

Ali tests positive for virus as England arrive in Sri Lanka

Rahul out for India; Australia's Warner set for comeback

SYDNEY Jan 5, (AP) — KL Rahul has been ruled out with injury, denting India's stock of backup batsmen.

David Warner is set for a comeback and Will Pucovski has been given the all clear, meanwhile, in potential boosts to Australia's struggling top order.

With a series lead on the line at the Sydney Cricket Ground, there'll be changes in the personnel when the third Test starts Thursday.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India on Tuesday said Rahul had sprained his left wrist during batting practice on the weekend and would return to the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru for rehabilitation on the injury.

Rahul hasn't played a Test match since 2019, but was factoring in calculations for a return with the series tied 1-1 and two matches remaining. Rohit Sharma seems set to make his return from injury, with the only doubt over where.

With Mayank Agarwal tallying just 31 runs in four innings this season, it could be a straight swap at the top.

India's batting depth is being tested. Skipper Virat Kohli played in the first Test, which Australia won by eight wickets, before returning home to be with his wife, who is expecting the couple's first child this month.

Stand-in captain Ajinkya Rahane posted a century that was instrumental in guiding India to an eight-wicket win in the second Test at Melbourne last week.

Both teams are in Sydney, weighing up the best formulations for start-

ing XIs on a wicket that traditionally takes spin.

Australia coach Justin Langer indicated Warner would return following almost six weeks on the sidelines with a groin injury, saying the veteran opener was "very, very, very likely to play" on his home ground.

An independent neurologist gave 22-year-old Pucovski clearance from a concussion sustained in a tour game, an assessment that put the young opener into the frame for a test debut.

Both openers went through batting practice on Tuesday, along with former skipper Steve Smith who is struggling for runs in this series. Joe Burns was cut from the Australia squad after the second test, leaving a vacancy in the opening pair, and makeshift opener Matt Wade could easily return to the middle-order to create another spot.

CRICKET

"All the concussion protocols ... have been passed. He's been cleared and that would be very heartening for him," Langer said of Pucovski. "There's no reason why Will can't be selected now. It's just working out the balance of our team, where we're at in the series ... we weigh up whether this test match is right, or the next test match is right."

Also:

HAMBANTOTA, Sri Lanka: England allrounder Moeen Ali was isolating in Sri Lanka after testing positive for the coronavirus upon his arrival in the South Asian country for the team's two-Test cricket tour.

Pace bowler Chris Woakes has been deemed as a possible close contact of Ali and was also observing a period of self-isolation in developments which have cast an early shadow on the tour that takes place weeks after a white-ball trip to South Africa was derailed by a spate of positive COVID-19 results.

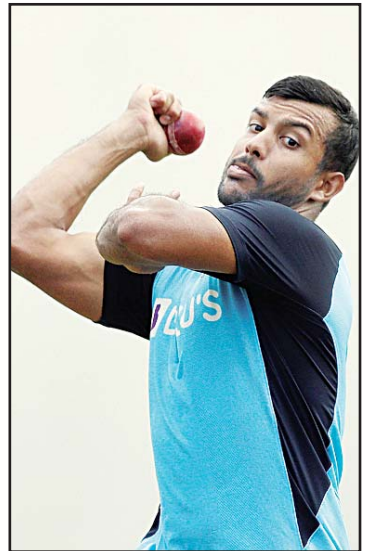
The whole squad was given a clean bill of health prior to departure and again after quick turnaround testing on arrival in Hambantota on Sunday, only for the more-sophisticated PCR process to show Ali was carrying the virus, according to the England and Wales Cricket Board.

Ali is due out of isolation on Jan 13, the day before the first Test starts in Galle. Woakes is being advised to isolate for a minimum of seven days.

England's players were hosed down with disinfectant spray after disembarking their charter flight, before being kept in 48-hour solitary quarantine in a hotel. They will undergo testing for a second time on Tuesday, with plans to begin training having been delayed until Wednesday at the earliest.



South Africa's Dean Elgar plays a shot during play on the third day of the second cricket Test match between South Africa and Sri Lanka at Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg, South Africa, Jan 5. (AP)



India's Mayank Agarwal bowls in the nets at the Sydney Cricket Ground during training in Sydney on Jan 5, ahead of their cricket Test against Australia starting Thursday. (AP)

Howes leads motorbikes

Al-Attiyah wins Dakar Rally stage

JEDDAH, Saudi Arabia, Jan 5, (AP) — Nasser Al-Attiyah won his third stage of the Dakar Rally in Saudi Arabia and cut his deficit to overall leader Stephane Peterhansel to five minutes on Tuesday.

Al-Attiyah won the prologue and the second stage, and had to open the 403-kilometer (250-mile) loop around Wadi Ad-Dawasir, a blend of rocky canyons and dunes.

The Qatari dominated, beating Henk Lategan of South Africa by 2-1/2 minutes. Peterhansel overcame an early puncture and was third, four minutes back.

Some contenders didn't fare so well. Defending champion Carlos Sainz, racing second early on, lost his way along with Saudi flagbearer Yazeed Al Rajhi. Sainz was back on track 31 minutes later and Al Rajhi after 45 minutes.

RALLYING

Bernhard Ten Brinke of the Netherlands, in the top five with about 40 kilometers to go, rolled his car and was receiving a competitor's help to resume.

Peterhansel held on to the overall lead, five minutes over Al-Attiyah. Mathieu Serradori of France rose to third, 26 minutes back. Sainz was fourth, 33 minutes back, and Sebastien Loeb was sixth, 46 minutes down.

Skyler Howes of the United States became the motorbike overall leader after stage two winner Joan Barreda

Casali agrees to 1-yr deal with Giants

SAN FRANCISCO, Jan 5, (AP) — Catcher Curt Casali agreed to a \$1.5 million, one-year contract with the San Francisco Giants on Monday, a month after he was cut by the Cincinnati Reds.

The 32-year-old Casali hit .224 with six homers and eight RBIs in 31 games and 93 plate appearances last year, when he earned \$541,667 in prorated pay from a \$1,462,500 salary. Reds pitchers were 14-11 with a 3.68 ERA in his starts.

Casali has a .230 average, 37 homers and 105 RBIs in seven major league seasons with Tampa Bay (2014-17) and Cincinnati (2018-20).

San Francisco opened a roster spot by unconditionally releasing left-hander Andrew Suarez, whose rights were sold to South Korea's LG Twins. Casali can earn \$500,000 in roster bonuses, either \$500,000

for making the opening day active roster or \$125,000 apiece for 30, 60, 90 and 120 days on the active roster.



Phil Hughes has retired from baseball, more than two years after throwing his last pitch.

The 34-year-old right-hander said on Twitter on Sunday he was announcing what's been "fairly apparent ... these last couple years."

"Through many ups and downs over 12 years, I look back and am incredibly proud of what I was able to accomplish," he said. "While injuries have forced this chapter of my life to come to a close, I'm very excited to pursue other passions. As my job title shifts from baseball player to dad I'll always feel very connected to this game and the relationships I have made."

and defending champion Ricky Brabec went off course 40 kilometers in.

Howes came into the picture after the stage's midpoint and finished fourth. Last year, in his second Dakar, he was ninth overall, taking a laidback approach just three months after breaking his neck. He said he has the same mindset this year.

"Today the dunes flowed really well and I felt comfortable there," Howes said. "Then we got out into the open desert on the really fast sandy tracks

and I felt right at home. I told myself if I was feeling good, then I'd let it ride."

Two-time winner Toby Price of Australia outdueled Kevin Benavides of Argentina to win the stage. Matthias Walkner, who lost two hours on Monday because of a mechanical problem, was third. Brabec was 22 minutes off the pace, and Barreda 25 minutes.

Overall, Howes led Benavides by 2-1/2 minutes, and Xavier de Soultrait was third.



Washington Capitals left wing Alex Ovechkin (8), (foreground), runs a play as defenseman Justin Schultz (2) defends during NHL hockey practice at the MedStar Capitals Iceplex in Arlington, Va, Jan 5. (AP)

Proteas win by 10 wickets

JOHANNESBURG, Jan 5, (AP) — South Africa beat Sri Lanka by 10 wickets inside three days in the second and final Test on Tuesday to clinch the series 2-0 and gain some revenge for a surprise loss to the Sri Lankans the last time they toured.

South Africa's quicks bowled Sri Lanka out for 211 in their second innings at the start of the day at a typically pace-friendly Wanderers, leaving the Proteas batsmen with a simple target of 67 to win.

South Africa got there without losing a wicket and in just 13.2 overs as the home team cruised to victory. Aiden Markram was 36 not out and Dean Elgar 31 not out.

Sri Lanka tested South Africa in stages but their hopes ultimately faded when captain Dimuth Karunaratne was out at the start of the day and soon after making a century. Karunaratne led the resistance with his 103 but he went less than five overs into the day's play, and with his exit Sri Lanka lost their last six wickets for 35 runs.

Pace bowler Lungi Ngidi finished with 4-44 for South Africa and was denied the chance of a five-wicket haul when pace partner Lutho Sipamla knocked out Asitha Fernando's off stump to end the innings and collect three wickets.

South Africa gave opportunities to young seamers Sipamla and Wiaan Mulder in the Tests alongside Ngidi and Anrich Nortje in a bid to build depth ahead of upcoming series in Pakistan and at home to Australia.

"The four seamers bowled really well," said South Africa captain Quinton de Kock, who was successful in his first series as Test skipper. "Our young lineup, they will get more experience, but good to see them come out hungry."

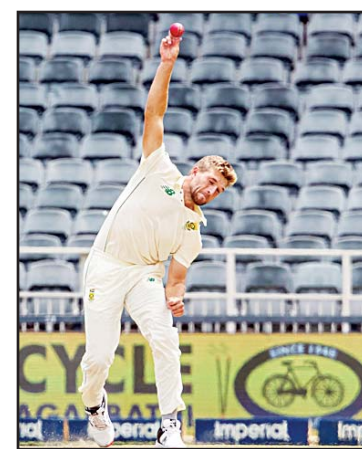
Sri Lanka started the day 150-4, with Karunaratne on 91, and had hopes of setting South Africa a reasonably challenging target on a difficult Johannesburg pitch for batsmen.

CRICKET

The tourists weren't able to do that as Karunaratne fell early trying a pull shot off fast bowler Nortje. He succeeded only in looping a catch to Mulder. His overnight partner Niroshan Dickwella was out four balls later and Sri Lanka's resistance ended.

"We fought hard but lost wickets," Karunaratne said. "Individually, a couple of things we need to highlight, but as a group we have some positives to take out of the series."

The Sri Lankans showed grit in a losing effort after an horrendous run of injuries hampered them on the tour. They were missing two of their most experienced players before the series and had five players injured during the first test, contributing to their innings defeat. Four



South Africa's bowler Wiaan Mulder bowls during play on the third day of the second cricket Test match between South Africa and Sri Lanka at Wanderers stadium in Johannesburg, South Africa, Jan 5. (AP)



South Africa's captain Quinton de Kock speaks during the post match interview as he holds the trophy for winning the series at the end of play on the third day of the second cricket Test match between South Africa and Sri Lanka at Wanderers stadium in Johannesburg, South Africa, Tuesday, Jan 5, 2021. South Africa beat Sri Lanka by 10 wickets. (AP)

of those players were ruled out of the second test. That left the bowling attack especially depleted and Vishwa Fernando, who took five in the first innings, was the attack's most experienced member with just nine test appearances coming into the game.

South Africa's run chase at the end was relatively untroubled. Markram was given out in the over before lunch to a catch in the slips by Kusal Mendis but that decision was overturned when video replays showed the ball touched the ground as Mendis took it low down.

Markram and Elgar saw it through soon after lunch and South Africa completed a first Test series win in two years and since beating Pakistan in early 2019. A month later, they were shocked to lose 2-0 at home to Sri Lanka, which became the first Asian team to win a Test series in South Africa.

Browns' Stefanski 'positive' for virus

CLEVELAND, Jan 5, (AP) — The Cleveland Browns will play their first playoff game since 2002 without first-year coach Kevin Stefanski, who tested positive for COVID-19 just two days after leading the team back to the postseason.

The team announced Stefanski's positive result on Tuesday — 18 years to the day since the Browns' last postseason game. Also, Pro Bowl left guard Joel Bitonio and wide receiver Khadarek Hobbs also tested positive along with two staff members — tight ends coach Drew Petzing and defensive backs coach Jeff Howard.

Special teams coordinator Mike Priefer will be the acting head coach Sunday.

Bitonio and Hobbs played in Sunday's win over the Steelers, who rested quarterback Ben Roethlisberger and several other top players to be fresh for the playoffs.

NFL rules state that anyone testing positive must sit out at least 10 days.

FOOTBALL

League spokesman Brian McCarthy said there is no change to the status of Sunday night's game at Heinz Field in Pittsburgh. He added the league is continuing to conduct standard contact tracing to identify any possible high-risk close contacts.

"If any players or personnel are identified as such, they would remain apart from the team and facilities for five days from the last exposure to a positive individual," McCarthy said in an email to The Associated Press. "They would be eligible to return to the team and play in the game."

It's a major blow to the Browns (11-5), who qualified for the playoffs for the first time in 17 seasons on Sunday with a 24-22 win over Pittsburgh — ending the league's longest playoff drought. They'll play the Steelers again this week in the first round of the AFC playoffs.

Cleveland has been hit hard by the virus. The Browns were without six players, including top cornerback Denzel Ward, and three assistant coaches last weekend for their biggest game in years after a rash of positive tests.

On Monday, Stefanski said he didn't want to get into any "hypotheticals" regarding Ward or any of the other infected players. Now, he'll only be able to work virtually this week to prepare Cleveland for its first playoff game since Jan 5, 2003 — a 36-33 loss at Pittsburgh.