

Indian men's hockey team lose 1-2 to New Zealand in Olympic test event

18/08/2019 21:23 by admin

Indian men's hockey team squandered an early lead to go down fighting 1-2 to New Zealand in their second match of the Olympic Test event in Tokyo on Sunday.

Skipper Harmanpreet Singh put India ahead in the second minute by converting a Penalty Corner. (Source: File photo)

Tokyo: Indian men's hockey team squandered an early lead to go down fighting 1-2 to New Zealand in their second match of the Olympic Test event in Tokyo on Sunday. Skipper Harmanpreet Singh put India ahead in the second minute by converting a Penalty Corner, but New Zealand struck back in the last quarter through two well-crafted field goals – Jacob Smith (47th) and Sam Lane (60th) to have the last laugh.

India had made an impressive start to the tournament, thrashing Malaysia 6-0 in their opening match but the second-match defeat means they are currently sitting at the second spot in the points table with one match to go. India will face hosts Japan on Tuesday.

World No. 5 India started the match with an aggressive approach and dominated possession in the opening few minutes at the Oi Hockey Stadium. India won their first penalty corner in just the 2nd minute, which was beautifully converted by their drag-flicker Harmanpreet to give his team a quick start and a 1-0 lead.

The Indian team continued to attack and won another Penalty Corner in the 6th minute, but could not find the target. It was a difficult phase for the New Zealand team as they were under constant pressure, but given their recent experience of playing in the FIH Pro League, the World No. 8 side defended well and avoided giving away another goal before the half-time break.

India tried to extend their lead in the initial few minutes of the third quarter through some good combination play inside New Zealand's striking circle, however, they could not find another break-through.

Harmanpreet had another chance to extend his team's lead in the 42nd minute, but New Zealand's goalkeeper Richard Joyce made a good save. The last quarter of the match saw New Zealand turn around the momentum as they started to attack the Indians on the counter. It was in the 47th minute that New Zealand worked out a good combination in the Indian half, and produced an effective attack which saw Jacob Smith find the back of the net to equalize.

Dealt a huge blow, India looked to restore their one-goal advantage in the remaining minutes. They had some opportunities inside the last quarter but could not capitalize.

With barely a minute remaining on the clock, it was New Zealand's turn to counter and their execution was perfect as they scored the winner through Sam Lane, who took advantage of India being short of players in defense.

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