

## Sports

# India axe openers, Australia recall Marsh for third Test

## Debutant Mayank Agarwal to open batting with Hanuma Vihari

**MELBOURNE:** India axed both openers yesterday while Australia recalled allrounder Mitchell Marsh at the expense of struggling batsman Peter Handscomb for the high-stakes third Test. With the four-Test series tied 1-1, much is riding on the Boxing Day showdown at the Melbourne Cricket Ground where up to 90,000 fans are expected, and India can't afford another top order flop.

Murali Vijay and KL Rahul scored just 95 runs between them in eight innings across the opening two Tests in Adelaide and Perth, failing to play their part alongside the likes of Virat Kohli and Cheteshwar Pujara. They have paid the price with debutant Mayank Agarwal expected to open the batting with Hanuma Vihari, who is set to be bumped up the order. Experienced No.6 Rohit Sharma was declared fit and resumes his place in the side after missing the Perth Test.

But ace spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, who also missed that game, has failed to recover from an abdominal strain, with left-arm finger-spinner Ravindra Jadeja brought in as part of a four-man attack.

Skipper Kohli, who had some testy exchanges in Perth with Australian counterpart Tim Paine, insisted the defeat there was in the past and his team was starting with a new slate in Melbourne.

"As a team, whether you're 2-0 up or 1-0 down, what has happened in the past has no significance to what is going to happen in the next Test," he said before the team was announced.

"So the key is to stay in the moment, stay in the present. We just need to play consistently good cricket and not get too excited or taken aback from situations in the match."

Kohli, who scored a battling century in Perth but was criticised for failing to acknowledge the crowd

when he was controversially given out, also said he would not be looking for confrontations with Paine in Melbourne.

"Both teams are passionate and desperate to win. Obviously, things happen on the field. But as long as the line isn't crossed," he said. "I'm sure Tim and myself understand what happened and we don't want to do something unnecessary. We want to lead our teams well and play good cricket that the public wants to see."

### RELIEVE PRESSURE

Despite winning to level the series in Perth, Australia opted for change by recalling Marsh, whose part-time seamers will help relieve pressure on the home side's pace attack on a pitch that is not expected to offer as much for the bowlers as Adelaide or Perth.

Part of the thinking also revolves around the potentially decisive fourth and final Test in Sydney, with only a three-day recovery period if Melbourne goes the full five-day distance. Handscomb is the fall guy, axed after scoring just 34, 14, 7 and 13 across four innings.

"I'm sure Pete would be upset. I think he's had conversations with the selectors that there's a few things they would like him to work on and Pete is open to that," Paine said. He added that he did not believe dropping a player from a winning XI would impact Australia's momentum.

"No I don't think so, we did it last year during the Ashes as well. The majority of this decision has been based around it's a long series, we've played on a lot of hot days and our bowlers have had a big workload," he said. "We believe Mitch can come in and do a really good job with the bat and obviously he'll give great support to our bowlers."

**Australia** - Marcus Harris, Aaron Finch, Usman Khawaja, Shaun Marsh, Travis Head, Mitch Marsh, Tim



**MELBOURNE:** India's chairman of the selectors MSK Prasad (C) speaks to the media after a training session in Melbourne yesterday, ahead of the third cricket Test match between Australia and India. — AFP

Paine (capt), Josh Hazlewood, Pat Cummins, Nathan Lyon, Mitchell Starc.

**India** - Mayank Agarwal, Hanuma Vihari, Cheteshwar

Pujara, Virat Kohli (capt), Ajinkya Rahane, Rohit Sharma, Rishabh Pant, Ravindra Jadeja, Mohammed Shami, Ishant Sharma, Jasprit Bumrah. — AFP

## Woods roars back, 'Moliwood' star in dramatic 2018

**PARIS:** Tiger Woods snatched plenty of golfing headlines in 2018 with his remarkable comeback after years in the wilderness and will now be eyeing a 15th major title, while British Open champion Francesco Molinari inspired Europe to a Ryder Cup thrashing of the United States in Paris.

It was an eventful year for golf fans, with Woods' return adding a sub-plot to the bigger tournaments, even as many of the younger generation confirmed their respective rises to the top of the game.

Justin Thomas' spectacular eagle on the final hole at the WGC Mexico Championship kicked off the season in style, and although the 25-year-old lost out to veteran Phil Mickelson that day in a play-off, three major titles went to Americans under the age of 30.

Woods, who claimed his first tournament victory since 2013 in front of raucous galleries at the Tour Championship, ended his year with four straight Ryder Cup losses and a defeat by Mickelson in their overly-hyped and ultimately low-quality \$9 million match in Las Vegas.

But nothing can take away from the impact the 14-time major winner made on his return after over four years spent battling injuries.

The 42-year-old led on the back nine in the fourth round of the British Open at Carnoustie, and also produced a thrilling charge at the USPGA Championship before ending his title drought in the final individual event of the campaign.

As ever, the former world number one will be bullish about his chances of edging closer to Jack Nicklaus' all-time record of 18 major titles in 2019,



Tiger Woods

but Woods has still not lifted one of golf's biggest prizes for a decade.

A rise from outside the top 1,000 in the rankings to world number 13 in less than a year was stunning, though, and Woods will have a chance to put a disastrous Ryder Cup performance behind him when he likely doubles up as captain and player at next year's Presidents Cup in Melbourne.

"I want to compete. I want to play," he said of the December 2019 matches against Ernie Els' International side earlier this month.

### 'MOLIWOOD' STAR ON CENTRE STAGE

The pre-Ryder Cup narrative centred around Woods and the Americans' bid to end a 25-year wait for victory on European soil, but the match-play showdown ended in a familiar one-sided home win as Molinari teamed up with Tommy Fleetwood to devastating effect in September.

'Moliwood' reeled off four straight victories as a partnership, with Thomas Bjorn's hosts ruthlessly grinding down the US to triumph 17.5-10.5 after losing the opening session, before Molinari capped a golden year by becoming the first

European in history to claim a perfect five points.

The Italian won the prestigious BMW PGA Championship at Wentworth, clinched his first PGA Tour title in the States and became the first player from his country to seal a major title before his heroics in France.

"If someone told me I would go on to win Wentworth, win on the PGA Tour, win the Open, five points at the Ryder Cup, I probably would have laughed," he said after adding the European Tour's Race to Dubai crown in November.

Brooks Koepka bristled late in the season at a perceived lack of media attention in his game after a magnificent 2018 which saw the 28-year-old brush off the disappointment of missing the Masters through injury by winning two majors.

He and the likes of Thomas, Rickie Fowler and Masters champion Patrick Reed will be young Americans to watch in the new year, with exciting Spaniard Jon Rahm seeking to continue his incredible rise.

The men's season will have a more truncated feel to it with all four majors being played between April and July after drastic changes to the schedule, with the USPGA to be played before the US Open, making the British Open at Royal Portrush the final major of the year.

### LINDBERG, PARK FIGHT DUEL

It was a strong year for women's golf, with England's Georgia Hall and Swede Pernilla Lindberg sealing thrilling major breakthroughs at the British Open and ANA Inspiration respectively. Hall also teamed up with compatriot Charley Hull to impress in a mixed-gender European Tour event, while Lexi Thompson showcased her skills on the PGA Tour in the QBE Shootout alongside Tony Finau earlier this month. The standout moment of 2018 came back at the start of April, though, when Lindberg denied Park Inbee an eighth major crown in a gruelling eight-hole, sudden-death play-off that started in Sunday-night gloom and ended on the Monday morning. — AFP

## Identical twins strike gold, 163 miles a day

**PARIS:** One woman ran almost 163 miles in 24 hours, there was a marathon chess duel, while identical twins landed a major international title each in the same sport. Here, AFP Sport also looks at a 16-time world champion and a Hungarian skimmer in five stories you may have missed in 2018:

### ONE DAY... 163 MILES

American Camille Herron smashed the women's world 24-hour and 100-mile records in December in an incredible display of endurance. The 36-year-old ran 162.9 miles (262km) on a track in Phoenix, beating the best-placed male finisher by over five miles.

In an Instagram post, the ultramarathon runner said she used three different pairs of shoes during her record-breaking effort, going "into the pain cave" for the final five to six hours. But Herron was able to come "back from the dead", apparently thanks to some tacos and beer. The 37-year-old later told the BBC that she hopes to see ultramarathon running added to the Olympics in the near future.

### THE GOLDEN IDENTICAL TWINS

Russian Dina Averina was utterly dominant at the 2018 rhythmic gymnastics world championships in Sofia, winning five gold medals of a possible six, including the all-around title for the second straight year.

Her identical twin sister Arina had to settle for bronze, just three months after pipping Dina to the European championships gold medal in Spain. The 20-year-old sisters have now won a remarkable 18 major championship gold medals between them in only two years.

The twins can be told apart by a scar on Arina's forehead, which she sustained after an accident with a club. Dina has done her best to help the audience, though, sporting a new hairstyle in recent competitions.

### RAPID(ISH) CHESS

Magnus Carlsen, world chess champion since 2013, retained his title again



Camille Herron

in November by beating American challenger Fabiano Caruana, but that was only half the story in a marathon battle between the world's two highest-ranked grandmasters. A seven-hour, 115-move draw in the opening game set the tone in London, as the match ended with 12 consecutive draws for the first time in world chess championship history. That meant rapid-chess tiebreakers, and Norwegian star Carlsen reeled off three straight wins to finally see off Caruana.

### A 16-TIME WORLD CHAMPION RETIRES

Darts great Phil Taylor bowed out back on January 1, retiring from the sport at the age of 57. The Englishman finished his career with a staggering 16 world championship titles, with his most recent coming in 2013.

But 'The Power' came agonisingly close to finishing on 17, after a thrilling run to the final in his last event at Alexandra Palace. He came up against an inspired opponent in tournament debutant Rob 'Voltage' Cross, though, as the former electrician powered to a 7-2 victory to claim the £400,000 (\$508,000) prize. — AFP

## Enable, Winx make history as Justify captures Triple Crown

**PARIS:** Enable and Australia's leading equine lady Winx cemented their places in racing's record books in a 2018 season that produced a landmark Melbourne Cup success for Godolphin and a Triple Crown for Justify.

Over jumps the Grand National was captured by Tiger Roll, the smallest horse in the field displaying the heart of a lion to prevail in a pulsating finish to the world's most famous steeplechase.

Buveur d'Air defended his Champion Hurdle crown with stablemate Altior taking the Champion Chase but their trainer Nicky Henderson was denied a historic Cheltenham Festival treble when his Might Bite was foiled by Native River in the Gold Cup.

But it was two representatives of the fairer sex that stole the season's headlines. The John Gosden-trained four-year-old filly Enable overcame injury to defend her Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe crown at a renovated Longchamp in Paris in the autumn.

Under the masterful guidance of 48-year-old Italian jockey Frankie Dettori, she then became the first Arc winner to go on to capture the Breeders Cup Turf at Churchill Downs.

"She conquered America!" exclaimed Dettori. Owner Prince Khalid Abdullah has confirmed his superstar stays in training in 2019 with the objective of becoming the first-ever triple Arc winner.

Bookmakers make her a 4-1 shot to succeed where only 2013/2014 winner Treve has tried, the French filly only missing out in 2015 to Golden Horn, trained by Gosden and ridden by Dettori. Australia's wonder mare Winx added a record fourth Cox Plate in October to extend her remarkable run to 29 wins in a row.

"I can't believe it," said long-time jockey Hugh Bowman afterwards. "The electricity that came through my body when I turned into the home straight. "Everyone watching gets so much joy and pleasure out of this wonderful horse," he added.

"The fact that she's been able to do it so many times consecutively just speaks volumes for the management of her."

And, like Enable, the omens are encouraging for racelovers that she will be back racing as an eight-year-old in March. One race Winx will never contest due to stamina limitations is the Melbourne Cup, which this year went to Cross Counter, ending two decades of frustration for Sheikh Mohammed's Godolphin stable, which also enjoyed Epsom Derby success with Masar.

Legendary Irish trainer Aidan O'Brien suffered heartache when his Melbourne Cup contender Cliffs of Moher had to be put down. After last year's heroics in setting a new record for Group/Grade One wins, O'Brien had a quieter 2018 season.

One of the big races he missed out on was the Irish Derby, but he was all smiles despite defeat as he congratulated winner Latrobe's trainer and jockey-his sons Joseph, 25, and Donnacha, 19.

In May, O'Brien had high hopes that Mendelssohn would become Europe's first-ever winner of the Kentucky Derby. But his runner wilted in the 'Run for the Roses', trailing in last behind Justify, with Bob Baffert's colt going on to sweep the Preakness and Belmont Stakes to become the 13th horse to capture the coveted Triple Crown.

Sadly injury intervened to scupper his bid to end his career on a high in the Breeders Cup Classic. A lucrative stud career now beckons. Another major racing figure-human not equine-heading off into well deserved retirement is Luca Cuman.

The Newmarket-based Italian trainer, 69, is bowing out after a career spanning more than 40 years with his haul of major race victories featuring a brace of Epsom Derby triumphs for Kahyasi (1988) and High Rise (1998).

Traillblazing Irish jockey Katie Walsh, who came closest to becoming the first woman to ride a Grand National winner when third on Seabass in 2012, has also decided to withdraw from racing's frontline.

One man not considering imminent retirement is Mark Johnston, the 58-year-old Scotsman who in August sent out his 4,193rd winner to become Britain's record-breaking trainer. That's 600 more than John Dunlop, the English training great who saddled 10 British classic winners and who died aged 78 in July. — AFP