

SPORTS

It's a moment to rejoice, not only for the players but the whole Pakistan nation — Azhar

Pakistan hope historic home Tests will help turn team's form

RAWALPINDI, Pakistan, Dec 10, (AP): Pakistan captain Azhar Ali is counting on the return of Test cricket in the country after 10 years away to turn around their fortunes.

Pakistan made a pitiful start to the world Test championship recently when it lost both Tests by innings margins against Australia in Brisbane and Adelaide.

"We had a tough series in Australia and it's very unfortunate the way we lost there, it was disappointing," Azhar said on Tuesday, the day before they play Sri Lanka at Pindi Cricket Stadium.

"(But) moving forward we see this home series as an opportunity and advantage to turn things around."

Pakistan and Sri Lanka will play two Tests. Sri Lanka already has 60 points in the world Test championship after it drew the series against New Zealand at home. Pakistan has

yet to earn a point.

Sri Lanka was the last team to play a Test in Pakistan in 2009 when terrorists attacked its team bus in Lahore. Eight people were killed in the ambush and several Sri Lanka players and officials were injured.

Zimbabwe was the first team to

CRICKET

visit six years later for a limited-overs tour. Meanwhile, Pakistan played almost all of its home Tests in the United Arab Emirates to sparse crowds.

Azhar has played 75 Tests but this will be his first in Pakistan, as for all of his other 15 teammates.

"It's a moment to rejoice, not only for the players but the whole Pakistan nation," Azhar said.

"It's a wonderful opportunity to get back on the winning track. We will try



Sri Lankan Test team skipper Dimuth Karunaratne (left), and his Pakistani counterpart Azhar Ali (right), pose for a photo with the trophy of the cricket Test series after their press conference in Rawalpindi, Pakistan on Dec 10. (AP)

our best to fix our mistakes and improve wherever we had been lacking. We have outstanding talent in our squad, they have potential, and if we implement it results will be good."

Pakistan has picked uncapped left-arm fast bowler Usman Shinwari in hope Pindi Stadium's pitch will live up to its reputation as helpful to seamers. But Pakistan has history against its side, as it has lost its last three Tests in Rawalpindi.

Azhar is also wary of a Sri Lanka side featuring captain Dimuth Karunaratne, Dinesh Chandimal, Lahiru Thirimanne, and former captain Angelo Mathews. Fast bowler Suranga Lakmal, who toured in 2009, had to pull out at the last minute due to dengue fever.

Sri Lanka also has an advantage of good knowledge about Pakistan from Mickey Arthur, who was hired as the Sri Lanka coach last week. Ar-

thur coached Pakistan for three years until he was removed after the Cricket World Cup in England in July.

"Definitely, if someone is with you for so long he does have a lot of information about you," Azhar said with a smile. "But in cricket these days we all have a lot of knowledge about each other's strengths and weaknesses, and yet players score runs ... like David Warner did against us recently."

Karunaratne said what Arthur knew about Pakistan was invaluable.

"It's a big advantage for us," Karunaratne said. "Mickey ... knows everyone closely, and how the team is going to get prepared."

Karunaratne will be playing a Test for the first time, and said he was happy to be a part of Pakistan's first true home Test in more than a decade.

"This is my first time in Pakistan so I am really excited," he said. "It's a great pleasure for me."

Arsenal stage comeback to sink West Ham and end winless run

Martinelli shines

LONDON, Dec 10, (RTRS): Arsenal scored three quickfire second-half goals through Gabriel Martinelli, Nicolas Pepe and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang to beat West Ham United 3-1 away as they ended a seven-match winless run in the Premier League.

After a poor start to the game by both sides, the Hammers took the lead seven minutes before the break when Angelo Ogbonna charged into a crowded box to head home a Pablo Fornals cross at the London Stadium.

But Arsenal, with interim coach Freddie Ljungberg searching for his first win since taking over from the sacked Unai Emery, equalised on the hour thanks to a sharp finish from Brazilian Martinelli, his first Premier League goal.

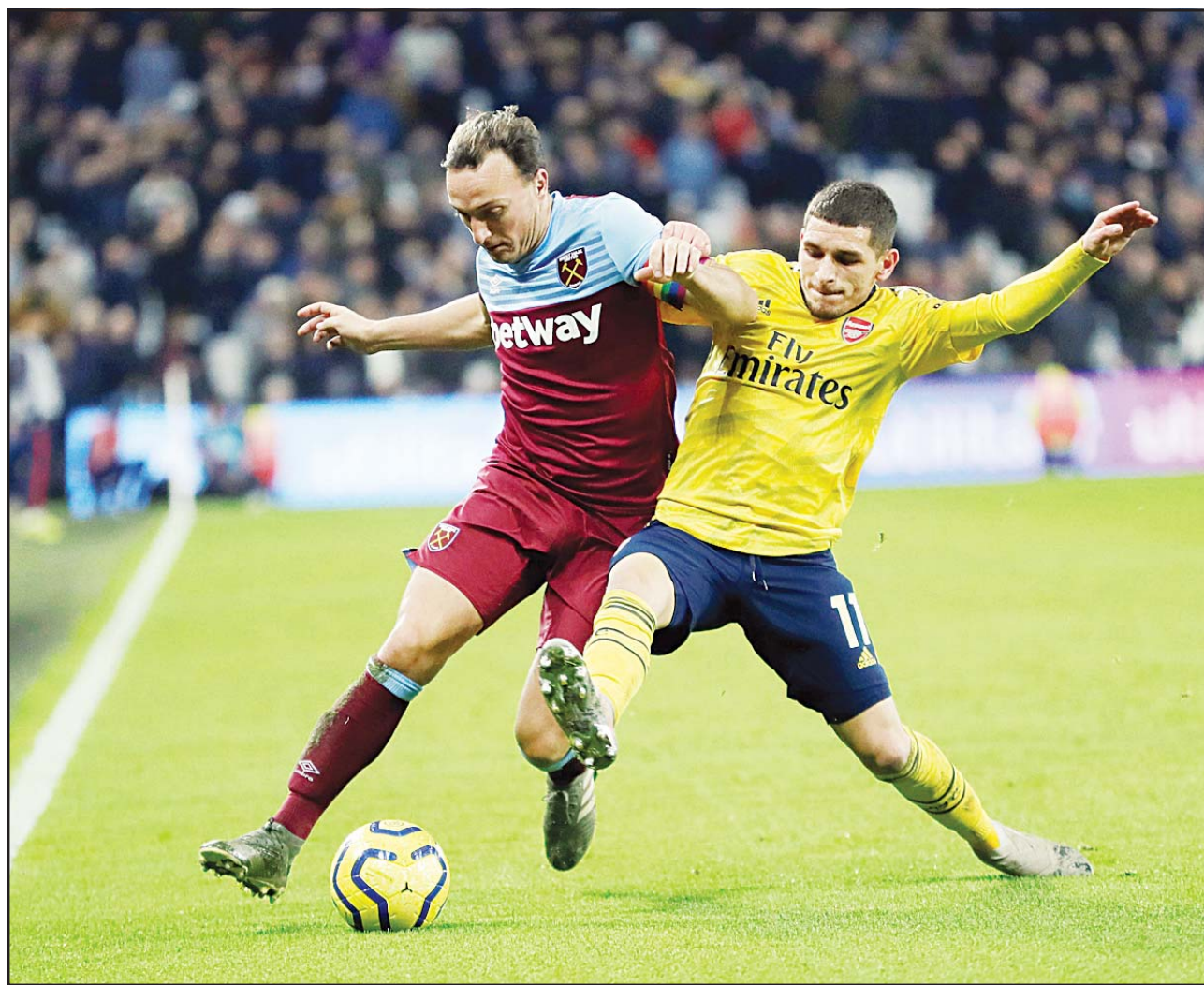
Six minutes later record signing Pepe put the visitors ahead with a superb curling shot into the far corner after being set up by a clever back-heel from Aubameyang.

The pair reversed roles for Arsenal's third with Frenchman Pepe chipping a cross into the box and Aubameyang volleying home on the turn after 69 minutes.

"It means so much for the players. They have been living under enormous pressure and you see it in their performances," said Ljungberg.

"You can see the players have been a bit low and you see in the dressing room the relief and how happy they are. We enjoy tonight and we continue working tomorrow. We have to work on our belief — that was the difference," he said.

The win took Arsenal up to ninth on



West Ham's Mark Noble (left), duels for the ball with Arsenal's Lucas Torreira during the English Premier League soccer match between West Ham United and Arsenal at the London Stadium in London on Dec 9. (AP)

22 points from 16 games, while West Ham's third straight home loss leaves them in 16th place on 16 points, only a point above the relegation zone, and increases the pressure on Chilean manager Manuel Pellegrini.

The former Manchester City boss said he was sure he could turn the

club's fortunes around, however.

"The pressure for me is exactly the same if we win or lose. When you don't have results things are more difficult. If I had not seen the team play the way they did in the first 65 minutes, I might have doubts," he added.

"For 60 minutes there was just one

team on the pitch. But football can be like this.

"We made mistakes in moments of defending. The problem was a lack of patience and quality to decide the game with a second goal and we made important mistakes in defence," he added.

Jamshedpur snatch point

Late goal denies Chennaiyin 'win'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 10: Substitute Issac Vamalswama helped Jamshedpur FC snatch a point from a determined Chennaiyin FC with a 1-1 draw in the Indian Super League (ISL) played at the JRD Tata Sports Complex on Monday.

Chennaiyin scored midway through the first half, the goal coming from the Lithuanian striker Nerijus Valskis.

Chennaiyin, who are playing under the guidance of a new coach, Owen Coyle, seemed to have regained the inspiration of the former champion as the boys showed a renewed resolve to resurrect their form: looking more organized in the opening half with wingers Thoi Singh and Lallianzuala Chhangte doing well to mobilise the attacks on either side.

The absence of Spaniards Sergio Castel and playmaker Piti seemed to hinder the offensive plans of the hosts, who had to rely for most of the time on the Indian combination of Sumeet Passi, C.K. Vineeth and Farukh Choudhary. Jamshedpur failed to get a close look at the opposition goal in the first half showing clear lack of purpose.

The Chennaiyin goal came in the 26th minute —

SOCCER

a superb effort by Valskis and Rafael Crivellaro in controlling the ball. A one-two exchange from the pair opened up a decisive gap in Jamshedpur's otherwise tight defence as Crivellaro essayed a perfect pass for Valskis, who picked up the ball and finished with a delectable half-turn.

The visitors could have increased the scoring but Subrata Paul was in immaculate form at the Jamshedpur goal. The former India goalkeeper cut off a few good Chennaiyin moves that seemed to threaten the hosts in the opening half.

The absence of an accomplished finisher kept bothering the hosts who showed more offensive intent after the break with the introduction of the young Aniket Jadhav. Jadhav did compound the worries of the Chennaiyin defence, which was led by the towering Romanian Lucian Goian, and the hosts finally managed the equalizer with just a minute left of regulation time.

Chennaiyin missed a golden opportunity in the 89th minute when Aniket Jadhav showed his skills to fox a couple of defenders and find Passi inside the box. He picked out Issac whose shot was deflected in off Farukh Choudhary, wrong-footing the goalkeeper.

Andreescu named Canada's athlete of the year

TORONTO, Dec 10, (RTRS): Bianca Andreescu was awarded the Lou Marsh Trophy as Canada's athlete of the year, capping a remarkable year in which the teenager became the country's first tennis Grand Slam singles champion with her US Open triumph.

Andreescu, an unknown quantity to most in Canada a year ago, was a unanimous pick after a breakout season in which she upset Serena Williams in the US Open final and reached a career-high fourth in the world rankings.

"Wow, I'm so thankful for this award. I was not expecting it and to be the first tennis player to win is even more surreal," the 19-year-old Andreescu said in a statement issued by Tennis Canada.

"None of my success this year would have been possible without the support from all of Canada."

Andreescu, who at the end of 2018 was ranked 178th but who finished this season at number five, began to gain attention in January when she beat former world number ones Caroline Wozniacki and Venus Williams on her way to the Auckland final.

In March, as a wildcard, she won the Indian Wells title but a shoulder injury forced her to retire from a

TENNIS

last-16 match at the following event in Miami and caused her to miss most of the clay and grass-court seasons.

Andreescu, the daughter of Romanian immigrants to Canada, then won her hometown tournament in

Toronto before going on to make history in New York where she denied Williams from earning a record-tying 24th Grand Slam singles title.

The Canadian lost just four completed matches during the season, which she finished with a 48-7 record including injury retirements.

The other finalists for the award, which is named after a former Toronto Star sports editor, were sprinter Andre De Grasse, golfer Brooke Henderson, NHL goalie Jordan Binnington and MLB pitcher Mike Soroka.

"Canadian sports crushed it this year so there are definitely many other athletes who deserve a piece of this award as well — we all motivate each other to be better," said Andreescu.

"I can't wait for what 2020 will bring and am always proud to represent Canada at the highest level."



Jamshedpur FC players celebrate the equaliser against Chennaiyin FC.

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