

## Sports

# Waqar backs Pakistan captain Azhar 'to deliver' against England

## It is 10 years since Pakistan lost a Test series against England

**SOUTHAMPTON:** Waqar Younis believes Pakistan captain Azhar Ali can overcome a poor run of form as his side look for a series-levelling win in the second Test against England at Southampton starting today.

Pakistan, despite not having played international cricket for six months because of the coronavirus, dominated the majority of last week's first Test at Old Trafford, with opening batsman Shan Masood hitting a Test-best 156 and leg-spinner Yasir Shah taking eight wickets.

Their pace trio of Mohammad Abbas, Shaheen Afridi and teenage rising star Naseem Shah all troubled England's top order. Pakistan, despite a second-innings collapse, were still favourites to win when they reduced England to 117-5 in pursuit of a target of 277.

But a partnership of 139 between Chris Woakes (84 not out) and Jos Buttler (75) turned the tide as England won by three wickets to go 1-0 up with two to play. Azhar, criticised for his tactics during Buttler and Woakes' stand, has made just one fifty in 10 innings since becoming skipper in November.

Pace great Waqar, himself a former Pakistan

captain and now the team's bowling coach, sympathised by saying Wednesday: "Being captain and playing in the top order is not easy. "When you're in bad form, or have had a bad game, everything gets scrutinised.

"I've been captain myself so I know what he's going through. But he's a seasoned player...He knows how to come out of these situations and I expect him to deliver in the upcoming two Test matches." Pakistan played two leg-spinners at Old Trafford, with Shadab Khan backing up Yasir, but they could now deploy a fourth seamer on what may be a less receptive Ageas Bowl surface. If that's the case then Faheem Ashraf, who has played in just four Tests since making his debut against Ireland two years ago, may be in line for a recall. "We haven't really decided about it but we are definitely going to gear him up and see whether he is ready to go and deliver the goods for Pakistan," said Waqar.

It is 10 years since Pakistan lost a Test series against England and head coach Misbah-ul-Haq said they "should not be mentally down" following last week's agonising loss. England star all-rounder Ben Stokes will miss the last



**MANCHESTER:** File photo shows Pakistan's Shadab Khan (R) celebrates after taking a catch to dismiss England's Ollie Pope for 7 during play on the fourth day of the first Test cricket match between England and Pakistan at Old Trafford in Manchester. —AFP

two Tests of the series after travelling to New Zealand to be with his ill father. Zak Crawley, dropped for the last two Tests in favour of an

extra bowler deployed by England to compensate for Stokes' quad injury, is now set to return to England's top order. —AFP

## Aussie Starc bulked up to challenge speed record

**SYDNEY:** Australian strike bowler Mitchell Starc has muscled up during the off-season and modified his bowling action as he targets crashing through the hallowed 100 mph mark. The left-armed has used his unusually long lay-off due to the coronavirus pandemic to spend quality time in the gym ahead of an upcoming blockbuster summer against India.

Only a handful of bowlers are in the 100 mph club, with Pakistan's Shoaib Akhtar considered the fastest ever with his 100.2 mph (161.3 kph) rocket in 2003 the world's quickest delivery.

Starc has been knocking on the door for years, with a 99.7 mph (160.4 kph) missile against New Zealand in Perth in 2015 his best effort so far. He hopes the extra work will not only make him quicker, but help stave off the injuries that have struck before when he strived to smash speed records.

"It would be nice but at the same time the two occasions I've been up around that (160 kph) mark I've snapped my foot," he told cricket.com.au late Wednesday. "Hopefully that's not the case but when everything's going well, that rhythm is happening and conditions suit, then I can get that speed gun up.

"Perhaps that extra time in the gym and extra time off I might be able to push the limits again." Starc added that he had tweaked his bowling action, which had helped him retain his extreme pace and hone his radar. —AFP

## Top-ranked Barty driven by Wimbledon 'dream'

**SYDNEY:** World number one Ashleigh Barty won't have a chance to fulfil her dream of winning Wimbledon this year, but she remains laser-focused on being crowned champion at the All-England Club.

The Australian won the junior Wimbledon title as a 15-year-old in 2011, but the expectations that came with that success took their toll and she made a shock decision three years later to ditch tennis for cricket.

"In short, I think I needed just to find myself," Barty, who is skipping the upcoming US Open due to coronavirus fears, said in an interview yesterday with broadcaster ABC of her move to the Brisbane Heat cricket team.

"I felt like I got twisted and maybe a little bit lost along the way in the first part of my career." While cricket gave her "a different perspective about sport", the lure of tennis was never far away, driven by an ambition to taste success again at Wimbledon.

"My dream is winning Wimbledon. Without a doubt," said Barty, who returned to tennis in 2016. "It took a long time for me to say that out loud. It took a long time for me to have the courage to say that out loud, but that's what I want. That's what I want to work towards.

"Being able to win junior Wimbledon was really special, but it just gave me a taste of what it's really like." She has been robbed of the opportunity this year, with the tournament cancelled for the first time since World War II due to the worldwide coronavirus outbreak.

The 24-year-old already has one Grand Slam title to her name, winning the French Open last year, which helped her surge to the



Ashleigh Barty

top of the world rankings where she has stayed since. But she can't remember much about her breakthrough at Roland Garros, where she beat Marketa Vondrousova in straight sets in the final.

"It doesn't feel real, still," Barty said. "That whole match is a bit of a blur, and the lead-up to that (winning) moment is a little bit lost. "The best thing was turning around and being able to look at my team, that moment I will never forget," she added.

Barty admitted to "ups and downs" during her extended layoff this year, but her decision to miss the US Open, which is set to start in New York on August 31, was an easy one given the unpredictability of the pandemic.

"That was a massive part of it for our team — accepting that this is something greater than what we can control, we can't do anything about it," she said. "We just have to play our part and do the right thing. And then hope we get an opportunity some time in the year to get back to some kind of normal." —AFP