Countering dew: Kuldeep Yadav bowls with wet ball at nets

NEW DELHI, OCT 31 /--/ Anticipating that gripping the ball may prove to be a stiff challenge because of dew, chinaman bowler Kuldeep Yadav was seen practising with the wet ball on the eve of the Twenty20 series-opener against New Zealand. Dew has always been prevalent whenever Indian teams play at home from October to January. Any score becomes chase-able under lights during this time of the year as bowlers find it extremely difficult to grip the ball. During the optional net session in the afternoon, Kuldeep was seen soaking the white cherry in mineral water after every second delivery. The idea was conceived by bowling coach Bharat Arun, who was seen discussing the strategy with the chinaman bowler. India paceman Bhuvneshwar Kumar had also adopted the same strategy to prepare himself for death bowling in the past. Bowling with the wet ball will help Kuldeep learn to get more control as it turns into a slippery bar of soap after gripping. The wet ball also skids off the pitch making it easier for batsmen to score For a wrist spinner, the grip becomes all the more important as there are more chances of wet ball slipping out of the hand. Kuldeep primarily bowled to Dinesh Karthik at the nets but the batsman was seen negotiating the deliveries easily.

Pick and stick with Ashes 'keeper: Adam Gilchrist

SYDNEY, OCT 31 /--/ Wicketkeeping great Adam Gilchrist has called on Australian selectors to pick and stick when they decide who will be behind the stumps for the upcoming Ashes series.

Three players are seen as being in the mix to take the gloves -- and also provide middle-order batting stability -- ahead of the first Test against England in Brisbane on November 23. They include the current incumbent Matthew Wade, who has struggled with the bat, his predecessor Peter Nevill, who was axed 12 months ago, and the fast-improving Alex Carey. Whoever gets the nod should be given an extended run, said Gilchrist, who played 96 Tests, making more than 400 dismissals and scoring over 5,500 runs. "Whoever they pick, they just need to give them a good run at it," he told radio station SEN late Monday. "Say 'We've got to settle here now'. Like they've done with (Matthew) Renshaw at the top of the order. "He was untried and they threw him in there. He's had 10 or 11 Tests now." Gilchrist pointed to fellow wicketkeepers Ian Healy and Rod Marsh as players who repaid the faith of selectors by becoming greats of the game. He said there were arguments for all three players, but he believed South Australian Carey, 26, could be the surprise pick despite his lack of international experience.

Spotlight on Nehra, India look to turn tables in T20s vs NZ

NEW DELHI, OCT 31 /--/ Ashish Nehra running into bowl one last time at a place where it all began will form the sub plot as India aim to better their abysmal T20 record against New Zealand in the three-match series starting here tomorrow. The opening match at the Feroz Shah Kotla will be Nehra's last game in competitive cricket and India would look to bid a befitting farewell to the seamer, whose career has been characterised by many injuries and many comebacks. It is appropriate that the 38-year-old will be hanging up his boots in front of his home crowd and nothing would be sweeter than an Indian win against a team that has been their Achilles heel in this format. India have so far lost all their matches against New Zealand, the fifth and last one coming at the ICC World T20 in 2016. For a team that has stormed its way to the top of world cricket with wins over Australia, England and Sri Lanka, among others, this piece of statistic certainly sticks out like a sore thumb. That aside, India have been on a roll. With series wins over big teams like Australia, India have firmly stamped their supremacy in the limited-overs format. Having emerged a 2-1 winner in a keenly-contested preceding One-day International series against the same opponents, India's confidence is high and they would look to continue the good work in this slam-bang format. With a strong all-round and in-form team at their disposal, India will fancy their chances of improving their record against the Kiwis. Fresh from his fluent century in the series-deciding third and final ODI, which made him the fastest to complete 9000 runs, skipper Virat Kohli will be eyeing yet another series victory. He looked in great touch alongside Rohit Sharma, the game's other centurion, and the two batting stalwarts would eye an encore.

Besides the vice-captain and the captain, Shikhar Dhawan and Mahendra Singh Dhoni, who has a better record against the Kiwis among Indian players, will look to shoulder the batting responsibility. All-rounder Hardik Pandya adds to the team's strength and the New Zealanders would be wary of him. In bowling, India will look to Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Jasprit Bumrah for breakthroughs with the new ball as well as in the death overs. With his match-turning effort on Sunday, Bumrah showed why he is considered the best death bowler in the world. Though he went for 92 in his 10-over spell in Kanpur, Bhuvneshwar has normally been a bowler captain Kohli could turn to. Leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal will be high on confidence after his crucial two-wicket burst at Green Park and he is again going to be the key spinner. Kuldeep Yadav is the other spinner, who could figure in the playing XI. Then there is Nehra, who will bring to an end 18 years of international cricket journey, and he must be hoping for that perfect ending. Against the likes of Kane Williamson, Ross Taylor, Tom Latham, Trent Boult and Mitchell Santner, it will take some doing.

TEAMS (FROM):

India: Virat Kohli (capt), Rohit Sharma, Jasprit Bumrah, Yuzvendra Chahal, Shikhar Dhawan, Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Shreyas Iyer, Dinesh Karthik, Kuldeep Yadav, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Mohammed Siraj, Ashish Nehra (only for first game), Manish Pandey, Hardik Pandya, Axar Patel, KL Rahul

New Zealand: Kane Williamson(capt), Todd Astle, Trent Boult, Tom Bruce, Colin de Grandhomme, Martin Guptill, Matt Henry, Tom Latham, Henry Nicholls, Adam Milne, Colin Munro, Glenn Phillips, Mitchell Santner, Ish Sodhi, Tim Southee. (PTI)

Match starts at 7pm IST.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh, Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports (I/C) and Information & Broadcasting, Col. Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore waving participants during the flagging off of the Run For Unity, on the Rashtriya Ekta Diwas, at Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium, in New Delhi on Tuesday.

Munro describes Bhuvneshwar, Bumrah are best new ball bowlers

NEW DELHI, OCT 31 /--/ New Zealand's dashing batsman Colin Munro called the Indian pace duo of Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Jasprit Bumrah the "best" new ball bowlers in the sub-continental conditions. Munro was in a great form in the series-deciding third and final ODI against India, scoring a fluent half-century, but he is aware his aggressive approach would not always get him runs. "The big challenge for me was just actually finding a good tempo to bat at. I'd like to say that I want to go and blast off in the first 10 overs but it's not always going to be the case, especially when you are playing against Bhuvi and Bumrah, the two best opening bowlers in these conditions," Munro said on the eve of the first T20I against India. New Zealand lost the three-match ODI series against India 1-2 but will look to win the T20 series as they are the number one team in the world in this shortest format and have never lost a game against India earlier. New Zealand have a 100 percent record against India in this format, winning all their five matches so far. "We have been lucky enough for the last couple of years to be successful. Looking forward to the series and it should be a good one," Munro said. He added, "I play aggressively, my way sometimes it comes off and you look good, sometimes it doesn't and you don't look good. Obviously, there is plenty to play for and we have got a good record against India. Hopefully, we will get off to a good start." Mitchell McClenaghan and Luke Ronchi are out with injuries and their absence did hurt the team. "Their absence has been felt but (Tom) Latham has done really well this season. We have got an experienced bowling attack," said Munro. Ross Taylor's impressive showing in ODIs have earned him a recall to the New Zealand T20I side and asked if the senior player is a certainty in the playing XI tomorrow, Munro said he was not sure. Taylor has not played a T20I since New Zealand's semifinal loss to England in the World T20 in 2016. Munro got in touch with Brendon McCullum recently and the former New Zealand captain motivated him. "It is a funny one, actually, because after the second game I wouldn't say I was down but I hadn't got off to a start I wanted to while opening the batting. So, I sent him a text message to ask him his thoughts and let him know what I was thinking," said Munro. "And again he came out and said 'Mate, you know you got a good record in T20 and the way you play at the top of the order. If you can, try and implement that in the ODI game'."

Tough one-day culture sets Delhi cricket apart, says Virender Sehwag

NEW DELHI, OCT 31 /--/ Delhi has a penchant for producing mentally hardened players and former India opener Virender Sehwag attributed this to a tough club level one-day cricket, played day in and out, through a long summer.

The Delhi District Cricket Association (DDCA) on Tuesday named Gate 2 of the Feroz Shah Kotla Stadium as the 'Virender Sehwag Gate'. Asked what sets apart Delhi cricket, Sehwag said, "In Delhi a lot of one-day cricket is played in clubs. And by the time these players come to Ranji Trophy they become very tough mentally and they don't find it difficult to get used to the grind." The 39-year-old Sehwag said he was honoured. "It is a great honour and today we have a gate named after a cricketer but later we can have dressing room, stands, restaurants and dressing rooms and other things named after cricketers. It's a good thing and positive move from DDCA.

"I had a wish that whenever such a function happens, we should call all the cricketers who have represented Delhi and India," Sehwag said. Sehwag thanked the DDCA and said this will motivate younger players. "Any young cricketer will get motivated - Delhi versus Gujarat - and we had to win and qualify. Ashish Nehra and Amit Bhandari played really well in that game, picking up five and four wickets, and though I scored only 50 or 60 runs I still fondly remember that game as we managed t qualify for the knockouts." Sehwag said he got lots of tips and motivation from former players Bishan Singh Bedi and Mohinder Amarnath.

Bumrah hops to top in ICC T20 rankings, Kohli remains no.1

DUBAI, OCT 31 /--/ Indian fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah climbed to the number one spot in the latest ICC T20 rankings while his fifth-ranked team could go as high as second if it beats New Zealand in the three-match series beginning here tomorrow.

Bumrah, who attained a career-best third position in the ODI rankings on Monday, has regained the T20 top spot after Pakistan spinner Imad Wasim slipped one place. India captain Virat Kohli, who on Monday edged AB de Villiers to claim the top ranking in ODIs, also goes into the New Zealand series as the top-ranked batsman in the shortest format. In the team rankings, India will be Pakistan a huge favour if they defeat New Zealand in the upcoming series, as such a result will see their arch rivals top the standings. New Zealand are the top-ranked side in the shortest format with 125 points but Pakistan have closed in to within one point after securing a 3-0 win in the series against Sri Lanka that culminated in Lahore on Sunday. India are placed fifth at 116 points and can at best go to second position with a 3-0 win over New Zealand which will take them to 122 points.

AITA seeks inclusion of Ankita, Myneni, Divij, Raja in TOPS

NEW DELHI, OCT 31 /--/ Realising that a few medal prospects at next year's Asian Games have been left out of the Target Olympic Podium Scheme, the AITA today sought inclusion of top women's singles player Ankita Raina and three men's players, but has left out veteran Leander Paes.

In the initial list of tennis players selected for financial assistance under the TOPS, the government had announced seven names, including top doubles stars such as Sania Mirza and Rohan Bopanna. However, country's top woman's singles player Ankita Raina was a surprise exclusion while second-best ranked player Karman Kaur Thandi and Prarthna Thombare, who focuses more on doubles, were included in the list. Apart from Ankita, AITA has also requested the ministry to include Divij Sharan, Purav Raja and Saketh Myneni. The All India Tennis Association (AITA) Secretary General Hironmoy Chatterjee said the Federation had given these four names before also but it was the government and national observer Somdev Devvarman who had finalised the list. "We had given names of these players before also, keeping the rankings in mind, but these players were left out. We have Asian Games lined up next year and all these players, we believe, are medal prospects for India," Chatterjee told PTI. "Divij is doing really well and so is Raja and Saketh. Saketh also won a Challenger three days back. He was injured and has come back well. We have written to the government to sanction grants to these players also," he added. The AITA arrived at the decision at its recent Executive Committee meeting in Kolkata. Sharan and Raja had a successful stint as a team before splitting recently. Delhi's southpaw Sharan had excellent back-to-back performances on the Tour in his last three events, winning the ATP 250 European Open title with Scott Lipksy and ending runner-up at the Brest Challenger with Scott Clayton and at Tashkent Challenger with Yuki Bhambri. Sharan is now India's second-highest ranked player at number 51 in the doubles behind Rohan Bopanna (14). Purav Raja, who now plays with Paes, is number three at 62, seven places above his partner. Asked if Paes' name was discussed for addition to the list, Chatterjee said, "He (Paes) has not played Asian Games in the last few years, so his name was not discussed." Both Paes and Bopanna had missed the 2014 Incheon Games, citing the need to play on the professional Tour to defend crucial points. Sania had also initially expressed inability to play but eventually turned up and won the mixed doubles gold with Myneni and women's doubles bronze with Thombare. (PTI)

Tensions mount as Klopp eyes Euro boost

LONDON, Oct 31 /--/ As-sailed by mounting criticism from frustrated fans, Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp needs to mastermind a sustained challenge in the Champions League to keep the doubters at bay.

With Liverpool lagging 12 points behind Premier League leaders Manchester City despite Saturday's 3-0 win over Huddersfield, Klopp could be forgiven for breathing a sigh of relief that Slovenian minnows Maribor are the next visitors to Anfield on Wednesday. Having failed to win a trophy in his two-year reign and already out of the League Cup, Klopp has had to face some awkward questions as Liverpool struggle to get back on track after a spluttering start to the season.

The knives were out for Klopp following the recent 4-1 thrashing at Tottenham, with pundits and fans suggesting Liverpool are no better off than when the German's predecessor Brendan Rodgers was in charge. It must have been especially worrying for Klopp that victory against Huddersfield was played in a muted atmosphere punctuated by moans from the tetchy Anfield crowd. Given Liverpool's rich history -- which includes 18 English titles and five European Cups -- Klopp fears his club's supporters now have unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved in a football world far different than the club's heyday. Liverpool's net spend of £54 million ($71 million, 61 million euros) in the last transfer window was dwarfed by the sums splashed out by title rivals Manchester City, Manchester United and Chelsea. "The problem is here, the moment things don't work out, we get compared with the past," Klopp complained. "They wreck the confidence of the players when they say things like, 'You are not good enough'. It's a problem." Against that difficult backdrop, Klopp might find a long run in the Champions League -- a competition that stirs the emotions of Reds fans like no other -- is his best chance of changing the mood music at Anfield.

Pochettino, Zidane take contrasting roads to the top

LONDON, OCT 31 /--/ When Tottenham clash with Real Madrid in the Champions League at Wembley on Wednesday, the glamour tie will provide the backdrop for a fascinating touchline duel between Mauricio Pochettino and Zinedine Zidane. Tottenham boss Pochettino and Madrid coach Zidane are both highly regarded managers who have assembled teams capable of winning Europe's elite club prize, but the pair could not have taken more contrasting journeys to the top of their profession. Pochettino, 45, has enjoyed a remarkable transformation from journeyman Argentine defender to coveted coach while Zidane, who is the same age, is the French World Cup winner whose brilliance in his glittering playing career has been followed by more success in the dugout. With Tottenham and Real level on points as they battle it out at the top of Group H, AFP Sport takes a look at the experiences that define Pochettino and Zidane: The son of a Santa Fe farm worker, Pochettino was brought up with a tenacious work ethic that fuelled his rise from those humble roots. "As a boy, all I thought about was football, football, football. It was everything," Pochettino said. Fighting to claw out a career as an uncompromising defender was no hardship for Pochettino, who made his professional debut with Newell's Old Boys in 1988 and won the Argentine Primera Division in 1991. Pochettino's rugged reputation earned him a move to Espanyol in 1994 but he toiled in relative anonymity in Spain, winning only the Copa del Rey in 2000. Zidane savoured some of his finest moments on the international stage but Pochettino won only 20 caps and his most memorable contribution was to concede the penalty that led to England's 1-0 win over Argentina at the 2002 World Cup. While Pochettino had a rural childhood, Zidane was raised on the mean streets of Marseille's La Castellane district, where he forged his potent combination of balletic grace on the ball with a street fighter's mentality. After learning his trade at Cannes and Bordeaux, the midfield maestro established himself as a superstar while working under Juventus boss Marcello Lippi.\ "Lippi was like a light switch for me. Before that football was about enjoying myself. After I arrived in Turin, the desire to win things took over and never left me," Zidane said. While Pochettino's trophy cabinet gathered dust, Zidane hoovered up two Serie A titles with Juventus before helping Real's star-studded "galaticos" win La Liga and the Champions League. The latter silverware was secured thanks to Zidane's sublime strike in the 2002 final against Bayer Leverkusen, while his majestic displays led France to glory at the 1998 World Cup and 2000 European Championship. Hugely influenced by Marcelo Bielsa, his coach at Newell's Old Boys, Pochettino applied those lessons to seize his chance when Espanyol came calling in 2009. Saving Espanyol from relegation, Pochettino kept them afloat for another two years with little investment in the squad. The offer to manage Southampton in 2013 was a "dream" for Pochettino, who won over his squad despite intense training sessions which led Jack Cork to say you need "two hearts" to play for him. After taking Southampton to eighth place in his second season, Pochettino was hired by Tottenham in 2014, leading them to third and second place in the past two years. Obsessive about every detail, Pochettino even chooses the exact laundry detergent used to wash the first-team kit, while he bombards players with motivational text messages day and night. "To me, if a player doesn't work hard for the team, he won't play. Nothing happens by chance," he said. Pochettino remains without a trophy in his managerial career, while Zidane appeared to have been parachuted into the dream scenario when he was appointed Real boss in January 2016. Zidane's only prior experience had been as assistant to former Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti, before a brief spell as the club's reserve coach. Yet Zidane has had the Midas touch, leading Real to seven trophies, including Champions League crowns in 2016 and 2017 and the La Liga title last season.