

MOMENTOUS

SPORTS

THE KING IS BACK!

By Qasim Bajwa

KARACHI: After a gap of almost 2 years, Pakistan Captain Babar Azam returned to form in style as he compiled a masterly hundred that got Pakistan back in the game late on Day 4 of the Karachi Test, at the National Stadium Karachi.

The hosts are currently well-placed at 192-2 chasing a target of 506, and will be eyeing victory on the last day of this intriguing test match, with both Babar Azam and Abdullah Shafique well-set and playing nicely.

Earlier on Day 4, Australia declared their 2nd innings on 97-2 when Marnus Labuschagne was dismissed by Shaheen Shah Afridi, setting Pakistan a target of 506 with a possible of 172 overs still to be bowled in the match. Pakistan then lost two early wickets when Imam-ul-Haq and Azhar Ali were dismissed cheaply for single figures, but then Captain Babar Azam joined Abdullah Shafique in the middle and together they both constructed a brilliant partnership of 171*, denying the Aussies any more inroads into the game.

It was Babar Azam's 6th Test century and 4th in Pakistan, and his 2nd against Australia, having been dismissed in the nervous-nineties on two occasions before against the same opposition. The Pakistan Captain struck 12 fours on his way to a hundred.

There was one chance for the Aussies when Abdullah edged one in the slips, but Steve Smith there grassed the opportunity. The Aussies tried everything, from reverse swing to around the wicket spin tactics, but nothing really troubled the two batters as both Babar Azam along with Abdullah Shafique remained stern in their approach and kept milking the Aussies for runs all around the ground. Babar got to the landmark just moments before stumps when he swept Mitchell Swepson over the in-field. The world number one ODI and T20I batter could not hold his emotions as he brought the iconic 'Calma' celebration and raced to hug his teammate Abdullah.

A lot of crowd is expected to come and witness the final-day proceedings of what is becoming a gripping game between the two sides as Pakistan, still needing 314 to win, will be hoping this pair of Babar and Abdullah stays at the crease for as long as possible in order to achieve the target, while Australia needs 8 more wickets to win and go 0-1 up in the 3-match Test Series.