

Shami, Ishant reel in Kiwis

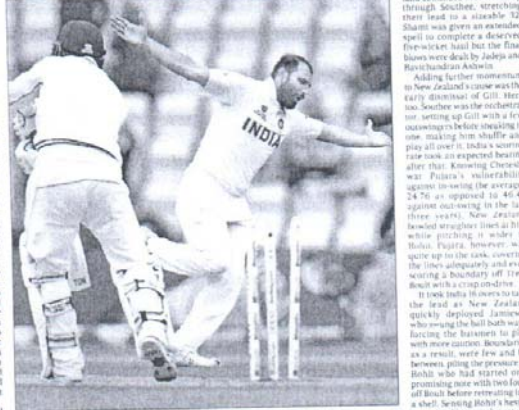
Pacers share seven wickets as India peg innings lead to 32 runs; game in balance ahead of reserve day

Somnathvir Laha
somnathvir.laha@hindustantimes.com

KOLKATA: The first World Test Championship final is poised for a gripping finish with India dominating New Zealand for 249 before taking a slender lead in the second innings on the fifth day at Southampton. Given the favourable weather predictions for the reserve day, this could hold down to a one-day style fast-off if India declare as the right time and allow their bowlers enough overs to go full tilt at the Kiwis. Home comfort to come at a price as a difficult pitch where only one batsman has been able to score fifty but the wickets are such that both teams will be tempted to adopt a more even-tempered approach. India moved to a measured start after losing opener Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill to Tom Southee's devious in-swing and close out a day that started with New Zealand scoring just 34 runs in the first session.

Most of the early grind had to do with Mohammed Shami and Ishant Sharma firing away during a testing length that had New Zealand's batsmen in two minds. No one sailed as much as Kane Williamson, who scored just 15 off the first 100 balls he faced—his slowest 100 date—but no one could have anchored the innings better as well. It was fitting that New Zealand took the lead through Williamson, with a crunching square cut off Shami in the 13rd over, before Southee's 4th ball provided for a very effective final flourish that added 14 runs in 27 overs since then.

New Zealand's overall run rate before that was 1.87, covering



India pacer Mohammed Shami (l) celebrates the dismissal of New Zealand's BJ Watling.

India's pace duo of Shami and Ishant Sharma were the mainstay of the attack. Shami's left-arm swing was a constant threat, while Ishant's right-arm pace and bounce were equally effective. The duo shared a five-wicket haul, with Shami taking the most wickets. The Indian bowlers were in excellent form, and their attack was well-organized. The Indian batsmen were also in good form, with Shami and Ishant leading the way. The match was a closely fought contest, and the result will be decided on the reserve day.

and continued to score freely through Southee, stretching their lead to a sizeable 12 Shami bowled an excellent spell to complete a deserved five-wicket haul but the Kiwis have been dealt by Jaiswal and Ravichandran Ashwin.

Adding further to the momentum in New Zealand's case was the early dismissal of Gill. Here too, Southee was the architect after that. Knowing Cheteshwar Pujara's vulnerability against an off-spinner and even scoring a boundary off 111 from 100 balls with a straight drive.

It took India 10 overs to take the lead as New Zealand quickly deployed Lamineke who swung the ball both ways, forcing the batsmen to play with more caution. Bowlers, as a result, were few and far between, giving the batsmen a chance to score. Shami and Ishant who had started on a promising note with two four-fifties before restricting them to a short spell. Seeing Ishant's hesitation at taking an over on the attack, Shami quickly brought in Southee and got a break-a-buck over of only 33.33. While there were some who were not convinced the India skipper adopted the right approach by shoving the ball further up, that he finished on 49 off 177 balls, a 27.68 strike rate slower than Kohli's.

According to the Cricviz Analytics, it was the slower Willamson had batted up to 100 balls, just 15 runs from the 100 balls. Kane Williamson has scored fewer runs from the first 100 balls of a Test innings. Cricviz tweeted it added, "Kane Williamson's run rate in this match (0.26 rpi) was the slowest for any batsman in Test cricket in the last decade in Test cricket (min 400 runs).



New Zealand captain Kane Williamson scored a 177 ball 49 in Southampton on Tuesday.

A Kane grind, slow and steady like Kohli

Sanjeev K Sanyal
sanjeev.sanyal@hindustantimes.com

MUMBAI: Inexpensive of late the World Test Championship final ends, the game will also be remembered for the batting of Virat Kohli and Kane Williamson, how they outwitted their grade as premier batsmen in world cricket to turn grafters and help hold their team's innings together. Usually known for his classical style of play, Kohli played one of his slowest knocks, hitting one boundary in his 132-ball 44, with a strike rate of only 33.33. While there were some who were not convinced the India skipper adopted the right approach by shoving the ball further up, that he finished on 49 off 177 balls, a 27.68 strike rate slower than Kohli's.

With the last world test at stake, the skipper deployed a more risk-prone Kohli. Used to batting in the middle order, Kohli was asked to bat in the top order. He was seen hitting in the post hoc session. But he soldiered on. The biggest factor in the NZ innings was that Williamson was still there when the second new ball was taken in the 8th over. Mohammed Shami was in the middle of an overplayable spell but Williamson ensured he didn't run through the side. On the fifth ball of the second new ball, he cut Shami powerfully over his backfoot for his third four and when he chumped the bowler to the cover fence for his 34th run.

Williamson could not become the second batsman in the first 100 balls as he was caught in the slip cordon by Kohli off Ishant Sharma, for a 10th over success as captain. Williamson and Kohli have to lay their hands on an A.C. English. They hung in to get this one has from even in their effort on the crease.

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