

Aussies wrap it up in 11 days

Australia swept to an 82-run win in the third Ashes Test at Adelaide Oval on Sunday to retain the urn with two matches to spare and leave England facing recriminations over another failed campaign.

Chasing a world-record target of 435, England fought on day five but were dismissed for 352. Left-arm quick Mitchell Starc claimed three wickets, while Scott Boland took the final wicket of Josh Tongue before tea after England resumed on 207 for six.

Australia wrapped up the series in just 11 days of play -- the joint second-quickest Ashes series in more than a century. The fastest came in 1921, when Australia beat hosts England in eight days.

England have now gone 18 Tests without a win in Australia, dating back to their last series triumph there in 2010-11.

England's last three trips to Australia yielded one-sided scorelines of 5-0, 4-0 and 4-0 in favour of the hosts, with more of the same on the cards as two more matches of this series remain -- at Melbourne and Sydney.

"The last two months have been a bit of a grind. But it's all worth it for days like this."

Australia captain Pat Cummins

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"That dream is now over....It hurts, it sucks, but we ain't going to stop."

England captain Ben Stokes



PHOTO: REUTERS

AFC to launch Nations League competition

REUTERS

The Asian Football Confederation said on Sunday it will launch a Nations League contest in a bid to improve competition standards and commercial opportunities for national teams across the continent.

No start date was given by the Kuala Lumpur-based governing body. It said it intends to use existing FIFA international windows to run the competition.

"The AFC Nations League represents an important step forward in our ongoing commitment to support the development of our 47 member associations," AFC general secretary Windsor John said in a statement.

"By introducing a structured competition platform ... we aim to ensure consistent access to high-quality matches while addressing logistical and cost related challenges faced by national teams."

The AFC currently organises the Asian Cup every four years, with the next edition of the 24-team finals due to be played in Saudi Arabia in January 2027.

Europe's governing body, UEFA, launched its own Nations League competition in 2018 to increase the number of meaningful matches played by its members.

'Middle-overs attacking phase' at heart of Akbar's evolving game

Akbar Ali has been waiting in the wings for a national team opportunity since that euphoric moment when he led the U-19 team to World Cup glory in 2020. The wicketkeeper-batter has had time to reflect on his game while many of his batch-mates have already become part of the national team's core. In an interview with The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi, the 24-year-old spoke about his batting template, areas for improvement and the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League (BPL). Following are the excerpts:

DS: What are your thoughts on your development as a skipper?

Akbar Ali (AA): As you grow, your life changes and, in my case, things such as knowledge and maturity are obviously growing with matches. In that way, captaincy too is evolving. I am understanding my game better now. I knew my strengths and weaknesses before, but through these matches, I can feel more clearly what works best for me.



DS: Since the 2020 U-19 World Cup win, many from your batch have joined the national team. Where do you see room for improvement in your own development?

AA: From my point of view, whatever I was supposed to do, I did that and I am continuing to do so. However, I feel that if I could be more consistent, it would be better for me. Over the last few months, my focus has been on how to become more consistent, regardless of where I play next.

DS: Are you trying to implement any specific changes in your batting?

AA: Regardless of the situation, backing my own strengths is very important. I have been trying to do this for the last six or seven months. Previously, due to various influences or match situations, I might not have expressed myself naturally, but now I feel I should express myself and back my strengths regardless of the situation.

DS: Is this about risk-taking?

AA: It is one part of it, but there is more. We are told to take the game deep and that's not a bad thing.

But in trying to take the game deep, for instance, traditionally we're taught to attack in the first 10 overs, play safely between overs 11 and 40 to save wickets, and then attack again in the last 10. I believe we should move away from this mindset. In modern cricket, successful teams like India, England or Australia have a high boundary ratio in the middle overs. Our coaches are also

telling us that this phase is no longer just for rebuilding; it is an attacking phase.

DS: You often bat lower down the order in domestic cricket. Do you feel you should bat higher up in a different template?

AA: As a batsman, I always want to bat higher because it provides the opportunity to face more balls and enjoy the game. However, in our country, we are less inclined to experiment with the batting order. In other countries, players like Rohit Sharma or Jos Buttler started lower down the order but moved up and achieved great success. In Bangladesh, no one wants to take that risk or experiment. It would be better if this changed.

DS: What are your roles and expectations for the BPL?

AA: When I was picked by Rajshahi Warriors, I spoke with [Najmul Hossain] Shanto and the coaches about their expectations and plans. I will try to deliver what they expect from me. We have an exciting team with a good mix of experience and youth, and the atmosphere is very pleasant. Regarding wicketkeeping, Mushfiqur Rahim bhai will likely keep wickets, so I am preparing myself as a fielder.

A tough reality check for Sanjida and Co

SPORTS REPORTER

The sight of the glittering inaugural SAFF Women's Club Championship trophy sparked dreams of lifting it for Sanjida Akhter, but reality soon set in when the Nasrin SC forward led an inexperienced side into the five-team tournament.

India's East Bengal FC were crowned champions on Saturday in Kathmandu, Nepal, while Bangladesh Women's Football League champions Nasrin SC finished bottom of the table with two draws and two defeats, without registering a single win.

"When I first saw the trophy, I felt we could have brought it home had we come with the full-strength squad that won the Bangladesh Women's Football League title," Nasrin SC captain Sanjida told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday. "But the reality was that we went there with a squad full of U-17 and U-20 players."

The 24-year-old winger, who has been out of the national setup, was the only experienced campaigner



in a Nasrin SC side largely made up of age-level players.

While national discards Sabina Khatun, Masura Parvin, and Krishna Rani Sarkar were reluctant to participate, several senior players -- Maria Manda, Monica Chakma, Ritu Porna Chakma, Rupna Chakma, Shamsunnahar Sr, Tohura Khatun, and Sheuli Azim -- were unavailable. All of them had been part of Nasrin SC's

title-winning Bangladesh Women's Football League campaign last year but were barred from joining the team due to the Bangladesh women's national side's preparations for next year's AFC Women's Asian Cup in Australia.

"I really felt bad when I saw that the Pakistan club brought around 90 percent of their national players, and I spoke to their captain, who is 32," said Sanjida. "East Bengal

brought seven Ugandan players along with three to four national players, while the clubs from Bhutan and Nepal also featured senior national players."

Sanjida had trained with Nasrin SC for only 10 to 12 days before the tournament, having been sidelined for nearly four months while attending the AFC B licence coaching course.

"Nasrin SC might not have achieved good results, but the young girls did not perform poorly," Sanjida said. "Our team was mostly made up of U-17 players, and I believe they gained valuable experience playing against mature, experienced and quality players."

She added that there were no regrets regarding their performance.

Responding to a query, Sanjida said, "I am 100 percent sure we could have written our name in the SAFF record books had we been able to play alongside our experienced players, because even five senior players can change the fate of any match."

Mbappe equals Ronaldo's record

After matching idol Cristiano Ronaldo's club record for most goals in a calendar year, Kylian Mbappe hit his trademark 'Siuu' celebration in Real Madrid's 2-0 LaLiga win over Sevilla on Saturday. Mbappe scored his 59th goal from the spot, equaling Ronaldo's 2013 tally.

PHOTO: REAL MADRID

Pakistan crush India to clinch U-19 Asia Cup title

SPORTS REPORTER

Pakistan thrashed India by 191 runs in a one-sided final in Dubai to lift their second ACC Under-19 Asia Cup title on Sunday.

Sameer Minhas smashed 172 off just 113 deliveries with the help of 17 fours and nine sixes to power Pakistan to 347-8 after they were sent to bat first.

Opener Sameer, who was adjudged both player-of-the-final and player-of-the-tournament, batted till the 43rd over, before getting deceived by a slower delivery from Deepesh Devendran and got caught at mid-on with the score on 302-4.



Indian bowlers then pulled back Pakistan in the final phase, conceding just 45 off the last seven overs.

In reply, India came out all guns blazing, but none of the batters could hang around long enough to trouble the Pakistanis and they were eventually all out for 156 in 26.2 overs.

For Pakistan, Ali Raza claimed 4-42 in 6.2 overs.



Conway, Latham's historic feat

New Zealand openers Devon Conway (L) bumps fists with Tom Latham during the third day of the third Test against West Indies at Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui on Sunday. The two batters entered the record books by smashing their second hundreds of the match to help set West Indies an unlikely victory target of 462 on day four. It was the first time in a Test match that a team's opening batters had each hit centuries in both innings. Latham chalked up 137 and 101 while Conway chalked up 227 and 100.

PHOTO: AFP

