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A Test series between England and India has become one of the most eagerly anticipated battles in international cricket. Long gone are the days when India's cricketers were viewed with mild curiosity, and tended to succumb meekly to bowling that was even slightly hostile. Sunil Gavaskar and Kapil Dev changed all that, while Bishen Bedi's beguiling left-arm spin and bright turbans remain for me the best illustration of Indian cricket – disarm-

ing charisma masking magical skill.

The modern Indian cricketer is very different to Bishen. This is now the sport of superstars who are adored every bit as much as actors and pop icons. The rewards for the top players are immense, while despite allegations of corruption against him, the President of the Indian Board was recently elected as the first chairman of the International Cricket Council. Make no mistake; India is cricket's powerhouse.

But like England, India are struggling. They have not won a Test match overseas for three years and last time they were in England an aloof, uninterested-looking team was despatched 4-0. Worse still, when

England toured India 18 months ago they did the unthinkable by coming back from 1-0 down to win the series 2-1.

Duncan Fletcher, the coach widely credited for masterminding England's long-awaited Ashes success in 2005, returns as India's coach determined to make amends for his team's disastrous showing four years ago. Only three of his players have appeared in Tests in England before, making this one of the least experi-

enced squads to tour here. But this is the chance Fletcher has been waiting for.

For years his hands were hopelessly tied by the presence of truly legendary figures such as Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid, VVS Laxman and Virender Sehwag. The coach's position was virtually ineffectual. But with their retirements that has all changed, and now surrounded by talented and ambitious young men such as Virat Kohli,

Cheteshwar Pujara and the dashing Shikhar Dhawan, Fletcher can finally mould the team in his own fashion.

Alastair Cook was the captain of the first England team to win in India for 26 years, and whose

current crisis graphically reflects sport's wheel of fortune. He faced a similar predicament in 2010 when he could not buy a run and was saved by a painstaking century in the last match of the summer. But he was not distracted by the captaincy then. Now England's current run of six defeats in seven Tests adds greatly to the pressure on his shoulders.

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