

What to WATCH

STAR SPORTS HD 1
EPL
Manchester City vs Leicester City
Live from 09:00 pm
Aston Villa vs Chelsea
Live from 11:30 pm

Brighton vs Brentford
Live from 02:00 am (Monday)
STAR SPORTS HD 2
EPL
Tottenham Hotspur vs Crystal Palace

Live from 09:00 pm
SONY SIX
The Ashes
Australia vs England
3rd Test, Day 2
Live from 5:30 am (Monday)

DAY'S EVENT

BCL
South Zone vs Central Zone, Chattogram
North Zone vs East Zone, Rajshahi

Tigers drawing inspiration from Wellington Test

SPORTS REPORTER



32 matches across formats and not a single win for Bangladesh away in New Zealand. With such a forgettable history, it always is a hard task for the Tigers to find inspiration ahead any series against the Kiwis in their backyard.

"We played 10 Tests [actually nine Tests] here in New Zealand previously and we do not have a record worth boasting about," team director Khaled Mahmud said from New Zealand in a video message yesterday.

Mahmud is correct. Although there are plenty of notable instances of individual brilliance from the Tigers, one needs to really comb through history to dig up a collective effort worth drawing inspiration from.

However, Mahmud did mention that rare Test upon which the Tigers are looking to improve on in the crucial two-Test series, part of the World Test Championship, starting from January 1.

"The Wellington Test in 2016 (in January 2017) was different. We only lost that game after tea on the final day. We are taking inspiration from that Test. If we were able to declare the innings after scoring 595 for the loss of eight wickets in that game, then we want to do something better this time around," Mahmud added.

In that game, Shakib Al Hasan's 217 and skipper Mushfiqur Rahim's 159 coupled with fifties from Tamim Iqbal, Mominul Haque and Sabbir Rahman helped Bangladesh pile up a mammoth first-innings total that eventually helped them take a 56-run lead in the second innings. That first innings was probably one of the very few occasions when Bangladesh's batters were able to display a collective approach in New Zealand. However, despite taking the game into the last session, a torrid final day and a disappointing batting display in the second innings saw the Tigers lose by seven wickets.

The Tigers, who arrived in Tauranga from Christchurch on Friday, enjoyed a break yesterday. The Mominul Haque-led side will have three more practise sessions and a two-day warm-up game against New Zealand XI on December 28 and 29 before the first Test.



STARS CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS

The football world's stars embraced the festivities on the occasion of Christmas, taking to social media to show off decked-out trees surrounded by their loving families. Lionel Messi shared a snap alongside his wife Antonela Rocuzzo while Cristiano Ronaldo went in the other direction, including his ever-expanding family in matching outfits alongside other close relatives. Neymar and Robert Lewandowski also kept their families in focus, with the former posing alongside his son and the latter capturing his wife and two kids in a Kodak moment.

PHOTO : TWITTER

Conte has no qualms over Kane's attitude

AFP, LONDON

Antonio Conte has said Harry Kane is "totally involved in the Tottenham project" despite a modest start to the season.

Kane was linked with a pre-season move to Manchester City but the deal fell through.

Many pundits felt his failure to join the Premier League champions has contributed to Kane's poor form in the early stages of the campaign -- although England's agonising penalty shoot-out loss to Italy in the Euro 2020 final at Wembley may have played a part as well.

England captain Kane found goals hard to come by when Nuno Espirito Santo, sacked in November and replaced by Conte, was in charge of Tottenham and even now the striker has



scored just nine goals in all competitions this season.

However, he scored a second Premier League goal of the campaign against Liverpool last weekend and the 28-year-old will aim to build on that performance when Spurs are at home to London rivals Crystal Palace on Sunday.

Even so, Kane's returns have been a long way off last season's 23 goals and 14 assists in the Premier League.

"Harry has showed me great availability and showed me (he is) totally involved in the Tottenham project," Conte said Friday.

Kohli's India seek to conquer FINAL FRONTIER



AGENCIES



Virat Kohli bruised from being fired from India's one-day captain bids to rebound by leading his country to an historic triumph in South Africa in a three-match Test series which starts at SuperSport Park in Centurion on Sunday.

South Africa is the only regular Test-playing nation where India have yet to win a series.

India coach Rahul Dravid has urged his players to seize the chance to claim a first ever Test series win in South Africa, a moment that could be career defining for many in the team.

India have enjoyed recent success in Australia and England, but South Africa remains a mighty challenge for the top ranked Test side, though they will arguably never have had a better chance against a home team going through a transition period and with far less experience than in the past.

"It is a great challenge and a great opportunity for everyone," Dravid told reporters on Saturday. "It is something you look forward to as a batsman, the chance to play away from home and test yourself against

some really good opposition in their home conditions.

"A lot of your career is defined by those sorts of performances, so it is a great opportunity for everyone in the group to put in the performances that are something that they can remember, and people will remember them for."

South African captain Dean Elgar said he thought the teams were evenly matched.

"India are number one in the world for a reason but the fact that we are playing in our own back yard gives as an advantage."

Despite losing to New Zealand in last year's world Test championship final, India are the top-ranked Test team, five places ahead of South Africa, who have lost several key players to retirement in recent years. Kohli leads an experienced side. Crucially, it has the fast-bowling fire power to match South Africa's in conditions which usually favour pace.

No fewer than ten of India's 18-man squad have toured South Africa before.

India vice-captain KL Rahul indicated India were likely to maintain their recent strategy of picking five bowlers, which he

acknowledged would lead to a "very difficult discussion" about settling on five specialist batsmen.

India have the luxury of choosing between capable players in both batting and bowling, while South Africa's options seem limited, especially since fast bowler Anrich Nortje withdrew from the series because of a hip injury.

South Africa will, of necessity, field a batting line-up short of proven quality, with two players in their top six yet to score a Test century, while India may be unable to find a place for Shreyas Iyer, who scored 105 and 65 on debut against New Zealand last month.

South Africa's fast bowling remains their strength but the loss of Nortje is a major blow. Much will depend on former world number one Kagiso Rabada, whose form in the past two years has been moderate.

The hosts will also hope the injury-plagued Lungi Ngidi can recapture the form which enabled him to take 6-39 on debut against India at the same venue in 2017/18.

In South Africa's favour, Centurion has been a fortress for the home side, with 21 wins and only two defeats in 26 Tests at the venue.

'Barrel', Boland and the MCG

AGENCIES



Australia have illustrated the depth of their fast bowling stocks by handing Scott Boland a surprise debut in the third Ashes Test against England.

Boland's transformation from a 118kg batting allrounder at Frankston-Peninsula to Australia's second Indigenous male Test cricketer in 144 years completed when Australia dropped a Christmas Day bombshell after confirming Boland will make a dream home Test debut and be given the chance to bowl Australia to Ashes glory at the MCG.

The MCG specialist, who hails from the Gulidjan tribe near Colac in western Victoria, joins Faith Thomas, Jason Gillespie and Ashleigh Gardner as players of Indigenous descent to feature at Test level.

Boland, who played the last of his 17 international limited-overs matches in 2016, has an enviable record at the MCG which, until recent seasons, had a reputation for being a bowlers' graveyard.

The 32-year-old's record of 91 wickets at 25.71 in 26 first-class games at the 'G is impressive given most of his matches there have been on docile, unresponsive surfaces.

Australia skipper Pat Cummins said Boland record at the Melbourne Cricket Ground factored into their thinking.

Boland's 272 first-class wickets have included 42 in his past six games at the 'G at an average of 14.4.

The Victorian set to become first Indigenous man to pull on Baggy Green since Jason Gillespie. "It's huge - 'Dizzy' (Gillespie) was the first. Australia's got a rich history of 50,000-60,000 years and it's great that that's starting to get reflected in our team," Cummins said.

Boland, who wasn't even in the Australian squad last Monday, suddenly has the chance to help achieve this summer's main mission.

It seemed unlikely when the boy nicknamed "Barrel" because of his shape felt embarrassed to remove his shirt in a Victorian dressing room as a 21-year-old.

But Boland shed more than 20kg in the next five years and will proudly pull on the No.19 shirt worn by close mate James Pattinson when he makes history in the horses-for-courses selection shock.

"The only advice I had for him was I think he's wearing my No.19, so I said if you play to the No.19's average on Boxing Day you should get player-of-the-match," Pattinson told News Corp on Christmas Day.

"I think it was 69 with the bat and about 16 with the ball ... he should have a pretty good game."

Pattinson played in Boland's debut for Victoria against Western Australia at the MCG back in 2011.

"When he first came he was a bit bigger, but I've seen how hard he dedicates himself to his fitness," Pattinson said.

"He loves the gym, he gets around with his short shorts and reckons he's got the best legs in the team."

"He always had a really good knack of bowling to the left-handers, but the one thing he wanted to improve on was bowling to the right-handers."

"Over the years he's really done that. He's a smart bowler, he charges in, he doesn't give the batsmen an inch and he's picked up a few yards as well."

Player-of-the-match in the only Marsh Sheffield Shield game held at the MCG so far

this season, Boland would be awarded the Jonny Mullagh Medal (named for the star Aboriginal allrounder from Australia's historic 1868 tour of England) if he was to earn that honour again in his maiden Test.

'Players deserve credit for Villa's rise'

LONDON

Steven Gerrard said Friday his players deserved the credit for Aston Villa's climb up the Premier League table since he took charge of the Birmingham club.

Villa had lost five straight league matches and were just two points above the relegation zone when Gerrard left Scottish champions Rangers to replace Dean Smith, sacked as manager in November.

Since Gerrard's arrival at Villa Park, the club have climbed from 16th to 10th and will be bidding for a fifth win in seven league games when they are at home to Chelsea on Sunday.

"I had confidence and belief that we could come in and have the impact that we've had," said Gerrard, who brought several of his coaching staff with him from Glasgow giants Rangers.

"The players deserve the credit for going and carrying those performances out."

The former Liverpool and England captain added: "Once I started talking to Villa, the very first thing I did was look at the fixtures in the short-term."

"There were a lot of fixtures to be excited about, and I think the players have done extremely well in terms of the points return."

Under Gerrard, Villa have beaten Brighton, Crystal Palace, Leicester and Norwich while losing narrowly to title contenders Manchester City and Liverpool.

