

India bowlers strike back after Pietersen's fighting ton

Captain Kevin Pietersen's timely century helped England recover from a poor start but Indian bowlers struck late to reduce the visitors to 282 for six in the first innings at the close of play, in reply to India's 453, on the third day of the second cricket Test here Sunday.

At the close of play, James Anderson was batting on one after Pietersen (144) scored his 15th Test century and Andrew Flintoff scored 62 to bail England out of trouble, after being at a precarious 131 for four at the Punjab Cricket Association (PCA) Stadium. For India, Zaheer Khan and Amit Mishra picked up two wickets each.

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 to light up a gloomy morning.

But it was the 149-run partnership between Pietersen and Flintoff that bailed out England, who lost the plot in the last two overs by losing both the batsmen, tilting the scales in India's favour.

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 made 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 dug in, 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. The England captain also went past 4000 runs, including 1000 for the year.

The advantage, however, swung back in the favour of the hosts when Harbhajan, who was treated with disdain by the English batsmen, trapped Pietersen leg before in the penultimate over of the day. Misra struck with the last ball of the day by removing Flintoff.

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