

Lad, Nayar stand between Karnataka and Final



Posted by Disha Shetty

Advised rest for two weeks by doctors after a head injury, Abhishek Nayar batted out 41 deliveries and kept Mumbai alive in the semi-final.

Aditya Tare, the Mumbai captain, led by example, providing the brightest spark on the third day of the Ranji Trophy 2014-15 semifinal on Friday (February 27) to keep Karnataka at bay at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bangalore.

Although Karnataka were kept to 202 on the opening day, their bowlers had set the match up for them by rolling Mumbai over for just 44 on the same day. And their batsmen added 286 runs in the second

innings on the second day to set Mumbai a target of 445. But on Friday, Mumbai, resuming on 61 without loss, chipped away to end on 277 for 6, still 168 runs in arrears. **Siddhesh Lad (41) and Abhishek Nayar (2) were the two unbeaten batsmen at close of play.**

Tare, on 40 overnight, fell agonisingly short of his sixth first-class hundred when he was caught behind off S Arvind. His 291-minute vigil yielded 98 runs with 15 hits to the fence. Akhil Herwadkar, who was unbeaten on 21 overnight, survived a close call on 31 when he was trapped in front by Abhimanyu Mithun, but Vineet Kulkarni, the umpire, thought otherwise. Mithun did have the last laugh when Herwadkar, attempting to play across the line, was lbw in the sixth over of the day. It would have been a double-wicket maiden for Mithun had Robin Uthappa, filling in for the injured CM Gautam behind the stumps, held on to an edge off Shreyas Iyer. Mumbai were 79 for 1 then and Iyer was yet to get off the mark. The morning had dawned bright and sunny, and done its part in easing out the pitch a bit, and after the early wicket, Mumbai resisted. And Karnataka were left to rue the drop, as Tare and Iyer added 76 runs. Both looked solid during their time at the crease, with Tare in particular playing some pleasing drives through cover, bringing up his half-century off 72 balls. After the early reprieve, Iyer put a premium on patience and waited for the loose deliveries, as the duo brought up Mumbai's 100 in 29.5 overs.

Iyer scored his sixth first-class half-century before a lapse in concentration, pulling a short-pitched Mithun delivery that found Suchith Jagadeesh, the substitute fielder, at midwicket, leaving Mumbai 155 for 2. Tare meanwhile, was still going strong. His ability to soak in pressure was evident in the manner he left the balls he needed to. Mumbai went to lunch at 166 for 2 in 54 overs, still very much in the race. Post lunch, Tare and Suryakumar Yadav prevented further damage, with the captain looking increasingly comfortable. While Tare lent the artistic touch, Suryakumar, who took 26 deliveries to get off the mark, was more than happy to hang around, striking his first boundary only off the 68th delivery he faced. But the break seemed to have energised Karnataka as their frontline pacers found extra zip and hit tighter lines. Arvind provided the much-needed breakthrough for Karnataka, ending Tare's 219-minute vigil with a delivery that kept a bit low and Uthappa pounced the resultant edge. With Nayar still recovering from the head injury he sustained on the first day, it was upon Suryakumar and **Lad**, the new man in, to see Mumbai through most part of the session. When the second new ball was taken in the 80th over, Mumbai were still in the hunt. But Arvind struck to dismiss Suryakumar for 36 and the momentum swung back Karnataka's way. Nikhil Patil could only fend a R Vinay Kumar lifter that rose off good length to Kunal Kapoor at the stroke of tea. From 194 for 2 Mumbai had slipped to 237 for 5, and Karnataka were the happier side going into the break. "Those two back-to-back wickets probably hurt us, Surya and Nikhil," admitted Tare after the day's play. "Probably Nikhil could have continued and it would have been a different ball game."

The sixth-wicket pair of Siddhesh Lad and Wilkin Mota, however, resisted for 53 minutes to add 31 runs, but a smart bowling change later, Shreyas Gopal went under Mota's slog to rattle the timber.

Then Nayar, who was discharged from the hospital on Thursday, walked in to bat much to everyone's surprise and kept Mumbai going. Mumbai were 268 for 6 and still had a mountain to climb. **The scoring rate had drastically reduced and Mithun's short-pitched deliveries just added to Mumbai's woes. But Lad and Nayar were unfazed and took Mumbai through to the close.**

"They were playing the typical Mumbai game. They are a very strong team," said Shreyas. "We were prepared for a hard fight. We are still fighting and are just one or two wickets away before we could push them harder."

Mithun, who starred with an 89 on the second day, was the most successful Karnataka bowler returning 3 for 49 in his 27 overs, while Vinay, whose 6 for 20 rattled Mumbai on the opening day, and Arvind took one wicket each.

As things stand, Karnataka are better placed to make it to their second consecutive final, and Mumbai, the 40-time champions, must hope that Lad and Nayar, both recognised batsmen, can swing a miracle for them.