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COMBINATION CONUNDURUM

# Kohli's fitness throws up combination puzzle again

[Vishaal Loganathan](#) · Last updated on Fri, 24 Mar, 2017, 06:51 PM





Who among the three will feature in Dharamsala? © AFP

Very rarely does a team go into a Test without any problems over the team combinations. Pitch conditions, experience, injuries and form all combine to make the selection of a right combination one of the hardest tasks ahead of the game. Throw in an injury to a vital player, and the headache only increases.

Virat Kohli's shoulder injury leaves the Indian team facing many such questions over their team combination. Can they go in with five bowlers? Who can replace Kohli? Is Rahane good enough as captain? etc. Here are some of the questions at the top of our minds.

## Should Virat Kohli take the risk even if not fully fit?

The Indian captain had said that he [would not receive any special treatment](#) but there is just so much Virat Kohli brings to the side by just being there. Kohli is not only India's star batsman, but he brings in many other attributes to the side. He brings the crowd in, his intensity and aggressiveness rub off on the team, he is able to lift the team up when down, and leadership comes naturally to him. To lose Virat Kohli would be more than just losing a middle-order mainstay.

The threat of further aggravating the shoulder injury looms like a dark, daunting cloud, but the rewards at the other end look much bigger. Kohli mentioned that there is no threat of aggravating the injury while batting, so he would be able to do his primary job without much ado. On the field, however, he wouldn't be able to be himself. In the second innings of the last game, Kohli positioned himself at slip and did most of the throwing with his left arm. That would leave Kohli not at his optimal best in the field, but he should be able to do most of what he does despite the injury.

### If Kohli is not fit, then?

Ajinkya Rahane takes the reins. Rahane was the stand-in captain when Kohli was off the field after his injury in Ranchi. His performance as captain was satisfactory, with regular bowling and fielding changes, but the intensity left a lot to be desired. Australia managed to pull themselves back into the game through a big stand between Steve Smith and Glenn Maxwell when Rahane was incharge.

Rahane is a calm and composed captain, and seemed to prefer the waiting game, but against the Australian, Kohli's aggressive demeanour is almost a must. It will be interesting to see how Dharamsala unfolds for the right-hander if Kohli can't play.

In terms of batting, too, Rahane will have to take up a truckload of responsibility. He could move up the order, while Shreyas Iyer and Karun Nair bat at five and six. Nair has shown that he has the temperament for the big knock. Iyer's approach will be closely watched, too. He is a naturally attacking batsman who can take the game away from the opposition very quickly. Kohli was one player in the line-up capable of such performances, and the team will hope in the captain's absence, Iyer can step up.

### **Shami or Ishant?**

This is a bit of a strange one. Mohammed Shami isn't even part of the original squad, but India's best fast bowler in the past year is training with the squad. However, given the conditions in Dharamsala, the team would love to have Shami straight back into action.

Ishant and Umesh have been the trusted pair in Shami's absence, and in this series they have done very well despite the odds stacked against them. Umesh Yadav has been the more consistent and potent of the two, and would be the first pick. If Shami is indeed picked for another pacer, then Ishant Sharma will have to sit out.

With the pitch at Dharamsala expected to help the pacers more, there could be a case of

playing three of them. That would mean Shami would replace one of the spinners or a batsman. Dropping Ashwin or Jadeja seems too far-fetched, but there could be a chance of taking out Karun Nair for Shami. It all would again depend on Kohli's availability.

Bhuvneshwar Kumar, the other pacer in the squad, has an outside chance of being selected, but the pitch certainly doesn't seem the kind that would make him very effective.

### Any other potential changes to the XI

A very small chance. Murali Vijay wasn't seen at the nets on Friday and if that was as a result of injury, then Abhinav Mukund could get a chance. Vijay usually doesn't bat a day before a Test match, but on Thursday he wasn't seen at the practice session at all. Mukund, on the other hand, batted for a reasonable amount of time. If Vijay is sick or unfit, then the left-hander will come back in to the side.

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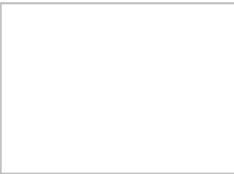
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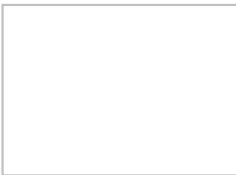
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