

After Pune debacle Organisers at Bengaluru assure 'sporting' pitch for second test

NEW DELHI, FEB 28 /- Barring a last-minute intervention from the home side, the second test between India and Australia will be played on a "sporting" pitch which will be fair to both teams, organisers in Bengaluru have said.

Pitch talk dominated reaction in India to their series-opening defeat inside three days in Pune, where Australia's left-arm spinner Steve O'Keefe claimed 12 wickets, the best figures recorded by a visiting spinner on Indian soil. Many believe India's play to roll out a turning track backed on the hosts, who would do well to ask for a similar pitch as they chase a series-leveling victory in the second test on Saturday, Karnataka State Cricket Association secretary Sudhakar Rao said they had not received

any suggestion from the Indian team and were focusing on preparing a pitch which would provide a fair contest between bat and ball. "Our intention is to prepare a sporting, test-match pitch," Rao told Tuesday's Hindu newspaper.

"We want a five-day match. We definitely don't want to see the match end in two and a half days," Australia beat India at their own spin game on the boney-dry Pune track used for the venue's test debut. O'Keefe and spin partner Nathan Lyon claimed all 10 Indian wickets in the hosts' second innings. "We like to keep some moisture underneath. So we haven't stopped watering it," Rao added. They should water it until two or three days before the match. Then we will see what the pitch looks like, two days out, and take a call.

Ex-Test players to develop young Aussie talent



SYDNEY, FEB 28 /- Former Test stars Ryan Harris and Matthew Elliott were appointed to nurture young Australian talent, with the pair's first assignment an under-19 series against Sri Lanka. Fast bowler Harris and batsman Elliott beat off competition from 38 other applicants to be picked as high performance coaches at the National Cricket Centre, entrusted with developing the country's future stars. "We have undertaken a thorough process to find the best coaches to mentor Australia's emerging talent and we are extremely excited to have both Matthew and Ryan joining," said Cricket Australia executive general manager Pat Howard. "Both have been through the Cricket Australia coaching pathway... and have a strong understanding of the challenges that are ahead in developing Australian cricketers to be ready for first-class and international cricket."

Former high performance coach Graeme Hick has since been appointed as the Australia team batting coach, while the second coaching role is newly created. The pair start work next week. Their first assignment will be to mentor Sri Lanka's display had been a reaction to press reports implicating the players in Ranieri's exit. Vardy's first-half opener was Leicester's first league goal in seven games and made them the last team from Europe's five major championships to find the net in 2017. While the display will give Leicester's fans hopes of a late-season rally under Shakespear, it leaves unanswered questions about whether things had gone so badly wrong under Ranieri. Asked if he wanted the job full-time, Shakespear said: "My remit was to get them ready for Liverpool and I've done that. Let's see what happens. Liverpool could have provisionally gone third with victory, but instead they remain fifth, 14 points below leaders Chelsea and a point behind fourth-place Arsenal having played a game more. Jurgen Klopp's side, who replied through Philippe Coutinho, have won only one of their last seven league games and look a shadow of the team who looked poised to challenge for the title just weeks ago.

Vardy lifts Leicester to post-Ranieri win

LEICESTER, FEB 28 /- Jamie Vardy scored twice as a revitalised Leicester City started life without sacked manager Claudio Ranieri by sinking Liverpool 3-1 to spark their Premier League survival hopes. Ranieri, 65, was dismissed last Thursday, nine months on from Leicester's fairy-tale title win, and fans honoured him with banners, masks and a smartphone light show in the 65th minute. His former charges were unrecognisable from recent weeks, with Danny Drinkwater also on target yesterday as they snapped a run of five straight defeats to climb out of the relegation zone to 15th place.

"All I asked of the team was to remember what they were about and remember their identity," said Leicester caretaker manager Craig Shakespeare. Both Vardy and Drinkwater said Leicester's display had been a reaction to press reports implicating the players in Ranieri's exit. Vardy's first-half opener was Leicester's first league goal in seven games and made them the last team from Europe's five major championships to find the net in 2017. While the display will give Leicester's fans hopes of a late-season rally under Shakespear, it leaves unanswered questions about whether things had gone so badly wrong under Ranieri. Asked if he wanted the job full-time, Shakespear said: "My remit was to get them ready for Liverpool and I've done that. Let's see what happens. Liverpool could have provisionally gone third with victory, but instead they remain fifth, 14 points below leaders Chelsea and a point behind fourth-place Arsenal having played a game more. Jurgen Klopp's side, who replied through Philippe Coutinho, have won only one of their last seven league games and look a shadow of the team who looked poised to challenge for the title just weeks ago.

Metabolism disorder sidelines Goetze indefinitely

BERLIN, FEB 28 /- Borussia Dortmund will be without Mario Goetze for the foreseeable future after a medical check revealed a metabolism disorder, the latest setback for Germany's World Cup hero.

"I am in the process of getting treatment and I will do everything I can to get back into training as quickly as possible to help my team achieve our common goals," Goetze told the club website yesterday. The 24-year-old scored in extra-time of the 2014 World Cup final to seal a 1-0 win over Argentina. But this season he has endured a difficult return to Dortmund, struggling with form and injuries, following three unhappy years at Bayern Munich spent mainly on the bench. It cost Dortmund 22 million euros to buy Goetze back from Bayern, having been forced to sell him in 2013 for 37 million euros when the Bavarians triggered a release clause in his contract. He has not played at all this month after picking up a leg injury and was dropped for Dortmund's RB Bundesliga win over second-placed Borussia Mönchengladbach in February because of poor form. The attacking midfielder has scored seven goals in four appearances for Dortmund this season. Dortmund, who are third in Germany's top flight, gave no date for his return. But there is relief that the club now know there is a medical reason for the Germany star's woes.

"We are glad to know the reasons for Mario's complaints and we are convinced that after receiving the right treatment, he will give us the quality with his exceptional abilities," said Dortmund's director of sports Michael Zorc. "Mario gets the full backing and maximum support from all of us at Borussia Dortmund on his way back." Among the games he will miss is the Champions League round-of-16, second-leg clash at home to Benfica on March 8 having lost the first match 1-0 in Portugal. (AFP)

State cricket associations seek deadline extension for compliance report from COA

NEW DELHI, FEB 28 /- The Committee of Administrators (COA) of the BCCI have received multiple pleas from various state associations to extend the deadline for submitting compliance report on Lodha recommendations till March 27. The COA on February 28 had written to all state associations to submit a compliance report adhering to all Lodha diktats by March 11. However, disqualified members of 20 state units have written to COA led by Vinod Rai that they need more clarity and support secretary Amitabh Chaudhary's plea in Supreme Court is pending. Lodha's ruling on the COA should wait till then.

"Yes, a letter is being sent to the COA as we feel they should wait till March 27 as Amitabh's plea is pending in Supreme Court. Some clarity is still required regarding cumulative tenure of 9 or 18 years. It will be prudent if we can wait rather than being in a hurry to fill up compliance report," a state unit official told PTI today. Amitabh Chaudhary has filed a plea in SC that seeks clarification on scope of COA taking over the management rather than ensuring smooth transition to the new administration.

Rangana Herath to lead Sri Lanka in Test series against Bangladesh

COLOMBO, FEB 28 /- Leeward spinner Rangana Herath will lead the Sri Lanka Test squad in the two-match home series against Bangladesh beginning March 7 in Galle.

Herath led the Sri Lankan team to victory in November last year with a clean sweep of 2-0 against Zimbabwe in his first series as captain. Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's domestic left-arm spinner Malinda Pushpakumara has also been included in the squad for the upcoming series. Lanka Cricket (SLC) confirmed. Pushpakumara first represented the Sri Lanka team in 2012 when he faced South Africa and Zimbabwe during a triangular tournament besides also making an appearance for Lanka A in 2015 against Pakistan. He is currently playing against Sri Lanka Lions. However, these are the only squad details released so far. It is likely that the remainder of the squad will be announced later today. Bangladesh have played 16 Tests against Sri Lanka, the last in 2012 when they won by one run. But they could only manage two draws against the islanders in their previous two series.

IPL 2017

PUNE /- Sunil Gavaskar is the most successful batsman in the history of the Indian Premier League (IPL), with 3,095 runs in 159 matches. He is also the only batsman to have scored 100 runs in every match he has played. In 2017, he is set to play for Sunrisers Hyderabad.

The 25-year-old Stokes has come up through the ranks at Durham, where Botham is the head coach. The chairman having finished his illustrious playing career with the English county, Botham, one of the outstanding all-rounders of his generation, said he was glad that Stokes - set to have fresh responsibilities with England as vice-captain to new Test skipper Joe Root - was being well-rewarded.

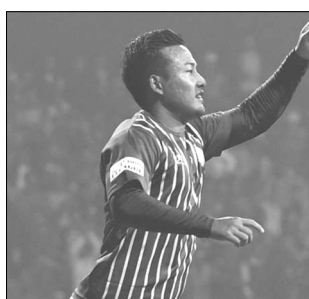
"He is getting for the IPL, what most googlers do for China to play football are getting good for the IPL," Botham told a news conference at Durham's Chester-le-Street headquarters. "Cricket needs to move and I think players deserve the rewards. It's a precarious living. You can have an injury and never play again and I think you should be rewarded for that."

Mohun Bagan thrash Club Valencia 4-1 in AFC Cup South Zone play-off

KOLKATA, FEB 28 /- Sports, Recreation of Mohun Bagan scored a hat-trick to power heavyweights Mohun Bagan to a thumping 4-1 win over Club Valencia of Maldives in their return fixture of the AFC Cup South Zone play-off.

Jeje hit three goals in 2nd half and 82nd minners while Sony Norde, making a return, also made his presence felt as he netted the ball in the 87th minute. Godfrey West Omodu, who had struck a solitary goal in the first leg, reduced the margin with his 52nd minute strike for the Maldives at the Rabindra Sarovar Stadium here.

Mohun Bagan, captained by Jitendra Kumar Singh, thrashed Valencia FC, Mazia



Capitalising on a defensive lapse, the Maldives outfit made it 2-1 with Omodu easily deceiving Debit Majumder under the bar.

Jeje completed his hat-trick with Katsumi Yusui surging down the centre and finding Prabir Das down the right as he neatly sidestepped his defender to finish. Balwant set up the fourth goal for Katsumi to slide it sideways and Sony smashed it across the bar. Jeje's sixth minute lead with his strike in the 71st minute and Mohun Bagan had to settle for a 1-1 draw.

'Box-office' Ben Stokes deserves every penny of Rs 14.5 crore: Ian Botham

LONDON, FEB 28 /- Ian Botham says "box-office" Ben Stokes deserves every penny of the more than £1.7 million (\$22 million) he is expected to rake in playing in the Indian Premier League. Stokes set a record for an overseas player in the cash-rich Twenty20 competition.

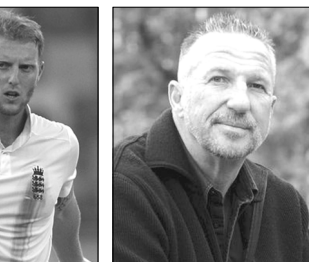
Botham, who played 64 Test matches for England between 1976 and 1984, said he was glad that Stokes - set to have fresh responsibilities with England as vice-captain to new Test skipper Joe Root - was being well-rewarded.

IPL 2017

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Botham is the former England captain and was at the County Championship, imposed because of their financial problems. Durham's sanction was agreed with the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) on Monday as a condition of £3.8 million financial support from the governing body.

Very loyal to Durham County Cricket Club, Botham said cash-strapped Durham would bounce back from last season's relegation to the second division of the County Championship, imposed because of their financial problems. Durham's sanction was agreed with the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) on Monday as a condition of £3.8 million financial support from the governing body.



Hales called up to England tour after rapid recovery

LONDON, FEB 28 /- England's new batting line-up should play a role after all in England's tour of the West Indies after earning a call-up. However, Hales had been omitted because of a right hand fracture. The 28-year-old Nottinghamshire batsman will miss 11 Tests and 40 One Day Internationals under his belt - suffered the injury during a tour of Australia in late January. However, Hales has been summoned after a scan confirmed he has sufficiently recovered although he will have to undergo rehab when he gets to the West Indies to ensure he is fully fit. Hales, who had a hand injury that had the highest individual ODI score - 171 against Pakistan at his Trent Bridge home in 2010. Hales has spent the last three days before the first match in Antigua on March 30. He has tweeted: "I might tomorrow. Can't wait to get back amongst!"

Dhoni-led Jharkhand secure 7-wicket win over Services in Vijay Hazare Trophy

KOLKATA, FEB 28 /- Fans who turned up to watch a M S Dhoni special returned disappointed even as Jharkhand cruised to a comfortable seven-wicket win over Services for their second victory in the Vijay Hazare Trophy here today.

Chasing a stiff 277, Jharkhand did not require services of their captain 'cool' as Saurabh Tiwary (102 not out off 103 balls; 3x4, 6x6) and Ishank Jaggi (116 not out off 92 balls; 10x1, 4x6) put together an unbroken 214-run partnership to script a fluent chase with 22 balls to spare. He may not have played a role with the bat but Dhoni's tips during the drinks break played a big role in their win, Jaggi later revealed. "Mahi bhai advised us to play in a calm and composed manner. He told us if you play with patience runs will come. It's about staying there and finish the game," Jaggi said. The left-hander Tiwary added: "We played without any pressure well aware of the fact that MS comes next."

Jharkhand had a shaky build-up and were reduced to 65/3 inside 17 overs but poor fielding from Services let the duo build on a firm stand. Yet to open his account, Tiwary was dropped at mid-off by Shakti Malviya off Pooan Poonia, while Jaggi got a reprieve on 25. At 107/3 midway into their innings, the match tilted heavily in favour of Services as they required run rate going past six. It was an ideal situation for the 'finisher' Dhoni as the crowd kept on shouting his name in anticipation but Tiwary and Jaggi did not take a step wrong and complemented each other in their solid left-right combination. They kept rotating strikes and got an odd boundary or six in every over providing a calm assurance in the dressing room as the crowd started to become frustrated and shouted 'Saurabh Tiwary Hai Hai'. Tiwary however took it in a positive spirit and said: "We must understand that they're envious as Mahi bhai never played here. Being a professional I did not mind. We were subjected to much more abuse than we've seen here." Having slowly built their innings, the duo took charge of the show and Jaggi completed his sixteenth List A century in 82 balls with a boundary in the 42nd over, while Tiwary followed suit reaching his second List A hundred in 100 balls. Having trolled by the crowd in his exquisite knock, Tiwary later acknowledged his hundred to the crowd gesturing that 'keep shouting'. But Dhoni returned on the field during the customary handshake after the win and

walked midway on to the boundary rope near the spectators and waved at them. Thousands gathered outside the venue unable to enter, while a few hundreds managed to get in with passes, while rooftops of the residential buildings and a school surrounding the stadium were a packed look since 9 a.m in a never-before atmosphere.

But the only action they could have of Dhoni was his two run-outs and a caught-behind dismissal on a flat deck. Bengal cricket Academy in the small industrial township of Kalyani about 50 kilometres from Kolkata. Earlier in the day, the academy had a solid 104-run opening partnership between Gaurav Kochar (50) and Nakul Verma (48) but he restricted Saurabh Tiwary to just one run against Saurashtra here two days ago. Verma missed a half-century narrowly when Vikash Singh gave the first breakthrough of the day in the 20th over.

Dhoni produced a spectacular run-out to dismiss Abhijit Salvi (31) before his caught behind claimed the skipper Soumya Swain's wicket for 12 to reduce them to 158/4 in 32nd over. Salvi played on the legside for a single but Dhoni was quick to gather the ball and hit the stumps directly at the opposite

Leicester City's Craig Shakespeare keen on full-time manager job after win over Liverpool

LONDON, FEB 28 /- Leicester City caretaker manager Craig Shakespeare said he was ready to take on the role full-time after overseeing an impressive 3-1 win against Liverpool in his first game.

Shakespeare was promoted from his role as assistant following Claudio Ranieri's sensational dismissal last Thursday, nine months on from Leicester's 5,000-1 Premier League title triumph. Leicester looked a team reborn in Monday's game, prevailing through Jamie Vardy's first-half double and a sweet Danny Drinkwater strike, and

there was a coordinated smartphone light show in his honour in the 65th minute, accompanied by chants of his name. Asked what Ranieri would have made of Leicester's dramatic return to form, Shakespeare said: "Knowing Claudio, he is saying, 'That's football!'"

He said that to me on Thursday night and reminded me of that on Friday morning. "The performance you saw tonight is what I think Man City (who Leicester beat 4-1 in December). We have done it, but not often enough."

Leicester, who host second bottom Hull City on Saturday, had lost their previous five league games and were the last team in Europe's five major leagues to find the net in 2017. Vardy broke an eight-game personal goal drought in the 29th minute, having not scored since his hat-trick ball before tucking a shot past Simon Mignolet.

Drinkwater slammed in Leicester's second with a searing 25-yard shot and Vardy headed in a third goal before Philippe Coutinho reduced the arrears with 21 minutes remaining. The weekend's results had seen Leicester slip into the bottom three, but they leapt up to 15th place, two points

Summarised scores

At Bengal Cricket Academy, Kalyani: Services 276/9; 50 overs (Shamsher Yadav 54 not out, Gaurav Kochar 50, Nakul Verma 48, Rahul Singh 40; Shabbarz Nadeem 3/52) lost to Jharkhand 279/3; 46.2 overs (Saurabh Tiwary 116 not out, Saurabh Tiwary 102 not out by seven wickets.

At Eden Gardens, Kolkata: Saurashtra 209/7; 20 overs (Mayank Agarwal 89; Kushang Patel 4/36, Chirag Jani 3/40) beat Sunrisers Hyderabad 279/3; 46.2 overs (Saurabh Tiwary 116 not out, Saurabh Tiwary 102 not out by seven wickets.

At Jadhav University second campus, Solitake: Chhattisgarh 235/9; 50 overs (Abhinavman Chauthan 90 not out, Amandeep Khare 57; Mohammed Mudhasir 6/33) beat Jammu and Kashmir 231; 48.2 overs (Punit Bisht 68; Parvez Rasool 51; Pankaj Rao 4/35, Sumit Ruikar 2/33) by four runs.

clear of the relegation zone. Liverpool would have gone third with victory, but they remain in fifth place and new tail leaders Chelsea by 14 points. Beaten manager Jurgen Klopp said his players had been told to cheer their good form in display from Leicester and said there was no excuse for the passivity of their display.

"We knew how Leicester would play; go back to their roots," said the German, whose side welcome fourth-place Arsenal to Anfield on Saturday. "We could have done much better. We let them be the Leicester of last year - that's our fault.