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FOR THE MAN
OF HUNDREDS**

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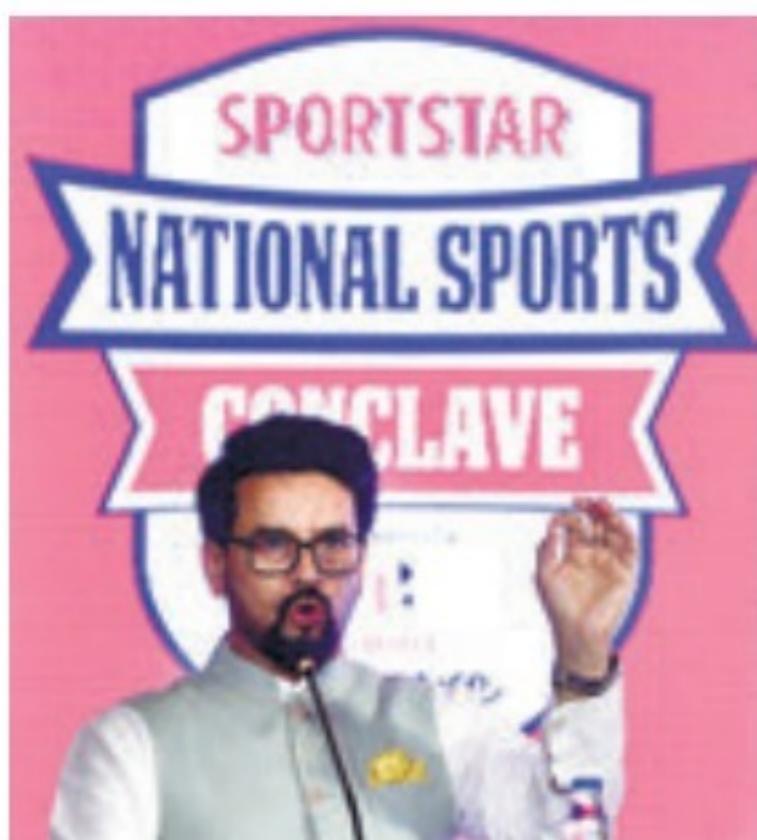
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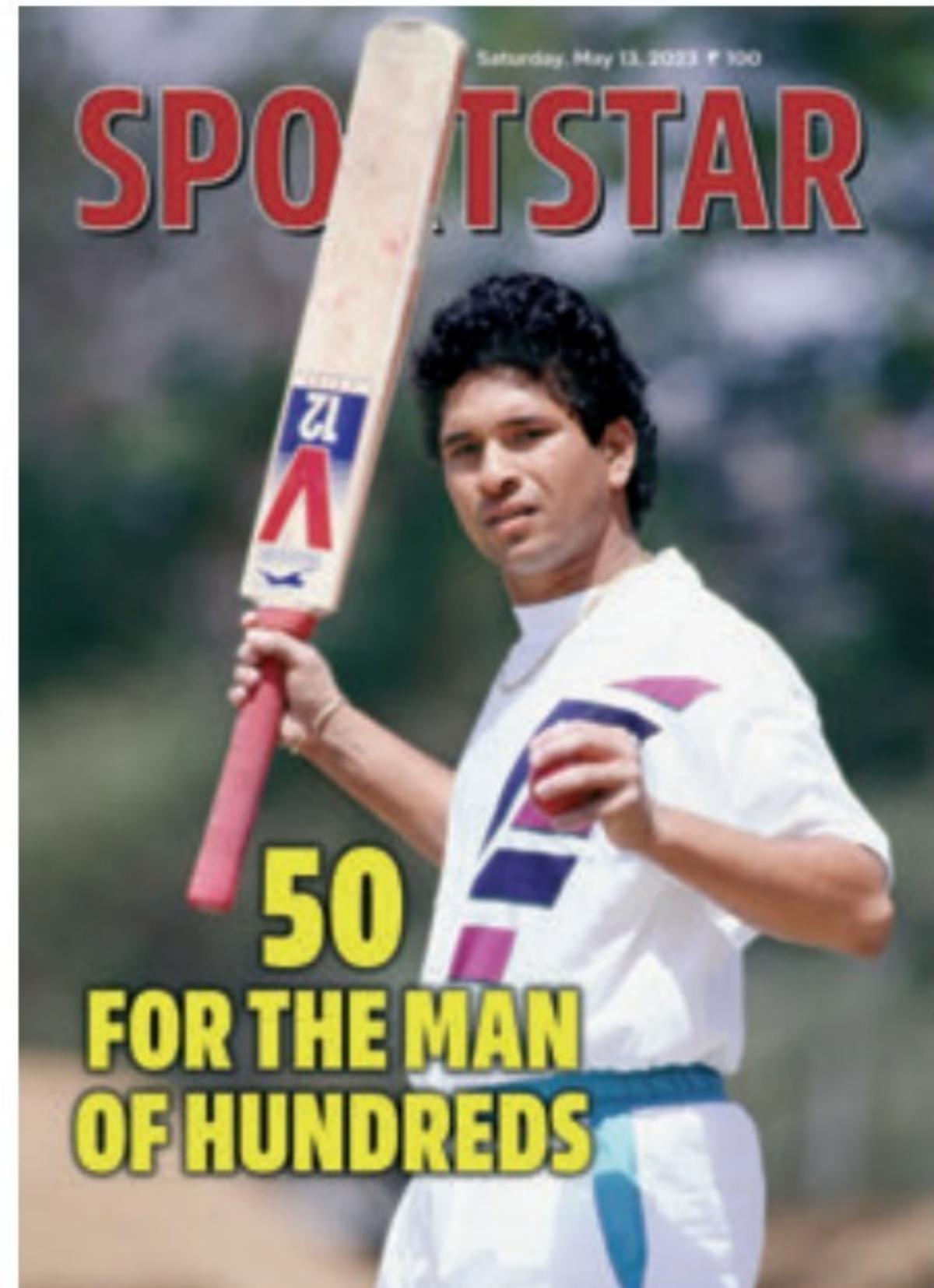
26 Ahead of Sachin Tendulkar's 50th birthday we asked his fans to pen their messages for their beloved icon. Here are 50 responses.



74 Delivering the keynote address at Sportstar's National Sports Conclave, the Union Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs, Anurag Thakur, touched upon the Central Government's effort to ameliorate playing conditions in the country.



80 With his first title at the Orleans Masters, Priyanshu Rajawat has announced himself in the Indian badminton scene. "It has really boosted my confidence and I want to keep the momentum going," says the youngster.



8 "The first innings lasted 24 years. In the second innings, I am just completing 10 years. I would want to achieve more in the second innings. That's my goal now," says Sachin Tendulkar, who turned 50 on April 24. An exclusive chat with the Little Master.

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“For the second weekend in a row I don’t know (how it happened). I am quite angry, disappointed. Not with myself, because I’m 100 per cent sure it wasn’t my fault.”

— FRANCESCO BAGNAIA,
WHO CRASHED OUT OF
GRAND PRIX OF THE
AMERICAS WHILE LEADING
FROM POLE POSITION.



“I can’t win every time. I was feeling good. And I think it’s just it’s a challenge. So let us discuss it as a challenge and move on.”

— ELIUD KIPCHOGE, A DAY
AFTER HIS SLOWEST
MARATHON EVER IN BOSTON
AND JUST HIS THIRD LOSS IN A
MAJOR RACE TO GO WITH 12
VICTORIES.

Jordan’s ‘Last Dance’ sneakers sell for record \$2.2 million

A pair of signed, game-worn Michael Jordan sneakers from the 1998 NBA Finals fetched a record \$2.2 million, making them the most valuable sneakers ever sold, auction house Sotheby’s said.

The Air Jordan 13 “Breds” — short for “black and red” — were worn by Jordan in the second game of the Finals during his final season with the Chicago Bulls, referred to as the “Last Dance”.

Jordan scored 37 points in the game and led the Bulls to a 93-88 win over the Utah Jazz. He went on to win his sixth and final NBA Championship and was named the Finals MVP.

Sotheby’s said Jordan gifted the sneakers to a Jazz ball boy after the game as thanks for finding a lost jacket. They were the final pair of Breds that Jordan wore in a game.

They are the only complete pair of sneakers worn by Jordan in an NBA Finals game that have been photo-matched and authenticated by the MeiGray Group, the official authenticator of the NBA, the auctioneers added.

The previous record for a pair of sneakers was held by a pair of Kanye West’s Nike Air Yeezy 1s, which Sotheby’s sold for \$1.8 million in 2021.

Sotheby’s also auctioned Jordan’s jersey from the opening game of the 1998 Finals for \$10.1 million in September 2022, which became the most expensive piece of game-worn sports memorabilia ever sold.



AP

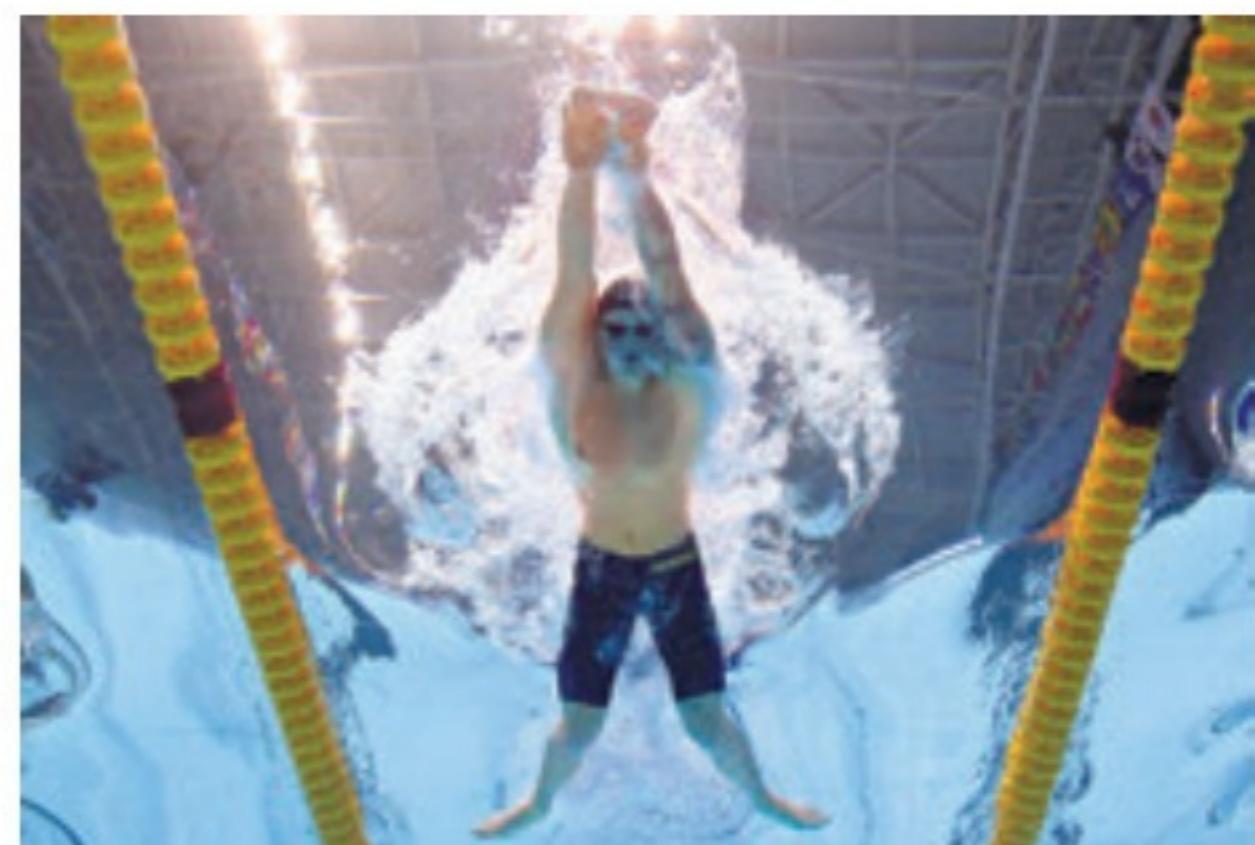
Olympic champion Adam Peaty to miss World Championships

Triple Olympic champion Adam Peaty was the big absentee as Britain announced a 29-strong team for the world aquatics championships in Fukuoka, Japan in July.

The 28-year-old said on social media last month, when he announced he was skipping the British championships, that he wanted to focus on his mental health ahead of the 2024 Paris Olympics.

Peaty, an eight-time world champion and the world record holder in 50m and 100m breaststroke, missed the 2022 world championships in Budapest after fracturing a bone in his foot.

He said last month that he was tired and not enjoying the sport as much as before.



REUTERS

Germany appoints commission to re-appraise 1972 Munich Olympics attack

Germany has appointed an eight-person commission to re-appraise the attack on Israeli athletes and team members at the 1972 Munich Olympics to answer unresolved questions, said German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser in a statement.

"For too many years, there was a lack of understanding or reappraisal of the events, transparency about them or acceptance of responsibility for them," she said.

The project is part of a larger government approach to seek reconciliation with the families affected, including a compensation offer of 28 million euros (\$30.67 million).



REUTERS

Mo Farah says Great North Run will be his final race

Britain's four-time Olympic champion Mo Farah said he will end his athletics career at the Great North Run in September.

Farah finished ninth in his final marathon in London, clocking 2:10:28 — nine minutes behind winner Kelvin Kiptum.

The 40-year-old will compete at the 10km Great Manchester Run on May 21 before the Great North Run half-marathon on September 10.

"Part of me was wanting to cry," Farah told *BBC* after the London Marathon. "I will miss that feeling, I am emotional today."

"I want to pass that on. The Great North Run is going to be my last ever run and that will be my goodbye."

"My career has been amazing, my wife and kids have been with me throughout this journey and I want to give time to them now, as well as getting involved in grassroots sport and give back to this sport."

Farah has won the Great North Run six times. He won gold in both the Olympic 5,000 and 10,000 metres at the 2012 Games in London before retaining both titles in Rio four years later.

But he failed to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics, and has struggled with injuries.



AP

New Zealand considers 2034 Commonwealth Games bid

The New Zealand Olympic Committee (NZOC) has signalled an interest in bringing the Commonwealth Games back to the country for the fourth time in 2034, the body said.

New Zealand also hosted the multi-sports gathering of mostly former British colonies in Auckland in 1950 and 1990 as well as in Christchurch in 1974.

The NZOC said the prospective bid had government backing and had been encouraged by the new hosting model implemented by the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF), which allowed for more "flexible and innovative" Games.

The bid would not be focused on a single city as the Games traditionally have been following the Olympic model but would be for a national event with local characteristics, NZOC chief executive Nicki Nicol said.

The next Commonwealth Games in 2026 will be held in the Australian state of Victoria, while India and the Canadian province of Alberta have expressed interest in staging the 2030 edition, a century after the first British Empire Games.



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#50FORSACHIN

SUITABLE BOY

For his **50th birthday**, Sachin Tendulkar gets candid in a heart-to-heart with *Sportstar*.

AMOL KARHADKAR

He is 50. It's a reality check that we are all getting old. But he doesn't feel so. Just a few days before he celebrates a landmark birthday, Sachin Tendulkar sits down at his bungalow in Mumbai for a chat and looks back at his first innings and spells out the targets for his second.

The chroniclers have often compared Sachin Tendulkar's rise in international cricket with India's changing face globally. How do you look at the parallel?

Coincidentally, the timing was such. Multiple changes were happening in our country at that time and things started looking different. The biggest change I noticed on the field was the 1996 World Cup. From then on, things started changing dramatically in Indian cricket.

As a nation, of course, things were changing too. So many things happened around us. Even for me, personally, actions that I



was involved in started changing. There were sponsorships and multiple other things. I was possibly the first (Indian) cricketer to have signed a contract where an agent was managing an athlete. That concept didn't exist in India until then.

There were a few statements about it from certain sectors saying now the focus is on money and all that. But, in fact, it was the other way around. I didn't want to sit across the table negotiating contracts because that was never my strength. I didn't want to

**Home comfort:**

Sachin has always credited his middle-class upbringing as the reason for his dedication to cricket.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

waste my energy on that. What gave me a peaceful sleep at night was the right column on the scoreboard and if the team won. That determined the quality of sleep I got.

The bank balance was never more important than the score account, so my family members would ask me more about the runs I scored than the contracts I signed. So, I wanted to be focussed only on the game.

How did you never let the middle-class mentality affect you?**It was synonymous with the Indian psyche in the 80s and the 90s.**

I think it's because of the calmness of my father along with the grit of my mother. I have always believed that niceness should not be taken as weakness. If I am nice, polite and humble, it doesn't mean that I am not confident. I am just displaying my upbringing.

To me, I would say I was representing the nation on the field and my family everywhere else. That was important. Where I



needed to show aggression, I showed aggression. There was a question once about my nature of being aggressive on the field and calm off it. I said: 'On the field, I was reacting to what I saw, and off the field, I was responding to what was happening.'

There is a difference between reaction and response. Reaction came instinctively on the field where I knew I had to win the battle against the bowler and eventually against the opposition. Otherwise, the response was completely different. It is to do with my family. Most of the time, I would think how my father would have responded to a certain situation. That is what I do.

How have you ensured that the bubbly kid in Sahitya Sahawas never let the Bharat Ratna or the global celebrity status supersede him?

The accolades are a reflection of what I have done in the field. But that doesn't give me the right to misbehave or do whatever I want because at the end of the day I have to come back home and face everyone (in the family). It's a reflection of the way the family — my parents, both my brothers, and my sister — brought me up. And, in the second part of my life, Anjali, her parents, kids, my uncles and my aunts — everyone around me played a big role.

We never really had celebrations for any of my achievements. Everyone was really happy, encouraging and supportive of whatever I wanted to be, but there were never any big celebrations or parties. We just told ourselves — 'This a good moment, thank God' — and offered a box of sweets and moved on. We always followed a mantra at home: 'Let the whole world talk about the last match; we think about the next match.' That mantra started right in my schooldays.

Even when I did well in school matches, I felt good about it, but celebrations, as such, never happened. Let's think about the next one. That way the ball kept rolling and also, it didn't give me time to think about what I have been able to achieve and start thinking otherwise. The mind was constantly occupied with 'What's next?' That process continues even now. So, just simple upbringing kept me grounded. Once I entered through the main door of the house, everything was normal. It didn't matter what had happened on the field.

Do you feel there is now more

focus on how Indian cricketers respond to certain things rather than how they play?

I think when one is representing the nation — India for me — it's a package deal. What happens with a player on the field and around it becomes really important. Whether it's a reaction or a response, it has to be measured. Like I said, if you are loud and vocal, it doesn't make you any bigger or smaller than what you are. Whatever you are is what you do on the field. And off the field, I have always believed that in my life, while I make runs or take wickets, the rest of the things will take care of itself. The day it becomes reversed, it's the beginning of your downfall.

It has been almost a decade since you last played for India. What is it that you miss the most about playing cricket?

When you are playing for your country, the pride, on-field challenges, meetings, dressing room camaraderie, and all other moments are natural but not permanent. These are the things that happen when you are with a team. We played a couple of tournaments here recently for Road Safety and it was fun to get together and play again.

Otherwise, my send-off was really good in the last match. I always used to think about how the experience of my last match would be. Whatever happened on that day, it's more than special to me. That's the reason I don't miss anything because that's the last memory of me exiting the field as an active cricketer.

When they (West Indies) were eight-down, then nine-down, I was literally telling myself — 'These are the last moments for me on the field. I was literally counting. And then, it would never be the same. I would never be an active India cricketer; would always be considered as a retired cricketer.' That moment was so special that I don't have any regrets.

What went on in your head while listening to chants of 'Saaaachin, Saaaachin' every time you walked out to bat?

There were occasions when I went in to bat and someone jumped on top of the sight screen, I would tie my shoelaces. That was just to let the crowd settle down. A batter or a bowler, whoever it may be, eventually has to own that space. And to own the space,



Early recognition: Sachin Tendulkar, captaining the Dattu Phadkar XI, led his team to the first-ever The Sportstar Trophy triumph in 1987. Raj Singh Dungarpur, the then chairman of selectors, presented the trophy.

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Young genius: Sachin Tendulkar (pic, below) is the toast of his teammates, after he, alongside Vinod Kambli (extreme right), set the then world record for the unfinished third wicket partnership of 664 runs in the inter-school Harris Shield semifinals against St. Xavier's at the Azad Maidan ground in Bombay on February 27, 1988. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY





Cooking up a storm:
A 15-year-old Sachin (above, facing page) scored a century on his Ranji Trophy debut against Gujarat at the Wankhede Stadium in Bombay. THE HINDU
PHOTO LIBRARY

you need to be in control. Occasionally, I would let them settle down first and then start playing, but it was difficult. The first few balls, there was excitement. I would also sometimes feel different. Not all outings are the same. Sometimes you are in a good space, sometimes you aren't. Sometimes, you are so focussed that it really doesn't matter; even when the screen is not right you play. And sometimes you are not thinking right, you just need to buy some time to settle down.

Do you remember the first time you ever heard that chant?

Yes, from my mother. She would keep calling out for me from the balcony — ‘Sachin, Sachin’ — because I would never come back home on time. I would be playing with my friends and she would endlessly keep calling. But I would ignore her because I wanted to keep playing. Evening time would be the most frustrating for me because I had to leave everyone and go home. Invariably, I used to be the last one to go back.

You were a trendsetter on the field in many ways — be it in technique, running between the wickets, playing lofted strokes consistently. What do you make of modern batting techniques?

I think it has changed completely; and what's changed it completely is the laws of the game. They keep changing and that is going to change the way one plays cricket. You can make the game faster by adding more fielders in the circle. Or you can make it slower by reducing the number of players in the circle.

The number of bouncers you use or the number of balls you use, all these factors can make the game faster or slower.

If we shorten the game — say, make it 40 overs with an additional fielder in the circle — we'll get to see maybe 380-run totals. Whereas if you take one fielder out of the circle and use just one ball, you may not see 300-plus totals so frequently.

It is all about the rules that the ICC introduces and also the kind of surfaces that we use. Earlier, the matches would start at 9 am. In the first 45 minutes, the ball would swing, and the red ball would reverse as well and get soft. In the afternoons, the pitch would break up a bit thanks to the sun, thus helping the spinners. It was more balanced, I would say.

Up front, the pacers were in the game and later on the spinners also had a role. Now, from afternoon onwards, life has become, without any doubt, tougher for the bowlers. There is no hiding there.

Would you want parity to be restored rather than the game to be driven more by the commercial aspect?

That balance has to be there. Of course, commercially it has to make sense but at the same time, if you are going to introduce shorter and faster formats to the younger generation, then we need to get the game going at a reasonable pace even in Test cricket. It cannot be a dead track and a drawn Test match. Nobody wants to see that today.

It may sound slightly strange, but today's generation possibly will not have the patience to watch a Test match for five days. I am not suggesting keeping limited overs for each side, but it all depends on the kind of surfaces you produce. The surfaces have to be interesting enough — while in shorter formats they are tilted more towards batters, Test cricket can be tilted more towards bowlers.

It's the bowler who is constantly asking questions to a batter. If that question itself is not interesting for spectators to watch, and if the bowler doesn't get enough help from the surface, then the match becomes boring. It becomes too slow because other formats are way faster than this. On a flat surface, a bowler says, ‘Nothing is happening, I am going to play a defensive line.’ A batter is thinking, ‘If I don't play foolishly, I am okay. The bowler is not looking to get me out.’

In return, we are slowly but surely emptying the stadiums or not engaging enough eyeballs. To engage more eyeballs, I think the pitch has to be interesting enough and helpful enough for a bowler to do something every over.

So, you prefer a two-and-a-half day Test match over a five-day dull draw?

We should not judge a Test match by the number of days it lasted but by the quality of cricket played. If the quality of cricket is good and it goes on for four-and-a-half days, I am fine. But the quality cannot be boring. Why is it so that if it's a challenging wicket, no one can bat? It is called Test



In August company:
Sachin Tendulkar shares a moment with Dennis Lillee, the former Australian pace bowler and chief coach of the MRF Pace Foundation in 1989. Sachin was in Madras for a stint with the Foundation to sharpen his batting skills on its fast wickets.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY



cricket — that's where your skill and character are tested. There will be difficult surfaces and that is where you are meant to go out and show your mettle.

Taking a cue from there, what would you attribute Indian batters' lack of form at home in Test cricket to?

Doctored pitches, lack of skills, evolving batting techniques due to limited overs' overdose — or a culmination of all these factors? Also, whichever opposition team you take, they have got most of their players participating in the IPL for two months. So, Indian conditions are not foreign anymore.

Similarly, for our players, they are no longer unfamiliar opponents. Earlier, if I was playing against someone — say Glenn McGrath — we would only see him every four years in Australia or every four years in India. But now, you know we have the luxury of spending two-and-a-half months with them every year, batting or bowling against them every day.

Yes, there have been some disappointing performances but that happens to everyone. I will not point fingers at anyone and say, 'So and so is not doing well.' I would much rather go one-on-one and tell them that this is what it is.

That is also possibly one of the reasons we have travelled better. Of course, we have the ammunition to go to any part of the world and cause problems for the opposition. It's a combination of everything.

So is the case with the opposition. If we provide helpful tracks for bowlers, they can exploit those conditions. It cannot be just one-way traffic that our bowlers are being able to exploit, and they cannot do it.

Had T20 cricket happened earlier, would we have seen a different Sachin Tendulkar?

I don't know, honestly; tough to answer. I personally don't think so because there was a period where several people did not understand what T20 was about and termed it as a game for youngsters. There were a number of such experts who hadn't played a single ball themselves, but had larger voices than anyone else who had played for quite some time.

But I realised that it is not so taxing. In fact, I would say that T20 is the easiest format to play. In the ODIs you have to last the whole day, which makes it the most

difficult format to play physically.

T20 is not the toughest format at all. In Test cricket, when the fast bowlers have to bowl long spells in the heat, it can be very taxing. Or for that matter, if a batter has to bat the whole day under the scorching sun, that is when things can get tough.

In all these situations, of course you are going down physically but if you don't look after your hydration or if you are not fit, the first thing that lets you down is your focus and concentration. That's where proper fitness comes in to play.

Is there any period or instance during your career - or life - that you wish had panned out differently?

Yes, the 2007 World Cup. That phase from 2005 and 2007 wasn't a great one in Indian cricket. Also, the late 90s, which was a dark phase in Indian cricket. These two for sure.

Late 90s also coincided with...

My captaincy!

So, when people look at your captaincy record, do you sometimes feel the other scandals are conveniently overlooked?

Without any doubt! I feel that, but I don't want to point fingers. I think some don't want to speak and some pretend not to know.

About India's young cricketers, do you at times fear that they tend to be overconfident?

There are two ways to look at it. One is, of course, they are getting a chance to mingle with foreign players during the IPL. Their behaviour too has changed. So, the way the teams interact with each other on and off the field pre and post-IPL is completely different.

Also, there are not many rivalries like before. And for any sport, you need rivalries. Like in tennis with Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic, or in Formula One with Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen.

Is it time to accept that we live in a world where a Mumbai Indians versus Chennai Super Kings rivalry matters more to the audience than India versus Australia?

Not the cricket audience; I am referring to the players. Crowds only respond to what

Braving the hostilities: Sachin (below, facing page) was left with a bloodied nose after he was struck on the face by a short ball from Waqar Younis during the fourth Test match against Pakistan at the Jinnah Stadium in Sialkot. The gutsy youngster batted on after receiving medical attention and made 57 in the second innings.

V. V. KRISHNAN



A first of many: Sachin Tendulkar scored his maiden Test 50 in the second Test match between India and Pakistan in Faisalabad, in November 1989. v. V. KRISHNAN





the players are doing, but players don't play according to how the crowd is responding.

There are different ways to look at it. One is the commercial interest, and the second is camaraderie between players.

If you know someone really well, then it's a little hard to tell them what you would otherwise say on the field; you'll be slightly measured. But if you don't know someone, you are going to go all out and make his life uncomfortable in the middle.

So, it is also about getting to know each other. When you are familiar with each other after spending more than two months together, then it's different.

Speaking about young cricketers, there's a blooming cricketer at home. How do you assess Arjun's career shaping up?

Neither my parents nor my brother pressurised me. I got the freedom to be what I wanted to be. That's exactly what we do with Sara and Arjun. They are not pressurised but are asked to give their best. Whatever they are doing, whatever they wish to be in life, we ask them not to settle for the second position.

I judge them by their effort, and not the result. When you look at pushing yourself, you should look at the mirror and say: 'This is the best I could have done.' To me, that is a winning combination. Post that, the results may not be guaranteed, but efforts are. If you tick all the boxes in that regard, I am fine.

If there's a change that you want to see in the next decade — in India or Indian cricket — what will that be?

In cricket, I think we are heading in the right direction. The big change that I had wanted to happen — equal opportunities — has already begun with the Women's Premier League, that too in grand style.

I was in Ahmedabad to felicitate the Under-19 girls' team and that's where I told Jay Shah (BCCI secretary) and Roger Binny (BCCI president) that it's brilliant that the WPL is being introduced. It's going to take women's cricket to a different level by opening the doors for so many young girls.

Somewhere you need leaders to emulate, and younger generations can watch all these women compete in a fair manner, but at a very high level.

Also, their athleticism was a pleasant

sight to watch. I was really pleasantly surprised with the way they fielded and threw themselves on the field. I didn't expect this level and full marks to them.

This is the change I am seeing — equality. That is what should happen not only in cricket but also in our country and beyond, plus in all professions and all walks of life. Equality has multiple layers, in opportunity and freedom to express yourself on various platforms. Being gender neutral is something that will give everyone a reason to smile.

How do you plan to remain involved with the game?

My doors are always open. As and when anyone wants to discuss anything with me and interact, I am more than happy to meet and discuss.

You have also been involved in social activities during and after your playing days. What drives you towards contributing to social development over the last decade?

We started the Sachin Tendulkar Foundation basically to work with children in three verticals — health, education and sports. We have done a decent job, which gives us satisfaction.

It's all about what we feel from within. I have always done that right from the mid-90s but we kind of got everything together under one umbrella with more focused work.

It becomes difficult to do 25 different things, so to have just three focused verticals, that too for children, makes it feel good. Outside the Foundation, too, we do some work, but the Foundation is where my energy will be spent in my second innings [life].

We have a dedicated and committed team that strives to impact as many lives as possible and show them direction, channelise their energy and enthusiasm and help them achieve their dream.

We have been working all over the country with no specific region being targeted. I have received love from all over the country and it becomes my duty to give back to everyone.

Even before the Foundation was shaped, you never wasted any opportunity to interact with

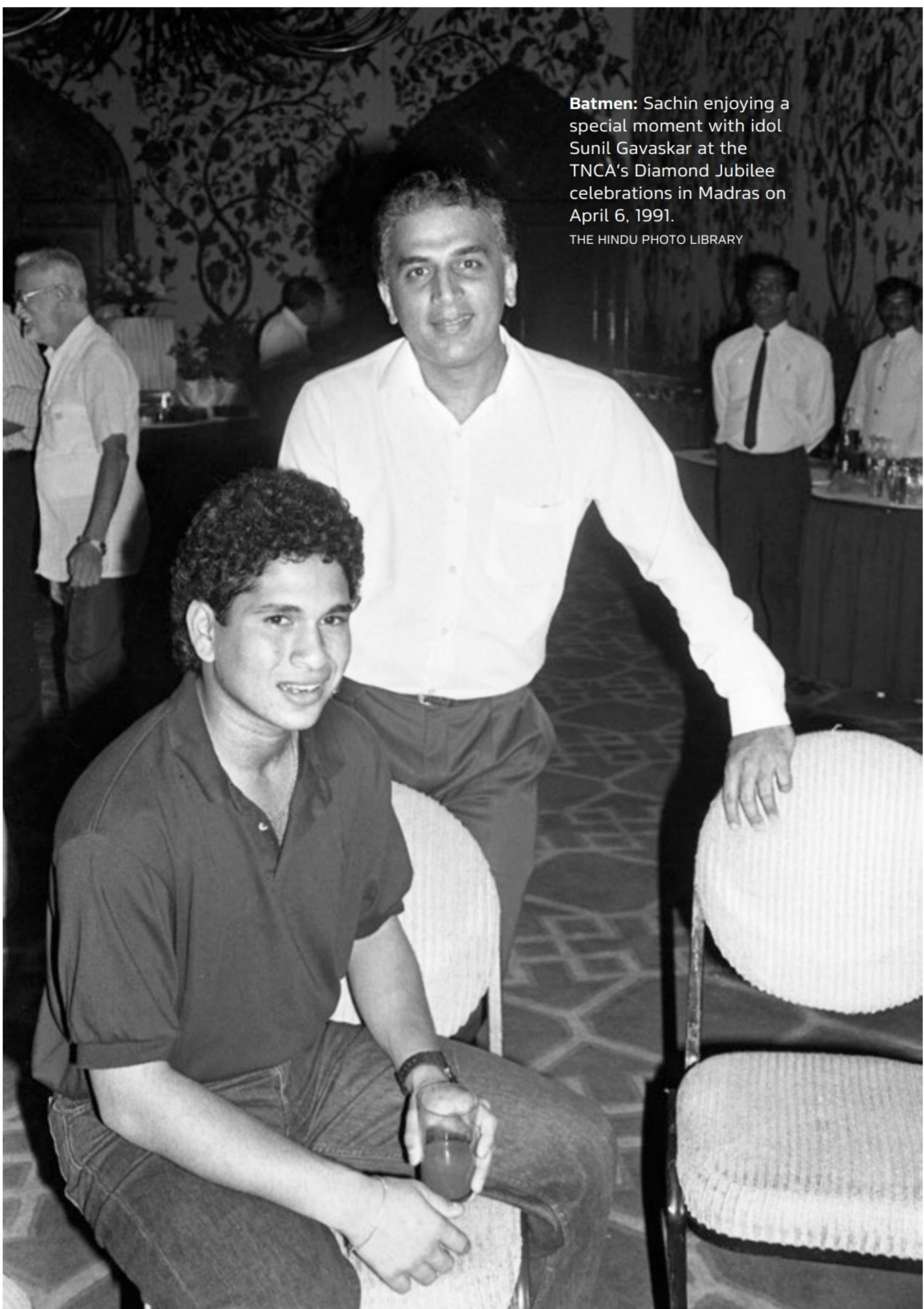


Moush to talk about: Sachin and Sanjay Manjrekar having a ball during a Sunday Club meeting of the Indian team during the 1989 tour of Pakistan. V. V. KRISHNAN



99 to go:
Sachin on way
to his maiden
Test hundred
at Old Trafford,
on the fifth and
final day of the
second Test
match
between India
and England
on August 14,
1990.

V. V. KRISHNAN



Batmen: Sachin enjoying a special moment with idol Sunil Gavaskar at the TNCA's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in Madras on April 6, 1991.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY



youngsters. How do you assess Gen Z?

The exposure they have is just unbelievable. When I was in Tadoba recently, I stopped to have a look at a school just outside a village. We used to pass a school on the way to the forest and it was as big as this room possibly — with 34 students [17 girls and 17 boys], if I am not mistaken.

One of the teachers requested me to stop by, and all the children waited outside the school. It was a really special moment for me because they had a chapter on me in of their books. The teacher opened the book and told the students that it was the same person. Then I interacted with them and asked them what they wanted to be. Their responses were unbelievable, be it musician, professional dancer, police officer, doctor, or scientist.

In Madhya Pradesh, too, we interacted with children. There was a school and a hostel being built, in which I had dedicated a

floor to my parents. Also, in October while we were playing a tournament, we got those kids to travel to Indore. We had arranged for about 100 of them to be taken there and I interacted with them as well.

It's good to see that the Foundation is working for them. All I can say is that if my father were alive, he would have been very happy. He would have said, 'This is the right path.' So, that makes my journey even more satisfying. There is no harm in setting bigger goals and that is something I would want to do.

At 50, is there anything that you wanted to achieve and have not been able to do yet?

Not really. The first innings lasted 24 years. In the second innings, I am just completing 10 years. Like I said, I would want to achieve more in the second innings. That's when I would be wearing the Foundation hat and representing India. That's my goal now.

Historic Day: Alan Donald (5 wickets) of South Africa and Sachin (62) hold the Man of the Match award after South Africa's first international match in 21 years, at the Eden Gardens in Calcutta. India won the match by three wickets. THE HINDU
PHOTO LIBRARY



Young turks: Sachin and Sanjay enjoy the Australian countryside in Wagga Wagga, in 1991. V. V. KRISHNAN



Standing tall: Sachin scored his first century in Australia on the fourth day of the third Test match at the Sydney Cricket Ground on January 5, 1992.

V. V. KRISHNAN



Breaking another barrier: Sachin became the first non-Yorkshireman to play for the Yorkshire County cricket club at London's Oval Ground on April 28, 1992. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY



Tying them in a knot: With six to win from the last over, South Africa found Sachin too hot to handle and could manage only three, handing India a memorable victory in the Hero Cup semifinals at the Eden Gardens on November 24, 1993. The man of the moment celebrates the win with Salil Ankola, Mohammed Azharuddin, Ajay Jadeja and Pravin Amre. V.V. KRISHNAN



A worthy winner: The Sportstar honoured Sachin Tendulkar with the first-ever The Sportstar Sportsperson of the Year award in 1994 in Madras on May 1, 1995. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY



A new innings: Sachin with his bride Anjali Mehta soon after their wedding in Bombay on May 25, 1995. For the then Indian vice-captain and Anjali – a paediatrician with Bombay's J. J. Hospital – it was a traditional Maharashtrian ceremony.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY



Partners in crime: With Sourav Ganguly, Sachin forged a prolific opening partnership in ODIs with 6,600 runs at an average of close to 50. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY



Proud moment: Captain Sachin led India to the Titan Cup triumph, beating South Africa by 35 runs in the final at the Wankhede Stadium on November 6, 1996. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY



Left was not his right: Sachin, a natural left-hander, batted and bowled right-handed. He was a formidable table tennis player, according to team-mate Yuvraj Singh. "You cannot beat him in table tennis, No matter how hard you try," says Yuvraj. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY



Desert storm: Sachin bludgeoned a star-studded Australian attack to score a breathtaking 134 in the Coca Cola Cup final in Sharjah on April 24, 1998. Two days prior, he had scored 143 against the same opposition to take India to the summit clash. **Right:** Sachin's teammates, understandably, are over the moon. V. V. KRISHNAN



Greats gather: Sachin in the company of Aussie legends Sir Donald Bradman and Shane Warne. AP



Bleeding blue: The Indian flag finds a pride of place in Sachin's kit-box. V. V. KRISHNAN



Another milestone: Sachin scored his 28th ODI 100 in the third match between Australia and India at the Nehru Stadium in Indore on March 31, 2001. During the course of the innings, Tendulkar also became the first batter to cross the 10,000-run mark in ODIs. V. V. KRISHNAN



Stamping his class: Sachin scored a mammoth 241 in the final Test match against Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground in January 2004. Many consider this Sachin's best innings as he did not hit a single cover drive during his 613-minute vigil. V. V. KRISHNAN



First to the post: On February 24, 2010, Sachin created yet another record when he hit an unbeaten 200 off 147 balls against South Africa in the second ODI of the series. He became the first batsman to score a double century in ODIs. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY



Dream come true: Sachin Tendulkar poses with the ODI World Cup after India's memorable triumph at home in 2011. PTI



'Ton'dulkar: Sachin's 100th international century came against Bangladesh during the Asia Cup in Dhaka on March 16, 2012.

AP

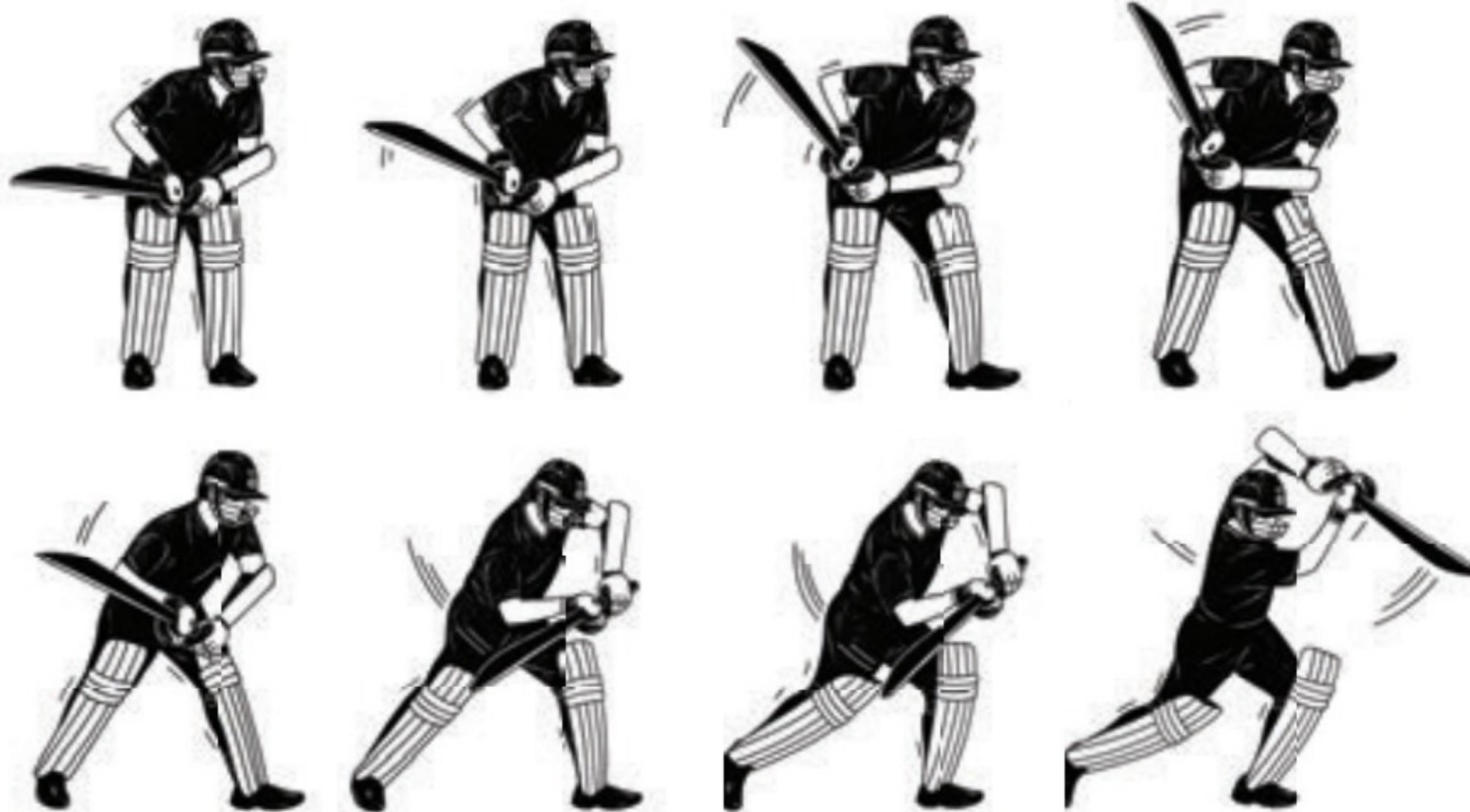


To Sir, with love:
Sachin
Tendulkar
shows his
Bharat Ratna to
guru Ramakant
Achrekar in
Mumbai in
February 2014.

AFP



A career to cherish:
Sachin, in the
company of his
family, is emotional
after playing his
last and 200th
Test match,
against the West
Indies at the
Wankhede
Stadium in Mumbai
on November 16,
2013. K. R. DEEPAK



AND IT IS A FIFTY FOR THE MAN OF HUNDREDS

On Sachin's 50th birthday, we asked his die-hard fans to pen heartfelt notes for their beloved icon.
Here are a few selected ones. #50forSachin

The responses from our readers have been edited for clarity, word limit, as well as for aesthetics, while capturing the warmest messages for Sachin.

John Kuruvilla

The world stood in wonder when the teenager with a pencil moustache started blasting centuries with his willow in the international cricketing arena nearly three and a half decades back, a time when India was in the cusp of sporting resurgence. Then started the saga of a brilliant cricketing legend who, by total dedication and sheer dint of hard work, reached hitherto unheard of highs of batting glory and set records that no aspiring scions of this field can ever dream of obliterating. Brought up in the mofussil precincts of the mega city of Mumbai, along with playmate Vinod Kambli, he single-handedly popularised this erstwhile white-flannelled Englishman game in the Indian sub-continent and made it a heady religion.

Ayan Biswas

If cricket is a body, Tendulkar is the soul. He was the reason why I started to watch cricket. Till my Matriculation exam we did not have any television, but I heard that a 16-year-old lad became the sword of Damocles to the hazardous Pakistani bowlers. I wish you can celebrate your 100th birthday with this energy.

Mili Sudhesh

Your induction into the national cricket team at the age of 16 showcased your capability and prowess. It was your total dedication to cricket along with will power and grit that enabled you to play cricket for more than two decades, while breaking and creating many batting records in your illustrious career. You were a perfect team member. You stepped down as captain, without any egos, and you even agreed to play under junior captains and contributed immensely. Thus proving that team achievements are more important than personal goals.

Ramalingam V

Tendulkar is the jewel in India's crown. He inspired even the diamond merchants who had gathered

from far flung places such as Antwerp, London and Mumbai to watch international fixtures hosted by Nicky Oppenheimer, the chairman of De Beers and various other companies dealing in diamonds.

They may have been weighing his carat, cut and clarity before they came to the conclusion that here in India there is another rare gem.

Shankar Ramachandran

For cricket lovers of certain vintage like me, 90s was an era, when 'God' himself descended on Earth. For an entertainment-starved nation, India winning the World Cup in 1983 and the subsequent World Championship of Cricket in 1985 were just the sort of epochal events that got etched in my memory for all times to come.

While all of the above was happening and when Indians were asking for more, a cherubic-faced child prodigy burst on to the scene in 1989 in Pakistan. That was the start of the everlasting love between the Indians and the 'God of Cricket'.

Srinivasan Krishnan

From being a child prodigy to attaining the Bharat Ratna, Sachin guarded not just the crease but also a billion hopes of a country! Born as a mortal, he became immortal.

Kushagra Mishra

His career is the pinnacle of the sporting world, festooned by extraordinary temperament, unflinching grit and delicate batting craftsmanship, whether it's the paddle sweep to beat the fielder at deep fine leg or the upper cut over the keeper's head that was used with precision against bouncers.

Even though his tennis elbow injury restricted certain movements, he managed to reinvent his batting with a positive intent. He is an example of excellence, the North Star of modern day cricket.

Amany Kapur

I truly agreed with Mathew Hayden when he said — "If cricket is a religion, Sachin is a God". You are our

country's pride. I have been watching you since I was seven. Your passion towards cricket and playing for India has influenced and encouraged me to follow my dreams.

I respect you a lot and always will. I hope that I can meet you someday and learn more about your journey. I wish that I could become a great person like you and have an ambitious personality like yours.

Ishaya Kumar

There came a man with a willow in his hand who wielded it like a magic wand on a 22-yard-long pitch for more than two decades to earn the sobriquet — 'God of Cricket'. You have always been a light to the globe, that has not only helped us win in cricket but also changed the way the world looked at India. Several schools have begun and promoted sports alongside academics as a result of you. I aspire to be just like you.

Ananya Rajan

Watching my dad scream 'Sachin, Sachin' and shake his head while watching countless reruns of your matches on TV has made me realise what you mean to our cricket-crazy nation.

Each swing of your bat and century that you scored sparked the love for cricket among generations of Indians. My school has the biggest cricket ground in Delhi, and to hear our coach motivate each player to be the 'next Sachin' is heart-warming. But as they say, there will be only one Sachin, so I am wishing you a happy 50th and loads of good health.

Kolluru Raju

Sachin stands as a testimony for the great personality of the game of cricket. He can be called as the true prodigy of the gentleman's game. Other than being a legendary batsman, Sachin is known for his humility as well as his grit and determination. Because of which he is a true source of inspiration for millions of cricket lovers around the world. It is said that bowlers used to

be anxious to bowl to Sachin Tendulkar not just because of his talent and proficiency but also because of the kind of respect they had for him as a person. The most remembered innings of Sachin Tendulkar was the Sharjah ODI where he scored 134 runs and ultimately helped India single-handedly win the Cup. This day was also a special day for him because it was his birthday.

Aditya Ranjan Sharma

Along with your birthday, my love affair with cricket too has reached 50 milestone years. From wanting that MRF bat on every birthday of mine to shedding tears on your retirement, you always reminded me of a young boy in the team who became a legend with time.

In all these years, I learned a lot from your luminous personality — especially whenever you got dismissed at 99, when we the fans became unhappy your smile filled our lives with a triumphant feeling. Even today your birthday does the same.

Kiran Narendran

I always longed for a time machine! Not for me, of course. If there was one, it could've helped Sachin go back to 1st March, 2003, and score those two runs against Pakistan to make the best ever World Cup innings truly

complete. Sachin, thanks for playing during my lifetime and illuminating my childhood, teenage and youth. Bat up for the fifty, but the innings has just started.

Antony Chalissery

Truly a Bharat Ratna, Sachin is a rare breed. Whenever he scored a century, he looked up to the sky raising his bat and thanking God, while remembering his father and other mentors.

Even at the peak of being a celebrity, he was a docile and down-to-earth person converging into uniqueness, the one and only. While completing half a century in his life innings, I wish the Master Blaster longevity and prosperity.

Harshad Rajadhyaksha

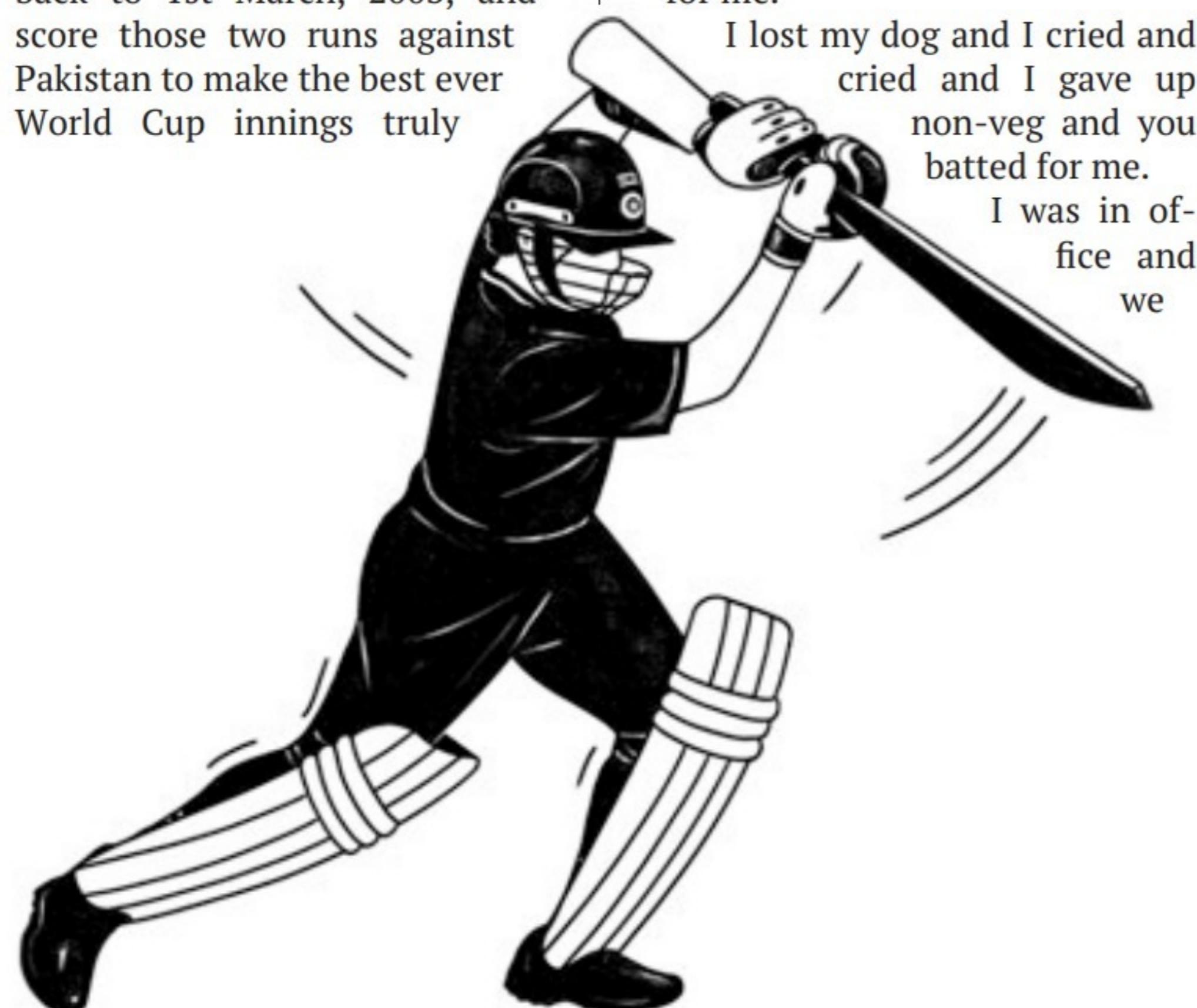
I was in school and hated Chemistry and lost a tug of war game and took my bleeding hands home and you batted for me.

I spouted a moustache and spent vacations in Pune with my long-departed grandpa and loved every match you played and you batted for me.

I fell in love and out of love and graduated and looked ahead at my brand new dreams and you batted for me.

I lost my dog and I cried and cried and I gave up non-veg and you batted for me.

I was in office and we



friends bonded over you and screamed ourselves hoarse on the streets and fluttered the flag as you ripped through Shoaib and you batted for me.

I got better pay and bought my first car and a new LCD to go and on it too, you batted for me. I saw people lose jobs and not lose hopes and the world was now a far tougher place and you batted for me.

I came back home from some really tiring work and a child in my building called me uncle and I put on the TV and you were there and you batted like I was still in school and like the world had not moved and you batted for me.

Yuvraj Yadav

Happy birthday to the deity whose drives are straight as 'Arjuna's Arrow', upper-cuts sharper than 'Takemikazuchi's Sword', punches as solid as 'Zeus's Thunderbolt' and still calm as 'Equanimous Buddha'.

Mitul Sinha

I have never seen Don Bradman play live but I can proudly say that I had the privilege of watching Sachin bat. No one else can play the straight drive with the same elegance as the Little Master. I used to collect his Boost stickers and photos of his from all newspapers, be it in any language, just to get them added to my Sachin Dairy.

Deepa

Born with a willow in hand,
Hailed as the GOD of cricket land;
Sportsman par excellence,
Your footwork was your greatest defence;
Genius of the game,
No one could ever match your fame;
An iconic cricketer, a legend of your times,
Your passion and perseverance rang a many victory chimes;
Darling of the masses,
One will forever cherish your centuries in all matches;
Words fall short in praise of you,
Blessed by the hands of God are born only a few;

Wishing you a happy birthday this year,
Hope good luck and peace be with you forever.

Anurag Asopa

Sir, you have set a strong foundation in the lives of the pre-digital era generation. I value you the most along with my family. I witnessed your journey from Sahitya Sehwas to Perry Cross Road and words can't describe how each innings of yours has motivated me in my life. I owe my every achievement to you (after the blessings of my parents & family). I am blessed to be a part of Sachin's Era.

Love Durai

I remember how we used to gather around the television set, eagerly waiting for Sachin to walk out to bat. We would watch in awe as he took on the best bowlers in the world and made them look ordinary. I also remember how we would mimic Sachin's batting style in the streets, using makeshift cricket bats and tennis balls. Sachin Tendulkar was more than just a cricketer to us 90s kids. He was a symbol of hope, a source of inspiration, and a legend in every sense of the word.

Yash Pratap

Sachin Sir, with the runs you scored, you took a sledge hammer to conventional pictorial batting, chalking up runs that crackled with a raw primitive power that instantly bewitched the young likes of Yuvraj & Dhoni. You liberated what it meant to be a classical batsman like Gavaskar (conventional, correct and proper), transforming morose singles into serene drives and flicks that actually converted to fours. In order to do this you abandoned 100 years of artistic refinement.

Your batting conveyed the speed of events, things and life itself in the modern world.

Your genius illuminated the world of cricket like a comet; well, it's still blazing away today.

Brijesh Srivastava

You are not only a blessed cricketer with unparalleled technique and cricketing brain but an institution that helped the Indian cricket ecosystem scale new heights. Your retirement from international cricket was a watershed moment that divided Indian cricket into pre and post-Tendulkar eras.

Arya R Nair

Those straight drives did not just go past the umpire for a boundary, but straight into our hearts. We celebrated your centuries, bit our nails during your 90's and became dejected during tough times. You always found ways to come back stronger from injuries or a lack of form — the epic 241 at Sydney, a testament to that.

Midhun Menon

I 'hate' Sachin Tendulkar to the core. He was the reason I got scoldings from my mother for skipping studies and dad's beatings for breaking the glass window of my neighbour's home while practising Sachin's lofted shot. I nearly missed by 12th board exam because I was waiting for him to score his 10,000th ODI run. I also had to miss an S5 engineering exam because he was playing that Sydney classic in 2004. Finally, he was the reason I cried like a baby on 16th November, 2013. Sachin, 'I hate you like I love you'.

Ritwika Dhar

The only way I can capture the vast essence, impact and meaning of Sachin in our lives is alphabetically: Achrekar Sir; Billion dreams; Century of centuries; Desert storm; (Tennis) Elbow; Fighter; Gwalior 200; Headingley; Inspiration; Jab Sachin out tv off; Kambli; (Brett) Lee 14; Mumbai; Newlands 169; Old Trafford 1990; (Shivaji) Park; Queen's Park Oval; Rajni & Ramesh's son; Sachin Tendulkar. *Sach is truth, Sach is life, Sach is the answer, Sach is it.*

Ashika

We live in a country that breathes and lives cricket where Sachin is the

one who lit the atmosphere. He is the true epitome of 'how to live cricket'. We can never thank enough this 'Moon' of ours whose moonlight brightened India on another level.

Jhanvi Langalia

You are my biggest inspiration to become a cricketer. I have seen many matches that you've played, every achievement you've got, and I've hardly seen you fail. You have taught me that an individual is different on and off field. If you win a match, that does not make you great, if you lose a match, that does not define you, either! Thank you for teaching me that success and failures should be equal as failure is not opposite. In fact, it is a part of success.

Gautham Menon

You are the umbilical cord to our childhood. Your centuries were an ecstasy and dismissals a heartbreak. Wishing my 'CHILDHOOD' a well-deserved half-century.

Venkateswaran N

You are an epitome of hard work reaping the fruits of success, who never took anything for granted and treated the game above everything else — the innings of 79* for Mumbai against Haryana in 2013 before your final international series, a case in point. The emotion of 'Sachin, Sachin...' will always live with us.

Sony Raj

26 needed off one Qadir over,
You were born then;
22 yards of Sialkot, Wasim and Waqar,
You grew up there;
Flies swatted away that night,
Henry Olonga among them;
Short, you aren't,
Say Ambrose and Walsh;
Not to mention McGrath and Warne,
Or Murali and minnows;
That Shoaib waft over point takes pole position,
Amongst tons and tons of fun;

Keep those coins of Ramakant *bhai* close,
For real men deal only with real currency;
We rise to one more fifty,
As we did for those countless ones.
'Sachiiin, Sachiiin', the cry goes on... and on.

Barath Selvan

He carried the entire burden of the nation for almost 24 years! The runs he scored, the peak he has achieved, the failures he has gone through, the criticism he faced, the records he has set, and the people he inspired cannot be in the pages of any other cricketer around the world.

Mary Vidhya K

You are the reason behind me falling in love with cricket. You have taught us not to give up, to go beyond boundaries and create milestones. I want to go back in time just to see you playing again. The Indian team is incomplete without you.

Sayantan Dey

The flag bearer of Indian cricket, the hope for a million Indian eyes, whether its Sharjah, Wankhede, Eden or Sydney; the heartstring of this cricket-crazy nation, the silent fighter, the mighty warrior, the humble and the invincible. Watching you bat has been absolutely ambrosial!

Vinu Suraj

He is the closest to perfection. Not sure how he stays that humble even after having carried the whole nation's expectations for more than two decades. As a tribute to my hero, I got him etched on me as a tattoo. I wish that he lives on forever.

Kembai Srinivasa Rao

Your unique urge of continuous learning to upgrade your style of play to match all evolving formats of cricket inspired many youngsters to learn from you. Even while pursuing the peak of your sports career, you mentored the next generation of young cricketers. We now see

glimpses of your style in many of them.

Sourav Sinha

I remember reading a news article in the 1980s about a wonder kid in Mumbai named Sachin Tendulkar who could be India's next Sunil Gavaskar. I was waiting for you to be selected in the Indian team; and I didn't have to wait long as you got selected for the Pakistan tour in 1989. In those days, you used to bat with a helmet that didn't have a front grille. One of Waqar Younis' balls reared up dangerously and caught you on the face. You fell with blood all over. The ball had hit your nose and it was a terrible scene. Navjot Sidhu, who was your partner at the other end, later said that you got up with confidence and uttered, *Hum khelega* (I will play). That's Sachin Tendulkar!

Usha Krishnamurthy

S - Simple
A - Adorable
C - Charismatic
H - Hardworking
I - Inspiring
N - Noble
That is SACHIN.

Vishal Akre

It is hard to achieve success. But it is much harder to sustain success. Your feet were always on the ground even when your fame was touching the sky. It is a privilege for me to be born in your 'Generation, City and Country'. On this special day, I wish happiness to always flourish in your life as abundantly as the runs you scored while all your sorrows get bowled out.

Deivanayagam Subramanian

S - SIMPLE
A - ADMIRABLE
C - CRICKETER
H - HUMBLE
I - INDIAN
N - NATIVE
T - TERRIFIC
E - ELEGANT
N - NATURAL
D - DARING

U - UNIQUE
L - LOVELY
K - KNOCKING
A - AGGRESSIVE
R - RAREST

Chaitanya Tatya

May 28, 2017: The 12th board results were announced and I was to appear again next year.

Struggling to even pass the Science course, I was hopeless about my future. Same day, I went to see *Sachin: A Billion Dreams*. and I experienced a roller coaster of emotions. I am a small-town boy, chasing his dreams bit by bit. I don't know what God is, but Sachin Tendulkar has shown me the right direction every time I've hit my lowest.

I've come miles, and have more to go. I wish the same for him!

Kalpesh Bamboli

I used to think that you don't age. But you do. You don't even play cricket anymore. Which means, I'm not a child anymore. In fact, cricket is not cricket anymore.

It's a sport now. I don't get goosebumps when I see a cover-drive now. I don't embarrass myself by screaming when a batsman scores a century. I don't get upset when I miss a match now. I don't think I'll wake up at 4:00 am just to watch a cricket match anymore. There are no emotions left in cricket. Wood and leather, nothing more!

Ananthakrishnan R

Have you seen God, my friends? We saw him, not in heaven but in a stadium. We have seen legends and champions but we have not seen a god in front our eyes until Sachin Tendulkar came in to bat at No. 4 for India. Nothing bad will happen if you have Sachin in your dreams because he is a god.

Ajay Nair

Sachin, the master blaster, the cricketing great, Fifty years of life, and records hard to replicate. The little master, who wielded the willow with grace,

A cricketer par excellence, whose feats none can replace.
 You scored a hundred centuries, an unparalleled feat,
 In cricketing history, your name shall forever beat.
 The highest run-scorer in Tests and ODIs combined,
 Your impact on the game, we shall forever remind.
 On this special day, we wish you joy and cheer,
 May your life be blessed with all that's dear.
 You're an inspiration to millions, a true icon of the game,
 Your legacy shall forever remain.
 Thank you, Sachin, for all the memories you've given,
 For the moments that have made our hearts livin'.
 Here's wishing you good health, happiness and love,
 May your 50th birthday be as grand as the heavens above.

Chandan Kumar

From admiring the best of the game in Sunil Gavaskar and Viv Richards and sharing the field with legends like Kapil Dev, Anil Kumble, Rahul Dravid and Sourav Ganguly to facing the toughest bowlers from three different generations like Waqar, Wasim, Walsh, Lee, McGrath, Warne, Cronje, Murali, Vaas, Steyn, Anderson and so on — playing it your way was never easy. The impact you've had in the lives of Dhoni, Virat, Rohit and millions of people with your magic is remarkable yet unexplainable at the same time.

Hema Chandran S S

I was 14 in 2008, when I was watching from the F stand of Chepauk since mid of Day 3 of that unforgettable Test against England where Sachin scored an unbeaten 103. He amazed all of us with his very natural (classic) and unique straight and cover drives. Moreover, it was never easy to cement his place in the Indian team for 24 long years while many other cricketers were still trying to make their international debut.

Korak Banerjee

Cricket or Sachin — I don't know whose fan I became first. I can't even remember how I became a devotee of him. But I know that this man is my oxygen! The reason for my maximum happiness in life is Sachin Ramesh Tendulkar. He is my idol for his discipline, dedication, devotion and behaviour on and off the field. Sachin Sir, I want to see another chanceless hundred from you after 50 years. I will wait for it. The whole India will wait for it.

Suchitra S

You were my favourite sportsperson, even prior to me getting acquainted with cricket, because you were the favourite of many around me who looked up to you as a kid. It was through the prism of your game that I became a fan of the sport, which only fueled my admiration for you exponentially.

Newspaper clippings, magazines, posters & cards — I collected them all to gratify my awe of you. I still reminisce the times I watched cricket just to be bowled over by your game. Thank you for all that you have done for the sport, fans and beyond.

Biplab Dikshit

As a 90s kid, I too was smitten by SRT. I used to adjust my guard just like him, while holding an MRF bat. It all started when I saw him play in the 1996 World Cup.

I was barely six then. He was going after Warne and not letting him settle. I felt a connection; just didn't want him to get out.

L. Srichandrasekar

Sachin! Sachin! Sachin! Sachin!... these chants that emanate from every Indian, whether on or off the cricket field, stand testimony to his sheer hard work and dedication. In Sachin's heydays, the burden of a

nation was on his shoulders and he did not disappoint. His stats show he is the greatest. His acts show he is the finest. His grace shows he is the best. His persona shows he is the most honest.

Charudatt Prabhu

We are all enveloped in Sachin's aura. Aren't we? He occupied our hearts and minds. His success felt like a personal one, while his failure made us feel for him. No words will ever suffice to express gratitude for what he has done.

We pray that he gets what was always expected of him: a 100, the real one. May the next 50 come effortlessly, Sachin, we promise, there will be no pressure.





A RARE JEWEL IN THE HISTORY OF THE GAME

I got to know him on the tour to Pakistan in 1989. It was brave of the selectors to pick him for a tour as demanding as Pakistan. He was ready. I observed him closely and was convinced there was something about him.

My first sighting of this precocious talent was at the Brabourne Stadium in 1988. I had finished my stint in the nets. It was a good two hours of bowling to some of our top batters. I was feeling good but I was tired too. It was humid and I had bowled non stop. That's when Raj *bhai* (Dungarpur) walked up to me and said, "I want you to test this boy. He is very gifted."

The boy was hardly 16. He stood padded up. I was wondering what was so great about him that Raj *bhai* wanted me to bowl to him. I had my apprehensions. I agreed to bowl six balls to this boy. I went soft but he looked prepared. He played a drive. As if to challenge me. I bowled a little quicker and he got into position deftly. This was getting interesting. I let go of one to rattle him. He played back. Looked good. That was my first meeting with Sachin Tendulkar.

I got to know him on the tour to Pakistan in 1989. It was brave of the selectors to pick him for a tour as demanding as Pakistan. He was ready. I observed him closely and was convinced that there was something about him. *What was it?* His ability to play in the big league at such a small age. His talent to take on bowlers like Imran Khan, Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis. He tore into Abdul Qadir in a tour game. There were glimpses of his prowess on that tour.

The knock he took on his nose from Waqar and the way he hit back was proof of his grit. I don't know what went on in his mind when Waqar left him with a bleeding nose, but I was sure of one thing. This was a critical moment for the young man. Such incidents leave an impact on your mind. Only the strong hearted recover and that was exactly Sachin's character. He played



KAPIL DEV

the same bowler with a lot of confidence and came up with some front-of-the-wicket shots. I knew we had a player who was going to serve the team flor ong.

From the Pakistan tour, Sachin grew into a phenomenal batter. On the tour to England he adjusted well to the swing and seam and in Australia he was at his furious best on the bouncy track of Perth. It was an exceptional performance as he met fire with fire. His backfoot play is extraordinary but that day he was slamming the Australians on the front foot. You need skills to do that.

The success in Australia was followed by a superb century in Johannesburg on the historic tour to South Africa. Allan Donald was coming in with a lot of fire and it was one of the fastest spells I have seen in my career. You had to be technically sound and also gritty to face Donald that day and Sachin produced a scintillating century. I rate that knock high up and one of his very best. To meet that pace with aggression needed guts and Sachin displayed plenty.

Over the years, I saw Sachin grow as an individual. He was disciplined and committed to the team. In the nets, he would be too happy to bowl to any batter, even tailenders, and it showed his qualities as a team-man. He hardly made any demands and accepted each day as a learning process. A very inquisitive man, Sachin just won't sit quiet. The competitive flair in him was infectious and I have seen how others in the dressing room would be inspired by him.

I was in the team for the first five years of his career. He picked up the lessons very fast, worked on his game amazingly to understand the nuances of batsmanship in different conditions. I was amazed at how he handled the pressure of having to perform every time he took guard. Failure would



Words of wisdom: "Talking of potential, I feel Sachin could have achieved much more. He had the calibre, but I suspect the pressure to perform impacted his natural flair to attack. I would have been happier if he had scored more double centuries because he had it in him – the stamina and the temperament. And yes, a triple century would have added to the lustre of his feats," says Kapil Dev. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

leave him so dejected. He took them to heart in his early years but came to embrace them and recover quickly to try and play to his potential.

Talking of potential, I feel he could have achieved much more. He had the calibre, but I suspect the pressure to perform impacted his natural flair to attack. I would

have been happier if he had scored more double centuries because he had it in him – the stamina and the temperament. And yes, a triple century would have added to the lustre of his feats. Nevertheless, he will always be a rare jewel in the history of the game.

As told to Vijay Lokapally



TENDLYA HAS ALWAYS BEEN THERE FOR ME

In our long journey, there have been challenges, and that's life – it never follows a set direction. There have been differences, emotional outbursts, misunderstandings, but every time, we have come out stronger and happier.

I was at the Shivaji Park the other day. It was a busy Saturday afternoon and braving the scorching heat, several young cricketers were busy with their local tournaments. I walked around the park, obliged a few selfie requests, and gradually walked towards the pitch that, once upon a time, was our home.

That afternoon, as I strolled around the park, I was eventually searching for two of my favourite people, who have been an integral part of my journey — the late Ramakant Achrekar sir and my *dost* Sachin Tendulkar, who turned 50.

When I met this little curly-haired boy for the first time, Tendulkar — or *Tendlya*, as I call him — was just eight, and I was a year older. Back then, none of us thought that we would be friends for life and would eventually go on to don the India colours. We went to the same school — Shardashram Vidyamandir — and chased the same dream of playing cricket. Though he appeared shy, *Tendlya* was a prankster, and so was I. You would hear so many stories from our old friends about how both of us would fool them and as I look back at those days, it brings a smile.

We were in Indore for a junior national camp, where Vasoo Paranjape sir was our coach. On one Sunday afternoons, *Tendlya* and I decided to play a prank on two of our team-mates — Sourav Ganguly and Sanjay Das. When they both were fast asleep, *Tendlya* and I took buckets of water and splashed them into their room. By the time Sourav woke up around 5 o'clock in the evening, all they could see in the room was water and their kits were floating.

They called up the hotel reception, inquiring whether the pipe burst. But to their

surprise, they opened the door and saw me, Kedar Godbole and *Tendlya* standing outside with buckets of water. They realised who was behind it!

Both of us were die-hard film buffs, but were too scared to discuss anything in front of Achrekar sir. So, once our local match got over early and we were excited to go and watch the Tom Cruise-starrer '*Top Gun*'.

However, on reaching Sterling — a popular cinema hall those days — we realised that only those above 18 were allowed. Since both *Tendlya* and I were underage and looked it, we decided to sneak in behind our taller friends, who were a bit senior to us. And luckily, we were not caught.

Achrekar sir somehow got to know about it later and was not very happy. But then, we ensured that we never skipped our training and gave our hundred per cent on the field. Back in those days, we did not have money and every time we would feel hungry after practice or a game, we would go near the Shivaji Park Gymkhana to grab a *vada pav* or on days, when we had some pocket money, we would relish wraps. Those were simpler times!

We shared a strong bond on and off the field and that kept the '*Tendlya-Kambly*' pair going. We would compete, score tons of runs, but at the end of the day, we knew that we were there for each other. There would be days when we would throw challenges at each other and the rule was that whoever scored higher, deserved an extra *pav*. We continued that tradition for quite a few years.

And I think, it's this understanding and bonding that helped us share a record 664-run partnership, playing for Shardashram



VINOD KAMBLI



Vidya Mandir against St. Xavier's in a Harris Shield fixture on February 24, 1988.

Back in those days, the bowlers from the opposition teams were scared of facing us and I remember how the captains had to motivate the fielders because they knew that we would hit all around the park and they would have to struggle.

And, we enjoyed this attention. That Harris Shield outing was the highest partnership, but Achrekar sir ensured that we did not lose focus. Sir was a very serious man and meant only cricket.

Without Achrekar sir, we would not have come so far, and one can't imagine having a coach like him in today's times. *Tendlya* made his debut for India before me, but Achrekar sir always encouraged me and made me believe that I, too, would certainly don the national colours. He made both of us work very hard and always made us believe that we were a family first and being

Early success:
Sachin Tendulkar and Vinod Kambli set a world record for the unfinished third wicket partnership of 664 runs in the inter-school Harris Shield semi-finals against St. Xavier's, at the Azad Maidan ground in Bombay on February 27, 1988. THE HINDU
PHOTO LIBRARY

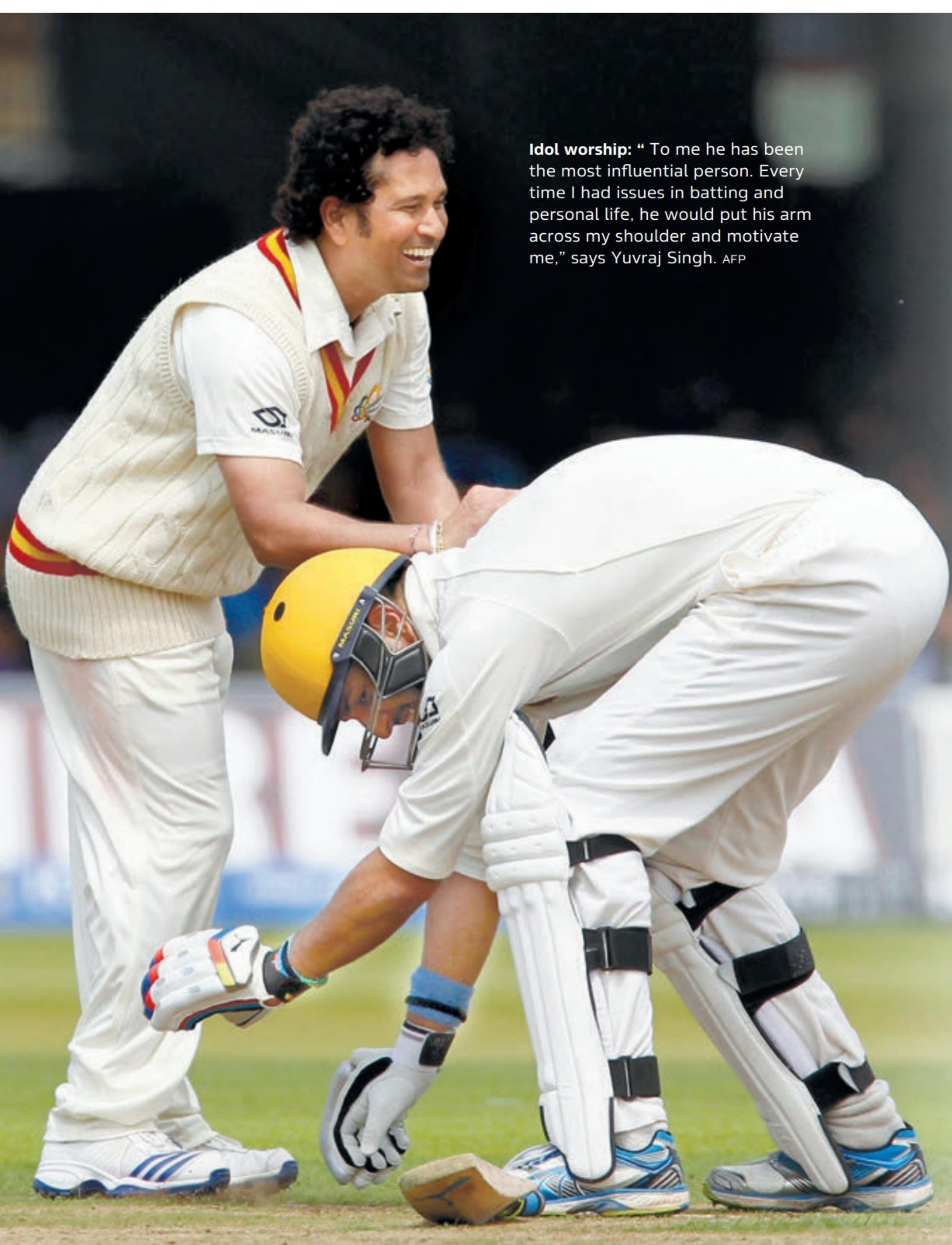
youngsters, that idea inspired us. We played as siblings and were happy with each other's success.

In our long journey, there have been challenges, and that's life — it never follows a set direction. There have been differences, emotional outbursts, misunderstandings, but every time, we have come out stronger and happier.

Tendlya has always been there for me, and more than anything else, that's something I will always cherish. I am glad to see Arjun (Sachin's son) making his debut in the Indian Premier League and making a mark. I am proud of him, as much as I am proud of my dear friend, who has helped me overcome challenges, take things in my stride and has walked alongside me, through thick and thin.

Be the way you are, my friend. *Tere jaisa yaar kahan!*

As told to Shayan Acharya



Idol worship: “To me he has been the most influential person. Every time I had issues in batting and personal life, he would put his arm across my shoulder and motivate me,” says Yuvraj Singh. AFP

THANK YOU SACHIN FOR BEING THERE FOR INDIAN CRICKET

You will not come across such a level headed person. To me he has been the most influential person. Every time I had issues in batting and personal life, he would put his arm across my shoulder and motivate me.

I played cricket because of him. Such magical influence he had on a generation of cricketers. I was 11 when I saw him playing at the Sector-16 Stadium in Chandigarh. We had known Kapil Dev as the most iconic player and he came from my city. I remember, in 1996, when Sachin came to meet us to address the Star City Club, which was managed by Kailash Gattani. He spoke to us and that was some experience for me. Another time, he had come to Chandigarh and dad (Yograj Singh) was to pick him up. I was told to run to the stadium because dad focussed on picking him.

The first dressing room meeting with Sachin (Nairobi, 2000) was an amazing experience. It happened 23 years ago but it is so vivid. He was the first person to come and shake hands with everyone. Vijay Dahiya and I stood in awe and disbelief. Such humility from such a big star. It was a great feeling for us and from there began my reverence for the best cricketer I have known.

When I got the 'Player of the Match' award against Australia, he was happier than me. I could not believe I could do it but he believed in me. He guided me on how to go ahead with my career from that point. "Everything happens for a reason. Your career begins when you win matches for the team. Not when you get into the playing XI," he had said. That stuck with me and was the reason why I could play 40 Tests and more than 300 ODIs.

I remember getting into the team bus and discovering there was just one seat left



YUVRAJ SINGH

— next to Sachin. I was hesitant but (coach) Aunshuman Gaekwad assured me and made me sit next to him. Sachin made me comfortable with his non-stop questions and I felt as if we had been friends for ages. I just watched in disbelief at his ability to make juniors feel at home.

I remember once I opened my coffin (kit bag) and he happened to spot his picture that I had pasted for inspiration.

"Nice picture," he remarked. That day it was announced that Sachin and I were going to bat in the same nets. At the end of the day, I called up my parents to share the joy. There was so much to learn just watching him prepare for the match.

What can I say of his batsmanship. Impeccable. He is technically the most accomplished and mentally very sharp.

No one can adapt to conditions and equations as quickly as Sachin can. He can also confront the opposition with his innovative shot selection. How he controlled his instinct was always a mystery. He was always one step ahead of the bowler. The best batter I have seen.

You will not come across such a level headed person. To me he has been the most influential person. Every time I had issues in batting and personal life, he would put his arm across my shoulder and motivate me. His line was unforgettable.

"You will matter when it matters most." I had to win the World Cup for him (in 2011). Thank you Sachin for being there for Indian cricket.

As told to Vijay Lokapally



HE IS ALWAYS A GREAT COMPANY

Sachin sir respects the game and his colleagues. It is a reflection of our culture as he has admiration for people around him.

In 2002, I was so excited to be playing in the Times Shield in Mumbai. I had seen Sachin sir at the Green Park (in Kanpur) earlier, and this was a chance to see him from close quarters as Atul Ranade (from Sungate Mafatlal) had invited me to MIG ground (in Bandra) where Sachin sir was to come for practice. It was a great experience. I came to know him at the camp in 2004-05 in Bangalore for the Indian Oil Cup in Sri Lanka. I made my debut in Dambulla, but played with him for the first time in Jaipur in 2005.

Like many, I had watched him on television at home when he smashed Australia in Sharjah in 1998. I was 12 years old and he made the greatest impression on my mind. I never would have imagined I would be in the same team as Sachin sir seven years later.

I have not seen a man as humble as Sachin sir. He will not talk about his achievements but never miss an opportunity to praise you.

I have not seen him lose his cool and just marvelled at his ability to concentrate on the game. His devotion to cricket can't be matched. I have not seen him miss a training session. I have not seen him hesitate to bowl to the tailenders in the nets. So many of us have gained from his wisdom as he would make small adjustments to our batting and bowling.

Can you imagine my state of mind when, very early in my career, we were sitting next to each other in the dressing room after a



SURESH RAINA

very tiring practice session and he got up to fetch a drink and stopped to ask me, "What can I bring for you?" Even as I stumbled in response, he just walked up to the fridge and came back with an energy drink. I was deeply humbled. Such a superstar fetching a drink for a newcomer like me.

To be in the dressing room when he got the first ever ODI double century in Gwalior against South Africa in 2010 was such a privilege.

I saw him build the innings like a professional, never losing his discipline to play the ball on merit. There was so much anxiety towards the end when there was pressure to increase the pace but he did not lose his concentration. It was a tribute to his fitness that he produced that epic innings.

I got to spend a lot of time with him during the recent Road Safety series for seniors and was stunned to see his dedication. Even if the practice was optional, he was there to be with the team. It is amazing how he manages to keep his focus in place so many years after his retirement.

Sachin sir is always a great company. He respects the game and his colleagues. It is a reflection of our culture as he has admiration for people around him. His collection of songs would keep us entertained and his favourite (a Kishore Kumar number from *Imtehan – Ruk Jana Nahi Tu Kahin Har Ke*) – symbolises his spirit to go on and on. He is the most iconic player I have known and a revered Bharat Ratna.

As told to Vijay Lokapally

In awe: "I have not seen a man as humble as Sachin sir. He will not talk about his achievements but never miss an opportunity to praise you," says Suresh Raina. REUTERS



FITNESSWISE

RAMJI
SRINIVASAN



Sweat and blood: Sachin exercising under the guidance of Ramji Srinivasan at the MRF Pace Foundation, Chennai, 2006.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY



Man Miracle of Sports Fitness

Sachin's unique approach to keeping fit ensured his stunning longevity.

'Excellence is not an extraordinary act but a habit. You are what you do repeatedly over the years.'

That is Sachin in a nutshell. Doing it for 24 years was no mean task by any sporting standard, that too with a zen mind on a spartan body – the most lethal combination in professional sport.

Sachin's '*veni, vidi, vici*' was not on a real battlefield but on cricketing fields, against difficult and fierce oppositions for more than two decades.

'*Here I am, rock you like a hurricane*' – the famous Scorpions song would have been an apt beginning number when Sachin entered the ground.

The man practised what he preached, rather than sit outside and sermonise. Whether it was a win or a loss, he carried himself with pride – that's the true mark of sportsmanship. He went on with his job quietly without much ado, unlike current social media insanity.

The path created by Sachin was a paradigm shift in the world of cricket for years to come, with all current players and management enjoying the fruit of it from an economic point of view apart from cricketing parlance.

Sachin is a superb case study for any sports professional on what, where, when, why and how to manage one's body and mind for peak performance through

multiple years. He was a man miracle from a sports fitness and scientific point of view (not just an empty superlative for the occasion).

From the physical point of view, I can, with confidence, narrate some instances to which I was privy to for many years:

Symbol of defiance

He was told not to use a heavy bat to prevent lower back issues. Hence he worked on his posture and dynamic stability, while continuing to use heavy bats with highly-specialised protocols that suited only him. In the end, he had the last laugh, as he defied sports scientists and self-proclaimed experts in the strength and conditioning field. There are many more such instances where he defied logic to execute a task magnificently with mind-blowing mind and muscle connect.

Reinvention mode

Being a professional player for 24 years is no joke, regardless of the sport. Despite having limited facilities and staff available during his early playing years, he harnessed his potential to the maximum in order to become the best of the best. He understood the role of each support staff in the team very well and what to



Running man: Sachin and Robin Singh go through their sprints under the watchful eyes of Australian physio, Andrew Kokinos, during a training session at the M. A. Chidambaram stadium, Chennai, in 1998.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

expect from them professionally. He also designed his own ankle-toe support guard and taping technique in accordance with his foot mechanics, be it for batting or bowling.

Roger Bannister, the late English neurologist and athlete who was the first to run a mile under four minutes, once said — “Doctors and scientists said that breaking the four-minute mile was impossible; that one would die in the attempt. Thus, when I got up from the track after collapsing at the finish line, I figured I was dead.”

This quote would be very pertinent to Sachin, having defied many professionals and pundits in sports science by reinventing himself at every stage of his injury or slump in form and coming out with flying colours as a one-in-a-billion player.

Having seen him from close quarters during varied occasions and situations connected to the game, skill, fitness, diet or injuries, for many years, I have seen his instinctive ability to think out of the box and execute certain parameters seamlessly.

It gives me goosebumps to think about how this man can sync his mind and body at will and execute an insane task with a song on his lips.

Limitless hope

During a fitness test held in a training camp in Chennai

way back in 2000, I was assisting in testing the team before a tour. During the sit-and-reach test for flexibility, Sachin scored low. He was flummoxed about the result and requested for five more minutes to warm up sufficiently and redo the test. I agreed and bang on after five mins he redid the test and scored the massive distance he had suggested he would cover.

I was left speechless with his accuracy and ability to do what he wanted. This was the first time I saw what he could do at will, if he puts his mind to it. He understood his body at every stage and became the most ‘adaptable athlete’ in the world of cricket. There are many more instances like this, be it our strength sessions, games or running sessions, about which I can go on and on like a spool deck.

The real beauty of Sachin lies in his humility and the ability to listen and take genuine opinions that he tries to implement without doubting the motive behind them. He is an astonishing sportsman, who can separate fact from fiction like a swan and not pretend to know the answer for all.

For me, my era of cricket can be split into two phases — AST (After Sachin Tendulkar) & BST (Before Sachin Tendulkar)! He is the *jedi* of world cricket who wielded his bat like a lightsaber and brought happiness to billions around the world.

He is the eternal ‘God of Cricket’! ☰

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LET'S HAVE AN EVEN CONTEST BETWEEN BAT AND BALL

The old saying of cricket being a batter's game is true because a batter's first mistake can be the end of his innings and so the playing conditions are made to suit them. But that's no reason to have silly restrictions on the bowlers like it is for the bouncers.

The most competitive and glamorous T20 league in the world is reaching the halfway stage, and we have seen some nail-biting finishes. The T20 format does lend itself to last over scrambles, but when it comes to the final ball of the game with the result on the line, it can test the nerves and heartbeats of even the most hardened followers.

While the first week of the tournament saw teams that were set a target winning most of the matches, the next round saw teams batting first defending even small totals. The best example was the reigning champions Gujarat stopping the Lucknow team from chasing 130, the lowest total defended in the tournament so far. Lucknow was in a healthy position with nine wickets in hand and 31 runs needed with six overs to go. Whether it is pressure or the urge to be a hero, players go for the big shots when a couple of sensible, less risk shots can win the game. Sure, the net run-rate is important to be aware of, but the first priority always has to be to win the match and get the points. The net run-rate can come into play more towards the later half of the tournament when there is usually a gap between the top two teams on the points table and the others looking to finish third and fourth.

This is where the so-called big hitters are supposed to earn the mega bucks they are given. On most occasions, they flatter to deceive with the odd six or two but unable to take their team over the finish line. This shorter format is extremely tough on the bowlers, with short boundaries and big bats, and it is not fair to be harsh on them. The definition of a wide for a bouncer is also not in favour of a good short-pitched delivery, so the bowlers can often feel that they are bowling with one hand tied behind their backs. A bouncer should be called a wide



only if it is way above the batter's head. Most quick bowlers are going to get the ball just above the batter's head in any case. The good batters will actually use it to score runs as we have seen with the hook shot, the ramp shot or the upper cut. Those deliveries are not called wides, but if a batter misses those attempted shots they are called wides, which is really strangling the quick bowlers. One can understand if it is called a wide when a batter ducks under or sways out of the line of the ball going above his head in his regular stance, but when a shot is attempted and missed it shouldn't be called a wide. As it is, the bowlers are on a hiding to nothing in this format of the game, and if one of their weapons has to be sheathed, then they are going to be hammered even more.

In the past when the bouncer restrictions came in to the game with none being allowed in the white ball format, we saw the so-called pinch hitter who used to be batting at number eight or lower being promoted up the order. He would blindly step out and



Bizarre rules:

Punjab Kings' Jitesh Sharma avoids a bouncer in the IPL match against Sunrisers Hyderabad. "A bouncer should be called a wide only if it is way above the batter's head," says the author. AFP

swing his bat at some of the quickest bowlers in the game, well aware that no comeback delivery would be aimed at their helmets because the bouncer was banned. It was cringing to see these lower-order batters treating quick bowlers like Curtly Ambrose, Courtney Walsh, Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis and Allan Donald — to name a few — as if they were spinners. They wouldn't have dared to do that in the red ball format even though in this format, the bouncer was limited to one in an over. In the red ball format the quick bowler wouldn't mind giving a wide but in the white ball format every run is crucial and so the quick bowlers are chary of banging the ball into the pitch and getting the batters' ears to burn. When I became Chairman of the ICC Cricket Committee, I expressed my reservations about the bouncer being virtually banned and proposed that the white ball game should allow the bowlers to bowl at least one bouncer in the over. I explained the reasons which have been enumerated above and there was almost unan-

imous approval from the rest of the committee who were all ex-players of repute. As soon as that playing condition came into force the pinch-hitter went back to where he belonged, at the lower order of the batting ranks. The committee also introduced a playing condition to allow one bouncer to each batter in the over instead of just one bouncer in an over.

The old saying of cricket being a batter's game is true because a batter's first mistake can be the end of his innings and so the playing conditions are made to suit them. But that's no reason to have silly restrictions on the bowlers like it is for the bouncers. Today, we see boundaries being brought in by as much as 10 metres, making even a mishit go for a six. It is understood that ground advertising is a huge source of income but if the ground authorities can devise boundary advertising boards to be cushioned at the bottom half with rubber or foam to soften the impact of a fielder sliding or diving and crashing into it, then the boundaries can be pushed back to make it tougher to hit a six and have an even contest between bat and ball.

These are just thoughts expressed before in various fora, and hopefully, some merit will be seen in it to make the game, especially the white ball format a keener battle between bat and ball. ☈



Calypso power: Nicholas Pooran's 15-ball half-century – the fastest of the season and joint second-fastest in IPL history – turned the match on its head. Lucknow Super Giants went from needing 114 runs in 56 balls to 24 in 18 as the West Indian feasted on the small boundaries at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium and the Royal Challengers Bangalore bowling attack. SPORTZPICS / IPL



Not so cheeky: After almost defending four runs off the last over, Harshal Patel missed a run-out at the non-striker's end that would have forced the match into a Super Over. Bangalore's luck didn't improve as a fumble by wicketkeeper Dinesh Karthik off the last ball allowed Avesh Khan and Ravi Bishnoi to sneak a bye and seal Lucknow's dramatic one-wicket win. SPORTZPICS / IPL



Captain's knock: Skipper Rohit Sharma's first IPL fifty since 2021 gave Mumbai Indians its first win of the season. Rohit and Ishan Kishan plundered 68 in the PowerPlay while chasing a middling 173 but even then, Mumbai got over the line only off the last ball in a scrappy finish owing to Anrich Nortje's superb bowling in the death overs. SPORTZPICS / IPL

IPL PHOTOLINE



Fortress breached: M. S. Dhoni's late-overs genius flickered to life before Sandeep Sharma held his nerve and nailed two yorkers with Chennai Super Kings needing seven runs to win off three balls as Rajasthan Royals pulled off its first win at Chepauk since the inaugural season in 2008. Dhoni's unbeaten 17-ball 32 included one four and three sixes. SPORTZPICS / IPL



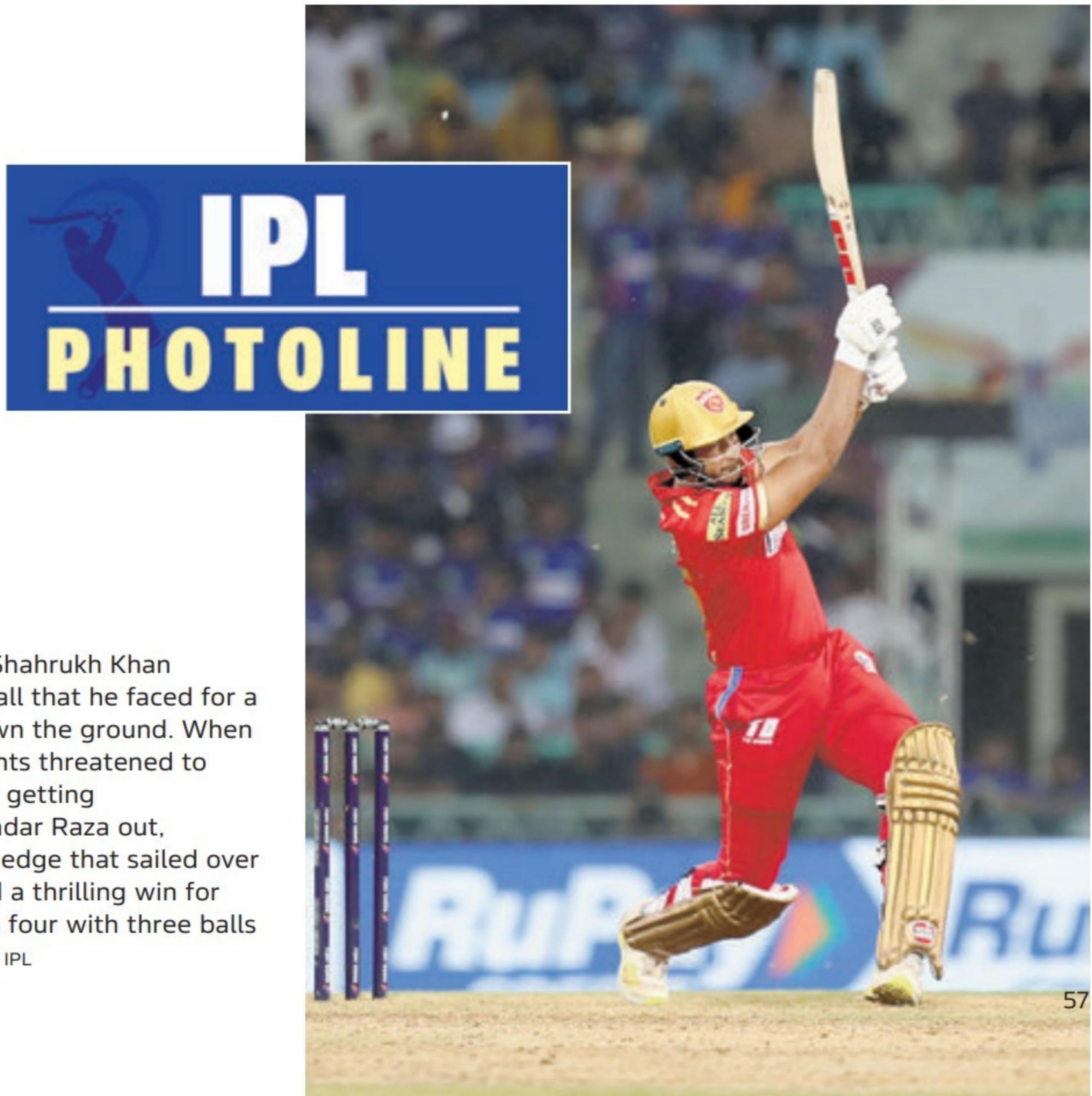
Many a slip: Shubman Gill's 49-ball 67 put Gujarat Titans on the threshold of victory but it was crisis man Rahul Tewatia who imparted the finishing touches when four runs were needed off two balls. With just six runs to defend in the last over, Sam Curran castled Gill off the second ball and darted in two yorkers that seemed to tip the scales in Punjab Kings' favour.

SPORTZPICS / IPL

Brook no criticism: After a string of low scores in the IPL, Harry Brook silenced his critics in style by smashing the first hundred of the season as Sunrisers Hyderabad posted a match-winning 228 for four against Kolkata Knight Riders. Brook played to his strengths, punishing the quicks and rotating the strike against spinners and brought up his century off 55 balls. SPORTZPICS / IPL



Dream debut: Vijaykumar Vyshak piled misery on Delhi Capitals as his three for 20 was instrumental in Royal Challengers Bangalore defending a modest 174 at the Chinnaswamy Stadium. The debutant deceived David Warner with a slower delivery in his first over and removed Axar Patel with a similar delivery to all but end the meek challenge mounted by Delhi. SPORTZPICS / IPL



Blockbuster finish: Shahrukh Khan smashed the first ball that he faced for a six – a clean hit down the ground. When Lucknow Super Giants threatened to spring a surprise by getting half-centurion Sikandar Raza out, Shahrukh got a top edge that sailed over the rope and sealed a thrilling win for Punjab Kings with a four with three balls to spare. SPORTZPICS / IPL



Knight in shining armour: Venkatesh Iyer ended Kolkata Knight Riders' 15-year-long century drought by becoming only the second centurion from the franchise after Brendon McCullum. However, his 49-ball hundred didn't help Knight Riders snap their 11-year winless streak against Mumbai Indians at the Wankhede as the host's power-hitting eclipsed Venkatesh's individual brilliance. SPORTZPICS / IPL



Earning his stripes: Arjun Tendulkar didn't let the pressure of an IPL debut or of carrying arguably the biggest name in world cricket get to him as he bowled an impressive first over which went for four runs against Kolkata Knight Riders. He also got the ball to swing into N. Jagadeesan, resulting in an LBW appeal, before being taken for 13 runs in his second over and ending with figures of 2-0-17-0. SPORTZPICS / IPL



Caribbean carnage: Shimron Hetmyer's power-hitting helped Rajasthan Royals avenge its last year's final defeat against the Gujarat Titans. Chasing 178, Royals slipped to 55 for four before skipper Sanju Samson (60) and Hetmyer (56 not out) dramatically pulled things back for them in Ahmedabad. VIJAY SONEJI



MS shows the way: Glenn Maxwell and Faf du Plessis' 126-run third-wicket stand meant that Royal Challengers Bangalore had a fair shot in the 227-run chase against Chennai Super Kings. While they thrived on sloppy fielding and poor bowling, CSK captain M. S. Dhoni packed the duo with two cool catches under towering shots to affirm the Yellow over the Reds at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium.
K. MURALI KUMAR



Off the blocks: The IPL bowling card registered a Tendulkar wicket for the first time in 15 years when young Arjun dismissed Sunrisers Hyderabad's Bhuvneshwar Kumar. With 19 to defend in the final over, Arjun hit his yorkers before striking off the penultimate delivery.

SPORTZPICS / IPL



Passion unchained: Virat Kohli unleashed his aggressive best against the Punjab Kings during his return as Royal Challengers Bangalore captain after 555 days. Kohli racked up his fourth half-century of the season alongside Faf du Plessis (84), before the South African's rib injury prompted Kohli to marshall the troops on the field. SPORTZPICS / IPL



Mayhem in Mohali: Mohammed Siraj ripped through the Punjab Kings in Mohali during its 175-run chase against RCB. Siraj cracked the top-order with two wickets before recording his best IPL figures (4/21) and his second four-for since 2017.

SPORTZPICS / IPL

IPL PHOTOLINE



Breaking the duck: After five successive defeats, Delhi Capitals finally opened its account as it scraped past Kolkata Knight Riders for a four-wicket win. Captain David Warner slammed a half-century before the middle-order made heavy weather of a 128-run chase, eventually winning with just four balls to spare.

R. V. MOORTHY



Jaddu denied: Sunrisers Hyderabad's Heinrich Klaasen got in the way of teammate Mayank Agarwal's chip, denying bowler Ravindra Jadeja a straightforward catch during their clash in Chennai. It only took a fuming Jadeja three balls to make amends as he castled Agarwal before finishing with figures of 3/22 in a comfortable Chennai Super Kings win. R. RAGU



IPL PHOTOLINE

Twin terror: Mohit Sharma and Mohammad Shami served a death-bowling masterclass as Lucknow Super Giants settled for a horrendous seven-run defeat, chasing 135 against Gujarat Titans at the Ekana Stadium. Mohit and Titans recorded four consecutive wickets in the last over, including LSG skipper K. L. Rahul after his sluggish 61-ball 68.

SPORTZPICS / IPL



Yorker Singh: Arshdeep Singh denied Mumbai Indians its first successful 200-plus chase at the Wankhede Stadium as he defended 15 in the final over in unbelievable fashion. The Punjab Kings seamer broke the middle-stump off consecutive deliveries as Tilak Varma and Nehal Wadhera (in pic) succumbed to the might of his inch-perfect yorkers.

EMMANUAL YOGINI



MI's kryptonite: Punjab Kings' well-rounded effort helped it record its 15th win in 30 meetings with Mumbai Indians in the IPL since 2008. No team poses a better record against the five-time champion, which has also conceded five of their 10 meetings at the Wankhede to the Kings.

EMMANUAL YOGINI

MIXED EMOTIONS

Yellow: A young CSK fan shows her love for M. S. Dhoni during the match against Mumbai Indians.

K. V. S. GIRI



While CSK fans are dreading the end of Thala's career, Zimbabwe's young cricketers turned IPL fans for the first time.

End is nigh

The end is getting nearer for MS Dhoni. And there is every indication of that. On the night CSK beat Sunrisers Hyderabad at the M.A. Chidambaran Stadium in Chennai, Dhoni said, “[I am] definitely old, you know, you can't really shy away from that. Whatever said and done, it's [the] last phase of my career.” It was hard enough for Chennai fans to accept then; it is harder now, and not just because, more than three weeks into this IPL, it feels more real than ever. Deep down, the clamouring fans, braving the enervating humidity of the city, knew the time would come soon enough. That's why there were loud chants of ‘Dhoni! Dhoni!’ each time a wicket fell, so much so

that at one point, they even egged on the umpire to take a review against Ambati Rayudu, hoping to see their ‘Thala’ march out to the crease.

“It feels good to be here, the fans always stay back to hear me out,” Dhoni said with a smile. One thing is clear — when Dhoni has finally played his last match for CSK, shorn of frills and gimmicks, walking swiftly back with a few waves of the hand, cricket fans will stand still in honour of a man who turned their fantasies into reality.

Moment to cherish

Zimbabwe's U-19 cricketers have been in India on an exposure trip for the last few weeks. While they have travelled to several



venues around Mumbai, featuring in friendlies with local teams, the youngsters had an evening to remember recently as they watched the Indian Premier League fixture between Punjab Kings and Mumbai Indians at the Wankhede Stadium.

The players were watching an IPL game in a stadium for the first time, and they soaked in each and every moment. "The boys really enjoyed themselves. It was a great opportunity for them," said Zimbabwe U-19 coach Prosper Utseyea.

Ever since reaching India, the Zimbabwean youngsters wanted to watch an IPL game, and on hearing that, Zimbabwe international Sikandar Raza, now part of Punjab Kings, arranged tickets for the entire team. The only Zimbabwean cricketer to feature in this edition of the tournament, Raza requested the franchise and ensured that the youngsters had the best view of the proceedings from the stands.

They were elated to see Sachin Tendulkar and also cheered for Raza, every time they saw him in action. That's not all; they even sang the team song along with the Zimbabwean superstar. "The kids might not

get an opportunity to watch the IPL from the stadium anytime soon, so I had to do this for them," Raza said. And, the kids surely had fun!

Orange brigade

Hero-worship of cricket stars has always reached titanic levels in the IPL. Take the case of Sunrisers Hyderabad, whose fans brave soaring temperatures and host road processions while police vehicles escort the team bus to the stadium. All in the hope of catching a glimpse of their favourite superstars.

Be it celebrities, former cricketers, school children or even the elderly, Sunrisers fans know how to make their presence felt. Even though their team is in a precarious position, with a playoff berth hanging by a thread, it doesn't dampen their spirits. Sport has the power to break boundaries and unite masses and irrespective of the result, legions of fans will continue to grow in the cricketing opera called IPL.

Ayan Acharya, Shayan Acharya & V. S. Aravind

One for the album:

Zimbabwe's U-19 cricketers are enthralled by all the drama that unfolds in an IPL match.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

A 100 for Rabada

64

The number of IPL appearances for Kagiso Rabada, when he claimed the 100th wicket of his IPL career. He became the 21st IPL bowler to achieve this landmark, but is the quickest to do so in terms of number of games. Rabada did so in the Mohali match against Gujarat Titans on 13 April 2023.

Quickest to reach 100 IPL wickets (ie in fewest matches)

| Mts | Bowler | For teams | Achieved target while playing for | Achieved on | Wkts | Ave. | S/R | Eco |
|-----|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|------|-------|-------|------|
| 64 | Kagiso Rabada | DC/PBKS | PBKS | 13 Apr 2023 | 100 | 20.02 | 14.52 | 8.27 |
| 70 | Lasith Malinga | MI | MI | 18 May 2013 | 100 | 17.39 | 16.22 | 6.43 |
| 81 | Harshal Patel | RCB/DC | RCB | 10 Apr 2023 | 101 | 23.24 | 16.35 | 8.53 |
| 82 | Bhuvneshwar Kumar | PWI/SRH | SRH | 17 Apr 2017 | 100 | 20.77 | 17.87 | 6.97 |
| 83 | Amit Mishra | DC/DChr/SRH | SRH | 10 May 2014 | 101 | 21.40 | 18.05 | 7.11 |
| 83 | Ashish Nehra | MI/DC/PWI/CSK/SRH | SRH | 5 Apr 2017 | 100 | 23.40 | 18.05 | 7.78 |
| 83 | Rashid Khan | SRH/GT | GT | 23 Apr 2022 | 101 | 20.73 | 19.60 | 6.35 |

5

The number of overseas players, below 25 years of age, who have scored centuries in an IPL match. England's Harry Brook became the latest to join this exclusive list when he made an unbeaten 100 for SRH against KKR at Eden Gardens on 14 April 2023.

Youngest overseas batter to register an IPL century

| Age | Overseasbatter | Runs | From | For | Agst | Venue | Date | Result |
|----------|-----------------|------|--------------|------|------|-----------|-------------|--------|
| 23y-122d | Quinton de Kock | 108 | South Africa | DC | RCB | Bengaluru | 17 Apr 2016 | Won |
| 23y-153d | David Warner | 107* | Australia | DC | KKR | Delhi | 29 Mar 2010 | Won |
| 23y-330d | David Miller | 101* | South Africa | PBKS | RCB | Mohali | 6 May 2013 | Won |
| 24y-51d | Harry Brook | 100* | England | SRH | KKR | Kolkata | 14 Apr 2023 | Won |
| 24y324d | Shaun Marsh | 115 | Australia | PBKS | RR | Mohali | 28 May 2008 | Won |

5

The number of English players who have the distinction of registering a three-figure score in IPL cricket. In all 10 centuries have been made by English players. Harry Brook, for Sunrisers Hyderabad, became the recent addition to this elite list at the Eden Gardens on 14 April 2023.

IPL centuries by England players

| Runs | Balls | S/R | Batter | For | Agst | Venue | Date | Result | Bat# | M Inns |
|------|-------|--------|-----------------|-----|------|------------|-------------|--------|------|--------|
| 124 | 64 | 193.75 | Jos Buttler | RR | SRH | Delhi | 2 May 2021 | Won | 1 | 1 |
| 116 | 65 | 178.46 | Jos Buttler | RR | DC | MumbaiWS | 22 Ap 2022 | Won | 1 | 1 |
| 114 | 56 | 203.57 | Jonny Bairstow | SRH | RCB | Hyderabad | 31 Mar 2019 | Won | 1 | 1 |
| 107* | 60 | 178.33 | Ben Stokes | RR | MI | Abu Dhabi | 25 Oct 2020 | Won | 2 | 2 |
| 106* | 60 | 176.67 | Jos Buttler | RR | RCB | Ahmedabad | 27 May 2022 | Won | 2 | 2 |
| 103* | 64 | 160.94 | Kevin Pietersen | DC | DChr | Delhi | 19 Apr 2012 | Won | 3 | 2 |
| 103 | 61 | 168.85 | Jos Buttler | RR | KKR | MumbaiBS | 18 Apr 2022 | Won | 1 | 1 |
| 103* | 63 | 163.49 | Ben Stokes | RPS | GL | Pune | 1 May 2017 | Won | 5 | 2 |
| 100* | 55 | 181.82 | Harry Brook | SRH | KKR | Kolkata | 14 Apr 2023 | Won | 2 | 1 |
| 100 | 68 | 147.06 | Jos Buttler | RR | MI | Mumbai DYP | 2 Apr 2022 | Won | 1 | 1 |

Note

** Among Englishmen Jos Buttler has five centuries, while Ben Stokes has made two.

** Kevin Pietersen was the first Englishman to do it in 2012, followed by Ben Stokes in 2017, Jonny Bairstow in 2019, Jos Buttler in 2021 and finally Harry Brook in 2023.

** Bairstow was the wicketkeeper.

** The Ahmedabad match was the playoffs

2

The number of players who missed at least 10 years of IPL cricket between matches. After appearing for Kolkata (one game in 2010) and for Pune Warriors in 2011 and 2012 in three IPL matches, Harpreet Singh Bhatia recently made a comeback when he appeared for Punjab Kings against Lucknow Super Giants in Lucknow on 15 April 2023. This means he made a comeback after nearly 11 years, having played his previous IPL game in May 2012. He just went ahead of the previous record held by Matthew Wade by 20 days! This is now the most prolonged time taken by any player to make a comeback in an IPL career.

Longest missing career spans between two IPL matches

| IPL matches missed (years) | Player | From | For | Comeback date | For |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------|-----|---------------|------|
| 10y, 10m, 26d | Harpreet Singh Bhatia | 19 May 2012 | PWI | 15 Apr 2023 | PBKS |
| 10y, 10m, 6d | Matthew Wade | 21 May 2011 | DC | 28 Mar 2022 | GT |
| 8y, 10m, 17d | Wayne Parnell | 23 May 2014 | DC | 10 Apr 2023 | RCB |
| 7y, 11m, 8d | Rilee Rossouw | 22 Apr 2015 | RCB | 1 Apr 2023 | DC |
| 7y, 10m, 4d | Colin Ingram | 21 May 2011 | DC | 24 Mar 2019 | DC |
| 7y, 21d | Sean Abbott | 13 Apr 2015 | RCB | 5 May 2022 | SRH |

14

The number of batters who have reached the 4000 runs landmark in IPL cricket. K. L. Rahul became the latest to join this exclusive club during his 74 for Lucknow Super Giants against Kings Punjab in Lucknow on 15 April 2023. However, by doing so in his 105th innings, Rahul became the quickest to achieve this landmark in terms of number of innings. He bettered the previous record of 112 innings, held by Chris Gayle since 2019. The table shows the team played for when the landmark was achieved.

Quickest to reach 4000 IPL runs

| Inns | Mts | Batter | For | Runs | Ave. | Achieved on |
|------|-----|-------------------|------|------|-------|-------------|
| 105 | 114 | K. L. Rahul | LSG | 4044 | 47.02 | 15 Apr 2023 |
| 112 | 113 | Chris Gayle | PBKS | 4073 | 41.56 | 25 Mar 2019 |
| 114 | 114 | David Warner | SRH | 4014 | 40.55 | 17 May 2017 |
| 128 | 136 | Virat Kohli | RCB | 4002 | 37.75 | 18 May 2016 |
| 131 | 143 | A. B. de Villiers | RCB | 4032 | 39.92 | 28 Mar 2019 |

6

The number of players who have the distinction of achieving the all-rounders' double of 2000 runs and 50 wickets in IPL cricket history. Hardik Pandya recently became the latest to join these select cricketers while playing for Gujarat Titans against Rajasthan on 16 April 2023 in Ahmedabad.

Players with 2000+ runs and 50+ wickets in an IPL career – listed in chronology

| Career figures | | | | Figures at the time of achieving the double | | | |
|-----------------|-----|------|------|---------------------------------------------|------|------|-------------|
| Player | Mts | Runs | Wkts | Mts | Runs | Wkts | Achieved on |
| Jacques Kallis | 98 | 2427 | 65 | 79 | 2046 | 51 | 16 Apr 2013 |
| Shane Watson | 145 | 3874 | 92 | 65 | 2012 | 55 | 13 May 2014 |
| Kieron Pollard | 189 | 3412 | 69 | 108 | 2002 | 56 | 9 Apr 2017 |
| Ravindra Jadeja | 216 | 2541 | 141 | 174 | 2000 | 110 | 2 Oct 2020 |
| Andre Russell | 104 | 2133 | 92 | 97 | 2030 | 89 | 14 May 2022 |
| Hardik Pandya | 111 | 2012 | 51 | 111 | 2012 | 51 | 16 Apr 2023 |

Note

** Ravindra Jadeja is the only player in the above list with over 2000 runs and 100 wickets

** Shane Watson is the quickest to reach this landmark of 2000 runs and 50 wickets in IPL, in just 65 matches.

All records are correct and updated until 21 April 2023

Sri Lanka toys with Ireland

Sri Lanka registered its biggest Test win ever as it trounced Ireland by an innings and 280 runs in Galle to take a 1-0 lead in the two-match series. Ireland, playing only its fifth Test since it was granted Test status in 2017, failed to cope with the conditions and was outplayed inside three days. Sri Lankan spinners Prabath Jayasuriya and Ramesh Mendis picked 15 wickets between them while Harry Tector (34 and 42) was the only visiting batter who provided some resistance in both innings. Earlier, Sri Lanka's four centurions — skipper Dimuth Karunaratne, Kusal Mendis, Dinesh Chandimal and Sadeera Samarawickrama — had ensured the hosts wouldn't need to bat again by putting 591 on the board.



AFP

T20I match called off due to hailstorm

The fourth T20I between New Zealand and Pakistan was called off due to a hailstorm in Rawalpindi after the visiting side had put 164 for five on the board in 18.5 overs. Pakistan had brushed a depleted New Zealand aside in the first two T20Is before the Kiwis clinched a thrilling four-run win in the third to keep the series alive. Haris Rauf was New Zealand's nightmare in the first two games as he picked two four-wicket hauls on consecutive days. Babar Azam slammed a match-winning hundred in the second T20I and set the record for scoring the most number of T20I tons as captain (3). Pakistan's 38-run win in that game also meant Azam drew level with Eoin Morgan of England and Afghanistan's Asghar Afghan for most wins as T20I captain (42).



AFP

Garry Ballance retires

Former England cricketer Garry Ballance, who attempted to give his international career a new lease of life by turning out for Zimbabwe, announced his retirement from all forms of cricket. Ballance had signed a two-year deal with Zimbabwe last year following the racism scandal involving his Yorkshire team-mate Az-eem Rafiq. The Zimbabwe-born cricketer was released by Yorkshire in December 2022 after he spent a year on the sidelines due to mental health issues. The 33-year-old played five ODIs, one Test and one T20I for Zimbabwe this year. Ballance, who struck an unbeaten 137 in his solitary Test appearance for Zimbabwe against West Indies in February, is only the second cricketer, after Kepler Wessels, to have scored two Test hundreds for two different countries.



AP

Tom Price has a memorable day

Gloucestershire cricketer Tom Price had a field day against Worcestershire in a County Championship Division Two match. Coming in at No. 9, Price led a rescue act with a 98-ball 109 to help his team to a respectable 231 and then picked a hat-trick on the same day with his medium pace to condemn the opposition to a paltry 157. The 23-year-old ended with figures of four for 58 in the first innings and made early inroads in Worcestershire's second innings with two for 19 before the match ended in a draw.

McCullum cleared of corruption charges



In a huge sigh of relief for English cricket ahead of the Ashes, Test coach Brendon McCullum will face no action over his involvement with the promotion of an online betting business. The English and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said that the Kiwi had done nothing in contravention of its anti-corruption code, which doesn't debar players and officials from becoming brand ambassadors of betting companies. McCullum had appeared in online advertisements for a Cyprus-based bookmaker but will consult with the ECB before undertaking such commitments in the future. McCullum has revolutionised England's Test team, which has won 10 of its last 12 matches under him.

AP

Dhruva Prasad



(Seated from L-R) Manisha Malhotra, head of sports excellence and scouting at JSW Sports, TransStadia founder Udit Sheth, Manjusha Kanwar – DGM-Sports, IOCL and L. V. Navaneeth, CEO of THG Publishing Private Limited. Vineel Krishna, the secretary of Sports & Youth Services in Odisha is also seen on the screen in the background during a panel discussion on 'Making of a Sporting Nation: Public-Private partnership for Sports Development'. R. V. MOORTHY



Mallika Nadda, Chairperson of Special Olympic Bharat, Tahsin Zahid, CEO Sports, Physical Education NSDC, Desh Gaurav Sekhri, Co-Founder Sports and Society Accelerator, during a conversation on 'Right to Play: Harnessing sports for social development' at the Sportstar National Sports Conclave in New Delhi.

R. V. MOORTHY



Vita Dani (Co-owner, Chennaiyin FC & Chairperson, Ultimate Table Tennis) was part of a panel discussion titled 'Balancing on- and off-field success in sports leagues'. Others in the picture are PKL commissioner Anupam Goswami, LaLiga India's MD Jose Antonio Cachaza, and PVL's CEO Joy Bhattacharjya. R. V. MOORTHY



"**Bowlers are not given their dues in terms of ad-making.** They are always looking for someone who bats, who scores the fifties and hundreds," former India cricketer Harbhajan Singh said during a conversation on 'The power of sports and its superstars in brand building'. R. V. MOORTHY



The Conclave was held in association with Hero We Care, a Hero Motocorp CSR Initiative, ONGC, Jain University, Vajiram & Ravi, Institute for IAS Examination, Cric HQ, Shiv-Naresh and News X



Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur, who delivered the Keynote Address at the Conclave, goes through Sportstar's special coffee table book titled 'Hockey & India: A Golden Legacy' in the company of the publication's Editor Ayon Sengupta (left) and L. V. Navaneeth, CEO of THG Publishing Private Limited.

R. V. MOORTHY



Murali Sreeshankar, who turned 24 on the day of the Conclave, cuts a cake on stage to mark the occasion. The CWG 2022 silver medallist is flanked by (from left to right) Paralympic gold medallist Pramod Bhagat, shooting World Championship silver medallist Anjum Moudgil, Asian Games silver medallist Rani Rampal and reigning boxing world champion Nikhat Zareen. The power-packed panel sat down for a chat about 'Eyeing the Paris podium.' R. V. MOORTHY



Tokyo 2020 silver medallist Mirabai Chanu (on screen) headlined a panel discussion on 'Nurturing the sports potential of India's North-East,' which included (from left to right) Abu Metha, adviser to Nagaland's CM, Robert Romawia Royte, the Sports Minister of Mizoram, former boxing world champion Sarita Devi and BCCI joint secretary Devajit Saikia. R. V. MOORTHY



(From left) Adille Sumariwalla (President, AFI), Rahul Bose (President, Indian Rugby Football Union), Kalyan Chaubey (President, AIFF) and Deepa Malik (President, PCI) in discussion on 'Players at the helm: Reimagining the role of National sports federations,' during the Conclave. R. V. MOORTHY



Focus grassroots: "We have close to 7998 athletes training in about 34 disciplines at our centres," Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur said during the *Sportstar* National Sports Conclave in New Delhi. R. V. MOORTHY

India ready to bid for Olympics

Delivering the keynote address at *Sportstar's* National Sports Conclave, Anurag Thakur also touched upon the Central Government's effort to ameliorate playing conditions in the country.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

Sports minister Anurag Thakur stressed the need to promote and back women athletes in India during his keynote address at *Sportstar's* National Sports Conclave in New Delhi.

"On March 10, we launched Khelo India 10 Ka Dum for empowering women through sports. Women's Day was on the 8th of March, but we couldn't launch that day due to Holi. We organised this across 50 cities in the country, and more than 1500 women

participated in 10 sports. This is not a one-off initiative.

"In the past 18 months, we have launched Khelo India leagues for women across sports and have seen tremendous success. I think the WPL (Women's Premier League) 2023 was extremely successful. It has opened the gates for many organisations that might be thinking about whether to start a league for women or not. There are a lot of takers for women athletes in the

country,” Thakur said.

Thakur also touched upon the Central Government’s effort to ameliorate playing conditions in the country. “PM (Narendra) Modi is a sports lover. Since the Khelo India scheme was launched in 2017, we have developed a three-tier pyramid structure for coaching and training athletes in the country. At the bottom of the country, will be the Khelo India athletes who will train at the various centres set up by SAI,” he said.

“We have close to 7998 athletes training in about 34 disciplines at our centres. And we provide support to 3000 Khelo India athletes. These athletes are chosen by the talent identification and development committee. We also looked at Khelo India, Khelo India Youth Games and Khelo India University Games and the National Games to pick upcoming players and athletes. We don’t just choose them. We look to polish them. The expenditure on each athlete is Rs. 6,28,000. There are still many areas to look at. Sports is a State subject, and the State has to play a very important role.

“The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports has seen a manifold increase in its budget. From a mere Rs. 466 crore in 2004-2005, we have Rs. 3397.32 crore in the financial year 2023-2024. We have sanctioned more than Rs.3000 crore in the past five years for 280+ infrastructure projects in 36 States wherein we are building multi-purpose sports complexes, indoor halls, synthetic athletic tracks, hockey astroturfs and mini stadiums. We will build 1000 Khelo India centres to focus on talent identification at the grassroots level before August 15, 2023. We are successfully hosting the G20 Presidency right now, and I’m sure we will be fully equipped to host the future Olympics in India soon. We are keen to host and will make sure we have a successful bid.”

Thakur noted that multiple international sporting events were coming to India.

“We hosted the 44th FIDE Chess Olympiad in July last year for the first time in India’s history in Chennai and it was a resounding success. Prior to that, we held a torch relay which travelled 75 cities and it is a moment of pride when the FIDE President announced that before every Chess

Olympiad, the torch relay will begin from India — the birth nation of chess. We held the FIFA U-17 Women’s Football World Cup in October, 2022 which was the second major football tournament hosted by us in the past five years. We also hosted the IBA Women’s World Boxing Championships in New Delhi in which our women boxers made the entire country proud. The third edition of the WADA Athlete Biological Passport Symposium was organised last year in New Delhi where over 200 participants from 56 nations including WADA officials, experts from different anti-doping organisations participated.”

The minister also emphasised on the importance of fitness. “I would also take the opportunity to talk about the Fit India Movement that our PM had inaugurated. In an age where there is so much reliance on digital platforms, it is very important that all citizens focus on a Fit India. We organise various events across the year under the Fit

India Movement and many of our illustrious sportspersons support the movement and are Fit India icons, inspiring people. Fit India Freedom Run, Fit India Cyclothon, Fit India School Weeks, Fit India Quiz, Fit India Plog Run and Fit India Motorbike Expeditions are a few of the events that we organise under the Fit India Mission banner. More than 10 crore people participate in these programmes every year and we want to reach more and more people so that the message for Fit India is spread across the nation.

Thakur also lauded *Sportstar* for being at the forefront of multi-sport coverage for more than four decades. “We have a magazine that began as a print-only multisport back in 1978, and it has evolved to still be India’s premium sporting magazine. I still remember my playing days when I used to buy the *Sportstar* every week, and the major attraction for me at that time was the middle page which had a glossy poster kind of paper that I used to take out and put up on my cupboard,” he said.

The Conclave was held in association with Hero We Care, a Hero Motocorp CSR Initiative, ONGC, Jain University, Vajiram & Ravi, Institute for IAS Examination, Cric HQ, Shiv Naresh and News X.

Point to prove:

"The game and security for the players will go hand in hand," says Rahul Bose.
President of Rugby India. R. V. MOORTHY



Rahul boasts of a special bond with rugby

The long-term plan is to make a sport as aggressive as rugby appealing to everyone and the federation's efforts towards televising games and more competitions is one step towards that.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

Rahul Bose wears many hats. He is a critically acclaimed actor, a performer known for his offbeat choices in film and theatre. He has even taken up direction through the course of his career as an artist. However, the biggest 'role' of his life perhaps lies in his first love — Rugby.

A national team player for 11 years, Bose hung up his boots in 2009. However, he never stepped away from the sport, working to popularise it and induct young children into the game, especially from underprivileged communities. That effort got a new lease of life in 2021, when he was elected the president of Rugby India. Speaking at the Sportstar National Sports Conclave in New Delhi, Bose shared his priorities as a

player-turned-administrator.

"It's not rocket science. The fundamental issues that any president of Indian rugby would face today are — first, nobody knows about the sport because we're not on mass media. So how do we create a property that can actually be on television and have a strong online presence? We've been working on that for four years, quietly. Second, there's no money in the sport. In the last 15 months, we have increased sponsorships coming in by about 120%. Third, what can we do for our teams to get better? We've instituted our 360 degree high performance system," Bose explains.

While these are admin basics, Bose prides on Rugby India's focus on nuanced efforts in areas like prevention of sexual harassment, safety and pay parity.

"We have a Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) policy, which is one of the most detailed policies in any federation in India. We have pay parity between men and women. All our facilities and all our nationals are played at the same time for men and women. We pride ourselves on being one of the most gender-sensitive federations, I would venture to say, in history. These are the things that are not so obvious, but are important in terms of the culture of what you're building," he adds.

These pins on his vision board come from long-term ambitions for the sport which he realises he might not even be a part





of. "It's a four-year term and after four years, even if someone comes in with, not necessarily, the finest of motives, they will not be able to disrupt the kind of structures we've put in place ethically as well as performance-wise," he says.

Even these are a few steps ahead for the demographic that usually takes to rugby. For most, it boils down to the very basics — pay and physical security.

"The current player composition is socio-culturally and economically the poorest sections of society and from rural poor, not so much the urban poor. A major portion of the rural poor is tribal. The sport did not pay and is, by nature, dangerous. So we would have sportspersons who were not paid, but would have their shoulders or knees or faces smashed. That had to change," the 55-year-old says.

"One of the best things to happen is, around 18 women, some State players, some national and some ex-national players from Odisha got permanent jobs with the State government — as physical education teachers or police persons. This will be an added incentive for people to take up the game but they also have to be that good to be top two or three in the country. So, the game and security for the players will go hand in

hand," Bose adds.

The long-term plan is to make a sport as aggressive as rugby appealing to everyone and the federation's efforts towards televising games and more competitions is one step towards that. However, Bose insists that the top priority will be the conditions of players currently pursuing the sport.

Bose hails idea exchange as a key part of his job as president. At the National Sports Conclave, Bose was part of a panel on players returning to head sports federations in India alongside Adille Sumariwalla (Athletics Federation of India), Deepa Malik (Paralympic Committee of India) and Kalyan Chaubey (All India Football Federation).

"At events like this, you're talking to people who understand the ecosystem. This is not an event where you say a few things and everybody starts to clap. It's a tough audience because they know what sport is about. It's their daily job. When you go and present something here, it better be good and if it isn't good, you'll get to know very quickly. I am on a panel with Kalyan Chaubey, Adille Sumariwalla and Deepa Malik. With all of them giving their inputs, I picked up at least three things today that I'm going to implement at our federation," Bose concludes. ☈

Leading the charge:
Maharastra and
Odisha girls in
action during the
final of the
National Senior
Rugby 7s
Championship in
Bhubaneswar.
BISWARANJAN ROUT

On track: "At present we have around 98 athletes preparing for 2024 that includes 40 para athletes and 168 athletes we are supporting for 2028," says Sandip Pradhan.

R. V. MOORTHY



TOPS a real game changer for sport in India

The Target Olympic Podium Scheme, facilitating foreign exposure and taking 'individual' care of athletes, has proved to be a big boon, says Sandip Pradhan, DG, Sports Authority of India.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

The Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS), since its inception in 2014, has been providing a valuable service to Indian sport, Sandip Pradhan, DG, Sports Authority of India (SAI), said at *Sportstar's* National Sports Conclave in New Delhi.

"We have clubbed the initiatives of TOPS with the funding under the Sports Federations that is assistance under the National Sports Federations (NSFs)," Pradhan said in reply to a question from veteran journalist Vijay Lokapally at the Conclave.

"Together if we locate P. V. Sindhu's profile in the last Olympic cycle, we provided 69 international exposures, foreign coach was provided to her, gym and a trainer was provided to her, to Neeraj Chopra: Dr. Klaus [Bartoniez], two foreign coaches were provided. Even now, Neeraj, in the last few months, has been training — sometimes in the USA, sometimes in the U.K., sometimes in South Africa, and now Turkey. That is the journey that is possible because of TOPS," he said.

Commenting on the plans for the 2024

Olympics, Pradhan said, "For 2024, our plan is already in place. We have a Target Olympic Podium committee, and many of those who are around are also a part of the committee. We have the sub-committees in place to analyse the individual game. At present we have around 98 athletes preparing for 2024 that includes 40 para athletes and 168 athletes we are supporting for 2028. We already had a discussion with the federations and not just me but also our committees and sub-committees. All the federations have given a plan for the Paris Olympics and also for the Asian Games which is a very important milestone."

Pradhan also said that his organisation is trying to create a synergy between the different entities involved in sport in India — TOPS, the federations, and NGOs.

The Conclave was held in association with Hero We Care, a Hero Motocorp CSR Initiative, ONGC, Jain University, Vajiram & Ravi, Institute for IAS Examination, Cric HQ, Shiv Naresh and News X.



Valery Shavyrin-70

By C.G.S.Narayanan

Undoubtedly Valery Mikhailovich Shavyrin is one of the brightest representatives of the Russian school of chess composition. Born on January 27, 1953 in Sukhoi Log, Sverdlovskaya he was drawn into Chess composition at the age of 15. An International grandmaster in chess composition, Valery was also world champion in the three-mover section in 2001–2003, Winner of many international competitions and author of articles in specialized magazines. In FIDE Albums he scored 128 points. Out of about 1000 published works a third won first prizes. He has his own style, his own approach, and his own concept which distinguishes him from the rest of problem fraternity. The following selection from the Russian magazine '64', clearly demonstrates his creative approach.

V. Shavyrin
I prize, Schach, 2017



Mate in three moves

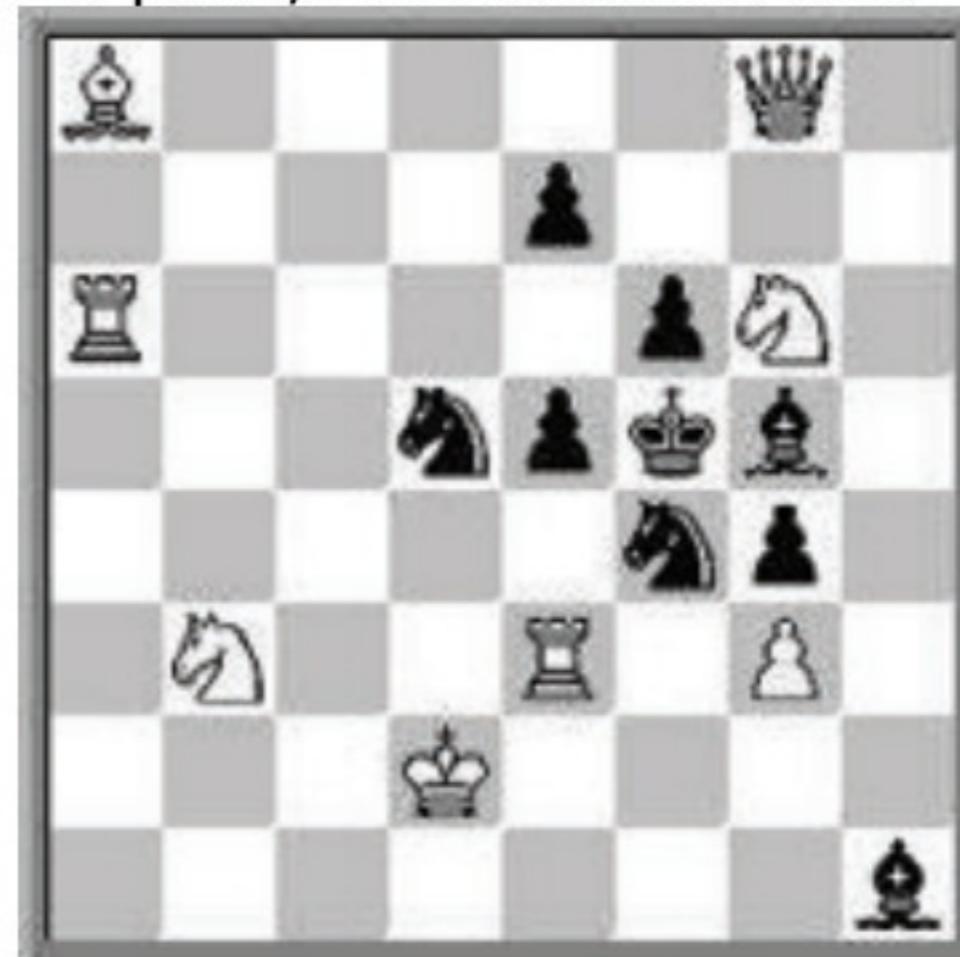
1.Na5? ~ 2.Nc6#(C), 1...Bd3!(a),
1.Nd8? ~ 2.Nc6#(C), 1...Nd3!(b).
Key 1.Kh2! ~ 2.Rd5+ exd5 3.Bg3#,
1...Bd3(a) 2.Nd8! ~ 3.Nxf7#(B),
2...Bg6 3.Nc6#, 1...Nd3(b)
2.Na5! ~ 3.Nxc4#(A), 2...Nb2
3.Nc6#, 1...c6 2.Nd6! ~ 3.Nd7#,
2...Nd3(b) 3.Nxc4#(A).
A synthesis of logic and a multitude of themes: Swiss, Somov, changing

the functions of moves, Hannelius return. Good construction.

The second problem below is a pioneer in the development of change

Multi-threat functions. Threat checkmates are transformed into the second moves of variations in background of the corrections of BN

V. Shavyrin
I prize, Die Schwalbe 2000



Mate in three moves

Key 1 . Ra4! ~ 2 . Rx f 4 + B x f 4
3.Nh4#(A), 2...exf4 3.Nd4#(B),
2...Nxf4 3.Nxe7#(C), 1...Nf~
2.Nh4+(A) Bxh4 3.Qxg4#,
1... Nhg6 2.Nd4+(B) e xd 4
3.Qe6#, 1...Ng2 2.Nxe7+(C)
Nxe7 3.Be4#.

A three-mover for solving
V. Shavyrin

I prize, Die Schwalbe 2007



Mate in three moves

Solution to problem for solving in the article 'Dresden varieties': **Key 1.Qf2!** (2.Qg1 3.Qg8)1....f4 2.Qg2 Rg5 3.Qxc6; 1...b4 2.Qa2 Ra5 3.Qg8

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

NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

With his first title at the Orleans Masters, Priyanshu Rajawat has announced himself in the Indian badminton scene.

V. S. ARAVIND

Pullela Gopichand Badminton Academy (PGBA) has produced many players of international repute like P. V. Sindhu, Saina Nehwal, Srikanth Kidambi, Parupalli Kashyap, H.S. Prannoy, Sai Praneeth and Sameer Verma. The latest to join the list is Priyanshu Rajawat who clinched the Orleans Masters 2023, his first major title. The 21-year-old tamed Danish shuttler Magnus Johannessen in a thrilling final that lasted around 68 minutes. Now, with his maiden BWF Super 300 title in the bag, Priyanshu is eyeing the ultimate glory — an Olympic medal.

“Representing India is always special. It was a huge win for me as it was my first big tournament. It has really boosted my confidence and I want to keep the momentum going,” Priyanshu tells *Sportstar* in an exclusive interaction. “The feeling of winning the title hasn’t settled in but I am back at practice already.”

The journey

Following in the footsteps of elder brother Kunal Rajawat, Priyanshu, who once aspired to become a footballer, fell in love with the shuttle and racquet after being denied admission to a football academy. At the age of eight, he managed to impress Gopichand when the legendary shuttler was on a routine scouting tour at the Gwalior academy.

“My elder brother was a badminton player too. I used to go to the academy and watch him and that’s how I gradually fell in love with the game. When the trials were happening in Gwalior, Gopi sir, who was present at that time, spotted me. He continued to come to Gwalior to check our progress. Later, I joined the academy in 2011 and since then I have never looked back,” he says.

Born in a middle-class family, Priyanshu is grateful to his family for allowing him to pursue a career in sports.

“My father owns a Xerox shop, and my mother is a



Great start: Priyanshu Rajawat is on a high after winning his maiden title at the Orleans Masters 2023.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

housewife. Despite some difficulties, my family has ensured that I don’t face many difficulties in life. Yes, I was out of home at the age of eight, but I learned my craft by watching badminton legends, of whom Gopi sir has been very kind and helpful. We get all the facilities here and there are so many stars like Prannoy bhai, Srikanth bhai and Sai bhai. I am thankful to all these people for shaping my career.”

Pursuing a BBA in a private university in Madhya Pradesh, Priyanshu relies on his sister, Taneea Rajawat, to take decisions on and off the court. An actor who has featured in a couple of web series, she follows every



match and is always in constant touch with the shuttler. "My sister is everything to me. My parents generally don't watch me playing live as they get very tensed. After every match, the first call goes to my sister. It has been like that ever since I started playing professionally. I call her and share everything — not just the match results but also any issues I face," he says.

Biggest dream

The 21-year-old was a part of the Indian squad that won the Thomas Cup. But the youngster, who hails from Dhar, Madhya Pradesh, is more satisfied with his Or-

leans win.

"The Thomas Cup victory was very special, and I still get goosebumps when I think about it. But winning this one (Orleans) is a bit more special. Everyone in the academy was happy and the seniors congratulated me on my arrival. Gopi sir too was happy with my performance. But I can't rest with just one win. We started training the very next day after my arrival. Now my focus is to win further tournaments that are lined up this year," he says.

The lanky teenager remembers every detail. While playing in the final, he was filled with pride, but win-



Star in the making: Priyanshu's talent was recognised at an early age by Pullela Gopichand, whose academy was instrumental in nurturing him.

NAGARA GOPAL

ning it was more important. Priyanshu stunned Kenta Nishimoto in the pre-quarterfinals, and the road ahead is to win a medal at the Paris Olympics next year.

"The goal is to win an Olympic medal for India in men's singles, the qualification for which is fast approaching. I don't think it's impossible to win an Olympic medal. Also, I would like to win a medal at the World Championships and the preparation has been



Sis the best: Priyanshu's sister Taneea Rajawat has played a critical role in the shuttler's success, providing him with all kinds of support.

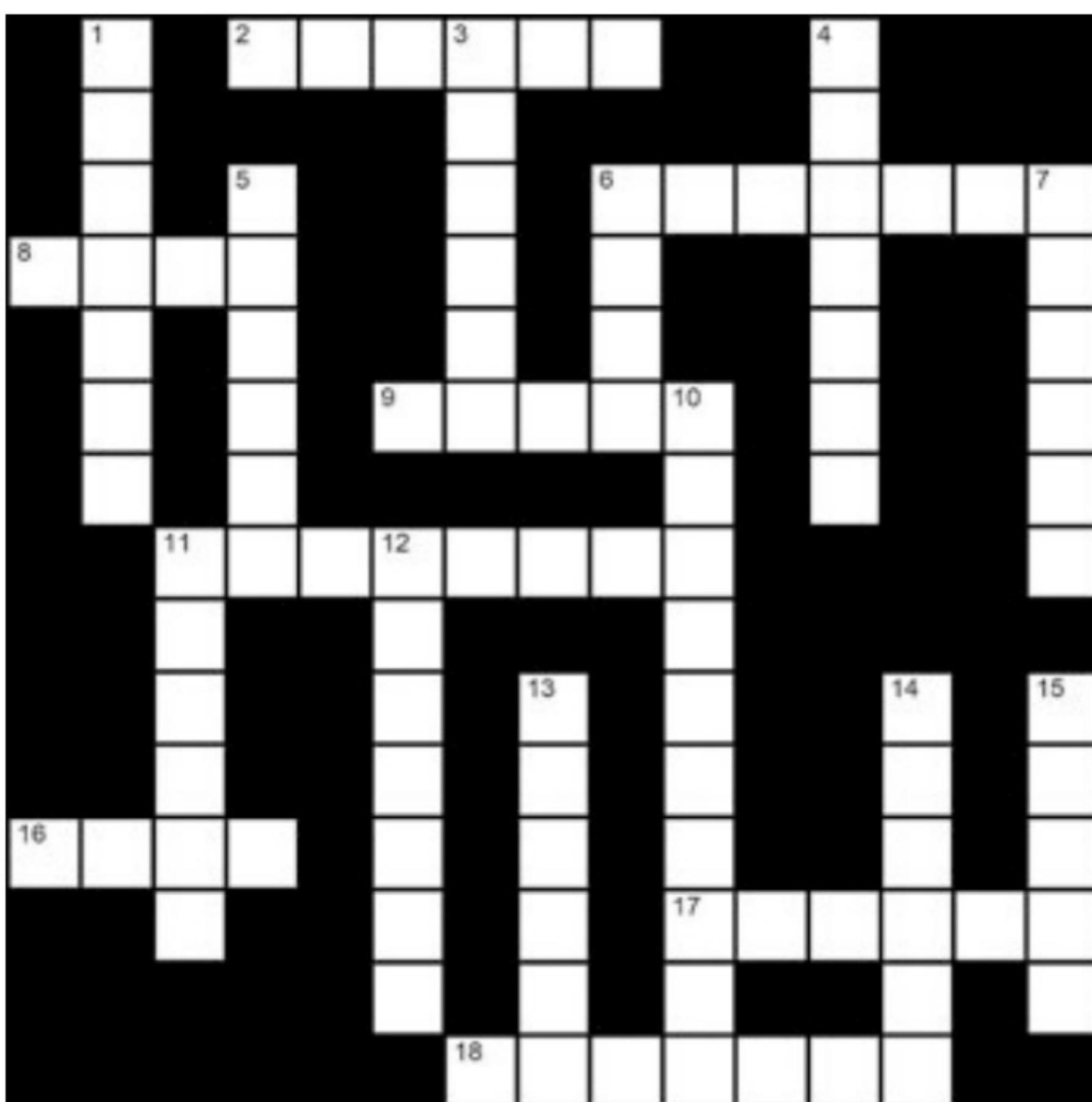
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

good. I need to curb my instincts of trying to finish matches early and I am working on it; but I will keep playing the attacking game," he adds.

Chasing calm

Priyanshu believes that sticking to discipline is the key to success. So he practises meditation in order to keep his composure while playing. Talking about not feeling any pressure during matches, he says, "I get to play against the likes of Srikanth in the academy. They give you an idea of how to play in big tournaments and that really helps as they are experienced and have succeeded at the highest level. I never take pressure as I feel if I play to my strengths, I can win the game."

"Preparation is key and I try to remain injury-free and take good nutrition before any game. Diet is very important, and I believe in giving my best on court and for that, the approach has to be right. I will win and lose matches but being disciplined helps me. I don't want to take any match lightly, and, as I said, winning an Olympic medal is my goal. That's going to be the best moment of my life," he signs off. ☈



SOLUTION TO LAST FORTNIGHT'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS

2 Recently, Abdullah Shelbayh became the first person from this country to win an ATP Tour main draw match. (6)

6 Priyanshu ..., the Indian badminton player who won the Orleans Masters recently, beating Magnus Johannessen of Denmark. (7)

8 Arkady Dvorkovich is this governing body's president. (1,1,1,1)

9 Beiwen ..., the Chinese-born American badminton player. (5)

11 Gary ..., who retired from cricket after playing for Zimbabwe and England at the international level. (8)

16 Ukrainian football club Dynamo ... (4)

17 Jeswin Aldrin recently beat ...

Sreeshankar's long jump national record. (6)

18 MotoGP World Champion Francesco ... (7)

DOWN

1 Ramon Sanchez-Pizjuan Stadium is this Spanish club's home. (7)

3 Sri Lanka Test captain's first name. (6)

4 Cricketer Neketh Gedara Roshan ... Jayasuriya. (7)

5 American tennis player Jessica ... (6)

6 ... Crouser, two-time Olympic gold medallist in shot put. (4)

7 First name of the basketball player who is nickname 'Mad Maxey.' (6)

10 LIV Golf CEO. (4,6)

11 Swiss tennis player Belinda ... (6)

12 ... World Sportsman of the Year in 2000, the year of its inception, was Tiger Woods. Last year, it was Max Verstappen. (7)

13 The ... Open, an ATP250 event, is held in Banja Luka, Bosnia-Herzegovina. (6)

14 Paulo Exequiel ..., Argentine footballer who plays for Roma. (6)

15 Spanish football club Real ... Balompie. (5)

Star power: Lionel Messi showed his class once again in PSG's match against Angers. AFP



Race to the finish

Premier League

There was a time when Arsenal was waltzing towards winning its first League title since 2004, but now, the Gunners can feel the breath of Pep Guardiola's well-oiled Manchester City on their shoulders. Given the circumstances, Arteta's men really cannot afford to drop points, but they did against bottom-placed Southampton in a 3-3 draw. They would have come away with nothing, if not for the late heroics of Martin Odegaard and Bukayo Saka. Trailing 1-3 till the 87th minute, Odegaard and Saka clinched two late goals to bag a precious point for the league-leader. Also, dropping points in earlier matches against Liverpool and West Ham (both 2-2 draws) has not helped Arsenal's case.

It is not just the title race that is heating up. The battle for a precious Champions League spot is gripping, to say the least. Tottenham Hotspur, which looked like a likely candidate to grab a UCL spot earlier, is on a downward spiral, especially since Antonio Conte's exit. The spiral took a steeper drop as Eddie Howe's Newcastle United beat Spurs 6-1 in a ruthless performance at St. James' Park.

Erik Ten Hag's Manchester United came away with a 2-0 win against Forest last week to solidify its place in the top-four race.

Stamford Bridge has not been a happy place to be in this season and the disappointment continued as Frank Lampard's Chelsea succumbed to a 1-2 loss against

While the Premier League title race heats up, Bayern's misery continues with Mainz loss. Meanwhile Juventus' 15-point penalty overturned.

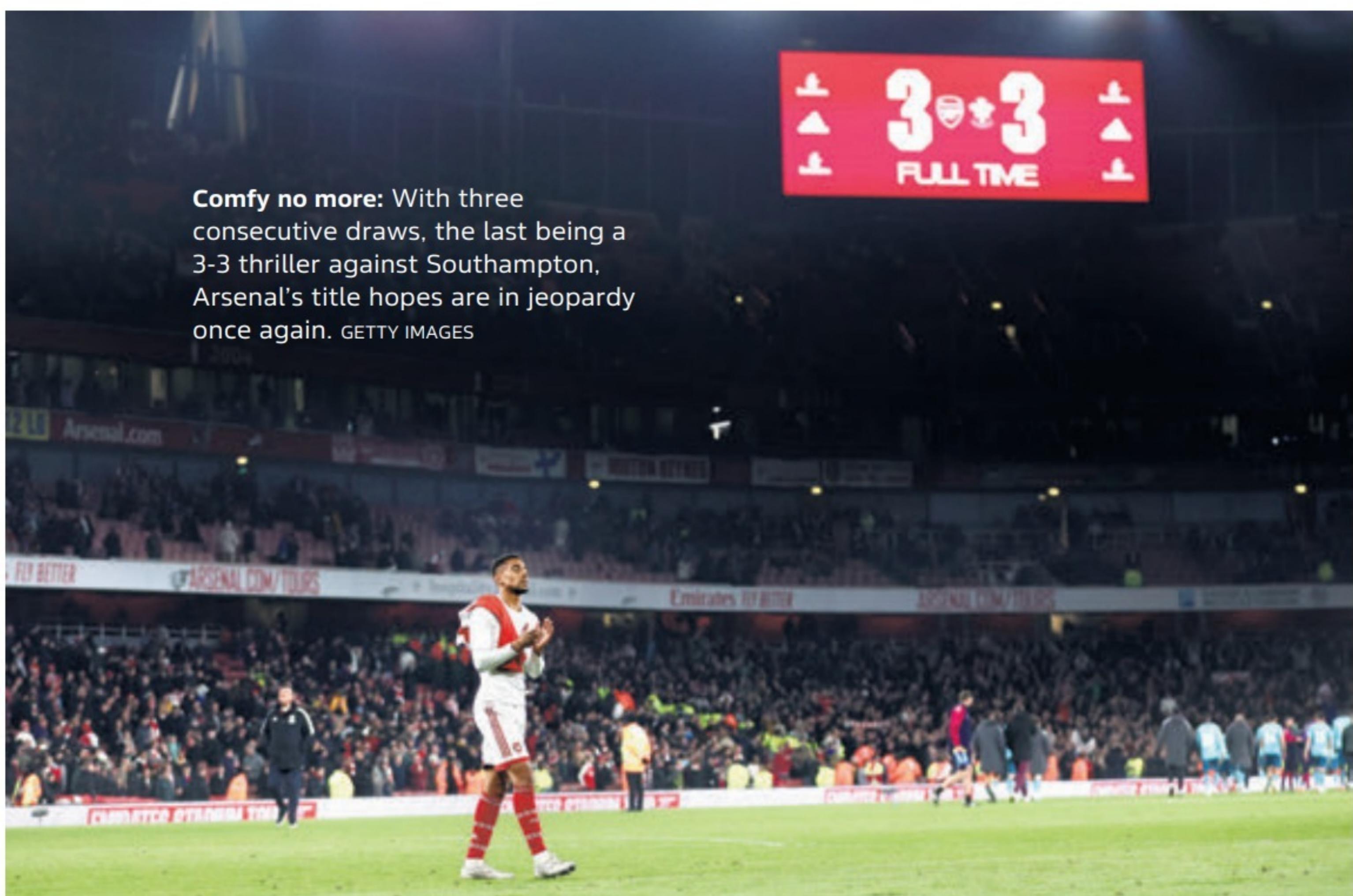
Brighton and Hove Albion to remain in the bottom-half of the table. Lampard is yet to win a match since rejoining as the interim manager after head coach Graham Potter got the axe.

After matchday 32, Arsenal tops the table with 75 points. Man City is second with 70, having played two games less. Newcastle and Man United occupy third and fourth, respectively with 59 points each, but the Magpies are higher due to a better goal-difference. The Red Devils have a game in hand against Howe's side. Spurs are fifth with 53 points, with Villa and Liverpool occupying sixth and seventh with 51 and 50 points, respectively. Chelsea is 11th with 39 points.

La Liga

Barcelona is well on its way to winning the La Liga crown for the first time since Lionel Messi's departure. It faced a tricky challenge against an in-form Atletico Madrid side. But Xavi and his men did enough to eke out a 1-0 win, as Ferran Torres scored the only goal of the match.

Real Madrid secured a comfortable 2-0 win against Celta Vigo, with Marco Asensio and Eder Militao scoring for Los Blancos. A league-title sounds far-fetched for Carlo Ancelotti's side this season unless Barca suffers a late-season crumble. But, it is still in contention to win two other trophies — the Copa del Rey and the Champions League, which, if it wins, will be a record-extending 15th title.



Comfy no more: With three consecutive draws, the last being a 3-3 thriller against Southampton, Arsenal's title hopes are in jeopardy once again. GETTY IMAGES

After matchday 30, Barcelona leads the standings with 76 points. Real Madrid, Atletico Madrid and Real Sociedad occupy the second, third and fourth place with 65, 60 and 54 points, respectively.

Bundesliga

Julian Nagelsmann would be forgiven for chuckling at Bayern Munich's expense. After his sacking, his successor Thomas Tuchel has been finding the going tough in Bavaria. If the UCL humiliation at the hands of Man City wasn't enough, Bayern's Bundesliga monopoly is at risk after it suffered a 3-1 loss against Mainz. It resulted in the club losing the top spot in the standings.

Borussia Dortmund's failure to capitalise on Bayern's misfortunes has been a common occurrence over the past seasons. But that was not the case this past matchweek as the Ruhr side thrashed Eintracht Frankfurt 4-0 to climb to the summit.

After matchday 29, Dortmund tops the standings with 60 points. Bayern is second with just a point behind. Union Berlin and SC Freiburg are third and fourth with 55 and 53 points, respectively.

Serie A

Preparations to celebrate a league title after 33 years are in full swing in the city of Naples. Despite its recent loss against AC Milan in the Champions League, Luciano Spalletti's side has been an embodiment of efficiency in Serie A this season. In its latest outing against Juventus, Giacomo Raspadori struck late in second-half additional time to steal a 1-0 win for Napoli. As things stand, if Napoli wins its home game against Salernitana next week

and Lazio draws or loses its away match against Inter, Napoli will win the Scudetto with six games to spare.

Juventus got a big lifeline after its 15-point penalty got overturned. This meant Massimiliano Allegri's side jumped to third and is well in contention to play in the Champions League next season.

City rivals Milan and Inter, who will face each other in the UCL semis, won their respective games. Both teams kept a clean sheet as Milan beat Lecce 2-0 and Inter defeated Empoli by a 3-0 scoreline.

After matchday 31, Napoli is the runaway leader with 78 points. Maurizio Sarri's Lazio occupies second place with 61 points. Juventus is third with 59 points, and Jose Mourinho's Roma is fourth with 56 points.

Ligue 1

Lionel Messi, who has made a career out of bewildering everyone with his genius, pulled the latest rabbit out of his hat in Paris Saint-Germain's 2-1 win against bottom-placed Angers. With PSG leading 1-0, Messi, in the 26th minute, spotted Kylian Mbappe's run and took the whole defence out with a perfectly weighted through-ball to the Frenchman, in what surely was one of the assists of the season. Mbappe, who scored both goals in the win, did justice to the pass by slotting the ball inside the net with a composed finish.

After matchday 32, PSG leads the standings with 75 points. Marseille is second with 67 points and Lens third, with 66 points. Monaco is fourth with 61 points.

Aneesh Dey



HISTORY IN THE MAKING

The UEFA Champions League rolls into the semi-final stage after an exciting set of quarter-finals.

Young brigade:
Rodrygo of Real Madrid evades Trevoh Chalobah of Chelsea during their quarterfinal at Stamford Bridge. GETTY IMAGES

Real Madrid continued its domination in the competition as it brushed aside Chelsea to register its eighth final-four entry of the last decade. In the semi-final, it will be up against Manchester City, which is on the prowl for its first-ever European title.

Pep Guardiola will be looking to win the competition for the first time since he parted ways with Barcelona but will have to deal with a Madrid side that has had his measure in recent years, including last season.

The second semi-final will bring together two bitter cross-city rivals — Inter Milan and AC Milan. San Siro, which will be rebuilt after this season, will host both sides in the tournament for the first time since 2005. AC Milan will be spurred on by the fact it has never lost to Inter in the Champions League as it looks to reclaim the trophy it last won in 2007.

Real Madrid vs Chelsea

First leg: RMA 2-0 CHE | Second leg: CHE 0-2 RMA

Chelsea's last hopes of reviving a catastrophic season were quashed by an efficient Real Madrid, which won the quarterfinals 4-0 on aggregate.

Carlo Ancelotti's men didn't have to sweat much against a lifeless Chelsea side. In the first leg, Karim Benzema opened the scoring for Madrid at home, before Marco Asensio sealed the tie with a trademark left footer. Its win was also aided by a Ben Chilwell red card in the second half.

At Stamford Bridge though, the Blues put up a stronger fight, with Frank Lampard's side not scoring in the first half thanks to a brave performance by Madrid keeper Thibaut Courtois.

Madrid shrugged off an indifferent first-half performance as it secured a semifinal spot thanks to a brace by Rodrygo.



Bayern Munich vs Manchester City

First leg: MCI 3-0 FCB | Second leg: FCB 1-1 MCI

Manchester City took apart a clueless Bayern Munich in the first leg at home, before sealing the tie at Munich, despite a draw. Thomas Tuchel's start as Bayern's manager has been disappointing, to say the least, and against Guardiola, with whom he shares a famed rivalry, the German was found wanting.

Driven forward by an enterprising Bernardo Silva in the midfield, City made short work of Bayern in the first leg. Defensive midfielder Rodri opened the floodgates with a left-footed curler before Silva and Erling Haaland rounded up the scoreline.

Haaland, top scorer in Champions League this season, blazed a penalty high in the first half of the second leg, but managed to score in the second. Joshua Kimmich scored a late consolation goal for Bayern as it crashed to a heavy defeat, the kind which it has usually meted out to others in the past.

AC Milan vs Napoli

First leg: ACM 1-0 NAP | Second leg: NAP 1-1 ACM

Napoli's hopes for a first European title in more than 30 years were crushed by its

Italian rivals AC Milan, which returns to the semi-final stage of the competition for the first time since its title win in 2007.

Milan took the early advantage in the first leg at Naples through Algerian midfielder Ismael Bennacer, who scored in the first half following a pacy counterattack.

Olivier Giroud wrapped up the tie in the second leg, rendering Victor Osimhen's late goal irrelevant. Milan's win was built upon a rock-solid performance by Mike Maignan in goal, who helped his side keep a vital clean sheet in the first game.

Inter Milan vs Benfica

First leg: BENO-2 IM | Second leg: IM 3-3 BEN

Inter Milan's progression into the semi-finals was paved by an effective first-leg performance, with the Italian side outmuscling Benfica 2-0 away, as Nicolo Barella and Romelu Lukaku found the net.

Inter would consolidate its position at home by taking a 3-1 lead by the 78th minute, with Barella among the scorers again. Benfica though would score twice late in the game to draw the second leg, but lose the tie 5-3 on aggregate, as Inter progressed to its first Champions League semi-final since its title win in 2010 under Jose Mourinho.

Top shot: Erling Haaland silenced the Bayern Munich crowd after scoring the opening goal.

AFP

Pranay Rajiv

Asian Champions Trophy hockey: Pakistan, China confirm participation

In a major development, Pakistan and China have confirmed their participation in the seventh Asian Champions Trophy hockey tournament to be held at the SDAT-Mayor Radhakrishnan Stadium in Chennai from August 3 to 12.

Confirming the news, J. Sekar Manoharan, president of the Hockey Unit of Tamil Nadu told *Sportstar*, "Since there were doubts expressed by the media on the two teams (China and Pakistan) participation, we are happy to inform that they have sent their confirmation.

Chennai will be the first Indian city to host the Asian Champions Trophy, which started in 2011 and a Hockey India committee is overseeing the preparations for the same.

In the recent past, Odisha has been the first-choice for international games in India. The State has hosted two World Cups — in 2018 and 2023 — and FIH Pro League games.

The competition will include six Asian nations — India, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, China and Pakistan.

Team Sportstar



THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

Sports ministry approves Sreeshankar's proposal to train abroad

The sports ministry has approved Commonwealth Games silver medallist long jumper Murali Sreeshankar's proposal to train in Greece for over a month in preparation for the World Athletics Championship and Asian Games later this year.

The long jumper, along with his coach Sivasankaran Murali, would be training in Greece for 32 days, the cost of which will be covered under the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS), a ministry release said.

Sreeshankar is currently training under international coach Keith Herston at the Texas Tech University till the end of this month, funding for which has also been covered under TOPS.

Besides Sreeshankar, the government's Mission Olympic Cell (MOC), in its 95th meeting, also approved proposals of racewalkers Priyanka Goswami and Sandeep Kumar to train and compete in Melbourne, Australia for 16 days.

The duo, along with their coach Gurmeet Singh, is expected to leave for Australia on May 15.

Besides athletics, MOC also approved the proposal of judoka Linthoi Chanambam towards foreign training-cum-competitions in Georgia and Poland.

Linthoi, who had earlier trained in Japan under TOPS funding, is aiming to compete in the Gori Cadet European Cup across Georgia and Poland and subsequently training at the same locations along with her coach Mamuka Kizilashvili.

The foreign training-cum-competition will last 28 days during which Linthoi will train and compete in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Poland.



Petroleum Inter-Unit TT: Sathiyan overpowers Sharath

For the second time in three days, G. Sathiyan defeated Sharath Kamal in five sets and claimed his first men's singles title in the Petroleum inter-unit table tennis tournament in New Delhi.

In the women's final, which went the distance, Reeth Rishya battled from a 1-3 deficit against upcoming talent Yashaswini Ghorpade to reel off the last three sets for her second title.

Sathiyan faced an improved version of Sharath within 48 hours of his 4-1 victory in the men's final. But overall, Sharath's lack of sharpness was all too evident in his shot-making.

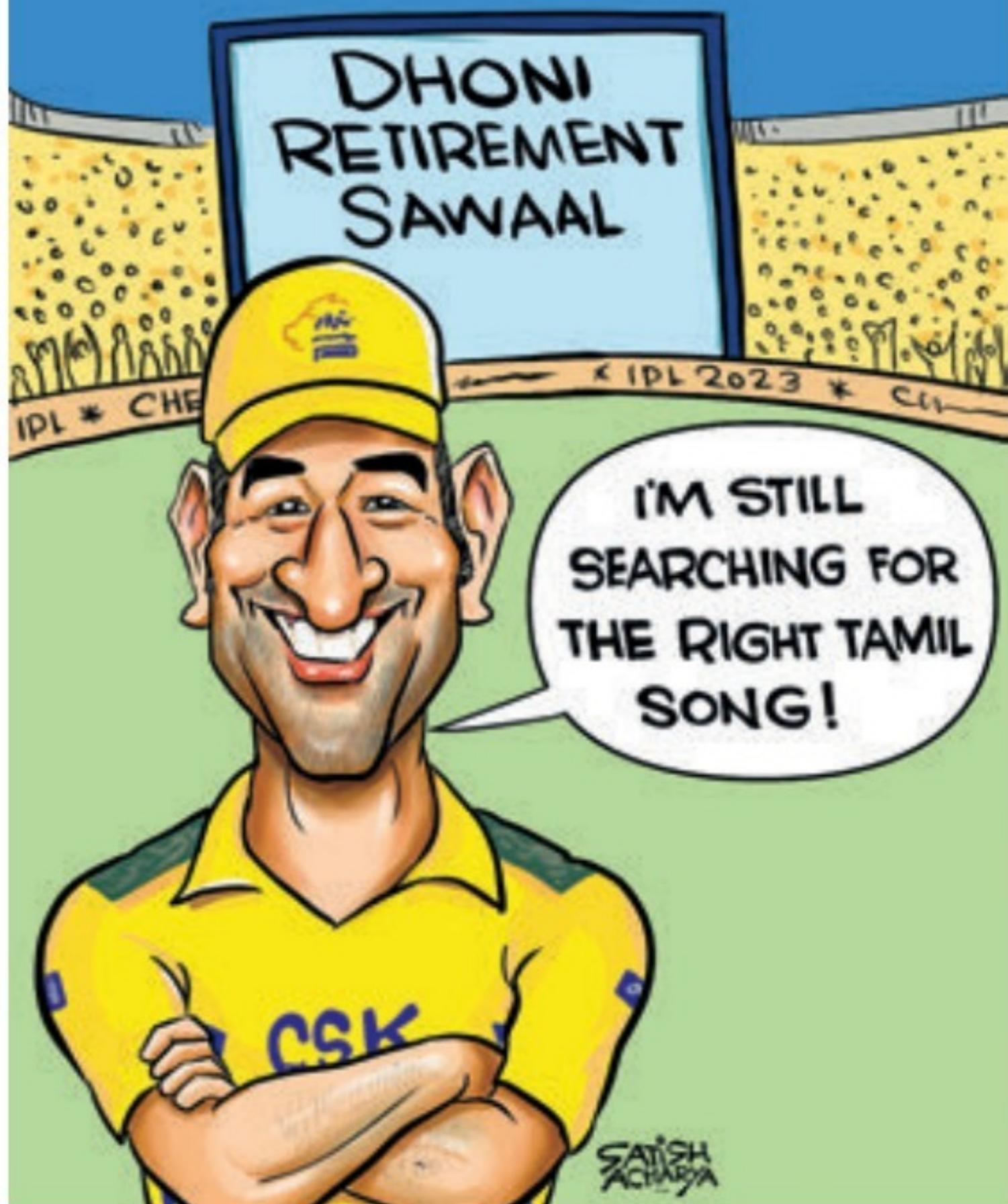
Even before Sharath could settle down, Sathiyan pocketed the first set. But in the second, a resurgent Sharath looked like drawing level before Sathiyan sneaked ahead to lead 2-0. The third saw Sharath check his unforced errors and dominate Sathiyan. This also raised visions of the match going the distance. But that was not to be.

Though the players were going neck-and-neck in the fourth set, Sathiyan broke away to lead 3-1. In the fifth, Sharath fought back from 7-9 to hold a set point at 10-9 before Sathiyan again changed gears and made it 10-all with a powerful finish.

In the extended points, Sathiyan forced two successive errors from Sharath to claim the title.

In the women's final, Yashaswini Ghorpade appeared to sign off her unbeaten run in the championship with another title after leading Reeth

SPORTOON



Rishya 3-1. But, Reeth found her rhythm and raced away with the last three sets. Once errors crept into Yashaswini's play and she became increasingly indecisive, Reeth did just enough to become the champion.

Rakesh Rao



Singles champions
Reeth Rishya and G.
Sathiyan are
flanked by
runners-up
Yashaswini
Ghorpade and
Sharath Kamal on
the concluding day
of the 41st
Petroleum
inter-unit table
tennis tournament
in New Delhi.

RAKESH RAO

All in the name of sport

Power slapping is a growing sport. That most crude of human reactions to a perceived insult is set to make millionaires of those who see dollar signs in everything. What next? Nail-biting as a television sport? Ear wax-clearing as international competition?

SURESH MENON

So how did power slapping become sport? Was it inspired by Will Smith's slap on a surprised Chris Rock during the Oscars? And was cricketer Harbhajan Singh the first international sportsman to bring it to this country when he slapped Santhakumaran Sreesanth during an IPL match long ago? My apologies, this is more serious than all that.

Power slapping is a growing sport, and since one of this column's concerns is growing sports, here are the rules: Each match is broken into 10 rounds, with competitors delivering and receiving one slap per round. If the person getting slapped — the defender — can't recover from the hit within 60 seconds, they lose the match.

Defenders also get penalised for flinching, which includes ducking their head, raising their shoulder or turning their body to protect their face. The person slapping — the striker — must have both feet on the ground before slapping the defender with the heel of their hand, palm and fingers hitting at the same time. AP

They are allowed to "wind-up," or practice the trajectory of their swing, up to two times as long as they tell the referee and the defender how many practice swings they plan to take. Strikers are penalised for lifting their feet, slapping or winding-up inappropriately and hitting the defender's eyes, ears, mouth and temple.

I have taken that from a serious article on the "sport" from the CBS News website, somewhat horrified that television sees money in it (or why would it telecast anything?). It has support from Arnold

Schwarzzaneger too, and soon, I am sure, those who equate sport with "manliness" and the tough guy image will be queueing up to slap and be slapped in the name of sport.

The sport saw a casualty in 2021 when one competitor died.

The Discovery cable station TBS began televising Power Slap, while Nevada athletic officials approved UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship) President as lead promoter for the Power Slap League. TBS has since pulled out, but the UFC are promoting it. So now it is only a question of marketing.

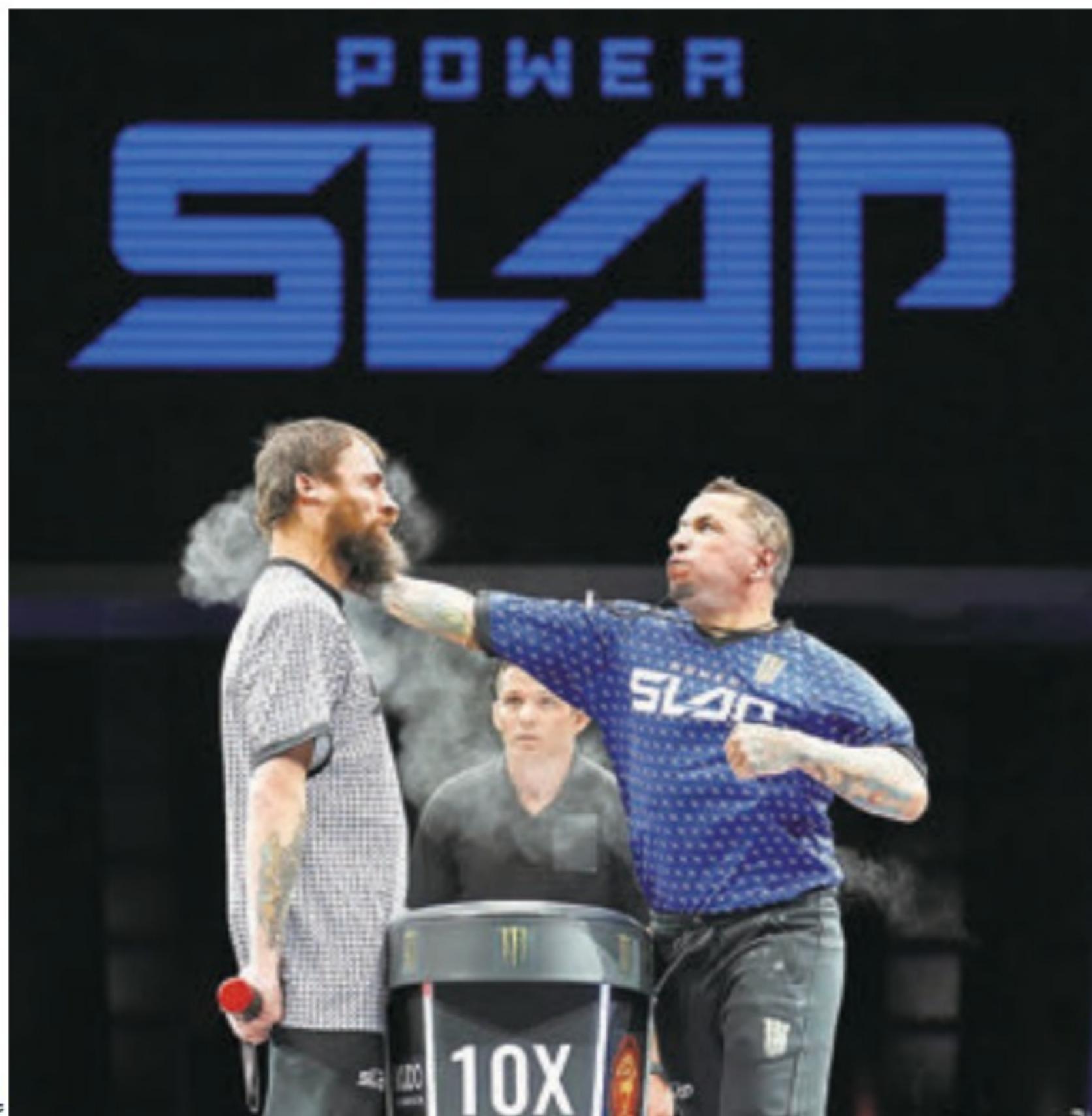
That most crude of human reactions to a perceived insult is set to make millionaires of those who see dollar signs in everything. What next? Nail-biting as a television sport? Ear wax-clearing as international competition?

Neuroscientists say slap fighting isn't safe, but the promoters say that boxing isn't safe either, so what else you got?

Slapper and slappee

(as they might soon be called) stand to make thousands of dollars per slap, and if television audiences encourage the sport, the entire sporting-marketing-political-Olympic complex might swing into action, and we (or our grandchildren) will be wondering what the fuss was all about. Money is often the final justification.

Yet there is something stunningly puerile and dangerous about the whole thing that suggests that we as a race are either amazingly bored with the sports that we have or find suffering the most palatable of visual joys. Neither shows us or our new "sport" in a good light. ☐



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