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### Virat's batting a mix of Ponting and Richards

India played like a champion team in the Test against Sri Lanka and showed that that it was not just about home advantage. They have the talent and the ability to win. Of course it's more to do with the batters, and many of them putting up some good performances.

Virat Kohli, once again, was the great exception. The more I see of him, the more I enjoy the way he plays. He likes to dominate and is very much a mix of Ricky Ponting and Viv Richards. When he's at the crease, there's always an air of excitement, always something happening. It's a good sign when the captain is performing, as this helps the team follow in the same pattern.

Murali Vijay, too, took his opportunity once he got to play. He's a very experienced opening batsman, technically sound, and you need guys like him to open the batting with the right-hand-left-hand combination which works wonderfully well for India. It works well for India, with someone like Shikhar Dhawan at the other end who likes to dominate, while Murali is calm and composed. Then follow Pujara, who has the same temperament of Rahul Dravid, and Virat at No 4 who takes the game away from the opposition. The only one who missed out was Ajinkya Rahane. But this happens to even the best of players, who can sometimes get into a tangle and nothing seems to work.

These Tests were good preparation for our bowlers ahead of the South Africa series. They have bowled a good number of overs, especially the pacers. I think that the homework is being done well. Sri Lanka is not one of the strongest teams we have faced but nevertheless India's performance as a unit will hold us in good stead for what will be a hard tour of South Africa.

Now we move on to the shorter formats of the game with the ODIs series beginning at Dharamsala on Sunday. India are definitely the favourites again. Sri Lanka may play well in one odd game but I don't think they have the technique or the bowlers to exploit the conditions. It's also likely that they will go into the ODIs with the mindset that India are a better and stronger side, and that will play on their minds.

Just coming back to Rahane: he is in the ODI side but he may not get a chance. One could see in the Tests that he was trying too hard. Personally, I feel both he, and India, would have been better served if he had been released to play some Ranji matches which would have prepared him for South Africa.

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### **Rohit double will probably earn him a place in SA tour**

The debacle of Dharamsala hit the Indians hard and they bounced back with intent and aplomb in Mohali. Indians did not have much luck in Dharamsala as it is a wicket on which the toss plays too great a role. The conditions early in the game are disproportionately skewed in favour of the team batting second. The ball swings too much and conditions are not great for limited overs cricket. No wonder then that Rohit Sharma and his men were in dire straits with half the team in the pavilion and less than 20 runs on the board.

While India lost the match, the cricket played in the Test series made it clear that India are the superior side in normal conditions, especially on a batting track. This was further proved on Wednesday when India put on a whopping 392 on the back of a fantastic double century by Rohit Sharma. The win sets the series up rather wonderfully for the decider this weekend.

Rohit can now boast of the remarkable milestone of three double centuries in one-day cricket. He was exceptional on Wednesday and really went on a rampage against a below par Sri Lankan attack. The way he played once he crossed a century was really a feast for the eyes. Any connoisseur will tell you that his strokeplay is amazing and Rohit gave a full display of this gift. Once he hit three figures he seemed to switch to T20 mode and scored at a scorching pace.

With a total of 392 there was little for the bowlers to do and they were professional and clinical in the way they went about the job. Rohit would be happy with the win and also would be aware that the double century really sets him up well for a place in the South Africa tour. There is healthy and intense competition for a place in the Test side between Ajinkya Rahane and Rohit Sharma. This can only be a good sign for Indian cricket. Rahane has been very good in Test cricket, and Rohit, too, has made the most of the chances he has got of late, so it is a tough call.

The other well-timed event was the wedding of Virat Kohli. I wish him and his bride a wonderful future ahead. Like much of his cricket, it was well-planned, well-timed and gives him a good break ahead of the rigours of the tour to South Africa. He now has Lady Luck firmly by his side and things will only get better for him from here on!

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### **Lanka was no match for even an India without Virat**

As I expected, India did well in the ODI series. They have been playing some fantastic cricket over the last couple of years, and at home it very difficult for visiting teams to beat us. The only team that came close to competing was New Zealand, but it's generally been one-way traffic in favour of India.

I didn't expect Sri Lanka to perform any miracles, not with the kind of team and players they have at present. It seems that after the retirement of the likes of Jayawardene and Sangakkara, they haven't been able to find the replacements they need. The quality is somehow missing in all formats both in batting and bowling. They may win a game here and there but I don't see them being consistent in the future unless they start working hard and doing things differently.

The player that stood out for me was Angelo Mathews. He used all his experience, and was the only one who took any kind of attack to the opposition bowlers. He didn't bowl much, but did well with the bat showing you need both temperament and technique to do well against a team like India.

Ultimately, Sri Lanka was no match for the hosts and India showed they are definitely much, much superior, even without Virat. This shows there is a lot of talent and that a lot of players are trying to cement their place in the side, hoping to get an opportunity for the coming tour of South Africa.

For India, the established players dominated, while among the youngsters, Shreyas Iyer grabbed the opportunity he got with a couple of 50s. The No. 4 slot has not been cemented by anyone so far and is still up for grabs, especially in ODIs. He played well, to his strengths, showing he was a good option for this position. The other youngster who has impressed me is Chahal. I'm a bit surprised he has not been picked for South Africa as he was outstanding. Too many pace bowlers are being taken and another spinner would have been handy.

We now have the T20s to look forward to. It's a format in which sometimes the favourite doesn't always win. We may see some spark from the Lankans, and they might even win a game, but India are definitely much more experienced, so I'm not really expecting anything different to happen.

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### **Defeating a weak Lanka not the best preparation for tour of SA**

Truth be told, the win against Sri Lanka in the T20 series was one that made me worry for Sri Lanka and also hope for the very best for India over the next few months. Defeating a weakened Sri Lankan team ahead of a tough tour of South Africa is not ideal preparation. If playing in vastly different and favourable Indian conditions is bad enough but to also have a raw inexperienced side as opposition made matters worse. It did bring back memories of 2012, exactly five years ago, when we embarked on a tour to Australia immediately after a series against a weak West Indian team.

That said, there are several positives that might ensure that India will do well in South Africa. I cannot recall such depth in the pace bowling department ever before. Bhuvaneswar Kumar is a fantastic swing bowler, and the cupboard has other stellar talents who now are quite experienced. There are Mohammed Shami, Jasprit Bumrah, Ishant Sharma, Umesh Yadav all of whom have pace and variety.

Coming back to the T20 series, it was wonderful to witness the classy strokeplay of Rohit Sharma. Like some of the other youngsters, he really plays exceedingly well when he is captain. Rohit has had an exceptional year, and has shown a hunger and determination that is quite special. He has tried to be at the crease till the end of an innings and has also notched up some amazing records. A player has to be special to score three double centuries, and the fastest century in T20s. Rohit has always been exceedingly talented, but his strokeplay and rhythm over the last year has really been quite special.

Looking ahead, 2018 is a big year for India as they travel overseas, starting with South Africa and then to England and Australia. The bowling is looking adequate and India seems to have the firepower to take 20 wickets. What would be critical would be how well the batsmen adapt to South Africa. Having played almost non-stop in India, the top order would need to readjust their approach and wait out the first hour to acclimatize to the conditions in South Africa. There is plenty of talent and ability in the batting but adjustment and dependence on good technique would be critical over the coming months.

South Africa will also be critical as Virat Kohli and his men know that it is the start of a lot of cricket in conditions that aid pace and bounce. A good performance in this series would set the tone for a happy and positive 2018.