

Can Buttler still be trusted as wicketkeeper?

Root has dilemmas as England goes for series-clinching win

LONDON, Aug 12, (AP) — A rare winning start to a Test series isn't stopping the questions from mounting up for England cricket captain Joe Root.

Can Jos Buttler still be trusted as the wicketkeeper?

How much has fast bowler Jimmy Anderson left in the tank?

How best can fellow paceman Jofra Archer be utilized?

And, perhaps most significantly of all, how does England go about replacing Ben Stokes?

The second Test against Pakistan starts in Southampton on Thursday with England having won the opening match of a series for the first time in six.

Another victory will clinch a first Test series against Pakistan in 10 years — and a second series of this pandemic-affected summer, having already beaten the West Indies — but Root's team has issues to address.

For starters, Stokes, the world's No. 1 all-rounder, will be missing because he has returned to New Zealand for family reasons. It deprives England of a player who often digs the team out of trouble — with ball or bat — and will lead to a more specialist batsman, likely Zak Crawley, being added to the lineup.

Buttler should keep his place despite missing three chances behind the stumps in the first innings — two against opener Shan Masood who went on to make 156. The wicketkeeper also made amends for a falling batting average by scoring a crucial 75 as England successfully chased down a target of 277. His batting is set to ensure he stays off being replaced by fellow gloveman Ben Foakes despite his rival typically being more accomplished behind the stumps.

A big debate now centers on the makeup of England's attack, given the quick turnaround of games — the three Tests this series take place in



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successive weeks — and Anderson's acknowledgement that his radar was off at his Old Trafford home ground where he took one wicket across two innings.

England's all-time leading Test wicket-taker was rested for the second Test against the West Indies and selectors could follow a similar path a month later, especially considering Anderson's recent history of injuries. Mark Wood would be the natural replacement on the Rose Bowl's fast track, while the uncapped Ollie Robinson is another alternative.

Archer has been used to open the bowling and as first change this summer, but Root gave English cricket's new star only five overs in the second innings of the first Test. England seem increasingly unsure of how to get the best out of Archer, who has been overshadowed by Stuart Broad and Chris Woakes in recent weeks.

So it will be intriguing to see what pace attack England goes with — and the same applies for Pakistan as the tourists seek a way back into the series after letting the advantage slip at Old Trafford.

Pakistan opted for an additional leg-spinner in all-rounder Shadab Khan, who was utilized for only 11.3 overs in the two innings, and he could be replaced by Faheem Ashraf, a left-handed batsman and a right-arm medium fast bowler.

Azhar Ali will be under scrutiny for his captaincy and his batting after underwhelming with both in the first Test.

It can be argued he was too cautious while defending a sizeable target of 277 runs on a wearing pitch, with Pakistan letting the game slip away despite reducing England to 117-5 on the fourth day as front-line leg-spinner Yasir Shah was held back nearly 40 minutes after tea. Before that, Pakistan could have easily batted England out of the game after getting a 107-run lead in the first innings.

Meanwhile, Ali's batting form is in sharp decline, with the captain scoring only 139 runs in his last 12 away Test innings, without a single half century. That run includes three ducks, the last one in the first innings at Old Trafford.

"After playing international cricket for 10 years, I understand when I need to take certain decisions," Ali said. "When I bat, I'm not thinking about the captaincy, whether or not I'm out of form."

And when I'm captain, I don't think about my batting at all, whether I scored a 100 or 0."

Sevilla, Shakhtar reach Europa semis

Ocampos' late winner end Wolves' European run

DUISBURG, Germany, Aug 12, (AP) — One missed opportunity was all it took to end Wolverhampton's long European run.

Raul Jimenez stepped up to take an early penalty against Sevilla in Tuesday's quarterfinal, just as he'd done to beat Olympiakos in the previous round. This time, though, his shot was too central and saved by Yassine Bounou.

Sevilla dominated the rest of the game as Wolves increasingly tired in their 59th game of a long season. A goal seemed inevitable and Lucas Ocampos delivered with a header in the 88th minute to secure a 1-0 win.

The loss ended Wolves' best European run since reaching the UEFA Cup final in 1972 — and its chances of qualifying for the Champions League. Sevilla, meanwhile, stayed on course for a record-extending sixth title in the competition. Manchester United is next up in the semifinal Sunday.

"We knew we had to work a lot and I think my team has played a great game, exactly the game we expected," Sevilla coach Julen Lopetegui said through a translator. After the penalty save, "we had the control over the game."

Sevilla had 73% possession and seemingly endless second-half set pieces around the Wolves penalty area — so many that the grass around the six-yard box was thoroughly churned up as players

jostled for position.

They finally broke through when Ocampos met Ever Banega's cross with a glancing header.

"I think it's justice, that goal," Lopetegui said.

Wolves forward Adama Traore earlier showed extraordinary pace in his 54th club game of the season to sprint in behind the Sevilla defense, only for Diego Carlos to cut him down with a tackle from behind for the penalty. Jimenez had 27 goals for Wolves in 2019-20 and scored against Olympiakos last week. His shot this time was within easy reach for Bounou, who said he knew Jimenez' penalty-taking style from their time together at Atletico Madrid in 2014-15.

"I don't think we can blame Raul. He's given us so much this season," Jimenez' Wolves teammate Leander Dendoncker said.

After the penalty, Wolves didn't have another shot on target.

Traore's speed has been pivotal

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in many of Wolves' games this season but it was a non-factor after the opening half-hour and the increasingly weary right-sided forward was later substituted.

Wolves had the longest Europa League campaign of any team left in the competition, having started more than a year ago in the first qualifying round with a win over Northern Irish club Crusaders on July 25, 2019.

"It's a long journey. We wanted to go as far as we could. We had it today really, really close. Of course everybody's disappointed, but we should not ignore all the effort. It's almost 14 months of hard work," Wolves manager Nuno Espirito Santo said. "Disappointment is something that cannot take away all the good things that we've been doing."

Sevilla's semifinal opponent Manchester United beat Copenhagen 1-0 on Monday after extra time.

Meanwhile, Shakhtar Donetsk routed Basel 4-1 to set up a Europa League semifinal against Inter Milan.

Four Brazilians scored for the Ukrainian side before Ricky van Wolfswinkel netted a consolation goal for the Swiss side.

Junior Moraes put Shakhtar ahead in the second minute by steering in a header from Marlos' corner. It was the Brazilian-born Ukraine forward's 25th goal across all competitions, coming after he scored two against Wolfsburg in the second leg of their rescheduled round-of-16 tie last week.

Afimico Pululu almost equalized with a solo effort for Basel, but Taison grabbed Shakhtar's second with a deflected shot after a fine flowing team move in the 22nd.

Marcos Antônio almost added a third when he struck the crossbar with a curling shot in the 40th. Raoul Petretta produced a clearance to deny Moraes from the rebound.

Alan Patrick's penalty in the 75th effectively sealed the Ukrainian side's place in the semifinals, before right back Dodó added the fourth.

The tournament is being played in a shortened format in Germany because of the coronavirus pandemic, which forced all European competitions to be halted for months.

Shakhtar will play Inter in Düsseldorf on Aug 17.

The final takes place in nearby Cologne four days later.

All four semifinalists have already secured places in the 2020-21 Champions League group stage through their national leagues.

That means that the group-stage spot allocated to the Europa League winner will pass to Rennes because it finished third in the French league.



FC Basel's Arthur Cabral (right) duels for the ball with Shakhtar's Serhiy Kryvtsov during the Europa League quarter-final soccer match between FC Shakhtar Donetsk and FC Basel at the Veltins-Arena in Gelsenkirchen, Germany on Aug 11. (AP)

Spire Motorsports expands to 2 cars with Leavine purchase

Bell promotion to Gibbs' car bittersweet because of Jones

CONCORD, North Carolina, Aug 12, (AP) — The path to landing a Cup Series ride with Joe Gibbs Racing was bumpy for Christopher Bell, who was hired for the coveted job after the team told Erik Jones he was being let go at the end of the season.

The decision by Gibbs blindsided Jones, who thought talks on a contract extension had been progressing. That was before Leavine Family Racing said it was closing at the end of this season, a decision that could have put Bell out of a job.

The 25-year-old from Oklahoma is a longtime development driver for Toyota, a former Truck Series champion and twice nearly won the Xfinity Series championship driving for Gibbs. With the Leavine seat going

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away, both Gibbs and Toyota had to find a spot for Bell. It came at the expense of Jones.

"Uncomfortable is a good way to put it," Bell said Tuesday. "I don't think any of us, myself, Joe Gibbs Racing, Toyota, none of us expected the whole LFR deal to go down like it did, so I think that put everybody in a little bit of a box."

"There was a time period a couple weeks ago that I wasn't sure how I was going to be able to continue my Toyota relationship and I was pretty scared by that. They have been my centerpiece of my career, whether that be NASCAR racing or dirt racing. I didn't want that to end."

Leavine a week ago said it was closing and Jones was informed Gibbs would not renew his contract two days later. Bell was formally announced as the next driver of the No. 20 Toyota on Monday.



In this Feb 16, 2020, file photo, Christopher Bell takes a parade lap in front of fans before the NASCAR Daytona 500 auto race at Daytona International Speedway in Daytona Beach, Florida. (AP)

That closed a whirlwind week in which Jones appeared to be the last to learn his job was in jeopardy. Another longtime Toyota-supported driver, he has two wins in 133 Cup Series starts. He won the Truck Series championship in 2015 and has been part of the Gibbs organization his entire NASCAR career.

"I was blindsided a little bit. I didn't expect it coming from our talks," Jones said on NBC Sports before Sunday's race. "I thought we were moving in a good direction."

Bell said the way things unfolded have been "bittersweet" because it had cost Jones his job. Bell followed Jones' exact path through NASCAR's national series and moved up each time Jones was promoted. The two are also de facto teammates since Leavine is a partner with Gibbs' four-car organization.

"It was a tough spot," Bell said. "I

didn't envy Coach Joe Gibbs at all. He had to make an extremely tough decision on what he wanted to do. Fortunately, it worked out for me, but I understand that it's a very hard situation and I did have a lot of remorse for Erik because he has kind of been a guy that I have followed up through the same path and he has been along with Toyota just like me."

Meanwhile, Spire Motorsports said it has purchased the NASCAR charter and assets of Leavine Family Racing, which is closing its team at the end of this season.

The purchase of the No. 95 from Bob Leavine gives Spire a second guaranteed spot in Cup Series races, the Leavine race shop and all inventory owned by that organization. Leavine is currently in a technical alliance with Joe Gibbs Racing, so all its current cars will be returned to Gibbs at the end of the year.

Spire will expand to two cars in 2021 and operate out of the Leavine race shop in Concord, North Carolina. Spire has made 58 Cup starts using more than a dozen different drivers. The team did not announce who will drive its cars next season or which manufacturer it will join.

"This is an exciting moment for Spire as we take the natural next step in our long-term plan to build our race team," said Spire Motorsports co-owner Jeff Dickerson.

Spire is owned by Dickerson and T.J. Puchyr, two industry veterans who have moved from driver and sponsor representation into team ownership. The team scored a victory in its first season when Justin Haley was a surprise winner at Daytona in July, 2019.

Spire got into the Cup Series by purchasing a charter from Furniture Row Racing when that team closed at the end of the 2018. Both Furniture Row and Leavine were partners with Gibbs and the organizations both chose to fold when operating costs became too burdensome.

Leavine had hoped the introduction of the Next Gen car in 2021 would cut costs and allow him to stay in business, but the coronavirus pandemic has delayed the new car until 2022. Dickerson believes Spire can still successfully build a two-car operation.

"These are no doubt trying times, but I have never been prouder to be part of this sport," Dickerson said. "NASCAR has managed several difficult situations this spring and into the summer."

We believe in the ownership model that NASCAR has built and where this sport is going now more than ever."

Paris Marathon canceled after 'coronavirus' hits travel plans

PARIS, Aug 12, (AP) — The Paris Marathon has been canceled because of the coronavirus after repeated attempts to find a new date, organizers said Wednesday.

The race was originally due to take place in April but was then moved to October. Organizers said they'd recently tried to rearrange the race for November but continuing travel restrictions made that unrealistic.

"Faced with the difficulty that many runners, especially those coming from abroad, had in making themselves available for the 14th/15th November, it was decided that it would be better and simpler for those concerned

if we organized the Schneider Electric Marathon de Paris in 2021," organizers said in a statement.

They will now focus on the 2021 edition of the race. Runners who were registered for this year's race will be automatically signed up for next year.

The coronavirus pandemic has wreaked havoc on the international marathon calendar, given the large numbers of runners typically involved and the difficulty of maintaining any social distancing. Some races like Berlin have been canceled outright and others like London have been restricted to elite runners only.



In this April 14, 2019 file photo, competitors in the Paris Marathon run past the Cleopatra's Needle at the Place de la Concorde in Paris, France. (AP)



Wolverhampton Wanderers' Adama Traore, (left), challenges for the ball with Sevilla's Lucas Ocampos during the Europa League quarter-final soccer match between Wolves and Sevilla at the MSV Arena in Duisburg, Germany, on Aug 11. (AP)