

Unstoppable England on brink of big win over SA

ASSOCIATED PRESS
PORT ELIZABETH, JANUARY 19

ENGLAND TOOK 10 wickets on a rain-curtailed day on Sunday to move to the brink of a dominant victory over South Africa in the third Test and an unbeatable series lead.

The tourists crashed through the brittle South African batting line-up twice on the fourth day in Port Elizabeth. England first took four wickets for one run in less than five overs at the very start to bowl the home team out for 209 in its first innings after the hosts resumed the day on 208-6.

Then, England captain Joe Root led with a career-best four wickets with his part-time off-spin as South Africa, following on, slumped again to 102-6 at stumps in their second innings.

Root's young England team, half of which is under 25, was on the way to a landmark win. England is expected to see out victory on the final day on Monday and take a 2-1 series lead with one Test to play.

The South Africans were still 188 runs from England's first-innings score of 499-9 declared and faced a psychologically scarring defeat ahead of that series finale in Johannesburg. England have a chance to go to Jo'burg off the back of their heaviest defeat of South Africa in more than 100 years.

The only obstacle appeared to be the rain, which stopped play for more than three hours on Sunday and might return to frustrate England on the final day. Three of the first four days have been rain-affected.

"Don't (talk about rain)," said England fast bowler Mark Wood. "No. I'm concerned. I thought Africa was the sunniest place in the world. I am a little bit worried. "(But) If we have the same attitude tomorrow ... then I think we'll be in a good place."

Sunday's rain delay certainly didn't dampen England's fire.

England's fast bowlers ripped through South Africa first. Stuart Broad took three of the four wickets in a devastating early England spell to wipe out South Africa's first innings. That gave England a 290-run first-innings lead and Root made South Africa follow on. Broad took his three wickets in 16 balls. Sam Curran had the other one, and three of the four were convincingly bowled as South African stumps flew in all directions.

BRIEF SCORES: England 499/9 declared lead South Africa 209 (De Kock 63; Bess 5/51, Broad 3/30) and (following on) 102/6 (Du Plessis 36; Root 4/31) by 188 runs

'Rahul to continue keeping wickets, gives balance'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BANGALORE, JANUARY 19

INDIA CAPTAIN Virat Kohli on Sunday said the team will continue with KL Rahul as the wicketkeeper batsman "for a while" as he lends massive balance to the side just like his illustrious namesake Rahul Dravid did during 2003 World Cup.

Rahul has been in sublime touch with the bat and in the last two ODIs against Australia, also did a decent job behind the stumps in 2-1 series win. He kept the wickets here on Sunday even though Rishabh Pant had regained full fitness after getting concussed by Pat Cummins bouncer in the first ODI. "I think lack of clarity in position of batsmen has really hurt us in the past. Now that we understand that this feels right, we will go ahead with that for a while and figure out if this is the right thing to do or not. You cannot chip and change immediately and create confusion among the group," Kohli said at a media conference on Sunday with reference to No 4 conundrum during ODI World Cup.

"We are playing very well, unchanged team and did the job two with back to back wins. Don't see any reason why we should change this balance. It has done well for the team," making it clear that Rishabh Pant might have to wait a bit longer for his comeback in the playing XI.

Late entrant Veer's all-round show helps Colts win opener

SANDIP G
JANUARY 19

THREE YEARS ago, Siddhesh Veer posted on facebook: Siddesh=intelligence+ destiny. He was just 15 then, waiting for his board exam results. Cricketing dreams were just budding—he used to train a local academy in Pune just to keep himself preoccupied in his spare time. Three years later, those words couldn't have rung truer. For, he was not included in the first team list for the Under-19 World Cup announced in December. He wasn't expecting a call-up either because he hadn't played for the country since March last year, after failing to follow-up his 81 against Afghanistan U-19 in the quadrangular U-19 series.

Veer, though disappointed at the snubbing, didn't give up his hope. He posted another picture with the caption: Training hard, I believe in destiny. Then as fate had it, all-rounder Divyansh Joshi picked an injury and Veer got a New Year surprise. That day, he

VISHAL MENON
BANGALORE, JANUARY 19

This was a match in which Rohit Sharma reaffirmed just how much he loved batting at Bangalore's Chinnaswamy Stadium. Barring a brief period of lull, the opener showcased his full repertoire of shots against the Australian bowlers, flaying them to all corners of the ground to register his 29th ODI century. He found support from his captain Virat Kohli, a local favourite, who helped himself to another half-century – a stroke-filled 89.

Together, their efforts comfortably eclipsed Steve Smith's commanding 131. This was also a match in which Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins – arguably the two best fast bowlers in contemporary cricket on current form – were put to the sword by the flashing blades of India's rampaging duo. The end result was a comprehensive 7-wicket win for India that helped them seal the series 2-1.

Even before Rohit had walked out to bat to gun down the 287-run chase, social media had gone into a meltdown, showcasing clips of his herculean 209, which he had scored against the same opposition at the same venue six seasons ago.

These days, whenever India's second-most popular cricketer is at the crease, no total looks ungettable, and no score unachievable. It's this sense of security that would have played in the minds of the team management when they had asked KL Rahul to partner Rohit during the chase tonight. The reason being the other incumbent opener Shikhar Dhawan had walked off the field earlier in the day after hurting his shoulder. "Dhawan was taken for an X-Ray and a call on his availability would be taken after fully assessing his condition," was the BCCI statement.

Even in his absence, they didn't have a reason to panic. Because they knew Rohit and Rahul would take them home. However, Rahul was not quite in his element tonight. He departed for a 27-ball 19 with the score reading 68/1 in the 12th over. There was still no reason to panic, because in walked Kohli. Over the past six years or so, it's the Rohit-Virat partnerships at the top of the order, which have fundamentally taken them past the finish line.

On Sunday night, a similar script would get played out in front of a packed Bangalore crowd. Kohli took his time to get into the groove on a slow pitch, Josh Hazlewood, making a comeback into ODIs after 14 months,

looked menacing with his pin-point precision and tight Test match lengths. Even Rohit struggled during this brief phase, in which he scraped through just a single off 19 Hazlewood deliveries. There were a couple of collective groans from the crowd and a gasp of anguish from the Indian dressing room, when Rohit went for an uncharacteristic cross-batted heave off Ashton Agar. But these would only be minor blips as India's most experienced pair hung on. They had played through more difficult phases in the past.

Starc expensive

Australia captain Aaron Finch brought on Starc for his second spell, and this is when Rohit and Virat decided to go on the offensive. The premier left-arm pacer had conceded 16 runs from the two overs in his first spell. He didn't fare any better in his subsequent spell either. He and Cummins were both guilty of bowling too wide. They got no help from this benign pitch that had no lateral movement to offer.

Barring Hazlewood and Agar, none of the Australians looked like breaching the two marauders in blue India jerseys. There was one particular shot from Rohit that stood out from his deluge of blistering stroke-play. It was a six smoked off Hazlewood that went sailing past the long-on boundary for a six. By the time Rohit departed – caught in the deep off Adam Zampa's bowling for 119 – India required just 80 runs from the remaining 13 overs.

Virat and India's No.4 Shreyas Iyer marched on without much fuss, peeling off the remaining runs with relish. Iyer played some out-of-the-world drives on the up off Starc and Cummins. Infact, the Mumbaikar smacked Starc for a one-handed six over the covers. That singular moment of brilliance just encapsulated a soul-crushing day at the office for the visitors. Iyer remained unbeaten on 44 as India romped home in the 46th over.

India team coach Ravi Shastri was beaming ear-to-ear after his team's performance. "This team, the boys showed great character. Nobody can say we played an inferior Australia side. We got a thrashing in Mumbai, and then to win two games, with all the travel, and with Australia winning all three tosses. We picked important wickets in the middle overs. Virat and Rohit batted well, and Shreyas will get a lot of confidence from this innings. If sides are looking to take us apart in the last 10 overs, then we have a lot of variety," he asserted.

VISHAL MENON
BANGALORE, JANUARY 19

PRADEEP SAHOO, the 34-year-old leg-spinner from Bhiwani, roped in as Australia's premier net bowler, is now an integral part of their limited overs set-up for close to a year. He termed Steve Smith as a player with an insatiable thirst for training and intense love for batting.

"He keeps batting for hours at the nets. At times, the coach (Justin Langer) would have to literally drag him out so that others can have a hit. Even after training, if he is not particularly happy with something, he would go for another batting stint. Always keen to improve, he keeps probing you with questions all the time," Sahoo explained. Not long ago, Langer had talked about how Smith would shadow practice even in the shower. Smith is absolutely obsessed about batting. This manic obsession has helped the former Australia captain make a seamless comeback with ridiculous ease, following his year-long suspension from the game for his involvement in the Sandpapergate fiasco in 2018.

After plundering runs in the Ashes, the 30-year-old followed it up with a string of decent scores in the recently concluded Test series against New Zealand at home. Smith once again found himself amongst runs in the ODIs as well – notching up a commanding 131 in the series finale against India at Bangalore. His ninth ODI century and third



Rohit Sharma completed his 29th century in the must-win third and final ODI against Australia in Bangalore on Sunday. PTI



Steve Smith last scored an ODI century exactly two years ago, against Pakistan at Perth. PTI

against India, propelled the visitors to 286/9, after taking first strike. This century was special because it was his first in two years, incidentally his last three-figure knock also came on the very same day against Pakistan in Perth. He had come close at Rajkot when he was dismissed on 98 but on Sunday he crossed the three-figure mark.

Slow off the blocks

Despite the flourish in the end, Smith found it difficult to get off the blocks at the start. India captain Virat Kohli tried to exploit Smith's inherent weakness against the rising short-pitched deliveries, by employing a leg-slip and deep fine-leg. Smith almost fell

fore he struck an unbeaten 48 off 36 in the final, a similar knock to the one he authored against Sri Lanka in India's World Cup opener on Sunday. His late flourish—44 off 27 balls—was the reason India's total soared to 297, which seemed distant when he walked in after skipper Priyam Garg got out in the 43rd over. Veer's improvisation was classical finisher's stuff: six runs in his first 10 balls, 25 in his next six and 13 in his next eleven.

He began with an onslaught of Dilshan Madushanka, the highly-rated Sri Lankan left-arm medium pacer. He was smoked for three successive boundaries. The first was a thumping cover drive, the next was a firm drive that the long-on fielder misfielded, the third, though, was a fierce pull shot that perfectly bisected the leg-side gap. Thus he gave India the required momentum at the death, as they plundered 46 runs off four overs. In the next over, he scooped medium-pacer Amshi de Silva over the keeper's head. The ball was shorter than he had anticipated, but he didn't lose his shape and waited for the

ball to reach him, and then with a twirl of his wrists, he completed the shot. Three balls later, he slog-swept the medium-pacer, as if he's a spinner, to the grass banks. The deflated Sri Lankans seemingly gave up, and would have been reasonably happy in conceding just one more boundary to him.

But Veer was far from finished. Next up, he tormented them with his off-spin. First, he dismissed the well-set opener Kamil Mishara for 39 before taking out the Amshi, the bowler he had punished. He doesn't possess fancy variations, but bowled with considerable cunning, varying his pace and angle, demonstrating that he has the composure and intelligence to make his fortunate break count.

BRIEF SCORES: India 297 for 4 in 50 overs: Yashasvi Jaiswal 59, Priyam Garg 56, Dhruv Chand Jurel 52 not out, Siddhesh Veer not out 44; Amshi Oren 1/40) bt Sri Lanka 207 all out in 45.2 ovs Nipun Perera 50, Ravindu Rathantha 49; Akash Singh 2/29, Siddhesh Veer 2/34).

ZIM START WELL

Zimbabwe dominated the opening day of the first test against Sri Lanka with the hosts reaching 189-2 at stumps on Sunday.

SCORECARD » India vs Australia

3rd ODI | Bengaluru | Toss: Australia

AUSTRALIA 286/9 IN 50 OVERS

D Warner	c Rahul b Shami	3 (7b)
A Finch	run out	19 (26b, 1x4, 1x6)
S Smith	c Iyer b Shami	131 (132b, 14x4, 1x6)
M Labuschagne	c Kohli b Jadeja	54 (64b, 5x4)
M Starc	c sub b Jadeja	0 (3b)
A Carey	c Iyer b Yadav	35 (36b, 6x4)
A Turner	c Rahul b Saini	4 (10b)
A Agar	not out	11 (13b)
P Cummins	b Shami	0 (1b)
A Zampa	b Shami	1 (6b)
J Hazlewood	not out	1 (2b)

■ Extras: (lb 14, w 13) 27
Fall of wickets: 1-18 (Warner, 3.2 ov), 2-46 (Finch, 8.5 ov), 3-173 (Labuschagne, 31.3 ov), 4-173 (Starc, 31.6 ov), 5-231 (Carey, 41.4 ov), 6-238 (Turner, 43.6 ov), 7-273 (Smith, 47.1 ov), 8-276 (Cummins, 47.4 ov), 9-282 (Zampa, 49.2 ov)

■ Bowling:	
J Bumrah	10-0-38-0
M Shami	10-0-63-4
N Saini	10-0-65-1
K Yadav	10-0-62-1
R Jadeja	10-1-44-2

INDIA 289/3 IN 47.3 OV

R Sharma	c Starc b Zampa	119 (128b, 8x4, 6x6)
KL Rahul	lbw b Agar	19 (27b, 2x4)
V Kohli	b Hazlewood	89 (91b, 8x4)
S Iyer	not out	44 (35b, 6x4, 1x6)
M Pandey	not out	8 (4b, 2x4)

■ Extras: (lb 2, w 8) 10
Fall of wickets: 1-69 (Rahul, 12.3 ov), 2-206 (Sharma, 36.4 ov), 3-274 (Kohli, 45.5 ov)

■ Bowling:	
P Cummins	7-0-64-0
M Starc	9-0-66-0
J Hazlewood	9.3-1-55-1
A Agar	10-0-38-1
A Zampa	10-0-44-1
M Labuschagne	1-0-11-0
A Finch	1-0-9-0

■ India won by seven wickets and with 15 balls to spare.

off-stump is. He brought up his maiden ODI half-century with a sublime on drive off Shami. He didn't carry on for a big haul – getting dismissed for 54, courtesy a sublime diving catch by Kohli. The third-wicket alliance between the master and apprentice yielded 127 runs, and if anything, it only helped Smith to settle down. He nurdled and grafted his way back into gaining utmost fluency. Smith had already taken his tally to 77 by the time Labuschagne had departed, and continued in the similar vein, crossing his personal landmark in the 44th over.

On his part, Kohli perhaps missed a trick by not asking his pacers to persist with the short-pitched stuff. Instead, they were perhaps guilty of bowling too much on Smith's pads. Following the century, Smith upped the ante, smoking an inexperienced Navdeep Saini for a boundary and a sensational wristy flick shot for a six. The beauty of his batting is the manner in which he manages to stay so deep in the crease, turning attempted yorkers to full-tosses.

He added 31 runs from his final 15 deliveries, but sadly for Australia, there wasn't much support from the other end. Once Alex Carey departed for a promising 36-ball 35, it opened up the floodgates for India. Wickets fell in a heap, leaving Smith with the arduous task of dragging the score past the 300-run mark. He couldn't. But through this knock, Smith once again underlined his intrinsic value to his team, and his insatiable love for batting.

Shaw smashes 150 off just 100 balls

Lincoln: Prithvi Shaw slammed a 100-ball 150 in India A's 12-run victory over New Zealand XI in the second practice game on Sunday, coming back from an injury in the manner that matched the hype around him. Eyeing a return to the Indian senior team, the 20-year-old Shaw struck 22 fours and two sixes during his blazing knock at the Bert Sutcliffe Oval. Shaw's knock will certainly excite the selectors as they pick the squad for the Test series in New Zealand. The first Test will get underway on February 21 at the Basin Reserve in Hamilton and the second match is scheduled to be played at the Hagley Oval in Christchurch, starting February 29. Batting first, India A were all out for an imposing 372 in 49.2 over before restricting the home side to 360 for six. PTI