

Kohli grabs second position in Test rankings

DUBAI, DEC 7 /- Riding on his career-best 243 in the third Test against Sri Lanka, India captain Virat Kohli today jumped three places to grab the second position among batsmen in the ICC Test rankings. Kohli's double ton was followed by a 50 in the second innings as he finished with 610 runs in the series, which India won 1-0 after the first and third Test ended in draws in Kolkata and New Delhi. Kohli, who slammed back-to-back double centuries and recorded three-figure scores in three consecutive matches, started the series in sixth position but has leapfrogged David Warner, Cheteshwar Pujara, Kane Williamson and Joe Root after the stupendous run which saw him average 152.50. Though 45 points separate him from Australia captain Steve Smith, Kohli would be eyeing the chance of reaching the zenith in all three formats since he is the current No. 1 in Tests and T20s, the ICC said in its statement. Smith though has been in a different league and last week reached 941 points, the joint fifth-highest in terms of the highest points tally in batting history in Tests. Smith is now on 938 points while Kohli is on 893 points. Former Australia captain Ricky Ponting is the only batsman to have been at the top in all three formats at the same time - in December-January 2005-06, while his compatriot Matthew Hayden is the other batsman to have topped all three formats.

Though Smith enjoys a substantial lead over Kohli, the competition for second to fifth positions remains intense. Before this Test, only 11 points separated second-ranked Pujara from fifth-ranked Kohli. Following the latest performances, the gap has increased slightly with 28 points now separating second-ranked Kohli from fifth-ranked Williamson. Among other Indians, opener Murali Vijay (up three places to 25th) and middle-order batsman Rohit Sharma (up six places to 40th) are the other batsmen to move up. Pujara slipped two places to the fourth spot, while Ravindra Jadeja was at the top of the second spot, while Ashwin lost a place to be at the fourth position. For Sri Lanka, captain Dinesh Chandimal has gained eight places to take ninth position after finishing the series with 366 runs, the first time he has moved into the top 10. All-rounder Angelo Mathews has moved up seven places to 23rd position after scoring 111 in the first innings while Dhananjaya de Silva's match-saving 119 in the second innings has lifted him nine places to 47th position. In the ICC Test Team Rankings, India has lost one point but remains well ahead of South Africa at the top of the rankings, while Sri Lanka remains on its pre-series tally of 94 points in sixth place.

Position	Player	Rating
1	Steven Smith, AUSTRALIA	938
2	Virat Kohli, INDIA	893
3	Joe Root, ENGLAND	879
4	Cheteshwar Pujara, INDIA	873
5	Kane Williamson, NEW ZEALAND	865
6	David Warner, AUSTRALIA	815
7	Hashim Amla, SOUTH AFRICA	795
8	Azhar Ali/Azhar Alim, PAKISTAN	755
9	Dinesh Chandimal, SRI LANKA	743
10	Dean Elgar/Dean Elgar, S AFRICA	732

No laughing matter for India in tired Sri Lanka 'rivalry'

NEW DELHI, Dec 7 /- The humorous observation that India and Sri Lanka's cricketers see more of each other than their respective partners appears to have taken a more serious tone with the Indian board accepting that an overdose of the one-sided rivalry is bad for cricket. Three months after subjecting Sri Lanka to a 9-0 whitewash across all formats, Virat Kohli's men prevailed 1-0 in the latest round of a duel between the neighbours to seal their record-equaling ninth consecutive test series win. Three of those triumphs have come against an unsettled and inexperienced Sri Lanka side in the throes of a tricky transition period following the retirements of batting stalwarts Mahela Jayawardene and Kumar Sangakkara in 2015. India's six other series wins in this period include home triumphs against South Africa, New Zealand, England, Bangladesh and Australia, as well as a victory over West Indies in the Caribbean. While it makes financial sense for Sri Lanka to play India, the game's economic engine, the home board (BCCI) said the latest series, an underwhelming prospect for fans, was unavoidable as it had to honour its commitment to the calendar. "The back-to-back series resulted from what had been committed in the past in the current FTP (Future Tours Programme), BCCI acting secretary

Amitabh Choudhary told reporters on the sidelines of the third and final test in Delhi. "The observation of the captain of the team will be a substantial basis of further discussions on FTP." Indian captains seldom talk about scheduling issues but Kohli has expressed concerns that the frequency of certain contests might result in plenty of empty seats in the stands. "It definitely has to be taken into consideration because you don't want fans going away from the game or not watching," Kohli said ahead of the back-to-back series against Sri Lanka, who have managed only one win in the last nine tests against their neighbours. "We have to find a balance between how to engage the fans and, at the same time, keep players fresh, keep cricket exciting and have very competitive going throughout the year." India also played five one-dayers in Sri Lanka this year, against an opponent containing many regulars in the Indian Premier League (IPL). "This analysis has to be done over a period of time, by asking fans who watch the game," Kohli said. "For someone watching the game, it is very different than someone playing the game. For us, there is no room for saying that I don't want to play this game. I don't know if too much cricket is being played, or (if's) repetition of the same series. That point will definitely be discussed (with the Indian board) in future."

Mani fears for Indo-Pak cricket ties

KARACHI, DEC 7 /- Former ICC President Ehsan Mani fears PCB's decision to file a compensation claim against the Indian Cricket Board will lead to bad blood and impact future cricket relations between the two nations. The Pakistan Cricket Board has filed a compensation claim of USD 70 million against BCCI before the ICC for not honouring a bilateral cricket series agreement. "I have concerns about the consequences of this case whatever its outcome. What I am concerned about is the affect it is going to have on cricket relations between the two countries in the long run," Mani said on Geo Super channel. "I just think all avenues of talks, discussions and back door diplomacy were not explored by the PCB before going ahead with its compensation claim to the ICC. It would have waited and first exhausted all options of trying to get something out of India for them not playing bilateral ties with Pakistan before opting for the compensation claim option," he added. Mani, who served as ICC president between 2003-2006, said even if Pakistan won its compensation claim what guarantee is there India would agree to pay out the amount. "Say if Pakistan is successful in its



compensation claim what happens if India holds back the money. Then Pakistan has to go to the ICC board and it will not help relations between both countries," he said. Mani said even though there was a clause that said the Disputes Resolution Committee's decision was binding on both parties and could not be challenged in any other forum, but when it came to money things often get ugly. "If India holds back on payment what does Pakistan do, does it ask the ICC to deduct India's share of revenues from ICC events? Can the ICC do that?" Mani said Pakistan would have filed the compensation claim after going through all legal aspects and there is a clause in the ICC constitution which said no government interference is tolerated in any member board's affairs. "India says it is not getting government clearance to play Pakistan and that clause will then become important in this case. But overall I think there will be bad blood and feelings and it will impact future cricket relations between the two," he said. Mani also felt that former BCCI President and ICC Chairman N. Srinivasan had a significant role to play in India not resuming bilateral cricket ties with Pakistan. "He was not good news when he was there at helm of affairs. He was anti-Pakistan and in his tenure all chances of India taking initiative to get government clearance to play regular bilateral cricket with Pakistan were non-existent." Mani said that India had become a difficult member to deal with in the ICC due to its stubbornness but felt that this was also because they were weak officials in the world body. "India does contribute significantly to the ICC, but we don't buy this 70 percent talk. The bottom line is ICC failed itself by not exploring the markets of USA and China." Even today there just has to be the right moves made to make India realise that it can't operate independently in world cricket. (PTI)

'Circus' fears as Ben Stokes included in England ODI squad against Australia

SYDNEY, DEC 7 /- Suspended all-rounder Ben Stokes was included today in England's squad for their one-day series against Australia, with coach Trevor Bayliss bracing for a "circus" if he is cleared to play. Stokes is currently banned from international cricket while British authorities probe his involvement in a late-night fight outside a Bristol nightclub, and it remained in doubt whether he would play. Batsman Alex Hales, who was caught up in the same fracas, was also named in the 15-member squad for the five-game series, starting in Melbourne on January 14. Selectors said in a statement they were advised to name their strongest squad, and picked the pair accordingly. "Both Alex Hales and Ben Stokes are included, though their involvement remains subject to any relevant legal or disciplinary developments in relation to the incident in Bristol in September," they said. Bayliss admitted Stokes' potential appearance in Australia could be a distraction for the team. "Whenever he comes back that's going to be a bit of a circus for sure," he told reporters after England lost the second Test in Adelaide on Wednesday. "Whether it's any more of a circus than it's already been, it's hard to say. If it happens, let's just get it with it and take it on the chin." He added: "We've got to adjust to that at some stage." New Zealand-born Stokes did not travel to Australia with the rest of the squad for the Ashes Test series, and has missed the first two in Brisbane and Adelaide, with England losing both. But speculation that he is preparing for a dramatic call-up was fuelled by his decision to sign with New Zealand provincial side Canterbury as their overseas player in late November. In his first limited overs match for his birth province against Otago, he was bowled for two. He did better against Auck-

land on Wednesday, hitting 34 from 41 deliveries as he came off the rust. Stokes could yet return mid-series to the Ashes if police decide not to charge him. British detectives late last month passed a file to the Crown Prosecution Service for a decision, but there has been no word since. "I've got absolutely no idea. Still waiting for the police report," he said when asked if he expected Stokes to play in the Ashes. "The forthcoming series against Australia presents another significant opportunity for this group to showcase their skills and talent against a quality side away from home." England one-day squad: Eoin Morgan (capt), Moeen Ali, Jonathan Bairstow, Jake Ball, Sam Billings, Jos Buttler, Tom Curran, Alex Hales, Liam Plunkett, Adil Rashid, Joe Root, Jason Roy, Ben Stokes, David Willey, Chris Woakes, Mark Wood.



Master Blaster Sachin Tendulkar addressing a press conference to announce the launch of a video game of JetSynthesis' 'Sachin Saga Cricket Champions', in Bengauru on Thursday

Tendulkar launches gaming platform featuring him

BENGALURU, DEC 7 /- Cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar today unveiled a digital game featuring him, developed by JetSynthesis, a leading Indian entertainment and gaming firm. The aim of the gaming platform - Sachin Saga Cricket Champions - is to bring cricket fans together and enable each one of them to "experience my journey", Tendulkar said. Tendulkar said he decided he used to play video games in parlours. "During my stint with Yorkshire in 1992 and during 2003 World Cup in South Africa, I used to visit video parlours along with

team-mates. Even at home, I do these stuff and my son joins in too. I love doing it," he said. Tendulkar said the company worked on the project for two years and shot his batting in a high-tech studio in London where a James Bond movie had been filmed. He said he had to wear a special suit with 27 receptors on his body, which captured the body movements and footwork while he displayed his batting skills. Thirty-six cameras were used for the shooting. More than anything else, the gaming platform speaks of his important innings than the 100 centuries

he scored. Tendulkar said, "I must give one example - my first Ranji Trophy match was the most important for me at that point of time in my career because there were question marks whether a 15-year-old could perform, and if he doesn't, his career is destroyed," he said. Those were the kind of thoughts running in his mind, but he got a hundred and changed his career. Tendulkar said. Speaking to PTI on the sidelines of the event, JetSynthesis Non-Executive Chairman Kris Gopalakrishnan said the company expects to get five million

downloads in next 60 to 90 days. "The one million pre-registrations clearly indicates great interest shown by people on this platform, and we would like to build and improvise it based on the feedback, we get," he said. To a query, he said he has invested in this venture in his personal capacity, but did not reveal the numbers. JetSynthesis Vice Chairman and Managing Director Rajan Navani said the platform will feature 23 languages in future. Gopalakrishnan said the company wants to reach out to a large number of people by providing this entertainment to

low-end smartphone users. Right now, the company has two studios at Pune and Mumbai for shooting purposes. "Through this game, the player gets a chance to step into the shoes of Tendulkar and relive his innings from some of the most memorable matches he played for India," said JetSynthesis Vice Chairman and Managing Director Rajan Navani. The game brings in real time shadow movements, authentic stadium environments and swift motion quality of fielders plucking the ball out from thin-air, Navani said. (PTI)

Ronaldo breaks new ground as Madrid edge out Dortmund

MADRID, DEC 7 /- Cristiano Ronaldo became the first player to ever score in all six Champions League group games in one season as Real Madrid edged out a dispirited Borussia Dortmund 3-2 on Wednesday. Lucas Vazquez grabbed the winner nine minutes from time as the European champions, who were already guaranteed to go through to the last 16 as runners-up in Group H to Tottenham Hotspur. Ronaldo took his tally to nine goals in six European appearances this season with a spectacular long-range effort into the top corner after Borja Mayoral's opener to give Real a 2-0 lead inside 12 minutes. Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang continued his excellent record against Madrid with a quick-fire double either side of half-time to bring Dortmund level. But despite Vazquez's late strike, the Germans drop into the Europa League with a record low two points thanks to their better goal difference over APOEL Nicosia, who were defeated 0-0 at Spurs. Real were, though, hit by a fresh injury blow as French international defender Raphael Varane limped off just before half-time holding his left leg. Zinedine Zidane now faces a defensive crisis ahead of the visit of Sevilla on Saturday with captain Sergio Ramos, right-back Dani Carvajal and holding midfielder Casemiro all suspended. "With Rafa he has done some damage to himself, but we will see tomorrow when we do the scans as always," said Zidane. "He won't be there Saturday that is for sure. We have to look for solutions." Zidane made six changes from the side that started Saturday's 0-0 draw at Athletic Bilbao, but the hosts still made a flying start. Ronaldo's fine through ball just evaded Isco, but fell perfectly into the path of Mayoral and the 20-year-old kept his cool to chip the onrushing Roman Burki for his first Champions League goal. By contrast, Ronaldo had his 114th in the competition moments later as he lined up a sumptuous strike from 25 yards.



Dortmund's Serbian defender Neven Subotic (R) vies with Real Madrid's Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo during the UEFA Champions League group H football match Real Madrid CF v Borussia Dortmund at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid