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***Good start to the tour with a convincing win in first T20***

India has got off to a brilliant start in England. We are definitely one of the best teams in the T20 format, very experienced but you do need a good first game in an overseas tour to keep the pressure on the opposition. This was a very convincing win, and will only further boost the morale of the team.

Kuldeep Yadav set the stage with a five for 24. It doesn't surprise me that he did well; he's a very crafty bowler. He's still very young but has been playing this format for a few years and has the right temperament. I like the fact that he is always trying to buy wickets, and not bowl wide, or trying to contain a batsman running away from him. That is the best way to play in any format of the game and why he has done so well.

Also, England seemed to have no idea about him. They have not played this type of a left-arm chinaman often and didn't read him at all. Besides, their mindset was to just go out and attack the way they did against Australia recently. What they need to remember that India is a different team altogether.

England are good against pace but they have been exposed by the fact that they are not reading Kuldeep. Buttler was really the only one reading the ball, the others were guessing. The best way for them to play someone like Kuldeep is try not to slog him because he's comparatively slower in the air than Chahal.

Speaking of, Chahal didn't have a good outing on Tuesday but is a fantastic spinner. I would like him to bowl a bit straighter and try to buy wickets rather than bowling too wide and trying to just contain the batsmen.

Batting wise, India are fine and Rahul played like a champion. What I like about him is that he attacks from the beginning. Keep in mind that there are many in the side who can come up and bat higher: Rahul got the opportunity and took it.

One game does not make you a bad side, but I still feel that this series will be a huge challenge for England. They have a lot of homework to do in the coming matches to compete with India. Otherwise, I feel the spinners will help India run away with the series.

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***Won't be surprise if we end up having an "Indian Summer"***

It's been a good beginning for the Indian team. They showed their experience in Twenty20 cricket was far superior to most other sides, and played well as a unit. I'm sure they will carry this form into the coming ODIs as well. It's been a wonderful summer thus far, and I won't be surprised if it becomes an "Indian Summer" altogether by the time the tour ends!

It's been good to see different players performing well over the three T20s. Of course, Rohit Sharma was absolutely brilliant in the last match, showing that it doesn't matter where you play; all it takes is technique and temperament and the ability to access the situation at the right time and plan the innings. So, while everyone played their part, Rohit was exceptional. Hardik Pandya also came good in the last game with four wickets, and continued with a well-made 33. The only worry, perhaps, is Shikhar's form, but I'm sure he will come good. He needs a little time to settle in and the 50-over format will help him with that.

India will need to rely more on their pacers in England. The spinners will play a part in this series – they played well in the T20s with a case in point being Chahal who bowled a good line and length. I was a bit surprised that Kuldeep was left out of the last game but the end result was good so that decision turned out fine.

I feel, however, that the seamers are the ones who will do the job, with the spinners chipping in. The good thing is that in Raina they will have someone who can contribute with bat and ball. It will be interesting to see what combination India goes with. It will all depend on the nature of the wicket because certain wickets change very quickly in England. So far the summer has been a hot one, but a few days of cold, rainy weather could change things.

Moving from one format to another is always difficult but India have always performed well in the shorter formats of the game. Preparation is on the right track, exactly what it should be before the series with the red ball begins. England have a wonderful record in 50-over cricket and have been dominant at home in recent times. India, however, have begun this tour on the right note and I am hoping they start with a bang in the ODIs too.

## Test series will be a test of India's temperament, technique

The best possible feeling for a true cricket lover is the anticipation of a five-Test series. It's wonderful that India are playing a full-fledged series in England as it will really be a test for their temperament and technique. Playing the red ball in English conditions is one of cricket's greatest challenges from a batting point of view, so an absorbing two months lies ahead.

At present, England is facing an Indian summer, which means the Indians will feel a bit more assured going into the first Test at Birmingham. My only concern is whether enough preparation has been offered to the cricketers, particularly those who only play Tests. Cheteshwar Pujara and Ishant Sharma should have been included, among others, in the ODIs so that they got more time in England. Yes, they were in England anyway but being with the team would have helped. That said, I am not convinced that limited-overs, white-ball cricket offers ideal preparation for Tests. The one four-day game was also reduced to three days, rather ironically, because of heat! These are players who play in 40-plus degree Celsius during the IPL so I think they can cope with the English sun.

The other concern is that the batting order has not been set as yet. The opening slot looks unsettled with Shikhar Dhawan looking slightly tentative. Virat Kohli is a very different batsman from the one who toured a few years ago. He has developed well in the intervening years and will hopefully reach peak form soon. His timing and form have not been what we have been used to in recent times. Pujara too seems to be in ultra-defensive mode and doesn't seem to be looking for runs. It is important to keep the scoreboard ticking and hopefully he will approach the first Test with positive intent.

India's bowling looks good with Ishant Sharma at the helm. It might be wise to use Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravinder Jadeja as the spinners. Kuldeep Yadav should not have been played in the shorter formats. Now that he has, he should only be used if conditions are favourable. It would show positivity and intent to go in with five bowlers.

England do start as favourites — they have some very good batsmen to balance their strong bowling attack. Joe Root is wonderful to watch and, in the company of senior pro Alistair Cook, and Jonny Bairstow, gives their batting a good base. The middle-order is not too experienced so that's a chink in their armour.

Recent India-England series have been dominated by James Anderson and once again he is the fulcrum of the England bowling attack. However, he is not getting younger and hopefully our batsmen will face him with greater assurance. The hosts look like a settled side, but since this is a long series, things can change even after a good beginning. India must believe in themselves and be adaptable. That is the key.



***Bowlers have been excellent; top-order needs to work on technique***

As India get ready for the second of the five-Test series against England, they would be aware that they could have been 1-0 up rather than 0-1 down. It was a close match and India would be disappointed at not finishing the job. However, they also need to take heart from what they did right, and remedy the areas in which they fell short.

Going forward into the Lord's Test, the performance of the bowlers would give India a lot of hope. Ishant Sharma was excellent and got wonderful support from Mohammed Shami and Umesh Yadav. The bonus was the superb bowling spell from Ravichandran Ashwin and, till the end of the match, it was evident that the hosts were not able to read him properly.

However, the batting was a reflection of the fact that the top order needs to really work on their technique. Quickly. Some of the shortcomings I could pick out were that they were too loose, lacked balance and had too much bat speed on their shots. Other than perhaps in London – which is facing an unusually hot summer – the Indian batsmen will have to negotiate the moving ball and they simply need to be tighter, and exhibit more balance at the crease. They also can't rely on bat speed and go hard at the ball like they do in the subcontinent. They need to play with soft hands, and also play and score more runs on the backfoot. The number of catches offered to the slips suggests lack of balance, too many strokes on the front foot, and quite simply too many loose shots.

The Indians need to take a leaf out of Virat Kohli's book and tighten up their game. He was simply exceptional at Edgbaston, and hopefully he will continue the form and also inspire other batsmen to do well.

The team selection, too, needs to be looked into. When batsmen are struggling with the moving ball, it might be an idea to induct Cheteshwar Pujara into the side. I know he is not in great form, but he has the ability to occupy the crease and just needs time in the middle to rediscover his touch.

It might also be a good idea to play Ravinder Jadeja instead of Hardik Pandya. Jadeja's spin might be a good foil for the pace trio and Ashwin, and he might also contribute with the bat. It is unfortunate that Bhuvneshwar Kumar, who was so good on the last tour, is injured but Jadeja might give the team balance. England really took advantage of having two all-rounders, Ben Stokes and Sam Curran, in the side.

The conditions at Lord's, especially if it remains warm, might help the Indian batsmen and hopefully the bowlers will also keep up the good work. India are not too far behind England – who also struggled against the moving ball – and just need to make a few changes in the approach to batting. A lot of cricket is still left to be played, so India need to rectify their mistakes quickly and stay positive.

***Batsmen need to take a leaf out of Virat's book***

The first Test was disappointing because we had a good chance to win; the second even more disappointing because we were comprehensively outplayed by Joe Root's England team. There is no denying that India's batting was completely abject in front of the moving ball at Lord's. While this would have been somewhat understandable in the first Test, a collective failure in the second is really hard to accept. In my last article, I had spoken about the importance of getting one's technique right when playing the moving ball.

The pre-determined movement to the front foot and the inability to play with soft hands are conspiring to create a situation where the batsmen are prodding at the ball. The other problem is excessive defence. Cheteshwar Pujara, for instance, has sound technique which helps him occupy the crease for long. However, he tends to stop scoring and if a wicket falls at the other end, the scoreboard looks dismal, putting further pressure on the incoming batsman. A reluctance to rotate strike among the batsmen enables the bowlers to work on a batsman through an over.

Our batsmen would do well to study how Virat Kohli is playing, with shots off the backfoot. He has tweaked his game so that he can deal with the moving ball. The rest, too, do not have to curb their style – they simply need to make adjustments in their footwork to ensure they are compact at the crease. They also need to realise that they need to keep the scoreboard moving since runs are critical even in such conditions.

Maybe leaving out Shikhar Dhawan was not a good idea, as he has not done much worse than the others. Also, it might be good to play Ajinkya Rahane at number three. Significantly, the concern of being dismissed by James Anderson is palpable among the Indians. He is an exceptional bowler with a fine record against India, but the batsmen need to back themselves and play their natural game, rotate strike and punish the loose ball.

The other trick India missed in the last Test was in not playing a third specialist seamer. In many ways this was the game-changer as the absence of Umesh Yadav allowed Chris Woakes and Jonny Bairstow to flourish and take the game out of India's reach.

The third Test is crucial and India need to find the ability to stem the rot. No amount of external advice can make a difference unless the players themselves decide to prove they are no pushovers. They need to forget they are 0-2 down and come out feeling positive and unafraid in order to put up a good fight.

The day brought in the sad news of Ajit Wadekar's passing away. A captain who made India believe overseas victories were possible, his wins in England and West Indies were critical contributions in the history of cricket in India. I was particularly shocked because I had met him a couple of months ago and he had seemed in good health. Indian cricket is the poorer with the passing away of this stalwart.



### **India will hopefully carry confidence of win to Southampton**

It was a remarkable recovery by the Indian team in Nottingham. They showed that they are on a par with England and once again it was the captain, Virat Kohli, who played the main role. India were superb as a unit but you can only win when you have runs on the board, so the rest of the boys should try and take a leaf out of the captain's book.

What is great about Virat is that he is playing in testing conditions and being able to adjust very well. Playing in England is totally different from playing anywhere else in the world. He has made the necessary adjustment to his technique and that made all the difference. His balance is terrific, he gets into position and judges length much better than the others. Once he occupies the crease, he is always looking for and taking runs, and this is not a good sign for the opposition! He reminds me of Viv Richards who would do the same thing. I've never seen anyone playing with so much authority, and so consistently. He is a match-winner; whenever he performs India has always done well.

I don't know how the pitch at Southampton will play but the bit of cloud cover that is being predicted will help India. There will probably be some grass as England knows that the Indians play spin much better. To be very honest, I don't think the pitch matters much. They just need to go and play; as Virat showed it doesn't matter where you play, and in what conditions, you just have to go and perform.

Where the opening combination is concerned, I was glad to see Shikhar Dhawan back. He did look a bit vulnerable but everybody is when you play in England — who's not? Barring Virat, the others have been struggling, and this is on both sides. But Shikhar is one of those who go for his shots; he and KL Rahul may not have scored very many runs but they gave India the start they needed.

The bowlers also did wonderful job. Bumrah bowled a magnificent spell in the second innings when the pitch was not really offering much help. Pandya's spell in the first was crucial and made all the difference. The seamers have been absolutely fantastic, were moving the ball much more and looked sharper than England's bowlers. Despite his injury, Ashwin will definitely be in the scheme of things for the fourth Test. However, should he not be able to play, Ravindra Jadeja would be the best bet to replace him.

England will have to work on a few aspects of their game to come back strongly. The hosts will, I'm sure, shrug off the last match as a bad game. However, the openers — Cook and Jennings — don't seem to be in the best form to tackle the Indian pacers and Ishant and Bumrah will cause them problems. They rely heavily on Joe Root, and Ben Stokes. I think that they will go in with the same bowling combination, though Stokes looked a bit rusty after his 'lay-off'. If the pitch has something to offer they may need to choose between Woakes and Stokes.

It's been a very interesting series thus far, there have been many ups and downs from Test to Test. It was great to see India's fight-back. Every game is different but once you make a strong comeback, after being on the mat, you carry that confidence into the next game and feel that you can do it again. I think that we are in for another cracking match. Hopefully they will level the series so that we can look forward to a deciding final Test.