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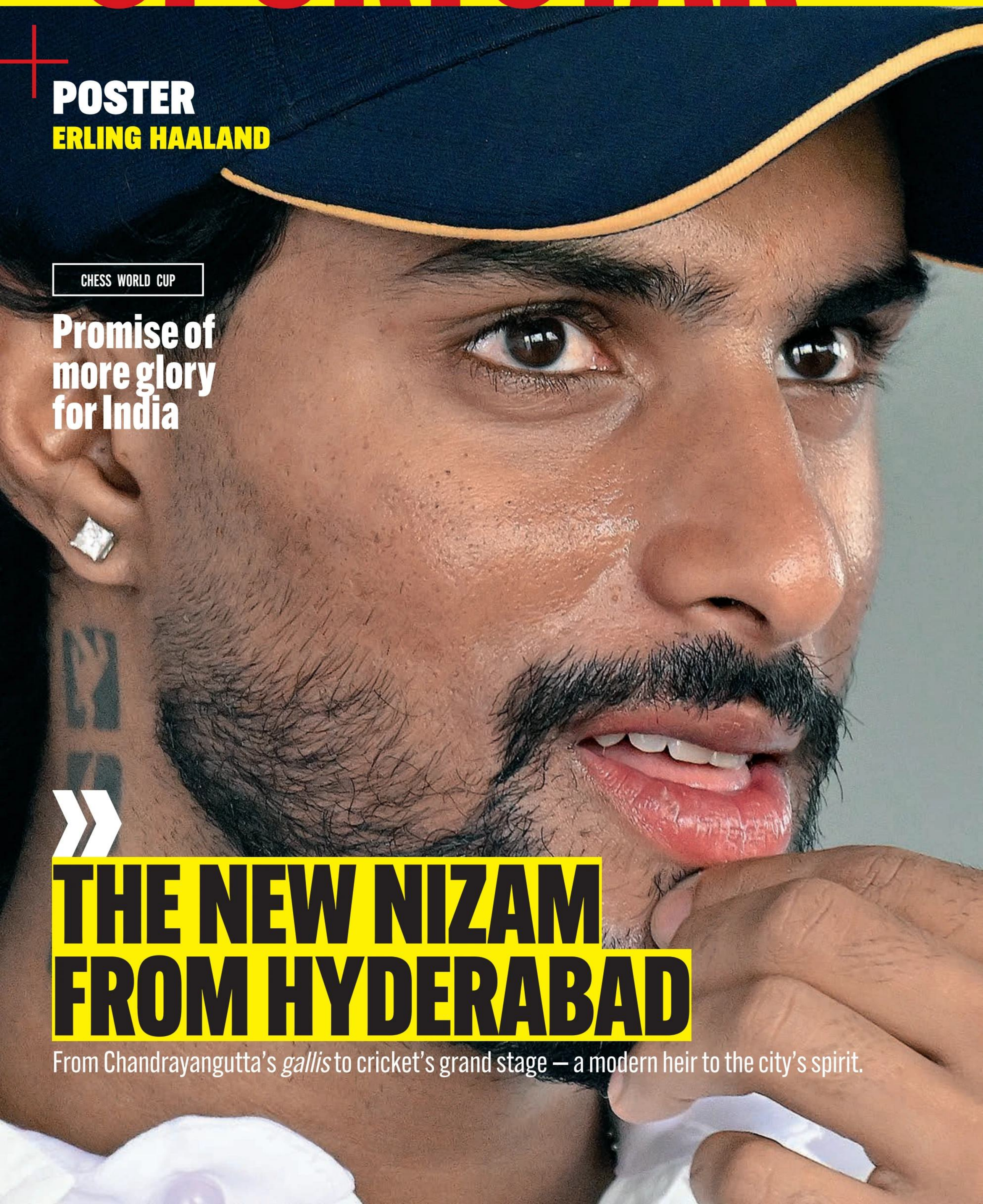

POSTER
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CHESS WORLD CUP

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THE NEW NIZAM FROM HYDERABAD

From Chandrayangutta's *gallis* to cricket's grand stage — a modern heir to the city's spirit.

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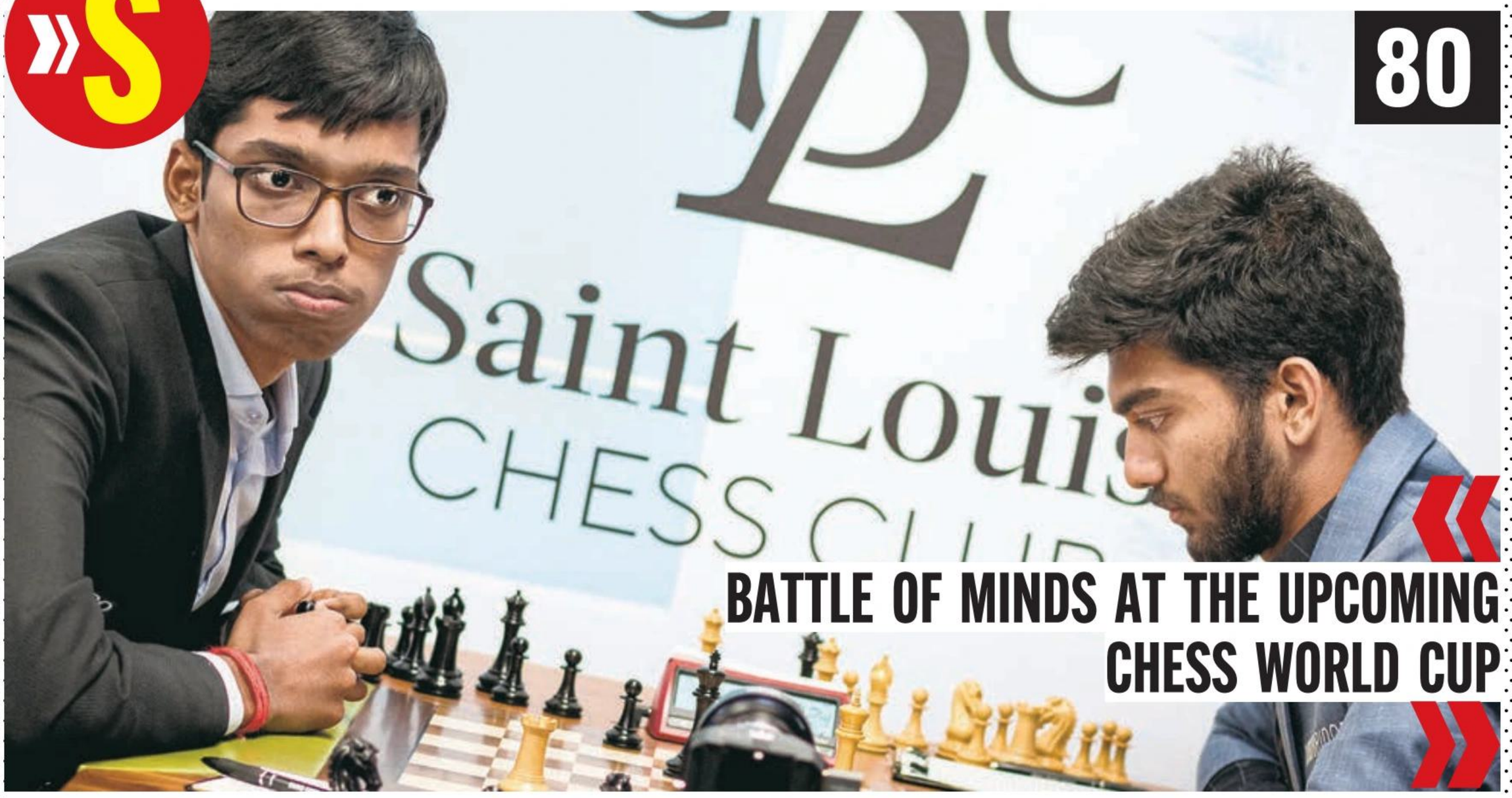

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KCL SCORES BIG,
BOTH ON AND OFF THE FIELD

Kochi Blue Tigers players celebrating with the trophy after winning the KCL Season 2 final match at Greenfield International cricket stadium in Thiruvananthapuram

After an impactful entry into the cricketing ecosystem in the State, Kerala's own cricket carnival, the Kerala Cricket League (KCL) in its second season left a lasting impression on the fans with a grandeur show both on and off the field.

The Kerala Cricket Association's novelty-driven multifaceted approach raised the brand value of the league, making it one of the popular domestic cricket leagues in the country.

The second season kicked off with the grand unveiling of KCL's official mascots Veeru, the elephant; Charu, the great Indian hornbill; and Chakiyar the third umpire.

The month-long canter Van Trophy tour which traversed all the six districts from where the franchisees were based, spreading KCA's anti-drug message among school and college students. The vibrant fan village at Greenfield stadium with interactive fun games were designed to create a festival-like atmosphere for spectators.

Sanju Samson on his way to an scintillating century against Finesse Thrissur Titans

The launch of the fan engagement app increased the popularity of the league on social media. The footfalls at the venue were sufficiently higher compared to the last season.

Star attraction

On the field the biggest attraction was Sanju Samson, who was making his KCL debut for Kochi Blue Tigers. The Blue Tigers splurged more than half of their total purse to buy Sanju in the player auction. It was a gamble which Kochi dared to take, knowing pretty well that the player would not be available for the entire duration of the tournament.

Sanju played only six matches but left his indelible mark on the tournament. He scored a century, showcasing his silken elegance and poise, and three half centuries that lit up the night sky. Fans thronged the stadium to watch him bat and Sanju did not disappoint them.

Dominant Kochi

Led astutely by Saly Samson, Kochi Blue Tigers dominated the

Salman Nizar lit up the tournament by slamming five sixes in an over from Basil Thampi

KCA president Jayesh George and secretary Vinod S. Kumar honour women achievers during the launch of the Kerala Women's Cricket League.

PHOTOS: NIRMAL HARINDRAN

league and became the deserving winners.

However, behind the success of Kochi Blue Tigers was months of meticulous planning by head coach Raiphy Vincent Gomez and his team. From picking the players in the auction to assigning specific roles to them, Raiphy had planned everything in detail. The players understood their roles and executed them to perfection.

The opening gambit of Vinoop Manoharan fired Blue Tigers to explosive starts. Rookies like Mohammed Ashique turned into match winners as Kochi scripted some great wins in the tournament. The only team which could match Kochi was last year's defending champion Aries Kollam Sailors.

The Sailors hit form in the latter part of the tournament and was expected to be a worthy rival for Blue Tigers in the final. Skipper Sachin Baby, despite not being able to replicate the first season's form was still a force and the explosive Vishnu Vinod was a match winner.

The final was expected to be a close affair but Kochi's myriad strength in finding the perfect fit for every challenge saw Vinoop and P.S. Jerin turn heroes with the bat and ball respectively. Kochi's indomitable spirit saw it dethrone Kollam Sailors.

All rounder Akhil Scaria was chosen as the player of the tournament

Standout moments

The KCL like in the previous season brought unheralded players into limelight and at the same time enhanced the reputation of few.

Salman Nizar's five sixes, Ajinas' hat-trick were the standout moments of the league that also saw some nail-biting finishes. Akhil Scaria who performed consistently with bat and ball was chosen as the player of the tournament. Ahammed Imran showed he was a player with a bright future.

The second edition of KCL received an overwhelming response in social media, gaining over 50,000 followers on various platforms.

The official promo film featuring Mohanlal crossed two million views on Instagram within 36 hours. The next edition of KCL promises to be even bigger with plans to spread it out to other districts.

The spectators enjoying action at the Greenfield stadium

OFF-SIDE

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IF SPORT CAN'T STAND UP TO POWER, IT STANDS FOR NOTHING

Donald Trump's threat to **"take away"** World Cup games in Boston exposes how fragile sport's independence really is — and how easily power bends its ideals.

"I love the people of Boston, and I know the games are sold out. But your mayor is not good," Donald Trump said recently. "We could take them away. We have the right to do that with FIFA. I could call Gianni, the head of FIFA, and say, 'Let's move it to another location,' and he would do it, very easily."

The threat continued as he hinted that he might also look at the Los Angeles Olympics.

This was a direct assertion that political power can override the supposed independence of international sport. When a U.S. president threatens to "take away" global events as if they were personal assets, it exposes the fragility of sport's autonomy and sets a dangerous precedent.

FIFA, the IOC, and every other sporting body thrive on the myth of neutrality. In reality, they depend on governments for host-city guarantees, visas, security, and public money.

FIFA's clarification: "Safety and security are the top priorities at all FIFA events worldwide. Safety and security are obviously the governments' responsibility, and they decide what is in the best interest of public safety. We hope every one of our 16 host cities will be ready to successfully host and fulfil all necessary requirements," read nowhere close to an assertion of autonomy and came across as a carefully worded statement meant to placate power.

The episode mirrors a wider trend. At the recent Sharm El-Sheikh summit, Pakistan's Prime Minister went out of his way to praise Trump, unprompted and unprovoked. Across the world, leaders and institutions alike seem eager to appease power rather than test it.

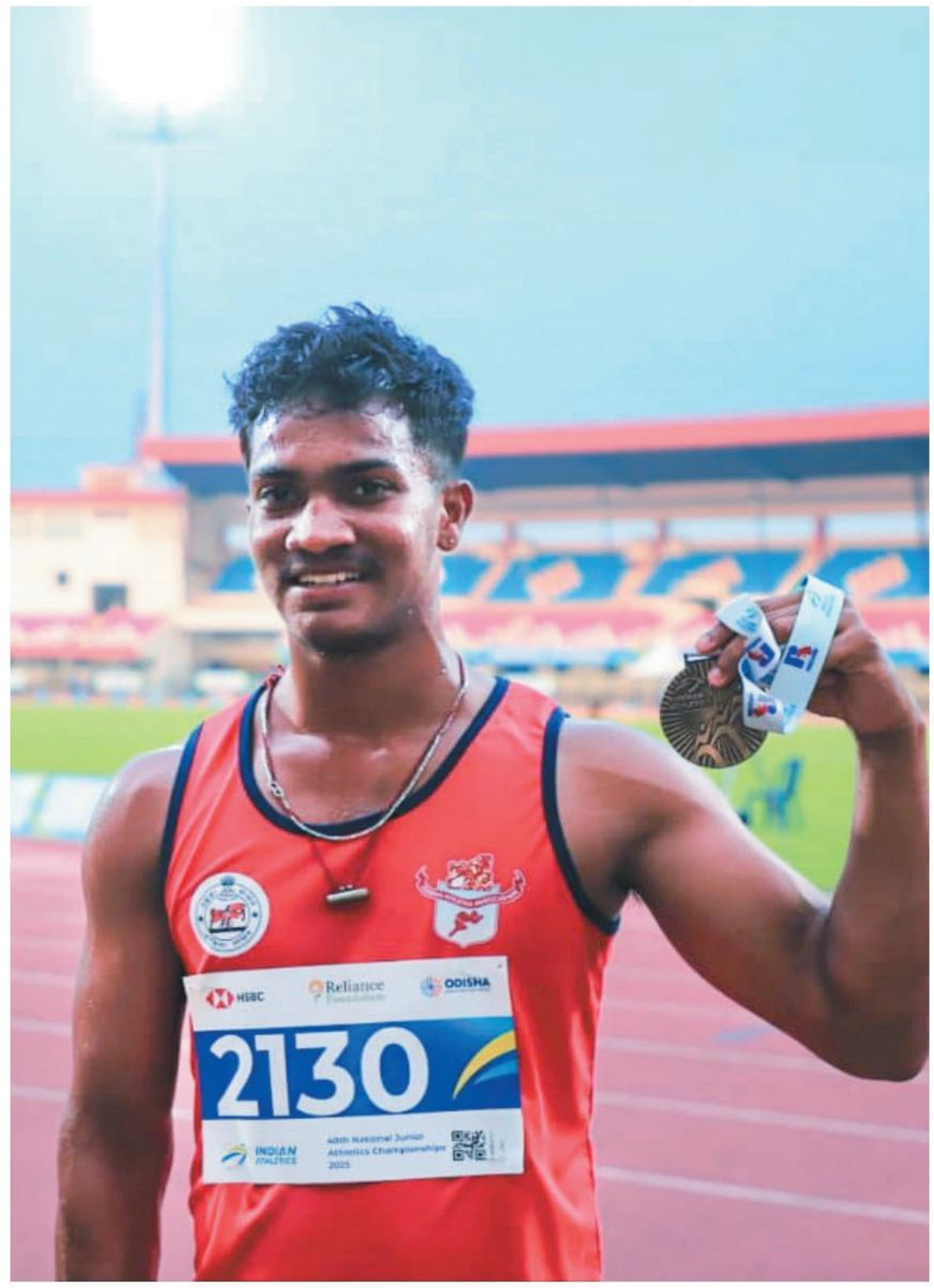
Sport has always been political, sometimes subtly, sometimes unmistakably. The 1936 Berlin Olympics served as a propaganda event for Nazi Germany, while the 1980 Moscow and 1984 Los Angeles Games were caught up in boycott and counter-boycott by the Western and Eastern blocs at the height of the Cold War. Today, India and Pakistan no longer play in each other's countries. At the recent Asia Cup T20 tournament and the ongoing Women's ODI World Cup, players didn't shake hands following the horrific Pahalgam attack and India's retaliation. Every gesture, or the absence of one, is interpreted as a statement of national intent.

Handshakes are not mandatory in sport. Elina Svitolina and Marta Kostyuk of Ukraine refuse to shake hands with Russian or Belarusian opponents in tennis, but Olga Kharlan, a Ukrainian fencer and six-time Olympic medallist, was disqualified from the 2023 World Fencing Championships for declining to shake hands with her Russian counterpart.

And yet, there are still glimpses of what sport can be. Before their match at the Sultan Johor Cup, junior hockey players of India and Pakistan exchanged high-fives, a reminder that sport's unifying spirit survives best when left to athletes, not administrators.

If FIFA, the IOC, or any other global body has a duty now, it is to protect the game from political interference. For journalists, fans, and citizens alike, the task is vigilance. Sport's beauty lies in its autonomy, its ability to let rivals coexist without rancour. We should not yield that field to agendas that serve narrow ends, when sport's true purpose is the shared human pursuit of excellence.

'I want to reach the Olympics podium as a sprinter', says Odisha's PRATIK MAHARANA



The 40th National Junior Athletics Championships has concluded in Bhubaneswar. Over 2000 athletes competed on the track and field of Kalinga Stadium. Several athletes made a mark and smashed long-standing records. Odisha ended its campaign with 7 medals across age categories. But one name stood out in the sea of talent making waves at Kalinga. That belongs to the up-and-coming sprinter, Pratik Maharana the rising star of Odisha.

Born in Odisha's Bargarh to a businessman father Judhisthir Maharana and a housewife mother Urmila, track and field was not Pratik's initial choice of sport as a kid. "I always played cricket, loved it as a kid," says Pratik. But fate clearly had different plans for the young sprinter. A chanced encounter with his coach Siba Mishra during a cricket match changed the trajectory of his life.

"Siba sir saw me playing cricket in Bargarh and asked if I wanted to run. I immediately said yes. That is how my journey in athletics began,' he adds. While his training continued unhindered under the tutelage of his coach, the covid pandemic pushed his sprinting dreams to the back burner. Bogged down by circumstances, Maharana had to take up odd jobs to keep himself and his family afloat during the challenging times. Off the tracks for over two years, his coach rediscovered him on a trip to his hometown in 2022, who then brought him to Rourkela and began training him at the Birsa Munda Athletics Stadium. Pratik has not looked back ever since.

Cut to 13 October 2025, he breached the qualifying mark in 200m sprint event for the World Athletics U20 Championships 2026, which will be held in the USA. Cheers erupted at the stadium as Pratik clocked a timing of 21.24s, his personal best, along with a gold medal. "The curve is my favourite place on the tracks, feels like a burst of energy rushes through me when I run past it," smiles the usually shy and reserved lad. On 11 October, Pratik had clinched silver in the mens 100m event with a timing of 10.74s in the same Championship.

While a talent like Pratik is hard to miss, Amiya Mallick, one of the greats of the Indian sprint, has a sharp observation about the youngster from him state, "Pratik's block start can be better, he has the time and age on his side and can definitely improve in this aspect," observes the former 100m national record holder, while evaluating his junior's performance in the nationals. Athletics Federation of India has announced Indian squad for South Asian Senior Athletics Championships, and Pratik will compete for India in the 200m and 4x100m events. His current focus is to better his timing, bring laurels for the country, his state and secure a place in the final Indian Contingent for the World Championships. "I am not running for a job, I want to finish on the Olympics podium one day," signs off Pratik.

« A tough one, a really tough one but one that I'm really happy with.

– Four-time Olympic gold medallist Ariarne Titmus on her decision to retire from competitive swimming »

29

Daniel Naroditsky, the American chess Grandmaster and former child prodigy who rose to become one of the most influential voices in the game, has passed away at the age of 29.

A Grandmaster by 18, Naroditsky was celebrated not only for his sharp play but also for his insightful commentary and contributions as a coach. The Charlotte Chess Center in North Carolina, where he trained and mentored young players, announced his passing on social media, remembering him as "a gifted player, educator, and cherished member of the chess community."

11

Indian squash veteran Joshna Chinappa captured her 11th PSA Tour title with a commanding win over Egypt's Haya Ali in the Japan Open final in Yokohama. The former World No. 10 prevailed 11-5, 11-9, 6-11, 11-8 in a 38-minute contest to lift the USD 15,000 Challenger crown. Chinappa, who now rises to World No. 94 following the triumph, had earlier cruised past another Egyptian, fourth seed Rana Ismail, 11-7, 11-1, 11-5 in the semifinals.

« I've experienced all the joy that comes from being an athlete. I feel fulfilled.

– Double Olympic gold medallist Risako Kinjo of Japan after announcing retirement from wrestling at the age of 30 »

ON TARGET

Jyothi Surekha Vennam became the first Indian woman compound archer to win a medal at the World Cup Final, clinching the bronze with a flawless performance in Nanjing, China. The reigning Asian Games champion was at her imperious best against world No. 2 Ella Gibson of Great Britain, shooting 15 perfect arrows to prevail 150-145 and secure her maiden podium finish in the tournament. GETTY IMAGES

A YEAR ENDS, A REIGN ENDURES

Years reset, champions don't. Dvalishvili's run has become less about victory than about the quiet **inevitability** of his will.

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The final numbered event of 2025 in the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) has all the ingredients to be one of the year's best.

At the top of UFC 323 main card, the Bantamweight Championship rematch between champion Merab Dvalishvili and former champion Petr Yan is a contest of validation versus vengeance.

Dvalishvili continues to cement his legacy through relentless activity and dominant wins over top contenders, turning his reign into an iron-fisted era. If successful in his fourth defence, he would become the first UFC champion to record four title defences in a single year.

For Yan, who has clawed back from a three-fight slide, this bout is an all-or-nothing bid for redemption. His insistence that he was not at his best in their first encounter makes this main event a pivotal test of his resurgence. A loss here could permanently close the door on his championship future.

The Flyweight co-main event offers a classic veteran-versus-rising-star narrative. Alexandre Pantoja has been nothing short of a world-beater, extending his win streak to eight while defending his belt with consistent dominance.

Pantoja exemplifies a battle-tested champion. Since capturing the title from Brandon Moreno in December 2023, he has been on a tear, defending it four times and extending his overall win streak to eight. His style is defined by unrelenting, high-pressure offence.

Opposite him stands Joshua Van, a 24-year-old pocket rocket who has compiled an impressive 8-1 record since joining the promotion.

At just 24, Van's rise has been fuelled by youthful hunger and rapid progression. He has faced and passed every test quickly.

This fight will reveal whether his raw talent, momentum, and pace can overcome Pantoja's championship experience and veteran control. Van enters with little to lose and everything to gain, making him a dangerous and unpredictable threat.

Also announced on the card is a light heavyweight match-up between former champion Jan Blachowicz and Bogdan Guskov.

Raw exultation: Merab Dvalishvili roars in triumph after retaining his bantamweight title, his trademark intensity on full display inside the Octagon following another dominant performance. GETTY IMAGES

Blachowicz is chasing his first win since May 2022, following a split draw with Magomed Ankalaev in their title fight two years ago and subsequent decision losses to Alex Pereira and Carlos Ulberg.

Did you know?

The record for the longest winning streak in the UFC bantamweight division belongs to Georgian powerhouse and current champion Dvalishvili, who has notched up an extraordinary 14 straight victories.

This remarkable run includes wins over multiple former champions such as Yan, Jose Aldo, Henry Cejudo, and Sean O'Malley.

His dominance not only makes his streak the longest in the division but also places him among the all-time greats in UFC history. Overall, he ranks fourth for the longest win streak, with the legendary Anderson Silva topping the list at 16.

Nicknamed "The Machine", Dvalishvili also holds the UFC record for most career takedowns landed, underscoring the tireless energy and volume he brings to every fight.

THE LONG COMMUTE TO CLARITY

BEFORE TILAK VARMA LEARNED TO CLEAR THE ROPES, HE LEARNED TO WAIT – 60 DAILY KILOMETRES ON A SCOOTER THAT TAUGHT HIM PATIENCE BEFORE POWER.

V. V. Subrahmanyam
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Thirty kilometres from Hyderabad's bustle, at the quiet NexGen Cricket Academy Ground in Thummukunta, Tilak Varma readies for another season — this time leading his State, before rejoining India's squad for the Australia T20s later this month. Yet, for all the new weight of fame and international travel, his story began in the lanes of the Old City.

Every morning, a young Tilak would hop onto his coach Salam Bayash's two-wheeler for the 60-kilometre round trip across Hyderabad's chaotic streets, from his home in Balapur to the suburb of Lingampally six days a week for coaching. Amid the honking and rush, those rides forged something the city traffic lacked — discipline. Years later, that same discipline defines Tilak's cricket.

Fresh from his exploits at the Asia Cup, where he played a sensational match-winning innings against Pakistan in the final, the 22-year-old from Hyderabad now looks ahead with purpose.

Tilak insists his technique hasn't changed much. "The only thing I feel is that I'm more confident in playing some strokes — not only picking the gaps but also clearing the ground with greater ease," he smiled.

Yet, for Tilak, confidence no longer means aggression alone. In the Asia Cup final, it meant control — the ability to hold back when instinct said

NAGARA GOPAL

attack. The reverse sweep and the switch hit may be his calling cards, but he left them in the kitbag that evening, proving he could win through patience as much as power.

He knows adaptability is key. "I have to be ready to accept any challenge, whether it's batting from No. 3 to No. 7. I'm really working on mental toughness as much as skills. My target is to guide the team home, even when the asking rate is 12 an over. Never easy, but I'm learning to adapt."

That adaptability reflects in his T20I record — a study in range and role-awareness. At No. 3, Tilak has piled up 443 runs at an average of 55.37 and a strike rate of 169.73, elite numbers that underline his authority as a top-order enforcer. Drop him to No. 4, and he remains just as productive: 435 runs at 62.14 with a strike rate of 134.67, thriving amid middle-overs traffic where others often stall. Even when slotted lower down — a 31 not out at No. 5, a 29 at No. 7 — he has found ways to make an impact. Across positions, his 10 fifty-plus scores and 50-plus career average reveal a batter capable of anchoring, accelerating, or rescuing, depending on what the game demands.

And fittingly, he batted at No. 4 in the Asia Cup final against Pakistan — a night that tested every ounce of that adaptability. India beat Pakistan by five wickets in a tense finish to retain the title at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium. Chasing 147, India lost three wickets in the opening three overs to give Pakistan hope. But Tilak's unbeaten 53-ball 69 calmed things down, eventually taking the Men in Blue past the finish line. Reflecting on that Asia Cup final, Tilak was quick to point out that he'd done similar things before. "But since that knock came under such pressure, with

Calm finisher: In a final crackling with tension, Tilak Varma's composure outlasted the chaos as he guided India through a nervy chase of 147 against Pakistan. AFP

everyone watching, now people know about my potential," he laughed.

"Honestly, not many recognised my capabilities before that game. In that context, the innings was very significant. Now people say I can play according to the situation," he added. Asked whether expectations bring pressure, Tilak dismissed the thought. "Playing for the country is a golden opportunity. Even if you're a superstar, you must perform consistently. I can't take even a single game lightly. But I don't feel pressure — I've worked too hard for these chances. My goal is to seize them and finish matches."

For Tilak, mindset is everything. "If you have confidence, you can handle any challenge with ease. My attitude is the same whether it's club cricket, domestic matches, IPL or internationals. I love challenges and thrive on them."

The coach who shaped him

If discipline is Tilak's hallmark, credit goes to his childhood coach and mentor, Salam Bayash, now Head Coach at Legala Cricket Academy in Hyderabad. "I owe everything to him. He believed in me from the start. I can never forget those long scooter rides to training every day," Tilak recalled.

"Salam bhai's dream is that I become the No. 1 player in the world and win the World Cup. He always told me that there will be ups and downs, but a player should never fall short of giving 100 per cent. Consistency is key and that's been my motto."

It was Tilak's consistent performances in domestic cricket that first caught the attention of IPL scouts. During the 2021–22 Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, he emerged as Hyderabad's second-highest run-scorer, amassing 215 runs in seven innings at a strike rate of 147.26.

His form made heads turn at the IPL 2022 auction, where Mumbai Indians secured his services for Rs 1.70 crore — a move that proved instantly rewarding as Tilak slotted seamlessly into the side's core group.

Those IPL performances fast-tracked his rise to the international stage. Tilak made his T20I debut against West Indies in Tarouba in 2023, announcing himself in style as his first two scoring shots — off just his second and third deliveries — sailed for sixes.

Turning points and lessons

But it was against South Africa a year later that he truly bloomed — twin centuries crafted not in haste but with the quiet certainty of a young man beginning to understand his own powers. "Those hundreds came at the right time, under tough conditions. They gave me the belief that I was ready for the big stage. Now I even feel like a senior player in this format," he smiled.

Those knocks all but cemented Tilak's place in India's T20I setup as the natural successor to Kohli at No. 3. The opportunity came with a gesture of trust from skipper Suryakumar Yadav, who voluntarily

Guided growth: Rohit Sharma's quiet counsel, Tilak Varma's eager ear — a passing of wisdom that mirrors Indian cricket's changing guard.
EMMANUAL YOGINI

dropped a spot to let the youngster bat in his preferred position.

Tilak repaid that faith in style. "Surya bhai's best knocks have come at No. 4, so I asked if I could try at three. I told him, 'You've made hundreds there, now let me show what I can do,'" he had told this publication.

Tilak was effusive in his praise for head coach Gautam Gambhir and Suryakumar, also his IPL teammate at Mumbai Indians. "Gautam sir supports every player and gives us confidence. And when Surya says that even if you get out for zero, we'll still back you — that message lifts your morale instantly. Both always tell us to express ourselves, and that's a huge message."

Beyond the T20 label

Tilak is determined not to be boxed in as a T20 specialist. "I'm good, but I want to be a complete all-format player. For me, Test cricket is the ultimate challenge. I know it won't be easy, but I'm working really hard to get there."

The Indian dressing room, he said, makes that journey easier. "The atmosphere and bonding are excellent. You never feel out of place. Everyone, including the support staff, is so good."

A summer stint with Hampshire further underlined Tilak's growing maturity, as he amassed 358 runs in four County Championship matches at an average just shy of 60, including two centuries and a fifty. The 22-year-old left-hander blended restraint with authority, batting with a calm assurance that spoke of an evolving all-format temperament.

"Playing County cricket had a big positive impact. I thought I might get an India-A call after that, but I'm happy with the backing I've got so far. Switching between red and white ball doesn't bother me — if anything, it's made me more positive and aggressive.

"Succeeding in different conditions and on tough tracks shows I'm ready for bigger opportunities. Mentally and physically, I feel ready to be an all-format player. I rarely miss domestic First-Class matches when available — domestic cricket is a huge platform to refine your game."

Tilak's rise stems from a steady progression through Under-16, U-19 and Ranji Trophy cricket. "Even if there's no First-Class game, I'll still play a club match. I just can't stay away from cricket." Tilak first flickered on the radar at a domestic U-16 tournament in 2018, where he plundered 960 runs for Hyderabad — a number so audacious it demanded attention. That same season, barely 16, he was fast-tracked into the Ranji Trophy side, making his First-Class debut for Hyderabad. The following year, he checked off the remaining boxes of the domestic circuit, featuring in both the Syed Mushtaq Ali and Vijay Hazare trophies. By the time he topped the scoring charts in a quadrangular U-19 series involving South Africa, Zimbabwe and New Zealand to seal his spot in India's 2020 U-19 World Cup squad, Tilak had already lived a small career before turning eighteen — each

Roots first: For all his T20 fame, Tilak Varma still treats domestic cricket as sacred ground — the arena that keeps his game honest and evolving.
NAGARA GOPAL

innings sharpening the sense that his rise was not so much sudden as it was destined.

Filling big shoes

Tilak's emergence coincides with the retirement of two giants — Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli. "They're legends and inspirational figures. I'd like to be Tilak Varma in my own right.

"I do dream of finishing with most ICC trophies. If you remember, I started playing after the 2011 World Cup, and my dream is to win a World Cup for India," he said.

Asked if he feels pressure to fill the void, Tilak replied, "I haven't thought about that. My aim is to do well in every game. They are legends, and replacing them is impossible. But I'll always give more than 100 per cent."

Influences and gratitude

Ahead of his first season with Mumbai Indians, then captain Rohit had quickly recognised Tilak's rare blend of technique and temperament, convinced the then 19-year-old had the makings of an all-format India player. Tilak carried that promise into his maiden IPL season, standing out as a lone bright spot, with 397 runs in 14 innings at 131, even as Mumbai endured a forgettable campaign.

"What I admire most about Rohit *bhai* is his discipline on and off the field.

"Being a complete family man shows how grounded he is despite all his achievements. I'd love to follow that example," Tilak said.

He also credited his parents. "I feel privileged to get the support they've given me despite all their hardships. It's just the beginning, and hopefully, with God's grace, it will be a wonderful journey."

Cricket, as ever, will test not just his range but his resolve — whether he can sustain that discipline born of a 60-kilometre commute and a coach's quiet faith.

The next T20 World Cup, to be co-hosted by defending champion India and Sri Lanka, will arrive soon enough. Tilak is ready for the challenge.

'I JUST ENJOY PLAYING GOOD CRICKET'

NAGARA GOPAL

TILAK VARMA

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Opposition you loved playing against and hated most

I love playing against Australia in Australia. There's no team I really hate — I just enjoy playing good cricket.

How do you unwind

By relaxing with my family and childhood friends.

One thing people don't know about you

People know me as calm under pressure since the Asia Cup win (smiles), but I've loved chasing and finishing games since childhood.

Favourite ground

My home ground, the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium in Hyderabad, and the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai.

Sporting idol

Rohit Sharma.

Favourite song

"I Got Love" by American hip-hop and R&B recording artist Nate Dogg.

Favourite destination

Switzerland.

Biggest off-field accomplishment

I enjoy playing any sport, nothing beyond that.

Favourite book

Books by Sidney Sheldon.

Secret talent

None in particular.

Prankster in the team you'd stay away from

Arshdeep Singh.

1st

Anchored grace: South Africa's Tazmin Brits celebrates her century against New Zealand in Indore. Brits' ton, along with Sune Luus' unbeaten 83, powered the Proteas to a six-wicket win and their first victory of the tournament. GETTY IMAGES

2nd

Fire first: Defending a modest 178, pacer Marufa Akter (left) gave Bangladesh the perfect start by trapping both England openers, Tammy Beaumont and Amy Jones, in front during the PowerPlay in Guwahati. RITU RAJ KONWAR

3rd

Return poise: Former England captain Heather Knight, in her first competitive match after eight months, capitalised on three reprieves to guide her team to a four-wicket win with a steady 111-ball 79 against Bangladesh. RITU RAJ KONWAR

4th

Quiet defiance: With unwavering focus, Australia's Beth Mooney plays a shot against Pakistan in Colombo. The defending champion was reeling at 115 for eight before Mooney's gritty century lifted her side to 221 for nine. Australia went on to win by 107 runs. AFP

5th

Youth unbound: India wicketkeeper-batter Richa Ghosh in action during her 77-ball 94 against South Africa, a knock that helped the Women in Blue post a competitive 251 in Visakhapatnam. K. R. DEEPAK

6th

Spark rising: Under the lights at the ACA-VDCA Stadium in Visakhapatnam, South Africa all-rounder Nadine de Klerk (left) celebrates after her blistering 54-ball 84 powered the Proteas to a three-wicket win over India. K. R. DEEPAK

7th

Century storm: Bangladesh's Nishita Akter Nishi is castled by New Zealand pacer Lea Tahuhu in Guwahati. Playing her 100th ODI, Tahuhu took three wickets to help the White Ferns secure a 100-run win in their final league fixture in Guwahati. AFP

8th

Lead by example: England captain Nat Sciver-Brunt raises her bat after scoring a century against Sri Lanka. She later claimed two wickets as England sealed an 89-run win over the Lankans. AFP

9th

Fearless pursuit: Australia captain Alyssa Healy plays a commanding stroke en route to her 107-ball 142 against India in Visakhapatnam. Her innings anchored Australia's record chase of 331, the highest successful pursuit in women's ODI history. K. R. DEEPAK

10th

Legacy lives: Former India captain Mithali Raj unveils a stand named in her honour at the ACA-VDCA Stadium in Visakhapatnam ahead of the India vs Australia clash. K. R. DEEPAK

11th

Steady flame: South Africa all-rounder Chloe Tryon plays a shot during her composed half-century against Bangladesh. Her knock was crucial in the Proteas' three-wicket win, their third straight victory of the tournament.

K. R. DEEPAK

12th

Rain paused: Sri Lanka's Nilakshika Silva plays a shot during her unbeaten 55 against New Zealand in Colombo. Her effort helped the host post 258 before rain forced the match to be abandoned. GETTY IMAGES

13th

Brief brilliance: Pakistan captain Fatima Sana celebrates the dismissal of her English counterpart, Nat Sciver-Brunt, in Colombo. Sana's four-wicket haul restricted England to 133 for nine in a rain-shortened contest, but Pakistan's chase was cut short by showers. GETTY IMAGES

14th

Spellbound control: Australia leg-spinner Alana King's (second from left) economical spell of two for 18 in 10 overs spearheaded the defending champion's 10-wicket win over Bangladesh, sealing a semifinal berth. K. R. DEEPAK

15th

Twin calm: South Africa openers Tazmin Brits and Laura Wolvaardt bump gloves after guiding their side to a 10-wicket win over Sri Lanka. The ODI was converted into a 20-over affair following rain, with the Proteas chasing down 121 in 14.5 overs. AFP

16th

Drenched routine: New Zealand's Suzie Bates celebrates after taking a catch against Pakistan in Colombo. Persistent rain forced yet another washout, the third in four matches at the venue, with both sides sharing points. AFP

17th

Measured regret: India vice-captain Smriti Mandhana on her way to a 94-ball 88 against England in Indore. Speaking at the post-match press conference after her side's narrow four-run loss, Smriti took responsibility for the defeat, admitting that the team's shot selection should have been better. R. V. MOORTHY

Guiding force: Sri Lanka captain Chamari Athapaththu speaks to her teammates during a team huddle, her voice still the guiding force of a side learning to balance experience with promise in a changing era for women's cricket. GETTY IMAGES

Between rain and rebuild, Sri Lanka's women search for a second sunrise

FOR MORE STORIES

In Colombo's rain-soaked World Cup, Sri Lanka's women's team fights not only opponents but history — balancing veterans, new faces, and a system **still learning to grow.**

Lavanya Lakshmi Narayanan
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In the early days of the Women's ODI World Cup, on a muggy night in Colombo, Sri Lanka head coach Rumesh Rathnayake looked preoccupied as he oversaw training at the Colombo Cricket Club Ground. A crucial game against Australia beckoned, and Sri Lanka's flaws with the bat and in the field had been laid bare.

The team's extremes in experience are striking. A 40-year-old Udeshika Prabodhani leads the pace attack, 39-year-old Inoka Ranaweera remains its ace spinner, 35-year-old Anushka Sanjeewani has been among the best keepers in the tournament, and the side continues to rely on 35-year-old Chamari Athapaththu for both performance and inspiration. At the other end are 20-year-olds like Vishmi Gunaratne and Dewmi Vihanga, still finding their footing on a stage that

often feels a generation too soon.

"Unfortunately, it's a game of runs and wickets," Rathnayake tells *Sportstar*. "Look at just the batting. We've wanted to elevate the others to Chamari's level, and we had some heartening results. We narrowed that difference a lot. I just wish everyone got to see that a lot more on the big stage."

The mood is reminiscent of the 2024 T20 Asia Cup campaign, which Sri Lanka won by beating India in the final. That tournament, too, was about finding answers beyond Athapaththu, who had begun hinting that her international career was nearing its end.

Harshitha Samarawickrama and Kavisha Dilhari carried Sri Lanka home then, while Athapaththu, like a mother watching her children in a school final, nervously bit her nails on the sidelines. These are the faces of Sri Lanka's future, but for all the promise, consistency remains elusive.

This World Cup feels markedly different from the 2022 edition in New Zealand. For one, Sri Lanka wasn't even there, having played no ODIs in the lead-up to that tournament because of the pandemic. Since then, the team has played 36 ODIs and won 12 — a modest but meaningful improvement.

The Harshithas, Vishmis, and Kavishas have been the focus of Sri Lanka's rebuild, while bowlers such as Vihanga and Malki Madara have been blooded. But the gulf between the senior pros and the emerging generation is still evident to the coach. "We are aware that the ladies start cricket a bit late, so age is not a big issue," Rathnayake told this publication during the T20 World Cup in the UAE last year.

"We try to encourage youngsters coming through, and the board has arranged key opportunities for youngsters to show themselves off. The actual fruit of that exercise will come through in another five years. For us here, though, the challenge is upskilling our group."

The problem, of course, is that upskilling cannot, and should not, happen during a World Cup.

Defining triumph: Sri Lanka batters celebrate their historic win over India in the 2024 Women's T20 Asia Cup final, a landmark triumph that signalled the team's intent to step out from Chamari Athapaththu's shadow and script its own chapter in the women's game. GETTY IMAGES

Step by step

Shashikala Siriwardene, Sri Lanka's first bona fide star and Athapaththu's predecessor as captain, recalls how passion once powered the sport in a landscape with little financial incentive.

Her own journey began with her father's quiet commitment to her early coaching — a small act of belief that mirrored many others across the island. For players like Athapaththu, it was often an uncle or a relative who filled that role, people who trusted a system that had yet to take shape.

"It was a struggle to demonstrate to our people our ability to play cricket, making it challenging to maintain the team's cohesion. Each individual faced their own unique set of difficulties," she tells *Sportstar*.

It also took visionaries who thought well ahead of their time to fight for the women's game to be seen on its own merit, separate from the men's structure. One such pioneer was Gwen Herath, the founding president of the Sri Lanka Women's Cricket Association, who passed away earlier this year. She rallied funds for the team, brought in the appliance brand Singer as a sponsor, and ensured Sri Lanka made it to the 1997 World Cup in India.

When compared with Pakistan and Bangladesh, where domestic fixtures are irregular, Sri Lanka benefits from a long-standing club ecosystem. Representation from the Armed Forces — Army, Navy, and Air Force — has historically provided a steady supply of players who later graduated to the national side.

Today, clubs serve as the first tier of the pathway, feeding players into provincial teams that compete in the National Super League (instituted in 2024).

"There was a significant increase in cricket activity over time. Initially, there were approximately six to eight matches annually, involving six or seven clubs. Additionally, two to three schools participated in cricket. However, with the advent of district and provincial tournaments, as well as 50-over, T20, NSL, and school cricket, the number of clubs and opportunities thereafter has grown,"

Grassroots exchange: New Zealand's senior women cricketers share catching drills and laughter with young players at Devapathiraja College in Rathgama, one of Sri Lanka's key nurseries for emerging women cricketers. X/@WHITE_FERNS

Siriwardene adds.

"We have quite a decent system in Sri Lanka. School cricket is picking up, and solid coaches are entering the fray. We have solid Under-17s, U-19s, and emerging A teams that are getting more opportunities," former cricketer Hashan Tillakaratne, who has coached both Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in recent years, tells *Sportstar*.

His optimism is reflected in the U-19 side's 5-0 T20 whitewash over a touring Australian outfit. "There was a time when we were struggling to put the side together; now you have some of these girls in the rankings. It's a definite step up," he says.

Colleges such as Devapathiraja College in Rathgama, the hometown of breakout all-rounder Kavisha Dilhari, are now central to nurturing Sri Lanka's best talent. SLC has even facilitated occasional exposure tours where visiting international teams train and interact with these players.

Kavisha herself embodies a system that has finally begun to produce talent rather than merely chase parity. She benefited from the Foundation of Goodness (FOG), a social non-profit co-founded by Kushil Gunasekera and Muttiah Muralitharan that now supports sporting talent. Several national players have risen through its grassroots programs, making FOG a pillar of Sri Lanka's sporting ecosystem.

Its work has drawn support from Surrey Cricket Club, the Marylebone Cricket Club, various Australian academies, and even pop star Bryan Adams, who contributed to building facilities on the island.

"That Asia Cup win definitely did something here in mushrooming interest in the women's game. So many girls from rural areas suddenly emerged wanting to play like Chamari, Kavisha, and Harshitha. Our job then becomes to ensure there are facilities for these dreams," Gunasekara tells *Sportstar*.

The ground in Seenigama, Gunasekara's native village, now serves as FOG's High-Performance hub. Its scouting camps reach across the country in search of players to feed into the national structure. FOG has built playgrounds in several villages and hopes to expand further into the northern province and the central tea-estate regions.

Bridging the gap

Even as Sri Lanka's system grows, the gap between the senior team and its feeder tiers remains an uncomfortable truth.

Rathnayake is blunt: "It's a concern. I won't lie, but this is what I have." A large part of the issue lies in exposure. Like many 'smaller' cricketing nations, Sri Lanka rarely plays top-tier opposition. Before this World Cup, the team had not faced Australia in an ODI since 2019 — and that meeting was eventually washed out. "We were not often given the chance to compete against those teams. We did have the opportunity to play India in the Asia Cups and Asian Games, but encountered the others only during ICC events. In my 17-year career, I participated in just one bilateral series with Australia," Siriwardene says.

Sri Lanka's first win of the tournament came in a scrappy match against Bangladesh, a contest where the team that made fewer mistakes prevailed. It was sealed by yet another Athapaththu masterclass: three wickets for one run in the final over when Bangladesh needed nine to win. For now, the senior side and its management will reflect on a difficult campaign before resuming domestic duties.

At the time of writing, Sri Lanka's World Cup has been shaped as much by the weather as by form, with three of its five Colombo fixtures affected by rain. So much for home advantage. The rains have also dampened attendance. SLC announced free entry at the R. Premadasa Stadium and refunds for those who had already paid. Crowds, mostly families from the surrounding Maligawatta suburb, made an evening of it regardless.

One fan summed it up best: "Things in Sri Lankan cricket always happen as miracles. Look at Chamari!"

For years, sparks of brilliance have kept the women's game alive on this island. The challenge now is to turn those sparks into a steady flame.

THE QUIET BEAUTIES OF A NOISY GAME

Sportstar reporters on the Women's World Cup trail **capture stories** beyond the scoreboard — of places, people, and fleeting cricketing moments.

A trip to Indore is never complete without a walk down Sarafa Bazaar, or so the Diary was told, repeatedly. From the staff at the Devi Ahilya Bai Holkar Airport to the cab driver who picked me up and the hotel concierge, everyone had the same suggestion.

Indore is a foodie's haven, even more so during Diwali. After match duties at the Holkar Stadium, the Diary and a few colleagues set out to conquer the jam-packed, winding lanes of Sarafa Bazaar. What began

Quiet pride: A smile worth more than a headline, as Bangladesh pacer Marufa Akter holds her *Sportstar* feature in hand.
ANIRUDH VELAMURI

Cultural duality: A glimpse of Colombo's contrasts, from a vintage collage of a celebrity cricket match at the P. Sara Oval featuring Nargis to the calm waters of Beira Lake seen from the Seema Malaka Temple. PICS: LAVANYA LAKSHMI NARAYANAN

as a casual stroll soon turned into a two-hour gastronomic marathon, and a stomach with absolutely no room left.

The Diary's World Cup stint spanned three India matches, all defeats, one in Indore and two in the port city of Visakhapatnam. Yet, it wasn't the cricketing highs or the culinary delights that will linger longest in memory. It was a five-minute exchange with Bangladesh pacer Marufa Akter that etched itself most deeply into the Diary's pages. An interview with Marufa, conducted earlier in Colombo, had already appeared in Sportstar by the time she flew to India. When the Diary found a quiet moment to hand her a copy of the magazine, the 20-year-old's radiant smile on seeing it felt like the best review one could ever hope for.

Anirudh Velamuri

A city of memories, missing a few

After much coaxing from every tuk-tuk driver the Diary employed for its stadium runs, a day was finally set aside to explore Colombo. The six-hour sightseeing expedition began at the iconic P. Sara Oval, which incidentally now serves as the home base of the national women's team and its developmental pathways.

Tucked away in Borella, a neighbourhood that has historically borne the brunt of the city's riots, the venue, home to the Tamil Union Cricket Club, was among the structures burnt down during the anti-Tamil violence of 1983. The premises, as the Diary's car guide later revealed, house cricket memorabilia from Sir Donald Bradman's visit to the island. Funnily enough, the only visible female representation on its walls was a framed collage from a celebrity cricket match featuring Bollywood veterans of the 1950s, including Raj Kapoor and Nargis.

More than the heavily Instagrammed and crowded Gangaramaya Temple, the Diary found peace in the quiet Seema Malaka Temple just a few hundred metres away. The structure itself stands as a symbol of Colombo's inter-religious harmony; its reconstruction on the Beira Lake was funded by a Muslim businessman and designed by the legendary Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa.

The World Cup run in Sri Lanka has been underwhelming, marred by washouts, lacklustre promotion, and

Enduring echo: A billboard of the late Zubeen Garg stands tall in Guwahati, his voice and presence still woven into the city's everyday rhythm. RAJDEEP SAHA

thin crowds. Yet, nothing disappointed quite like the Sri Lanka Cricket Museum housed within the board's headquarters. The exhibits trace the nation's cricketing journey but abruptly stop at 2016. The small room is lined with trophies from continental and bilateral triumphs, including a proud display of the 2014 Men's T20 World Cup silverware. But the cherished Women's Asia Cup trophy, won in Dambulla in 2024 after beating India, remains tucked away somewhere in a box; one among many updates the museum sorely needs. It is an opportunity lost for a nation hosting the women's world showpiece for the first time.

Lavanya Lakshmi Narayanan

A city tuned to a different frequency

When the Diary stepped into the taxi pick-up area of the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport, it was pleasantly surprised to spot a few billboards promoting the Women's World Cup. But as soon as the cab began its 20-odd kilometre journey into Guwahati city, the Diary was greeted by countless signages paying tribute to Zubeen Garg, the iconic Assamese singer who had recently passed away, outside homes and traffic signals alike.

"He's considered a legend here. People loved him because he wasn't afraid to speak his mind, even if it meant going against the establishment," said a media member from the Assam Cricket Association.

It was only natural then that the opening match of the tournament between India and Sri Lanka, held in the city, drew record-breaking crowds for a special Garg tribute. His loyal followers made sure they didn't miss it.

Garg's voice is unmistakable and seems to follow you wherever you go in Guwahati. You could be in your hotel room writing about how Bangladesh nearly beat England and swear you heard someone outside humming Ya Ali. His voice lingers in restaurants, filling the air, and even at the Barsapara Stadium, helping a groundsman get through his day.

While the New Zealand team trained in the nets to songs like Here Without You by 3 Doors Down, it was clear to the Diary that cricket may come and go in Guwahati, but Zubeen Garg will live forever.

Rajdeep Saha

The fan who finally asked

Landing in Colombo ahead of the final few league matches of the Women's ODI World Cup, the Diary had expected to see signs of support for Sri Lanka, which still had three home games remaining.

Every local who asked the reason for visiting received the same reply: cricket coverage at the R. Premadasa, fondly known as Khettarama. For days, tuk-tuk drivers ferried the Diary to and from the stadium, passing the usual flags and banners, yet none seemed curious enough to ask who was playing.

Until one afternoon, a wide-eyed Nallasamy hesitated before accepting his fare and asked if spectators were allowed to watch. When told that entry was free, his face lit up even more. On learning that Sri Lanka was playing "a good team", South Africa, he promised to park nearby and join in.

Later, when the cameras panned across the nearly empty stands, the Diary smiled. There he was, cheering the teams on despite the rain.

Kavita Menon

Urban rhythm: Brightly painted tuk-tuks wait outside Colombo's R Premadasa Stadium, as much a symbol of the city's pulse as the cricket they ferry fans to. KAVITA MENON

Introducing Schoolyard – *Sportstar's* New School Sports Corner

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Editor, Sportstar

WEST INDIES SHOWS SIGNS OF FIGHT AGAINST DOMINANT HOST

Its performance in the latter half of the second Test against India, with John Campbell and Shai Hope scoring centuries, **bodes well** for its future.

Abhishek Saini
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West Indies hadn't won a Test in India since 1994, and not many had lofty expectations of Roston Chase and Co. to end this unceremonious streak.

It landed in India on the back of just two wins in its last 10 Tests, having endured a demolition at the hands of Australian pacers, and losing two ace quicks — Shamar Joseph and Alzarri Joseph — to injuries.

However, this was still a side desperate for a turnaround — not in fortune, but in morale. In this context, John Campbell and Shai Hope's 177-run defiance that kept India's bowlers at bay for a session and a half during the second Test in New Delhi was akin to the West Indies turning a corner.

Captain Chase had lamented his side's propensity to fail to stick to basics for long enough and hand away advantages. Even after their heroics in the second Test, Hope and Campbell average 27 and 25, respectively, this year. But they offered a template for turning their team's ailing form around, blending intent and attrition against a threatening spin attack.

Lower down the order, Justin Greaves emerged as a dependable batter who could usher in the change of intent. He gave glimpses of resolve against Australia and reinforced the order with a doughty fifty in the second innings in New Delhi. The remnants of their batting bravado were visible when West Indies took the field to defend 121 runs. With close-in catchers keeping India's batters on their toes, West Indies looked far from the listless side that had meandered through

Heroics in vain: Centurions John Campbell and Shai Hope's 177-run defiance kept India's bowlers at bay for a session and a half. AFP

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Heroics in vain: Centurions John Campbell and Shai Hope's 177-run defiance kept India's bowlers at bay for a session and a half. AFP

NEW DELHI TEST PHOTOLINE
INDIA-WEST INDIES

Purple patch continues: Yashasvi Jaiswal and Shubman Gill extended their prolific form, striking commanding centuries in the first innings to power India to 518 for five declared. PICS: R. V. MOORTHY

FOR MORE IMAGES

Bag of tricks: Kuldeep Yadav dismantled the West Indian middle order with a five-wicket haul, wrapping up the visitor's first innings for 248. R. V. MOORTHY

Defiance: Following on, West Indies showed rare resolve as Shai Hope (left) and John Campbell and struck determined hundreds to stave off an innings defeat. R. V. MOORTHY

Polishing it off: India wrapped up the chase early on the final day, with opener K.L. Rahul anchoring the innings with a composed half-century. R. V. MOORTHY

Done and dusted: Shubman Gill capped his first home series as India's Test captain with an assured sweep over West Indies. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

ON THE WRITE LINE

Sunil Gavaskar

FOR MORE STORIES

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN NICE IF THOSE WHO WERE NOT PART OF WEST INDIES TEST SERIES HAD BEEN SENT EARLIER TO AUSTRALIA

The international schedule for India is a **very tight one,** and the mingling of the three formats is never a help.

Over the years, a significant misconception among Indian cricket fans is that if a player is replaced as captain, he will attempt to undermine the new captain by not performing to the best of his ability. Nothing can be further from the truth, for the simple fact is that if a captain has been replaced and then doesn't perform, he could be out of the team altogether. So, no player, however aggrieved he may feel at losing the captaincy, is ever going to deliberately underperform.

With that misconception still going strong, many are questioning if young Shubman Gill will be able to handle two former captains, Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, who are part of the three-match One-Day International series against Australia. Gill has gone out of his way to say that his equation with them hasn't changed simply because he is the captain now. If anything, he will only benefit by having these two stalwarts by his side. Both would be happy to offer suggestions if asked, and what could be better for a captain leading in this format for the first time than to have two of the greatest ODI players playing in his team?

It was never going to be easy for both to make a comeback on a bouncy Perth pitch after a few months' gap. It's not as if the other players who have been playing regularly have performed any better. The international schedule for India is a very tight one, and the mingling of the three formats is never a help. The batters have to adjust to the bounce of the white ball and, with it, the bat speeds to be able to hit more fours and sixes. The bowlers also have to bowl a different length than in red-ball cricket. Regardless of a player's experience, adjusting takes time. So, it would have been nice if those who were not part of the Test series against West Indies had been sent earlier to Australia to play a couple of warm-up games and be better prepared for the steep bounce in Perth and other Aussie pitches.

That said, the white-ball series is really only to fulfil the commitment to the broadcast rights holder, for the result of both the ODI and T20I series is not going to count for anything. There are no points on offer, nor is there a prestigious Cup to be won.

The broadcasters have a huge role to play, with the viewership running up to millions. It is because of the huge amounts they buy the rights for that they have to try and recoup their investment, even if they don't make much money out of it. That said, the cricket must never suffer, and so the spin of the coin mustn't decide the game. Suppose there is going to be heavy dew. In that case, it is clear that unless the team batting first puts up a humongous total on the board, it will not be able to defend it, with the bowlers

Change of guard: Shubman Gill has taken over as India's new ODI captain, replacing Rohit Sharma for the ongoing three-match series in Australia. AFP

handicapped by having to bowl with a ball made wet and slippery by the dew. So, the authorities can make the effort to have day games instead of day-night games whenever possible.

India found the wet ball tough to bowl with in the ongoing Women's World Cup and lost two games where they put up a big total, which they would have won if they had been played during the day. So, the toss made a difference. They still have a couple of games to play and qualify for the semis.

If they do get there, then the coach must tell them to play smart cricket and not throw their wickets and the match away by going for the glory shots, whether batting first or chasing. Not too many Indian girls, apart from skipper Harmanpreet Kaur and Smriti Mandhana, are capable of smashing the sixes, so the others could be well advised to be less ambitious and not throw the game away looking for sixes and getting caught well inside the boundary. Otherwise, like it happened with the men's team, which at least got to the final, the fans will be heartbroken by another cup going somewhere else.

If anything, Gill will only benefit by having Rohit and Virat by his side. Both would be happy to offer suggestions if asked, and what could be better for a captain leading in this format for the first time than to have two of the greatest ODI players playing in his team?

Jadeja's all-round show

5 The number of occasions when Ravindra Jadeja did the double of a century and 4-plus wickets in an innings in his Test career. In the Ahmedabad Test, while scoring his sixth Test century, along with a four-wicket haul, he became only the third player in Test cricket history to achieve this rare feat on five or more occasions going level with his former teammate R. Ashwin. Only England's Ian Botham has done so on more occasions — a record six. For the record, West Indian Garry Sobers and Bangladeshi Shakib Al Hasan have done so on four occasions each.

Player scoring a century and also claiming a four-plus wicket in an innings of a Test match

Inn	Player (for)	100s	4+ wkt hauls	Opponent	Venue	Month, Year	Result
6	Ian Botham (Eng)	103	5/73	New Zealand	Christchurch (Jade)	Feb 1978	Won
		108	8/34 (2)	Pakistan	Lord's	Jun 1978	Won
		114	6/58 & 7/48	India	Mumbai (WS)	Feb 1980	Won
		149* (2)	6/95	Australia	Leeds	Jul 1981	Won
		138	5/59	New Zealand	Wellington (BR)	Jan 1984	Drawn
5	R. Ashwin (Ind)	103	5/156 & 4/34	West Indies	Mumbai (WS)	Nov 2011	Drawn
		113	7/83 (2)	West Indies	North Sound	Jul 2016	Won
		106 (2)	5/43	England	Chennai	Feb 2021	Won
		113	6/88 (2)	Bangladesh	Chennai	Sep 2024	Won
5	Ravindra Jadeja	175*	5/41 & 4/46	Sri Lanka	Mohali	Mar 2022	Won
		112	5/41 (2)	England	Rajkot	Feb 2024	Won
		107* (2)	4/143	England	Manchester	Jul 2025	Drawn
		104*	4/54 (2)	West Indies	Ahmedabad	Oct 2025	Won

Note: The numbers in parentheses indicate which innings of the match

7 The number of Test centuries for Yashasvi Jaiswal before the age of 24 years. He thus became only the eighth batter in Test cricket history to register seven or more centuries before the age of 24. Aussie legend Sir Don Bradman (12 centuries) and Indian Sachin Tendulkar (11) are the only batters with 10 or more centuries before 24. However, as an opening batter, his tally of Test centuries equals South African Graeme Smith. They both have seven centuries before the age of 24 while opening the batting. The table below have the details.

Most Test centuries as an opening batter before turning 24

100	Opening batter	Inn	Runs	Ave.	HS	From	To
7	Graeme Smith (SA)	50	2542	54.09	277	Oct 2002	Mar 2004
7*	Yashavi Jaiswal (Ind)	49	2428	51.66	214*	Jul 2023	Oct 2025
5	Len Hutton (Eng)	21	1345	67.25	364	Jun 1937	Aug 1939+
5	Alastair Cook (Eng)	54	2116	39.92	118	Mar 2006	Dec 2007
5	Kraigg Brathwaite (WI)	63	2193	37.81	212	May 2011	Oct 2016

** Jaiswal has an opportunity to extend his three-figure tally this year.*
** Hutton's Test career was interrupted because of the WW2. His next century (his sixth) came in Feb 1947, seven and half years later.*

5 The number of 150-plus scores by Yashasvi Jaiswal before the age of 24. With the 175 he made in Delhi, he is now just behind Sir Don Bradman, who had eight 150+ scores, which include six double centuries.

Test batters with most 150+ scores before turning 24

No. of 150+ scores	Batter (for)	150+ scores	From	To	Age at last 150+ before 24
8	Don Bradman (Aus)	254, 334, 232, 223, 152, 226, 167, 299*	28 Jun 1930	30 Jan 1932	23y-156d
5	Yashasvi Jaiswal (Ind)	171, 209, 214*, 161, 175	2 Feb 2024	10 Oct 2025	23y-286d+
4	Javed Miandad (Pak)	163, 206, 154*, 160	9 Oct 1976	6 Feb 1979	21y-239d
4	Sachin Tendulkar (Ind)	165, 179, 177, 169	12 Feb 1993	16 Mar 1997	23y-255d
4	Graeme Smith (SA)	200, 151, 277, 259	18 Oct 2002	1 Aug 2003	22y-181d

+ Jaiswal has another two Tests before his 24th birthday on 28 Dec 2025.

5 The number of Indian batters who have had the misfortune of being dismissed run out after making scores of 150-plus in a Test innings. Jaiswal, in the Delhi Test, is the latest and is also the first Indian opener to be dismissed in that manner. The previous highest by an Indian opener was the 131 by Navjot Singh Sidhu against Sri Lanka in Mohali in November 1997. Incidentally, Jaiswal's 175 is the seventh-highest score by an opener who was run out in Tests. West Indian Conrad Hunte's 260 against Pakistan in Kingston in March 1958 is the highest score.

Indian Test batters dismissed run-out after making a 150-plus

Runs	Batter	Against	Venue	Month, Year	M Inns	Bat#	Result
218	Sanjay Manjrekar	Pakistan	Lahore	Dec 1989	1	3	Drawn
217	Rahul Dravid	England	The Oval	Sep 2002	2	3	Drawn
180	Rahul Dravid	Australia	Kolkata	Mar 2001	3	6	Won
175	Yashasvi Jaiswal	West Indies	Delhi	Oct 2025	1	1	Won
155	Vijay Hazare	England	Mumbai BS	Dec 1951	1	4	Drawn

12 The number of innings Shubman Gill needed to reach his fifth Test century as captain during his unbeaten 129 in Delhi. He is now the third quickest in terms of innings to register five hundreds as captain. Only England's Alastair Cook and India's Sunil Gavaskar have done it quicker — in nine and 10 innings respectively.

Fewest innings to reach five Test centuries as captain

Inns	Captain (For)	M	Runs	Ave.	50s	Achieved on
9	Alastair Cook (Eng)	5	889	127.00	0	6 Dec 2012
10	Sunil Gavaskar (Ind)	6	843	105.38	1	24 Jan 1979
12	Shubman Gill	7	933	84.82	1	11 Oct 2025
13	Don Bradman	7	1125	102.27	2	28 Jun 1938
14	Steve Smith	8	980	75.38	2	27 Dec 2015

Note: 52 batters have made five or more Test centuries as captain

27 The number of successive Tests India has not lost against the West Indies since its last defeat in Kingston on 22 May 2002. India's unbeaten run against this opponent has been extended now for 23 years, six days. However, this is not a Test record, as England had not lost any of its first 47 Tests against New Zealand, spanning more than 45 years from 1930 to 1975.

Longest unbeaten run for a Test side against another

Tests	For	Opp	From	To	Span	Result
47	Eng	NZ	+10-1-1930	5-3-1975	45y-1m-24d	W-23, D-24
30	Eng	Pak	21-10-1961	31-8-1982	20y-10m-11d	W-11, D-19
29	WI	Eng	3-6-1976	8-8-1988	12y-2m-6d	W-20, D-9
27	Ind	WI	9-10-2002	*14-10-2025	23y-6d	W-17, D-10
24	Aus	SA	17-2-2011	10-12-1952	41y-9m-24d	W-19, D-5
24	WI	Ind	+10-11-1948	23-2-1971	22y-3m-14d	W-12, D-12

+ Unbeaten run began with the first H2H Tests between the two sides
** Unbeaten run sequence still in progress.*

10 The number of Test series won in a row by India against the West Indies. Since losing the five-match Test series 2-1 in the Caribbean in April-May 2002, India has not lost a single Test match against this opponent — in the last 27 Tests (spanning 10 series) between the two sides, with India winning 17, and 10 Tests ending in a draw. By doing so, it now equals the Test record for the most Test series wins in a row with South Africa, which had also won its last 10 series against the very same opponent.

Most consecutive Test series victories against a particular opponent

Series wins	For	Opp	From	To	Tests	W	L	D	Win%
10*	SA	WI	26-11-1998	17-8-2024	34	23	3	8	67.65
10*	Ind	WI	9-10-2002	14-10-2025	27	17	0	10	62.96
9	Aus	WI	23-11-2000	11-12-2022	28	23	1	4	82.14
8	Aus	Eng	8-6-1989	6-1-2003	43	28	7	8	65.12
8*	SL	Zim	11-9-1996	31-1-2020	17	14	0	3	82.35

122 The number of Test wins for India at home. Its recent win in Delhi has elevated it to the third in the list of most home Test victories, surpassing South Africa's 121. It now trails, only behind Australia (262) and England (241).

Most Test wins at home

#	Team	M	W	L	D	T	Win%
1	Aus	450	262	103	84	1	58.22
2	Eng	558	241	132	185	0	43.19
3	Ind	296	122	58	115	1	41.22
4	SA	254	121	77	56	0	47.64
5	WI	270	95	74	101	0	35.19
6	NZ	235	76	71	88	0	32.34
7	SL	162	72	47	43	0	44.44
8	Pak	172	64	30	78	0	37.21
9	Ban	81	14	53	14	0	17.28
10	Zim	72	9	43	20	0	12.50
11	Ire	2	1	1	0	0	50.00
12	**Total**	**2552**	**1077**	**689**	**784**	**2**	**42.20**

Note:
** England had an unbeaten 20-series run against New Zealand from 1930 to 1983, which included 15 victories and five drawn series, spanning nearly 53 years.*
** Australia now has an unbeaten 14-series run against West Indies from 1995 to 2025, including 12 wins and two drawn series.*
All records are correct and updated until 18 October 2025.

Craft endures: Mohammed Shami leads Bengal's charge as teammates celebrate their Ranji Trophy win over Uttarakhand at Eden Gardens, marking a triumphant homecoming for the pace spearhead. PTI

BETWEEN EDEN AND THE VALLEY

Across the Ranji map, **from Kolkata to Coimbatore to Kashmir,** our reporters find the game's heartbeat in the small moments that never make the highlights reel.

Mohammed Shami's fan following may not be as widespread as that of M. S. Dhoni, Virat Kohli or Rohit Sharma, but his 'Shamidom' has a steady presence across the country. Whether it's an away match or a home engagement, when Shami dons the whites for Bengal in the Ranji Trophy, fans throng the stadiums to cheer their beloved star. Shami, too, reciprocates their affection.

After leading Bengal to an eight-wicket win over Uttarakhand with his seven-wicket haul in the Ranji Trophy season opener at Eden Gardens, Shami acknowledged his fans' support throughout the contest. He went up to them to sign autographs on sheets of paper, caps, jerseys, bats, balls, posters and even mobile phone covers — all with great patience.

In a short video, Shami declared, "I'm here to stay!" — a statement that should delight his followers.

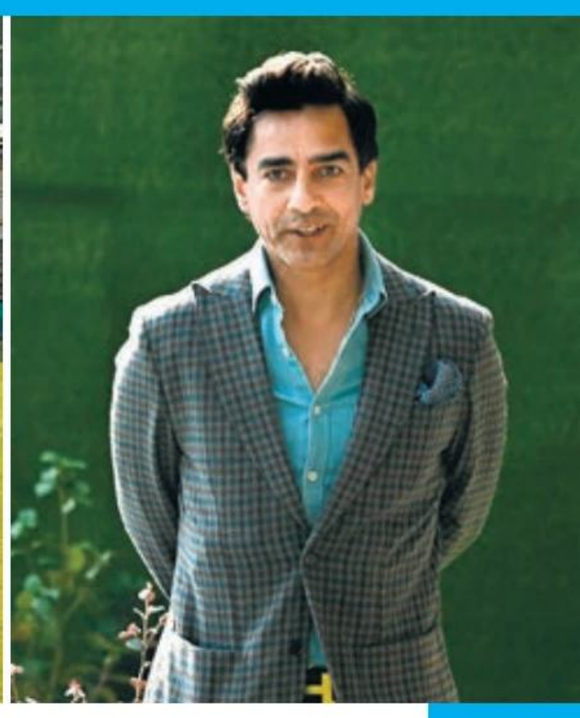
Y.B. Sarangi

Cricket on the field, feasts off it

Patting its belly, the Diary declares with pleasure that it was a gastronomically satisfying trip!

The caterer for the match was the popular Madhampatty Pakashala, thanks to the TNCA! Although there was no non-vegetarian food for the reporters (there were only two of us), our TNCA liaison used his influence to have some dishes smuggled in for us every day. Lip-smacking stuff, no complaints!

The day before the match, the Diary had an episode of Breakfast with Champions! Sai Kishore made an offer the Diary couldn't refuse: to have breakfast with him.



Ful'filling' experience: Between overs and aromas — Coimbatore's Valarmathi Mess feeds the Ranji trail.
PRASANNA VENKATESAN

Homecoming hope: In Srinagar's calm, cricket stirs again. For BCCI president Mithun Manhas, watching from the sidelines, it's both homecoming and mandate.
IMRAN NISSAR

Over fluffy idlis, bondas, omelettes and refreshing cups of filter coffee, he said he intended to show more of his personality, beyond cricket, in casual YouTube interviews. The Diary affirmed that this is exactly what viewers want and made a mental note to watch his recent interview with a popular YouTuber.

For lunch, the Diary visited Valarmathi Mess, known for its Kongu cuisine. Tamil Nadu cricketers Andre Siddarth (CSK) and C. V. Achyuth were spotted there. Siddarth smiled and waved; the Diary, in a food coma, sheepishly acknowledged.

Now, to the most intriguing part. On the final day, the two reporters and a TNCA liaison, someone well connected in cricket's media circles, found themselves deep in conversation.

That's when the Diary heard a remarkable nugget: a former India team official had once splurged Rs. 12 lakh in just an hour on apparel shopping in Chennai.

Prasanna Venkatesan

Hope in the valley

Beyond the heavy security guarding the entrance of the Sher-e-Kashmir Cricket Stadium in Srinagar, host to the clash between Jammu & Kashmir and Mumbai in the opening round of the 2025–26 Ranji Trophy, the Zabarwan mountain range and the chinar trees provide a quaint, verdant backdrop to the venue situated in the posh neighbourhood of Sonwar Bagh.

It may be hard to believe, given the basic facilities, that this was once a venue which hosted two ODIs — between India and West Indies in 1983, and India and Australia in 1986. But geopolitical tensions and militant violence have meant that even First-Class matches have been sparse in recent decades. When it hosted two Ranji matches last year, it was after a six-year gap.

Majid Dhar, who played 37 First-Class matches for J&K and now oversees cricket in Kashmir, hopes for better days ahead. His optimism stems from Mithun Manhas's elevation to BCCI president in September.

Manhas had served as JKCA's Director of Cricket Operations after retiring in 2017 and was in attendance during the fixture.

"The facilities need to be upgraded. A good thing has happened for the JKCA; someone from our association is now representing the top position of the BCCI. We are hopeful things will improve in two to three years," Dhar said.

"This is the only First-Class ground in Srinagar. The season has started in October, which is why we are able to host matches here. When it gets colder, we host matches in Jammu."

Vivek Krishnan

Top performers after Round 1

Run-Scorers

1. Sanat Sangwan
Team: Delhi
Runs: 267
2. Ayush Loharuka
Team: Bihar
Runs: 226
3. Lalit Yadav
Team: Goa
Runs: 213

Wicket-Takers

1. Manav Suthar
Team: Rajasthan
Wickets: 11
2. Shreyas Gopal
Team: Karnataka
Wickets: 11
3. Sakib Hussain
Team: Bihar
Wickets: 10

LISTEN TO OUR PODCAST

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UAE dashes Japan's hopes, books berth for T20 World Cup

1 With the victory, UAE **joins** Oman and Nepal as the three teams advancing from the Asia and East Asia-Pacific qualifier

The United Arab Emirates sealed the final berth for next year's Men's T20 World Cup with a commanding eight-wicket win over Japan in the qualifier in Oman.

Japan's dream of a maiden World Cup appearance ended as it was restricted to 116 for 9, before UAE chased down the target in just 12.1 overs. With the victory, UAE joins Oman and Nepal as the three teams advancing from the Asia and East Asia-Pacific qualifier to the 2026 T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka.

PTI

2

Rishabh Pant will mark his return from a foot injury by captaining India A in two four-day games against South Africa A in Bengaluru, starting October 30. Cleared by the BCCI's Centre of Excellence after rehab, Pant will skip Delhi's second Ranji round. Vice-captain B Sai Sudharsan will also play both matches, while KL Rahul, Dhruv Jurel, Prasidh Krishna, and Mohammed Siraj join for the second fixture from November 6. All are expected to feature in India's Test squad for the South Africa series beginning November 14 in Kolkata.

GETTY IMAGES

3

Shaheen Afridi has been named Pakistan's new ODI captain. The 25-year-old left-arm pacer will begin his leadership stint against South Africa in a three-match ODI series starting November 4. Since his debut in 2018, Shaheen has played 66 ODIs, taking 131 wickets at an average of 24.28, and has firmly established himself as Pakistan's spearhead across formats.

AFP

4

Afghanistan turned the tables on Bangladesh in emphatic fashion, sealing a 3-0 ODI series sweep with a crushing 200-run win in Abu Dhabi. After posting a commanding 293 for 9, with Ibrahim Zadran **(in pic)** making 95 off 111 balls, its bowlers dismantled Bangladesh for a meek 93, completing a demolition that mirrored the 3-0 drubbing Afghanistan had suffered in the T20Is prior. It was the fifth ODI series win on the bounce for Afghanistan.

PICS: GETTY IMAGES

5

Kane Williamson and Nathan Smith have returned to New Zealand's 14-member squad for the upcoming three-match ODI series against England. Both last featured in ODI cricket during the Champions Trophy final against India in March but missed the start of the home season due to injuries. Williamson has recovered from a recent minor medical issue, while Smith has regained full fitness after suffering an abdominal injury during the second Test against Zimbabwe in August.

India's junior shuttlers shine with historic silver and bronze

The Indian contingent clinched a historic maiden team bronze, while Tanvi Sharma won silver, ending a **17-year wait** for a medal in the girls' singles event.

Nihit Sachdeva
nihit.s@thehindu.co.in

The National Centre of Excellence (NCE) in Guwahati has been home to the cream of India's next generation of badminton stars for over two years. Adding another feather to its cap, the venue hosted some of the most talented shuttlers from across the world during the BWF World Junior Championships, held from October 6-19.

Hosting the event for the first time since Pune 2008 played its part as the Indian contingent clinched a historic maiden team bronze. In the individual events, Junior World No. 1 Tanvi Sharma ended a 17-year wait for a medal in the girls' singles by winning silver.

Team bronze for the ages

The Badminton Association of India (BAI) selected 25 players from 13 states — one of its most diverse squads ever — following the World Junior Championships selection trials at the NCE in August.

The group then underwent a three-week preparatory camp under Korean Park Tae-seng (singles), Russian Ivan Sozonov (doubles) and Indian coaches.

With the likes of Tanvi and Unnati Hooda — both of whom have already shown tremendous potential at the senior level — a medal was always within reach in the mixed team event, called the Suhandinata Cup, held from October 6-11.

The tournament introduced an updated relay scoring system, making matches more exciting. Each tie followed a best-of-three games format, with the first side to reach 45 points winning the game. A game comprised five matches — boys' singles, girls' singles, mixed doubles, boys' doubles and girls' doubles. Each match was played until one side scored nine points, after which the next began, continuing from the same cumulative score. The game concluded once a team reached the 45-point mark.

"We took feedback and suggested first-to-11 instead of nine points per match," said Sanjay Mishra, BAI General Secretary. "This is mainly being planned for the Sudirman Cup (the senior mixed team event held every two years). If the Sudirman Cup has 21 points (per game) and best-of-five matches, the tie goes on for six-seven hours. It's difficult for the audience to wait. To reduce the time, this is being planned. Maybe, it will be done in the next cycle."

Placed in Group H, India cruised into the knockout stage with 2-0 wins over Sri Lanka, the UAE and Nepal, while rotating six of its eight singles players and experimenting with different doubles pairings.

After conceding the opening game to Korea in the quarterfinals, Sozonov used the substitution rule to replace Viswa Tej Gobburu with C. Lalramsanga, who paired up with Bhargav Ram Arigela in the boys' doubles. The move paid off, as the Bhargav–Lalramsanga duo gave the team winning starts in the next two games, making the job easier for the rest of the squad. India defeated Korea 44-45, 45-40, 45-33 to secure a semifinal spot and a medal. Unlike in 2008, there was no bronze-medal play-off.

Indonesia, however, ended India's dream run with a comprehensive 45-34, 45-21 win in the semifinal. China survived a scare to edge Japan 45-42, 38-45, 45-42 in the other one.

In the summit clash, China avenged last year's loss to Indonesia, winning 45-30, 45-44 to clinch a record-extending 15th title.

Tanvi breaks the singles barrier

After a day's rest, it was every player and pair for themselves as the individual leg got underway.

Even in this segment, a new scoring format was trialled as part of the Badminton World Federation's (BWF) broader testing and analysis programme. Each match followed a best-of-three format, with each game played to 15 points. If the score reached 14-all, a two-point lead was required to win a game. At 20-all, sudden death came into play.

Players accustomed to the conventional 21-points-per-game format had mixed views on the trial. While some felt it encouraged a more aggressive approach, others found that recovering from a slow start became more difficult. The early

Fight to the finish: Tanvi lost to Thailand's Anyapat Phichitpreechasak in the final. RITU RAJ KONWAR

rounds, which featured several one-sided contests, saw some matches finish in as little as ten minutes. Overall, only seven fixtures lasted between 50 and 60 minutes, while three crossed the hour mark — the longest being a girls' doubles quarterfinal that stretched to one hour and 18 minutes. The shorter duration reduced physical strain on the players.

The BWF will gather data from further trials before deciding at its Annual General Meeting in April 2026 whether to implement the format across all levels.

Of India's 18 entries across five categories, five reached the quarterfinals — Bhargav–Viswa (boys' doubles), Bhavya Chhabra–Vishakha Toppo (mixed doubles), Tankara Gnana Dattu Talasila (boys' singles), Tanvi and Unnati (girls' singles) — but only Tanvi progressed beyond that stage.

The runs of Andhra duo Bhargav and Viswa (playing together since the age of 13) and Bhavya and Vishakha, who paired up for the first time in an international event, show how the next generation of Indians are taking doubles more seriously under Sozonov's guidance. The success of the country's top men's pair, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, has clearly inspired the next generation.

Top seed Tanvi, who idolises former World No. 1 Tai Tzu Ying of Chinese Taipei for her strokeplay and deception, was at her fluent best in a 15-11, 15-9 semifinal win over China's Liu Si Ya. However, Thailand's Anyapat Phichitpreechasak — who had earlier beaten Unnati in the quarterfinals — denied Tanvi the chance to become only the second Indian gold medallist after Saina Nehwal (2008), prevailing 15-7, 15-12 in the final. The 16-year-old from Hoshiarpur later admitted she needed to sharpen her strokes and build greater endurance and patience.

Guided by former Olympic and World Champion Chen Long, China's Liu Yang Ming Yu defeated top-seeded Indonesian Mohd Zaki Ubaidillah 15-10, 15-11 to claim the boys' singles crown. China also won

All smiles: India settled for a bronze in the team event after its dream run ended with a defeat to Indonesia in the semifinal. PTI

both the boys' and girls' doubles titles, reaffirming its might as badminton's Asian powerhouse.

Rigorous regimen pays off

The Guwahati facility, where Tanvi and 47 other shuttlers currently train, houses 16 courts, a 4,000 sq ft gymnasium equipped with modern fitness tools, a 60-bed hostel and a 2,000 sq ft physiotherapy centre.

Every night, after 9.30 p.m., the players' mobile phones are collected by the hostel warden. "The warden has the parents' contacts. If there's any emergency, players can call them; otherwise, the phone will be a distraction," said Mishra.

Even players from Guwahati must stay in the hostel. No one is allowed to order food from outside, and outings are permitted just once a week.

The idea behind these measures is to micro-manage the players' development — from sleep cycles and diet to recovery after training. "Our next plan is to increase the capacity to 100 so that we can focus on more players," Mishra added.

A significant stepping stone

What does it mean to be a Junior World Champion? The answer differs across generations.

Some shuttlers develop rapidly and do not need a junior title to propel them at the senior level. Saina's 2008 triumph came just three months after she had already reached the Olympic quarterfinals in Beijing. On the other hand, Thailand's Kunlavut Vitidsarn, a three-time Junior World Champion (2017–19), won his first major senior medal — a silver — at the 2022 Senior World Championships before clinching gold a year later.

For others, the transition proves more challenging, and their success at the Junior Worlds remains the defining moment of their career.

Honour board

Mixed Team:

Gold: China, Silver: Indonesia, Bronze: India & Japan

Girls' Singles:

Gold: Anyapat Phichitpreechasak (Tha), Silver: Tanvi Sharma, Bronze: Liu Si Ya (China) & Yataweemin Ketklieng (Tha)

Boys' Singles:

Gold: Liu Yang Ming Yu (Chn), Silver: Mohd. Zaki Ubaidillah (Ina), Bronze: Li Zhi Hang (Chn) & Richie Duta Richardo (Ina)

Mixed Doubles:

Gold: Lee Hyeong Woo & Cheon Hye In (Kor), Silver: Hung Bing Fu & Chou Yun An (Tpe), Bronze: Chen Jun Ting & Cao Zi Han (Chn), Loh Ziheng & Noraqilah Maisarah (Mas)

Girls' Doubles:

Gold: Tan Ke Xuan & Yue Yue Wei (Chn), Silver: Zi Yu Low & Noraqilah Maisarah (Mas), Bronze: Kodchaporn Chaichana & Pannawee Polyiam (Tha), Cao Zi Han & Chen Fan Shu Tian (Chn)

Boys' Doubles:

Gold: Chen Jun Ting & Liu Jun Rong (Chn), Silver: Cho Hyeong Woo & Lee Hyeong Woo (Kor), Bronze: Kazuma Kawano & Shuji Sawada (Jpn), Alexius Ongkytama Subagio & Aquino Evano Keneddy Tangka (Ina)

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« Athletes have regressed. They make less money now than we did in the 1990s. They have less power and less control »

CARL LEWIS

Jonathan Selvaraj
jonathan.selvaraj@thehindu.co.in

Things didn't go so well for Carl Lewis the last time he was at New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium. Lewis is one of the all-time greats of track and field, with nine Olympic and eight World Championships gold medals. But, during his only competitive appearance in India, at the Nehru Centenary International Athletic Meet in 1989, the jet-lagged American was beaten in the 100m by a little-known Austrian sprinter, Andreas Burger.

His return to the venue earlier this month, as chief guest of the Vedanta New Delhi Half Marathon, was far less stressful. Although the early morning start typical of distance running initially threw him off, Lewis soon hit his stride in a freewheeling chat with *Sportstar*.

He spoke not only about his previous experience running in India but also about how social media has distorted goals for younger athletes today, his coaching career, the one ambition he never achieved, whether track and field can reclaim the spotlight, and how his life could come full circle at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

What was your experience at the half-marathon like?

It was really interesting because I've never been to a race at five o'clock in the morning. That was a challenge! Distance runners run in the morning all the time. Sprinters do not. We cannot! But it was a joy to see the crowds stretching endlessly and to see the happiness in people, especially the young ones.

You don't have the best memories at JLN, though. A long time ago, you competed here, and the race didn't go so well for you.

I remember it was late in the year, but yes, it happened. 1989 was kind of in the middle of my career. I didn't win every race, but I always tried to make sure I won the big ones. I don't have any sadness about that time. It was an incredible experience to come to India.

After the race, I went and bought this huge bronze sculpture of a religious figure that I tried to take home. Unfortunately, it wouldn't fit in my luggage, so I placed it on the seat next to mine on the flight home. They even had to buckle it in! I've been to India many times. I love the country and the culture, and I'm just glad I was invited in the first place.

How did you process those moments when you did lose? Because there can't have been many of them.

I wouldn't say 'processing' is the right word. I'd say I evaluated my race. I'd look at what I could do better and ask myself a few questions: What did I do poorly? What mistakes did I make that I could correct? How did I prepare? I always evaluated my races from more of a business standpoint, not an emotional one.

I never gave away emotional control to my competition because that didn't help. I was always focused on what I could control. That meant thinking to myself, '*You didn't push out of the blocks properly,*' '*You didn't*

Gold restored: Final of the men's 100m at the 1988 Seoul Olympics — a race that shook the world. Ben Johnson crossed first, but after his steroid scandal, Carl Lewis (fourth from left) was crowned champion, with Linford Christie and Calvin Smith moving up the podium. GETTY IMAGES

run the turn right,' and 'You *fouled too many times*.' So I worked on those things.

Is that the kind of obsession needed to be great?

Everyone has their own way, but I was in a unique situation because I did both the jumps and the sprints. In the 30 years since I retired, maybe only a couple of athletes have had success in both. There aren't many people who've been in my situation.

I also don't think we'll see it happen again. That's just how society is now. You won't see another Jesse Owens, someone excelling in both the sprints and the jumps. I just don't see it.

It was different for me because I had to do so much more than everyone else in the competition. I was always doing two events a day, so I had to look at things differently.

Why do you think athletes these days don't combine events?

Honestly, the long jump is too difficult for most people. They just give up on it. It's not that there isn't talent — there are plenty of great athletes who could do it. But when they reach the next level, they realise, "Man, the sprints are pretty easy compared to that jump."

I was always a jumper at heart. I loved the event because it was hard. To me, the sprints were the easier part. Since I already enjoyed doing the tougher thing, it allowed me to do both.

I don't think too many fans would have guessed that. What do you think a lot of fans miss about track and field?

The technical aspect, for sure. When it comes to sprinting, most people can only run at full speed for about one second — so for most of the race, you're either speeding up or slowing down.

Many people would tell me, 'You didn't get a good start.' And I'd think, no, I had exactly the start I trained to have. I knew that 90 per cent of my race was designed a certain way, and that start was part of the design.

Why do you think jumpers aren't hitting the same distances as in your generation?

One thing I'm noticing is that jumpers today aren't having the same kind of success we did. I think they're jumping differently, and that's why they're struggling. I see certain things they're not doing if they want to go farther.

There are crucial movements in the final three steps of a long jump — small but vital changes in the angle of take-off that allow you to hit the board with more force and speed. It's a little complicated, but that's where the distance comes from.

Right now, most long jumpers are in the 8.40m or maybe 8.50m range. That's solid; they're good athletes, and they're working hard. But if you want to jump 8.60m, 8.70m, 8.80m or even 8.90m, there are specific things you need to do differently, and I'm not seeing that.

It's the same on the women's side. They're jumping around 7.00m, but if you want to reach 7.30m or 7.40m, there's something different you have to work on.

I understand what needs to be done, but right now we're in a space where it's acceptable to jump 8.40m as long as you get the medal. And, yes, it's the same Olympic medal I received — I jumped 8.72m in Seoul — but performance is about more than the prize. It's about you.

It's not that today's athletes aren't good. The long jump is just an event that works against your instincts. You have to fight genetics and fight what your body is telling you not to do to perform it correctly. We're not

Rare defeat: Andreas Berger celebrates after edging past Carl Lewis by one hundredth of a second to win the 100m on the opening day of the Nehru Centenary International Athletic Meet in New Delhi on September 19, 1989.
THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

designed to jump forward; our bodies are built to jump vertically, not horizontally. If you try to leap over something, you often feel like you're going to fall forward. That's a safety mechanism. So to jump really far, you have to override that instinct, and that's something a lot of people don't yet understand.

Right now, there are only a few people alive who have truly mastered that: Mike Powell, myself, Larry Myricks, and a few others. I coach college kids now, and some of them compete around the world. But even then, I don't always see the desire to figure it out, because they're still winning.

Why do you think that is?

We live in a society that no longer rewards or even values the excellence of performance. We're too focused on the prize. That's what social media has done to us; it doesn't matter what you actually achieve. If you have enough likes, enough followers, and if you're famous, then you've "won". It's not about excellence anymore.

You won a whole lot of medals, too! What motivated you then? You usually get motivated if you don't have something, after all.

It depends on what you want to achieve. I wanted to jump 8.90m — to match Bob Beamon. So, I kept jumping, trying to reach that mark. I was always motivated because I only came close once. That goal stayed with me.

In the sprints, I wanted to run faster, to break the world record. When I ran 9.93 for the world record, the next goal became 9.8. I always had a goal, and it wasn't about winning or being number one. It was about the performance, about achieving what I knew I was capable of.

The big thing is that I always jumped and ran for time and distance, not for place. What disappoints me about today's jumpers is that many aren't trying to jump farther. They're content with mediocrity.

And I wish they weren't, because they have the talent. They work hard; they do everything right. But there isn't a single jumper in the world saying, 'I want to break Carl Lewis's record. I want to break Mike Powell's record.' That's my frustration. They're great athletes and great kids, but when I was 17, I said, 'I want to break Bob Beamon's world record'. It took me until I was 30 to do it, but that was my goal from the start.

Right now, I don't see anyone interested in breaking our records — they're satisfied with winning medals. It's not a lack of ability; it's cultural.

Golden leap: Carl Lewis soars to gold in the men's long jump final at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, sealing one of his four titles at the Games. GETTY IMAGES

Performance doesn't matter as much as winning. When the culture rewards you for being famous rather than being excellent, you start thinking, "Hey, I'm still winning medals — that's enough."

Are there any goals you wish you could have accomplished?

Of course! The long jump world record that Mike Powell holds. I never got that one. That's probably the only thing. I love Mike; we actually talk about it a lot. I have a lot of respect for him.

He was a great competitor and a great guy. We still see each other from time to time. The one thing he has over me is that record. And I'll say this — that day was the best jumping I ever did, and Mike beat me at the end of it. I can't say he got lucky or that I might have won on another day.

No, that was the best day I ever had. I gave him my best shot, and he still won. I take pride in the fact that he had to break the world record just to beat me. And I don't think I'll see anyone break that record in my lifetime.

And thank God, Mike was so good that I don't think anyone ever will.

You're a coach now. (Lewis is the athletics coach at his alma mater, the University of Houston.) What's that like?

Last year, we had two athletes on our track team who won Olympic medals — a silver and a bronze. That's the happiest I've ever been because I know I helped them fulfil their lifetime goals.

It's probably interesting for you as a coach because you get to see that transformation in an athlete. Do you remember when you first realised, maybe at 12 or 13, that you weren't just fast but special?

Actually, it was a lot later — when I was 17. I was a late bloomer. When I was 13 or 14, I was just an average kid. At 17, I suddenly realised, Wow, I have a talent! That's when I had a growth spurt.

I'd been running for years and had good technique, but I was small. I never thought I'd grow tall — and then suddenly I did. That made all the difference. Some kids develop really young; others much later. If you look at photos of me at 14 or 15, I look like a 12-year-old. Even at 16 or 17, I looked very young for my age.

Do you think it's possible to build a champion by doing the same things you did when you were young? Or would the process have to evolve completely?

There were great champions then and great champions now. The mindset is just different. Social media is different; the internet is different. It doesn't make things worse — just different.

But while some things change, the science doesn't. The ideal running mechanics are the same as they've been for hundreds of thousands of years. The best way to run hasn't changed. The problem now is that everyone wants to prove they're smarter than the past.

That's a big issue. There are very few checks and balances, especially in our sport. The internet is full of misinformation. When I go online, I see coaches and so-called experts talking — and at least ninety per cent of it is incorrect.

Everyone wants to be famous and promote themselves, not realising that the best coaches and the best programmes are usually promoted by others. If you're constantly promoting yourself, you're probably more focused on promotion than on actually doing the work.

You were one of the greatest as an athlete. How would you rate yourself as a coach?

I can't answer that — ratings have to come from someone else. But I was lucky because I had the greatest mentor. When I started as a volunteer, I went to coach (Tom) Tellez, and he guided me into coaching. I did a lot of studying. He gave me a stack of papers this high and told me to go read. So I read through everything, absorbed the

information, and learned the science behind it. Coach Tellez and I even wrote a book about the science of running. I studied and then put that knowledge into practice. Coach Tellez would watch the sessions and say, "This is right; that's wrong." It wasn't like I just decided to start coaching. I actually put in the time. I couldn't simply say, 'I'm Carl Lewis — I know what I'm talking about!'

Why did you feel the need to do that? After all, you are Carl Lewis!

The bottom line is that my name brings both opportunities and challenges. It's definitely an advantage, and wherever my name can help, I use it. But when it comes to athletics, I had to put in the work. I don't shy away from that.

Is there a medal that stands out for you?

A few. My first Olympic medal stands out, as does my 100m gold at the Tokyo World Championships. And, finally, my last Olympic medal in Atlanta — those three mean the most. But I've donated all my medals to the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., so anyone can see them. I don't keep any at home. I did that because I understand the power of an Olympic medal. When people see it, they melt.

Last year, one of our University of Houston athletes — Shawn Maswanganyi — brought his medal to campus and showed it to the university president. She held it with such pride. That's what I wanted for my medals, too. If they sit in my house, no one gets to share that magic. I also have a granddaughter. One day, when I'm gone, I want her, or her children, to be able to go to the museum and say, 'That's my papa.'

What does being called the greatest ever mean to you?

It's funny because people say, "You're one of the greatest athletes of all time," and billions may know you or love you. But I still have to shave. I still have to watch what I eat. I still have to exercise. Every morning, when the alarm goes off, I still think, Oh man, I don't want to get out of bed. It reminds me that I'm just like everyone else, whether I was one of the greatest or not.

It's interesting that you mention the mundane things, because there must have come a time when age started catching up. How did you deal with that?

I always knew it was coming. I was never afraid of that phase of life, and I wasn't going to compete once I couldn't be competitive. I didn't want to drag my career on.

After Atlanta, I think I could have gone all the way to Sydney. I really do. Maybe not definitely, but I think I could have won at 39. Still, I knew it was time to move on. My life was expanding in other ways, and that's probably why that transition didn't bother me.

> « **The long jump world record that Mike Powell holds. I never got that one. That's probably the only thing. I love Mike; we actually talk about it a lot. I have a lot of respect for him**
> – Carl Lewis »

You competed in an era full of incredible rivalries — Ben Johnson, Mike Powell. What did that competition mean to you?

Competition was vital. My focus was always on running the best race in my lane. The rivalries inspired me to work harder and to stay in front.

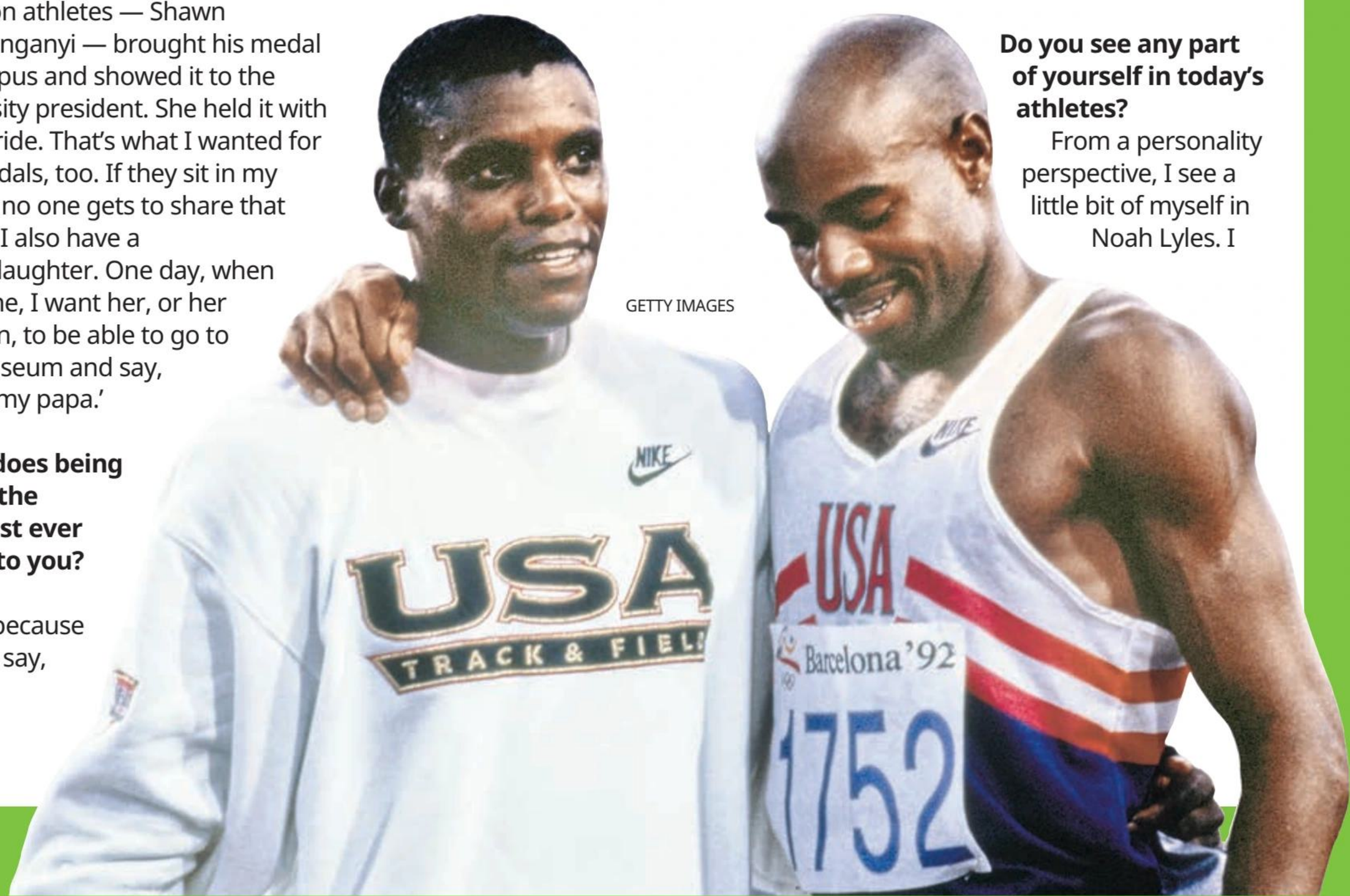
You also had a reputation for arrogance. How much of that was real, and how much was performance psychology?

You build your confidence; you prepare for it. When I went into major Championships, I was always ready — that's where my confidence came from. It came from preparation, hard work, and making sure every detail was covered.

I ran a lot of events, but the Championships mattered most. I competed in four World Championships and four Olympic Games. In 1993, I was in a car accident, so I wasn't at 100 per cent. But even then, I made the 100m and 200m finals. I didn't do the long jump because of the injury, but I was still ready. I also got sick with Giardia in 1994, so 1995 was difficult. But I knew I could still perform. I told myself, 'I'm going to give it one more shot — and then I'm done.'

Do you see any part of yourself in today's athletes?

From a personality perspective, I see a little bit of myself in Noah Lyles. I



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Celebratory finish: Delhi LG Vinai Kumar Saxena and event ambassador Carl Lewis with elite men's podium finishers Alex Matata (gold), Boyelign Teshager (silver), and James Kipkogei (bronze) at the 20th Vedanta Delhi Half Marathon. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

understand him. I understand that he's trying to market and brand himself. Of all the athletes in the world today, I probably see the most of myself in him.

If you could go back in time and meet the 17-year-old Carl Lewis, what would you tell him?

I'd tell him the same thing I tell all the young athletes I coach: Listen.

You have two ears and one mouth — listen more. Your elders know a lot more than you think they do.

The Olympics are coming back to Los Angeles. What's that going to be like?

I think the Games are going to be fabulous. The Olympics bring people together. Paris was incredible, and L.A. will be the same. I'm really looking forward to taking some of our young athletes there. I don't know what it will feel like walking into the Coliseum with one of them, watching them run their rounds. My role has changed — it's like being a parent. One day, you realise you've become the adult guiding someone else. It will be very emotional.

The last time the Olympics were in L.A., there was the Soviet boycott. Now there's political division at home — Trump, the culture wars. Do you see parallels?

Honestly, I don't think America is any more divided than it's always been. The difference is that this administration allowed people to say things openly. People feel free to be evil, racist, and ignorant. But this country has always been divided — by race and by gender.

The racism and misogyny were always there. What's changed is that now, under Trump, people feel permitted to say these things publicly.

But you know what? I'm a Black man — this is the life I've always lived. So now people around the world say, "This is terrible!" Well, this has always been our reality.

In a strange way, maybe it's not entirely bad that people say these things out loud now. Because once you're out, you can't go back in.

L.A. will probably be important for track and field, too. Back when you were at your peak, the sport was everywhere. Now it doesn't have the same cultural dominance. How do you fix that?

Unfortunately, I don't think we can. In the 1980s and '90s, we fought hard to make the sport professional. Then, in the 2000s, people thought the job was done — and they took their foot off the gas. Other sports have passed us by. I don't think we're going back to those glory days. In many ways, we've regressed. Athletes make less money now than we did in the 1990s. They have less power and less control. It's almost like the old amateur era again.

To recover, athletes would have to do a lot of work. Some are starting to realise the sport's in trouble — but what are they going to do about it? I don't think enough people have the stomach for that fight.

The best thing we can do now is hold on to what we have.

Born to fly

* Undefeated in the long jump for 65 consecutive competitions (1981–1991) — one of the longest winning streaks in athletics history
* His 1984 Olympic quadruple gold replicated Jesse Owens's 1936 feat
* Won a total of nine Olympic gold medals and one silver, along with eight gold, one silver, and one bronze at the World Championships
* Inducted into the USA Track & Field Hall of Fame (2001) and IAAF Hall of Fame (2012)
* His mother, Evelyn Lawler, was also a sprinter who competed for the U.S. national team
* Served as a UN Goodwill Ambassador and has engaged in various humanitarian causes

FORGING CHENNAI'S ESPORTS FUTURE

The CEGC, with a prize pool of ₹1 crore, will feature two titles, Counter-Strike 2 (CS2) and Battlegrounds Mobile India (BGMI), and will be Chennai's first major esports tournament bearing VRS ranking points for CS2

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When Skyesports cancelled its third tournament of the year, Skyesports Masters 2025, online communities wondered what was next for one of India's leading esports organisers.

Days later, Skyesports had its answer: the inaugural edition of Chennai Esports Global Championship (CEGC) between November 7–16, with support from the Government of Tamil Nadu.

"After the VRS (Valve Regional Standings) rankings, the calendar was structured (in a way) that companies like ESL and Blast put in a lot of money into bringing in major teams, focusing on the Tier 1 ecosystem," Shiva Nandy **(right)**, the founder and CEO of Skyesports, tells *Sportstar*.

"But for Counter-Strike or Dota 2, the Tier 2, Tier 3 tournaments are lagging. So, we thought of restructuring — bridging the gap between Tier 2,3 and Tier 1."

The CEGC, with a prize pool of ₹1 crore, will feature two titles, Counter-Strike 2 (CS2) and Battlegrounds Mobile India (BGMI), and will be Chennai's first major esports tournament bearing VRS ranking points for CS2.

"We are expecting over 100 teams each from Europe, Southeast Asia and India. Big teams like Eternal Fire and OG have already registered, and if everything goes well, S1mple might come to Chennai," Nandy adds.

Oleksandr 'S1mple' Kostyliev **(right)** is a CS Major and Intel Grand Slam champion and one of the most decorated CS players of all time. His presence will naturally raise CEGC's stakes, both in terms of competition and engagement.

But for Skyesports, CEGC is a step towards a broader goal.

"When I was 10 years old, my parents didn't (always) encourage me to play cricket. Now, my wife takes my kids to the CSK (Chennai Super Kings Academy). We see a similar future for esports in India," Nandy says.

A parallel between cricket and video games would have attracted amusement 20 years ago. Not anymore. The Union Government, World Anti-Doping Agency, International Olympic Committee and Olympic Council of Asia have acknowledged esports as a legitimate sport, one making inroads to become a potent career option.

"Maybe four to five years ago, there wasn't a lot of Indian (esports) representation on the global stage," Sriram Vishaal, the company's Head of Esports, says.

"Now we are seeing it from different titles: India returned to PMGC [PUBG Mobile Global Championship] (in 2025 after four years) and GodLike (esports team) coming second in the World Championship (2023).

"The India Game Developer Conference, CEGC, and (esports in) CM Trophy are happening in Chennai. Things are changing."

A BROKEN STRUCTURE, NOT A BAD NIGHT, COST INDIA ITS ASIAN DREAM

India's failure to qualify for the AFC Asian Cup exposes **deep issues** — from ISL limbo to federation drift. Can Khalid Jamil steady the sinking ship?

Chaotic reality: A burst of effort in a campaign defined by drift — India's fight lacked direction when it mattered most. PICS: AIFF

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Two head coaches, a national league in limbo, players skipping national camps, and a federation seemingly adrift — the last eight months in Indian football have culminated in failure to qualify for the AFC Asian Cup for the first time since 2019.

On paper, India was expected to top Group C of the qualifiers, which included lower-ranked sides Hong Kong, Singapore, and Bangladesh. Yet, after four rounds, the Blue Tigers sit bottom of the table, winless, with just two goals to show.

If last year's results were bad, this year's have been worse when it mattered most. The defeat to Singapore in Goa was another dismal night — only 10% of the 19,000-seater stadium was occupied. Unless the people in charge act decisively, Indian football will continue its quiet fade into irrelevance.

Somewhere in the same State, former head coach Manolo Marquez might have watched with a sense of relief that he was no longer the face of this failure.

Managing the national team was once a dream for Marquez, but the job quickly soured. "When you see that all the teams don't play by the same rules [naturalisation process], you feel like this isn't the place for you," he conceded in an interview with Marca.

Three days before the away game in Hong Kong in June, the players already knew it would be the Spaniard's last match. India went on to lose to Hong Kong for the first time in 15 years. Marquez pointed fingers, including at himself, before resigning in July, less than a year into the role.

The Federation's next move felt like a last-ditch appointment. Khalid Jamil ticked many boxes: he communicates well with players, has turned underdogs into contenders, and, crucially, tends to make the most of limited resources without complaint. Even after the loss to Singapore, Jamil refused to single out individuals.

Unlike his predecessors — Igor Stimac and Marquez — Jamil is

unlikely to generate headlines about how the sport is run in India.

On the field, however, his appointment meant an abrupt shift in philosophy midway through the qualifiers: from Marquez's possession-based style to Jamil's defensive structure.

The transition between two vastly different systems disrupted continuity. Across four matches, 38 players were called up and 18 changes were made to the starting elevens since the Bangladesh fixture in March.

What should have been the pinnacle of Jamil's coaching career instead became a trial by fire — a faltering qualifying campaign riddled with obstacles.

His job was made harder by the ISL's uncertain future, players arriving at his first camp in August without proper pre-season training, and with Mohun Bagan refusing to release its players despite the FIFA window. "We will adjust with the players we have," Jamil said at the time.

To his credit, India finished third in the eight-team CAFA Nations Cup, recording positive results against Tajikistan and Oman and pushing Iran close. Those outcomes briefly restored optimism ahead of the double-header against Singapore.

But the problems persisted. Before the Singapore games, 14 of the 23 players in the travelling squad failed to report on the first day. Rahim Ali, Subhasish Bose, and Lalengmawia Ralte, who would later impress against Singapore, were not even part of his original probables.

Lalengmawia is easily India's best all-round midfielder — a player the team can be built around for the next few years. But why did the coach decide his experience and quality were vital only three days before the Singapore home tie?

Despite his reservations, Jamil delivered on the promise of attacking football for his first home match in charge. His team played with intent and energy, qualities that had been missing from the national side in recent years, but fatigue soon eroded that intensity.

Jamil attributed the errors to the lack of top-tier match practice. "Yes, before this preparation also, we tried to call players early, but we didn't get them since there were many problems. We had to solve it," he said.

It's worth asking whether the result, despite India's attacking effort, will only harden Jamil's belief that defence-first football is the way forward.

"At home, we have to attack," he said when asked if India would persist with that approach, before adding, "I like defending more. You can say, today, we attacked and lost. For me, the result matters."

Still, Jamil should not be made a scapegoat for the malaise surrounding the team. Everyone knew what they were getting with him, yet somehow expected something different. In 15 matches before his appointment, India had scored more than one goal only once — a 3-0 win over the Maldives — and failed to score in 10.

The CAFA Nations Cup and the home fixture against Singapore suggested Jamil deserves time and space to rebuild. If India is to become a disciplined, low-block side capable of grinding out results, he needs institutional backing.

Jamil's defensive philosophy may not please the purists, but results are now a necessity. His club-level success often relied on foreign strikers who could spearhead his counter-attacks. With the national team, even Sunil Chhetri can't answer the lingering question: who after Chhetri? Jamil defended his inclusion, saying, "He is one of the best strikers we have."

Yet with two dead rubbers left in the campaign, Jamil was non-committal about the veteran's future. "We will think about it later. This is not the right time to speak on Chhetri," he said.

With the next World Cup and Asian Cup qualifiers likely two years away, a decision on the 40-year-old's international future should be among Jamil's easiest calls.

But for Jamil to put the pieces together, he needs help from those above him. There is still no clarity on the ISL and I-League's status, and three international windows could pass before the domestic structure resumes.

If decisive action doesn't follow soon, this failed qualification campaign will no longer be an exception — it will become the norm.

WITH THE NEXT WORLD CUP AND ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS LIKELY TWO YEARS AWAY, A DECISION ON SUNIL CHHETRI'S INTERNATIONAL FUTURE SHOULD BE AMONG JAMIL'S EASIEST CALLS

CAN THE SUPER CUP SUPERCHARGE INDIAN FOOTBALL?

With the ISL in doubt and the national team struggling, the 2025-26 Super Cup comes as both a test of endurance and a **chance at revival.**

Super Cup 2025-26 at a glance

Dates: October 25 – November 22
Teams: 16 (13 from ISL, 3 from I-League)
Total matches: 27
Venues: GMC Athletic Stadium, Bambolim, and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, Fatorda

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Eliminated from both the Asian Cup and World Cup qualifiers, the men's national football team finds itself in a nightmare no footballing nation should be in.

Add to that the uncertainty over the Indian Super League's future, and it becomes clear that Indian football is caught in a crisis of its own making.

But survival precedes resurrection. The All India Football Federation (AIFF) will hope the 2025–26 Super Cup is, after all, that faint glimmer of light at the end of a long, dark tunnel.

"Football is a matter of national interest. Individuals may

Title tide: Defending champion FC Goa will look for an early Christmas on home soil, with coach Manolo Marquez rejoining the side after a nightmarish stint as India coach. FC GOA MEDIA

change, but the game must go on," said Kalyan Chaubey, the AIFF President.

Since replacing the Federation Cup in 2018, the Super Cup has been central to Odisha's long-standing ambitions of becoming India's sporting capital — with all but one edition staged in Bhubaneswar.

Yet with every passing year, the gloss has worn thin, and the voices of coaches and players have echoed off concrete instead of being met with cheering stands. The AIFF has now decided to make it the curtain-raiser rather than the dying act this season, pitching its tent in Goa.

Choppy waters

The year 2025, up to October, has seen the AIFF and Football Sports Development Limited (FSDL) — the body that ran the ISL until the 2024–25 season — locked in a tug of war, with their relationship set to end in two months. A full season without top-flight football, India's poor international performances, and Mohun Bagan Super Giant's consecutive withdrawals from the AFC Champions League Two (ACL 2) threaten to dent India's AFC coefficient ranking.

In the past, the same metric saw India's slots reduced to zero in the AFC Champions League Elite — and history, if not careful, may yet rhyme.

In such times, the Super Cup provides a last-ditch opportunity to salvage continental berths for Indian clubs. The winner of the Super Cup will secure a place in the preliminary stage of ACL 2.

Yet familiar cracks remain — the tournament's format has changed more frequently than a losing team's tactics.

The 2025–26 Super Cup will feature 16 teams divided into four groups of four, with the group winners qualifying for the semifinals.

Super Cup format over the years

2018-2019: Qualification round + single-elimination knockouts
2023-2024: Group stage + knockouts
2024-2025: Single-leg knockouts.
2025–2026: Group stage + knockouts

The tournament's broadcast tells the tale of two cities: all matches in Fatorda will be televised or streamed, while those in Bambolim will unfold off-camera (at the time of writing).

That four of the 16 teams — FC Goa, Bengaluru FC, Mohun Bagan Super Giant and Mumbai City FC — have been spared travel and guaranteed broadcast coverage for all their group-stage matches also raises the age-old question: are all clubs truly equal before the federation?

Reshuffle of the roster

The uncertainty surrounding the ISL has affected transfers,

Battle royale: Mohun Bagan and East Bengal are set to face off in the group stage, setting up a fourth Kolkata derby this season. East Bengal has won the first two, while Bagan claimed the latest to lift the IFA Shield on October 18. FSDL/ISL MEDIA

One last time?: Sunil Chhetri turns 42 next year, and with no clarity on the next ISL season, the Bengaluru FC forward might just call it a day with a final flourish in the Super Cup.
FSDL/ISL MEDIA

sponsorships and finances for several clubs — notably Odisha FC, which will not participate in the Super Cup for the first time.

The club won the tournament in 2023 and reached the final in 2024. Meanwhile, Churchill Brothers — the 2013–14 Federation Cup champion — withdrew from last season's Super Cup and have also opted out of this edition.

There are, however, reasons for excitement among fans. Three-time national champion Dempo Sports Club enters the Super Cup for the first time, replacing Real Kashmir and reviving a whiff of nostalgia for vintage Goan football.

The Golden Eagles have struggled to rise to prominence since their withdrawal from the I-League in 2016.

Having earned successive promotions back to the I-League in 2024, Dempo finished in the top half last season and will hope to continue their ascent in the Super Cup.

Hyderabad FC, the 2021–22 ISL champion, will play its first tournament reborn as Sporting Club Delhi under coach Tomasz Tchórz.

The tournament pits Bagan and East Bengal — one of the few embers still burning bright — against each other in the group stage, for a fourth Kolkata derby this season. East Bengal has won the first two, while Bagan claimed the latest to lift the IFA Shield on October 18. The Red-and-Gold Brigade ended a 12-year drought of national trophies with the Super Cup in 2024 and will look to add another under new coach Oscar Bruzon.

Defending champion FC Goa will look for an early Christmas on home soil, with coach Manolo Marquez rejoining the side after a nightmarish stint as India coach.

He has won three trophies in India — two of them, the Bandodkar Trophy and Super Cup, with the Gaurs — and will fancy a fourth, riding on local support.

The last dance?

The 2025–26 Super Cup could also be a potential swansong for India's record goalscorer, Sunil Chhetri.

The striker came out of international retirement in March but has not found the net in competitive fixtures since.

Chhetri turns 42 next year, and with no clarity on the next ISL season, the Bengaluru FC forward might just call it a day with a final flourish in the Super Cup.

For Chaubey, too, this might prove to be the last waltz, with elections looming in September next year.

Looking inward and rebuilding the domestic structure has always been the foundation for revival in footballing nations.

The Super Cup might just serve as a catalyst for the same, a reminder that even in turmoil, hope endures for those willing to search in the right direction.

Last gasp: Getting on the end of an excellent cross by Bruno Fernandes, Harry Maguire (second from right) towered over everyone to guide the ball home and pocket three points for Manchester United. AP

Red Devils end Anfield hoodoo

Over 3,500 days later, Manchester United **shock** Liverpool 2-1 as Harry Maguire seals victory with a dramatic late goal.

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FOR MORE STORIES

January 17, 2016. Wayne Rooney scored in the 78th minute to give Manchester United a 1-0 win against arch-rival Liverpool. After that, Liverpool went on to win the league twice, while United has continued its wait for its first Premier League crown since 2013.

Ahead of Liverpool's home match against United in the Premier League on October 20, all signs pointed towards Arne Slot's men beating Manchester United and keeping the streak going.

However, the recent Premier League gameweek saw one of the biggest surprises. 3,564 days after its last win at Anfield, Manchester United did it again. Ruben Amorim's men beat Liverpool 2-1 in what can be called an upset, given both the team's

Nick of time: Ronald Araujo (left) turned hero for Barcelona with a 90+3-minute winner after being set up by Frenkie De Jong. AFP

fortunes and on-field performance in the recent past.

Bryan Mbeumo silenced Anfield in the second minute after latching onto a pass from Amad Diallo and expertly finding the net with a sublime finish. The early setback, however, did not deter Liverpool, and as expected, it continued to have a better attacking output against United.

Cody Gakpo, who was unlucky in the match, hitting the post three times, finally broke through the Red Devils' backline to grab an equaliser in the 78th minute. At that point, Liverpool, given its penchant for scoring late winners, was favourite to steal another victory from its arch-rival. But in the biggest of surprises, it was United that took the lead again in the 84th minute. The match-winner? Harry Maguire. Getting on the end of an excellent cross by Bruno Fernandes, he towered over everyone to guide the ball home and pocket three points for his team.

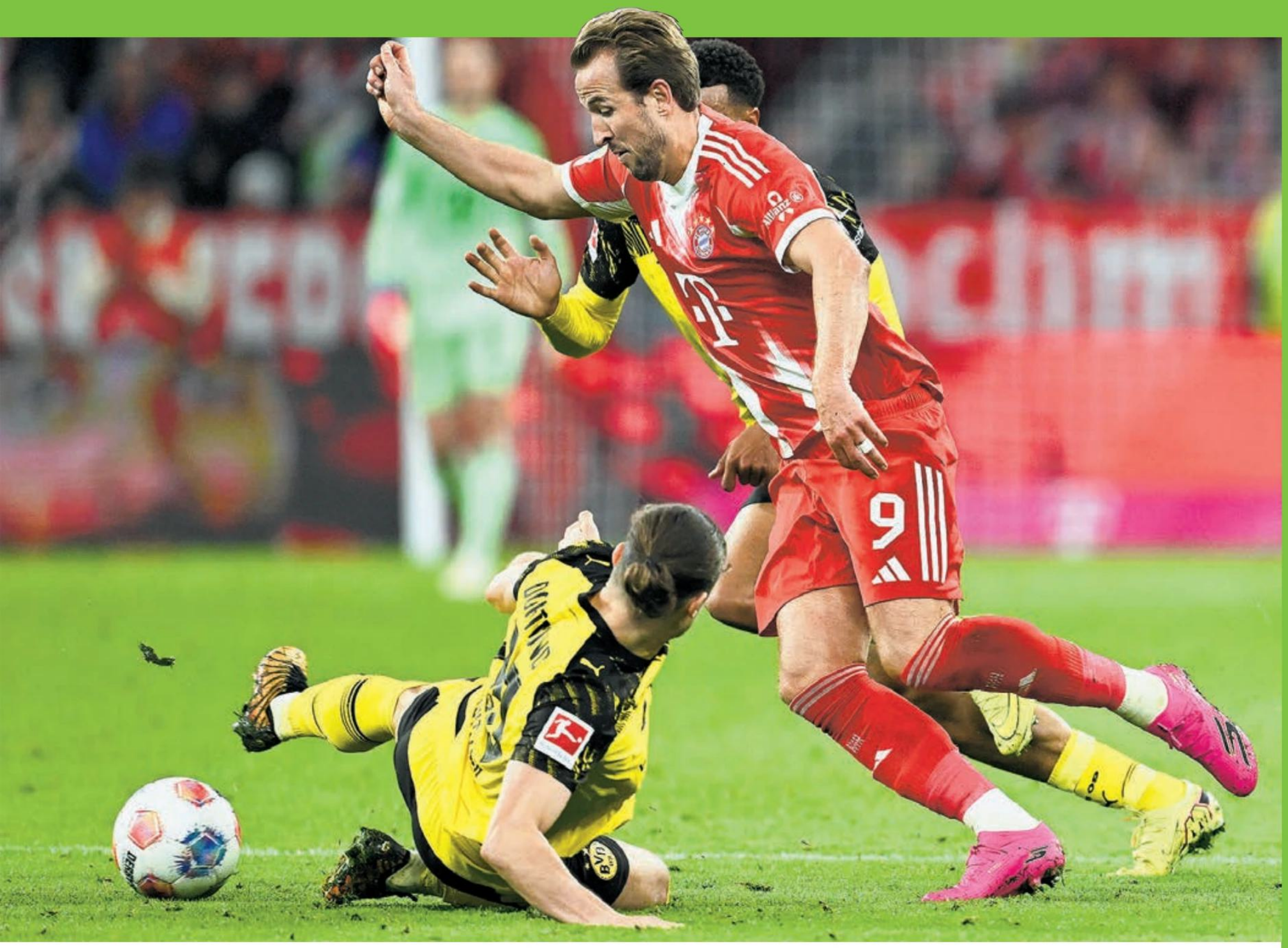
The rest of the matches in matchday 8 of English top-flight football did not throw up many surprises. Barring Tottenham Hotspur's 1-2 loss against Aston Villa, all the traditional big teams enjoyed positive results.

Manchester City rode on an Erling Haaland brace to beat Everton 2-0. Arsenal beat Fulham courtesy of Leandro Trossard's goal, while Chelsea thrashed Nottingham Forest 3-0, a result that led to the sacking of Ange Postecoglou just 39 days after he was appointed manager of Forest.

The Crystal Palace vs Bournemouth clash was the highest-scoring match of the weekend, with the teams playing out a 3-3 draw. Arsenal currently tops the table with 19 points. Man City (16), Bournemouth (15), and Liverpool (15) follow in second, third, and fourth, respectively. Chelsea (14) and Tottenham (14) are fifth and sixth, while United is ninth (13).

La Liga

It almost turned into a frustrating gameweek for Barcelona, with the Catalans almost settling for a 1-1 draw with Girona, but Ronald Araujo turned hero with a 90+3-minute winner after being set up by Frenkie De Jong. The match, however, did not just have drama on the pitch. Off it, too, it had its fair share of moments. Players of both teams stood still for 15 seconds after kick-off, which was a coordinated protest against the league's decision to stage a regular-season game in the United States.



Derby drama: Bayern Munich, led by Harry Kane (9), maintained its perfect start to the season by beating Borussia Dortmund 2-1 for its seventh-straight victory. AP

Later, in the dying stages of the clash, Barcelona manager Hansi Flick got his marching orders for vociferously protesting the official's decision to award just four minutes of added time after the second half, with the German indicating that more time should have been given. He will miss the season's El Clasico when his team takes on arch-rival Real Madrid on October 26.

Kylian Mbappe came good for Real Madrid again as his 80th-minute goal gave his team a 1-0 win against Getafe, but the match will be remembered for all the wrong reasons as Getafe had two players sent off in a space of seven minutes.

Atletico Madrid bounced back from its frustrating 1-1 draw against Celta Vigo. It beat Osasuna, albeit by the narrowest of margins, with Thiago Almada's 69th-minute strike proving enough for Diego Simeone and his men.

Villarreal played out a 2-2 draw against Betis, while both Basque clubs also settled for draws. Athletic Bilbao's match against Elche finished 0-0, while Real Sociedad was held to a 1-1 draw by 10-man Celta Vigo.

After matchday 9, Real Madrid tops the table with 24 points. Barcelona (22) is second, followed by Villarreal (17) and Atletico Madrid (16) in third and fourth.

Bundesliga

Der Klassiker stole the spotlight in German top-flight football, and it was Bayern Munich, which maintained its perfect start to the season, beating Borussia Dortmund 2-1, the Bavarians' seventh-straight victory. Harry Kane stole the show, bagging a goal and an assist. Kane now has 12 league goals and has scored 22 goals in 14 appearances for club and country so far this season.

RB Leipzig beat Hamburger SV 2-1, with Eintracht Frankfurt drawing 2-2 against SC Freiburg.

Bayer Leverkusen played out a seven-goal thriller against Mainz, clinching a 4-3 win. VfB Stuttgart beat Wolfsburg 3-0.

After matchday 7, Bayern Munich (21) has a five-point lead at the top. RB Leipzig (16) is second, followed by Stuttgart (15) and Dortmund (14) in third and fourth. Leverkusen is fifth with 14 points.

Serie A

The recent gameweek in Serie A witnessed many shocks, with some of the traditional big teams losing points against weaker opposition.

Injury-riddled Napoli, missing the

Great escape: European champion Paris Saint-Germain, which had to come back from two goals down, was held to a thrilling 3-3 draw by RC Strasbourg. AFP

likes of Scott McTominay and Rasmus Hojlund, lost 0-1 against Torino. Como beat Juventus 2-0, piling on the frustration for Igor Tudor's side that had come into the match after playing out five successive draws in all competitions.

Inter Milan earned a hard-fought 1-0 victory at AS Roma. The result denied Roma the chance to take the outright lead at the top of the table, instead leaving it level on 15 points with Inter and Napoli at the summit.

AC Milan, however, did not squander its opportunity. Rafael Leao starred with a brace as the Italian giant beat Fiorentina 2-1 to go top of the table.

After matchday 7, AC Milan leads the Scudetto race with 16 points. Inter, Napoli, and Roma, all on 15 points, are second, third, and fourth, separated by goal difference.

Ligue 1

Paris Saint-Germain's return from international football faced a major challenge as the European champion was held to a thrilling 3-3 draw by RC Strasbourg. The Parisians had to come back from two goals down to deny their opponent a first league win in 34 games in Paris. Olympique de Marseille welcomed the defending champion dropping points with open arms, and took the top spot after thrashing Le Havre 6-2. Former United player Mason Greenwood bagged four of those, propelling himself to second in the top scorer standings with six, one behind Strasbourg's Joaquín Panichelli.

Olympique Lyonnais, on the other hand, wasted an opportunity to go joint top of the table, losing 2-3 to OGC Nice. At the end of matchday 8, Marseille leads with 18 points, one ahead of PSG in second, while Strasbourg and RC Lens assume third and fourth spots respectively with 16 points each.

International

Among the stories of the October international window, the tale of one of the smallest nations rose above the rest. During the course of the two weeks, Cape Verde, an island nation in the central Atlantic Ocean off the west coast of West Africa, secured its first-ever qualification for the FIFA World Cup.

What makes it all the more remarkable is that with a population of just over five lakh, it became the second smallest nation to play in the global showpiece, second only to

African flair: Cape Verde qualified for the FIFA World Cup for the first time, becoming the second-smallest nation to play in the global showpiece. AFP

Iceland (2018). The Blue Sharks beat African giant Cameroon to the top spot in its qualifying group and finished the round with seven wins, two draws, and one loss.

Another notable qualifier is South Africa, which overcame a three-point deduction (for fielding an ineligible player earlier) to return to the tournament since memorably hosting it in 2010.

Meanwhile, Mohamed Salah will get a shot at redemption when he returns to the big stage with Egypt after missing out on qualification last time. His former Liverpool teammate, Sadio Mane, also experienced similar success, leading his nation, Senegal, to a third straight appearance at the World Cup.

With the conclusion of the qualifying round, the four best second-placed teams — Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, and Nigeria — are still in the hunt. They will play two single-match semifinals and a final in Morocco in November, with the winner getting to participate in the inter-continental play-offs in March 2026, where two World Cup berths are up for grabs.

Across the Mediterranean Sea, Thomas Tuchel's England became the first European nation to secure qualification. The Three Lions have had a perfect qualifying campaign so far, and a 5-0 thrashing of Latvia ensured that they would reach a ninth successive major tournament finals, with two games to spare.

However, Portugal will have to wait till the next international window to qualify, after it was held to a 2-2 draw by Hungary. Cristiano Ronaldo, who is bidding to reach a record sixth World Cup, scored a brace, but a stoppage-time equaliser from Dominik Szoboszlai temporarily spoiled Portugal's party.

Meanwhile, Norway's Erling Haaland reached yet another milestone after scoring a hat-trick in the game against Israel to become the fastest player to reach 50 international goals. The star striker reached the mark in just 46 games, well ahead of Harry Kane's previous record of 71. Norway is now in pole position to qualify from its group with six wins in six so far, with Italy three points behind in second.

From Asia, Arab powerhouses Saudi Arabia and Qatar also booked their place for next year's tournament in the USA, Canada, and Mexico, after finishing top of their respective qualifying groups.

Results updated as of October 20

Relentless raid: Arjun Deshwal's career-best performance lit up Chennai, even as fans wondered if the Thalaivas' surge had come too late. PKL MEDIA

A CITY THAT LIVES ITS KABADDI, POINT BY POINT

Sportstar's team on the ground brings you the sights, sounds and stories of Chennai's kabaddi fever — a **celebration** that thrives both on and off the mat.

Tamil Thalaivas wrapped up its home leg with a commanding 57–37 win over the Patna Pirates, the team's first 50-plus score of the season, led by skipper Arjun Deshwal's career-best 26 raid points.

After the customary post-match press conferences, the Diary stepped out to catch the cab waiting at the gate. As it got in, the driver, Kavi Chakravarthi, was glued to his phone, with match highlights playing on a screen clipped precariously above the steering wheel.

His hands stayed steady on the wheel, but his eyes followed every frame of the replays. A lifelong Thalaivas supporter, Kavi traced his allegiance back to watching with school friends in Coimbatore when the team debuted in 2017.

"I hail from Coimbatore, and we watch the PKL without fail. We try not to miss Tamil Thalaivas' games, especially since they're based out of

Tamil Nadu," he said. But as he spoke about the Pirates match, a flicker of disappointment crossed his face. It's not often you meet a fan dejected after a win of that scale.

"We've had underwhelming performances. It's great to see them perform like this, but I think it's too little, too late now," he said. "When they got Arjun and Pawan Sehrawat in the auction, I thought we could go all the way. But it wasn't meant to be, I guess."

The Thalaivas, despite being in the PKL since Season Five, have qualified for the playoffs just once, in 2022. Yet even through his frustration, Kavi's voice lifted when the talk turned to local talent. He singled out Arul Babu of the Thalaivas for his sharp play and even mentioned Patna's Sudhakar, arguing that the raider had far more to offer than his current role suggested. He was convinced Tamil Nadu's deep talent pool would eventually make its mark in the league.

As the cab pulled away from the stadium, the Diary contemplated the strange mathematics of fandom, where 57 points could still feel like zero.

Nigamanth P.

Home pulse: The SDAT crowd turned the Chennai leg into a festival, where devotion met decibels and the mat became a shared celebration. PKL MEDIA

Kabaddi's cathedral finds its congregation

The SDAT Multipurpose Stadium roared back to life during the thrilling final two days of the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) Season 12 Chennai leg, silencing any murmurs about low turnouts earlier in the leg. The city's deep-rooted passion for sport, especially for kabaddi, came alive in a vibrant spectacle.

It was a true testament to Chennai's reputation: fans didn't just turn up, they poured through the gates. The final day was a complete packed house, the energy so palpable that hopeful fans queued outside, praying for a last-minute ticket to the action.

The atmosphere did more than impress the locals; it lifted the players too. As U Mumba skipper and India international Sunil Kumar put it, "The Chennai crowd has always been incredibly supportive of kabaddi. It doesn't matter if the Tamil Thalaivas are playing or not, they always cheer us on. I think this is the noisiest crowd in the country, and that energy gives us extra motivation to perform well on the mat."

The roaring crowd did more than cheer. It reignited the spark in the PKL's 'Showman', Mohammadreza Shadloui. This season, the towering Iranian had looked a shadow of his brilliant self. But in the leg's final match, the Gujarat Giants defender delivered a defiant display that reminded everyone why he commands the league's highest price tag. The deafening stands left no doubt that in this city, kabaddi is a celebration.

Saikat Chakraborty

Beating the clock, barely

The 12th season of the Pro Kabaddi League has seen several matches decided by a player's ability — or inability — to dive back into their half in time. On one of the final Chennai leg days, the Diary got a small taste of that very pressure, albeit through slightly unfortunate circumstances.

By midweek, the matchday arrival routine ran on autopilot. The Diary would enter through the side gate at the SDAT Indoor Stadium, flash its accreditation to the guard, and walk down the narrow path lined with hoardings of PKL's biggest names. Another quick ID check at the final barrier, and entry was granted.

This well-oiled process came undone on the last day of coverage. Stopped at the final checkpoint, the Diary was asked for the accreditation that should have been hanging around its neck. A quick glance downward revealed only an empty lanyard. With the first raid minutes away, entry was suddenly impossible.

A frantic search followed as the Diary retraced its steps along the path, scanning every patch of ground in growing panic. Just when the clock threatened to beat it, an alert security guard came to the rescue, holding up the missing ID that had slipped unnoticed onto the floor. Thanks to the guard's timely intervention, the Diary made it inside just in time — grateful for the save, and with a new respect for those who beat the clock to reach back across the line.

Aditya Padinjat

« Sometimes, you swim at a high stroke rate, thinking the faster you pull, the faster you'll swim, but that's not true »

SRIHARI NATARAJ

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Srihari Nataraj caused a ripple effect as he clinched a silver medal in the men's 200m freestyle event on the opening day of the 11th Asian Aquatics Championships, held at the Veer Savarkar Sports Complex in Naranpura, Gujarat, from September 28 to October 10.

It was India's first medal at the continental event in 16 years. The host nation eventually finished with its best-ever haul of 13 medals in a single edition — four silver and nine bronze — and the 24-year-old from Bengaluru played a huge role in that success, with four individual medals and three in relays.

In an exclusive conversation with *Sportstar,* Srihari opened up about his preparation, the use of data to improve his results, and more:

Did you know before this event that India hadn't won a medal for 16 years?

I knew we didn't win a medal at the previous one in 2016. I did the qualifying time (during the trials), but I came third. Then, one of my seniors, who came second, said he wasn't going to swim the 200m backstroke. He said he'd inform the federation so that I'd get the spot, but I didn't. I didn't know it had been 16 years — it wasn't on my mind.

How did you prepare for the event?

It was a good month in Ahmedabad under coach Nihar Ameen. I like to stay at home and train, but we had the camp. The facility was really good.

I did miss some of Mum's food and the way she pampers me before sessions with a milkshake. She even jokingly told someone that maybe the difference between gold and silver in some of the events was the smoothies and the stuff she keeps ready for me before or after my sessions.

Out of the seven medals you won, which one was the toughest, and in which did you feel you had the best chance of winning gold?

If I had swum just the 50m backstroke, it would have been a lot closer than it was. That was definitely an event where I thought I could get gold. [The gap between Srihari and China's Gukailai Wang, the gold medallist, was 0.35 seconds)

Going into the 100m backstroke final, I was the fastest seed, and I hadn't swum the 100m backstroke for a medal this entire year, or even in a final. I thought I might surprise myself — and at 75m, I did surprise myself — but physically, that was a tough race for me.

How did data analytics help you in your training and races?

I've been working with Swimple, a company that analyses races, for a long time. It's based at the Padukone–Dravid Centre for Sports Excellence, where I train.

Srihari Nataraj's medals at the 2025 Asian Aquatics Championships

50m Backstroke — Silver
200m Freestyle — Silver
4x200m Freestyle Relay — Silver
100m Freestyle — Bronze
100m Backstroke — Bronze
4x100m Freestyle Relay — Bronze
4x100m Medley Relay — Bronze

The guy (Aditya Kariyappa) who set it up was initially working in Eindhoven with the Dutch national team. Two years ago, I took a trip to Eindhoven to get my assessments done. They give you every bit of data — stroke rate, distance per stroke, velocity, stroke length, turn time, underwater distance — to find the most optimal way to swim.

Sometimes, you swim at a high stroke rate, thinking the faster you pull, the faster you'll swim, but that's not true, because sometimes you're just putting in energy to pull faster without catching any water. And if you don't, you're just slipping, wasting energy, and staying in the same place. They have a camera system and delayed feedback. When you swim, you have the whole system with the metrics, and then you get the feedback 30 seconds or a minute later. You can see what's happening with your stroke. Technically, the coach and the analyst are there to tell you what's good and what's not, and you can immediately make changes.

Then, you get metrics to see whether those changes are working positively or negatively. That's something you incorporate into training every day. This is how the Europeans have been training for a long time — and the Australians as well, in some places. Sometimes, textbook-wise, your technique might be right, but you might not actually need it — and until you have the metrics, you don't know.

Any recent example where Swimple helped you?

I went to the Singapore Open earlier this year. It was pretty much my first tournament of the season after the National Games. I wanted to get some races in before the World University Games.

I swam the 100m freestyle heats and felt the stroke rate was a bit conserved. In the evening, I tried pushing a little more, but we realised that more effort for me doesn't mean it's more optimal. I actually swam slower, and we understood why. Going into the 200m freestyle, we kept it optimal. We knew the exact stroke rate I should swim at. Going into the 200m finals, they noticed that in my third turn, I was slowing down going into the wall — I needed to carry more momentum and use that for my underwaters. These small changes made a 0.1–0.2-second difference per lap, which adds up in the end.

Anchor man: India finished with 13 medals — four silver and nine bronze — and Srihari played a huge role in that success, with four individual medals and three in relays. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Besides swimming, you also love watching films. Did you watch any during the tournament?

Karate Kid Legends before the 200m freestyle finals. I swam the heats and it was bad. I was overthinking a bit when I came back to my room. I told my roommate, and we played it on the TV at the hotel. During the month-long camp, I must've watched at least 15 films.

FAIRWAY OF PROMISE

India's young golfers showed glimpses of their **potential** as Shannon Tan overcame a tense final round to win the Hero Women's Indian Open.

Twist in the tale: Shannon Tan, who started the final round seven shots off the lead, won the title in the most dramatic way possible. LADIES EUROPEAN TOUR

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For a brief while, it looked like the drought of a home winner at the Hero Women's Indian Open golf would finally be over. In the 17 seasons of its existence, the marquee event of the sport in the country has only had one Indian lifting the trophy.

That it did not happen, and Hitaashee Bakshi **(facing page, above-right)** faltered when it mattered most on a dramatic final day that saw hold-ups, swinging fortunes and unexpected results.

With close to 120 golfers from 31 countries in action over four days in the middle of an unexpectedly clear October, the tournament has come a long way from its humble beginnings. In many ways, it mirrors the growth of women's golf in a country that continues to see it, along with a few other sports, as the domain of the privileged.

"We started the Women's Golf Association of India in 2004 as Champika Sayal's brainchild to have a professional tour for women in the country. We had some great players like Anjani Desai and Nonita Lall Qureshi, but they were amateurs; it wasn't possible for them to carry on playing and make an income out of the sport. We started with four to five girls, putting in ₹10,000 each, along with Satish Tandon, who was our first president, to get it off the ground. The first Indian Open was in 2007," WGAI president Kavita Singh told *Sportstar*.

From 79 entries back then with a prize purse of $100,000, the event has grown into a $500,000 tournament this time around. From only being an Asian event to being co-sanctioned by the LET (in 2010) and drawing entries from all the top European nations, it's been a steady rise for the event and for women's golf. The inclusion of the sport in the Olympics has helped increase its visibility and, more importantly, ensured that it is taken seriously as a sport.

Back then, India's top golfer Smriti Mehra

was already a veteran of the professional world, ploughing a lonely furrow as the first Indian woman on the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) Tour — the top-drawer circuit in golf — way back in 1997. On Sunday, golf lovers' hopes rested on a 21-year-old in her first full season on the LET.

Hitaashee had started well on the final day, a couple of birdies and a three-shot lead keeping her in the game through the first four holes. But the final-day jitters caught up with the youngster. Three bogeys in a row were followed by a horrendous double bogey on the par-5 eighth hole. Play got held up for almost 20 minutes as players and referees debated whether her tee shot had landed out of bounds before rolling into the water or within the course line. She eventually had to trudge back to the start for her third shot and never recovered.

England's Alice Hewson, part of the leader group with Hitaashee and Pranavi Urs **(below)**, risked little and stayed steady with a couple of birdies, parring the rest to cruise ahead, closing in on the trophy even as her closest competitor, Shannon Tan, sat in the clubhouse waiting for the formalities to be completed before flying home as the runner-up for the second year running.

Instead, the 21-year-old Singaporean, who started the final round seven shots off the lead, saw Hewson first hit her tee shot into the water and then miss an easy putt for a double bogey on the very last hole, to be handed the title in the most dramatic way possible.

For the home fans, however, it was the performance of the Indian golfers that held promise. Four Indians in the top 10 was unimaginable even a few years ago, despite Aditi Ashok's victory way back in 2016 as an 18-year-old. Aditi, now a regular on the LPGA — the only Indian on the tour — even came close to a historic Olympic medal in Tokyo before a heartbreaking fourth-place finish.

Consider this: when the first-ever professional tour was launched in October 2006, it included five legs for a prize purse of ₹6 lakh with five

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

players. This year, the Women's Professional Golf Tour of India has 13 legs with 54 players vying for a total prize money of ₹229 lakh. Sitting pretty on top of the India Order of Merit is the experienced Vani Kapoor, with four wins and earnings exceeding ₹16 lakh. Vani, who has never missed a cut in her 13 appearances in the Indian Open, admitted it has been a learning curve. "It makes me feel really proud of myself that I'm still here, still giving them a fight. Obviously, I'm doing something right and that's really good. When I started there were fewer girls and the organisation and all the golfing bodies were also growing with us — we were gaining experience together," she said.

She agreed that perceptions played a big role and needed to change. "There's this misconception that golf is an elite sport; the government definitely thinks so. That's why they don't provide that much financial aid to golfers. But most people who are playing golf don't come from rich backgrounds. Today, if I don't have a few sponsors, I cannot be playing golf. One cannot reach one's true potential because we have so many constraints. Also, I'm a firm believer that every corporate house should support a sport. And then you see the results. You need support not just after you become a star, but before," she shrugged.

Kavita, however, knows it's a long road ahead.

"In the early days, we got no support from the government at all. I was turned down brutally by the sports minister and the tourism minister. We still barely do. If it were not for the corporate sector, it would have been very tough. But I want an Indian girl to win — maybe in the Olympics, maybe here. There's no lack of talent in our country. It's about discipline, consistency, and hard work. And the hunger has to be there. But I really hope we get an Olympic medallist," she declared.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Surge in fortune: Englishman Tommy Fleetwood, seen here celebrating with his son, took home the trophy and 834 ranking points, catapulting him to 25th in the Race to Dubai — a remarkable leap of 69 places. AFP

IN FULL SWING

Tommy Fleetwood's win capped a **landmark week** for Indian golf, as global stars like Rory McIlroy lit up the DP World India Championship.

IN PIC: TOMMY FLEETWOOD (AFP)

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When golf's European Tour — or the DP World Tour, as it has been known for the past four seasons — announced its final schedule for the latter part of 2025, New Delhi was strategically placed within the overall scheme of things.

Announced on April 23 this year, the DP World Tour India Championship quickly grabbed attention within the country's golfing community and beyond for several reasons — including the highest prize money ever for an event in the subcontinent and India's second event on the European Tour after the marquee Indian Open.

Its timing also stood out: scheduled towards the end of the year, it aligned perfectly with the national capital's early winter and festive season, while serving as the penultimate event in the Race to

Dubai season finale.The week of October 13–19 proved that, despite everything, big-ticket sporting events will always attract crowds and attention in India. Englishman Tommy Fleetwood took home the trophy and 834 ranking points, catapulting him to 25th in the Race to Dubai — a remarkable leap of 69 places. His victory is proof that more than a big name or a powerful game, it was patience and consistency that held the key to success on one of the Tour's shortest courses. The Lodhi Course at the Delhi Golf Club (DGC), revamped in 2019, measures just 6,912 yards.

Part of the Tour's 'Back 9' series, which offers significantly higher ranking points than regular events, the $4 million DP World India Championship was headlined by arguably the greatest European golfer of all time, Rory McIlroy, and featured several of the sport's biggest names.

It also drew one of the largest crowds seen at the historic DGC in recent years. The last time the venue — located in the heart of the city and considered among the most challenging in the country, dotted with 14th–15th century tombs and monuments from the Lodhi Dynasty — witnessed such a turnout was in 2014, when then World No. 1 Tiger Woods stopped by for a sponsored exhibition match. The stakes this time were far higher, and so were the numbers following the likes of Fleetwood, Shane Lowry, and of course, McIlroy, over four days across the 18 holes.

"It's pretty tricky. You're really just trying to be as conservative as possible off the tee and then trying to pick off birdies on the par fives and maybe a couple more. It's a tricky golf course — you just have to get the ball in the fairway. The rough is unpredictable. Maybe being a little less aggressive with approach shots and getting it on the right side of the pin," said McIlroy. The Irish World No. 2 — one of only six men with a career Grand Slam and the reigning Masters champion — finished tied 26th, struggling on a course that, by general consensus, is a throwback to older times when accuracy was at a premium and brute power had little to contribute.

Shane Lowry, a six-time winner on the Tour with three PGA victories and one of the few big names to have played at the DGC before, echoed the sentiment. "I'm so excited to get out there and take it on this week. It's kind of refreshing to be playing a course like this. We play so many now where you just hit the driver on every hole without thinking. This is an old-school course — it's very tight off the tee and enjoyable to play," he said. Lowry used that familiarity to his advantage, taking the lead on Day 1 with an impressive seven-under-par 65 before errors pulled him back.

Fleetwood's experience was similar. He carded an impressive 64 on Day 2 before succumbing to the narrow fairways, tree-lined bushes and unpredictable greens. The last time Fleetwood played at the DGC, in 2016, he was ranked 82nd in the world with just one DP World Tour win, earned three years earlier. Nine years on, he is a seven-time Tour winner, a four-time Ryder Cup player, and this year broke through on the PGA Tour for the first time — becoming only the third man in history to win both the FedEx Cup and the Race to Dubai.

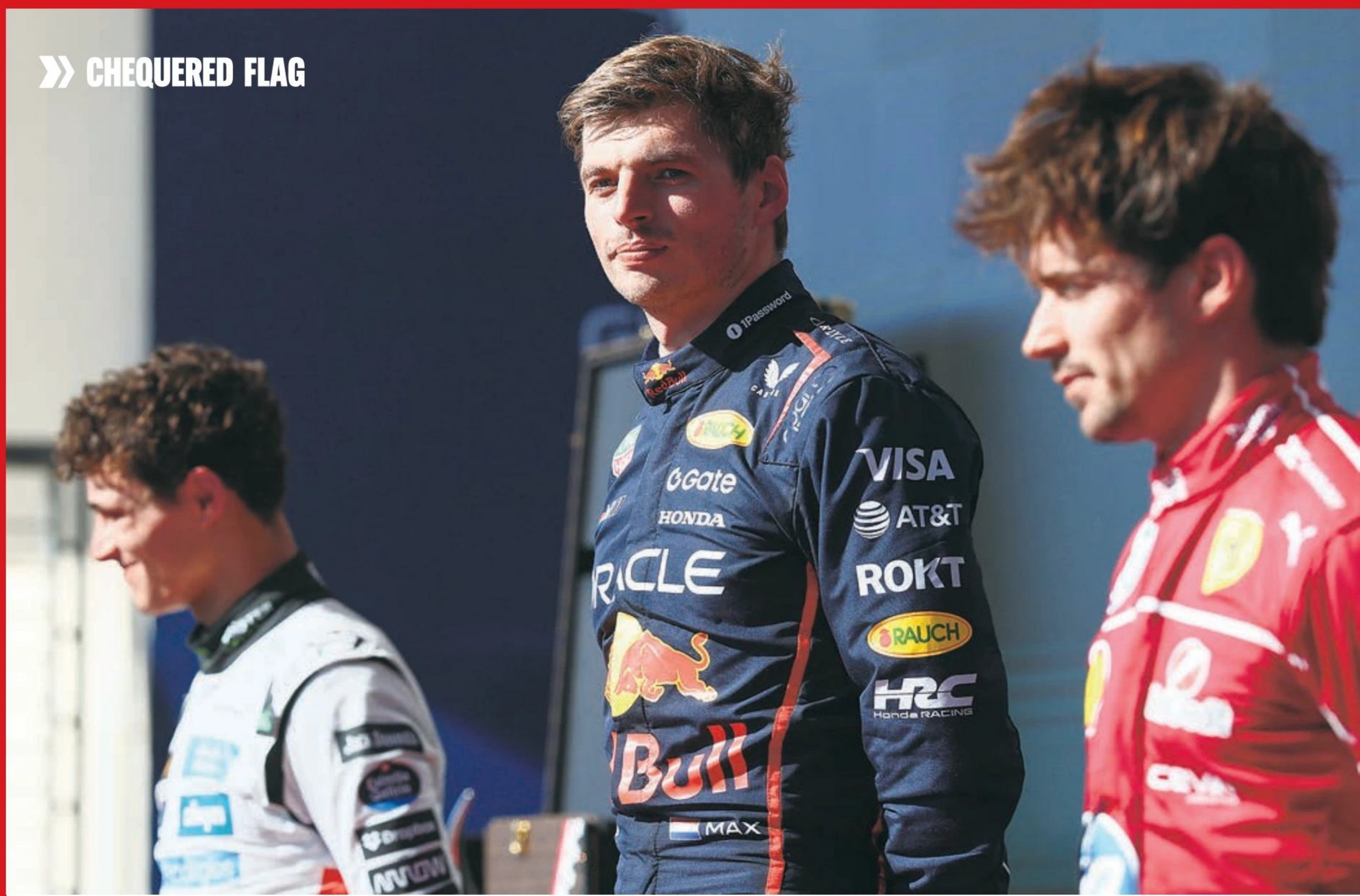
"I think the course is so good — you can have a definite strategy for how you want to play it. I can't imagine many people doing it, but you can be as aggressive as you want, really, in terms of the clubs you're hitting off the tee. Overall, you have to keep the ball in play, stay patient and be strategic. I really like that about golf courses when we get to play those," Fleetwood said.

Tour sponsor DP World's Deputy CEO and CFO, Yuvraj Narayan, insisted the event would not be a one-off spectacle. "Every sport needs a trigger to capture people's imagination. The DP World India Championship is exactly that. When young Indians see Rory McIlroy, Tommy Fleetwood or Viktor Hovland competing on their home soil, it plants the seed for a lifelong connection with the game. We believe golf is ready to take its place on the Indian sporting stage," he declared.

The event, co-sanctioned by the Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI), also has its president, cricketing legend Kapil Dev, convinced that India stands on the cusp of a golfing revolution. "It's a reflection of our rising stature. Over the past 50–70 years, any country that has done well economically has also done well in sport — that can't be a coincidence. The DP World India Championship is a landmark moment for Indian golf and a true reflection of India's rising stature on the international golfing stage," Kapil said.

He agreed it was a great opportunity for local talent to learn from the best. "You won't get a better opportunity to learn if you're an Indian golfer playing here. I've been watching Tommy and Rory particularly closely — one thing our boys can learn is their focus. These guys never waver, never give up," he said.

Dismal show: European great and World No. 2 Rory McIlroy struggled at the Delhi Golf Club's Lodhi Course, ending the tournament tied for 26th. AP



Closing in: The victory was not just the culmination of a perfect weekend for the Red Bull Racing driver, but a clear statement that Verstappen is well and truly in the driver's title picture, perhaps even the frontrunner for the crown. GETTY IMAGES

STILL IN THE HUNT

Max Verstappen is scripting one of Formula One's great comebacks, his latest victory bringing him within **striking distance** of the battling McLaren duo.

Anish Pathiyil
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The emphatic stage dive into the waiting mechanics in parc fermé was the only time Max Verstappen had to stretch his muscles in Austin. The 28-year-old dominated the United States Grand Prix from lights to flag, finishing almost eight seconds ahead of McLaren's Lando Norris to register his 68th career win in Formula One.

The victory at the Circuit of the Americas (COTA) was not just the culmination of a perfect weekend for the Red Bull Racing driver, but a clear statement that the Dutchman is well and truly in the driver's title picture, perhaps even the frontrunner for the crown.

With five rounds remaining, Verstappen sits just 40 points behind championship leader Oscar Piastri, who could only manage a fifth-place finish in Texas. Verstappen has clawed back 64 points on the Australian in the last four races, meaning a fifth consecutive drivers' title is no longer a distant dream.

Two weeks on from his second-place finish through the streets of Singapore, Verstappen started the weekend on the front foot, clinching pole position for the Sprint Race just ahead of the two McLarens. It was another opportunity for the Dutch driver to eat into the points deficit in the

Ecstatic: Verstappen celebrates with Red Bull team after the win. GETTY IMAGES

drivers' championship. What might have been a one- or two-point swing at best turned into a blessing in disguise when the two papaya cars collided at the first corner.

Piastri had made a quick start from third on the grid but found no space on the inside going into the steep, left-handed first corner. The 24-year-old braked earlier than his teammate, hoping to switch back inside and pass him with better traction. Waiting for him at the corner, however, was the front end of Nico Hulkenberg's Kick Sauber, who was himself embroiled in a tussle with Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso. Piastri bounced off Hulkenberg and into Norris, leaving both McLarens with terminal damage, and Verstappen with an eight-point advantage.

Piastri's misery continued into qualifying. Struggling to deal effectively with the crosswinds that made life difficult in the twistier sections of the COTA circuit, the Aussie could only manage sixth on the grid, well behind his rivals, who locked out the front row. George Russell's poor getaway at the race start handed Piastri fifth place on a platter, but that was all he could manage after 56 laps.

The Sprint Race also signalled the turn in fortunes for another team. After qualifying a disappointing eighth and tenth for the short-distance shootout, Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton and Charles Leclerc saw the track open up for them after the first-lap melee. The pair of scarlet red cars finished just shy of the podium—behind Verstappen, Russell and Williams' Carlos Sainz.

The Scuderia had a better outing in Qualifying for the main race — third for Leclerc and fifth for Hamilton. An offbeat call to fit red-walled soft tyres on Leclerc's car for the start paid dividends. The Monegasque, the only driver in the top 15 to employ the strategy, gained better grip off the surface at the start and eased past Norris into second. Despite the tyre disadvantage, he held off the Briton for 21 laps and again until lap 51 after the pit stop, before the quicker McLaren eventually went ahead. Hamilton, who came close to passing his teammate just before his stop, had to settle for fourth, making him the first driver ever to register 5,000 points in Formula One.

This see-saw battle for second place allowed Verstappen to complete a serene victory despite the soaring Austin temperatures, which forced the organisers to issue a heat hazard warning. It seemed like the air of invincibility had returned around the Red Bull driver after his 122nd podium finish, placing him level with Sebastian Vettel (third) on the all-time list. As we head to Mexico City next week (October 24–26), it is well and truly squeaky-bum time for Piastri and Norris, with the four-time champion hot on their heels.

MotoGP

An unfortunate incident with Marco Bezzecchi in Indonesia forced World Champion Marc Marquez to sit out the Australian Grand Prix at Phillip Island, with surgery required on his right shoulder. The Ducati rider has won 11 of 19 races this year, and with him out of contention in this race, it was an opportunity for someone to step out of his shadow and claim a premier-class win.

The less-heralded Raul Fernandez of Trackhouse Aprilia made the most of the opportunity, speeding to his and the team's maiden MotoGP victory. Sprint Race winner Bezzecchi, who was handed twin long-lap penalties for the Marquez crash, could only manage third for the Aprilia factory team, behind VR46 Racing Team's Fabio Di Giannantonio.

High ground: World Champion D Gukesh is the No. 1 seed in the tournament. MICHAŁ WALUSZA/FIDE

BATTLE OF MINDS

With Magnus Carlsen absent and **three Indians topping** the seeds, the upcoming World Cup in Goa promises more chess glory for the country.

P. K. Ajith Kumar
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The last time India hosted the Chess World Cup — way back in 2002 in Hyderabad — for most people, Indian chess began and ended with Viswanathan Anand, who ended up as the champion at the event. Even ardent sports fans would have struggled to answer if they were asked to name the second-best player in Indian chess.

How times have changed.

The likes of D. Gukesh, R. Praggnanandhaa, Arjun Erigaisi and Divya Deshmukh are now familiar names. They are regularly in the headlines, often for their stunning achievements on the chessboard in some corner of the globe. And they are all competing at the upcoming Chess World Cup in Goa, at Resort Rio, near Baga Beach.

Chess is indeed a much-changed game in India as the World Cup returns to the country after a gap of more than two decades. Even a casual glance at the list of players would tell you as much: all the top three ranked players in the tournament are Indians.

Gukesh may not be the highest-ranked Indian in the latest ratings released by FIDE — he is, in fact, not even in the top 10. But he is the No. 1 seed at the World Cup. As the defending World Champion, he will be looking forward to this tournament after all the disappointments he has had to face of late.

Heavy duty: R Praggnanandhaa (left) and Arjun Erigaisi (right), are seeded second and third, respectively, in the tournament. MARIA EMELIANOVA/FIDE

Fellow Chennaite Praggnanandhaa is seeded second, while Arjun is third. It is not often that you see all the top three seeds being Indians in a major event of a truly global sport.

The World Cup is one of the biggest events in chess. When it comes to individual competition, it is second only in stature to the World Championship. Reigning champion Magnus Carlsen is not defending his crown this time. In the last edition of the event, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, he defeated Praggnanandhaa in the final.

His absence may take some sheen off the World Cup, but that doesn't make the tournament any less interesting. The Norwegian, who recently became a father for the first time, isn't particularly keen to play classical chess these days, preferring rapid, blitz or freestyle formats.

With Carlsen staying away from Goa, along with World No. 2 Hikaru Nakamura and No. 3 Fabiano Caruana, the World Cup takes on an even more open look. Not that a knockout event is expected to progress according to the seeding — all it takes is one bad move for a top player to crash out of the tournament. In chess tournaments played in the Swiss or round-robin format — as is often the case — one gets multiple chances to bounce back into contention after a setback or two.

Praggnanandhaa starts as one of the favourites, not just because he was the finalist in the last World Cup. The 20-year-old has played some sparkling chess this year and won a few significant tournaments, including the prestigious Wijk aan Zee. Though he had some poor results after finishing as runner-up at the 2023 World Cup, he told this writer in an interview how he had worked hard on his game and how it paid dividends. Little wonder he is ranked World No. 5 right now.

Arjun meanwhile is a step above at No. 4. He will also be motivated by the slots available for the Candidates Tournament — the qualifier for the World Championship — from the World Cup. He is well down the ladder in the FIDE Circuit (another route to the Candidates), and a good show at the World Cup is his best shot (the top three from Goa will qualify). Praggnanandhaa is leading the Circuit table, that too by a comfortable margin.

It is not just the terrific trio of Indian chess that the host nation is pinning its hopes on. Players such as Aravindh Chithambaram, Nihal Sarin and Vidit Gujrathi are also expected to advance to the latter stages of the tournament. The other Indians in the fray include Pentala Harikrishna, S.L. Narayanan, Karthikeyan Murali, V. Pranav and Goa's own Leon Mendonca.

And there is another Indian who will very much be in the limelight:

FACTBOX

Number of players
206

Number of rounds
8

Prize money
$ 2,000,000
(Winner - $ 120,000)

Candidates spots at stake
3

In the limelight: Divya Deshmukh was given a wild card for this tournament. MICHAL WALUSZA / FIDE

Divya. She was given a wild card by FIDE, and this will be her first event in India after her stunning triumph at the Women's World Cup in Georgia in July.

This is her second major event in the open section, after she skipped the women's section of the Grand Swiss tournament and chose to play in the open event at Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

She did well too, with a Grandmaster-norm-level performance. But she didn't need that norm, as the World Cup had already given her the Grandmaster title directly.

The teenager from Nagpur — easily one of the most exciting young talents in women's chess — should gain from her experience in Goa, though nobody expects her to set the tournament on fire. With an Elo rating of 2498, she is seeded 150th in a field of 206.

Anish Giri, fresh from his victory at the Grand Swiss, is the highest-seeded non-Indian. Despite his Indian-sounding name, he is Dutch with partial Nepalese lineage. He is seeded fourth and will be hoping to reproduce his form from Uzbekistan.

German Vincent Keymer and American Wesley So, seeded fifth and sixth respectively, are also among the contenders for the top prizes. There is a long list of other big stars, including Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzbekistan), Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (France), Wei Yi (China), Ian Nepomniachtchi (Russia) and Levon Aronian (USA).

With the World Cup, big-time chess returns to India after three years. The last major event the country hosted was the Chess Olympiad at Mamallapuram, near Chennai, in 2022. It was a roaring success — very well organised, with thousands queueing up to watch the players in action after buying tickets. And the Indian fans had plenty to cheer about too, as the host nation won the bronze medal in both the open and women's sections.

Chennai had also hosted the 2013 World Championship between Viswanathan Anand and Carlsen. That ended in disappointment for Anand's hometown as he lost his crown to his young challenger.

Back in 2000 in New Delhi, Anand had qualified for the World Championship final, which he went on to win in Tehran, the first of his five World titles.

As a mentor, he has played his part in shaping the golden generation of Indian chess.

This World Cup is not just an opportunity to underline India's dominance in world chess — the country holds the Olympiad title in both men's and women's categories — but also to once again play an excellent host, as FIDE now sees the country as an important destination for global events.

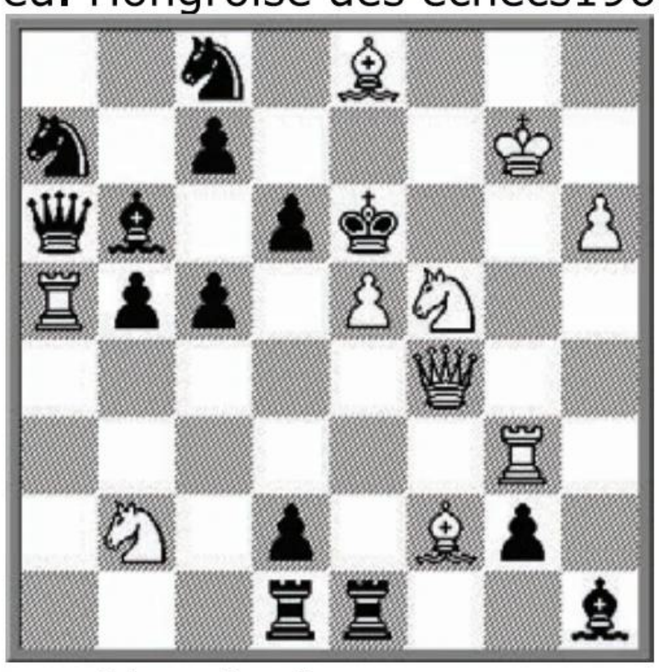
Half-pin in three-movers

By C.G.S.Narayanan

The World Chess Composition Tournament is a long-established team event enabling composers from all over the world to compete at international level with new chess problems and studies on set themes. Inspiring themes and joint work have been the highlights of each WCCT. Eleven such tournaments have been held to date, with enthusiastic worldwide participation. The themes set for the sev12 WCCT have been announced now in eight sections. Secton A Two-mover; Section B Three movers; Section C-More movers; Section D Studies; SectionE Helpmates; Secton F Sēlfmates; G Section G Fairies and Section H Retro .

The three mover theme; (proposed by Israel) A black halfpin is created after Black's first move and/or White's 2nd move. This halfpin must be fully exploited by the mates, namely, there will be at least one move by each of the two half-pinned black pieces followed by a mate exploiting the pin of the other piece.

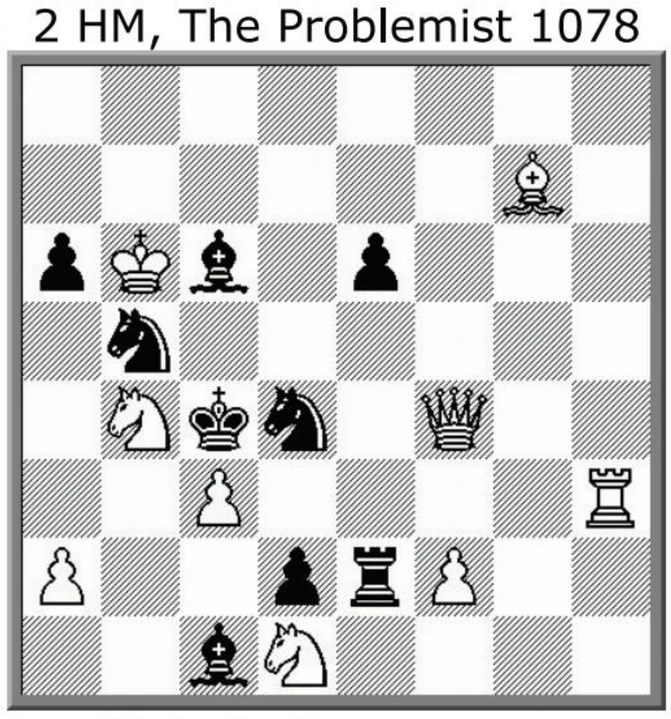
Vilmos SchneideF first prize
Fed. Hongroise des echecs1965



Mate in three-moves
1.Qg4! [2.Ne7+,Ne3+]
1…Kd5 2.Kf6 [3.Rd3#] c4/b4 3. Q×c4/Qd4# 1…K×e5 2.Bf7 [3.Nd3#] c4/b4 3.N×c4/Bd4#

In three-movers the initial threat enables black or white to create a half-pin.In the first problem above the BK moves to d5 or e5 which is followed by quiet moves of white which covers BK flight square sets up secondary threats.

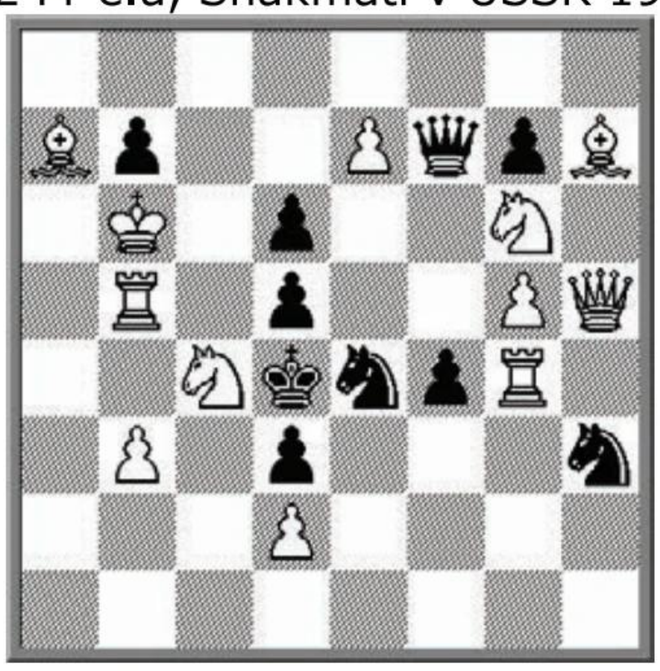
Valentin Rudenko
2 HM, The Problemist 1078



Mate in three moves
1.Rh4! [2.Q×d4+ S×d4 3.R×d4#]
1…Re4 2.Qf3 [3.Qd3#] Re3/S×f3 3.Q×c6/Se3# 1…Be4 2.Qe5 [3.Qc5#] Sb3/Bd5 3.Q×e6/Q×e2#

One more half-pin problem by famous Russian grandmasters is given below for solving

Lev Loshinski and E.Umnov
1-2 Pr e.a, Shakmati v USSR 1940



Mate in three moves

Solution to problem for solving in the article 'Anti-Bristol corrections'':Key 1.Qd1! (2.dxc3 Qd4 3.Qxd4)1…B any 2.axb4 3.Nc7;1…Bd4 2.Qf1 3.Qc4;1…Be5 2.Qxh1 3.Qxe4;1…Bf6 2.Qg4 3.Qe6 (2…Qc4? Qxe4? Bxd8

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

SERVING UP A STORM

As the monsoon clouds gather in the city, the Chennai Open returns with homegrown talent, global stars and **fresh promise** for Indian women's tennis.

Rising star: Maaya Rajeshwaran Revathi has emerged as a new hope in singles and a bright prospect for the future. EMMANUAL YOGINI

Nihit Sachdeva
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The second edition of the Chennai Open, a WTA 250 event, is set to take place at the SDAT Stadium in Nungambakkam from October 27 to November 2.

The tournament was previously held on a single-year licence in 2022, when the then 17-year-old Linda Fruhvirtova of Czechia won her maiden title. The upcoming edition coincides with the centenary year of the Tamil Nadu Tennis Association (TNTA).

The event arrives at a time when women's tennis in India has shown encouraging signs. Maaya Rajeshwaran Revathi has emerged as a new hope in singles and a bright prospect for the future — particularly after her stunning run to the semifinals of the WTA 125 Mumbai Open in February as a qualifier.

The 16-year-old from Coimbatore, who trains at the prestigious Rafa Nadal Academy, also made her junior Grand Slam main-draw debut at last month's U.S. Open.

As a team too, India's players impressed by finishing second among six teams in the Billie Jean King Cup Asia-Oceania Group I tournament in Pune, thereby qualifying for the World Group play-offs for only the second time under the current structure. Shrivalli Bhamidipaty came into the limelight with her flawless 5-0 singles record — a major factor behind India's success.

The momentum continued when World No. 337 Sahaja Yamalapalli, the country's top-ranked player, defeated 2017 U.S. Open champion Sloane Stephens in straight sets at a WTA 125 event in Mexico last week.

While Maaya and Sahaja were granted main-draw wildcards for the Chennai Open in the first list announced on October 17, Shrivalli became the third Indian to secure one three days later, after World No. 37 Lois Boisson — this year's surprise French Open semifinalist — withdrew due to injury. Junior Wimbledon champion Mia Pohankova, the 16-year-old Slovak, has received the fourth and final wildcard.

Karman Kaur Thandi, whose career has been derailed by multiple injuries since her upset of France's Chloé Paquet in the 2022 edition, has used a Special Ranking to enter the qualifying rounds. Two wildcards for the qualifiers, scheduled for October 25–26, are also likely to be handed to local players. Riya Bhatia, Prarthana Thombare, Rutuja Bhosale and Ankita Raina are among the Indians in the doubles draw.

Realistically, it would be ambitious to expect an Indian player to replicate Sania Mirza's Hyderabad Open triumph in 2005 — still the country's only singles title on the main tour — but a deep run to the semifinals could provide a significant boost towards qualifying for next season's Australian Open.

From an international perspective, Paris Olympics silver medallist Donna Vekic, and former Wimbledon semifinalists Tatjana Maria and Lulu Sun will be the main stars to watch. But there will be no Top 10 player in action, as two other WTA 250 events in Hong Kong and Jiangxi, China, take place during the same week, ahead of the season-ending WTA Finals in Riyadh from November 1.

Chennai has a rich history of hosting tour-level events but majorly for men. An ATP 250 tournament was held annually from 1997 to 2017. The city continues to host a Challenger Tour event — the second tier of men's tennis — each year. However, as far as women's events are concerned, there have been only six international tournaments in the city since 2001: five ITFs (the lowest tier of professional tennis) and the inaugural WTA Chennai Open three years ago. For this year's edition, TNTA President and Indian tennis legend Vijay Amritraj coordinated with Octagon — the sports agency holding the three-year licence for the event — to relocate the tournament from Mexico. Whether the city retains the WTA 250 event for 2026–27 will depend on how this edition unfolds.

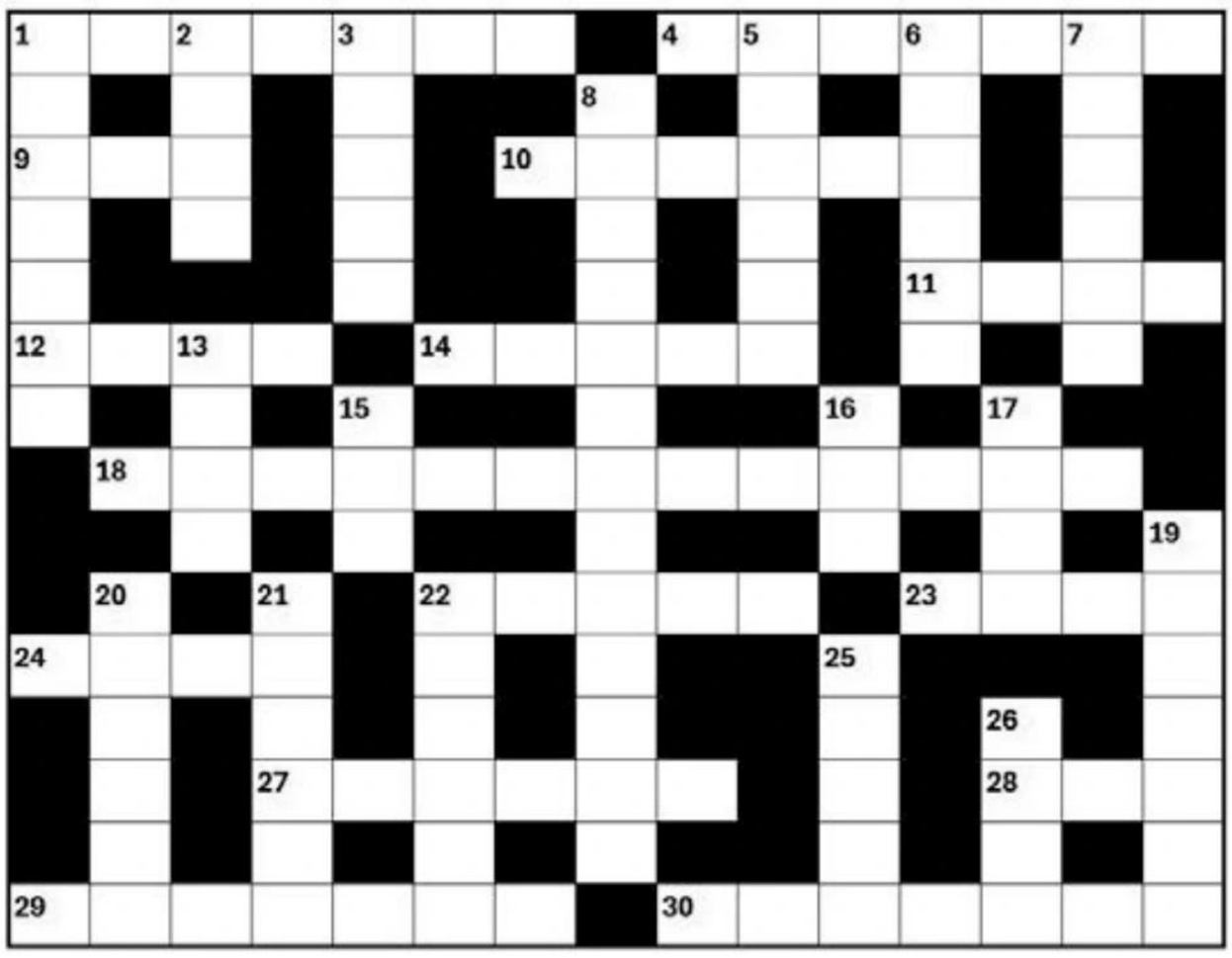
The organisers have done their due diligence by upgrading the venue. Three courts have been re-laid, offering medium to slow-medium surfaces. To handle the rain and wet conditions as the event coincides with the onset of the monsoon, each court will be tended to by a separate crew. "Even if it rains an hour before play, the courts will be bone dry," said Amritraj at a press conference last week.

Matches on all three courts will be televised (Eurosport and Doordarshan), and the challenge system will be available on all of them. However, Hawk-Eye technology will be restricted to the centre court.

The singles champion will receive ₹31.5 lakh, while the doubles winners will take home ₹11.48 lakh in prize money.

The singles champion will receive ₹31.5 lakh, while the doubles winners will take home ₹11.48 lakh in prize money.

CROSSWORD
N. SOORYA PRAKASH



SOLUTION TO LAST FORTNIGHT'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 Identify the surname of this Jamaican sprinter who won the 100m at the recent World Athletics Championships. (7)

9 & Down 1 Which Polish tennis player, ranked World No. 2 in singles, reached the final of the mixed doubles event at the U.S. Open 2025? (3,7)

10 Name the new BCCI president? (6)

12 & Down 6 Which is the second-most successful football club in India? (4,6)

14 Identify the first name of the Indian sportsperson who won the bronze medal at the ISSF World Cup shotgun mixed team event held in Nicosia, Cyprus in May 2025. (5)

18 Who won the bronze medal at the 2025 Asian surfing championships held in August in Mamallapuram, thus becoming the first from India to win an individual medal at this continental level event? (6,7)

22 Identify the surname of the former Indian player who was the manager of the Indian football team at the 2010 Asian Games Guangzhou, China. (5)

23 Which city in India has a sports complex named after Shree Shiv Chatrapati also known as Balewadi Stadium that conducts multiple sports? (4)

24 Which country did India beat to secure a third place in the second edition of the CAFA Nation's Cup football? (4)

27 Which Indian won silver in the T35 track event for women at the World Para Athletics Championships in Delhi? (6)

28 & 11 Identify this former cricketer from England who is the only wicketkeeper-batter to score 100 First-Class centuries. (3,4)

29 & 4 Which team ended as runner-up in the 134th edition of the prestigious Durand Cup football tournament held recently? (7,7)

30 Who won the player of the match award in the Irani Cup recently? (7)

DOWN

2 Who is the only bowler in the world to take a hat-trick with the first three deliveries of an innings in an ODI match? (4)

3 & 7 Which team from West Yorkshire, England, got promoted to the Premier League for the 2025-26 season? (5,6)

5 Which former Indian cricketer is picked by Sydney Thunders in the upcoming BBL season 15? (6)

8 Who won the Ballon d'Or award 2025 for women recently? (6,7)

13 Identify the first name of this Zimbabwean cricketer who holds the longest international career record in men's cricket among active players. (4)

15 Identify the first name of this player who notched up the all-rounder's double of 7000 runs and 200 wickets during the recently-concluded Test series between England and India. (3)

16 Identify the first name of this Australian cricketer who scored a 37-ball hundred in a T20I. (3)

17 Identify the first name of this shooter who won the prestigious Khel Ratna Award in 2024? (4)

19 Who won three gold medals at the recent World Athletics Championships? (7)

20 Who recently became the first Indian in women's cricket to score an international hundred in all three formats of the game? (6)

21 Who is the present chairman of the Pro Kabaddi League? (6)

22 Which team from Munich won the German Super Cup recently? (6)

25 Identify the first name of this Russian-born Dutch chess GM who recently won the FIDE Grand Swiss tournament? (5)

26 Which town, coming under the aegis of the Karnataka State Cricket Association, hosts Ranji Trophy matches? (4)

Rajputana Royals crowned champion of the inaugural Archery Premier League

The inaugural Archery Premier League (APL) final at the Yamuna Sports Complex in New Delhi on October 12, between Rajputana Royals and Prithviraaj Yodhas produced an edge-of-the-seat thriller. Royals, trailing by two points at one juncture in the summit clash, stormed back to win 5-4 in a shoot-off.

Royals, which had dominated the competition since the opening day, having gone undefeated for the first week, found itself in the soup early on after Gatha Anandrao Khadake's upgraded arrow saw Yodhas take the first set.

Royals, however, pulled level soon, with recurvers Ankita Bhakat and Mete Gazoz of Turkey starring with timely 10s.

The third set witnessed a historic moment as Yodhas delivered a perfect 80, a first in the competition. However, with only a 9 required to seal the championship in the final set, Mexican Matias Grande erred and hit an 8.

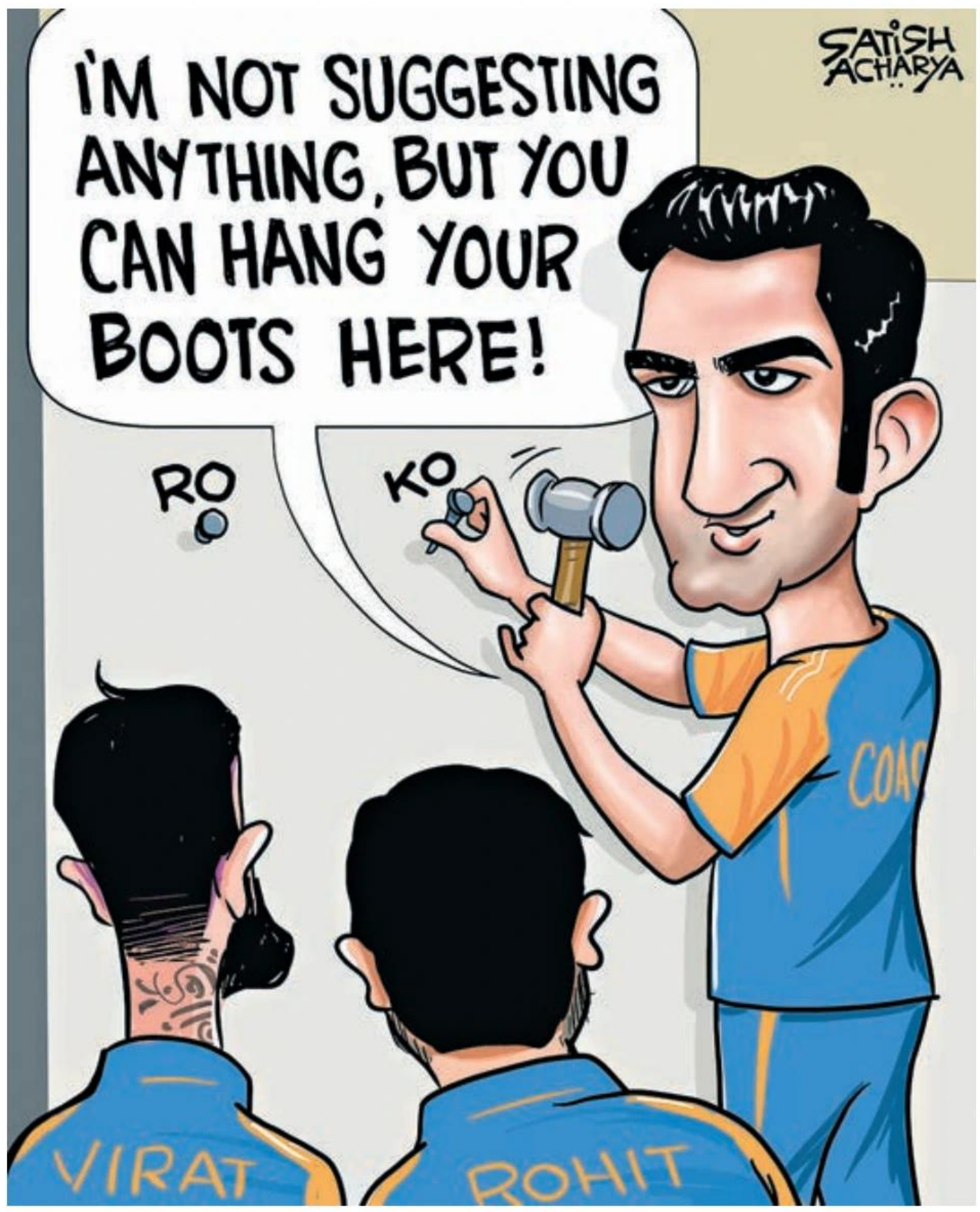
Ojas Deotale and Brit Ella Gibson, two of Royals' most consistent compound archers, made the most of the opportunity and hit the target in the tie-breaker, while none of the four Yodhas, probably still shaken by what had transpired only moments earlier, could find the yellow dot.

The 11-day-long action had featured 36 Indian and 12 top foreign archers, who had been slotted into six franchises.

SANTADEEP DEY

Triumphant: Olympics champion Mete Gazoz of Turkey after leading his franchise Rajputana Royals to victory in the inaugural Archery Premier League in New Delhi. PTI

SPORTOON



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Ryan Fernando

FOR MORE STORIES

SWEET RECOVERY

The author suggests some **high-protein** desserts that can satisfy the sweet cravings of athletes without interfering with their recovery.

As a nutritionist working closely with athletes, I fully understand the sacrifice and dedication required to push your body to its limits during training. Recovery is just as critical as the workout itself, and the right nutrition plays a crucial role in ensuring you get the most out of your efforts. But let's be honest, sometimes you just need a treat to keep you motivated and on track. That's why I want to share with you some high-protein dessert options that can satisfy your sweet cravings without interfering with your recovery.

I've seen athletes put in the work in the gym, only to be left craving something sweet afterwards. These high-protein desserts are designed to give your body the nutrients it needs to repair and recover.

Let's dive in.

Protein-Infused Custard

Custard is a classic comfort dessert that can be effortlessly upgraded into a nourishing, protein-rich treat.

How to make it: Start by cooking together 1 cup (240 ml) of milk, 2 egg yolks, 1 tablespoon (15 ml) of a natural sweetener like honey, and 1 tablespoon (8 g) of cornstarch to thicken it. Once the custard is ready, stir in 1 scoop (25 g) of your preferred protein powder. Top with a fresh fruit salad (75 g) to enhance the flavour and nutritional value.

Why it works: The protein helps repair muscle fibres and supports recovery, while the fruit adds antioxidants and fibre.

Protein Ice Cream (Whey or Plant-Based)

When you've been working hard in the gym, a cold, creamy dessert can feel like the ultimate reward. Traditional ice cream might satisfy your cravings, but it often lacks the protein needed for recovery. This protein ice cream recipe is a great alternative.

How to make it: Mix your choice of protein powder (25 g) with 240 ml of milk (dairy or non-dairy) and add 1 tablespoon (15 ml) of a natural sweetener like maple syrup. You can add flavourings like 1 tablespoon (10 g) of cocoa powder or a handful of berries for extra flavour. Freeze for 2–3 hours, and you'll have a creamy, protein-packed dessert.

Why it works: The protein aids muscle recovery, and the milk provides additional nutrients like calcium.

Kulfi with Plant-Based Protein

Kulfi is a rich, creamy Indian frozen dessert that's often enjoyed during festivals. By adding plant-based protein, you can make this dessert more beneficial for recovery while still enjoying its delicious flavour.

How to make it: Blend 1 cup (240 ml) of milk (or plant-based milk like almond or soya milk), 2 tablespoons (30 ml) of cream, 1 tablespoon (15 ml) of a natural sweetener like stevia, and 1 scoop (20–25 g) of your chosen protein powder. Add 2 tablespoons (30 g) of chopped pistachios or almonds for healthy fats and texture. Pour the mixture into moulds and freeze for 3–4 hours.

Why it works: It's a great balance of protein, fats, and carbohydrates to support your recovery and energy levels.

Greek Yoghurt Protein Bowl

When time is tight, a Greek yoghurt protein bowl is an easy,

Smart moves: Recovery is where the real progress happens, therefore it's important to indulge in cravings wisely. GETTY IMAGES

customisable option. Greek yoghurt is already packed with protein, and adding a scoop of protein powder turns it into a perfect post-workout dessert.

How to make it: Start with 1 cup (240 g) of Greek yoghurt, which is naturally high in protein. Add 1 scoop (20–25 g) of whey or plant-based protein powder, and top with fresh fruit (about 75 g), 1 tablespoon (15 g) of chia seeds, and 2 tablespoons (30 g) of nuts or granola. It's quick, easy, and nutrient-dense.

Why it works: Greek yoghurt is rich in protein, and the added protein powder further supports muscle recovery. The toppings provide fibre, healthy fats, and antioxidants, making this dessert a well-rounded option after training.

Chocolate Protein Balls

Sometimes, you just need a quick and portable snack or dessert. These chocolate protein balls are perfect for busy athletes who want something high in protein and easy to grab after a workout.

How to make it: Combine 2 tablespoons (30 g) of cocoa powder, 1 scoop (25 g) of protein powder (whey or plant-based), 3 tablespoons (45 g) of nut butter, and 1 tablespoon (15 ml) of a natural sweetener like honey or dates. Roll the mixture into bite-sized balls and refrigerate for 1–2 hours.

Why it works: These little bites are packed with protein to help with muscle recovery, and healthy fats from the nut butter keep you feeling satisfied. They're easy to store and grab on the go, making them an ideal post-workout snack.

Bonus: Protein Mug Cake

Sometimes, after an intense workout, nothing beats the comfort of a warm dessert. A protein mug cake is a quick and easy way to satisfy your sweet cravings while giving your body the protein it needs for recovery.

How to make it: In a microwave-safe mug, combine 2 tablespoons (30 g) of protein powder, 2 tablespoons (30 g) of almond flour, 1 tablespoon (15 ml) of sweetener like honey or stevia, and 2–3 tablespoons (30–45 ml) of milk. Microwave for 60–90 seconds, and you'll have a warm, protein-packed cake ready in no time. Top with Greek yoghurt for extra protein and nutrition.

Why it works: A mug cake offers the warm comfort of dessert while fuelling your muscles with protein.

It is important to properly fuel the body after intense training.

Recovery is where the real progress happens, and these high-protein desserts are designed to help you refuel while satisfying your sweet cravings.

With festivals approaching, these desserts also provide a healthier way to indulge during celebrations while keeping your nutrition in check.

Enjoy these treats knowing they're working just as hard as you are to support your recovery!

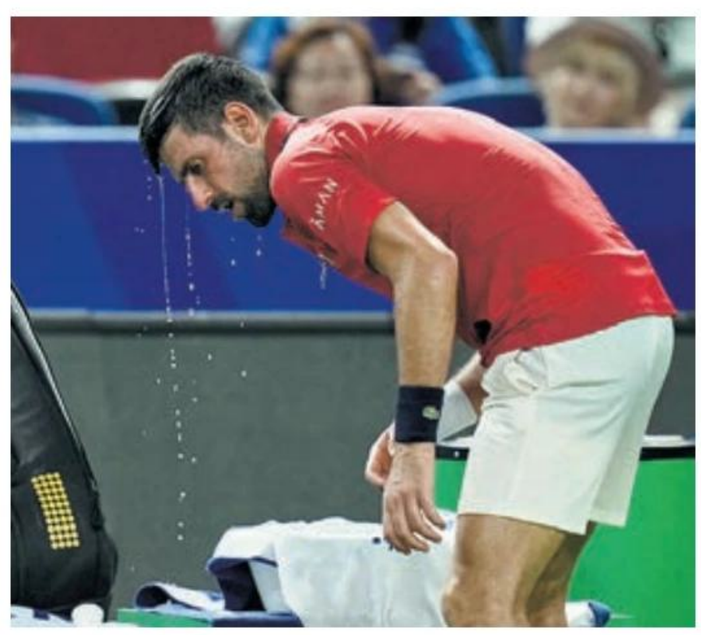
A new and aggressive opponent

According to a survey by World Athletics undertaken two years ago, three-quarters of athletes have been **directly impacted** by climate change. This is a startling figure.

Suresh Menon

Athletes around the world have a new and aggressive opponent to deal with. Even international sport, where competitors are younger, fitter, stronger, better looked after, is beginning to suffer. The enemy is extreme heat. And it is not affecting just performance, but health too. Awareness is of the problem not always followed by action, however.

At the Shanghai Open tennis recently, players were forced to retire; Novak Djokovic vomited in successive matches as the conditions got to him. Emma Raducanu quit her match with dizziness in Wuhan as players "wilted in brutal conditions" of high temperature and humidity. One official asked, "You want a player to die on the court?" He was echoing what Daniil Medvedev had spelt out so decisively at the U.S. Open in 2023: "One player gonna die."



Major concern: At the Shanghai Open tennis recently, players were forced to retire; Novak Djokovic vomited in successive matches as the conditions got to him. AP

The ATP said in a statement that player safety was its top priority and that it is considering such a policy. Note the tense: present continuous. The ATP doesn't have an overall heat policy in place unlike the Grand Slams or the WTA. The decision is left to the local authorities during a tournament.

It isn't just the players. Last year, assistant referee Humberto Panjoj collapsed during a football match between Canada and Peru in Kansas City after being positioned in the direct sun. He had to be stretchered off. A study earlier this year has warned that afternoon matches at the 2026 World Cup in the U.S. could expose players and fans to "potentially dangerous levels of heat."

The 2022 World Cup football in Qatar had to be played in winter. Most matches were held late evening, local time. In the U.S. World Cup, matches are scheduled for the afternoon, to cater to Europe's television audience (which also means sponsors with interests in that region). International sport is squeezed between the climate crisis and television business. According to research by the Queen's University, Belfast, almost 90% of the North American stadiums hosting the World Cup could face potentially dangerous levels of heat. Spectators are in danger too.

According to a survey by World Athletics undertaken two years ago, three-quarters of athletes have been directly impacted by climate change. This is a startling figure.

The Economist recently summed up the effect of climate crisis on sport: "Beyond sweeping planetary changes, seemingly small variations in temperature make a huge difference to athletes' performance. The sapping effect of warm weather is well known, and is why they often try to acclimatise themselves before competitions in hot places. Even then, though, only so much adaptation is possible: higher temperatures hasten dehydration, cause glucose to be broken down more quickly and reduce the amount of oxygen sent to the muscles (the body has to prioritise sending blood to the skin in order to cool itself down)."

If that is the case with professional sport, what of amateur sport which do not have the same resources? And lower down the pecking order, what of the casual knockabout games among half-fit, unfit or untrained players?

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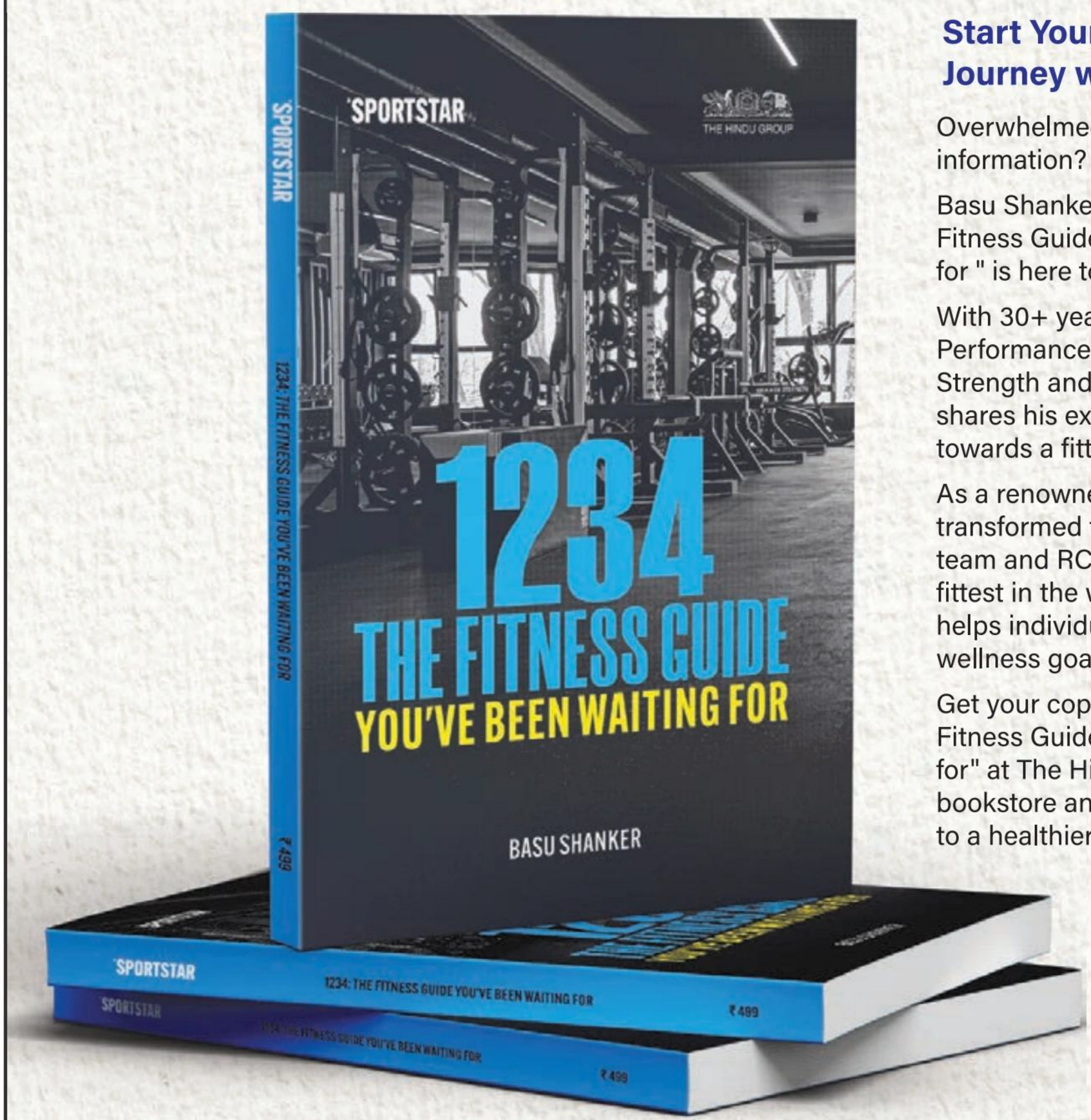

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