

Maharaj spins South Africa victory

Markram's 82 and Maharaj's 5-33 lead South Africa to dominant series-opening win against Australia

● Maharaj takes 5-33 (career-best)

● Markram scores 82 opening batting

● Australia collapse from 60-0 to 198 all out

AFP | Cairns

Aiden Markram hit 82 before left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj tore through Australia's new-look batting order as South Africa claimed the One-Day International series opener by 98 runs in Cairns yesterday.

Sent in to bat, Markram -- opening for the first time in ODIs since 2021 -- crunched nine boundaries in his 81-ball knock to power South Africa to a formidable 296-8.

Skipper Temba Bavuma (65) and Matthew Breetzke (57) also helped set the tone for the three-match ODI series.

In reply, openers Mitchell Marsh and Travis Head flattened South Africa's pacemen



South Africa's Keshav Maharaj (L) celebrates with a teammate after taking the wicket of Australia's Cameron Green

as Australia raced to 60-0 after seven overs.

But the match flipped after the introduction of spin, with Maharaj conjuring rampant turn and he picked up four wickets in his first 15 balls.

He finished with career-best figures of 5-33 from 10 overs as Australia were dismissed for 198 in the 41st over.

It was a strong bounce back from South Africa after their 2-1 defeat in the Twenty20 series

between the teams.

"I just tried to utilise the conditions and was fortunate to get the rewards," Maharaj said.

Marsh played a lone hand with 88 off 96 balls in a disappointing batting effort from Australia,

Scorecard

South Africa 296 for 8 (Markram 82, Bavuma 65, Breetzke 57, Head 4-57) beat Australia 198 (Marsh 88, Maharaj 5-33) by 98 runs

transitioning after the recent retirements of veterans Steve Smith and Glenn Maxwell from ODI cricket.

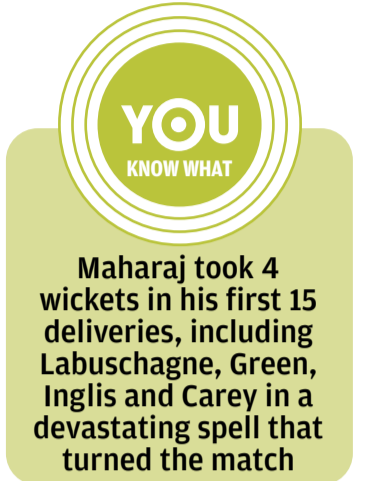
"He's (Maharaj) an outstanding bowler and there was certainly a little bit more spin than we expected," said Marsh, who is captaining Australia in this series in place of Pat Cummins.

South Africa had been rocked by the news that quick Kagiso Rabada would miss the series with an ankle injury.

An unruffled Markram appeared to be cruising to his fourth ODI century before he was caught behind off left-arm quick Ben Dwarshuis in the 24th over.

A sluggish Bavuma was overtaken by Breetzke, playing his third ODI.

But South Africa lost three wickets for just seven runs with the fall of Breetzke, Tristan Stubbs (duck) and Dewald Bre-



Maharaj took 4 wickets in his first 15 deliveries, including Labuschagne, Green, Inglis and Carey in a devastating spell that turned the match

vis (six), before Bavuma kicked on.

After a breakout T20 series, ODI debutant Brevis hit a first-ball six -- but then holed out to Head, who finished with 4-57.

Head's excellent match continued with the bat until he was stumped for 27, providing debutant offspinner Prenelan Subrayen with his first ODI wicket.

Making his return since being axed from Australia's Test team, Marnus Labuschagne (one) fell on his sixth delivery after unsuccessfully reviewing an lbw decision off Maharaj.

Ronaldo gets Hong Kong hero's welcome, avoids Messi pitfall

● Ronaldo provides assist in 2-1 Saudi Super Cup win over Al Ittihad

● Ronaldo emotional over local support

AFP | Hong Kong

Cristiano Ronaldo was given a hero's welcome yesterday as he played a pivotal role for Saudi side Al Nassr in Hong Kong -- where great rival Lionel Messi became public enemy number one last year for failing to play.

The 40-year-old former Manchester United and Real Madrid ace Ronaldo got an assist in a 2-1 Saudi Super Cup win over Al Ittihad, who had French veteran Karim Benzema up front.

"Ronaldo, Ronaldo," rang out from the moment that he came out to warm up on a sweltering



A supporter of Al-Nassr's Cristiano Ronaldo poses before the Saudi Super Cup semi-final football match between Al-Nassr and Al-Ittihad at the Hong Kong Stadium

and damp evening in southern China, where several pitch invaders unsuccessfully tried to get to the superstar at the end.

Cheers went up every time that the Portuguese captain, wearing his trademark number seven shirt, touched the ball.

It was all a far cry from the

rabid reaction Messi sparked when he remained on the bench for an Inter Miami friendly at the same Hong Kong Stadium in February last year.

The Argentine wizard's no-show drew boos and calls for refunds from thousands of fans



Fans not only camped outside Cristiano Ronaldo's hotel, but some even booked rooms there, and a museum dedicated to him opened in Hong Kong, highlighting his immense popularity

who had paid large sums to see the World Cup-winning captain play.

The 38-year-old said he was injured but that failed to quell a spectacular fallout that saw China cancel two friendly matches featuring Argentina.

Home hero Piastri to have Australian F1 grandstand named after him



A general view of the Albert Park Circuit in Melbourne

AFP | Sydney

Oscar Piastri will have a grandstand named after him at the Australian Grand Prix from next year, an honour the McLaren driver said was "surreal".

The Piastri Grandstand will sit opposite the pit lane at the Albert Park circuit in Melbourne, the home race of

24-year-old Piastri.

"It is pretty surreal, it still feels weird racing at home -- it is very cool racing at home," the world championship leader said on social media.

Other notable drivers with stands at Albert Park include Jack Brabham, Arthur Waite, Alan Jones, Daniel Ricciardo and Mark Webber.

Piastri currently tops the drivers' standings with 284 points, narrowly ahead of McLaren team-mate Lando Norris, with 10 grands prix left in this campaign.

Australia hosts the first race of next season.

The naming of a grandstand is an honour typically reserved for sporting legends with a long line of achievements.

Former F1 driver Webber said it was a reflection of Piastri's promising results so far as he pursues a first world crown.



Oscar Piastri

Klopp 'decisive' in move to Leipzig, says Bakayoko

AFP | Berlin



Belgium winger Johan Bakayoko said a conversation with Jurgen Klopp was the decisive factor in his move to RB Leipzig from PSV Eindhoven this summer.

With links to Premier League sides Everton and Nottingham Forest as well as Borussia Dortmund, the in-de-

Johan Bakayoko

mand Bakayoko, 22, signed with Leipzig in July.

The winger was one of several young additions to Leipzig's squad in the first transfer window under Klopp, who took over as Red Bull's global head of football in January.

In an interview with AFP and other media yesterday, Bakayoko revealed Klopp's role in recruitment and said his chat with the former Liverpool coach was the "decision point" for the move.

"When I had the talk with Jurgen Klopp, for me I thought 'OK, I have to go'.

"That was the trigger point for me to say: OK.

"(Klopp said) we are here to make you better. We need you. And that's what I want.

"So it was a perfect match." Red Bull own RB Leipzig as well as clubs in Austria, the United States, Brazil and Japan and hold minority stakes in Paris FC and Leeds United.

The winger said teammate Xavi Simons, who has been heavily linked with a move to Chelsea, was not distracted by the transfer speculation as the pre-season preparations have continued.

"When you're good, that's what happens. (Rumours) are just a part of it.

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