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Star SPORT



England all-rounder Ben Stokes is about to take a flight to the heavens after his double blow, including the prized scalp of India captain Virat Kohli, that decisively swung the absorbing opening Test at Edgbaston in the home side's way. England won the game by 31 runs.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Stokes seals thrilling win

AFP, Birmingham



Ben Stokes took three wickets on Saturday, including the prize scalp of India captain Virat Kohli, as England won the first Test by 31 runs in a thrilling finish at Edgbaston.

The all-rounder, who could miss next week's second Test of a five-match series at Lord's because of a court trial on a charge of affray starting Monday, took two wickets in an over including that of Kohli.

Stokes ended the match, England's 1,000th Test, when he had Hardik Pandya (31) caught at first slip by Alastair Cook, with India bowled out for 162, having been set 194 to win.

Stokes finished with innings figures of four for 40 in 14.2 overs.

However, fellow England all-rounder Sam Curran was named man-of-the-match after starring with both bat and ball.

That England had a target of 194 to defend was largely down to the 20-year-old Curran's 63, his maiden Test fifty in just his second match at this level rescuing the hosts from the depths of 87 for seven.

Curran's innings came just a day after the Surrey left-arm swing bowler's Test-best haul of four for 74 during India's first innings of 274 that featured a brilliant 149 by Kohli – his maiden Test century in England.

An elated Stokes told Sky Sports: "Virat played a brilliant knock in the first innings but moments like that (getting him out) change games.

"I am proud to be part of his group. I thought we were a bit behind yesterday (Friday) but for Sam Curran to play the way he did was a real turning point."

A stunned Curran added: "I can't take it all in, it is all very special."

For England captain Joe Root there was the relief of seeing his side win the first Test of a series after a run of three straight defeats in campaign openers against Australia, New Zealand and Pakistan.

"I am thrilled, it was a fantastic team performance," said Root. "I asked the guys to play with passion and show belief. If we did that, we would give ourselves a chance."

Meanwhile Kohli urged India to remain "positive and fearless" during the rest of the series.

"It was a great game of cricket and I was

glad to be involved in such a fantastic Test match," said Kohli.

"We showed character at times but England were relentless in the areas they hit.

"Our bowlers were outstanding in the second innings. Hopefully we will build on that. There is no hiding from this game. We have to play positive and fearless."

Saturday's play started with the match on a knife edge.

India were 110 for five – still 84 runs shy of victory – with England needing five wickets.

Given the sunny conditions in Birmingham, the only certainty then was the match would finish with more than a day to spare.

Kohli was 43 not out and wicket-keeper Dinesh Karthik unbeaten on 18.

England knew they needed early strikes and James Anderson, their all-time leading Test wicket-taker, duly obliged when he had Karthik (20) caught low down by Dawid Malan at second slip off just the sixth ball of the day.

New batsman Pandya played several solid defensive shots before driving Stuart Broad down the ground for a textbook four.

Kohli then completed an 88-ball fifty when he glanced Anderson down to fine leg the fourth four of his innings.

India were 141 for six, needing 53 more runs to win, when paceman Stokes had Kohli lbw for 51 with just his third ball of the day.

Kohli reviewed but experienced Pakistan umpire Aleem Dar's decision was upheld.

Three balls later, Stokes had Mohammed Shami caught behind for a duck and India were 141 for eight, with their hopes of just a seventh win in 58 Tests in England fading fast.

And when Sharma was lbw to leg-spinner Adil Rashid's googly for 11, India had been reduced to 154 for nine and soon afterwards Pandya nicked Stokes to Cook.

The second Test will start at Lord's on August 9.

SCORES IN BRIEF

England: First innings 287 and second innings 180 (Bairstow 28, Curran 63; Ashwin 3-59, Sharma 5-51, Yadav 2-20)

India: First innings 274 and second innings 162 (Kohli 51, Pandya 31; Anderson 2-50, Broad 2-43, Stokes 4-40)

Result: England won by 31 runs

Player-of-the-match: Sam Curran

BCB plans first-class for women

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is planning to hold a franchise-based longer version regional tournament to help women's cricket flourish across the country.

The BCB will introduce a first-class competition for women, resembling the Bangladesh Cricket League, which will initially be played in a two-day format. A day will be added every season until the tournament is granted Test status.

"We are planning to host a franchise-based longer version tournament for women cricketers. They usually play in the National Cricket League (NCL), which is a 50-over tournament. We plan to form four zonal teams for the tournament that

will continue for two days," Nazmul Abedin, team operating manager of the BCB, told reporters at Mirpur on Saturday.

The board is looking to turn the tournament into a three-day next season before they eventually transform it into a full-fledged longer-version cricket competition over the next two years, depending on public response and if the maiden season is a success.

Following the Bangladesh women's team's victory in the Asia Cup, the Ireland series and the ICC World T20 qualifier, Nazmul informed that women's cricket has grown in popularity in the country.

"Day by day, we will try to achieve Test status as early as possible. If we attain the status, we will be able to play Test cricket with top-notch teams on a regular basis," he said.

Meanwhile, the cricketers will

leave for Chittagong tomorrow to participate in an eight week training programme in the port city. Nazmul also informed that the first week of training will focus on fitness while skill and match preparation will follow. The programme will continue until the ICC World T20 tournament begins in November in the West Indies.

Nazmul added that the board is yet to confirm a team who will take part in four to five practice matches in October ahead of the World T20 tournament and that the BCB also plans to reinforce the structure of women's cricket from its roots.

"We have already given a proposal where we are planning to start an under-18 tournament as we did not have any age-level tournaments before. It will help the young cricketers play competitive cricket and represent the senior stage," said Nazmul.

The match will kick off at 4:00pm at the Bangabandhu National Stadium (BNS).

Fareast up against South East today

SPORTS REPORTER

Last year's beaten finalists Fareast University will look to go one better this time around when they square off against South East University in the final of the 2nd Shahjalal Islami Bank Faraaz Gold Cup Football Tournament today.

The match will kick off at 4:00pm at the Bangabandhu National Stadium (BNS).

Fareast University team captain Mainul Abedin Sujoy, who, along with one of his teammates, was snapped up by Championship League side Youngmen's Fakirerpool Club following his sparkling performance in this tournament last year, thanked the organisers for giving them the platform to showcase their talent.

"I am looking for your blessings. This is a great platform for us and I hope this initiative continues," the midfielder said during a pre-match press conference at the BNS yesterday.

His opposite number Mohammad Tuhin, who has already caught some attention with his goalscoring exploits, hoped his team would end up on the winning side. "We want to become champions and reward everyone with a good performance."

The 14-team championship has been played in 70-minute match format, with games going straight into tie-breakers in case of a draw in regulation time. The champion team will receive Tk 2 lakh and runners-up team will receive Tk 1 lakh as prize money while there will be awards for best players, top scorer and best goalkeeper.

The press conference was attended, among others, by tournament committee chairman Hasanuzzaman Khan Bablu, member secretary Sheikh Mohammad Aslam and a host of former footballers.

Make sure to get a copy and indulge in the spectacular photos and a collection of 34 columns written by The Daily Star's Executive Editor Syed Ashfaqul Haque.



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