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## HEIR APPARENT TO THE KING OF CLAY

Spanish youngster Carlos Alcaraz looks prime to add a second Grand Slam on a court where his countryman Rafael Nadal raged for years, accumulating 14 titles.



**POSTER**  
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**Cover Image:** Carlos Alcaraz (Getty Images)

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## OFF-SIDE

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# THE WRESTLERS' REDEMPTION

The protest against WFI can be watershed moment for Indian sport.

In India's wrestling halls, echoes of triumph and glory have faded, replaced by a battle against exploitation and injustice. India's Olympic and Commonwealth Games medal winners embody the spirit of change in a sport tarnished by the darkness of a scandal.

Their struggle runs deep, akin to the unyielding earth beneath their feet. They have been spearheading a protest against the former president of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, and a system that has steadfastly denied them justice. Singh has been accused of sexual exploitation and other misdemeanours.

In the blistering heat of relentless summer days, the wrestlers have taken their stand upon the footpaths of Jantar Mantar, untiring in their protest since April 23. Their demands ring out with resounding clarity — a call for accountability, transparency, and a restoration of the sacred sanctity that once adorned the sport. Their unified voices reverberate through the nation, hoping to ignite a transformative movement of change. Many have lent their support to this fight but more have stayed away.

But united against adversity, the wrestlers



**Never give up:** Wrestler Vinesh Phogat during the protest against former Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi. PTI

form an unbreakable bond, warriors both on and off the mat. They fight for the honour and dignity of their sport, refusing to let the transgressions of a few overshadow the dedication of many.

Within dimly lit halls, their revolt resounds — a symphony of defiance with each wrestler's thud on the mat. Their actions are stark and honest, stripped of any sugar-coating. The Wrestlers' Redemption, an ongoing saga, can be a watershed moment for Indian sport, ensuring a safe playing field for every budding athlete. Many Indian sporting bodies need a deep cleanse much

like the one USA Gymnastics was forced to carry out following the Larry Nassar scandal. More than 150 women, including Olympic champions, had testified in court against the former doctor of USA Gymnastics, who had sexually abused athletes in the guise of medical care.

Bajrang Punia, Sakshi Malik, and Vinesh Phogat, and their comrades forge ahead, undeterred by daunting odds, creating a path towards integrity and fairness. Their struggle persists, their unwavering resolve endures.

In this wrestling tale, the protagonists write their own narrative, redeeming their beloved sport. They herald a new era where honour, justice and the spirit of the mat reign supreme.

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# Aditi Ashok becomes first Indian female golfer to enter top 50 in world rankings



Aditi Ashok became the first Indian female golfer to enter the top 50 in the world rankings after her T5 place finish at the LPGA Founders Cup.

Aditi scored an average of 1.89 points and has moved up by 15 places in the rankings and is currently at the 49th spot in the women's golf world ranking.

Nelly Korda of the USA remains on the top with an average of 8.40 points followed by Korea's Jin Young Ko, who moved one place forward with 8.38 average points overtaking Lydia Ko of New Zealand's 7.84.

Jin Young won the LPGA Founders Cup, which led to her increase in points and almost closing the gap with the leader Korda.

Aditi will next play at the Aramco Series Florida, which is a part of the Ladies European Tour. She is currently leading the Race to Costa Del Sol, the Order of Merit for LET.

## SUSPENDED FOR SUSPECTED DOPING



**Kenyan distance runner Rhonex Kipruto**, who won a bronze medal in the 10,000-meter race at the 2019 world championships, has been suspended for suspected doping, the Athletics Integrity Unit said. Kipruto has been notified of a charge relating to irregularities in his athlete biological passport, the AIU said. Kipruto was only 19 when he finished third in the 10,000 at the 2019 worlds in Doha, Qatar. The race was won by Joshua Cheptegei of Uganda. REUTERS





**« I will not be in Roland-Garros and I do not intend to continue playing in the following months. I am going to regenerate my body and when I feel ready, I will start again.**

– Rafael Nadal in a press conference ahead of the French Open. »

## 76ers

The Philadelphia 76ers has parted ways with head coach Doc Rivers after three seasons. Rivers led the 76ers to the Eastern Conference semifinal series in each of his three seasons at the helm. Third-seeded Philadelphia fell apart in the second half and dropped a 112-88 decision to the second-seeded Boston Celtics in Game 7. Rivers, 61, is best known for coaching the 2007-08 Celtics team featuring Hall of Famers Kevin Garnett, Paul Pierce and

Ray Allen that won the NBA title. The Celtics returned to the Finals two years later but lost in seven games to the Los Angeles Lakers; they also made the 2012 Eastern Conference Finals. Rivers has not coached a team past the second round of the playoffs since then.



## 200

More than 200 Russian athletes have been sanctioned following the 'Operation LIMS' investigation into Moscow's anti-doping laboratory with more bans to come, the World Anti-Doping Agency said. The suspensions are the result of data and samples retrieved by WADA's Intelligence and Investigations team into the Moscow Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS). Another 182 cases remain under investigation.



**« I handled Dearica with care from day one, when she told me. And she knows that.**

– "Las Vegas Aces head coach Becky Hammon, denying making derogatory remarks about two-time All-Star Dearica Hamby's pregnancy. »

## APOLOGIES, LADIES!

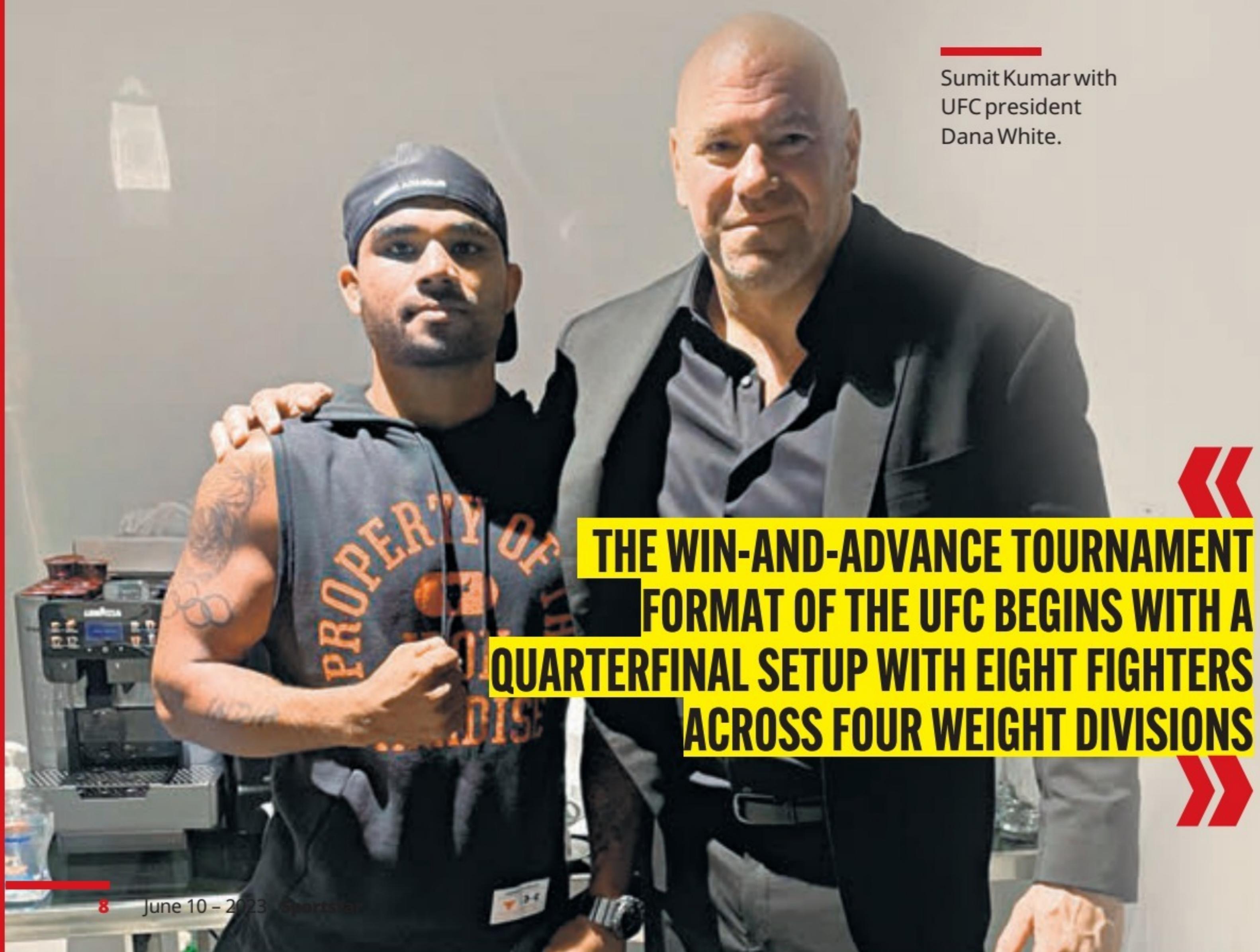


The organisers of the Madrid Open have apologised to the women's doubles finalists of this year's tournament following criticism for denying players the opportunity to make speeches at the trophy ceremony. Singles world number three Jessica Pegula, who partnered with Coco Gauff in their 6-1, 6-4 defeat by **Victoria Azarenka and Beatriz Haddad Maia**, said she was left disappointed after organisers did not allow the finalists to address fans. "Not giving our women's doubles finalists the chance to address their fans at the end of the match was unacceptable, and we have apologised directly to Victoria, Beatriz, Coco and Jessica," tournament CEO Gerard Tsobanian said. GETTY IMAGES

# IN QUEST FOR GLORY

The success of **Road to UFC's** first season in 2022 has ensured UFC's zippy return to tap talent from its fresh and booming market in Asia.

Sumit Kumar with  
UFC president  
Dana White.



THE WIN-AND-ADVANCE TOURNAMENT  
FORMAT OF THE UFC BEGINS WITH A  
QUARTERFINAL SETUP WITH EIGHT FIGHTERS  
ACROSS FOUR WEIGHT DIVISIONS

**T**he road to the American dream is open again. The rules of the journey remain intact: 32 of Asia's handpicked MMA fighters will

compete, break some bones and jaws and chart their path into the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) in a year.

The success of Road to UFC's first season in 2022 has ensured UFC's zippy return to tap talent from its fresh and booming market in Asia. India, too, had its share of jubilation and despair last season when Uttarakhand-born Anshul Jubli soared to the top of the lightweight division and bagged a historic UFC contract in March 2023. His compatriot Pawan Maan Singh was not so lucky as a spinning backfist from Indonesian Jeka Saragih — Anshul's final opponent — ended his shot in the first round.

Anshul's remarkable rise from the blue has opened up a new path to the top for India's silently teeming MMA arcade. The Road to UFC Season 2, which begins its course at the UFC Performance Institute in Shanghai on May 27-28, will also bear two Indians across different divisions.

Uttar Pradesh boys Sumit Kumar and Rana Rudra Pratap Singh will represent the country in their separate quests to the Octagon. Sumit (7-0-0) will open his campaign against South Korean Seung Guk Choi - a Road to UFC

## UTTAR PRADESH BOYS SUMIT KUMAR AND RANA RUDRA PRATAP SINGH WILL REPRESENT THE COUNTRY IN THEIR SEPARATE QUESTS TO THE OCTAGON

participant last season — in the flyweight division. However, the 22-year-old Sumit's seven-match win streak is under scrutiny for alleged record-padding. While Sumit's record remains under a cloud, his undeniable skillset has earned him a ticket to China after being spotted by UFC chairman Dana White himself.

Meanwhile, Rana, who will take on South Korean Chang Ho Lee in the bantamweight division, holds an 11-1 record through a predominantly Indian fight background, honing his skills in the suburbs of Lucknow. A momentous test awaits in Shanghai.



**RANA RUDRA PRATAP**

**Age:** 26

**Weight Class:**

Bantamweight

**Record:** 11-1-0

**Last Fight:** Win · Triangle Choke · R1. Versus Harsh Mishra at Fight of Knights on May 22, 2022  
Ranked fourth in featherweight and seventh in bantamweight among South Asian pro fighters.

### SUMIT KUMAR

**Age:** 22

**Weight Class:** Flyweight

**Record:** 7-0-0\*

**Last Fight:** Win - Guillotine Choke - Round 1. Versus Arjun Kumar at Warrior's Dream Series 2 on July 23, 2022  
Ranked sixth among South Asian pro flyweight fighters.

\*Record under scrutiny.

## Fights and events to watch out for

**UFC**

**Road to UFC**

**Date:** May 27-28

**Venue:** UFC Performance Institute, Shanghai

**UFC 289:** Amanda Nunes vs Irene Aldana — Women's bantamweight main event title bout

**Date:** June 10

**Venue:** Rogers Arena in Vancouver, Canada

**UFC 289:** Charles Oliveira vs Beneil Dariush — Lightweight co-main event bout

**Date:** June 10

**Venue:** Rogers Arena in Vancouver, Canada

## The Road to UFC format

The win-and-advance tournament format begins with a quarterfinal setup with eight fighters across four weight divisions: flyweight, featherweight, bantamweight and lightweight.

The quarterfinal fights are separated into four episodes to be held over two days in Shanghai. India's Sumit Kumar competes in Episode 2 (May 27) in the flyweight category while Rana Rudra Pratap Singh's bantamweight opener will take place in Episode 4 on May 28. The semifinals and finals will be held at separate UFC events later in the year with the winners in each category earning a contract.



# REVELLING IN CORONATION



SCAN TO READ MORE

**A**rsenal tried until the end, but it wasn't meant to be. The cannons of the Gunners could not break down the resilient blue walls of Manchester City as the latter clinched the Premier League title for the fifth time in six seasons. It was also Pep Guardiola's third consecutive title win, equalling Sir Alex Ferguson's record with Manchester United (**1999-2022 & 2007-09**).

Man City's 1-0 win against Chelsea was a mere formality, as Arsenal's 0-1 loss against



Nottingham Forest meant Guardiola and his men were crowned champions a day before they emerged out of the Etihad Tunnel, receiving a Guard of Honour from the Chelsea players.

On the other side of Manchester, Erik Ten Hag almost secured

Champions League football for the Red Devils as Manchester United eked out a 1-0 win against Bournemouth courtesy of an acrobatic finish from Casemiro. It needs just a point from its remaining



## IT WAS ALSO PEP GUARDIOLA'S THIRD CONSECUTIVE TITLE WIN, EQUALLING SIR ALEX FERGUSON'S RECORD WITH MANCHESTER UNITED

**Third time's the charm:** Manchester City wrapped up a third consecutive Premier League title. Arsenal led the table for much of the season, but was overhauled by an indomitable Treble-chasing City side in the closing weeks of the campaign. AP

two matches against Chelsea and Fulham to book a UCL berth for next season.

Man United could have booked a berth in matchday 37 if Liverpool had lost to Aston Villa. It was all going well for United as the Reds were trailing 0-1, but Roberto Firmino signed off his last match at Anfield in style after grabbing a late equaliser to keep his side mathematically in

the top-four race.

Tottenham Hotspur's 1-3 loss at home to Brentford summed up its lacklustre season, as Harry Kane's early goal proved futile.

It was a monumental week for Brighton and Hove Albion as it beat already-relegated Southampton 3-1 and secured European football for the first time in its history.

In the lower half of the table,

Everton stayed in the race for Premier League survival after Yerry Mina scored the equaliser in the 10th minute of second-half added time to earn a point in the 1-1 draw against Wolverhampton Wanderers. Leeds United, which remains in the 18<sup>th</sup> place, did not make things easier for itself with a 1-3 loss against West Ham United.

### La Liga

It was a week of contrasting emotions in the Catalan region. Barcelona clinched its first La Liga title since the 2018-19 season, and the fact that it did so by beating rival Espanyol at its home ground made it sweeter. It was also a bittersweet moment for club veteran Sergio Busquets, who celebrated his last La Liga crown with his childhood club after confirming his exit in the summer.

Xavi and his men would have wanted to celebrate the title at Camp Nou with a win, but that was not to be as Barca succumbed to a 1-2 loss against Real Sociedad in the last gameweek.

Valencia's 1-0 win over Real Madrid was marred by racial allegations. As if the Champions League drubbing by Manchester City weren't enough, Carlo Ancelotti saw Vinicius Junior, who was subjected to racial abuse from the crowd, receive a red card. A VAR check showed that Vinicius pushed Valencia's Duro in the face, but the latter escaped punishment despite putting the winger in a headlock. After the match, the Brazilian tweeted about the incident, a part of which said, "I'm sorry for the Spaniards who don't agree, but today, in Brazil, Spain is known as a country of racists."

Atletico Madrid continued its red-hot form with a 3-0 win against Osasuna in Diego Simeone's last season in charge of the club.

### Bundesliga

It is not often that the Bundesliga title race goes down to the wire because of Bayern Munich's undisputed dominance in the league. But that has not been the case in German top-flight football this season. After the sacking of Julian



Nagelsmann, things at Bayern have been tumultuous, to say the least, and the club that stands to benefit is its arch-rival Borussia Dortmund.

Bayern Munich suffered a 1-3 defeat at home to RB Leipzig, which seriously dented its hopes of retaining the title. Dortmund still had work to do against Augsburg, and the Ruhr side did it in prime fashion. A Sebastian Haller double and a Julian Brandt goal guided Dortmund to a 3-0 win against 10-man Augsburg.

As things stand, the title race will go down to the last matchday, and all Dortmund needs to do to win the title is beat Mainz in its last outing of the season.

Bayern plays Cologne in its last final match of the season, and the only way it can seal the title is by winning and hoping Dortmund drops points.

After matchday 33, Dortmund stays top with 70 points, followed by Bayern in second with 68 points and Leipzig in third with 63 points. Fourth-placed Union Berlin and fifth-placed SC Freiburg have the same points (59), but Berlin stays in a Champions League spot because of a better goal difference.

**Champions again:** Barcelona clinched its first La Liga title since 2019 with a victory at local rival Espanyol. This is Barcelona's first league title without Messi this century. AFP

#### Serie A

Life is good for Napoli, having already won the Scudetto. But Luciano Spalletti's men have no interest in taking their foot off the pedal, which was evident in their 3-1 win against Inter.

Milan missed out on a UCL final spot after losing to city rival Inter, but it is still in the hunt for a berth in Europe's premier club competition next season. It clinched a 5-1 win against Sampdoria, which included a hat-trick by Olivier Giroud.

Lazio beat Udinese 1-0 to solidify its position in the Champions League race. After matchday 36, Juventus,

Lazio, and Inter occupy the table's second, third, and fourth positions with 69, 68, and 66 points, respectively. Milan is fifth with 64 points.

#### Ligue 1

Paris Saint-Germain inched closer to a record 11th Ligue 1 title after a first-half brace from Kylian Mbappe guided it to a 2-1 win against Auxerre. PSG could have won the trophy if not for Lens' 3-1 win against Lorient. As things stand, PSG needs to avoid defeat against Strasbourg in its next match to retain its crown.

Even if PSG loses its last two matches and Lens wins its last two, PSG is likely to win due to its superior goal difference.

After matchday 36, PSG leads with 84 points, followed by Lens with 78. Marseille and Monaco occupy third and fourth place with 73 and 65 points, respectively.

**Aneesh Dey**

**Paris Saint-Germain inched closer to a record 11th Ligue 1 title after defeating Auxerre 2-1**



# TREBLE-HUNTING CITY SINKS REAL TO SET UP FINAL CLASH WITH INTER

City, which has **never won European football's biggest competition**, will play Inter Milan in the final in Istanbul on June 10.

**Stunning show:**  
Kevin de Bruyne is Manchester City's top scorer in Champions League knockout games with 11 goals. GETTY IMAGES

## Real Madrid 1-1 Manchester City Manchester City 4-0 Real Madrid

**P**ep Guardiola's Manchester City, which has never won the UEFA Champions League, is on course for an elusive treble after it beat Real Madrid 5-1 (on aggregate) in the two-legged semifinal. In the final, set to happen in Istanbul on June 11, City will face Inter Milan, which trumped its cross-city rival AC Milan with effortless ease in the last-four clash.

City buried the ghosts of its semifinal defeat to the same opponent last season when Real overturned a 4-3 defeat in the first leg with a remarkable late comeback in the second before winning the final.

The contest was on an even keel in the first leg this time, with City and Madrid trading blows at the Santiago Bernabeu in a 1-1 draw. Madrid, the reigning UCL champion, took the lead through a mesmerising solo goal from Vinicius Jr. before Kevin de Bruyne ensured parity for City with a piledriver of a shot, which whistled past Los Blancos goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois.

But in Manchester, City's attackers ripped Carlo Ancelotti's side apart with their fluid movement and ruthless finishing.



**Tryst with destiny:** Inter Milan will play in the UCL final for the sixth time and first since lifting its third European Cup in 2009-10 under Jose Mourinho.

GETTYIMAGES

Bernardo Silva began the rout in the 23rd minute with a composed finish after De Bruyne assisted him with a slick through ball. The Portuguese midfielder was at it again when he headed in a rebound to set City on the way to a famous win.

Real, though, weathered the storm and even briefly held the upper hand early in the second half. But Guardiola ensured his side did not cede the advantage in the face of a spirited counterattack.

Defender Manuel Akanji netted the third and decisive goal in the 76th

minute to kill off any hopes of a Madrid revival. Argentinian World Cup hero Julian Alvarez put the cherry on top with an injury-time goal moments after being subbed in.

Guardiola's win—his last UCL title came in 2011 with Barcelona—over his long-time rival Ancelotti will taste even sweeter, considering that he didn't need a goal contribution from his record-gobbling Norwegian forward Erling Haaland.

**AC Milan 0-2 Inter Milan**

**Inter Milan 1-0 AC Milan**

Inter Milan turned back the clock

by outplaying AC Milan twice at their shared home ground, the San Siro.

Inter and Milan have been in revival mode in the last couple of years after a dormant decade dominated by Juventus, the last Italian side to come close to winning the UCL. Inter won the 2020-21 Serie A title, while Milan took the honours last season.

Inter looked the better of the two sides. The Nerazzurri pressed harder, passed with intent, and struck at the right moments to constantly stay ahead in the tie.



IT WOULD ALSO HELP THAT MOURINHO'S INTER HAD FAMOUSLY HELD OFF GUARDIOLA'S BARCELONA, ONE OF THE GREATEST FOOTBALL TEAMS EVER ASSEMBLED, ON THE WAY TO WINNING THE UCL



In the first leg, while Milan took time to settle, Inter hit the ground running with a 7<sup>th</sup> minute goal from Edin Dzeko. The Bosnian outpowered his marker and side-footed the ball to open the scoring. Then in the 11th minute, Henrikh Mkhitaryan trapped a diagonal ball from the flank by left-back Federico Dimarco at the edge of the box before sidestepping Milan defenders to slot it home.

Milan, which was missing Rafael Leao due to injury, grew into the game in the second half but couldn't prevent Inter from seizing an early

advantage in the tie.

In the second leg, Simone Inzaghi's side was much more conservative, drawing a growingly desperate Milan side in before hitting it on the counter.

Romelu Lukaku, who was resigned to a reduced role from the bench, was pivotal. In the 74th minute, the Belgian waltzed past a couple of defenders before laying it on the path of Lautaro Martinez, who slotted it past Mike Maignan at the first post.

Inter, which began its UCL campaign with European

heavyweights Bayern Munich and Barcelona in the group stage, will be up against the relentless machine of Guardiola's City in the final.

Inzaghi and his men will try to draw motivation from the feats of the last Inter side that climbed the summit in 2010 under the stewardship of Jose Mourinho. It would also help that Mourinho's Inter had famously held off Guardiola's Barcelona, one of the greatest football teams ever assembled, on the way to winning the UCL.

*Pranay Rajiv*

# NO TIME TO REST ON THEIR LAURELS

Despite their **stellar performance** at the World Championships, Indian boxers know the job isn't done yet.

Jonathan Selvaraj  
Twitter @jon\_selvaraj

Once he landed in New Delhi, back from the IBA men's boxing World Championships in Uzbekistan, Indian boxer Deepak Bhoria was counting down the hours to when he could make the journey back home to Hisar, Haryana. He had been away from home for nearly four months — first for the national men's boxing camp in Patiala and subsequently the World Championships in Tashkent.

In that time Deepak, who boxes in the men's 51kg category, had to keep a close watch on his weight. "You always have to control what you eat. And during a competition, you have to be really strict. Sometimes you have to skip a meal so that you make your weight and are allowed to compete. Because of that, you develop really intense cravings," he says.

For Deepak this means Indian sweets. "I really want to eat *garam gulab jamuns*. There is a shop near my house that I always buy them



from," he says.

He's not going to eat too many though. "Just a couple. Just so that I get a taste," he says.

You might think Deepak has earned the right to indulge himself a bit. After all, he had an excellent World Championship — beating reigning champion and Olympic bronze medallist Saken Bibossinov of Kazakhstan en route to a bronze medal of his own. But even that isn't something that merits a celebration for Deepak.



**Evasive tactics:** Deepak's defence was on target during his quarter-final bout. IBA

## INDIA HAD ONE OF ITS BEST-EVER PERFORMANCES AT THE BOXING WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS. ONLY SEVEN INDIAN MEN HAD WON MEDALS AT THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS AND THE TEAM THAT WENT TO UZBEKISTAN MINTED ANOTHER THREE

But it's not just him who feels this way.

India had one of its best-ever performances at the Boxing World Championships. Only seven Indian men had won medals at the World Championships and the team that went to Uzbekistan minted another three in Deepak Bhoria (51kg), Mohammad Hussamuddin (57kg) and Nishant Dev (71kg). The three

bronze medals, which were all won in weight categories that will be part of the 2024 Paris Olympics, were India's best-ever result at the Boxing World Championships in terms of medal count and placed India 5th in the medal tally. While Bhoria beat world champion Bibosinov, Nishant Dev became the first Indian to beat a boxer from Cuba when he beat Jorge in the quarterfinals of the men's

71kg category.

Despite that, both coaches and players know the job is only partly done. "When the team came back, I wanted everyone to know that we can't celebrate our results. I specifically told the three boxers who had won bronze to not make a big fuss about their medals when they went home," says CA Kuttappa, head coach of the men's team. That advice



**Perhaps the biggest change was the decision to pick the team not on the basis of selection trials but on the basis of a continuous assessment during the national camp.**

was largely adhered to. "Deepak and Hussamuddin both kept things simple at home. Nishant's family had already arranged a big function, but he told me he didn't have an idea until he reached home," says Kuttappa.

It says something about how highly Kuttappa and the Indian team rates itself. They no longer consider a record medal haul worthy of celebration. "I don't see the medals as something special. What was much more satisfying for me was to see their performance. There were boxers who didn't win a medal but boxed at a much higher level than I have ever seen before. Shiva Thapa (63.5kg category) lost in the first round but he discovered a new level to his game. Sachin Siwach (54kg category) was boxing in his first competition as a senior and he proved he belonged at this level. Ashish Kumar (men's 80kg category) was probably 30 seconds away from beating a two-time Olympic gold medallist. As a coach this was very satisfying," says Kuttappa.

Most of all, it gives Kuttappa and the coaching staff the self-belief that they are on the right track. There was no guarantee that this Indian team would perform the way it did when the boxers first arrived at the camp at the National Institute of Sports in Patiala in January. There were plenty of doubts raised over the team that did travel to

**Close shave:** Mohammad Hussamuddin in action during his victorious quarter-final bout. IBA



Uzbekistan, which notably didn't include Amit Panghal who had won a silver medal at the 2019 World Championships as well as a gold medal at the Asian Games and Commonwealth Games.

This was a new look setup — with

Kuttappa returning to head the coaching staff alongside Dmitry Dmitruk and high-performance director Bernard Dunne, both of whom had previously worked with Ireland.

"We tried to rethink how we were



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working with the team," says Kuttappa.

The team brought in nutritionists and psychologists to work with players and gave more emphasis to strength and conditioning than ever before. Perhaps the biggest change

was the decision to pick the team not on the basis of selection trials but on the basis of a continuous assessment over the course of the national camp.

Not everyone was on board with the new policy. "We were asking guys to go out of their comfort zone. If

you were a boxer who had done well previously you would of course think why things should be any different. There were a few boxers who wouldn't want to listen to the nutritionist. Or they wouldn't want to hear what the psychologist was

saying. They felt that boxing was just — *ja ke ladna* (go and fight). Boxing is still that but there is no reason you can't be prepared better," says Kuttappa. The biggest objection was with the new selection policy. "You had some boxers who came and said, 'Aap trial karwao (conduct trials). I am better in competition. I have medalled in these big tournaments. I have a good record.' But they didn't realise that the gold medals they were talking about were not the ones we were targeting. We are looking at big medals at the Olympics. Those will not come if we keep going on like normal," he says.

But there was no going back. "The old system of picking players had a lot of problems. The boxers weren't focusing on training but just on trials. Training se koi matlab nahin hai (They were not focused on training). There were boxers who would say, 'I don't feel like doing weight training. It makes my body tight, and they would go for a run instead. Or, if they were sparring, they would be talking to each other in the middle of the round. Once the new policy came in, there was no easy day. They were doing their best at every session. We tried to work a lot on bringing in new techniques and tactics, but the main change was in the boxers' mentality. They were hungry to achieve because they knew they had to be consistent. This is the big change," Kuttappa says.

Old results no longer carried as much weight as the exclusion of Amit Panghal —who was replaced by Deepak suggested. While the pick eventually proved correct, Kuttappa admits he was nervous before the team travelled to Uzbekistan.

"There was of course pressure on the boxers, but I felt there was a lot of pressure on the coaches and the support staff as well because our policy was going to be put to the test at this competition. If we didn't perform well, how would we be able to justify it?" he says.

However, those nerves would settle. Not at the competition itself but in the training sessions before the event. "We had a few training days before the competition started.



On our first training day we had some sparring sessions with Uzbekistan. They were the hosts and also one of the strongest teams in the tournament (Uzbekistan would top the medal tally with 9 medals including 5 gold). Before we came in, they had stopped two boxers sparring. But when we sparred with them, we realised we aren't just boxing at their level, we are actually beating them. Deepak was looking really good against (eventual champion at 51kg) Hassanboy Dusmatov. Sachin (Siwach) almost stopped (the silver medallist at 54kg

Oybek) Juraev. Even at superheavyweight Narender (Berwal) boxed really competitively with (Olympic champion Bakhodir) Jalolov. That's where we got the self-belief that our guys can do really well. I was thinking that we might not just get medals we could actually go into the final and win gold too," says Kuttappa.

Indeed, it looked that way as the Indians began their tournament. While Deepak had already proved his worth in the past beating former Olympic champion Shakobdin Zoirov a couple of years ago, and



**It's not just about the volume of punches but also how quickly the boxers get into good positions to land or defend them. It's more about moving the feet and preparing to engage.**

Inspire institute of Sport in Vijayanagar where he has been training for the past six years, felt there was a significant improvement in the fighter who went a step further in Tashkent.

"I think the major difference in how Nishant is boxing is how much more active he is. You need to engage more at the elite level," coach Warburton says. By activity, he isn't referring to the volume of punches thrown but in how quickly boxers get into good positions to defend or throw punches. "Activity is about moving the feet and preparing to engage. It's not just about throwing a lot of punches. When a boxer isn't active, he is standing still and becoming vulnerable. Being active is about how you are able to engage the opponent; your activity after you punch and whether you have an opportunity to punch once more. There were times in the past where his activity wasn't up to the level it needed to be. But I think as the competition progressed, his activity level increased," says Warburton.

Indeed, as the tournament progressed and as he racked up the big wins including the first by an Indian over a Cuban boxer, Warburton noticed how Nishant's self-belief also seemed to grow. "His coaches of course believe in him, but you could see that he is starting to believe in his ability as well. His demeanour at the start was that of a young person who was a bit tentative. As he went on, you could see the growth in his self-belief as well. I think that will continue to grow towards the Asian Games as well," says Warburton.

Deepak started believing in himself a lot more too. Perhaps more significant than his medal is the fact that he got rid of a bogey of sorts beating World Champion Bibossinov after suffering two straight losses to him previously. "When you beat the world champion, you get that confidence, no matter who is the world champion or who is in front of me. I can beat him. If I am in a difficult situation, I know what to do to get out of it," he says.

But while Deepak finally got the win against Bibossinov in Tashkent, he admits the actual self-belief to pull off the victory had come in a lot earlier. "Confidence is a big thing in boxing. If you do anything with confidence you have a much better chance of being successful. Before I went to the Worlds, I already had a level of belief because of how well we had prepared in training. You get confidence from wins, but I think the confidence that comes from good training is even better because you know that you can do it again."

While the boxers deserve credit for getting the job done in the ring, Kuttappa and other coaches say the support staff deserve plenty of credit as well. "Everyone contributed. Our psychologists talked to the boxers every day. As coaches, we understood which boxer needs to be pushed more and where we need to back off. Our video analysis team worked really hard every day of the camp and even at the World Championships. Before the bout against Bibossinov, they analysed how Deepak had boxed against him earlier and how others had done against the Kazakh. They found Deepak was mostly using straight



**Standing tall:** Nishant Dev after winning his quarter-final bout. IBA

Hussamuddin already had two Commonwealth Games bronze medals on his wall, perhaps the breakout performance Indian boxer at the World Championships was 22-year-old Nishant Dev who was competing in his second World Championships after a long break following a surgery early last year.

Nishant had competed at the World Championships in 2021 too where he lost in the quarterfinals. John Warburton, his coach at the

shot combinations against Bibossinov. We found that other opponents were scoring more with hooks. We asked Deepak to try that, and, in the bout, he landed each one that he threw. Later, a lot of coaches came and told us that Deepak had won because of his right hook. But the credit has to go to the video team as well," says Kuttappa.

While there were plenty of factors Kuttappa is pleased with, he admits the fact that they were not able to place a boxer in the final was a disappointment. There is also the fact that the World Championships were a bit depleted with the absence of boxers from Great Britain, USA and Ireland who were boycotting the tournament.

Coach Warburton feels that while the absence of these strong teams did make a difference it doesn't take away from the overall performance. "Would Great Britain, USA, Ireland and maybe Canada have won a few medals from the Worlds? Of course, they would have. But I think the level of Indian boxers was quite high. I think they would have beaten a few of them as well. I had a number of coaches who told me how highly they rated Nishant and other boxers," says Warburton.

Despite the disappointment of a boxer not reaching the finals, coach Kuttappa sees a silver lining. "Our selection policy is such that should a boxer win a silver or gold at the world championships, they would automatically make the team for the Asian Games. But because no one has that medal, there are no places guaranteed in the team. Everyone will be preparing as hard as before," he says.

Warburton agrees with that assessment too. "I think for a young boxer like Nishant, perhaps it's not a terrible thing that he didn't get a silver or gold. It isn't as if he is the finished item just yet. There are still some areas to work on. There were moments where he could have controlled the centre of the ring better, rather than go to the ropes. If he had won gold, would he have achieved too much too early? His main competition of the year is, after



## WHILE THERE WERE PLENTY OF FACTORS KUTTAPPA IS PLEASED WITH, HE ADMITS THE FACT THAT THEY WERE NOT ABLE TO PLACE A BOXER IN THE FINAL WAS A DISAPPOINTMENT

all, yet to come," says Warburton.

That would be the Asian Games, which will also serve as the qualification event for the Olympics next year.

"It's strange to say this about the World Championships but they are almost like the semifinal event for

this year. The main event is the Asian Games. It's going to be as hard as the World Championships because both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (the two countries won 9 of the 13 gold medals at the World Championships) will be taking part. Right now, only the gold and silver medallists at the Asian Games will get the quota so we will have to reach the final to have a



**Team work:** The Indian boxing contingent at the World Championships. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

chance," says Kuttappa.

So, the boxers will be back preparing once again at the national camp. Any celebrations, as coach Kuttappa says, will have to wait. "Even after the Worlds, I told our boxers — there's no reason to celebrate just yet. Our job isn't done. They can have their sweets and celebrations later," he says.



**Warburton feels that while the absence of strong teams from countries like Great Britain and USA did make a difference, it doesn't take away from the overall performance of our boxers.**

# MORE INFRASTRUCTURE, BETTER TRAINING FACILITIES NEED OF THE HOUR

While AFI insists athletes should repeat their **best performances – that came elsewhere and earlier in the season** – in selection meets at home if they want to go for the majors, little effort is taken to ensure that they are offered the sort of facilities that would help them do so.

Stan Rayan  
Twitter: @StanByMe28

**W**ith Neeraj Chopra hitting a wonderful high with every meet, Indian athletics should be bright and brimming. And efforts should be made to give athletes the best facilities at national meets so they can bring out their best too.

Sadly, that does not seem to be happening if the recent National Federation Cup — an important qualification meet ahead of the Asian Championships in Thailand in July — in Ranchi is any indication.

It is a busy season with three majors lined up — the Asian Championships, the World Championships,





**The magical leap:** Abdulla Aboobacker won the silver medal in the men's triple jump final at the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham. GETTY IMAGES

and the Asian Games — and athletes are desperate to achieve the qualification standards while also picking up precious world ranking points that could help them qualify for the Worlds in Budapest in August.

While the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) insists athletes should repeat their best performances — that came elsewhere and earlier in the season — in selection meets at home if they want to go for the majors, little effort is taken to ensure that they are offered the facilities that would help them do so.

But they had one shock after another. The first big jolt came when the AFI advanced the dates of two prominent National meets, the Federation Cup and Inter-State Nationals — qualifying events for the Asian Championships and the Asian Games — by a month.

With the organisers of the Asian meet and the Asian Games

**WITH THE ORGANISERS OF THE ASIAN MEET AND THE ASIAN GAMES SETTING UP EARLY DEADLINES FOR ENTRIES, THE AFI WAS HELPLESS AND WAS FORCED TO ADVANCE THE DATES OF THE QUALIFICATION MEETS TOO**





## JYOTHI YARRAJI, WHO SET NATIONAL RECORDS IN THE SPRINT HURDLES LAST YEAR, IS NOW PROVING TO BE A FAST CLIMBER IN 200M TOO

setting up early deadlines for entries, the AFI was helpless and forced to advance the dates of the qualification meets.

That has upset many athletes' plans, especially those training abroad. Cancelling flights and rebooking tickets are expensive. Their training plans went haywire.

If that was not enough, when the athletes landed in Ranchi for the Federation Cup, they realised there was no warm-up track.

"For sprinters, everything has to be perfect on a given day. You have to get a good warm-up track to mimic what you will do on the main track," said Amiya Kumar Mallick, the men's 100-metre national record-holder, shortly after emerging as the Federation Cup's fastest man.

"Unfortunately, it was unavailable. That was a major problem."

A prominent coach who did not want to be named said a competition without a warm-up track makes life difficult for athletes. "We need to have a warm-up track, at least 100m straight so that they can warm up. Yes, it's hard on the athletes. It's difficult; I understand the challenges," he said.

Madhu Kant Pathak, the president

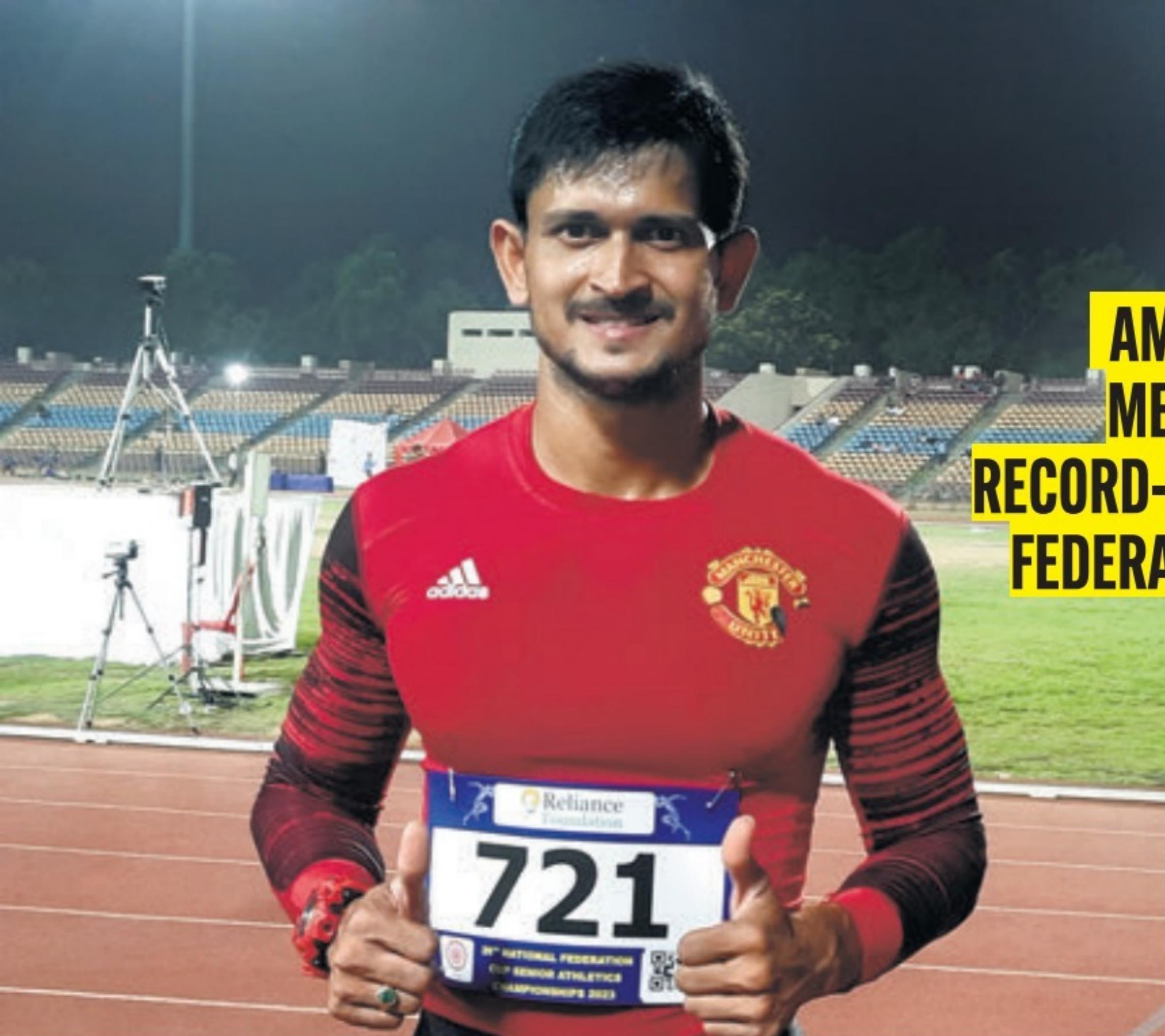
of the host Jharkhand Athletics Association, explained that the sudden change of dates had left him with very little time to organise the event properly.

"We have another athletics stadium, which hosted the National Games a few years ago, but the track there is not in good condition now. So, we had to have the Federation Cup here (at the Birsa Munda Football Stadium, which also has an athletics track), and we did not get much time either," he said.

No national records were set at the event; there were a few meet records and plenty of interesting duels. The men's javelin throw, where Rohit Yadav upset the in-form D.P. Manu to win the gold, was perhaps the biggest surprise of the championship. Rohit also improved his personal best by nearly a metre to 83.40m.

"I was looking at 85m," said Rohit, who had a great day with his first three throws all over 83m, better than his previous best of 82.54m last year. And Sachin Yadav, who finished third, improved his personal best by six metres, and he entered the 80m club.

Jyothi Yarraj, who set a series of national records in the sprint hurdles



## AMIYA KUMAR MALICK, THE MEN'S 100-METRE NATIONAL RECORD-HOLDER, EMERGED AS THE FEDERATION CUP'S FASTEST MAN

last year, is now proving to be a fast climber in the 200m, too. She improved her personal best twice, bringing it from 23.60 to 23.42s as she jolted seasoned sprinter Archana Suseendran to take the gold. She had taken the 100m hurdles title with a meet record. K.M. Chanda, the National Games women's 800m champion in 2:01.58s, broke Tintu Luka's meet record in the event, clocking 2:01.79s.

With national record-holder Praveen Chithravel (his 17.37m record jump is awaiting ratification) training and competing abroad and Commonwealth Games champion Eldhose Paul down with a heel injury, the men's triple jump lost much of its sheen.

"They will both be back for the Inter-State Championship (in Bhubaneswar from June 15), then these jumps will change," said Abdulla Aboobacker, the Commonwealth Games silver medallist, who took the gold in Ranchi with 16.76m.

The quarter-mile event had some surprises and drama. Tamil Nadu's Rajesh Ramesh was involved in a close race with Kerala's Muhammed Ajmal, and both went sub-46s for the first time, with the former emerging

champion in 45.75s.

Aishwarya Mishra had it easy in the women's 400m, finishing in 52.57s, the fastest time by an Indian woman this year, but her joy was short-lived. Karnataka's Priya Mohan, who finished second, filed a protest soon after the race, claiming that the Maharashtra girl had cut her lane while handling a corner. An hour later, Aishwarya was disqualified for lane infringement, and Priya was declared the winner.

**There were no surprises as Asian record holder Tajinderpal Singh Toor won the men's shot put with 20.42m, while women's javelin national record holder, Annu Rani, now training in Germany under Werner Daniels, who has tinkered with her technique, opened her season with 59.24m. Gulveer Singh of Uttar Pradesh picked up a double by winning the men's 5,000 and 10,000m and meeting the AFI's qualification standard in both events. Also qualifying was Jinson Johnson in the 1500m, where he is the Asian Games champion, having won the title in Jakarta in 2018.**

Expect more drama and surprises at the Inter-State Nationals in Bhubaneswar in June.

**No surprises:**  
There were no surprises as Asian record holder Tajinderpal Singh Toor won the men's shot put with 20.42m.

K. MURALIKUMAR





# WHO'LL WIN THE FRENCH OPEN?

Rafael Nadal's decision to pull out of this year's competition has thrown the men's field wide open. In this intriguing post-Nadal clay era, let's look at the contenders and the predicted champion.

Paul Fein

No player in tennis history has ever dominated a Grand Slam tournament and a surface like Rafael Nadal. Now that domination will end.

The King of Clay had won 14 titles at Roland Garros, an unbreakable record, until his finely tuned, muscular body finally broke down. Injuries have plagued Nadal since he

turned pro in 2003, but a devastating upper hip injury incurred at the Australian Open in January kept the nearly 37-year-old Spaniard out of important preliminary events at Monte Carlo, Barcelona, Madrid, and Rome. A practice session in early May that left him grimacing and covering his face cast doubt on his ability to defend the title he captured in Paris a year ago despite a painful foot injury.



Rafael Nadal, the King of Clay, had won 14 titles at Roland Garros, an unbreakable record, until his finely tuned, muscular body finally broke down



**Career twilight:** Rafael Nadal will miss the French Open for the first time in 19 years after a hip injury ruled out the 14-time men's singles champion. The 36-year-old Spaniard plans to retire in 2024. GETTY IMAGES



**NOVAK DJOKOVIC, THE  
AUSTRALIAN OPEN CHAMPION,  
TOOK THREE WEEKS OFF  
BEFORE THE ROME MASTERS  
BECAUSE OF THE LINGERING  
EFFECTS OF SURGERY TO  
REPAIR HIS RIGHT ELBOW**



**Bumpy build-up:** Novak Djokovic suffered his earliest exit at the Italian Open since 2013, when he was beaten by Danish star Holger Rune in the quarterfinals. Djokovic was eyeing a seventh title in the Italian capital.

GETTY IMAGES



SCANTOREADMORE

Then, at an emotional press conference on May 18, Nadal announced his French Open withdrawal, saying he plans to retire in 2024 but hopes to reach the Davis Cup final at the end of this year. "I don't like the word, but I feel strong enough to say it: I don't think I deserve to end like this," Nadal said in Spanish after withdrawing. "I've worked hard enough throughout my career for my end not to be in a press conference."

Admirers of the tennis giant at Roland Garros will just have to gaze longingly at the six-metre-high metal statue immortalising Nadal on the grounds near Court Philippe Chatrier.

We knew the Spanish legend couldn't last forever, just as injuries forced 40-year-old Roger Federer to hang up his racquets last year. But it's still sad to witness another member of the iconic Big Three lose his battle against the ravages of time.

In this intriguing post-Nadal clay era, let's look at the contenders and the predicted champion.

**Stefanos Tsitsipas:** "The way tennis is played today on clay, you have to finish the point at the net because today's players seldom err on groundstrokes and are so good defensively," observed former

No. 1 Jim Courier. In theory, Tsitsipas, one of the elite volleyers, should take greater advantage of this asset.

Against the elite, his career records are poor — 2-11 vs.

Djokovic, 0-4 vs. Carlos Alcaraz, and 0-2 vs. Holger Rune. If the favourites falter, however, the handsome, broad-shouldered Greek has an outside chance to reach the French final again, where he lost in 2021 to Novak Djokovic after winning the opening two sets.

**Jannik Sinner:** The 21-year-old Italian advanced to the semis or better in seven tournaments this season to reach a career-high No. 8. He made technical improvements on his serve by using a new takeback and tossing more accurately. As a



result, he boosted his average first serve speed to 124 mph at Indian Wells, compared to 117 mph the year before.

Darren Cahill, who joined the coaching team a year ago, has encouraged Sinner to diversify his one-dimensional power game by mixing in drop shots and changing pace. To crack the top-5, he needs to improve his volley. Although Jannik

**Strong contenders:** Norway's Casper Ruud, Russian Daniil Medvedev and Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas will have a chance to showcase their skills at Roland Garros. AP, AFP & REUTERS

has notched up three wins over Alcaraz, he is yet to reach a Grand Slam semifinal. If Sinner plays smart tennis and moves well on the clay, he could make the penultimate round at Roland Garros.

**Casper Ruud:** After a career year highlighted by making the final at the French Open, US Open, Miami, and the ATP Finals, Ruud came back to earth this season with a mediocre 11-9 match record going into Rome. A big forehand and a much-improved serve elevated him to a career-high No. 2 before he dropped to No. 4.

Despite the slump, Casper should gain confidence from this stat: he stands at No. 3 on the ATP Tour among the "Under Pressure Leaders" on clay during the past 12 months. The greatest player in Norwegian history will need to maintain that clutch play to reach another Grand Slam final.

**Daniil Medvedev:** After a disappointing straight-sets third-round loss to Sebastian Korda at the Australian Open, No. 3-ranked Medvedev rebounded strongly by winning Rotterdam, Doha, and Miami on hard courts. But Tennis Channel analyst Paul Annacone advised caution. "Clay is a work in progress for Medvedev." Rune outclassed him 6-3, 6-4 at Monte Carlo, and No. 121 Aslan Karatsev

**ADMIRERS OF THE TENNIS GIANT AT ROLAND GARROS WILL JUST HAVE TO GAZE LONGINGLY AT THE SIX-METRE-HIGH METAL STATUE IMMORTALISING NADAL ON THE GROUNDS NEAR COURT PHILIPPE CHATRIER**



ALCARAZ BOASTS TERRIFIC ATHLETICISM  
AND SPEED, A MASSIVE FOREHAND, POTENT  
FIRST SERVE, AND WICKED KICK  
SECOND SERVE

edged him 7-6 (1), 6-4 at Madrid.

At long last, the 27-year-old, lanky 6'6" Russian is embracing clay, a surface he's never mastered, as his career 7-6 record at Roland Garros indicates. He's hampered by minimal sliding skills, poor court positioning, costly double faults, and a mediocre net game.

**Carlos Alcaraz:** The 20-year-old Spaniard moulded his game after that of the legendary Federer, renowned for his shot-making wizardry and incomparable athleticism. How well that style works on clay in best-of-three-of-five-set matches is one of the most intriguing questions at this Roland Garros. Alcaraz saw his 12-match winning streak—fashioned by his clay titles at Barcelona and Madrid—end at the Internazionali BNL d'Italia when 135th-ranked

Fabian Marozsan shocked him 6-3, 7-6 (4).

Despite his upbringing on Spanish clay and the stylistic influence of his compatriot Nadal, Carlos, the early betting favourite, doesn't have the shot tolerance for long, grinding points needed to win the French Open this year.

Also, his backhand occasionally falters, and he resorts to low-percentage shots. On the plus side, Alcaraz boasts terrific athleticism and speed, a massive forehand, a potent first serve, and a wicked kick second serve.

**Novak Djokovic:** The Australian Open champion took three weeks off before the Rome Masters because of the lingering effects of surgery to repair his right elbow. The 36-year-old Serb hasn't regained the clay-court form that produced two

French Open and six Italian Open titles. Fast-rising 20-year-old Holger Rune overpowered and out-steadied him 6-2, 4-6, 6-2 in the Rome quarterfinals.

The setback meant that for the first time since 2004, neither Nadal nor Djokovic reached the final of the world's second-most prestigious clay tournament.

In addition, it could presage the beginning of the end of The Djoker's reign at the top, evoking memories of Federer's stunning upset over superstar Pete Sampras at the 2001 Wimbledon, a harbinger of his future greatness.

Djokovic will advance deep into the second week, but one of the New Generation will take him down.

**Holger Rune:** "He kind of reminds me [of me] a little bit, the way he



**The next big thing:** Alcaraz, long touted as a future Grand Slam champion, has dominated the ATP Tour in recent weeks. The 20-year-old Spaniard has shown the wherewithal to rule the men's game. GETTYIMAGES

plays," Djokovic said before Rune whipped him at the Rome Masters. "Really fit physically, great defence, but also a great counter-puncher. He can hurt you from both the forehand and backhand sides. Really solid serve. Aggressive returns. Just an all-around player on all surfaces."

Tennis Channel analyst Prakash Amritraj gave a succinct evaluation of Holger's decisive victory. "This is scary. But Novak was on the defensive the entire match." Rune drew the right conclusion about his impressive performance. "If it's working against Novak, it works against almost anybody." The tennis world first learned that at the Paris Masters last October, when the Danish Daredevil knocked off five top-10 foes, including Djokovic in the final.

This year, the ruggedly built,

blond Dane has eschewed the antics that used to annoy opponents, becoming a happy warrior that fans like. Cheers have replaced jeers, and the feeling is mutual. "I find it more fun to play in a crazy atmosphere," said Rune during the Rome Masters, known for its impassioned spectators.

Although Alcaraz, the 2022 US Open champion and winner of Masters titles at Monte Carlo and Madrid this spring, has overshadowed Rune, the Dane will have his day in the sun at Roland Garros. There, Holger, who describes himself as "a huge fighter," will seize his first Grand Slam title and join Carlos to form what looks like the new Big Two.

**Dark Horses:** Lorenzo Musetti, Francisco Cerundolo, Jiri Lehecka, Zhang Zhizhen, and Arthur Fils.

## The Women

"If you are going to challenge Swiatek, you have to overpower her," said former No. 1 Jim Courier. That challenge would seem daunting on clay, the slowest of the sport's three main surfaces. However, much like the men these days, the women are belting out their groundstrokes, favouring power over consistency. They're also blasting first serves regularly in the 110–120 mph range.

Another factor could jeopardise Swiatek's chances to defend her title. "The courts at Roland Garros are quick," said Monica Puig, the 2016 Olympic gold medalist. "They're like hard courts with some dust on them."

When Swiatek won 37 straight matches and the French and US Opens in 2022, she looked almost unbeatable. This season, she's looked vulnerable, particularly against power hitters. "I definitely think other girls are dissecting more how to beat her and playing better," No. 3-ranked Jessica Pegula said at Media Day in Rome. "You can't really expect her to play lights out forever; nobody can do that, not even the best players in the world. I think we've all just pushed each other."

Let's find out who, if anyone, will dethrone the Queen of Clay.

### Jelena Ostapenko: Cicero's

famous maxim — "Fortune favours the brave" — applies perfectly to Ostapenko. This go-for-broke slugger blasted a fusillade of winners to win the 2017 French Open as a 100-1 longshot. When Jelena is good, she's extremely good. And when she's bad, well, you know what happens. Before upsetting Simona Halep in the final, she whacked an astounding 245 winners but also committed an ungodly 217 unforced errors in six matches.

At the recent Rome Masters, the resurgent, 25-year-old Latvian blasted past 2021 French Open titlist Barbora Krejčíková, No. 8 Daria Kasatkina, and former No. 2 Paula Badosa before Elena Rybakina stopped her. While the bulky, 5'10" Ostapenko is the slowest mover among the contenders, she counteracts that weakness by



## WHEN IGA SWIATEK WON 37 STRAIGHT MATCHES AND THE FRENCH AND US OPENS IN 2022, SHE LOOKED ALMOST UNBEATABLE



staying mostly on offence.

Win or lose — and she won't reprise her 2017 tour de force — Jelena is always entertaining with bold shots and facial expressions ranging from anguish to delight.

**Paula Badosa:** "She hits the ball incredible, but mentally, that's the thing that has hurt her most," said Puig. The burden of great expectations after a brilliant junior career overwhelmed her when she joined the pros and again last year when she rose to a career-high No. 2 only to nosedive to No. 38.

Happily, Badosa rebounded with decisive victories over Kasatkina at Stuttgart, No. 6 Coco Gauff at Madrid, and No. 5 Ons Jabeur at Rome. Don't be surprised if the 5'11" Spaniard whips more top-tenniers in Paris.

**Veronika Kudermetova:** "She's like a wall. She's so consistent and gives you no free points," said Puig about the classic-stroking Russian. In the past 12 months, Kudermetova scored impressive wins over No. 4 Badosa en route to the 2022 French Open quarterfinals, Sabalenka in Berlin on grass, Jabeur in San Jose on hard courts, and Gauff in Doha on hard courts. Bolstering her clay

credentials this spring, Veronika eliminated No. 3 Pegula and No. 8 Kasatkina to reach the Madrid semifinals and Qinwen Zhang, Maria Bouzkova, and Anastasia Potapova to reach the Rome semifinals.

Versatile Veronika, ranked No. 12, won't win her first major in Paris. But she can beat almost anyone on any surface on a given day, so keep an eye on this talented Russian.

**Jessica Pegula:** Listed No. 10 in the early betting odds, Pegula ranks No. 3 on the WTA Tour. Notably, Jessica also ranks No. 3 in doubles, playing with fellow American Gauff. Her backhand, especially down the line, is one of the best, but the 5'7" daughter of the billionaire owner of the Buffalo Bills doesn't have a huge weapon in her arsenal, and her flat groundstrokes aren't ideal for clay.

The late-blooming 29-year-old hasn't beaten a top-15 player on clay this year.

A hard-court specialist, Pegula upset Swiatek in January's United Cup after going 0-4 against her last year.

Jessica described herself as "determined," but that requisite trait isn't enough on clay against Swiatek, Sabalenka, and Rybakina.

**Coco Gauff:** Vegasinsider.com's third favourite status to win her first major title greatly overrates Gauff's chances. She has seldom reproduced the form that carried her to the Roland Garros final a year ago. The 19-year-old American, once considered a sure-fire future champion, looked confused and almost resigned when Badosa thrashed her 6-3, 6-0 in the Madrid third round.

What's gone wrong with Gauff? Rick Macci, who coached Serena and Venus Williams during their formative years and will now guide Gauff, says her "shaky forehand" is the problem.

On April 30, Macci tweeted he'd improve Gauff's forehand, and it "will become her best shot someday. Needs time off with the exact biomechanical plan to reprogram the reflexes of 12 years and confuse the muscle memory."

We'll have to wait until next year for Gauff.

**Iga Swiatek:** The world No. 1 has captured two of her three major titles at Roland Garros, in 2020 and 2022. Swiatek's forehand averages 77 mph, the same as the average on the ATP Tour, and her 2,479 rpms,

**Top women:**

Iga Swiatek,  
Elena  
Rybakina and  
Jelena  
Ostapenko.

AFP &  
GETTY IMAGES



## WHEN JELENA OSTAPENKO IS GOOD, SHE'S EXTREMELY GOOD. AND WHEN SHE'S BAD, WELL, YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENS. THIS GO-FOR-BROKE SLUGGER BLASTED A FUSILLADE OF WINNERS TO WIN THE 2017 FRENCH OPEN AS A 100-1 LONGSHOT



average only slightly less. Her big forehand, slender 5'9" physique, and blazing speed are reminiscent of Steffi Graf, who won seven of her 22 Grand Slam titles at Roland Garros.

Swiatek won the 2021 and 2022 Rome titles, and before her 2023 quarterfinal loss against Rybakina, she was a terrific 11-1 on the season and 56-8 lifetime on clay. A right thigh injury incurred in the second-set tiebreaker eventually forced the 21-year-old Pole to retire at 2-6, 7-6 (3), 2-2. That gave the Kazakh three straight victories over Swiatek this season, the others coming at the Australian Open and Indian Wells. Swiatek remains the consensus favourite to take Roland Garros, but now the betting odds have become a little more even.

**Aryna Sabalenka:** The second of Sabalenka's career breakthroughs this year may ultimately prove as critical as the first. The Belarusian outhit Rybakina 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 in the Australian Open final for her first Grand Slam singles title.

Three months later, Sabalenka became the first woman to beat Swiatek in a clay court final since 2019, when she prevailed 6-3, 3-6, 6-3 in the Madrid Open. "I'm super

happy. Especially against Iga on clay, it's something special," Aryna said. "What she did last season and what she keeps doing, it really motivates me a lot to improve, to keep working hard, to keep fighting. I know that it's always a battle against her. I was thinking of it when I was down in the last game 'OK. I did it at AO, so I'll probably be able to get this win again."

That confidence will fuel her relentless power game and could take her to the French Open final.

**Elena Rybakina:** "She reminds me of Lindsay Davenport because she attacks with the serve and return of serve, so her opponents are always under pressure," said ESPN analyst Mary Joe Fernandez during Rybakina's exciting run to the 2023 Australian Open final. The 2022 Wimbledon champion also has former No. 1 Davenport's picture-perfect backhand, but she moves better and boasts greater serving power, with first serves usually in the 115-120 mph range. "I love her service motion," said former No. 1 Andy Roddick, a rocket server. "It's rhythmic. She can hit all four [service box] corners. And that works on every surface."

The 23-year-old Kazakh's aggressive forehand would benefit from more topspin and less predictability. "If she can develop a forehand down the line, she'll be almost unbeatable," said former doubles star Rennae Stubbs.

"Despite being very tall (6'0"), Rybakina moves incredibly well," pointed out Puig. The last phase in her development is to capitalise on her powerful serves and groundstrokes by coming to the net more. Most importantly, however, Rybakina boasts a confidence-soaring 3-0 record against Swiatek in 2023. Swiatek fell to Rybakina 6-4, 6-4, in the round of 16 at the Australian Open and 6-2, 6-2, in the semifinals at Indian Wells. In another critical rivalry, the slender, broad-shouldered Kazakh defeated Sabalenka 7-6 (11), 6-4 in the Indian Wells final, her first victory after four straight losses.

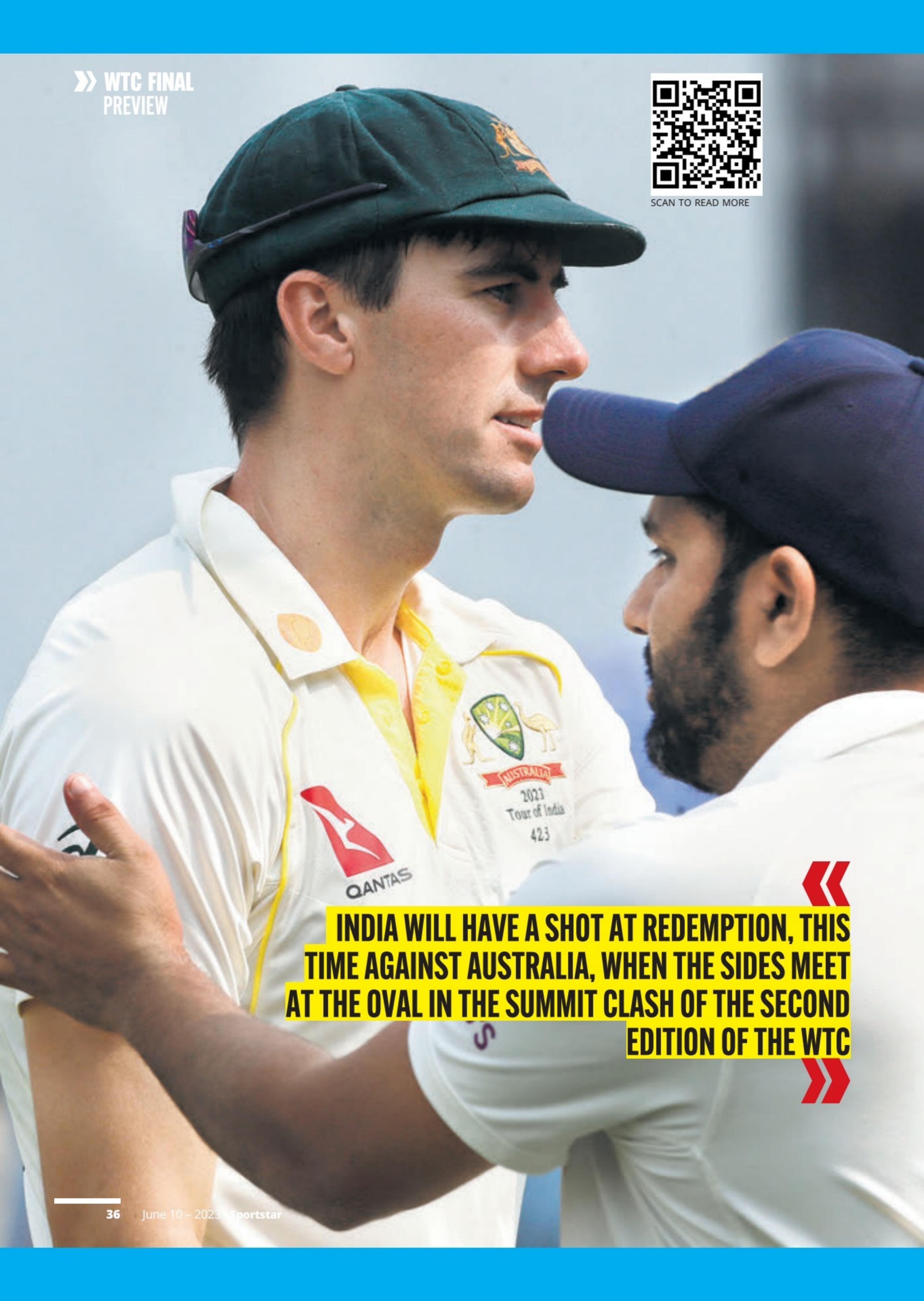
Forget Elena's deceptive No. 6 ranking. Had she received the 2,000 points that Wimbledon took away from her last year, she'd stand No. 3 behind Swiatek and Sabalenka.

During this fortnight, the reserved Kazakh will overpower one or both of her toughest rivals to seize her second Grand Slam title.

**Dark Horses:** Qinwen Zheng, Mirra Andreeva, Karolina Muchova, Donna Vekic, and Camila Osorio.



SCAN TO READ MORE



INDIA WILL HAVE A SHOT AT REDEMPTION, THIS  
TIME AGAINST AUSTRALIA, WHEN THE SIDES MEET  
AT THE OVAL IN THE SUMMIT CLASH OF THE SECOND  
EDITION OF THE WTC

# INDIA'S CHANCE FOR WTC REDEMPTION

On paper, Australia **appears to be the stronger side.** But India, the top ranked Test side in the world, will not go quietly.

Ashwin Achal

Twitter: @ashwinachal

**T**he inaugural ICC World Test Championship final, held at Southampton a couple of years ago, did not go India's way. Despite persistent rain leaving just three and a half days of play, New Zealand took out India by eight wickets to secure a historic title triumph.

India will have a shot at redemption, this time against Australia, when the sides meet at The Oval in the summit clash of the second edition of the WTC. Rohit Sharma's men will be desperate to rid themselves of the burden of not having won an ICC trophy since the 2013 Champions Trophy. The match marks the comeback of Ajinkya Rahane, who has reinvented himself as a powerful strokemaker in this IPL.

Rahane, who made 49 and 15 in the WTC final against New Zealand, is among the six specialist batters in the squad. The Mumbai cricketer last played a Test in January 2022, but did strike some red-ball form with two centuries in the 2022–23 Ranji Trophy.

Ishan Kishan was a surprise inclusion, replacing an injured K.L. Rahul. Kishan, the third opener in the side after Rohit and Shubman Gill, was picked

ahead of Suryakumar Yadav and Ruturaj Gaikwad. Rahul, the Lucknow Super Giants captain, has been ruled out with a thigh injury. Kishan is unlikely to feature in the eleven, with K.S. Bharat set to don the gloves.

**First-choice wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant, who suffered a car accident in December 2022, is yet to recover from his injuries.** Fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah also missed out due to a back injury.

Mohammed Shami and Mohammed Siraj will lead the pace attack, and both can be potent in seam-friendly English conditions. Umesh Yadav and Jaydev Unadkat provide support, but they face a race against time to recover from niggles.

India will look to Cheteshwar Pujara to deliver with the bat. Pujara is the only one in the side to truly



**Rishabh Pant, who suffered a car accident in December 2022, is yet to recover from his injuries. Fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah also missed out due to a back injury.**



### Top 5 Australian batters in WTC 2021-23

Player	Inns	Runs	HS	Ave.	100s	50s
U. T. Khawaja	28	1608	195*	69.91	6	7
M. Labuschagne	33	1509	204	53.89	5	5
S. P. D. Smith	30	1252	200*	50.08	3	6
T. M. Head	26	1208	175	52.52	3	6
D. A. Warner	28	847	200	31.37	1	4

### Top 5 Australian bowlers in WTC 2021-23

Player	Inns	Wkts	BBI	Ave.	5wi
N. M. Lyon	32	83	8/64	26.97	5
P. J. Cummins	25	53	5/38	21.22	3
M. A. Starc	30	51	4/33	27.27	—
S. M. Boland	13	28	6/7	13.42	1
C. Green	24	23	5/27	29.17	1

acclimatise to conditions in England, having chosen to play for Sussex in the County Championship. Pujara is making the most of it, scoring heaps of runs in his stint.

Up top, Rohit and Gill are a study in contrast. Rohit has had a poor run in the IPL and has looked out of sorts. He may not read too much into his form in the shortest format, but he will be nervous taking first strike at The Oval.

Gill, on the other hand, is on top of the world. Playing for the Gujarat Titans, he recently smashed his first IPL century. Gill has been scoring runs at will and is making his name as the next big thing in Indian cricket. Only a few months ago, Gill became the youngest Indian to score a century in all three international formats. His graph will reach new heights if he does well in London.

The last time India met Australia in a Test match; Virat Kohli stole the show with a brilliant 186. That knock in the fourth Test in Ahmedabad in March helped India salvage a draw to win the series 2-1. Gill was the other centurion for India, as the home team comfortably overtook Australia's first innings total of 480.

It was Australia's surprise win in the third Test of that leg that guaranteed a spot in the WTC final. Australia went on to finish the WTC cycle with the most wins (11) among all teams.

Australia faces a dilemma with opener David Warner. Warner has been named in the 17-man squad but has struggled for runs in Test



**Top 5 Indian batters in WTC 2021-23**

Player	Inns	Runs	HS	Ave.	100s	50s
C. A. Pujara	30	887	102*	32.85	1	6
V. Kohli	28	869	186	32.18	1	3
R. R. Pant	21	868	146	43.40	2	5
R. G. Sharma	17	700	127	43.75	2	2
R. A. Jadeja	19	673	175*	37.38	2	3

**Top 5 Indian bowlers in WTC 2021-23**

Player	Inns	Wkts	BBI	Ave.	5wi
R. Ashwin	26	61	6/91	19.67	2
J. J. Bumrah	19	45	5/24	19.73	3
R. A. Jadeja	23	43	7/42	23.23	3
Mohammed Shami	23	41	5/44	27.12	1
Mohammed Siraj	23	31	4/32	32.86	-



# INDIA & AUSTRALIA'S RECORD AT THE OVAL »



TOTAL	WON	LOST	DRAW
<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>

**India's performance in WTC 2021-23**  
(MOST RECENT FIRST)

**India vs Australia BGT |**  
Final result: **India won 2-1** (4)

**Bangladesh vs India**  
Final result: **India won 2-0** (2)

**India vs Sri Lanka**  
Final result: **India won 2-0** (2)

**South Africa vs India**  
Final result: **India lost 1-2** (3)

**India vs New Zealand**  
Final result: **India won 1-0** (2)

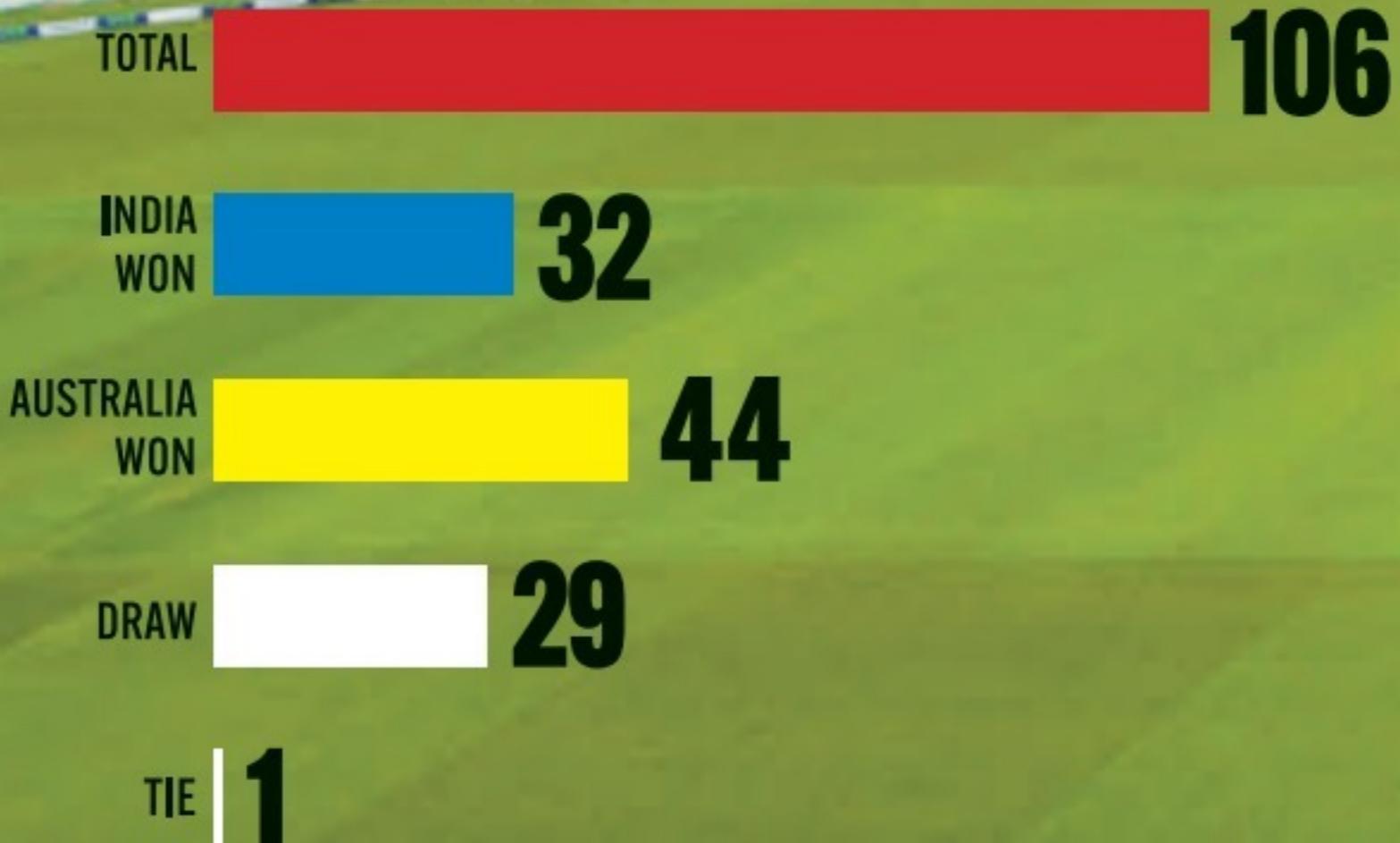
**India vs England**  
Final result: **Series draw 2-2** (5)

## India's Squad

Rohit Sharma (C),  
Shubman Gill,  
Cheteshwar Pujara,  
Virat Kohli,  
Ajinkya Rahane,  
K L Rahul,  
KS Bharat (WK),  
Ravichandran Ashwin,  
Ravindra Jadeja,  
Axar Patel,  
Shardul Thakur,  
Mohammad Shami,  
Mohammed Siraj,  
Umesh Yadav,  
Jaydev Unadkat



## INDIA VS AUSTRALIA HEAD-TO-HEAD »



### Australia's Squad

Pat Cummins (C),  
Steve Smith (VC),  
David Warner,  
Travis Head,  
Usman Khawaja,  
Marnus Labuschagne,  
Matthew Renshaw,  
Marcus Harris,  
Alex Carey, Josh Inglis,  
Cameron Green,  
Mitchell Marsh,  
Scott Boland,  
Josh Hazlewood,  
Nathan Lyon, Mitchell  
Starc, Todd Murphy



### Australia's performance in WTC 2021-23 (MOST RECENT FIRST)

#### India vs Australia BGT

Final result: **Australia lost 2-1** (4)

#### Australia vs South Africa

Final result: **Australia won 2-0** (3)

#### Australia vs West Indies

Final result: **Australia won 2-0** (2)

#### Sri Lanka vs Australia

Final result: **Series draw 1-1** (2)

#### Pakistan vs Australia

Final result: **Australia won 1-0** (3)

### WTC 2021-23 POINTS TABLE

TEAMS	M	W	L	T	D	N/R	PT	PCT
<b>Australia</b>	19	11	3	0	5	0	152	66.67
<b>India</b>	18	10	5	0	3	0	127	58.8
<b>South Africa</b>	15	8	6	0	1	0	100	55.56
<b>England</b>	22	10	8	0	4	0	124	46.97
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	12	5	6	0	1	0	64	44.44
<b>New Zealand</b>	13	4	6	0	3	0	60	38.46
<b>Pakistan</b>	14	4	6	0	4	0	64	38.10
<b>West Indies</b>	13	4	7	0	2	0	54	34.62
<b>Bangladesh</b>	12	1	10	0	1	0	16	11.11

\*Australia and India have played the second and third-highest number of matches in this WTC cycle after England



cricket. With a few fifties for the Delhi Capitals in the IPL, the southpaw has managed to find a little rhythm.

Matt Renshaw and Marcus Harris are the other top-order options in the fray. Warner could well find himself out of the reckoning when the final squad number is cut to 15.

Usman Khawaja's comeback success augurs well for Australia. Khawaja was dropped after a disappointing run in the 2019 Ashes, but since his return, the left-hander has racked up triple-digit scores. Khawaja will be keen to correct his subpar returns in England.

The batting line-up is further strengthened by the presence of Marnus Labuschagne and Steve

**Sizzling form:** Shubman Gill's purple patch has continued unabated across formats. Following his 58-ball 101 against the Sunrisers Hyderabad in IPL 2023, Gill now has five hundreds in international cricket this year and one in the IPL. GETTY IMAGES

Smith, the no. 1 and no. 3 ranked batters in the world, respectively. Like Pujara, the duo will hit the ground running, having competed in the County Championship.

Travis Head, who impressed as an opener in India, is likely to bat at five. Like he did in India, Head will have the licence to attack the bowling.

Mitchell Marsh and Cameron Green provide balance as the two

batting all-rounders. Green is rated as a bright young prospect, especially after his brilliant 114 against India in the fourth Test.

Captain Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, Mitchell Starc, and Scott Boland make up a strong pace attack. Hazlewood flew home early from the IPL after reporting side soreness. However, scans have not shown any damage and Australia is confident in his fitness. Todd Murphy, who impressed in his debut series in India, joins the ageless Nathan Lyon as the two offspinners in the squad.

On paper, Australia appears to be the stronger side. But India, the top-ranked Test side in the world, will not go quietly.

Travis Head, who impressed as an opener in India, is likely to bat at five. He will have the licence to attack the bowling



## JHULAN GOSWAMI

The author is a fast bowling legend and led India's attack for nearly two decades



# IMPORTANT TO APPOINT A LONG-TERM HEAD COACH

The players and the coaching staff should be on the same page and it takes time to build a team as the **players need to understand the operating style of a particular coach** and then get used to it. Frequent changes leave the players confused.

**T**he inaugural edition of the Women's Premier League was a watershed moment for women's cricket in the country. As several young, rookie talents proved their mettle on the big stage and bravely faced the biggest names in world cricket, it gave us hope.

Seeing the likes of Kanika Ahuja, Parshavi Chopra, and Shreyanka Patil compete against top overseas players was an assurance that the future of India's women's cricket is bright.

**I am sure the BCCI will eventually look at a dedicated window for the WPL so that it attracts more players and also gives them a chance to shape up well.** This time, the franchises did not get much time to scout talents, but from the next season on, the scenario will change.

The Board started the U-15 tournaments last year, and it was a step in the right direction as it was the perfect opportunity to bring out the brightest of young talents. Similarly, the introduction of the U-23 tournament is a great move. There are times when several players lose the plot after playing age-group cricket, as there is a gap between age-group and international cricket. That's why

the U-23 tournament will be crucial. It will provide the players with more opportunities and, at the same time, give the WPL scouts more options.

**The next two years are going to be crucial, with two major ICC events lined up:** the T20 World Cup in Bangladesh in 2024 and the ODI World Cup in India in 2025.

It is important that we appoint a head coach for a longer period of time and not chop and change frequently.

A team does not get ready overnight, and the role of a coach becomes crucial ahead of big-ticket tournaments. So, a dedicated support staff needs to be given enough freedom for the next two years. It'll be unfair to judge coaches on the basis of just one series.

The players and the coaching staff should be on the same page, and, trust me, it takes time to build a team as the players need to understand the operating style of a particular coach and then get used to it. Frequent changes leave the players confused. I believe the BCCI is thinking about a long-term coach, and I welcome the idea.

*As told to Shayan Acharya*

« The next two years will be crucial, with the T20 World Cup in 2024 and the ODI World Cup in 2025 »





# ON THE LONG ROAD TO SUCCESS

Shayan Acharya  
Twitter @ShayanAcharya

**S**o, who else is a Parshavi Chopra fan?" tweeted Indian off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin as India's women's U-19 team inched closer to its maiden World Cup title.

The emotions were running high at Senwes Park in Potchefstroom as India bundled England out for just 68 in the final. Parshavi took two wickets and, along with Titas Sadhu and Archana Devi, put her team in command.

The senior team had come within striking distance of

Parshavi Chopra's **rise epitomises the revolution of women's cricket** in the country.

winning a World Cup on a few occasions, but those campaigns ended in heartbreak. So, when the youngsters put England on the mat, millions of Indian cricket fans had prayers on their lips and hope in their hearts.

And Ashwin's tweet — coming in around seven o'clock on that January evening — instantly resulted in thousands of shares. Just like the seasoned Indian spin ace, the cricket



## FACTFILE

**Age:** 17

**State:** Uttar Pradesh

**Events:** U-19 women's cricket and UP Warriorz in WPL

**Parshavi in numbers:**

**U-19 World Cup:**

Matches: 6

Wickets: 11

Best: 4 for 5 against Sri Lanka U-19

Average: 7.00

**Women's Premier League:**

Matches: 4

Wickets: 3

Best: 2 for 29 against Gujarat Giants

Economy: 8.16

fans, too, were in awe of young Parshavi's brilliance.

The young leg-spinner claimed 11 wickets in the tournament, emerging as the second-highest wicket-taker, just behind Australia's Maggie Clark. In the course of the tournament, the soft-spoken Parshavi often did away with the conventional leg-spin and served up a few unplayable googlies, which earned praise from her opponents and seniors.

And she certainly had a huge role in guiding India to a title win in the U-19 World Cup. The 17-year-old was roped in by the UP Warriorz at her base price of Rs 10 lakh for the inaugural edition of the Women's Premier League, and she did not disappoint.

Breaking into the final XI in a star-studded side, Parshavi featured in four games and claimed three wickets, including those of international stars Ashleigh Gardner and Hayley Matthews. Her ability to find breakthroughs at crucial junctures impressed many. Alyssa Healy, the captain of Warriorz, lauded the youngster, and former India captain Jhulan Goswami, too, seemed optimistic about her future.

"There have





been quite a few young players who have proven their talents in the WPL, and leggie Parshavi was one of them. There's huge potential, and the more she plays, she will earn the experience and be ready for the next level," Goswami says.

Parshavi's efforts at the junior level have earned her a ticket to the U-23 camp at the National Cricket Academy, and she wants to improve her craft gradually. "The WPL has been a huge learning experience for me, where I got to interact with so many legends. Each of them has taught me a thing or two, and I want to execute those learnings in my game as I move ahead," says

Parshavi.

Cricket did not come to her naturally. She started off as a skater, clinched a silver medal in the U-14 Uttar Pradesh Skating Championships, and was also a 100-metre sprinter in school. This was before her father, Gaurav Chopra, who played cricket at the club level in Bulandshahr's Sikandrabad, a small town in Uttar Pradesh around 95 km from Delhi, enrolled her at the Yuvraj Singh Centre of Excellence (YSCE) in Greater Noida.

That was in 2017, and a few months before joining the centre, Parshavi watched the entire

Parshavi Chopra with her parents. She credits their unflinching support for her development as a player.

V.V. KRISHNAN

Women's World Cup — where India reached the final — and was hooked to the game. From skating, her world soon revolved around cricket and there hasn't been any looking back since then.

"Even though I was into skating, my family was very interested in cricket. My grandfather, father, and uncle have played local-level cricket. When I got inspired by the Indian women's senior team after the 2017

“Papa has supported me throughout my journey, and during the lockdown, he ensured that I had enough training at home”

World Cup, they supported my decision to play the sport," Parshavi says.

Initially, she wanted to be a fast bowler, following in the footsteps of Goswami. But Vishal Bhatia, her coach at YSCE, encouraged her to bowl leg-spin, given her slender build. And as she continued with the sport, Parshavi would watch old videos of Shane Warne and start looking up to the late Australian spin great as her idol. "I make it a point to watch old match videos of Warne and how he dominated the opponents. Every time I watch those matches, they help me understand match situations better, and I have tried imbibing a few of Warne's tricks," she says with a smile.

While Bhatia and JP Nautiyal, another seasoned coach, worked on Parshavi's progress, her father Gaurav, too, ensured that she played regular cricket at the local level. "Papa would take me in and around Delhi and NCR to play local-level matches so that I got enough game time. Initially, I would play those tournaments with boys, but gradually, as we got to know more about local women's tournaments, I started playing in those competitions," Parshavi says.

And playing in different conditions helped her overcome the fear. "*Mujhe darr nahin lagta hai* (I am not scared), whatever the situation. Even in crunch time, I stay calm and focus on my job," she says.

In the WPL, too, she had a similar approach. Taking on Gujarat Giants, the young leggie used the wrong'un to dismiss Gardner and Hemalatha Dayalan in pressure situations. "I never look at my opponent, no matter how big a player she is. I just stick to my basics and execute the plans. That was the same mindset in the WPL," she says.

"When I returned from the U-19 World Cup, I knew that the standard would be much higher in the WPL, so, I prepared accordingly. Along with my coaches, I worked on target bowling and also planned when to use the googly..."

During the tournament, she picked the brains of Deepti Sharma,

## « Sachin sir told me I should keep backing myself and stay focused for the next level »

her teammate at Warriorz. "Deepti didi is also from UP, so we bonded pretty well, and it was a great opportunity to be with someone of her stature," she says.

A bit of an introvert, Parshavi broke into the Uttar Pradesh women's U-16 team at 12 and graduated to the State's U-19 team in due course. In the 2019-20 season, she claimed 20 wickets in the Women's U-19 One-Dayers for Uttar Pradesh. Even during the COVID-19-induced nationwide lockdown, Parshavi's father, Gaurav, prepared a pitch at home for a single wicket. "Papa has supported me throughout my journey. During the lockdown, he ensured that I had enough training at home. My brother Raghav was also part of the UP U-16 camp, so we trained together at home during that time. My coaches would also connect over video call and help me with their suggestions," Parshavi adds.

After winning the U-19 World Cup, Parshavi travelled to Ahmedabad with her teammates for a felicitation programme organised by the BCCI, where they had the opportunity to interact with Sachin Tendulkar. "Sachin sir told me to back myself and stay focused. He said, 'Your journey has just started, and there's still a long way to go.'"

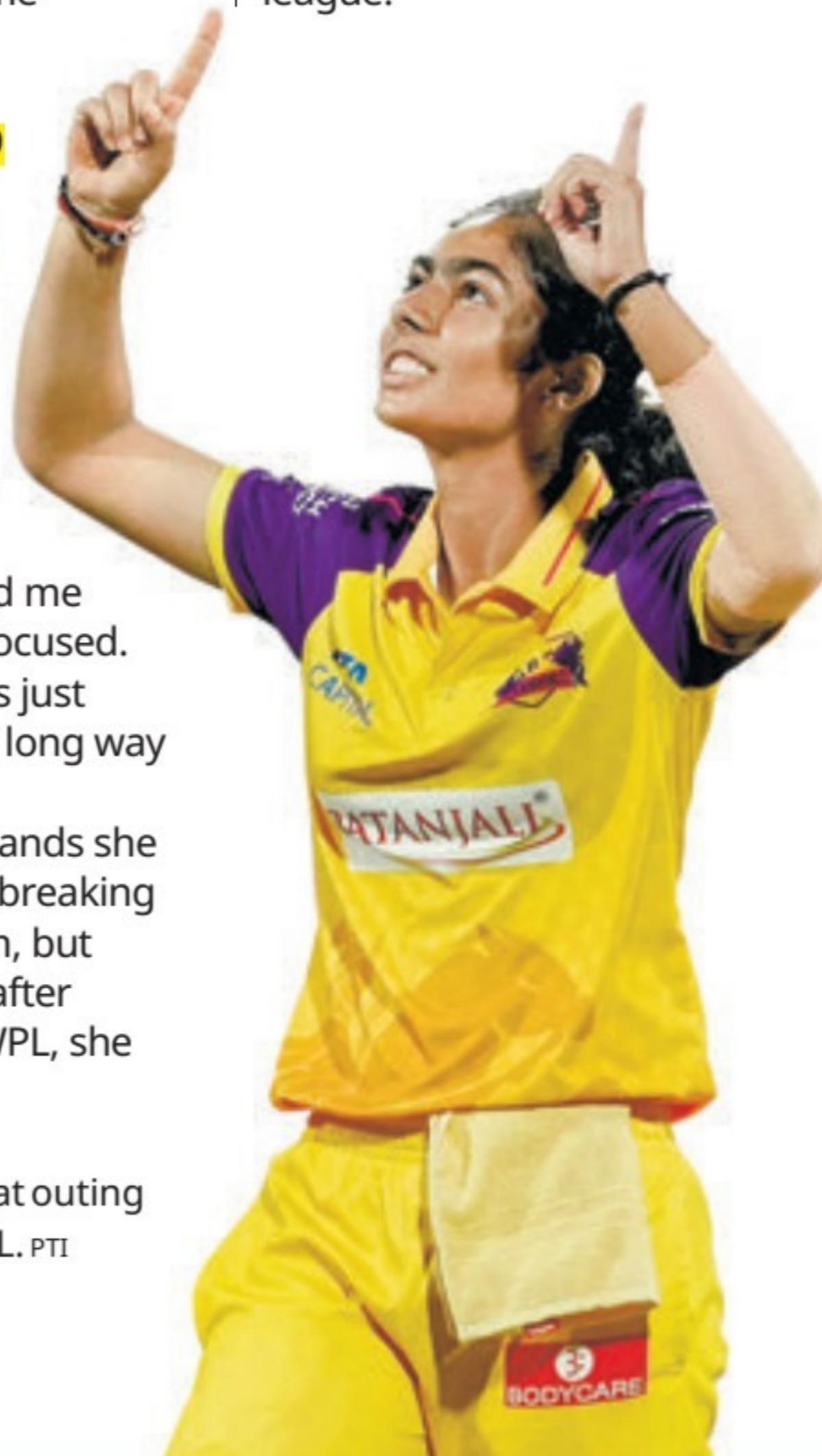
Even Parshavi understands she has a lot to prove before breaking into the senior India team, but buoyed with confidence after enjoying success in the WPL, she

Parshavi Chopra had a great outing with UP Warriorz in the WPL. PTI

wants to give her hundred per cent. "My ultimate goal is to play for India, but for that to happen, I need to perform consistently at the domestic level," she says.

Parshavi has a chance to make the cut for the senior women's team in the next couple of years, especially with the 2024 T20 World Cup scheduled in Bangladesh and the ODI World Cup in India in 2025. The spin-friendly nature of the subcontinent pitches will bolster her chances of getting picked.

A few years ago, when Gaurav, who works in the real estate sector, moved to Greater Noida from Sikandrabad, he dreamed of seeing Parshavi in Indian colours. The daughter has already made the dad proud with some quality performances at the U-19 level and is now waiting in the wings with the hope of breaking into the big league!





## ON THE WRITE LINE

Sunil Gavaskar



# HAVING INDIAN COACH OR CAPTAIN KEY TO IPL TEAMS' SUCCESS

Look at the **progress made by Rinku Singh under Chandu Pandit**, the terrific coming back to form of Venkatesh Iyer and Varun Chakravarthy, and Nitish Rana growing as a captain.

**S**o now it's the playoffs, and there are four teams left standing to try and take the coveted IPL trophy home. Will we have a champion that has never won the trophy before, or is the experience of the big finals going to help the teams that have won it earlier? Those who have missed out will be doing post-mortems as to why they couldn't progress and why they faltered. Ideally, such an analysis should be done after a few days have passed after the finals, for then it is more likely to be a reasoned one and not an emotional one.

**Most importantly, it's got to be an honest one, with no holds barred**, for that's the only way hard calls can be taken before the next auction comes up. The two bottom placed teams have plenty of food for thought. They were coached by two of the greatest batters in the history of the game, and yet their teams finished in the bottom half. There could be many reasons for this, but the main one is the aura that these two wonderful players have about them. What this does is keep players, especially domestic newcomers, shy of approaching these masters for any advice. These players have had such superior skills and a magnificent temperament that it's not easy for them to think like those not as gifted as

they were in both the technique and temperament departments.

So, what might have looked like an easy-to-rectify problem during their playing days is not conveyed in the same facile way they solved it themselves. Often, the language is a barrier for a young, budding Indian player who comes from the interiors and may not be conversant in English to understand. That probably explains why players like Yash Dhull, Priyam Garg, and Sarfaraz Khan, to name just three, have made little or no progress. Prithvi Shaw has also not been able to come to terms with the delivery around the ribcage, and the result has been a shortage of runs from some of the most promising and prolific young players in the country. Then there was the stubborn, almost defiant refusal to promote the in-form Axar Patel up the batting order. It prompted Ravi Shastri, who had coached the Indian team until last year and seen the batting ability that Axar has, to question if there was something in the contract that said Patel wouldn't bat above number 7 in the batting order.

**The other crucial thing is to have an Indian as the coach or skipper**, for that allows the newer, younger players to approach them easily and talk about their problems, if any, and





**Calming influence:** Nitish Rana has grown as a captain under the stewardship of Chandrakant Pandit.

SPORTZPICS/IPL



SCAN TO READ MORE

also pick their brains on how to get better. It is quite apparent that teams that have Indian coaches and captains are a lot happier than those that don't. There will be a minimum of seven Indian players in every playing squad, and make no mistake, however wonderful the overseas talent there may be in the team, it will invariably be the Indian skill that wins more matches.

Look at the progress made by Rinku Singh under Chandu Pandit, the terrific coming back to form of Venkatesh Iyer and Varun Chakravarthy, and Nitish Rana growing as a captain. Under the guidance of Gautam

Gambhir, see how Ravi Bishnoi, Ayush Badoni, and Naveen Ul Haq are flowering, as also under Ashish Nehra and Hardik Pandya, who invariably find a new player of the match. That's simply because communication and reach are easy for the domestic Indian players in these teams. Mind you, there will always be the overseas champ who has a way with young players and can act as a guide and mentor to them. These are rare exceptions and not the norm.

Out of the 15 titles so far, 12 have been won by teams led by Indians.

I rest my case.



**There will be a minimum of seven Indian players in every playing squad, and make no mistake, however wonderful the overseas talent there may be in the team, it will invariably be the Indian skill that wins more matches.**

# YASHASVI'S BLITZKRIEG

**13}** The number of balls taken by Yashasvi Jaiswal during his blistering knock of 98 not out for RR against KKR in Kolkata on 11 May 2023 to reach his 50th run. This is now the quickest, i.e., in terms of fewest balls to get an individual fifty in IPL cricket history. The previous record of 14 balls was held by K. L. Rahul in 2018 and Pat Cummins in 2022. On three occasions in T20 cricket, Yuvraj Singh, Chris Gayle and Hazratullah Zazai achieved the landmark in just 12 balls. Jaiswal also equalled the record of reaching an individual fifty after the fewest overs in a team's innings — in just 2.5 overs.

#### Quickest individual fifty in IPL cricket (i.e. reaching 50 in fewest balls)

Balls to 50	Batter	Runs	Balls	For	Agst	Venue	Date	Result	Balls to 50
13	Yashasvi Jaiswal	98*	47	RR	KKR	Kolkata	11 May 2023	W	13
14	K. L. Rahul	51	16	PBKS	DC	Mohali	8 Apr 2018	W	14
14	Pat Cummins	56*	15	KKR	MI	Pune	6 Apr 2022	W	14



Yashasvi Jaiswal

#### Quickest individual fifty in T20 cricket (i.e. reaching 50 in fewest balls)

Balls to 50	Batter	Runs	Balls	For	Agst	Venue	Date	Result
12	Yuvraj Singh	58	16	India	England	Durban	19 Sep 2007	W
12	Chris Gayle	56	17	Melbourne Renegades	Adelaide Strikers	Melbourne Dock	18 Jan 2016	L
12	Hazratullah Zazai	62	17	Kabul Zwanan	Balkh Legends	Sharjah	14 Oct 2018	L

#### Reaching an individual fifty in fewest overs of the innings

Ov	Balls	Batter	Runs	Balls	For	Agst	Venue	Date	Result	M Inn
2.5	14	K. L. Rahul	51	16	PBKS	DC	Mohali	8 Apr 2018	W	2
2.5	13	Yashasvi Jaiswal	98*	47	RR	KKR	Kolkata	11 May 2023	W	2
3.6	19	K. L. Rahul	71	36	PBKS	CSK	Mohali	5 May 2019	W	2
3.6	16	Ishan Kishan	84	32	MI	SRH	Abu Dhabi	8 Oct 2021	W	1
4.1	20	David Warner	126	59	SRH	KKR	Hyderabad	30 Apr 2017	W	1
4.1	18	Jos Buttler	67	26	RR	DC	Delhi	2 May 2018	L	2



K. L. Rahul

**21}** The number of balls remaining when Mumbai (200/4) successfully chased RCB's total of 199/6 at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on 9 May 2023. No side in IPL history has successfully chased a target of 200-plus and won with so many balls to spare. The previous record in such a chase is the win by Delhi Daredevils against Gujarat Lions in Delhi on 4 May 2017, when the former won with 15 balls to spare. In all T20 cricket, only one side has won by a better margin while chasing a target of 200-plus. Surrey (221/1 in 16 overs) successfully chased Middlesex's total of 221/5 with 24 balls to spare at the Oval on 3 Aug 2018 in the Vitality Blast tournament. Meanwhile, two days after Mumbai's successful run chase against RCB, on 11 May 2023, RR chased down KKR's 149/8 in Kolkata with 41 balls (6.5 overs) to spare. Only one side has successfully chased a target of a 150-plus target in fewer overs. Deccan Chargers made 155/0 in 12 overs while chasing Mumbai's 154/7 at the DY Patil Stadium in New Mumbai on 27 April 2008. The tables below details both the successful run chases in the IPL.

#### Successful run chases of 200-plus in IPL history with 10 or more balls to spare

Balls to spare	Losing side (batting 1 <sup>st</sup> )	Winning side (batting 2 <sup>nd</sup> )	Venue	Date
21	RCB (199/6)	MI (200/4 in 16.3 ov)	Mumbai WS	9 May 2023
15	GL (208/7)	DC (214/3 in 17.3 ov)	Delhi	4 May 2017
10	KKR (200/3)	PBKS (204/2 in 18.2 ov)	Kolkata	4 Apr 2010

#### Successful run chases of 150-plus in IPL history with 35 or more balls to spare

Balls to spare	Losing side (batting 1 <sup>st</sup> )	Winning side (batting 2 <sup>nd</sup> )	Venue	Date
48	MI (154/7)	DChr (155/0 in 12 ov)	Mumbai DYP	27 May 2008
41	KKR (149/8)	RR (151/1 in 13.1 ov)	Kolkata	11 May 2023
37	CSK (156/6)	MI (158/1 in 13.5 ov)	Mumbai WS	14 May 2023

**184 }** The number of wickets for Yuzvendra Chahal when he dismissed KKR captain Nitish Rana in Kolkata on 11 May 2023. This is the maximum number of wickets claimed by any IPL bowler in the tournament's history since it began in April 2008. Chahal went ahead of the previous record tally of 183 wickets by Dwayne Bravo, who held the record since 31 March 2022, when he went past Lasith Malinga's 170.

#### The last four bowlers who held the IPL record for the most wickets in the tournament

Record Wkts	Record holder	Achieved on	Previous record holder and wkts	Record with the previous holder
90	Amit Mishra	1 May 2013	Lasith Malinga, 89	—
92	Lasith Malinga	7 May 2013	Amit Mishra, 91	6 days
171	Dwayne Bravo	31 Mar 2022	Lasith Malinga, 170	8y-10m-24d
187	Yuzvendra Chahal	11 May 2023	Dwayne Bravo, 183	1y-1m-11d

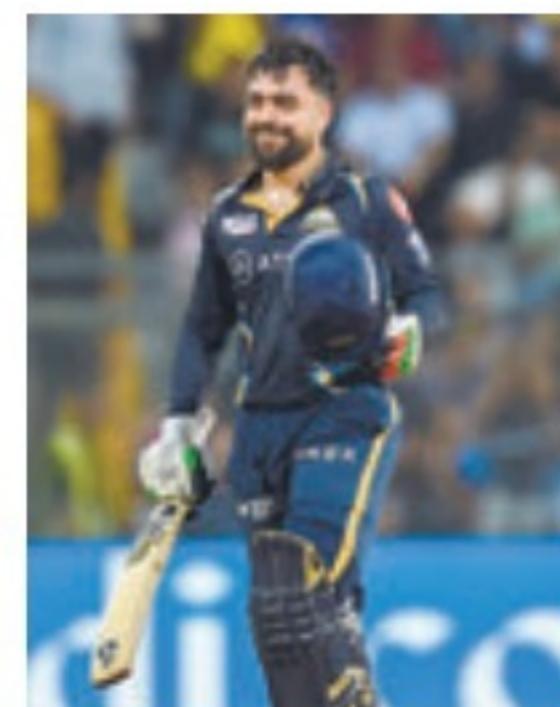


Yuzvendra Chahal

**79 }** The number of runs Rashid Khan scored against MI at the Wankhede Stadium on 12 May 2023 while batting at number eight. This is now the highest score by any batter while batting at #8 or lower in IPL cricket history. Only one batter in IPL has made more runs, Andre Russell, but while batting at number seven. The table below has the details.

#### Highest individual scores of batters from batting positions 7 or lower in IPL cricket

Runs	Batter	Bat#	For	Agst	Venue	Date	Result	M Inn
88*	Andre Russell	7	KKR	CSK	Chennai	10 Apr 2018	Lost	1
79*	Rashid Khan	8	GT	MI	Mumbai WS	12 May 2023	Lost	2
68	Shardul Thakur	7	KKR	RCB	Kolkata	6 Apr 2023	Won	1
68	Dwayne Bravo	7	CSK	MI	Mumbai WS	7 Apr 2018	Won	2
66*	Pat Cummins	8	KKR	CSK	Mumbai WS	21 Apr 2021	Lost	2
66*	Dinesh Karthik	7	RCB	DC	Mumbai WS	16 Apr 2022	Won	1
66	Andre Russell	7	KKR	PBKS	Pune	18 Apr 2015	Won	2
64	Harbhajan Singh	8	MI	PBKS	Mumbai WS	12 Apr 2015	Lost	2



Rashid Khan

**6 }** The number of IPL sides dismissed in less than 14 overs. Rajasthan batters had the dubious distinction of being the latest side in this list when RCB bowlers proved unplayable in Jaipur on 14 May 2023. RR was dismissed for a paltry 59 in just 10.3 overs. The total was the third lowest by any side in IPL history, and the number of overs was the second-fewest taken by any bowling side to dismiss an opponent.

#### Batting sides dismissed in fewest overs in IPL

Overs	Total	Batting side	Bowling side	Venue	Date	M Inns	Result for batting side
9.4	49/10	RCB	KKR	Kolkata	23 Apr 2017	2	lost by 82 runs
10.3	59/10	RR	RCB	Jaipur	14 May 2023	2	Lost by 112 runs
12.5	87/10	MI	PBKS	Mohali	10 May 2011	2	Lost by 76 runs
13.4	88/10	PBKS	RCB	Bangalore	6 May 2015	2	Lost by 138 runs
13.4	66/10	DC	MI	Delhi	6 May 2017	2	Lost by 146 runs
13.5	82/10	LSG	GT	Pune	10 May 2022	2	Lost by 62 runs

#### Lowest totals in IPL

Total	Overs	Batting side	Bowling side	Venue	Date	M Inns	Result for batting side
49/10	9.4	RCB	KKR	Kolkata	23 Apr 2017	2	lost by 82 runs
58/10	15.1	RR	RCB	Cape Town	18 Apr 2009	2	lost by 75 runs
59/10	10.3	RR	RCB	Jaipur	14 May 2023	2	Lost by 112 runs
66/10	13.4	DC	MI	Delhi	6 May 2017	2	Lost by 146 runs

All records are correct and updated until 19 May 2023

# WAKING FROM BLISSFUL SLUMBER

The hillside city is momentarily shaken up when **popular Punjabi music blares across the ground**, but soon the stifled silence of the faceless people who keep the monolith of the IPL ticking takes over.

**Swaying to its own rhythm:** The IPL caravan, which returned after 10 years to Dharamsala, has come and gone. Reality settles in as a taxi driver garbles in post-midnight contemplation, "Once the speed of life catches up, you can't follow cricket." R.V. MOORTHY

Dharamsala lets you settle in. Its narrow single-lane roads leading to the stadium, packed with patiently waiting cars lined up tidily behind one another, are testament to that fact. No one is in a hurry. Not even the players. Rajasthan Royals opener Yashasvi Jaiswal, in a meditative trance, sweats it out for more than an hour in a net session on the eve of an IPL 2023 match against the Punjab Kings. His opening partner, Jos Buttler, opts for an intense game of football with his teammates, whom he knocks down with nonchalant vehemence, much like he treats bowlers across the 22 yards. Jaiswal is reprising the pull and the cut shot with metronomic consistency, the mighty Dhauladhar range watching over as a sentinel, while Buttler, tackling Yuzvendra Chahal, tumbles over the lush green chequered grass of the HPCA Stadium, reminiscent of the Lord's turf. The



hillside city is momentarily shaken up when popular Punjabi music blares across the ground, but soon the stifled silence of the faceless people who keep the monolith of the IPL ticking takes over. From ground staff to caterers, you can hear their muffled echoes through the dingy corridors lined with crates of Campa Cola, a relic of India's pre-economic liberalisation era.

The IPL caravan, which returned after 10 years to the city, has come and gone. Reality settles in as a taxi driver garbles in post-midnight contemplation, "Once the speed of life catches up, you can't follow cricket."

#### **Evergreen Ashu bhai**

On a hot Sunday evening in Ahmedabad, defending champion Gujarat Titans is undergoing a training session at the Narendra

Modi Stadium ahead of its last home fixture. The team played an away game in Mumbai two days ago, so this is an optional session. Some senior players have decided to skip the nets.

As the training session gets underway, Ashish Nehra frantically shuttles between nets. There is a spring in his step.

One minute, he is chatting with Rashid Khan, and the next, the former India fast bowler is correcting Yash Dayal's run-up. Nehra is 44 but looks at least 10 years younger, thanks to his fitness and agility. Maybe that's why most players fondly call him 'Evergreen Ashu bhai.'

Nehra's impact on the Titans has been immense. Ever since taking charge as the head coach in 2022, he has guided the team to a title

victory and given the players much-needed freedom. "Ashish bhai kept it very simple for us as a team. He made us realise that we should do what we needed to do. Everyone is a professional, and they know what's to be done. Everyone has played enough cricket; they know what suits them," says Rashid.

"He (Nehra) has told us that 'If you need one hour of practice, you do it. If you want to train for two or three hours, go for it. There's no restriction.' It's not like you can only bat for 20 or 30 minutes, and someone wants to bat more. It is left to the players to decide how long they need to be in the nets. That helps."

Nehra has put the players' interests first, and this clear-cut communication has allowed the players to go out there with an open mind.

Several senior players who have been part of the Titans dressing room over the last two seasons indicate that Nehra has made the dressing room lively. You find him sharing lighter moments with players in the nets. That's Nehra for you.

**Dhruva Prasad & Shayan Acharya**

**Lifting the spirits:** Several senior players who have been part of the Titans dressing room over the last two seasons indicate that Nehra has made the dressing room lively. PTI

**The mighty Dhauladhar range watches over as a sentinel, while Buttler, tackling Yuzvendra Chahal, tumbles over the lush green chequered grass of the HPCA Stadium.**



» IPL PHOTOLINE



**Samad sizzler:** With four required off the last ball in a topsy-turvy 215-run chase, Sunrisers Hyderabad's Abdul Samad crunched a six off Sandeep Sharma to hand Rajasthan Royals a heartbreakingly defeat at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur.

SPORTZPICS/IPL



**3rd**

**SKY routine:** T20 batting scientist Suryakumar Yadav continued his experiments with an enthralling 35-ball 83 as Mumbai Indians thumped Royal Challengers Bangalore in a 200-run chase, storming to the target in just 16.3 overs at the Wankhede Stadium. EMMANUEL YOGINI

# 4th

Dousing SRH spirits:

Prerak Mankad (64 not out, 42b) and Nicholas Pooran (44 not out, 13b) stunned Sunrisers Hyderabad with a tremendous streak of ball-striking, keeping Lucknow Super Giants alive in the Playoffs race.

SPORTZPICS/IPL



# 5th

**Pink capitulation:** In a do-or-die contest in Jaipur, host Rajasthan Royals crumbled against a spirited Royal Challengers Bangalore, recording the third-lowest total (59) during a hard-hitting 112-run defeat. SPORTZPICS/IPL



A dynamic photograph of Andre Russell in mid-swing, wearing his purple KKR kit and yellow helmet. He is looking intensely at the ball. The background is a blurred stadium crowd.

**6th**

**Dre party:** An under-fire Andre Russell's blitzing 42 off 23 balls helped Kolkata Knight Riders override a 180-run target set by Punjab Kings at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata. K. R. DEEPAK

THE WEST INDIAN HAMMERED THREE SIXES AS  
20 RUNS CAME OFF SAM CURRAN'S 19TH  
OVER. RUSSELL AND RINKU SINGH FIGURED IN  
A 54-RUN STAND OFF 27 BALLS TO SWING THE  
GAME KNIGHT RIDERS' WAY



## 7th

**Better and better:** Suryakumar Yadav bettered his highest IPL score in two successive matches and notched up his maiden IPL hundred with a ravaging 103 not out off 49 balls against Gujarat Titans. EMMANUEL YOGINI



## 9th

**Dogged fightback:** Titans' magician Rashid Khan followed up his four for 27 against MI with an audacious 79 not out off 32 balls in a faltered chase, comprising a whopping 10 sixes at the Wankhede Stadium. EMMANUEL YOGINI



## 8th

**Surefire Singh:** Prabhsimran Singh's stoic, maiden IPL century braved Punjab Kings' batting jitters to eventually fend off Delhi Capitals by 31 runs at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in Delhi. R.V. MOORTHY

# 10th

**Eden rampage:** Yashasvi Jaiswal rewrote the record books with a spellbinding 13-ball fifty—the fastest-ever in the IPL—as Rajasthan Royals crushed Kolkata Knight Riders by nine wickets at the Eden Gardens. K. R. DEEPAK



GOEL  
TMT

JAISWAL NOTCHED UP HIS FIFTY OFF JUST 13 BALLS TO ACHIEVE THIS FEAT. THE 21-YEAR OLD SMACKED 26 RUNS IN THE FIRST OVER OFF KKR SKIPPER NITISH RANA TO KICKSTART A 150-RUN CHASE



## 11th

### Rinku and Rana silence Chepauk:

KKR's Rinku Singh and Nitish Rana struck fifties in a counter-attacking 99-run partnership off 76 balls and delayed CSK's playoffs qualification. Deepak Chahar's triple strike had KKR reeling in the PowerPlay before the southpaws ensured the Yellow Army's league stage campaign at home ended with a six-wicket defeat. R. RAGU



## 12th

**Gill-smacked:** Shubman Gill's maiden IPL hundred left Sunrisers Hyderabad gobsmacked before Mohammad Shami and Mohit Sharma picked eight wickets between them to end its misery as Gujarat Titans became the first team to qualify for the playoffs with a 34-run win. VIJAY SONEJI



## 13th

**Nerves of steel:** Coming off a shoulder injury and featuring in just his third match this season, Mohsin Khan varied his lengths and pace to perfection against the big-hitting Mumbai Indians' duo of Tim David and Cameron Green to successfully defend 10 runs off the last over and hand LSG a five-run win.

PTI PTI



## 14th

**Capital punishment:** Rilee Rossouw's 37-ball 82 and Phil Salt's 14-ball 26 propelled DC to its first 200-plus score of the tournament as the duo ransacked 51 runs off the last two overs. Liam Livingstone responded with a valiant 48-ball 94 but PBKS fell short by 15 runs and stared at imminent elimination. R.V. MOORTHY



## 15th

**Southpaws sizzle:** Devdutt Padikkal was the aggressor in a 73-run partnership with Yashasvi Jaiswal, which helped RR recover from the early loss of Jos Buttler. With the required rate mounting, Shimron Hetmyer chipped in with a 28-ball 46 before Dhruv Jurel hit the winning six to end PBKS' campaign. R.V. MOORTHY



## 16th

**Return of the king:** Virat Kohli ended his century drought in the IPL with a 62-ball hundred against SRH and added 172 runs with Faf du Plessis for the opening wicket to set up RCB's thumping eight-wicket win. The talisman equalled Chris Gayle's record for most hundreds in the tournament with his sixth ton. NAGARA GOPAL



K  
THE CHENNAI SUPER KINGS OPENER HIT  
AXAR PATEL FOR BACK-TO-BACK SIXES  
AND GOT TO HIS THIRD FIFTY  
OF THE SEASON  
»

## 17th

**Gaikwad goes big:** CSK's prolific opening pair of Ruturaj Gaikwad and Devon Conway flattened DC with a 141-run stand for the first wicket, which paved the way for the team's mammoth 223 for three. In reply, skipper David Warner scored more than half of his team's runs as DC's batting fell away, handing CSK a 77-run win and a top-two finish. R.V. MOORTHY



SCAN FOR MORE PICTURES



19th

**Green signal:** Repaying the faith the franchise showed in him at the auction, Cameron Green delivered when it mattered most with an unbeaten 47-ball century, studded with eight fours and as many sixes, as Mumbai Indians beat SRH by eight wickets while chasing 201 and stayed alive in the playoffs. AFP

18th

**Miracle curtailed:** Rinku Singh threatened to pull off yet another miracle after KKR needed 41 to win off the last two overs. He took Naveen-ul-Haq for 20 runs in the penultimate over, and with 18 needed off three balls, Rinku went 6,4,6 off Yash Thakur as LSG sealed a 1-run win and a spot in the playoffs.

K. R. DEEPAK



GILL REACHED HIS CENTURY OFF 52 BALLS, WITH FIVE FOURS AND EIGHT SIXES. THE 23-YEAR-OLD BECAME THE FOURTH BATTER AFTER SHIKHAR DHAWAN, JOS BUTTLER AND KOHLI TO SLAM CONSECUTIVE IPL HUNDREDS

## 20th

**Tale of two tons:** Shubman Gill's second consecutive hundred trumped that of Virat Kohli as table-topper. Gujarat Titans thwarted RCB's bid for a playoffs berth with a six-wicket win. Gill fittingly imparted the finishing touches with an imperious six down the ground, leaving the crowd at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium shell-shocked. K. MURALIKUMAR

# JESWIN ALDRIN BREAKING THE MOULD

Aldrin's **journey to the top** has much to do with his upbringing as much as his talent.

**Jonathan Selvaraj**  
Twitter @jon\_selvaraj

Until very recently, the village of Mudalur in Tamil Nadu had just two claims to fame: its churches and a treacly sweet confection known as *Muscoth Halwa*. Now there is Jeswin Aldrin, who, many believe, may be the next big thing in track-and-field.

The young man who broke India's long-jump national record with a leap of 8.42m at the National Jumps Meet in March this year has shown potential to put Mudalur on the global map. He currently leads the world in outdoor competition this season.

Once you are in this quiet coastal village, it's easy to find Jeswin's home. Just ask around for Blessing Street and stop across the large billboard for the SJ Muscoth Halwa factory. That address tells you a lot about the world that this 20-year-old grew up in and one that he had to grow out of too.

**Religion has always had an outsized role to play in Mudalur.** The village gets its name, which literally means first village in Tamil, from the fact that it was the first purpose-built Christian settlement in this part of South India over two centuries ago.

The main streets in the village, just like the one where Jeswin's home is, are all named after religious precepts. There are seven major churches and multiple sects catering to a settlement of around 4500. Even among the devout in Mudalur, Jeswin's own denomination, the Pentecostals, stands apart due to the severity with which they practise their faith.

WE COULDN'T WATCH SPORTS ON TV, BUT MY PARENTS HAD BOUGHT A COMPUTER FOR USE IN THE HALWA STORE. WITHOUT TELLING THEM, I WOULD WATCH VIDEOS OF LONG JUMPERS AND OLYMPIC CHAMPIONS



In contrast to other sects, the Pentecostals gather for prayers multiple times a week. Their churches are austere, and their beliefs are equally so. Ostentatious behaviour is frowned upon. There are no TVs at Jeswin's home, and his ever-expanding trove of medals still doesn't have a display cabinet.

Instead, posters with biblical passages are put up on the walls. Sport wasn't forbidden, but it certainly wasn't encouraged. "Playing is seen as something wasteful. The purpose of life is to be devoted to prayer or business," says Simon Isaac, Jeswin's uncle.

**Business in Jeswin's family means Muscoth Halwa.** The coconut milk and cashew nut-based sweet was first made by Jeswin's great-grandfather, Joseph Abraham, in 1966 from a recipe he learned in Sri Lanka. The factory across from his home is run by his father, Johnson, while his uncle, Simon, handles sales and marketing.

On the signboard above the factory is a quote that pays tribute to the family's faith. It reads, "All his grace". And indeed, business is booming. The sweet might have been a regional delicacy, but it's gone global now. "I've been told it is one of Chief Minister Stalin's favourite sweets," says Simon. One tonne of the sweet is packaged in the factory each day, and an increasing percentage of that is exported.

It's in this world of prayer and work that Jeswin, the eldest of three sons to Johnson

**Early signs:** Jeswin was always a sporty kid, spotted at the school ground more often than in the classroom.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



**WE WEREN'T ALLOWED  
TO HAVE A TV AT OUR  
HOME. SO, WHEN WE WENT  
FOR A COMPETITION, THAT  
WAS THE ONLY TIME I GOT  
TO WATCH TV**

Isaac and Esther, was born and expected to follow as well.

When he now sees himself crisscrossing the globe for tournaments, rubbing shoulders with Bollywood and sporting elites at white-tie award functions, competing with the best in his field at the World Championships, and being singled out for praise by Olympic gold medalist Neeraj Chopra, it is something he can hardly contemplate. "I don't think I could imagine the world I live in now," he says.

Jeswin might have never known this other life he now inhabits if he hadn't discovered a love for athletics in school. He was always a sporty kid, spotted on the school grounds more often than in the classroom at Daniel Thomas High School in Mudalur. Nicknamed 'Halwa' by his classmates owing to his family's business, Jeswin was part of the school's kho-kho and volleyball teams and was a decent runner as well.

For the most part, Jeswin's parents let him indulge his passion for athletics if his priorities remained his studies and his faith. It was a compromise that Jeswin accepted. He says his enthusiasm for athletics was partly because it let him escape the stifling nature of his day-to-day life.

Competition also gave Jeswin a chance to travel out of his village and away from the restrictions that he had to live with. "There was a time when the school kids travelled for a competition, and we couldn't find where Jeswin was. Only after some time did we discover that he was standing near a shop that had a TV screen, and he was just glued to it," says Anitta Irene, one of Jeswin's PT teachers.

Jeswin can now smile when he thinks about those days. "We weren't allowed to have a TV at our home. So, when we went to a competition, that was the only time I got to watch TV. There would be times when others would go out to the market or to eat, but I would just be happy because I got to watch TV," he recalls.



**Special talent:** Jeswin didn't always specialise in the long jump. In his early days, he would compete in high jump events as well. He didn't take long to pick up the long jump technique and soon started accumulating medals. Here he is seen post his win at the Asian Door Championships, with his grandmother and with Sreeshankar. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

It wasn't always an easy compromise to maintain. Jeswin wasn't always allowed to travel for competitions. "If it was on Sunday, for instance, I would never have been allowed to travel. But I remember there was one time when I was in 7th grade and wanted to compete in the divisional championships, and my mom didn't let me go. Then the next year, the same thing happened. I cried so much that finally she allowed me, and my father arranged a vehicle for me to go and compete," he says.

**There wasn't a happy ending in this story, for by the time Jeswin reached the competition venue, all the jump events were over.** But his willingness to stand up for himself and fight for the opportunity to be allowed to compete was significant. It wasn't just a fascination with forbidden entertainment that drew him to athletics. "I loved sports because it let me be myself. It was the one place where I could really express myself," he says.

Jeswin didn't always specialise in the long jump. In his early days, he would compete in the high jump as well. His coaches did what they could to support him. "We got a jump pit stitched at a local furniture store just for Jeswin. We used fixed poles to put the bar on. It was tough

to procure a jumping pit for just one student, so we managed with what we could. I think that is one of the reasons Jeswin moved to long jump," Irene says.

**Johnson believes the long jump was always Jeswin's true calling.** He recalls Aldrin making a dash to the long jump pit to watch as soon as he had finished the high jump competition at junior meets.

Jeswin didn't take much time to pick up the long jump technique and soon started accumulating gold medals in almost every meet. Benson, a volleyball coach at Jeswin's school, feels no one but the youngster deserves credit for becoming one of the finest athletes in the country. "He used to come and practise for hours on the school grounds. On weekends, he used to go to Anna Stadium, more than an hour away, to practise on the synthetic track. Most kids in our school don't even know what a synthetic track is yet. But Jeswin used to go there so he could improve his technique," Benson said.

Jeswin's obsession with jumping saw him testing the limits in more ways than one. "We couldn't watch sports on TV, but my parents had bought a computer for use in the halwa store. Without telling my parents, I would watch videos of



## Jeswin Aldrin

**Age:** 21

**State:** Tamil Nadu

### Career Highlights

National Record holder in men's long jump with 8.42m

2023 World leader in men's long jump

Silver 2023 Asian Indoor championships

Gold 2022 National Games

Gold 2022 Federation Cup

Gold 2023 Indian Open Jumps Competition

« I loved sport because it let me be myself. It was the one place where I could really express myself »

**I'M VERY COMPETITIVE. I JUST HAVE TO BE THE BEST. IF I'M NOT, I WILL TRY AND FIGURE OUT HOW I CAN BE THE BEST. I JUST DON'T LIKE OTHER PEOPLE WINNING**

long jumpers and Olympic champions on the computer. I saw the video of Mike Powell jumping 8.90 m, and I realised how far that was," he says.

Despite his persistence, Jeswin was still a long way from the elite athlete he is today. "I was around 15 years old when I first learned what the (then) junior national record was (7.97m by K Premkumar). I couldn't believe someone could actually jump that far. At that time, I hadn't even crossed 6m," he says.

He still had self-belief, though. "Even though I was so far from the national record, I remember telling my PT teacher that one day I'd make the record myself. I didn't know how I would do it, but I knew I would. I'm very competitive in everything. I just have to be the best. If I'm not, I will try to figure out how I can be the best. I just don't like other people winning. It seems crazy, but even when I was in Mudalur, I had this belief that I would become an Olympic gold medalist," he says.

For Jeswin, the chance to make that ambition a reality came when he was scouted by Anthony Yaich at the U-18 National Championships in Ranchi. He only took second place with a then-personal best of 7.32m, but Yaich liked what he saw and wanted the youngster to come and train with him at the Inspire Institute of Sport in Bellary, where he had recently started working.

At first, both Jeswin and his immediate family were wary of the move. Travelling for competition was one thing. Moving to what seemed completely different at that time was an entirely different matter. "We



drove from Mudalur to Bellary. That was a long journey. The campus was so different from life in Mudalur.

There was some reluctance among both Jeswin and his parents. He was nervous about going away from home. His mother was really worried about the fact that there was no Pentecostal church where he lived. I really had to convince them that this was the best idea," says uncle Simon.

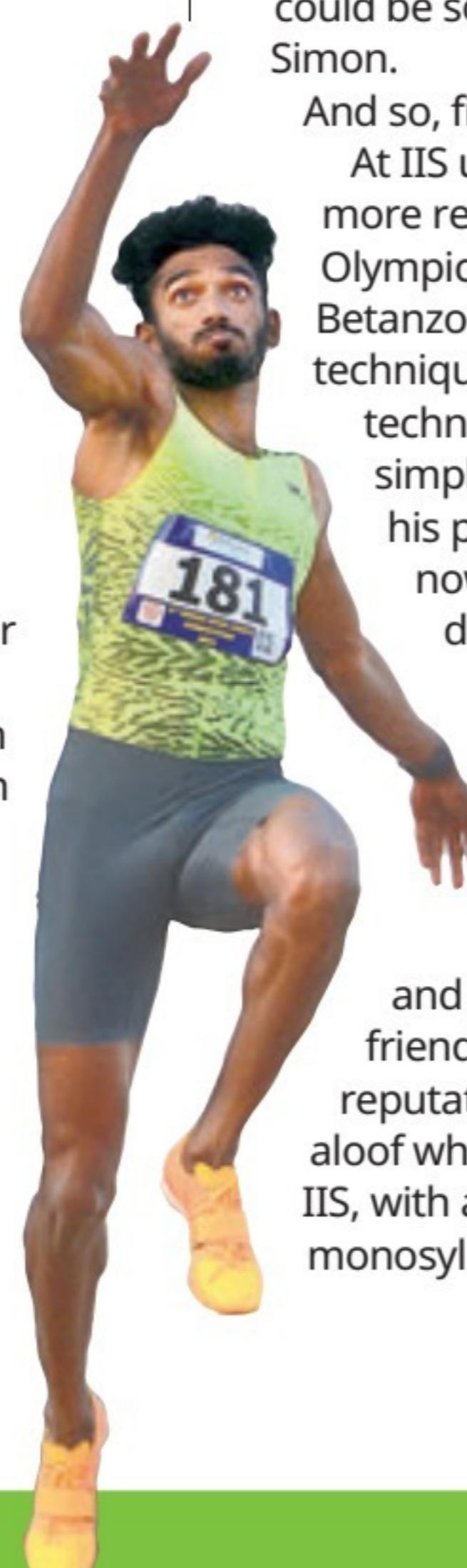
Two and a half years older than Jeswin's father, Simon had himself left the village in his youth to earn a degree in IT and had worked abroad in the field while also handling marketing for the halwa business. He felt Jeswin needed to move out. "Mudalur is a perfectly fine place, but it is too small for a boy of Jeswin's ability. He had to go out if he wanted

to realise his potential. IIS had the facilities, and more importantly, Anthony had the belief that Jeswin could be something special," says Simon.

And so, finally, Jeswin did.

At IIS under Yaich and now, more recently, under Cuban Olympic medalist Yoandris Betanzos, he honed his technique. Instead of the hang technique, which was simpler to learn but limited his performance, he has now started to master the double hitch kick technique, where the jumper makes two cyclic kicks while airborne.

He's changed in other ways too. Warm and gregarious with close friends, Jeswin had a reputation for being a bit aloof when he first arrived at IIS, with a penchant for monosyllabic answers. But this





**Business class:** Nicknamed 'Halwa' by his classmates owing to his family's business, Jeswin was part of the school's kho-kho and volleyball team and was a decent runner as well.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

was only partly true. "For a long time, I had no real opinions on culture, films, or politics because I had no idea what they were. I had no exposure to it. It's only when I got a phone that I actually got an understanding of what people were talking about," he says.

Like many youngsters of his generation, he's an anime fan now, binge-watching episodes of *Blue Lock* on his phone. But jumping remains his primary love. While he has pictures of his favourite characters from the anime *One Piece* on his phone, his wallpaper is the number '8.60m' – the distance he's now looking to clear.

While he's already the world leader with his jump of 8.42m right now—a result that has also qualified

## FOR A LONG TIME, I HAD NO REAL OPINIONS ON CULTURE OR FILMS OR POLITICS BECAUSE I HAD NO IDEA ABOUT WHAT THEY WERE

him for the 2023 Worlds—it's a mark that is still early in the season. If he does get anywhere near 8.60m though, he will be a contender for the podium at the world level.

Jeswin's already competed at that level, having taken part in the 2022 Worlds in Eugene, Oregon. Although he didn't advance out of the group stage with a best effort of 7.78m, the experience was an eye-opening one for him. "That was my first major competition. I got to jump alongside the guys I had only seen on TV. I even spoke to Mike Powell, whom I once used to secretly watch on the computer. He even recognised me. He said, 'You are that guy from India, aren't you? Keep up the good work.' He even posed for a picture with me," says Jeswin.

But Jeswin isn't nearly satisfied with just a picture. "I came 20th at

the World Championships. It was a great experience. But it isn't enough. I knew that if I did everything right in training, I could take my place on the podium. Right now, I can see how I am improving with every training session. That's what makes it exciting for me. I don't get bored with training. I want to do it again and again," he says.

Jeswin doesn't say as much, but he has another point to prove this time around. Although he met the qualification standard set by the Athletics Federation of India to compete at the Commonwealth Games with a clearance of 8.26m at the Federation Cup early this season (he also had a jump of 8.37m that wasn't eligible for a record since it was wind-aided), a dip in form saw

I GOT TO JUMP ALONGSIDE THE GUYS I  
HAD ONLY SEEN ON TV. I EVEN SPOKE TO  
MIKE POWELL WHO I ONCE USED TO  
SECRETLY WATCH ON THE COMPUTER. HE  
EVEN RECOGNISED ME



**Sweet beginnings:** Muscoth Halwa, the coconut milk and cashew nut-based sweet was first made by Aldrin's great grandfather Joseph Abraham in 1966. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



**Mom's the world:** Jeswin's mother, who once forbade him from competing, now earnestly follows his every competition. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

him being denied the chance to compete in Birmingham.

Instead, he was asked to compete in ad hoc trials and told he would only get a chance to be a part of the Indian team if he cleared 8m. He tried once in Trivandrum and then once more in Patiala, and although he came close on both occasions, he ultimately fell just short.

**It was a difficult time, but Jeswin's made peace with it.** "There were things in my last season that were bad for me. I don't want to go through it again. What I learned is to leave as little as possible to chance. This time, I am giving everything I can to be my best. If I do everything well in training, I know I can be a great jumper," he says.

His family believes it as well. "They support me completely now," says Jeswin. While his father now knows the intricacies of technique, his mother, who once forbade him from competing, now earnestly follows his every competition, even if on a mobile phone, since their home still doesn't have a TV.

"I make it a point to watch every

time he has a tournament. I know what his position in the world is and who his competitors are. I pray for him before every competition," she says. While his parents have come to appreciate what he does, Jeswin, whose Twitter bio reads 'Gods' plan', hasn't lost touch with his roots. "Before I went to IIS, my mom gave me a Bible, and I still read it. I still pray before I go to sleep. Before I jump, I give thanks to God for giving me the ability to jump. And while I'm not able to go to church when I am training, my mother makes me make up for it whenever I go home," he says.

Indeed, Jeswin believes he is finally doing what he was meant to do. "He put me here to compete and create history. Every day when I wake up, I say a prayer thanking him for giving me this opportunity to be able to fulfil my potential. Jumping is something that allows me to be free. If I stayed in Mudallur, I couldn't be free. I wanted to be free in my life. To do what makes me happy. There is nothing holding me back. Only my dreams," he says.



IN ANOTHER ICC CHANGE,  
ANY RUNS SCORED OFF A  
FREE HIT WHEN THE BALL  
HITS THE STUMPS WILL  
NOW BE GIVEN AS RUNS,  
RATHER THAN BYES.

# International Cricket Council scraps soft signal rule

1

The International Cricket Council (ICC) has also introduced a new law making it **mandatory for players to wear helmets** in "high risk positions."

Umpires will no longer be required to give a 'soft signal' before referring catches to the television umpire, the International Cricket Council has ruled in its latest playing conditions changes. The International Cricket Council

(ICC) has also introduced a new law making it mandatory for players to wear helmets in "high risk positions." In another ICC change, any runs scored off a free hit when the ball hits the stumps will now be given as runs, rather

than byes. The ICC's new rules come into effect on June 1, meaning the June 7-11 World Test Championship Final between Australia and India at The Oval will be played according to the new rules.



2

**England pace spearhead James Anderson** tweaked his groin while playing for Lancashire in the County Championship. A scan revealed that the injury was not too serious. The 41-year-old expects to be fully fit for the Ashes. Anderson was ruled out of the 2019 Ashes after just one session due to a calf injury. He is England's all-time leading wicket-taker in Tests with 685 victims.



3

**Daren Sammy has been named West Indies white-ball coach**, while Andre Coley will take charge of the Test and the West Indies A teams. Sammy has led the West Indies to two T20 World Cup titles. Sammy's first assignment will be a three-match ODI series against the UAE in Sharjah in June, while Coley's will be a two-match home Test series against India in July.



4

**David White will step down as CEO of New Zealand Cricket in August.** "I feel the time is right for myself, my family, and NZC," White said. "NZC is in a secure financial position with a solid balance sheet and long-term commercial agreements in place." During White's tenure, the New Zealand men's team won the inaugural World Test Championship and reached the final of the World Cup three times (one T20 and two back-to-back ODI World Cups).



5

**Grant Bradburn has been appointed as Pakistan men's cricket team's head coach for the next two years.**

Bradburn, a former New Zealand international cricketer, had previously served as the fielding coach of the side from 2018 to 2020.

"It is a great honour for me to work with the highly talented and skilful side like Pakistan as a head coach," Bradburn said in a PCB release.

Former South African cricketer Andrew Puttick will serve as the batting coach, while strength and conditioning coach Drikus Saaiman and physiotherapist Cliffe Deacon will continue in their respective roles.



6

**Jofra Archer will miss a second successive Ashes series**, after scans revealed a recurrence of a stress fracture to his right elbow. It is the third time the 28-year-old has suffered the injury. Meanwhile, Jonny Bairstow will take over the wicketkeeping duties from Ben Foakes, who has been left out of the squad.



7

**Former Test player and field hockey Olympian Brian Booth died at 89.** Booth played 29 Tests for Australia, including two as captain. He had five Test centuries and scored 1,773 Test runs at an average of 42.21. Booth also represented Australia in field hockey at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics.

## Play around a single square

By C.G.S.Narayanan

In direct mate two-move problems the defences on a single square present a variety of ideas with different defence motifs to defeat the threat. These include unguards, self blocks, self-pins, interference to name a few. It requires a minimum of three defences with a common motif to make an overall impression on the solver. The play can be after the key or in more than one phase. The first example below presents two phase changed mates after self pins on a single square e4 from the set (diagram position) to post key.

**H.Bartalovic**  
I prize, Main post 1955



Mate in two moves

Set: 1....Qxe4 2.Rd5; 1....Bxe4 2.Qf5  
1....bRxe4 2.Bd4; hRxe4 2.Bh2  
Key 1.Rxf3! (2.Qxg7)  
1....Qxe4 2.Qc5; 1...Bxe4 2.Rf5  
1....bRxe4 2.d4; 1...hRxe4 2.Qf4

The thematic square is given in bold letters. Four changed self-pin mates after capture of WNe4 in two phases (i.e from set to post key play) in this unsurpassed masterpiece by the Yugoslav grandmaster.

In the second two-mover, after the key by the queen, WPc4 is captured by five different men on c4 to remove the guard for d5 which lead to mates by five different men but again on a single square -d4!

Key 1.Qd8!(2.Qxd5)  
1....Qxc4 2.N(6)d4  
1...dxc4 2.Qd4  
1....Nxc4 2. Bd4  
1....Bxc4 2.d4  
1...Kxc4 2.N(2)d4

**Reddmann Hauke**  
2 HM, Die Schwalbe 1993



Mate in two moves

Five defences on c4 by black and five mates by white on d4

In the problem for solving below there are three interferences on e6 in the diagram position. The key changes the three mates to new ones which include two battery mates.

**C.G.S.Narayanan**  
I prize, BJM-60 Ty, 1997

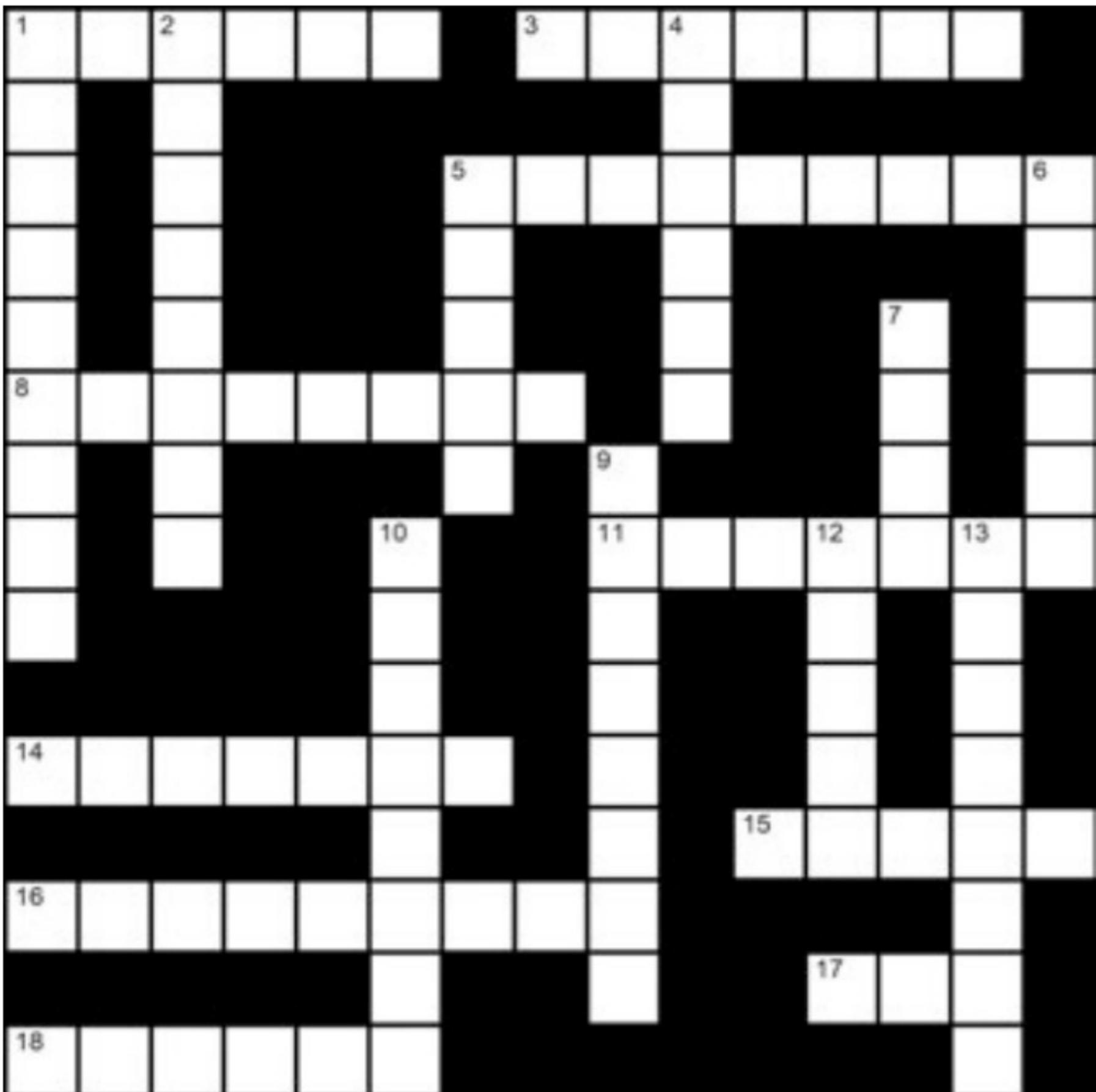


Mate in two moves

Solution to problem for solving in the article 'Vasyl Dyachuk excels': Key 1.0-0-0!(threat 2.Nxb5) 1...Ne2+ 2.Nxe2; 1...Bxc3 2.b2xc3; 1...Qxe3 +2.f2xe3; 1...Qxe5 2.Sc2 1...Nd5 2.Qxd5

Readers may send in their queries to  
[cgsnarayanan@hotmail.com](mailto:cgsnarayanan@hotmail.com)

# ► CROSSWORD SRIRAM SRINIVASAN



## SOLUTION TO LAST FORTNIGHT'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1** ... Madushka recently became the second-youngest Sri Lankan to score a Test double century after Mahela Jayawardene. (6)

**3.** 'The Irons,' their home is the London Stadium. (4,3)

**5** India's 82nd GM. (9)

**8** The ... Cup, the World Mixed Team Championships in badminton which takes place every two years. (8)

**11** Dutch football club ... Zaanstreek. (7)

**14** Lucky the Leprechaun is the mascot for this NBA team. (7)

**15** In golf, it means a score 2-under par on each hole. (5)

**16** Martial art, introduced in to the Olympics in 2000, in which Korea

dominates. (9)

- 17** ... to host Volleyball World Beach Pro Tour 2023 for the first time.  
(3)

**18** British tennis player Cameron ...  
(6)

DOWN

- 1** The football club nicknamed 'The Magpies.' (9)
  - 2** The dominant high jump technique before the Fosbury Flop. (8)
  - 4** Most T20 international wickets: 3. Rashid, 2. Southee, 1. ? (6)
  - 5** Tamil Thalaivas star ... Sehrawat. (5)
  - 6** Danish tennis player ... Rune. (6)
  - 7** Italian football club Associazione

Sportiva ... (4)

- 9** Owen ..., who won 8 mixed doubles Grand Slams with Billie Jean King. (8)

**10** The winner of the Princess of Asturias Award for sports for 2023. (8)

**12** Lucas ..., Brazilian footballer who plays for Tottenham Hotspur. (5)

**13** ... Shafique, first to register four consecutive ducks in T20 internationals. (8)

# NATURE'S FURY

Rain plays spoilsport for F1 at Imola, while MotoGP reaches 1000 races.

Dipak Ragav  
Twitter @dipakragav

The Formula One circus was thrown into chaos when the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix — the sixth round of the 2023 Formula One season — that was to be held in Imola on May 21 was cancelled due to heavy rainfall and flooding in Northern Italy.

After a double-header in Azerbaijan and Miami, the F1 circus was getting ready for a triple-header with races in Imola, Monaco and Barcelona.

However, extreme rainfall in the region in the early part of the week meant the area surrounding Imola came under water.

Even as team personnel and tv crew were arriving at

the venue to set up the facilities trackside on May 17, F1 decided that going ahead with the race weekend was impossible after people were displaced and the whole region was severely affected. The personnel were soon forced to evacuate the track.

The resources needed to hold the race would have stretched the local government, which had to focus on relief and rehabilitation work.

F1, in a statement, said, 'The



**Spoilsport:** An empty track and grandstand at Acque Minerali Turn after the F1 Grand Prix of Emilia Romagna was cancelled due to flooding. GETTY IMAGES

## EXTREME RAINFALL IN THE REGION IN THE EARLY PART OF THE WEEK MEANT THE AREA SURROUNDING IMOLA CAME UNDER WATER AND THE RACE WAS CALLED OFF

decision has been taken because it is not possible to safely hold the event for our fans, the teams and our personnel, and it is the right and responsible thing to do given the situation faced by the towns and cities in the region. It would not be right to put further pressure on the local authorities and emergency services at this difficult time."

**1000 for MotoGP:** Marco Bezzecchi celebrates with his trophy on the podium after winning the MotoGP.

REUTERS



## MOTOGP



### Meanwhile, in the world of two-wheeler racing,

MotoGP marked the 1000th race since the championship started in 1949 at the French Grand Prix held at Le Mans.

Italian Marco Bezzecchi took his second win in the premier class. He is just one point behind reigning champion and leader Francesco Bagnaia who had another non-finish in the main race after colliding with Maverick Viñales.

Bagnaia, who has 94 points, was able to hold on to the championship lead thanks to finishing third in the sprint race on Saturday, but the reigning champion needs to keep an eye on his compatriot.

Baganaia has now retired from two of the last three races and has only been able to stay in the lead thanks to his performances in the Saturday sprint events.

He will quickly need to sort out his Sunday performances, as losing 25 points on a Sunday could soon bite him in his title defence. With this win,

Bezzecchi, who is only in his second year in the premier class of MotoGP, has shown that he is a serious title challenger.



## GALAXY OF STARS

1

Lakshya Sen, Shaili Singh, Anju Bobby George, Aparna Popat, M. M. Somaya, Abhishek, Roger Binny and Vimal Kumar, during the launch of the new-look, redesigned Sportstar magazine, in Bengaluru on May 14, 2023. K. MURALI KUMAR



2

**India beat Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal in the South Asian qualifiers** to secure a berth at the Asian Championships LAN Finals that are set to be contested in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, from July 10-17.

Skipper Manav Kunte (mnz), Vishal Vernekar (HBK), Abhishek Yadav (Abhi-), Shahbaz Hussain (PinkMaN), Krish Gupta (Krish'), and substitute Jaikishan Malik (KaEL) effortlessly defeated Pakistan by 54-12 and Sri Lanka by 39-14 on the opening day. The team further beat Nepal by 47-24 and Bangladesh by 40-16 on second day in the best-of-one matches.

Against Nepal in the best-of-three finals, India secured comprehensive victories in the first two rounds by 34-27 and 36-34 to become champions of South Asian qualifiers and the only team from the region to qualify for Asian qualifiers.



3

**Kenya's Sebastian Sawe (above)** and Ethiopia's Tsehay Gemechu powered through heat and humidity to claim the international elite men's and women's titles respectively in the Tata Consultancy Services World 10K Bengaluru. Ethiopia dominated the international elite women's field, claiming the top three spots. Tsehay's speedwork came to the fore as she left her competitors in the dust as they made their way into the stadium. Among the Indian elite, Murli Gavit and Tamshi Singh posted the best timings.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

ASHWIN ACHAL



## Katya Coelho, a trailblazer



**It was yet another “India’s first” for Katya Coelho, who became the first female IQFoilier from the country to qualify for the Asian Games 2023.**

Katya's dominance earned her gold in all three Asian Games selection trials for the IQFoil category held in Mumbai this year.

IQFoil is a windsurfing class selected by World Sailing to replace the RS:X for the 2024 Summer Olympics. The biggest difference between RS:X windsurfing and IQFoil is the carbon mast present under the board with the basic structure of having a sail and a board remaining the same.

Katya's feat was not a bed of roses though. She had to step out of her comfort zone and perform in windspeeds regularly above 18 knots (approximately 33 km/hr).

“We had wind up to 22 knots. It was one of the toughest competitions I’ve been in because I had a very bad and high impact fall due to the strong wind condition and high speed,” she told *Sportstar*.

Katya will start her training for the World Championships — which will take place in July — next month and will take a break before the 2024 Olympic qualifiers in August.

NETRA V

## SPORTOON

### PLAY-OFF LADDER...



4

**The inaugural edition of the Taekwondo Premier League**, featuring 12 teams, will be held from June 22 to 26 with prize money worth Rs. 15 lakhs up for grabs. Several other individual prizes will also be on offer for the players, according to Dr. Venkata K. Ganjam, Founder and Director of the League. Interestingly, the TPL also has four women being the team owners — former Miss India Asia Pacific and Miss Asia Pacific World Srishti Rana (Haryana Hunters), Ruchita Mittal (Maharashtra Avengers), a diamond businesswoman, Shilpa Patel (Bengaluru Ninjas), an entrepreneur in hospitality, and Isha Patel (Chennai Strikers). The logo of the TPL was unveiled in Hyderabad in the presence of the other team owners Shyam Patel (Delhi Warriors), owner of Global Sports, Allu Venkat Reddy (Hyderabad Gliders) Chairman of iMark Developers, Vijay Kumar Bhansali (Gujarat Thunders), a social activist of international repute, and Bijit Gogoi (Assam Heroes), India 2006. “The League is a team event with each team comprising five members including a captain and each contest will be of five rounds of 1.30 min each with a strategic time out of 30 seconds,” Founder Director Duvvuri Ganesh said.

V. V. SUBRAHMANYAM



## FITNESSWISE

Ramji Srinivasan



# INJURY PREVENTION IN ELITE SPORTS

With workload management more difficult than ever, **tackling injuries is of prime importance** for elite athletes.

**U**nderstanding the importance of fitness in professional sports is not rocket science. Injuries are part and parcel of any sport and can teach athletes to step up their level or get completely sidelined and end their careers.

There are some remarkable examples in both cases, and we shall dwell on how to prevent and identify injuries in the earlier stages and come out of it successfully.

The reasons for repetitive injuries are of great concern in recent times in spite of having loads of support staff and embracing the latest technology in sports science.

Why is it so and what may be the reason for it? These are pertinent questions that have raised many eyebrows in recent times. There are many points to ponder to find a remedial measure to curtail it and make the players robust to play all games full throttle.

Different sports have different types of injuries depending on various factors, ranging from acute and chronic to career or life-threatening injuries. We shall look at the common factors related to all sports in relation to repetitive injuries.

#### Root causes

- Unscientific way of training, improper form and technique, wrong choice of exercise and movement mechanics, and finally, unprofessional process and protocols.
- Workload management — getting the wrong end of the stick with regards to crunching data and inference from it.
- Identifying the niggle in the initial stages before it becomes a serious injury.
- Lack of screening and assessment protocols, not



properly monitored and executed for each player.

- Failure in incorporating proper recovery protocols in place.
- Lack of sleep.
- Dehydration and improper dietary habits.
- Too many fitness components.
- Wrong mechanics in movement or skill set.
- Improper warm-up and cooling down.
- Lack of proper equipment to train.



SCAN TO READ MORE



#### Painful moments:

Paul Pogba of Juventus reacts after going down with an injury during a Serie A match.

GETTYIMAGES

**The reasons for repetitive injuries are of great concern in recent times in spite of having loads of support staff and the latest technology in sports science.**

- Unable to identify the probability of injury due to certain deficiencies such as muscle imbalance, structural issues, movement issues and more.
- Premature specialisation in training module without proper foundation on balance, stability and execution of good form in exercise pattern in the initial stages.
- Too much borrowed knowledge from other sport without validating the cause and effect of the exercise prescription.
- One exercise pattern for all skill set and individuals.
- Negating finer movements for gross movement.
- Human error in identifying niggles, acute and chronic injuries.
- Improper gear during the game or training mode.
- Lack of accountability among support staff with regards to injury or performance is one of the major pointers to be noted cutting across any sport.

#### Prevention modules

- Proper testing and assessment protocols at regular intervals.
- A fitness plan that includes various components of fitness specific to the sport and even more specific to the skill.
- Individual fitness plans according to individual's periodic regime.
- Cool down correctly after exercise or sports.
- Stay hydrated. Drink water to prevent dehydration, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke.
- Proper nutrition pre/during/post fitness regime or game or skill time.
- Incorporating proper foolproof recovery protocols and workload management.
- Using the right equipment or gear. Proper shoes that give support and that may correct certain foot problems that can lead to injury.
- Master the form of exercising and then move on to progression on all components of fitness. Do what is required for the sport and skill.
- Never push through the pain barrier, which can be a major cause of injuries.
- Consulting and engaging proper professionals, be it a sports medicine doctor or physio or massage therapist or an S&C coach.
- Set up short/mid- and long-term goals and work towards it.
- Maintaining a proper workout log can provide a wider perspective with good data to fall back for identifying performance and injuries at an early stage.

# Let's be fair

**We should care as much for the welfare of our sportswomen and men** as we care about the medals they bring. A national body that handles safety and welfare is only a start.

**Suresh Menon**

**O**n August 18, 2016, the Prime Minister tweeted, "On this very auspicious day of Raksha Bandhan, Sakshi Malik, a daughter of India, wins a bronze and makes all of us very proud." In another tweet, he said, "Sakshi Malik will inspire several sportspersons in the years to come."

Does that mean Malik, who had just won an Olympic medal then, will inspire girls to take to wrestling? Or will girls be inspired to keep away from sport by the treatment meted out to her and other international medal winners protesting against sexual abuse at the hands of the president of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), who is a powerful member of the ruling party?

The WFI has no internal complaints committee, as mandated by law. Few sports bodies do.

If the Sports Ministry is serious about attracting women to sports, the time is overdue for setting up an independent body across all sports that will deal with complaints.

In recent years, there have been complaints by women cricketers, women at sports camps, cyclists, and athletes. A report published by students of the National Law University in Jodhpur in August 2021 indicated there could be 200 perpetrators and 10,000 victims across 53 sports in India.

The advantage of a national body charged with the specific task of handling complaints from sportswomen is that the sports bodies don't have to get into areas where



**Seeking justice:** Wrestlers Vinesh Phogat, Sakshi Malik and Sangeeta Phogat during their protest against Wrestling Federation of India chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. ANI

they lack the expertise or the finances to pursue the complaints. It would also rid the system of conflicts of interest where an individual known to be close to an official is named to the ad-hoc committees that are appointed with the chief aim of sweeping everything under the carpet.

A national body, along the lines of the anti-doping agency, will have a major role to play in ensuring the safety of our athletes from a very young age. Horror

stories about coaches and officials circulate in the media for a while, and then everything is forgotten. The top wrestlers who decided that enough was enough and sat down in public protest in New Delhi have not managed to get enough support of even those from other sports.

This is not because other sportspeople don't care; it is a matter of self-preservation for those who know that despite all the hard work and medals and runs and wickets, athletes are subservient to officials in our country, and a word from them can destroy careers. The power balance is skewed in favour of officialdom. The sport, as the cliche goes, is greater than the sportsperson, but the official is greater than the sport even.

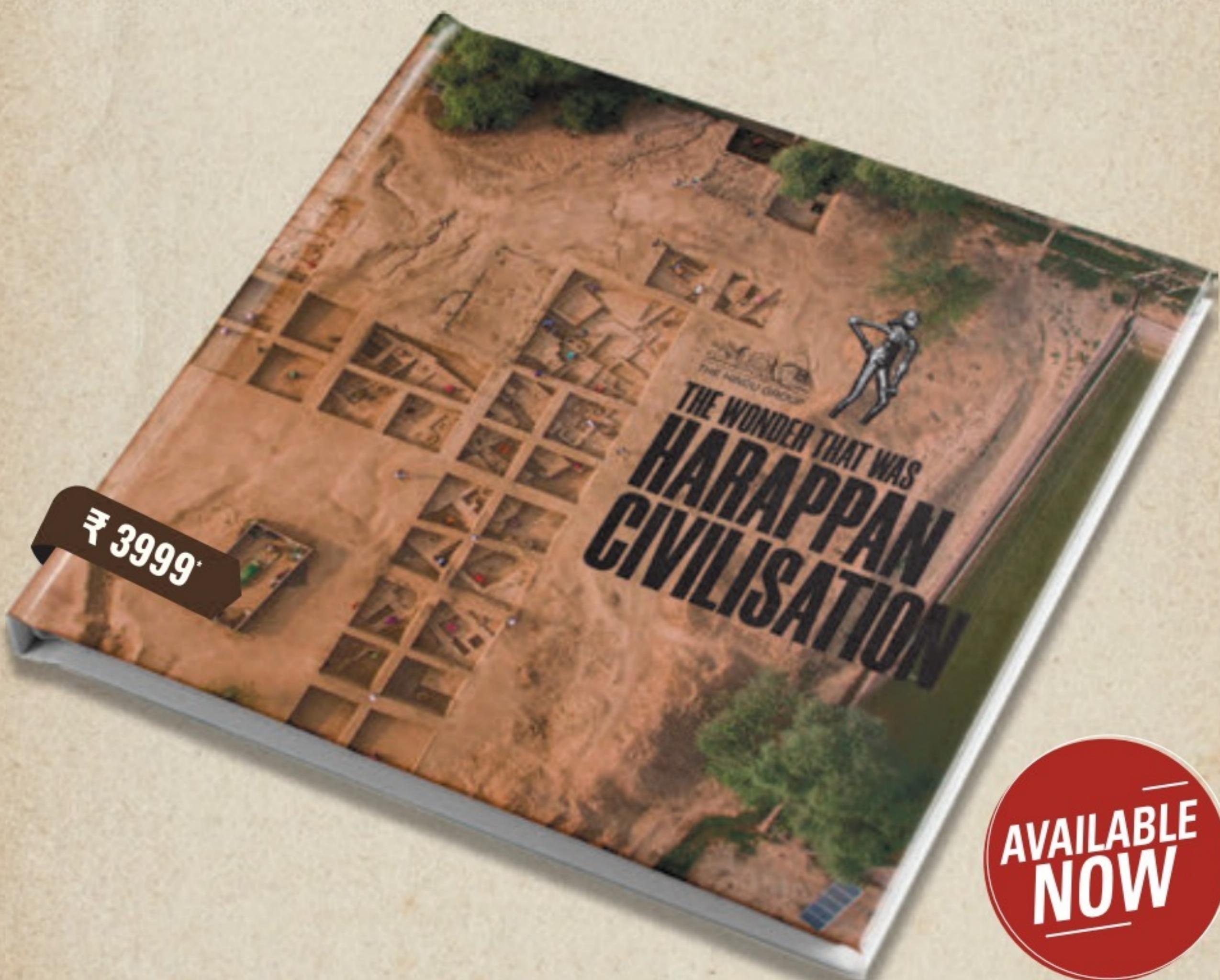
We, as a nation, love it when our sports stars win laurels. Politicians bask in the reflected glory. Yet when the athletes need succour, the same politicians suddenly have other things to do. We should care as much for the welfare of our sportswomen and men as we care about the medals they bring. A national body that handles safety and welfare is only a start.

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