

Sports

Afghanistan beat Ireland for 'historic' first Test victory

DEHRADUN: Afghanistan claimed their first ever victory in Test cricket yesterday, beating fellow newcomers Ireland in what captain Asghar Afghan hailed as a historic day for the war-torn country. Afghanistan and Ireland both achieved full member status of the International Cricket Council in 2017, becoming only the 11th and 12th teams to play the long format of the sport beloved of purists.

Rahmat Shah and Ihsanullah Janat scored fifties as Afghanistan chased down 147 to beat Ireland by seven wickets on day four of the one-off game in the north

SCOREBOARD

Final scoreboard on the fourth day of the one-off Test between Afghanistan and Ireland in Dehradun, India, yesterday:

Ireland first innings 172 (T. Murtagh 54 not out, G. Dockrell 39; Y. Ahmadzai 3-41, M. Nabi 3-36)

Afghanistan first innings 314 (R. Shah 98, A. Afghan 67; S. Thompson 3-28)

Ireland second innings 288 (A. Balbirnie 82, K. O'Brien 56; R. Khan 5-82)

Afghanistan second innings (target 147; overnight 29-1)

M. Shahzad c Poynter b McBrine 2

I. Janat not out 65

R. Shah st Poynter b Cameron-Dow 76

M. Nabi run out (Murtagh/Poynter) 1

H. Shahidi not out 4

Extras: (w) 1

Total (3 wickets, 47.5 overs) 149

Fall of wickets: 1-5 (Shahzad), 2-144 (Shah), 3-145 (Nabi)

Did not bat: A. Afghan, I.A. Khil, R. Khan, Y. Ahmadzai, W. Momand, W. Salamkheil

Bowling: Dockrell 22-7-58-0 (w), McBrine 13-5-35-1, Cameron-Dow 5.5-0-24-1, Murtagh 5-3-15-0, Thompson 1-0-9-0, Balbirnie 1-0-8-0.

Result: Afghanistan beat Ireland by seven wickets

Indian city of Dehradun. "It's a historic day for Afghanistan, for our team and our people," Afghan said.

"We have been playing for a while, we have been playing first-class cricket, so we have that composure. The bowlers were very good, Rashid (Khan), Yamin (Ahmadzai)," he added. Afghanistan were steered to their target by a 139-run partnership between Shah, who made 76, and debutant Janat, who hit an unbeaten 65.

Shah, a top-order batsman, registered his second fifty of the match after making 98 in Afghanistan's first innings score of 314. With three needed to win, Afghanistan lost Shah and then Mohammad Nabi in successive deliveries before Hashmatullah Shahidi came to the crease and hit the winning boundary.

"I want to congratulate all the lads in the team, they have been absolutely brilliant," said Afghan. "We have got a few games before the World Cup and we want to make every opportunity count," the captain added.

Cricket has become the national sport of Afghanistan, torn apart by decades of war, with many of the Afghan players cutting their cricketing teeth in refugee camps in Pakistan. The country gained one-day international status in 2009 and have qualified for their second 50-over World Cup in England and Wales, due to begin on May 30. They have also been part of four Twenty20 World Cups.

They have made India their base since 2015, far away from the guns and bombs of their home country. Last year they made the leap to Test cricket, taking on India in Bangalore, but were thrashed inside two days.

Khan, the Indian Premier League (IPL) sensation who is second in the ICC one-day international rankings, played a key role in the Ireland game, taking five wickets on Sunday as Ireland were dismissed for 288.

Khan returned career-best figures of five for 82 with his leg-spin to stall Ireland's resurgence after Andy Balbirnie and Kevin O'Brien had hit gritty half-centuries



DEHRADUN: Afghanistan's team members pose with the trophy after winning the Test cricket match between Afghanistan and Ireland at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in the northern Indian city of Dehradun yesterday. — AFP

in their second innings. Balbirnie made 82 and O'Brien 56 before a 10th-wicket 58-run partnership between James Cameron-Dow and Tim Murtagh set up the potentially tricky chase for the Afghans. It was Ireland's second Test too. They played their debut Test against Pakistan in Dublin last year, losing by five wickets.

For Ireland, Tim Murtagh stood out with scores of 54

not out and 27 batting at number 11. "It's been a long tour, but the lads have been very good. You are never tired to play Test cricket, it's always a special feeling," said Ireland captain William Porterfield.

Ireland lost the two Twenty20 matches at the start of the series between the two minnows and then levelled the one-day internationals at 2-2. — AFP

No complacency on World Cup security, says cricket chief

KARACHI: The deadly New Zealand shootings which Bangladesh cricketers narrowly avoided means security will remain an "absolute priority" going into the World Cup, the head of cricket's governing body said Sunday.

Fifty people died in attacks on two mosques in Christchurch on Friday, in what is believed to be the worst assault on Muslims in a Western country. Bangladesh's Test cricketers were just a few minutes from being caught up in the massacre, arriving in a bus at one of the mosques as shooting began.

The third Test between Bangladesh and New Zealand which was due to start in Wellington on Saturday was cancelled and the team returned home.

Speaking on the sidelines of Pakistan Super League (PSL) final in Karachi, the International Cricket Council (ICC) chief executive David Richardson said security had to remain "an absolute priority".

"I don't think security is anything new, obviously something happening in New Zealand probably took a lot of people by surprise and it emphasised the need not to be complacent, especially going into the World Cup," Richardson said.

The England and Wales Cricket Board will host the World Cup from May 30 to July 14. "I know the work has already been done by the security director together with all the security agencies in the UK and they are leaving no stone unturned," he added.

Richardson said Pakistan had taken "a great step forward" in safely hosting the PSL matches, a decade on from an attack on the Sri Lankan team bus in Lahore which has seen foreign teams refuse to play in the country over security fears.

Pakistan has gradually tried to revive international cricket at home, having hosted the finals of Pakistan Super League for the last two years and played matches against a World XI, Sri Lanka and the West Indies.

This year eight PSL matches were hosted in Karachi without incident and Richardson, a former South African player, said it was helping to change the image of Pakistan. "The perception outside of Pakistan was that it was quite a dangerous place to visit in the past and that perception slowly but surely has been changed," he said.

He said a recent tour by 43 foreign players, including former Australia all-rounder Shane Watson and current New Zealand opener Colin Munro, reflected the changes Pakistan has made.

Trust over security has "increased tremendously," he added. However, last month Cricket Australia acted on their government's advice not to tour Pakistan, where no Australian senior team has played since 1998. — AFP

Flyers use flair for dramatic to top Pens

PITTSBURGH: Sean Couturier scored with 3.4 seconds left in overtime Sunday to give the visiting Philadelphia Flyers a critical 2-1 win over the Pittsburgh Penguins. Couturier's 29th goal came when he blasted the puck from the right circle to the far side past goaltender Matt Murray, who also gave up James van Riemsdyk's tying goal with 18.8 seconds left in regulation. Flyers goalie Carter Hart, in just his second start in 11 games, made 41 saves. The game was played 16,000 days after Philadelphia (35-29-8, 78 points) last won the Stanley Cup in 1975, and the two points helped keep the Flyers' playoff hopes alive. They are six points out of an Eastern Conference wild-card spot with 10 games to play.

ISLANDERS 3, WILD 2 (OT)

Brock Nelson scored at 1:04 of overtime as New York defeated host Minnesota, which had twice erased one-goal deficits. Jordan Eberle and Anders Lee also scored, and goaltender Thomas Greiss made 32 saves as the Islanders won for the fifth time in their past seven games and bounced back from a disappointing 2-1 loss to the Red Wings on Saturday in Detroit. Zach Parise and Jared Spurgeon scored for Minnesota, which lost for the fourth time in its past five games. Goalie Alex Stalock, making just his second start in the past 14 games, stopped 17 of 20 shots.

GOLDEN KNIGHTS 6, OILERS 3

Jonathan Marchessault scored two goals, including what proved to be the game-winner early in the third, and Malcolm Subban had 16 saves to lead Vegas over visiting Edmonton. Mark Stone, Cody Eakin, Brayden McNabb and Alex Tuch also scored goals, and William Karlsson and Reilly Smith each had two assists for the Knights (40-27-5, 85 points), who won for the eighth time in nine games. Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Leon Draisaitl and Kris Russell scored goals, and Connor McDavid had two assists for Edmonton (32-33-7, 71 points), which remained seven points out of the second wild card in the Western Conference. It was the eighth straight multi-point game for McDavid, who now has 105 points this season.

SABRES 4, BLUES 3 (SO)

Sam Reinhart scored in the third round of the shootout as host Buffalo snapped a seven-game skid with a victory over St. Louis. Reinhart nearly won the contest in the waning moments of overtime, but his shot caromed off the left



LAS VEGAS: Connor McDavid #97 of the Edmonton Oilers steals the puck from William Karlsson #71 of the Vegas Golden Knights in the second period of their game at T-Mobile Arena on Sunday in Las Vegas, Nevada. The Golden Knights defeated the Oilers 6-3. — AFP

post. Buffalo captain Jack Eichel and St. Louis forward Tyler Bozak each scored in the first round of the shootout. Reinhart's bid banked off Jake Allen's glove and into the net to set the stage for former Sabres forward Ryan O'Reilly, whose shot deflected off the crossbar to end the game.

AVALANCHE 3, DEVILS 0

Tyson Barrie scored two goals, Philipp Grubauer had 22 saves and Colorado kept its postseason hopes alive with a win over New Jersey in Denver. Nathan MacKinnon had a goal and an assist to give him 91 points on the season. He joins Hall of Famer Peter Forsberg as the only two Avalanche players to have consecutive 90-point seasons. Colorado trails Arizona by four points in the Western Conference wild-card race. The Avalanche host the Coyotes on March 29. Cory Schneider stopped 31 shots for the Devils, who had their two-game winning streak snapped. New Jersey has not won three straight since late December.

CANUCKS 3, STARS 2 (SO)

Josh Leivo's goal in the fourth round of the shootout lift-

ed visiting Vancouver past Dallas. The Canucks posted their second win in three games, while the Stars took their second straight loss, which prevented Dallas from gaining ground on St. Louis for third place in the Central Division. Tim Schaller led the Canucks with two goals, marking the first two-goal game of his NHL career. Jamie Benn and Taylor Fedun tallied for the Stars.

DUCKS 3, PANTHERS 2

Adam Silverberg scored with 4:43 to play as Anaheim continued to play spoiler with a victory over visiting Florida. Devin Shore and Adam Henrique also scored goals, and Ryan Getzlaf had a pair of assists as the Ducks (30-35-9, 69 points), won for the sixth time in their past nine games, with all six of those victories coming against teams either currently in a qualifying position for the playoffs or fighting to become eligible. The Panthers (32-28-12, 76 points) were the furthest out from eligibility in that group, but their hopes had been raised with a four-game winning streak that had them believing they could grab the second wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference. — Reuters

PSL success boost hopes of Pakistan's cricket revival

KARACHI: All future Pakistan Super League matches could be played on home soil after the last eight games of the 2019 tournament went off without a hitch in Karachi, boosting hopes of attracting more international teams, said the country's cricket chief at Sunday's final.

Quetta Gladiators beat former champions Peshawar Zalmi by eight wickets on Sunday to lift their maiden PSL title in a pulsating atmosphere created by a capacity crowd of 32,000 fans at the National stadium.

"Today is a historic day," said Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Ehsan Mani at the closing ceremony on Sunday. "Around 230,000 people have watched matches in Karachi which indicates that Pakistan is a safe country and we are gradually returning to normal as far as hosting cricket is concerned."

Sri Lanka are in discussions about play-

ing two Tests in Pakistan in October and talks are also taking place with Bangladesh about a tour in early 2020. "I thank all the foreign players who came here and I hope to see them here for all the PSL matches next year," said Mani.

Peshawar were restricted to 138 for eight in their 20 overs. Umar Amin top scored with 38, while rookie 18-year-old quick bowler Mohammad Husnain finished with three for 30. Quetta raced to victory with eight wickets and 13 balls to spare as former Pakistan opener Ahmed Shehzad (57) and Rilee (38) put on an unbroken 73-run stand to see the Gladiators home at 139 for two.

The first 26 round-robin matches were held in the United Arab Emirates, which has been Pakistan's neutral venue since a deadly attack on the Sri Lankan team bus in Lahore 10 years ago. Pakistan hosted Zimbabwe for five limited-over matches in 2015 which was followed by the PSL final, three Twenty20 internationals against a World XI and a single Twenty20 international all in Lahore in 2017.

Last year Pakistan hosted three PSL matches and the West Indies for a Twenty20 series. This year 43 foreign players, including former Australia all-rounder Shane Watson and current New Zealand opener Colin Munro, took part in the PSL latter stages in Karachi. —AFP

Sarri's stubbornness threatens Chelsea's top-four hopes

LONDON: Chelsea's latest Premier League away-day collapse at Everton leaves Maurizio Sarri's side facing an uphill task to finish in the top four and secure much-needed Champions League qualification.

Languishing in sixth, the Blues trail fourth-placed Arsenal by just three points but face a much tougher run-in than the Gunners in the remaining eight games of the Premier League season. A run of four defeats in their past five league games away from Stamford Bridge also gives little reason for hope ahead of upcoming visits to title-chasing Liverpool and Manchester United, who also lead Chelsea by a point in fifth.

A kind Europa League draw, with Slavia Prague to come in the quarter-finals before a potential last-four clash with Eintracht Frankfurt or Benfica, may now provide the easiest route to next season's Champions League, with a place in the group stage on offer for the winners of that competition.

But to emerge victorious in Baku on

May 29 or stand a chance of a top-four revival, Sarri must iron out a number of repeated failings from his first season in charge. Sarri was given the striker he desired in January with the arrival of Gonzalo Higuain.

However, the Argentine has scored just three times in 10 appearances, against lowly opposition in Huddersfield and Fulham, with even Sarri admitting Higuain has to do more. "He needs to improve his physical condition and mental condition," said Sarri after defeat at Goodison Park.

But the pressure is on for him to finally relent and hand Olivier Giroud league starts. The French World Cup winner is the Europa League's top scorer with nine goals, but has made just six Premier League starts all season with Eden Hazard, the departed Alvaro Morata and Higuain all handed more time as the focal point to Chelsea's attack. Chelsea's striker struggles have been exacerbated by a lack of goals and creativity from midfield. Sarri's side have now failed to score in eight of 30 Premier League games. —AFP