

# Chelsea fightback in Newcastle draw eases pressure on Maresca

- Newcastle led 2-0 at halftime
- Reece James scored a superb free-kick
- Joao Pedro netted a brilliant solo equalizer

AFP | London

Chelsea saved Enzo Maresca from more awkward questions as they fought back from two goals down to rescue a 2-2 draw against Newcastle yesterday.

Maresca's side were in danger of a damaging defeat after Newcastle's Nick Woltemade struck twice in the first half at St James' Park.

But Chelsea hit back after the interval thanks to Reece James's superb free-kick and Joao Pedro's eye-catching solo effort.

Chelsea remain fourth in the Premier League after a disappointing run of just one win in their last five top-flight matches.

But the Blues' gritty fightback was essential for Maresca after a turbulent week that raised questions about the Italian's long-term future with the club.



Chelsea's English defender #24 Reece James (L) scores their first goal from a freekick

Maresca claimed on Friday that reports he could replace Pep Guardiola as Manchester City boss were "100 percent speculation".

City have reportedly placed Maresca on a list of candidates should Guardiola walk away at the end of the season.

The City link came after

Maresca appeared to criticise a lack of support from the Chelsea hierarchy.

Maresca, who is under contract under 2029, said after last weekend's win over Everton that the previous 48 hours had been his worst at the club because he and his players had not received the support he expected during

a difficult run of results.

There has been criticism this season of Chelsea's rotation policy, which at times has left the team looking disjointed and poorly organised.

**Jig of delight**

After making 11 changes for the League Cup quarter-final

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Newcastle's Nick Woltemade, who scored both first-half goals, was seeking redemption after scoring an own goal in his team's defeat to rivals Sunderland just last weekend

win at third-tier Cardiff on Tuesday, Maresca reverted to his senior stars, but they made a dismal start on foggy Tyneside.

Woltemade was clearly determined to find redemption after his own goal condemned the Magpies to a 1-0 defeat at bitter rivals Sunderland last weekend.

The fired-up German striker took just four minutes to make the impact he desired.

Jacob Murphy's cross reached Anthony Gordon at the far post and when his shot was pushed out by Chelsea goalkeeper Rob-

ert Sanchez, the ball fell kindly for Woltemade to slot into the empty net from five yards.

Maresca was left to rue Chelsea's woeful defending as Woltemade celebrated only his second goal in his last 12 games in all competitions.

Unable to handle Newcastle's intensity, Chelsea fell further behind in the 20th minute.

Gordon was given too much time by Chelsea's sloppy defence and the winger delivered a pinpoint cross that invited a finishing touch.

Woltemade obliged, sticking out a boot to poke home from close range before a lengthy VAR check confirmed the German was just onside.

With Chelsea in disarray, Gordon and Woltemade carved open them yet again on the stroke of half-time, but on this occasion the German somehow volleyed wide when it seemed easier to score.

Maresca's half-time team talk had the desired effect as James reduced the deficit in the 49th minute with a sublime free-kick that flashed past Newcastle 'keeper Aaron Ramsdale.

Crucially, Newcastle were controversially denied a penalty after Trevoh Chalobah's barge into Gordon.

## Dogged Hodge ton sees West Indies save follow-on against New Zealand

AFP | Mount Maunganui

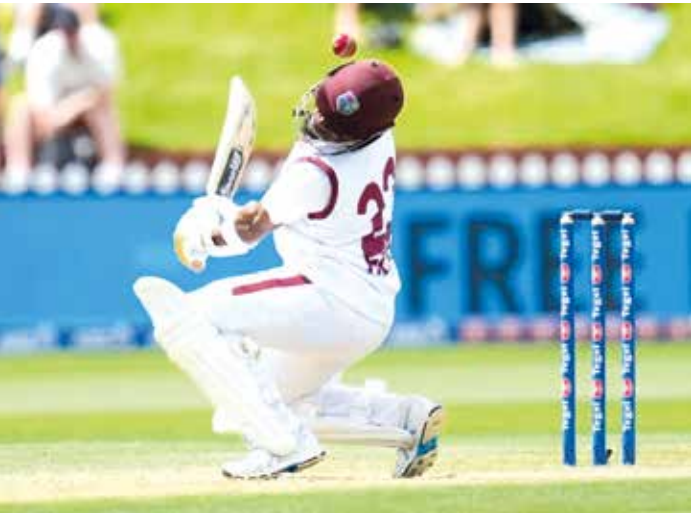
Kavem Hodge scored his second Test century on Saturday as the West Indies avoided the follow-on in the third Test at Mount Maunganui.

At stumps on the third day, the West Indies were 381-6, still 194 runs behind with Hodge unbeaten on 109 and Anderson Phillip at the other end on 12.

The 32-year-old Hodge crawled to his century off 224 balls, hitting 12 boundaries and being dropped on 74 by Daryl Mitchell off Ajaz Patel.

It took him 33 balls to get through the 90s, including a long stoppage on 97 after he was hit a painful blow in the box by a Michael Rae delivery.

"Thankfully I was able to get over it and go past the landmark," Hodge said.



West Indies' Kavem Hodge narrowly avoids being struck by a bouncer

"I told myself, hey, I spent all day to get 90. I still have all day tomorrow. Just stick to the processes.

"It makes no sense I work so

hard from zero to 90 and then go change. So just stick to the processes, keep concentrating every opportunity I get."

Hodge shared in an 81-run

partnership with Justin Greaves which edged the visitors closer to the follow-on target of 375, and fifty stands with Tevin Imlach and Alick Athanaze.

New Zealand received a spark from an unlikely source when Mitchell trapped Greaves lbw for 43, just his fourth Test wicket in his 35th match.

Batting suddenly looked a lot harder, as West Indies captain Roston Chase came and went, trapped lbw by Patel.

Leading batsman, Shai Hope was missing yesterday because of food poisoning.

Phillip came to the crease and should have been out for two when edging Patel to wicketkeeper Tom Blundell, but New Zealand did not appeal. He was then dropped on eight from Patel's bowling by Rae at mid-on.

## Australia four wickets from Ashes glory as England cling on



Australia's Nathan Lyon celebrates dismissing England captain Ben Stokes

AFP | Adelaide

An unrelenting Australia were four wickets from retaining the Ashes at close of play in the third Test yesterday as England clung to the dying hope that they could chase a record 435 to save the series.

England clawed their way to 207-6 to take it to a fifth day in Adelaide with Will Jacks on 11 and Jamie Smith two, still 228 runs from their target.

They lost big guns Zak Crawley (85), Joe Root (39), Harry Brook (30), and Ben Stokes (5) in the final session with Nathan Lyon and Pat Cummins doing the damage.

Australia wicketkeeper Alex Carey, who made a century in the first innings, had another good day with his quick hands stumping Crawley off Lyon.

"I just thought Nathan was bowling really well and to continuing putting lots of energy on the ball," said Carey

"He toiled away all day and finally got some reward. There's enough in the pitch. We saw that, and finally he picked up a couple of late wickets."

Carey expected England to fight till the bitter end on Sunday and said he was still not thinking about winning the Ashes.

"We'll reflect on today and come up with plans for tomorrow."

"We know these guys are quality players right to the end, and we want to keep working hard and probably not look too far ahead."

England must win to keep the five-match series alive after being crushed by eight wickets at Perth and Brisbane.

With attendance over the first four days swelling to more than 200,000 -- a record for the Adelaide Oval which has been hosting Tests since 1884 -- they face a daunting task.

## India drops Shubman Gill T20 World Cup squad

AFP | New Delhi

Indian selectors dropped Test and ODI captain Shubman Gill yesterday from the T20 squad for the World Cup in February after a prolonged form slump.

Gill, 26, has scored only 291 runs in his past 15 matches in the game's shortest format at an average of 24.25.

"Shubman Gill is short of runs at the moment," chief selector Ajit Agarkar told reporters in Mumbai.

However, batter Suryakumar Yadav was retained as captain despite similar concerns over his form.

A T20 specialist, Suryaku-



India's Shubman Gill during nets (file photo)

mar has managed just 244 runs across his last 22 innings in the format, without a single fifty.

"We have full faith in our captain to deliver during the World Cup," Agarkar said.

Suryakumar acknowledged that his "rough patch" had been going on for too long.

"I know what to do. I have time to fix it. We will definitely see Surya the batter," the captain said.

All-rounder Axar Patel was named as Suryakumar's deputy.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Ishan Kishan was rewarded for his stellar form in domestic cricket with a spot in the 15-member squad.