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ACES AWARDS

Jay Shah, a game changer

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The shooting sensation bagged the Sportstar of the Year (Female) and Sportswoman of the Year (Olympic Sports) honours at the annual Sportstar Aces Awards

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- Inauguration of Purvanchal's first Sainik school in Gorakhpur and operation of Atal Residential Schools across 18 divisions of state

Information & Public Relations Department, Uttar Pradesh

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OFF-SIDE

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MANU BHAKER AND THE GRACE OF TRUE CHAMPIONS

In a world full of the self-deluded and petulant, it was refreshing to witness the **charm of a young champion** at the recently concluded Sportstar Aces Awards.

Success is a funny thing. One day, you're just another person wandering around, and the next, people start acting as if you've arrived straight from Mount Olympus. It's surreal how quickly ordinary life can turn into a quasi-religious spectacle.

The problem with pedestals is that they tend to come with a free side of delusion — a little voice whispering: *Yes, you are different. Yes, you are special.* Athletes, artists, politicians — the ones who get all the applause — are especially susceptible. If enough people tell you you're divine, it must be tempting to start believing it.

The rest of us, tragically ordinary, watch from below, wondering at what point they lost touch with reality.

But there are those who manage to stay grounded, no matter their extraordinary achievements. They're the ones who can handle the spotlight without demanding an altar — always nice, always human. They are the real champions: those who never forget how to be a regular person, even when others insist on their divinity.

In a world full of the self-deluded and petulant, it was refreshing to witness the charm of a young champion at the recently concluded Sportstar Aces Awards. Manu Bhaker, 23, is not weighed down by the gravity of a double Olympic medal.

When most of today's celebrities dodge anything that doesn't promise a big paycheque, Manu raced against the clock to attend the Sportstar Aces in Mumbai. She was competing at the Karni Singh Range in the national capital until 2 p.m. but braved a 40-minute drive to Delhi airport, a two-hour flight, and the famously sluggish Mumbai traffic — all for an awards night she could have easily skipped.

After the awards wrapped up, most people sprinted off in search of champagne — or something stronger — but Manu lingered. She took selfies with anyone who asked, chatted as if she had nowhere better to be, and generally made you feel like you mattered.

It's tempting to call people like that rare. We've seen it with Neeraj Chopra at the 2022 Sportstar Aces, and Leander Paes does it practically every day — each time, they make people feel special, even when they have nothing tangible to offer in return.

It's easy to admire the discipline of champions, but it's far rarer to see them remain so accessible. Manu seems to have mastered it with the same calm precision she applies to shooting, effortlessly dodging the gravitational pull of self-importance.

And that's a real star: someone who treats you as if you're as special as the medal around their neck.

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PARENTS' ROLE IN NURTURING ATHLETES

The impulse to engage in play is shared by nearly every child, and this truism is all too banal. The activity of playing has deep evolutionary roots and is the primary means through which children learn about their surroundings and the world in general, thereby preparing them for adulthood. To define the overlap or separation of the categories of playful activity and sports is no simple task. Moreover, one notes with interest that many, if not most, children, particularly boys, seek to emulate a sporting celebrity, though such aspiration often attenuates sooner than later owing to a lack of support or resources.

The primary explanatory variable dictating the success or lack thereof for a child's future sporting career are the parents, through whose agency of moral and financial support, much can be lost! This is no frivolous claim as evinced by Mary Kom's parents, who supported her pursuit of boxing despite social norms, Richard Williams structuring the sporting lives of Serena and Venus Williams, and LeBron James's mother working multiple jobs to support her son, just to name a few. Given this, it is important for parents to take cognizance of their manner of support of their wards that would at best turn out a star athlete and at worst turn out a well-rounded individual

Such support begins with encouraging sporting activities from a young age irrespective of the child's gender and fostering a lifelong love for sports and physical activity while also emphasizing its crucial role for a healthy lifestyle.

Encourage participation in multiple sports for overall development, and prioritise fun over competition until puberty. It is best to avoid imposing a sport upon a child. Rather, allow the child to figure out a sport based on their preference and available resources.

Provide positive reinforcement and constructive feedback. Avoid excessive pressure and comparison as these can lead to burnout and unnecessary stress.

Provide kids with proper training, injury prevention education, nutrition, hydration, adequate sleep and recovery.

Unwavering support throughout the child's sporting journey, through wins and losses, will go a long way in ensuring the wellbeing and the physical and emotional development of the child, thereby cultivating a fertile ground for well-rounded individuals and ace athletes!

Halt Sports Injuries (HSI) : ***An Ortho One Initiative to create awareness through learning sessions and provide medical support at subsidised cost for deserving sports persons.***
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HALT SPORTS INJURIES

ABTP

"I'd set a goal for myself to be in top 10 by the end of the year. Now, it's the end of February and I've already made it, so this is something incredible for me,"
– Mirra Andreeva after becoming the youngest player to win a WTA 1000 title

"I have not resigned, I will complete my tenure. IOA is my family, and if I am unhappy over something, I have every right to express it. This does not mean that I am resigning,"
– IOA's Athletes Commission chairperson and boxing legend, M. C. Mary Kom

2nd

Angel Yin shot a blemish-free final round to win the LPGA Thailand tournament by a stroke from a fast-finishing Akie Iwai of Japan and claim her second tour title. The 26-year-old American made seven birdies — and no bogeys — for a four-round total of 28-under 260 at Siam Country Club's Pattaya Old Course, which was enough to hold off Iwai despite her 61 being the lowest score of the day. It is the California native's second LPGA title after winning the Buick LPGA Shanghai in 2023. She is a two-time major runner-up — at the 2023 Chevron Championship and the 2019 U.S. Women's Open. Yin's best finish in four previous appearances at LPGA Thailand was a share of third place in 2021.

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Indian cue sports maestro Pankaj Advani has once again showcased his brilliance on the international stage, capturing an unprecedented 14th gold medal at the Asian Snooker Championship. Advani's victory in Doha adds to an already staggering list of accolades. He now holds five Asian snooker titles (across 15-red, 6-reds, and team formats) alongside nine Asian billiards titles, and his two Asian Games gold medals (2006, 2010) further highlight his dominance.

MAKING A DECISION

Geraint Thomas, the former Tour de France champion who also won gold medals in track cycling for Great Britain at the Olympic Games in 2008 and 2012, announced that this will be his final year as a professional. "I think now the decision is official, you do start to reflect because when you're in it, it's just one thing after the next, year after year, so you don't really appreciate it," he said. AP

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A TITLE UP FOR GRABS

Ilia Topuria leaves the featherweight class following an **undefeated 2024 campaign.**

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Ultimate Fighting Championship CEO and president Dana White dropped a bombshell when he announced that reigning featherweight champion Ilia Topuria will be relinquishing the title.

Topuria's decision has opened the door to an exciting match-up between former divisional champion Alexander Volkanovski and Diego Lopes for the vacant title, making the 2025 calendar that much more engrossing.

"Topuria has felt like he's done all he can in that division, and he feels like he's cemented his legacy, and his body cannot make the weight anymore," White said in an *Instagram Live* video.

"So, he will move up to 155 pounds (lightweight) and vacate the featherweight title. As soon as the first punch is thrown in the Volkanovski vs. Lopes fight, the title is vacated," he added.

The Georgian-Spanish grappler leaves the featherweight class following an undefeated 2024 campaign. He defeated Volkanovski at UFC 298 to win the championship and then defeated Max Holloway by knockout at UFC 308 to defend it.

Topuria has reportedly set his sights on the lightweight title and could face current champion Islam Makhachev. However, there has been no development on that front yet.

Volkanovski **(right inset)** and Lopes **(left inset)** will lock horns in Miami on April 12, marking Volkanovski's return to action after 14 months away following his knockout loss to Topuria.

'The Great' seeks two-time champion status, and while most assumed that opportunity would come in a rematch against Topuria, Lopes boasts an impressive track record to make the fight a cut above the rest.

Lopes burst onto the scene in mid-2023, earning five wins in just over a year to catapult himself into the featherweight title picture. His most recent success came at UFC 306, where he secured a gruelling unanimous decision win against Brian Ortega.

On the other hand, Volkanovski has had a rather unceremonious couple of fights in the recent past, having lost two on the bounce by knockout and three of his last four. But his performance in the last couple of years does not paint the full picture of his calibre inside the ring.

Apart from Topuria, the only other fighter the 36-year-old Volkanovski has failed against was Makhachev before switching weight classes. He currently boasts an astounding 13-3 record in the UFC.

In addition to the featherweight title fight, there are two highly interesting fights. Firstly, Paddy "The Baddy" Pimblett gets his toughest test when he meets former lightweight titleholder Michael Chandler.

The other bout will see former interim featherweight champion Yair Rodriguez welcoming newcomer Patricio 'Pitbull' Freire.

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MANU BHAKER LOOKED LIKE A TRAILBLAZER, THEN BECAME ONE

Manu is a true wunderkind, but her rise to becoming **India's most prolific shooter** wasn't just talent — it was grit, fire, and an unyielding will to conquer every obstacle.

WATCH MANU'S INTERVIEW

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The first edition of the reinstated Sportstar Aces Awards, held on February 15, 2019, witnessed an unfiltered yet endearing moment when Manu Bhaker, then a prodigious talent, stepped onto the stage.

Fresh from the rigours of a day-long training session and a four-hour journey, Manu found herself at a rare loss for words. Named Young Athlete of the Year (girl), she could only manage a sheepish smile and the words, "I don't know what to say. I didn't even change my clothes or go to the washroom."

The sincerity of the 16-year-old pistol shooter's confession not only drew ripples of laughter across the ceremony hall but also instantly endeared her to all present.

Fast forward nearly six years, and Manu's life remains as hectic as ever. Coincidentally, she finds herself at the same hotel in Mumbai, attending the same function.

Once again, she arrived directly from the Dr. Karni Singh Shooting Range in New Delhi. This time, however, she manages to squeeze in 10 minutes to freshen up before her name is called out — twice.

First, International Cricket Council chairman Jay Shah presents her with the Sportstar of the Year (Female) award, followed by the Sportswoman of the Year (Olympic Sports) honour.

"I thought I might get one award,

but receiving two is an absolute honour. Receiving even one award is special, but two feel like the ultimate recognition. I'm glad to be part of this evening and to have Sportstar give me two trophies. So yeah, that's super nice," Manu later says, grinning from ear to ear while seated on a plush sofa in her suite.

It has taken fire and frost to shape Manu into the athlete she is today. At the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, an equipment malfunction, the pressures of the grandest stage, and the sport's inherent unpredictability conspired against her.

However, strengthened by the scars of that emotional battle and with a renewed hunger to reclaim her place among the elite, Manu became independent India's first athlete to win two medals (bronze in 10-metre air pistol and 10-metre air pistol mixed team) in a single edition of the Olympic Games in Paris. She also became only the second Indian female athlete to secure multiple Olympic medals after badminton ace P. V. Sindhu.

I AM GENERALLY A HAPPY, POSITIVE PERSON. BUT I DO SULK A LOT AS WELL. MY FRIENDS HELP ME COME OUT OF IT

Social media erupted in celebration, television news channels looped her podium moments endlessly, newspapers and magazines hailed the young markswoman, and sponsorship deals poured in as an entire nation swelled with pride. Yet, through all the adulation, Manu remains grounded and effervescent.

"It's not like I'm very famous or anything. Nowadays, when people recognise me, they tend to be very

R. V. MOORTHY

Star honour: ICC chairman Jay Shah presented the Sportstar of the Year (Female) award to double Olympic medallist Manu Bhaker. R. V. MOORTHY

helpful. And sometimes, I really need that help. The downside is I tend to have long conversations. Some turn out to be very long, and I miss commitments," she laughs. Manu had come agonisingly close to another bronze medal in the 25m sports pistol. When the curtains fell on the 'Rapid' qualification round, only Veronika Major of Hungary had a better score than Manu. It was Major again who edged out the Indian in a shoot-off for bronze in the final, registering an extra hit (10.2-plus shot).

When asked how much she would hypothetically pay to retake the deciding shot, she smiles wryly before saying, "I am a very practical person, and I know that no amount of money or anything else can take me back in time. So, I'm just going to focus on the present and work towards better results in the future."

It is difficult to miss Manu in a crowd. Selfie and autograph hunters are drawn to her like moths to a flame. Yet, the Jhajjar-born athlete obliges everyone without hesitation.

"Honestly, I try to accommodate every request. Sometimes it gets really difficult, but I do my best," she says.

Just when one begins to appreciate the maturity beyond her years, a remark serves as a fleeting reminder of how young she actually is. "I try to enjoy every moment because YOLO (you only live once)," the 22-year-old (at the time of the interview) says, explaining how she is balancing her newfound fame while preparing to return to competition after an extended break.

"Yes, it was a little difficult to manage all the travelling. But getting back to training? Not so

AFP

SHOOTING IS GOING TO GROW IMMENSELY IN INDIA BECAUSE WE ARE NATURALLY DISCIPLINED AND POSSESS GREAT KNOWLEDGE OF FOCUS, MEDITATION, AND YOGA

much. I love sports. And as long as someone loves what they do, I don't think it's difficult for them to return to it. I was waiting for this. I wanted to resume competitive shooting."

It never seemed as if Manu had been away for seven months as she breezed through February's open selection trials to comfortably secure a spot on the Indian team headed to Argentina and Peru for the season-opening ISSF World Cups in April.

Having recorded the best qualifying average (based on the top four scores in 13 designated competitions) in the 25m sports pistol, she placed second in the 10m air pistol behind Suruchi Singh, who hails from a neighbouring village in Haryana.

Her cheerful demeanour outside the range stands in stark contrast to her focussed, no-nonsense approach within it. She flits between these alternating personas with remarkable ease.

"I am generally a happy, positive person. But I do sulk a lot as well. My friends help me come out of it. However, when I'm at the range, if someone disrupts my training, it really annoys me."

When the conversation shifts to Indian shooting, Manu listens intently before adding: "Shooting is going to grow immensely in India because we are naturally disciplined

Evening to remember: Manu's mother, Sumedha Bhaker, flaunts her daughter's trophy on a night she dazzled as Sportstar of the Year — Female and Sportswoman of the Year — Olympic Sport (facing page, left). Manu also shared a candid moment with Indian chess grandmaster Vidit Gujrathi and his fiancee. Pics: EMMANUAL YOGINI

and possess great knowledge of focus, meditation, and yoga. These things help a lot."

For her own goals, Manu has decided to prioritise fitness in 2025 rather than focus on specific competitions. "This season, my primary goal is to be very fit. Then, I'll sit down with my coach to plan for the competitions we want to target. We also have the World Championships later this year."

This decision is influenced by a persistent elbow issue that has troubled her for some time.

Manu has made minor adjustments to her shooting equipment to aid in her rehabilitation. She explains, "There will be some changes to my gear now. We already made some modifications to the grips right after the Olympics.

Certain angles were putting too much strain on my arm. I've had multiple injuries, and even now, we are trying to find the best-suited equipment, grips, posture, and stance. The aim is to minimise injuries in the long run."

A journey towards peak fitness begins with an athlete's diet, and Manu is conscious of this aspect.

"I always try to eat home-cooked food. My mum almost always travels with me during training or competitions. Staying fit should be a principle in life. When your body is healthy, your focus improves, and you feel more confident. Strength also helps prevent injuries," she explains.

Despite a lavish spread at the awards ceremony, Manu quietly retreated to her room after the

QUICK BYTES

 # Dream holiday

I'd love to relive the days of sailing with my family — chatting in the anchor area, playing on the deck — just living carefree again

 # Tattoo at gunpoint

I already have something in mind. If something drastic happens, I'll get it done. Not revealing much for now!

Pride of the nation: Double Olympic-medallist Manu Bhaker received the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna award (above, right) for her resounding success at the Paris Olympics. RITU RAJ KONWAR & PTI

event and ordered broccoli soup and a cup of milk with a dash of honey.

"The cherry on top is that I love doing it (staying fit)," she chirps.

There are other things from which Manu derives pleasure as well. She reads a lot; Dr. Brian Wess' *Many Lives, Many Masters* is keeping her occupied these days. Other than that, she has currently taken a liking to Rishab Rikhiram Sharma's "calming yet strong" sitar instrumentals.

She has also perfected the art of playing the violin and horseriding, two things she turns to after exhausting sessions at the range.

As the car designated to take Manu and her mother to the airport arrives, the chauffeur instantly recognises his illustrious passenger. Within seconds of loading the luggage, he requests a selfie, and Manu smiles and obliges.

Perhaps politely declining is one of the few skills she has yet to master.

 # Cheat day meal (except aloo paratha)

C'mon *yaar*, it's always gonna be aloo paratha! But I barely get cheat days, so I've made peace with healthy food. Still, when I do cheat, parathas it is!

 # Actor for your biopic

Whoever can do justice to my character. Not sure yet—maybe people can suggest, or you can help. Whatever...

 # Dream concert?

Top pick: Arijit Singh! Also love Karan Aujla and Rishab Sharma's Indian classical setup

All the award winners of the 2025 Sportstar Aces Awards got together for a photograph at the end of the night. EMMANUAL YOGINI

The jury members of the Sportstar Aces Awards – Olympic gold medal-winning hockey player M.M. Somaya, former World. No 1 shooter Anjali Bhagwat, multiple time Commonwealth badminton champion Aparna Popat and five-time world chess champion Viswanathan Anand — were honoured by Nirmala Lakshman, Chairperson, The Hindu Group and Sportstar Editor Ayon Sengupta. R. V. MOORTHY

Downtown Heroes FC, a football club based in Jammu and Kashmir won the Chairperson's Choice Sports for Social Good Award. The Award was presented by Nirmala Lakshman, Chairperson, The Hindu Group to co-founders of the club Kaiser Bhat, Hinan Manzoor and Mushtaq Bashir. R. V. MOORTHY

Vidit Gujrathi and coach Srinath Narayanan, members of India's Chess Olympiad-winning men's team in Budapest, accepted the National Team of the Year Award from Olympian and former world no.1 shooter Anjali Bhagwat, Dr. B. Rajender, Additional Chief Secretary Govt of Bihar and Raveendran Shankaran, Director General & CEO, Bihar Sports. RITU RAJ KONWAR

Vantika Agrawal and Divya Deshmukh, members of India's Chess Olympiad-winning women's team in Budapest alongside coach Abhijeet Kunte accepted the National Team of the Year Award from Olympian and former world no.1 shooter Anjali Bhagwat, Dr B Rajender, Additional Chief Secretary Govt of Bihar and Raveendran Shankaran, Director General & CEO, Bihar Sports. RITU RAJ KONWAR

Reliance Industries was adjudged the Best Corporate for Promotion of Sport. Devang Bhimjyani (right), Head of Reliance Sports & Lifestyle Business, received the award on behalf of the group from The Hindu Group's CEO L.V. Navaneeth and jury member Aparna Popat . RITU RAJ KONWAR

Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology won the Best University for the Promotion of Sport Award in the Sportstar Aces Awards. Achyuta Samanta (middle), Founder of the institution, collected the award from Rajesh Kejriwal, Managing Director, Kyoorius and Indian Grandmaster Pravin Thipsay. R. V. MOORTHY

Ravinder Kumar (left), Joint Secretary, Railways Sports Promotion Board collected the award for Best PSU for the Promotion of Sport award from LV Krishnan, CEO, TAM Media research and former India cricketer Nilesh Kulkarni. RITU RAJ KONWAR

Olympic bronze medallist Leander Paes swapped the tennis racquet for the hockey stick, giving two-time Olympic bronze medallist P.R.Sreejesh a tough time guarding the goal. RITU RAJ KONWAR

Two-time Olympic medal-winning badminton ace P.V. Sindhu was felicitated with the Inspirational Icon honour at the Sportstar Aces Awards by Leander Paes and Shashi Sinha, CEO, IPG Mediabrands India. RITU RAJ KONWAR

Mumbai's 2024 Ranji Trophy-winning side was honoured with the Club/State Team of the Year Award. Mumbai Cricket Association president Ajinkya Naik collected the award along with veteran Mumbai player Dhawal Kulkarni from John Prasad, Executive Director , Corporate communication, Indian Oil and Olympic shooter and India coach Suma Shirur.

R. V. MOORTHY

Olympic bronze medal-winning shooter Swapnil Kusale was honoured with the Sportsman of the Year (Olympic Sports) honour by former India football captain Bhaichung Bhutia and Ramesh Narayan, Managing Director, Canco Advertising.

R. V. MOORTHY

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Archer Harvinder Singh, javelin thrower Navdeep Singh and shooter Avani Lekhara were honoured for their gold medal triumphs in the Paris Paralympics by Jayen Mehta, Managing Director, Amul and Ayon Sengupta, Editor, Sportstar. RITU RAJ KONWAR

Under-17 World Wrestling champion Neha Sangwan was honoured with the Young Achiever Award (Female) by Olympic bronze medallist P.R. Sreejesh and Rahul More, Regional Sales Manager West, Elite Foods. Right: Parth Mane receives the Young Achiever Male Award from Kishore Selva Babu and Dhawal Kulkarni. PICS: R. V. MOORTHY

Four generations of Indian hockey came together as Dilip Tirkey, P.R. Sreejesh, Gurbux Singh and M.M. Somaya caught up during the Sportstar Aces Awards. EMMANUAL YOGINI

Leander Paes caught up with Navdeep Singh after the awards night.

EMMANUAL YOGINI

GAME CHANGER

Jay Shah, the newly appointed ICC Chairman, has played a **crucial role** in the formation of the Women's Premier League (WPL), which has revolutionised women's cricket.

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Jay Shah, newly appointed ICC Chairman, was honoured with the Special Recognition Game Changer award at the Sportstar Aces Awards 2025 in Mumbai, recognising his transformative contributions to Indian cricket and the sport globally. "I dedicate this award to all the women working hard on the field," Shah said after receiving the award from Viswanathan Anand, five-time World chess champion and Aces jury member.

Shah, who began his journey in cricket administration in 2009 with the Gujarat Cricket Association, played a pivotal role in the development of the world's largest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad.

In 2019, he became the youngest-ever Honourary Secretary of the BCCI, spearheading key reforms and landmark initiatives that shaped Indian and international cricket.

Under his leadership, the Indian Premier League (IPL) secured a record-breaking media rights deal, making it the second most valued sporting league globally in per-match value. He also played a crucial role in the formation of the Women's Premier League (WPL), which has revolutionised women's cricket.

As part of the ICC Olympics Working Group, Shah was instrumental in cricket's return to the Olympics, beginning with the Los Angeles 2028 Games. His tenure also saw the introduction of the Pay Parity Policy, ensuring equal match fees for India's men and women cricketers, and a 300-700% increase in prize money for domestic tournaments.

Shah's visionary leadership and reforms have solidified his place as one of the most influential administrators in cricket today.

Jay Shah receives the Special Recognition Game Changer Award from Viswanathan Anand, watched by THG Chairperson Nirmala Lakshman during the Sportstar Aces Awards.

R. V. MOORTHY

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TOKYO 1964 USHERED IN A GOLDEN PHASE FOR INDIAN HOCKEY

Gurbux Singh was part of the Indian side that won **two Olympic medals** — a gold at the 1964 Tokyo Games and a bronze at the 1968 Mexico Olympics.

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At 89, Gurbux Singh has seen India's hockey history evolve through the decades. He was part of the Indian side that won two Olympic medals — a gold at the 1964 Tokyo Games and a bronze at the 1968 Mexico Olympics.

His academic interests and strong moral code also led him to roles as a coach, selector, and administrator, with Gurbux dedicating over half a century to India's national sport.

Gurbux took up hockey at the age of 16 and quickly made his mark, representing Agra University in 1954–55. A year later, he clinched the Obaidullah Gold Cup, signalling the start of a promising career.

In 1957, he joined East Bengal, playing a pivotal role in its historic Beighton Cup victory. That same year, he signed with Calcutta Customs, where he played from 1958 to 1965. Later, from 1968 to 1980, he represented Mohun Bagan Club, further cementing his legacy in Indian hockey.

Gurbux represented Bengal in the Rangaswamy Cup from 1957 to 1972, captaining the side on numerous occasions. One of his standout achievements came in 1961 when he led Bengal to the prestigious Aga Khan Cup title.

His international debut came on June 5, 1961 during India's tour of New Zealand and Australia, marking the beginning of his glittering international career. He was part of the victorious squad at the International Hockey Tournament in Ahmedabad in 1962, followed by another successful outing in Lyon, France, in 1963.

His Olympic medals and Asian Games triumphs further solidified his legacy as a legend of the sport. In recognition of his contributions, he was awarded the Arjuna Award in 1966.

Even today, he remains a passionate supporter of the sport and its players. For his service to hockey and Indian sport, Singh was honoured with the Sportstar Aces Lifetime Achievement Award.

"I am thankful to The Hindu Group and Sportstar for honouring me at an event like this at the fag end of my career and my life. When I made my debut back in 1960s, there was a joke going around that wipers weren't invented to help me with my glasses in cold European conditions. I was the only player pursuing an Olympic sport with spectacles on. In our time, our job was to do hard work.

"The 1964 Tokyo Olympics, when we won back the gold medal, marked the beginning of a five-year second golden period for Indian hockey. I hope and pray that we can regain the glory we lost over the past 40 years and return to the right track, back to another golden age," Gurbux said.

Gurbux Singh receives the Lifetime Achievement award from Nitin Karkare, Executive Director, FCB Group India, and M. M. Somaya, Olympic gold medallist and Jury member, at the Sportstar Aces awards in Mumbai. RITU RAJ KONWAR

Gurbux Singh's achievements

* Won gold at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and bronze at the 1968 Mexico Olympics.
* Represented India in multiple tournaments, including the International Hockey Tournament in Ahmedabad (1962) and Lyon, France (1963).
* Made his international debut on June 5, 1961, during India's tour of New Zealand and Australia.
* Captained Bengal in the Rangaswamy Cup (1957–1972) and led the team to the Aga Khan Cup title in 1961.
* Played a key role in East Bengal's historic Beighton Cup victory in 1957.
* Represented Agra University (1954–55) and won the Obaidullah Gold Cup in 1956.
* Played for Calcutta Customs (1958–1965) and Mohun Bagan (1968–1980).
* Served as a coach, selector, and administrator, dedicating over half a century to Indian hockey.
* Awarded the Arjuna Award in 1966 for his contribution to Indian hockey.

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SUCCESS IS MEASURED BY EFFORT AND DEDICATION, NOT JUST MEDALS

Mary D'Souza Sequeira **made history** as one of India's first female Olympians when she debuted at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics and later set Asian records in short sprints by 1956.

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Team Sportstar
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Athlete, hockey player, trailblazer – Mary D'Souza Sequeira is all those things and more. Coming from the vibrant neighbourhood of Bandra in the 1950s, she emerged as a champion sprinter.

A formidable athlete, she smashed national records and claimed gold, silver, and bronze medals at the Asian Games in Delhi (1951) and Manila (1954). She made history as one of India's first female Olympians when she debuted at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics and later set Asian records in short sprints by 1956. But Mary's prowess didn't end with track and field – she also represented India in field hockey, becoming the nation's first female double international. Nearly seven decades ago, Mary's speed, resilience, and groundbreaking achievements made her a household name and an enduring icon in Indian sports.

Mary, now based in the USA with her children, has always been a fighter, and at the age of 93, she has battled glaucoma, congestive heart failure, and breast cancer – all with

Proud moment: Marissa , daughter of Mary D' Souza , receives the Lifetime Achievement award on her mother's behalf from Saket Lakkad senior vice-president (Finance), Casagrand and K. C. Vijaya Kumar, Sports Editor, The Hindu (middle).
R. V. MOORTHY

her trademark smile.

Her daughter Marissa accepted the Sportstar Aces Lifetime Achievement Award on her behalf in Mumbai and fondly recalled her mother's connection with the heritage venue, where she once worked as a Lakme girl selling perfume.

"Thank you to Sportstar and The Hindu Group for this recognition. Throughout her career, sports journalists have been her unwavering allies, especially when she faced obstacles like political interference, lack of funding, and nepotism. And now, in the twilight of her life, you have come through for her again — lifting her spirit with this award and reminding her that she is not forgotten," Marissa said.

In a recorded message, Mary said, "Although born in British-occupied India, representing free India remains one of the proudest moments of my life. Looking back at my sports career, life tested me with struggles and rewarded me with triumphs. It taught me that success isn't just about winning but about hard work, spirit and determination. To young athletes, believe in yourself, work hard and face every challenge with confidence. Success isn't measured just by medals but by the effort and dedication you put into your journey. Thank you, Sportstar, for this recognition. With all my health issues, I knew God was keeping me alive for a reason. I am so grateful to be recognised when I am alive."

Mary D'Souza Sequeira's achievements

* One of India's first female Olympians, representing the country in the 1952 Helsinki Olympics.
* Won gold, silver, and bronze medals at the 1951 Delhi Asian Games and 1954 Manila Asian Games.
* Set national and Asian records in short sprints by 1956.
* Represented India in both athletics and field hockey, becoming India's first female double international.
* National champion — Dominated Indian athletics, setting multiple national records in sprint events.

The grit, grind, and the gold

Paralympic gold medallist Navdeep Singh has come through financial struggles and societal doubts to **claim his place** among the best and brightest in javelin throw.

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New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru (JLN) Stadium is roughly three kilometres from Jangpura, a neighbourhood in South Delhi. A 17-year-old Navdeep Singh, taking his formative steps in javelin throw at the JLN, made the round trip on foot.

"*Jo cheez bina paison ke ho sakti thi, vo humne bina paison ke ki hai* (Whatever could be done to save money, I did). I used to stay in a paying guest accommodation near Kotla. I then moved to Jangpura and trained at the JLN Stadium. I never travelled by the [Delhi] Metro. It took me around 30 minutes to walk. It saved money, which I could then spend on my diet," Navdeep tells *Sportstar* on the sidelines of the Aces Awards in Mumbai.

Navdeep's interest in javelin developed later than it does for most athletes. Like nearly every child in Haryana, wrestling was his first love. Despite being aware of his condition — Dwarfism, caused by a genetic mutation affecting bone growth — his father, himself a wrestler, encouraged him to pursue the sport.

"My father was a sportsperson too. A big positive was that I received a lot of support from him. I took up wrestling for about three to four years. I even won a bronze medal at a State championship. Sports have been part of my life since childhood, and they are mostly individual sports. I also took part in sprints for a while," Navdeep says. He only discovered javelin throw after stumbling upon a Neeraj Chopra video on YouTube. Neeraj's gold medal at the 2016 Under-20 World Championships piqued his interest, prompting him to move to New Delhi.

"I was 17 when I left Panipat. I initially stayed in Sonepat with my aunt and commuted daily from her house. Eventually, my father moved me to Delhi, so it was a gradual process. I did not have to convince them to let me go," Navdeep says.

QUICK BYTES

 # One piece of advice you would give to 15-year-old Navdeep Singh
Be a little less mischievous

 # Your favourite cheat meal
Mutton Biryani

 # What do you do when you are not training
When I am not training, I am usually watching a film

Podium finish: Navdeep Singh clinched the men's javelin F41 gold on the opening day of the National Para Athletics Championship, recording a throw of 39.93m at Chennai's Nehru Stadium.

B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

 # One sports personality whom you consider your idol

Neeraj Chopra

 # Your favourite memory, apart from winning gold, from the Paris Paralympics 2024

Nothing beats winning gold, but after the Paralympics, it would be meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi

 # What would you be if not a javelin thrower

If not a javelin thrower, I'd be a wrestler

Champion celebrated: Paris Paralympic gold medallist Navdeep Singh receives a special honour from Jayen Mehta, Managing Director, Amul, at the Sportstar Aces Awards ceremony . RITU RAJ KONWAR

Surviving on a shoestring budget marked his early days in the capital. Often, he could not afford the nutrition required to sustain an athlete's regimen. Dal and tandoori roti became his staples. Looking back, he believes that the period of struggle was instrumental in shaping his character.

"The struggle was necessary for me. It moulded me into who I am and gave me the ability to face any challenge. During that time, I realised, '*Navdeep, tu kya hai, tu kya kar sakta hai*' (Navdeep, what are you? What can you do?). That phase was important, and I will always be grateful for it," Navdeep says.

His first breakthrough came in 2017 when he won gold at the Asian Youth Para Games in Dubai. However, life truly changed for him after his gold medal at the World Junior Para Athletics Championships in Switzerland in 2019. He was then inducted into the Khelo India programme before securing Target Olympic Podium Scheme funding to prepare for the Tokyo Paralympics in 2021.

Being included in the country's top sports programme ensured a fixed monthly stipend and allowed him to train at the Sports Authority of India's centre in Bengaluru.

"If I compare then to now, things

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Moment to savour: Navdeep Singh celebrates with his gold medal in the men's javelin throw F41 event at the 2024 Paris Paralympics. REUTERS

have improved drastically. For my achievement at the Junior Worlds, I received support from the government. Now, athletes get similar support much earlier — after a Khelo India Games medal or a win at the Nationals. Previously, we had to secure international medals to receive the same backing. That is a positive change," Navdeep says.

Tokyo setback to Paris triumph

Navdeep scrolls through his phone's gallery, searching for a video of his meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi following his return from the Tokyo Paralympics in 2021. He had missed out on a bronze medal by just 60 centimetres, finishing fourth with a best throw of 40.80 metres.

Unable to find the video, he turns to his old ally — YouTube. He skips to the part where he promised the Prime Minister that he would win a medal at the next Paralympics.

Three years later, in Paris, Navdeep kept his word. With a best throw of 47.32 metres, he not only secured the gold medal but also shattered the Paralympic record in the F41 category.

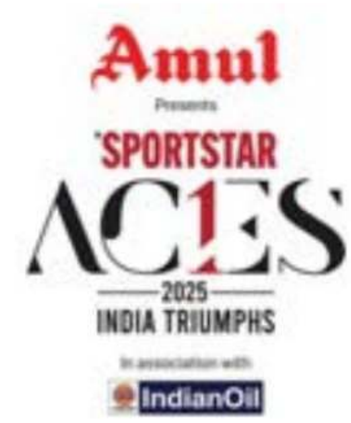
"I think the first feeling was that I had removed the 'loser' tag that people had put on me after I finished fourth in Tokyo. I was satisfied that I had proven myself and that I was not a 'loser' just because someone else said so. That emotion came out in front of the camera and went viral," Navdeep recalls.

Having faced societal rejection due to his genetic condition, Navdeep relied on introspection to carve a successful path in sport. It helped him navigate the Tokyo setback and played a pivotal role in his comeback.

"*Bohot zyada farak padta hai* (What people say affects you). Even if someone makes a small comment about you, you start thinking about it. You wonder, 'Why is that person saying this?' If it happens repeatedly, you begin to doubt yourself — 'Am I really like this?' "If people say you're not good, you start searching for faults within yourself. I have been through that phase. But then I worked on myself — how I could improve, understanding my strengths and weaknesses. I cut out all distractions, and the path became clear," Navdeep says.

Although he blushes at being called a celebrity, fame has followed him post his triumph in Paris. He is an Arjuna awardee, frequently recognised in public, and often gets selfie requests. More importantly, he has nothing to prove anymore.

"A person should never be stagnant. I just want to keep improving. When you aim to keep getting better, you always set new targets to achieve, and that is what I want to keep doing," Navdeep says.



« I went through a bit of an existential crisis after Candidates disappointment »

VIDIT GUJRATHI

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Daily, thousands from around the world gather to capture a photo with Mumbai's iconic Gateway of India.

So, it wasn't hard to convince Vidit Gujrathi to step out of the Gateway-facing Taj Mahal Palace Hotel for a quick photo before the Sportstar Aces 2025 awards night. Even as one of the world's top chess players, the tourist in him remains very much alive.

The brief photo session was soon interrupted by surprised chess fans. Vidit, momentarily taken aback by the quick recognition, smiled and graciously posed for selfies.

Back inside the hotel, we settled in for a long, insightful conversation — covering his Candidates 2024 campaign, his 'tech' aspirations, and the 'low-key' 2025 he has planned.

The Candidates Tournament was the highlight of 2024 for you. What were your key learnings from it?

I remember how incredible it felt when I qualified for the Candidates after winning the FIDE Grand Swiss. It was a euphoric moment because we had been preparing so intensely for it. I put my heart and soul into chess for nearly two years.

Once I qualified, I completely shut out the world. I went off social media and focused entirely on chess. I invested a lot of money into training because I didn't want any regrets. I'm very proud that I gave it my all.

There were highs and lows in the Candidates. It started well — I was the first player to win a game. However, the problem was that I failed to convert several winning positions. Against [Fabiano] Caruana and [Ian] Nepomniachtchi, for example, I couldn't hold onto my advantage when those winning positions arrived.

Looking back, do you think there was anything you could have done differently in your preparation?

Possibly. I was mainly working on the technical aspects of my game, but I could have focused more on the mental side — perhaps some mental conditioning coaching. I think that's where I fell short in crucial moments. I was extremely composed in some games, like my wins against Hikaru [Nakamura], but I struggled to maintain that consistency. That's what bothers me now when I reflect on it.

Is that something you plan to work on in the future?

Yes, of course. It's a never-ending

QUICK BYTES

 # Favourite chess format
Blitz
 # Favourite opening move
E4

#Dream location to play chess
A Rajasthani palace
#One chess rule change you would make
Increase the King's powers

 # A famous person, dead or alive, you would want to play chess with
Gautama Buddha
#If you could change one move from the past...
vs Ian Nepomniachtchi in Candidates 2024

Pics: RITU RAJ KONWAR

process. The period after the Candidates was tough for me because I had given everything to it and didn't get the results I wanted. I felt empty and didn't know what to do next. What was my next goal? I had dedicated myself entirely to the Candidates — so what now? I went through a bit of an existential crisis.

How did you overcome that phase?

For about a month after the Candidates, I was completely burnt out. Then I moved from Nashik to Mumbai. I felt that a change in environment and being around friends would help. I also eased off my chess preparation for a while. It took two to three months to find my rhythm again.

You turned 30 recently. Given that chess is a sport increasingly dominated by younger players, how are you handling it?

It's something that lingers in the back of my mind. I've realised that the best way to deal with it is to accept that I'm 30 and make decisions accordingly. The way I eat has changed, and my sleep pattern has changed. If I tried living as though I were still 18, it wouldn't work.

At first, it wasn't easy, but I've managed to reset my goals, and I feel I'm getting a better grasp on things now. Also, I met my fiancée around this time, so turning 30 hasn't been bad.

You mentioned the FIDE Grand Swiss title. Do you consider that the best victory of your career?

Absolutely. It was an extremely strong field, and I lost my first-round game. I'm very proud to bounce back and win what's regarded as the strongest open tournament. I also remember making some incredibly aggressive moves — quite unlike my usual style. I was bold and fearless, and I loved that.

You were one of the first Indian chess players to explore streaming. What led you to that decision?

I had always wanted to try it, but until 2017-18, the internet where I lived wasn't good enough for streaming. Then I moved houses, and at the same time, the pandemic hit. I can't sit idle — I'm a workaholic, or at least I used to be.

Engaging with an audience comes naturally to me, and I'm good at chess, so I combined the two. The timing was perfect as well, with so many people streaming and consuming content. Many who had drifted away from chess started watching it again during the pandemic.

Chess, like any professional sport, has rivalries, but you've struck up a strong friendship with fellow Super GM Anish Giri. It's probably the best 'bromance' in the chess world. How did it start, and what is the foundation of your friendship beyond chess?

In 2015, we were both at the World Cup. I got knocked out early, and he [Anish] was still in the tournament. I didn't know him well, but we met through mutual friends. I asked him if he needed a coach since I had already been eliminated, and he said no. So our relationship started with rejection [laughs].

Later, when he qualified for the Candidates, he reached out to me for an online training session. We worked together for a week, and he liked the energy and vibe. That led to him inviting me to the Netherlands for training.

We ended up working together on and off for two years across various events. The best thing was how well our energy matched. He's funny, and I can take his jokes. He can take mine too. We're also the same age, which helped. Plus, he has a wonderful family and a very homely environment.

Despite this, you didn't include Anish in your Candidates' preparation team...

I wanted to transition to a more aggressive style of play, and his style didn't align with that. So although he's a great friend, from a technical standpoint, it wasn't the right fit. It was a pragmatic decision.

In a recent interview, you mentioned considering retirement or moving to something less stressful. Is that thought still on your mind?

Yes, it is. Look at Magnus Carlsen — he's not playing classical tournaments now, but he still plays rapid and blitz because of his deep love for chess.

I also have a passion for chess — otherwise, I wouldn't have played for 23-24 years. But I have other interests too. I'm very tech-savvy. I love technology, I read about it constantly, and I've even tried to build things myself. I was learning to code at one point and wanted to create software. Now, with AI, I want to explore what's possible.

I'm a tech nerd, and I'm also Gujarati — so business is in my DNA! Maybe I'll explore tech or business or even combine the two.

Chess is an inherently stressful game, especially at the highest level. How do you manage that stress?

Any professional sportsperson experiences stress, anxiety, and fear. The best thing about sports is that it provides quick feedback. A normal person may not get that feedback as immediately, but in sports, there's always something at stake.

It's like being thrown into a cage — that's when your instincts kick in, and you realise where you stand. Chess has given me immense self-awareness and has been my greatest catalyst for spiritual growth because it has helped me understand myself better.

Is that what led you to meditation, or was it something you always practised?

I was always inclined towards spirituality but didn't know which path to take. In 2019, I came across a video and a book by my Guru, Om Swamiji. I later visited his ashram in Himachal Pradesh. That's when I found a mentor for life.

He guided me in working on myself, and meditation became an integral part of my routine. All my success in chess has been, in some way, because of his guidance.

Another significant factor is, of course, your fiancee, Nidhi Kataria. How does she support you through the process?

I am blessed to have found someone like Nidhi **(facing page)**, who is extremely supportive. She was new to the chess world but made an effort to learn the game. She tried following my matches but couldn't understand much, so she would rely on the engine bar to figure out what was happening.

She is very soft-spoken and gentle. Having a supportive partner who truly understands you is often underrated. Chess players go through a lot emotionally, and she has been my rock — grounding me and bringing me back to the good side of life.

What are your chess plans for 2025?

I won't be competing in the Candidates cycle, as the qualification process is quite tough. Instead, I will focus on the World Cup and the Grand Swiss for direct qualification. The game is shifting towards rapid and blitz formats, and adapting to that change is essential.

What are your thoughts on freestyle chess? Do you see a future where it replaces traditional formats?

It's possible, but it doesn't have to be a replacement — it's like saying if you have paneer, you can't have tofu. Both can exist independently. It's a welcome addition but doesn't need to take over.

It's interesting to play, but as a spectator, I'm still getting used to it. The positions aren't what you typically see in a chess game, so it can sometimes be hard to follow.

However, as a player, it's a lot more fun. One of the challenges in modern chess is the sheer amount of preparation required, with computers making it harder to be creative in openings. Freestyle chess offers so many possibilities, forcing players to rely more on their thinking. There's less preparation and more on-the-board play, much like in the old days.

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The show is on: Each outfit was accompanied by the two drivers, team principal and pit crews, making it a visually extravagant showcase.

Pics: GETTY IMAGES

ECHOES OF THE PAST, VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Formula One's 75th anniversary celebration was a **grand spectacle,** bringing together the drivers, team principals, and motorsport fans for a night of nostalgia and glamour at the iconic O2 Arena.

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"To be a champion, you have to be able to do the impossible." These words, spoken by five-time World Champion Juan Manuel Fangio, defined his dominance on the track during the 1950s, an era when Formula One was still in its infancy.

Seventy-five years later, the sport's legacy continues to thrive. Since its inception, F1 has pushed the limits of engineering, showcasing just how fast a human can go in a

four-wheeled machine crafted to precision. Now, as the sport marks its 75th anniversary, the milestone called for a celebration.

The F1 75 show was the perfect curtain-raiser for another season of high-octane racing. Just weeks before the start of the 24-race calendar, all 10 F1 teams gathered at the O2 Arena in London — a venue renowned for hosting elite sporting events.

Featuring a15,000-strong crowd, a huge LED screen and a large catwalk, the show's biggest highlight was the launch of the liveries — the paint scheme and designs of the teams. With seven minutes to impress, teams utilised all their creative energy to introduce their challengers in unique ways under the same roof.

Though it was quite uncharacteristic for a sport that takes centre stage on a track, it was an opportunity to bring the spotlight onto the cars before the action. Each outfit was accompanied by the two drivers, team principal and pit crews, making it a visually extravagant showcase, tied together by musical performances and the comedic commentary of MC Jack Whitehall.

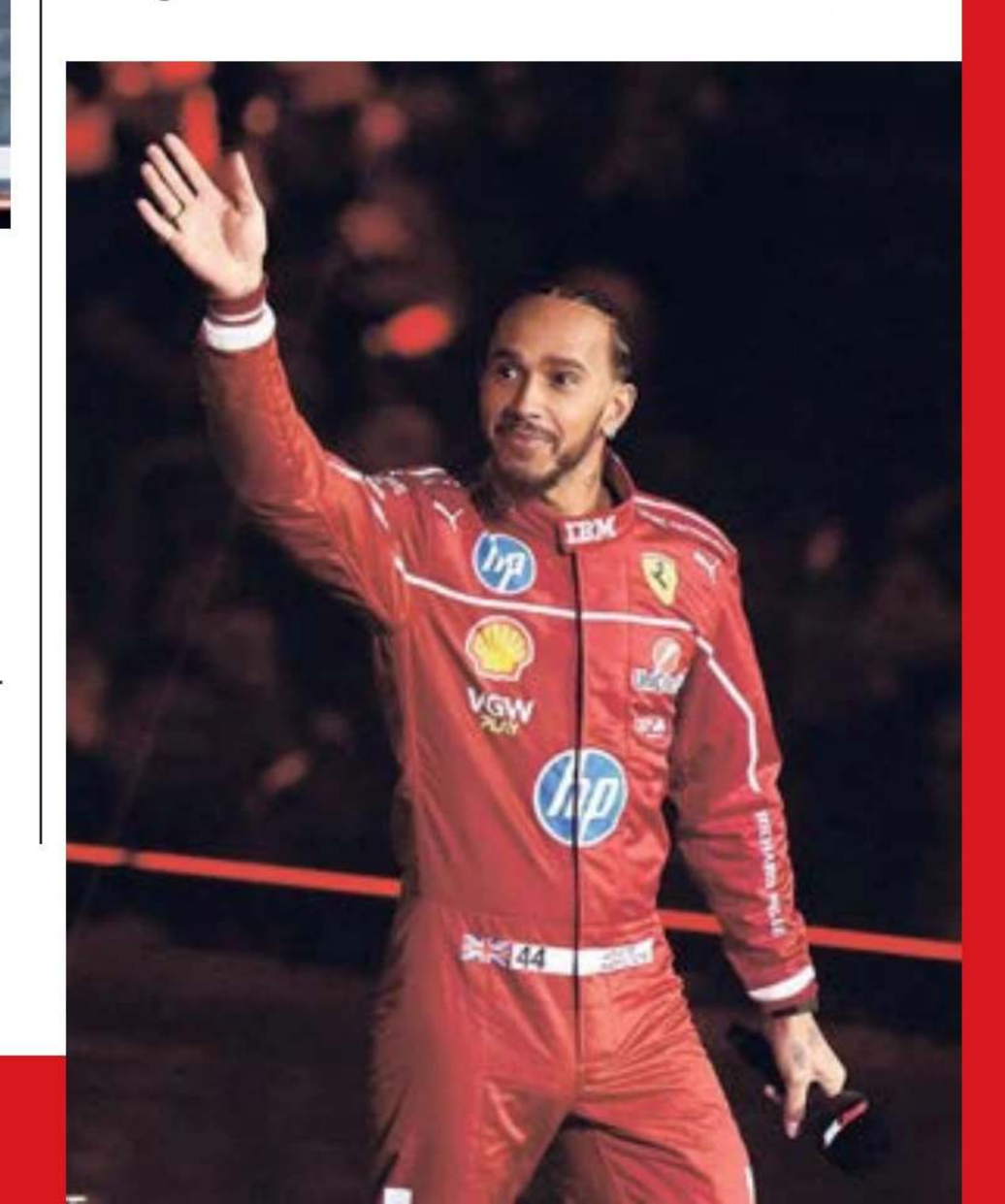
The show began with Sauber's trademark black and neon green aesthetics, while Williams paid tribute to its legacy and founder Sir Frank Williams in a pre-recorded segment. Racing Bulls unveiled a brand-new look, which was later discussed among fans as the best of the lot, and Alpine stuck to a DJ mix to pump up the crowd.

The sky was the limit for Aston Martin, which drew inspiration from the James Bond movie, *The World is Not Enough,* as the drivers posed on speedboats across the Thames before being hoisted down into the venue. Mercedes stuck to its classic silver and black fade, while Red Bull had the company of a dance crew on stage.

However, the much-anticipated reveal was Lewis Hamilton **(below)** in the iconic red of Ferrari, which also paid homage to its rich history, honouring Enzo Ferrari. Constructors' champion McLaren displayed its majestic cars of the past and sported a similar livery for its title defence in 2025.

Amidst all the glitz and glamour was an anniversary that had been commemorated in an unusual yet memorable way. Moreover, F1 also reported it received nearly 1.1 million concurrent viewers on its *YouTube* livestream and 7.5 million in total across platforms.

The F1 75 was a befitting inauguration just a week ahead of pre-season testing on February 26-28 at the Bahrain International Circuit. The grid will get an understanding of the pecking order before an exciting season of intense racing unfolds.



A fearless, unsung hero

Mohinder Amarnath was simultaneously an indispensable member of the team's unprecedented successes, an unobtrusive participant and a frequent victim of the political swirl inside and outside the Indian dressing room.

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In his memoir, *'Fearless,'* Mohinder Amarnath walks us through a triumphant yet tumultuous period of Indian cricket, placing himself in a fascinating twin role.

Mohinder was simultaneously an indispensable member of the team's unprecedented successes, an unobtrusive participant and a frequent victim of the political swirl inside and outside the Indian dressing room.

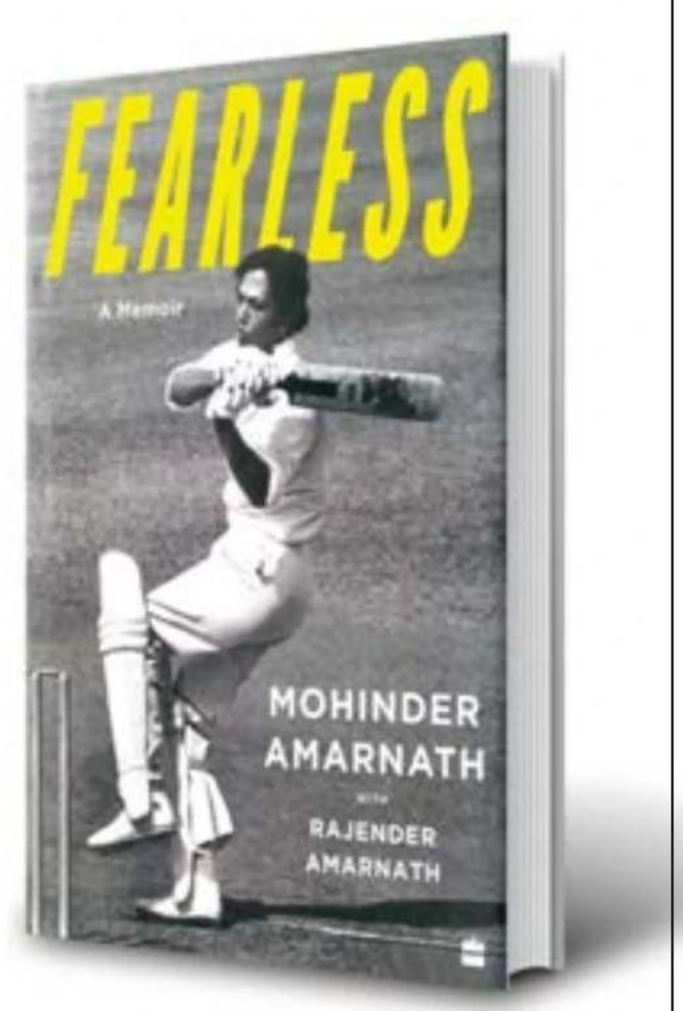
The early parts of the book — which Mohinder has co-written with his brother Rajender — describe Mohinder's initiation to the sport under the watchful eyes of his father, Lala Amarnath, arguably India's first cricketing superstar.

These initial chapters drip with Mohinder's deference and admiration for his dad, which comes through in his interactions with other players and administrators, across the world.

A key part of Mohinder's early journey was his elder brother Surinder, who he calls a better batsman than him. Mohinder shares the deep bond he had with his sibling in their journey through the Indian domestic circuit and into the national team. But, Surinder eventually fades away from the narrative, which the writer attributes to that era's unfair selection process, which afflicted him too. Also worth highlighting is the multi-focal training model Lala designed for his sons. This included practising batting on grass without pads to counter spin and using wet tennis balls to prepare for bouncers against pacers.

As expected, *'Fearless'* is rich with anecdotes collected by Mohinder over countless tours and tournaments. Interestingly, two such hilarious nuggets, where Mohinder steps into the role of a prankster, involve Sunil Gavaskar and missing shoes.

But on several other occasions, *'Fearless'* opts to blur out the identity of cricketers who were part of controversial stories, and understandably so. Among his colleagues, Mohinder is most candid about Gavaskar. The writer is open enough to requote Gavaskar's criticism of him early on in his career and then proudly brandishes the appreciation from the Little Master that followed later on.



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Meanwhile, Mohinder's relationship with the administration, particularly the selectors, wasn't straightforward. Vast swathes of the memoir place Mohinder in exile when he was overlooked for national team selection for reasons beyond him. The conflict reaches its crescendo later on in the book, with Mohinder baring his version of his much-reported showdown with the selectors in 1988.

Another battle which defined Mohinder's career was the one against the short ball, which occupies a significant space in his recollection. This ranges from his early sense of control of it and the brief window where he was branded circumspect to the rising ball and his eventual mastery over it.

His combat with the short ball, which included multiple near-career-ending injuries and mental breakdowns, played a major role in the construction of his legacy and eventually lent a befitting title to this book.

'Fearless' is, however, scattered with editing errors, which is surprising, considering the obsessive gene running through the Mohinder family. Nevertheless, the narrative yarn is compelling enough for the reader to gloss over those minor faults, presenting one with a vibrant image not just of Mohinder Amarnath, but also of a fabled period of Indian cricket.

CHAMPIONS TROPHY PHOTOLINE
PAKISTAN VS NEW ZEALAND

Architects: Will Young (107) and Tom Latham (118) and stitched a 118-run stand for the fourth wicket as New Zealand posted 320 for five after being put into bat first by Pakistan in the Champions Trophy opener. AFP

FOR MORE IMAGES

Dominance: New Zealand bowlers were all over Pakistan batters, led by William O'Rourke, who claimed three for 47 as the host was shot down for just 260, losing the game by 60 runs.
GETTY IMAGES

Resistance: Towhid Hridoy delivered a resilient century after Bangladesh stumbled to 35 for five inside the first 10 overs. His 100 off 118 balls, coupled with a crucial 154-run partnership with Jaker Ali, helped the Bangla Tigers regain their footing in the contest. PTI

Roaring quick: Mohammed Shami showcased his brilliance once again, claiming his sixth five-wicket haul in ODIs while reaching the milestone of 200 wickets in the format. His efforts helped India bowl out Bangladesh for just 228 after being asked to field first. AP

Attacking start: Rohit Sharma began the chase with a quickfire 41 off 36 with the help of seven fours as India scored 69 runs in the first 10 overs. The Indian captain fell a ball before the PowerPlay ended. AFP

Shining star: Shubman Gill anchored India's 229-run chase with an unbeaten 101 on a challenging surface, guiding the team to a six-wicket victory in its Champions Trophy opener. AP

Flawless: Opener Ryan Rickelton smashed his maiden ODI hundred on a grassy Karachi pitch and powered South Africa to 315 for six against Afghanistan after electing to bat first. AP

Too quick to handle: Kagiso Rabada got the ball to move and troubled Afghanistan batters on their Champions Trophy debut. Afghanistan never got going in the 316-run chase and fell short of the target by 107 runs. AFP

Duckett full of runs: Opener Ben Duckett hit a stroke-filled century against Australia and registered the highest individual score in the tournament's history – 165, helping England post the highest team total ever in the Champions Trophy (351).
GETTY IMAGES

Inglished: Josh Inglis smashed his maiden ODI century as Australia dashed England's hopes, effortlessly chasing down a record 352 — the highest in tournament history — in the 48th over. AP

Laying platform: Saud Shakeel and Mohammad Rizwan stitched a 104-run third-wicket partnership after India troubled Pakistan early with two wickets inside the PowerPlay. PTI

Tightening grip: Hardik Pandya bowled a miserly spell of two for 31 in eight overs and got key wickets of Babar Azam and Saud Shakeel as India controlled the scoring rate and restricted Pakistan to 241. AFP

Swept away: Shreyas Iyer continued his good run, struck 56 off 67 balls, and added 114 runs with Virat Kohli as India dominated Pakistan bowlers in the middle overs. AFP

Magic number 82: Virat Kohli once again brought his 'A' game against Pakistan as he struck his 82nd international hundred – 51st in ODIs. During his knock, Kohli also became the quickest to reach 14,000 ODI runs in the 287th inning. India completed the chase with 45 balls to spare. AP

Uninterrupted: Michael Bracewell bowled his full quota of 10 overs on the trot, dismantling Bangladesh's middle order. He finished with figures of four for 26, restricting the opponent to 236 for nine. REUTERS

Cruise control: Batting at number four for the first time, Rachin Ravindra struck a seamless century, his fourth in ODIs, as New Zealand went past Bangladesh's total with 23 balls to spare. AP

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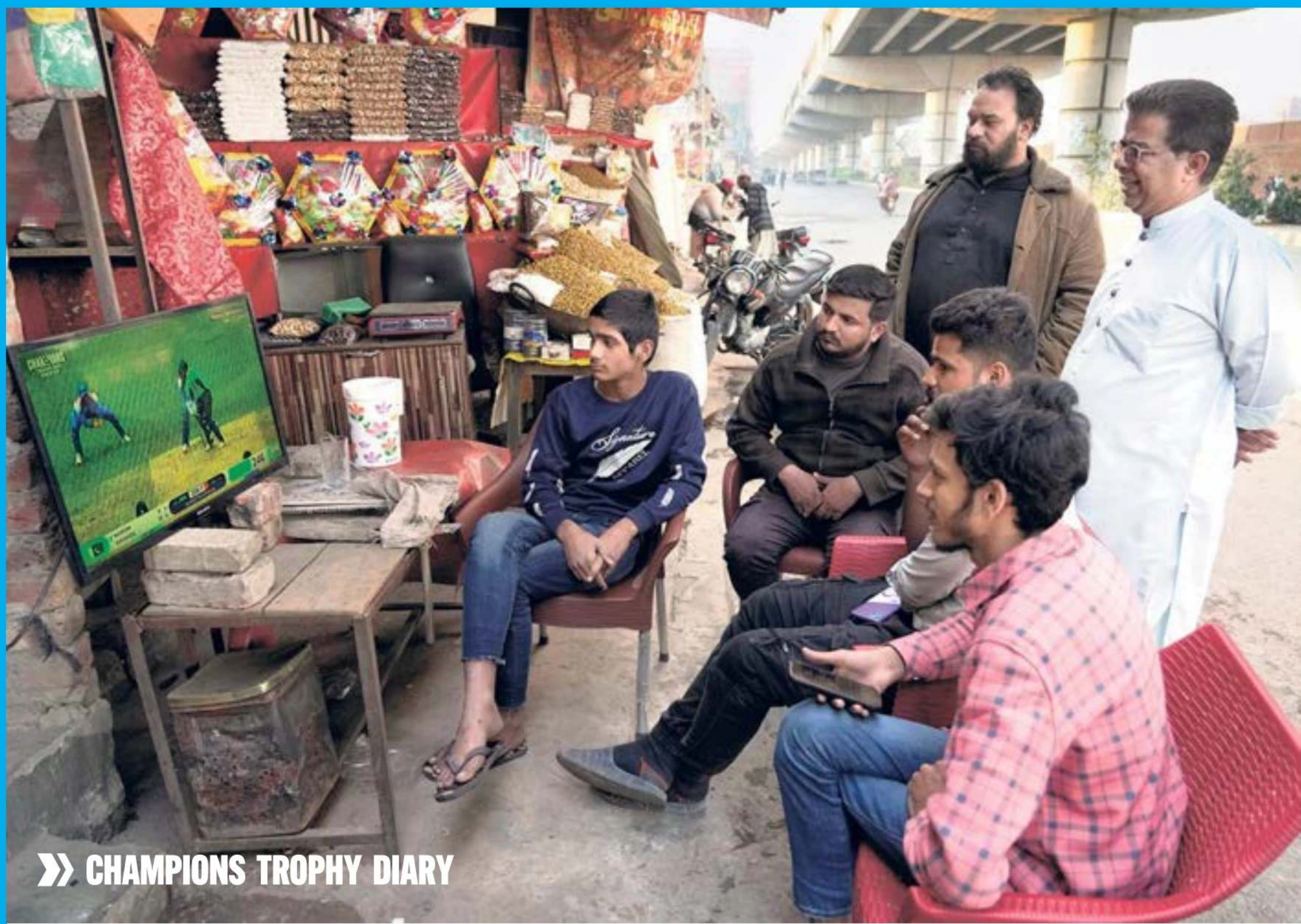


Marquee game: In Lahore's bustling streets, cricket fans huddle around a roadside shop, eyes fixed on the screen, as Pakistan takes on India in the ICC Champions Trophy showdown. AP

Beyond boundaries: Cricket, music and memories on the road

Our correspondents capture Pakistan's **warm hospitality, cricket fandom, and cultural bonds** with India during the ICC Champions Trophy, while also highlighting the muted buzz in Dubai due to the hybrid tournament model.

"*Aap pehle kabhi aaye ho idhar?* (Have you been here before?)" asked the immigration officer, examining the documents. She smiled upon learning that this was the Diary's first visit to Pakistan. "Welcome to the country. May you have a great tournament," she said.

Pakistan last hosted a global event in 1996, when the Diary was in junior school. Nearly 30 years later, covering the ICC Champions Trophy in Pakistan felt surreal. After a whirlwind journey from Mumbai to Delhi to Amritsar in a single day, the Diary arrived at the Wagah-Attari Border, ready to cross on foot.

But heavy rain posed a challenge — keeping the documents dry. With the help of porters, the luggage was managed, and after final security checks on the Indian side, the Diary stepped into Pakistan.

"*Aaj sardi bahot hai* (It's very cold

Melodic journey: As he drives through the streets of Pakistan, Adnan shares his love for Indian music. SHAYAN ACHARYA

today)," remarked a porter, guiding the Diary to the immigration centre. As he loaded the luggage into the car, he offered a tip: "*Local khana zaroor khayein*... (Do try the local food)," enthusiastically recommending must-have delicacies.

Driver Waqas, a die-hard cricket fan, nodded in agreement. The 40-minute drive to Lahore's Allama Iqbal International Airport was filled with his animated discussions about Virat Kohli, whom he admired greatly. At the airport, a massive Champions Trophy poster featuring all eight captains stood prominently. Nearby, a group of young fans clicked selfies, capturing the moment.

The flight to Karachi was smooth, and two hours later, a large sign outside the airport greeted the Diary — 'Welcome to Pakistan'.

***

On a Sunday afternoon in Lahore, at the Niazi bus station, a group of youngsters sat huddled in a corner, eyes glued to a smartphone. A roar erupted as Babar Azam struck a boundary against India in the Champions Trophy in Dubai. Cricket had once again united strangers in a shared moment of passion.

"*Yehi cricket hain, sabko ek saath kar deta hain* (Cricket unites everyone)," said Amjad from Dera Ismail Khan. "All of us are strangers, but on match days against India, everyone becomes a friend." He regretted that India wasn't playing at Gaddafi Stadium, calling it a missed once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Nearby, travel agency customers and drivers had gathered around TV screens. Initially confident, the mood soured as Pakistan lost quick wickets. "*Yaar, yeh koi run tha!* (There was never a run there!)," an elderly man exclaimed in frustration as Imam-ul-Haq was run out.

Saud Shakeel and Mohammad Rizwan briefly revived hopes, but as their wickets fell, spectators quietly dispersed and boarded their buses.

"*Aap ki team to jeet gayi* (Your team won)," remarked the hotel reception staff in Islamabad. The hotel had planned a match screening, but with Pakistan's semifinal hopes diminishing, the area lay nearly empty.

"It would have been wonderful if the team had won [against India], but people will still turn up in Pindi to show their support," said a hotel staffer. With a smile, he added, "I would love to watch Kohli in action someday." Posters of Kohli and Rohit Sharma adorned city streets, a testament to their immense popularity. On the drive from Lahore to Rawalpindi, driver Adnan was delighted to learn the Diary was from India. "India se ho? Aap ko kuch sunata hoon (You're from India? Let me play you something)," he said, grinning as he played Kumar Sanu classics.

"I'm a big fan of Kumar Sanu. I've loved his songs since childhood," he said, playing "*Sajna Sajna*" and "*Kitna Pyar Tumhe Karte Hain*."

"One day, I'd love to meet him," Adnan added, mentioning his love for Noor Jahan and Atif Aslam. "But when it comes to Hindi music, Sanu best hain..." he said with a grin. "*Idhar toh Hindi gaane kaafi chalte hain* (Here, Hindi songs are quite popular). I love listening to old songs..."

Shayan Acharya

Muted buzz

Meanwhile, the ICC Champions Trophy's hybrid model, in which Dubai hosts only India's matches while the rest of the tournament takes place in Pakistan, has resulted in little buzz about the event in the UAE's biggest city.

Dampened enthusiasm: There was no shortage of support for Team India inside the Dubai International Cricket Stadium. However, the same couldn't be said for the city as a whole, with the overall buzz surrounding the tournament remaining fairly muted. PTI

Tournament signage is largely restricted to the area surrounding Sports City, as one enters the Dubai International Cricket Stadium.

The only real sign of the tournament taking place was through the Diary's interactions with cab drivers, who were eager to strike up a conversation about cricket upon spotting a group of reporters with accreditation cards around their necks.

Most of the cabbies we encountered over the past week were from Pakistan, often reflecting the prevailing sentiment regarding their team's dismal state.

On the ride back from the stadium to our hotel, another driver from Pakistan offered us a lift from inside the stadium and welcomed us by congratulating us on India's win. He then provided a point-by-point breakdown of the game's key moments.

It was all good until he decided to throw a curveball at the end of our trip, quoting four times the price of a standard fare — perhaps hoping that a group of Indian scribes would be charitable following the Men in Blue's victory. Though we managed to settle for the usual fare, one can't blame him for trying to hustle us on a day when his team surrendered without a fight.

S. Dipak Ragav

ON THE WRITE LINE

Sunil Gavaskar

FOR MORE STORIES

FRIENDS ARE YOUR GREATEST WEALTH, AND IN MILIND REGE'S LEAVING, I HAVE BECOME ENORMOUSLY POORER

Right till the end, **he was obsessed with Mumbai cricket,** and even in the hospital, he was glued to Mumbai's progress in Ranji Trophy.

It is never easy to cope with the loss of a loved one, especially somebody you have known all your life. When Milind Rege breathed his last, I was in Dubai for the opening game of the Champions Trophy. I met him just before I left for Dubai and told him I would see him again in a few days. That wasn't to be, as he left us the day before India's opening game.

He was almost five months older than me. Both of us grew up in the same surroundings. We lived in a cluster of four buildings, each with six apartments. He lived in building number two, and I lived in building four. In between these four buildings was the compound where we played tennis-ball cricket. The Sunday afternoon tennis-ball matches between the boys from the buildings used to be watched by just about everybody who lived in the flats. They would all come to their balconies to watch us play, squabble over umpiring decisions, and generally have a good time.

We were the only two boys among all the four buildings who were admitted to a convent school by our parents. So we went to school and came back together. The same was true during college too.

He was the captain of the school's cricket team, and both of us were picked for Bombay (now Mumbai) Schools, West Zone Schools, and the All India Schools Team, which played 'Tests' against the London School Boys team. My parents wanted me to focus on my studies too, so I missed out on playing the last 'Test' of that series. Cricket was not a career option then, but it definitely opened the doors for a corporate job because inter-corporate cricket was huge in Mumbai at the time. We even played at the college level, Mumbai University and West Zone University. After the second year of college, he was offered a job by Tatas, with whom he stayed loyal throughout his life.

Being an all-rounder who was performing very, very consistently, he was picked for the Mumbai Ranji Trophy team two and a half years before I was picked. Every time Mumbai's top order struggled with the bat, it was invariably Milind, along with Ajit Naik, Karsan Ghavri, or Rakesh Tandon, who rescued the team and got them to a competitive total.

When he was barely 25 years old, he suffered a heart attack, which meant any aspirations he had of playing for India were ground to dust. Like he did when playing for Mumbai, he wouldn't just give up. He made a swift recovery, which saw him return to play for Mumbai and captain the team. Of course, at that stage, he knew that with the knowledge of his earlier health episode, he was unlikely to be considered for higher honours. But he still kept on giving his very best for Mumbai.

Even after his retirement from the game, he was actively involved with Tata Sports Club and Mumbai cricket. I used to call him regularly from

Strong bond: Sunil Gavaskar (foreground) and Milind Rege (holding trophy) knew each other since infancy and were best friends ever since.
THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

overseas to find out Mumbai's progress in the Ranji Trophy, and right from the moment he answered the phone, I would know whether Mumbai had done well or was struggling.

I remember dedicating my century at Adelaide in 1985 to him because he had just had a successful bypass surgery. He had another bypass surgery a decade or so later, but his heart had weakened considerably, though he never ever showed it or made any fuss about it. He fulfilled many roles for Tatas and Mumbai, being a selector, manager, and, in recent times, also an advisor to the Mumbai Cricket Association.

Right till the end, he was obsessed with Mumbai cricket, and even in the hospital, he was glued to Mumbai's progress. The disappointing loss in the semis would certainly have demoralised and dejected him, and that's the sad thing — that he went knowing that Mumbai was not going to be in the final. They say that friends are your greatest wealth, and in his leaving, I have become enormously poorer. I am sure, from up there, he will be checking up on what's happening in the Tatas as well as Mumbai cricket circles and wanting them to do well.

It was very nice to know of the respect shown by the Mumbai team, observing two minutes' silence once the news of his passing away came through.

While this has been sad news, the good news is India beating Pakistan and ensuring a place for themselves in the semi-final. It has been a superb all-round show, which gives us hope that they will be able to go all the way and bring the Champions Trophy back home.

I used to call Milind regularly from overseas to find out Mumbai's progress in the Ranji Trophy, and right from the moment he answered the phone, I would know whether Mumbai had done well or if Mumbai was struggling.

STATSMAN
MOHANDAS MENON

Gill gallops to 2500 ODI runs

50 } The number of innings Shubman Gill needed to aggregate 2500 runs in his ODI career. He thus becomes the quickest among 204 players who have managed to cross the 2500-run mark in ODI cricket. He achieved this milestone during his 112 against England in Ahmedabad on 12 February 2025.

Quickest to reach 2500 career runs in ODIs

Inns	M	Batter (For)	Runs	Ave.	100	50	HS	Achieved on
50	50	Shubman Gill (Ind)	2587	60.16	7	15	208	12 Feb 2025
51	52	Hashim Amla (SA)	2538	55.17	8	15	140	28 Oct 2011
52	52	Imam-ul-Haq (Pak)	2520	54.78	9	14	151	12 Jun 2022
56	59	Viv Richards (WI)	2533	55.07	5	16	153*	8 Jan 1984
56	59	Jonathan Trott (Eng)	2525	52.60	4	20	137	2 Jun 2013

India's Shubman Gill. VIJAY SONEJI

1 } The number of players older than Varun Chakaravarthy to make their ODI debut for India. In the Cuttack ODI against England on 9 February 2025, he became the second oldest after former wicket-keeper Farokh Engineer.

Oldest to make debut in an ODI match for India

Age	Player	Against	Venue	Date	Result
36y-138d	Farokh Engineer	England	Leeds	13 Jul 1974	Lost
33y-164d	Varun Chakaravarthy	England	Cuttack	9 Feb 2025	Won
33y-103d	Ajit Wadekar	England	Leeds	13 Jul 1974	Lost
32y-350d	Dilip Doshi	Australia	Melbourne	6 Dec 1980	Won
32y-307d	S. Abid Ali	England	Leeds	13 Jul 1974	Lost

Note: The Leeds ODI as shown here was India's first-ever ODI game

3 } The number of batters who have made five or more ODI centuries while chasing targets of 300-plus. In the Cuttack ODI against England, Rohit Sharma became the latest to join this elite list. Rohit also became the third batter after Virat Kohli and Jason Roy to aggregate over 700 runs in a successful run-chase of 300+ in ODIs and the third after Sachin Tendulkar and Kohli to aggregate 6000 runs while batting second in ODIs. The three tables below provide all the details.

Most ODI centuries while chasing targets over 300-plus

100s	Batter	Runs	Opp (Total)	Venue	Date	Team total (result)
9	V. Kohli	107	SL (315/6)	Kolkata	24 Dec 2009	317/3 (won by 7 wkts)
	(Ind)	133*	SL (320/4)	Hobart	28 Feb 2012	321/3 (won by 7 wkts)
		183	Pak (329/6)	Mirpur	18 Mar 2012	330/4 (won by 6 wkts)
		100*	Aus (359/5)	Jaipur	16 Oct 2013	362/1 (won by 9 wkts)
		115*	Aus (350/6)	Nagpur	30 Oct 2013	351/4 (won by 6 wkts)
		106	Aus (348/8)	Canberra	20 Jan 2016	323/10 (lost by 25 runs)
		122	Eng (350/7)	Pune	15 Jan 2017	356/7 (won by 3 wkts)
		140	WI (322/8)	Guwahati	21 Oct 2018	326/2 (won by 8 wkts)
		123	Aus (313/5)	Ranchi	8 Mar 2019	281/10 (lost by 32 runs)
5	J. Roy	162	SL (305/5)	The Oval	29 Jun 2016	309/4 (won by 6 wkts)
	(Eng)	180	Aus (304/8)	Melbourne	14 Jan 2018	308/5 (won by 5 wkts)
		101	Aus (310/8)	Chester-le-Street	21 Jun 2018	314/4 (won by 6 wkts)
		123	WI (360/8)	Bridgetown	20 Feb 2019	364/4 (won by 6 wkts)
		114	Pak (340/7)	Nottingham	17 May 2019	341/7 (won by 3 wkts)
5	R. Sharma	111*	Aus (359/5)	Jaipur	30 May 2010	362/1 (won by 9 wkts)
	(Ind)	150	SA (303/5)	Kanpur	11 Oct 2015	298/7 (lost by 5 runs)
		152*	WI (322/8)	Guwahati	21 Oct 2018	326/2 (won by 8 wkts)
		102	Eng (337/7)	Birmingham	30 Jun 2019	306/5 (lost by 31 runs)
		119	Eng (304/10)	Cuttack	9 Feb 2025	308/6 (won by 4 wkts)

Most ODI runs in successful run chases of 300-plus

Runs	Batter (for)	Inns	Ave.	S/R	100s
998	V. Kohli (Ind)	11	124.75	127.30	7
886	J. Roy (Eng)	10	88.60	124.97	5
787	R. Sharma (Ind)	10	112.43	104.93	3
603	J. Root (Eng)	8	120.60	100.67	3
528	R. Taylor (NZ)	5	176.00	107.10	4

Most ODI runs in run-chases

Runs	Batter (for)	M	Inns	NO	Ave.	S/R	100	50	HS
8720	S. Tendulkar (Ind)	236	232	26	42.33	88.44	17	52	175
7857	V. Kohli (Ind)	163	156	33	63.88	93.54	27	40	183
6026	R. Sharma (Ind)	152	148	28	50.22	91.48	16	37	152*
5742	S. Jayasuriya (SL/Asia)	214	210	15	29.44	93.35	10	30	152
5575	J. Kallis (SA/Africa)	169	158	34	44.95	71.91	5	45	139

Note: Virat Kohli's 27 centuries are the most by any batter in a chase, followed by Tendulkar (17) and Rohit (16).

338 } The number of sixes hit by Rohit Sharma in his ODI career. When he hit the first six during his knock of 119, he passed the tally of 331 by West Indian Chris Gayle to become the batter with the second most sixes in ODI cricket history. Only Shahid Afridi has hit more.

Leading six hitters in ODIs

Sixes	Batter (for)	M	Inns	NO	Runs	Ave.	S/R	100	50	HS	Balls/6
351	S. Afridi (Pak/ICC/Asia)	398	369	27	8064	23.57	117.00	6	39	124	20
338	R. Sharma (Ind)	268	260	36	10988	49.05	92.69	32	57	264	35
331	C. Gayle (WI)	301	294	17	10480	37.83	87.19	25	54	215	36

22 } The number of ODI centuries from Rohit Sharma after attaining the age of 30. His century against England in Cuttack takes him to the top of the list.

Most ODI centuries after the age of 30

100s	Batter (for)	M	Inns	NO	Runs	Ave.	S/R	50s	HS
22	R. Sharma (Ind)	115	113	13	5857	58.57	101.38	28	208*
21	S. Jayasuriya (SL/Asia)	262	258	11	8676	35.13	91.62	39	189
21	T. Dilshan (SL)	232	219	22	8389	42.58	88.06	40	161*

9 } India's unbeaten run at home in bilateral ODI series against England since 1993. Its 3-0 win in the recent series has extended its unbeaten run since its last defeat to England, which came 40 years ago, in January 1985. Only on four occasions in ODI history has a side managed to remain unbeaten in nine or more series against an opponent; India is the only side to do it twice — against Sri Lanka and now England. The second table lists all the bilateral series results between India and England, in India since 1981.

Consecutive unbeaten head-to-head ODI home bilateral series

Series	Unbeaten side	Losing side	From	To	Last series lost	Won	Shared
11+	England	Pakistan	24 May 1978	13 Jul 2021	0-2 (2) on 3 Sep 1974	10	1
11	India	Sri Lanka	12 Sep 1982	15 Jan 2023	none	10	1
9	Bangladesh	Zimbabwe	20 Jan 2005	6 Mar 2020	0-3 (3) on 26 Nov 2001	8	1
9+	India	England	18 Jan 1993	12 Feb 2025	1-4 (5) on 27 Jan 1985	7	2

*Notes: * England had won six home series against Pakistan from May 1978 to Jun 2003 and has won its last four ODI series since Sep 2010.*
** India has won outright its last six home series against Sri Lanka since Oct 2005.*
** India has won its last seven home series against England since Mar 2006.*

In the 11 head-to-head bilateral ODI series in India (India won 8, England won 1, Shared 2)

Series played	Venue	M	Ind	Eng	Series won by	
Nov 1981-Jan 1982	Ind	3	2	1	India	*India's first-ever bilateral ODI series against any opponent*
Dec 1984-Jan 1985	Ind	5	1	4	England	*England's only ODI series win in India came 40 yrs ago*
Jan-Mar 1993	Ind	6	3	3	Shared	
Jan-Feb 2002	Ind	6	3	3	Shared	
Mar-Apr 2006	Ind	6	5	1	India	
Nov-Dec 2008	Ind	5	5	0	India	
Oct 2011	Ind	5	5	0	India	
Jan 2013	Ind	5	3	2	India	
Jan 2017	Ind	3	2	1	India	
Mar 2021	Ind	3	2	1	India	
Feb 2025	Ind	3	3	0	India	

All records are correct and updated until 18 February 2025.

Tense finish: Shardul Thakur's valiant half-century wasn't enough as defending champion Mumbai fell to last year's finalist Vidarbha in a gripping Ranji Trophy semifinal. EMMANUAL YOGINI

Vidarbha's celebrations, Kerala's composure – two semifinals, one dream

Our correspondents bring you the **highlights and intriguing moments,** both on and off the field, from the Ranji Trophy semifinals.

Beating Pakistan has often been considered as good as winning the World Cup for India's men's cricket team — at least until a decade ago. Similarly, in the Ranji Trophy, most teams, throughout the tournament's nine-decade history, have treated their fixture against Mumbai with a similar sense of occasion.

While every team dreams of lifting the Ranji Trophy, facing Mumbai has always carried an added sense of challenge — often evoking a sentiment of "let's hope for the best." Little wonder, then, that the Vidarbha Cricket Association (VCA) wore a festive look after the home side triumphed over the domestic powerhouse in the semifinal, winning by 80 runs. Despite Vidarbha having defeated Mumbai at the same venue six years ago, celebrations erupted at the greens of Jamtha minutes after Ajinkya Rahane returned to the dressing room following his post-match media interaction. Vidarbha players' families, former cricketers, association members, and a select group of privileged fans in the members' stands all gathered on the ground alongside VCA officials to revel in the team's convincing victory

Put it in the Louvre: Jalaj Saxena triumphantly holds up Salman Nizar's helmet — the very one that deflected Arzan Nagwaswalla's slog-sweep, sending the ball gently into Sachin Baby's hands. R.V. MOORTHY

against the 42-time champion.

Photo sessions and autograph sprees continued for well over an hour. Even after coach Usman Gani summoned the players for a team meeting — reminding them that the ultimate target was still a week away — it took captain Akshay Wadkar, highest run-scorer Yash Rathod, and leading wicket-taker Harsh Dubey an extra 10 minutes to reach the dressing room, as eager fans clamoured for autographs.

For the first four days of the semifinal, however, the crowd at the VCA Stadium had primarily turned up for a glimpse of India's T20I captain, Suryakumar Yadav, who was part of the opposition camp **(pic below, facing page)**. With Suryakumar, former India captain Rahane, T20I star Shivam Dube, and all-rounder Shardul Thakur among the marquee names, the match generated an enthusiastic response from spectators. On day three — a state holiday marking Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's birth anniversary — well over 3,000 fans flocked to Jamtha. While many travelled from neighbouring districts, some even made the journey from Madhya Pradesh, crossing the State border to witness the contest. One particularly devoted Suryakumar fan, who had travelled from Chhindwara — approximately 130 km from the stadium — had gone the extra mile by painting his entire body in the tricolour. Instead of the Ashoka Chakra, he emblazoned "Surya" in blue across his chest. His dedication was rewarded when Suryakumar stopped to take a selfie with him while leaving the stadium after the day's play.

Amol Karhadkar

Semifinal for the ages

It was a pleasant morning at the Narendra Modi Stadium, with a crisp breeze sweeping across the ground as play resumed on the fifth day of the Ranji Trophy semifinal between Gujarat and Kerala. But despite the refreshing weather, the players from both sides were feeling the heat — 27 runs and three wickets separated them from a place in the final.

"*Nammal ithu jeikum* (We will win this)," the Kerala team manager had declared on the eve of the decisive day. But the situation suggested otherwise. The two batters at the crease had already put on 91 runs, looking rock-solid in defence. Gujarat, you could say, was firmly in the driver's seat.

Kerala's preparations had been meticulous. Four spinners worked tirelessly in the nets before play began, with close-in catchers ready to pounce on any low-flying chances. The wicketkeeper honed his reflexes, anticipating sharp turn from the surface. Under head coach Amay Khurasiya, a former India international from Madhya Pradesh, Kerala had transformed into one of the grittiest outfits in the competition. The support staff spoke of his strict methods — only those willing to fully commit to his philosophy found a place in the side. Throughout the match, Khurasiya remained deeply involved, passing notes scribbled on small pieces of paper to the batters whenever possible. In the dugout, coordinated claps rang out, lifting the energy of those battling it out in the middle. Team meetings were a daily ritual after play, though the staff revealed that little was actually spoken. Instead, the coach chose to inspire his players with motivational videos — one featuring former India football captain Sunil Chhetri stood out in particular.

A few overs into the final morning, twin strikes from Aditya Sarwate sparked wild celebrations in the dugout. "*Oru ball madhi* (One ball is enough)," became the rallying cry from the bench. But Gujarat's last pair refused to surrender easily, stretching the contest to its very limits. Then, with just two runs needed, Arzan Nagwaswalla's attempted slog-sweep took a deflection off the helmet of Salman Nizar at short leg and lobbed gently to Sachin Baby. Kerala's players erupted in unrestrained joy — Sarwate sprinted across the field, high-fiving his skipper along the way. Salman, still dazed from the blow, collapsed to the ground, engulfed in bear hugs from his jubilant teammates. Amidst the euphoria, Khurasiya remained composed. He raised his palm toward the staff, revealing the number two written on it — a prediction he had made the night before. He had confidently stated that Kerala would either take the lead by six runs or just two. In the end, Kerala's fate unfolded just as he had foreseen.

Anish Pathiyil

Embracing the competition: Bengaluru, one of this year's Women's Premier League T20 venues, has enthusiastically welcomed the event. RAJDEEP SAHA

No longer an undercard, and a fast game ignites a gentle-paced city!

Our correspondents share **candid moments and firsthand experiences** from covering the WPL matches in Vadodara and Bengaluru.

"People don't watch the WPL here. Well, they do, but not as much as the IPL. You can't even get tickets for the IPL," an auto driver candidly remarked when asked if there were any signs of Women's Premier League fever in the Garden City.

After a four-hour train journey from Chennai to Bengaluru and a day spent familiarising itself with the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium, the Diary felt a knot in its stomach. After all, this was its first outstation assignment — kicked off by Royal Challengers Bengaluru versus Mumbai Indians, a rivalry for the ages in Indian franchise cricket.

But before the Diary could dwell on its nerves, it was pleasantly surprised to see the auto driver's claim being challenged. Yes, there were fans in Virat Kohli jerseys. One RCB supporter even had 'RO45' painted on his face — a choice that left the Diary somewhat perplexed. Yet, among them were also those who had turned up purely for the

women's game.

One such fan, a devoted member of the Danni Wyatt-Hodge faithful, had travelled all the way from Mumbai to watch his favourite player in action. His poster read, 'Danni, watching you from the stadium is always a treat to my eyes.'

The Diary also met a die-hard Harmanpreet Kaur supporter. Clad in a Mumbai Indians jersey, the fan from Odisha had been enamoured with the batter long before her legendary 171 against Australia [2017 Women's ODI World Cup].

Then came the match. The Diary silently prayed it wouldn't go to a Super Over, and thankfully, the cricketing gods obliged. The report was filed, the press conferences attended. Now came the challenge of finding an auto back to the hotel.

Deeply engrossed in Uber and Ola, the Diary happened to bump into the Harmanpreet fan once again. "How was the match?" it asked — realising in hindsight how redundant the question was. Mumbai Indians had won.

After exchanging goodbyes and with no auto in sight, the Diary plugged in its earphones and began the walk back to the hotel. It was then that it dawned — the nerves had settled, and the WPL season had truly arrived in Bengaluru.

Rajdeep Saha

Feast worthy: Indulging in Vadodara's rich culinary traditions, especially its sumptuous thali, is a must for any traveller. KAVITA MENON

Cricket, chaos and culinary delights

The Diary's stint in Vadodara was all about stepping into a world of unknowns. Arriving in the city on a chilly morning, the mix of excitement and nervousness was palpable — covering cricket was a departure from the usual motorsport beat. But amid the matches, finding time to explore was just as important.

A local described Vadodara as a city that wakes up *aaram se* (leisurely), easing into the day with a wholesome breakfast before truly getting to work around noon.

Like many developing urban centres in India, Vadodara has undergone a series of facelifts in recent years. Little did the Diary realise that the resulting congestion and unexpected traffic jams would become its prime opportunity to take in the city's essence.

Another chance to explore came on the final evening, after the conclusion of the Women's Premier League (WPL) inaugural leg, in the company of an old colleague.

Race Course Road — a bustling roundabout lined with some of Vadodara's trendiest shops and restaurants — was the ideal starting point. A Gujarati thali, highly recommended for travellers, was devoured in no time.

Auto rides from one stop to another turned into impromptu guided tours, courtesy of the friend, who enthusiastically shared facts about every passing landmark. An avid cricket enthusiast, well-versed in Gujarat's stadiums, she somehow forgot to mention Kotambi.

Situated on the outskirts of the city, the BCA Stadium in Kotambi was tasked with hosting the much-anticipated third edition of the WPL. Glorious sunsets painted the stadium in hues of orange, much like the locals who turned up in their team's colours. The absence of Gujarat Giants on the fixture list that day didn't dampen spirits — fans still turned out in huge numbers, eager to witness some of the world's best in action. Vadodara deserves more cricket — its people, and the Diary, would certainly agree. And Kotambi is ready for it!

Kavita Menon

VIJAY SONEJI

India completes 3-0 clean sweep against England

1 England was bowled out for just 214 in 34.2 overs, succumbing to a heavy 142-run loss in the **third and final one-dayer.**

England's dismal tour of India ended with another crushing defeat as it suffered a 3-0 whitewash in the ODI series. In the final match in Ahmedabad, England was bowled out for just 214 in 34.2 overs, succumbing to a heavy 142-run loss.

Earlier, India posted a formidable 356, with Shubman Gill leading the charge with a sublime 112 off 102 balls, while Shreyas Iyer contributed 78 and Virat Kohli added 52.

This series defeat marked a disappointing start for Brendon McCullum as England's white-ball coach, following an already underwhelming 4-1 loss in the T20I series.

2

GETTY IMAGES

Sri Lanka thrashed Australia 2-0 in a two-match ODI series. In the opening match, Charith Asalanka scored a gritty, career-best 127, helping the host set a 216-run target. Sri Lanka bowled out the visitor for 165, courtesy of Maheesh Theekshana's four-wicket haul, to go 1-0 up. After opting to bat in the second game, Kusal Mendis' fifth ODI hundred and Asalanka's unbeaten 78 helped Sri Lanka post a commanding 281 for four. In reply, Australia was bundled out for 107 – its lowest ODI total in Asia – and stumbled to a 174-run loss.

3

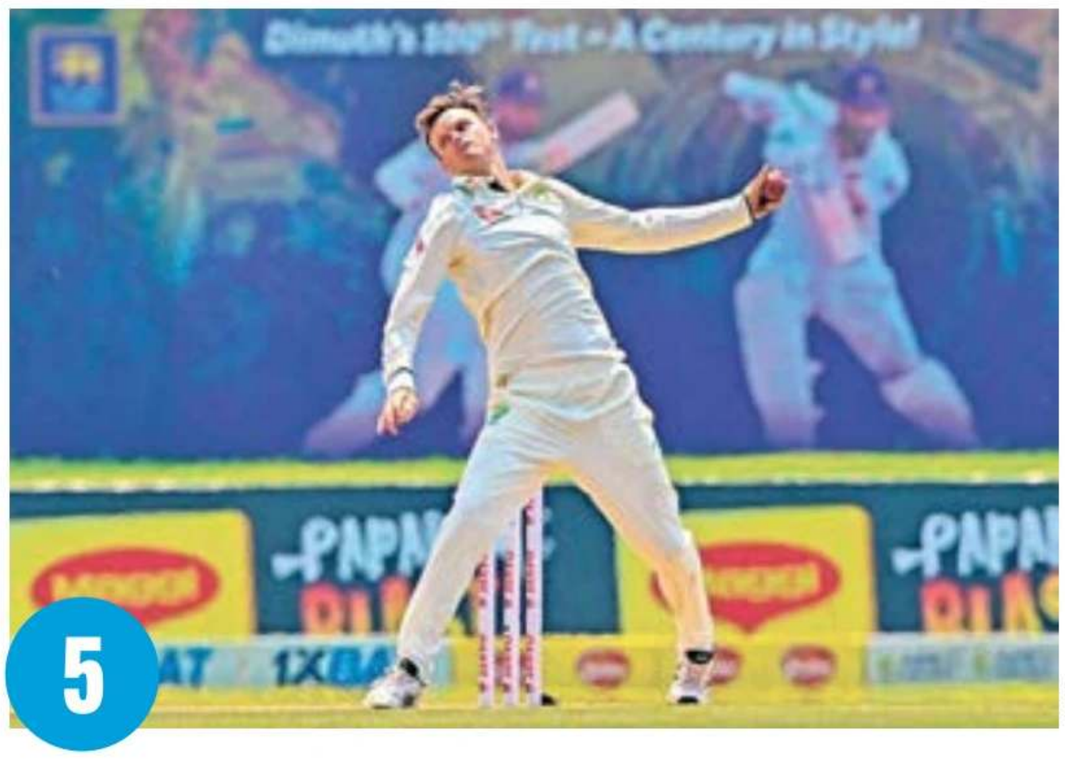
TWITTER | @ZIMCRICKETV

Zimbabwe clinched the three-match ODI series 2-1 against Ireland after Ben Curran's maiden ODI century helped the team cruise to a nine-wicket victory in the decider. Curran and opener Brian Bennett **(above)** made easy work of the 240-run chase and helped Zimbabwe seal its first ODI series win since March 2023. The host took the lead after Zimbabwe secured a 49-run victory, thanks to Bennett's 163-ball 169 and Blessing Muzarabani's four-for. Ireland bounced back in the second match as Curtis Campher's three-wicket haul and 63 with the bat powered the visitor to a six-wicket series-levelling win. While the opener of the three-match T20I series was washed out, Zimbabwe won the second game by three wickets.

4

AP

New Zealand clinched the Tri-Nation series title after beating host Pakistan by five wickets in the final to make a strong statement ahead of the ICC Champions Trophy. Pacer Will O'Rourke and the spin duo of Michael Bracewell and Mitchell Santner dismantled the Pakistani line-up, which folded for 242. Daryl Mitchell and Tom Latham then hit fifties as the Kiwis coasted to the target with 28 balls remaining. New Zealand remained unbeaten, beating both Pakistan and South Africa in the league stage, while the home team completed a record 353-run chase against a second-string Proteas side to book its spot in the final.



5

AFP

Australian spinner Matthew Kuhnemann, the highest wicket-taker in the Test series against Sri Lanka, was reported for a suspect bowling action. Cricket Australia confirmed the development, stating that match officials raised concerns following the second Test in Galle. Kuhnemann must undergo an official assessment to determine whether his bowling action complies with the regulations. If his action is found to be illegal, he will be suspended from bowling in international cricket until he modifies his action and passes a subsequent reassessment, but he can continue playing domestic cricket for Tasmania.

MARINERS HOLD THE FORT IN DOMINANT TITLE DEFENCE

The defending champion's intelligent planning and effective implementation was evident in its **authoritative performance,** accomplishing 16 wins, four draws, and just two losses in its successful pursuit of the title.

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With a legacy spanning over 150 years in the country, Indian football has seen many historic clubs rise to the top. This season, Mohun Bagan Super Giant, the 136-year-old powerhouse, etched its name in history once again by securing the Indian Super League's League Shield for the second consecutive time, a testament to its consistency and dominance.

The immensity of this feat could be gauged from the wild celebrations of the otherwise reserved and undemonstrative head coach of The Mariners, Jose Molina **(left)**.

The moment the referee blew the final whistle, signalling Mohun Bagan's solitary goal win over a visiting Odisha FC, the Spanish gaffer ran onto the pitch and started pumping his fists in a display of unbounded jubilation.

It was very much in line with the scenes that unfolded in the stands of the Salt Lake Stadium, where some 60,000 home fans went into raptures after seeing their team accomplish 52 points in 22 matches to reach a stage

Last laugh: Dimitri Petratos (left, centre) scored the only goal of the match in added time. Mohun Bagan broke many records on the way to its title, including securing six successive clean sheets among a total of 14. It also scored the highest number of goals (43) and conceded the fewest (14) on its way to the title. FSDL

of invincibility with two matches to spare (second-placed FC Goa, which has 42 from 21, could reach a maximum of 51 if it wins its remaining three matches). What made Mohun Bagan's achievement even bigger was the fact that it had the highest accumulation of points in the history of the ISL.

The title marked the fruition of intelligent planning and effective implementation. This was evident in the team's authoritative performance as Mohun Bagan accomplished 16 wins, four draws, and suffered just two losses in its successful pursuit of the title.

The team broke many records, including securing six successive clean sheets among a total of 14. Another factor aiding its success was creating the ideal balance of attack and defence, reflected in the fact that Mohun Bagan scored the highest number of goals (43) and conceded the fewest (14) on its way to the title.

And in the title count, The Mariners also established themselves as one of the best performers in the ISL by winning a trophy in three successive seasons. Mohun Bagan won the ISL Cup in the 2022-23 season before picking up the League Shield in the next two, reaching a level of unmatched consistency. Mumbai City FC has won the League Shield and the Cup on two occasions each, placing it one up in terms of the total number of trophies, but Mohun Bagan outscores it in terms of consistency.

"To win a trophy, you need to be a team. And it is not about having 11 players but a group of players. A title is realised when everybody is working in the same direction. The support of the owner and management is really important. So is the contribution of the coaching staff, the supporting staff and, of course, the quality and hard work of the players," Molina said when he was asked about the recipe for success.

Molina arrived with great credentials, having served as the sporting director of the Spanish football federation, and he proved his worth by shepherding Mohun Bagan to the title.

"Every title, for us as a player and as a coach, is special. You start with dreams at the beginning of the season, and it feels really good when your plans and hard work bring results at the end of the season. Our goal is to make the fans happy, and today they are the happiest fans in the world. I am happy for all the support they have given us through the league," Molina added.

This reaffirmed Molina's special bond with Kolkata, as he had helped ATK (the previous name of the franchise before it merged with Mohun Bagan in 2020) win the ISL Cup in 2016. "Winning a title gives me a sense of fulfilment. So, both titles are important in my career," Molina said while setting his sights on the next target — winning the 2025 ISL Cup.

Hunger for trophies: Mohun Bagan established themselves as one of the best performers in the ISL by winning a trophy in three successive seasons — the ISL Cup in the 2022-23 season and the League Shield in the next two. FSDL

One for the fans: Some 60,000 home fans went into raptures at the Salt Lake Stadium after seeing their team accomplish this mammoth feat. FSDL

TALISMANS ON FIRE

As Liverpool's Mohamed Salah continued his **fiery form,** Luka Modric rolled back the years with an excellent strike for Real Madrid.

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There are seasons when a team's football is so ruthless and pristine that victory is inevitable. In the last four seasons, Pep Guardiola's Manchester City has been that team in English top-flight football, but the 2024-25 season has belonged to Arne Slot and his well-oiled Liverpool side.

In its latest win, Liverpool beat defending champion Man City 2-0 to go 11 points clear at the top of the table, making it the overwhelming favourite to win its 20th Premier League title.

This team might lack the flair and the swashbuckling nature often associated with the Jurgen Klopp era, but Slot's Liverpool is effective and can churn out results even on bad days — something champion teams tend to do.

Against Man City, Liverpool took its chances, as Pep Guardiola's men enjoyed more possession and had more shots on target. Leading the Reds' charge was its Egyptian talisman Salah **(left)**, who scored a goal and set up Dominik Szoboszlai for the second

In doing so, he became the first player in Premier League history to score and assist in both matches against the reigning champion in a single season.

Salah's pass for Szoboszlai was his 11th away assist of the season, a

MODRIC'S INCREDIBLE STRIKE FROM OUTSIDE THE BOX PROMPTED COACH CARLO ANCELOTTI TO CALL THE 39-YEAR-OLD A 'GIFT TO FOOTBALL' DURING HIS POST-MATCH PRESS CONFERENCE

GETTY IMAGES

joint record he now shares with Cesc Fabregas, who achieved that total in the 2014-15 season with Chelsea.

Meanwhile, his 16 overall assists this season are more than that of any Liverpool player in Premier League history, overtaking Steve McManaman's tally of 15 in 1995-96.

Salah has scored and assisted in 11 Premier League matches in 2024/25, the most by a player in a single season in one of Europe's big five leagues since Lionel Messi did so with 11 for Barcelona in 2014/15.

Liverpool's primary challenger, Arsenal, suffered a major setback in the title race after a 1-0 home loss against West Ham. While coach Mikel Arteta urged his players to fuel their anger positively after the loss, it would take a major collapse from Liverpool for the Gunners to come back into contention.

Another London heavyweight, Chelsea, suffered a disappointing result after losing 1-2 against Aston Villa, in a match where Marcus Rashford announced himself to Villa fans by assisting both goals for his team.

It would have been another disastrous week for Ruben Amorim after his Manchester United side trailed 0-2 against Everton at Goodison Park but a second-half charge saw the Red Devils come back and take a precious point courtesy of strikes from Bruno Fernandes and Manuel Ugarte.

Tottenham Hotspur looks like a rejuvenated side, and Ange Postecoglou's men showed that with a dominant 4-1 win against Ipswich Town, which saw Brennan Johnson grab a brace along with strikes from Djed Spence and Dejan Kulusevski.

Newcastle United and Nottingham Forest played a seven-goal thriller, with the former bagging a 4-3 win at home.

After gameweek 26, Liverpool leads the standings with 64 points. Arsenal is second with 53, having played a game less.

Nottingham and Man City are third and fourth with 47 and 44 points, respectively. Chelsea lies seventh with 43 points, while Man United languishes in 15th with 30 points. Tottenham is 12th with 33 points.

La Liga

Barcelona needed a win to maintain momentum and stay at the top of the table, and it did so with a 2-0 away victory against Las Palmas. However, Hansi Flick's men were made to work hard.

Despite enjoying the lion's share of possession, Barca struggled to create chances in the first half, but Flick's team-talk at the break seemed to have worked as it came out all guns blazing in the second. Dani Olmo opened the scoring in the 62nd minute, and Ferran Torres added the second late in stoppage time.

Real Madrid also needed a win to keep the pressure on arch-rival Barcelona, and the defending champion did that with a 2-0 home win against Girona. The highlight of the match was Madrid's opening goal, where 39-year-old Luka Modric rolled back the years with an incredible strike from outside the box. The Croatia international was called a 'gift to football' by Ancelotti during his post-match press conference. Vinicius added Madrid's second in the 83rd minute to seal all three points for Los Blancos.

Real's city rival Atletico Madrid had a simple outing against Valencia, clinching a 3-0 away win, as Julian Alvarez bagged a brace for Diego Simeone's men.

Athletic Bilbao, which is vying for

a Champions League spot, took a step in the right direction and in style after thrashing lowly Valladolid 7-1 as the misfortunes of the Ronaldo Nazario-owned team continued.

After gameweek 25, Barcelona leads the standings with 54 points. Real Madrid, also on 54 points, stays second due to its inferior head-to-head record. Atletico has a point less than its city rival and is third in the table, while Athletic is fourth with 48 points.

Bundesliga

Xabi Alonso and his boys might not have been able to emulate the invincible form from last season but they have continued to set records.

With Bayer Leverkusen's 2-0 win over relegation-threatened Holstein Kiel, Alonso extended his unbeaten run in away games to 28 in the Bundesliga (W20 D8) — a record.

Meanwhile, midfielder Florian Wirtz reached double figures in assists in consecutive seasons of the league — only Salah has managed to do so in each of the last two seasons in Europe's big five leagues.

Leverkusen had six draws in its last season, which it won. With 11 games left to play, it has already drawn eight games, leaving it second in the standings below Bayern Munich, which is looking to win its first league title under manager Vincent Kompany.

Kompany's side had missed out on automatic qualification in the Champions League after finishing 12th in the standings. But the Bavarians have picked up tempo since, qualifying for the round of 16 with a playoff win against Celtic.

In the league, they continued to march forward with a 4-0 victory over 2022 Europa League champion Eintracht Frankfurt, extending its lead to eight points.

Serie A

Lautaro Martinez made history with Inter Milan as the Nerazzurri returned to winning ways against Genoa, after suffering a narrow defeat to

Consistent: Lautaro Martinez became the first overseas player at Inter Milan to reach double figures in goals in six different Serie A seasons. AFP

Dembele scored hat-tricks against VfB Stuttgart and Brest in consecutive matches, becoming the first player to do so as a PSG player in all competitions.

On song: Ousmane Dembele has found the net 16 times in all competitions. AFP

Juventus a week ago.

Martinez netted the winner in the 1-0 win, becoming the first overseas player at the club to reach double figures in goals in six different Serie A seasons.

Defending champion Inter got fortune on its side with the victory, as its closest competitor, Napoli, which was leading the standings before the game, was beaten 2-1 by Como.

The winner was scored by 19-year-old Assane Diao, who became the youngest player with more than five goals in all European leagues this season.

Atalanta, third in the table, thrashed Empoli 5-0 and looks to be making a late surge to challenge for its first-ever top-division title. With 54 points, it is just three points short of Inter.

After 26 rounds, Italian Super Cup champion AC Milan remains out of contention.

Milan's manager, Sergio Conceicao, who took charge of the club in December 2024, now faces the sudden challenge of turning the tide for a side that was eliminated from the Champions League and missed out on a chance to enter the top six after a 1-2 loss to Torino.

Ligue 1

With 56 points and a game in hand, Luis Enrique's Paris Saint-Germain has a 10-point cushion over second-placed Marseille. Its most reliable striking option has been former Barcelona talisman Ousmane Dembele, who has found the net 16 times in all competitions.

Earlier this month, he scored hat-tricks against VfB Stuttgart and Brest in consecutive matches, becoming the first player to do so as a PSG player in all competitions.

Ligue 1, often derided outside of France for its quality, also gained a substantial reason to silence its critics in February.

France was the only country to see all of its clubs qualify past the league phase of the UEFA Champions League.

League standings and points tally are updated as of February 24, 2025.

All smiles: (Left to right) **1.** Jyothi Yarraji and Animesh Kujur celebrate their 200m golds; **2.** Records were set by multiple weightlifters, inculding Bindyarani Devi in the women's 55kg category; **3.** Moumita Mondal won gold in the women's long jump. Pics: RITU RAJ KONWAR. **4.** Dhinidhi Desinghu set new national records in the women's 400m and 200m freestyle categories, picking up 11 medals, including nine golds. PIC: STAN RAYAN

THE FUTURE SHONE BRIGHT IN UTTARAKHAND

The 38th National Games **lived up to expectations,** producing competitive performances with a host of new faces to watch out for.

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By any measure, the 38th National Games that concluded on February 14 should count as among the most ambitious domestic sports tournaments undertaken in India. Over 18 days, some 10,000 athletes competed in 35 disciplines spread across eight locations in Uttarakhand. The Games lived up to expectations — a high-level event, producing competitive performances with a host of new faces to watch out for.

This undertaking came with its fair share of challenges. The scheduling was not ideal. The previous two editions in Gujarat (2022) and Goa (2023) were held towards the end of the international calendar, which meant participating athletes were at the peak of their abilities.

This time around, the Games were bracketed between the last week of January and the second week of February — a particularly awkward time in the international calendar. Barring Sarabjot Singh and Swapnil Kusale, none of India's other Olympic medallists took part in the competition. Track and field athletes were still coming off their off-season. Some shooters noted that the late winter cold in the hill state stiffened their fingers and made it harder to gauge their trigger pulls.

There were issues before the Games began too. Although players with roots in Uttarakhand have been counted among India's greatest athletes, most — like Abhinav Bindra, Jaspal Rana, Lakshya Sen, and Rishabh Pant — have had to make their careers elsewhere. With its hilly terrain and lack of sporting facilities, the state has found it hard to develop as a sports hub.

Keeping the National Games in mind, a massive effort was made to develop infrastructure. According to official estimates, some 1,000 crore rupees were spent in preparation. A shooting hall was built from scratch at the Maharana Pratap Sports Complex in Dehradun, along with a

Shadowing Neeraj: Sachin Yadav's 84.39m throw was one of the biggest highlights at the Games. RITU RAJ KONWAR

multi-purpose hall and a renovated athletics track.

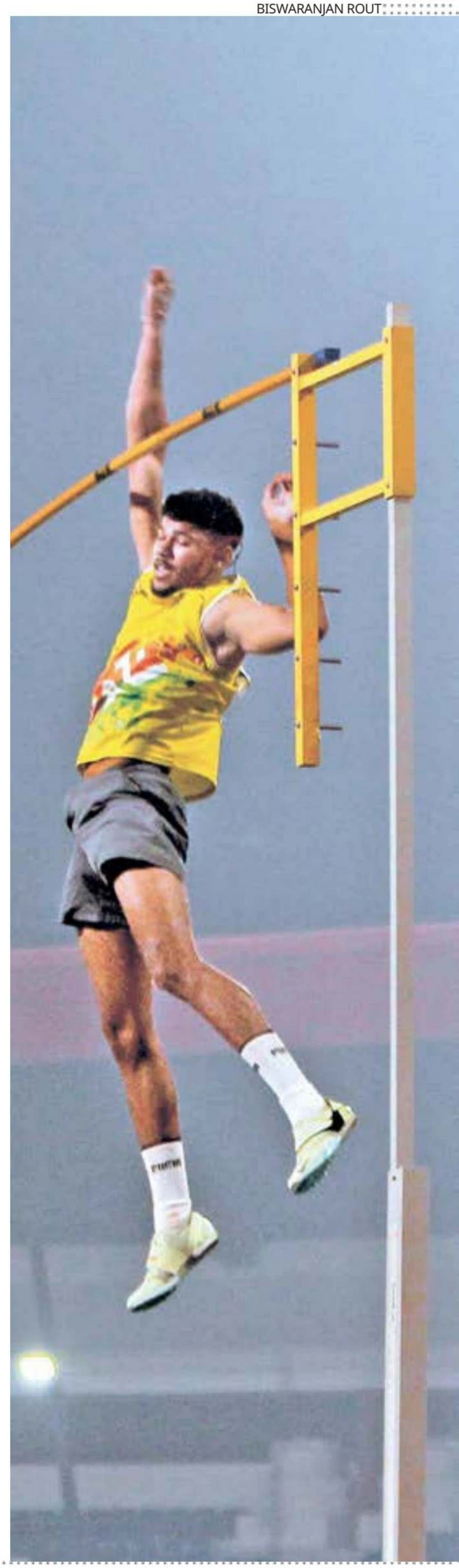
Although these facilities were to some extent rushed — the equipment at the shooting range in particular was being installed just a few hours before the start of the competition — the fact remains that these same venues would witness some impressive performances by Indian athletes.

There were enough storylines for fans of Indian sport to look back on. In the men's javelin throw, Sachin Yadav announced himself as a potential heir to Neeraj Chopra with a world-leading 84.39m throw, although he looked good for a much bigger mark, having cleared around 86m in a warm-up attempt. At just 20 years old, Madhya Pradesh pole vaulter Dev Meena **(right)** improved on the national record by 0.01m to finish at 5.32m, and looked set to add several more inches by the end of the year. Animesh Kujur's breezy 100m and 200m double suggests he should be taking a crack at the Indian national record very soon.

There were impressive numbers posted at the shooting range too, with Ashi Chouksey (598/600) and Aishwary Pratap Tomar (597/600) notching qualification scores in excess of the world record in the women's and men's 50m three-position category, respectively.

While both Ashi and Aishwary are established shooters, a number of athletes used the National Games as a springboard to national recognition. Nineteen-year-old Suruchi Phogat continued to post top scores in the women's 10m air pistol — shooting her third straight competition score above 585 (for perspective, the highest score in qualifying at the Olympics was 582) and then following it up with a dominant performance in the final. Jonathan Anthony, just 15, stunned a number of elite shooters, including Olympic bronze medallist Sarabjot, in the men's 10m air pistol competition to become the youngest shooting gold medallist at a National Games.

BISWARANJAN ROUT



RITU RAJ KONWAR

18-YEAR-OLD POOJA WON GOLD IN THE WOMEN'S HIGH JUMP WITH A CLEARANCE OF 1.84M, ERASING THE PREVIOUS MEET RECORD OF 1.83M SET BY SWAPNA BARMAN IN 2022

Next generation

India's next generation wasn't just making a mark on the shooting range. Sixteen-year-old Suryaksh Rawat was praised by double Olympic medallist PV Sindhu after reaching the final of the badminton men's singles category. Fourteen-year-old Olympian Dhinidhi Desinghu of Karnataka set new national records in the women's 400m and 200m freestyle categories, picking up 11 medals, including nine golds. But while Dhinidhi's medal haul in the pool in Haldwani might overshadow some of the other participants, perhaps the most promising prospect of the Games emerged at the weightlifting hall in Dehradun.

Gyaneshwari Yadav delivered a striking performance, lifting a total of 192kg in the women's 49kg category, which, along with her snatch (85kg), was more than what any other Indian weightlifter apart from Mirabai had lifted in that division. It was also more than what Mirabai was lifting at the same age.

Records were also set by Bindyarani Devi in the women's 55kg category (snatch lift of 88kg), Mehak Sharma (snatch 106kg, clean and jerk 141kg, and total 247kg) in the women's 87+ kg category, Vaishnav Thakur in the men's 102kg category (160kg snatch), and Rudra Mayan (175kg snatch) in the men's 109+ kg category.

The National Games' odd timing actually adds to the significance of these results. Coming at a time in the season when they are still some way from their best, India's athletes will only improve as the season progresses. Indeed, even where some athletes fell short of national marks, there was enough in their results in Uttarakhand to hint at interesting matchups in the years going forward.

18-year-old Haryana athlete Pooja improved on her personal best and meet record, winning gold in the women's high jump with a clearance of 1.84m, erasing the previous meet record of 1.83m set by Swapna Barman in 2022. But Pooja, like Swapna, has her sights set on the women's heptathlon going forward. A high jump like the one she uncorked in Dehradun should boost her points total significantly. But she is unlikely to go unchallenged.

Moumita Mondal of West Bengal didn't set any records but made a major improvement in her 100m hurdles while also winning gold in the women's long jump, happening almost simultaneously. Moumita has also given the heptathlon a shot in recent times, and both she and Pooja will be tempted to give the event a go once again with the Asian Games coming next season.

Beyond the good news

Questions have been raised about the long-term viability of big-ticket events like the National Games. Uttarakhand has previously faced the prospect of sporting infrastructure going to waste — their indoor ice skating rink, constructed for the South Asian Games at a cost of over 100 crore rupees in 2011, is currently defunct, with plans being made to turn it into a regular indoor venue. With equipment and facilities constructed at a cost of hundreds of crores this time, the challenge will be to keep them in use.

One of the purposes of the Games is to promote a sporting legacy. Although Uttarakhand achieved its best-ever performance at the National Games, finishing seventh in the medal tally with 24 golds and 103 overall, complaints were raised that not all the medal winners were from the state.

With the state government promising jobs and large sums of money to medal winners, there was ample incentive to field players who weren't homegrown — defeating the purpose of the Games to begin with.

The state's first gold medal was won by Tapas Achom in the wushu competition. Achom, however, is a native of Manipur. Narender Berwal, who won gold in the 91+ kg category of men's boxing, is a resident of Haryana. Multiple allegations were also made against their canoeing team.

An official complaint was raised by the Telangana team in the beach handball competition, alleging that Uttarakhand had fielded six players who were not eligible to participate according to the competition rules. Another complaint was made with the same objection in the men's indoor event. Both complaints were rejected, with the Uttarakhand team winning silver and bronze in the two competitions.

These, however, are not issues restricted to Uttarakhand alone. Previous hosts Goa were hit with the same charges when they conducted the Games in 2023 as well. Indeed, Uttarakhand also had genuine home-grown stars of their own, with Ankita Dhyani winning gold in the 3000m steeplechase and 5000m while also taking silver in the 10000m.

The final impact of the Games will be seen in the years to come. It remains to be seen whether Uttarakhand will make full use of its facilities and whether its athletes can continue to perform at the same level.

It also remains to be seen whether the next host, Meghalaya, will avoid these unsavoury practices. Should they do so while maintaining what went right in Uttarakhand, the 2027 Games will be a net positive for Indian sport.

RITU RAJ KONWAR

SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLD SURYAKSH RAWAT WAS PRAISED BY DOUBLE OLYMPIC MEDALLIST PV SINDHU AFTER REACHING THE FINAL OF THE BADMINTON MEN'S SINGLES CATEGORY

As Manipur conflict persists, one community faces sporting exclusion

For the **second straight year** since the start of ethnic conflict in the state, not a single member of the Kuki-Zo community has been included in the Manipur team for the National Games.

Jonathan Selvaraj
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Despite the civil unrest that has ravaged Manipur for the better part of the last two years, the state has maintained its reputation as one of India's most prodigious sources of sporting talent. At the close of the National Games, the state had won 52 medals, placing it in the top 10 of the medal tally.

However, while the conflict has affected all sections of the population, one side has faced a disproportionate impact. Not a single player from the Kuki-Zo tribe, which comprises some 16 per cent of the state's population, was part of the 416-member Manipur team at the 2025 National Games in Uttarakhand — although other minority groups, including Nagas and Manipuri Muslims, were. There was no Kuki-Zo representation in the Manipur team at the previous edition in Goa either.

This has not always been the case. Players from the Kuki-Zo community have represented Manipur at previous editions of the National Games, particularly in football. Five members of the state football team at the 2022 National Games were from the community. Since the outbreak of violence, however, that has not happened.

According to officials from the Manipur Olympic Association, the difficulty of organising competitions is largely to blame. "We got confirmation that the National Games were going to be held only a couple of months before the Games opened. With the situation as it is in Manipur, it was a huge task even to organise trials and assemble a team to compete at the Games. We did the best with what was possible," says N. Ibungochoubi, the joint secretary of the Manipur Olympic Association.

While it is true that the Games were held on short notice, it is also true that every trial and camp was held in the region of the state capital, Imphal. All state sport federation offices are also in the city. As things stand, Imphal remains a no-go zone for some ethnicities.

"Unfortunately for us, all the state sports federations, facilities, and resources are in Imphal. Our players can't go there for competition, trials, training, or camps. So, of course, they will not be part of any state team. It's a matter of our lives or the sport. Life is more important," says David Suantak, founder of Play4Change Football Club in Saikhul, which reached the semifinals of the Indian U-18 club football championships last year. Although the club is based in Manipur, they compete in the Meghalayan league since it's impossible for their players to play in Imphal.

In 2023, *Sportstar* reported how Ngamgouhou Mate, the captain of the Indian U-17 team that had won the South Asian Football Championships, and two of his Kuki teammates, Levis Zangminlun and Vumlenlal Hangshing, had to embark on a gruelling 15-hour, 438-km journey through Dimapur in Nagaland to reach their families — some in refugee camps — rather than take the shorter route through Imphal.

'I don't know how long I can do this'

A couple of days ago, 22-year-old Joel Haokip made a similar journey as he returned to his family after a stint in professional football with Dempo Football Club last year.

Uncertain future: Joel Haokip (front row, second from right) last represented Manipur at the 2022 National Games in Gujarat. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Joel was part of the Manipur side that competed at the 2022 National Games in Gujarat. Although the team exited in the group stage after blowing a 2-0 lead against Kerala, Joel, who played as an attacking midfielder, had a good tournament — scoring two goals and providing one assist for his team.

That competition was also the last time Joel represented Manipur.

Joel was born and raised in Imphal, where he trained at the prestigious Classic Football Academy — run by former India international Renedy Singh. He had represented Manipur from the U-14 age group as a part of the team that won the Khelo India competition. He was also one of Classic Football Academy's top prospects and, on the morning of May 3, 2023, had played a match against NorthEast United's U-21 side. "Funnily enough, that match was actually one of the best games I've played. After the match, we started hearing bad news coming out of Churachandpur. We thought it would be nothing and planned to go out to the city, but that was when my parents called me back. That whole night was chaos. The rioters were yelling that they would kill us, and as men, we had to go out with sticks to try and protect the neighbourhood," he says.

It was only with the arrival of the CRPF that Joel's family was able to make its way to a refugee camp and eventually out of the capital to Kangpokpi. "I just took my boots with me. All my trophies, medals, and anything from my life as a footballer in Imphal got left behind," he says. Almost before his family found a place to stay, Joel says he crossed the state border and made his way to Kolkata. "I love football so much. I was desperate to be able to play again," he says.

Although Classic Football Academy publicly announced that they had ended their partnership with him, Joel says he was supported by Renedy in finding a club and a place to stay in Kolkata.

The resumption of his career hasn't been smooth. "When I was in Classic Football Academy, we had chefs, nutritionists, and strength and conditioning experts. I only had to concentrate on my football. The biggest challenge I faced after leaving Manipur has been taking care of myself. I fell sick very often," he says.

Now in his second year of playing football outside his state, Joel carries a lot of resentment. Once considered one of his academy's top talents, he is struggling to live up to the potential he once saw in himself. "I think my career would have been very different if the conflict had not happened. I was just starting to make a name for myself. I was just about to break out. In Kolkata, I started from zero. Wherever you go in India, you have to be three to four times better than the locals to get a chance to play," he says.

Joel persists because he loves the sport too much but admits it is becoming difficult. "Many of my (Kuki) teammates have already stopped playing. Some are studying, and others have started working. I really thought I was going to play professionally, but now I really don't know how long I'm going to do this. I'm going to keep trying, though," he says.

Promising prospect: Tingmila Doungel was one of the star pupils at the academy run by the Olympic bronze medallist Mary Kom.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

competed in the football competition), Tingmila was one of the exceptions.

Hailing from Saikhul Hill town, Tingmila doesn't recall any sporting infrastructure in her town. "One day, though, I saw the *Mary Kom* movie and I wanted to be just like her. I used to run and train like she did until one day my grandfather took me for selection trials at the Mary Kom Academy," she says.

Tingmila would go on to become one of the star pupils at the academy run by the Olympic bronze medallist in Imphal's National Games Village, winning silver medals at the Khelo India Youth Games in 2018 and 2019. "I think my happiest moment was when I represented India. I competed and won gold at the Silesia Cup in the junior category. That same year, Mary Kom ma'am also took part in the senior category. That was so special," she recalls.

While the COVID pandemic halted her progress, Tingmila was still the best boxer in the 48kg weight category in Manipur. She represented the state at the 2022 National Championships and was also the senior state champion in the same weight class (that, incidentally, Mary had won five world titles in) in February 2023.

It was just a small step, but Tingmila had much bigger ambitions. She recalls a poster on the walls of her academy. "They were Mary Kom ma'am's words: 'Just because you are a woman, doesn't mean that there is anything you can't do.' I really liked that quote by Mary Kom ma'am. I wanted to be just like her," she says.

Those hopes ended on May 3. As mobs rampaged across Imphal, Tingmila and a few of her academy teammates from the same community hid in their academy's garage. "There were six or seven of us there. We hid for three days before the Assam Rifles soldiers rescued us and took us away. After I got out of Imphal and got back to my village in Saikhul, I didn't go anywhere. Sometimes, I would help as a volunteer at the town's self-defence unit. My two friends, who were also boxers, and I were serving tea and cleaning the office," she says.

Tingmila says she once thought she would be able to return to boxing soon enough. "I didn't think the conflict would go on for so long. I was thinking I could go back to my academy after a week and train once again. But things kept getting worse. In 2024, I realised one day, suddenly, that I will never be able to go back to the academy and I will never be able to see my friends and coaches ever again," she says.

Unlike Joel, who lost most of his memorabilia from his time as a football player for Manipur, Tingmila managed to save her medals and bring them to Chennai with her. Reminiscing isn't always helpful. "Sometimes I look at them and I remember how I used to play and how much I achieved. And then I feel bad because I know that can't happen anymore," she says.

While Tingmila misses the chance to fight in the ring, she also — despite the animosities that now exist between communities in Manipur — misses her teammates and her coaches. "I still keep in touch with some of my friends from the academy. Sometimes, I keep in touch with my coach, Ronald Singh. He is still coaching in the academy. He is my favourite coach. He is the one who helped me a lot when I started. Every coach is good and helps, but he was particularly my favourite. After I escaped, he used to ask me where I was and what I was doing. He encouraged me to find a way to continue boxing and my career," she says.

There has been less communication with others. "Mary Kom ma'am was very nice to us when I was at the academy. I've actually stayed at her home in Delhi when I was competing at the Khelo India Games. Her husband, Onler sir, has picked me up in his car also. But since the war, I have not spoken to them. I also haven't heard anything from the state federation," says Tingmila, who now hopes to become a coach and start her own academy someday.

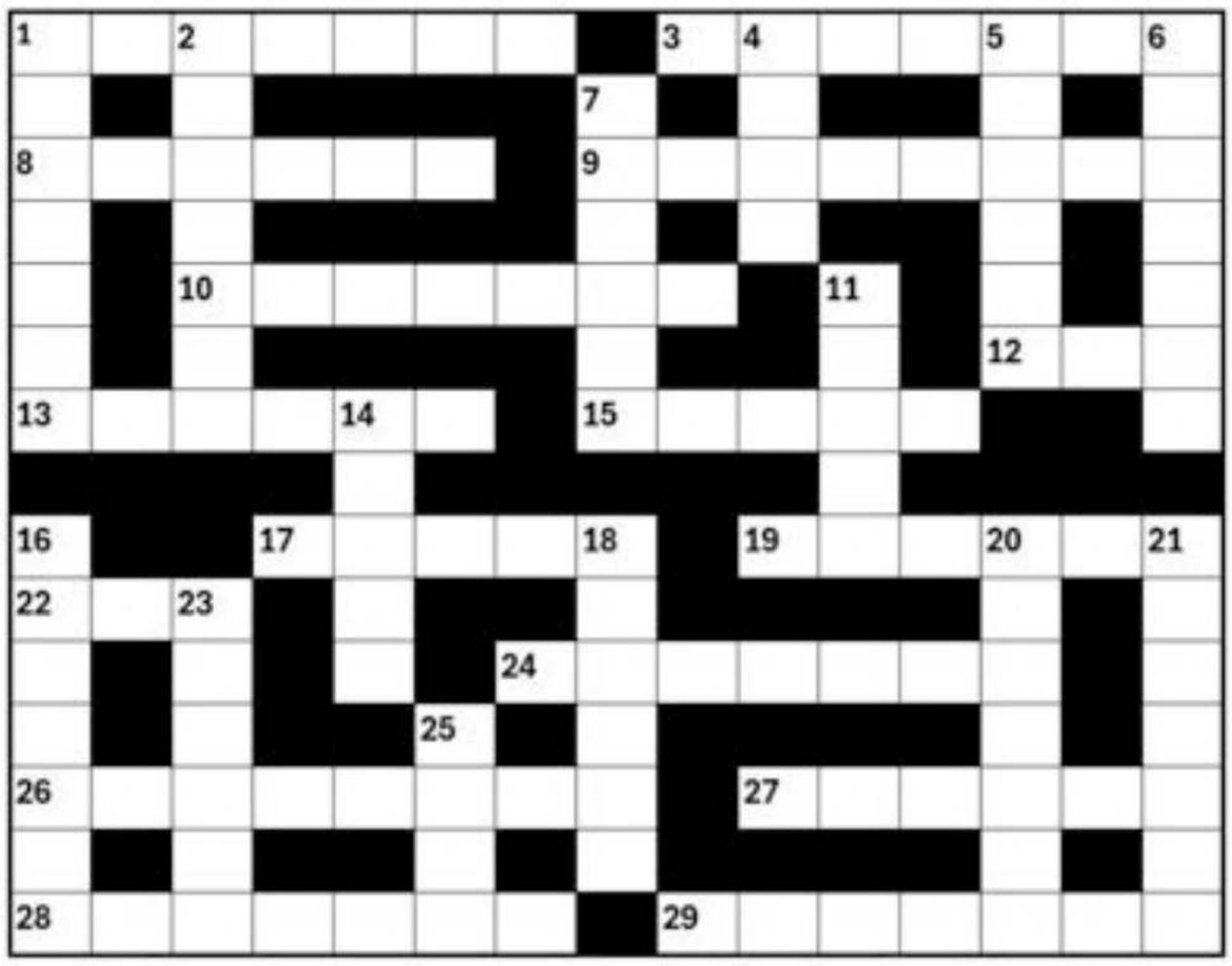
'My dreams were so big'

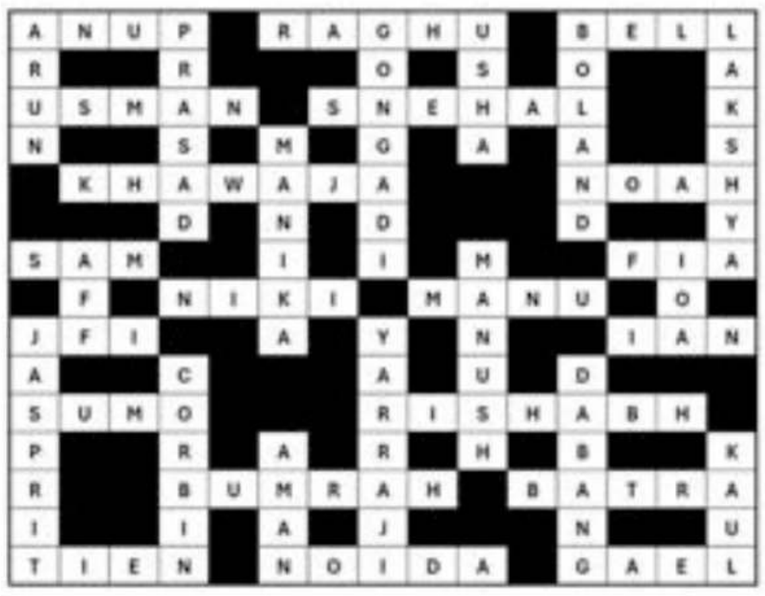
While Joel is still pushing to fulfil his sporting ambitions, Tingmila Doungel has all but come to terms with the end of hers. Doungel, now 23, is a student in Chennai, studying for a diploma at the YMCA College of Physical Education. Her horizons were once much broader.

"When I was boxing, my dream was so big. I wanted to become an Olympic and world champion. That was my dream. But this conflict is going on, so everything is like...," she says, without completing the sentence.

While it is true that even before the civil conflict, there were relatively fewer high-level non-football sportspersons compared to their more numerous Meitei counterparts (every Kuki-Zo member of the 2022 National Games squad, for instance,

CROSSWORD
N. SOORYA PRAKASH





SOLUTION TO LAST FORTNIGHT'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 Which North African country is selected as one of the three nations to host the 2030 FIFA World Cup? (7)

3 What is the franchise name of the PKL team from Uttar Pradesh? (7)

8 Who scored both the goals for Odisha Warriors in the final of the first-ever Women's Hockey India League in January 2025? (6)

9 Who was named as captain of the ICC Men's ODI Team of 2024? (8)

10 Which former Indian footballer was conferred with Padma Shri in 2025? (7)

12 The biannual championships for masters athletic events are held under the auspices of _ _ _? (1,1,1)

13 Which Indian tennis player won the first singles match versus Togo in the recently held Davis Cup tie? (6)

15 Which former Indian speedster retired from all forms of cricket on January 10, 2025? (5)

17 Who is named as vice-captain of the England ODI team? (5)

19 Which PKL team is led by Indian captain Pawan Sehrawat? (6)

22 Identify this governing body of association football, beach soccer and futsal in most countries and territories of Asia? (1,1,1)

24 Who won the player of the match award in the tri-series final held in Pakistan recently? (7)

26 Which southern European country on the Iberian Peninsula is selected as one of the three nations to host the 2030 FIFA World Cup? (8)

27 Who won the player of the series award in the two-match Test series held recently between South Africa and Pakistan? (6)

29 What is the franchise name of the Tamil Nadu team which took part in the recently concluded Hockey India League? (7)

DOWN

1 Who is the captain of the South African T20I team? (7)

2 Who made his Davis Cup debut for India against Togo recently? (7)

4 Who scored a hat-trick for Manchester City in the Premier League match against Newcastle United on February 15, 2025? (4)

5 Who finished as runner-up in the women's singles at the 2024 BWF World Tour Finals? (3,3)

6 Identify the one of two venues that hosted the matches of the 2024 ICC Women's T20 World Cup? (7)

7 Who took four wickets in the SA20 final held on February 8, 2025? (6)

11 & Across 28 Which player won the player of the tournament award in the recently-concluded first edition of the Women's Hockey India League? (5,7)

14 What is the surname of the cricketer who, in 2009, became the first Western Australian to score a century on Test debut? Till date he is the only Australian to score a hundred on Test debut versus South Africa? (5)

16 Which State team won the Senior Women's National Football Championship in December 2024? (7)

18 Which State team finished as runner-up in the Senior Men's National Football Championship for the Santosh Trophy in December 2024? (6)

20 Which Spanish footballer was transferred on loan from PSG to Aston Villa recently? (7)

21 Identify this Aussie all-rounder who made a shocking retirement announcement from ODIs recently? (7)

23 Komaravelli Srinivas and Khazima Mahabooba Basha won the men's and women's singles World Cup titles respectively in this sport in November 2024 (6)

25 Which player won the player of the series award in the recently concluded tri-series cricket tournament in Pakistan? (4)

Turton doubling

By C.G.S.Narayanan

Combinative ideas where two different pieces of like motion are used according to the needs of the situation in the longer movers. Three types of Turton doubling shown in the three and longer-movers are given for study this week. The first one is the classic **Turton doubling** in miniature where the weaker line piece first makes an anti-critical move and subsequently the stronger one comes in front to take part in the proceedings.

Otto Wurzburg
Brirish chess magazine 1896

Mate in three moves

Key 1.Bh3! waiting
1...Ka8/Kb8/Kc7 2.Qg4 any 3.Qc8
After 1...a5 comes the stunning queen sacrifice 2.Qa6+ Kxa6 3.Bc8

The second problem illustrates **Loyd-Turton doubling** with line pieces of different strength, the stronger one makes anti-critical move first and subsequently the weaker piece comes in front. White cannot play 1.Re7? with 2.Rxe2 as the d1 square gets vacated nor can he play 1.Rh7? 2.Rxh2 for 3.Ng2 because of Rxh7+.So white plays 1.Ka8!, arranges the threat 2.Rh7 followed by 3.Ng2. Now the only defence 1...Rh8+ is met by the brilliant 2.Qe8!! if black plays 2....RxQ+ 3.Ka7 Ra8 ch 4.Kxa8 followed by 5.Ng2. After the sac offer 2.Qe8 if BR still goes back to defend Ng2 with 2...Rh2 3.Re7 brings the WR in front of WQ threatening 4 Rxe2 BxR 5.Qxe2 mate.

Stefan schneider
First prize.Ostekke Schweiz 1977

Mate in five moves

The problem given for solving shows **Brrunner-Loyd doubling** where two like motion line pieces of equal strength are used.

Brujnner Erich
Akademische Monatcshe 1910

Mate in three moves

Solution to problem for solving in the article"A striking visual theme'
Key 1.Qb1! (2.Nh5+Kxe4 3.Re3)1..Rc4 2.Rc3;1...Rb4 2.Rb3;1...Ra4 2.Ra3;1..Rxe4 Rf3; 1...Rd5 2.Rd4 (3.exd5/Nh5);1...Rd6 2.Rd5(3.Bxe5/Nh5);1...Rd7 2.Rd6(Rf6/Nh5)
Seven magnet theme variations. White rook chases its counterpart in this masterpiece
Mate in five moves

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

SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Gulveer Singh sets 5000m indoor national record

Hangzhou Asian Games bronze medallist Gulveer Singh broke the national record and became the first Indian to break the 13-minute barrier in the men's 5000m indoor race at the BU Terrier DMR Challenge in Boston. The 26-year-old Army runner, who already held the national record in 5000m, clocked 12:59.77, finishing fourth in the event behind Cole Hocker (12:57.82), Cooper Teare (12:57.97), and Jack Rayner (12:59.43).

The Indian's performance not only set a new national record but also established a new Asian 5000m short track record. His performance eclipsed the earlier Asian indoor 5000m record of 13:08.41s set by Thailand's Kieran Tuntivate in 2022.

Gulveer's run saw him surpassing the World Athletics Championships qualifying standard of 13:01.00s.

He also bettered his own 5000m outdoor national record of 13:11.82 by more than 12 seconds.

Indian athletics chief coach Radhakrishnan Nair, however, said Gulveer's timing may not be considered as the outdoor national record. "Indoor timing may not be considered as outdoor national record, though Gulveer's indoor timing is better than even the outdoor," Nair said.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

SPORTOON

1 Services emerged victorious in a nail-biting final against Railways to claim the 71st senior National men's kabaddi championship at the Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor Stadium in Cuttack. Led by Pro Kabaddi League star Naveen Kumar, Services prevailed 30-30 (6-4) in a tie-breaker, showcasing remarkable composure when it mattered the most. Services' defensive combination of Jaideep Dahiya and Rahul Sethpal — winners of the PKL in season 11 — proved crucial in key moments.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

2 Uttarakhand's Man Singh and Bhagirathi Bisht won the men's and women's titles, respectively, at the Apollo Tyres New Delhi Marathon race. The 35-year-old Singh, the 2024 Asian Marathon Championship winner, clocked an impressive time of 2:15:24s to emerge winner in a competitive men's elite field. Pardeep Chaudhary (2:15:29s) and Akshay Saini (2:15:34s) were right on his heels, but finished second and third, respectively. Bhagirathi, also from Uttarakhand, claimed the top spot among elite women with a time of 02:48:59s. Thakor Bharatjee (02:49:16) and Ashwini Jadhav (02:50:48) won the silver and bronze, respectively.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

FITNESSWISE

Ramji Srinivasan

FOR MORE STORIES

Busting myths in the world of sport science

Here are the ten **most misunderstood fitness topics** the author has discussed with coaches around the world.

Over the past 30-plus years of coaching, I've been blessed to meet many coaches from around the globe, each with a rich tapestry of backgrounds, experiences, and achievements. Reflecting on this journey, I shall share the 10 most misunderstood topics and headlines that I've discussed over the years with many legendary coaches in the world of sports science.

Talent is paramount

We have all heard this statement many times — from skill coaches to parents and many itinerants — however, it's not as simple as that. Yes, talent helps, but all things being equal, mental resilience can be the key factor in securing victory on the big stage. Similarly, 'robot' athletes who fail to communicate will ultimately never reach their full potential. My coaching experience has taught me that an athlete with average talent, but a strong mind and perseverance, can indeed outperform a disconnected super-talent on the day.

All athletes are equal

This is a completely false narrative. Even in professional teams today, what suits a successful player is often followed by others, regardless of their own shortcomings.

This approach has repeatedly led to disaster, as many are now witnessing. It is crucial to understand that not all athletes can tolerate the same load. Instead, coaches must assess an athlete's capacities before testing their thresholds.

Working with intelligent categorisation and bandwidths is highly effective. It's no secret that much of our individual programming is done randomly under the guise of 'out-of-the-box' thinking — this is sheer incompetence in an attempt to be different. It's a no-brainer for S&C coaches to adopt and adapt accordingly.

Know-it-all attitude: Self-proclaimed experts or game-changers?

This is perhaps the most dangerous attitude in vogue today, fuelled by social media and personal branding. Nobody will ever know it all. Without any window dressing, India remains far behind the curve in sports science and allied fields. The more you learn, the more you realise how little you actually know. A willingness to express your point of view and be challenged is essential.

Obscure, myopic thinking is not the sign of a successful S&C coach. Self-branding makes it even more difficult to keep an open mind — 'my way or the highway' is not the right approach.

Programming is constantly evolving and morphing with each specialised athlete. Evaluation and peer reviews are constant and never-ending. Listening is a process that enlightens and challenges me to keep learning.

Textbook learning prepares you for the real world

An ideal life should have a combination of practice and theory. Theoretical knowledge is non-negotiable for a robust foundation, but ultimately, there is no substitute for hands-on experience in developing expertise in coaching.

If you want to stand out as a

Foot strike conundrum: Sprinting mechanics and foot strike velocity to the ground are totally different from walking, so why are athletes still taught running mechanics drills at walking speed? The ball-of-the-foot paradigm is baffling. GETTY IMAGES

coach, train a range of athletes at varied levels and challenge yourself in unorthodox settings. A master coach is someone who has produced results consistently over time at various locations, with various athletes, at various ages and stages of development.

Where theory meets practice there lies success. Talking theory till the cows come home may be good for a classroom presentation, but practical application needs to be innovative according to the skill, athlete, situation, and needs. There seems to be a huge missing link here.

Ground contact positions are static

Foot strike is entirely velocity-dependent. Sprinting mechanics and foot strike velocity to the ground are totally different from walking, so why are athletes still taught running mechanics drills at walking speed? The ball-of-the-foot paradigm is baffling. Where is the adaptation?

More is better

Many athletes seldom know how much is enough because they have always done too much. It's the critical job of the coach to be a caretaker rather than a slave driver. Similarly, some athletes have limited concentration capacity. Avoid being redundant in both communication and loading principles. What we say, and how we say it, matters a lot in effective implementation. As coaches, the words we use are like sets and reps — they must serve the purpose they are designed for.

Cues are fixed

Cues have a validity period and are like food — you need to change them often in line with the needs of an athlete specific to skills and other requirements. For example, some athletes feel the muscle working in a particular angle and range, while others do not — cue accordingly. Communicate in a way that makes sense to your athletes, not just in a way that makes sense to you.

Coaching is all about the sets and reps

Athletes are the ultimate performance variable, not your programme. Empathy is one of the greatest qualities a coach can have — it is not a weakness. The job of a coach is to connect people with purpose first, without ulterior motives. Focusing merely on the science and workload will not produce championship-winning performances.

Target weaknesses over strengths

Strengths are what make an athlete great and lead to winning. Focusing solely on their weaknesses can impede confidence and annihilate performance. Gradual progression, adaptation protocols, and benchmarks are much more influential than rigid timeframe setting — never rush to 'clear' weaknesses. Keep strengths really strong and progressively address weaknesses through proper processes and protocols.

You need world-class facilities to succeed

This is a total misnomer. Time and time again, athletes have set and broken world records that once seemed humanly impossible. Many of these athletes have never been to a sports science centre or trained at cutting-edge facilities.

This is a false excuse for underperformance and avoiding responsibility for failure. People use facilities as an excuse when, in reality, it is a failure of creativity. I have personally seen athletes thrive in world-class scenarios without proper access to facilities, nutrition, or other paraphernalia.

Having sports science is an excellent tool for peak performance, but many athletes have also proven otherwise. There is a saying in Tamil: for a mighty warrior, even a blade of grass is a deadly weapon to strike or defend.

Players play, but only the fans see the whole picture

Simon Critchley, an English philosopher, tells us a **philosophy of football** in his book, *What We Think About When We Think About Football.*

Suresh Menon

Football is working class ballet, says the philosopher Simon Critchley, fully conscious of the contradiction in a game played by millionaires and followed by the working class too. Yet ballet it is, or as he puts it in another place, it is a matrix of moving nodes endlessly shifting but all the while trying to retain its form.

Die-hard fans: Liverpool supporters ahead of kick-off in an English Premier League match. AFP

Critchley is an English philosopher who teaches in New York. He is a serious fan of Liverpool Club who says this "may be the governing passion of my life. My only religious commitment is to Liverpool Football Club." The quotes above are from his book *What We Think About When We Think About Football.* It is not, the author tells us, a philosophy of football; perhaps it is about what football can teach philosophers.

Belgian writer Jean-Phillipe Toussaint held the view that it is in words that we can reactivate the 'forgettableness' of football, writing that can brush up against the experience of football. Perhaps that is why it has attracted philosophers and literary writers who as fans are able to see the bigger picture.

Critchley tells us that when someone is playing well, he is not conscious of the play itself. When interviewers thrust a mike in his face and ask a player what was going through his mind when he scored that goal or made that pass, the honest answer would be "nothing." No one responds with, "I was thinking of buying a new pair of trousers, then watching a Tarantino movie, and perhaps having a pizza sent to my room for dinner."

That's why they often answer a stupid question with a politically correct answer like, "I was thinking of my country and my first coach and the hours my parents spent driving me to practice when I was in school." No. If your mind was filled with all that, you didn't have the focus to score the goal.

"The experience of watching football," says Critchley, "bestows a strange license and liberty of speech." Fanaticism and obsession are common conditions in football, but, as Critchley points out, the players play, but only the fans can see the whole picture. In football, he says, it is not just the disappointment (of your team losing) that kills you, it's the ever-renewed hope.

Critchley refers to the philosophers Sartre and Heidegger, Nietzsche, the artist Velazquez, the playwright Brecht and others, but his book is accessible and enjoyable. The sport is looked at from the point of view of the players, the managers, the spectators, and in the passing the ego and large purses of the sponsors.

Despite everything, the purpose of play, Critchley reminds us, is play itself. It is not the expression of some inner psychological reality. A 0-0 draw, an Italian writer once told us, is the ideal game, achieving a sort of aesthetic harmony like in chess.

"I have found a strange beauty," says Critchley, "to watching one team completely nullify another." Goal-scoring, he says is a media obsession. It's a thought...

Transforming
Rural India

In the selection Process for New Beneficiaries under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Rural)

Survey work is being conducted by the surveyors under the supervision of the Block Development Officers

Self-registration facility is available for eligible citizens on 'Awaas Plus App'

Contact for more information

- Gram Panchayat Secretary
- Block Development Officer
- Project Director (District Rural Development Agency)
- Chief Development Officer

Toll free number : 1800-180-4042

Rural Development Department, Uttar Pradesh

Information & Public Relations Department, Uttar Pradesh

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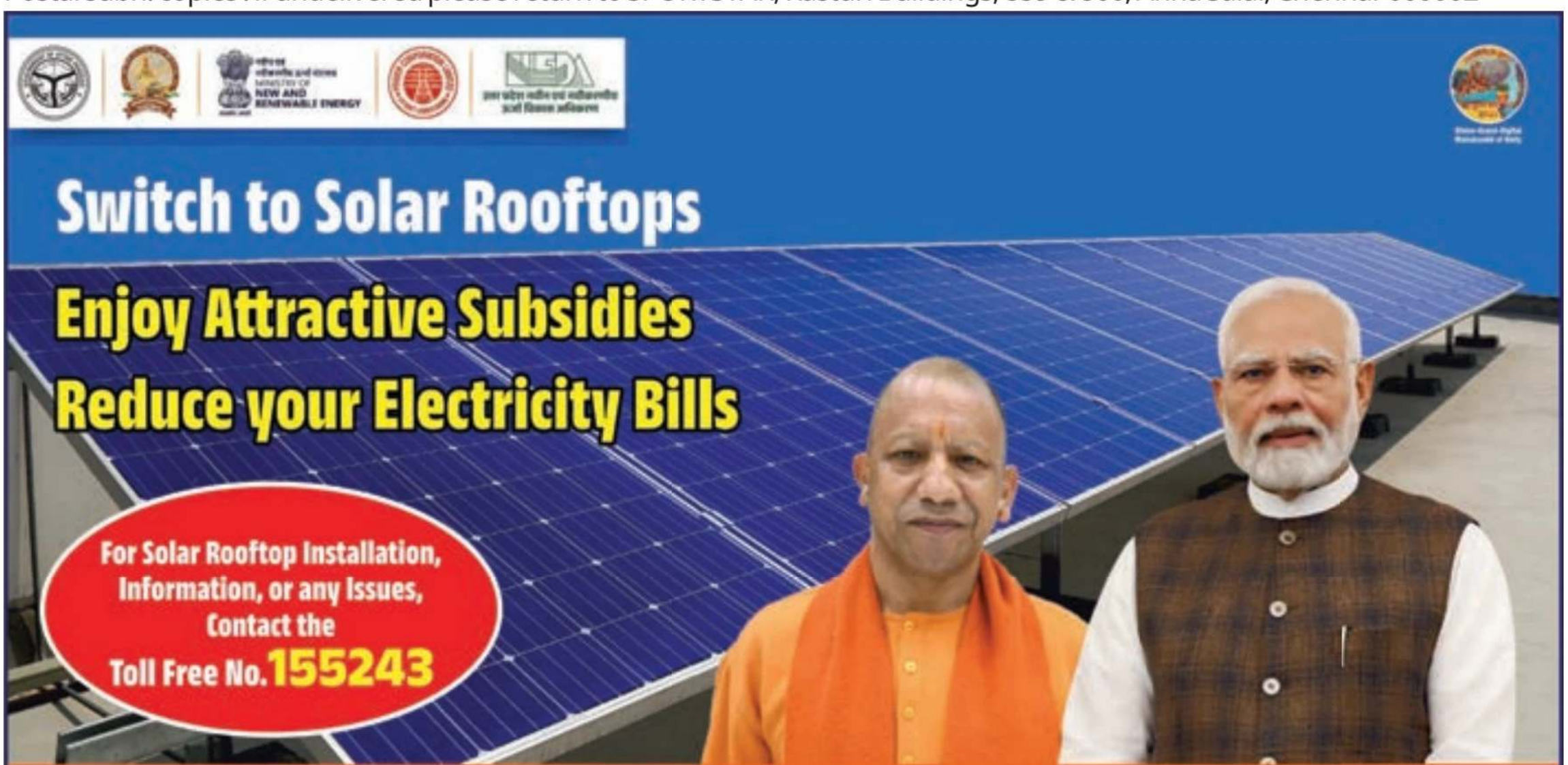

PM SURYA GHAR : MUFT BIJLI YOJANA

300 Units of Free Electricity Under the Scheme

Capacity of the System	Central Government Subsidy (₹)	State Government Subsidy (₹)	Total Permissible Subsidy (₹)
1 KW	30,000	15,000	45,000
2 KW	60,000	30,000	90,000
3 KW	78,000	30,000	1,08,000
4 KW	78,000	30,000	1,08,000
5 KW	78,000	30,000	1,08,000

- The estimated cost of the plant is ₹60,000 per kilowatt
- The operational lifespan of solar panels is approximately 25 years
- Install a 3 KW plant with an EMI of just ₹1800/-
- Bank Loan at an interest rate of only 7%
- After the commissioning of the solar plant, the subsidy will be directly transferred to the beneficiary's account through the DBT scheme
- Savings of up to two-thirds on the electricity bill
- Install the solar rooftop plant only through a UPNEDA-registered vendor. Select the vendor carefully

Apply Soon to Avail the Benefits of the Scheme

https://pmsuryaghar.gov.in/

For any Concern/Complaint, Contact 155243 or Visit https://upnedasolarsamadhan.in

Department of Additional Sources of Energy, Uttar Pradesh

Information & Public Relations Department, Uttar Pradesh