

MOHINDER AMARNATH

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**#WhatDrivesYou
EXIDE**

India start as favourites, West Indies no pushover

As the year draws to a close, Indian cricketers and fans would be satisfied with the way the team has performed across the year and across the globe. They look a settled side with formidable talent in all departments. The bench strength is tremendous and there are several promising players in the domestic set-up as well.

In such a situation, no player, however big an achiever, is larger than the game. Nobody should be in a position to dictate terms regarding his selection without playing adequate domestic cricket. There is no player anywhere in the world who should be able to tell the team that he wants to choose his matches. It would be an unhealthy trend to start particularly when there are hundreds of cricketers across India who are toiling in domestic cricket – this would send a wrong message about merit and hard work to them. Wriddhiman Saha, Rishabh Pant and Sanju Samson are all very competent and the thrust should be to look forward.

India takes on West Indies in a T20 series of three games starting tomorrow. This is a format that the West Indians have excelled in, but they are without some of their big guns like Andre Russell. The format lends itself to surprise results and can be turned by one star performance, so West Indies are very much a contender.

That said, there is no team that has the experience that India has in this format, and they are playing on home turf. The only concern I have is for the injured duo, Jasprit Bumrah and Hardik Pandya. A back injury is always hard to come back from for a bowler. It is either caused by a faulty action or trying for extra pace. I hope I am wrong, but a stressed back can make the return to top pace a long, arduous one. Both these lads are very, very important for the team, and I hope they heal well.

Before I sign off, a word about Bob Willis. A thorough gentleman, he was as gentle and friendly off-field as he was menacing and larger-than-life on it. A dying breed, he was soft-spoken and well-mannered whenever I played against him, and his mincing steps building into a fast run-up is a memory all his fans will always remember. Rest in Peace, my friend.

MOHINDER AMARNATH

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India looks set to claim series

As the format gets longer, the West Indian side, which undoubtedly does have exciting players, is more at a disadvantage. The Indians will be going into the one-day series with a distinct advantage. The dynamics between the two teams has come a full circle since the 1980s when the Caribbeans were complete and overwhelming favourites. The visitors at present have a young side with some promising players but consistency and experience are issues.

The Indian team is looking well settled and several of its key players are in good form, starting with the captain. I was particularly impressed with Mohammed Shami who is in good rhythm and also using variations of pace to good effect. In the absence of Jasprit Bumrah, it is good to see that the Indian team has enough firepower in what is now one of the best pace attacks going around.

The one area that is under much scrutiny is the wicketkeeper's slot. Rishabh Pant needs to be calm and composed to harness his considerable talent. He shouldn't feel pressured to show his audacious stroke play every time he bats. He should learn to be patient at times and also show the full face of the bat when batting. His wicketkeeping also needs to improve. I have never seen a keeper collecting a ball in front of the stumps in my time. He needs to hone his technique and wait for the ball rather than grab at it. There is no questioning Pant's talent but he needs to make these crucial changes to his game. Many youngsters, like Sanju Samson, are knocking at the gates with very strong performances in domestic cricket.

The opening slot looks to be in good hands in all formats with KL Rahul, Mayank Agarwal and Rohit Sharma looking in tremendous touch. Rahul would be pleased with his performance in the final T20. I personally don't put too much in store by batting performances in T20 but as Rahul goes into the ODI series it would feel good to have some runs under the belt. This Indian team looks like a well-oiled unit at present and barring an upset, will claim this series comfortably.

MOHINDER AMARNATH

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Series opens up again, youngsters show grit

The batting display by Shimron Hetmyer and Shai Hope in Chennai was of such a high standard and so intelligently executed that I don't think there was much else that the Indian bowlers could have done to stop them. It was power hitting at its very best with memories of the heady days of Gordon Greenidge and Desmond Haynes springing back to mind from the recesses of memory. The West Indians have now taken the lead in this series and look pretty ominous on the batting front. They would undoubtedly be inspired by this win and will go to Vishakapatnam with greater confidence and resolve.

For the Indians, there is really not much else that could have been tried on the bowling front. Part of the plan is to try out new combinations and it is hard to fault the likes of Shivam Dube. Having only played T20s at this level, the transition takes time, and with Hope and Hetmyer in such good touch, his task became harder.

In the batting, once again it was proved that 300-plus scores are difficult to post when Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma are not among the runs. There was also a wobble towards the end when the West Indians were able to restrict India in the slog overs. That said, Hetmyer was in such form, a bigger total might also have been chased down by the visitors.

The main positive in the batting for India was the way Rishabh Pant performed. He showed resolve to stay in when the team needed him and without modifying his game too much, was able to keep the scoreboard moving at a fair pace. Shivam Dube, too, gave him good company and that would bolster the youngster's confidence.

Going forward, I do expect the Indians to come back strongly in the second ODI. They need to back their youngsters even in the face of the odd reversal and I expect to see the same team again. The pitch there normally is a better and I do not think it would be different this time.

The West Indians have really opened up this series by going up 1-0. This is a short series and they would fancy their chances. There's everything to play for in the next few days.

MOHINDER AMARNATH

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Indians delight with performances, series nicely poised

When Rohit Sharma bats the way he did in Vishakapatnam, few sights in cricket can be better! India rode another magnificent century from their opener to restore parity in the one-day series against West Indies.

As the series is nicely poised for the decider, it is clear that West Indies are in with a chance only if their target is under 300. Their bowlers were unable to restrict India and if they need to do the job tomorrow, they need to be far better, especially in the death overs. They were bowling at one length with no variations in line or pace. This would not help on a wicket like the one in Vishakapatnam since it was an even paved track.

For India there are many reasons to be happy. Kuldeep Yadav's hatrick being one case in point. Admittedly, it is easier for a bowler to be clever and experimental when defending a mammoth total. But Yadav is very much part of India's two spinner strategy, and when he feels his variations and loop are going to plan, it augurs well for the team.

Mohammed Shami, too, deserves credit because it was his double hit in one over that stopped a very productive partnership. Shami is really a calmer and more wily bowler than he was a few months ago, which once again is a good sign for the team.

For the West Indians, their bowling is truly an area of concern. Pace variations and finding the right length is of crucial importance, especially against a batting line-up as strong as India's. Their best chance is they bat first and manage to post a huge total on the back of an individual performance by one of their big hitting batsmen, or through a strong partnership like in the first ODI.

For India, they just need to be as good as they were in the last match. Virat Kohli has not scored in either the first or the second match. It might be time for him to come good and seal the series with a good knock. It was possibly his first golden duck in one-day cricket and he would surely like to set the record straight at Barabati Stadium!