

Root returns as Windies eye series win

AFP, London

England will hope the return of captain Joe Root proves inspirational in the second Test against the West Indies at Old Trafford starting Thursday.

Root missed England's four-wicket defeat at Southampton in international cricket's return from lockdown last week after attending the birth of his second child.

He has rejoined the squad, with West Indies needing just one win from the two remaining Tests at Old Trafford to clinch a first series win in England for 32 years.

Although all three fixtures are being played behind closed doors because of the pandemic, Root will be in a familiar situation.

England have now lost the opening match of a series for the eighth time in ten campaigns, a run dating back to the 2017/18 Ashes in Australia. Most recently in South Africa they did recover from a heavy defeat in the first Test to win that series 3-1.

But now at 1-0 down with just two to play, there is far less margin for error. Joe Denly appears to be the most likely candidate to make way for Root. England wicketkeeper Jos Buttler is also



HIGHLIGHTS

With two Tests remaining at Old Trafford, visitors West Indies are just one win away from recording their first Test series victory in England since 1988. On that tour, the Caribbeans, led by Sir Vivian Richards, beat the hosts 4-0 in a five-match series.

Since the 2017-18 Ashes in Australia, England now have lost the first Test of a series for the eighth time in the last ten occasions. The most recent of such instances was in South Africa when they came back strongly to win the series 3-1 after a heavy defeat in the opening match.

The hosts have lost only once in their last 12 Tests at the Manchester venue.

under the scanner, although coach Chris Silverwood said: "First and foremost we want to give Jos the best opportunity to succeed. He just needs to go and make those big scores now doesn't he? He knows that as well."

Meanwhile, with six Tests in seven weeks, including three against Pakistan, England could

yet recall Broad in Manchester, having already said they plan to rotate their battery of quicks.

It was West Indies fast bowler Shannon Gabriel, however, who was named man-of-the-match in the first Test for a nine-wicket haul.

Gabriel was only included in the squad after being named as a reserve following ankle surgery.

Given the second Test starts just days after the end of the first, fitness is likely to be the West Indies' biggest issue as they return to Old Trafford, the venue for their quarantine period amid the pandemic and two subsequent intra-squad warm-up matches.

The West Indies arrived in England with many doubting if their batsmen could give an impressive fast-bowling unit enough runs to play with. But they built a first-innings lead of over a hundred runs at Southampton after captain Jason Holder took a Test-best 6-42 in England's lowly 204.

Set 200 to win, the West Indies did then collapse to 27-3.

But Blackwood stepped up, even if the rashness that has characterised his stop-start West Indies career saw him fall five runs short of what would have been only his second Test century.



Despite green light, cricketers reluctant to resume training

EKUSH TAPADER



Despite the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Monday deciding to allow interested players across the country to avail the board's training facilities and resume individual practice following a four-month halt due to the coronavirus pandemic, a few players remain in a state of confusion.

Local authorities at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, an international standard venue, have prepared the ground and are ready to allow entry to interested players for individual training.

But several local cricketers would rather continue doing fitness work at home as they have been since the enforced break. While some cricketers are backtracking due to coronavirus fears, others are waiting for a clear official announcement from the BCB regarding the resumption of practice.

The BCB considered making their facilities available after numerous videos of national team players, including wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim, practising outdoor were posted on social media, stirring discussion. Some players have avoided resuming practice due to fears of being dragged into such conversations.

Right-arm pacer Abu Jayed, a regular member of the Bangladesh Test team, mentioned that he would await BCB's official announcement before taking the field.

"I will go to the field the day the BCB allows me to start bowling. I won't go without such notice from the board. The board is prioritising our safety and we should keep that in mind. I am not worried about my skills because I think if I can keep my fitness then I can get my rhythm back quickly," said Jayed, who has been doing regular running sessions in

front of his residence in Mirabazar, Sylhet.

Another reason behind players' reluctance to return to the field is the uncertainty regarding international tours and series. It is still unclear at this time if there will be any international tours this year -- especially after the postponement of the Asia Cup, originally scheduled for September.

Even the resumption of the Dhaka Premier League, which was halted after the completion of the first round in mid-March, is unconfirmed. With no cricket on the horizon, players are opting to bide their time before taking the risk of going out to practice.

Cricketers are maintaining fitness by doing gym and running sessions regularly but it is skills training that players have been missing most during the halt.

Khaled Ahmed, another national pacer from Sylhet, has been honing his skills in an open space in front of his house in Alompur. But, for now, Khaled will be practising in his front yard rather than hurrying to avail facilities at international grounds.

"I haven't set a date [to return to practice] yet. The BCB also did not relay any message to us. We have been in touch with the coach [Russell Domingo] and he has asked us to work on our fitness from home as we do not have any upcoming series. He asked us not to rush into anything now. So I'll just wait out this month before returning to training," said Khaled.

Meanwhile, Ebadot Hossain, another national pacer, has been availing the gym facilities at his residence in Moulvibazar and doing regular running sessions to keep himself fit. Bangladesh Under-19 pacer Tanzim Sakib is also walking the same line.

It was confirmed after discussion with a few cricketers that they are now awaiting a proper guideline from the BCB before returning to cricket.

'Soton Test erased swing doubts'

REUTERS

The ball moved enough in last week's Southampton Test between England and West Indies to erase any lingering doubt about swing bowling under cricket's COVID-19 protocols, manufacturer of the Dukes ball told Reuters.

Strict health regulations included a ban on saliva to shine the ball, even though players can still use sweat to polish it in order to generate swing.

"The ball did swing and it was a balanced game of cricket," Dilip Jajodia, managing director of British Cricket Balls Ltd, which produces the Dukes balls, told Reuters. "When you flick your wrist, there are so many things that apply to swing. Not just anybody can run up and swing a ball. There are swing bowlers and there are fast bowlers."

"You can't look at Mark Wood or Jofra Archer and say 'oh, the ball is not swinging'. They are not swing bowlers, they are fast bowlers. Likewise, Shannon Gabriel is not a swing bowler either. For them, Jason Holder swings the ball and he was moving it."

Marauding Atalanta go second

AFP, Milan



Mario Pasalic scored a hat-trick as Atalanta brushed aside struggling local rivals Brescia 6-2 to move second in Serie A on Tuesday.

Gian Piero Gasperini's side extended their unbeaten league run to 13 games to move six points behind leaders Juventus who visit eighth-placed Sassuolo on Wednesday. Inter Milan and Lazio are two points behind Atalanta before they play against SPAL and Udinese respectively later this week.

Gasperini's side have scored 93 league goals so far this season -- 26 more than eight-time reigning champions Juventus.

The game between high-scoring Atalanta and 19th-placed Brescia was one between two neighbouring teams from cities ravaged by the coronavirus pandemic.

A minute's silence took place before kick-off with players forming a circle with the backdrop of the music "Rinascero, Rinascerei" (I will be reborn, you will be reborn) by Bergamo musician Roby Facchinetti.

Atalanta's top scorer Luis Muriel, with 17 league goals this season, watched from the stands hours after the Colombian left hospital after suffering a head injury in a fall at his home.

But his absence was not felt with Croatian Pasalic opening the scoring within two minutes at the Gewiss Stadium connecting with a Ruslan Malinovskyi cross.



Atalanta's Croatian midfielder Mario Pasalic celebrates the first of his three goals during a 6-2 thumping of Brescia on Tuesday. The Bergamo-based outfit, who have scored a staggering 93 goals in 33 matches so far, have moved back to the second spot in Serie A.

PHOTO: ATALANTA BC

Brescia hit back minutes later with Ernesto Torregrossa pouncing on Atalanta defender Mattia Caldara's poor clearance.

But the hosts got back into their stride and were four-goals up after half an hour with Marten De Roon, Malinovskyi and a Duvan Zapata header within a five-minute spell.

The punishment continued in the second half with Malinovskyi again setting up Pasalic to beat Lorenzo Andrenacci in the Brescia goal after 55 minutes.

The Croatian added a third three minutes later sending in Ebrima Colley's cross for his ninth goal this season, five of them against Brescia, having scored a brace in the away leg last November.

Nikolas Spalek pulled a goal back for Brescia who move closer to Serie B next season.

Atalanta however are having one of the best seasons in the club's 112-year history with a berth in the Champions League quarterfinals in their debut season.

SHORT CORNER

SA cricket divided over Ngidi's BLM stance

Racial divisions in South African cricket were laid bare on Tuesday when 30 black former international players issued a statement alleging racism remained a factor in the game.

The letter commended current fast bowler Lungi Ngidi, who last week expressed support for Black Lives Matter, and called for Cricket South Africa (CSA) to come out strongly in favour of the movement. Signatories included fast bowler Makhaya Ntini, Vernon Philander, Herschelle Gibbs, Ashwell Prince, Paul Adams and JP Duminy. A total of 36 people, including five coaches, were named on the document.

Current black players such as Kagiso Rabada and Ngidi were not included, nor were any white players.

The statement claimed despite three decades of cricket unity, "the views expressed from one side of the racial divide are still very much part of our lives... We see this an opportunity for CSA to be unequivocal about its position and to make sure the problem is confronted and we also invite our fellow white cricketers to join in this move to defend human dignity."

The statement noted criticism of Ngidi by former players, including Pat Symcox, Boeta Dippenaar and Rudi Steyn. -- AFP

Asian Tour's restart delayed

Golf's Taiwan Masters was cancelled Wednesday because of the coronavirus pandemic, casting doubt over the planned September resumption of the Asian Tour season. The long-standing, \$950,000 tournament was scheduled to tee off at the Taiwan Golf and Country Club from September 17-20.

The tournament was scrapped because of health concerns and travel restrictions on players living outside Taiwan, the tour announced in a statement.

The Asian Tour, which has been suspended since American Trevor Simmsby won the Malaysia Open on March 7, still hopes to return at the \$1.181 million Shinhan Donghae Open from September 10-13 in South Korea. -- AFP

Big Bash from December 3

Cricket Australia announced Wednesday plans for a full Twenty20 Big Bash League season starting in December, but acknowledged the schedule could be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 10th BBL will begin on December 3 when Adelaide Strikers host Melbourne Renegades, followed by 60 matches across the country and a final on February 6. The ambitious fixture list, which will follow the Women's Big Bash League means Cricket Australia will meet its commitments to broadcasters and not face penalties for reduced content. -- AFP

2022 WORLD CUP Four games a day confirmed

REUTERS

World Cup fans will be able to watch an unprecedented four games a day on TV during the group stage of the Qatar 2022 World Cup after the schedule was confirmed on Wednesday.

With the relatively short travel distances for the venues, it could be possible for fans at the 32-team tournament to attend multiple games each day. The early games will kickoff at 1000GMT with the fourth match starting at 1900GMT. The tournament's opening game will be on Nov. 21 while the final will be on Dec. 18.

"The World Cup is always a festival of football, a real celebration for the fans who come on-site and watch. In Qatar, with the compact nature, this is going to be amplified even more with 32 teams and 32 sets of supporters all in and around Doha," said FIFA Chief Tournaments and Events Officer, Colin Smith.

Petkovic's volley to Insta troll

AFP, Berlin



Andrea Petkovic has dealt with a critic on social media by telling him to try dealing with Petra Kvitová's serves after the German lost in straight sets to the former Wimbledon champion at an exhibition event in Berlin.

"You are so terrible! I think you should quit tennis and do a different career," wrote an Instagram user after Petkovic's 6-4, 6-1 defeat to Czech Republic star Kvitová, ranked 12th in the world, on Monday.

However, Petkovic, 32, fired back in style on Twitter alongside a screen shot of the social media troll's comments. "Missed this!," Petkovic replied after defeat in her first match for ten months.

"Bro, have you been living under a rock? 1) I have 3 careers going at the same and hate to toot my own horn but I'm awesome and 2) you try returning Petr's leftie serve on grass and then get back to me. Love."

Petkovic, who is ranked 87th in the world having last been in the top ten in 2015, had planned to end her career in 2020, but will play on into next year because this season has been affected by the coronavirus pandemic.



Germany's Andrea Petkovic (L) and Czech Republic's Petra Kvitova do a racket-bump after an exhibition match in Berlin on Monday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

The German then followed up on Twitter by adding, "oh and btw, I got used to these things years back and do not care whatsoever."

"I had ten of these today AFTER AN EXHO (exhibition game), but the career thing was funny to me -- wrong person, buddy, wrong person."

As well playing tennis professionally, Petkovic is also a presenter for German broadcaster ZDF.

The renowned bookworm has written her biography, due out in October, and in March she founded an online book club, which has just under 5,000 followers on Instagram.