

Malinga has the knack of breaking stubborn pairs

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WHEN Sri Lanka came to India last year they started well scoring over 750 in the first Test with Jayawardene getting a magnificent double century. This was in response to India getting more than 400 in the first innings. India did manage a draw with some sensible batting in the second innings as well. However what that match showed was that India can be thwarted by the Lankans with the bat on a flat pitch.

The next two Tests were different with India's bowlers coming up trumps even as their batsmen continued to plunder runs against a Lankan attack that seemed to be toothless with the great Muralitharan looking a pale shadow of the bowler that spun his team to many a win. The Lankans have always had a good new ball attack which though not necessarily pacy could use the shine and hardness of the ball to good effect. More crucially they did not have Lasith Malinga in their team since he was recovering from an injury. His return to the test team has completely changed the equation since he has the knack of not letting the openers flourish and then later come in and separate a stubborn pair too.

He did that in the first Test when he got two of the accomplished batsmen in the world when they were looking well set and in the mood for many more. Tendulkar and Dravid had built a partnership and had their sights set on centuries when Malinga produced two scorers to dismiss them and turn the match Sri Lanka's way. It wasn't just with the ball but even with the bat that Malinga had changed the course of the match.

India had fought back well to restrict the Lankans after they had ended the first day with just two wickets down and with one of the centurions

still at the crease. The Indian new ball bowlers got 7 wickets between them and it was then that an unlikely partnership developed between Malinga and Rangana Herath that kept Indians on the field longer and added invaluable runs for their team.



It was also Muralitharan's last test and he was on 792 wickets when the game started. His showing in India did not encourage thoughts that he would get to the magical 800 wickets. However he was quite clearly buoyed by the crowd support and was keen on ending his Test career with a special performance and it was a special one indeed as he captured another five-for in the first innings getting the ball to turn prodigiously like he did in the past.

The delivery that got Dhoni turned so sharply from well outside the off stump that if it hadn't it could well have been called a wide. Then in a fairytale ending with just one Indian wicket left in the second innings he got the last man and with it his 800th wicket.

There was another Test going on too between Pakistan and Australia and here Pakistan were let down by their batting once again. Surprisingly it was not the regular bowlers but the parttimers who got the wickets for Australia as Shane Watson in the first innings and Marcus North with his off spinners in the second sent Pakistan to a defeat. Malinga for his deeds with both bat and ball is the CEAT International Cricketer of the Week.

