



Tilak’s patient ton powers South Zone; Sooryavanshi scores manic 92 for East Zone

NEW DELHI, AUG 31: South Zone weathered a blistering early morning bowling effort from India pacer Gurnoor Brar (four for 70) to finish day two of the Duleep Trophy semifinal 90 runs in the green at the BCCI Centre of Excellence here on Monday.

From an overnight 40 for two, South was reduced to 80 for five. But skipper Tilak Varma played all day (106 batting, 225b, 7x4), and combined with Shreyas Gopal (87, 169b, 11x4) for an excellent, match-turning 175-run partnership.

If not for a flurry of wickets towards close – from 255 for five to 270 for nine – South would have been in a healthier position. Nevertheless, with Tilak still around, South can hope to turn the screw further on day three, starting from 285 for nine.

It was an uncharacteristic innings from the usually dashing 23-year-old



Hyderabad batter. His half-century took 149 balls and contained no boundaries, and the first hit past the ropes came on the 154th delivery, helping South secure the first-innings lead.

Shreyas was a tad faster but eschewed none of his partner's caution, safely cutting and steering his way to his fifty from 107 deliveries. But just when the 32-year-old seemed set for his seventh First Class ton, an attempted glide to third-man brought about his downfall.

A mini collapse ensued, and it was only then that

Tilak shifted gears, and reached his eighth First Class hundred from 219 balls with back-to-back boundaries off Gurnoor. But in the morning, Gurnoor would have had no inkling of the things to come. Off his fifth ball, he turned N. Jagadeesan inside-out and rearranged his stumps.

R. Smaran, the 2025-26 Ranji Trophy top-scorer, was consumed by another mesmerising delivery that hit the top of off-stump. K. Himateja was sent back next ball to push South to the brink only for Tilak and Shreyas to turn the ta-

bles.

On the adjacent ground where East Zone was playing Central, proceedings were in stark contrast. Where South scored 73 runs in the opening session, East, propelled by Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's manic 92 (81b, 7x4, 7x6), scored as many as 183.

But from 200 for two, Ishan Kishan's outfit was dismissed for 266, the same first-innings total as Central. In what is now an one-innings shoot out, Central was 45 for three at stumps, with captain Rajat Patidar too back in the hut.

THE SCORES:
North Zone 195 vs. South Zone 285 for nine in 94 overs (Tilak Varma 106 batting, Shreyas Gopal 87, Gurnoor Brar 4/70).

Central Zone 266 & 45/3 in 20 overs vs. East Zone 266 in 57 overs (Abhimanyu Easwaran 69, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi 92, Harsh Dubey 4/66).

US Open: Sabalenka starts ‘three-peat’ campaign with win over Osorio

NEW DELHI, AUG 31: World No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka brushed aside Colombia's Camila Osorio 6-2, 6-4 in the first round of the US Open on Monday, starting her campaign for a 'three-peat' at Flushing Meadows in fine fashion.

Top seed Sabalenka's second-round clash is against Russia's Polina Latcenko as she looks to become only the third woman after Serena Williams and Chris Evert to win three straight US Opens.

The Belarusian hit 32 winners against Osorio in a match which lasted an hour and 27 minutes at the Arthur Ashe Stadium.



Osorio handed Sabalenka a break with a double fault in the third game - one of five she had across the opening set - and slipped 4-1 behind as the Belarusian converted on another break point with an unreturnable backhand.

The Colombian reduced

the lead to 4-2 in the next game but Sabalenka restored her advantage with a perfectly placed drop shot on break point in the seventh game.

After exchanging early breaks in the second set, Sabalenka broke her opponent's defence to secure the crucial break in the

ninth game, before closing it out with an unreturnable serve.

"I'm super happy with the level I played," said Sabalenka. "I feel like this is one of my favourite stadiums, I really experienced the best emotions here on this stadium."

Sabalenka hasn't reached a final since winning at Indian Wells and the Miami Open to complete the Sunshine Double in March. Three players - Elena Rybakina, Jessica Pegula and Coco Gauff - have the opportunity to replace Sabalenka at the top of the WTA rankings over the next fortnight in New York.

Lionel Messi Says He's Retiring From Playing For Argentina

NEW DELHI, AUG 31: Lionel Messi announced his retirement from international soccer on Monday after two decades representing Argentina.

"It was a decision that hurt — and still hurts deeply — but I understand that the time has come," te 39-year-old Messi said on his Instagram account.

"I swear to you that I always gave it my all — not just in these last few years when we won everything, but before that too; I always fought and left everything on the field for this jersey, to bring you joy and make you feel proud to be Argentine through football."

Messi played in a record-



tying six World Cups, won it in 2022 in Qatar and led Argentina to this year's final, losing to Spain in extra time in New Jersey.

He explained he wrote his retirement letter on June 21 — two days after the World Cup final — but waited to publish it because his father was facing health issues that eventu-

ally claimed his life.

Jorge Messi died on Aug. 8 in his native Rosario.

Messi will continue to play for Inter Miami. Over the weekend he scored four times in a 7-1 win over CF Montreal.

He made his Argentina debut in 2006 but his journey was fraught with frus-

tration until he finally lifted the World Cup in 2022.

"Thank you for all the love these past 20 years," he said. "I'm going to miss hearing you all from the inside so much. Now I'm going to be one of you, cheering and supporting you from the outside (through thick and thin, even more so)."

In the letter, the Inter Miami captain did not say how long he intends to continue playing.

"I leave with the peace of mind and pride of having given you — along with my teammates — moments we once only dreamed of. Experiencing this with you was incredible. I love you all," he added.

J&K Eyes Rs 1,000–1,200 Cr Under Khelo India 2026–31 Programme

HIMALAYAN MAIL NEWS
JAMMU, AUG 31

Jammu and Kashmir has drawn up an ambitious five-year roadmap to maximise Central assistance under the Khelo India programme, with the Union Territory aspiring to secure around Rs 1,000–1,200 Cr during 2026–31 for strengthening sports infrastructure, nurturing talent and building a comprehensive sports ecosystem across the UT.

The roadmap was presented today before the UT Level Coordination Committee (UTLCC) in its first meeting chaired by Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo, who called for a focused, district-driven approach to leverage the national programme for creating high-quality sports infrastructure and facilities across Jammu and Kashmir.

Chairing the meeting, the Chief Secretary directed all Deputy Commissioners to leverage the rechristened Khelo India 2026-31 scheme to create the best possible sports infrastructure and facilities in their respective districts, while ensuring optimal utilisation of existing assets. He called for prompt preparation of comprehensive district sports plans and directed the districts to submit the requisite plans by September 15, 2026.

Dulloo observed that Jammu and Kashmir has consistently demonstrated remarkable sporting talent and stressed the need to provide young athletes with the right platforms, facilities, coaching and exposure to hone their abilities and compete at the highest levels.

He called upon the departments and districts to aspire for maximum admissible funding under the Khelo India programme, with particular emphasis on developing Centres of Excellence and strengthening the sports ecosystem from the grassroots to the elite level.

Presenting the roadmap, Commissioner Secretary, Youth Services & Sports, Dr Shahid Iqbal Choudhary, outlined J&K's strategy to tap the various funding windows under the Khelo



India programme and build a coordinated sports development architecture for the next five years.

He reiterated that the roadmap seeks to address the sporting requirements of athletes from grassroots participation in schools to preparation of elite sportspersons capable of contributing to India's medal tally at the Olympic and international level.

He urged Deputy Commissioners and concerned departments to be proactive and prompt in preparing district-level plans so that Jammu and Kashmir can make optimal use of the national funding opportunities available under the programme.

Dwailing it out further, he added that the national Khelo India programme carries a total financial outlay of ₹28,489 Cr for 2026–31, including administrative expenses, with the annual allocation rising progressively from Rs 3,173 Cr in 2026–27 to Rs 9,198 Cr in 2030–31. The roadmap prepared by the Youth Services & Sports Department seeks to position J&K to secure the maximum admissible share from these national funding windows.

The meeting was apprised that the national outlay is structured across key intervention areas covering the entire sports development continuum. The largest window is Khelo India Training Facilities, with an allocation of Rs 10,586 Cr, accounting for 37.2 per cent of the total outlay. This is followed by Strengthening Strategic Sports Assets with ₹4,963 Cr, Sports Infrastructure for Medal Strategy with ₹4,866 Cr, Talent Identification and Development with ₹2,407 Cr, and Sports Competitions and Leagues with Rs 2,358 Cr.

Other important win-

dows include State Action Plan for Sports Infrastructure Development (Central Share) with Rs 1,400 Cr, Coach and Support Staff Development with Rs 748 Cr, Sports Technology with ₹302 Cr, and the Fit India Movement with Rs 300 Cr. An additional Rs 559 Cr has been earmarked for administrative expenses under this programme.

The funding architecture, comprising both recurring and non-recurring components, provides opportunities ranging from creation and upgradation of sports infrastructure and training facilities to talent identification, competitions, coaching, technology and promotion of fitness.

A major thrust of the new roadmap is on grassroots talent identification and athlete development, with J&K targeting a ten-fold increase in the number of supported athletes.

The strategy envisages deployment of Khel SETU as an integrated platform for mapping and identifying sporting talent across schools and universities, while addressing the existing gap in Physical Education Teachers in government schools by enhancing their capacity through trainings and other courses.

The roadmap also proposes a common four-level coaching framework, systematic skilling of local trainers, community coaches and PETs through E-Khel Paathshala, and focused development of women coaches at local, national and international levels.

Under the proposed Khelo India Training Facilities framework, the roadmap envisages development of Olympic Training Centres at the elite level, upgradation of existing facilities into National Centres of Excellence, and greater

participation of accredited private academies through the PPP mode.

It also proposes expansion of Khelo India Centres, introduction of Khelo India Utkarsha Vidyalayas and Feeder Schools, and strengthening of specialised training facilities to create a structured pathway from grassroots participation to elite performance.

Three major technology interventions have been identified in collaboration with local premier technical institutions. These include an AI-based Sports Talent Identification and Athlete Performance Analytics Platform and an AI-enabled Sports Infrastructure and Youth Services Delivery Management System through NIT Srinagar, besides a Digital Youth Health Screening and Preventive Care System through IIT Jammu.

The roadmap envisages a coordinated transformation of Jammu and Kashmir's sports landscape by combining existing infrastructure, new investments, grassroots talent identification, professional coaching, sports science and technology, with the larger objective of creating a sustainable pipeline of athletes capable of representing the UT and the country at national and international sporting arenas.

The meeting was attended by ACS, PWD; Commissioner Secretary, Youth Services & Sports; DG, Budget; representatives of Planning, Rural Development Department and other concerned departments. Deputy Commissioners participated through video conferencing from their respective offices.

Pakistan sends home seven players, two coaches before final Test against England

NEW DELHI, AUG 31: The Pakistan Cricket Board has confirmed that seven players have been released from the Test squad after the Lord's Test, with seven replacements named — five of them uncapped at Test level — for the final Test against England at Edgbaston.

Those released are Mohammad Rizwan, Imam-ul-Haq, Salman Ali Agha, Ali Usman, Aamir Jamal, Muhammad Awaiz Zafar, and Khurram Shahzad. Rizwan, Imam, Agha, Usman, and Khurram have all played in this series.

In their place, Pakistan has called up batters Saim Ayub (eight Tests) and Abdullah Fazal (two Tests),



left-arm spin-bowling all-rounder Arafat Minhas (three ODIs, four T20Is), left-arm quick Mohammad Imran Jnr, Quaid-e-Azam Trophy 2025-26 player of the tournament and wicketkeeper-batter Saad Baig, and right-arm pace all-rounders Mohammad Imran (Imran Randhawa) and

Razaullah. The new arrivals will link up with the squad ahead of the third Test against England.

There are also changes in the backroom staff: Sarfaraz Ahmed and Umar Gul have been released, with Mike Hesson and Ashley Noffke brought in as replacements.

Women’s Asia Cup: Bangladesh cruises past Indonesia to start on winning note

NEW DELHI, AUG 31: Bangladesh secured a comfortable 71-run victory over debutant Indonesia to begin its Women's Asia Cup 2026 campaign on a winning note at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium on Monday.

Indonesia was playing its first match at the tournament, and ultimately proved little competition for a Bangladesh side that was incisive with the ball and sharp in the field.

After losing the toss and being asked to bat first, Bangladesh got off to a sedate start as Ni Made Putri Suwandewi dismissed opener Juairiya Ferdous



inside the PowerPlay. However, Dilara Akter and Sobhana Mostary rallied to keep things ticking along with a partnership of 40 that averted an early collapse. Mostary would go on to top-score with 40 from 42 deliveries.

From the other end, how-

ever, most of the other batters struggled for rhythm with the exception of Shorna Akter, whose punchy 18-ball 31 helped push Bangladesh up to 129 for eight at the end of 20 overs.

Ni Ariani was the pick of the Indonesian bowlers

with figures of three for 28.

In the chase, Indonesia was rocked early as Marufa Akter struck twice inside the first six overs to leave the chase dead in the water. Left-arm spinner Nahida Akter claimed figures of three for 15, while there was also three run-outs as Indonesia finished on 58 all out.

Opener Maria Corazon was the only batter to reach double figures, scoring 12 from 13 deliveries.

Indonesia will face Sri Lanka in its next game on Wednesday, while Bangladesh takes on the same opponent next on Sunday.