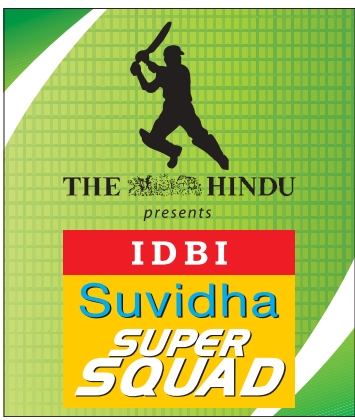


My 15 K. Srikanth



The World Cup is the biggest cricketing event, and picking a side for the mega-tournament should only be done after taking all the factors into consideration. I have really thought long and hard, before arriving at my squad.

My side will have seven specialist batsmen. Virender Sehwag, Sourav Ganguly, Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid, V.V.S. Laxman, Yuvraj Singh and Mohammed Kaif pick themselves and this is bound to be one of the finest line-ups in the competition.

Batting will remain India's strength. However, it is important that we pick the right bowlers. Zaheer Khan will surely be the pace attack's spearhead, and the left-armer has been particularly impressive in recent times.

It will be important to have an ex-

perienced paceman along with Zaheer, and Javagal Srinath should find his way back into the squad. He is extremely unlucky to be left out of the Test side to New Zealand, especially since he made a reasonable comeback against the West Indies.

In the ODIs, Srinath may have been a touch expensive, yet if we look at the pitches he had to operate on, it was not a poor performance by any yardstick. Srinath should share the new ball with Zaheer, and he could be effective on the seaming South African pitches. However, he has to tighten up his fielding.

Ajit Agarkar has been extremely inconsistent all through his career, but I would still be compelled to give him the nod simply because he can score a few runs. Similarly, Aashish Nehra, who has been erratic, still has to be picked because if he can find his rhythm, he can strike early. We saw an example of that in the ICC Champions Trophy game against England.

However, I have to reiterate that I am forced to select Agarkar and Nehra because there are no alternatives with experience around. I hope in the future, L.Balaji, who is most unfortunate to be dropped from the Indian side after just one game, and Tinu Yohannan, receive more chances, to prove their worth.

The all-rounder slot has to go to Sanjay Bangar, who showed good temperament during the ODI series

against the West Indies. He has to work on his bowling though. Here too, there are not too many options for India.

In the spin attack, Harbhajan Singh picks himself, and left-armer Murali Kartik will be my choice as the second spinner. He bowled extremely well in the home ODI series against the West Indies, and he is a genuine spinner of the ball. The lad is also a handy batsman and a fine fielder.

I am in favour of taking the talented Parthiv Patel as the second wicket-keeper for the event. Rahul Dravid has donned the big gloves without flinching so far, but the demanding nature of the job could take its toll on his body, and World Cup is a stage where we cannot afford to take chances. Don't forget Dravid, as a frontline batsman, already has enough burden on his shoulders.

I would have loved to have the young Ambatti Rayadu, wonderful storkemaker, in the side because he really has the ability to make a difference in one-day cricket. In this squad, there is sadly no room for him, but he appears a quality player.

● **The team: Sourav Ganguly, (captain), Virender Sehwag, Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid, V.V.S. Laxman, Yuvraj Singh, Mohammed Kaif, Sanjay Bangar, Harbhajan Singh, Murali Kartik, Parthiv Patel, Zaheer Khan, Javagal Srinath, Aashish Nehra, and Ajit Agarkar.**



*Happiness called
Suvidha*