

De Silva leads Sri Lanka’s fight

AFP, Galle

Dhananjaya de Silva hit an unbeaten 94 as Sri Lanka recovered from an early collapse to reach 242-6 at stumps on a rain-hit day one of the first Test against Pakistan on Sunday.

The fifth wicket pair of de Silva and Angelo Mathews (64) put on 131 after Sri Lanka had slipped to 54-4 in the opening session, with Shaheen Shah Afridi taking three wickets on his Test return.

De Silva stood firm in an extended final session in Galle despite losing his partner Sadeera Samarawickrama, who made 36, after a 57-run stand.

Wicketkeeper-batter Samarawickrama fell to Agha Salman's spin and play, which had witnessed two rain interruptions at a cost of 24.2 overs lost, was called off for the day.

De Silva batted elegantly with deft cuts, drives and pulls, and amassed 10 fours and three sixes -- one of them to reach his fifty.

But he slowed down in the final hour of play as he awaits his 10th Test century in his 50th match.

Mathews, playing his 105th Test, raised his 39th half-century in the five-day format.

The pair seemed comfortable and de Silva started to take on the bowlers with boundaries, but leg-spinner Abrar Ahmed got former captain Mathews caught behind at the stroke of tea.

Shaheen, playing his 26th Test, moved to 100 wickets on his return from injury when he sent back Nishan Madushka.



Messi completes Inter Miami signing

REUTERS

Argentina great Lionel Messi has completed his signing for Inter Miami on a deal that will keep him in Florida until 2025, the Major League Soccer side said on Saturday.

The seven-time Ballon d'Or winner will be joining the squad in the coming days and will hold a franchise player spot, the club added.

The 36-year-old himself said: "This is a great opportunity and together we will continue to build this beautiful project," said Messi.

"The idea is to work together to achieve the goals we set ourselves and I'm really looking forward to being able to start helping here in my new home."

Messi is expected to make his debut next Saturday when Miami host Mexico's Cruz Azul in their Leagues Cup opener.

Team co-owner David Beckham said: "I dreamed of bringing the best players in the world, players with the same ambition I had when I came to the LA Galaxy to help grow football in the United States and build a legacy in this sport we love so much.

"Today that dream has become a reality. I couldn't be prouder that a player of Leo's caliber is coming to our club."

Having the World Cup winner on board promises to be a big boost for soccer in the U.S. where the sport trails in popularity behind the other major North American men's professional leagues. Messi will be formally unveiled on Sunday in an entertainment event at DRV PNK Stadium.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Bangladesh's strike bowler Taskin Ahmed takes a catch off his own bowling to remove Afghanistan opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz, taken aback by a short delivery, in the very first over of the second T20I in Sylhet yesterday. Taskin also removed the other Afghan opener, Hazratullah Zazai, with yet another short of a length delivery to give the Tigers a flying start, which was capitalised later on by [bottom] skipper Shakib Al Hasan as he accounted for two more Afghan batters to put pressure on the visitors.

Bowlers keep visitors from letting loose

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh bowlers were able to mount pressure on Afghanistan during key stages to restrict the visitors to 116 for seven in a rain-affected second T20I reduced to 17 overs per side at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

The Tigers had let it slip in the death overs during the first T20I, However, this time they produced a more consistent effort with the ball as the hosts were set a DLS target of 119. Ace pacer Taskin Ahmed and skipper Shakib Al Hasan turned the screws on Afghanistan to set the stage for a series whitewash in Sylhet.

Sending the visitors to bat, Taskin produced a fiery spell at the top. Pace was complemented by extra bounce as Afghan batters turned attention to getting out of the line of a few deliveries.

Rahmanullah Gurbaz had tried charging Taskin in the first over and swung his bat wildly, producing a thick outside edge that flew over third man for a six. Taskin, however, stuck to his guns and banged it in again next delivery, angling it in to Gurbaz who was late to the shot. Taskin ran in and took the catch himself to remove the dangerman.

Hasan Mahmud would support the initial pace onslaught, troubling Ibrahim Zadran at the other end. Taskin then returned for his second over and found another strong response after Hazratullah Zazai had caressed one through cover. Noticing how Zazai was barely moving his feet, Taskin angled one that left Zazai from a length and the batter could only produce a catch to Liton Das behind the wicket, unable out his nous of keeping batters at bay. Despite the intention being there from Afghan batters, both Shakib and Nasum mixed the deliveries up, the former able to slow things in the air and make it difficult to time deliveries.

Mohammad Nabi had taken the Tigers attack to cleaners in the first T20I. There was a danger of that happening again when he was let off by Shakib, dropping a chance at cover off Nasum.

Mustafizur accounted for Nabi in the 10th over before Shakib came in and dented Afghanistan further with two wickets in an over. Zadran only managed a top edge off Shakib, mistiming the delivery and departing for 22 before Najibullah Zadran too departed in the last ball, castled by the Bangladesh skipper.

Shakib ended with two for 15 in three overs while Nasum put down four overs for 15 as well without the reward of wickets.

Mustafizur showed his skills at the death in the 16th over, giving up just three runs while bringing an end to Karim Janat and Azmatullah Omarzai's 42-run stand with the latter's wicket falling after a 21-ball 25.

Taskin produced another top-edge in his last over to see off Janat and ended up with three for 33 in four overs while not letting any of the Afghanistan star players from getting a big score.



to contend with the extra bounce.

While Mustafizur Rahman gave away 13 runs in the last over of the Powerplay, this time the supporting acts of Shakib and Nasum Ahmed were on point. Both bowlers put in economical overs before rain stopped play for over an hour.

After the rain, Shakib brought

Bangladesh lose Nepal series on penalties

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh lost their two-match FIFA friendly series against Nepal in tiebreaker after the second match ended in a goalless draw at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

The women in red and green, who were held to a 1-1 draw in their first match on Thursday, lost the decisive penalty shootout 4-2 as the visitors celebrated the bragging rights to the keenly contested series.

Sheuli Azim and Maria Manda failed to convert their spot-kicks for the hosts while Shamsunnahar and Monika Chakma converted theirs. For Nepal, only goalkeeper Anjali Thmbapa Subba saw her spot-kick saved by Bangladesh goalie Rupna Chakma while Sabitra Bhandari, Hira Kumari, Deepa Shahi and Anita KC converted theirs.

With the tiebreaker taking place only to decide a winner of the series, the record books will say that this was a drawn match between the two sides. Nepal lead head-to-head by 5-1 with five other matches ending in stalemate.

While the first match offered quite a few chances at both ends, with the hosts taking a 65th minute lead through skipper Sabina Khatun before Sabitra scored a stoppage-time equaliser, there were hardly any clear-cut chances throughout the second match.

Most of the time the action concentrated in the middle of the pitch, with no side able to take a stranglehold of the proceedings. Despite a few injury issues, Bangladesh coach Mahbubur Rahman Litu opted to field the same starting eleven that played in the first-match.

While the defence held firm despite the absence of Akhi Khatun, who has left for China a couple of months ago, the indecisiveness up front was felt yet again in absence of Sirat Jahan Swapna, who has bid goodbye to football.

It looked as if the reference point was missing when the likes of Krishna Rani Sarkar and Sanjida Akter moved up the flanks, with lack of cohesion among Sabina and Tohura Khatun quite evident.

Litu, who was handed the responsibility in absence of long-time coach Golam Rabbani Choton, lamented the absence of key players in the side.

"There are a lot of expectations on this team since they did well in the past. But this team does not have Akhi, Swapna, Shamsunnahar Jr. How will I threaten the opposition going forward? When you have key players missing in those positions, you will have to suffer," the stand-in coach said after the match.

"We did not play for 10 months. There was an impact on our game. There were also injuries in our team. It is hard to play with such a patched-up team," Litu added.

Captain Sabina, being the prolific striker and the most experienced player of the team, said she they had specific plan regarding the tiebreaker, but that didn't work.

"We had our plans for the tiebreaker. We also had trained accordingly," Sabina said. "There were better spot-kick takers in the team which is why I didn't take a shot."



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

VONDROUSOVA writes her own happy ending

REUTERS, London

When Marketa Vondrousova punched away a volley and fell to the ground after completing one of the most unexpected runs to the Wimbledon title, a jumble of thoughts must have been running through her head.

After all, Saturday was meant to be the day when Tunisian sixth seed Ons Jabeur would finally become the first Arab and first African woman to win a Grand Slam title.

Instead, a distraught Jabeur was left with tears streaming down her face as her Wimbledon dream was wrecked in the final for the second year running with a 6-4 6-4 drubbing.

In stark contrast, Vondrousova knelt down on the grass in her moment of triumph -- staring at the turf that until this fortnight had not brought her much joy.

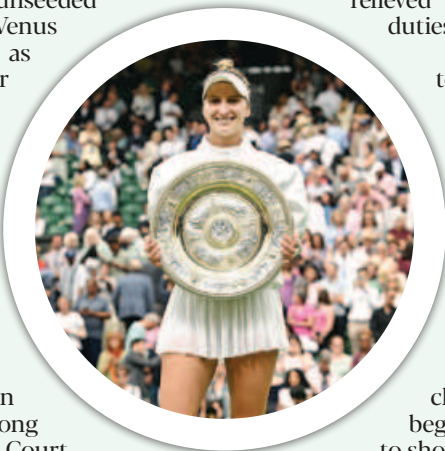
The Czech left-hander had won only one match at the All England Club before this year and 12 months ago she had come to London as a tennis tourist with her arm and elbow in a plaster cast as she recovered from a second bout of wrist surgery.

Her time out from the sport meant that she fell so far off the tennis radar that she no longer even had a clothing sponsor.

But the 42nd-ranked Czech put those problems behind her to become the first unseeded woman to lift the Venus Rosewater Dish as she completed her own phenomenal comeback story.

"I don't know what's happening right now," Vondrousova said during the presentation ceremony as she was given a standing ovation by a 15,000-strong capacity Centre Court crowd that included tennis greats Billie Jean King and Martina Navratilova.

"Ons, you are such an inspiration for all of us and I hope you will win this one day; you are an amazing person."



"This time last year I had a cast on so it's amazing that I can now stand here and hold this (trophy), it's crazy," added the Czech, whose husband Stepan Simek had flown in from Prague especially for the final after being relieved of his cat-sitting duties at home.

"It's amazing as tomorrow is the first anniversary of our wedding. I am exhausted but I am so proud. I am going to have a beer as it's been an exhausting two weeks," said Vondrousova.

While the clearly elated Czech began her victory lap to show off the Rosewater Dish to all corners of Centre Court, Britain's Princess of Wales was left to console a sobbing Jabeur who could not fathom how she had messed up her chance of holding aloft the most famous trophy in women's tennis.

The truth of the matter was that she was the architect of her own downfall, with the 31 unforced errors she produced telling their own story.

"This is very, very, tough. I am going to look ugly for those photos," the 28-year-old Jabeur told the crowd through tears.

After the hollering fans gave the crowd favourite a prolonged ovation, she added: "This is the most painful loss of my career."

"Today is going to be a tough day for me but I'm not going to give up and I am going to come back stronger. It's been a tough journey but I promise I will come back and one day win this tournament."

Only time will tell if she can fulfil that promise but on Saturday she was ruining all the chances she had missed during the opening exchanges of a contest that was effectively being played in an indoor arena after the roof was closed to block out the howling winds blowing through the grounds.

Jabeur knows she could have won the first set 6-0, but the mental fortitude she had shown to knock out four Grand Slam champions en route to the final simply deserted her on Saturday.