



Minnesota United midfielder Hassani Dotson, front (left), and Seattle Sounders forward Jordan Morris leap to head the ball during the first half of an MLS playoff Western Conference final soccer match on Dec 7, in Seattle. (AP)

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Australia beat India to avoid sweep



Players and support staff of the Indian team pose with the winners trophy at the end of the third T20 international cricket match between Australia and India at the Sydney Cricket Ground in Sydney, Australia on Dec 8. Indian won the series 2-1. (AP)

Gradual return of crowds in Australia inspires players

SYDNEY, Dec 8, (AP): Matthew Wade and Glenn Maxwell combined to help Australia to a 12-run win to prevent Virat Kohli's India sweeping the Twenty20 series, ensuring the white ball section of the tour finished all square.

The scene is well and truly set for a four-match test series starting next week in Adelaide.

Australia won the one-day international series 2-1 and India won the first two T20s to clinch the series in the shorter format before the home team rallied to finish on a high.

It was the first major sports event in Sydney since the state government removed restrictions on crowds that were put in place for the COVID-19 pandemic, and there was plenty of entertainment for the 30,436 fans at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Wade scored 80 from 53 balls and shared a 90-run fourth-wicket partnership with Maxwell, who had plenty of reprieves in his 36-ball 54 as Australia tallied 186-5 after being sent in to bat.

Australia's spin bowlers - wrist spinners Mitch Swepson (3-23) and Adam Zampa (1-21) and allrounder Maxwell (1-20) - combined for the first five wickets before paceman AJ Tye dismissed Kohli for 85 in the penultimate over to all but end the chase.

Kohli had a lucky start, when Maxwell missed a run-out chance and Steve Smith dropped a catch in the outfield, before posting his 25th half-century in the T20 format.

CRICKET

He shared important partnerships of 74 with Shikhar Dhawan (28) for the second wicket and 44 for the sixth wicket with hard-hitting Hardik Pandya (20 from 13 balls), but wasn't able to convert the start into his first century in T20s.

India's victory equation was 43 runs from 17 balls when Zampa removed Pandya and it got even harder when Kohli's 61-ball knock ended on the first ball of the 19th, cutting Tye to Daniel Sams at deep backward point. India finished 174-7 from 20 overs.

"At one stage, when Hardik got going, I thought, 'Yeah we could pull this one off,'" Kohli said, but "the middle-over phases when we were batting cost us the game."

"This series win is a nice little asterisk for us finishing the limited-overs leg of T20 on a high."

After playing the entire Indian



Australia's Glenn Maxwell (right), plays a shot during the third T20 international cricket match between Australia and India at the Sydney Cricket Ground in Sydney, Australia, Dec. 8. (AP)

England camp cleared of virus and free to leave South Africa

CAPE TOWN, South Africa, Dec 8, (AP): Two people in the England cricket tour party who gave unconfirmed positive coronavirus tests in South Africa were cleared on Tuesday and freed from self-isolating.

The two positive tests, along with an outbreak in the South Africa camp and among workers at their shared bio-secure hotel in Cape Town prompted the rest of the tour to be abandoned on Monday.

England officials still wanted independent ratification of the positive results in its camp.

"Following further testing and analysis, in the opinion of the independent virologists based in Cape Town and London, the two

individuals are not infected, and do not pose any risk of passing on the infection to the rest of the party," the England and Wales Cricket Board said in a statement.

"The advice is they are now free to join the rest of the group and are no longer self-isolating." The England party will head home on Thursday.

The teams played out a three-match Twenty20 series but the first one-day international scheduled for last Friday was postponed to Sunday because of another infection in the South Africa team, then canceled when two hotel workers caught the virus. That made England undergo a round of tests, producing two unconfirmed positives.

Premier League in the United Arab Emirates without crowds, because of COVID-19 restrictions, Kohli said the gradual return of crowds in Australia had inspired the players from both teams.

"It's great that we can play in front of crowds in Australia and it just gives you another dimension of motivation when you're in a tough situation," Kohli said. "As players, you love riding that - that's why you've seen exciting games so far in the limited-overs leg. I think it's going to the same moving forward as well."

Australia's innings was eventful and kept the crowd and the umpires on their toes, with Kohli denied a review for signaling too late on a not out decision against Wade. It would have been overturned by the TV umpire if the

challenge had been made within the required 15 seconds.

Wade, who was on 50 when he was hit on the pads, told the on-field umpire that the replay was already being shown on the stadium screen by the time Kohli confirmed he wanted to refer the decision, and the TV umpire agreed. Broadcaster Foxtel said India took 17 seconds to ask for the review.

Maxwell also had his share of drama. He was dropped twice and saw off two DRS challenges after unsuccessful appeals from India for caught-behind. The Australian allrounder also got the benefit of further intervention from the TV umpire after he'd started walking off when he was caught out - only to be called back when replays showed wrist spinner Yuzvendra Chahal overstepped and was called for a no-ball.

Seattle scores twice late, stuns Minnesota United

Sounders advance to MLS Cup final

SEATTLE, Dec 8, (AP): As the confetti flew and the fireworks popped before an empty stadium, the Seattle Sounders were handed the Western Conference championship trophy for the fourth time in five years.

Only a few minutes earlier, the Sounders appeared on the verge of relinquishing their claim of being defending MLS Cup champions.

"I don't know how we did it, I'm just telling you, I don't know how we did it," Seattle coach Brian Schmetzer said.

The Sounders capped one of the more unlikely comebacks in MLS playoff history on Gustav Svensson's header off a corner kick in the final moments of second-half stoppage time to give Seattle a 3-2 win over Minnesota United on Monday night to advance to the MLS Cup final.

Seattle scored three times in the final 15 minutes of regulation and stoppage time to stun Minnesota and claim a spot in the league championship game for the fourth time in five seasons.

Seattle will travel to Columbus to face the Crew in the MLS Cup final on Saturday. Seattle is just the second team in MLS history to reach the final four times in five seasons, joining DC United in the first seasons of the league.

"God I wish our fans were in that stadium," Schmetzer said. "I wish I was a fan. ... That was unbelievable. In our Sounders history, this is gonna go down as one of the best games ever."

Will Bruin scored in the 75th minute to pull Seattle to 2-1 and set the stage for the wild final moments when the Sounders scored twice off corner kicks. Raul Ruidiaz had a fortunate bounce fall at his feet before he beat goalkeeper Dayne St Clair to pull the Sounders even at 2-2 just before the end of the 90 minutes.

Seattle continued to press for a winner and nearly got it from Ruidiaz only to see his shot hit the outside of the post.

But Svensson came through by rising above the Minnesota defenders on the final corner kick.

Svensson said after the game that he tested positive for COVID-19 after returning from international duty last month with Sweden and was why he was unavailable for Seattle's first two playoff wins. Svensson said he was asymptomatic.

"I didn't want this year to end with me just on the sideline, watching from the TV," Svensson said. "I'm very happy now that I could help my teammates to play another game."

Seattle will attempt to become the first repeat champs in MLS since the Los Angeles Galaxy in 2011-12.

SOCCER

For most of the night it appeared the young, upstart Loons would be on their way to Columbus to play in their first final in Minnesota's fourth MLS season. Minnesota had limited scoring chances but took advantage of the ones they did get, taking the lead on Emanuel Reynoso's perfect free kick from 30 yards in the first half. Defender Bakaye Dibassy scored on a header off an assist from Reynoso midway through the second half, and the Loons appeared headed for the final.

"At this moment in time the best way to describe it, it's just been a little bit of a shell shock to be honest," Minnesota coach Adrian Heath said.

Reynoso continued to show himself as one of the bright young stars in the league following his move in September from Boca Juniors in Argentina to join the Loons. Reynoso had a part in Minnesota's final 11 goals of the season, either scoring or assisting on each one of them.

"We bent. We didn't break for a majority of the game," Minnesota's Ethan Finlay said. "I'm just sick to my stomach, obviously. Everyone in the locker room is sick."



Seattle Sounders' Nicolas Lodeiro (center front), lifts the championship trophy after the team beat Minnesota United in an MLS playoff Western Conference final soccer match, Dec. 7, in Seattle. The Sounders won 3-2. (AP)