



Rohit's form in focus as India head to Gabba

Australia have lost just one of their last five men's Tests against India (W3, D1), despite losing the toss in four of those matches.

The last time Australia secured consecutive Test victories against India was in December 2014.

India have suffered six defeats in their past 12 men's away Tests (W5, D1) and are aiming to avoid consecutive away losses for the first time since July 2022.

Australia have lost at the Gabba to only four teams: India, New Zealand, West Indies, and England.

Shubman Gill (91) and Rishabh Pant (89*) played crucial roles in India's iconic Gabba win in 2021; only Greg Chappell (109*) has scored higher in a successful fourth-innings chase at the venue.

REUTERS, MELBOURNE

A chastened India head to Brisbane beset by worries over the form of captain Rohit Sharma and the fitness of strike bowler Jasprit Bumrah, while resurgent Australia look to keep the momentum in the third Test starting on Saturday.

After missing India's big win in the first Test in Perth to be with his newborn son, opener Rohit dropped down the order at the Adelaide Oval where he managed just nine runs as the tourists crashed to a 10-wicket defeat inside three days.

The resumption of Rohit's run of low scores provided more ammunition for his critics, who contend that the 37-year-old is now dead weight in the team.

His former teammates are also alarmed, saying his form

is affecting his captaincy following criticism of India's tactics in Adelaide.

Where Rohit fits into the Indian batting order – or whether he fits in at all – will continue to stoke debate in the subcontinent if the skipper fails again at the Gabba.

Though Rohit was hardly alone in struggling against the pink ball in Adelaide, his failures shone a kinder light on Bumrah's captaincy in the series opener.

Though the five-Test series will still be alive after Brisbane, the stakes are high in the context of the World Test Championship.

Another defeat for India would mean their hopes of reaching the WTC final is out of their hands while putting world champions Australia within one win of next year's decider at Lord's.

Women's age-level meets set to boost pipeline

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Bangladesh U-19 women's team will leave for Malaysia today to take part in the inaugural edition of the ACC Women's U-19 Asia Cup, scheduled to be held in Klang between December 15 and 22.

The tournament will be part of the junior Tigresses' preparation for the upcoming ICC U-19 Women's T20 World Cup, also scheduled in Malaysia from January 18 to February 2 next year. Before the global event, they will also travel to Sri Lanka for a four-match T20 series against the hosts to fine-tune their World Cup preparation.

Ahead of the regional meet, Bangladesh Cricket Board yesterday named a 15-member squad, which will be led by batter Sumaiya Akter.

Last year, Bangladesh not only had a decent campaign in the inaugural U-19 Women's T20 World Cup in South Africa, but they also produced players like Marufa Akter, Shorna Akter, Dilara Akter and Rabeya.

Meanwhile, some squad players like Sumaiya, Disha Biswas and Nishita Akter Nishi (travelling reserve) have either played or are in the national team radar.

Sajal Ahmed Chowdhury, the age-level selector who will also be the manager of the U-19 team in their Asia Cup campaign, feels that they are expecting the same thing to happen with the current crop.

NZ keen to give Southee winning farewell

REUTERS

New Zealand hope pace veteran Tim Southee will sign off from Test cricket with a victory over England in the third and final match of the series but the hosts' bowling unit will have their hands full keeping the explosive Harry Brook quiet in Hamilton.

England have secured their first Test series victory in New Zealand since 2008 with comprehensive wins in Christchurch and Wellington. Brook's fearless batting has epitomised England's dominance with the middle order batter smashing 171, 123 and 55 in his three outings.

He has replaced compatriot Joe Root as the top-ranked test batsman and his senior teammate was full of praise for Brook.

Southee is set to play his 107th Test against the same side he faced on his debut 16 years ago, with the tourists eyeing a 3-0 series sweep.

Southee's Test haul of 389 wickets is second only to Richard Hadlee's 431 among New Zealand bowlers but the former captain has struggled of late, failing to take more than two wickets in each of his last 12 Tests.

He has taken only four in the series so far but the 36-year-old is keen to sign off in style at Seddon Park, where the third Test begins on Saturday.

After heavy losses in the first two matches, New Zealand could be tempted to switch things up in Hamilton by playing left arm spinner Mitchell Santner.



Tamim puts on a show

SPORTS REPORTER

Tamim Iqbal put on a grand show in Sylhet yesterday in the National Cricket League (NCL) T20 with an exquisite 33-ball 65 – which was the highlight of another good day in the newly laid-out tournament for local players.

The former Bangladesh captain, who is returning to competitive cricket after seven months with the NCL T20, hit a classy half-century, his 50th in recognised T20s, to help Chattogram Division post 145-9 in their allotted 15 overs in a curtailed game in Sylhet.

In reply, Sylhet Division opener Tawfique Khan Tushar hit back with a quickfire 36-ball 76 but got no support from his teammates as his side succumbed to a 12-run defeat.

Tamim, who made 13 off 10 in the previous match against Rangpur Division, looked in command from the start against Chattogram, hitting flourishing drives off pacers and clearing the ropes against spinners with ease.

National selector Hannan Sarkar, who closely observed Tamim's knock, said the youngsters watching from the field could learn a lot from this innings.

"How experienced players build their innings and finish it off, was on display in Tamim's batting today [yesterday]. The juniors had the opportunity to closely observe him from the field.

"We always think T20 batting is just about power-hitting. It is obviously necessary but along with that, one has to balance themselves

and maintain their shape, like Tamim did in the shots he played down the wicket," Hannan said.

Meanwhile, in another game held at the same venue, Khulna Division defeated Barishal Division by one run in a thrilling encounter. Chasing 131, Moin Khan's unbeaten 27-ball 43 nearly took Barishal home, who needed three runs in the last three balls with four wickets in hand.

Hannan pointed out that Moin's decision to get off strike in the final over might have cost Barishal the game and how this was a learning opportunity for the batter.

"The tournament's purpose was to promote our local players. There was a close match today [yesterday] and on Tuesday a big score was chased down. If things continue going this way, our players will gain experience



But only one run came from the last three balls off a wide as the Khulna fielders executed three run outs, all of which involved skipper and wicketkeeper Nurul Hasan, and Barishal succumbed to a dramatic defeat.

through domestic cricket."

In the day's other two games, Dhaka Metro completed an eight-run win over Rajshahi Division while Rangpur Division completed a comfortable 21-run win over Dhaka Division.



"They are talented, but we are still grooming them. If they mature enough, they will be in the national team pipeline," Sajal told The Daily Star yesterday, adding that they picked the players for the Asia Cup based on their performance in the recent series and programmes.

"All the players have played in the Premier League [WDPL]. We also played a tri-nation U-19 series in Cox's Bazar involving Pakistan and Sri Lanka. We formed a 25 member preliminary squad with the existing squad of that series and those who performed well in the WDPL.

"Then we held two camps (19 days and 17 days) at the BKSP, where we played some practice matches between us. We also played three matches with our emerging team."

Sajal, however, feels the necessity of regular age-level tournaments to enhance the U-19 pipeline, strengthening the national side.

"Last year, we hosted a combined U-16 school cricket tournament. There were some findings from the tournament, and this year, we planned to do a U-18 tournament," he informed.

The young Tigresses, who are in Group B alongside Sri Lanka and hosts Malaysia, will first tackle Sri Lanka on December 16, before they face hosts Malaysia the next day.

The six-team T20 competition also features India, Pakistan and Nepal, who are pitted in Group A.

The top two teams from each group will qualify for the Super Four, before the title decider unfolds on December 22.

India's Gukesh hits chess peak in record time

AGENCIES

Indian teen prodigy Gukesh Dommaraju became the youngest undisputed world chess champion yesterday after beating China's Ding Liren in the final match of the series in Singapore.

The game was going for a draw but with a one-pawn advantage – supported by a rook and a bishop – a tenacious 18-year-old Gukesh pressed on and was richly rewarded for it.

"At the first moment, I didn't see that I was winning. When I realized that I was winning it was the best moment of my life," said Gukesh, who surpassed the achievement of Russia's Garry Kasparov who won the title at age 22.

When Ding realised he had made an endgame blunder that gave his opponent an opportunity to pounce, the Chinese grandmaster slumped on the table, while Gukesh burst into tears, burying his face in both hands. "I probably got so emotional because I didn't really expect to win that position", Gukesh told reporters.



He also became the second Indian after five-time world chess champion Viswanathan Anand to hold the title.

The series, which kicked off on November 25, was a 14-round long-time "classical" event with a prize fund of \$2.5 million. His victory in game 14 gave him a score of 7.5 against Ding's

6.5. Magnanimous in victory, Gukesh praised Ding, saying the 32-year-old "fought like a true champion".

"Since I was seven, I have been living this moment, already for ten years... I am living my dream," said the elated 18th World Champion.

Born to a doctor father and microbiologist mother, Gukesh started playing chess when he was seven, and became India's youngest grandmaster aged 12 years, seven months and 17 days. He reached the world championship by becoming the youngest winner of the prestigious Candidates Tournament in April.

In 2022, Gukesh beat US number one Fabiano Caruana at the Chess Olympiad and later that year triumphed over Magnus Carlsen, a five-time world champion, who relinquished his title in 2022, citing a lack of motivation.

"Becoming the world champion doesn't mean that I'm the best player in the world, obviously there's Magnus, so it's also a motivating factor", Gukesh said.

Contrasting scenarios for Barca, Guardiola

Forward Ferran Torres came off the bench and scored twice, including an 85th-minute winner, while Raphinha scored one as Barcelona earned a hard-fought 3-2 victory at Borussia Dortmund in the Champions League on Wednesday to qualify for the knockouts alongside leaders Liverpool. In Italy, Juventus handed a 2-0 defeat to 2023 winners Manchester City, a major blow to the English champions' hopes of directly qualifying for the last 16 by clinching a top-eight spot as the Citizens plunged to 22nd on the table with eight points.



In a pulsating five-goal second half, Torres struck twice in 10 minutes after coming on in the 71st minute to lift Barcelona to 15 points, in second place with two games remaining in the league phase.

Raphinha has now been directly involved in more goals than any other player in the Champions League this season with eight involvements – six goals and two assists.

Juventus are now unbeaten in their last six meetings with Manchester City (W4 D2), with this now the Citizens' longest ever winless run against an opponent in European competition.

City have lost seven of their last 10 matches across all competitions (W1 D2), as many defeats as they had suffered in their previous 105 matches combined (7).

Pep Guardiola's side have gone eight games without a clean sheet away from home in all competitions – the joint-longest such run of Guardiola's managerial career.