

'Common sense ball from masterful Root'

AGENCIES

Having endured a slew of criticism for not being able to match the "Bazball" style of cricket, Joe Root bounced in his own "masterful" way to lead England's recovery from early trouble after India pacer Akash Deep took three wickets on debut in the fourth Test on Friday.

England, who are fighting to stay alive at 2-1 down in the five-match series, reached stumps at 302-7, thanks to Root's unbeaten 106, after electing to bat first in Ranchi.

Joe Root hit his 10th Test century against India yesterday, most by any batter against the Indians in Tests. He overtook Australia's Steve Smith, who has scored nine Test tons against India in 37 innings.

The tourists slipped to 112-5 but Root, with just 77 runs over his previous six innings, found his form to put on a 113-run stand with wicketkeeper batsman Ben Foakes, who made 47.

Opener Zak Crawley described Root's spell at the crease as "unbelievable". "He was due, he's the best player we've ever had," he said. Root's 31st Test ton came after a torrent of criticism for throwing away his wicket off a reverse scoop as England lost the third Test.

Root and Foakes kept calm in an uncharacteristically patient show of batting by England, a temporary departure from their attacking "Bazball" style, which denied India a wicket in the afternoon session.

"A really good day for England and a masterful hundred from England's best player in Joe Root," former captain Michael Vaughan told TNT Sports.

"Lovely to see Common sense Ball," Vaughan had also tweeted on X in reference to the type of cricket played by England and Root.



Joe Root on Friday was accorded a standing ovation from the England players and fans after the veteran had reached his 31st Test ton with a boundary off debutant India pacer Akash Deep in the fourth Test in Ranchi. Root reverted to his own style of play during his patient 106 not out after failing multiple times in the last three Tests while trying to be aggressive against the India bowlers. Meanwhile, Akash Deep, who replaced Jasprit Bumrah, took three crucial wickets earlier in the day.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Arsenal, City seek to keep heat on Liverpool

REUTERS, London

With leaders Liverpool otherwise engaged this weekend, Manchester City and Arsenal have the chance to close the gap in what is brewing to be the closest Premier League title race for years.

Juergen Klopp's side stretched their lead to four points as they turn their attention to Sunday's League Cup final against Chelsea.

Champions City, who like Arsenal have played 25 games to Liverpool's 26, head to Bournemouth on Saturday evening before Arsenal then try to settle some scores with Newcastle United.

Liverpool have 60 points to City's 56 and Arsenal's 55 with all three sides knowing that the margins for error are minimal.

City's draw with Chelsea last weekend snapped an 11-match winning streak and altered the odds ever so slightly in the title race. But a hard-fought victory over Brentford in midweek courtesy of Erling Haaland's goal got them back on track and Pep Guardiola's side will be expected to dispatch a Bournemouth team they beat 4-1 this time last year.

Arsenal's sensational start to 2024 suffered a bump on Wednesday as they lost 1-0 to Porto in their Champions League last-16 clash, failing to have a shot on target. Mikel Arteta's side can ill afford any hangover from that game as they host Newcastle.

The last time the two sides met Arteta was left seething about the match officials after a 1-0 defeat. But they look better equipped to go the full distance this time.

Jaker again makes his case for national team

SPORTS REPORTER

Comilla Victorians' wicketkeeper-batter Jaker Ali Anik once again showed his ability as a finisher in this year's Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) yesterday, further strengthening his case for a call up to the Bangladesh Twenty20 squad.

Comilla suffered a six-wicket loss to Fortune Barishal in their last group-stage game at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday, a match they could've lost by an even bigger margin had it not been for Jaker.

The 26-year-old displayed great maturity coming in at number seven when Comilla were 86 for 5 in 14.5 overs, took on the Barishal bowlers on a tricky Mirpur surface and scored an unbeaten 16-ball 38 which featured four sixes and two fours to push their total to 140 for 8.

This was the wicketkeeper-batter's ninth outing in this year's tournament and so far he has scored 179 runs at an excellent strike rate of 151.69.

Although he is yet to score a half-century, with his best score being an unbeaten 40 off 31 balls against Khulna Tigers, Jaker has been instrumental in Comilla finishing second in the points-table, regularly playing impactful innings in pressure situations.

Jaker has been dismissed only twice in nine innings, which speaks volumes of his consistency, and has an average of 89.5, the best in the tournament.



Despite his consistent run lower down the order and the Bangladesh team being on the lookout for a finisher in Twenty20s, Jaker was overlooked by the outgoing selection panel led by Minhajul Abedin Nannu for the Tiger's forthcoming three-match home T20 series against Sri Lanka next month.

The selectors picked four specialist openers in the T20I squad in the form of Anamul Haque, Liton Das, Mohammad Naim and Soumya Sarkar while skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto at times also opens the innings.

Towhid Hridoy and Mahmudullah Riyad were the only specialist middle-order batters in the squad with the latter expected to play the role of a finisher against Sri Lanka.

Comilla coach Mohammad Salahuddin had criticised the selection process after

Jaker wasn't named in the squad.

"You are looking for players to bat at number six and seven and this guy [Jaker] has been doing well for the last two years. He scores runs at crucial moments for us and is sensible. I feel that this boy should be given opportunity," the Comilla coach had said at a press conference on February 14.

Although Jaker has played three T20s for Bangladesh, they were in last year's Asian Games where the board had sent a second-string team.

The Bangladesh management had the perfect opportunity to give Jaker some real exposure in international cricket in the Sri Lanka series.

But their decision to overlook Jaker has denied him a chance to prove his mettle and the team has also wasted an opportunity to assess a potential finisher leading up to this year's ICC Twenty20 World Cup.

Hathurusingha meets new chief selector

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national team head coach Chandika Hathurusingha, who arrived in the country on Thursday, attended a Bangladesh Premier League game for the first time this season on Friday before he gets busy with the upcoming international assignments against Sri Lanka, starting from March 4.

Hathurusingha had been away following the white-ball tour of New Zealand and the regulation visit yesterday saw him meet new chief selector Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu, who is set to hold office from next month in his new role.

Hathurusingha's strained relationship with past chief selector Faruque Ahmed saw the latter resign back in 2017 during the Sri Lanka's first stint with Bangladesh as head coach. While Hathurusingha's relationship with the Minhajul Abedin-led selection panel was amicable, this time Lipu has come in with more influence than the past selection panel.

The head coach and Lipu watched the game between Comilla Victorians and Fortune Barishal in Mirpur yesterday. It was learned that the courtesy meeting did not see them discuss too much regarding the upcoming international series but the duo got enough chances to acquaint themselves.

SHORT CORNER

'I am not the only problem in Bayern's bad run'



Bayern Munich coach Thomas Tuchel said he was not the only one responsible for his team's bad form and hoped the club's decision to part ways with him at the end of the season would liberate him and his players for the remainder of the campaign. The Bavarians this week decided to cut ties with Tuchel at the end of the current campaign.

Australia punish NZ to win 2nd T20I and clinch series

Australia's bowlers sliced through some reckless New Zealand batting on Friday to win the second T20I by 72 runs in Auckland and clinch the three-match series. Leg-spinner Adam Zampa knocked over the middle order to finish with 4-34 as the home side were skittled for 102 in 17 overs at Eden Park.

Argentina to tour US after China cancels friendlies in Messi gap

The Argentina Football Association (AFA) said Thursday the national team will play two friendlies in the United States in March after China cancelled matches in a spat over a Lionel Messi no-show in Hong Kong. The world champions will play El Salvador in Philadelphia on March 22 and Nigeria in Los Angeles four days later.

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Ecstatic FC Qarabag players celebrate as they made history by becoming the first team from Azerbaijan to reach the UEFA Europa League Last 16 with a 6-5 aggregate win over Braga on Thursday. Qarabag had taken a commanding 4-2 advantage into the second leg but were reduced to 10 men and required a last-gasp strike from Nariman Akhmedzade at Tofiq Bahramov Republican Stadium in Baku to make it to the round of 16 for the first time. They will face in-form Bundesliga leaders Bayer Leverkusen next.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Mohammedan, Abahani share the spoils

SPORTS REPORTER

Bashundhara Kings ended their first round of matches in the Bangladesh Premier League on top of the table with a 1-1 draw against Sheikh Russel KC at the Bashundhara Kings Arena after country's traditional rivals Mohammedan SC and Abahani shared the spoils in a 2-2 draw at the Rafique Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium in Mymensingh yesterday.

Rakib Hossain cancelled out a 46th-minute strike from Japanese midfielder Kodai Iida in the 67th minute for 10-man Kings, who ended the first phase with 22 points, five ahead of Mohammedan. Abahani are in this position with 15 points.

The second round matches of the league will resume on March 29 after the last two matches of the ninth round take place today.

In Mymensingh, the country's two most popular outfits faced off just nine days after they had squared off in the Federation Cup encounter in Gopalganj where Mohammedan had showed spirited fightback to come from a goal down to beat Abahani 2-1. Yesterday, Mohammedan were

once again on the back foot, and only came out with a point due to a debatable penalty awarded by referee Symoon Hasan in the dying minutes of the high-intensity encounter.

Abahani got off to a sparkling start by taking a second-minute

pressure on Abahani in search of an equaliser, with Uzbek midfielder Mozaffarjon Mozaffarov watching his free-kick go out after hitting the outside of the crosspiece in the 11th minute.

Abahani tried to attack in transitions, with Cornelius



lead when Brazilian forward Bruno Rocha found the top corner of the far post with a perfect free-kick from outside the box close to the left flank.

The early damage helped Mohammedan wake up to mount

Stewart delivering a beautiful pass inside the Mohammedan box but Washington Brandao failed to make proper connection before Pappu Hossain rescued Abahani with a diving save off a Mozaffarov drive in the 38th minute.

However, Abahani doubled their lead 10 minutes into the second half when Brandao whipped in a cross from the right flank and Bruno headed it down at near post for Cornelius, who flicked it home from the grip of Mohammedan goalkeeper Sujon Hossain.

Mohammedan, however, bounced back with a goal in the 68th minute when Soulemane Diabate converted from the spot following a tackle from behind on Sunday.

Diabate levelled the margin in the 87th minute from the spot after referee Symoon awarded another penalty to the Black and Whites citing a handball inside the box even though TV footages did not catch any discernable incident of handling-the-ball by any Abahani player. The match was held up for 10 minutes in the face of protests from Abahani, who saw their manager Nazrul Islam given marching order.

Meanwhile in Gopalganj, Sheikh Jamal DC came from behind to beat Rahmatganj MFS 2-1 to stay in fourth position of the 10-team table with 14 points while Rahmatganj were in eighth position with seven points.