



AKMAL WAS SUSPENDED HOURS BEFORE HIS PSL team Quetta Gladiators was to take on Islamabad in the opening match of the 2020 edition on Thursday.

India Ready To 'Taste' Kiwi Flavoured Pace In Opening Test



Press Trust Of India

WELLINGTON - India's battle-hardened cricketers are ready for their toughest challenge of the World Test Championship till date as they face formidable hosts New Zealand on a spicy Basin Reserve track in the series-opener beginning here on Friday.

Virat Kohli's top-ranked team, with 360 points in its kitty, is certainly the favourite on paper but the Black Caps under Kane Williamson are experts at wearing down opposition with their patience on pitches which turn flat as the game progresses.

The last time New Zealand lost a series at home was back in March 2017 and since then have won five (10 Tests) in familiar conditions.

For New Zealand, it is time to pick up pieces after their 0-3 drubbing in Australia while the current Indian team would love to reassert that they are the best when it comes to winning in adverse conditions like they did in Australia last year.

The open Basin Reserve ground has always been challenging for both batsmen and bowlers due to cross winds.

And the new opening pair of Prithvi Shaw and Mayank Agarwal will have its task cut out against a top class seam attack comprising Trent Boult, Tim Southee, and Kyle Jamieson, who in all likelihood will make his debut.

However, the absence of left arm speedster Neil Wagner, who could have created awkward angles with his short balls, will provide some respite for the Indian middle-order. Wagner is on a break to welcome his first child.

New Zealand named their 12 on the day and it will be a choice between seamer all-rounder Daryl Mitchell or slow left-arm orthodox Ajaz Patel.

In an open ground with overcast conditions expected, captain Kohli will not mind winning the toss and unleash Jasprit Bumrah, Ishant Sharma and Mohammed Shami on the home team.

Even Kohli admitted that his men would need to have tons of patience once the track eases out as Williamson's team is known to the play waiting game. "It doesn't matter how much patience

opposition has, we have to show more patience. We can't really prepare in a manner where New Zealand show more patience and put pressure on us," skipper Kohli made his intentions clear during a media interaction.

While New Zealand are expected to go with four frontline pacers and may be a fifth seamer in all-rounder Colin de Grandhomme, the Indian team management might be tempted to try out Ravichandran Ashwin, who purely as a spinner, has more variety compared to left-arm orthodox of Ravindra Jadeja.

The wind factor in Wellington is an issue that captains need to deal with and Kohli is no different as he will have to judiciously choose ends for his bowlers. "If breeze is blowing across the ground, who is more effective with inswinger or outswingers, these things you think as a captain," said Kohli.

The return of Trent Boult for New Zealand and Ishant for India, from their respective injuries will certainly bolster both the sides.

For India, Cheteshwar Pujara, Kohli and Ajinkya Rahane will have to be the foil around Shaw, Agarwal and Vihari with their techniques being tested.

"As a batsman, you need to think that ball might not travel in the air a lot more when you are hitting against the wind. So you need to be prepared to run a lot more which we experienced last time and if you have a light bat, you are in trouble.

"You need to be firm with your stance and where your bat is as it can really swing around," added Kohli, who is India's best batsman by a mile.

Teams:

India (First 12): Virat Kohli (captain), Mayank Agarwal, Prithvi Shaw, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Hanuma Vihari, Wriddhiman Saha (wk), Ishant Sharma, Mohammed Shami, Jasprit Bumrah, Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja.

New Zealand (12): Kane Williamson (c), Tom Blundell, Trent Boult, Colin de Grandhomme, Kyle Jamieson, Tom Latham, Daryl Mitchell, Henry Nicholls, Ajaz Patel, Tim Southee, Ross Taylor, BJ Watling.

Match Starts: 4 am IST.

Peeling It Back: Williamson Promises Quintessential NZ Approach To Handle Indian Pace

New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson on Thursday said his team will rely on his tried and tested patient approach to tackle the Indian pace battery of Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami and Ishant Sharma in the Test series starting here on Friday.

Williamson said it will be "a lot different" to facing Australian speedsters in their own den. New Zealand are still reeling from a 0-3 thrashing in their last away Test series in Australia where Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc made life miserable for the Black Caps batsmen.

Asked how different it will be facing a quality Indian pace attack at home, Williamson replied: "A lot of differences I suppose, the conditions being the first one."

"India have a world-class pace attack that has performed in all conditions so a really exciting opportunity for our team."

Williamson said the Kiwis will be going back to their style of patient cricket which has yielded results at home since 2017.

"So it is peeling it back. Obviously coming back here from Australia, back into Test cricket, the guys are really looking forward to get into it," Williamson said.

"It's taking some learnings from that. But it's in some ways trying to peel back, (that's) the style of cricket we play in New Zealand and (we will) connect with that again," he added.

The Basin Reserve pitch, at least on the first two days, has a lot of juice and Williamson was asked if India's batting line-up would be vulnerable in these conditions.

"I think if you can execute your plans on a surface that's going to provide some assistance then it's a challenge for anybody," he explained.

"But we've seen here on these surfaces in NZ, that there is some assistance early on but that can also, the pace and some of the bounce you can get can provide opportunities for scoring.

"So there's a balance there and yeah it's never a given even when the surface is green that's for sure," he added.

His opposite number Virat Kohli's wicket is important but that's not the sole focus of his team, said the Black Caps skipper.

"Obviously, Virat's the best or one of in all formats without a doubt. They're a quality side. They're leading the Test championships and there's a reason for it.

"You certainly don't focus on one player and I guess that brings us back to the focus on our own team's approach."

OBVIOUSLY, VIRAT'S THE BEST or one of in all formats without a doubt. They're a quality side. They're leading the Test championships and there's a reason for it.



PAKISTAN CRICKET BOARD SUSPENDS AKMAL PENDING ANTI-CORRUPTION INVESTIGATION

Press Trust Of India

KARACHI - Umar Akmal's flatter-to-deceive career took another hit on Thursday when the Pakistan Cricket Board suspended the batsman with immediate effect, pending an anti-corruption investigation.

The PCB, however, did not get into the specifics of the breach committed by Akmal.

"The Pakistan Cricket Board today suspended Umar Akmal with immediate effect...he cannot take part in any cricket-

related activity pending the investigation being carried out by PCB's Anti-Corruption Unit," the Board said in a statement.

"As this is an ongoing investigation, the PCB will not make any further comments," it said.

Akmal was suspended hours before his PSL team Quetta Gladiators was to take on Islamabad in the opening match of the 2020 edition on Thursday.

"Quetta Gladiators are allowed to apply for Umar Akmal's replacement in the HBL Pakistan Super League 2020,"

the PCB added.

He is the younger brother of former Pakistan wicketkeeper-batsman Kamran Akmal, who played 53 Tests, 58 T20s, 157 ODIs, and cousin of current captain Babar Azam.

The 29-year-old, who last played for Pakistan in October, has featured in 16 Tests, 121 ODIs and 84 T20s, scoring 1003, 3194 and 1690 runs respectively.

Akmal, who promised a lot after making a hundred in New Zealand on his Test debut, has failed to live up to the high

expectations that came with some fine performances early in his career.

Constant run-ins with the authorities have also marred his stop-start career.

Earlier this month, Akmal had escaped a PCB ban for allegedly making crude remarks to a trainer during a fitness test at the National Cricket Academy in Lahore.

The suspension of Umar is similar to what happened at the onset of the PSL's third edition in Dubai when two Pakistan play-

ers, Sharjeel Khan and Khalid Latif who were in the Islamabad United franchise, were suspended and sent home under the Anti-Corruption Code.

Later Sharjeel was banned for five years (half of it suspended) for breaching five clauses of the code and Latif was banned for 10 years for similar offences.

Sharjeel has now returned to cricket and is representing Karachi Kings in the PSL after completing his ban period and fulfilling all requirements of the PCB's rehabilitation program.



ROGER FEDERER PULLS OUT Of French Open After Knee Surgery

Agencies

Paris - Roger Federer has undergone surgery to resolve a longstanding knee problem and said Thursday he would be out of action until after the French Open. The 20-times grand slam winner revealed on his Facebook account that

he underwent surgery in Switzerland on Wednesday and would miss a string of tournaments including the May 24-June 7 French Open.

"As a result, I will miss Dubai, India Wells, Bogota, Miami and the French Open," he said.

The 38-year-old explained that he had

intended to avoid surgery if possible but the knee problem refused to go away.

"My right knee has been bothering me for a little while," said the world number three who reached the Roland Garros semi-finals last year.

"I hoped it would go away, but after an examination and discussion with my

team, I decided to have arthroscopic surgery in Switzerland yesterday."

"After the surgery the doctors confirmed that it was the right thing to have done and are very confident of a full recovery.

"I can't wait to be back playing again soon, see you on grass!" (AFP)

India Hope To Continue Fine Run Against Australia In Fih Pro League Tie

Press Trust Of India

BHUBANESWAR - Hosts India would look to continue their fine form when they take on title holders Australia in their next FIH Pro League tie here on Friday.

India have made an excellent start to their maiden FIH Hockey Pro League season and are currently sitting third in the table with eight points from four games.

The Manpreet Singh-led side claimed five points from a possible six against the Netherlands before claiming another three in a stunning 2-1 victory over Belgium, the reigning World and European champions. The Red Lions bounced back with a 3-2 win in the second match.

Few would dispute that India, coached by former Australian international Graham Reid and captained by newly crowned FIH Men's Player of the Year Manpreet, are playing their best

hockey in recent years.

It would also be India's penultimate home tie at the Kalinga Stadium here before they embark on a series of away games. But past records and statistics don't look promising for the hosts as Australia have an outstanding recent record against India.

The world no.2 Kookaburras have won 22 of their last 30 meetings against world no.4 India and have not faced a defeat since a 2016 Test match in Bendigo, Australia, when VR Raghunath scored twice in a 3-2 win.

Australia, managed by Colin Batch, who was recently named 2019 Men's FIH Coach of the Year, also have an imperious record at the Kalinga Stadium, a venue where they have not suffered a defeat in regular time since a semi-final loss at the hands of Germany at the Hero Champions



Trophy in 2014.

The Australians were unbeaten in all six matches on the way to claiming the title at the 2017 Hockey World League Final, and won five of their six

matches at the Odisha Hockey Men's World Cup 2018, with only the Netherlands getting the better of them in a semi-final shoot-out after the regular time finished 2-2.

The Kookaburras will be in a confident mood coming into the tie after their recent performances against Great Britain in the FIH Pro League, where they claimed five points out of six.