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### T20 World Cup

India's squad is a fine balance of experienced players and emerging talents, which aims to navigate this ever-evolving hyper-specialised format

Cover Illustration: Soumyadip Sinha

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## OFF-SIDE

Ayon Sengupta

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# SHED A TEAR FOR THERE WILL NEVER BE ANOTHER LIKE THEM

CSK and Liverpool will never want this era to pass. For them, there will **never be another** M. S. Dhoni or Jurgen Klopp.

**"Big boys don't cry."**

The fear of tears has cowered men since the dark ages, when our ancestors huddled in caves with no fire to burn. The hominin evolution has passed through millions of years, from long-extinct Dryopithecus to designer-clad metrosexual man. But yet, our relationship with the lachrymal gland continues to be problematic. We'd rather blink or stare into the distance — much like M. S. Dhoni did after Chennai Super Kings' season-shattering loss to Royal Challengers Bengaluru — than let a tear fall.

But what is life without emotions? Without pain and suffering, happiness, and love, we'd just be zombies, killing time.

Our feelings, though, our joy and sorrow, spill over like popcorn in a movie theatre in the communal comfort of a sports stadium. In a sea of shared passion, rare to find elsewhere, our inhibitions melt away like ice in a sultry Chennai July. We are all in it together, swept up in the moment, and freed from the entrenched cultural values that we have always absorbed.

Even the most stoic souls in the Chinnaswamy Stadium could not hide the collective heartache when Dhoni's usually unflappable expression cracked as he and CSK failed to cobble up the requisite runs to make it to yet another IPL playoff. It didn't matter if you bled yellow or red; the sight of the legend hobbling away amidst the raucous celebrations of the opposing team tugged at every heartstring present in the stands. With a creaking knee and slowing reflexes, Dhoni's inevitable march towards retirement felt all too real, and the tear glands were in overdrive.

Tears were also flowing freely 8244 kilometres away at the Liverpool stadium. Inside Anfield, the 60,059 fans sang a rendition of The Beatles' *'I Feel Fine'*.

*"Jurgen said to me, you know*

*We'll win the Premier League, you know  
He said so  
I'm in love with him  
And I feel fine."*

Jurgen Klopp's wife, Ulla, wiped away the tears. And even captain Virgil van Dijk struggled with his emotions, while the floodgates opened for local boy Trent Alexander-Arnold. "And I never usually cry," the right back said. Since setting foot in Merseyside as the self-proclaimed "Normal One" at a "Special Club" back in October 2015, Klopp has been the beating heart of Liverpool. He breathed life back into a city that was drowning in despair, transforming doubters into believers with his attacking and winning football.

"I'm surprised. I thought I'd already be in pieces, but I'm not. I saw a lot of people crying, and I will tonight too because I will miss people. Everything will be fine because the basics are 100% there. You welcome the new manager like you welcomed me. You go all in from the first day. You keep believing. You push the team. I'm one of you now. I love you to bits," were the crying manager's last words to his fans.

George Sephton, the club's DJ since 1971, played the song of the Liverpudlian band:

*"Sunset doesn't last all evening  
A mind can blow those clouds away  
After all this, my love is up and must be leaving  
It's not always gonna be this grey  
All things must pass  
All things must pass away."*

CSK and Liverpool will never want this era to pass. For them, there will never be another Dhoni or Klopp.

And as far as our boys go — big and small — we should teach them to cry. Roger Federer cried when he won, he cried when he lost; it made him human, and a true champion.

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**« On behalf of WADA, I am deeply disappointed and disgusted by the deliberate lies and distortions coming from USADA, including that WADA has swept doping cases in China under the rug.** –

Former president of WADA, Canadian Dick Pound »



**« No, I don't think the world record will be under threat. For me, I'm watching what's going on now when it comes to the race, it's picking up a few times.**

– Usain Bolt »

## 400 IM

Summer McIntosh lowered her own world record in the 400-metre individual medley at the Canadian Olympic trials.

The 17-year-old touched the wall in 4 minutes, 24.38 seconds, nearly 1-1/2 seconds better than her time of 4:25.87 at last year's world championships trials, also held at the Toronto Pan Am Sports Centre.

McIntosh, a two-time world champion in the

400 IM, was just under world-record pace midway through the race and picked up the tempo on the breaststroke leg to open a two-second gap with 100 metres to go.



## 29

Sherif Lawal, a British boxer, died after losing on his professional debut in London. He was knocked down by a blow to the head from Malam Varela in the fourth round of a scheduled six-round middleweight fight at Harrow Leisure Centre.

The referee waved it off to allow paramedics to attend to Lawal. He was taken to the hospital but died. He was 29. "The British Boxing Board of Control sends their condolences to the family of Sherifdeen Lawal following his tragic passing after his boxing contest," the board posted on X.

## CHAMPION STUFF



**Oleksandr Usyk beat Tyson Fury by split decision to win the world's first undisputed heavyweight championship in 25 years,** an unprecedented feat in boxing's four-belt era. Britain's Fury was the early aggressor, but Usyk gradually took charge, and the "Gypsy King" was saved by the bell in the ninth round before slumping to his first career defeat. Ukraine's Usyk, who remains undefeated, joins the likes of Muhammad Ali, Joe Louis and Mike Tyson as undisputed heavyweight champion, the first since boxing recognised four major belts in the 2000s. AFP

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# CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM OR NAKED AGGRESSION?

Ayan Acharya

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STORIES



Every India World Cup squad has the same dilemma: fans want to know all the details — the surprise picks, omissions, their hows and whys. You can tell which side of the line the current T20 World Cup squad falls on by looking at the social media response. It's true what they say: the more things change, the more they remain the same. **The year and venues may be different, but the theme remains the same with this Indian team — ageless experience over youthful exuberance.** T20 is fast becoming a hyper-specialised

format with clear skill sets and the possibility of different starting XI combinations based on oppositions and conditions. The reason lies in the evolution of the game. In its origins, T20 cricket was played by individuals who would look to adopt a risk-free approach at the start before upping the ante. It was about driving the opposition back systematically. There was scepticism about

**Captain in distress:** Rohit Sharma's loss of form in the latter stages of IPL 2024 will be a concern for the Men in Blue. K. MURALIKUMAR

**Lack of spark:** In this IPL, Hardik made 216 at a strike rate of 143.0 and was dismissed 12 times in 13 innings. VIJAY SONEJI

INDIA'S T20 WORLD CUP SQUAD IS A FINE BALANCE OF EXPERIENCED PLAYERS AND EMERGING TALENTS, WHICH AIDS TO NAVIGATE THIS EVER-EVOLVING HYPER-SPECIALISED FORMAT.

shedding caution completely in a format where each over is five per cent of the game. That was until West Indies, in 2016, and then England, in 2022, persuaded the world that naked aggression was perhaps the future.

Those transformations worked because these teams had ample playing resources and a glut of attacking batsmen to pick from. But with the selection choices of this Indian team, one always gets the feeling that it needs to try really hard in ICC T20 tournaments to conquer the final frontier.

In T20 World Cups, India appears to have a strong preference for conventional batting depth over

specialised power-hitters. However, there was a complete about-turn in the time between the last T20 World Cup and this one, when it temporarily jettisoned that approach by including the likes of Rinku Singh, who played 15 T20Is, Tilak Verma (16), and Jitesh Sharma (9) in its playing XIs. Yet two of these three did not make the cut for the World Cup, while Rinku is in the reserves.

They say the IPL is long enough for you to play yourself in and out of form. India's captain and vice-captain can vouch for the latter.

Returning to action after five months due to an ankle injury that he suffered during the ODI World Cup last October, vice-captain Hardik

Pandya, India's likely fourth pace-bowling option, bowled his full quota of four overs only five times in IPL 2024. The Mumbai Indians captain often bowled with the new ball this year, ahead of Jasprit Bumrah, and conceded 10.25 runs per over in this phase while picking up only two wickets. With the bat, Hardik made 216 at a strike rate of 143.0 and was dismissed 12 times in 13 innings.

Meanwhile, India skipper Rohit Sharma began the season on a high, even hitting his second IPL century — his first since 2012 — in MI's loss against CSK, but his form tapered off as the season wore on. Rohit hit 89 in 76 balls in the PowerPlay with a





**A necessary change:** Virat Kohli's strategy has shifted from rotating the strike against spin to looking for boundary options. EMMANUEL YOGINI

strike rate of 117 in his last seven outings, with a dot ball percentage of over 50. He was dismissed inside the first six overs in five of the last seven innings. His loss of form will be a concern for the Men in Blue.

But it's not all doom and gloom. Suryakumar Yadav, India's flamboyant No. 4, returned for Mumbai Indians from an injury layoff to hit three fifties and a century in 11 innings. Virat Kohli, who will play his sixth T20 World Cup, also went past 9000 runs in T20 cricket on Indian soil in the must-win game against Chennai Super Kings, making him the first player with 9000-plus T20 runs in any country. Kohli has tried to be the PowerPlay enforcer for his team, the Royal Challengers Bengaluru, hitting 33 fours and 20 sixes while striking north of 160 in that phase.

RCB has reaped the rewards of one key Kohli evolution, and India would hope for more of the same. The sweep has been a key scoring option for Kohli to counter spin in

the middle overs this IPL. Essentially, it appears that Kohli's strategy has shifted from rotating the strike against spin to looking for boundary options. It was on full display during his unbeaten 70 off 44 against Gujarat Titans in a league match, where he employed the slog-sweep and the conventional sweep with gay abandon.

"I've brought out the slog-sweep to the spinners. I just mentally put myself in that situation, and I didn't practise it at all," Kohli had said about the change in approach.

"I know I can hit it because I've hit it a lot in the past. So, I just felt like I needed to take a bit more risk, and for me, that shot was something that I used to hit regularly back in the day. And that's allowing me to hit off the back foot as well, because I'm always looking to expose that side of the field against the spin."

"For me, that has been a massive factor in this IPL. So, I think it just takes a bit more conviction to take out that thought that props up: 'what

if you get out'. I've been managing to stay ahead of that thought in this IPL, and that's really helped me in the middle overs in this IPL, keeping my strike rate up and keeping the scoring rate going for the team as well."

The realisation that T20 matches aren't about absorbing pressure and attacking on the break, at least not all the time, is timely.

Going into the bunker is never the solution. In the top three, there must also be an attacking threat, ideally initiated by somebody with a wide palette of shots. Kohli has been rightly criticised for letting the ball drop after the PowerPlay in the past, but this current version of him does fit the bill in more ways than one.

The selectors also deserve credit for picking Shivam Dube while his stocks are high. Chennai Super Kings used Dube as a specialist against spin. His strike rate of 155.54 against spin is a direct result of his big reach, power, and clear intent. Dube, though, has a discernible weakness against pace, especially well-directed



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bouncers. Teams strategically used the two-bouncer-per-over rule, introduced in this IPL, to keep him quiet at times, but with no such provision at the World Cup, the left-hander is likely to get some breathing space.

While the ongoing IPL may have turned out to be a run-fest, the perception surrounding the upcoming T20 World Cup is that conditions in the USA and especially the Caribbean might be a little less batter-friendly.

As a result, the selectors have packed the squad with as many as four spin-bowling options. All of India's group matches have got either a 9.30 am or 10.30 am start, which rules out the possibility of dew troubling the tweakers while gripping the ball and imparting spin while delivering.

And then there's the thing nobody is working up a sweat about yet, but frankly, it's an area that is key to redressing the bat-ball balance during the World Cup: India's pace attack. With the exception of redoubtable Jasprit Bumrah, the other two members — Mohammed Siraj and Arshdeep Singh — have had an up-and-down IPL season.

While Siraj has conceded close to 10 runs an over in the IPL PowerPlay so far, taking five wickets while averaging close to 50, Arshdeep has been slightly better, taking seven wickets in the PowerPlay at an economy rate of close to nine and an average of 34. Siraj's struggles have spilled over into the death overs, where he currently has three wickets at an eco rate of 9.15. Arshdeep has more wickets between 17 and 20 — nine but at 12.1 runs per over.

The bowling numbers, of course, have been askew this year, thanks in part to the Impact Player rule, which was introduced in IPL 2023 and allows teams to bring in a 12th player at any point in a match to replace a player from the XI after the toss. The absence of it in the ICC tournaments should help allrounders wrest some of the advantage back from specialists.

India has four all-rounders in Hardik, Dube, Axar Patel and



**Top class** Jasprit Bumrah has taken 20 wickets this IPL, with a solid economy rate of 6.48. K. R. DEEPAK

Ravindra Jadeja, but given the makeup of the squad, it is highly likely only two will feature in the XI.

India may not have the sense of T20 ideological purity of England or the peak West Indies yet, although it may have a wider array of options to break down opponents. And much

as the world loves the heady euphoria generated by the barnstorming nature in which the modern T20 game is played, the overarching feeling is that India will once again live by the adage that defence is as important a part of cricket as attack.



**The absence of the Impact Player Rule in the ICC tournaments should help allrounders wrest some of the advantage back from specialists.**

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« We will find a cult hero from the USA  
in this T20 World Cup »

# STUART LAW

Nilesh Mehta

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In professional cricket, a skilled coach plays a vital role, much like a visionary leader. Stuart Law, hailing from Brisbane, Australia, is a prime example. Transitioning seamlessly from player to coach, Law has left a lasting impact on teams worldwide. With over two decades of experience, Law's coaching style has proven adaptable and effective, shaping strategies and boosting player performance at all levels of the game.

Beyond coaching, Law has been instrumental in nurturing talent, notably as the first high-performance coach for the Australian Cricket Academy set in 2010. With a career marked by leadership and success, including five Sheffield Shield titles as captain of Queensland, Law's influence continues to grow.

Now leading the USA men's cricket team, Law is set to make his mark on American cricket, especially ahead of the ICC T20 World Cup in June 2024.

#### What was the driving force that made you consider the USA men's cricket team coaching stint?

When this was presented to me, the opportunity to take a USA cricket team to a World Cup for the first time was pretty inviting, to be honest. I see it as a great challenge to work with some of the great associate cricketers going around and also try to help them become the best they

can be. So, it wasn't something I took lightly. I see it as a fantastic opportunity to get in when USA cricket's right at the grassroots and hopefully build something strong that can keep on building on top for years to come.

#### Have you been to the United States frequently?

I've come in for work with Sri Lanka a couple of times. When I was with Sri Lanka, we played New Zealand in a couple of matches. And then, when I was with the West Indies, we played a few in Fort Lauderdale. So, I've seen a bit of cricket in this country, but now I've got a real taste and a real appetite to get into it.

I have seen what Houston and Dallas have. I'm looking forward to seeing not only the temporary stadium in New York but also Fort Lauderdale in Florida to gauge how cricket has progressed and what the USA holds. But talking to the boys,

they're very hopeful that cricket is on the up. If we can get a few more interested, you know, youngsters, involved in the game, hopefully, USA cricket will start gaining momentum and being stronger, which will then obviously hold the sport in good stead in this part of the world.

#### You talked about the pitches in New York and Fort Lauderdale. You come from a land where drop-in pitches are not a rare commodity. MCG, for example, uses a drop-in pitch when they play their cricket.

The science and technology involved in producing cricket pitches have advanced by leaps and bounds. The boys that have put these pitches together aren't just doing any type of grass. It'll be grass that's suited to survive on a concrete bed. New York will probably not get those direct, super-hot conditions like you would in Texas or Florida, but it'll be

**We want to provide the USA with something to be proud of. And if that happens, I'm sure the boys will be jumping out of their skins. Once we start talking cricket, the language is pretty simple. Right?**

conducive to the conditions. They've done it for long enough now. In Adelaide, where the groundsman is from, it can get up to 45 degrees Celsius during the hottest summer, which is quite hot and dry. And then in the winter, it can get down close to 0.

He'll have all the technology and know-how to produce them. When they first started the drop-in wickets, they weren't very good. But year after year, the ground staff and the people involved in it have learned how to ensure they can still get that consistent pace and bounce in. So, I think the ones we will see at the World Cup will be excellent cricket pitches. Something I have heard is that hopefully, at the end of the World Cup, they're going to be donated to USA Cricket in certain parts of the country. It would be great for the grassroots level as well to have ready-made cricket pitches there. We just need someone who knows how to take care of them.

**The term "good pitches" is a relative term. What constitutes a good pitch?**

A good pitch is an even contest between bat and ball, so there's something in it for everybody. In my experience, drop-in pitches don't spin a great deal, but there's enough there. They can be fast and bouncy. I know the one in Perth at the big Optus Stadium; they say it's one of the fastest in Australia. Adelaide, they say, is quick as well. So, the guys have the formula to produce good cricket pitches.

**When you talk about the life expectancy of a pitch, particularly a drop-in pitch, is there a life expectancy where, after a few years, the drop-in pitch is kind of taken out and something else is planted in its place?**

I don't think that's the case. They renovate them ever so often, and the renovation should create that growth underneath. I don't know exactly how all that works. But having talked to a few and seen them in action, if they keep renovating and top-dressing, the pitch should survive pretty much



**Task cut out:** Stuart Law's first assignment with USA will be a T20I series at home against Bangladesh. AFP

for the long term.

**When it comes to coaching the USA cricket team, it's akin to managing a mini-United Nations, with players hailing from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. How do you bridge these differences and ensure effective communication on the field?**

I have had a pretty good upbringing in coaching, having spent time in predominantly non-English-speaking countries like Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. But one thing that is synonymous with it is the language of cricket. The cricket terms are generally the same. You might not understand everything that's being said, but if they're talking cricket, I can sort of pick up what's going on. I mean, talking to the players here, they're very respectful of the flag that they represent now. Even if they weren't born here or haven't been here that long, they're still very respectful of representing the US people. And I think that's a great thing. We stand there. We listen to it. We will be singing it, but we listen to the national anthem before the matches. It will be a proud moment for the boys. We want to provide the USA with something to be proud of. And if that happens, I'm sure the boys will be jumping out of their skins. Once we start talking cricket, the language is pretty simple. Right?

**Is Stuart Law, the coach, a strict disciplinarian, or is he a friendly guy?**

I probably did come in too hard at times. I've learned along the way that you've got to change. We've got to ensure that, as coaches, we're continually changing, seeking different ways to get a message across. And right now, I still expect players to turn up and do their work. And if they're not doing their work, the conversation needs to be had. And the one thing that probably has gotten me into trouble a lot is that I tell the truth, and the truth from my point of view. Not from everybody's point of view, but from what I've seen and what I think will make you a

Donning multiple hats: Stuart Law has also been the Australian team's batting coach, worked at CA's Centre of Excellence, and coached the Under-19 team. AFP



better person, a better sportsman, and a better professional. At the moment, I am very friendly. I don't want you to play the way I want you to play. I want you to play the way you want to play, and I'll be here to support you and help you achieve what you want to do. And I think that's the only way you can survive. It's not the only way you can survive, but I think it's a way to survive for a while. And if it's not working, well, then you need to sit down and have that honest conversation with the player. I don't expect perfection. Cricket is the worst game for perfection. You'll never be perfect at cricket, but I expect 100% effort and dedication to the cause. The team always comes first.

**Regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the USA men's cricket team, can you enumerate a couple of strengths and weaknesses?**

Our batting lineup is looking pretty solid, with Steven Taylor — one of the best Associate players — and Corey Anderson on board. They bring a ton of experience, especially Corey, who's proven himself in World Cups. Having him around is a huge boost for the

younger players and those stepping up to this level for the first time.

We've got a variety of spin options. Fast bowling is only going to get better. I haven't seen Ali Khan up close in a match, but I've seen him at practice. I'm told he is very exciting. So, you know what? I don't think we will be the easy-beats that some people think we might be. I think there will be a few times when our team puts a few people on notice. And, hopefully, we might be able to pinch a win against one of the big teams. That'd be awesome. The good thing about Twenty20 cricket is that whoever turns up on the day — you know if someone has a bad day and we have a good day — you just never know. It just could be that opportunity that we're looking for, and hopefully, we're good enough to grab hold of that opportunity.

**Now that we are playing in Dallas, Fort Lauderdale, and New York, all venues in the USA, of course, do you think the team will have a home-court advantage playing in front of their crowds?**

I think they will be packed. The games in Dallas have been sold out for quite some time. And we play

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Vast experience: Stuart Law has previously served as head coach for Bangladesh and West Indies, and as interim coach for Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. He also coached the Bangladesh Under-19s and led Bangladesh to its first Asia Cup final in 2012. AFP

Canada, which is, you know, their first game, and what a first game to start with. The oldest history of international cricket matches is in the USA and Canada. Who'd have thought? So, yeah, whether we have the home-ground advantage, I don't know. Yes. Some of our boys have played in Major League Cricket in Dallas. They also played Minor League Cricket in Dallas. It's tough because we haven't played in New York. No one's played on the ground in New York. So I wouldn't say we've got the out-and-out home-ground advantage, but what we do have is the excitement of playing in different venues in the USA. And if we do get that support from the home crowd, it'll be awesome. I just hope that everyone loves the underdog like we do in Australia.

**As the head coach, what are your main priorities and goals leading up to the T20 World Cup?**

My main goal was to get to know and understand the players and staff around me and build relationships with them. Good relationships can create really good environments. So that's been the number one thing. It's been a little bit disjointed because we were in camp together, and then we had a week's break. Then we came back, and we played the series against Canada. I felt we started building good momentum together and enjoying what we were doing. And then we had a bit of time away. My goal is simple: I want to see our team approach every game with a smile, embracing the joy of playing the sport we love. Beyond that, I expect us to compete fiercely at every opportunity, striving for excellence on all fronts. It doesn't matter if we win or lose. I just want to see the competitiveness. And if we get some of the boys with a real competitive spirit firing on the day, then wins will come. It's all about progressing through the next phase. That'd be a dream come true. I think we've got to be realistic in our expectations as well and make sure that we maintain those expectations throughout the whole process. But number one, just build relationships and enjoy each other's company. World Cups are very special to play, and they don't come around very often. Fingers

crossed, we can get out there and give a good account of ourselves.

**Obviously, in the Canada series, the USA did remarkably well, blanking the Canadians. With the Bangladesh series coming up, it will be a good litmus test for the USA team because now you're playing against a team that is known to surprise many people in the previous World Cups.**

Yeah, it is a great challenge for us. That's for sure. Bangladesh has come on leaps and bounds in the last couple of years. They've got a very good pace bowling attack now. Everyone knows they're renowned for their spin bowling, but they now have a good pace bowling attack. And their batsmen have always been productive. So what a great challenge for us. We have four matches, three in Houston down at Prairie View, and then we come to Dallas and play a warm-up game against them at Grand Prairie. We'll get an idea of what we're up against, and they're a pretty good benchmark to see where we're actually at. So, I think all the boys are excited about playing against Bangladesh. I'm always excited to play international cricket, but against some of the boys I coached many years ago, it should be nice catching up with them. It would



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**Prolific player:** Australian batter Stuart Law cuts Dion Nash of New Zealand during the 1996 ODI World Cup quarterfinal. V.V. KRISHNAN

be even nicer if we snuck a win or two against Bangladesh.

**The Impact Player and two-bouncer rule have been implemented in the Indian Premier League (IPL). What are your thoughts on those?**

I like the two-bouncer rule. It is a real weapon if you have fast bowlers. That's one thing. This game, particularly the T20 format, is stacked in the batter's favour. The batter is not punished if he swings and misses; however, if a bowler oversteps, he or she must bowl another ball. Impact rule, I am not 100% convinced. Don't mess with the fabric of the game of cricket. I've seen it used in different parts of the world. Cricket isn't football, where you can sub three or four players. You cannot score 80 odd runs and then not do the fielding. And part of the game is, you know, you've got to be fit, you've got to be skilled, and you've got to show commitment to the team. And, generally, it's a 40-over game. It's not a 20-over game because you have to bat for 20

overs and field for 20 overs. I disagree with the Impact Player rule.

**How do you envision USA cricketers contributing to nurturing and developing cricket talent domestically and fostering increased interest in the sport among youth?**

I'm sure there are people out there, kids watching or knowing the game of cricket. The one thing in this country is that not many people know about the game of cricket. When you mention cricket, they think about a mobile phone company. They might have seen their heroes from, you know, other worlds, but I reckon that if we play well and put up something inspirational on the cricket field in the World Cup, it'll trigger something in young kids in the USA. So every player, coach, and administrator has a role to play in increasing cricket's profile in this country, and the way we can do that is for players to talk positively about the game. And, hopefully, on the cricket field, we can show them how far it can go. So everyone's got a part to play, not just certain individuals. But we will find a cult hero from the USA in this World Cup. I guarantee we'll find one that fans will jump on and love. It might be that they become the face of USA cricket.

**Do you perceive a trend emerging regarding increased injuries among cricket players compared to your generation?**

I think everyone's a little bit more aware of their bodies nowadays. If we had a slight hamstring problem, a calf problem, or a broken or cracked finger, we could still get the right way of playing, but it was a bit uncomfortable. Our senior players told us to just get on with them. If I went into an MRI scanning machine and had my whole body scanned, I'd come in with about 45 injuries. Cricket's not easy on the body. Everyone says, 'Oh, you just stand there', but that's not the case. For a fast bowler, it's the most unnatural movement for a human body to go through. So, if you don't always get it right, there will be problems. I've got to be careful what I say here because the sports science that has come into the game was designed to prevent injuries. They haven't. The injuries are still there. They might not be as severe as they possibly could have been, but they're still there. So they haven't prevented them, but they have stopped the player from playing earlier. Otherwise, you would have kept playing through back in the day, and it would have been career-ending. So, they stopped them playing earlier, and then they



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knew how to rehab them. And I think that the shining example of that is Pat Cummins. As a young kid, he got stress fractures in the back and missed five years of cricket. You know, he was trying to come back, but he was still injured, and Cricket Australia took him aside. They gave him a programme.

#### **Who is your favourite Indian pace bowler?**

I must say my favourite is Mohammed Shami. I know he's injured now, but I saw him when I was coaching the West Indies in India in a Test match. And my word, the skill level of that bowler is unbelievable. He's fast. He's not tall. He's very strong and accurate. He's very skinny, but I just love his seam presentation. He's always at you. He looks like he's injured running in. It looks like he's hobbling on one leg, but then he comes in and bowls at 145 kmph. Jasprit Bumrah is a real-class bowler with very difficult actions to correct your rhythm and timing as a batsman.

And then you have Mohammed Siraj... He's in your face. He's the one who stirs the pot, but he's also got some good skill and pace. India has produced some world-class fast bowlers for many years now, the last five to 10 years, and I think it was something that was missing in their repertoire. They always had spin. They had skilled bowlers who could bowl swing and a little bit of seam, but now they have some of the fastest bowlers on the planet. Mayank Yadav is quick. I was watching him in the IPL.

#### **Shami had an Achilles injury and surgery, so he will be out for an extended period. But regarding his comeback after an Achilles injury as a coach, do you think he will be the same Shami that we saw pre-Achilles surgery?**

It'll depend on which leg it is. I'm unaware of which leg it is, whether it's his left leg that he lands on or, you know, if it's not his landing leg, he's got more of a chance, but he probably won't be the same. One thing that won't leave his body is his



**World Cups are very special to play, and they don't come around very often. Fingers crossed, we can get out there and give a good account of ourselves.**

skill level. I hope he comes back. If he doesn't, I think that'll be understandable considering the injury he's had, but, fingers crossed, he gets fit and is back, terrorising the batsman.

#### **Regarding the Australia team for the World Cup, were you surprised by any exclusions or inclusions?**

To be honest, not really. Probably the biggest talking point will be Steve Smith. Everyone else will say Jake Fraser-McGurk, but the big talking point will be Smith missing out. I think for a long time, he's been a wonderful player, but he's probably not where Twenty20 cricket is now. You know, the way that those teams are set up now, they don't have a player who bats at number 3. If they lose two quick wickets, they go in to stop the wicket flow.

They just send someone in to try and hit six and some, so that's how the game's gone. So maybe it doesn't suit certain players, necessarily. Smith, I think, as I said before, is a wonderful player, but there may be better options in Australian cricket. The rest of the team is the team that won the 2021 World Cup in Abu Dhabi. It's pretty much how it should be.

#### **Have you been following the IPL closely?**

Not closely, but close enough. It's a bit difficult to get coverage in the hotels here in the US on the IPL. The wickets have grass on them; there is good, even bounce as well, and the boundaries are 65 metres. So, there is not much chance for the bowlers in those conditions, but some of the batting has been unbelievable. Sunrisers Hyderabad have been great in that respect, with Travis

Head opening and playing brilliantly and Heinrich Klassen coming in and finishing it off. It has just been good to watch.

#### **Who do you like better? Stuart Law, the cricketer, or Stuart Law, the coach?**

If you ask someone else, they probably don't like either. All day long, I'd rather be a player. But having said that, I'm pretty comfortable with what I did and where I am right now. I'm just happy being who I am and enjoying my time. You know, it's been a long ride in the game of cricket. The game of cricket has been great for me. So I've only got a few more years left to be the coach, but we might be playing every day of the week.

#### **What kind of legacy does Stuart Law want to leave behind?**

As a player, I always wanted to be a tough competitor. I think I achieved that in my career. As a coach, an understanding coach, it took me a while. It's been a long ride, but getting the terms took me a while. So, I was still in my early years as a coach and probably more swayed by the playing mentality than the coaching mentality. I want to leave with the memories of the people I coached who said I was hard but fair. I was always, you know, approachable, and hopefully, I'll produce some good cricketers for years to come.

I look back fondly on the boys I've coached in under-19 Bangladesh. We had Najmul Shanto, who's now captain of Bangladesh. I had a bit to do with him during an under-19 World Cup, and seeing them perform well on the world stage gives me a really good feeling inside. I'd like to continue doing that.



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**Indifferent returns:** Despite getting off to a blazing start in IPL 2024, India captain Rohit Sharma's form tapered off as the competition hurtled towards the business end. K. MURALIKUMAR

# A rivalry for the ages and a left-field choice

IRELAND MUST PLAY OUT OF ITS SKIN TO DISPLACE INDIA OR PAKISTAN FROM THE TOP TWO SPOTS BEFORE THE ‘SUPER 8’ STAGE.



## THE ABSENCE OF A FOURTH FRONTLINE SEAMER INDICATES INDIA IS EXPECTING THE BALL TO TURN IN THE SUPER 8 STAGE IN THE WEST INDIES

Santadeep Dey  
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It would be pragmatic to label India and Pakistan as the favourites to progress from Group A at the upcoming Twenty20 World Cup in the West Indies and the USA.

However, on May 10, with less than a month to go for T20 cricket's biggest extravaganza, former American

football defensive end J. J. Watt's famous words - "Success isn't owned, it's leased. And rent is due every day" - may have come as a rude awakening for Pakistan, the 2009 champion and last edition's runner-up.

Meeting each other for the first time in the shortest format after 15 years, Ireland registered its first win in men's T20Is over a full-blooded Pakistan squad in the first clash of a three-match series in Dublin.

Although Pakistan won the remaining two fixtures, would the team deal with the loss as a mere glitch in the matrix? After all, the two sides are set to go up again in a



month's time at Lauderhill, Florida, on June 16. From Zimbabwe edging Australia in 2009 to Namibia beating then Asia Cup defender Sri Lanka two years ago, the T20 World Cup is no stranger to upsets. Given the single round-robin format of the group stage, even one win against the odds can prove to be decisive. So, there will be no room for complacency.

### How late is gracefully late?

And obviously, there are bigger worries for Babar Azam's men — for starters, there's no knowing who they are until Pakistan plays its T20I series opener against England on May 22. Going into a marquee tournament, it is imperative to strategise months ahead with a core 11 in mind. As Ramiz Raja said on his YouTube channel, it does seem like "Pakistan are stuck. They can't handle the combinations. Every

player is on trial".

The individual performances in Dublin are bound to confuse the selectors further.

Former pacer Umar Gul's nephew, 23-year-old Abbas Afridi, may have finished with six wickets, the second-most successful in the series after leading paceman Shaheen Shah Afridi, but he conceded 112 runs off the 71 balls he bowled.

Naseem Shah and Mohammad Amir took four wickets combined and leaked runs at a touch below 10 an over. Hasan Ali, who replaced Naseem in the third T20I, gave away 42 runs in three overs without taking a single wicket.

In the batting department, left-handed opener Saim Ayub appeared clueless. He averaged 21.66 in the series, while Babar and Mohammed Rizwan were left to do the heavy-lifting again.

Once the squad is finalised, the biggest challenge awaits Pakistan on June 9 when it meets archrival India, presently the No. 1 T20 side, at the Nassau County International Cricket Stadium in New York.

### Well-rounded

Hardik Pandya, who captained Rohit Sharma in the 2024 Indian Premier League, will return to being the latter's deputy in India's blue.

The top-order of India looks mostly settled, with Rohit and Yashasvi Jaiswal set to open. Batting mainstay Virat Kohli follows. However, it wouldn't be that bad an afterthought to have Kohli open alongside Rohit and get Sanju Samson to come in at three.

The middle order will have the big-hitters in Suryakumar Yadav, Rishabh Pant, and Hardik Pandya.

In the bowling department, Rohit has opted for a spin-heavy approach, with Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, and Yuzvendra Chahal in the 15-member squad.

The absence of a fourth frontline seamer indicates India is expecting the ball to turn in the West Indies when the tournament rolls over to the business end. This also indicates Hardik, a fast-bowling all-rounder,



**Change of guard again:** Babar Azam took over Pakistan's T20I captaincy from Shaheen Shah Afridi earlier this year. AFP

may often be called upon to roll his arm over for the full quota of four overs. The tournament will also mark the return of Pant to international cricket after a horrific car accident kept him away from the game for more than a year. He has been impressive in the IPL for Delhi Capitals, having scored 446 runs in 13 innings at an average of 40.55 and a strike-rate of 155.40.

#### What do Ireland, USA and Canada bring to the table?

Although Canada went down by 86 runs to Bermuda in the opening game of the Americas qualifier, an amazing recovery saw it seal a debut appearance in the quest for the biggest prize in T20 cricket. Under the able leadership of all-rounder Saad Bin Zafar, it defeated the Cayman Islands twice and Panama by margins of 100-plus runs each time to set up a date with Bermuda

again in the final. This time, though, it got the better of the host.

However, in April, Canada got a reality check when it toured the US for a five-match series, where Monank Patel and Steven Taylor's pyrotechnics coupled with Harmeet Singh's economical spells resigned the visitor to a 4-0 series drubbing (one match was abandoned). Despite the commanding win, what would bother the host nation is the limited gametime it has had leading into the tournament. Before the said series, it last played a match in July 2022.

Canada, the sole Americas qualifier, and host USA will play the tournament-opener on June 1 at the Grand Prairie Stadium in Dallas.

Having featured in all men's T20 World Cups since 2009, Ireland is a certified giant-killer. And this time, nothing is different.

The side has gone with an experienced line-up, retaining an overwhelming 11 of its squad of 15 in 2022.

#### Two teams that will qualify

In Group A, it's evident who the

top two will be without much thought.

Ireland will have to come up with the performance of a lifetime to be able to remove either India or Pakistan from the top two slots ahead of the 'Super 8' stage.

The USA and Canada will be here for the 'big-match' experience. They need to keep their nose to the grindstone and any positive outcome that comes along the way will remain an unforgettable moment.

#### Dark horse

Ireland is a glowing example for the Davids of the world. It has sent Goliath packing, not once but many times over. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan have fallen prey once in 2024.

Against India, in August 2023, Craig Young had removed Yashasvi Jaiswal and Tilak Varma off successive deliveries shortly before the match got called off due to rain. India had saved its blushes with a two-run victory via DLS.

In March 2023, it hammered Bangladesh at the latter's home.

# THREE STANDOUT PLAYERS



## JASPRIT BUMRAH

Bumrah's outstanding performance in the recent IPL is noteworthy. Despite Mumbai Indians' underwhelming campaign, he took 20 wickets in 13 innings with an impressive economy rate of 6.48, the best among bowlers with a minimum of 10 overs. With Shami opting out due to injury, Bumrah leads India's pace attack with support from Mohammed Siraj and Arshdeep Singh.



## BABAR AZAM

Babar has been Pakistan's highest scorer in T20Is throughout 2023-24. He has scored 600 runs at an average of 40.00 and a strike rate of 143.54. His century against New Zealand in 2023 is the only hundred scored by a Pakistani batter in that period. His strength lies in the variety of shots he can play against spin and pace.



## CURTIS CAMPHER

Campher, a South Africa-born seam-bowling all-rounder representing Ireland, achieved a unique feat by taking four wickets in four consecutive deliveries in a T20 World Cup match against the Netherlands in 2021. Since 2023, he has been the team's third highest run-scorer with 388 runs in 19 innings and has also taken seven wickets.

# Plenty of brawn and a giantkiller

AUSTRALIA AND ENGLAND ARE EXPECTED TO DOMINATE GROUP BUT SCOTLAND COULD BE THE JOKER IN THE PACK.

**Dhruva Prasad**

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**O**ther than reigniting cricket's oldest rivalry, Group B, comprising Australia, England, Namibia, Oman and Scotland, offers little in terms of throwing a spanner in the works as far as the make-up of the Super Eights is concerned. Australia and England, winners of the last two editions of the T20 World Cup, respectively, will expect to sail through the group stage with relative ease, riding on a bevy of all-round options.

Defending champion England has retained the core of its 2022 T20 World Cup-winning side, with as many as eight players who featured in the final against Pakistan finding a place in the squad for the upcoming event. Among the notable absentees are Ben Stokes, who opted out of the tournament in April, the retired Alex Hales, and Chris Woakes.

However, since lifting its second T20 title, England hasn't had a smooth run in the shortest format, having lost eight of its 12 matches, which include series defeats against Bangladesh and West Indies. The side's topsy-turvy returns closely mirror its captain Jos Buttler's mixed dividends in international cricket and the Indian Premier League (IPL) of late. However, England's top order will be buoyed by the fearless hitting ability of Phil Salt.

With Jonny Bairstow, Harry Brook, Liam Livingstone and Will Jacks to follow, England will hope to maintain the thrill-a-minute tempo that has come to define its cricket of late. Despite its recent failures, England is the third-fastest scoring team in T20Is in the last 12 months, going at 9.37 runs per over.

Tearaway speedster Jofra Archer's much-awaited return to international cricket from injury also bodes well



for England, which hasn't succeeded in identifying a pace spearhead in the run-up to the global showpiece. But given his spate of injuries (back and elbow) in recent years, Archer and England will have their 'fingers crossed'.

With Chris Jordan also being named in the squad, Archer will not be the only one returning from the international wilderness. Jordan last turned up for England last September, featuring in just the lone T20I in the four-match series against New Zealand at home, but his



**Mixed bag:** England's topsy-turvy returns in T20Is since winning the last World Cup closely mirror its captain Jos Buttler's mixed dividends in international cricket. AFP

death-overs specialisation and his recent upturn in the batting department brought him back into the scheme of things.

With Archer, Jordan, Mark Wood and Reece Topley in the ranks, England is spoilt for choices in the pace bowling department. All-rounders Moeen Ali and Sam Curran add batting firepower at the death and help England strike a judicious balance between its seam and spin attack, which will be led by leggie Adil Rashid.

Similarly, archrival Australia's

## ENGLAND HAS RETAINED THE CORE OF ITS 2022 T20 WORLD CUP-WINNING SIDE, WITH AS MANY AS EIGHT PLAYERS WHO FEATURED IN THE FINAL FINDING A PLACE IN THE SQUAD

campaign will also revolve around its pantheon of all-rounders, who lend dynamism to the middle-order. Led by skipper Mitchell Marsh, who was handed over the reins of the T20I

side last year, Australia boasts of a side with relentless batting ammunition all the way down to No. 7. Marcus Stoinis and Glenn Maxwell's presence in the

middle-order provides the 2021 champion with seven bowling options too, ensuring neither department is comprised.

With Cameron Green and spin all-rounder Ashton Agar also on the roster, Australia has enough wiggle room to extend its batting depth and allow the top-order to go hell for leather. The Aussies are the fastest-scoring team in T20Is in the last 12 months, averaging 10.11 per six balls, and with a top-three comprising David Warner, Travis Head and Marsh, they would back themselves to continue in a similar vein.

With Tim David and wicketkeeper Matthew Wade entrusted with the role of going berserk at the death, there is little that will deter Australia from its approach.

To back up its batting might, Australia will unleash the enviable pace troika of Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood, with Adam Zampa helming the spin attack. While Cummins has overseen Sunrisers Hyderabad's fearless approach in the IPL and has also had a fruitful outing with the ball, Starc's dwindling returns in the shortest format could pose a concern.

As cover, Australia has the option of roping in Nathan Ellis, a proven death-overs specialist who can also thrive across phases with his variations.

Though it's a long shot, the team that comes close to potentially upsetting powerhouses England and Australia is Namibia, which qualified for its third consecutive T20 World Cup after an unbeaten run of six games in the Africa Region Qualifier tournament last year.

Currently ranked No. 14 in the world, Namibia stunned Sri Lanka in the opening game of the 2022 T20 World Cup and had shown an appetite for a fight in the tournament in the preceding year.

The African nation will be led by all-rounder Gerhard Erasmus, who bats in the top order and can also open the bowling with his off-break. He will helm a 15-member squad that includes 12 players who featured in Namibia's victorious Africa Qualifier



campaign.

One spot above Namibia in the global team rankings, Scotland too has punched above its weight in the past, having beaten West Indies in the last edition of the tournament.

The Scottish Saltires also emerged from the Europe Region Qualifier unscathed, winning six out of six games while also beating a higher-ranked Irish side.

Leading from the front is top-order batter Richie Berrington, who was Scotland's joint-highest run-scorer in the Qualifier event, with

**Race against time:** Aussie T20I skipper Mitchell Marsh has not played since his last appearance for Delhi Capitals in the IPL on April 3 due to a right hamstring strain. GETTY IMAGES

248 runs at an impressive strike rate over 170.

The tournament was headlined by the Scottish pair of Ollie Hairs, who struck at over 200 for 248 runs, and left-arm seamer Bradley Currie, who was the top wicket-taker, with 12 scalps at 4.80 runs an over.

The lowest-ranked side in the group, Oman (18), was also unbeaten in the Asia Qualifier tournament last year and clinched the final against Nepal in a thrilling Super Over finish after thrashing Bahrain by 10 wickets in the semifinal, which confirmed its participation in the upcoming World Cup.

The team will have a new skipper in 31-year-old all-rounder Aqib Ilyas, who takes over from 36-year-old Zeeshan Maqsood, who will make his third appearance for Oman at the T20 World Cup after 2016 and 2021.

The bowling will be spearheaded by left-arm seamer and Peshawar-born Bilal Khan, known for his scorching yorkers.

#### Two teams that will qualify

It will probably come down to the June 8 clash between England and Australia in Bridgetown as far as deciding the top team in the group is concerned.

#### Dark horse

Scotland is most well-equipped to stage an upset, having previously beaten Test-playing nations at the T20 World Cup. England, which has lost to Netherlands and Ireland in previous editions of the World Cup, will be most wary. England has already been stung by Scotland in the past, having lost an ODI by six runs back in 2018.

**← Australia's pantheon of all-rounders lend dynamism to the middle-order →**

# THREE STANDOUT PLAYERS



## PHIL SALT

He hammered back-to-back hundreds the last time he visited the Caribbean shores and subsequently grabbed his opportunity in the IPL by striking at over 180 as an opener for Kolkata Knight Riders.



## TRAVIS HEAD

The left-handed opener has earned a reputation for being a player for big occasions, owing to his exploits in the World Test Championship final and the World Cup summit clash last year. That he heads into another global tournament on the back of a trailblazing IPL season should be cause for concern for opposition teams.

## GERHARD ERASMUS

The Namibian skipper has donned the role of both batter and bowler with elan. In the past year, the 29-year-old has been his team's third-most prolific run-scorer (360) while also picking up the highest number of wickets (24) in T20Is.



# West Indies batting strength, Afghan spin stars and high-flying Kiwis

**THE PRESENCE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND UGANDA ADDS A POTENTIAL FOR UPSETS.**

**Sahil Mathur**

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**G**roup C of the T20 World Cup features an intriguing three-team battle between New Zealand, West Indies, and Afghanistan for the top two spots. Additionally, the presence of Papua New Guinea and Uganda adds a potential for upsets. Each of the top three teams in this group has distinct strengths: New Zealand is a balanced squad, Afghanistan relies more on its bowlers, and West Indies has opted for a batting-heavy side.

#### New Zealand doesn't surprise anymore

Kane Williamson will play his sixth T20 World Cup — fourth as captain — while Tim Southee is set for his seventh appearance and Trent Boult for his fifth.

Unsurprisingly, the Kiwis have opted for experience, and it reflects in their selection process: only two players, Rachin Ravindra and Matt Henry, haven't played in a T20 World Cup before.

"I think when you go to World Cups, you want experience, and you want people who know what it's like," coach Gary Stead said after the squad announcement.

The Black Caps are yet to win a T20 World Cup; their best performance was the runners-up finish in the 2021



edition. New Zealand is a team known for its ability to adapt rather than following a set template. It will have to adapt quickly, as the last time a New Zealand team played in the Caribbean was in August 2022. Its first match will be against Afghanistan in Guyana. If New Zealand loses, its next match against West Indies will become doubly important.

#### Can Afghanistan spin it to win it?

Despite New Zealand being the favourite to top the group, Afghanistan has a good chance due to the three venues where the five teams will play during the group stage — Guyana, Tarouba, and Gros Islet — where spinners have had good economy rates in the last two



**Power-packed:** The Rovman Powell-led West Indies has decided on a batting-heavy squad, filled with plenty of hard-hitting all-rounders.

GETTYIMAGES

years, averaging 7.20, 7.25, and 7.33, respectively.

Afghanistan's bowling line-up is strong, with a threatening spin attack led by Rashid Khan (leg-break), Mujeeb Ur Rahman (off-break), Noor Ahmad (left-arm wrist spin), and Mohammad Nabi (off-spin).

With Rahmanullah Gurbaz at the top and Gulbadin Naib and Nabi in the middle, Afghanistan will hope to achieve a par score and leave the rest to their spin quartet.

## PLAYING UGANDA AND PNG IN ITS FIRST TWO GAMES COULD PROVIDE AN EARLY ADVANTAGE FOR THE WINDIES

However, its lack of experience in playing in that part of the world could pose a challenge. It has been nearly seven years since an Afghan team played a game in the West Indies.

Rashid's performance in the 2024 Indian Premier League has been average, with 10 wickets in 12

matches at an economy of 8.40. His dip in form could be a concern.

It might be helpful that Afghanistan will play Uganda first before facing New Zealand.

### Power-packed West Indies

Afghanistan will meet the home team in its final league game, a potential decider for at least one of



**Blip or headache:** Afghanistan captain Rashid Khan's indifferent form with the ball in this year's IPL will be a cause of concern going into the T20 World Cup. EMMANUEL YOGINI

the top spots. The Rovman Powell-led side has decided on a batting-heavy squad, filled with plenty of hard-hitting all-rounders.

The West Indian squad includes power-hitters such as Powell, Johnson Charles, Shimron Hetmyer, Jason Holder, Shai Hope, Brandon King, Nicholas Pooran, Andre Russell, Sherfane Rutherford, and Romario Shepherd. The two-time T20 champion has a reputation for playing high-risk cricket. And given the inexperienced nature of the bowling line-up, the batters will be inclined to provide a cushion of extra runs for the Alzarri Joseph-led attack.

Playing Uganda and PNG in its first two games could provide an early advantage for the co-host,

which will then face New Zealand and Afghanistan in the last two group stage matches.

#### Why do PNG and Uganda pose a threat?

They are coming into the tournament with plenty of wins behind them, albeit against fellow Associate nations. A format as volatile as the T20 gives teams like PNG and Uganda a fair chance to showcase their skills and even stage an upset.

Papua New Guinea, also known as the Barramundis, won six out of its six games in regional finals to qualify, while Uganda, called the Cricket Cranes, won five. In the last 12 months, PNG has won 14 out of its 18 matches, while Uganda has won 32 of its 37 games.

PNG also comes with the experience of playing in the 2021 T20 World Cup. It nearly missed out on qualifying for the 2022 edition in Australia, finishing third in the global qualifiers. Uganda will have its cult hero, 43-year-old Frank Nsubuga,

who will be one of the oldest players in the tournament. Additionally, Alpesh Ramjani, who claimed the most wickets in T20I cricket last year among men (55), was nominated for the 2023 T20I Cricketer of the Year award.

#### Two teams that will qualify

New Zealand and the West Indies. Despite their overreliance on experience and conventional approach, the Black Caps certainly have the quality to make it to the next stage. West Indies, on the other hand, has plenty of big hitters, and if even half of them go hard, there's no stopping it.

#### Dark horse

Afghanistan is certainly going to be tough to beat, and it might even make it to the Super Eight stage. It now has plenty of experience and potential to compete with the world's best. Its players play in T20 leagues around the world and are skilled enough to handle the pressure in difficult situations.

# THREE STANDOUT PLAYERS



## RACHIN RAVINDRA

The New Zealand opener had a memorable ODI World Cup in India last year and while he may have blown hot and cold in the IPL 2024 – 161 runs in nine innings at a strike rate just shy of 160 – his team would hope he has a memorable maiden T20 World Cup.



## NICHOLAS POORAN

One of the best middle-order batters West Indies has produced in the shorter format, Pooran has been in superb touch lately. The left-hander would love to continue it on the big stage.



## AZMATULLAH OMARZAI

The pace-bowling all-rounder is adept at taking wickets with the new ball and can also be aggressive with the bat when coming in to bat lower down the order.



# Tussle between power, skill and temperament in ‘Group of Death’

GROUP D HAS MORE THAN TWO CONTENDERS, UNLIKE THE FIRST THREE GROUPS WITH **CLEAR FAVOURITES** FOR THE SUPER 8.

**Abhishek Saini**

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**U**nlike the other three groups of this T20 World Cup, where lopsided odds present clear favourites for the Super 8, Group D has more than two contenders. On paper, South Africa might appear as the heavyweight, but underestimating Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and the Netherlands, which has beaten the Proteas in the last two World Cups, would be fraught with risk for Aiden Markram's side.

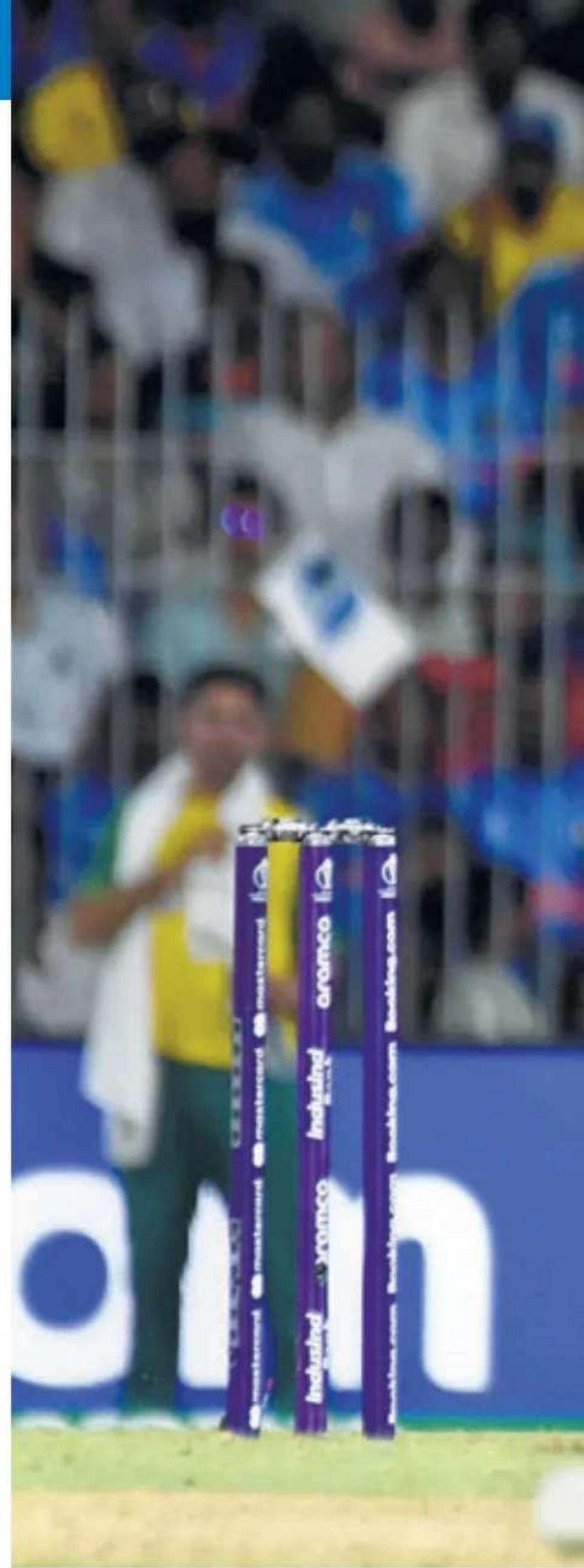
The addition of Nepal makes Group D the most competitive pool.

#### **South Africa is batting its way to victory**

South Africa has laid its cards on the table for how it will approach the tournament. In Markram, Heinrich Klaasen, Tristan Stubbs, and David Miller, the Proteas have had four batters with a strike rate of over 150 in T20Is since 2022.

The latest inductee into this slam-bang batting order is Ryan Rickleton. The 27-year-old southpaw, yet to get a cap in the shortest format, stole the show in SA20 2024, where he scored 530 runs in 10 innings at a strike rate above 173.

Three of South Africa's four group games will be in the USA, which is expected to have batter-friendly tracks, giving the batters a chance to flex their might with the



willow.

With the ball, South Africa again turned to the SA20 when it included Ottiel Baartman, the highest wicket-taker of the 2024 edition. However, he might have to wait for his turn in a pace battery that boasts Anrich Nortje, Kagiso Rabada, Marco Jansen, and Gerald Coetzee.

Keshav Maharaj, Tabraiz Shamsi, and Bjorn Fortuin will be waiting to pounce once low and slow tracks in the Caribbean come the team's way.

If South Africa wants to banish the ghosts of the shock loss to the



**New leader:** Aiden Markram took over South Africa's T20I captaincy from Temba Bavuma last year.

R. RAGU

Netherlands in 2022 and end the unceremonious streak of knockout exits in ICC tournaments, it cannot rely on reputation alone. Given the contrast in playing conditions through the group stage and Super 8, South Africa will need its big names to adapt well and step up.  
**Will the real Sri Lanka please stand up?**

Sri Lanka advanced to the semifinals in four of the first five editions of the T20 World Cup. However, since winning the title in 2014, it has failed to reach the

**IF SOUTH AFRICA WANTS TO END THE UNCEREMONIOUS STREAK OF KNOCKOUT EXITS IN ICC TOURNAMENTS, IT CANNOT RELY ON REPUTATION ALONE**

last-four stage.

Under a new captain, Wanindu Hasaranga, Sri Lanka would wish for a change of fortune in 2024. A recurring problem for Sri Lanka has

been its meek display against big teams. Not having to play the preliminary group stage this year, courtesy of a format change, will allow the side to focus on the crunch

### In charge: Leggie Wanindu

Hasaranga was named captain of Sri Lanka after missing the IPL to get fit in time for the T20 World Cup. AFP

games. In the last two editions, the first round had two groups of four, which included teams that entered the tournament through the qualifying pathway and teams that finished between ninth and 12th in the previous T20 World Cup.

However, this time, 20 teams will be divided into four groups of five in the first round, followed by a Super Eights phase.

The Sri Lankan unit is built around its bowling attack, which is tailor-made for the slower surfaces that are expected in the second round of the World Cup in the Caribbean. Tweakers Hasaranga and Maheesh Theekshana have had economy rates of 7.42 and 6.71, respectively, in T20Is since 2022. The pair, along with quicks Matheesha Pathirana and Dilshan Madushanka, will be vital in containing the opposition's scoring rate.

Sri Lanka would hope the rigours of captaincy in high-stake contests do not weigh down on Hasaranga's performances.

If the bowlers play their part, the experience of Angelo Mathews, Kusal Mendis, and Dasun Shanaka with the bat can take Sri Lanka over the line.

### The time is now for Bangladesh

Ending its series of near misses in the T20 World Cup will top Bangladesh's priority list.

It could have been in contention for a semifinal spot in 2022 if not for its agonising five-run reverse to India via the Duckworth-Lewis Stern Method. In 2016, Bangladesh missed the semifinal berth due to a one-run loss against the same opponent.

The Bangla Tigers have gone with experienced names like Soumya Sarkar, Litton Das, Mustafizur Rahman, and Taskin Ahmed in both batting and bowling departments. If Najmul Hossain Shanto, still relatively new as a full-time captain, can efficiently marshall his troops, Bangladesh will stay in the hunt for



the next round. A run to the Super 8, and eventually the semifinals, will also serve as the perfect farewell for its veteran duo of Shakib Al Hasan and Mahmudullah, both likely to be playing their final World Cup.

### Netherlands and Nepal will decide the qualifiers

The Netherlands and Nepal might not be in the race to advance to the next round, but their fixtures will decide the fate of the other three teams. No team would know it better than South Africa and Bangladesh.

The Netherlands showed it can punch above its weight in the 50-over World Cup when it beat South Africa and Bangladesh in the round-robin stage. Most names from that squad—Scott Edwards, Max O'Dowd, Logan van Beek and Bas de Leede—were retained for the T20 World Cup.

Nepal qualified for only its second T20 World Cup after finishing as runner-up in the Asian qualifiers behind Oman. Even though it is mostly against Associate nations, the Rohit Paudel-led side has shown a flair for the extraordinary.

Dipendra Singh Airee struck six

sixes in an over against Qatar in April, becoming only the third batter after Yuvraj Singh and Kieron Pollard to manage the feat in T20Is. During the 2023 Asian Games, Airee struck a nine-ball half-century against Mongolia to better Yuvraj's record for the fastest fifty.

In the same match, Nepal became the first team to score 300 runs or more in a T20I.

The bigger teams in the World Cup will be a tough test for Nepal, but its record over the last year has piqued viewer interest.

### Two teams that will qualify

South Africa and Sri Lanka: The sheer star power makes South Africa a favourite for the top spot. Sri Lanka is likely to edge past Bangladesh for second place, given its better head-to-head record in the recent encounters.

### Dark Horse

Of the three major teams, Bangladesh probably has the ideal blend of youth and experience. If it can have its best players on top of their game, Bangladesh might change its all-too-familiar tale of stumbling at crucial junctures.

# THREE STANDOUT PLAYERS



## HEINRICH KLAASEN

One of the most devastating hitters in T20 cricket right now, Klaasen will be among the most closely followed players at the T20 World Cup. His strike rate hovers around 160 in internationals, but he has shown he can go a couple of gears higher, striking at 186 in the Indian Premier League (IPL) and a whopping 208 in SA20.



## MATHEESHA PATHIRANA

The slingy right-arm quick cut short his IPL to recover from a hamstring injury, and Sri Lanka would want to wrap him in cotton wool till the start of the tournament. His economy rate of 8.24 in 19 innings at the death in IPL makes him a valuable asset.



## DIPENDRA SINGH AIREE

For all his feats over the past year, the limelight will fall on Dipendra Singh Airee and how he fares against the A-listers of international cricket.



## » CROSSWORD

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SOLUTION TO LAST FORTNIGHT'S CROSSWORD

#### ACROSS

- 1 Who holds the record for the highest individual score in an innings? (7)
- 3 Who is the only cricketer to win the Player of the Final award twice? (7)
- 5 Who did Yuvraj hit for six sixes in an over in the 2007 edition? (6)
- 7 Who is the only player to score a hundred for India? (5)
- 10 & 11 Who has officiated in most number of matches as an on-field umpire? (5,3)
- 12 & DOWN 15 Who is the only Indian player to take part in all previous eight editions. He, incidentally, figures in the current edition too? (5,6)
- 14 Who was the captain of Australia

when it won the tournament for the only time so far, in 2021? (5)

- 17 Who is the only player to score two hundreds in the history of the tournament so far, the most by any player? (5)
- 20 & DOWN 16 Who is the only bowler to pick six wickets in an innings? (7,6)
- 21 Who was the highest scorer in the 2009 edition? (7)

#### DOWN

- 1 Who was the first bowler to take a hat-trick in T20 World Cup? (5)
- 2 Who was the first player to represent two different countries in the tournament? (6)
- 3 Who holds the record for the most number of wickets in the tournament history? (6)

- 4 Which Indian player figured in only the 2007 edition and took two catches in the final? (9)
- 8 Who finished as the highest wicket taker in the last two editions? (9)
- 9 & ACROSS 19 Who is the only cricketer to win the Player of the Final and Player of the Series award in the same edition? (3,6)
- 13 & ACROSS 6 Who is the only player from a non-Test playing nation to pick five wickets in an innings? (5,5)
- 18 & 5 Who is the only player to win the Cup twice as captain? (5,5)



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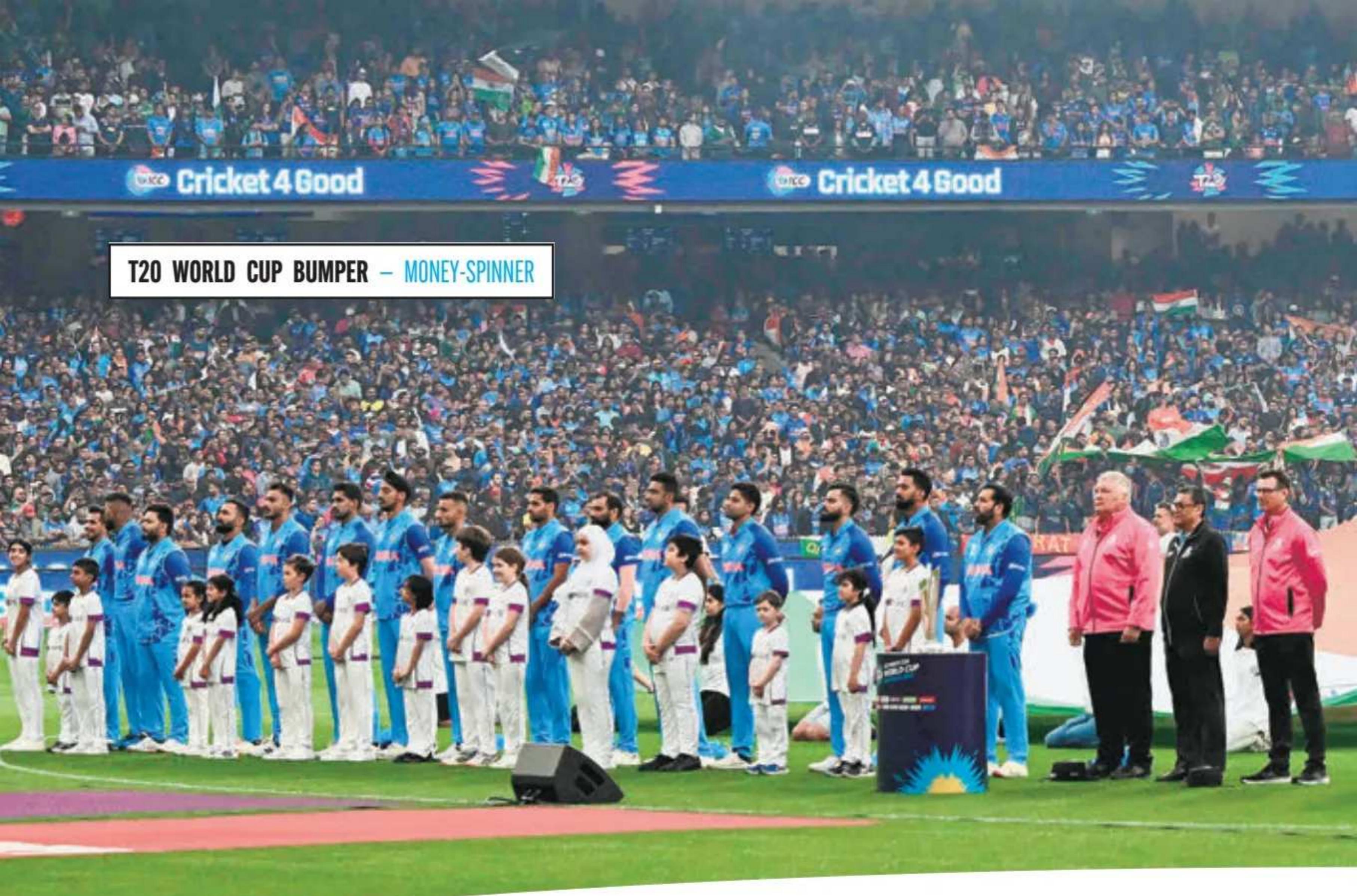
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T20 WORLD CUP BUMPER – MONEY-SPINNER

# India-Pakistan rivalry sets the cash registers ringing

The **limited opportunities** for India-Pakistan matches contribute to their significance as cultural events, driving engagement, media coverage, and commercial opportunities within the cricketing world and beyond.

Vinit Karnik  
[sportstar@thehindu.co.in](mailto:sportstar@thehindu.co.in)

**T**he Indian subcontinent significantly contributes to cricket's commercial value and fanbase, leading to high viewership and stadium attendance. India-Pakistan cricket matches, known for their intense rivalry since 1952, draw significant interest globally. These matches consistently generate high television ratings and viewership, attracting broadcasters, sponsors, and marketers seeking to engage a massive audience, including the diaspora.

Scheduling the India-Pakistan matches not only maximises viewer interest and commercial value for the

tournament but also generates revenue streams for advertising, broadcasting rights, sponsorship deals, ticket and merchandise sales, and sports tourism. These encounters consistently attract a large viewership on television and streaming platforms, boosting advertising revenue for broadcasters. They hold significant cultural importance for fans and the global South Asian diaspora, leading networks to prioritise coverage of these matches.

The "Mauka Mauka" ad campaign attempts to build anticipation for the



match but has been criticised by some for potentially perpetuating stereotypes. Ultimately, advertisers and broadcasters must strike a balance between creativity and cultural sensitivity to ensure their content resonates positively with the audience, avoiding any potential controversy. Due to the geopolitical situation, bilateral series between the two countries are infrequent.

Therefore, the rarity adds to the excitement whenever they meet in international tournaments. Brands capitalise on this by investing in advertising and sponsorships.

The limited opportunities for India-Pakistan matches also contribute to their significance as cultural events, driving engagement, media coverage, and commercial opportunities within the cricketing world and beyond.

The rivalry between India and Pakistan also engages fans emotionally, allowing advertisers to create memorable experiences and giving advertisers significant brand visibility. By aligning their ads with the

excitement of the rivalry, advertisers can enhance the viewer experience. They approach these matches with cultural sensitivity, aiming for ads that resonate positively with viewers. They also strive for innovation and creativity, using unique storytelling and celebrity endorsements. Determining the exact percentage of revenue generated by India-Pakistan matches compared to the entire revenue of a cricket World Cup cycle involves various factors like advertising rates, sponsorship agreements, ticket sales, and merchandise revenue.

India-Pakistan matches are highly sought-after by broadcasters worldwide, contributing significantly to broadcasting revenue. They also attract high viewership and

**Cynosure of all eyes:** India-Pakistan matches are highly sought-after by broadcasters worldwide, contributing significantly to broadcasting revenue. AFP

engagement, leading to premium advertising rates. Sponsors are keen on these matches, further boosting revenue.

Additionally, ticket sales and merchandise revenue from India-Pakistan matches are substantial due to fan demand. Overall, while it's challenging to provide an exact percentage, these matches play a crucial role in the financial success of a World Cup cycle.

**The author is Head — Sports, Esports and Entertainment — GroupM South Asia**

**« The "Mauka Mauka" ad campaign has been criticised by some for potentially perpetuating stereotypes »**

# RARING TO GO

The T20 World Cup has consistently been a platform for emerging talents to announce themselves on the global stage. Over the years, it has seen the rise of stars like Rohit Sharma, Carlos Brathwaite and Sam Curran. As we look forward to the 2024 edition, here are eight World Cup debutants who could light up this year's tournament.

Mayank

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## SHAMAR JOSEPH

Shamar Joseph's exploits in his debut series against Australia catapulted him to fame. The 24-year-old Guyanese bowled 12 overs straight in the Brisbane Test, taking 7/68 to help the West Indies secure its first Test win Down Under since 1997. Joseph's clean bowling action and precision in the 'right channel' have been assets in the longer format. However, with only three T20 matches under his belt, he has yet to prove his worth in the shorter format. Lucknow Super Giants named Joseph as the replacement for Mark Wood in the Indian Premier League 2024, where he played just one game, conceding 11.75 runs per over. He remains wicketless in T20s and has yet to make his T20I debut, but playing in familiar Caribbean conditions, his prospects appear promising.

## WILL JACKS

Will Jacks brings an X-factor to the English squad. At 25, Jacks has already played 165 T20 matches, amassing over 4000 runs at an impressive strike rate of 160. He has four centuries and 31 fifties in the shortest format. An aggressive top-order batter, Jacks is also a handy off-spinner, having taken 6/199 on his Test debut against Pakistan. Jacks has played in the SA20 and Bangladesh Premier League before featuring in IPL 2024, scoring centuries in all three leagues within three months. In 11 T20Is, he has 181 runs while striking at 150 with a highest score of 40. With England boasting top-order options like skipper Jos Buttler, Phil Salt, Jonny Bairstow, and Harry Brook, the inclusion of Jacks could add even more flamboyance to the 2022 T20 World Cup winners.



# YASHASVI JAISWAL

Yashasvi Jaiswal's inclusion in the Indian team ahead of regulars

like Shubman Gill, Ishan Kishan, and Shreyas Iyer is no longer a surprise.

Meeting the demands of modern T20 batting standards, Jaiswal was already in the reckoning for the 2022 T20 World Cup.

This time, pairing up with Rohit Sharma, a partner with whom he flourishes in the Indian jersey, the left-right combination could prove to be highly beneficial for India's cause.

Jaiswal was the gold medal-winning team member at the Asian Games 2023 in Hangzhou, China. He has amassed 2670 runs in 95 T20s and has scored three hundreds, including a century, against Nepal in 2023.

Although the flashy left-hander did not have a standout campaign in IPL 2024, his pedigree with the bat remains undeniable.



# RYAN RICKELTON

Ryan Rickleton's stance, shots, role, and position all evoke comparisons to Quinton de Kock. As a left-handed opener who also keeps wickets, Rickleton appears to be an ideal successor to de Kock, who is in the later stages of his international career.

Rickleton is among a handful of players set to partake in the T20 World Cup 2024 without any T20 international experience.

His exceptional form in domestic T20 championships in South Africa earned him this opportunity, where he was the leading run-scorer in the SA20 and second in the CSA T20 Challenge, which led to his national call-up in the T20Is. He has played four Tests and two ODIs for SA.

Despite his team, MI Cape Town, finishing at the bottom in the SA20, Rickleton scored 530 runs in 10 innings, with five fifties, at a strike rate of over 170.

With a middle order featuring some of the world's fiercest hitters – Heinrich Klaasen, Aiden Markram, Reeza Hendricks, and Tristan Stubbs – pairing Rickleton with de Kock at the top of the order seems like a perfect match for South Africa.



# MICHAEL BRACEWELL

Michael Bracewell is not a youngster; rather, he is a late bloomer, though cricket runs in his blood. Michael, the nephew of Brendon Bracewell and John Bracewell and cousin of Doug Bracewell, comes from a cricketing family.

Making his international debut in 2022 at the age of 31, Michael quickly established himself as a three-format player on the international circuit. Named the 2023 New Zealand Men's ODI Player of the Year, he scored a remarkable 140 off 78 balls against India in the Hyderabad ODI, nearly overshadowing Shubman Gill's double century.

The New Zealand spin-bowling all-rounder missed out on the ODI World Cup 2023 in India due to a ruptured right Achilles sustained while playing for Worcestershire in the T20 Blast.

In T20Is, Bracewell has taken 24 wickets in 21 matches and scored 167 runs at a strike rate of 125.

Recently, he led New Zealand in a five-match T20I series against Pakistan.



# MATHEESHA PATHIRANA

Matheesha Pathirana is a true new-age pacer. Part of the new crop of fast bowlers inspired by Sri Lankan legend Lasith Malinga, Pathirana, too, has a slingy action, which makes it awkward for the batters.

Pathirana, who has a knack for picking wickets, has a combined haul of 28 wickets in 12 ODIs and six T20Is.

Having played only six games for the Chennai Super Kings in IPL 2024, Pathirana managed 13 scalps, averaging only 13.00. His overall average in the shortest format is also under 20.

Pathirana's recent form bodes well for Sri Lanka, as he has not gone wicketless in his last 10 T20 matches, totalling 20 scalps.

At just 21, he forms a formidable pace trio with fellow youngsters, Nuwan Thushara and Dilshan Madushanka, for Sri Lanka in the T20 World Cup.



# SHIVAM DUBE

Shivam Dube has emerged as one of the most improved cricketers recently.

A powerful striker, he can serve as a floater for India in the World Cup, with his strong game against spinners well-suited to the conditions expected during the tournament.

With little to no foot movement, Dube modified his stance and bat flow to offset this aspect of his game.

He showed glimpses of his new approach during the Afghanistan T20I series in January, hitting two consecutive unbeaten half-centuries.

His impressive IPL campaign, where the 30-year-old was the second-highest run-getter for Chennai Super Kings after Ruturaj Gaikwad with 396 runs in 14 innings at a strike rate of over 160, also adds to his reputation as a key player in the middle order.



# GERALD COETZEE

Gerald Coetze is another exciting young talent regarded by many as the "next big thing" from South Africa.

Known for his toe-crushing yorkers and death bowling, Coetze stood out in the ODI World Cup 2023, where he was South Africa's highest wicket-taker with 20 scalps in eight games.

Despite his impressive ODI World Cup performance, Coetze has only 21 matches of experience across all three formats and is still finding his footing in international cricket.

The 23-year-old had a hot-and-cold IPL debut season, taking 13 wickets in 10 games but conceding runs at an economy rate of 10.17. His economy in T20 internationals also exceeds 10 RPO, though he often proves to be a reliable wicket-taker.

Coetze, alongside Kagiso Rabada, will spearhead the South African pace attack, which also includes Marco Jansen and debutant Ottniel Baartman.





## ON THE WRITE LINE

Sunil Gavaskar



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# YASH DAYAL'S REDEMPTION SHOWS WHY CRICKET IS A GREAT LEVELLER

The left-arm bowler's redemption arc was complete after he successfully defended 16 off the last over against CSK and helped RCB reach the playoffs.

If ever proof was needed that the game of cricket is a great leveller and can lift you to the skies and bring you down with a huge thump, and also the other way around, it was seen in the match between the defending champion Chennai Super Kings (CSK) and their southern neighbours Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

It was a virtual knockout game for both teams. RCB had to win within certain parameters of the net run rate to go ahead of CSK and qualify for the playoffs as the fourth team with Kolkata (Knight Riders), Rajasthan (Royals) and (Sunrisers) Hyderabad, who had already qualified for the three other slots. For CSK, if they lost the game in such a way that their net run rate would be one decimal point better than Bangalore's, they would be the fourth team in the playoffs.

So, when the last over of the game was to be bowled, with Chennai needing 17 runs to qualify, guess who was given the ball. Yash Dayal. Yes, the same Yash Dayal who had been smashed by Rinku Singh for five sixes last season when Kolkata needed 30 runs to win in the last over. When the first ball of the over went for a humongous six off the bat off the one and only M.S. Dhoni, the RCB fans must have thought,

"Oh no, here we go again". That's where Dayal showed he had learned from his Rinku Singh experience. Instead of looking to bowl the fast yorkers he bowled to Rinku, he delivered the back of the hand slower delivery this time, and even the 'Great' M.S. Dhoni was deceived by the slowness. Though the ball was in the slot, he couldn't generate enough power to take the ball over the ropes and was caught in the deep.

The next few were similar deliveries, and the batters swung and missed. It was redemption time, as only the game of cricket can provide, and more than the bowler himself, his family and close ones would have shed tears of joy. For their very own Yash had stopped not just any ordinary player but probably the greatest finisher in the game, MSD, and another accomplished match winner, Ravindra Jadeja, from spoiling the Bangalore dream once again.

Cricket has batters getting fluently to 99 but then struggling to get a century, and bowlers who have been walloped for five balls picking up a wicket off the final delivery of the over to show that it is a great leveller.

It is such a feel-good story, for when it came to crunch time again, the man who had been hammered last season got up after the first blow and stood triumphantly tall. Hopefully, this will



be just the beginning of a resurgence for Yash, and other bowlers who have been taken to the cleaners this season. They will see that there is always light at the end of the tunnel.

By the way, Rinku's massive effort wasn't credited to coach Chandu (Chandrakant) Pandit by anybody last season, like all the great efforts of Kolkata this season are being suggested as the influence of the current mentor and former skipper Gautam Gambhir. Of course, Gambhir himself will be the first to acknowledge that the credit can't go to any single individual, as he has been harping on about the 2011 World Cup finals win. Pandit is still the coach too and what it indicates is that the media will invariably give the bouquet to the person who is the more famous and marketable to get the eyeballs or optics, as it's called now while those who have also had a significant role to play will hardly, if ever, get a mention.

India starts its campaign for the ICC men's T20 World Cup against Ireland. With the captain,

**Turning the tide:** Hopefully, this will be just the beginning of a resurgence for Yash Dayal, and other bowlers who have been taken to the cleaners this season will see that there is always light at the end of the tunnel. PTI

vice-captain and key batter and bowlers' franchise being knocked out of the IPL, these players will get some quality time with their families before they embark on the World Cup. The fact that they have been playing in the same format should be a big help, as it should not take too long for them to get back into the rhythm.

Ireland cannot be taken lightly, as indeed any team in this ultra-short format of the game. The Indian team's effort must be to win big and try to intimidate their future opponents.

Indian fans have been waiting since 2007 for another T20 World Cup win — to echo the Bangalore franchise war cry, '*Ee Saala Cup Namde!*'



**The fact that Indian players have been playing in the same format should be a big help at the T20 World Cup, as it should not take too long for them to get back into the rhythm.**

» INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE  
PHOTOLINE



1st

**SKY-shots:** Suryakumar Yadav slammed a 51-ball hundred against Sunrisers Hyderabad to guide Mumbai Indians to a seven-wicket win at home.

EMMANUAL YOGINI



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2nd

**Waltzed:** Jake Fraser-McGurk smacked a 19-ball fifty — his third under 20 balls in the IPL — against Rajasthan Royals, setting up Delhi Capitals' 20-run win at home.

SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR





**3rd**

**Travishek:** Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma made a mockery of the 166-run chase against Lucknow Super Giants as the Sunrisers Hyderabad opening pair finished the game in just 9.4 overs.

M. VEDHAN



**4th**

**Into the Himalayas:** Virat Kohli scored a stellar 92 off 47 balls, including six maximums and seven fours, as Royal Challengers Bengaluru thrashed Punjab Kings by 60 runs in Dharamsala. R.V. MOORTHY



## 5th

**Opening salvo:** Shubman Gill and Sai Sudharsan recorded the joint-highest opening stand of 210 in IPL history as Gujarat Titans defeated Chennai Super Kings in Ahmedabad. VIJAYSONEJI



## 6th

**Stand and deliver:** Venkatesh Iyer's busy knock of 42 from 21 balls proved vital as Kolkata Knight Riders defended 158 runs against Mumbai Indians.

K. R. DEEPAK



## 7th

**Singh is King:** Simarjeet Singh rattled Rajasthan Royals' top order to set up Chennai Super Kings' five-wicket win at home. B.JOTHI RAMALINGAM



## 8th

**Green flag:** Cameron Green's economical spell of 1/19, following his 32-run cameo at the end of the innings, contributed significantly to the Royal Challengers Bangalore's 47-run victory over the Delhi Capitals.

K. BHAGYA PRAKASH



## 9th

**Eliminated:** Gujarat Titans was eliminated from playoff contention after its home match against Kolkata Knight Riders was called off due to rain. VIJAY SONEJI



## 10th

**Blitzkrieg:** Tristan Stubbs smacked a 25-ball 57 late in the innings to push Delhi Capitals' score past 200. He later picked up a wicket as Delhi successfully defended the 208-run target against Lucknow Super Giants.

R.V. MOORTHY



## 11th

### Leading from the front:

Sam Curran took two wickets against Rajasthan Royals before anchoring the 145-run chase, scoring an unbeaten 63 off 41 balls to lead the Punjab Kings to a five-wicket victory. AFP



## 12th

**Abandoned:** Rain played spoilsport as the match between Sunrisers Hyderabad and Gujarat Titans in Hyderabad was called off. The result confirmed SRH's berth in the playoffs. AP



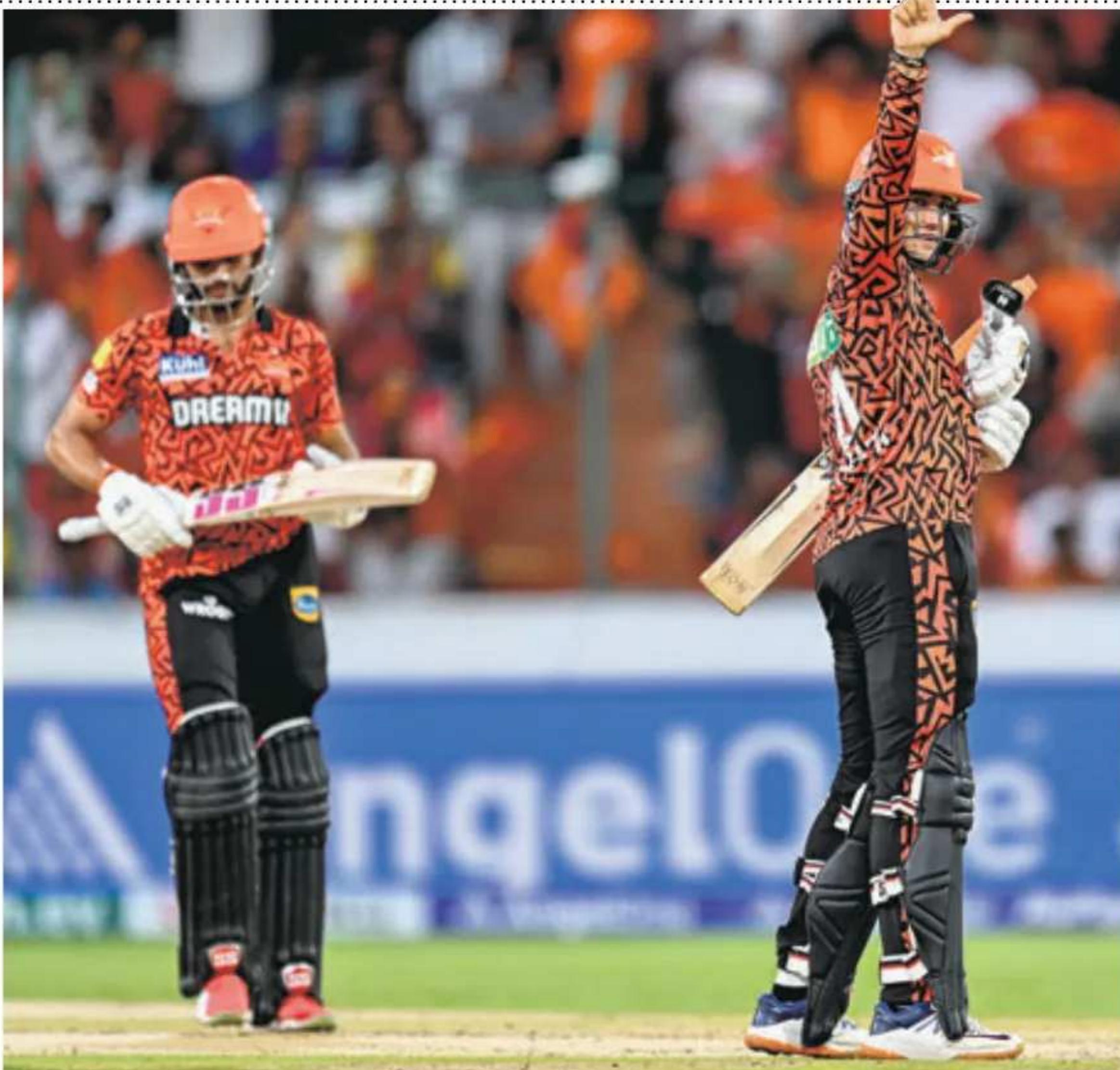
## 13th

**Slam-Bang:** Nicholas Pooran was in his element as he struck a 29-ball 75 with the help of eight sixes and five fours against Mumbai Indians. Lucknow Super Giants won the match by 18 runs. PTI



## 14th

**Jubilation:** Royal Challengers Bengaluru trumped Chennai Super Kings to qualify for the playoffs. It was also RCB's sixth consecutive win of the season. K. BHAGYA PRAKASH



## 15th

**Whirlwind:** It was just another day for Abhishek Sharma as he notched up his third fifty of the season as he took Sunrisers Hyderabad past Punjab Kings' 215-run target with ease. K.R. DEEPAK



## 16th

**Done and dusted:** The final league match of the season between Rajasthan Royals and Kolkata Knight Riders was called off due to rain in Guwahati. The result meant RR finished third in the points table. PTI



# England dominates in 3-0 series sweep against Pakistan

1

Amy Jones was adjudged player-of-the-series for her cameos lower down the order.

England Women registered a 3-0 clean sweep of Pakistan in a T20I series that saw the host win all three games by a comfortable margin after batting first. With 78 runs in three matches, Amy Jones

**(above)** was adjudged player-of-the-series for her cameos lower down the order. Danni Wyatt's 87, the top individual score of the series, powered England to a match-winning 176 in the final

game. While Pakistan suffered a humbling defeat, captain Nida Dar became the top wicket-taker in women's T20Is during the second game, surpassing Megan Schutt's tally of 136 scalps.



2

Playing each other in a T20I for the first time since the World T20 in 2009, Pakistan sealed the series win against Ireland after beating the host 2-1. Ireland's Harry Tector (**above**) shone with the bat (77) in the opener, helping his side secure its first T20 win against Pakistan. However, the visitor won the second game by seven wickets to level the series. In the decider, Shaheen Shah Afridi's 3/14 and quick half-centuries from Mohammad Rizwan and Babar Azam guided Pakistan to a six-wicket win.



3

The BCCI is planning to revamp the domestic cricket season, including changes to the Ranji Trophy schedule. A four-member working group, established to propose these changes, has recommended splitting the Ranji Trophy. The tournament could commence in October, with matches scheduled before and after the Vijay Hazare and Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophies. The working group has also suggested eliminating the zonal format for the Duleep Trophy, replacing it with four teams selected by the national selectors.



4

Cheteshwar Pujara, who plays for Sussex in County Championship Division Two, scored his first century of the season. After Derbyshire was bowled out for 246 in the first innings, Pujara's unbeaten 113 helped his side extend its lead to 111 runs. Sussex went on to win the match by an innings and 124 runs, its second win of the season. The Indian batter is currently Sussex's second-highest run-scorer this season, with 372 runs in eight innings at an average of 53.14.

GETTY IMAGES



5

James Anderson announced his retirement from Test cricket, bringing an end to an illustrious 22-year-long international career. The 41-year-old pacer, who made his Test debut in 2003 at Lord's, will feature in his last match in July when England faces West Indies in a three-match Test series. Currently, he holds the record for the most wickets by a pace bowler in Test cricket history with 700 scalps, which he achieved during the final day of England's Test tour of India earlier this year.



6

Bangladesh won four out of five T20Is against Zimbabwe to secure a series win. Najmul Hossain Shanto's side won the first four games on the trot to set up a comfortable lead against the visitor. Zimbabwe, which did not qualify for the T20 World Cup 2024, denied the host a clean sweep by bouncing back in the fifth game. Skipper Sikandar Raza's unbeaten 72 and an all-round performance by Brian Bennett (70(49), 2/22) helped Zimbabwe grab a consolation win.

AFP

« Impact Player rule is quite confusing; shifts focus from 11 players »

# SAM CURRAN

**Shayan Acharya**

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**E**ngland's Sam Curran is highly valued in global franchise leagues for his all-round skills. Despite a challenging season as captain for Punjab Kings in this year's IPL — PBKS didn't reach the playoffs for the 10th season in a row — the 25-year-old remains optimistic.

The 2022 T20 World Cup Player of the Tournament shares his thoughts on England's prospects in the upcoming ICC event and discusses the Impact Player rule in the IPL with *Sportstar*.

**You took over the reins from injured Shikhar Dhawan midway through this IPL season. How do you sum up your team's campaign?**

Taking over halfway was always going to be a challenge, but I think it was an experience I didn't want to turn down. Unfortunately, the results haven't been what we would have liked. But we played some excellent cricket in patches. We just haven't got those close points you need. Overall, it was a very frustrating result, but you always have to look at the positives when you are losing.

You have to make sure you keep getting better at those things. The

group has been fantastic, and the energy in the camp has been really good.

**When you look back and reflect, is there anything that you could have done differently?**

That reflection will probably be done sometime after the tournament, but hindsight is a fantastic thing. You always look back and think, 'Oh, I wish we had done that.'

We batted well in some games, and we bowled well in others. But we just haven't put those perfect few games together with the bat, ball, and field.

But that's the sport. That's why we play this great game where you learn from losses, and take confidence from good performances. I always like to look forward.

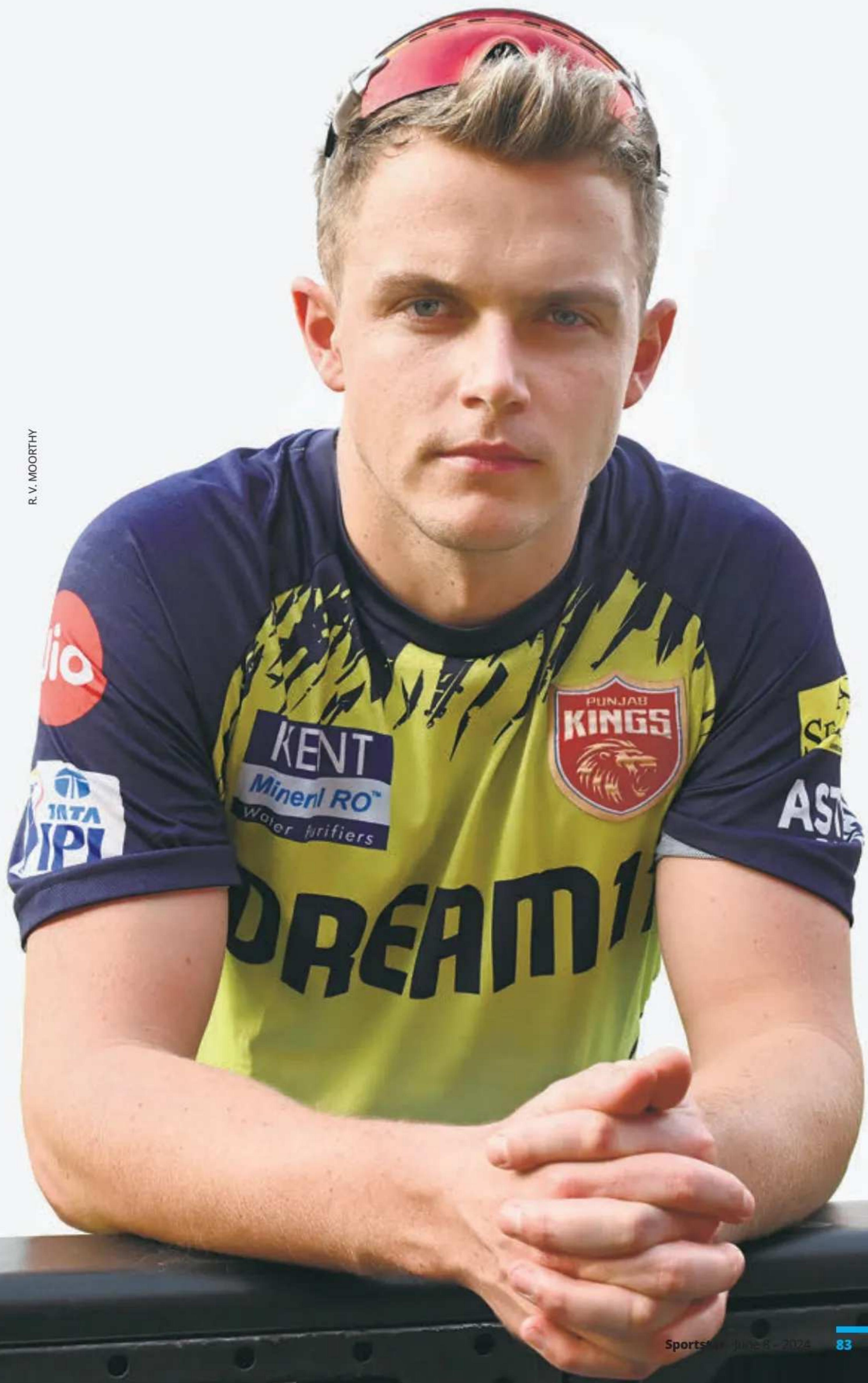
**How much has the IPL changed over the last couple of years with the Impact Player rule?**

I guess the fans and people watching at home would love to just keep seeing lots of sixes, but I think the Impact Player rule has made a huge difference. With the bat, it allows players to go fractionally more attacking at the top of the order because they know if it doesn't

go to plan, you are most likely to just bring in that extra batter at No. 7 or 8. In a way, it has probably helped the scores and how the players are playing, but vice versa, if you bat well, it allows an extra bowler to be in when you are defending. So, there are pros and cons for each team. I think it does make it quite confusing, as it shifts the focus from 11 players and requires more tactical analysis. The rule has been here for a couple of seasons. Who knows what they will do with it? But it certainly has increased the scoring. The way batsmen are developing has been fantastic to watch, but the challenge of keeping it fair between the bat and the ball will always be a debate.

**Since the game seems tilted towards the batters now, how does a bowler approach tricky situations?**

You've got to watch the batsmen. They are finding different ways to attack the bowlers. The grounds in India offer some really good batting wickets. There's also the dew factor. As bowlers, you've got to keep challenging yourself in training. You need to start experimenting with different kinds of deliveries. You want to be in those moments —defending totals for your team. It





**Stepping up:** Sam Curran stood in as Punjab Kings captain in the absence of Shikhar Dhawan, who missed majority of the games in this IPL due to a shoulder injury. R.V. MOORTHY

might not always work, but you can reap great rewards from doing that.

I just hope the game keeps developing in a fair way. The IPL is such a great tournament, so everyone wants to see lots of runs. That said, there's nothing better than some good bowling as well. It's been a fantastic competition in that regard.

**In this edition, teams scoring 240-plus has become the norm. So, from a bowler's point of view, how crucial is mental conditioning?**

Yeah, the mental aspect is very

important. The IPL is a long tournament; there are lots of games, both home and away. You just have to look at a team like RCB (Royal Challengers Bengaluru) and see how they've found some rhythm in the last couple of games.

You have always got to keep believing when you have a bad day. You wake up the next day, stay positive, and keep your mindset good. As a captain, I have tried to keep the mood in the camp positive.

The management does that as well. We've lost some games, some close ones as well, and that can be quite tough because you play some good cricket and still lose. Each team has such good players, so the tournament is even. Anyone can beat anyone on their day. That's the fantastic thing about the tournament. It's just about winning

those crucial moments. You just have to keep believing that things will turn around and that you're there for a reason.

Sometimes, if you do have a tough day, don't be too hard on yourself because there are a lot of games to come.

**As captain, how did you handle the challenge of Punjab Kings losing six out of seven home games in Mullanpur and Dharamshala, especially given the absence of Dhawan?**

Of course, our home record hasn't been amazing. It was just putting together that perfect game we struggled with, particularly at home. I wouldn't say it's got to do anything with the home ground or the home conditions. It's fair for both teams on the same day; unfortunately, we just

didn't put in the best performances on those days. But then we went away and got good wins in Kolkata and Chennai.

That's just the nature of T20 cricket and the IPL, where anyone can beat anyone. There are a lot of positive signs to move forward when the team comes back to play at the home stadium next year.

**Punjab Kings has one of the most formidable fast bowling line-ups, comprising Chris Woakes, Kagiso Rabada, Arshdeep Singh, Harshal Patel, and you. With the game going the batters' way, what were the conversations that the bowling group had while preparing for the games?**

We have been quite lucky this year, as we have had a nice contingent of fast bowlers and even some of the guys that haven't played—you look at Woakes, who has such experience. It's been really good to be able to chat with each other and, when we are training, learn from each other.

That's the great thing about the IPL—you can pick each other's brains. I have chatted quite a bit with Arshdeep about left-arm bowling and the little things we can work on

together. Harshal's coming in as an experienced player for our team has been fantastic. He has been in a really good rhythm over the last few games. KG (Rabada) is one of the world's best bowlers in all formats. So, he has been great to be around. A lovely guy who's keen to share ideas and is very positive.

**The T20 World Cup is around the corner. The wickets in the US are untested, whereas the ones in the West Indies could be slightly slower. As a fast bowler, how do you plan to adapt to the conditions?**

We don't play in the US since our group (Group B) is in the Caribbean. The wickets are different at each venue. There are some very high winds there as well, which could be a factor when you're bowling.

Some surfaces might turn a little bit, so you can use your slower balls and use the pitch, whereas some grounds will be a bit smaller with high winds. We just adjust to the conditions on the day. We've got a very experienced bowling attack, and we will have our plans. There are so many good teams; it'll be tough to pick the winner right away.

**Being the defending champion, surely there will be a lot of expectations from England...**

Going into another World Cup year is hugely exciting. We are defending champions, and we take a lot of confidence from that. We have a few games against Pakistan to prepare for the World Cup, and it will be really good for the team to come together after a long time apart.

We are going to play in the Caribbean, which is a fantastic place to play cricket. But it's a World Cup, where you have to take one game at a time. That's what we did well in Australia last time when we won it. I am sure the messaging will be very similar. Everyone starts with zero points.

Whoever adjusts best to the conditions will have an advantage. We will be ready for our first game when it comes in early June. Expectations are always going to be there for a team like England — from all big teams, for that matter. India is a very strong team, as are South Africa and Australia. The West Indies, the home nation, are a fantastic team as well. Come the end of June, and we will be up at the final, fingers crossed.

REUTERS



◀ Come the end of June, and we will be in the T20 World Cup final, fingers crossed ▶

**Imola inspiration:** Max Verstappen (centre) with second-placed McLaren's Lando Norris (left) and third-placed Ferrari's Charles Leclerc (right). AFP

# RED BULL STAYS STEADY AS CHALLENGERS EDGE CLOSER

Max Verstappen claimed his fifth win of the season at Imola after fending off a strong late challenge from Lando Norris, signalling potential **increased competition** for Red Bull.

Dipak Ragav

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**M**ax Verstappen restored normalcy at the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix with his fifth win of the season after an upset defeat at the previous round in Miami. However, for the first time this season, the reigning champion was made to work for it and had to stave off a late charge from McLaren's Lando Norris.

Earlier this year, Carlos Sainz and Ferrari gave some excitement to the season by winning the Australian GP after two years of Red Bull dominance. Granted, Verstappen retired from the race due to a technical issue, but Ferrari showed enough pace that weekend for Sainz to possibly prevail even if the Dutchman had been in the race. The three-time champion hit back strongly, producing dominant performances in Japan and China.

But in Miami, McLaren brought a range of upgrades that helped Norris take his maiden Grand Prix win and close the gap. Yes, he rode his luck with the timing of the Safety Car, but the fact that Verstappen couldn't challenge him after racing resumed showed that McLaren had made good steps.

In Imola, the Red Bull was on the backfoot from the start of the free practice session on Friday. But the reigning champion has such

a good understanding of the car that the team was able to troubleshoot itself out of a hole. Verstappen showed why he is considered the best of his generation, as he grabbed pole position by a slim margin over McLaren's Oscar Piastri.

On Sunday, Verstappen led from the front, ahead of Norris, who started second, following a three-place penalty to his teammate Piastri for impeding another car during qualifying.

As always, the Red Bull pulled away from the pursuing pack, building up a couple of seconds of lead over Norris, Leclerc, Sainz, and Piastri. At this stage, it appeared it would be another straightforward weekend for Verstappen.

However, it was not until the race's closing stages that things became interesting, as Norris slowly chipped away at Verstappen's lead, which was as high as five seconds at one point. In a matter of a few laps, Norris came within 1.5 seconds of Verstappen before running out of laps to cross the line just



## In the battle for second place, Ferrari has a healthy lead over McLaren for now (187 vs 124), but the latter has turned up the heat on the Italian giant over the last two weekends.



seven-tenths of a second behind. Norris felt that if the race had been a lap longer, he could have tried a move on Verstappen.

Though Red Bull prevailed, McLaren's ability to give the championship leader a run for its money for the second event in a row portends positive signs for the championship's competitiveness.

As McLaren celebrated another positive weekend, missing a win by a whisker, the battle for second is also slowly heating up. For now, Ferrari has a healthy lead over McLaren (187 vs. 124), but the latter has turned up the heat on the Italian giant over the last two weekends. Ferrari pinned hopes on the upgrades it brought to Imola to take the fight to Red Bull but underperformed in front of the adoring Tifosi. The Scuderia qualified behind the two McLarens and, in the race, struggled to give the British team any trouble as Leclerc trailed Norris. The other Ferrari of Sainz lost fourth place to Piastri at the pit stops.

While Leclerc gave something to

the fans by finishing third, there will be a lot of introspection back in Maranello. The good news was that the gap to Red Bull seemed to have come down, and fans will hope these two teams can keep the energy drinks giant honest in the coming races to breathe some excitement back into the sport.

### Moto GP

Prima Pramac rider Jorge Martin broke clear of reigning champion Francesco Bagnaia with a double in the French GP at Le Mans. The Spaniard secured pole position and won the Sprint and Grand Prix to extend his championship lead to 38 points. But the big winner this weekend was Marc Marquez, who starred on both days following a disappointing qualifying in which he was only 13th fastest but managed to finish second in both events.

Martin cruised to victory in the Sprint race after factory Ducati rider Bagnaia got a poor start and fell down the order on the opening lap. The Italian eventually retired from

**Gap is closing:** Though Red Bull prevailed, McLaren's ability to give the championship leader a run for its money for the second event in a row portends positive signs for the championship's competitiveness. AP

the race, gifting 15 points to his title rival.

On Sunday, Bagnaia made amends to snatch the lead from pole-sitter Martin at the start and keep his position for two-thirds of the race. Martin made an overtake eight laps before the chequered flag, but the two-time champion reclaimed it within a few corners. On the next lap, Martin decisively got the job done on the Ducati rider to seal his second win of the season. Meanwhile, Marquez charged from 13th place and caught up to the top two in the closing stages of the lap. On the last lap, the seven-time champion made an opportunistic move on Bagnaia to pinch his second place of the weekend.



# GUARDIOLA'S 'FOUR'-SIGHT TRUMPS KLOPP'S CURTAIN CALL

Manchester City capped off an exciting Premier League season with their **fourth consecutive title**, staving off a stern challenge from Arsenal.

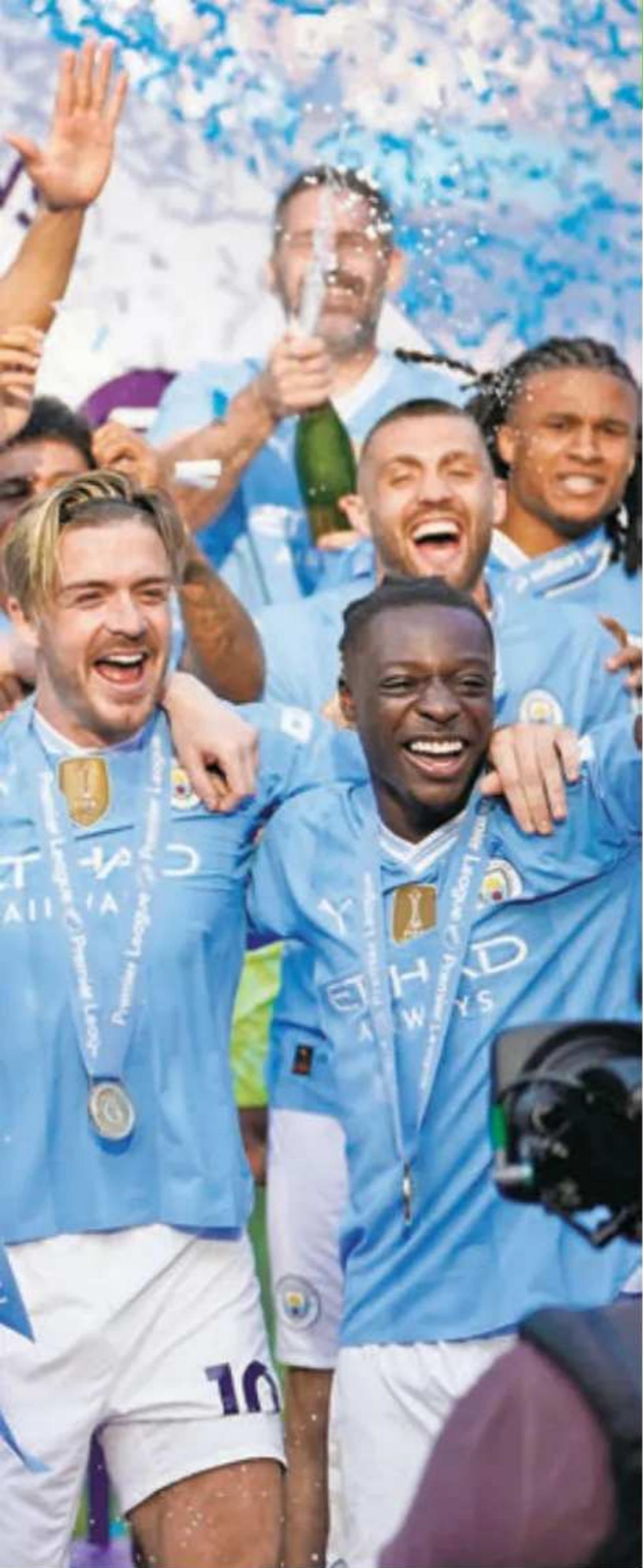


FOR MORE STORIES

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**E**arlier this year, an image of an inscription on Manchester City's dressing room wall surfaced online. The writing read, 'No team has ever won four consecutive Premier League titles...yet.'

Months later, fans at the Etihad Stadium witnessed an exhilarating, yet familiar sight as Kyle Walker lifted the Premier League trophy after City beat West Ham United on the final matchday, making it a historic four on the trot for City. The 2023-24 season also saw a record-breaking 1,246 goals being



**Champions once again:** City had to wait till the final day to seal the title after beating West Ham 3-2. **RIGHT, BELOW:** An ecstatic Pep Guardiola celebrates with Phil Foden, who was declared Player of the Season. Pics: AP

scored, 24 more than the previous tally set in 1992-93.

If there is one word to describe Manchester City since Pep Guardiola's arrival in 2016, it would be 'inevitable'. Even as Mikel Arteta's Arsenal set the club's season record of 28 wins, City beat the London side by two points.

Coming off a historic treble-winning campaign, City began its title defence with six wins in six, before succumbing to consecutive

defeats against Wolves and Arsenal. It then dropped 11 points out of a possible 18 in November-December and tumbled to fourth place by Christmas.

What followed was a phenomenon that football fans have become accustomed to, as City went on a 23-game unbeaten streak to retain the crown.

Meanwhile, Arsenal's chances took a hit when it lost to West Ham and Fulham in three days midway through the season. The final nail in the coffin was hammered by Aston Villa, which beat the Gunners 2-0 at the Emirates in April.

#### Fabulous Foden

The departure of captain Ilkay Gundogan and an injury to midfield maestro Kevin De Bruyne in the season opener brought the spotlight on local hero Phil Foden. The English youngster took the opportunity on the chin and recorded his career-best goals (19) and assists (8) tally, eventually winning the Premier League Player of the Season award.

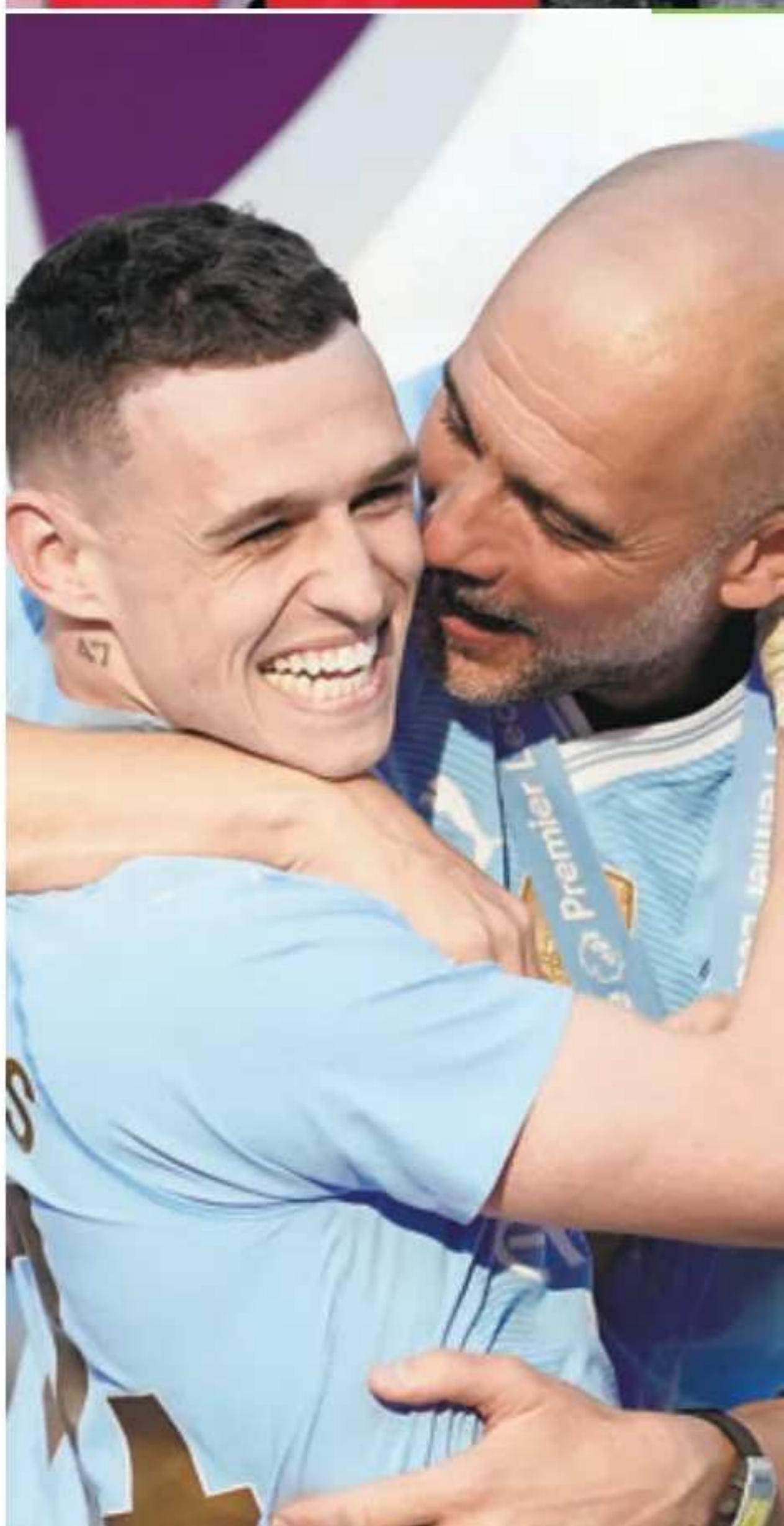
Erling Haaland once again proved to be a menace for the opposition in front of goal, netting 27 goals and securing his second successive Golden Boot in what pundits considered a 'disappointing' campaign for the Norwegian.

#### Not a fairytale ending for Klopp

There was a point in the season when Liverpool was in contention to secure a quadruple, which would have made it a magical conclusion to a monumental nine-year reign by Jurgen Klopp (**above**) at the Merseyside club.

However, after his bombshell announcement in late January that he was stepping down as Liverpool manager, the team won the League Cup before crashing out of the FA Cup against Manchester United and the Europa League against Atalanta.

Liverpool kept pace with Man City and Arsenal at the top of the league table until its shocking defeats to Crystal Palace and city-rival Everton. Klopp's hope for a final title eventually subsided as it settled for third place.





**So near, yet so far:** Mikel Arteta's (below) Arsenal set the club's season record of 28 wins, but it wasn't enough as losses to West Ham, Fulham and Aston Villa ruined their title chances. Pics: GETTY IMAGES

Nevertheless, the German manager will leave Anfield having delivered Liverpool its first league title in 30 years in 2020, a year after leading the team to Champions League glory.

#### 'Good Evenings' for Villa in Europe

Spaniard Unai Emery took over relegation-threatened Aston Villa in 2022 and led it to the UEFA Europa Conference league in his first season. Villa strengthened its squad ahead of the 2023-24 season by bringing in players like Pau Torres, Moussa Diaby and Youri Tielemans.

Villa managed to rejig the 'big six' in the league and cemented itself in fourth position, guaranteeing a spot in next year's revamped Champions League, marking its first appearance in the competition in 41 years.

Villa's standout player of the season was Ollie Watkins who spearheaded the attack with 19 goals and 13 assists, bagging the Playmaker award at the end of the season.

#### Chelsea, Tottenham and Manchester United struggle

Despite spending a ludicrous amount of money over the

previous three transfer windows, Chelsea performed below average in the first half of the season.

Former Man City man Cole Palmer was Chelsea's lone bright spot as he registered 22 goals and 11 assists, the highest in the league. His performance earned him the Premier League Young Player of the Season award, helping his side stage a late turnaround.

Chelsea finished in sixth place, three points above Newcastle and Manchester United, who are in seventh and eighth respectively.

Tottenham got off to a flying start under newly appointed Ange Postecoglou, going unbeaten in the first 10 games.

The optimistic start was undone after it managed to get only one point from the next five games (four losses and one draw).

Spurs ended the season in fifth place, securing Europa League football for next season.

While Manchester United manager Erik Ten Hag described his side as one of most "entertaining" in the league, the Red Devils' season ended with their worst

Premier League finish (8th).

Ten Hag's men also ended the campaign with a negative goal difference (-1) for the first time in the side's history.

#### Dyche to the rescue

Everton became the first team in the top flight of English football to receive two separate points deductions in a single campaign for breaching the profit and sustainability rules.

With a drop into the Championship looming, manager Sean Dyche inspired his side to 13 wins, including its first Merseyside derby victory against Liverpool at Goodison Park in more than 13 years. Despite an eight-point deduction, the Toffees ended the season 14 points clear of the relegation zone.

#### Premier League too strong for Championship teams

Luton Town, Burnley and Sheffield United were relegated to the Championship, making it only the second time in Premier League history that all three promoted clubs were relegated, after Bolton Wanderers, Barnsley and Crystal Palace did the same in 1997-98.

» FROM THE  
WORLD OF FOOTBALL



1

**Bayer 'Neverluseñ'**

Xabi Alonso's (centre) all-conquering Bayer Leverkusen went the entire Bundesliga season unbeaten, racking up 28 wins and six draws in 34 matches. This was just the third instance of a club from Europe's top five leagues completing an 'invincible' season after Arsenal (2003-04) and Juventus (2011-12).

2 **FIFA**

**WWC heads to Brazil**

Brazil was declared the host of the 2027 Women's World Cup after receiving the most votes in a ballot by the FIFA Congress, beating the joint bid of Belgium, Netherlands and Germany. It was the first instance of member nations being allowed to vote for the host which was previously decided by the FIFA council.



AP



3

**Fitting farewell for Hayes**

Mayra Ramirez scored twice as Chelsea routed Manchester United 6-0 to clinch its fifth straight Women's Super League title in a triumphant sendoff for manager Emma Hayes (centre). Chelsea and Manchester City entered Saturday's final round level on points, but the London club sealed the win on goal difference after City beat Aston Villa 2-1.

AP



4

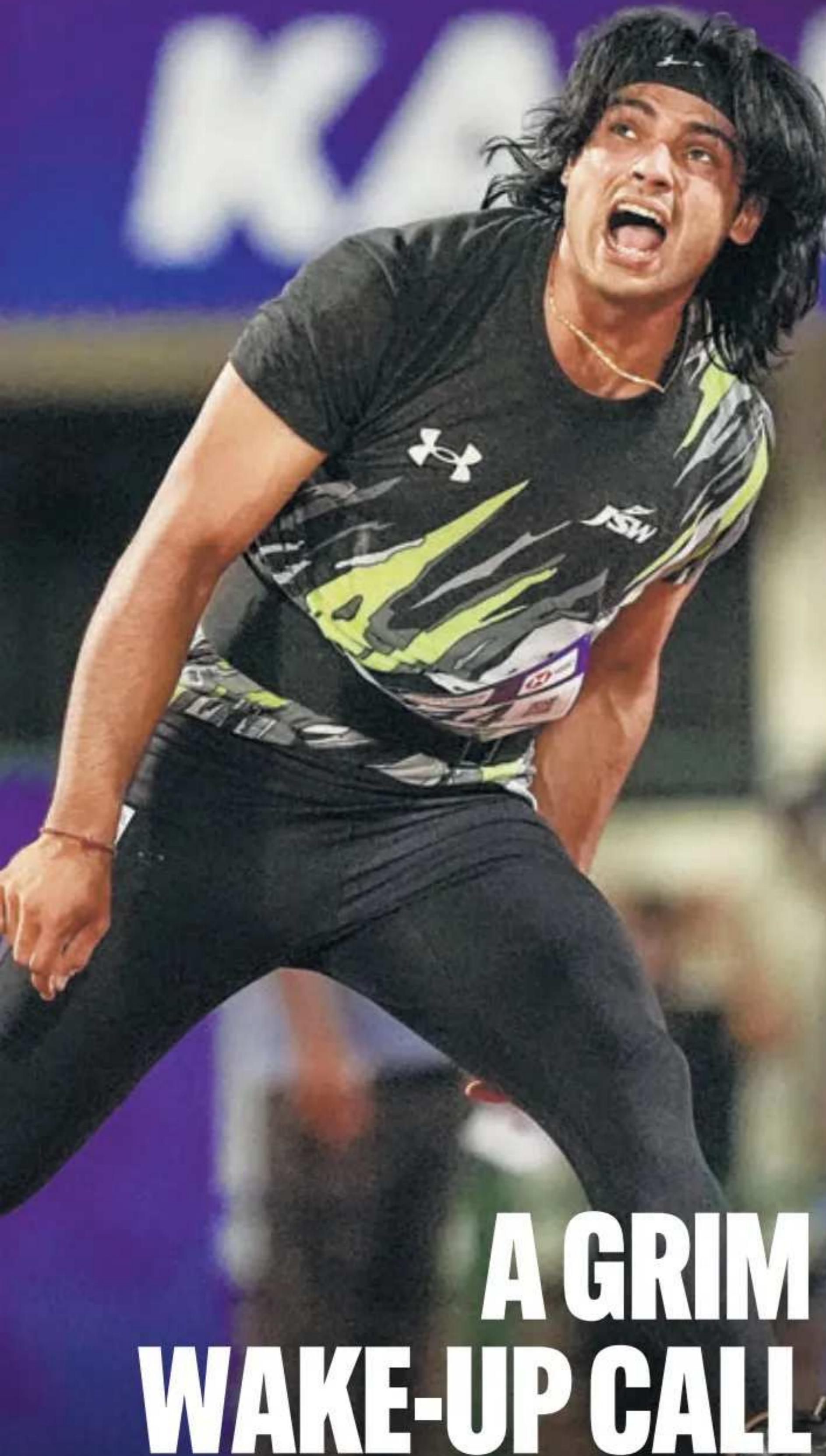
**Allegri loses the plot**

Juventus beat Atalanta to win its 15th Coppa Italia title, its first trophy in three years, but the night ended on a sour note after manager Massimiliano Allegri (centre) was sent off for his tussle with officials. Post match, he clashed with the director of an Italian newspaper, forcing the club to sack him for being 'incompatible with the values of Juventus'.

REUTERS

Anish Pathiyil

» ATHLETICS  
FEDERATION CUP



## AGRIM WAKE-UP CALL

The 27th Federation Cup at Kalinga Stadium saw Neeraj Chopra's homecoming, but **not a single athlete** met the Olympic qualification standards.

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**T**he 27th Federation Cup, held at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar from May 12 to 15, could have been one of the most memorable domestic athletics meetings in recent times, setting the tone for the upcoming Paris Olympics.

The entry list had a certain Neeraj Chopra amongst the participants for the men's javelin throw. The 26-year-old, India's only Olympic and World Champion in track and field, had confirmed he would take part in an event on home soil for the first time in three years.

It raised the profile of the meet and also drew attention towards those still chasing the Olympic standard in other events with less than two months remaining in the qualification cycle.

Neeraj turned up for the event less than a week after his season-opener in Doha where he finished second with 88.36m throw in the Diamond League meeting. A police vehicle escorted the star as he arrived for a light training session two hours before his event on the final day.

Considering the European competitions he is set to take part in, as he prepares for Paris, Neeraj did not push himself unnecessarily, but still won gold with his fourth and last throw of 82.27m in front of nearly two thousand spectators. He happily obliged requests for autographs and selfies too.

"It was a great feeling to compete in India after a long time. I'm happy to see so many people turning up to watch athletics," he said afterwards.

While Neeraj's homecoming did make a mark, the fact that no athlete in the capital of Odisha managed to book a spot for the Summer Games was disappointing.

In javelin itself, silver medallist Manu DP (82.06m) fell well short of the entry mark of 85.50m for Paris. Home

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**Leading the way:** Neeraj Chopra did not push himself unnecessarily but still won gold with his fourth and last throw of 82.27m. PTI



BISWARANJAN ROUT

favourite Kishore Jena, who booked his spot for Olympics with his silver medal-winning performance at the Hangzhou Asian Games, finished fifth with 75.49m. Jena opened his season along with Neeraj in Doha but there too, he could only produce 76.31m.

For many Olympic aspirants, the domestic outdoor season began with individual meets for 400m, jumps, and throws in March, followed by select events at the Indian Grand Prix-I on April 30.

Come the Federation Cup, the athletes were expected to at least get closer to the entry standards for Paris. And the strategy was to follow it up by gaining confidence through some overseas exposure before hitting one's stride at the National

Inter-State Championships from June 27 to 30 in Panchkula.

The conditions leading up to the competition were not ideal — the maximum temperature was hovering around 40 degrees and the humidity was considerably high. But the heavy downpour on the night before the opening day made things much better.

The 400m hurdlers were in focus on day one. T. Santhosh Kumar (above; centre), who finished sixth at the Asian Games and has a Personal Best (PB) of 49.09s, clinched gold but clocked 50.04s. R. Vithya Ramraj, the joint National Record-holder with the legendary P. T. Usha at 55.42s, pulled out at the start of the women's final with a back issue and Punjab's



LISTEN TO THE  
PODCAST



**Nayana James (right) defeated Shaili Singh for the top spot in women's long jump. But both were well short of the 6.86 mark for Paris.**



K. R. DEEPAK



**Frontrunners:** In sprints, 200m winners — Animesh Kujur and Unnathi Aiyappa Bolland (in pic, left) — showed great potential and are bright prospects for the future. PTI

## NATIONAL RECORD-HOLDER JESWIN ALDRIN COULD ONLY PRODUCE 7.99M ON HIS WAY TO THE GOLD MEDAL DESPITE PLEASANT CONDITIONS

Veerpal Kaur (59.43s) emerged as the winner.

Abha Khatua claimed sole ownership of the National Record in women's shot put on the second day. Abha, who equalled Manpreet's Kaur effort of 18.06m in Asian Championships in July last year, went past it with a throw of 18.41m in the fifth round. The 28-year-old, who switched from gliding to rotation technique in 2022, is still well short of the automatic qualification mark of 18.80m for the Paris Olympics.

A day later, Asian Record-holder

Tajinderpal Singh Toor took the gold in men's event with 20.38m, well below his personal best of 21.77m set at the same competition last year in June.

Toor, who recorded four foul throws, said he has some fitness issues due to which he will not go for competitions outside India but is confident of achieving the 21.50m mark required to qualify for Olympics at the National Inter-State Championships.

The jumpers failed to live up to their billing. In the absence of M

Sreeshankar, who had already qualified for Paris but will be unable to take part due to injury, Jeswin Aldrin is expected to represent the nation in men's long jump. He is the National Record-holder at 8.42m. However, the 22-year-old from Tamil Nadu could only produce 7.99m on his way to the gold medal despite pleasant conditions.

In the women's event, an exciting contest was expected between the experienced Nayana James of Kerala and Uttar Pradesh's young Shaili Singh.

While Nayana had won the Indian Open in March with a PB of 6.67m, Shaili had clinched gold at IGP-1 in Bengaluru with 6.52m. Nayana (6.53m) defeated Shaili (6.34m) for the top spot on the podium in Bhubaneswar but to achieve 6.86m, the mark for Paris, both of them need to do much better.

Praveen Chithravel, the National Record-holder in men's triple jump at



**Falling short:** Tajinderpal Singh Toor took the gold in men's event with 20.38m, well below his personal best of 21.77m. K.R. DEEPAK

17.37m, hoped to take inspiration from the presence of one of his biggest supporters in Neeraj but his gold medal-winning effort was just 16.79m. Praveen had a 17.12m jump during IGP-1, just 10cm short of the qualifying mark for Paris, and he is capable of covering that gap in the next one-and-a-half month.

In sprints, Animesh Kujur and Unnathi Aiyappa Bolland showed great potential and are bright prospects for the future.

Most members of the men's and women's 4x400m relay teams, which qualified for Paris Olympics during the World Relays event in The Bahamas, participated in Bhubaneswar to stay in competition mode ahead of the Asian Relay Championships in Bangkok where

they'll aim to do well and qualify for the mixed relay also.

With the exception of Neeraj, big names such as hurdler Jyothi Yarraj, high jumper Tejaswin Shankar, javelin thrower Annu Rani, and steeplechasers Avinash Sable and Parul Chaudhary who missed the Federation Cup either due to training or competing abroad, will have to turn up for the National Inter-State Championships, which is a mandatory event.

During a press conference on the penultimate day of the event, Athletics Federation of India President Adille Sumariwalla said, "So far 20 have qualified directly, including the relay teams, for the Olympics."

Some will qualify through the rankings. We hope by the time the qualification period closes, 35 of our athletes would have qualified." The Federation Cup performances are a wake-up call if India intends to send a big athletics contingent to Paris.

#### Olympic Qualification Standards

Event	Men	Women
100m	10s	11.07s
200m	20.16s	22.57s
400m	45.00s	50.95s
800m	1:44.70s	1:59.30s
1500m	3:33.50s	4:02.50s
5000m	13:05.00s	14:52.00s
10000m	27:00.00s	30:40.00s
110m/100m hurdles	13.27s	12.77s
400m hurdles	48.70s	54.85s
3000m Steeplechase	8:15.00s	9:23.00s
High Jump	2.33m	1.97m
Pole Vault	5.82m	4.73m
Long Jump	8.27m	6.86m
Triple Jump	17.22m	14.55m
Shot Put	21.50m	18.80m
Discus Throw	67.20m	64.50m
Hammer Throw	78.20m	74.00m
Javelin Throw	85.50m	64.00m
Decathlon/Heptathlon	8460 points	6480 points
20km Race Walk	1:20:10s	1:29:20s
Marathon	2:08:10s	2:26:50s

# THE PARENTAL EDGE

Indian shooters' parents play a crucial role in their success, significantly contributing to their emotional and mental well-being.

**Jonathan Selvaraj**

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**M**anu Bhaker didn't show any emotion after shooting a disappointing 93 in her first series in the 10m air pistol event of the third Olympic selection trials. Neither did her coach, Jaspal Rana, who watched from the spectator gallery of the MP Shooting Academy in Bhopal, as she dropped to last place early in the contest.

Manu's mother, Sumedha Bhaker, couldn't deal with the stress, though. "Mere se dekha nahi jayega (I won't be able to see this)," she muttered as she rushed out of the range.

While waiting outside, she mouthed prayers and scribbled furiously into a notebook, only to return at the end of the qualification round, by which time Manu had come through in first place with 577 points.

Sumedha wasn't the only nervous parent in Bhopal. While she left the venue, unable to watch her daughter compete, the other parents tried their best to hide their nerves.

Sujit Sen, father of Tilottama Sen, says he hides behind walls so that she won't see him while shooting in the 10m air rifle event.

"I don't want her to turn around and see me. If I show any worry

on my face, it could end up disturbing her. So, I usually just stay 180 degrees behind her to avoid coming into her peripheral vision," he says.

These parents have gone out of their way to ensure that their children have the best possible system in place for the competition.

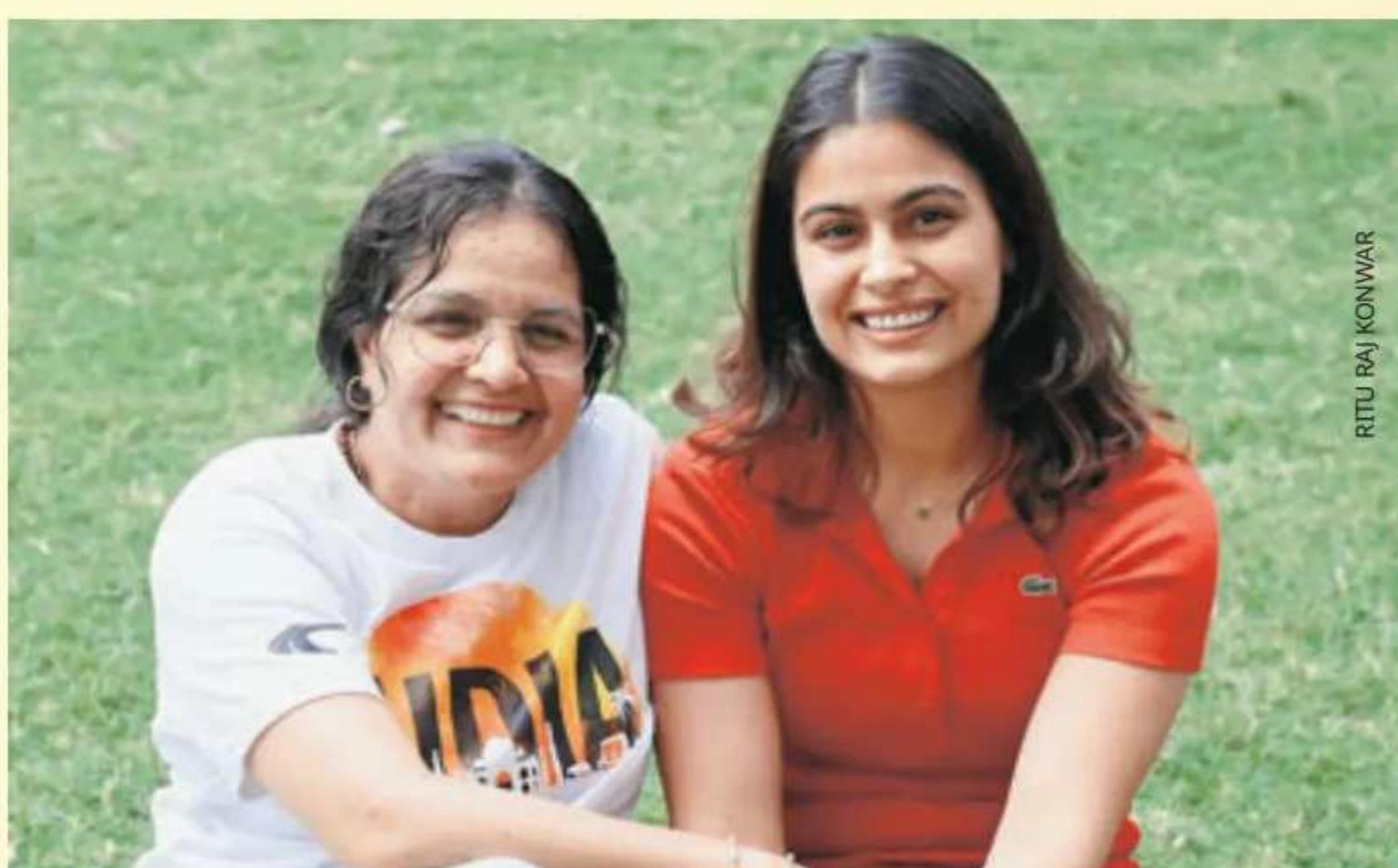
Pawandeep Singh Samra, father of Asian Games champion and world record holder Sift Kaur Samra, dropped her off in Bhopal after driving down 1200 kilometres from Faridkot in Punjab instead of taking a flight or train.

Not only did he want Sift to be able to travel easily from her hotel in Bhopal to the shooting range, he also wanted to avoid her going through the headache of travelling with firearms through the airport.

He wasn't the only one. Sachin Singh, father of Esha Singh, who will be competing in the 25m pistol event at the Paris Games, drove 850 kilometres from Hyderabad to Bhopal for the same reason.

Of course, not all parents are like this. It's mostly the parents of younger girls who feel they have to be there by their daughter's side.

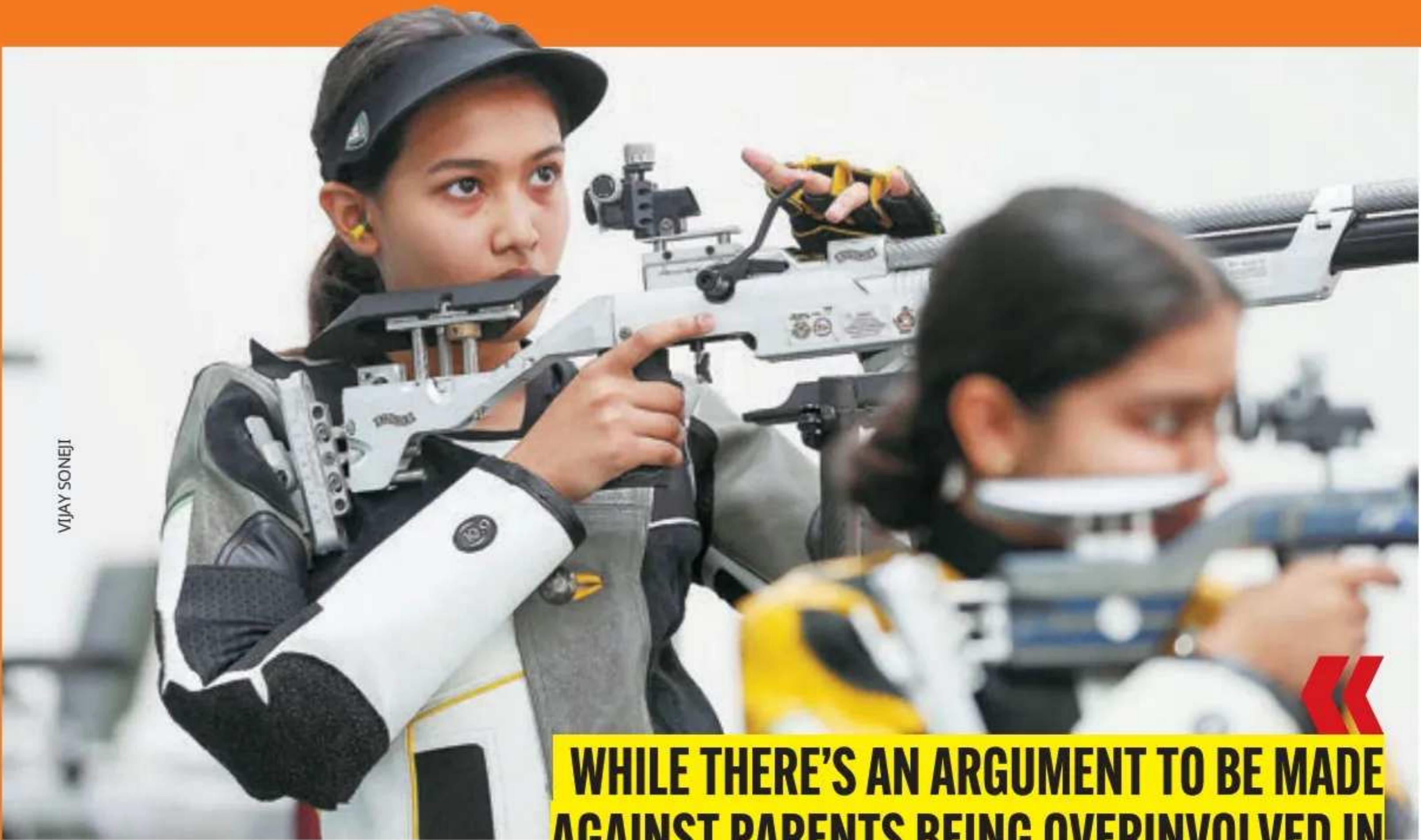
"Boys don't seem to have the same kind of clingy parents. They seem to value their independence a



**Aboard the mothership:** Manu Bhaker will have her mother by her side when she travels to Paris for the Olympics. RITU RAJ KONWAR



« Some time back I got some ayurvedic oil that I rubbed onto Manu's fingers and knees. There's so much stress in her joints when she shoots. I have found that it has really helped her – Sumedha Bhaker, mother of Manu Bhaker »



lot more. I've seen a couple of parents come to competitions when their children were juniors, but they stopped coming soon after. Girls generally seem to have more protective parents," says Deepali Deshpande, former chief coach of the Indian shooting team.

**Clingy or not, the parents in Bhopal take their job seriously. Their role doesn't just end with dropping their child off. Sujit, who often has to take unpaid leave from his job as a software professional in Bangalore to travel with Tilottama (above), noted down every one of her scores and sent them to himself over WhatsApp. Once he returns to his hotel room, Sen plots the scores on an Excel document, trying to find patterns in her performances.**

In the evening, he will sit with her and discuss, among other things, the 9.7 in her third series that kept her already impressive 632.4 qualifying score from being even higher. He'll also dole out performance-based rewards. "After every competition or training round, I usually motivate her by rewarding her for her good scores. For every 10.8 shot, I give her 20 rupees, and for every 10.9 shot, I give her 25 rupees. If she crosses 635 in qualification, it's a bonus of 100 rupees," says Sen.

## WHILE THERE'S AN ARGUMENT TO BE MADE AGAINST PARENTS BEING OVERINVOLVED IN THEIR CHILDREN'S CAREER, TILOTTAMA SEN'S FATHER, SUJIT, THINKS A BALANCE HAS TO BE MADE

While there's an argument to be made against parents being overly involved in their children's careers, Sen thinks a balance has to be struck.

"At the end of the day, when a coach is working with so many athletes, there's no guarantee that they are going to be able to give their undivided attention to an athlete. This is especially true for younger shooters, who lack the maturity to know when they need to stand their ground against a coach. At last year's World Cup in Bhopal, Tilottama was told by a coach to tinker with her rifle in order to experiment with its settings. It proved to be a disaster, but she couldn't have said no to her coach. **Sometimes you need a family member to be able to put their foot down.** Tilottama is only 16. Once she gets older, she will have more confidence to be able to make her own decisions. I'll happily step away

then," says Sen.

That's the sort of role Pawandeep Singh sees himself fulfilling as well. "There was no range in Faridkot when Sift started her career. I run a rice mill and have no knowledge of shooting. But because I had to travel with Sift whenever she trained and then whenever she travelled for a competition, I understood a fair amount myself. **Now my role is to sometimes serve as an intermediary between Sift and her coaches,**" he says.

Not all parents who travelled to Bhopal felt the need to be as involved with their child. "My job is just to be by Manu's side. When it comes to shooting, what can I actually say that Jaspal sir doesn't already know?" Sumedha says.

The same is true for Sift's mother, Ramneek Kaur, as well. "My job is simply to keep Sift as relaxed as possible so that she is not stressed outside shooting. She has her own



**Pillars of success:** Sift Kaur Samra with her parents, Ramneek Kaur and Pawandeep Singh Samra. RITU RAJ KONWAR

ideas about practice and techniques. So to keep her relaxed, the two of us will usually watch films together in our hotel room. Over the last five days, we have watched Yodha, Heeramandi, and Laapataa Ladies on Netflix. Basically, my job is to ensure that she doesn't carry her shooting back to her hotel room," says Kaur.

Sumedha tries to do more. "Some time back, I got some ayurvedic oil that I rubbed onto Manu's fingers and knees. There's so much stress on her joints when she shoots. I have found that it has really helped her," she says.

While Sumedha is always looking for ways to give her daughter an extra edge, it wasn't always this way. For most of her daughter's career, Sumedha wouldn't travel with her for

competition. As the principal of a private school in the village of Goria, Haryana, where Manu was born and raised, she felt her biggest responsibility was to the hundreds of children she was teaching. "Manu would often ask me to travel with her. But for a long time, I didn't feel it would be right. How could I focus on my one daughter at the cost of the thousand girls I was the principal for?" she says.

She started accompanying her daughter once in a while a few years ago before now travelling full time with her for domestic competitions at least. "After Manu moved her training base from Goria to Faridabad, it became harder for me to commute back and forth to the school. Eventually I had to give it up," she says.

Sumedha says the stress of watching her daughter's preparation and matches is not too different from awaiting the exam results of

her students. "Manu competed at her first (2018) Commonwealth Games at the same time as we had our class 12 board exams. The nervousness I felt for both was the same," she says.

Although she's constantly by her daughter's side, Sumedha says she often wonders about returning to teaching. "Maybe after Manu's career, I'll go back to teaching," she says. For now, though, she's planning to travel along with her daughter to the Paris Games. "I don't yet know when I will go, but I would like to be with Manu when she competes," she says.

She's not the only parent, though, who is thinking of travelling to Paris. Sujit is planning to fly out for the Olympics, assuming Tilottama makes it to the Indian team. "I want to watch, but I don't want her to think I'm there. I will be booking a separate flight, so she doesn't even know I'm there," he says.

## ◀ Dreams of winning Olympic gold at LA 2028 keep me up at night ▶

# SAURAV GHOSAL

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**P**icture this. You've dedicated over 30 years of your life to a sport, 21 of those competing at the highest level, and it is now time to take a few steps back. How must that feel? Ask veteran Indian squash player Saurav Ghosal, who recently announced his retirement from the PSA tour, the professional circuit of the sport, at the age of 37.

In the five weeks between mentally making peace with his decision and the actual announcement, Ghosal has been reliving the best and worst of his storied career in conversations with peers, tributes in the media, and messages from his opponents and fans alike.

It has been some time since he last picked up a squash racquet, and he is now embracing a slower pace of life, indulging in activities he couldn't enjoy while fully immersed in the demands of competitive squash. However, Ghosal is not finished with his passion for squash and has his eyes set on the Los Angeles Summer Olympics in 2028.

**Between an impressive Asian Games campaign last year and**

**now, what changed? When did you feel like you're done with the PSA circuit, and when did discussions about retirement begin?**

On the last night of the Asian Games, which was the individual final, it just felt in some ways that it was an endpoint, but I didn't want to read into it a lot because I lost that day, got slightly injured, and felt like it was just too raw a time to be able to take any sort of decision.

So, I put it in the back of my mind. I thought I'd just get away. I was injured anyway and knew that I had to take some time off to recover and then come back and see how I felt, and that's what I did. But for some reason, there was this nagging feeling in my head through the months that I was still playing. I was going into tournaments thinking about that at different points in time, which has never happened to me in my career before.

Sometimes, when you're going to the airport, you're like, "Ah, I wish I didn't have to go." Once I'm at the tournament, I've

always been very excited to play and compete, and playing on some very nice stages around the world has been brilliant. But these last few months, starting in November when I played my first tournament after the Asian Games and leading up to the Windy City Open in Chicago in February, there were different points in time where I felt like mentally I wasn't fully there. Physically, too, certain small things were going on with my body that weren't letting me play at my very best. Nothing major, but things that were just holding me back. That made me sit up and take notice a little bit more.





**One thing that can get better is the quality of expertise available in India. We don't quite have what's needed to produce someone who's going to make the top 20 or top 30 in the world.**

R. RAGU



LISTEN TO THE  
PODCAST





**Special moment:** Saurav Ghosal secured India's maiden singles squash medal at the Commonwealth Games by clinching bronze in the men's singles event at the 2022 Birmingham Games, triumphing over defending champion James Willstrop of England with a commanding 3-0 victory (11-6, 11-1, 11-4). GETTY IMAGES

When I came back from Chicago at the end of February, I discussed this with my wife, Dia, and my dad.

The tipping point was when I was not continuing to play the PSA even though I loved doing it. I was continuing to play more because I was scared of letting go, having done it for so long. When I realised and accepted that, I felt it couldn't be that I have something that I'm scared of, which is making me stay here. It should be a positive reinforcement rather than a negative one. That's when I said this is going to be very hard, and we're going to step into the unknown in a lot of ways; but you have to do it at some point. Also, understanding that there was no wrong or right time to do this. It was more about me making peace with the decision; whenever I did take it, that was a process that I had to go through, and for the most part, I have made peace with it.

**When you play a sport professionally for 20 years, you become accustomed to that routine. Have you considered how you will handle the fear of missing out?**

Right now, I love it. That grind is

very tough. One of the things that we discussed was that if I'm going to do this, then I need to get away from the grind for a good four or five months because the mind and the body just need time to heal, rejuvenate, and replenish themselves. So, for two months, I was not training. I was doing a lot of things that I've not done all these years. Small things like going out shopping with my wife or sitting with my dad and having tea or coffee in the evening. And then days where I'm not actually doing anything and just having conversations and discussions. I feel a lot more excited to watch squash now, and I think that's good. For the next few months, I won't be playing as much squash. Instead, I'll focus more on physical training. This will prepare me for when I start playing more in late August or early September. I have three months before the World Teams in December, so I want to be in a good position and not have to start from scratch. This way, I can focus on my squash game right away. Squash is a game where you can hit the ball very well, but it doesn't help if you don't get to the ball.

**It must be a challenge for your coach as well to train somebody who has retired from PSA but still wants to play for the country. Did they recommend not retiring and just scaling back on PSA?**

If I'm playing PSA, I'm playing to be the best I can be and have the highest ranking that I can have. Given the way the PSA is structured,

you have to play a minimum of 15 tournaments a year to be able to do that. Add the tournaments for India, and you're talking 7-18 tournaments a year. It's almost impossible to cut it down. The other option is that I don't push for all events, but I go all out for a few. However, my makeup from the start is that if I step on the court, I can't not push.

This new reality is now an experiment, both for me and for my team. Just because it's not been done before doesn't mean it cannot be done now. We're going to do everything we can. We'll prepare the best we can like I've always done, and then once you've controlled all these controllables, we'll leave it to the uncontrollables to take care of themselves.

**How much of a temptation or motivation is that opportunity to be an Olympian, given there's no guarantee of the sport's future in the charter after LA?**

I'd be lying if I said that the Olympics was not on my mind. Being an Olympian is a big honour for any sportsperson. I am working right now to be in the best possible shape for December for the World Teams. And then we go to the next one, which is the Asian Individual Championships (May, June 2025), and then we go to the World Cup (next December), which is in Chennai. Then there's the Asian Games and the Commonwealth Games in 2026. If I feel like I am producing a level of play that is going to get me to the Olympics, then we have a discussion.

**Deadly duo:** Saurav Ghosal had won a mixed doubles silver with Dipika Pallikal in the 2018 CWG in Gold Coast. Ghosal wants to do one better at the next edition. GETTY IMAGES

In terms of qualification criteria, nothing is official. Surely, there'll be a route available through the PSA rankings — a quota — but this door is closed for me. There is a good chance that there will be some sort of regional quota. So maybe the Asian Games will be a qualification route. These might be clear only close to 2026. For me, playing any tournament for India has never been about just being there; I want to do something where I feel like I can genuinely try to win something. I know that I won't have that ranking; I won't have the constant match practice against the top guys, which is going to be a hindrance. But I feel like, at this stage in my career, the most important thing for me is that my body and my mind have to be in the best shape possible, and for that to happen in '28, playing 18 tournaments a year for the next four years, we're pushing the rock high uphill to make that possible. This way, the workload is a lot lower, and I have a lot longer to recover between tournaments.

**Last year, during the Nationals, we spoke to a few players to find out what needs to be focussed on now that the sport is headed to the Olympics. Some of them asked for better sparring partners, more Challenger events, and the like. What are your thoughts?**

One thing that can get better is the quality of expertise available in India. We don't quite have what's needed to produce someone who's going to make the top 20 or top 30 in the world. There is a reason why I go to David (Palmer) and James (Willstrop), right? There's a reason why Ramit (Tandon) is in New York quite a bit; there's a reason why Velavan (Senthilkumar), a national champion right now, goes to Barcelona. We would love to stay in Chennai or somewhere in India for the most part. That's a lot easier. That is where



we have to try to fill the void a little bit. The higher you go, there are a lot of subtleties in the game that have to be kind of relayed to the players because they, at least, have to have recognition of those aspects. They might not have the skills right away to execute those abilities, but if they have no recognition, then they won't even try to execute those bits.

**Reflecting on your PSA tour career of over two decades, do you have any regrets or any unfulfilled goals?**

The only one that stands out for me is that I wanted to make single digits in the rankings, perhaps make the top five. The rankings work in such a way that you need a few matches to go your way. There have been a few matches over the last four or five years where I've been up against some of the top guys and have been very close to winning them, the last one probably being against Diego at the World Championships last year in Chicago. If you win these kinds of matches, the draw opens up a lot more. If you have one or two good tournaments like that, suddenly, from like 12-13 in the world, you're up to eight, nine at least, if not higher. That would be the one thing that I wish had fallen into place for me. Having said that, when I began playing squash at eight, I didn't even know what PSA was; I didn't even know it existed till I was 15-16, and at that point in time, no Indian had ever made the top 50 in the world. When I was 18, Ritwik (Bhattacharya) was ranked 38 in the

world, which was the highest. At that point, I thought, "Well, no one's made the top 30 in the world. So, let's do it." If I had to go back and look at myself as a kid and someone told me that I would finish with whatever I have right now, I would have beaten the hand off and said 'thank you very much' and then walked away. As a human, you always want more, but you also have to be grateful for everything that has happened. and I'm thankful for that.

**What is your vision now?**

The Asian Games is definitely on the list. I would love to win the individual gold. I'm very fortunate to have the two team goals. That's something that, growing up, I wanted to have. If I can make it to the Asiad, and if I can get two medals, it will take me up to 11 medals, which will equal P.T. Usha's haul at the Games. It will be nice to have a squash player on the list with someone like her who's done unbelievable things herself. The individual medal at the Commonwealth Games was a big thing, and if I can better that, then great.

One thing that would be nice is for Dipika (Pallikal) and me to win gold in the mixed doubles. We have won silver and bronze, and it would be nice to win gold too. If everything works out and the Olympics happens, just getting there would be an achievement. But if we win a medal, it would trump everything else. These are the things that keep me up at night.

## Black correction

By C.G.S.Narayanan

To define black correction as per 'Encyclopedia of chess problems' A random move of a black piece, a primary defence, carries a harmful effect called a primary error (or general error) which white uses to mate with a contingent or secondary threat. However same black piece can play to compensate for the primary error and prevent secondary threat. But this corrective move (simply called correction) has a new disadvantageous effect, a secondary error which white can utilize.

Sam Loyd  
Musical World 1919



Mate in two moves  
Key 1.Re1! waiting  
1....B any 2.Qg1; 1...Bg2 2.Qh4

**Tertiary black correction:** As all possible moves carry the same removal effect as its random move, raising the play to higher degrees is possible only by gradual accumulation of arrival weaknesses in its corrective moves. The only one arrival weakness can be repeated by the same piece in two parallel variations and that is the interference on the same line. In a classic by the British Grandmaster below the secondary error-unpin of the white bishop-is materialized after the secondary correction 1...Nd3! The next correction 1...Nd7! Repeats the same error but prevents its

utilization. However it carries a third error, a self block on d7, which allows a new mate 2.Bf7.

Comins Mansfield  
Australian Meredith Ty 1928



Mate in two moves

**Key 1.Qe2!** (2.Qxe7)

1....N any 2.Qb5; 1...Nd3 2.Bd6  
1...Nd7 2.Bf7; 1...eP any 2.Rxd8

The chess geometry does not permit one piece to close the line of another in the restricted form of two-mover. In the three or longer movers it is possible to extend the action of a line piece along the bent line thus providing more spots for arrival of another piece to it. The problem for solving (below) is an elegant presentation of quaternary correction

where the black bishop gradually deprives the black rook of access to b6 then d6 and finally e6

Miodrag Mladenovic  
3 HM, Olympic Tourney 2009-10



Mate in three moves

Solution to problem for solving in the article 'Gamage unpin': Key 1.Be2 (2.Ne4) 1...Bf5 2.Qxg7; 1...d5 2.Qc7

Readers may send in their queries to  
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## AFI to hold coaches accountable for failed dope tests of athletes



In order to curb the doping menace, the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) has decided to take action against coaches whose athletes commit doping violations.

The AFI, following its discussions with various stakeholders for about six months, took this important decision at its executive committee meeting.

"Coaches of the athletes who are caught for doping and sanctioned will get a similar punishment. It is high time people were called out, named, and shamed," AFI president Adille Sumariwalla (**above**) said at a virtual press conference.

"We will suspend the coaches (who have coached dope offenders), we will inform departments concerned, and they will not be allowed to enter the stadiums. These people have to be removed from whatever posts they are holding."

"We had talks with various agencies regarding this. If the coaches take a share of the athletes' cash award, then they should also get the stick."

The AFI chief said now the athletes needed to declare their coaches' names on dope control forms, and all the coaches would have to be registered with the federation.

Y. B. SARANGI

## » INDIAN PLAYGROUND

### SPORTOON



**1** Olympic wrestler Vinesh Phogat criticised the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) for not providing information about the trials format, "including the date, time and venue" with three months left for the Paris Olympics. Vinesh, who secured a quota place in the women's 50kg category for India, took to X to share her concern with a letter directed to the WFI and the Sports Authority of India (SAI). "I request the authorities to prioritise this matter and promptly announce the dates, time, venue and exact format for the trials officially," she said.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

**2** Joshna Chinappa and Abhay Singh beat Rathika Suthanthira Seelan and Harinder Pal Singh Sandhu 10-11, 11-2, 11-9 in a 45-minute final to become the mixed doubles champions of the HCL National doubles squash championship. **The results (finals): Men:** Abhay Singh & Velavan Senthilkumar bt Rahul Baitha & Suraj Chand 11-4, 11-8. **Women:** Rathika Suthanthira Seelan & Pooja Arthi bt Janet Vidhi & Nirupama Dubey 11-3, 9-11, 11-1. **Mixed:** Joshna Chinappa and Abhay Singh bt Rathika Suthanthira Seelan and Harinder Pal Singh Sandhu 10-11, 11-2, 11-9.

S. PRASANNA VENKATESAN



## FITNESSWISE

Ramji Srinivasan



FOR MORE STORIES

# INDICATORS OF AN EFFECTIVE STRENGTH TRAINING SESSION

There are **several important signs** one should be aware of to determine if your workout hits the sweet spot and delivers the best fitness results.

**T**he value of strength training or any workout is rated by how much sweat they have produced or how sore they are the next day, even today. While it is good to work up a sweat and know that your muscles have been worked hard, this is not the only way to measure the efficacy of your workout.

In many cases, this can even be detrimental to your health. There are several important signs one should be aware of to determine if your workout hits the sweet spot and delivers the best fitness results.

It is important to understand that each person has different objectives and needs with regards to their training, sport, skill, etc. It means that the way we measure the success of our training will vary significantly from that of the other athlete. Especially, from the perspective of the RPE (Rating of perceived exertion) scale after a workout.

Having worked with so many people of varying ages, sports, skill sets, and needs, it is important that I professionally recognise what their specific needs are each time I train with them.

And helping them solve the issues

and reach their specific goals.

While it is impossible to achieve these goals in just a few sessions, it is good to have indicators to know you are on the right track.

### Progression increment?

If you want to know how great your workout was, the first thing to do is reflect on any progress you made in your performance. Here are some pointers for your progression increment.

- INCREASED MOBILITY AND ANGLES OF MOVEMENT
- INCREASED LIFTING CAPACITY WITH PROGRESSIVE LOADING
- INCREASED ABILITY TO PERFORM THE COMPLEX MOVEMENT EASILY THROUGH FULL RANGE OF MOTION
- INCREMENT IN DYNAMIC STABILITY AND BALANCE
- MAINTAINING THE RIGHT FORM THROUGH THE RANGE OF MOTION
- ENDURANCE INCREMENT WITH TOLERABLE HIGH-INTENSITY WORKOUT

When you reflect on your performance on the field and the transfer of the components required for your particular sport is spot on, it's clear you are on the right path. It is better to be proactive than reactive in the gym session

regarding the goals and targets reached.

### Feel-good factor

After finishing a vigorous workout, the rush of endorphins leaves you feeling superb. Bonus: You get the extra confidence boost from accomplishing a challenging task. It is one of the easiest and most effective ways to tell if you had a great workout. Those struggling with injuries can feel depressed and defeated when they walk into the gym looking at others. Instead, the focus should be on making them feel better through specialised protocols designed to get them into a positive mindset.

### Fundamental movement patterns addressed

One hundred years ago, we did not need gyms as we were forced to walk everywhere; most jobs were very physical, and even home life demanded rigorous activity, let alone the professional sportsman.

Including the basic functional movement patterns in the workout is essential for long-term development.

- PUSH
- PULL
- TWIST
- SQUAT
- JUMP



- LUNGE
- GAIT

Each of these movements is like a base motor programme for every movement we can make as humans. By improving movement quality and strength across these patterns, you improve the strength of every muscle in the body.

Strength cannot overcome poor movement. If the movement is poor, it does not matter how strong your muscles are; your body will have to compensate and create an alternative way to move that is less efficient, weaker, and more unstable.

#### **Adding different skills**

In addition to functional movement skills, it is important to mix your training programme by combining various abilities into your programme in the perfect ratio to deliver a perfect concoction for success at every stage of training goals. Different skills, or bio-motor abilities, are added to a training workout that will place significantly greater demands on the body.

- STRENGTH
- SPEED

- POWER
- BALANCE
- AGILITY
- ENDURANCE
- FLEXIBILITY
- COORDINATION

Most sporting activities require some combination of speed, quickness, and strength, with varying amounts of endurance. A fair degree of explosive power, whether to hit a cricket ball or tennis ball, jump to catch a ball, sprint, or react to an opponent's offensive tactics, is an essential component.

#### **Better sleep**

The purpose of sleep is to restore the body's energy supply and provide time to recover, repair, and rejuvenate. The usual

**Rewarding task:** After finishing a vigorous workout, the rush of endorphins leaves you feeling superb.  
GETTYIMAGES

recommendation for the average adult is between seven and nine hours of sleep per day. Your high-intensity routines require longer recovery time as the body has used more fuel. It's a case of high-intensity workouts equalling longer recovery times. While we can work to achieve our potential, we must always consider our abilities and our limitations and avoid the danger of overtraining, which can lead to decreased performance, decreased energy, depression, and potentially serious injury. Always remember that rest is part of the training protocol, and the harder you train, the longer you need to rest.

#### **You are looking forward to the next workout**

When you have a great workout, it is normal to look forward to the next one. Exercise is about challenging yourself but not pushing to extremes that leave you dreading the next workout for fear it'll be too hard, too exhausting and just not fun every day. While we endeavour to be the best we can be, it is not wise to aim for perfection. It is okay to make mistakes. The secret to getting results is not about being perfect all the time; it is all about staying consistent and enjoying the journey. Some days, you'll be able to push your body harder, but many other days you'll need to take it easy. Remember to listen to your body and choose the right type of workout that not only challenges you but also keeps you excited for your next workout.



**It is important to understand that each person has different objectives and needs with regard to their training, sport, skill, etc.**

# A blight on sport

There should be some way of **restoring justice** to sports so badly abused by a structure – government-sponsored doping – which placed the system above the individual.

Suresh Menon

The Paris Olympic Games are around the corner, and inevitably, doping is part of the conversation. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, two major schemes have emerged of sustained, government-sponsored doping. Access to the files of the Stasi has revealed that in 1974, East Germany passed legislation formalising — in fact insisting on — doping as a key element in the preparation of athletes.

More than ten thousand children and women were forcibly doped, making the country's achievements between 1976 and 1988 dubious. The tiny nation finished second in the medals tally in 1976, '80 and '88 (they boycotted the Olympics in 1984).

It is now accepted that the Moscow Olympics in 1980 was a triumph of chemists over athletes; testing wasn't sophisticated enough. Overall Russia has been stripped of 48 medals at the Olympics, more than any other country, and was banned for fiddling with the drug tests. There too, both in the days of the Soviet Union and later, there has been systematic state-sponsored doping.

But can the East Germans who won at those Games (and the Winter Olympics too — a total of 489 medals) be stripped of their medals? "East Germany never positioned worse than second on an Olympic medal table in either the sun or snow," wrote the Australian columnist Darren Kane, pointing out the legal difficulties involved.

Firstly, no East German failed a dope test at the Olympics. There was no ruling on what drugs were and when and how they might not be taken. We cannot



**What the rule book says:** The WADA code says that all cases must be brought against the athletes within a decade of the date the violations allegedly occurred. AFP

assume that every athlete from East Germany won because of doping — that's tough to prove. The WADA code says that all cases must be brought against the athletes within a decade of the date the violations allegedly occurred.

More interestingly, the East Germans didn't break any rules. Officially, drug testing began at the Mexico Olympics in 1968. One athlete failed because he had had a couple of beers. Alcohol was banned, steroids weren't — and they weren't until 1976.

Can we use the rules of 2024 to retrospectively punish those who were ingesting performance-enhancing drugs in

the 1970s, but whose efficacy wasn't properly known and thus were not banned?

The cancel culture, so much a thing of today often asks the same question: what was acceptable yesterday might not be kosher today, but is that reason enough for the 'cancellation'? You can only break a law that exists, not one that will come into force years later.

What these countries did is a blight on sport. Lives were destroyed without a second thought — all in the cause of proving a political point. Yet, there should be some way of restoring justice to sports so badly abused by a structure which placed the system above the individual.

'Victims' are both those who were denied medals as well as those who were put through the drugs regimen. Some of the latter were compensated for medical consequences after the reunification.

But a few thousand dollars and 'moral' victory in a race alone don't quite cut it.



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