

Five memorable moments that made Cheteshwar Pujara India's Mr Reliable

NEW DELHI, AUG 24

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor on Saturday paid tribute to Cheteshwar Pujara and hailed him as "India's Mr Reliable" and said the batter deserved a dignified farewell after his retirement from international cricket.

"I can't help feeling a pang of regret at the retirement of @cheteshwar1. Even if it was inevitable after his recent string of exclusions from the Indian team, and even if he has nothing left to prove, he deserved a little longer in the saddle and a dignified farewell worthy of his outstanding Test career for India.

When he was dropped, with typical gumption, he returned to the domestic scene and racked up a number of impressive scores. But the selectors had decided to move on, and one cannot blame him for deciding to throw in the towel," said the diplomat turned MP, who has written books on cricket.

Pujara, who amassed 7,195 runs in 103 Tests, was known for his defence and ability to anchor innings across all conditions. Unlike Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, he rarely commanded the spotlight, but embodied the purest spirit of Test cricket.



Here are five moments from India's Mr Reliable's career that proves Tharoor's point.

Drawn Test at Johannesburg 2013

India haven't always fared well in Test matches in South Africa and that is why a draw against the Proteas in Johannesburg meant so much. Pujara didn't fare well in the first innings scoring 25 off 98 balls but in the second innings he scored 153 off 270 balls batting nearly six hours. He killed enough time for India to draw the match.

A series of tormenting Australians 2020-21

The series is now famous for the historic victory at Gabba.

It was India's second series win in Australia after 2018-19. And Pujara was the common

factor in both. Kohli-less India needed someone to step up and while youngsters like Gill and Pant did their bit, throughout the four match Test series he took countless blows. Battered and bruised he faced 928 balls through that series, Pujara caused fatigue among the Australian quicks Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins. As former coach Ravi Shastri called Pujara a "real warrior" on Sunday, Shastri added that he was "simply brilliant" in the two back to back series wins in Australia. Three centuries Down Under 2018-19

In 2018-19 when Kohli lifted the Border Gavaskar Trophy as the first Indian captain to win it Down Under, people forgot it was Pujara who played the key

role throughout the series. 123 and 71 in Adelaide, 106 in Melbourne and 193 in Sydney. He made it a point to grind the Aussie bowlers into the dust and they feared him every time they faced off.

Pujara vs England Southampton 2018

Overcast and swinging conditions in Southampton 2018. James Anderson and Stuart Broad at the peak of their bowling. India scored 273 in their first innings. Pujara batted with the top and the tail, remaining unbeaten on 132 in 257 balls batting nearly six hours despite much support.

Despite India's loss, Pujara's toil almost ruined the Test for England.

11 hours at the crease Ranchi 2017

We have listed out two innings where Pujara batted almost six hours. Now change the scenario. Pre- summers in India. March 2017. India took on Australia in Ranchi and Australia scored 451 after batting 137 overs.

Pujara's response? 525 balls faced (87.5 overs), 202 runs, at a strike rate of 38.47 but 672 minutes at the crease. Pujara batted for over 11 hours. The match ended in a draw but the Australians did not enjoy with Pujara at the crease.

Dream11 in talks with BCCI to exit Rs 3.58 billion jersey sponsorship deal: Report

MUMBAI, AUG 24

Indian fantasy sports platform Dream11 has initiated talks with the country's cricket board to exit its 3.58 billion rupee (\$41 million) jersey sponsorship deal, according to multiple media reports.

The move followed the central government ban on real-money online games, including fantasy sports, under the newly enacted Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Bill which threatens the survival of the popular gaming sector. The law prohibits advertising, promotion and sponsorship of such platforms, making Dream11's continued association with the Indian cricket team legally untenable, the report said.

Dream11 signed a three-year agreement with the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) in 2023 to feature its logo on the national team's jerseys.

"These are watertight agreements and cannot be exited unilaterally. It



will have to be a mutual decision since the law of the land doesn't permit advertising of banned games," one source said.

Dream11 commands a valuation of \$8 billion. The new bill states that anyone who offers money games after the law comes into force could face a jail term of up to three years and a fine.

BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia did not immediately respond to a Reuters call on messages seeking confirmation of whether Dream11 has to secure a new sponsor.

Asia Cup-bound Shubman Gill 'unwell', set to miss Duleep Trophy

NEW DELHI, AUG 24

Shubman Gill, in all likelihood, will miss the Duleep Trophy for North Zone for being "unwell". The India Test captain had been scheduled to lead North Zone in the multi-day tournament.

"Shubman will not be able to play in Duleep. It's not that he's down with any injury, but he's unwell," North Zone coach P. Krishna Kumar told on Saturday.

It was learnt that Gill is down with fever at present. Nothing from the BCCI, though, has been announced officially on Gill's absence from Duleep.

However, on Friday, Gill had posted a couple of pictures of himself with mountains in the backdrop. "Never miss the chance to catch a sunset," his post read.

With Gill set to be out, Haryana opener Ankit Kumar, previously chosen as the former's



deputy, is likely to lead North Zone, who begin their Duleep campaign in the quarter-final clash against East Zone at the BCCI Centre of Excellence ground on August 28. Ankit had also captained Haryana in last season's Ranji Trophy.

Missing Duleep implies Gill goes into the upcoming Asia Cup with no game time since the end of the Oval Test against England, which had concluded on August 4. That shouldn't worry him or the Indian team management much, though, as the Asia Cup will be played in a different format (T20).

Besides, the command

with which Gill had batted in the recent England Tests, where he hit four centuries and aggregated 754 runs at an average of 75.40, should give him some confidence when he's out to bat next. And that's irrespective of the format.

Absence from Duleep also gives Gill a few extra days' rest, which is essential for him as, following the Asia Cup, India's home season gets underway with two Tests each against the West Indies and South Africa in October and November, respectively. The Proteas, reigning Test champions, are expected to pose a tough challenge.

PCB chief rules out 'begging' India for bilateral cricket as political row brews over Asia Cup clash

NEW DELHI, AUG 24

Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Mohsin Naqvi has ruled out the possibility of seeking India's approval for bilateral cricket ahead of the Asia Cup.

Naqvi, who also heads the Asian Cricket Council, stated that future negotiations with India would take place only on equal terms.

"I think we are very clear that whenever talks are held will be on an equal footing with India and there will be no more begging for negotiations. That time has passed and whatever will happen will be on the basis of equality," Naqvi said at a press conference in Lahore, days before the start of the Asia Cup.

India holds the rights for this year's Asia Cup, the tournament is being staged in the UAE after India refused to travel to Pakistan for the ICC Champions Trophy earlier this year.

Despite India versus Pakistan matches being the most commercially lucrative contests in world cricket, the two sides



now meet only in multi-nation tournaments in a neutral venue.

The PCB has attempted to persuade India to resume bilateral cricket, but the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has consistently turned down the offer.

The Indian government has made it clear that there will be no bilateral cricket with Pakistan in the foreseeable future.

But the teams will continue to face each other in international tournaments organised by the International Cricket Council (ICC) and the Asian Cricket Council (ACC).

The scheduled September 14 Asia Cup group-stage encounter between India and Pakistan has sparked political debate in India.

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Priyanka Chaturvedi on Friday demanded that the live telecast of the match be blocked, citing national interest and public sentiment.

Chaturvedi said she was dismayed by the insistence of both the BCCI and the youth affairs and sports ministry on allowing India's participation in the Asia Cup in the UAE and the fixture against Pakistan.

"Hiding behind the garb of

sportsman spirit to allow the match to happen lacks moral courage to stand against the terror nation," she said.

In a letter addressed to Union IT minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, who also holds the charge of the information and broadcasting ministry, Chaturvedi urged the government to stop the broadcast and streaming of the high-profile clash.

"Keeping the view of national interest and public sentiment, it is necessary the MeitY (Ministry of Electronics and IT) blocks the live streaming of the India-Pakistan match across all OTT platforms, websites, and apps. Since you also hold the charge of Information and Broadcasting Ministry, I urge you to block broadcasters from telecasting the match live," she wrote.

India and Pakistan could meet more than once in the Asia Cup, depending on the progression of both teams beyond the group stage.

India and Pakistan will play at the group stage on September 14 in Dubai during the Asia Cup scheduled to start in the UAE from September 9.

'All good things come to an end': Cheteshwar Pujara retires from all forms of Indian cricket

NEW DELHI, AUG 24

Cheteshwar Pujara, the rock of Indian batting in the longest format for over a decade, on Sunday announced his retirement from all forms of cricket, bringing the curtains down on an exemplary Test career.

The 37-year-old made the announcement on social media, having played the last of his 103 Tests in 2023.

"As a little boy from the small town of Rajkot, along with my parents, I set out to aim for the stars; and dreamt to be a part of the Indian cricket team. Little did I know then that this game would give me so much - invaluable opportunities, experiences, purpose, love, and above all a chance to represent my state and this great nation.

"Wearing the Indian jersey, singing the anthem, and trying my best each time I stepped on the field

- it's impossible to put into words what it truly meant. But as they say, all good things must come to an end, and with immense gratitude I have decided to retire from all forms of Indian cricket," Pujara said in a heartfelt note.

The decision was not entirely surprising, considering the team's two other stalwarts, Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, bid farewell to Test cricket ahead of the England tour earlier this year, while another long-time teammate, R Ashwin, retired midway through the Australia tour in December.

With 7195 runs at an average of 43.60, Pujara stands at eighth place in the all time leading run-getters from India. He also amassed 21301 runs in first-class cricket.

With another domestic season around the corner, Pujara was expected to turn up for Saurashtra but the champion batter thought it was the right time move on.

"We were hoping he would play the upcoming season but we respect his decision. What a legend he has been for Saurashtra and Indian cricket. Alongside Ravindra Jadeja, Pujara is the biggest cricketer to have come out of Saurashtra and we can't thank him enough for his contribution to the game in the region.

"I would have loved to see him say goodbye from the ground but it his call and we wish him all the best," Saurashtra Cricket Association president Jaydev Shah told PTI.

Pujara had made his first-class debut under Shah's captaincy.

"His dedication towards the game from the start and end of his career remained the same. That is how I would remember him. Also, a big salute to his father (Arvind Pujara) for shaping his cricketing career and making him one of the best in the business," Shah added.

During his time away from the Indian team, Pujara turned to commentary and was part of the broadcast team for the recent India-England series in the UK. As recently as last month, he seemed committed to play another year of domestic cricket and was keeping up with his fitness routine even while commenting.

Pujara collected 19 hundreds and 35 half centuries in his career ranging from 2010 to 2023. Following the retirement of Rahul Dravid, he became the wall of the Indian Test team especially in overseas conditions.

His conventional methods may not be the most attractive but were very effective. He was brilliant at tiring out the bowlers and batting time, something that was best displayed on the back-to-back tours of Australia in 2018 and 2021 when he played a pivotal role in the team's successive series wins Down Under.

After the team moved on from him and Ajinkya Rahane in 2023, Pujara piled on runs in domestic cricket with the hunger of a teenager. "He trained like an 18-year-old with us wanting to go back to where he belonged (Indian team). Such was his dedication to the game," said current Saurashtra head coach Niraj Odedra. "I did not see the retirement decision coming but I am guessing he made the call know that he won't be playing for India again. Having said that his contribution to Indian cricket is immense. I would say it was a tad too late but a good decision," Odedra added.

As a person, Pujara remains a picture of humility. In his retirement message, he duly thanked the people and institutions that made him the player he became.

"I would like to thank the BCCI, and Saurashtra Cricket Association for the opportunity and support

through my cricket career. I wouldn't have made it this far without the invaluable guidance of my mentors, coaches and spiritual guru -to them I shall always remain indebted. "A big thank you to all my teammates, support staff, net bowlers, analysts, logistics team, umpires, ground staff, scorers, media personnel and all those who tirelessly work behind the scenes to enable us to compete and play this game we love. "The game has taken me to places across the globe - and the passionate support and energy of the fans has always been a constant.

"And ofcourse none of all this would have been possible or meaningful without the innumerable sacrifices and steadfast support of my family my parents, my wife Puja, my daughter Aditi; my in-laws and the rest of my extended family - who have made this journey truly worth it," added Pujara.