

The ICC (Indian Cricket Curse) Revision 1

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2nd April 2011, the day the Little Master, Sachin Tendulkar's dream of a World Cup was fulfilled on home soil. Ravi Shastri said, "The party begins in Mumbai" and it swept to all parts of a nation rich in cricketing history. Joy was brought to the 1.2 billion souls all in awe of MS Dhoni's 91 not out finishing the game with a bang (literally). 2 years later this same team tasted victory in the Champions Trophy beating hosts England by 5 runs.

Since then it has been an interesting period for Indian cricket where despite the plethora of talent we have within the squad, we have not been able to win a single ICC trophy. So why is this the case? We can't talk about favourites in these tournaments without mentioning India due to their star studded lineup. I feel there is more beyond the surface of hype and expectations and we can't gloss over the mistakes made by the Men In Blue.

Sure. We can't win everything but then again: No one remembers who came second, only who came first and for Indian fans the pain keeps building up. What does this mean for the future of a sport that people in this nation regard as a religion and the players to be the gods? Maybe the BCCI rules off the field but are we losing our power on it? Dare I say will the Indian team be boycotted and attention diverts elsewhere? These are the fearful thoughts I personally get and it is something not to be taken lightly. Follow me as I look to explore some of the potential reasons behind India's poor performance in those crunch games...

There have been reports circulating about the workload of Indian players in recent times [1] and so it may help to start by understanding the schedule of the Indian players. Upon India's heartbreak last year, let us review their calendar in 2023:

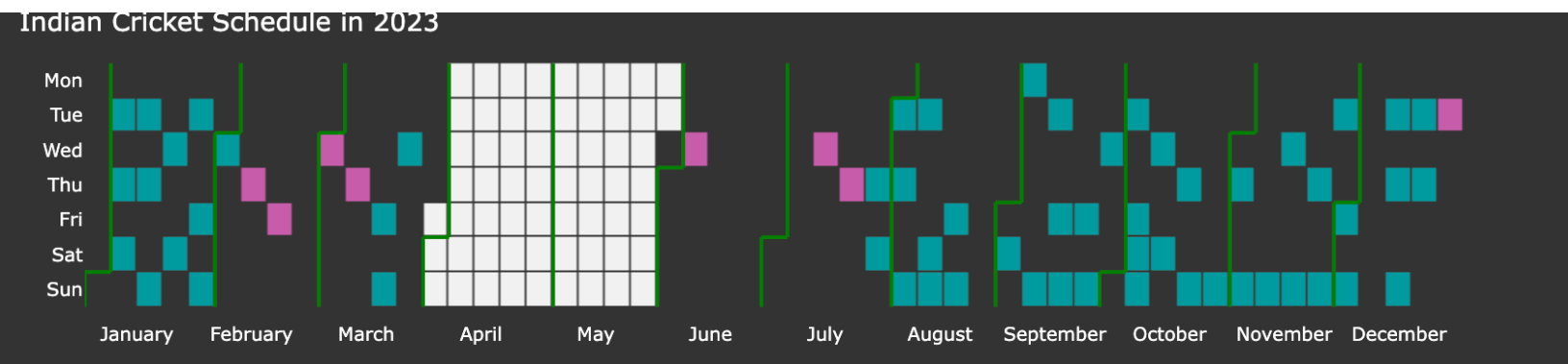
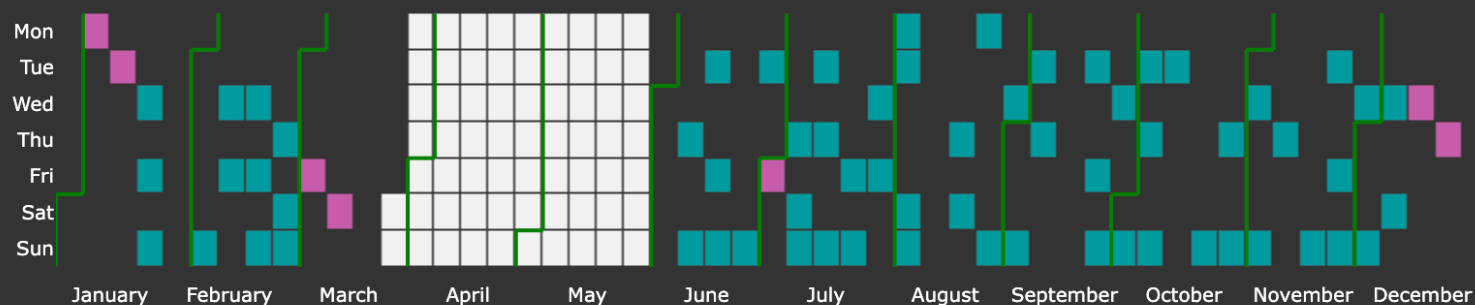


Figure 1: The blue tiles illustrate ODIs and T20 internationals, pink shows test matches and we see a pool of white during April and May marking the IPL season. It's not only the packed schedule of games but the need to continuously train and travelling for tours can take a toll mentally and physically.

Maybe this is just one year but this is a recurring theme we have seen for the years before that:

Indian Cricket Schedule in 2022



Indian Cricket Schedule in 2021

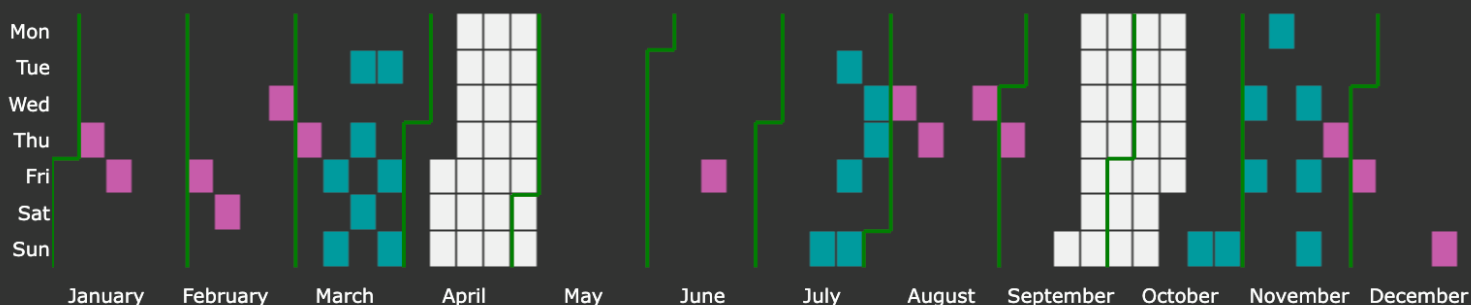


Figure 2: India Cricket's schedules in 2022 and 2021. Note that the 2021 IPL season was split due to the country's intense COVID wave. It led to the second half being played in the UAE just before the T20 World Cup in the same nation. Likewise before the 2022 T20 World Cup commencing October, India played non stop limited overs cricket giving little time to recover.

Make no mistake: The IPL has been revolutionary for cricket. An opportunity for local Indian talent to showcase their abilities, the unity of global cricketers and Bollywood, the money and recognition up for grabs. However some players chose to put aside those incentives for a greater purpose. Take Australian spearhead Mitchell Starc who is making his first appearance in the IPL since 2015. He stepped aside to prioritize his international commitments and manage his fitness and workload which he feels improved his game [2].

I am not saying Indian players should pull out of every IPL season but they should be encouraged to make the decision to shy away from the big bucks and allow their bodies to rest. Additionally, it is crucial for the BCCI to assess the heavy schedule and manage the workload of the national team.

The Unfair Coin

We know that venues can play a role since they offer different conditions that can vary throughout the game. Take Dubai for instance. It can be tough to bowl second due to the dew factor and thus affecting the bowler's grip [3]. Batters are able to take advantage of this and score runs freely which ultimately led to India's defeats to Pakistan and New Zealand in their horror 2021 T20 World Cup campaign.

| Win Percentages at Venues before the knockout game | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|--------|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Date | Venue | Format | % Wins Batting First | % Wins Batting Second | Tosses to Game Win Ratio | India Toss Win | India Innings Order |
| 2014-04-06 | Shere Bangla National Stadium | T20 | 52.900000 | 47.100000 | 0.650000 | False | 1 |
| 2015-03-26 | Sydney Cricket Ground | ODI | 54.500000 | 45.500000 | 0.520000 | False | 2 |
| 2016-03-31 | Wankhede Stadium | T20 | 25.000000 | 75.000000 | 1.000000 | False | 1 |
| 2017-06-18 | Kennington Oval | ODI | 37.500000 | 62.500000 | 0.620000 | True | 2 |
| 2019-07-09 | Old Trafford | ODI | 52.900000 | 47.100000 | 0.590000 | False | 2 |
| 2021-10-31 | Dubai International Cricket Stadium | T20 | 50.700000 | 49.300000 | 0.550000 | False | 1 |
| 2022-11-10 | Adelaide Oval | T20 | 63.600000 | 36.400000 | 0.000000 | False | 1 |
| 2023-11-19 | Narendra Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad | ODI | 42.900000 | 57.100000 | 0.570000 | False | 1 |

Figure 3: This describes the venue win percentages and toss information based on the format BEFORE the knockout game. For the most part India has been on the wrong side of the coin so the opposition have been able to capitalise but of course this is something that cannot be changed.

So you may look at this and jump to the conclusion that India just got unlucky with the toss and that after that things just did not go our way on that day. Well... I beg to differ. We still have not explored how India played and it is from this where we need to make a change to our approach.

The Tentative Game

Being cautious is not a terrible ploy. It is important to preserve wickets when batting and likewise play defensive at times in the field to reduce boundaries. Except maybe Team India has taken this a bit too far and perhaps forgot to play their fearless game that helped them reach the final stages of the major tournaments. Cast your minds back to the 2019 semi final chase against New Zealand at Old Trafford under the aggressive, energetic captaincy of Virat Kohli.

New Zealand vs India Innings

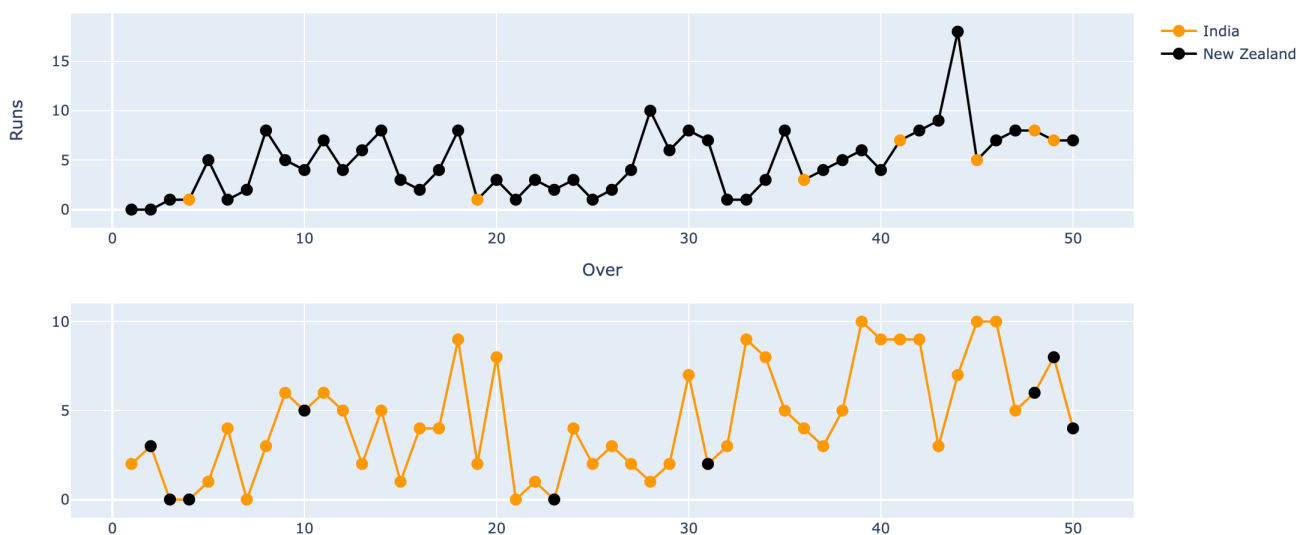


Figure 4: *The innings stories of New Zealand and India respectively. The cluster of black dots in India's innings shows us the early loss of wickets leading to slow progress in the innings. Though a partnership was stitched up, the pressure built left too much to do towards the end and thus falling short.*

In these crunch games, it is crucial to make a statement early in the innings. Though it was not a huge score to chase and the new ball was swinging, Team India could have looked to be more positive and put pressure on the opposition.

India vs Australia Innings



Figure 5: *A similar story in the 2023 World Cup final. India started strong with the bat but in the middle phase the run rate hardly crossed 5. During their defence, they picked up early wickets but to defend a low score, they went defensive in the field allowing Australia to take easy runs and form a match winning partnership.*

These two games don't show the India we want to see. Regardless of the competition stage and the opposition, India need to deliver the first punch and gain a psychological advantage over their opposition. Sure, they should not make any rash decisions with the bat and ball but equally playing it safe is not the way to go moving forward.

The Resurgence

This year Team India has another opportunity to prove themselves when they compete in the World T20 Cup in the West Indies and USA. So does they fancy their chances this time? I'm sure they will be looking to get payback on the likes of England and Australia who have robbed them of ICC glory (this time the International Cricket Council not the Indian Cricket Curse).

What I feel will bring back the fearless Indian cricket team is the presence of young blood. It is the youth mentality of being carefree and going out there to express yourself without the fear of failure. Rohit Sharma will be leading his troops into battle and he has been praised for taking initiative in India's positive approach with the bat. It is imperative that the rest of team follows particularly in the shorter format of the game.

INDIAN BATTERS T20 STRIKE RATES UNDER ROHIT SHARMA'S CAPTAINCY IN 2022 AND 2024 SO FAR

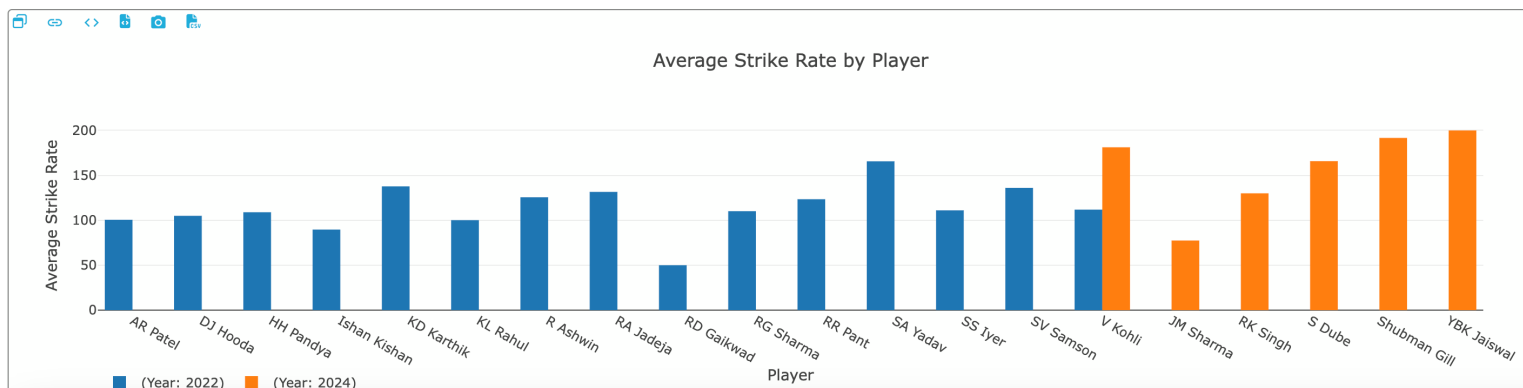


Figure 6: Note that Rohit Sharma did not captain any T20s in 2023 thus this year is ignored. We are only just into 2024 but already we are seeing some positive signs from the youngsters Shubman Gill and Jaiswal. It is great to see Virat Kohli amping up his strike rate and we hope for him to build on that for the tour.

I certainly agree with Robin Uthappa when he said that T20s are regarded as a batters' game [4] and so for the bowlers, it is important to be inexpensive to put pressure on the batters and increase the chances of taking wickets.

INDIAN T20 BOWLERS' ECONOMY RATE UNDER ROHIT SHARMA'S CAPTAINCY IN 2022 AND 2024 SO FAR

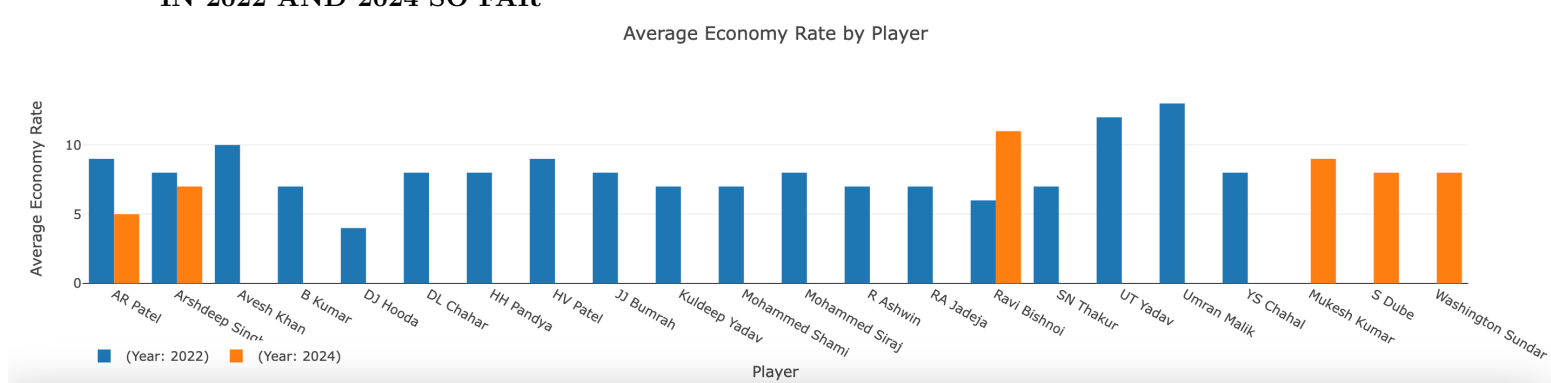


Figure 7: Arshdeep Singh had a great start with the ball in 2022 and so far has reduced his average economy this year. Likewise AR Patel has started 2024 far more economically at an average of 5 runs per over which is exceptional in the T20 format.

I strongly advocate a blend of fresh new talent alongside the experienced stars in Rohit, Kohli and Pandya to drive India to a 2nd T20 World Cup triumph. Thus I would like to end this journey by presenting to you my selection of Team India in the 2024 T20 World Cup:

Rohit Sharma (c)
Virat Kohli

These two superstars of the game will be looking to fire with the bat. The captain with his aggressive elegant batting alongside the classy King Kohli regarded as the 'master of the chase'.

Suryakumar Yadav: The number 1 T20 batter in the world at the moment. Mr 360 due to his ability to hit everywhere had a stellar 2022 when the last World T20 occurred and we back him to perform again this year.

Shubman Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rinku Singh

I personally am excited to see these new stars. Based on their 2024 strike rates thus far, I have belief that their power hitting abilities can both set competitive totals and chase down big scores.

Hardik Pandya
Shivam Dube
RA Jadeja
AR Patel
R Ashwin

These are my picks for the all rounders in the squad. Pandya, Ashwin and Jadeja are experienced campaigners and so they can bring some stability into the team. So far in 2024 AR Patel's average economy of 5 and Shivam Dube's strike rate of over 165 have been positive signs for the Men In Blue.

Jasprit Bumrah, Arshdeep Singh and Mohammed Shami

The strike bowlers for Team India. They all have the ability to bowl lethal yorkers and variations that will trouble batters in the death overs. Arshdeep Singh in particular had a great tournament in 2022 with the new ball and the experience of Bumrah and Shami will make them a dangerous combo.

Ravi Bishnoi

At a young age, this leg spinner had an average economy rate of 6.0 in 2022 and although he has been expensive so far in 2024, in my view he is someone worth keeping an eye on.

References

- 1) [How much cricket is Team India playing compared to other teams](#)
- 2) [How prioritizing international cricket improved Mitchell Starc's game](#)
- 3) [Dew Factor in the UAE](#)
- 4) [T20 is a batter's game: Robin Uthappa](#)