

MAIL TODAY

'TEST CRICKET HERE TO STAY'

Former Pakistan captain Wasim Akram rubbishes claims that Twenty20 will 'kill' the five-day game

By **Ajit Vijaykumar**
in New Delhi

THE fate of Test cricket has started to resemble that elephant in the room which everyone knows about but no one really wants to speak of. The situation isn't ideal, given that T20 has made a huge dent in the appeal of the longest format of the game.

The Test matches are being played on dull tracks with far too many draws for a fan smitten by the slam-bang version of cricket.

So when top players like Chris Gayle and Kevin Pietersen declared, in no uncertain terms, that T20 will soon finish off Test cricket, it was time to take stock of the situation. Some feel that T20 will eventually usurp the five-day game, while others say that the doomsday predictions are part of a passing phase and everything will normalise in due course.

Pakistan's legendary all-rounder Wasim Akram is part of that optimistic group. The ICC might be scurrying to defend Test cricket at every possible juncture but for Akram, there is no need to panic.

"Test cricket will always be there. Every cricketer, who wants to be the best, has to perform in Test cricket because it is the ultimate. Twenty20 is just for enjoyment. For a bowler, there is no time to even think in T20, it gets over before it starts," Akram said in the Capital on Monday.

"Look at Sachin Tendulkar. He has scored the most runs in Tests and hit the most centuries too. If he had done so in T20, no one would have remembered it."

But when current Test stars

start discussing the demise of the five-day game, there must be some danger lurking around the corner.

"Yes, something needs to be done. I agree with the idea of day-night Test matches. But I don't think 4-day Tests will work. We will have too many draws because in a five-day game, you can't escape."

Talking about matters closer to his heart, Akram lamented the route Pakistani pacers Shoaib Akhtar and Mohammad Asif have taken. While Asif has been given a chance to redeem himself with the PCB picking him for the Champions Trophy, Akhtar hasn't been given the same opportunity and it seems like the end of the road for the Rawalpindi speedster.

"Asif should learn from his mistakes. He was the best bowler in Pakistan at one point. As for Akhtar, I believe he has had some fall-out with the selectors. He played in Abu Dhabi but didn't look fit at all. I don't think he will get another chance."

So doesn't he feel the urge to coach Pakistani pacers at this critical juncture?

"I am always ready to give tips but full-time coaching is not my cup of tea. I am just too impatient for that," the Pakistani great admitted.

BALL TAMPERING

One would have thought that when former South African pacer Allan Donald suggested that ICC should legalise ball-tampering to assist fast bowlers who toil away on unresponsive wickets, Akram would give his stamp of approval.

But the former left-arm pacer rubbished the idea.

"I don't know why Donald said that. I am with ICC on this. If a player has the ability to get reverse swing, he will do it anyhow."

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Wasim Akram (right) during the launch of the Gatorade Centre for Pace Excellence in the Capital on Monday

PAUL PAHS