

Five substitutions will benefit top teams, says Palace boss Vieira



Patrick Vieira, Manager of Crystal Palace reacts as Marcelo Bielsa, Manager of Leeds United looks on during a match (file photo)

Reuters | London

Allowing five substitutions can help clubs manage player workload better given the busy fixture list and surge in Covid-19, but such a move would hand an advantage to the top teams, Crystal Palace boss Patrick Vieira said.

Manchester United manager Ralf Rangnick and his City counterpart Pep Guardiola have both urged the Premier League to increase the number of substitutions from three to five as a way to protect players.

"I think five subs regarding the period that we are in at the moment can be the right answer for us as a manager. But I don't think that would be fair for the top five teams and the rest of us," Vieira told reporters ahead of the Boxing Day clash away to Tottenham Hotspur.

"Any decision you make you always have people who are for and against. But for me, I don't know if we should remain with the three substitutes."

The Frenchman said that he wasn't too concerned about the high number of games during festive period but added that it was tough on players coming back from COVID-19 to play without enough training.

"I'm not worried about the players' welfare regarding the games in this period as it's been like this for years. I am worried regarding COVID," he said.

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PATRICK VIEIRA

Vieira confirmed that Palace have reported "a couple of positive cases" in the last few days. Palace's trip to Watford earlier this month was postponed due to a COVID-19 outbreak at the home side.

"We hope we're going to be okay (to face Spurs) but when you're looking at the number of cases around we start to be worried," said Vieira.

"I think (Spurs is) a really difficult place to go. The atmosphere, the players' energy... so what is important for us is to play with courage, with confidence and belief."

Palace are 11th in the league standings with 20 points from 17 games, six points adrift of six-placed Spurs.

Kohli's India seek to conquer final frontier in South Africa

Virat Kohli will seek to rebound from being fired as India's One Day captain to lead the Test side to a first ever series win in South Africa

● **The three-test series starts today in Centurion**

AFP | Centurion

Virat Kohli bruised from being fired as India's one-day captain bids to rebound by leading his country to an historic triumph in South Africa in a three-match Test series which starts at SuperSport Park in Centurion on Sunday.

South Africa is the only regular Test-playing nation where India have yet to win a series.

"We have worked really hard to win series away from India," said vice-captain KL Rahul at India's pre-match press conference on Friday.

"We've won series in England and Australia, which gives us a lot of confidence. We haven't won a series in South Africa, which gives us extra motivation to do our best."

South African captain Dean Elgar said he thought the teams were evenly matched.

"India are number one in the world for a reason but the fact that we are playing in our own back yard gives as an advantage."

Despite losing to New Zealand in last year's world Test championship final, India are the top-ranked Test team, five places ahead of South Africa, who have lost several key players to retirement in recent years.

Kohli leads an experienced side.

Crucially, it has the fast-bowling fire power to match South Africa's in conditions which usually favour pace.

No fewer than ten of India's 18-man squad have toured South Africa before.

Kohli, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ishant Sharma, Ravichandran Ashwin, Umesh Yadav and



National Indian cricketers during a practice session ahead of their first test against South Africa

reserve wicketkeeper Wriddhiman Saha are on their fourth tour of the country.

Ajinkya Rahane and Mohammed Shami are on their third tour, while Rahul and Jasprit Bumrah were part of the closely-contested 2017/18 series which South Africa won 2-1.

"We know what to expect and we've had great preparation," said Rahul.

"The pace and bounce is very different to other countries and it was very important that we came here early and had preparation in the middle."

Rahul indicated India were likely to maintain their recent strategy of picking five bowlers, which he acknowledged would lead to a "very difficult discussion" about settling on five specialist batsmen.

Centurion fortress

India have the luxury of choosing between capable players in both batting and bowling, while South Africa's options seem limited, especially since fast bowler Anrich Nortje withdrew from the series because of a hip injury.

South Africa will, of necessity,



Virat Kohli leaves after a practice session ahead of India first test against South Africa, in Centurion

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KL RAHUL

more vulnerable.

South Africa's fast bowling remains their strength but the loss of Nortje is a major blow.

Much will depend on former world number one Kagiso Rabada, whose form in the past two years has been moderate.

The hosts will also hope the injury-plagued Lungi Ngidi can recapture the form which enabled him to take 6-39 on debut against India at the same venue in 2017/18.

In South Africa's favour, Centurion has been a fortress for the home side, with 21 wins and only two defeats in 26 Tests at the venue.



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field a batting line-up short of proven quality, with two players in their top six yet to score a Test century, while India may be unable to find a place for Shreyas Iyer, who scored 105 and 65 on debut against New Zealand last month.

Elgar confirmed star wicketkeeper-batsman Quinton de Kock was only available for the first Test and will then take paternity leave, which will leave the home team's batting even

Indonesia score in extra time to overcome Singapore in Suzuki Cup semi-final

AFP | Tokyo

Indonesia scored twice in extra time to overcome eight-man Singapore 4-2 at the city state's National Stadium yesterday, as they reached the AFF Suzuki Cup final for the sixth time.

The hosts wasted an opportunity to win the semi-final when Faris Ramli missed a stoppage-time penalty and Indonesia capitalised in the extra 30 minutes as Irfan Jaya and Egy Maulana Vikri netted against the tiring Lions.

The Indonesians have never won the competition, but they will get their chance to end their drought in next week's final against Thailand or Vietnam.

The Thais hold a two-goal lead after the first leg of that tie.

Following a 1-1 draw in the first leg, Indonesia took the lead after 11 minutes when Witan



Indonesia's Irfan Jaya (left) consoles Singapore's Ikhsan Fandi

Sulaeman capitalised on poor defending to square the ball for Ezra Walian to tap home.

Ricky Kambuaya shot just over the crossbar and Ramai Rumakiek's free-kick was stopped

by Hassan Sunny as the Garuda tried to build on their advantage.

Singapore suffered a huge blow in stoppage time when Safuwani Baharudin was controversially sent off after he was



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shown a second yellow card following a tussle with an Indonesian defender.

But the Lions immediately got back on level terms as Indonesia struggled to clear Shahdan Sulaiman's free-kick and Song Ui-young fired home after a

goalmouth scramble.

Indonesia nearly restored their lead when Rizky Ridho fired against the crossbar on the hour and they received a further boost when Irfan Fandi also received a red card for bringing down Irfan Jaya as he bore down on goal.

But Singapore's nine men rose to the occasion and went ahead in the 74th minute when Shahdan Suleiman curled in a superb free-kick from 20 metres.

Indonesia capitalised on their two-man advantage as Pratama Arhan scrambled the ball home three minutes from time to level the score once again.

Singapore still had a chance to win the game in regulation time when they awarded a last-minute penalty, but Faris' tame effort was kept out by goalkeeper Nadeo Argawinata.

Riyad Mahrez to lead Algeria in African Cup of Nations defense

Reuters | London

Riyad Mahrez will captain Algeria as they defend their African Cup of Nations crown next month, named by coach Djamel Belmadi to lead his 28-man squad at the tournament in Cameroon.

The Manchester City attacker is one of 15 players from the squad that won the last finals in 2019 to return for the delayed 2021 edition, where Algeria compete in Group E against Equatorial Guinea, the Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone.

Algeria begin the defence of their crown against Sierra Leone on Jan. 11 in Douala.