

Agar ready for another spin tilt at Eng in Sydney

SYDNEY, DEC 31 /-/- Ashton Agar said today he was ready for another crack at England after being called into Australia's squad as the second spinning option for this week's final Ashes Test in Sydney. Whether Agar plays alongside first-choice spinner Nathan Lyon depends on the state of the Sydney Cricket Ground pitch, which in the past has earned a reputation as a turning wicket. Agar shot to Test fame when he made a record score of 98 while batting at number 11 against England at Trent Bridge in July 2013. However, Agar, 24, has played only three Tests since then after he managed just two wickets at 124 in two matches in that series more than four years ago. He played in both Tests against Bangladesh this year and said he was ready to take on England if he got his chance in Thursday's Sydney Test. "I feel better coming into a Test match now. It doesn't feel too fresh or too out of the blue," Agar told reporters. "Playing the overseas in India (this year) was a pretty whirlwind experience. So certainly feel a lot better walking out onto the SCG now." Skipper Steve Smith said he was unsure what to expect from the SCG pitch following Saturday's attritional fourth Test draw on a lifeless Melbourne Cricket Ground pitch.

I need more time to get to full fitness: Saina

NEW DELHI, DEC 31 /-/- Recovering from an ankle injury, star India shuttler Saina Nehwal said she will look to get back to her full fitness during the three weeks break after the India Open next month. "I had this ankle injury before this tournament, so I am playing a match after three weeks, there was some pain. Ankle injury is tough because the lunge depend on the ankles," Saina said. "I will get more time, 2-3 weeks after India open. After the World Championship there was not enough time when I joined Gopi sir, there were too many tournaments and after that I had this injury. It is still not upto the mark. There is a lot of speed still required. I need to be in best shape to play against the best," she added. (PTI)

Virat Kohli remains second in Test rankings



TOP 10 TEST BATSMEN

ID	Rat.	Name	Nat.
1	947	S.P.D. Smith	AUS
2	893	V. Kohli	IND
3	873	C.A. Pujara	IND
4	855	J.E. Root	ENG
4	855	K.S. Williamson	NZ
6	831	D.A. Warner	AUS
7	776	H.M. Amlia	SA
8	759	A.N. Cook	ENG
9	755	Azhar Ali	PAK
10	743	L.D. Chandimal	SL

INDIA VS SOUTH AFRICA

Kohli-led Team India practice indoors due to rain in Newlands

NEWLANDS: Team India on Sunday were forced to practice indoors due to rain ahead of the first Test starting January 5 at the Newlands Cricket Ground in Cape Town. The official Instagram account of Indian Cricket Team uploaded a picture showing players training indoors in Newlands. "And we've moved indoors for the training session #TeamIndia," Indian Cricket Team's Instagram post read. The Tamil Nadu batsman scored 292 runs in 2 Tests at an average of 97.33, including one century. With regular opener Shikhar Dhawan's chances of playing the first Test under cloud due to an ankle injury, Vijay is expected to open for India with KL Rahul. While the team were practicing indoors, India's middle-order batsman Cheteshwar Pujara was pictured enjoying the rain at the lush-green Newlands stadium. India play three Tests, six One-Day Internationals and three Twenty20 International matches on their two-month tour with the series called a limus test for both for Kohli as captain and the team in general. With a great mix of solid batsmen and good fast bowlers, this tour is being viewed as a golden chance for India to get one over hosts South Africa. India have not won a single Test series in the 'Rainbow Nation' for the past 25 years but Kohli said that his team is paying no attention to the past series in South Africa.



Team India on Sunday were forced to practice indoors due to rain.

Losing only one game at World Blitz is huge achievement: Anand

CHENNAI, DEC 31 /-/- Chess ace Viswanathan Anand termed losing just one game at the World Blitz Championship in Riyadh as a huge achievement after capturing the title at the World Rapid event. "It is a fantastic feeling to finish on the podium in the Rapid and Blitz. Because they are both very different formats. Losing just one game is a huge achievement in such an event," he told PTI after his third place finish behind Magnus Carlsen and Sergey Karjakin. "One is 15 minutes plus 10 seconds, which is much slower, similar to a half-an-hour game. The second one is three minutes and two seconds, which is the equivalent, of let's say a five-seven minute game. So very different rhythms. Doing well in one doesn't mean doing

well in the other as well," he added. Anand has endured a tough year which included an early exit in the Chess World Cup in Georgia and finishing last in the recent London Chess Classic, before the turnaround towards the end of 2017. The legend said he had peaked on the last day in both the tournaments adding that to do well in both felt good as he had expected to perform well in one of them. "In both I peaked on the last day. The Rapid tournament really came into my grasp only with my 14th round win against (Alexander)

Grischuk. And in the Blitz, the second day was when I got going. It was only towards the second half of the second day that I really started to do well," he said.

"So for me it is nice, recently my results in both Rapid and Blitz have suffered a bit. And I wanted to make amends. Realistically, I thought I would do better in one, rather than both. So to do it like this is fantastic," Anand added. He further said there have been very few people who have finished on the podium in both formats, which made the achievement all the more sweet. "There are very few people who have finished on the podium in both formats. (World champion Magnus) Carlsen, definitely. But I can't think of too many other names. So that gives

you an idea of the difficulty," he added. Anand, who finished the Blitz event with 14.5 points from 21 rounds, said he had done well this time to avoid dropping points at crucial stages unlike in previous tournaments. "Losing just one game is a huge achievement as it is really exhausting playing three days of Rapid chess and right away starting 11 rounds of Blitz, followed by another 10 rounds (of Blitz)." "I think under those circumstances, keeping control and not losing more than one game is a big accomplishment. I mean, in previous years, I was memorizing points at crucial moments and this cost quite a few places. This year, I believe most of all I did well because of my stability," he added. (PTI)



TOP 10 TEST BOWLERS

ID	Rat.	Name	Nat.
1	892	J.M. Anderson	ENG
2	883	K. Rabada	SA
3	870	R.A. Jadeja	IND
4	829	R. Ashwin	IND
5	819	J.R. Hazlewood	AUS
6	799	H.M.R.K.B. Herath	SL
7	784	N. Wagner	NZ
8	774	M.A. Starc	AUS
9	771	N.M. Lyon	AUS
10	753	M. Morkel	SA

In the bowlers' rankings, there is no change in the top nine with England's James Anderson leading the field. Anderson had started the year on 810 points in sixth position and has finished on 892 points in number-one spot. The spin trio of Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja and Rangana Herath had started 2017 in the top three positions, and have finished at third, fourth and sixth places, respectively, while Australia's Josh Hazlewood started and finished in fifth spot. The only change in the top 10 is the return of South Africa fast bowler Morkel in 10th position.

The 33-year-old claimed five for 21 in Zimbabwe's first innings for which he has been rewarded with a rise of three places, which has now put him one place ahead of Dale Steyn. It is for the first time in nearly two years that Morkel is within the top 10. Morkel's team-mate Keshav Maharaj, who took five for 59 in Zimbabwe's second innings, has gained two places and is now at a career-high 16th position. Outside the top 20, Chris Woakes of England and Australia's Pat Cummins have moved up three places each. Woakes is now in 28th place, while Cummins is now ranked 36th. Shakib Al Hasan of Bangladesh is the number-one ranked all-rounder and is followed by India's Ravichandran Ashwin.

Amarjit extends contract with Arrows after Dheeraj blow

NEW DELHI, DEC 31 /-/- Indian Arrows captain Amarjit Singh today extended his contract till the end of 2019-20 season, giving the All India Football Federation's developmental side a boost after the loss of goalkeeper Dheeraj Singh. Just like Dheeraj, who quit the I-League side to appear for a trial with Scottish Premier League side Motherwell FC, the contract of Amarjit also was to end today. But the Manipuri, who also captained India's U-17 World Cup team, decided to extend his contract for the rest of the current I-League season, plus another two years. All the remaining players, except for Jeakson Singh, Anwar Ali and

Nongdamba Naorem, have earlier signed contracts till the end of 2019-20 season, according to team sources. Jeakson, Anwar and Naorem are currently with the Indian Arrows on loan from Minerva Punjab. Amarjit's contract was to expire today but he has signed to extend his contract till 2019-20 season. Except for Jeakson, Anwar and Naorem, all the players now have same contract till 2019-20, a team official told PTI on conditions of anonymity. "Before the start of the I-League, Amarjit and Dheeraj had signed contracts for upto December 31, and all the others for three years, that is till 2019-20 season," he added. Meanwhile,

India's U-17 World Cup goalie Dheeraj has applied visa for travelling to United Kingdom for a trial with Motherwell FC, which is currently at the bottom half of the Scottish Premier League table. "Dheeraj has applied for his visa and he will be leaving for Scotland as soon as he receives the visa. He will be there in Scotland for at least two months for a trial at Motherwell FC," his agent Anuj Kichlu told PTI. It is also learnt that the AIFF has received a letter from Motherwell FC that the club wanted Dheeraj to appear for a trial in Scotland and that was why he has been released by the federation.

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