

Thousands brave winter chill, witness Kashmir’s long-awaited football match

ADIL AKHZER
SRINAGAR, DECEMBER 26

BRAVING WINTER chill and cold weather, the Valley witnessed its first major sporting event in Srinagar since the revocation of special status of Jammu and Kashmir on August 5. On Thursday, Real Kashmir hosted I-league champions Chennai City at TRC Turf Ground, drawing several thousand in the stands.

Unlike past, however, the attendance was less, with rows and rows of seats remaining empty during the match. “The seating capacity is around 13,000 at the ground. Today, we saw around 5000-6000 people present at the match,” Umar Amin, Media Manager of Real FC the told The Indian Express. “The match ended peacefully.”

Thursday’s match -- which Real Kashmir won 2-1 -- was the first home game of the season, after Real Kashmir’s previous match against Gokulam Kerala, which was to be played on December 12, had to be rescheduled due to adverse weather conditions. Real Kashmir’s next match here will be on January 5 against Mohun Bagan. Since early morning, hundreds of fans ar-

rived at the ground to watch the match despite the sub-zero temperatures during the night and the day temperature dipping significantly ahead of the New Year. On December 21, the 40-day chill period Chilai Kalan started in the valley with locals gearing up for some harsh weather conditions.

The match on Thursday afternoon, however, started in sunshine. “I am hardcore football fan. I left early morning to reach here and to support Real Kashmir,” says Arshid Ahmad, a resident of North Kashmir’s Sopore – 50 kilometers away from Srinagar.

While the match was going on at the ground, BJP General Secretary Ram Madhav arrived at the ground and watched the match briefly. Talking to media persons on the sidelines, Madhav said he was “delighted to be present today at this match.” “I am happy that I witnessed two first two goals and both were by Real Kashmir FC,” he said.

Kashmir has witnessed a complete lockdown since August 5, when government revoked special status of Jammu and Kashmir and bifurcated the state into two Union Territories. While the businessmen, after the restrictions were lifted, did not open the shops for the whole day, there has

Goa survive Chennaiyin resurgence in goalfest

Chennai: FC Goa regained the top spot in the Hero Indian Super League after trouncing Chennaiyin FC in an edge-of-the-seat contest that ended 4-3 in favour of the visitors. First-half goals from Ahmed Jahouh (26’), Brandon Fernandes (41’) and Hugo Boumous (46’) set the Gaurs on their way. Chennaiyin threatened to come back with goals from Andre Schembri (57’) and Rafael Crivellaro (59’) but Ferran Corominas (63’) added a fourth for Goa before Crivellaro managed to get another goal back in injury time, setting up a grandstand finish. However, Sergio Lobera’s team held on to seal the win. FC Goa head the table with 21 points from 10 matches.

been a change in the last two weeks, as the shops are now open and public transport is also back on the roads.

Team officials told *The Indian Express* that the J&K police had advised them not to sell more tickets and keep the tickets limited. “We had initially sold more than 2000 tickets because it was the first big event post August 5. But then there was more crowd at the ground and it reached over 5000,” said an official. “We are hopeful that there will be more crowd in the next match.”

Farooq, Armand score in Kashmir's maiden win

PTI: Taking advantage of the home conditions, Real Kashmir on Thursday scored their first victory of the ongoing I League season with a 2-1 defeat of the defending champion Chennai City. Danish Farooq (22nd minute) and Ivory’s Bazie Armand (27th) scored for the winners while Syed Suhail Pasha was the lone scorer for the visitors as he found the net in the 48th minute. Real Kashmir had drawn their away matches against Kolkata giants East Bengal and Tiddim Road Athletic Union (TRAU) of Imphal before taking on the Holders.

The win takes Real Kashmir to seventh place in the standings with five points, while the defending champions drop to eighth place with an inferior goal difference of -2.



Security personnel watch Real Kashmir’s match against Chennai City at TRC Turf Ground in Srinagar on Thursday. Kashmir won 2-1. *AIFF*

Akhtar alleges teammates treated Kaneria unfairly

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KARACHI/NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 26

FORMER PACER Shoaib Akhtar has claimed that his teammate Danish Kaneria faced discrimination at the hands of a few Pakistani cricketers, who were reluctant to even eat with him because he is a Hindu. Kaneria supported Akhtar’s claim.

Kaneria, only the second Hindu to play for Pakistan after his maternal uncle Anil Dalpat, took 261 wickets in 61 Tests at an average of 34.79. He also played 18 ODIs. Akhtar made the revelation during a show *‘Game on Hai’* aired on PTV Sports.

“In my career I fought with two-three (in the team) when they started talking on regionalism. Things like ‘who is from Karachi, Punjab or Peshawar’, that used to infuriate. So what if someone is a Hindu, he is doing well for the team. They used to say ‘sir ye yaaha se khaana kaise le raha hain’ (how is he taking food from this place)?” said the 44-year-old, who played 46 Tests and 163 ODIs.

“The same Hindu won the Test for us against England. If he is taking a bagful of wickets for Pakistan, he should play. We could not have won the series without Kaneria’s effort. But not many gave him credit for that,” said Akhtar.

When contacted, Kaneria supported Akhtar’s claims. “Shoaib has been a legend of the game. His words are also as blunt as his bowling. When I was playing I did not have the courage to speak on these matters but after Shoaib bhai’s comments, I do. He has always supported me and also Inzy bhai (Inzaman-ul-Haq), Mohammad Yusuf and Younis bhai (Younish bhai).” Kaneria told PTI over phone from Karachi.

“Those who did not support me, I will make their names public soon. Having said that, I feel fortunate and honoured that I got to play for Pakistan,” added Kaneria.

Kaneria, now 39, was found guilty of spot-fixing alongside Mervyn Westfield while playing for Essex against Durham in 2009. The leg-spinner was found to have convinced Westfield to concede 12 runs during the one-day game. Westfield was handed a four-month prison sentence and ECB banned him for five years.

Kaneria admitted to spot-fixing in 2018 after six years of denial.

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SHOAIB AKHTAR
ON ALLEGED TREATMENT TO KANERIA

Boxing Day: Eng land first punch

Curran records best bowling performance for England (4/57); de Kock’s gritty 95 takes hosts to 277/9

ASSOCIATED PRESS
CENTURION, DECEMBER 26

JAMES ANDERSON marked his 150th appearance with a wicket off the first ball of the series before England lost a little of its early impetus in the opening test as South Africa reached 277-9 at stumps on Thursday.

Anderson forced Dean Elgar out caught behind down the legside at SuperSport Park to give England immediate reward for loading its bowling attack with quick bowlers and putting South Africa in to bat. Stuart Broad, Anderson’s long-time pace partner, and newcomer Sam Curran followed up as South Africa struggled to 111-5 soon after lunch before recovering.

Broad took three wickets and Curran 4-57 in his best bowling performance for England so far. Quinton de Kock led a middle-order revival for South Africa with his 95 off 128 balls. De Kock blasted 14 fours to hit South Africa out of trouble and found help from debutant Dwaine Pretorius (33) and Vernon Philander (28 not out).

Curran removed de Kock just short of his century, Broad had Kagiso Rabada for the final strike of the day, and Jofra Archer also picked up a wicket to give all of England’s four front-line fast bowlers some success. Anderson had 1-69 on his return from a calf injury that’s kept him out since the beginning of the Ashes series. He’s the first bowler ever to play 150 tests.

While celebrating that achievement, his first offering of the series was wayward down the legside. Elgar still managed to push his bat out at it and edge behind to wicket-keeper Jos Buttler. Anderson leaped in the air in celebration.

Curran claimed the wicket of Aiden Markram (20) in his first over into the attack – England’s first change. Broad sent back Zubayr Hamza (39), South Africa’s new No. 3 following Hashim Amla’s retirement, shortly before lunch. Curran and Broad both struck to remove Rassie van der Dussen, the second South African on debut, and captain Faf du Plessis (29) respectively soon after lunch.

In deep trouble

The Proteas were in deep trouble at that point. It was the kind of start England captain Joe Root was hoping for. There was also a sense of relief for Root that England’s leading two pace bowlers came through their first challenges of the four-test series. The 37-year-old Anderson had bowled just four overs in test cricket since February before this match.

Broad had struggled in the buildup to the first test in South Africa with a flu-like illness that struck down a number of England’s touring players. Broad had spent nearly a week in bed recovering. Batsman Ollie Pope missed out on selection for the series opener completely and was one of three England players still sick and quarantined at the team hotel.

Jonny Bairstow came into the team for Pope but the attention was on England’s bowling attack. Star allrounder Ben Stokes also played and added a fifth pace option. His



James Anderson took his 150th Test wicket — Dean Elgar — off the first ball bowled on Thursday. *AP*

father was in a critical condition in a Johannesburg hospital earlier this week suffering from a serious illness while vacationing in South Africa to watch his son play. Ged Stokes has improved and is now stable. That allowed England’s vice captain and most important player to take part in the first test and Stokes collected catches to get rid of Hamza and tailender Keshav Maharaj.

The 21-year-old Curran was undoubtedly the spark for England, though, as was de Kock for South Africa. The left-handed wicket-keeper-batsman attacked from the moment he arrived at the crease with South Africa under pressure. He just missed a sixth test hundred when Curran cleverly found enough movement with the old ball to produce an edge behind to Buttler.

BRIEF SCORES: South Africa 277/9 (de Kock 95, Philander 28*, Curran 4/57, Broad 3/52) vs England

Photographer trips, delays start of play

Centurion: Photographer Christiaan Kotze became part of the story on Thursday when he was injured in front of the sightsscreen and caused a delay to the start of a Test match – and possibly contributed to South African batsman Dean Elgar’s wicket.

Kotze, on assignment for AFP, had finished shooting some pre-play images before the first Test between South Africa and England. He was walking in front of the sightsscreen when he tripped on the boundary rope and then lost his footing on a slippery pitch cover. He collapsed in severe pain from what was diagnosed as badly-sprained right knee

ligaments and needed medical treatment on the spot before he was carried away on a stretcher.

The start of the match was delayed by several minutes – and when it began Elgar played a loose shot and was caught behind down the leg side off the first ball of the match, delivered by James Anderson. Kotze’s his wife Catherine took over his ground level camera, while after treatment he hobbled up to a more comfortable position in the press box.

“I hope I didn’t cause Dean Elgar to lose concentration,” he said. “But when I was limping past some English guys they thanked me for the wicket.”

‘Is that what happened?’ Smith asks after being booed at MCG



Steve Smith was greeted by a mixture of boos and cheers by the Melbourne crowd. He was unbeaten on 77 at the end of Day 1 against New Zealand. *AP*

AP & AFP
MELBOURNE, DECEMBER 26

IT’S THE biggest event on Australia’s cricket calendar, the opening day of the Boxing Day test at Melbourne Cricket Ground. It’s not the time an Australia batsman would expect to be booed. “Is that what happened? I have no idea,” Steve Smith said on Thursday after scoring an unbeaten 77 on day one of the second test against New Zealand.

Walking to the crease at the fall of Australia’s second wicket, in front of a record crowd of more than 80,000 – the biggest attendance ever for a day’s play in an Australia-New Zealand test – Smith was greeted by a mixture of boos and cheers. The booing was no doubt linked to Smith’s 12-month ban at the hands of Cricket Australia for his role in the ball-tampering affair in the Cape Town Test against South Africa in March, 2018. Smith was Australia’s captain at the time.

Smith is eligible to regain Australia’s captaincy role in March 2020. The 30-year-old showed tremendous resilience during

Australia’s Ashes tour of England in 2019, scoring 774 runs at an average of 110.57 and jointly winning the player-of-the-series award with England’s Ben Stokes, despite constant abuse from English crowds.

And now he is hearing boos in his home country. “I don’t really listen when I walk out to bat. Cheering, booing, dunno. I’ve learnt to just block it all out, regardless, good or bad,” Smith has scored centuries in his past four Melbourne tests, before missing last year’s clash against India because of his 12-month suspension. It will be interesting to see if the boos turn into cheers if the World No.2-ranked batsman’s sheer class is on display again on Friday.

On Thursday, in the Black Caps’ first Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground since 1987, skipper Kane Williamson won the toss and opted to bowl, and it looked to be a good decision with Joe Burns out first ball and David Warner just before lunch.

But first Marnus Labuschagne, the world’s leading run-scorer for 2019, and then Smith smacked half centuries to seize back control and leave them on 257 for four, frustrating the disciplined New Zealand bowlers.

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STEVE SMITH
ON BEING BOOED

Along with the fidgety Smith, Travis Head was not out 25, desperate for runs after a lean spell. Labuschagne made 63 with Colin de Grandhomme taking 2-48.

The signs are ominous for New Zealand with superstar Smith scoring centuries in his past four Tests in Melbourne, and a fifth looking likely. “The way they bowled and placed their field, I had to be patient,” said Smith. “It’s not the kind of wicket you could go after them. I think we did pretty well today. The plan will obviously be to score as many as we can (on Friday),” he added. “But after getting sent it, I think you’d take 257 for four at the end of the day. One more good partnership would be nice and sort of set the game up for us.”

The visitors need to win to square the

three-match series after crashing in the opening day-night clash in Perth by 296 runs.

It was a bold decision by Williamson to bowl on a pitch that has traditionally been docile and favoured the batsmen. And it appeared to pay dividends in a sizzling opening over from Trent Boult, back after missing two Tests with a rib injury. After three testing balls to Warner, his fourth clattered into Burns’ middle stump, with the opener out for a golden duck to huge roars from the large New Zealand contingent in the 80,000-strong crowd.

Boult was sorely missed by the Black Caps in Perth and along with Tim Southee found early swing and zip with the ball. “Obviously we would have liked a few more wickets on our tally,” said Boult. “I think the overheads (cloudy conditions) and the way the pitch played in the first hour or two, it’s annoying not to have them a couple more down. On the positive, they haven’t got too far ahead of the game. Hopefully we get a couple (of wickets) early tomorrow.”

BRIEF SCORES: Australia 257/4 (Smith 77*, Labuschagne 63, de Grandhomme 2-48) vs New Zealand