



BATTLE OF UNEQUALS: DC NEEDS SHAW BOOST AGAINST FORMIDABLE CSK

PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Delhi Capitals will be aiming to rejig their out-of-depth batting order by bringing the flamboyant Prithvi Shaw in the mix against the defending champions Chennai Super Kings in what could be safely termed as a 'battle of unequals' on Sunday's Indian Premier League encounter.

In T20 format, reputations do go for a toss but DC in their last four meetings haven't been able to get past CSK and the margins of defeat — 91, 27 and 77 runs respectively paints a sorry picture. One also needs to take into account that in those three heavy losses, the core of the Delhi team has been more or less same save their last meeting when Rishabh Pant wasn't available.

Hence a win against CSK would be considered as a big upset in the tournament. If CSK once again looks like a team to beat with all its bases nicely covered, it has been

quite the opposite for the Ricky Ponting coached Capitals, which has been outplayed in both departments of the game. DC's co-owners GMR and JSW have been completely messing up the team composition at the auction table itself for some years and there is hardly anything that Ponting or Director of Cricket Sourav Ganguly could do with domestic talent that lacks quality. CSK got an uncapped Sameer Rizvi for 8.40 crore and the two sixes in his first IPL innings against Punjab Kings showed why the franchise was desperate to get him on board. Among all franchises, DC probably has had the weakest talent scout program and it is paying a huge price for poor recruitments.

The gulf between domestic cricket and IPL once again became evident with Ricky Bhui, the highest scorer in Ranji Trophy with 902 runs in the just concluded season. That Bhui is out-of-depth at

this level was cruelly exposed by young South African paceman Nandre Burger of Rajasthan Royals. The manner in which he set up with a fast full delivery to peg Bhui on the backfoot and then a well-directed bouncer that was aimed for his skull left the burly Andhra captain both scared and scarred.

Shaw, who made a comeback to competitive cricket during second half of Ranji Trophy, might not exactly conform to the fitness standards set by Ponting and his support staff but even the biggest 'punter' in the DC change room knows where to put his money if the choice is between Shaw and Bhui. There is too much on the plate of David Warner, who is well past his prime and skipper Rishabh Pant, who will take some time to find his groove. Mitchell Marsh's time with DC for the past two seasons can't exactly be termed consistent and the presence of Shaw will indeed add some muscle to



DC's batting against an attack comprising Mustafizur Rahman, Deepak Chahar, Matheesha Pathirana and Ravindra Jadeja. Add to it, Daryl Mitchell's seam-up stuff and Rachin

Ravindra, whose bowling potential hasn't yet been unlocked by CSK's 'spiritual captain' Mahendra Singh Dhoni. If DC bring in Shaw, they can push Marsh as one down,

which could lend a bit more solidity to the top-order but the real challenge will be facing the pace-off deliveries bowled by Mustafizur, who cleverly mixes his variety of cutters to make life miserable for the

batters. The problem with DC is lack of quality power hitters among domestic talents in case Pant fails to fire and also there isn't much difference between Shai Hope and Tristan Stubbs, both of whom take time before going for the jugular. Similarly DC's death bowling is one of concern and save Axar Patel, whose economy rate is less than six in two games, none of the other bowlers have gone for anything less than 7.50 per over.

Anrich Nortje couldn't hit the right length in the Royals game where DC lost it in the last five overs of their bowling innings. DC would need Ishant Sharma to come back as he could have some questions for Rachin Ravindra, who has started the tournament in imperious fashion. Shivam Dube's pyrotechnics will meet its match in Kuldeep Yadav's guile and that will be one battle that cricket lovers would be waiting for.

TEAMS
CSK: MS Dhoni (c), Moeen Ali, Deepak Chahar, Tushar Deshpande, Shivam Dube, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Rajvardhan Hangargekar, Ravindra Jadeja, Ajay Mandal, Mukesh Choudhary, Ajinkya Rahane, Shaik Rasheed, Mitchell Santner, Simarjeet Singh, Nishant Sindhu, Prashant Solanki, Maheesh Theekshana, Rachin Ravindra, Shardul Thakur, Daryl Mitchell, Sameer Rizvi, Mustafizur Rahman and Avanish Rao Aravelly.
Delhi Capitals: Rishabh Pant (c), David Warner, Prithvi Shaw, Yash Dhull, Abhishek Porel, Axar Patel, Lalit Yadav, Mitchell Marsh, Pravin Dube, Vicky Ostwal, Anrich Nortje, Kuldeep Yadav, Jake Fraser-McGurk, Khaleel Ahmed, Ishant Sharma, Mukesh Kumar, Tristan Stubbs, Ricky Bhui, Kumar Kushagra, Rasikh Dar, Jhye Richardson, Sumit Kumar, Swastik Chikara and Shai Hope.

Sunrisers Hyderabad explosive form threatens Gujarat Titans

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

A depleted Gujarat Titans bowling attack will have to raise its game by quite a few notches if it intends to stop a marauding Sunrisers Hyderabad team fresh from its record total against Mumbai Indians, in the upcoming afternoon IPL match here on Sunday.

Sunrisers are coming here on the back of breaking the ceiling for all time IPL total when they plundered 277 against Mumbai Indians to secure their first win of the season.

First time skipper Shubman Gill's Titans, who started off with a win at home against Mumbai Indians, on the other hand slipped in Chennai in their previous game.

The profligate Umesh Yadav is no match for injured Mohammed Shami and that is proving to be a big factor for Titans.

The resounding 63-run defeat affected their net run rate as it plummeted to -1.425, worst among the league's 10 teams, which could cause some problems towards the business end of the tournament. It can't be denied that losing Hardik Pandya, who lends necessary balance with his all-round skills has also been a big factor. Winners and runners-up in the last two seasons, GT's success under Pandya has centred around one of their batters ability to come up trumps and play a match winning role.

Whether it's Wriddhiman Saha, David Miller, Pandya, or Rahul Tewatia, one of them has typically ignited the batting lineup. However, in the absence of the inspirational India all-rounder, their batting display appears drab and lacking its usual spark.

GT had a one-day style batting approach chasing Chennai Super Kings' imposing 207, and barring Sai Sudharsan



none could reach 30s. The likes of Sudharsan, Vijay Shankar look unidimensional, while Gill's T20 batting will again come for scrutiny, after his knocks of 31 and 8. That their finisher Miller (12 and 21) is also struggling underscored their slow approach in the middle overs (11-15) where they managed just 34 runs. They would hope that Miller is able to get his mojo back as they would have to bat out of their skin to match SRH's batting might. Tournament dark horses SRH have lit up the IPL with a record-breaking performance at home in their last match. Their 277/3 against Mumbai in Hyderabad on Wednesday took them past the previous record IPL total of 263/5 set by Royal Challengers Bangalore against Pune Warriors in 2013. Australia World Cup winner Travis Head (62; 24b) made a stunning debut for SRH, smashing the fastest fifty for the franchise, taking 18 balls for the milestone to give them an explosive start. The feat was then bettered by uncapped Indian Abhishek Sharma who got to his fifty in just 16 balls.

With the South African duo of Aiden Markram and Heinrich Klaasen too have been in imperious form lower down the order, the likes of Umesh Yadav and Rashid Khan will be tested. Being an afternoon match, the dry surface may also prove handy for the spinners as Rashid and Sai Kishore will be crucial for either sides. It's not just their batting their bowling also looked balanced and the Australian World Cup winning skipper Pat Cummins has shown his ability to utilise his resources well. Despite a thin spin presence, Cummins did well to use left arm orthodox Shahbaz Ahmed to good effect in dismissing Ishan Kishan inside the power-play.

In the pace bowling front, Cummins has formed a fine partnership with Indian veteran Bhuvneshwar Kumar, who bowled a superb 13th over, giving away just five runs in a game that was primarily dominated by batters. Cummins then conceded just three runs in the 15th over and also dismissed Tilak Varma against the run of play to turn the course of the game.

Gill has embraced captaincy, he will learn to make tactical decisions: Gary Kirsten

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Gujarat Titans might have made a topsy-turvy start to IPL 2024 but their mentor Gary Kirsten backed Shubman Gill, and said the young captain will learn the nuances of making tactical decisions in the fast-paced world of T20 cricket.

Titans, the IPL 2022 winner and the current runners-up, are now placed seventh on the table with two points from as many matches after a win over

Mumbai Indians and defeat against Chennai Super Kings. "It's a fast game. You are making tactical decisions on a regular basis. It's not like Test cricket where it unfolds over a long period of time. "I've been really impressed with the way he's conducted himself as a leader," Kirsten told the media on the eve of GT's day-game against Sunrisers Hyderabad on Sunday. Kirsten said Gill, who took



over as GT skipper after Hardik Pandya moved to MI, has adjusted to his role well. "I think he's embraced it (captaincy) really well. He's shown some good leadership qualities. He's a smart guy. He's a young captain, and there's lots to learn, especially in T20. So, he'll learn along the way." Kirsten admitted that the Titans were well below par in their big 63-run defeat against the Super Kings, which also affected their net run rate.

"As with any cricket team, you want to play to the best of your ability. We weren't good enough that day (against CSK). I think we've acknowledged that and we've had our conversations around what we need to make sure that we are better to gain from our skills. "Every team has different kinds of strengths and we didn't show that in the CSK game and we just got to move on," he said.

KKR pummeling reveals lack of variety in RCB bowling

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Three matches might be too small a sample size to form an opinion but going by the lack of variety that has been on show in Royal Challengers Bengaluru's bowling attack, they might just be staring at a long, tiring IPL season this year.

The match against Kolkata Knight Riders on Friday offered the latest and the largest footprint of this particular weakness as the RCB bowlers failed to check a set of free-hitting batters while defending 183. The immediate defence will be to project the presence of dew and an improved M Chinnaswamy pitch during the second innings. But a deep dive will give a different picture.

Defending a total, even a competitive one like 183, demands a tight beginning, however, the RCB bowlers were profligate. Mohammed Siraj's length ball was walloped over mid-wicket for a six by Phil Salt, and the Englishman was served with two more juicy offerings on the fifth stump which were carted for a six and four each. The first over produced 18 runs.

Alzarri Joseph was introduced in the third over. But the pacer gave Sunil Narine a length ball on leg-stump which was dispatched for a six over long-on and two balls later a short-pitched delivery was sent in the same direction for a maximum.

These are the balls that will be punished at this level — dew or no dew, whether it is easy pitch or tough pitch.

There was an exception in Vysakh Vijayakumar who used knuckle balls and pace-off deliveries to good effect to return with excellent figures of 1/23, but the more experienced names were reluctant to bring in those variations — at least consistently. "The second innings was slightly better to bat because the ball came on to the bat a bit quicker because of the dew. I was trying to use hard-length balls and short balls banged into the pitch to contain batters," Vijayakumar said in the post-match press conference. "But it was still gripping from both the ends. We did try to mix it up but they (KKR batters) got away with it." There's some truth in his words. The stats show that KKR bowlers used 22 balls under 120 kmph and conceded just 20 runs off them to pick up three wickets.



Matt Henry replaces David Willey in Lucknow Super Giants squad

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Lucknow Super Giants on Saturday named New Zealand fast bowler Matt Henry as a replacement for England all-rounder David Willey. Henry joins LSG at his base price of Rs 1.25 crore. Willey had withdrawn from the tournament citing personal reasons. Willey joined the Super Giants through the auction last year after representing Royal Challengers Bengaluru during IPL 2022 and 2023. The left-arm seamer had also complained of fatigue after spending more than two months on the road after appearing in other T20 tournaments like

ILT20 (Abu Dhabi Knight Riders) and Pakistan Super League (Multan Sultans) earlier this year. Willey is the second England pacer to be unavailable for LSG after Mark Wood was pulled out by ECB to manage his workload ahead of the upcoming T20 World Cup. Wood was replaced by West Indian pacer Shamar Joseph. For Henry, LSG is his third IPL team after being a part of Chennai Super Kings and Punjab Kings, for whom he played two matches in IPL 2017. Overall, the 32-year-old Henry has represented New Zealand in 25 Tests, 82 ODIs and 17 T20Is, grabbing 256 wickets.

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PCB wants to bring Babar back as captain

PTI ■ LAHORE

PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi has offered Babar Azam captaincy in the white ball formats but the star player has not yet made his decision, sources have claimed.

It has been learnt that Babar has set down conditions for accepting the captaincy, including having a say in appointment of coaches. Babar has conveyed that he should give the reins of the side in all three formats.

The national selection committee, though is divided on the issue. A former Punjab caretaker minister, who apparently has no cricket background, is not in favour giving back absolute power to Babar.

"Some members of the selection committee now feel the best thing is to let Shaheen Shah Afridi continue as captain for the home T20 series against New Zealand in April and give him a chance to prove his credentials," one well-informed source said.



He said there was a feeling among some selectors it would be best to wait for a series or two before taking a final decision to bring back Babar as captain. The interesting part is that the selectors including

Muhammad Yousof, Asad Shafiq, Abdul Razaq, Wahab Riaz and the former minister, Bilal Afzal after meeting with Mohsin Naqvi asked him to make the final call. "They made their opinions clear to the PCB chief and have

This despite the fact that the PCB chief gave clear mandate to the selectors while appointing them to select the captain. The Test captaincy is with Shan Masood. Similarly there is also no clarity on what the PCB is doing about the appointment of foreign coaches with the national team.

"As of now the PCB has met with refusals from several foreigners including Adam Voges, Luke Ronchi, Shane Watson and Mike Hesson," the source said.

He said presently the PCB is hoping that their negotiations with Gary Kirsten and Jason Gillispie are successful as they want them to take over as white ball and red ball coaches. "The only catch is that both Kirsten and Gillispie are adamant they will bring their own support staff while the PCB wants to make the other appointments as it wants some of its local players on the support staff as assistant specialist coaches," he said.

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