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**England will have to raise their game to beat Virat & Co.**

India have got off to the start they wanted on their England tour, winning the T20 series with authority. Even in the match they lost, they fought hard till the last over. This confidence and momentum will surely be carried into the ODI series. The way this Indian team is shaping up in the shorter version, even England will have to raise their game in order to stop Virat and his boys. This team looks like it could win in any condition in the shorter format of the game.

I have been travelling to England every year for the last 20-22 years and have not seen a summer like this. It is very, very hot and the typical moist English condition is a far cry from what it usually is. It is more like playing in India at the moment. The wickets are hard and batting friendly: the spinners are sure to enjoy bowling on these tracks. The challenge for England this series will be to handle the Indian spinners and this will be the decisive factor. England in England is always a strong opposition but this Indian team is a force to reckon with.

Both the sides have a strong batting line-up though I believe India, with all their potential and being led by an aggressive Virat Kohli, are a step higher. The Indian bowling looks much stronger than its English counterpart. The consistent game time given to Umesh will help his confidence as there is no real substitute for pace and the spin of Kuldeep and Chahal will control this fragile English middle-order. It was really surprising not to see Kuldeep play the third T20.

One has to speak about Hardik Pandya, Lokesh Rahul and Rohit Sharma. The day Rohit performs he makes others just watch. The range of shots this man has is amazing and in the shorter formats he is no doubt one of India's biggest match-winners, along with Kohli. It is good to see Virat keeping faith in Rahul. He is a player for the future and, if confidence is kept in him, he will develop into a giant of a player. Hardik needs special mention. He is improving by leaps and bounds and is someone who changes the entire dynamic of the team composition with his batting and bowling. He is a fearless cricketer.

We are just at the start of a long tour and the way India has begun we could be set for a glorious 'Indian Summer' if the England bowling does not improve. (Gameplan)

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### **Root's confidence rubbed off on the others while India lost steam**

England bounced back strongly in the ODI series and by the end of the shortest and shorter versions of the game it's one-all. After having lost the last game of the three-match T20 series and then the first ODI, England turned it around based on a more planned approach in countering the strong Indian batting and the guile of their bowlers, especially the spinners.

Eoin Morgan needs a mention, not only for his batting effort in the third ODI but for winning the toss at Lord's and Headingley and taking the right call. At Lord's he opted to bat first realising there was a possibility the pitch would slow down. Being a local boy, he got it right. At Headingley, he invited India to bat first understanding that whatever moisture was in the pitch would settle down to make batting easier during the chase. A captain sets the tone for a team and I think Morgan did exactly that on both occasions.

Joe Root's coming to the party helped in a big way. He not only propped up the English middle-order but showed his teammates how to go about handling the wrist spin of Kuldeep and Chahal. Judging the length, using the feet to smother the spin, and rotating the strike helped the England innings never to choke. Root's confidence rubbed off on to the others and that is why it is so important to have someone in the middle-order who can control the game and allow others to play around him. The English bowling picked itself up, Rashid standing out with his control and variation. Moeen Ali's liking for Indian batters continued and both he and Rashid allowed England to get a grip of the game in the middle-overs.

If England had the Root effect, India lost steam in the last two games. It was not clear why Umesh and Rahul were not included in the third ODI. Bhuvneshwar was coming out of an injury and did not look 100 percent, but Umesh already looked in good rhythm. Siddharth Kaul was also in good form except for the Lord's game. Rahul is a must for Virat in the middle-order which needs a bit of strengthening. It's important that the management gives an extended run to the No. 4 so that he can play with a bit of freedom and not worry about his place.

As long as Virat was at the crease at both Lord's and Headingley, India looked in control but once he left the batting could not keep up the pace. The Indian spinners created havoc in South Africa but the pacers will also have to pick up wickets in overseas conditions. It can't be spinners all the time. Bumrah's injury is a setback but it's important the others stand up as well. The longest part of the series will begin soon and it's important that all contribute. (Gameplan)

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### **Virat and Co. will be raring to after a good break**

India start the most awaited phase of their tour of England and Virat Kohli and his boys will be raring to go in the five-match Test series after a good break. I am sure that the break and the practice match have provided Virat and the team management enough time to review their thoughts about the composition of the team for the first Test.

Much has been spoken about the spin combination for India. It will be important to see what combination India will play with. There has been lot of rain in Birmingham over the last two days and this will influence the conditions a lot. It will also be not easy to let Ravichandran Ashwin go especially after the way the England batters played Kuldeep Yadav in the last few games. Ashwin is an honest trier, a fighter to the core, and someone who has more than 300 Test wickets in his kitty will be tough to ignore.

India won the last Test in South Africa but the attack here will be different due to injury issues of Jasprit Bumrah and Bhuvneshwar Kumar and the other fast bowlers will have to stand up in their absence. Umesh Yadav will be a certainty as he has looked the best of the lot so far in this campaign. He has bowled with pace and control and is in good rhythm. Ishant Sharma is also experienced and knows exactly what the team expects of him. Having spent some time playing County cricket, Ishant will be match-ready in English conditions.

As for the Indian batting, Murali Vijay along with KL Rahul should be vying for the opening slot followed by Cheteshwar Pujara, Virat, and Ajinkya Rahane. India will have to get the opening combination spot-on right from the first Test as that's a very important slot in overseas conditions. Virat will be keen to stamp his authority in English conditions and his form will be crucial for his team.

England must be feeling better about things with the rains having shown up. It must have been the hottest summer for them and at times the temperature seemed more like they are in India. With rain returning, the moist weather should return and that will ensure movement in the air. This should be a great contest between Virat and Jimmy Anderson as the Virat of 2018 is vastly different to the one in 2014.

Anderson and Stuart Broad, along with Ben Stokes, Moeen Ali, and Adil Rashid will have to be at their best. The quicks will want the ball to swing. If it does not, they could find the going tough against this quality Indian batting line-up. (Gameplan)

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### **Virat's challenge will be to instil confidence and mental strength**

The first Test of the India-England series was another bright example of why the original version of the game continues to be the ultimate test for any cricketer. It was a humdinger of a battle with the pendulum swinging this way and that every now and again. Ultimately, the team that held its nerves and delivered when it mattered came out on top.

Virat Kohli's conviction and determination to grind in difficult situations, his selection of shots, and ability to dominate the bowlers in every sphere of the game is extraordinary. He is rightly the No. 1 batsman in the world. He may not have been at his fluent best at Birmingham but his attitude of not giving up stands tall. This is also an example of batsmanship: Even if it's not your day, you still make the runs. It's a huge statement that the other batsmen in the team need to stand up. I personally believe that this batting line-up has the ability to score runs in these conditions. Virat, the leader, has a job on hand. He will have to get this team going. The confidence needs to be brought back: It's more in the mind and that will be his challenge on this tour.

The positive thing for India is the bowling. All the bowlers did a grand job, especially Ashwin. He has added a lot more variety to his repertoire and will continue to be a massive threat to the opposition. I remember talking about Ashwin in my preview to this series and I am happy with the way he has presented himself. He is conscious about the need to succeed overseas and has improved immensely since the time his spot was challenged by younger players. He will continue to bother England right through the series.

The selection of Ollie Pope, a right-hander, by the England selectors is a strategy to counter the off-spin of Ashwin. India need to think about a second spinner at Lord's. It's been very hot and history shows it spins at Lord's and, as far as I'm concerned, Kuldeep Yadav would be the right choice. At no stage, however, should India compromise on the five-bowler option. England will be without Ben Stokes for the second Test but the inclusion of Chris Woakes and his all-round ability will balance the side.

Taking the series into context, this game at Lord's is a massive one. One-down, and India will have to find a way to fight back. There is no doubt that England will be greatly challenged if the Indian batting gets going, and if it does that could be the turnaround the visitors are looking for. It's not over yet! (Gameplan)

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### **It will be tough, but not impossible, for India to fight back**

The India-England series is at the midway stage and the third match will really test India's resilience. Virat and his boys have had a tough time, especially at Lord's, countering the swing bowling but they need to remember that in South Africa they came back strongly to win the third Test. They are 2-0 down but there are still three matches to go, which is lot of cricket and I bet you that, if rain does not take three days away, all the games will have results. So amidst the chaos all is not lost yet.

Much has been spoken about the capability of the Indian batters to battle in difficult times but at Lord's it was the supreme ability of Anderson and company which got the better of them. What hurt the Indian fans, however, was the lack of a fight rather than the loss. I believe this team is better than it stands now.

Can the Indians fight back? Well, that is the big question. The worry is, have they succumbed to the fact that it will be tough. Yes, it will be tough but not impossible. The mind has to believe that. A lot is said about Kohli's influence but he alone will not win matches. Tendulkar did not. India played sensationally well in that era because the players around him scored as much. Vijay, Pujara, Rahane, Rahul, and Dhawan have to believe; they have done it earlier in difficult situations and only that belief can help themselves to change the mental frame they are in now.

India will need a good start at the top which has not happened yet. Whether a Dhawan instead of Vijay will help them to counter-attack is another question but whoever is entrusted with the job will need to stand tall and that will provide respite to the middle-order to take the fight back to England. For Dhawan, who has a chance to play, the big booming cover drives have to be put away. He needs mental discipline to play other shots which he is capable of and much more on the back foot. Will India play Karun Nair as the sixth batsman? That could be a good option.

The bowling looks in good shape with Bumrah coming in. Shami has been the best on show and Ishant has to find his first Test form at the earliest. But Virat has to find a way to get the field right. Too many easy singles have been given away, especially off good deliveries, in the point region. He can't afford that.

England will be even more bolstered by the return of Stokes. I think he will play and his inclusion will not only add more variation to the English bowling but will also add depth to their batting. Trent Bridge is a venue where the ball swings, a venue very close to Broad and Anderson's heart. So a full pronged pace attack could be the way forward for England. Suddenly the English team, whose record has not been very good of late, looks strong. Still, India has a chance. It's not over yet. (Gameplan)