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VICTORIOUS TEAM INDIA

PHOTO ESSAY

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THE WORLD IN OUR HANDS

INDIA'S LONG WAIT FOR AN ICC TROPHY CAME TO AN END AS ROHIT SHARMA'S MEN WON A THRILLING T20 WORLD CUP FINAL AGAINST THE PROTEAS IN BRIDGETOWN

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Cover: Rohit Sharma (Getty Images)

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www.sportstar.thehindu.com
mail to: sportstar@thehindu.co.in

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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THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES, TEAM INDIA

Our joy is no less than that of the players who made it possible, and our **umbilical link** to the moment is no less than theirs.

Watching sports can be deeply emotional. As the years roll by, and my hair turns more grey than black, my memories often go back to September 24, 2007.

With the family crammed in the sweat-filled drawing room — as much to do with the tension on the field as with the sultry, overbearing Kolkata evening — we put faith in Joginder Sharma's gentle dollies against the batting prowess of Misbah-ul-Haq.

My Dadu (grandfather), two short of 90, had the place closest to the television, and my Didu (grandmother), in dramatic fashion, had already exiled herself from the gathering after Sohail Tanvir had hit two sixes to plunder 15 runs from the 18th over to make it Pakistan's game to lose. But still, there was faith, and the win unexpectedly came when Misbah scooped the Cup to Sreesanth's lap in the third legal ball of the final over.

The celebrations in that suburban Kolkata room were as loud and wild as they were in that Johannesburg field. Needless to say, the old man led the festivities, a customary fare of Shiraz *biryani* being the order for the night from his modest pension.

Our lives are often measured by the sporting events we have lived through, and our conversations are peppered with nostalgia for where we were when M.S. Dhoni lifted the Cup, or when Neeraj Chopra won gold at the Tokyo Olympics; years after the events had passed.

Our joy is no less than that of the players who made it possible, and our umbilical link to the moment is no less than theirs.

The memories of 2024 are now spiced with Rohit Sharma's assault on Mitchell Starc in a Super 8 game against Australia. It was a masterclass in seizing momentum. Virat Kohli had departed for a five-ball duck, and India was six for one after two overs. It was a ripe opportunity to add to the pressure and snatch the initiative, as the Aussies often do in a must-win situation. At the Daren Sammy Stadium, Rohit converted intent into an extraordinary passage of play — 6, 6, 4, 6, 0, wide, 6 — to turn the game India's way.

Time has a way of slipping through our fingers, and much has slipped our grasp since that eventful September night in South Africa. Rohit had gone on to add substantial weight to his credentials as one of India's greatest white-ball players, even as the team grappled with the suffocating expectations of a nation starved for a global title since the 2013 Champions Trophy.

In the rum-soaked, carefree Caribbean, where the air is as relaxed as the locals, Rohit, coach Rahul Dravid, and their men rediscovered India's cricketing paradise by lifting the nation's second ICC T20 World Cup.

This final in Bridgetown was as nerve-wracking as it was 17 years ago, proving that time and age do little to ease the agony of a tight match. Heinrich Klaasen was snatching away our dream after dispatching Axar Patel for 24 runs in the 15th over.

But then, dreams have a peculiar knack for materialising when you're on the brink of despair. Here, Jasprit Bumrah first, and then Suryakumar Yadav, teetering on the edge of glory and disaster, swung the title in India's favour.

The celebrations in the cramped but chilly Chennai office (*Sportstar's* air conditioner is perpetually set to arctic) were equally boisterous. But *biryani* brought with Dadu's pension would have made this win even sweeter — or spicier, in this case.

No one can celebrate a win quite like the old man.

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GETTY IMAGES

BREWING UP A STORM

Puja Tomar, aka The Cyclone, became the **first Indian MMA fighter** to win in the UFC.

Nigamanth P
nigamanth.p@thehindu.co.in

Many trained, many tried, and almost all of them failed when it mattered most, except for a certain 30-year-old.

Puja Tomar **(above, in green)** defied the odds to become the first-ever Indian MMA fighter to register a win in the UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship). 'The Cyclone' achieved this milestone at UFC Louisville, securing a split-decision victory over Brazil's Rayanne dos Santos in the strawweight division a couple of weeks ago.

Such is the pressure that a stage like the UFC puts on an athlete. But Puja saw it differently. "Looking at it as a fight didn't put me under any pressure. But I had this constant rage to win it, at least for the flag I represent. I've seen a lot of fights like this and have won championships. But I felt a slight pressure to win it for India," she said.

The UFC win is just another feather in Puja's cap. She turned heads with her technique in the ONE Championship and went on to participate in the Matrix Fight Night, a promotion founded by Bollywood actor Tiger Shroff.

The Uttar Pradesh-born fighter climbed the ranks and tasted success by winning the strawweight title bout against the USA's Bi Nguyen. She then defended her title via knockout against Russia's Anastasia Feofanova, and that is when the UFC came knocking on her door.

When asked about her journey to the UFC, she explained, "I knew when MFN was started, there would be a steady rise in MMA's popularity in India. MFN was the promotion that kicked off my career. Yes, I started to fight to get financially stable, but MFN provided a lot more than financial stability, and evidently, my career took off."

But her road to the top has been filled with challenges, starting with the scarce opportunities for women in combat sports as compared to the male fighters.

"Getting validation from my family was the most difficult part. If it were boxing, it would've been different since people know about the sport, but MMA is different. They didn't want me to get injuries or cuts on my face. My mom was my only support system. " Puja said.

Puja lost her dad at a very young age. To help her mother make ends meet, she worked on their farm, which helped improve her endurance.

"I didn't expect that it would make me stronger. I went on to participate and win the National Wushu Championship. So I guess all the *ghee* I ate and the milk I drank helped me become stronger and made me who I am today," she said.

Puja isn't certain when she will enter the octagon next in the UFC, but there is one thing she is confident of — clinching the championship belt and bringing glory to India.

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INDIA CAPS DREAM RUN WITH THRILLING FINAL WIN IN BARBADOS

RAHUL DRAVID'S MEN HELD THEIR NERVE TO WIN INDIA'S SECOND T20 WORLD CUP, **HERALDING A NEW ERA** AS ROHIT SHARMA AND VIRAT KOHLI'S RETIREMENTS PAVE THE WAY FOR A YOUNG BRIGADE IN THE 20-OVER FORMAT.

Ayan Acharya
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A haunting image from 2007 captures captain Rahul Dravid sitting dejected after Sri Lanka defeated India by 69 runs in Port of Spain, Trinidad. The Indian cricket team had just faced one of its most disappointing days, exiting the ODI World Cup after failing to chase a modest target on a seemingly harmless pitch.

Fast forward 17 years, and on his final day as India's head coach, Dravid leapt out of his chair as Anrich Nortje hit Hardik Pandya (right) for a single to deep midwicket. South Africa needed 30 off 30 balls with six wickets in hand to win its maiden World Cup title, but Dravid's India fought back to end an 11-year wait for an ICC title. India was the world champion again.

India captain Rohit Sharma accepted the trophy he first won as a rookie player way back in 2007. In many ways, he forged this white-ball team in his image. Having won his first ICC trophy as captain, Rohit announced his retirement from T20Is. Moments earlier, Virat Kohli had ended his T20 international career, breaking the news shortly after receiving the Player of the Match award for his 59-ball 76 in India's seven-run victory.

Their retirements, following the T20 World Cup win in Bridgetown, represent a poignant and poetic full

circle. For well over a decade, Kohli and Rohit have been at the forefront of India's stellar achievements in international cricket. A second T20 world title was something both were chasing desperately, especially after the gut-wrenching defeat in the 50-over final last year. Now that the T20 World Cup trophy is in the cabinet, they've passed the baton to the next generation of T20 cricketers.

Two promising talents, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rinku Singh, who have already been initiated into the T20 scheme, did not get a game in this tournament but have undoubtedly learned a lot by watching the seniors play. It's now time for them to make their own memories.

Tactically, the retirements of Rohit

Golden moment: Rahul Dravid had no plans to continue as India head coach after the ODI World Cup final defeat, but a call from Rohit Sharma changed his mind. Now here he was letting his hair down after being crowned world champion on his final day at work. K. R. DEEPAK

K. R. DEEPAK

Roaring success: Mercilessly booed by IPL crowds, Hardik Pandya bounced back to play a crucial role in India's T20 World Cup triumph, while Virat Kohli, who hadn't performed in eight games prior to the final, came good when it mattered. K. R. DEEPAK

and Kohli open up numerous possibilities for the side. The team now has the chance to establish a new T20I opening combination, with Jaiswal seemingly having secured one spot. Suryakumar Yadav can move to No. 3, while Rinku Singh can be slotted in as a death-overs power-hitter. His ability to take down pace bowlers from overs 17-20 will make his inclusion even more enticing.

The performance of spin-bowling all-rounder Axar Patel, both with the ball and the bat, has been outstanding, highlighted by his crucial 47 in the final. He will be the perfect replacement for Ravindra Jadeja, who also retired from T20 internationals a day after India's World Cup triumph. Axar's electrifying fielding is an added bonus, further enhancing his value. It was a moment of redemption for all-rounder Hardik Pandya. After a challenging IPL 2024 campaign, both as captain and player, he redeemed himself spectacularly in this competition. He capped it off by successfully defending 15 runs in the last over. Hardik finished the tournament with 144 runs and 11 wickets in eight matches.

Meanwhile, it was heartbreak once again for South Africa at the final hurdle. The Proteas needed 26 runs from 24 balls to chase down a target of 177, but the wicket of Heinrich Klaasen, who scored 52 from 27 balls, shifted the momentum dramatically in India's favour. This match could well have been Quinton de Kock's final international appearance for his country, leaving his successor some big shoes to fill. Despite the loss, there were many positives for the team, including Klaasen's excellent form, Aiden Markram's captaincy skills, and Ottniel Baartman's impressive bowling.

There was more anguish in store, this time for the 2022 world champion, England, which made it to the semifinals riding on a mix of some good cricket and dollops of luck. But in a bit of symmetry, after the events of Adelaide 2022, their run was snapped by rampant India spinners, who sent Jos Buttler's side tumbling to a 68-run defeat in Georgetown, Guyana. The low, slow surface there proved much too much for the Three Lions, whose power-hitters clearly like pace on.

Under the leadership of Jos Buttler and head coach Matthew Mott, England has lost both its white-ball world titles in the past seven months. Mott, who was appointed as the white-ball coach in 2022, quickly led the team to victory in the T20 World Cup in Australia. However, since then, the results have been mixed, raising questions about whether Mott will remain in charge for the upcoming series against Australia in September.

With no T20 World Cup for the next two years, England has time to reassess. The next edition will be held in India and Sri Lanka, where England is familiar with the conditions and will know how to improve. Additionally, the Champions Trophy in Pakistan next year will also feature slow, low pitches, similar to those that have recently exposed England's inability to perform on such surfaces. Rob Key, the managing director of England men's cricket, faces a considerable challenge ahead. A complete reboot could be on the cards, including debates over

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Drawing first blood: Jasprit Bumrah clean bowled opener Reeza Hendricks to deal an early blow to the chase. **Right:** Heinrich Klaasen's quickfire 52 took South Africa close to the target before the tables turned dramatically.

K. R. DEEPAK

Buttler's captaincy.

England's arch-rival, Australia, fared even worse, crashing out after back-to-back losses in the Super 8s and failing to reach the finals of the ICC flagship event for the second consecutive time. David Warner's departure leaves a significant gap at the top of the order. The 37-year-old exits as his country's leading men's T20I run-scorer, amassing 3,277 runs at an average of 33.43.

Jake Fraser-McGurk is likely to fill Warner's spot. He impressed during the last IPL season, representing the Delhi Capitals and scoring 330 runs in nine innings at a strike rate exceeding 200. Warner even posted a photo on social media of the pair drinking by the pool with the caption — 'All yours now, champion'.

The Australian selectors must also consider the ageing squad, as only Tim David (28) and Nathan Ellis (29) were under 30 among the 13 players used in this T20 World Cup. By the time of the next edition, Glenn Maxwell will be 37, Marcus Stoinis 36, Mitchell Starc 36, and Josh Hazlewood 35, indicating that the T20 team may need an overhaul.

Meanwhile, the early exit of co-host West Indies robbed the event of its festive fervour. Though fans were disappointed with the result, they could not fault the effort. Rovman Powell's men, serenaded by Calypso legend David Rudder's live rendition of the anthem, *Rally Round the West Indies*, before the games, brought large crowds back to the stadium. "When you look on a large scale, we haven't won the World Cup. We aren't in the semi-finals," Powell had said earlier. "But I think the cricket we have played in the last 12 months is commendable. Credit has to be given to the team. If you can move from number 9 to number 3 in the world in a

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Nerves of steel: Arshdeep Singh dismissed dangermen Aiden Markram **(above)** and Quinton de Kock and also kept his cool in the penultimate over to give away only four runs. K. R. DEEPAK

year, that's tremendous work."

Powell is right. Since March last year, West Indies has won multiple series against South Africa (away), India, England, and South Africa (at home). Even in its only series defeat, against Australia, its batters racked up scores of 202, 207, and 220. This is a side that can challenge for the title in the future, led by the likes of Nicholas Pooran, Powell, Akeal Hosein, and Alzarri Joseph.

Meanwhile, co-host USA's dream run to the Super 8s will remain one of the lasting moments of this tournament, and its win over Pakistan a seminal event. Having already won its first match at a T20 World Cup by beating Canada, USA held its nerve in a Super Over to defeat the 2022 finalist. USA even ran South Africa close in its opening Super 8 match before being comprehensively beaten by West Indies and England.

By qualifying for the Super 8s, the USA secured direct entry to the next edition in 2026. However, it currently has no fixtures planned against major cricketing nations before that tournament. Securing victories against stronger teams will be a top priority, but the players also need to adapt to different conditions.

The drop-in wickets at Nassau County International Cricket Stadium drew criticism for their poor quality, leading to low-scoring matches. This was evident after just two games at the venue, with South Africa bowling Sri Lanka out for 77 — its lowest T20 score — and India dismissing Ireland for 96. Consequently, the toss in New York became pivotal, with the team bowling first gaining a significant advantage. Eight of the 16 matches in the USA leg were allotted to New York, which included the marquee India vs Pakistan match. It is thus evident that besides investment in talent, USA also needs to up its game when it comes to the holistic upliftment of cricket infrastructure to compete with the best.

The World Cup was illuminated by many more such remarkable moments. Like when Afghanistan killed two birds with one stone by defeating Bangladesh, thereby knocking both Bangladesh and Australia out of the tournament. Afghanistan's first semifinal appearance in an ICC event reaffirms its remarkable progress since qualifying for the T20 World Cup for the first time in 2010. Another highlight was Uganda's qualification and participation in its maiden T20 World Cup, having risen through the ranks in the Africa Qualifier. On the other hand, the early exits of Pakistan and Sri Lanka in the first round should prompt introspection regarding their team compositions and strategies. There is a compelling case to be made here for this being one of the most engaging tournaments in recent years, with an expanded pool of 20 teams. While there's still work to be done in terms of scheduling matches, engaging a wider audience, and enhancing the spectator experience, the excitement and unpredictability of the competition were undeniable.

After nearly a month of traversing the Americas and playing 55 matches, the fact that the winner was decided on the last ball of the final is a win for the sport.

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CRICKET, CURRY AND CHAOS!

From butter chicken in Rodney Bay to a hurricane after India's T20 World Cup win, the Diary's Caribbean ride was a **whirlwind of flavours** and emotions.

Ayan Acharya
ayan.acharya@thehindu.co.in

On the eve of India's final T20 World Cup Super 8 match against Australia in St. Lucia, the Diary had gone out for dinner with his Airbnb host at Rodney Bay. This lively area, filled with restaurants, bars, and hotels, caters almost exclusively to tourists.

After over two weeks into the tournament, the Diary craved Indian food, and Spice of India looked like the best place for a fulfilling North Indian meal. The naans were incredibly fresh, though the butter chicken gravy, despite being tasty, lacked that authentic kick.

On the drive back to the apartment, the Diary was checking the weather forecast for matchday when a youthful Rishi Kapoor's voice suddenly implored, 'Tumne kabhi kisi ko pyaar kiya? [Have you ever loved someone?]'.

Click-worthy: The breathtaking views of the airports in transit helped ease the frustration of flight delays to some extent. AYAN ACHARYA

Intrigued, the Diary turned to the apartment owner, Shiv, who confessed his enduring love for the legendary Indian singer Kishore Kumar. "These days, much like the IPL ruining the game, Indian movie songs have massacred the joy of listening to music," Shiv lamented. He is a purist at heart.

The next day, Rohit Sharma led the charge with a brilliant 92, securing India's victory over Australia and extending its unbeaten run. This match also marked the end of the St. Lucia leg of the tournament.

As a farewell gift, the apartment owner presented the Diary with a $2 banknote (right below). But this wasn't just any $2 note — it was a tribute to the legendary West Indies cricketer

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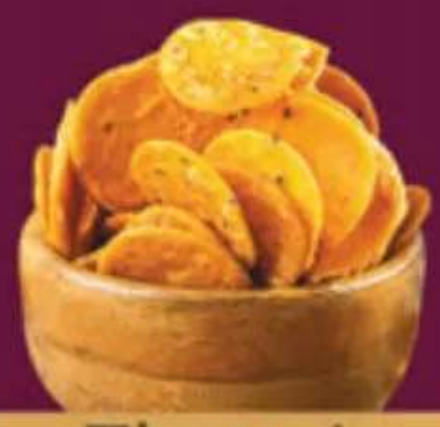

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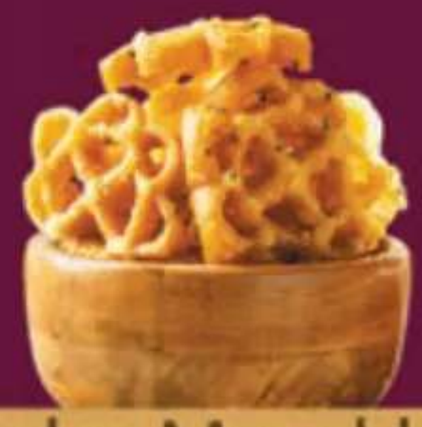

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Sir Vivian Richards, featuring a picture of the former batting star. This commemorative currency **(right)** was launched in Antigua, Richards' birthplace, during a ceremony marking the 40th anniversary of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank.

The Diary was chuffed to bits as he took off for Trinidad for the first semifinal between South Africa and Afghanistan.

Rashid Khan's men were no match for the ruthless Protean pacers as Aiden Markram and his team made history by qualifying for their first-ever World Cup final.

The trip back to Barbados for the final wasn't smooth. Flight connectivity in the Caribbean is often problematic, and the limited fleet of aircraft on each island struggled to handle the strain of a major tournament like the T20 World Cup.

The Diary learned this the hard way when what should have been a one-hour trip from Trinidad to Barbados turned into an all-day ordeal. However, the breathtaking views of the airports in transit helped ease the frustration to some extent.

Bon appétit: Spice of India offered some delectable *naans* and a decent butter chicken curry. Pics: AYAN ACHARYA

At the Kensington Oval in Bridgetown, Barbados, under overcast skies, Rohit's men clinched their second T20 World Cup title, defeating South Africa by seven runs in a nail-biting final. Celebrations erupted in the dressing room, even as a hurricane warning loomed large.

Hurricane Beryl, a formidable Category 4 storm, was expected to pass by Barbados on Sunday night, with its centre projected to be approximately 80 miles off the south coast.

As the Indian team found itself stranded, the Diary chose to get out ahead of the storm instead of waiting for it to pass and risk getting stuck with a possible airport shutdown.

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1st

Driving past: Quinton de Kock slammed his first fifty of the tournament as his 40-ball 74 took South Africa to 194/4, which proved too much for USA as it lost the match by 18 runs. AP

FOR MORE IMAGES

2nd

Salt in the wounds: England made light of West Indies' 180/4 as the defending champion chased down the target inside 18 overs thanks to Phil Salt's unbeaten 87 off 47. AP

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Healing Champions: HOSMAT's Role in Cricket's Biggest Matches

DR. THOMAS CHANDY

The roar of the crowd, the thrill of a winning six, the agony of a crucial injury, these are the emotions that course through the veins of cricket. For the players on the field, the pressure is immense. But behind the scenes, another battle is waged. The fight to keep these gladiators in top form. HOSMAT, the Hospital for Orthopaedics, Sports Medicine, Arthroscopy/Arthroplasty, and Accident Trauma is that silent guardian making sure our cricketers stay in their best form.

Since 1993, this Bengaluru institution has been synonymous with healing cricketing heroes. From the hallowed turf of Chinnaswamy Stadium to the high-tech treatment rooms of HOSMAT, the journey of recovery unfolds.

A Partnership for Peak Performance

Recognizing the growing need for specialized sports medicine in India, the hospital's founders joined hands with the Karnataka State Cricket Association to become the official medical care provider for international matches. This collaboration ensures that when injuries strike on the field, a world-class medical team is at hand, ready to respond with expertise and efficiency.

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Imagine the adrenaline surging through the veins of the HOSMAT staff during a high-stakes match. The Players' Medical Room (PMR) at Chinnaswamy transforms into a mini-hospital, staffed by a dedicated team of professionals. On the match day 5 staff are on the ground near the boundary line to attend emergencies. Orthopaedic and emergency medicine consultants, an anaesthetist, nurses, and paramedics – all stand ready to respond to any medical crisis.

A Global Clientele

Indian stalwarts like MS Dhoni, Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Jasprit Bumrah, VVS Laxman, Mithali Raj and Gautam Gambhir are just a few to have received care at HOSMAT's facilities. International stars like Andrew Flintoff, Lance Klusener, Mohammad Hussain, Shoaib Akhtar, and Bangladesh's heroes like Shakib Al Hasan and Mushfiqur Rahim have also entrusted their well-being to the hospital's expertise. This diverse clientele is a testament to HOSMAT's reputation for excellence in sports medicine.

Dr Thomas Chandy, founder of HOSMAT Hospital, is an experienced Orthopaedic Surgeon (American Board Certified) trained in New York. He has fellowships in Sports Medicine, Arthroscopy and Joint replacement from University of Oklahoma, US, followed by being chief of orthopaedics in Tulsa , Oklahoma for 10 years and has worked in the US for 16 years.

HOSMAT's success hinges on meticulous preparation beyond just having a well-trained staff. Located just minutes from the stadium, the hospital ensures the crucial golden hour for treatment is never missed. Advanced diagnostics like MRI, CT scans, and X-rays are readily available, providing doctors with a clear picture of the injury for swift diagnosis. The team itself boasts an impressive roster - 15 orthopaedic specialists, 20 visiting surgeons, and 2 neurosurgeons, all working together to get players back on their feet, fast.

The Science and Art of Healing

But healing goes beyond high-tech equipment. The state-of-the-art physiotherapy department is a haven for injured players, employing the latest techniques to rebuild strength, flexibility and endurance specific to the sport. From muscle strains to ligament tears, the physiotherapists work tirelessly to get players match-fit, incorporating targeted exercises and rehabilitation programs. This comprehensive approach ensures a complete recovery, allowing players to return to the field at their peak performance.

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The enthusiastic roar of the crowd can sometimes lead to sprained ankles or the occasional bump on the head for spectators caught in the throes of celebration. The team is there to ensure everyone enjoys the game safely. A team of 12 medical personnel is stationed near the boundary line during matches, ready to respond to any emergencies in the stands. They also provide 2 Advanced Cardiac Life Support Ambulances (ACLS) specifically for players, that are manned by one trained paramedic along with a qualified nurse and a driver to ensure safe and enjoyable experience.

HOSMAT's Legacy in Cricket

From the electrifying 1996 World Cup quarter-final between India and Pakistan to the historic 2011 World Cup and the most recent edition in 2023, HOSMAT has been present, ensuring the smooth flow of the game. The hospital has also provided medical services for other major matches and national football tournaments, solidifying its position as a leading provider of sports medicine in India.

The satisfaction of witnessing a player recover and return to the field is immeasurable. HOSMAT plays a vital role in this journey. The hospital is a silent partner in those magical moments on the field, the unseen force that keeps the game going. So, the next time you witness a breath-taking catch or a lightning-fast delivery, remember, there's a team behind the scenes. At HOSMAT, the unwavering dedication to healing the champions who make it all so special is matched only by the team's passion for cricket.

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3rd

On song: Suryakumar Yadav struck a 28-ball 53 that helped India set a total of 182, which Afghanistan batters could never really challenge, and got bowled out for 134. K. R. DEEPAK

4th

Hat-trick hero: Pat Cummins struck off his three consecutive deliveries in death overs to restrict Bangladesh to 140/8 in the first innings. Australia won the game by 28 runs via the DLS method. AFP

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5th

In it to win it: South Africa found itself on the right side of a thrilling game as England fell seven runs short of the 164-run target. AFP

6th

Too good: USA batters had no answers for Roston Chase's spin, as the off-spinner finished with 3/19. West Indian batters then chased down the 129-run target inside 11 overs. AFP

7th

Quickfire: Hardik Pandya scored an unbeaten 27-ball 50 as his final flourish took India to 196/5. Bangladesh never showed up to chase and lost the game by 50 runs. AFP

8th

Writing history: Emotions ran high as Afghanistan defeated Australia for the first time ever in any format. The 21-run defeat jolted Australia's chances to qualify for the semifinals and put Afghanistan in front. AP

9th

Triggering collapse: USA slipped from 115/5 to 115 all out as Chris Jordan took four wickets in five balls, including a hat-trick. England then chased the target in 9.4 overs to book a place in the semifinals. AP

10th

Winning formula: Marcso Jansen scored a vital 14-ball 21 to finish a tricky chase of 124 (DLS) to knock West Indies out of the tournament and qualify for the semifinals. AFP

11th

Rampage: Rohit Sharma turned *Super Saiyan* as he scored a record 92 off 41 balls, including a 29-run over against Mitchell Starc, to power India into the semifinals as Australia fell short by 24 runs. K. R. DEEPAK

12th

Giant strides: Dramatics took centre stage in St. Vincent as Afghanistan qualified for the final four for the first time ever in an ICC tournament, beating Bangladesh by eight runs and knocking out Australia at the same time. AP

Losing ground: South African bowlers, led by Marco Jansen's 3/16, were all over Afghanistan in the first semifinal, bowling the opposition out for mere 56 in the first innings. AFP

Short and sweet: South Africa qualified for the final of a T20 World Cup for the first time as it completed the chase within nine overs. AP

Punching gloves: Rohit Sharma and Suryakumar Yadav strung a 73-run stand for the third wicket, which proved vital for India to finish with 171/7 in the first innings. AFP

Rising to the occasion: Axar Patel demolished England's top order, removing Jos Buttler, Moeen Ali and Jonny Bairstow during his four overs as India entered a T20 World Cup final for the third time. AFP

Man of big occasions: Despite a horrid tournament, Virat Kohli saved his best for the last as he scored 76 runs off 59 balls after South Africa reduced India 34/3 inside PowerPlay. K. R. DEEPAK

Swept away: Promoted to bat at number five, Axar Patel played one of the most important knocks of his career and his 31-ball 47 got India back into the game. He stitched 72 runs with Kohli, playing the aggressor in the fourth-wicket stand. K. R. DEEPAK

Eyes on the prize: Suryakumar Yadav's incredible presence of mind led to a catch that might become one of the most iconic in Indian cricket history. In the final over, with South Africa needing 16 runs from 6 balls, Yadav caught David Miller at the boundary, significantly impacting the game's outcome. K. R. DEEPAK

Amazeballs: Jasprit Bumrah angled the ball into the stumps, and Marco Jansen was a fraction too late with his front-foot defence. The stumps were shattered, dealing a significant blow to South Africa's chances. K. R. DEEPAK

Signing off: After taking over as head coach in November 2021, Rahul Dravid's team made it to the finals of the World Test Championship and the ODI World Cup in 2023 but fell short. However, India finally crossed the finishing line on June 29, the last day of Dravid's coaching stint. GETTY IMAGES

Sigh of relief: "This is what I wanted, I wanted to win the cup." Rohit Sharma announced his retirement from T20 internationals after leading India to the world title in Barbados. GETTY IMAGES

Gratitude: "I'm grateful and humbled right now and I bow my head," Virat Kohli said as he announced his retirement from T20Is after scripting a historic win for India in the final. AP

Screams of joy: Rishabh Pant, who made a remarkable comeback after a horrific car accident in 2022, celebrates with the World Cup trophy in hand. REUTERS

So close yet so far: Chasing 177, South Africa needed 30 off 30 balls with six wickets in hand at one stage. However, things took a wild turn as the rainbow nation fell short of the target by seven runs. GETTY IMAGES

UNSTOPPABLE BY DESIGN

Jasprit Bumrah writes **his own destiny,** and he does it in his own indomitable style.

Ayan Acharya
ayan.acharya@thehindu.co.in

It's not a clever turn of phrase, nor is it a courteous gesture in a room full of journalists who have witnessed the highest highs and the lowest lows of the sport. You've rummaged through the back of your mind, rifled through options in Merriam-Webster, and still come up empty. You're just wide-eyed and wide-mouthed, letting out a simple "Holy s**t."

Bridgetown, Barbados — a verdant cricketing land that gave the world the three Ws (Frank Worrell, Everton Weekes, Clyde Walcott) and many other cricketing greats like Garfield Sobers — was suffering a shortage of superlatives as Jasprit Bumrah went about doing Bumrah things in the T20 World Cup final against South Africa on Saturday.

There is an air of invincibility around the 30-year-old pacer. When Heinrich Klaasen was thrashing Axar Patel around in the 15th over, which eventually cost 24 runs and threatened to break India's defence of 176, Axar bowled two wide balls to avoid Klaasen's hitting arc. Bumrah, fielding at deep fine leg, realised what Axar was trying to do and walked back to his fielding mark with a sly smile, as if he could see the future.

At this point, South Africa needed 30 runs from 30 balls with six wickets in hand, and questions were already being asked about Bumrah's late re-entry into the attack. But when he did come back in the 16th over, he conceded just four runs. "The 16th over, it was a run-a-ball, and we were up against it. But the ball was scuffed, and I knew I could get reverse swing. I am just happy that I kept calm and executed it," said the redoubtable Bumrah after the match.

He then returned for the 18th over, his last of the tournament. Klaasen was already back in the pavilion, but David Miller was still out there, with Marco Jansen for company, who is no muck with the bat. With six balls to do what he does best — making the opponent sweat, that is — Bumrah not only clean-bowled Jansen with a perfect inswinger but also went for just two runs, finishing the final with figures of 2 for 18.

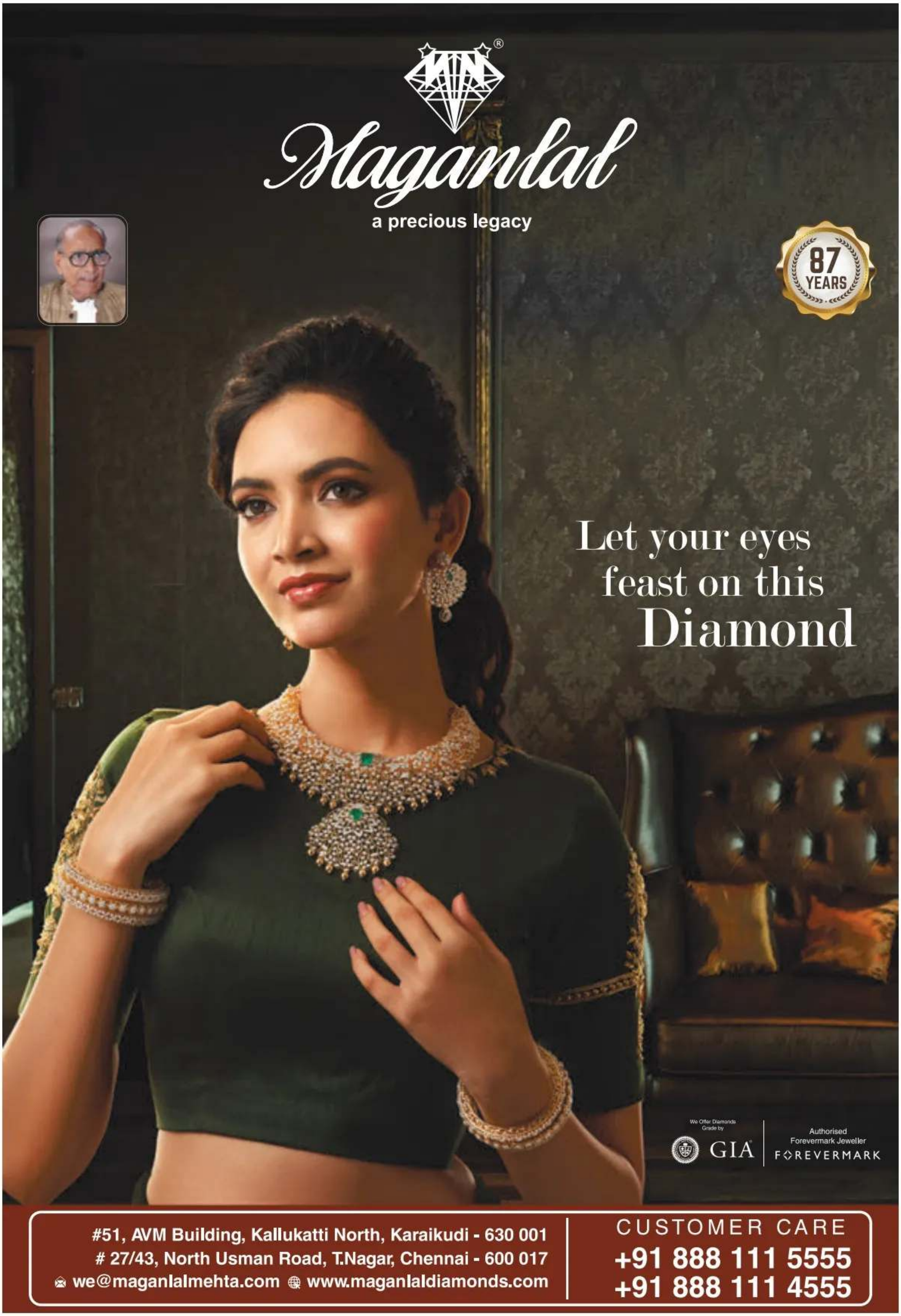
He ended the competition with 15 wickets at an economy rate of 4.17 and an average of less than 8.26, rightly earning him the Player of the Tournament award.

Before the match, Bumrah was marking his run-up when he saw his wife, Sanjana Ganesan, a TV sports presenter. He put down the bucket of paint, and the couple hugged, with Sanjana wishing him good luck. Bumrah had earlier been to three finals and two semifinals across all formats in international cricket, but this time, as he walked away from his wife towards his teammates, he smiled at her with a thumbs-up, as if to say — "I got this."

And boy did he...Bumrah had seen the future. And in it, he was the king of the world!

MATCHES	WICKETS	ECONOMY
8	15	4.17

AFP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India's success story

8 India's consecutive victories in this edition of the T20 World Cup make it only the third side after Australia and South Africa to win most T20WC matches in a row. If India wins its first game in the next edition of the T20WC, it will go ahead of the other two sides.

Longest winning streak by a side in the T20WC

M	Team	From	To	Captain/s
8	Australia	25 Oct 2022	20 Jun 2024	Aaron Finch (2), Matthew Wade (1), Mitchell Marsh (5)
8	South Africa	3 Jun 2024	26 Jun 2024	Aiden Markram (8)
8*	India	5 Jun 2024	29 Jun 2024	Rohit Sharma (8)
7	India	30 Sep 2012	4 Apr 2014	M. S. Dhoni (7)

Note: South Africa had lost its last two T20WC games to Pakistan and Netherlands in the previous edition of the tournament.

100 India's win percentage in the recently concluded T20WC made it the first to win the title without losing a single game. The table shows how all the T20WC winners have fared in each tournament.

Performance of the winning T20WC sides since 2007

Year	Winning team	M	W	L	N/R	Win%
2024	India	8	8	0	0	100.00
2021	Australia	7	6	1	0	85.71
2014	Sri Lanka	6	5	1	0	83.33
2016	West Indies	6	5	1	0	83.33
2022	England	6	5	1	0	83.33
2007	India	7	5	1	1	71.43
2009	Pakistan	7	5	2	0	71.43
2010	England	7	5	1	1	71.43
2012	West Indies	7	4	2	1	57.14

36 The number of T20WC match wins for India, the most for any side, making it the most successful side in the tournament's history.

Most successful T20 World Cup sides in history

Team	M	W	L	N/R	Win%
India	52	36	15	1	69.23
South Africa	49	32	16	1	65.31
Australia	47	30	17	0	63.83
Sri Lanka	54	33	21	0	61.11

9 The number of players who have been part of the T20 World Cup title-winning team twice. Rohit Sharma is the most recent member to join this exclusive group, largely dominated by West Indian players.

Players being a part of the playing XI in winning a T20 World Cup final twice

Player	For	Winning years
Samuel Badree	West Indies	2012, 2016
Dwayne Bravo	West Indies	2012, 2016
Johnson Charles	West Indies	2012, 2016
Chris Gayle	West Indies	2012, 2016
Denesh Ramdin	West Indies	2012, 2016
Andre Russell	West Indies	2012, 2016
Daren Sammy	West Indies	2012, 2016
Marlon Samuels	West Indies	2012, 2016
Rohit Sharma	India	2007, 2024

50 The number of times Rohit Sharma, as captain, has been a part of a T20 international winning match. This makes him the first captain in T20I history to reach this milestone. He achieved it in the final of the recent T20WC final in Bridgetown on June 29, 2024.

T20I captains with maximum victories

Captain	For	M	W	L	N/R	Win%
Rohit Sharma	India	62	50	12	0	80.65
Babar Azam	Pakistan	85	48	30	7	56.47
Brian Masaba	Uganda	59	44	12	3	74.58
Eoin Morgan	England	72	44	27	1	61.11

2 The number of T20I bowlers to claim a four-wicket haul while bowling at positions number 8 or below. Afghanistan's pacer Gulbadin Naib's figures in his side's historic win over the Aussies in Kingstown on 22 June 2024, now rank as the second-best by a T20I bowler in this position.

Best figures by bowlers while bowling at number 8 or below (listed below are only for bowlers from a Test nation)

Figures	Overs	Bowler	Bowling position	For	Against	Venue	Date	Result	M Inns
4/18	3	Stuart Thomson	8	Ireland	Netherlands	Al Almerat	17 Feb 2019	Won	1
4/20	4	Gulbadin Naib	8	Afghanistan	Australia	Kingstown	22 Jun 2024	Won	2
2/3	0.4	Danushka Gunathilaka	8	Sri Lanka	Bangladesh	Sylhet	18 Feb 2018	Won	2
2/12	3	Alok Kapali	8	Bangladesh	Pakistan	Mirpur	29 Nov 2011	Lost	1
2/22	4	Kieron Pollard	8	West Indies	South Africa	North Sound	19 May 2010	Lost	1

Meanwhile, just two weeks before Naib's effort, West Indian Akeal Hosein, against Uganda, in Providence, on 8 Jun 2024, had recorded the best figures by any spinner, who began as the opening bowler in the innings. Previously, another left-armer, Imad Wasim of Pakistan, had 5/14 against West Indies in Dubai on 23 Sep 2016 which were the best figures.

Best figures by a spin bowler who began as the first bowler in the innings in a T20I match (listed below are only for bowlers from a Test nation)

Figures	Overs	Bowler	For	Against	Venue	Date	Result	M Inns
5/11	4	Akeal Hossain	West Indies	Uganda	Providence	8 Jun 2024	Won	2
5/14	4	Imad Wasim	Pakistan	West Indies	Dubai	23 Sep 2016	Won	1
5/20	4	Mosaddek Hossain	Bangladesh	Zimbabwe	Harare	31 Jul 2022	Won	1
4/6	4	Sulieman Benn	West Indies	Zimbabwe	Port of Spain	28 Feb 2010	Lost	1
4/8	4	R. Ashwin	India	Sri Lanka	Visakhapatnam	14 Feb 2016	Won	1

Note: Hossain and Ashwin are right-arm offies, while the rest are left-arm slow bowlers in the list

5 The number of times when only three bowlers have taken all 10 wickets in the same innings of a T20I match. In the T20WC match in North Sound on 13th June 2024, three England bowlers achieved this feat against Oman. This has been accomplished only by England and India among the top-ranked cricket nations, with England being the first to achieve it in a T20WC match.

All 10 wickets in a T20I innings shared between three bowlers

Bowling side	Bowlers involved	Against	Venue	Date	Result
Malaysia	Mohd Wafiq 3/14, Pavandeep Singh 3/30, Sharvin Muniandy 4/32	PNG	Kirtipur	29 Mar 2022	Won
India	Axar Patel 3/15, Kuldeep Yadav 3/12, Ravi Bishnoi 4/16	West Indies	Lauderhill	7 Aug 2022	Won
Sierra Leone	Samuel Conteh 3/7, George Sesay 3/2, Chernoh Bah 4/10	Mali	Benoni	9 Dec 2023	Won
Hong Kong	Haroon Arshad 4/7, Ehsan Khan 3/9, Anas Khan 3/18	China	Mong Kok	16 Feb 2024	Won
England	Jofra Archer 3/12, Mark Wood 3/12, Adil Rashid 4/11	Oman	North Sound	13 Jun 2024	Won

106 Bangladesh's total against Nepal in Arnos Vale in Kingstown on 16 June 2024 is now the lowest total successfully defended by any side in a T20WC.

Lowest totals successfully defended in a T20 World Cup match

Total (overs)	Batting 1st	won by	Batting 2nd	Venue	Date
106 (19.3)	Ban	21 runs	Nep (85 in 19.2)	Kingstown	16 Jun 2024
113/6 (20)	SA	4 runs	Ban (109/7 in 20)	New York	10 Jun 2024
115/7 (20)	SA	1 run	Nep (114/7 in 20)	Arnos Vale	14 Jun 2024
115/5 (20)	Afg	8 runs-DLS	Ban (105 in 17.5)	Arnos Vale	24 Jun 2024
119 (19.2)	SL	59 runs	NZ (60 in 15.3)	Chattogram	31 Mar 2014
119 (20)	Ind	6 runs	Pak (113/7 in 20)	New York	9 Jun 2024

3 The number of bowlers who have the unique distinction of bowling their full quota of four overs in a T20 match without conceding any runs. The most recent instance was on 17 June 2024, when New Zealand's Lockie Ferguson achieved this feat against PNG, marking the first time it had happened in a T20 World Cup match.

Bowlers conceding fewest runs in their 4-over spell in T20 internationals

Bowling	Bowler	For	Against	Venue	Date	Result
4-4-0-2	Saad Bin Zafar	Canada	Panama	Coolidge	14 Nov 2021	Won
4-4-0-3	Lockie Ferguson	New Zealand	PNG	Tarouba	17 Jun 2024	Won
4-2-2-5	Yalinde Nkanya	Tanzania	Cameroon	Kigali	9 Dec 2022	Won
4-3-2-3	George Sesay	Sierra Leone	Mali	Benoni	9 Dec 2023	Won

Bowlers not conceding any run in their 4-over spell in T20 cricket

Bowling	Bowler	For	Opp	Venue	Date	Result
4-4-0-2	Akshay Karnewar	Vidarbha	Manipur	Mangalagiri	8 Nov 2021	Won
4-4-0-2	Saad Bin Zafar	Canada	Panama	Coolidge	14 Nov 2021	Won
4-4-0-3	Lockie Ferguson	NZ	PNG	Tarouba	17 Jun 2024	Won

3 The number of batters who had the misfortune of being run out in their nineties. Most recently, West Indian Nicolas Pooran achieved a score of 98 in Gros Islet on 17 June 2024 against Afghanistan, making him the second batter to be dismissed so in a T20WC match, following former team-mate Chris Gayle.

T20I batters dismissed run out while in their nineties

Runs	Batter	For	Opp
98	Chris Gayle	WI	Ind
91	Sabawoon Davizi	Czech Rep	Malta
99	Hamil Ali Mazar Shah	Den	Fin
98	Nicolas Pooran	WI	Afg

All records are correct and updated until 29 June 2024.

A SPIRITED STORY OF POWER AND GRACE

Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli may have **said their goodbyes to T20I cricket,** but their legacies will endure forever.

Ayan Acharya
ayan.acharya@thehindu.co.in

The fans of the Indian cricket team know all about pantomime. From the disappointment of a semifinal defeat in the 2022 T20 World Cup and the harrowing pain of losing the final of the 50-over World Cup at home last year to now rising back up again triumphantly with a second T20 World Cup title — it was a fairytale turnaround reminiscent of Cinderella.

Indian cricket's rollercoaster journey has thus been a parable of modern cricket. The team's T20 World Cup final victory at the Kensington Oval in Bridgetown, Barbados, with thousands of fans and a garnish of subsequent emotions and celebrations, made an ideal backdrop for two of the sport's greatest practitioners and trend-setters — Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli — to bring the curtains down on their respective T20I careers.

Rohit joins the ranks of eight West Indians — Samuel Badree, Dwayne Bravo, Johnson Charles, Chris Gayle, Denesh Ramdin, Andre Russell, Daren Sammy, and Marlon Samuels — who have won the men's T20 World Cup twice, while Kohli departs with the honour of being named Player of the Match in the T20 World Cup final, a record 16th time in T20Is. He also secured the one white-ball trophy missing from his cabinet.

While Kohli embodied the smoke and magic nature of T20 cricket as it began Rohit encapsulated what the format became: fire and brimstone. Revisiting their time together merits the use of the word awesome. Rohit exits the format as its highest scorer (4231 runs in 159 matches), with Kohli close behind (4188 runs in 125 matches) — a combined total of 8419 runs.

Their retirement from T20I was not entirely unexpected. Both players had skipped the format after India's 2022 T20 World Cup semifinal defeat, returning only in January this year with a focus on this T20 World Cup.

Rohit's performance in this edition was a testament to his fresh all-out aggressive approach, regardless of

Contrast in genius: While Kohli embodied the smoke and magic nature of T20 cricket as it began Rohit encapsulated what the format became: fire and brimstone.

Pics: K. R. DEEPAK

the batting conditions. His 92 against Australia in St. Lucia was the third-highest score of the tournament, and his crucial 57 against England helped India post a competitive total on a difficult, turning pitch in the semifinal in Georgetown, Guyana.

Even in the final against South Africa, he fell cheaply while attempting his favoured sweep shot against Keshav Maharaj in the second over, but not before smacking him for two consecutive boundaries, including one reverse sweep. Rohit's strike rate in the PowerPlay was consistently above 140, often setting the tempo for the rest of the team.

This aggressive style also benefitted Rohit's opening partner, Kohli, allowing him time to assess the conditions before accelerating. Despite a challenging campaign this World Cup, where he scored only 75 runs in seven innings, Kohli delivered when it mattered most. His crucial knock in the final helped India reach a formidable total of 176-7.

Kohli started briskly, hitting three beautifully timed boundaries off Marco Jansen in the first over of the innings.

However, with India having lost three wickets for just 34 runs in the PowerPlay, he had to adapt his approach to a more cautious one. The progression of his innings in the final illustrates this shift:

- First 5 balls: 14 runs
- Next 43 balls: 36 runs
- Last 11 balls: 26 runs

Kohli's greatest asset in white-ball cricket has been his ability to break down targets into manageable goals. However, the rapid evolution of T20 cricket eventually caught up with him. The demand for higher strike rates and a less risk-averse approach meant his recent years in T20Is were a slow burn, with occasional brilliance like his 53-ball 82 against Pakistan in Melbourne (2022 T20 World Cup) or his 59-ball 76 against South Africa. These performances reminded us of his greatness, and we celebrated them with a certain reserve — less jubilant, more appreciative.

At 35, despite his numerous achievements, Kohli pushed himself to meet modern T20 demands, showcasing his insatiable drive to be the best. This relentless pursuit will be his lasting T20I legacy.

Rohit, on the other hand, will be remembered for acknowledging that T20 cricket has evolved more in the last three years than in the previous decade.

While this may sound simple, it represents a multilayered challenge, especially considering that the team he was leading was a side that was traditionally focused on preserving wickets before launching an attack in the latter overs.

But when the demand to go big from the start appeared like Stanley Kubrick's monolith from the cult classic *2001: Space Odyssey*, triggering a shift in evolution, Rohit was front and centre of that transition, leading by example.

When India defends its T20 World Cup title at home in 2026, Kohli and Rohit will not be part of the squad. Yet, the new team will be building on an edifice that their exalted predecessors laid the foundation for.

ON THE WRITE LINE

Sunil Gavaskar

FOR MORE STORIES

WITH THE BENCH STRENGTH INDIA HAS, IT CAN DEFINITELY WIN MORE TITLES

Skipper Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli have announced their retirement after the T20 world Cup victory, but India has in Shubman Gill and Yashaswi Jaiswal, two young players **ready to take up the mantle.**

India's win in the ICC men's T20 World Cup has not just satiated the Indian cricket fans' craving for a World Cup but may have, in fact, increased the appetite for the same, looking at the fact that the team was unbeaten throughout the tournament. Even in the ODI World Cup, India lost only in the final, and so as far as the white-ball format is concerned, India definitely is a team that can be expected to win more titles. Of course, luck will play a part, but with the bench strength that India has, it is definitely doable.

In the T20 format, with two stalwarts, skipper Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, announcing their retirements after the Barbados win, there are two big holes to fill. India has, in Shubman Gill, who will captain the team in Zimbabwe, and Yashasvi Jaiswal, two young players ready to take up the mantle. There's also Abhishek Sharma and Ruturaj Gaikwad around, so there is a surplus of opening-batting riches.

The fact that the stalwarts have announced their retirement from only the T20 format does suggest that they are keen to play in the Champions Trophy next February. That could put the selectors in a bit of a quandary, as they may well want to start planning for the World Cup in 2027 sooner rather than later.

There were some comments about the scheduling of the ICC T20 World Cup from some former cricketers from the old powers that were laughable, to say the least. They seemed to forget the fact that the major, if not the only, source of sponsorship for the ICC comes from India. It is therefore understandable that the timing for the telecast will be at a time that is good for Indian viewers. Indian TV has bought the rights for three billion dollars and so, obviously, would want to cash in on that with prime-time viewing for the millions who follow the game in India, which, just for information, would be more than the combined population of both the old powers.

American TV buys broadcast rights for the Olympics for billions of dollars and so has all the marquee events at the Games at a time that is good for its viewers. We haven't heard a squeak from anybody from the old powers that this favours the U.S. athletes, have we? But then, with them being poodles of USA that would be unwise. The double standards are no longer shocking to the discerning in the subcontinent because, by now, they know what to expect from the old powers. Nothing but jealousy and frustration that they no longer call the shots.

There was also a question raised in an Australian paper about the fairness of the catch that Suryakumar Yadav took to dismiss David Miller in the final. All the replays were quite clear that SKY had done a marvellous balancing act as he took the catch and flicked the ball up in the air

Celebration time: The Indian team remained unbeaten in the tournament as it clinched its second World T20 title. K. R. DEEPAK

before he crossed the boundary rope and then jumped in the air and caught the ball within the boundary to complete a fabulous catch. Nobody questioned the catch, but the writer of the article did. He may be interested to see the video floating around of the 10 most blatant cheating acts done by the Aussies before trying to point a finger at SKY. Pot calling the kettle black indeed.

Doing a story just to get eyeballs and accusing someone of cheating is dastardly. So is making allegations of indiscipline without a shred of evidence. Shubman Gill being made captain of the Indian team clearly rubbished the report that said he was sent back from the just-concluded World Cup for indiscipline. It was clearly understood by the team management and selectors that he was going to be around till the USA leg of the tournament and then come back to India to take a short break. Therefore, sullying a dedicated young man's name for a few more eyeballs is simply not on. A few months ago, at the start of the year, it was Ishan Kishan who was accused of indiscipline, again without the tiniest bit of proof. Two good young cricketers whose names were spoilt just to get more views and likes. So sad.

What if both of these young men, who have millions of followers on the public media, did something similar to those who wrote these rubbish allegations? They could well use the same method of using the words 'allegedly, reportedly, according to a reliable source in the paper' to do a character assault on those who wrote the stories about them. Would those guys like it? I'm sure not.

Before you do such stories about those trying to make a career in Indian cricket, think about what would happen if similar stories without evidence were written about you. It can easily be a case of three fingers pointing back at those making the unfounded allegations.

So please cool it, guys, and help build the Indian team rather than trying to destroy it. After all, you also make your living writing about Indian cricket, so be fair to it.

Doing a story just to get eyeballs and accusing someone of cheating is dastardly. So is making allegations of indiscipline without a shred of evidence. Before you do such stories about those trying to make a career in Indian cricket, think about what would happen if similar stories without evidence were written about you.

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The dual avoidance

By C.G.S.Narayanan

Dual is a weakness in an orthodox direct mate problem where more than one mate follow a single black defence. Later on in modern compositions 'dual separation' and dual avoidance have become an integral part of many themes and considered embellishments.There are many ways of preventing the duals like 'Herpai'and 'Java'. In the diagram below the arrival of a dummy unit on d3 .(after the key 1.d4!) would permit a dual mate 2.Nxc3 and 2.Nxe3 as each BR ceased to guard its companion..

L.I.Loshinski
Die Schwalbe 1930

Mate in two moves

It is the departure effects of black's en passant capture defences that stop duals. **Key 1.d4!** (threat 2.Qc5)
1…dxc4 e.p 2.Nxe3 (2.Nxc3?)
1…exd4 e.p 2.Nxc3 (2.Nxe3?)
1…fNe6 2.Rxd7;1…gNe6 2.Rxf5
This kind of interference play is called 'Herpai' theme and is a form of dual defence.It may be noted that similar pair of interferences by the knights on e6 do not constitute dual avoidance at all.The moves are merely double errors of interference and unguards.

In the second problem features'Java 'theme -so called because Tuxen in the early 1930s investigated it while he was living in Java. In fact according to John Rice, Mansfield composed the first example in 1919.

P.Keres
I prize, Schachvarlden 1934

Mate in two moves

Key 1.Rh4! (threat 2.Rb4)
1…Be4 2.Nd4 (Nc5?)
1…Ne7 2.Nc5 (Nd4?)
1…Re4 2.Qb1
Be4 closes WRs additional guard to b4 and so the unpinned WN must avoid closing WB guard to that square.Similarly Ne7 closes WB guard to b4 and WN avoids closing wR line

The interest in the problem for solving given below lies in the 'quintuple avoidance'of mates.

P.Overkamp(after Loshinski)
Probleemblad 1951

Mate in two moves

Solution to problem for solving in gthe article'Prevention of check':
Key 1.Bg5! (2.Bf4) 1…Bd2 2.Bxd3 3.Bg6
1…Bc3 2.Kc6 3.Bf7;1…Bb4 2.Ke4 3.Bf7;1….Ba5 2.b8Q;1…d2 2.Ke5

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

When Chepauk proved that resilience too needs support

South Africa's gritty defiance in the face of a humbling loss against India might have earned it respect and a place in history, but **will it change its red-ball destiny** back home?

Lavanya Lakshmi Narayanan
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South African skipper Laura Wolvaardt often slips into a one-liner when she tries to explain a game's complexities: "Cricket's a funny game." It truly is. Years later, when people will look back at the one-off Test between India and South Africa at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai, they might see the big scores and historic wicket-hauls, but they won't feel what the 12,000-odd spectators at the Chepauk experienced — the relentless defence of the Proteas and the unending chirpiness of a ground-to-the-ground Indian bowling lineup. You'll see the bun and chomp down on it without even realising how those layers formed within, under the intense heat and pressure of the coastal city.

For India, whose newfound patronage of women's Tests has brought the MAC Stadium just its second-ever fixture since the one against the West Indies in 1976, there is the luxury of brushing past this win because it has become the norm. This is the team's third Test triumph on the trot after massive victories over England (by 347 runs at the D.Y. Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai) and Australia (by eight wickets at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai). The highs have facilitated the formation of a stable red-ball core and now a revitalised domestic tournament.

South Africa is a polar opposite. In the history of Tests for women, it has played only 15 to India's 41, of which three have just happened in the last two years after an eight-year red-ball hiatus. The Proteas have a solitary win in the format, which came against the Netherlands in 2007.

Wolvaardt's side has been the only one outside the 'Big Three' to show both interest and ability to invest in the game's longest format for its women. However, their efforts so far have remained confined to the international realm.

South Africa does not have any red-ball or multi-day cricket at the domestic level and came into the Chennai Test having last played the format in a thrashing at the hands of Australia — an innings and 284-run defeat — in Perth earlier this year.

Coming into this fixture, Wolvaardt had issued an ultimatum of sorts.

"We need to play more Test cricket and incorporate it into our domestic system and practice, or we must just leave it because playing one in three years is very hard to adapt to. But I am on the side to have more of it," she said.

With a weak spin arsenal on a traditionally spin-favouring surface,

One for the album: **(Clockwise from left)** Shafali Verma after scoring a magnificent double century. The Indian team celebrates after its win. A jubilant Sneh Rana after taking the wicket of Sinalo Jafta. PICS: B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

not many gave the Proteas much of a chance against the Goliath that India is turning out to be in home conditions.

However, the side's batting mainstays — Wolvaardt, former captain Sune Luus, Marizanne Kapp, and the young Nadine de Klerk — led a memorable resistance to make India earn its victory, stretching them more than both England (day three) and Australia (first session of day four) had.

Luus was the chief resistor. She pulled the brakes for three and a half hours in the first innings and a bit more in the second to wear down an otherwise boisterous Indian bunch. She had help from Kapp in the first innings, but her record-breaking 190-run stand with Wolvaardt truly defined the Protean resilience that this match will be remembered for. Wolvaardt learned from her early dismissal in the first innings and dug deep for over six and a half hours during her 314-ball 122.

Sporadic experiences of the long format condemn teams to be perennial learners. Wolvaardt had to figure out how to stay calm and power through the elements, her own doubts, and itches to score differently to drop anchor. As did the lower order, which batted for a collective 21 overs in the second innings compared to a paltry 7.5 overs in the first.

"It would be ideal to practise red-ball stuff more often, even if it's just having a few inter-squad games or camps. Maybe a full-fledged four-day league is a little bit far away, but just to practise it a bit more. Just to come into an international Test match in India with absolutely no experience in the format is tough," Wolvaardt said after the loss.

Players have always vouched for more Tests because of the

Batting masterclass: (Clockwise from left) Suné Luus scored a defiant 109 in the second innings. Marizanne Kapp was steadfast in her 141-ball 74. SA captain Laura Wolvaardt led from the front with a solid 122. India captain Harmanpreet Kaur with the trophy. Smriti Mandhana calls on the Chepauk crowd to cheer louder. PICS: B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

challenges the format poses and its coveted reputation as the game's purest format.

Indian off-spinner Sneh Rana went a step further in asking for more games within the Test fold in a series.

"We should have more Tests and it shouldn't just be the one, there should be two!" she delightedly told reporters.

But calls like that need Tests to be given greater context, first within the series itself and then internationally. The latter is a challenge when there are only four nations actively pursuing the format.

India had the opportunity to go the women's Ashes way and make its home multiformat series adhere to a cumulative points system, where every fixture gets certain points. The winner is the one with the most points at the end of the full tour. Even after its steamrolling of England and Australia in December, India opted not to go that way when South Africa came visiting, despite the latter having stark structural weaknesses compared to the other two.

In such a scenario, much comes down to individual brilliance and even milestones for a large part of the game. Take Shafali Verma's 200, for instance, which was the headline on day one. A 20-year-old almost going past Indian legend Mithali Raj's Test top score — it was a record the nation was waiting to see with bated breath, but the youngster fell short. Her innings, alongside Smriti Mandhana's fluent 149, gave India the cushion it needed to stay confident no matter how much the Proteas fought until the final session of the last day.

When India eventually sealed the win with well over an hour's play left in the day, the scoresheet of that remarkable Protean second innings made its way around the Chennai Press Box.

A bunch of reporters on duty signed the sheet with messages commending the visitors' efforts.

As Wolvaardt came to speak to the press, she was given the envelope with tributes from the press. "I'm going to frame this," she said.

Heading into the final day, batting coach Baakier Abrahams spoke about the team needing positive frames of reference in this format, particularly when it has little to no red-ball roots in the current system.

"There were some signs we showed of our resilience when we were under pressure and those are things we want to build on going forward. So if there's going to be more Tests for women, we now have positive reference points to build on and we'll only get better and the level of competition will get better and women's Test cricket will benefit," he said, foreshadowing a spirited batting show that saw SA drag the game to the very end.

This Protean effort must take pride of place in the nation's batting showcase alongside Jacques Kallis, Hansie Cronje, and Adam Bacher's efforts against Australia in 1997 in Melbourne, Faf du Plessis and AB de Villiers' effort against Australia in a drawn Test in Adelaide in 2012, and Kapp's match-saving exploits with the bat against England in Taunton. It didn't bring a win, but it helped the nation remember how to defy the despair of looming defeat and fight till the very end.

With the Proteas set to don the whites again, this time at home against England, it could just be the 'why' that carries them to glory.

The case file for more multi-day red-ball games just got another incredible addition from action at the Chepauk.

One hopes the powers that be, national and international, pick up the pages and read.

IN THE RECORD BOOKS

Shafali Verma became only the second Indian woman to score a Test double ton after Mithali Raj.
Her double century is the fastest by a woman (194 balls) and her 292-run stand with Smriti Mandhana is the highest opening stand in women's Tests.

India has now won all three Tests it has played under Harmanpreet Kaur's captaincy.
She is now India's joint most successful captain for India, alongside Mithali who has as many wins.

Laura Wolvaardt became the third woman after England's Heather Knight and Tammy Beaumont to register a century in all three formats of the game.
She is the first to do so in a calendar year.

India's score of 525/4 on Day 1 is the most runs scored by any team in a single's day play in Test history.
Moreover, the eventual score of 603/6d in the first innings is the highest team total in the history of women's Tests.

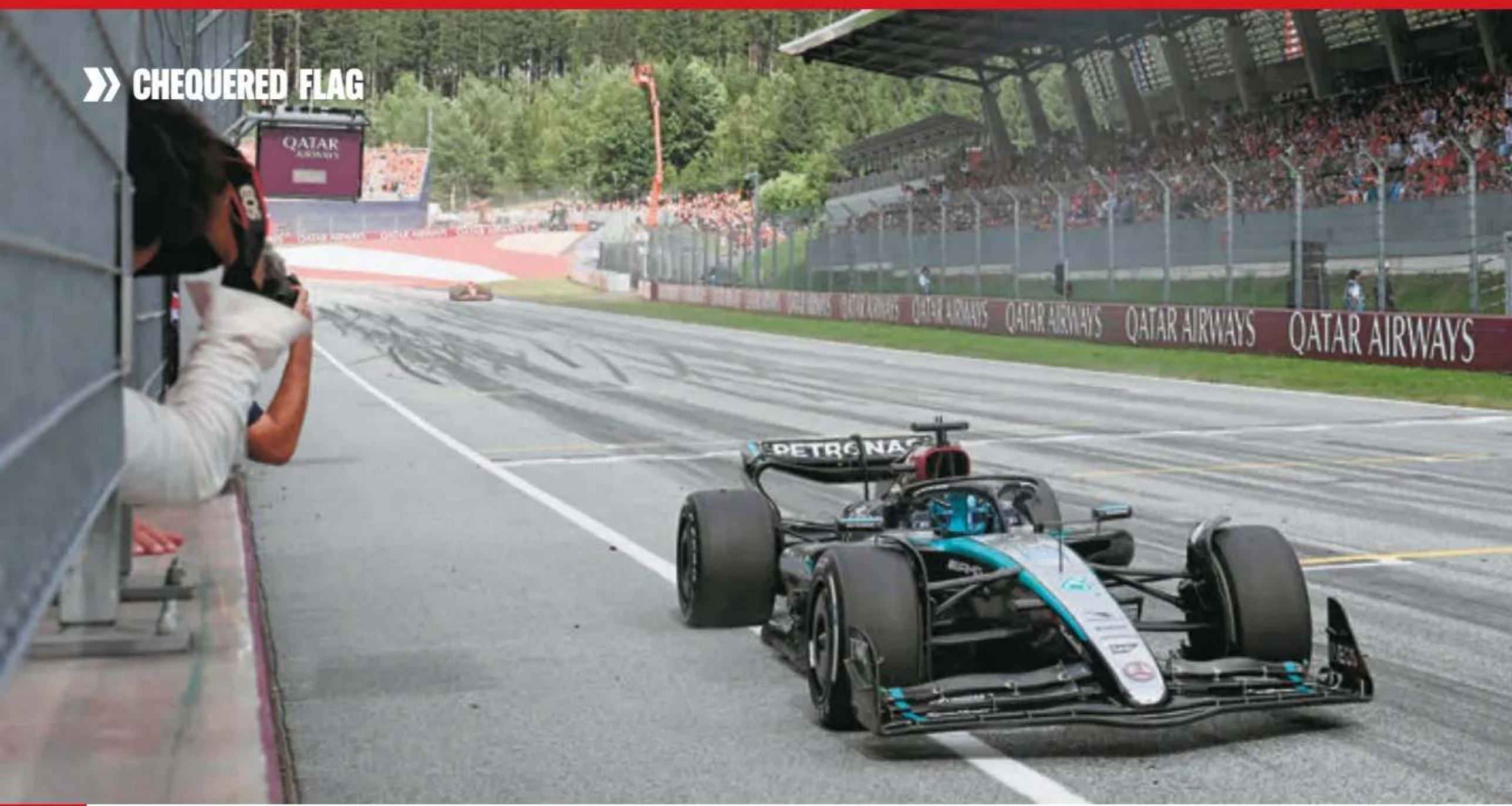
FROM THE WORLD OF CRICKET

Duckworth passes away

Frank Duckworth, co-inventor of the Duckworth-Lewis method for calculating target scores in limited-overs cricket hit by bad weather, died at the age of 84. Duckworth, along with his fellow statistician Tony Lewis, came up with the formula which was officially adopted by the International Cricket Council (ICC) in 1999. It was first used in the second match of England's one-day series against Zimbabwe in 1999. The method was renamed the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern (DLS) method after it was slightly modified by Australian statistician Steven Stern.

Most runs conceded in an over

England seamer Ollie Robinson gave away 43 runs in an over during a County Championship match, and became the record-holder for bowling the second-costliest over in First-Class cricket history. The 30-year-old was playing for Sussex against Leicestershire in a Division Two match. The figures from Robinson's 13th over in the game read: 6, 6nb, 4, 6, 4, 6nb, 4, 6nb, 1. He also set the record for most runs conceded by an English bowler, surpassing former Test pacer Alex Tudor's 38-run over.



SLOW TURN OF THE TIDE

Red Bull may still be leading the standings, but its **advantage is slimming** with every race, especially after Max Verstappen's deliberate collision with Lando Norris.

Dipak Ragav
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Ever since the Miami Grand Prix, where Lando Norris won his first race, it has become evident that Red Bull's advantage is shrinking, with McLaren closing the gap, and Ferrari and Mercedes not far behind.

Despite McLaren often having the fastest car, Verstappen came out on top in Canada and Barcelona thanks to his race craft in executing a strategy and Red Bull's operational sharpness.

The season has come alive

When Verstappen won four out of the first five races of the year, there was a sense of resignation in the F1 paddock and among fans that Red Bull would win both titles this year at a canter and wouldn't be challenged even in 2025.

But things have dramatically turned in the last few races as McLaren has emerged as the clear and persistent challenger to the reigning champion.

The Spanish GP in Barcelona is usually a good barometer of where the teams stand. The circuit layout perfectly blends fast, medium, and slow corners, including a long straight, exposing the car's aerodynamic performance.

So, when Norris took a sensational pole at the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya, it showed that McLaren now had a car as quick as the Red Bull.

Unfortunately, Norris fluffed the start and dropped two places, allowing George Russell to take the lead ahead of Verstappen. But it

AFP

Winning moment: Mercedes' George Russell claimed his first win of the season at the Austrian GP. AFP

was here the Dutchman showed his craft when he took the lead from Russell on the third lap with an audacious move. At the same time, Norris got stuck behind Mercedes for most of the first stint, costing him valuable time. Verstappen quickly built more than a five-second gap, a lead that would prove handy towards the end.

Even as others pitted around him, Norris stayed out longer to have fresh tyres at the end of the race and, in clear air, set some impressive lap times. While Verstappen stopped for the first time on lap 17, Norris stayed out until lap 24 and made his last stop on lap 47, six laps after the Dutchman.

What was once a lead of more than six seconds gradually came down, and Norris came within two seconds of Verstappen at the flag. But the time he lost stuck behind Russell in the opening stint eventually cost him the race, and it was the second time in two weekends that McLaren let a win slip away despite having the fastest car.

Friends turn foes?

While the on-track battle between Verstappen and Norris, who share a cordial friendship off the track, had been respectful, considering they weren't involved in a wheel-to-wheel battle, one always wondered what would happen if they came close on track.

THE WORST OF MAX VERSTAPPEN'S OLD HABITS CAME TO THE FORE WHEN BATTLING FOR THE LEAD WITH LANDO NORRIS

Verstappen is known for being an uncompromising driver when fighting another car, and his early career showed that he could cross the line of what is acceptable in racing by deploying questionable manoeuvres.

The Dutchman had mellowed a bit recently, considering his significant car advantage and did not need to take any risks, even when fighting in a pack.

But all that bonhomie ended when the top two drivers in the standings clashed at Red Bull's home track during the Austrian GP.

The worst of Verstappen's old habits came to the fore when battling for the lead with Norris. After a slow pit stop reduced his healthy lead of seven seconds to three, Verstappen was being hunted by Norris towards the closing stage of the race.

Once the McLaren driver got within DRS range of the Red Bull, an intense game of cat and mouse began. Having won the Sprint race on Saturday comfortably, Verstappen was now in danger of being humbled at the Red Bull Ring in front of his adoring fans.

At a time when Red Bull's advantage had shrunk drastically, red mist descended on the 26-year-old driver. In the past, he used to move under braking while trying to defend, prompting the FIA to clamp down on it a few years ago. Now, under pressure, those bad habits came back as he kept moving under braking, forcing Norris to complain about it.

Soon, he ran wide off the track to stay ahead when Norris tried to go down the inside. It was only a matter of time before Norris tried to make a move at the right-handed turn three, and Verstappen moved left to block the McLaren. Both drivers collided, suffering punctures and gifting Russell his second career victory.

Norris had to retire the car after sustaining significant damage while Verstappen limped back to the pits for a tyre change and came home fifth.

Though the Red Bull driver was handed a 10-second time penalty, it made no difference to his final position, and he came out of the weekend extending his lead in the championship but with his reputation tattered.

Maximum impact: When Norris (right) tried to make a move at turn three right-hander, Verstappen (left) moved left to block the McLaren, and both drivers collided. AFP

Leading the charge: Jayson Tatum (0) played a crucial role in Boston Celtics' title-winning run. REUTERS

DOMINANT CELTICS LEAPS ACROSS THE LAKERS

Led by an in-form Jayson Tatum, Boston Celtics **won its 18th championship**, breaking the Los Angeles Lakers' previous record.

Rajdeep Saha
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Growing up, Jayson Tatum was a devoted fan of the Los Angeles Lakers and admired Kobe Bryant deeply.

He was tantalisingly close to playing for his favourite team when the Lakers had the chance to draft him in 2017.

"It was crazy that the Lakers had the second pick, and I was so close to a dream come true. But it was like they didn't want anything to do with me at the time," Tatum told *ESPN* in a 2022 interview.

It was poetic irony that he played a crucial role in the Boston Celtics' championship run this season, helping the team surpass the Lakers' all-time tally by winning it for a record 18th time.

Celtics' dominant season

The Celtics had an exceptional season. Under the guidance of head coach Joe Mazzulla, who has been at the helm since 2022, it clinched the top spot in both the Atlantic Division and the Eastern Conference before entering the Playoffs.

This marked the seventh time it topped both division and conference standings. In the previous six instances — 1973-74, 1975-76, 1980-81, 1983-84, 1985-86, and 2007-08 — the team lifted the Larry O'Brien Championship trophy.

Deserved winners: This marked the seventh time that Boston Celtcs lifted the Larry O'Brien Championship trophy after topping both the Atlantic Division and the Eastern Conference. AFP

This season, too, the franchise continued this trend.

In the first round, the Celtics faced the Miami Heat. In the best-of-seven series, the Celtics wrapped things up 4-1, comfortably cruising to the Conference semifinals, where it defeated the Cleveland Cavaliers with the same 4-1 scoreline. It then swept the Indiana Pacers 4-0 in the Conference finals.

In the NBA Finals, the Celtics met the Dallas Mavericks for the first time in the competition's history. Despite Dallas being armed with Luka Doncic — the Slovenian forward-guard who was a contender for the MVP award with a points-per-game average of 33.9 — Boston extended Dallas' wait for a second NBA title.

Lacklustre Lakers and not-so-golden Warriors

During the late '90s to late 2000s, the Los Angeles Lakers, led by legends Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant, celebrated five title-winning seasons.

However, following O'Neal's retirement in 2011 and during Bryant's final years, the Lakers failed to qualify for the Playoffs for six straight seasons.

Its fortunes changed with the signing of LeBron James, whose 2019-20 season not only helped his team lift the trophy after a decade but also earned him the MVP title. However, things have been quiet since then.

After failing to make it past the first round in the 2020-21 season, the Lakers didn't qualify for the Playoffs the following year. There was a slight improvement in the 2022-23 season when the Lakers reached the Conference finals, but they faced another first-round exit this past season.

Perhaps the promise of the first-ever father-son duo in NBA

Defending champion Denver Nuggets, which knocked out the Lakers this time around, was ousted by the Minnesota Timberwolves in the Conference semifinals.

Off-colour: Stephen Curry and LeBron James had forgettable seasons with their respective teams, Golden State Warriors and Los Angeles Lakers. AFP

history with LeBron and Bronny James may reap some rewards in the upcoming season, but only time will tell.

Interestingly, the defending champion Denver Nuggets, which knocked out the Lakers this time around, was ousted by the Minnesota Timberwolves in the Conference semifinals.

Over in San Francisco, while point guard Stephen Curry received the Clutch Player of the Year Award, his team, the Golden State Warriors, had a season to forget. The six-time champion failed to make the Playoffs after losing to Sacramento Kings in the Play-in tournament.

The Warriors could have just looked back at the 2021-22 season, when it clinched its sixth title, for some answers. Perhaps it relied too much on Curry, who finished his 15th season as a Warrior. The next best points-per-game to Curry's 26.4 was Klay Thompson's 17.9.

Mr. Consistent delivers again

Nikola Jokic **(left)** of Serbia was adjudged the Most Valuable Player of the regular season in 2024. This was his third MVP title, with the other two coming in 2021 and 2022.

Jokic has been with the Denver Nuggets since the 2015-16 season and has shown a steady rise in his scoring rate.

In the 2018-19 season, he crossed 1500 points during the regular season. Over the past four seasons, he has had two 2000+ points seasons – 2021-22 and 2023-24. In the year he helped his team win its maiden NBA title, Jokic amassed 1690 points with an average of 24.5.

While Jokic and his team couldn't defend its title against an in-form Celtics, it will hope to bank on the Serbian star to lead by example next season and clinch its second title in three years.

AFP

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NADIA COMANECI

The world was quite unprepared for the arrival of Nadia Comaneci at the Olympic stage. What could a man-made scoreboard do under such circumstances but blink? Montreal 1976 will always be known for this faux pas as well as the perfect 10 turned in by the 14-year-old Romanian gymnast in the team part of the competition for the first time. In a sport where places are determined by fractions, none had thought the scoreboard would be required to display four digits to show a 10.00, and in the end what Comaneci saw as she came off her dismount was 1.00. The official announcement brought an end to the drama as it was made known that Comaneci had achieved perfection. Once she had proved it to be achievable, she couldn't stop doing it again and again. The Romanian, in fact, carded six 10s during the Games on the way to three gold medals (all-around, beam and uneven bars), a silver (team) and a bronze (floor). Tacked down as a long-term prospect by Belo Karolyi in 1967 when she was just six, Comaneci underwent a strict training regime under the future Romanian chief coach. She gained eligibility to compete at the senior level in 1975, making her debut in America for the first time on her maiden tour abroad, she left an indelible mark with a double backward salto dismount off the uneven bars. Blessed with exceptional skill, balance and impressive technique, Comaneci suffered much due to an injury before she rebounded to gain two more golds at Moscow 1980, off the beam and on the floor, after she fell behind narrowly in the all-around, settling for silver, by a 0.1-point margin.

GETTY IMAGES

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JESSE OWENS

James Cleveland Owens' family moved from Alabama to Cleveland to overcome the struggles of everyday life a little after he turned nine. Owens was already a workhorse of the poor family, picking 100 pounds of cotton every other day to help his mother put food on the table, despite being a frail child who was often sick, battling chronic bronchial congestion. The shift to Cleveland was a godsend for Owens, as he was able to attend a better school, which opened a chance to try his luck in athletics. But given the social conditions of the time and the lack of regular competition across all levels, it was a tough ride to the top for the American. True, the string of scintillating performances that Owens dished out in Berlin leading to an unprecedented four gold medals has often been portrayed as a big boost to the fight against racism as they took place under the close scrutiny of Adolf Hitler. But, for all the acclaim in the media, Owens was never met by his own country's president, and he was given only a backdoor entry to the bus that brought in all the winners. Later, as he gave up his amateur status, he was left to race against horses and cars to eke out a living. But true champions never say die and Owens found his calling in public relations, setting up business in Chicago.

AP

MICHAEL PHELPS

Michael Phelps has an unprecedented tally of 28 medals — 23 gold — that he owes to his mother Debbie and none else. As a child, Phelps was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and it was the timely intervention of his mother that later gave the world the medal-making machine we know. When he was just seven, with his mother cajoling him to not give up, Phelps did put in a ton of work in the pool, often swimming an astounding 80km every other week. Offsetting his disappointment in Sydney (just a fifth-place finish in the 200m butterfly), Phelps took Athens 2004 by storm, picking eight medals, six of them gold. Beijing 2008 will remain the highpoint of his career as Phelps won gold in each of his eight events. London 2012, too, was profitable as he garnered a further six medals, four of them gold. And then, finally came Rio 2016 as Phelps re-emerged from retirement to stack up five more golds and a silver. Larisa Latynina's benchmark of 18 medals, gained between Melbourne 1956 and Tokyo 1964, that had stood for 48 long years looked a pale shadow by the time Phelps finally bid hurrah.

CARL LEWIS

It is said that the young Carl Lewis was so small and short that his sister used to jocularly call him "shorty." He then had such a spurt in height at 15 that his parents had to put him in crutches for more than three weeks. When he moved from his hometown of Willingboro to the University of Houston, he found himself well within the trappings of a hero-in-the-making. At 19, he was selected to represent his country at Moscow 1980 but had to stay at home as the US chose to boycott the Games. Lewis emerged as the biggest draw at Los Angeles 1984, with gold in the 100m, 200m, long jump and the 400m relay. Lewis did not disappoint at Seoul 1988 as he finished with two more gold medals and a silver, earning his second consecutive crown — the first by an athlete at the Games — in the long jump, and was then given pole position in the 100m after Canadian Ben Johnson was stripped of the gold medal following a positive dope test.

Four years later in Barcelona, Lewis again won two gold medals, in the long jump and the 400m relay, before becoming the third athlete to win four on the trot at Atlanta 1996 where, at 35, he was nowhere near his best but still managed to leap to a resounding victory.

GETTY IMAGES

USAIN BOLT

Usain Bolt first marked himself as a track prodigy at the 2002 world junior championships, where he won the 200m at 15 to become the youngest-ever male champion in any event. The tall and lanky youngster, standing 6 feet and 5 inches tall, defied the conventional wisdom that such sprinters are often disadvantaged at the start. This was proved correct to a certain extent when the young Jamaican had a not-so memorable debut at Athens 2004 and finished last in the 2005 world championships final. It was thereafter that Bolt took to 100m and, as they say, the rest is history. Armed with the perfect concoction of attributes — speed, swagger and a never-say-die spirit — he ruled in Beijing, London and again in Rio in 2016. Bolt struck gold not just in the 100m and 200m, but in the 4x100m relay as well (though the Beijing crown has since been stripped because of a teammate's doping infraction). In Beijing, Bolt came through in the 100m and 200m with world records and that too by the widest margins ever recorded in the Games final of the two events.

AP

MAJOR CONTROVERSIES

The Olympic Games, which had its inception in 1896, has been witness to a wide range of **historic events** throughout the years, some great and some not very. As much as one celebrates the showpiece event for its greatness and glory, it has had its fair share of controversies and scandals. With Paris 2024 lurking on the horizon, we take a look at some of the most controversial moments in Olympics history.

Team Sportstar

WYNDHAM HALSWELLE GETS A WALKOVER

In the 1908 Summer Olympics held in London, the men's 400 metres witnessed USA's John Carpenter, who was the winner, getting disqualified. Carpenter blocked Wyndham Halswelle of Great Britain using his elbow that was then legal under American rules but prohibited by the British rules under which the race was run.

A second final race was held due to the disqualification saga, in which Halswelle was to face the other two finalists William Robbins and John Taylor of the USA.

Both Robbins and Taylor decided to forfeit the race as a sign of protest against the judge's decision. Halswelle was thus the only medallist in the 400 metres, a controversial race which became the only ever walkover victory in Olympic history.

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GETTY IMAGES

JIM THORPE LOSES HIS MEDALS BUT WINS THEM BACK, POSTHUMOUSLY

The first native American to win an Olympic gold medal, Jim Thorpe, was stripped of his gold medals in the decathlon and pentathlon events by the Olympic Committee. It was found he had been paid for playing two seasons of semi-professional baseball before competing in the Olympics — a practice against the rules of amateurism of the Games back then.

In 1983, 30 years after his death, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) restored his Olympic medals with replicas, after ruling that the decision to strip him of his medals fell outside of the required 30 days.

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THE FLYING FINN BANNED FROM COMPETING

In the 1932 Olympics held in Los Angeles, nine-time Finnish Olympic gold medallist Paavo Nurmi's amateur status was questioned by Swedish authorities and he was banned from running in the Games. Despite pleas from all the other competing athletes of the marathon, he was not allowed to compete. Nurmi was later forced into retirement due to this incident, making this one of the most shameful incidents in Olympic history.

1936

ADOLF HITLER MISUSING THE OLYMPIC GAMES

In 1931, the IOC selected the German capital city of Berlin as the host of the 1936 Summer Games. After Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933, the Olympics started aligning with the dictator's dangerous Nazi politics. A number of prominent politicians and organisations called for a boycott of the Games, while other campaigners called for it to be relocated. Despite the pushback, the event was conducted and still remains a blot on the Olympic landscape.

Hitler considered the Berlin event as 'his' Olympics and misused it to spread his Nazi propaganda and Post-War German glorification.

AFP

1956

BLOOD IN THE WATER

The Soviet Union's invasion of Hungary had raised intense tension leading up to the 1956 Summer Olympics in Melbourne. Several countries like Spain, the Netherlands and Switzerland boycotted the event following the IOC'S decision to allow Soviet athletes to participate.

The Soviet-Hungarian tension boiled over when the two men's water polo teams met for the semifinal. Several players from both teams started getting increasingly violent as the game progressed resulting in absolute mayhem.

The crowd was prevented from rioting only because the police intervened in time. Hungary's Ervin Zador was punched in the eye by Soviet Union's Valentin Prokopov. This infamous match came to be known as the 'Blood in the Water'.

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1968

TLATELOLCO MASSACRE

In an attempt to make use of the media attention and coverage leading up to the Olympics, students took to the streets of Mexico to protest against the atrocities of their authoritarian government. Days ahead of the inauguration, they marched on the streets of Tlatelolco in Mexico City demanding an end of police repression and the release of political prisoners.

The government repressed the protest using military might, firing at thousands of students resulting in several deaths.

1972

MUNICH FIRINGS

The 1972 Munich Olympics, which was called the "Cheerful Games" ended up turning into a tragedy. In the second week of the tournament, 11 members of the Israeli Olympic squad and a policeman were killed by members of the Palestinian Black September Organisation.

The Games were suspended within hours of the attack. But the IOC President Avery Brundage instructed that the Games must continue once things are brought to control despite the death of the athletes.

1976

TAIWAN, PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA BOYCOTT THE GAMES

Canada initially did not allow the Republic of China's team (Taiwan) into the country as it did not recognise Taiwan as a nation. Canada's decision was in violation of its agreement with the IOC to allow all recognised teams to compete in the country.

Later on, Canada agreed to allow the Taiwanese athletes into the country if they did not compete under the name or flag of the Republic of China. Other competing countries including the U.S. threatened to boycott the event.

However, all of this came to an end after the IOC agreed to Canada's demand. This led to Taiwan boycotting the Games. The People's Republic Of China also boycotted the Games due to the IOC not recognising them as the sole representative of China.

2008

ANGEL MATOS ATTACKS REFEREE

Cuban taekwondo athlete Angel Matos was banned for life from all international events after kicking a referee in the face during the bronze medal match in Beijing. Matos, a former Olympic gold medallist, suffered a foot injury during the match. He took a timeout but failed to return to the arena within the allotted time, resulting in the referee disqualifying him for a time violation.

Matos argued with the referee, kicked him in the face, punched a judge in the arm, and spat on the floor of the arena before being escorted out by security. The IOC gave him a lifetime ban after this incident.

GETTY IMAGES

2016

RUSSIAN ATHLETES BANNED FOR DOPING

The World Anti-Doping Agency's (WADA) series of investigations, which took place post doping allegations during the 2014 Winter Olympics, resulted in the ban of its Russian wing RUSADA for non-compliance to the World Anti-Doping Code.

Out of the 389 athletes in Russia's Olympic squad for the Rio Olympics, 111 athletes were expelled for doping, one day prior to the opening ceremony.

THE BONDING I SHARE WITH MY RELAY-MATES IS SOMETHING I WILL CHERISH FOREVER

SCAN TO WATCH

We **enjoyed our moments** and I am still in touch with them.

Shiny Wilson

I have participated in four consecutive Olympics from the 1984 Los Angeles Games to '96 Atlanta. It is not easy for a woman to compete in four back-to-back Olympic Games. I did so at a time when facilities were not great and qualifying marks were strict.

I would pick the 1984 Games as the best as it was my first experience at the quadrennial event. But the 1988 Games in Seoul, too, was memorable in many ways.

Since we had earlier been to the Seoul Sports Complex for the 1986 Asian Games, it was not new for us. When it came to facilities and aura, the 1988 Olympics was better than the 1986 Asian Games.

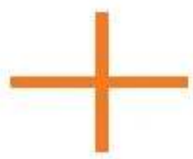
I still vividly remember the '84 and '88 Olympic Games. In both the Games, we went gaga over the weight training facilities and the beauty parlours. There was a sweet experience in Seoul. After tasting the bland food at the hall, my fellow Indian competitor Mercy Kuttan and I went to the kitchen, added a few spices to make it tastier. Everyone was laughing at us. It was fun. No doubt, the food was good overall. Then, we met Carl Lewis and Ben Johnson. At that time, we couldn't get many photographs. Whatever we have was what the Press photographers clicked. Also, it was nice meeting Lim Chun-ae, the girl who got the gold in the 1986 Asian Games after I was disqualified from 800m for changing the lane early. Lim's parents had come to the 1988 Olympic Games and we took photos with them. It was a very nice feeling.

At the 1988 Olympics, we didn't do much shopping as we did at the '86 Asian Games. However, we did watch quite a few movies.

On the track, I finished 18th in 800m in the Heats and lost early in the Heats in the women's 4x400m relay. I am happy to say at every Olympic Games, I improved my timings. And the bonding I share with my relay-mates, Mercy, Vandana Rao and Vandana Shanbhag is something I will cherish forever. We enjoyed our moments and I am still in touch with them.

I also recently sent my birthday wishes to P. T. Usha, who competed in 400mH, at the '88 Games.

As a woman athlete, things were different then. I was afraid to go to the National camp alone. Every time, there was camp in Patiala my parents would enquire with other athletes' families as to who could accompany the athlete. Things have now



At that time, we couldn't get many photographs. Whatever we have was what the Press photographers clicked.

B. VELANKANNI RAJ

changed for the better. There was one incident at the 1985 World Indoor Games in Paris. From India, only high jumper N. Annavi and I were selected. The climate was very cold. I was put up in a ladies hostel while Annavi stayed far away from me. I used to train alone. It was safe but not easy at all.

After I got married to swimmer Wilson Cherian in 1988, I used to go with him. Sometimes, he was at the National camp with me. After marriage and motherhood, I became the National champion and took part in two more Olympic Games in 1992 & '96. I am so happy that javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra won a gold medal in the Tokyo Olympics and is expected to win this time too in Paris. Our relay runners, men and women, are doing well. It all depends on the day. I hope and believe that the Indian athletics contingent does even better in Paris.

For me, participation at the Games was the ultimate as it is the dream of everyone. But very few get to live that dream and I am one of the very few who has done that. I, as a woman and an athlete, had my share of difficulties and struggles in the journey to achieve the Olympic dreams. But it was all worth the effort in the end.

As told to K. Keerthivasan

WHEN I CONQUERED A CHINESE AT THE OLYMPICS

Having played against Lu Lin not long ago, I could **plan a strategy** along with coach Manjit Dua and the Chinese coach Lid Yang. I knew I had to remain at my peak and catch him off guard.

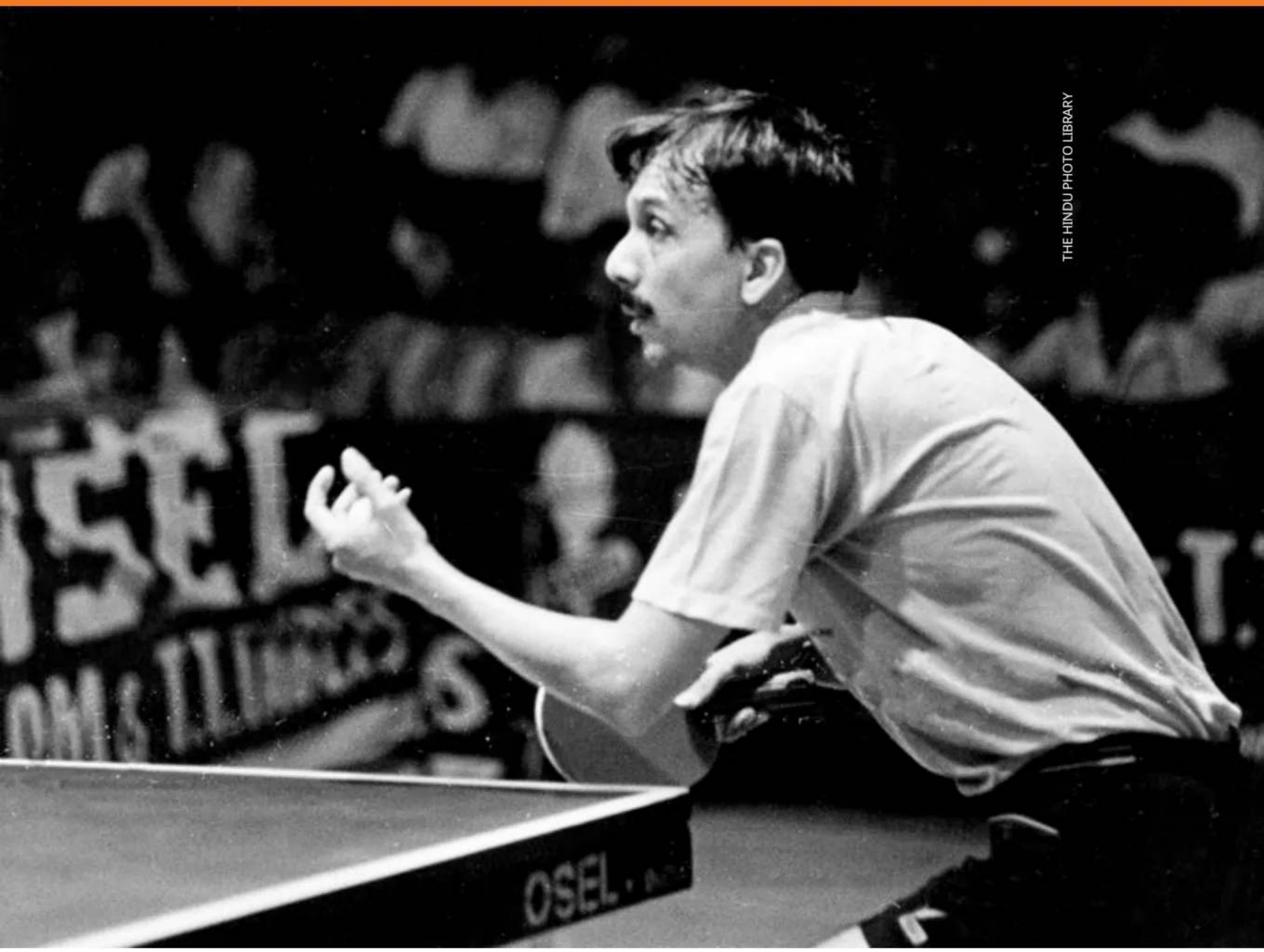
Kamlesh Mehta

Table tennis was introduced into the Olympics in Seoul in 1988. We, as table tennis players, did not realise the importance of Olympics. We knew that the Olympics is a big, big event, but it hadn't really struck. In fact, I was not to go for the qualifications in 1988. The federation asked me to pay for my airfare to Islamabad for the qualification event. I declined and went only after the whole issue was sorted out and qualified as well.

In 1992, once the importance had been underlined being an Olympic sport, there was a lot more focus from the government, and even the media. I remember before I went to the Olympics, there were so many people covering my training regime and all. That had never happened for any of the TT-related important events. The attention was different, so 1992 in that way was different. Even the qualification process was different from the one we had for 1988. It was very difficult to qualify since each group had six players from nine previously and depending on the overall standings, the highest-placed player from each country was assured of an automatic qualification and had the option of choosing the doubles partner.

Asia being a table tennis powerhouse, the qualification field was very challenging. I had a good outing, especially the win against a dominant Chiang Peng-Lung from Chinese Taipei that ensured a direct qualification and Chetan (Baboor) also earned the ticket. I then chose my old mate and partner Sujay Ghorpade as the doubles partner so the three of us went to Barcelona. There was no specific team camp for the Olympics in India. I trained abroad for a while before joining Sujay and Chetan in Barcelona.

Lu Lin covered up quite a bit in the second game but the last service was in my hand at 20-15. He was attacking everything that was coming his way, so I literally served a simple service – a beginner's service – and he hit it too hard and it went long.



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There was a huge change in the format. From eight players in a group in Seoul, it had been shrunk to four players in a group for the league stage, with only the group-topper progressing to the knockouts. I had Lu Lin — the multiple times Chinese national champion — in my group who was billed as China's future star and Kim Taek-Su, the Korean legend along with a Latin American paddler.

It was a tough group and the very first match was against Lu Lin. I had competed against him in the qualification event knockouts and I thought I played my best table tennis, but was still nowhere close to stretching him. I lost convincingly in the qualifiers despite being at my best but in Barcelona, the tide had turned. Having played against him not long ago, I could plan a strategy along with coach Manjit Dua and the Chinese coach Lid Yang. I knew I had to remain at my peak and catch him off guard. The match was early in the morning and just like in Hong Kong, it ended in straight games. In my favour, though!

I had opened up a decisive 15-5 lead. He covered up quite a bit in the second game but the last service was in my hand at 20-15. He was attacking everything that was coming his way, so I literally served a simple service — a beginner's service — and he hit it too hard and it went long. It resulted in a window of silence in the hall. I had beaten Lu Lin! A Chinese had lost a match in the Olympics, that too in the league stage. And I was the conqueror. I then beat the Latin American and lost to Kim Taek-Su despite stretching him to the decider. Had Lu Lin overcome Kim Taek-Su, it would have been a triple tie between us but Kim Taek-Su was on song. Not only did he beat Lu Lin but also went on to earn the bronze medal. I may not have qualified for the knockouts, we were not really medal prospects but I definitely had one of the highlights of my career at the Olympics. Lu Lin was a member of the gold-medal winning pair in men's doubles in Barcelona and I had knocked him out!

I couldn't stay back to watch other top stars in action as my wife Monalisa was due to deliver our second child, so there was an important medal waiting for me back home!

As told to Amol Karhadkar

IT WAS NOTHING LESS THAN MAGIC

The tears rolling down my cheek were not only for the triumph, but also **for the pain I endured** to win a medal for my country. It indeed was a proud moment.

Leander Paes

Barcelona brought me closer to a lot of legends, but it also taught me a lesson. By the time my first Olympics campaign was over, I realised that if I have to win a medal four years later, I'll have to focus on singles.

Over the next four years, I worked extremely hard for my singles and prepared my body and tennis specifically for the altitude conditions I was going to face at Stone Mountain in 1996. I travelled to far off countries like Ecuador, Colombia, Brazil, just to make sure that my body and mind were acclimatising well. And then, Atlanta happened!

As we checked in at the Games village, it was a surreal feeling with so many top athletes from around the world competing in their respective disciplines. I was just 24, but I had the confidence, so soon after the signing-in session at the Georgia Tech University, I told myself, "the Olympic mission has started!"

It's easy to write it now, but even at that point in time, I thought that something magical would happen over the next few days and being a strong believer in destiny, things just fell into place.

It was nothing less than magic.

I still remember the words of our non-playing captain Jaidip Mukerjea after the draw was released. "Tough luck, Lee. Tough draw...," Uncle Jaidip told me as I was to play Pete Sampras, who by then was pretty much the world No. 1, in the opener!

I prepared hard and left no stone unturned for the tournament, but after seeing the draw, I went blank and did not know what to do. As luck would have it, we found out that Richey Reneberg was replacing Sampras, who had withdrawn.

Back then, Richey was among the top 20 in singles. I knew it was going to be a tough match. I lost the first set, but won the second, and after running him around for two sets, in the third set, when I got up for a break, Richey retired from exhaustion! In the second round, I played Nicolas Pereira of Venezuela, followed by Thomas Enqvist in the third round and Renzo Furlan in the quarterfinals.

And, there came Andre Agassi in the semifinals!

Even though we had a great fight, Andre's backhand ruptured a few tendons in my right playing wrist. It made things difficult for me and Andre reached the final! I had to face Fernando Meligeni from Brazil for the bronze. After the game against Andre, I had my wrist wrapped in a solid cast for 24 hours to try and heal my injury as fast as I could.

On the match-day morning, with the first touch of the ball, I realised I was in trouble. The pain that shot through my wrist into my arm was unbearable and I had to stop my warm-up after the first shot. But I did not give up.

The words of Muhammad Ali, who I met at the Opening Ceremony, resonated in my mind. He had told me that I was embarking on a special journey and that it should inspire each and every young child in India.

I met Muhammed Ali at the locker room after the game, and only then did it sink in that I have actually fulfilled my dreams. He congratulated me, hugged me and being one of his biggest fans, I couldn't have asked for more. It was an emotional moment.

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By then, most of our athletes had failed to clinch medals and the pressure was mounting up and I knew that I could not miss out on the opportunity of clinching India's second individual medal — 44 years after Khashaba Jadhav won a bronze in wrestling in Helsinki.

But throughout the tournament, my team ensured that we did not discuss anything about winning or losing. My parents, my sister and a few dear friends were with me around that time and I spent a lot of time with them, just talking about everything else except my performance. That approach helped me handle the trickiest of the situations. To keep myself calm, I listened to a lot of music and my playlist would revolve around the numbers by Gipsy Kings, Sting, A.R. Rahman and Michael Jackson. That would keep me in my zone.

And that mental toughness reflected in my game during the bronze medal fixture. I knew the match was going to test my mental strength. In the first set, I was unable to have control in my playing wrist and lost. In the second set, I shifted gears and was able to bounce back and win, with two breaks.

But in the third set, I found myself several break points down early. Fernando and I traded breaks and I protected my injured wrist by making shorter rallies.

My aggressive tennis mounted the pressure on Fernando, and when his final passing shot down match point sailed over my head and beyond the baseline, my hands went up in the air. And the tears rolling down my cheek were not only for the triumph, but also for the pain I endured to win a medal for my country. It indeed was a proud moment! As I returned to our base, the entire Indian contingent cheered for me. I met Ali at the locker room after the game, and only then did it sink in that I have actually fulfilled my dreams. He congratulated me, hugged me and being one of his biggest fans, I couldn't have asked for more. It was an emotional moment.

As told to Shayan Acharya

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THE FEELING OF WINNING AN OLYMPIC MEDAL DIDN'T SINK IN FOR ALMOST TWO DAYS

The moment of **joy was confined** to my fellow weightlifters and officials. There was nothing special even in the evening at the Games Village after my feat.

Karnam Malleswari

It is a trip down memory lane which I love to take quite often. For, even now, when I look back at the Sydney Olympics 24 years later, every experience there stands out as very special for me. It was also the first time women's weightlifting was introduced in the Olympics. For obvious reasons too! I created history by becoming the first-ever Indian woman athlete to win an Olympic medal — bronze in weightlifting. I am glad that I was the inspiration for many athletes who emulated that feat later on from India. Memories linger on about the whole experience of being there in the Sydney Village. There was that typical aura around the whole venue. Unfortunately, I am bad at recalling some of the big names from other disciplines whom I have met there, but a few little things like watching them train, move around in the dining hall are some things which are fresh in my memory. Honestly, there were no real interactions with them, just informal greetings but the atmosphere was electrifying, the way the delegations from all the participating countries moved around. Frankly, I always wanted to interact with the big names of the world of sport over the years. I have the greatest respect for them even now. The buzz of excitement and expectations were something so surreal, for me coming from such a humble background where we struggled to meet ends in my formative years back home in Amadalavalasa (Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh).

In fact, most of the athletes didn't have the time to interact as each one of them was busy with their own training schedules, planning and strategies. As a 25-year-old, I remember vividly my coach asking me to go to bed early the night before the competition. He wanted me to be completely relaxed. He even chided the judokas and wrestlers who were making some noise in the nearby accommodation to ensure I had a sound sleep. That evening, I plucked a few flowers from the beautiful garden in the Games Village. I got up very early on the morning of the competition. I always carried a Lord Ganesh idol with me and after performing puja I went to the competition hall. There was none from the Indian contingent except, obviously, the weightlifting fraternity. Not even the media for no one thought, probably, that India would get a medal in weightlifting. So, when I won the historic medal — yes I still feel that with more proper guidance from the support staff I could have easily won the gold which I missed by two kg — it was like any other World championship or International gold.

The moment of joy was confined to my fellow weightlifters and officials. There was nothing special even in the evening at the Games Village after my feat. I was told that the Chef de Mission and others celebrated my achievement at some other events. I remember only my good friend and hockey International Dhanraj Pillay shouting "Malleswari zindabad" with a couple of his teammates. Essentially, the feeling of winning an Olympic medal didn't sink in for almost two days. I could feel the significance of such a great moment of Indian sport when a young Gopichand (former All England champion and now chief national badminton coach) walked into my room. He was very curious to get a feel of the Olympic medal. "Can I see that medal and hold it please," was his boyish query. I made him comfortable and the joy on his face also made me feel proud.

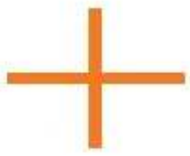
Honestly, there were no celebrations even on the next day after that medal-winning performance. In fact, nothing great on this front when I was there in the Games Village except for a couple of athletes personally congratulating me later when I had a chance encounter. I requested the Chef de Mission to book a return ticket to India as I was desperate to be back having been away for close to three years preceding the Olympics. I wanted to spend some time with my family as I got married in 1997. But the Chef de Mission said it was a historic medal, and insisted that I stay back. He facilitated my husband Rajesh Tyagi's trip to Sydney and that's how I could share my joy with my family in person for the first time. We both went to watch some of the Indians in action, especially cheering for the boxers.

Coming back to the Games Village, the arrangements, the kind of planning, taking care of every individual there, was too good and amazing. The varieties of food from Chinese to Continental to Indian was delicious though as athletes we had to stay away from having too much of it for obvious reasons.

I feel so glad when I look back at what is arguably the greatest moment of my life and also one of the finest ever in Indian sporting history itself.

Equally delighted that India has quite a few potential medallists in the 2024 Paris Olympics, too, and sincerely looking to celebrate a few more golden moments and watch my fellow Indians bring laurels to the country in Paris.

As told to V. V. Subrahmanyam



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I WAS HAPPY THAT I COULD MAKE THE NATION PROUD

For about a year and a half, I had remained in the top-3 of the world and was dominant at times. **My preparation was great** and despite a relatively bad second round, I managed to make the final. Winning the silver medal was a sense of relief.

Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore

I, personally, have always felt the Olympic Village as an all immersive experience. You don't feel the vibes of the Games if you don't live at the Olympic village. For 24x7, it is Olympic level experience. Staying in a hotel or renting out a place does not get you the same experience. People who stay outside miss out on the vibes of the Olympic village. The experience gave me the energy to compete at the highest level. Walking around the Olympic village, you see so many athletes of different nations, different sports, all in their best shape. The team spirit is very much visible there. It is an amazing mixture of culture as the athletes of the world and others laugh, talk and train together. It is very interesting to talk to some of them, hear their life stories and play friendly matches with them. And when there is a need, the others are ready to support you. With the proximity to so many other venues, on off days, you can watch other athletes in action. I watched boxing, swimming and volleyball.

The Games village has a lot of training facilities. In 2004, I remember watching the 100-metre sprinters practising the exchange of baton. In actual competition, it is done in a flash. But in training, you keep seeing them do it again and again, in pursuit of perfection. I also remember watching Michael Phelps training at the Games village swimming pool.

He was very fast. His coach was pulling him with a rope from the front to help him go faster. I asked the coach why was he not creating the resistance by pulling Phelps from the back. I got an interesting answer. He said that he was trying to get Phelps used to the higher speed and that he was capable of achieving that speed, from a psychological perspective.

The camaraderie at the Games village is fabulous. After dinner, many jokes are shared. Language and boundaries are no bar. All athletes prepare their best for the Games. Actually, what is more important is how one manages the mind when not competing. One has to be in the best mental shape, yet relaxed. Listening to top athletes and watching them train, we too get into that mode. You feel that your fears are not yours alone. That is something young athletes need to learn.

You learn how to shoot, dribble, pass and run. But nobody teaches you about how to be relaxed. One has to be a student throughout the life, grasping, observing and absorbing the key factors. I remember talking to a world record holder. I was telling him how my heart was pumping as if it would pop out. He said, "you know what, I was feeling the same."

It was very enjoyable to interact with the Indian contingent. I was strolling through the village, and happened to walk into the hall of the Indian hockey team where they had their team meeting. Nobody was around. There was a white board, on which the coach makes a drawing and discusses positions. I wrote a motivational stuff on the board. Later, the hockey players told me that they liked it.

When I went to Athens, my mind was very clear. It was not just for participation. With my background in military, I was determined to win. For about a year and a half, I had remained in the top-3 of the world and was dominant at times. My preparation was great and despite a relatively bad second round, I managed to make the final. I was fifth in qualification and I could fire my way to the second place. In those days, you may remember that the qualification score counted in the final. Winning the silver medal was a sense of relief and I was happy that I could make the nation proud.

The accolades I received were something I never imagined, that a sport other than cricket could capture the imagination of the entire nation. The love and affection of the people was humbling. It was good for the next generation to start preparing to win. That medal, many felt, broke the glass ceiling.

The others felt, we can do it too. Abhinav Bindra, who won the gold in the next Olympics in Beijing, has also acknowledged this. It gave a sense of belief to everyone.

From one, we got to three medals, and then to six and seven. It is bound to increase.

As a former Sports Minister of the country, and the current Sports Minister of Rajasthan, I feel that we should be talking about the 2036 Olympics. Start preparing for it by grooming the 10 and 12-year-olds. That is the way to continue building on our achievements.

Overall, the amount of resources and support has increased a lot, not just in terms of material, but also in terms of the attention and accolades from the entire country.

As told to Kamesh Srinivasan

When I walked into the hall of the Indian hockey team, there was nobody around. There was a white board, on which the coach makes a drawing and discusses positions. I wrote a motivational stuff on it. Later, the hockey players told me that they liked it.

LIVING HIS DREAM AT THE ZENITH OF SPORT

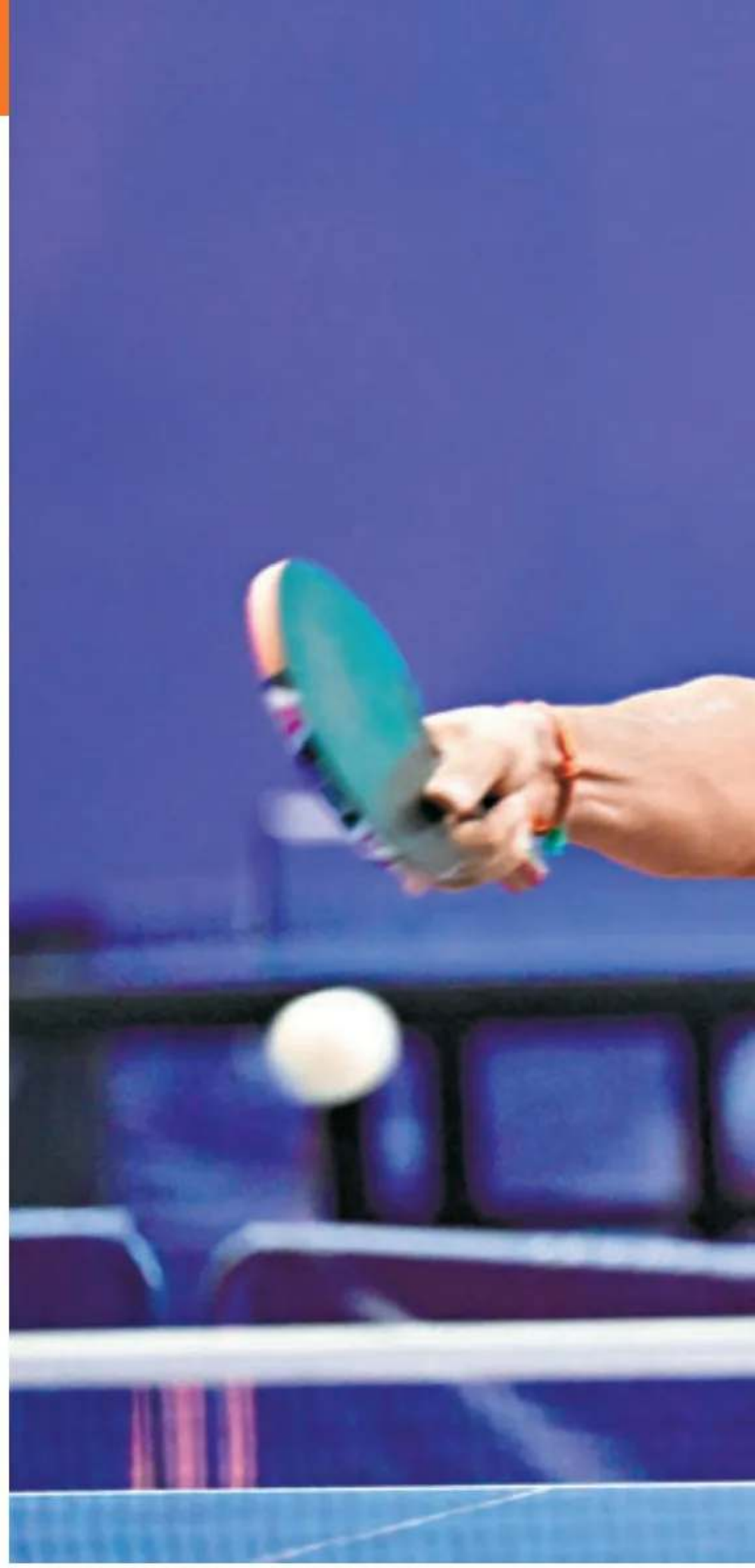
Harmeet Desai's maiden appearance in the Olympics is a **testament to his hard work** and dedicated family support.

Amol Karhadkar
amol.k@thehindu.co.in

Harmeet Desai is neither a party animal nor particularly inclined towards festivals or family functions. However, when the Indian table tennis contingent makes its debut at the Paris Olympics this month, it will be an occasion the 30-year-old from Surat will cherish. Not only will he fulfill his decade-old dream of becoming an Olympian, but he will also compete as one of the two men's singles players, alongside veteran Sharath Kamal.

It has been a long wait, but it's worth it. "It means a lot. It's almost 24-25 years of hard work. I think it's every sportsperson's dream to represent their country in the Olympics. I am really excited and looking forward to playing my first Olympics," Harmeet says in his trademark soft-spoken manner.

We are seated at the Sports Authority of India's campus in Bengaluru, just hours before Harmeet experiences his final sunset in India before officially becoming an Olympian. After participating in three preparatory tournaments and undergoing personal



training in Germany, he will join his teammates in Paris. This schedule means he won't reunite with his family — parents Rajul and Archana, wife Krittwika, and elder brother Hraday — until August.

As he narrates his story, you can sense him reminiscing about his days as a five-and-a-half-year-old, hooked on three racquet sports — tennis, badminton, and table tennis. To play tennis, he had to venture out of his home in Surat. But for table tennis, he could play at home, thanks to his father Rajul, a university-level paddler, who had bought a table for home use.

Around four months after he was introduced to the game, Rajul realised that his son had ball sense — the innate quality required to be a paddler. He then asked Harmeet to choose one of the three racquet

On the rise: Over the last three years, Harmeet has emerged as India's highest-ranked men's singles paddler in the world. K. MURALI KUMAR

sports. "Standing on a tennis court, I told him I wanted to play table tennis. And ever since, my life has revolved around the game," Harmeet says.

Once he got hooked, Harmeet's life revolved around a 9'x5" table, and the Desai household revolved around his table tennis. Realising that Harmeet was meant to be an odd-one out in Surat — where kids typically aspired to join the renowned diamond hub or become stockbrokers — his parents adapted their professions to support him.

After winding up their stockbroking firm, Rajul devoted himself to Harmeet's table tennis, while Archana, who was Harmeet's first opponent at home, joined a school as a principal. Hraday, a fierce competitor on the table and still one of his tactical go-to persons, motivated him to dream bigger.

The family was keen on nurturing Harmeet's passion for table tennis, which quickly developed into an obsession. But Surat, being a small town, lacked a sporting culture and the necessary expertise. As a result, Harmeet's parents started inviting outstation coaches for sessions and sending him away on training stints since his early teen days.

Harmeet's selection for and sustenance at the Petroleum Sports Promotion Board (PSPB) Academy in Ajmer for a year as an eight-year-old truly convinced his parents about his passion.

Since the early 1990s, the Academy has been the dream destination for aspiring paddlers in India, where Harmeet became the youngest ever to be selected. "I was just eight years old, and till date, nobody that young has enrolled in the Academy. I stayed there, and for my parents, it was a shock," he recalls.

"When we went to Pune for the

Vital cog: He played an integral role in India winning a historic team bronze at the 2018 Asian Games and gold medals at the Commonwealth Games.
K. MURALI KUMAR

trials, they didn't want to break my heart and thought such a young kid wouldn't be selected anyway. But once I got selected, they were shocked. I wasn't even thinking about staying away from my parents and family for a year. I stayed there for one year, went to a couple of national ranking tournaments, won a title in the under-10 category before coming back home due to homesickness. I was so young that I used to wet my bed at night."

The one year at PSPB turned out to be a game-changer for Harmeet. Not only did it give him a taste of the outside world, but he also had to cope with being ragged by seniors. "They taught me swear words, and I had no clue they were swear words," he says.

However, it was his wait for a phone call from home every evening — an STD call to the hostel — that eventually got to him. Having switched their careers and doing their best to fund his table tennis coaching, placing an STD call every day was not really affordable for the Desais. But they ensured that at least one of the extended family members called Harmeet to make him comfortable.

While the PSPB Academy has a reputation for making champions, it has also seen numerous cases of ruining promising careers. "There was a saying there that the one who leaves the Academy never becomes a player. I think it's just me who came out of the Academy and made it into the senior team or played really well after that," he says with a sense of pride.

"I wanted to prove to everyone that I could become good. After two or three years, I got another offer

from the Academy, but I didn't want to go." By then, the household had established its own schedule. When he wasn't training in Surat, Harmeet was travelling to various table tennis hubs in search of quality partners and training facilities. "I must have practised at every major training facility all over India," he says. From Narkeldanga and Ultadanga in old Kolkata to the swanky gymkhana in Pune and clubs in Chennai, he would travel whenever he could.

While he trained somewhere or was taking exams in his hometown — "once the school failed me due to lack of attendance"— sometimes, Desai Sr. would travel alone to Senior National Championships, videotaping matches so that Harmeet could watch and improve his game. It was the pre-*YouTube* era, and such innovations helped Harmeet upgrade his skills. While he has worked with various coaches during his journey, he holds Swedish legend Peter Karlsson in high regard, ever since he travelled to his academy for the first time as a 16-year-old.

"Peter once told me in Sweden that table tennis is just 10-20 per cent of life. He said there are more important things like family or food. I didn't understand what he meant at that time. For me, table tennis was life, and my life was always about table tennis. Whether I got more or less money didn't matter. If the achievement was less or more, that didn't affect me. It was always a constant."

Since we are on a trip down memory lane, I ask him whether he recalls the first time he thought of

> « Harmeet's year-long stint at PSPB as an eight-year-old convinced his parents about his passion »

Focus on the basics: After cementing his place in India's squad midway through the last decade, Harmeet started focusing on enhancing his skills. K. MURALI KUMAR

becoming an Olympian. Pat comes the reply, "Soon after we won the World Junior Team Championship bronze."

The trio of Harmeet, Soumyajit Ghosh — then the wonder boy of Indian table tennis — and G. Sathiyan had started idolising Sharath and aspiring to follow in his footsteps by then. While Ghosh had all but assured himself a ticket to London — the only Olympics Sharath failed to make the cut for since 2004 — Harmeet wasn't thinking so big.

"I was young, but Ghoos (Ghosh's nickname) was confident of qualifying for the Olympics. It took me some time to realise I could get there too, and around 2013, I really set my eyes on Olympic qualification. I had two near-misses for Rio and Tokyo, but that made me a better table tennis player," he says.

After cementing his place in India's squad midway through the last decade, Harmeet started focusing on enhancing his skills. He realised he needed to improve his short game, so he worked on his flicks during his training stints in Germany. This resulted in him playing an integral role in India's historic team championship bronze at the 2018 Asian Games and gold medals at the Commonwealth Games.

Sharath admits that after failing to qualify as a team for Tokyo, Harmeet was very determined to help make it happen. Over the last three years, he emerged as India's highest-ranked men's singles paddler in the world, overtaking Sathiyan and Sharath for almost a year.

One cannot help but ask whether qualifying for the team event for the first time matters the most to him or if it's his qualification as one of only two men's singles entries from India.

"For me, the most important thing is representing the country at the Olympics, that too with Sharath *bhaiya* as India's flag-bearer. Definitely, everybody has a personal preference, but for me, what matters the most is I will remember representing India in the Olympics."

For every sports fanatic — let alone an athlete — the Olympics is associated with childhood memories. Harmeet is no exception. But his obsession with table tennis reflects in his early Olympic memories as well.

"It was 2000 when I saw Chetan Baboor's picture in action. It was just a picture in a newspaper. Then in 2004, I followed Sharath Kamal. I don't remember the result, but I think he played against a Spanish player," he says.

"And then in 2008, I followed everything. I remember Abhinav Bindra winning the gold and Vijender Singh winning the (bronze) medal. From then on, I have been following everything."

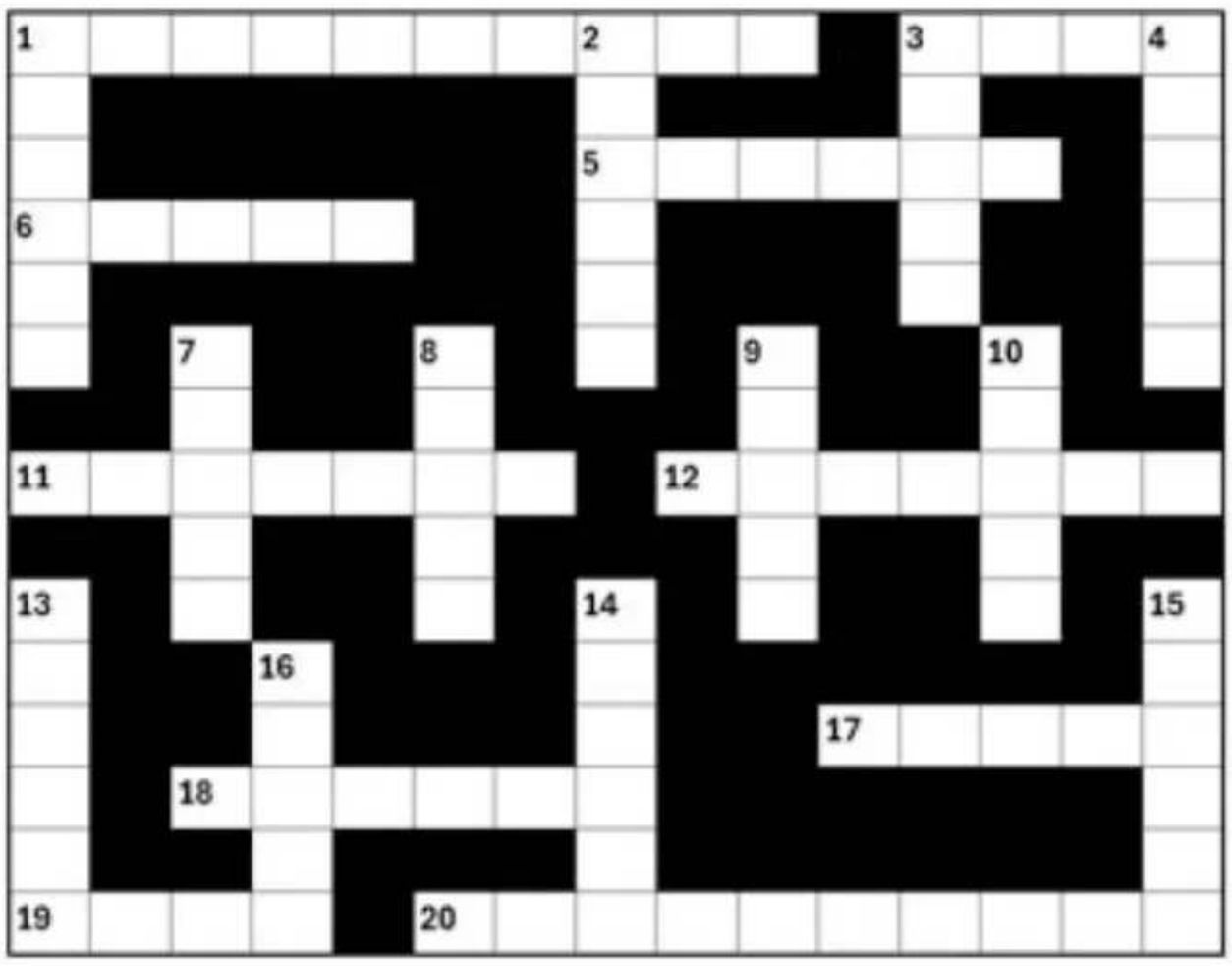
Everyone entering the Olympic village for the first time has a wishlist of things to do, both inside and outside the arena. Meeting idols, not necessarily from their own discipline, is often a main agenda. Ask Harmeet which athlete he is desperate to meet, and his eyes light up.

"Rafael Nadal," he says. "It might be his last Olympics, so I would like to meet him. I've followed him since he won his first French Open title. I didn't like Federer's domination much at the time; I wanted someone to challenge him. My father liked Federer a lot, and when I saw Nadal, I liked his fighting spirit and never-give-up attitude. I have been following him a lot, so I'd like to meet him in Paris."

It may be Nadal's last Olympics, but Harmeet will definitely revel in his first. And if he can play a stellar role and help India make it a memorable team championship debut by advancing past the initial hurdle, he would all but ensure that Paris won't be his only Olympic appearance.

Let the celebrations begin in July, also Harmeet's birth month, and extend for months thereafter!

CROSSWORD
N. SOORYA PRAKASH



SOLUTION TO LAST FORTNIGHT'S CROSSWORD

INDIAN OLYMPICS SPECIAL

ACROSS

1 In which city did Shiny Abraham became the first Indian woman to reach the semifinals of an Olympic event? (3,5)

3 Who missed out on an Individual Olympic medal by one hundredth of a second? (4)

5 Who is the only Indian woman with multiple medals in Olympic history? (6)

6 & 8 Down Who scored three goals in the hockey final against Germany on 15th August 1936? (5,5)

11 Identify the athlete who won Independent India's first ever individual gold medal? (7)

18 In which city did Indian last win a gold medal in hockey? (6)

19 Identify this athlete who won a bronze medal in hockey in 1972 and whose son, too, later, went on to win a bronze medal in 1996? (4)

20 Who became the first Indian woman to win an individual medal in Olympic history? (10)

DOWN

1 In which city did India win its first gold medal after Independence? (6)

2 Who jointly holds the record of having won four medals in hockey (most medals in Olympic history) for India? (6)

3 Who shares the honours with **"Down-2"** above? (4)

4 Identify this city where India's Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore became the first Indian after Independence to win a silver medal in Olympics? (6)

7 Who emulated his father, by winning a medal in hockey in the Munich Games in 1972 thus becoming the first father-son combo from India to win Olympic medals? (5)

9 Who won the silver medal in the weightlifting competition in the last Olympics? (5)

10 & 14 Who won a bronze medal in badminton in the 2012 London Olympics? (5,6)

13 Who won independent India's first ever individual medal in Olympic history? (6)

15 & 17 Across Who is the only Indian woman to win a medal in wrestling? (6,5)

16 & 12 Across Identify this city where India's both medals in that edition of Olympics were bagged by women? (3,2,7)

From zero to hero: Albania's Klaus Gjasula (8) scored on both ends of the pitch after coming on as a substitute in his side's 2-2 draw against Croatia. After taking the lead in the 11th minute, Albanian coach Sylvinho replaced its goalscorer Qazim Laci with Gjasula to see out the game with just over a quarter of the tie remaining. However, Croatia turned the game around with two goals in two minutes, the second bouncing into the goal after an unfortunate deflection off Gjasula. With time running out, Gjasula found himself in the right place at the right time, calmly firing the ball past Dominik Livakovic to score his first-ever goal for Albania and save a point. GETTY IMAGES

VAR plays spoilsport: VAR was at the centre of controversy yet again after Netherlands' Xavi Simons (7) had his goal ruled out in the second half against France. English referee Anthony Taylor consulted with the Video Assistant Referee and fellow countryman Stuart Attwell before ruling out the goal after an unusually long check, in a tournament that had demonstrated quick resolution till then.

The officials subjectively concluded that Dutchman Denzel Dumfries (far right) was offside and impeding goalkeeper Mike Maignan's ability to dive and try to stop the shot rifled in from 14 yards by Simons. The game eventually ended in a stalemate with both sides failing to find the back of the net. GETTY IMAGES

Say cheese: Cristiano Ronaldo's star power was on show during Portugal's 3-0 win against Turkiye after as many as six spectators made it onto the pitch in the hunt for a selfie with him. The first of the bunch was a young boy who was warmly received by the five-time Ballon d'Or winner, who waited for the boy and posed with him for a picture.

However, as the interruptions became more frequent, the Portuguese captain was left visibly unimpressed, refusing to entertain and take a picture with the pitch invaders. The incident even led to coach Roberto Martinez raising concerns regarding the safety of the players in the post-match press conference. AP

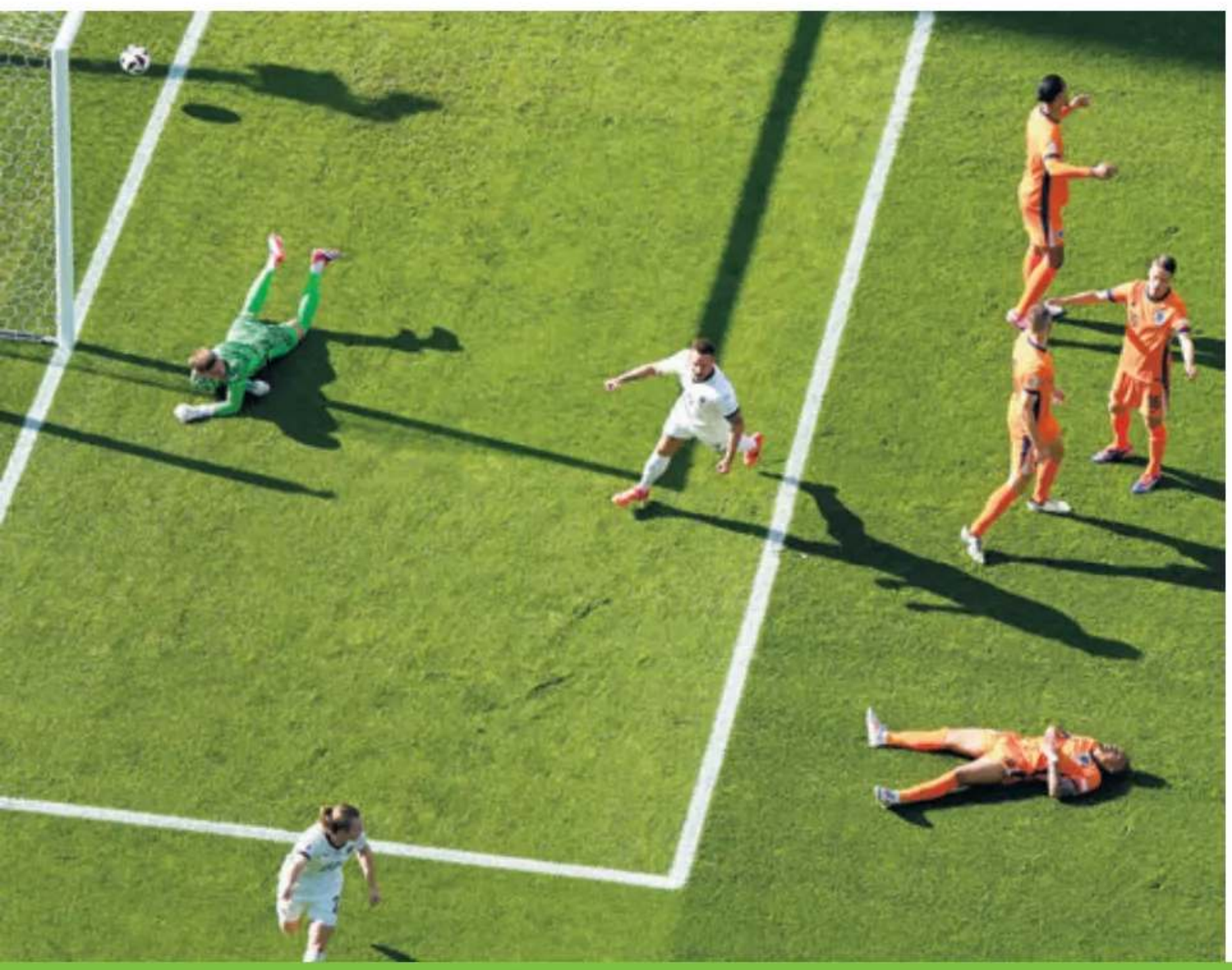
FOR MORE STORIES

Troubled times: Hungarian players were left in tears after teammate Barnabas Varga was stretchered off the field in his side's match against Scotland, following a horror collision with opposition keeper Angus Gunn.

After getting struck in the face by Gunn's shoulder, Varga lay motionless on the pitch as the players frantically covered him and signalled the medical staff to enter the pitch, prompting comparisons to Denmark's Christian Eriksen's collapse in the previous edition. Sheets were brought in and he was given medical attention on the pitch before being taken to the hospital, where he returned to a stable condition.

Hungary's Kevin Csoboth went on to score in the 10th minute of added time to win the match, with the players, led by captain Dominik Szoboszlai, holding Varga's jersey aloft to pay tribute to him. AFP

Masked marauder: France's Kylian Mbappe scored his first-ever European Championship goal, converting from the spot in his side's final group stage match against Poland. The French captain donned a protective mask during the game after sustaining an injury to the nose in France's only victory in the group stage against Austria in its first match. Polish talisman Robert Lewandowski went on to score an equaliser in the game, scoring from the spot after his initial penalty was saved but retaken after VAR checks adjudged that goalkeeper Mike Maignan had advanced off his line too early while making the save. France ended the group stage with one win and two draws, finishing one point behind group winner Austria. AP



Own goals galore: Dutchman Donyell Malen (bottom right) added his name to the long and growing list of own-goal scorers in the tournament after directing the ball past his own keeper Bart Verbruggen in the sixth minute of the group stage match against Austria. So far, there have been eight own goals in Euro 2024, the number steadily inching close to the record of 11, scored in the last edition. Austria went on to beat the Netherlands 3-2, thanks to an 80th-minute winner from Marcel Sabitzer, which helped Ralf Rangnick's high-tempo side finish first in a group containing heavyweights France and Netherlands. AP

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FOR MORE STORIES

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Quick learners: Khvicha Kvaratskhelia got Georgia off to a blistering start, scoring 92 seconds after kick-off in its do-or-die group stage match against Euro 2016 winner Portugal. Georges Mikautadze doubled the lead for Georgia from the penalty spot in the second half, securing his nation a spot in the round of 16 in its debut appearance in the tournament.

Ranked 74th in the world by FIFA, a disciplined Georgian team caused one of the biggest upsets in Euros history after beating sixth-ranked Portugal, a victory that will live long in the memory of the Georgian supporters who look ahead to a bright future. AFP

Jude shock: England's Jude Bellingham dragged his team from the brink of elimination after scoring the equaliser against Slovakia with a stunning bicycle kick in the final few seconds of the knockout clash. Slovakia, which took the lead midway through the first half, seemed fearless and in cruise control, all before Bellingham raised his right boot high in the air.

It was England's first shot on target of the game, which forced the match to go into extra time for the first time in this tournament. England captain Harry Kane headed in the winner from close range in the first minute of extra time to send the Three Lions into the final eight of a major tournament for the fourth consecutive time, where they will face Switzerland. AFP

Joan Mathew Jacob

SMOOTH SAILING FOR THE WORLD CHAMPION

Argentina has looked the strongest team so far, **remaining unbeaten** on its way to the quarterfinals. However, Uruguay presents a strong challenge with its present form.

On the money: Lautaro Martinez (right) has been Argentina's hero in the group stage with four goals in three matches. AP

The 48th edition of the Copa America began on June 14, with the United States hosting the tournament. Here are five key highlights from the event so far:

Argentina through to quarterfinals

Defending champion Argentina not only secured a place in the quarterfinals but did so in style by winning all three group matches. Additionally, Lionel Scaloni's men did not concede a single goal throughout the group stages.

Although Lionel Messi has yet to score in this edition, he provided an excellent assist in Argentina's opening match against Canada.

He did not play in the final group game against Peru, with Scaloni stating that Messi was rested due to a minor knock on his leg, which Messi described as "not serious," and also because the Argentine captain played the first two matches with a fever.

ALTHOUGH LIONEL MESSI HAS YET TO SCORE IN THIS EDITION, HE PROVIDED AN EXCELLENT ASSIST IN ARGENTINA'S OPENING MATCH AGAINST CANADA

Lautaro Martinez has been the *Albiceleste*'s hero in the group stage, scoring four goals in three matches.

Uruguay looking strong under Marcelo Bielsa

Amidst all the hype surrounding Argentina, Marcelo Bielsa's Uruguay has flexed its muscles, making a strong case for being favourites to clinch the title for a record 16th time in Copa America 2024.

Transformed under Bielsa's heavy-duty playing style, *La Celeste* boasts serious talent with players like Darwin Nunez, Federico Valverde, and Facundo Pellistri, and looks more menacing with the experience of Luis Suarez.

Uruguay began its campaign with a 3-1 win against Panama and followed it up with a 5-0 thrashing of Bolivia.

With full points from three matches, it has secured a place in the quarterfinals as the Group C topper.

Bielsa's men concluded the group stage with a 1-0 win against USA, knocking the host out of the tournament.

Kendry Paez, a new phenomenon

When a major club like Chelsea secures a pre-contract signing for a 16-year-old, it shows the player's exceptional potential. Ecuador's Kendry Paez came into the spotlight after becoming the youngest player

Marching on: Uruguay possesses serious talent in players like Federico Valverde and Darwin Nunez (first and second from left). AP

to score in this edition of the Copa America.

He found the net from the penalty spot in Ecuador's 3-1 win against Jamaica.

Currently playing for Independiente del Valle, it was announced on June 5, 2023, that Paez would join the Blues in the Premier League after his 18th birthday in the summer of 2025.

A great start: Ecuador's young sensation, Kendry Paez (10), will join Chelsea in 2025. REUTERS

James on song for Colombia

James Rodriguez's career has been one of ebbs and flows. Once considered the next big thing in world football, the 32-year-old's journey hasn't always gone as planned.

However, Rodriguez has been a revelation in this Copa America, being a major cog in Colombia's excellent campaign so far, which saw it win its first two matches and secure a place in the quarterfinals.

Against Paraguay, Rodriguez assisted both of Colombia's goals in its 2-1 victory.

In the subsequent match, he provided another assist as his team secured a 3-0 against Costa Rica to book a ticket for the knockouts. If Colombia aims to go far in this campaign, Rodriguez will be pivotal.

Brazil catches momentum after a slow start

Despite being packed with talent and having a strong legacy, Brazil faced criticism following a goalless draw against Costa Rica.

This led to speculation about whether it would be an uneventful tournament for Vinicius Junior and his teammates.

However, the 'Samba Boys' bounced back in their second game, decisively defeating Paraguay 4-1, with Vinicius scoring twice.

As of July 2, Brazil has not yet secured a place in the quarterfinals, something which Dorival Junior's team will aim to achieve with a win against Colombia in its final group match.

Aneesh Dey

> « James Rodriguez has been a major cog in Colombia's excellent campaign so far »

PTI

Suhas Yathiraj becomes World No. 1 para shuttler

Indian para shuttler Suhas Yathiraj became the world number one player, displacing French legend Lucas Mazur in the latest BWF Para Badminton World Rankings. The 40-year-old Arjuna awardee had won the silver medal in the SL-4 category at the Tokyo Paralympics, losing the title clash to Mazur.

Suhas has now amassed 60,527 points, leaving behind his French rival (58953).

"Finally, World Number 1. Happy to share that, in the latest Badminton World Federation Para Badminton rankings announced for Men's Singles category, I have got world number 1 ranking.

"First time in life, replacing previously long standing world number 1 Lucas Mazur of France. Thanks a lot for your blessings and wishes," wrote Suhas on 'X'.

Suhas, an IAS officer of the Uttar Pradesh cadre, had won the World Championship title defeating Fredy Setiawan of Indonesia in February this year.

SL-4 category in para badminton is for players with movement affected at a low level on one side of the body, in both legs, or the minor absence of one limb. They play standing on a full-width court and have good court movement and a full range of shots.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

SPORTOON

1 The Basketball Federation of India (BFI) has signed a seven-year deal with ACG Sports Limited, with a guarantee of Rs. 216.30 crore for hosting the National State Basketball League for men and women.

The president of BFI, Aadhav Arjuna said that for each year, the amount would be 20.6 crore rupees for the 5x5 format and 10.3 crore rupees for the 3x3 format. "It was a transparent system, and we gave it to the highest bidder. It is a medical group of companies, and has already been associated with supporting basketball through many events", said the BFI president.

KAMESH SRINIVASAN

2 The State government of Odisha announced an extension of its support to Hockey India by another three years till 2036. This partnership was solidified in a high-level meeting attended by Hockey India President Dr. Dilip Tirkey and Hockey India Secretary General Bhola Nath Singh, with the Chief Minister of Odisha Mohan Charan Majhi, Minister of State for Sports & Youth Services Suryabanshi Suraj, Chief Secretary & Chief Development Commissioner Pradeep Kumar Jena, IAS, and Commissioner-Cum-Secretary R. Vineel Krishna, IAS.

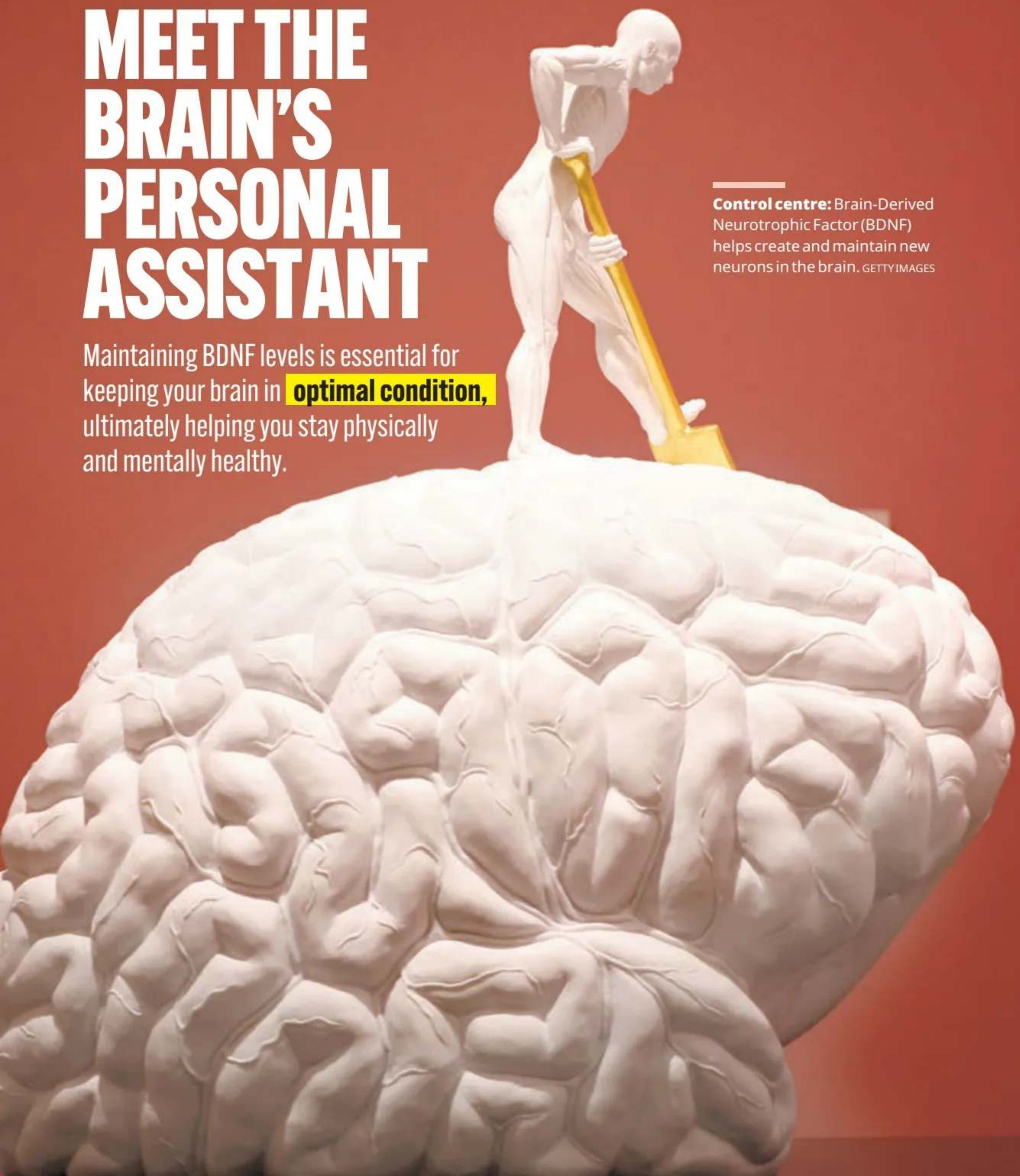
TEAM SPORTSTAR

Ryan Fernando

FOR MORE STORIES

MEET THE BRAIN'S PERSONAL ASSISTANT

Maintaining BDNF levels is essential for keeping your brain in **optimal condition,** ultimately helping you stay physically and mentally healthy.



Control centre: Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor (BDNF) helps create and maintain new neurons in the brain. GETTY IMAGES

The human brain is like a super gym that continually improves at learning new things, retains information, recovers from injuries, and helps prevent neurodegenerative diseases. This is largely thanks to a vital protein known as Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor (BDNF), which helps create and maintain new neurons in the brain.

BDNF acts like a happiness elixir. When its levels are high, we feel happier and less stressed, as if we have a natural mood-lifter built right into our brains. High BDNF levels can help you keep safe from diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's and stay sharp as you age, acting like an anti-aging potion that keeps you quick-witted and vibrant well into your golden years!

So, it makes sense to explore ways to boost BDNF levels. Let me get into them one by one:

• **Exercise:** Physical activity is like a magic spell for boosting BDNF. Go for a run, hit the gym, or dance around your living room.

• **Low-carb diet:** Switching to a low-carb diet can make you smarter and happier by improving metabolism and insulin sensitivity.

• **Meditation:** Think of meditation as a brain spa. It boosts BDNF levels, protecting your mind and making you feel amazing.

• **Sleep:** Getting deep, restful sleep sharpens your mind and makes you smarter.

• **Brain games:** Playing puzzles and brain games is like a fun adventure for your brain, making it sharper and more resilient.

• **Cold showers:** Cold showers, especially when taken six hours before exercise, have shown promise in increasing BDNF levels. It might be uncomfortable, but the benefits could be worth it.

A study on the influence of nutrition and physical activity in endurance athletes indicated that proper dietary practices, including the consumption of plant-based proteins and unsaturated fatty acids, positively affected various performance metrics and BDNF levels post-COVID-19 infection.

Certain foods can also strengthen your brain. For example, resveratrol, found in berries, grapes, dark chocolate, and peanuts, can boost BDNF levels. Dark chocolate? Yes! It's a polyphenol that protects your brain and gives it a super boost.

The Omega-3 fatty acids that we keep hearing about are also fantastic for brain health, and can be found in chia seeds, walnuts, and flax seeds. A meta-analysis found that supplementation with Omega-3 fatty acids significantly increased BDNF levels compared to control groups.

What about spices? Any brain boosters there? Absolutely! Curcumin, found in turmeric, has anti-inflammatory and neuroprotective effects, potentially increasing BDNF levels. Combine it with black pepper to enhance absorption. Enjoy these tasty treats and give your brain the love it deserves!

As much as you may have enjoyed reading these information about BDNF, now, let's consider factors that decrease its levels:

• **Sugar:** Consuming too much sugar can lower BDNF, which is detrimental to brain health. Cutting down on sweets can improve mental health.

• **Stress:** Chronic stress can slash BDNF levels. Practice stress-busting activities like yoga or meditation to keep your brain sharp. Relax and enjoy life to avoid those stress lines on your forehead.

• **Isolation:** Loneliness reduces BDNF levels. Stay socially active and connected to boost brain power and resilience. Don't shy away from social interactions; go out, mingle, and build connections with the world around you.

And there you have it! Boosting BDNF is as simple as lacing up your sneakers, munching on dark chocolate, and saying namaste to meditation? So next time you feel foggy, channel your inner brainiac: exercise like you're training for a marathon and swap those carbs for some Omega-3-packed nuts.

And for the sake of your neurons, put down those sugar-laden treats. Your brain will be so grateful that it might just write you a thank-you note!

AFP

Proper dietary practices, including the consumption of plant-based proteins and unsaturated fatty acids, positively affected various performance metrics for endurance athletes.

Using sports to make a point

Sporting events — especially those telecast live around the world — attracting protests of one kind or another have a long history.

Suresh Menon

Climate crisis is real. So too is the climate protest at sports events. Last year Jonny Bairstow tackled a protestor — from *Just Stop Oil*, the British climate activist group — during an Ashes Test at Lord's. The *JSO*'s tactics involve throwing orange powder, seen most dramatically when a protestor jumped onto the table at the world snooker championships in Sheffield and brought the game to a halt.

The cause cannot be faulted — we have to spread consciousness about the climate; as the UN Secretary-General says, "Climate breakdown has begun." But the methods sometimes cause concern. The tactics, rather than the reasons for them, get focused on even if, according to the *JSO*, these are attempts at forcing the cause "to the forefront of public consciousness and impact the media agenda." This is the danger in all forms of protest. The message can sometimes get lost in the delivery. But it cannot be ignored.

Athletes are often sympathetic to the cause of climate crisis. Footballer (and commentator) Gary Lineker has said, "I think what is more important is our existence in the future rather than a slight disruption of sporting events." Formula One's Lewis Hamilton and tennis star Coco Gauff have said they support the cause. "If that's what they felt they needed to do to get their voices heard, I can't really get upset at it," said Gauff.

But does annoying the fans and those running the sports become counterproductive?

Giving importance: Athletes are often sympathetic to the cause of climate crisis. Footballer and commentator Gary Lineker said, "I think what is more important is our existence in the future rather than a slight disruption of sporting events." AP

Sporting events — especially those telecast live around the world — attracting protests of one kind or another have a long history. At the Mexico Olympics in 1968, Black American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos made visible gestures supporting Black empowerment and human rights. The Black Salute, an easily recognised gesture, didn't need footnotes to have it explained as anything other than support for an oppressed people.

It will be surprising if the Paris Olympics is free of protests or at least attempts at protesting. The *Derniere Reservation* is a French group that wants the government to commit to a comprehensive and energy-efficient renovation of all buildings by 2040. It is a single-point agenda, but the group has made its presence felt at sporting events.

A young woman interrupted the semifinals of the French Open by tying her neck to the net of the tennis court. Stage 10 of the Tour de France was halted when activists sat on a road to prevent riders from passing.

It is not only activists who use sports, athletes do too, to make a point. Muhammad Ali was lost to boxing during his best years because he refused the draft for the Vietnam War, saying famously, "I ain't got no quarrel with them Vietcong."

More recently, the San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick refused to stand for the national anthem, because "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses Black people..."

Things change, usually slowly, even if it is sometimes difficult to see the future through the orange mist.

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Published on alternate Sundays. RNP No: HQ/SD/505/2023-25, RNI No. 30513/1978.
Postal subn. copies : if undelivered please return to SPORTSTAR, Kasturi Buildings, 859 & 860, Anna Salai, Chennai-600002

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