

# AUSTRALIA REGAIN CONFIDENCE FOR PAKISTAN SERIES

**MELBOURNE:** Lacking context, suspense and crowd enthusiasm, the Chappell-Hadlee series between Australia and New Zealand may not have generated the returns projected by its commerce-minded organisers.

The home side, however, enjoyed a windfall of confidence from the 3-0 series win which captain Steven Smith hopes will be banked for the tests against Pakistan starting this week in Brisbane.

Scarcely 20,000 fans turned up to the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Friday to watch the finale against New Zealand, a year after more than 90,000 packed the stadium for the World Cup final between the same teams.

With New Zealand's batsmen skittled for 147 in 36.1 overs, Australia won by 117 runs, bringing an unloved tournament jammed between two test series to a premature conclusion. Former players and pundits have long bemoaned the proliferation of one-day tournaments that jam up the international calendar and tend to offer little more than bragging rights to the winning team and revenues to the hosting cricket board.

The International Cricket Council is weighing proposals to inject relevance to the format, including making bilateral series serve as qualifiers for the quadrennial World Cup. "There's been a few proposals that have come up and you

want as much relevance for every series as possible," Smith told reporters after the Melbourne win.

Australia enjoy the top ranking in one-day cricket but selectors have often been loath to field their strongest teams. They sent an under-strength squad to South Africa, resting frontline pacemen Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood, who were duly hammered 5-0. Local media blamed the whitewash in South Africa in part for the humbling 2-1 test series loss at home to the Proteas. The South Africa one-day tournament was another that lacked any meaningful context, but Proteas captain Faf du Plessis said his side's victory gave them an edge

ahead of the highly anticipated test series. Smith will hope for the same spur against Pakistan, who they play in the first day-night test at the Gabba from Thursday. "Obviously it's going to be different in Brisbane against the pink ball and against a quality opposition like Pakistan, so we'll have to be at our best if we want to score some runs at there," he said. "It's been a great series for us and great for our confidence as well. "Winning is a lot better than losing and it becomes a bit of a habit as well. Hopefully we can keep up this habit for the rest of the summer."

Since being humiliated in Hobart to lose the South Africa test series with a game to spare, Smith's side have

bounced back with four straight wins, including the dead rubber test in Adelaide with a re-jigged side.

While in-form opener David Warner was man-of-the-series with two centuries against New Zealand, the return to form of pace spearhead Mitchell Starc is ominous for Pakistan. The left-arm was in full flight at the MCG, capturing three wickets and two with a pair of almost unplayable inswinging yorkers. "I think he's got better with every game he's played (and) I think he's getting back to his best," said Smith. "When he's (bowling yorkers) we know he's going pretty well, so hopefully we can see a big series against Pakistan." —Reuters

## REBUILDING N ZEALAND PUNISHED FOR 'TREPIDATION': HESSON

**MELBOURNE:** New Zealand's rebuilding one-day international side played with "trepidation" against a resurgent Australia and their lack of intensity in the field contributed to a 3-0 series whitewash, Black Caps coach Mike Hesson said.

Australia, fired by another match-winning century from opener David Warner, completed the sweep with a 117-run rout of the touring side at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Friday.

That followed a pair of stinging losses for the Black Caps in Sydney and Canberra, magnifying a steep decline since Brendon McCullum's team contested the World Cup final against the same opponents last year.

"The first couple of games I'd describe them as a passive performance, especially in the field and with the ball," Hesson told reporters.

"There were some good signs (in Melbourne) with a more complete performance with the ball and in the field but we weren't able to back that up with the bat. "The energy and intensity in the field is something we've really instilled into whoever has come into the group and those first couple of games that was the most disappointing, that we didn't offer as much as we needed to in the field and didn't back up our bowlers enough.

"We haven't played well at all. We've played a side with a little bit of trepidation. It's exposed us in some areas that we knew a little bit about but it's shown us we've got plenty of room to move."

With Ross Taylor scratched from the tour to have eye surgery, opener Martin Guptill and all-rounder James Neesham were the only New Zealand batsmen to excel with the bat in Kane Williamson's team.

Opener Tom Latham, BJ Watling and all-rounder Mitchell Santner had dreadful series, all averaging under 12.

Pace spearhead Trent Boult battled hard for his six wickets but had precious little support until Melbourne, where left-arm spinner Santner and Colin de Grandhomme made belated contributions.

"We've lost 10 players from our side from a year ago and we've got some players there who are trying to find their feet in international cricket," said Hesson. "They've played against a very good side and some have shown glimpses and others have been found a little bit wanting in areas where we thought they'd be better in." New Zealand take on a newly-confident Bangladesh in another three-match one-day series from Dec. 26 in Christchurch before three T20s and a two-test series against the same side in January. — Reuters



**MUMBAI:** India's captain Virat Kohli plays a shot on the third day of the fourth Test cricket match between India and England at the Wankhede stadium in Mumbai yesterday. — AFP

# KOHLI, VIJAY PUT INDIA AHEAD AGAINST ENGLAND

**MUMBAI:** India captain Virat Kohli maintained his red-hot form as he and Murali Vijay struck fine centuries to help the hosts overtake England on day three of the fourth test at the Wankhede Stadium yesterday.

The hosts, leading 2-0 in the five-match series, reached 451 for seven at the close, 51 runs ahead of the touring side.

Captain Kohli was unbeaten on 147 at stumps with Jayant Yadav on 30 not out. The 28-year-old Kohli brought up his 15th test hundred and second of the series and celebrated with a leap in the air, bringing the 22,000 crowd at the stadium overlooking the Arabian Sea to their feet.

Kohli batted majestically, rarely looked in trouble, and hit 17 fours with sublime stroke-making. He shared crucial stands with the lower-order batsmen - 57 with Ravindra Jadeja for the seventh wicket and an unbroken 87 with Yadav.

Vijay and Kohli, who also passed 1,000 test runs in 2016 and 4,000 in his career, added 116 for the third wicket before the former was out for 136, hitting a full toss from Adil Rashid straight back to the leg-spinner.

England successfully reviewed the umpire's not out decision to dismiss Karun Nair lbw for 13 off Moeen Ali before part-time off-spinner Joe Root picked up the wickets of Parthiv Patel and Ravichandran Ashwin in four balls.

India, who were comfortably placed on 262-2,

SCOREBOARD			
<b>MUMBAI, India:</b> Scoreboard at stumps yesterday on the third day of the fourth test between India and England at Wankhede Stadium.			
<b>England 1st Innings:</b> 400	<b>India 1st Innings (Overnight):</b> 146-1	<b>Extras:</b> (5b, 7lb, 2w)	14
Lokesh Rahul b Ali	24	<b>TOTAL:</b> (for 7 wickets)	451
Murali Vijay c and b Rashid	136	<b>Overs:</b> 142.	
Cheteshwar Pujara b Ball	47	<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-39, 2-146, 3-262, 4-279, 5-305, 6-307, 7-364.	
Virat Kohli not out	147	<b>Still to bat:</b> Umesh Yadav, Bhuvneshwar Kumar.	
Karun Nair lbw b Ali	13	<b>Bowling:</b> James Anderson 15-5-43-0, Chris Woakes 8-2-34-0 (1w), Moeen Ali 45-5-139-2, Adil Rashid 44-5-152-2, Jake Ball 14-5-29-1 (1w), Ben Stokes 8-2-24-0, Joe Root 8-2-18-2.	
Parthiv Patel c Bairstow b Root	15	<b>Series:</b> India leads 2-0.	
Ravichandran Ashwin c Jennings b Root	0		
Ravindra Jadeja c Buttler b Rashid	25		
Jayant Yadav not out	30		

were reduced to 307-6 before Kohli and Jadeja propped them up. Jadeja was out to Rashid for 25. The hosts could have been in more trouble if Rashid had held on to a return catch from Kohli, then on 68. Root also dropped Yadav on eight off James Anderson, compounding England's problems. Yadav was relieved again on 28 when replays showed he had edged Moeen to wicketkeeper Jonny Bairstow down the leg side but England did not have any reviews left to challenge the umpire's not out decision.

Resuming on 146 for one, the hosts suffered

an early jolt when Cheteshwar Pujara (47) was bowled by the second ball of the morning shouldering arms to paceman Jake Ball.

However, it proved to be the only success for the English bowlers in the morning as Vijay and Kohli flayed the attack. Vijay reached his second century of the series with a single against off-spinner Moeen and hit 10 fours and three sixes in his knock. He was given out lbw to Rashid on 116 but managed to overturn the decision on review as replays suggested he got an inside edge before the ball struck his pad. — Reuters

## HARTLEY RED-CARDED AFTER SIX MINUTES

**PARIS:** England captain Dylan Hartley was red-carded after just six minutes on the pitch as his Northampton Saints slumped to a 37-10 defeat to Leinster in the European Champions Cup on Friday.

Hartley, who had started on the bench following autumn international duty, replaced Mikey Haywood after 50 minutes for his 50th appearance in the tournament.

However, just six minutes later, the 30-year-old hooker was heading off in disgrace for aiming a wild punch at the head of Leinster flanker Sean O'Brien. As well as helping to condemn 2000 champions Northampton to a second defeat in three games in Pool 4 and allow Leinster cement top spot, the incident could dent Hartley's hopes of captaining the British and Irish Lions in New Zealand next year.

Northampton ended the game with 13 men when replacement forward George Pisi was yellow-carded for a high tackle.

"It's happening too much," said Saints director of rugby Jim Mallinder of his team's woeful disciplinary record. "The players don't do it on purpose but you have to be so careful now. We have spoken about it over the last few weeks and we have had our disciplinary issues and it continues to haunt us."

Leinster's new Irish star Garry Ringrose scored the only try of the first half after just two minutes when he sprinted clear following a clever shimmy and dummy from full-back Rob Kearney.

Skipper and winger Isa Nacewa popped over the conversion for 7-0 which soon became 10-0 for the three-time champions when the 34-year-old New Zealander kicked a penalty.

### METRONOMIC BOOT

Northampton's only points of the first period came via a 20th-minute penalty from the metronomic boot of Stephen

Myler. Northampton were level at 10-10 in the 45th minute thanks to a try from Samoan winger Ahsee Tuala who finished off a move inspired by former Munster centre JJ Hanrahan.

Myler added the extras before Nacewa hit a monster penalty to restore Leinster's lead at 13-10.

That signalled the entrance of Hartley but he and his fellow forwards were soon over-powered when O'Brien was barged over the try line thanks to the supporting muscle of No8 Jamie Heaslip.

Nacewa again hit the extras for 20-10 before Hartley's brief appearance came to an end for his right-handed haymaker at the head of O'Brien.

Referee Jerome Garces had no hesitation in reaching for the red card as Hartley trotted off much to the dismay of watching England coach Eddie Jones.

Leinster scored a third try when debutant Rory O'Loughlin outjumped an inattentive Ben Foden to dot down a clever crossfield kick from Ross Byrne.

Nacewa missed the extras but Leinster soon made their one-man advantage count when Jamison Gibson-Park skipped through a weary Northampton defence for a 32-10 lead and a bonus point. Nacewa added the fifth try in the last minute.

On Saturday, defending champions Saracens will seek to make it 12 straight wins in Europe when they take on English Premiership rivals Sale in Pool 3.

Saracens have not lost in Europe since they were beaten 13-9 by Clermont in the 2015 semi-final. The other game in Pool 3 pitches Scarlets against Toulon.

Other top match-ups see Leicester, in Pool 1, face Munster in a re-run of the 2002 final. Top 14 leaders Clermont head to Belfast to face Ulster in Pool 5 while Toulouse will be seeking their first victory in Pool 2, away at Italians Zebre. —AFP



**PARIS:** England captain Dylan Hartley was sent off just six minutes after coming on as a substitute.

## TARASOVA AND MOROZOV CLINCH MAIDEN CROWN

**MARSEILLE:** Russia's Evgenia Tarasova and Vladimir Morozov won their first major title on Friday when they clinched the pairs crown at the Grand Prix figure skating final, sounding out a warning for the 2018 Olympics.

In their four-year partnership, their best previous performances had been bronze medals at the 2015 and 2016 European championships.

But on Friday, they triumphed with 213.85 points, winning the free programme ahead of Canadian favourites Meagan Duhamel and Eric Radford.

Skating to Music by English rocker John Miles, they obtained 135.25 points in the free programme with the Canadians on 134.55.

"Obviously, you always have the goal to win, but we focused on skating clean," said Tarasova.

"We've had two weeks of good preparation and worked very hard and this is the result. This victory is a big step forward for us. The judges now look at us as potential winners and that is important."

World champions Duhamel and Radford, who finished third overall behind China's Yu Xiaoyu and Zhang Hao, paid

dearly for a fall on a triple axel.

In the women's individual event, Russia's world and European champion Evgenia Medvedeva started her Grand Prix final defence by taking the lead in the short programme.

The 17-year-old scored 79.21 points ahead of Canada's Kaetlyn Osmond on 75.54. "Setting records is not important to me, I'm not chasing after them," said Medvedeva.

"I just want to show what my coaches have taught me and the work we do every day in practice. Today I'm happy with my performance, but there is still room to grow." In ice dance, Canada's Tessa Virtue and Scott Moir marked their return after two years with a scintillating performance to a soundtrack of hip-hop, blues and Prince standards.

They beat the world record with 80.50 points to take the overall lead after the sort programme ahead of Maia Shibutani and Alex Shibutani of the United States and French pair Gabriella Papadakis and Guillaume Cizeron.

Virtue and Moir were the 2010 Olympic champions on home ice in Vancouver and silver medalists in 2014 in Sochi. —AFP



**MARSEILLE:** Evgenia Tarasova and Vladimir Morozov of Russia pose with the gold medal after winning the Pairs Program during ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Final in Marseille, southern France, Friday. — AP