

India end long wait

Win series despite draw in Wellington

Cricket

AFP, Wellington

India secured their first series win in New Zealand since 1968 on Tuesday despite rain cheating them of a huge victory in the third Test here Tuesday.

The draw at the Basin Reserve was all the tourists needed for a 1-0 series win, breaking the 41-year gap since their last series victory in New Zealand.

India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni said the mood in the dressing room after the long awaited win was "fantastic".

"We have achieved something that is big, but the tough part is to maintain it," he said afterwards.

"I think it will be tougher for the next guys who come here."

As number three ranked team in the world, the ever-improving India were always expected to overcome an inconsistent New Zealand, ranked eighth.

India's star-laden batting lineup and more than competent bowling attack proved too much for New Zealand, with a modest bowling attack and brittle and inexperienced batting lineup.

New Zealand captain Daniel Vettori said India deserved to be bracketed with Australia and South Africa at the peak of world cricket.

"They're obviously starting to prove themselves away from home," he said.

"I think you can throw Australia, South Africa and India in there as the three best teams in the world, it's hard to distinguish between

the three at the moment."

The skipper said his side's patchy performances continued to frustrate their attempts to rise higher up the world Test rankings.

"We've been inconsistent but we've only lost one Test match. I think people have to remember that," he said.

But New Zealand had the weather to thank for not losing a second Test in the series on Tuesday, with the home side poised on the brink of a humbling defeat at 281 for eight when rain led to the game being washed out early in the afternoon.

With only two second innings wickets remaining, New Zealand remained 336 runs adrift of the massive target of 617 set by India when they declared at 434 for seven early on Monday.

By then the series win was a formality, with India needing only a draw after coming to Wellington with a 1-0 lead after thrashing the hosts by 10 wickets in the first Test in Hamilton.

The third Test draw calls into question Dhoni's caution in deciding to bat on during the early part of the fourth day to extend India's lead to 616, although rain on Tuesday had been forecast for several days.

The highest successful Test fourth innings run chase was 418 scored by the West Indies against Australia in 2003.

But Dhoni defended his decision, saying the extra buffer of runs allowed his team to maintain an aggressive field through New Zealand's second innings.

"When you have that extra 80 runs on the board you can have those extra catching fielders hanging around for a lot longer," he said.

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India's cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar (C) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of New Zealand batsman James Franklin (R) on the final day of the third Test at Basin Reserve in Wellington yesterday. Although rain denied India a victory in the final Test, the visitors won the series 1-0. It was also India's first series victory in New Zealand since 1968.

PHOTO: AFP

DIV I CRICKET

Khelaghar in race of three

SPORTS REPORTER

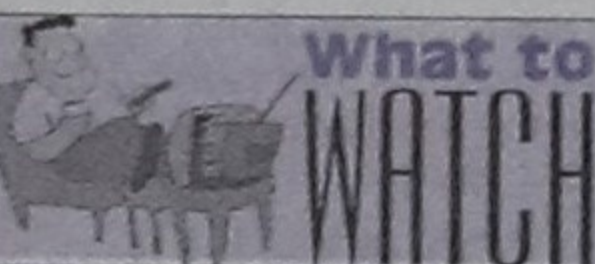
Khelaghar SKS jumped to top of the First Division Cricket League points table defeating title favourites Kalabagan by six wickets in a Super League match at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Kalabagan batted first and were bowled out for 184 in the 48th over. Tarek top scored with 70 and Khelaghar's Saker took four wickets.

In reply, the winners reached their target in the 42th over with Niaz scoring an unbeaten 104 off 109 balls.

In other matches, Eskaton SS defeated Baridhara Dazzlers by three wickets at the Dhaka University ground, Bangladesh Boys beat Jatrabari KC by six wickets at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium and in a reduced 30-overs-a-side match Azad SC defeated Indira Road by 100 runs at the Jahangirnagar University ground.

All the eight teams have now played 15 matches out of which Khelaghar has 22 points and Eskaton and Kalabagan are even on 20 points at the second position. The race to the Premier Cricket League is now between Khelaghar, Eskaton and Kalabagan as teams have one more match to go.



ESPN

Sportscentre India

Sports News

Live at 8:30pm

TEN Sports

UEFA Champions League

(Quarterfinals)

Liverpool v Chelsea

Live from 12:00am (Thursday)

Barcelona v Bayern Munich

Live from 2:45am (Thursday)



Shoaib Akhtar

(Pakistan fast bowler)

"I know this will be an important series for me -- both form and fitness wise, so I will do my best to play all the matches and keep fitness."

After being named in the 15-man squad for the ODI series against Australia on Monday,

Nazrul Shikkha Manzil school champions

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Kabi Nazrul Shikkha Manzil of Meherpur clinched the title of the Standard Chartered Young Tigers National School Cricket tournament with an exciting one-wicket victory over Railway Hospital Colony City Corporation High School of Chittagong yesterday.

In the low-scoring final at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, Rajon Ahmed guided the southwestern region school to victory in the very last over when he followed up

his three-wicket haul with an unbeaten 10-ball 13 that featured two well-timed boundaries.

Railway won the toss and elected to bat, but Rajon proved their decision wrong by inflicting the initial damage as they were reduced to 43 for three.

The port city school failed to recover from the early hiccups and were eventually bowled out for 133 runs in 49.5 overs. They looked in total disarray and opener Mohammad Jewel's 24 was the saving grace as they managed to take the total past 100.

Besides Rajon's three for 24, Ashik Parvez also picked up three wickets for 18 runs.

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PHOTO: STAR

JUNIOR TIGERS OF 2009: Players of Meherpur's Kabi Nazrul Shikkha Manzil celebrate with the trophy after defeating Chittagong's Railway Hospital Colony City Corporation High School in the final of the Standard Chartered Young Tigers U-16 National School Cricket Championship at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

NZ gamble on Oram

Name Twenty20 WC squad

Cricket

AFP, Wellington

New Zealand's selectors have gambled on injury-prone all-rounder Jacob Oram being fit for the ICC World Twenty20 in June, naming him in a 15-man squad announced Tuesday.

The 30-year-old Oram, ranked the fifth-best all-rounder in the world in one-day internationals, has been plagued by injuries over the past four years, which have seen him in and out of the national side.

He did not play in the just-concluded three-Test series against India because of an Achilles strain.

But he has been included in the squad for the World Cup in England on the assumption that he is fully fit, Glenn Turner, the head of the selection panel, said.

The squad also includes Brendon Diamanti, who has yet to play an international Twenty20, and four other players absent from the side that won the two Twenty20s against India last month.

The recalled players are Peter McGlashan, who last played against Sri Lanka in 2006, James Franklin, who played against Australia in

February, and Scott Styris and Kyle Mills, who turned out against the West Indies in December.

Turner said the fickle English climate had presented a challenge in selecting the side.

"We're really not sure what conditions will prevail in early June," he said.

"But being able to take 15 players means we have hopefully been able to cover all angles."

"In selecting the side we have been particularly conscious of selecting players in the middle and lower order who are boundary hitters."

Notable omissions from the squad are one-day specialists Grant Elliott and Tim Southee, who are both on the list of replacement or cover players.

The World Twenty20 opens on June 5. New Zealand's group matches are against Scotland on June 6 at the Oval and South Africa on June 9 at Lords.

SQUAD

Daniel Vettori (captain), Neil Broom, Ian Butler, Brendon Diamanti, James Franklin, Martin Guptill, Brendon McCullum, Nathan McCullum, Peter McGlashan, Kyle Mills, Iain O'Brien, Jacob Oram, Jesse Ryder, Scott Styris, Ross Taylor.

India remain third in ICC rankings

PTI, Dubai

India might have clinched a historic Test series triumph over New Zealand on Tuesday, but the team did not gain from it in the International Cricket Council (ICC) rankings, remaining static at the third spot in the latest list issued later in the day.

Rain and stubborn New Zealand resistance led by centurion Ross Taylor prevented India from gaining a point and keeping up the pressure on South Africa, the side directly above it in the Test Championship table.

The eighth-placed Kiwis, in fact, ended up gaining a point for managing two draws.

When rain forced the players off the field 20 minutes after lunch in the third and last Test in

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BFF, Nokia to strike deal

SPORTS REPORTER

Mobile phone giant Nokia is all set to revive their relationship with Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF).

Nokia's local high-ups led by Prem Chand, the managing director of the company, met BFF president Kazi Salahuddin yesterday and agreed in principle to sponsor the national team for one year as well as sponsoring the youth development programme.

Last year Nokia had sponsored the national team for two tournaments -- the AFC Challenge Cup and SAFF Championship -- but they are

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When the coaches box!

SPORTS REPORTER

Two boxing coaches were involved in a minor jostling over the training schedule of the camp for the upcoming South Asian Games at the BKSP yesterday.

It was learnt that a BKSP and a NSC coach first exchanged heated words and the argument soon escalated into a physical confrontation before the pair had to be separated by BKSP staff.

"We are aware of the incident and we will visit the scene tomorrow," Bangladesh Olympic Association vice-president and training committee chairman Mizanur Rahman Manu told reporters.

As many as 33 boxers have been training under the supervision of four coaches at the sports institute for the SA Games to be held in Bangladesh in early 2010.

Dhoni thanks mates

Cricket

AFP, Wellington

India's Captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni said Tuesday a magnificent team effort had led to the country's first series win in New Zealand for four decades.

But he did have some special words for opening batsman Gautam Gambhir and pace bowler Zaheer Khan, who were both at the forefront of the 1-0 series victory, clinched with a draw in the third Test.

"Both of them, they keep on improving each game they play," Dhoni told reporters.

"They look to improve. They raise the bar wherever they are performing."

Gambhir was the top performing batsman of the tour, despite having only cemented his place in the Test side after a strong series against Sri Lanka in the middle of last year and a barrage of runs since.

His second innings 137 in the second Test in Napier guided India to the safety of a draw after New Zealand ran up a massive 619 for nine in the first innings and dismissed the visitors for 305 in their first knock.

Gambhir's second innings 167 in Wellington set India on the path to victory, which was only thwarted by rain on the last day.

By the end of the Test series, he had accumulated 445 runs at an average of 89.0, eclipsing the effort of the "Little Master" Sachin Tendulkar who finished with 344 runs at an

average of 68.8.

Master off-spinner Harbhajan Singh finished the series with 16 wickets at an average of 21.37 runs per wicket. His best innings saw him grabbing six wickets for just 63 runs.

Left-arm pace bowler Zaheer was second in India's bowling ranks, garnering 13 wickets at an average cost of 30.76 runs in the three-Test

series, including a best performance of five for 65 in New Zealand's first innings in Wellington.

"Zak [Zaheer Khan] has been brilliant for the last two years. He has bowled well everywhere, not only India," Dhoni said.

"He helps the other bowlers and it has been fantastic to

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PHOTO: AFP

India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni poses with the National Bank Trophy during the prize distribution ceremony after the final day of the third Test at the Basin Reserve in Wellington yesterday.

India's 'best ever' team

Cricket

AFP, New Delhi

Mahendra Singh Dhoni's men were Tuesday hailed as India's "best ever" cricket team after winning the country's first Test series in New Zealand in 41 years.

India clinched the three-match series 1-0 on the back of a 10-wicket triumph in the first Test in Hamilton after heavy rain left them two wickets short of winning the third Test in Wellington Tuesday.

It was India's first series win in New Zealand since the 3-1 success under Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi in 1968.

Dhoni's men also won the preceding one-day series 3-1, though they lost the two Twenty20 internationals at the start of the seven-week tour.

"The current team is much better than ours was," Pataudi told Indian media. "In fact, it is easily one of India's best ever sides, probably the best."

Pataudi said the lack of green-top wickets -- India's bugbear in New Zealand in the past -- and unusual batting-friendly conditions did not diminish the team's performance.

"I have been very impressed the way the team has played over the past few years, both at home and abroad, and in all forms of the game," he said. "The side has a bright future."

India have won six of their last nine Test series and the third in a row after beating world cham-

pions Australia and England at home last year.

Of the 29 one-day internationals India played over the past 12 months, they won 21, lost seven while one game was washed out.

India are also the reigning world Twenty20 champions with seven wins out of 13 in the shortest form of the game.

The latest results continue a remarkable run for skipper Dhoni, the team's wicket-keeper and reliable lower order batsman, who has now won five of his seven Tests as captain with the other two ending in draws.

New Zealand captain Daniel Vettori, writing in the Times of India, described India as one of the best teams in the world.

"The confidence of winning in different conditions has made all the difference," wrote Vettori. "They are winning Test matches everywhere."

"The race for the top team in the world is now tied in a three-way contest between Australia, India and South Africa. It's pretty close to call at the moment."

Meanwhile, the Board of Control for Cricket in India announced a reward of 1.5 million rupees (30,000 dollars) to each member of the 16-man squad and one million rupees for the support staff.

India's next major assignment is the defence of the World Twenty20 title in England in June. Dhoni's men won the inaugural edition in South Africa in 2007.