

'No regrets': Warner turns over to final Test chapter

STAR SPORTS DESK

David Warner, Australia's most successful opener, will bid adieu to Test cricket at his home ground in Sydney with the third Test between Australia and Pakistan, set to begin on January 3. Yesterday, in a press conference in which Warner also revealed that he had decided to call time on his ODI career as well, the left-handed opener spoke openly about his 15-year-long career for Australia. Excerpts of it are given below:

Q: How are your emotions ahead of your final Test?
David Warner: I'm feeling great. It's the great(est) decision I've made, I've got to give back to my family. I'm definitely retiring from one-day cricket as well. That was something that I had said through the World Cup – get through that, and winning it in India, I think that's a massive achievement. So, I'll make that decision today, to retire from those forms, which does allow me to go and play some other leagues around the world and sort of get the one-day team moving forward a little bit. I know there's a Champions Trophy coming up (in 2025). If I'm playing decent cricket in two years' time and I'm around and they need someone, I'm going to be available.

Q: Was there any doubt that you'd be able to go out on your own terms here at home?
DW: No, I said quite clearly in England before the World Test Championship (final), there was a lot of talk about me and my form. I wanted to nip it in the bud early. I said my ideal preparation to finish would be Sydney – that's ideal, that's fantastic. But I actually had Lord's pencilled in as my last Test (second Ashes Test), especially if I didn't go as well as I did in a partnership with 'Uzzie' (Usman Khawaja) at the top of the order. Then from there, it just followed on that we played some good

innings together. I didn't have that hundred (in England) that I always wanted but always eluded me in achieving. But as a team and as a whole we did our bit.

Q: What did you learn from the 'Sandpaper Gate scandal' in Cape Town?
DW: Reflecting back on that whole period, my whole career, I've got no regrets because you are going to have a lot of hurdles you are going to have to jump. There's going to be obstacles in the way, but you have to move forward and I've done that with dignity. I've got a lot of passion for the game and it was important from my perspective that I'm giving back, making sure that I gained the respect back but making sure I'm putting Australian cricket first. I want every young kid who wants to play cricket to dream of playing for Australia and that's what was really important for me when I came back.

Q: Is your legacy that you created a pathway for T20 cricketers to become Test cricketers?
DW: It's easy for me to sit here and talk about playing for your country at Test level through T20 cricket. Fortunately, in my development, I didn't have (franchise leagues) there so I didn't have to make those decisions of going off and playing in those. For me, it was always about playing Test cricket for Australia. We're well remunerated as well with the central contracts, and that's the passion that you have growing up – to play red-ball cricket for Australia. Today, with so many different opportunities and a lot more money at stake for younger guys coming through, it's a tough decision to make.

Q: How would you like to be remembered as a Test cricketer?
DW: I just want to leave (a legacy) behind that you can go out and play the way you want to play, you can play with freedom, you can play reverse sweeps like Joe Root if you want. You've got the ability to do that and you've got to trust and believe in yourself.



Bangladesh Under-19 coach Stuart Law and skipper Mahfuzur Rahman Rabby were present in Mirpur yesterday during the squad announcement for the upcoming Under-19 World Cup in South Africa, starting from January 19. After their maiden Asia Cup triumph in December last year, the young Tigers will be hopeful of following in the footsteps of the Akbar Ali-led 2020 World Cup-winning batch.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'Business again' for young Tigers

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh under-19 team's expectations have risen higher than ever since their maiden Asia Cup triumph last month, as selectors yesterday announced an unchanged squad from the continental tournament, led by Mahfuzur Rahman Rabby, for the upcoming ICC Under-19 World Cup in South Africa.

By winning their first World Cup

BANGLADESH GROUP FIXTURES

JANUARY 20:

Bangladesh v India, Bloemfontein

JANUARY 22:

Bangladesh v Ireland, Bloemfontein

JANUARY 26:

Bangladesh v USA, Bloemfontein

SQUAD

Mahfuzur Rahman Rabby (Captain), Ashiqur Rahman Shibli, Jishan Alam, Chowdhury Md Rizwan, Adil Bin Siddik, Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman Boranno, Ariful Islam, Shihab James, Ahrar Amin (Vice Captain), Sheikh Parvez Jibon, Rafi Uzzaman Rafi, Rohanat Doullah Borson, Iqbal Hasan Emon, Wasi Siddiquee and Maruf Mridha.

in 2020, a new benchmark was set by the Akbar Ali-led Bangladesh under-19s. For the new batch of young Tigers, the focus will once again be on lifting the trophy.

However, there has been a significant change in the culture and environment in the age

groups in Bangladesh. Despite the maiden Asia Cup victory, which will undoubtedly boost the confidence of the players heading to the World Cup, head coach Stuart Law's message to the players was to "refocus" for the imminent hurdle.

"I made a very big point to the players after the Asia Cup to make sure that they really enjoy the win. Celebrate, enjoy, but once we arrive back in Bangladesh, it's business again," Law told the media yesterday.

"So we've got to drag the boys back down to earth, get them back into worrying about what's in front of them, not what has happened.

"We've got to refocus now and start working again on the process that we used to go through the Asia Cup. And if we do that, we play pretty well. So, it's just a matter of enjoying the moment, yes, but now it's back to business," he added.

The former Australian batter is not ready to put the pressure of expectation on the players. Instead, Law is focusing on one game at a time, stating that their first game against India on January 20 would be their most crucial match.

There will be spotlight on Ashikur Rahman Shibli – adjudged player of the tournament in the Asia Cup after scoring two centuries – while Jishan Alam, vice captain Ahrar Amin, pacer Maruf Mirdha, leg-spinner Wasi Siddiquee, and others are expected to shine in the huge event.

Law, however, has constructed a role-centric roster, putting more emphasis on utilizing the individual player to match the roles required to tackle specific challenges in the next World Cup.

"Look, we picked teams to win the match that was in front of us. If you're playing a spin-heavy team against India, I think you're mad.

"I'm not picking teams because I like people. I'm picking teams because, you know, this is a game," he said.

The 55-year-old was optimistic about his pace-bowling unit, describing them as "high quality." Law also mentioned the significant gains in the fitness level of the cricketers, which, according to the Australian, are all pieces of the jigsaw puzzle waiting to fall into place.

'Mentality needs to be better'

REUTERS

Arsenal need to build a stronger in-game mentality, midfielder Declan Rice said after the north London club dropped points in back-to-back matches with a 2-1 defeat against Fulham on Sunday, hurting their Premier League title challenge.

Arsenal failed to capitalise on an early lead given by Bukayo Saka at Craven Cottage, slipping to fourth place on 40 points at the halfway stage of the campaign, having lost 2-0 at home against West Ham United on Thursday.

While there may be pressure from reigning champions Manchester City and this season's surprise package Aston Villa's victories over the weekend, Rice said Arsenal will not hit the panic button.

"When you go 1-0 up, you need to take more control and have more self-belief," Rice told Sky Sports. "You need to have more desire, the mentality needs to be better. We need to demand more for each other.

"In this league, there's no room to mess up. There's so many good teams around you and we want to be pushing up the top end of the table." Arsenal are not fixated on the points table, Rice added.

Villa moved up to 42 points, the same as Liverpool, who lead on goal difference and host Newcastle United later on Monday, while City sit third with a game in hand.

"There's a lot of media who talk and say 'Arsenal will win the league this year, Arsenal are better this year', and whatnot. But we don't get involved in that, we just try to take every game as we can," Rice said.



Sisters usher new hope in chess

ANISUR RAHMAN

Siblings Walijah Ahmed and Wadifa Ahmed have set a rare precedence in Bangladesh chess by becoming champion in the National Junior Women's (U-20) Championships in successive years.

Wadifa, the younger of the two sisters, became unbeaten champion in girls' category of the 41st national junior championship with 8.5 points from nine matches on Sunday. Walijah, the elder one, had had won the same title a year ago.

Having inherited a knack for chess from their father, the sisters are doing their best to blaze a trail in the game, but the constant thought of financial security may bring an early end to their promising careers just the way it did to their father's fledgling career in the early 1990s.

Mainuddin Ahmed, their father, once used to participate in national chess championships regularly before leading the country for Italy to earn bread and butter in 1991. Both his daughters were born in Milan and they learnt the game from their father.

Walijah and Wadifa returned to the country with their mother, Taslima Khatun, in 2015. Despite staying abroad, their father always follows their game



while the mother takes them around to different tournaments.

"My daughters discuss chess with their father, who is doing business in Milan. Walijah learned the game from her father, who follows each of his daughters' games on online platforms. He also discusses with them after each game," Taslima told The Daily Star. "I, too, have a soft corner for chess, so I go around with my daughters on their chess journey."

Walijah started playing chess tournaments under Bangladesh Chess Federation 2016 and earned her Women's Candidate Master title in 2018.

She became runner-up in the national women's chess championship last year and also beat WFM Rani Hamid. Wadifa followed her elder sister's footsteps and earned Women's FIDE Master title in 2023.

However, the lack of opportunities in chess in Bangladesh frustrates Taslima and her family. The 21-year-old Walijah is concentrating more on her studies now so that she could have a more secured future.

"Very few chess events are held in Bangladesh, so neither of them is getting enough opportunity to earn expected norms. Walijah earned WCM once

she got chance to play in zonal chess tournament in 2018," Taslima said.

"Wadifa is getting more time to play chess. Last year she played in different tournaments in India, Nepal, UAE and Netherlands. We bore all the expenditure for the participation," informed Taslima, adding that GM Enamul Hossain Razib is training the two daughters.

Asked how she feels with the success of her daughters, Taslima said, "Sometimes I become emotional, especially when they do well because I feel our efforts are paying fruit."

Wadifa is setting her sights up and is thankful to her parents for passing the game on to her.

"I really love to play chess. I may have inherited the love for the game as my grandfather and father used to play chess and now my elder sister is also playing," Wadifa said.

"I had to work hard to become champion this time after I performed really poorly in the last edition. So, I was determined to produce something good this time.

"Now, I am looking forward to earning the WFM and then WGM and I know I have to work hard to achieve these titles. I also need financial support from sponsors and a good coach to achieve my targets," said the ninth-grader.



New mother Osaka makes winning return

REUTERS, Brisbane

Four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka felt the nerves but looked solid on her return to elite tennis after 15 months out as she got past Germany's Tamara Korpatsch 6-3 7-6(9) in the first round of the Brisbane International on Monday.

The 26-year-old from Japan last competed on tour at the Pan Pacific Open in Tokyo in September 2022 and had her first child, daughter Shai, in July before stepping up her preparations for the Jan. 14-28 Australian Open.

Osaka displayed no signs of rust to break Korpatsch to love in her first game back and the former world number one turned up the heat again towards the end of the opening set to close it out in 38 minutes with a sizzling forehand winner.

"I was super nervous playing the entire time but I was really excited to be out here. It feels really good to be back," Osaka said after signing autographs and taking pictures with supporters courtside.