

# A train journey



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Two days before the India-New Zealand Test began here on Friday, Sachin Tendulkar, Gautam Gambhir, Suresh Raina, R Ashwin and a few others got their willows repaired by India's most trusted one-man bat repair shop.

While Tendulkar's new bat turned out to be slightly longer than the permissible length, Gambhir had two of his bats repaired by Ram Bhandari, the most trusted 'Bat Doctor' of Indian cricketers.

"All batsmen and bowlers of the Indian team come to me to get their bats repaired. When Sehwag recently returned from Sri Lanka, he stopped over in Bangalore for a day and told me about what he required in his bats," Bhandari disclosed to MAIL TODAY.

Left-handed Raina wanted a thick bat handle and 52-year-old Bhandari duly altered it to suit his grip. Off-spinner Ashwin is also very particular about his willow.

He too got his bat repaired by the Bangalore-based 'Bat Doctor'.

Cheteshwar Pujara, who made a fine century in the first match on his comeback to the Test team, got the balance of his bat checked before the match began on August 23 in Uppal, Hyderabad. "I checked the balance and weight of his bat. He uses a single handle grip," Bhandari told MAIL TODAY.

While Pujara had said that he uses bats weighing 1170-1180 gms – he admitted he didn't know for sure – Bhandari, who turned to repairing bats eight years ago, said that his bat weighs 1100 gm.

However, Tendulkar could not locate Bhandari to have his bat's length adjusted. "He turned to an employee of the Karnataka State Cricket

Association and he cut the toe as per instructions from the maestro. The bat was just about half-an-inch longer [than the length specified by the Marylebone Cricket Club, the guardian of cricket rules],” a source told Mail Today.

MCC rules state that “ the length of the bat, when the lower portion of the handle is inserted, shall not be more than 38 inches/ 96. 5 cm”. They also say that the width of the bat shall not exceed 4. 25 inches/ 10. 8 cm at its widest part.

Gambhir was luckier than Tendulkar.

Since the team had reached Bangalore three days ago, the Delhi batsman had enough time to have his favourite willows mended.

“ Gambhir asked me to check two of his bats and get the stroke back. He said that they were making a strange noise at the bottom when he was playing strokes. The reason was that when a bat is excessively used, it gradually loses stroke,” Bhandari said.

“ I took the bats home and first checked them with a hammer to ascertain what exactly was required and where. I discovered that the bats had become sort of ‘ hollow’ from the place where the stroke comes. Then I ‘ opened’ the portion of the bats where they required repair work, and used Fevicol and left them pressed in a machine overnight. I returned them back to Gambhir the next day,” he disclosed.

Bhandari said that he also got the handle of Raina’s bat fixed.

“ He asked me to make the handles of two bats thicker so that he could use a single grip on them. I wrapped the tape heavily around the handles to help give him a comfortable grip,” he disclosed.