



Serena Wins 3rd Singles Match

Serena Williams completed a clean sweep of her singles matches at the mixed teams Hopman Cup in Perth Thursday as she prepares for her bid to make Grand Slam history at the Australian Open. The winner of 23 Slam singles titles, Williams was made to work a little harder than expected by young Brit Katie Boulter, but prevailed in straight sets to make it three victories from as many outings. With the Australian Open less than two weeks away, Williams dropped just one set in her singles matches, although at different times she seemed to be troubled by a right shoulder problem and had both ankles strapped.

Kadak Chicken

A scientist from Madhya Pradesh has suggested Indian cricket team to add Kadaknath, a local breed of chicken completely black in colour, to their diet



Proteas on Top as Pak Crumble Again

Duanne Olivier led another fast bowling assault on Pakistan's batsmen as South Africa took control on the first day of the second Test at Newlands on Thursday. Olivier took four for 48 as Pakistan were bowled out for 177 after being sent in on a hard, green-tinged pitch. Aiden Markram struck an assured 78 as South Africa reached 123 for two at the close.

F1 Tribute to Schumacher at 50

Michael Schumacher turned 50 on Thursday with Formula One and his fans paying tribute to the sport's most successful driver with a mixture of celebration and sorrow. "Our champ turns 50 today. We're all with you Michael #KeepFighting," said Ferrari, celebrating a driver who won five titles in a row for the Italian team between 2000 and 2004. Thursday's focus was on celebrating a champion who holds the records for most titles and wins (91). The Formula One website declared 'Schumacher Week', with stories and interviews looking back on the career of a man who retired in 2012 after a three-year comeback with Mercedes.

Herrera Lauds Pogba 'Magic'

Ander Herrera has lauded the impact of "magic" Paul Pogba as he continues to impress following the dismissal of Jose Mourinho. "He is playing very simple and effective in our half, and then when he is in the opponent's half he has that magic to change the game, so we are really happy for him. I think Nemanja (Matic) and me today, or the other players, we have to help him to make him feel free and that's what we're doing."

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On Day 1 of the fourth and final Test, Cheteshwar Pujara scores his third century of the series to lead India once again

Man of the Series



Anand Vasu Sydney

Don't be shy, say it out loud: India are the best Test team in the world. They are not only the No. 1 ranked team, but they are as good as it gets at the moment. South Africa were a pest, England were troublesome, but in Australia, India are on the verge of showing just who is boss.

That they have done so thanks to a man who was not so long ago considered a burden the team had to carry is another matter altogether. Left out of the Test team for the first Test in England, Cheteshwar Pujara has emerged the man of this series in Australia. He has scored three centuries—as many as Sunil Gavaskar back in 1977-78, and even the Little Master only managed his feat against a severely depleted team, what with the best being away in Kerry Packer's parallel universe. Pujara is playing an Australian team missing Steve Smith and David Warner, but the bowling attack is strong.

And within those terms of engagement, the smiling man with the slight hunch has been a marauder. On the first day of the final Test, Pujara made 130, and he ate up 250 balls in the process. India ended the day with more than 300 on the board, but crucially had a determined and industrious Hanuma Vihari keeping Pujara good company.

The second new ball had been taken, but it was not as before, that the shiny cherry automatically brought a wicket and that one led to a few more.



INDIA DOWN UNDER

Pujara is an irritating little opponent in that he runs slowly between the wickets, refuses to hit the ball in anger and collects his runs as though he has nothing better to do than stay at the crease all day and wait for good things to come his way. With KL Rahul failing once more, Pujara was at the crease at 10.38am Sydney time and he did not relinquish his position when stumps were drawn.

Pujara's play does not destroy the morale of opposition bowlers in the violent manner that Viv Richards or Virender Sehwag boasted, but he does suck the oxygen out of the opposition just as effectively.

On this tour, Virat Kohli has been the most loved cricketer simply because he is so Australian in his methods. Kohli will spank glorious cover-drives while laying into the opposition with his chatter. Kohli will whip the ball through midwicket while he gets the crowd on his side and Kohli will always behave as though his team is on top, irrespective of the scoreline or the situation in the match.

Pujara, however, will just be him-

self. He will irritate the fast bowlers into bowling too straight and then pick them off for fifty or more runs through prods, nudges and flicks to midwicket; he will kick Nathan Lyon so gently that the offie won't even know that he is being blunted.

Mayank Agarwal, who had the best seat in the house for the best part of Pujara's exposition, explained it correctly. "To watch him bat, the way he grinds the bowlers, he has got a pattern to it and he understands his strengths that he knows he is very tight with his defense," said Agarwal, who did not do too badly himself, scoring 77. "Pujara looks to do that and waits for the bad ball to come. And as far as partnership is concerned, he keeps talking that these are the things we can look at and he tells me this is what they are looking

to do, and all of those things, tips. We just keep communicating a lot while batting out there."

But Agarwal knows that he would not be speaking from a position of strength if it had not been for all that Pujara has done this series. Aside from being himself and batting long, he has laid down a template for others to follow. Kohli has been the first to embrace the self-denial approach of Pujara in this series although he is the exact opposite as a batsman.

The beauty of this Indian team in Australia is that they have not been shy of scoring ugly runs. Some of the shots they play might be the most attractive in the game, but the bigger task is to do the heavy lifting that ensures they are in a place to win their first series here.

SCORECARD

INDIA 303 for 4 (Pujara 130*, Vihari 39*, Agarwal 77; Hazlewood 2/51) v AUSTRALIA

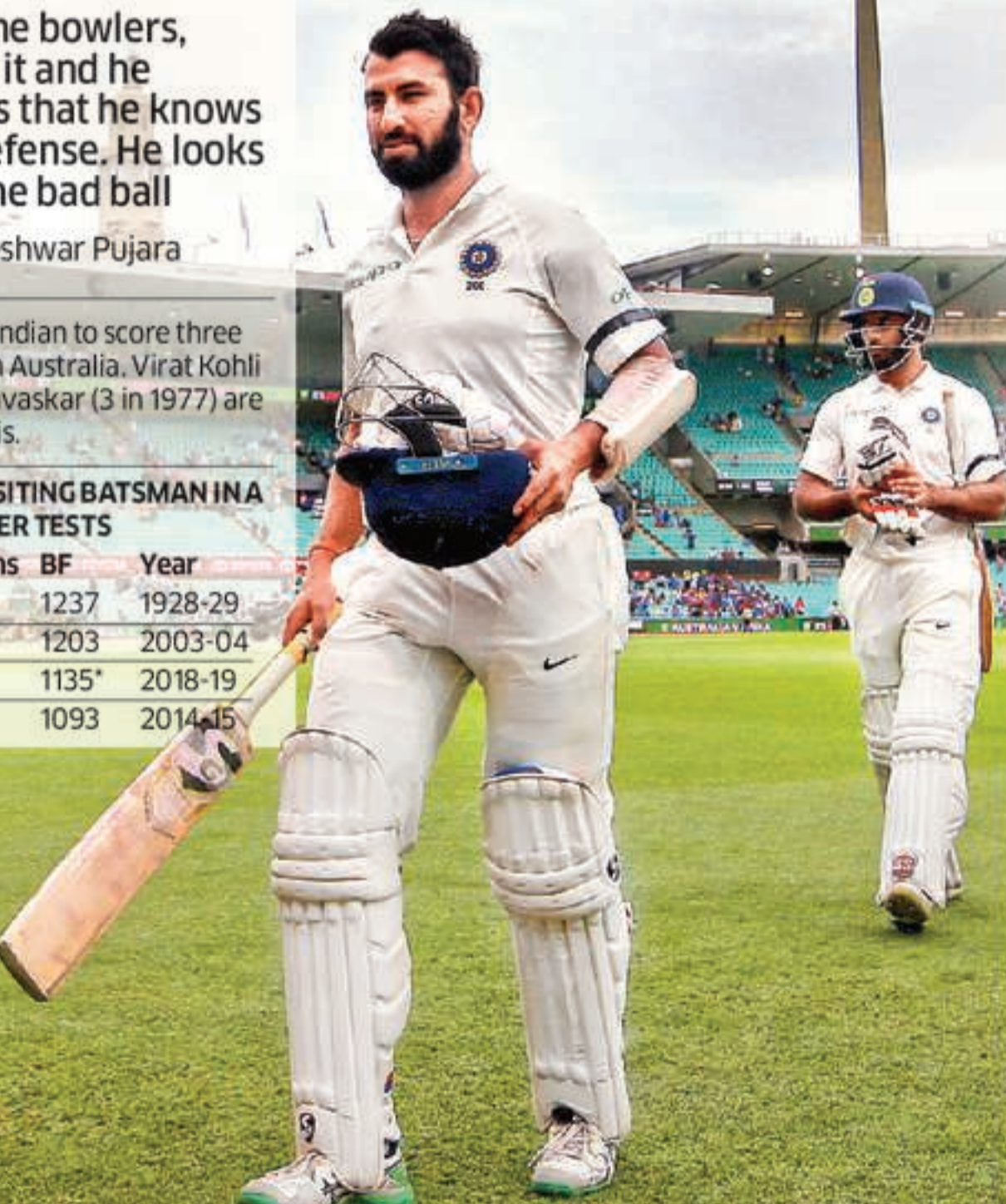
The way he grinds the bowlers, he's got a pattern to it and he understands his strengths that he knows he's very tight with his defense. He looks to do that and waits for the bad ball

MAYANK AGARWAL, on Cheteshwar Pujara

Pujara became only the third Indian to score three or more centuries in a series in Australia. Virat Kohli (4 centuries in 2014-15) and Sunil Gavaskar (3 in 1977) are the only others to have achieved this.

MOST DELIVERIES PLAYED BY A VISITING BATSMAN IN A SERIES COMPRISING FOUR OR FEWER TESTS

Player	Mat	Inns	BF	Year
Herbert Sutcliffe (ENG)	4	7	1237	1928-29
Rahul Dravid (IND)	4	8	1203	2003-04
Cheteshwar Pujara (IND)	4	7	1135*	2018-19
Virat Kohli (INDIA)	4	8	1093	2014-15



Making Test Cricket Exciting

The brand of cricket India have played in the series has helped bring about a resurgence in Test cricket



Boria Majumdar Sydney

At the celebratory lunch in the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG) Trust suite, Steve Waugh was asked about his impressions of the summer so far? Waugh, almost a cult at the SCG, did not have to think much. "The Indians under Virat Kohli have brought excitement back to Test cricket."

The brand of cricket and the manner in which they have played the series so far, the Indians have helped bring about a resurgence of sorts in Test cricket.

Asked to elaborate, Waugh went on to say, "When I first played India in the late 1980s they were really humble and nice people but they hardly ever spoke. Under Virat things are very different. A feisty character himself, he has encouraged his team to express themselves. I think he and this team are great for Test cricket. They have aggressive bowlers who are all bowling quick and they haven't held back in their celebrations."

Virat's message to the team is loud and clear. "Be obsessed about winning and don't hold back." In fact, when asked if the others are as obsessed about winning, Virat had this to say, "I am sure they are even if some of them don't express in the manner that I do. But if you see the end of the MCG Test you will see how (Cheteshwar) Pujara and Jinks (Ajinkya Rahane) celebrated and you will know what it means to them and us all."

This team is clearly the most exciting of all Indian teams to have toured down under. Never has it happened that three Indian fast bowlers have all bowled at 145 kmph and pushed the Australians on the backfoot with

the short ball. In fact, in a throwback to CLR James, it can easily be said that Jasprit Bumrah is like violent poetry in motion. He is symbolic of a resurgent and powerful India expressing itself on the world stage and doing so in the most dignified and skilled way. And when he isn't bowling fast or short, he is using skill of a very different kind.

"The ball with which he got Shaun Marsh at the MCG was just a delight to watch. You can travel miles to see it. Ricky (Ponting) and I have been discussing why isn't he using it more," says Akash Chopra currently commentating on the series. "You just love to see the raw energy this Indian side brings to the middle every session they play. Kohli is clearly the leader of the pack and is a great whiff of fresh air for Test cricket," adds Michael Clarke, yet another Aussie great with a great record at the SCG.

Does it all come consciously to Kohli and his boys or are they just representatives of their times? Probably a mix of both. Just like Usain Bolt, Kohli is also a showman besides being the best batsman in the world at the moment. His celebrations, his manner of speaking, his combative attitude have all added to the Kohli cult.

And he is wonderfully complemented by Pujara. Resolute, composed and determined, Pujara is very different to Kohli and brings diversity to the team making it what it is. He is equally passionate and it was evident when he reached his third hundred of the series on Thursday. The punch in the air was in itself a statement—he had escalated himself from being very good to great in the last one month. In doing so he has almost ensured India isn't losing this Test match.

To go back to Waugh, "Playing two spinners was a statement from India. They want to win and not draw this game. This is a very different Indian team and can only be good for the game." Indeed!

OSAKA BELIEVES

US Open win has given the Japanese confidence to win tight matches

Japanese star Naomi Osaka said her US Open victory in September had given her the self-belief to be able to come from behind and win tight matches.

Osaka was speaking after recovering from losing the first set of her Brisbane International quarter-final to Latvia's Anastasija Sevastova on Thursday.

The world number five overhauled Sevastova to win 3-6, 6-0, 6-4 and reach the semi-finals of the season-opening tournament.

"I feel like right now I'm really confident in myself, and I feel like the off-season training that I've been doing is really paying off," she said. "And I'm not sure if I would have had the same feeling six months ago. Six months ago I hadn't won the US Open."

Osaka's stunning victory over Serena Williams at New York's Flushing Meadows in September sent her profile into the stratosphere, although her breakthrough win was partially overshadowed by Williams' furious tirade against the umpire.

Osaka dropped her opening service game in Brisbane on Thursday, and that was enough to surrender the first set to Sevastova.

But Osaka came storming back to

win the second with the loss of just five points. She then broke Sevastova's serve to start the deciding set and was able to hold the advantage, sealing victory with her 11th ace of the match.

The 21-year-old has enormous power but said she was tested by Sevastova, who favours angles and deception over brute force, and who defeated her twice last year. "I just really wanted to play this match knowing that I would have long rallies and knowing that she would be hitting tricky shots," Osaka said.

"So for me, this match was really important because I think that I can handle power players pretty well, but for me it is always harder to hit against people like her, because I don't really know what's coming next. So I think that this match was a good confidence booster."

Osaka will now play Lesia Tsurenko in the semi-finals after the Ukrainian beat Estonia's Anett Kontaveit 7-5, 6-3.

With the shock loss of defending champion Elina Svitolina on Wednesday, Osaka is now the firm favourite for the title. "My main goal is to show consistency and I'm really happy with this tournament so far," she said.

"I (made) the semis or higher in my last four tournaments, so I think that's something that I'm going to keep trying to do."

AFP

An Agent, a Tycoon & Players' Trading

Jorge Mendes and Chinese billionaire Guo Guangchang first used third-party ownership and then Premier League club Wolves to make millions

Tom Bergin & Cassell Bryan-Low

In early 2016, Europe's most powerful football agent, Jorge Mendes, stood dressed in his trademark dark suit and white shirt alongside Chinese billionaire Guo Guangchang at a luxury hotel in Shanghai. They were there to launch a new partnership.

Mendes and Guo, co-founder of a Chinese investment group called Fosun, announced they would create an agency to expand football in China and help players build careers. But that was only part of the plan.

What Mendes and Guo didn't publicly reveal then, or since, was that they also envisaged creating a network of clubs and football academies in Europe and buying and selling players, emails and internal presentations related to the deal show. Such a network would enable the partners to sidestep a ban on investors buying stakes in players and trading them. With the help of top agents like Mendes, such trading could capture profits that might otherwise go to assist smaller clubs.

Trading and representing players, Fosun believed, according to an internal presentation from 2015, was the only sustainably profitable part of the football industry. The Fosun group, which encompasses a range of entities controlled by Guo and his two co-founders, is worth more than \$10 billion.

It is also a business model that some fans, officials and club owners criticise and oppose. They say it diverts money to agents and financial investors that would otherwise go to clubs and help sustain the competition that fans pay to see.

Players are bought and sold by clubs. If someone other than a club has a share in the "economic rights" of a player, this is known as "third-party ownership." Newspapers in Portugal and Britain have reported over the past two decades that Mendes' agency Gestifute had stakes in around a dozen prominent players.

Documents show Mendes' third-party ownership went much further than previously thought. His agency came to hold stakes in more than 50 top players by late 2015, according to a signed contract between Fosun and Gestifute. By holding stakes in players, Mendes stood to increase his influence and to gain when those players were bought and sold by clubs.

Mendes' holding company, Start SGPS, had a net income of €25.1 million in 2015, emails show. That was more than all but 10 European football clubs, according to data compiled by UEFA.

But there was a problem for the Mendes business model and Fosun's grand vision. In 2012, U E F A had said third-party ownership potentially

competition and took money out of the sport; and in May 2015, FIFA imposed a rule intended to end the practice.

The ban did little to hamper Fosun's ambitions though. FIFA had stopped third-party investors. But there was nothing to prevent Fosun from buying a football club, which could freely own players' economic rights without Fosun breaching the ban.

In May 2016, English club Wolverhampton Wanderers was on the market for about £40 million. Within a month, Fosun had decided to buy Wolves, emails show, and Mendes remained important to its plans.

Between Fosun's decision to buy the club in 2016 and February 2018, Wolves spent more than £65 million buying players, its published accounts show. In some cases, the players purchased were represented by Mendes or he helped arrange the deals, the club has said in statements. Full details of the transfers are not publicly available.

In April, the English Football League said it had examined Mendes' relationship with the club and found it was not a breach of its rules forbidding an agent from having an executive role at a club or controlling its strategy. It said in a statement at the time that Mendes "holds no role at the club."

Meanwhile, Wolves, just two years after being bought by Fosun, ascended to the top tier of English football. The team relies heavily on players from Mendes' home country. When it took to the field for the first time in the Premier League in August, five of the 11-man team were Portuguese.

Reuters

Bargain Ballers

In an era of ever increasing transfer fees, it is somewhat heartening to know that there are still a number of bargains up for grabs now that the transfer window has reopened. International superstars from across Europe's top five leagues are available to negotiate with overseas clubs now that they have entered the final six months of their contract. Here are some of the best

Daniel Sturridge, 29
LIVERPOOL, 4 GAMES
The injury-prone forward might be worth a gamble from a Premier League side

Mario Balotelli, 28
NICE, 9 GAMES
Several clubs could do with and without a touch of Balotelli

Aaron Ramsey, 28
ARSENAL, 11 GAMES
The Welshman and his agent has made it clear he is ready to find a new club

Franck Ribery, 35
BAYERN MUNICH, 14 GAMES
The experienced winger could be set to leave Bayern in the summer

Diego Godin, 32
ATLETICO MADRID, 15 GAMES THIS SEASON
The experienced defender would be a great quick-fix for a top club

Juan Mata, 30
MANCHESTER UNITED, 11 GAMES
The midfielder will be a good addition to most teams

Adrien Rabiot, 23
PSG, 15 GAMES
The young midfielder has caught the attention of many clubs in Europe

*League and Champions/Europa League only
Source: The Independent