

BRIEFLY

Agarwal to be rested for Mumbai game

New Delhi: India's Test opener Mayank Agarwal will be rested for the high-profile away Ranji Trophy game against Mumbai, starting January 3 as a part of workload management programme by the BCCI ahead of A team's tour of New Zealand. Agarwal will be a part of the India A squad's shadow tour, where they would play two warm-up List A games, three unofficial ODIs and two four-day 'Tests' before joining the senior team for the Test matches. The tour starts on January 17.

With the Karnataka opener set to leave with A squad led by Shubman Gill on January 10, it is understood that BCCI had asked the state team to exempt Agarwal from the upcoming Ranji game. However Ajinkya Rahane and Prithvi Shaw will be turning up for Mumbai even though they are also part of the A team. As per a report in Cricinfo, Ravikumar Samarth has been recalled by Karnataka for the upcoming encounter.

2019, a year of accomplishment: Bumrah

New Delhi: India speedster Jasprit Bumrah on Tuesday described 2019 as a year of "accomplishments, learning and memories" on and off the field and said he was eagerly looking forward to another successful year in 2020. "2019 has been a year of accomplishments, learning, hard work and making memories, on the field and off it too. And on the last day of the year, I'm looking forward to everything that 2020 has to offer!" Bumrah wrote on his twitter handle along with a few pictures of his achievements in the year gone by.

In 2019, Bumrah not only emerged as India's pace spearhead in all three formats of the game, but also became one of the best bowlers of the world. Bumrah, 26, finished 2019 as the numero uno bowler in one-day cricket while occupying the sixth spot in ICC Test bowlers rankings..

India U-19 team lose to SA by five wickets

East London:Skipper Priyam Garg's fifty went in vain as India Under-19 team suffered a five-wicket loss to South Africa in an inconsequential third Youth ODI at the Buffalo Park here. Before this match, India Under-19 had already taken an unassailable 2-0 lead after winning the first two matches of the series.

Sent into bat on Monday, India under-19 team lost three wickets before crossing the fifty-run mark with Achille Cloete striking twice for the hosts. Garg and N Tilak Varma (25) then steadied the ship as the two added 58 runs together.

BRIEF SCORES: South Africa Under-19 193/5 (Jonathan Bird 88 not out) beat India Under-19 192/8 (Priyam Garg 52, N Tilak Varma 25; Pheku Moletsane 2/36) by five wickets.

Fewer the better

England cricket board joins Australia counterpart in four-day Test drive; cites scheduling, workload concerns

ENS/REUTERS
DECEMBER 31

IF TEST cricket embraced pink balls and day and night fixtures towards the end of this decade, the next could see the traditional format getting compressed to four days. The supporters argue, and the arguments have been raging for several years, that the shortened format could woo more audience, is more marketable, decongests the crammed schedule and reduce player workload.

While Cricket Australia has been one of its staunch supporters, England and Wales Cricket Board might join them, as the International Cricket Council (ICC) cricket committee is set to discuss the issue next year as the game strives to stay relevant.

"We believe it could provide a sustainable solution to the complex scheduling needs and player workloads we face as a global sport," an England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) spokesperson told London's Daily Telegraph newspaper.

The official, however, maintained that it's an emotive topic for the fans and players. "We're definite proponents of the four-day Test concept, but cautiously so, as we understand it's an emotive topic for players, fans and others who have concerns about challenging the heritage of Test cricket."

Ashes rivals Australia already seem to be taking the same view. Cricket Australia chief executive Kevin Roberts said last week that the board would "seriously consider" playing four-day Tests. "A recent survey conducted by Cricket Australia also met with similar responses. "We know having surveyed around 8000 Australian fans a couple of years ago, the two main things they wanted were an expanded BBL and more innovation in Test cricket in the form of four-day Tests and day-night Tests, I think as we explore possibilities in the next cycle from 2023 to 2031, it's very important we ask ourselves the right questions about cricket," he said. Further vindicating his logic is the stat that in the past decade of Tests played in Australia, as many 38 of the 52 Tests were decided in four or fewer days.

The other "Big Three" member of the ICC, the powerful Indian board, has yet to declare its stance on the matter, with its president Sourav Ganguly saying he wants to see the proposal before commenting. "First we will have to see the proposal, let it come and then we will see. It's too early to say. Can't comment just like this," Ganguly had said.

Four-day matches were given the green light by the ICC in 2017, when South Africa hosted one against Zimbabwe, while England played one against Ireland in July this year. In the past, Tests have been scheduled over three, four, five or six days, and also been 'timeless', lasting until a positive result.

With an increasing number of Test matches ending prematurely, the administrators are keen to free up more space in the schedules for lucrative shorter form matches. In the last five years, the games that have gone to the fifth day have dipped. In 2014, as many as 66 Tests veered to the fifth day. The corresponding numbers in the subsequent years were 60 in 2015, 62 in 2016, 51 in 2017, 44 in 2018 and 33 this year.

Among its advocates are former England skipper Michael Vaughan. In a column for *The Daily Telegraph*, he wrote: "If you actually dissect a five-day Test match, the fifth day is costing the game a lot of money. As



The supporters of the proposal argue that the shortened format could woo more audience, is more marketable, decongests the crammed schedule and reduce player workload.AP

EXPLAINED
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Why four-day Tests?

AMONG THE chief reasons England and Wales Cricket and Cricket Australia have been pushing for four-day Tests is that the number of Test matches surviving till the fifth-day has rapidly declined in the last five years. In 2014, not less than 66 Tests reached the fifth. Since then, there has been a progressive decline. In 2015, the count barely touched 60, the next year, it improved to 62, but the next three years saw only 51, 44 and 33 reaching till the fifth day. In Australia, as many as 38 off the 52 Tests that produced a result ended in four or fewer days. So they argue that the fifth-day is redundant, in terms of finance, infrastructure and workload management of players.

long as that money is spent in the right way—on grassroots, on marketing Test cricket, on growing the sport around the world - that would be a good thing."

He also pointed out that the changed format could woo the new audience, thus making it more relevant to the new-generation view-

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ers. "We always have to remember that cricket is an entertainment business. At the minute the white-ball game has overtaken Test cricket. Apart from those of us who already love Test cricket, I don't think Test cricket has done enough to reach a new audience. So we need to make it more relevant and more appealing. It might just bring a little more relevance if it gets shortened," he said.

So has been former Australia captain Mark Taylor, putting in the same category as the pink-ball matches for the traditional format.

Some of the contemporary players, though, are not so pleased. Australia batsman Travis Head believes Test cricket should not be denied the possibility of late drama on a fifth-day wicket. "I think that (five-day tests) plays a lot with the wicket, brings spin into play," Head told reporters in Sydney on Tuesday. "So I'd like to keep it at five days," he added.

A few days ago, his skipper Tim Paine too

had opined the same. He pointed out to the Ashes, where four of five Tests went to the fifth day. "We might not have got a result if we'd done that in the Ashes, I think every game went to a fifth day," he said. "That's the point of difference with Test cricket, it is five days, it's harder mentally, it's harder physically, and it tests players more than the four-day first-class fixtures do. I think that's what it's designed to do, so I hope it stays that way," he added.

The Federation of International Cricketers Associations (FICA) fears the new gaps in the calendar could well be filled with more cricket. "It would take pressure off the schedule but our concern would be that the ad hoc way the schedule currently works they would simply plug in more cricket into the gaps," FICA chief Tony Irish told ESPNcricinfo.

While four-day Tests allow a golf-like Thursday-to-Sunday scheduling, they require a minimum of 98 overs a day to be played, a challenge considering five-day matches already often fall short of their daily quota of 90 overs.

The MCC's new chief executive Guy Lavender, has vociferously voiced his dislike. "The MCC's view is that five day Tests from a cricketing perspective make sense. There is another perspective around 4 day Tests from a customer experience perspective and looking at the difficulties of fitting in the tours programme and a congested international fixture list with emergence of domestic Twenty20 tournaments," he was quoted as saying in *The Daily Telegraph*.

"The net impact is if you reduce from five to four the jigsaw becomes much easier to fit together. It is a debate that is going to run but from our perspective, five days Tests is what we would like to see continue," he added. The modernist versus traditionalists, the bouts will spill forth into the new decade.

England illness outbreak eases ahead of second Test in S Africa

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CAPE TOWN, DECEMBER 31

THE OUTBREAK of illness in the England squad is easing, which would surely allow the tourists a better buildup to the second Test against South Africa in Cape Town. As many as 11 players and another six members of the England support staff have been sick with a contagious flu-like illness at some point on the tour but Tuesday's medical update was the most positive in the two weeks since the squad arrived in South Africa: "There are no further outbreaks," the team said.

The second Test starts on Friday and England may be close to a fully healthy squad. Opening batsman Dom Sibley was the latest player to go down sick, falling ill in the wake of the 107-run loss in the first Test in Centurion.

But he's improving, the team said, and is expected to train with the squad at the Newlands ground on Wednesday. Like Sibley, captain Joe Root, vice captain Ben Stokes, Jos Buttler, Stuart Broad, Jofra Archer and Joe Denly also all played in the first test but were ill before or during the match. Batsman Ollie Pope was ruled out of the game and Chris Woakes, Mark Wood and Jack Leach were also sick.

Many of the players had to be put in quarantine in an attempt to stop the spread of the illness. Root and Buttler were quarantined at the SuperSport Park stadium for a period of time during the third day of the first Test. Pope, Woakes, Wood and Leach were all in quarantine at the team hotel. Root, Stokes, Buttler, Broad, Archer and Denly are expected to be fully recovered for Newlands and batsman Pope, seam bowlers Woakes and Wood, and spinner Leach are all out of quarantine and back with their teammates. England made 268 all out chasing 376 to win the first Test.

But Joe Root didn't cite that as an excuse for the defeat. "We're not going to hide behind that as an excuse but 14 of our squad have been taken ill in the last week and a half [this includes four of the support staff]. Ben, in particular has had to deal with that horrible thing with his father and his illness. So we've had a lot thrown at us. Everyone has dealt with it the best they can," he said.

Although they lost, it was still the highest fourth-innings score ever made at SuperSport Park. That showed The England squad had been brought together by its off-field issues, head coach Chris Silverwood said. He used the word "galvanized."

"We've seen a lot of character, a lot of guts and a lot of bravery from a few of the guys that have been poorly but have got themselves out there, got themselves up for it and shown a lot of fight. I'm proud of the guys in that respect, the amount of courage that they've shown. It's almost pulled us together and made us stronger as a unit," he added. Allrounder Stokes will especially be looking forward to a return to Newlands, where he hit a brilliant and career-best 258 on England's last tour to South Africa.

Leach in fray

Left-arm spinner Jack Leach will be in contention for the second Test. But since that Test, he has been more or less peripheral and ineffective with the ball. He was dropped after a disastrous outing against New Zealand in Mount Maunganui (2/153). However, England missed a spinner in the first Test here, where Keshav Maharaj of South Africa was mighty effective in both innings.

DOWN THE MEMORY HOLES

Tales from the PGA Tour: Birdies, bogeys and a celebrity surgeon

ASSOCIATED PRESS

KAPALUA (HAWAII), DECEMBER 31

RORY MCILROY won his fourth event of the year at the HSBC Champions and returned home from Shanghai to a surprise.

His wife had finished the room in their new house to display his trophies. McIlroy had not seen them — the claret jug, Wanamaker Trophy, U.S. Open trophy, World Golf Championships trophies — since the summer of 2018.

"It's sort of the last room that we've been waiting on to get finished in the house," McIlroy said. "People walk into my house, it's not as if they are front and center. But I like to have them out so in a reflective moment, I can go and have a look at all I've achieved on the golf course the last few years."

It's also a time to think about what else he wants to do. Golf, as in life, is about going forward. That still leaves time to look back on a few tales from the tour that go beyond birdies, bogeys and knee-high drops.

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Golfers usually are the celebrities in their families. Charles Howell III had a different outlook.

He was chatting outside the locker room at Kapalua when the conversation turned to his father, who arranged for his first lessons with David Leadbetter during a medical conference in Florida. It was his father who joined Augusta Country Club so his son could play. It was his father who was there for his development from junior golfer to PGA Tour member.

For about 20 minutes, he raved about Dr. Charles G. Howell, a renowned pediatric surgeon. He told about one surgery that lasted 18 hours and required his father's full focus with no bathroom breaks. There was another high-profile case in which his father was

among the few surgeons around the world who was called in to perform.

It was a special moment in which the son spoke about the feats of his father the way most people talk about athletes.

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Justin Thomas was talking in Mexico about how he hates losing more than he enjoys winning. Phil Mickelson was asked his opinion on the matter, and he agreed.

"I can certainly relate to what he's saying," Lefty said. "I can identify exactly where he's coming from."

The next day, Mickelson stopped for a quick chat with NBC Sports analyst Paul Azinger. They played plenty of money games in Mickelson's early days, and they were reminiscing about the wins and losses.

Azinger brought up a match they had one year at Bay Hill.

"I'll never forget Olympic Club," Mickelson replied.

Bay Hill is where Mickelson had a 15-foot putt on the last hole that was worth \$1,600 if he made it. The others could have opted out for \$800 if they conceded the putt. Azinger wouldn't concede. He wanted to see it. Mickelson poured it in the heart of the cup.

So what happened at Olympic Club?

Mickelson delivered another big shot into the 18th to 4 feet for birdie. He already was ahead in the match. Azinger came up short of the green and conceded the birdie — and then he changed his mind. Azinger chipped in for birdie. Mickelson missed the short put.

Twenty-one years later, Mickelson still remembered. The sting of losing can last longer than the joy of winning.

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He looked like a typical fan on vacation at the Sony Open with board shorts and flip-flops as he waited outside the ropes on the



Ian Poulter's son Luke (right) is considered to be bigger follower of the sport than his father.

18th green. This was Marc Leishman, who had played earlier in the day. Leishman was with his two sons, who wanted to get an autograph from Peter Malnati.

Peter Malnati?

"They watched him once on a day he made a hole-in-one, and he was always smiling," Leishman said. "They're big fans."

Maybe they learned what to like from their father. Moments later as Leishman turned to leave, two fans recognized him and asked for his autograph. Another wanted a selfie. Then, a man asked Leishman if he could help fix his slice.

The Aussie had time for all of them. With the last fan, he took a stance and pointed to

a man a few feet away with his back turned and said: "If you wanted to hit him in the back, you wouldn't swing up or down. You'd go straight into the back. That's how you want the driver."

Time for everyone.

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The only one in Ian Poulter's household who might be more passionate about golf is his son, Luke, who came out to Liberty National for the start of the FedEx Cup playoffs, the final event before going back to school.

Poulter played the last round with Jordan

The only one in Ian Poulter's household who might be more passionate about golf is his son, Luke, who came out to Liberty National for the start of the FedEx Cup playoffs, the final event before going back to school. Poulter played the last round with Spieth, who was moving up the leaderboard. Luke couldn't get enough of it as he watched Spieth line up a 15-foot birdie putt on the 10th.

Spieth, who was making everything as he moved up the leaderboard, Luke couldn't get enough of it as he watched Spieth line up a 15-foot birdie putt on the 10th.

"Watch this! He'll make this," Luke said. "He makes everything. Do you know he's had only 10 putts on the front nine? Ten putts!" Spieth missed. Luke was no less impressed and continued to rave about Spieth. "He's brilliant," he said. "Best putter on tour."

Finally, it was pointed out to the teenage Poulter that his father is not bad either. In fact, his father has made his share of big putts in his career.

Luke grinned, narrowed his eyes and offered the self-assured nod of a proud son.

"I know," he said.

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Pat Ruddy is a former golf journalist and intensely proud golf owner of The European Club south of Dublin. It is a strong test of golf, lacking only a reasonable traffic pattern to

host big events. But it has held a number of tournaments, including the Irish Amateur Open Closed.

The day after the British Open, Ruddy was showing photos on the wall of the course and the competitions it has held. One photo he loves is of 17-year-old Rory McIlroy, curly hair spilling out from under his cap, hitting a shot against Simon Ward in the final of the Irish Amateur Open Closed. McIlroy won, 4 and 2.

The photo required a closer look. Irish golf is a tightly knit group, and it was not unusual for someone eliminated in an early round to stay around to caddie for a mate. Ward and his caddie were in the background of the photo watching McIlroy hit.

The caddie in the photo from 2006 was Shane Lowry. On this day, he was known better as "Champion Golfer of the Year."

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For all his work with title sponsors and television negotiations, PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan still appreciates the core product of his business.

He spent more than an hour walking outside the ropes Sunday morning at East Lake for the conclusion of the third round at the Tour Championship. He stopped briefly to consult on the lightning strike that sent six people to the hospital and halted play the day before, and then resumed his role as spectator.

Monahan was following along the 13th fairway with the final group of Brooks Koepka and Justin Thomas when he stopped to watch tee shots on the 18th. Tommy Fleetwood drilled a driver down the middle. "Did you see that?" Monahan said. "Man, these guys are really good."

The smile suggested he realized exactly what he had said.

Yes, these guys are good. In fact, the PGA Tour used to have a slogan along those lines. No hash tag required.