



Daniel Vettori led his side to a 123-run advantage as he remained unbeaten on 100 at the end of the second day's play against Pakistan in the Napier Test yesterday.

Katich backs his skipper

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Simon Katich doesn't want to replace Ricky Ponting as captain and is happy supporting the current leader. After Australia's draw with West Indies in Adelaide there has been some noise from former players about removing Ponting and Rodney Hogg, a vocal critic, wants Katich to be promoted.

"It's a shock to hear that sort of stuff," Katich told AAP. "Ricky's obviously done a fantastic job and I'm just happy being back in the team. It's flattering to hear that sort of comment but at the same time I know what my role in the team is and that's to open the batting and hopefully be a senior player to help Ricky out. From that point of view, I don't buy into that at all."

Div-I Chess

SPORTS REPORTER

Titas Club maintained their sole lead in the points table with maximum ten points after end of the fifth round yesterday in the Dutch-Bangla Bank First Division Chess League. Bangladesh Biman are in second position with eight points and 12 Soft Solution Limited are in third with seven points in four games. Games of the fifth round were held yesterday at the Chess Federation hall-room. In the fifth round: Titas beat Dhaka Metropolitan Chess Club by two-and-a-half to one-and-a-half points. Biman beat Farashgonj Sporting Club 4-0. 12 Soft Solution did not have any matches in this round. Sixth round games will start today at 3:30 pm at the same venue.

Manu chef

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all 23 disciplines of the Games as the head of the training and facilities committee, said a BOA press release yesterday.

The 11th SA Games will be held in Bangladesh from January 29 to February 9 next year. Some 1800 athletes from eight nations will take part in a record number of 23 disciplines.



Shahidur Rahman Shattoo

(Coach of Bangladesh football team)
"The boys did not play well. They looked tired the entire game. I will ask them why after returning to the hotel." On why his charges failed to deliver their game plan and conceded defeat against India without putting in a fight.

Maldives start

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victory against Bangladesh will not help any more. It will be a different match, a special day and you have to think differently and do better to get the result."

After having confirmed their semifinal berth, India rested five regular players in their last group match against Maldives and went down 2-0 to finish group runners-up.

"We did not field our full strength in the match against Maldives where we went down 2-0 and it will not happen again," Sukhvinder said.

"After coming here we are improving match by match though the boys were not up to the mark in the first two matches, but they came close to their level in the semifinal and hope they will put another

good show in the final."

India have struck three goals in four matches while Maldives found the back of net 11 times and whether it would matter in deciding the final match remains to be seen.

"The more important thing is to create chances and avail them. We created chances and struck three games in the matches we won and at the same time we did not concede any goal so it does not matter how many goals you score," said the Indian coach.

"It is not a hundred metre sprint to run one to one rather it is a team game and each player can stop anyone," said Sukhvinder when asked how to stop in-form Maldives strikers Ashfaq Ali and Ahmed Thoriq, the top-scorer of the tournament.

ICL-ers back

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been drafted in the squad but he has hardly any chance to play the tri-nation series and that's why the selectors brought in fresh faces into the national fold as backup in the Premier League," opined Rafiqul.

Apart from Mushfiqur, Sahgir Hossain and Dhiman are the other keepers in the team and the inclusion of latter raised many eyebrows when he has made hardly any impression in the ongoing league.

"Dhiman is a proven wicketkeeper and we just included him as backup," defended Rafiqul.

The selected cricketers have been asked to report to head coach Jamie Siddons at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium Gymnasium at 10am today.

The team will be reduced after ten days.

Exciting tie

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left-arm spinner Mosharraf Hossain for a 26-ball 23.

Sharifullah was the most successful bowler with 3 for 36.

Earlier Biman made a disastrous start when Razzaq removed Avishek Mitra in the second ball of the innings but Zahurul Islam (30) joined Mushfiqur (20) to repair the damage by associating 56 runs in the second wicket stand but after the dismissal of Zahurul, wickets fell like nine pins before Shafiqul restored the party.

Spinner Arifat Sunny caused the middle order collapse by taking three wickets while another spinner Nasir

Hossain picked up two wickets on a slowpitch.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BIMANVABAHANI

Venue: SBNCS

BIMAN: 173-9 in 42 overs (Mushfiqur 20, Zahurul 30, Nasanta 12, Mosharraf 13, Shafiqul 55 not out, extras 23; Razzaq 1-25, Shafiqul 1-49, Rafique 1-19, Sunny 3-15, Nasir 2-23).

ABAHANI: 173 all out in 42 overs (Imrul 67, Razzaq 23, Nasir 33, extras 7; Shafiqul 2-38, Tareq 1-25, Sharifullah 3-36, Mosharraf 1-35, Sunny 2-23). Result: Match tied

Safina doubtful for Aus Open

INTERNET, undated

Dinara Safina is a serious doubt for the Australian Open after a back injury forced her to withdraw from the Brisbane International, a main lead-up event to the first Grand Slam of the year.

Safina retired in tears after just two games of her opening match of the WTA Tour Championships in Doha, despite receiving pain-numbing cortisone injections the night before in a bid to be fit for the season-ending tournament.

India level

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scored a fine 46.

Earlier Sri Lanka skipper Kumar Sangakkara played a captain's knock of 59 from 31 balls to fire the visitors to 206-7.

The left-hander, who starred in his team's 29-run victory for the second match in Nagpur on Wednesday with a superb 78 off 37 balls, smashed eight boundaries and two sixes.

Chinthaka Jayasinghe chipped in with 38 from 28 balls and Angelo Mathews hit an unbeaten 26, including a six off the last ball of the innings from seamer Ashish Nehra.

India, who dropped five catches and conceded 17 wides, face a stiff target of 10.4 runs an over under lights to draw the two-match series.

Sangakkara and veteran Sanath Jayasuriya plundered 81 in 39 balls for the second wicket after danger man Tillakaratne Dilshan was bowled by Ishant Sharma for one in the second over.

Jayasuriya made 31 off 21 balls with five fours and a six before he was trapped leg-before by off-spinner Yusuf Pathan.

Sangakkara himself fell in the 11th over when he holed out in the deep off Uvraaj Singh, who celebrated his 28th birthday on Saturday with 3-23 from three overs.

The lower order batsmen kept a good pace as the Indian fielding wilted in the cold weather.

MSC

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comfortable 8-wicket victory.

BRIEF SCORES

Mohammedan v Victoria (37-over-a-side match)

VICTORIA: 141 all out in 36.5 overs (Kamrul Islam 33, Mohammad Sharif 31; Foysal Hossain 3-47, Nabil Samad 2-22)

MOHAMMEDAN: 142 for 2 in 30.4 overs (Shamsur Rahman 51, Mohammad Ashraf 24) Result: Mohammedan won by 8 wickets

Still no

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poor performance and termed Friday as a 'bad day' for Bangladesh football.

"No type of style appeared in Bangladesh's play yesterday (Friday) and the performance the boys put up was not our real strength," Shantanu said.

"If so, we could not have played well against Bhutan, Sri Lanka and tournament's better side, Pakistan."

He, however, was more disappointed at seeing no challenge from his charges.

"Would not be discontent if the boys lost the game providing a fighting show."

Manager Satyajit Das Rupu believed that Bangladesh went on the backfoot because the boys were trailing by running against the Indian players.

Vettori drives Kiwis

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

It was even balance at tea on the second day of the third and deciding Test at Napier. New Zealand were trailing by 57 runs with only five wickets in hand, Brendon McCullum and Daniel Vettori were yet to settle in, Danish Kaneria was in hot form having run through the middle order and the second new ball wasn't far away. Either team could have grabbed the ascendancy. It was Vettori and McCullum who broke the shackles of the first two sessions with a combination of intelligence and exhilarating strokeplay, and seized control of the game.

McCullum was explosive, improvising constantly, while Vettori combined inventiveness with solidity to rapidly change the character of the game. New Zealand's nervous approach of the first two sessions - the defensive, perhaps over-cautious, batsmen struggling to survive Kaneria as several close catchers hovered around the bat -- gave way to a thrilling evening. Runs came quickly and New Zealand swiftly took a sizeable first-innings lead.

New Zealand's jail-break was assisted by the Pakistan fast bowlers, who have caused batsmen the most problems this series with seam, swing and tight lines and lengths. Not today though. Umar Gul and the rest offered width with their short-of-a-length deliveries and Vettori kept picking boundaries with his favourite short-arm cuts and deflections.

McCullum attacked Kaneria by playing the sweep and suddenly the floodgates

were flung open.

At times McCullum placed his bat outside off, with his back foot in line with off stump, and started to create his own angles. Even the skilful Mohammad Asif lost his poise and sprayed the ball around. The shot of the evening was an imperiously-pulled six from outside off stump against Asif. McCullum started the bowler again when he charged out to crash a length delivery over cover.

Pakistan seemed to have run out of ideas when, against the run of play, Gul got the ball to burst off the pitch towards the throat of McCullum, who fended it straight to gully. Pakistan also had an opportunity to get rid of Vettori, but Kaneria dropped a straightforward return catch off him on 97.

Until Kaneria's lapse, though, Vettori, who has marvellous self-awareness of the limitations of his game and thrives within them, had played a chanceless innings. He arched his back to cut short-of-a-length deliveries from the line of the stumps without making it appear risky, he walked across to work perfectly acceptable deliveries to fine leg and frustrated bowlers with his short-arm pulls and nudges. Once in a while, Vettori increased pressure on the bowlers with calculated big hits: he lifted Kaneria for a straight six, and swept him and pulled Asif for four more.

New Zealand's 123-run lead at the end of day two, however, might not have been possible without the patience Tim McIntosh showed during the first session. The defining image of his half-century was not a shot but the military snap with which he shouldered arms. He left 57 balls alone and played 151 dot balls as he defended

passionately. McIntosh's batting has almost an anaesthetic air about it but the stone-walling effort wasn't dull or boring. He laid the platform and allowed McCullum and Vettori to express themselves later.

McIntosh's defiance was the primary feature of the morning session, but Kaneria eventually broke his resistance and that of several others after lunch. Kaneria was allowed to settle into a rhythm because of New Zealand's defensive approach and it was his googly that caused batsmen the most trouble. Unlike in the past, when he has been guilty of overusing it at times, Kaneria was more prudent in deploying the wrong 'un today. He concentrated on building pressure with his bouncing legbreaks and sliders, and bowled a variety of deliveries that slowly suffocated the batsmen.

It was the wicket of Ross Taylor, who top-edged a sloop sweep, that got Kaneria going. He bowled a few loopy deliveries on the leg side to McIntosh who suddenly began playing the sweep before top-edging one as well. Kaneria then turned his attention to Daniel Flynn, spinning a few legbreaks into the left-hand batsman before slipping in a googly that caught the edge. The appeal for caught-behind was turned down, but the decision was reversed after a review. It may have been the right decision, for Flynn seemed to walk as soon as the review was asked for, but video evidence wasn't conclusive.

New Zealand were 145 for 5 at that stage, having lost three wickets for 27 runs, and Vettori and McCullum had just come together for a partnership that would give New Zealand the upper hand in the deciding Test.

Woods goes for a break

Golf

AFP, Los Angeles

PGA Tour commissioner Tim Finchem said Friday they would not attempt to rush Woods into returning to the sport.

The fallout continues for Tiger Woods who says he will step away from the sport to try and fix the damage his infidelity has done to his relationship with his wife and family.

Woods said he was taking an "indefinite break" from the PGA Tour and apologized, pleading for forgiveness and vowing to become a better husband to his wife and family.

Woods was taken to hospital on November 27 after hitting a fire hydrant and a tree, two days after a tabloid reported he was having an affair with New York club hostess Rachel Uchitel.

Woods, who turns 34 on December 30, was first linked to Uchitel, who has denied the affair.

Cocktail waitress Jaimee Grubbs, 24, played a voicemail, which she claims to be Woods talking to support her claim they had a 31-month relationship.

Also on a list compiled by FOX News are porn star Holly

Sampson, 36; Kalika Moquin, 27, a Las Vegas club manager; model Jamie Jungers, 26; Mindy Lawton, a 33-year-old waitress from Orlando; and three unidentified women, two from British reports and another waitress from Orlando.

"His priorities are where they need to be, and we will continue to respect and honor his family's request for privacy," Finchem said. "We look forward to Tiger's return to the PGA Tour when he determines the time is right for him."

Ten women have been romantically linked to the billionaire golfer, whose private life has come under the glare of public scrutiny since he crashed his car in late November.

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After much soul searching, I have decided to take an indefinite break from professional golf. I need to focus my attention on being a better husband, father and person," he added.

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"I want to say again to everyone that I am profoundly sorry and that I ask for forgiveness," Woods wrote.

"Again, I ask for privacy for my family and I am especially grateful for all those who have offered compassion and concern during this difficult period."