

Star SPORT

DHAKA MONDAY MARCH 10, 2025, FALGUN 25, 1431 BS

India's spin ploy pays off

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN FROM DUBAI

The ploy of having a diverse spin attack in the Champions Trophy once again clicked for India, this time in the all-important final against New Zealand at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

It did not come as a surprise when India named a spin-heavy squad for the tournament as they were scheduled to play all of their matches in Dubai where surfaces are more conducive to spin, as opposed to the ones in Pakistan, where other teams were scheduled to play except for the games against India.

For their first two matches, against Bangladesh and archrivals Pakistan, India had the same three-ponged spin attack of left-arm spinners Axar Patel and Ravindra Jadeja alongside chinaman Kuldeep Yadav.

India opted to crank their spin ploy up a notch, adding mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy alongside the aforementioned three from their last Group A game against New Zealand. Varun made an instant impact, claiming a career-best 5-42 in the final group game.

India went with the same spin quartet in yesterday's final as well. However, for a while, it seemed as if their spin-ploy would finally backfire when New Zealand openers Rachin Ravindra and Will Young put up a quick 57-run opening stand after India skipper Rohit Sharma lost a record-equaling 12 tosses in a row.

The wicket of Sunday's final was previously used during India's match against Pakistan on February 23, and during that game, spinners got a decent amount of purchase from the surface.

With spinners on Sunday extracting very little turn, it looked like the Black Caps were heading towards a big total in the final.

According to broadcasters, the average



PHOTO: AFP

turn was only 2.0 degrees on Sunday during New Zealand innings, the lowest in all five matches played so far in Dubai. The opening match between Bangladesh and India here witnessed a 3.5-degree turn -- the highest in the tournament -- while the second semifinal against Australia saw an average turn of 2.7 degrees.

But the Indian spinners quickly adjusted to the condition, bowling with extra pace at stumps. The result was evident as the four spinners combined to account for five wickets in 38 overs, conceding just 144 runs.

Introduced in the first Powerplay, Varun, just in his second over, gave India the first breakthrough, trapping Young in front for 15.

Kuldeep then joined the party by taking two quick wickets -- those of Rachin (37) and Kane Williamson (11). Jadeja removed Tom Latham (14), and suddenly the momentum of the game had changed, with the Black Caps reduced to 108 for four in the 24th over.

When Glenn Phillips (34) was trying to build a partnership with Daryl Mitchell (63), Varun once again hit back by casting

the former to put India on top in the contest in front of the sea of blue in the Dubai gallery.

Axar might have finished wicketless, but his economical bowling saw him build the pressure on the Kiwis as he gave away just 29 in his eight overs.

26 of the 47 wickets claimed by Indian bowlers in the tournament were scalped by spinners -- a fact that sums up how spinners were pivotal in India's bid to regain the Champions Trophy title for first time after 2013.

‘We have always wanted to train with seniors’

Bangladesh women's football team defender Afeida Khandokar was handed the captaincy after 18 players, including most seniors, boycotted training under coach Peter Butler. The lanky centre-back wore the captain's armband in two friendlies against hosts UAE recently, both matches ending in 3-1 defeats for Bangladesh. Following her return to the country, Afeida spoke with The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman in an interview, where she opened up about their recent tour, their experience of playing without the seniors, and a few other issues.

The excerpts of the interview are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): You have represented Bangladesh several times along with the senior players, but this time, you were probably the most experienced player in the senior squad. How was your experience?

Afeida Khandokar (AK): When I represented the national team along with the senior players, there was no pressure on me because there were players like Sabina [Khatun], Masura [Parvin], and other senior players in the team, and I just played my own game. But, in the matches against UAE, there was a bit of pressure because our team had only three weeks of preparation. Besides, we were also tired while playing the first match against UAE because we had reached there just a day before the match after a sleepless night. So, it was really hard for us to play without rest, and there was also a fear of how UAE would perform because we had no prior knowledge about them.

DS: What do you think were the differences between Bangladesh and the UAE team?

AK: The UAE players had more experience and were better at decision-making on the field. We might have failed to make the final pass, which allowed them to counter, and we conceded goals due to mistakes in defense and midfield. Another difference was the physical advantage of the UAE players, who were taller than us. Also, many players in our team represented the senior team for the first time, and a few played their first international matches. So there were some differences, but we were satisfied with our performance.

DS: Did you feel the absence of the senior players who were not part of the team?

AK: We could have fought better had the SAFF-winning squad played the matches. We might have even won the matches. However, we did not dwell too much on the absent players; rather, we focused on those who were available.

DS: How did you feel about the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Tabitha Awal's announcement to start the next women's camp with 55 players, including the boycotting players, on the night you returned from UAE?

AK: We also want to put everything that happened behind us and start afresh as a

team. We were really pleased to hear the announcement from the BFF president. Before leaving for Dubai, we were happy to hear that they would join the camp after the two friendly matches because we never wanted to see them outside the training camp. We always wanted to train with the seniors.

DS: How did you enjoy leading the senior national team in the two friendly matches?

AK: I never thought about leading the senior national team, but I had to do it. I tried to fulfill the responsibility I was given in both matches.

DS: How long do you think it may take for this group of young players to mature?

AK: I think the only thing this group of girls lacks is experience. If they are given opportunities to play many international matches, they will develop quickly. Our senior players have been playing international matches for the last 12 years. They also played in the SAFF Women's Championship when they were U-16 players. We finally became SAFF Champions in 2022. The result did not come overnight; it happened over a long period. I think every player should be given time, and the results will come eventually.

DS: I want to go back a bit. What was your mental state when a group of senior players skipped training while a group of young players, including you, continued training under Peter Butler?

AK: We came here to play, and we prioritised playing, regardless of who conducted the training, because we were about to sign contracts with the federation. It is a professional environment where an individual player has to focus on her own performance.

DS: What do you expect from the Bangladesh women's team in the upcoming AFC Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers?

AK: We should play more beyond our comfort zone, especially beyond South Asia. We still don't know our opponents in the Asian Cup Qualifiers. The coach will take care of how we prepare after the draw. However, we expect good results in the Asian Cup Qualifiers because the senior players will rejoin the team, and together, we will try to perform well.

What to WATCH

Star Sports Select HD1
Premier League
West Ham vs Newcastle Utd
Live from 2:00 am (Tuesday)
T Sports
Dhaka Premier League
Live from 9:00 am

CHAMPIONS
TROPHY 2025 • PAKISTAN

INDIA MAKE HISTORY

India won the Champions Trophy 2025 by beating New Zealand by four wickets in the final in Dubai yesterday. Here we present you the highlights of the contest:

India became the first team to win the tournament three times (Joint-champions in 2002 with hosts Sri Lanka, in 2013, and 2025).

After losing the toss in the final, India captain Rohit Sharma's unlucky streak in the coin toss in ODIs tallied to 12 on the trot -- the joint-most by a captain along with West Indies' Brian Lara.

India's spinners accounted for 26 out of the 47 wickets they took in the tournament -- a percentage of 55.32.

Rohit's 83-ball 76 was the second 50-plus score in a Champions Trophy final by an Indian captain, after Sourav Ganguly's 117 against New Zealand in 2000. It is also the second-highest score by a captain in the final of a Champions Trophy.

76 is Rohit's highest in any ODI final, bettering his 66 against Australia in the 2008 CB series final at the SCG.

The 105-run stand between Rohit and Shubman Gill is only the third instance of an opening duo putting together a century-run stand in a Champions Trophy final, after Ganguly and Tendulkar's 141-run stand against New Zealand in 2000 and a 128-run partnership between Azhar Ali and Fakhar Zaman in 2017.

India's spin quartet bowled 38 overs in the final -- the third most bowled by India spinners in an ODI. The most bowled by India spinners was when they bowled 41.2 overs against the West Indies in Indore in 2011.

India's spinners bowled 37.3 percent of their balls projected to hit the stumps - the highest by them in the five innings this tournament - and picked 5/50 off those deliveries.

India dropped nine chances in this campaign - the most by any team. Only Bangladesh (66.6) and Pakistan (60) have a worse catching efficiency than India (70%) in this tournament.

MOST RUNS

263 Rachin Ravindra

Matches **4**

Average **65.75**

MOST WICKETS

10 Matt Henry

Matches **4**

Economy-rate **5.32**

PLAYER OF THE FINAL

Rohit Sharma

PLAYER OF THE TOURNAMENT

Rachin Ravindra

ROHIT SHARMA

It [uber-aggressive approach in batting] is not natural to me, but something I really wanted to do. I have played all these years in a different style, and now we are getting the results with this. We have to understand the nature of the surfaces and I was very clear about how I wanted to execute in the first five-six overs. I have gotten out as well earlier, but the execution matters. The depth [in our batting lineup] gives me the freedom and it helps.

MITCHELL SANTNER

We lost to a better side today. We lost a couple of wickets after the Powerplay and they really got the squeeze on. Credit to how their spinners bowled. They are world-class bowlers. We were 20 or 25 runs under to what we were looking for.