

# In football, anything is possible: Gurpreet Sandhu

Players hail the role of India coach Igor Stimac after the sensational draw against Qatar

## WC QUALIFIERS

SPORTS BUREAU  
DOHA  
India's players were an overjoyed lot after holding reigning Asian champion Qatar to a goalless draw in the second qualifying round for the 2022 FIFA World Cup here on Tuesday.

Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, who wore the captain's armband on the night and put in a heroic shift under the bar, hailed the performance as a team effort.

**Crucial point**  
"I feel extremely proud of the team," he told the AIFF. "Everyone played their hearts out, and gave everything out on the pitch. That enabled us to come back to the dressing room satisfied, and with a very crucial point."

"We have played just two matches, and we have played well, that too against two powerful teams. It gives us that added motivation and confidence that in football, anything is possible."

**Bouncing back**  
Going into the match, Qatar was ranked 62nd in the world, some 41 places above India's 103. While defeat to Oman in the opening game of the qualifiers was a big blow, India bounced back admirably.



A big thank you! The Indian players perform the 'Viking Clap' routine with fans after the goalless draw in Doha on Tuesday.

• COURTESY: AIFF

Players hailed the role of the coach, Igor Stimac. "The coach has changed everything — things we do on and off the pitch," said Anirudh Thapa. "I am happy we were able to make him proud with our performance. This [result] has to rank at the top. Qatar are an extraordinary side."

Young midfielder Sahal Abdul Samad said: "This is quite unbelievable. We defended well in the first-half.

At the interval, the coach told us to come out and attack, and enjoy our football. We played it around, and stretched them while maintaining our shape all throughout."

**Emotional**  
Central defender Adil Khan was emotional. "I am getting goosebumps even thinking of the result," he said.

"The self-belief in the team defines everything. I

was in the National team some seven years back, but it is a different set-up now. We are making good progress under [Stimac]."

**Critics proven wrong**  
Stimac felt that critics of his players' fitness had been proven wrong.

"Against Qatar, we proved to everyone who was talking about a lack of fitness among the players [that we are fit]," he said.

"Qatar are in a different league as compared to any team in Asia and my boys made sprints till the very last minute. They defended with such concentration throughout."

India will host Bangladesh in its next match of the qualifiers on October 15 in Kolkata.

Stimac exhorted India's supporters to fill the stands for the occasion. "We have heard a lot

## From the dugout

This has to rank at the top. Qatar are an extraordinary side and this was a qualifier match as well, which makes the result even sweeter for us. I'm glad that we could come here to their home and return with points

ANIRUDH THAPA



The coach did a lot of research on the opponents and gave us a lot of short videos to watch, and prepare. We watched them perhaps a million times

MANDAR RAO DESSAI



This is quite unbelievable. We understand we have to do more, and we will surely do more

SAHAL ABDUL SAMAD

I can't control my emotions. I am getting goose bumps even thinking of the result. The self-belief in the team defines everything. I was in the National team some seven years back, but it is a different set-up now

ADIL KHAN



We have played just two matches, and we have played well, that too against two powerful teams. It gives us that added motivation and confidence

GURPREET SANDHU

Qatar are in a different league compared to any team in Asia and my boys made sprints till the last minute. They defended with such concentration

IGOR STIMAC

about the passion for football in Kolkata. I want to see a full house at the YBK Stadium," the Croat said. "You

need to be our 12th player. We deserve that and I expect the fans to come and help us get the three points."

# Can England save some face?

Hosts drop Roy; Aussies going strong on Smith's awesome form

## THE ASHES

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
LONDON

England has dropped Jason Roy for the fifth Ashes Test against Australia that starts on Thursday, as it looks to level the series at 2-2.

Roy failed to impress in the first four matches, either as an opener or when he dropped down the order at Old Trafford, where he made a top score of 31.

Paceman Craig Overton has also been left out for the clash at The Oval, with Sam Curran and Chris Woakes, who made way for Overton at Old Trafford, coming in.

The England and Wales Cricket Board also confirmed that Ben Stokes would play as a specialist batsman due to a shoulder injury.

England needs a victory to draw the series, although Australia has already retained the Ashes.

Captain Joe Root said Roy had missed out due to Stokes' injury, which meant the side needed re-balancing. "It's always tough to leave guys out, but Stokes picked up a shoulder injury in the last game and won't be able to bowl the overs we normally expect him to," he said on Wednesday.

Australia heads to The



Work to do: The England batsmen will be keen to change the trend of not giving their bowlers enough runs to defend. • AFP

Oval hungry to win its first Ashes series in England since 2001 as the peerless Steve Smith seeks to inflict further pain on the hosts.

To stand any chance of levelling the series, England will have to find a way to solve the riddle of the immovable Smith, who has scored 671 runs in just five innings at an astonishing average of more than 134.

The former captain, top of the international rankings, has carried his team's batting with three centuries and two fifties, including a double-century in the win at Manchester, with Marnus Labuschagne the only other batsman who has shown any consistency.

Smith, who returned to

Test action in England after completing a 12-month ball-tampering ban, has made his mountain of runs despite missing three innings after he was felled by a Jofra Archer bouncer.

Given a full series, the freakish Smith might well have been even closer to Don Bradman's mark of 974 runs for the most runs ever made in a Test series, set in 1930.

**Pace power**  
The other key factor for Australia has been the strength of the pace attack, with Josh Hazlewood and World No. 1 Pat Cummins catching the eye with 42 wickets between them.

Australia coach Justin

Langer, revelling in having the world's top-ranked batsman and bowler at his disposal, is urging the other batsmen to step up in the match starting on Thursday, even though he admits they lack experience.

Joe Root, meanwhile, must inspire his troops to one last effort.

**The teams:** England: Joe Root (Capt.), Jofra Archer, Jonny Bairstow (wk), Stuart Broad, Rory Burns, Jos Buttler, Sam Curran, Joe Denly, Jack Leach, Ben Stokes and Chris Woakes.

**Australia (from):** Tim Paine (Capt. & wk), David Warner, Marcus Harris, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, Mitchell Marsh, Matthew Wade, Pat Cummins, Peter Siddle, Mitch Starc, Nathan Lyon, and Josh Hazlewood.

## SA-A IN INDIA

M.R. PRAVEEN CHANDRAN  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Rain and bad light made India-A wait a day to win the unofficial first Test against South Africa-A at the Sports Hub on Wednesday.

Only 20 overs of play was possible on the third day but India-A had the South Africans on the mat at 179 for nine when play was called off due to bad light, 15 minutes before the scheduled close. The visitors led by 40 runs.

Heavy rain in the morning wiped out two sessions and play began only at 3.30 p.m. The overnight pair of Heinrich Klaasen and Wiaan Mulder didn't show any signs of discomfort and negotiated the bowling with ease.

**Aggressive Mulder**  
Mulder, in particular, was in sparkling touch. He greeted Gowtham by lofting him over long-on for a six and then square-drove a boundary to show his attacking mood early.

Mohammed Siraj, who was given an extended spell, failed to trouble the batsmen. Klaasen was circumspect but Mulder took the attack to the bowlers. The sixth wicket stand prospered and added 74 runs when bad



Adding to the tally: Shahbaz Nadeem picked up one of the four South Africa-A wickets to fall on Wednesday. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

light stopped play for the first time.

When play resumed after 10 minutes, the Indians got the much-needed breakthrough in the first over bowled by Jalaj Saxena after re-

sumption.

**Fatal error**  
A loud appeal for leg-before against Klaasen was turned down by the umpire. Mulder (46) attempted a run and

was sent back but he couldn't beat Ricky Bhui's direct throw from short square-leg.

Mulder's dismissal opened the floodgates. Jalaj had Piedt (1) caught by 'keeper Bharat off a ball that bounced and Marco Jansen's (0) intended drive off Shahbaz Nadeem ended in Ruturaj Gaikwad's hands in the covers. Klaasen (48) soon lost his patience and was caught in the deep by Shardul Thakur off Jalaj before bad light forced the umpires to call off play.

**The scores:**  
South Africa-A — 1st innings: 164.

India — A: 1st innings: 303.

**South Africa-A — 2nd innings:** Pieter Malan b Siraj 4, Aiden Markram c Bharat b Shardul 4, Zubayr Hamza c Bhui b Gowtham 44, Khayelihle Zondo c Bharat b Nadeem 10, Senuran Muthuswamy lbw b Nadeem 4, Heinrich Klaasen c Shardul b Jalaj 48, Wiaan Mulder run out 46, Dane Piedt c Bharat b Jalaj 1, Marco Jansen c Gaikwad b Nadeem 0, Lutho Sipamla (batting) 5, Lungi Ngidi (batting) 0; Extras (nb-2, w-1, b-8, lb-2): 13; Total (for nine wkts. in 55 overs): 179.

**Fall of wickets:** 1-4, 2-14, 3-38, 4-52, 5-94, 6-168, 7-169, 8-170, 9-178.

**India-A bowling:** Siraj 11-1-36-1, Shardul 7-1-28-1, Nadeem 14-4-17-3, Dube 4-0-14-0, Gowtham 11-1-52-1, Jalaj 8-2-22-2.

# Sri Lanka's Pakistan tour in jeopardy

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's cricket board said on Wednesday it had received warnings that its National team could be the target of a terror attack during the upcoming tour of Pakistan.

The board said the Sri Lankan Prime Minister's Office had advised it to "reassess the situation" after it received "reliable information of a possible terrorist threat" against the National squad during the six-match limited overs tour.

It stopped short of calling off the tour, but said a reassessment of the security situation would be sought from the Sri Lankan government.

Sri Lanka was the victim of a militant attack during a Test match in Lahore in March 2009.

# Steelers-Panthers match-up ends in stalemate

Home team Warriors post a narrow win over U Mumba

## PKL

Y.B. SARANGI  
KOLKATA

Ace raider Deepak Hooda's magnificent effort could not fetch Jaipur Pink Panthers a much-needed win but aided in breaking its five-match losing streak in the Pro Kabaddi League here on Wednesday.

Hooda picked up 14 points even as Panthers' encounter with Haryana Steelers ended in a nail-biting 32-32 tie.

Hooda gathered seven points as his side reached a comfortable position, through an all-out, at 13-7 in the first half. Sandeep Dhull and Niles Salunke also contributed valuable tackle points.

**Kandola shines**

However, Vikas Kandola lived upto his reputation to spoil Panthers' hard work at one go. Three minutes before the breather, the agile



In the limelight: Panthers' Deepak Hooda showcased his raiding skills against Steelers on Wednesday. • RAJEEV BHATT

Kandola moved out of the Panthers' clutches to claim Santhapanaselvam, A. Elavarasan and Sandeep Dhull and grab five points. Steelers had Pink Panthers all out and jumped to a 16-14 lead.

Steelers also benefited from Pashanth Rai's raids to lead 18-14 at half-time. It in-

ched ahead after the break as Ravi Kumar and Sunil tackled with purpose.

The dashing Hooda collected points regularly to keep Panthers in the hunt. Panthers made a blunder when it unsuccessfully challenged a decision to award a bonus point to Steelers and

gave away one more to trail 23-27.

Panthers performed another all-out on Steelers and went on to regain the lead. But, Steelers equalised in the closing seconds to share the spoils.

**Narwal's master move**  
Rinku Narwal led a last minute super tackle to help Bengal Warriors post a slim 29-26 win over U Mumba in the other contest of the evening. This was Warriors' second consecutive victory at home.

**The results:**  
Jaipur Pink Panthers 32 (Deepak Hooda 14, Sandeep Dhull 5) tied with Haryana Steelers 32 (Vikas Kandola 7, Ravi Kumar 5, Prashanth Rai 5, Sunil 5).

Bengal Warriors 29 (Sukesh Hegde 8, Maninder Singh 7, Mohd. Nabibakhs 5, Rinku Narwal 4) bt U Mumba 26 (Arjun Deshwal 15, Fazel Atrachali 4).

# Hari, Nihal post emphatic wins

Vidit and Adhiban also progress to the second round

## WC CHESS

SPORTS BUREAU  
KHANTY MANSIYSK (RUSSIA)

P. Hari Krishna and Nihal Sarin completed 2-0 triumphs while Vidyut Gujrathi and B. Adhiban posted 1.5-0.5 victories for a place in the second round of the World Cup chess championship here on Wednesday.

Vidit won and Adhiban drew the second game of Round One to set up the required margin to advance in the knockout competition.

Bouncing back from Tuesday's defeat, Surya Shekhar Ganguly, S.P. Sethuraman and S.L. Narayanan scored much-needed victories to stay in the hunt. Aravindh Chithambaram and Abhijeet Gupta drew their games once again.

As a result, these five Indians will be in action during Thursday's tie-break rapid games. If the tie persists,



B. Adhiban. • FILE PHOTO: BISWARANJAN ROUT

blitz games will also be played.

M. Karthikeyan became the first Indian to make an exit, following a defeat.

**The results (round one, game two):** P. Hari Krishna (2746) bt Yuri Gonzalez Vidal (Cuba, 2552) 2-0; Surya Shekhar Ganguly (2658) bt Vladimir Fedoseev (Russia, 2664) 1-1; Ernest Inarkiev (Russia, 2693) bt M. Karthikeyan (2617) 1.5-0.5; Michael Adams (England, 2694) drew with Aravindh Chithambaram (2609) 1-1; S.L. Naraya-



Vidit Gujrathi. • FILE PHOTO: VIVEK BENDRE

nan (2611) bt David Anton Guijarro (Spain, 2674) 1-1; B. Adhiban (2639) drew with Eduardo Iturrizaga Bonelli (Venezuela, 2626) 1.5-0.5; Vidyut Gujrathi (2718) bt Alan Pichot (Argentina, 2600) 1.5-0.5; Anton Korobov (Ukraine, 2679) drew with Abhijeet Gupta (2609) 1-1; Jorge Cori (Peru, 2676) lost to Nihal Sarin (2610) 0-2; Tamir Nabaty (Israel, 2658) lost to S.P. Sethuraman (2624) 1-1.

**Note:** The 1-1 games will be decided by tie-break on Thursday.