldeep.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Not mincing words:

Despite hailing from a generation that revered Test cricket, former Indian Test cricketer Dilip Doshi has his own set of ideas about the game.

VIJAY SONEJI



Fresh thought on age-old issues

SHAYAN ACHARYA

The selection committee and the think-tank of Indian cricket have got something wrong and twisted. They are not thinking alike is what I feel.

Talking cricket with Dilip Doshi is always fun. The former India spin wizard, who featured in 33 Tests and took 114 wickets, takes you on a fruitful journey and doesn't mince words while explaining what is wrong with spinners in today's times.

Despite hailing from a generation that revered Test cricket, Doshi has his own set of ideas about the game.

In a free-wheeling chat with *Sportstar*, the 72-year-old talks about his playing days and reveals his apprehensions about Indian cricket now.

You belong to a time when Test cricket was considered the ultimate form of the game, with ODIs still in baby steps. T20 wasn't even thought about. Decades later, how much do you think has the game evolved?

First of all, it's a wrong notion that limited overs cricket and the faster pace of game have come into being only in the last 20-30 years. In fact, the most popular form of club cricket, whether it's in England, Australia, India - and in Calcutta, where I grew up and also in Mumbai - it was either a time restricted game or a limited-over format already.

In the Lancashire league, which was one of the most famous professional cricket leagues in the world, where the greats like Gary Sobers, Vinoo Mankad, Dattu Phadkar,

Everton Weekes etc played, there used to be a sense of urgency with limitation in the number of overs. In those days, this was the hunting ground for talent scouts.

Now, in modern times, this sense of urgency is defined in a different way, with a commercial sense attached to it. So, it used to be a limited-over game then also, because in the Lancashire League, you could not have cheated the opposition by bowling less number of overs as there was a sense of fairplay prevailing.

In fact, (as a professional), you could bowl the entire quota of overs. That means if it was 50 overs, then I could bowl 25 overs continuously. There was no restriction. And in those days, the grounds had no hoardings and the boundary was fully extended.

So, are you saying, nothing much has changed over the years, in terms of the pace of the game?

Now, the main difference is that while the shorter version of the game has been defined more commercially, the quality of the game has gone down enormously.

Today, the bats are heavier, the grounds are shorter. The physical attribute of every cricketer is different because he does weight training and all other kinds of fitness and strength training. The sweet spot of the bat appears to be all round, rather than in the

middle. The edge of the bat is almost one third the size of the middle, if not more. So, all this contributes to a different kind of approach to the game. It is a heavily batsman-oriented game and most of the fans want to see the big runs being scored, the bowler being hit all over the park.

I feel that like a batsman is allowed to bat for the full quota of 20 overs, a bowler should also be allowed to bowl 10 overs in a T20 fixture. There should be no restriction on the bowlers, except that four bowlers have to be bowled, if not five. That will balance the game much better than it is now.

England had the John Player League, played every Sunday. It was a 40-over each affair, in which I participated for quite a long time. There was the Gillette Cup knockout, which was of 60 overs each, and the Benson and Hedges Cup, which was of 55 overs each. I was fortunate enough to have played in all these tournaments.

Could you elaborate?

I remember a game between Warwickshire and Nottinghamshire in 1974 when I was still qualifying, so I couldn't play and Sir Garfield Sobers was our captain. In 40 overs, Warwickshire with John Jameson and Rohan Kanhai had put on 286 for the loss of five wickets.

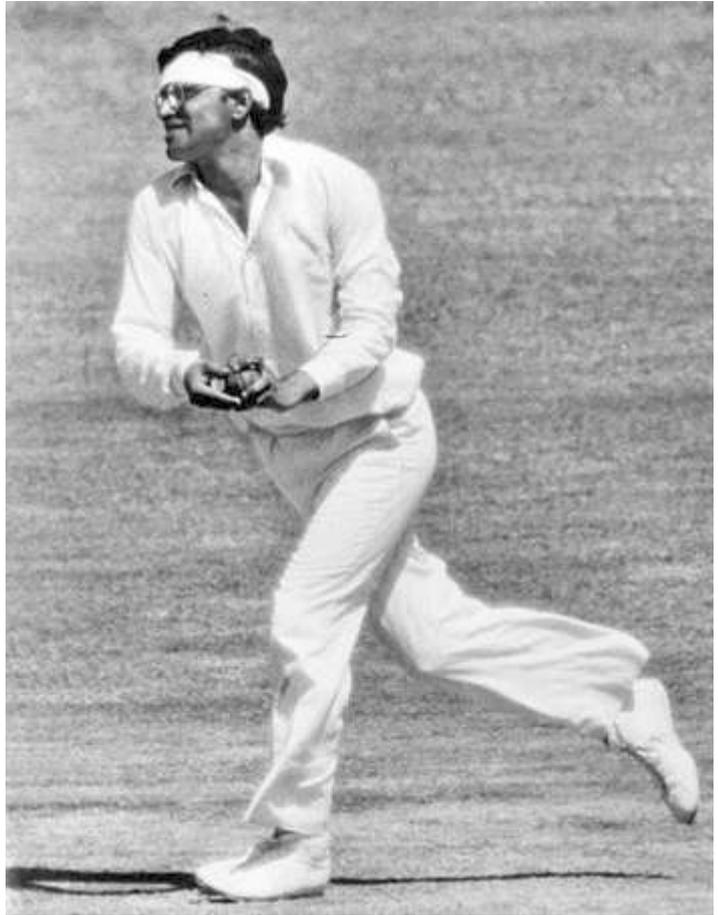
Sir Garfield was at his best, even though he had retired recently. And this was played on a full ground, at Trent Bridge. And I watched every ball.

Not only did Nottinghamshire achieve the target of 287, they did so with a few overs to spare with Sobers playing an innings, breathtaking and of pure genius.

One has seen all these things. So, for me and for all the cricketers of our generation, who have played across the world, the refreshing change in the modern game is the very high standard of fielding and athleticism and the security of a good financial package for every cricketer.

The other side of the coin is the quality of technique. The quality of spin bowling, especially, has gone down drastically. And the technique of the batsmen has also changed so much to the demands of the short form game that Test cricket is suffering.

Why do you think Test cricket is struggling to find takers? Is it because that over the last couple of decades, most of the Boards have emphasised more on ODIs and T20s, ignoring the



longer format?

Would a (Sunil) Gavaskar or a (Sachin) Tendulkar or a (Virat] Kohli or a (Dilip) Vengsarkar existed, had they been brought upon only the shorter format of the game? Surely not!

I think this subject is like proper schooling. A proper technique stands you in good stead in the long term. Take a look at the Test match which India played against New Zealand in Wellington in February. I don't think it's a shame to be defeated by a better team on the day. But the way I look at it is, actually have we learnt anything from that defeat?

To me, the footwork of the batsmen was unbelievably poor. Most of the players were caught within the crease. They were neither on the frontfoot nor on the backfoot.

Most of the batsmen's front feet pointed down the middle of the pitch straight towards the bowler, like they do to make room to hit a ball in a T20 game. If that muscle memory is going to dictate the rest of your career, then God help India in Test cricket. We cannot win games overseas unless we

Comparing eras: In my playing days, you could bowl the entire quota of overs. That means if it was 50 overs, then I could bowl 25 overs continuously. There was no restriction. And in those days, the grounds had no hoardings and the boundary was fully extended.

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Calling a spade a spade: “All the young players who are coming into the Indian team today, whether it is Shreyas Iyer or Prithvi Shaw, or Rishabh Pant (above), nobody has got footwork.”

K.R. DEEPAK

mentally change the approach and address the inherent weaknesses.

What should be the right approach, then?

It’s not a shame to lose, but it is about why we lost. And what can we do to improve our performance? I think footwork is the key. Take any other game. Let’s say, tennis. The game has evolved; graphite racquets have come in. Many things have changed in the game - the dress has changed, the endorsement, everything you look at. But no basics have changed! In tennis also, footwork is the most important thing for a player to become great. If you watch all the great tennis players, their footwork is just right to get into the right shot and to either move forward or go back.

Cricket is the only game where I’ve seen these changes, which are rather damaging. So drastic it is that the basic format of the game -- Test cricket -- is suffering. Only Test cricket can provide you with great cricketers, current or future.

Why is this happening?

Because of poor coaching. Cricket was starved for finance, at least in most part of the world, except in England. They used to get paid well in England. All of us played because we loved the game. That was the real reason why we actually played. Now, a lot of money has come in - the sponsors, of course. All the multinational companies see benefit in it, which I think is a great way to be. But look at the side-effects. The proliferation of money, has created (coaching) posi-

tions which need not be there. I am a great believer in ‘no coaching.’

What do you mean by that? Is it even possible to survive in today’s times without proper coaches?

I need people who can guide me if I’m wrong. Coaching from the grassroot level is a very discrete thing. You would never have had Bradman, Sobers, Kanhai, Viv Richards, Brian Lara, unless they were all guided by a very discrete coach. I remember talking to Sunil about this and he always said that the coach only told him when he was going wrong. And because the desire to create a perfect technique was so great, these players could adjust to any demands of the game.

I’ll give you a small example. In Sydney grade cricket, Sir Donald Bradman once scored 100 in three overs (in 1931). It was an eight-ball over game. Now, that tells you that fast scoring always existed. If you take a look at the record books, and if you read Neville Cardus or A. A. Thomson, they will tell you about village cricket and how 20 runs were to be scored in the last over and how the villagers used to score it.

So, this is no new phenomena. Today, weightage is added by the security of finance to a cricketer, who doesn’t have to worry about doing any other job, which was not the case previously.

These days, there are too many coaching staff involved with a team. With different people and different approaches, do you think that the youngsters are getting confused as to who to listen to and which technique to follow?

All the young players who are coming into the Indian team today, whether it is Shreyas Iyer or Prithvi Shaw, or Rishabh Pant, nobody has got footwork. So what is the (National Cricket Academy) doing? They’re failing, in my view. What is Rahul Dravid doing? He was supposed to be a master technician and I salute him for that. But that is not helping. Basically, the hunger for excellence has to come from within you.

The player has got to understand that. This Indian team is hungry to perform well. But when they are not able to do so, where’s the hunger for excellence? I don’t see it. The hunger for excellence comes when you want to excel at your own art. That means you have to cut out all the weaknesses and the weaknesses lie in the technique.

Mentally, they are all very fine, as I understand from a distance. And today's cricketers talk far more about the game, about attitude, mental fitness. I think it should be displayed on the field.

Burnout is also a major area of concern.

I read about burnout, but I don't understand it. To me, it is a modern phenomenon. There is always pressure at every level, whenever you play. There is a pressure to perform, to keep your place in the team, pressure to win and also to live up to the expectations of your fans. But today's cricketers are happy in the sense that they are well fed, they're well looked after. And therefore, there is no pressure for finance, the only pressure is of performance. What other pressures are we talking about?

That pressure is something that has always been there. It's been going on for generations. So why do you think this is happening? As far as technique is concerned, you spoke about no footwork. But what would you say about someone like a Cheteshwar Pujara, who only plays the longer format?

Cheteshwar is an outstanding batsman and he can become better than what he is. But I see, most of the times he gets out to an incoming ball. There is a technical deficiency there. Take a ball coming from a left-arm bowler, who is bowling round the wicket, wide over the crease. It's just common sense that the ball will keep on coming with the arm and when you shoulder arms to that incoming ball and get bowled, to me it is quite unpardonable for a player of Pujara's calibre.

If you look at the basic foot movement of all the players, the foot doesn't go towards the line of the ball. Generally, the foot has to go towards the line of the ball, so your body is closer to the ball. They're playing far apart. And this is one of the reasons for poor performance.

But there has to be some solution.

The batsmen, of course, need to improve their technique.

How can they improve it?

They can improve by looking at the textbook sometimes. Sometimes, you got to go to the drawing board. I do not think there has been a better book written or illustrated than the

'Art of cricket' by Sir Donald Bradman. To me, it is like a must for all cricketers.

And I'm quite surprised that nobody talks about such kinds of important things, the technique and where to learn it from.

You have heard of coaches who are unsung heroes. There was Sachin's coach (Ramakant Achrekar) and there used to be another gentleman called Bhandarkar in Pune. In Calcutta, where I grew up, the most important coach who guided me when I went wrong was Sunil Dasgupta. How? Sunil *da* was not even an established club cricketer in Calcutta, but he understood the game.

When I was in college, he guided me when I went wrong. He was a net in-charge. So, he understood. The coach's job is to look at the natural ability of an individual and allow him to develop that.

I could spin the ball on any surface, but I could not deliver the arm ball. So every time I tried to bowl an arm ball, Sunil *da* would twist my ear and say, "I'll take the ball away from you, if you are going to try anything except spinning the ball..." Because, he later told me, you are doing what almost nobody else does. The others bring the ball in because they can't spin the ball. So why do you want to change that? He taught me thus and never interfered. He didn't say keep your arm like this or like that. So everybody is different in his own right.

That's what you were talking about earlier, that you don't need a coach, you need a guide.

You need somebody who keeps an eye on you and when things are going wrong, he should tell you that this is not the right way to go. Today, what happens is that there is a support staff of 16 to 18 people in a team, which is higher in number than players.

Would it be possible if there was no money? Of course not.

So, look at the great teams of the past. The 80s West Indies, Allan Border's (Australian) team, even the Indian teams in our times, we had no coaches. People helped each other. When we were in Australia (in 1980-81), Sir Garfield Sobers, who was then the Mayor in Melbourne, would help *Vishy* (Gundappa Viswanath), or anyone else, if needed. So, really speaking, the existence of coaching at an international level in the team is like almost copy and paste from other sports, whose requirements are entirely different from cricket.

But cricket definitely doesn't require a

“
I read about burnout, but I don't understand it. To me, it is a modern phenomenon. There is always pressure at every level, whenever you play. There is a pressure to perform, to keep your place in the team, pressure to win and also to live up to the expectations of your fans.”



Sincere advice: “The problem is we start talking big before the boy even establishes himself in the true sense. Taking a lot of wickets in T20 doesn’t establish you, this is the futility of the whole thing. Kuldeep Yadav will have to develop a big heart and become a thinking bowler,” says Doshi.

G. P. SAMPATH KUMAR

full-time coach in a proper national team, because if you require coaching at that level, you have simply not arrived there. Therefore, a person who is a manager could be a former cricketer, who could guide you. I fully endorse that today, you require a fielding coach, a fitness trainer, a physio and a masseur, who are vital for the team. Now, the game has surely changed for the better in these areas. The standard of fielding has gone very high. Fast bowling also has become very good as you can see from the abundance of good fast bowlers in India. It was not the case earlier.

Talking about bowlers in particular, there have been cases of fatigue and breakdowns. Why does that happen?

In the last 15 years, we have seen many players breaking down, especially the bowlers. This emphasises on one thing - cricket requires cricketing muscles to be used more often and create a repetitive muscle memory, which cannot be replaced by gym training. I often hear that some of the bowlers are required to bowl only 30-40 balls in a

net session. It is quite ridiculous.

Most of the Indian Test cricketers don’t even play the first-class games, which I think is a wrong thing. Their State teams never have the advantage of having these stalwarts around. I don’t think you require so much of rest. The point is, if you look at the number of overs people bowl, it is far less. Then why is the breakdown happening?

Because, if you want to bowl a 30-over spell, you should be used to it. Whether at your club level, whether in the nets, or whether in the Ranji games. You suddenly cannot turn up and bowl a 40-over spell. And after three days, you play another game, where you are required to bowl another 40 overs. That triggers a breakdown because those muscles are not used (for) a longer period. And, the injuries happen.

Now with Sourav Ganguly, a former India captain, at the helm of the BCCI, do you think that the Board should ensure that when there are no international assignments, the top players should feature for their State teams in domestic tournaments?

It should be made compulsory. I’m sorry, there is no soft-soaping here. It has to be mandatory that people should play for the States. The impetus also should come from the players themselves.

In the last edition of the Ranji Trophy, some of the players from Mumbai did not play a few games, saying that they required rest after playing for India in a couple of T20Is.

The approach is totally wrong. You cannot cotton-wool a player and expect him to be fit all the time. The players have to be exposed to all kinds of rigorous activities on the field and as often as possible, because cricket requires elongated muscles. The bowlers require special bowling muscles to develop stamina. And the stamina and the endurance of those muscles can only be tested by continuous play.

I remember a conversation I had with the great Alec Bedser, who was England’s selection committee chairman for a while. With us was John Woodcock, a very senior cricket correspondent. England was playing a Test against the West Indies at Lord’s and Steve Harmison was bowling. In the first three overs, Harmison, who was England’s premier fast bowler then, bowled at least eight wides. He was all over the place. Bedser

opined that till then, Harmison hadn't bowled even 75 overs for his county. Then, Woodcock asked Alec how many overs he would have bowled before the first Test when he was captaining Surrey.

Bedser bowled on an average 175 to 200 overs every week because it was seven days-a-week cricket. So, on an average, a bowler was required to bowl 25-30 overs every day. This work schedule shows you the futility of modern management in cricket.

The players feel that this workload management is required to adjust to all the three formats. There are also concerns about non-stop cricket round the year. Recently, Kohli also spoke about a packed international calendar.

The cricket board and the international cricket bodies have to manage that. As a player, all I can tell you is, look at the shorter format. If you're playing a lot of T20s, as a bowler, you're supposed to bowl four overs. And probably the drilling sessions of fielding etc., are quite rigorous. But if you're playing everyday, the rigorous routines don't help. What I understand personally is not to create muscle fatigue during the cricket season.

Additionally, a modern cricketer travels and stays in great comfort, which basically should help ease some of the fatigue.

This is where the international body, whether it's the ICC or the BCCI, should take the lead and decide how much is too much! Because of the abundance of sponsorship, you could really have games 24 hours (a day) if you want to. But that will damage the game rather than do any good. We need to preserve it.

You spoke about how the standard of bowling has deteriorated over the years. There have even been question marks on how the wickets behave these days. Where are we going wrong?

About the decline of spin bowling, it's not only in India. It is across the world. But more sadly in India because the world looked at us for high-quality spin bowling. I dare say and I know I'm going to upset quite a lot of purists, I really believe we haven't got a world-class bowler, all-round, at present.

When I say all-round, I would like to see a bowler who is capable of commanding respect both at home and overseas. We are lacking that at the moment.

Why so?

Therefore, you have to go back to the basics again. Most of the bowlers have an open-shouldered action, which stems from playing a lot of T20 or the limited-overs format. You see, when you rise from that level, it is harder to stay at the top. Staying at the top will require a totally different technique and mental approach.

Lack of competition is making average spinners play for India. Of course, if you're playing regularly, you're going to perform well a few times. My problem with all this is that if my basic technique is open-shouldered, I'm limiting myself anyway and chances of growth are limited.

You said India has failed to maintain its domination in spin-bowling. In your times, India had legends like Bishan Singh Bedi, Erapalli Prasanna, B. Chandrasekhar and S. Venkataraghavan. Then there was a generation which saw the rise of Anil Kumble and Harbhajan Singh. But after that, there hasn't been consistency. There has been an R. Ashwin, a Pragyan Ojha or a Kuldeep Yadav. But they have not been (very consistent). Why has this happened?

While T20 is absolutely a must in modern life, it has also brought some weaknesses into the game which you can see very clearly. Again, I go back to the hunger for excellence. If a player is very satisfied by being picked by an IPL team, and gets a good package, bless him, that's all good.

But then, the ambition stays there. It doesn't extend to your being an excellent cricketer, a world-class value to the national team or to whichever team you play for. This creates a lower ceiling beyond which you cannot grow.

If you look at the pyramid of talent, the top is for Test cricket. The talent of Test cricket trickles down to the ODIs and T20s. These days, players are rising from the success of T20 to the upper level, where they are found wanting.

I would say not more than 20-30 percent will be able to make the transition, most of the players will fail because the gap between the T20 and ODI is huge. And the gap between limited overs cricket and Test cricket is really many oceans apart. That's the problem we actually seem to be having.

You had earlier said that Kuldeep would sooner or later be exposed

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because of his action. Similarly, Yuzvendra Chahal has been successful in the shorter format, but hasn't made it to the Test setup yet. What are they doing wrong? What are the areas they should be working on?

First of all, your wicket-taking ability in T20 is more due to the nature of the game. Batsmen have to play shots continuously and the bowlers keep getting wickets by that. When you play a longer format of the game, the batsmen are not willing to throw away their wickets and are planning a longer innings. They want to stay there, and you have to prise the batsmen out. You need to have your own planning.

Let's take an example of the futility of thinking of the spinners these days. Before he bowls to a right-hand batsman, an off-spinner puts a deep point to save a boundary. It's a defeatist attitude straightaway. Anybody who understands the game and has played in any level knows that if you have a deep point for an off-spinner, it means he is expected to bowl a short ball outside the off-stump every now and then, thus feeding the square cut. It is a cardinal sin.

Therefore, with this approach, a field is being set for a regular bad ball. It shows a lack of confidence in the bowler and a shortage of thinking and planning. A modern captain wants to stop a boundary and will only give one run by posting his fielders on the boundary from the very beginning.

If I was a captain, I wouldn't play a bowler who is not capable of bowling a tight length and line at a higher level. This is the simple truth. I spoke to one or two young spin bowlers and they depend on the analysts to tell them how the runs were scored off their bowling. Quite simply, they are dependent on others instead of being thinking bowlers who plan the demise of a batsman.

But it has been quite a journey for Kuldeep. From being a mystery spinner to declining, he has seen it all in quick time.

That's the problem. We start talking big before the boy even establishes himself in the true sense. Taking a lot of wickets in T20 doesn't establish you, this is the futility of the whole thing. Kuldeep will have to develop a big heart and become a thinking bowler.

What about Ravindra Jadeja? You have always spoken highly of him.



Jadeja is a good all-round cricketer, let's make no mistake. In my view, his bowling has suffered recently. Two-three years (ago), I thought he would move ahead with his bowling, but unfortunately, he has not.

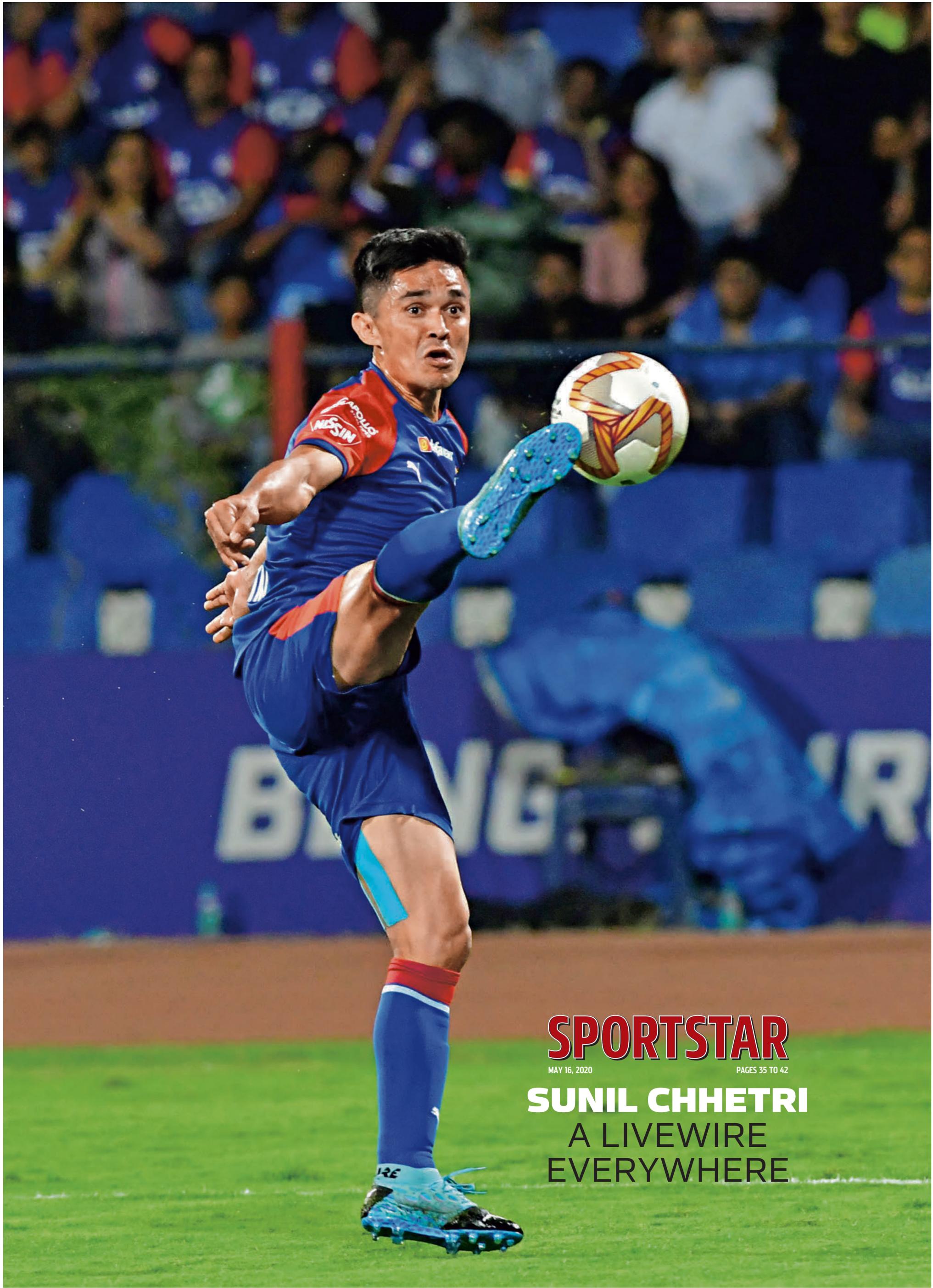
Whatever the reasons, I'm not sure, it's very difficult to judge it from this distance. I say this only because a spinner, as he continues playing, learns his craft more and more. And he develops certain attributes which he hasn't had before. Because of the confidence Jadeja has developed, and by continuous exposure at the highest level, he should have improved. But he has not. That's the point.

Do you think that the BCCI should involve former spin aces and maybe use their expertise to help out the young spinners?

No. I think it should be avoided totally. First of all, when you bring former cricketers of high repute or whatever you want to call it, it causes an inhibition in the minds of the youngsters. This is a psychological issue, which is delicate. Showing somebody what I had done in my time is not good enough.

Making a point:

"Ravindra Jadeja is a good all-rounder, but in my view, his bowling has suffered recently," says Doshi. PTI



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SUNIL CHHETRI

A LIVEWIRE
EVERYWHERE

What's important is to guide the youngster (about) what he should be doing with his talent. And I think this is where you don't necessarily need former big names. Some of the really good coaches I've seen across the world, are the unsung heroes.

People may be only the local maidan coaches, but they love the game so much, they are so passionate about it, and they are very discreet. So you can imagine Ramakant Achrekar never destroyed Sachin's shot-playing ability. He enhanced it by allowing him to perfect the technique.

Unless you have the temperament and the technique to defend good deliveries, you cannot stay at the crease long enough. Imparting your knowledge to a young cricketer requires great interpersonal skill.

The spin bowlers must be taught essentially to spin the ball. If they're going to roll the ball and deliver slow, they are no more spinners. So these are the basic attributes which (have) to be taught from the very early days. And that's what I feel is the criteria.

What is your advice for Ashwin, Kuldeep and Jadeja?

Let's take Ashwin first. There is no doubt that he's a thinking cricketer. But I have always maintained that he needs to decide whether he is an off-spinner or not. In my view, he is an off-spinner. This means 98 to 99 per cent of his bowling should be the classic off-spin as his stock ball. Mastering the stock ball, which is the off-spin, and mastering the line, is the crucial element in his game. And if he does that, then I think (he) will be a handful.

But experimenting too much with different kinds of deliveries is going to create confusion in the muscle memory. And to revert to the stock ball becomes all the more difficult. There is so much variation possible within your stock ball as every delivery is going to be naturally different from the previous one.

I think the variation lies in your controlling the length and line rather than changing the nature of the delivery. Every delivery that comes out has a naturally different parabola and different revolutions because of the human effort behind it. That's the control that I require to see in every spin bowler or every bowler.

Similarly, if you look at Ravindra Jadeja, I think he's an outstanding cricketer overall, undoubtedly. He can reach further heights

by focussing on his bowling. To me, he is a bowling all-rounder, like Kapil Dev. So, if you're a bowling all-rounder, your bowling has to keep improving. When your bowling doesn't improve, it could actually take you backwards. So that's where Jadeja will have to work on.

As far as Kuldeep is concerned, I feel he's too slow in the air. And that's because at the time of bowling, his non-bowling arm falls away and he opens up. Therefore, he cannot put the full bodyweight behind the delivery and these are the technical issues which I have observed before.

As far as the Indian team is concerned, there seems to be too many changes in the side. What are your thoughts about the selection? Do you think there has to be consistency?

The selection committee and the think-tank of Indian cricket have got something wrong and twisted. They are not thinking alike is what I feel. They have persisted with K. L. Rahul in different areas, and it appears that finally he has come of age, at least (it) appears so. I would have persisted with him in the Tests against New Zealand, and also with Shikhar Dhawan if he was fit. I would have not taken Prithvi Shaw and (instead) gone with players who are proven in this area. All the youngsters like Iyer can wait because technique is very important in Test cricket, and I think Rahul has just about got things right. Playing like this with an experimental team and losing so badly overseas is really not acceptable.

I do not know why there are so many changes so often. It also shows that we are not sure of what we're doing. I do understand that the Test team and the ODI team should be quite similar. There could be one or two changes in that, but I do not see a major difference in the Test team and the ODI team.

At the T20 level, you can afford to change with three or more. But at the Test level, Rahul should have been playing. If Shikhar was fit, he should have been playing.

And people like Ajinkya Rahane also have to be persisted with. And many times you realise that mediocrity is always at its best because they have to keep floating. You need to decide who your top players are and persist with them. That's what a lot of good teams have done over the years and (that's why they have) been successful. ❧

“The spin bowlers must be taught essentially to spin the ball. If they're going to roll the ball and deliver slow, they are no more spinners. So these are the basic attributes which (have) to be taught from the very early days. And that's what I feel is the criteria.”



Play disrupted: Sachin Tendulkar appeals for calm after his run-out by substitute fielder Nadeem Khan triggered unrest among spectators at Eden Gardens in Kolkata on February 19, 1999. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

When substitute fielders stood out

ABHISHEK MUKHERJEE

A good catch or a direct hit can be decisive in a contest but can break careers too as Australia's Callum Ferguson found out in the Hobart Test against South Africa in 2016-17.

And if it's the 12th man who does the damage, it can be painful for the other team.

Ricky Ponting kept abusing Duncan Fletcher on his way back to the dressing room at Trent Bridge after having been run out by Gary Pratt, a famous moment in the 2005 Ashes series.

Here are 10 moments or contests involving substitute fielders that stand out:

1) Nadeem Khan

His direct hit sparked unrest in the stands at the Eden Gardens and compelled the authorities to conclude the much-hyped India-Pakistan Test without spectators. The reason? Sachin Tendulkar was run out in a seemingly dubious way.

It was the second innings, on day Four. Tendulkar was comfortably coming back for his third run after flicking Wasim Akram to deep midwicket. Nadeem's throw from the deep was accurate; it hit the stumps. Tendulkar would have made it, however, had Shoaib Akhtar, who had come drifting along

It is not always that playing XI members contribute in a cricket match. Even the 12th man sometimes does the damage and changes the complexion of the game.

from mid-off, not been in Tendulkar's way as he entered home stretch to complete the third run.

Tendulkar's attention was on the throw, and he ran into Akhtar. The bat hadn't been grounded when the ball hit the stumps. The crowd at Eden Gardens made their displeasure felt by throwing bottles on the ground. The match resumed after a delay and the Indian innings kept tumbling.

The crowd was eventually evicted on the fifth day as Pakistan went on to win the Asian Test Championship contest by 46 runs.

Nadeem, the brother of former Pakistan wicketkeeper Moin Khan, played just one Test in his career — another famous one against India, in Chennai, also in 1999.

2) Gary Pratt

At Trent Bridge in August 2005, on display was a mighty Australian team full of accomplished match-winners and it wouldn't have been pleasing for Ricky Ponting & Co. to follow on against a less-heralded English side.

Having to do a lot of catch up in the second innings, Ponting had settled down for a long innings when Damien Martyn tapped a ball to cover. Martin and Ponting set off for a

sharp single, but the fielder — 12th man Pratt — threw accurately to the strikers' end to catch Ponting short.

3) Ravindra Jadeja

Jadeja is an excellent all-rounder and an asset as a substitute fielder for any side. In the 2019 World Cup, he took a tumbling catch to end the innings of the rampaging Jason Roy at Edgbaston.

Roy drove Kuldeep Yadav down the ground; the ball wasn't fiercely struck, so it was about to land when Jadeja, positioned at long-on, came swooping down on it and plucked a superb catch.

This gave India its first breakthrough of the innings, in the 23rd over. England won by 31 runs and went on to clinch the title.

4) 2019 World Cup final

There were as many as three catches held by substitute fielders in the memorable final at Lord's. England's James Vince claimed two of those, and Tim Southee — yes, he wasn't part of New Zealand playing XI — one of them.

5) Gursharan Singh

Before he played the first and only Test of his career, the Punjab batsman had a memorable outing in a Test as a substitute fielder. This was the third Test between India and the West Indies in Ahmedabad in 1983. Gursharan took four catches in that contest, till date the most by a substitute in a Test match.

Younis Khan, Virender Sehwag and Jackson Bird also took four catches in a Test later.

6) Younis Khan

Against Bangladesh in Multan in 2001, Pakistan's Younis Khan took four catches as a substitute, all off the bowling of leg-spinner Danish Kaneria.

7) Dane Vilas

This was Callum Ferguson's debut Test, the second Australia-South Africa Test in Hobart, in November 2016. Batting first, Australia was struggling at 16 for 4 when Ferguson, batting on 2, defended a short delivery from Kyle Abbott behind point; Dane Vilas retrieved the ball and threw it accurately at the strikers' end to catch Ferguson short of his crease. The decision to come back for the second run was fatal; Ferguson's dive couldn't save him. His brother, in the stands, walked off in disgust.

Vilas had played six Tests before this game, and he has yet to add to that tally. Four of the Tests he played in were in South Africa's India tour in 2015.

8) Peter Handscomb

Handscomb, the Australia batsman,



Flash in the pan:

England's Scott Elstone is congratulated by Andrew Strauss (left) and Matt Prior after catching India's Harbhajan Singh at Trent Bridge on August 1, 2011. Then only 21, Elstone took two catches, to dismiss Suresh Raina and Harbhajan, and dropped one, in the second innings as England won by 319 runs. AP

came on as a 12th man and took a superb diving catch to help dismiss England's Dawid Malan for 140, in the Perth Test of December 2017. Nathan Lyon's delivery caught the edge of Malan's bat and the ball ballooned to the vacant point region, where Handscomb came running in and dived to take the catch.

9) Scott Elstone

England's Elstone played just 14 first-class matches in his career, and although he didn't feature as a player, the Trent Bridge Test against India in 2011 would be memorable for him. Then only 21, Elstone took two catches, to dismiss Suresh Raina and Harbhajan Singh, and dropped one, in the second innings. England won by 319 runs.

10) Virender Sehwag

In a Test against Zimbabwe in Nagpur, in February 2002, India's Virender Sehwag took four catches as a substitute fielder — two off the bowling of Harbhajan Singh and one each off Anil Kumble and Javagal Srinath. India won that match by an innings and 101 runs. 

How many substitute fielders have taken three or more catches in a Test? Here's the list:

4 Gursharan Singh (India), Younis Khan (Pakistan), Virender Sehwag (India), Jackson Bird (Australia)

3 Derek Sealy (West Indies), Willie Rodriguez (West Indies), Yajurvindra Singh (India), Haroon Rasheed (Pakistan); Mark Greatbach (New Zealand), W. V. Raman (India), V. V. S. Laxman (India), Marlon Samuels (West Indies), Mashrafe Mortaza (Bangladesh), and Shaun Marsh (Australia).

ON THE WRITE LINE

SUNIL GAVASKAR



Early times: How really great was Dr. W.G. Grace? Only the written word is there to chronicle the talent of those times.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

Sport needs immediacy, not isolation

Health, safety and human lives are extremely important. So it's better to wait till conditions permit a proper sporting contest rather than one contrived only for revenue.

The sporting world is in turmoil and there doesn't seem to be a light at the end of the tunnel. To be sure lives are far more valuable than any sporting activity, but sport is one of the channels for passing time in this period of self-isolation. Nostalgia is high even on the list of the *TikTok* generation as current internationals go back to their growing up years to see how they got through the initial tough times to become the heroes of the modern generation. Thankfully, there are also some grainy black and white videos of some earlier times to let the internet generation know that cricket was played earlier than the 1990s.

But what about the earliest times before there were any cameras or instruments to capture the skill and talent of those generations? Test cricket started in 1877 and there were no cameras then, but does that make the players of that era any lesser than the current ones? Even when cameras and films came into being there's not much stock of sport to go through. So how deadly was Fred, 'the demon' Spofforth? How really great was Dr. W.G. Grace? Only the written word is there to chronicle the talent of those times, but as we know even today so much of that is also up to the personal likes and dislikes of the chronicler.

Television has made the chronicler more



aware of the need to put personal likes aside and be true to facts. Gone are the days of the chronicler saying a player he didn't particularly like as having dropped a simple catch in the slips, even when the ball had landed well in front of the fielder. Today it can be seen with so many camera angles exactly where the ball had dropped and was it even a chance. In the same way, these days, a writer can't say that it was a terrible shot when a batsman had been bowled by a delivery that would have challenged even the best in the business. He also can't wrongly comment on a bowler because he will be exposed more than the player he is trying to discredit. That's the biggest plus of the modern age. Not that individual biases don't exist today. As long as there are humans these will be there, but at least the general public will be able to see for themselves and decide rather than relying on the words of others.

Debates will always be there, especially in these times of not much other physical or mental activity. Were the earlier eras tougher or is the pressure of being scrutinised by millions of viewers today greater? Comparing eras has been a favourite pastime since ages. Don't we all say our school and college days were the best and our children don't have an idea how much ours were better than their teen years? These kinds of 'my days were better...' is a constant theme between eras and one needs to take it with a bagful of salt. Right now though, the sport-

ing world is in pause mode and it looks like no events will happen till August at least. The cricket world is waiting to see if the ICC World Twenty20 Cup will take place or be postponed to a later date. There have been proposals to play in front of empty stands for everybody knows that the real income is from TV rights, and even if there are 100 spectators at the ground the organisers will still make money. How the current players think about this will be interesting. For, every performer likes to be appreciated and hear and feel that appreciation which can't happen in empty grounds. That said, even he would want to get back into action after the forced inactivity even if there is nobody to see his skills.

The idea, though, to have a Test series in one centre and venue is not an appealing one. The essence of a series is to be able to play on different surfaces and in varying weather conditions in front of crowds of different temperament, so that's not a great idea to start with. What it suggests is that only money matters and not a real test of talent and temperament. It's like saying, let's play all the four Majors in tennis and golf at one venue. It's like saying let's have all the Formula One races at just one circuit.

Health, safety and human lives are extremely important. So it's better to wait till conditions permit a proper sporting contest rather than one contrived only for revenue. ❧

Cricket crazy: Fans watching the 2019 World Cup cricket match between India and Australia on TV. The cricket world is waiting to see if the ICC World Twenty20 Cup will take place or be postponed to a later date. There have been proposals to play in front of empty stands for everybody knows that the real income is from TV rights, and even if there are 100 spectators at the ground the organisers will still make money.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

All about Test cricket captains

The captain of a cricket team, at times also referred to as the skipper, is the appointed leader, having several additional roles and responsibilities over and above those of the 10 others in the playing XI. In cricket, the main role of the captain is to act as a sort of intermediary between the coaching staff and the rest of the team. He becomes part player, part selector or even part coach/mentor, and must be able to successfully balance the various pressures that come with the multiple responsibilities.

As in any other sport, the captain is usually the person who is the most experienced in the squad. However, there have been several instances in Test cricket where the captain has been the least experienced member of the squad.

The captain also needs to have good communication skills and is most likely to be a certainty in the playing XI, as he is responsible for the team selection. It is his task to go out for the toss before the start of a match and then take a call as to whether his side bats or fields first. During the match, the captain decides the team's batting order, which bowler will open the bowling, who are his first and second bowling changes, and where each fielder will be positioned. While the captain has the final say, decisions taken on the field or in the dressing rooms are often collaborative. A captain's knowledge of the complexities of cricket strategy and tactics, and shrewdness in the field may contribute significantly to the team's success. Excelling as a cricket captain requires the incumbent to have a thorough understanding of how the game is played, the ability to strategise, and at the same time lead his teammates both on and off the field.

Nowadays, with the coaching and support staff as part of the squad, the captain's decision-making responsibilities are less of a burden. This allows him to fully concentrate on his skills, which are either batting or bowling and at times both. However, despite all that, the captain of a cricket team typically shoulders more responsibility for results than team captains in other sports.

Here's the first part of a statistical review of the captains in Test cricket since 1877.

First captain for each Test side

Team	Captain	Opponent	Venue	Date	Result
Australia	Dave Gregory	England	Melbourne	March 15, 1877	Won by 45 runs
England	James Lillywhite	Australia	Melbourne	March 15, 1877	Lost by 45 runs
South Africa	Owen Dunell	England	Port Elizabeth	March 12, 1889	Lost by 8 wickets
West Indies	Karl Nunes	England	Lord's	June 23, 1928	Lost by an innings and 58 runs
New Zealand	Tom Lowry	England	Christchurch	January 10, 1930	Lost by 8 wickets
India	C. K. Nayudu	England	Lord's	June 25, 1932	Lost by 158 runs
Pakistan	Abdul Hafeez Kardar	India	Delhi	October 16, 1952	Lost by an innings and 70 runs
Sri Lanka	Bandula Warnapura	England	Colombo (<i>Premadasa</i>)	February 17, 1982	Lost by 7 wickets
Zimbabwe	Dave Houghton	India	Harare	November 18, 1992	Drawn
Bangladesh	Naimur Rahman	India	Dhaka	November 10, 2000	Lost by 9 wickets
ICC World XI	Graeme Smith	Australia	Sydney	October 14, 2005	Lost by 210 runs
Ireland	William Porterfield	Pakistan	Dublin	May 12, 2018	Lost by 5 wickets
Afghanistan	Asghar Afghan	India	Bangalore	June 14, 2018	Lost by an innings and 262 runs

Notes:1) Dave Gregory of Australia is the first captain to win a toss.

Owen Dunnell of South Africa and Asghar Afghan of Afghanistan lost their respective Test matches in two days!

Ireland's opening day in Test cricket (May 11, 2018) was washed out because of rain. Play began the next day.

Most Tests as captain

Tests	Captain	Team	Period
109	Graeme Smith	South Africa	April 24, 2003-March 5, 2014
93	Allan Border	Australia	December 7, 1984-March 29, 1994
80	Stephen Fleming	New Zealand	February 14, 1997-December 18, 2006
77	Ricky Ponting	Australia	March 8, 2004-December 29, 2010
74	Clive Lloyd	West Indies	November 22, 1974-January 2, 1985

+ Smith's tally includes one Test for the ICC World XI.

Most Tests as captain for other sides

Team	Tests a captain	Captain	Period
India	60	M. S. Dhoni	April 11, 2008-December 30, 2014
England	59	Alastair Cook	March 12, 2010-December 20, 2016
Sri Lanka	56	Arjuna Ranatunga	December 8, 1989-February 28, 1999
Pakistan	56	Misbah-ul-Haq	November 12, 2010-May 14, 2017
Bangladesh	34	Mushfiqur Rahim	October 21, 2011-October 8, 2017
Zimbabwe	21	Alastair Campbell	September 11, 1996-November 19, 2002
Zimbabwe	21	Heath Streak	September 12, 2000-March 1, 2004
Ireland	3	William Porterfield	May 12, 2018-July 27, 2019
Afghanistan	2	Asghar Afghan	June 14, 2018-March 18, 2019
Afghanistan	2	Rashid Khan	September 5, 2019-November 29, 2019

Most Test wins as captain

Wins	Captain	Tests as captain	Team	Period
53	Graeme Smith	109	South Africa	April 24, 2003-March 5, 2014
48	Ricky Ponting	77	Australia	March 8, 2004-December 29, 2010
41	Steve Waugh	57	Australia	March 5, 1999-January 6, 2004
36	Clive Lloyd	74	West Indies	November 22, 1974-January 2, 1985
33	Virat Kohli	55	India	December 9, 2014-March 2, 2020
32	Allan Border	93	Australia	December 7, 1984-March 29, 1994

Most Test defeats as captain

Losses	Captain	Tests as captain	Team	Period
29	Graeme Smith	109	South Africa	April 24, 2003-March 5, 2014
27	Stephen Fleming	80	New Zealand	February 14, 1997-December 18, 2006
26	Brian Lara	47	West Indies	March 27, 1997-December 1, 2006
22	Allan Border	93	Australia	December 7, 1984-March 29, 1994
22	Alastair Cook	59	England	March 12, 2010-December 20, 2016
21	Michael Atherton	54	England	August 5, 1993-August 4, 2001

Most Tests drawn as captain

Draws	Captain	Tests as captain	Team	Period
38	Allan Border	93	Australia	December 7, 1984-March 29, 1994
30	Sunil Gavaskar	47	India	January 24, 1976-February 5, 1985
27	Graeme Smith	109	South Africa	April 24, 2003-March 5, 2014
26	Clive Lloyd	74	West Indies	November 22, 1974-January 2, 1985
26	Imran Khan	48	Pakistan	July 29, 1982-January 7-1992
25	Arjuna Ranatunga	56	Sri Lanka	December 8, 1989-February 28, 1999
25	Stephen Fleming	80	New Zealand	February 14, 1997-December 18, 2006

Note: The four captains involved in a tied Test match are Richie Benaud (Australia) and Frank Worrell (West Indies) 1960, Kapil Dev (India) and Allan Border (Australia) in 1986.

Most successful Test captains (minimum 25 Tests as captain)

Win percentage	Wins	Captain	Tests as captain	Team	Period
71.93	41	Steve Waugh	57	Australia	March 5, 1999-January 6, 2004
62.34	48	Ricky Ponting	77	Australia	March 8, 2004-December 29, 2010
60.00	33	Virat Kohli	55	India	December 9, 2014-March 2, 2020
58.06	18	Mike Brearley	31	England	June 16, 1977-September 1, 1981
56.25	18	Kane Williamson	32	New Zealand	July 28, 2016-March 2, 2020
54.00	27	Viv Richards	50	West Indies	August 7, 1980-August 12, 1991

Least successful Test captains (minimum 25 Tests as captain)

Win percentage	Wins	Captain	Tests as captain	Team	Period
8.82	3	John Reid	34	New Zealand	February 18, 1956-July 13, 1965
11.76	4	Kapil Dev	34	India	February 23, 1983-March 17, 1987
14.29	4	Kim Hughes	28	Australia	March 24, 1979-November 26, 1984
15.63	5	David Gower	32	England	August 12, 1982-August 29, 1989
16.00	4	Sachin Tendulkar	25	India	October 10, 1996-March 6, 2000
18.75	6	Daniel Vettori	32	New Zealand	November 8, 2007-January 29, 2011



Home alone at 87

Legendary English umpire Dickie Bird receives help from neighbours and the Barnsley Council, who deliver food and supplies to him during the coronavirus lockdown.

SHAYAN ACHARYA

Dickie Bird turned 87 on April 19. But with the world coming to a standstill due to the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, he had no plans to celebrate the birthday this year.

The legendary English cricket umpire, who retired in 1996, spent the day at home — all alone — watching television and taking phone calls from friends wishing him.

For years, Bird has lived a solitary life, on his own terms.

“I live on my own. I never married because of cricket. I would travel all around the world and would never be home,” Bird told *Sportstar* prior to his birthday.

Long career: Dickie Bird officiated in 66 Tests and 69 One-Day Internationals between 1973 and 1996. AP

At a time when the world is in a lockdown due to the pandemic, Bird, like millions of people around the world, is confined to his home. “I have a huge house with a great view (in Barnsley in England), so I make the most of it,” he said.

But not even in his wildest dreams could Bird imagine that something like this pandemic would jeopardise everything, and the last few weeks have been challenging for the veteran umpire.

Bird hasn’t been able to step out of home, go for his walks, or even visit the Yorkshire Cricket Ground (Headingley) in Leeds to watch local cricket. “I cannot go



out of home. I am isolated,” he said. “I can just go out to the garden, sit there for a while, and take in a bit of sunshine. That’s as far as I can get,” he said.

At his age, living alone is not easy, but Bird is grateful to his neighbours who have made sure that he has enough supplies and food. “I have got good neighbours. A lady who lives down the lane has been bringing me food. I have got food sent from the Barnsley Council as well. It (the crisis) could go on for months, so I have got to stick it out,” he said.

“I have gone through a lot of things in life, but I have never seen something like this, where people are bringing me food and leaving it at my backdoor. They knock on the door and say, ‘We have brought you food.’ Things are such that you can’t be in contact with anybody,” he said, adding that in such times, it is important to stay motivated.

“If you don’t talk (to people), you could get depressed. So, you have got to try and occupy your mind and keep going,” he explained.

Bird, who officiated in 66 Tests and 69 One-Day Internationals between 1973 and 1996, has come up with a new routine these days. “I wake up in the morning, do some

Setting the standard: Umpire Dickie Bird walks out for his last Test match, against India at Lord’s in 1996. Bird, with his exemplary ways in the middle, was the harbinger of good fortune for umpires.

GETTY IMAGES

fitness exercise for about 50 minutes. That keeps me mentally strong,” he said.

Once done with the morning exercises, Bird spends most of the time watching old cricket matches on television and rekindling memories. “That’s all you can do now – watch television, go to bed, wake up next morning, and follow the same routine.”

With England badly hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, all sporting action has come to a halt. While Premier League football has been postponed, the English County Championship too has been delayed. “I don’t think there will be any county cricket this season. What they are probably looking at is having T20 (Twenty20) games. That’s where the money comes from. That’s something they will try and get in August,” Bird, a former president of the Yorkshire Cricket Club, said.

“In my retirement, sports keeps me going. In winters, I watch football at my local club Barnsley, where I am a season ticket holder. In summers, I watch cricket at the Yorkshire Cricket Club, where I have a life membership. That’s what’s kept me going so far. But now, there is nothing at all. There is no sports. The way things are going, it’s looking very gloomy,” he said ruefully. ☹



‘Let two Australian teams play at same time’

“The downside...is that multi-format players won’t be able to play in both,” says Australia’s limited-overs captain Aaron Finch.

AYAN ACHARYA

Aaron Finch, Australia’s limited-overs captain, is open to red-ball and white-ball squads playing international series concurrently, like his English counterpart Eoin Morgan suggested.

International and domestic cricket remain suspended in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, with the Indian

Keeping fit: Despite the coronavirus lockdown, Aaron Finch is training just as much as he normally would. VIVEK BENDRE

Premier League (IPL) too indefinitely postponed.

In an interview, Finch spoke to *Sportstar* about the forthcoming Twenty20 World Cup in Australia, the prospect of a behind-closed-doors IPL and more.

Firstly, I hope you are doing well with everything that’s going around. Australia is scheduled to host the men’s T20 World Cup a few months down the line. How significant will sports be in putting this crisis behind us?

Sports is something that has the ability to bring people from all different walks of life together.

In regards to the World Cup, it will be enormous if it is played because it will be the first real piece of sport that will take place at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. Of course, we need to make sure it is safe to go ahead and hopefully if it does, crowds will be allowed to attend.

How are your teammates holding up? Have you been in touch with Australia coach Justin Langer and the others?

We have different WhatsApp groups where everyone is keeping in contact every day and the communication from JL and the other coaches has been awesome throughout this period.

How has your cricket training been affected?

I’m still training just as much as I normally would, but of course it is a different kind of training that I am doing at the moment. I am doing a lot more fitness and strength-based training.

Eoin Morgan has said he is open to England’s red ball and white ball squads playing international series concurrently if that’s what it takes to get the sport up and running. Would you say it’s a viable option?

It is definitely an option that can be looked at. The downside to that though is that multi-format players won’t be able to play in both. But that also has the ability to create opportunities for those that wouldn’t necessarily get that opportunity in the first place.



While the Aussies have been magnificent in T20s and Tests, the middle order – and the balance of the side – remains the major issue in One-Day Internationals?

Our middle order is also quite inexperienced compared to some others around the world. It’s important that we give these guys time to adapt and learn as a group, to get that really good understanding of how each plays and build those partnerships.

At the end of the day, the top four is where the bulk of the runs need to be scored and help take some pressure off the middle order.

I have huge confidence in the guys who are all working so hard to get better.

Lastly, has Royal Challengers Bangalore been in touch with you and would it be at all prudent to hold the T20 league this year?

We are getting constant feedback from the IPL franchises as to what is happening around the tournament.

The IPL is such an important competition for a cricket-loving country like India, so it is important to do everything we can to play. ☺

Staying in touch: “The communication from JL (head coach Justin Langer) and the other coaches has been awesome throughout this period,” said Finch.

VIVEK BENDRE



Still training: Due to the coronavirus lockdown, Corey Anderson has been training in his backyard in the US just to ensure that his hand-eye coordination is on track. AKHILESH KUMAR

‘Kohli, Rohit are natural leaders’

New Zealand’s Corey Anderson, who has played with Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma in the IPL, feels both of them have different styles of captaincy.

WRIDDHAAYAN BHATTACHARYYA

Not many cricketers get a chance to rub shoulders with the best in the business. Corey Anderson feels his Indian Premier League (IPL) journey is special because it let him bat and bowl against top international stars.

Having played with Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli for Mumbai Indians and Royal Challengers Bangalore, respectively, the New Zealand all-rounder had the best of two

worlds that rule Indian cricket today.

“In IPL, you are playing with Indian and international players who are rockstars. It’s different environment, players and coaches every time. Mumbai probably has a bigger place in my heart as I have spent most of my time there. Even Delhi (Daredevils) and RCB were fantastic.

“To play against someone like Kohli from the under-19 World Cup (in 2008) to all



of a sudden taking the field with him for RCB (in 2018) is quite a surreal feeling. If you had asked me when I was 18 or 19 of what he was supposed to become (*laughs*)...it is such a cool thing to be part of — witness his growth in real-time, Anderson told *Sportstar* in an Instagram Live session.

With four IPL titles, Sharma is the most successful captain in the Twenty20 league. In Kohli’s absence, he has also led India to glory in limited-overs cricket, the Nidahas Trophy and the Asia Cup being the highlights.

Anderson has observed their captaincy style closely and he feels “there is no massive difference”.

“Both are very good captains. Sharma is probably a bit laidback in that role. He is passionate, wants to win, but keeps it under wraps a little bit more. Kohli wears his heart on his sleeve and shows a lot of emotion.

“But they both take charge of the team. They are natural born leaders. They are also the best batters. Sharma is one of my favourite players to watch when he is in full

flow. He makes cricket look like the easiest game in the world. The top guys in the world do that,” he said.

Anderson believes Sharma and Kohli have injected the winning culture in Team India. “They are good tacticians, they understand the game and know how to win. That’s why India has been so successful. They have numerous players who have captained IPL teams. You know that if someone drops out — be it injury or anything — they have replacements,” said Anderson, who also witnessed the rise of Jasprit Bumrah and Hardik Pandya from rookies to heroes.

The New Zealander praised the Mumbai setup for their solid scouting process.

“Boom (Bumrah) was very fresh when he came. That’s one thing I give it to Mumbai. They do very well with scouting with these young players coming out of nowhere. He was raw but had incredible talent. There are a lot of people who are talented but you need to harness and steer it in the right direction. Shane Bond was the bowling coach of Mumbai. His IQ of the game is

In awe: “To play against someone like (Virat) Kohli from the under-19 World Cup (in 2008) to all of a sudden taking the field with him for RCB (in 2018) is quite a surreal feeling,” said Anderson.

G. P. SAMPATH KUMAR



Leading from the front: Corey Anderson believes Rohit Sharma (left) and Virat Kohli have injected the winning culture in Team India.

K. R. DEEPAK

fantastic. He is an incredible coach. For someone like Bumrah to come into the environment with Shane looking after him was massive; just the baby steps while trying to figure out the bigger picture thinking ‘how am I going to become the world’s best bowler’.

“And today, he is one of the best bowlers in the world. He has achieved those things quickly; credit to this talent and he is also a smart person. He has listened to the right people,” Anderson said.

Pandya’s ‘swagger’

IPL 2020 would have marked Pandya’s comeback after six months. He was nursing a back injury. The all-rounder had to undergo a surgery last year. He announced his match fitness by performing in the local DY Patil T20 Cup in March.

“He has progressed unbelievably well. It is cool to see from where he started to where he is now. There is a swagger about him and he loves being a rockstar. Indian fans love him. He has been a massive part in Indian cricket being the all-rounder they wanted.

“With the lockdown due to COVID-19, someone in his position is raring to go out there I am sure. It gives him a bit more time to recharge engines and go again when he needs to go. Being injured, having time out of the game, you want to get back immediately. He is in the prime, it will be awesome to see where he heads towards the end of his career,” said Anderson, who is currently in Dallas with his fiancée.

Due to the coronavirus lockdown in the US, Anderson has been training in his backyard just to ensure that the hand-eye coordination is on track. 📧

A fun-filled session for a noble cause

The fund-raiser by *chess.com* involving the cream of Indian chess stood out for its star value, novelty and reach.



RAKESH RAO

In these days of lockdowns across several countries, sporting activities have come to a halt. Almost every governing body in the world of sports has announced suspension/cancellation of events until the COVID-19 pandemic is dealt with, appropriately.

Given the gravity and enormity of the situation, nations, companies, organisations and individuals have come up with charities and fund-raising activities.

Obviously, given the prevailing compulsions of social distancing, competitions are ruled out. But chess remains a welcome exception. Chess is perhaps the only discipline that continues to hold online competitions and events, to raise money to help the needy in these distressing times.

Among the lot, the fund-raiser by *chess.com* involving the cream of Indian chess stood out for its star value, novelty and reach.

Without doubt, over the years, the growth of information technology has

helped chess like few other sporting disciplines. The technical advancement made live broadcast of every worthy tournament possible on a single mobile application. On the go, a chess lover could follow the moves made in real time.

Online chess players have gone above 35 million on the World No. 1 site, with a record five million games played in a single day, on Sunday, April 12, 2020. The single biggest reason for this spike was the pandemic, forcing people to stay indoors or seek online activities.

In these challenging and testing times, Viswanathan Anand saw an opportunity to make a difference. He visualised a chance for the not-so-strong chess players to pay-and-play with one among India's top Grandmasters during a fun-filled session.

As it turned out, the event raised over \$6,000 and made Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweet, "Innovative effort and kind gesture by our chess players. Am sure the participants would have had an enriching

Fund-raiser: The online chess simultaneous event raised over \$6000.

PHOTO COURTESY:
CHESS.COM



Thanking everyone:

"I'm obviously very grateful to all the participants who took part today and I hope they enjoyed it. Of course, we are raising money but this was also meant to be a fun day where they get a chance to play a strong grandmaster," Viswanatha Anand said. K.V.S. GIRI

experience."

In fact, the man behind the initiative Anand, was quick to respond by tweeting, "Thank you Sir. We enjoyed the challenge, were happy to contribute."

Even after being forced to stay back in a small German town of Bad Soden after travel restrictions were imposed from mid-March following the outbreak of the pandemic, Anand did not miss out on the opportunity to rise to the occasion.

International Master Rakesh Kulkarni, Director of *chess.com* told *Sportstar*, "Anand approached us with this novel idea of a simultaneous chess for charity and got the cream of Indian chess — P. Hari Krishna, Vidit Gujrathi, B. Adhiban, K. Humpy and D. Harika — on board. No wonder, the response from the chess lovers was simply stupendous."

Revealing the details, Kulkarni said, "Essentially, players from around the world

could 'buy' a game with these top GMs. A guaranteed game against Anand was worth \$150 while a game against the other GMs was for \$25.

"Each player agreed to play on 20 boards. This was a clock-simultaneous display, meaning both players had to complete the game within a stipulated time. *Chess.com* opted for the Neo-Classical time control of 45 minutes + 45 seconds increment starting from Move One. This time-control is a classic middle ground between rapid and classical chess. The stars took white in all games, as is the case in a simultaneous display. It was open to a worldwide audience, who had a FIDE or *Chess.com* Blitz rating of 2000 or lower.

"The top stars were shown throughout the live coverage on mute. As soon as the star player finished his quota of games, they were brought into the live show. A mini-interview of about five minutes was held



with each star player.”

For the record, Anand won 18 and drew three after playing 21 opponents. Adhiban kept a clean slate winning all 18 boards. Hari, much like Anand, drew three and won the rest of 19 boards. Humpy won 17 and lost one out of 18, while Harika won 13, drew four and lost two out of 19 boards.

The job done, Anand said, “I’m obviously very grateful to all the participants who took part today and I hope they enjoyed it. Of course, we are raising money but this was also meant to be a fun day where they get a chance to play a strong grandmaster.”

Harika, too, was very pleased with the outcome of the players’ gesture. “It’s a privilege that we can play our sport from home and collect funds for a good cause. It was a much different experience than playing normal simultaneous chess, as on internet, 20 different boards pop-up and you have to keep track of it. So, it is difficult than an over-the-board simultaneous display. But the whole point was to interact with fans and collect donations.”

No doubt, in the given scenario where almost every on-field, on-court and on-arena sporting activity has come to a standstill, chess continues to grow, thanks to its internet-friendly nature.

Therefore, online charity events are likely to continue, with Anand open to the

idea of being part of more such initiatives.

On the subject of the lockdowns in several countries leading chess-loving people to turn to online activities, Erik Allebest, the CEO and co-founder of *chess.com*, makes an interesting point.

“Since the launch of *chess.com* in May of 2007, the site had a pretty steady growth pattern each year where traffic increases, then flattens out during summer for USA/Europe, before growing again. We’ve grown from 20-50 percent every year since starting out 13 years ago. This month, everything changed. Basically, we are now expecting that our next 10 years of growth could happen in the next three months.”

Interesting are the numbers in the Indian context. “Usually, the highest average was of about 1,000 players from India joining this site daily. In March, it was over 8,000 every day,” revealed Ellebest.

It is obvious that not all new online-players are going to pursue chess, as actively, once the lockdown restrictions are eased globally. But leading online chess portals are hoping to retain a small per cent of these players.

Over all, in these otherwise depressing times for all social and recreational activities, chess continues to not only gain new ground but also prompting players to make a difference. ☞

Clockwise from left-top:

International Master Rakesh Kulkarni, Grandmasters Abhijeet Gupta, P. Hari Krishna and Viswanathan Anand discuss the games during the chess.com-PM CARES Fund charity online simultaneous chess event.

PHOTO COURTESY: CHESS.COM

Rookie vs Queen: When an amateur took on Koneru Humpy

Indian grandmasters agreed to play games against chess enthusiasts to raise money for PM-CARES fund. The author faced off against Koneru Humpy.



Noble cause: Two of India's best women's chess players, GMs Koneru Humpy (left) and Dronavalli Harika, during a training session in Hyderabad. Top GMs agreed to play simultaneous multiple games with chess enthusiasts to raise money for the Prime Minister's Citizen Assurance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund. The author managed to hold on till the 50th move, giving up finally on the 51st in his game against Humpy. V. V. SUBRAMANYAM

SRIRAM SRINIVASAN

It's 6:50 pm. My match was to start 20 minutes ago. But the green-and-white board on *chess.com*'s live page shows no signs of movement. I am excited and nervous. Is there a better way to spend the evening of day 18 of the lockdown, I tell myself. For, this isn't any chess match. It's going to be me versus a grandmaster. I am no pro at chess. Not even close.

The only reason I am here is that I jumped at the chance, and so did 114 other enthusiasts, of playing a game against a top Indian grandmaster. Making the cut was the easiest part. Participants need to have a FIDE standard rating of under 2000 to get in. When we signed up a few days ago, we knew six Indian Grandmasters — Viswanathan Anand, Pentala Harikrishna,

Vidit Gujrathi, Baskaran Adhiban, Koneru Humpy, and Dronavalli Harika — have agreed to play simultaneous multiple games with a view to raise monies for the Prime Minister's Citizen Assurance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM-CARES) Fund.

I am playing Humpy, the newly crowned world women's rapid chess champion. She will be playing 17 others at the same time. The only other time I have played a GM was a few months back when the World Youth Chess Championship winner R. Praggnanandhaa visited our office, and was generous enough to accept our offer of playing against 10 of us simultaneously. He won all 10 without breaking a sweat.

Playing face to face is definitely more exciting than doing this online. As I wait for the Humpy match, I also realise, for someone whose best chess finish is No. 4 in the office tourney, I am incredibly lucky to be playing GMs back to back.

At a parallel Zoom meeting, set up by the organisers to communicate with the 115 non-GMs, we are told that the matches will start any moment. There's still time to exchange notes, though. I see one of them on chat saying, "I will just pretend I know what I am doing." Another, jokingly, says, "I will resign after the first move. Humpy won't expect that."

Meanwhile, one of them playing Harikrishna says his match has started. "He is playing A4, should I be concerned?" asks the player. The chess notation A4 tells us that the player playing white has moved the pawn in front of his dark-square rook two squares forward. Why would anyone do that, given that one of the big principles of chess is about controlling the central squares, which are on the D and E columns? Turns out the A4 move is called the Ware Opening, named after a player who was known for rare openings, and ensures the rook gets a look in unusually early in the game. World champ Magnus Carlsen is said to have used this opening in the 2012 World Blitz Championship against Teimour Radjabov. Guess what, he won.

My board will come to life anytime now. I quickly think back to the rather superficial look I had at some of Humpy's games a day ago, which revealed her liking for the D4 opening while playing white. The D4 move essentially involves moving

the pawn in front of the queen two squares up. It is said to be the second-most used first move, after E4, which while taking the pawn in front of the king to one of the key central squares, opens up pathways for the queen and one of the bishops. When black responds to white's D4 (or the Queen's Pawn Game) by moving up its own pawn on D two squares, white has a chance to effect what's called a Queen's Gambit. It can do so by taking up the pawn on C2 to C4, thereby luring the black pawn on D5 to have a go at it. When you accept the Queen's Gambit, they say, you invariably land in trouble.

Humpy is online now. The excitement of playing a GM quickly gives way to alarm. Over the last 24 hours, I have almost taken the D4 move for granted. What I see, instead, is the English Opening. The world champion has started by moving forward her pawn in front of the bishop that's to the left of the queen. That's C4 for you, another popular opening move. I, playing black, recover and respond with an E5, making sure at least after the first set of moves the central squares aren't in one person's control.

There's plenty of time to think, and that's not always a good thing. Each player gets 45 minutes. And then for every move made, 45 seconds get added to the clock. That's only fair since the GMs are playing many games all at once. I have always believed that the best chance for an underdog against a giant in any sport is in its shortest version. I have to play real good to win this one. Things seem even to my untrained eyes in the initial moves. Maybe they are. But by the 10th move, I am left with little choice but exchange queens, which in an odd way is relieving. Surely, a better deal than just losing my queen. But the bishop that takes my queen, after I take the white queen, is so strategically placed that I can't castle on either side. And I am unable to dislodge the bishop from that spot. My remaining powers are hamstrung, and the match goes downhill for me from there.

We are still equal on the big powers — two rooks each — but my king is stuck in a corner. I hold on till the 50th move, giving up finally on the 51st. I do a quick recap and figure out I was never in with a chance. And then I realise I had the same feeling when I lost to Praggnanandhaa. ☹

The author is the Strategy & Digital Editor, News Desk, The Hindu

“There's plenty of time to think, and that's not always a good thing. Each player gets 45 minutes. And then for every move made, 45 seconds get added to the clock. That's only fair since the GMs are playing many games all at once.”

When black sees stars...

by C.G.S.Narayanan

In a two-mover when the black king moves to its four diagonal squares we have the popular 'Star flight'. Similar moves in a three-mover form the 'King-star' and this star concept is extended to other pieces such as bishop and queen as well. The first problem below by Russian maestro features King-star followed by quiet continuations by the white queen. Bpd6 moves down to self-block the just vacated square in all the four variations. All in an enviable meredith setting.

Yakov Vladimirov
1-2 Pr, Moscow Tourney 2010



Mate in three moves

Key 1.Nd7! waiting

- 1...Kc6 2.Qb3 d5 3.Qb6
- 1...Kc4 2.Qb7 d5 3.Qb4
- 1...Ke6 2.Qxe4 d5 3.Qf6
(2...Kf5/Kf7 3.Qxg4/Qf6)
- 1...Ke4 2.Qb5 d5 3.Qxd3

After this straightforward example we move on to a complex problem by the the Russian trio which combines Bishop-star with black correction by the bishop. The set mates for two of the correction moves greatly enhances the quality of this composition. The self-blocks after three BB moves blend nicely in this lightweight setting.

V.Kirilov, B.Maslov & V.Chepizny
N.Ovechkin 100 MT 2011



Mate in three moves

1...Bxc6+ 2.Qxc6 B any 3.Nxf3

1...Be6 2.Nf3+ Kxc4/Ke4 3.Qxe6

Key 1.Qh2! (2.Be3+ Kc3 3.Qb2)

Now the bishop unblocks d5 square

1...BBd5 any 2.Bxf3 any 3.Qf2/Qg1

1...Be6 2.Qf4+ Kd5 3.Bxf3

1...Bxc6+ Kxc6 any 3.Qf4

1...Bxc4 2.Nxf3 Kd5/Ke4 3.Qe5/Qf4

1...Be4 2.Qf2+ Kd5 3.Qc5

The problem for solving features among other things virtual BB-star of pin-mates, interchange of white's second and third moves.

V.Kirilov and B.Maslov
I HM, Zidachi i Etyudi 2010



Mate in three moves

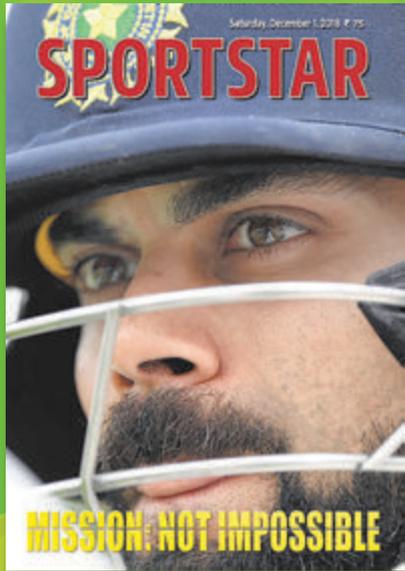
Solution to problem for solving in the article 'Mate reversal by pawn key':

Set 1...Bg7 2.Nf6 **A**; 1...Bh6 2.Ng5 **B**

Key 1.d4! waiting 1...Bg7 2.Ng5 B and

1...Bh6 2.Nf6 A. Reciprocal change of mates by pawn key

**Readers may send in their queries to
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Responsibility:

Posted in Delhi as deputy inspector general (sports) in the Central Reserve Police Force, former ace swimmer Khajan Singh, 55, appeals to the citizens to “stay indoors and support the government, health workers and police” in this battle against coronavirus.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY



A lockdown way back in 1986!

VIJAY LOKAPALLY

At the time of COVID-19, former swimmer Khajan Singh remembers the ‘sporting lockdown’ at the Eric Arnold Swim Centre that drove him to the podium at the Seoul Asian Games.

It was a self-imposed lockdown by Khajan Singh that propelled him to a podium finish at the 1986 Asian Games in Seoul when he won the silver in 200m butterfly.

“It was a lockdown indeed. This is for a national cause to fight COVID-19. What I experienced was my hard work in search of an Asian Games medal, a recognition for swimming which was so close to my heart,” Khajan told *Sportstar* as he relived one of the glorious moments in Indian sports.

Having begun his illustrious career with a 100m butterfly bronze at the 1979 Trivandrum junior nationals, Khajan took seven more years to reach the zenith of his swimming story, which began in humble surroundings of Munirka village in south Delhi. “It was a small pond near the Baba Ganganath Mandir where I developed my love for swimming,” said Khajan.

The lockdown phase for Khajan began at the training camp for the Asian Games. “I was determined that I have to win a medal at Seoul. My swimming fraternity wanted me to achieve something and the intensity of doing something took me to Newcastle (in Australia) where I trained with (coach) Eric Arnold for 10 months.”

The Eric Arnold Swim Centre became Khajan’s world and there was nothing on his

mind except swimming. “The coach had just one instruction. Lock yourself at the Swim Centre. My day started at 4 in the morning. As Eric would order ‘4.30 in water’. Train for three hours, eat, sleep, train, eat and sleep. I was confined to my room and the pool for weeks and months. There was no mobile phone, no TV, no Internet. Just myself and the pool. It was a sporting lockdown.”

As Khajan explained, “As it is, swimming is the toughest sport because all you see is water. The spectators are out of your mind because you see nothing and hear nothing once you are inside the water. It is just you and you, pushing yourself and throwing fleeting glances at the competitor in the lanes that flank you.”

When Khajan returned, he plunged into the final phase of preparation of four months. “India pulled out of the Commonwealth Games and we just had to focus on the Asian Games. I was again in a state of kind of isolation. From the Nehru Stadium to Talkatora Pool and back. It was a punishing schedule but then one had to achieve the goal too. For four months, it was again just the pool and me.”

At the Asian Games, Khajan began with a sixth-place finish in the 100m butterfly. “I was not worried because my event was the



200m. I had prepared hard and was ready even though I missed my coach since he was refused permission to travel to the Asian Games. (He was allowed to travel at the 1988 Olympics to the same city)."

Recalling the race, Khajan said, "I was in Lane 5 and just focused on Lane 4 (Yukinori Tanaka) since he was Japan No. 1 and the favourite. He actually slowed the race and I failed to notice the guy in Lane 3 (Japan No. 2 Hiroshi Sato). Sato won in what was one of the closest finishes of the swimming event at the Seoul. Half a stroke separated us all."

The winner clocked 2:01.06, Khajan 2:02.38 and the bronze medallist 2:02.99.

Khajan lamented, "If only I had my coach with me. He would have not allowed me to make the tactical mistake. But I was

happy that I could win a medal in swimming."

India's previous swimming medal had come at the 1951 Delhi Asian Games when Sachin Nag won the gold in the men's 100m freestyle.

The silver at Seoul made Khajan a hero. "It was a boost to swimming and people came to recognise the sport. I am grateful to the print media of that time for giving us wide coverage. I have preserved my Sportstar copy that carried my coverage."

Posted in Delhi as deputy inspector general (sports) in the Central Reserve Police Force, Khajan, 55, appeals to the citizens to "stay indoors and support the government, health workers and police" in this battle against coronavirus. ❧

Unforgettable

moment: Khazan Singh (left), who did India proud by winning the 200m butterfly silver with a record-breaking effort, follows gold medallist Hiroshi Sato (Japan) at the awards ceremony during the 10th Asian Games in Seoul in 1986.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

Different approach:

Jwala Gutta called for the separation of singles from doubles in the training process in India as a solution necessary at the grassroots level.

MOHAMMED YOUSUF



A proper ecosystem needed for doubles

Indian badminton star Jwala Gutta has expressed her disappointment with the state of the doubles game in India, calling its current condition as 'pathetic.'

LAVANYA LAKSHMI NARAYANAN

Decorated Indian badminton doubles player Jwala Gutta expressed her disappointment in the postponement of the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo, terming it unfair on athletes even as she called for the prioritisation of public health and welfare.

"We're forgetting that next year players turn a year older and their bodies will react differently. I think for athletes preparing hard for Tokyo, it's inevitable but a little unfair to them, because they have endured

physical and mental pressures to prepare themselves for this timeline," the 36-year-old told *Sportstar* in an Instagram Live session.

"But, of course, the circumstances are anything but conducive for the Olympics to happen, so we have to accept it. The good thing for sportspersons is that they are trained to adapt. So they may be disappointed but I think they'll be fine," she added.

The coronavirus pandemic has left

global sport in limbo, with high-profile engagements including the Tokyo Olympics now postponed. Jwala last played in 2017, but is no stranger to the paces of preparation for the marquee quadrennial event, having featured in the 2012 London Games and the 2016 Rio Olympics.

While hoping for the best for the doubles prospects in the fray for qualification, she expressed her disappointment with the state of the doubles game in India, calling its condition “pathetic.”

Jwala has been a vocal critic of national coach Pullela Gopichand, questioning the centralisation of power at his academy and holding it responsible for the decline of the doubles game in India.

“The issue is that we have given someone who knows nothing about doubles the authority on everything badminton-related in our country. We are looking to him (Gopichand) for answers, but he does not have any because he does not understand doubles,” the former national champion said.

India’s doubles players’ Olympic preparations suffered when coach Flandy Limpele resigned in March citing personal reasons. Limpele stated that doubles was not as favoured as singles in the country. He was India’s fourth foreign coach to resign without completing his tenure and the third to leave the Indian system in under a year.

As far as qualification goes, while Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty have been consistent and look set to make the cut, securing tickets to Tokyo in 2021 seems a tall order for Jwala’s former partner Ashwini Ponappa and N. Sikki Reddy.

With April 29, 2021, as the new cutoff date for Olympic qualification, Ponappa and Reddy have a tough task on their hands. Currently ranked 28th in the BWF rankings, they have to break into the top 16 to make it to Tokyo. Ranked 30th in mixed doubles with Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, Ponappa does not have it easy there either.

Need to separate doubles from singles

Jwala called for the separation of singles from doubles in the training process as a solution necessary at the grassroots level.

“The camps have to be separate. You cannot have a combined camp. You have to have a proper ecosystem for doubles. We need an administrator to do what Gopi did

for singles badminton in doubles as well,” she said.

October 14 will mark 10 years since Jwala and Ponappa won gold at the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi. She laments that while her success brought attention to doubles, especially women’s doubles, that attention hasn’t sustained and has not been matched by investment.

“In India, we have a tendency to make demigods out of people. We splurge money on them after they win. My request to the government is, if you have that kind of money, invest it in nourishing players. Make players out of that money. If they win, give them the money. Players need to know the importance of the financial aspect. Right now, it’s selective, that’s why we have only one medal hope,” she added.

She reiterated the need for equal engagement and investment drawing from her own experiences of playing in the Commonwealth Games.

“Back then, everyone would say, ‘Oh, only Saina (Nehwal) can win a medal.’ Every day we saw news articles that said only Saina can win a medal. I remember back then, Ashwini was very young and she’d say, ‘How can they say this?’ It does affect people.

“Why should we expect only one medal? Why not five or 10? If there’s equal treatment, we can win more medals in the Olympics, especially with the talent we have today,” she added.

Jwala says her academy in Hyderabad is her way of creating a space that can specifically focus on doubles game, besides also having plans to branch out into other disciplines in the long run.

Having launched the Jwala Gutta Academy of Excellence in January, the veteran player was all set to inaugurate the 55-acre premises in Gachibowli this month. However, the lockdown has put those plans on hold. “I wanted to start our summer camp and was a little disappointed. I’ve focused on the small details and it’s quite fancy to look at. I’ll release images on social media soon. There are 14 courts and I’ve played here and I enjoyed it, so I think others will too,” she said.

Jwala says the idea behind the academy came from breaking the very centralisation of power she has opposed.

“I got messages like ‘Didi, I am not motivated to play any more’ and ‘Speak up for us.’ The point is, I cannot if I do not have

“
Back then, everyone would say, ‘Oh, only Saina (Nehwal) can win a medal.’ Every day we saw news articles that said only Saina can win a medal. I remember back then, Ashwini was very young and she’d say, ‘How can they say this?’ It does affect people.





Two to tango: Jwala Gutta and Ashwini Ponappa with the doubles gold they won at the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi. R. RAGU

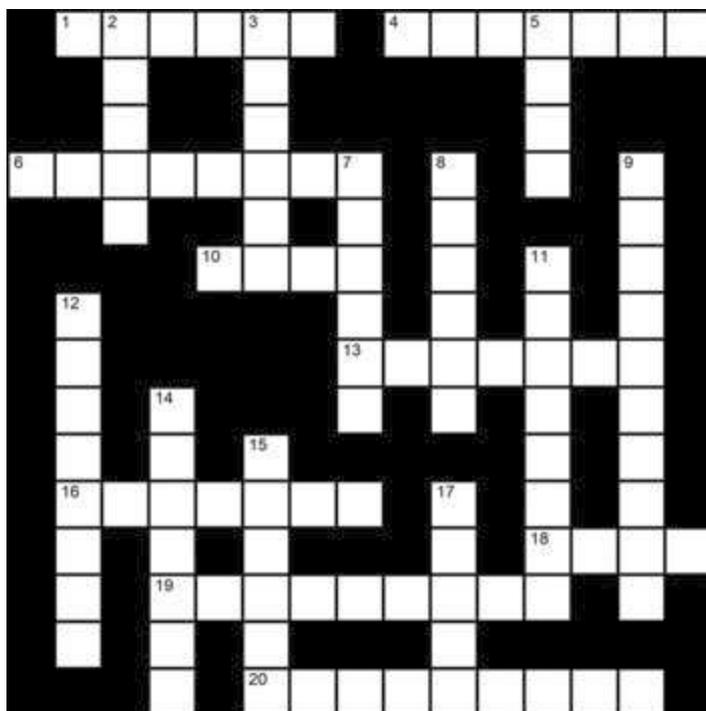
a stadium or a facility. The question was: If not his (Gopichand's) academy in Hyderabad, what's the other option? I didn't get any government support and I didn't want to wait any more. We sold one of our houses and set it up," she added.

Jwala also extended support to world champion P. V. Sindhu, who had a rather ordinary 2019 save the world title win.

"When Sindhu won the World Championship last year, she also had to follow that

with many functions and felicitations and other public appearances. She can't avoid it because if she does, she becomes controversial.

"Even attending this gets people talking on different terms. If I was in her place, I would think of myself and what's good for my career. I would have taken the risk of not obligating myself and skip these engagements. However, I don't know her situation, so that's up to her," she said. ☞



SOLUTION TO LAST FORTNIGHT'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1 '281 and Beyond' is about him. (6)
- 4 In the top-100 list, No. 1 is Carlsen, No. 3 is Ding. No. 2 is ? (7)
- 6 Vice-captain of Barcelona and Spain football teams. (8)
- 10 'The greatest driver never to win the World Championship.' (4)
- 13 Mid-fielder, for many years at Barcelona, now at Vissel Kobe. (7)
- 16 *But Seriously* is his autobiography. (7)
- 18 The basketball team from Brooklyn. (4)
- 19 Only player with a batting average of less than 20 to hit a

Test double hundred. (9)

20 Highest individual run-scorer in the 1992 World Cup final. (5,4)

DOWN

- 2 'Sacker,' Dennis Leslie ... (5)
- 3 Sergio Leonel ... del Castillo. (6)
- 5 Aleksander Ceferin is its president. (1,1,1,1)
- 7 Indian with two individual Olympic medals. (6)
- 8 A score of 1-under par means this: a ... (6)
- 9 The Kings in the NBA are from here. (10)
- 11 Infamously, Lever used this to shine the ball. (8)

12 Sri Lanka's coach when it won the 1996 World Cup. (8)

14 Dempo has won this competition thrice. (1-6)

15 His technique invariably resulted in a line of cars behind him, or the "... Train.' (6)

17 The country which was supposed to host the 1940 Olympics. (5)

My Chuni da

Chuni Goswami received accolades and recognition from every possible platform. But the main accolade came from the common man on the road. His popularity in the days before television coverage was miraculous in the extreme.

RAJU MUKHERJI

He seemed born to blend. Unwittingly, he bridged the divide between Bangal (East Bengalee) and Ghoti (West Bengalee) in an exemplary manner. His presence led to a rapport between the cricketers and footballers of Bengal. He possessed a magical mass appeal that gave him unprecedented popularity among the populace. His popularity even in the non-television era of his time would have dwarfed many a current cinema star.

Born and brought up in the liberated Murapara Zamindari (now in Bangladesh), my maternal link, where he was preceded by Sarojini Naidu, Bhanu Bandyopadhyay and Nripati Chattopadhyay, the young Chuni utilised his sports talents in the path of reconciliation of differences between the two artificially divided parts of Bengal.

Destiny too willed so. While Chuni was showing off his football skills to his Tirthapati Institution friends at Deshapriya Park, a distant pair of eyes watched with awe and wonder. The man walked across, asked him for his father's address, and by evening was knocking at the door. The elder Goswami instantly recognised the boxer-footballer Bolai Chatterjee and was only too happy to allow his son to be at the Mohun Bagan ground the following morning for a practice session. As the cliché goes, the rest is history.

Former players were wide-eyed in amazement to see the talent exhibited by the child prodigy. Within the course of the year, Chuni was the shining star of club and state teams. By 1958, at the age of 20, he was scoring goals for India.



In awe: To my generation, Chuni Goswami was all glamour and skill. Every movement of his we would try to copy – the way he walked, the way he spoke, the way he smiled, writes the author.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

Under Syed Rahim's coaching, Chuni flowered beside the magnificent duo of P. K. Banerjee and Tulsidas Balaram and held India's flag high at the 1960 Rome Olympics. He went a step further at the 1962 Jakarta Asian Games when India won the gold under his leadership. This was Indian football's most successful era, when men of the calibre of Arun Ghosh, Jarnail Singh, Peter Thangaraj, Simon Sunder Raj, Mario Kempiah and Yousuf Khan, among a host of others, dominated the Asian football scenario. Apart from PK and Balaram, the ever-green glamour of CG stood out in the glittering panorama.

Chuni Goswami led India in a pre-Olympic qualifying match at Calcutta's Rabindra Sarobar Stadium in 1964. As a 14-year-old enthusiast, I remember attending the one-month camp every single day as a spectator. Unfortunately, the brilliant Rahim was replaced by an English coach named Wright. Chuni da scored the lone goal as India lost 1-3 to Iran with my favourite defender Arun Ghosh denying the opposition a dozen goals. Never again was India good enough to qualify for Olympic football.

A lack of guidance held Chuni back from



accepting a foreign assignment with Tottenham Hotspur in his heydays of the 1960s. This was a typical scenario in our football context. While cricketers were going abroad and taking up assignments in the English cricket leagues, our football players never received any encouragement from our "frog in the well" administrators, who were content with their clubs' politics, personal prominence and media flatterers. Thankfully, Chuni Goswami had the talent to seek other avenues.

He was deeply attached to cricket since his school days. He represented Monohar Pukur Milan Samity in cricket while a student at Ashutosh College. He also represented Calcutta University in cricket while doing wonders and winning championships on the football ground.

Chuni made his Ranji Trophy debut under the strangest of circumstances. At the peak of his football career, he was selected to play against M. L. Jaisimha's Hyderabad in the Ranji Trophy quarterfinals. The year was 1962-63, the season when four West Indies fast bowlers came to India. Roy Gilchrist, the fearsome fast bowler, held little terror for the debutant as Chuni most courageously gave support to his skipper Pankaj Roy, who scored two hundreds in the match. Thereafter, Chuni played very irregularly for Bengal as he was busy with his football commitments for club, state and country.

In the Ranji final against Bombay in 1968-69, Chuni played two glorious knocks of 96 and 84, displaying his leanings for cross-batted strokes, particularly the sweep. His fantastic speed between wickets

The victorious Indian team from the 1962 Jakarta Asian Games. Chuni Goswami is standing fourth from right. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

is still in the memory of people who have seen him bat. Chuni da's lone first-class century came against Bihar at Jamadoba in 1971-72 when he promoted himself to bat at No. 3.

The highlight of Chuni's cricket life was of course the fantastic victory of the combined Central-East Zone team under Hanumant Singh that inflicted an innings defeat on the visiting 1967 West Indies team at Indore. Chuni da took five and three wickets in each innings and in tandem with Subroto Guha he had the powerful Caribbeans on the mat. Skipper Wesley Hall top-edged a high skier towards mid-wicket. Goswami ran nearly 30 yards from mid-on and lunged forward to hold on to the ball one-handed, and then actually went on a victory lap around the ground! Skipper Hanumant Singh's cultured voice, "Chuni, we are not playing football," was drowned out by the thousands who had come to see their soccer hero playing cricket. That was the kind of popularity and affection he enjoyed.

In 1971-72, the Bengal cricket captaincy crown was on his head and he led Bengal to the final. The following year — my debut season — he led Bengal for the last time and announced his retirement. This idea of when to call it a day is a splendid example that he has set for others. At 34, Chuni realised another few years of cricket would be a waste of time as he would be curtailing the prospect of a deserving youngster. He had left international football at 26 and now first-class cricket at 34. A master-stroke: a great lesson for most sportsmen.

If Subimal was his first name, surely his



middle name was Flamboyance. Both names were destined to stay in the background. Glamour and Chuni Goswami became synonymous. Reeking of glamour, Goswami was a revelation in a world of introvert Indian sportsmen. Most of our champion sportsmen in the pre-1960s were quiet, confident men who avoided controversies and publicity. Not so Goswami. He revelled in his extrovert form. He loved crowds, companionship and constant media coverage.

To my generation of sports lovers, Chuni Goswami was a magical name. Handsome of bearing, glamorous of manner, the man had a distinct individuality. Smiling, waving, chatting — he seemed to be in perpetual motion. An extrovert to the extreme, he brought the Bengal cricketers out of their shells. With Chuni *da* as captain, the Bengal team learnt to take on the opposition eyeball to eyeball. Within the typical easygoing exterior of his Bengal teammates, he planted a tough approach to the job, which obviously did wonders for the state in the future. This was a distinct contribution of his.

Goswami seemed destined to bond people. Following Independence and Partition, the differences between the Padma migrants and the Bhagirathi residents were distinct and definite. Hilsa and Chingri. Bangal and Ghoti. In such a precarious scenario emerged a young lad with eastern Bengal tastes and lingo to become the hero

In recognition: Chuni Goswami receives the Arjuna Award from President Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and (facing page) the Padma Shri from President Giani Zail Singh, respectively. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

of the western Bengal *bhadrolok*. Without meaning to do so, his approach and actions actually assisted in bridging the yawning chasm between two extremely strong loyalties. So popular was he that I remember praying with all earnestness: Let Chuni Goswami do well but East Bengal win! I am sure there were many school boys of the 1960s with similar prayers.

A long association of about 60 years has come to an end. Our childhood hero is no more. Chuni *da* has left the *maidan* for the *Elysian Fields*.

The last time I met him was on his 82nd birthday at his Jodhpur Park residence on 15 January. The Philatelic Bureau had issued a stamp in his honour that day. The ever-jovial face was in distinct discomfort. To enliven him, I recounted own glorious days to him — his magnificent contributions, his unique brand of witticisms. A tear or two welled up as he smiled his enjoyment. But no words emanated from the brilliant raconteur. A sad sight; sadder still to relate. Really unfortunate.

For an extrovert like Subimal Goswami, universally popular as Chuni, to be sofa-tied and tongue-tied was indeed a dungeon-like existence. Boudi (sister-in-law) Bubl, Chuni *da*'s wife, and his endearing grandson gave him the best companionship possible, but the inevitable was near at hand. Though extremely saddening, perhaps his passing away was, in a sense, a blessing in disguise. No one would have liked to see his ever-cheerful face in that posture.

My elder brother Deb was a regular opener for Bengal and Mohun Bagan in the early 1960s and so I was quite a frequent visitor to those matches. I saw Chuni *da* often enough and was thrilled to get his cheery smiles. Once he offered me and my friend Bapi toast and tea at the Mohun Bagan canteen when we were waiting for a lift from Deb. That year, I also attended his wedding reception as the guest of his elder brother Manik *da*, who played club cricket with me at Milan Samity at the time.

However, the first genuine meeting with Chuni *da* was in December 1967 when I attended the Mohun Bagan nets after writing my final school exams. With him and his very witty elder brother Manik *da* around, the net sessions were full of laughter and humour, repartee and wisecracks. Chuni *da* warmed me up with, "Oh! No, another

Mukherji. Oh! No, another with specs." I was too stunned to think of a reply but realised that I had gained acceptance at the Bagan household.

Never before I had met anyone with his peculiar brand of speech and humour. However, I realised he had a funny peculiar way of speaking: a statement in the form of a query. He had a fantastic sense of humour. He would keep us in splits.

"This pitch is a pace bowler's graveyard." Before the star pace bowler could take another breath, the Bengal captain replied, "Please take rest today. I need soldiers who will fight for his team."

That was typical straightforward Chuni Goswami repartee. He had no time for excuses, vague comments or for the soft-hearted. He led from the front and expected everyone to follow. Chuni *da* did not believe in unnecessary theories. He always maintained that if you cannot motivate yourself, no one can motivate you. Absolutely to the point!

Once he admonished a prominent batter who complained about the size of the sight screen after being dismissed, "Watch the ball and forget the sight screen. Did you get sight screens in school, college and roadside matches?" He gave cent percent and more to the cause and expected others to do so.

Chuni *da* received accolades and recognition from every possible platform. The Arjuna Award was followed by the Padma Shri. A whole lot of honorary posts were created for him. Influential people queued up to shake his hands and be photographed.

But the main accolade came from the common man on the road. His popularity in the days before television coverage was miraculous in the extreme. People stopped their cars to wish him. People at airports and railway stations stared at him and waved. Once our train was held up for more than two minutes at Bardhaman till Chuni *da* came to the door of his coach to wave to the multitude waiting to catch a glimpse of the man they had only heard of and read about.

To my generation, Chuni Goswami was all glamour and skill. Every movement of his we would try to copy — the way he walked, the way he spoke, the way he smiled. Our childhood hero was far ahead of the celluloid stars in sheer popular mass appeal. Always impeccably dressed, he spoke in an easy manner, mixed easily and genuinely enjoyed companionship.



He possessed a very rare sense of timing. He knew what to do and when. He knew when to retire just as he knew when to take up a new assignment. He knew his abilities just as he knew his limitations. His life has been a shining example to many. He never wanted to be a teacher, but his life was a document of teaching.

Not only was Chuni *da* my first Bengal captain, he was also the man who released my first book *Cricket in India: Origin and Heroes* in 2004. Ten years later, he penned a fabulous foreword to my second book, *Eden Gardens: Legend and Romance*. About three years ago, in a wistful mood one evening, Chuni *da* said, "I want you to write my obituary."

"*Ki bolchen ta ki* (What are you saying?)" I protested.

In a serious vein, he just added, "I am your captain. I am your senior. I like the way you write."

His companionship was full of humour and nostalgia; prawn and beer. I am indeed blessed to have had him as my captain. ☞

Raju Mukherji, who played 50 first-class matches for Bengal, has worn many hats in his career. He has also been a coach, selector and match referee, and is the author of the books Cricket in India: Origin and Heroes and Eden Gardens: Legend and Romance.

This article was first published on Mukherji's personal blog.

He has a career after football

India captain Sunil Chhetri jives to 'Dance monkey,' makes *laddus* and settles the Messi vs Ronaldo debate during the coronavirus lockdown.



SHYAM VASUDEVAN

“I’m fast and clean. I might have a living after football in dishwashing, I’m that good!” Now, when’s the last time you’ve heard someone who’s career stats are comparable with the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi say something like that? Enter Indian football captain, Sunil Chhetri.

Having terrorised defenders for a living, Chhetri has picked up a rather invaluable skill over the coronavirus-induced lockdown: dishwashing. “I have been assigned the task of dishwashing at home and I have become really good over the lockdown,” he says with a tinge of pride in his voice. From lifting many a cup on the football pitch to scrubbing cups clean by the kitchen sink, he seems to have done it all.

The Indian national team captain is at home with his wife at their Bengaluru residence. “I am trying to be of as much as help as I can to my wife with the household chores. I help with cleaning, dusting and making the bed. The other day I cleaned all three bathrooms; it took me almost three hours,” he said in earnest.

India’s most-capped footballer has spent considerable time in the kitchen and has tried his luck at the culinary arts, too. “I am a horrible cook, but I try to make small things like snacks and tea. I saw some vegan recipes on YouTube and tried to make oats *laddus* the other day and I also made some chia pudding. They came out pretty well!”



The Bengaluru FC skipper, who is well-known for his uncompromising workout regime and strict diet, endured a bit of a slump heading into the lockdown. “We were knocked out of the Indian

Super League on February 8 and till March 10 I did not do any physical activity. I needed the rest because I took a PRP (platelet-rich plasma) injection on my hamstrings. It was long due and I was advised two weeks of rest.

“The first weeks were bad; I was sleeping late and eating whatever I wanted to. I devoured garlic *naans*, pizzas and burgers. I think it was the first time I had so many cheat meals. I had gained almost 2-3kg in just

Learning new skills: Sunil Chhetri spends considerable time in the kitchen and the chia pudding is proof of his credentials as a budding chef. AFP & SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Among the best: With 72 international goals, Sunil Chhetri is the second-highest active international goal-scorer, sandwiched between Cristiano Ronaldo (right) in first spot and Lionel Messi in third. GETTY IMAGES

about a month,” he said. “Thankfully, reality hit me. It’s been almost two weeks now and now I’m back on track. I work out six days a week and take complete rest on one day. I’ve been focusing on band work, cardio, stretching and core workouts at home now,” he added.

Chhetri also revealed that his go-to tune during a workout is the raging sensation ‘Dance monkey’ by Australian artist Tones and I. “I play it when I work out. I used to call it ‘Monkey dance,’ but my wife corrected me and said it’s called ‘Dance monkey,’” the 35-year-old said sheepishly.

Much like all of us, Chhetri too has succumbed to binge-watching. Having binged on the new *Money Heist* series, he said he likes to juggle genres.

“One thing I’ve realised is if you stick to one genre, it gets monotonous and you don’t learn anything new. So I try to juggle around. I watched a few lovely videos about cosmos stuff. I learnt a few things about our solar system, this is what excites me. It is very interesting, give it a shot and you will be mesmerised,” he said.

While his passion for the solar system is evident from his tone, there’s another particular set of videos that keep him going — highlights featuring Messi.

“In fact, even before this interview, I was stretching and was watching a Messi video. And that really lifts me up. If anyone in the world is sad, just put on Messi

video and he’ll be happy,” he said.

“The kinds of goals he scores, his dribbles, his nutmegs, his understanding of the game, his touches are unbelievable. I don’t think you can teach anyone that, you know — you can’t teach someone to dribble five players in your own box. The coach will probably never play you again (if you did that)! But then you watch Messi dribbling five players his own box... He’s just different,” Chhetri said.

With a stunning 72 international goals to his name, Chhetri is the second-highest active international goal-scorer, sandwiched between Ronaldo in first spot and Messi in third.

When asked who he thinks is a more complete footballer, Chhetri says: “If you say that, then I will say Ronaldo. I mean, it’s close. The moment you say complete, it’s about height, heading ability, shooting with both feet, coming back to defend corners also — so, in that aspect, yes, Ronaldo.

“But generally, as a player, there’s no comparison between Messi and anyone else. He’s just a level up — he’s completely different. If you ask me who affects the game more, it has to be Messi. The build-up play, the passes, the assists, and the understanding. The value of him in Barcelona or Argentina gives him a little edge over Ronaldo. I think he’s the best player.”



Training buddies in Bengaluru

After finishing the IWL 2020, India players Aditi Chauhan and Loitongbam Ashalata Devi planned a stay for two-three weeks in Bengaluru to work on their fitness.

MANASI PATHAK

Indian national team players Aditi Chauhan and Loitongbam Ashalata Devi have turned training buddies in Bengaluru amid the nationwide coronavirus lockdown. After finishing the Indian Women's League (IWL) 2020 season, in which goalkeeper Aditi lifted the trophy with Gokulam Kerala, the duo planned a stay of two-

three weeks in Bengaluru to work on their fitness. Since March 10, Aditi and Ashalata have been training with Dipali Pandey, a physiotherapist whom they had worked with in the national team setup. Although the two had planned to train at Dipali's Peak Performance sports rehab clinic only for a few weeks, they had been forced to extend their stay because of the lockdown.

Indoor training becomes routine

Staying in a room across from their trainer's apartment, Aditi has been focusing on her rehab as she recovers from a minor ankle injury, while Ashalata has been working on her strength and conditioning.

"For now, we are focusing on basic overall fitness and thus following the same workout routine," Aditi said. "Initially, we would have two sessions: a core session of a half hour in the morning, followed by a strength and conditioning session of 1-1.5 hours in the evening, focusing on weight training, strength and agility."

"We did this for two-three weeks, but since last week we have cut it short to one session per day. Prior to the sessions, we spend close to 30-45 minutes on our warm-up and mobility drills," she added.

Ashalata and Aditi are training indoors, with some sessions carried out on the terrace of their place of stay. In the absence of access to gyms, Aditi believes they are "using time effectively with limited resources."

Some learning, some unwinding

Apart from taking care of her physical well-being, Aditi is keeping her mind busy, re-reading tennis ace Rafael Nadal's autobiography *Rafa: My Story*. In addition to this, Aditi has taken up an online course.

"I am doing an online entrepreneurship course for my academy SheKicks FA," she said. "I have studied sports management but I don't have a business background. Since I have stepped into this industry, I want to acquire the right knowledge and skill set for running it."

Based in New Delhi, SheKicks FA is a female-centric football academy founded by Aditi. When not training, cleaning the house or cooking meals, Aditi and Ashalata sit down for movies or a few episodes of Web series. Currently, they are excited about the second season of Amazon Prime's *Four More Shots Please!* Ashalata also occasionally indulges in Manipuri movies.

Aditi and Asha have been staying to-



gether for over a month now. But it was not so long ago that they were pitted against each other. In February, Ashalata's Sethu FC played Aditi's Gokulam Kerala in the semifinals. Ashalata, who captained 2019 champion Sethu, recalled the 3-0 loss as they shared a laugh together on the telephonic interaction.

"Of course, the loss felt a bit bad," Ashalata said. "A bit?" Aditi questioned as she added, "She didn't talk to me then!"

Explaining the reason for the side's exit, Asha elaborated: "My team had a lot of young players, there were barely three to four senior team players. The younger players were participants of the under-17 Khelo India tournament. I did have some trouble managing the team and knew that having big expectations wouldn't be possible, but the young girls put in a lot of effort to reach the semifinals."

Women's football at risk

Women footballers in India were fortunate to play out the IWL season before the

coronavirus pandemic brought the world to a standstill.

But globally, such was not the fate of woman athletes as leagues and events were cancelled or postponed.

The pandemic, according to global players union FIFPro, presents "an almost existential threat" to women's football in particular.

Highlighting the financial implications of the suspension, FIFPro warns that women's football — despite recent growth — is particularly vulnerable, with less-established professional leagues, lower salaries and less investment meaning "the fragility of the women's football ecosystem is exposed by the current situation."

Aditi believes the women's game is likely to bear the brunt of the fallout. "Women's football globally could be adversely affected financially. The stride that we had made in the interest and awareness of the women's game could take a hit. We might have to go back a few steps and start the journey again." ❧

Training drills: Aditi Chauhan has been focusing on her rehab as she recovers from a minor ankle injury, while Ashalata Devi (facing page) has been working on her strength and conditioning.

@ASHALATADEVIOFFICIAL /INSTAGRAM &

@ADITICHAUHAN OFFICIAL/INSTAGRAM

FITNESSWISE

RAMJI
SRINIVASAN



Alternative workout: Learning a new type of regime like Pilates can prevent boredom and also enhance the desired skill components.
REUTERS



Coronavirus lockdown: Tech for training

As gyms are shut, we need to think out of the box to evaluate our current fitness levels using what is available, from pillows to books to water-filled buckets.

In the world of sport, technology has played a huge part in tracking fitness and devising cutting-edge equipment. We are going to look at how it can help you keep up the level of fitness in the time of the coronavirus lockdown.

Smart watches and fitness apps

Science has grown so much that most people use smartphones, smart watches and shoes with microchips. There are numerous fitness apps for your convenience.

Choose the app that is pertinent to your goals and needs. The apps can give you feedback on various parameters like calories burnt, number of steps taken, workload management, distance covered, number of reps, rate of perceived exertion, timers and many more. They also support live video-conferencing with the personal trainers, physios, coaches and other experts. This enables each athlete to work on the specifics for skills and fitness.

The information collected can be stored on a computer or cloud for any-time access. A daily workout tracker on all aspects of fitness can be modified based on individual needs. Target nudges, sleep patterns, a per-

formance scale of 1-10 and customised programmes can be activated.

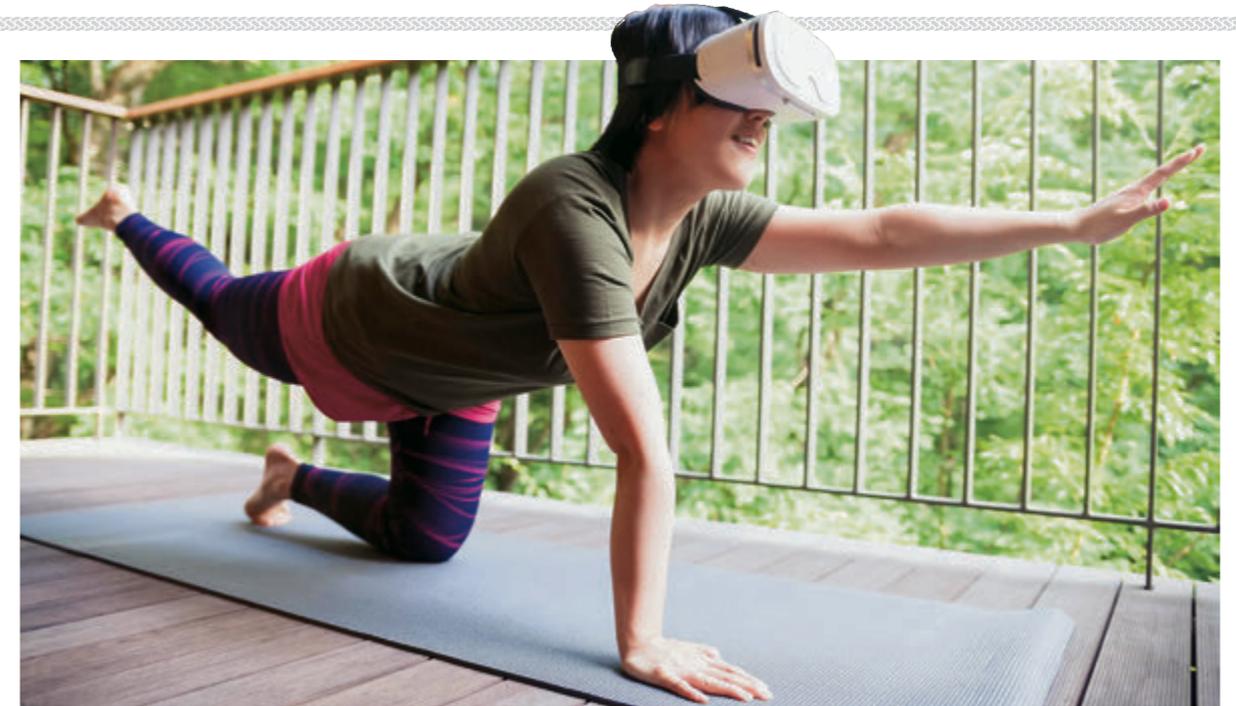
Specialised wearables offer even more advance data collection during the physical activities. These include global positioning, balance, torque, acceleration, deceleration, force, power, body chemistry, sweat analysis and live muscle fatigue percentage for each muscle group.

Strength calculators are also available through specialised algorithms to calibrate the total weight lifted or 1RM (one rep max) calculations and more.

A specialised workout log can track not only fitness, but also well-being from emotional levels to sleep patterns. There are various questions along with answers available to be filled. This way, an athlete is aware of what needs to be looked into on a daily basis.

There are many advanced tools available in the market for elite and top-end athletes that come with a huge cost due to the research and development in inferring precise data collection.

As gyms are shut, we need to think out of the box to evaluate our current fitness levels. So using what is available from pillows to books to water-filled buckets or cans, et cer-



era, can be used as a resistance tool for strength, circuits, hybrid or balance and stability work. A diet regime app has many functions, including designing your diet according to your calorie burn as well as body fat percentage goals.

The interactive applications available on the Web or on a smartphone will help in assessing fitness, injury prevention, postural assessment, diet regimes, recovery and planning. One has to choose the right app.

Learn new regimes

Learning a new type of regime like yoga, Pilates, Gyrotonic, Gyrokinesis, meditation and Tai Chi and more can prevent boredom and also enhance the desired skill components in their respective fields. It's been proven that cross-training enhances performance and injury prevention. Variety is the spice of life. Each one can design a programme according to their requirements for the day. It will help the brain think differently. Pilates and Gyrotonic are based on the principles of yoga. They help develop top-level balance, stability, breathing, centring techniques, bracing techniques, wrapping techniques and also functional patterns for each sport.

Yoga is a proven tool for top sports personalities to develop the connect between mental and physical preparedness. Yoga has to be seen holistically as a great tool for performance.

Body weight exercises are good, but they

have a tendency to plateau after a while. One can work on an isometric exercise regime for various joints.

Webinars and podcasts for mental conditioning

This is the right time to work on various aspects on mental conditioning. Listen to experts and follow a process to boost mental strength. Loads of new gadgets can be applied like neuro trackers, electroencephalograms, NeuroCom, et cetera, to get bio feedback and neuro feedback data. Brain wave function can infer a huge amount of data on an athlete's mental make-up during various situations. With a qualified sports psychologist, one can decipher the information. Each athlete can be mapped accordingly into a certain domain.

Video conferences

Motivational speakers can also play a part in keeping the athletes on track via video conferences.

Virtual reality

Playing a game during this time is next to impossible, but perfect practice makes you a perfect player. Virtual reality is an option to simulate real-time conditions to train and collect data. It helps in better strategic planning. It also improves technique and increases patience.

VR is catching up fast as a relaxation tool for sportspersons.

Through the lens: Virtual reality is catching up fast as a relaxation tool for sportspersons.
GETTY IMAGES



FIH extends Pro League by one year

The second season of the Hockey Pro League will now continue till June 2021 although when it will actually resume is still uncertain.

The complete lockdown of sports activities across the world due to COVID-19 pandemic has forced the International Hockey Federation (FIH) to stretch the competition into next year, it said in a communique.

The Pro League was originally scheduled to be held from January to June 2020 in the run-up to the Tokyo Olympics but only one-third of the games were completed till early March before the health crisis cut short all activities.

While Australia was the first to call off its visits to Europe, the league itself was postponed till April 15 before extending subsequently to May 17. Earlier, New Zealand called off its scheduled trip to India in May.

“Taking into account both the latest recommendations from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the postponement of the Tokyo Olympic Games, it was agreed that extending the event into the middle of 2021 was the appropriate course of action, giving the best possible chance for the competition to be completed whilst enabling FIH and all NAs (national associations) to deliver on broadcast and commercial partner agreements,” the FIH said.

■ UTHRA GANESAN



Viswanathan Anand named ambassador for WWF India

Five-time world chess champion Viswanathan Anand is the new Ambassador for World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) India’s Environment Education programme.

Commenting on his association with WWF India, Anand said, “Our children deserve a better, greener and more sustainable world than the one we are living in today and it is our responsibility as parents and elders to show them the way. I am very excited and happy to join WWF India and work together with them to help more and more children and youth know about the need to protect our natural world. I look forward to an enriching and progressive association with WWF India.”

Presently, the Environment Education programme reaches out to school children, youth and citizens across the country. It aims to create a generation of critical thinkers, problem solvers and environmentally-conscious individuals. The programme also impacts over five million children across 2,000 schools.

■ TEAM SPORTSTAR



AIBA keen to bring back headgear for male boxers

Noticing the growing concern among support staff about head injuries to boxers, the International Boxing Association (AIBA) is deliberating on bringing back headgear for male amateur boxers.

Dr Karanjeet Singh, who represented the Asian Boxing Confederation in an inter-continental medical commission meeting of the AIBA in Laussane, felt bringing back headgear would be a wise decision.

“Over the last six-seven years, the number of cuts on the head and face has increased due to the absence of headgear. The agenda of the meeting was to find medical reasons to reinstate headgear and reduce concussion and cuts on the face,” Karanjeet told *Sportstar*.

“We presented some facts which we have noted here in India. For example, in the boxing league there were 15 percent injuries in close to 100 bouts (for men) while there was no injury in the national camp, where we had about 500 bouts in 31 sparring sessions from November 15 to March 18 in Patiala. The use of headgear is compulsory during training and trials. Even professional boxers wear headgear during training. The other point is without the headgear, incidents of head-butting have increased. It inflicts serious injuries on boxers.”

■ Y. B. SARANGI



Clarke asks coaches not to follow any ideas blindly

India’s foreign table tennis coach Brett Clarke underscored the importance of the banana flick stroke.

Using the videos of India’s Harmeet Desai and world’s top player Fan Zhendong to make his point, the Australian said if the coaches are not teaching the flick in their academies or clubs, they are falling behind on international trends. “It is a must,” he said in a video conference to Sports Authority of India coaches.

Clarke asked the coaches not to follow any ideas blindly. “It’s their responsibility to know the truth. They have to do their own research and do what is appropriate for their players,” the Olympian said.

Hinting at the need to have a longer backswing for powerful strokes, Clarke showed the videos of Germany’s Timo Boll and China’s (the world’s) top three players Fan Zhendong, Xu Xin and Ma Long. “If the top three players have a bigger backswing there must be some truth in it. But I leave it to coaches to decide,” he said.

■ K. KEERTHIVASAN



Helping hand: With no sports happening around the world, a sports complex in national capital New Delhi has been turned into a shelter for daily wage labourers and homeless people as they maintain social distancing and sit in a line to collect food. The Indian government had extended the nationwide lockdown to slow down the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). REUTERS

Sport and nostalgia are close mates

We are in crisis. Sport will not find a vaccine. But it will keep us sane till one is developed.

SURESH MENON

Someone was bound to ask the question sooner or later. How can you write on sport, he asked, when people are dying, when economies are crumbling and civilisation as we know it is under threat? We are in crisis and you worry about whether he should have played back to the ball or stretched forward?

It is a fair question even if there is no sporting event actually taking place. The short answer to the importance of sport during normal times that helps us deal with the difficult times was provided by former West Indies wicketkeeper Deryck Murray, now member of the Commonwealth Advisory Board on Sports Membership.

He said, "During my time keeping wickets in some very talented West Indies teams, I saw the effectiveness of each member of the team playing their individual roles to achieve a collective goal. And as the world grapples with its response to the pandemic, one very important principle that must guide our strategies is the power of teamwork.

"So, whether your role is on the frontlines of the health system, helping to keep essential services running, or to maintain social distancing, your contributions are an invaluable part of an essential collective effort. This also applies to the collaboration of sectors. In this way, I see sport as a vital team member in the collective assault on coronavirus."

This is useful to remember. Sport and writing about it have a direct link to life.

But there's more. In times of crisis, when uncertainty rules, when information is limited while professionals try to put together a cogent picture, sport connects us with the certainty we knew and the information that is available at the touch of a computer key.

While those qualified to do so look into the future, the rest of us take refuge in the past, in what evokes memories of a time when we shared in something outside ourselves. Sport is a way of transcending the fear that envelops the world now.

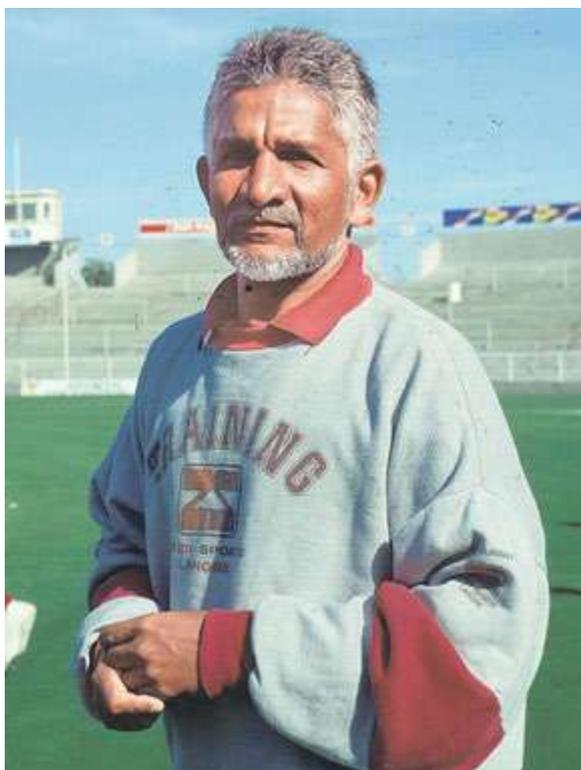
We focus on the minutiae of competitions past, on the personalities who thrilled us, on the statistics we can still recall without effort in order that we don't fall into a depression about the here and now. And it's not just the sport, but the related memories they give rise to.

Remember when Sachin Tendulkar made a century just after you had finished your school exams? Remember that Messi goal you managed to sneak away and watch on your wedding day? You may not remember who gave you what as a present but you will always remember that goal that day. Sport is woven into the fabric of our lives.

Which is why it is not impolite or out of place to speak or watch or read

about sport in dark times. Sport and nostalgia are close mates, travelling together, each sharpening the outlines of the other.

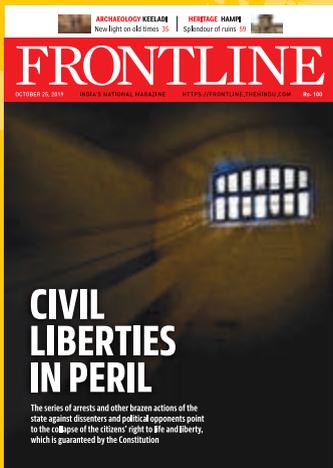
We are in crisis. Sport will not find a vaccine. But it will keep us sane till one is developed. ❧



Point to ponder: Former West Indies wicketkeeper Deryck Murray, now member of the Commonwealth Advisory Board on Sports Membership, said, "During my time keeping wickets in some very talented West Indies teams, I saw the effectiveness of each member of the team playing their individual roles to achieve a collective goal. And as the world grapples with its response to the pandemic, one very important principle that must guide our strategies is the power of teamwork." THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY



THE HINDU GROUP



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