

Sports

India beat New Zealand to give new T20 skipper Rohit winning start

JAIPUR: India gave Rohit Sharma a winning start as captain by securing a five-wicket victory over New Zealand in the first T20 international despite a late wobble in Jaipur on Wednesday. The hosts were cruising towards a target of 165 as Rohit struck a quickfire 48 and Suryakumar Yadav made 62.

India, from needing 23 from the final four overs with eight wickets in hand, stuttered badly to leave them still requiring 10 off the last over, bowled by part-time seamer Daryl Mitchell. But Rishabh Pant struck the winning boundary over mid-off with two balls to spare to put India 1-0 ahead in the three-match series.

It was an encouraging start to life as skipper for Rohit, who took over from Virat Kohli in the shortest format following India's shock Super 12 exit at the T20 World Cup. "Towards the end we saw it wasn't easy. Was a great learning for the guys because those guys haven't batted in that situation before for India," said Rohit. New Zealand, without usual captain Kane Williamson, were playing just three days after their World Cup final loss to Australia in Dubai. India made a bright start to their chase before opener KL Rahul was caught off Mitchell Santner for just 15.

But the home side, with new coach Rahul Dravid in the dugout for the first time, took total control through Yadav and Rohit. Yadav, who was given the man-of-the-match award, struck

six fours and three sixes in his 40-ball innings before he was clean bowled by Trent Boult, who earlier removed Rohit, in the 16th over.

New Zealand dragged themselves back into the contest in the closing overs, but stand-in skipper Tim Southee turned to Mitchell instead of leg-spinner Todd Astle in the 20th over and Pant got India over the line. "We played our best cricket and took it deep," Southee said.

Guptill, Chapman impress

Earlier, half-centuries by Martin Guptill and Mark Chapman propelled the visitors to 164 for six. The Kiwis lost Mitchell for a duck, bowled in the first over by seamer Bhuvneshwar Kumar. Guptill and Chapman then put together a 109-run second-wicket partnership, hammering the Indian bowling attack at will. Chapman scored 63 in 50 balls but fell to Ravichandran Ashwin as he tried to hit the off-spinner over the leg-side boundary. Ashwin also dismissed Glenn Phillips, lbw, in the same over for nought.

But Guptill continued with his lively innings, smashing four sixes and three fours in his 70 off 42 balls before being caught at deep mid-wicket. Wicketkeeper Tim Seifert tried to accelerate but was caught off Kumar for 12. Kumar finished with figures of 2-24 while Chahar and Mohammed Siraj took one wicket each. The teams will meet in the second T20I today in Ranchi. — AFP



JAIPUR: India's Rohit Sharma plays a shot during the first Twenty20 cricket match between India and New Zealand at the Sawai Mansingh stadium in Jaipur on Wednesday. —AFP

Three athletes test positive inside Beijing Olympic bubble

BEIJING: Three athletes attending training events for the Beijing Winter Olympics have tested positive for COVID-19, Chinese officials said yesterday, with the country on high alert against the coronavirus ahead of the Games.

Beijing 2022 organizers have left nothing to chance with the games set to start in February, restricting entry to the capital and insisting on daily virus tests for thousands of athletes who will be kept within a "closed-loop" bubble. One of the athletes, a foreign luger, tested positive at the airport when entering the country and was sent to a quarantine hotel along with another infected teammate as they had no symptoms, officials said last week. But a third person has now tested positive — another luger and a close contact of the earlier cases, Zhao Weidong, an Olympics organizing committee member, said yesterday.

The latest patient is asymptomatic and has also been transferred to a quarantine facility for "medical observation," Zhao said at a press conference. Authorities are continuing to "test people, materials and the environment, as well as conducting health monitoring and disinfecting the environment," Zhao added. China is gearing up to tackle one of the largest challenges to its zero-COVID strategy as thousands of athletes are expected to descend on Beijing for the games, which will be held from February 4 to 20. City authorities this week imposed strict new rules on inbound travelers, requiring all visitors to Beijing to show a negative COVID test result from the past 48 hours and cancelling flights from higher risk areas within the country. — AFP

Villa not stepping stone to Liverpool job: Gerrard

LONDON: Steven Gerrard has slammed claims he will use the Aston Villa job as a stepping stone towards eventually taking charge of his former club Liverpool. Gerrard was hired as Villa boss last week after agreeing to leave Scottish champions Rangers.

Premier League strugglers Villa host Brighton in Gerrard's first match on Saturday and his emotional reunion with Liverpool comes at Anfield on December 11. The Liverpool legend has never hidden his ambition to manage the club he captained to Champions League glory in 2005 and FA Cup success a year later. But Gerrard is adamant his move to Villa Park after three and a half years in Glasgow was not motivated by taking another step closer to his Liverpool dream.

"It's very unfair to describe this as a stepping stone, you will never hear me say that," Gerrard told reporters at his first Villa press conference yesterday. "I'm all-in and I will give this job all it needs to be successful. The opportunity to be back in the Premier League and the opportunity to be back close to my family are the two reasons this was right for me. I am 100 per cent committed and so are my staff. There is nothing wrong with having dreams and aspirations."

While Gerrard was keen to distance himself from Anfield for now, he remains in contact with Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp after working with the Reds' youth teams before taking his first managerial job at Rangers. "Liverpool have a world-class coach in Jurgen Klopp. If he was to sign a lifetime deal right now I would be very happy for him and them," Gerrard said.



Steven Gerrard

"I've been in touch with Jurgen since day one. We live in the same area and I bump into him when he's walking his dogs. He sent me a message saying he was looking forward to a big hug on the side on December 11 and it's something for me to look forward to as well."

Former England midfielder Gerrard has established his managerial credentials by leading Rangers out of the doldrums to their first Scot-

tish crown in 10 years — in the process stopping arch rivals' Celtic in their bid to win 10 successive titles. That unbeaten league campaign with the Glasgow club, as well as their relative success in European competitions under Gerrard, suggests he is capable of revitalizing Villa. The 41-year-old has replaced Dean Smith at Villa Park after five successive defeats triggered his predecessor's sacking.

Villa are just two points above the relegation zone and Gerrard knows he needs to spark an immediate upturn in results. "Long term, the club would like to be back on a European level, I don't think now is the right time to put any date on that," he said. "For me more importantly, it is about focusing on the short-term, which is Brighton at the weekend. We need to start winning football matches again."

He has already made his mark at the training ground by banning tomato ketchup. "It was banned before I had seen it!" Gerrard said. "The players have to have the right mentality. Go above and beyond. They need to strive to be elite." —AFP