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SPORTSTAR



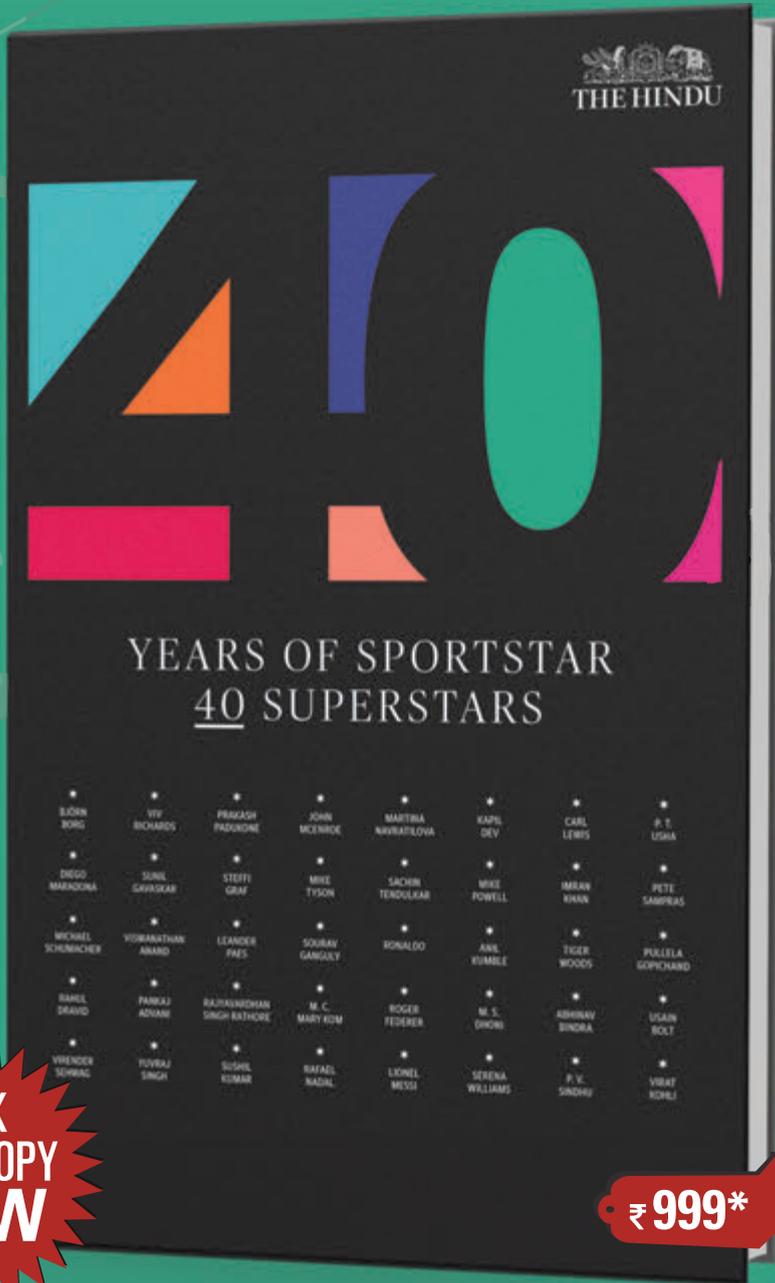
MISSION RESTART

A SPECIAL PUBLICATION FROM

SPORTSTAR

Roger Federer is poetry in motion, he makes it look so simple,
writes *Sachin Tendulkar*

Sachin Tendulkar and other Super Writers pay tribute to 40 Superstars



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20 In death, Balbir Singh took away a large chunk of hockey history, documented only in his mind. He was a kind soul who served Indian hockey with distinction and remained its most loyal supporter.



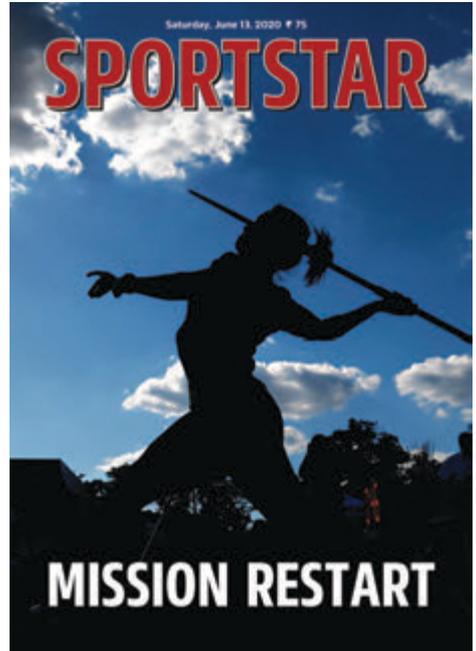
30 Three of India's famous quartet of spinners reached personal milestones — they recently celebrated landmark birthdays — and former team-mate Sunil Gavaskar has a lot to say about them.



35 In a chat with Sportstar, former South African all-rounder Lance Klusener speaks about the coronavirus pandemic, the proposed ban on the use of saliva by bowlers and his idol Clive Rice, among other things.



50 "...I don't want to have this kind of a break ever again," says Asian Games gold medal-winning heptathlete Swapna Barman, who is left without any equipment or gear, to continue training.



6 The ministry of home affairs has given go-ahead to the reopening of sports stadiums without spectators, allowing elite athletes to resume their practice and workouts. *Sportstar* speaks to top athletes to find out their views on resumption of outdoor training.

ALSO READ ...

10 Getting back to cricket... when and how?

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Design: R. Ravikannan

Cover image: Reuters

Poster: Jadon Sancho (Getty Images)

(Pages 59-66)



I see those of you who are staying silent, some of you the biggest stars yet you stay silent in the midst of injustice. Not a sign from anybody in my industry which of course is a white-dominated sport.

- Six-time world champion Lewis Hamilton on Instagram calling out Formula One over its silence amid "injustice" following the death of George Floyd, an African-American man who died in Minneapolis after a police officer knelt on his neck during an arrest on May 25.

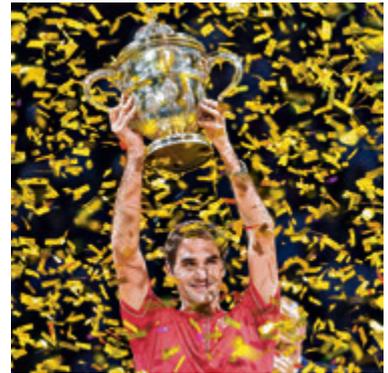


I've always been one to want a fair contest between bat and ball, so if that's taken away, even as a batter I don't think that's great. Whether they can find other ways with certain things, it'll be hard. I actually spit on my hands most balls and that's how I get grip and stuff. So that might take some adjusting to certain things like that, but that's something for the ICC to figure out what they want to do going forward and different regulations.

- Australia batsman Steve Smith on the proposed ban on the use of saliva on cricket balls.

Roger Federer highest-paid global athlete

Roger Federer topped the 2020 *Forbes* magazine list of highest-paid global athletes announced on May 29, leading the line-up for the first time with pre-tax earnings of \$106.3 million (€95.5 million). The Swiss tennis legend, a men's record 20-time Grand Slam singles champion, becomes the first player from his sport atop the annual list since its 1990 debut, rising from fifth in 2019. Federer's haul over the past 12 months included \$100 million from appearances fees and endorsement deals plus \$6.3 million in prize money. His previous best showing was second in 2013. The ongoing coronavirus pandemic that shut down sports worldwide caused the first decline since 2016 in the total income of the world's 100 top-paid athletes, a 9 percent dip from last year to \$3.6 billion. Another plunge is expected next year from the shutdown. Portuguese football star Cristiano Ronaldo was second on the list at \$105 million, \$60 million in salary and \$45 million from endorsements, with Argentine football hero Lionel Messi third on \$104 million, \$32 million of that from sponsorship deals. Messi and Ronaldo, who have traded the top spot three of the past four years, saw their combined incomes dip \$28 million from last year due to salary cuts when European clubs halted play in March.



Man City's Mahrez has watches worth £300,000 stolen

Manchester City winger Riyad Mahrez had three luxury watches worth more than £300,000 (\$370,000) stolen when thieves raided his penthouse apartment, according to British media reports on May 31. More than £50,000 in cash along with Cartier bracelets and rare football shirts worth up to £150,000 were also taken from the Algeria international. The watches were reported to be a £230,000 Richard Mille timepiece, a £40,000 Rolex Daytona and a £35,000 Rolex Day Date. Mahrez, 29, was said to not have been at home when the offenders used a key fob to access his apartment and three others in the Manchester city centre block on April 24. *The Sun* quoted a letter sent to residents which read: "Four apartments were accessed without authority using a fob which had general access throughout the building. The fob in question is now in our possession, has been fully deactivated and cannot be used again." The robbery continued an alarming sequence of Premier League stars being targeted by thieves.



Austria to stage F1 season-opener in July

Formula One's truncated coronavirus-hit season will finally get underway with the Austrian Grand Prix on July 5, with the Red Bull Ring hosting a second race the weekend after. "The two Formula One races on July 5 and 12 at Spielberg will be staged without spectators," said Austrian health minister Rudolf Anshoher. Austria's Red Bull Ring and Britain's Silverstone circuit will each host two grands prix without spectators on an initial eight race Formula One calendar published on June 2.

Austria's races start the season on July 5 and 12 and will be called the Austrian Grand Prix and the Grand Prix of Steiermark (Styria), the region in which the circuit at Spielberg is located. Silverstone will host the British Grand Prix on August 2 and the 70th Anniversary Grand Prix on August 9. The Hungarian Grand Prix will be on July 19 with races in Spain, Belgium and Italy on August 16 and 30 and September 6, respectively. The Formula One season was unable to start in Australia in March as planned due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Women's Bundesliga resumes

After the men's Bundesliga resumed in Germany on May 16, the women's top flight was back in action on May 29 across the country, with defending champion Wolfsburg facing Koln, and 1. FFC Frankfurt taking on Sand. The foundation for the resumption was the hygiene concept created by the "sport medicine/special match operations task force" that was drawn up jointly by the German Football Association (DFB) and the German Football League (DFL) to ensure strict hygiene guidelines and continuous testing and monitoring, among other measures. The season's final round of fixtures is planned for June 28. In addition, the Women's DFB Cup also started up again.



Pigeon racing beats snooker to the start line in England

Pigeon racing beat snooker and horse racing to be the first sport to return following the easing of coronavirus lockdown restrictions in England. Sport has been shut down since March but the British government approved the return of domestic competitive action behind closed doors from June 1. Premier League football is scheduled to restart on June 17 while cricket chiefs still hope to stage a full international programme during the English summer. But pigeon racing will have a brief moment in the spotlight. More than 4,000 birds belonging to members of the Barnsley Federation of Racing Pigeons in the north of England were released from a park ahead of a 90-mile sprint. Meanwhile, reigning world champion Judd Trump launched snooker's return behind closed doors in the opening match of the Championship League. The televised tournament, taking place in the English city of Milton Keynes, was the first event since the Gibraltar Open in March. Trump described in a tweet how he had been tested for coronavirus before the event: "Arrived in Milton Keynes test done hopefully all clear for action tomorrow... swab up the nose is not enjoyable at all enjoy that everyone."

Wary of returning to outdoor training

The central ministry of home affairs (MHA) has given go-ahead to the reopening of sports stadiums without spectators. This allows elite athletes, many of who are stuck in their hostel rooms at various Sports Authority of India (SAI) centres across the country, to resume their practice and workouts. The athletes have been restricted since mid-March when the nation went into lockdown mode because of the coronavirus pandemic. Sportstar speaks to top athletes across disciplines to find out their views on resumption of outdoor training.

CRICKET

Faiz Fazal (Vidarbha)

When I think about the future, I don't find an answer to when cricket will resume again. Right now, it is very risky to step out and train. It's a very dangerous phase and we should not be careless in our approach. Ultimately, human lives are very important and that's the priority now. No matter how much protection you take, it may be difficult to tackle the virus. It is important to stay at home and build your immunity. We are having training sessions at home via Zoom app and will continue doing that for now.



Shreevats Goswami (Bengal/Sunrisers Hyderabad)

Hopefully, the situation post the monsoon will improve and we will reach a point where the players can go out and train. In this uncertain scenario, the scheduling of domestic season needs to be looked into as well. Some reports suggest the IPL (Indian Premier League) could be held in September-October, in which case the domestic season will be pushed back anyway. That said, there are too many variables at play, inter-state travelling being a major challenge. Sometimes we play Ranji matches at these far-flung venues where ensuring norms of social distancing can be quite a task. Then there are concerns about hygiene, sanitising our hotels and kits. All these need to be taken into consideration.

Riyan Parag (Assam/Rajasthan Royals)

Personally, I will let it settle down. We had a few cases in Guwahati recently, so I would like to stay indoors till it's all safe. Safety is the utmost concern. We live in a flat, and there is some space, so I can do some exercises and other training. At this point, it's about how mentally tough you are.



Sarfaraz Khan (Mumbai/Kings XI Punjab)

It feels good to know that stadiums are opening. The BCCI (Board of Control for Cricket in India) is our parent and whenever they announce that training or matches can start, we will gain motivation and do so. Cricket or any sport starting will be a positive sign. As of now, I am in my maternal home in Chhatarpur village in Uttar Pradesh and I can't travel. There are agricultural fields here. I do one day of long-distance running followed by a short-distance one, then agility and weight training with the help of my father.

FOOTBALL

Michael Soosairaj (ATK FC)

I don't feel it is the right time to train. There are so many people suffering and there will be a constant sense of fear at the back of our minds and we won't be able to train peacefully. Since it is anyway our off-season, I feel it is better to begin once the cases reduce.



Edwin Vanspaul (Chennaiyin FC)

It's a welcome directive. It's been over two months since anyone had any kind of activity. So this will be useful for both individual sports and team sports athletes, but only if it's done with the right precautions and guidelines. I am in the off-season now and training at a ground near my home. In the morning, I am working out between 6am and 7am. I am doing ball exercises and power workouts.

Anirudh Thapa (Chennaiyin FC)

It is a welcome gesture. I am sure all the necessary precautions are being taken by the government and management at different sports complexes. Keeping that in mind, I am open to the idea of going out to train, of course while maintaining all the guidelines for personal safety. I think the authorities are leaving no stone unturned to contain the virus and create a safe environment for the citizens.



Nivetha R., (coach, Tamil Nadu women's football team)

The MHA has made this provision for athletes heading to international competitions, like the Olympics, for example. It is directed more at individual athletes. This isn't suitable for team sports and hence has created some confusion. Many think that stadiums are being opened so things will go back to older routines. That isn't the case though. We can handle fitness at home because some kind of minimum training equipment will be there, but it won't help them give their 100 percent. So this call is to give them an environment

to get back to full potential. We are staying put as we don't have directives yet. With the rate of infection still high, it will take some time and a lot of planning to get back.

BOXING

Ashish Kumar

Staying at home and training was difficult because the facilities and equipment aren't as good. The training camp idea and opening up facilities for us is a good idea but only if we follow the rules put in place for our safety. Our preparation at home is never going to be as good as the one in a camp and so I think it's a good idea.



Amit Panghal

The focus will be more on the skill aspect as individually we were training on fitness during the lockdown. Also, the confidence will be less owing to the nature of the pandemic, but I am sure we will find our way back. I think the camp will start after May 31 either at SAI Rohtak or SAI Sonapat. We are awaiting official confirmation.

TENNIS



Prajnesh Gunneswaran

The moment any of the tennis courts open I will start practice... The tennis court is pretty open and there aren't going to be many people on the court and it should be fine. I will try my best not to touch my face while playing and use a sweatband instead. There's only so much I can do to prevent it. When I go to the supermarket, I don't think it's less risky than going to a tennis court. After a point, I guess we just have to hope we don't get it and try to be safe and go forward and resume regular activities as much as possible.

TABLE TENNIS

Ayhika Mukherjee

All of us, of course, are going through a very rough phase. I wouldn't choose to go out to practise in the current situation. I'd rather stay home, follow the government guidelines and continue working on my mental and physical fitness.

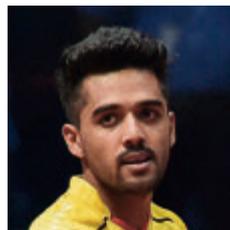


Archana Kamath

There is some amount of fear, but I think that's normal. Having said that, just like all the other athletes, I am also itching to get back to playing and training. But assessing the situation is equally important. In the end, whatever the seniors and the federation decide, I will go by that. They know much better.

Sanil Shetty

We got an email from the federation (Table Tennis Federation of India) whereby they have enlisted eight names. The federation has asked for our thoughts on the training camp, which may start from the end of May. I feel it's too early to start. While travelling, I would constantly have the fear of falling ill or contracting the virus. Most players have managed to arrange for training from home for the next two months. If there's no vaccine, there's always a chance (of falling sick), irrespective of the precautions you take.



WRESTLING

Bajrang Punia

I welcome the government's decision. The Olympics are coming up and this decision has been taken keeping that in mind. As athletes, coaches and volunteers, we have a collective responsibility to be safe and responsible in public. We will know what kind of precautions and arrangements the government has made only when we get there and see it ourselves.

ATHLETICS

Jinson Johnson

We haven't received any official statement as of now and we will only start once we get the orders. I will start slowly and won't push too hard as acclimatisation will be the key here. Moreover, social distancing is a must and masks have already become the norm. It will be interesting how we train outdoors. We will follow all the guidelines strictly.



Muhammed Anas

Fitness-wise, it won't matter much as we are already doing our training. The only difference is that we will be able to train under guidance of our coach Galina Bukharina and will be able to run on the track, which is very important once proper training starts. We need to be on the track. At NIS (National Institute of Sport) Patiala, we are in a safe

environment as they are following all rules to protect us. We are maintaining our fitness in the given space available inside the hostel campus and are looking forward to train on the track.



M. R. Poovamma

We are already training in a lawn and the only difference is there will be a coach, which will be good. Having said that, we will stick to the guidelines and maintain social distancing. Except for the exchange of the baton, I don't feel there will be a major issue. There is time for the Olympic qualifiers and also for the Asian Championships. So we will train individually and take a measured approach.



PARA-ATHLETICS

Ekta Bhyan

We are yet to receive an SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) regarding the training protocol for para-athletes. So we're going to wait. We are dependent on assistance and we need arrangements to be made if we're allowed to head out to stadiums to train. My dependence on my assisted device – my wheelchair – puts me and others like me at higher risk because keeping surfaces clean and virus-free, especially when we're dependent on others, is hard. Our dependence also makes it hard to maintain social distancing properly. Add to that, those with spinal injuries come with impaired respiratory systems and that makes us more vulnerable to this virus. I hope these are considered when a protocol is devised for us.



SHOOTING



Divyansh Singh Panwar

To be honest, I was waiting for this decision for quite some days now, so that I could practise properly. Although we had a makeshift range set up at coach Deepak (Kumar Dubey) sir's apartment, I must say that shooting at an international range, where all the big competitions are organised, gives you a different kind of energy and confidence. No, I am not hesitant to train during the pandemic. If international events begin shortly, I will surely take part, given the fact that we have already missed some major tournaments because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Manu Bhaker

For now, I am not looking to take part in any outdoor training sessions. I am already training at my makeshift range at home, so there's no point venturing out. However, if international events resume, I will surely be participating in those. That said, if possible, till the whole COVID graph flattens out, I would like to keep away from any type of camps.



BASKETBALL



Vishesh Bhriguvanshi

I would like to go back to training only when I am assured that it's safe to do so. I will go every day if I have a secure place. It's difficult to go into a public space now. I would like to get some training done because it's been two months without basketball. Whatever the government is saying regarding guidelines is difficult for basketball since it comes under B-category sports. They said, only 8-10 players can practise and only 2-3 players can play together. It will be difficult for coaches to manage as well considering our sport is a team game. When I came to Dehradun, I didn't know the lockdown was going to happen and I didn't even have a treadmill at home.

■ SHAYAN ACHARYA, WRIDDHAAYAN BHATTACHARYYA, V. S. ARAVIND, SANTADEEP DEY, SHIVANSH GUPTA, AASHIN PRASAD, SHYAM VASUDEVAN, LAVANYA LAKSHMI NARAYANAN & AYAN ACHARYA



Million-dollar question: Can live cricket action begin with no spectators in the stadium? AP

Getting back to cricket... when and how?

Players, coaches, administrators, franchise owners, umpires and broadcasters share their thoughts on a new beginning.

It's been more than two months since international cricket across the world stopped due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and many of those involved with the game are starved for some live action. Recently, the International Cricket Council released its 'back to cricket' guidelines for a phased return. Is it time for a restart?

Sportstar spoke to players, coaches, administrators, franchise owners, umpires and broadcasters for their thoughts on a new beginning.

PLAYERS

Navdeep Saini (Fast bowler, India and Delhi)

I haven't thought about this at all. When cricket resumes and if there are new rules for bowlers to make the ball shine, I will think about it then. As of now, I don't know how to go about this. It will be important to see what else you can do to make the ball shine.

It is a part of the game and the ball will only talk if there is shine. *Shine karne se hi ball kuch na kuch harkat karti hai, agar ball harkat nahi karegi, to mushkil rahega bowler ke liye* (the ball performs at its best when there is shine, if it doesn't then it is a problem).

Faiz Fazal (Batsman, India and

Vidarbha)

When I think about the future, I don't find an answer to when cricket will resume again. Right now, it is very risky to step out and train. It's a very dangerous phase and we should not be careless in our approach. Ultimately, human lives are very important and that's the priority now. No matter how much protection you take, it may be difficult to tackle the virus, so the risk remains. It is important to stay at home and build your immunity. For now, we are having training sessions at home via Zoom app and will continue doing that for now.

There are a lot of factors involved in it, and it is important that we take time to approach it. There will be fear for sure, so we need to take things slow and react accordingly.

COACHES

Dav Whatmore (Coach and director of Cricket, Baroda)

It will be the objective of everyone to restart as soon as possible. That would probably mean playing matches without people watching them. That also means, cricket in India could have a tighter schedule with a lesser number of games in each of the

formats, especially the Ranji Trophy. If the IPL (Indian Premier League) is conducted in September-October, then there is less time for normal season. It will be compressed in three formats. Exactly how will it play up is up to the parent body (Board of Control for Cricket in India, or BCCI) to decide. With respect to international cricket, the ICC has a role to play, perhaps revisiting the FTP (Future Tours Programme). At the moment, there are a number of series that has been cancelled or postponed, and there are some series coming up. The Twenty20 World Cup is an important tournament for all the countries, so that could be deferred until next year. That's up to the ICC.

But international cricket may have to be played without too much of a crowd.

Coaching, I don't think, will have that much of a difference. You would still try and train and play. It's just that you have to be safe depending on the conditions. You have got to come up with the tactics.

Chandrakant Pandit (Coach, Madhya Pradesh)

What is the priority at the moment? I think it is human health and their lives. It is for every country. We have to accept whatever guidelines come our way. I don't know how you can prevent this. Everybody is keeping the health of people at the forefront. As long as we fight COVID-19, we should take precautions.

There can be changes in cricket. The advantages the bowlers got earlier were well within the rules of the game. But now, if we have to think about the rules and avoid the other precautions, it may not be advisable. If we don't follow the rules, a cricketer can contact coronavirus, which will be worse. And these rules could be temporary.

It is not only a problem for the sports fraternity, it is a problem for all. Everybody is suffering due to the virus.

As and when the government permits us, we will go in full swing. But there will be travel restrictions. Social distancing is essential now. If 25 cricketers are going to be together, it should not affect them and cricket should not be over. If not today, then tomorrow, we all can enjoy cricket but at the moment, living is more important to us.

We will win the battle.

ADMINISTRATORS

Sanjay Jagdale (Former BCCI secretary and selector)

It is difficult to say what changes may



happen in cricket now. It all depends on whether a vaccine is found for COVID-19. There should be some new development.

There are, of course, going to be changes. It is hard to assess what is going to happen to the virus. Even the scientists are not sure as to what can stop the pandemic. A lot of people are saying it is going to be with us but there should be some treatment. We may need to wait longer to reach a decision regarding cricket.

People have misused the cricket ball before, even before saliva was used to swing the ball. I know it will be difficult for the bowlers but there can be alternatives. You can help a fast bowler by making changes to the ball or depending on what type of wickets you provide. These are other ways to keep the game fair and strike a balance between bats-

PlayerSpeak:

"When cricket resumes and if there are new rules for bowlers to make the ball shine, I will think about it then. As of now, I don't know how to go about this. It will be important to see what else you can do to make the ball shine," says India pacer Navdeep Saini. AFP

**CoachSpeak:**

“Coaching, I don’t think, will have that much of a difference. You would still try and train and play. It’s just that you have to be safe depending on the conditions. You got to come up with the tactics,” says Dav Whatmore, Baroda’s coach.

M. VEDHAN

men and bowlers.

Arun Dhumal (Treasurer, BCCI)

It is indeed challenging because this phase has come out of the blue. This is a learning for all of us on how to cope with the challenge and see to it that we give our 100 per cent (despite the odds). Be it for the players, for the staff — everybody is working on a strategy on how to go about it so that things are fine when cricket resumes.

The BCCI will also be in a difficult position in case cricket does not resume fast, especially the Indian Premier League. In that case, the BCCI will also have to face a lot of financial hardships. It would definitely have a spiralling effect. It is not rocket science to understand. In case the BCCI is in a problem, the State associations will also be facing the problems. We can only distribute something to the cricket bodies when [funds] are coming to the BCCI.

All the boards are feeling the heat. Once things settle down, everybody needs to sit across the drawing board once again and re-draw strategies on how to can cope with the situation. The BCCI will definitely do whatever possible to help world cricket at

large because if cricket has to survive, then the BCCI will have a role to play and we would like to do our bit so that there is competitive cricket.

Wasim Khan (Chief executive, Pakistan Cricket Board)

There are two key fundamental challenges. One is finance, which I think administrators across all the cricket boards will have to meticulously manage and there will be a lot of contingency planning going on behind the scenes, with the ‘worst case, what if’ scenarios.

Secondly, it will be about rescheduling bilateral cricket with all the postponed series that will happen. Clearly, there will be a backlog, and it is up to us to work our way through all of that. We are all committed to do it, it is about working in solidarity and finding a collective solution.

At this point of time, the players and all the stakeholders need to be given confidence.

FRANCHISE OWNERS**Venky Mysore (CEO and managing director, Kolkata Knight Riders)**

The key point to be remembered is that live entertainment is going to be in great demand. Sports is the best thing here — cricket in particular in Indian context. Now, under the current situation, live entertainment is something that you can only enjoy on your television and digitally. What’s the end game with this? Until the vaccine comes out, this is going to be the scene.

But we are in a category which is not only in great demand but it’s going to continue to be even more premium than anything. It might take two years to get a vaccine for COVID-19. So what happens between now and that period? How do you manage? The bottom line is with all this, the thought process and innovation has to come in as to how you prepare for the short run and also for the long run.

The short-run situation is where you can come up with creative ideas and leverage it with technology to be able to give the fans as much enjoyment, happiness and fulfilment as you can within the limitations. I see it as a three part thing — how to manage in short run, how do you push it to medium run and how do you position yourself for the long run? That’s my thought process around it.

The team that we have is always together. We are not an event management company, we are a franchise which is professionally run

and there are people who work round the year. Certain franchises put the team together only to stage the tournament. The problem with that is you are putting together a show only for that period, so you are not doing anything. We built our franchises on two pillars — brand and fan base. If you want to build your brand, you need to work throughout the year, that's how the brand becomes more valuable and you get a premium and other brands associate with you. When it comes to the fan base, that is something which is going to be with you. So during this time, even though they will be disappointed not being able to come to Eden Gardens and watch us live, we will have our ways of engaging them.

In times of COVID-19, you have to look after the health and safety of players. You have to be innovative too. Suppose you hold it in a city like Mumbai where there are four grounds and teams have their own hotels, which are completely sanitised, and have two buses each. That's one model.

In 2014, we went to the UAE (United Arab Emirates) for one leg of the tournament. There were three grounds, separate hotels, there were restricted movements — that's going to be the thought process now: how do you contain this? The risk needs to be managed to run the robust tournament.

People ask if foreigners don't come what will you do? Look, that's not even an option. The strength of IPL is the fact that it's a marquee product which is of international quality and that's caught the imagination of public over 12 seasons. You don't want to tinker with that. It's the combination of Indians and foreigners that makes the tournament exciting. That draws people to the stadium and draws people towards television. So, you cannot tinker with that. We need to take all the precaution and work through it.

Salman Iqbal (Pakistan Super League team owner, Karachi Kings)

As an investor, as a cricket team franchise owner, you want crowd in the stands. But realistically, as a fan, you just need to see cricket now. We are tired of watching the old games. At this stage, we are even ready to have cricket in empty stadiums, because the game has to begin. If we go with the theory that there won't be any cricket until fans come in, then it will take us at least a year from now to attain normalcy.

If fans don't come in, we will lose a lot of money and there is no doubt about it. But all



the industries — cricket, television — are taking a hit. It's an issue worldwide. The world post the pandemic will be different and there will be a lot of financial changes. If somebody is spending a dollar a day now, he/she will have to cut it down to fifty cents. That's where savings will be important and I am sure, all the boards — including the Pakistan Cricket Board — will come up with financial solutions. If they keep charging us all the money, as it was before the pandemic, then that's not a way. Post COVID-19, the whole scenario changes, television viewership will improve, but it is important for the Boards to ensure that the leagues are not hurt.

The boards will have to let us know how things will affect. If there is no in-stadia activity, then that budget will change. So basically, the whole financial aspect will change. If the owners and Boards take a hit, then player salary may also be hit, unless we come up with a new way of making money. We have to find ways to survive and also sustain.

UMPIRES

Shavir Tarapore

It'll be interesting to see how the TV audience warms up to player celebrations with physical distancing. Everyone is watching so much TV now, whether it is cricket,

AdminSpeak: "All the boards are feeling the heat. Once things settle down, everybody needs to sit across the drawing board once again and re-draw strategies on how to cope with the situation. The BCCI will definitely do whatever possible to help world cricket at large because if cricket has to survive, then BCCI will have a role to play and we would like to do our bit so that there is competitive cricket," says BCCI treasurer Arun Dhimal. **AFF**

**OwnerSpeak:**

“Under the current situation, live entertainment is something that you can only enjoy on your television and digitally. What’s the end game with this? Until the vaccine comes out, this is going to be the scene,” says Venky Mysore, CEO and managing director, Kolkata Knight Riders. RAJEEV BHATT

football, hockey... in cricket, for instance, maximum celebrations take place when a wicket falls. Television’s dominion over the game has a lot to do with the drama and raw emotion the sport evokes on the field. How the authorities get the balance right is something worth looking forward to. In the foreseeable future though, playing in front of empty stands may not be economically viable for the game.

Today, you may say 60-70 percent revenue comes from the television rights, but ticket sales matter just as much. That’s where those running the sport and individual associations come in. It has to be a holistic effort.

Shining the ball with saliva or sweat is another aspect that needs to be looked into. Say under the new guidelines, it is decided that bowlers can only use an artificial substance like wax to facilitate swing bowling, under strict supervision of the umpires. You can’t just expect fast bowlers to arrive and immediately get used to the alternative methods... Using saliva or sweat is a habit and you can’t control it easily.

Plus, a ball exchanges hands throughout the day. How do you deal with that then? What happens if a bowler applies saliva once? Do you change the ball? In the event it

keeps happening intermittently, do you keep changing the ball or come up with some sort of a penalty? These are all factors that need to be considered, moving forward.

Grassroots cricket is an important stakeholder in all this. Ensuring safety precautions around physical distancing and use of artificial substances are implemented properly is paramount. These are all young kids, who, in their youthful exuberance, can tend to overlook these important measures. What do we do then? Therefore, any significant overhaul in the rules needs to be a well-thought-out plan.

Vinayak Kulkarni

When cricket can resume depends on whether we want to have public cricket (with spectators at venues) or private cricket. Private cricket can resume after a month or so when things are relaxed, when people can commute. If you want to go public, fingers crossed, don’t know, because we can’t say we can have only 100 spectators. Then it’s not a game.

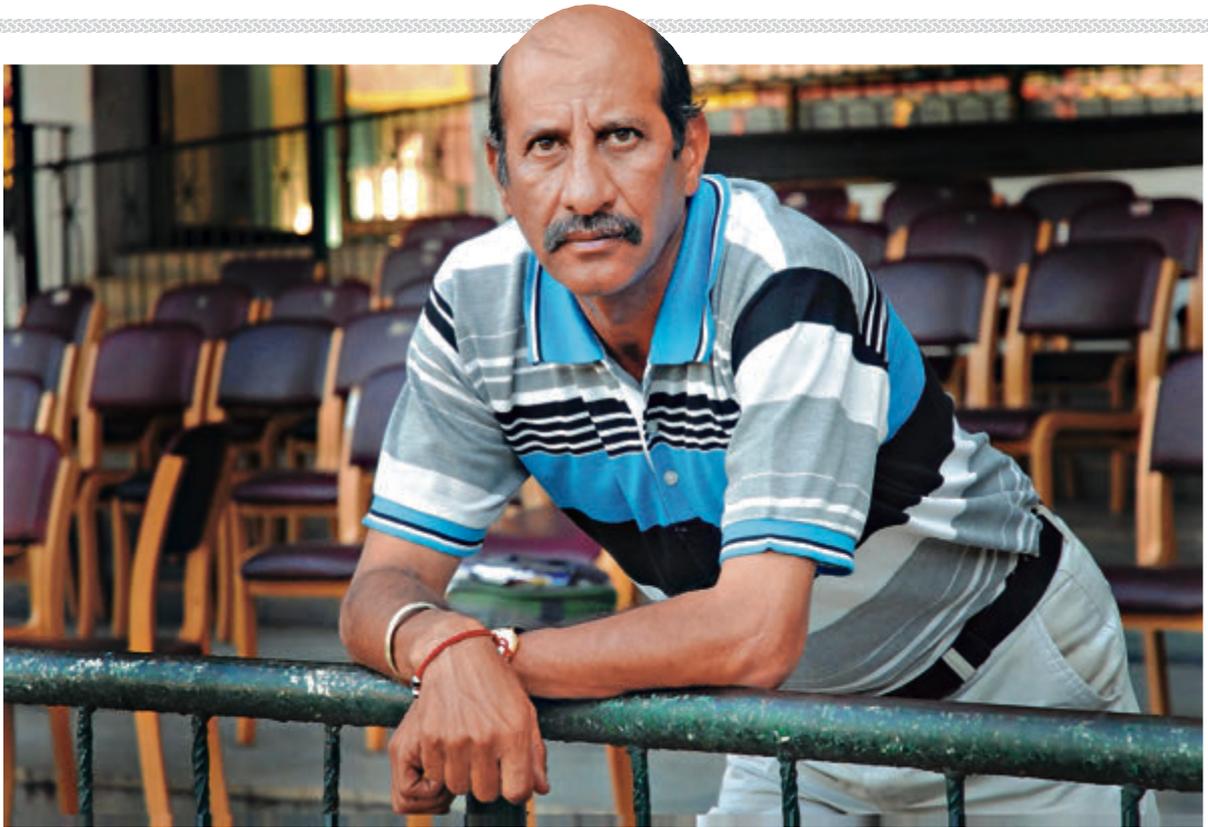
One argument you can make is that I can beam it on TV, you can sit in the house and see. The purists of the game will still go to the stadium.

But as far as [the issue of] saliva being used [is concerned], and players’ sweaters [being handed over to the umpires], there may be certain changes. In fact, a lot of things are written on that, whether umpires will hold the caps and sweaters. If you see some of the grounds, behind the wicket-keeper there’s a box to keep the fielders’ helmets. Like that, you can keep a box where you can keep the cap and sweater also, and if more than one person has to keep you can have plastic bags for each individual.

[To ascertain the alternative to] using saliva on the ball, manufacturers have to sit together and decide. It’s not hygienic.

It will be difficult to start with but as the days pass, [bowlers can adapt to it]. But in local matches, it has been tried. People say, ‘use these Poppins, or mints’. We allowed officially to use mint, i.e, we allowed them to be applied on the ball. Nothing happened. Unless you have the skill, these minor things won’t make a lot of difference. But at the highest level, people have the skills. It may make a difference.

The most important thing is keeping the shine on the ball. [Players] are not [risking contracting coronavirus any other way] as cricket is not a contact sport, except when shaking hands, which can easily be stopped.



The ball is thrown from one end to the other. So, if your hand is clean, and if you get to a point where at every drinks break, everybody should wash their hands, that can take care of it. Next is only keeping the shine on the ball. For that, now we're using sweat and saliva. You find out some other substance, it can be an extraneous substance, having the same properties. Then it wouldn't make any difference. Now the argument may be that the saliva which we apply, the availability of it is limited in quantity. Maybe some less, some more. But ultimate quantity is limited. So you provide the same quantity of extraneous substance which can take care of these things. We can do the chemical analysis of sweat, we can do the chemical analysis of the saliva.

If you play in a closed stadium, where limited number of spectators are let in, they maintain the distance, and players do not come anywhere near them, or no spectator comes near them, then there's no problem [in restarting cricket]. But if you have like in Indian stadiums where people come in hordes, then we will have to wait for a longer time. One person with COVID-19 may be the spoilsport for all. Players can be safe because a separate enclosure is there, rooms are separate. Even now no player goes near a spectator unless he wants to give an autograph or

he wants to mingle.

There will be restrictions. It will be like a family of 15 moving around for three months where nobody goes and mingles with somebody else and comes back.

Cricket can resume. But what is our ultimate motto, just to play or promote? If I'm promoting it, how do I promote? I want to promote remotely or physically also? Cricket, of course, will not stop, it'll move on.

As umpires, we only facilitate. We will welcome that, any resumption of cricket, we welcome it. As of now, we don't come in contact with many people. May be a caterer who comes into the dressing room or a captain, to talk. Otherwise, where do we come into contact with players? We do maintain a distance. The only thing is, when 40,000 people are watching, I may raise a bar; that will be absent, so I'll have to look at something else to raise my bar.

BROADCASTERS

Matt Weiss (GM, Fox Cricket)

It's going to be difficult and we will need to be guided by our federal state governments on that in the first instance.

There are a lot of moving parts depending on the T20 World Cup scheduled in October. Then, at *Fox Cricket*, we need to schedule our summer from there. Our contract with

UmpireSpeak: "Any significant overhaul in the rules needs to be a well-thought-out plan," says noted umpire Shavir Tarapore.

K. GOPINATHAN

BroadcasterSpeak:

"I think the priority for the board will be to hold the IPL and bilateral series. This is because it will be more controlled with limited players coming in from abroad and matches being in select venues. As viewers are starving for new content, live cricket matches besides the IPL will also generate huge ratings," says Sam Balsara, chairman, Madison World.

SHASHI ASHIWAL



CA (Cricket Australia) is a close working relationship — we are great partners and I can't see COVID-19 having any impact on our existing contract moving forward. As a subscription based model, we can wait for cricket to return. That and our football codes will be a great boost after a tough period for all sports broadcasters.

India arriving for summer would be another terrific series and we can't wait for that to happen. Crowd or no crowd, we can broadcast, to a world starved of sport, the clash of two great nations. Being winter season, the cricket channel itself is always lower at this time of year. Having said that, we had launched 'A Week with Wornie' featuring six half-hour interviews with an icon of the game done by one of the best interviewers, Mark Howard. Shane helped make the series outside his contract with us to help *Fox Sports* at this tough time — to provide some great content for our subscribers. That's why he is a team player and a legend.

Sam Balsara (Chairman, Madison World)

Indians are more adaptable than others. If Germany, which loves football as much as India loves cricket, can play football in empty stadiums, so can we play cricket in empty stadiums. Anyway most of the "commerce" is related to television rather than spectators in stadiums. The earliest cricket can resume on television is in September, because it starts raining from June to August and lots of

pitches across the country are relaid at this time. If you see generally in Test cricket, any ways there is very limited crowd on weekdays in India, and even less abroad. Also, domestic cricket in India is played in near empty stadiums. Still, cricket is played very competitively. It will be good to add some innovations like crowd stimulation sounds and VR screens where fans can interact. I am sure cricket will still generate interest amongst fans, especially in times like today when fans are starving for live action.

While getting fans to the stadiums will be a challenge till the time a vaccine is found, the organisers and broadcasters will have to think of ways and means to get more interactions between the cricketers and the fans. There may be instances when fans interact with cricketers while playing, get VR screens put up in stadiums with faces of fans cheering from their homes being telecast on it. Also, one can simulate the sounds of fans cheering when a wicket falls, or a four or a six is hit, etc.

I think the priority for the board will be to hold the IPL and bilateral series. This is because it will be more controlled with limited players coming in from abroad and matches being in select venues. As viewers are starving for new content, live cricket matches besides the IPL will also generate huge ratings. 

■ SHAYAN ACHARYA, ABHISHEK MUKHERJEE,
WRIDDHAAYAN BHATTACHARYYA & AYAN ACHARYA

Keeping them apart: P. V. Ramana, the father of world champion P. V. Sindhu, said it would be better to have separate training camps for the country's Olympic hopefuls and not for all the players as has been the case so far.

V. V. SUBRAHMANYAM



Parents call for changes

V. V. SUBRAHMANYAM

The parents of some of India's top badminton players feel there are issues with regard of implementation of safety guidelines.

The Badminton World Federation (BWF) has issued a revised list of events as it attempts to restart tournaments following their suspension because of the global coronavirus outbreak, but the parents of some of India's top players feel there are issues with regard of implementation of safety guidelines.

P. V. Ramana, the father of world champion P. V. Sindhu, said it would be better to have separate training camps for the country's Olympic hopefuls and not for all the players as has been the case so far.

"That way, a lot of management issues can be easily sorted out to the convenience of one and all. Definitely I am terribly worried about the health of any player. It is not just about Sindhu alone. After all, most of them are sacrificing so much for the country's pride," said Ramana, and Arjuna Award winner and former international volleyball player.

He also feels the physiotherapist needs to get sanitised "every time he attends to a different player, and of course a mask and gloves are compulsory. A physical trainer has to maintain a distance to guide the players. And the coaches too cannot move too

closely and have to make their points from a distance," he said, adding, "More importantly, there are many minor issues like the benches where the players rest between training being sanitised frequently."

"And, again, serious doubts do arise as to how long it will take for a player to peak in this changed training schedule," Ramana said.

Krishna Reddy, the father of doubles international N. Sikki Reddy, feels doubles training needs a serious thought to avoid overcrowding at training venues.

"The guidelines may look comforting, but they would definitely mean the players have to adapt to a different kind of training schedule, which may take a long time for them to adjust to," he said.

Chief national badminton coach P. Gopichand said safety measures will be implemented as the players' health is of utmost importance. "There is no way we are going to be complacent. We will follow the guidelines in letter and spirit for we are conscious of the huge responsibility on us," he said.

"Obviously, no one wants to be in a spot for any untoward development in this regard," he added. ☞



Getting there: World No. 31 A. Sharath Kamal (left) and No. 32 G. Sathiyan both raised concerns about flights at this time.

GETTY IMAGES

Paddlers apprehensive about camp

SHIVANSH GUPTA

India's top table tennis players are apprehensive about travelling for training camps even as the national federation attempts to resume sporting activity about two months after the global coronavirus outbreak brought sports to a halt.

The Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI) reached out to the country's top paddlers for their approval to organise a 10-day training camp in June and emailed the players sharing the details of how it plans to conduct the camp.

"I am sending it (the email) with the government SOP (Standard Operating Procedure). The government had given us guidelines on sanitisation, social distancing and other preventive measures. But our guidelines will be more extensive and camp-related," said M. P. Singh, secretary general of the TTFI.

Singh said the TTFI is considering conducting the camp in the second half of June,

The Table Tennis Federation of India has reached out to the country's top paddlers for their approval to organise a 10-day training camp.

with Patiala, Chennai, Kolkata, Sonapat and New Delhi among the options for hosting it.

"Kolkata looks difficult because of the havoc wreaked by Cyclone Amphan recently. We will have to check if S. Raman's facility (in Chennai) will be able to accommodate 18-20 players, including coaches, while maintaining sanitisation and social distancing. There is a school in New Delhi which has an air-conditioned facility, so that's an option as well," Singh said.

The plan will be executed only after the players' approval and in complete coordination with the central and state governments, said the TTFI secretary general, adding that safety and health will be the priorities.

"Two camps, for male and female players, will be conducted at the same venue but at different timings. A maximum of 10 players along with a coach will train together at any given point," Singh said. "The morning



and the evening sessions will have two three-hour slots, one each for male and female players. Between each session, sanitisation will take place. We will maintain social distancing and follow all the guidelines strictly at all times. Everyone will have separate rooms and toilets."

Singh added that there was a possibility of conducting separate camps for men and women on different dates.

World No. 31 A. Sharath Kamal said he was happy with the TTFI's proactive response to the coronavirus-forced lockdown, but he had his reservations about travelling, especially with the uncertainty looming over flight schedules. "Yes, the flights have started, but a lot of them are still being cancelled. A lot of doubts are yet to be cleared. Moreover, it's not only about the safety of the players. We also need to keep in mind the safety of the cleaners, the cooks and the maintenance staff at the facility."

Risk of contact:

Harmeet Desai, who is also apprehensive about travelling, said he will consult his teammates before deciding.

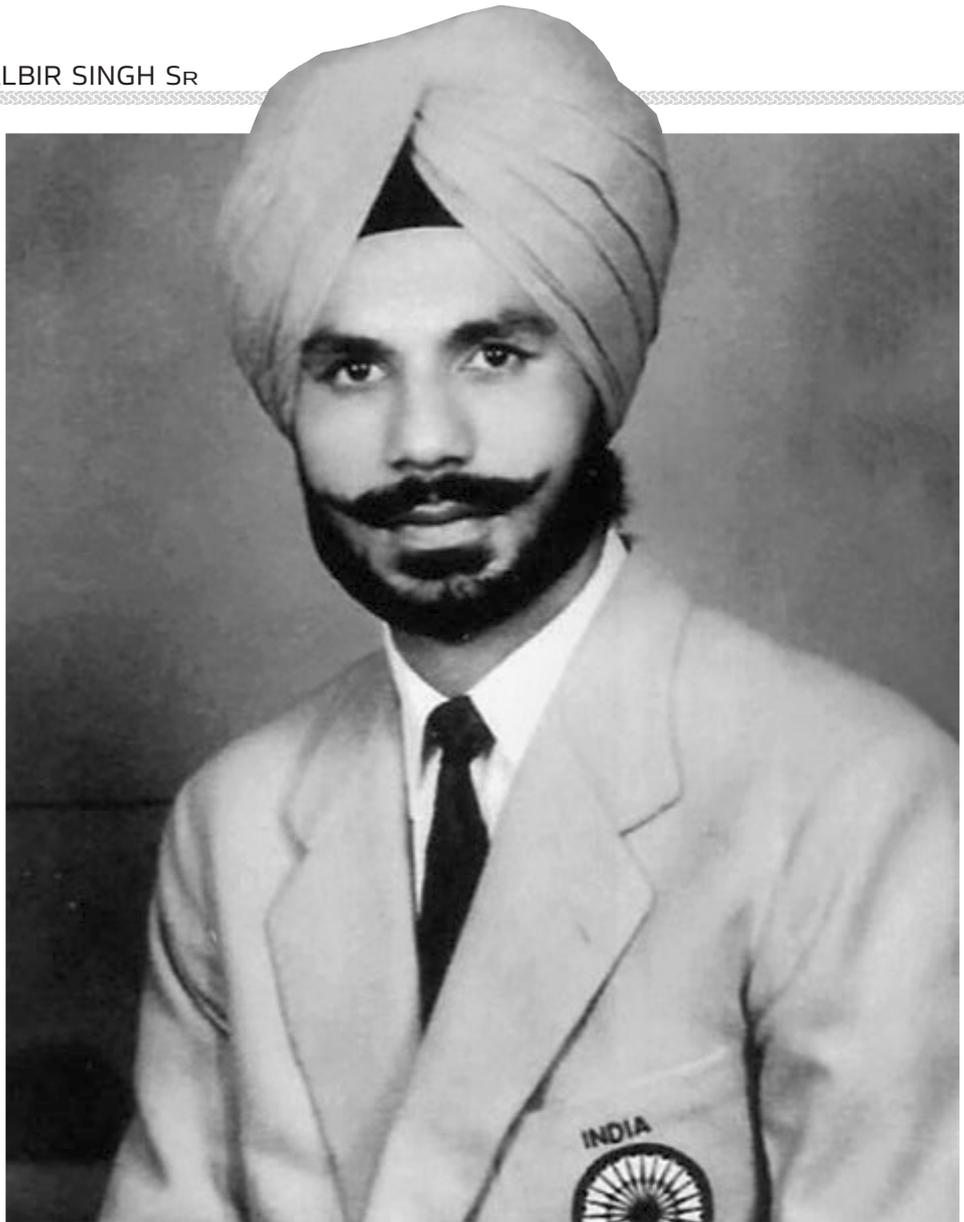
BISWARANJAN ROUT

G. Sathiyan, the world No. 32, hopes the camp happens in his home town Chennai, but he too is doubtful whether players from different states will be able to travel. "The camp is not an issue, but let the flights operate more regularly. The routes are currently very limited and most states have set up quarantine rules. A lot still needs to be worked out, so I am not entirely sure I would want to travel," he said.

Surat's Harmeet Desai, who is also apprehensive about travelling, said he will consult his teammates before deciding. "I will also consult with my family before arriving at a decision. I don't think the problem is staying in the facility at training. The risk lies while travelling, meeting and interacting with others. A lot of players will come from different parts of the country."

The TTFI email listing the guidelines followed up its mail to top players on May 18 for their opinion on conducting the camp. ❧

Hat-trick: Three gold medals at the Olympics – 1948 (London), 1952 (Helsinki) and 1956 (Melbourne) – brought Balbir Singh the status of greatness as a player. PTI



A champion...and an advocate for hope

Balbir Singh was a kind soul who served Indian hockey with distinction and remained its most loyal supporter even in times of acute distress.

VIJAY LOKAPALLY

The hands that once held the hockey stick firmly, guiding the ball, caressing or slamming it, leaving his opponents chasing his shadow, trembled to hold a pen as he bravely tried to scribble his name. Giving an autograph seemed such an arduous task for Balbir Singh, who could once produce a goal from nowhere. His frail figure was proof of the world having whizzed by, time leaving its mark on this wonderful

athlete who dazzled on the hockey field like none other, with the glorious exception of Dhyan Chand.

Having watched neither in action, one could only wistfully visualise the treat they must have dished out to their fans. We could feast only on stories recounted by old-timers. Polite to a fault, Balbir sported an infectious smile. His warm hug created such positive vibes about a man who had spent



his life helping fellow sportsmen, his upright character a testimony to the values that underlined his commitment to his team and nation.

Balbir also respected cricketers. And cricketers respected the hockey star in return. Vijay Hazare had earned fame on the tour to Australia in 1947-48 with a century in each innings of the Adelaide Test against Don Bradman's team. Balbir would mention Hazare in our conversations but not a word of his own dazzling role in India winning the 1948 Olympic gold in London. His humility restrained him from making pompous references to his hockey feats.

He does write about the harsh treatment meted out to him at the London Olympics. He was twice dropped from the playing XI despite scoring six goals against Argentina in his debut match of the Olympics. The final against host Great Britain was a thriller. Kishan Lal and K. D. Singh "Babu" played barefoot after it rained. And India won 4-0 after Balbir scored the first two goals. The team was accorded a red-carpet welcome in Bombay.

"Hockey was the only sport that gave the

country something of a ray of golden hope, something to shout about," wrote Balbir.

The team was fêted by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Balbir would often recall those memorable days of hockey being the "darling sport" of the nation. It is said that Balbir and "Flying Sikh" Milkha Singh never required an appointment to meet the prime minister. "It's true. We could meet him at short notice. He loved hockey," Balbir told this writer once.

Hockey was hugely popular in India when Balbir was winning the hearts of his countrymen. He played fair and there was an indefatigable spirit that marked his game. He was said to be the fittest in the team and had a penchant to come up with some innovative streaks. Those who watched him in action would recall his impeccable timing in releasing the ball. His control of the ball was astonishing and it was rare that he would lose possession.

It was memorable meeting this legend at his home in Chandigarh in February. The place was a virtual hockey museum and one basically soaked in tales from India's glorious domination of the game. He had clearly

Magician with the stick: Balbir Singh scores against Great Britain in the Olympic final at Wembley Stadium on August 12, 1948. India won 4-0.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY



One of a kind: In death, Balbir Singh took away with him a large chunk of hockey history, documented only in his mind.

AKHILESH KUMAR

aged and his grandson Kabir was his means of communication. The national flag in his room was a constant reminder of the momentous occasion in London when he took pride in “mastering” the master, Great Britain. Independent India celebrated the hockey gold on English soil and he could relive every moment of that epic contest with minute details.

His speech was a mumble. You had to sit close because he had also become hard of hearing. There was a time when he would, in a flash, hear a call for the ball amid the din of spectators and unerringly find his partner. “Those were such lovely days,” the sparkle in his eyes confirmed that he had dug deep into the past to recall those magical moments.

Three gold medals at the Olympics —

1948 (London), 1952 (Helsinki) and 1956 (Melbourne) — brought him the status of greatness as a player. In 1975, he was the coach when India won the World Cup at Kuala Lumpur. India has not won it since.

Balbir was emotionally attached to the game. A hockey defeat would result in him giving his meal a miss. Family members often hid the news of India’s loss from him. The game was that dear to him. He was an inseparable part of hockey discussions in any era. Towards the end of his journey, he yearned for the company of young players and scribes. He wanted to share his memories and regale them with inspirational stories. On one of the trips to his house, some of us expressed our desire to “feel” the gold medals. He pulled them out of his treasure box and let us hold them. “Do you feel the

current?" His eyes were moist.

In death, Balbir took away with him a large chunk of hockey history, documented only in his mind. He was a kind soul who served Indian hockey with distinction and remained its most loyal supporter even in times of acute distress. He refused to believe that Indian hockey had plunged to irretrievable depths. He always advocated hope. "Hard work and dedication can take you places. We have hockey in our blood. All it needs is proper guidance," he would repeat at various forums and seminars.

In *The Golden Hat Trick: My Hockey Days*,

his captivating autobiography, Balbir documented his attachment to the game. "Her love for me was eternal. Our love blossomed in London. We married in Helsinki and honeymooned in Melbourne. After a period of 11 long years (from the 1964 Tokyo Olympics), she returned to me as fresh, as gay, as charming as she ever was. This time she took me to Kuala Lumpur and we were again top of the world. I am waiting for her – my hockey fairy."

Alas, his yearning for another date with the hockey fairy shall remain an unfulfilled dream. ❧

Balbir Singh ji's passing away is a very sad day for all of us. His achievement of three back-to-back gold medals will always inspire us.

– **Sardar Singh, former midfielder**

Years played: 1947-1958

Born: December 31, 1924 (Olympic record book states October 10, 1924)

FAMILY

Father: Sardar Dalip Singh (of village Haripur Khalsa, Jalandhar district, Punjab)

Mother: Karam Kaur

Daughter: Sushbir Bhomia

Grandson: Kabir Bhomia

UNIQUE OLYMPIC RECORDS

Most goals in an Olympic final: Five at Helsinki Games vs the Netherlands on July 24, 1952, in a 6-1 Indian win.

Back-to-back hat-tricks: Three goals in semifinal vs Great Britain and five goals in final vs the Netherlands at 1952 Helsinki Olympics.

Double hat-trick in an Olympic match: Six goals at London Games vs Argentina on August 4, 1948, in a 9-1 Indian win.

Top-scorer: Nine goals in three matches at the 1952 Helsinki Games

Three successive Olympic gold medals: London (1948), Helsinki (1952), Melbourne (1956)

Biggest goal difference: India scored 38 goals and conceded none at the 1956 Olympics under Balbir's captaincy. Was flag-bearer of the Indian contingent at the 1952 and 1956 Olympics and was captain of the victorious Indian hockey team in 1956.

PLAYING RECORDS

Tour	Caps	Goals
1954 overseas tour	16	83
1955 overseas tour	37	141
1948, '52, '56 Olympics	8	22
Total	61	246

HIGHLIGHTS

Manager of the victorious Indian team at the 1975 World Cup in Kuala Lumpur. Was chosen as one of the 16 iconic Olympians across disciplines of the modern Olympics (from 1896 to 2012) – the only hockey player, only Asian male and only Indian to be honoured in this manner.

AWARDS

Padma Shri (1957)

Dhyan Chand Award for Lifetime Achievement by Hockey India (2015)



It has been a very sad morning for me after knowing Balbir Singh ji has left us. He was a great man manager and knew how to use players' skillset.

– **V. Baskaran, 1980 Olympic gold medallist**

Compiled by B. G. Joshi.



Making the nation proud: Prime Minister Indira Gandhi greets members of the Indian hockey team that won the World Cup and manager Balbir Singh (centre) at her residence in Delhi on March 22.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

Hockey has lost its brightest star

There was a sense of understated elegance in his measured step and upright gait. RIP Balbir Sir. Thank you for inspiring a generation of hockey players.

Growing up in Bombay, I had read a lot about Balbir Singh's accomplishments. As though his three Olympic gold medals were not enough, he had gone on to be the manager of the successful team at the World Cup in Kuala Lumpur in 1975. He also held the coveted post of director (sports) in Punjab.

In the late 1970s, as I started my fledgling career, stories of Balbir Sr as a team manager started filtering through. After all, he was the man in charge when India won the World Cup. While most showered wholesome praise on his management skills, there were a few who were wary of his style of functioning. His writ ran large and he could wield the whip when needed.

After making my international debut in 1980, there was this deep desire to meet him



M. M. SOMAYA

and get to know the person behind the legend. He did come to meet the team before the 1980 Olympic final with his three gold medals worn proudly round his neck and even gave us a pep talk – that had been but a fleeting glance. Later in 1982, he was appointed manager of our team slated to participate in the Champions Trophy in Amsterdam.

It was my first exposure to the great man. There was a sense of understated elegance in his measured step and upright gait. There seemed a halo of calmness around him. Call it charisma or mystical presence, there was something special in this man that touched your heart at the very first meeting. It was as much his persona as his playing achievements that had me in awe.

Balbir Sr was intuitive in his management style and quickly forged a bond with

players by his personalised touch. He was also not averse to taking bold positions and at times his forthright decisions singled senior players. In particular, he did not take kindly to players who did not keep team interests above their own. Hailing from a different era, he did not have the experience of modern-day tactics for astroturf hockey. Yet, his strong work ethic and exceptionally insightful mind kept him abreast with the best in the business.

The Champions Trophy in Amsterdam saw our team play with renewed vigour under his guidance. In the match against Pakistan, we were trailing 0-3 in the first 15 minutes. His composure in the situation convinced us that all was not lost. We recovered to beat Pakistan 5-4 riding on a hat-trick by Rajinder Singh Sr. It was a gruelling tournament where we had to play six matches against the best in the world within eight days. We went the distance and finished on the podium as bronze medalists. This was a performance that remained India's best in the Champions Trophy for 36 long years. It was in large measure due to the astute handling of the team by Balbir Sr, ably assisted by Colonel Balbir, who was his deputy.

For someone who had been ever victorious in his era, there was a rude surprise in store. The team that had promised so much at the Champions Trophy tanked on the horrendous day in Delhi during the 1982 Asian Games final. It was a collective failure of everyone on the field. A blowout if there was one. With a nation in mourning and brickbats flying thick and fast, it would have shattered the nerve of most. Not Balbir Sr. On the contrary, it brought to the fore the true mettle of the great champion.

He regrouped the team and somehow convinced us that we should go to Melbourne to play the Esanda Trophy, which had the best countries on view — a virtual World Cup competition. Exactly 20 days after our monumental loss in the Asian Games final, the Asian arch-rivals were pitted against each other again in the opener in Esanda, Melbourne. India won 2-1 and went on to defeat Holland, England, New Zealand and a host of top teams to make it to the final. Although we ultimately lost to host Australia, it was a retribution of sorts to beat the old enemy and finish on the podium from a fully competitive field.

For many like me, it was a return of confidence to continue a career in hockey.



Two kings: Balbir Singh with Indian football captain Samar Banerjee during the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

Balbir Sr's association with the Indian team across the three tournaments in 1982 gave the team two results that were never equalled by any Indian team for many decades. In our meetings subsequently, he would always remember the good times and not let us feel the burden of the one big loss. He would lightheartedly also remind me of the days when he pulled me up on the odd occasion for violating team curfew timings!

The discipline that he maintained enabled him to retain a sharp memory and excellent health. He always alluded to his glass of cold milk that was the secret of his fitness and immense energy. During our last meeting in March this year, he had the same angelic smile and maintained the poise and serenity that he had when I first met him. At age 95 and mobbed by many admirers, he took the time to say, "No. 4 (my shirt number), how are you and how is your friend Joe (Joaquim Carvalho)." His passing is a personal loss since I was greatly influenced by his managerial style.

Hockey has lost its brightest star, signalling the end of an era. RIP Balbir Sir. Thank you for inspiring a generation of hockey players. ❧

A day with the hockey legend

“At the 1948 victory ceremony, as the Tricolour was going up, I felt as if I was going up, too. I felt as if I was flying,” Balbir Singh said in an interview at his Chandigarh residence in February.



AYAN ACHARYA

The highway from Delhi to Chandigarh is a trip through history and geography. The fables of Kurukshetra and the bloody past of Panipat are complemented by broad roads, flanked by picturesque greenery.

It was early February and the landscape was softer in the morning in Chandigarh. Everything seemed quieter; the tea stalls were opening for business, while some eateries were catering to locals searching for breakfast to shake off the winter slumber.

As one went from the bustling, seemingly crowded streets of Sector 43 to the sprawling, luxurious roads of Sector 36, there was no sense of history attached until you landed on the doorsteps of house No. 1067.

Looking back:

Balbir Singh with his daughter Sushbir at their home in Chandigarh.

AKHILESH KUMAR

Of the eight gold medals that India has won in field hockey at the Olympics, three reside here.

“These are all that my father is left with now,” said Sushbir, Balbir Singh Sr’s daughter, referring to his three Olympic gold medals. “Naturally, after losing dad’s lifetime treasure trove at the hands of SAI (Sports Authority of India) and after our long struggle trying to trace them and still not finding any leads, we are more possessive.”

It was Balbir’s good fortune that the three Olympic medals continued to be in his possession and weren’t lost. The 1985 Padma Shri awardee had donated his captain’s blazer from the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, 36 medals including the silver



from the 1958 Tokyo Asian Games, and more than 100 rare photographs to the SAI secretary at the time on being told that they would be displayed at the then-proposed National Sports Museum.

“Dad’s three Olympic gold medals are our family’s pride. I hail from a freedom fighter’s family; my grandfather always stressed upon the importance of contributing to the honour of the *tiranga* (Indian tricolour). The Olympic golds stand as testimony towards the same,” said Sushbir.

According to Balbir’s maternal grandson Kabir, the International Olympic Committee’s Olympic Museum wanted the Melbourne Games blazer to be part of the official London Olympics exhibition where Balbir was the only Indian and the only hockey player chosen among 16 icons across all disciplines in 116 years of the modern Olympics era.

“That is when we contacted SAI to get that blazer as Nanaji had nothing with him in London apart from the Olympic medals. But the SAI officials said that they didn’t know about the whereabouts,” Kabir said.

It was not all patrician airs and drawing-room decorum at Balbir’s house, of course. His 1948 Olympic Diploma was framed and hanging on the wall. An approximately 16x22-inch certificate now awarded to the top eight finishers in all competitions, it was signed by the president of the Games, the IOC president and the chairman of the Organizing Committee. His first trophy as a

Great honour:
Balbir Singh leading the Indian contingent at the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

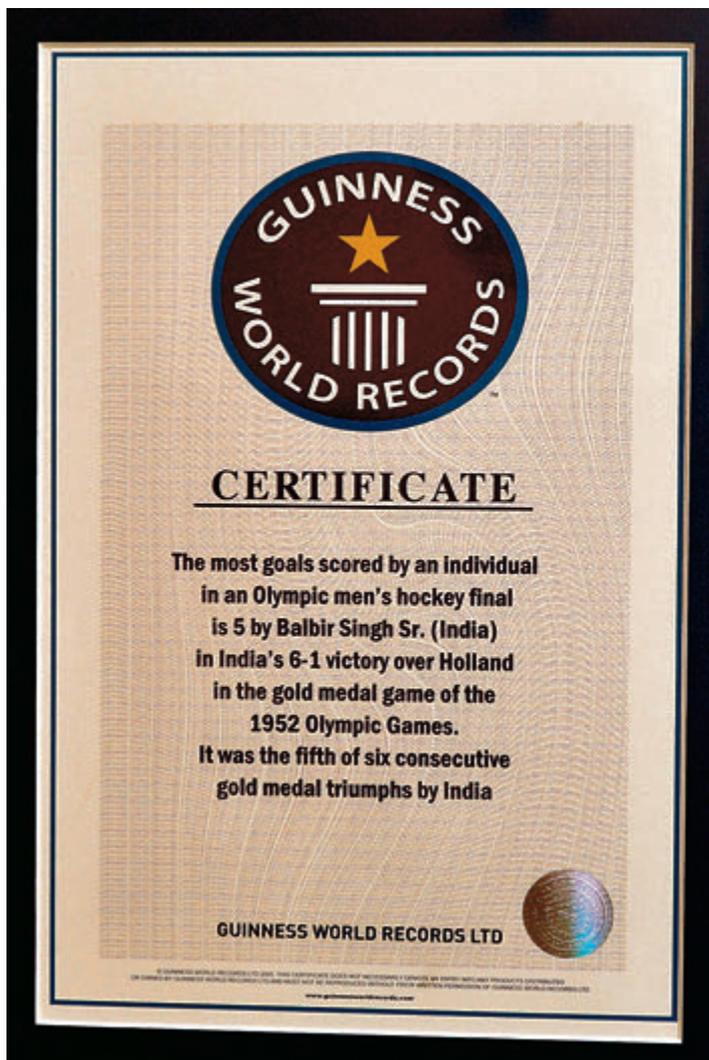
teenager in school was kept nearby, commemorating the beginning of a storied career.

At 95, Balbir’s mind was still sharp, but his body fell a step behind. For driven, competitive athletes like Balbir, seekers of sustained excellence, coming to terms with the march of age can be tougher than one can imagine.

Balbir holds the unique honour of being the flag-bearer for the Indian contingent in two successive Olympics, in 1952 and 1956. An alumnus of DS School in Moga (Jalandhar district), Khalsa College, Balbir went from giving goalkeepers anxious moments in inter-university and national championships to holding the record for the most individual goals — five, against the Netherlands at Helsinki in 1952 — in an Olympic final.

“I keep staring at the medals for a long time,” said Sushbir. “It’s difficult to explain the feeling in words. Each medal tells so many stories. Each time I end up feeling prouder of his contribution towards the nation and feel blessed for being his daughter.”

Balbir was introspective and unassuming. He was at the heart of one of Indian hockey’s watershed moments, but even on that day, 72 years later, he played down his contribution. In a drawing room, a virtual museum celebrating many a monumental achievement, a 342-page long paperback titled *A Forgotten Legend: Balbir Singh Sr.,*



Triple Olympic Gold & Modi's New India by Canadian journalist Patrick Blennerhassett stuck up like a sore thumb. The book delved into the mystery of how and why a country “consciously” forgot one of its greatest icons. There was credence to this belief.

Amid the clamour for a Bharat Ratna for former India batsman Sachin Tendulkar, the central government modified the rules to pave way for eligibility of sportspersons for the country’s highest civilian award. “The names of Tendulkar, (Abhinav) Bindra and Dhyan Chand were doing the rounds, but there was not a single mention of my father. He’s a three-time Olympic gold medallist!” said Sushbir.

More than just a symbol

Balbir and hockey aren’t immediately associated with India’s dominant status in sports today. After the division of India in

Scaling great heights:

An alumnus of DS School in Moga (Jalandhar district), Khalsa College, Balbir Singh went from giving goalkeepers anxious moments in inter-university and national championships to holding the record for the most individual goals – in an Olympic final.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

1947, the subcontinent witnessed arguably the largest mass migration in modern history leading to harrowing consequences. Amid the turmoil after Independence, the focus shifted to the 1948 Olympics. “The national anthem and the fact that we beat our rulers (British) on their home soil to retain the Olympic hockey gold can never be forgotten,” said Balbir.

India had won three Olympic gold medals in hockey before Balbir’s ascent – at Amsterdam in 1928, Los Angeles in 1932 and Berlin in 1936 – but those were as a British colony. Balbir’s 1948 gold, therefore, was much more than just a symbol of sporting success; it meant India had put itself on the world sporting map.

“At the 1948 victory ceremony, as the Tricolour was going up, I felt as if I was going up, too. I felt as if I was flying,” Balbir said in his raspy voice.

Incidentally, Balbir almost didn’t make it to London! When the Indian team was picked for the London Games, his name was left out of the list of probables. It was only after Dickie Carr, an Anglo-Indian who had won gold at the 1932 Olympics, asked why Balbir wasn’t playing that his name was included.

At his home in Chandigarh, Balbir raised his hand gingerly and waved it for the first time that day as he described the moment of euphoria.

“As a child, I used to ask my father (Dalip Singh), who was a freedom fighter, what the flag means. That day, when our flag was hoisted (at Wembley Stadium), I realised what independence means. It was the proudest moment for me,” he added.

His voice was almost muted, garbled but warm. There was a pause. He lingered a little longer, perhaps punctuated by memories, perhaps by exasperation at the current state of Indian hockey. “I still remember that before the match started, Wembley Stadium was reverberating with the noise of the English fans,” he said, pausing again to catch his breath. “But after half-time, some English fans started rooting for India, saying ‘make it half a dozen,’” Balbir recalled, his hands trembling and voice shaking.

When the hockey legend was battling for life at the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research in Chandigarh in early 2019, an old photograph sent to Sushbir reflected the Olympic champion’s selfless love for the country. It was from October 1962, when India was at war with



China. Sharing the anecdote, Sushbir said, “A man called me up and said he had a picture of my father that he would like us to have. He was deputed to then chief minister Partap Singh Kairon’s office in 1962 when my father went to meet the CM. When he met him, he offered his three Olympic gold medals for the China war fund. This left everyone in the office, including the CM, surprised. Kairon refused to accept the medals. But my father said the medals were the best he could offer, and on his insistence, the CM accepted them.

“However, Kairon did not send the medals to the PM’s relief fund and kept it in the office instead. After a couple of months, he returned the medals to my father and told him, ‘These (medals) are the country’s pride and can’t be exchanged for money.’”

‘Everything’

The camera captured Balbir, frail and slow, with a red turban wrapped tight around his head, as he retired into his room. He had a

Gracious host: In that interaction with him in February, Balbir didn’t let his age and frailty get in the way of a warm welcome – nor a farewell. As I left, he said to me with an endearing smile, “Thank you for coming. Come again soon.”

AKHILESH KUMAR

picture of his late wife up on his bedroom wall; a photograph of India’s 1975 World Cup win found a place as well along with a hockey stick. “It (the stick) has given me everything,” said Balbir with a smile.

“His energy and memory are an amazing source for all of us. It is such an honour to be known as his grandson. If he stays fit, I’m taking Nanaji to Tokyo this time,” Kabir said.

Unfortunately, he didn’t have that chance. Balbir Singh had been in a semicomatose state since since May 18 and had developed a blood clot in his brain after first being admitted to Fortis Hospital, Mohali, for bronchial pneumonia with high fever. He died in Chandigarh on May 25 after battling multiple health issues. He was 95.

In that interaction with him in February, Balbir didn’t let his age and frailty get in the way of a warm welcome – nor a farewell.

As I left, he said to me with an endearing smile, “Thank you for coming. Come again soon.” ❧

ON THE WRITE LINE

SUNIL GAVASKAR



Spin assassins of yore

Prassie, Venkat and Chandra, three of India's famous quartet of spinners (Bedi, obviously, the other great), reached personal milestones – recently they celebrated landmark birthdays – much to the delight of the pre-internet generation.



Fabulous four: B. S. Chandrasekhar, S. Venkatraghavan, Bishan Singh Bedi and E. A. S. Prasanna share a light moment, and the topic seems to be the deadliest weapon they ever had – the cricket ball.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

Last month, two of India's finest match-winners celebrated landmark birthdays within days of each other. On May 17, Bhagwath Subramanya Chandrasekhar turned 75 and a few days later, on May 22, Erapalli Anantharao Srinivasa Prasanna entered his 81st year. A month earlier, on April 21, Srinivas Venkataraghavan had completed 75 years. So three of India's famous quartet of spinners reached personal milestones much to the delight of the pre-

internet generation. The internet generation was, of course, enamoured by the antics of someone nowhere near the class of these wonderful spinners who bowled India to many a famous win. What was sadder still was the mainstream media, apart from the odd shining example, also did not find it fit to have a paragraph or two if not a whole article about these stalwarts even while finding space to gush about a couple of current superstars calling their teammates'

names while doing their internet chats with overseas players.

Yes, the cricket loving public is understandably more keen to know about the current players and how they are dealing with the current situation. And the modern generation is not shy at all. They are happy to put just about everything up on their public platforms and the many websites and call even the silliest stuff they see, adorable. Then, of course, there's this fascination about the players from across the border. What they are saying gets splashed even when most times they are having a go at the Indian players either directly or subtly. Do any Indian players' interviews or comments ever feature in the media elsewhere? NO. Then why give the foreign players an outlet to take their animosity out in our media platforms?

Prassie, Venkat and Chandra belong to the generation that played the game for the love of it and the honour and privilege of playing for the country. Chandra was the first I saw from the North Stand of the Brabourne Stadium against Bobby Simpson's Australians in 1964. The Australians had finished a long tour of England for the Ashes and stopped over in India to play a three-Test match series on their way back home. Chandra was new to Test cricket but was running in to bowl as if he had been playing Test matches since birth. The confidence with which he bowled was unbelievable. The North Stand crowd at the Brabourne Stadium was one of the most critical crowds in the country then. It was mainly filled with Mumbai Ranji Trophy players, past as well as current and senior division club cricketers who knew their game. If they got stuck into you then you had it. There are many stories of players from other States pulling out at the last moment of playing a Test match at the Brabourne Stadium and the rumour mills used to suggest that it was because they got cold feet at the prospect of facing the North Stand crowd. Chandra had no such fears and I still vividly remember the ball with which he clean bowled Peter Burge, the burly Australian batsman. It pitched just outside the leg-stump and hit the top of the off-stump knocking it into the gloves of the wicketkeeper. It was exactly like the Warne delivery to Mike Gatting. Peter Burge was also built like Gatting. Of course there was no TV then and it was not an England game for it to be called the ball of the century or

the greatest whatever that has to involve England and Australia, but to bowl that delivery on a flat batting pitch like the Brabourne Stadium was very, very special. Thereafter, it was a privilege for me to be in the same Indian team when Chandra bowled India to victories in England and Australia. There was no thumping the chest or giving the batsman any send off. Just a slow walk towards the wicketkeeper. The gentle assassin that's what Chandra was.

Prassie on the other hand was a lot more excited when he got a wicket. He would come out with peals of laughter at his success in trapping the batsman. You could actually feel his brain clicking as he plotted the batsman's dismissal. The revolutions that he put on the ball could be seen from the time the ball left his fingers till it reached the batsman.

Prassie's best figures came in Auckland when I captained the team for the first time as Bishan Singh Bedi got injured just before the toss. It was Day One and on a green tinged pitch Prasanna picked eight wickets which are still the best figures at that venue. What a bowler he was and what a fun guy — always willing to tell a joke and laugh. A privilege to have shared the same change room with him.

Venkat suffered from the comparison with Prassie. While Prassie had the loop, Venkat had accuracy. On a pitch giving even the slightest help, Venkat was unscorable. His biggest attribute was a never-say-die spirit. He had a temper, but that actually made him more loveable because everybody knew that he was going to be the first one to laugh after that.

Way back on the 1979 tour, I turned up on the last day of the Lord's Test match in a *kurta* and *lungi*. There was no uniform those days. Venkat, who was the captain, didn't say anything till after lunch when we had to go upstairs to the lunch room. He came next to me, looked at me up and down and asked sternly "what's this" ? I replied, "C'mon skip, you know what it is. You wear it all the time in Chennai." The next moment he gulped out a laugh so loud that the rest of the change room joined in. He then shook my hand in that bone crushing grip of his. Yes, it was preferable to face him even on a spinning pitch than get your fingers crushed in his hand.

Terrific cricketers and even more wonderful guys. Stay well, stay healthy all your lives. ☺



The North Stand crowd at the Brabourne Stadium was one of the most critical crowds in the country then. It was mainly filled with Mumbai Ranji Trophy players, past as well as current and senior division club cricketers who knew their game. If they got stuck into you then you had it.

All about Test cricket captains – Part III

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 bat-

ting 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.

The third part of this series looks at their bowling performances.

Best innings bowling figures by captains

Bowling figures	Captain	Country	Opponent	Venue	Date	Result
9/83+	Kapil Dev	India	West Indies	Ahmedabad	November 16, 1983	Lost
8/60+	Imran Khan	Pakistan	India	Karachi	December 27, 1982	Won
8/63+	Rangana Herath	Sri Lanka	Zimbabwe	Harare	November 10, 2016	Won
8/106	Kapil Dev	India	Australia	Adelaide	December 14, 1985	Drawn
7/37	Courtney Walsh	West Indies	New Zealand	Wellington	February 12, 1995	Won

+ Second innings

Best match bowling figures by captains

Bowling figures	Captain	Country	Opponent	Venue	Date	Result
13/55	Courtney Walsh	West Indies	New Zealand	Wellington	February 13, 1995	Won
13/135	Waqar Younis	Pakistan	Zimbabwe	Karachi (Defence)	December 6, 1993	Won
13/152	Rangana Herath	Sri Lanka	Zimbabwe	Harare	November 10, 2016	Won
12/100	Fazal Mahmood	Pakistan	West Indies	Dacca	March 8, 1959	Won
11/79	Imran Khan	Pakistan	India	Karachi	December 27, 1982	Won

Note: India's Kapil Dev (10/135 vs West Indies at Ahmedabad on November 16, 1983) and Bishan Singh Bedi (10/194 vs Australia at Perth on December 21, 1977) are the only captains to lose a Test match after taking a 10-wicket match haul!

Best innings bowling figures by captains – how the record changed hands

Bowling figures	Captain	Country	Opponent	Venue	Date	Result
4/70	James Lillywhite	England	Australia	Melbourne	April 3, 1877	Won
5/19	Aubrey Smith	England	South Africa	Port Elizabeth	March 12, 1889	Won
6/155	George Giffen	Australia	England	Melbourne	January 1, 1895	Lost
7/100	Monty Noble	Australia	England	Sydney	February 27, 1904	Lost
7/80	Gubby Allen	England	India	The Oval	August 18, 1936	Won
7/44	Ian Johnson	Australia	West Indies	Georgetown	April 28, 1955	Won
8/60	Imran Khan	Pakistan	India	Karachi	December 27, 1982	Won
9/83	Kapil Dev	India	West Indies	Ahmedabad	November 16, 1983	Lost

Note: For Smith, it was in his only Test match of his career.

Best match bowling figures by captains – how the record changed hands

Bowling figures	Captain	Country	Opponent	Venue	Date	Result
7/61	Aubrey Smith	England	South Africa	Port Elizabeth	March 13, 1889	Won
8/40	George Giffen	Australia	England	Sydney	February 4, 1895	Won
11/90	Arthur Gilligan	England	South Africa	Birmingham	June 17, 1924	Won
12/100	Fazal Mahmood	Pakistan	West Indies	Dacca	March 8, 1959	Won
13/135	Waqar Younis	Pakistan	Zimbabwe	Karachi (Defence)	December 6, 1993	Won
13/55	Courtney Walsh	West Indies	New Zealand	Wellington	February 13, 1995	Won

Note: For Smith, it was in his only Test match of his career.

Leading wicket-takers in Tests as captain

Wickets	Captain	Country	Tests as captain	Average	Strike rate	Period
187	Imran Khan	Pakistan	48	20.27	49.26	July 29, 1982-January 7, 1992
138	Richie Benaud	Australia	28	25.79	77.68	December 5, 1958-December 11, 1963
117	Gary Sobers	West Indies	39	34.00	92.82	March 3, 1965-April 26, 1972
116	Daniel Vettori	New Zealand	32	33.39	79.96	November 8, 2007-January 19, 2011
111	Kapil Dev	India	34	26.35	60.52	February 23, 1983-March 17, 1987
107	Wasim Akram	Pakistan	25	23.36	50.88	April 16, 1993-November 28, 1999
106	Bishan Singh Bedi	India	22	24.82	68.67	February 5, 1976-November 19, 1978
103	Shaun Pollock	South Africa	26	21.37	56.63	July 20, 2000-January 5, 2003

First to landmark Test wickets as captain

Wickets	Captain	Country	Achieved on	Opponent	Venue
50	Richie Benaud	Australia	December 12, 1959	India	Delhi
100	Richie Benaud	Australia	February 10, 1961	West Indies	Melbourne
150	Imran Khan	Pakistan	April 14, 1988	Wellington	Port of Spain

Note: Imran Khan became the leading wicket-taker as a Test captain when he crossed Richie Benaud's tally of 138 wickets at Georgetown on April 2, 1988.

Most five-wicket hauls as captain

Five-wicket hauls	Captain	Country	Tests as captain	Wickets	Average	Period
12	Imran Khan	Pakistan	48	187	20.27	July 29, 1982-January 7, 1992
9	Richie Benaud	Australia	28	138	25.79	December 5, 1958-December 11, 1963
8	Bishan Singh Bedi	India	22	106	24.82	February 5, 1976-November 19, 1978
7	Courtney Walsh	West Indies	22	85	25.72	April 16, 1994-December 9, 1997
6	Daniel Vettori	New Zealand	32	116	33.39	November 8, 2007-January 19, 2011
6	Jason Holder	West Indies	32	90	24.78	October 14, 2015-November 29, 2019

Most 10-wicket match hauls as captain

10-wicket hauls	Captain	Country	Tests as captain	Wickets	Average	Period
4	Imran Khan	Pakistan	48	187	20.27	July 29, 1982-January 7, 1992
2	Intikhab Alam	Pakistan	17	54	31.74	October 24, 1969-March 6, 1975

Most wickets in a calendar year as captain

Wickets	Captain	Country	Year	Tests	Average	Strike rate	Five-wicket hauls
58	Kapil Dev	India	1983	14	20.45	46.41	3
55	Shaun Pollock	South Africa	2001	13	21.38	56.84	4
54	Richie Benaud	Australia	1959	8	18.65	58.96	4
54	Daniel Vettori	New Zealand	2008	14	26.13	65.61	5
48	Bishan Singh Bedi	India	1976	10	20.00	67.88	3
48	Imran Khan	Pakistan	1982	8	14.75	42.60	3

Most five-wicket hauls in a calendar year as captain

Five-wicket hauls	Captain	Country	Year	Tests	Wickets	Average	Strike rate
5	Bishan Singh Bedi	India	1977	7+	38	22.97	61.67
5	Daniel Vettori	New Zealand	2008	14	54	26.13	65.61
4	Gubby Allen	England	1936	5	32	16.16	30.47
4	Fazal Mahmood	Pakistan	1959	5	32	17.06	44.97
4	Richie Benaud	Australia	1959	8	54	18.65	58.96
4	Shaun Pollock	South Africa	2001	13	55	21.38	56.84
4	Jason Holder	West Indies	2018	6	33	12.39	27.30

+In the 1977-78 Melbourne Test, Bedi's first innings came in 1977 while the second came in 1978. The bowling figures above have been adjusted accordingly.

Note: *No captain has been able to claim more than one 10-wicket haul in a single calendar year!*

Best innings bowling figures in very first Test match as captain

Bowling figures	Captain	Country	Opponent	Venue	Date	Result
7/52	Imran Khan	Pakistan	England	Birmingham	July 29, 1982	Lost
7/91	Waqar Younis	Pakistan	Zimbabwe	Karachi (Defence)	December 5, 1993	Won
6/7	Arthur Gilligan	England	South Africa	Birmingham	June 16, 1924	Won
6/132	Naimur Rahman	Bangladesh	India	Dhaka	November 13, 2000	Lost
6/155	George Giffen	Australia	England	Melbourne	January 1, 1895	Lost

Notes:

- *Naimur Rahman was on Test debut and it was also Bangladesh's inaugural Test match!*

- *The only other captain on Test debut to take a five-wicket haul other than Naimur was England's Aubrey Smith in his only Test match vs South Africa at Port Elizabeth on March 12, 1889.*

- *George Giffen's six-wicket haul came in the second innings - he did not bowl in the first!*

Best match bowling figures in very first Test match as captain

Bowling figures	Captain	Country	Opponent	Venue	Date	Result
13/135	Waqar Younis	Pakistan	Zimbabwe	Karachi (Defence)	December 6, 1993	Won
11/90	Arthur Gilligan	England	South Africa	Birmingham	June 17, 1924	Won
11/104	Rashid Khan	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Chittagong (Divisional)	September 9, 2019	Won
11/150	Buster Nupen	South Africa	England	Johannesburg (Old)	December 27, 1930	Won
10/78	Gubby Allen	England	India	Lord's	June 30, 1936	Won

Note: *The best match bowling figures by a captain on Test debut is 7/61 by England's Aubrey Smith in his only match vs South Africa at Port Elizabeth on March 13, 1889.*

Bowling hat-tricks by captain

Bowling figures	Captain	Country	Opponent	Venue	Date	Result
4/30	Wasim Akram	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	Lahore	March 6, 1999	Drawn
3/33	Wasim Akram	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	Dhaka	March 14, 1999	Won

Note: *These two hat-tricks came in successive Tests, just a week apart in the Asian Test Championship, of which the Dhaka Test was the final match.*



Difficult times: With funding drying up fast, Lance Klusener and his colleagues at the Afghanistan Cricket Board had to take a 25 percent salary cut. PTI

Cricket wasn't the dream

SHAYAN ACHARYA

From a sensational debut in Test cricket, with match-winning figures of 8 for 64 against India in Calcutta in 1996, to heartbreak in the World Cup semifinal in 1999 – Lance Klusener has experienced many ups and downs in his long and illustrious career.

But the 48-year-old cannot imagine when was the last time he had such a long break from cricket.

As the world grapples with the coronavirus pandemic, there hasn't been any cricketing activities for nearly three months, and Klusener – who is now head coach of the Afghanistan cricket team – admits it will take some time for things to get back on track.

The pandemic has also impacted finances. With funding drying up fast, Klusener and his colleagues at the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) had to take a 25 percent salary cut.

However, Klusener is optimistic that

once things ease out, the Afghanistan players will be able to bounce back.

In a chat with *Sportstar*, the former South African all-rounder opened up on a range of issues.

Cricket has been hit hard by the pandemic. As the coach of Afghanistan, how do you see the way forward?

It's tough to say. If we are not going to have the T20 (Twenty20) World Cup or the Asia Cup, then we will have to look for quite a few bilateral series. The team will try and arrange fixtures against oppositions which weren't scheduled.

How has the lockdown impacted the Afghanistan team?

We did not have a lot of fixtures planned. Our biggest thing was the Asia Cup and the T20 World Cup. In terms of that, it has affected us. It has basically cancelled all our fixtures... We need to be proactive in trying

“We grew up in the apartheid era when South Africa was banned and our biggest goal, I guess, would have been to play for our states,” says Lance Klusener.



Resuming sports: Afghanistan head coach Lance Klusener is optimistic that once things ease out, the players will be able to bounce back.

K. MURALI KUMAR

to organise bilateral series or other fixtures, which were not scheduled originally. So yeah, in terms of fixtures, it has wiped up our whole year.

Some of the teams have already resumed practice while maintaining health guidelines. What's the status with Afghanistan?

We have tried to keep them going, on online platforms, showing them videos of opposition and trying to stimulate their minds. We can't get on to the field, and there is only so much you can do online without being interactive. That's being really limited. We have challenged them physically to keep up in terms of fitness. There have been fitness videos posted online.

There was Ramadan in between, so it was a challenge for the boys as well. Afghanistan has been hit hard by the virus as well like other countries. It has been a challenge. If we are permitted by the government, we will try and get some camps going in June. However, our focus – from the administration's point of view – is to try and pick as many fixtures as we can.

How do you plan to go about it?

The boys have been inactive for close to two months, so they will have to slowly get into the swing of things. We have to monitor the bowlers' workloads, build up fitness levels again.

And then, in terms of fixtures, everybody is trying to jump in and get involved in the process. Friends, other coaches, other administrators – who you have relations with – could be reached and see whether we can fit in a few fixtures.

The pandemic has also had an impact on the finances. Your thoughts?

It's extremely difficult. You mentioned finances, we all had to take pay cuts, which I guess is the norm these days. We need to be playing games, we need to be selling TV rights to fund our cricket. We really are hoping to bring Afghanistan on TV. That's where comes the support of bigger nations. They should come to the party and host us for a few games, if none of the two big tournaments (Asia Cup and T20 World Cup) take place.

Afghanistan will be playing a lone day-night Test against Australia this year...

It will be a big opportunity for players and they will be tested at the highest level. So that's a challenge for players, coaches and everybody to make sure that they are prepared. It only being roughly our fourth Test match (fifth), it's going to be a big, big challenge and a learning opportunity as well. We need to thank Australia for accommodating us.

When the action resumes, there will be



a lot of rule changes. What are your thoughts on the proposed ban on the use of saliva for ball shining?

Saliva will make a little bit of a difference. It won't be a huge difference. There are various substances which invariably will find their way on to a cricket ball somehow. If we can't use saliva, then there might be something that we can use like a certain wax product or whatever, which is available to all teams for a limited amount, in each innings. That will certainly help and it will certainly be something that will help people stay away from the habit of using saliva to shine the ball. That will also take away having to do anything with the wicket.

With so many changes coming in after the pandemic, do you think it will be a challenge for the coaches as well? How do you plan to address it?

It's a learning curve all around. There are a lot of habits that just come naturally, like putting saliva on the ball, celebrating with hugs, shaking hands, to name a few. So we might just need to be wary of that for a while.

Hopefully, down the line, we can find a vaccine or something that can take care of it. But we need to be extremely careful, certainly getting back into the sport. Players have got a lot of learning too and coaches too need to get a little bit innovative. We might need to train in smaller groups. For example, we might need to have groups of batters in the morning – it might make longer days for coaches as well if that's the way training needs to go.

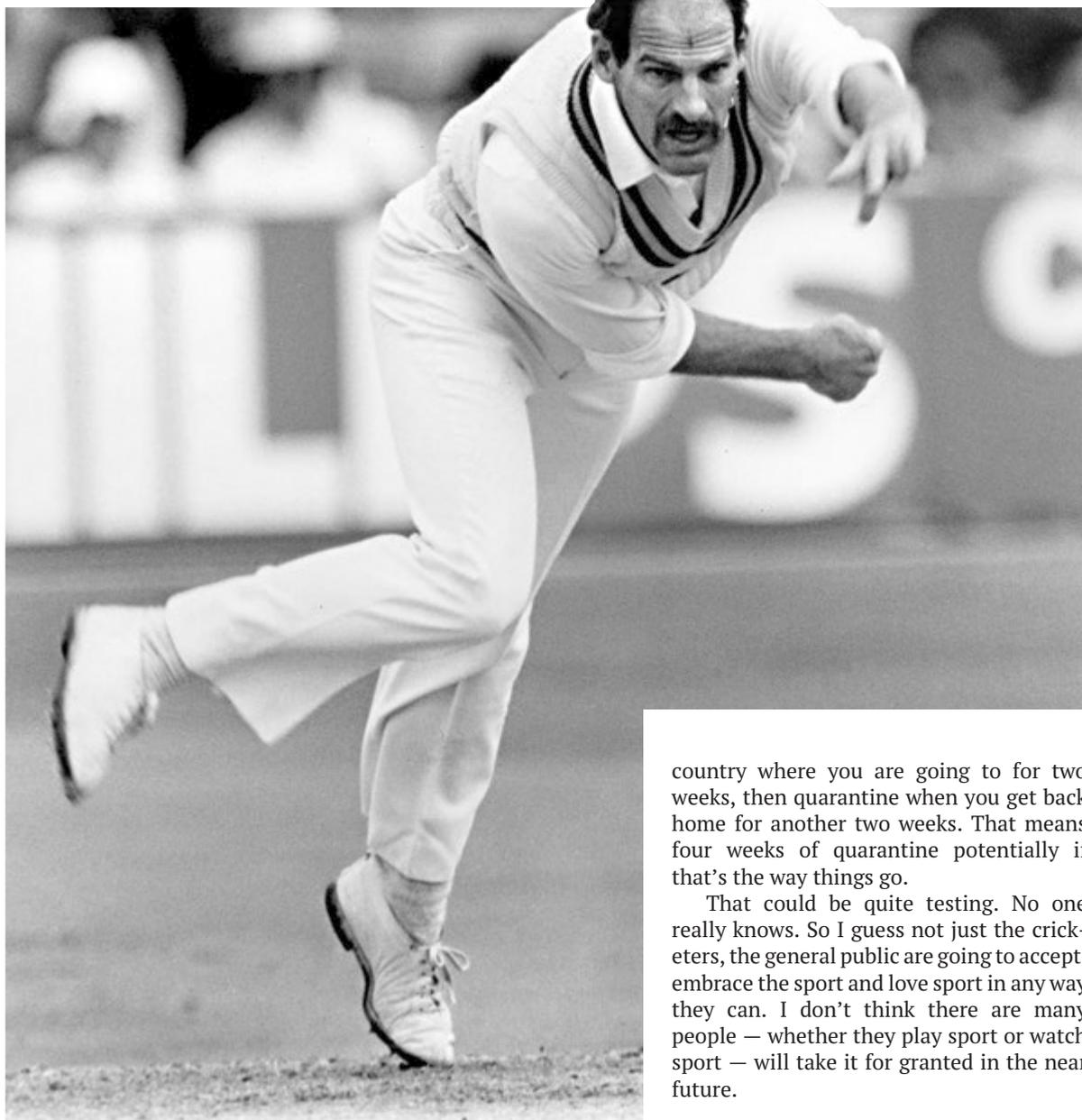
Everybody is just waiting to get back into the park in any shape or form they can – even if it means no spectators, or whatever it is. It's going to be a real shame but we gotta make do with what we are allowed to do at the time.

But yeah, it's gonna be different, not just cricket, but all sports are gonna be very different for a certain amount of time, going forward. We can just hope and pray and that the smart people can find us a vaccine or something like it that will take care of it. But it will be different, there will be challenges – for umpires and administrators as well.

A question of pace:

“South African bowlers like Andile Phehlukwayo and (left) Dwaine Pretorius are bowling in the mid-120s, whereas all-rounders such as Shaun Pollock, Jacques Kallis were all bowling in the mid-140s – that does elevate you certainly from a bowling point of view into a different space,” says Klusener. AP

Do you think in international cricket,



Strong influence: “I had the privilege of spending a lot of time with him (Clive Rice), playing with him back in KwaZulu-Natal, when he played there as well. So, Clive definitely played a big part in my career,” says Klusener. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

where calendars are chock-a-block, a “bio-secure bubble” is a sustainable model?

Yes, it will be difficult. There will be quarantines as well. Can we train during quarantine? You know people then returning to their countries, will we have to remain in two-week quarantine before we are released to our families? Yeah, quite difficult and testing times. Some countries can’t travel, some can, some borders are closed.

Just really envisage longer time on the road. With quarantine, you might have a situation where you have three T20 games but you might have to quarantine in that

country where you are going to for two weeks, then quarantine when you get back home for another two weeks. That means four weeks of quarantine potentially if that’s the way things go.

That could be quite testing. No one really knows. So I guess not just the cricketers, the general public are going to accept, embrace the sport and love sport in any way they can. I don’t think there are many people — whether they play sport or watch sport — will take it for granted in the near future.

Let’s talk a bit about South African cricket. The Proteas have been blessed with fast bowling all-rounders over the years. After Clive Rice, Brian McMillan, you and Shaun Pollock carried forward the legacy. Do you think the current squad lacks that?

I think I saw some decent all-rounders. I just speak from a South African point of view. They are there, but the difference is I think — small differences — you’ve got Dwaine Pretorius, Andile Phehlukwayo. The difference is that they are bowling in the mid-120s, whereas all-rounders such as Shaun Pollock, Jacques Kallis were all bowling in the mid-140s — that does elevate you



certainly from a bowling point of view into a different space.

So, I don't think there is a lack of quality. I think that on any given day, those are seriously good all-rounders. But the small differences is that 20km per hour in bowling speed – that sets those all-rounders apart.

Do you think Clive Rice would have been as successful and well known as Richard Hadlee, Kapil Dev or Imran Khan if he had a full international career?

I had the privilege of being at the National Academy with Clive Rice as the head coach, so even my batting style – I took quite a bit from Clive. I had the privilege of spending a lot of time with him, playing with him back in KwaZulu-Natal, when he played there as well. So, Clive definitely played a big part in my career. Unfortunately, I got him towards the very end of his career. But definitely, given the opportunity at the international level, he was a phenomenal all-rounder. His record speaks for itself, in county cricket as well.

Apartheid did rob the world of not just

cricketers, but many other sportsmen too who didn't get that opportunity. But that's just the way life is. It is important for us who are given that opportunity we make the very best of it.

You are regarded as one of the finest all-rounders from South Africa. But as a youngster, what was your biggest dream?

Growing up in South Africa, the dream wasn't certainly to play cricket for a living. We grew up in the apartheid era when South Africa was banned and our biggest goal, I guess, would have been to play for our states. Dreams of playing for our states (came after seeing) icons like Graeme Pollock, Clive Rice – we used to idolise them and try and emulate.

For us, growing up in those years, it was more of a dream to be like somebody you had seen in the newspapers. Because we did not have television sets those days. But the dream of playing for the country finally materialised in the early 1990s, when it did become possible. And then I did finally realise that maybe I was good enough to have some sort of career on the cricket field. We dreamed very differently in those days. ☺

Seeking an alternative:

Klusener says, "Saliva will make a little bit of a difference. It won't be a huge difference. There are various substances which invariably will find their way on to a cricket ball somehow." AP

Lefties, rightly a treat to watch

Southpaws are different from the majority – graceful and most looking as if they have all the time in the world to play.

VIJAY LOKAPALLY

Left-hand batsmen have a special place in cricket. They are different from the majority – graceful and most looking as if they have all the time in the world to play. We have come to admire batsmen like Gundappa Viswanath, Mohammad Azharuddin and VVS Laxman for their artful batsmanship, all timing and style, hitting the ball but not wanting to hurt it.

Among the left-handers we saw in the last 50 years, David Gower was the one to be revered. You would not want to miss a ball when he was on strike. Mark Waugh was the right-handed version of Gower.

Our own Sourav Ganguly came closest to that class of silken strokeplay. There was not a moment of boredom when Ganguly batted.

Here, we pick 10 left-handers to watch, beginning with Nari Contractor. From accounts based on old-timers, writers and players, he commanded respect and had a following.

In later years, Ajit Wadekar emerged as the most attractive batsman to watch. This list does not include left-handers Hrishikesh Kanitkar, S. Ramesh, Hemant Badani and Ravindra Jadeja, all successful with immense utility – as bowlers and fielders. But the list had to be restricted to 10 who would deliver in all conditions.

These may not be the best 10 in every cricket lover's diary. So, feel free to make your own favourites.



NARI CONTRACTOR

Among the most gutsy of Indian openers, he was looked up to by his contemporaries for inspiration. Consistency was his hallmark and his career, like that of Ajit Wadekar, can't be judged by the number of Test centuries he made. He had two classy innings of 90-plus runs – 92 in Delhi against the West Indies in 1969 and 92 again against Pakistan at the same venue in 1961 – which are talked about by old-timers for their tenacity.

That he made runs on uncovered pitches and without protective equipment spoke for his ability to absorb pressure. Sadly, his career ended because of a life-threatening head injury caused by a bouncer from Charlie Griffith, notorious for his dubious action.

Contractor represented India in 31 Tests and scored 1,611 runs with one century and 11 half-centuries. In the 138 first-class games he played, he scored 8,611 runs with 22 hundreds.

AJIT WADEKAR

Sir Garfield Sobers once had a message to be conveyed to Ajit Wadekar. “Please say hello to a great batsman from a good batsman.” That is how the legendary West Indian rated Wadekar, one of the most stylish batsmen Indian cricket has seen.

For Wadekar, batting was an exercise in nonchalance. His leisurely walk to the crease was such a deception actually. He was quick on his feet and electric in shot execution.

His ability to be in the best position to pull and hook was stunning. A delight to watch and a batsman who played to entertain. His Ranji Trophy knock of 323 against B. S. Chandrasekhar and E. A. S. Prasanna in 1967 is rated among the classics.

Wadekar represented India in 37 Tests and scored 2,113 runs with one century and 14 half-centuries. In 237 first-class games, he scored 15,380 runs with 36 hundreds and 84 fifties.



SALIM DURANI



I once asked Tiger Pataudi to pick his best Indian XI. The first name he wanted me to write down was Salim Durani. “Now we shall pick the rest,” he smiled. Durani, according to Pataudi, was a “genius” who was “wasted” due to his erratic moods. Durani, his contemporaries vowed, was the most unpredictable player on the field. He could throw away his wicket and then the next day swing the match on its head with his bowling.

His dismissals of Sobers and Clive Lloyd to fashion a thrilling win in Port of Spain in 1971 helped India make history. In 13 years, he played just 29 Tests and yet most captains preferred to have him as the first choice in their XI. That he could hit sixes on demand made him a darling of the spectators.

In 29 Test matches, Durani scored 1,202 runs with one century and seven half-centuries. In 170 first-class games, he scored 8,545 runs with 14 hundreds and 45 half-centuries.

W. V. RAMAN

The lazy artist, who is rightly rated an underachiever. For his awesome talent to take on the opposition often with his single-handed charge, Raman did not achieve what he promised. He had the rare skills to excel in all conditions. Not the one to worry about the playing surface, his strength was in adapting to the challenge quickly. He could attack as well as play the waiting game with equal comfort.

His off-side play was breathtaking and footwork against the spinners was cited by coaches as an example to emulate. His knock of 83 on debut against the West Indies in Madras in 1988 was as crafty as one can imagine, but Narendra Hirwani’s 16 wickets in that Test stole the limelight. He was a feared batsman in domestic cricket with some outstanding innings to his credit.

Raman represented India in 11 Tests scoring 448 runs with four half-centuries. In 132 first-class games, he scored 7,939 runs with 19 centuries and 36 fifties.

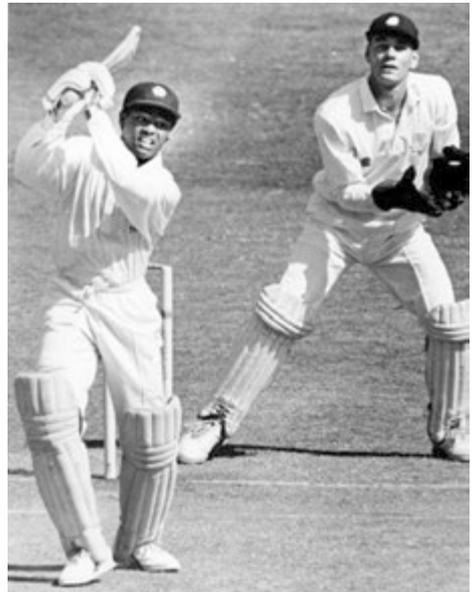


VINOD KAMBLI

Comparison with Sachin Tendulkar was unfair to this talented Bombay batsman. If only he had the dedication of Tendulkar, there is no doubt Kampli would have figured among the greats of the game. Two double centuries in the same season, against England and Zimbabwe, established him as a frontline Indian batsman but he failed to live up to his promise.

Often he was guilty of throwing his wicket away, but when he batted, he stood out for his strokeplay against the best of bowlers. He liked to take on the challenges from the opposition and the contests he thus created were delightful parts of those matches.

In 17 Test matches, Kampli scored 1084 runs with four centuries and three half-centuries. In 129 first-class games, Kampli amassed 9,965 runs with 35 centuries and 44 fifties.



SOURAV GANGULY



One of the finest to have graced the game and arguably the greatest left-hander Indian cricket has known. The dream debut he made at Lord's with a century in 1996 only confirmed his prowess. We often forget that Ganguly was deprived of five years of international cricket after being picked to tour Australia in 1991-92.

He was a champion stroke-player with a delightful range of shots square of the wicket. His aggressive approach to batting allowed him the freedom to dominate the competition and there was an enviable streak of consistency in both the formats of the game.

His Test innings of 144 against Australia in Brisbane in 2003 was as pacy as the 183 against Sri Lanka in Taunton in the 1999 World Cup. He was a captain's delight in every format of the game.

The former India captain represented the country in 113 Test matches scoring 7,212 runs with 16 hundreds and 35 half-centuries. In 254 first-class games, Ganguly scored 15,687 runs with 33 centuries and 89 half-centuries.

YUVRAJ SINGH

His batting would take away all the fear of failure from the dressing room. The pressure to score when most failed only ignited a fire in him to tear into the opposition. The elegance that marked his batting was a natural phenomenon. He backed himself to shine in difficult situations and this quality made him the special player in the captain's diary of men to rely upon. His talent to pick the ball early made him a terror at the crease.

He was known to impart power to carry the ball far into the crowd and also pick gaps with delicate placements. He worked on his batting as he progressed but ended up with an average record in Tests. That remained his biggest disappointment even though he played right through his career on merit, sadly wanting to prove his credentials in the longer format of cricket. He is one batsman you would pay to watch.

Yuvraj represented India in 40 Tests, scoring 1,900 runs with three centuries and 11 half-centuries. In 139 first-class games, he piled up 8,965 runs with 26 centuries and 36 fifties.



GAUTAM GAMBHIR



Gritty and compact, he was a picture of confidence at the crease. He created his space in the middle with his desire to fight. He loved a fight actually. In fact, it was an essential part of his build-up to the occasion. The image of an angry man was crafted to motivate himself and that was the driving force behind his match-winning knocks on two big platforms – the 2007 T20 World Cup final in Johannesburg and the 2011 World Cup in Mumbai.

He could not only light up a limited-overs contest with some sensational strokeplay but also play the sheet anchor role as he did with an epic show in Napier against New Zealand when he batted 436 balls to make 137 to help India draw the Test. He was a complete batsman who deserved greater credit for his contribution to the game.

In the 58 Test matches he played, Gambhir scored 4,154 runs with nine centuries and 22 half-centuries. In 198 first-class games, he scored 15,153 runs with 43 hundreds and 68 half-centuries.

SURESH RAINA

A century on Test debut, against Sri Lanka in 2010, was a well-earned reward for this gifted batsman. That he played his first Test five years after making his ODI debut was hard to understand. When in good form, he just waited for that opportunity. And when it came, Raina did not grab the chance.

To his credit, he became an integral part of the ODI team and came up with many match-winning performances in the limited-overs formats. In the 2011 World Cup, Raina came up with crucial knocks against Australia and Pakistan and justified Greg Chappell's claim that the southpaw possessed tremendous mental toughness to deliver in challenging situations. His exceptional showings in T20 cricket also endeared him to the young fans in modern cricket.

Raina has represented India in 18 Test matches and scored 768 runs with one century and seven half-centuries. In 109 first-class games, Raina has scored 6,871 runs with 14 centuries and 45 half-centuries.



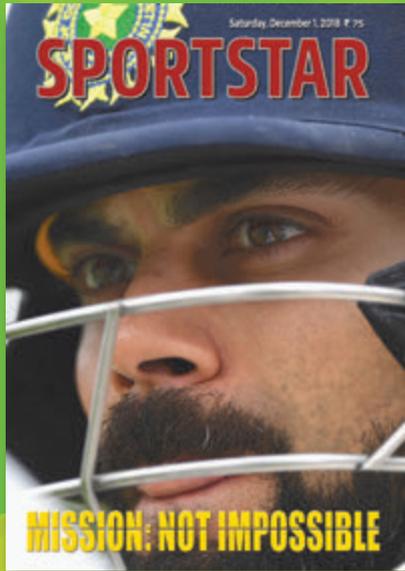
SHIKHAR DHAWAN



He made his mark as a junior cricketer and maintained his reputation at the next level with sterling performances. His tendency to score in exacting circumstances has helped him to remain one of the most trusted batsmen in the team. His sensational Test debut against Australia in 2013 was an innings as good as any seen for a long time.

His 187 took the wind out of the Australian attack and the feature of the innings was the timing of his shots. He toyed with the bowlers and left a huge impact on the audience with his wide array of shots. His innings evoked lavish praise and helped him remain relevant in all formats of cricket.

In the 34 Test matches he has played so far, Dhawan has scored 2,315 runs with seven centuries and five half-centuries. In 122 first-class games, the southpaw has scored 8,499 runs with 25 centuries and 29 half-centuries.



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An NBA season like no other

AASHIN PRASAD

With NBA teams returning to training, assistant coach Vin Bhavnani claims the priority at Oklahoma City Thunder is to maintain safety and well being of everyone involved.

For Vin Bhavnani, it all started as a dream in his dorm room during senior year of college. “I had one dream. It felt real and I just started pursuing it,” says Bhavnani. With a background in engineering and no prior experience in team sports, Indian-origin Bhavnani set out to become an NBA coach. His single-minded pursuit and hard work paid dividends and now he is the assistant coach of Oklahoma City Thunder.

Fate could have taken him away from the sport, when he was offered a job as a sales executive in 2004. “It took me two-and-a-half years to get the sales job after my parents said ‘Enough was enough!’,” remembers Bhavnani.

“And on the same day, the [New York] Clippers called me saying, ‘Hey, here’s a video opportunity’. I won’t even call it an internship, there was no label. It was database entry for potential scouting. It was just half a season of video coordinating at the Clippers and then I met the Spurs video coordinator and he called me over.”

He spent two seasons at San Antonio Spurs as the assistant video coordinator, before landing a role at Thunder as the lead video coordinator. Bhavnani is now embarking on his 10th season at Thunder, where he also worked as manager of scouting and player development for five seasons before earning a promotion as the assistant coach in 2016.

Of the several highs and lows from his stint at Thunder, the first-round play-offs – a first for the team after its re-branding from Seattle SuperSonics – against Los Angeles Lakers, ranks special for Bhavnani. Thunder had captain Kevin Durant and rookie stars James Harden and Russell Westbrook going toe-to-toe against Kobe Bryant’s Lakers, which would go on to win the championship and complete a three-peat.

“We were down 0-2 and we came home to the most amazing crowd. I’m getting goosebumps right now. There was a stretch in that game in the third quarter, when we came back, cut the lead and took the first lead of that series... the crowd reaction and our players’ belief, you could see it on their faces. It was such a beautiful moment. Then we won the next game. We lost in LA, we

came back and lost on a tip against the best team in the league. That told us that we were good. I watch that segment on YouTube, that third quarter, regularly,” he says.

Thunder was on course for a fifth successive play-off place when the 2019-20 season was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pause in the season was publicly played out ahead of the game between Thunder and Utah Jazz. Both teams had finished their pre-match warm-ups and were out on the court for tip-off when confusion ensued. With the news of Jazz’s Rudy Gobert testing positive for coronavirus coming through, a Thunder medical official came out to talk to the referees. After a long consultation, the match was postponed leaving the spectators bemused.

Bhavnani, who had a ringside view of the proceedings, says: “The game was publicised, so I think it was very unique. I haven’t experienced stopping of gameplay. So just from a unique standpoint, that’s what I remember about that day.”

With NBA teams returning to training, Bhavnani claims the priority at Thunder is following the guidelines of the league to maintain safety and well being of everyone involved.

He concedes this is an unusual circumstance for the team, placed fifth in the Western Conference. “You don’t have your hands on the players, but the training staff sends films and workout routines,” he says.

On what will be the new normal for NBA, Bhavnani says, “I’m not sure. I just know that protocols are there right now and we follow them until we’re told otherwise. I do know there’s more video conferencing, there’s more communication, which is a great thing. The more the communication, I think the better your relationships are. I hope that would stick for a long time.”

Perseverance: With a background in engineering and no prior experience in team sports, Vin Bhavnani set out to become an NBA coach. His single-minded pursuit and hard work paid dividends and now he is the assistant coach of Oklahoma City Thunder.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT





Topping the charts: Timo Werner scores for RB Leipzig against Cologne on June 1. Werner's hunt for Robert Lewandowski's golden boot has helped Leipzig move to third, two points behind Borussia Dortmund. AP

Goals galore in Germany

Bundesliga action continues to unfold quickly, with teams slowly settling into the normalcy of playing in empty stadiums with rules that aren't out of place in a world dealing with a pandemic.

A fortnight ago, Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund restarted their league campaigns with impressive wins and maintained a four-point gap at the top of the table.

Since then, the Bavarian giant has defeated Dortmund in Der Klassiker to go seven points clear at the top.

Bayern followed up the win over Dortmund with a 5-0 drubbing of relegation-battling Fortuna Dusseldorf, with Robert Lewandowski scoring a brace to go within one strike of another 30-goal season.

The defeat to Bayern also saw Dortmund lose Mahmoud Dahoud to a long-term injury and Erling Haaland to a niggle. However, Jadon Sancho made his first start since the league resumed and scored the first hat-trick of his professional career to help his team bounce back against bottom club Paderborn. The English winger's return to form and fitness, coupled with Haaland's possible return

The Bundesliga saw a series of high-scoring games even as other top leagues in Europe get their houses in order for a restart.

to the starting XI soon, will be a welcome boost for a club that's hoping to win its first domestic title since 2011-12.

Timo Werner's hunt for Lewandowski's golden boot has helped RB Leipzig move to third, two points behind Dortmund. The German striker, who is expected to leave the club at the end of this campaign, scored his 31st goal of the season as Julian Nagelsmann's side brushed aside FC Koln 4-2.

Borussia Monchengladbach's goalless draw against Werder Bremen was followed by a comprehensive 4-1 win against Union Berlin. Monchengladbach occupies the final Champions League position, with an inspired Bayer Leverkusen looking to oust it.

Leverkusen midfielder Kai Havertz has been the most impressive player over the last fortnight. He has scored more goals since the restart than anyone and showed his tactical flexibility in the win against Freiburg. Pushed into a false nine role, he did his best to unsettle Freiburg's defence and used his physical power to run through defenders and poke the ball home for the only goal of the game.

Schalke failed to win its 11th match in succession as Bremen took three points in its fight for survival. The pressure is now on David Wagner as Schalke has gone from challenging for a Champions League spot to dropping into the bottom half of the table.

Schalke's slide down the table saw Hertha Berlin leapfrog it into ninth place courtesy a 2-0 win against Augsburg. Bruno Labbadia took charge of the capital club during the lockdown and has overseen an unbeaten run — three wins and a draw — while playing an attacking brand of football.

Other leagues to resume

Football is slowly returning from the coronavirus-enforced break as all major leagues across Europe have released plans to restart their campaigns.

The tentative dates for resumption are June 17 for the Premier League, June 13 for La Liga and June 20 for Serie A.

Ligue 1 will not reverse its decision to end its campaign prematurely despite several clubs protesting.

Premier League

After a three-month break, the English Premier League will return with little separating Liverpool and its first league title in 30 years. If Manchester City loses its first game when the season continues, the Reds could seal the title in their first game.

Beyond that, six clubs are fighting for the remaining three Champions League spots. While Manchester City and Leicester City have a good lead, the fourth spot — currently occupied by Chelsea — is not beyond the reach of Manchester United, Wolverhampton Wanderers and Sheffield United.

Jose Mourinho's Tottenham Hotspur, in eighth and seven points behind Chelsea, retains an outside chance of pipping the others for fourth spot if results go its way.

La Liga

The title fight in Spain remains a two-horse race, with Barcelona and Real Madrid separated by two points at the top.

Los Blancos won the Clasico to take the top spot, but they lost to Real Betis before the break, and Barca won against Real Sociedad to take back control.

The Real Madrid players will also have to get used to playing in unfamiliar settings as their stadium, the Santiago Bernabeu, is

RACE FOR THE GOLDEN SHOE

Premier League

Name	Team	Goals
Jamie Vardy	Leicester City	19
Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang	Arsenal	17
Mohamed Salah	Liverpool	16
Sergio Aguero	Manchester City	16
Danny Ings	Southampton	15
Marcus Rashford	Manchester United	14
Sadio Mane	Liverpool	14

LA LIGA

Name	Team	Goals
Lionel Messi	Barcelona	19
Karim Benzema	Real Madrid	14
Luis Suarez	Barcelona	11
Lucas Perez	Alaves	11
Gerard Moreno	Vilalreal	11
Roger Marti	Levante	11
Angel Rodriguez	Getafe	10

SERIE A

Name	Team	Goals
Ciro Immobile	Lazio	27
Cristiano Ronaldo	Juventus	21
Romelu Lukaku	Inter Milan	17
Joao Pedro	Cagliari	16
Josip Ilcic	Atalanta	15

Bundesliga

Name	Team	Goals
Robert Lewandowski	Bayern Munich	29
Timo Werner	RB Leipzig	25
Jadon Sancho	Borussia Dortmund	17
John Cordoba	FC Koln	12
Sebastian Anderson	Union Berlin	12
Robin Quaison	Mainz	12
Rouwen Hennings	Dusseldorf	12

undergoing renovations. The league gave the club permission to use its training ground to see out this season.

Sevilla, Sociedad, Getafe, Atletico Madrid and Valencia are all separated by five points as the clubs look to grab the final two Champions League spots.

Serie A

While Inter Milan spent most of the season in a two-way fight for the title with Juventus, mixed results before the break see it return as an outside contender.

Lazio's consistency throughout the season helped it go eight points clear of Inter and just one point behind Juventus.

Behind Inter, Atalanta and AS Roma are three points apart for the final position in the table that guarantees participation in top-tier European football next season. **ES**

■ ANIRUDH VELAMURI



Tough times: “The coronavirus has spread worldwide, so everyone’s suffering. Athletes from other countries are suffering, too,” says Swapna. AP

A break too long...

The Asian Games gold medal-winning heptathlete – left without any equipment or gear – has to make do with basic exercises at home, often improvising to lift her nieces and nephew for squats.

ABHISHEK MUKHERJEE

Swapna Barman has been confined to her home in Jalpaiguri for the past two months. She had come home for a week-long break on May 19 from her training base at the Sports Authority of India (SAI), Kolkata. The nationwide lockdown soon followed and Swapna – left without any equipment or gear – has to make do with

basic exercises at home, often improvising to lift her nieces and nephew for squats.

“This is for the first time in nine years that I’m spending so much time at home. But I don’t want to have this kind of a break ever again,” Swapna told *Sportstar*.

The urge to return to training is strong, but she wants the COVID-19 crisis to abate

before resuming her regular routine.

“If they do open the premises for training, it will be very good for us. We’ll be able to practise. I’m a heptathlete; I have to learn many techniques, and I have to train for many disciplines. I’m not able to do much in the courtyard; just some basic exercises. If the ground opens, I would like to go. However, the COVID-19 cases are going up. Let the situation stabilise a bit, then I’ll be able to focus solely on my training when I return,” Swapna said.

Swapna had been training to reach her peak fitness in the lead-up to the Olympics, for which she hopes to qualify. After spending much of 2019 recovering from injury – a meniscus tear – she was gearing up for the Olympic qualifiers before the pandemic impeded her progress.

“Last year, I went to Mumbai and consulted a doctor. I was told to do certain exercises to improve my strength level, and I do that even today. I have practised a lot for the Olympic trials. I don’t know whether I’ll be able to qualify for the Olympics but I never lost hope and practised a lot for the trials. The virus brought everything to a halt,” she said. “The coronavirus has spread worldwide, so everyone’s suffering. Athletes from other countries are suffering, too.”

For the moment, she is spending time with her family. “I try to cope by spending time with my nieces and nephew – eight-year-old Adrija, two-year-old Adrishya, and five-year-old Ankit – and help my sister-in-law with cooking,” she said.

Swapna pays a lot of attention to her diet. “I like to have sweets, especially *rasgulla*, but I’m not having it. Plenty of green vegetables are available here. I’m having vegetables, and instead of roti, I’m having rice, because everyone at home is used to eating rice. Rotis are cooked only occasionally. And I occasionally take chicken as well; although I don’t like it, I have it for health reasons,” she said.

She has not been able to participate in online classes or discussions organised by SAI. “I do have internet at home, but I haven’t been able to participate in webinars as the connection is very slow and intermittent.”

Outdoor training is also out of bounds. “I have a ground nearby where I can go and train, but now it is covered with slush due to rain. Also, if I go out, it doesn’t look nice that I’m training outdoors and the rest are



indoors to prevent the spread of the virus,” she pointed out.

As far as her post-resumption plans are concerned, Swapna awaits instructions and guidance from her coach, Subhash Sarkar. “I have put on some weight, although that’s not a big problem. I have to first improve my fitness. I will aim to get to a reasonable level within a week or so,” she said. ☞

Ready for return: “If they do open the premises for training, it will be very good for us. We’ll be able to practise.”

Combination of white and threat correction

By C.G.S.Narayanan

In a white correction two-mover, a random move by a white piece is refuted by opponent owing to a general error. The same piece corrects this error by playing to a particular square. But when instead of correcting this general error the thematic piece corrects the threat itself then it is known as 'Threat correction'. The initial threat invariably reappears after some other defence. Three two-movers which combine the white and threat correction are presented in this article.

Valery Shansin

1-2 Prize, Super Problem 2015



Mate in two moves

Try 1.Rg5? (2.c5)

1...Rc7/Rd7 2.Qd5 1...Nf5 2.Rxg4

but 1...Rd7! defeats the threat

Try 1.Rd5!? (2.Nbc5) (2.c5?)

1...Rc7 2.c5 original threat reappears

but 1...Bxd3!

Key 1.Rf5! (Ndc5) (c5?)

1...Rd7 2.Rf4; 1...Rxf5 2.c5 Here again the original threat reappears

1...Nxf5 2.Qxg4; 1...Kxf5 2.Qg6

The try and the flight giving key forego the initial threat 2.c5 after random try and substitute new threats on the same square. An artistic composition.

Valery Shansin
I Prize, 4 FIDE World Cup 2013



Mate in two moves

The try 1.Bh8? threatens 2.Rd4

1...f4 is met by 2.Qd3 but fails to ...e5!

Black corrects the threat with 1.Be5? (2.Qd3) 1...Bxb4 2.Qf4 but 1...Qf3!

Key 1.Be3! (Qf4) 1...Qf3 2.Qd3

1...e5 2.Rd4 The threats after the tries

reappear as mates after defences

post-key. There is also additional

feature of Dombrovskis embedded in this masterpiece.

The problem for solving below

combines white and threat correction

with active black queen play.

Marjan Kovaceic

V.Pilichenko 60 JT

I prize, Uralsky Problemist 2012-13



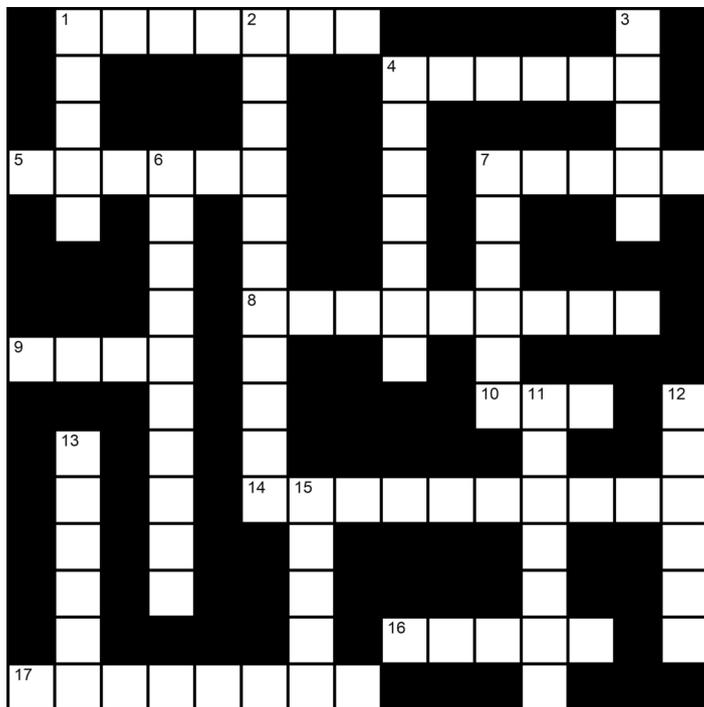
Mate in two moves

Solution to problem for solving in the

article 'Battery play in three-movers'

Solution 1.Qh3! (2.Rd8+ Kxd8 3.Rg8

**Readers may send in their queries to
cgsnarayanan@hotmail.com**



SOLUTION TO LAST FORTNIGHT'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1 German football club RasenBallsport ... (7)
- 4 The only Polish F1 driver till date. (6)
- 5 The word that can come after each of the following: bowling, popping, return. (6)
- 7 ... T10 Premier League. (5)
- 8 Djokovic's Balkan tournament. (5,4)
- 9 ...Hollioake, who played cricket for England. (4)
- 10 One circuit of a track. (3)
- 14 Steven Peter Devereux ... is better known as. (5,5)
- 16 Dad Chris and son Stuart... (5)

- 17 Lucien Favre is its head coach. (8)

DOWN

- 1 Irish golfer Shane ... (5)
- 2 Only Test victim of Sunil Gavaskar, the bowler. (6,5)
- 3 The father Cairns whose son Chris also played for New Zealand. (5)
- 4 The GM with the middle name Borisovich. (7)
- 6 In the last two years, she has co-captained the American football team with Carli Lloyd and Megan Rapinoe. (4,6)
- 7 He will leave Ferrari at the end of 2020. (6)

- 11 The San Siro is its home. (1,1,5)
- 12 Only Indian with two triple centuries in Tests. (6)
- 13 Estadio Azteca is the largest stadium of this country. (6)
- 15 He's called 'The Baddest Man on the Planet.' (5)



SAI opens training for elite athletes

Olympic-bound athletes cloistered at the National Institute of Sports, Patiala, and the Centre of Excellence, Bengaluru, have finally got the go-ahead to resume training.

A day after opening its stadia in Delhi to trainees, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) cleared sporting activities for elite athletes, subject to ministry, SAI and national sports federation Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). While Patiala has athletes and weightlifters, Bengaluru has the men's and women's hockey teams and a few athletes. However, only elite athletes either already qualified for the Olympics or part of the national camp and on the verge of qualifying will begin in the initial stage.

Equipment would be self-sanitised after use by the athletes, who will maintain social distancing and follow the staggered schedule provided for training. The athletes have been stuck indoors for about two months with the nationwide lockdown amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

■ UTHRA GANESAN



National Games postponed indefinitely

The much-delayed 36th National Games, scheduled for October-November in Goa, has been postponed indefinitely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) had told the Goa government that it must host the National Games as scheduled from October 20 to November 4 this year, but a spurt in the number of novel coronavirus cases led to a postponement.

"The National Games organising committee has decided to postpone National Games due to COVID-19 pandemic," Goa's deputy chief minister Manohar (Babu) Aijaonkar, who also holds the sports portfolio, said in a statement shared by IOA president Narinder Batra (in pic).

"... Committee to hold meeting in September end and decide on fixing dates for National Games. (Goa) Government to take advice from Union Sports Ministry, need four months advance notice to organise games," he added.

The previous edition of the Games was held in 2015 in Kerala.

■ AGENCIES



Archery coach passes away in road accident

International archer-turned-coach Jayantilal Nanoma died in a road accident in Rajasthan on May 31. He was 34 and is survived by his wife and daughter.

Nanoma, an Asia Cup and Asian Grand Prix medallist in the compound individual and team events in 2010, met with an accident while travelling with a friend from Banswara to Dungarpur in a car.

Nanoma was employed as a district sports officer in Dungarpur. As a coach, he produced several national- and international-level archers from Rajasthan.

He worked as a coach with the Indian team in different overseas competitions. He received the prestigious Maharana Pratap State Sports Award.

■ Y. B. SARANGI



SRFI reveals new plans

The Squash Rackets Federation of India (SRFI) has brought in quite a few changes in its national circuit. Listing out the tweaks at a webinar, SRFI secretary Cyrus Poncha (in pic) and Harish Prasad, its national development officer, assured that all the changes will be implemented gradually after the lockdown.

Poncha said a mobile app (on both Android & iOS) — inclusive of players, coaches, referees and academies — will be launched "in a couple of months." Moreover, I-Spin Pro has been added to the existing I-Spin (membership account of players who want to take part in SRFI-sanctioned events) free account. There will be no change as of now in the dates and venues of the national junior/sub-junior championships (scheduled in Mumbai from October 31 to November 6). "The SRFI rankings till April have been frozen, and an updated rankings list will be released after the junior nationals," informed Poncha.

Girls in the under-11, 13, 15 and 17 age groups can take part in one more category, U-19, apart from their own age groups. "This will not be applicable to boys as of now," said Poncha. Intra-city schools championship for boys and girls will be held in districts and cities across the country as and when the situation gets better.

■ K. KEERTHIVASAN



Some good news: Cricketers train at the Amritsar Games Association Complex on June 1. With the government issuing new guidelines and easing many restrictions, including those on sports activities, in the fifth phase of the lockdown, officials are hopeful of organising the Indian Premier League in the later part of 2020. PTI



How to return to playing sports

The system has to be foolproof depending on sports and skill set and other variables taken into consideration.

Focus point: After evaluation of an athlete to find out which muscles are particularly weak, all muscles of the limb need to be exercised, concentrating on those that are weaker.

The criteria to define a return to competition or play (RTP) are quiet confusing and challenging for the people who are involved in the process. The primary objective and responsibility of the entire coaching and support staff are cause no harm in an athlete returning to playing at the highest level of competition.

The process and guidelines in establishing a strong ecosystem in place are key for RTP. The system has to be foolproof depending on sports and skill set and other variables taken into consideration. Each sport will have a different process and protocols in place for their athletes in RTP. One has to adhere to them for successful implementation.

Return to play system

An athlete's RTP system should involve the following:

- Coach
- Team physio
- Personal physio

- Sports medicine doctor
- Mental conditioning coach
- Strength and conditioning coach
- Nutritionist
- Parents

The goals of rehabilitation can best be described by the following objectives. Only when each of these goals has been attained can an athlete return to competition.

Step 1

- Control the inflammatory process
- Control pain
- Restore joint range
- Restore soft tissue functionality

Step 2

- Improve muscle endurance
- Improve muscle strength
- Develop sports-specific movement and skill patterns

- Improve all components of fitness

Step 3

- Individualised maintenance programmes

Rational headway is important to

provide reliability in success and to minimise the potential for re-injury. Assuming that clinical success assures a safe athletic performance may be the reason certain injuries have high rates of re-injury. Although an athlete may be considered to be completely rehabilitated in a traditional clinical setting, no assurance can be given for the restoration to expected levels of sports performance. Bridging the gap is the vital cog between clinical evaluation and RTP.

Medical personnel attached to the team or individual athlete must provide guidance on activity suitability during each phase of rehabilitation following the logical progression of the above objectives. One must also understand the psychological make-up of the athlete.

While many athletes require reassurance, the majority require a strong hand to thwart a premature return and exposure to injury.

The most common mistakes

1. Rehabilitation is often focused on a single muscle group. After evaluation of the athlete to find out which muscles are particularly weak, all muscles of the limb need to be exercised, concentrating on those that are weaker. However, the limitations imposed by the injury or surgery should be taken into account.

2. Rehabilitation may be neglected until the injured area reaches a similar level of pain or size as the uninjured side.

3. Exercises for developing proprioception are neglected and not given due significance in avoidance and return from injury.

4. Postural deficiencies, anatomical malalignment and biomechanical imbalances are commonly ignored when designing the rehabilitation programme.

5. Specific sports skills and the SAID (Specific Adaptation to Imposed Demands) principle are often not incorporated into the programme. Exercises should be adapted to the specific needs of the athlete's particular position in a sport and highly specialised fitness protocols. This is a most critical aspect of RTP.

6. The progression of exercises must be tailor-made not only according to the nature of the injury, but also to the type of surgery, if conducted, and the specific nature of the sport.

The development of these skill patterns prior to RTP will serve as a guideline to give the athlete and coach abundant prospects to

understand the athlete's new limitations, if any, in his or her skill set and fitness, as well as to mentally prepare the athlete for a return to full competition.

Sample progression in fitness activity

Step 1: Back to regular activity

An athlete is back to his or her regular activities (such as school or college).

Step 2: Very light aerobic activity

Start with light aerobic exercises to increase the heart rate. This means 5-10 minutes on an exercise bike or walking or light jogging.

Step 3: Moderate physical activity

Continue with activities to increase the athlete's target heart rate

This includes moderate jogging, brief running, moderate-intensity stationary biking and moderate-intensity weightlifting.

Step 4: Heavy, non-contact activity

Progress to heavy, non-contact physical activities such as sprinting, running, high-intensity stationary biking, weightlifting and non-contact sport-specific drills (in all three planes of movement).

Step 5: Practice and full-contact sessions

An athlete may return to practice and full-contact sessions in a controlled environment.

Step 6: Competition phase

A fit athlete may return to competition.

The above progression will vary according to the nature of the injury, the sport played, skill sets, the place of injury and other variables. And, finally, each athlete's RTP will vary. One format may not suit all.

Finally, progression is key to success in RTP

1) No activity, complete rest, recovery phase

2) Light aerobic exercises, target heart rate 70 percent less, heart rate increment phase

3) Sports-specific exercises, base drills, movement phase

4) Non-contact training process, complex training phase with all range of movement for skills in progression, coordination and cognitive phase

5) Full-contact training, post-medical clearance, contact phase can be resumed, functional skills through varied fields and fitness, physiological and psychological increment phase through support staff

6) Return to play with full efficiency. ☺

“While many athletes require reassurance, the majority require a strong hand to thwart a premature return and exposure to injury.”

Memory is an important asset

The question of memory in sport is a crucial one. It helps you remember and dip into experience and it also helps focus.

SURESH MENON

Some years ago I spent a day with Sachin Tendulkar in Mumbai, and our conversation segued into a game — I would mention a year and a venue, and Sachin would come back immediately with how many runs he made, how he got out, and some other details you wouldn't expect him to remember. Later I mentioned this to Rahul Dravid in Bengaluru, and he too, it turned out, could do same thing.

The question of memory in sport is a crucial one. It helps you remember and dip into experience — bowlers are always told by coaches that memory is an important asset — and it also helps focus. You can call up Erapalli Prasanna, the great off spinner of the 1960s and 1970s any time, and he will tell you how he bowled to Ian Chappell or how he tucked away in his mind the ball that got Clive Lloyd. This is an automatic reflex.

The second, focus, is what psychologists call “working memory”, the ability to concentrate on the job in the face of distractions. Asked after an innings if someone (a photographer, I think it was) who followed him all the way to the wicket had distracted him, Tendulkar answered honestly that he didn't see him at all.

When you see top players performing under pressure, it usually means their working memory is well tuned. Psychologists use an analogy to make the concept clearer. It is the ability we have to shut out all the sounds in a noisy bar and keep up a conversation

with a friend.

Viswanathan Anand can recall every game he has played over the last four decades or so (and lots of others, besides), the moves, the position at any point, the mistakes, both his and his opponent's, and you have to evoke that poem we learnt in school: “And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew. That one small head could carry all he knew.”

Research with chess players have shown that two elements hold the key: practice, and pattern recognition. That's easily said, not so easily (for the rest of us) done!

The tennis great Ramanathan Krishnan also has amazing recall. We were once talking of a match which had taken place three decades earlier, and he remembered not only the scores, the strokes he played, he could even tell me at what point he changed his racquet! I checked out the first two which were spot on, but there was no way of confirming the change of racquet. Chances are that was spot on too.

As a reporter, it was important to double check, of course. When I started out, I was gently warned by a senior to be

careful about the statistics one cricketer spouted. He spoke fluently about figures, and matches and it was a marvel till I remembered the warning and double checked. Only to find that most of the figures were, how shall I put it, less than spot on! Memory plays tricks too. ☞



Fresh in memory: You can call up Erapalli Prasanna, the great off-spinner of the 1960s and 1970s, any time, and he will tell you how he bowled to Ian Chappell or how he tucked away in his mind the ball that got Clive Lloyd. This is an automatic reflex.

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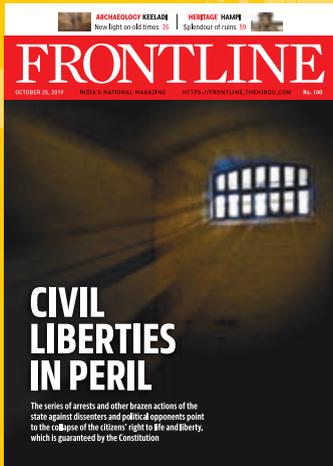
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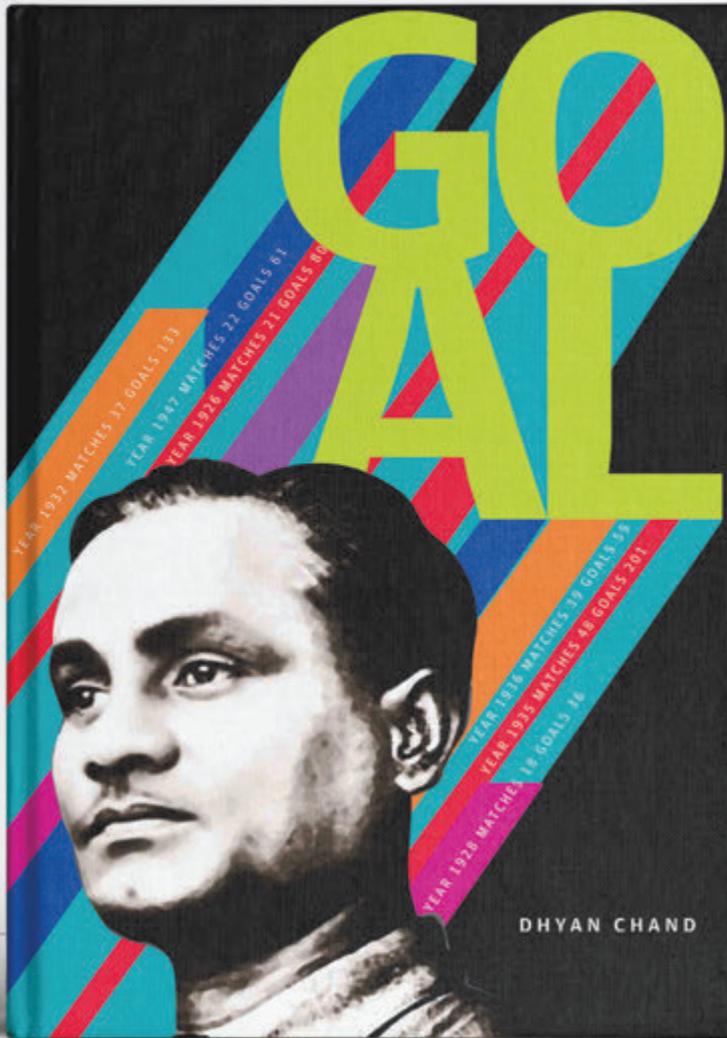
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