

A Test series etched in memory

“It was a well fought series, a lot of good learnings for us ... being in the game for longer, creating pressure and sometimes absorbing pressure when the wickets are difficult and sometimes playing to the situation.”

Player-of-the-series
Jasprit Bumrah

“Obviously in the context of this series, it’s been a massive series,” he said after his 20th win as captain. It is one that a few of us didn’t have. The boys have had their eye on it and it has lived up to the hype.”

Australia captain Pat Cummins

AGENCIES

Australia completed a six-wicket win in Sydney to clinch the fifth Test against India.

The home side rebounded from losing the opening Test against India to clinch the series 3-1 on Sunday and win the Border-Gavaskar Trophy for the first time in a decade.

The series was a real treat for cricket loving fans all over the world as there was no shortage of twist and turns in the five-match series.

Here there are some talking points from the series:

ALIVE AND KICKING
Bumper crowds turned up to watch the first-ever five-Test series between the two teams, swelling as the showdown intensified.

Drawn in by fine weather, the holiday period and knife-edge action, attendance records were smashed to prove the red-ball game remains hugely popular.

The peak came in the fourth Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, where a staggering 373,691 spectators streamed through the turnstiles, beating the previous record of 350,534 at the same ground during the 1936-37 Ashes series against



England.

BRILLIANT BUMRAH
Prodigious seamer Jasprit Bumrah reinforced his reputation as not only India’s most potent bowler, but one of the best the world has seen.

He put in a mammoth effort to help carry the team and keep them in the hunt for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, with his 32 wickets at an average of

13.06 the most by an Indian in a series in Australia.

Bumrah sent down 53.2 overs in the Boxing Day Test alone – more than he has bowled in any match of his career – and the toil took its toll in Sydney when a back issue restricted his input.

His pivotal role was further highlighted by the decision to hand him the captaincy in Perth and

● The win in front of a packed house at a Sydney Cricket Ground bathed in pink for Glenn McGrath’s cancer charity yesterday ensured Australia will defend their World Test Championship title against South Africa at Lord’s in June.

● With the Border-Gavaskar Trophy safely in the cabinet, Australia now hold all the bilateral titles they play for in the longest format as well as the WTC crown they won by beating India in 2023.

impacts. A fearless Konstas slammed a whirlwind 60 in his first Test innings in Brisbane, taking on Bumrah with little respect, to position himself as a potential long-term opener for Australia.

Reddy was equally impressive, proving able support to the frontline attack while crunching a maiden century in the fourth Test.

END OF THE ROAD
Both sides face a transitional period and the series could have been the last for some of their ageing, and underperforming, veterans.

Australian opener Usman Khawaja, 38, hit 41 in the second innings at Sydney but never really got going. In his favour, Australia have no obvious successor.

Indian skipper Rohit Sharma is similarly under pressure, with a horror run of form seeing him dropped from the last Test in Sydney.

Rohit, 37, insisted he “rested” for the good of the team and would be back, but his days could be numbered.

Superstar Virat Kohli, 36, is also in the twilight of an incredible career.

He has almost certainly played his last tour of Australia and while he scored an unbeaten 100 at the first Test in Perth, he failed to make another big score.

‘Not facing Rana in the nets, he is too quick for me’

Amid the handful of foreign stars featuring in this year’s Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), former England batter Alex Hales is definitely one to look at. The hard-hitting opening batter, who recently turned 36, has been roped in by Rangpur Riders for six matches and will be available until the Sylhet phase before heading to Dubai for ILT20. On Sunday, Hales talked to *The Daily Star’s Samsul Arefin Khan*, sharing his experience of playing in different T20 franchise-based tournaments, including this BPL, and the teams that he deems favourite in the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy. The excerpts of the interview are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): There were talks of you joining Dhaka Capitals in the BPL. But you are eventually playing for Rangpur Riders. What’s the story?

Alex Hales (AH): That’s the first time I heard about it. I don’t know anything about signing for Dhaka.

DS: You have played for Rangpur before. How’s the new stint with the team so far?

AH: I think I played in 2018 for a full season. I loved it and it was really great fun. To get a chance to come back to play for a successful franchise, it’s really a great honour.

DS: It’s your third time in the BPL. How much are you enjoying?

AH: I like this year’s BPL. The wickets in Dhaka were nice. Earlier, sometimes it was slow and low but this time, they had good pitches. I think Sylhet is quite nice as well.

DS: You must be very happy to see your side leading the points table after the Dhaka phase.

AH: I’m here for six games. We won three out of three. I think we bowled really well. Our seamers and spinners have been brilliant. It’s a good enough start you can hope for in any competition.

DS: Do you see any changes in this BPL?

AH: There are definitely some better bowlers around. There are some good pace bowlers around now which is great to see. And more and more batters are clearing the ropes and hitting sixes. I think Bangladesh’s T20 cricket is heading in the right direction.

DS: You must have played Nahid Rana in the nets. How good is he?

AH: No, no, no. I’m not facing him in the nets. He is too quick for me (laughs). I think I faced him last year when I played for Khulna



Tigers [in the nets], I’m now too old and in the nets, I usually just face throwers.

DS: Do you think you could have given England cricket more service as you decided to retire early?

AH: It was my time. My last game was the World Cup final that we won [in 2022 in Australia]. I wanted to go out on my terms and celebrate the World Cup win. Now I focus on franchise cricket. I’ve been away from cricket for some time as well to enjoy family time. So I’m happy with my decision.

DS: You have played in almost all franchise-based leagues across the globe. How do you see BPL compared to other franchise leagues?

AH: It’s just as good as all the other leagues. It’s challenging as an overseas player. You often get challenged a lot by the spinners. There are a lot of skillful spinners here and that’s a tough challenge as an overseas player. But the guys are bowling at good pace as well and the pitch is carrying.

DS: There are fewer foreign recruits in BPL this year. Why do you think BPL is not attracting as many foreign stars as other leagues?

AH: I think four tournaments are running at the same time. SA20, ILT20, and Big Bash along with the BPL. There’s too much cricket during January-February. So, it’s the same for almost all the leagues as they don’t have as many overseas players as they wanted. Also, the Champions Trophy is in February, so, the tournaments are being cramped into the calendar during this period. Next year, hopefully, it will be different and there will be lots of foreign players [in BPL], and I want to be one of them.

DS: Regarding Champions Trophy, which teams do you see as favourites?

AH: India are always up there, especially in the sub-continent conditions. Probably India, Australia, and South Africa. No one talks about South Africa but they are always in the final.

DS: Coming back to BPL, you must want similar good wickets [as the Dhaka phase] in Sylhet as well.

AH: I played may be two or three games in Sylhet and it’s usually been good pitch to bat on. So hoping for more of the same.

BPL aims to satisfy fans in Sylhet phase

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN FROM SYLHET

The Sylhet phase of the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) gets underway today at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium with organisers aiming to make it a bigger success both on and off the field than the opening phase in Dhaka.

The Dhaka phase provided high-scoring matches and quality on-field cricket, however, the off-field fiasco over the ticketing system, with angry fans vandalizing the main gate of the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium after not getting tickets, left a sour taste.

So far, there have been no complaints over tickets in terms of availability and process of procurement ahead of the Sylhet phase. There are sufficient number of tickets available for fans at three designated areas and they can also purchase their tickets online.

“We always have to pay attention towards the quality of cricket... But this time, we are also thinking about our fans and how to satisfy them. We are all but ready. I hope we can satisfy the Sylhet fans,” BPL governing council member secretary Nazmul Abedeen Fahim told reporters in Sylhet yesterday.

On the opening day, home side Sylhet Strikers will face table-toppers Rangpur Riders in the first match which will be followed by Durbar Rajshahi taking on Fortune Barishal.

Sylhet lost their opening match against Rangpur on December 31 and arrived in Sylhet the next day to get a head start on their preparation for this phase, in which they will play five games in eight days.

“We had a good preparation in the last couple of days. We will get support from the crowd. Hopefully, the players will deliver and we hope to start winning from this phase,” Sylhet’s fielding coach Dollar Mahmud said.

Kyle Mayers, Barishal all-rounder, also hoped for a turnaround after the eight-wicket defeat to Rangpur in their previous game. “It’s okay to make mistakes in a tournament, especially at the beginning. As the captain said, we are still trying to find our best combination... We just need to find the balance, try to find the best eleven and play the best cricket that we can.”



BFF wants BPL outfits in women’s league

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite the nonappearance of top clubs like Bashundhara Kings, Mohammedan SC and Abahani in yesterday’s view-exchange meeting on the Women’s Football League (WFL), Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) women’s committee chairperson Mahfuza Akter Kiran remained hopeful about holding a competitive WFL this year.

Kiran had invited the 10 clubs of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) along with clubs who took part in last year’s WFL for the meeting but officials from only four BPL clubs – Brothers Union, Rahmatganj MFS, Bangladesh Police FC and Chittagong Abahani – turned up.

In the last edition, none of the BPL outfits participated in the WFL which also included hattrick champions Bashundhara Kings.

“We need to include the country’s top clubs to make it better. The clubs you mentioned did not turn up maybe because they were busy. But I think those who turned up are also capable to make the women’s league stronger,” said Kiran after the meeting at the BFF House.

Kiran informed that the federation wants to introduce the double-league format in the WFL in order to get FIFA recognition.

She also informed that the BFF is thinking of introducing ‘players’ pool system’ to make the league competitive



Fast bowler Kwena Maphaka, South Africa’s youngest Test debutant at 18 years and 270 days, had a day to remember as he claimed his maiden Test wicket during Day 3 of the second Test against Pakistan in Cape Town yesterday. The left-arm pacer dismissed star batter Babar Azam for 58 and sent back Khurram Shahzad later in the day to bundle out Pakistan for 194 in response to the Proteas’ 615. South Africa enforced the follow-on and the visitors were 152-0 after 35 overs in their second innings.

PHOTO: AFP

Real hope Vinicius won’t face suspension

REUTERS

Real Madrid are hopeful Vinicius Jr will avoid suspension after the club appealed his straight red card during their 2-1 comeback win over Valencia last week, manager Carlo Ancelotti said on Sunday.

The Italian coach confirmed Vinicius is travelling to Cartagena for Monday’s Copa del Rey match against Deportiva Minera.

The Brazilian striker was sent off for slapping Valencia goalkeeper Stole Dimitrievski during Friday’s LaLiga match and Ancelotti is confident that the 24-year-old will escape even the minimum two-game suspension for his red card.

“It wasn’t a red, it was a yellow, and that’s why we hope he will not face any suspension,” the 65-year-old manager told reporters.

Ancelotti also said that Vinicius is under immense mental stress due to previous incidents of racist abuse directed at him in Spain.

