

India to fight Freddie

Champions Trophy proper gets underway today



AFP, Jaipur

Under-pressure India go into their first Champions Trophy match here on Sunday praying charismatic England captain Andrew Flintoff does not fire against them.

"He is an exciting cricketer to watch. It is always nice to see someone like Freddie do well - except against India," said Dravid, whose team won just two of their last nine one-day internationals.

"I'd like to see him (Flintoff) fail as much as he can against us," the Indian captain said in a light vein.

"He had a big impact in a Test series in India and also made a huge impact in the Ashes series that has been well-documented."

Ace all-rounder Flintoff played a key role in his team's regaining the Ashes at home last year, scoring 402 runs and grabbing 24 wickets against Australia.

He then led an injury-hit England to a creditable 1-1 draw in India early this year, making 264 runs and taking 11 wickets in a three-Test series.

Speculation is rife that Flintoff will open an innings, but the Indian skipper said his team are well prepared.

"It does not really matter who opens. I think Freddie could provide some exciting possibilities up the order, but we could also get him out early and that could put a lot of pressure on their middle order," he said.

"It will be interesting who England open with and I am sure they are going to try out different combinations and look to see what works best for them, but we are pretty well prepared."

The eight-team tournament kicks off here with a Group-A match between India and England. Other teams in the group are world champions Australia and a qualifier (either Sri Lanka or the West Indies).

South Africa, New Zealand, Pakistan and a qualifier are in Group B. The top two teams from each group advance to the semi-finals.

Dravid said his spinners could test England's batsmen on a home pitch. "The biggest challenge they (England) will probably have to deal with is how they play our spinners. How they play in these conditions and how they adapt and adjust themselves to the wickets," said the Indian skipper.

India may have thrashed England 5-1 in a home one-day series in April this year, but Dravid said the past results had no relevance to Sunday's clash.

"It's only an advantage, but has

no relevance now because the day's performance matters," he said. "There is no soft start in the competition. Any of these eight teams can win the tournament. I don't think anyone will call England a soft team. I think you are making a big mistake if you do that."

"They have got some good match-winners and we are not going to take them lightly. Any of these teams can win not only this

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PHOTO: AFP

THE FACE OF INDIA: Indian cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar bats during a net session at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium on the eve of the hosts' opening ICC Champions Trophy match against England today.

ATTACK ON SHOOTERS

Sports to stop for a day

SPORTS REPORTER

Different national sports federations have decided to abstain from all kinds of sporting activities in the country for a day to protest the police attacks on national shooter Asif Hossain Khan and others on October 2 at the National Shooting Complex in Gulshan.

The decision was taken at a joint meeting of the executive committee of Bangladesh Shooting Federation and leaders of different national sports federations at the Shooting Federation office yesterday.

The meeting also decided to form a committee with general secretaries of football, weightlifting, swimming, shooting federations and women's sports association to set a date for the protest.

Bangladesh Shooting Federation president Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury, who presided over the meeting, said they would send shooter Asif, who is now receiving treatment at a private hospital in the city, and shooting coach Shoebuzzaman to Bangkok for better treatment within the next few days.

Inzi disallowed to visit India

PTI, Karachi

The new regime in the Pakistan Cricket Board has denied Inzamamul Haq the permission to visit India and commentate on television during the Champions Trophy in line with its policy to keep tight control on the players.

Even as Inzamam was packing his bags to leave for India, he was told that it was not the best time for him to visit India.

PCB's concerns are primarily twofold. At a time when Pakistan cricket is shrouded in controversies, PCB thinks any ill-judged comment by Inzamam could add fuel to the fire.

Also, Inzamam was to return home only on November 7 and just four days later Pakistan are due to meet West Indies in the first Test in Lahore.

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Scheduling irks Dravid



CRICINFO, undated

Rahul Dravid has said that it's disappointing to have an 11-day gap in between India's first and second game of the Champions Trophy, adding that it was a far from the ideal situation.

India kick off their campaign

against England at Jaipur but it's only on October 26 that they make their re-entry.

"Even in the last Champions Trophy, we played against Kenya, had a long gap, and then played Pakistan in the last match." Dravid admitted at the pre-match press conference. "I understand that some of the scheduling is done keeping many things in mind and if you're playing the first game, you end up having to play the last game. It's a chance to go back, go home for

Diwali, spend some time with family and then reassemble again. But again, ideally in a tournament like this, you wouldn't want to have a 11-day gap."

Scheduling a tournament usually involves more than just cricketing logic. To keep India in the tournament as long as possible is a solution to keep public interest alive and it comes as no surprise that they're playing the first and last game of the main part of the tournament. None of the other seven teams have to

endure such a lull and to sustain the intensity would probably be one of India's big challenges.

For without intensity, they would struggle. England, on current form at least, are probably the softest opposition, allowing India to ease in to the competition, but Dravid wasn't willing to concede to that argument. "I don't think there are any soft starts in an eight-team competition," he added. "I've said

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