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**Published 24.11.17**

**I feel it's only going to get tougher for Sri Lanka**

Mother Nature denied India victory in the first Test at the Eden. The amount of time lost to untimely rain gave Sri Lanka the chance to play out the final day, though it did turn out to be a cliff-hanger finish. Virat Kohli declared at the right time, India losing was taken out of the equation and then the Indian pacers nearly had the opponents on the mat.

A special mention has to be made about the curator and groundsmen who prepared an excellent strip that lasted all five days. Even on the fifth day, the pacers were getting help and troubling the batsmen. This is what the world will get at the Eden, henceforth. The surface and different brand of grass will always keep the quicks in the game. I had said at the start that despite all the rain, if they won the toss, India could still win and the bowling on Day Five was testament to that. Bhuvni, who has by far been the best Indian bowler in all conditions, showed how much he has improved over the last two seasons. He is an asset at the moment.

The likes of Pujara and Kohli showed their class and what it takes to score runs despite both the weather and pitch aiding the seamers. Pujara batted when the situation was very tough on Day Two but Virat rose to the occasion when the team could have got into real trouble had he not stayed put. I have always maintained that Pujara is India's best bet at No. 3 – he soaks in pressure and drains the opponents.

Virat is a challenger; however tough the situation, he will take it on. What an innings he played to put India in a commanding position! I don't think he expected seven wickets to fall but his whole idea of putting pressure on Sri Lanka going forward in the series was successful. For me, Virat is getting better every season both as a player and as captain. After yet another century, he rightly said that 50 was just a number. But he is slated for many more if he remains fit.

So, it's Nagpur next. The word is that the Indian management wanted play on green wickets during this series and that is why the Nagpur pitch, like Eden, also has a green tinge. This, I believe, is the right thinking ahead of the South Africa tour. The Indian pace attack has turned out to be very potent and this series is a good time to experiment. For the spinners, it will help them plan their bowling on the green surfaces in South Africa. Besides, I think they too at times want to bowl on a pitch that has a bit of bounce. As for the batters, they will also be getting a feel of what is expected as they step out of home conditions, and it will help them get mentally ready.

For Sri Lanka, I feel it's only going to get tougher. Their attack needs to step up and, if the pitches are green, they need a better bowling unit to support Lakmal and get India out twice. They must remember that in home conditions the Indian batsmen don't miss too many times.

**Published 30.11.17**

### **The way the Lankans are playing is inexplicable**

The India-Sri Lanka cricket matches are gradually turning into a nightmare for the team from the island nation. Ever since the first Test in Galle in 2015 the slide has been downward, and rapid. Now it's getting to a situation of embarrassment for the Sri Lankan boys. When two teams play a cricket match one is supposed to lose; that's a given. But when one just doesn't compete, then the challenge and the fun of sport completely disappear. Sri Lanka were lucky that time was lost to rain in Kolkata, taking the win away from India. They have lost nine games in a row since India visited the Emerald Isle and again in Nagpur it was just no contest.

One could understand if they were playing in conditions away from the sub-continent but when conditions are tailor-made, ones you have played in all your life, such submission is inexplicable. Yes, the difference in quality of the sides is vast but what is even more distinctly apparent is the difference in fight and determination. The Sri Lankan players have been born and brought up on turning pitches. When India toured Sri Lanka, Virat Kohli finished on the right side of the toss and, on more than one occasion, Sri Lanka was striving to save the game on Day 4 of the Test, something that is very, very hard to do. But there are no excuses when you win the toss on a good flat pitch and still get dismissed for 200 runs!

The Lankan bowling has looked very ordinary. The pitch at the Eden allowed them an option to pick wickets. However, with the fast bowlers getting no pace and the spinners being forced to bowl on a good pitch on Day 2 against some of the best batters in the world, it was just asking for too much. Four individual hundreds were scored, and Murali Vijay deserves a lot of credit as comebacks are not easy. The opening slot has revolved around the three openers, one replacing the other and the best part is they have taken their chances and Sri Lanka has been at the receiving end.

Virat Kohli's sensational form continues, and the cricketing world has begun to run out of adjectives to describe him! I'm hoping his form continues over the next 15 months, which are crucial for Indian cricket. Ashwin's landmark 300 Test wickets is remarkable and the rich legacy of Indian spinners over different decades continues.

The third Test is in Delhi where, more than anything, we need to hope that the weather doesn't stand in between a sweep for India. To be honest, if the Sri Lankans don't stand up, this Test too will probably see an early finish. With no Herath, who has been Sri Lanka's best bowler, I don't see how Sri Lanka can get 20 wickets against this Indian line-up. Coincidentally, this is Herath's second back injury that has occurred during a series against India.

**Published 10.12.17**

### **Lanka salvage pride, Kohli electrifies with his batting**

When many felt India's win on the last day of the Delhi Test was a matter of time, Sri Lanka resisted well to draw the match. The seniors put their hands up in the first innings with Mathews and skipper Chandimal scoring hundreds and the juniors rallying around them to salvage some pride with a valiant fight back in the second.

India used this series as a preparation for the upcoming South Africa tour, playing on mostly green tops. They also, probably, consciously moved away from the five-bowler combination and included Rohit Sharma in the middle-order to bolster their batting for the away series. Rohit has done his bit with the bat, playing fluently as always and hopefully will carry the confidence abroad. The seamers — Umesh, Shami, Bhuvneshwar and even Ishant — have displayed absolutely fine form which will send a signal to the South Africans that this Indian attack, along with Ravi Ashwin is potent enough to pick 20 wickets on the harder, bouncier surfaces of South Africa.

Virat Kohli's has electrified world cricket with the bat and his good form will be very important for India in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Centurion. Murali Vijay and Sikhar Dhawan are battle-hardened. Vijay soaks in the opponent attack before launching into them and Dhawan likes to take it on from the get go. It is a good combination to have at the top and, along with the resilient Cheteshwar Pujara at No. 3, India seem ready for the South African challenge. Yes, Ajinkya Rahane's form could be a bit of worry but the class that he is, I am pretty sure that it is just a matter of time before he turns things around.

India go into the ODI and T20 series against Sri Lanka under a new captain as Kohli takes a much-deserved break. There are few new faces and rightly so, as this could be the ideal series to blood new faces. Rohit has led well for the Mumbai Indians and has the experience to do it at this level. His form in shorter formats has always been sparkling and he will surely lead from the front.

The Lankans are also led by a new captain in shorter formats of the game and a new coach has taken over. Not to have Dinesh Chandimal in the side is probably not the right decision for the Sri Lankans. Hopefully, the new coach and captain will bring a new work ethic into the team and they should draw inspiration from the resistance they put up on the last day of the third Test. The Lankans have some exciting youngsters in their ranks and it will be interesting to see how they evolve in this series. The quicker the process of revival for Sri Lanka, the better it will be for them.

**Published 22.12.17**

### **Rohit's was one of the finest innings I'd seen in a long time**

After the valiant fight in the third Test at Delhi and the handsome win in Dharmasala, one expected Sri Lanka to put up a good show in the ODI and T20 series against India. But the two bright spots were ultimately a flash in the pan as India have absolutely swarmed over their opponents till date. A blistering knock by Rohit Sharma, a muscling innings by Shikhar Dhawan and fine bowling by Chahal and company gave the Lankans no chance to dent India's confidence a bit.

Actually the Rohit Sharma act at Mohali took the wind out of the opponents. Midway through the tour Sri Lanka as a unit must have believed that they were on their way up now. But they had no inkling of the 'Rohit Storm' that was all set to hit them and take away every life-force which they may have garnered at that juncture. It was one of the finest innings I have seen in some time in the shorter format of the game. It would have deflated any team at the receiving end of it. Such batting not only deflates an opponent also breaks them mentally. What made the knock even more super was that Rohit was captain and it was a do-or-die game for him and it shows his mental make-up.

Rohit, as I have always maintained, is a delight to watch when in flow. He had a good outing in the Test matches he played and in the shorter format he is an even more dangerous player under pressure. If Rohit struck gold in the 2nd ODI, it was Shikhar Dhawan's turn in the third and after the first T20 one point is amply evident: this Sri Lanka side is absolutely no match for India in every department.

I am also happy to see KL Rahul score runs again. He is a very good player and the selectors need to give him confidence. He is, for me, the solution at number four for India in one day cricket in tough conditions because on quick pitches, the back-foot game is important and Rahul has one. Don't let him lose confidence.

What I personally believe is, that India, irrespective of the opponent, has forged a high level of performance for themselves in every department and that definitely will keep the morale of the team very high. What they will need to do is to carry this level into South Africa and from there to make the mark in other away series. Under Virat, that is definitely a possibility as the captain himself believes in topmost level performance.