

## Sports

# England captain Root demands change after racism scandal

**LONDON:** England captain Joe Root yesterday demanded change after a racism row engulfed Yorkshire County Cricket Club, saying the events had “fractured our game and torn lives apart”. Root, who is currently in Australia leading Ashes preparations, issued his statement following weeks of escalating pressure at the club he has represented since childhood. Former player Azeem Rafiq was found by an independent report to have been subject to “racial harassment and bullying” and subsequent allegations have emerged from others setting in motion additional investigations. Yorkshire chairman Roger Hutton resigned last week after sponsors withdrew and the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) stripped Headingley of the right to host international matches. Root, who made his debut for his native Yorkshire in 2009, said he felt “compelled” to speak out as England captain and a senior player from the county.

“I just want the sport to be a place where everyone is enjoying it for the beautiful game it is and feels equal and safe,” he said in a statement from England’s base on Australia’s Gold Coast. “It hurts knowing this has happened at YCCC, so close to home.” He added: “These events have fractured our game and torn lives apart. I want to see change and actions that will see YCCC rise from this with a culture that harnesses a diverse environment with trust across all communities

that support cricket in the county. We need to educate, unify and reset.”

Root, 30, told a subsequent press conference that he had not witnessed racist incidents during his time at the Yorkshire. “But it is clear things have happened at the club and we have to make sure we eradicate it,” he said. Earlier this week, new Yorkshire chairman Kamlesh Patel praised Pakistan-born Rafiq for speaking out over the racist abuse he had suffered, revealing the county had settled an employment case with their former player.

## England stance

England under Root have taken to wearing T-shirts before games calling for an end to discrimination in cricket and staging pre-match “moments of unity” to signal their abhorrence of racism. “You look at the work the current England teams have been doing over the last few years, it’s something we care deeply about,” he said. “This shouldn’t just apply to Yorkshire, this should apply across the game. Every county should find ways to eradicate racism from the sport and I think it’s really important we look to do that.”

The England team were rocked by a racism scandal in June, with paceman Ollie Robinson given a ban following the re-emergence of historical offensive tweets that overshadowed his Test debut against New Zealand. But, following a pub-



Joe Root

lic apology, Robinson returned to the side after serving his suspension and Root said there was a place for rehabilitation, as well as punishment.

“From my point of view, we all make mistakes and racism is something we completely have to eradicate,” he explained. “But I do think people

deserve a second chance and if they are willing to accept that they’ve made a mistake and they want to make change and want to move forward then I think that’s really important as well. “We are all human beings and I think that’s something that we have to remember within this.” — AFP

## Indian champion wrestler wrongly declared dead

**NEW DELHI:** A young Indian wrestling champion has assured the world that she is alive and well after a case of mistaken identity saw national media declare her the victim of a murder. Nisha Dahiya, who just days ago won bronze at the Under-23 world championships in Belgrade, spent Wednesday training for an upcoming national competition. But by evening she was shocked to learn that several news outlets had declared her dead, after the murder of a trainee wrestler with the same name at a training institute in the northern state of Haryana.

The victim’s brother was also killed, local media reported. Several outlets had declared the victim’s namesake dead before she posted a video on Instagram to announce that she was “absolutely fine”. “Obviously everybody is happy to realize that I am alive. I am preparing for the tournament now,” the former Under-23 national champion told Press Trust of India.—AFP



James Neesham

## Neesham aims to finish the job in T20 World Cup final

**DUBAI:** Jimmy Neesham nearly quit the game after being dropped from New Zealand’s one-day squad in 2017 but four years later he now stands on the cusp of Twenty20 World Cup glory. History beckons for New Zealand and Neesham after he became an unlikely match-winner in his team’s remarkable win over England in the first semi-final on Wednesday.

Neesham smashed an 11-ball 27 in New Zealand’s tense chase of 167 and then sat calmly in the dugout amid the celebrations after Daryl Mitchell hit the winning boundary in his unbeaten 72. The photos of the moment went viral on social media and Indian website ESPNcricinfo captioned it “Jimmy Neesham didn’t move” to which the allrounder replied: “Job finished? I don’t think so”.

New Zealand will play either Pakistan or Australia in their first ever T20 World Cup final on Sunday in Dubai but the spotlight remains on 31-year-old Neesham who came close to delivering the Kiwis the 50 over World Cup trophy in 2019. The allrounder, a left-hand batsman who bowls medium-pace, scored 13 runs off five balls in a super over during the dramatic final which England won.

Neesham also took three wickets and was

involved in the final ball run out to level the scores on 241 before the super over also ended in a tie. Hosts England won on boundary count. Neesham took to humor to pass off their heartbreaking loss and wrote on Twitter, “Kids, don’t take up sport. Take up baking or something. Die at 60 really fat and happy.”

He has shown real strength of character since a poor 2017 Champions Trophy – he scored one half-century in 11 ODI matches and took four wickets – led to him being dropped. He later admitted to being frustrated by the turn of events and took help from an Auckland-based psychologist Paula Dennen.

## ‘Sport, a great teacher’

He also revealed that Heath Mills, the head of the New Zealand Cricket Players Association, talked him out of retirement and advised him to “take one game at a time”. The suggestion not only helped him get back to the game he loves but also gave the Black Caps a winner they needed. Neesham walked in at 107-4 in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday to turn the game on its head as he hit two sixes and one four off Chris Jordan in the 17th over to stun favorites England. Praise has flowed for the Auckland-born cricketer with skipper Kane Williamson saying Neesham’s knock was the “deciding factor”. “Jimmy Neesham, was thinking of quitting the game in 2017 and today playing a match defining innings to help New Zealand qualify for the final,” India’s batting great VVS Laxman wrote on Twitter.—AFP