

Pakistan close on series victory

AFP | Abu Dhabi

Pakistan grabbed an early wicket after Babar Azam struck a fluent 99 to edge closer to claiming a series victory over Australia in the second Test at Abu Dhabi yesterday.

Azam narrowly missed out on a hundred after an aggressive innings, while skipper Sarfraz Ahmed followed up his first-innings 94 with 81 as Pakistan declared their second innings at 400-9, setting a daunting 538-run target for the tourists.

By the close on the third day, Pakistan had Shaun Marsh dismissed for four -- bowled by left-arm pacer Mir Hamza for his first Test wicket -- to boost their chances of victory after Australia clung on for a thrilling draw in the first Test in Dubai last week.

Aaron Finch (24) and Travis Head (17) were at the crease with Australia, who are 47-1 and need another 491 for an unlikely win or to bat out two full days on a weary and spinning Sheikh Zayed Stadium pitch.

No team has ever chased more than 418-7 to win a Test, made by the West Indies against Australia at Antigua in 2003.

Pakistan piled on the runs with Azam, Sarfraz and Azhar Ali -- who was the casualty of a bizarre run out -- all making



Pakistan cricketer Asad Shafiq (R) plays a shot as Australian wicketkeeper Tim Paine looks on

half-centuries to build on the hosts' 137-run first-innings lead.

But none of them could go on to score a ton, with Azam falling agonisingly close to his maiden hundred, trapped leg-before by medium pacer Mitchell Marsh.

Azam, who hit three sixes and six fours, improved on his previous best Test score of 90 not out he made in New Zealand two years ago.

He and Sarfraz added 135 runs for the sixth wicket to end any hopes Australia had of a fight-back after taking the second new ball at 273-5.

Sarfraz struck five fours and a six and delayed the declaration in hope of a century, but fell leg-before to leg-spinner Marnus Labuschagne who finished with 2-74.

But the pick of the bowlers

was off-spinner Nathan Lyon who followed his first-innings four wickets with 3-135 in a marathon 43-over vigil.

After a dull opening period, the embarrassing dismissal of Azhar brought the day to life. The batsman edged a Peter Siddle delivery towards the third-man boundary and, thinking the ball had crossed the rope, halted in the middle of the pitch to talk

Pakistan 1st innings 282 (Fakhar Zaman 94, Sarfraz Ahmed 94; N. Lyon 4-78; M. Labuschagne 3-45)

Australia 1st innings 145 (A. Finch 39; Mohammad Abbas 5-33, Bilal Asif 3-23)

Pakistan 2nd innings

Fakhar Zaman c and b Lyon 66

Mohammad Hafeez c Head b Starc 6

Azhar Ali run out 64

Haris Sohail st Paine b Lyon 17

Asad Shafiq c sub (Agar) b Labuschagne 44

Babar Azam lbw b M. Marsh 99

Sarfraz Ahmed lbw b Labuschagne 81

Bilal Asif c Head b Lyon 15

Yasir Shah lbw b Lyon 4

Mohammad Abbas not out 0

Mir Hamza not out 0

Extras: (lb 2, nb 2) 4

Total: (for nine wkts dec; 120 overs) 400

Bowling: Starc 7-0-32-1 (1nb), Siddle 23-4-68-0, Lyon 43-8-135-4, Holland 16-3-46-0, Labuschagne 16-1-74-2, M. Marsh 13-3-39-1 (1nb), Head 2-0-4-0

Australia 2nd innings

A. Finch not out 24

S. Marsh b Hamza 4

T. Head not out 17

Extras: (lb 2) 2

Total: (for one wkt; 12 overs) 47

Bowling: Abbas 4-0-15-0, Hamza 3-0-19-1, Yasir 3-0-6-0, Asif 2-1-5-0

to fellow batsman Asad Shafiq.

But Mitchell Starc picked up the ball less than a yard from the boundary and threw it back to wicketkeeper Tim Paine, who ran Azhar out, leaving the Pakistani duo -- who have combined experience of 130 Tests and over 9,000 runs -- stranded and looking bewildered.

Azhar fell for a well-played 64, including four boundaries.

Pakistan had earlier lost Haris Sohail for 17, stumped by Paine off Nathan Lyon after resuming at 144-2.

The teams will play three Twenty20 internationals after the Tests, with the first in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday.

Chasing Schumacher's record was never the plan: Lewis Hamilton

Reuters | New York

Lewis Hamilton will edge closer to Michael Schumacher's all-time record if he wins a fifth Formula One world title this weekend in Austin, but he said on Wednesday that chasing the German great was never part of his plan.

The Mercedes driver will move to within two of Schumacher's all-time mark of seven championships if he scores eight points more than his Ferrari rival Sebastian Vettel in Austin on Sunday.

Yet Hamilton said that he realised his lifelong ambition in 2015 when he equalled the tally of his boyhood idol Ayrton Senna, the Brazilian triple champion who died in 1994, and that chasing Schumacher's mark was never his aim.

"Honestly that has never been my goal. I started out with the goal to match Ayrton Senna or to equalise with Ayrton Senna who is my ... who's the guy that I aspire to be like," Hamilton told Reuters.

"And I equalled him two years ago. So since then it's kind of been going into unknown territory.

"So I mean Michael's stats are incredible and still quite a long way away, but I'm here for some time still, so I'm just going to keep working hard and keep trying to do what I do and what I love and enjoy it and we'll see where it takes us."

Hamilton is 67 points clear of Vettel with three races and a maximum 75 points remaining after Texas, and will fancy his chances of sewing up the title having won five of the past six races at the Circuit of the Americas -- including the last four.



Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton walks in the pits after his victory in the Formula One Japanese Grand Prix at Suzuka

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LEWIS HAMILTON

Yet with so much riding on the weekend, Hamilton said now is not the time to make changes to his approach.

"The approach that I've had up until now has worked very well," said Hamilton. "So we naturally want to win this weekend. So diligence and

going through the same steps in terms of getting the car to where it needs to be through the weekend, I feel naturally relaxed and I know what I'm going to do."

Hamilton has already won nine races so far this season and looks likely to end the year in double figures, which is no mean feat considering he feels this year has been tougher than any he has experienced before.

"This year has been the most intensive, the cars the faster, the requirement on the driver's side physically and mentally is on another level," said Hamilton.

"We've been fighting another team who have had the upper hand for a long part of the season. So collectively as a team we've had to go above and beyond to deliver more than them."

Serena coach makes plea for honest on-court coaching

Reuters | Washington

The coach whose attempts to guide Serena Williams mid-match during this year's US Open final led to her explosive row with the umpire and a code violation en route to defeat, has called for on-court coaching to be permitted.

Patrick Mouratoglou admitted gesturing to Williams from the stands during her match with Japan's Naomi Osaka -- in contravention of US Open and other grand slam tournament rules -- but the American was left incensed at the umpire's strict interpretation of the rule. She said she had not seen Mouratoglou's signal and that she had "never cheated in her life".

The incident and the ensuing row resulted in a game penalty and a \$17,000 fine for Williams,

and divided tennis by triggering a debate about sexism in the sport.

The debate was fuelled by Williams's and others assertions that an umpire would not have dealt with a male player in the same way.

Coaching during matches is permitted in some women's events, but grand slam tournaments are among those which do not allow it. The US Open permitted players to talk to their coaches during qualifying and junior matches, but any move to allow it during main draw matches would need to be unilateral among the four slams.

This is likely to be problematic with Wimbledon so far entirely against it, although Wimbledon chief Philip Brook told reporters recently it was time for a "grown-up conversation"

about the issue.

Mouratoglou clearly thinks it is a good idea and yesterday said mid-match coaching needed to be authorised in order to "ensure tennis sustains its development".

The Frenchman said it was time coaching was both recognised and valued, because the fallout following last month's US Open final made it look as though coaching was shameful.

"Authorising coaching in competition and actually staging it so that the viewers can enjoy it as a show would ensure it remains pivotal in the sport," he posted on his Twitter feed.

Mouratoglou said he could not understand why tennis was "just about the only sport" where coaching was not allowed, citing soccer, basketball and boxing as high profile examples, and pointing out that elite cyclists are in radio contact with their advisors during races.

Touching on a theme raised by the Williams episode, Mouratoglou said legitimising in-competition coaching would end hypocrisy.

"It is a very basic truth that the vast majority of tennis coaches are actually coaching on court, despite the rule," he said.

"Of course, coaches are usually discreet... occasionally the players are punished for it, but for the most part they are not."

Representatives of the four grand slam tournaments are expected to meet before the end of the year, at which point the future of mid-match coaching will be a topic of conversation.



Serena Williams of the US walks off court with her coach Patrick Mouratoglou after finishing a training session ahead of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne, Australia