

## Why this phobia over a wicket?

14<sup>th</sup> February 2010, Sunil Gavaskar

THE clash between the top two teams has certainly generated a lot of heat and dust after India, the No. 1 team, lost by an innings with a day to spare. The South Africans have always done well in India and they have begun this two-Test series also well and won't lose the series even if India play out of their skins and win the Eden Garden's game.

The selectors copped a lot of blame for restricting the choice of the team management by picking three bowlers in the reserves plus a wicketkeeper. Having said that, the simple fact is that the South Africans outplayed India in all departments of the game and won handsomely. The South Africans have the big plus of having a bowler who can get the ball to swing at almost 150 kmph and that is hard to counter even on a slow pitch like the one at Nagpur. The Indians were lucky that because of the rain expected in Nagpur just before the Test started, the curator did not water it and so it stayed dry and got slower as the days progressed. If it had been the pitch that was seen during the earlier internationals played there, then the Indians would have been likely embarrassed even more than they were.



Not surprisingly speculation about the Eden Garden's pitch has begun and though the curator first said that he had got a call from somebody in the BCCI he has now backtracked and is claiming that no instructions were given. What this does is add to the speculation and spoils India's name. India have shown that they can play on green fast pitches. Didn't they win at Perth which is supposed to be the fastest pitch in the world? Didn't they win batting first on a green-top in Leeds in overcast conditions too and didn't they win at The Wanderers which is also supposed to be a quick wicket too? So why this phobia has been created about winning only on turning pitches? Surely the No. 1 team does not need any assistance from the pitch. South Africa has shown that they can win overseas too. They have won a series in Australia where they dethroned the then No. 1 team in the world and now they are here to snatch the No. 1 rank from India too. Winning overseas is definitely sweeter than winning at home and South Africa are looking to taste such a win at the Eden Gardens. They have come here in a bit of turmoil after seeing their coach and the selection panel asked to step down. Those happenings seem to have brought the team together and Graeme Smith deserves all the kudos for ensuring that the team got onto the field with such determination.

Hashim Amla and Jacques Kallis showed that they were prepared to wear down the Indian bowlers and play the waiting game. Unfortunately, the Indians seemed in a rush of sorts and Steyn bowling like the wind and getting the ball to move both ways was too hot to handle. He had great support from Morkel, Parnell and the underrated but highly effective Paul Harris. For his ten wicket haul in the Test that helped South Africa put it across India, Dale Steyn in this week's CEAT International Cricketer of the Week.