

India eyeing top spot in Tests at the historic Brabourne

India will return to the historic Brabourne Stadium Wednesday for their first Test here in 36 years, aiming to beat Sri Lanka in the third and the final match and top the Championship table.

After their massive win by an innings and 144 runs at Kanpur, India lead the series 1-0 and if they manage to wrap up the three-match series 2-0, they will pip South Africa for the top spot.

On the eve of the Test, India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni said the team was not reading much into the rankings because that would add to the pressure.

Dhoni, however, expects a repeat of the Kanpur show from his boys so that the team can end the year on a high. The batsmen completely dominated the second Test, and Shanthakumaran Sreesanth's successful comeback was the lone bright spot for the fast bowlers. But at Brabourne, the spotlight could be on the speedsters, who are expected to get assistance from the wicket.

The track, which looks like having disconcerting bounce for the fast bowlers to make use of it, could give Sreesanth the extra edge to test Sri Lankan batsmen. The Kerala paceman ripped apart the visitors' top-order with a five-wicket haul at Kanpur and would be looking for another such performance to cement his place in the team, and also to make his way into the One-day side.

The fast bowler had a minor injury scare but will join forces with spearhead Zaheer Khan to form the potent bowling combination.

Sri Lankan fast bowlers have showed they can cause some serious problems for the Indian batsmen. In the first Test in Ahmedabad, they reduced the famed Indian batting line-up to 32 for four before Rahul Dravid and skipper Dhoni hit centuries to save the hosts.

Indian batsmen, however, learnt their lessons and since then have put up a dominating display. They will retain the winning combination except one change -- opener Murali Vijay coming in place of Gautam Gambhir, who has sought leave to attend his sister's wedding.

India will certainly miss Gambhir, who hit centuries in both Tests.

The task is cut out for Vijay. He has to hold one end and allow Virender Sehwag to score freely.

After the drubbing at Kanpur, things are not looking bright in the Sri Lankan camp. Slump in form has forced spin wizard Muttiah Muralitharan to contemplate retirement. The 37-year-old Muralitharan would like to leave an impression in what will be his last Test in India.

But it is the Sri Lankan batting that doesn't look like a collective force. The visitors were twice bowled out at Kanpur, though Thilan Samaraweera's unbeaten 78 on the fourth day showed that the wicket was not playing tricks.

Sri Lanka came to India looking for their maiden Test win on Indian soil, but now face a different situation. It is time for the visitors to re-draw their strategy and avoid a 2-0 loss.

India played their last Test at Cricket Club of India in 1973 against England. Overall in 17 matches

at Brabourne, India have won six, lost six and drawn 11.

Teams:

India: Murali Vijay, Virender Sehwag, Rahul Dravid, Sachin Tendulkar, V.V.S. Laxman, Yuvraj Singh, Mahendra Singh Dhoni (captain/wicketkeeper), Harbhajan Singh, Zaheer Khan, Sreesanth, Pragyan Ojha, Amit Mishra and Subramaniam Badrinath

Sri Lanka: Tharanga Paranavitana, Tillakaratne Dilshan, Kumar Sangakkara (captain), Mahela Jayawardene, Thilan Samaraweera, Angelo Mathews, Prasanna Jayawardene (wicketkeeper), Nuwan Kulasekara, Chanaka Welegedara, Muttiah Muralitharan, Rangana Herath, Thilina Kandamby and Kaushal Silva

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