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WORLD CUP 2023

Coming of age
of giant-killing
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INTERVIEW

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To see Mohammed Shami in this World Cup is to savour the
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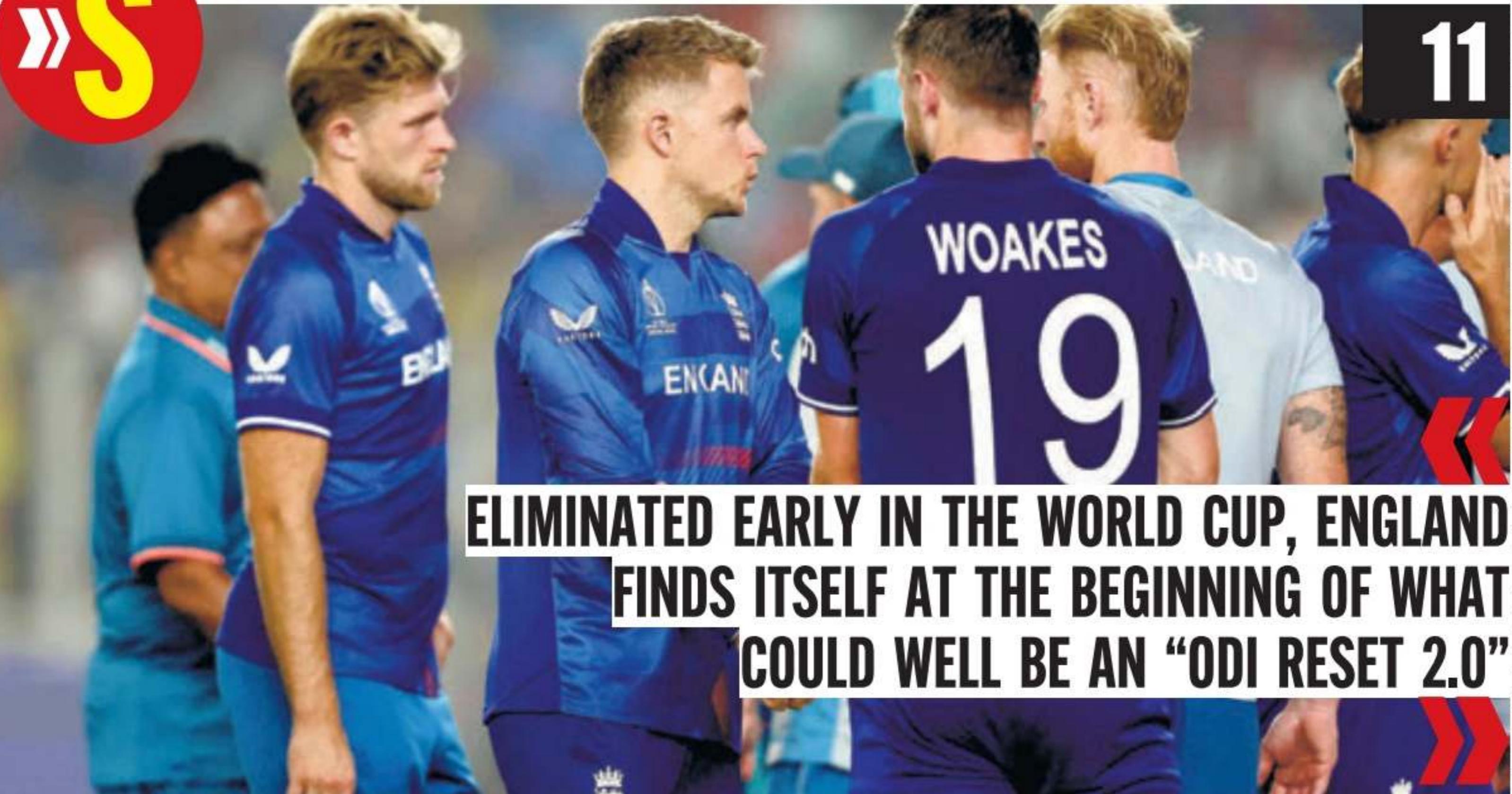
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TO APPEAL OR NOT TO APPEAL

In this World Cup of soaring sixes and bowling spectacles, **fans were in for a twist** that left everyone with a sour taste.

Cricket, a sport that can turn you from a superhero to a supervillain quicker than a chameleon changes colours, never fails to deliver its fair share of drama.

In this World Cup of soaring sixes and bowling spectacles, fans were in for a twist that left everyone with a sour taste. **Shakib Al Hasan, the Bangladesh captain, pulled out a law mustier than the childhood clothes in a grandma's trunk — Timed Out — to end Sri Lankan veteran Angelo Mathews' very short stay at the crease.**

According to Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) law 40.1.1, "After the

fall of a wicket or the retirement of a batter, the incoming batter must, unless Time has been called, be ready to receive the ball, or for the other batter to be ready to receive the next ball within 3 minutes of the dismissal or retirement. If this requirement is not met, the incoming batter will be out, Timed out."

The ICC World Cup 2023 Playing Conditions, however, had decided to trim it further to just two minutes. In a world where every second counts, Mathews found that those 60 seconds could mean the difference between a blockbuster knock and a walk back to the pavilion.

The all-rounder was on a sticky wicket when he walked



A first: Sri Lankan batter Angelo Mathews was given Timed Out during the World Cup match against Bangladesh at the Arun Jaitley Cricket Stadium in New Delhi. R.V. MOORTHY

in after Sadeera Samarawickrama's departure, with the Lankan Tigers at 135 for four in 24.2 overs. Just when he was about to play a few tunes on the Shakib symphony, disaster struck as his helmet strap decided to snap. It chewed up precious seconds — the kind you can't get back once you've spent them.

With a sly grin, Shakib casually strolled over to umpire Marais Erasmus (he was on television monitoring duty and passed on the verdict against Jonny Bairstow in the acrimonious Ashes second Test of 2023) and requested a little throwback to the obscure Timed Out Law. The

dreaded finger was raised, and Mathews' pleas fell flatter than a pancake on a griddle.

The Spirit of the Game debate, only invoked in the 'Gentleman's Game,' was stoked again, and Shakib was everybody's villain; much like Ravichandran Ashwin for his righteous stand of running a batter out for backing up at the non-striker's end. **The Spirit of the Game, though, can't be a free pass to turn every cricketer's lapse of attention into a heartwarming tale of forgiveness.** But Mathews here was caught off guard by malfunctioning equipment, and Shakib could have been everybody's hero with a smidge of leniency.

» WORLD VIEW OF THE FORTNIGHT



« We're clearly not world champions on sprint race weekends. We do some good work on track to get it done, but still it doesn't explain what went wrong.

– Mercedes' boss Toto Wolff after the Brazilian Grand Prix performance ➤



« My last chance to win at the Olympics was in 2016 – Paris is not my goal. It is more about winning my battles against the authorities and me fighting for what is right.

– Caster Semenya ➤

7th

Top-ranked Novak Djokovic won a record-extending seventh title at the Paris Masters with a 6-4, 6-3 win over Grigor Dimitrov in the final. Djokovic, who had been pushed to three sets in his three previous matches, enjoyed a comfortable afternoon under the roof of the Palais Omnisports. He was in total control from the start, while Dimitrov got off to a timid start, letting his opponent dictate the play. He never found his rhythm.

Dimitrov was second-best in all areas, and the result improved Djokovic's record against Dimitrov to 12-1.



GETTY IMAGES

2026

The 2026 Pan Pacific Championships will be moved from Canada to Los Angeles, giving the city a chance to host a major international swimming meet ahead of the 2028 Summer Olympics. The Pan Pacs are held every four years, rotating between Australia, Canada, USA and Japan. The meet was postponed to 2026 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

WHAT A RELIEF!



World champion steeplechase runner Norah Jeruto of Kazakhstan has been cleared of doping after arguing that ulcers and a bout of COVID-19 could explain unusual blood test results. The Kenya-born Jeruto won the 3,000-metre steeplechase title for Kazakhstan at last year's world championships in Eugene, but couldn't defend it at this year's competition after she was charged with doping in April. AP



SHAMI HAS INEVITABLY SCYTHED
THROUGH RIVALS IN HIS FIRST
SPELL BEFORE RETURNING TO MOP
UP A FEW MORE SCALPS

Batter's worst nightmare: Mohammed Shami is currently India's highest wicket-taker in World Cups, having gone past Zaheer Khan and Javagal Srinath. PTI

THE ANNIHILATOR UNABATED

Indian pacer **Mohammed Shami** devastates opposition ranks in his opening spell and is equally unyielding in his second and third bursts.

K.C. Vijaya Kumar

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Fast bowlers peddling gentle looseners before getting into their rhythm and batters offering the forward defensive shot until they get their eye in are all part of cricket's quaint traditions. But the modern era, with its accent on the quick and the settled, instant noodles and hot tea bags, tends to tweak orthodox dogmas, marrying the classical with the contemporary.

To see Mohammed Shami in full flight is to savour these complex realities. Often deemed an able foil to Jasprit Bumrah, a buddy to Mohammed Siraj, and an ally to Umesh Yadav, Shami's uniqueness is often overlooked at worst or tends to be taken for granted at best. Be it the first over or stepping in as first change, Shami steams in, gaining speed, not for him the eternal winnowing steps of Bumrah before the sudden explosion or the antelope's gait of Siraj.

A bowling action pleasing to the eye ensues, and the ball homes in, like a pigeon returning to its roost, to that exact uncertain spot for innumerable batters. On and around

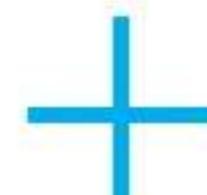
off-stump, angling in, and the willow wielders tap their inner Hamlet and perhaps whisper: to drive or not to drive. In that split second shrouded in confusion, the delivery becomes either the seducer drawing the edge, the sledgehammer thudding into pads, or just dismantling stumps.

Shami will keep running, a hand raised and a smile spreading across his face, just another day at work while his teammates race towards him. To land the ball on the money from the very first ball is a special attribute, and through this World Cup and earlier in his career, except during those phases when he carried some niggles, Shami has been both 'Meticulous Maximus' and 'Annihilator

'Unabated'. All done with a grin and the certainty of a river seeking the sea.

Yet he tends to get the boot. In a white-ball environment that emphasises all-round ability, Shami's weaker batting arm, despite his odd long-handle forays at the crease, is cited as an excuse to drop him. The Indian team management did that in the latest World Cup, leaving him out of the playing eleven in the games in Chennai, Delhi, Ahmedabad, and Pune. The all-round skills of Hardik Pandya and, to a lesser extent, Shardul Thakur meant that the doors were shut on the man with roots in Amroha, Uttar Pradesh.

An unfortunate injury to Hardik



Relentless Shami is also a menace at the nets, not for him the 'good mornings' and 'have some hot chocolate' bonhomie with his batting mates.



SHAMI
in each World Cup

2015

17
Wkts

Best 4-35

2019

14
Wkts

Best 5-69

2023

16
Wkts

Best 5-18

Mohammed Shami

SHAMI in different phases in World Cup 2023

Overs	Overs	Overs
1-10	11-40	41-50
6	7	3
Wkts	Wkts	Wkts

RPO-3.16	RPO-4.52	RPO-5.33
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Top wicket-takers in World Cup

	Mts	Wkts	Best	Avg	RPO	4W
Glenn McGrath (Aus)	39	71	7-15	18.19	3.96	2
Muttiah Muralidaran (SL)	40	68	4-19	19.63	3.88	4
Mitchell Starc (Aus)	25	58	6-28	18.87	5.11	6
Lasith Malinga (SL)	29	56	6-38	22.87	5.51	3
Wasim Akram (Pak)	38	55	5-28	23.83	4.04	3
Chaminda Vaas (SL)	31	49	6-25	21.22	3.97	2
Trent Boult (NZ)	27	49	5-27	25.12	4.82	4
Mohammed Shami (Ind)	15	47	5-18	12.74	4.90	7
Zaheer Khan (Ind)	23	44	4-42	20.22	4.47	1
Javagal Srinath (Ind)	34	44	4-30	27.81	4.32	2

Top wicket-takers for India in World Cup

	Mts	Wkts	Best	Avg	RPO	4W
Mohammed Shami	15	47	5-18	12.74	4.90	7
Zaheer Khan	23	44	4-42	20.22	4.47	1
Javagal Srinath	34	44	4-30	27.81	4.32	2
Jasprit Bumrah	17	33	4-39	18.30	4.08	2
Anil Kumble	18	31	4-32	22.83	4.08	1
Kapil Dev	26	28	5-43	31.85	3.76	1
Ravindra Jadeja	18	25	5-33	26.96	4.45	1
Manoj Prabhakar	19	24	4-19	26.66	4.40	1
Madan Lal	11	22	4-20	19.36	3.66	1
Yuvraj Singh	23	20	5-31	23.10	4.99	2
Harbhajan Singh	21	20	5-53	40.40	4.20	0

SHAMI Best figures in World Cup

Overs	Overs	Overs	Overs	Overs
5-18	5-54	5-69	4-16	4-22

vs Sri Lanka vs New Zealand vs England vs West Indies vs England

Date: 2-11-2023 Date: 22-10-2023 Date: 30-6-2019 Date: 27-6-2019 Date: 29-10-2023

meant that the team was now scrambling for balance. With no like-for-like replacement available for Hardik, the think-tank decided to field six batters and five full-fledged bowlers. Suryakumar Yadav and Shami found their spots in the clash involving New Zealand in Dharamshala, and the rest is history.

Shami's yield in the matches so far has been five for 54 (against New Zealand), four for 22 (England), five for 18 (Sri Lanka), and two for 18 (South Africa). He has inevitably scythed through rivals in his first spell before returning to mop up a few more scalps. Placed fourth with 16 wickets in the bowlers' table (as of November 7) for this World Cup, Shami is bound to move ahead.

The quadrennial championship seems to get the best out of Shami, who bagged 17 in the 2015 edition in Australia and New Zealand. In 2019, he played in four games and still had a net yield of 14. Currently, he has 47 wickets overall in all three World Cups combined, which is the highest for an Indian, ahead of Javagal Srinath and Zaheer Khan, who have 44 scalps each. Just that Shami got this in 15 games while his seniors needed extra games (Zaheer, 23; Srinath, 34). It would be apt to state that Shami has been a talisman this time around, even if he was inducted a bit late into the playing eleven by Rohit Sharma. Earlier, the pressure built up by Bumrah was dissipated through Thakur, an eager performer but a notch below his established pace colleagues. Even Siraj wasn't exactly firing on all cylinders until he found his mojo against Sri Lanka. Shami, of stifling length, surprise bouncers, and camouflaged angles, has run riot at the bowling crease.

Just like his predecessors Srinath and Zaheer, Shami also revels in the mentor's role, standing at mid-off or mid-on, having a quick chat with Bumrah or Siraj, and also passing notes to Rohit, Virat Kohli, and K.L. Rahul. Siraj's effervescence, at times, needs to be capped, and Shami does that in his sardonic ways. "We enjoy each other's success; otherwise, what is the point in playing a team sport?



Mentoring teammates: Mohammed Shami revels in the mentor's role, standing at mid-off or mid-on, having a quick chat with Jasprit Bumrah or Mohammed Siraj. PTI

"At times, they put pressure, and I get the wickets; at other times, I put pressure on the batter, and they get the wickets; in the end, all this helps the team," Shami said at a post-match press conference.

In the latest World Cup, he has grabbed wickets once in every 9.75 balls, and that is a remarkable strike rate. He devastates opposition ranks in his opening spell and is equally unyielding in his second and third bursts.

Relentless Shami is also a menace at the nets, not for him the 'good mornings' and 'have some hot chocolate' bonhomie with his batting mates. After the session, he is gentle and easy to break into a guffaw, but when he runs in to bowl, the batters have to contend with everything, be it cutters, yorkers, bouncers,

IT WOULD BE APT TO STATE THAT SHAMI HAS BEEN A TALISMAN THIS TIME AROUND, EVEN IF HE WAS INDUCTED A BIT LATE INTO THE PLAYING ELEVEN

scrambled seam, slower balls, and the range doesn't end with this.

Shami's life hasn't been easy. After shifting to Bengal to further his prospects, he polished his skills under the great Wasim Akram while with the Kolkata Knight Riders. There were injury woes, a personal crisis involving a failed marriage, and the public airing of dirty linen.

Through all this, he hung in, and despite the odd craving for biryani, he has watched his diet, and a lot of credit is due to the Indian bowling

coaches, be it Bharat Arun in the past or the current occupant, Paras Mhambrey.

A supreme bowler with skills allied with pace, besides a handy knowledge of reverse swing, Shami remains a vital cog as India marches ahead in the latest World Cup. Always buzzing, Shami's working over of Ben Stokes, which finally resulted in bruised egos and shattered stumps, will always be the stuff of folklore. And with Shami around, more such episodes are bound to happen.



Down and out: England's Ben Stokes walks back dejected, bowled by Mohammed Shami in the World Cup match against India, in Lucknow. Stokes' dismissal was a microcosm of all the problems Jos Buttler's men faced in this World Cup: shot selection, absorbing pressure, and curious selection calls. REUTERS

How the mighty fall

England's **World Cup campaign** has seen a flip-flop in team selection, oscillating between a preference for specialists and a clutch of all-rounders.

Ayan Acharya

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The colour drained from Ben Stokes' face; he looked spooked, as if he had just seen a ghost. Having been clean bowled while trying to play a clumsy, inexplicable swipe to Mohammed Shami, Stokes' exit triggered a dramatic collapse. Chasing 230 on a tacky pitch, England was bowled out for 129 — the first time it lost five times at a

World Cup. And five days later, it was knocked out of the tournament with a defeat against Ashes rival Australia in Ahmedabad — eliminated before the Netherlands and Afghanistan.

Cricket, in many ways, is an individual sport within a team game. Stokes' dismissal in Lucknow against India was a microcosm of all the problems Jos Buttler's men faced in this World Cup: shot selection, absorbing pressure, and curious

selection calls. This England team, once unplayable because of its unbridled pace, has morphed into a side now playing the percentages. The optimism that surrounded the build-up has long since dissipated, and England finds itself at the beginning of what could well be an "ODI reset 2.0".

It marks the end of a period of churn behind the scenes as well. During the ongoing competition, Test



captain Stokes declined a three-year central contract in favour of just one year. What does it say about the scarcity of alternatives that the call went out to a man who had retired from ODIs in July last year, citing the unsustainability of playing all three formats? Additionally, David Willey, the only member of England's World Cup squad not to get a central contract, announced his international retirement.

The short-term reasons for the former champion's decline are various, but its premature exit

shouldn't come as a surprise. England, after all, played only 42 One-Day Internationals in the build-up to the 2023 World Cup, compared to 88 in the run-up to the 2019 edition. The fact that the One-Day Cup in England — English cricket's domestic 50-over competition — takes place at the same time as The Hundred further compounds the challenges, with star batter Harry Brook even acknowledging that he was trying to "learn and figure out the format" in the World Cup.

Not to forget the Buttler-led side has also had to contend with a significantly ageing squad, with an average age of 31-plus.

As of November 7, 2023, all-rounder Moeen Ali is the oldest member, at 36 years and 141 days, while Brook is the youngest, aged 24 years, 257 days. Given the star appeal of many of its players and an increasing familiarity with the Indian audiences due to IPL exploits, England, along with India, is one of only two sides which had to travel after every group-stage match to



Time for introspection: This England team, once unplayable because of its unbridled pace, has morphed into a side now playing the percentages. AP

cater to eyeballs in all host cities.

England's World Cup campaign has also seen a flip-flop in team selection, oscillating between a preference for specialists and a clutch of all-rounders. Chris Woakes, Sam Curran, and Liam Livingstone, who played the first match against New Zealand, were all benched for the fourth game against South Africa. While Woakes and Livingstone returned later, Curran remained on the sidelines. Stokes, who has been struggling with a knee injury for the past 18 months, has

played in this World Cup as a specialist batter with limited success. He bats at No. 4, where Buttler averages 68 in ODIs. Yet, he has only batted there in 14 games. Also, England's reluctance to reinstate Brook, its best young batter — he has missed three on the trot — into a wobbly top six, has been borderline foolhardy.

A significant factor in England's success under former captain Eoin Morgan was its fearless approach against the new ball. Jason Roy and Jonny Bairstow, at their peak, were

intimidating openers, often unsettling new-ball bowlers. However, in the current World Cup, the performance of the top order has been rather ordinary. Only Bangladesh has lost more than England's 15 wickets in the 10-over PowerPlay — while scoring at only 5.25 an over. Roy's absence from the squad has impacted Bairstow, too, who now must be the aggressor given Dawid Malan's more circumspect style up top. Additionally, Bairstow and Malan had only opened together twice before this World Cup.

The winds of change are blowing through English cricket. Buttler, at 33, is unlikely to make the 2027 World Cup in South Africa and could

THE BUTTLER-LED ENGLISH SIDE HAS ALSO HAD TO CONTEND WITH A SIGNIFICANTLY AGEING SQUAD, WITH AN AVERAGE AGE OF 31-PLUS

well consider stepping down as captain in 50-over cricket. Several 2019 World Cup winners like Bairstow, Mark Wood, Woakes, Moeen Ali, Adil Rashid and Stokes may retire down the line.

In that sense, when Stokes screamed "oh no" after gifting a catch to short fine-leg on 64 against Australia, it did feel symbolic, like getting sucked into a vortex of despair, marking the end of one era and the need for another to begin. There's an aching beauty in decline that adds joyful intrigue to resurrection. As Moeen said: "Everything good comes to an end. Maybe the writing was on the wall, and we just didn't see it as players because we thought we'd be performing well. I think if I was in charge, I'd play the younger guys [after this tournament]. I'd just start again and I'm sure they're going to do that."



HUMBLED AND HARROWED

Quinton de Kock's (pic, below) 174 was the headline act as South Africa **thumped** Bangladesh by 149 runs in Mumbai.

SOUTH AFRICA
382-5 (50 overs): Quinton De Kock 174, Heinrich Klaasen 90, Aiden Markram 60

beat

BANGLADESH
233 (46.4 overs):
Mahmudullah 111; Gerald Coetzee 3/62, Marco Jansen 2/39

Shayan Acharya
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It was another day and another run feast for South Africa! At the Wankhede Stadium, Quinton de Kock's impressive 174 and a rapid 90 from Heinrich Klaasen helped South Africa put up a formidable total of 382 for five. It went on to secure a convincing 149-run victory over Bangladesh, strengthening its prospects of securing a semifinal spot.

Had it not been for Mahmudullah



Skittled by pace: Gerald Coetzee (in pic) and Marco Jansen took five wickets between them, ensuring Bangladesh was all out for 233.

PICS: EMMANUEL YOGINI

waging a lone battle with a 111-ball-111, Bangladesh wouldn't have reached 233. He delayed the inevitable with a 68-run partnership for the ninth wicket with Mustafizur Rahman. But for a side that was reeling at 58 for 5 in 15 overs, after Marco Jansen jolted its top-order, Mahmudullah's efforts were not enough to avoid a fourth defeat on the trot.

The day, however, belonged to de Kock, who featured in his 150th ODI.

Banking on his familiarity with the iconic venue from his IPL tenure with the Mumbai Indians, he steered his team to a remarkable feat: becoming the first side to achieve three 350-plus scores in a single World Cup edition. The Proteas had previously scored an impressive 143 in the last 10 overs against England. On a relatively flat pitch, South Africa added one more run to its tally against Bangladesh, even after a shaky start at 36 for 2 within eight overs.

» WORLD CUP – MATCH 24



ALL HAIL MAD MAX

Glenn Maxwell **smacked** the fastest men's World Cup century in 40 balls as Australia completed the biggest winning margin in World Cup, by 309 runs.

Vijay Lokapally

He is a tormentor of bowlers. If they dread bowling to him, it is understandable because Glenn Maxwell revels in smashing good deliveries. Like he did at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi against the Netherlands with some astounding strokes.

At the 2015 World Cup, he blasted a 51-ball hundred against Sri Lanka in Sydney, and here he took a mere 40 to get to the coveted mark. "That was just a freak show," Australian captain

Pat Cummins said. "He was just fantastic; it's as clean-hitting as you'll ever see."

True. It was the kind of inning you play in your dreams. Maxwell exploded in the 49th over, bowled by Bas de Leede. The sequence was 4, 4, 6, 6, 6. The crowd loved it, and so did Maxwell's partner at the other end, Cummins. "You've got no options as a bowler when someone's running as hot as that," remarked Cummins.

Maxwell summed it up: "I had to

Record-breaking feat: Glenn Maxwell's ton is the fourth fastest in ODI history. **Right:** Leg-spinner Adam Zampa snapped up 4 for 8 and in doing so, helped boost Australia's chances of reaching the last four. PICS: R. V. MOORTHY

bat a little bit differently, and that probably tempered me down a little bit and actually made me play the situation a bit. Patty was brilliant out there as well for me." Maxwell was unstoppable with a flurry of reverse sweeps, his most productive shots.

AUSTRALIA
399-8 (50 overs):
Glenn Maxwell 106, David Warner 104; Logan Van Beek 4 for 74
beat
NETHERLANDS
90 (21 overs): Vikram Singh 25; Adam Zampa 4 for 8



RUBBING SALT IN THE WOUND

England's World Cup campaign is all but over, following a disorganised and **disheartening** eight-wicket loss to Sri Lanka in Bengaluru.

ENGLAND
156

(33.2 overs): Ben Stokes 43; Lahiru Kumara 3/35

lost to

SRI LANKA

160-2

(25.4 overs):
Pathum Nissanka 77*, Sadeera Samarawickrama 65*

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Cricket, as a game, doesn't quite lend itself to the kind of trash talk that is seen before heavyweight boxing bouts. Press conferences are pretty mundane. Players and teams call each other world-class. There is respect and little else. But with the match between England and Sri Lanka proving to be a one-sided affair, as Sri Lanka registered a thumping eight-wicket win to hand England its fifth straight loss to the Island Nation in World Cups, expectations were for the post-match media briefing to dish out some much-needed fireworks.

Though not of the feisty kind, it ended up providing more talking points than the match itself. The English journalists, who had started

On cloud nine: Sri Lankan pacer Lahiru Kumara celebrates the fall of an England wicket. He bowled with hostility and picked up 3 for 35. K. MURALIKUMAR

sharpening their knives halfway into the game after their team had collapsed for 156, plunged the dagger into Jos Buttler's heart, asking him if he was questioning his position at the helm and if he still thought he was the best man for England.

Lankan spinner Maheesh Theekshana added insult to injury by telling the world that England had underestimated his team. "Because we also lost three games and only won against the Netherlands, I think they underestimated us," he said. "That's why the result went our way, and we won the game." It was a brutally straight assessment, the kind of thing that is not always forthcoming. It may well be because English is not Theekshana's first language. But no one can deny that the statement carried more than a kernel of truth.

» WORLD CUP – MATCH 26



PICS: R. RAGU

SHEDDING TAG AND NERVES WITH APLOMB

South Africa choking in a World Cup? **Well, not anymore.**

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Pakistan and South Africa could not be any further apart on the comfort spectrum in the 2023 Men's ODI World Cup. One is sitting pretty in the top half of the table, with imposing performances in all departments, while the other is struggling with a collective loss of form, rumours of infighting, and a lack of faith from its own cricket board. But cricket doesn't discriminate. It put both sides under the pump, with a near 30,000 crowd in Chennai cheering every single one of the 22 players, jersey colour no bar, in a humdinger that eventually went South Africa's way.

The last five overs of the run chase

— an Achilles heel in an otherwise perfect campaign for the Proteas so far — had every soul inside the expanses of the MA Chidambaram



PAKISTAN

270 (46.4 overs):

Saud Shakeel 52; Tabraiz Shamsi 4/60, Marco Jansen 3/43

lost to

SOUTH AFRICA

271-9 (47.2

overs): Aiden Markram 91; Shaheen Afridi 3/45

Stadium transfixed. Hawkers kept aside their wares, clutching the rails to ease the nerves, while the white noise of fingers jamming laptop keys faded into silence in the press box. Shaheen Afridi, who found the perfect line and length in his second spell, was proving hostile to the South African tail.

Fans egged on Afridi as he bolted into the wicket, hunting for a breakthrough. The 'knowledgeable Chennai crowd' collectively gasped when Haris Rauf pulled off one of the best caught and bowled attempts in the tournament (**left**) and rose to its feet when Keshav Maharaj (**in pic with Tabraiz Shamsi, above**) managed to squeeze Mohammed Nawaz to fine leg for four to put a close game to bed.



WARNER HEAD WRITES NEW CHAPTER IN TRANS-TASMAN RIVALRY

Australia managed to defeat a determined New Zealand in a **high-scoring thriller** in Dharamsala, keeping its semifinal hopes alive.

AUSTRALIA

388

(49.2 overs): Travis Head 109; David Warner 81; Glenn Phillips 3/37

beat

NEW ZEALAND

383-9

(50 overs): Rachin Ravindra 116; Adam Zampa 3/74

Scaling heights: Travis Head (right), playing his first match in this World Cup, smashed 109 from 67 balls, adding 175 in 19.1 overs with David Warner. PICS: R.V. MOORTHY

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If there were any murmurs of a Trans-Tasman skirmish at the World Cup, they certainly didn't permeate the air 1500 metres above sea level in Dharamsala. However, the tranquility and bonhomie of the hills soon gave way to David Warner and Travis Head's opening salvo that bludgeoned New Zealand's new-ball pace attack, and by the time evening descended on the foothills of the world's highest



peaks, the two rivals had aggregated the most runs in a World Cup game.

Chants of 'Rachin, Rachin' reverberated across the stadium in an all-too-familiar tone as the clinical Kiwis, led by Rachin Ravindra, inched closer to hunting down a record 389-run target. While the Trans-Tasmanian rivalry flies under the radar, what frays the nerves are the neighbours' opposing methods. After Australia's brash onslaught, the Black Caps switched on their supercomputer, ticking off incremental 10-over targets without fuss.

But a flurry of wickets made a very gettable 97 in the last 10 overs seem taller than the mountains, and when James Neesham was run out (**pic, above**) with a six needed to tie the scores off the penultimate ball, somewhere in the world Martin Guptill and the 'nice guys' would have winced.



CITY OF JOY TURNS ORANJE

Paul van Meekeren claimed 4 for 23, and captain Scott Edwards scored 68 as the Netherlands **secured** its second World Cup victory, defeating Bangladesh by 87 runs in Kolkata.

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The Dutch cricketers were delighted to get a second opportunity to sing their team song, borrowed from Australian rules football, as they stunned a higher-ranked Bangladesh at the Eden Gardens 11 days after shocking a formidable South Africa. It was the Netherlands' best-ever performance, improving upon its previous record of one win apiece in 2003 and 2007 in its five appearances in the World Cup over 27 years. It was a moment of reassurance and hope

for a team that made it to the event through the qualifiers.

For all-rounder Bas de Leede, whose father Tim donned the iconic Dutch colours in the 2003 edition, such noticeable performances would inspire young kids in his country to take to the game. Despite being the lowest-ranked side in the tournament, the Dutch fancied their chances of making it to the semifinals. Whether they enter the last four or not, their superb show has the potential to trigger a cricket awakening in the Netherlands at a time when the game has been included in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

NETHERLANDS

229

(50 overs): Scott Edwards 68, Wesley Barresi 41, Mustafizur Rahman 2 for 36

beat

BANGLADESH

142

(42.2 overs): Mehidy Hasan 35 ; Paul Van Meekeren 4 for 23

Incisive spell: Player of the Match

Paul van Meekeren broke the back of the Bangladesh chase with figures of four for 23. Earlier captain Scott Edwards' (below) knock propelled the Dutch to a competitive 229 on a tacky Eden Gardens pitch. PICS: RITU RAJ KONWAR



» WORLD CUP – MATCH 29

MAULING THREE LIONS TO RETAIN ASCENDANCY



Captain Marvel: Rohit Sharma scored a classy 87 from 101 before Adil Rashid ended his stay with a googly that was miscued to cover. PICS: K. R. DEEPAK

Defending champion, England's disappointing World Cup journey took a **turn for the worse** as it suffered a 100-run loss to the host, India, in Lucknow.

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England's ODI World Cup defence took a turn for the worse as it suffered a 100-run defeat to India in Lucknow, even after limiting the home team's strong batting lineup to 229.

India, after being inserted, faced early trouble, falling to 40 for three just after the opening PowerPlay. Captain Rohit Sharma played an almost flawless innings on a challenging pitch, accumulating 87

INDIA
229-9 (50 overs):
Rohit Sharma 87, Suryakumar Yadav 49; David Willey 3/45

beat
ENGLAND
129 (34.5 overs): Liam Livingstone 27; Mohammed Shami 4/22



runs from 101 balls. He adjusted his approach, opting for consolidation over aggression. Suryakumar Yadav and Jasprit Bumrah's rearguard helped India set a target of 230, which looked below par at the halfway mark.

But the England batters were about to find out just how challenging the conditions were and how incisive the Indian bowling was. Bumrah began the slide by dismissing Dawid Malan and Joe Root in successive deliveries. Mohammed Shami capitalised on this, taking four wickets, including the struggling Ben Stokes.

India's left-arm spin duo of Ravindra Jadeja and Kuldeep Yadav also got a share of the spoils, with the latter castling English skipper Jos Buttler with a ripper.

Bumrah returned soon enough to put an end to the English resistance, sending the spirited Lucknow crowd into a deafening roar as it celebrated India's sixth win on the trot, effectively sealing its semifinal spot.

Awake-up call: Ben Stokes has had a forgettable World Cup so far. In Lucknow, he was beaten four times by Mohammed Shami before swiping across the line and losing his stumps.



Spell from hell: Mohammed Shami was menacing and incisive in his opening spell, with his figures of four for 22 spelling doom for defending champion England.

» WORLD CUP – MATCH 30

LIVING THE DREAM RUN

Afghanistan kept its World Cup semifinal hopes alive with a **seven-wicket win** over Sri Lanka.



Triumphant return: Hashmatullah Shahidi and Azmatullah Omarzai put on an unbroken 111-run stand to get Afghanistan over the line with 28 balls to spare. PICS: AFP

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Afghanistan extended its impressive ODI World Cup run with a convincing seven-wicket victory over Sri Lanka at the Maharashtra Cricket Association in Pune. This marks their third win in the tournament, following previous victories over former World Cup champions England and Pakistan.

Afghanistan's victory over Sri Lanka was primarily due to its bowlers, who limited the opposition to a mere 241 runs on a pitch that seemed favourable for a higher score. Fazalhaq Farooqi (**pic above**)

SRI LANKA

241 (49.3 overs): Pathum Nissanka 46, K. Mendis 39; Fazalhaq Farooqi 4/34

lost to

AFGHANISTAN

242-3 (45.2 overs):
Azmatullah Omarzai 73 not out,
Rahmat Shah 62, Hashmatullah Shahidi 58 not out

excelled with figures of 4/34, and Mujeeb Ur Rahman's performance in the middle overs, taking 2/38, played a crucial role in Sri Lanka's collapse from 134 for three to 185 for seven.

Maheesh Theekshana's late-order efforts pushed Sri Lanka closer to the 250-run mark, but it ultimately fell short in a well-executed Afghan chase. Afghanistan overcame the early loss of Rahmanullah Gurbaz, systematically breaking down Sri Lanka's total. The Afghan middle order, led by Rahmat Shah, Hashmatullah Shahidi, and Azmatullah Omarzai, delivered with half-centuries, sealing the victory.

Shahidi and Omarzai celebrated their second century partnership in the World Cup, delighting the enthusiastic Afghan fans in the crowd who danced with joy.

The Afghan pair comfortably found boundaries against the Sri Lankan bowlers despite the challenges of dew, securing victory in the 46th over, exceeding their coach Jonathan Trott's expectations.

» WORLD CUP – MATCH 31

BANGLADESH

204 (45.1 overs):

Mahmudullah 56, Litton Das 45; Shaheen Afridi 3/23, Mohammad Wasim 3/31

lost to

PAKISTAN

205-3 (32.3

overs): Fakhar Zaman 81, Abdullah Shafique 68; Hasan Miraz 3/60



AFP

SHUTTING THE DOOR ON THE NEIGHBOURS

Bangladesh, which was bowled out for 204, became first team to be **eliminated** from the competition.

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Although Pakistan's fast bowler Shaheen Afridi (**pic, above**) may no longer surprise batters with prodigious swing in the first PowerPlay, his knack for picking up wickets endures. Shaheen seems particularly threatening when facing Bangladesh.

Back in 2019 at Lord's, he impressed by taking six wickets for just 35 runs against Bangladesh, making him the youngest, at 19, to achieve a five-wicket haul in World Cup history. In the 2023 World Cup in India, he reached a milestone by

becoming the fastest Pakistani to claim 100 ODI wickets in his 51st match, with figures of 3 for 23. He accomplished this feat by setting up Tanzid Hasan for a lbw dismissal.

Hasan made his side rue the absence of a third specialist opener when Shaheen followed up four outswingers, with one that came into the left-hander. The sense of impending doom was almost palpable when Shaheen removed Najmul Shanto and the old warhorse Mahmudullah. Bangladesh's 204 was never going to be enough on a slow Eden Gardens track. Pakistan cruised to the target in 32.3 overs, finding its second wind in the top-four race and showing Bangladesh the exit door.



Shepherding the chase: Fakhar Zaman's quickfire 81 piloted Pakistan to a seven-wicket win over Bangladesh in the World Cup. RITU RAJ KONWAR

» WORLD CUP – MATCH 32



PICS: M. VEDHAN

PROTEAS CLIP KIWIS' WINGS

South Africa **moved a step closer** to clinching a World Cup semifinal berth after a 190-run win over New Zealand in Pune.



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South Africa's winning strategy, a familiar one, was to set a massive target in the first innings and then dismantle the opposition for a low score in the second. This approach resulted in New Zealand's third consecutive loss in the ODI World Cup match held at Pune's Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium.

New Zealand's decision to send the confident South African batting unit to bat first set the stage for its downfall. Although the Kiwis prevented South Africa from gaining

SOUTH AFRICA

357-4

(50 overs): Rassie van der Dussen 133, Quinton De Kock 114, David Miller 53

beat

NEW ZEALAND

167

(35.3 overs): Glenn Phillips 60; Keshav Maharaj 4/46, Marco Jansen 3/31

an early advantage, the Proteas reached the 150-run mark in the 29th over. Unfortunately, their inability to take wickets proved to be their undoing. Quinton de Kock and Rassie van der Dussen (**pic, above**), scoring brilliant centuries, accelerated their run rate after the 30th over. David Miller, Aiden Markram, and Heinrich Klaasen added to New Zealand's misery by hitting boundaries in the death overs, much to the delight of the nearly full Pune crowd, to boost South Africa to 357/4.

Any hopes New Zealand had of chasing down this mammoth total were quickly dashed by left-arm pacer Marco Jansen, who dismissed Devon Conway and Rachin Ravindra in the opening PowerPlay.

The rest of New Zealand's batting lineup, except Glenn Phillips, who scored a 50-ball 60, faltered. Keshav Maharaj (**pic, left**) cleaned up the lower order, ending with figures of 4/46, as the Kiwis were bundled out for 167.

The significant margin of defeat adversely affected New Zealand's Net Run Rate (NRR), which could eventually impact its semifinal hopes.



WALTZING INTO THE SEMIFINALS

A **fiery bowling performance** saw India bowl Sri Lanka out for just 55 to secure a World Cup semifinal spot.

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The Wankhede Stadium resonated with chants of 'Kohli ko bowling do (let Kohli bowl)' as India stepped onto the field to defend a mammoth total of 357 against Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, Virat Kohli didn't need to roll his arm, thanks to a formidable fast bowling display by Mohammed Shami and Mohammed Siraj.

Their outstanding performance ensured India's resounding 302-run

victory over Sri Lanka.

Undoubtedly, this was one of India's most commanding displays in the current tournament, securing its place in the semifinals. Following a mesmerising partnership between Kohli and Shubman Gill that set the stage for a big total, few anticipated Sri Lanka's ability to mount a comeback. However, what unfolded was beyond expectations, as the Sri Lankan batters failed to endure even

Breaking morale and records:

Mohammed Shami's 5 for 18 against Sri Lanka made him India's highest wicket-taker in World Cups, with 45 scalps in just 14 matches. AP

INDIA

357-8 (50 overs):

Shubman Gill 92, Virat Kohli 88, Shreyas Iyer 82; Dilshan Madushanka 5 for 80

beat

SRI LANKA

55 (19.4 overs): Mohammed Shami 5 for 18, Mohammed Siraj 3 for 16



20 overs, eventually collapsing for a mere 55 runs. This brought back memories of their performance in the Asia Cup final in September, when they were dismissed for just 50.

Sri Lanka's chase got off to the worst possible start, with Jasprit Bumrah striking with the first delivery before Siraj picked up the next three wickets to reduce the opponent to 4 for 3.

Adding to Sri Lanka's troubles, Shami secured his second five-wicket haul in just three matches, propelling India's unstoppable march forward. While Indian fans celebrated their team's victory, it was a disappointing turn of events for the young Sri Lankan fast bowler, Dilshan Madushanka, who achieved his first five-wicket haul and became the tournament's leading wicket-taker. Despite his exceptional performance, Sri Lanka faced its fifth defeat in seven matches, effectively ending its chances of reaching the knockout stage.



Breathing fire: Mohammed Siraj (top) broke the back of the Sri Lankan run chase with hostile pace and swing. He removed Dimuth Karunaratne and Sadeera Samarawickrama in the second over of the innings, before Kusal Mendis was bowled in his next. **Purple patch:** Kohli (above) continued his good form with yet another crucial 88 batting first. PICS: EMMANUEL YOGINI

» WORLD CUP – MATCH 34



ALIVE AND KICKING!

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Afghanistan extended its remarkable run, defeating the Netherlands by seven wickets at the Ekana Stadium in Lucknow, bringing it closer to a maiden ODI World Cup semifinal spot.

The Netherlands, opting to bat, had a strong start, scoring 66 in the initial 10 overs, its best performance in the opening PowerPlay during this World Cup. Max O'Dowd was the early aggressor, delivering some impressive boundaries against left-arm pacer Fazalhaq Farooqi.

But the Dutch contributed to their own downfall, allowing Afghanistan to effect four run-outs. The Afghan

spinners kept the Dutch batting in check, limiting them to 179. Sybrand Engelbrecht's half-century was the only silver lining.

Afghanistan made a circumspect start, losing both openers for 55. However, Rahmat Shah played a pivotal role, crafting a well-paced half-century. After Rahmat's dismissal, captain Hashmatullah Shahidi and all-rounder Azmatullah Omarzai guided Afghanistan to its fourth victory of the tournament in front of an enthusiastic crowd of over 22,000. This was the third consecutive match that Afghanistan won chasing in this World Cup.

Afghanistan continued its spirited pursuit for a place in the World Cup semifinals with a **seven-wicket win** over the Netherlands in Lucknow.



Crucial innings: Rahmat Shah fell for 52, with 51 runs still needed, but his fifty ensured clearing the deficit was a mere formality for his teammates.

PICS: RITU RAJ KONWAR

NETHERLANDS

179

(46.3 overs): SA
Engelbrecht 58;
Mohammed Nabi 3/28

lost to

AFGHANISTAN

181-3

(31.3
overs): Hashmatullah
Shahidi 56*, Rahmat Shah
52

Spinning a web:

Mohammad Nabi (in pic) was the pick of Afghanistan's attack, taking 3 for 28, while Noor Ahmad impressed by taking 2 for 31.

NEW ZEALAND

401-6 (50

overs): Rachin Ravindra
108, Kane Williamson 95;
Muhammad Wasim 3/60

lost to

PAKISTAN

200-1 (25.3

overs): Fakhar Zaman
126*, Babar Azam 66*;
Tim Southee 1/27

WORLD CUP – MATCH 35



STAYING AFLOAT IN RAINY BENGALURU

Pakistan's stunning batting performance revived its World Cup semifinal chances in a **rain-affected** match against New Zealand in Bengaluru.

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Pakistan and New Zealand are as different as chalk and cheese. Pakistan had been seeking a revival in its World Cup campaign, while New Zealand, after four wins on the trot, had fallen sideways with three successive defeats.

So when they faced each other with a semifinal spot on the line, the last thing anyone wanted was to be staring at the sky for most of the game.

With dark clouds hovering over the ground, New Zealand was put in to bat. Rachin Ravindra scored his third century in the World Cup, and in the company of Kane Williamson,



Standout show: Rachin Ravindra, who hit a classy 108, was involved in a second-wicket stand of 180 with Kane Williamson. PICS: K. MURALIKUMAR

who scored 95, helped the Kiwis post 401/6.

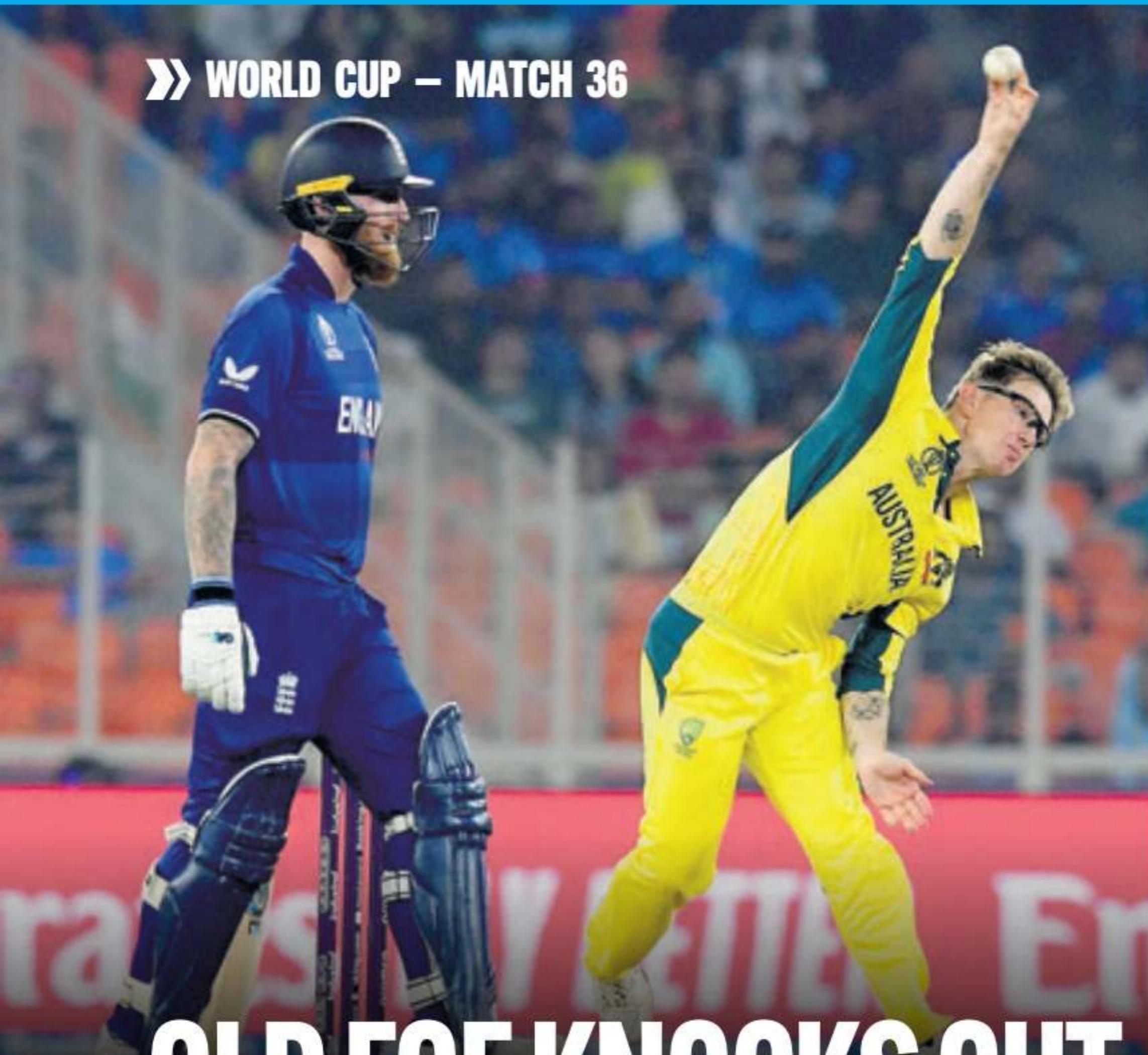
And then, Fakhar Zaman (**above**) happened.

Ish Sodhi, brought to the side to find purchase on a dry-looking surface, was taken to the cleaners. Trent Boult and Tim Southee were unable to shake the Pakistani opener.

A day before the game, this reporter heard Zaman say to the local net bowlers whose help he elicited for practice, "Out karo mujhe (get me out)."

That challenge stayed unfinished until the last ball was bowled in this game, with rain bringing the curtains down on the match and handing the Men in Green a relieving 21-run (DLS method) win.

» WORLD CUP – MATCH 36



OLD FOE KNOCKS OUT ENGLAND

England's World Cup defence **ended in agony** after old rival Australia secured a 33-run victory in Ahmedabad.

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Battered and bruised after relinquishing the World Cup title, England arrived in Ahmedabad looking for a morsel of consolation against its old foe, Australia.

Ben Stokes, on the eve of the match, was candid in admitting that pride was at stake for the Three Lions. His gritty 90-ball 64 was even symptomatic of it. He prolonged English hopes, but once Stokes met his end, it was a familiar tale of submission.

Australia knocking on the semifinal door after the 33-run victory was salt in the wound for England.

Adam Zampa (**pic, above**) completed the demolition job for the five-time champion. First, with the

bat, Zampa's 19-ball 29 left England hapless, swelling Australia's total from 247/8 to 286. With the ball, he removed Stokes, Moeen Ali, and Jos Buttler for 21 runs to jump to the top of the leading wicket-takers chart.

AUSTRALIA
286

(49.3 overs): Marnus Labuschagne 71; Chris Woakes 4-54, Adil Rashid 2/38

beat

ENGLAND

253

(48.1 overs): Ben Stokes 64, Adam Zampa 3/21

Marnus Labuschagne and Cameron Green chipped in in the absence of Glenn Maxwell and Mitchell Marsh, ensuring Australia headed into the business end of the tournament firing on all cylinders.



Anchoring the innings: Marnus Labuschagne's 83-ball 71 held Australia's middle order together. PICS: VIJAY SONEJI



A showman, superstar: Virat Kohli reached his 49th ODI hundred in his 277th innings; Sachin Tendulkar scored his 49 in 452. PICS: K. R. DEEPAK

ROLLING ON WITHOUT A BLEMISH

India is **assured of the top spot** after winning all eight of its group-stage matches.

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If losing against India by a colossal margin of 243 runs at the Eden Gardens wasn't embarrassing enough, the South African team combined fell short of Virat Kohli's score (101 not

out, 121b, 10x4) by 18.

Billed as the virtual ICC World Cup final, the clash of the top two teams of the league stage was expected to be a fiercely contested affair. But Kohli, who turned 35 on matchday, and Ravindra Jadeja (9-1-33-5) had other ideas.

Having opted to bat in Kolkata,

India skipper Rohit Sharma came out all guns blazing. Marco Jansen ending the night as the most expensive South African bowler in World Cup history, having conceded 94, only helped the host's cause.

Once the openers departed, Kohli and Shreyas Iyer dropped anchor to stitch together a 134-run



What a catch: Quinton de Kock dove full length in front of the stumps to grab a breathtaking catch to dismiss a dangerous-looking Suryakumar Yadav. **Among the wickets:** Ravindra Jadeja (below) became the second Indian spinner to take a five-wicket haul in World Cups. Yuvraj Singh was the first.

partnership. The duo paced the innings well to set the course for a mammoth total of 326/5.

In response, no South African batter could score more than 14 as India scripted a famous win to seal its No. 1 spot in the CWC23

standings.

Meanwhile, life came full circle for Kohli, who had scored his maiden international hundred at this very venue in 2009, when he notched up his 49th ODI century to equal Sachin Tendulkar's record.

INDIA

326-5 (50 overs): Virat Kohli 101*, Shreyas Iyer 77, Rohit Sharma 40
beat

SOUTH AFRICA

83 (27.1 overs): Ravindra Jadeja 5/33, Kuldeep Yadav 2/7, Mohammed Shami 2/18



» WORLD CUP – MATCH 38



A WIN MARRED BY CONTROVERSY

The match turned feisty after Angelo Mathews became the first international cricketer to be **timed out**.

Vijay Lokapally

Angelo Mathews is not going to forget Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan. Neither would millions of fans across the world after seeing some amazing developments at the Arun Jaitley Stadium, where Bangladesh defeated Sri Lanka by three wickets in the ICC ODI World Cup.

Mathews, walking in at the fall of Sadeera Samarawickrama's wicket at 135, did not even face a ball. He was 'timed out', the first such dismissal in the history of international cricket. He was, in the opinion of umpire Marais Erasmus, not ready to face his first ball within the stipulated two minutes. That's the law.

"The fielding captain initiated



SRI LANKA

279 (49.3 overs): Charith

Asalanka 108, Pathum Nissanka 41; Tanzim Hasan 3/80

lost to

BANGLADESH

282-7 (41.1 overs): Najmul

Hossain Shanto 90, Shakib Al Hasan 82; Dilshan Madushanka 3/69

Royal uproar: Sri Lanka's Angelo Mathews said Bangladesh's actions were "disgraceful" after he became the first international cricketer to be timed out in his team's World Cup loss in New Delhi. PICS: R. V. MOORTHY

the appeal to Marais Erasmus, who was the standing umpire, that he wanted to appeal for timed out," reserve umpire Adrian Holdstock explained.

Shaqib, declared Man of the Match for his sterling innings of 82 (**in pic**) in addition to two wickets, expressed no regrets. Ironically, he fell to Mathews, but the match was sealed by then.

"We were at war out there," said Shaqib. The Sri Lankans, propelled by Charith Asalanka's century, were obviously disappointed, but this episode would set in motion the timed-out mode of dismissal in future matches. History was made in New Delhi. It was Bangladesh's first ever win over Sri Lanka in a World Cup.

Beauty of Ekana



Lucknow's Ekana Stadium looks like a massive cake topped with white frosting laced with flecks of green. **Visually, it is akin** to the Optus Stadium in Perth, which seemingly impersonates a black forest cake!

In the dusty plains of Northern India, with the Ganges constituting its lifeline, gifting alluvial soil and water and supporting mankind, Lucknow harks back to an era of royalty and culinary delights, especially in its older parts, while the business district and suburbs have their high-rises and glitzy malls. In this landscape, from afar, the Ekana Stadium looks like a massive cake topped with white frosting laced with flecks of green. Visually, it is akin to the Optus Stadium in Perth, which seemingly impersonates a black forest cake!

As the cricket bandwagon rolled into Lucknow, with India scheduled to play against England on October

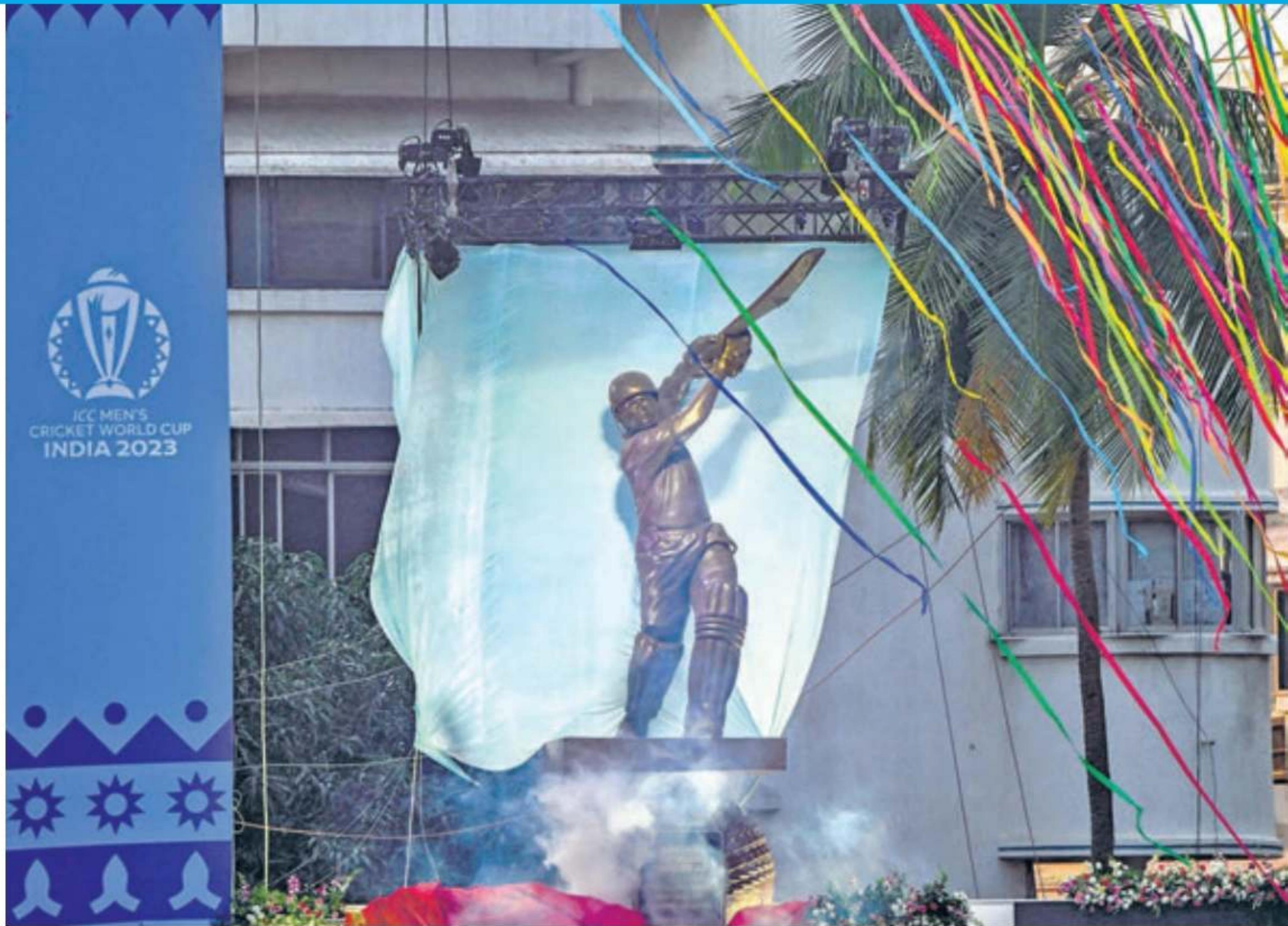
29, it was time to check out the venue on the outskirts of Uttar Pradesh's capital. Like new airports across the country sprouting in distant places, and there is this famous one-liner about Bengaluru's airport not being in Bengaluru, the Ekana Stadium, too, is a bit away on the map. But once you get there, the complex gets overwhelming with its size. The multiple facilities cater to cricket, tennis, and indoor sports. And to get to the B Ground to train at nets, cricketers were hopping into large cabs!

The match, though, was one-sided, as has been the case with most contests involving India in this World Cup. Even after the Men in Blue mustered 229 for nine, riding

Sky come alive: Fireworks light up the sky after India steamrolls England in Lucknow to continue its winning run in this World Cup. AFP

largely on skipper Rohit Sharma's 87, the total felt adequate once Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami scythed through their rivals. India won by 100 runs, and it was time to head to Mumbai.

The next day at the airport, Rohit's men, like always in public spaces, were treated like rockstars. Fellow passengers, airport staff, cabin crew, and security personnel were all smitten as cellphones were whipped out and pictures taken. In a corner sat Eoin Morgan, watching the spectacle unfold, when Kuldeep Yadav yelled to him: 'Mo!' The former England captain waved back. The man, who held aloft the World Cup in 2019, is now part of television commentary panel. His erstwhile



team is now in free fall. Sport truly elevates, but it can also deflate, and England would vouch for that.

Mumbai frenzy

The Wankhede Stadium was all decked up and ready to honour one of its favourite sons. Sachin Tendulkar's statue was unveiled inside the venue with much fanfare on November 1. The maestro playing a lofted shot was frozen in stone, and later Tendulkar spoke about his fascination for this ground, a place he had sneaked into as a 10-year-old to see a match when in reality he didn't have a ticket, a truth he got to know later while taking the suburban train back home. And now, through the statue, he has become Wankhede's permanent resident.

It was time to sample the abundant thrills of speed the next day as India blew away a hapless Sri Lanka. A 302-run triumph was initially mounted upon high-class batting thanks to Virat Kohli, Shubman Gill, and Shreyas Iyer. But the killer punch was delivered by the

Permanent resident: Life-size statue of Sachin Tendulkar was unveiled at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai before the India vs. Sri Lanka World Cup match. EMMANUEL YOGINI

fast troika of Bumrah, Shami, and Mohammed Siraj. The last two were in supreme rhythm, and Sri Lanka was bundled out for 55!

As the fans trooped out to Churchgate station and Marine Drive, finding ways to get back home, inside the Indian dressing room, the now-customary fielding medal was given to Shreyas. The pleasant surprise was Tendulkar popping up online and giving a pep talk: "I don't want to say anything more, but I am sure all of you know what you need to do. I have been excited to see the brand of cricket you play."

Kolkata delights

Time to fly from the west coast to the east, and as the plane descends into Kolkata, it is still evening, but the

skies are pitch dark. The sun has set, and since India doesn't have different time zones, natural light inevitably varies on the west-to-east axis or vice versa. Old yellow taxis and the latest vehicles ply the roads of this great eastern metropolis with its colonial legacy, cultural riches, and old tram lines, besides having the cricketing theatre of dreams, the Eden Gardens.

Sunday, November 5, is a day invested with a sporting halo. It is a day when India takes on South Africa, essentially a face-off between the number one and two teams according to the points tally. Equally, it is the day Kohli turns 35, and additionally, he is on the cusp of equalling Sachin Tendulkar's record ODI tally of 49 hundreds. Eden Gardens is at its best when it comes to rising to the occasion, and the weekend crowd relishes every moment as India defeats South Africa by 243 runs.

King Kohli equals his idol through a century, more attritional than aggressive, but more importantly, it



helps India post 326 for five. The rivals, blown away in the first 10 overs by the Indian pace trio and Ravindra Jadeja, never recover. The last named bags a five-for, and the Men in Blue register their eighth win on the trot. Kolkata parties late into the night as egg rolls and frothy brews fly off the shelves at Park Street and across the city. With India ascendant and seemingly eyeing a fairytale finish in the World Cup, the caravan rolls into the final stretch.

K. C. Vijaya Kumar

Enter DLS

With the monsoon season starting to take over the southeastern part of India, Bengaluru is almost always a beneficiary, with light showers here and there embellishing everything it touches.

For most of the two days leading up to the crucial Pakistan vs. New Zealand encounter in the Garden City of India, everyone had weather maps and DLS calculators open

Owning the moment: Virat Kohli, on his 35th birthday, equalled Sachin Tendulkar's record for most ODI centuries (49). K. R. DEEPAK

instead of team sheets or past scorecards, praying to any form of divinity they knew for a full game.

Inside the press box, an aisle to the right housed the Pakistan contingent. A lone New Zealander sat on the left, jabbing away on his laptop, courtesy of much of the press heading to the Rugby World Cup. The Bangalore Press Club had organised a dinner meet for the visiting reporters, an opportunity to make full use of the melting pot that World Cups can be.

But once the big screen at the Chinnaswamy Stadium announced, "Match called off, Pakistan wins by 21 runs (DLS)," the three rows where the Pakistan reporters were seated, which were quiet until then, erupted. Unscheduled pieces to camera ensued; some were singing in

celebration, and others found the perfect 'shayari' (sonnets), in praise of centurion Fakhar Zaman.

The Indian reporters and even the lone Kiwi headed to the press club, waiting to pat these reporters on the back for a cherished win. But representation arrived only close to midnight, with the reporters sharing their joy with their compatriots back home before joining the others for a hot plate of biryani to end a memorable day.

Lavanya Lakshmi Narayanan

Friendly rivalry in cooler climes

After over three weeks of navigating India's urban chaos, Dharamsala was a welcome break for the Australians and Kiwis. Though the surrounding beauty sharpens the senses, the Himalayan climes help ease into slow living. A subdued sibling rivalry between Australia and New Zealand, where, it is believed, there are more sheep than humans, couldn't have asked for a better setting. The Trans-Tasman contest is



often low on hype and high on substance, and it was no different this time around.

The Black Caps visited the Dalai Lama ahead of the match, and their skipper, Tom Latham, quipped that there were 'certainly no field placements' discussed with the spiritual leader. Aussie captain Pat Cummins, meanwhile, confessed with a smug smile that it was 'sad' that England's campaign was unravelling.

With a shared contempt for the English and some Indian flavour thrown into their midst, the

neighbours from across the Tasman Sea were at home. David Warner, egged on by the DJ's contrivance to play the popular Telugu number Srivalli just as the Australian moved to the square-leg boundary, sent the crowd into delirium with his dance steps.

Then there was Rachin Ravindra, proud of his Indian heritage but a 100 per cent Kiwi, who endeared himself to the fans over the course of his valiant hundred.

A family of three — a son in Virat Kohli and mother and father in Glenn Maxwell and Kane Williamson jerseys

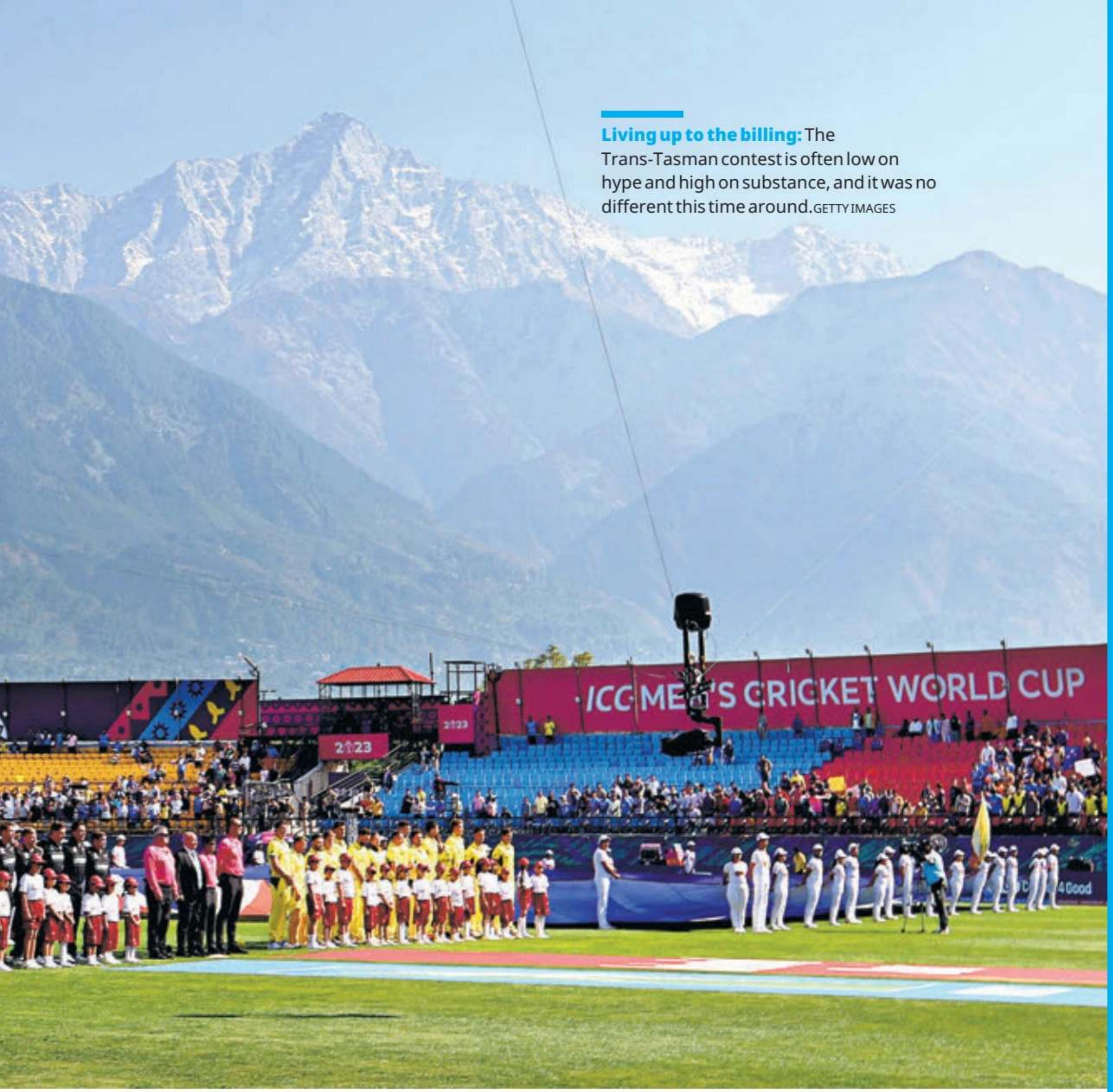
— walking hand-in-hand to the HPCA Stadium was an enduring image of the contest. And a Kiwi fan who couldn't stop brooding over the 'accidental six' at the 2019 World Cup final was a reminder of the scars left by the British.

Dhruva Prasad

Sunny side up

Journalists and sniffer dogs have something in common. They both spend much of their professional lives searching for "explosive" material.

As a result, it was no surprise to



Living up to the billing: The Trans-Tasman contest is often low on hype and high on substance, and it was no different this time around. GETTY IMAGES

see a group of journalists covering the ODI World Cup match between South Africa and New Zealand in Pune gathering to meet the stadium's resident sniffer dog after the pre-match press conference.

The sniffer, an English Cream Labrador, seemed delighted as he received affection from a group of strangers he might never encounter again.

A curious South African journalist asked the dog's caretaker about its name. "Sunny," came the reply.

"Oh, was he named after Sunil

Gavaskar?" inquired the journalist, prompting loud laughter.

The bewildered caretaker looked on as Sunny wagged his tail in excitement amid the amusement.

Here's another shared trait between journalists and sniffer dogs: they both are easily amused.

Pranay Rajiv



Star attraction: The sniffer, an English Cream Labrador, seemed delighted as he received affection from a group of strangers he might never encounter again. PRANAY RAJIV



ON THE WRITE LINE

Sunil Gavaskar



HAVEN'T COME ACROSS A MORE CHILLED-OUT SKIPPER THAN ROHIT SHARMA

Some of the **younger players** have seen what the skipper is doing and have lost their wickets in trying to take the team to a bigger total.

The Indian team's phenomenal run in the group stage of this edition of the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup is truly because of an all-round performance. The batters have batted superbly, and the bowlers have been extraordinary simply because on pitches where they have had little or no help, they have been running through the opposition line-ups like a hot knife through the hardest frozen butter. Watching them in action has been an even greater thrill than seeing the batters, who, apart from the odd one, have been rather pedestrian in comparison.

Their performance stands out simply because there haven't been many World Cups in the past where so many centuries have been scored in the tournament. So, for the Indian bowlers to dismiss sides for under 100 is indicative of how much of an impact they have had in the tournament and the huge part they have played in India's victories.

The pitches in India in October are the best for batting because they are fresh and, coming after the monsoon season, are not dry, which aids spinners.

As the months go on, the pitches become a little more bowler-friendly. The winter months are also good for the batters, as the pitches

have a little moisture that helps the ball skid onto the bat a little bit more.

The one huge aspect of the Indian team's performance that has gone under the radar has been the captaincy of Rohit Sharma. In my years of watching cricket, I don't think I have come across a more chilled-out skipper than Rohit. He has that same easy approach to captaincy as he has with his bat, and while he occasionally shows his disapproval of some lapse in the field, he does it in an elder brotherly manner where the erring player knows he has not quite done what he was expected to do but does not get offended by the glare directed at him.

One can sense the easy camaraderie between him and his players. He is still one of the boys, but his team knows there's a line that cannot be breached. From all accounts, he is a delight at media conferences, where his expressions, coupled with his laconic answers, have made his press briefings a must-attend.

What he has shown in the tournament is to be proactive, not just while batting, where, in the interests of his team getting off to a flying start, he has sacrificed personal milestones and glory.

Some of the younger players have seen what the skipper is doing and have lost their



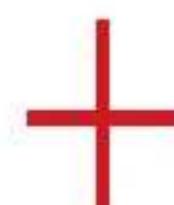
Languid genius: Rohit Sharma has that same easy approach to captaincy as he has with his bat. EMMANUEL YOGINI

wickets in trying to take the team to a bigger total. Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul, and Suryakumar Yadav are prime examples of players who aren't certainties in the team yet but still have gone the extra mile in the pursuit of the team's interest. For Iyer and Suryakumar, to bat in the free way they are doing for the team's sake is a tribute to the skipper and the coach, Rahul Dravid, who during his time was the greatest team player in the Indian team. Rohit's willingness to go the unconventional way was seen once more when he opted to bat against South Africa, and despite getting to an electrifying 40 off just 24 balls, he got out trying to hit another boundary.

Some of the other captains have been pretty ordinary, and if anything, it also brings into question the kind of support they are getting from the coach. For example, despite rain

clouds hovering over the ground and knowing that the DL method comes into play only if a minimum of 20 overs have been bowled, the New Zealand skipper kept bowling his spinners and went over the 20-over mark. There was no attempt whatsoever to delay the proceedings, despite being well ahead of the bowling rate. Similarly, teams opting to field first in the searing October heat have struggled when it comes to chasing, and the energy levels are just not the same batting second. Rohit's bold approach contrasts vividly with the timid ones of most other captains and explains why India have been the dominant team in the tournament so far.

Yes, the Cup is still far away, but India have paved a path that has lit up the tournament like the Diwali lights that we will see all over India shortly.



Rohit Sharma is a delight at media conferences, where his expressions, coupled with his laconic answers, have made his press briefings a must-attend.

» **STATSMAN**
MOHANDAS MENON

Gill's feat

38} The number of innings Shubman Gill needed to reach a personal milestone of 2000 runs in his ODI career. His landmark is now the quickest among 245 batters while aggregating 2000 runs in ODI cricket. Gill bettered the 12-year record of 40 innings, previously held by South African Hashim Amla since January 2011.



Quickest to reach 2000 career runs (in fewest innings) in ODI cricket

Inns	Mts	Batter	Achieved on	Score	Agst	Venue	Runs	Ave.	100/50	HS	Result
38	38	Shubman Gill (Ind)	22 Oct 2023	26	NZ	Dharamsala	2012	62.88	6/10	208	W
40	41	Hashim Amla (SA)	21 Jan 2011	64	Ind	Pt Elizabeth	2040	56.67	6/12	140	W
45	45	Zaheer Abbas (Pak)	2 Oct 1983	48	Ind	Jaipur	2033	50.83	7/8	123	L
45	51	Kevin Pietersen (Eng+)	21 Apr 2007	100	WI	Bridgetown	2026	56.28	5/14	116	W
45	47	Babar Azam (Pak)	16 Sep 2018	33	HKg	Dubai	2006	54.22	8/7	125*	W
45	51	Rassie van der Dussen (SA)	12 Oct 2023	26	Aus	Lucknow	2008	57.37	5/12	134	W

Note:

** + Pietersen's figures above include two ODI matches for a World XI side in October 2005 in Australia.

** The columns 8 to 11 above provide the batters' updated ODI career figures at the end of the match, where they achieved the landmark.

** # Gill was the 241st player to achieve this landmark. Since then, four others have reached 2000 runs in ODIs, taking the tally to 245.

32} The number of innings Virat Kohli needed to register the first duck of his World Cup career, which came against England in Lucknow on 29 October 2023. This is the most number of innings taken by any batter in the World Cup to register their first-ever duck. Curiously enough, three of the best batters of this generation have had the misfortune of recording their first World Cup duck, all of which came in this edition of the tournament in Lucknow. Incidentally, for the first time in WC history, the #3 batters (Kohli and Root) from both sides made ducks in the same match.

Most innings batted to register first World Cup duck

Inn	Mts	Batter (for)	Runs	Ave.	100/50	Against	Venue	Date	Result
32	32	Virat Kohli (Ind)	1384	55.23	3/9	England	Lucknow	29 Oct 2023	Won
23	27	Steve Smith (Aus)	899	42.81	1/8	Sri Lanka	Lucknow	16 Oct 2023	Won
22	22	Virender Sehwag (Ind)	843	38.32	2/3	Sri Lanka	MumbaiWS	2 Apr 2011	Won
22	24	Shahid Afridi (Pak)	259	12.33	0/0	Zimbabwe	Brisbane	1 Mar 2015	Won
22	23	Joe Root (Eng)	933	46.65	3/5	India	Lucknow	29 Oct 2023	Lost
20	22	Tillekeratne Dilshan (SL)	741	43.59	2/3	Afghanistan	Dunedin	22 Feb 2015	Won

Note:

** Sehwag's only duck came in his final WC innings — in the 2011 WC Grand Final.

** Sri Lankan Sanath Jayasuriya holds the record for playing in maximum innings (37) without making a WC duck. Among current players, Aussie David Warner has not made a duck in the 24 innings he has batted.

34} The number of ducks in international cricket for Virat Kohli. On being dismissed before opening his account against England in Lucknow, Kohli has now equalled Sachin Tendulkar's duck tally in all international cricket. For India, only Zaheer Khan (43 in 227 inns), Ishant Sharma (40 in 173), Harbhajan Singh (37 in 284) and Anil Kumble (35 in 307) have more ducks in international cricket. However, among top-order players, Tendulkar and Kohli top this list.

Most ducks for India in international cricket among top-order batters

Os	Batter	Mts	Inns	Runs	Ave.	100	50	HS
34	Sachin Tendulkar	664	782	34357	48.52	100	164	248*
34	Virat Kohli	514	570	26209	54.03	78	136	254*
31	Virender Sehwag	363	431	16892	40.60	38	70	319
30	Rohit Sharma	458	478	18044	43.37	45	99	264
29	Sourav Ganguly	421	485	18433	41.42	38	106	239

Note: Sehwag and Ganguly have also appeared for other teams in ODIs. But the above figures are for India only.

63} The number of innings K. L. Rahul required to reach 2500 runs in his ODI career. This is the joint-second quickest for an Indian batter in ODIs, equaling Navjot Singh Sidhu, who, however, took one match less than Rahul. For India, only Shikhar Dhawan took fewer innings (60). Rahul achieved this landmark during the game against England in Lucknow on 29 October 2023.

Quickest to reach 2500 career ODI runs (in fewest innings) for India

Inns	Mts	Batter	Achieved on	Runs	Ave.	HS	100	50
60	61	Shikhar Dhawan	26 Mar 2015	2507	43.98	137	8	12
63	66	Navjot Singh Sidhu	25 Mar 1994	2501	41.68	134*	4	19
63	67	K. L. Rahul	29 Oct 2023	2507	50.14	112	6	16
64	67	Virat Kohli	20 Oct 2011	2531	45.20	118	7	16
66	71	Sourav Ganguly	7 Jul 1998	2503	40.37	124	4	16

Note: K. L. Rahul is the 197th player to aggregate 2500+ runs in ODI cricket and the 24th Indian to do so.

8} The number of occasions Virat Kohli has been able to aggregate 1000 or more runs in a calendar year in his ODI career. During his knock of 88 against Sri Lanka in Mumbai on 2 Nov 2023, he set a new ODI record of going past 1000 runs in a calendar year on most occasions. He surpassed the previous record held by Sachin Tendulkar, who had achieved the feat of 1000-plus runs in a calendar year on seven occasions from 1994 to 2007.

1000 or more ODI runs in a calendar year on most occasions

1000+ runs	Batter (for)	1000+ runs (year)
8	Virat Kohli (Ind)	1381 (2011), 1026 (2012), 1268 (2013), 1054 (2014), 1460 (2017), 1202 (2018), 1377 (2019), 1054* (2023)
7	Sachin Tendulkar (Ind)	1089 (1994), 1611 (1996), 1011 (1997), 1894 (1998), 1328 (2000), 1141 (2003), 1425 (2007)
6	Sourav Ganguly (Ind)	1338 (1997), 1328 (1998), 1767 (1999), 1579 (2000), 1114 (2002), 1240 (2007)
6	Ricky Ponting (Aus)	1166 (1998), 1038 (1999), 1154 (2003), 1191 (2005), 1424 (2007), 1198 (2009)
6	Kumar Sangakkara (SL)	1010 (2004), 1333 (2006), 1127 (2011), 1184 (2012), 1201 (2013), 1256 (2014)
5	Rohit Sharma (Ind)	1196 (2013), 1293 (2017), 1030 (2018), 1490 (2019), 1060* (2023)

4} The number of occasions when both the openers have had the misfortune of being dismissed for a golden duck (out first ball!) in the same innings. The last three such instances have occurred in a World Cup match, including the latest occurrence in Mumbai by Sri Lankan openers against India on 2 November 2023.

Both openers dismissed for a golden duck in the same innings in an ODI match

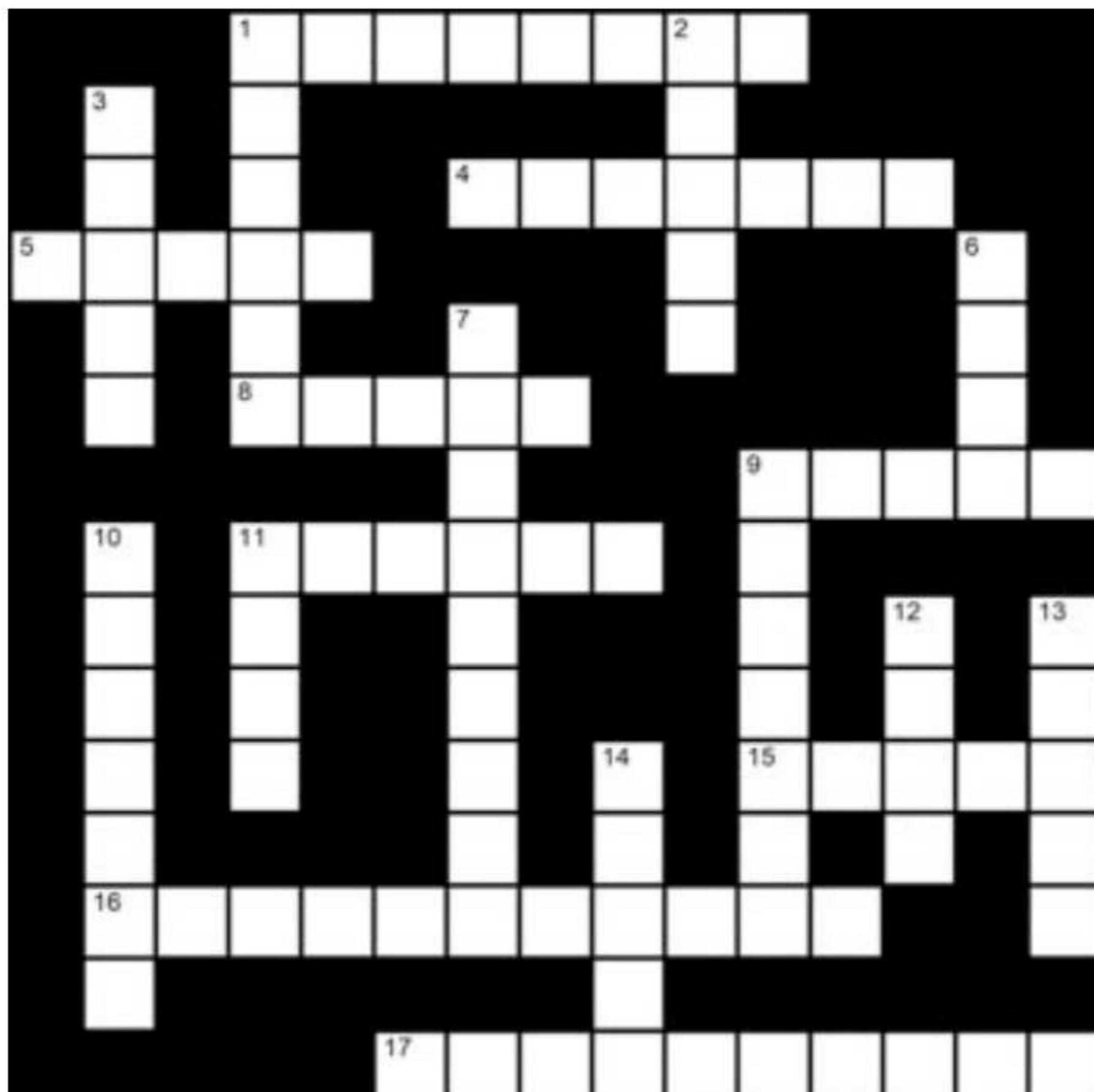
Opener1 (runs/balls)	Opener2 (runs/balls)	For	Agst	Venue	Date	Result	M Inns
Piet Rinke (0/1) <i>b Fidel Edwards</i>	Terry Duffin (0/1) <i>c Denesh Ramdin b Fidel Edwards</i>	Zim	WI	Georgetown	7 May 2006	Lost	2
Lahiru Thirimanne (0/1) <i>Ibw Dawlat Zadran</i>	Tillekeratne Dilshan (0/1) <i>c Afsar Zazai b Shapoor Zadran</i>	SL	Afg	Dunedin	22 Feb 2015	Won	2
Martin Guptill (0/1) <i>Ibw Sheldon Cotterell</i>	Colin Munro (0/1) <i>b Shelden Cotterell</i>	NZ	WI	Manchester	22 Jun 2019	Won	1
Pathum Nissanka (0/1) <i>Ibw Jasprit Bumrah</i>	Dimuth Karunaratne (0/1) <i>Ibw Mohd Siraj</i>	SL	Ind	Mumbai WS	2 Nov 2023	Lost	2

Note: Terry Duffin was captain for Zimbabwe in the above match

All records are correct and updated until 3 November 2023

CROSSWORD

SIRAM SRINIVASAN



ACROSS

- 1 The NBA team from Los Angeles that's not called Lakers. (8)
- 4 Former UFC champion ... Ngannou who competed and lost recently against Tyson Fury. (7)
- 5 Afghanistan head coach. (5)
- 8 The R in NRAI. (5)
- 9 The common first name of tennis player Nagal and javelin thrower Antil. (5)
- 11 Duan is this tall South African cricketer's twin brother. (6)
- 15 Indian Dutch cricketer ... Dutt. (5)
- 16 The all-time leading scorer with the Phoenix Suns who died recently. (6,5)
- 17 The motorsport circuit

Autodromo Jose Carlos Pace is well known as ... (10)

DOWN

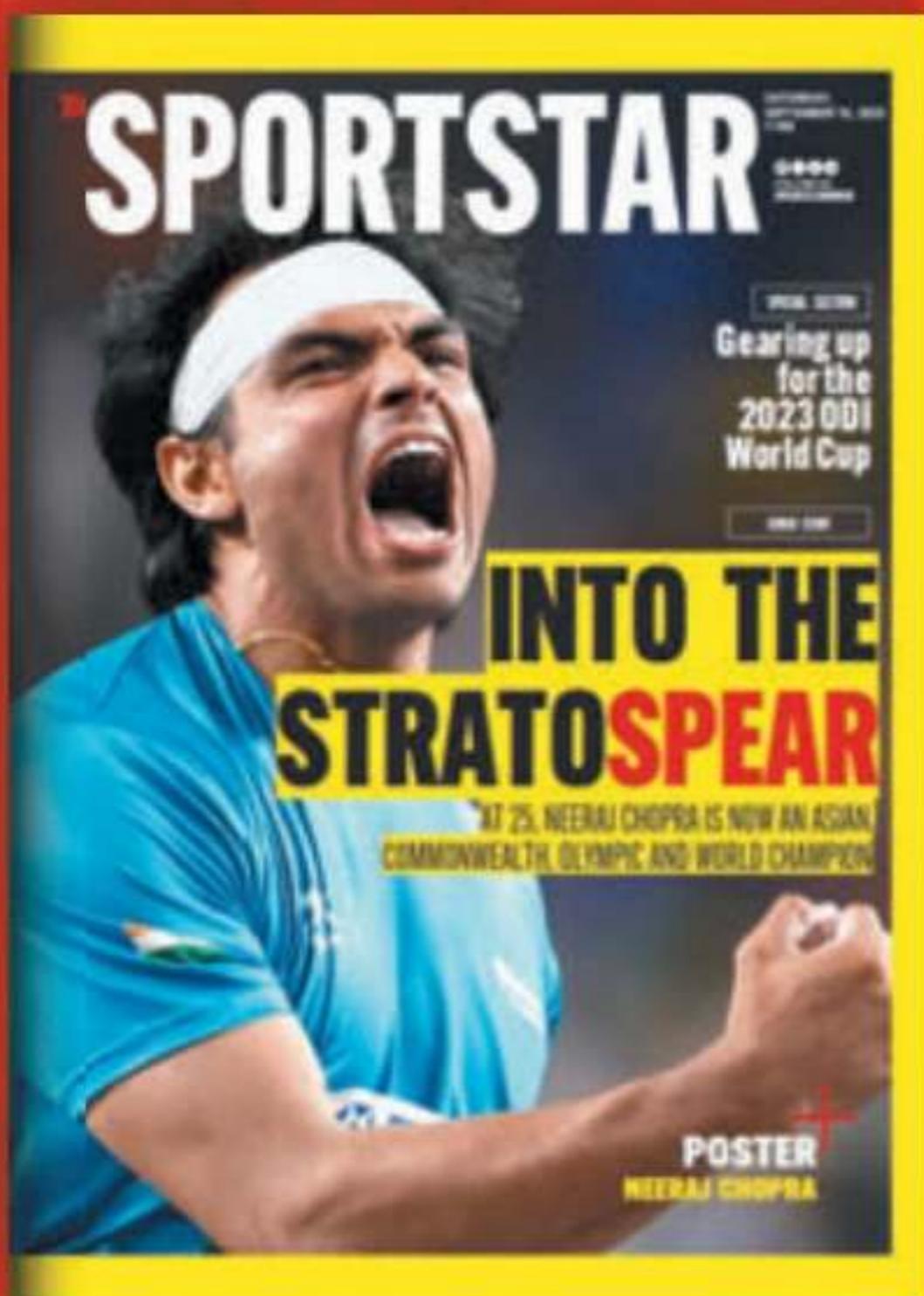
- 1 South African runner Mokgadi ... Semenya. (6)
- 2 Kazakh GM ... Jumabayev. (5)
- 3 Iconic Lankan cricket team supporter, popular as 'Uncle' ... (5)
- 6 In the 1975 World Cup, he had figures of 12-8-6-1 against East Africa. (4)
- 7 Any match between Borussia Dortmund and Bayern Munich, also known as the "German Clasico." (9)
- 9 Tennis player from Greece, Maria ... (7)
- 10 Kaylee ..., first woman swimmer



SOLUTION TO LAST FORTNIGHT'S CROSSWORD

to hold every backstroke world record . (7)

- 11 Former Indian hockey star ... Felix Sebastian. (4)
- 12 Spanish football club ... Vallecano de Madrid. (4)
- 13 Indian TT player ... Thakkar. (5)
- 14 Virdhawal ..., the Indian swimmer who will retire after the National Games. (5)



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Wearing multiple hats: In Kane Williamson's absence, Tom Latham has impressed with his astute leadership skills. NAGARA GOPAL



« New Zealand has faced numerous injury setbacks during the ODI World Cup, yet its stand-in captain, wicketkeeper, and crucial middle-order batter has led with clarity and aplomb »

TOM LATHAM

Mayank

mayank.c@thehindu.co.in

Despite star batter and regular captain Kane Williamson being sidelined due to an injury, New Zealand has shown strength in the ongoing ODI World Cup. Tom Latham, who has led the team in Williamson's absence, discusses the future of ODI cricket, World Cup preparation, the significance of all-rounders, and the importance of money in an interview with *Sportstar*.

While Tests endure as the oldest and purest form and T20 is the disruptor, what's your take on the future of the 50-over format?

One-day cricket is fantastic. It has a little bit of everything — there is a T20 element. But there's also a hint of Test cricket. With the changing landscape of the game, it's difficult to predict where the ODI will be in the future. I'm not sure where it is, but we'll have to wait and see. But I certainly enjoy this format, as I'm sure so do many other guys.

As captain, how easy or difficult was it for you to ensure all bases were covered while picking the World Cup team?

When compared to 2019, it's a reasonably similar squad. There are

always changes, whether they are due to conditions or different teams. But, from our perspective, it's always been about sticking to our blueprint as best we can, which may vary from team to team and country to country depending on the circumstances. But I believe being true to what you want to do as a team makes you more successful.

It doesn't matter if it's a bilateral series at home or away or a World Cup. For us, sticking to the style we want to play will hopefully give us a better chance than coming to the World Cup and changing the way we want to play just because it's a World Cup. That's something our team has done exceptionally well over the last eight or 10 years.

New Zealand's consistency and a match-by-match approach, along with extensive tours and a strong A team, have been key to your success in World Cups. Is there a team mantra?

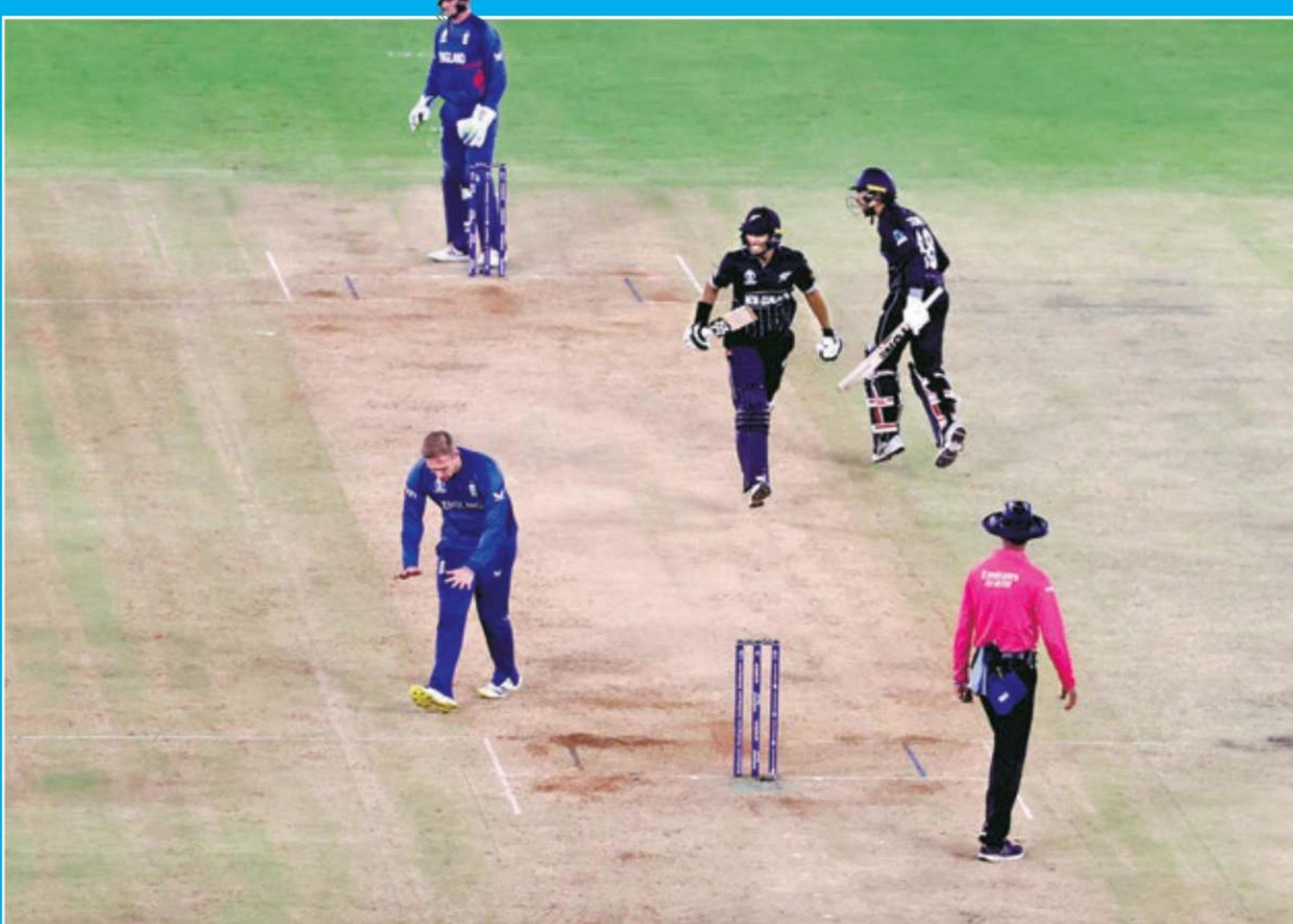
I wouldn't say there is anything we specifically focus on. Over the last few years, there have been New Zealand-A tours to India. We've been fortunate enough to tour these parts of the world, whether here, in Sri Lanka, or Pakistan, so we've played in these conditions a lot. Leveraging

the experience of players who have played in the IPL at many of these venues is beneficial.

Understanding the conditions has been critical because they are so different from what we have back home. The conditions at the last two World Cups [2015 in Australia-New Zealand and 2019 in England] were similar to what we face at home. It all comes down to planning and preparation.

What have been the biggest takeaways for New Zealand so far? Regardless of whether you're winning or losing, I believe there are always things you can improve and do better. If you look at the first few matches, different guys stood up at different points, which is always important in a big tournament.

I like how guys have been proactive in terms of field placement or different ideas from a bowling standpoint. From a batting point of view, we've sort of nailed our blueprint reasonably well in terms of how we want to operate, and I think that's shown in our success initially. In a tournament, I believe you have to move on quickly from game to game and have to take a lot of positives about how you're performing. If you give yourself a



chance and put yourself in the right position, you will hopefully come out on top more often than not.

How important do you think an all-rounder's role is? You have Mitchell Santner and Daryl Mitchell in your team.

All-rounders even up the balance. We're fortunate to have a few in our team, which makes things a lot easier. Many teams in this World Cup have a lot of all-rounders, whether they are spinning or seaming all-rounders. It means you can play with an extra batter or bowler, which has always been critical to winning matches.

Speaking of Santner, he has been good at containing the flow of runs. How important is a defensive bowling option in the middle

overs?

Mitch has been outstanding. He bowls in the top 10, can bowl through the middle, and has bowled in the last 10. So, while he may appear to be a defensive bowler, he is quite attacking. He can turn the ball on almost any surface. He's been fantastic throughout this tournament in terms of performance.

He's played here and been



Avenging defeat: The rematch of the 2019 World Cup final turned out to be a damp squib with the Black Caps cantering home in pursuit of 283.

REUTERS

around the IPL for a few years, so he's familiar with the conditions in these parts of the world. The pressure he's been able to apply, particularly in the middle stages, has been tremendous, and while he may not have picked up the wickets, the guys at the other end are reaping the benefits. He also serves as a handy finisher and has finished a few games for us. He's been

« **All-rounders even up the balance. We're fortunate to have a few in our team** »



All Blacks denied: South Africa clinched a record fourth Rugby World Cup title by beating 14-man New Zealand and retaining its crown in Paris. GETTYIMAGES

playing exceptionally well, and hopefully, can continue that.

It appears like the Kookaburra ball is fading a lot quicker. Do you feel that the reverse swing is more of a factor this time than say during the 2011 or the 2015 World Cup?
I believe that throughout a 50-over game in these parts of the world, the ball does deteriorate and becomes softer quicker than before. We also might see this throughout the tournament when there are a few more used surfaces on either side of the wicket where reverse swing might become a factor.

So, whether it be a softer ball or reverse swing, they are all factors guys put into their preparation. You have to try to utilise those factors as

much as you can, especially from a bowling point of view. Batting-wise, you should be aware that, with the ball being softer, the middle phases can be challenging.

The focus back home was primarily on rugby, which the All Blacks eventually lost in the final. How do you handle it as a team when the spotlight isn't on you?
It's pretty cool that a lot of the guys here like rugby. But, from our perspective, we have support at home.

It may not be as visible as the other teams around here, but we get a lot of messages and know that people are rooting for us. But that has never been our primary focus. It's always been about how we play and collaborate as a group.

You spoke about how playing the IPL has helped players gauge conditions here. What difference does getting a contract for an IPL franchise make?

The IPL is an amazing tournament. Some players have played in it, and some haven't. I have never played, so looking from an outside point of view, being able to mix with different guys from all over the world, not just Indian players, has probably been a huge thing for the sport, and just finding different ways guys can probably train and play together. It is all about trying to gain as much knowledge as possible.

The country vs club debate continues, with some favouring franchise cricket for its financial stability. How crucial is money to you?

Personally, not to me. You look at other guys; different people will say different things, but obviously, some people go for a lot of money in these franchise tournaments, which is a bonus, but some go for a little less. I suppose everyone has their reasons for playing the game, which may differ from person to person.

Afghanistan rises, and makes itself heard

It has been a World Cup of significant firsts for Afghanistan, which is now **more than just a feel-good story.**

Shayan Acharya

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It's a Sunday afternoon at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai, and Jonathan Trott is one of the first to step onto the field to inspect the wicket. The head coach of Afghanistan walks around, adjusts his red cap, and takes a closer look at the surface before asking his assistant coaches to bring out the whiteboard and place it near one of the rollers.

Trott and his coaching staff write the schedule for the day and clarify things for the players. Over the next few minutes, the Afghanistan cricketers, regardless of their seniority, approach the board, examine their assignments and batting positions for the day, and slowly get down to business.

It has been the norm for the Afghan Atalan, as the team is affectionately known by fans, in the ongoing World Cup. The management has focused on discipline, creating a happy space in the dressing room, and allowing players to express themselves. The results are showing as well. With four victories, including those against England and Pakistan, the side has eight points and a serious crack at the semis. However, it did not happen overnight.

According to Trott, the former England batter who took charge of the team in July last year, there wasn't just one specific thing that led to their recent success. Over the past 16 months, he has been working to improve various aspects. This was no easy feat, given the challenges the team faced in the wake of a Taliban takeover back home, an economic crisis, an uncertain future, and numerous defeats.

"What you are seeing now is a side that has more confidence after the win against England. There's a lot of self-belief about their talent, methods, and confidence in



beating Test-playing nations and more historic sides," Trott says.

In the 2015 and 2019 World Cups, Afghanistan finished at the bottom of the points table.

"Hum khule dil se khelte hain (We play with freedom). We have nothing to lose," says Gulbadin Naib, who led Afghanistan in the 2019 World Cup. At the time, there was conflict between selectors and players, which played a role in their last-place ranking. However, this time around, Naib, who is with the team on tour, is pleased to see a much more energetic performance. "We don't have a huge history of the game, but we learned from every mistake. In



the 2019 World Cup, we lost quite a few close games — against Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. Back then, we could not finish a game and lost the plot in key moments, but now, we don't let that happen," Naib says.

In Leeds four years ago, Naib bowled the crucial final over as Afghanistan attempted to defend 227 against Pakistan. It was a nail-biting finish in the end, with Imad Wasim and Wahab Riaz securing the win for Pakistan with just two balls to spare. One of the most thrilling games of the 2019 tournament resulted in a heartbreaking loss for Afghanistan.

"Taking lessons from those

Overseeing transformation:

Jonathan Trott has been influential in charting Afghanistan's ascent in international cricket ever since he replaced Graham Thorpe as the head coach in 2022. GETTY IMAGES

defeats, for us, the last four years were about identifying our weaknesses and turning them into strengths, and the result is quite visible."

In their recent match in Chennai, Afghanistan's Ibrahim Zadran and Rahmat Shah showcased their batting skills and led their team to a convincing eight-wicket victory over

Pakistan. After the match, the players walked around the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium and expressed their gratitude for all the crowd support. Their performance once again vindicated their 'dream chasers' tag.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Lucknow served as Afghanistan's 'home' for cricket. However, the pandemic brought financial challenges. In August 2021, the Taliban's takeover further complicated matters, leading to a shift away from India as home base. Additionally, changes in the Afghanistan Cricket Board and coaching staff occurred. Lance



Picture perfect: Rashid Khan has been the face of Afghanistan cricket for close to a decade. Here, he can be seen celebrating his team's win over Pakistan in the 2023 ODI World Cup.

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Klusener was replaced by Graham Thorpe, who, unfortunately, couldn't take the position due to illness, eventually paving the way for Trott.

The team then relocated to the United Arab Emirates. After showing promise in events like the Asia Cup and the T20 World Cup, the focus shifted to the ODI World Cup. Drawing from their previous experiences in India and with the addition of coaching talents like Milap Mewada and mentor Ajay Jadeja, Afghanistan prepared for the tournament.

"We worked a lot for this moment over the last one and a half years.

We knew that since the World Cup would be in India, the conditions would be ideal for our batters and spinners. So, it was about doing something special, and we did that," says assistant coach and former Afghan cricketer Raees Ahmadzai.

Since August 2021, Afghanistan has featured in 30 ODIs, losing 14 and one yielding no result. Around the same time, India featured in 53 ODIs, while Australia's tally was 35. While Afghanistan played India, Australia, and New Zealand just once in this span—all in the World Cup—most of its ODI outings were against Bangladesh (nine games)

and Sri Lanka (eight games).

Despite initial setbacks—defeats against Bangladesh in February 2022—domestic cricket events—the Shpageeza League and Wazir Mohammad Akbar Khan Provincial Grade Tournament—have been held regularly, the last one being in March this year, where 10 teams participated. Though not many star players featured in it due to international commitments, several youngsters showed their mettle.

"Our domestic structure has improved, but going forward, we need lots of international matches against strong teams. If we play

« In this World Cup, the batters have taken on a more significant role for Afghanistan »



Batting might: Ikram Alikhil has been one of Afghanistan's batting mainstays in this year's ODI World Cup.

GETTYIMAGES

more, we will be counted as one of the favourites, at least in Asian conditions," says Ahmadzai.

"This is the third time we played against England, while with Pakistan, it was our seventh outing. We played New Zealand for the third time, so if we get to play them more, we will only get better."

In recent years, Afghanistan has largely relied on its star spinners, Rashid Khan and Mujeeb Ur Rahman. However, in this World Cup, the batters have taken on a more significant role. In the 2019 edition, a total of seven players were tried out in top-three positions for nine games, and they collectively made 648 at an average of 24.

This time around, only three players have been tried in the top three, scoring 730 in seven outings at an average of 36.50.

Ahmadzai, coming from a time when Afghan cricketers had limited facilities in Kabul and mainly trained in Peshawar, acknowledges the significance of their World Cup

success and attributes it to Trott.

"He is like us — a true fighter. He has the same mentality as an Afghan, and he's a tough guy who does not like excuses. And it's the same with us — we don't care whether it's a good pitch or a bad pitch. We are here to win and show the world what we can do," Ahmadzai says.

Trott concurs with a smile: "Losing isn't a great experience. We are not here to make up for the numbers, make experiences, etcetera, etcetera... We are here to win, and from winning, you get experiences."

According to wicketkeeper-batter Ikram Alikhil, Trott and Jadeja are a constant source of motivation. "It's not just about one game. At every moment, the coach (Trott) and Ajay (sir) boost our morale. Even in tricky situations, they tell us, 'Don't worry, chase ho jayega'. They guide us on how to assess conditions, apply our minds, and never lose hope," says Alikhil.

"The vibe in the dressing room is always positive, and that inspires all of us. While the seniors like [Mohammad]Nabi and Rashid are always there to help us, throughout the tournament, the coaches have

always backed us through thick and thin."

The journey thus far has been a monumental one with Afghanistan also qualifying for the 2025 Champions Trophy for the first time. Ahmadzai acknowledges the role played by the Indian Premier League (IPL) in this transformation. "Playing in the IPL and other leagues has boosted the confidence of the players, and we are reaping the benefits now," he says. "For instance, Noor (Ahmad) was with me at the U-19 level, but after the IPL stint with the Gujarat Titans, he's a different person. He looks very mature. So, these tournaments have not only given our players experience but have also boosted their confidence."

This is likely one of the reasons Alikhil is optimistic about chasing down a tall total even when the team is five wickets down. "That's how we have been in this tournament. Earlier, our wins would often be termed upsets, but we have shown the world that we can win regularly against big teams. We know that if we can improve our game, it will inspire the next generation, and that's our aim," he says with a smile, "Hum kar payenge (We can do it...)"



PILLARS OF TEAM INDIA'S FUTURE STRONGER THAN EVER

India will play five T20Is against Australia at home immediately after the ODI World Cup, where some of the **top SMAT performers could get a look in.**

Sahil Mathur

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The Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (SMAT), India's premier domestic T20 tournament, hardly ever draws large crowds. But it remains highly significant for the country's cricket system and the national selectors, especially with the upcoming T20 World Cup just seven months away. Selectors Salil Ankola and Shiv Sundar Das were in attendance when Punjab secured its first title, defeating

Baroda in a thrilling high-scoring final at the IS Bindra Stadium in Mohali. This year's tournament has aligned well with international T20 trends, emphasising aggressive batting and placing less emphasis on wicket preservation.

It also saw the most number of sixes being hit (1503) in the history of SMAT.

Setting the tone

The second day of the tournament saw plenty of records breaking, with Punjab



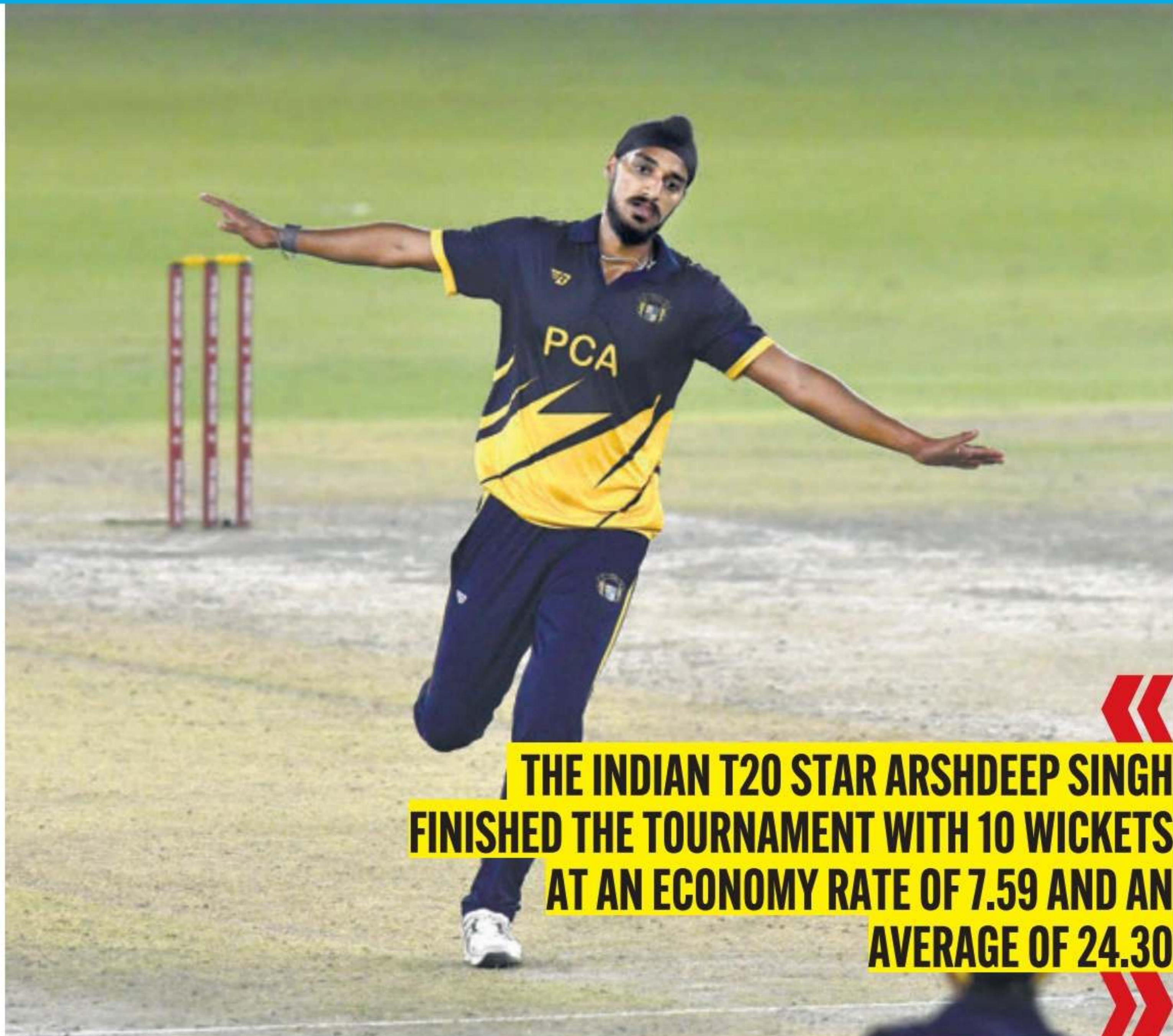
One for keeps: A jubilant Punjab team after it secured its maiden Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy title by beating Baroda in a high-scoring thriller in Mohali. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

smacking the highest score of 275/6 against Andhra while recording the most sixes hit in an innings by an Indian T20 team (22). On the same day, Ashutosh Sharma's 11-ball fifty for Railways against Arunachal Pradesh broke the long-standing record of Yuvraj Singh's 12-ball fifty, which he scored against England in the inaugural World T20 in 2007.

In Punjab's successful campaign, 23-year-old Abhishek Sharma played a major role, scoring 485 runs at a strike rate of 192.46. The opener

+

The likes of Riyan Parag, Abhishek Sharma and Suyash Sharma did well at SMAT but looking ahead at the T20 World Cup, are they ready for the international stage?



THE INDIAN T20 STAR ARSHDEEP SINGH FINISHED THE TOURNAMENT WITH 10 WICKETS AT AN ECONOMY RATE OF 7.59 AND AN AVERAGE OF 24.30



hit 39 sixes and found the fence (both fours and sixes) every 3.4 balls. He was rightfully adjudged the Player of the Tournament.

Proving their mettle

Meanwhile, Riyan Parag's purple patch continued unabated. The 21-year-old was the highest run-scorer in the Deodhar Trophy (354) and he followed it up with seven consecutive fifty-plus scores in SMAT. He amassed 510 runs, becoming only the third player to cross the 500-run mark in the tournament, at a staggering average of 85 while striking at 182.79.

But it was not only about Parag but also about Assam's development as a burgeoning white-ball powerhouse. For the first time in the tournament's history, the Land of

Stepping up: Baroda needed 32 off 12 with seven wickets in hand when India and Punjab pacer Arshdeep Singh bowled a clutch 19th over, claiming three wickets in five balls to tilt the scales in his team's favour.

SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Blues secured a top-four finish. Apart from first-time captain Parag, Rishav Das, and Sumit Ghadigaonkar also left a mark.

Under the spotlight

Bhuvneshwar Kumar had a satisfying return for Uttar Pradesh, finishing as the joint-third highest wicket-taker with 16 scalps, while Yuzvendra Chahal secured 11 victims in seven innings. Sanju Samson's performance didn't leave a lasting

impression, as he scored 138 runs in six innings. Harshal Patel, who also opened for Haryana in six games, had an underwhelming tournament, ending with seven wickets and 124 runs. Umran Malik, Mukesh Kumar, Washington Sundar, Avesh Khan, and Arshdeep Singh also made minimal impact in most games.

Rinku Singh, Tilak Varma, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Ravi Bishnoi, and Yashasvi Jaiswal showcased their potential. Rinku performed well in the lower order, scoring 256 runs at a strike rate of over 170. Tilak hit a century against Baroda, while Gaikwad achieved the same feat against Vidarbha. Jaiswal provided quickfire starts for Mumbai.

With Hardik Pandya sidelined for a few weeks, the Indian selectors will



be looking for his replacement, both in the short and long term. Shivam Dube and Venkatesh Iyer had opportunities but didn't make a significant impact. Dube scored 190 runs for Mumbai, and Iyer managed 122 in five games for Madhya Pradesh. Pace-bowling all-rounders like Sanvir Singh and Abhimanyusingh Rajput also showed potential. However, they may need more time to gain widespread attention.

Leg spin taking a quick turn

Chahal faces stiff competition from Ravi Bishnoi, who has already played 16 T20Is for India. Bishnoi's quick leg spin aligns with the new T20 trend. Representing Gujarat, he took 13 wickets in eight games with an economy just above six.

However, a rising star, Suyash

Great touch: Riyan Parag was the highest run-scorer in the Deodhar Trophy (354) and he followed it up with seven consecutive fifty-plus scores in SMAT. S. S. KUMAR

Sharma, outshone both spinners. Bowling for Delhi, he secured 18 wickets in just seven games, making him the joint-second-highest wicket-taker in the tournament. What's remarkable is his economy rate of 4.64.

What's in there for the Indian team?

The likes of Riyan Parag, Abhishek Sharma and Suyash Sharma did well at SMAT but looking ahead at the T20 World Cup, are they ready for the international stage?

India will also play five T20Is against Australia at home immediately after the ongoing ODI World Cup, where some of the top performers from this competition could get a look in. The future looks promising.

◁ Suyash Sharma outshone seniors Chahal and Bishnoi, picking 18 wickets in seven games for Delhi ▷

 If you really want to win a medal for India, work hard, train hard. You should be mentally and physically fit to win more 

ANURAG THAKUR

Vijay Lokapally

Union Sports Minister Anurag Singh Thakur has set his eyes on India achieving its best medal haul at the Paris Olympics next year. India's success at the recent Asian Games has convinced him that this is the best sporting phase since Independence and needs to be capitalised upon. In this interview, he shares his views on various aspects.

How do you look at this tenure of yours? Is it satisfying?

Like any other Indian, I'm also very happy and satisfied with the performance of our athletes at the Asian Games and the Para Asian Games. It has been a consistent and commendable performance from the entire contingent.

But if you look at the last two years, the policies of the Narendra Modi government have been implemented well. And that is bearing fruit from the Tokyo Olympics, Paralympics, Deaflympics, Special Olympics, Commonwealth Games, and now the Asian Games and the Federation Games. We have won the highest-ever number of medals in all these tournaments.

And the foundation is also becoming stronger. Our player pool is becoming much larger. So, I think, in a way, the policies of the Modi government with Khelo India and the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) and the increase in the budget, which has gone up by more than two and a half times, are getting us the

results. So it is a combination of sporting talent and good administration.

Have you given personal attention to this?

Yes, because I've seen that in my previous roles in the Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association and the BCCI. In a module where I tried increasing the facilities for the players, increasing the budget, creating more grounds and equipment, and providing the best coaches, I delivered at the state level. At the BCCI level, with the under-19 and India 'A' teams getting more exposure, it has expanded the base—the bench strength has increased. Similarly, at the recent Para Games, we won 111 medals compared to the 72 medals last time. Even at the Asian Games, while we had 70 medals last time, now we have 107 medals with 28 golds.

What is your point of view?

Seeing the results, I think if you give the players the facilities, they can perform well. We had the same kind of athletes earlier. But the facilities

were missing. Now, they have nothing to worry about. Their boarding, lodging, and training are taken care of by the Government of India, and they also get an out-of-pocket allowance. That is with the TOPS because it comes with two components: the core and the development athlete. The Khelo India athletes, close to 3000, also get nearly ₹6,20,000 per annum, which is a good amount for looking after their needs and training.

You always talk about the need to have quality coaches. How much has that contributed since you've ensured that they had the best available coaches?

It is very important to have the right pool of coaches. There are two major factors. One is to hire the best coaches and then start a programme of 'training the trainer and coaching the coach.' We should have a similar setup down the line — it should be a top-to-bottom approach with the top coaches at the top level, and they should train the coaches until the district level. States and districts should also follow a similar method so that the athlete working at the district


If you give the players the facilities, they can perform well. We had the same kind of athletes earlier. But the facilities were missing.



level knows what is expected at the national level.

Do you believe India is on course to becoming a major sporting nation?
Yes. That is the idea behind it. And Prime Minister Modi wants India to be a sporting superpower. For that, you need to have quality events, and have the best players perform well. And you need to have the best infrastructure.

I think in all directions. Since I took over, I've had nearly 450 new coaches. We have surrendered the administrative posts and hired more coaches. We are opening 1000 Khelo India centres, and I'm not taking five years.

In this financial year, we'll complete all 1000 Khelo India centres, and 1000 former champion athletes will be hired in those centres.

That means they will get job opportunities, and at the same time, they can train more than 1,000

players at the grassroots level in their home districts.

Is this the best phase of Indian sport since Independence?
If you look at the facilities, budget, and growing infrastructure, yes, we can say that in the last 75 years, this is the best period. But we are not stopping here. We have to be among the top sporting nations.

As a Sports Minister, how do you look at the doping menace? What is the government doing to curb it?
We're trying to create awareness. Also, more dope testing is happening. We have passed the National Anti-Doping Bill. And there are effective tools to create more awareness—digitally and physically. I think more associations should come on board to create awareness at the grassroots level because, in a country with a population of 1.4 billion, mere physical classes or awareness

campaigns may not help. It has to go both with the App and at ground level. So we're trying to work on both. And if anyone is doping, all I can tell is that you may perform in one event, but you will be caught in the next. That's not the way forward. If you want to win a medal for India, work and train hard. You should be mentally and physically fit to win more. If not today, then tomorrow you will lose the medal you won if you are guilty of doping. On various occasions, the PM has urged youngsters to stay away from the menace of doping. When he met the Asian Games winners, he told them to spread awareness about the ills of doping.

What made you announce "Abki baar, sau paar."? Is it because of the Olympics, or you were sure of the inputs from your team of coaches and experts?

I think you have raised the right

question. Not many believed me when I said this. So everyone said last time you had 70. How can there be a 50% jump? But if you are connected at the grassroots and you know what is happening, what kind of facilities we are providing, and how frequently our Mission Olympic Committee meets, then you will understand my confidence. They meet every fortnight. We keep track of the players, what they're doing, and how the training is going—all these things make a lot of difference. So, if you're keeping track and making the right calculation, you will understand. We may get five medals, plus or minus. It could have been 95. But in the end, it was 107. With God's grace and the athletes' performances, we were able to achieve this.

A lot of associations want to adopt the BCCI module, which you had put in place, if you remember, as the BCCI secretary and then as the president. What can the other associations learn from this?

Every association or federation will have its own set of requirements. A few federations may have quality administrative staff. But many will be working like the traditional sports associations. They must realise the time has come for professionalism—whether your Secretary-General is effective in implementing the policy decisions, day-to-day monitoring is done by the general manager (administration), or by the general manager (sports), or you have a CEO in place. The term CEO looks fancy. But if anyone can afford a good CEO, they should. If they can't, they should have a professional team at the general manager level so that whatever decision they're taking will be implemented. Because implementation is the key, it's not what you're designing; it's how effectively you are implementing.

The honourable Prime Minister, at the 141st IOC session, declared India's intent to host the 2036 Olympics, which you had also indicated earlier. Do you think the absence of a professional CEO in the IOA, despite multiple directives from the IOC, hampers India's chances?

The IOA is an independent, autonomous body. I think they have already decided about it. The only issue is about the experience of a CEO. You know you won't find many with around 10 years of experience as the CEO in a senior position. So, I think they have an issue with that. It depends on what your requirements are.

What is the status of the Wrestling Federation of India? When can we expect an election as the international body has said that Indian wrestlers will have to compete under a neutral flag till the elections are held?

We have asked the IOA to form a subcommittee. They have already got one, and it has already announced the election. There is a returning officer in place, too, but unfortunately, a previous association has gone to court, and there is a stay in the Punjab and Haryana High Court. That's a challenge.

Do you think the National Games in Goa could have been better planned and fitted somewhere else in the calendar rather than at the end of a gruelling season, while also clashing with the cricket World Cup?

You need to look at the upcoming talent because most of the athletes will be busy with preparation for the Olympics. So, if you want to have the best talent in a

R.V. MOORTHY

country like India, we should not look at a limited set of players. It will help in identifying new talent.

Talking of the World Cup, why weren't the visas issued to cricket fans from Pakistan?

It is up to government policy or invitations, too.

Is this the most satisfying phase of your career — as a sportsman, administrator, and a politician.

As a full-time Lok Sabha Member of Parliament, BCCI president, IOA vice president, Parliament Standing Committee chairman, and youth wing president for the longest time in the BJP, every role has been challenging. And if you work with a Prime Minister like Modi who wants to deliver, I think it is an uphill task because you want India to be a sporting nation. For that, you need to work 24x7 to be successful. If you look at the results, yes, I'm very happy. If you look at the aspirations of the new India and Prime Minister Modi, I think we still need to work a lot on the ground. So, for the next 12 years, until India hosts the Summer Olympics and the Youth Olympics, we should have more athletes who can win medals.

What do you have in store for sporting talent in the North-East?

A National Sports University costing ₹900 crore was awarded to Manipur. There are more than 30 States and Union territories that have more population than Manipur, but we have given it to the NorthEast, which should be the hub of sports. NorthEast has been producing a lot of sportspersons. So, I think that was the right decision.

It is said that you have elected

« If we don't appoint elected sportsmen, then you have an issue. And if we do, then you also have an issue »





Inspiring leadership: The policies of the Modi government with Khelo India and the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) and the increase in the budget are getting us the results. PTI

people like P. T. Usha (head of IOA), Dilip Tirkey (Hockey India) and Kalyan Choubey (All India Football Federation) so that they don't speak anything against the government?

If we don't appoint elected sportsmen, then you have an issue. And if we do, then also you have an issue. Let me make it clear. I have always believed that administration is a very different ball game. Even coaching. It's not that if you're a good player, you have to be a good coach or administrator. Very different roles. Every individual can play a very different role. I'm a former player. But am I a good administrator? It is for others to judge whether I am a good cricket administrator, a Sports Minister, or a Member of Parliament. So, how do you move from one position to another? How do you motivate yourself to work harder? I think all of them have been elected by their

respective bodies. They should deliver now.

How do you keep yourself fit, motivated, and so much involved. You're not just handling sports, you're handling the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, too?
Fitness *ka dose, aadha ghanta roz* (Fitness dose, half an hour daily). That's the mantra for everyone. Whatever you do, you can take 30 minutes out for yourself. Even 15 minutes will be enough if you want to work hard. In a small room, too, you can do yoga, or quick cardio, or you can do other things like sit-ups and push-ups—whatever you want to do. You can work on your physique because it's very important. If you want to work 18 to 19 hours every day, which we do, then you need to be physically fit. Luckily, I'm able to take some time out for myself (**pic, left**).

What will make you happy? India hosting the Olympics or winning medals at the Olympics?

Hosting the Olympics without winning medals is not complete. So, that is why I said I was working on

increasing the medal tally by 2036. For that, whatever is required at the grassroots level, we will do that. And hosting the Olympics in the manner we organised G-20 will be a memorable event for the world.

Are you reaching out to rural India?

Of course. If you look at the talent, the majority of them are coming from tier 2 or tier 3 cities or remote villages. Talent lies in rural India, and the facilities are also growing in smaller towns. TOPS is supporting their training and development under the guidance of top coaches to secure medals. As a Sports Minister, my gate is open from seven in the morning until one o'clock at night.

What is your message to the youth?

I would like to tell them, 'Let's make India a developed country by 2047'. For that, we have to remember the words of Prime Minister Modi. 'Don't ask for your rights; only do your duties.' So every Indian should contribute towards making India a developed country. Take pride in your heritage and culture.

READY FOR THE FINAL ACT

The Indian women's success in the Asian Champions Trophy proved that their Paris dreams **are on the right track.**

Uthra Ganesan

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Missing out on gold medal and a Paris Olympics berth at the Hangzhou Asian Games had cast doubts on the ability, selection, coaching and even attitude of the Indian women's hockey team.

It looked riddled with self-doubt throughout the tournament and crashed out in the semifinal against host and eventual champion China.

Later, both the coach and players admitted they weren't good enough.

And so, when the Asian Champions Trophy (ACT) came around in less than a month, coach Janneke Schopman and her girls knew what they were up against — recent form, naysayers, self-doubt and scrutiny from the Federation.

There were also the larger-than-expected crowds — something that the Indian men's team is used to, but a novelty for the women.

But by the end of the competition, it was clear that the team had regained the confidence and belief of being Asia's best.

The uncertainties were replaced with a smooth on-field rhythm and the hunger for the Olympic ticket was renewed afresh. It was also a relief for Hockey India officials, knowing that knee-jerk actions were not needed.



AS CAPTAIN SAVITA STOOD TALL – IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE – WITH A TROPHY INDIA HAD WON ONLY ONCE BEFORE (IN 2016), THE TEAM OF 20-ODD GIRLS FINALLY SHOWED ITS TRUE METTLE

As captain Savita stood tall — in more ways than one — with a trophy India had won only once before (in 2016), the team of 20-odd girls finally showed its true mettle.

A good problem to have

With almost the entire squad retained from the Asian Games, India was out to find itself in the Women's ACT (WACT).

And it managed to do so, along with a few youngsters who gave Schopman a “good problem of plenty” in selection, even as the likes of Navjot Kaur and Sharmila Devi continue to push for a return.

Salima Tete and Sangita Kumari, both 21 and both from Jharkhand's Simdega, shone in the WACT. Salima was adjudged Player of the Tournament, while Sangita was India's top-scorer. Despite playing out of their comfort zone, they brought balance to the team, while staying true to their potential and ability to adapt and perform.

Their confident and aggressive attacking game high up the field was in stark contrast to past players from their region, who preferred to be defenders or at best defensive midfielders. It's a transition as much

in the mind and attitude as in performance. The fact that the duo soaked up the attention from the local crowd and fed on it augurs well too.

However, the experience of the injured Sushila Chanu was missed. And, Vaishnavi Phalke, the only one to be dropped, found herself drafted back in after Sonika was ruled out with a possible concussion injury following an on-field collision.

Even Savita, unwell for almost the entirety of the tournament, got respite with Bichu Devi even playing the entire pool match against Korea.



Tackling woes: Not everything was flawless, though. Schopman was upfront about her displeasure with the team's on-field discipline.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

It will be interesting to see how she shapes up as India prepares for life after Savita.

For now, however, the Indian captain proved there is no one close to her. A penalty save in the final underlined her brilliance over the entire week.

Defensive strength

As much as the youngsters impressed with their speed and

scoring skills, India's success was largely built on the solidity and experience at the back, where the trio of Deep Grace Ekka, Udita and Nikki Pradhan ensured there were no loose balls for the rivals.

With Neha often falling back to augment the defence and Nisha and Jyoti doing their bit, India's defence was impenetrable. Deep Grace deservedly stepped up to receive the

Player-of-the-Match award in the final. That India conceded only three goals in seven matches is proof.

Areas of concern

Not everything was flawless, though. Schopman was upfront about her displeasure with the team's on-field discipline. India earned the most cards throughout the tournament — five green and yellow each — with many of them



That winning feeling: The victorious Indian women's hockey team (above) beat Japan 4-0 in the final to lift the Asian Champions Trophy. **Below:** Vandana Katariya celebrates a goal during the match. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

coming in the final quarter of the matches.

"I keep telling them — no cards," Schopman shrugged after every game, only for it to happen again.

In the semifinal, India found two of its most experienced players — Vandana Katariya and Udita — sitting out with five-minute suspensions in the final seven minutes.

It didn't help that most of the fouls came in open play and were unnecessary. It may not have affected much against relatively weaker Asian sides but come the Olympic qualifiers and the team could get hurt badly against teams such as Germany and New Zealand.

Schopman would also be looking closely at penalty corners. Although it got better in the last couple of games, India still converted only eight out of the 36 it earned. Most of

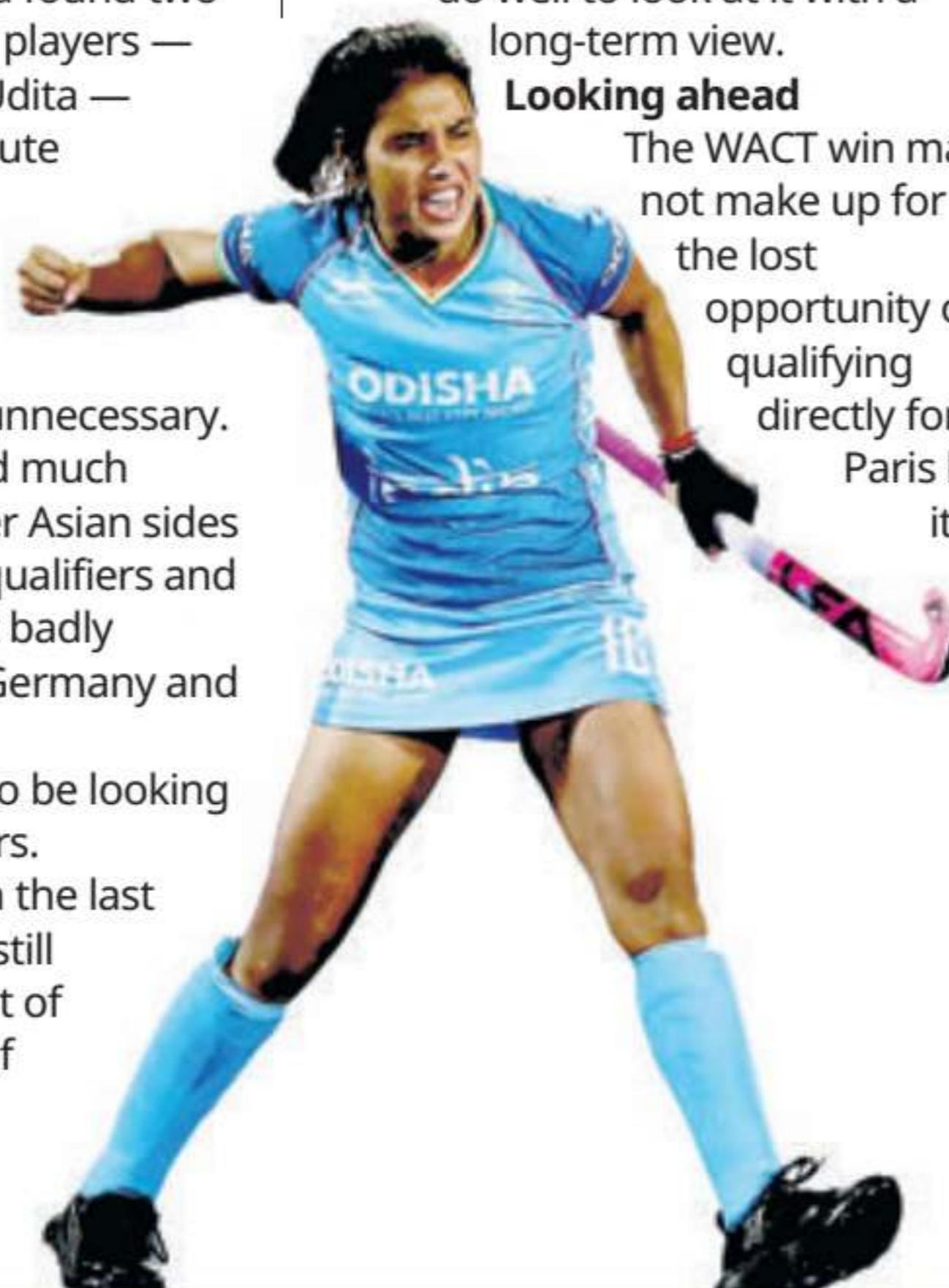
them were follow-up PCs, with problems in both stopping and flicking.

Deepika is still raw and unreliable, and though Deep Grace steps in often, India lacks a match-winning flicker like Gurjit Kaur, currently out of favour.

While all teams struggled in this department on the recently relaid turf that didn't have enough time or matches to get settled, India would do well to look at it with a long-term view.

Looking ahead

The WACT win may not make up for the lost opportunity of qualifying directly for Paris but it



does put the team in a much better position to do so when the Qualifiers come around in less than two months.

With WACT runner-up Japan being one of the other seven teams — Chile, Germany, Italy, USA, New Zealand and Czech Republic being the others — it will not be easy. But the fact that it will be held again in Ranchi will be a bonus.

The knowledge of conditions and how the turf behaves will also help.

The team also will be without the burden of having to win. A top-three finish is enough to secure passage.

Most importantly, the team now knows what a vocal crowd behind you can do and that it will be an advantage.

Four years ago, the Indian women had to take a similar, longer and tougher route to qualification.

They sealed it eventually at home in Bhubaneswar against USA, coached, incidentally, by Schopman back then. The Tokyo Olympics then proved to be a turning point for the game in India.

With the WACT providing the reset platform it needed, India will hope there is bigger success in store in Paris 2024.



Elusive glory: Saurav Ghosal (right) was denied a gold medal by Malaysia's Eain Yow Ng during the final of the men's singles squash event at the Hangzhou Asian Games. PTI

SAURAV RALLYING ON FOR A FINAL FLOURISH

Saurav Ghosal, 37, **has seen many seasons** in world squash, having dedicated the better part of the last two decades to his career in the sport. Does he have it in him to push till the 2028 Olympics?

K. Keerthivasan & Lavanya Lakshmi Narayanan
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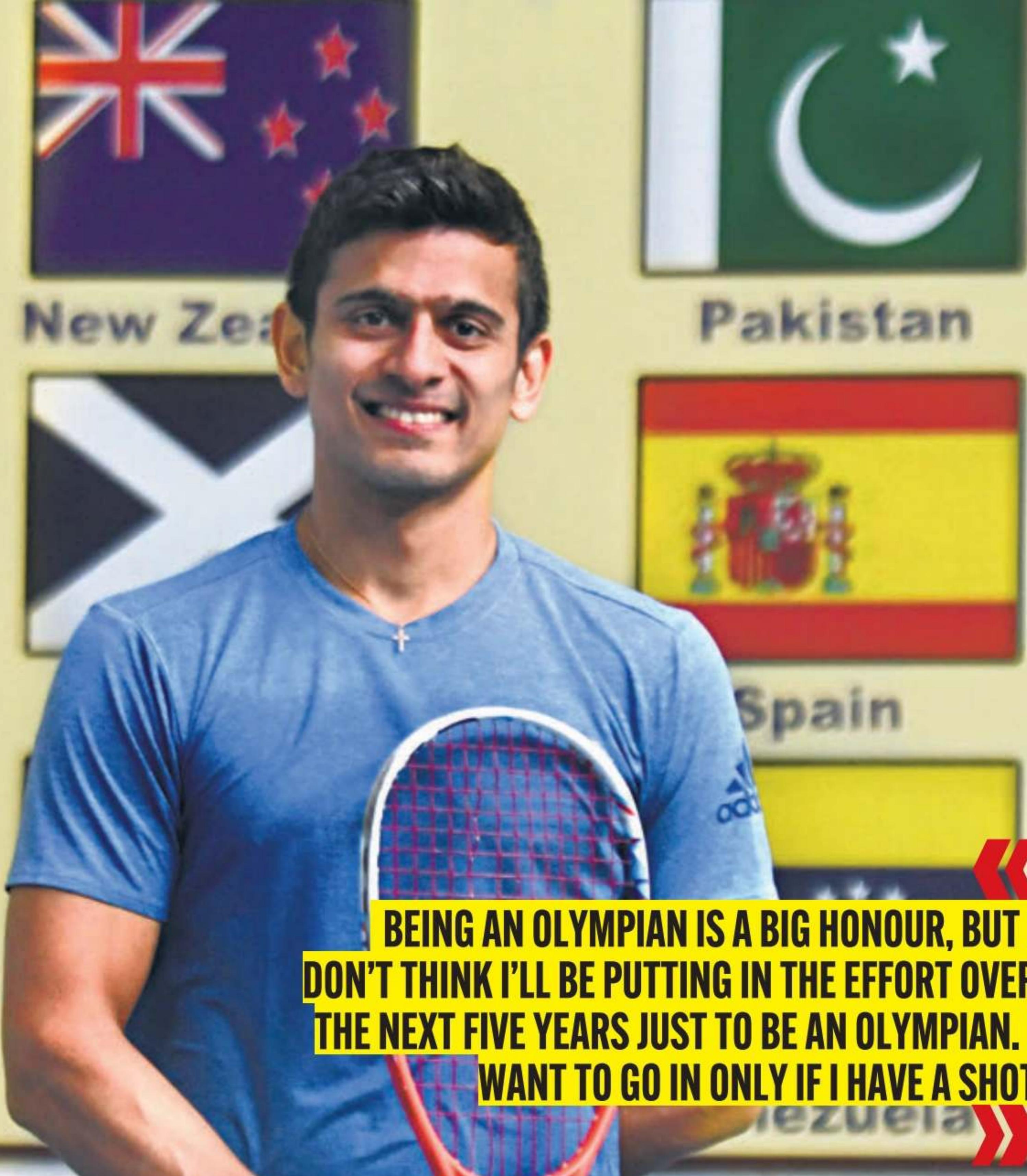
When Saurav Ghosal lost his men's singles final at the Asian Games, it was hard to keep the feelings of disappointment and disillusionment at bay. At 37, the heaviness of not clinching an elusive gold medal at the Asiad in his sixth attempt felt a bit much to carry. Ghosal called close friend and coach James Wilstrop, hinting at the need to sit down and have the hard talk about his future in the sport.

Between that phone call and the next conversation the duo would have, a series of remarkable events transpired. At the 141st session of the International Olympic Council in

Mumbai, squash was formally added to the tournament roster of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. Felicitations for the Asian Games medallists were in their last leg and Ghosal found time to drop Wilstrop a text to schedule their phone call.

"Speak about what?" the Brit would write back. "What is there to speak about? The Olympics is there now!"

"I think a lot of people still can't believe that we are in. We understand that we're in only in the LA Games right now and we still have to work very hard to make sure that we grow the sport in the right way, through digitisation and sustainability to show to the IOC, and



BEING AN OLYMPIAN IS A BIG HONOUR, BUT I
DON'T THINK I'LL BE PUTTING IN THE EFFORT OVER
THE NEXT FIVE YEARS JUST TO BE AN OLYMPIAN. I
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Remember the name: Saurav Ghosal shows off his National Championships record. B.JOTHI RAMALINGAM

subsequent organising committees of the Olympics, that squash deserves to stay in," Ghosal tells *Sportstar*.

The 37-year-old has seen many seasons in world squash, having dedicated the better part of the last two decades to his career in the sport. He returned from Hangzhou with his ninth Asiad medal, having made the podium in every single edition since Doha 2006. **The squash community has been screaming at the top of its lungs about Olympic inclusion for years.** Now, that this milestone has been reached, Ghosal must contend with a bigger opponent — time.

The veteran squash player will be 42 by the time the LA Games come around. This isn't an age bracket too many professional players belong to in competitive squash.

Colombian Miquel Rodriguez, world ranked 13 now, will be 42 in five years, while world No. 8 Tarek Momen of Egypt will turn 40. Ghosal believes that the chance to make the Olympic podium is the dangling carrot most players will use to prolong their careers.

Ghosal is of the opinion that players will want to be in 2028 at Los

Angeles, irrespective of their age.

"I think you might have a few when the Olympics come around. At least people are going to try. Players will give up World Championship titles for that Olympic gold. It remains to be seen now whether people will make it and actually be on the podium at 40 or 41 or 42 or whatever the age is," he says, with a wry smile.

But does he have five more years to give to squash? To chase a singles gold at the Worlds, or better still the Olympics? Can his family pull on?

"All these years, I've been all in. It's something that I have to grapple with, something that I have to sit down with my wife and figure out — whether we, as a family, can make it work over the next five years. It's not an easy call or easy decision," Ghosal explains. He cites tennis legend Roger Federer as an example.

"Someone like Federer, who's an

absolute sporting inspiration, would have played longer if his body allowed him to, because he's unbelievable. However, his body couldn't keep up and so Federer didn't want to just stick around and be one of the people in the mix. He wanted to be THE person, as he was for so many years," he says.

"If I do go for the Olympics, I want to do it only if I have a shot. I don't want to do it just to be there. Of course, being an Olympian is a big honour, but I don't think I'll be putting in the effort over the next five years, just to be an Olympian. I want to go in with a shot. Physically, whether I can sustain it till I'm 41-42, and then mentally too are all things to think about. I've done this for 20 years. Can I be there for the next five years and really be ready to fight a war every time I go on court? Because that's what it takes," he adds.

Towards that end, Ghosal has been picky with his tournament schedule, something which he credits for his longevity, along with injury management and a carefully curated nutrition regimen.

"I think it's about taking care of the body. Love for the sport is a more mental thing to help you stay with the sport. I think the injury part, you do everything you can control. I've been working with my trainer David Brown for 10 years now. We do a lot of things that have no impact on the body outside the court because there is so much impact on the joints when we're working on the court. Rest and recovery are something we work on very acutely. Nutrition too. I've paid a lot more attention in the past three years and it's helped put me in a place where I am able to perform at my best," he says.

"Over the last two to three years, I've been mindful of my scheduling. I



The veteran squash player will be 42 by the time the LA Games come around. This isn't an age bracket too many professional players belong to in competitive squash



杭州第19届亚运会 The 19th Asian Games



Smiles of success: The Indian squash teams pose with their Asian Games medals. While Abhay Singh, Mahesh Mangaonkar, Saurav Ghosal and Harinder Pal Sandhu won gold in the men's team event, the women's team of Anahat Singh, Tanvi Khanna, Dipika Pallikal and Joshna Chinappa won bronze. Additionally, in the mixed doubles event, Dipika and Harinder won gold, while Anahat and Abhay won bronze. PTI

am one of the players on the PSA Tour with the lowest numbers of tournaments played in the top 20. I space out competitions as much as I possibly can to give my mind and body the time to recover and recoup and be in a good frame of mind to play," he adds.

Ghosal's composure, courteousness and maturity are traits that have earned him respect both on and off the court. He is a mentor to a young Indian contingent that features the likes of Tanvi Khanna, Anahat Singh and Abhay Singh.

He is quick to accept that his Instagram reel skills are nowhere close to that of his budding colleagues but he says that the talents around him keep him grounded and cynical at bay.

"Personally, I don't think I have appreciated what I've done up to now

and I want it to be that way because I feel like that is what has kept me in this frame of mind to be able to improve every day. If I get caught up in my achievements, I won't see the need to do anything anymore. I won't be able to realise my full potential."

"I truly believe that I have more in my locker and that it would be the biggest regret in my life if I finished my career and I didn't achieve that potential," Ghosal says.

His self-actualisation vision board is pretty simple. Of course, the glitter of an Olympic medal would be great, but Ghosal hopes to bow out from squash after breaking into the world's top five.

He would also like to better his World Championships quarterfinal finish with a medal. "Hopefully, if that happens, it will be the best part of my career."

Ghosal at the Asian Games



Team gold
2014 Incheon

Team gold
2022 Hangzhou

Singles silver
2014 Incheon

Singles silver
2022 Hangzhou

Singles bronze
2006 Doha

Singles bronze
2010 Gangzhou

Team bronze
2010 Gangzhou

Singles bronze
2018 Jakarta

Team bronze
2018 Jakarta

DREAMS REALISED IN DREAM RUN

The Asian Para Games saw India produce its **best ever performance**, breaking several records along the way.

Netra V

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The Asian Games 2023 in Hangzhou, China, was soon followed by the Asian Para Games 2023 that had the motto — ‘Hearts meet, Dreams shine,’ symbolising the ties between the Asian countries. India finished fifth in the medals tally with an impressive total

of 111 medals — 29 gold, 31 silver and 51 bronze. This overshadowed the country’s Asiad tally that stood at 107 medals — 28 gold, 38 silver and 41 bronze.

While crossing 100-plus medals seemed feasible once the Games commenced, it seemed close to impossible given India’s track record at the last three editions of the Asian Para Games.

The Asian Para Games made its

debut in 2010 in Guangzhou, China, where India managed to clinch only 14 medals with one gold, four silver and nine bronze. In the 2014 event held in Incheon, South Korea, India was placed 15th with a total of 33 medals. Before 2023, India’s best performance at the Asian Para Games came in the 2018 Jakarta Games where it bagged 72 medals and finished ninth.

Not only did the 2023 edition see India’s best ever performance at the Asian Para Games, but it was also the country’s highest gold medal tally at this event with the previous highest being in 2018 with a difference of 14 gold medals between the two editions.

The Indian para-athletics squad made the most of the occasion, securing almost half of the country’s total medals in the Games. With a total of 55 medals — 18 gold, 17 silver and 20 bronze — the para-athletics contingent led the country’s medal tally count, followed by 21 medals from the para badminton team. Ankur Dhama, 29,



Last stretch: Ankur Dhama (right, running with his guide) became the first Indian to win two gold medals as he cruised through the men’s 1,500m T11 and 5,000m T11 events. AFP

INDIA’S TALLY AT THE PARA ASIAN GAMES

GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
29	31	51



Target in sight: With her triple medal feat in compound archery — two gold and one silver — Sheetal Devi became the first Indian female athlete to win two gold medals and the world's first armless archer to participate and win at this Games. GETTY IMAGES

became the first Indian to win two gold medals as he cruised through the men's 1,500m T11 and 5,000m T11 events.

The javelin throw event saw two world records being broken by Indians on the same day. First, reigning Paralympic and world champion Sumit Antil successfully defended his gold medal while also improving his world record in the men's javelin F64 event with a massive throw of 73.29m in his third attempt. He bettered his 70.83m mark he achieved at the World Para Athletics Championships in Paris earlier this year.

The second world record was broken by Sundar Singh Gurjar in the men's javelin throw-F46 final to win gold with a 68.60m throw in his sixth and final attempt. The Indian broke Sri Lankan Dinesh Priyantha's previous world record of 67.79m, while two other Indians in the event, Rinku and Ajeet Singh, won silver and bronze, ensuring a 1-2-3 podium finish for the country. This was not the first podium sweep that India saw at this Games — the country also won all three medals in the men's club throw F51, men's rapid chess VI-B1 and men's discuss throw F54/55/56 events.

Among the Indian para archers, it was Sheetal Devi, a 16-year-old armless archer from Jammu and Kashmir, who made heads turn. With her triple medal feat in compound archery — two gold and one silver — she became the first Indian female athlete to win two gold medals and the world's first armless archer to

participate and win at this Games. Her fellow mixed team gold medal-winning partner Rakesh Kumar, also grabbed three medals.

The triple medal feat was also achieved by para-badminton players Pramod Bhagat and Thulasimathi Murugesan.

As expected, the host country China was ranked first in the medals table with 521 medals — 214 gold, 167 silver and 140 bronze — dominating in most of the events. It was followed by Iran, Japan and South Korea.

Nagoya in Japan is scheduled to host the next Asian Para Games from October 14 to 22, 2026.

With this Asian Para Games edition being rescheduled by a year due to COVID-19 and acting as one of the major tournaments ahead of the Paris Paralympics 2024, all eyes will be on the medal-winning athletes to scale up their performances in the French capital.

» CHEQUERED FLAG

Fight to the finish: Sergio Perez (left) leads Hamilton (below) by 32 points and can seal second place if he can continue the form he has shown recently. GETTY IMAGES

SECOND CALLING

All eyes are now on the fight for second place between Sergio Perez and Lewis Hamilton. Among the constructors, Mercedes and Ferrari are also fighting for the second spot.



S. Dipak Ragav

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With both the drivers and constructors' titles sealed, Formula One embarked on a triple-header in the Americas with races in the USA, Mexico City and Brazil. It might look like the 2023 season is hopping from one place to another without a context. However, as the last three weekends have shown, there are enough intriguing battles still left.

While the big prize in F1 is the driver's title, it is the constructors' standings that determine how the prize money is distributed among teams.

In that sense, the race between Mercedes and Ferrari for second in the standings will go down the wire, with the former ahead by just 20 points. Further down, Williams, AlphaTauri, Alfa Romeo and Haas are locked in a fight for the last four positions in the constructors' title, with just 16 points separating the four teams. Each place is worth tens of millions of dollars. This battle has seen a massive change in fortunes for AlphaTauri as it moved

REUTERS

from tenth to eighth in the last three rounds, with Daniel Ricciardo and Yuki Tsunoda banking some valuable points.

However, the most significant competitive fight for positions is between Sergio Perez and Lewis Hamilton as they try to finish second in the driver's standings.

Two of the three events — USA and Brazil — were Sprint weekends, with an extra Sprint race on Saturdays. As it has been for the whole season, Max Verstappen ticked off everything in his sight, winning all three races, including the sprint events. While he had to work a bit in Austin, Texas, the other two weekends were relatively straightforward for the 2023 champion. En route to his third title, which he sealed in Qatar, Verstappen broke numerous records as he amassed race wins for fun.

The only thing he had left was for the most wins in a year — incidentally, a record he held after climbing the top step 15 times last year. **With the hat-trick of wins in the Americas, Verstappen has won 17 of the 20 races, with two more to go in Las Vegas and Abu Dhabi.**

With the three-time champion sailing into the distance, all eyes were on his teammate Perez. The fight between Perez and Hamilton is a microcosm of how well they have driven this year.

Perez, with the best car on the grid at his disposal, is struggling to nail the second place and has been poor for most of the season. At the same time, Hamilton has maximised his car's potential and beaten his teammate George Russell comprehensively.

So when Hamilton finished second on the road in Austin, it seemed the fight would go down to the last race as he came within 20 points of Perez. But later, Hamilton and Ferrari's Charles Leclerc were disqualified from the race after the post-race checks revealed their cars' floor planks had worn more than the tolerance level allowed by the regulations. It helped Perez move up a place to fourth, and he held a

39-point lead.

At the following race in Mexico, the local hero got a brilliant start but, in his overzealousness, tried to win it all in the first corner and collided with Leclerc and retired within seconds of the race start, much to the disappointment of the sell-out crowd. **To add salt to the wounds, his chief rival Hamilton fought back strongly, taking second in Perez's home ground, narrowing the points gap.**

While on the face of it, it doesn't matter who finished second or third in the driver's standings, Red Bull Racing has never had its drivers finish the year 1-2 in the championship. It is something team boss Christian Horner wants to achieve this year, considering the dominant machinery at their disposal.

Thankfully, Perez and Red Bull had one of their best outings in recent times at the Sao Paulo Grand Prix in Brazil, with the driver finishing fourth well ahead of Hamilton, whose Mercedes car struggled. Perez scored a third in the Sprint race and was on course to finish third in the Grand Prix before Fernando Alonso, whose Aston Martin too found some speed, managed to nick it on the last lap with a sensational overtake.

Perez now leads Hamilton by 32 points and can seal second place if he can continue the form he has

shown recently. In a year in which his stock has nosedived to an all-time low, having got less than half the points of his teammate, to end up as vice-champion can be the balm that soothes the pain and helps him come back strongly next year.

Moto GP

Meanwhile, Francesco Bagnaia and Jorge Martin continued to trade blows in their see-saw fight for the rider's crown, with the latter winning both the Sprint and main race in Thailand and narrowing the gap to the former. **Bagnaia, the defending champion, had a poor outing in the Sprint race, finishing seventh before making a better effort on Sunday to take second place for the factory Ducati team.** It was a welcome return to form for Martin after two poor outings in Indonesia and Australia, where he lost a lot of ground to his chief rival. With just three races to go, Bagnaia holds a slender 13-point lead and will need to be more clinical, considering if he wants to defend his crown.

Heat is on: Perez (forefront), with the best car on the grid at his disposal, is struggling to nail the second place and has been poor for most of the season. At the same time, Hamilton (behind) has maximised his car's potential. AFP





CHENNAI IN CARNIVAL MODE

Chennaiyin FC's latest victory in the ISL added on to the **celebration** of sports and cinema in the city.

Chennai is not known to experience winter in its truest sense. But, as the diary cruised past the Marina Beach on his way to the Nehru Stadium, he could feel a nip in the air, which marks a period of post-summer relief for the city. The release of a Vijay film too added a touch of festive flair in the city, which was already in an upbeat mood after India beat Australia in its ODI World Cup encounter at the MA Chidambaram Stadium. It was a pleasant sight to watch the locals groove to music from Vijay's latest release, *Leo*.

Now, the city waits eagerly for Chennaiyin FC to build momentum after a rocky start in the current ISL campaign. The Marina Machans were playing Punjab FC in their second home match of the season. Having secured their first win of the season against Hyderabad FC, Owen Coyle's men were desperate to give the home crowd a reason to cheer about. And they did.

Chennaiyin, in a display of complete dominance, thrashed

Capping it in style: Chennaiyin, in a display of complete dominance, thrashed Punjab 5-1, with captain Rafael Crivellaro (far right) bagging a goal and two assists. B.JOTHI RAMALINGAM

Punjab 5-1, with captain Rafael Crivellaro bagging a goal and two assists.

One might expect the home crowd to be lenient towards a former player, but that was not the case when Punjab defender Melroy Assisi's malicious two-footed tackle sent CFC forward Rahim Ali writhing in pain. The foul was met with loud jeers, which quickly turned to cheers as Assisi saw a straight red.

From there on, it was cruise control for Chennaiyin FC, much to the delight of the boisterous crowd!

"It is a good win, but it is too soon to say anything. Owen Coyle is a good coach, but the team needs to be prepared for better opponents," said lifelong CFC fan Gautham, as the chants of 'Chennaiyin FC, the pride of Tamil Nadu' echoed in the background.



Cleiton and the penalty fiasco

Cleiton Silva represents the best of Brazilian flair to the East Bengal fans, a large number of whom root for the Selecao when they are watching international football. Cleiton, who did a fist-up celebration after scoring a goal last season to pay tributes to his hero, Pele, had a subpar game at home against Kerala Blasters.

Looking for an equaliser after conceding an early goal at home in Salt Lake Stadium, East Bengal earned a penalty late in the second half (83rd minute). Cleiton, the captain, stepped up to take the attempt from the spot. Much to the surprise of the East Bengal fans, the Brazilian striker hit a weak penalty,

and the Blasters' goalkeeper Sachin Suresh rightly anticipated and dived to his left to make a perfect save.

The assistant referee indicated that Suresh came out of the line before Celiton had taken the shot and the referee ordered the penalty to be retaken. This was not the end to the drama as the veteran of many battles, Cleiton, appeared a bundle of nerves and let fly a feeble attempt. Sachin judged it correctly again and flew to his right to block the attempt. The rebound fell in Cleiton's way but the Brazilian appeared to be so upset with himself that he shot it over to send the home fans to the depths of despair.

A little after this, Kerala Blasters made it 2-0 to literally take the game

Shot stopper: Players of Kerala Blasters congratulate their goalkeeper Sachin Suresh (in grey) after he saved back-to-back penalties by Cleiton Silva of East Bengal. DEBASISH BHADURI

away from East Bengal. The home side earned another (for the third time) penalty in the final minute of the injury-time and Cleiton found the target from the spot this time to end the jinx. The rectification process did not help East Bengal much as it crashed to its third consecutive loss, the second on the trot at home.

"I am happy that Cleiton took the penalty because it shows that he's here for the team as a captain. We have to accept that we can make mistakes, all of us. And in the end, he is working with the right attitude. And finally he got it right. So, the message is to not give up," explained East Bengal's Spanish coach Carles Cuadrat after the match.

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Aneesh Dey &
Amitabha Das Sharma

“I am happy that Cleiton took the penalty because it shows that he's here for the team as a captain. We have to accept that we can make mistakes, all of us. And in the end, he is working with the right attitude. And finally he got it right. So, the message is to not give up – Carles Cuadrat, East Bengal coach »

» WORLD OF FOOTBALL

1



2



REUTERS

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Messi, Bonmatí win 2023 Ballon d'Or crowns

Lionel Messi won his record-extending eighth Ballon d'Or for the best player in the world, ahead of UEFA Player of the Year and treble winner Erling Haaland of Manchester City. Barcelona's Aitana Bonmatí (left, below) won the women's award after inspiring Spain to victory at the Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand earlier this year.

Emiliano Martínez and Jude Bellingham win Yachine, Kopa awards

Argentina's World Cup hero Emiliano Martínez (in pic: above left) won the Yachine Award for the best male goalkeeper of the year. Jude Bellingham bagged the Kopa Trophy for the best U-21 male player. Erling Haaland (in pic; below) was awarded the Gerd Müller Trophy for the highest-scoring male striker with Vinicius Junior winning the Socrates Award for his humanitarian work.



3

Bittersweet week for Bayern Munich

Summer recruit Harry Kane scored a hat-trick on his Der Klassiker debut as Bayern Munich thrashed Borussia Dortmund 4-0 at Signal Iduna Park. Dayot Upamecano gave the Bavarian side a 4th-minute lead before Kane's goals helped the side end Dortmund's unbeaten start to the season. The result was a welcome boost for Bayern after it crashed out of the DFB-Pokal after conceding an injury-time winner away to third-tier Saarbrucken.



GETTY IMAGES

4

Pressure mounts on Erik Ten Hag at Man United

Defending champion Manchester United crashed out of the Carabao Cup after a humbling 3-0 loss to Newcastle United at Old Trafford in a rematch of last season's final. The early exit compounded by a tumultuous campaign in the league and the Champions League throws manager Erik Ten Hag's future in doubt. An uninspiring win against Fulham at the weekend did very little to allay the calls for his dismissal.



GETTY IMAGES

5

Al Nassr rides on Mane winner to progress in King's Cup of Champions

Sadio Mane scored an extra-time winner to help Al Nassr beat Al Ettifaq in the Round of 16 match of the King's Cup of Champions. Anderson Talisca's opening goal was ruled out by VAR for offside despite Cristiano Ronaldo moving away from the ball's path. VAR was in play again later, upgrading Talisca's yellow to red following a suspected elbow on the opposition defender.



REUTERS

6

Real Madrid reigns supreme

A 92nd-minute winner from Jude Bellingham helped Real Madrid come from behind to win the first El Clasico of the season at the Olympic Stadium in Montjuic, Barcelona. Ilkay Gundogan pounced on a defensive lapse to give the home team a 6th-minute lead but a long-range strike from Bellingham midway through the second half levelled the scores before the last-gasp winner sent Los Blancos to the top of the table. [Turn page for match report]



Duel of the giants

The latest **El Clasico** was the perfect harmony of new names and familiar faces, as Jude Bellingham continued his red hot form.

BARCELONA

1
(İlkay Gündoğan
6')

REAL MADRID

2
(Jude
Bellingham 68',
90+2')

Spainish football has moved beyond the Lionel Messi-Cristiano Ronaldo era. Ushering in a new phase, it is time for the new generation of players to stamp their presence, which will define the legendary fixture for years to come.

And, if the recent Clásico is anything to go by, exciting times lie ahead. Real Madrid edged Barcelona 2-1 to secure the first bragging rights of the 2023-24 La Liga season.

The talking point ahead of the encounter was the plethora of young talent in both teams — Gavi, Alejandro Balde, Fermin Lopez, Vinicius Junior and Bellingham, to name a few.

Yet, it was the experienced İlkay Gündoğan who showed his class by scoring the opening goal. Combining with Ferran Torres, he capitalised on some lackadaisical defending from Aurelien Tchouameni and David Alaba to side-foot the ball into the net, past Madrid keeper Kepa Arrizabalaga in the sixth minute.

Lopez could have doubled Barca's lead but he hit the post, as the Catalans kept a 1-0 lead against the Los Blancos at half-time.

Barca continued its first-half momentum in

Man of the moment: If scriptwriters had a chance to pen down how the match would unfold, a late winner by Bellingham (No. 5) would have been the top pick for many. And that is exactly what happened. AFP

the second 45, and Inigo Martinez struck the post in the 52nd minute as the home team came agonisingly close to doubling its lead for the second time in the match.

But as the second half progressed, Carlo Ancelotti's men seemed more settled.

The introduction of Luka Modrić and Eduardo Camavinga brought stability in the midfield for Madrid.

And soon, the equaliser came in the 68th minute as Bellingham pulled a rabbit out of his hat. Getting the ball approximately 25 yards from the Barca goal, the Englishman blasted a shot to rattle the top-right corner, past a helpless Marc-André ter Stegen.

The momentum gradually started to shift in Madrid's favour and the home team finally succumbed in additional time as a maestro assisted Bellingham.

Modric, who got a deft touch inside the box, bounced the ball over Martinez's head.

All Bellingham had to do then was tap in the ball from point-blank range to bag the winner.

Anish Pathiyil & Aneesh Dey

Half-battery creation

By C.G.S.Narayanan

Half-battery is an arrangement where two pieces of the same colour stand between a friendly linear piece (rook, bishop or queen) and the opponent's king, so that moving of either of the intermediate pieces off the line would produce a battery with the remaining piece. Half-battery two-movers are more difficult to solve than regular battery problems in that the solver has to not only spot the correct piece which makes the key but also decide on the destination of the key piece.

Half-batteries help present several ideas in more than one phase i.e set play, virtual play and post key phase. The problems involving creation of half-battery mostly necessitate destruction of an existing battery using a flight giving key. In the illustrative example below the sacrificial flight giving key destroys B+R battery and creates half-battery.

Johner Hans

Neue Zuricher Zeitung 1933



Mate in two moves

Key 1.Re5!! (2.Rf5)

- 1...Nxe5 2.Rxc6; 1...Bxe5 2.Rf3
- 1...Kxe5 2.Re3; 1...Rc5 2.Re6
- 1...Qc5 2.Ng4; 1..Nd6 2.Re6

The first three variations show defences on the same square which include two self blocks.

Byron Zappas
3 Prize, Quick #2 WCC 1987



Mate in two moves

Set : 1...Qh1 2.Nxf6; 1...Ng4 2.Nb4

Key 1.Nc5! threat: 2.Qxe6

- 1...Qh1 2.Nxd3; 1...Ng4 2.Nd7
- 1...Kxd5 2.Nb3

The flight giving key sets up the half-battery destroying the R+B direct battery which already provides two set mates which are changed by the key. The direct battery fires 2.Nb3 after the king flight.

Problem below is half-battery creation of different kind with passive sacrifice, half-pin and pin mates

Dobbs, Gilbert

Good Companion 1919



Mate in two moves

Solution to problem for solving in the

article 'Plachutta interference': Key
1.d5! 1...Bxd5 2.Rg8 Bxg8 3.Ra8;
1...Qxd5 2.Ra8 Qxa8 3.Rg8

Readers may send in their queries to cgsnarayanan@hotmail.com



1

» INDIA PLAYGROUND

A goal each from Ningombam Amarjit Singh and Irengbam Rohit Singh helped Odisha Naval Tata Academy, Bhubaneswar, to a 2-0 victory over Madhya Pradesh Hockey Academy, Bhopal, in the final of the 51st Nehru junior hockey tournament at the Shivaji Stadium in New Delhi. PIC: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



2

Karamjit Bedi, all of 14 years, provided the decisive difference to the fortunes of Christie's Golf with a five-feet 'pressure- putt' on the final hole to contribute two crucial points to his team's thrilling 8-7.5 victory over The Pioneers in the final of the Delhi Golf Club League at the DGC course in New Delhi.

Paired with Pratap Atwal against Pioneer's duo of Rishabh Periwal and Sonavi Kaicker in Game 5, Karamjit Singh came up with a remarkable 35-feet chip on the final hole that stopped around five feet from the pin. Amid mounting tension, Rishabh faced a must-putt situation from 10 feet but faltered. That left Karamjit with two putts from five feet to seal the game. Karamjit needed just one putt to clinch two crucial points. Though Game 6 and Game 7 were still in progress, it was clear that the teams were going to win a game each. In such a scenario, Karamjit's effort effectively tilted the scales in favour of Christie's Golf.

RAKESH RAO

TEAM SPORTSTAR

3

An array of global volleyball stars will assemble in Bengaluru when it plays host to the Men's Club World Championships 2023, a first in India, from December 6 to 10. Six top clubs will play 10 matches across five days at the Koramangala Indoor Stadium, and the home nation will be represented by the Ahmedabad Defenders. The Defenders secured their berth in the marquee tournament following their victory in the second season of the Volleyball League earlier this year. Apart from the Indian side, the tournament will see Sir Safety Susa Perugia (Italy), Sada Cruzeiro Volei and Minas Tenis Clube (Brazil), Suntory Sunbirds Club (Japan), and Halkbank Spor Kulubu (Turkey) vying for honours.



SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

IAU 50km run: Chakib Lachgar on top



Chakib Lachgar Latrache of Spain (middle in pic) and Carla Molinaro of Great Britain emerged champions in the men's and women's sections, respectively, in the IAU 50km Run in Hyderabad.

Chakib Lachagar clocked 2:48:20 to clinch the honours, while Alejandro Jimenez Vicente (2:49:30) and Jesus Angel Olmos Pascual (2:50:12), both also from Spain, finished second and third, respectively.

In the women's section, Carla Molinaro won the race with a time of 3:18:23, while Andrea Pomaranski (USA) in 2:19:07 and Sarah Webster (Great Britain) in 3:20:07 finished second and third, respectively.

In the team competition, Spain's men's team and Great Britain's women's team won the championships.

For India, there was something to cheer for as the men's team finished second while Great Britain finished third.

Overall, Spain and Great Britain won four medals each. Spain won three in the individual event and one in the team competition.

V. V. SUBRAHMANYAM

SPOORTOON



- 4** **Hruthik Katakam and Parthsarthy Mundhe** won the boy's and girls' titles in the Asian under-16 tennis tournament at the MSLTA Marathwada Centre. In the finals, Hruthik beat Ayush Poojary, while Parthsarthy beat Vrandika Rajput. Vrandika won the doubles title in partnership with Dia Agarwal. The boy's doubles title was bagged by Fazal Ali Meer and Prakaash Sarran. The results: Under-16 boys: Hruthik Katakam bt Ayush Poojary, 6-4, 6-2; Under-16 girls: Parthsarthy Mundhe bt Vrandika Rajput 6-2, 6-1.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

- 5** **Jindal Panther beat Achievers 9-8 in the final** of the Indian Masters 14-goal polo championship at the Jaipur Polo Ground. Santiago Marambio (4) and Simran Shergill (3) did the bulk of scoring for the champion team, while Siddhant Sharma and Naveen Jindal chipped in with a goal each. Abhimanyu Pathak was the top scorer with five goals for Achievers, which had incidentally beaten Jindal Panther in the league match. Matthew Perry scored the other three goals for the Achievers. Mare Alama, ridden by Shergill, was adjudged the 'Best polo pony.'

KAMESH SRINIVASAN



FITNESSWISE

Ramji Srinivasan



MAKING SENSE OF SIXTH SENSE

Developing a sixth sense helps athletes balance their training, performance and recovery **in an effective manner.**

No matter how hard you train, Somebody will train harder. No matter how hard you run, Somebody will run harder. No matter how much you want it, Somebody will want it more. I am Somebody" — Steve Prefontaine.

The term 'sixth sense' seems like a paranormal experience, but in reality, it's just common sense combined with an analytical mind which enables one to understand situations and act accordingly to get the desired results.

Sixth sense is pertinent for both athletes and coaches who come from varied backgrounds and have different career perspectives. While a few of them are training to reach success within their own domain, others are competing at the national level to prepare for a higher level of competition, like the Olympics.

All athletes face the same challenges while balancing hard training with the daily stress stemming from studies, parental/social pressure and expectations, and work/behavioural lifestyle dynamics.

Some of the athletes, particularly those in peak shape, tend to know their own bodies very well. They understand when to take it easy and when it's time to train hard.

However, this is not often the scenario. In order to maximise the training volumes and performance outcomes, there is a very narrow gap between maximised training and

overtraining. Inability to balance training and recovery can have serious consequences.

In recent times, with the advent of technology along with varied measures and methods to control the balance of the athletes' output data with crunched numbers for inferences, specific subjective feelings (Borg scale) or resting heart rate measurements just prior to training have provided valuable indicators of recovery and readiness status.

Instead of focusing solely on training or recovery monitoring, the analysis in sport provides us a concrete tool to observe how training and behavioural lifestyle factors are affecting athletes' bodies as a whole. The objective data derived from 24/7 monitoring helps athletes interpret the reactions of their body and to better balance the overall training load and recovery.

There is an apt observation that athletes who are hardworking seldom get time to recover and the ability to relax during the course of the day. Keeping this in mind short breaks and 'relaxation slots' in their daily or weekly routines ensure better recovery.

For strength and conditioning coaches, however, it is more essential to learn how to develop a kind of 'sixth sense' for the athletes. By 'sixth sense' I mean the ability for an athlete to interpret body feedback and to programme daily routines to support the training progress.

The ability to rest and recover is an art for any athlete. They need to know when to play



The when is the key: An inability to balance training and recovery can have serious consequences. Here we see a few Real Madrid players with coach Carlo Ancelotti (with cap) at a training session in Madrid. AFP

hard, when to rest and when to recover harder. When their muscles are sore or when they are having disturbed sleep, it is still challenging for them to take some time off and get rest.

When they learn to listen to their bodies better with the help of objective measures, they will have much more self-confidence in making those important training decisions, which eventually lead to better performances. Being aware of the bio-rhythm is a catalyst for peak performance.

Taking cricket as an example, the professional players are mindful of when and where to take a necessary break to rejuvenate and excel in their performances. The major point is the avoidance of injuries, including repetitive ones.

There would always be a varied point of

views and criticism when a player is rested or given a break. It's a no-brainer from the professional angle to give players the best recovery protocols for their longevity in excellence.

At times players are forced to play due to pressure even though they are supposed to be rested on physical, psychological and social angle — this can be a myopic vision in excellence.

There is a thin line between will power and foolishness. Involvement of the players in making the decision regarding their rest and recovery from management to coaches is a concoction for long-term success.

Helping players develop their sixth sense is the duty of the coach and the entire ecosystem if the system needs to thrive. The sixth sense should be your first sense.



The ability to rest and recover is an art for any athlete. They need to know when to play hard, when to rest and when to recover harder

A serious sport with a funny name

Pickleball is a combination of tennis, badminton and table tennis, and was in the news recently because *Friends* star Matthew Perry **is known** to have played it a few hours before he died.

Suresh Menon

Pickleball — *New York Times* called it a serious sport with a funny name — has arrived! And how do we know this? Because there are pickleball jokes and books on pickleball jokes. Here's one: Why did the pickleball player cross the road? To get to the other court.

This is interesting because it reshapes an old joke, much like pickleball which has reshaped some old sports. And the punchline hints at its growing popularity. Those playing it get off from one court only to get onto another.

Pickleball is a combination of tennis, badminton and table tennis, and was in the news recently because *Friends* star Matthew Perry is known to have played it a few hours before he died. It is the fastest growing sport in some countries. Pickleball players are called 'pickles'.

There is a national body for the sport in India, and you can hire indoor courts in many cities to play the game. And — another sign of its popularity — there is a clamour for including it in the Olympics.

Another sign of its popularity is that there are already different versions of how the game got its name. And it was invented only in 1965. Joel Pritchard, a Congressman,

and his two friends Bill Bell and Barney McCallum created it in Bainbridge Island (near Seattle) to entertain their children bored with the usual summer activities.

As for the name, one version has it that it is named after the pickle boat — a rowing crew that is thrown together from those who didn't make it to the main teams — since the sport is a mix of rules thrown together. Another credits the family dog Pickles with lending his name to the sport by the simple method of running off with the ball every time it came near him. This version is supported by the McCallum family. Doubtless we will hear other versions — tracing it back to ancient Greece or Rome or the connection with a bottle of pickles, perhaps.

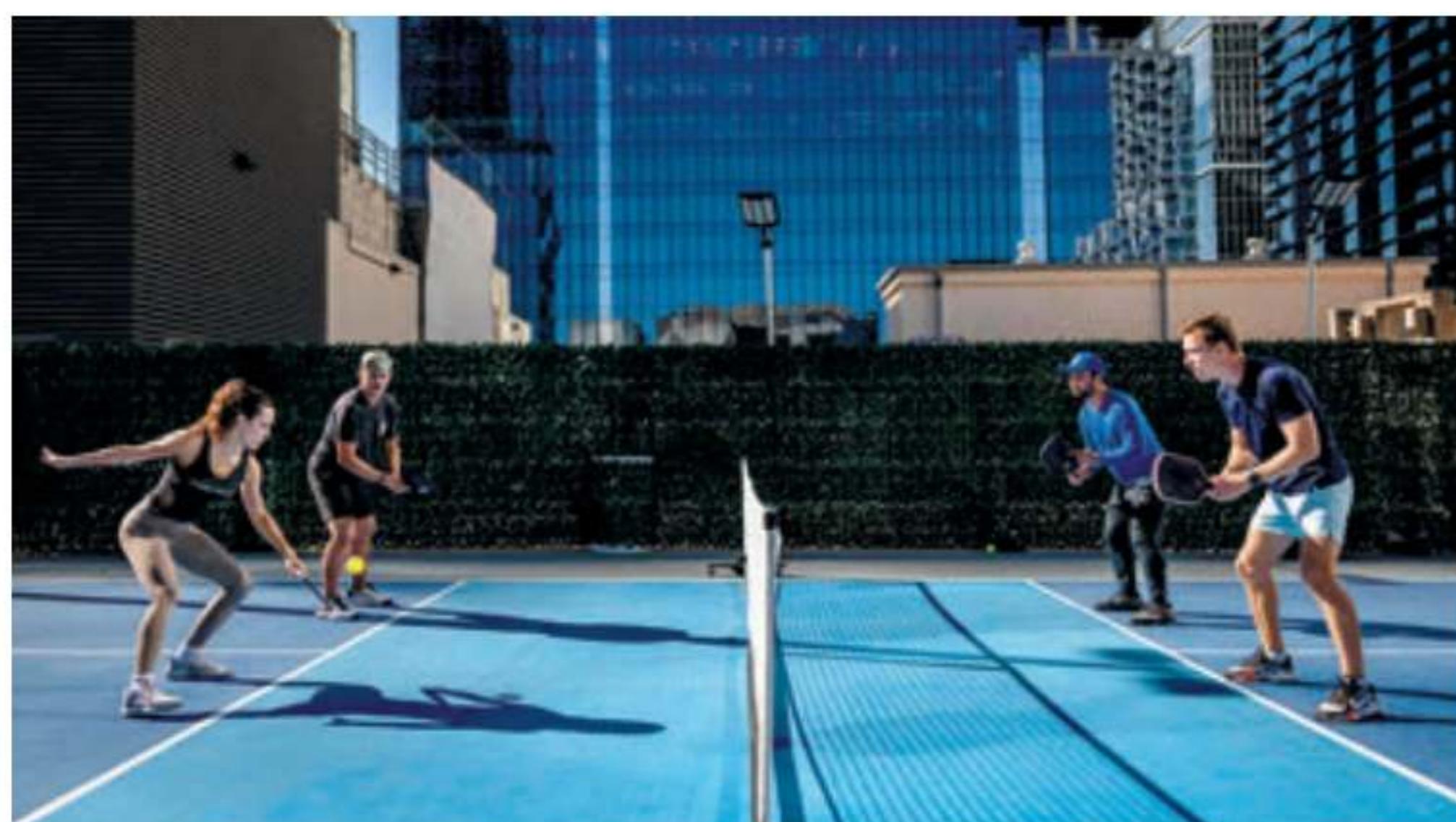
The court is the size of one badminton is played on. The game is played with a paddle, and a plastic ball, the size of a tennis ball which has holes in it. The zone near the net is called the kitchen.

Initially, the sport came up against opposition from two sets of people: tennis players who didn't want their courts to be converted into pickleball courts and residents tired of the regular pop-pop sound which they said was like "having a pistol range in your backyard." Some 40 per cent of tennis courts in the U.S. have been converted into pickleball courts in the last four years.

Clubs see money in this. Players see social networking and physical fitness advantages of playing on a smaller court.

There are nay-sayers, of course. "Any game that you can take up after breakfast and be pretty good at by lunch is not a sport," wrote a *Washington Post* humourist. He is unlikely to be inducted into the Pickleball Hall of Fame anytime soon.

Gaining popularity: Pickleball is the fastest growing sport in some countries. GETTYIMAGES





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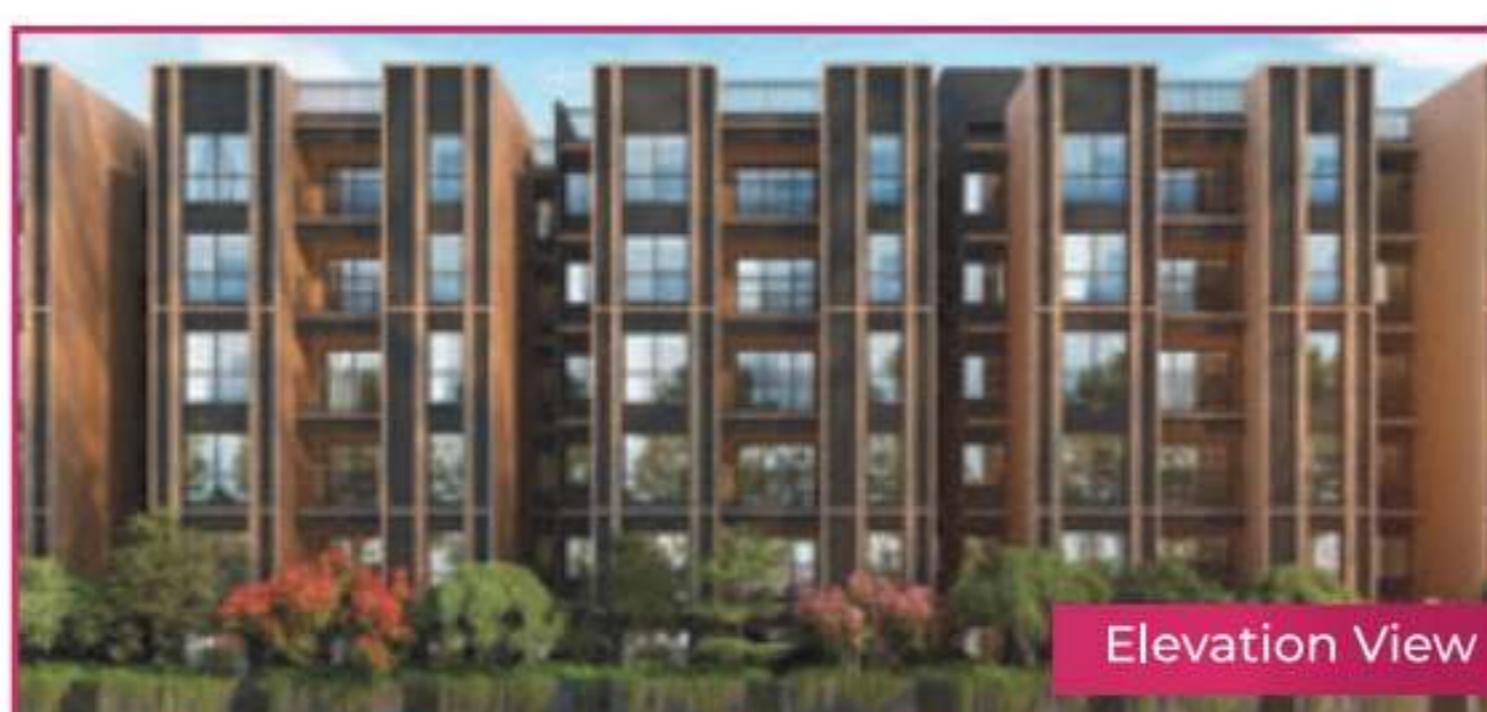
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