

Dhoni fires India to clinch series

India thump Australia in third ODI and clinch maiden bilateral series victory on Australian soil

● **Unflappable Mahendra Singh Dhoni hit his third half-century of the three-game series against Australia**

AFP | Melbourne

Master finisher Mahendra Singh Dhoni eased India to a seven-wicket victory to clinch their one-day international series against Australia in Melbourne yesterday.

The unflappable veteran wicketkeeper hit his third half-century of the three-game series to again prove the difference after his match-winning knock in the second game in Adelaide.

The 37-year-old wicketkeeper-batsman kept his usual cool during an unbeaten 87 off 114 balls as India chased down Australia's 230 with four balls to spare at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

It consummated a hugely-successful tour of Australia where Virat Kohli's team also claimed an historic first-ever 2-1 Test series win Down Under.

"It's been an amazing tour for us. We drew the T20 series, won the Test and the ODI series," Kohli said.

"We are feeling confident and balanced as a side with the World Cup in mind."

Dhoni was given tremendous support from Kedar Jadhav with a belligerent unbeaten 61 from 57 balls in a match-winning 121-run stand.

"I am happy to bat at any number," said man-of-the-series Dhoni. "The important thing is where the team needs me. I can't say I can't bat at No.6 after



India's Mahendra Singh Dhoni plays a shot playing 14 years."

India wrapped up the ODI series after losing the opening match in Sydney by 34 runs before levelling with a six-wicket win in Adelaide to set up the decider in Melbourne.

Dhoni, a much-loved sporting hero back home, captained India to a World Cup win in 2011. He quit Tests in 2014, and stepped down as the limited-overs skipper three years later.

Kohli looked set for another big score before he was caught behind off Jhye Richardson for 46 off 62 balls in the 30th over leaving his side at 113 for three.

Dhoni and Jadhav took up where Kohli left off, guiding their team to a convincing victory.

Underwhelming batting

India leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal earlier captured the best figures by any bowler in one-day



This is only the second bilateral ODI series India have played in Australia after losing 1-4 in 2016

cricket in Australia to restrict the home side to just 230.

Chahal, playing in his first match in the series after coming in for Test wrist-spinner Kuldeep Yadav, mesmerised the Australians with his six for 42.

"I enjoyed bowling for the first time in Australia (internationals). The ball was spinning a little bit, so I planned to bowl

slow and vary my pace," said Chahal, named man-of-the-match.

Chahal shares the record with fellow Indian Ajit Agarkar, who claimed the same figures against Australia at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in 2004.

Only Peter Handscomb showed any appreciable fight for Australia with his 58 off 63 balls before he became one of Chahal's victims.

It was an underwhelming batting performance by the Australians, who managed just 17 boundaries before they were bowled out with eight balls left.

"We took it down to the wire. When you give some great players a couple of chances, it always hurts," Australia captain Aaron Finch said.

Australia's openers again failed to get a start and Alex Carey was out in the third over when he got a nick off Bhuvne-

| Australia | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|-----|
| A. Carey | c Kohli b Kumar | 5 |
| A. Finch | lbw b Kumar | 14 |
| U. Khawaja | c & b Chahal | 34 |
| S. Marsh | st Dhoni b Chahal | 39 |
| P. Handscomb | lbw b Chahal | 58 |
| M. Stoinis | c Sharma b Chahal | 10 |
| G. Maxwell | c Kumar b Shami | 26 |
| J. Richardson | c Jadhav b Chahal | 16 |
| A. Zampa | c Shankar b Chahal | 8 |
| P. Siddle | not out | 10 |
| B. Stanlake | b Shami | 0 |
| Extras (lb2, w8) | | 10 |
| Total (all out; 48.4 overs) | | 230 |
| India | | |
| R. Sharma | c Marsh b Siddle | 9 |
| S. Dhawan | c & b Stoinis | 23 |
| V. Kohli | c Carey b Richardson | 46 |
| M.S. Dhoni | not out | 87 |
| K. Jadhav | not out | 61 |
| Extras (lb1, w7) | | 8 |
| Total (3 wickets; 49.2 overs) | | 234 |

shwar Kumar and was taken by Kohli at second slip for five.

His partner Finch followed six overs later again to Kumar trapped leg before wicket for 14.

Shaun Marsh and Usman Khawaja steadied the innings before Adelaide centurion Marsh was smartly stumped by Dhoni off a wide down the leg-side from Chahal for 39.

Khawaja followed three balls later when he got a thick leading edge and offered Chahal a return catch for 34.

Marcus Stoinis lasted 20 balls before he became Chahal's third victim, caught at slip by Rohit Sharma for 10, leaving Australia rocking at 123 for five in the 30th over.

Glenn Maxwell hit a breezy 26 off 19 balls before Mohammed Shami enticed him to pull with a short-pitched delivery to Kumar sprinting in from the deep to take a diving catch.

AC Milan coach Gattuso banned for Italian Super Cup ref protest

AFP | Milan

AC Milan coach Gennaro Gattuso was on Thursday handed a one-game touchline ban for angrily confronting the referee after his side's Italian Super Cup final defeat to Juventus in Saudi Arabia midweek.

Gattuso, 41, angrily confronted officials for not awarding a penalty for a foul by Juventus's German midfielder Emre Can on Andrea Conti late in his side's 1-0 defeat in Jeddah.

The Lega Serie A on Thursday banned the former AC Milan and Italian international midfielder and imposed a 15,000 euros (\$17,000) fine.

Gattuso was punished for "shouting at the referee in a threatening manner and challenging his decisions, as well as having subsequently, while waiting for the prize-giving ceremony, addressed further offensive words and insinuations towards the referee".

Dortmund to launch super-sub Alcacer from bench again

AFP | Berlin

Borussia Dortmund head coach Lucien Favre says goal-ace Paco Alcacer will again start on the bench when the Bundesliga leaders resume their season at RB Leipzig today.

Dortmund start the second half of the season in Germany six points clear, but second-placed Bayern Munich could close the gap away to Hoffenheim yesterday.

Dortmund have never won at the Red Bull Arena where they have drawn and lost in two previous visits.

Alcacer has been a sensation since joining from Barcelona last August, scoring 12 goals in as many league games.

But 11 of those have been off the bench including a hat-trick as a replacement in October's thrilling 4-3 win at home to Augsburg.

Barca defeat Levante but threat of disqualification looms



Barcelona's French forward Ousmane Dembele scores a goal

AFP | Barcelona

Barcelona overturned a first leg defeat to beat Levante in the Copa del Rey on Thursday but could yet be thrown out of the competition after being accused of fielding an ineligible player.

Barca won 3-0 at the Camp Nou, with Lionel Messi setting up two Ousmane Dembele goals and then scoring himself to seal a 4-2 victory on aggregate.

Their place in the quarter-finals, however, is under threat after Levante president Francisco Javier Catalan confirmed shortly before kick-off that the club were to lodge a complaint to the Spanish Football Federation yesterday.

Levante claim Barcelona defender Juan Brandariz 'Chumi' played illegally in the first leg as he should have been serving a suspension.

"Whatever happens on the field of play today, Levante are going to take this situation to the Federation tomorrow," Catalan said earlier on Thursday.

"We feel that there is a solid enough precedent to back up the club's decision to do so." Chumi was banned after he received a yellow card playing for Barcelona's B team in the Segunda B division.

Barcelona, however, insist a change in the rules in November means the suspension does not carry over into the Copa del Rey.

Solskjaer warns Man United players over complacency

AFP | Manchester

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer has warned Manchester United of the dangers of complacency as they prepare to face Brighton after beating Tottenham to extend their perfect record under the interim boss.

Solskjaer has won all six of his matches in charge since taking over from Jose Mourinho on December 19, and will look to keep that sequence going at Old Trafford today.

Arguably the most impressive victory in the sequence came last Sunday, when Tottenham were beaten 1-0 at Wembley thanks to a Marcus Rashford goal and an eye-catching goal-

"We've had six good games but the next one is the most important one. You cannot be too confident. It's complacency you have to be wary of. It's the other side of it"

OLE GUNNAR SOLSKJAER



David de Gea saves from Harry Kane's free-kick at Wembley

keeping display from David de Gea.

"As I've said before, you go into every single game as a Manchester United coach, as a player or manager, thinking you'll win the next one, that's just the nature of this club," said Solskjaer.

"We've had six good games but the next one is the most important one. You cannot be too confident. It's complacency you have to be wary of. It's the other side of it."

"I want players to be confident but not be complacent and take their foot off the pedal because that's a big difference for me. I want them go into games full of confidence, taking people

on, getting the crowd with them because that's what it's about."

Solskjaer has yet to see the best of forward Alexis Sanchez, who missed last Sunday's win at Tottenham with a minor hamstring problem.

"He's champing at the bit in training," he said. He's attitude has been fantastic in training and I'm looking forward to seeing him."

The interim boss has played down the suggestion that he is responsible for coaxing better performances out of the players since last month's departure of Mourinho, adding that he was confident the former United manager would be back in work soon.

Cardiff sign Niasse on loan from Everton

AFP | London

Cardiff City have bolstered their striking options in a bid to remain in the Premier League with the signing of Everton striker Oumar Niasse on loan for the rest of the season.

The Senegalese striker could soon be followed by the signing of Nantes forward Emiliano Sala, who was expected to undergo a medical yesterday, for a club record fee.

Niasse, 28, has had a bit-part role at Goodison Park since arriving in a £14 million (\$18 million) deal from Lokomotiv Moscow in January 2016, going out on loan to Hull two years ago under current Everton boss Marco Silva.