

Root will be 'scary' once he starts converting : Malan



Joe Root touches gloves with team mate David Malan during the first day of the fifth Ashes cricket test match.—REUTERS

SYDNEY, JAN 4 /--/ Joe Root could score a "scary" amount of runs when he starts converting his half-centuries into centuries, teammate David Malan said on Thursday after the England captain failed to do so for the fourth time in the Ashes series.
Root has often been grouped with Steve Smith, Virat Kohli and Kane Williamson as the best batsmen of the current generation but the 27-year-old's inability to build on good starts has become almost an asterisk over his inclusion. On the opening day of the fifth Ashes test, Thursday, he again crossed the 50 mark only to fall for 33, caught at square leg by Mitchell Marsh off Mitchell Starc, a couple of overs

before the end of the day. "Joe's disappointed when he gets out whether he scores 150 or he scores 50. No matter who you are you want to be scoring 100s," said Malan. "In his own mind he's probably a bit disappointed he doesn't convert more, but he's still contributing for the team and putting the team in really good positions."
He still averages (52) in test cricket and the day will come when he will probably start converting as well as Steve Smith does or the other greats have done. "And when that happens, it will be scary to see how good he can be and how high his average can jump to," Root is already cringing of losing his first Ashes series as captain after England lost the first three tests of the series but they were determined to secure a consolation victory in Sydney after having the better of the fourth test draw. On Thursday, Malan shared a 133-run partnership with Root that looked to have secured the honours of the day for England before two late wickets with the second new ball left them wobbling on 233 for five.
"I think the position we were in tonight before those last two wickets, I think we would have been aiming for 400 to 450 at least," said Malan, who finished unbeaten on 55. "Losing these two wickets has put us back a bit, but there's still no reason why, if we can get through that new ball tomorrow, we can't get another 150 runs."

Neroca challenge for young Indian Arrows

IMPHAL, JAN 4 /--/ Debutants NEROCA FC will be aiming to keep up their unbeaten run to six successive matches when they host a young Indian Arrows in their third home game I-League here tomorrow.

With 11 points from six games, the Manipur-based side are placed third and they have a great opportunity to leapfrog Minerva Punjab and trail leaders Kingfisher East Bengal (17 points) by three points, that too with a game in hand. The defeat to Minerva Punjab FC in their first game now seems a distant past as they are unbeaten in five games. Coached by Gift Raikhan, the side also has managed to hold Kolkata giants Mohun Bagan and Kingfisher East Bengal to draws. The recent signing of Serbian forward Nedo Turkovic to partner Felix Chidi has provided the unit with a much-needed tooth in Arrows in the presence of experienced Indians in Gouramangi Singh and Singam Subash Singh, the men in orange look a force to reckon with. Raikhan, who has surprised many with his astute tactics did not reveal too much on the eve of the match about his thoughts. "We have a plan for tomorrow. We have a different strategy. As a coach, I don't talk about my strategy before the game. We planned together and all my players have understood my plan. Now, we have to prove it and the plan should be successful on the field," he said. Skipper Lalit Thapa

Sri Lanka to have a new ODI skipper

COLOMBO, JAN 4 /--/ Sri Lanka is set to name a new ODI captain next week, replacing current skipper Thisara Perera with either Angelo Mathews or Dinesh Chandimal, Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) said. Both Mathews and Chandimal have stepped down from captaincy across all formats following the loss against Zimbabwe in July last year. While Chandimal, who is currently leading the Test team, had lost his place in the ODI squad last month. "The chairman of selectors has informed me that they are considering appointing either Angelo Mathews or Dinesh Chandimal to fill the role," SLC president Thilanga Samathipala said in a press release. He said the new head coach, Chandralekha Hathurusinghe, is focused on the 2019 World Cup and wants a permanent solution to the captaincy problem. A final decision regarding the captaincy will be taken on January 9 before Sri Lanka leaves for the ODI tri-series in Bangladesh.

Sharapova eases into Shenzhen semi-finals

SHENZHEN, JAN 4 /--/ Russian former world number one Maria Sharapova marched into the semi-finals of the Shenzhen Open here today with a comfortable 6-3, 6-3 victory over Zarina Diyas of Kazakhstan. Sharapova, who has worked her way up to 59 in the world rankings since her return from a doping ban last year, will face either of the Czech pair Kristyna Pliskova or Katerina Siniakova in the next round. Sharapova, who is unseeded in the tournament that serves as a build-up to the Australian Open, is embarking on her first full season since returning from a 15-month drugs ban in April. The five-time Grand Slam winner was never at all in trouble against Diyas, who is 66 in the world, and joins Romanian Irina-Camelia Begu in the Shenzhen semi.

Match against ATK called for a force majeure: Sergio Lobera

KOLKATA, JAN 4 /--/ A funding FC Goa coach Sergio Lobera said their Tatu delayed Indian Super League match against ATK that got over well past midnight should have been declared 'force majeure'. In a first in Indian football, the match kicked off last night at 10:45 p.m. in peak winter after a day-long drama surrounding FC Goa team's arrival that got delayed following a couple of technical snags and crash of a fighter jet at the Dabolim airport that forced the postponement of the match. The match was originally slated for December 31 but the organisers had to postpone the match as police refused to make security arrangements on New Year's Eve.



change and come back for the match within five minutes after training in travel gear. So it was obvious that we ended up conceding a goal in the first four minutes," he added. A Robbie Keane opener was cancelled out by Goa's all-time leading goal scorer Felton Colonias in a space of 20 minutes as both teams shared spoils after the drama surrounding the kickoff. "The only thing I will be content about today is that none of my players are injured. There was nothing physically that was serious. My players did a lot of good work today and that's the only thing I can thank them for," Lobera said.
"The players put in a lot both physically and mentally. They did everything they could do. FC Goa will now travel to Guwahati to play NorthEast United FC on January 6 before returning to Goa to take on Jamshedpur FC at home on January 11, which means the Gaurs will take the field three times in nine days. "The adverse condition that we are facing is not just for today. What is concerning is the matches we have after this. All will get affected. I am glad we ended stronger as on another day, we could have won," Lobera concluded. An ISL official, however, put the blame on FC Goa team management and questioned their strategy to fly out via a chartered plane. "They had 48 hours to reach Kolkata and also got reservations for 36 members. They could have flown in 16 and the remaining from the technical staff could have come on the match day. It could have been avoided," he said.

change from December 31 and agreed to play the match on January 3. But within the prevailing circumstances and causes that were there today, I think it called for a force majeure," the 40-year-old said at the post-match news conference that got over past 1 a.m. "We respect what's been told to us. But obviously it's not what we would have liked. Never in my life, I've seen a situation like this in professional football. ISL is a great league and it does not deserve matches like this." The coach said he had not risked the health of their players by playing the match. "The health of players is paramount and we took a big risk in that. We are not the ones to make a decision whether we should play or not. It's the people who make rules should tell us whether we should play or not," Lobera said, hitting out at the organisers. The Gaurs opted for a chartered

plane on January 2 to reach here after they were unable to get reservations of their technical staff and players on a single passenger flight. But the chartered flight developed a technical snag and the team could not fly out of Goa on January 2 afternoon and rescheduled their departure time to 10am on the match day. Then again there was another technical snag and they could not take off. More bad luck was in store for FC Goa as a MiG-29K aircraft caught fire after veering off the runway, which led to operations at the Goa airport being suspended in the afternoon. "The circumstances that we had to face in last two days as a team did not permit us to play this game," the Spanish coach said. "It's not good as a

It was a tough day in office: Sheringham on delayed ISL game

KOLKATA, JAN 4 /--/ Former Manchester United star and Indian Super League side ATK's coach Teddy Sheringham said it was unusual to finish a football game past midnight, something that he had never experienced in his long association with the game. The match against FC Goa was delayed by nearly three hours due to the hurdles faced by the visiting side to reach the city. FC Goa headed straight from airport to kickoff of the match at 10:45pm last night.



"We do realise it's 10 o'clock in the morning. We are not just the only crazy ones. Thanks for staying," Sheringham said after the drawn game. "It's the first time I'm finishing a game at 1am and still sitting here. It's really unusual," the former Manchester United player, who won three premiership titles with the team, added. There was plenty of suspension and drama in the build-up to the kickoff after the ISL first announced that the match would be delayed by a "minimum one hour". Sheringham said he was not surprised by the 8:15pm but the delay kept stretching. "First we are told that it won't be 8 o'clock. It would be 8:30pm, then it was 9 o'clock. It was a very hard day at the office." "It's very

difficult but we kept talking about keeping our focus intact," he added. Robbie Keane headed home a fourth minute lead from a Ryan Taylor free kick but FC Goa took 20 minutes to restore parity through all-time leading goalscorer Ferran Corominas. "It's been a frustrating day and I think it's shown on everybody not just their team but our team as well," the 51-year-old said.

Bellerin strikes late to rescue Arsenal in Chelsea thriller

LONDON, JAN 4 /--/ Hector Bellerin came to Arsenal's rescue as the defender's last-gasp goal earned a dramatic 2-2 draw in a heated London derby against Chelsea on Wednesday.

Bellerin looked set to be the villain of the piece for Arsenal after the Spaniard's foul on Eden Hazard conceded a penalty that allowed the Chelsea star to cancel out Jack Wilshere's opener. When Marcos Alonso put Chelsea in front with just six minutes left at the Emirates Stadium, Bellerin's misery seemed complete. But the 22-year-old enjoyed a sweet moment of redemption in the 90th minute as he lashed in only his second goal of the season. The frenetic conclusion to a thrilling encounter actually did little for either team's prospects in the Premier League. Chelsea remained in third place, one point behind Manchester United and 16 adrift of runaway leaders Manchester City. Arsenal, who have now won only once in 13 league meetings with Chelsea, are languishing in sixth place, five points behind fourth placed Liverpool in the battle to qualify for the Champions League in the early sign of the drama to come. Alvaro Morata squandered a golden opportunity to put Chelsea ahead when Arsenal defender Calum Chambers completely misjudged a long pass. Morata's shot on the loose ball and sprinted clear but with only



Hector Bellerin celebrates scoring their second goal

Arsenal goalkeeper Petr Cech to beat, the Spain striker scuffed woefully wide. Foreshadowing the penalty angle to come for Arsenal, Ainsley Maitland-Niles had a spot-kick appeal turned down following Turner Moses' challenge. It looked a good decision by referee Anthony Taylor however and there was more frustration for Wenger moments later. Sanchez wiggled into position for a powerful shot that Thibaut Courtois pushed onto one post, with the ball rolling agonisingly along the goalline, then hitting the other post before rebounding into the keeper's arms. If that was a stroke of luck for Chelsea, Courtois's next contribution as he produced a fine save to

shot high into the net at Courtois's near post. It was Arsenal's first league goal since May 2015, although it might have been fortune to still be on the pitch after avoiding a second yellow for a theatrical tumble just before he scored. Yet the crucial moment in a pulsating clash came just four minutes later. As Hazard twisted and turned inside the Arsenal area, Bellerin rashly stuck out a leg to halt his progress and Taylor pointed to the spot. Hazard stepped up to convert the 67th minute penalty for his ninth Chelsea goal this season. Gunners boss Arsene Wenger had ranted darkly about refereeing conspiracies after Arsenal's Calum Chambers conceded a debatable penalty for handball in Sunday's draw at West Bromwich Albion. The Frenchman has already been charged by the Football Association for his angry protests at the weekend, but his decision to meet Davide Zappacosta's cross with a cool finish in the 84th minute, it seemed certain Arsenal would win in a winning style. But Bellerin was determined not to end the night as the fall guy and he struck a blow for Arsenal in the 89th minute. Ozil picked out Rob Holding on the Chelsea goalkeeper. Even then there was almost a sting in the tail when Zappacosta smashed against the bar in stoppage-time.

Wenger rages at 'farcical' penalty, vows to fight charge

LONDON, JAN 4 /--/ Arsene Wenger slammed the "farcical" penalty decision that cost Arsenal in their thrilling 2-2 draw against Chelsea and vowed to fight a Football Association charge in his latest furious attack on the authorities.

Wenger was seething after Arsenal's penalty for handball in Sunday's draw at West Bromwich Albion. Bellerin's challenge on Eden Hazard in the second half of Arsenal's 2-2 draw against Chelsea at the Emirates Stadium. The Arsenal manager felt there wasn't a foul. "I'm angry," he said, justifying Taylor's decision and Hazard's rebound into the wound by saltling the incident. "I'm angry," he said, insisting he has every intention of stating his case in front of the governing body. "I will contest the charge 100 percent. You can listen to every interview and I will say everything I said without any problem," he said. "I am 35 years in football and I know what I said. What I find terrible is we just saw a great game and we talk only about this and

Ankita Raina to lead India's challenge in Fed Cup

PUNE, JAN 4 /--/ The country's top singles player, Ankita Raina, will lead the Indian challenge at Asia/Oceania Group in Fed Cup, to be hosted in New Delhi's DTLA from February 7 to 10. Raina, ranked 255 in the world, has been selected alongside the promising Karman Kaur Thandi (285), Pranaja Yadlapati (462) and Prachi Tanu (462) who is India's second-highest ranked player at number 144 after Samia Mirza (12). Samia, ranked 125 in the world, and has already pulled out of the Australian Open, will not play in the event. The Indian Tennis Federation (ITF) is expected to announce the team after getting clearance from the ITF. The selectors also said, "Wenger should show more respect for the officials as he responded to his rival's complaints. For sure there is a lot of frustration from the coach after the game. Sometimes we don't agree with them, but we must have great respect for the decision of the referee," he said.