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CRICKET

Off-spinner Lyon reaches 500 as Australia crush Pakistan in 1st Test

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FOOTBALL

Man United hold Liverpool, Arsenal top Premier League

'Incredible performance. A joy to watch from the start to the end. The way we did it against this very good team'

AFP
London

Manchester United ended Liverpool's perfect record at Anfield yesterday, holding the Premier League title chasers to a 0-0 draw after wins for Arsenal and Aston Villa.

Jürgen Klopp's men came into the match as hot favourites to inflict yet more agony on their bitter rivals and boasting 11 wins from 11 games in all competitions at home this season.

Liverpool dominated, hogging nearly 70 percent of possession and 34 shots to United's six but they could not break through against their stubborn opponents.

Klopp's men finish the day second in the table, a point behind Arsenal's tally of 39 after the Gunners earlier beat Brighton 2-0.

It was a moral victory for United manager Erik ten Hag, whose team last season suffered a 7-0 drubbing at Anfield and came into the match with 12 defeats in 24 games this season. United were missing suspended captain Bruno Fernandes while out-of-form Marcus Rashford was once again left on the bench. But they dug deep and stopped their slide after a heavy home defeat against Bournemouth last week and a tame Champions League exit in midweek.

United goalkeeper Andre Onana reacted well to keep out a close-range Virgil van Dijk header in the first half and the visitors could even have won the game, but Rasmus Hojlund's shot was blocked at the near post by Liverpool goal-



Manchester United Jonny Evans (second from left) and Scott McTominay (centre) jump to defend a corner during the English Premier League match against Liverpool at Anfield in Liverpool yesterday. (AFP)

keeper Alisson Becker. Van Dijk said the Liverpool team were frustrated by the result, believing they were "superior in all aspects".

"If you see how we played the game, we had most of the ball and created some opportunities," he told Sky Sports. "There was only one team trying to win the game."

"We want to win every game of course and that is why it is frustrating. Sometimes we shot too easy and could have passed on the overlap. The right decision was sometimes lacking."

Scott McTominay, who skippered United, said his team were disappointed they did not cre-

ate more opportunities. "We had to stay calm and stick together and we had moments in the game where we had chances and could have hurt them," he added.

Mikel Arteta's Arsenal, runners-up to Manchester City last season, dominated at the Emirates, wasting a succession of openings but they finally broke through in the 53rd minute.

Brighton defender Jan Paul van Hecke jumped to head a corner away but could only flick it into the path of Gabriel Jesus, who headed the ball into an empty net.

Kai Havertz doubled the lead for the Gunners in the closing min-

utes, slotting past goalkeeper Bart Verbruggen after being found by Eddie Nketiah. "Incredible performance," Arteta told the BBC.

"A joy to watch from the start to the end. The way we did it against this very good team. Even at half-time the scoreline didn't reflect that. We fully deserved to win the game."

Across London, Unai Emery's Villa fell behind to a Keane Lewis-Potter goal on the stroke of half-time. However, Brentford's Ben Mee was sent off in the 71st minute and six minutes later Villa were level when Alex Moreno got to the end of a Leon Bailey cross.



Arsenal's Kai Havertz (centre) is mobbed by teammates Leandro Trossard (left) and Declan Rice (second left) and Eddie Nketiah after scoring the team's second goal against Brighton and Hove Albion at the Emirates Stadium in London yesterday. (AFP)

Ollie Watkins completed the turnaround against his former club when he headed in a Boubacar Kamara flick-on from a corner with five minutes to go to make it 2-1.

Kamara was sent off in the closing minutes for violent conduct.

Mohamed Kudus scored twice and Lucas Paqueta provided all three assists at the London Stadium as West Ham beat Wolves 3-0.

On Saturday, Manchester City let slip a 2-0 lead to draw 2-2 with Roy Hodgson's Crystal Palace, be-

fore jetting off to Saudi Arabia to play in the Club World Cup. The weekend's Premier League action was overshadowed by a shocking incident at Bournemouth, where Luton captain Tom Lockyer suffered a cardiac arrest, forcing Saturday's game to be abandoned.

Luton confirmed Lockyer was responsive before being taken to hospital and was in a "stable" condition. In an update on Sunday the club said he was undergoing tests and scans.

EXPO STARS LEAGUE

Wakrah beat Duhail to go 2nd, Arabi stun Sadd

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Wakrah dashed reigning champions Al Duhail's hopes as they battled back twice from being a goal down to score a 3-2 win in their rescheduled match of the Expo Stars League 2023-2024 season at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium yesterday.

In the late evening clash, Al Arabi beat Al Sadd 1-0 in their rescheduled match at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium.

Al Arabi rode on a goal-mouth melee goal from Rafinha, scored in the 31st minute, to beat the table toppers Al Sadd as The Wolves failed to find an equaliser.

Earlier, it was a superb fightback from The Blue Wave who suffered an early setback but they challenged the formidable Red Knights to eventually prevail in the end.

While Youssef Aymen (7th minute) and Philippe Coutinho (45+15th minute-penalty) scored for Al Duhail, Jacinto Dala (27th minute), Omar Ali (74th minute) and Hamdi Fathi (77th minute) got the goals for Al Wakrah.

The win saw Al Wakrah move into the second spot in the rankings with 24 points, ahead of Al Gharafa on goal difference. Al Duhail remain in fifth place with 17 points. Al Sadd lead the rankings with 28 points with Al Arabi being 6th with 16 points.

The crucial contest began with Al



Al Wakrah's Omar Ali celebrates after scoring a goal during the Expo Stars League match against Al Duhail at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium yesterday.

Duhail grabbing early lead on a freak chance following a free kick from Coutinho. With Mohamed Benyetou of Al Wakrah making a defensive header the ball flew towards the goal but goalkeeper Saoud Mubarak did well to get his hands high to make a block, the ball however fell out and a lurking Aymen kicked it in with a high left foot.

Put on the backfoot, Al Wakrah

looked to make inroads into the rival defence. They succeeded in making some openings and intensified their attacks midway through the opening half.

In the 25th minute, Lucas Mendes made a header but it was saved after Al Duhail goalkeeper Salah Zakaria grappled with his hands. Soon a Trent Sainsbury's shot from close missed to the left



Al Arabi's Rafinha (right) celebrates after scoring against Al Sadd yesterday. PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil

after a set piece situation. The misses were soon made up for as Dala, waiting at the top of the box got a good pass and rushed in to make a telling kick with Zakaria (well out of his blocks) again struggling to hold on to the ball which lobbed over and into the net (1-1).

The closing stages of the first half saw Al Duhail win a penalty as Sainsbury drew a foul against Khaled Mohamed in front of the goal. A VAR check resulted in the spot kick being given and Coutinho made no mistake as Al Duhail

went into the break at 2-1. In the second session (69th minute), Al Duhail got a good chance to double the lead but South Korean Kim Moon-hwan being in the clear dashed in to score but failed to beat a diving goalkeeper with the ball going just wide to the left after touching his legs. Moon-hwan also had a waiting Almoez Ali on the left but chose to go solo.

Five minutes later, Al Wakrah snatched an initiative to level the scores at 2-2 as Omar Ali made the most of a defensive header from

Ruben Semedo. Ali took the lob on the volley from just inside the box to score with a left-footer. With Al Duhail still coming to terms, Al Wakrah bagged their third and winning goal within minutes as Dala moving from the right provided an unmarked Fathi with a fine ball to slam in from just outside the box and into the left corner of the goal (3-2).

Al Duhail tried to make amends in the remaining time but Al Wakrah held on to savour a delightful victory.

FIRST TEST

Australia hammer Pakistan by 360 runs for win in Perth

‘I DON’T THINK IT’S ANY SECRET THAT HE’S THE MOST IMPORTANT COG IN OUR BOWLING LINEUP’

Reuters
Perth

Spinner Nathan Lyon joined the illustrious 500-wicket club yesterday, picking up 2-14 on a seam-friendly Perth Stadium surface to help Australia bowl Pakistan out for a paltry 89 and cruise to a 360-run victory on day four of the first Test.

Defending 450, Australia’s much-vaunted pace attack ripped through Pakistan’s batting lineup in the afternoon, allowing Lyon to trap tail-ender Faheem Ashraf lbw and celebrate his milestone before the tourists folded inside 31 overs.

“I don’t think it’s hit me yet, but there’s obviously been a lot of hard work go into the journey... It’s pretty special to take 500 in my first Test back,” Lyon told reporters.

The world Test champions, now 1-0 up in the three-Test series, had declared after lunch on 233-5 in 63.2 overs, having posted 487 earlier and bowling the visitors out for 271 in the first innings.

Pakistan’s fourth innings run-chase started in shambolic fashion as they were reduced to 48-4 inside 15 overs before tea, and it did not get any better.

Josh Hazlewood (3-13) and Mitchell Starc (3-31) inflicted the most damage, but all eyes were on Lyon as he sought to join Shane Warne (708) and Glenn McGrath (563) among Australians with 500 wickets, and become the eighth player overall to reach the figure.

The 36-year-old lost a caught-behind review in the 26th over, but got his man in the 28th, going upstairs again to send Ashraf on his way for five, with Hawk-Eye showing contact with the stumps.

The off-spinner, returning from a torn calf which left him sidelined for most of this year’s drawn Ashes series in England, held the ball aloft and accepted the embrace of his team mates, and then clean-bowled Aamer Jamal (4) later in the over for good measure.

“I don’t think it’s any secret that he’s the most important cog in our bowling lineup,” Australia skipper Pat Cummins said.

“It’s great having him back, another 500 to go”



Australia’s Mitchell Starc (centre) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Pakistan’s Sarfaraz Ahmed on day four of the first Test in Perth yesterday. **Right:** Australia’s Mitchell Marsh celebrates his 50 runs against Pakistan yesterday. (AFP)



Lyon’s bowling figures were initially given as 2-18 but were later adjusted to 2-14, with the other four runs counted as byes.

Consecutive strikes by Hazlewood to dismiss Saud Shakeel (24) and Khurram Shahzad (0) brought the match to a frenetic end.

Earlier, Pakistan’s debutant seamers Shahzad (3-45) and Jamal (1-28), outshining the more experienced Shaheen Afridi and Ashraf, accounted for the three Australian wickets to fall on the fourth day.

Usman Khawaja (90) and Mitchell Marsh (63 not out) accumulated throughout the morning session, absorbing some body blows on an uneven pitch and accelerated after lunch in pursuit of a declaration.

Marsh, more comfortable as the aggressor, ended with seven fours and two sixes but the innings was called to a close by Cummins when Khawaja mistimed a cut to third man.

“We were not as disciplined as we wanted to be,” Pakistan captain Shan Masood said.

The second Test begins in Melbourne on Dec. 26 before concluding in Sydney, where Pakistan last won a Test Down Under in 1995, on Jan 3.

SCOREBOARD

Australia 1st innings	487 all out
Pakistan 1st innings	271 all out
Australia 2nd innings (overnight 84-2)	
D. Warner c Haq b Shahzad	0
U. Khawaja c Azam b Afridi	90
M. Labuschagne c Ahmed b Shahzad	2
S. Smith lbw Shahzad	45

T. Head c Haq b Jamal 14
M. Marsh not out 63
Extras (lb11, nb7, w1) 19
Total (5 wkts-decl; 63.2 overs) 233

Fall of wickets: 1-0 (Warner), 2-5 (Labuschagne), 3-87 (Smith), 4-107 (Head), 5-233 (Khawaja)

Did not bat: Alex Carey, Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Nathan Lyon, Josh Hazlewood

Bowling: Shaheen Shah Afridi 18.2-4-76-1, Khurram Shahzad 16-4-45-3, Aamer Jamal 9-0-28-1, Faheem Ashraf 7-0-37-0, Agha Salman 13-1-36-0

Pakistan 2nd innings
Imam-ul-Haq lbw Starc 10
A. Shafique c Carey b Starc 2
S. Masood c Carey b Hazlewood 2
B. Azam c Carey b Cummins 14
S. Shakeel lbw Hazlewood 24

S. Ahmed c Marsh b Starc 4
A. Salman run out 5
F. Ashraf lbw Lyon 5
A. Jamal b Lyon 0
S. Shah Afridi not out 3
K. Shahzad c Warner b Hazlewood 0
Extras (b10, lb10) 20
Total (all out; 30.2 overs) 89

Fall of wickets: 1-2 (Shafique), 2-17 (Masood), 3-19 (Imam-ul-Haq), 4-48 (Azam), 5-56 (Ahmed), 6-63 (Salman), 7-79 (Ashraf), 8-83 (Jamel), 9-89 (Shakeel), 10-89 (Shahzad)

Bowling: Mitchell Starc 9-2-31-3, Josh Hazlewood 7.2-2-13-3, Pat Cummins 6-1-11-1, Nathan Lyon 8-2-14-2

Toss: Australia
Umpires: Richard Illingworth (ENG), Joel Wilson (WIS)
TV umpire: Michael Gough (ENG)

SPOTLIGHT

Arshdeep, Avesh on fire as India crush Proteas

AFP
Johannesburg

Pace bowlers Arshdeep Singh and Avesh Khan set up a convincing eight-wicket win for India in the first one-day international against South Africa at the Wanderers Stadium yesterday.

Left-arm Arshdeep took five for 37 and Avesh claimed four for 27 as South Africa crashed to 116 all out.

New cap Sai Sudharsan and Shreyas Iyer hit half-centuries as India needed just 16.4 overs to reach the target.

Indian captain K.L. Rahul said he had expected India’s spinners to play a prominent role on the same pitch on which spin had prevailed in a Twenty20 international on Thursday.

“It was completely different to what we expected,” Rahul said at the post-match presentation.

“There was a lot of help in the wicket and the boys bowled really well.”

Kuldeep Yadav was the only spinner used, taking the last wicket at a cost of three runs in 2.3 overs.

South African captain Aiden Markram said there had been more help for the seam bowlers than he anticipated when he won the toss and decided to bat.

“Credit to the Indian bowlers,” he said. “There was a bit of lateral movement and we weren’t able to settle and build partnerships.”

India’s dominant performance was testimony to their strength in depth in a match in which both teams were without key players – including their front-line fast bowling attacks – ahead of a Test series starting on December 26.

Arshdeep, who had not taken a wicket in three previous ODIs, and Avesh, with three wickets in five appearances, stepped up to the challenge in emphatic fashion.

By contrast, South Africa’s bowling looked threadbare as they tried to defend the second-lowest total made in ODIs at the Wanderers.

Arshdeep struck twice off successive balls in the second over, dismissing Reeza Hendricks and Rassie van der Dussen for nought.

With the pitch offering help to the seam bowlers, Arshdeep took the first four wickets in a seven-over opening spell and Avesh followed up by taking the next four, also in a seven-over spell.

The left-handed Sudharsan hit his first ball in international cricket for four, striking fellow one-day debutant Nandre Burger through the



India’s Arshdeep Singh appeals successfully for the dismissal of South Africa’s Rassie van der Dussen (unseen) during the 1st ODI at The Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg yesterday. (AFP)



India’s Avesh Khan celebrates after dismissing South Africa’s Wiaan Mulder in Johannesburg yesterday. (AFP)

his bat hit his boot and not the ball. Sudharsan went on to make an elegant unbeaten 55 off 43 balls with nine fours.

India included only three players from the side that played in the World Cup final against Australia last month, while South Africa fielded six from the side that lost to the Australians in the semi-final.

“With the amount of international cricket being played you have to rest some players,” said Rahul.

“Chopping and changing is a must in the modern game.”

“We believe in whoever’s here to win the game and do their best for the team.”

The second encounter in the three-match series takes place in Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth) tomorrow with the third in Paarl two days later. The first Test begins at Centurion on December 26.

BRIEF SCORES

India 118 for 2 (Sai Sudharsan 55*, Shreyas Iyer 52) **beat South Africa 116** (Arshdeep Singh 5-37, Avesh Khan 4-27) **by 8 wickets**

‘Proud’ Lyon joins elite club with 500th Test wicket

Perth, Australia: Australian off-spinner Nathan Lyon claimed his 500th Test wicket yesterday to join an exclusive club of just seven others to achieve the feat, with skipper Pat Cummins believing he has another 200 in him. The 36-year-old veteran, whose longevity is partly due to having not played international white-ball cricket since 2019, reached the milestone in his 123rd match. He began the first Test against Pakistan in Perth on 496 and was left stranded on 499 after their first innings.

But he finally reached 500 on day four by dismissing Faheem Ashraf lbw on review, with his teammates mobbing him in celebration. Lyon then bowled Aamer Jamal in the same over for his 501st.

“It’s something I’m very proud about, I don’t think it’s hit me yet,” said Lyon.

“I still pinch myself when I see my name next to those guys,” he said of the exalted company he has joined, including fellow spin kings Muttiah Muralitharan and Shane Warne.

Affectionately known as “Garry” after former Australian rules football player Garry Lyon, he made his debut in 2011 and has best figures of 8-50, collecting 23 five-wicket hauls and 10 wickets four times so far. He told reporters before the Perth match that he wanted to continue playing at international level until Australia’s next Ashes sojourn to England in 2027. Lyon would not say how many more wickets he could get, but Cummins suggested he had

another 200 in him. “I still think he’s got 40-50 Test matches,” he said. “That’s four or five years at 10 a year, probably average what four (wickets) a game, that’s another couple of hundred (wickets) and that’s 700.”

That would move him close to fellow Australian Warne, who has 708 and is second on the all-time list behind Sri Lanka great Muralitharan on 800.

A classical spinner who flights the ball, the right-arm could feasibly catch West Indian great Courtney Walsh (519) during the current three-Test series.

If not, the milestone should be in sight during Australia’s two-Test home showdown with the West Indies that follows later in January.

After that, fellow Australian Glenn McGrath on 563 would be his next target.

English pair Jimmy Anderson (690) and Stuart Broad (604), along with India’s Anil Kumble (619) fill out the 500 club.

“I don’t think it’s any secret that he is probably the most important cog in our bowling line-up,” added Cummins.

“Most games he’s probably bowling 30 overs a day and basically you can just put him down one end, he’s not going to go for many runs, take some wickets, then us quick bowlers can just rotate through the other end.”

“As a captain, it makes it lots easier knowing you have a bloke who’s played 100-odd Test matches, who knows his craft and can bowl in pretty much any conditions.”



Australia’s Nathan Lyon poses with fans after his victory on day four of the first Test against Pakistan in Perth yesterday. (AFP)

SHEIKHA HIND CROWNS WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL CHAMPIONS



Vice-Chairperson and CEO of Qatar Foundation HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani and Ali Ghanem al-Kuwari, President of QVA and WAVA, crowned on Saturday the winning teams of the first edition of the Women's Open Volleyball Championship for the sports season 2023-2024. The championship was organised by the Qatar Volleyball Association (QVA) with the participation of 10 teams. HE Sheikha Hind awarded the "F45" team the championship cup and the gold medals. The second-place team, Waed Academy, received silver medals, while the third-place team, Al Arabi SC, received bronze medals.

Volleyball Competitions



CRICKET

Salt hits century as England edge past West Indies

Series still alive for visitors who are 2-1 down with two games to go

Reuters
St George, Grenada

England kept their five-match Twenty20 series in the West Indies alive after winning the third game by seven wickets with a ball to spare thanks to Phil Salt's unbeaten 109 in a mammoth run chase in St George's, Grenada, on Saturday.

Put in to bat by England skipper Jos Buttler, the home side posted 222-6 on the back of Nicholas Pooran's 82 off 45 deliveries.

Chasing a record T20I score at the National Cricket Stadium, Salt went all guns blazing with nine sixes and four boundaries, building a 115-run opening stand with Buttler (51) before Harry Brook (31 off seven) finished things off in style with a six.

West Indies are now 2-1 up in the series with two matches left to play.

"Great to keep the series alive, a fantastic win. Any time you chase 220 is a fantastic innings - credit to Phil Salt," Buttler said.

"Phil Salt has such great intent from ball one. It's something we've asked him to do, but for him to go on and stay in the game a bit longer, it can surprise you how much he can do in the end."

The opening pair had looked well set to guide England home before Buttler was caught in the deep soon after he had brought up his half-century, thanks to some brilliant team work for a relay catch.

Akeal Hosein caught Buttler's top edge off Andre Russell near the rope and just as his momentum threatened to take him over, he tossed the ball to Alzarri Joseph who completed the catch. Will Jacks returned to the pavilion without troubling the scorers while Gudakesh Motie once again put the brakes on England's scoring rate with 1-30 in four overs, leaving the tourists to chase 83 in the final five overs.

But Liam Livingstone provided some impetus with fireworks of his own while Salt brought up his century in 51 balls - becoming only the fifth Englishman to score a T20 in-



Phil Salt (left) and Harry Brook of England celebrate winning the 3rd T20I against West Indies at Grenada National Cricket Stadium, Saint George's, Grenada, on Saturday. (AFP)

ternational ton - to give England hope. When Livingstone (30 off 18) departed, Harry Brook came in and smashed four sixes, which included three in the final over from Andre Russell when they needed 21 to win.

Earlier in the first innings, England had the ideal start when Brandon King, the Caribbean side's hero from the last game, fell for just eight runs while his opening partner Kyle Mayers was dismissed for a duck.

But Pooran was in the mood for a big score and the wicketkeeper-batter cleared the ropes

six times to go with his six boundaries, ably supported by skipper Rovman Powell (39) who hit three sixes.

BRIEF SCORES

England 226 for 3 (Phil Salt 109*, Jos Buttler 51) **beat West Indies 222 for 6** (Nicolas Pooran 82, Adil Rashid 2-32) **by seven wickets**

Next matches:

4th T20I (D/N), Tarouba, December 19, 2023
5th T20I (D/N), Tarouba, December 21, 2023

SPOTLIGHT

Young posts century as New Zealand see off Bangladesh in first ODI

AFP
Dunedin

Opener **Will Young** cracked a rapid century as New Zealand recovered from a dreadful start to beat Bangladesh by 44 runs yesterday in the rain-affected first one-day international.

The match was shortened to 30 overs each after three rain delays to New Zealand's innings in Dunedin.

The home side burst into life in the final stages to post an imposing 239-7. Needing an adjusted target of 245 to win the first ODI of the three-match series, Bangladesh were restricted to 200-9 in a chase that lost momentum.

New Zealand bounced back after losing two wickets in the game's opening over when seamer Shoriful Islam had Rachin Ravindra and Henry Nicholls both caught without scoring.

A brilliant 171-run stand for the third wicket between Young, who hit 105 off 84 balls, and captain Tom Latham, who finished with 92 runs, handed the advantage back to the hosts in a match played in overcast conditions throughout.

Their stand straddled two stoppages, which reduced the innings from 46 overs to 40 and then to 30.

The pair hit out in brutal fashion over the last 10.4 overs, when the hosts chalked up a remarkable 131 runs. Latham fell short of his eighth ODI century, bowled by off-spinner Mehidy Hasan Miraz, but Young forged on to reach three figures for the third time in the 50-over format before being run out in the final over. Young said his first priority was to steady the innings after its disastrous start.

"Tommy and I set up a nice partnership although it was on and off with the rain," Young said. "We came back on with 10 overs to go and we thought why not have a crack? And it came off today. It was nice to get a few out of the middle at the end and it's the icing on the cake to finish with a win."

Shoriful was comfortably Bangladesh's best bowler, taking 2-28



off six overs. The chase began brightly, with opener Anamul Haque reaching 43, supported by Towhid Hridoy (33) and Liton Das (22), who all scored at better than a run a ball.

However, the pursuit tailed off when Afif Hossain fell for a hard-hit 38 in the 24th over, with his team still needing 80 runs.

Visiting captain Najmul Hossain Shanto said the result was "very disappointing" after Islam's early fireworks.

"If we'd taken a third wicket, it could have been a different ball game," said Shanto, before singling out the expensive spin bowling of Mehidy and Afif as a weak point.

"I think our fast bowlers bowled really well but our spinners need to learn quickly before the next match."

New Zealand's best bowling figures of 2-24 were recorded by all-rounder Josh Clarkson, who made his debut along with seamer William O'Rourke.

The remaining games are in Nelson and Napier next week as Bangladesh seek their first ODI win over the Black Caps on New Zealand soil after 17 defeats.

BRIEF SCORES

30 overs New Zealand 239 for 7 (Will Young 105, Tom Latham 92, Shoriful Islam 2-28) **beat Bangladesh 200 for 9** (Anamul Haque 43, Josh Clarkson 2-24, Ish Sodhi 2-35, Adam Milne 2-46) **by 44 runs (DLS method)**

Next matches:

2nd ODI, Nelson, Dec 20, 2023
3rd ODI, Napier, Dec 23, 2023

BADMINTON

Axelsen and Tai triumph in World Tour Finals

AFP
Beijing

Olympic badminton champion Viktor Axelsen and former world number one Tai Tzu-ying of Taiwan triumphed yesterday in their BWF World Tour Finals deciders in Hangzhou.

The 29-year-old Dane dominated China's Shi Yuqi in straight sets 21-11, 21-12 in a one-sided men's final of the year-ending Badminton World Federation (BWF) event in China's east.

"I'm extremely proud and extremely tired," said world number one Axelsen, who speaks fluent Chinese.

"My year has been extraordinary. It has also been marked by big disappointments," he said, pointing to defeats in the All England Open and the World Championships on home soil.

"But a great sportsman gets up and recovers from disappointing experiences. And that's what I



Denmark's Viktor Axelsen poses with the trophy after his win against China's Shi Yuqi after the singles final during the BWF Badminton World Tour Finals award ceremony in Hangzhou, in China's eastern Zhejiang province yesterday. (AFP)

managed to do. I've won some big titles, so I can't be disappointed with this year," he said.

In the women's final, world number four Tai fought back to get the better of Spain's Carolina

Marin 12-21, 21-14, 21-18. Marin is a former Olympic champion and the only European in the women's world top 10.

She made the final after a gripping, three-set defeat of China's

Chen Yufei, another Olympic champion, in Saturday's semi-finals.

"I wasn't able to train well before coming, so my preparation and performance here were not optimal," Tai said.

"But when I saw the excellent form of Carolina Marin and Chen Yufei...I told myself I had to grit my teeth and do my best to be able to compete," she said.

In the men's doubles, South Korean world champions Kang Min-hyuk and Seo Seung-jae overcame the Chinese pair of Liang Weikeng-Wang Chang 21-17, 22-20 to win the men's doubles.

Chen Qingchen and Jia Yifan gave the home crowd something to cheer about by beating South Korea's Baek Ha-na and Lee So-hee 21-16, 21-16 to win the women's doubles.

The mixed doubles title went to Zheng Siwei and Huang Yaqiong with a 21-11, 21-18 defeat of Feng Yanzhe and Huang Dongping in an all-Chinese final.

Balbirnie stars as Ireland win Zimbabwe ODI series

Harare: Andy Balbirnie struck an unbeaten 82 as Ireland beat Zimbabwe by seven wickets in Harare yesterday to seal a 2-0 one-day international series victory.

Needing 201 runs to win a match reduced to 40 overs a side because of rain, the tourists lost captain Paul Stirling with just 12 on the scoreboard.

But Balbirnie shook off recent indifferent form to create partnerships of 70 with Curtis Campher (40) and 63 with Harry Tector (33) to take the match away from the hosts. Balbirnie patiently built his innings, compiling a total including a six and four fours off 102 balls.

"I think if you bide your time, you will get some luck. Sometimes it goes your way, sometimes it does not," said the right-hand batter. The match-winning runs, a four from wicketkeeper Lorcan Tucker, came with 13 balls to spare as Ireland reached 204-3 at Harare Sports Club. Zimbabwe made 197, thanks

mainly to Joylord Gumbie (72) and back-in-form Sikandar Raza (37), while Graham Hume and Campher took four wickets each for the Irish. Ireland missed Josh Little, the six-wicket star of their win on Friday, as he picked up a nagging injury. The tour marked an impressive start to the captaincy of Stirling as Ireland also won the preceding three-match Twenty20 series. The first ODI was abandoned due to rain. "I think we saved our best performance for the last match. I am so happy for the lads. We have worked hard recently and it was good to be rewarded," said the skipper.

BRIEF SCORES

Zimbabwe 197 in 40 overs (J. Gumbie 72, S. Raza 37, W. Masakadza 24; G. Hume 4-34, C. Campher 4-37) **v Ireland 204-3 in 37.5 overs** (A. Balbirnie 82 not out, Campher 40, H. Tector 33, L. Tucker 29 not out)

Result: Ireland won by seven wickets on DLS method

SERIE A

Bologna into top four as Reijnders delivers for Milan

'It's an honour to play here of course, to score here at San Siro is very nice'

AFP

Milan

Bologna moved into Serie A's Champions League positions yesterday after seeing off top-four rivals Roma 2-0, while Tijani Reijnders inspired AC Milan to a 3-0 cruise over Monza.

Thiago Motta's side have been the revelation of the season so far and will finish the weekend fourth after another impressive display against depleted Roma.

Nikola Moro's 37th-minute strike and a Rasmus Kristensen own goal shortly after the break were enough for Bologna to claim their third win in four games and jump a point above champions Napoli and Fiorentina, who beat Verona 1-0 earlier in the day.

Motta has done a sensational job at Bologna after replacing Sinisa Mihajlovic in September last year, just over three months before his Serbian predecessor died following a long battle with leukaemia.

Bologna was Mihajlovic's last job in football and on Sunday home fans paid tribute with a big banner honouring the indelible memory he left over the three-and-a-half years he coached the club. His picture was also shown on the stadium's screens in the presence of his wife Arianna and their children.

For Motta it was a big win against his former coach at Inter Milan Jose Mourinho, with whom he won the Serie A, Italian Cup and Champions League treble in 2010. Mourinho, whose team missed key attackers Paulo Dybala and Romelu Lukaku, drop down to seventh, three points from Bologna.

Bologna are four points behind third-placed Milan who strolled to victory at the San Siro and moved six points behind Inter Milan ahead of the league leaders' clash at Lazio.

Milan's win came in large part thanks to a stellar display from Reijnders who set his team on the way to victory with a brilliant third-minute strike.

The Netherlands midfielder collected Christian Pulisic's pass just outside the area and then set off on a mazy dribble past five Monza defenders before poking his first home goal for Milan past Michele Di Gregorio.

Building on their midweek win at Newcastle United which ensured a spot in the Europa League knockout, third-placed Milan moved up to 32 points.

"It's an honour to play here of course, to score here at the San Siro is very nice," said Reijnders, who believes Milan can still fight for the league title.

"Of course, you always have to believe, we are



AC Milan's Tijani Reijnders scores a goal during the Serie A match against Monza in Milan yesterday. (AFP)

not finished yet. We are now halfway through the season and we have to keep going. Today was a good start."

Also on target for Stefano Pioli's team were teenage debutant Jan-Carlo Simic, who netted his first Milan goal shortly before the break, and Noah Okafor whose 76th-minute strike came following more fine play from Reijnders.

Born in Germany, centre-back Simic represents Serbia at youth international level.

The 18-year-old was brought on midway through the first half for Tommaso Pobega, the

latest in a long line of Milan players to suffer a muscular injury this season.

He doubled the hosts' lead three minutes before half-time, ramming home Rafael Leao's low cross before charging off to celebrate.

And the San Siro faithful then began chanting Simic's name as his parents wept with joy in the stands.

"It's a dream for any kid to make your debut for a club like AC Milan and scoring on your debut is incredible," said Simic to Sky.

"But I've worked very hard for moments like this."

BUNDESLIGA

Leverkusen cruise past Frankfurt 3-0 to open up 7-point lead

AFP

Munich

A goal and two assists from Nigeria striker Victor Boniface helped Bayer Leverkusen to a 3-0 home win over Eintracht Frankfurt, sending the league leaders seven points clear.

Bayern Munich and Stuttgart, who are seven and eight points behind respectively, can narrow the gap to Leverkusen when they clash in the Bavarian capital later yesterday.

Xabi Alonso's unbeaten Leverkusen, who have won 21 and drawn three of 24 matches in all competitions this season, overran the visitors thanks to a brilliant Boniface performance.

The Nigerian squeezed a low shot under Kevin Trapp to open the scoring 14 minutes in. Boniface created Leverkusen's next goal for Jeremie Frimpong early in the second half, his shot rebounding off Trapp and landing perfectly for the Dutch international to slam home.

The 22-year-old, who is almost certain to be selected for Nigeria's Africa Cup of Nations bid in January, then helped seal the result, finding Florian Wirtz in space for Leverkusen's third.

Wirtz, who was again superb while pulling the strings in midfield, hit the crossbar with 10 remaining.

Frankfurt have won just one of their past eight matches in all competitions - last Saturday's surprising 5-1 home thrashing of Bayern. Bayern, who have played two games fewer than Leverkusen, will host Stuttgart without midfielders Joshua

Kimmich and Leon Goretzka, along with back-up goalkeeper Sven Ulreich, all ruled out with the flu.

With Noussair Mazraoui and Kingsley Coman joining Serge Gnabry on the injury list this week, Bayern have just five out-field players on the bench.

Earlier on Sunday, Freiburg's Michael Gregoritsch and Roland Sallai came off the bench to secure a 2-0 home win over 10-man Cologne.

Dogged but outclassed, Cologne fought hard but were reduced to 10 men with just over half an hour remaining when Jeff Chabot swept Lucas Hoeler's legs out from under him, picking up a second yellow.

Hoeler was replaced by Gregoritsch and the 1.93-metre tall Austrian had Freiburg ahead shortly after. Gregoritsch was first to a loose ball in the Cologne box, slamming home to set his side on course for their seventh win of the season.

Gregoritsch has now scored in his past league three games, having broken a goal drought which dated back to April.

"I just keep scoring," a thrilled Gregoritsch told DAZN.

"I've been in the right place at the right time... of course my self-confidence is coming back a little."

Sallai, who was also brought on with Gregoritsch, scored in the fifth minute of added time to seal the result.

Freiburg, who secured passage to the Europa League knockout round playoffs despite a midweek loss to West Ham, moved up to sixth in the table, leapfrogging Eintracht Frankfurt and Hoffenheim.



Bayer Leverkusen's Nigerian forward Victor Boniface celebrates scoring a goal against Eintracht Frankfurt in Leverkusen, western Germany, yesterday. (AFP)

LA LIGA

Sociedad and Betis share intense draw

Agencies

Barcelona

Real Sociedad and Real Betis shared the spoils in an intense 0-0 draw yesterday in La Liga.

Both teams lost ground on Athletic Bilbao, fifth, who beat Atletico Madrid on Saturday.

La Real, sixth, trail their Basque rivals by two points, while Betis, seventh, are five points behind Athletic. It was an even battle in San Sebastian with both sides coming close.

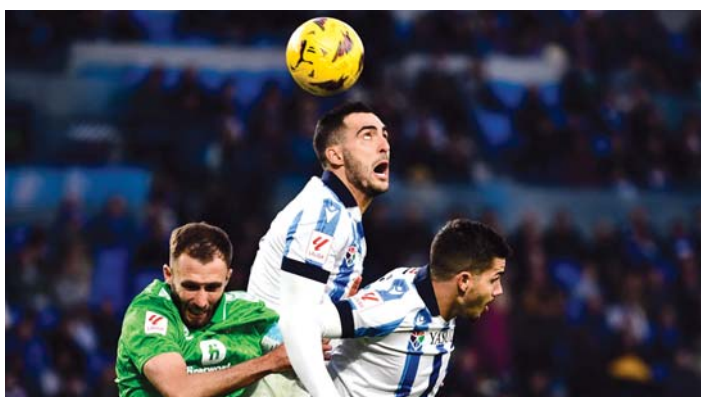
Willian Jose came close in the first half for Betis, while Rui Silva tipped a Martin Zubimendi effort against the post. Ayoze Perez hit the post for Betis at the other end after controlling a fine ball by Isco.

La Real had a goal disallowed before half-time for offside against Mikel Oyarzabal and the forward hit the post with a free-kick after the break. Earlier winless bottom-of-the-table Almeria drew 0-0 with Real Mallorca.

Valencia fight back to hold Barcelona

On Saturday Valencia fought back to snatch a 1-1 draw at home against Barcelona - a result that will do nothing to ease the pressure on Xavi Hernandez's side, winless in their last three games in all competitions.

Barcelona looked nervy and erratic despite dominating the ball, having travelled to Valencia in the wake of two defeats in four



Real Betis' German Pezzela (left), Real Sociedad's Mikel Merino and Andre Silva (right) vie for a header during the La Liga match at Anoeta Stadium in San Sebastian yesterday. (AFP)

days - a 4-2 home loss to La Liga leaders and local rivals Girona on Sunday followed by Wednesday's 3-2 Champions League defeat at Group H bottom side Antwerp.

But Barca hit an all but impenetrable wall in Valencia goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili, who made a string of outstanding saves to keep the visitors at bay.

Striker Robert Lewandowski was often frustrated up front, sometimes by Mamardashvili, who made two brilliant reflex saves point-blank to deny the Polish striker, but also by his own play, misfiring three times from close range in the first half.

Valencia held out as well as they could with Barcelona on top after the break, with the Georgian goalkeeper making another incredible save one-on-one against substitute Ferran Torres. Joao Felix final-

ly broke the deadlock in the 55th minute with a close-range strike, tapping in from a Raphinha cross.

However, Valencia made the most of the chance that came their way and equalised 15 minutes later with a brilliant curling shot from the edge of the box by Hugo Guillamon into the top left corner.

Barca tried to make a late press for a winner but Mamardashvili made two more saves as the locals held on for a valuable point.

"In football, when you waste so many opportunities, these things happen. We deserved to win. We played very well and did what we needed to do to win the game."

Frustrated Xavi told Movistar Plus. "We have to be much more convincing in the opponent's area. I think we gave away two points. We took a point that leaves us very unsatisfied."

FOCUS

Club World Cup set for June-July 2025, new Intercontinental Cup in 2024

Reuters

Paris

FIFA's revamped Club World Cup planned for 2025 and set to feature 32 teams will be played from June 15 to July 13, while a new Intercontinental Cup will be played annually from next year, Gianni Infantino, the head of world soccer's governing body, said yesterday.

The announcement drew criticism from the global players' union FIFPro who said the decision to add a bigger Club World Cup at the end of the European season demonstrated "a lack of consideration" for players' physical and mental health.

FIFA had announced an expanded Club World Cup earlier this year and unanimously voted to appoint the United States as hosts for the first edition of the event.

The Council met in Jeddah in Saudi Arabia to ratify the dates for the Club World Cup and also confirmed that next year's Intercontinental Cup would have the UEFA Champions League winner playing a team that came through intercontinental playoffs.

The Intercontinental Cup playoffs will be played on December 14, 2024, followed by the final on December 18.

"The tournament will feature all current confederation premier club competition champions," FIFA President Infantino said.

"(It) concludes with a final at a neutral venue between the UEFA Champions League winners and the winners of an intercontinental playoff between clubs from the other confederations."

"EXTREME MENTAL AND PHYSICAL PRESSURES"

The 2025 edition of the Club World Cup, which will be held every four years, will have eight groups of four with the top two teams from each group going through to the knockout stages - the same format as the World Cup. The current version of the FIFA Club World Cup - an annual competition with seven teams - will be discontinued after the tournament now being hosted by Saudi Arabia.

The existing format sees the European and South American champions enter the tournament in the semi-final phase while champions from the other confederations come through earlier rounds. The



dates of the Club World Cup, however, give European teams who qualify little time to rest between the 2024-25 and 2025-26 seasons.

The European season traditionally ends in May with the Champions League final taking place by the first week of June, while the new season kicks off in August.

FIFPro said in a statement: "The expanded competition will undercut the rest and recovery time of these players at the end of the 2024-25 season, and further disrupt national employment markets by changing the balance between national and international competitions.

"Players will have to perform at the end of an 11-month season with little prospect of getting enough rest before the following season starts.

"The extreme mental and physical pressures at the pinnacle of the game is the principal concern of players with multiple club and national team competitions, leading to exhaustion, physical injuries, mental health issues, diminished performance, and risks to career longevity," it added.