

Dhoni wants Harbhajan to strike in middle overs

Skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni and coach Gary Kirsten appeared concerned over the dwindling strike rate of India's most experienced bowler Harbhajan Singh and both watched the off-spinner go through a prolonged nets, on the eve of the third One-dayer against Australia here Saturday.

Dhoni later admitted at the news conference that the off-spinner was not at his best in the first two matches of the series, but he was not unduly perturbed as Harbhajan is too experienced a bowler not to overcome the lean patch.

'One thing is for sure, Harbhajan is not bowling at his best. Maybe he is just one match away from striking form. He loves challenges and he will bounce back. There was no special focus on Harbhajan at the nets, it was a routine practice session.'

Dhoni is more worried about Harbhajan not striking in the middle overs even after the medium-pacers provided the breakthrough.

'We would like Harbhajan to take wickets in the middle overs, though he bowled well in the Nagpur game except the two costly overs.'

Talking of the Australians, Dhoni said they would naturally be on the backfoot with some frontline players on the injured list, Brett Lee in particular, but that should not affect Indians' plans.

'We are not much bothered about their (Australians') injuries as we are more focussed on the job at hand. The last match is over and we have to start from the scratch. In a series like this, when you lose some of your experienced players it does put you on the backfoot. Lee is their main bowler and his absence will surely be felt,' the skipper added.

'Whatever be their problems, you cannot count them out. They have an experienced batting line-up that can win matches for them.'

Dhoni reiterated that the series has now become best-of-five matches after sharing the first two games. He cited the rollicking eighth-wicket stand between Harbhajan and Praveen Kumar rejuvenated the side when they were looking down the barrel.

Dhoni agreed with Australian captain Ricky Ponting that it will be a low-scoring game.

'We saw that the wicket didn't produce that many runs during the Champions League. But some days have past since then and you never know how it will behave. You can't continue to think about it and not play your natural game.'

'You cannot go into the match thinking that you will score more than 300 like Nagpur. A good start is important and then you can set a target as to what kind of score would be good enough to defend.'

Dhoni said he did not see any need to tinker with the opening combination of Sachin Tendulkar and Virender Sehwag.

'I am satisfied with the opening pair and there is no need for a change.'

'Every individual has some role to play in the team and they are up to it. I am happy to play the role of a floater in the batting order.'

Talking about his century at Nagpur, Dhoni said it was special because of the way he and Gautam Gambhir batted.

'We did so much of running. We were converting the singles into twos. We kept the run rate going over six runs per over without taking any risk.'

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