

Sports

Lyon stars as Australia crush Sri Lanka inside three days

Australians seal a 10-wicket victory

GALLE: Spinner Nathan Lyon starred with a match haul of nine wickets as Australia wrapped up the opening Test on Friday with a crushing victory over Sri Lanka before lunch on the third day. The hosts were bundled out for 113 in their second innings allowing the Australians to seal a 10-wicket victory in their first over back at the crease in Galle. Lyon, whose five-for helped bowl out Sri Lanka for 212 in the first innings, and fellow spinner Travis Head took four wickets each to send the hosts packing before the morning was over. It was a huge victory for Australia, who suffered a 3-0 whitewash in Sri Lanka on their last tour in 2016.

"Amazing win. Turning up this morning I didn't think it was going to happen that fast," skipper Pat Cummins said. "Really proud of the squad. It's really foreign conditions for us." Opener Usman Khawaja (71) and Cameron Green (77) stood out in Australia's first innings effort of 321 that made them take control in extreme spin conditions. Green put on crucial partnerships with

Khawaja and then wicketkeeper-batsman Alex Carey, who made 45, to handle the spinners with aplomb.

"Players go through their whole careers looking for a method in these conditions, and in his first knock he's found it," Cummins said of the 23-year-old Green who was named man of the match. "Really happy for him, he was the difference." Sri Lanka suffered a blow before play began when Angelo Mathews was ruled out due to COVID-19, with Oshada Fernando named his replacement. Skipper Dimuth Karunaratne started strong, smashing four boundaries in the 17-run first over of the innings off Mitchell Starc.

Head joins spin party

But the tables soon turned when Lyon and fellow spinner Mitchell Swepson took charge. Lyon got skipper Karunaratne caught behind for 23 after just 20 balls while Swepson trapped Pathum Nissanka lbw for 14. The leg-spinner then got Oshada caught out in the 12th over as Sri Lanka slipped to 63-

4. Wickets kept tumbling with Sri Lanka's batsmen desperately trying to hit their way out of trouble. Head, a left-handed batsman and an occasional spinner, struck twice in his first over to claim Dinesh Chandimal - his first Test scalp - and Dhananjaya de Silva.

Swashbuckling opener David Warner brought an easy finish to formalities, hitting a four and a six off Ramesh Mendis to bring up the win in four balls. Earlier in the day, fast bowler Asitha Fernando took Australia's last two first-innings wickets with the tourists adding eight to their overnight 313, for a commanding lead of 109. Ramesh Mendis took four wickets while debutant Jeffrey Vandersay took two. "We bowled well in patches. I think Ramesh bowled really well but the others couldn't support him," said Karunaratne.

The skipper said it was difficult to bat against Lyon, who managed to turn the ball heavily. "We just wanted to put pressure on him, and play a couple of shots," he said. "The approach was really good, the intention was really good, but I



GALLE, Sri Lanka: Australia's David Warner plays a shot during the third day of first cricket Test match between Sri Lanka and Australia at the Galle International Cricket Stadium. —AFP

think sometimes we took bad decisions." The third day started early after abysmal weather shortened play on Thursday, with strong winds collapsing a spectator stand. The second and final Test begins July 8 at the same venue. —AFP

NHL Sharks fire Boughner as coach after missing playoffs

SAN FRANCISCO: Bob Boughner was fired on Friday as coach of the San Jose Sharks along with three of his assistants after the team missed the National Hockey League playoffs. The 51-year-old Canadian went 67-85 with 23 overtime losses after being promoted from assistant coach in December 2020 when the Sharks fired Peter DeBoer. The Sharks, also seeking a new general manager, had not missed the playoffs in three consecutive campaigns since the team took the ice in 1991.

"As we progress through our search for the next general manager of the Sharks ... it has become apparent that the organization is in the process of an evolution," Sharks assistant general manager Joe Will said. "The bottom line is we have missed the playoffs for the past three seasons, which isn't acceptable to our owner, our organization, or to our fans. As part of this evolution and evaluation, we felt it was in the best interest of the club to allow the next Sharks general manager to have full autonomy related to the make-up of the on-ice coaching staff moving ahead."



Bob Boughner

The firing leaves two NHL coaching vacancies after the Boston Bruins hired Jim Montgomery on Friday, leaving only the Sharks and Winnipeg Jets in search of head coaches ahead of Thursday's NHL Draft in Montreal. The Sharks went 32-37-13 this season, finishing 20 points behind the Nashville Predators for the last Western Conference playoff berth. Boughner is 147-147-45 overall as an NHL coach having had a two-season stint with the Florida Panthers from 2017-2019.

Bruins ink Montgomery

Montgomery, 53, replaces Bruce Cassidy, who was fired June 7 after six seasons with the Bruins. Boston went 51-26-5 this season and qualified for the Stanley Cup playoffs in each of Cassidy's six seasons. The Bruins haven't gotten past the second round since reaching the 2019 final, where they lost to St. Louis.

"Jim has a winning history and throughout the interview process he conveyed his ability to connect with all types of players while also demanding that his teams play with structure," Bruins general manager Don Sweeney said. Montgomery spent the past two seasons as an assistant for the Blues, including helping them advance to the Western Conference second round this season, when they lost in six games to the eventual champion Colorado Avalanche. Montgomery coached the Dallas Stars for two seasons, going 61-43-10, before being fired in 2019 and later checking himself into an alcohol abuse recovery program. —AFP



BIRMINGHAM, England: England's Stuart Broad (L) unsuccessfully attempts to run out India's Mohammed Siraj on Day 2 of the fifth cricket Test match between England and India at Edgbaston. —AFP

Ton-up Pant turns tables on England

BIRMINGHAM: Rishabh Pant gave Ben Stokes' England a taste of their own medicine with a superb counter-attacking century as India recovered from a top-order collapse to 338-7 at stumps on Friday's opening day of the COVID-delayed fifth Test. Recalled England great James Anderson and fledgling quick Matthew Potts reduced India to 98-5 at Edgbaston after Stokes won the toss under overcast skies.

Pant responded with a brilliant 146 off just 111 balls. The wicketkeeper hit 19 fours and four sixes while dominating a partnership of 222 with fellow left-hander Ravindra Jadeja, 83 not out at stumps. England came into this match following a 3-0 whitewash of Test world champions New Zealand, several times hitting themselves out of trouble in their first series under captain Stokes and red-ball coach Brendon McCullum. The aggressive approach has been dubbed 'Bazball' in honor of McCullum's nickname, but the 24-year-old Pant has played this way for pretty much his entire career. "In English conditions, especially where you know one bowler is pitching on the same spot, then it is important to disturb him," Pant told reporters. "As a player I give my 100 percent. Yes, I might play some different shots sometimes, but I try to play my percentage (strokes)."

'Under pressure'

England assistant coach Paul Collingwood paid tribute to Pant by saying: "He is certainly entertaining, doesn't take a backward step and he puts you under pressure." But having seen England reach three stiff targets against New Zealand, he added: "The guys are confident they can chase down no matter what in the fourth innings." Pant was especially severe on Jack Leach, swinging himself off his

feet while slogging a four and later driving the left-arm spinner one-handed for six.

Leach, fresh from a 10-wicket haul and the player award in the third Test against New Zealand, conceded an expensive 71 runs in nine wicketless overs. Part-time off-spinner Joe Root succeeded where the frontline bowlers had failed when Pant edged a drive to Zak Crawley at slip. It was the end of a double century partnership that lasted a mere 39 overs, with Pant's hundred his fifth in 31 Tests and third against England. Potts, who only made his international debut against New Zealand, had earlier added to his growing reputation by removing Virat Kohli for 11. The 23-year-old had dismissed Black Caps skipper Kane Williamson three times in four innings. On Friday, following a 90-minute rain delay, the paceman took two wickets for five runs in seven balls to reduce India to 71-4. Potts had Hanuma Vihari plumb lbw for 20 before he induced Kohli to play on. It is nearly three years since India's star batsman made the last of his 27 Test hundreds.

Friday's match should have been played in Manchester last September only to be postponed just hours before the scheduled start because of coronavirus concerns within the India camp. India, 2-1 up in the five-match contest, were without captain Rohit Sharma on Friday after he was ruled out with COVID-19. Fellow opener KL Rahul, who with Rohit scored heavily in England last year, had already been sidelined with a groin problem.

Both teams have experienced major upheaval since they last met, with Chris Silverwood and Root replaced as England's coach and Test captain respectively. Kohli stepped down as India captain in February, with paceman Jasprit Bumrah leading the side for the first time at Edgbaston, while Rahul Dravid succeeded the retiring Ravi Shastri as coach in November. By playing the game, albeit almost a year later than schedule, India are helping fill an estimated £40 million (\$48 million) hole in English cricket's finances. —AFP

Players twist for glory at the table football WCup

NANTES: Dressed in athletic wear and using special hand grips for extra power, more than 1,000 players of table football are taking part in a World Cup this week in western France. At stake in the six-day competition are bragging rights for the champions, as well as an opportunity for organizers to press for the game to be recognized by more countries worldwide as a sport. Traditionally played in bars or outdoors, and often accompanied with alcohol, cigarettes and shouting, table football is usually seen as a bit of fun.

But the World Cup in the city of Nantes has brought together the most dedicated fans from around the globe who view it as more than light entertainment between friends. "It's a wonderful competition, but it's not just a race for the medals," Farid Lounas, the head of the France-based International Table Soccer Federation, told AFP. "The main objective is to institutionalize this discipline which brings people together and which, by only needing a table, transcends social class," he added.

Many players have flown long distances to be present from countries as diverse as Japan, Iran and the United States. "We came at our own expense. We have no support, neither from the authorities nor from anyone. We manage as we can," said Jules Epotie, 42, a sports manager from Cameroon in West Africa. China, Iran, Somalia, Switzerland, Armenia and latterly Italy recognise table football as a sport. But France - the home of the game, according to one theory on its origins - has declined several requests to give it sporting status which would open up new funding and facilities.

Livestreamed

Not everyone is bothered, however, with veteran French player Georges Gomes saying he enjoyed the biennial competition mostly as a social event. "There is absolutely nothing to gain in terms of money, material or anything else. There are only titles," he told AFP. "But above all, it's the pleasure of being present and enjoying a social moment, meeting people from different nations."

The competition is being played in a cavernous sports hall on an island in the centre of Nantes, where spectators are invited to wander around the tables to watch the games - because seeing the small ball from the stands is impossible. Another problem is the huge variation in the rules for playing between and within countries, with the federation authoring a 50-page booklet that serves as the final word in case of disputes. —AFP

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