

Ashwin has no regrets over 'mankading' controversy

NEW DELHI: Indian star Ravichandran Ashwin has insisted he has no regrets over his controversial 'Mankad' dismissal of England batsman Jos Buttler which sparked a worldwide debate. "You can't say that Ashwin is a villain," the Indian all-rounder insisted in his first interview since the storm erupted after he ran out Buttler at the non-striker's end in an Indian Premier League game last month.

The Kings XI Punjab skipper has been at the centre of a major cricket controversy for using the ploy made famous by India player Vinoo Mankad in 1947. Mankading, as it has become known, is legal but frowned upon by purists unless the batsman has been warned. Ashwin, who seemed to have waited for Buttler to leave his crease before clipping off the bails, insisted his "conscience was clear" over the March 25 incident.

"People can say that they believe it is right or wrong, that is their opinion, but you can't say that Ashwin is a villain. That is not in my character," Ashwin told the India Today television channel late yesterday. "There is nothing to defend. It was instinctive. I didn't plan to wait for Buttler to go out and I will hit (the bails). He had done that four or five times," Ashwin said. "It is in the rules if the batsman goes out of his crease then you can whip the bails off. Nobody told the batsman to stay in the crease, but it his respon-

sibility to stay inside the crease.

"And most importantly my conscience was clear. People who know me well, know that I will never do anything illegal." Cricketers and pundits have criticised Ashwin. Even the MCC, the arbiter of cricket laws, released a statement saying that if Ashwin had deliberately waited for Buttler to be out of his crease that would be "unfair". A video of England paceman James Anderson putting an image of Ashwin through a shredder has gone viral on the internet but the Indian off-spinner is not bothered.

"Today Jimmy Anderson might feel that whatever I did was wrong. Maybe, tomorrow he might end up doing (Mankading) it," he said. "Who knows, it is all a question of perception of right and wrong. I don't think in this case it is necessary because it is within the law." Buttler, who walked back to the dressing room after a heated exchange with Ashwin, still feels aggrieved. "I think if you look at the footage, probably the wrong decision was made because at the time he was expected to release the ball I was in my crease," Buttler told Britain's Daily Mirror newspaper. "At the time, I was really disappointed with it. I didn't like the style of it," added Buttler, who was also a victim of the rare dismissal at the hands of Sri Lanka's Sachithra Senanayake while playing for England at Edgbaston in 2014. — AFP



JAIPUR: In this file combination of photos created on March 26, 2019, Rajasthan Royals' Jos Buttler (L) walks back to the pavilion after he was dismissed by Kings XI Punjab's Ravichandran Ashwin during the 2019 Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Rajasthan Royals and Kings XI Punjab at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur on March 25; and (R) Ashwin reacting after dismissing Buttler during the same match at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium. —AFP

Nabi backs Afghan spinners to shine at World Cup

NEW DELHI: Mohammad Nabi said Afghanistan's spinners would be a handful at the cricket World Cup after their experiences playing in England and in the cauldron of the Indian Premier League. The 34-year-old batting all-rounder will form a potent spin attack with Rashid Khan and Mujeeb Ur Rahman at the World Cup, with all three currently contesting the high-pressure IPL.

Nabi and Khan also played for Leicestershire Foxes and Sussex Sharks respectively in England's T20 Blast last year, while Rahman has been signed by Middlesex for the coming season. "Ours is a good combination because Rashid and Mujeeb are wicket-taking bowlers and I am more defensive, bowling a lot of dot balls," Nabi, who plays for Sunrisers Hyderabad, told AFP in an interview. "It was a great experience for us and was of big help," he said of last year's T20 Blast. "Rashid and I bowled really well and he also batted well. "We will quickly get adjusted to the conditions there hopefully," added Nabi, who will represent Kent in this year's 20-over contest.

While most of the Afghan team are at a training camp in South Africa, the spinners are all warming up for the 50-over World Cup in the IPL. Both Nabi and Khan have starred in Hyderabad's campaign, and 18-year-old Rahman is playing for Kings XI Punjab. But Nabi said the IPL, with its big crowds and tight games, was great preparation for the World Cup despite the differences between T20 and 50-over cricket. "The IPL helps a lot," Nabi said. "If you play these kind of pressure games before the World Cup it will help a lot in the tournament against top opposition teams." "It is a white-ball format after all. Yes it is a change of format but you can adjust easily to the 50-over game," he added.



Mohammad Nabi

Beating the odds

Nabi's seven wickets from less than 16 overs, conceding a parsimonious 87 runs, has made him one of the top 10 bowlers in this year's IPL. He will now hope to take that form into the World Cup, where Afghanistan face a daunting opener against defending champions Australia on June 1. The strong middle-order batsman has been at the centre of Afghanistan's fairytale rise, captaining the side at their first World Cup in 2015. But while many Afghanistan players learned the game in refugee camps in Pakistan, Nabi hails from a wealthy Afghan family that lived in Pakistan during the Soviet invasion.

Since beating the odds to compete at the 2010 World T20 in England, Afghanistan have qualified for all major international tournaments and won their first Test against Ireland last month. "It was a historic occasion," Nabi said of the victory. Now expectations are building for their second World Cup, where Afghanistan's cricketers will hope to bring further joy to their war-torn nation. "We will try our best at the World Cup and challenge every team that we play against," Nabi said. "Inshallah (God-willing) in future we will challenge everybody in Test cricket." —AFP

Pollard hoping for Windies recall after IPL blitz

MUMBAI: West Indies outcast Kieron Pollard said he was targeting a return to the national team for the World Cup after smashing a whirlwind 83 in the Indian Premier League. Pollard, whose knock off 31 balls helped Mumbai Indians beat Kings XI Punjab on the last ball on Wednesday, said he hoped his problems with the West Indies board were in the past.

The 31-year-old, who last played an ODI in 2016, said he was "blacklisted" under the previous regime but was hopeful of a recall after last month's ousting of controversial board president Dave Cameron. "There has been a lot of turmoil in West Indies cricket over the last couple of years. We have seen in the last couple of weeks there's a change," said Pollard. "The most I can do every time I step on the cricket field is try to put runs on the board," he added, when asked about the West Indies' World Cup squad.

"There's people there who have the job to select and whatever and let's see how that goes. As I said, I'm 31 years, Chris Gayle is still playing, he's 39, and he's whacking it all around." Pollard's blitz, which included three fours and 10 sixes, came after big innings by Punjab batsmen Lokesh Rahul and Gayle. Rahul registered his maiden IPL century and Gayle hit 63 off 36 balls to guide Punjab to 197-4, but Pollard's fireworks overshadowed both of them.

Pollard said it could be the start of a fresh era for West Indies cricket under new chief Ricky Skerritt, the former team manager. "We have a new chairman of selectors, there's a new president of the cricket board, and as I said you take it as it comes," said Pollard. "We know what we can do and I think Chris batted superbly," he added, also paying tribute to fellow West Indian IPL stars Andre Russell and Sunil Narine. "These guys are having a good tournament and again, when your mind is free, you just go out and enjoy cricket." West Indies start the World Cup against Pakistan at Nottingham, England on May 31. — AFP