

‘Biggest load of rubbish I’ve ever heard in my life’: Aaron Finch on ‘question mark’ over Virat Kohli’s place in T20 World Cup team

NEW DELHI, MAR 27:

Virat Kohli’s place in the Indian cricket team for the T20 World Cup has been a topic of much debate for the past few months now. While it has been pointed out that having Kohli and Rohit Sharma in the side will go against India’s T20 blueprint, Kohli’s numbers in the format speak for themselves: the prolific batter has only had three seasons in the IPL where he hasn’t at least aggregated 400 runs. Of the 109 times Kohli has batted for India in T20 Internationals, India have won on 70 occasions. In those outings, he has scored 2828 runs at 67.33; 15 times he was the man of the match. He is still the unparalleled chase-master. He averages 71.85 when chasing, with a healthy strike rate of 137. These numbers show that Kohli could make it into the Indian team by his batting chops alone, rather than just being included to “popularise the game in USA” as former England player Kevin Pietersen had recently suggested. Another former cricketer has now weighed in on Kohli’s spot in



Team India for the T20 World Cup.

“I can’t understand why, every time there’s an ICC event coming up in any format, people always talk about Virat Kohli. Is he under any pressure for his spot? That is the biggest load of rubbish I’ve ever heard in my life. He’s

the greatest player that I have ever seen in white ball cricket. It doesn’t matter that he strikes it at 140 and there are guys whose strike rates are in 160. If I’m picking a team, you’re picking a guy who you know day in day out gets the job done in bog

games. Just ludicrous that we keep having this conversation!” Finch said. The Indian team think tank is facing a problem of plenty going into the T20 World Cup, with players like Ruturaj Gaikwad, Suryakumar Yadav, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Shreyas Iyer, Hardik Pandya, Rinku Singh, Tilak Varma, Ishan Kishan, Jitesh Sharma and Sanju Samson all more than capable of playing the way India want in the shortest format of the game. Recently, during his commentary stint for the IPL 2024 game between Gujarat Titans and Mumbai Indians, Pietersen had said: “The World Cup is happening in the USA. India are playing Pakistan in New York. You’d want someone like a Virat Kohli to help the game grow.” “I know my name is now attached to just promoting the game in different parts of the world when it comes to T20 cricket. I’ve still got it I guess,” Kohli had said with a smile after being awarded the player of the match for his 77-run innings against Punjab Kings.

‘Dhoni and CSK’s magic recipe’: RCB legend AB de Villiers uses Shivam Dube example to highlight what makes Chennai different

MUMBAI, MAR 27:

Cricket legend Ab De Villiers has highlighted the stark difference in team cultures at the Chennai Super Kings and other franchises, notably the team he played for in the Indian Premier League for many seasons. De Villiers used the example of CSK’s match-winner against Gujarat Titans to highlight how playing for Chennai, especially under MS Dhoni, was benefitting him. It must be noted that Dube started his IPL career in the 2019 season with RCB. He played two seasons for the Virat Kohli-led franchise. But in 15 matches, he just managed 169 runs at a strike rate of 122. “I spent a bit of time with Dube at RCB. It’s absolutely fantastic to see him shine like this at CSK. He never really broke free at RCB changing room. Was quite a shy guy. Worked very hard, asked a lot



of questions. He did a bit of learning there. But he never really felt comfortable,” De Villiers said on JioCinema. “Dube talks about feeling free at CSK. That is the magic recipe that MSD (Dhoni), Ruturaj Gaikwad, Stephen Fleming have set up over there. They just make it work every single time, every single season with new players coming through that feel free with new players coming

through.” “This franchise (CSK) is something different from all others. They are giving me the freedom. They want me to do better and I also want to win some matches,” Dube said after winning ‘Player of the Match’ award. After the game, Chennai Super Kings captain Ruturaj Gaikwad revealed the role Dhoni had played in Dube’s improvement.

Former KKR player rips into head coach Chandrakant Pandit for dressing room tensions last IPL: ‘Overseas guys don’t need someone telling them what to wear’

MUMBAI, MAR 27:

Namibia all-rounder David Wiese, who was part of the Kolkata Knight Riders squad last season, has opened up on dressing room tensions between certain players and head coach Chandrakant Pandit. ‘Issues’ that are likely to have played a hand in a topsy turvy IPL season which saw the two-time champions finish seventh in the 10-team points table. Speaking on Hitman for Hire: A year in the life of a franchise cricketer podcast, Wiese shared, “There were certain issues going on behind the scenes in the team. Guys weren’t happy with certain things that were going on, and a lot of the times, it was a tough changing room. There was a new coach coming in and



he liked to do things a certain way, and that didn’t sit well with the players.” Adding up on the situation, Wiese added, “Guys were frustrated because a lot changed, and the coach brought in things that he thought would bring success. But as an overseas player, they sometimes don’t sit well. He’s known

in India as a fairly militant type of coach, a strict disciplinarian. The overseas guys who’ve played all over the world don’t need someone coming in and telling him how to behave and what to wear and what to do. I was chill with it, but there were players more stubborn than me.” Having played five Test

matches and 36 ODIs for India, Pandit made his mark as a coach in the Indian domestic setup, leading Vidarbha and Madhya Pradesh to Ranji Trophy titles. Pandit was appointed as the KKR head coach ahead of the 2022 season, when he replaced Brendon McCullum, who had led the franchise to the final in 2021 under the captainship of Eoin Morgan. In IPL 2024, KKR opened their account with a four-run win against Sunrisers Hyderabad in their first game of the season last Saturday at Eden Gardens. The 2012 and 2014 winners next face the Royal Challengers Bangalore on Friday at the Chinnaswamy Stadium.

IPL 2024: CSK’s Shivam Dube enters new season with new weapon against pacers

NEW DELHI, MAR 27:

IT was the 14th delivery that Shivam Dube faced on Tuesday night. Seconds after Spencer Johnson ran in and delivered a well-directed, shoulder-high bouncer, the 33,400-odd spectators at Chepauk cleared the throat for the umpteenth time on the night. There was something about the roar as Dube got inside the line of the ball and deposited Johnson well into the stands beyond deep fine-leg. For a batsman, who has been at unease when facing chin music, Dube did well. The reward for all the hard work he had been putting behind the scenes in domestic cricket, to confront the short-ball challenge. In the middle, Johnson had a quizzical face. The rest of his Gujarat Titans teammates looked shell shocked. At the Chennai Super Kings dug-out, there were high-fives among the support-staff. “I know they are going to bowl



short balls and I’m ready for that,” Dube, who talks very little, would say later. He faced six short balls through the night, and not once did he look rattled. The short balls and the bouncers were supposed to

trouble Dube. Last IPL season as Dube went about smashing the spinners, opposition captains’ not only wasted any time in bringing on the pacers, but also tested him with short-balls and bouncers. With two bounc-

ers allowed per over this IPL, Dube was among those batsmen, whose comfort levels in the middle against pacers, was bound to be tested. Having looked clueless last season against short balls, he now has not one fall back option, but two. One where he is keeping the ball down by rolling his wrists and another where he stands tall and uses his power to clear the fence, like he did in the case of Spencer. “Well if you rewind one, maybe two years ago, teams would come in and bowl short balls and Dube would either duck out of the way or defend,” Chennai’s batting coach Mike Hussey said. “And that’s all he had until he got in... Then he could maybe play some shots against it. Now bowlers are still coming in with the same plan but he’s been able to score off it as well. And he’s been able to find boundaries if he gets into the right position as well.

IPL 2024: Former Indian cricketer believes Hardik Pandya boos to get louder at Wankhede



NEW DELHI, MAR 27:

How angry Hardik Pandya’s trade to the Mumbai Indians had made fans of his old team, Gujarat Titans, was apparent when the two teams met in their season opener last week. Multiple times during the IPL 2024 game, which the Titans won by six runs, loud

boos rang out at the packed Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad as Gujarat fans let their displeasure be known to Hardik, who had captained the Gujarat-based franchise since its inception. In his two seasons at the helm at the Titans, Hardik had led the team to a title in the

2022 season and took them into the final last season. Not just the Gujarat faithful, there is some anger among the Mumbai Indians fan base also after the team management chose to elevate Hardik to captaincy over longtime general Rohit Sharma, who was part of the team’s five IPL titles. If the reception Hardik got at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad was frosty, it could be even worse when Mumbai play their first home game on Monday next week against the Rajasthan Royals. “You have to see how Hardik gets welcomed in Mumbai because I think he is going to get booed a bit louder here... Because as a fan, a Mumbai fan or a Rohit Sharma fan, nobody expected that captaincy will be given to Hardik,” Tiwary was quoted.

Lopez grapples with history in quest for fifth Olympic gold

HAVANA, MAR 27:

In the history of the modern Olympic Games, dating all the way back to 1896, only one athlete, Dutch speedskater Ireen Wust, has managed to win five golds in five successive Games. Cuban wrestler Mijain Lopez, however, is looking to match her achievement when he lands in Paris in the summer for what will be his sixth Games, even though he has not competed for over two years. “I’m going to do it,” the ever-confident Lopez told. “The fatigue is there, the body aches are there, so the mind has to be strong, the motivation has to be even stronger,” he said, dripping with perspiration after an intense three-hour training session on the mats at the Cerro Pelado high-performance centre in Havana. If the perspiration and the inspiration do the job in Paris, the 1.98m (6ft 5in) Greco-Roman wrestler will move ahead of such luminaries as the Americans Carl Lewis (long jump), Michael Phelps (swimming, 200m medley) and Al Oerter (discus), Denmark’s Paul Elvstrom (sailing) and Japan’s Kaori Icho (wrestling), all of whom won individual gold in four different editions of the Games. When, just shy of his 39th birthday, the Cuban giant overcame the Georgian Jakobi Kajaia in the 130kg competition in the Covid-delayed Tokyo Games three years ago, it was widely expected to be his swansong. He has not competed since. But the 41-year-old -- he turns 42 on August 20, just after the Paris Games end -- is determined to grapple again, not just with his opponents but with his own advancing years. The first battle he has had to fight was with himself, getting his weight stabilised below the required 130kg. He is still a few kilos above but the training sessions are paying off.

Pakistan in negotiations with Luke Ronchi for head coach's job

LAHORE, MAR 27:

The Pakistan Cricket Board has narrowed down its search for a new head coach to former Australia and New Zealand wicket-keeper-batter Luke Ronchi. A PCB source said on Wednesday that “extensive discussions” had taken place with the 42-year-old Ronchi, who has also coached Pakistan Super League side Islamabad United. “With no high-profile coach showing interest in working for the PCB as most of them are already committed with different leagues or have reservations working in Pakistan cricket, the search has come down to Ronchi,” the source said. He said the contract with Ronchi should be finalised in the next few days before the home T20 series against New Zealand commences. Ronchi, after taking retirement from professional cricket, has also worked with the New Zealand team as its batting consultant and coach. The source added that the PCB team had contacted some well-known coaches but most of them were either already committed or reluctant to accept any assignment with the Pakistan board. “Given the history of the PCB in dealing with foreign and local coaches, obviously one can understand the reservations of some foreign coaches,” he said. The source said that even Ronchi had not said yes as yet and had asked for an ironclad assurance that he would be given a proper time frame to work with the Pakistan team over a period of time no matter what the results are. “He wants clear assurances that his performance will only be evaluated after a certain period of time, not after every series or event,” the source said. PCB chief Mohsin Naqvi had last week blamed the leakage of salary details and other aspects of a possible coaching contract with Shane Watson for the Australian to eventually back out of the discussion.

FIFA World Cup qualifiers: Why losing to Afghanistan is a new-low for Indian football

MUMBAI, MAR 27:

When he scored in the 37th minute, Sunil Chhetri’s face bore no emotion as he trudged back to his half. When India misplaced the most pedestrian of passes minutes later, his face contorted itself into that familiar mix of abject fury – one that only his Indian teammates seem to elicit. When he was substituted in the 67th minute after scoring a penalty in his 150th game for the Indian national football team, his face on the bench turned to one of concern and urgency. And when thirty minutes later, the referee blew the final whistle, the country’s most recognisable footballer buried his face in between his hands, unable to face the reality of what Indian football truly is. It was the 2013 SAFF Cup Final where Afghanistan had last beaten India in an international football match. On Tuesday, in Guwahati and in a World Cup qualifier second



round match at that, Afghanistan defeated them once again, this time to the sweet tune of two late goals. Four of Afghanistan’s players do not currently have a club to play (according to their coach Ashley Westwood) and weren’t in the middle of a football season like every Indian player on the pitch was. The Afghans struggled to put a team together for these qualifiers due to disputes between

the players and management. India were only able to pick one point from a possible six from these two games against opponents who they should have easily picked apart over two legs. How different does a year in Indian football look like? Last year India were coasting. Head coach Igor Stimac had his camps, had the players he wanted, and had a glut of teams to base his preparations against. It result-

ed in wins against Lebanon, Kuwait and the Kyrgyz Republic and three international tournaments won within the country. Cut to a year later and Indian football is back to its familiar state of wretchedness. It’s just March and the national team has played six times already – conceding an unfathomable eleven goals in the process and scoring a grand total of zero goals from open play. Stimac’s response after this latest failure: “I’m still confident of achieving our targets (WCQ R3) in June, not pleased with what we saw tonight. Substitutions are made to have some impacts and today there was none. I’m sorry for what happened but I expect much better in June.” Even on Tuesday, a goal from open play was a laughable dream. And that is saying something, considering Chhetri had a chance minutes into the start of the game.

Captaincy speculation: Shahid Afridi comes to the defence of Shaheen

KARACHI, MAR 27:

Former Pakistan skipper Shahid Afridi has come out in defence of his son-in-law Shaheen Shah Afridi following speculation that the tall pace bowler was going to be removed as the national T20 captain. “I think that if you have appointed someone as captain (Shaheen) and given him the responsibility then give him time as well,” Afridi told. “The biggest problem with our cricket is that our system changes whenever the faces change in the board. Whoever comes thinks whatever he is doing is the best for Pakistan cricket,” said Afridi. Afridi remarked that Shaheen should be given adequate time to prove himself. “If you change the captain then either the decision to appoint him was wrong or the decision to change him now is wrong,” he



added. Afridi was seen as one of the main driving forces behind the appointment of Shaheen as the national T20 captain after last year’s ODI World Cup India. Babar Azam was removed as the white-ball captain after Pakistan failed to advance beyond the league stages. The skipper then stepped down in the red-ball

format. Afridi also backed the appointment of a foreign coach but said he should be a high-profile person like Andy Flower, who has a great track record. “I believe that even if you bring in a foreign coach, the staff under him should be Pakistani so that our people can also move forward and improve their skills,” he said.

No clarity on WFI’s proposed national camp yet

CHENNAI, MAR 27:

A few days after the selection trials to pick the teams for the Asian Championships and Asian Olympic Games Qualifier were held (March 10 and 11), the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) had expressed its intention to commence national camps for top-four wrestlers. It was decided to start the camp on March 27. A proposal in this regard was also sent to the Sports Authority of India (SAI). However, the federation are yet to receive a response from the SAI. The Asian Championships is scheduled in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan from April 11 to 16 while the Olympic Qualifier is from April 19 to 21 in the same city. So far, only one Indian wrestler, Antim Panghal (53kg), has earned the Paris Olympics quota with the remaining 17 up for grabs in the remaining two qualifiers. The second one — World OG Qualifier — is slated from May 9 to 12 in Istanbul, Türkiye. “No communication yet from the SAI on national camp. The camp might get delayed now as even an approval tomorrow (Wednesday) means wrestlers could take at least a couple of days to join,” a source in the know of things told. The WFI has proposed to hold the men’s (freestyle and Greco-Roman) camp in Sonapat and has given three options for the women’s camp — Gandhinagar, Bhopal and Patiala with the first venue being the priority. Notably, the ad-hoc committee, which was managing affairs of the WFI, too started the camp with venues being Sonapat and Patiala for men and women respectively. “The top finishers from the trials wanted to prepare in foreign countries. More than half-a-dozen of them even sent their proposals in this regard to the authorities concerned. But camp is necessary for others who finished with silver and bronze medals,” added the source.