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JUDE BELLINGHAM

VISHY ANAND COLUMN

**Gukesh's
level didn't
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Gukesh became the youngest winner of the men's Candidates chess tournament, defeating higher-ranked opponents and is now a step away from becoming world champion.



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D. Gukesh

The teenager became the youngest to win the Candidates and earn the right to challenge reigning World champion, Ding Liren.
Cover Image:
D. Gukesh by Michal Walusza

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OFF-SIDE

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FROM OUTSIDER TO TOP CONTENDER, GUKE SH IS ON THE MOVE

Youthful audacity triumphed over seasoned scepticism as D. Gukesh became the youngest-ever to win the FIDE Candidates.

The young, like over-enthusiastic puppies, are eager to bound into the unknown with reckless abandon, thrilled by the thought of defying convention. But as the years pile on, so do the caution signs. We are tethered by the weight of past missteps, hesitant to stray too far from the beaten path.

Those careful voices of experience had thought little about 17-year-old Dommaraju Gukesh. According to former champion Magnus Carlsen, he was not exactly expected to set the chess world on fire at the FIDE Candidates in Toronto. "I cannot imagine him winning the Candidates. I can see him being anywhere from +2 to -5 (at the end of the tournament). I don't think he will do poorly, but I don't think he will do too well either. He's not quite ready yet to make the leap," Carlsen had told *chess.com* ahead of the tournament.

But youthful audacity triumphed over seasoned scepticism. While the old guard crumbled like last week's stale biscuits under the harsh glare of the spotlight, Gukesh held steady. Carlsen's picks — two-time World Championship contender Ian Nepomniachtchi, World No. 2 Fabiano Caruana, and World No. 3 Hikaru Nakamura — finished half a point behind him.

During a post-victory introspection, the youngest winner of the Candidates confessed that his heart-wrenching seventh-round defeat to Iran's Alireza Firouzja fuelled his quest for glory. Up a pawn and pressing for victory, Gukesh miscalculated under time pressure and lost a precious advantage. "If I had to pinpoint when I really felt this could be my moment, it

was probably after I lost to Firouzja. I was actually quite upset, but during the rest day, I already felt so good. Even though I just had a painful loss, I was feeling at my absolute best," India's youngest-ever Grandmaster said.

Gukesh has had his fair share of misses, like a stumble at the Swiss Masters, where he finished 81st after starting as the fifth seed, and a third place at the London Chess Classic, where he began as the top seed. A loss of 43 rating points towards the end of 2023 had almost derailed his chances of making it to the Candidates. But Gukesh won the hastily organised Chennai Grand Masters 2023 on tiebreaks to secure the lone qualifying spot from the FIDE Circuit to the Candidates.

In Toronto, too, he bounced back from the loss to the Iranian to win three and draw four of the last seven games.

Gukesh is in a realm where Viswanathan Anand (at 26) had once trodden as the first Indian in 1995. It had taken Anand four years to become a Challenger from a Candidate. But Gukesh, under Anand's tutelage and the support of the WestBridge Anand Chess Academy, has bridged that divide between candidate and potential champion in one go.

"Age considers; Youth ventures," Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore once said. Gukesh, at 17, is ready to venture into uncharted territory and create his own legacy. His Toronto triumph will inspire every aspiring chess player in India. And a victory over China's Ding Liren in November will make him the youngest world champion. Carlsen and Co. will no longer consider him an outsider.

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— Former Wimbledon and French Open champion Garbine Muguruza announcing her retirement at a news conference »

6.24

Armand Duplantis put down a marker ahead of this year's Paris Olympics as the Swede broke his own pole vault world record with a 6.24 metres effort in the first Diamond League meeting of the 2024 season. Duplantis bettered his previous mark of 6.23 metres set at the Eugene Diamond League finale in September, clearing the bar with ease before leaping up off the sponge mat below and racing off in celebration at his first outdoor event of the

year. It was the eighth time that Duplantis broke the world record, and the 24-year-old was the only man to clear six metres at the Egret Stadium.



3

The top three in Beijing half marathon have been stripped of their medals, organisers said, following an investigation into the finish that saw China's He Jie controversially win. The race's bizarre finish saw He Jie cross the line first after two runners from Kenya and one from Ethiopia seemed to deliberately allow him to win. He Jie, the 2023 Asian Games marathon gold medallist, won by one second after his rivals appeared to slow down towards the finish and waved him out in front.

HANGING HIS BOOTS



Two-time world champion Kento Momota said he is retiring from international badminton aged 29, ending a top-level career that never recovered from a car crash four years ago. Momota, who had already missed out on a place at the Paris Olympics, will play for Japan for the last time at the Thomas Cup in China. The former World No. 1 will only feature in domestic competitions in Japan after that and not on badminton's World Tour. AFP

AN UPHILL TASK IN HAND

Jamahal Hill, still recovering from his loss to Alex Pereira, has a crucial fight against Khalil Rountree scheduled for UFC 303.

PICS: GETTY IMAGES

Nigamanth P

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While the bruises he suffered against Alex Pereira are still getting patched up, light heavyweight fighter Jamahal Hill (above) has another duel in his hand. Hill is making up for lost time.

A former titleholder who won his belt with a short-notice victory over Glover Teixeira in January 2023, Hill vacated his title in July, after sustaining a torn Achilles while playing a pickup basketball game during 2023 International Fight Week.

Hill ultimately made a swift recovery but fell short in his bid to recapture the strap, suffering a demoralising loss at UFC 300.

Pereira successfully defended his light heavyweight belt, knocking down Hill with a huge left hook midway through the first round.

Hill fell backwards onto the canvas despite the champion's lack of a perfect landing. Pereira pounced, swarming and securing the finish, making it appear easy.

UFC CEO Dana White, within a week after the

proceedings of UFC 300, announced that a pivotal light heavyweight matchup between Hill (12-2/1 NC) and top contender Khalil Rountree is the latest addition to UFC 303.

While Hill's loss to Pereira ended his four-fight winning streak, Rountree (13-5), on the other hand, is riding a five-fight winning streak, during which he has recorded four knockouts.

The finishes include bonus-winning knockouts of Anthony Smith, Chris Daukaus, and Karl Roberson. Meanwhile, UFC 303 takes place on June 29 at the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas. The card headlines the UFC's 2024 International Fight Week celebration and features former two-division champ Conor McGregor (left) making his long-awaited return, against Michael Chandler in the main event.

McGregor's last fight ended prematurely when he suffered a broken leg in the third fight against Dustin Poirier at UFC 264. After nearly three years on the mend, the first double champion in UFC history is eager to get back into the Octagon.

Chandler, who most recently fought Poirier at UFC 281, will be the ideal opponent for the Irishman. He has four performance bonuses from five UFC appearances and has once contended for the lightweight belt.



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» COVER STORY

Rakesh Rao
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For more than a decade, Viswanathan Anand remained the world chess champion. In the space of 12 years, Anand won five times and became one of the greatest players to have played the game. Strangely, only a handful of Indians watched Anand in action as he went about collecting world titles in three different formats. Even shooter Abhinav Bindra and cueist Pankaj Advani scaled great heights in their illustrious careers in the absence of live images of their conquests in India.

As a welcome move, in recent years, more and more live broadcasts of sporting disciplines have become available, and chess is one of the biggest gainers. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic proved a boon for chess since it caught the attention of those confined indoors with access to the internet. As a result, young Indians like R. Praggnanandhaa, D. Gukesh, Arjun Erigaisi, and Nihal Sarin, among a few others, benefitted immensely. The live images, coupled with their consistent performances, have helped grow the chess community. From the 2022 Chess Olympiad to the 2023 World Cup to the FIDE Candidates 2024, some stupendous Indian performances were hailed.

Till the other day, the biggest gainer was World Cup runner-up Praggnanandhaa. Today, notwithstanding the ongoing IPL, Gukesh's sensational triumph in the Candidates tournament becomes the talking point. Many stayed awake all night to keep track of the final round once it became known that Gukesh had the best chance to win, ahead of three of the top-four players in the world. India woke up to the news of Gukesh, 17, becoming the youngest to win the Candidates and earn the right to challenge the reigning world champion Ding Liren in the world title clash scheduled to begin in late November this year.



The media's urge to immediately reach out to the champion was understandable. Unlike the days when Anand was in his prime, news and visuals travel almost in real-time. No wonder, players like Gukesh, Praggnanandhaa, and a few others are lucky to reap the benefits of this ever-improving technology. Gukesh, younger than Praggnanandhaa by a year, has been in the news since he broke his Chennai mate's record of being the youngest Indian Grandmaster. Given his exploits in cash-rich online chess in the past few years and his triumphs over World No. 1 Magnus Carlsen on a few occasions, Praggnanandhaa has become the face of the new generation of Indian chess

champions. For those following the rise of these two youngsters, it is quite evident that Gukesh steadily rose in the classical time format of the game while Praggnanandhaa was busy sharpening his skills in the shorter duration formats suited for online chess.

Gukesh's rise began in March 2022, days after Praggnanandhaa hit the headlines for stunning Carlsen in online chess. Gukesh came in second to Erigaisi in the National Championship in Kanpur. This was the first time Gukesh played after the pandemic and showed a glimpse of the hard work he had done during the long period of lockdown. Interestingly, around 25 months after taking the top two spots in the



GUKE SH'S 'DATE' WITH DESTINY

IF THE MEN'S CANDIDATES WINNER BEATS DING THIS YEAR, HE WILL BECOME INDIA'S SECOND WORLD CHESS CHAMPION.

country's flagship event, Gukesh and Arjun found themselves among the top 10 players in the world. When the new FIDE rankings are released on May 1, 2024, Gukesh will be ranked sixth, two ahead of Arjun. Going back to the days when Gukesh began his ascent, he had to contend with coming second to Arjun in the 2022 International Open. Gukesh produced a series of title-winning performances in Spain, where he won a hat-trick of titles by beating the field in the La Roda tournament, the Menorca Open, and the Sunway Formentera

International tournament. This boosted Gukesh's ratings and confidence, and soon he reached the brink of the top 50. More than the rise in rating, what helped Gukesh catch the attention of the chess world was his stupendous showing in the Chess Olympiad in Mamallapuram. Playing on the top board, he won the first eight rounds, with World No. 2 Fabiano Caruana being his most illustrious victim. He went on to win the gold medal and collect the team bronze. Last year, Gukesh became the youngest to reach 2750 in ratings and

Acing the challenge: D. Gukesh won the 2024 FIDE Candidates after a draw against Hikaru Nakamura (USA), with Ian Nepomniachtchi (Russia) and Fabiano Caruana (USA) also drawing their match. MARIA EMELIANOVA

soon overtook Anand in the world rankings. It was the first time in 37 years that Anand was second to an Indian in the rankings. The year also saw Gukesh's long-time coach, Vishnu Prasanna, assume the role of mentor and pave the way for the youngster to take the services of Polish Grandmaster Grzegorz Gajewski, as suggested by Anand. In the World Cup, Gukesh, Praggnanandhaa, Vedit Gujrathi, and Erigaisi produced what was the biggest advertisement for Indian chess by reaching the quarterfinals. Eventually, Praggnanandhaa reached the final

and qualified for the Candidates.

What followed was a tough phase for Gukesh. His form deserted him. The youngster was desperate to meet the rising expectations of qualifying for the Candidates, but the pressure took its toll. Keen to take one of the qualifying spots for Candidates from the Grand Swiss, Gukesh tried too hard, but the event proved a disaster. Starting as the fifth seed, armed with a rating of 2758 in a very strong field, Gukesh finished 81st. His performance rating was 2578, and he lost 26 rating points. This was also the event where Vedit performed exceptionally well to win and qualify for the Candidates. In the London Chess Classic, Gukesh started as the top seed in the 10-player field and eventually finished

Joyous moment: D. Gukesh mobbed by fans after winning the 2024 FIDE Candidates tournament. MICHAŁ WALUSZA

third. By this time, his live rating had plummeted to 2715. Finally, all the hard work with Gajewski started bearing fruit with the hurriedly organised Chennai Grand Masters in December. In this eight-player invitational event, organised to help Gukesh boost his ratings and qualify for the Candidates based on being the highest-rated on the FIDE Circuit, he went on to win the tournament and moved to second on the Circuit. Since topper Caruana had already qualified by coming third in the World Cup, Gukesh got the lone qualifying spot from the FIDE Circuit for the Candidates. What makes Gukesh such a formidable force in world chess is his amazing ability to find the best moves, calculate accurately in quick time, and stay ambitious in search of victory. Unlike his peers, Gukesh did not use computer-aid or engine analysis to find the best continuation. This helped his natural abilities to sense danger and prepare accordingly. Armed with a ticket to the Candidates, Gukesh produced another stellar performance in the Tata Steel Masters in Wijk aan Zee. He punched above his weight to tie for the title and eventually finished second to Chinese Wei Yi following tie-break games.

Significantly, Gukesh bounced back from losing to world champions Liren and Anish Giri in the third and fourth rounds to post a hat-trick of wins, beginning with the conquest of Ian Nepomniachtchi and two Dutchmen, Jorden van Foreest and Max Warmerdam. He continued his campaign without losing any more games. He beat German Alexander Donchenko and Iranian Parham Maghsoudloo. The gain of 18 rating points from this event played its part in Gukesh returning to his best. Gukesh entered the Candidates very well prepared, but without carrying any burden of expectations. Seeded sixth among eight players, Gukesh, at 17, was only the second youngest to play in the Candidates. The record for



the youngest player in the Candidates Tournament stands in the name of the legendary Bobby Fischer, who played as a 16-year-old in 1959. What unfolded at Toronto's The Grand Hall was a story for the ages. Showing great maturity, Gukesh started slowly, was a touch lucky to beat Praggnanandhaa in the second round, and suffered a heartbreak in the seventh round, where he lost to Alireza Firouzja after holding a very promising position.

"I was really disappointed with the way I lost in time pressure. All along, I thought I was winning after a point. After I reached my room and analysed the position, I discovered that, though I felt I was in a winning

position, with correct play, Firouzja could still draw. I made some of the best logical moves, but as computer analysis later suggested, it was not enough for me to win. Then I felt a little better," Gukesh said.

"It was at this point that I felt very good about myself and believed that I could win the Candidates. I went out with Gajewski, along with a Toronto-based friend, who also brought some awesome home-cooked food. Later, we played pickleball, and I really felt good ahead of the second half of the tournament."

Once in the home stretch, Gukesh did not put a foot wrong. He targeted two of the lowest-placed, off-form



Points scored – 9/14

Rd	Seed	Opponent	Country	Rating	Colour	Result	Rank
1	7	Vidit Gujrathi	India	2727	White	Draw	6th
2	5	R. Praggnanandhaa	India	2747	Black	Won	5th
3	4	Ian Nepomniachtchi	FIDE	2758	White	Draw	Tied 2nd
4	1	Fabiano Caruana	USA	2803	Black	Draw	Tied 2nd
5	8	Nijat Abasov	Azerbaijan	2632	White	Won	8th
6	2	Hikaru Nakamura	USA	2789	White	Draw	Tied 2nd
7	3	Alireza Firouzja	France	2760	Black	Lost	7th
8	7	Vidit Gujrathi	India	2727	Black	Won	6th
9	6	R. Praggnanandhaa	India	2747	White	Draw	5th
10	3	Ian Nepomniachtchi	FIDE	2758	Black	Draw	Tied 2nd
11	1	Fabiano Caruana	USA	2803	White	Draw	Tied 2nd
12	8	Nijat Abasov	Azerbaijan	2632	Black	Won	8th
13	3	Alireza Firouzja	France	2760	White	Won	7th
14	2	Hikaru Nakamura	USA	2789	Black	Draw	Tied 2nd

players — Nijat Abasov and Firouzja — to snatch victories and move half a point ahead of the field. Similarly, top seed Caruana got his campaign back on track by beating Vidit and Praggnanandhaa to go into the final round with hope. Nakamura, too, came into the title hunt with a hat-trick of victories and a draw with Nepomniachtchi. With the final-round pairings clubbing four contenders over two boards, Gukesh needed a draw against Nakamura to at least book his spot in the tie-break games, if needed. Nakamura too faced a must-win situation, much like Caruana and Nepomniachtchi did in their encounter.

As it turned out, Gukesh offered nothing to Nakamura from the white side and cruised to an easy draw. This result took Nakamura out of the equation. The focus was firmly on the nervy battle, where Caruana looked like he was closing in on an important victory over Nepomniachtchi. A decisive result on this board would have led to tie-break games involving Gukesh. Caruana, looking good enough to win on many occasions, eventually cracked and misplayed the position. Nepomniachtchi, on his part, came up with a timely sacrifice of his rook for a bishop and pawn and hung on. Caruana once again overlooked the precise continuation and, later, offered a draw to Nepomniachtchi. An equally exasperated

Nepomniachtchi, who also needed a win to challenge Gukesh, took a few moments to consider the draw offer. He eventually extended his hand and accepted Caruana's offer by saying, "I am sorry." Before leaving the table, Nepomniachtchi once again apologised to Caruana for offering such a stubborn defence and spoiling his rival's chances of forcing tie-break games with Gukesh. Caruana quietly responded, "My fault."

In the meantime, Gukesh, who had seen Caruana inching closer to a win, left the venue for his hotel room. "I wanted to prepare for the tie-break games (against Caruana, scheduled on the following day), but I could not bear to watch the game between Caruana and Nepomniachtchi. It was a roller-coaster game. I was as tense as the players. So, Gajewski and I decided to go for a walk," he said. "We were out for a walk when my dad walked up and told us it was all over and I was the champion. I was so relieved. Now, I'm very happy to win this event and be the Candidate."

D. Gukesh

Rank

1st

Seeding

6

Rating

2743

Performance Rating

2847

Rating points gained

20.4

HOW THE INDIANS FAARED

Of the five debutant Indians in the 2024 Candidates, D. Gukesh went on to claim the title in the open section, where an eight-man field included four from the world's top-10 list.

The other four – two in each section – also had their moments. If R. Praggnanandhaa played to his rating and seeding, Vidit Gujrathi had the rare distinction of beating World No. 3 Hikaru Nakamura twice. If third-ranked Koneru Humpy showed steely resolve to bounce back from a poor start to finish joint-runner, young R. Vaishali matched her senior compatriot's tally by dramatically rising from a four-game losing streak to finish the campaign with five straight victories.

Here are the Candidates' report cards of these four Indians. Read on...

Rakesh Rao

R Praggnanandhaa came to Toronto with the seasoned Russian Grandmaster Peter Svidler as part of his team. In spite of playing to his rating, he was left to rue a few missed chances, including one against Gukesh in the second round, which he eventually lost. His



opening preparation clearly stood out, and he was seldom in any trouble going into the middle game. Clearly, he could shift gears when needed.

Looking back, Praggnanandhaa was sure to reflect on his fifth-round clash against Ian Nepomniachtchi, whom he out-prepared in the opening phase and then missed a possible victory before agreeing for a draw.

In fact, his seven-game winless streak, from Round 8 to 13, including losses to Nakamura and Caruana, effectively pushed him out of the title race.

Of his three victories, including two against last-man Nijat Abasov, the one with black pieces against Vidit was well-crafted. Praggnanandhaa's losses to the two Americans — Nakamura and Caruana — late in the competition must have taught the youngster a lot.

In both these encounters, he played white but could not deal with the superiority of these two players, who are considered the strongest after Magnus Carlsen in the past decade.

Overall, Praggnanandhaa can draw strength from the fact that, despite being a debutant, he could play to his seeding in such a challenging field.

He won and lost an equal number of games. He will remember his first Candidates as the one where he could have clearly done better.

R. Praggnanandhaa

Rank

5th

Seeding

5

Rating

2747

Performance Rating

2745

Rating points lost

0.4

Points scored – 7/14

Rd	Seed	Opponent	Country	Rating	Colour	Result	Rank
1	3	Alireza Firouzja	France	2760	Black	Draw	7th
2	6	D. Gukesh	India	2743	White	Lost	1st
3	7	Vidit Gujrathi	India	2727	Black	Won	6th
4	2	Hikaru Nakamura	USA	2789	Black	Draw	Tied 2nd
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11	2	Hikaru Nakamura	USA	2789	White	Lost	Tied 2nd
12	4	Ian Nepomniachtchi	FIDE	2758	Black	Draw	Tied 2nd
13	1	Fabiano Caruana	USA	2803	White	Lost	4th
14	8	Nijat Abasov	Azerbaijan	2632	Black	Won	8th



MICHAL WALUSZA

Vidit Gujrathi, the most experienced of the three Indian debutants, left his stamp on the Candidates with a display of enterprise that surprised many. Though his points tally does not reflect the value he brought to the competition, his twin victories over

Nakamura will be recalled in every discussion of this premier event.

Victories over World No. 3 Nakamura and World No. 4 Alireza Firouzja gave Vidit instant recognition in the chess world. Though Vidit won the Grand Swiss — considered the toughest open tournament — to

qualify for the Candidates, the conquests of Nakamura and Firouzja surely did bring never-before attention to his skill sets. When Vidit beat Nakamura in their return encounter in the second half of this double round-robin event, it was believed that the popular American's title prospects were firmly buried. But Nakamura bounced back to stay in contention until the final-round deadlock against eventual champion Gukesh.

Vidit was sure to rue the losses to Praggnanandhaa and Gukesh, but nothing was more shattering than the defeat to Ian Nepomniachtchi.

He appeared to be on the threshold of victory but slipped and lost to the two-time defending champion, who remained the only unbeaten player in the competition. Vidit hid his face in his hands and fought back tears. What a huge miss it was!

Overall, Vidit could take back plenty of positives, the biggest being the way he ended Nakamura's 47-game unbeaten streak in classical time format. It was a great learning experience for him, who is showing great skill in matching some of the finest in the world.

Vidit Gujrathi

Rank

6th

Seeding

7

Rating

2727

Performance Rating

2697

Rating points lost

6

Points scored – 6/14

Rd	Seed	Opponent	Country	Rating	Colour	Result	Rank
1	6	D. Gukesh	India	2743	Black	Draw	1st
2	2	Hikaru Nakamura	USA	2789	Black	Won	Tied 2nd
3	5	R. Praggnanandhaa	India	2747	White	Lost	5th
4	4	Ian Nepomniachtchi	FIDE	2758	Black	Lost	Tied 2nd
5	1	Fabiano Caruana	USA	2803	White	Draw	Tied 2nd
6	3	Alireza Firouzja	France	2760	White	Won	7th
7	8	Nijat Abasov	Azerbaijan	2632	Black	Draw	8th
8	6	D. Gukesh	India	2743	White	Lost	1st
9	2	Hikaru Nakamura	USA	2789	White	Won	Tied 2nd
10	5	R. Praggnanandhaa	India	2747	Black	Draw	5th
11	4	Ian Nepomniachtchi	FIDE	2758	White	Lost	Tied 2nd
12	1	Fabiano Caruana	USA	2803	Black	Lost	Tied 2nd
13	8	Nijat Abasov	Azerbaijan	2632	White	Draw	8th
14	3	Alireza Firouzja	France	2760	Black	Draw	7th



Koneru Humpy made up for a slow start in the second half of her campaign to share the second spot. Given her experience and head-to-head record

against those in the field, the 37-year-old was expected to do better. But she deserves all credit for giving it her all despite struggling with form.

Points scored – 7.5/14

Rd	Seed	Opponent	Country	Rating	Colour	Result	Rank
1	7	R. Vaishali	India	2475	Black	Draw	Tied 2nd
2	4	Kateryna Lagno	FIDE	2542	Black	Draw	6th
3	5	Tan Zhongyi	China	2521	White	Draw	1st
4	8	Nuryul Salimova	Bulgaria	2432	Black	Lost	Tied 7th
5	1	Aleksandra Goryachkina	FIDE	2553	White	Draw	5th
6	2	Lei Tingjie	China	2550	White	Lost	Tied 2nd
7	6	Anna Muzychuk	Ukraine	2520	Black	Draw	Tied 7th
8	7	R. Vaishali	India	2475	White	Won	Tied 2nd
9	4	Kateryna Lagno	FIDE	2542	White	Draw	6th
10	5	Tan Zhongyi	China	2521	Black	Draw	1st
11	8	Nuryul Salimova	Bulgaria	2432	White	Won	Tied 7th
12	1	Aleksandra Goryachkina	FIDE	2553	Black	Draw	5th
13	6	Anna Muzychuk	Ukraine	2520	White	Draw	Tied 7th
14	2	Lei Tingjie	China	2550	Black	Won	Tied 2nd

In the first half of seven rounds, Humpy was not only winless but suffered a loss to the lowest-rated Bulgarian Nuryul Salimova in the fourth round and to second-seeded Chinese Lei Tingjie in the sixth.

However, it was in the second half that Humpy's determination came to the fore. She resurrected her campaign by not only staying unbeaten but also scoring over compatriot R. Vaishali, avenging the loss to Salimova, and finishing her campaign by beating second seed and defending champion, Lei Tingjie. This triumph saw her match Lei's tally and finish joint runner-up, before Vaishali joined the duo.

It is creditable that, despite lacking the cutting edge for the better part of the Candidates, Humpy could draw from her vast experience to bounce back.

Though champion Tan Zhongyi, who never trailed, went beyond the reach of the other contender towards the closing stages, Humpy did extremely well to occupy the next best spot.

Koneru Humpy

Rank

Tied 2nd

Seeding

3

Rating

2546

Performance Rating

2542

Rating points lost

1.4



MICHAL WALUSZA

Indeed, R. Vaishali was the discovery of the Candidates, for which she had qualified by emerging as the surprise champion of the Grand Swiss in November. After becoming the country's third female Grandmaster, she had rightfully earned her spot.

Points scored 7.5/14

Rd	Seed	Opponent	Country	Rating	Colour	Result	Rank
1	3	K. Humpy	India	2546	White	Draw	Tied 2nd
2	5	Tan Zhongyi	China	2521	Black	Lost	1st
3	8	Nuryul Salimova	Bulgaria	2432	White	Won	Tied 7th
4	1	Aleksandra Goryachkina	FIDE	2553	Black	Draw	5th
5	6	Anna Muzychuk	Ukraine	2520	White	Draw	Tied 7th
6	4	Kateryna Lagno	FIDE	2542	White	Lost	6th
7	2	Lei Tingjie	China	2550	Black	Lost	Tied 2nd
8	3	K. Humpy	India	2546	Black	Lost	Tied 2nd
9	5	Tan Zhongyi	China	2521	White	Lost	1st
10	8	Nuryul Salimova	Bulgaria	2432	Black	Won	Tied 7th
11	1	Aleksandra Goryachkina	FIDE	2553	White	Won	5th
12	6	Anna Muzychuk	Ukraine	2520	Black	Won	Tied 7th
13	2	Lei Tingjie	China	2550	White	Won	Tied 2nd
14	4	Kateryna Lagno	FIDE	2542	Black	Won	6th

Equally, she was not expected to make a splash in the Candidates since she hardly had opportunities to play with the elite.

But she did.

Rated seventh in the field of eight players, Vaishali had a highly forgettable first half despite a decent

start. In the first three rounds, she was part of all three possible results, with her victory coming over the lowest seed, Salimova, in the third round.

However, the victory was to remain the brightest part for Vaishali for the next six rounds, since she lost the last four rounds of the first half.

When she ended the first half with two defeats and resumed the second half with two losses, Vaishali's campaign appeared to be in tatters.

She lost a few games by committing early blunders and the rest by playing moves of suboptimal strength in crucial positions.

What followed was simply sensational and unforeseeable. She won the remaining five rounds to finish as joint runner-up.

Notably, her victims included top seed Aleksandra Goryachkina, second seed Lei Tingjie, fourth seed Kateryna Lagno, and former World Championship runner-up Anna Muzychuk.

Beating Goryachkina and Lagno, the two Russians in the fray, was clearly a big takeaway for Vaishali.

R. Vaishali

Rank

Tied 2nd

Seeding

7

Rating

2475

Performance Rating

2552

Rating points gained

14.2



EN PASSANT

Viswanathan Anand



CALM AND STEADY GUKESH DESERVED TO WIN

D. Gukesh was the only one whose level didn't **fluctuate** very much.

D Gukesh is the deserving winner of the Candidates tournament. The story of the last two rounds was only about him. He has become the youngest challenger in history. In his very first Candidates tournament, against some of the strongest players of all time, some of whom have played four or five Candidates tournaments, and Ian Nepomniachtchi, the winner of the last two Candidates, he handled the pressure well.

Gukesh was the only one whose level didn't fluctuate very much. In the 13th round, against Alireza Firouzja, the opening didn't go well, and he was looking for play. But unexpected things started to happen under pressure. Gukesh was the calmer player. His moves were steady, and when Firouzja started to overreach, he grabbed the advantage and converted it most

efficiently, which is very difficult when you realise the implications of what you are doing, that you are going to take the lead in the tournament, and so on.

The pressure was only going to build. Fabiano Caruana defeated R. Praggnanandhaa. Then we had a dramatic last round, in which only a win against Hikaru Nakamura would have guaranteed Gukesh first place, and he was black. He once again played one of his unusual openings in Queen's Gambit Accepted. Nakamura never seemed to find his way against Gukesh and was very soon worse. But the advantage was not big enough for Gukesh to play for a win. He got the draw, which at least guaranteed him the tie-break.

He was facing a tiebreaker for some time, as Nepomniachtchi had managed to get into a lost position against Caruana; that was the situation for two hours. Occasionally



Caruana would slip, Nepomniachtchi's position would improve, and a few seconds later, the old evaluation would be restored. The participants must have been under enormous pressure at the end of such a long tournament. Ironically, the youngest participant coped with it the best, and the more experienced ones cracked. It shows the enormous mental strength of Gukesh. Caruana and Nakamura managed to win late games, showing their class bringing more pressure on Gukesh.

Caruana and Nakamura didn't have the strongest tournaments, but they waited for their moment and



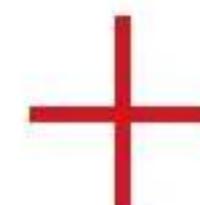
Scintillating show: Gukesh, who was one of three Indian players in the eight-man Candidates tournament, will face China's Ding Liren for the title later this year. MICHAŁ WALUSZA

grabbed the chance at the last minute. It was worrying for Gukesh that Caruana and Nakamura were peaking at the end. But Caruana, who has won many games with smaller advantages than what he had against Nepomniachtchi, was unable to withstand the pressure. He got confused about a position where there could have been four queens on the board and then had to come

back to make a draw.

In the women's tournament, only the two Chinese participants had any mathematical possibilities on the final day. In the end, Lei Tingjie lost to both the Indian participants, R.

Vaishali, who scored five wins in a row after four straight defeats, and Koneru Humpy, who rescued her tournament in the end. Tan Zhongyi was the deserved winner by a big margin.



Caruana, who has won many games with smaller advantages than what he had against Nepomniachtchi, was unable to withstand the pressure.



INTER-ZONAL MULTI-DAY TROPHY: FORESIGHT FROM BCCI, BUT MISPLACED IN A WHITE-BALL WORLD?

India's return to red-ball cricket amidst a landscape dominated by shorter formats and limited support for women's Tests **poses an intriguing question**.

Lavanya Lakshmi Narayanan

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The scorching afternoon sun beat down upon the Maharashtra Cricket Stadium in Pune, setting the stage for a gripping showdown in the Senior Inter-Zonal Multi-Day Trophy final between East and South Zone. With temperatures hovering around 39°C, the empty stands witnessed a tense battle where every run and wicket mattered.

In a nail-biting 30-minute passage of play, East's Titas

Sadhu and Annapurna Das thwarted a determined South, led by Minnu Mani, clinching a one-wicket victory in the summit clash.

After a six-year hiatus, the tournament returned to India's domestic cricket calendar, featuring six teams competing for top honours over a fortnight in Pune.

The South and North Zones secured direct places in the



semifinals through a draw of lots.

Following the quarterfinals and semifinals in the main city, the action shifted to the outskirts. **The dry heat of Gahunje, compounded by its remote location, made conditions challenging for players and spectators alike.**

Dehydration loomed large, with tender coconut husks scattered around the dugouts, and players battling exhaustion under the blazing sun. Officials and players had to make refreshment arrangements in bulk to power through the conditions.

South encountered additional hurdles, with a team-wide illness and players like Arundhati Reddy requiring medical attention. Similarly, Titas struggled with a persistent cough.

"Day matches have a lot of value as it builds stamina and builds a habit of playing for a longer duration of time," Umesh Sethi, the East Zone coach, tells *Sportstar* on the sidelines.

"That said, I hope these fixtures are scheduled for the winter. If it's a one-day fixture, it's fine to play in such trying conditions, but in summer, these games are hard on

Triumphant: East Zone, which won the inter-zonal multi-day trophy.

PICS: LAVANYA LAKSHMI NARAYANAN

the body and on the surface.

Sethi feels the quality of the game will improve if it is played in winter. "The pitch doesn't get time to get prepared properly, and on the second day itself, it dries out and then ends up costing the side that has won the toss. In this game, we wanted to win the toss and bat. We were very happy to dismiss the opponent for a modest score, but the pitch cracked up on day two. It made life difficult for us as well, and we couldn't take the lead. If we do these fixtures in winter, the surface won't break down so much," Sethi adds.

East Zone captain Deepti Sharma was awarded the winner's cheque of Rs. 50 lakh. Former India captain and BCCI Apex Council member, Shubhangi Kulkarni, watched the game from the Members' Box in the South End and presented the winner's trophy. This added a special significance to the event, as Pune held sentimental value in Kulkarni's cricketing career.

In perspective

"I was lucky to be in a place like Pune, which has been very progressive and safe for women," she tells *Sportstar*. "Those days, a career in cricket came with a lot of apprehension — be it for safety, be it women playing what was considered a men's game. When we played, we always had people come and watch. It began with curiosity about our attire — whether we would turn up in trousers, salwars, or skirts. We played in trousers, of course. Once that initial curiosity was satiated, the support was steady and more game-focused."

Shubhangi comes from an era when Test cricket was the main format, with one-day cricket gradually gaining prominence.

"Our domestic cricket was mostly in the one-day format. But the semifinals of the Inter-State competition called the Nationals then, would be a two-day affair, and the final would be a three-day

contest," the 64-year-old remembers.

Between its first-ever Test against the West Indies in 1976 and its latest international red-ball fixture against Australia in December 2023, India has played 40 Tests, winning seven, losing six, and drawing 27. With the advent of the T20 format in the women's ecosystem in 2004, the frequency of Tests dwindled. Between 1976 and 2004, India played 30 Tests, while from 2005 onwards, only 10 matches have been played.

"It's certainly not the growth format, is it?" former Australian captain Lisa Sthalekar, who has been tracking the scores of the tournament on the BCCI app from Australia, tells Sportstar.

"If we're going to conquer the world, it is through T20 cricket. We're already seeing Thailand and Papua New Guinea forge their way into the fold. Thailand even made it to an ICC event in 2020. You want to see more countries do that. That's where the majority of the funding goes, and perhaps rightly so. But that doesn't mean Test cricket shouldn't exist in the women's ecosystem. It does limit who is involved, but I think that's okay as well. We can't have everything."

Red-ball's geographics

Women's Test cricket is currently dominated by Australia, England, and India, with South Africa starting to follow suit. Other nations, including old-world powers like New Zealand, have been parched for red-ball action. Even if one wants to add a few Tests to the schedule, it's hard to find a window that does not have bilateral white-ball fixtures, franchise short-format tournaments like the Women's Premier League, The Hundred, the Women's Big Bash League, or ICC-recognised private initiatives like FairBreak Global.

"At the moment, the calendar for women's cricket has come a long way from teams having just one or two major series a year at best. If we want more and more Test cricket, where are we slotting it in considering white-ball being the priority and varying economic capabilities to stage the longer format? Even in the men's game, some countries go at a



loss when they put on Test cricket. If you ask Ireland, they might feel differently about Test status now. We need to acknowledge that. But if there are countries that want to play Tests, then absolutely (fine). The players—all of them want to play Test cricket. Maybe we need to do an ICC World XI against whoever is successful among India, England, and Australia so it allows someone like Suzie Bates to play a Test match," Sthalekar says.

India revived the Inter-Zonal tournament for women's multi-day cricket, enhancing its domestic foundation for Test cricket. Unlike England's men's County system, their women lack an equivalent. Australia now hosts a permanent three-day match between 'Green' and 'Gold'

teams annually. New Zealand's Hallyburton Johnstone Shield shifted from multi-day to 50-over format since the late 1990s.

Red is right

World Cup-winning former England skipper Charlotte Edwards, who now coaches a range of domestic outfits across England and Mumbai Indians in the WPL, believes a lack of red-ball experience cost England in the one-off Test against India last December.

"In the Test match, we've seen that if your technique is not strong, you'll get found out. Playing too much white-ball cricket can be detrimental to Tests and we need to find the right balance or even education through playing age-group red-ball cricket," Edwards tells Sportstar.

Cause for concern: Dehydration loomed large and players battled exhaustion under the blazing sun.

where the playing style has been brisk. Where the women's side struggles is in taking control of the game and slowing things down. It helped India eke out a draw in 2021 and thrash the same opponent by 347 runs a few months ago.

"England seems to have a decent approach to how they want to go about their T20 cricket. They want to be a bit more aggressive, and that helps their mindset. The mindset issue comes in Test cricket when you have to bat longer, and so a strong defence comes into the scheme of things. That might not be how they

brushed aside the need for red-ball experience.

"I remember asking Matthew Mott this question while doing commentary.

"My thought was that if you play the longer format, you get a better understanding of your skillset and how to pace your innings. He believed that a longer format doesn't necessarily create great players. David Warner is a prime example of this — a T20 player who entered the Test arena. It's not one-size-fits-all. My opinion is that red-ball cricket has developmental value," she says.

The fact that the BCCI has put on this tournament is encouraging foresight. They saw that the last two Tests against England and Australia ended triumphantly. They realise that this is a format that brings them great success, especially on home soil.

"This bodes well for those who want to play more Test cricket because they'll be able to produce some wonderful players. This tournament showed that there were several players who put their hands up whom you don't otherwise see on the circuit," she adds.

Shubhangi is quick to point out that a mere Inter-Zonal is not the start and end of work.

"In terms of skill development and technique, the longer version will certainly help. But it will be a challenge. Right now, the Inter-Zonal is a good format. Quality players who can adapt to the shorter versions and double up for red ball were in the mix.

"If we look at the inter-state level, we need to see if that is viable and if they have the resources to allow the format to trickle down to the grass-roots club/district level. It is going to be a challenge for all countries, including us," she says.

As things stand, the sole red-ball fixture on the international calendar is the Women's Ashes Pink Ball game at the MCG in 2025.

The debate persists: Should more international Tests drive domestic multi-day cricket, or should red-ball cricket be introduced independently? Time will decide.

BETWEEN ITS FIRST-EVER TEST AGAINST THE WEST INDIES IN 1976 AND ITS LATEST INTERNATIONAL RED-BALL FIXTURE AGAINST AUSTRALIA IN DECEMBER 2023, INDIA HAS PLAYED 40 TESTS, WINNING SEVEN, LOSING SIX, AND DRAWING 27

"It's something we're looking to do here. Academies are starting to play two- or three-day cricket. It's unbelievable that the girls go into international Test fixtures with just a handful of multi-day games under their belt, if any at all. Compare this to the guys who have at least 30–40 red ball games to their names before they play the format internationally. That is something we're determined to address. We know, at the Southern Vipers, that this is something we want to do. But something more concrete, like a tournament, is yet to take shape," she adds.

England, a nation enamoured (or blindsided, depending on where you stand) by the men's team's 'Bazball' philosophy, has a women's set-up

want to play their cricket, but that might be what is required as you then earn the right to bat. India did that brilliantly. India scored at over four runs an over throughout the innings. They were able to absorb pressure well thanks to a strong defence. Whenever an opportunity presented itself, they were able to dispatch the loose balls. I think that was a great blueprint on how to bat in Test cricket," Edwards points out.

"The fact that there were so many bowled dismissals is a cause for concern, and I guess that's where the strong defence comes into play. It was quite disappointing on that front to see us being completely outplayed, especially with the kind of batting we have."

Necessity or luxury

Sthalekar remembers a time when former Australia Women's head coach Matthew Mott (now with the England men's white-ball side)

« We overcomplicate things by bowling too many types of deliveries in one over »

TRENT BOULT

Shayan Acharya

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Trent Boult adjusts his cap, puts his phone in his pocket, and says with a smile, "I always try to come into the IPL with an open mind of trying to get better."

Having transitioned to freelancing from his central contract with New Zealand Cricket to spend more time with family, Boult finds himself constantly on the move due to cricket commitments worldwide. Despite "dying to see" his three young boys, he remains passionate about the game.

Currently playing for the Rajasthan Royals in the IPL, he is gearing up for the T20 World Cup with New Zealand in June, followed by the Major Cricket League. Juggling these commitments is a challenge, but his love for bowling and competing against the best keeps him going.

In a chat with *Sportstar* in Jaipur, he reflects on his career and the impact of T20 cricket on fast bowlers.

It has been quite a satisfying campaign for the Rajasthan Royals so far. What are your thoughts?

It has been a great start. We won the first four games; I don't think we could have asked for a better beginning. The team is working together well, and we understand

that it's a long tournament. We had a good start last year too, so we're not looking too far ahead. We're just going to be ourselves at the moment.

As the most experienced fast bowler in the Rajasthan Royals team, how do you pass on your knowledge to the young players?

I think I offer a level of experience, since this is technically my 10th IPL. My first IPL was in 2015 for the Sunrisers Hyderabad. I was so excited because I had the opportunity to open the bowling with Dale Steyn, someone I never thought I would play against, let alone with.

I think that's the best part of this competition: it gives you the chance to bowl with bowlers you're not used to, bowlers you've played against, and then obviously inspire, coach, and mentor young bowlers coming through.

I've had the honour of bowling with a lot of great bowlers throughout my years: (Kagiso) Rabada, (Jasprit) Bumrah, and Steyn, to name a few. And then I moved to Rajasthan; there have been some brilliant up-and-coming bowlers who have represented India over the last couple of years. Then there's a nice balance with a guy like Sandy

(Sandeep) Sharma, who has played a lot of cricket. He debuted in the IPL in 2013, which was a long time ago. They all offer a lot of experience. I always try to come into these tournaments with an open mind, trying to get better, learn, and answer questions from any bowler.

This year, it's been exciting. We've got a find in Mr. Burger (Nandre Burger), as we call him, who is backed up nicely by Avesh Khan, who I have played with before. The spinners (Ravichandran Ashwin and Yuzvendra Chahal) need no description or introduction, so it's a nice balance.

Do you think that T20 cricket, with its cap of only four overs, has given a fresh lease of life to fast bowlers in terms of longevity?

No, I don't think that way, to be honest. Jimmy Anderson aside, I don't think anyone can get close to what he's achieved over his 20-something-odd career. He's an inspiration to every fast bowler out there. He does the yards, has played 20 years of Test cricket, and has claimed 700 wickets for a reason.

When it comes to the T20 format, apart from the obvious advantage of being a shorter format, I think it's still a very demanding game. With the amount of franchise cricket around



R. V. MOORTHY





the world, guys seem to be playing 50-plus T20 games a year.

This part of the world is a tough place to play, but I don't think it gets any better than the IPL. It's a tournament everyone wants to be a part of.

You're playing against the best players in the world, and we all know the crowds, the passion, and the following that cricket gets here. So yeah, there are a lot of positives to the format.

If you could shed some light on your preparation process ahead of the IPL or any other major international event?

I think the positive of playing so much T20 cricket is that, generally, you are up to speed [with trends], having moved around different franchises and tournaments around the world.

Yeah, it's a format that you think is only four overs for a bowler.

Speaking from experience, I think you need to do the work and make sure you are conditioned to be able to play three or so T20 games in a week. And you are adding the challenges of travel, diet, sleep, climate — things that come into effect while touring the subcontinent. It's a combination of things that you need to get right.

Then again, you're playing the best players in the world in a competition like the IPL. So it's a great challenge, but something that I've embraced.

I've moved away from potential cricket and my career as such with the New Zealand cricket team, but I still definitely have ambitions to represent my country.

[Moving away from the contract] was basically to get a good opportunity to see more of the world, play a little less cricket, and see my family a whole lot more. So yeah, no regrets from my end.

Impactful call: Trent Boult on Impact Player rule - "It has allowed teams to equip batters that can bat down to No. 10. It shows in the scores." R.V. MOORTHY

As a fast bowler, what are your thoughts on the Impact Player rule in the IPL? The house seems to be divided...

It has made a huge difference. It has allowed teams to equip batters who can bat down to No. 10. It shows in the scores. The boundary count is higher than it has ever been; we have already seen a couple of 250-plus scores.

When it comes to analysing data from a bowling point of view and looking at how the guys get out and where they were hit for sixes, I think it's skewed massively. Because there's data that has been there for years with the standard 11 players; now you can slightly manipulate that with the balance of the sides.

I'm sure it's what everyone wants to see. They want to see high-scoring games. They want to see record chases, and I think that's what we're going to see more often.

And what are your thoughts on the newly introduced two bouncers per over rule?

It's a good initiative. The grounds are pretty small. The balls aren't moving around as much as they have in previous times. It just gives the bowlers another card up their sleeve to try to be that little bit more unpredictable. So I'm sure it will have a good effect throughout the tournament.

Many believe that Shane Bond joining the Royals as the bowling coach has helped the fast bowlers immensely. You have had a long association with him — in the New Zealand team and later Mumbai Indians. What does he bring to the table?

I have had a relationship with for probably a dozen years, and he's great. As a player, he's very experienced; he was a very skilled bowler. One of the best things he brings to the table is his level-headedness. He is very calm,

and the tactics that he brings to the table are incredible.

This game is about tactics. I always think we overcomplicate it as bowlers by trying to bowl too many [types of] deliveries in one over. Some of the best bowlers in the world, Glenn McGrath and Brett Lee, for instance, are the masters of a couple of deliveries, and they have chosen them very well.

That's where *Bondi* (Bond) comes into it very, very nicely. He does research on the players and has a good ability to bond with all the

I'VE MOVED AWAY FROM POTENTIAL CRICKET AND MY CAREER AS SUCH WITH THE NEW ZEALAND CRICKET TEAM, BUT I STILL DEFINITELY HAVE AMBITIONS TO REPRESENT MY COUNTRY

bowlers he works with. I think that is important when it comes to moving around franchises and dealing with different squads and personalities every year. It's no wonder why he's been so successful in the IPL for 10-plus years.

Now that you are a freelancer, how do you manage your workload and ensure that you make yourself available for the leagues and also for New Zealand?

There are no shortcuts. I enjoy hitting the gym. I enjoy marking out the cones and doing the running, and I love bowling, so that's why it has never been so much of a chore for me. You have to move with the times.

You can't be complacent and just come to the table with the same plan every time. I spent a lot of time with DJ [Dwayne] Bravo over the last couple of years, and I think he's an inspiration for taking his game to the next level.

He has adapted to his game



Freelancer: Trent Boult was released from his central contract in 2022 to spend more time with his family and to play in franchise leagues around the world.

M. VEDHAN

around the world, and played 600 T20s for that reason; he still has it. So, for me, it's about taking the lessons from the likes of those guys and just trying to be better every game.

Despite being favourites in ICC white-ball events, New Zealand is yet to win a title. With the T20 World Cup on the horizon, what are your expectations?

I have always thought we have a successful record in ICC events, and that comes down to the fact that it turns out to be very simple equations, like winning a game to reach the semifinals or the final. And, in those situations, I think New

Zealand plays its best cricket, with a very well-planned side that's equipped with some of the best players in the world who can definitely take on any team.

We are not looking too far ahead in the T20 World Cup. The tournament is quite long, consisting of 20 teams, including some lesser-known nations that have yet to show their full potential.

However, there are also some quality teams participating. Therefore, it will require a lot of hard work to succeed, especially during the must-win games. Nevertheless, I'm confident that New Zealand can compete with any team in the world.



ON THE WRITE LINE

Sunil Gavaskar



SHOWING WHY CRICKET IS A GENTLEMAN'S GAME

Derek Underwood and Raman Subba Row, who passed away recently, were hard-nosed professionals who never gave you an inch on the field but were the first to applaud an opponent when he did well.

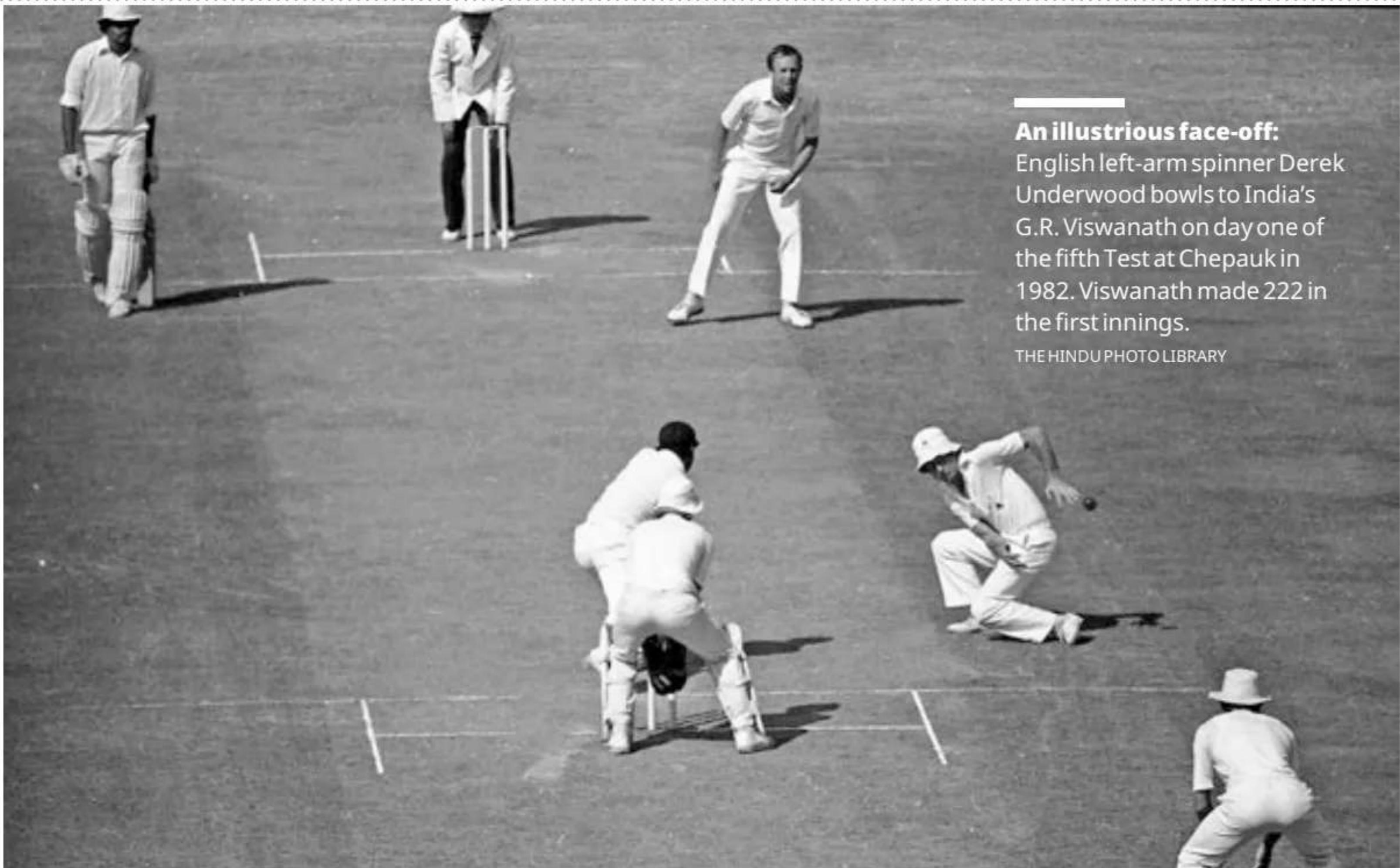
Last week, not just English cricket but world cricket lost two wonderful gentlemen. The passing of Raman Subba Row and Derek Underwood reduces the number of gentlemen in the game. Make no mistake, they were hard-nosed professionals who never gave you an inch on the field but were the first to applaud an opponent when he did well. That, in no way, took away their competitiveness or lessened their desire to do well for their team. Not just that, but when they were successful, they were humble and did not celebrate in a wild way with expletives, screaming like a banshee, or jumping up and down as if the success was totally unexpected. There was no ego, either.

Who can forget Underwood applauding the exquisite century scored by G. R. Viswanath with a warm handshake and then saying to him, 'Master, when you have had enough, please give your wicket to this bowler'. Not that he was not going to try and get Vishy out, but simply an acknowledgement of a superior performance by an opponent. This was during the Delhi Test match in 1981, a game where the little genius was to be dropped from the squad. The selection committee, headed by Polly Umrigar, one of India's all-time greats, had already taken the momentous decision to leave out Chetan Chauhan from the team

despite him being the highest scorer on the tour of Australia and New Zealand a few months earlier. Despite being a failure on that twin tour with just one 50-plus score in both countries, I had been appointed as the captain for the series, so leaving Chauhan out was a shocker for me.

Chauhan and I had struck up a lovely partnership on the field, and my respect for his gutsy fighting qualities as an opener was second to none. Still, he was left out of the team even after I requested the committee to give him two Tests to fail. Normally you ask for two chances to succeed, but here I asked the other way, so confident I was that Chauhan would carry on his scoring, especially after the confidence of having done well Down Under on different pitches and conditions.

Now, after two Tests, the committee wanted to leave Vishy out. He had just played a crucial cameo in the first Test, which we had won narrowly, so this did not make any sense to me. When I saw that the selectors were bent on leaving him out, I said that I did not want to be part of the meeting and would leave. The meeting was held immediately after the second Test in Bengaluru had finished. I had scored 172 there before being dismissed caught and bowled by Underwood, so I was much more confident when I joined the selectors for this meeting. Off-spinner Ghulam



An illustrious face-off:
English left-arm spinner Derek Underwood bowls to India's G.R. Viswanath on day one of the fifth Test at Chepauk in 1982. Viswanath made 222 in the first innings.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

Ahmed, who had also captained India in one Test, was the Hon. Secretary of the BCCI then and the convenor of the selection meeting. He was also a bureaucrat. He had also been a selector before becoming board secretary. He therefore could sense when he needed to step in. He said that if the captain feels so strongly about it, the selection committee should respect it, as after all, he is going to take the team out in the middle. The selection committee was made up of stalwarts; apart from Umrigar, there were the premium all-rounders, Dattu Phadkar and Chandu Sarwate, who was also a fingerprint expert in the police.

Vishy not only got the century, which I have just written about but followed it with a 200 in Chennai, where he and the late Yashpal Sharma batted together for a whole day. To Umrigar's credit, when we sat down to pick the team for the final Test, he thanked me in the

selection meeting for insisting on Vishy being selected.

Mind you, as the captain, I was only coopted to the selection meeting with no voting power. That gesture from Umrigar once again showed that when it comes to Indian cricket, there should never be any egos.

Raman Subba Row was like Chauhan, a gutsy opening batsman who later came to India as the manager of the England team and got along tremendously with the BCCI officials. In later years, he would travel to Mumbai every winter to spend time with his good friend Madhav Apte and stay with him. No doubt the evenings would be filled with reminiscing about the cricketers they both had seen and picking all-time Best Elevens and World Elevens.

RIP, Raman and Derek. Thank you for showing why cricket was called the gentleman's game.



Who can forget Underwood applauding the exquisite century scored by G. R. Viswanath with a warm handshake and then saying to him, 'Master, when you have had enough, please give your wicket to this bowler'.

» PHOTOLINE
INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

1st

Reddy, set, go: Nitish Kumar Reddy rescued Sunrisers Hyderabad from a tricky position against Punjab Kings and hit 64 from 37 balls and elevated his team to 182 that proved good enough to earn two point. SRH won by two runs. R.V. MOORTHY



2nd

Ease of business: Rashid Khan's late cameo of 24 off 11 balls helped Gujarat Titans close out a last-ball thriller against Rajasthan Royals. GT won by three wickets. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR



3rd

Magician at work: Jasprit Bumrah was at his lethal best as he wreaked havoc on Royal Challengers Bengaluru's batting line up and picked up his second fifer of IPL. MI won by seven wickets. EMMANUAL YOGINI



4th

'Cool'deep: Coming back after an injury, Kuldeep Yadav took three wickets in his first nine deliveries and set up Delhi Capitals' win over Lucknow Super Giants in an away game. DC won by six wickets.

SANDEEP SAXENA



5th

Hit'em hard: Shimron Hetmyer hit three maximums and a four in his 10-ball 27 cameo in a tricky run chase to get Rajasthan Royals home in the last over against Punjab Kings. RR won by three wickets.

SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR



6th

Rubbing Salt on wounds: Phil Salt smashed 89 in 47 balls as Kolkata Knight Riders eased past Lucknow Super Giants' modest total of 161. KKR won by eight wickets. AP

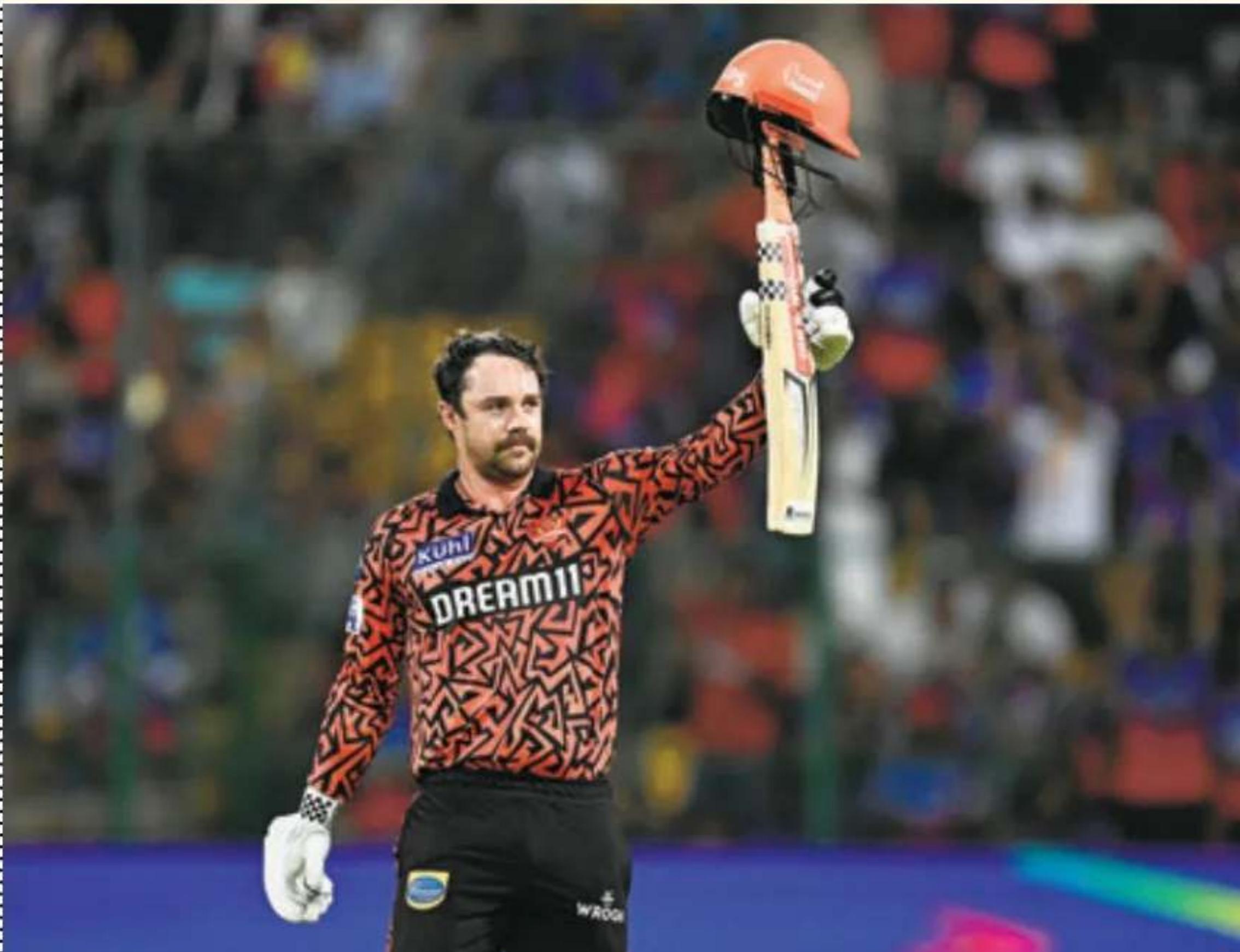
7th

Pathbreaker: Coming back after an injury break, Matheesha Pathirana picked up four wickets to derail Mumbai Indians' 207-run chase. EMMANUAL YOGINI



8th

Keeping up with trends: Rohit Sharma scored an unbeaten 63-ball 105 filled with a variety of strokes but couldn't help Mumbai Indians cross the line in front of home crowd. CSK won by 20 runs. EMMANUAL YOGINI



9th

'Head'ache for bowlers: Travis Head slammed 102 runs off 41 balls to set up Sunrisers Hyderabad's record total of 287/3 against Royal Challengers Bengaluru at M. Chinnaswamy Stadium.

K. BHAGYA PRAKASH



10th

Ageing fine: Dinesh Karthik hit seven sixes and five fours on his way to a 35-ball 83 that gave Royal Challengers Bengaluru an outside chance at an improbable 288-run chase. SRH won by 25 runs.

K. BHAGYA PRAKASH



11th

Moment of joy: Sunil Narine once again bashed bowlers around the park, reached his maiden T20 century in 49 balls and took Kolkata Knight Riders to 223/6. AFP

12th

And that's how it's done: Jos Buttler anchored his way to a record-equalling run chase of 224 in IPL with an unbeaten 60-ball 107 for Rajasthan Royals. RR won by two wickets. AFP





13th

Crash landing: Gujarat Titans' batting failed to get going in Ahmedabad and was bundled out for 89 against Delhi Capitals. DC won by six wickets. VIJAY SONEJI



14th

Destroyed in seconds: Jasprit Bumrah's inswinging yorker rattled Rilee Rossouw's stumps. Bumrah picked three wickets as Mumbai Indians defeated Punjab Kings in Mullanpur by nine runs. R.V. MOORTHY



15th

Leading the way: K. L. Rahul's composed knock of 82 runs guided Lucknow Super Giants to a comfortable eight-wicket win over Chennai Super Kings at home. SANDEEP SAXENA



16th

Fantastic beasts: Sunrisers Hyderabad's Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma smashed 125 runs in PowerPlay against Delhi Capitals to record the highest PowerPlay score in T20 cricket history.

SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR



17th

Giving it back: Jake Fraser-McGurk smashed the fastest IPL 2024 fifty in 15 balls in the 267-run chase including a 30-run over against Washington Sundar. However, his 18-ball 65-run knock went in vain. SRH won by 67 runs. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR



18th

Falling prey: Virat Kohli tries to fend a full toss from KKR's Harshit Rana only to end up being caught and bowled. Virat, who felt the ball was above waist height, expressed his displeasure to the umpires before walking off. In the end, RCB fell short by just one run. K.R. DEEPAK



19th

Derailed: R Sai Kishore's four-fer had Punjab Kings' middle order in a tight grip that eventually set up Gujarat Titans' three-wicket win in Mullanpur. R.V. MOORTHY

» FROM THE WORLD OF CRICKET



1

Former Australia batter Stuart Law has been appointed head coach of the USA men's national team. Law will be in charge for the 2024 T20 World Cup which is being held in the USA and West Indies in June. The 55-year-old has previously coached Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, West Indies and Afghanistan. "It is an exciting opportunity to join USA cricket at this time," said Law. USA kicks off the World Cup against Canada in the tournament's opening match in Dallas on June 2.



2

New Zealand levelled the five-match T20 International series 1-1 against Pakistan, thanks to a brilliant 42-ball 87 by Mark Chapman. Pakistan batted first and put up a solid score of 178 for the loss of four wickets from its 20 overs, with contributions coming from the top-order and a quickfire 20-ball cameo of 41 by Shadab Khan towards the end of the innings. However, New Zealand, led by Chapman, chased down the target with 10 balls to spare.



3

Chamari Athapaththu smashed the third-highest individual score in women's ODIs to help Sri Lanka pull off the highest-ever successful run-chase in women's ODIs in Potchefstroom to level the three-match ICC Women's Championship ODI series. Chasing 302, Athapaththu led Sri Lanka's fightback with an unbeaten 195, the third-highest score in women's ODIs, as the visitor overhauled the target with 33 balls to spare.



4

Nida Dar became the second Pakistani woman to reach 100 ODI wickets. She achieved this feat during Pakistan's match against the West Indies in Karachi. Dar claimed 4/52, which brought her tally to 103. Despite Pakistan's score of 223, the West Indies managed to win the match in the last ball with a boundary from Karishma Ramharack, securing a 2-0 lead in the three-match series. The West Indies also earned two crucial points in the ICC Women's Championship.



5

Zimbabwe women's team has hired former West Indies pacer Courtney Walsh as a coaching consultant in a bid to qualify for the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2024 in Bangladesh. Zimbabwe women are yet to make an appearance at the Women's T20 World Cup. "We count ourselves fortunate and privileged to be able to bring in Courtney as a technical consultant for our campaign," Zimbabwe Cricket Managing Director Givemore Makoni said.

» T20 WORLD CUP SPECIAL – I
STATSMAN / MOHANDAS MENON

First T20 World Cup – 2007

Host: South Africa; **Total matches:** 27 (12 teams)

Semifinals: New Zealand (143/8) lost to Pakistan (147/4) by six wickets in Cape Town on 22 September 2007; India (188/5) beat Australia (173/7) by 15 runs in Durban on 22 September 2007

Final: India (157/5) beat Pakistan (152/10) by 5 runs in Johannesburg on 24 September 2007
(Winning captain: M. S. Dhoni)

Team results

#	Team	M	W	L	NR	Win%
1	Ind	7	5	1	1	71.43
2	Pak	7	5	2	0	71.43
3	SA	5	4	1	0	80.00
4	Aus	6	3	3	0	50.00
5	SL	5	3	2	0	60.00
6	NZ	6	3	3	0	50.00
7	Zim	2	1	1	0	50.00
8	Eng	5	1	4	0	20.00
9	Ban	5	1	4	0	20.00
10	Scot	2	0	1	1	0.00
11	WI	2	0	2	0	0.00
12	Ken	2	0	2	0	0.00

Note: The India-Scotland game was abandoned without a ball bowled is shown as No result in the above table.

Highest individual scores (100s: 1)

Batter (Team)	Runs	Balls	4s	6s	S/R	Opp
C. Gayle (WI)	117	57	7	10	205.26	SA
H. Gibbs (SA)	90*	55	14	2	163.63	WI
J. Kemp (SA)	89*	56	6	6	158.92	NZ
S. Jayasuriya (SL)	88	44	11	4	200.00	Ken
K. Pietersen (Eng)	79	37	7	4	213.51	Zim
G. Gambhir (Ind)	75	54	8	2	138.88	Pak
M. Hayden (Aus)	73*	48	9	3	152.08	Ban
J. Siddique (Ban)	71	49	6	3	144.89	Pak
Yuvraj Singh (Ind)	70	30	5	5	233.33	Aus

Best bowling figures (Four-wicket hauls: 10)

Bowler (Team)	O	Md	Runs	W	E/R	Opp
M. Gillespie (NZ)	2.5	0	7	4	2.47	Ken
R. P. Singh (Ind)	4	0	13	4	3.25	SA
M. Morkel (SA)	4	0	17	4	4.25	NZ
Md. Asif (Pak)	4	0	18	4	4.50	Ind
S. Afridi (Pak)	4	0	19	4	4.75	Scot
D. Vettori (NZ)	4	0	20	4	5.00	Ind
S. Clark (Aus)	4	0	20	4	5.00	SL
U. Gul (Pak)	4	0	25	4	6.25	Scot
E. Chigumbura (Zim)	4	0	31	4	7.75	Eng
Shakib Al Hasan (Ban)	4	0	34	4	8.50	WI

Leading run-getters

Batter (Team)	M	I	No	Runs	HS	Ave.	S/R	100	50
M. Hayden (Aus)	6	6	3	265	73*	88.33	144.81	0	4
G. Gambhir (Ind)	7	6	0	227	75	37.83	129.71	0	3
M.-ul-Haq (Pak)	7	7	3	218	66*	54.50	139.74	0	2
S. Malik (Pak)	7	7	2	195	57	39.00	126.62	0	2
K. Pietersen (Eng)	5	5	0	178	79	35.60	161.82	0	1
J. Kemp (SA)	5	5	3	173	89*	86.50	139.51	0	1
A. Gilchrist (Aus)	6	6	1	169	45	33.80	150.89	0	0
C. McMillan (NZ)	6	5	1	163	57	40.75	181.11	0	1
A. Ahmed (Ban)	5	5	1	162	62*	40.50	129.60	0	1
M. J'wardene (SL)	5	5	1	159	65	39.75	152.88	0	1
M. S. Dhoni (Ind)	7	6	1	154	45	30.80	128.33	0	0
S. Jayasuriya (SL)	5	5	0	154	88	30.80	160.41	0	2

Most sixes hit

Batter (Team)	6s	Balls/6	M	I	Runs	Ave.	S/R	4s
C. McMillan (NZ)	13	6.92	6	5	163	40.75	181.11	7
Yuvraj Singh (Ind)	12	6.33	6	5	148	29.60	194.73	9
C. Gayle (WI)	10	6.00	2	2	117	58.50	195.00	7
M. Hayden (Aus)	10	18.30	6	6	265	88.33	144.80	32
I. Nazir (Pak)	10	9.80	7	7	147	24.50	150.00	13
J. Kemp (SA)	10	12.40	5	5	173	86.50	139.51	13

Leading wicket-takers

Bowler (Team)	M	O	Md	Runs	W	BB	E/R	S/R	4w
U. Gul (Pak)	7	27.4	0	155	13	4/25	5.60	12.77	1
S. Clark (Aus)	6	24	0	144	12	4/20	6.00	12.00	1
S. Afridi (Pak)	7	28	1	188	12	4/19	6.71	14.00	1
R. P. Singh (Ind)	7	24	0	152	12	4/13	6.33	12.00	1
D. Vettori (NZ)	6	24	0	128	11	4/20	5.33	13.09	1
Md. Asif (Pak)	7	26.5	0	212	10	4/18	7.90	16.10	1
I. Pathan (Ind)	7	22	1	149	10	3/16	6.77	13.20	0
M. Morkel (SA)	5	20	0	120	9	4/17	6.00	13.33	1
N. Bracken (Aus)	6	22.2	0	142	8	3/16	6.35	16.75	0
M. Johnson (Aus)	6	24	0	153	8	3/22	6.37	18.00	0
S. Pollock (SA)	5	19.3	1	167	8	3/40	8.56	14.63	0

Hat-trick (1)

Bowler (Bowling)	For	Opp	Venue	Date
B. Lee (3/27)	Aus	Ban	Cape Town	16-Sep-2007

Second T20 World Cup – 2009

Host: England; **Total matches:** 27 (12 teams)

Semifinals: Pakistan (149/4) beat South Africa (142/5) by 7 runs in Nottingham on 18 June 2009; Sri Lanka (158/5) beat West Indies (101/10) by 57 runs at The Oval on 19 June 2009

Final: Sri Lanka (138/6) lost to Pakistan (139/2) by 8 wickets at Lord's on 21 June 2009 (Winning captain: Younis Khan)

Team results

#	Team	M	W	L	NR	Win%
1	Pak	7	5	2	0	71.43
2	SL	7	6	1	0	85.71
3	SA	6	5	1	0	83.33
4	WI	6	3	3	0	50.00
5	Net	2	1	1	0	50.00
6	Eng	5	2	3	0	40.00
6	NZ	5	2	3	0	40.00
6	Ind	5	2	3	0	40.00
9	Ire	5	1	4	0	20.00
10	Ban	2	0	2	0	0.00
10	Aus	2	0	2	0	0.00
10	Scot	2	0	2	0	0.00

Leading run-getters

Batter (Team)	M	I	No	Runs	HS	Ave.	S/R	100	50
T. Dilshan (SL)	7	7	1	317	96*	52.83	144.74	0	3
J. Kallis (SA)	5	5	1	238	64	59.50	126.59	0	2
C. Gayle (WI)	5	5	1	193	88	48.25	134.02	0	2
K. Akmal (Pak)	7	7	0	188	57	26.85	125.33	0	1
A. B. de Villiers (SA)	6	6	1	186	79*	37.20	155.00	0	2
S. Jayasuriya (SL)	7	7	0	177	81	25.28	115.68	0	1
K. Sangakkara (SL)	7	7	2	177	64*	35.40	108.58	0	2
S. Afridi (Pak)	7	7	2	176	54*	35.20	140.80	0	2
Y. Khan (Pak)	7	6	3	172	50	57.33	139.83	0	1
Dwayne Bravo (WI)	6	5	1	154	66*	38.50	145.28	0	2
M. Jayawardene (SL)	7	7	1	154	78	25.66	122.22	0	1
K. Pietersen (Eng)	4	4	0	154	58	38.50	152.47	0	1
Yuvraj Singh (Ind)	5	5	1	153	67	38.25	154.54	0	1
L. Simmons (WI)	5	5	0	150	77	30.00	137.61	0	1

Most sixes hit

Batter (Team)	6s	Balls/6	M	I	Runs	Ave.	S/R	4s
Yuvraj Singh (Ind)	9	11.00	5	5	153	38.25	154.54	10
C. Gayle (WI)	8	18.00	5	5	193	48.25	134.02	21
K. Akmal (Pak)	7	21.42	7	7	188	26.85	125.33	15
Dwayne Bravo (WI)	6	17.67	6	5	154	38.50	145.28	12
A. B. de Villiers (SA)	6	20.00	6	6	186	37.20	155.00	16
K. Coetzer (Scot)	5	9.40	2	2	75	37.50	159.57	4
D. Hussey (Aus)	5	7.60	2	2	55	27.50	144.73	1
S. Styris (NZ)	5	13.60	5	5	81	27.00	119.11	1
M. Guptill (NZ)	5	15.80	5	4	102	34.00	129.11	6
S. Jayasuriya (SL)	5	30.60	7	7	177	25.28	115.68	22

Highest individual scores (100s: 0)

Batter (Team)	Runs	Balls	4s	6s	S/R	Opp
T. Dilshan (SL)	96*	57	12	2	168.42	WI
C. Gayle (WI)	88	50	6	6	176.00	Aus
S. Jayasuriya (SL)	81	47	10	3	172.34	WI
A. B. de Villiers (SA)	79*	34	5	6	232.35	Scot
M. J'dene (SL)	78	53	9	1	147.16	Ire
L. Simmons (WI)	77	50	12	1	154.00	SA
T. Dilshan (SL)	74	47	11	1	157.44	WI
L. Wright (Eng)	71	49	8	0	144.89	Net

Note: Tillakaratne Dilshan (SL) hit the maximum number of 4s: 46

Leading wicket-takers

Bowler (Team)	M	O	Md	Runs	W	BB	E/R	S/R	4w	5w
U. Gul (Pak)	7	24.3	0	158	13	5/6	6.44	11.31	0	1
L. Malinga (SL)	7	25.2	0	181	12	3/17	7.14	12.67	0	0
A. Mendis (SL)	7	26	0	143	12	3/9	5.50	13.00	0	0
S. Ajmal (Pak)	7	28	0	163	12	4/19	5.82	14.00	1	0
S. Afridi (Pak)	7	28	0	149	11	4/11	5.32	15.27	1	0
Dwayne Bravo (WI)	6	21	0	184	10	4/38	8.76	12.60	1	0
R. van der Merwe (SA)	6	24	0	135	10	2/14	5.62	14.40	0	0
M. Muralitharan (SL)	7	27	0	158	9	3/29	5.85	18.00	0	0
W. Parnell (SA)	6	20.5	0	119	9	4/13	5.71	13.89	1	0
D. Steyn (SA)	6	22	0	145	9	2/21	6.59	14.67	0	0
A. Cusack (Ire)	5	17	0	153	8	4/18	9.00	12.75	1	0
K. McCallan (Ire)	5	19.3	0	137	8	2/26	7.02	14.63	0	0

Best bowling figures (Five-wicket haul: 1; four-wicket hauls: 8)

Bowler (Team)	Overs	Md	Runs	W	E/R	Opp
U. Gul (Pak)	3	0	6	5	2.00	NZ
S. Afridi (Pak)	4	0	11	4	2.75	Net
W. Parnell (SA)	4	0	13	4	3.25	WI
A. Cusack (Ire)	3	0	18	4	6.00	SL
L. Simmons (WI)	3	0	19	4	6.33	SL
Z. Khan (Ind)	3	0	19	4	6.33	Ire
S. Ajmal (Pak)	4	0	19	4	4.75	Ire
P. Ojha (Ind)	4	0	21	4	5.25	Ban
Dyne Bravo (WI)	4	0	38	4	9.50	Ind

Hat-trick (no instances)

Third T20 World Cup – 2010

Host: West Indies; **Total matches:** 27 (12 teams)

Semifinals: Sri Lanka (128/6) lost to England (132/3) by 7 wickets in Gros Islet, Saint Lucia on 13 May 2010; Pakistan (158/5) lost to Australia (197/7) by 3 wickets in Gros Islet, Saint Lucia on 14 May 2010

Final: Australia (147/6) lost to England (148/3) by 7 wickets in Bridgetown, Barbados on 16 May 2010 (Winning captain: Paul Collingwood)

Team results

#	Team	M	W	L	NR	Win%
1	Eng	7	5	1	1	71.43
2	Aus	7	6	1	0	85.71
3	SL	6	3	3	0	50.00
4	Pak	6	2	4	0	33.33
5	NZ	5	3	2	0	60.00
5	WI	5	3	2	0	60.00
6	Ind	5	2	3	0	40.00
6	SA	5	2	3	0	40.00
9	Ire	2	0	1	1	0.00
10	Ban	2	0	2	0	0.00
10	Zim	2	0	2	0	0.00
10	Afg	2	0	2	0	0.00

Leading run-getters

Batter (Team)	M	I	No	Runs	HS	Ave.	S/R	100	50
M. Jayawardene (SL)	6	6	1	302	100	60.40	159.78	1	2
K. Pietersen (Eng)	6	6	2	248	73*	62.00	137.77	0	2
S. Butt (Pak)	6	6	1	223	73	44.60	131.17	0	2
C. Kieswetter (Eng)	7	7	0	222	63	31.71	116.84	0	1
S. Raina (Ind)	5	5	0	219	101	43.80	146.00	1	1
M. Hussey (Aus)	7	6	4	188	60*	94.00	175.70	0	1
E. Morgan (Eng)	7	7	2	183	55	36.60	128.87	0	1
K. Akmal (Pak)	6	6	0	180	73	30.00	120.80	0	2
C. White (Aus)	7	7	3	180	85*	45.00	146.34	0	1
D. Hussey (Aus)	7	7	1	179	59	29.83	130.65	0	2
J. Kallis (SA)	5	5	0	171	73	34.20	116.32	0	1
S. Watson (Aus)	7	7	0	163	81	23.28	146.84	0	2
U. Akmal (Pak)	6	5	1	155	56*	38.75	143.51	0	2
A. B. de Villiers (SA)	5	5	1	153	53	38.25	122.40	0	1
D. Warner (Aus)	7	7	0	150	72	21.42	148.51	0	1

Highest individual scores (100s: 2)

Batter (Team)	Runs	Balls	4s	6s	S/R	Opp
S. Raina (Ind)	101	60	9	5	168.33	SA
M. J'dene (SL)	100	64	10	4	156.25	Zim
M. J'dene (SL)	98*	56	9	4	175.00	WI
C. Gayle (WI)	98	66	5	7	148.48	Ind
C. White (Aus)	85*	49	6	6	173.46	SL
M. J'dene (SL)	81	51	8	2	158.82	NZ
S. Watson (Aus)	81	49	7	4	165.30	Pak
R. Sharma (Ind)	79*	46	4	6	171.73	Aus
K. Pietersen (Eng)	73*	52	8	2	140.38	Pak
K. Akmal (Pak)	73	55	8	1	132.72	Ban
S. Butt (Pak)	73	46	8	2	158.69	Ban
J. Kallis (SA)	73	54	3	3	135.18	Ind
D. Warner (Aus)	72	42	2	7	171.42	Ind

Most sixes hit

Batter (Team)	6s	Balls/6	M	I	Runs	Ave.	S/R	4s
C. White (Aus)	12	10.25	7	7	180	45.00	146.34	10
M. J'dene (SL)	11	17.18	6	6	302	60.40	159.78	29
C. K'wetter (Eng)	11	17.27	7	7	222	31.71	116.84	20
S. Watson (Aus)	11	10.09	7	7	163	23.28	146.84	10
D. Hussey (Aus)	10	13.70	7	7	179	29.83	130.65	8
U. Akmal (Pak)	10	10.80	6	5	155	38.75	143.51	6
D. Warner (Aus)	10	10.10	7	7	150	21.42	148.51	13

Best bowling figures (Four-wicket hauls: 4)

Bowler (Team)	Overs	M	Runs	W	E/R	Opp
D. Nannes (Aus)	4	0	18	4	4.50	Ban
C. L'veldt (SA)	4	0	19	4	4.75	Pak
M. Morkel (SA)	3	0	20	4	6.66	Afg
S. Ajmal (Pak)	4	0	26	4	6.50	SA
S. Styris (NZ)	2	0	5	3	2.50	Zim
D. Sammy (WI)	3.4	0	8	3	2.18	Ire
C. L'veldt (SA)	4	0	12	3	3.00	Afg
M. Johnson (Aus)	3.2	0	15	3	4.50	SL
G. Dockrell (Ire)	4	0	16	3	4.00	WI
N. McCullum (NZ)	4	0	16	3	4.00	Zim

Hat-trick (no instances)

Leading wicket-takers

Bowler (Team)	M	O	Md	Runs	W	BB	E/R	S/R	4w
D. Nannes (Aus)	7	26	1	183	14	4/18	7.03	11.14	1
C. L'veldt (SA)	4	16	0	104	11	4/19	6.50	8.73	1
S. Ajmal (Pak)	6	22.2	0	169	11	4/26	7.56	12.18	1
S. Smith (Aus)	7	23	1	163	11	3/20	7.08	12.55	0
M. Johnson (Aus)	6	22.2	0	145	10	3/15	6.49	13.40	0
A. Nehra (Ind)	5	20	0	156	10	3/19	7.80	12.00	0
R. S'bottom (Eng)	7	21.3	0	160	10	3/23	7.44	12.90	0
G. Swann (Eng)	7	22	0	144	10	3/24	6.54	13.20	0



CAN T20 WORLD CUP CRACK THE AMERICAN DREAM?

The United States will host a cricket World Cup **for the first time in its history** as the game seeks to extend its reach beyond its traditional borders.

Ashwin Achal

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The early indicator of a readily available market came in 2015 when the Cricket All-Star Series was held in the United States of America. The exhibition T20 series, which featured two teams led by retired legends

Sachin Tendulkar and Shane Warne, was held in three cities: New York City, Houston, and Los Angeles. The games were held in a baseball stadium, which was altered with drop-in pitches.

Despite the makeshift arrangements, crowds poured in. Enthusiasm was high, especially among the Indian diaspora. In the second outing held in Houston,

around 26,000 fans thronged Minute Maid Park. The chance to see the likes of Tendulkar, Warne, Ricky Ponting, Brian Lara, Kumar Sangakkara, and Jacques Kallis in the flesh was simply too tempting to pass on. The third match in Los Angeles brought fans from all over California State, home to a sizeable number of cricket-crazy Indians.

For the players, the novelty was



extending borders: The West Indies will host two-thirds of the matches in the 2024 tournament, with the US staging the rest. GETTY IMAGES

wait for the World Cup to commence. "We used to travel to the West Indies and England to watch the Indian team play. Now that the World Cup is happening in the USA, we do not have to travel too far," Badlani said. Badlani had moved from Maharashtra to the USA in 2009 and joined the private tennis-ball leagues. Since the early days of playing matches on public grounds, the sport has now caught the attention of the local government. "Given the boom in tennis ball leagues, the city recognised the revenue potential in cricket. So now we have to get permits from the city to use the grounds. These grounds are in high demand; they must be reserved well in advance," Badlani said. The World Cup could pique the interest of local Americans. "Once in a while, a person born and raised in America will stop at our match and ask about cricket. They want to understand the sport, but this is rare," Badlani said.

Irfan Sait, Director and Chief Coach at Karnataka Institute of

WHEN USA CRICKET'S APPLICATION TO JOIN THE ICC WAS APPROVED IN 2019, CRICKET ADMINISTRATION GOT BETTER STREAMLINED

undeniable. Tendulkar and Warne were suitably impressed, terming the series a success. If matches involving players well past their prime proved to be a hit, then the 2024 ICC Men's T20 World Cup is sure to be a home run.

The premier cricket tournament makes a historic first visit to the USA, with India's group stage matches set

to be held in New York and Lauderhill (Florida). There is interest expected from those with roots in Pakistan and Sri Lanka as well, but the ICC counts on the Indian fans to turn up in large numbers.

Rakesh Badlani was among the many who travelled to Los Angeles to cheer on Tendulkar and other stars. Badlani is an active tennis-ball cricketer in the Bay Area and cannot

Cricket (KIOC), realised the potential of taking his academy to the West. He started his coaching centre in San Francisco before moving to Atlanta. Many in the USA harbour big dreams—playing international cricket or even in the IPL. The key is to start young and learn the basics well. "Indians who have moved to the USA hold on to dreams and aspirations of playing professional cricket. This is passed on to their kids. Parents are willing to pay for good cricket infrastructure and facilities. The success of the IPL has got everyone's attention. They believe that their children can play



Gearing up for action: India and Pakistan will face each other at the 34,000-seater Nassau County International Cricket Stadium in the 2024 T20 World Cup. Pics: GETTY IMAGES

international cricket or get an IPL contract," Sait said.

One drawback, as Sait points out, is a lack of government support. This will happen only when local Americans take a liking to the sport.

This was true in the UAE as well, when Emirati Sultan Zarawani led the national team in the 1990s. "When Sultan was playing, there was substantial official support for cricket in the UAE. Once he stopped playing, official funding and support stopped," Sait said.

Hosting the World Cup could provide the spark to get the government on board in the USA. "The 1987 World Cup hosted in India gave the sport a huge boost here. A similar spurt can occur if the T20 World Cup is a success in the USA," Sait said. On a professional level,

there are now more opportunities to move to the USA and take up cricket as a career option. Take the case of Sindhu Ashok, an India 'A' woman cricketer, who got married and moved to the USA to take up a corporate job. She started playing club cricket and now leads the USA's national women's team. A.S. Sri Krishna followed a similar path, shifting base to the USA to play for Minor League Cricket side San Diego Surf Riders. Krishna, who played in the Karnataka State Cricket Association Division I league and represented the Indian indoor cricket team, noted that grounds in the USA may not be on par with those in India.

When USA Cricket's application to join the ICC was approved in 2019, cricket administration got better

streamlined. This paved the way for the advent of Minor League Cricket, a development T20 league for Major League Cricket. Krishna was among the players roped in when Minor League Cricket teams looked for quality talent. "A lot of players were signed from India, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan," Krishna said.

The administrative cricket body of the USA has had its fair share of trouble, having been suspended by the ICC for long periods. With an official, recognised system now in place, the picture looks a lot more palatable. "Hosting the World Cup is a step in the right direction. The USA will also host the Olympics in 2028, which will feature cricket as a discipline. This brings a lot of hope for the development of cricket in the region," Krishna said.



DAVID SLAYS GOLIATH AT LORD'S, AND SRI LANKA'S FIRST WORLD CUP

The T20 World Cup has had many **unforgettable moments** in its eight editions, which have contributed to its popularity. Here are a few.

Sahil Mathur

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The T20 format emerged as an innovative spectacle aimed at captivating audiences with its fast-paced action, symbolised by the brisk flight of the white Kookaburra ball. Initially met with skepticism from purists and players alike, its potential as a serious cricketing endeavour was doubted.

However, in 2007, the inaugural World Twenty20 tournament signalled a significant shift. Over the ensuing 17 years, what was once dismissed as a mere entertainment gimmick has evolved into a cricket powerhouse. Today, T20 cricket commands a fervent following, surpassing even the traditional bastion of One Day Internationals (ODIs), which now struggles to maintain its relevance beyond its quadrennial pinnacle.

In the eight editions of the T20 World Cup, there have been numerous unforgettable moments that have contributed to the format's popularity.

► GIBBS STEALS GAYLE'S THUNDER

It began with an exciting knock from two of cricket's biggest names, Chris Gayle and Herschelle Gibbs of the West Indies and South Africa.

The Gayle storm hit Johannesburg on September 11, 2007, during the opening game of the World Twenty20. The West Indian opener scored a whopping 117 runs off just 57 balls, hitting the ball out of the park multiple times. The West Indies finished its innings at 205/6. South Africa then chased the total down with 14 balls to spare and eight wickets in hand, thanks to Gibbs' unbeaten 90 off 55 balls.

This game had it all: a 50-ball hundred, 18 sixes, and a total of 413 runs scored. This moment marked the arrival of the World T20 and set the standard for how the game would be played — full of excitement and entertainment.



► MORE DRAMA, MORE ENTERTAINMENT

During the build-up to the 2014 game between Australia and the West Indies, there was a lot of talk. Two days ahead of the game, James Faulkner said he disliked the West Indian players, which did not go down well for the Australian.

Australia scored 178/8 in Mirpur, and the West Indies accepted the challenge. There were send-offs, animated reactions, and celebrations loud enough to get under the skin of the opposition. Amidst all this, Chris Gayle set up the chase with his 35-ball 53. The West Indies needed 31 in the last two overs.

Darren Sammy hit Mitchell Starc for a six and two more fours, getting 19 runs from the penultimate over. With 12 needed off the last over, Faulkner was given the ball, and Sammy was on strike. Two perfect yorkers made it 12 needed off four. However, another attempted yorker turned into a full toss, and Sammy cleared the ropes. Faulkner bowled another slot ball, and Sammy hit it straight, throwing the bat in the air in joy, knowing it had enough power to go over the ropes.

The whole West Indian team ran onto the ground. Bats were flying. The players, led by Gayle, broke into a celebration dance that featured moves from the global hit "Gangnam Style", by the South Korean rapper PSY. Emotions ran high that night.

"Like I said in the pre-match press conference, talk is cheap. Cricket is a game of action. You can talk all you want, but it is the action that matters. West Indies acted today. It feels very good to bring it home. We fought for it. Faulkner will not like us anymore," Sammy said later in the press conference.





► BOWLERS HAVE THEIR SAY

The format seems to favour batters, but there have been times when bowlers have dominated the game.

In 2009, Pakistan pacer Umar Gul (**above**) took the first five-wicket haul of the tournament. He was introduced in the 13th over, when New Zealand was 72/4. In the next five overs, Gul took five wickets, and the Kiwis were bowled out for 99. Gul bowled three overs, picked up five wickets, and conceded just six runs.

In 2014, Rangana Herath produced a stunning spell. New Zealand had bowled Sri Lanka out for 119 in a match that decided who qualifies for the semifinals. The left-arm spinner, introduced in the fourth over, instantly claimed a wicket, and picked up two more in his next over. He conceded a single off his 14th delivery but took a wicket on the next ball, leaving the Kiwis at 30/5 in eight overs. After a break, he came on to bowl his final over, which also turned out to be the last over of the match. Herath ended up with figures of five for three in 3.3 overs, and New Zealand was bowled out for 60. Sri Lanka went on to win the title that year.



Pics: GETTY IMAGES & AP

► ANYONE CAN BEAT ANYONE

In the first edition, Australia faced Zimbabwe in its opening fixture. Despite being a crowd favourite, Australia slipped to 19 for three in no time and eventually managed to score 138 for nine. However, Zimbabwe, anchored by Brendon Taylor's unbeaten 60, managed to surpass Australia's total off the penultimate delivery, winning the match.

In 2009, England, the host country, also faced a similar fate when it lost to the Netherlands. The Netherlands was chasing a target of 163 at Lord's and required seven runs off the last over. It managed to score two off the final ball, thanks to Ryan ten Doeschate and Edgar Schiferli (**left**). An overthrow confirmed the Netherlands' first-ever victory over England across formats.

Five years later, in the same tournament, the Netherlands defeated England again, this time quite convincingly at Chittagong. While the Dutch scraped through 133/5 in the first innings, England didn't even show up in the second innings, getting bowled out for 88 while chasing 134.

In the 2022 edition, Zimbabwe (**above**) managed to defend a modest target of 131 against Pakistan in Perth. Despite losing wickets regularly, Pakistan was well within reach of the target, needing 11 runs off the last over with Mohammad Nawaz and Mohammad Wasim at the crease. The duo scored eight runs in the first three balls, but Brad Evans bowled a dot ball on the fourth delivery and removed Nawaz on the fifth. Pakistani batters attempted to run on the last ball but could only complete one run before Shaheen Shah Afridi was run out.

» T20 WORLD CUP – SPECIAL I
PHOTOLINE

2007 – SOUTH AFRICA



1st

Blazing start: West Indies' **Chris Gayle** smashed a remarkable 117 against host South Africa in the opening match in Johannesburg. The Gaylestorm era had officially begun. GETTY IMAGES



2nd

Three for three: India's first match against Pakistan featured the first-ever bowl-out in T20s. **Robin Uthappa's** celebration pretty much encapsulated India's flawless performance, with Virender Sehwag, Harbhajan Singh and Uthappa hitting the stumps with clinical precision. GETTY IMAGES



3rd

Fiery spell: Australia's **Brett Lee** decimated Bangladesh with the first-ever T20 hat-trick. In the 17th over of their group stage clash, Lee sent Shakib Al Hasan, Mashrafe Mortaza and Alok Kapali back to the pavilion in a game-changing over. GETTY IMAGES



4th

Ruthless: Yuvraj Singh showed no mercy to Stuart Broad in India's clash with England in Durban. The southpaw hit six consecutive sixes in the 19th over, in what is now considered one of the greatest moments in T20 history.

GETTY IMAGES



5th

Twist of fate: Down to the last wicket in Johannesburg, Misbah-ul-Haq needed to score six runs off the last four balls to script a memorable victory against India in the final. But his ill-timed scoop ended Pakistan's dreams in the most shocking manner.

GETTY IMAGES

6th

True leader: Captain MS Dhoni played a vital role in the team's success by taking smart and brave decisions on the field, like choosing Joginder Sharma to bowl the last over of the final.

GETTYIMAGES



7th

Turning point: The title was a defining moment for Indian cricket. It effectively set the stage for the T20 revolution in India that started with the Indian Premier League the following year. GETTYIMAGES



2009 – ENGLAND



8th

Unforgiving: Gayle played another memorable knock in the 2009 edition when he scored a blistering 88(50) against Australia, plundering sixes off the likes of Brett Lee and Mitchell Johnson. GETTYIMAGES



9th

In vain: India was 87/5 in the 15th over when Yusuf Pathan came on to bat against England, which had set a target of 154. The explosive batter scored a quickfire 33 of 17 balls, but it wasn't enough as India lost by three runs at Lord's.

GETTYIMAGES



10th

Power play: In the 2009 T20 World Cup clash against Scotland, **AB de Villiers** exhibited sheer dominance, amassing 79 runs from a mere 34 deliveries. His explosive batting propelled South Africa to a commanding total of 211 runs at The Oval. Scotland could only manage a meagre 81 in the chase. GETTY IMAGES



11th

Scoop off flair: Featuring 12 fours and two sixes, **Tillakaratne Dilshan's** incredible 96 not out played a crucial role in Sri Lanka's semifinal match against West Indies, helping it post a total of 158/5 at The Oval. Sri Lanka eventually won by 57 runs. The flamboyant opener went on to become the highest run-getter in that edition. GETTY IMAGES



IN ONLY ITS PENULTIMATE SUPER 8 MATCH AT LORD'S, INDIA WAS ELIMINATED BY ENGLAND AFTER LOSING BY THREE RUNS, WITH DHONI AND YUSUF STRANDED AT THE CREASE AND FIVE WICKETS STILL IN HAND

12th

Glorious moment: Shahid Afridi kept his composure to score a fine half-century in a high-pressure situation as he steered Pakistan to its maiden T20 world title at Lord's. He was ably supported by Shoaib Malik in a run-chase of 139, after Abdul Razzaq's three wickets restricted Sri Lanka to a below-par total. GETTY IMAGES



13th

Trend-setter: **Suresh Raina** scored India's first-ever T20 century in its group stage match against South Africa, helping his side post a challenging total of 186 on a difficult pitch in Saint Lucia. This was also just the third international T20 century by any batter. India eventually won by 14 runs. GETTY IMAGES

2010 – WEST INDIES



14th

A Lankan lesson: Sri Lanka knocked Dhoni's men out of the tournament with a last-ball win in Saint Lucia, thanks to a solid 46 by **Angelo Mathews**. A late surge by Chamara Kapugedera during the chase further sealed India's fate. GETTY IMAGES



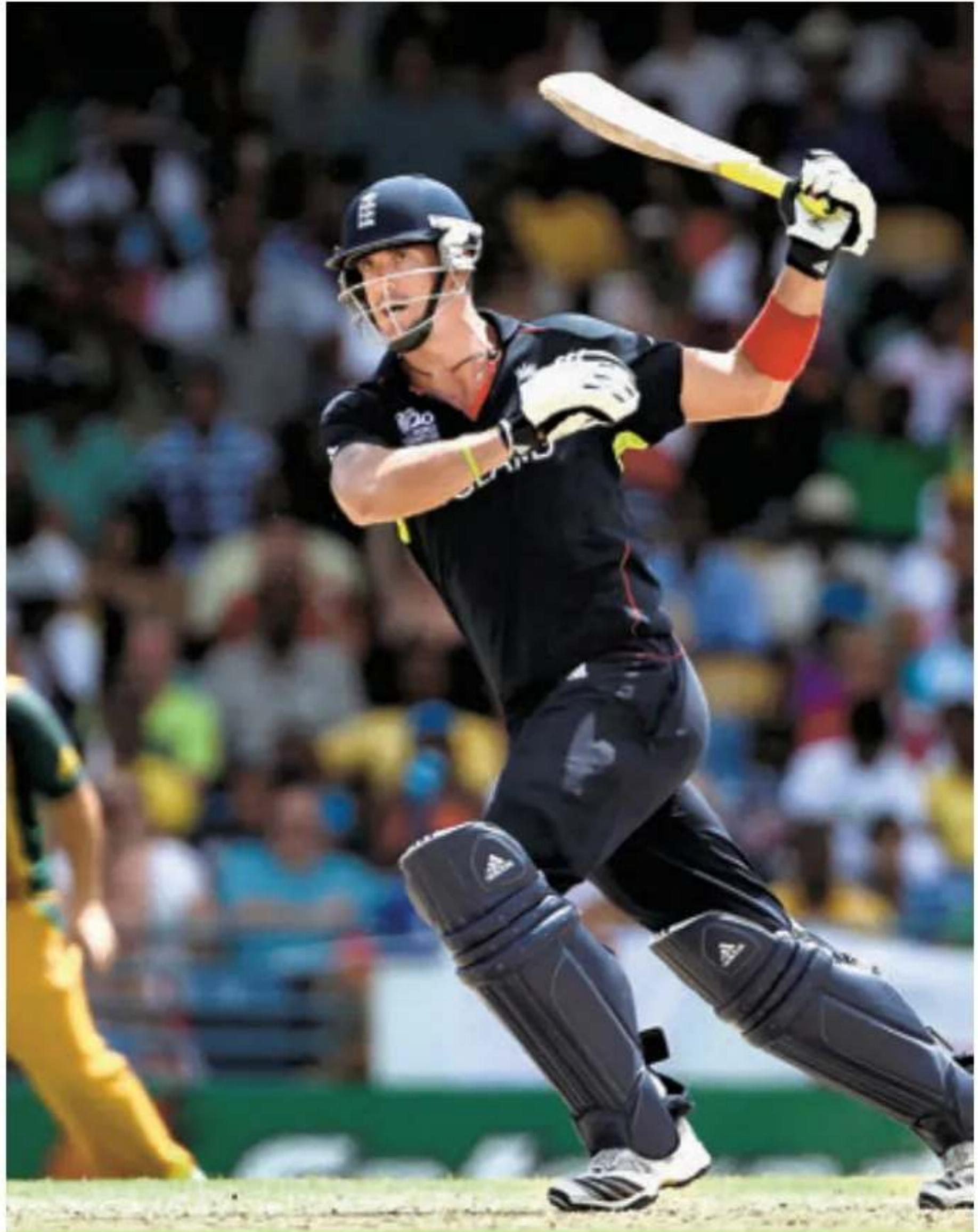
15th

The wow factor: One of the best performances in T20 World Cup history, this five-wicket maiden by Pakistan's **Mohammad Amir** against Australia was a sight to behold. Brad Haddin was caught on the first ball, and Mitchell Johnson's stumps were shattered on the next. Michael Hussey and Steven Smith were then run out on the third and fourth deliveries, respectively, followed by Shaun Tait being clean bowled by a perfectly executed yorker on the final one. The over ended like this — WWWWOW. GETTY IMAGES



16th

Rescue act: Australia snatched an improbable victory against Pakistan after **Michael Hussey** played the kind of innings that can destroy any opposing team's spirit. With Australia five wickets down and needing 85 from the last seven overs, Hussey came to the crease and smashed 60 not out of just 24 balls to deny Pakistan a second successive T20 World Cup final. GETTY IMAGES



17th

Blockbuster finale: Two of cricket's fiercest rivals met each other for the first time in a T20 World Cup final in Bridgetown. After Australia posted 147, Craig Kieswetter and **Kevin Pietersen** (the Player of the Series) delivered superlative performances to help England reach the target with three overs to spare. GETTY IMAGES

18th

Mercurial knock: New Zealand's Brendon McCullum showed why he is one of the most feared batters in the world when he smashed seven sixes in his innings of 123 against Bangladesh in Pallekele. The eventual target of 192 was too much for the Tigers. AP



19th

Turn of the tide: Even though India's total of 170 seemed gettable, England had no answer to Harbhajan Singh's guile. The off-spinner picked up four wickets conceding just 12 runs in his spell. England succumbed for just 80 runs in Colombo. K. R. DEEPAK



20th

On song: Virat Kohli's love affair with Pakistan was in full display when he scored a sterling 78 not out to guide India to a comfortable eight-wicket win in Colombo. However, the Men in Blue failed to qualify for the semifinals due to insufficient net run rate in the Super 8 stage. K. R. DEEPAK



21st

Web of mystery: Ajantha Mendis of Sri Lanka scripted a fairytale performance by taking six wickets for just eight runs in an 82-run victory against Zimbabwe in Hambantota. The Lankans went on to face West Indies in the final. AP



22nd

Déjà vu: Despite Marlon Samuels' knock of 78, West Indies could only set a target of 137 runs in the final in Colombo. However, Sunil Narine and Darren Sammy managed to take five wickets between each other to restrict Sri Lanka to just 101. The Windies were world champions once again. K.R. DEEPAK



23rd

Calypso takeover: This was the first world title for the West Indies since 1979 and it couldn't have come with a better and more deserving team. The likes of **Gayle, Kieron Pollard, Dwayne Bravo, Andre Russell and Sunil Narine** all went on to become T20 legends in their own right. K.R. DEEPAK

THREE-HORSE RACE: WHO WILL KEEP WICKETS FOR INDIA AT THE 2024 T20 WORLD CUP?

Each of the **three contenders** – Dinesh Karthik, Rishabh Pant and Sanju Samson – brings something different to the table.

Vijay Lokapally & Shayan Acharya

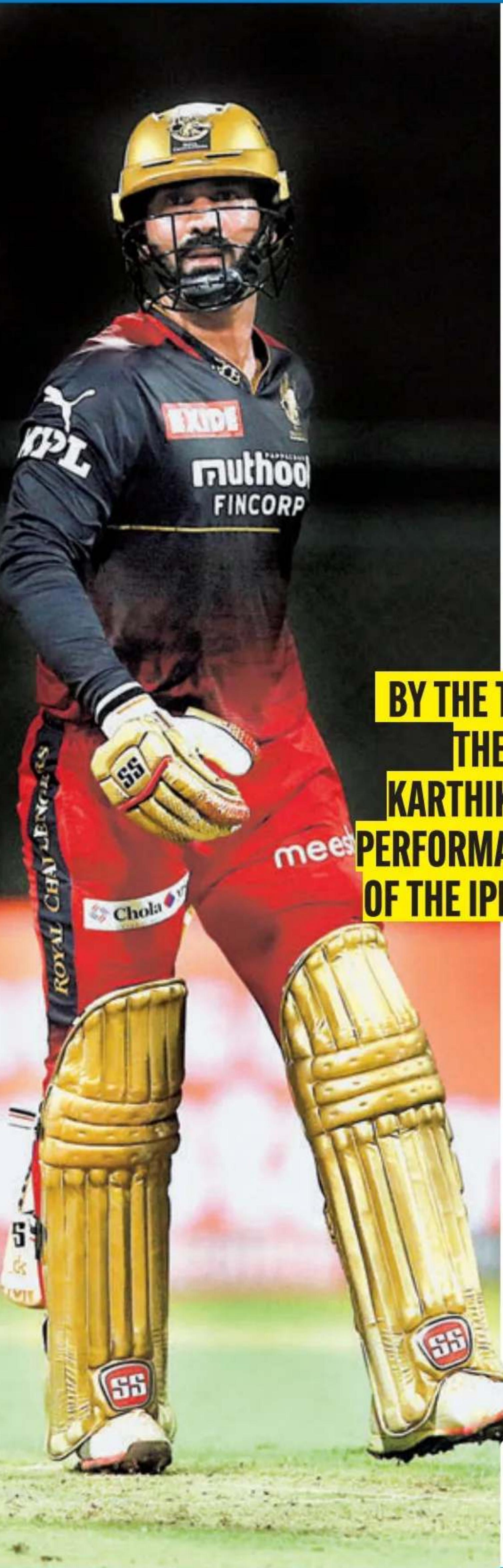
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As Dinesh Karthik kept clearing the fence in an Indian Premier League (IPL) fixture against Mumbai Indians at the Wankhede Stadium, his old friend and the captain of the Indian team, Rohit Sharma, walked up to him, applauded, and said in jest, "World Cup ke selection ke liye push karna hai isko, shabash! Dimaag mein chal raha hai iska World Cup... (He's pushing for World Cup selection. He has the World Cup selection in his mind)."

On the face of it, that seemed like banter between two colleagues who have known each other since their formative years, but not quite. Rohit's words were significant, with the T20 World Cup just a few months away and the national selection committee set to decide on the 15-member squad soon. But what about Rishabh Pant and Sanju Samson? They are strong candidates for the job.

By the time the ICC tournament gets underway in the USA and the West Indies, Karthik will have turned 39. But his phenomenal form in this edition of the IPL as a finisher certainly makes him a contender. Featuring for a star-studded yet struggling Royal Challengers Bengaluru,





Strong contender: Rishabh Pant, who has come back from a life-threatening accident, is the frontrunner for the wicketkeeper's slot. SPORTZPICS/IPL

Karthik has so far amassed 251 runs, with a couple of fifties. And his record of guiding India home in tricky situations — a la the Nidahas Trophy back in 2018 — certainly adds gloss to his glorious resume.

However, the four-member selection committee, led by Ajit Agarkar, will find it challenging. Focusing on breaking India's title jinx in an ICC tournament since 2013, the selectors, like the team management, will have to answer a fundamental question before they sit down to pick the final 15—should the side be constructed based on the current trend or should it go by reputation and opt for big names?

According to former national selector Bhupinder Singh, the factor that will play a significant role is the playing conditions. "We are playing in New York, and there is little idea about the pitches. The boundary's size and the playing surface's character will count a lot. As for the team, I think it is more or less settled — six batters, two all-rounders, three fast bowlers, and two spinners,"

BY THE TIME THE T20 WORLD CUP BEGINS IN THE USA AND THE WEST INDIES, DINESH KARTHIK WILL BE 39. HOWEVER, HIS SUPERB PERFORMANCE AS A FINISHER IN THIS EDITION OF THE IPL MAKES HIM A STRONG CONTENDER

said Bhupinder.

Selection is always a tricky start, but going by tradition, it is unlikely that the selection committee would allow room for experiments. It would like to proceed with the players who have been part of the set-up over the years. However, the only position that could see three-way battle is the wicketkeeper's. Going by the current form, Karthik has tough competition from Samson and the comeback man Pant.

However, former India wicketkeeper-batter and national selector Syed Saba Karim puts his money on Pant. "You need to pick players who have done it for you," Karim says. "The way Rishabh has come back, he has carved his script here, and he is an absolute match-winner and can play those impact innings."

Pant has had a fairy-tale-like comeback to professional cricket 15 months after a horrific car crash. As the captain of Delhi Capitals, Pant has been exceptional both with the bat and behind the stumps. Karim is impressed with the youngster and has no

intention of looking for a replacement. "He is someone who can fare well against any top-quality bowler. Most international teams have five top-quality bowlers plus a sixth bowling option."



SANJU SAMSON'S PYROTECHNICS WITH THE BAT AND CAPTAINCY PROWESS WHILE LEADING THE RAJASTHAN ROYALS MAKE HIM A STRONG BET FOR THE WICKETKEEPER'S SPOT



Before the IPL started, there were debates over the future of Virat Kohli in white-ball cricket. However, the former India captain has ensured that he strikes form in the tournament and assures himself of a ticket to the USA.

In the previous editions of the T20 World Cup — in 2021 and 2022 — India failed to cross the line despite some of the biggest names in the ranks. That led to questions on whether it was a fair call to pick a half-fit Hardik Pandya, who could not even bowl in the UAE, or leave out the seasoned leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal.

These are some aspects that need to be considered this time. Karim has an interesting suggestion: "Since the conditions are new and the grounds are untested, it would have been nice if someone from the coaching staff or the Board could visit those venues, do a bit of recce, and update the selectors, based on which they can make an informed decision."

While that may be wishful thinking, the former selector believes it is essential for Agarkar and his team to 'look at players who can be match-winners'. "It's not about scoring 50s or 100s; it's about delivering those knocks when it matters the most," Karim says, and for that to happen, there isn't a need for too much tweaking.

In a format that's fast and





Race heats up: While Hardik Pandya is likely to be the frontrunner for the seam-bowling all-rounder's spot, Shivam Dube has given compelling reasons for selectors and the team management to consider him for the T20 World Cup. R. V. MOORTHY & AP

demanding, stability is the key. While the former selectors believe that India's core team looks solid, the majority is in favour of picking Pandya as a middle-order batter and a fourth fast-bowling option, despite him being at the receiving end of the Mumbai Indians fans.

"International cricket is a different ball game altogether," says Surendra Bhave, one of the selectors who picked India's ODI World Cup-winning team in 2011.

Bhave believes that tournaments like the T20 World Cup deserve that sincerity, and it's essential to go with seniority rather than experimentation.

"Let's be honest. There's a huge difference between the IPL and international cricket, and we need to keep that in mind when picking a

team," Bhave says. While he firmly believes that there's no alternative to big-match temperament — Virat and Rohit bring that to the table — Bhave hopes to see Shivam Dube and his ward Ruturaj Gaikwad in the ranks. Dube has been in excellent form since India's T20 series against Afghanistan, while Ruturaj has made his presence felt for both the Indian team and Chennai Super Kings.

"Dube moved up quite a bit last year, and the selectors should look at him," Bhave says, adding, "Ruturaj, on the other hand, operates at a sublime level.

If you have to get cracking against quality bowling, he is an exceptional player and looks solid against any bowling."

But will there be enough space to fit all the 'deserving' candidates?

SPORTSTAR'S 15

1. Rohit Sharma (Capt)
2. Yashasvi Jaiswal
3. Virat Kohli
4. Suryakumar Yadav
5. Rishabh Pant
6. Hardik Pandya
7. Ravindra Jadeja
8. Jasprit Bumrah
9. Kuldeep Yadav
10. Mohammed Siraj
11. Arshdeep Singh
12. Rinku Singh
13. Sanju Samson
14. Axar Patel
15. Harshal Patel



DHONI SAID, “IF WE WIN, YOU TAKE THE CREDIT. IF THEY WIN, I WILL TAKE THE BLAME”

I could not have let the team down. My captain, **MS Dhoni**, had placed immense faith in me.

Joginder Sharma

That one ball was a moment of intense pressure that changed my life. The Pakistanis were on the verge of a win, and Misbah-ul-Haq threatened to spoil our party. He had put his team on the cusp of victory, and the weight of that moment was palpable. Every team member was tense, and I was no exception. The gravity of the situation was overwhelming.

I could not have let the team down. My captain, MS Dhoni, had placed immense faith in me. I knew

why. He had seen me bowl the last overs in domestic and local matches, so he was far more confident than me. That is the beauty of having a captain like Dhoni.

Our journey through the tournament was a testament to our resilience and skill. From the bowl-out finish after a tie against Pakistan to the grand finale, we played some outstanding cricket. We found our match-winners in each challenging situation, and I was about to discover that I would have to play a critical role

in one of the most crucial moments of the tournament.

We lost to New Zealand in the early part of the competition but came back strongly. The surge came from a sensational knock by Yuvraj Singh against England. What a performance!

The calculated assault by Yuvraj on Stuart Broad was a confirmation of his range of strokes and a positive mindset. Broad was left bruised. As a bowler, I could read his mind. It can be very demoralising, but Yuvraj is such an exceptional batsman.

Once we defeated England, South Africa, and Australia, the next two also bowed to our team's all-around talent. It was a new format for us, but it was amazing how the team adapted to the inputs from coaches, Lalchand Rajput and Venkatesh Prasad. Practising the bowl-out was a well-thought-out strategy, and it worked beautifully. Winning that match was crucial. We found our strength in the England contest and never looked back. Like the 1983 team under Kapil Dev, this squad had little expectations from the fans. We could have done better in the 2007 ODI World Cup, and that's why winning the inaugural T20 World Cup was so joyful. It changed the lives of many cricketers.

Let me get back to that ball. Pakistan needed 13 to win, with Misbah on fire. Dhoni gave me the ball with the assurance, "If we win, you take the credit. If they win, I will take the blame." This galvanised me.

I bowled a wide to start with but managed to follow it up with a dot ball. I felt so relieved. And then Misbah hit me for a six. I could feel the tension, but I was not perturbed. I saw Dhoni's calm and inspiring face. I attacked Misbah on the stumps, and he tried to scoop the ball over S. Sreesanth. He could not clear Sreesanth, who held on to the skier as if his life depended on it. We had won, and I was delighted to be part of history. I have relived that ball a million times!

As told to Vijay Lokapally



IN 12 DAYS, THE IMAGE OF INDIAN CRICKET UNDERWENT A FASCINATING TRANSFORMATION

We wanted to erase the bitter memories of the 2007 ODI World Cup. The fact that we were a **young team** served as a huge motivation.

Yuvraj Singh

It was a memorable fortnight for Indian cricket. The debacle at the 2007 ICC ODI World Cup in the West Indies was a significant blow to the team. We had a strong lineup capable of winning the Cup, but things went awry when we lost the opening match to Bangladesh, much to the disappointment of our fans, who had prayed for us. We never recovered from that defeat. Less than six months from that dark day, we made history by winning the

Cup in a format that was alien to us.

When we left for South Africa in early September, we honestly did not believe we could excel in the inaugural T20 World Cup. But we wanted to erase the bitter memories of the ODI World Cup, and the fact that we were a young team served as a huge motivation. We were without Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid, and Sourav Ganguly, all of whom opted out of this format. The challenge was massive, and we had the man to

shepherd us—MS Dhoni. He had faith in the team, and the team too believed we could go the distance riding on his self-belief. In just 12 days, the image of Indian cricket underwent a fascinating transformation.

Rain denied us a shot at Scotland in the first match. We were up against Pakistan, and Robin Uthappa was in his element. His half-century laid the foundation. The match was tied, and we won in a bowl-out, a new concept to decide the winner. To begin with, a win against Pakistan was just the elixir we needed. A loss to New Zealand in a high-scoring match was a wake-up call. We needed to pull up our socks, and we did. On September 19, I was delighted to play a part in India's win and, in the process, join the elite league of stalwarts like Garry Sobers and Ravi Shastri, who too had hit six sixes in an over.

I have been asked so many times — when did I realise that six sixes were possible? I knew the pressure was on Stuart Broad to avoid being slammed, and when I got the fourth six, I knew it was my day. I had to make sure that I connected well. Well, I was able to put the bat on the ball and leave Broad stunned. I felt sorry for him. The team was in a zone now. We moved past South Africa and Australia in style. Victories against these two opponents brought a degree of confidence and a resolve that we were destined to do something big. The final was against Pakistan, and we were ready.

Gautam Gambhir played a sterling innings, but 158 was going to be a tough target to defend. We grabbed regular wickets, and at 77 for six, we seemed to be through. Then we ran into Misbah-ul-Haq. He almost snatched the game away until Joginder Sharma and S. Sreesanth combined to secure a memorable win. We won by five runs. It was a win that led to the creation of the Indian Premier League in 2008 and prepared us for the 2011 World Cup triumph.

As told to Vijay Lokapally



THE FACES HAD CHANGED, BUT NOT THE JERSEYS

We had grown up watching the **heroes of 1983** and listening to their stories. We had not just followed in their footsteps but had joined them after the 2007 win.

Harbhajan Singh

As I stood at third man, the tension was palpable. Jogi (Joginder Sharma) was about to deliver the ball, and Pakistan needed a mere six runs to secure victory. The atmosphere was electric after Misbah-ul-Haq smashed him for a straight six off the third ball. The outcome was uncertain, and the stakes were high. Anything could have happened.

When Misbah scooped the ball and Sreesanth positioned himself under it, the tension was unbearable. The team, the nation — we were all holding our breaths. And then,

Sreesanth's hands closed around the ball, and the stadium erupted in joy. We had won the Cup, a victory that was all the more sweet because no one had seen it coming.

This title was not just a victory; it was a much-needed boost for Indian cricket after the great 1983 World Cup triumph. We had grown up watching the heroes of 1983 and listening to their stories. We had not just followed in their footsteps but had joined them, carrying their legacy forward. The faces had changed, but not the jerseys. It was a victory for India — a victory that was a

testament to our rich cricketing heritage. We were a perfect blend of youth and experience. MS (Dhoni), Yuvi (Yuvraj Singh), Viru (Sehwag), and Ajit (Agarkar) played exceptional international cricket and guided the young ones in the squad. This balance was our strength, and we built on it effectively.

After that bowl-out win against Pakistan in the first match, we were confident we would pull it off. As a spinner, I was used to bowling at a single stump, and regular practice at the nets under coach Venkatesh Prasad's supervision ensured we had already prepared for the bowl-out rule to decide a tied match. Robin Uthappa was not a bowler, but his ratio of hitting the stumps was the best among those picked. Prasad chose individuals who could bowl from four steps and were spinners. It was very clever thinking.

We had little experience with this T20 format. But we had tremendous self-belief. We learned from every match and the most from the loss against New Zealand. We understood not to take any liberty with the opposition. Among the most memorable moments was Yuvi's magnificent assault, which left Stuart Broad demoralised. Sitting in the dugout with pads on, I marvelled at his capacity to improvise his strokeplay. Broad was helpless against a batter who seemed possessed. After the fourth six, I knew Yuvi would not let go of this opportunity. He loves to belt the ball, and he was in a devastating form to exploit the pressure the bowler found himself under. That victory in Johannesburg changed the face of the game in India. The reception in Mumbai was mind-blowing, and the following year, the Board of Control for Cricket in India introduced the Indian Premier League (IPL). The victory was a turning point for the cricketers, propelling the game to new heights. We all have fond memories of that evening in South Africa.

As told to Vijay Lokapally



YUVRAJ SINGH'S SIX SIXES GAVE A DECISIVE DIRECTION TO OUR CAMPAIGN

I was tasked with being part of the bowl-out group against Pakistan, a **nerve-wracking** moment for any player.

Robin Uthappa

Being part of a remarkable triumph was a true honour. Despite the heartbreaking early exit from the 2007 ICC ODI World Cup, we refused to let it break our spirit. We played the Natwest Series in England, and though we lost 3-4, it was a testament to our resilience. My personal comeback at The Oval, where MS (Dhoni) and I added 60 runs for the sixth wicket, was a moment of redemption. During this high-scoring

match, I secured the winning run with just two balls remaining, hitting a four off Stuart Broad.

The confidence I gained from the win at The Oval was crucial in helping me stay mentally strong. Just five days after we played the final ODI in England at Lord's, we were lining up against Scotland at Durban.

Unfortunately, the game was washed out due to rain. Despite the novelty of the T20 format, our team was committed to adapting and

excelling. We meticulously practised the bowl-out. This preparation, which turned out to be a stroke of genius, clearly demonstrated our dedication and hard work.

The tied match against Pakistan was a turning point for us. Pakistan seemed to have the upper hand, but then Misbah-ul-Haq's run-out kept us in the game. I was proud of my half-century, but more than my batting, I was thrilled to have contributed with fielding and some bowling. It was a victory that we truly earned.

I was tasked with being part of the bowl-out group, a nerve-wracking moment for any player. I was third to hit the stumps after Viru (Sehwag) and Bhajji (Harbhajan). Pakistan missed all their three attempts (Yasir Arafat, Umar Gul, and Shahid Afridi). The loss against New Zealand in Johannesburg was a setback, but it didn't deter us. When we returned to Durban, we hit back through Yuvi (Yuvraj Singh) against England.

Yuvi's dazzling knock was a game-changer. Sitting in the dugout, I could hear the spat between Yuvi and Andrew Flintoff. Poor Stuart Broad suffered Yuvi's wrath. His six sixes in an over gave a decisive direction to our campaign. There was no stopping as we tamed South Africa and Australia for another clash with Pakistan in the final. We knew the challenge — defending 157 against a good batting lineup — would require us to be at our best. RP Singh gave us a splendid start with two wickets, and then Joginder Sharma joined the act. It was a tense match, with both teams giving their all. It worked well for us when Irfan (Pathan) dented Pakistan's hopes. But we had to reckon with Misbah.

They needed 13 runs from Joginder's last over. The first ball went over my head at long-on for a six. I was praying. The next ball, I saw the ball go up to Sreesanth. When he took the catch, I had reached mid-on. That gave me a chance to grab a stump as a souvenir.

As told to Vijay Lokapally



T20 WORLD CUP WIN PAVED WAY FOR SMOOTH TRANSITION IN WHITE-BALL CRICKET

It was my first season after a **long injury layoff**, and the tournament turned out to be nothing short of a fairy tale.

Irfan Pathan

Not many gave us a chance. It was the first edition of the game-changing T20 World Cup, and the Indian team was perhaps the least talked about, at least initially.

The seniors, Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid, and Sourav Ganguly, had withdrawn. Under the captaincy of a young Mahendra Singh Dhoni, we entered the unfamiliar terrain of white-ball cricket in the far-off land of South Africa.

By then, many of us — including Dhoni and Gautam Gambhir — had played quite a bit of international

cricket, and in no way were we inexperienced. However, even then, not many imagined that we would be able to master a format that was quick, tricky, and exciting.

However, as the tournament progressed, we not only proved people wrong but also ended up creating history by beating Pakistan to clinch the first-ever title. I will forever remember those moments in the final.

At the Wanderers that afternoon, Gautam played one of the finest innings to guide us to a competitive total and left it to us — the bowlers

— to defend it. It was challenging for sure, but every player was motivated to prove themselves, and that attitude brought the best out of us. While RP (Singh) provided those early breakthroughs, Pakistan still had partnerships by Younis Khan and Imran Nazir to rebuild, and there was a time when it looked as if we were slowly losing the grip.

As the crowd chanted our names and waved the tricolour, we bounced back. I am happy and proud to have played a hand in that historic victory. While Robbie (Uthappa) got Nazir run out, I swung into action with the three important wickets of Younis, Shoaib Malik, and Shahid Afridi. And with Afridi gone, we knew it was our match to lose. But Misbah-ul-Haq and Sohail Tanvir took charge and ensured a thriller.

To be honest, at one point, we believed that Misbah would lead the team to victory. However, we did not lose hope. Joginder, arguably, bowled the best spell of his career, and that one misjudgment by Misbah proved to be costly — it shattered Pakistan's chances and brought joy to millions of Indian supporters.

It was my first season after a long injury layoff, and the tournament turned out to be nothing short of a fairy tale. It instilled confidence in the young Indian cricket team and paved the way for a smooth transition in white-ball cricket.

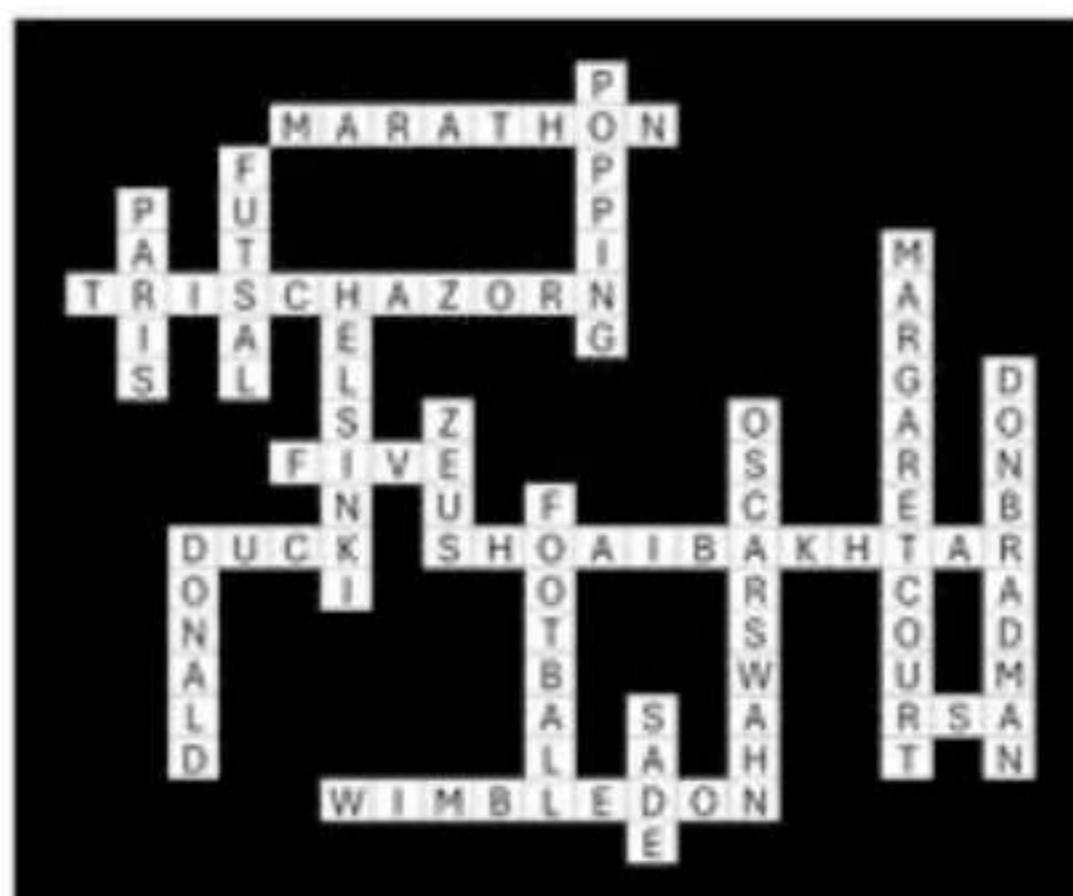
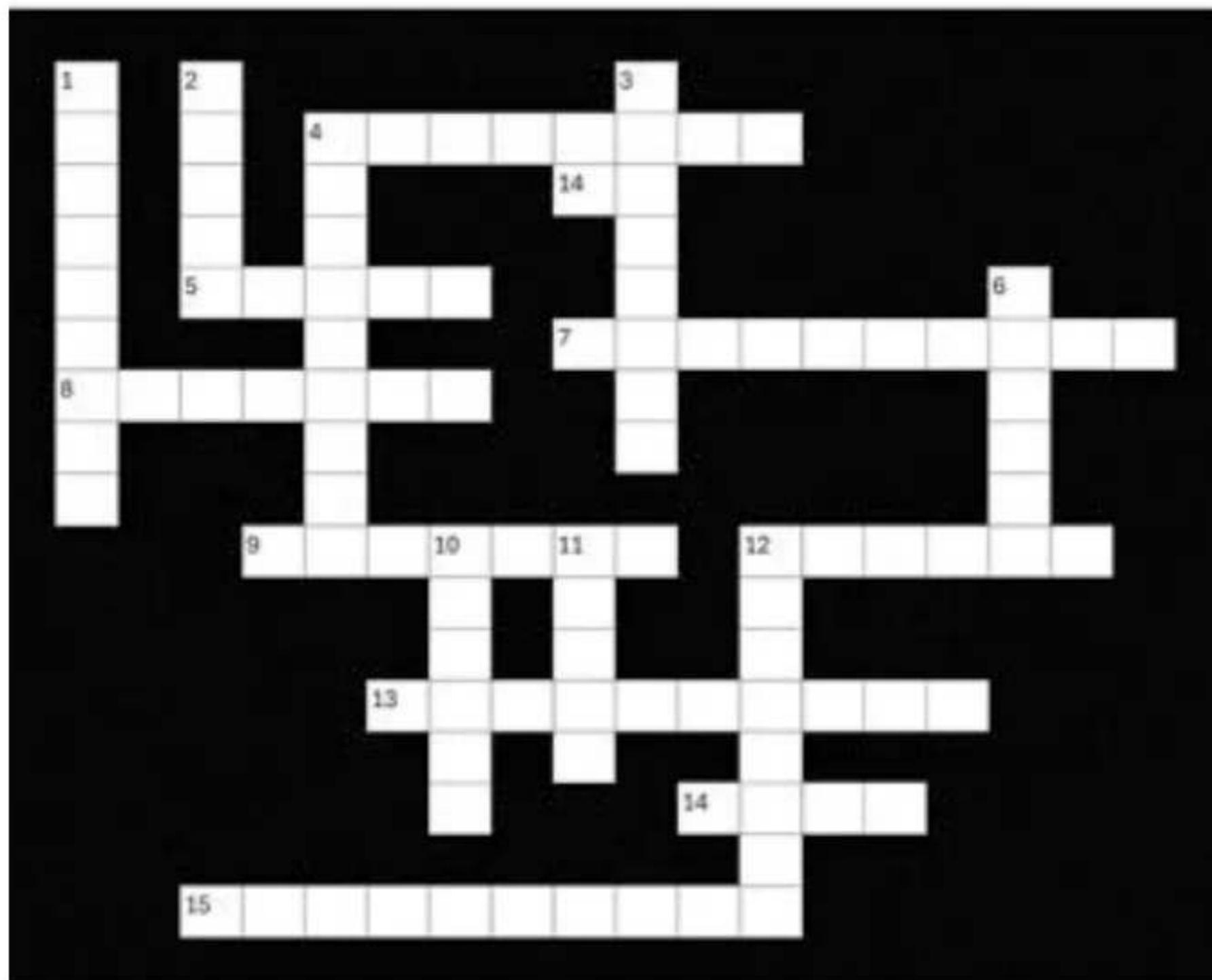
The final was one of the biggest moments of our lives. However, our confidence received a boost after we defeated Pakistan in our second game via a bowl-out. It was also a special game for me because I bowled a maiden over and claimed a couple of wickets.

For the team, it gave us the belief that we could overcome any challenge. Our emphatic wins against England, South Africa, and Australia further bolstered our confidence and ensured we were on the right path. The rest, as they say, is history!

As told to Shayan Acharya

» CROSSWORD

KARAN PILLAI



SOLUTION TO LAST FORTNIGHT'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 4 What's common between the playing styles of Roger Federer, Grigor Dimitrov, Stefanos Tsitsipas and Richard Gasquet? (8)
- 5 A badminton shot. (5)
- 7 Who is the youngest golfer to win the Masters? (5, 5)
- 8 Who is the footballer nicknamed Fenomeno? (7)
- 9 Legendary singer Elton John was once the owner of which football club? (7)
- 12 What is the Japanese clothing brand whose name is short for 'unique clothing' and became famous for collaborating with Roger Federer? (6)
- 13 Last season, which team did

Manchester City beat in the Champions League final to complete the treble? (5, 5)

- 14 What is the name of the octopus known for its World Cup predictions? (4)
- 15 What was the original name of volleyball? (10)

DOWN

- 1 Whom did Stuart Broad dismiss in the final delivery of his career? (4, 5)
- 2 Serbia will make its debut in which football tournament this year? (5)
- 3 A water sport featuring seated players and double-bladed paddles. (8)
- 4 The only batter to score 400 in a single Test innings. (5, 4)

6 What leads to a free hit in cricket's shorter formats? (2, 4)

10 _____ Cup is a golf competition between Europe and United States. (5)

11 The Suzanne Lenglen Cup is given to the female winner of The _____ Open. (6)

12 UFC stands for _____ Fighting Championship. (8)

« The way of playing these days is naturally aggressive; it's probably inspired by the franchise leagues around the world »

DEVON CONWAY

Ayan Acharya

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New Zealand wicketkeeper-batter Devon Conway is currently recovering from the injury he sustained during the second T20I against Australia in Auckland back in February. He had fractured the joint of his left thumb and subsequently underwent surgery. Conway, who played a crucial role in CSK's title victory in the 2023 IPL, will miss the whole IPL this year and is currently focusing on getting ready for this year's T20 World Cup, which will be held in the USA and the West Indies in June.

In a chat with *Sportstar*, Conway talks about his time with the New Zealand cricket team, the evolving nature of T20s and whether international teams are more risk-averse than franchise sides.

You made your international debut in 2020. How do you look back on your progress as an all-format player?

I've been fortunate to play four years of international cricket across three different formats, allowing me to travel to various parts of the world and adapt to diverse conditions. For me, it's an ongoing journey of striving to improve in each format, aiming for greater consistency and effectiveness. There's an element of adaptation and also a focus on keeping things as simple as possible. It's about elevating my intent and refining shot selection across

different formats; that's what I look to control.

New Zealand has generally been an aggressive team in recent years. Have there been discussions regarding adopting the same approach in the lead-up to the 2024 T20 World Cup?

The way of playing these days is naturally aggressive; it's probably inspired by the franchise leagues around the world. It hasn't been something we've spoken specifically about, but there is an awareness being created throughout world cricket that everyone's going to look explosive, especially inside the PowerPlay. It might differ based on the conditions we are faced with in different parts of the world. We've got lots of depth in our batting line-up, and some experienced big hitters down the order — guys like Jimmy Neesham have been in and around the setup for a long time. As an opener, you have that in the back of your mind. I can play with freedom, knowing that if it is not my

day, then someone down the order could contribute to the team's cause. That said, it's not just us. Most countries have that kind of batting depth these days.

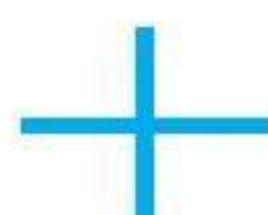
Matchups are a big part of T20 cricket. Since you are particularly strong against spin, teams tend to attack you with quicks. Do you think teams tend to overdo the matchups angle?

As a player, it's still good to identify what's a good matchup for you and exploit that — just having that freedom to know that this is my matchup and I'm going to commit to it. The key is to keep honing your skills on the side and continue to get better; maybe then I can take advantage of seamers in the future.

How enjoyable was it to bat with Rachin Ravindra in that 273-run partnership against England during last year's World Cup? You two are best mates.

It was fantastic for him to seize the opportunity, with Kane [Williamson]

We've already seen some benefits of the two-bouncer rule in this IPL, and I don't see why it can't be the norm in international T20 cricket in the future.



Never stop learning: "The key is to keep honing your skills on the side and continue to get better; maybe then I can take advantage of seamers in the future," said Conway. GETTY IMAGES



unfortunately being injured. Losing an early wicket against England allowed Rachin to come in and play outstanding shots early on, cementing his place in the batting line-up.

He had a fantastic World Cup, and batting alongside him and forming that partnership, particularly against England, was special. We are really close friends on and off the field, and we worked hard in training even during the winter years. For us to have that stand in the opening World Cup match was special and something I'll cherish for a long time.

You've been part of franchise T20 leagues around the world. Do you

feel teams in T20 leagues are more open to innovation and risk than in international cricket?

I don't think that's necessarily the case. Sometimes in leagues, you are playing on pitches that are good for batting, especially in places like India, whereas the last T20 World Cup in Australia was, perhaps, more suitable for bowlers. In franchise leagues, they are trialling different methods to gain an advantage over opponents, so they are conditioned to have those high run-rates.

The IPL's two-bouncer rule has become a popular tactic for fielding sides. As a batter, what are your thoughts on the rule's

efficacy and potential for implementation in T20Is?

The two-bouncer rule is a valuable addition, addressing a long-standing challenge for bowlers in T20 cricket. It has enabled them to keep batters guessing and exploit various blind spots they may struggle with, thereby creating ways to apply pressure on them in different phases. We've already seen some benefits of it in this IPL, and I don't see why it can't be the norm in international T20 cricket in the future.

Sony Sports Network has acquired the exclusive broadcast rights of New Zealand Cricket for seven years.

» CHEQUERED FLAG



Formula One returned to China after four years, with Max Verstappen dominating yet again, winning both the Sprint and Grand Prix races.

Dipak Ragav

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Formula One returned to China for the first time since 2019 at the Shanghai International Circuit. The previous four editions weren't held because of COVID-19 and the associated restrictions. It was also the first Sprint weekend of the season. However, not much changed up front as Max Verstappen (left) continued to operate on a different plane from the rest of the grid as he clinched both the Sprint and Grand Prix wins.

Friday's promise fizzles

On Friday afternoon, as rain hit the circuit, Lando Norris took the Sprint pole in a mixed-up grid ahead of Lewis Hamilton, which portended some excitement. But it was just a mirage as Verstappen and Red Bull showed their supremacy on dry conditions in the sprint race on Saturday morning. The Dutchman won it with ease ahead of Hamilton and teammate Sergio Perez.

In qualifying later on Saturday, Verstappen led a Red Bull lockout of the front row while Fernando Alonso produced a stunning lap to finish third ahead of two McLarens and two Ferraris — in that order. But the big surprise was when Hamilton, who starred in the Sprint, got knocked out of the first part of the qualifying after finishing only 18th fastest. On Sunday, in a race that saw some clashes between drivers that triggered two full Safety Cars, Verstappen was untroubled. Despite losing his nearly 20-second lead at one point, the reigning champion nailed the subsequent restarts to get his 58th career victory, finishing 13 seconds ahead of the pursuing field.

Following this win, he holds a 25-point lead in the championship ahead of Perez. It was another commanding drive by the 26-year-old, and the combination of Verstappen and Red Bull is one of the most dominant pairings the sport has ever seen. As his team boss said after the race, Verstappen has won 50 per cent of all races since the last time F1 visited China in 2019.

Behind Verstappen, Norris clinched a brilliant second, helped by the fortunate timing of a virtual safety car that allowed him to jump Perez, who came third to complete the podium.

The Mexican dropped a place at the start to Alonso and, despite retaking it a few laps later, came out behind Norris and Leclerc after the first round of pit stops. Once the race restarted following the Safety Car periods, Perez couldn't quickly get rid of Leclerc and when he eventually passed the Ferrari on lap 39, the McLaren driver had built a five-second lead. Despite his best efforts, Perez could not get close to Norris and had to settle for third.

Driver market jigsaw

Since Hamilton announced he would join Ferrari in one of the most high-profile driver transfers early this year, all eyes have been on the driver market. The move opened a coveted spot in Mercedes, which, despite its recent struggles, is one of the top teams on the grid.

But ahead of the Chinese GP, Fernando Alonso (right), a key player in the driver market, took himself out of contention when he signed a multi-year deal to stay at Aston Martin. While one domino has fallen, Mercedes has been aggressively courting Verstappen in recent weeks.

At the start of the season, there were rumours of discontent in Red Bull between team boss Christian Horner and its star driver Verstappen. At Shanghai, Horner blasted Merc team boss Toto Wolff for trying to poach his star driver and said Wolff should instead focus on improving his team's on-track performance.



AFP

Moto GP



REUTERS

If Formula One is predictable and one-way traffic, Moto GP is anything but, after Maverick Vinales became the third different winner this season in as many races.

The Spaniard was on song at the Motorcycle Grand Prix of the Americas in Austin, Texas, where he won both the sprint and main race. The Aprilia rider was on the money from the start of the weekend, taking pole position easily, three-tenths faster than rookie Pedro Acosta and Marc Marquez. On Saturday, Vinales put on a clinical performance in the 10-lap Sprint with a lights-to-flag victory ahead of Marc Marquez and Jorge Martin.

But it was his performance in the main race on Sunday that showed how good he was. Vinales had a poor start and fell to 11th on the opening lap, but over the next ten laps, breezed past the field with clinical precision. Even as Vinales was fighting back, Marquez looked set to get his first win for his new team, Gresini Racing MotoGP, when he took the lead at the halfway stage from Acosta. But just moments after he got ahead, the seven-time MotoGP champion, who had won the race in Austin a record seven times, lost control of his bike and crashed out.

It made the task easier for Vinales, who regained the lead eight laps before the chequered flag and cruised to his maiden win for Aprilia ahead of Acosta and Enea Bastianini of Ducati.



Lost track: The last three years have been disappointing by any measure for Johannes Vetter. GETTY IMAGES



Vetter late than never

On a comeback trail, the javelin thrower reflects on a **difficult past** riddled with injuries and missed competitions, while prioritising his Olympic dreams over the world record.

Jonathan Selvaraj

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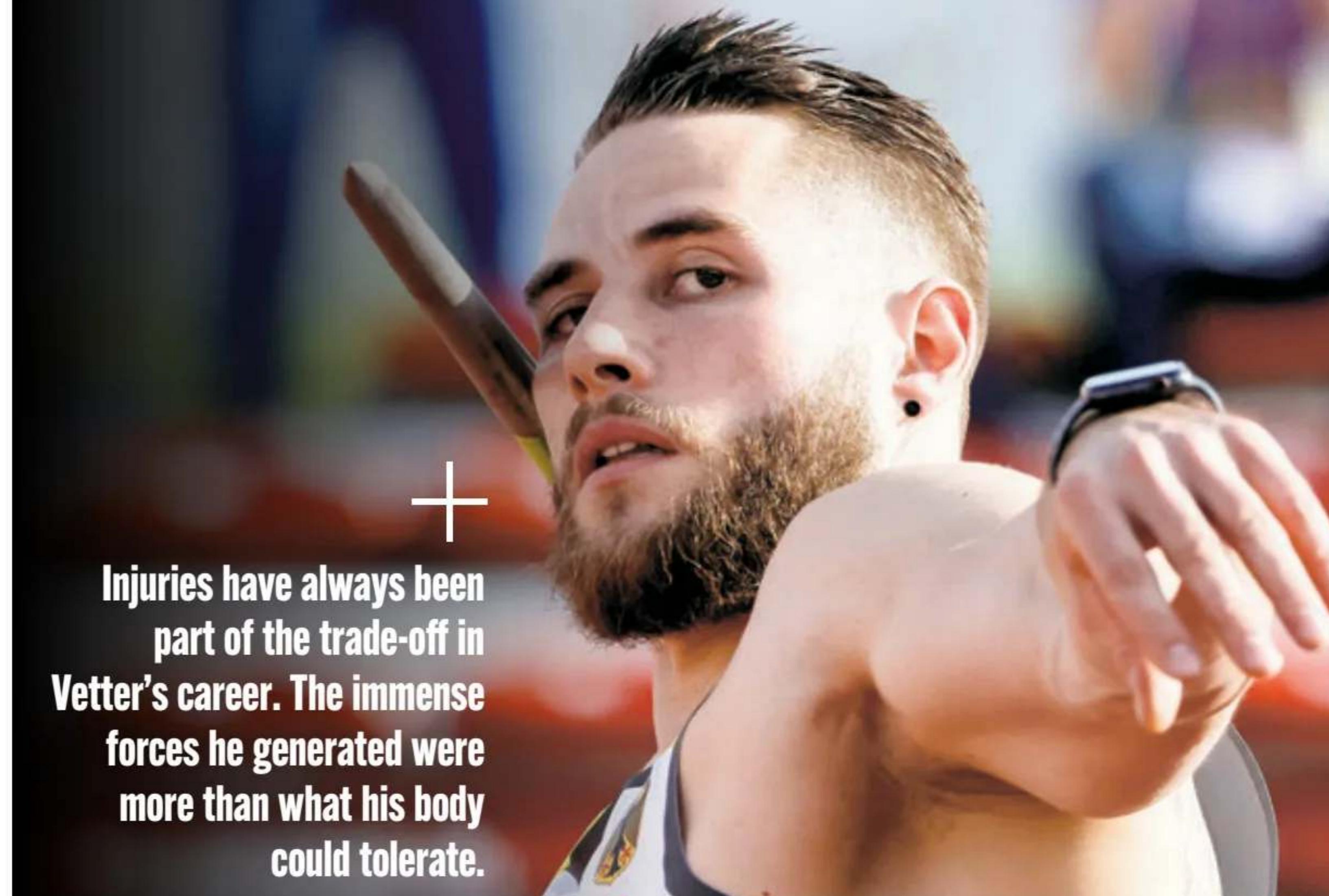
When he sat down for a *Zoom* interview with *Sportstar*, Johannes Vetter chose a spot just in front of his trophy case at his apartment in Offenburg, Germany. It's a cabinet filled with memories from a career that has marked him as one of the most fearsome competitors in javelin throw for many years. Besides mementos from his many victories at the European championships and a statue of a spearman from a competition in Germany, there are

also multiple Diamond League trophies as well as medals from the 2019 World championships where he won bronze and the one in 2017 where he won gold.

There's not much from more recent competitions, though. For all his ability — he has the second-best throw in history (97.76m) and has more throws over 90m than anyone else in history — the last three years have been disappointing by any measure for Vetter. A massive favourite for gold at the Tokyo Games, Vetter finished a disappointing ninth in a competition

where India's Neeraj Chopra created history to win gold. That was followed by a mystery injury to his throwing shoulder at the start of 2022. He threw only twice that year. Last year, as this injury persisted, he competed just four times, with a best effort of 80.82m.

Vetter, still, tried to keep a positive outlook. A look at his social media profile all through that dry spell has him posting pictures and videos of himself in the weight room and training hall. Yet there are times when the German admits to being frustrated with it all. This was



Injuries have always been part of the trade-off in Vetter's career. The immense forces he generated were more than what his body could tolerate.

especially so when he missed his second straight World Championships in a row last year — a competition that was won once again by Neeraj.

"It's not a great feeling when you see that others are competing but you aren't. People might say why I didn't just avoid looking at what others are doing but I couldn't really switch off. I mean, you can turn your social media off but you can also see the results on the internet or on the TV. There's a lot of media where you definitely see the results from the Worlds. I mean, I can't do anything about that," he tells *Sportstar*.

Injuries though have always been part of the trade-off in Vetter's career. The German, standing at 6 foot 2 inches and weighing 105 kg, is probably one of the most explosive throwers on the circuit but the immense forces he generates are often more than his body can tolerate.

A bronze at the Doha World championships was followed by a

foot surgery post-cartilage damage. He has been suffering from persistent shoulder pain since the winter of 2021. "Sometimes I cannot help it (injuries) because it comes with the power I put into the throws. I'm also 31 now so I'm starting to get old as a professional athlete and especially in a sport like the javelin. There are a lot of big forces that act on the body when you throw the javelin that far. And yeah, I mean, I try to push my own limit to the maximum all day. So sometimes s*#t happens and then you get injured. But it's part of the business," he shrugs.

Hardest comeback

Vetter's most recent comeback from injury has also been his hardest. It took nearly a year and a half to simply diagnose the problem. "The last few years have been pretty hard. The main issue was that the doctors couldn't find out what the problem was. That was the worst time of my career, where I knew I was having an

Far from his best: At the Tokyo Games, Vetter complained of not finding enough grip on the runways, slipped on his first attempt and only managed to throw 82.52m. GETTY IMAGES

injury but the doctors didn't know what the problem was," he says.

Although the injury couldn't be diagnosed, Vetter could certainly feel it, particularly at the point of the greatest tension when either throwing or lifting weights. "There was enormous pain," he says.

As his body tried to protect him, Vetter says he had to consciously will himself to throw instead of instinctively flinging it as he had done on previous occasions. Speaking to a German newspaper, he said that he couldn't even throw a stone into water intuitively. Instead, he had to concentrate on repeating the movements of the throw before he could manage such a simple task.

"It was only at the end of summer last year when we started to

understand what was wrong when I tried something different with my physiotherapy and started doing a lot more shoulder stabilisation," he says.

"The problem was that the scapula from my right shoulder was not in the right position. The head of the humerus doesn't rest properly in it. As a result of that, I wasn't getting my shoulder to move in the right angle and get into the right positions. That caused the constant pain. Once we figured out what was wrong, we were able to work on stabilisation," he says.

The regimen for the most part has worked. "When I started training in October, we directly began with throwing some balls and javelins. We were only throwing indoors but suddenly I felt no pain. That's when I knew that I was on the right track," he says.

Just because the injury has been diagnosed and treated doesn't mean it's all smooth roads ahead. His injury can be managed with physiotherapy but it's a recurring one. Also, according to him, he can't do a lot of shoulder stabilisation otherwise the same shoulder can become overstimulated. Vetter will have to try and find that balance if he is to throw pain-free.

Olympic dreams

With the Olympics a little over three months away, Vetter will very

much hope for that to be the case. In the trophy cabinet at his home, perhaps the biggest hole is the empty space where he had hoped to place an Olympic medal.

Back in 2021, he was the undisputed favourite for the Tokyo Games. He'd thrown over 90 metres at seven separate competitions in the lead-up to the Olympics. Then where it mattered most, Vetter struggled. He complained of not finding enough grip on the runways, slipped on his first attempt and only managed to throw 82.52m.

"I just couldn't get the right grip when I was blocking. My foot was just skidding. When that happens you can't do anything. If you are slipping on the track, there is no way you can make a good throw. That was the most difficult part of what happened at the Olympics. I had really good throws before the Olympics and I had really good throws after it (he competed in another six competitions post-Tokyo with a best throw of 89.60m and a lowest of 86.17m)," he says.

In the months after the disaster at Tokyo, Vetter has had a role to play in changing the

quality of the runway. "Mondo had created a new running surface, especially for the Olympics in Tokyo but unfortunately they made every running surface in the stadium. And that's not going to work for the javelin throw especially if you produce as much power as I did. I was coming down so hard that the surface couldn't hold me. After the Tokyo Olympics, Mondo and I tried to find a solution that worked for everyone. Now the runways at any Mondo track are a lot harder and have more grip. The change hasn't been made across the whole stadium, just the 8 metres of the runway before blocking. I've also worked with Puma to make a shoe that gives me more grip," he says.

While he couldn't put a performance together when he most needed to, Vetter looks back at the 2021 season with



some fondness. "Despite what happened at the Olympics, 2021 was a great year for me. I had a lot of 90m throws and I was very consistent at that mark. I did find out the hard way that not every surface was meant for me but if I could conserve the kind of form that I was in, I'd wish that I could bring that to 2024 as well," he says.

There have been positive signs. A few weeks back, Vetter posted on Instagram, a training throw from his camp in South Africa. Without a running start and starting only from the crossovers stage of his run-up, Vetter threw what was estimated in the comments section as 80m.

Learning to step back

Despite those flashes of promise, there's always the ever-looming threat of injury. Even as his shoulder has recovered, in recent weeks Vetter felt some trouble with his throwing elbow. While some of his compatriots have already started their throwing season, Vetter will only return to competition in May at home in

Lesson learnt: "The most significant thing I learned was how to treat my body with a little more respect"—
Vetter. GETTY IMAGES



THE DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT OF HIS INJURY DON'T GUARANTEE A SMOOTH ROAD AHEAD. THOUGH IT CAN BE MANAGED WITH PHYSIOTHERAPY, IT IS A RECURRING ONE

Offenberg.

While it's not what he had planned originally, Vetter has learned to take a step back. "All in all, I'm feeling pretty good. From a strength perspective, I'm not very far off from where I was in 2021. I had a really good training camp in South Africa in the winter. There are some exercises in the gym where I'm even stronger. I actually wanted to start my season in February or March but I picked a slight muscle tear in January. After I treated that, I had some issues with my elbow last month. I've done a lot of treatment to get it fixed again," he says.

While it might be frustrating that he can't head back to the field and just throw, Vetter's learned over the past couple of seasons that sometimes his own ambition can be a stumbling block. "The most significant thing I learned was how to treat my body with a little more respect. I was doing a lot of bad technical things in training and I was getting away with it. I've learned to recognise where I might be starting an injury. When that happens, I know now that I can't throw anymore. I have to find the problem, solve the issue, and only then restart throwing. It's something that can be frustrating because you want to throw but I know that it's most important to throw when I am fully fit and pain-free," he says.

Even as he waits to make his return, Vetter has seen the international field move ahead. Some of that is inevitable. He explains this by way of Germany's own fortunes in the javelin throw. "You always will have new players coming up. There was a time when Germany had a lot of really good throwers (Vetter, Thomas Rohler, and Andreas Hoffman were all throwing over 90m simultaneously back



in 2019) but right now that's not the case. We (the three Germans) are now starting to get older and more injury-prone and that's why you don't have a lot of Germans at the top right now although we have a young guy Max Dehning who just threw 90m," he says.

"I think Finland had the same problem. They had some really good years and then the older guys ended their careers and then there was like a big hole. Nobody was there who was able to throw really, really far. Now they are getting back. I think it will be the same in Germany."

Not jealous of Neeraj

Perhaps the most unexpected rise in the world javelin though has been that of the Indians. No Indian had even made an Olympic final before the 2020 Olympics. Now Neeraj Chopra is an Olympic and World champion and he alongside Kishore Jena have already qualified for the Olympic games.

According to Vetter, this was a phenomenon that was bound to occur. "There are a lot of talented guys in India. I mean, first of all, you

have a big, big population so there is bound to be talent.. And secondly cricket is a big national sport so there are a lot of guys who will know how to throw. I don't know if that's the reason but I think there's been a lot of improvement," he says.

And while it's Neeraj who's the undisputed leader of the javelin world right now, Vetter isn't envious of the Indian's success. "I don't really compare myself with others. I have a lot of respect for Neeraj's achievements and for his career. But the javelin throw is a very unique event as no one has exactly the same style. I think we are very different both in terms of body type and technique," he says.

While he's gone two years away from the podium in elite competition, and has not even met the 85.50m qualification standard for the Paris Olympics, Vetter believes he can get back on the top. Despite all his struggles, he says his self-belief has never wavered.

"When you aren't successful, you don't always have a lot of people around you but I have a small team who have stood by me; and I've

Searching for inspiration: An ecstatic Vetter after winning the men's javelin throw competition at the ISTAF 2021 athletics meet in Berlin. Despite all his struggles, he says his self-belief has never wavered. GETTY IMAGES

always been very self-motivated. Right now my goal is to just stay healthy. I'm not looking at that (Olympic qualification) number.

"If I can do that, I know I will be able to make big throws again," he says.

He knows he has a few of them still left in him and there's unfinished business too, perhaps even a crack at Jan Zelezny's world record, which he missed by 72 centimetres in 2021. But if he had to choose though, he'd first fill that Olympic-sized gap in his cabinet and resume.

"This year I'm not looking at any number in terms of throws. My first priority is the Olympic gold medal. The last two years have been really tough. I would like to throw far but first I really want to get a medal at the Olympics. It would be much nicer than a world record this year," he says.



SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

I-League coronation will fuel Mohammedan Sporting's ISL journey

The club's return to the top division marks a **triumphant revival**, fuelled by a professional setup, strategic investment, and a commitment to nurturing local talent.

Amitabha Das Sharma

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Mohammedan Sporting has turned the arc-lights back on itself with the recent I-League triumph.

This reinstated the credence to its erstwhile stature as a football giant jostling for space alongside its city cousins — Mohun Bagan and East Bengal.

Much like a fallen hero in the historic context, Mohammedan Sporting's existence as a football club in the last few decades has been a

tale of pitiful decline. With controversies and mediocrity engulfing it, the once towering force in Indian football was virtually relegated to oblivion.

As the first Indian team to win the prestigious Calcutta Football League in the pre-Independence period (in 1934), Sporting assumed a stature that would dwarf the achievements of its more famous compatriots (Mohun Bagan and East Bengal). It won the prestigious Calcutta Football League (CFL) five successive times from 1934 to 1938.

Despite being a couple of years younger than Mohun Bagan (Asia's

All smiles: Mirjalol Kosimov of Mohammedan Sporting celebrates after the win. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

oldest footballing institution), Mohammedan Sporting (established in 1891) straddled the sport like a colossus with a trove of trophies.

The club has recorded a lot of firsts in its list of achievements, besides winning the CFL. This includes feats like being the first Indian team to win an overseas tournament and the first Indian team to win the Durand Cup and the Rovers Cup without conceding a goal.



Rooted in tradition: The Mohammedan Sporting Club Tent at the Kolkata Maidan. DEBASISH BHADURI

This would place Sporting on the same platform as Mohun Bagan, which was the first Indian team to win a tournament (IFA Shield in 1911) after beating a British regimental team.

Mohammedan Sporting was doing the same thing by the third decade of the 19th century that significantly overshadowed the other two city giants, rendering them virtually insignificant.

The next five decades (till the middle of 1980s) would see a lot of success stories by Sporting but it gradually fell to disrepute, achieving little by way of success.

The fan base, that runs into millions across the country thanks to its religious nomenclature, started diminishing as the club regressed into a period of mediocrity with its team repeatedly failing in regional and national tournaments.

The team was also in the news for wrong reasons, such as fan violence, which became the order of the day.

And with a management unwilling to turn to a professional arrangement, the team's form and fortune hit doldrums.

After almost three decades of darkness, a new management assumed power in 2020 and tried to haul the club out of its distress. The new office bearers started looking for investors to fund and professionalise the club.

This saw the arrival of Bunkerhill, a Gurugram-based sports management company, which decided to invest in Sporting's revival. "We entered when Mohammedan Sporting management was looking for an investor as their own initiative was not generating enough funds to sustain the team's aspirations of playing in the big league.

"We did our research and found that Mohammedan Sporting had a huge potential and we started with the plan of getting the team to the I-League. The team was then playing the third tier of the national league system," says Dipak Kumar Singh, director of Bunkerhill, which owns 61 per cent stake in the team that secured its passage to the ISL.

Mohammedan Sporting entered into an agreement with Bunkerhill in October 2020.

"We started a three-year project with the aim to see the team qualify to the top tier of the country's football league, the ISL. It feels nice that our efforts bore fruit and we could reach the target just the way we had wished for," Singh, who is also the chairman of Sporting's football committee, told *Sportstar*.

The professional setup ensured that experts took charge of the decision-making process, which saw the arrival of the former assistant coach of the Russian national team, Andrey Chernyshov.

The new head coach helped Sporting reach within striking distance of the I-League title in the 2021-22 season. A loss against Gokulam Kerala ended its title hopes but that turned out to be a blessing in disguise as the door to ISL promotion was yet to be opened for the I-League champion in that season.

"Sometimes whatever happens, happens for good. Winning the league then would not have given us the promotion. Winning matters now



as we go into the ISL at the right time," Singh added, expressing satisfaction with the fact that the team does not have to pay the hefty franchise fee.

Another name that shares the onus of the team's triumph is the former India international and the former club forward, Dipendu Biswas, who, as the football secretary and the senior men's team manager, took the role of an interlocutor between the club management and the investor.

"We are not a hugely invested side, but we have the commitment and the spirit to achieve it. The players have remained committed to the cause and Chernyshov's coaching acumen gave the right guidance and direction to the team to achieve the target," said Biswas, who also played a role in enlivening the dressing room by sharing his wisdom and experience.

Singh applauded Biswas' role in Mohammedan Sporting's success, saying, "He was more like a psychologist in the team as he would try to provide the right advice and motivation in trying to get the best out of the players. He also helped the coach in effectively implementing the

team's plans and strategies."

Looking at the tough road ahead after ISL qualification, Biswas said that the club will be giving its best to retain the nucleus of the team.

"We hope to retain 80 per cent of the squad and make additions only when necessary. We would like to go ahead with the players we have groomed over the years," Biswas said.

The transition to ISL will not be stark or surprising as Mohammedan Sporting has a fairly settled team that needs minor additions, felt Singh. "The transition will not be difficult as we have qualified for the ISL on merit. We had the offer of paying the franchise fee and participating in the ISL, but we decided against it.

"There are a lot of advantages of qualifying as a champion. It gives you the chance to prepare a proper team under a good coach," he said while adding that Chernyshov will continue as the head coach.

"We have understood that money cannot always give you success. Last season (2022-23) we had the highest budget in the I-League as we hired a lot of expensive players but ultimately understood money is not going to

Eyeing bigger prizes: "We are not a hugely invested side, but we have the commitment and the spirit to achieve it"— Dipak Kumar Singh, director of Bunkerhill. DEBASISH BHADURI

give you the championship. The reason for Mohammedan Sporting's success is scouting," Singh said, while adding that the management will revise the budget according to need.

"We have seen that there is not much of a difference between the Indian players playing in the two leagues. We will have to select some good foreign players for which we have the whole spectrum of the European and Latin American leagues, and get the right players in the right positions," he said.

Mohammedan Sporting will prefer to play the ISL matches in front of its fans in the city and will urge the State Government to renovate the Kishore Bharati Stadium according to the specifications laid down by the ISL.

"We would prefer to play the regular matches in KBS while having the derby matches (against Mohun Bagan and East Bengal) in the Salt Lake Stadium," Singh said.

» MATCH OF THE FORTNIGHT

Jude shock: The in-form Englishman lashed the ball in the top corner in the dying minutes of the game to seal the win. AFP



REAL ADVANTAGE

Jude Bellingham scored a **late stunner** to effectively end Barcelona's chances of winning any trophy this season.

With a stoppage-time winner and a goal controversially ruled out, the season's final El Clasico did not disappoint, as Real Madrid beat Barcelona 3-2 to almost confirm its 36th league title.

Barcelona, now 11 points behind its arch-rival and table-topper Real Madrid, needed a win to keep itself alive in the title. But a spirited performance by the *Los Blancos* in front of their home crowd meant that Xavi will most likely depart Barca without a trophy in his final season.

It was the Blaugranas who broke the deadlock first. Andreas Christensen got at the end of Raphinha's corner to find the net with a powerful header in the sixth minute.

With an early goal, the intent was clear from Xavi's men — to grab a second and build momentum. But as it is often seen, Madrid's resolve to get back into the match bore fruit when Pau Cubarsi brought down Lucas Vazquez inside the box with a mistimed challenge, prompting the referee to point to the spot

immediately.

Vinicius Jr stepped up to take the penalty and kept his calm to slot the ball in the bottom-right corner, with Ter Stegen diving into the right direction but failing to get his hand to the ball.

With the scores level, the match was poised to churn out a thriller, but a controversial moment in the 28th minute raised further questions about La Liga's refusal to embrace modern technology.

Lamine Yamal flicked the ball towards the goal from Raphinha's corner, and it appeared to have crossed the line before Real Madrid keeper Andriy Lunin parried the ball to safety. While Barcelona players appealed for a goal, the match officials seemed unsure of the outcome due to the absence of the



goal-line technology.

The decision was referred to the Video Assistant Referee (VAR), who after a lengthy deliberation, concluded that the ball hadn't completely crossed the line.

It is to be noted that all other top-flight leagues in Europe — England (Premier League), Germany (Bundesliga), Italy (Serie A) and France (Ligue 1) have employed this technology to reduce errors.

Both teams upped the ante in the second-half to get the breakthrough and it was Barcelona that succeeded in the 69th minute.

Yamal's low cross inside the box was dealt poorly by Lunin, and he pushed the ball straight in the path of Fermin Lopez (right), who had the easiest of finishes from the rebound. Despite

taking a lead in the match for the second time, Barcelona's defence disappointed again as it conceded the equaliser four minutes later.

Vinicius spotted the run of Vazquez at the far post and found the latter with a perfectly weighted cross.

The latter slotted the ball inside the net with a first-time finish to level the scores 2-2.

The Los Blancos pushed for the winner, and Barcelona succumbed in the dying minutes of the match.

Vazquez crossed low inside the box, with Joselu getting to the ball. But he opted for the dummy and let it roll for Jude Bellingham, who arrived at the far post and lashed the ball in the top corner to confirm the win for Real Madrid.



Battle ready: Joao Felix (left) and Luka Modric vie for the ball in what was a tense encounter right from the start. AP

REAL MADRID

3

Vinicius Junior 18' (P)
Lucas Vázquez 73
Jude Bellingham 90+1'

BARCELONA

2

Andreas Christensen 6'
Fermin López 69'

» FROM THE WORLD OF FOOTBALL



GETTY IMAGES

Bayer Leverkusen wins first-ever Bundesliga title

Bayer Leverkusen secured its first-ever Bundesliga title after beating Werder Bremen 5-0, with five league games left to spare. Leverkusen is the first team since Borussia Dortmund to win the Bundesliga, ending Bayern Munich's 11-year dominance since the 2011-12 season. As of March 22, Leverkusen is on an unbeaten run of 45 games across all competitions under the helm of Xabi Alonso (in pic).



AFP

Nagelsmann to be in charge of Germany till 2026

Head coach Julian Nagelsmann has signed a contract extension with the German national team until at least the 2026 World Cup.

Germany, the host, will be looking to compete at Euro 2024 after being eliminated in the group stage of the 2022 World Cup.

Its fortunes have since improved with Nagelsmann at the helm, and the team will head into the Euros in good form.



AP

Roma game abandoned after Ndicka's collapse

AS Roma's central defender Evan Ndicka collapsed on the pitch during a Serie A match against Udinese and had to be carried off on a stretcher. The game was later abandoned. At the 18th minute with the score at 1-1, Ndicka fell backward onto the pitch, clutching his chest in pain. However, as he was being carried off, he managed a thumbs-up. He was discharged from hospital the next day and will undergo further treatment.



AP

Liverpool out of Europa League

Atalanta knocked Liverpool out of the Europa League, winning 3-1 on aggregate in the quarterfinals.

After defeating the Premier League club 3-0 in the first leg, the Italian club lost 1-0 in the second.

This dealt another significant blow to Liverpool's hopes of a fairytale ending in manager Jurgen Klopp's final season.

The club now shifts its focus back to the Premier League, where it sits in second place, level with league leader Arsenal on 74 points.



5

APP

PSG to face Dortmund in a bid to reach second-ever UCL final

PSG and Dortmund will face off in the 2024 Champions League semifinals after staging comebacks in the quarterfinals.

Barcelona led 3-2 after the first leg. However, a controversial red card in the second fixture didn't help its cause as PSG mounted a comeback and won 6-4 on aggregate (in pic).

Dortmund was also trailing by a goal after the first leg, but it came back to defeat Atletico Madrid 5-4 on aggregate.



6

APP

FA Cup final to be a Manchester Derby yet again

Manchester City secured its place in the final by defeating Chelsea in the semifinal, thanks to a late goal by Bernardo Silva in the 84th minute.

Meanwhile, despite holding a three-goal lead in the second half, Manchester United faced a tough challenge against Championship side Coventry City, which scored three late goals and forced the match into extra time and eventually a penalty shootout (in pic), which the Red Devils won 2-4.

Both Manchester clubs were finalists in the previous year's final as well, which City won 2-1.



7

APP

Heavyweights Madrid and Bayern to lock horns in UCL semifinal

Real Madrid is set to clash with Bayern Munich in its Champions League 2024 semifinal draw. Madrid beat defending champion Manchester City in a dramatic second leg that went into penalties. Antonio Rudiger beat Ederson from the spot to win the shootout 4-2. Bayern and Arsenal too played out a draw in the first leg; however, in the reverse fixture, the Bavarian club knocked the Gunners out with a solitary second-half goal by Joshua Kimmich (in pic).

Aneesh Dey & Karthik Mudaliar



The Habas factor in Mohun Bagan's success story



FSD/ISL MEDIA

Antonio Habas remains the **most successful** head coach in the history of the ISL.

Habas (left) continues to remain the most successful head of the ISL. The astute Spanish head coach won two ISL titles (one each with Atletico de Kolkata and ATK) and one League Shield (with Mohun Bagan SG) during his four seasons with the Kolkata club owned by Sanjiv Goenka.

This is a stupendous record by any count and the Mohun Bagan supporters always accord a special place of honour for the 66-year-old veteran coach, whose ability to devise winning strategies against any opponent in the Indian context is now a big part of the Mohun Bagan lore.

A gathering of around 62,000 fans witnessed the latest edition of Habas' coaching wisdom when Mohun Bagan SG dispossessed the mighty Mumbai City FC from the top of the perch with a 2-1 win in the final league match to wrest the League Shield title.

"If you all have to put your trust in me and perform on the field according to the plans I set, then I am sure we will be able to lift



the Shield," Habas had told his players, after taking over from his compatriot Juan Ferrando mid-season at Mohun Bagan SG, as revealed by the team's assistant coach, Manuel Perez.

Mohun Bagan seemed to be falling out of the league winner's

Into the big league: Mohun Bagan beat Mumbai City FC 2-1 to win the League Shield. PTI

race after suffering three consecutive losses forcing the departure of Ferrando before Habas arrived to steady the team and record nine wins, two draws and a solitary loss in 12 matches to secure the League Shield and sent the Mohun Bagan fans in a mad celebration over the team's new silverware.

Amitabha Das Sharma

One for the fans

Chennaiyin FC, the joint-second-most successful club in the Indian Super League (ISL), with two titles, has struggled in the bottom rungs of the standings in the last few years.

It changed three head coaches — Csaba László, Bozidar Bandovic and then the interim coach Sabir Pasha — but neither could steer it to the playoffs.

With debilitating performances, the turnout at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Chennai, the club's home ground, shrunk.

But all of it changed this season. Owen Coyle, the Scotsman who had previously taken the Marina Machans to the final, took charge of the club, taking it back into the

knockouts after four years.

The JLN Stadium had fans back in the stands again, about 7000 in its last home game against NorthEast United FC.

Before kick-off, two tifos were unfurled by the home fans — one read '*'Chennaiyin till I die'*', while the other said '*'Rise as one'*' as David Sting, one of the most loyal fans of the club roared with thousands of fans, despite the humidity at the Marina Arena.

The players delivered too. From trailing 0-1, Chennaiyin FC registered a comeback win, with Aakash Sangwan equalising with an Olympic goal and Ankit Mukherjee winning it with a stoppage-time strike.

Though its qualification was sealed the next day — after East Bengal lost 1-4 to Punjab — it felt like Christmas for the players outside the stadium.

Fans clicked pictures with the coach, Jordan Murray signed jerseys and local boy Alexander Romario Jesuraj danced to local songs.

Though the club's run ended with a 1-2 loss to Odisha in the playoffs, CFC will find solace in getting back to familiar territory — luring the fans into the stadium with the most important aspect of the sport — hope, to play, to improve and someday, win.

Neeladri Bhattacharjee



Heartwarming: Chennaiyin FC's players and head coach thank the fans for turning up at the stadium after their last home game, which they won 2-1. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Selected Stocchi

by C.G.S.Narayanan

The initial years after the second world war opened up a new era in the development of the two-move chess problem, with theme of changed mates after certain black moves coming into prominence. One of the outstanding composers during the period was the Italian maestro Ottavio Stocchi (1906-1964) who reigned supreme in the early fifties. He produced a large number of classic compositions which included 124 prizes and many awards in the period 1950 to 1955. Dual avoidance in self blocks on a square was named after him. I present here three of his masterpieces quoted in the book 'Selected Stocchi' by Luciano Citeroni and Geoff Foster.

O.Stocchi

5th HM, The Hindu 1953



Mate in two moves

Set: 1...b2 2.Qe5

Key 1.Qh3 (2.Rxf7)

1...fxg6 2.Rf8; 1...f6 2.Re5

1...Bf6+ 2.Rg5; 1...Ncd5 2.Nc5(Nd8?)

1...Nbd6 2.Nd8(Nc5?) 1...Nd4 2.Qe3
(Re2?) 1..d4 2.Re2? (Qe3?)

A fine key clears the way for an unexpected cross-check and three other battery mates including the threat. Defences on d6 lead to self blocks with dual avoidance by black line opening. Furthermore, two black moves to d4 lead to double interference mates again with dual

avoidance. A marvellous traditional problem with three distinct main themes

Ottavio Stocchi

First prize, Arbeider Skak 1951/1



Mate in two moves

1...N any 2.Qe5; 1...Nd6 2.Qh8

Try 1.Qb3?(Qxc4) N any 2.Qd5

1...Nb6 2.Nc6 but 1...Bxd3!

Key 1.Qb5 (2.Qxc4)N any 2.Nb3

1...Nd2 2.Nxe2; 1..Bf7/Bf5+ 2.Nf5

A three phase problem with a constant random defence but a different black correction move in each phase. A fine refutation to the try caps this lovely composition

A Stocchi Meredith for solving

O.Stocchi

I prize, Meredith Ty,
Norsk vanforetidskrift 1954



Mate in two moves

Solution to problem for solving in the article 'Loshinski's masterpieces'

Key: 1.Rb1! (2.d4) 1...Bb2/Rb2

2.Qf2/Qxc3; 1...Be6/Re6

2.Bd6/Nd7; 1...Bg4/Rg4 2.Bg1/Ne6

Triple Grimshaw in an elegant setting

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



Akanksha Nitture completes a double

Sixth-seeded Akanksha Nitture (**left, above**) of Maharashtra completed a 'double', winning the singles and doubles titles in the FNCC AITA women's tennis tournament at Film Nagar Cultural Centre in Hyderabad.

Akanksha scored a 6-4, 6-3 win over unseeded Abhaya Vemuri of Telangana in the singles final.

Later, Akanksha, who was the top-seed alongwith her partner Yubrani Banerjee of West Bengal recorded a hard-fought 4-6, 6-4, 10-4 win over the Bihar duo of Medhavi Singh and Yushi Singh in the doubles final.

The results:

Finals:

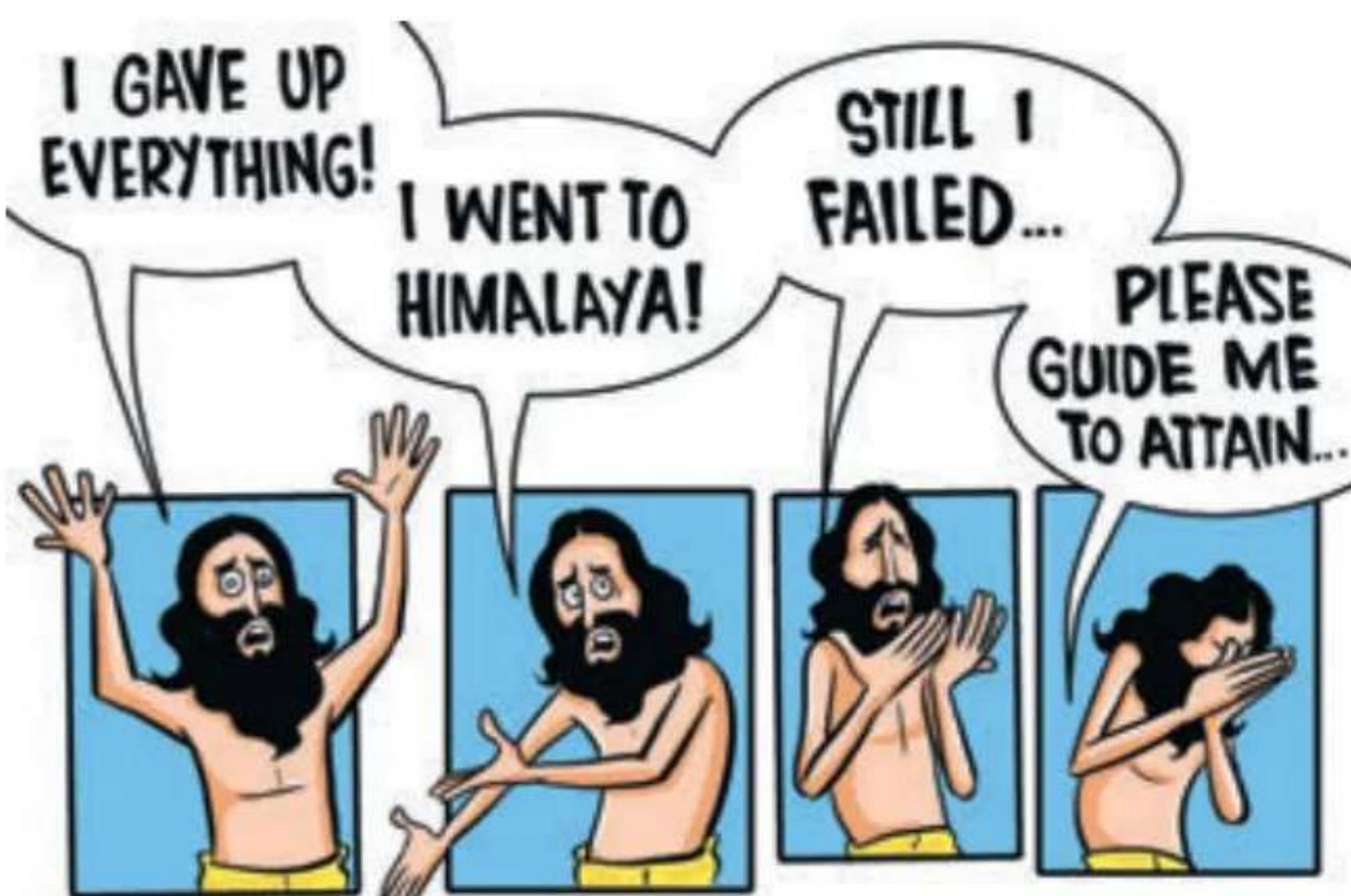
Singles: Akanksha Nitture (Maha) bt Abhaya Vemuri (TS) 6-4, 6-3.

Doubles: Akanksha Nitture (Maha) & Yubrani Banerjee (WB) bt Medhavi Singh (Bih) & Yushi Singh (Bih) 4-6, 6-4, 10-4.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

» INDIAN PLAYGROUND

SPOROON



1 The Equestrian Federation of India (EFI) announced an extensive calendar of 41 competitions for the 2024-25 season. This will be the first time that India will be hosting an FEI CSI two-star (2*), the Asian Equestrian Federation (AEF) sanctioned U-21 Regional Group III international competitions in Show Jumping and Dressage on borrowed horses along with two Para-Dressage National events apart from three selection trials each for Dressage, Jumping and Eventing respectively to pick the Indian team for the FEI Asian Continental Championships. The 2024-25 season will start on August 11.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

2 M. Dharma of Bengaluru carded a solid four-under 68 in the final round to end a seven year-long winless streak, claiming a five-stroke victory at the ₹1 crore Gurgaon Open. The 38-year-old totalled 18-under 270 for the week to emerge champion for the first time since 2017. Dharma's third professional win earned him a cheque worth ₹15 lakh that lifted him from 40th place to seventh position in the TATA Steel PGTI Ranking. "I've had to wait a long time for this victory so I'm just soaking in the moment," he said after the win.

TEAM SPORTSTAR



FITNESSWISE

Ramji Srinivasan



'Culture' – the most misused word in high-performance organisations

From mottos to mindsets, the culture of high-performance organisations is one of the most **crucial elements** that define their success.

“T

The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team” — Phil Jackson

In any high-performance organisation worldwide, or in any sport, the term most frequently heard is — ‘culture’.

Often, it's used by those outside the system to explain why certain teams consistently experience success or failure compared to others.

There are numerous definitions of ‘culture’, ranging from ideas, customs, goals, attitudes, ethics, and social behaviour of a particular people or society.

Regardless of these definitions, one thing is abundantly clear: **when organisations have a poor culture, they are desperate for change, and when they have a very strong one, they want to ‘protect and preserve’ everything that contributes to its strength!**

Clear communication with a consistent message is a key factor in any professional organisation, where most professionals expect clarity and coherence.

One of the primary attributes of organisations with a strong culture is clarity regarding acceptable behaviours, how people are treated, and the way individuals carry out their daily duties.

In Malcolm Gladwell's book, *David and Goliath*, he emphasises the significance of clear communication from leaders. He suggests that people want to know whether:

1. Yesterday's rules are the same today
2. The rules that apply to someone else are the same that apply to them
3. If the rules change, they want to be told!

When you step into any high-performance facility worldwide, the team's motto will be prominently displayed on the wall. This motto is meant to describe the organisation's structure, operations, and processes, and is ingrained into the fabric of the organisation. Often, this

mantra permeates every aspect of the organisation, evident as soon as you enter the building and felt in interactions with staff and players. In contrast, organisations with a poor culture have a distinct smell — more of a stench. The signs of a poor culture are immediately apparent:

- Poor staff communication
- Gossip about team members
- Staff feeling marginalised
- Uncoordinated protocols
- Appearances over results
- Players cutting corners
- Branded attire over performance
- Disrespecting teammates/staff
- Style over substance

The issues mentioned above are merely the tip of the iceberg; deeper and more toxic issues remain hidden beneath the surface. It's easy to point fingers at a single staff member or a specific individual in management.

Having said that, it's possible that an individual with a toxic disposition, who holds significant decision-making power, may not align with the organisation's culture.

While this individual may possess the requisite skills for the job, their abrasive personality can adversely impact the entire culture, setting unrealistic and unscalable standards over time for both the team and staff.

Just talk: Clear communication with a consistent message is a key factor in any professional organisation, where most professionals expect clarity and coherence.

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Is it right to blame the entire group for this downfall? Based on my personal experience, the answer is — NO. Every player aims to elevate their performance to the next level, but when presented with an easy option, they might go for it — it's just human nature. **Honest introspection is necessary to identify the individual who acts as the spoke on the wheel, disrupting the entire organisational culture.**

One simple method for recruiting the right staff for the organisation is to assess personality and trust gut instinct. While someone may be competent and excel professionally in their domain, negative personality traits can destabilise the entire system. If an individual focuses more on "I" than "we", it's likely a red flag. The mindset required for a professional in an individual sport versus a team sport varies due to a load of factors. Being mindful of the need to recruit the right person can be a game-changer.

With the right people in right positions, the system can become robust, fostering progressive growth and performance across various factors, by reinforcing the

organisation's work culture — clarifying what it stands for and, equally importantly, what it does not stand for.

There's a misnomer that all high-performance centres are truly high-performance centres, but unfortunately, they cut a sorry figure, merely functioning as organisations. Despite having plenty of staff, a flashy social media presence, designer uniforms, cutting-edge weight rooms and recovery facilities, these elements do not necessarily equate to high performance. How can these centres truly live up to the expectations of key stakeholders? This is indeed a million-dollar question, quite literally!

Each organisation will face specific problems, but **by reflecting on these issues and engaging in honest, truthful conversations within the organisation, many issues can be resolved.** This approach can help restore reputation and establish a winning culture.

Each organisation has its own unique and meaningful culture. There's no fixed template for implementing a successful culture across all organisations. While the

concept of 'culture' is complex within high-performance organisations, it essentially involves a set of guidelines and ethics that are embraced and followed, and how individuals within that culture adhere to them.

The motto — this is the way we set the process and protocols here — needs to be ingrained into the bloodstream. **There's no better place than an organisation with a robust culture and open lines of communication between staff and players,** where the team members breathe and live by the same principles.

As a fellow professional, I would personally encourage each of you to examine the culture within your current organisation. What do you stand for? How do others perceive you and describe your contribution to the organisation? How would you describe your role in bringing about positive change within the organisation?

Answering these questions with honesty may ultimately determine whether your organisation is positioned for sustained success in the future.

Money, money, more money!

The chairman of the ATP, Andrea Gaudenzi, has announced Saudi Arabia's PIF has committed a billion dollars for a **newfangled tennis ecosystem.**

Suresh Menon

The louder he talked of his honour, the faster we counted our spoons. So said Emerson (not the Australian tennis player Roy, but the 19th century American philosopher Ralph Waldo). Modern sports' version of that might be: **the more they talked of streamlining a sport and making it better for players and fans, the faster we looked for Saudi money.**

Golf and soccer have succumbed in various degrees to the Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF), worth some 700 billion dollars. And now it seems to be the turn of tennis. The chairman of the ATP, Andrea Gaudenzi (**in pic**), has announced the PIF has committed a billion dollars for a newfangled tennis ecosystem. It will be 'streamlined' by another tournament, although nothing is final yet.

One proposal will see a coming together of the ATP and the WTA to sell media rights and sponsorships but with separate tours and financial support from the PIF.

There is too a proposal for a 'Premier' Tour run by the four Grand Slams and 10 other events with finals for both men and women at the same venue. This proposal envisages a four-week off season. It would mean the end of the ATP and the WTA Tours and the elimination or downgrading of over one hundred tournaments.

The U.S. Tennis Association's tennis chief said in an interview that changes are necessary because "events (the four Slams apart) lack consequence." There is also the matter of an extra billion dollars flowing into the



tennis kitty with the Premier Tour.

The Professional Tennis Players Association (PTPA) believes that players should have a say in how the sport is run. Ironically, this was the principle on which the ATP (Association of Tennis Professionals) was founded. Some four years back, Novak Djokovic and Vasek Pospisil formed the PTPA when they felt that the ATP (and WTA) focussed on tournaments and the voices of players began to get muted.

Meanwhile the PIF wants to own and run an elite Masters tournament, ahead of the year's opening Grand Slam in Melbourne. It already has the naming rights for men's rankings and a year-end tournament for young players in Saudi Arabia.

All parties agree there is more money to be made from the game and the sport is ripe for an overhaul. **A nagging question is: do you invest**

some money to attract more money, or do you negotiate with the PIF and leave it to that entity to handle the show. That latter is not as ridiculous as it sounds. This is what golf's PGA Tour has done, more or less.

Tennis is in upheaval as a result of the realisation that more money could be made with less effort. It is a formula that elite players in most sports, and the not-so-elite administrators understand and endorse. It will be at least another couple of years before agreements are hammered out and the nay-sayers taken on board.

Sport is getting to a stage where there are billions of reasons to ignore sportswashing.



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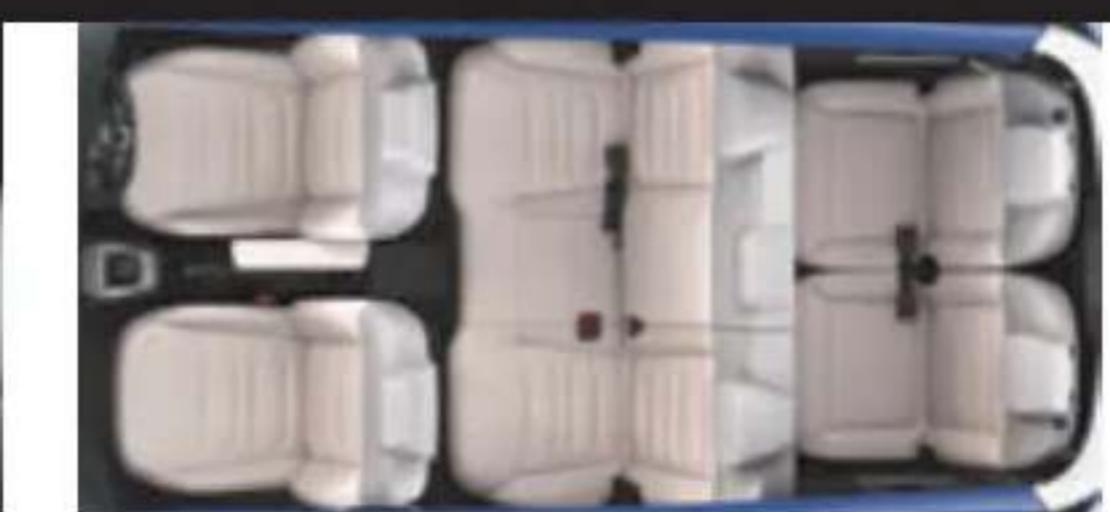
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