

Sports

# Rohit hits hundred as India make S African bowlers toil

## Opening the batting suits me, says ton-up Sharma

### SCOREBOARD

**VISAKHAPATNAM:** Scoreboard at stumps on the first day of the opening Test between India and South Africa in Visakhapatnam yesterday:

India	
M. Agarwal not out	84
R. Sharma not out	115
Extras (lb1, nb2)	3
Total (59.1 overs)	202
To bat: V. Kohli, A. Rahane, C. Pujara, H. Vihari, R. Ashwin, R. Jadeja, W. Saha, I. Sharma, M. Shami.	

**Bowling:** Philander 11.1-2-34-0, Rabada 13-5-35-0, Maharaj 23-4-66-0 (nb1), Piedt 7-1-43-0, Muthusamy 5-0-23-0 (nb1).

**South Africa:** F. du Plessis (capt), A. Markram, D. Elgar, T. de Bruyn, T. Bavuma, Q. de Kock, V. Philander, S. Muthusamy, K. Maharaj, D. Piedt, K. Rabada.

**VISAKHAPATNAM:** Rohit Sharma said opening the batting suited him across all formats after he hit a century yesterday in his new role in Test cricket against South Africa. The 32-year-old Sharma — a star of India's limited-overs side — made 115 on a rain-hit day one of the opening match as India reached 202 without loss in Visakhapatnam.

Sharma and Mayank Agarwal, on 84, made the South African bowlers toil after the hosts elected to bat first at the start of the three-match series. "I think it suits my game," Sharma told reporters. "Just wear the pads and go in to bat. I don't like the waiting game."

"You know the bowlers who are bowling with the new ball, so the game plan is easier for you... At number six, the ball is reversing, field placement is different and you need to keep all those things in mind."

A sudden thunderstorm forced the umpires to call tea early, and no further play was possible after heavy rains lashed the coastal city and washed out the final session. Sharma completed his fourth Test century in the second session with a single off debutant spinner Senuran Muthusamy to raucous cheers from the home crowd and the dressing room.

He hit five sixes and 12 fours from 174 balls and showed frequent glimpses of the form that has made him such a feared one-day batsman. "Opening the batting is a different ball game in red ball cricket. Of course mentally you have to train your mind more than anything else," he said. "You have to challenge yourself to play the new ball and take the game forward." Agarwal, like Sharma, also used his feet to good effect against the South African spinners, who struggled on the batting-friendly pitch.

Playing his fifth Test since making his debut last year, Agarwal raised his fourth half-century with a six off Keshav Maharaj. Both Sharma and Agarwal — who hit 11 fours and two sixes — took apart the opposition bowling



**VISAKHAPATNAM:** Indian cricketer Rohit Sharma (R) plays a shot during the first day's play of the first Test match between India and South Africa at the Dr. Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy ACA-VDCA Cricket Stadium in Visakhapatnam yesterday. —AFP

in the second session of play as India scored 111 runs after taking lunch at 91-0.

Sharma, who got to his 50 before lunch, shifted gears and went after the slow bowlers as he hammered off-spinner Danie Piedt for two successive sixes to move into the nineties. "We wanted to use our feet and get closer to the ball and then obviously those are my shots that I play and I wanted to back myself and back my game," said Sharma. South Africa captain Faf du Plessis rotated his

spinners for a large part of the day with intermittent spells from pacemen Kagiso Rabada and Vernon Philander. Philander, who got Sharma out for a two-ball duck in a practice game last week, tested the senior batsman early on in the innings by swinging the ball both ways. Sharma got off the mark as an opener in the longer format in style as drove Rabada for a boundary at backward point. India, who top the Test World Championship rankings, are looking for a record 11th Test series win at home. —AFP

## Nats stun Hader, Brewers in National League wild-card game

**WASHINGTON:** Washington Nationals rookie Juan Soto tracked a pitch from Milwaukee Brewers closer Josh Hader and quickly recognized a fastball down the middle of the plate.

He ripped the ball into right field — and helped send Washington into the next round of the playoffs. "Just get a base hit to the middle," Soto said to TBS in a postgame interview. "That's what I'm thinking."

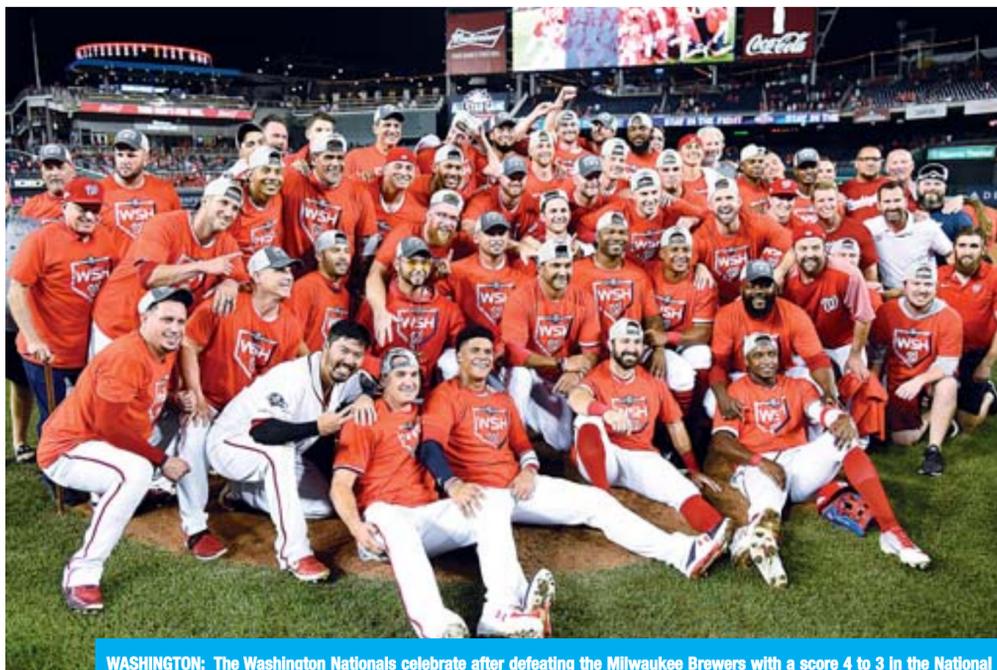
Soto's hard-hit single rolled under the glove of Brewers right fielder Trent Grisham, and three runs scored on the eighth-inning play, pushing the Nationals to a 4-3 comeback win over visiting Milwaukee in the National League wild-card game Tuesday night.

Washington advances to face the Los Angeles Dodgers, who will host Game 1 of the National League Division Series tonight. The Nationals went 3-4 against the Dodgers during the regular season.

For most of the evening, it looked as though the Brewers would head west to Los Angeles. Milwaukee scored three runs in the first two innings and held on to a 3-1 edge entering the bottom of the eighth. Brewers manager Craig Counsell brought in Hader (0-1), a hard-throwing southpaw who notched 37 saves this season.

Hader quickly found trouble. Michael A. Taylor took first with one out after umpires ruled that he was hit by a pitch, although replays indicated that the ball may have hit the knob of his bat before striking him on the hand.

One out later Ryan Zimmerman followed with a broken-bat single, and Anthony Rendon drew a walk on a full count to load the bases for Soto. "The hit by pitch, I'd have to look at it



**WASHINGTON:** The Washington Nationals celebrate after defeating the Milwaukee Brewers with a score 4 to 3 in the National League Wild Card game at Nationals Park in Washington. —AFP

again," Brewers manager Craig Counsell said to TBS. I didn't really catch a good glimpse of it. Our dugout seemed to think it hit the bat first."

Earlier in the game, Yasmani Grandal and Eric Thames homered for the Brewers. A promising campaign ended abruptly for Milwaukee, which won 89 games — including 18 of its final 23 contests — before the late-inning collapse.

Nationals right-hander Stephen Strasburg (1-0) earned the victory after pitching three scoreless innings of relief. He gave up two hits, walked none and struck out four. Daniel Hudson notched the save by pitching a scoreless ninth for the Nationals. He and Strasburg followed starter Max

Scherzer, who gave up three runs in five innings and left the mound with the Nationals' postseason hopes in doubt.

"These guys are amazing," Soto said of the Nationals' pitching staff. "They always go to compete. They never give up. They show us how to never give up, so we just keep going and fight."

Hader allowed three runs (two earned) on two hits and a walk in one inning. He struck out two. The Brewers jumped to a 2-0 lead before recording their first out at the plate. Grisham drew a leadoff walk, and Grandal yanked a first-pitch fastball over the wall in right field for his third career postseason home run.

The quick strike stunned the

Nationals home fans, who had just settled into their seats. Grandal was 1-for-13 with seven strikeouts against Scherzer in regular-season matchups before belting the two-run homer into the Washington bullpen. In the second, Milwaukee increased its lead to 3-0 on a leadoff shot by Thames. He pounded a low breaking ball an estimated 41 feet to right-center field for his first career postseason homer.

The Nationals pulled within 3-1 in the third on Trea Turner's solo homer. He squared up a 97 mph fastball for his first postseason blast off Brewers starter Brandon Woodruff. The right-hander threw four innings and gave up one run and two hits, striking out three without a walk. —Reuters

The penalty has been a hot topic during the off-season for disappointed Vegas fans. Overlooked was the fact the Golden Knights also blew two other chances to clinch the series before that, including a 2-1 loss in double overtime at home in Game 6, when Vegas finished with a 59-29 edge in shots and lost on a short-handed goal by Tomas Hertl.

Pavelski, who scored a team-high 38 goals, has moved on as an unrestricted free agent to sign with the Dallas Stars. San Jose also will be without left winger Evander Kane, who scored 30 goals last season, after he received a three-game suspension for physical abuse of an official during a 5-1 preseason loss at Vegas on Sunday. That contest featured 114 penalty minutes and a handful of third-period dustups as the teams geared up for Wednesday night's season opener.

The good news for the Sharks is two-time Norris Award winning defenseman Erik Karlsson, who played just 53 games last season and was hampered in the playoffs by a groin injury, is healthy again after undergoing offseason surgery.

"When he wants to go, he can go, and that's a positive," said center Logan Couture, who led the team with 14 playoff goals and took over for Pavelski as team captain. "You just hoped he recovered from that surgery, and it looks like he has." —Reuters

six games in the second round of the conference playoffs in their initial season en route to the Stanley Cup Final, where they lost to the Washington Capitals. But the Sharks got revenge last April by winning the final three games of their best-of-seven series in dramatic fashion.

Vegas had a 3-0 lead midway through Game 7 in San Jose when Cody Eakin was assessed a five-minute major penalty for cross-checking Joe Pavelski on a faceoff. An off-balance Pavelski collided with Paul Stastny and was knocked to the ice, where he banged his head and was knocked out while also sustaining a nasty gash.

The Sharks then scored four goals in 4:01 to take the lead, just the second time in NHL history that a team scored four goals on a power play in a playoff game. Jonathan Marchessault sent the game into overtime with a goal with 47 seconds remaining, but San Jose capped the remarkable comeback when Barclay Goodrow scored the series-winner at the 18:19 mark in OT.

NHL officials later acknowledged that Eakin should have been called for just a two-minute minor instead of a five-minute major. "It's so disappointing," Marchessault said afterward. "It's a joke. That's what it is. It's embarrassing."

## Knights, Sharks renew rivalry on opening night

**LAS VEGAS:** The Vegas Golden Knights have had a little more than five months to stew over the controversial ending of their first-round Western Conference playoff series with the San Jose Sharks.

Thanks to the NHL's schedule-maker, they won't have to wait this season for a rematch. The teams will meet Wednesday night in Las Vegas on the league's opening night. Two nights later, the teams — which are expected to battle for the Pacific Division title — will play again in San Jose.

"Doesn't matter," Vegas coach Gerard Gallant said about opening the season with back-to-back games with the Sharks. "We played them seven times last year in the playoffs, so you get used to teams. They know us, we know them, we're just getting ready for the home opener, and it should be a great game."

In 2018, the Golden Knights knocked off San Jose in

## Pakistan recall Umar, Shehzad for S Lanka Twenty20s

**KARACHI:** Pakistan yesterday recalled trouble-making opener Ahmed Shehzad and middle-order batsman Umar Akmal for the three-match Twenty20 series against Sri Lanka starting this weekend.

It will be the first time the 27-year-old Shehzad will represent Pakistan since a four-month ban for a failed dope test last year. The ban was further extended by six weeks after Shehzad violated rules by playing club matches despite the ban.

Shehzad played the last of his 57 Twenty20 internationals in Scotland in June last year. Umar, 29, played the last of 82 Twenty20 internationals in 2016 against the West Indies. That year, former head coach Waqar Younis labelled both Shehzad and Umar as "indisciplined" and called on selectors to let them play domestic cricket to earn their places in the national team.

The three Twenty20 internationals will all be played in Lahore on October 5, 7 and 9. Chief selector Misbah-ul-Haq announced the changes to the squad as it prepared to meet Sri Lanka for the final one-day international of the tour on Wednesday in Karachi. The first ODI was abandoned due to rain, while Pakistan won the second on Monday. —AFP

## Tanak wants to 'finish the job' and seal first rally title

**LONDON:** Ott Tanak wants to "finish the job" of securing his first ever world rally title with the Estonian taking a 17-point lead over Sebastian Ogier into this weekend's Wales Rally GB. The season's third-last rally has a new start in Liverpool today before three tough days of forest driving with plenty of rain forecast and frequent fog complicating matters.

Ogier won in Turkey last month to trim Tanak's advantage and set the stage for an enthralling season run-in with Thierry Neuville not totally out of it either. 30 points adrift. Tanak's Toyota broke down in Turkey but in what could prove pivotal to the destination of the 2019 crown, he returned to pick up five precious points in the closing power stage.

"The gap in the championship is closer now, but we have three rallies to go and we know that we were fast on each of them last year," Tanak, 31, told Toyota's official website. "Now we just have to finish the job, starting in Wales," added Tanak who will be mindful of last year's painful outcome when he was forced to retire in the lead after a heavy smash.

Five wins from 11 rallies and top of the timesheets in 97 stages is evidence of Tanak's dominance this year. While he has the form and speed to seal the deal, against him is the fact that he has yet to win any of the three remaining rallies.

But despite his lack of success in Wales he says it's a rally he likes. "The roads are fast and they have a nice flow, but the conditions make it difficult, especially because the grip levels are constantly changing at every corner." —AFP