



All Roads Lead to Oval: Upbeat India aim to deliver succour punch in series finale

NEW DELHI, JULY 30: India and England players will push their tired bodies on the line with everything to play for in the fifth and final Test starting at The Oval on Thursday, promising a fitting end to what has been a fiercely fought and highly watchable series.

The series, playing in front of packed crowds, has also been a perfect advert for Test cricket with all four games stretching to the final session on day five.

Not to forget the skirmishes along the way that has spiced it up enough for all the Test loving fans.

Whether it's Shubman Gill's tirade against Zak Crawley deliberately wasting time at the Lord's or Ravindra Jadeja refusing to call off proceedings on the final day much to the chagrin of Ben Stokes, things couldn't have gotten hotter than what it already is in London, experiencing a heat wave for the better part.

And Gautam Gambhir, the man always ready for a scrap has only intensified it with an altercation with Oval curator Lee Fortis.

And in this backdrop with no Jasprit Bumrah to stand as the team's leafy banyan tree, it is boom or bust time for Gambhir's men.

Expect the series finale to go down to the wire as well with England under an inspirational leader in Ben Stokes, enjoying a 2-1 advantage over a young and free spirited India, who have surpassed all ex-



pectations under new skipper Shubman Gill.

In the first series as captain of a team undergoing major transition, Gill has led from the front and with 722 runs and is only 52 shy from Sunil Gavaskar's record of most runs by an Indian in a series.

He needs another 11 runs to surpass Gavaskar's record of most runs (732) by an Indian captain in a Test series (1978-79 vs West Indies).

The 25-year-old has come of age with four hundreds thus far including a double century and a match saving 103 in the previous Test at Old Trafford. After low returns in three innings, Gill played the most defining knock of his career in Manchester to enhance his reputation not just as a batter but also as captain.

Having played a massive role in earning a famous draw from an almost hopeless situation, Gill and his team go into the finale with momentum on their side but gaps to fill.

Like Gill, Stokes too has led by example and despite battling multiple niggles, the England leader would be pushing his injury prone body to the limit.

With their fast bowlers also jaded, England have added Jamie Overton to the squad. With 511 runs, K L Rahul has been a model of consistency at the top of the order but more will be expected from Yashasvi Jaiswal and number three Sai Sudharsan on what is generally a decent batting surface at The Oval.

In injured Rishabh Pant's absence, Washington Sundar and Ravindra Jadeja are expected to round up the top six following unbeaten hundreds that denied England a victory in the fourth Test.

The Indian management firmly believes in having a batting option till number eight and that could possibly lead to Kuldeep Yadav being once again left out of the playing eleven despite constant calls for his inclusion over the course of a long and gruelling series.

Dhruv Jurel will keep the wickets and could bat at seven in Pant's absence and Shardul Thakur might retain his place at eight despite not exactly enjoying the confidence of his skipper. Going by batting coach Sitanshu Kotak's comments ahead of the fifth Test, India will retain the template that has been fol-

lowed thus far. "See you have to see the balance of both batting and bowling to win the match. Because, like you're saying, you have to take 20 wickets. Similarly, it's equally important that you score 550-600 runs," said Kotak. "Overall, if you play with 6 bowlers, then some bowlers will under-bowl. So, if that 6th bowler is an all-rounder, then you know that he will contribute in batting and in bowling as well."

"If he is a pure bowler, and has under-bowled then after the match, when you look back, you will think that rather an extra bowler a batter would have made a difference," Kotak all but made clear head coach Gambhir's thought process.

On the bowling front, Akash Deep is expected to replace Jasprit Bumrah in the playing eleven with the latter advised to not risk his health.

Mohammed Siraj will be the leader of the attack and third pacer's spot will go to either Prasidh Krishna or Arshdeep Singh, who has patiently been waiting for his Test debut.

Surrey amassed more than 800 runs in the last County game played here but it remains to be seen how the pitch behaves for the high stakes clash.

Considering the short turnaround, England cancelled their opening training session on Tuesday with head coach Brendon McCullum only turning up in casual clothes to have a look at the pitch.

missing out are spinner Liam Dawson and pace bowlers Jofra Archer and Brydon Carse."

"England have included Jacob Bethell, who will bat at No.6. Surrey bowlers Gus Atkinson and Jamie Overton come into the side, along with Nottinghamshire quick Josh Tongue," the ECB said.

ENGLAND SAYING XI: Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Ollie Pope ©, Joe Root, Harry Brook, Jacob Bethell, Jamie Smith (wk), Chris Woakes, Gus Atkinson, Jamie Overton, Josh Tongue.

India Champions pull out of WCL semifinal clash against Pakistan Champions

NEW DELHI, JULY 30: Indian Champions have pulled out of their World Championship of Legends (WCL) semifinal clash against Pakistan Champions, owing to tense political relations between both nations, reported ESPNcricinfo on Wednesday.

This ends India's journey in the six-team tournament at fourth place, with a win, a no-result and three losses. The semifinal was originally scheduled for Thursday, but now, the Pakistan Champions will advance to the finals, facing off against either the Australia Champions or the South Africa Champi-



ons, who are playing the second semifinal.

Notably, the Indian Champions side, consisting of stars like Shikhar Dhawan, Yuvraj Singh, Suresh Raina, Harbhajan Singh, Robin Uthappa, Yusuf Pathan etc, had earlier also refused to play their group stage match

against Pakistan Champions on July 20.

While both teams had shared the points after India's refusal to play, Pakistan Champions will now progress to finals because of their top place finish, with four wins and nine points.

Sporting relations be-

tween both the nations have once again deteriorated due to a terror attack at Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir earlier in April this year, which was followed by an 'Operation Sindoor' by Indian Armed Forces in retaliation to the attack.

However, things, at least for now, look normal in international cricket, with both teams set to face each other in the Asia Cup in the UAE on September 14, while the Indian women's team will be playing their ICC Women's World Cup clash against the arch-rivals on October 6 in Colombo.

Ayush Shetty storms into Macau Open quarters; Dhruv-Tanisha also advance

NEW DELHI, JULY 30: Seventh seed Ayush Shetty eased into the quarterfinals of the Macau Open BWF Super 300 tournament with a straight-game win over Chinese Taipei's Huang Yu Kai, here on Wednesday.

World No. 31 Shetty made short work of the 66th-ranked Huang, winning 21-10, 21-11 in just 31 minutes.

In mixed doubles, fifth seeds Dhruv Kapila and



Tanisha Crasto, ranked 18th in the world, outclassed Thailand's Ratchapol Makkasa-

sithorn and Nattamon Laisuan 21-10, 21-15 in a brisk 26-minute encounter.

However, it was the end of the road for Sathish Kumar Karunakaran in men's singles, as he went down to Malaysia's Justin Hoh 19-21, 12-21 in 37 minutes in the pre-quarterfinals.

India also suffered a setback in mixed doubles, with the 34th-ranked pair of Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Shivani Gadde losing to Chinese Taipei's Wu Guan Xun and Lee Chia Hsin 20-22, 17-21 in another 37-minute clash.

Jadeja consolidates as world No 1 Test all-rounder, Abhishek is top ranked T20I batter

NEW DELHI, JULY 30: India all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja on Wednesday stretched his lead to consolidate as the world No 1 all-rounder in Test cricket, while Abhishek Sharma rose to the top spot in the T20 format for the first time.

In the latest ICC Men's Test Player Rankings, Jadeja stretched his lead by 117 rating points from the second-placed Mehidy Hasan Miraz of Bangladesh, getting to a total of 422 points.

On the other hand, Travis Head's year-long reign at the top ended after he missed the five-match series in the Caribbean which Australia won 5-0, following which India opener Sharma moved up to the No 1 spot in T20s.

The left-handed Sharma now has 829 rating points while Head is now second with 814 points.

"Jadeja has inflated his lead at the top of the rankings for all-rounders after grabbing four wickets and scoring a fighting 107 not



out," the ICC said in a statement on its website.

"He has added 13 rating points and is now on an aggregate of 422, 117 rating points clear of Bangladesh's Mehidy Hasan. He has also moved up five places to 29th among batters and up one place to 14th among bowlers," it added.

Washington Sundar also moved up eight places to get to 65th after his maiden Test century and a 203-run defiant stand with Jadeja for the fifth wicket, which ensured a remarkable draw in the fourth Test at Manchester.

"Sundar has also moved up eight positions to joint-13th among all-rounders, having also taken two wickets in the match," the ICC said.

While Joe Root also extended his lead by 37 points as the top ranked batter in Tests from the second placed Kane Williamson, England captain Ben Stokes moved up three places to get to the third spot among all-rounders which is also his highest ranking since December 2022.

Root struck a fine 150 in England's only innings at Manchester while Stokes recorded a five-for and also made a valuable 141.

England bowlers Jofra Archer and Chris Woakes also made gains in the latest rankings. "The Test

bowling rankings see fast bowler Jofra Archer continue his impressive return after four years, his haul of three for 73 lifting him 38 places to 63rd position," the ICC said.

"Chris Woakes is up one place to 23rd after finishing with three wickets in the match, which included a double-strike early in the Indian second innings," it added.

England's Ben Duckett moved up five places to get to 10th, Zak Crawley reached 43rd and Ollie Pope got to the 24th, the ICC informed.

The conclusion of the T20I series between Australia and the West Indies saw wicketkeeper-batter Josh Inglis breaking into top 10.

"Josh Inglis's 172 runs in the five-match series, including two half-centuries, has helped him up six places to ninth position, while Tim David (up 12 places to 18th) and Cameron Green (up 64 places to 24th) have attained career-bests," the ICC said.

No Stokes, Archer; Ollie Pope to lead England in fifth Test against India

NEW DELHI, JULY 30: Injured skipper Ben Stokes and lead pacer Jofra Archer will not be part of the fifth and final Test against India, starting here from Thursday, as England made three changes to their playing XI for the series-deciding game.

The hosts lead the series 2-1 after four intensely fought Test matches that has also had its fair share of controversies.

Ollie Pope will lead the side in Stokes' absence.

Stokes, who has led the team from the front and has claimed 17 wickets



while scoring some vital runs with bat, will miss out on the game at The Oval due to a shoulder injury, while Archer has been rested after having made his return to Test cricket following a long gap of four years.

Pacer Brydon Carse will also miss the final Test, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said in a press release on Wednesday. "Captain Ben Stokes is unavailable due to a right shoulder injury. Also

Legendary England cricketer Graham Thorpe to be honoured on Day 2 of Oval Test

NEW DELHI, JULY 30: As India and England face off at The Oval for the final Test of the series, the cricketing world will pause to remember Graham Thorpe — one of England's most gifted left-handed batsmen — at the ground he called home.

August 1, the opening day of the match, would have been Thorpe's 56th birthday. But it is on Day 2, August 2, that the formal tribute will take place: The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has announced a remembrance during the lunch break, honouring a player who combined calm elegance with grit and resilience.

Thorpe, who played 100 Tests for England and was known for his compact technique and steely temperament, died last August after being struck by

a train at Esher railway station in Surrey. An inquest last week heard painful testimony about his long battle with mental illness, including anxiety, depression, and a brain injury following a suicide attempt in 2022.

His widow, Amanda, told the Surrey coroner's court that he had spoken of "wanting to go to Switzerland" and had asked for help in ending his life. "He told me he didn't want to be here anymore," she said, describing his final weeks as marked by isolation, fear, and despair.

For Indian fans, Thorpe's name will forever be linked to England's historic win in Karachi in 2000, where he calmly guided the team to victory in near darkness — England's first Test series triumph in Pakistan in 39

years. He made his debut with a century against Australia in 1993 and played key roles under the captaincies of Michael Atherton, Nasser Hussain, and Michael Vaughan.

The inquest heard that Thorpe's mental health declined sharply after the 2021-22 Ashes tour of Australia, where England suffered a humiliating defeat. During that tour, he was involved in a late-night incident in Tasmania involving indoor smoking and drinking.

Amanda Thorpe told the court that the sacking devastated him. "If he hadn't been on that tour, he wouldn't have been dismissed — and that was ultimately what he couldn't deal with."

He was later offered a coaching contract by the Afghanistan national

team, but his condition had deteriorated too far. "He tried to do it," his wife recalled, "but I had to tell them he was too unwell."

Mental health in elite sport is an issue of growing concern — in India as much as in England. Former cricketers like Virat Kohli and Abhinav Mukund have spoken about mental fatigue, anxiety, and the pressure of performance. In 2020, Kohli revealed that during the 2014 England tour, he "felt like the loneliest guy in the world."

Experts in sports psychology say governing bodies must take proactive responsibility for the post-retirement well-being of players — especially those transitioning into coaching roles, often without institutional safety nets.

Leon Marchand smashes 200m individual medley world record

NEW DELHI, JULY 30: France's Leon Marchand smashed the 200m individual medley world record in Singapore on Wednesday, setting a new mark of 1:52.69 seconds.

Swimming in the semifinal at the world championships, the 23-year-old took more than a second off the previous record of 1:54.00 set by Ryan Lochte in 2011.

Marchand beat Michael Phelps's long-standing 400m medley record at the world championships in Japan two years ago.

"Actually I can't believe it right now," said Marchand, who won four indi-



vidual golds in front of his home fans at the Paris Olympics a year ago.

"I knew I was going to be close to my PB (personal best) because I felt really good today, and preparation has been pretty good. But 1:52 is unbelievable

for me."

Marchand took an extended break from swimming after his Paris Olympics heroics and only returned to competition in May.

He is focusing on the medley events in Singa-

pore and had said he was going for Lochte's record.

He got his world championship campaign under way on Wednesday morning, clocking a time of 1:57.63 in the heats.

He said he would go all-out for the record in the semifinal rather than conserve his energy for Thursday's final.

"It was good, I swam well, I think I pretty much did what I wanted to do," Marchand said after his morning heat.

"There are a few technical details that I'll go over with my coach, things I can improve on for tonight."