

Cricket

When Politics Upstages Sports

By: Javid Lateef

It is the eve of the Pakistan/India ODI series and factors other than cricket have made their way into this great rivalry.

Political instability has led to the Pakistan nation going under a State of Emergency. This will obviously play a big part on the Pakistani players psyche as they go into this much anticipated series.

The Pakistan players are going through their regular pre game rituals and the manager has already issued a statement saying that politics has nothing to do with cricket and the Pakistan board has backed his statement up, stating that the series will go on.

Whatever is said and done, this period of anarchy and strife in Pakistan will affect the players and I believe that that they will either come together as a team or split at the seams.

The teams are well matched up, as far as I can see. The Pakistan seam attack will suffer from the loss of *Mohammed Asif*, a bowler who has had major success against India.

The return of *Shoaib Akhtar* will make for a great spectacle. In this sport that we love and adore, there are very few greater sights than seeing a genuine quick with a long run up, roaring up to the crease and unleashing balls at 90 mph. He is a trump card that Pakistan has, but I watched him during his comeback

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match against South Africa and I fear he is carrying too much weight. I predict he will breakdown before this series gets over.

Umar Gul and *Sohail Tanvir* are excellent seamers but are not going to threaten the Indian batsmen as much as *Asif* could have. *Afridi* is the spinner and *Shoaib Malik*, the skipper will chip in with a few overs.

The Indian batting, on a good day, will have the upper hand against this Pakistani bowling attack. I feel that once the Indian top order can survive the opening overs, it will be an uphill battle for the Pakistani team.

The Pakistani batting does not have that middle order presence that *Inzamam* provided. They will rely heavily on *Younus Khan* and *Mohammed*

Yousuf. Both are great players, but have a propensity to getting themselves run-out. *Shoaib Malik* has a great record against India, but is prone to rash stroke making, which leads to his downfall.

The bowling is going to be the key factor in this series. The final outcome of this series, the winner, will be the team that handles the bowling part of the equation the best.

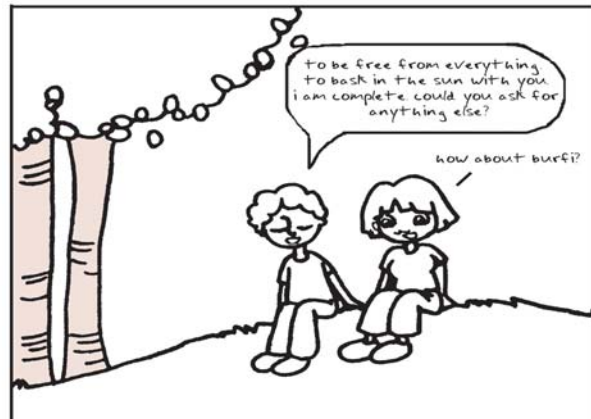
India has two excellent left arm seamers who will trouble the Pakistan bowlers. Pakistan has a great seam attack with *Akhtar*, *Gul* and *Tanvir* too. The Indian spin attack with *Harbhajan* and *Karthik* is superior on paper but we are looking at two sub-continent teams, to whom spin is not a big issue.

To sum it all up, I believe that the team that handles the big pressure occasions the best will win this series.

Time to buckle down and watch this unfold now. Signing off....*Chak De India*.



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