

Cricket

Follow The Yellow Brick Road



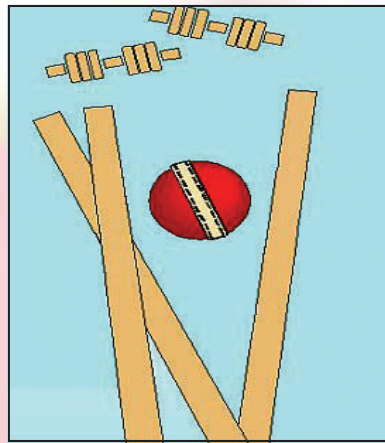
By: Javid Lateef

The series with the Pakistan team has just come to an end. Apart from the first test which was evenly contested, it's pretty much been a batting feast on flat, lifeless tracks. The sub-continent wickets seem to be getting worse with the passage of time, or maybe we just don't have great spinners like we did in yesteryears!!! The last two test matches between India and Pakistan meandered into meaningless draws with a little bit of excitement here and there. Ultimately, it will be a test series that is imminently forgettable.

The Indian team leaves for Oz in a week's time for what promises to be a great series; the might of the Indian batting vs. the Aussie seam and swing attack. Batting on Australian tracks is a challenge, as the seam and bounce will test the best of players. Indian batsmen are so used to playing on these docile Indian pitches where the initial front foot stride is almost second nature to most batsmen. Staying balanced in the crease and the ability to play off the back foot is the key to success in Australia. It will be interesting to see how the fab four (Sachin, Sourav, Laxman and Dravid) perform, on what is most certainly a swan song for all of them.

There is a selection headache for the BCCI. There are too many batsmen in form and only so many slots available. Yuvraj Singh, who is in the form of his life and striking the ball with ease and precision, just scored a magnificent century

against the Pakistani team. He may very well find himself on the bench for the test matches in Australia as there are no slots left in the middle order. Asking him to open the innings just to get him in the team would be a bad move, as the Indian man-



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agement has ruined a few careers by doing so. Should be interesting to see how the team management deals with this dilemma.

The Indian bowling is a serious source of concern

(when has it not been?). Sreesanth, the quickest and most volatile seamer to have played for India in the near past, is not available due to a shoulder injury. Zaheer Khan will be spearheading the bowling attack, and one hopes that the rest he has had will rejuvenate him and that he will be back at his sharpest best on the seaming Oz wickets. I am looking forward to seeing how RP Singh performs, as I believe he is a genuine wicket taking bowler. Ishant Sharma and Irfan Pathan round off the seam attack, and they both are quite handy bowlers.

Kumble and Harbhajan will lead the spin attack. The Indian captain should enjoy bowling on these tracks that will offer him a lot of pace and bounce.

Harbhajan has to refocus on being a test match bowler. Playing in all of these One Day Internationals has ruined that magnificent loop he had. He needs to start tossing up the ball a little more to entice the aggressive Aussie batsmen to commit errors. The fielding was a little shoddy in the series against Pakistan and the whole team needs to get their act together.

I will be waking up at the crack of dawn in India and armed with a plate of my Mom's idlis and dosas, I will be watching the Boxing Day test match. Signing off for now.

Happy New Year to all!

small hands

