

Smith, Marsh put Eng to the sword

Australia Captain Steve Smith hits the ball to score his double century
(Picture courtesy: AP)

Perth

An epic and unbeaten 301-run stand by home captain Steve Smith and Mitchell Marsh struck a heavy blow against England's hopes of keeping the Ashes out of Australian hands on day three of the third Test at the WACA yesterday.

On an agonising day for Joe Root's team, Smith broke bowlers' hearts with his second double-century against the hapless English side after all-rounder Marsh celebrated his maiden ton.

The pair pushed Australia to 549 for four and a first innings lead of 146 runs, rendering England's 403 hopelessly inadequate.

They strode off to a standing ovation, with Smith unbeaten on 229 and Marsh 181 not out, pushing toward a double-century of his own.

"It felt really good yesterday, I was in the zone. I wanted

to cash in today," Smith said before he exited the ground.

"We wanted to be out in the middle and just keep batting."

On day two, Dawid Malan and Jonny Bairstow had English chests bursting with pride after building a 237-run stand for a record fifth-wicket stand in Tests at the WACA.

The mark lasted less than a day, as Smith and Marsh smashed 57 boundaries between them to leave England praying for the mercy of rain.

Showers are forecast for days four and five, but the weather may not be enough to save England, who managed only a single wicket despite no fewer than seven players rolling over their arm throughout the day.

Having torched England for 107 runs in the middle session, Smith and Marsh plundered another 128 after tea, as England's bowlers battled fatigue and the inescapable

knowledge that none of their plans were working.

Having punished England with 215 at Lord's in 2015, Smith set himself a new personal best in a masterclass of patience, precision and timing.

His unbeaten 390-ball knock has him fourth on the list of highest innings at the WACA, with the possibility of further promotion on day four.

He reached the three-figure mark, his seventh against England, when he whipped paceman Stuart Broad through the leg side for four.

The second hundred with a single off all-rounder Moeen Ali, and he bounded down the wicket roaring in triumph to the delight of a big day three crowd.

Marsh celebrated his recall with his maiden Test century, completing a rare family trio of Ashes tons. (Reuters)

BRIEF SCORE

Australia 4 for 549 (Smith 229*, M Marsh 181*) lead England 403 by 146 runs

Hamilton makes his prediction for 2018

London

Formula 1 World Champion Lewis Hamilton believes his former team McLaren's switch to Renault power-units for 2018 could be the catalyst the team needs in order to fight for the world championship once again.

Ferrari and Mercedes fought it out for the titles this year, with Red Bull joining the fray near the end of the year. McLaren, meanwhile, remained in the doldrums with Honda power, and the teams last title of any kind was Hamilton's maiden drivers crown back in 2008.

The last constructors title was in 1998, when Mika Hakkinen won that year's drivers title.

McLaren decided they'd had enough of Honda power this year, and the switch to Renault has given the team a confidence boost and, based on Red Bull's three wins with that same power-unit this year, they believe they can be back at the front next year, along with



Lewis Hamilton (file pic)

excellent chassis development. Hamilton has always kept an eye on how his old team have been doing, and finds it quite sad that they are still struggling. But, next year he feels it could be a four-way scrap for the championship.

Ferrari are likely to be closer, if not ahead, of Mercedes. Red Bull will make gains, and if the Renault power-unit is finally on the pace,

McLaren may at last be winning once again.

"Next year, McLaren will have Renault engines, then we may see four teams fighting for the championship," Hamilton said. "I think Red Bull will be quicker and Ferrari for sure will be fast again. We can't stand still - we have to keep moving forwards." (givesport)



Williams put off driver announcement to New Year

London

Formula One team Williams have put off until the New Year an announcement on who will partner Canadian teenager Lance Stroll next season.

A team spokeswoman confirmed no driver news was planned before January, with the 21-race 2018 season due to start in Australia on March 25.

Russian Sergey Sirotkin appears favourite for the drive, the only remaining vacancy on the starting grid, rather than Poland's comeback hopeful Robert Kubica.

Williams have said their decision would be based on performance and have given

few hints about who is likely to succeed now retired Brazilian Felipe Massa at the former champions.

Sirotkin, a 22-year-old development driver for the Renault team this year, has been backed by Russian billionaire Boris Rotenberg and his SMP Racing.

Rotenberg's brother Arkady is a close ally and former judo partner of President Vladimir Putin.

Leaving aside his significant backing, the Russian impressed in post-season testing in Abu Dhabi after he was passed over by Renault when that team were looking to replace Britain's Jolyon Palmer. (Reuters)