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Mid Week ENTERTAINMENT

KRISTEN STEWART HAS CHOSEN
HER WEDDING OUTFIT | 15



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WHO IS SAMANTHA LOCKWOOD? THE HOLLYWOOD STAR RUMOURED TO BE DATING SALMAN KHAN



SAMANTHA LOCKWOOD HAS BEEN IN THE NEWS EVER SINCE PHOTOS OF HER CELEBRATING SALMAN KHAN'S 56TH BIRTHDAY SURFACED ON THE INTERNET.

American actress Samantha Lockwood of 'Shoot The Hero' and 'Hawaii Five-0' fame, recently became the talk of the town after reports of her dating Bollywood superstar Salman Khan emerged in the media. The actress was recently snapped attending the superstar's 56th birthday bash in Alibaug and as soon as pictures of the two made their way to social media, rumours mills were abuzz with news of the two dating each other. However, Samantha dismissed all such reports and said in a recent interview with Bollywood Hungama that the news had been spun out of proportion and there was absolutely nothing between the two.

HRITHIK ROSHAN GOES FIERCE, INTENSE IN FIRST LOOK OF 'VIKRAM VEDHA'



MUMBAI, (IANS) On his 48th birthday on Monday, Bollywood star Hrithik Roshan treated his fans with his first look as Vedha from the upcoming film 'Vikram Vedha'. Hrithik took to Instagram, where he unveiled his look. Covered in blood, the actor is seen sporting a rugged yet intense look as he sports a heavy beard and mustache. The star completed his look with sunglasses and staring at the camera lens. "VEDHA. #vikramvedha," he wrote as the caption for the image, which currently has 882K likes on the photo-sharing website. The film stars Hrithik and Saif Ali Khan in lead roles, with Radhika Apte in a crucial role. Pushkar and Gayatri, the original writers and directors, are donning the director's hats for the Hindi remake as well. A cult film in its own right 'Vikram Vedha' is a neo-noir action crime thriller film. Based on the Indian meta-folk tale 'Vikram aur Betaal', the film tells the story of a tough police officer who sets out to track down and kill an equally tough gangster. This original Tamil blockbuster starred R. Madhavan and Vijay Sethupathi.

'BAJRANGI BHAJJAAN' FAME HARSHAALI MALHOTRA DEDICATES HER BHARAT RATNA DR AMBEDKAR AWARD TO SALMAN KHAN



Harshaali Malhotra, who appeared as Munni in Kabir Khan's film 'Bajrangi Bhaijaan', has received the prestigious Bharat Ratna Dr Ambedkar Award. He took to Instagram and shared this news with her fans. Sharing the photo while receiving the award, Harshaali wrote, "Blessed to receive Bharat Ratna Dr Ambedkar award from Shri Bhagat Singh Koshyari (Governor of Maharashtra)." She can be seen wearing a white and pink lehenga in the photo. Her fans are extremely happy to see her receiving the award. One of them wrote, "Congrats girl GOD bless you to be happy and successful always," while another mentioned, "Congratulations Sister. You deserve it. Many More to come. God bless." The third one commented, "Congratulation feeling proud for you keep going fast god bless you." She also dedicated the award to director Kabir Khan and Salman Khan who was the lead actor in the film. She wrote, "This award is dedicated to @beingsalmankhan @kabirkhankk @castingchabra uncle for believing in me... And for full @Bajrangibhaijaan team. Bharat Ratna Dr. Ambedkar national award from shri Bhagat Singh Koshyari (Governor of Maharashtra)."

ANALYSIS: POSTPONEMENT OF DOMESTIC TOURNAMENTS THROWS CAREERS AND LIVELIHOOD IN LIMBO



NEW DELHI, (IANS) The postponement of several tournaments -- Ranji Trophy, Col CK Nayudu Trophy, and senior women's T20 League for the 2021/22 season due to raging COVID-19, has put a question mark on the future and livelihood of hundreds of domestic Indian cricketers who are already suffering financially since the pandemic began. The Ranji Trophy was supposed to be held for the first time in two seasons, following its cancellation for the first time in its 85-year history in 2020/21 also due to the pandemic. The men's domestic first-class competition was scheduled to start on January 13 at multiple venues across six cities -- Mumbai, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Thiruvananthapuram and Chennai.

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'KATVIC' COMPLETE ONE MONTH OF MARITAL BLISS



CELEBRITY COUPLE KATRINA KAIF AND VICKY KAUSHAL, WHO TOOK THEIR WEDDING VOWS LAST MONTH, CELEBRATED THEIR FIRST MONTH ANNIVERSARY ON SUNDAY.

ALIA BHATT 'FLEXES' BEAU RANBIR KAPOOR'S PHOTOGRAPHY SKILLS



ALIA AND RANBIR HAD JETTED OFF TO AN UNDISCLOSED LOCATION TO RING IN THE NEW YEAR AMID THE WILDERNESS.

VAANI KAPOOR: NEVER CHOSEN FILMS THINKING I'LL WIN AWARDS FOR THEM



SHE SAID THAT IF PEOPLE HAVE LOVED MY PERFORMANCE IT'S BECAUSE THE CHARACTER WAS WRITTEN SO "BEAUTIFULLY AND WITH SO MUCH DIGNITY."

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CLOSE-IN: CRICKET TEST CAPTAINCY IS A DYING ART



CAPTAINING ONE'S COUNTRY SIDE IS AN HONOUR THAT EVERY CRICKETER DREAMS OF. THE INJURIES TO VIRAT KOHLI AND EARLIER TO ROHIT SHARMA HAVE GIVEN KL RAHUL THE GOLDEN MOMENT TO BECOME ONE.

SA V IND: WHY INDIA LOST THE JOHANNESBURG TEST



WINNING TWICE AND DRAWING THRICE. BUT WITHIN FOUR DAYS, SOUTH AFRICA HANDED THEM A SEVEN-WICKET LOSS, THEIR FIRST-EVER DEFEAT AT THE WANDERERS.

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'KATVIC' COMPLETE ONE MONTH OF MARITAL BLISS

MUMBAI, (IANS) Celebrity couple Katrina Kaif and Vicky Kaushal, who took their wedding vows last month, celebrated their first month anniversary on Sunday. Katrina took to her Instagram and posted a picture tagging and hugging Vicky while the two smiled for the camera. The actress wrote in the caption, "Happpppyyyy one month my (love)". The couple's close friend Neha Dhupia wrote in the comments, "Happy happyhappy our gorgeous couple we love you."

Vicky and Katrina got married on December 9, in an intimate ceremony after 3 days of wedding festivities at the Six Senses Fort Barwara Hotel. The much hyped wedding was attended by 120 guests amid tight security. The celebrity couple shifted to their new apartment in Mumbai's Juhu area where Virat Kohli and Anushka Sharma are their neighbours. Earlier, Katrina shared a picture of herself flaunting her diamond-studded 'mangalsutra'.

VAANI KAPOOR: NEVER CHOSEN FILMS THINKING I'LL WIN AWARDS FOR THEM

MUMBAI, (IANS) Actress Vaani Kapoor, who will be next seen in 'Shamshera', says she never chooses films thinking that she would win awards for them, but picks them from her heart. Vaani says: "I have never chosen films thinking I will win awards for them. I have always chosen projects from my heart and that's why I'm fortunate that I have films like 'Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui' in my filmography. "It is rare to find a project that can consume you, make you dissolve yourself on screen to become someone like Maanvi. Maanvi is an idea and an ideal for the world and I'm blessed that I got to play this character with all my heart and soul." She said that if people have loved my performance it's because the character was written so "beautifully and with so much dignity." The actress added: "If I were to win awards, I would dedicate them to the transgender community in India because we wanted to speak about inclusivity. If the film wins or my performance wins, it will show people that mainstream media is embracing this thought of much-needed change. "Mainstream media has the power to change societies, make it evolve, and become better. But again, we didn't make the film keeping awards in mind. It was made from the purest place in Abhishek Kapoor's heart. He wanted us to open our minds." She added: "We made the film to seed a thought about changing oneself, one's beliefs and ideas about how society is and how society should be for the future generations."



Ranveer Singh says he's duty-bound to entertain people



MUMBAI, (IANS) Ranveer Singh, who was most recently seen in sports drama '83', considers it his duty to use his craft for entertaining people and telling stories in the most engaging way. The actor is glad that the profession of acting allows him to explore the human being in him as well. Ranveer says, "I am really just in the process of exploring myself as a person. To do different characters and present different films that we as people can be proud of, I feel duty-bound to entertain people." Reflecting up on his journey, he says, "It's been an amazing 10 years. I have worked with the finest filmmakers who have shaped me, taught me what it means to be an artiste. I have learnt so much but I feel hungry. My hunger is insatiable, I want to do more films like '83' that receive this kind of unanimous love." The actor wishes to traverse the path of experimentation in his next decade in cinema, "I intend to continue on this path and continue to explore. I am living the dream. I wake up in disbelief everyday till date that I am an actor. I still can't get over it and I am grateful for the opportunities. I say a prayer of gratitude everyday, I recognise and value my opportunities and got to play Kapil Dev in the definitive movie like '83'. It blows my mind." Recollecting the memories of '83' screening, the superstar adds, "I cannot tell you how fulfilling it was to be in the screening of '83'. You see people laughing, crying, standing up to applaud and they are feeling this emotion together in a community viewing. They have shared an experience together and that is life. Life is a shared experience and that's what I want to continue to do."

KRITI SANON TO HAVE FIVE RELEASES IN 2022

MUMBAI, (IANS) Kriti Sanon, will be seen in five films in 2022 all of which belong to different genres thereby allowing her to push the boundaries with her work. She credits her last year's release 'Mimi' for giving her the strength to take on more risks. Reflecting on the year gone by, Kriti says, "2021 was an amazing year professionally. The kind of love that 'Mimi' got has been extremely overwhelming and has not only made me more confident as an actor to take risks but has also made me hungrier to push the envelope further". Looking forward to having more experimenting roles in the coming year, the actress shares, "What excites me more is the fact that all these projects belong to completely different genres and worlds. So there's a lot to look forward to in 2022!" Next on the cards for the actress are several big-ticket releases like 'Adipurush' with Prabhas, 'Bachchan Pandey' with Akshay Kumar, 'Ganapathi' with Tiger Shroff, 'Bhediya' with Varun Dhawan and 'Shehzada' with Kartik Aaryan.

OMICRON SHADOW OVER GRAMMYS: SHOW POSTPONED

LOS ANGELES, (IANS) The Grammy Awards have been postponed due to coronavirus-related concerns, an Academy spokesperson has confirmed to 'Variety'. No new date has been confirmed as of yet. The 2022 show, scheduled for January 31, had been moving full speed ahead before a full audience at its traditional venue, the Crypto.com Arena (formerly known as the Staples Center) in downtown Los Angeles, but the recent Covid-19 surge has caused the postponement or cancellation of multiple events across the country. Sources have told 'Variety' that even though the Crypto.com Arena has a basketball or hockey game or a concert booked nearly every night until mid-April, a number of artistes and executives are said to have reservations about appearing in person. This is what has led to the postponement of the music world's most important show. The Recording Academy and its television partner, CBS, said in a joint statement: "Given the uncertainty surrounding the Omicron variant, holding the show on January 31 simply contains too many risks. We look forward to celebrating Music's Biggest Night on a future date, which will be announced soon."

AYUSHMANN REFLECTS ON MESSAGE OF INCLUSIVITY IN 'CHANDIGARH KARE ASHIQUI'

MUMBAI, (IANS) Actor Ayushmann Khurrana has shared that the intention behind making 'Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui' was to talk about the concept of gender inclusivity. The film, which was released on OTT after a successful theatrical run recently, became the most streamed content within 24 hours of its digital release. Commenting on the same, the actor said, "We wanted to talk about the need for gender inclusivity and for that to happen, it was important that a critical number of people saw and engaged with the film." He further said, "From the get go, we wanted to make a film that touches as many people as possible. It is really heart-warming to see that 'Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui' became the number one streamed content within 24 hours of its drop." He added, "'Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui' has been made with a lot of love, soul and heart. The fact that it is entertaining so many people and delivering an important, positive message for social good is really, really humbling." 'Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui', directed by Abhishek Kapoor, which also stars Vaani Kapoor, touches upon the subject of transgender inclusivity and has received a positive response from the audience.



PLAYING THE GAME: RANVEER SINGH SHARES QUIRKY DIGITAL ART



MUMBAI, (IANS) Bollywood star Ranveer Singh, who recently portrayed cricket icon Kapil Dev in the Kabir Khan directorial '83', shared a digital art on his social media. The caricature is designed by renowned artiste, Graphicurrry's Prasad Bhat, who's a regular at Mumbai's Kala Ghoda Festival. Ranveer took to his Instagram to share the art, which blends together the essence of Kapil Dev, Ranveer himself and 'Bohemian Rhapsody' hitmaker Freddie Mercury. Ranveer captioned the picture, "Ranveer x Kapil x Freddie". '83', which was released on December 24 suffered a major jolt with the pandemic returning for a third wave. Several states updated their safety guidelines limiting the occupancy in theatres with national capital Delhi completely shutting cinema halls in order to curb the spread of the contagion. The film, which was touted to be one of the biggest hits suffered invariably because of the social and medical condition of the society, at large, grossing only Rs 97 crore across India, in all languages.

VICKY KAUSHAL REQUESTS AANAND L. RAI TO CAST HIM IN DIRECTOR'S NEXT FILM



MUMBAI, (IANS) Bollywood actor Vicky Kaushal, whose wedding with Katrina Kaif was the centre of attention recently, has made a public appeal to Aanand L. Rai for casting him in the director's next venture. Vicky took to his Instagram story and posted the poster of Rai's recent directorial, 'Atrangi Re' starring Sara Ali Khan, Dhanush and Akshay Kumar. Mightily impressed with the film, the 'Masaan' actor wrote on the picture, "Kitnipyaari Film hai... mazaa aa gaya! @saraalikhani95 such a difficult role to play and how wonderfully you have surrendered yourself to it." He added, "@dhanushkraj absolutely genius. @akshaykumar Garda udadiye! @aanandlrai Cast me in your next Film Sir, please!" 'Atrangi Re' took the direct-to-digital route as it released to a positive response on Disney+ Hotstar. As for Vicky, the actor will have three releases this year including 'GovindaNaam Mera', 'The Great Indian Family' and 'Mimi' director Laxman Utekar's next untitled film.

KRISTEN STEWART HAS CHOSEN HER WEDDING OUTFIT

LOS ANGELES, (IANS) Actress Kristen Stewart got engaged to her girlfriend Dylan Meyer in November after two years together and although she is unsure how many "traditions" they will follow on their big day, she's already chosen her clothes but wants to keep the details a surprise. She told 'Entertainment Tonight': "You're supposed to, I mean, I guess traditionally speaking and in this case, I mean, who knows how many ... I don't even know detail-wise, I don't know how many traditions we're going to follow. "But I know what I'm gonna wear, and I can't tell you. Like, the whole thing, we kind of have to do the surprise thing." Stewart said portraying Princess Diana in 'Spencer' was "such a trip" and a very unique role because there are so few people like the late royal, reports femalefirst.co.uk. She said: "The most resounding takeaway that I have from making this movie was probably how big and how small I felt as her. I've never felt so big and so small at the same time. "And I don't know, just to sort of be aware of there are certain impactful and, you know, touching people that exist and they're sort of lightning in a bottle, one-in-a-million special, but their inner lives are maybe not sometimes what it feels like for everyone outside, do you know what I mean?"





ALIA BHATT 'FLEXES' BEAU RANBIR KAPOOR'S PHOTOGRAPHY SKILLS

MUMBAI, (IANS) Bollywood actress Alia Bhatt recently uploaded pictures clicked by her partner Ranbir Kapoor on social media. It is the first time that the actress publicly addressed Ranbir as her 'boyfriend'. Alia took to Instagram and shared a few pictures of herself from her year-end vacation with Ranbir at an undisclosed location. She wrote in the caption, "Casually flexing my boyfriend's photography skills." While Ranbir's mother Neetu Kapoor and Alia's mom Soni Razdan commented with heart emojis under the pictures, Alia's 'Two States' co-

star Arjun Kapoor put up a quirky comment saying, "#phirseuddchale". Alia and Ranbir had jetted off to an undisclosed location to ring in the New Year amid the wilderness. In an earlier set of pictures shared by Alia on her Instagram, Ranbir too made an appearance in one of the images. On the work front, Alia was supposed to be seen in S.S. Rajamouli's magnum opus 'RRR' alongside Telugu superstars Ram Charan and Jr NTR. However, the third wave of the pandemic has pushed the release of the film to a later, unannounced date.

Dharmendra unveils 2022 Dadasaheb Phalke film fest and awards

MUMBAI, (IANS) Veteran Bollywood star and former MP Dharmendra took to his Instagram handle on Thursday to share the reel unveiling the invitation to the Dadasaheb Phalke International Film Festival Awards 2022. In his caption, Dharmendra wrote: "Friends, with love to you all, I'm delighted to unveil the mesmerising invitation to India's most prestigious awards ceremony, Dadasaheb Phalke International Film Festival Awards 2022, in affiliation with Incredible India and Zee5." Outlining the history and relevance of the event, which will be held in Mumbai on February 20, Dharmendra said the Dadasaheb Phalke International Film Festival (DPIFF) was first held in 2012 and had been "applauded" by the Prime Minister's Office and the ministries of Culture and Tourism. He pointed out that the festival and awards carry forward the legacy of Dhundiraj Govind Phalke, "lovingly known as Dadasaheb Phalke, the Father of Indian Cinema". He concluded by claiming that it was India's "only independent international film festival, with a mission to celebrate three broad segments of cinema and the work of aspiring, young, independent and professional filmmakers". The event will be streamed live on ZEE5 on February 20 from 7 p.m. onwards.



2022 Sundance Film Festival will be a virtual event because of Omicron

LOS ANGELES, (IANS) The Sundance Film Festival, scheduled to take place at Park City, Utah, from January 20 to 30, has scrapped its plans for an in-person gathering for 2022. It will now be presented as an exclusively virtual event because of the Omicron surge. "Despite the most ambitious protocols, the Omicron variant with its unexpectedly high transmissibility rates is pushing the limits of health safety, travel and other infrastructures across the country," 'Variety' quoted from a statement issued by the organisers. The statement noted: "The festival's in-person Utah elements will be moving online this year. While we're disappointed to not provide the full hybrid experience and gather in-person as intended, audiences this year will still experience the magic and energy of our festival." Sundance had held a virtual edition in 2021 and offered select physical screenings in markets across the US. This year, according to 'Variety', Sundance organisers were hopeful that the festival could proceed in person, given that movie theatres across the United States have not yet closed because of the Omicron variant -- and 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' continues to drive the public to the cineplex in record pandemic numbers.

Anushka Sharma-starrer 'Chakda Xpress' on Jhulan Goswami to release on Netflix

MUMBAI, (IANS) Bollywood actress Anushka Sharma is all set to make her comeback after three years with the film 'Chakda Xpress' based on the life of female Indian cricketer Jhulan Goswami. The movie will have an OTT release on Netflix. Anushka calls 'Chakda Xpress' a really special film because it "is essentially a story of tremendous sacrifice." "Chakda Xpress is inspired by the life and times of former Indian captain Jhulan Goswami and it will be an eye-opener into the world of women's cricket. At a time when Jhulan decided to become a cricketer and make her country proud on the global stage, it was very tough for women to even think of playing the sport," she said. Anushka shared that the film is a dramatic retelling of several instances that shaped her life and also women's cricket. "From support systems, to facilities, to having a stable income from playing the game, to even having a future in cricket - very little propelled women of India to take up cricket as a profession. Jhulan had a fighting and extremely uncertain cricketing career and she stayed motivated to make her country proud. She strived to change the stereotype that women can't make a career out of playing cricket in India so that the next generation of girls had a better playing field." Anushka added that Jhulan's life is a living testimony that passion and perseverance triumphs over any or all adversities and 'Chakda Xpress' is the most definitive look into the not so rosy world of women's cricket back then. "As a woman, I was proud to hear Jhulan's story and it is an honour for me to try and bring her life to audiences and cricket lovers. As a cricketing nation, we have to give our women cricketers their due."

JIMMY SHEIRGILL PUTS RUMOURS ABOUT HIS TELEVISION DEBUT TO REST



MUMBAI, (IANS) Actor Jimmy Sheirgill opens up about the reports going around about his television debut and says it is too early to reveal anything as nothing has been finalised from his end. As per sources, 'Udaariyaan' producers, Sargun Mehta and Ravi Dubey are all set to come up with a new show, titled 'Swaran Mandir', which is going to be a family drama. It is about a couple who are abandoned by their young children at an old age. The makers have approached well known actor Aman Verma and later Jimmy for the show to play a lead role. But Jimmy has not signed any contract, and neither Aman said 'yes' for the show. Jimmy told IANS that Sargun and Ravi just narrated the idea. "I have done a Punjabi film, 'Jindua' many years back with Sargun, so I know both of them for quite a long time. They narrated an idea to me but beyond that no contract has been signed yet. This is too early to say anything as things have not moved ahead. I don't know how this news came out. In fact, I am also shocked that without any confirmation, these reports are going around," he says. On his interest in doing television shows, the actor adds: "I have been occupied with movies and web shows like 'Your Honor', so doing a television serial that too if it continues for years is not possible. Of course, if something interesting comes for a short span of time, I can think of being part of it." Jimmy started his career with the movie, 'Maachis' and later did movies such as 'Mohabbatein', 'A Mere Yaar Ki Shaadi Hai', 'Munna Bhai M.B.B.S.' and also ventured in web shows among which recent one is 'Your Honor'.

APARSHAKTI KHURRANA TO PLAY LEAD IN ATUL SABHARWAL'S 'BERLIN'



MUMBAI, (IANS) Bollywood actor Aparshakti Khurrana will start 2022 with Atul Sabharwal's next film, 'Berlin', a gripping suspense thriller where he will star as the lead. This will be the actor's second outing in the genre after 'Dokha Round D Corner', and the film will go on floors this month and will be shot across Delhi, Agra and Bhopal, the key cities in the Hindi belt. Aparshakti said: "I can't wait to get on the sets for this one. "2021 for me has been full of surprises, with starting my journey of playing the lead role on a positive note, I also got the opportunity to explore different, more serious genres - which is something I have wanted to do since day one, and who better than Atul Sabharwal could have helped me get there?" Heaping praises on his director, Aparshakti recollects Atul's past projects. "I have followed Atul Sir's work very closely and I can undoubtedly vouch for his craft, especially when it comes to storytelling in this tricky genre. I still remember how mind-blowing and ahead of its time 'My Wife's Murder' was. "Totally loved 'Powder' starring Pankaj Tripathi and his last work of 'Class of 83' shows how fine he is with his craft. He beautifully captures the nuances required for this genre and I am more than excited to have him helm this project for me," he concluded.

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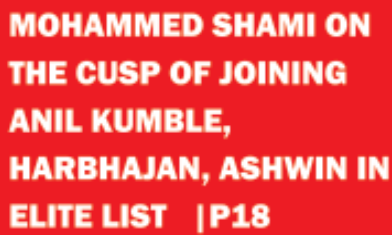
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'DON'T THINK I HAVE ANYTHING TO PROVE': VIRAT KOHLI OPENS UP ON HIS BARREN SPELL | P18



Mid Week *Sports*

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"This is not the first time that people have talked about my form, it has happened a few times in my career. England in 2014 was one of those phases. I do not kind of look at myself from the lens the outside world looks at me with," said Kohli addressing the virtual press conference. The Delhi-born cricketer added he does not judge himself according to numbers, because then a person will never be content. He said, "If all the times you look at yourself and judge yourself on the basis of numbers, I do not think you will ever be content with what you are doing." Kohli also stated that he doesn't think he has anything to prove to anyone, but that being said, he still hopes to have an impact in the upcoming games. "I have nothing else to worry about but the reality of the situation is that you want to have an impact on the side. I do not think I have anything to prove to anyone," he said.

Former Indian spinner Harbhajan Singh who recently announced his retirement from all formats of cricket has suggested that Team India should play the series decider against South Africa with two spinners. In the past two matches, India played with five bowlers, but only Ravichandran Ashwin was the registered spinner in the team. Mohammed Shami, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj and Shardul Thakur were all pacers and Harbhajan feels playing two spinners might just be the x-factor that could help India defeat the Proteas and thereby win the series. So far, spinners of both sets of teams haven't had much success on South African tracks, Ravichandran Ashwin picked up just 1 solitary wicket in the second Test, while Proteas pacer Keshav Maharaj didn't register a single scalp in the ongoing Test series. Harbhajan Singh however feels the story could be a little different in the third Test. Speaking on his youtube channel, the 'Turbanator' revealed how the pitch in Cape Town is different from the previous two pitches at Centurion and Johannesburg.

Indian pacer Mohammed Shami, who recently completed 200 Test wickets of his career is nearing yet another personal milestone. Shami, who alongside Jasprit Bumrah wreaked havoc in the first Test, became the 11th Indian bowler to surpass the mark of 200 Test wickets. Shami will have a chance to write his name in the history books yet again in the Third Test match versus South Africa in Newlands, Cape Town. The 31-year-old needs to pick up five more wickets to join the likes of Anil Kumble, Javagal Srinath, Harbhajan Singh, and Ravichandran Ashwin in an elite list of bowlers. Mohammed Shami has so far amassed 45 Test wickets against South Africa in 20 appearances and will need five more wickets to surpass the figure of 50 Test wickets against the Proteas. The Indian speedster will thus be able to join the legendary bowlers like Anil Kumble, Javagal Srinath etc on an elusive list.

Former Indian opener Wasim Jaffer, renowned for his hilarious memes on social media, opined that he was 'surprised' to see KL Rahul walking out to captain team India in the second Test versus South Africa. Rahul was handed the captaincy after Virat Kohli suffered an upper back spasm and was subsequently ruled out of the second Test. Jaffer though felt that the management made the wrong choice, as instead of KL Rahul they've should let Ajinkya Rahane captain the team, owing to his unbeaten record as the skipper in the purest format. Speaking to InsideSport, Jaffer said, "I was surprised by the management's decision. When you have someone as good as Ajinkya Rahane available who has not lost any Test as a captain and won you a Test series in Australia, do you need to give the Test captaincy to KL Rahul?" He further continued, "I have nothing against KL Rahul. He is young and has captained the Punjab Kings. People are thinking about him as a future captain. But I think Rahane should have led the side in Kohli's absence." Wasim Jaffer also added that Virat Kohli was sorely missed by the team, as they went down by seven wickets in the second Test. "India definitely missed Virat Kohli, the captain, because he brings so much aggression to the field. So, they missed that energy," stated Jaffer.

KL Rahul was the prime example of making it big and playing a huge role in India winning the first Test with 123 in the first innings. In the second Test, Rahul reached half-century but got out at the half-way mark. In contrast, Dean Elgar, the South Africa captain, was rock-solid and battled hard to hang around to ensure victory for his team.

Perhaps, not having the services of Kohli the captain did hurt India. With Kohli being ruled out before the start of second Test, KL Rahul didn't have much time to think of plans as the stand-in skipper. Kohli was a fiery captain and used to inspire the team to do well on the field, which had an effect on tight victories in Johannesburg 2018 and Lord's 2021. But with no Kohli here, India missed his in-your-face attitude and ability to fire up things with his intensity. In the second innings, Rahul brought in Thakur, someone who could swing the ball, nine overs late. There, India missed a trick as the swing bowler could have made use of moisture on pitch and overcast conditions. His field placings left a lot to be desired as South Africa picked up runs easily.

3RD QOI



CLOSE-IN: CRICKET TEST CAPTAINCY IS A DYING ART

BY YAJURVINDRA SINGH

Captaining ones country side is an honour that every cricketer dreams of. The injuries to Virat Kohli and earlier to Rohit Sharma have given KL Rahul the golden moment to become one. He became the 36th Indian Test captain and his name has now been etched in the history of Indian cricket, forever. In the elite list of Indian captains, there are many who have had a short stint, some have been successful and some not. The pressure of leading ones country is enormous. As much as one may say that the captain is as good as his team, the onus and responsibility solely seems to fall, especially in defeat, on the one who is the leader. In the earlier days, when the coach was just looked at as a manager and the captain controlled every cricketing aspect of the game, captaincy was another ball game.

The final playing eleven, the batting order and even the field placement was the domain of the one at the helm. There were some extraordinary leaders who in the days of no video analysis could detect weaknesses and plan strategies on the spot. This was then a mandatory requirement of a captain as every other member of the side looked up to them. Captaining a side in the present days has become a completely different kettle of fish. The captains, from several recent press reports, seem to indicate that they have very little say in choosing the touring side. Apart from that, a captain has a professional coach and a team of support staff, each a specialist in their domain to listen to. The plans and strategies are now worked out more in the conference rooms rather than on the playing field. One truly feels sorry for the modern-day captain whose main importance seems to come from the off-the-field commercial activities. One wonders as to how the likes of Tiger Pataudi, Chandu Borde, AjitWadekar, Bishan Bedi, S. Venkataraghavan, Sunil Gavaskar and many such brilliant Indian cricket captains would have stood up to the way a modern captain is perceived. All of them had an astute cricket mind and were ready to discuss and debate. However, once on the field they were the whole and sole of every movement that took place there. Leadership

cannot be assessed by how many matches one has won or lost or led. One needs to assess every parameter of a side to understand it. Believe me, it is not a simple case of addition or subtraction. Watching Test cricket captaincy in the present times seems like a standard pattern being followed. There is very little thought process and innovation that one comes across. Most of the teams come to the field with a concrete plan, which when it goes awry, completely disintegrates. The captain looks as much at sea as the players around him. The present digital and multimedia influences and intensive analysis by one and all has made the captains' job unpardonable in defeat and so, rather than thinking out of the box, one becomes defensive in ones' approach. The most effective influence that has brought the downfall in the art of Test cricket captaincy has been the advent of limited-overs cricket. One does not have to take 20 wickets to win a match. The bowling and field restrictions has initiated a standard format of how to captain a side. In the limited-overs version, one does not need to plan a downfall of a batsman but restrict one in every respect. The result of this has impacted Test cricket immensely. The short format of the game may be of great interest to millions who want excitement and a definite result. One understands this in the fast-moving world that we all live in at present. However, the skill and art of patiently demolishing a bowling attack or getting a batsman out needs time. This is where captains in the modern times are failing, as batters need to be thought out and bowlers need to be used vigorously, to get teams out. This new concept of giving bowlers a four-over spell or batters the luxury of playing in their own way is quite ridiculous. When one went into the field as a captain, the only thought process was to get the opponents out as quickly as possible. One never thought of preserving bowlers for later or for the next match or series. In the late 70s and 80s, Kapil Dev was India's only destructive fast bowler. The team depended on him in foreign conditions to get wickets. He bowled his heart out whenever called for and when on a song, to get the ball out of his hand, was impossible even though it led to his exhaustion.

ANALYSIS: POSTPONEMENT OF DOMESTIC TOURNAMENTS THROWS CAREERS AND LIVELIHOOD IN LIMBO

CONTD. FROM PAGE 1

But, last week, it emerged that six Bengal players and their assistant coach had tested positive for COVID-19. Mumbai all-rounder Shivam Dube and the team's video analyst had also tested positive prior to the team's departure for Kolkata, to add further doubt on the tournament's immediate future and ultimately it was postponed, keeping in mind the safety of the players, support staff, match officials, and other participants involved.

What may seem a fair call given that there are 38 teams that take part in the Ranji Trophy and creating a bio-security bubble for almost two months and other logistical issues would have been a nightmare for BCCI, the grind of domestic cricketers continues.

Remember, not every player has a job in some government organisation, an IPL contract, or a supportive parent or spouse to help them see through the lean financial phase. Domestic cricket is their bread and butter and the cruel pandemic has snatched that right from them as well.

Yes, the Indian cricket board had earlier announced a significant increase in match fees for domestic players regarding their payments for 2021/22. But the financial uncertainty brought by the pandemic once again reminds about the lack of central contracts for players as well as stakeholders in the game.

Notably, the BCCI offers annual contracts to national team players who are graded on the basis of their performance over a 12-month period. The need of the hour is to do the same for domestic cricketers, umpires and others and it will be a challenging task. But if any cricket board in the world can do it, then it's the BCCI -- the richest cricket board. Even BCCI president Sourav Ganguly at the time of starting his tenure had suggested that a 'contract system' will be formulated for India's first-class cricketers.

"We will bring in a contract system for first-class cricketers. We (office-bearers) will ask the new finance (sub) committee to prepare a contract system," Ganguly had said.

The postponement of the Ranji Trophy has put the premier first-class tournament in a tricky situation because its final was scheduled for March 16 to 20 and the IPL usually starts by the first week of April. Postponing the Ranji Trophy by 15 or 20 days could further cripple the first-class tournament, whenever it takes off as there is already a significant reduction in the number of matches.

In 2019/20, for example, each side played eight group matches in the Ranji Trophy followed by three knockout games (if they made the final). This time around, teams will play just five group matches, which also reduces the net increase in pay.

And it is not only about the financial sufferings, the players are also missing on showcasing their talent as well. More often IPL scouts keep a close eye on these domestic matches, call players for trials and, if they get impressed, cricketers get hefty deals in auction of the cash-rich league.

Last week, the board had also postponed the Under-16 Vijay Merchant Trophy following the fresh surge of COVID-19 cases and the growing threat of the Omicron variant. COVID-19 cases have been multiplying in India in recent weeks with several states announcing night, and weekend curfews, amid other forms of restrictions and these are definitely not a good sign for Indian domestic cricket.

THERE IS AND WILL ONLY BE ONE LEADER.



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