



**JOSHUA CHEPTEGEI GUNNING FOR LONG DISTANCE DOUBLE AT TOKYO OLYMPICS**

**BARCELONA MIDFIELDER PHILIPPE COUTINHO SUFFERS INJURY, TO UNDERGO KNEE SURGERY**



## 'Rahane showed mental strength after 2018 SA tour'

**Former Selector Gandhi Recalls Phase When Batsman Sought Clarity, Overcame Odds In Spite Of Being Gripped By Uncertainty**

Arani.Basu@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: Ajinkya Rahane is currently the face of Team India's character and the toast of the nation. The events of the last five days are going to be the highlight of his career. Yet, not many know that the leader of one of the greatest comebacks in the game has been battling bouts of self-doubts and uncertainty for nearly three years now.

Being dropped from two Tests in South Africa in 2018 despite being the designated vice-captain was probably the lowest point in Rahane's career. "That was a time when it looked like he might have taken a hit mentally. Leading up to that South Africa tour, he had done well overseas."

"Maybe the home series before that didn't go as well as he had desired, but you got to be patient with a player such as Rahane," former national selector Devang Gandhi told TOI. "You always have to look at the bigger picture. Immediately after that, he played a crucial knock of 48 in Johannesburg where we won the Test. That showed his character and the ability to fight."

It was a turbulent time for Rahane. His spot in the Test XI seemed to be in jeopardy and his future in limited-overs cricket too didn't look promising. "He was a little disturbed because of his non-inclusion in ODIs. Before that tour, he had scored five 50s in ODIs as an opener. But he had to make way once Rohit and Shikhar got fit. He was part of the squad and then there was the emergence of KL Rahul. It became difficult to pick him," Gandhi said.

It may be recalled that captain Virat Kohli too had made a statement on Rahane's utility in the middle-order for the World Cup in England that happened a year later. Rahane never played an ODI after the South Africa tour. "He was not picked for the World Cup. That must have taken a toll on him," said Gandhi.

Gandhi says Rahane may

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**-Devang Gandhi**



AJINKYA RAHANE

be an affable young man but he is firm in his beliefs. Rahane had approached the selectors and sought clarity about his future both in Test cricket and ODIs. "All the selectors had conversations with him. I remember Jatin Paranjape and I having a conversation with him in Bangalore in 2018. He was harping on the way forward for him and asked for clarity. We assured him he was very much there. As far as Test cricket is concerned, his vice-captaincy was never in doubt," Gandhi added.

Sticking with Rahane as the vice-captain even after he was dropped for two Tests was a big call. "Whatever opportunity he had got as a captain, like in the Dharamshala Test match against Australia or even when Virat would be off the field for some time, he impressed in the way he led."

"The way he gathered everyone here is there to see. We saw Ashwin, Jadeja and other seniors getting together before he made a call."

Rahane's form has been different for three years. As he was battling to assert his position in the team, things could not have been easy for him with the perception around him. "He was never willing to give up. He went to county cricket. He wanted to prove a point. He showed eagerness to feature in the shadow A tours before the big tours. His resolve and mental strength have brought him to this day where he has scripted this comeback for India at the MCG," Gandhi said.

Like in Test cricket, Rahane has played out the toughest session of his career and it's time to make the most of his form.

## Burns dropped; Warner, Pucovski in for Sydney Test

Sydney: Australia on Wednesday included David Warner and debutant Will Pucovski in their squad for the third Test against India, with selectors ditching Joe Burns after a poor start to the series.

Warner will return as he continues recovering from a groin injury, while Pucovski is also expected to be fit after a concussion, Cricket Australia said in a statement.

Fast bowler Sean Abbott has also recovered from a calf strain and was included in the 18-man squad for the remainder of the four-Test series.

But out-of-form Burns was released after struggling in the first two Tests. "Unfortunately, Joe's returns haven't been what he or the selectors would like or what we consider he is capable of," national selector Trevor Hohns said.

Although Warner was still recovering from his injury, selectors were hoping the opener would be fit for the match at the Sydney Cricket Ground. "David has made strong progress in his recovery from injury and will be given every chance to play," Hohns said.

The selection of Pucovski clears the way for the 22-year-old to make his Test debut, after a blow to the helmet in a warm-up match earlier this month. Despite an outbreak of



**BACK TO THE GRIND:** Marnus Labuschagne bats at the nets in Melbourne on Wednesday

Covid-19 in Sydney, Cricket Australia has confirmed the third Test will be held at the SCG on January 7, with players expected to arrive on January 4. The virus cluster, which emerged earlier this month, has forced authorities to put parts of the city in lockdown and place restrictions on travel to other states. But officials were still confident the Test would be able to go ahead before the teams travelled to Brisbane for the final Test on January 15.

**THE SQUAD:** Tim Paine (capt), Pat Cummins, Sean Abbott, Cameron Green, Josh Hazlewood, Marcus Harris, Travis Head, Moises Henriques, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Michael Neser, James Pattinson, Will Pucovski, Steve Mitchell, Mitchell Starc, Mitchell Swepson, Matthew Wade, David Warner. AGENCIES

## 'I will have Mayank and Rohit opening'

Melbourne: Former India skipper Sunil Gavaskar would like to see Rohit Sharma open with Mayank Agarwal in the third Test in Sydney.

Rohit's inclusion in the squad is a big boost for the visitors. However, one player will have to make way for him in the playing XI.

Gavaskar feels Shubman Gill should bat at No. 3 after Rohit comes in and Hanuma Vihari should be dropped for the third Test. "I will have Mayank-Rohit opening, Gill in

### SYDNEY TEST



**DOWN THE ORDER?** Shubman Gill

the middle order, and Vihari goes out for the third Test," Gavaskar said on Sony Sports

Network. It is interesting to note that both Mayank and Vihari have not lived up to expectations but the former India skipper backed Mayank over Vihari.

While Mayank has scored 31 runs in four innings, Vihari aggregated 45 in three in the ongoing Test series.

The former skipper also lauded Ajinkya Rahane for his gritty hundred and said the ton will go down as one of the most important centuries in the history of Indian cricket.

Gavaskar had said the valiant knock of Rahane sent a message to the Australian camp that the visitors will not just lie down and be walked over. "I believe that this hundred is going to be one of the most important hundreds in the history of Indian cricket," Gavaskar had told Channel 7.

India levelled the four-match series on Tuesday after securing an eight-wicket win in the Boxing Day Test. The third Test between both teams will begin on January 7. ANI

## 'NO TRIP TO SYDNEY BEFORE JAN 4'

Melbourne: The Indian and Australian teams will continue to train in Melbourne for few more days and travel to Sydney only three days prior to the third Test beginning at the SCG on January 7. "Last night's announcement is we're proceeding in Sydney and we're putting our plans in place to do that and to do that safely. Players will be in Melbourne for a few more days, training there and moving up to Sydney a couple of days ahead of the Test match," CA chief executive Nick Hockley said.

## INDIA 2ND IN ICC WTC RANKINGS

Dubai: India kept themselves in contention of competing in the final of the ICC World Test Championship next year after winning the Melbourne Test that helped them retain their second spot in the points table, released on Wednesday. India bagged 30 points for their eight-wicket win. They are placed second with 390 points and a 72.2 percentage of points (PCT). Australia are on top spot with 322 points with a 76.6 PCT.

## ROHIT JOINS UPBEAT INDIAN TEAM

Melbourne: Batsman Rohit Sharma on Wednesday joined the Indian team in Melbourne after completing his two-week quarantine in Sydney, bolstering the tourists who are on a high after scripting an incredible comeback in the ongoing four-match Test series against Australia. Rohit's inclusion will strengthen the team that was going through one of its worst phases last week.



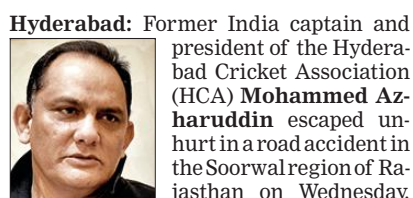
ROHIT SHARMA

"So how was your quarantine, my friend," chief coach Ravi Shastri was heard asking Rohit in a video posted by BCCI. The batsman was heard saying he is feeling younger. Rohit exchanged greetings with the likes of Cheteshwar Pujara, Umesh Yadav, Wriddhiman Saha, Ravindra Jadeja, Mohammed Siraj and batting coach Vikram Rathour.

Shastri said the medical team will look at how the player is feeling physically after completing his quarantine before a call is taken on his inclusion in the playing XI for the crucial third Test against Australia in Sydney.

## Azhar escapes unhurt in road mishap

TIMES NEWS NETWORK



Hyderabad: Former India captain and president of the Hyderabad Cricket Association (HCA) Mohammed Azharuddin escaped unhurt in a road accident in the Soorwal region of Rajasthan on Wednesday.

Azharuddin was on his way to Ranthambore when the car in which he was travelling was badly damaged in an accident on Kota highway. A person travelling with Azharuddin suffered a minor injury. Azhar continued his journey in another car.

HCA vice-president John Manoj told TOI that Azhar was unhurt. "I spoke to his son and he told me that the car was badly damaged but Azhar is unhurt. He was shifted to another car immediately after the accident and continued his journey," he added.

Late in the night, Azhar also confirmed to TOI that he is safe. "All good, nothing to worry," he said.

## Combined Dist XI bag junior state title

Hyderabad: Y Aakash's 111 set up SSGF Combined District XI's 154-run win over SSGF Ranga Reddy district in the final of the VII School Premier League junior state cricket 2020 at the Quli Qutub Shah Stadium on Tuesday.

**Brief scores (final):** SSGF Combined Dist XI 416 in 49.3 overs (Y Aakash 111, Pruthi 63, Dharmik 52, Ansh 65, Chaturya 40, Sohal Shaik 35, Samridhi 38; K Satwik 5/38, Ilhan Baig 3/38, Akshat Saxena 2/28) bt SSGF Ranga Reddy dist. 262 in 46.5 overs (Suchir Choudhary 93, Vasudev 102; A Shaik 4/18).

### ASV's tennis camp

The Academia Sports Village (ASV) will conduct a month-long free tennis training-cum-fitness camp at the Hyderabad Polo and Riding Club (HPRC) in Aziz Nagar on the outskirts of the city from January 3 to 31. The training will be conducted for U-19 boys and girls separately. For registration and other details, contact 95151-25592.

### Athletics selection trials

Selection trials of the Hyderabad District athletics sprint team will be held at Nizam College Grounds from 6.30 am on January 3. Athletes must bring date of birth certificates. For more details contact BC Bhaskar Reddy, Ph: 9849048586. TNN

## Lovely off-spin bowling display by Ashwin



WRISTY BUSINESS VVS LAXMAN

The Indian team completed one of its sweetest, most satisfying Test wins at its favourite hunting ground in Australia, the MCG. After the humiliation of being shot out for their lowest Test score in Adelaide, they could have been seized by self-doubt and a crisis in confidence. Credit is due to Ravi Shastri and the support staff for putting 36 all out in the first Test in perspective and ensuring the team was in the right mind-space ahead of the second game.

The first steps towards victory were taken on day one when, after losing the toss, India's brilliant bowlers knocked the hosts over for 195. Standing in for Virat Kohli, Ajinkya Rahane marshalled his resources astutely, setting unorthodox

fields and reaping rewards once the bowlers executed their plans impeccably, best exemplified by Marnus Labuschagne being caught at leg gully of Siraj.

The Australian batting stood exposed, as did their over-dependence on Steve Smith. Ravichandran Ashwin seems to have the measure of Smith at the moment and backed up his top performance in the first Test with another lovely display of off-spin in Melbourne. It's the best I have seen Ashwin bowl overseas, and that's saying something given the peaks he has scaled.

I was heartened by the approach as well as the performances of debutants Shubman Gill and Mohammed Siraj. They were not overawed by the stage and fitted in perfectly, which shows how well prepared and ready they were to perform at the highest level. It also reiterates India's burgeoning bench strength, even without their best batsman and the

most experienced pacer on tour, Mohammed Shami, not to mention the absence of Ishant Sharma and Rohit Sharma, India didn't appear seriously handicapped.

If there was one disappointment, it was that Mayank Agarwal and Cheteshwar Pujara failed in both innings, but Rahane more than made up with one of his most significant knocks. Like at Lord's in 2014 when he set up the victory, he was aggressive and showed a lot of intent, which is when he is at his most effective. His statements of positivity during his wonderful hundred rubbed off on Rishabh Pant and Ravindra Jadeja, propelling India to the only

300-plus total of the series so far. Australia's approach in the second innings too baffled me. India was a bowler light with Umesh Yadav limping off, but a team that once prided itself on scoring at four runs an over struggled for even half that run-rate. Again, that is a tribute to the tremendous quality India projected as a bowling group, every cog functioning at heightened efficiency to compensate for Yadav's injury. India must celebrate this win with gusto, further buoyed by the knowledge that the force is with them now, and a successful defence of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy is no longer a pipedream. GAMEPLAN



## Wagner heroics put cherry on NZ win

Mount Maunganui: New Zealand's bowlers produced a late final session surge to guide their side to a tense 101-run victory over Pakistan in the first Test in Mount Maunganui on Wednesday and keep alive their hopes of reaching next year's World Test Championship final. Pakistan were dismissed for 271, chasing a victory target of 372, with 4.3 overs remaining in the Test at Bay Oval. New Zealand had been hot favourites to win the game as the final day started with the tourists 71-3 but a 165-run partnership between Fawad Alam and Mohammad Rizwan gave the tourists a chance of a draw, if not an unlikely victory. Kyle Jamieson ended the partnership when he had Rizwan trapped in front, albeit after a review, for 60, and left Pakistan 242-6, still 131 runs away from their target with 25 overs remaining.

He also had Yasir Shah caught in the gully for a duck, while Neil Wagner, who has played the last three days with two broken toes, had Fawad caught by wicketkeeper BJ Watling for 102 and then Faheem Ashraf for 19 to expose the tail. Rival captains Williamson and Mohammad Rizwan paid rich tribute to New Zealand quick Neil Wagner who bowled with two broken toes to help the hosts win the tense opening Test.

**Brief scores:** New Zealand 431 (Williamson 129, S Afridi 4/109) & 180/5 dec (Blundell 64) bt Pakistan 239 (Faheem 91; Jamieson 3/35) & 271 (Fawad 102; South 2/33, Jamieson 2/35). New Zealand won by 101 runs. AGENCIES

## United move up to 2nd spot

London: Marcus Rashford's 93rd minute strike beat Wolves 1-0 to move Manchester United into second in the Premier League as fears over the continuation of the season due to rising coronavirus infection rates grew on Tuesday.

A record 18 positive tests for Covid-19 among players and staff were detected in the weekly round of testing. All five matches scheduled for Tuesday went ahead despite disruption for Sheffield United and Southampton. Bottom-of-the-table United revealed they had suffered a number of positive cases but were still able to field a squad of 18 for their 1-0 defeat at Burnley.

**RESULTS: PREMIER LEAGUE:** Brighton 0, Arsenal 1 (Lacazette 66), Burnley 1 (Mee 32), Sheffield United 0, Southampton 0, West Ham 0, West Brom 0, Leeds 5 (Sawyers 9-og, Aloski 3), Harrison 36, Rodrigo 40, Raphinha 72), Manchester United 1 (Rashford 90+3), Wolves 0. **LA LIGA:** Sevilla 2 (Ocampos 8-pen, En-Nesyri 53), Villarreal 0, Barcelona 1 (Dembele 67), Eibar 1 (Kike 57), Cadiz 0, Real Valladolid 0, Levante 4 (Duarte 2, Morales 22, 24, Roger 55), Real Betis 3 (Mandil 12, Canales 78-pen, 86), Athletic

## Goa mount stunning comeback, down HFC

Aditya.Singh@timesgroup.com

FC Goa scored twice from just two shots on target as they came back from a goal down to defeat Hyderabad FC 2-1 at the Tilak Maidan Stadium on Wednesday.

Despite being on the back foot for the majority of the match, Goa made their chances count as Igor Angulo and substitute Ishan Pandita delivered late strikes to cancel out Hyderabad striker Aridane Santana's header.

Goa had the first chance on goal when they won a free-kick in the early minutes. Brandon Fernandes delivered a promising ball into the box, and James Donachie missed an easy header as the referee blew the whistle for a foul.

Goa rattened up the pressure by keeping ball possession as Hyderabad tried to create attacks by winning the ball high up

## Simha, Arjun shine in Balaaji CC win

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Hyderabad: HK Simha's 139 (157b, 4x12, 6x7) and leg-spinner G Arjun's seven for 13 helped Balaaji CC defeat Mahmood CC by an innings and



**PERFORMERS OF THE DAY:** Dheeraj Goud, Yash Kapadia, Varun Goud, G Arjun, HK Simha and Anirudh Yadav (from left)

155 runs in the HCA A1 Division three-day league match here on Wednesday. Needing 292 runs to make Balaaji CC bat again after Simha's ton helped them reach 412, Mahmood were shot out for 137 in the second essay with Arjun wreaking havoc. He had returns of 8-3-13-7.

Yash Kapadia (194; 246b, 4x25) and Varun Goud (132; 110b, 4x22, 6x1) put DC on top against BDL. Anirudh Reddy's 119 (131b, 4x15, 6x3) let Jai Hanuman's strong reply against Income Tax. Anirudh Yadav (110; 141b, 4x16) and Dheeraj Goud (105no; 133b, 4x15) helped Apex CC take control of their match against Jai Bhagwathi CC.

**Brief scores: A1 Division (three-day):** BDL 138/9 & 100/3 in 19 overs (B Revanthi 31, Hima Teja 30batting; Rahul 3/74) vs Deccan Chronicle 479/8 in 90 overs (Yash Kapadia 194, A Varun Goud 132, Srikrishna 45, MA Adnan 56), Central Excise 285 & 38/0 in 5 overs vs SBI 326/8 in 90 overs (Daniel Manohar 53, Akash Bhandari 50, Ahmed Quadri 86, Vishal Sharma 35, Alfred Absalom 30no; Dane Johnson 4/77). Income Tax 290 (Deepak Dixit 32; Y Shrawan Kumar 3/58) vs Jai Hanuman 472/9 in 90 overs (Rohit Rayudu 97, Anirudh

Reddy 119, Sai Purnanand Rao 33, N Surya Teja 52, Irfan Khan 92, Harshavardhan Singh 42; Raju Yadav 4/37), Concorde CC 239 & 131 in 22.3 overs (Ashish Srivastav 3/22) vs Cambridge XI 377 in 81.2 overs (Rishikesh Sisodia 80, Syed Askar 76, Sagar Chaurasia 54, Ashish Srivastav 31, M Pratyush 4/8D), MP

**Government Medical Colleges cricket tournament Hyderabad:** Telangna Government Medical Colleges T10 knockout cricket tournament will be held at LB Stadium on Jan 1 and 2. Twelve teams are participating in the tournament.

**Osmania university team for HCA league** The following players will represent Osmania University in the HCA two-day league in 2020-21.

**Squad:** Sanjay Pradhan, Debarshu Rayaguru, K Hrudai, B Vishnu Sairam, K Dinakar, Ashrith, A Ranjith, C Vinay Kumar, SK Kareem, CH Manikanta, Anish Rao, Naga Chaitanya, Venkat Saurav, D Copala Krishna, T Nitish, Varun Dalal. **Standbys:** Rahul, Md Zavid, Sahil, TNN