

## The true meaning of Test Cricket

The 4 Test Series between India and Australia 2020-21 will live long in the memory books, records and remembered as one of the best if not THE BEST Test Series of all time.

**Test 1 (Day / Night) – December 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> 2020, Adelaide, Australia – India won the toss and elected to Bat first.**

India had a relatively good team with Virat Kohli as the Captain and one of the best batsmen in the world. Australia was led with Tim Paine as their Captain but as we all know, Australia are perhaps one of the toughest Test Cricket teams in the world to beat, especially at home. With India being the visitors, fighting for the Gavaskar-Broad Trophy, India who do not have a strong record with victories or performance levels on tour, they knew it was going to be a real test of character during this series.

India did not score heavily but Kohli still managed to put 74 out of the 244 in India's first innings. Australia did not start too well either on Day 2 but managed to get up to 192 by mid-way Day 3 before India returned for their 2<sup>nd</sup> innings. Tim Paine was the highest scorer for his side at 73 so the captains for both teams were doing their part for their team.

What took place after Tea on Day 3, 18<sup>th</sup> December 2020, will not be forgotten especially by India. India had a total collapse and put a total of 36 on the board with only 21.2 overs faced. Australia needed only 90 runs to win the 1<sup>st</sup> Test.

The scorecard below tells the tale of horror and disbelief from all Cricket lovers right across the world:

### INDIA 2ND INNINGS

BATSMEN		R	B	M	4s	6s	SR
Prithvi Shaw	♥ b Cummins	4	4	14	0	0	100.00
Mayank Agarwal	♥ c †Paine b Hazlewood	9	40	57	1	0	22.50
Jasprit Bumrah	♥ c & b Cummins	2	17	20	0	0	11.76
Cheteshwar Pujara	♥ c †Paine b Cummins	0	8	16	0	0	0.00
Virat Kohli (c)	♥ c Green b Cummins	4	8	13	1	0	50.00
Ajinkya Rahane	♥ c †Paine b Hazlewood	0	4	3	0	0	0.00
Hanuma Vihari	♥ c †Paine b Hazlewood	8	22	43	1	0	36.36
Wriddhiman Saha †	♥ c Labuschagne b Hazlewood	4	15	27	0	0	26.67
Ravichandran Ashwin	♥ c †Paine b Hazlewood	0	1	1	0	0	0.00
Umesh Yadav	not out	4	5	21	1	0	80.00
Mohammed Shami	retired not out	1	4	12	0	0	25.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>(21.2 Ov, RR: 1.68)</b>	<b>36</b>					

**Fall of wickets:** 1-7 (Prithvi Shaw, 3.1 ov), 2-15 (Jasprit Bumrah, 7.6 ov), 3-15 (Cheteshwar Pujara, 11.2 ov), 4-15 (Mayank Agarwal, 12.1 ov), 5-15 (Ajinkya Rahane, 12.5 ov), 6-19 (Virat Kohli, 13.4 ov), 7-26 (Wriddhiman Saha, 18.4 ov), 8-26 (Ravichandran Ashwin, 18.5 ov), 9-31 (Hanuma Vihari, 20.1 ov), 9-36\* (Mohammed Shami, retired not out)

It was India's lowest ever Test Score in history. I am sure you can imagine how the media took this and the pressure India were now under especially after knowing that King Kohli was heading home as planned after the 1<sup>st</sup> Test in order to welcome his first born into the world. Furthermore, Mohammed Shami was out injured due to a fractured forearm for the rest of the series so losing a main strike bowler also put immense pressure on India. Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood had bowled beautifully where Hazlewood finished with 5 wickets for 8 runs and Cummins at 4 wickets for 21 runs.

# INDIA'S HORROR SHOW

LOWEST TEST TOTALS FOR THE TEAM



TOTAL	OPPOSITION	VENUE	YEAR
36	AUSTRALIA	ADELAIDE	2020
42	ENGLAND	LORD'S	1974
58	AUSTRALIA	BRISBANE	1947
58	ENGLAND	MANCHESTER	1952
66	SOUTH AFRICA	DURBAN	1996

Australia got to 90-2 with relative ease and India just did not know what had happened or even how to respond to this shock performance. Australia were left on a high with Tim Paine given the man of the match and India were left to answer some very difficult questions and of course the coaching and management staff has to react quickly before the 2<sup>nd</sup> Test in a few days. India had to act fast and had to make changes swiftly to their batting and bowling team in order to fight back for the next Test. This also included who would be their new captain.

India chose Ajinkya Rahane as their Captain. Mohammed Siraj (Debutant) replaced Moahmmed Shami, Shubman Gill (Debutant) replaced Prithvi Shaw, Rishabh Pant replaced Wriddhiman Saha and Ravindra Jadeja replaced the missing Virat Kohli.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Test – 25<sup>th</sup> December to 28<sup>th</sup> December 2020, Melbourne, Australia. Australia won the toss and elected to bat first.**

India were back! Australia were bowled out for 195 in 72.3 overs on the 1<sup>st</sup> Day! Series was back on! India closed the 1<sup>st</sup> Day's play at 36 for 1. India showed great batting resilience for Day 2 losing only a further 4 wickets and making Australia's top bowlers work extremely hard leaving them frustrated. Close of the 2<sup>nd</sup> day was 277-5 after 91.3 overs. Rahane finished at 104 not out and Jadeja at 40 not out.

By the morning of day 3, Rahane could not extend his century by much unfortunately and got out at 112 whilst Jadeja got out shortly after reaching his half century at 57. India were all out for 326 by lunch.

Australia were feeling the pressure almost immediately when they came out to bat but were fortunate not to lose the early wickets due to the wicket reviews. But it did not keep India down and the telling pressure led to the close of play with Australia at 133 for 6, highest score being 48 from Mancus Lambuschagne with again Steve Smith not firing on all cylinders and getting out for a duck! A

Day 4, Australia couldn't face the pressure and were bowled out by lunch for 200 for 10 leaving India a target run chase of 70 to clinch the victory which they did with ease despite losing their opening batsman, Mayank Agarwal for 5 runs and their number 3 batsman, Cheteshwar Pujara for 3 runs. Both the Test Debutants Shubman Gill and Mohammed Siraj impressed and put in excellent performances for the team. Ajinkya Rahane got man of the match for the highest knock of 112. India had won by 8 wickets showing a comprehensive win and come-back.

**Result: Series level: 1-1**

The world was watching including Virat Kohli. His message to the team on Twitter was this:

*"What a win this is, absolutely amazing effort by the whole team. Couldn't be happier for the boys and specially Jinks who led the team to victory amazingly. Onwards and upwards from here."*

On the other hand, Tim Paine, the losing Captain knew his team would have to do better moving forward:

*"We are very disappointed, we played pretty poor cricket, pretty sloppy cricket, for the majority of the match," Paine told the host broadcaster after the match. "That's to take nothing away from India; they put us under pressure and forced us into making a number of mistakes, especially with the bat, and in the field, and when you do that against good side it makes it very hard to win."*



### **3<sup>rd</sup> Test – 6<sup>th</sup> January to 10<sup>th</sup> January 2021, Sydney, Australia – Australia won the toss and elected to bat.**

Australia looked comfortable putting up 166 for the loss of just 2 wickets on Day 1. Will Pucovski made 62, Marnus Lambuschagne not out at 67 and Steve Smith finally showing his world-class batting not out at 31.

Day 2, Australia were still in command. Lambuschagne got out at 91 and Steve Smith reached a well-deserved century but eventually went at 131. There was a short spell of rain too, but Australia managed to get the scoreboard up to 338 before India began their innings later in the day closing at 96 for 2 relying on two veteran batsmen to play the majority of the day: Cheteshwar Pujara (9 not-out) and the captain, Ajinkya Rahane (5 not-out).

India sustained the Australia pressure and bowling attack in day 3. They were at 180 for 4. Pujara reached his 50 but unfortunately got out. After that, India managed to only put on another 64 runs finishing the day mid-way at 244 for 10 leaving Australia to capitalize on their 94-run lead. Australia put on another 103 for 2 with Lambuschagne and Smith in great form once again. Total lead now 196.

Australia finished mid-way on the 4<sup>th</sup> day, shortly after tea and declared at 312 for 6 desperate to get India back in for their 2<sup>nd</sup> innings hoping they could clinch victory as the pressure was now all on India to bat well and to draw the match at the very least but not lose. India were set to chase a target of 407 to win.

India made a good solid start reaching 46 with Rohit Sharma opening and managing 52 for India before he was dismissed later in the day. By the end of day 4, they were at 98 for 2 leaving yet again Pujara (9 not-out) and Rahane (4 not-out) to keep India in the match facing a possible 97 over day to survive.

Rahane got out without adding to his score at the start of day 5. It was a big wicket for Australia, and they knew they had a chance to start tumbling down the order. However, Rishabh Pant had other ideas along with Cheteshwar Pujara who held his nerves. Pujara and Pant took India to 250, a 4<sup>th</sup> wicket partnership of 148! Unfortunately Pant lost out on his century and got out at 97, leaving Pujara to face the music and entrusting Hanuma Vihari who came into bat at number 6 to steady the ship with Pujara and to protect the lower order. What was about to unfold was true drama.

Vihari got injured almost immediately after the team total reach 272. Vihari had a hamstring injury so severe that he could not run properly. However, with India facing down the barrel with plenty of overs left in the day, he continued to bat under immense pressure. Unfortunately, Pujara could not sustain the onslaught any further and got out at 77 but should be commended having faced 205 deliveries keeping India in the match. Was this the chance Australia desperately needed with a window to the lower order opening-up? They thought so. However, Ravinchandran Ashwin (India's main spin off-break bowler) also had other ideas.

Together, a batsman who could not run (Vihari) and a bruised and battered Ashwin soaked up 42.4 overs for just 62 runs. The drama and what was being witnessed was surreal! Luck played a part too at times where missed stumping changes and some dropped catches during the match took place however, these two batsmen did not give up their wickets and took India to the finish line for the draw. Heated comments from the Australian Captain, Tim Paine, could be heard from the stump microphone telling Ashwin that he will see him at the Gabba (Brisbane which was the venue for the final 4<sup>th</sup> test where Australia held a record for not being beaten for over 30 years). Ashwin was determined enough along with his batting partner Vihari not to let such words get in the way of the job that he was there to do. Did it he did, and Australia could not break through the resilience of this Indian determination to fight for the draw on the final day of the test.

***Result: Draw, Series still level at 1-1.***

What takes place in the final 4 match Test match of the series is perhaps my most enjoyable yet favourite part of this article. It is without question, the best level of drama, on edge entertainment and the most enthralling phase based on my former experience as a Cricketer and as a lover of the game.

**4<sup>th</sup> Test (Final match of series) – 14<sup>th</sup> January to 18<sup>th</sup> January, Brisbane, Australia (The “Gabba”) - Australia won the toss and elected to bat.**

Australian Cricket have been proud to have had an exemplary record of being unbeaten for 32 years at this venue and naturally, the Australians felt highly confident of continuing this record at this ground, nicknamed, the Gabba or better known by most Cricketers as the “The Australian Cricket Cauldron”.

Day 1: Australia did not make the best of starts and found themselves down at 35 for 2 after 13 overs. They steadied the ship so to speak by reaching 154 for 3 by the 54<sup>th</sup> over. Marnus Lambuschagne was in control leading the Australian batting after Steve Smith whom everyone was hoping to see a big score from, fell at cheaply at 36 when Australia were at 87 total runs.

The scoreboard continued to tick-over and Australia had reached 213 before Marnus Lambuschagne also got out at 108. Tim Paine, the captain put in a good knock and stayed till the close of day with Australia at 274 for 5.

Day 2: Australia reached 300 in the first session of the day. Tim Paine reached his 50 but departed when Australia reached 311. By lunch, Australia had put up a respectable innings score of 369 all out. Australia had a wobble earlier in their batting line-up but managed to fight through their innings.

Lunch: Pressure was now on India to hit back in their first innings. India managed to lose 2 wickets by the close of day at 62 for 2. Rohit Sharma contributed a positive 44 before he got out. Young Shubman Gill got out cheaply for 7 leaving Cheteshwar Pujara (8 not out) and Ajinkya Rahane left as the two veterans to test the Indian team’s character and resolve based on their veteran experience to see out the day.

Day 3: Australia broke through the veteran partnership getting Pujara out for 25 after India had reached 105. At 144, Rahane departed at 144 after making 37. The Indian’s were in some trouble being 4 wickets down and shortly after at 161, Mayank Agarwal also departed at 38 with India at 161 for 5. Rishabh Pant who a lot of people were looking at to score big, made 25 leaving India at 186 for 6. Pressure was definitely on the Indian team to get to 300 at the very least to stay in the match.

India managed to get to Tea. Washington Sundar and Shardul Thakur were building a great partnership. It was on the cards for a record 7<sup>th</sup> wicket partnership which no one could believe. They ended up taking India to 309! These two youngsters set a new Indian 7<sup>th</sup> wicket partnership at the Gabba after 30 years of 123. Previously the Indian record was set by Kapil Dev and Manoj Prabhakar for 58 runs in 1991. India back in the match! Thakur unfortunately fell after making 67 and Sundar fell after making 62. India reached a respectable 336 before putting Australia back into bat late in the day for their second innings where Australia added a further 21 runs without the loss of any wickets.

Day 4: Australia looked resolute. First wicket of Marcus Harris fell at 89. Australia were in a total lead of 122. India finally got the breakthrough as they needed to start getting wickets in order to stand a chance of staying in the match. Incredibly, David Warner fell at 91 in the following over making 48, 2 runs away from his 50.



Indians were on a roll. Australia continued to bat but the runs dried up pretty quickly. Australia however managed to get to 196 for 5 and Steve Smith had reached his 50 but fortunately for India, he could not go onto make a big score managing a total of 55. Australia went onto make another 98 runs before the team got out with a total score of 294 and a total lead of 327 for India to chase. Mohammed Siraj and taken 5 wickets for 73 runs with his compatriot Shardul Thakur taking 4 wickets for 61 runs. Bowlers had done their part for India. Now it was on the Indian batsmen to see what they could do. India came in right at the end of the day to start their second innings and were at 4 for no wickets before close of day.

For Australia to win, they would need to get India out completely (requiring all 10 wickets) otherwise they would face another draw. No one could anticipate a victory for India at this stage. It just wasn't possible or was it?

Day 5: The pressure was on! Rohit Sharma cracked first at Australian's were ecstatic after getting him out cheaply for only 7 runs, India at 18 for 1! Now the batting display put on by young Shubman Gill with veteran Cheteshwar Pujara is what will live long in memory of Test Cricket.



Pujara appeared to be struggling at one end getting hit by the ball from across his entire body. He was struck on the head multiple times where many safety stoppages to play took place due to concussion protocols which is now a safety regulation to check on the health and well-being of the player being struck.



On the other end of the wicket, Shubman Gill was striking the ball very well and continued making runs. His 100 was looking very promising until he fell at 91 with India at 132 for 2. Pujara continued to get the treatment from the Australian bowlers without any letup but he somehow managed to sustain the relentless attack. No one apart from him will ever be able to tell you how he survived the continuous punishment delivered by Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood, frustrating the Australian team ball after ball after ball.

Ajinkya Rahane was next to go after he was looking to score big with some of the shots he was playing and giving confidence to Pujara to continue to fight. However, Rahane fell for just 24, India at 167 for 3. Everyone felt that this match now rested on the shoulders of young Rishabh Pant and Cheteshwar Pujara to at least get India within reach for a draw. But it seems, Rishabh Pant had other ideas! India reached 187 for 3 by tea with Pujara managing to get to 43 and Pant on 10. India were 140 runs behind in total.

Pujara after facing an astounding 211 balls and over 5 hours of punishing, full pressure Test batting with with bruises all over his body, fell at 56 after Cummins did the job with the new ball darting back for an LBW decision against Pujara. India at 228 for 4. Had he done enough for India for Pant to continue dominating the runs for

India? Pant continued to bat but to Australia's frustration, Tim Paine missed a vital stumping opportunity to get him out. Was this the luck India has been waiting for to go their way?

India now required just 99 runs with a possible 21 over left to play. Rishabh Pant had reached his 1000 Test runs in a record so was this the confidence he needed to continue playing the way he was? Could he get India to the finish line before the overs ran out?

India had reached 265 before Agarwal got hit trying to hit big through the covers off Pat Cummins and Matthew Wade took the catch. Australia got the lifeline they so desperately needed! Was this the breaking moment for India?



Washington Sundar came into bat with Rishabh Pant still scoring on one end. However, Sundar did not hold back and started to build a partnership with Pant instead. India were now at 318 when Sundar finally got out at 22! India now at 318 for 7! Was this going to be the moment of truth with Indian tail end showing, less than 5 overs remaining, with only Pant remaining as the last main batsman.

NOT TODAY! India and Rishabh Pant managed to get to the finish line with a total of 89 not out! India completely ecstatic, Australia not able to believe what had just happened and losing the series!

## Final Result: India won the series 2-1 (A new history written by India)

As a Cricket lover, as someone who has always said time and time again, Cricket is all about Test Cricket. I do not believe there is any greater proof in the history of the sport that can deliver this type of quality from the individual to the team, character and spirit making this perhaps the best sport of all!

Thank you Cricket for allowing me to witness this match and thank you to the players from both the Indian and Australian Cricket Squad and their respective countries for this delightful spectacle which I will remember for the rest of my life.

A truly great victory by India and commiserations for Australia having lost their 32 year undefeated reign at the Gabba!

*Article by: Amit Ohri (Just Cricket), 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021.*

