

BRIEFLY

Bhaker misses final by one point

Putian: Manu Bhaker missed out on the finals by a point as India drew a blank on the second competition day of the World Cup Finals for rifle and pistol shooters here on Wednesday. After Sanjeev Rajput's narrow miss on day one, it was Bhaker in the women's 25m pistol event. Bhaker shot 583 in qualification, the same score as two other competitors, one of whom made the finals with the Indian losing out on lesser number of inner 10s. In fact, both Bhaker and Australian Elena Galibovitch not only had the same score, but also the same number of 17 shots in the inner 10 ring. Among other Indians, Asian Games champion Rahi Sarnobat shot 569 for an 18th-place finish in the women's 25m pistol, while Anish Bhanwala shot 578 in the men's 25m rapid fire pistol to end in 10th position. PTI

Maradona quits as coach of Gimnasia

Buenos Aires: Diego Maradona has quit as coach of Argentinian Superliga side Gimnasia, less than three months after taking over, the club announced. "Maradona is no longer the Gimnasia coach," club president Gabriel Pellegrino said on Argentina's Radio La Red. "He said he was here to add to things, not to divide," was Pellegrino's explanation for the World Cup-winner's decision. Reports in Argentina suggested Maradona's departure was linked to an imminent management shake-up at the club in La Plata, 50 kilometres from Buenos Aires. Maradona was no longer keen on remaining at the club after Pellegrino, the man who brought him back to Argentine football, pulled out of running for re-election as the side's president next Saturday. AFP

NADA to be present at inter-district meet

New Delhi: Dope testing will be a part of the National Inter-District Junior Athletics Meet (NIDJAM) for the first time in its 17-year-old history, Athletics Federation of India (AFI) announced on Wednesday. The AFI confirmed that the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) will send a team to collect a number of samples in the three-day event, beginning here on Saturday. AFI President Adille Sumariwalla said anti-doping measures this year will be among the major steps taken towards raising the bar and making NIDJAM the most prized event for the young athletes. PTI

DDCA vice-president Bansal removed

New Delhi: The Delhi & Districts Cricket Association (DDCA) on Wednesday removed Rakesh Bansal from the post of vice-president after it came to light that he has been charge-sheeted in a criminal case. Rakesh has been accused of signing a cheque worth Rs 50 lakh to a company, which had subsequently bounced. "The DDCA, on Wednesday, received intimation that Mr. Rakesh Bansal, who is Vice-President of DDCA, has been accused and charged in a criminal case for offence under Section 138 NI Act by the Court of Mr. Tushar Gupta, Metropolitan Magistrate," DDCA issued a press release. Earlier on Saturday, DDCA president Rajat Sharma had resigned from his post, citing his inability to continue amidst "various pulls and pressures". However, the DDCA ombudsman on Sunday rejected Sharma's resignation, asking him to resume work as president and also fixed November 27 to formally hear the matter. PTI

# Fast forward

Pakistan's latest pace sensation, 16-year-old Naseem Shah, has impressed even the great Andy Roberts

SRIRAM VEERA  
MUMBAI, NOVEMBER 20

A NIGHT before the tour game in Perth against Australia 'A', Pakistan's premier batsman Babar Azam was shaken by a WhatsApp call from the late Abdul Qadir's son Sulaman from Lahore.

It's bad news – the young teenaged pace talent Naseem Shah's mother had died, and Sulaman, a mentor of sorts of Shah and who took in a fresh-faced teenager at his Abdul Qadir Academy a few years ago, wants Babar and the team to break the news gently. "Let him sleep now, no point in waking him and shock him. Please tell the manager to tell the news gently to him," Sulaman says. Babar promises to do the same and soon, the manager is on line, affirming the same.

As it turned out, after Sulaman's discussions with the family and the team management's internal talks, it was decided that Shah would play that 'A' game. "He never was going to make it in time for the funeral," Sulaman says.

He didn't bowl in the first innings and in the second, stormed into cricketing world's imagination with an imperious performance – snarling bouncers that shake up Usman Khawaja whose woes convince the selectors not to pick him for the Test series, and snorters from just short of length that harrasses the Test opener Marcus Harris. Short videos go viral on Twitter, Cricket Australia puts out slightly longer versions and the cricketing world gets all delirious – nothing quite stirs it like the sighting of the next great pace hope. He is 16, they say, and even if some doubt his age, no one doubts his natural talent.

It's just not fans that are goose bumping but the cricketing fraternity is salivating. That art is truly international is proven when one hears the excited voice of the pace legend Andy Roberts from Antigua. Turns out, a few years ago, Roberts had been in Lahore for a three-week pace camp and had worked with the very young Shah. More than his own stint, he seems to be more interested in finding out about how the boy is doing now.

As one mentions a few tidbits from the internet, and sends videos to him, Roberts repeats the full name "Naseem Shah" three to four times, lingering and stretching Naseem in obvious pleasure.

"Wonderful talent. I remember. Just a young kid then. You see young talent and see some good stuff but this boy was something else. Had everything: pace, skill to move the ball, and was aggressive – he was very eager to learn," Roberts says.

So much so that, Roberts remembers the last day, the farewell moment from the camp. "He was almost crying, tears in his eyes that we were leaving and camp was ending. I used to wonder what happened to him."



Shah and Roberts didn't need to be worried for the talent would run in to Pakistan's wisest cricketing head – Mudassar Nazar, the former opener and medium pacer who runs the National Cricket Academy and the man whose brains Imran Khan used to pick during his captaincy days.

It was during a troubled phase a couple of years ago when Shah reached out to Mudassar. He was hit by a serious back injury. "Not just one but three stress fractures on the back," Mudassar seems to shudder even now. "It was dark times indeed, and even as I would tell him to be strong and motivate him, even I was worried. But how hard he worked. Great commitment and desire," Mudassar says.

"Mera kya hoga, sir? (What will happen to me?) Will I be able to play again? Will I be able to bowl as fast as before? Baccha tha, young boy, he used to keep asking and I would keep counselling him that he can if he works hard. His friends and peers like Musa Khan and Hasnain Mohammad were all going past him and that also makes one wonder, na?"

Mudassar suggested a few course corrections: the action was modified a bit – "His front leg was going too far across at the crease, twisting his back, and that was changed. Small stuff like that. His overall strength was increased. All this means, not



Naseem Shah is set to become the youngest Test debutant on Australian soil. PCB



only did he have to do gym sessions but also change his action – and practise it a lot to make it natural. It needs great passion and hard work to do all that."

For nine months, Shah spent hours in the morning, afternoon, and evening working on all that was required. "He was with me at the academy for those months and slogged so hard. Any early doubts I had about him disappeared."

Not just Mudassar but the Pakistan cricket establishment threw their weight behind Shah. He had been signed up by the PSL team Quetta Gladiators when he was hit by the injury. Nadeem Omar, the team's owner and a godfather to many young cricket talents in the country, allowed him to be with the team even if unfit so that he doesn't feel dispirited and also learns from the likes of Viv Richards, team's mentor.



"To bowl fast, you need to be aggressive and you need to want to bowl fast. It causes pain to the body and you need to withstand it. Naseem was always eager to do whatever was required. He had everything I would say," Mudassar says.

It's the nuances that Mudassar strived to inculcate. "The angles, for example. How to use the crease better. I would say something about say, the need to bowl from round the stumps and he would quickly pick it up and do it in training. How to bowl different lengths. He would soak it all up quickly. But I would say he was already really good when

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It's an impression that Shah gave to people even years before. Sulaman, son of Qadir, remembers the day when Shah's uncle Saeed brought him to his academy. Clad in Salwar Kameez, a thin eager-eyed lower-middle class kid from Lower Dir, a place eight hours by road from Lahore, started to bowl at the ground. "I am not exaggerating but the very first ball he bowled, I was moved and started to watch with great interest. I had given him an old ball mind you but he bowled superbly. He bowled a few balls and I remember rushing to him to tell him, 'Naseem, what do you want to do? Under-16, Under-19 and even Pakistan ODI team you will play even if you don't work hard. That's the kind of talent you have? But if you work hard, you will play Test match cricket for Pakistan and there is nothing greater than that. Will you?' "I won't say that uski zehen mey maine Test dream daala, but I am happy to have played a small part," Sulaman says.

Next day, Sulaman took Shah to the pace trials for U-16. But the selection was already done and the last-instant intervention wasn't enough. "He was heart broken but I told him, just trust me, work on your bowling, next year you will get in. No one can stop you."

Some time later, Sulaman sent a message to his father Qadir, who was with ZTBL, a team in domestic cricket. "Baba, you have to see this kid. And he said, Bhejo, send." Soon, Qadir was a fan. "He has everything: pace, action, and cricketing sense. He is going to be a big cricketer, baba said."

Around this time, Shah started to work with a former pacer and a respected coach Saud Khan. "It was Saud bhai who polished him. At the academy we had worked on his run-up, making it more fluent, and then Saud bhai worked a lot with him during this important phase."

Roberts entered the picture around this time. "To bowl fast, you have to be aggressive. That he was. I told him and other bowlers about the need to improve the lower-body strength. The legs. Talked a bit about the need to be accurate with bouncers – even then he was very keen in bowling them," Roberts laughs. "Nothing out of the world but usual stuff that you tell young pacers but he was very eager."

"You know the difference between Pakistani and Caribbean pacers?" Roberts warms up. "Here they constantly keep talking about need for fast pitches. As if in our days, we bowled on really quick tracks. No way. You have to be fast through the air, not off the wicket. If there is help, great but the real job is done through the air. The Pakistani bowlers understand that. The young kid too got it. I am so happy that he has continued to work and Pakistan cricket has helped him to reach Tests. I would be very interested in watching how he performs."

Only thing that Mudassar worries now is the kind of hype building around Shah. "It can get tricky. I hope he takes all that and settles down. But it's great that he has a great bowler like Waqar Younis as team coach there. Who better than him to coach? Remember, even Waqar didn't have success early in Australia. His record in that country improved later. So he will pass on all that. And even if things don't go according to what we all wish, one thing is certain: Naseem will come back from Australia a better, improved bowler. This experience will help him a great deal."

How far can the boy go? "All the way, I would say. He is the real deal," Mudassar says. "From what I see, he has everything, it's up to him now," Roberts says.

Sulaman was at Shah's house for the mother's funeral. "I spoke to him that day. And told him 'remember how happy your mother would be. November 21st (the start of the first Test) is your day, her day. You are born to do this: be a great fast bowler. Just focus on it'. I know how terrible it is to lose a parent; I lost my father recently and he is so young but I just wanted to make sure that he knows all his family, friends, Pakistan cricket and even cricket fans around the world are with him." What did he say? "I will try my best. Playing Tests for Pakistan has been my dream. Karoonga."

**Australia vs Pakistan: 1st Test: Live on Sony Network: 5:30 am**

## Qureshi's absence opens door for teens in Pak squad

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 20

Pakistan has been forced to pick two rookie 17-year-olds for their Davis Cup encounter against a full-strength Indian squad, after senior players Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi and Aqeel Khan pulled out protesting against the tie being shifted to a neutral venue.

The International Tennis Federation (ITF) has shifted the November 29-30 tie from Islamabad to Kazakhstan capital Nur-Sultan. The Pakistan Tennis Federation named teenagers Huzaifa Abdul Rehman and Shoaib Khan, both of whom are ranked as lowly as 446 and 1004 respectively in the junior ITF ranking list.

Yousuf Khan and Ahmad Kamil, also teenagers, along with Amjad complete the squad. With Pakistan's top players Aisam and Aqeel pulling out of the tie in protest against shifting out of matches to a neutral venue, the PTF was left with no option but to pick junior players.

"It could have been a good tie but for India. We are sending junior players. Our senior Davis Cup team is not coming. We are sending our junior Davis Cup team. They are all 16-17 years old and will gain some experience," PTF President Salim Saifullah Khan told PTI. "India wanted to win this tie, so now they can win this tie easily. Everyday hundreds of Indians are coming to Pakistan. Our hotels in Islamabad are full of Indians but the six Indian players can't come. It's a shame," Khan added.

In the last tie, Pakistan hosted against Uzbekistan in April 2018, apart from Aqeel and Aisam, Muzammil Murtaza, Heera Ashiq and Shahzad Khan were part of the squad, which had lost 0-4. In the same year, Pakistan had beaten Korea 4-0 at home.

Since 2017, Pakistan hosted four Davis Cup teams and Hong Kong was the only team deciding against travelling to Islamabad.

The International Tennis Federation (ITF) dismissed Pakistan's review appeal against shifting of the tie against India to a neutral venue and nominated Nur Sultan to host matches on Tuesday.

When asked whether they have let their team down by pulling out, veteran Aqeel told PTI, that it was about taking a stance.

"We have not let down our team and nation, I don't think so. The Pakistan federation is also supporting us. This is a moral stand that we have taken. It's not that wherever you throw us, we will go and play. In the past also ITF has taken a few decisions that went against us," the 39-year-old said.

"We are also standing somewhere. We are also playing in Group I. We have maintained our position by beating some good teams in Asia zone. Aisam and I were very clear in our stance that if the tie is played outside, we won't play," he said.

Aqeel questioned why India was given a walkover when Australia had refused to travel to India in May 2009 in the wake of Mumbai terror attack during the previous year. "Why the tie was not played on a neutral venue at that time and India were given a walkover?" he countered, indicating that ITF was not fair with PTF. "We wanted a good competition. Indian tennis federation and Indian team have missed out on an opportunity to receive incredible hospitality and security by refusing to visit Islamabad. We don't understand, thousands of people are coming here, then what was the problem with this Indian team?"

The winner of the tie will make it to the 2020 Davis Cup Qualifiers, from where the winning team will strive to make it to the World Group.

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## Root ready for test after Ashes blip

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE  
MOUNT MAUNGANUI, NOVEMBER 20

ENGLAND CAPTAIN Joe Root has declared himself free of any Ashes hangover as he looked to revive his fortunes and those of his team in the two-Test series in New Zealand starting on Thursday. Root said he had been working on his batting shortcomings and denied the Test captaincy weighed on his performance in the drawn mid-year series against Australia, in which he suffered three ducks as England failed to regain the Ashes.

Neither England nor New Zealand were prepared to name their line-ups Thursday for what will be the maiden Test at Mount Maunganui's Bay Oval ground. But Root said rising star Jofra Archer "would bring something different to what we had previously" in the bowling stakes, indicating the pacer-man will be included.

New Zealand will not be fighting fire with fire – their genuine quick Lockie Ferguson is in the squad for the first time, but captain Kane Williamson said he would sit out the first Test. England have had the upper hand over New Zealand this year, narrowly winning the World Cup on the boundary count-



Joe Root prior to a training session at Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui. AP

back rule when the final was tied, and winning the recent Twenty20 series 3-2 when a super over was needed to separate the two sides. But while the wins were satisfying, Root said Test cricket was another level altogether and after failing to beat Australia he fancied England could start on the road to redemption against New Zealand.

"Long term it's important that we look after Test cricket in England and we make it a priority," he said.

"You look at the guys in the dressing room and they're all desperate to get that right. We feel we're in a strong position to take this team forward."

Root, who averages 47.91 but was well off his best with an average of 32.50 against Australia this year, was adamant the pressure of captaincy was not an issue. "It's very clear that I want to be leading this team moving forward," he said. "I'm not concerned about it. I know I've not performed as I'd like to in previous series and probably over the last year, but they're challenges you face as an international player. It could have been exactly the same if I wasn't captain. I've gone away and worked out a few things and feel like my game's in good order coming into this series."

Despite Root's confidence, New Zealand go into the series ranked second in the world, one spot ahead of England, and have won seven of their past eight home series including a 1-0 win in a two-match series against England 20 months ago. Tim Southee, Trent Boult and Neil Wagner, who took 32 of the 40 England wickets to fall in that series, were confirmed Thursday as again forming the bowling pace attack.

**New Zealand vs England 1st Test: Live on Sony Network: 3:30 am**

## Bookies who approached woman cricketer to be further investigated

EXPRESSNEWS SERVICE  
BENGALURU, NOVEMBER 20

TWOBOOKIES, reported to the India cricket board's Anti-corruption and Security Unit (ACSU) for approaching a member of the national women's team, have been directed by a city court to appear before the crime branch for further investigations on November 22. The bookies-Jitendra Kothari and Rakesh Bafna-had approached a 20-year-old cricketer while she was rehabbing at the National Cricket Academy in the city under the pretext of offering her managerial services last February.

The cricketer had then reported the approach, made during India-England one-day series, to the International Cricket Council, which conducted an inquiry and warned the bookies after finding prima facie evidence against them. Based on a reference made by the ICC, the regional integrity manager of the ACSU, Haridyal Singh Champavath, filed a criminal complaint with the Bengaluru police in September this year. The Bengaluru po-

lice then registered a case of cheating and conspiracy against the duo. According to the complaint filed by Champavath, the bookies approached her on social media, offering opportunities to appear in commercials. They met her at the Chancery Pavilion hotel in Bengaluru on February 12. Bafna then sought supply of information of the team, saying he wanted to rope in more players so as to facilitate bet-

ting. The player then reported the approach to the ICC.

According to the case registered against the bookies, they were planning to use the information provided by the player for the India England women's one-day series played at the end of February in India. ACSU head Ajit Singh Shekhawat, a former Rajasthan director general of police, had spoken about a woman cricketer being approached by bookies in September.

With the Bengaluru crime branch police aggressively tracking fixing incidents after a flurry of such instances, especially in the Karnataka Premier League T20, the two bookies recently approached a sessions court in Bengaluru fearing arrest and seeking anticipatory bail. Kothari, who hails from Gurgaon, and Bafna, who's from Cuttack, have been granted anticipatory bail but have also been directed by the sessions court to appear before the CCB police on November 22. The duo has also been asked to appear before the police twice every month. The two bookies on Wednesday filed a fresh set of anticipatory bail pleas.