

# Afghanistan ecstatic over Test status



**Kabu**  
Cricket-mad Afghanistan was euphoric after being awarded Test match status, a rare glimmer of good news amid rising insecurity, though many lamented the lack of sports infrastructure in the conflict-torn country.

Both Ireland and Afghanistan became cricket's 11th and 12th Test nations on Thursday following a

unanimous vote by the International Cricket Council during its annual meeting in London.

"This achievement was a dream for Afghanistan and we have been yearning for this status," said Afghanistan Cricket Board chairman Atif Mashal, hailing it as a "historic achievement".

"We have been

granted the full membership and the Test status, and I congratulate this news to the cricket board, and to the entire Afghan nation."

Afghan cricket has made rapid strides since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, with the country's premier leg-spinner Rashid Khan making waves in T20 leagues including Indian Premier League this year.

The successes have brought much-needed cheer in a country beset by a wrenching conflict that has resulted in a record number of civilian casualties.

"For a nation like Afghanistan it is a huge and remarkable achievement, the entire nation will be celebrating," said Afghanistan Cricket Board chief executive Shafiq Stanikzai.

"Afghanistan... dared to dream that this would happen and today it has become a reality."

But many fans rued the lack of infrastructure -- and security -- to host international matches.

"Afghanistan does not have many cricket grounds that meet international standards and most importantly security to host games," said

24-year-old Kabul resident Mohammad Daud.

"It's a shame that we have got Test status but don't have the infrastructure to match."

Last year, Afghanistan's national team shifted its base from Sharjah in United Arab Emirates to Noida, Delhi, while India's former batsman Lalchand Rajput replaced Pakistan's Inzamam-ul-Haq as team coach. (AFP)

## Contador, Degenkolb headline Trek team

Paris

Alberto Contador will have two powerful climbers alongside him as he targets a third Tour de France title ten years after his first, in an international Trek team unveiled on Friday.

In the mountains, the 34-year-old can count on Colombian Jarlinson Pantano, winner of a stage in last year's race, and Dutchman Bauke Mollema. The Trek team also features Germany's John Degenkolb, recruited in the close season and winner of the Milan-SanRemo and the Paris-Roubaix classics two years ago.

In an international lineup the US-registered team includes riders of seven different nations. Contador has five wins on major tours while 28-year-old Degenkolb has never won a stage on the Tour de France in his three times competing.

Trek team for the Tour de France: André Cardoso (POR), Alberto Contador (ESP), John Degenkolb (GER), Koen De Kort (NED), Fabio Felline (ITA), Michael Gogl (AUT), Markel Irizar (ESP), Bauke Mollema (NED), Jarlinson Pantano (COL)



Srikanth Kidambi of India celebrates

## India's Srikanth into Aus Open semis

Sydney

India's Srikanth

overcame compatriot Sai Praneeth 25-23, 21-17 to reach the semi-finals of badminton's Australian Open in Sydney yesterday.

It will be Srikanth's

third straight Superseries semi-final, a turnaround from his modest form of last season.

"It's going great so far, I just want to play well," he said.

"I missed six-seven tournaments last year, I just want to play as many games as possible."

After a close first game, Praneeth faltered in not maintaining the pressure on Srikanth, who steadily grew in confidence and closed out the match and will face China's Shi Yuqi in Saturday's semi-finals.

Chinese fourth seed Shi progressed with a 21-17, 21-12 win over Denmark's Hans-Kristian Solberg Vittinghus.

South Korea's Lee Hyun-Il knocked out Chinese eighth seed Tian Houwei 17-21,

21-15, 21-18 and will next face China's sixth ranked Chen Long.

Chen won a 78-minute struggle over two-time Olympic and five-time world champion Lin Dan 21-16, 12-21, 23-21.

China's sixth seed Sun Yu won a re-match of last year's women's final when she knocked out India's defending champion Saina Nehwal 21-17, 10-21, 21-17.

Chinese Taipei's Tai Tzu Ying, recovering from flu, dug deep to beat India's fourth-ranked Pusarla Sindhu, 10-21, 22-20, 21-16 and advance to the semi-finals of the women's event.

The top seed will face Japanese third seed Akane Yamaguchi, who powered past China's Chen Yufei, 21-15, 21-14.

Japan's Nozomi Okuhara also made it to the last four following a 21-12, 23-21 victory over compatriot Sayaka Takahashi.



Justin Gatlin

## Gatlin dreaming of 'historic' Bolt duel

Sacramento

Justin Gatlin says the prospect of lining up for one final duel against Usain Bolt is driving his weary body as he attempts to book his place on the US team for August's World Championships.

The 35-year-old former Olympic and world champion said racing against Bolt in what will be the Jamaican superstar's farewell to track and field would be "special."

"It's a part of history," Gatlin told reporters at the US trials in Sacramento.

"For me, when I made my comeback into the sport, I said to myself, 'I just want to be shoulder to shoulder with him.'"

"Watching him run in the Olympics in 2008, when I was sitting at a restaurant, I said to myself, 'I want to run with that guy.'"

"There's no fear -- just a total respect for how fast he is, the competition he brings. So I want to make it to these last finals."

Gatlin's rivalry with Bolt has been one of sprinting's most compelling narratives since the

American returned to track and field in 2010 after a four-year doping ban, the second drug-related sanction of his career.

But with the exception of a lone Gatlin victory in a Rome Diamond League meeting in 2013, the rivalry has been one-sided. Bolt leads Gatlin 8-1 in head-to-head meetings, a record which includes two Olympic and world 100m finals.

This season, Gatlin's preparations have been plagued by a series of niggling injuries that have disrupted his training.

"It set me back a couple of weeks, about three weeks. So I've just been clawing to get back to where I needed to be," Gatlin said. In the circumstances, reaching London for one last showdown with Bolt would be especially satisfying, Gatlin said.

"It would be the toughest year for me. But it would be an honour to get through and show the fortitude that I have," he said.

Gatlin was a comfortable winner of his 100m first-round heat at Sacramento's Hornet Stadium on Thursday in a brisk

10.00 seconds.

Yet the dominant US sprinter of his generation acknowledges he is being nudged aside by a new crop of athletes, led by 21-year-old Christian Coleman, the fastest man in the world this season who clocked 9.82 earlier this month.

"It's a foreign experience. I'm usually the young guy," Gatlin joked. "To be able to run with these guys and hang with them, I'm enjoying it and having fun."