

Pakistan-South Africa final and last Test match today

Shadab, Faheem expected to return as Pakistan look to avoid clean sweep

JOHANNESBURG: Shadab Khan and Faheem Ashraf could both come into consideration as all-rounders as Pakistan seek to avoid a clean sweep when they play South Africa in the third and final Test starting at the Wanderers Stadium on today (Friday).

The back-to-back defeats in the first two Tests showed Pakistan's batting to be inadequate against South Africa's fast bowling, with Shan Masood standing out among the very few batsmen who displayed confidence on the bouncy wickets.

The bowlers, too, were disappointing at Newlands, so it seems likely there will be changes. Pakistan could do with spin all-rounder Shadab Khan and seam bowling all-rounder Faheem Ashraf, after their four specialist bowlers were worn down during South Africa's first innings of 431 at Newlands. Despite being without suspended captain Faf du Plessis, South Africa will be pushing for a clean sweep. Opening batsman Dean Elgar was an-

nounced as stand-in captain on Wednesday after Du Plessis was suspended for one match after South Africa fell short of the required over rate during their nine-wicket win in the second Test at Newlands. The loss of Du Plessis will inevitably disrupt South Africa's plans. He has led South Africa to 17 wins in his 27 Tests in charge and was named man of the match after scoring a century at Newlands. Speaking on Sunday before the ban was announced, Du Plessis said South Africa were determined to keep the pressure on Pakistan and win the series 3-0.

Shadab Khan could replace Yasir Shah in the third Test.

Du Plessis is likely to be replaced in the batting order by Zubayr Hamza, 23, who will become South Africa's 100th Test player since the country returned to international cricket in 1991. Hamza has been part of the squad throughout the series, primarily to gain experience in the national team set-up. He got a taste of Test cricket in front

of his home crowd at Newlands when he took a good catch at fine leg as a substitute fielder. Hamza has a career first-class batting average of 49.29. A second change in an already fragile batting line-up may be necessary, with opening batsman Aiden Markram facing a fitness test on Thursday after suffering a right thigh injury which prevented him from batting in the second innings at Newlands. Uncapped Pieter Malan, a teammate of Hamza at the Cape Cobras franchise, is on standby.

Du Plessis's ban may also cause South Africa to question the wisdom of fielding an all-seam bowling attack, which inevitably puts pressure on over rates. The Wanderers is the ground where South Africa have most often fielded four fast bowlers and left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj has only played in one of a possible three Tests at the ground since becoming a regular member of the squad. The pitch received a "poor" rating from the International Cricket Council after a Test against

India last season. A repeat would cause the ground to be barred from staging international matches for a year and it seems unlikely the surface will again be prepared to give an undue advantage to fast bowlers.

Teams: South Africa (from): Dean Elgar (capt), Aiden Markram or Pieter Malan, Hashim Amla, Temba Bavuma, Theunis de Bruyn, Zubayr Hamza, Quinton de Kock (wkt), Vernon Philander, Keshav Maharaj, Kagiso Rabada, Dale Steyn, Duanne Olivier

Pakistan (from): Sarfraz Ahmed (capt/wkt), Imam-ul-Haq, Shan Masood, Azhar Ali, Asad Shafiq, Babar Azam, Fakhar Zaman, Shadab Khan, Faheem Ashraf, Mohammad Amir, Yasir Shah, Hasan Ali, Mohammad Abbas, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Mohammad Rizwan

Umpires: Sundaram Ravi (IND), Joel Wilson (WIS)

TV umpire: Bruce Oxenford (AUS)
Match referee: David Boon (AUS). —AFP

Quick Read

South Africa's Albie Morkel announces retirement

CAPE TOWN: Former South Africa international all-rounder Albie Morkel has decided to retire from all forms of cricket, ending a two-decade career that earned him a reputation as a clean striker of the ball and a bowler full of guile. The 37-year-old, the older brother of fast bowler Morné Morkel, played a single test, 58 One-Day Internationals and 50 T20 matches for South Africa over 11 years, having more influence with bat than ball as a "finisher" at the end of limited-overs innings. "Time has run out for me on the cricket field, and I would like to announce my retirement from the game," Morkel said in a statement on Wednesday. "There are some new opportunities on the horizon, and I'm looking forward to grow into those. I will be enjoying the game from the other side of the rope." Morkel was one of the top buys at the inaugural Indian Premier League auction when he went to the Chennai Super Kings for \$675,000 (£528,075) in 2008 and later played for Delhi Daredevils, Rising Pune Supergiants and Royal Challengers Bangalore. He also had spells in English county cricket with Derbyshire, Durham and Somerset. —AFP



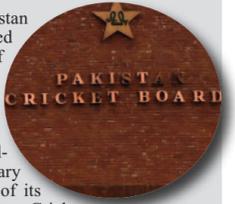
Pace deficient Pakistan should try Wahab Riaz: Afridi

KARACHI: Pakistan former captain and star all-rounder Shahid Afridi has said that the team should give a chance to speedster Wahab Riaz, if they are lacking in the pace department. "Good luck for the ODIs and third Test against South Africa to team Pakistan. I feel that if pace is what we are lacking we should try and give a chance to Wahab Riaz in the squad," said Afridi in a tweet. Riaz last represented Pakistan internationally back in October last year against Australia in a Test series. The speedster, however, has been pretty active in the domestic circuit, representing the Lahore Whites in the recently concluded National T20 Cup that the Whites won. Meanwhile, Afridi's statements regarding picking up Riaz comes after skipper Sarfraz Ahmed voiced concerns over his bowling unit's lack of pace, after losing the Test series to South Africa. —AFP



PCB accepts apologies of UAE cricketers for comments

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) accepted on Thursday the apologies of three UAE cricketers, who were involved in making critical comments on social media during the Emerging Teams Asia Cup last year. "Following the recent disciplinary sanctions imposed on three of its professional players, Emirates Cricket Board [ECB] has today confirmed that PCB has received and accepted formal apologies made to them by the players," the ECB said in a statement. Captain Rohan Mustafa, batsman Rameez Shahzad and spinner Ahmed Raza were fined and suspended for eight weeks for venting off their frustrations after the UAE missed out on a chance to qualify for the semi-finals of the Emerging Teams Asia Cup in Karachi in December. "As a gesture of good will, ECB will donate the fines imposed on the players to a Karachi-based charity," the ECB added. After missing out to qualify for the semis, Mustafa tweeted that they lost due to 'poor facility' in Pakistan. However, the Emirati captain removed the posts, and replaced them with apologies. —APP



GOLD COAST: Jockeys race during the 2019 Magic Millions official barrier draw at Surfers Paradise Foreshore.

ICC announces '15-day amnesty' for SI corruption whistleblowers

DUBAI: The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Thursday announced a 15-day amnesty for whistleblowers who have previously failed to report corruption in the embattled sport in Sri Lanka, warning of five-year bans if they fail to come clean.

A host of scandals have rocked Sri Lankan cricket in recent years including a match-fixing controversy revealed in a sting operation carried out for a TV documentary. The ICC anti-corruption unit has regularly investigated cases in the island nation. A spokesman for the sport's governing body said the amnesty will run from January 16-31. "Both domestic and international participants are obliged to report, without delay, full details of any approaches, incident or information that they receive to engage in corrupt conduct," he added.

"Failure to do so is a serious offence and can result in a ban from cricket of up to five years. However, under the amnesty, any information reported by a participant will not attract a charge for their failure to report previously." Alex Marshall, the ICC's General Manager for Anti-Corruption, added: "This is the first time the ICC has held an amnesty and it is in response to the very specific challenges we face in Sri Lanka."

"Allowing retrospective reporting of alleged approaches to engage in corrupt conduct will assist in our ongoing and wide-ranging investigations, as well as enabling us to continue to develop a comprehensive picture of the situation there." The announcement of the amnesty came just a week after Sri Lanka was rated as the most corrupt cricket nation by the world governing body. The ICC Council feels "Sri Lanka's cricket administration is corrupt from top to bottom", said sports minister Harin Fernando. The crisis-ridden Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) is to hold delayed elections in February, which were due last May when the term of president Thilanga Samathipala ended. Sumathipala has been accused of violating ICC rules by holding office despite alleged links to gambling. He denies the charges. In November, former Sri Lankan fast bowler Dilhara Lokuhettige was suspended for corruption during a limited-over league in 2017. —AFP

Footballers Kaka, Figo to arrive in Pakistan today

The Business Report

KARACHI: Football icons Ricardo Kaka and Luis Figo arrived in Karachi on Friday to formally launch World Soccer Stars event.

The duo will make a special appearance at Karachi's Pearl Continental, after which they will visit Lahore for another press conference. They reached Karachi via a special flight from Dubai earlier today.

Brazilian star Ricardo Kaka and Portuguese legend Luis Figo on the plane to Karachi Brazilian star Kaka and Portuguese legend Figo, who will be promoting World Soccer Stars during their visit to Pakistan, were welcomed at Karachi's Jinnah International Airport with the traditional Sindhij ajrak and topi. World Soccer Stars has

promised a football spectacle starting from April 26 to 29 with two matches in Karachi and Lahore. The event is being organised by TouchSky Group who hopes that the visit of the legendary duo will help portray Pakistan's softer image to the rest of the world.

Pakistan football captain shares excitement at meeting Kaka, Figo

KARACHI: Pakistan football captain Saddam Hussain has said he is excited to meet Brazilian star Ricardo Kaka and Portuguese legend Luis Figo, who reached Karachi earlier today to formally launch World Soccer Stars event. "I am excited to meet Kaka and Figo today," an ecstatic. The

25-year-old further shared that he will be presenting the national team jersey to the football stars. "The reason why I want to present them [Kaka and Figo] with the national team jersey is because it has Pakistan's flag on it," Hussain said.

Kaka and Figo arrive in Pakistan to launch World Soccer Stars. The duo are making a special appearance at Karachi's Pearl Continental, after which they will visit Lahore for another press conference.

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Djokovic thrashes Murray in Open practice match

MELBOURNE: World number one Novak Djokovic exposed Andy Murray's frailties in a practice match ahead of the Australian Open on Thursday, with the Scot calling it a day while losing 6-1, 4-1. Three-time major winner Murray is on the comeback trail after missing 11 months with a hip injury which has seen him slump to 230 in the world. He was bundled out of the Brisbane International warm-up last week in round two by Russia's Daniil Medvedev and headed straight to Melbourne to fit in some much-needed practice.

Long-time rival and six-time Australian Open champion Djokovic offered to share a court with him, but Murray called time after less than an hour with his movement around the baseline appearing restricted. The pair have met four times in Australian Open finals, with the Serb winning them all. This year's edition of the season's opening Grand Slam in Melbourne Park begins Monday. Speaking ahead of Brisbane, Murray said "I still have some pain in my hip", but that "I'm in a better place than I was a few months ago". —Agencies



Serena handed tough draw in quest for record 24th Slam

MELBOURNE: Serena Williams has been handed a challenging draw in her quest for a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title at the Australian Open, starting with Germany's Tatjana Maria in the first round. The American, seeded 16, is gunning to match Margaret Court's record of singles majors and claim an eighth Australian Open crown. But Williams is in a tough half of the draw and could meet world number one Simona Halep in round four, and if she gets through that Karolina Pliskova in the last eight. Before those potential ties, either Chinese wildcard Peng Shuai or Canadian Eugenie Bouchard would await Williams in the second round. Halep, who enters the tournament having played just one game in four months after a back injury, was handed a chance to avenge Estonia's Kaia Kanepi, who beat her in the first round of the US Open in August. If she comes through that dangerous opening showdown, she could meet Venus Williams in round three. Defending champion and third seed Caroline Wozniacki starts against Alison Van Uytvanck of Belgium and could meet 2008 champion Maria Sharapova in round three. "Coming back as defending champion, it's something I always dreamed of. I feel at home here. These courts are suited for me. I'm enjoying every minute," said the Dane at Thursday's draw, while paying tribute to Williams. "Serena is the greatest player to have played the game. Her experiences have been a learning experience for me. It's be fun though as well. She has a baby now! It's amazing being back on tour so soon." —AFP



BURBANK: (L-R) Cyd Wilson, Kathryn Newton and JoBeth Williams attend SAG-AFTRA Foundation's 9th Annual LA Golf Classic benefiting emergency assistance at Lakeside Golf Club

Japan survive scare, Qatar get welcome win at Asian Cup



AL-AIN: Yuya Osako's quickfire double spared Japan's blushes against lowly Turkmenistan at the Asian Cup on Thursday as 2022 World Cup hosts Qatar briefly lifted the clouds of the Gulf crisis with a 2-0 win over Lebanon.

Uzbekistan left it late before seeing off Oman 2-1 but it was four-time champions Japan who had the biggest scare as they had to come from behind from a team ranked 127th in the world.

Arslan Amanov's first-half rocket raised the prospect of a titanic upset by Turkmenistan but Osako's brace restored order before Ritsu Doan appeared to make the game safe.

However, Ahmet Atayev buried a penalty 11 minutes from time before Japan survived to win 3-2, a further reminder that the big teams have not had it all their own way at this Asian Cup. "The first match is always a bit special and we expected a battle," said Japan coach Hajime Moriyasu, who was relieved to get off to a win-

ning start in Group F. "Obviously we're happy to get the three points but we have a lot of things to work on for the next game."

Earlier in the tournament's opening group games, defending champions Australia were shocked 1-0 by Jordan, South Korea laboured to a 1-0 win over the Philippines and China needed an own goal to spark a 2-1 comeback win against Kyrgyzstan. The Blue Samurais have arguably the best pedigree in the competition after reaching the last 16 of last year's World Cup, and were not expected to be troubled by Turkmenistan.

But Turkmen captain Amanov put the heavy underdogs ahead after 26 minutes in Abu Dhabi, unleashing a ferocious long-range drive that arched into the top corner.

GULF SHOWDOWN: Osako produced a smart turn and finish inside the box to equalise for Japan 10 minutes into the second half after

sustained pressure from the former champions.

The Werder Bremen striker put Japan in front four minutes later, tapping into an empty net, and Doan added a deflected third after 70 minutes but Atayev smashed in a penalty nine minutes later to ensure more anxious moments for the Japanese. Other Group F fixture, in Sharjah, Eldor Shomurodov was the hero for Uzbekistan as he struck four minutes from time to grab a 2-1 win. Shanghai SIPG midfielder Odil Ahmedov fired the White Wolves ahead on 34 minutes with a low free kick, before Oman's Muhsen Al-Ghassani levelled midway through the second half. But as full time loomed, Shomurodov shrugged off the attentions of two defenders and beat goalkeeper Faiz Al-Rushaidi at his near post to clinch victory.

Elsewhere, Qatar's campaign in Group E opened under the shadow of the Gulf showdown that has left them blockaded and shunned by

their neighbours, including Asian Cup hosts UAE, for more than 18 months. Near the end of a tepid opening half in Al Ain, Lebanon's Ali Hamam thought he had scored with the game's first shot on target - only for his volley to be ruled out for a foul.

The pace quickened in the second period and the breakthrough came on 65 minutes, when Bassam Al-Rawi swept a curling free kick over the wall and past a diving Mehdi Kahlil.

Substitute defender Abdelkarim Hassan, the 2018 Asian player of the year, was causing problems down the left and it was his break that created Qatar's second when Almoez Ali gobbled up a rebound with 11 minutes on the clock.

It was a welcome win for Qatar, who as well as contending with the Gulf blockade are also desperate for a good showing before their next major tournament - the 2022 World Cup on home soil. —AFP