

India hit back late as South Africa finish Day 1 on 247/6 in tense Guwahati Test

NEW DELHI, NOV 22

India clawed their way back into the contest on the opening day of the second Test in Guwahati, taking four wickets in the final session to leave South Africa on 247 for 6 at stumps.

On a slow-scoring day, the visitors built two partnerships of more than 80 runs, but India's late strikes ensured the match stayed level after South Africa had controlled large parts of the day. South Africa chose to bat first after Temba Bavuma won the toss, with India once again losing the flip under new captain Rishabh Pant.

The hosts made two changes to the XI, bringing back Nitish Kumar Reddy and B. Sai Sudharsan, while South Africa replaced Corbin Bosch with spinner Senuran Muthusamy. Pant led India for the first



time in Tests, standing in for Shubman Gill, who missed out due to a neck injury suffered in Kolkata.

The visitors made a steady start through their openers, but India broke through at an important moment when Jasprit Bumrah removed Aiden Markram in the last over before lunch.

Kuldeep Yadav struck immediately after the interval, dismissing Ryan Rickelton to give India a second wicket early in the afternoon.

Bavuma and Tristan Stubbs then steadied South Africa, adding more than 80 for the third wicket.

Their partnership slowed the game down and kept India at

bay for much of the second session. Even after Bavuma fell, Stubbs continued to hold the innings together as South Africa moved into a strong position.

India's effort with the second new ball shifted the momentum. Ravindra Jadeja dismissed Bavuma, Kuldeep removed Stubbs soon after, and the pressure built quickly.

Mohammed Siraj added a wicket late in the day as India finished the session strongly, taking four wickets in the final hours to drag the match back to an even position.

At stumps, South Africa were 247 for 6.

India will look for quick wickets on the second morning to prevent South Africa from crossing 300, while the focus will soon shift to India's batting group, who will want a much stronger showing than their failed chase of 124 in Kolkata.

Ashes opener ends in two days as Head's 'reverse Bazball' powers second-shortest Test in Australia

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Australia wrapped up the opening Ashes Test in Perth inside two days, completing one of the fastest finishes ever seen on Australian soil and overwhelming England by eight wickets.

The match was done and dusted in just 847 deliveries, making it the second-shortest Test completed in Australia and the third-shortest in Ashes history.

Only the 1931-32 Australia-South Africa Test (656 balls) and the 1888 Ashes clash (788 balls) were over quicker.

At the heart of the whirlwind was Travis Head, who reversed England's "Bazball" bravado with a blitz of his own.

Promoted to open after

Usman Khawaja's injury, opening day and 11 more before tea on Day 2.

Head produced one of the great Ashes centuries, reaching three figures off 69 balls and powering to 123 from 83 deliveries.

He cracked 16 fours and four sixes before falling in the deep with victory in sight.

Fast bowlers dictated the tempo from the start: 30 wickets fell for 468 runs across 113 overs in just five sessions, including 19 on a manic

Chasing 205, Australia stormed to 205-2 in under 29 overs, with Marnus Labuschagne unbeaten on 51 after levelling the scores with a six.

The victory extends Australia's unbeaten home Ashes run to 16

Tests — 14 wins and two draws since the 2010-11 series. The second Test begins on 4 December at the Gabba.

'Better' & 'fresher' pitch await teams in Guwahati after Eden surface controversy

NEW DELHI, NOV 22

India's loss to South Africa in two-and-a-half days in the opening Test of the series has opened a debate on the state of the pitch in Guwahati.

This being the first Test in the Northeastern state and a 9am start to beat the early sunset --- tea will be at 11am followed by lunch to be taken at 1.20pm -- has added intrigue to the contest.

This follows high drama surrounding the surface in the Eden Gardens Test with Gautam Gambhir terming it as "exactly the wicket we wanted" and batting coach Sitanshu Kotak saying that the head coach actually sacrificed himself to prevent throwing the curator under the bus.

So how will the red soil wicket at the Barsapara Stadium behave? It certainly isn't as dry as the Eden pitch and unlike Calcutta which was not watered in the



lead-up to the start, it was watered on Thursday morning.

India's obsession with pitches which turn from Day I, despite knowing it reduces the gulf in quality between the two teams' spinners, has backfired.

There is hope that the Guwahati pitch will not behave similar to Eden Gardens where luck outweighs skill.

India's stand-in captain Rishabh Pant said he expects the pitch to assist batters for the first two days before helping the spinners as the match progresses.

Hopefully, we'll go back to play four Tests against India: South Africa captain Temba Bavuma

NEW DELHI, NOV 22

Temba Bavuma has been left wondering why world Test champions get to play just a two-Test series against India.

Bavuma, who led South Africa to the WTC title earlier this year, said the brief series does little justice to the contest between two of the strongest red-ball sides in world cricket.

"We woke up this morning to watch the Ashes. We watched with a bit of jealousy, knowing that they were playing five Tests. They'll be going at each other," Bavuma said.

"Hopefully, not too far in the future, but more in the near future, we'll go back to play four Tests against India."

He knows that teams have



very little to say in such scheduling and it is entirely up to the International Cricket Council to take a call. The reigning champions aren't also playing any home series in the current WTC cycle.

out their frustration," he said.

"Look, however way the series goes, 1-1, 2-0, it would be nice for a three-Test series against a formidable team like India. "And it's just good for the fans, really, when people get to see good cricket, one team dominating, another team dominating. But there also being an opportunity for one team to come out as victors," he said. Bavuma wants to continue doing the good on-field work and compel the stakeholders to give them a fair deal.

"Like I've already said, as players, all we can do is what we've been trying to do out on the field, keep playing good cricket. That will attract the top nations and other nations to play a lot more cricket."

No. 3, the No. 1 issue for India as Guwahati hosts its maiden Test

NEW DELHI, NOV 22

In the current Indian team, no player, barring Mohammed Siraj, has any experience of playing red-ball cricket in Guwahati, set to be India's 30th Test venue on Saturday.

The India pacer had played a Ranji Trophy match in Guwahati against Himachal Pradesh in 2016. The latest Test venue has already stirred a debate over whether it is wise to play such important matches away from the traditional venues because of unknown conditions.

But the Birsapara Stadium promises a good surface where the Test could last the entire duration. But can Rishabh Pant's India square the series against the world Test champions?

Shubman Gill was ruled out of the Test much before the team arrived for an optional practice session on Friday morning. The regular captain is in Mumbai for an assessment of his neck spasms ahead of the ODI series.

But who will replace Gill in the playing XI? More importantly, will Washington Sundar continue



at No. 3, or will we see new incumbents for the No. 3 and 4 positions?

On the eve of the Test, Sai Sudharsan was seen visualising his batting at the main square. Picking Sai would add a seventh left-handed batter to India's line-up. South Africa off-spinner Simon Harmer would welcome such a move. Or, will the think-tank go with Devdutt Padikkal? But he, too, is a left-hander.

There is talk that Sai may be reinstated at No. 3 with Dhruv Jurel promoted to No. 4 and Washington dropping down the

order. There is also a possibility that Nitish Reddy may replace Axar Patel with India going with three specialist spinners.

Ajinkya Rahane has called on the team management to stop the constant chopping and changing at No. 3 and commit to a long-term option.

"I'll take a name. Sai Sudharsan. He did well, I guess," Rahane said on Ravichandran Ashwin's YouTube channel.

"When you bat at No. 3, it requires a different skill. Washy is a great player, an amazing talent. But going to bat at No. 3 is very

confusing for him. Washy, I believe, is a bowling all-rounder."

"If he has to bat at No. 3, then he has to prepare differently. Whether it is Washy or Sai, giving security is of utmost importance," Rahane said.

While India will be without Gill, South Africa too will miss Kagiso Rabada, who is yet to recover from his rib injury.

There was enough hint from Temba Bavuma that Lungi Ngidi, who has joined the team as a reinforcement, could feature in the second Test.

"Is there a temptation to play him? Yeah, definitely. If there is a bit of assistance with the new ball, especially with the early morning spots, he definitely comes into play," the South Africa captain said. Winning the toss will be crucial in the circumstances and Pant's luck with the coin could come into play. Despite all their success in ODIs and T20Is in recent times, India's status in Tests is under the pump and only a victory will be able to restore some pride. Another loss could have huge repercussions.

'No undue pressure': Rishabh Pant's mantra ahead of India vs South Africa 2nd Test

NEW DELHI, NOV 22

Rishabh Pant, who will be making his debut as captain in Guwahati on Saturday, has a simple philosophy when it comes to leading the side: Don't put undue pressure on yourself. Focus on the controllables.

The Indians are 1-0 in arrears in the two-match series, and unless they manage to win the second Test, it could jeopardise their chances of making the World Test Championship final.

"See, we feel at this top level, playing international cricket, you are going to be put under pressure like this, that you might be 1-0 down in the series," Pant said in his pre-match press conference on

Friday.

"But at the same time, as a team, we don't want to dwell too much on the result every time we play cricket because we need to have a clear mindset that, regardless (of whether) we are one up or they are one up, we still have to give our 200 per cent when we (are) on the field. "Taking that undue pressure is not required to play cricket, I feel. You've got to keep it simple. Just go out there and try to do your best, and eventually, the team who is going to play better cricket will win the match."

Pant was asked about the much-debated topic -- his decision to start the third day at Eden Gardens with Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel rather than one of the

two left-arm spinners and Jasprit Bumrah, and whether he might have chosen differently in hindsight.

"A lot of discussion happened as a team, and we felt going with a spinner was the thought process for us," Pant said. "Yes, there is always a chance (you could have brought) a fast bowler in, that's for sure.. (That thought comes in) when someone gives you a wicket afterwards."

"But that's the challenge as a captain you want to face each and every day. You are going to be questioned, but eventually you are going to do what you believe is right in that given frame of mind. And trust that person who has the ball will do the job for the team."

Lakshya Sen storms into Australian Open final after 85-minute semifinal thriller

NEW DELHI, NOV 22: Indian badminton star Lakshya Sen battled his way into the summit clash of the Australian Open Super 500 with a gripping semifinal victory that lit up the Sydney Olympic Park on Saturday. His triumph over Chinese Taipei's seasoned campaigner Chou Tien Chen delivered the kind of drama and intensity that turns an ordinary Super 500 event into a spectacle worthy of the big screen.

Sen, ranked World No. 12 and still chasing his first title of the season,

outlasted Chou in an 85 minute thriller that finished 17-21, 24-22, 21-16. The match swung repeatedly, its momentum shaped by the tenacity of two shuttlers whose Olympic dreams may not have resulted in medals but whose rivalry continues to elevate the sport in the four years between Games.

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Chou, 35, began with authority, racing to a 4-0 lead and entering the mid-game break of the opening set at 11-6. His experience and geometric precision set the tone as he controlled the pace and dictated the front court exchanges with his

trademark shuttle control. Sen did not fade, err or fold, yet Chou's mastery carried him to a 21-17 first game win. Sen has long known that defence alone does not win matches, but it can buy precious time against a powerful and accurate opponent.

He used it to stay afloat, to tire Chou, and to push the encounter into a decider. The turning point arrived in the second game when Sen stared at elimination while trailing 18-20. With extraordinary composure he saved both match points, forced

errors from Chou and claimed the game 24-22 with a sequence of relentless retrievers and sharp counter-attacks. The momentum carried into the deciding game where Sen seized control early.

He went into the break with an 11-6 lead, stretched it to 14-7 and benefited from a service fault by Chou that widened the gap to 17-9. Though the physical toll on both players was evident, Sen's superior fitness helped him close out the match 21-16.