It's Smith once again

AFP, Melbourne



Steve Smith put Australia in command of the third Test with a memorable innings to leave India with a massive task to stay alive in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy series in Melbourne on Saturday.

Smith blasted an imperious 192 off 305 balls with 15 fours and two sixes to spearhead Australia to a formidable 530 and then took a diving catch to have the tourists at 108 for one at the close on the second day and trailing by 422 runs.

India's first task was to avoid the follow-on target of 331 while the Australians, leading the four-match series 2-0, will be pressing for victory over the final three days.

Murali Vijay passed fifty for the fourth time in the series and was unbeaten on 55 with Cheteshwar Pujara not out 25 after Smith swooped to take a catch low off the ground at second slip to dismiss Shikhar Dhawan for 28 off Ryan Harris. It could have been better for Australia but wicketkeeper

Brad Haddin dropped Pujara on 12 off the bowling of Josh Hazlewood. Smith dominated day two with his highest Test score and

was the last wicket to fall when he went after a big shot with fielders on the boundary in pursuit of a double century. It was his third century of the series, his fifth for the year

and was replete with all his quirky shotmaking to leave India skipper MS Dhoni at a loss as to how to contain him. "I feel pretty good at the crease. Everything is working for

me at the moment which is nice and the most pleasing thing is that we've got 530 runs on the board and that's a very good first innings total for us, " Smith said. SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: First innings 530 (Smith 192, Harris 74, Rogers 57, Haddin 55, Watson 52; Shami 4-138, Yadav 3-130, Ashwin 3-134)

INDIA: First innings 108 for 1 (Vijay 55 not out, Dhawan 28, Pujara 25 not out; Harris 1-19)

Sanchez lifts Arsenal

AFP, London



Alexis Sanchez helped maintain 10-man Arsenal's Champions League push as his man-of-the-match display condemned Queens Park Rangers to a 2-1 Premier League defeat on Friday.

The Chilean forward went from zero to hero after squandering an early penalty and then putting Arsenal ahead with a 37th-minute header.

Arsenal striker Oliver Giroud was sent off for violent conduct before Sanchez's mazy run carved out a second goal for Tomas Rosicky.

Charlie Austin's late penalty had nerves jangling at the Emirates Stadium, but it was too little, too late for QPR,

who fell to a record-equalling ninth straight away defeat. In a bid to end his side's woes away from Loftus Road, QPR manager Harry Redknapp recalled Rio Ferdinand for

the first time since October and he formed part of a new three-man defensive set-up. But those carefully-laid plans should have been thrown

out of the window inside the opening eight minutes.

Former Arsenal left-back Armand Traore, among those called in by Redknapp, tripped the all-action Sanchez for a clear penalty. Sanchez stepped up instead of regular taker Santi Cazorla,

but saw his tame spot-kick pushed out by QPR goalkeeper Rob Green, who also scrambled away the rebound. Arsenal pressed and probed for an opener, but a combi-

nation of last-ditch defending and inaccurate final balls let them down.

Giroud went close from distance before forcing an acrobatic save from Green with a 28th-minute free-kick.

It was one-way traffic and the pressure finally told when Sanchez made amends by heading Arsenal into the lead.

Kieran Gibbs drilled a cross into the box from the left and Sanchez exploited inattentive defending from Traore to head home his 15th goal of the season.

2014 YEAR END SPECIAL: TENNIS

Prizes shared around

REUTERS, London



Grand slam titles were shared around like slices of pizza in 2014 but for all the welcome variety Novak Djokovic

and Serena Williams ended the year still setting the standard.

For the first time since 1998 the eight grand slam singles trophies on offer were lifted by eight players.

While the four women's champions were existing members of the elite club, Switzerland's Stanislas Wawrinka and Croatia's Marin Cilic marked the biggest shake-up of men's tennis for a decade with breakthrough victories.

After years spent in the shadow of 17-times grand slam champion and compatriot Roger Federer, Wawrinka came good in Melbourne, beating Djokovic in the quarterfinals of the Australian Open and showing no mercy to injured Spaniard Rafa Nadal in the final.

Nadal rebounded to claim a ninth French Open title, but the year was too prove a worrying one for the injury-prone Mallorcan who suffered a shock defeat by Australian teenager Nick Krygios at Wimbledon before a wrist problem and a grumbling appendix restricted him to only seven more matches.

Federer, 33, claimed five titles but was unable to add to his record collection of grand slams.

He came close though. The Swiss maestro went toe to toe with Djokovic for five sets in an epic Wimbledon final, while a few weeks later in New York he looked favourite for the title before being ambushed by the powerful Cilic in the semi.

The door had been opened invitingly by events earlier on that sweltering New York day when Asian trailblazer Kei Nishikori became the first Asian man to reach a grand

Serena Williams won her 18th grand slam title at the US Open to move level with Martina Navratilova and Chris Evert and only four

Kei Nishikori of Japan became the first Asian man to reach a grand slam singles final with a stunning defeat of Novak Djokovic in the

behind record holder

Steffi Graf.

slam singles final with a stunning defeat of Djokovic.

It meant that, for the first time since 2005 a men's grand slam final took place without a member of the Fab Four, be it Federer, Nadal, Djokovic or Briton Andy Murray.

Cilic seized his chance in ruthless fashion by destroying Nishikori, completing a stunning comeback from the depths of the previous year when he served a doping ban.

Djokovic, who got married and

became a father this year, claimed a

chart-leading seven titles and won his last three events, culminating at the ATP World Tour Finals. "I physically feel very fit," Djokovic said ominously. "I'm very motivated to keep on playing on a

very high level. I'm going to try to use these years in front of me to fight for number one in the world and the biggest titles in the sport." Like Djokovic, Williams, 33, will

start 2015 as the measuring stick for

the rest as usual.

The American, now the oldest world number one, overpowered Caroline Wozniacki to win her 18th grand slam title at the U.S. Open, moving level on the all-time list with Martina Navratilova and Chris Evert and only four behind record

holder Steffi Graf. While not as dominant as the final gaps on his CV. on Day 2 AFP, Christchurch

SL cave in

New Zealand had the scent of victory after only the second day of the first Test against Sri Lanka Saturday after a scintillating bowling spell forced the tourists to follow on 303 runs in arrears.

After New Zealand posted 441 in their first innings at Hagley Oval in Christchurch, a four-pronged pace attack led by Trent Boult dismissed Sri Lanka for 138 inside 43

"That first innings was something special. It just seemed to happen against a quality side so it was brilliant," New Zealand's chief destroyer Boult said after returning figures of three for 25 off 11 overs.

Sri Lanka made a more solid start to their second innings, reaching 84 without loss at stumps, but with three days remaining they were still 219 runs in arrears and Boult believed the signs were good for New Zealand.

"It's a great opportunity to win a Test match in New Zealand," the left-arm quick said.

titles and the way she scythed

through the draw at Flushing

Meadows was awe-inspiring, win-

ning 14 consecutive sets and drop-

ping only 32 games in bagging a

most improved player on the cir-

cuit, and Canadian Eugenie

Bouchard both contested their first

grand slam finals but the establish-

ment showed they are unwilling to

cede the top trophies to the new

retired in September, won the

Australian Open, Maria Sharapova

fought off Halep to win the French

Open title while Czech Petra

Kvitova thrashed Bouchard to win

world of the International Premier

League in December but a more

fitting climax to a memorable year

was Federer leading Switzerland to

the Davis Cup title to fill one of the

Tennis entered the brave new

her second Wimbledon title.

Chinese veteran Li Na, who

Romania's Simona Halep, the

sixth U.S. Open crown.

generation.

He described the pitch as "inconsistent" with the amount of assistance it gave but said if the New Zealand bowlers kept the pressure on "then I think we're going to be successful".

SCORES IN BRIEF

NEW ZEALAND: First innings 441 (McCullum 195, Neesham 85, Williamson 54; Mathews 3-39, Lakmal 3-90) SRI LANKA: First innings

138 (Mathews 50, Thirimanne 24, Prasad 18; Boult 3-25, Wagner 3-60, Southee 2-17, Neesham 2-28) SRI LANKA: Second

innings 84 for no loss (Karunaratne 49 not out, Silva 33 not out)





