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The ongoing IPL's record-breaking 9.58 run rate after 54 matches is largely due to the Impact Player rule. But where do we draw the line?

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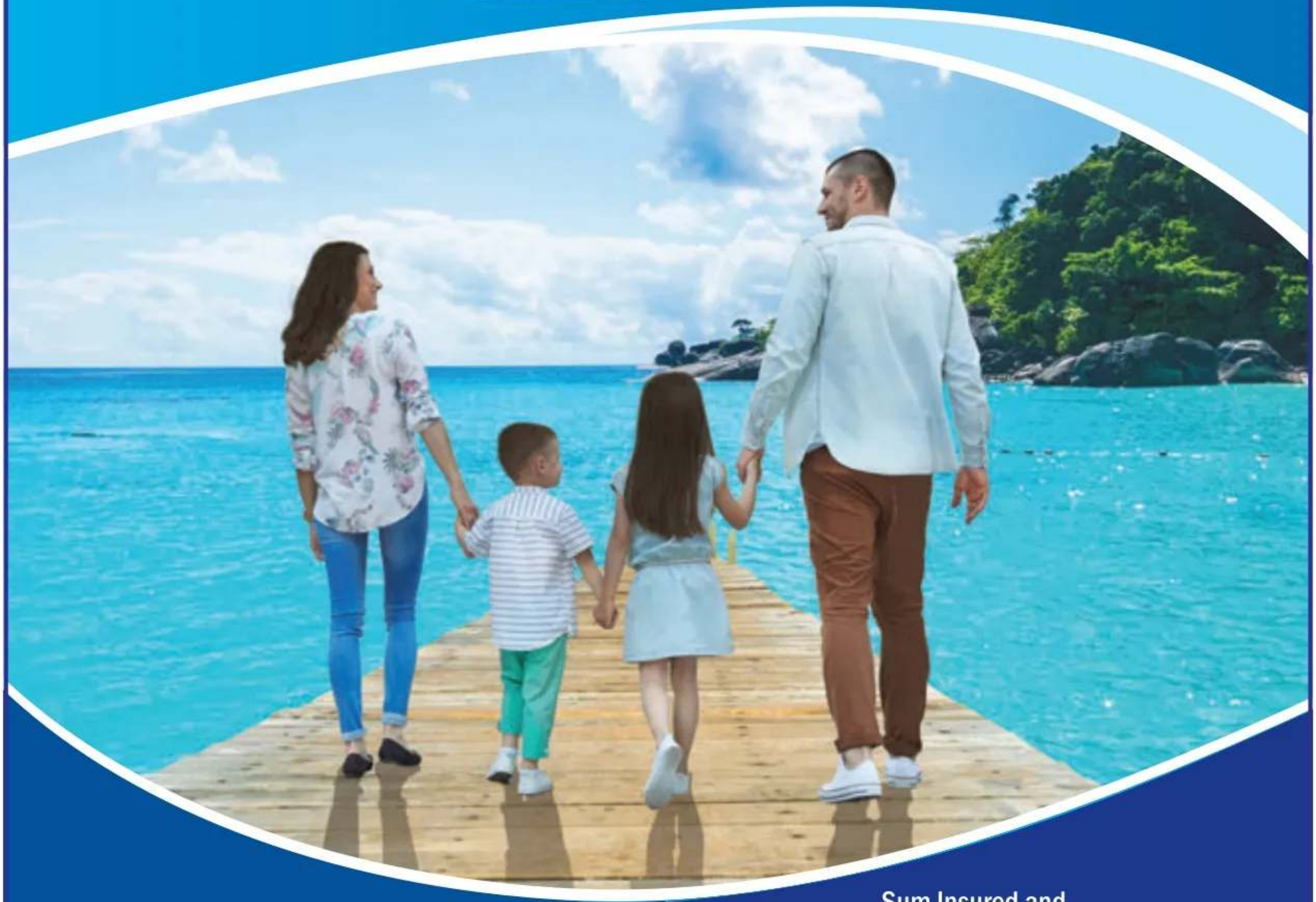

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www.sportstar.thehindu.com
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Published by Nirmala Lakshman, Kasturi Buildings, 859, 860, Anna Salai, Chennai-600 002 and Printed by SDT Rao at Kala Jyothi Process Private Ltd, Plot no CFC-1&2, Survey No 18, E-City, SEZ & General Industrial Park, Raviryal & Srinagar (Village), Maheswaram(M), R.R.Dist, Telangana - 501359 on behalf of THG PUBLISHING PVT LTD., Chennai-600 002.

Editor: Ayon Sengupta (Editor responsible for selection of news under the PRP Act).
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OFF-SIDE

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IT'S TIME TO SHED THOSE NOSTALGIA GLASSES

Despite calls for change after India's semifinal exit from the 2022 T20 World Cup, **eight players from that squad** now head to the US and the Caribbean for the ninth edition of the tournament.

Letting go? That's a tough one. Humans, creatures of habit, find solace in the familiar. We cling to our loved ones and hesitate to bid adieu to the places that cradled us. Even as we switch houses and swap roles, there's this relentless gravitational pull drawing us back to what we've left behind. We're like moths to a flame, forever returning to those familiar haunts and those familiar faces, always allergic to change.

We hunker down in our hometowns, endure unhappy relationships, and tolerate unrewarding workplaces. Ask Xavi, he has decided to bear one more season with Barcelona, 88 days after he had let go and said, "In Barcelona, you always feel like you're not valued, you're mistreated."

We are stubborn creatures, clinging to what is comfortable, like shipwreck survivors to an anchor, even when that comfort is drowning us.

We endure; we soldier on because the alternative — breaking up — is so hard.

And Indian cricket as well is not immune from this reluctance to alter. Our selectors, wearing nostalgia glasses, are unwilling to cast their gaze beyond the shadows of yesteryear. Despite the clamour for transformation following India's semifinal exit from the 2022 T20 World Cup, it is like deja vu two years later, as eight faces from that squad now travel to the US and the Caribbean for the ninth edition of the tournament.

After creating a nucleus well-versed in the present-day approach to T20s, the team management surprisingly brought back Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli for the series against Afghanistan earlier this year. Despite their class, Rohit and Kohli have struggled to align their batting with the dizzying strike rates that govern T20s today. And their presence in India's top 3 has come at the expense of Rinku Singh; the left-hander boasts an impressive average of 89, striking at 176.23 in 11 T20I innings.

Rohit (152.77) and Kohli (148.08), opening for their teams in the ongoing IPL, have found themselves outpaced by the likes of Jake Fraser-McGurk (233.33), Travis Head (189.74), Abhishek Sharma (195.20), Sunil Narine (183.66), and Phil Salt (183.33). (Till the Mumbai Indians vs Sunrisers Hyderabad game on May 6).

Rajasthan Royals' Yashasvi Jaiswal has played the most number of matches as an opener for India — 17 matches, 502 runs, 33.46 average, 161.93 strike rate — since the 2022 World Cup. Jaiswal, after a tepid start in this year's IPL, has rediscovered his rhythm, amassing 316 runs at an impressive strike rate of 157.21. The southpaw is expected to partner skipper Rohit at the top, while Kohli is slated to occupy the number three slot. In Rinku's absence, the power-hitting mantle at the death might fall on one of Rishabh Pant, Sanju Samson, or Shivam Dube, who has scored 350 runs at a strike rate of 170.73 in IPL 2024.

As for letting go gracefully, Kohli, too, proves he is human. Despite his declaration of being imperious to 'outside noise', he's been firing more rapidly in press conferences against those pointing fingers at his sluggish strike rate. Even a man of his cricketing prowess finds it hard to simply let his bat do the talking.

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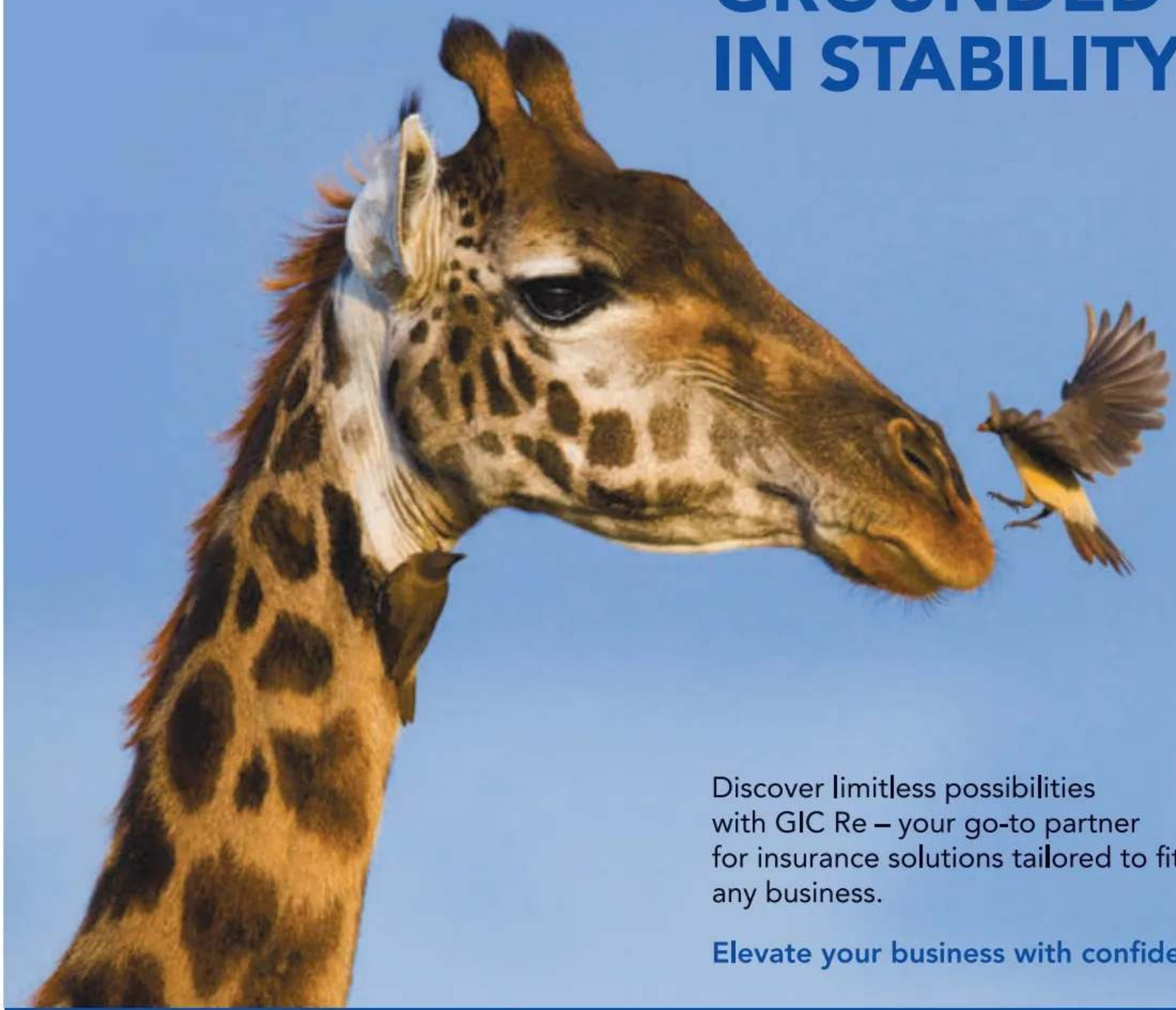

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« Rafael Nadal is the master of underpromising and overdelivering.

– Former American tennis player Andy Roddick sceptical of the Spaniard's doubts about French Open 2024 participation »

15

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has suspended former Olympic power broker Sheikh Ahmad al-Fahad al-Sabah of Kuwait for 15 years after his conviction for forgery was upheld on appeal this year at a Swiss criminal appeals court.

Sheikh Ahmad's sanction for "a betrayal of his IOC Member's oath, as well as the seriousness of the damage to the IOC's reputation" was approved by the Olympic body's executive board. The 15-year suspension starts from the date of his previous ban for a separate issue of unethical conduct, in an Olympic Council of Asia election. That was a three-year sanction imposed on July 27 last year. Sheikh Ahmad led the Olympic Council of Asia, created by his father in Kuwait, before joining the IOC in 1992.

2

The Los Angeles Lakers fired head coach Darvin Ham after two seasons and a 90-74 regular-season record. The Lakers finished the regular season with a 47-35 mark, good enough for only an eighth-place finish in the Western Conference. They defeated the New Orleans Pelicans in the play-in round to earn the No. 7 seed in the playoffs, but were bounced by the Denver Nuggets in the opening round, 4-1. It was Ham's first NBA head coaching job.

« Well, who is going to say now that women's tennis is boring, right? I think it was the most intense and, like, crazy final I played.

– Iga Swiatek, after a gruelling three-hour 11-minute victory against Aryna Sabalenka at the Madrid Open »

HONOURED

Seven-time Olympic gold medallist swimmer Katie Ledecky was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by U.S. President Joe Biden. The 21-time World champion was among the 19 people, which included International Olympic Committee (IOC) member and actress Michelle Yeoh, and Jim Thorpe, to receive the highest U.S. civilian award. AP

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In fine form: Merab Dvalishvili has secured victories over former champions Petr Yan, Henry Cejudo, and UFC Hall of Famer Jose Aldo in three of his last five fights.
GETTY IMAGES

'THE MACHINE' REVVING UP FOR O'MALLEY CHALLENGE

Merab Dvalishvili, nicknamed 'The Machine', is eagerly awaiting a potential showdown with O'Malley.

Nigamanth P
nigamanth.p@thehindu.co.in

In recent weeks, the pressing question among UFC enthusiasts and analysts has revolved around Merab Dvalishvili's next bout. His remarkable 10-fight winning streak, placing him third among active bantamweight contenders, has stirred considerable interest.

Following Sean O'Malley's successful defence of the bantamweight championship at UFC 299 against Marlon Vera, speculation suggests that Dvalishvili is next in line for a title shot. As he currently occupies the top spot in the bantamweight rankings, 'The Machine' eagerly anticipates a potential showdown with O'Malley.

"Since I'm top ranked, I will be fighting for the belt next. O'Malley wants September, and I'm up for it. I'm training as hard as I can," said Merab in an exclusive interaction with Sportstar.

Merab debuted in professional MMA in 2014 before joining the UFC in 2017. Despite a strong pre-UFC record, his early UFC career stumbled with two consecutive losses, including a submission defeat to Ricky Simon of the USA. "I lost my debut fight because I was sick, but the second was an outright loss. It was tough. But I learned a lot from these two fights. I kept my head down and continued to train hard. That helped me find my rhythm and guided me to where I am today," Merab said. Merab has secured victories over former champions Petr Yan, Henry Cejudo, and UFC Hall of Famer Jose Aldo in three of his last five fights. Out of the 10 wins, Merab has managed to finish just one opponent: Marlon Morales via submission back in 2021. When deciding to go aggressive or play the waiting game, 'The Machine' believes that the nature of his opponents is the decisive factor.

"There are two things to take into consideration. First, my opponents are tough, and it's hard to finish them. Second, in my initial two fights, I was rushing my opponents, trying to finish them, and because of those two mistakes, I lost. So, I'd rather win by dominating my opponents for three rounds than make any mistake," Merab said.

But when Merab faces O'Malley, he wants to knock him out. "Everybody thinks I cannot strike. I'm a complete mixed martial artist, and I want to show the world that I can knock him out Mexican style," he concluded.

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INDIAN CRICKET COUNTS THE 'COST IMPACT' OF IPL PLAYER SWAPS

ALLOWING TEAMS TO SUBSTITUTE PLAYERS MID-MATCH HAS LED TO A GROWING RELIANCE ON SPECIALISTS, DIMINISHING THE IMPORTANCE OF ALL-ROUND PLAYERS.

By Dhruva Prasad
dhruva.prasad@thehindu.co.in

FOR MORE STORIES

Biggest beneficiary: Shivam Dube, whose power-hitting in the middle overs for CSK earned him a spot in India's T20 World Cup squad, has been employed purely as a batter and has bowled just a solitary over in 11 matches. SPORTZPICS / IPL

R. V. MOORTHY

IT IS QUITE TELLING THAT THE ONLY INDIAN PLAYERS TO HAVE SCORED MORE THAN 100 RUNS AND PICKED FIVE OR MORE WICKETS THIS SEASON ARE HARDIK PANDYA, RAVINDRA JADEJA AND AXAR PATEL

For a sport contested between 22 players since time immemorial, the addition of two members to the mix has almost irrevocably altered the lexicon of cricket. If the Indian Premier League (IPL) was the disruptor of international competition, the Impact Player rule has only further fed into the lore of the cash-rich league's subversive image.

After 54 matches, the average run rate of the ongoing tournament stands at a whopping 9.58, the highest ever for any T20 series or competition involving more than four matches. The fact that this landmark has coincided with the Impact Player rule's second iteration is not a mere coincidence. Nine of the 10 highest team totals in the IPL have come following the introduction of this innovation in 2023.

Though Sunrisers Hyderabad tops the charts with its 287-run total, the 250-run benchmark has been breached with abandon — eight times — this season. A 262-run target has been dismantled with eight balls to spare, and T20 batting, which seemed to have entered unchartered territory initially, has forayed into the stratosphere.

Understandably, the bowlers are left to feel like collateral in a spectacle that seems increasingly tailor-made for batters and fans. And while the skills of the likes of Jasprit Bumrah and Sunil Narine stand out even amidst this carnage, all-rounders have been handed the shorter end of the stick.

By allowing teams to swap one player for another at any point in the match, the sport has increasingly come to revolve around specialists, limiting the role of those with the ability to add value with both bat and ball in varying degrees.

The Impact Player rule affords the team batting first the luxury to field

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The hardest hit: Having featured in just two of Sunrisers Hyderabad's first 10 games this season, Washington Sundar has been starved of opportunities at a franchise keen on resetting the T20 template.
SPORTZPICS / IPL

seven specialist batters and then bring in a specialist sixth bowler by subbing out a batter in the bowling innings. It's vice versa for the team chasing — captains carry two team sheets to the toss.

"Eventually, cricket is played by 11 players, not 12 players. I am not a big fan of 'Impact Player'; you are taking so much from the game just for a little bit of entertainment. I can give you so many examples; guys like Washington Sundar and Shivam Dube are not getting to bowl. For us (the Indian team), it is not a good thing," Rohit Sharma, who will lead India at the T20 World Cup in less than a month, voiced his concern.

Washington, an economical off-spinner and a handy batter lower down in the order, has been particularly hard-hit. Having featured in just two of Sunrisers Hyderabad's first 10 games this season, the 24-year-old has been starved of opportunities at a franchise keen on resetting the T20 template. On both occasions, Washington came on as Impact Player after Sunrisers' batting innings and could only bowl five overs across two matches.

For his teammate Abhishek Sharma, who has batted with abandon in the PowerPlay thanks to the cushion provided by the Impact Player rule, the innovation has been a double-edged sword.

"Everybody knows that I can bowl. But because of this Impact Player rule, there is always an extra bowler. It is going to happen with all-rounders. It happened last year, and it is happening this year as well," Abhishek, who has bowled just three overs so far, said.

Dube, whose power-hitting in the middle overs for Chennai Super Kings earned him a spot in India's T20 World Cup squad, has been

The onset of the Impact Player rule has also diminished the role of part-timers, such as Deepak Hooda and Riyan Parag, and has left in its wake a legion of unidimensional strongmen.

employed purely as a batter and has bowled just a solitary over in 11 matches. In six of those games, Dube has been part of Impact Player swaps, either coming in as a batter after Super Kings have fielded or being subbed out at the end of the batting innings.

Though Dube has never consistently bowled a healthy diet of overs in the IPL, he was coming into the tournament on the back of having bowled a significant 67 overs in five Ranji Trophy games for Mumbai. He, however, bowled just four overs in eight matches during the last Syed Mushtaq Ali domestic T20 competition.

Krunal Pandya, Shardul Thakur, Rahul Tewatia, and Ramandeep Singh have also been unable to display their wares in both departments since the advent of the Impact Player rule. It is quite telling that the only Indian players to have scored more than 100 runs and picked five or more wickets this season are Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja, and Axar Patel.

Last year, only Axar, Jadeja, Krunal, and Shardul made the cut among Indians. In 2022, before the Impact Player rule, seven Indians (Hardik, Ravichandran Ashwin, Krunal, Axar, Shardul, Jadeja, and Washington) had achieved the dual feat.

While Shardul has played just six out of CSK's first 11 games, largely owing to the defending champion's preference for a specialist bowler with a similar skillset, Krunal's batting position at Lucknow Super Giants has seen him face just 59 balls across nine innings. In 2022, he batted at No. 4 and 5 in eight out of 13 innings, while this year he has been slotted only at No. 7 and 8.

Meanwhile, Tewatia, who burst onto the scene as a bowling all-rounder in 2014, has been typecast as a death-overs specialist with the bat and is yet to bowl a ball in Gujarat Titans' first 11 games.

This is not to say that all-rounders have become completely extinct in the context of the Impact Player rule. After all, the list of players who have scored more than 100 runs and picked five or more wickets this season includes the likes of Sunil Narine, Andre Russell, Sam Curran, Rashid Khan, and Cameron Green.

However, these are well-established names that add value with bat and ball to an almost equal degree. But what warrants urgent attention is the development of India's next supply line of all-rounders, which the Impact Player innovation seems to impede. The fact that the last two editions of India's domestic T20 tournament, the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, have also opted for the provision hasn't helped in identifying the next generation of all-rounders.

Hardik is still India's only seam-bowling all-rounder of international repute, and, with his performance under a cloud, he too has made use of the cushion of an extra bowler provided by the Impact Player rule. In 11 matches, he has not bowled at all twice and has completed his quota of four overs in just four games.

With India's team balance largely dependent on Hardik's ability to deliver his full quota of overs at the T20 World Cup, where the Impact Player provision doesn't apply, it doesn't bode well for the national team.

Though it's still a long shot, Sunrisers Hyderabad's Nitish Kumar Reddy perhaps comes closest to replicating Hardik's skills among Indians. But he too has largely been employed as a specialist batter, having bowled just 7.1 overs in seven matches.

India has long been plagued by the inability of its top-order batters to roll their arm over, and that shortcoming has spilt over into the upcoming global showpiece. The onset of the Impact Player rule has also diminished the role of part-timers, such as Deepak Hooda and Riyan Parag, and has left in its wake a legion of unidimensional strongmen, emboldened by the mirage of a Promised Land (read Impact Player rule), that doesn't exist on the international arena.

Undoubtedly, the provision has helped unlock the potential of the likes of Ashutosh Sharma and Abishek Porel on the big stage, but is that a trade-off Indian cricket is willing to make at the cost of the development of future Hardiks and Jadejas?

Player	Mat	Runs	Bat Av	HS	Wkts	Bowl Av	BBI
Hardik Pandya	61	1278	32.76	87	58 2	4.05	4/16
Ravindra Jadeja	50	1139	33.50	112	89	25.62	7/42
Axar Patel	64	1040	28.10	84	67	29.44	4/77

Indian players with 500+ runs and 5+ wickets in all internationals since May 7, 2022 (last two years)

Player	Mat	Runs	Bat Av	HS	Wkts	Bowl Av	BBI
Sunil Narine	11	461	41.90	109	14	20.78	2/22
Ravindra Jadeja	11	202	50.50	57*	8	34.50	3/18
Hardik Pandya	11	198	19.80	46	8	37.12	2/26
Andre Russell	11	198	33.00	64*	13	17.46	3/25
Sam Curran	11	185	20.55	63	13	26.30	3/28
Axar Patel	11	149	24.83	66	9	29.77	2/25
Cameron Green	9	112	18.66	37*	7	31.71	2/12
Rashid Khan	11	102	20.40	31	8	41.12	2/4

Players with 100+ runs and 5+ wickets in IPL 2024 after 54 matches

1st

Deceptive: Sandeep Sharma wreaked havoc on Mumbai Indians' batting lineup and ended with the figures of 5/18.
K. MURALI KUMAR

2nd

Revival: Yashasvi Jaiswal was back among the runs in IPL 2024 with a 59-ball century that helped Rajasthan Royals chase down a 180-run target against Mumbai Indians with nine wickets in hand. K. MURALI KUMAR

FOR MORE IMAGES

3rd

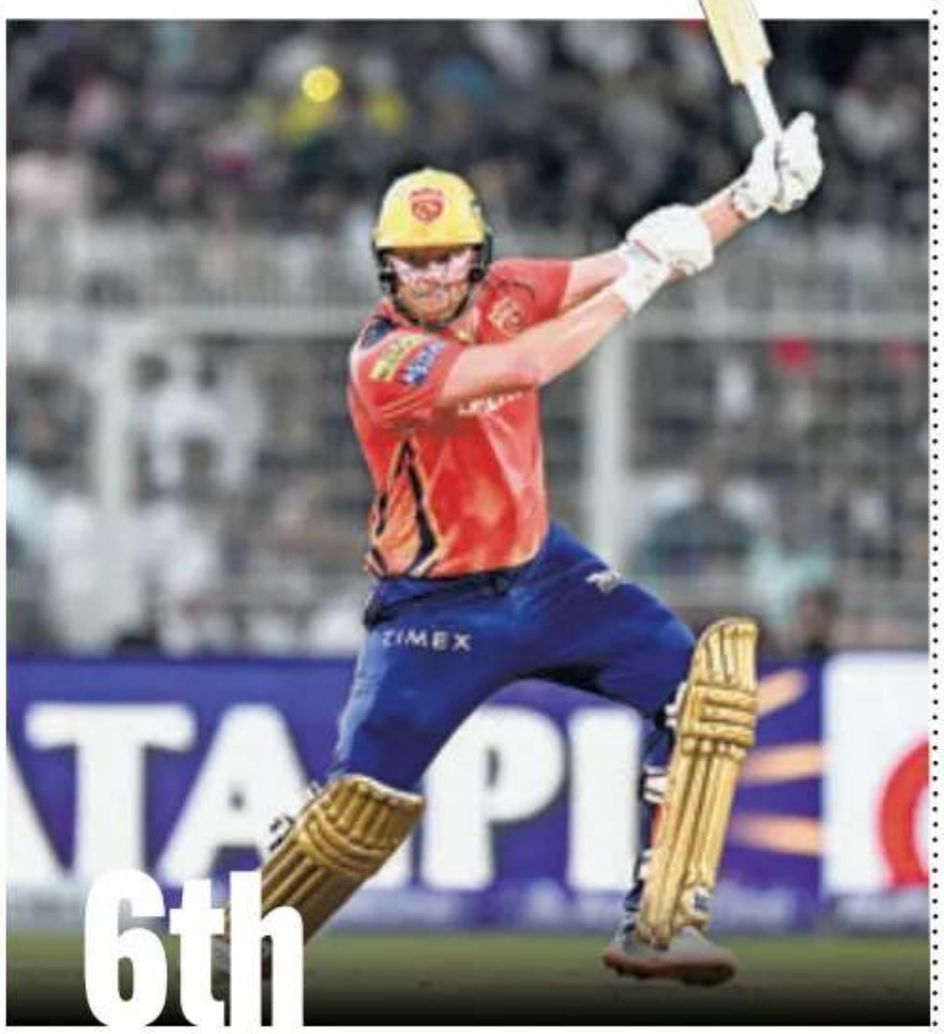
Stunning: Marcus Stoinis' sensational 63-ball 124 helped Lucknow Super Giants pull off the highest successful chase in T20s at M.A. Chidambaram Stadium: 211 against Chennai Super Kings.
M. VEDHAN

4th

Partner up: Rishabh Pant and Axar Patel combined for a 113-run partnership after Delhi Capitals lost 3 wickets for 44 runs. DC eventually defeated Gujarat Titans by four runs. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

5th

Revenge of the fallen: Royal Challengers Bengaluru outperformed Sunrisers Hyderabad in all departments in an away game and won by 35 runs. R. RAGU



6th

Rampage: Punjab Kings' Jonny Bairstow hit 108 in 48 balls and was helped by Shashank Singh's 68 off 28 as the duo pulled off a world record T20 chase of 262 against Kolkata Knight Riders. K. R. DEEPAK

7th

Blazed: Jake Fraser-McGurk smashed 84 runs in 27 balls as Delhi Capitals put on a show to hit 257/4 against Mumbai Indians. Capitals won by 10 runs.

R. V. MOORTHY

8th

Standing tall: Rajasthan Royals' captain Sanju Samson and Dhruv Jurel stitched an unbeaten 121-run partnership in 62 balls to chase down Lucknow Super Giants' target of 197 runs with one over to spare. SANDEEP SAXENA

9th

Jacked up: Will Jacks smacked a 41-ball ton, hitting his last 50 runs in just 10 balls, as Royal Challengers Bengaluru wrapped up a 201-run chase in 16 overs against Gujarat Titans. RCB hit 58 runs in the last two overs of the chase.

VIJAY SONEJI

10th

Rutu's Raj: Chennai Super Kings captain Ruturaj Gaikwad hit 98 runs off 54 balls to set up his team's massive 78-run win over Sunrisers Hyderabad.

B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

11th

Eyes on the prize: Varun Chakravarthy's miserly spell of 3/16 laid the foundation of Kolkata Knight Riders' seven-wicket drubbing over Delhi Capitals. K. R. DEEPAK

12th

A-Stoinis-hing: Lucknow Super Giants completed a tricky 145-run chase thanks to Marcus Stoinis' composed 62-run knock against Mumbai Indians. SANDEEP SAXENA

13th

Spin it to win it: Harpreet Brar (2/17) and Rahul Chahar (2/16) choked Chennai Super Kings' run flow in middle overs — no boundary was hit for 55 balls — that eventually helped Punjab Kings win the match comfortably by seven wickets. AP

14th

Timeless: Bhuvneshwar Kumar was at his vintage best when he reduced Rajasthan Royals' to 2/1 inside the first over. He then picked up a wicket off the final ball of the chase to pull off a thrilling one-run win for Sunrisers Hyderabad. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

15th

Pumped: Mitchell Starc was at his lethal best as his spell of 4/33 jolted Mumbai Indians' lineup and helped Kolkata Knight Riders earn two more points this season. EMMANUAL YOGINI

16th

Launched: Faf du Plessis hit 64 off 23 balls and added 92 runs with Virat Kohli in the first 35 balls of the 148-run chase against Gujarat Titans to set up Royal Challengers Bengaluru's win. K. MURALI KUMAR

17th

Super King: Ravindra Jadeja had a sensational day as an all-rounder, scoring 43 off 26 in the backend of the innings before picking up three wickets in Chennai Super Kings' 28-run win over Punjab Kings. R. V. MOORTHY

18th

Silent treatment: Harshit Rana, coming back after a disciplinary one-match ban, picked 3/24 as Kolkata Knight Riders climbed to the top of the points table after beating Lucknow Super Giants. SANDEEP SAXENA

Never gone, but now making his presence felt

With his confidence being sky-high and form at its peak, call him old or call him a find. **Shashank Singh,** at 32, does not mind!

Amol Karhadkar
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At 32, Shashank Singh has spent nearly 10 years in domestic cricket. He got his first IPL contract over six years ago. Yet, it is only now that he's being hailed as the big discovery of IPL 2024. Welcome to Shashank's world!

Shashank made his debut in senior domestic limited-overs cricket during the 2014–15 season. He earned his first Ranji Trophy cap five years later. In this IPL, he has been one of the standout performers, consistently delivering impressive performances as a middle-order batter. "It feels good when someone refers to me as a find. Ultimately, that's because I have been able to back myself, showcase my potential, and deliver frequently this IPL season," a relaxed Shashank tells *Sportstar*. "People like you follow domestic cricket so closely that you know that I have been around the circuit for a decade now. I am not sure how I have fared, but I have survived. I have always been confident about my abilities, and I am glad I have been able to execute them better."

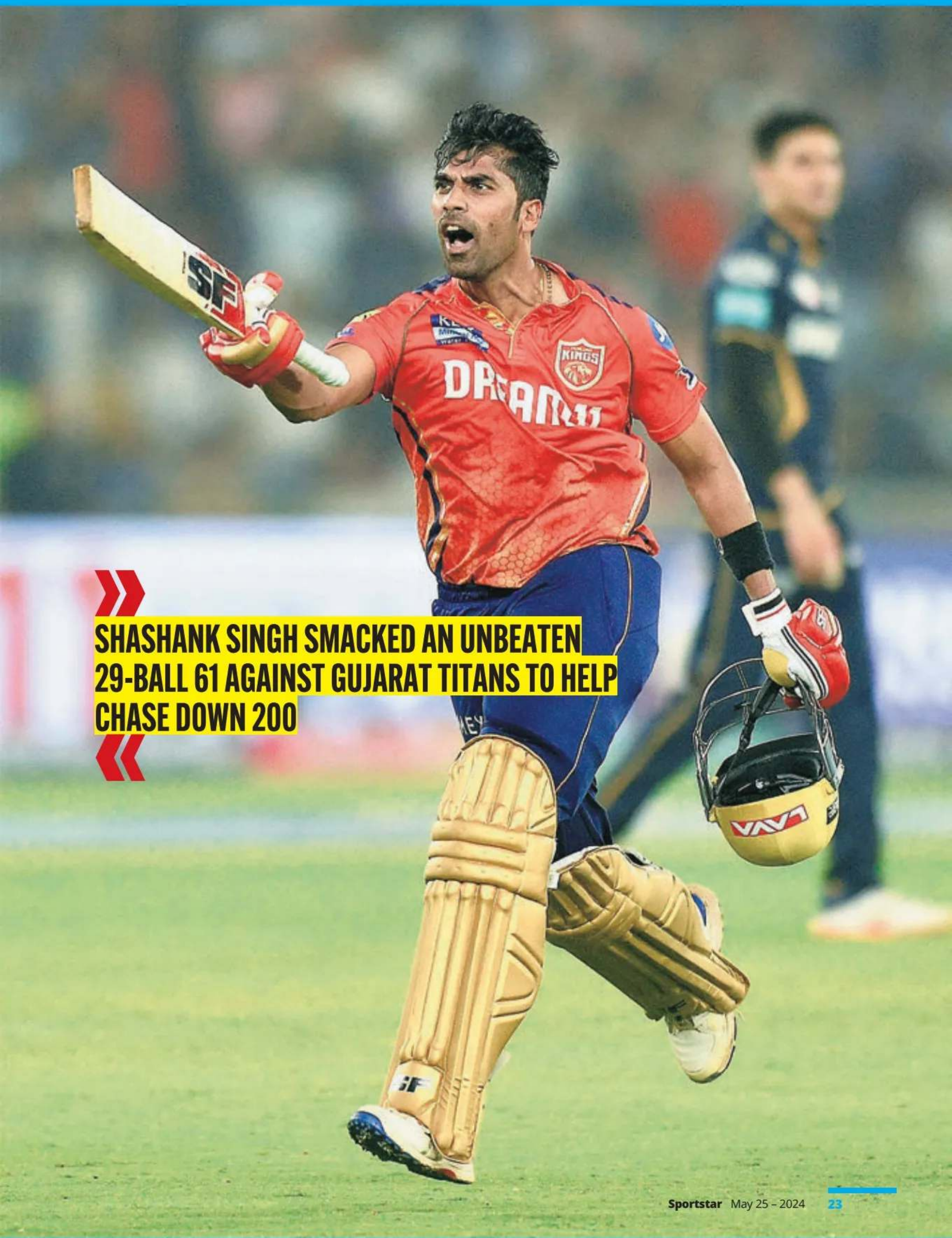
Shashank doesn't shy away from hitting good balls out of the park, but one cannot ignore his tendency to downplay himself. The fact that it took him a lot of time to cement a place in a side — domestic or IPL — seems to have made him more practical in his approach.

Growing up in Bhilai and representing Madhya Pradesh in Under-15 and Under-17 cricket, Shashank, the son of a police officer and telecommunications officer, moved to Mumbai with his family to pursue his cricketing dreams. Although he made it to Mumbai Under-19, his senior debut was delayed. He finally made the cut as an all-rounder in the 2014–15 season, but despite his effective medium-pace bowling, he struggled to secure a regular spot in the team. In 2018-19, he tried his luck in Pondicherry but eventually returned to Chhattisgarh, which was a recognised member of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) by now. During his debut season with Chhattisgarh, Shashank played a crucial role in securing its first-ever victory over Mumbai in all formats at the senior level.

While competing in Mumbai's maidans, Shashank had caught the eye of IPL scouts, earning stints with Delhi Daredevils (now Capitals) and Rajasthan Royals between 2017 and 2021. His IPL debut was with Sunrisers Hyderabad in 2022, but he was released and went unsold in the 2023 auction. Fast forward to 2024, and Shashank's fortunes have turned. His heroics for Punjab Kings, including a stunning unbeaten 68 off 28 balls, helped his team chase down the highest-ever IPL target of 262 with eight balls to spare. Shashank, unaffected by his past setbacks, embraces his success this time. "This is a byproduct of all the struggles I have had at various levels. I have learned from every failure and little success I have had over all these years," he says.

He chuckles at being called "old", just as he does when dubbed "the find of the season". Thanks to his morning yoga routine and countless hours on the cricket grounds across India, Shashank seems to be in his prime. His knack for breaking down challenging targets, like turning 127 off 54 balls into "six sixes and six fours," shows his confidence. Age doesn't bother him; he's focused on emulating his Mumbai teammates to reach his dream of playing for India.

"I have been playing with Pravin



SHASHANK SINGH SMACKED AN UNBEATEN 29-BALL 61 AGAINST GUJARAT TITANS TO HELP CHASE DOWN 200

Good mates: Good mates: Since getting a duck in the season opener against Delhi Capitals, whenever Shashank feels dejected, Jonny Bairstow's words echo in his mind: "If I don't see you smiling, I will stop speaking with you." SPORTZPICS / IPL

Tambe at D.Y. Patil (in Mumbai's corporate leagues) and have seen him debut in the IPL and in Ranji in his 40s," Shashank says. "And I have a friend in Surya (Suryakumar Yadav) with whom I have been playing for Parsee Gymkhana for the last 15 years."

Shashank emphasises the Suryakumar example, noting how both he and SKY excel at turning high-risk shots into calculated risks with precision, especially under pressure. "The world sat up and took notice when Surya hit Jofra Archer for a six off his first ball in international cricket, but I had been watching him do the same for well over a decade, so I knew he would do it. Similarly, I know what I am capable of, and I support my abilities."

Being the mature individual he is, on and off the field, Shashank doesn't require pep talks from mentors. He gleans pointers from short conversations as adeptly as he reads a bowler's wrist — it could be with former India cricketer Abey Kuruvilla or his head coach at one of his earlier teams, SRH, Brian Lara.

"We miss him (Kuruvilla) at DY Patil since he is with BCCI now, but he calls and shares his observations regularly," said Shashank. "And he (Brian) texted me the other day to compliment me, and we had a short chat."

Even Punjab Kings head coach Trevor Bayliss and director Sanjay Bangar are no exceptions. Just before the KKR game, Bangar and Shashank bumped into each other over breakfast. "All he told me was to be careful about a specific ball that Sunil Narine bowls, and I kept it in mind. Even Trevor — we had this meet and greet event with the fans, and someone was late by a couple of minutes — so in those two minutes, Trevor had a suggestion about a drive I played, and that's about it,"

The right choice: Punjab Kings signed Shashank Singh at his base price of Rs 20 lakh during the 2024 IPL auction amidst curious circumstances, which the team has since clarified in multiple social media posts. PTI

Shashank in IPL 2024

MATCHES PLAYED
11

RUN SCORED
315

STRIKE RATE
165.79

50s/4s/6s
2/24/19

All stats updated till PBKS vs CSK match in Dharamsala

Shashank says.

Throughout the conversation, there is a wide grin on Shashank's face. Perhaps Jonny Bairstow should take credit for it. "I got a duck in our season opener (against Delhi Capitals on March 23), was sitting dejected in the dug-out, and suddenly Jonny tapped me from behind and said, 'If I don't see you smiling, I will stop speaking with you'. I have kept it in mind ever since."

Despite his accomplishments, no conversation with Shashank is complete without mentioning the IPL Auction in Dubai on December 19. After the franchise raised the paddle for him, there was confusion as another player with the same name, a younger hard-hitting batter from Punjab, seemed to be preferred. The franchise issued a clarification the next day, but Shashank wasn't fazed. Bangar called him 'around 6 a.m.' and assured him of the franchise's trust. "Hitesh Goswami sir, our Chhattisgarh head coach and talent scout for the franchise, indicated that Punjab Kings was interested in me," he recalls. "It's been reduced to nothing but a joke in our camp ever since." Shashank even appeared in a social media video for the franchise, humorously addressing the identity confusion with a famous dialogue from the Hindi film *Andaz Apna Apna*.

With his confidence being sky-high and form at its peak, call him old or call him a find. Shashank Singh, at 32, does not mind!

Remember my name!

Each IPL has thrown up some **young heroes.** Here are six cricketers who have lit up the competition this year.

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Abhishek Sharma

— Sunrisers Hyderabad

Abhishek Sharma and Travis Head have formed an intimidating opening partnership for Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH), leading the team to three 250-plus totals this season.

Abhishek has been a part of the Hyderabad-based franchise since 2018. However, his explosive batting at the top of the order this year has helped him gain more attention. His opening performance was so impressive that his name was doing the rounds as a possible option for the opening slot for India's T20 World Cup squad.

The left-hander's 16-ball 50 against Mumbai Indians was the fastest by an SRH batter. Against Delhi Capitals, Abhishek scored 46 runs off just 12 balls, falling agonisingly short of equalling the record for the fastest fifty in IPL (13 balls), held by Yashasvi Jaiswal .

Abhishek's preference for spin is evident from his strike rate of 236 against spinners in IPL 2024, compared to 188.50 against pacers, despite his batting position suggesting a liking for pace.

Innings: **10** | Runs: **315** | Average: **31.50** | Strike Rate: **208.60** | HS: **63** | 50s: **1**

Riyan Parag

— Rajasthan Royals

Riyan Parag rode a successful domestic campaign, where he was the top run-scorer in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, to script a remarkable turnaround with Rajasthan Royals (RR) in the IPL.

After multiple middling seasons with Royals, batting mostly in the lower middle order and scoring only 600 runs in 54 games, Riyan has turned a corner with his promotion to the number four position.

Riyan has played a crucial role in Rajasthan Royals' batting during the middle overs, contributing significantly to its impressive performance this season. In 10 innings, he has scored four half-centuries and is currently the leading run-scorer for RR. With 409 runs this year, he has also become the highest-scoring uncapped player in the history of the IPL.

Innings: **9** | Runs: **409** | Average: **58.42** | Strike Rate: **159.14** | HS: **84*** | 50s: **4**

Ashutosh Sharma

— Punjab Kings

Ashutosh Sharma has often rescued Punjab Kings (PBKS) from tough spots with his strong performances in the lower-middle order this season.

He broke into the scene against Gujarat Titans at the Narendra Modi Stadium. Ashutosh got together with Shashank Singh for the seventh wicket, with Kings needing 50 runs off 27 deliveries. The 25-year-old scored 31 off 16 deliveries in a 43-run stand to pull off an unlikely three-wicket win for Punjab.

He was in a similar situation against Mumbai Indians, walking in with his side reeling at 77 for six in a 192-run chase. Ashutosh scored 61 runs off just 28 deliveries to prolong Punjab's fight.

Among batters who have played at least 50 balls at number seven or lower this IPL, Ashutosh's strike rate of 189.28 is second only to Andre Russell.

Innings: **5** | Runs:**159** | Average: **39.75** | Strike Rate: **189.28** | HS: **61** | 50s: **1**

Tilak Varma

— Mumbai Indians

Tilak Varma has been the silver lining in an otherwise dismal campaign for Mumbai Indians (MI).

The southpaw has held the MI batting unit in place when its big guns Rohit Sharma, Ishan Kishan, and Suryakumar Yadav have been inconsistent. He started the season with a 34-ball 64 that allowed his side to at least make a run at the record run chase of 277 against Sunrisers Hyderabad.

Tilak brought up two more fifties later in the competition to become the third-youngest player behind Rishabh Pant and Yashasvi Jaiswal to cross 1000 runs in the IPL.

With three games still in hand, Tilak is on course to better his 395-run debut season in 2022, which remains his best return with the bat in the competition.

Innings: **11** | Runs: **347** | Average: **38.55** | Strike Rate: **151.52** | HS: **65** | 50s: **3**

Angkrish Raghuvanshi

— Kolkata Knight Riders

Angkrish Raghuvanshi has proved to be a value-for-money pick for Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) this season.

The 18-year-old, who was India's leading scorer in the Under-19 World Cup 2022 in the Caribbean, was signed by KKR for Rs 20 Lakh in the 2024 mini-auction.

Raghuvanshi repaid the faith with a half-century against Delhi Capitals, making him the youngest to notch up an IPL fifty on debut. The 25-ball half-century was also the second-fastest by a batter in their first outing.

In six innings, Raghuvanshi's orthodox technique and youthful flamboyance have helped him carve out a space amidst heavyweights like Shreyas Iyer, Andre Russell, and Rinku Singh in the KKR batting order.

Innings: **6** | Runs: **131** | Average: **21.83** | Strike Rate: **165.82** | HS: **54** | 50s: **1**

N. Sai Sudharsan

— Gujarat Titans

Though the high of back-to-back IPL finals may be waning off for Gujarat Titans (GT), Sai Sudharsan has not let that trickle down into his batting. In a season riddled with inconsistency, Sudharsan has given his side something to cheer for.

The fact that Sudharsan has only two scores of less than 30 runs in 11 innings this year is a sign of his consistency. Sudharsan's performances have been invaluable for GT, given new skipper Shubman Gill's underwhelming returns. Currently third in the Orange Cap standings with 424 runs, Sudharsan has already bettered his breakout season (362 runs in 2023) and is a contender for the 'Emerging Player of the Year' award.

Innings: **11** | Runs: **424** | Average: **42.40** | Strike Rate: **131.67** | HS: **84*** | 50s: **2**

(all stats updated till Match No. 52 between RCB and GT on May 4)

Fourth T20 World Cup – 2012

Host: Sri Lanka; **Total matches:** 27 (12 teams)
Semifinals: Sri Lanka (139/4) beat Pakistan (123/7) by 16 runs in Colombo, RPS on 4 October 2012; West Indies (205/4) beat Australia (131/10) by 74 runs in Colombo, RPS on 5 October 2012
Final: West Indies (137/6) beat Sri Lanka (101/10) by 36 runs wickets in Colombo, RPS on 7 October 2012
(Winning captain: Daren Sammy)

Team results

#	Team	M	W	L	NR	Win%
1	WI	7	4	2	1	57.14
2	SL	7	5	2	0	71.43
3	Pak	6	4	2	0	66.67
3	Aus	6	4	2	0	66.67
5	Ind	5	4	1	0	80.00
6	SA	5	2	3	0	40.00
6	Eng	5	2	3	0	40.00
8	NZ	5	1	4	0	20.00
9	Ire	2	0	1	1	0.00
10	Zim	2	0	2	0	0.00
10	Afg	2	0	2	0	0.00
10	Ban	2	0	2	0	0.00

Leading run-getters

Batter (Team)	M	I	NO	Runs	HS	Ave.	S/R	100	50
S. Watson (Aus)	6	6	1	249	72	49.80	150.00	0	3
M. Jayawardene (SL)	7	7	1	243	65*	40.50	116.26	0	1
M. Samuels (WI)	7	6	0	230	78	38.33	132.94	0	3
C. Gayle (WI)	7	6	1	222	75*	44.40	150.00	0	3
B. McCullum (NZ)	5	5	0	212	123	42.40	159.39	1	0
L. Wright (Eng)	5	5	1	193	99*	48.25	169.29	0	2
V. Kohli (Ind)	5	5	1	185	78*	46.25	122.51	0	2
T. Dilshan (SL)	7	7	0	179	76	25.57	120.94	0	1
K. Sangakkara (SL)	7	7	1	170	44	28.33	126.86	0	0
M. Hafeez (Pak)	6	6	0	164	45	27.33	98.20	0	0
M. Hussey (Aus)	6	5	3	155	54*	77.50	123.01	0	1
I. Nazir (Pak)	6	6	0	153	72	25.50	150.00	0	1

Highest individual scores (100s: 1)

Batter (Team)	Runs	Balls	4s	6s	S/R	Opp
B. McCullum (NZ)	123	58	11	7	212.06	Ban
L. Wright (Eng)	99*	55	8	6	180.00	Afg
Shakib (Ban)	84	54	11	2	155.55	Pak
J. Charles (WI)	84	56	10	3	150.00	Eng
V. Kohli (Ind)	78*	61	8	2	127.86	Pak
M. Samuels (WI)	78	56	3	6	139.28	SL
T. Dilshan (SL)	76	53	5	3	143.39	NZ
L. Wright (Eng)	76	43	5	5	176.74	NZ
C. Gayle (WI)	75*	41	5	6	182.92	Aus
I. Nazir (Pak)	72	36	9	3	200.00	Ban
S. Watson (Aus)	72	42	2	7	171.42	Ind
E. Morgan (Eng)	71*	36	4	5	197.22	WI
S. Watson (Aus)	70	47	8	2	148.93	SA

Most sixes hit

Batter (Team)	6s	Balls/6	M	I	Runs	Ave.	S/R	4s
C. Gayle (WI)	16	9.25	7	6	222	44.40	150.00	19
M. Samuels (WI)	15	11.53	7	6	230	38.33	132.94	14
S. Watson (Aus)	15	11.07	6	6	249	49.80	150.00	19
L. Wright (Eng)	13	8.77	5	5	193	48.25	169.29	14
B. McCullum (NZ)	10	13.30	5	5	212	42.40	159.39	20

Note: Mahela Jayawardene (SL) hit the maximum number of 4s: 29

Leading wicket-takers

Bowler (Team)	M	O	Md	Runs	W	BB	E/R	S/R	4w	5w
A. Mendis (SL)	6	24	3	147	15	6/8	6.12	9.60	1	1
S. Watson (Aus)	6	24	0	176	11	3/26	7.33	13.09	0	0
M. Starc (Aus)	6	24	0	164	10	3/20	6.83	14.40	0	0
L. Balaji (Ind)	4	12	0	88	9	3/19	7.33	8.00	0	0
S. Narine (WI)	7	24.4	0	139	9	3/9	5.63	16.44	0	0
R. Rampaul (WI)	7	23.5	1	189	9	3/16	7.93	15.89	0	0
S. Ajmal (Pak)	6	24	1	163	9	4/30	6.79	16.00	1	0

Best bowling figures (six-wicket haul: 1; five-wicket haul: 1; four-wicket hauls: 4)

Bowler (Team)	O	Md	Runs	W	E/R	Opp
A. Mendis (SL)	4	2	8	6	2.00	Zim
L. Malinga (SL)	4	0	31	5	7.75	Eng
Harbhajan (Ind)	4	2	12	4	3.00	Eng
A. Mendis (SL)	4	0	12	4	3.00	WI
J. Kallis (SA)	4	1	15	4	3.75	Zim
S. Ajmal (Pak)	4	0	30	4	7.50	NZ
S. Narine (WI)	3.4	0	9	3	2.45	SL
T. Southee (NZ)	4	1	16	3	4.00	Ban
S. Finn (Eng)	4	0	16	3	4.00	NZ
R. Rampaul (WI)	3.4	0	16	3	4.36	Aus

Hat-trick (no instances)

Fifth T20 World Cup – 2014

Host: Bangladesh; **Total matches:** 35 (16 teams)
Semifinals: Sri Lanka (160/6) beat West Indies (80/4 in 13.5 ov) by 27 runs (DLS) in Mirpur on 3 April 2014; South Africa (172/4) lost to India (176/4) by 6 wickets in Mirpur on 4 April 2014
Final: India (130/4) lost to Sri Lanka (134/4) by 6 wickets in Mirpur on 6 April 2014 (Winning captain: Lasith Malinga)

Team results

#	Team	M	W	L	Win%
1	SL	6	5	1	83.33
2	Ind	6	5	1	83.33
3	WI	5	3	2	60.00
3	SA	5	3	2	60.00
5	Ire	3	2	1	66.67
5	Nep	3	2	1	66.67
5	Zim	3	2	1	66.67
8	Pak	4	2	2	50.00
8	NZ	4	2	2	50.00
10	Net	7	3	4	42.86
11	HK	3	1	2	33.33
11	Afg	3	1	2	33.33
13	Ban	7	2	5	28.57
14	Aus	4	1	3	25.00
14	Eng	4	1	3	25.00
16	UAE	3	0	3	0.00

Best bowling figures (five-wkt hauls: 2; four-wkt hauls: 7)

Bowler (Team)	O	Md	Runs	W	E/R	Opp
R. Herath (SL)	3.3	2	3	5	0.85	NZ
A. Malik (Net)	4	0	19	5	4.75	SA
R. Ashwin (Ind)	3.2	0	11	4	3.30	Aus
S. Badree (WI)	4	0	15	4	3.75	Ban
D. Steyn (SA)	4	0	17	4	4.25	NZ
N. Ahmed (HK)	3.3	0	21	4	6.00	Ban
I. Tahir (SA)	4	0	21	4	5.25	Net
N. K'sekara (SL)	4	1	32	4	8.00	Eng
T. P'angara (Zim)	4	1	37	4	9.25	Ire

Leading wicket-takers

Bowler (Team)	M	O	Md	Runs	W	BB	E/R	S/R	4w	5w
A. Malik (Net)	7	24.5	0	166	12	5/19	6.68	12.42	0	1
I. Tahir (SA)	5	20	0	131	12	4/21	6.55	10.00	1	0
R. Ashwin (Ind)	6	23.1	0	124	11	4/11	5.35	12.64	1	0
Samuel Badree (WI)	5	20	0	113	11	4/15	5.65	10.91	1	0
A. Hossain (Ban)	7	25.3	0	187	10	3/21	7.33	15.30	0	0
A. Mishra (Ind)	6	22	1	147	10	3/26	6.68	13.20	0	0

Highest individual scores (100s: 2)

Batter (Team)	Runs	Balls	4s	6s	S/R	Opp
A. Hales (Eng)	116*	64	11	6	181.25	SL
A. Shehzad (Pak)	111*	62	10	5	179.03	Ban
U. Akmal (Pak)	94	54	9	4	174.07	Aus
M. Jayawardene (SL)	89	51	11	3	174.50	Eng
J. P. Duminy (SA)	86*	43	10	3	200.00	NZ
V. Kohli (Ind)	77	58	5	4	132.75	SL
G. Maxwell (Aus)	74	33	7	6	224.24	Pak
T. Cooper (Net)	72*	58	9	1	124.13	Zim
V. Kohli (Ind)	72*	44	5	2	163.63	SA
Dwayne Smith (WI)	72	43	10	3	167.44	Ban
A. Finch (Aus)	71	45	7	4	157.77	Ban

Leading run-getters

Batter (Team)	M	I	NO	Runs	HS	Ave.	S/R	100	50
V. Kohli (Ind)	6	6	3	319	77	106.33	129.14	0	4
T. Cooper (Net)	7	7	3	231	72*	57.75	137.50	0	1
S. Myburgh (Net)	7	7	0	224	63	32.00	154.48	0	3
Rohit Sharma (Ind)	6	6	1	200	62*	40.00	123.45	0	2
J. P. Duminy (SA)	5	5	2	187	86*	62.33	140.60	0	1
Shakib (Ban)	7	7	2	186	66	37.20	129.16	0	1
H. Amla (SA)	5	5	0	185	56	37.00	131.20	0	1
A. Haque (Ban)	7	7	1	184	44*	30.66	118.70	0	0
A. Hales (Eng)	4	4	1	166	116*	55.33	158.09	1	0
A. Finch (Aus)	4	4	0	158	71	39.50	130.57	0	2
M. J'dene (SL)	6	6	1	158	89	31.60	125.39	0	1

Most sixes hit

Batter (Team)	6s	Balls/6	M	I	Runs	Ave.	S/R	4s
S. Myburgh (Net)	13	11.15	7	7	224	32.00	154.48	26
G. Maxwell (Aus)	12	5.83	4	4	147	36.75	210.00	13
T. Cooper (Net)	10	16.80	7	7	231	57.75	137.50	22
V. Kohli (Ind)	10	24.70	6	6	319	106.33	129.14	24
Shakib (Ban)	9	16.00	7	7	186	37.20	129.16	15
A. Haque (Ban)	8	19.38	7	7	184	30.66	118.70	22
J. P. Duminy (SA)	8	16.63	5	5	187	62.33	140.60	14

Note: Stephan Myburgh (Net) hit the maximum number of 4s: 26

Hat-trick (no instances)

Sixth T20 World Cup – 2016

Host: India; **Total matches:** 35 (16 teams)
Semifinals: New Zealand (153/8) lost to England (159/3) by 7 wickets in Delhi on 30 March 2016; India (192/2) lost to West Indies (196/3) by 7 wickets in Mumbai WS on 31 March 2016
Final: England (155/9) lost to West Indies (161/6) by 4 wickets in Kolkata on 3 April 2016
(Winning captain: Daren Sammy)

Team results

#	Team	M	W	L	NR	Win%
1	WI	6	5	1	0	83.33
2	Eng	6	4	2	0	66.67
3	NZ	5	4	1	0	80.00
4	Ind	5	3	2	0	60.00
5	Zim	3	2	1	0	66.67
6	Afg	7	4	3	0	57.14
7	SA	4	2	2	0	50.00
7	Aus	4	2	2	0	50.00
9	Net	3	1	1	1	33.33
9	Oman	3	1	1	1	33.33
11	Scot	3	1	2	0	33.33
12	Ban	7	2	4	1	28.57
13	SL	4	1	3	0	25.00
13	Pak	4	1	3	0	25.00
15	Ire	3	0	2	1	0.00
16	HK	3	0	3	0	0.00

Best bowling figures (five-wkt hauls: 2; four-wkt hauls: 7)

Bowler (Team)	O	Md	Runs	W	E/R	Opp
M. Rahman (Ban)	4	0	22	5	5.50	NZ
J. Faulkner (Aus)	4	0	27	5	6.75	Pak
Meekeren (Net)	2	0	11	4	5.50	Ire
M. Santner (NZ)	4	0	11	4	2.75	Ind
Shakib (Ban)	3	0	15	4	5.00	Oman
M. Nabi (Afg)	4	0	20	4	5.00	HK
C. Morris (SA)	4	0	27	4	6.75	Afg
W. M'kadza (Zim)	4	0	28	4	7.00	Scot
C. Jordan (Eng)	4	0	28	4	7.00	SL

Leading wicket-takers

Bowler (Team)	M	O	Md	Runs	W	BB	E/R	S/R	4w	5w
M. Nabi (Afg)	7	27	1	164	12	4/20	6.07	13.50	1	0
Rashid Khan (Afg)	7	28	0	183	11	3/11	6.53	15.27	0	0
M. Santner (NZ)	5	18.1	0	114	10	4/11	6.27	10.90	1	0
Shakib (Ban)	7	23	0	166	10	4/15	7.21	13.80	1	0
Ish Sodhi (NZ)	5	19.4	0	120	10	3/18	6.10	11.80	0	0
D. Willey (Eng)	6	21	0	159	10	3/20	7.57	12.60	0	0

Highest individual scores (100s: 2)

Batter (Team)	Runs	Balls	4s	6s	S/R	Opp
T. Iqbal (Ban)	103*	63	10	5	163.49	Oman
C. Gayle (WI)	100*	48	5	11	208.33	Eng
V. Kohli (Ind)	89*	47	11	1	189.36	WI
M. Samuels (WI)	85*	66	9	2	128.78	Eng
A. Fletcher (WI)	84*	64	6	5	131.25	SL
T. Iqbal (Ban)	83*	58	6	3	143.10	Net
T. Dilshan (SL)	83*	56	8	3	148.21	Afg
J. Root (Eng)	83	44	6	4	188.63	SA
V. Kohli (Ind)	82*	51	9	2	160.78	Aus
L. Simmons (WI)	82*	51	7	5	160.78	Ind
M. Guptill (NZ)	80	48	10	3	166.66	Pak
J. Roy (Eng)	78	44	11	2	177.27	NZ
A. Mathews (SL)	73*	54	3	5	135.18	Eng

Leading run-getters

Batter (Team)	M	I	NO	Runs	HS	Ave.	S/R	100	50
T. Iqbal (Ban)	6	6	2	295	103*	73.75	142.51	1	1
V. Kohli (Ind)	5	5	3	273	89*	136.50	146.77	0	3
J. Root (Eng)	6	6	1	249	83	49.80	146.47	0	2
M. Shahzad (Afg)	7	7	0	222	61	31.71	140.50	0	1
J. Buttler (Eng)	6	6	2	191	66*	47.75	159.16	0	1
J. Roy (Eng)	6	6	0	183	78	30.50	148.78	0	1
M. Samuels (WI)	6	6	1	181	85*	36.20	112.42	0	1
Q. de Kock (SA)	4	4	0	153	52	38.25	142.99	0	1

Most sixes hit

Batter (Team)	6s	Balls/6	M	I	Runs	Ave.	S/R	4s
T. Iqbal (Ban)	14	14.79	6	6	295	73.75	142.51	24
J. Buttler (Eng)	12	10.00	6	6	191	47.75	159.16	13
M. Shahzad (Afg)	12	13.17	7	7	222	31.71	140.50	23
C. Gayle (WI)	11	5.27	5	4	113	37.66	194.82	8
A. B. de Villiers (SA)	9	6.78	4	4	110	36.66	180.32	5
M. Guptill (NZ)	8	11.13	4	4	140	35.00	157.30	15

Note: Virat Kohli (Ind) hit the maximum number of 4s: 29

Hat-trick (no instances)

2014 – BANGLADESH

1st

Shock treatment: Debutant Hong Kong pulled off a major upset by beating Bangladesh with two balls and as many wickets to spare. Defending just 108, Shakib Al Hasan took three wickets to give the Tigers a glimmer of hope, but it wasn't enough as Munir Dar shepherded the chase with a knock of 36. AP

2nd

Start attack: Opener Alex Hales made history by becoming England's first T20 centurion when he scored a whirlwind 116 not out off just 64 balls against Sri Lanka. Chasing a commanding 189, Hales was ably supported by Eoin Morgan, who hit 57 as England won by six wickets. GETTY IMAGES

3rd

Titanic upset: England ran out of answers while chasing the Netherlands' modest total of 133 and succumbed to an embarrassing 45-run defeat. This was the second consecutive time that the Men in Orange defeated England in a World T20 match, the previous one being at Lord's two editions prior. GETTY IMAGES

4th

A win for spin: Ravichandran Ashwin and Amit Mishra bamboozled the Australian batters by picking up four and two wickets, respectively, to bowl them out for just 86 in their final group match. Yuvraj Singh had earlier scored 60 (43) to take India to 159. This win made it a clean sweep for India in the group stage. GETTY IMAGES

Sweet revenge: Sri Lanka exorcised its 2011 World Cup demons by beating India in the final. It was a forgettable performance by the Indians, in which Man of the Tournament Virat Kohli **(left)** was run out and Yuvraj Singh scored a meagre 11 off 21 balls — a far cry from the man who hit six sixes in an over in the inaugural edition. In the chase, Kumar Sangakkara's half-century was more than enough to give Sri Lanka its first World T20 title. GETTY IMAGES

7th

Electric Eden: India's high-profile match against Pakistan at the Eden Gardens began with Bollywood megastar Amitabh Bachchan singing the national anthem before the game. During the game, Indian captain Virat Kohli scored an unbeaten 55 while chasing a modest target of 118, leading the team to victory and sending the crowd into a frenzy at the iconic stadium. K. R. DEEPAK

8th

Battle of the underdogs: Ireland experienced a surprising upset at the hands of Oman, losing by just two runs. Renowned for its ability to defeat higher-ranked teams, Ireland faltered in the crucial final over bowled by Max Sorensen. Conceding 15 runs, Sorensen's lapse allowed Oman to clinch a memorable victory. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

9th

Runs galore: England recorded the highest chase in World T20 history when it overcame South Africa's mammoth total of 229. After Jason Roy's knock of 43 (16) gave England a blistering start, Joe Root scored a sublime 83 off 44 balls to guide his team home. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

Genius at work: M.S. Dhoni shattered Bangladeshi hearts with his iconic final ball run-out of Mustafizur Rahman to help India win by one run in a crucial group match. Needing two runs off the last three balls, Bangladesh failed to score a single run as it lost three consecutive wickets, thus crashing out of the tournament. K. BHAGYA PRAKASH

Remember the name: Pandemonium ruled Eden Gardens when Carlos Brathwaite hit four consecutive sixes off Ben Stokes in the final over to help the West Indies become T20 champion for the second time. Commentator Ian Bishop's unforgettable words — "Carlos Brathwaite, remember the name" — became etched in the history of the sport. AP

2021 – UAE, OMAN

13th

Magic Wade: In the penultimate over of Australia and Pakistan's semifinal, Shaheen Afridi was smacked for 22 runs by Mathew Wade. GETTY IMAGES

THE AUSSIE HIT THREE CONSECUTIVE SIXES OFF THE LAST THREE BALLS OF THE 19TH OVER TO SEAL THE VICTORY FOR HIS SIDE

14th

How the tables turned: The Indian bowling attack, featuring the likes of Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, and Ravindra Jadeja, was left in tatters after a relentless onslaught by openers Mohammad Rizwan and Babar Azam. Pakistan did not lose a single wicket while chasing a target of 152 runs, leaving captain Virat Kohli clueless. India never recovered from here, and lost its next match against New Zealand, later crashing out of the tournament. GETTY IMAGES

15th

Painful reprise: Two years after the heartbreaking loss to England in the final of the 50-over World Cup, New Zealand was beaten yet again in another final, this time by Australia. After posting a total of 172, the Black Caps couldn't deter the Aussies, who won comfortably with more than an over to spare. GETTY IMAGES

16th

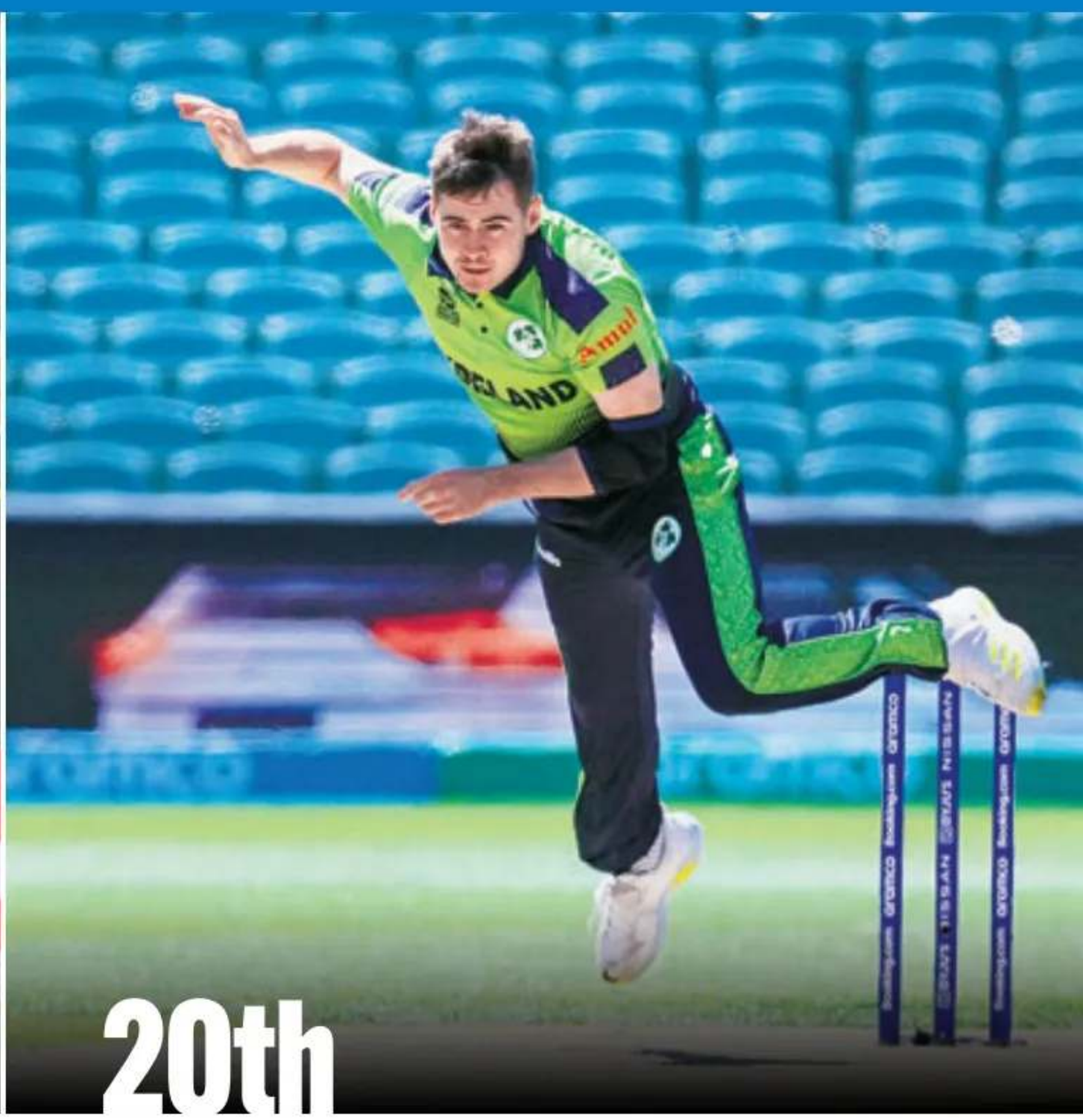
False start: Sri Lanka got off to the worst possible start after Namibia pulled off a stunning upset in the opening match of this edition. After posting a competitive total of 163/7, its bowlers were on fire, restricting Sri Lanka to just 108 runs. GETTY IMAGES

AFP

King shot: Virat Kohli played a stunning lofted straight drive for six under immense pressure to guide India to a memorable victory against Pakistan. Fittingly called the 'Shot of the Century' by the ICC, it was the icing on the cake in his match-winning knock of 82 not out. GETTY IMAGES

19th

Fly like a bird: Glenn Phillips stunned the crowd with an extraordinary catch to dismiss Marcus Stoinis, who went for an inside-out cover drive off Mitchell Santner. Phillips, charging in from the deep, launched himself towards the ball and managed to grasp it with both hands. Man of the Match Devon Conway scored 92 to help New Zealand post 200 and win by 89 runs. GETTY IMAGES



20th

Hat-trick club: Joshua Little of Ireland achieved a remarkable hat-trick against New Zealand after dismissing Kane Williamson, Jimmy Neesham, and Mitchell Santner consecutively in the 19th over. However, he couldn't prevent Ireland from sliding to a 35-run defeat. Earlier in the tournament, UAE spinner Karthik Meiyappan also got a hat-trick against Sri Lanka. AFP

21st

At last: It was only a matter of time before England won its second T20 World Cup. Captain Jos Buttler and Ben Stokes played steady knocks in a successful chase after Sam Curran's 3/12 restricted Pakistan to just 137. GETTY IMAGES

Change of guard: Rovman Powell took over as T20I captain in 2023, replacing Nicholas Pooran, who resigned as white-ball captain after the 2022 T20 World Cup. GETTY IMAGES

Rally round the West Indies

Forever in the shadow of their predecessors, this is a **golden chance** for Rovman Powell and his men to lay the ghosts of a legendary past to rest.

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The West Indies has a proud history of T20 cricket. Until England won the last T20 World Cup, the Windies were the only team to have won the coveted T20 silverware twice. They premised their game on fearlessness, aggression, and boundary-hitting.

The last two T20 World Cups haven't gone according to plan for the Caribbean lads. They crashed out of the 2021 edition in the Super 12s, with four defeats from five games and were eliminated in 2022 after finishing bottom of their group.

One of the criticisms aimed at the West Indies cricket team, particularly in T20Is, has been its one-dimensional focus on power-hitting.

This approach often resulted in a lower percentage of strike rotation and a higher number of dot balls. In other words, the team's 'hit or miss' strategy was no longer effective. As the T20 format evolved, so did the opposition.

However, it's important to note that West Indies has not abandoned its fast-paced scoring approach. In fact, since November 14, 2022, it has had the third-best run rate (9.80) among Full Member Nations, just behind Australia and South Africa. Additionally, it has the third-highest

Real impact player: In last year's T20 home series against England, Andre Russell delivered with both bat and ball, and ended with the most wickets in the series. His form will be crucial for the West Indies in the World Cup.
GETTY IMAGES

average runs per wicket (27.53), trailing only Australia and India during the same timeframe.

When we compare and contrast these numbers with the stats from the previous two T20 World Cups (between October 17, 2021, and November 13, 2022), a clearer picture emerges. During that period, West Indies had the fourth-worst run rate (7.80) and the third-worst average runs per wicket (22.32). Since the last T20 World Cup, West Indies has played 16 T20Is, won nine, and lost seven. The nine wins include five at home (vs India and England), two in South Africa, and one each in Australia and the USA (vs India).

Teams also need a strong bowling attack to win matches. Since the last T20 World Cup, West Indies has had the worst bowling strike rate (20) and the second-worst bowling economy rate (9.75). West Indies was successful in 2012 and 2016 due to its versatile attack. Samuel Badree was excellent in the PowerPlay and was superbly supported by Sunil Narine (2012) and Suleiman Benn (2016).

Narine retired from international cricket in November 2023, not having played for the West Indies since 2019. However, he continues to play in T20 leagues worldwide, particularly in the Indian Premier League, where he recently scored his first T20 hundred against the Rajasthan Royals. He is also KKR's joint-leading wicket-taker, taking 13 at 6.72 with his off-spin (till 51st Match vs MI). This form led the West Indies' T20I captain, Rovmroan Powell, to admit he had been "whispering in [Narine's] ears" over the previous 12 months, ahead of what will be the West Indies' first home World Cup campaign since the 50-over competition in 2007. But Narine has stated that 'that door is closed', ruling out the possibility of an international comeback.

However, Andre Russell's return has injected optimism into the West Indies cricket team. After being absent since the 2021 T20 World Cup, he made his return last year in the T20I squad against England for a five-match series at home. Russell's impact was felt as he excelled with both bat and ball, emerging as the top wicket-taker in the series, particularly effective in the death overs, and scoring at a blistering strike rate of 169.35.

When it comes to selecting World Cup squads, countries are placing greater emphasis on experience than current levels of performance. West

No return in sight: Sunil Narine's spectacular form this IPL season ignited chatter about his return to the national fold for the T20 World Cup. But the allrounder has ruled out any such possibility. K. R. DEEPAK

Indies, though, has tried to strike a balance between the two. Shimron Hetmyer has been named in West Indies' 15-man squad for the 2024 T20 World Cup. Shamar Joseph, the 24-year-old fast bowler who has played only three T20s and is yet to make his international debut in the format, has also been called up. Desmond Haynes, West Indies' chairman of selectors, said Shamar's selection was role-specific. "You really can't question Shamar Joseph's skills," Haynes said. "You saw him in Australia. We were looking at someone up front bowling the first PowerPlay, and he ticked the boxes." Shamar is one of several West Indies players in the IPL. Lucknow Super Giants signed him as a replacement player. However, he had a tough debut against Kolkata Knight Riders, conceding 47 runs. So far, he has played three T20s and has yet to take a wicket while conceding 9.91 runs per over.

Hetmyer's return is big news for West Indies, especially considering that selectors picked him for the finisher's role.

In the last two IPL seasons, Hetmyer has smashed 383 runs off 192 balls at the death while striking at 199.48 — taking down left-arm and right-arm pace with equal disdain, going north of 200 against both styles of bowling. This year too, Hetmyer's strike rate between overs 17 and 20 is upwards of 200. The mere thought of Hetmyer and Russell teeing off simultaneously should be enough to make bowling attacks shudder.

Given that bowling is likely to be West Indies' weaker suit, the toss will once again be crucial. Historically, West Indies has preferred chasing. In 2016, West Indies won six tosses out of six and chose to bowl every time; in 2021 it lost four tosses out of five, and was sent in to bat every time. Last World Cup, it won three tosses out of three and chose to bat twice.

ONE OF THE CRITICISMS AIMED AT THE WEST INDIES CRICKET TEAM, PARTICULARLY IN T20IS, HAS BEEN ITS ONE-DIMENSIONAL FOCUS ON POWER-HITTING

While boundaries may still be the primary grammar of the T20 format, it's the bowling that could ultimately decide West Indies' fate.

A record third T20 world title is theirs to grab — the question, as always, is just how badly do the men from the Caribbean want it.

Tough pill to swallow: According to India's chairman of selectors, Ajit Agarkar, Rinku Singh's exclusion was the "toughest" decision the selectors had to make while picking the T20 World Cup squad. K.R. DEEPAK

T20Is TAKE BACKSEAT AS LEAGUES SERVE AS WARMUPS FOR WORLD CUP SELECTION

India and South Africa have **increasingly turned** to their franchise T20 leagues when making national selection calls.

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With the Indian Premier League (IPL) capturing the attention of fans, experts, and selectors for over two months, the lucrative extravaganza seems to have become the primary testing ground for T20 World Cup selection, even as international matches in the shortest format take a backseat.

India's last international assignment was a three-match T20I series against Afghanistan in January at home that saw the return of Rohit Sharma as captain and Virat Kohli to the fold in the shortest format. The duo had not featured in a single T20I since India's defeat in the semifinal of the T20 World Cup in November 2022, following which it looked like the national team was eyeing a major overhaul, with Hardik Pandya assuming the reins.

Still, India only played 20 T20Is in the 12 months leading to this year's T20 World Cup and 28 since the last global tournament. Contrastingly, in 2022, India had featured in 40 matches in the year leading to the T20 World Cup and had played 35

Surging ahead: Despite emerging as India's lead spinner since the last T20 World Cup, leggie Ravi Bishnoi lost his World Cup spot to Yuzvendra Chahal, who has been picked on the back of his IPL form. AFP & EMMANUAL YOGINI

games since its group stage exit at the 2021 showpiece event. There was less than a year gap between the 2021 and 2022 editions.

With India's last T20I series coming more than four months out from this year's World Cup, beginning in June, the IPL naturally assumed greater significance.

This view was particularly vindicated when Rinku Singh didn't find a place in India's squad for the World Cup in the United States and West Indies following an IPL season that paled in comparison to the breakout tournament he had last year. However, his batting position for Kolkata Knight Riders was an overbearing factor that played into Rinku's lukewarm returns. In 82 balls faced in eight innings, the southpaw struck 123 runs at a strike rate of 150 while batting at No. 6 and 7 six times.

But preceding the IPL this year, Rinku had a stellar run for India, which was on the lookout for a bonafide finisher in the run-up to the T20 World Cup. Since his India debut in August last year, Rinku has scored 356 runs in 11 innings at a strike rate of 176.23, the best return for any Indian batter with more than 10 runs during this period.

Ajit Agarkar, the chairman of the national selection panel, admitted dropping Rinku was a harsh call.

"It's probably the toughest thing that we have had to discuss, frankly. He has done nothing wrong, nor has Shubman Gill, for that matter. It's the combinations. We are not quite sure what conditions we'll get, so we wanted to try and try and have enough options... It's just unfortunate. I don't think it's anything to do with Rinku Singh," he said.

Interestingly, six out of India's 10 highest run-scorers in the 12 months before the World Cup didn't find a place in the provisional squad, with selectors prioritising recent form in the IPL over performances on the international stage.

Ruturaj Gaikwad, Rinku, Tilak Varma, Ishan Kishan, Shubman, and Jitesh Sharma all missed out on a ticket to the USA and the West Indies, while Shivam Dube's spin-hitting abilities in the middle overs secured his place on the flight despite the left-hander playing only eight out of the 20 international T20s in the past year.

"We picked the guy (Dube) based on what he did in the IPL and a few games before the IPL as well," Agarkar said. To be fair, Dube's scintillating form in the IPL was hard to ignore, with the left-hander amassing 350 runs in 10 matches at a stunning strike rate of over 170.

With India seemingly hitting the reset button post the 10-wicket semifinal defeat against England at the 2022 T20 World Cup, the experienced trio of Rohit, Kohli, and Ravindra Jadeja featured in only seven matches between them out of the 28 T20Is the team played in the current cycle (November 2022–January 2024).

Despite the lack of international gametime in the shortest format, Kohli's returns in the IPL, combined with his experience handling big-match pressure, were enough for him to seize a World Cup spot. Meanwhile, Jadeja, who wasn't selected for the T20Is against Afghanistan in January and played just two games since the 2022 T20 World Cup, was also back in the scheme of things despite a lukewarm season with Chennai Super Kings. On the other hand, Washington Sundar, India's preferred spin-bowling all-rounder, along with Axar Patel, fell out of the national reckoning after an Impact Player-ravaged IPL season that has seen him play just two games so far.

Though there is merit in accounting for performances in arguably the world's most competitive T20 league, it has become increasingly difficult to contextualise international T20 matches, where the rules and quality of the opposition teams more accurately mirror the prevailing conditions at World Cups.

A case in point is leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi, who emerged as India's lead spinner in the period between the last T20 World Cup and the one that looms. He picked up 20 wickets in 14 matches and rose to the top of the global bowling ranks in this phase, but missed World Cup selection after managing only six scalps in 10 matches in the IPL for Lucknow Super Giants.

Bishnoi had overshadowed fellow leggie Yuzvendra Chahal with his recent performances in India colours. But the latter pipped him to the World Cup squad with a higher wickets tally for Rajasthan Royals in the ongoing IPL season, albeit at a higher economy rate.

It's not just India that is increasingly turning to its franchise T20 league when making national selection calls. South Africa, having played just five T20Is in the last 12 months and eight since the last T20 World Cup, banked on the performances of the newly founded SA20 to shape up its squad.

With the three-match T20I series in India in December last year being its last international assignment ahead of the World Cup, South Africa picked the most prolific batter and the second-highest wicket-taker of the subsequent SA20 tournament, Ryan Rickelton and Ottniel Baartman, respectively, in its T20 World Cup contingent. Both Rickelton and Baartman have yet to make their T20I debuts.

A lot has been said about restricting One-Day International cricket to ICC tournaments. And now, with T20 franchise leagues taking precedence and teams increasingly fielding second-string sides in international games in the shortest format, a similar case could be made for T20Is.

INSTAGRAM | @RYANRICKELTON

« Ryan Rickelton was the leading run-scorer in the SA20, and will likely partner Quinton de Kock at the top »

Chasing the World Cup dream, with a pitstop in India

Last year was a seminal year for Nepal as it achieved several milestones, including its **first appearance** in the Asia Cup, the highest-ever T20I team total at the Asian Games, and qualification for the 2024 T20 World Cup.

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"Meetha mein rakh, meetha mein..."

Monty Desai's voice resonated across the Sai Meghpan Sporrtslife Cricket Ground on a blistering April afternoon. Sitting atop a heavy roller, Desai closely observed the Nepal cricketers as they endured the searing heat, honing their skills in the nets.

Each time Dipendra Singh Airee or captain Rohit Paudel faced the local net bowlers, head coach Desai asked them to find the elusive sweet spot. Adding an element of fun to the rigorous training, Desai rewarded good defensive shots with imaginary cash, while poor shots incurred demerit points.

Away from the urban bustle, the Nepal cricketers camped at the scenic facility in Vapi, an industrial town in Gujarat, for a fortnight. Their objective: preparation for the T20 World Cup and the ACC Premier Cup in Oman. During this period, they also participated in the Friendship Cup, a T20 tournament, alongside domestic teams from Baroda and Gujarat, ultimately clinching the title.

THE NEPAL PLAYERS PLAN ON REACHING THE US BY MID-MAY. WHILE THE CONDITIONS WILL POSE CHALLENGES AND THE OPPONENTS WILL BE FORMIDABLE, NEPAL ENTERS THE FRAY ARMED WITH SELF-BELIEF

Amid a sea of fans, predominantly students from various universities across Gujarat, cheering on the Nepal team, the players focused on the task at hand — the T20 World Cup. "We are a determined lot, and our ambition is to achieve more for Nepal," said captain Paudel with a smile.

At just 21, Paudel, hailing from Nawalparasi district in the Lumbini province, will lead a youthful squad at the T20 World Cup, commencing with its first match on June 4 against the Netherlands in Texas. "The more we play, the better it will be for us," emphasised Paudel.

Their dedication has borne fruit in Nepal's recent successes. Since its reinstatement in 2019 after a three-year suspension, the Cricket Association of Nepal has been proactive in nurturing the sport nationwide and discovering

promising talents.

The players have reciprocated the association's efforts. Last year, the team participated in the Asia Cup and toured Pakistan and Sri Lanka, in addition to securing a spot in the T20 World Cup and impressing in a bilateral series.

With former captain Paras Khadka assuming the role of secretary, the domestic tournament featuring seven provinces has gained prominence. The focus remains on providing ample international exposure to the players. "Previously, our domestic structure lacked competitiveness, but it has vastly improved," said assistant coach Basant Shahi Thakuri. "Earlier, our bench strength was a concern, but over time, we've developed an A team, and with every opportunity, the players are learning." While acknowledging the need to bolster

Reasons to be cheerful: Nepal participated in the Friendship Cup T20 tournament in Vapi, competing against domestic teams from Baroda and Gujarat, and emerged as champion. The players were cheered on by fans, mostly students from Gujarat's universities. EMMANUAL YOGINI

school cricket, Thakuri expressed confidence in the burgeoning talent pool. "In our time, few considered cricket a viable career option, but attitudes have shifted. With each success of the national team, more youngsters are embracing the sport seriously."

Sompal Kami, one of the senior-most members of the team, brings a wealth of experience as a fast-bowling all-rounder. A part of Nepal's 2014 World T20 squad that achieved notable victories, beating Hong Kong and Afghanistan, Kami has imparted his knowledge gained from stalwarts such as Khadka and Shakti Gauchan to the current crop of players. "Back then, the struggles were a lot. The salaries were low and there was no contract system. We have come a long way. Our salaries have increased, and most importantly, we now have a contract system, which is a huge thing for us," Kami said. "It feels nice when people bank on our abilities, and that has happened because our game has improved."

Nepal underwent a period of coaching changes, affecting the team's planning. However, since Desai assumed leadership last year, there has been a notable upward trajectory. "We have played under several coaches, but Monty sir has given the team a new direction and has brought the players together," Kami said. "The result is showing."

Having taken over from former India international Manoj Prabhakar, Desai had an arduous task at hand. When he joined the team in February 2023, the Associate Member Nation needed 11 wins from 12 games in the World Cup Super League 2 points table. Only a miracle could have earned Nepal a spot in the ODI World Cup Qualifier in Zimbabwe.

Yet, drawing from his extensive experience with IPL franchises and the West Indies team, Desai instilled confidence in the players, leading to a remarkable turnaround. Nepal's unexpected surge into the Qualifiers and participation in the 2023 Asia

Experienced head: Monty Desai was appointed head coach of Nepal in February 2023. Desai has had coaching experience with Afghanistan, Canada, West Indies, and IPL teams such as Rajasthan Royals and the now-defunct Gujarat Lions.
EMMANUAL YOGINI

« I am lucky to be representing the country in yet another T20 World Cup.
– Nepal all-rounder Gulshan Jha »

Gearing up: Nepal pacer K.C. Karan warming up for the upcoming T20 World Cup at the Sai Meghpan Sporrtslife Cricket Ground in Vapi, Gujarat. EMMANUAL YOGINI

Cup underscored the team's newfound resilience. Desai's formula is simple. "We are trying to have the identity of being the fiercest competitors. When you are competing well in every department, then, more often than not, you have the opportunity to cross the line. That's how we have tried to stay on this journey."

Desai enlisted former Maharashtra cricketer Nandan Phadnis as the batting coach and persuaded the association to host teams from Ireland and the West Indies in Nepal.

When planning the India tour, Desai prioritised finding a residential facility conducive to focused training. "We sought venues that fit our needs, leading us to choose this facility in Vapi."

Operated by local sports enthusiasts Darpan Desai, Manish Bambania, Mehul Trivedi, Santosh Singh, Sukesh, and Suraj Shetty, the Sai Meghpan facility boasts lush green grounds, state-of-the-art training facilities, a gym, and accommodation. Paudel sees the merits clearly. "These camps help us bond well. Staying together for a couple of weeks, and just discussing the game and helping each other out will not only bring the players closer but also help us plan better for the upcoming assignments."

The Nepal players plan on reaching the US by mid-May. While the conditions will pose challenges and the opponents will be formidable, Nepal enters the fray armed with self-belief, ready to prove it is no pushover. Paudel has been leading by example against West Indies A with a century and a couple of fifty-plus scores. Meanwhile, Airee, fresh from his remarkable achievement of equalling a world record by smashing six sixes in an over against Qatar in April, promises to be a vital cog in the team's batting lineup.

But all eyes will be on young sensation Gulshan Jha, who recently featured in the U-19 World Cup. Jha's journey to this point has been nothing short of remarkable. Six years ago, he embarked on a journey to Ranchi to pursue his passion for cricket under the mentorship of former cricketer Arun Vidyarthi. "I was decent in studies, but cricket has always been my first love. Luckily, my parents supported my dream and sent me to Ranchi, where I lived in a hostel and pursued the game," shared Jha, a versatile pacer with skills in batting down the order.

Growing up in Sarlahi, Gulshan heard inspiring stories of how Khadka and his team overcame the odds to play their maiden T20 World Cup in 2014. "Those stories inspired me, and I am lucky to be representing my country in another T20 World Cup," Jha said with a smile.

A decade later, Nepal's cricketers are poised for another milestone, aiming to shine in the US and make their nation proud. It's been quite a journey, but the dream chasers are in no mood to stop.

It hasn't been easy, but the time has come for their biggest moment under the sun

Nine Associate teams will take part in this year's T20 World Cup. Here's how they are gearing up for their **biggest challenge yet.**

Honing skills: The Uganda cricket team poses for a group picture during its two-week tour of Sri Lanka, where it is undergoing training ahead of this year's T20 World Cup. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

TO BOLSTER ITS CAMPAIGN, UGANDA'S CRICKET BODY HIRED FORMER INDIAN FIRST-CLASS CRICKETER ABHAY SHARMA AS HEAD COACH

Shayan Acharya
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The 2024 men's T20 World Cup, which will comprise 20 teams for the first time, will include nine Associate teams, the most in any edition of the T20 showpiece event so far. Twelve teams got automatic entry, while the eight remaining slots were filled via the ICC's regional qualifiers, comprising the top two teams from Africa, Asia, and Europe, along with one team each from the Americas and the East Asia Pacific groups.

In preparation for its maiden T20 World Cup appearance, Uganda's national team, known as the Cricket Cranes, has embarked on a two-week tour of Sri Lanka. It engaged in friendly matches against Sri Lanka's Emerging and A teams in Galle and also faced off against the Army in Colombo.

To bolster its campaign, Uganda's cricket body hired former Indian first-class cricketer Abhay Sharma as head coach. With an illustrious coaching background spanning India A, India Under-19s, the Indian women's cricket team, and the Delhi Ranji Trophy team, Abhay brings extensive experience and aims to impart invaluable knowledge to the budding Ugandan squad.

"The Associate members need more game time, and since they don't get opportunities to play with the top teams, it's about handling the pressure and backing your game. That's most important," Abhay told *Sportstar*.

In January this year, the Uganda cricket team went to Saphale in Maharashtra to train at the Omtex ICWC Cricket Institute and played nine practice games. "Since we could not travel to India now due to the IPL and the UK and Australia were

The third time's the charm: Oman made its T20 World Cup debut back in 2016 and featured in the 2021 edition which it co-hosted with UAE. This will be its third appearance in the big-ticket event. GETTY IMAGES

not an option, we decided to tour Sri Lanka, as we are hoping that the wickets in the West Indies could be slightly slower, so practising in these conditions will help the players," Abhay said.

Uganda finished second behind Namibia in the T20 World Cup Africa Region Qualifier and defeated Zimbabwe during its campaign. The team includes Alpesh Ramjani, from Mumbai, who started playing cricket at Rizvi Springfield School. Ronak Patel and Dinesh Nakrani are other Indian-origin players on the Ugandan team.

"It's a huge experience and probably the biggest opportunity of a lifetime when you play against the top players you aspire to become like. For us, who wish to play in the best leagues in the world, this is a big chance," Ramjani said.

The team usually trains in the Ugandan capital city of Kampala, which has a couple of grounds. However, they have never played under lights.

"That's why we are planning to organise some games under lights in Sri Lanka and some indoor sessions so that the players get that exposure," Abhay said. "After the team's success, the people in Uganda are slowly warming up towards cricket, but the facilities need to improve. The grounds are still not of international standard, and hopefully, the ICC will help us get things better," he added. Abhay also believes that with more exposure, the talent pool will also be widened, which eventually will help the team.

"Cricket is now a popular game after football and rugby. The popularity of cricket has increased among the Ugandan people since our qualification," Ramjani said, adding, "They are discovering the sport. Like India versus Pakistan, Uganda plays very high-intensity games with Kenya. Qualifying for the T20 World Cup was a dream come true for 48 million people in the country."

Oman, a formidable force among Associate nations, boasts two T20 World Cup appearances. Led by coach Duleep Mendis, a former Sri Lankan captain, the team now has Aqib Ilyas at the helm. After reaching the final of the ACC Premier League, Oman retained much of its squad for the upcoming ICC event. The team has been diligently training in Muscat and is set to depart for Barbados around May 15, where it plans on playing three to four practice matches against local teams.

By being the first team to arrive in the West Indies, Oman aims to adapt to the conditions before its opening match against Namibia at the Kensington Oval on June 3.

"Our first game is in Barbados, so we will have a pre-tournament tour, and our boys will feature against the national side and the combined universities team there," Mendis told *Sportstar*.

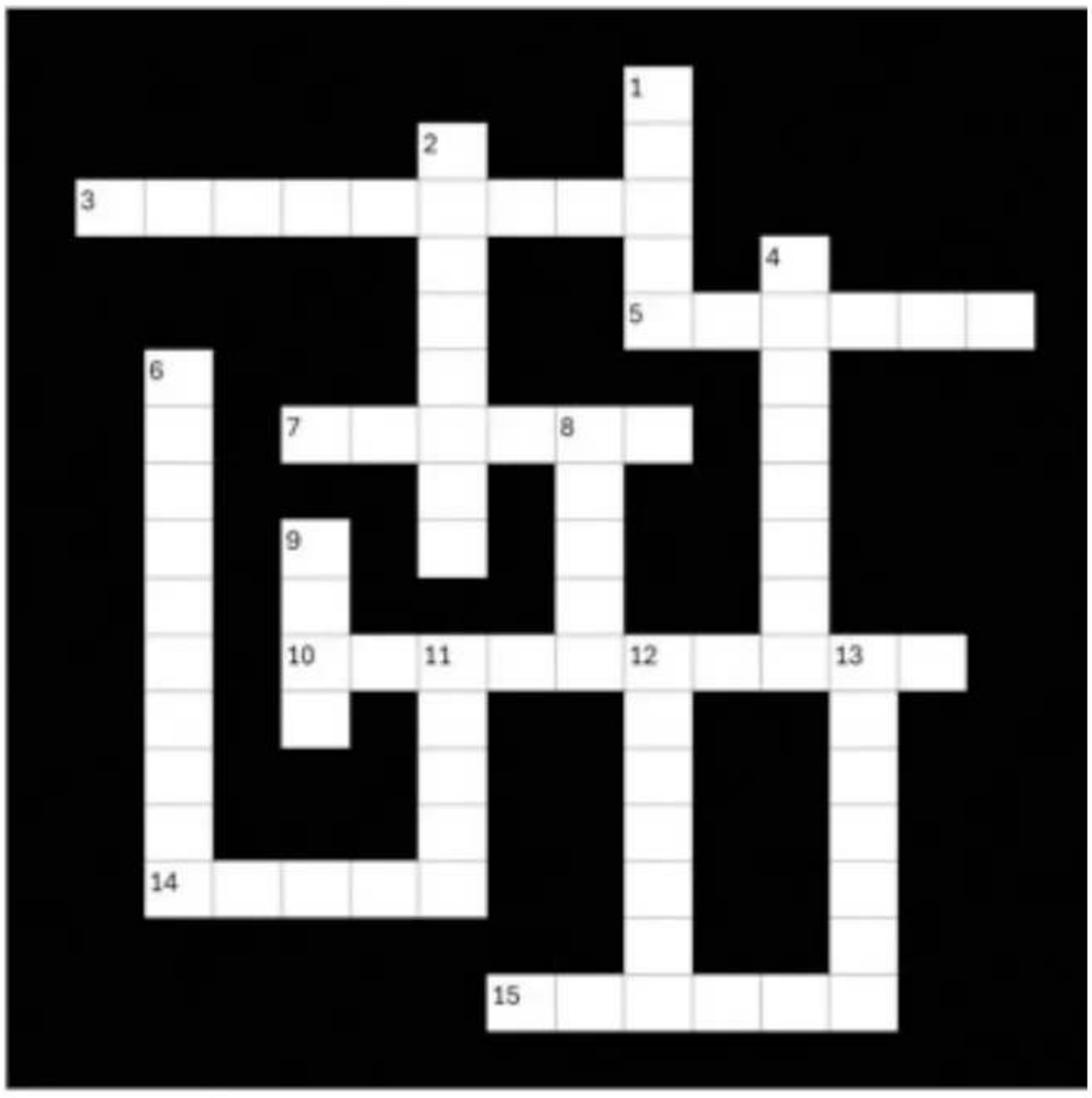
"This is the first time that our boys will be playing in the West Indies, so training in Barbados will help them a lot. It will help them get acclimatised to the conditions and surroundings. Barbados has a rich history and culture of cricket, and our boys must be used to that surrounding," he added.

The team, which performed well in the ACC Premier Cup, boasts a formidable bowling attack led by left-arm yorker specialist Bilal Khan, supported by Kaleemullah and Fayyaz Butt. Former captain Zeeshan Maqsood remains a key member, having led the team since 2016. The batting relies on Ilyas, Maqsood, Kashyap Prajapati, Naseem Khushi, Pratik Athavale, and Ayaan Khan.

"Fielding is an important aspect of T20 cricket, and if we can save a few runs, it will be good for us. Our strength is batting, and that has been backed up by bowling, but we need to raise our standards in fielding against better sides," Mendis said, adding, "We have upset a few teams in the past, and who knows, we might repeat that!"

While Oman is set for a Barbados tour, Namibia is currently busy playing intra-squad games at its base in Windhoek and will travel to St. Kitts on May 17 for training and build-up to the tournament. It's a similar story for Canada, Scotland, and Papua New Guinea, who are training at home and will soon fly to the West Indies with hopes of pulling off a few upsets.

CROSSWORD
KARAN PILLAI



SOLUTION TO LAST FORTNIGHT'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS

3 The legendary late German footballer Franz Beckenbauer was also known as _____ (3, 5)

5 _____: A Billion Dreams. (6)

7 Synchronised swimming is also known as water _____. (6)

10 Who was the highest run-scorer in the 2023 ICC World Cup? (5, 5)

14 An American football match lasts for _____ minutes. (5)

15 In bowling, what is the term that refers to three consecutive strikes? (6)

DOWN

1 The PDC stands for Professional _____ Corporation. (5)

2 What is the name of the sport that combines skiing and rifle shooting? (8)

4 Another name for underwater hockey. (8)

6 Who won the Wimbledon singles title on his first and only attempt? (5, 5)

8 How many countries have won the FIFA World Cup so far? (5)

9 How many players are there in a futsal team? (4)

11 Which sport features an oval-shaped ball? (5)

12 Sebastian _____ is a German gymnast who debuted in the 2012 Summer Olympics in London. (7)

13 In drag-racing, what are the chutes deployed to reduce speed called? (7)

ON THE WRITE LINE

Sunil Gavaskar

FOR MORE STORIES

DEAD-BALL LAW MUST BE REVISITED DURING ICC CRICKET COMMITTEE MEETING

In the Sunrisers Hyderabad vs. Rajasthan Royals game, a tense last-ball LBW call led to a batsman's referral, which meant the ball was dead, potentially offering a **strategic advantage** to opposition captains and coaches.

This season has once again shown the gulf between the domestic T20 leagues and the IPL. The same can be said for Under-19 boys who are suddenly finding themselves exposed in the men's game. There are always exceptions, of course, but the majority, on whom there were huge expectations and who went for crores of rupees, have failed to deliver.

This should not come as a surprise because the difference in standards of both batting and bowling in the domestic T20 league, Under-19 cricket, and the IPL is huge. Sure, some of these boys, with a bit more experience, can go on to become good players capable of holding their own even in the IPL. That said, to give some of these uncapped players crores of rupees is probably pushing their career progress back considerably because suddenly the focus goes missing.

It is perfectly understandable for a young player who hasn't seen such riches to get carried away by the glitz, glamour, and accessories that such sudden wealth can bring. If they have a family that can help them maintain their feet on the ground, then these boys, who are likely to fall with a thud, can be lifted and made to realise their potential a few years later.

One of the reasons that I have been propagating a salary cap for the uncapped player is mainly because there have been so many promising players at the junior level who, having acquired sudden name and fame, have gone astray and have been lost to Indian cricket. Again, when you compare what a Ranji Trophy player gets, even if he plays a full season of 35+ days but does not play IPL, he will end up earning a fraction of what the uncapped IPL guys get for playing 14 to 16 days of cricket. The BCCI is considering increasing the playing fees for the Ranji Trophy and domestic cricket, which is fantastic news, but like I said earlier, they still know that however well they perform in the Ranji Trophy or domestic cricket, one or two performances in the IPL is the shortest route to the India cap.

This year, the IPL has caused a fair bit of debate about the Impact Player and the DRS for wide balls and bouncers from some of the captains and coaches of the franchises, and this will certainly be a topic of debate for the BCCI and IPL Governing Council before the mega auction later in the year. In the Sunrisers Hyderabad vs. Rajasthan Royals game, there was a thrilling nail-biting last-ball finish where the batter was declared LBW, and he asked for a referral. The moment that happened, the ball became dead, and even if the ball had gone to the boundary, no runs would have been added. This loophole can be exploited by many a canny captain and coach who are defending runs, particularly in the last over. This is again something that should be up for debate, but it is pretty certain that the ICC will not be able to implement it for the ensuing T20 World Cup. It

can surely come up for discussion at the ICC Cricket Committee meeting that is likely to happen during the T20 World Cup, either in the USA or the West Indies.

If the law has to be referred to the MCC, then it would be a lot better if some former players who have played in the IPL and other T20 leagues in the world were brought in for their experience. The MCC makes laws, which are then to be followed by every cricket club, state, and country.

Therefore, a committee that is going to have the biggest impact on the laws of the game must have people who have played it at the highest level and should be from different countries and not just primarily from England. I am just giving you a list of the MCC Laws Committee. I am sure they are all perfectly capable people, but apart from the former umpires, Sundaram Ravi from India and Simon Taufel, nobody seems to have any international experience. The list is as follows:

Alan Fordham (Chair)
Deborah Burns
Bob Hampshire
Lt. Col David Jukes
Paul McMahon
Clare Polosak
Sundaram Ravi
Surendiran Shanmugam
Simon Taufel

Dear readers, do you think that recently retired former Test players from other countries should be included or not?

Giving context: If the dead ball law has to be referred to the MCC, then it would be a lot better if there were some former players who have played in the IPL and other T20 leagues in the world to be brought in for their experience. AFP

To give some of the uncapped Under-19 players crores of rupees is probably pushing their career progress back considerably because suddenly the focus goes missing.

AFP

Pakistan levels T20 series against New Zealand

1 Two final-over **run-outs** helped Pakistan edge through.

Pakistan made a terrific comeback in the fifth match against New Zealand to win by nine runs and level the T20I series 2-2. Shaheen Shah Afridi's 4/30 helped his side defend the 178-run total, put up after captain Babar Azam's 69 off 33 deliveries. After the first match was washed out, New Zealand was bowled out for 90 in the second to hand Pakistan a fairly easy win. However, the Kiwis fought back in the third and fourth games to lead the series briefly, and were on track to win the fifth game. Two final-over run-outs helped Pakistan edge through.

INSTAGRAM/CRICKET_INA

2

On debut, 17-year-old Rohmalia Rohmalia from Indonesia took seven wickets without giving a run to record the best bowling figures in T20I history, both men's and women's combined. Against Mongolia in the Bali Bash International women's T20I series, the off-spinner bowled 20 deliveries and removed seven batters for ducks to help her side win by 127 runs. Only the third bowler to take seven wickets in a women's T20I, she surpassed Netherlands' Frederique Overdijk's 7/3 in four overs against France in 2021.

GETTY IMAGES

3

The Women's T20 World Cup 2024 will commence from October 3 with last year's runner-up South Africa facing England in the opening game. The ninth edition will have 23 matches played across 19 days in Dhaka and Sylhet, Bangladesh, with each side playing four group games. Scotland qualified for its maiden T20 World Cup along with Sri Lanka after both teams made it to the final of the World Cup Qualifier.

BANGLADESH CRICKET

4

India clinched the five-match T20I series against Bangladesh with a 4-0 lead after defeating the host by 56 runs in the fourth game. India scored 122 runs for six wickets in a match reduced to 14 overs, thanks to a solid stand between Richa Ghosh and Harmanpreet Kaur. Bangladesh, which had a revised target of 125, as per DLS, could only manage 68 for seven wickets. India will be eying a series sweep when it plays the final game on May 9.

GETTY IMAGES

5

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) announced the appointment of former South Africa batter Gary Kirsten as head coach of its men's T20 and ODI teams. The country's Test side will be under the supervision of former Australia fast bowler Jason Gillespie while both coaches will be assisted by former Pakistan all-rounder Azhar Mahmood. Currently working as mentor of Gujarat Titans in the IPL, Kirtsen will join Pakistan ahead of the England tour in May. Gillespie will oversee the two-match Test series against Bangladesh in August as part of the 2023–2025 ICC World Test Championship.

AFP

6

West Indies women won the fifth T20I game against host Pakistan by eight wickets to win the series 4-1. The visiting side won the first three games on the trot to set up a 3-0 lead. However, in the fourth match, Pakistan restricted West Indies to 84 and won by eight wickets. The Windies bounced back in the last game and chased down the 134-run total with 10 balls to spare. Captain Hayley Matthews (78 off 49) put together a 103-run partnership with Shemaine Campbelle to lead her team to victory.

Islanders reign: Mumbai is now the most successful team in the league, with two Shields and as many ISL trophies. PTI

Mumbai City relishes sweet revenge over Mohun Bagan

Mumbai City, this year's ISL champion, saw more than 55 per cent of its goals scored by Indian players, which **bodes well for the future** of football in the country.

Neeladri Bhattacharjee
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Success in sports depends on a lot of things, such as the quality of players, their form, and fan support. But, on matchday, it narrows down to the most fundamental factor in the game: whoever plays better wins.

Mumbai City FC taught Mohun Bagan Super Giant, to which it had lost 1-2 in the final game of the ISL League stage, to relinquish the Winners Shield, a lesson in just that, beating it 3-1 in the Indian Super League (ISL) final at the Salt Lake Stadium on May 4.

Mumbai, having done better homework about its opponent, executed its plan to perfection and pulled off a comeback win over the Mariners to stun a 62,000-strong crowd, most of whom were Mohun Bagan fans. The Bagan supporters, who had taken two hours to fill the stadium, started making their way for the exit after Mumbai's second goal — Bipin Singh's strike in the 81st minute — and, within 20 minutes of full-time, the stadium was near-empty.

The presentation ceremony took place with a handful of Mumbai fans cheering from the stands, waving scarves of the West Coast Brigade, the team's official fan club.

The Islanders began the match on

It's the game that wins: Irrespective of what happened in the final, the 62,000 fans at the Salt Lake Stadium should remember that football won. PTI

the offensive, but the host drew first blood. Against the run of play, Dimitri Petratos, Mohun Bagan's hero in last season's final (scoring both goals), shot from distance, but the attempt was saved by Mumbai goalkeeper Phurba Lachenpa, only for Jason Cummings to tap the ball in on the follow-up.

Mumbai's comeback began in the second half, with the equaliser arriving within eight minutes of the restart. Jorge Pereyra Diaz received Alberto Noguera's long ball, beat his marker, Manvir Singh, and squeezed it in from a narrow angle.

Antonio Lopez Habas, Mohun Bagan's head coach, would later reflect, "Normally, we are a team that continuously attacks and defends. But today, when we attacked, the defence lacked, and vice versa. This was a problem for us."

Bipin, who scored the winning goal against Mohun Bagan (then called ATK Mohun Bagan) in the ISL final three years ago, continued to be the Mariners' nemesis, converting a pullback from Jakub Vojtus to double Mumbai's tally.

Vojtus put the competition to bed in the second-half injury time when he scored his first goal for the Islanders, with Mumbai shattering the treble-winning hopes of Mohun Bagan, which won the Durand Cup and the Shield this season.

With the win, Mumbai became the most successful team in the league, with two Shields and as many ISL trophies. It was also sweet revenge for the side. "I think the key to success was because we were very down when we lost here [against Bagan] because we wanted to play in Asia. But our strength has been figuring out why we lost, and we just ensured it doesn't happen again," Petr Kratky, Mumbai's head coach, said.

Kratky's tactical masterpiece

Kratky stated that his team had been passive in the Shield decider but planned to be more aggressive in the ISL final. It was clear from the start that Mumbai City and he meant business. "If you watch the game, we were better in the first half. Yeah, we conceded a goal because Mohun Bagan is a quality team, but our approach today was totally different than two weeks ago, and the boys executed it to get rewarded," Kratky said. Mumbai deployed Rahul Bheke and Mehtab Singh as two full-backs to counter Mohun Bagan's wing play in its 3-5-2 or 3-4-3 formation, with Manvir and Liston Colaco playing as wingbacks.

While in possession, Jayesh Rane and Noguera tried to find the overlapping runs of Vikram Partap Singh and Lallianzuala Chhangte. As Joni Kauko and Deepak Tangri of Mohun Bagan tried to close down Pereyra Diaz, Vikram kept barging into the box to find gaps in the Mariners' defence.

Close to the half-hour mark, Mumbai City almost got a penalty when Nogeura's cross for Vikram in the Mohun Bagan box hit Hector Yuste's hand—an incident referee R. Venkatesh failed to spot.

When out of possession, Lalengmawia Ralte, who was adjudged Player of the Match in the final, worked as an additional defender in front of the back-four, while Thaer Krouma denied Petratos any space in the final third.

Petratos' first shot on target came from way outside the box, which led to Cummings beating Tiri to score on the follow-up. Kratky's substitutions were clinical too. Mumbai's high press, especially in temperatures over 36°C, posed a risk of cramps, and Diaz, Nogeura, and Rane were all off before the last quarter. The three players who replaced them, Bipin, Vojtus, and Vinit Rai, made significant

Ralte rallies: Lalengmawia Ralte was adjudged the Player of the Match in the ISL final. FSDL/ISL MEDIA

contributions to Mumbai's win.

"We know how it feels when we're losing, but then we have two choices: to give up or keep pushing to get rewarded. This is my message for my team: believe and stick together because this is a powerful thing," Kratly explained.

Mohun Bagan's nightmare

Habas, the most successful head coach in the ISL, had faced Mumbai City in the 2020-21 final, with Mumbai winning 2-1.

Before the 2023–24 final, he had talked about completing a circle, trying to beat the Islanders in what could be his 'last phase of coaching'.

In the match, however, nothing clicked for Mohun Bagan. Petratos was relatively quiet (he had only one shot in the game), and Manvir's progressive passes were limited, with him creating only one chance.

Habas, after the loss, pointed out fatigue and the suspension of forward Armando Sadiku as possible reasons for the loss.

"Maybe, we've played too many finals to win this match," Habas said.

Sadiku, having joined Mohun Bagan last summer, had 11 goals and an assist in all competitions but remained suspended in the final for breaching the All India Football Federation Code of Conduct. A physically imposing forward, Sadiku's exploits in breaking the press could have been a panacea to Mohun Bagan's misery, according to the Spaniard.

"I think Armando is more aggressive than Jason (Cummings) or Dimi (Dimitri Petratos). That allows good possibility (space) for other guys to play. In football, we can't change history," Habas conceded.

Kolkata derby sub-plot

Football in Kolkata barely extends beyond the gamut of East Bengal and Mohun Bagan, the biggest clubs in the city. The ISL final was no different, and when the Islanders won against a familiar rival, they found a friend in East Bengal.

In fact, the player who captained Mumbai to victory is also a former East Bengal player, Rahul Bheke.

So is Mehtab Singh, who celebrated the win with Jamuna Das, better known as Lozenge Mashi, an ardent East Bengal fan who had come in Mumbai's colours — blue and white — at the Salt Lake Stadium.

After the match, two members of East Bengal also greeted Bheke with sweets, celebrating the victory.

The 10th season of the ISL saw the highest number of teams in the league's history so far and delivered some mouth-watering clashes over 139 matches, including the rise of some Indian youngsters like Vikram, Jay Gupta, and Abhishek Suryavanshi. That Mumbai City, which won the title, had over 55 per cent of its goals scored by Indians augurs well for the future of the sport in the country.

GOLDEN BOOT
Dimitrios Diamantakos (Kerala Blasters)

GOLDEN GLOVE
Phurba Lachenpa (Mumbai City FC)

EMERGING PLAYER OF THE LEAGUE
Vikram Partap Singh (Mumbai City FC)

GOLDEN BALL
Dimitri Petratos (Mohun Bagan Super Giant)

WINNER PRIZE MONEY
Mumbai City FC (Rs. 6 crore)

RUNNER-UP PRIZE MONEY
Mohun Bagan Super Giant (Rs. 2.5 crore)

BEST PITCH
Jamshedpur FC

GRASSROOTS AWARD
FC Goa

BEST ELITE YOUTH PROGRAMME
Bengaluru FC

FOR MORE STORIES

Joy Mohun Bagan!

Despite the loss in the final, where Mumbai City avenged its defeat in the final league match, Mohun Bagan reigned supreme as the **bearer of the League Shield.**

Everyone has to appreciate that the Shield winner winning the league title qualifies as the greatest achievement in Indian football. Mohun Bagan Super Giant realised it in the 10th edition of the Indian Super League, where it could not find ultimate success. Mohun Bagan displayed impressive consistency throughout the league stage, ultimately overcoming the formidable Mumbai City FC to win its first 'Shield.' The final league match was effectively a knockout final, and Mohun Bagan emerged victorious, defeating Mumbai City FC 2-1 and earning the highest number of points (48 points) ever achieved by a team in the tournament's history.

Mumbai City, needing a draw to win the shield, faltered at the last post and was consigned to the list of the vanquished despite netting 47 points to emerge as the second-best. Mohun Bagan's achievement meant that the opponents in the succeeding playoff stage had to acknowledge its feat with a 'guard of honour'. The Odisha FC team had to give a standing ovation to Mohun Bagan players as they came out of the tunnel to play the first leg of semifinal 1 at the Kalinga Stadium. Mohun Bagan lost the match 1-2, but its accomplishment remained undiminished.

The Mariners won the second leg 2-0 to reach the final, where they were outdone by Mumbai City FC 3-1. Despite the loss in the final, where Mumbai City avenged its defeat in the final league match, Mohun Bagan reigned supreme as the bearer of the League Shield. The joy of winning the Cup was diminished as Mumbai City FC had to acknowledge Mohun Bagan's shield triumph as a greater accomplishment. It had to accord a guard of honour to Mohun Bagan as its players went to the podium to receive their medals. Mumbai City, which won an ISL double in the 2020–21 season by beating the same opponent, could very well appreciate the sense of triumph and satisfaction that was then prevailing in the Mohun Bagan camp.

Amitabha Das Sharma

Taming the Gaurs

After packing his bag, the diary frantically travelled to the airport to board a morning flight from Chennai to Goa. The ever-lingering fear of missing a flight can be hard to shrug off, no matter how frequent a flyer one is. The reason for the trip from the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea? — Football.

The second Indian Super League (ISL) 2023–24 seminal pitted FC Goa against Mumbai City FC — a delicious fixture, not just for the quality of football but also for the amalgamation of fans belonging to two states so different in their cultures, despite being separated by just 600 kilometres.

On April 24, the day of the semifinal, as the diary was making preparatory notes about the upcoming clash, chants of 'Forca Goa' and 'Feel the Uzzo in the air' prompted him to go to the hotel balcony, from where he had a clear view of the sprawling green inside the Fatorda Stadium, the venue for the semifinal first leg.

PTI

Cut to the match, FC Goa did not disappoint the full-capacity crowd, dishing out some excellent football, which led to the Gaurs relishing a 2-0 lead till the 89th minute.

Seven minutes later, the Mexican waves from the orange-clad fans had stopped. The flashlights were off. And except for the West Coast Brigade (MCFC fan club) chanting their hearts out, the entire stadium

Mohun Bagan displayed impressive consistency throughout the league stage, ultimately overcoming the formidable Mumbai City FC to win its first 'Shield.'

was silent.

Mumbai pulled off a miraculous comeback, with Lallianzuala Chhangte and Vikram Partap Singh leading the charge. Mumbai City FC, trailing 0-2 till the 89th minute, finished with a 3-2 win.

The second leg provided no such twists. Mumbai won 2-0 and qualified for the ISL final with a 5-2 aggregate score.

The Matadors in Blue managed to tame the Gaurs this time. Next season, there will be renewed hopes again, and the 'beautiful game' will keep enthralling like it has been for so many years.

Aneesh Dey

Fanfare

Mumbai City FC gave its fans a night to remember in its last home game of the season, the ISL semifinal second leg, which it won 2-0 (5-2 on aggregate) against FC Goa.

It was a sold-out Mumbai Football Arena, with MCFC fans turning up well ahead of the match to welcome the team bus outside the stadium with blue flares and posters cheering their favourite players.

Minutes before kickoff, there were a considerable number of fans outside the stadium looking to somehow manage a ticket and enter the arena, which is a testament to the club's growing popularity due to its recent success.

The club's fan club, 'West Coast Brigade' even arranged a large tifo in the stands as they cheered and chanted throughout the night.

After the win, the MCFC players went over to the fans to thank them and gave away a few jerseys.

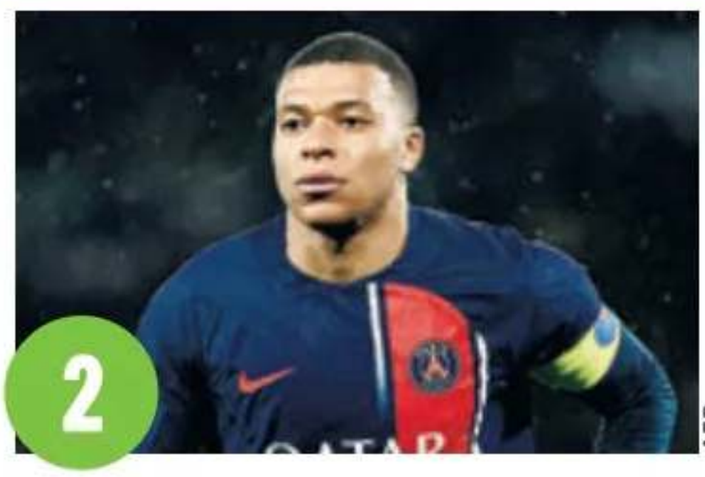
Karthik Mudaliar

1

AFP

Inter Milan wins Scuddetto on Derby day

Inter Milan won its 20th Serie A title after a 2-1 win against rival AC Milan at the San Siro stadium. A goal from Francesco Acerbi (18') and Marcus Thuram (49') in each half proved sufficient to secure Inter's victory, with Fikayo Tomori scoring a late goal (80') to reduce the deficit. The match also witnessed three red cards in stoppage time, with Milan being reduced to nine men. Inter completely dominated the league and lost only once this season. It held a 17-point advantage over second-placed Milan with five matches left and hence secured the Scudetto.



2

AFP

PSG wins record-extending 12th Ligue 1 title

Paris Saint-Germain won the French league in Kylian Mbappe's last season at the club after second-place Monaco lost 3-2 at Lyon. PSG has an unassailable 12-point lead over second-placed Monaco, which has three games left. The Ligue 1 triumph is PSG's third-in-a-row and a record-extending 12th overall. PSG is on course for a potential historic treble if it beats Borussia Dortmund in the Champions League semifinal.

3

AFP

Thiago Silva to leave Chelsea at the end of this season

Brazil defender Thiago Silva will leave Chelsea at the end of the season after four years at the club. The 39-year-old Silva announced he is leaving the door open for a return to Chelsea "in another role." Silva joined Chelsea in 2020 after his contract at PSG expired. He said he only planned to stay at the English club for one season but continued playing for the team after winning the Champions League.

4

AP

Xavi to continue as Barcelona manager

Barcelona boss Xavi Hernandez reversed his decision to step down at the end of the season and agreed to stay in charge of the La Liga giant for the 2024-25 campaign, a club spokesperson confirmed. Xavi has had meetings with Barca officials and agreed to honour the last year of his contract, with a series of unspecified conditions set by the club, sources said.

5

AFP

PSV Eindhoven becomes Dutch champion
PSV Eindhoven was crowned Dutch champion for the 25th time and it was the club's first title since 2018. Peter Bosz's men made sure of the Eredivisie trophy with two games to spare via a 4-2 win over Sparta Rotterdam at the Philips Stadion. Veteran Dutch striker Luuk de Jong has been key for PSV's success this season and his 27 goals have made him the league's joint top-goalscorer.

6

GETTY IMAGES

Barcelona W wins fifth straight Liga F in quadruple bid
Unbeaten Barcelona Women clinched a fifth consecutive Liga F title with a 4-1 win at Granada as it closed in on a potential quadruple. Barcelona has already lifted the Spanish Super Cup and will face Real Sociedad in the Copa del la Reina final on May 18 before the crunch clash with rival Lyon in the Champions League final on May 25 in Bilbao.

7

REUTERS

Leicester City and Ipswich Town win promotion
Leicester City claimed the Championship title with a 3-0 victory over Preston North End and was promoted back into the English top flight after facing relegation last season. Ipswich Town, too, achieved promotion to the Premier League for the first time in 22 years after beating Huddersfield Town on the final day of the Championship regular season. Ipswich **(the team's Harrison Clarke celebrates above)** defeated Huddersfield 2-0 to finish on 96 points, six ahead of third-placed Leeds United.

Vinicius to Real's rescue

The forward came up with a brace, including an **83rd minute penalty,** to make it all square ahead of the second leg.

BAYERN MUNICH
2

Sane 53'
Kane 57' (pen)

REAL MADRID
2

Vinicius 24'
Vinicius 83' (pen)

The UEFA Champions League semifinal witnessed a showdown between European royalty as 14-time winner Real Madrid travelled to the Allianz Arena to face six-time champion Bayern Munich.

It was the eighth time the two sides met at the penultimate stage of the competition — the most in tournament history. The two teams had contrasting domestic campaigns before heading into the crucial encounter.

While Real Madrid was within touching distance of the La Liga title, Bayern lost out to Bayer Leverkusen for the Bundesliga, leaving the UCL as its lone opportunity to win a trophy this season.

The home team started brightly with England captain Harry Kane releasing Leroy Sane down the left within the first minute. Sane's low shot across goal was blocked by 'keeper Andriy Lunin's strong left foot.

The Bavarians continued to pile on the pressure in the opening quarter. But the visitor took the lead through Vinicius Junior who was at the end of a perfectly-weighted pass in behind the defence from German midfielder Toni Kroos. After receiving earfuls from manager Thomas Tuchel for his below-par decision-making, Sane rebounded by firing in the equaliser after the half-time break, cutting in off the right before beating Lunin on his near post with a ferocious shot.

With the scores even, the home team upped the ante, moving the ball forward much quicker. The aggressive approach paid dividends when Jamal Musiala was brought down in the box by Lucas Vasquez. Kane calmly sent the 'keeper the wrong way before slotting in the penalty, giving Bayern the lead in the tie.

With the game trudging into the last 10 minutes, it looked like the home side would carry a slender lead to the Santiago Bernabeu but Los Blancos wrested the advantage back in the 83rd minute.

Vinicius was at the heart of it again, driving through the centre of the box, before laying the ball on to Rodrygo whose nimble footwork helped him draw a foul out of Kim Min-jae. Vinicius put away the resultant penalty kick to make it all square ahead of the second leg.

Karthik Mudaliar & Anish Pathiyil

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NORRIS BEATS VERSTAPPEN IN MIAMI FOR FIRST F1 WIN

Lando Norris' victory in Miami is **McLaren's first** since the 2021 Italian Grand Prix.

Dipak Ragav
dipak.ragav@thehindu.co.in

Formula One is one of the most competitive elite sports in the world, with only 20 slots available each year. Being one of the top 20 drivers in this challenging motorsport category is a great achievement in itself.

It is quite difficult to get into F1, but it is even harder to sustain a spot on the grid. That's why, in the 75 years of the FIA Formula One World Championship, there have only been 113 Grand Prix winners.

On May 5, 2024, Lando Norris became the 114th member of an exclusive club when he won the Miami Grand Prix. Over the last four years, the McLaren driver has been one of the fastest drivers on the grid, extracting results in a tricky car in which his teammates have not been anywhere close to him in terms of performance.

Long time coming

Since making his debut in 2019, Norris' growth has been exponential, and he is already one of the highest-paid athletes in F1. After slowly finding his feet in the first two years, Norris has improved in some areas, like his steel in wheel-to-wheel battles, especially on the opening laps. Combined with his sheer pace and superb ability to manage tyres, delivering consistent laps over a race distance, Norris has made a convincing case to be clubbed alongside Max Verstappen, Lewis Hamilton, and Charles Leclerc.

The only asterisk against him was that he had not won a race despite 15 podium finishes, though he has never had a race-winning McLaren under him. He came within four laps of winning the Russian GP in 2021, but a burst of rain and his team's indecision to leave him on a wet track meant he missed out on that opportunity. The 24-year-old has often been unfairly criticised for choking under pressure, but Miami was the first chance he had to go for the win, and he grabbed it with both hands in his 110th race. Now, with the weight off his shoulders, this could be the first of many for Norris.

Despair to delight

More than the win, it was how he went about in the race that showed why he is so highly rated. It was far from a perfect weekend, which started on a sour note after Norris was shunted out on the opening lap of the Sprint Race on Saturday morning.

The McLaren had new parts for this race, and Norris showed great pace all weekend, though he underachieved both in Sprint and the main qualifying. In the Sprint, he was ninth fastest and was taken out by Lance Stroll on the opening lap. The McLaren driver then posted the fifth-fastest time in qualifying for the main race.

On the opening lap, he dropped a position to fall to sixth behind Sergio Perez, while his teammate Oscar Piastri was running up as high as second. But once Perez stopped, Norris unleashed the pace of the McLaren and quickly caught up to Sainz, who was nearly five seconds ahead. Once the top four of Verstappen, Piastri, Leclerc, and Sainz stopped, Norris managed to do respectable times on older tyres and stayed out. It is here that

Sweet smell of success: Lando Norris won the race after starting from fifth on the grid and dropping to sixth on the first lap. GETTY IMAGES

fortune favoured the brave, as a fortuitous safety car following an incident between Logan Sargeant and Kevin Magnussen allowed Norris a cheap pit stop and helped him retain the lead.

After that, Norris ensured he put daylight between himself and Verstappen's Red Bull—the dominant combo of the last four years. Despite having a faster car, Verstappen had no answer to Norris' pace in the last 21 laps, eventually finishing seven seconds behind the McLaren.

Big move

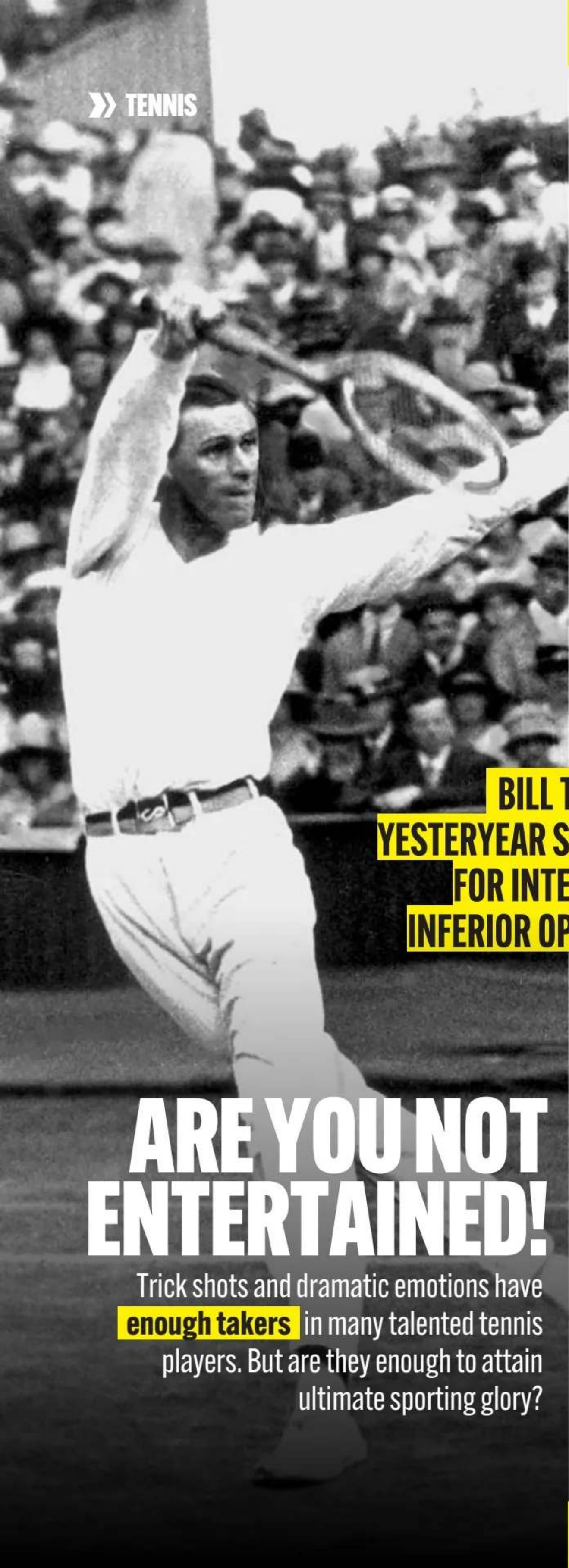
Although Norris was the main topic of discussion at the end of the Miami GP, the big news before the race was the announcement that design genius Adrian Newey would leave Red Bull Racing at the beginning of next year. Newey has been with Red Bull since 2006 and has been responsible for the team's success so far. He is regarded as the greatest F1 car designer of all time, having designed championship-winning cars for three teams: Williams, McLaren, and Red Bull. Where Newey goes next could have a significant impact on the competitive order from 2026, when a new set of technical regulations will come into effect.

Newey has a proven track record of successfully executing the concept whenever new rules are introduced. There are already rumours linking him to Ferrari, who will have Hamilton on board next year, someone Newey has said he would like to work alongside. Newey's departure could also affect Verstappen's future with Red Bull, and it will be interesting to see if the team can still be competitive without its technical guru.

Moto GP

Meanwhile, reigning two-time champion Francesco Bagnaia got his second win of the season in the Spanish Grand Prix at Jerez. The Italian, who crashed out in the Sprint Race, made amends on Sunday, clinching victory after being involved in a superb battle with local hero Marc Marquez throughout the 25-lap race. The Ducati rider started seventh, quickly made up positions on the opening lap, and took the lead briefly before being repassed on the opening lap. Later, his title rival Jorge Martin managed to sneak ahead of the Italian but crashed out of the race on lap 11, allowing Bagnaia back into the lead. The defending champion faced pressure from Marquez in the final laps but held on to his lead, reducing his deficit to Martin by 18 points.

AP



ARE YOU NOT ENTERTAINED!

Trick shots and dramatic emotions have **enough takers** in many talented tennis players. But are they enough to attain ultimate sporting glory?

Paul Fein

FOR MORE STORIES

"Trick shots are like happiness because they are my moments, it's mine"
— Gael Monfils.

From Bill Tilden and Jimmy Connors to Roger Federer and now Carlos Alcaraz, tennis champions have captivated crowds with their trick shots, creative mimes, and amusing wisecracks. These geniuses abounded in talent, flair, and audacity, and they often flaunted it. These charismatic characters brought drama, controversy, and beauty. The cultural historian Elizabeth Wilson noted in her illuminating book, *Love Game,* that while tennis was similar to art, it had a significant difference.

"Like the medieval jousting tournament or the Spanish bullfight, the tennis spectacle was simultaneously art *and* contest," wrote Wilson. "So, whereas when Nureyev danced, he had a free field on which to display his virtuosity and the beauty of his art, the tennis player was condemned to force his brilliance *against* an opponent. It is from this that tennis (more, I would argue, than other individual sports and certainly more than team sports) derives its tension: the unremitting pull between the art and the fight."

Epitomising both elements, Tilden, a

BILL TILDEN, A LARGER-THAN-LIFE YESTERYEAR SUPERSTAR, WAS RENOWNED FOR INTENTIONALLY FALLING BEHIND INFERIOR OPPONENTS IN EARLY ROUNDS

In a trance: According to the *New York Journal,* Tilden "moved with all the grace and stage presence of a seasoned actor".

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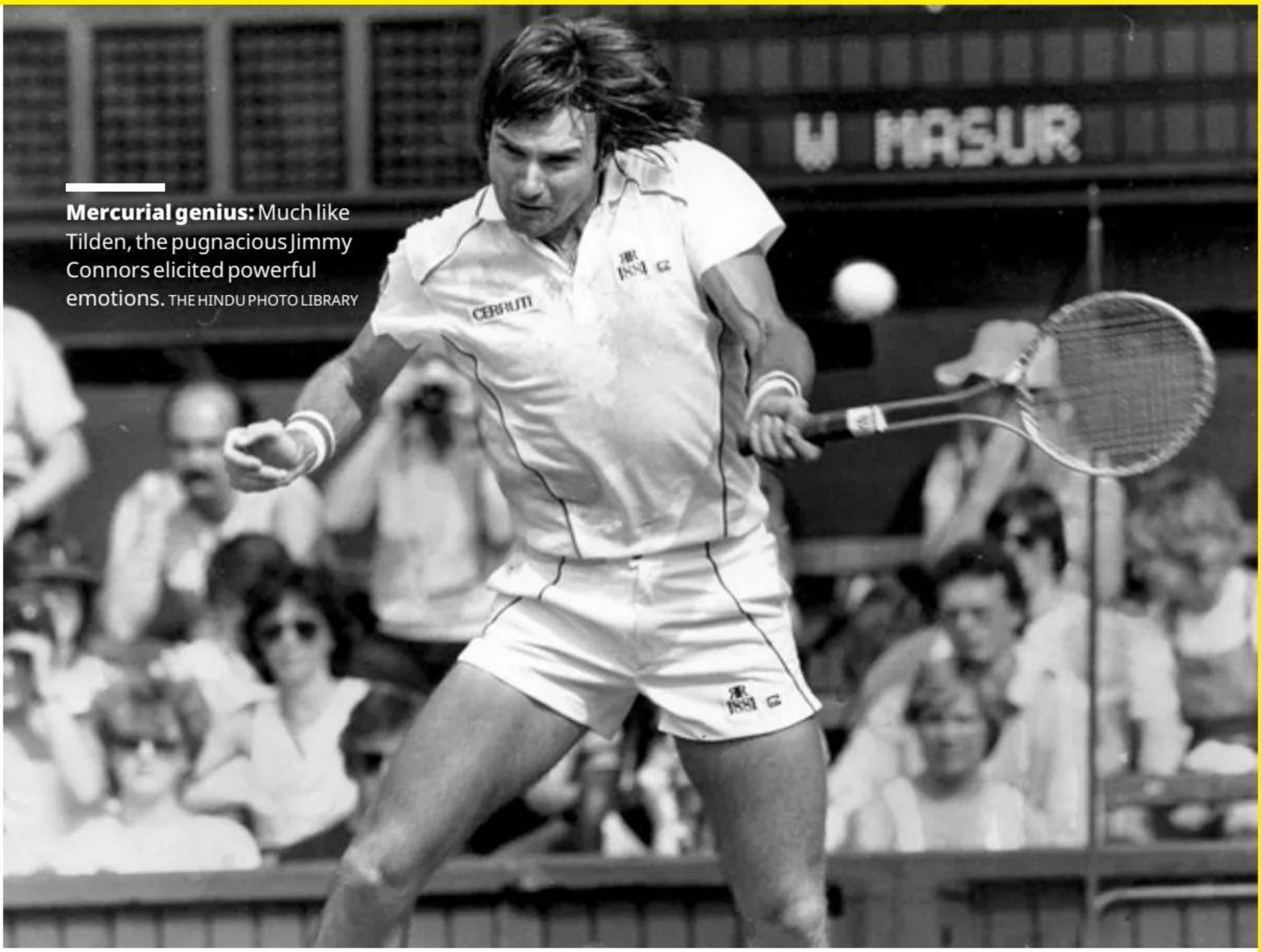


Mercurial genius: Much like Tilden, the pugnacious Jimmy Connors elicited powerful emotions. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

larger-than-life 1920s superstar, was renowned for intentionally falling behind inferior opponents in early-round matches. As cries of "Tilden's in trouble!" spread, spectators scurried to see him pull off another theatrical comeback.

In another party trick, the imperious American held five balls in his massive hand, fired four straight aces to win a game, and then casually tossed the fifth ball into the stands. "Tilden always seems to have a thousand means of putting the ball away from his opponent's reach. He seems to exercise a strange fascination over his opponent as well as the spectators," wrote archrival Rene Lacoste in his 1928 book, *Lacoste on Tennis*.

Tilden's passion to perform and his love of the dramatic arts made him a natural for Hollywood's fast-growing silent film industry. The sports hero drew mixed reviews as an actor. After playing a 'pseudo tramp' in the Broadway comedy, *They All Want Something*, the *New York Times* reviewer wrote that it was "at best only moderately entertaining" and had "none of the vitality he shows on the tennis courts." But the *New York Journal* review said that the budding thespian "moved with all the grace and stage presence of a seasoned actor." Bill also became a playwright and producer, sometimes investing in his creations.

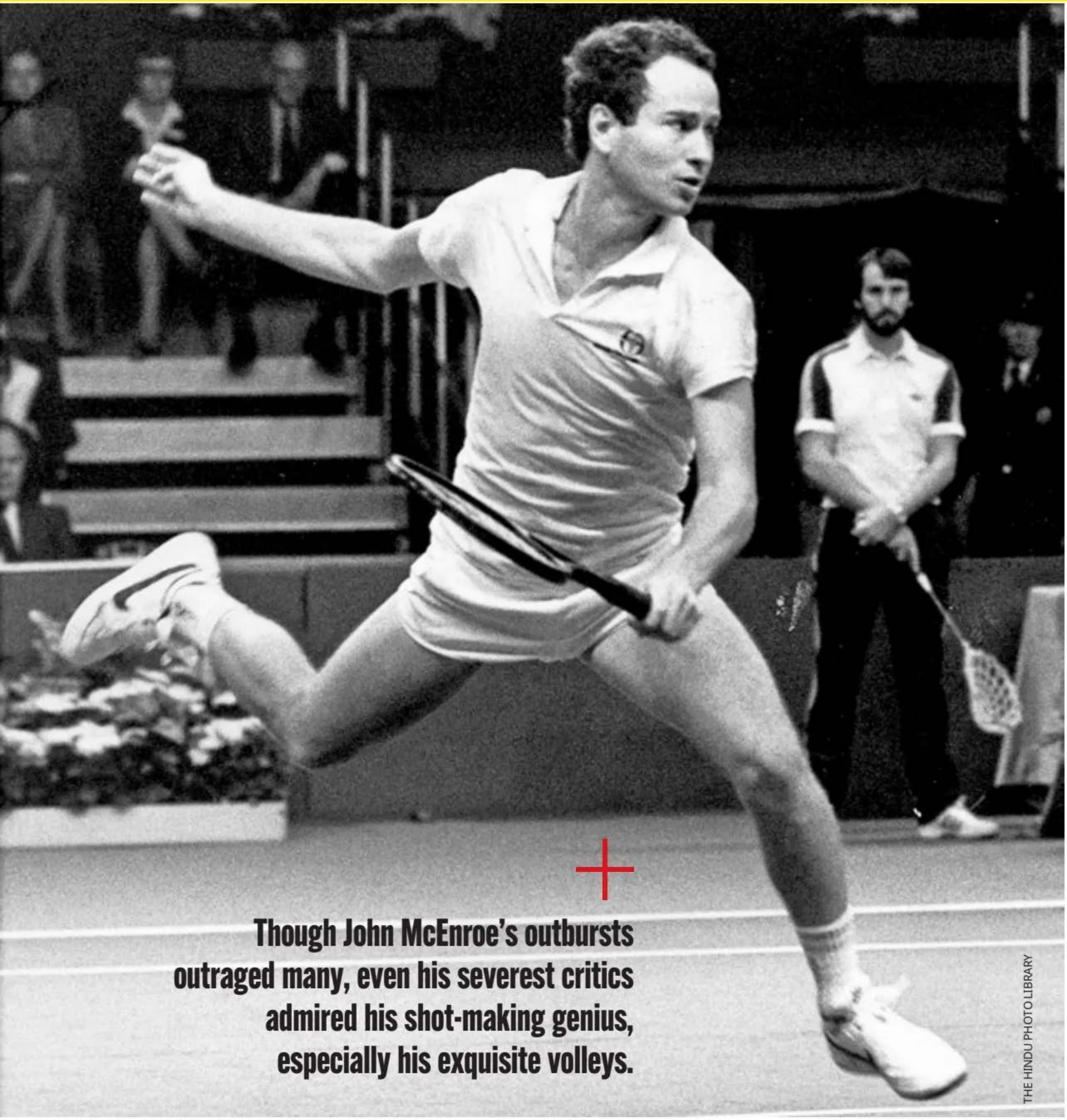
Much like Tilden, the pugnacious Connors elicited powerful emotions. Reviled in the 1970s for being rude, crude, and lewd — even mimicking masturbation — on the court, Jimbo was revered in the 1980s. Fist pumping — which he claimed he invented in tennis, animalistic grunts, powerful two-handed backhands, the Jimmy Cagney strut, and repartee with spectators make this rebel without a pause can't-miss TV for the sporting masses.

Connors's rivalries with the stoical Bjorn Borg, irascible John McEnroe, and dour Ivan Lendl provided riveting, high-stake matches, as did his 1975 Wimbledon final against Arthur Ashe. But his fiery competitiveness was never more appreciated than at age 39 during his comeback victory — he trailed 5-2 in the fifth set — over Aaron Krickstein, 15 years his junior, in the 1991 US Open quarterfinals. After belting a winner, the ageless warrior yelled toward a court microphone, "This is what they came for! This is what they want!"

On five-time winner Connors's love affair with the boisterous US Open fans, Chris Evert, his former fiancée, told *USTA Magazine*, "No one ever made a tennis court come alive more."

An artist with a racquet

John McEnroe, another fiery, Irish American lefty, said the compliment he relished most during his halcyon



Though John McEnroe's outbursts outraged many, even his severest critics admired his shot-making genius, especially his exquisite volleys.

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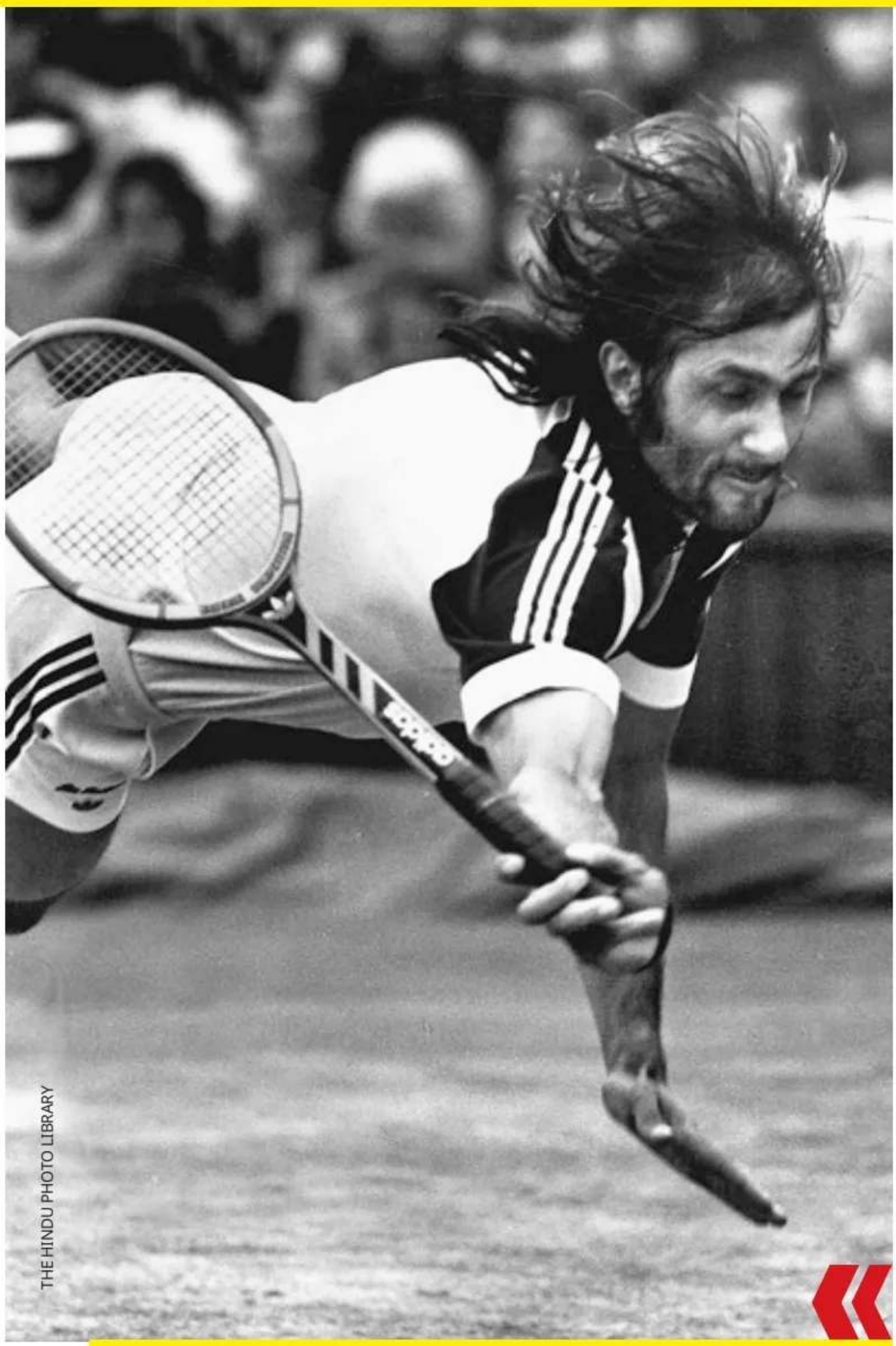
days was being called an artist. Though his outbursts outraged many, even his severest critics admired his shot-making genius, especially his exquisite volleys. "In terms of tennis talent, I've never seen anyone better than John," Ashe once said.

McEnroe captured four US Open and three Wimbledon titles, but he undoubtedly could have won more majors. He was fuelled by a rage for perfection, a Vesuvian rage that could explode at any time and often targeted lines people and umpires. "I want to change. I gotta change. I don't want to be some maniac," he confided in 1981.

Clay was McEnroe's least effective surface, and the French Open failures left a glaring gap in his resume. In 1984, after he outclassed Connors 7-5, 6-1, 6-2 in the semifinals, he again looked unstoppable against 24-year-old Lendl in the first two sets, allowing only 10 points in his nine service games. McEnroe tormented and bewildered his mechanical foe with vicious lefty serves, stinging volleys,



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NOT SINCE FRANKIE KOVACS HAD BIG-TIME TENNIS WITNESSED ANYTHING LIKE THE BUFFOONERY OF ILIE NASTASE IN THE 1970S

feathery drop shots, and clever angles. The artist was painting a masterpiece on the terre battue in Paris.

Ahead 6-3, 6-2, 1-1, the high-strung New Yorker angrily grabbed a TV cameraman's headset that was emitting loud noise, yelled "Shut up!" and threw it aside. Most of the already pro-Lendl crowd of 18,000 started booing and whistling. McEnroe lost his poise, the momentum, and eventually the final 3-6, 2-6, 6-4, 7-5, 7-5.

"It was the worst loss of my life, a devastating defeat: Sometimes it still keeps me up at nights," McEnroe confided in his 2002 autobiography, *You Cannot Be Serious*. "It's even tough for me now to do the commentary at the French — I'll often have one or two days when I literally feel sick to my stomach just at being there and thinking about that match. Thinking of what I threw away, and how different my life would've been if I'd won."

Ever since the first Wimbledon staged in 1877, talented showmen have had to navigate the tension Elizabeth Wilson described in a sport where split-second decisions can make the difference between victory and defeat. It's a truism that sports — especially tennis — reveal character as much as build character.

The mostly forgotten Frankie Kovacs attests to that. Nicknamed the 'Clown Prince of Tennis,' the handsome 6'4" Kovacs became notorious for crowd-pleasing antics like tossing three balls in the air to serve, then hitting one. He once did it on match point and hit an ace. The record books show the Californian reached the final of the 1941 U.S. National Championships (now the US Open) and defeated Bobby Riggs in 29 of their 64 amateur and pro matches.

Despite his considerable gifts — most notably, a powerful classic backhand considered second only to that of 1930s superstar Don Budge — he was remembered "as the greatest player never to win anything" of importance. In 1941, Budge said, "When Kovacs forgets his horseplay ... there's nobody he can't beat." Frankie's lame response: "When I get grim on the court, I dump the ball into the net or drive it over the fence. I can't stand the strain of being tense. ... I've got to have laughs to play good tennis."

The Bucharest buffoon

Not since Kovacs had big-time tennis witnessed anything like the buffoonery of Ilie Nastase (left) in the 1970s. Although Nastase, a superb athlete with a dazzling array of shots, won the French, Italian, and US Opens plus three Slam doubles titles (two with Connors and one with Ion

GETTY IMAGES

Tiriac), he surely would have achieved much more had he not been a compulsive jokester and provocateur. The incorrigible Romanian 'mooned' a referee, threw his shoe at a baseline judge who had called a foot fault on him, and changed his shorts *during* a match. Once he let a stubborn umpire know it was raining too hard to keep playing by standing under an umbrella (he borrowed from a fan) to receive serve.

Bud Collins, the esteemed journalist and broadcaster, nicknamed him 'the Bucharest Buffoon,' while others called him (just plain) 'Nasty.' During a London indoor tournament against Nastase, a ruggedly built Clark Graebner, who was furious at the Romanian's baiting the crowd, officials, and him, hopped over the net, jabbed his opponent in the chest, and warned him not to try any more dirty tricks. His bluff called, a terrified Nastase walked off the court, saying "I'm too frightened to continue." Nastase and a forgiving Graebner, who were friends and occasional doubles partners, went drinking afterward.

Other incidents ended less happily. In a mixed doubles match at Nice, Nasty whacked Frenchwoman Gail Chanfreau in the body with powerful volleys.

Players of this decade like Nick Kyrgios (above) and Benoit Paire (right), crave attention so much and compete so little that they masochistically self-destruct with underhand serves and other foolish shots on big points.

GETTY IMAGES

Enraged, she threw her racquet at him. Nastase also nearly got into a fistfight with intensely competitive Cliff Richey during a Paris final, and Nicki Spear, a mild-mannered Yugoslav, tried to slug Nasty, who had cursed him and his female relatives in a Boston doubles match. Nasty's obnoxious behavior in a Rome doubles final caused a near-riot that police had to be summoned to quell. And who can forget his infamous 1979 US Open match against McEnroe when fights broke out among dangerously inebriated spectators protesting Nasty's disqualification for repeatedly arguing a point penalty.

What made Nastase tick? In 1976, the popular psychologist Dr. Joyce Brothers speculated about his aberrant behavior in *Tennis* magazine. "With children, temper tantrums are normal. When older people act up, it's usually because they're getting something out of it. Nastase likes attention and because tennis has been considered a gentleman's game, he keeps his opponents so shook up they can't concentrate."

This decade, Nick Kyrgios, Benoit Paire, and Alexander Bublik crave attention so much and compete so little that they masochistically self-destruct with underhand serves and other foolish shots on big points. They haven't figured out the balance between showmanship and smart shot selection.

The worst culprit

The worst culprit, though, is Gael Monfils, a 37-year-old Frenchman. Pundits have raved about his breathtaking athleticism since he won his nation's Under-13 and Under-14 100-meter Sprint Championships and starred in the juniors.

Recently on social media, Monfils said, "People don't let you believe in your own dreams. People don't know you. This is why I try to have interactions with my real fans. I don't need to win 20 tournaments, but if I win one match here, another match there, this is what it is about."

That cavalier, low-expectations, uncompetitive attitude has often been what it's about for *Le Monf*. When he lost the fifth set 6-0 to Andy Murray at the 2014 French Open, former world No. 1 Andy Roddick tweeted that Monfils put in a "horrible effort," adding "showboats when winning and rolls over when down."

After his 6-4, 7-5 loss to Poland's Jerzy Janowicz at the 2015 Cincinnati Masters, Tracy Austin, a *Tennis Channel* analyst and two-time US Open champion renowned for her steely competitiveness, accused the well-liked Frenchman of not trying his best — the worst sin an athlete can commit. "To not give 100 percent and be so blatant about it, I think it's disrespectful. It looked like an exhibition tennis. We've seen that way too many times with him. With Gael, it's so difficult to watch because you know his upside ceiling could be so big, but he just goes away and doesn't even try."

Several years ago, during what should have been the prime of his career, Gael admitted he cared more about entertaining than winning. What a sad admission for any professional athlete. His job was to compete, compete tenaciously for every point. In a parallel way, his job was to train rigorously so he would not get exhausted in the middle of matches, which he sometimes did.

Flair versus function: With natural ability and his generally excellent technique, Gael Monfils should have achieved much more while entertaining at the same time. AP

His job during the past 20 years was to try to develop an all-court game, which he never did.

For all his acclaimed athleticism, 90 percent of it was limited to the baseline and counterpunching. His job was to try to hit the right tactical shot at the right time, especially on big points — not the flashy, low-percentage shot, which he, like Kyrgios and other would-be entertainers, often missed.

When you read the quote above by Gael, could his "dream" really have been to reach just one Grand Slam semifinal during his 20-year pro career or to rank in the top 10 only twice in the year-end rankings?

Considering his lean, muscular 6'4" physique, his marvelous natural ability, and his generally excellent technique, Gael should have achieved much, much more, while entertaining at the same time. Tournament tennis requires character and commitment, which all champions have in abundance. Lamentably, the sports world — and even Gael in his heart of hearts — knows he lacked both.

What role do social media and *Tennis Channel* and other sports networks play in creating, or, at least, perpetuating showboats like Monfils, Bublik, Kyrgios, and Paire by frequently replaying — and glorifying — their 'shot of the match' highlights?

After all, if they don't gain immortality by winning Grand Slam titles and Olympic gold medals, at least they get the proverbial "15 minutes of fame." Or maybe just 15 seconds on TV. Perhaps that's all that some athletes today want, considering their short attention spans and a fear of losing if they do actually compete. Instead, they rationalise their abnormal behavior and losses.

Federer's sublime brilliance

No champion fused 'the art and the fight' with the sublime brilliance of Roger Federer, and that undoubtedly accounted for much of his extraordinary popularity. The Swiss maestro won the ATP Fan Favorite Award a record 19 times, almost as many as his 20 Grand Slam singles titles, along with 13 ATP Sportsmanship Awards, another record.

But that fusion didn't come early or easily. Much like enfant terrible Bjorn Borg and the rebellious Andre Agassi, Roger behaved badly as an immensely gifted but tempestuous teenager. "When I was 12 years old, I was just horrible," he recalled about his frequent swearing and throwing his racquet. Working with a sports psychologist, Christian Marcolli, from age 18 to 20, completed his transformation into a calm competitor able to channel his exceptional athleticism and shot-making without stifling his creativity.

NO CHAMPION FUSED 'THE ART AND THE FIGHT' WITH THE SUBLIME BRILLIANCE OF ROGER FEDERER, AND THAT UNDOUBTEDLY ACCOUNTED FOR MUCH OF HIS EXTRAORDINARY POPULARITY

Much of Roger's enduring appeal came from his uniquely elegant style. Ironically, his graceful one-handed backhand earned the most praise though it was often the weak link that Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic exploited when they dethroned him. However, all his strokes, along with his ethereal movement, enthralled players, coaches, and fans from all walks of life.

McEnroe, who once owned an art gallery in New York City, commented, "Roger Federer is the most beautiful player I've ever seen on a tennis court, without question." Kathryn Bennetts, who runs the Royal Ballet of Flanders in Belgium, likened the graceful, coordinated, and skillful movement of Federer to Mikhail Baryshnikov.

"He has this smoothness to him," Bennetts told the *New York Times*. "An ease that makes him special. He's an artist, so refined. Like how dance transports you to a different place, so does he."

The most oft-quoted encomium of Roger came from the renowned writer David Foster Wallace, a tennis lover. Wallace invoked religion to praise the beauty of Federer in his 2006 *New York Times* essay "Federer as Religious Experience":

"The metaphysical explanation is that Roger Federer is one of those rare, preternatural athletes who appear to be exempt, at least in part, from certain physical laws," rhapsodised Foster. "Good analogs here include Michael Jordan, who could not only jump inhumanly high but actually hang there a beat or two longer than gravity allows, and Muhammad Ali, who really could "float" across the canvas and land two or three jabs in the clock-time required for one.

Federer is of this type — a type that one could call genius, or mutant, or avatar. He is never hurried or off-balance. The approaching ball hangs, for him, a split-second longer than it ought to."

Federer relished showing off his bold, jaw-dropping shots in big matches. In the 2005 Australian Open semifinals, he held match point against the redoubtable Marat Safin. When he sprinted beyond the baseline to reach a superb lob, the Russian smartly raced to the net. Instead of lofting a high lob to hang in the point, Federer foolishly attempted a 100-1, between-the-legs, back-to-the-net trick shot. It missed badly. Safin rebounded to upset Federer, and in the final, easily defeated Lleyton Hewitt, whom Federer would have been heavily favored to beat.

The Great Ones have short memories, though.

In the 2009 US Open semifinals, Roger conjured up another audacious 'tweener' on the penultimate point of his 7-6, 7-5, 7-5 victory over rising star Novak Djokovic. When it whizzed by the stunned Serb, the crowd erupted in thunderous cheers.

The Great Entertainer called it "the greatest shot of my career."

Gamage unpin

By C.G.S.Narayanan

We have already discussed in a previous article Goethart, a complex theme of unpin on the mating move. The essential features of Goethart are:a) interference of a pinned black piece by another black piece and b) a white battery piece unpins the pinned black piece taking advantage of the fact that the unpin does not release the defensive power previously nullified by self-interference.

Gamage is a simpler variety of unpin on the mating move where black piece is unpinned directly by the pinning white piece (after self-interference by black). Frederick Gamage (1881-1956) was a famous American problemist in the world of chess whose invention of black unpin by white became justly famous and named after him

H.E.Funk

Good Companions 1923(v)

Mate in two moves

The key 1.Rb4! (2.Rc3)

If black defends by playing 1…Bc5 white mates by 2.Qb5 which is Gamage unpin.The black bishop has interfered with newly pinned Rd5 preventing it from capturing Qb5. Similarly 1…Re5 2.Qh3 is yet another Gamage unpin because 2…Bg3 is ruled out by the black interference 1…Be5 2.Bb5;1…Rc5 2.Nxc5 provide the by play. The half pin set up is an unusual feature. Normally the un pinned piece on the mating move stays completely pinned in the initial position.

Udo Degener

3-4th HM,Troll 1977

Mate in two moves

1.Nb7?? (2.Rd6) 1...Bf4 2.Qg2 but 1...Be7!(Qb7?) Try 1.Ne4? 1…Be7 2.Qb7 but 1…Bf4!(2.Qg2?)

Key 1.Nb3! (2.Rd4) 1...Bf6 2.Qg2 1...Be7 2.Qa8.The theme embellished by logical tries.Gamage in a white pawn less setting.

A meredith (between seven and twelve pieces) Gamage for solving.

Csasz Karoli

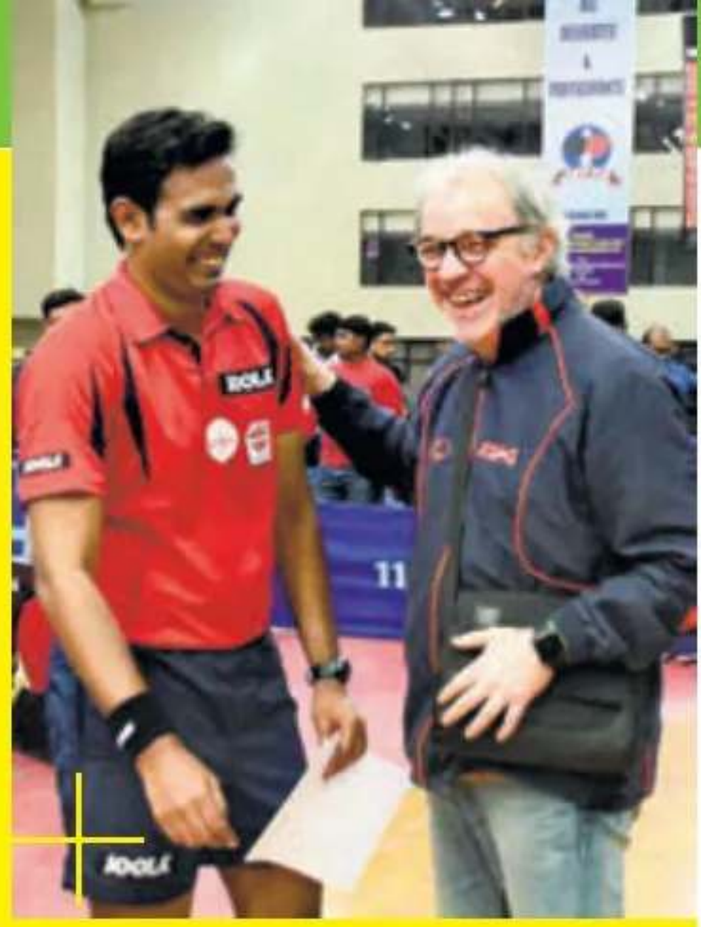
Magyar Sakkelet 1977

Mate in two moves

Solution to problem for solving in the article 'Selected Stocchi':Set:1…b4 2.Qxa5(A) 1….Nd1 2.Qxa1(B)

Key 1.Qe1 waiting 1…b4 2.Qxa1(B);1…Nd1 2.Qxa5 (A) Reciprocal change by separation of mates from set to key.

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



Massimo Costantini back as TT coach

Italy's Massimo Costantini has been chosen as the foreign coach of the Indian table tennis team for a two-year term. He is expected to reach India soon. The 66-year-old was the Indian team's coach on two previous occasions, from 2009 to 2010 and from 2016 to 2018. During his period, India won a record eight medals at the 2018 Commonwealth Games and two bronze medals at the 2018 Asian Games.

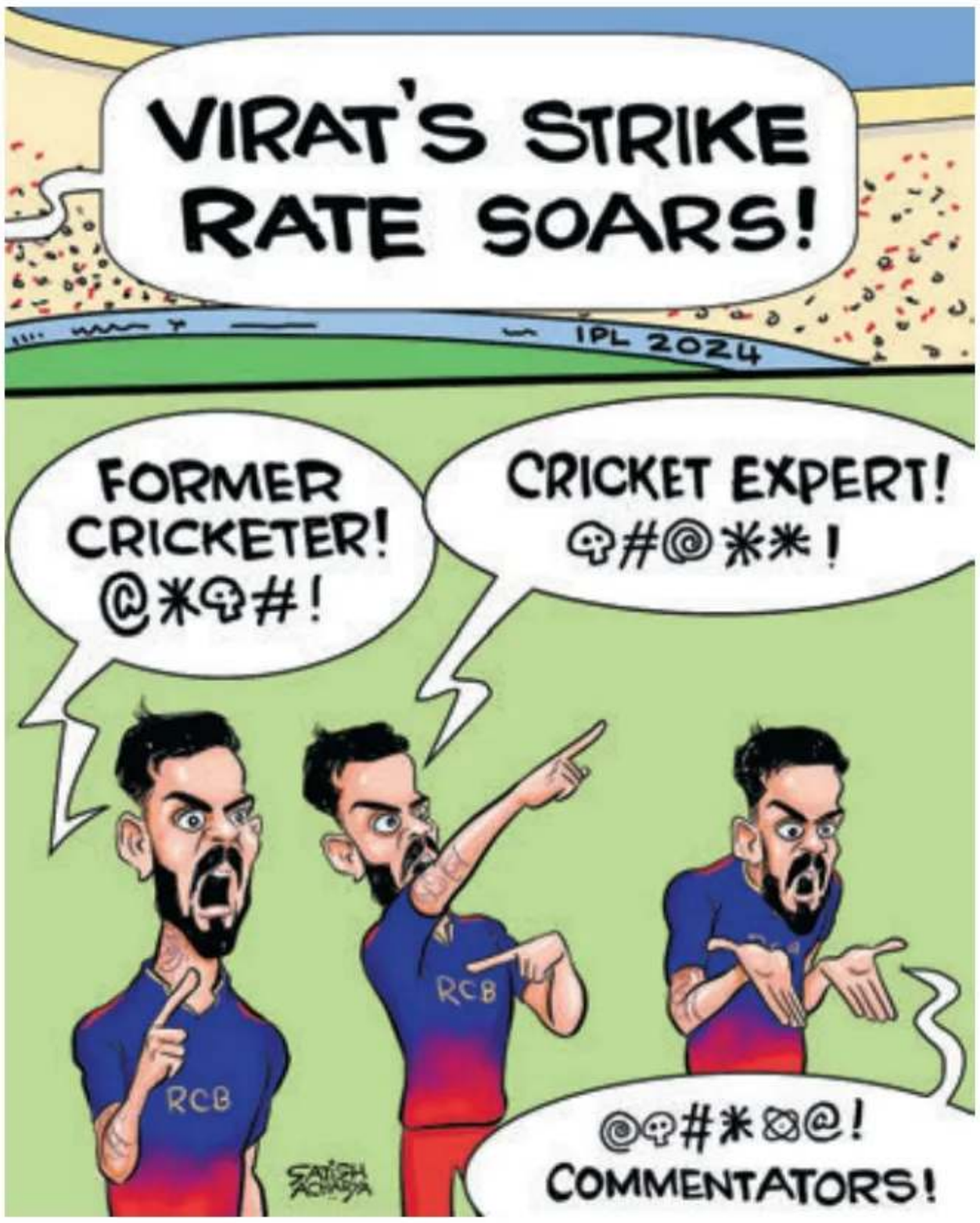
Massimo, who competed in the 1988 Summer Olympics, has been admired by quite a few Indian players, including 10-time national champion Sharath Kamal.

Since Massimo left in 2018, the team hasn't had the services of a foreign coach. The Indian team can finally breathe easy with the arrival of its first foreign coach in six years.

In a message to *Sportstar*, India's paddler Harmeet Desai said, "It's great to have a national team coach after such a long time. We won't have much time to train under him before the Olympics, but we will all try our best to make the best use of what is left. We have had great results under Massimo, and I hope that we can do even better this time."

K. KEERTHIVASAN

SPORTOON



1 Nitin Narang, the recently-elected president of AICF, has announced a budget of Rs. 65 crore to promote chess. During the AICF general body meeting, various important initiatives were discussed to strengthen the Indian chess ecosystem. These initiatives will provide financial and institutional support to both professional and grassroots-level players.

There were talks around multiple proposals such as the introduction of a chess development fund, financial backing with player contracts, coaching at all levels, and financial support to district and state associations.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

2 Buoyed by the recent success of its young amateurs, the Indian Golf Union (IGU) has spread its activities to 'Training the Trainers' and 'Growing the Game' to grow the game in the country. The IGU has brought an international trainer to have special sessions with teaching professionals and coaches.

"Time and again, we have been told at international meetings how the fraternity looks at India to grow the game in the region. We have the numbers, we have a coaches certification system and we are hopeful that in the next few years, India will be a golfing force," said IGU president Brijinder Singh.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Ryan Fernando

FOR MORE STORIES

IS IT SAFE FOR ATHLETES TO WORK OUT IN FASTED STATE?

Fasting before exercising, especially for athletes, can be a **tricky matter.** It largely depends on the individual, the type of exercise, and the duration and intensity of the workout.

Have you ever wondered if it's safe for you to exercise when you haven't eaten anything? Think of your body as a car, and your workout is like a trip you're going on with your car. Eating before a workout is like putting fuel in your car before the trip. Just like how you wouldn't want your car to run out of gas while you're driving, you also don't want your body to run out of energy during your workout. However, when you fast, fasting before a workout is like letting your body use up its stored fuel before giving it more.

Fasting before exercising, especially for athletes, can be a tricky matter. It largely depends on the individual, the type of exercise, and the duration and intensity of the workout.

During low-intensity exercise, such as a light jog or steady-state cycling, the body primarily relies on fats as a fuel source which means your body mainly uses fats to give you energy during this type of exercise. Fats provide a steady and abundant source of energy, making them ideal for prolonged activities. In contrast, during high-intensity exercise, like sprinting or intense weightlifting, and longer duration the body shifts its reliance on carbohydrates (glycogen) for energy.

Now in the case of recreational athletes, who play a sport just for the joy of it, when they train in a fasted state, fat oxidation is the primary energy pathway. Exercising in a fasted state may not significantly impact performance. However, the story changes during high-intensity exercises for longer duration, typically how most of the athletes train. Without readily available carbohydrates, elite athletes may experience a decrease in performance due to limited glycogen stores and impaired glycolytic metabolism. The absence of carbohydrates can lead to decreased muscle glycogen levels, resulting in fatigue, reduced power output, and compromised exercise capacity.

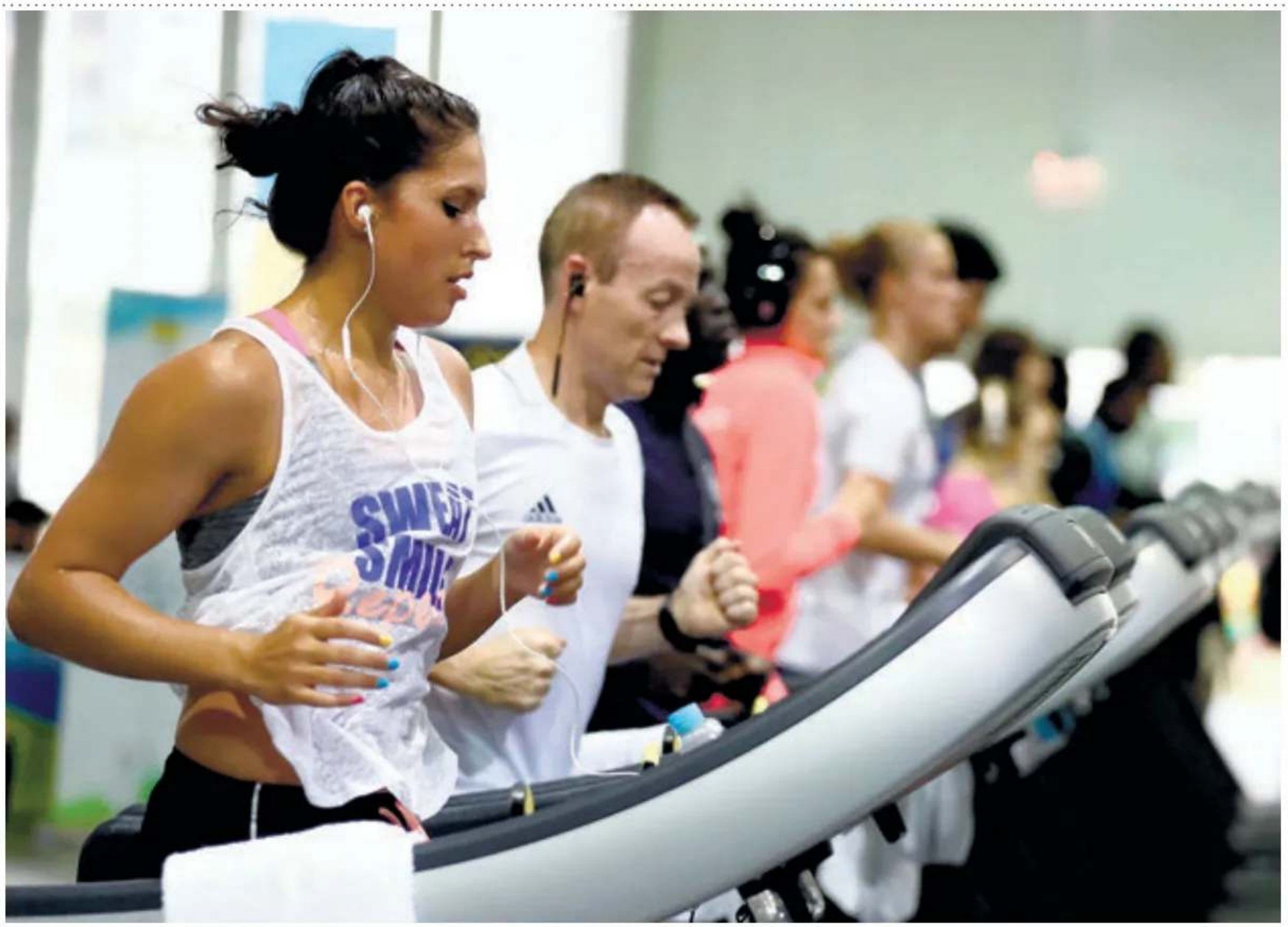
Despite the potential drawbacks, some elite athletes choose to incorporate fasted training into their regimen for specific purposes. One purported benefit is the enhancement of fat oxidation and metabolic flexibility. By training in a fasted state, athletes aim to increase their ability to use fats as a primary fuel source, which may be advantageous for endurance events or activities with prolonged duration.

Moreover, fasting has been associated with various metabolic adaptations, including improvements in insulin sensitivity, mitochondrial function, and cellular repair processes. These adaptations could potentially enhance athletic performance and recovery. Therefore to optimise performance, incorporate fasting twice a week, strategically timed with low-intensity training sessions, while eating a pre-workout meal on the remaining days before training.

Engaging in low-intensity exercise during fasting periods can help preserve muscle glycogen stores while promoting fat oxidation, thereby mitigating the risk of performance decrements associated with high-intensity efforts in a fasted state. Fasting also triggers a process known as mitochondrial biogenesis. Imagine your body is like a big city. Every city needs power to run, right? Well, inside your body, there are these tiny, tiny power plants called mitochondria. They make energy for your body to work, just like how power plants make electricity for a city. Now, mitochondrial biogenesis is like building more power plants in the city. When your body needs more energy, it makes more mitochondria. It's like adding more power plants to make sure the city has enough electricity to keep everything running smoothly.

Just like that, mitochondrial biogenesis gives you more energy, enhancing your performance.

On days designated for pre-feed



Making the most of it: By strategically alternating between fasting days with low-intensity training and pre-feed days with higher-intensity sessions, elite athletes can harness the potential benefits of fasted training. GETTY IMAGES

and training protocols, consuming carbohydrates in the hours leading up to a workout ensures adequate glycogen availability, optimising performance, and supporting muscle function during demanding activities.

Pre-workout meal options can include traditional dishes that provide a balance of carbohydrates, proteins, and fats to fuel performance and facilitate recovery. Some delicious and nutritious options include:

* Paneer paratha: A whole wheat flatbread stuffed with paneer (Indian cottage cheese) and spices provide a hearty source of carbohydrates, protein, and healthy fats.

* Upma: A savoury dish made from semolina (rava), vegetables, and spices. Upma offers a quick and energy-dense option for pre-workout fuel.

* Banana almond smoothie: Blend ripe bananas with almond milk, almonds, and a dash of honey for a refreshing and nutrient-rich beverage packed with carbohydrates, protein, and essential vitamins and minerals.

* Moong dal khichdi: A comforting combination of rice and split green gram (moong dal), seasoned with spices and topped with ghee (clarified butter), provides a balanced source of carbohydrates and protein, along with essential fatty acids.

* Sweet potato chaat: Roasted sweet potatoes tossed with spices, chickpeas, yoghurt, and fresh herbs offer a flavourful and nutrient-dense pre-workout snack, rich in complex carbohydrates, protein, and fibre.

By strategically alternating between fasting days with low-intensity training and pre-feed days with higher-intensity sessions, elite athletes can harness the potential benefits of fasted training while minimising the risk of performance limitations. This balanced approach allows for metabolic adaptations without compromising training quality or recovery.

The decision to work out in a fasted state for elite athletes is complex and multifaceted. While there may be potential benefits in terms of metabolic adaptations and fat oxidation, it's crucial to consider individual factors, performance goals, and the specific demands of the sport. Consulting with a sports nutritionist or healthcare professional can provide personalised guidance and ensure that fasting strategies are implemented safely and effectively within an athlete's training regimen. My final advice, is do not fast without having all your body assessment details, blood chemistry, and training load data in place before you put your food on hold.

Booker prize winner, a big cricket fan!

Salman Rushdie has used the names of cricketers for characters in his novels.

Suresh Menon

Salman Rushdie has a new hero. It is Tiger Pataudi. The novelist, who lost an eye during an attack while making a speech in upstate New York, writes in his book, *Knife*, thus: "I decided that Tiger would be my role model. If he could face up to the ferocious speed of (Wes) Hall and (Charlie) Griffith, I should be able to manage to pour water into a glass without spilling it, and in general succeed at being functional as a one-eyed man in a two-eyed world."

AP

Is Rushdie **(in pic)** a cricket fan? There are two stories that have done the rounds. One is of him playing outside his house in Mumbai in the 1950s, with, I think Polly Umrigar being the childhood hero. The other is of him saying over a decade back that he supported the Indian cricket team. I am not sure if either is authentic — they sound 'Bollywood cute', if you know what I mean. Like anecdotes stitched on to stories post-hoc after a person becomes famous. I may be wrong, of course, and Rushdie might have pretended to be Hazare or Mankad while playing with his mates as a boy.

But he has, like James Joyce, used the names of cricketers for characters in his novels. Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* has W. G. Grace, Ranji, Fry and other players of the golden era. There is even a slim book, *Cricket in the Writings of James Joyce.*

In his most recent novel, *Victory City*, Rushdie gave the sons of his fictitious Pampa Kampana the following names: Erapalli, Bhagwat and Gundappa, thus immortalising the three greats of Karnataka cricket, Prasanna, Chandrasekhar and Viswanath, and appropriately enough in a novel based in Karnataka.

As an aside, it is 50 years since they played key roles in Karnataka's first-ever Ranji triumph. But the Karnataka State Cricket Association is yet to name stands after them!

The names of the fictitious sons were chosen by their father Bukka Raya I. According to astrological charts, "Gundappa meant the child would be generous and high-minded, while Bhagwat meant that he would be a dedicated servant of god, and Erapalli suggested an idealistic dreamer with much imagination....Bukka conceded to Pampa Kampana in private that the boys' actual characters largely disproved the value of the astrologer's predictions...."

In his earlier *The Moor's Last Sigh,* former India player Abbas Ali Baig plays a key role. When Baig got to a Test fifty in Mumbai against Australia in 1960, a young lady ran from the stands and planted a kiss on his cheek. Three decades later, Rushdie created *The Kissing of Abbas Ali Baig* , a painting, in his novel.

"My mother (Aurora) was inspired," says a character, "She rushed home and in a single sustained burst completed the painting, in which the 'real' shy peck, done for a dare, was transformed into a full-scale western-movie clinch. It was Aurora's version that everyone remembered..."

Some scholar might even now be working on *Cricket in the Writings of Salman Rushdie*...

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