

Twenty20 more demanding

PTI, Durban

Twenty20 might be the shortest version of cricket but it is more demanding than Tests and one-dayers, says Indian skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni, who feels the slam-bang version was taking a "toll" on the players' bodies.

"Twenty20 is a very demanding form. It is just 20 overs a side and three hour match, but the intensity and involvement is more than a 50-over match or even a Test match," Dhoni said.

The wicketkeeper-batsman said the format was especially punishing on the bowlers, who had little margin for error against batsmen ready to smack them out of the ground.

"The bowlers have to put in more than 100 per cent because even though they have only four overs, the batsmen are looking to go at them all the time," he said.

"The batsmen also love to challenge fielders, by looking to convert ones into twos. Twenty20 is very tiring and exhausting, it takes a good toll on the body," Dhoni said.

On playing back-to-back matches in the competition, Dhoni said although it was taxing, it helped the team getting acclimatised to conditions.

"It is international cricket and you always want to win whether you are playing back to back or matches after a gap. If you play back to back matches, you have the advantage of knowing the conditions," he said.

That knowledge would put the Indians at an advantage against the Australians in the semifinal here on Saturday.

"We definitely know the wicket, we know the conditions, we know how the pitch behaves when there is grass on it, so we won't really panic. We do have an advantage, but everything depends on how you play on that day," he added.

Big guns ready

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"We knew the South Africa game would be among the toughest matches we would play in the whole tournament," he said.

"It was their home ground and the conditions were favourable for them, so we were under pressure and we did not get the start we were looking for."

The captain also had high praise for 20-year-old Sharma, who was named man of the match ahead of Rudra Pratap.

"It was a brilliant performance by Rohit," said Dhoni. "He has been sat out for ages and did not play in England, yet he came out and helped us recover."

"It is always a challenge to play Australia because they are the best team in the world, but I am sure we will be up to the challenge."

India received unexpected support from South African captain Graeme Smith, who said Dhoni's men were capable of upsetting Australia.

"They bowled and fielded superbly and kept us under pressure all the way," said Smith.

"In this format of the game things can change so quickly and if they carry on playing the way they are they have a good chance."

TEAMS

AUSTRALIA: Adam Gilchrist (capt, wk), Matthew Hayden, Brad Hodge, Andrew Symonds, Mike Hussey, Michael Clarke, Brad Haddin, Brett Lee, Mitchell Johnson, Nathan Bracken, Stuart Clark.

INDIA: Virender Sehwag, Gautam Gambhir, Robin Uthappa, Yuvraj Singh, Mahendra Singh Dhoni (wk), Rohit Sharma, Irfan Pathan, Joginder Sharma, Harbhajan Singh, Sreesanth, RP Singh.

Community rues Jose exit

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20 million pounds (40 million dollars).

WENGER, FERGUSON

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has admitted he was sad to see Jose Mourinho leave Chelsea despite their stormy relationship.

Wenger could have been forgiven if he breathed a sign of relief on hearing Mourinho had left Stamford Bridge after a series of highly-public disputes with the Portuguese coach.

Mourinho infuriated Wenger when he described the Frenchman as a "voyeur" and the squabble continued when the Gunners boss responded by saying: "When you give success to stupid people, it makes them more stupid sometimes and not more intelligent."

But Wenger insisted he had immense respect for the way Mourinho transformed Chelsea one of Europe's most powerful teams and won back to back Premier League titles.

"It is basically sad because I feel Mourinho is a manager of quality," he said. "We didn't get on the best but recently it has become better. That does not hide the fact I respected what he did and the



PHOTO: STAR

Sports Adviser Tapan Chowdhury hands over a jersey at BKSP yesterday to one of the members of the Bangladesh contingent that will participate in the Special Olympics World Summer Games which begins from October 2.

Eyes on the prize

AFP, Cape Town



Pakistan captain Shoaib Malik said his team

were looking beyond Saturday's semifinals after they laboured to a four-wicket win over Bangladesh in their final World Twenty20 Super Eight match at Newlands Thursday.

"We had hiccups today (Thursday)," Malik admitted. "We are much focused to improve on this performance."

Pakistan's win ensured they finished top of Group F in the Super Eight stage with three wins in three matches.

They earned a semifinal at Newlands against the second team from Group E, one of South Africa, New Zealand or India, depending on the final Super Eight match between South Africa and India later Thursday.

But Malik said he wasn't concerned about who Pakistan play Saturday. "We have our sights set higher than the semifinals," he said. "We are looking at winning the trophy."

Australia were the other semifinal qualifiers from the group after beating Sri Lanka by ten wickets in the first game of a double header at Newlands. Australia will have to travel to Durban for their semifinal.

Newcomer Zunaed Siddique made an aggressive half-century to play virtually a lone hand for Bangladesh after they were sent in to bat.

Opening batsman Siddique, who

was named man of the match, blasted 71 off 49 balls but Bangladesh were bowled out for 140 in 19.4 overs.

Pakistan seemed set for an easy win but they suffered a middle order batting collapse.

Opening batsman Imran Nazir, who had earlier retired hurt before scoring, returned at the fall of the fifth wicket and hit 27 not out to guide Pakistan home with six balls to spare.

Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraf said a dropped catch in the deep two balls after Nazir returned could have made the difference between winning and losing.

Siddique, 19, a tall left-hander, marked his international debut with a sparkling innings which included six fours and three sixes.

He said he was told to play his natural game. "I went out to play as I do in domestic cricket and not worry about the opposition," he said.

He showed a fearless approach at the crease. Even when three wickets fell in successive overs, he slammed two successive sixes over mid-wicket off off-spinner Mohammad Hafeez.

But his penchant for the lofted stroke over midwicket caused his downfall when he was caught in the deep off Pakistan captain Shoaib Malik.

Nazir retired hurt before a run had been scored by Pakistan when he was hit in the abdomen by a ball from Mashrafe Mortaza.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

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Farhad had opened the account early in PWD's victory against Shantinagar while Lalbagh defeated Government Printing Press with Monwar, Anwar and Shakil netting one goal apiece.

At the Bir Shrestha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium, Spandan KC also won 3-1, against Mirpur Ekadash, with Sadi striking twice and Ripon once.

City United Club shared points with Dilkusha in a 2-2 draw at the same venue.

SCHOOL FOOTBALL

Sunny Barua slammed all the goals in Segun Bagicha High School's 4-0 win over Khilgaon Model High School in the Dhaka School Football League (Under-11). In other matches, Motijheel Government HS blanked Nidhu Smriti HS 2-0 while Khilgaon Government HS edged Motijheel Government Primary School 1-0.

In the Under-13 League, Shaheed Nabi HS beat Ali Ahmed HS by a solitary goal, Sena Pally HS crushed haider Ali HS 3-0 while Jatrabari Ideal HS drew 0-0 with Ideal School of Motijheel.

ACTIVE CHESS

Abu Sufian Shakil emerged unbeaten champion in the weekend Active Chess with 5.5 points. A total of 34 players competed in the 6-round Swiss League. Minhajul Abedin Sagar finished runner-up with better tie-breaking points after finishing level with Mahfuzur Rahman Emon on five points.

Ashrafu admits

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Sri Lanka," he added.

On the other hand, Zunaed said that he felt no pressure in his first international match and is now looking forward to make it in the one-day internationals and Test matches.

"I did not think about the opposition. I took no pressure although this was my first international. I just tried to play the way I do in domestic cricket. I stayed positive and played my natural game," said the hard-hitting left-hander from Rajshahi.

"I got selected for the Twenty20 event and that was my priority. I am very happy that I could score some runs but would have been happier if we had won. Obviously I would like to play ODIs and Tests for Bangladesh and if the selectors feel I am good enough, then I will try my best to perform," he added.

us it worked out well. We make a lot of them (semi-finals) now it's about kicking on."

"It looks good," said Malik after inspecting the surface. "But the outfield is heavy so 165-170 should be a good total." The sunshine of recent days is also expected to be replaced by a touch more cloud cover, offering more assistance for the bowlers.

TEAMS

NEW ZEALAND: Lou Vincent, Brendon McCullum (wk), Peter Fulton, Ross Taylor, Scott Styris, Craig McMillan, Jacob Oram, Daniel Vettori (capt), Shane Bond, Mark Gillespie, Jeetan Patel

PAKISTAN: Imran Nazir, Shahid Afridi, Mohammad Hafeez, Salman Butt, Younis Khan, Shoaib Malik (capt), Misbah-ul-Haq, Kamran Akmal (wk), Mohammad Asif, Umar Gul, Sohail Tanvir

challenge most strongly for this season's Premiership title.

But while the United manager insisted the make-up of the Chelsea side will be unaffected by the changes in the dug-out, he admitted Mourinho's replacement, Avram Grant, faces a daunting task attempting to emulate the success of his predecessor.

And Ferguson - who acknowledged he will miss the chance to extend his three-year rivalry with Mourinho - believes the English game will be poorer for the loss of the controversial former FC Porto coach.

"Jose leaving is a disappointment for the game," Ferguson said. "He was terrific for football and terrific for Chelsea and I enjoyed the competition with him."

"He was something fresh and new for the game. But I wish him well and think he has been good for the game."

"He has been fantastic, unparalleled success and it's a test for whoever replaces him. At the moment it's Avram Grant and it's a big test for him."

FANS

Chelsea's fans would certainly like

to get a clearer picture of why such turmoil is engulfing their club.

Around 100 supporters gathered at Chelsea's stadium on Thursday to salute Mourinho. They chanted "bring back our special one" and unfurled a banner proclaiming "Mourinho: simply the best."

Chelsea officials moved quickly to insist they had not sacked the fans' idol.

In an open letter to their supporters, Chelsea said: "Early this morning we announced that Chelsea and Jose Mourinho had agreed to part company by mutual consent."

"The key phrase here is that there was mutual agreement. Jose did not resign and he was not sacked. What is clear, though, is we had all reached a point where the relationship between the club and Jose had broken down."

"This was despite genuine attempts over several months by all parties to resolve certain differences."

"The reason the decision has been taken is that we believed the breakdown started to impact on the performance of the team and recent results supported this view."

"We did not want this to continue or affect the club further."

SPECIAL OLYMPICS GP bids farewell to Bangladesh team

SPORTS REPORTER

Youth and Sports Adviser Tapan Chowdhury hoped that Team Bangladesh will shine in the 2007 Special Olympics in Shanghai, China this year.

Addressing a reception held for the Bangladesh team's farewell party at BKSP yesterday, organised by Grameenphone, Tapan said: "I hope the team will once again make us proud by bringing more medals as the whole nation's blessing is on them."

"They had been successful in the past and we should encourage them," added Tapan, who also handed over official jerseys to the team.

Zheng Qingdian, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Bangladesh, was also present as special guest.

Youth and Sports secretary Dr. Golam M Talukder, Chairman, of Special Olympics Bangladesh Ashraf-ud Dowla and Kafil HS Mueyed, Director, New Business Division of Grameenphone, were also present.

GP is the sponsor of the Bangladesh team for the Games that will be held in Shanghai, China from October 2-11.

Bangladesh, who have been taking part in the Games since 1995, will participate in seven disciplines -- aquatics, athletics, badminton, bocce, football, table tennis and cricket.

They have so far won 37 gold, 22 silver and 19 bronze medals in the last three editions.

Earlier this year, GP pledged its support to Special Olympics Bangladesh, a non-profit organisation which helps people with intellectual disabilities to develop self-confidence, social skills and a sense of personal accomplishment through sports training and competition.

The sponsorship will go beyond the team's participation and GP will also co-organise talent hunts in both regional and national levels to search for new talents.

INDIA-S AFRICA SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the Twenty20 World Championships Super Eight match between India and South Africa at the Kingsmead on Thursday:

INDIA				
Gambhir c Smith b Pollock	19			
Sehwag c Boucher b Ntini	11			
Karthick c A Morkel b Pollock	0			
Uthappa c Smith b M Morkel	15			
R Sharma not out	50			
Dhoni run out	45			
Pathan not out	0			
Extras: (b-2, lb-2, w-8, nb-1)	13			
Total: (For 5 wkts in 20 overs)	153			
Fall of wickets: 1-32, 2-33, 3-33, 4-61, 5-146.				

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Pollock	4	0	17	2
Ntini	4	0	30	1
Van der Wath	4	0	43	0
M Morkel	4	0	32	1
Philander	2	0	14	0
A Morkel	2	0	13	0

SOUTH AFRICA				
Gibbs lbw b Rudra Pratap	1			
Smith c Karthick b Rudra Pratap	4			
De Villiers lbw b Sreesanth	1			
Kemp run out	5			
Boucher b Sreesanth	36			
Pollock b Rudra Pratap	0			
A Morkel b Rudra Pratap	36			
Philander st Karthick b Harbhajan	2			
Van der Wath st Karthick b Harbhajan	2			
M Morkel not out	1			
Ntini not out	4			
Extras: (lb-9, w-15)	24			
Total (for nine wickets in 20 overs)	116			
Fall of wickets: 1-11, 2-12, 3-12, 4-30, 5-31, 6-100, 7-103, 8-109, 9-111.				

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Sreesanth	4	0	23	2
Rudra Pratap	4	0	13	4
J Sharma	4	0	24	0
Pathan	4	0	16	0
Harbhajan	4	0	31	2

Result: India won by 37 runs.

Man-of-the-match: Rohit Sharma.

Toss: India

Ryoto breaks Indian monopoly

SPORTS REPORTER

Japanese player Ryoto put an end to India's domination in the Asian Under-14 tennis when he lifted the boys' singles title in the second leg of the series.

India bagged all the titles in the first leg in Dhaka last week but Ryoto defeated India's Rohit 6-4, 7-5 in yesterday's final of the Amicus Asian 14/U Series tennis tournament at the BKSP.

India grabbed the remaining titles with Rohit-Ronit duo winning the boys' doubles beating Ryoto and Goghari (India).

Prarthana won double crown when she edged fellow Indian Vaideh 5-7, 6-3, 6-3 in the girls' singles final. Prarthana paired with Vaideh to clinch the doubles beating compatriots Namita and Vishesh.

Youth and Sports Adviser Tapan Chowdhury distributed prizes.

Dad right, mum surprised

INTERNET, undated



The telephone would not stop ringing and

the 15 people assembled in Dinesh Lad's room at Star Line building Gorai in the far suburbs of Mumbai couldn't believe that the boy next door had made it big.

On Thursday, Rohit Sharma, playing only his second innings for India, scored an unbeaten 50 and was declared the man-of-the-match in the do or die encounter against South Africa in the Super Eight of the Twenty20 World Championship.

The 20-year-old Rohit, who made his debut Twenty20 only 24 hours ago against England but did not get to bat, played with controlled aggression to help India cross 150.

He posted his half-century in style, pulling the last ball of the innings from Johan van der Wath for a six over square leg. He faced 40 balls and hit seven fours and two sixes.

"I always knew he had the potential to be a good cricketer and he proved it. I provided a platform and he achieved it. I feel he has great role to play in the future for

Indian cricket team," Dinesh Lad, Sharma's coach told rediff.com.

It was 2am in the morning but at Sharma's residence, the festivities had just begun.

Rohit's father Gurunath Sharma said, "For me the six which Rohit hit was the best moment of my life."



ROHIT SHARMA

Gurunath, who lost his job in a transport company, depended on his son's earning as he played for Indian Oil and later the Ranji trophy and his savings. Though his financial condition was adverse, Rohit has come out against all odds and proved himself.

"He had it in him as a child," says Lad, who spotted his talent.

"When I saw him playing cricket I knew he could make it and therefore coaching him since class seven. He scored his first century when he was playing for inter school tournament."

Rohit's mother Poornima too was pleasantly surprised by her son's smooth transition to the international stage.

"I was never interested and never wanted him to play cricket. It is only because of his passion I gave in. Now, I too enjoy the game," said Poornima, who was concerned that Rohit was not giving enough attention to studies.

After he started as a professional cricketer career, Rohit was the only earning member of the family. His younger brother is doing a hotel management course.

So how does the proud feel now as Rohit has become the man of the moment?

Poornima beams, "Rohit's father completed his 50th birthday recently and I think he has given the best birthday gift to his father. I have no more words to express my happiness."

She further adds, "I wanted to see him as an all rounder and I hope in future he makes it."

Though not a regular bowler, Rohit is a useful off-spin.

A great feeling: Singh

INTERNET, undated



Nursing a soft drink after dinner, Rudra Pratap

Singh presented a relaxed look but in the hour before he set his eyes on the meal in the Indian team's dressing room, he was intensity personified and feasted on the South African batsmen to star in India's fantastic victory that eliminated the home team from the ICC Twenty20World Championship semifinal race.

"It is my first international event. I had played but two of three Twenty20 games in India and I am delighted to be able to come up with the best figures for a four-over spell in Twenty20 cricket. It is a great feeling," he said of his figures of four for 13 in four overs that fetched him a record.

South African fast-medium bowler Morne Morkel's four for 17 against New Zealand were the previous best figures for a four-over spell. Of course, New Zealand fast bowler Mark Gillespie's four for seven in 2.5 overs against Kenya is the best spell of bowling in Twenty20

cricket so far. And it is no coincidence that the pitch here has produced the top five best figures in Twenty20.

"I think I have taken a step forward in reaffirming that Twenty20 is not just a batsman's game. It is a nice challenge and I am sure bowlers do not mind a little bit of juice in the wicket. They will be encouraged to come up with some good performances. Of course, it is tough for the bowlers since there are still 10 batsmen to dismiss in a Twenty20 game."

"There is no doubt that a catch like the one Dinesh Karthik took to see Graeme Smith's back tend to lift not just the bowler but the team as a whole," RP Singh said. "It is not just that the catches but when fields run batsmen out and even stop singles, the bowler draws motivation. If a fielder makes a great stop, even a loose delivery will begin to seem like a good one and takes the pressure away."

Asked what thoughts he took to the pitch after his team managed 153 for five in 20 overs, RP Singh said he hadn't worried about the total. "I remembered what was discussed at the team meetings and

the strategies that the captain and coaches made for us," he said. "Our score is not at the back of the mind when we set in to bat and we are focused on the tactics. If we cannot deliver 100 per cent, we try and achieve 80 per cent of that."

Despite bowling well on the tour of Ireland and England and claiming nine Twenty20 wickets so far, RP Singh does not stick his neck out and say that he believes he has a permanent place in the Indian bowling attack. "I do not have too much to say on whether I have done that or not. My job is to bowl in the right areas and I believe I have done that for the team every time. I have learnt a lot from the time I made it to the Indian team in Harare just over two years ago. I have bowled to the seniors in the team and talked to them."

He said there always was pressure when anyone was playing for the national side. "I will focus on my strengths and will work to succeed in the remaining matches," he said as he trained his thoughts on the upcoming semifinal against Australia.

Schaaf worried sleepless

AFP, Berlin



Werder Bremen coach Thomas Schaaf admits the insomnia suffered by high-profile new signing Carlos Alberto is giving him a few sleep-

less nights as his side struggle in the Bundesliga.

The 22-year-old attacking midfielder has started just one of Bremen's five Bundesliga games so far this season and the 7.8 million euros signing has failed to make an impact since his summer switch from Brazil's Corinthians.

Bremen, third in the league last season, have struggled this term and last weekend's 3-0 hammering by Borussia Dortmund which has left them 13th in the table.

But Schaaf says Alberto's ongoing insomnia keeps him awake at night as the Brazilian's sleeping problems have led to a fluctuation in form and minor injuries.

"It is a concern, his sleeping problems means he can't recover from training as well as we'd like and it has left him weak," said Schaaf, whose side face Bundesliga champions VfB Stuttgart on Saturday.

"He won't be available for us until we have done further tests."

Bremen manager Klaus Allofs stressed Alberto's sleeping problems are not related to headlines in the Brazilian press linking the five-times capped midfielder to a move back home.

After their Champions League defeats in midweek, both Stuttgart and Bremen will be battling to get their Bundesliga campaigns back on track.

Bremen were beaten 2-1 by Real Madrid at the Bernabeu on Wednesday night, while Stuttgart were beaten 2-1 by Rangers in Scotland.

But Germany's player of the year Mario Gomez is now fully recovered after recent injuries and scored in Scotland for Stuttgart to underline his return to form.

League-leaders Bayern Munich

FIXTURES

Saturday
Schalke 04 v Arminia Bielefeld, Werder Bremen v VfB Stuttgart, Hamburg v Nuremberg, Hertha Berlin v Borussia Dortmund, Energie Cottbus v VfL Wolfsburg, Hansa Rostock v Duisburg
Sunday
Hanover v Bayer Leverkusen, Karlsruhe v Bayern Munich