

Umar's hundred in tough conditions praiseworthy

6th December 2009, Sunil Gavaskar

THERE are three Test matches being played in different parts of the world and to old timers, who don't swear much by the latest format of the game—the T20 matches—it must feel like heaven. India and Sri Lanka are in the middle of finishing the three Test match series and New Zealand and Pakistan are playing against each other in New Zealand where Pakistan are the hosts. That's because of the situation in Pakistan where there is no realistic chance of any international sport being played for some time.

Australia and West Indies too are engaged in a Test series so for the connoisseurs of the game there is plenty to follow. The Australians have beaten the West Indies quite comfortably in the first Test and New Zealand won a thriller against Pakistan. India won the Kanpur Test and is looking good enough to win the last Test in Mumbai too. If they do that then they will get to the number one ranking in Test cricket and that will be a top achievement indeed.

However, it's staying at the top that will be tough and this is where Australia have been so good. They have been at the top of the tree for more than a decade or so and that shows how good they are. Gautam Gambhir has been in top form and he continues to go from strength to strength. His desire to learn and improve suggests that he is going to score many more big centuries in international cricket.



The first Pakistan versus New Zealand Test match was a close one with the Kiwis dominating for the first four days. The conditions were a bit cold and since the Pakistani team had gone directly from Dubai they did not have warm clothes with them for the early part of the trip. New Zealand is cold most times of the year and it does take some time getting used to those conditions where the limbs are stiff and frozen most of the time. It was therefore understandable that they took a bit of time getting used to the conditions.

The Pakistanis have been struggling for a good pair of opening batsmen and so have not been able to get off to a good start. It is therefore all the more praiseworthy for young Umar Akmal to have come in to play his first Test in tough circumstances and yet bat splendidly to get a century. He and his brother Kamran got Pakistan back into the match with their partnership and it was a pity when the elder brother got out when he was in sight of his century. For, it would have been quite unique for a brother to get a century on debut even as his elder brother gets another century.

In the second innings too, young Akmal batted well and while he was at the crease Pakistan had hopes of winning the Test match. Shane Bond broke the partnership and helped the Kiwis scrape a narrow win. But for his century on debut and another near ton in the second innings, Umar Akmal is the CEAT International Cricketer of the Week.