



THE NEW ORDER: Chandika Hathurusingha (L) is enjoying his first day as Sri Lanka coach at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo while Khaled Mahmud, who took charge of the coach-less Tigers after the sudden departure of Hathurusingha, makes his first day as technical director count at Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTOS: AFP/ STAR



A Cook classic at MCG

STAR SPORT DESK

CRICKET AUSTRALIA Alastair Cook reeled off a record-breaking double century to put England in full control of the fourth Ashes Test with a formidable 164-run innings lead in Melbourne on Thursday.

The phlegmatic opener emphatically bounced back after a lean run of scores to finish the day unconquered on 244 off 409 balls. At the close, England were 491 for nine. It was an innings that defined a compact left-hander for whom run gathering is secondary to the need to keep batting and batting.

And Sydney Morning Herald's Greg Baum aptly portrayed the Cook classic:

Joe Root departed to a top-edged hook, Dawid Malan lbw despite an inside edge that neither he nor Cook detected, and so made no referral. Cook doesn't deal much in edges. He bats.

Jonny Bairstow was out to another top edge, cutting at Nathan Lyon. Moeen Ali came in to play a short, strange innings, throwing the bat at fast bowlers and slow, setting the match on an edge.

Cook played as if he barely noticed. On he batted.

Chris Woakes joined him for an

COOK RECORDS

224 is the highest by a visiting batsman at the MCG bettering Viv Richards's 208 in 1984.

Crossed Brian Lara to become the sixth highest run-getter in Test cricket with 11,956.

The third visiting batsman to score two or more double centuries in Australia after compatriot Wally Hammond and West Indian Lara.

Holds the record for the highest scores by a visiting batsman in two of the five major venues in Australia after his 235 not out at the Gabba in Brisbane in 2010-11.

The highest by any batsmen in 2017, bettering Virat Kohli's and his own 243.

Cook and Kohli are the only players to have scored more than one double century for the year.

hour-and-a-half of competent obduracy. Steve Smith spilled a sharp catch from Cook at square leg, then when back in slips, a snick from Woakes flew between him and wicketkeeper Tim Paine.

Australia grew edgy. Cook grew more assured. This is what he does: he bats.

Slowly, then quickly, Australia frayed at the edges. Sensing it, the Barmy Army found extra voice. Returning a ball to Josh

Hazlewood, Shaun Marsh almost lobbed it on his head.

Cook? He batted. Smith set three short covers for him, then four on the hook. Cook had a look, then middled a straight drive. He must have got it for Christmas, which is also his birthday. He loves it.

Drinks came and went, and tea, and drinks again, and when play resumed, Cook

was in position before any other player, creased re-marked, bat at the ready.

Because that's what he does: he bats. Sometimes he hit balls to fieldsmen, sometimes past them. If it didn't get past this time, it would next. It was all of a piece, all batting.

Six hours passed, then nine and ten; Cook batted. Records went by the board. Cook batted on.

Many men know how to play shots, only some can bat. Cook's edge is his lack of edge. As a man, there is nothing in him that can be stirred up, no angst or fretfulness. As a batsman, he has no vanity to play upon. He has had a lean series, but he would always be out there again, and as an opener, at a known time. That was all that mattered. He bats, you see.

The match changed, but Cook's expression did not. The Australian bowlers tired, but Cook didn't. The crowd drifted away, but not Cook. He was there to bat. The Australian captain's well ran dry, but Cook's did not.

All he had to do was bat. And when play resumes on Friday morning, that will be him out there, batting.

A stoic Alastair Cook salutes the MCG crowd after his Boxing Day Test special -- a magnificent double century -- on the third day of the fourth Ashes Test against Australia yesterday. Cook was unbeaten on 244, the highest score by a visiting batsman at the MCG.

PHOTO: REUTERS



An emotional double

AFP, Melbourne

referring to his 243 against the West Indies in August.

"I always feel I've got the backing of the selectors but you've still got to deliver the goods, I hadn't done that on this tour. It was very frustrating."

At the close, Cook had been at the crease for 634 minutes and faced 409 balls to deny the Australians despite being dropped twice on 66 and 153 by Steve Smith.

"It's probably been one of the more emotional (ones) from where I'd been on this tour," Cook admitted. "It meant a lot last night and then today I was quite proud that I managed to back it up. After all the emotion came out yesterday, to get a real big one for the team was really important."

"I've doubted myself for 12 years and I'll probably continue to doubt myself but obviously the longer it goes the harder it becomes."

"But I suppose that's why I can be quite proud of going to the well again and delivering a performance like that was pleasing."

"It's just a shame it's three or four

weeks too late, I'll have to live with that for a long time but it's nice to score a few."

The former captain, 33, said he had been working hard in the nets to recapture form and felt he had re-discovered his scoring rhythm.

"I've always worked hard on my whole game and my approach to cricket, so unfortunately most of my runs are pretty ugly runs and quite hard work, that hasn't changed throughout my whole career," he said.

"Obviously, with my batting over a period of time, there are quite a few moving parts to it. When they're not quite in sync it can be quite frustrating."

Cook said he had been given great support by the England team during his barren run before posting his 32nd Test century in his 151st Test match.

"The feeling when I walked into the change room last night was very special, and obviously today as well," he said.

"The team has been fantastic. Obviously, we've had an interesting journey on this tour with a lot of things going on."

"(They) would have been entitled just because I literally hadn't scored a run since Edgbaston," Cook said.

Sabbir in hot water for alleged assault

SPORTS REPORTER

Sabbir Rahman had scored 38 runs in four innings of two Tests and 19, 17 and 39 in the three ODIs he played on the tour of South Africa. The 26-year-old right-hander then flopped in the fifth edition of the Bangladesh Premier League as a Sylhet Sixers icon player. There was no respite for him ahead of the home series against Sri Lanka in January as he made a duck in the final-round match of the National Cricket League (NCL); instead he has invited more trouble with an off-field incident.

Sabbir reportedly assaulted a young fan during that NCL match in Rajshahi on December 21. According to sources, after a boy made a noise directed at Sabbir during the innings break when he was batting in the nets, Sabbir asked his teammates to take the field and that he would join them a few minutes later. He then instructed his acquaintance to bring the young boy into the playing area and subsequently assaulted the young fan. Sabbir was also quite "aggressive" with match referee Showkatul Rahman and other match officials and is said to have threateningly told them not to file any complaints against him, but Showkatul submitted his report to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury confirmed the news of a report from the match referee and said: "We have received the match referee's report and forwarded it to the disciplinary committee."

BCB sources informed that the national batsman is going to face a heavy financial penalty, if not penalties including multiple-match ban, in addition to a fine of Tk 5 lakh in the case of level-4 offences under the ICC code of conduct. Heavy financial punishment was however nothing new to Sabbir, who had fined around Tk 12 lakh for "serious off-field disciplinary breaches" during the NCL in November 2016 after he reportedly entertained female guests in his hotel room.

His short career has been dotted with disciplinary issues. There was an incident during the ODI match against Afghanistan in September 2016, and the very next month the team management had warned him to watch his behaviour.

It is understandable that the BCB is going to take stern action against Sabbir but this issue raised a question of whether the game's governing body follows any uniformity regarding disciplinary issues. If they did, how is it possible that Test skipper Shakib Al Hasan and his deputy Mahmudullah Riyad are yet to face any consequences for their absence without permission from the final-round match of the NCL.

Nizamuddin confirmed yesterday that the two cricketers did not submit any letter for their leave even though there was a clear directive from the board to take part in the NCL final round. On the other hand, Tamim Iqbal was pulled up before a disciplinary committee for merely criticising a pitch during the BPL.

BCB president Nazmul Hassan made it clear since assuming office in 2012 that he would show 'zero tolerance' in regards to



disciplinary issues.

Hassan's bold initiatives towards the investigation of the BPL scandal and action against star all-rounder Shakib in July 2014 were highly praised and demonstrated fidelity to his promise.

Critics believed that those steps sent a strong message to cricketers but the reluctant approach this time towards Shakib and Riyad has cast doubt over the board's professionalism in creating a level field when tackling disciplinary breaches.

Sabbir's latest act was no doubt an odious one, and if proven he should face the harshest sanctions. But it must also be asked if a player like Sabbir was emboldened thinking that a competition like the NCL was not important enough for disciplinary breaches to come under BCB's purview, given the leniency shown to Shakib and Riyad.

We need to do more: Chandika

CRICBUZZ

Sri Lanka cricketers began training ahead of their five-week tour of Bangladesh on Thursday in Colombo, and new head coach Chandika Hathurusingha said that among other things, the team was lacking

intensity.

"Quite a few things we are not doing right at the moment and that's why we are in this situation. But no doubt about the skill we have. There are so many cricketers that I can see that they can go onto become one of the top five players in the world. If they are not doing justice to their talent, that means that lot of things are going wrong," Hathurusingha said on Thursday.

As the team hit new lows, there have been allegations of indiscipline, and opening batsman Danushka Gunathilaka had ended up serving a five-match suspension in

Antonio outdoes Gianluigi

AFP, Milan

Patrick Cutrone scored an extra-time winner and goalkeeper Antonio Donnarumma emerged from the shadow of his star brother Gianluigi as Milan dumped Inter out of the Italian Cup on Wednesday.

The 19-year-old broke through after 104 minutes at the San Siro after the match had ended 0-0 in regular time.

But Milan's third-choice goalkeeper Antonio Donnarumma, 27, elder brother of regular keeper Gianluigi, 18, played a key role on debut, after his sibling was ruled out with injury.

"When I heard Marco was injured, I was a little stunned, but I told myself to take this chance and have fun," Donnarumma told Milan TV.