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SPORT



Spin misfires amid dogged defiance

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Afghanistan did what had appeared impossible. They batted out 92 overs on the final day, losing five of their remaining seven wickets to draw the one-off Abu Dhabi Test yesterday. They would liken it to a win, but for Bangladesh, who had a day and a half to bowl them out with three frontline spinners at their disposal, the draw was a bitter disappointment.

Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam has 272 wickets in 62 matches, while Mehidy Hasan Miraz has 225 in 60. Off-spinner Nayeem Hasan, drafted in in anticipation of assistance from the pitch, has 48 Test wickets. Yet the trio managed just five wickets despite bowling in the fourth innings.

Mehidy was the pick of the spinners, claiming four scalps, including three in the second innings that set up a chaotic final hour. But more was expected from a spin group that bowled 95 of 142 overs Afghanistan saw through in their second innings. Asked whether he was disappointed that the spinners had not done more, skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto agreed.

"I really expected the spinners to come into this match because of the weather and the condition, but I think they tried," Shanto said during the post-match presser.

The pitch, as it turned out, became better for batting as the match progressed. The hosts lost three wickets on day four but returned with steely resolve on the final day, when the surface offered signs of cracking and rough patches to exploit. Afghanistan, however, showed their Test-match capabilities by countering the spin trio.

Miraz flighted the ball well and reaped some rewards, but Taijul, apart from a missed stumping opportunity, rarely threatened. Eventually, 25-year-old Sediqullah Atal proved to be the difference.

Known primarily for his white-ball exploits, Atal opened the innings and faced 332 deliveries for 111, his maiden Test century. When Taijul finally dismissed him after tea, the game opened up. But Yamin Ahmadzai, whose first-class averages are in the 20s, batted out 85 deliveries in one innings and 80 in another to help Afghanistan secure a hard-earned draw.

The 142 overs Afghanistan faced was the third-highest total a team had negotiated to force a draw. Their resistance was remarkable, but Bangladesh's missed opportunities made the outcome all the more frustrating. Two run-out chances went begging in the same over late in the day, Mominul Haque failed to take a half-chance at short leg, and Hasan Mahmud dropped a regulation catch at deep mid-on.

Yet the bigger concern will be the spinners' ineffectiveness. They usually run through opposition batting line-ups when the pitch offers assistance. When it did not, they could not force a result that had once looked inevitable.



"Messi is a monster, but he doesn't compare to Pele. There will never be another with that combination of technique, speed, and precision. I have a lot of respect for Messi; he is one of the greatest of all time, but 50 years ago Pele was already playing ahead of his time!

Brazil legend **ROMARIO**

How Afghanistan survived a session of madness

Test cricket rarely delivers drama as chaotic as the final session in Abu Dhabi yesterday. Four wickets were all Bangladesh needed to crown five days of toil, thirty-odd overs were all Afghanistan had left to endure. What followed was less a rearguard and more an improbable comedy of errors and survival. Balls kissed the timbers without the bails budging, fielders snatched at thin air, and routine run-outs turned into wild throwing contests.

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118.4 | The wall finally falls
Taijul Islam ended Sediqullah Atal's marathon resistance on 111 off 332 balls. A faint edge lobbed off the pad to Tanzid Hasan Tamim at short leg. Atal reviewed, but UltraEdge confirmed the nick, finally giving Bangladesh their long-awaited opening.

120.5 | The bails refuse to budge
Yamin Ahmadzai edged a Taijul delivery straight onto his stumps, but the bails stayed stubbornly in place. Litton Das and the close-in cordon stood frozen in sheer disbelief at the laws of physics betraying them.

121.1–121.2 | Two run-out chances thrown away
A dreadful mix-up left Qais Ahmad stranded, but Bangladesh threw to the wrong end before the bowler missed the stumps with Qais well short of safety. On the very next ball, another hesitant call nearly cost Ahmadzai his wicket. This time the throw reached the bowler's end, but Ahmadzai scrambled home by millimeters after a tense third-umpire review.

122.4 | Qais survives a stumping chance
Beaten by Taijul's flight, Qais lost his balance as the ball rolled off his pads towards silly point. Litton whipped off the bails in a flash, but Qais managed to drag his foot back in just in time.

126.3 | Another chance goes begging
Qais offered a sharp, airborne chance towards silly point, but the fielder could not make it stick. It was another reprieve for an increasingly adventurous lower-order batter.

130.5 | Hasan Mahmud drops a costly catch
Qais mistimed an aggressive heave off Mehidy Hasan Miraz, slicing the ball toward deep mid-wicket. Hasan Mahmud charged in, got both hands to the ball on the slide, and watched it spill out.

136.6 | Miraz offers late hope
Mehidy Hasan Miraz finally breached Yamin Ahmadzai's defences. Playing at a floated delivery with hard hands, Ahmadzai looped the ball toward short leg, where Mominul Haque showed brilliant anticipation with a diving catch. At 326/8, Bangladesh had five overs to claim the final two wickets.

139.3 | Qais's tactical cramp break
Qais suddenly collapsed onto the turf clutching his hamstring. As the physio spent four minutes stretching him out, Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto fumed.

141.2–141.6 | Two sixes to finish the madness
Qais danced down the pitch to clear long-off for six off Taijul, survived three defensive prods, and then capped the madness by slog-sweeping the final ball of the match over cow corner for another maximum. Falling just one run short of a half-century at 49 not out.

- **A total of 1,304 runs were scored in the one-off Test, making it the highest match aggregate in Tests involving Bangladesh and Afghanistan.**
- **Named Player of the Match, Bangladesh's Litton Das celebrated his 32nd birthday by becoming the first cricketer in Test history to register nine dismissals as a wicketkeeper while scoring a century and a half-century in the same match.**
- **Litton, who scored 53 and 102 in the first and second innings respectively, reached the milestone on the final day with a one-handed catch to dismiss Ikram Alikhil. He surpassed South Africa's Denis Lindsay, who recorded eight dismissals and scored a half-century and a century in the same Test in 1966.**
- **Afghanistan batted for 142 overs to reach 346 for eight in the fourth innings, making it the fourth-most overs batted in a final innings to save a Test match.**
- **Sediqullah Atal scored 111 off 332 balls, making it the seventh-highest number of deliveries faced by a batter in Asia in order to save a Test.**





PHOTO: ACB



Josh Hazlewood took six wickets as Australia completed a 214-run victory over South Africa on the fifth day of the first Test at Kingsmead on Tuesday. The fast bowler finished with six for 49, breaking two promising partnerships to help dismiss the hosts for 206 while chasing a target of 421. Matt Renshaw was named Player of the Match after scoring 190 in the first innings and 82 in the second, as Australia made a memorable return to South Africa in Tests for the first time since the sandpaper scandal in 2018. PHOTO: AFP

Sabbir's first-class ton after 8yrs

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Rajshahi Division's Sabbir Rahman ended an eight-year wait for a first-class century to help his side secure a draw against Khulna Division on the final day of the second round of the National Cricket League at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur on Tuesday.

Sabbir struck 113 off 221 balls, featuring eight fours and a six, to register his fifth first-class century. His previous hundred came in 2018, when he scored 165 in Bangladesh A's opening unofficial Test against Sri Lanka A in Chattogram. That remains his highest first-class score.

Pritom Kumar (44), Sunzamul Islam (39), Ali Mohammad (11 not out) and Shafiqul Islam (15 not out) also made valuable contributions as Rajshahi reached 500 for nine in their second innings before the two sides agreed to a draw.

Resuming at 300 for three, Rajshahi came under pressure in the final session when Khulna's Afif Hossain took two wickets and Sheikh Paeviz Jibon dismissed Sabbir within six deliveries to reduce them to 474 for nine.

With Rajshahi leading by 109 runs and nearly 26 overs remaining, last-wicket pair Ali and Shafiqul frustrated Khulna's bowlers, facing 50 and 58 deliveries respectively, to bat out 18 overs and secure the draw.

Khulna's Mahedi Hasan was named Player of the Match after scoring 104 in the first innings and taking eight wickets.

The two other matches in Sylhet also ended in draws. Ashraful Hasan's 122 helped Sylhet to 496 before Dhaka declared at 219 for six in their second innings, with Ashikur Rahman Shibli scoring an unbeaten 101. Chasing 271, Sylhet reached two for one.

At the other venue, Rangpur declared at 245 for six, setting Mymensingh a target of 373. Mymensingh ended at 189 for four.

Chattogram Division recorded the round's only victory, beating Barishal Division by an innings and one run in Cox's Bazar.

Tigresses eye strong finish after Sobhana's record ton

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Bangladesh will aim for a strong finish to their three-match WODI series against Australia in today's final game at Allan Border Field in Brisbane.

While the hosts have already sealed the series with dominant seven- and nine-wicket victories -- chasing down both targets in under 29 overs -- Bangladesh have finally found a silver lining in their historically fragile batting.

After managing just 166 in the series opener, the visitors posted an improved 220 for six in the second match. The innings was anchored by Sobhana Mostary, whose 118 off 134 deliveries set a new record for the highest individual WODI score by a Bangladesh batter. She also stitched a record-breaking 195-run partnership with unbeaten skipper Nigar Sultana Joty (74).

Speaking ahead of the match, batter Sharmin Akhter Supta emphasised the value of the tour. "Playing in such conditions is a great opportunity. We want to finish the series with a good knock," she said yesterday.

"Our batting was really good in the last match, and we want to carry that forward. If we can also step up in the bowling and fielding departments, we can finish the series on a high note."

City-PSG headline UCL action

STAR SPORTS DESK

Manchester City host reigning champions PSG in a blockbuster Champions League clash tonight, with Pep Guardiola returning to the Etihad for the first time since ending his 10-year reign. City, under Enzo Maresca, have won all eight matches this season, including a 3-0 victory over Liverpool in the last match. PSG, meanwhile, have struggled domestically but opened their European campaign with a 6-1 demolition of Slovan Bratislava. Both sides will look to strengthen their continental credentials.





- This will be Man City and PSG's ninth meeting. City have won four (D2 L2) and are unbeaten in four home games (W3 D1).
- PSG are unbeaten in nine consecutive European Cup/Champions League games against English sides (W7 D2). They could become only the second team to reach 10 such games, after Real Madrid's 11-match run from 2011 to 2017.
- Reigning Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele has been directly involved in 31 goals in 41 Champions League appearances for PSG (20 goals, 11 assists).
- Erling Haaland has scored 42 goals in 39 Champions League group-stage/league-phase appearances, more than any player since his debut season in the competition in 2019-20.
- Haaland has 36 goals in 40 appearances for City in the competition. Another goal would take him past Sergio Aguero's 36 in 64 appearances to become the club's outright top scorer.
- Since the start of last season, Vitinha leads all Champions League midfielders in completed passes (1,703), line-breaking passes (327) and possession won (106 times).

WHAT TO WATCH

Star Sports 1
4th T20I
India vs West Indies
Live from 7:30 pm

T Sports
World Championship of Legends
England vs Australia
Live from 5:30pm
Bangladesh vs South Africa
Live from 9:30pm

Sony Sports 1, 2, 5
UEFA Champions League
Live from 10:45 pm
LASK vs Liverpool
Live from 1:00 am (Thursday)
AS Roma vs Real Madrid
Man City vs PSG