

England chase 296 for victory

AFP, LEEDS

England were set a target of 296 to complete a series whitewash of New Zealand after dismissing the Black Caps for 326 in the third Test on Sunday.

Tom Blundell top-scored with 88 not out and Daryl Mitchell made 56 as the pair shared their fourth century partnership of a three-match series.

Mitchell and Blundell joined a select group of players when they posted their fourth century partnership of a Test series.

Only four other pairs have performed a similar feat, with Australia's David Boon and Mark Waugh sharing five hundred stands during the 1993 Ashes series in England.

New Zealand's sixth-wicket duo put on 113 on the fourth day of the third Test. That also shared a stand of 120 in the first innings of this match which followed their partnerships of 195 and 236 at Lord's and Trent Bridge respectively.

Yet despite all of Mitchell and Blundell's runs, World Test champions New Zealand are currently 2-0 down in a three-match series.

After Matthew Potts made the breakthrough to have Mitchell lbw on review for 56, the World Test champions collapsed on the fourth afternoon at Headingley.

Jack Leach polished off the tail on his way to figures of 5-66, which combined with his first-innings 5-100 gave the left-arm spinner overall figures of 10-166 -- the first time he had taken 10 wickets in a match during his 25-Test career.

England will fancy their chances of completing a clean sweep of the World Test champions after chasing down a target of 299 inside a day to win the second Test at Trent Bridge last week for a five-wicket victory that gave them an unassailable 2-0 lead in the series.

Another success in Leeds would mean England had won all three of their Tests since the appointment of a new leadership duo in captain Ben Stokes and red-ball head coach Brendon McCullum, a former New Zealand skipper.



Bangladesh spinner Mehedy Hasan Miraz gives the first breakthrough on the third day morning by dismissing overnight West Indies batter Joshua Da Silva in the second and final Test at the Darren Sammy Cricket Ground in Gros Islet, Saint Lucia yesterday. Pacer Khaled Ahmed then removed Alzarri Joseph as West Indies reached 376 for seven before rain stopped the play. PHOTO: AFP

Another day of 'big lessons for the boys'

SPORTS REPORTER

In his third year as Bangladesh head coach, Russell Domingo is still mentioning how tough Test cricket is and the South African is taking lessons from the opposition after the visitors were forced into the back foot by the second day's close of play in the second and series-deciding Test against the West Indies in Saint Lucia on Saturday.

Despite being under pressure on day two, the hosts recovered from losing four wickets in the first session and are eyeing to post a big lead to take full control of the Test match, courtesy of Kyle Mayers striking his second Test ton. Interestingly, both of his centuries had come against the same opponent.

"They chased down 400 against us in Chittagong. Kyle Mayers got 200. We're not getting those scores at the moment," Domingo expressed his frustration after the close of the second day's play.

"Big lessons for the boys. Test match cricket is hard and when you are not batting as well as you should, good teams will punish you and we're being punished now."

Interestingly, when Domingo was appointed as the Tigers' head coach in 2019, the situation was quite similar to where it stands after three years of his tenure. The learning curve for Bangladesh in the longest format seems never-ending



"We are getting a lot of 30s and 40s and odd 50s but nobody is doing what Kyle Mayers is doing and getting a big hundred. That's the difference between 230 and getting 400."

RUSSELL DOMINGO
Bangladesh head coach

since they started playing Test cricket 22 years back.

The talks over sticking to the basics, applying pressure when required or maximising the opportunities when offered -- the mantra of playing better cricket is known by all but when it comes to implementation, there is a huge void in

that regard.

The reappointment of Shakib Al Hasan as the Test captain after Mominul Haque resigned from the post ahead of the West Indies series was expected to be a major step towards the reformation of the Tigers' approach in the longest format of the game.

However, it is also important to realise that someone like Shakib, despite being a champion cricketer and a great tactician of the game, cannot single-handedly bring the best out of the team in a collective manner.

Shakib, who himself is a thorough professional and expects others to be the same, may have already realised in his first assignment on his third stint as the Tigers Test captain that he needs to work more as a leader, both on and off the field.

It is still too early to comment on the fate of the Saint Lucia Test as the Tigers did manage to rise against the odds when their backs were against the wall in the past.

Although it seems to be a tough ask for the visitors, especially in the current context of the Test match, Bangladesh really have to come up with something special in the coming days. However, what Domingo and Shakib need is to find the right collective approach, which at present seems missing in all departments of the game.

Brave Malaysia deny Bangladesh

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's football team won the FIFA International Women's Football Series 1-0 following a goalless draw against Malaysia in the second match at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium on Sunday.

Visitors Malaysia, who are 85th in FIFA Ranking, put up a much-improved performance compared to the first match and frustrated the women in red and green following a 6-0 defeat in the first match.

Golam Rabbani Choton pinned his hopes on the same playing eleven but the girls found it hard against a revamped Malaysian team, who had good defending, zonal marking and chased the Bangladesh players well to deny the home side from building the game from the deep.

Forward Sirat Jahan Swapna played a good role in exposing the Malaysian backline several times in the first match but she later looked unimpressive before being replaced by Ritu Parna Chakma at the start of the second half while captain Sabina Khatun, winger Sanjida Akter and forward Krishna Rani Sarker also failed to find the target.

After being resisted by the visitors, Bangladesh tried from outside the box to break the deadlock but the drives from the forwards could hardly trouble Malaysian goalkeeper Nurul Azurin Binti Mazlan, who was more impressive than the first match.



Kings extend lead

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Bashundhara Kings continued their winning run in the Bangladesh Premier League with a 3-2 win against Sheikh Russel KC at the Bashundhara Kings Arena yesterday.

With 14th win in 17 matches, Kings moved to 44 points, nine more than nearest rivals Abahani, who however played a match less. Sheikh Russel remained in seventh position with 18 points.

Kyrgyz defender Aizar Akmatov gave Sheikh Russel the lead in the 28th minute from the spot but Kings took 10 minutes to level the margin. Robson Robinho brilliantly entered the box from the left flank to square it to his unmarked compatriot Miguel Figueira, who drove to the top left-side of the net with a left-footed.

Iranian defender Khalid Shafiei made it 2-1 for Kings in the 65th minute following a rebound before Robinho widened the margin with a placing shot at the end of a forward-pass from compatriot Figueira. With clock ticking towards the end of six minutes of added time, Sheikh Russel pulled one back through substitute Mannaf Rabbi but could not avoid their fourth straight defeat against Kings in the professional league.

Can Swiatek solve grass court puzzle?

AGENCIES

Poland's world number one Iga Swiatek is the red hot favourite to win the Wimbledon title but admits that grass court tennis is something she is still trying to figure out.

That admission will offer hope to her rivals but the bad news is the 21-year-old has done a pretty good job of figuring everything out so far in her stunning early career.

Swiatek makes no secret of her use of sports psychology and may need all her powers of positive thinking to plot her way to the Wimbledon title. She appears to be a huge favourite going into the tournament -- courtesy of a 35-match winning sequence that began in Qatar in February.

She was simply unstoppable on the Roland Garros clay, dropping one set as she claimed a second French Open title in three years, having free-wheeled her way to the 2020 title when she became the youngest French Open champion for 28 years.



But Wimbledon presents an entirely different challenge for a player whose nine career WTA titles have been won on clay and hard courts and who admits grass is tricky.

"Honestly I still feel like I need to figure out grass. Last year, for sure, it was that kind of tournament where I didn't know what to expect," Swiatek told reporters on Saturday.

The women's draw remains open with defending champion Ashleigh Barty having retired earlier this year.

Four-time major winner Naomi Osaka, rarely a serious threat on grass, has withdrawn with an Achilles injury.

Meanwhile, ranked a lowly 1,204 in the world and without a competitive singles match in 12 months, 40-year-old Serena Williams will sweep into Wimbledon targeting what would be her greatest triumph.

The seven-time champion at the All England Club will also be chasing down a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title.

The odds have rarely been so stacked against the great American who can become the first unseeded woman to win Wimbledon.



Djokovic, Nadal lead title chase at all-change Wimbledon

AFP, LONDON

Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal headline the title chase at Wimbledon where eight-time champion Roger Federer, the world's top two players as well as valuable ranking points will all be missing.

Djokovic is bidding for a seventh title at the All England Club to move level with US great Pete Sampras.

Nadal, fresh from a 14th French Open victory and a record-extending 22nd major, is halfway to the first men's calendar Grand Slam in more than half a century.

The season's third Slam tournament has already made political waves even before the first ball is served on Monday.

The decision to ban Russian and Belarusian players in the aftermath of the invasion of Ukraine means there is no place

for world number one Daniil Medvedev or eighth-ranked Andrey Rublev.

Both the ATP and WTA, who control the men's and women's tours, retaliated by stripping ranking points from the tournament.

For the first time since his debut in 1999 -- notwithstanding the Covid-cancelled 2020 edition -- Federer will be a no-show as the 40-year-old recovers from knee surgery.

Also missing is Germany's world number two Alexander Zverev, who suffered serious ankle ligament damage in a horrific injury in his French Open semi-final against Nadal.

Djokovic and Nadal, ranked three and four, are therefore the top seeds meaning if they are to face each other for the 60th time, it can only be in the final.

Djokovic, the champion in 2011, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2019 and 2021, will be playing in

his final Slam of the year. His refusal to be vaccinated against Covid-19 will rule him out of the US Open later this year.

A bruising quarter-final loss to Nadal at the French Open which saw him deposed as champion in Paris will also provide extra motivation.

Nadal won the last of his two Wimbledon titles in 2010 having captured his first with an epic triumph over Federer two years earlier.

The 36-year-old Spaniard arrives at Wimbledon with the Australian and French Opens secured.

Nadal has endured a bittersweet relationship with Wimbledon.

Two titles have been accompanied by three lost finals as well as injury-enforced absences in 2004, 2009, 2016 and 2021.