

A bitter pill to swallow

Cricket

AFP, London

Pakistan captain Rashid Latif said his side had played "better cricket than England" despite losing by four wickets in the third one-day international at Lord's here on Sunday.

The result saw England complete a come-from-behind 2-1 series win in a match where Pakistan had no luck at all.

Fast bowlers Shoaib Akhtar and Mohammad Sami repeatedly beat the bat and marginal umpiring decisions went against Pakistan.

But had Pakistan not dropped

England opener Marcus Trescothick on his way to a match-winning unbeaten 108, as well as

missing two chances to run out the Somerset left-hander, it might have been a different story.

"Pakistan played extremely well. I'm not ashamed of the loss," said wicketkeeper Latif who dropped Trescothick on 93 after Mohammad Hafeez had missed him on 35.

"I went their (England's) way today although they also played well. But I personally feel Pakistan played better cricket than England."

"I always believed we were going to win this game. But I dropped a catch at a crucial moment and that is

all part and parcel of the game," Latif added.

However, Latif was happy with the progress his new-look team were making after eight senior players were discarded following Pakistan's first round exit at the World Cup.

"It is very difficult to lose a group of eight world-class players after the World Cup debacle. But the way they have played all three tournaments since (Pakistan won in Sharjah and lost in the final in Sri Lanka before coming to England) is very encouraging."

Pakistan coach Javed Miandad said the form of several players had impressed him. "Hafeez has improved a lot, (opening batsman) Imran Nazir is playing better cricket than he used to, Sami is bowling well and Yash Hameed, batting at number three, gave us a good start."

"They still lack experience," legendary Pakistan batsman Javed added. "But they are learning a lot."

Trescothick was elated at making a hundred in a winning cause for England against Pakistan, having made 137 at Lord's when England lost to them by two runs in a triangular one-day match two years ago.

"It's always very tough when you're facing two 100mph bowlers," explained Trescothick after battling Shoaib and Sami.

"But the best feeling of the lot was to be there at the end," added

Trescothick whose fifth one-day international century came off 101 balls.

Having made 86 in England's equalising win at The Oval on Friday, the man-of-the-series said he had been "building up to this" after notching the century.

Trescothick, who finished the match with a six off Azhar Mahmood as England won with nine balls to spare, also paid tribute to wicket-keeper Chris Read who made 25 not out and helped him put on 77 in 76 balls in worsening light and rain.

"It was a superb knock at that time of day when the game was as it was with us having lost a few wickets. You take your hat off to him," Trescothick said.

For Michael Vaughan this win meant victory in his first series as England's one-day captain since succeeding Nasser Hussain after the Test skipper quit following the team's first round World Cup departure.

"To come back from 1-0 down against a side of this quality shows immense character," said Vaughan, whose team lost Tuesday's day/night series opener at Old Trafford by two wickets.

Vaughan, who fielded first after winning the toss, added: "We had the better of the conditions but you still have to exploit them."

Shoaib pleases Javed

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AFP, London

Pakistan coach Javed Miandad insisted fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar had been the ideal team man during the team's three-match one-day tournament against England.

Shoaib, 27, who will play for English county side Durham for the rest of the season, has received almost as much criticism for his sometimes wayward bowling and colour-off-field lifestyle as praise for his fearsome speed.

But Javed, speaking after Pakistan's four-wicket defeat against England at Lord's on Sunday, said that result gave the hosts the series 2-1 said: "The past is the past. Shoaib's been an excellent team man, encouraging the young-

sters.

"Yesterday (Saturday) he came to this ground and bowled for an hour and a half in the nets. He was a different bowler in this last game," said Javed of the fastest bowler

currently in world cricket.

"If you have a problem you go in the nets and then apply yourself in the middle," legendary Pakistan batsman Javed added.

Shoaib took an expensive two for 69 in England's series levelling victory at The Oval on Friday but appeared a bowler transformed at Lord's on Sunday.

Figures of none for 40 from his permitted 10 overs did Shoaib no justice whatsoever after he repeatedly beat the bat and had England's match-winning centurion Marcus Trescothick dropped off his bowling as well.

Shoaib, known as the "Rawalpindi Express", has taken 88 wickets in 25 Tests, averaging 27.18.

Originally lined up by Durham's English rivals Hampshire, who instead got former Pakistan captain Wasim Akram as one of their overseas players, Shoaib will replace Dewart Pretorius at the Riverside-based county.

Durham captain Jon Lewis said: "I'm delighted Shoaib is joining us, he's a very exciting prospect. Dewart was doing very well and we knew we had to replace him.

Shoaib was very keen to come here and that is great for Durham. He's capable of producing devastating spells of fast bowling and I'm really looking forward to playing alongside him."

As well as his bowling prowess, Shoaib has courted controversy for ball-tampering incidents.

He was given a two-match suspension for ball tampering during a match in May against New Zealand and missed Pakistan's one-day series final in Sri Lanka as well as the two-wicket series-opening win against England at Old Trafford on Tuesday.

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