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Dream start to multi-format tour for India; younger players take centre-stage

Two convincing wins achieved on the same pitch that behaved completely differently in the two matches in Eden Park have given India a vice-like grip over New Zealand in the Twenty20 International series.

This dream start to the multi-format tour is indicative of the mindset and fighting spirit of this Indian team. I was impressed by what Virat said leading into the series – that despite a hard-fought three-match ODI series against Australia, the long flight to Auckland, the short turnaround time and entirely different conditions, his side wasn't going to be looking for excuses, that they would be switched on from ball one of the first T20I.

That speaks to the attitude of the unit as a whole, and it manifested itself in the brand of cricket they played over the weekend. The first game called for a furious assault on a target of 204, the second needed a more pragmatic approach after New Zealand were restricted to 132. India were clinical in both encounters, the same set of batsmen delivering the goods.

It wasn't the usual match-winners who came up trumps. Instead, and heart-warmingly with the larger picture in mind, KL Rahul and Shreyas Iyer reinforced their coming of age at this level, taking up the responsibility of piloting the side home. Rahul's talent has never been in doubt since he broke through towards the end of 2014. He seemed to have lost his way a bit but in the last few months, since being dropped from the Test team, he has gone back and had a hard look at himself, and has returned stronger, more organised and in control of his plans. He played differently in the two chases, which also means he is situationally more tuned in, and like a true match-winner, didn't throw it away before the job was done.

Shreyas is blossoming with every outing, and the surety and composure with which he was able to play the aerial strokes points to a confidence which comes from a sense of belonging within the team set-up. He has made a telling impression at the pivotal No. 4 position through a fusion of flair, flamboyance and lots of swag, and will only be better for the last two hits.

One can't, of course, forget Jasprit Bumrah's contributions with the ball. No praise can be too high for his control, and for almost intuitively figuring out the areas that will make each batsman uncomfortable. In another encouraging sign, the bowling group as a whole lifted itself at Eden Park on Sunday, giving New Zealand no respite whatsoever.

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New Zealand display resilience and grit; post stupendous win

No praise can be too high for the manner in which New Zealand mounted their highest successful chase on Wednesday night. Even on its own, getting past India's 347 in the first One-Day International was a monumental achievement. To do it after the 5-0 rout in the preceding T20Is, and that after losing the last three games from positions of strength, showed their resilience and belief. There was also some controversy surrounding the pre-decided break coach Gary Stead took after the T20I whitewash. Taking all those factors into consideration, the four-wicket victory must rank at the very top of their 50-over feats.

Ross Taylor was the glue who held the chase together, with excellent support from Henry Nicholls, who didn't carry the baggage of the T20I losses, and the impressive Tom Latham, doing an admirable job as captain in Kane Williamson's absence. To scale down such a mammoth target, New Zealand had to both not lose wickets up front and also keep the rate required to manageable proportions. Even though Martin Guptill was subdued, Nicholls' enterprise helped them achieve both those goals.

Nicholls and Taylor rebuilt after Guptill and Tom Blundell fell in quick succession, while the Taylor-Latham century stand put the issue beyond doubt. New Zealand were exceptional between overs 30 and 40, rattling up 117 runs as they took calculated gambles and targeted the short boundary, and by the beginning of the 41st over, the asking rate was down to 5.6, almost unthinkable when the target is nearly 350.

India will rue their fielding in Hamilton in particular. For the third successive ODI series, they lost the first match but I am confident that like they did against West Indies and Australia at home, they will come back stronger. For that, they will have to show more energy in the field, greater discipline with the ball and be creative when a partnership is building. Kuldeep Yadav's reprieve of Taylor when he was only 10 was one of the turning points; India can't afford any more fielding mishaps going forward.

The batting was impressive, from debutants Mayank Agarwal and Prithvi Shaw through Virat Kohli to Shreyas Iyer and KL Rahul. Shreyas showed that he can build an innings and then switch gears effortlessly, while Rahul's sparkling knock rekindled memories of explosive finishes from MS Dhoni and Hardik Pandya. If India can extend their batting brilliance to the other two departments, I can't see why they can't knot up the series in Auckland.

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New Zealand sweeps ODI series; India fumbles

New Zealand responded to a 0-5 defeat in the T20 internationals with a commanding 3-0 sweep of the One-Day International series, but as well as they played, they were aided in no small measure by a fumbling Indian side.

Virat Kohli and the management group must be disappointed at the bowling and especially, the fielding. The batting was shored up resourcefully by Shreyas Iyer, who has ended the discussion on the No. 4 slot, and KL Rahul, who once again showcased his versatility, but the lack of penetration was exposed by New Zealand in general, and their openers in particular.

For the third time in the series, Martin Guptill and Henry Nicholls were allowed to get off to a cracking start. India's 296 seemed competitive only until the fast bowlers started to bowl short, and to the batsmen's strengths. Nicholls is a strong back foot player and Guptill powered to a half-century, the stand-out stroke a fabulous pull off Jasprit Bumrah, well below his wicket-taking best on this tour.

Yuzvendra Chahal, easily India's best bowler, tried to make a fist of it alongside Ravindra Jadeja, who had another fine outing with the ball. Chahal was dangerous whenever he flighted the ball and allowed it to grip and turn, and as India cut through the middle-order, a tight finish appeared on the cards. But Colin de Grandhomme and Tom Latham calmly guided New Zealand home, the former especially impactful as he unleashed several massive strokes. -

Like it has been all series, India's fielding was less than impressive. Especially when the wickets are not coming, top-class fielding can act as an additional bowler. India will feel they let themselves down in the field.

Their early batting too left a lot to be desired. The start of any innings, be it with bat or ball, sets the tone for what is to follow. Apart from their half-century stand in the first ODI, openers Mayank Agarwal and Prithvi Shaw haven't strung together a partnership. When three wickets fall in the first quarter of the innings, including that of the best batsman in the side if not the world, it's never easy to recover and post a substantial total.

That India managed to do so was thanks to the growing maturity and influence in the middle order of Shreyas and Rahul, both capable of playing at more than one gear, both situationally aware, and both adept at the waiting and the power game. Pandey added a new dimension with his smartness in running, but the lack of firepower once Rahul and Pandey were dismissed off successive deliveries left India maybe 25 runs short.

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India hungry for Test series win; a cracker of a series in the offing

After the setback in the ODIs, India will want to end the tour of New Zealand the way they started it, with victory in the Test series.

I anticipate a close contest between two evenly matched sides. New Zealand are extremely difficult to beat in their backyard, but over the last couple of years, India have travelled well to all parts of the world.

While the fast bowlers have been rightly eulogized for their part in India's triumphs away from home, I feel the batsmen will have a big role to play as well. It's imperative for the top order, the openers and the No. 3, to spend time at the crease if India are to go big in the first innings, a recipe for success overseas.

Most of this team has played in New Zealand before and therefore has an idea of what to expect in terms of pitches, conditions and the bowling attack. It was good to see Mayank Agarwal back among the runs, even if it was in the second innings of the warm-up game. It looks like Prithvi Shaw will open alongside Agarwal because he opened in both innings in the practice match, but I hope the decision-makers have spoken to Shubman Gill and told him exactly what role they expect him to play. After all, it's not easy to be a prospective opening batsman one day, and a potential middle-order batsman the next.

I was also pleased that HanumaVihari made a century in Hamilton. He has had to sit out whenever India have played five bowlers, and time spent in the middle with CheteshwarPujara for company will stand him in good stead once the Tests start. Especially in a short away series, I would prefer that India went in with six batsmen, WriddhimanSaha as the wicket-keeper and four bowlers, among them three quicks.

If the team management is convinced that Ishant Sharma is a risk-free proposition, he will automatically walk into the XI to form the pace battery with JaspritBumrah and Mohammed Shami. Bumrah was a little off-colour during the ODIs but he has too much quality not to make an impact in red-ball cricket, which he will be playing after nearly six months. If there is even the slightest question mark over Ishant's paucity of match-fitness, Umesh Yadav should get his opportunity, especially after having held his own on the less responsive tracks in India.

New Zealand desperately need World Championship points, so they will go all out, but India are very good at seizing their chances. This series should be a cracker.

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India disappooint, need to up their game

Much was expected of India after their dominant start to the World Test Championship and recent exploits away from home. But at the Basin Reserve, they dished out disappointing fare in both innings to capitulate without a fight against a New Zealand team short on confidence after the drubbings in Australia.

The toss played a part with India batting in the most difficult phase of the first Test, but there was no excuse for their second-innings display when the pitch had lost a lot of life and pace. New Zealand must be given credit for creativity, use of angles and the manner in which they employed the short ball. Trent Boult was excellent after a slightly erratic first innings, Tim Southee was as good as ever and Kyle Jamieson impressed on debut, both in the first innings when he got rid of Cheteshwar Pujara and Virat Kohli, as well as in the second.

India's overseas victories have usually stemmed from good opening partnerships, but Prithvi Shaw was caught a little unawares in his first away Test. A few of his technical shortfalls were exposed. He loves hitting the ball to the on-side, but when the ball is moving around, he will be better off playing straight and getting the measure of the conditions without compromising on natural flair. Maybe he can take a leaf out of Kane Williamson's book. The captain came up with another stunner, an example on how to bat in New Zealand, by playing the ball right under the eyes and close to the body. He can also look at his partner Mayank Agarwal, who came into the game with little form but showed his maturity by batting with poise and application.

Ishant Sharma's whole-hearted, brave performance after a month away from the game and within a couple of days of landing in Wellington was an inspiration. His five-wicket haul was richly deserved but India, who seemed to have fought their way back when they restricted New Zealand to 225 for seven, again allowed the tail to wag and open up a lead of 183. A lead of 100 would have been manageable. Such a big deficit needed a stirring riposte but New Zealand choked the runs, stayed very patient and eventually reaped the rewards.

It's now India's turn to pay back in the same coin. Just as they can't allow New Zealand's bowlers to bowl at them without challenge, they will also have to rediscover wicket-taking ways in Christchurch. I expect them to come up trumps on both counts.

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India lose; need to stop repeating mistakes

It was refreshing to hear Virat Kohli offer no excuses for the 2-0 loss in New Zealand and stress on acceptance of the outcome, but I hope India do address the issues that hurt them badly in probably one of their worst overseas outings of late. The next Test series isn't until December, so the temptation to write this off as a one-off could be overwhelming. But if India want to avoid a repeat of this display in Australia later in the year, they can't afford to gloss over what transpired in New Zealand.

I am sure the batting group would be hurting, especially, since they take a lot of pride in preparation but were caught napping by New Zealand's game plans for two Test matches in a row. I agree the conditions were tricky and challenging, but that's no reason why there shouldn't have been greater application from the batsmen. New Zealand's plans were straightforward enough – to get swing with the new ball and make use of the lateral movement and, should that fail to produce wickets, to resort to liberal use of the short ball.

Ajinkya Rahane's tortured stint in the second innings in Christchurch best illustrated India's confusion. For an experienced and accomplished batsman who has scored runs all around the world, Rahane seemed all at sea against Neil Wagner and Kyle Jamieson's short-ball barrage, and tried to hit his way out of trouble. On that surface, it was a method never designed to succeed.

The other aspect that stood out was a repetition of mistakes from the same batsmen. Virat was trapped leg before to the ball coming in twice in the second Test, Mayank Agarwal fell in similar fashion in both innings in Christchurch to Trent Boult inswingers, Prithvi Shaw was cramped up and dismissed fending by balls following him in the second innings of both Tests. Test cricket is an unforgiving cauldron where there is no room for tentativeness. India's technical and mental frailties were badly exposed by a New Zealand side that looked out for the count during the T20s, but that knows how to win at home better than most other teams.

It was great to see Jasprit Bumrah return to somewhere near his best after an iffy ODI series. I can't really fault the bowlers because the batsmen didn't put enough runs on the board, though they will feel they should have done better than concede stands of 66 and 103 to openers Tom Latham and Tom Blundell in the two innings in Christchurch. They also gave away too many runs to Jamieson specifically, and the lower order, in both first innings, a big factor in a low-scoring series.