



India's bowler Shardul Thakur reacts after dismissing South Africa's batsman Temba Bavuma, during the second day of the 2nd Test Cricket match between South Africa and India at the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg, South Africa. (AP)

Sports

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Seam bowlers rule in Johannesburg

India lead 2nd Test in South Africa, tight finish looms

JOHANNESBURG, Jan 4, (AP): India took a 58-run lead over South Africa by stumps on the second day of the second Test on Tuesday and the match was heading for a tight finish on a tricky Wanderers pitch where any score over 200 appeared to be competitive.

of history from their first Test series win in South Africa. But nothing was guaranteed on a Wanderers surface that has seen India bowled out for 202 in their first innings and South Africa reply with 229 all out.

CRICKET

The seam bowlers ruled in Johannesburg, and especially India's Shardul Thakur, who was magnificent for career-

best figures of 7-61 and who almost single-handedly stopped South Africa taking control.

South Africa started the day 35-1 in their first innings and built themselves into a position of strength at 88-1 when Thakur struck three times in quick succession before lunch to remove Proteas captain Dean Elgar for 28, Keegan Petersen for 62 and Rassie van der Dussen for 1. Suddenly, South Africa went to lunch 102-4.

This time, he broke a 60-run stand between Temba Bavuma and Kyle Verreynne. He ended up removing both, seeing off Bavuma for 51 and adding two more lower-order wickets.

The game swung yet again late in the afternoon when opener KL Rahul, standing in as India captain for the injured Virat Kohli, and Mayank Agarwal went cheaply and India were 44-2 in their second innings.

The experienced Pujara and Rahane, who might be playing for their places after poor runs of form, steadied things and made sure there was no more damage before stumps.

Steelers stay in playoff mix



The ball gets past Pittsburgh Steelers wide receiver James Washington (13) and Cleveland Browns cornerback Greedy Williams (26) during the first half of an NFL football game in Pittsburgh. (AP)

Exemption given

Djokovic to defend title

BRISBANE, Australia, Jan 4, (AP): Novak Djokovic will get a chance to defend his Australian Open title after receiving a medical exemption to travel to Melbourne, ending months of uncertainty about his participation because of the strict COVID-19 vaccination requirements in place for the tournament.

The top-ranked Djokovic wrote on Instagram on Tuesday he has "an exemption permission."

Djokovic, who is seeking a record 21st Grand Slam singles title, has continually refused to reveal if he is vaccinated against the coronavirus. The Victoria state government has mandated that all players, staff and fans attending the Australian Open must be fully vaccinated unless there is a genuine reason why an exemption should be granted.

Australian Open organizers issued a statement later Tuesday to confirm Djokovic will be allowed to compete at the tournament, which starts on Jan. 17, and is on his way to Australia. He earlier withdrew from Serbia's team for the ATP Cup, which started last weekend in Sydney.



Djokovic

TENNIS

"Djokovic applied for a medical exemption which was granted following a rigorous review process involving two separate independent panels of medical experts," the statement said. "One of those was the Independent Medical Exemption Review Panel appointed by the Victorian Department of Health. They assessed all applications to see if they met the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation guidelines."

Tennis Australia said the process included the redaction of personal information to ensure privacy for all applicants. That means Djokovic was not obliged to make his exemption public.

Australian Open tournament director Craig Tiley said "fair and independent protocols were established for assessing medical exemption applications that will enable us to ensure Australian Open 2022 is safe and enjoyable for everyone."

"Central to this process was that the decisions were made by independent medical experts and that every applicant was given due consideration," Tiley said.

Victoria state Deputy Premier James Merlino last month said the medical exemptions were "not a loophole for privileged tennis players."

"It is a medical exemption in exceptional circumstances if you have an acute medical condition," Merlino said at a news conference.

The decision announced Tuesday will be widely debated in a city which endured months of strict lockdowns and harsh travel restrictions at the height of the pandemic.

Reaction on social media quickly turned to questions about the grounds for Djokovic's exemption, and what quarantine conditions he will have to meet on arrival in Australia.

Last year, all foreign players had to spend two weeks in hotel quarantine before the Australian Open, pushing the year's first major back from its usual mid-January start. There were also strict caps on crowd numbers, and days when fans weren't allowed into Melbourne Park as coronavirus cases surged.

The 34-year-old Djokovic has won nine of his 20 major titles at the Australian Open.

He shares the men's record for most majors with Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal.

Djokovic hasn't played at tour level since the Davis Cup Finals in early December, and has recently been practising in Spain. His posts on social media announcing his plans to travel to Australia were accompanied by a photo of Djokovic leaning on a tennis bag at an airport.

Roethlisberger likely last start at Heinz Field

PITTSBURGH, Jan 4, (AP): Ben Roethlisberger passed for 123 yards with a touchdown and an interception in likely his last start at Heinz Field, and the Pittsburgh Steelers handled the listless Cleveland Browns 26-14 on Monday night to keep their postseason hopes alive.

Pittsburgh (8-7-1) needs a win at Baltimore next week combined with a loss by Indianapolis to Jacksonville to reach the playoffs for the 12th time in Roethlisberger's 18 seasons.

FOOTBALL

He hardly did it alone. Rookie Najee Harris ran for a career-best 188 yards and a touchdown, Chris Boswell kicked four field goals and T.J. Watt sacked Baker Mayfield four times to give him 21 1/2 on the season, one short of the NFL record set by Hall of Famer Michael Strahan in 2001.

Pittsburgh's defense sacked Mayfield nine times in all as Cleveland (7-9) - which was eliminated from postseason contention on Sunday - inexplicably put the game on Mayfield's tattered shoulders rather than feed running back Nick Chubb against the NFL's worst rush defense.

Chubb ran 12 times for 58 yards while Mayfield threw it 37 times, completing just 16, for 185 yards with two touchdowns and two picks, hardly making a compelling case to be the team's long-term solution at a position where instability has been the norm for decades.

Things are far different in Pittsburgh. In more ways than one.

Roethlisberger, now 39, has defined the franchise from the moment he took over for an injured Tommy Maddox as a rookie two weeks into the 2004 season.

The sellout crowd roared as Roethlisberger jogged out onto the Heinz Field turf for the 135th time as the

NFL Standings

WASHINGTON, Jan 4, (AP): NFL standings after Monday's game.

American Conference						National Conference					
East			West			East			West		
Team	W	L	T	Pct	PF/PA	Team	W	L	T	Pct	PF/PA
x-Buffalo	10	6	0	.625	456/279	y-Dallas	11	5	0	.688	479/332
x-New England	10	6	0	.625	438/270	x-Philadelphia	9	7	0	.563	418/334
e-Miami	8	8	0	.500	308/349	e-Washington	6	10	0	.375	313/427
e-N.Y. Jets	4	12	0	.250	300/477	e-N.Y. Giants	4	12	0	.250	251/394
South						South					
y-Tennessee	11	5	0	.688	391/329	y-Tampa Bay	12	4	0	.750	470/336
Indianapolis	9	7	0	.563	440/339	New Orleans	8	8	0	.500	334/315
e-Houston	4	12	0	.250	255/424	e-Atlanta	7	9	0	.438	293/429
e-Jacksonville	2	14	0	.125	227/446	e-Carolina	5	11	0	.313	287/363
North						North					
y-Cincinnati	10	6	0	.625	444/355	*-Green Bay	13	3	0	.813	420/334
Pittsburgh	8	7	1	.531	327/385	e-Minnesota	7	9	0	.438	394/409
Baltimore	8	8	0	.500	374/376	e-Chicago	6	10	0	.375	294/376
e-Cleveland	7	9	0	.438	328/355	e-Detroit	2	13	1	.156	288/437
West						West					
y-Kansas City	11	5	0	.688	452/340	x-L.A. Rams	12	4	0	.750	436/345
L.A. Chargers	9	7	0	.563	442/424	x-Arizona	11	5	0	.688	419/328
Las Vegas	9	7	0	.563	339/407	San Francisco	9	7	0	.563	400/341
e-Denver	7	9	0	.438	311/294						

y denotes clinched division; e denotes eliminated from playoffs; x denotes clinched playoff spot

starting quarterback and began chanting "Let's Go Ben! Let's Go Ben!" as he made his way out for the opening coin toss. It was an honor Roethlisberger took by himself after teammates and fellow co-captains Cam Heyward and Derek Watt let him walk to the



Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger passes in the first half of an NFL football game against the Cleveland Browns in Pittsburgh. (AP)

Spurs have more virus concerns

Barca, Bayern hamstrung by 'more' COVID-19 cases

MADRID, Jan 4, (AP): Pedri González and Ferran Torres joined Barcelona's list of players with COVID-19, while German clubs' preparations for the Bundesliga's resumption after the winter break are being hampered by infections.



Torres

Torres tested positive hours after his official presentation in front of several thousand fans at Camp Nou following his transfer from Manchester City. Barcelona said the forward and Pedri "are in good health" and isolating at home.

Pedri was hoping to return to the field soon after having recovered from a leg injury that has sidelined the Spain midfielder since September.

Torres is recovering from a foot injury in October and hoped to be ready to face Real Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup semifinals next week.

Barcelona are still without Gavi Páez, Ousmane Dembele, Sergio Dest, Philippe Coutinho, and Abde Ezzalzouli due to infections. Jordi Alba and Dani Alves returned to training on Monday after testing negative following their isolations.

Xavi Hernández called up 10 reserve team players to travel with his squad on Sunday for the 1-0 win at Mallorca.

Of the Bundesliga's 18 clubs, 13 have reported infections.

Defending champions Bayern Munich are among the worst affected. Monday's training session

was put back until the late afternoon so players and coaching staff could be tested upon their return.

The team's return was already delayed by a day after the Bavarian club reported five infections: Captain and goalkeeper Manuel Neuer, players Kingsley Coman, Corentin Tolisso and Omar Richards, as well as assistant coach Dino Toppmöller, all tested positive.

It's unclear if the five have the omicron variant and whether they will miss Bayern's game against Borussia Mönchengladbach to resume the league on Friday. Neuer, who said he was suffering from light symptoms, will miss the match.

SOCCER

Gladbach reported four virus cases: Joe Scally, Mamadou Doucouré, Denis Zakaria and Keanan Bennetts, all in quarantine.

"All four players are doing well," Gladbach said.

Stuttgart have four players in isolation ahead of their visit to last-placed Greuther Fürth on Saturday: Silas Katompa Mvumpa, Naouirou Ahamada, Konstantinos Mavropanos and Mateo Klimovic.

Tottenham have more COVID-19 concerns ahead of the first leg against Chelsea in the English League Cup semifinals.

Spurs had an outbreak that affected nine first-team players in December, and manager Antonio Conte said there were more issues in the squad.

"We are checking a couple of situations. We'll see," said Conte, who didn't disclose the name of the players affected.