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SHARMA'S six of the best gives India T20 series against NZ

LONDON : Rohit Sharma smacked sixes off the final two balls of a dramatic super over for India to win the third Twenty20 against New Zealand in Hamilton on Wednesday and wrap up the series.

It sealed a man-of-the match performance from Sharma, the most prolific batsman in cricket's shortest format, who showed his class with 65 to set up India's 179 for five which was matched by New Zealand's 179 for six.

New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson had kept his side in the hunt with a classy 95 and when the scores were tied he scored another 11 of their 17 runs batting first in the super over.

India only scored eight off the first four deliveries in reply before Sharma smacked Tim Southee for back-to-back sixes to clinch the match and the series with two games to spare.

"It was unbelievable. I thought at one stage we were gone, down and out," a relieved Kohli said.

"He (Williamson) played a brilliant innings and they probably deserved to finish the game off the way he batted and the way he led from the front and I feel bad for him.

"But Rohit was outstanding in the first half and the last two balls as well."

India comprehensively won the first two games of the five-match series when they bowled first, which is their preferred option.

Djokovic beats Federer to reach Australian Open final

LONDON : Novak Djokovic shattered the hopes of ailing rival Roger Federer Thursday to sweep into a record eighth Australian Open final and move closer to his 17th Grand Slam crown.

In the 50th instalment of one of sport's greatest rivalries, the Serb shrugged off a tentative start to reinforce his recent dominance, showing no mercy to the Swiss maestro in a 7-6 (7/1), 6-4, 6-3 win.

He will play either fifth seed Dominic Thiem or seventh-ranked German Alexander Zverev in Sunday's final, but it will take a monumental effort to prize another title from the 32-year-old.

Of the seven Melbourne finals Djokovic has made, he has won them all.

If any extra motivation was needed, winning on Sunday will see the Serb reclaim the number one ranking after Rafael Nadal was sent packing in the last eight. "Respect to Roger for coming out tonight when he was obviously hurt and not even close to his best in terms of movement," said defending champion Djokovic, who is into his 26th Grand Slam final.

"He started well at the beginning and I was pretty nervous. It was very important for me to win that first set. Mentally I relaxed after that."

It was the fourth time Djokovic had beaten Federer at the semi-final stage in Melbourne after doing the same in 2008, 2011 and 2016.



LIVERPOOL SINK WEST HAM TO GO 19 POINTS CLEAR

LONDON : Liverpool continued their relentless march to a first English title in 30 years, easing to a 2-0 victory at West Ham United on Wednesday to move 19 points clear at the Premier League summit.

Mohamed Salah fired them ahead from the penalty spot in the first half and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain doubled their advantage early in the second to wrap up a remarkable 23rd win from 24

games this season and stretch their unbeaten league run to 40.

In a fixture postponed from December, when Liverpool were busy winning the Club World Cup, they never looked under much pressure and picked West Ham off at crucial moments, defending manfully when needed and looking a constant menace on the break.

Salah stroked home from the spot in the 35th minute

after Divock Origi was chopped down behind and Oxlade-Chamberlain finished off a lethal counter attack of the sort that has come to characterise Liverpool's season in the 52nd.

The victory was achieved comfortably enough, but Liverpool manager Juergen Klopp remains a hard man to please.

"These boys have played outstanding football throughout

the season. Tonight was a normal performance," he said.

His West Ham counterpart David Moyes was more effusive in his praise of Klopp's side.

"They are as good as there has been around at this moment in time, and it is very difficult for me as a former manager of Everton and Manchester United to say that," Moyes said.

West Ham had glimpses of goal,

with Manuel Lanzini fluffing an excellent opportunity at the start of the second half and Robert Snodgrass drawing a fine stop from Liverpool keeper Alisson, but their plight looks increasingly bleak.

While Liverpool have amassed a whopping 70 points, Moyes's side sit 17th with 23, outside the relegation zone only on goal difference.



Real sweep past Zaragoza into CDR quarters

LONDON : Real Madrid thrashed a depleted Real Zaragoza side 4-0 on Wednesday to reach the Copa del Rey quarter-finals.

The second division team made eight changes as they rested players for their clash with leaders Cadiz on Sunday and the 13-times European Cup winners took full advantage.

Real moved ahead in the sixth

minute when defender Raphael Varane finished from close range after a clever corner routine.

Lucas Vazquez doubled Madrid's advantage with a drive into the top corner after being set up by Toni Kroos.

Japanese playmaker Shinji Kagawa caused problems for the illustrious visitors at La Romareda, with Alphonse Areola making a fine save

to deny him.

Vinicius Jr. struck after 72 minutes with Karim Benzema wrapping up the win from close range for Zinedine Zidane's rampant side.

Third-tier Cultural Leonesa nearly took another scalp after eliminating Atletico Madrid in the previous round, with Valencia needing a 4-2 penalty shootout victory to beat them following a 0-0 draw.

Injured Felix to miss Madrid derby

Atletico Madrid said on Wednesday that Joao Felix has sustained a muscle injury, meaning the striker is likely to miss Saturday's city derby against Real Madrid.

Felix's absence could persuade Atletico to accelerate their pursuit of Edinson Cavani, who is keen to leave Paris Saint-Germain this month if the clubs can agree a fee.

Atletico confirmed in a statement that Felix was injured during last weekend's goalless draw with Leganes in La Liga.

"Joao Felix suffered a muscular injury in his right leg during the match against Leganes," the statement read.

"With the persistence of discomfort after a day of rest, the medical services have performed tests that detected the injury. His return will depend on his recovery."

Felix left Benfica for 126 million euros last summer but has only shown glimpses of his talent this season in an underperforming Atletico team.

The 20-year-old has scored four goals in 24 appearances.

His injury means Diego Simeone is likely to start with Alvaro Morata and Angel Correa up front against Real Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu, where Atletico will be looking for their first win in five games.



ENGLAND'S ARCHER MISSES SOUTH AFRICA T20S

LONDON :England fast bowler Jofra Archer has been ruled out of the three-match Twenty20 series against South Africa starting next month with an elbow injury, the England and Wales Cricket Board an-

nounced on Wednesday. Sussex quick Archer headed back to Britain on Tuesday in a bid to regain full fitness after a sore right

elbow saw him miss the final three Tests of England's 3-1 series win over the Proteas. The injury has raised doubts over the 24-year-old World Cup winner's availability for England's Test tour of Sri Lanka in March.

Archer played just one Test in South Africa, with his five-wicket haul at Centurion unable to prevent a Proteas win by 107 runs in the series opener before England bounced back.

He will be replaced for the T20s by Lancashire paceman Saqib Mahmood, who was already a member of a separate squad for the upcoming one-day international series. England had long planned to rest Archer, together with fellow World Cup winners Jos Buttler, Ben Stokes and Mark Wood, from the three-match ODI series in South Africa starting at Cape Town on February 4.

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