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Laxman praises tail

AFP, Perth

Indian batsman VVS Laxman praised the support of his batting partners after the Indian tail put on 134 potentially critical runs in the third Test against Australia at the WACA Ground on Friday.

After leading by 118 from the first innings, India slumped to 160 for six in their second innings, but with Laxman anchoring the resistance with 79, they recovered to reach 294 and extend their lead to 412.

That left the Australians having to produce the second biggest run chase in Test history to notch up the world record 17th straight Test win they covet.

Wicketkeeper Mahendra Singh Dhoni made 38 and put on 75 for the seventh wicket with Laxman, while number 10 R.P. Singh exceeded all expectations in making his highest Test score of 30 in adding 51 for the ninth wicket to push the lead beyond 400.

Laxman praised the pair for their efforts, describing his partnership with Dhoni as crucial and saying it was a mature knock from

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Arambagh post second win

SPORTS REPORTER

Surud struck the only goal as Arambagh registered their second win in the Metropolitan Senior Division Football League beating Purbachal Parishad at the Bir Shreshtha Shaheed Sepoy Mohammad Mostafa Stadium at Kamalapur yesterday.

The young striker struck the all-important goal for the Motiheel-based side in the 31st minute.

In today's matches, Dipali Jubo Sangha take on Sunrise and Badda Jagarani Sangsad face Agrani Bank at the same venue.



Did U Know?

The Australian Open was played in neighbouring New Zealand in 1906 and 1912.



Anil Kumble

(Indian cricket captain)
"It was an irony that Rahul (Dravid) took the catch as he has probably taken the most catches off my bowling."
When asked about his immediate reaction upon reaching 600 Test wickets.



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STAR Sports
Australian Open
Third Round
Live from 6:00am
English Premier League
Fulham v Arsenal
Live from 8:55pm
Newcastle v Bolton Wanderers
Live from 11:10pm



GRACE UNDER FIRE: Indian batsman VVS Laxman drives elegantly through mid-off during the third day of the third Test against Australia at the WACA in Perth on Friday.

Very, very steely

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

It was family day here at the WACA. Any youngster less than 15 years of age, if accompanied by someone older, would be allowed free entry. Many parents might have brought their kids along hoping for a special innings from VVS Laxman, a rubber-wristed masterclass where he usually races along in fifth gear.

What they got to see, though, was the beauty of craft, an artist showing his blue-collar ethic, a supremely-talented batsman mining industriously. Jaws didn't drop, like in Sydney, but a job was accomplished without much fuss. Mostly workmanlike, it contained a little sprinkling of stardust. In close to four hours the match gradually swung. Yet again it was Laxman steering an Indo-Australian contest.

Australians normally mention Laxman in the same breath as Tendulkar but rarely would they have seen this side of him. Starting with his 95 in Kolkata, a forgotten

gem from 1998 when he first drove Shane Warne inside out, he's been one to get instantly in the groove. Whether it's his epic 281, again in Kolkata, or his three classics in Sydney, or his cracker in Adelaide, or even his nuggets in Mumbai, Chennai and Brisbane he's opened the game up quite rapidly.

Here he was willing to wait and inch India towards the ascendancy. He walked in amid a mini-collapse and weathered an outstanding spell of pace. Never one to hustle the singles, he bided his time for the loose ball. Mitchell Johnson had just removed Sourav Ganguly, and Brett Lee, like he's done through this Test, batted in with high energy. He ducked and weaved and angled a few down to third man. He saw Mahendra Singh Dhoni struggle for the gaps -- stuck on five for 43 balls -- and encouraged him to hang in there.

It was tough out there. He muttered to himself before every ball and performed a seemingly superstitious ritual after each -- tapping the bat seven or eight times on the popping crease. His first four was streaky but with the second, a

magical flick through midwicket, was more like Laxman in full flight.

The carpentry wasn't without flourishes. Occasionally he teased the opposition. Picking Symonds from outside off he whipped him in front of square, taunting the fielder all the way to the boundary. Few current batsmen torment the fielders as much, timing with such precision that the chaser thinks he has a chance, only to see the ball scurry over the rope eventually.

"More than getting a hundred, it's about helping the team to win matches," he said. "And I enjoy playing under such situations. It's been that way throughout, not only for India but for Hyderabad and South Zone as well. These situations seem to bring the best out of me. It was important to analyse the situation and I took maximum strike against Lee. RP was happy to face Shaun Tait and Stuart Clark at the other end. I believed our tailenders were capable batsmen. And the way they responded was encouraging."

"It was important to get more than 400," he said. "That's why the

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India on the verge

Cricket

AFP, Perth

An impressive opening spell by Irfan Pathan rocked Australia's bid for a world record 17th successive win in the third Test against India at the WACA Friday.

The home side are chasing 413 to win after the Indian tail wagged to lift their side's second innings total to 294 on the third day here.

Pathan, an onlooker for the first two Tests, removed openers Chris Rogers (15) and Phil Jaques (16) in his opening spell with impressive late swing.

Rogers, who has had a tough debut, making just four in the first innings, was caught behind, while Jaques lived dangerously before guiding an outswinger straight to Wasim Jaffer at gully.

At stumps Australia were 65 for two, still needing a further 348 to win, with Ricky Ponting on 24 and Mike Hussey on five.

Only once before in Test history has a team scored more to win in the fourth innings of a Test, when the West Indies made 418 for seven

against Australia in Antigua in 2003.

The previous best at the WACA was Australia's 342 for eight against India back in 1977, in the first Test between the two countries at the venue.

Australia have not been beaten since losing to England at Trent Bridge in August 2005 and have not lost a home Test since December 2003, against India in Adelaide.

Australian coach Tim Nielsen said his side were paying the price for underperforming in their first innings in making just 212. However, he said they were capable of creating history.

"The good thing is the wicket's still in pretty good shape, the outfield's fast and we've seen that if batsmen get in they find it easier to score," he said.

"If we play well enough we'll give ourselves the chance to chase down a really big total and get the record we're looking for," he added.

But Indian batsman VVS Laxman said chasing more than 400 was a huge psychological burden for the Australians and tipped skipper Anil Kumble to play a big role in India's push for victory.

"They're under a lot of pressure

on Saturday getting 350 runs in the fourth innings," he said.

"The way our bowlers bowled in the last hour was very encouraging."

India snapped Australia's previous record 16-Test winning streak when they notched a memorable victory after following-on 274 runs behind in Kolkata in 2001.

Laxman was the hero on that occasion with a double century and his fighting 79 in India's second innings here enabled the tourists to recover from 160 for six and set the Australians such a challenging target.

He received good late support from Mahendra Singh Dhoni, with 38, and number 10 RP Singh, who made an invaluable 30.

Pathan, who came in as night-watchman towards close of play on Thursday, also made an important contribution with a battling 46.

Laxman has been a thorn in Australia's side throughout his career.

He averages nearly 60 in Australia in Test cricket and his overall average against the world's top team is 51.76 compared with a career average of 44.40.

He was not at his fluid best

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2

Fischer passes away

AFP, Reykjavik

Chess legend Bobby Fischer, whose tortured genius earned him both worldwide acclaim and disdain, has died at the age of 64 at his home in Iceland.



BOBBY FISCHER

"I can confirm that he died yesterday in his home due to an illness," close friend Gardar Sverrisson told AFP. Fischer was reportedly hospitalised for a period last year.

Einar Einarsson, the chairman

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BFF to work on demands

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) acting president Monir Ahmed on Friday said he would sit with league committee chairman Abdul Rahim to resolve the problem arising out of the threat by the national footballers' various demands.

Talking to the reporters, he said they would also meet with the representatives of clubs on Sunday to discuss the booters' demands, including start of the B. League and date of the inter-club players transfer.

Monir said the BFF executive committee would meet on January 24 to seek a way out of the impasse.

Earlier, on Thursday, former and present national footballers demanded early start of B. League as well as players transfer.

They threatened to go for movement if their demand is not met by January 24.

Roddick sent packing

REUTERS, Melbourne

American Andy Roddick lost his cool and his chances of a first Australian Open title when he was upset in the third round by German 29th seed Philipp Kohlschreiber in a Friday night thriller.

In a match that finished after 2.00am, the sixth seed was ousted by Kohlschreiber 6-4 3-6 7-6 6-7 8-6, handing Roddick his earliest exit from the event since his debut in 2002.

After the first two sets were split, both men had set points in the third but Kohlschreiber took the tiebreak 9-7 to move ahead.

Roddick lost his temper with umpire Emmanuel Joseph in the fourth set but he regained his composure to pinch it to the tiebreak.

But though Roddick saved four match points at 4-5 in the final set, Kohlschreiber broke in the 14th game to set up a fourth-round clash with Finn Jarkko Nieminen.

Tigers sound satisfied!

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

No matter how frustrated one became by watching the Tigers in New Zealand, captain Mohammad Ashraful believed that they did not return home empty-handed.

There was a mood like that of a winning team back home after a successful series at the Zia International Airport lounge and the feeling was reflected when skipper Ashraful and his deputy Mashrafe Bin Mortaza talked to the reporters about the outcome of the Tiger's second trip to New Zealand.

Coach Jamie Siddons was not accompanying the team that were whitewashed in the three-match one-day and two-match Test series

(both inside three days) against the Black Caps.

"There were a lot of positives in the series and there were also signs of improvement from what we did six years ago," was Ashraful's on-arrival reaction.

"The most encouraging part of this tour was our two new openers (Tamim Iqbal and Zunaed Siddiqui) and our bowling was also good, especially Mashrafe (Bin Mortaza) and Rajib (Shahadat Hossain). We might not have put too much runs on the board but our top-order batsmen's approach, off the first 15 balls, was really nice," he added.

But the Bangladesh skipper was quick to say that they need time to adjust with the new training method that they have been under since their Sri Lanka tour last year.

"You know we have been training in a different way since the last Sri Lanka tour and Jamie Siddons also put a lot of new things in our training and you have to show the patience to get the results from it," he said.

This trend of pointing fingers at new training methods whenever there is a change of coaching staff has continued and when queried, Ashraful said that they were getting acquainted and will be ready soon.

He said: "I think it will not take too much time and hopefully, we start to get the results from our next assignment against South Africa at home."

The question was also raised about selection as the team management's decisions to send Tushar Imran home after the ODI

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THE REAL POSITIVES: Up and coming Tigers (from L-R) Sajidul Islam, Zunaed Siddiqui and Tamim Iqbal wait at the VIP lounge of the Zia after their arrival from New Zealand early yesterday morning.

Mauresmo crashes out

Australian Open
The Grand Slam of Asia/Pacific

AFP, Melbourne

The top women's seeds advanced to the Australian Open fourth round in contrasting styles Friday but former champion Amelie Mauresmo was dumped from the tournament she won just two years ago.

Mauresmo became one of the highest-profile casualties so far as defending champion Serena Williams and fifth seed Maria Sharapova outgunned their opponents and world number one Justine Henin endured a tough workout.

A listless Jelena Jankovic battled through another draining three setter but the Serbian third seed managed to claw her way into the final 16, unlike the hapless Mauresmo.

She went down to hometown favourite Australian Casey Dellacqua 3-6, 6-4, 6-4, looking comfortable taking the first set before again succumbing to the jitters that have seen her labelled a Grand Slam choker in the past.

The Frenchwoman has strug-

gled to recapture the form that won her the Australian Open, Wimbledon and the world num-

ber one spot in 2006, conceding that nerves played a part in her latest loss.



Russian star Maria Sharapova is in full flow as she makes a forehand return during her thumping victory over compatriot Elena Vesnina in the third round of the Australian Open in Melbourne on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

"Yeah, confidence and really not keeping in mind the aggression that I should have," she said, describing herself as "frustrated and disappointed" at her early exit from Melbourne Park.

Mauresmo, seeded 18 here after a slide down the ranking last year, committed 43 unforced errors and handed Dellacqua match point with a double fault, her 10th of the match.

Serena Williams, who took Mauresmo's Australian crown last year breezed past Victoria Azarenka of Belarus 6-3, 6-4 and warned she was yet to hit top gear.

The American seventh seed nailed her serve for the first time this tournament and blasted down 15 aces.

"I'm feeling pretty good about where I am, I'm just enjoying every moment being here," she said.

"I'm moving well. I'm not even moving my fastest, you know I can move faster when I want to."

Sharapova, Williams' opponent in last year's final, was at her competitive best downing fellow Russian Elena Vesnina 6-3, 6-0.

In no mood to tolerate any obstacles as she seeks to make

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2

Daily Star end in style

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite suffering the ignominy of a first round exit, The Daily Star bowed out with their heads held high after thumping Ittefaq by five wickets in their final group game at the Maulana Bhashani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Put into bat, Ittefaq only managed 53 of their six overs, a total easily overhauled by The Daily Star in 2.4 overs with all their wickets intact.

Although the game had been rendered academic after Inqilab won both their matches, The Daily Star proved that "if you do go out, do so with all guns blazing".

The six-shooters were firing from the very first over as Aussie import Ashfaq Wares Khan held a sharp chance to dismiss the first Ittefaq batsman in the first over bowled.

Wares had relinquished the captaincy after the first match debacle and it showed as he felt free to express himself on the field.

New captain Mohammad Isam had set a good precedent by winning the toss and immediately putting the opposition in.

After Shamim Ashraf bowled the aforementioned fiery first over, the opposition were always on the back

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