

India need to regroup

Second ODI against SA today

Cricket

AGENCIES, Johannesburg

Thrashed in the first game in Durban, India would hope to put up a far more inspired display as they go into the second one-day against South Africa here on Saturday with a few problems to sort out in both the bowling and batting departments.

The Indians did well by drawing the Test series 1-1 and then winning the only T20 game on Sunday, but the humiliating 135-run defeat in the first match came as a big blow for the visitors who have to regroup before it's too late.

Already plagued by injuries to key players, nothing seemed to have gone right for Mahendra Singh Dhoni and his men in Durban as both the batting and bowling left much to be desired.

The Indians have a track record of not doing too well in the first match on tours and Dhoni and his men will be looking to bounce back and level the five-match series 1-1 at the New Wanderers ground which is likely to aid the pace bowlers.

Already missing key players such as Virender Sehwag and Gautam Gambhir, the injury list has only grown longer with pacer Praveen Kumar also returning home

because of an injury.

Paceman Sreesanth is also recovering from an elbow injury, which forced him to sit out of the first match, and it remains to be seen whether the Kerala speedster is fit enough to take the field today.

Batting has been India's strength but the top order collapsed like a pack of cards to be reduced to 43 for four in the first match, and the team could never really recover from that jolt.

Sachin Tendulkar, returning to the Indian one-day fold after close to a year, has a big role to play and the champion batsman has to take up the responsibility of giving India a competitive total on the board.

The Indian line-up has a number of young but talented players such as Murali Vijay, Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Suresh Raina but they have to fire when it matters most.

Kohli was the only batsman to score a half century in the last game unlike the South Africans who had three batsmen coming up with substantial contributions. The failure to build partnerships made India's chase all the more difficult.

For the off-colour Yuvraj Singh, it is the final chance to convince the selectors that he is the same destructive force who won India many a matches before the stunning slump in form.



China's Li Na holds the Sydney International trophy in delight after beating reigning champion Kim Clijsters of Belgium 7-6 (7/3), 6-3 in the final yesterday.

Li upsets Kim to title

Tennis

AFP, Sydney

China's Li Na upset two-time champion Kim Clijsters to win the Sydney International title and her fourth career WTA crown on Friday.

Eighth seed Li recovered from going behind 0-5 in the opening set to rally for a convincing 7-6 (7/3), 6-3 victory in 1hr 30min.

It was her second WTA title in Australia after winning the Gold Coast event in 2008 and last year she was a surprise semifinalist at the Australian Open.

Li, 28, will stay at her 11th ranking despite the win, while Clijsters missed the chance to move up from number three to two in the rankings ahead of Russian Vera Zvonareva.

It was Li's second victory in six encounters with US Open champion Clijsters and her first win over the Belgian in three matches at the Sydney tournament.

Clijsters, 27, who won in Sydney in 2003 and 2007, had been a perfect 13-0 in semifinal and final matches since her return to tennis in August 2009 as Li pulled off the boilover.

It capped a magnificent week for Li after she eliminated two-time major champion Svetlana Kuznetsova of Russia in the quarterfinals, Serbian Bojana Jovanovski in the semis and Australian Anastasia Rodionova and French qualifier Virginie Razzano in the earlier rounds.

Li became the first Chinese player to break into the world top 10 rankings after reaching the last four at last year's Australian Open.

London honours Cook

AFP, London

Alastair Cook received yet another honour for his starring role in England's Ashes victory away to Australia when he was awarded the Freedom of the City of London on Thursday.

The 26-year-old opening batsman scored a colossal 766 runs in England's 3-1 triumph, a tally that saw Cook named man of the series.

Now the left-hander, who plays for county side Essex, east of London, has followed in the footsteps of England captain Andrew Strauss in receiving the London award.

Cook, who will be presented with the accolade at a ceremony later this year, said Thursday: "I am greatly honoured and privileged to be given the Freedom of London for doing something I love... beating the Aussies."

Akram backs Afridi

Cricket

PTI, Karachi

Former Pakistan skipper Wasim Akram has backed the PCB's decision to retain Shahid Afridi as the national team captain for the one-day series in New Zealand.

Akram's comments came in the wake of the raging debate over whether Afridi should lead the team in the forthcoming World Cup. Some former greats have backed Test captain, Misbahul Haq, to lead the country in the prestigious one-day tournament.

"I feel that changing the captain so close to the World Cup will cause great damage to the national team and its chances in the tournament," Akram told reporters on the sidelines of the Quaid-e-Azam trophy final.

Akram, however, advised Afridi to work hard on his batting and bring more consistency and lead the team from the front.

The board, which is yet to announce the captain for the World Cup, added fuel to the fire when it said that it is also uncertain about appointing Afridi.

The board however named Afridi as captain for the six-match one-day series in New

Zealand this week.

Akram felt the selectors had made a mistake by not including senior batsman Muhammad Yousuf for the series.

"Yousuf is a very seasoned campaigner and I think, in the World Cup, when the pressure will be high and all matches will be important you need someone like Yousuf in the middle order to stabilise things. He should be in the side," Akram said.

The selectors gave no reasons for sidelining Yousuf for the series in New Zealand, but kept him in the World Cup preliminary squad of 30 players. The selectors expressed their unhappiness over the fitness of Yousuf which would be tested when he leads the Lahore team in the national one-day championship.

Akram also supported having the five-day Quaid Azam Trophy final under lights.

I think such changes in Test cricket as well will make it more attractive for spectators who now want more action and colour in the sport after the advent of T20 cricket," he said.

"There is nothing wrong in making such experiments that can prove beneficial to not only our domestic cricket but also Test cricket in future," he said.

'Int'l cricket in Pakistan still afar'

PTI, Karachi

Dave Richardson, ICC general manager for cricket operations, feels that the Pakistan Cricket Board's initiative to host the final of the country's premier first class competition under lights will have a positive impact on the sport.

Richardson said that the ICC, too, was working on several recommendations to make five-day cricket including Test matches more interesting.

"The PCB has taken a bold decision to hold the five-day final under lights and it will help popularise the sport as well," Richardson said.

He said the ICC was considering holding Test matches under lights in a bid to make it more interesting and attractive for the spectators.

Richardson, however, made it clear that it was not possible for an immediate return of international cricket to Pakistan. "I think once there is an improvement in the security conditions and arrangements then teams can be convinced to start looking at playing in Pakistan again," he said.

Richardson is in Karachi on the invitation of the PCB to watch the final of the Quaid e Azam trophy being held for the first time under lights and with an orange coloured ball.

Gazi, DOHS

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Sabbir 3-23, Naeem 3-33).

GAZI TANK: 145-1 in 25.5 overs (Mithun 58, Nasir 68 not out; Hasan 1-37).

Result: Gazi Tank won by nine wickets.

BKSP: 133 all out in 32.2 overs (Sarkar 39; Mehrab 3-11, Taskin 3-28).

DOHS: 138-0 in 21.4 overs (Javed 53 not out, Nasir 80 not out).

Result: DOHS won by 10 wickets.

CCS: 132 all out in 28.1 overs (Shahbaz 56, Suleiman 16; Razzak 3-22).

SURJO TARUN: 119-9 in 31 overs (Junaed 30, Dhiman 26 not out; Bishwanath 3-31).

Result: Surjo Tarun won by 13 runs.

India win

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World Cup?

HB: Everything is in our favour. The team has been playing very well, and also the conditions are on our side. All in all there are high expectations. Only one thing; the team should not be burdened by too much expectation, they should continue the way they have been playing and then they will do very well. I hope and expect that they will at least reach the quarterfinals.

Wellington Test starts today

Pakistan's eye on improvement

Cricket

REUTERS, Wellington

Taking a 2-0 sweep of the Test series against New Zealand was not on the mind of Pakistan captain Misbahul Haq as his side made their final preparations for the second Test at the Basin Reserve on Saturday.

The tourists won the first Test in Hamilton by 10 wickets.

The second Test begins on Saturday with the sides then embarking on a six

match one-day series as they complete their preparations for the World Cup that starts on February 19.

Misbah, however, said they had not even discussed a series victory let alone a sweep, instead preferring to concentrate on improving from their performance at Seddon Park.

Misbah also said he expected New Zealand to perform better than they had in Hamilton, where the lifeless pitch offered little to the bowlers, but frustrated New Zealand's batsmen enough for them to make

mistakes.

The Basin Reserve wicket was also quite green on Friday and expected to have more bounce and pace than Seddon Park.

New Zealand captain Vettori echoed Misbah's comments about the pitch, but the final make-up of his team, with all rounder James Franklin expected to come into the side, would determine whether he would bat or field first if he won the toss.

"Coming to the Basin you think there's a chance early on to take some wickets but I think in the past

the team that has been able to put a decent score on the board has actually had more success with the ball on days two and three," Vettori said.

"It's about trying to balance that up but I think the final weighting of the team will have a huge influence on whether we bat or bowl.

"I think it will be another belter here, in that it will have a bit of pace and there will be something in it for everyone.

"Guys who are prepared to apply themselves with the ball and the bat will get something out of it."



Pakistan skipper Misbahul Haq throws the ball during a practice session of the team at the Basin Reserve in Wellington Thursday ahead of their second Test against New Zealand that starts today.

Australia

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SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: 147 for 7 (Warner 30, Watson 17, Paine 21, Finch 53 not out, Smith 13; Swann 2-19, Yardy 2-19)

ENGLAND: 143 for 6 (Bell 39, Davies 29, Morgan 14, Wright 18, Bresnan 15 not out, Woakes 11 not out; Watson 2-17, Johnson 3-29)

Result: Australia won by four runs.

Man-of-the-match: Aaron Finch.

India's WC

FROM PAGE 16

event, and the list would be pruned to the required number as per ICC regulations for the tournament.

The World Cup is to be held in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh from February 19-April 2. India are placed in Group B in the preliminary phase along with co-hosts Bangladesh, England, South Africa, West Indies, Ireland and Netherlands.