

Cook says double hundred came '3-4 weeks too late'



Alastair Cook takes the applause as he leaves the field, Australia v England, 4th Ashes Test, Melbourne, 3rd day.

Pune coach Popovic suspended for four matches

NEW DELHI, DEC 28 /- FC Pune City head coach Ranko Popovic has been suspended for four matches and fined Rs 5 lakh for his remarks against match officials after his side's Indian Super League match against FC Goa at Margao on December 23. The Pune side won the match 2-0. The suspension will apply with immediate effect. "AIFP Disciplinary Committee found FC Pune City coach Popovic in breach of Article 50 (misconduct against match officials) and Article 58 (offensive behaviour and fair play) for his remarks made against Match Officials at the post-match press conference in Goa af-



ter Match # 31 between FC Goa and FC Pune City," the ISL said in a statement. "Mr. Ranko Popovic, Head Coach of FC Pune City is fined Rs 5,00,000 (Five Lakh INR) and is suspended for 4 (four) matches of FC Pune City, from the date of this decision. The amount should be deposited to AIFP within 10 days from the date of communication of this decision and until such payment, the match suspension to continue, over and above 4 match suspension," said a AIFP Disciplinary Committee communication to the club.

Cook's record double ton puts England in control

MELBOURNE, DEC 28 /- Alastair Cook reeled off a record-breaking double century to put England in full command of the fourth Ashes Test with a formidable 164-run innings lead in Melbourne, here today.

The stoic opener emphatically bounced back after a lean run of scores to finish the day unconquered on 244 off 409 balls. At the close, England were 491 for nine. Along the way, Cook surpassed the highest score by a visiting batsman in a Test match at the famous Melbourne Cricket Ground, bettering the 208 by West Indian great Viv Richards in 1984. He earlier bettered Wally Hammond's 200 set back in 1928 as the highest Test score at the MCG by an Englishman. Cook's fifth double-century in 151 Test matches also catapulted him above West Indian Brian Lara to become the sixth highest run-getter in Test cricket with 11,956. Australia, who already have won back the Ashes with an unassailable 3-0 lead, looked unable to stop the flow of runs in the final session as Stuart Broad supported Cook to take the game away from the hosts. Broad, who survived a series of hair-raising short-pitched balls, thrived in his partnership with Cook, pushing the tourists beyond 450 on a lifeless pitch. It needed multiple replays before Broad was finally given out for 56 off 63 balls to a diving outfield catch by Usman Khawaja off Pat Cummins, ending a demoralising 100-run stand off 110 balls with Cook. Cook cashed in on two dropped catches by Australia skipper Steve Smith along the way to continue the misery for the home side. Smith, who dropped Cook on 66 in the slips on Wednesday, put down the former England skipper for the second time on 153 in a sharp right-handed chance at square leg. The tourists lost seven wickets for 299 on the third day with captain Joe Root again failing to convert a half-century into three figures when he top-edged a hook shot off Cummins to Lyon at deep square leg. Root reached his third half-century of the series but was clearly furious with himself when he holied out on 61 in the morning session. David Malan, a century-maker in the third Test in Perth, was out leg before wicket with Josh Hazlewood's second delivery of the second new ball for 14. Malan conferred with Cook before deciding not to review, yet replays showed a distinct 'Hot Spot' nick on his bat which would have kept him at the crease if he had challenged the decision. It follows James Vince's similar dismissal on Wednesday to Hazlewood for 17, when he also did not seek a review despite 'Hot Spot' showing a mark on his bat.

AC Milan's Patrick Cutrone dumps Inter Milan out of Italian Cup

MILAN, DEC 28 /- AC Milan teenager Patrick Cutrone scored a sensational extra-time goal to dump Inter Milan out of the Italian Cup on Wednesday and book a semifinal showdown with Lazio. The 19-year-old broke through after 109 minutes under driving rain at the San Siro after the match had ended 0-0 in regular time to set up a two-legged semi-final against the Romans who saw off Fiorentina 1-0 on Tuesday. The victory was a welcome relief for new Milan coach Gennaro Gattuso who had likened the clash to "a World Cup final". "To think that yesterday I was in Primavera (Milan's youth team), now cheering at San Siro with this magnificent crowd is something incredible," said Cutrone who was booked for taking his jersey off in the celebrations after scoring. "I think this victory was necessary for morale, the derby can't be described as a normal game, but now we're enjoying this victory and this shift and from tomorrow we will think about the challenge against Fiorentina." Milan went into the game in 11th place in Serie A, a massive 21 points behind league leaders Napoli, meaning the Italian Cup and the Europa League, where they have made the last 32, are their only avenues to silverware this season.

Mohun Bagan Cannot afford to lose any more points : Sanjoy Sen

KOLKATA, DEC 28 /- Mohun Bagan started their I-League season well but have since lost momentum... Two consecutive draws and injuries to key players have pulled Mohun Bagan back after a good start to their I-League campaign. Head coach Sanjoy Sen wants the team to put the struggles behind them and go for the three points when they take up Indian Arrows at the Maidan (Kolkata) on Friday. "We play to win matches but it is impossible to win all the games. Obviously will be eyeing full three points from tomorrow's game." In the last match Jagannath NEROCA FC we created more chances but unfortunately could not convert. We have already lost too many points. Three draws are equivalent to defeats. We have dropped six points already. (Mohun Bagan) cannot afford to lose any more points," Indian Arrows dismantle Shillong Lajong 3-0 in a convincing display of possession football on Tuesday, November 26. They are certainly not pushovers for a Bagan side without key players. "Indian Arrows are a good side. They won their first game but lost in the next two matches. They successfully came back

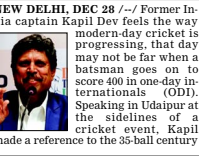


against Lajong and showed everybody they are a good side. We have to be cautious against them," stated Sen on this tour. "They would deliver a real big one for the team was really important. "I've doubted myself for 12 years and I'll probably continue to doubt myself but obviously the longer it goes the harder it becomes. "But I suppose that's why I can be quite proud of going to the well again and delivering a performance like that was pleasing. "It's just a shame it's three or four

weeks too late, I'll have to live with that for a long time but it's nice to score a few." The former captain, 33, said he had been working hard in the nets to recapture form and felt he had re-discovered his scoring rhythm. "I've always worked hard on my whole game and my approach to cricket. So, unfortunately most of my runs are pretty ugly runs and quite hard work, that hasn't changed throughout my whole career," he said. "Obviously, with my batting over a period of time, there are quite a few things that I've done. When they're not quite in sync it can be quite frustrating." Cook said he had been given very special support by the England team during his barren run before posting his 32nd Test century in a 151st Test match. "The feeling when I walked into the change room and saw the team special, and obviously today as well," he said. "The team has been fantastic. Obviously, we've had an interesting journey on this tour with a lot of things going on. "But we've stuck together really well as a side and as a group of players, and we've put in three good days. "The performance here and let's hope we can do the same on day four tomorrow."

Day not far when batsmen will score 400 in ODIs : Kapil

NEW DELHI, DEC 28 /- Former India captain Kapil Dev feels the way modern-day cricket is progressing, that day is not far when a batsman goes on to score 400 in one-day internationals (ODI). Speaking in Vidarbha at the sidelines of a cricket event, Kapil made a reference to the 35-ball century



scored by Rohit Sharma in the T20I against Sri Lanka recently and said that the most noteworthy change in today's batsmen is their mindset. "The biggest change today is the mindset of the cricketers. Scoring a hundred off 35 balls was unheard of back in the day (when I used to play). Indian cricket in Vidarbha in all quarters and the quality reflects in the results. That's a big positive," the 1983 World Cup-winning captain said.

Delhi stand in way as Vidarbha chase maiden Ranji glory

INDORE, DEC 28 /- A win away from their maiden title, Vidarbha embodied the allure often associated with underdogs as they braced up to face a battle-hardened Delhi that has for years braved a system that is anything but rubicund in the final of Ranji Trophy. Since reaching their maiden semifinal of the country's premier domestic tournament, Vidarbha's story has been about getting familiarised with uncharted territories, and now they are up against a team that is also seeking happy endings for years. If Vidarbha's dream runs in a heartbeat at the Holkar Stadium, it would pave the way for Delhi's eighth triumph - the last coming almost a decade back. Some turnaround it has been after the off-field controversies that dogged the team last season, with much publicised altercation between then skipper Gautam Gambhir and coach KP Bhaskar. A team that has produced some of the finest players in recent years and took set to supply a player or two more to the Indian cricket team in near future, Delhi certainly look like the fanciest of the two finalists. However, given Vidarbha's split run to their maiden title clash, Delhi are well aware of the threat the first-

timers could pose over the next few days. Not one to take anything for granted, Delhi skipper Rishabh Pant said on the eve of the match, "We are just focused on the job at hand. We know we will have to play really well to win the match." Medium pacer Rajnesh Gurbani has become the toast of the domestic scene since he ran through season favourites Karnataka in a star-studded batting line-up in the semifinal in Kolkata. In Delhi, Gurbani and his team-mates have another difficult challenge facing them. With the seasons' Gambhir at the top of the order, Delhi know they have a player who can be relied on in times of crisis. If the out-turning to Hazlewood for 17, when he also did not seek a review despite 'Hot Spot' showing a mark on his bat.



Vidarbha captain Faiz Fazal with Delhi captain Rishabh Pant in Indore

game with their openers in top form. Nitish Rana has scored a lot of runs batting in the middle-order. The seven-time winners have a young captain in Pant and though he has had a quiet season, the wicketkeeper would certainly look to impress the national selectors present there, with handsome contributions. Navdeep Saini, the 25-year-old pacer has been a consistent wicket-taker for Delhi this season. His seven-wicket match haul against Bengal in the semifinal contributed to his team's innings win. The bowler from Karnal, whose rise has been documented over the past few days, meant business in the group stages as he picked up five wickets against Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. Saini's pace bowling colleague, Kulwant Khejroliya too took four wickets against Bengal, as the duo bundled out their opponents for a paltry 86 in the second innings. Left-arm spinner Vikas Mishra has been the pick of the bowlers for Delhi this season, and has shone through the league, snaring a bagful of wickets against Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Railways. He has been accompanied by another left-arm spinner, Manan Sharma. As far as Vidarbha are con-

cerned, their charge has been led by the experienced Faiz Fazal (843 runs at an average of 76.83) and his opening partner, Sanjay Ramaswamy (735 runs at an average 66.81). Last but not the least are veteran Vinesh Jaffer and coach Chandrakant Pandit, who have won multiple titles with Mumbai. The duo have been inspiration for the Vidarbha youngsters as they know exactly how winning India's blue riband trophy

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- VIDARBHA:** Faiz Fazal (captain), Sanjay Ramaswamy, Vinesh Jaffer, Ganesh Salihis, Apoorv Wankhede, Vinod Walkar (wk), Kalya Sarwat, Akshay Wankhede, Siddheshwar Prasad, Karn Sharma, Shalabh Srivastava, Sidhesh Wath (wk), Akshay Karnewar, unklr, Bingswar, Ravikumar Thakur, Akshay Thakur.
- DELHI:** Rishabh Pant (captain and wk), Gautam Gambhir, Kunal Chandel, Anurag Shrey, Nilish Rana, Himmat Singh, Manan Sharma, Vikas Mishra, Vikas Tokas, Navdeep Saini, Kulwant Khejroliya, Akshay Sudan, Shriharsh Sharma, Umukt Chand, Milind Kumar. (PTI)