

Pietersen's ton helps England recover from a poor start

Captain Kevin Pietersen's timely century helped England recover from a poor start and took their total to 211 for four in the first innings at tea, in reply to India's 453, on the third day of the second cricket Test here Sunday.

Pietersen was batting on 106, his 15th Test century, and Andrew Flintoff on 36 and with their unbroken 80-run stand at the tea break pulled England out from a precarious 131 for four at the Punjab Cricket Association (PCA) Stadium here. The match started 90 minutes late due to poor light.

Pacers Zaheer Khan and Ishant Sharma lit up the gloomy morning by removing Andrew Strauss and Ian Bell (1) by the second over to leave England struggling at 2/1.

Strauss, who hit centuries in each innings of the [Chennai](#) Test, was trapped leg before wicket by Zaheer while Bell's poor form continued as he was clean bowled by Ishant by a pearl of a delivery.

Pietersen and Alastair Cook (50) then started the repair work by stitching a valuable 103-run partnership for the third wicket. Pietersen and Cook displayed some elegant stroke-play to keep the Indian bowlers at bay.

With Pietersen at the crease, Dhoni took a bold move by tossing the new ball to left-arm spinner Yuvraj Singh, who had dismissed the English captain three times on tour, for one over.

After that over, it was back to Zaheer, who had Pietersen missing and edging. But Pietersen refused to be on the backfoot and hit Zaheer for fours. Cook also played a couple of sublime drives down the ground off both the fast bowlers.

At a time when the partnership was looking dangerous, Zaheer struck again to trap Cook leg before he wicket.

But Pietersen at the other end looked solid with his flashes of audacity against off-spinner Harbhajan Singh. Pietersen's premeditated sweeps disturbed the rhythm of the Indian spinner, forcing captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni to replace Harbhajan with leggie Amit Mishra.

Mishra needed three deliveries to get rid of Paul Collingwood (11) as England slumped to 131/4.

But India's joy was short-lived as both Pietersen and Flintoff flourished in each other's company and swept away thoughts of England's collapse.

The runs started to flow as Flintoff swept and flicked besides some dismissive shots down the ground. Pietersen welcomed Harbhajan with a switch-hit six over midwicket in a 13-run return over. Pietersen refused to let Harbhajan settle and raised a splendid century from 126 balls.

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