



One-off Test: Suthar brilliant on debut as India take control against Afghanistan

MULLANPUR, JUNE 07: Debutant Manav Suthar's classical left-arm spin bowling was a beacon of hope for a bright future as his three wickets gave India complete control on the second day of their one-off Test against Afghanistan here on Sunday.

With mercury soaring, India declared their first innings at 564 for 8 once Washington Sundar scored a pressure-free half-century while adding 54 useful runs with Suthar (28 off 41 balls).

At stumps, Afghanistan were tottering at 113 for 5 with Suthar recording figures of 3 for 21 in 15.5 overs.

Prasidh Krishna (2/27 in 7 overs) was the other wicket-taker. Hosts, now, are ahead by 451 runs.

Having warmed up nicely with a short yet sweet maiden Test knock, Suthar got into the act straightway after being summoned to bowl the last over before tea.

He removed opener Abdul Malik, who wanted to sweep his way out of trouble after looking clueless facing first three deliveries.

A classical action and the old school diagonal run-up of bowling to right-handers while cutting between the umpire and stumps, the 23-year-old from Rajasthan's Sri Ganganagar was a delight to watch.

In times when spin bowling is increasingly starting to become more of a restrictive weapon, thanks to the mushrooming T20 leagues, Suthar brought a lot of freshness while sticking to basics — flight and turn.

Suthar has a high release point and his main attributes included putting multiple revs (revolutions) on the ball.

He could hang the ball for an extra second in the air and also get some drift before it turns away from the right-hand batters.

The 23-year-old has a repetitive action and the pitch map on TV showed that he could land the ball



on the same spot and make it do three different things.

A few would turn more, a few would go straight with extra bounce forcing batters to go on back-foot, and a few others were classic arm balls that come in with the angle.

The wicket of the Afghanistan opener was one which he bowled straight and the ball bounced a tad extra making Malik's sweep look like an ugly hoick.

In the case of Rahmanullah Gurbaz, a former KKR opening batter, he simply didn't allow him to come on the front-foot.

He bowled a few that went straight and Gurbaz defended. Then from the same spot, he bowled one that dipped late and then turned away kissing the edge of Gurbaz's willow into Sai Sudharsan's hands in the second slip.

Suthar's third and final wicket of the day came when the ball stopped and bounced with Afsar Zazai closing the face of the bat and the loopy leading edge resulted in an easy return catch.

Skipper Shubman Gill, very rightly allowed him to bowl unchanged for 13 overs from one end while shuffling between Mohammed Siraj, Prasidh and Kuldeep Yadav at the other end.

If Suthar's impressive ini-

tiation into Test arena is any indication, Indian selectors can hope for a smooth transition as and when Ravindra Jadeja is phased out from red ball format.

Earlier, Rishabh Pant answered his critics in the best possible manner with a stroke-filled 81 while Afghanistan pacer Mohammad Saleem enjoyed the fruits of labour in punishing weather with figures of 6 for 140.

In-front of a sparse Sunday crowd, Pant did play his signature strokes but also curbed his natural instinct to go after each delivery, treating each ball on its merit during his 121-ball knock that had six boundaries and three sixes.

He should have completed his century but debutant left-arm spinner Nangeyalia Kharote, who slowed the pace considerably.

Pant charged down the track but couldn't fully reach to the pitch of the delivery as the lofted hit ballooned up for a simple catch.

For Afghanistan, their IPL star Azmatullah Omarzai was distinctly unlucky. He was impressive with the second new ball, beating the bat on a number of occasions without much luck.

In fact, Pant, like KL

Rahul did on Day 1, also edged one but no one from the Afghanistan team appealed for caught behind. The replays, though, showed a snick.

In the first hour of the second morning, Gill (126 off 177 balls) was dismissed by Saleem (4/109 in 20 overs), who bowled a beauty to get rid of the Indian skipper.

It was pitched on fuller length on off-stump channel drawing Gill forward and then there was a hint of outward movement, as the ball took the edge of his bat to end a 169-run stand.

Dhruv Jurel (19 off 20 balls) played a few beautiful square of the wicket shots but Saleem got one to reverse as Jurel decided to leave the ball on length only to find his off-stump pegged back.

However, one dismissal that left the crowd high and dry was Pant's as they were expecting some more fireworks from him once the spinners came into operation.

Washington and Suthar added 54 for the seventh wicket to take the team past the 500 run mark.

With the bowlers tiring, Washington calmly rotated the strike and hit the occasional six. Just after he completed his half-century, Gill signalled for declaration.

Punjab: FM Cheema honours teen Asian gold medallist Sehnoor Bawa

DIRBA, JUNE 07: A teen girl from Punjab, Sehnoor Bawa, has made the country proud by winning a gold medal in the relay race at the recently concluded Under-20 Asian Athletics Championship held in Hong Kong.

Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema visited the residence of the young athlete and honoured her for the remarkable achievement.

Sehnoor is a resident of Khadial village in Dirba Assembly constituency. She developed a keen interest in sports from an early age and has brought laurels, not only to her region, but also to the entire nation through her performance.

Cheema, while visiting the teenager and her family, shared detailed information about various facilities and support available to athletes under the Punjab Government.

He said that Sehnoor's achievement at such a young age is a matter of pride for the entire nation.

He added that under the leadership of Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann and the Punjab government's sports-friendly policies,



young boys and girls from rural areas are excelling in sports and making their mark at various levels.

Cheema expressed hope that Sehnoor would be representing India at the Olympics and other international events in the future, bringing further recognition to the region. He assured her that the government would extend every possible support for her training and preparation.

The Finance Minister further assured that any equipment, facilities, or financial assistance required for her future competitions would be provided.

Congratulating Sehnoor's

family, he said that it is an exceptional achievement for a village girl to bring laurels to the entire region.

He expressed that the Punjab government is committed to strengthening sports infrastructure by constructing a major stadium in every third village.

Cheema mentioned that a modern stadium will soon be built in their village, which would help nurture more talented athletes.

He further added that a state-of-the-art indoor stadium is being constructed in Dirba town, where facilities will be available for eleven sports disciplines to be played simultaneously. Be-

sides developing sports infrastructure, the government is also providing qualified coaches in various villages to encourage and train young athletes, he said.

The Finance Minister also congratulated Jaspreet Singh, Sehnoor's coach, for recognising her potential and grooming her into an athlete of international calibre.

He said that as Sehnoor gears up for national and international events, the government is committed to extending every possible support to help her achieve greater success and make the country proud.

Praggnanandhaa is more dangerous than Carlsen: Pravin Thipsay

NEW DELHI, JUNE 07: First Indian to win the prestigious Norway Chess title, Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa is a more dangerous player than even World No. 1 Magnus Carlsen and the most improved chess player in the world, according to Dronacharya awardee Grandmaster Pravin Thipsay.

Praggnanandhaa's historic triumph at Norway Chess 2026 has reinforced his status among the game's elite, with Thipsay rating him as India's strongest player at present, ahead of reigning world champion D Gukesh and Arjun Erigaisi.

"Praggnanandhaa is the best Indian chess player right now. On current form, he can be considered one of the most dangerous opponents in the world, even more dangerous than Carlsen," Thipsay told PTI in an interview.

He pointed to Praggnanandhaa's impressive record against the Norwegian legend, noting that few players have enjoyed such success against Carlsen in recent years.

Thipsay described the Norway Chess victory as one of the finest achievements by an Indian player in recent years.

He particularly praised Praggnanandhaa's finish to the tournament, where he won his final four rounds against opponents rated



above 2750, including Carlsen and Gukesh.

"What a great comeback. After a somewhat disappointing 2025, he has produced something truly extraordinary. Indian chess needed a performance like this," he said.

According to Thipsay, the 20-year-old's biggest achievement has been the transformation of his playing style.

Once known primarily as a sharp attacking player who relied heavily on opening preparation, Praggnanandhaa has developed into a far more versatile competitor capable of excelling in a variety of positions.

"Three or four years ago, he was feared for his attacking chess. But opponents

gradually learned how to neutralise those strengths. Over the last few months, he has added new dimensions to his game, including improved defence, positional understanding and tactical accuracy," Thipsay explained.

He compared the evolution of Praggnanandhaa's style to that of former world champion Anatoly Karpov and Carlsen, players who focus less on gaining opening advantages and more on gradually outplaying opponents through superior understanding and consistency.

Thipsay believes India currently possesses three genuine world-title contenders in Praggnanandhaa, Gukesh and Arjun Erigaisi.

While all three are capable of becoming world champion, he feels Praggnanandhaa holds a slight edge at present because of his recent form and ability to consistently defeat players of equal or greater strength.

"It's very important to maintain form for a long period. Like Kasparov was the strongest, highest rated player in the world for 18 years.

If our youngsters gain that sort of consistency than singular performance, then it would really be great."

Former Grandmaster Dibyendu Barua also praised Praggnanandhaa's achievement, calling the Norway Chess title a remarkable milestone.

Ashish Purti's hat-trick powers India to Men's U-18 Asia Cup title

KAKAMIGAHARA, JUNE 07: Ashish Purti struck a fine hat-trick as a dominant India defeated hosts Japan 4-1 in the final to lift the Men's Under-18 Asia Cup title here on Friday.

Purti scored in the 2nd, 28th and 34th minutes while captain Ketan Kushwaha (30th) also found the back of the net as India produced a commanding display against the home team.

Acknowledging the team's achievement, Hockey India announced a cash award of Rs 3 lakh for each player of the gold medal-winning team and Rs 1.5 lakh for each member of the support staff.

Hockey India also announced a cash award of Rs 1 lakh for each player of the Indian Women's U-18 team that secured the bronze medal earlier in the day, along with Rs 50,000 for each member of the support staff.

India wasted no time in making their presence felt, winning a penalty corner inside the opening 90 seconds. Purti made no mistake with the finish, giving India an early lead.

Japan grew into the quarter, testing India with four circle penetrations. But the



final quarter and in the 52nd minute, Numada Gaku converted a penalty stroke to reduce the deficit to 4-1.

However, the goal proved to be little more than a consolation. Japan earned three more penalty corners in the closing stages but could not find a way past the resolute Indian defence.

Purti was adjudged player of the match for his stellar performance, capping an exceptional campaign that saw him emerge as the top scorer with 13 goals in the competition.

The momentum was firmly with India and it showed almost immediately. Prahalad Rajbhar won the ball in a dangerous area, surged forward and laid it off to captain Kushwaha, who finished coolly to put India 3-0 ahead at halftime.

India remained relentless in the third quarter. A slick run from Varinder Singh resulted in another penalty corner and Purti completed his hat-trick with a clinical finish in the 34th minute to hand India a commanding 4-0 lead.

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