SPORTSTAR

SATURDAY,
JULY 19, 2025
₹125

FOLLOW US:
SPORTSTARWEB

DEFLATED DREAMS

Inside Indian football's fight for **survival**

+ POSTER
RISHABH PANT

Step in to learn XIME Step out to lead

Xavier Institute of Management and Entrepreneurship

If one chooses to pursue a career in management, one needs to find the right college that offers the best quality of management education. The demand for MBAs in both the private and public sector is at an all-time high and that also means that there's a growth in the number of Management Institutes. A management course takes about 2 years and costs anywhere between Rs. 8L to even Rs. 25L. it is important that a student must consider several factors before deciding on the college for their MBA.

Why XIME?

XIME was established in 1991 by Prof. J. Philip, Principal Founder and builder of the XIME legacy. XIME has three well-planned campuses in Bangalore, Kochi and Chennai, strategically located close to electronics or manufacturing clusters.

Residential PGDM

XIME's residential PGDM programme has served as a springboard for several top alumni. Their testimonials have become legendary in the last 25 years. The PGDM course is developed with the future in mind. That gives our students the cutting edge. XIME constantly endeavors to ensure that the curriculum offers students a result- driven educational experience, meaning that it stays up to date with trends in the corporate world as well as environmental and social concerns.

Expectations from PGDM at XIME:

XIME's PGDM Programme focuses on the best business practices from around the world to prepare the students for working anywhere in the globe. Students are required to be in residence which gives them access to important campus resources like the faculty and library and helps in peer-learning. By encouraging students to think critically and evaluating trade offs rather than blindly following procedures, XIME prepares its students to work with world's leading organizations. Students spend considerable time analyzing Harvard Business School case studies and also get the opportunity to partake in XIME's International Studies program with partner institutions across the world, like for example Francde or some of the BRICS countries.

The Diversity Factor

The intake process at XIME is based entirely on merit. From the earliest batches twenty eight years ago, the intake has always reflected an equitable gender balance and diversity with students from all parts of the country. The strength of a Management Institute is about how far and how diversely one is able to look into the future. Keeping this in mind, XIME has distinctive courses that encourage students to think beyond the obvious, make them more confident and future-ready even before joining the corporate world.

The Distinctiveness

• Contemporary Business Environment: An opportunity for students to learn about major events happening all over the world and to analyze how these global events/ trends or macro-economic policies impact business.

• Business Ethics: XIME emphasizes the importance of responsible behavior even before graduating to corporate citizenship.

• XIME's Socially Useful Productive Activity (SUPA) initiative highlights the importance of ethical business practices in students so they are well prepared to handle situations that call for sensitivity and a sense of responsibility.

Prof. J Philip
Principal Founder, XIME

• CSR & Environmental Sustainability in Business: XIME has been working on CSR projects for decades that have made the students an important contributor to society. It was a natural choice for the college to help students learn about sustainability, making them more appealing to potential employers.

• Entrepreneurship: XIME's curriculum is designed to encourage entrepreneurship in the young minds by inspiring possibilities and promoting many original career opportunities. The students are inspired to come up with new ways of approaching their future.

• Leadership in Action: Students can find leadership practices across the globe in these business case studies, preparing themselves for socially responsible leadership.

XIME provides its students opportunity to see the real world from new perspectives and learn to function at a higher level, with greater confidence.

As the world progresses and changes, it is important for the young generation to be prepared for the future. That is what happens at XIME.

Visit www.xime.org for more information on the Institute, its courses and specialization offered.

CONTENTS

Follow us: sportstarweb

Saturday, July 19, 2025
FOR THE FORTNIGHT JULY 6-19, 2025

Volume 48 Number 15 ISSN 0971 359x 100 Pages

82

NBA: OKLAHOMA CITY THUNDER'S ROAD TO GLORY

Football

12 **Big Interview**
AIFF president Kalyan Chaubey shares his vision on reviving football in India

24 **Back to basics**
Can grassroots revival spark a lasting change in Indian football?

28 **Hidden fields**
A closer look at the state-level action shaping Indian football

32 **Life at the lower leagues**
Breaking down the I-League crisis

8
Cover Story
Indian Super League

Once Indian football's showpiece, the ISL now finds its future on tenterhooks

Cover illustration: Soumyadip Sinha

Read more...

57 **Analysis**
Inside England's Bazball blueprint

70 **Rugby Premier League**
A bold experiment in commercialising and scaling a niche game

72 **Interview**
Javelin thrower Thomas Rohler on how his Rio Olympics gold medal win changed him as an athlete

Poster: Rishabh Pant (Getty Images); Pages 43-50

Disclaimer: ***Special Focus is an advertising feature***

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

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

Editor: Ayon Sengupta (Editor responsible for selection of news under the PRP Act).
All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited.

Disclaimer: Readers are requested to verify & make appropriate enquiries to satisfy themselves about the veracity of an advertisement before responding to any published in this magazine.
THG PUBLISHING PVT LTD., the Publisher & Owner of this magazine, does not vouch for the authenticity of any advertisement or advertiser or for any of the advertiser's products and/or services. In no event can the Owner, Publisher, Printer, Editor, Director/s, Employees of this magazine/company be held responsible/liable in any manner whatsoever for any claims and/or damages for advertisements in this magazine.
Air Surcharge:
Colombo ₹ 15.00 | Port Blair ₹ 10.00

Editorial Team
Editor: Ayon Sengupta
Convergence Editor: V. V. Rajasekhara Rao
Design: R. Ravikannan
Editorial Consultant: Vijay Lokapally
Sr. Assistant Editor: Shayan Acharya
Assistant Editor: Jonathan Selvaraj
Chief Sub-Editor: Karan Pillai, Ayan Acharya, Aashin Prasad, Santadeep Dey, Lavanya Lakshmi Narayanan
Sr. Sub-Editor/Sr. Reporter: Saikat Chakraborty, Dhruva Prasad, Neeladri Bhattacharjee, Aneesh Dey, Pranay Rajiv, Nihit Sachdeva, Abhishek Saini
Sub-Editor/Reporter:, Nigamanth P, Anish P, Sahil Mathur, Joan Mathew Jacob, Rajdeep Saha, Kavita Menon
Senior Multimedia Producer: Sivasankar A

For Subscription:
Email: customercare@thehindu.co.in
No: 18001021878

For Advertisement
National Sales Head
Satish K Mendon
Satish.mendon@thehindu.co.in
Region
Delhi – Antesh Kumar Verma
+91 9818798519
Bengaluru – Gurunatha Reddy
+91 9845529981
Chennai – R. Ganesh
+91 9841290799

OFF-SIDE

Ayon Sengupta
sportstar@thehindu.co.in

A SPORT IN FREEFALL, A LOVE THAT WON'T LET GO

No villain, no betrayal — just endless tiny cuts. As clubs vanish and viewership fades, **Indian football bleeds quietly.**

The first time I watched live football in a stadium was a Calcutta Super Division League match between East Bengal and George Telegraph in the early 90s at the Kishore Bharati Krirangan. The stadium, with a capacity of around 10,000, had recently materialised in our corner of eastern Kolkata like a concrete spaceship.

Our neighbourhood was mostly made up of people who had crossed the border after Partition — migrants from East Bengal, who carried complicated histories, relentless optimism, and an almost irrational devotion to a football club that bore the name of the home they had left behind. The fact that East Bengal was playing practically in our backyard had sent the whole locality into a frenzy. Everyone was eager to see a young, gravity-defying Bhaichung Bhutia, who was already a teenage heartthrob.

Tickets were sold for Rs. 10 at the local market, and my father's favourite vegetable vendor lined up at dawn to secure them for his and our shared love for East Bengal.

On match day, the concrete ramparts were a sea of red-and-gold, and Bhutia didn't disappoint. He scored an acrobatic goal, the only goal of the game. The stadium shook with joy, and there was an overwhelming sense of belonging that I had never felt before in my brief decade spent on this planet.

Sport does that to you. It invents an emotional socialism where the ecstasy of victory is shared equally, and so is the sorrow when things fall apart. It's probably the only thing outside your own life that can make or break your heart.

But if falling in love with sports is easy, staying in love with Indian football is not. That beautiful, defiant sense of belonging I had felt as a child now lives under the constant shadow of decay. Every passing year feels like a slow, silent funeral.

There's no villain, no great betrayal, but a list of endless tiny cuts. Every season arrives with new murmurs: that this league won't survive, that this club can't pay salaries.

The financial model of Indian football is unfortunately broken, with most clubs running on credit and crossed fingers. Since 2000, 19 teams have disappeared across three divisions. The federation's commercial arm, Football Sports Development Limited (FSDL), signed a broadcast deal in 2023 with Viacom18 — owned by the same parent company — for Rs. 550 crore over two years. Each ISL match is worth Rs. 1.68 crore (2024-25 season), a stark contrast to the Rs. 104 crore the IPL earns as broadcast revenue from every game.

Broadcast revenue — supposedly the financial lifeblood of modern sport — is barely trickling in. And most clubs and the federation invest very little in youth systems, infrastructure, or anything that might help the sport grow. The AIFF cut its competition budget by Rs. 20 crore, while its scouting and grassroots programme saw a reduction of 69 per cent in 2024-25. Meanwhile, FSDL and the broadcasters point to falling viewership — 429 million in season one to 81 million by 2023. But no one knows which came first: the falling interest or the falling quality. It's a chicken-and-egg situation with no budget for either.

A chaotic football calendar, often drawn or changed last minute, and an endemic age-fraud problem add to the woes dragging Indian football down. The national team, meanwhile, continues to be in freefall. It has not won a competitive game since November 2023.

And yet the fans cling to a sport that gives them less and less to hold on to. But they don't scream as much anymore. They simply endure.

Your Dreams Our Goal

POORNIMA UNIVERSITY

OFFICIAL UNIVERSITY PARTNER

RAJASTHAN ROYALS

ADMISSIONS 2025-26

PROGRAMS OFFERED

ENGINEERING

B.Tech.

- Computer Science & Engineering
- Artificial Intelligence & Data Science
- Artificial Intelligence & Machine Learning
- Internet of things & Blockchain
- Cloud Technology & DevOps
- Data Analytics
- Full Stack Development & Mobile App.
- Cyber Security
- Electrical & Computer Engineering
- Electronics & Communication Engineering
- Civil • Mechanical

M.Tech.

- Computer Engineering
- Artificial Intelligence & Data Science
- Construction Technology & Management
- Energy & Environment
- Power System
- Production Engineering
- Product Design & Manufacturing
- Structural Engineering
- Transportation Engineering

LATERAL ENTRY / TRANSFER

- B.Tech. & B.Des.
- Transfer in II Year in all UG Programs

COMPUTER SCIENCE & APP.

BCA

- AI & Data Science • Cloud Technology
- Cyber Security • Data Analytics
- Artificial Intelligence & Machine Learning
- Cloud Technology & DevOps
- Full Stack Development & Mobile App.

MCA

- Artificial Intelligence & Data Science
- Artificial Intelligence & Machine Learning
- Cloud Technology & DevOps
- Cyber Security

ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN

B.Arch.

B.Des.

- Interior Design
- Fashion & Textile Design

B.Sc.

- Animation & VFX
- Gaming, Augmented & Virtual reality

BVA

- Applied Arts • Painting

MVA

- Applied Arts • Painting

M.Plan.

- Urban Planning

M.Des.

- Interior Design • Product Design

MANAGEMENT & COMMERCE

B.Com.

- Pass Course
- Audit & Taxation
- Insurance & Banking
- Finance & Accounting
- International Business (ACCA)

BBA

- Pass Course
- Banking & Finance • Business Analytics
- Digital Marketing • Financial Technology
- Global Business • Sports Management
- Startups & Family Business (CMA-US)
- Business Intelligence & Analytics (CMA-US)
- Financial Markets (CFA-L1)
- International Business (ACCA)

B.Sc.

- Exercise & Sports Science

BA

- Music Production

MBA

- Digital Marketing & Business Analytics
- Digital Marketing & Finance
- Digital Marketing & HR
- Hospital & Healthcare Management
- International Finance (ACCA-UK)
- Leadership & Entrepreneurship

PUBLIC HEALTH

MPH

- Master of Public Health

SCIENCE & HUMANITIES

B.Sc.

- Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics
- Environmental Science, Chemistry, Computer Application & Informatics

B.A.

- History • Political Science • Sociology
- Economics • Psychology • English
- Geography • Public Administration

MYS & TM

- Yogic Studies & Therapy Management

Ph.D

- Engineering
- Design
- Hotel Management
- Management & Commerce
- Public Health
- Science & Humanities
- Animation & VFX
- Yoga Education

HOTEL MANAGEMENT

B.Sc. (Affiliated to NCHMCT)

- Hospitality & Hotel Administration

JOURNALISM & MASS COMM.

B.A.

- Journalism & Mass Communication

M.A.

- Journalism & Mass Communication

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN RAJASTHAN

WE ARE HOSTING THE 5th KHELO INDIA UNIVERSITY GAMES

INDIA TO AUSTRALIA IN 3 YEARS

Study 1st Year at Poornima, 2nd and 3rd Year at Southern Cross University-Australia

In association with Southern Cross University Australia

8875666617

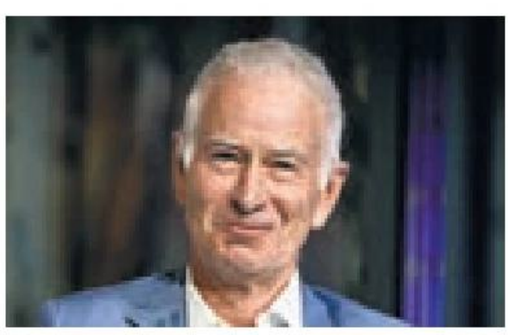
8875666618

www.poornima.edu.in

Follow us:

POORNIMA UNIVERSITY, IS 2027-31, RAMCHANDRAPURA, SITAPURA EXTENSION, JAIPUR-303905

« Physically, I'm probably one of the strongest ones, so maybe it would benefit me. But I think I'm not ready to play five sets." – World No. 1 tennis star Aryna Sabalenka on whether she'd want the women's game to turn to best-of-five set matches »



« It's going to be an interesting time to see if there's another player or two who can break in with those two." – Tennis legend John McEnroe feels the arrival of a third young contender could take the Carlos Alcaraz-Jannik Sinner rivalry to even greater heights »

$10 billion

The Buss family has agreed to sell a majority stake in the Los Angeles Lakers to TWG Global CEO Mark Walter, while confirming that Jeanie Buss **(in pic)** will remain governor of the storied NBA franchise. Financial terms of the deal were not disclosed, but initial reports stated that the agreement valued the 17-time NBA champion Lakers at USD 10 billion — marking the largest-ever sale of a professional sports team. Walter, who holds ownership interests in several professional sports franchises, including MLB's Los Angeles Dodgers and the WNBA's Los Angeles Sparks, has been a minority owner of the Lakers since 2021.

9.75s

Paris Olympics silver medallist Kishane Thompson clocked 9.75s at the Jamaican national athletics trials to win gold, becoming the sixth-fastest 100m sprinter in history. Meanwhile, three-time Olympic and 10-time world champion Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce punched her ticket to a ninth World Championships with a third-place finish in the 100m in the same trials, clocking 10.91secs.

SO NEAR, YET SO FAR

Three-time Olympic champion Faith Kipyegon failed in her bid to become the first woman to run a mile in under four minutes. Kipyegon, the Olympic 1,500-metre gold medallist from Kenya, ran in 4 minutes, 06.42 seconds — the fastest mile in history by a woman — at Stade Charléty in Paris. Her time was better than her world record of 4:07.64, but won't be recognised by the international federation because the Nike-sponsored event dubbed "Breaking4: Faith Kipyegon vs. the 4-Minute Mile" was unofficial. AFP

One-punch rise

"I'm not invincible. I'm beatable." Those aren't words you expect from a **newly crowned** two-division UFC champion. But Ilia Topuria's self-awareness might just be what makes him unstoppable.

Nigamanth P
nigamanth.p@thehindu.co.in

Holding a belt in the UFC is a mark of greatness. But to claim gold in two different weight classes — and hint there's room for more — is a rare blend of dominance and drive. Ilia Topuria did just that. At UFC 317, the Spaniard added the vacant lightweight championship to his resume with a ruthless first-round knockout of former champion Charles Oliveira. With the victory, Topuria dethroned Islam Makhachev and now sits atop the men's pound-for-pound rankings.

Topuria, already a featherweight titleholder, stepped up in weight but lost none of his venom. Known for his crisp boxing, explosive power, and rock-solid takedown defence, he brought all those weapons to the Octagon — and barely needed a round to unleash them.

The lead-up had been electric. Topuria **(below, left),** undefeated and exuding swagger, was seen as the next big thing. But Oliveira, a former lightweight king, was no stepping stone. With wins over Dustin Gaethje, Justin Poirier and Michael Chandler, he had faced — and beaten — the division's best.

Early on, Oliveira tried to dictate terms with body kicks and pressure, backing Topuria toward the fence. A brief scramble saw Topuria secure side control before Oliveira threatened with a leg lock. Calm and calculated, Topuria escaped and brought the fight back to the feet — a pivotal moment. Seconds later, the finish came with chilling precision. A probing jab drew Oliveira's guard just wide enough for Topuria to sneak in a thudding right hand. One punch. Lights out. New champion.

Now 17-0, Topuria isn't just perfect on paper — he's perfect in purpose.

But behind the bravado lies a fighter grounded in self-awareness.

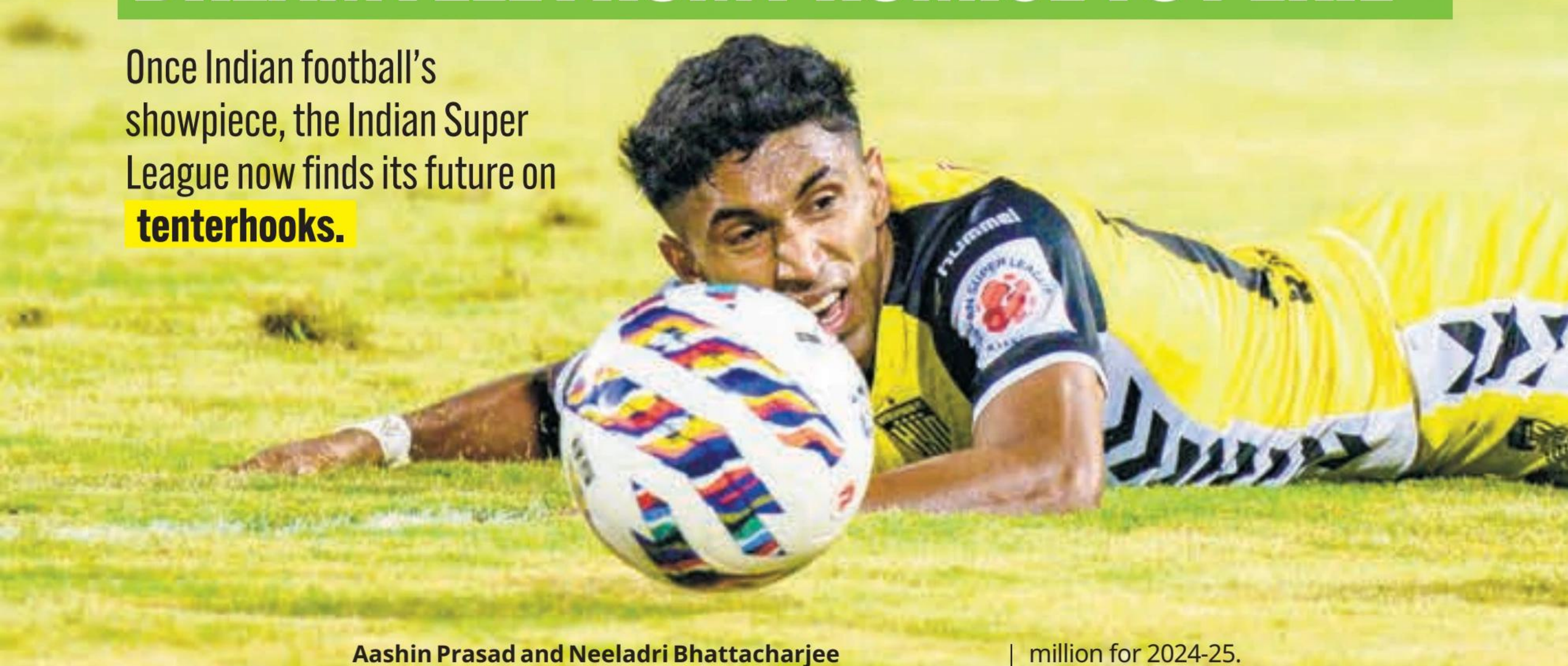
"I am not invincible," Topuria said after the fight. "Quite the contrary. I feel that I'm beatable, and that's why I work so hard... The work is so well done that I feel that there's no doubt left." In the co-main event, Alexandre Pantoja retained his flyweight crown with a clinical performance against Kai Kara-France. Dominating the grappling exchanges, Pantoja controlled much of the bout on the mat before locking in a rear-naked choke in the third round.

It marked Pantoja's fourth successful title defence, further cementing his status as one of the flyweight division's all-time elite.

GETTY IMAGES

CRASH OF THE CARNIVAL: HOW THE ISL DREAM FELL FROM PROMISE TO PERIL

Once Indian football's showpiece, the Indian Super League now finds its future on **tenterhooks.**



Aashin Prasad and Neeladri Bhattacharjee
aashin.p@thehindu.co.in, neeladri.b@thehindu.co.in

The launch of the Indian Super League in 2014 was meant to elevate the profile of the sport in the country. And for a fleeting period, the hype was real. Leading — albeit ageing — football stars from the 1990s and 2000s, and a mix of Indian cinema and cricket, helped establish an entertaining product. The three-month-long competition, which wasn't recognised by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) then, proved to be an instant hit.

But once the novelty factor wore off and the glitz was stripped away, the league struggled to reach the heights of its initial years. While the ISL brought about improved standards and professionalism, the popularity of the league has dwindled after 11 seasons.

WATCH OUR DISCUSSION ON WHAT'S WRONG WITH INDIAN FOOTBALL

Ballooning costs

The first season of the ISL, which had eight new teams, saw an average attendance of 25,408. But in the recently concluded season, despite boasting the iconic Kolkata outfits of Mohun Bagan and East Bengal, the numbers dropped to 11,084.

High operational costs, poor gate revenue, and diminishing broadcast numbers mean clubs have struggled to make it a profitable venture. In 2014, ISL's TV viewership amounted to 429 million, but the cumulative numbers for TV and digital platforms fell to around 130 million for 2024-25.

"Though clubs in the UK or Germany function this way, it becomes much more challenging for Indian clubs to follow that blueprint because of the cost that comes in, and the return on investment is almost negligible," a source told *Sportstar*. An estimated expenditure of a mid-table ISL club last season was close to ₹60 crore, with nearly half the amount written off as a loss in the balance sheet. An ISL team receives around ₹13–16 crore annually from the central revenue pool of the league. In comparison, an Indian Premier League (IPL) team receives a whopping ₹425 crore.

Of the eight original franchises, only five remain standing. FC Pune City shut operations due to financial woes, Delhi Dynamos moved base to Odisha to lower expenses, and three-time champion ATK made way for the entry of Mohun Bagan into the ISL, when the league was granted top-tier status.

"When Delhi Dynamos shifted to Odisha, the government offered the

High operational costs, poor gate revenue, and diminishing broadcast numbers mean clubs have struggled to make it a profitable venture.

Pics: FSDL/FOCUS SPORTS

Fall of dominoes: Only five of the league's original eight franchises remain, as financial pressures toppled clubs one after another.

stadium for free. That's a major chunk of operational cost gone. A lot of sponsors also came in through the government. That really helped the club manage their finances," another source added. "Also, manpower was reasonably cheaper than in Delhi because the cost of living in Odisha is lower."

Another founding club, Chennaiyin FC — a two-time champion — has consistently flirted with the idea of shifting base due to its bloated operational costs.

Hyderabad FC, which absorbed the operations of Pune City after a takeover, also inherited the financial muddle caused by the original franchise run by the Wadhawan Group.

The club had been in the red, and despite multiple efforts to bring in investors, it never managed to break even in six years of its existence — even after winning the title in 2022.

Issues lingering on from FC Pune City's holding company carried forward indirectly to HFC, and with the pandemic adding to the woes, the club struggled to break out of those shackles, playing with a constantly increasing financial burden year-on-year.

By the time HFC's owners managed to figure out a solution — which included transferring franchise rights to a novated company — it was already knee-deep in losses. Without immediate financial injection, the club struggled to hold things together.

"There were players, coaches whose salaries got delayed for quite some time," a source said. "And after a point, players and staff started leaving, and the club was suffering from ballooning losses. The league should have acted earlier, but it seemed like they waited till the last minute to force the sale."

The franchise has now shifted base to Delhi under new owners Jindal Football, who bought the franchise rights in August 2024 under the ambit of the BC Jindal Group. Legacy club Mohammedan SC's participation in next season's competition is still up in the air — and so is the fate of the league.

Entry of FSDL

The Master Rights Agreement (MRA), signed in 2010 by the All India Football Federation (AIFF) and its commercial partner Football Sports Development Limited (FSDL), will expire in December this year.

"When IMG Reliance entered into the partnership with AIFF, it wasn't just a financial transaction. It was a long-term commitment to revitalise Indian football. The objective was to bring in strong investors in the form of clubs and start a new league which can expand football's fanbase in India, while also providing AIFF financial stability to work on grassroots and accelerate development of footballers," a source told *Sportstar*.

"In 2010, Indian football's viewership had gone down to 15

Chain reaction: The instability of the top division has coincided with arguably the worst 18 months for the national team.

million. *Zee* had terminated the contract with AIFF, and at that point, this Master Rights Agreement was done."

Sources claim that the AIFF, over the years, has received over ₹600 crore from FSDL and ISL directly. Other investments made into the league add up to around ₹5,000 crore.

Despite the alleged investment, many clubs in the ISL have struggled financially.

"When you're making a loss and there is no support from investors, whether you fall from 300 feet or 40,000 feet, you're going to die. Despite being in a good financial year, the investments didn't come through, so the club had to shift to Hyderabad," says Gaurav Modwel, former CEO of FC Pune City, which went defunct in 2019.

Since the introduction of the ISL, Pune City was the fourth team to shut operations in the city in the space of five years. Three I-League clubs — DSK Shivajians, Bharat FC and Pune FC — have also been dissolved.

"It was difficult to get people to invest at the ISL level. We had advanced discussions with a couple of large partners, but eventually, it came down to the fact that Pune wasn't a footballing city. There were no home-grown names in football at that time," says Modwel.

While Modwel defends the good practices that ISL enforced in Indian football, he feels the poor checks and regulations on the salary cap rule have deteriorated the health of the franchises.

Bloated fees

"One of the main expenses that has shot up is the Indian player fee. The [squad salary cap rule] should have been firmly implemented. Many clubs spoke about how we could control some clubs flaunting this — referred to as the 'ghost salaries'. Clubs would employ family members of players and pay them separately. The stated policy was to control this, but it wasn't. The fear was that these are big business houses that want to win, and there was also fan pressure to win. Eventually, every team will succumb to the pressure of spending more to get players in and perform better," says Modwel.

Close to 60 per cent of a club's operational costs each season go into paying the fees of players and coaches. Since 2020, the Indian football transfer record has been broken six times — the last four involving the acquisition of Indian players. Bagan's next reported big-summer signing will likely be a 20-year-old full-back, who has made 34 appearances in the top flight, for ₹2 crore — making it the fourth-most expensive signing.

The biggest beneficiaries of the ISL have been players and coaches, according to a top club official. The inflated player market has also led to bloated wages. "Indian player salaries have skyrocketed. It's 8–10 times what they would draw outside of India," says Modwel.

FC Goa's CEO Ravi Puskur admitted that clubs need to take responsibility for the state of the current transfer market. "Clubs — mine included — have inflated player salaries irresponsibly. We are outbidding each other for perception, knowing fully well it's unsustainable. Then we act shocked when these players fall flat on the international stage. We built that illusion," he posted on *X*, after the men's national team's loss to Hong Kong in the Asian Cup qualifier in June.

State of limbo

As it stands, clubs are in a state of limbo over the future of the ISL. With less than three months to go before the supposed start of the ISL, there is no agreement yet over the new MRA among ISL clubs, FSDL and the AIFF. A club official noted that ISL clubs are wary of the proposed five per cent share of the broadcast rights revenue in the new deal. The new MRA has also cast doubt over the promotion of a new team from the I-League for the next five years, while also advocating for no relegation for another 10 years.

Mohammedan's struggles to cope with the financial model that comes with promotion to the ISL have been cited as an example to maintain a closed league. "If you compare India's football pyramid to the UK, it's almost inverted. In India, the ISL had 13 teams last year. The I-League had 12–13 teams last year. I-League 2 and I-League 3 are just 2–3 months long," a source said. "FSDL is confident that until the pyramid is fixed, good clubs will not come through promotion into the ISL. It will take time and when it feels confident, it will integrate ISL with the tiers below."

While the ISL's play-off system keeps the league competitive, there is no added motivation for bottom-rung teams to avoid the financial disparity that comes with relegation.

Lack of games

The first season of the ISL, which followed the league and play-off

Map not to scale | Foreign players and Indian players born abroad (registered state not officially disclosed) — 91

format of the IPL, was held over three months with just 61 matches. In contrast, the I-League was contested in a league format with 156 games across seven months. For the ISL to gain recognition as the top-flight league, it had to transition to a longer season and introduce promotion and relegation, as recommended by the AFC's roadmap. The latest ISL season was a 13-team affair with 163 matches, including the play-offs. In comparison, the top-ranked AFC team Japan's J-League has 380 matches; second-ranked Iran's Persian Gulf Pro League plays 161 matches; South Korea's top flight has 228; and Australia's league has 176.

Faltering national team

The instability of the top division has coincided with arguably the worst 18 months for the national team. The professional standards and overseas expertise that ISL introduced were meant to usher in improved performances, but the last decade has been a mixed bag. Two consecutive Asian Cup appearances in 2019 and 2023 notwithstanding, the Blue Tigers have failed to make a mark internationally.

With no competitive win since November 2023, India risks missing out on Asian Cup qualification.

Eleven years ago, the ISL was Indian football's grandest carnival. What remains now is a league gasping for air.

As the clock ticks towards the expiry of its very foundation — the MRA — the question that hangs heavy in the air is: Did the league fail Indian football, or was Indian football never ready for the ISL?

« AIFF is rethinking youth development timeline »

KALYAN CHAUBEY

Neeladri Bhattacharjee
neeladri.b@thehindu.co.in

With rankings tumbling, results fading, and the ISL's future uncertain, Indian football faces a reckoning.

In an exclusive interview with Sportstar, AIFF president Kalyan Chaubey shares his vision to spark a revival.

What is the AIFF's strategy to improve India's FIFA ranking?

To improve our FIFA ranking, the National Team must win matches, and for that, it has to score goals.

In the last 16 matches, the senior men's team has managed only one win (3-0 vs Maldives) and scored just seven goals, averaging less than 0.5 goals per game.

The AIFF can only facilitate, strategise and ensure the National Team plays in every FIFA window. Camps, training sessions, and opponents are selected based on inputs from the Chief Coach.

India's age-group teams have also failed to qualify for the FIFA U-17 or U-20 World Cups or even continental tournaments. How can this be fixed?

Youth development must begin early. Players under 11 should be exposed to football to build basic technique. By 12–13, they should be preparing for competition; 14–15 is for regular match play.

Ages 16–17 are for high-performance training, and by 18–20, players should be transitioning to professional setups.

Evaluating the ones who are playing today, we must ask: Did we have a structured youth development system 10 years ago? If not, we must ensure today's youngsters don't face the same gap.

The new MRA draft from FSDL proposes a 10-year moratorium on promotion and relegation in the ISL. Doesn't this violate the 2019 roadmap signed with the AFC?

FSDL submitted the proposal on March 5, and it was discussed in our Executive Committee meeting on April 7. A counter-proposal was then sent to FSDL.

Since the matter is sub judice, I cannot comment further.

Why is the ISL not listed in the AIFF's official calendar?

FSDL has yet to officially announce ISL's start and end dates. However,

R. V. MOORTHY

the normal period for the league is between September and March.

What is the update on including PIO/OCI players in the national team? Can you share the names of the 33 shortlisted players?

Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) and Person of Indian Origin (PIO) cardholders are foreign nationals granted limited social and economic rights in India. However, since India does not recognise dual citizenship, these cards do not confer Indian nationality.

Cardholders often have strong ancestral ties to India — through parents, grandparents, or prior residence — which can influence sporting eligibility and, in some cases, allow for national representation.

We are exploring how PIO/OCI players can align with FIFA statutes, Indian citizenship laws, and the national sports policy.

This is an ongoing process, and until we receive clarity from FIFA and the Government of India, we cannot disclose any names.

What are AIFF's plans for the Indian Women's League (IWL)?

The IWL is growing, with expanded participation, the launch of IWL 2, and initiatives like Asmita. Our goal is to widen the talent pool and strengthen the ecosystem.

Many ISL players underperform at the national level despite high salaries from their clubs. Is AIFF considering salary caps?

Player salaries are contracts between clubs and individuals. The AIFF cannot intervene in these matters.

The Supreme Court verdict on the AIFF constitution is due on July 18. How will the AIFF respond?

The Supreme Court is the highest authority in our country. The AIFF will fully abide by any judgment it delivers.

Several clubs have opted out of the Durand Cup. What is AIFF's roadmap for this tournament? And what's the status of the Federation Cup? Will it replace the Super Cup?

The Durand Cup is organised independently by the Indian Army. AIFF will continue to support it with technical assistance and a tournament slot.

The Super Cup continues as planned, and its scheduling will depend on the finalised league (ISL) calendar.

What did you take away from your recent meeting with Arsene Wenger?

I learned about a new FIFA 8v8 Under-15 competition to be played on half-sized pitches, designed to improve ball control and build-up play. India will participate in this initiative.

Mr. Wenger also stressed that beginning football at 13 is too late — players should start by age eight. In India, most children begin around 12–13. Through the Golden Baby League and Blue Cubs, we are trying

Youth reboot: Arsene Wenger's India visit may help reboot how the country grooms its next football generation.
BISWARANJAN ROUT

to change that and encourage earlier participation.

Is there a long-term plan for youth coaching and talent scouting?

We currently have 16,696 AFC/AIFF-licensed coaches and 3,29,945 players registered under the CRS system. This season, we've organised 1,697 matches.

League participation has increased, but we still need more licensed coaches actively involved at the grassroots level. To address this, AIFF is identifying 500 coaches for retraining and deployment across India. The first phase was held in Bhubaneswar with 54 coaches.

Many states lack structured leagues and are affected by factionalism and court cases. What is the AIFF doing to enforce league schedules and timely elections?

Sponsorship at the state level remains difficult. Without consistent financial backing, long-term planning suffers.

Each State/UT Association has its own constitution and operates under it. However, court cases are a major hurdle— whenever factions lose elections, they often resort to litigation.

Currently, there are nearly 275 sports-related court cases in which the Indian Olympic Association is involved.

At the start of your tenure, you prioritised grassroots development over hosting major events. Why did AIFF then bid for the 2031 AFC Asian Cup? Has the vision changed?

The vision hasn't changed. Multiple areas must grow together — grassroots development, international hosting, coach/referee education, and structural support. All these components must move forward together to build a strong football.

The FIFA–AIFF TDS Academy has already made an impact at the U-15 level and in IWL-2. We plan to launch more such academies in the coming months.

Secondly, when we hosted the U-17 Women's World Cup, we lost our first match 0-8 against the USA. This clearly showed that our preparation was not adequate.

The AIFF's EC Meeting on November 16, 2022, stated: "AIFF decided to withdraw its bid (for Asian Cup 2027) due to infrastructure delays, a strong competing bid from Saudi Arabia, and concerns over team preparedness. A cost-benefit analysis showed a negative return, with an estimated investment of Rs. 5,000 crores needed for stadiums, facilities, and tournament operations. Therefore, a practical collective decision has been taken to bid for 2031 AFC Asian Cup with better preparation."

NAAC GRADE A+
ACCREDITED UNIVERSITY

REVA UNIVERSITY
Bengaluru, India

A UNIVERSE OF
OPPORTUNITIES

Scan the
QR Code

Admissions Closing Soon
2025

CET Code : E - 232 | ComedK Code : E - 164

500+	4055	INR 40 LPA	1 Lakh per Month
Recruitment Partners	**Job Offers** (Still Counting)	Highest Package	Highest Stipend (Internship)

AI-Aligned Curriculum	Learn and Earn Opportunity	Innovate & Learn at REVA Research Centre	80+ Startups Incubated at REVA NEST
Sports and Athlete Wellness	Add-on Certification and Minor Programmes	Industry Connect through Internships	Experiential Learning

Engineering | Architecture | Design
REVA Business School | Management | Commerce
Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences
Science & Technology | Law | Performing Arts

REVA University will consider **JEE, COMED-K, CUET, KCET & Other State or National-level Entrance Exam Scores for B. Tech**

Call 90211 90211

Apply Online **@ reva.edu.in**

OFFICE OF ADMISSIONS
REVA University, Rukumini Knowledge Park,
Kattigenahalli, Yelahanka, Bengaluru,
Karnataka 560064

Revitalising Bihar Through Sports: Inside Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's Vision for Athletic Excellence

With the launch of the Chief Minister's Sports Development Scheme, Bihar is setting a **bold new agenda** that aims to make the state a national leader in sports infrastructure, talent identification, and athlete welfare.

The upcoming **State Sports Academy-cum-International Cricket Stadium** will be part of the Rajgir Sports Complex, which aims to support over 25 sports including hockey, football, swimming, kabaddi, volleyball, and wrestling.

Bihar, a land steeped in history and intellectual legacy, is undergoing a quiet but profound transformation. This change is not being driven by its famed educational institutions or political milestones, but by something that has long remained under the radar — sports. With the launch of the Chief Minister's Sports Development Scheme, Bihar is setting a bold new agenda that aims to make the state a national leader in sports infrastructure, talent identification, and athlete welfare.

The initiative is not just about building playgrounds or hosting tournaments. It is a comprehensive mission that touches every aspect of athletic development — from grassroots facilities and residential training academies to scholarships, jobs, and international-standard infrastructure. For a state that has historically lagged behind in sporting achievements, this marks a significant turning point.

At the heart of this transformation is the belief that sports can empower the youth, promote community well-being, and uplift the state's image on both national and international stages.

A New Foundation: Stadiums and Sports Buildings

The backbone of any sports ecosystem is its infrastructure. Recognising this, the state government has launched an unprecedented drive to build modern, accessible sports facilities across all its administrative blocks. Out of Bihar's 534 blocks, 252 already have fully constructed outdoor stadiums. An additional 64 are currently under construction, while 58 are at the active development stage. Proposals for stadiums have been received from 163 more blocks, indicating strong grassroots interest and participation in the program.

For young athletes who show exceptional promise, the state is setting up residential training centres based on the **Eklavya model.** These centres identify talented boys and girls from government schools and provide them with a complete support system.

In parallel, the government is developing multi-purpose sports buildings and gymnasiums in each district. These facilities serve a dual purpose — they provide athletes with training and fitness resources, and also act as community hubs where citizens can engage in health and wellness activities. So far, 25 districts have completed these sports-cum-fitness centres, and another 13 have received official approval for construction. This wave of infrastructure development reflects an important shift in policy thinking — from reactive support to proactive investment.

Financial Incentives for Performance: The Sports Scholarship Program

Beyond physical infrastructure, the state is making strategic financial interventions to support its athletes. The Sports Scholarship Scheme, launched under the Chief Minister's plan, provides monetary support to deserving athletes so they can train and compete without financial stress. In the fiscal year 2024–25 alone, a total of ₹7.15 crore has been allocated, directly benefiting 128 talented athletes across the state.

For many young sportspersons, this scholarship serves not only as a financial lifeline but also as a validation of their efforts and potential. It reassures them that their state believes in their journey and is committed to helping them succeed.

The World's Largest Sports Talent Hunt: MASHAAL 2024

One of the most ambitious undertakings within the Chief Minister's Sports Development Scheme is 'Mashaal 2024', touted as the largest sports talent search campaign in the world. This initiative

has set out to uncover young talent from every government school in the state.

As of date 16 lakh students have registered across the state to participate in the sports competitions. Students will compete across five different sports disciplines in an organised, state-wide competition. The best performers will be selected under a special program known as 'Prerna', through which they will receive high-quality coaching, modern training, and carefully monitored nutrition plans. What sets Mashaal 2024 apart is its scale and inclusivity.

By reaching into every government-run school, it democratises access to competitive sports. The campaign ensures that talent is not lost due to geographic or socio-economic disadvantages — a critical step toward building a level playing field for all children in Bihar.

Transforming Villages into Sporting Hubs

To truly make sports a part of everyday life, the initiative goes far beyond schools and cities. It aims to make every village in Bihar a participant in this movement. The state has set a goal to build at least one sports field in each of its 8,053 gram panchayats. As of now, construction work has begun in 8,018 of these panchayats, bringing structured sports activities into even the remotest areas. Alongside this, local sports clubs are being promoted to organise competitions, training camps, and recreational events. An overwhelming 20,962 applications have already been received for the formation of these sports clubs, reflecting the community's enthusiasm and willingness to participate. This decentralised approach is essential for creating a sustainable sports culture. By embedding facilities and activities into local communities, the state is ensuring that sports is no

One of the most ambitious undertakings within the Chief Minister's Sports Development Scheme is **Mashaal 2024**, touted as the largest sports talent search campaign in the world set out to uncover young talent from every government school in the state.

Under CM Nitish Kumar's direct supervision and persistent vision, Bihar emerged not only as a host but as a bold claimant to future leadership in India's evolving sporting ecosystem.

To host major events and provide elite training opportunities, the government is building international-grade sports facilities in all divisional headquarters. These include **synthetic athletic tracks, indoor arenas, modern swimming pools, and hockey turfs t**hat comply with global standards.

longer an elite activity but a mass movement.

Residential Training: The Eklavya Sports Centres

For young athletes who show exceptional promise, the state is setting up residential training centres based on the Eklavya model. These centres identify talented boys and girls from government schools and provide them with a complete support system.

This includes scientifically designed training programs, balanced and nutritious meals, modern sports equipment, and

academic education. By combining education and sports in one cohesive environment, these centres aim to groom the next generation of elite athletes in a holistic manner.

This model mirrors the best international practices where athletes are identified early, trained systematically, and supported emotionally and financially throughout their journey. With such an infrastructure, Bihar is taking a bold step toward professionalising its sports ecosystem.

Recognition and Rewards: National Sports Day Celebrations

Every year, on August 29, Bihar celebrates National Sports Day with a grand honour ceremony that recognises athletes who have brought glory to the state.

The Chief Minister personally acknowledges those who have won medals at national-level competitions, awarding them with trophies, certificates, and financial rewards.

One of the strongest testaments to the seriousness of the scheme is the government's decision to offer jobs to successful athletes. To date, **367 talented sportspersons** have been given government jobs based on their achievements.

This formal recognition plays a vital role in raising the status of sports in society. It motivates young athletes to strive for excellence and gives them a platform to showcase their achievements. More importantly, it signals to families and communities that sports is not just an extracurricular activity — it is a profession worthy of respect and investment.

Creating Careers in Sports

One of the strongest testaments to the seriousness of the scheme is the government's decision to offer jobs to successful athletes. To date, 367 talented sportspersons have been given government jobs based on their achievements. This is more than just an employment drive — it's a policy that connects performance with livelihood, offering athletes long-term security. It sends a powerful message: if you work hard and represent your state or country, you will be rewarded not just with applause, but with opportunities for a stable life.

Building Global-Standard Sports Infrastructure

To host major events and provide elite training opportunities, the government is building international-grade sports facilities in all divisional headquarters. These include synthetic athletic tracks, indoor arenas, modern swimming pools, and hockey turfs that comply with global standards.

Such infrastructure will not only raise the quality of training but also allow Bihar to host national and international events in the future. It represents a key step in positioning the state as a sports destination, attracting investments, media

attention, and tourism.

In a remarkable moment that has elevated Bihar's position on India's sporting map, the 7th edition of the Khelo India Youth Games (KIYG) was successfully hosted in the state in May 2025. The event marked a significant achievement not just in terms of sports participation and infrastructure development, but also in terms of the transformative leadership of Bihar's Chief Minister, Nitish Kumar. Under his direct supervision and persistent vision, Bihar emerged not only as a host but as a bold claimant to future leadership in India's evolving sporting ecosystem. The magnitude of the event was unprecedented in Bihar's history. Spanning 12 days, the Khelo India Youth Games 2025 brought together over 6000 athletes from across 36 states and union territories. These participants competed across 28 disciplines ranging from athletics, boxing, and wrestling to indigenous sports like kho-kho, kabaddi, and thang-ta. The Games were spread across five cities — Patna, Rajgir, Gaya, Bhagalpur, and Begusarai — each hosting multiple disciplines and welcoming waves of enthusiastic participants, officials, and spectators. Hosting an event of this scale demanded enormous logistical coordination, which was efficiently orchestrated by the state under the leadership of Nitish Kumar.

As stadiums rise, scholarships reach young athletes, and training centres nurture hidden talent, Bihar is scripting a **new narrative** — one of strength, stamina, and spirit.

Rajgir's International Sports City

The crown jewel of Bihar's sports renaissance is currently under development in Rajgir. A massive 90-acre land parcel has been acquired for the construction of a State Sports Academy-cum-International Cricket Stadium. With an investment of ₹740 crore, this project is one of the most ambitious in the state's history. The foundation stone was laid by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on 12 October 2018. Designed to meet international standards, the stadium is being constructed by the Shapoorji Pallonji Group and is modelled after the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Spread across 90 acres, the stadium will have a seating capacity of approximately 45,000, making it the largest in Bihar. It will feature modern amenities such as dedicated pavilions for players, VIP stands, coaches' boxes, cafeterias, and rest areas for spectators.

It is part of the larger Rajgir Sports Complex, which aims to support over 25 sports including hockey, football, swimming, kabaddi, volleyball, and wrestling. The stadium will also include a sports academy, research and training centers, a library, and indoor facilities.

Once completed, it is expected to serve as the home ground for the Bihar cricket team and host national and international matches, contributing significantly to the growth of sports infrastructure in the state. Once completed, the complex will feature world-class amenities for cricket and other sports, residential facilities for athletes, and centres for research and sports medicine. It is designed not just as a venue but as a full-fledged ecosystem where excellence is nurtured, and champions are created. This project symbolises Bihar's transition from a state with isolated athletes to a state that builds champions.

Breathing New Life into Patna's Iconic Moin-ul-Haq Stadium

Another key milestone is the

Another key milestone is the planned revival of Patna's **Moin-ul-Haq Stadium,** once the heartbeat of cricket in the region. The government has signed a memorandum of understanding with an institution affiliated with the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to upgrade and modernise the stadium.

planned revival of Patna's Moin-ul-Haq Stadium, once the heartbeat of cricket in the region. The government has signed a memorandum of understanding with an institution affiliated with the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to upgrade and modernise the stadium.

This partnership ensures technical expertise and credibility. Once revamped, the stadium will be capable of hosting high-profile domestic and international matches. For local players, it means exposure to top-tier events without leaving home — and for fans, a chance to witness world-class sports in their own backyard.

A Bold Leap into the Future

The Chief Minister's Sports Development Scheme is not merely a government program — it is a visionary project with the power to transform lives, uplift communities, and reshape Bihar's identity.

It is inclusive in design, ambitious in scale, and grounded in the belief that every child deserves a chance to dream, train, and excel.

As stadiums rise, scholarships reach young athletes, and training centres nurture hidden talent, Bihar is scripting a new narrative — one of strength, stamina, and spirit.

The impact of this transformation will be felt not just in medals and records, but in the confidence of its youth, the unity of its communities, and the pride of its people.

In the next decade, when Bihar athletes' step onto global podiums or take centre stage in national leagues, their journey will trace back to this bold, visionary step.

Bihar is not just playing the game — it is changing the rules.

BACK TO BASICS

India's football dreams suffer from late starts, poor infrastructure, and fleeting plans. Can grassroots revival spark a **lasting change?**

Neeladri Bhattacharjee
neeladri.b@thehindu.co.in

FOR MORE STORIES

Indian football, once termed the 'sleeping giant of Asia', now basks in its reflected glory.

A FIFA ranking outside the top 120, no competitive wins in nearly two years, and a quagmire in the domestic setup — India languishes in one of the darkest chapters of its footballing history.

But is there a way out of the dungeon?

There are two ways to go about it from here — use foreign imports of Indian descent for quick success, or strengthen the grassroots to create an assembly line for a better future.

While the former remains partially outside the All India Football Federation's (AIFF) purview — it would require a rule change by the Central Government — the latter has seen Asian countries like Uzbekistan and Japan reach the pinnacle of international football, the FIFA World

Cup, through grassroots development.

"Academies are not just meant to build players; they are long-term assets for the country," Subrata Paul, the director of the national team, tells *Sportstar*. "They are the heart and soul of a country's footballing future."

So, why has it not been successful in transforming India?

A late start

The Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) plan, developed by sports scientist Dr. Istvan Balyi, is one of the most globally accepted models for youth development, in football and otherwise.

Stage 1: Active Start (0-6 years old)
Stage 2: FUNdamental (6-9)
Stage 3: Learn to Train (9-12)
Stage 4: Train to Train (12-16)
Stage 5: Train to Compete (16-19)
Stage 6: Train to Win (19+)
Stage 7: Active for Life (any age)

Accordingly, most academies in leading footballing countries admit recruits from Stage 2 — having scouted the best from Stage 1 — typically at the age of six. Case in point — La Masia (Barcelona), Ajax Amsterdam, and Bayern Munich. Spain and Barcelona sensation Lamine Yamal joined La Masia when he was seven.

In India, the starting age for football academies is typically 12 — double the global standard — missing an entire stage of cognitive and physical development.

"I believe India has always invested a lot in education. But football is not like any other job. Unfortunately, it starts at a very young age. You cannot start to play football at 15 years of age. You have to start at 5-6 years because you have to find your feet," former Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger had said during his visit to India two years ago.

"When we started, we kept the minimum age at eight. But there are no competitions. I can't keep training them all day without testing them," rues Ranjit Bajaj, the founder of Minerva Academy, one of the few to field teams in every age-group tournament in India.

"It's hardly productive. So, we eventually moved to 12."

Though the country now has a league for kids between ages 6-12,

Patient rebuild: 'Patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet' — India needs to accept the mess it is in and ride on patience and hard work to grow the beautiful game. AIFF MEDIA

Foundational football: The Golden Baby Leagues is a long-term player development initiative designed to nurture a new generation of footballers — boys and girls — by introducing them to the game at the youngest age possible. AIFF MEDIA

called the Golden Baby Leagues (GBL), the matches are anything but competitive and are fairly low in number. For instance, an I-League or Indian Super League (ISL) team is mandated to play 21 matches in GBL to secure its license. At La Masia, the number of matches ranges from 40 to 55, and based on the players' ability, they are promoted.

"I was talking to a goalkeeper from Tajikistan during our latest trip there," says Priyansh Dubey, the goalkeeper of India's U-23 side.

"He told me that he started playing when he was six or seven. That's what makes them better. When I started playing (at the age of 12), they had already trained for four to five years."

The coronavirus pandemic only made things worse.

Over the last 10 years, the U-17, U-15 (started in 2015), and U-13 (started in 2017) leagues ran until 2019, when COVID-19 halted them temporarily.

The last two returned four years later, while the U-17 tournament resumed a year prior. In a country that starts developing players six years late, that's a decade of football development lost.

Subroto Cup, India's oldest school football tournament, has also suffered. Madhyamgram High School, the record seven-time winner of the U-17 tournament, has failed to reach the finals since 1996. Once the launchpad for future India stars like Shyam Thapa, Bhaichung Bhutia and Bruno Coutinho, it is a shadow of its past — mired in controversies, with five teams disqualified last year for fielding overage players.

The scouts of ISL clubs, these days, prefer AIFF Junior (U-17) and sub-junior (U-15) tournaments over the Subroto Cup.

Inconsistent presence of academies

The presence of academies across all age groups has also been inconsistent. According to the AIFF, there are 94 accredited academies.

But the ones that have consistently participated in all four age-groups — U-13, U-15, U-18, and U-21 — over the last 10 years and at the national level are just 10, a mere 10.6 per cent.

Clubs with consistent participation across all four age-groups (2015–2025)

- Reliance Foundation Young Champs (RFYC)
- Minerva Academy
- Sudeva Delhi FC
- Bhaichung Bhutia Football Schools (BBFS)
- Tata Football Academy (TFA, now called Jamshedpur FC Academy)
- Madras FC (formerly FC Madras)
- Bengaluru FC Academy
- Kerala Blasters FC Academy
- FC Goa Academy
- Chennaiyin FC Academy

There are two main reasons here. Firstly, the scheduling of age-group tournaments and the criteria have not remained uniform — an updated set of rules has been released before each season in the last decade.

Secondly, a lot of old academies — DSK Shivajians, JCT Mills, Mahindra FA, and the AIFF's own academy side, the Indian Arrows — have gone

> « Only 13 of the 43 players called up to the national camp in the past year came from ISL club academies »

The past and the present: While some old academies — Lallianzuala Chhangte (top left) is a product of the now-defunct DSK Shivajians FC — shut, several new ones have come up. Priyansh Dubey (above) is a product of the Reliance Foundation Young Champs. AIFF MEDIA

defunct, while several new ones — Punjab FC (since 2020), Mumbai City FC (since 2022), and the AIFF-FIFA Academy — have come up or ramped up their operations across age-group tournaments.

JCT Mills had once honed India's record goalscorer Sunil Chhetri, while Lallianzuala Chhangte, one of India's best wingers at the moment, is a Shivajians' product.

"If they had continued, they could have helped produce a lot more players. To have an academy, it's not easy to sustain one," laments Renedy Singh, former India captain and a graduate of the TFA's second batch in 1996.

"Back then, TFA was the only major academy. We had foreign exposure trips every year, the best training, and there were a few coaches who used to come from abroad. For me, TFA gave us the lifeline; all thanks to Ranjan (Bhattacharya) sir, (Mohammed Habib) Habib sir and PK Banerjee sir, who was the director."

"There was a time when 10 out of the 11 players in India's U-19 team were from TFA, including me. We played against Japan, Qatar, China and Bangladesh," Renedy adds.

From 1992 until 2022, 273 cadets have graduated from TFA — 147 of them have played for India, with 24 leading the Blue Tigers. However, the number of national team players from the academy has fallen drastically — from 17 in the first batch to just four in 2022.

The academies of ISL clubs, on the other hand, have failed to be the primary feeder for the senior team. In the last 12 months, 43 players have been called up for the national camp. Only 13 of them came through ISL clubs' academies.

Exposure trips have also played an important role. Minerva won the U-13 Gothia Cup in Sweden two years ago, while RFYC has had trips to Malaysia and Japan.

"I think the best example is when we went to the SuperMokh Cup in Malaysia. In 2022, we lost 0-8 and 0-7 in the U-14 category. Two years later, we won against two of the best academies in Malaysia in the same section," Robert Roelofsen, RFYC's Head of Youth Development, says.

"Playing abroad makes it easier to play in India rather than keep playing here. I let in some soft goals in Japan last year (SANIX Cup 2024). That gave me an idea about what I was doing wrong," Priyansh remembers.

"I worked on them, and when I came back to India, I confidently played over 35 matches for Mohun Bagan." Priyansh won the Golden Glove in the U-21 tournament this season.

A silver lining

India, however, is slowly learning to stitch its wounds — starting with the sculptors: the coaches.

Since 2022, the number of licensed coaches in India has increased by 86 per cent, with 500 of them currently under technical training to step up.

The AIFF-FIFA Academy now has an U-15 team that reached the semifinals of the AIFF U-17 Youth League this season.

"Evaluating the ones who are playing today, we must ask: Did we have a structured youth development system 10 years ago? If not, we must ensure today's youngsters don't face the same gap," Kalyan Chaubey, the president of AIFF, says.

India's tragedy does not lie in the fact that it can't produce world-class footballers. It lies in the obsession with quick results — the love for instant noodles over home-grown, self-cooked produce made with hard work. That needs to change.

It needs to accept the mess it is in, strive judiciously, and ride on patience to grow the beautiful game.

HIDDEN FIELDS

A closer look at the **state-level** action shaping Indian football.

Beyond the Indian Super League and I-League lies a vast network of state-run competitions that nurture local talent and build the foundation for tomorrow's stars. Here's a look at the leagues, cups, and tournaments organised by state associations across the country.

J&K and LADAKH

Registered districts: 28 and 0; **Approved clubs:** 136 and 64; **Total players registered:** 2,157 and 616; **Competitions:** Srinagar Premier League — three divisions for men (Premier, Super and A) and none for women. Each district has their own local league.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

Registered districts: 12; **Approved clubs:** 52; **Total players registered:** 2,012; **Competitions:** Himachal Football League (10 teams), Himachal Women's League

PUNJAB

Registered districts: 23; **Approved clubs:** 298; **Total players registered:** 9,479; **Competitions:** Punjab State Super League (12 teams), Punjab State League Second Division, Punjab State League Third Division, Punjab Women's League

ANDAMAN & NICOBAR

Registered districts: 3; **Approved clubs:** 1; **Total players registered:** 279; **Competitions:** Only sends teams for Santosh Trophy and Senior Women's National Football Championship

ANDHRA PRADESH

Registered districts: 28; **Approved clubs:** 168; **Total players registered:** 2121; **Competitions:** Andhra Pradesh Super Cup (eight teams)

TAMIL NADU and PONDICHERRY

Registered districts: 31 and 4; **Approved clubs:** 312 and 82; **Total players registered:** 9212 and 2847; **Competitions:** Chennai Football League (eight teams; was suspended from 2018 to 2022 due to disputes between the Chennai FA and the Tamil Nadu FA. The current season is on hold due to TNFA elections), Pondicherry Men's League, Pondicherry Women's League

ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Registered districts: 23; **Approved clubs:** 107; **Total players registered:** 1,609; **Competitions:** Indrajit Namchoom Arunachal League (12 teams), Tadar Tang State Level Football Tournament, Arunachal Women's Football Championship

ASSAM

Registered districts: 46; **Approved clubs:** 808; **Total players registered:** 11,629; **Competitions:** Assam State Premier League (eight teams), Assam Club Championship, Khirod Baruah Senior Inter-District Football Championship, Assam Women's League, Gobinda Ram Mour and Banarshi Devi Senior Women's Inter-District Football Championship

BIHAR

Registered districts: 39; **Approved clubs:** 54; **Total players registered:** 1,605; **Competitions:** Bihar State Soccer League (seven teams), Moin-ul-Haq Cup, All India Chaturbhuj Cup, Bihar State Women's League

CHHATTISGARH

Registered districts: 40; **Approved clubs:** 237; **Total players registered:** 6,205; **Competitions:** Only sends teams for the Santosh Trophy and the Senior Women's National Football Championship

DADRA & NAGAR HAVELI and DAMAN & DIU

Registered districts: 2; **Approved clubs:** 38; **Total players registered:** 484; **Competitions:** Dadra & Nagar Haveli Senior Division League (eight teams), Daman and Diu Senior Division League (seven teams)

DELHI

Registered districts: 9; **Approved clubs:** 154; **Total players registered:** 11,973; **Competitions:** Delhi Premier League (12 teams), FD Senior Division League, FD A-Division; FD B-Division, FD C-Division, FD Women's Premier League, FD Women's B-Division League

GOA

Registered districts: 2; **Approved clubs:** 268; **Total players registered:** 10,219; **Competitions:** Goa Professional League (teams), GFA First Division League, GFA Second Division League, GFA Third Division League, Bandodkar Trophy, Goa Police Cup, Goa Women's League

ODISHA

Registered districts: 33; **Approved clubs:** 491; **Total players registered:** 7,430; **Competitions:** FAO League [Four divisions: Diamond League (eight teams), Gold League (seven teams), Silver League Group A (four teams) and Silver League Group B (four teams)], FAO Super Cup, Kalinga Cup, Sahani Cup (Senior Inter-District Football Championship), Odisha Women's League, PC Behera Trophy (Senior Women Inter-District Football Championship)

GUJARAT

Registered districts: 33; **Approved clubs:** 375; **Total players registered:** 15,384; **Competitions:** Gujarat SFA Club Championship (six teams), Gujarat Super League (six teams), Gujarat State Women's League

HARYANA

Registered districts: 22; **Approved clubs:** 56; **Total players registered:** 2,092; **Competitions:** Haryana Men's Football League (eight teams), Haryana Women's Football League

WEST BENGAL

Registered districts: 19; **Approved clubs:** 399; **Total players registered:** 36,465; **Competitions:** Calcutta Football League [Seven divisions: Premier Division, Division 1-4, Groups A & B in Division 5], IFA Shield, Trades Cup, Uttarbanga Cup, Jayanta Chatterjee Inter-District Football Tournament, Calcutta Women's Football League, Women's IFA Shield

JHARKHAND

Registered districts: 24; **Approved clubs:** 716; **Total players registered:** 2,693; **Competions:** JSA League Premier Division (11 teams), JSA League Super Division, JSA League A Division, JSA Women's League

CHANDIGARH

Registered districts: 1; **Approved clubs:** 67; **Total players registered:** 1,636; **Competitions:** Only sends teams for the Santosh Trophy and the Senior Women's National Football Championship

KERALA

Registered districts: 14; **Approved clubs:** 854; **Total players registered:** 63,138; **Competitions:** Kerala Premier League (14 teams), 2nd Division Kerala Premier League, Super League Kerala (franchise), Inter-District State Championship Senior Men, Kerala Women's League, Inter-District State Championship Senior Women

MEGHALAYA

Registered districts: 20; **Approved clubs:** 134; **Total players registered:** 3,012; **Competitions:** Meghalaya State League (24 teams), Shillong Premier League, Meghalaya Women's State League

KARNATAKA

Registered districts: 31; **Approved clubs:** 880; **Total players registered:** 26,021; **Competitions:** BDFA Super Division (18 teams), BDFA A Division, BDFA B Division, BDFA C Division, Stafford Challenge Cup, Karnataka Women's Super Division League, Karnataka Women's A Division League, Karnataka Women's B Division League

NAGALAND

Registered districts: 16; **Approved clubs:** 54; **Total players registered:** 614; **Competitions:** Nagaland Super League (seven teams)

MIZORAM

Registered districts: 11; **Approved clubs:** 253; **Total players registered:** 5,776; **Competitions:** Mizoram Premier League (eight teams), Independence Day Cup, MFA Super Cup, MFA Cup, Mizoram Women's League

RAJASTHAN

Registered districts: 33; **Approved clubs:** 92; **Total players registered:** 6,795; **Competitions:** Rajasthan State Men's League — R-League A Division (11 teams), Mohan Kumar Mangalam Football Tournament

MADHYA PRADESH

Registered districts: 54; **Approved clubs:** 475; **Total players registered:** 9,508; **Competitions:** Madhya Pradesh Premier League (nine teams), Madhya Pradesh Women's Premier League

SIKKIM

Registered districts: 8; **Approved clubs:** 88; **Total players registered:** 1,893; **Competitions:** SFA A Division S-League (eight teams), SFA B Division, SFA C Division; Sikkim Premier League (nine teams), Sikkim Gold Cup; Chogyal Sir Tashi Namgyal Memorial Independence Cup, All India Chief Minister's Gold Cup

MANIPUR

Registered districts: 24; **Approved clubs:** 535; **Total players registered:** 14,713; **Competitions:** Manipur State League (17 teams), AMFA Cup, Thangjam Birchandra-Maipakpi Memorial Winners' Cup, Manipur Premier League (18 teams), Manipur Women's League

TELANGANA

Registered districts: 11; **Approved clubs:** 79; **Total players registered:** 2,715; **Competitions:** Rahim League A Division (12 teams)

UTTARAKHAND

Registered districts:13; **Approved clubs:** 42; **Total players registered:** 2,134; **Competitions:** Uttarakhand State Men's and Women's Leagues

UTTAR PRADESH

Registered districts: 77; **Approved clubs:** 161; **Total players registered:** 7,176; **Competitions:** Uttar Pradesh Super League (proposed)

LAKSHADWEEP

Registered districts: 1; **Approved clubs:** 24; **Total players registered:** 301; **Competitions:** *Kavaratti Football League

MAHARASHTRA

Registered districts: 36; **Approved clubs:** 1,307; **Total players registered:** 51,416; **Competitions:** WIFA Inter-District Men's Championship (35 teams), Maharashtra State Senior Men's Football League, Maharashtra State Senior Women's Football League, WIFA Inter-District Women's Championship

TRIPURA

Registered districts: 6; **Approved clubs:** 80; **Total players registered:** 2,570; **Competitions:** Chandra Memorial: A (10 teams), B and C Division Leagues, Rakhal Shield Football Tournament, Baikunth Nath Memorial Women's Football League

STATE WISE REPRESENTATION IN 2024-25 SEASON

ISL 2024-25

Karnataka — **Bengaluru FC**
Tamil Nadu — **Chennaiyin FC**
West Bengal— **East Bengal FC, Mohun Bagan Super Giant and Mohammedan SC**
Goa — **FC Goa**
Telangana — **Hyderabad FC**
Jharkhand — **Jamshedpur FC**
Kerala — **Kerala Blasters FC**
Maharashtra — **Mumbai City FC**
Odisha — **Odisha FC**
Punjab — **Punjab FC**
Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura — **NorthEast United FC**

I-League 2024-25

Mizoram — **Aizawl FC**
Goa — **Churchill Brothers and Dempo**
Delhi — **Delhi FC**
Kerala — **Gokulam Kerala**
Uttar Pradesh — **Inter Kashi**
Punjab — **Namdhari**
Rajasthan — **Rajasthan United**
Jammu & Kashmir — **Real Kashmir**
Meghalaya — **Shillong Lajong**
Karnataka — **Sporting Bengaluru**
Telangana — **Sreenidi Deccan**

I-League(2) 2024-25

Karnataka — **Bengaluru United**
Mizoram — **Chanmari**
West Bengal — **Diamond Harbour FC and United Sports Club**
Manipur — **Keinou Library and Sports Association Football Club (KLASA FC), North Eastern Re-Organising Cultural Association Football Club (NEROCA FC) and Tiddim Road Athletic Union Football Club (TRAU FC)**
Kerala — **Sports Academy Tirur**
Goa — **Sporting Clube De Goa**

Data updated as of June 30. Visuals not to scale.

Text by Aneesh Dey, Saikat Chakraborty and Joan Mathew Jacob

DOWNFALL BY DESIGN

With the I-League growing increasingly irrelevant, India's football structure is faltering at its foundations.

Neeladri Bhattacharjee and Aashin Prasad
neeladri.b@thehindu.co.in, aashin.p@thehindu.co.in

The I-League, which operated as the Indian top division for 12 years between 2007 and 2019, has delivered thrilling stories and nail-biting title races. Yet, year after year, its struggles have only been compounded. Meanwhile, the Indian Super League (ISL), initially launched as a franchise tournament in 2014, became Indian football's top-flight in 2019.

Stripped of its top-tier status, coupled with poor scheduling, lack of marketing and insufficient broadcasting, the I-League has seen several clubs pushed into disarray. Since 2014, eight clubs from the league have shut down, including former champions Salgaocar FC and Chennai City FC. The I-League has borne the brunt of the All India Football Federation's (AIFF's) apathy towards its own competition.

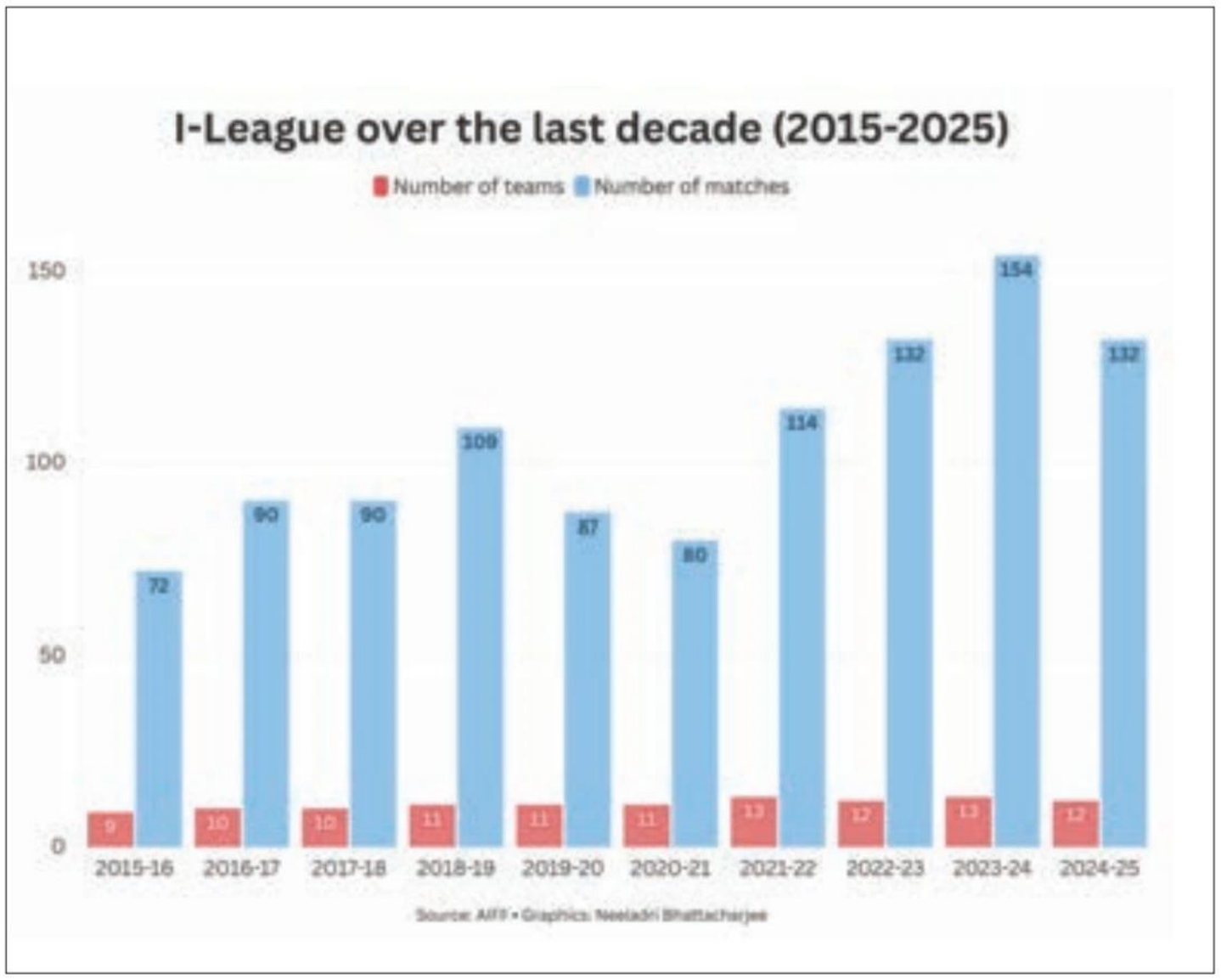
MRA responsible for I-League misery

V. C. Praveen, the owner of Gokulam Kerala, points to the Master Rights Agreement (MRA) signed between the AIFF and Football Sports Development Limited (FSDL) in 2010 as the root cause of the second division's predicament.

"From scheduling onwards, everything about Indian football is very poor now. The minute the MRA was signed, Indian football was killed," says Praveen. "They were only safeguarding their interest. The AIFF was very comfortable with the marketing money they were receiving, so they became very lazy."

In 2016, three Goan clubs — Dempo SC, Salgaocar FC and Sporting Clube de Goa — withdrew from the I-League, opposing the

Concerning impact: Gokulam Kerala, a two-time I-League champion, is among the clubs that feel the MRA has contributed to the apathy of lower leagues. AIFF MEDIA



move to make the ISL the premier division. The Asian Football Confederation (AFC), in its roadmap with the AIFF, designated the ISL as the sole first division in 2019.

Promotion from the I-League to the ISL was introduced in 2023, with Punjab FC and Mohammedan SC earning ISL spots in the next two seasons. The uncertainty around promotion between 2019 and 2023 financially impacted I-League clubs

"That was the crux of the financial distress we had," says Rohit Ramesh, owner of Chennai City, which won the league in 2019. "If you won the I-League, there was still no guarantee that you would play in the ISL. That was the beginning of the end."

The new MRA draft from FSDL also shuts the door on I-League promotion for the next five years, 'unless explicitly voted for by all stakeholders'.

"What is wrong with promotion and relegation?" asks Praveen. "Indian football is divided into rich and poor, and they don't want the poor to come into the rich man's league. Just because one club fails to meet the demand, they shouldn't say promotion and relegation are difficult or uncomfortable."

"Investors put money into clubs mostly because they see an opportunity to get into the ISL. That has helped the I-League to survive," adds Anuj Gupta, co-founder of former I-League side Sudeva Delhi Football Club, which currently plays in I-League 2. If that stops, the league could shut down because there is no motivation."

Financial struggles aplenty

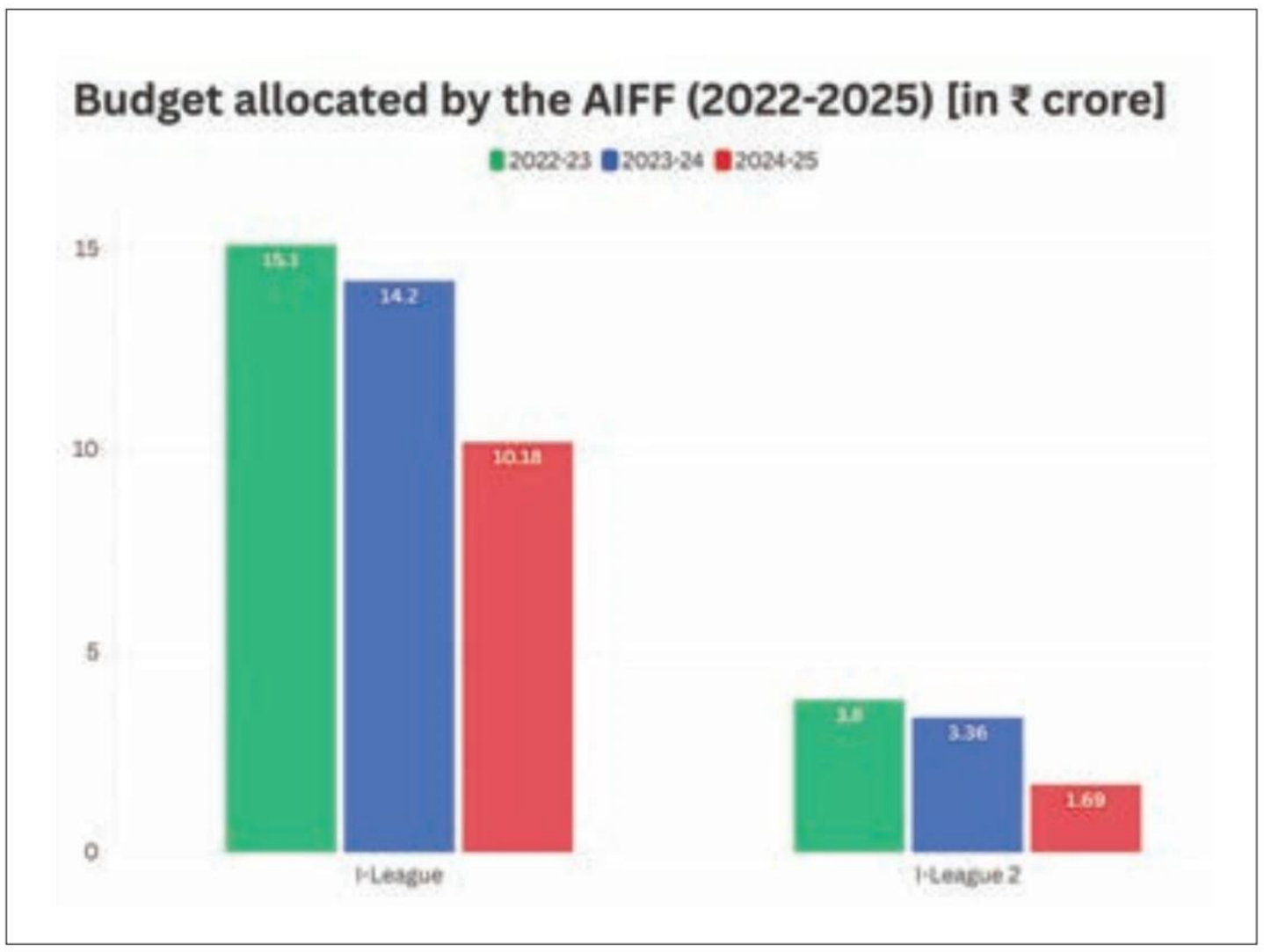
The AIFF's budget allocated for the I-League has kept falling over the years — from ₹15.1 crore in 2021 to ₹10.18 crore last year, marking a 33 per cent drop. Moreover, in 2022, the cost of broadcasting was deducted from the clubs without informing them in advance.

"The production cost in the very first year (under President Kalyan Chaubey) was ₹2 crore. And that money — around ₹17 lakh per club — was taken from their subsidies without even asking them," says Ranjit Bajaj, owner of I-League side Delhi FC, to *Sportstar*.

Clubs receive around ₹50–55 lakh in subsidies, and this deduction hit their finances significantly, by at least 30 per cent.

Last season, with less than two weeks to go before kick-off, clubs managed to bring *Sony Sports* on board as the television broadcaster, paying ₹2 crore from their own pockets.

"Earlier, the I-League was telecast on *Star Sports*. Then they said no one was watching it — so how did we get *Sony*? So, the I-League club owners showed initiative and managed to get all matches broadcast on *Sony TV*," says



All smiles: Diamond Harbour got promoted to I-League after its I-League 2 title win in 2024-25. AIFF MEDIA

Praveen.

Last month, all I-League clubs wrote to the AIFF requesting a reduction in Club Licensing fines so they can survive in the long run.

"These fines, as we have raised in multiple individual and joint discussions with you, are excessive and, in many cases, unjust, given the financial and operational constraints under which I-League clubs operate," read the letter.

Sportstar understands that I-League clubs were fined around ₹2 crore for licensing breaches.

"I feel the biggest losers have been the club owners. At the end of the day, they're spending from their own pockets but not getting even the same returns they did four years ago," Anuj adds.

Issues down the order

Further down the structural pyramid, in I-League 2, similar challenges persist. The AIFF's budget allocation for the league has fallen by over 55 per cent in just three years.

"Limited visibility, inconsistent refereeing standards, infrastructure gaps, and constrained revenue opportunities are all significant hurdles," says Gaurav Manchanda, owner of I-League 2 side FC Bengaluru United (FCBU), established in 2018.

Anuj added that the lack of sponsors and prize money makes the league an uphill battle.

"Last year, we played I-League 2 in a home-and-away format. So, the logistics cost was at least ₹40 to ₹50 lakh," he says. "But we hardly received any money from it. If you finish in the top four of the I-League, you get some prize money. We finished third in I-League 2 last season, but got nothing."

Yet, there are positives to the league. Over the past two seasons, 57 clubs across 23 states have participated in the I-League, I-League 2 and I-League 3, making it a truly pan-India competition.

"The good thing about I-League 2 is that no foreigners are allowed," says Anuj, while Manchanda adds, "The shift from the traditional group stage format to the current qualifier league format has brought much-needed stability and consistency to I-League 2."

Clubs now get a guaranteed 14 games over two to four months, which improves squad planning, financial security, and makes the league more meaningful.

The Indian football pyramid is in disarray, starting from the top-flight. But if the layers below continue to erode, will the topsoil really remain? The AIFF will need to put a lot of thought into that before it's too late.

Pall of gloom: Chennai City FC is one of the eight I-League clubs to have shut down since 2014. NISSAR AHMAD

LOST LEGACIES

A lookback at the Indian clubs that once promised greatness but **vanished** from the radar.

PTI

Saikat Chakraborty and Joan Mathew Jacob
saikat.chakraborty@thehindu.co.in, joan.mathew@thehindu.co.in

Over the past two decades, Indian football has witnessed the rise and fall of several clubs, many of which folded under the weight of financial strain, poor planning, and systemic neglect.

FC Kochin, Kerala

NFL | Disbanded in 2002

FC Kochin, founded in April 1997, was a pioneering professional football club from Kerala. Nicknamed 'The Elephants', it made history by winning the Durand Cup in its debut year. It was the only Kerala club to play in the NFL in the late 1990s, often finishing strongly. Financial difficulties led to its dissolution around 2002.

Fransa-Pax FC, Goa

NFL | Disbanded in 2006

Founded in 2002 in Goa, Fransa-Pax FC competed in the Goa Professional League before gaining promotion to the NFL in the 2004–05 season, finishing fifth. The club controversially folded halfway through the next season after owner Mickky Pacheco accused the AIFF of conspiring to relegate it, leading to its dissolution in March 2006.

Mahindra United FC, Maharashtra

NFL, I-League | Disbanded in 2010

Mahindra United FC was a Mumbai-based club founded in 1962. The club won numerous honours, including the National Football League and Indian Federation Cup domestic double in the 2005–06 season. Additional accolades include winning the Durand Cup thrice and the IFA Shield twice. However, after the 2009–10 season, the club announced that it was shutting down, with the owners claiming they were going to focus on the group's philosophy of developing sport at the grassroots.

JCT FC, Punjab

NFL, I-League | Disbanded in 2011

Jagatjit Cotton & Textile Football Club (JCT FC, **above in red & white**) was established in 1971 in Phagwara, Punjab. Nicknamed 'The Millmen', it famously won the inaugural National Football League in 1996 and multiple Durand Cups and Federation Cups. It was known for nurturing Indian talent, including Indian legend Sunil Chhetri. The senior team disbanded in 2011, though its academy continues and currently participates in the Punjab State Super Football League.

Bengal Mumbai FC, Maharashtra

NFL Div-2 | Disbanded in 2011

Founded in 1998, Bengal Mumbai FC aimed to reach the top tier of Indian football. Affiliated with the Mumbai Football Association (MFA), it achieved immediate success in its inaugural year, winning both the Mumbai Football League and the Rovers Cup. The club competed in the NFL Division II before being dissolved in 2011 due to financial and organisational challenges.

Viva Kerala FC, Kerala

NFL, I-League, Kerala Premier League | Disbanded in 2012

Viva Kerala FC, also known as Chirag United Club Kerala, was a team founded in 2004 and based in the city of Kochi. It participated in the NFL, the I-League, and the Kerala Premier League.

The side's only triumph came during the 2005–06 season, when it lifted the KPL title. Following an unsuccessful stint in the I-League in subsequent years, the club was dissolved due to financial distress caused by a lack of proper sponsorship.

Travancore Titanium FC, Kerala

Kerala Premier League and I-League 2 | Disbanded in 2015

Travancore Titanium FC, founded in 1973 and based in present-day Thiruvananthapuram, primarily played in the Kerala Premier League and the Kerala State Club Football Championship, while also

Into obscurity: Mumbai FC (left), former winners of the I-League 2nd Division and MDFA Elite League, folded in 2019, while the institutional side HAL (right) struggled to adapt and faded from top-tier football. K. MURALI KUMAR

participating in the I-League 2nd Division. It won the KPL once in the 2000–01 season and clinched the Kerala State Club Football Championship 10 times. Despite these achievements, the club shut down operations in 2015 due to financial issues and a lack of proper player recruitment.

Bharat FC, Maharashtra

I-League | Disbanded in 2015

Kalyani Bharat FC, also known as Bharat FC, was founded in 2014 by the Kalyani Group in Pune. It was a direct-entry team into the I-League, playing its home games at the Balewadi Sports Complex. Despite initial investment, the club competed for only one season, finishing 11th in 2014–15, before being dissolved due to concerns over financial viability.

Royal Wahingdoh, Meghalaya

I-League, I-League 2, Shillong Premier League | Disbanded in 2016

Based in the foothills of Meghalaya, Royal Wahingdoh was founded in 1946 as Wahingdoh Sports Club. Nicknamed the 'Royals', the club played one season in the I-League and was a regular in the Shillong Premier League. In fact, the team won three consecutive SPL titles from 2010 to 2012. Wahingdoh's best achievement came in 2014 when it won the I-League 2 title and earned promotion to the I-League. The team finished in third position in the 2014–15 I-League season, but decided against playing the following season despite receiving a national licence, due to the financial toll and lack of direction in the league.

Pune FC, Maharashtra

I-League | Disbanded in 2016

Owned by the Ashok Piramal Group, Pune FC was formed in 2007 and played two seasons in the I-League 2 before gaining promotion to the then top tier in 2009. The team's best result came in the 2012–13 season, when it finished second in the standings. However, financial troubles forced the club to shut down ahead of the 2015–16 season, with ISL club FC Pune City acquiring the Pune FC academy and rebranding it under its name.

Mumbai FC, Maharashtra

I-League | Disbanded in 2017

Founded in 2007, Mumbai FC competed in the I-League after gaining promotion to the top tier by winning the I-League 2nd Division in 2008. It also took part in the MDFA Elite League (now known as the Mumbai Premier League) and lifted the title in the 2010–11 season. The team, however, failed to find success in the I-League under then-coach Khalid Jamil and was eventually relegated in 2017, after years of financial problems. Instead of playing in the second division, the club's operations were shut down and it was subsequently disbanded in 2019.

DSK Shivajians FC, Maharashtra

I-League | Disbanded in 2017

Established in 1987 as Shivajians Sports Club in Pune, this community team dominated local football for two decades. In 2013, the DSK Group took over and renamed it. The club gained direct entry into the I-League in 2015 and notably partnered with Liverpool FC for a residential academy. It clinched a record 22 Pune Football League titles. However, its two-season stint in the I-League concluded in 2017 when the DSK Group's financial difficulties led to the club's withdrawal and eventual closure.

Delhi Dynamos, Delhi

ISL | Disbanded in 2019

Delhi Dynamos was one of the eight clubs to take part in the inaugural ISL season in 2014. The side competed in the top tier for five seasons, reaching the knockout stages twice (in 2015 and 2016). Ahead of the 2019–20 season, the club was rebranded as Odisha FC, and its base of operations was shifted to Bhubaneswar.

FC Pune City, Maharashtra

ISL | Disbanded in 2019

Like the Dynamos, FC Pune City was one of the founding clubs of the ISL. The team made it past the group stage only once in its five-year history, in the 2017–18 season, before losing to Bengaluru FC in the semifinal.

In 2019, the club was involved in a controversy after trying to sign Spaniard Néstor Gordillo from Chennai City FC while he was still under contract. The AIFF handed Pune City a two-window transfer ban, a two-year ban from participating in any AFC tournaments, along with fines. This forced the club to be dissolved within months and be replaced by Hyderabad FC in the tournament.

Rebel route: Salgaocar FC's (left) decline began in 2016 when it pulled out of the I-League after objecting to the AIFF's restructuring decisions regarding the I-League and ISL. PTI

Atletico de Kolkata, West Bengal
ISL | Disbanded in 2020

Initially named Atletico de Kolkata due to its affiliation with Spanish club Atletico de Madrid, the Kolkata-based football club, later known simply as ATK, competed in the Indian Super League (ISL) from its inaugural campaign until the 2019–20 season. ATK clinched the ISL Cup three times: in 2014, 2016, and the 2019–20 season, the last of which came when the ISL was recognised as India's top-tier league.

During the closing months of that season, ATK's owners, the RPSG Group, along with Sourav Ganguly and entrepreneur Utsav Parekh, bought a majority stake in I-League side Mohun Bagan. In July 2020, ATK was officially disbanded, paving the way for Mohun Bagan to join the ISL as ATK Mohun Bagan in the 2020–21 season.

United Sikkim FC, Sikkim
I-League | Disbanded in 2021

United Sikkim FC, co-owned by former Indian men's team captain Bhaichung Bhutia, was founded in 2011. Nicknamed the 'Snow Lions', it is the only club from Sikkim to have played in the I-League. It competed in the Sikkim Premier Division League and played home matches at the Paljor Stadium. In September 2019, Bhutia announced the club was shutting down due to unavoidable circumstances. It was briefly revived in January 2021 before being permanently closed down, even though its academy still exists.

Indian Arrows, AIFF
I-League | Disbanded in 2022

Indian Arrows FC was established in 2010 by the AIFF as a developmental team, initially known as AIFF XI, to nurture young Indian football talent. After a brief disbandment in 2013 due to financial constraints, it was revived in 2017. The club provided a platform for India's brightest youth players to gain I-League experience, aiming to strengthen the national team.

Chennai City FC, Tamil Nadu
I-League | Disbanded in 2023

Nicknamed 'The Lions', Chennai City FC was founded in 1946 as Nethaji Sports Club. It primarily competed in state leagues for decades before being renamed in 2014. The club gained national prominence when it entered the I-League in 2016, achieving its greatest success by winning the title in the 2018–19 season. However, due to persistent failures in complying with AIFF's club licensing regulations, it was barred from the 2021–22 I-League. On March 3, 2023, the club officially transferred its sporting licence, signalling its exit from professional football and effectively disbanding its senior team.

Salgaocar FC, Goa
NFL, I-League | Disbanded in 2023

Salgaocar FC, based in Goa, was one of the most successful clubs in the country. After its formation in 1956, the team won numerous major trophies, including the NFL in the 1998–99 season and the I-League in 2010–11. Additionally, the club also won four Federation Cups, three Durand Cups, three Rovers Cups and two Indian Super Cups. The team's decline began in 2016 when it pulled out of the I-League after objecting to the AIFF's restructuring decisions regarding the I-League and ISL. In 2023, the club announced it was shutting down senior team operations.

INSTITUTIONAL SIDES

In the past, the top tier of Indian football (I-League, previously NFL) had many institutional sides.

These teams rarely challenged for the title but were strong enough to do well in the second division and earn promotion. The teams included Hindustan Aeronautics Sports Club (commonly known as HAL SC), Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Football Club (ONGC FC), and State Bank of Travancore Football Club (SBT FC). These three, along with the omnipresent Air India FC, which won the Durand Cup in 2012, were the crème de la crème among 'office' teams. In 2010, following the disbanding of clubs associated with public sector undertakings for not fulfilling Asian Football Confederation (AFC) club licensing criteria, the AIFF was planning to create a league for corporate clubs. It held a preliminary meeting with 25 interested teams on 31 August 2023; however, the league is yet to materialise.

A SHIFTING LANDSCAPE

From NFL to ISL, tracing Indian football's journey from **reform to uncertainty.**

Aneesh Dey
aneesh.dey@thehindu.co.in

Indian football enjoyed its golden era from 1951 to 1962, and those who witnessed those times often reminisce fondly about the days gone by. However, nostalgia aside, football in the country did not follow the most professional approach back then, with most clubs playing in state leagues or select nationwide tournaments.

1996

1. First steps: In 1996, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) decided to overhaul the domestic structure by launching the country's first national league, a semi-professional tournament called the National Football League (NFL). It began with 12 teams spread across two zones (West and East), with matches played at neutral venues.

2006

2. Popularising the game: One of the main challenges the AIFF faced was ensuring that football reached a wider audience. In September 2006, it signed a 10-year television and media contract with Zee Sports to broadcast the upcoming new I-League, along with other AIFF-organised tournaments and select international matches of the Indian national team.

2007

3. Going pro: After 11 seasons of the NFL, the AIFF moved to further professionalise the sport by launching the I-League in 2007. It adopted a more traditional format, where teams played home and away fixtures.

2010

4. Breakdown of the partnership: Despite the 10-year contract, the AIFF terminated the deal in 2010, just four years in, due to differences between the two parties regarding payment and marketing.

2011

5. Start of the Reliance era: After Zee Sports, the AIFF brought Reliance Industries on board. It signed a new 15-year, ₹700 crore deal with Reliance and the International Management Group (IMG).

2013

6. Birth of the ISL: Around the same time, franchise-based leagues were gaining popularity in India, especially following the success of the Indian Premier League (IPL). Taking a cue from this model, the AIFF, with Reliance's backing, launched the Indian Super League (ISL) on October 21, 2013.

2014

7. Initial years: Despite the ISL's fresh approach to Indian football, it initially lacked official recognition from the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) and FIFA. The I-League remained India's official league, meaning ISL teams were not eligible to qualify for the AFC Champions League and AFC Cup.

From the album: [clockwise from facing page] Mohun Bagan striker Jose Barreto (right) and Vasco SC defender Sebi Dias vie for the ball during a National Football League match; action from the inaugural Indian Super League (ISL) fixture between Atletico de Kolkata and Mumbai City FC; Bhaichung Bhutia in action for Mohun Bagan during an I-League encounter. PICS: THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

2016

8. Pitch queens: The Indian Women's League (IWL) was launched with six teams to provide a national league for women's football. Earlier, the top competition was the Senior Women's National Championship, the women's equivalent of the Santosh Trophy. IWL winners qualify for the AFC Women's Champions League.

2017

9. Home stage: India made its debut in the men's edition of the FIFA U-17 World Cup as the host but finished bottom of the group, failing to reach the knockouts.

2019

10. Change in setup: After discussions between the AIFF and the AFC on the future roadmap of Indian football, the ISL was granted the status of the premier league competition in the country. This change allowed the ISL champion to represent India in the AFC Champions League playoffs, while the I-League winner earned a spot in the AFC Cup playoffs.

2022

11. A new addition: Following further AFC recommendations, the AIFF announced that from the 2022–23 season, the I-League champion would gain automatic promotion to the ISL without having to pay a participation fee. However, the promoted team would need to meet the national club licensing criteria set by the AIFF. After winning the 2022–23 I-League title, Punjab FC became the first team to gain automatic promotion to the ISL. Meanwhile, India hosted the 2022 edition of the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup but once again failed to progress beyond the group stage. The tournament was originally scheduled for 2020 but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2023

12. International woes: India made its third AFC Asian Cup appearance since 1996 but once again failed to progress beyond the group stage, as in 2011 and 2019. In the Asian Games, the team's best result since its Golden Era golds in 1951 and 1962 remained a Round of 16 finish — achieved in 2010 and 2022.

THE ROAD TO BASEL

Pics: GETTY IMAGES

The UEFA Women's EURO returns, with Spain and England headlining the **high-stakes** tournament in Switzerland.

Aneesh Dey
aneesh.dey@thehindu.co.in

In the biggest international event in women's football of 2025, 16 nations will compete for Europe's premier crown in the EUROs, which will be played in Switzerland across eight cities from July 2-27, with the final to be held in Basel.

The competition, first held in 1984, has had 13 editions, but only five nations have lifted the crown. Germany has dominated with eight titles, Norway has two, while Sweden, the Netherlands and defending champion England have lifted the crown once each.

Spotlight on Spain and England

All eyes will be on world champion Spain **(above)**, which will aim for its first-ever European crown. If boasting a star-studded squad wasn't enough, La Roja have two Ballon d'Or winners in their ranks — Alexia Putellas and Aitana Bonmati — who caught the eye in the last edition with more final-third passes (126) than any other player and also ranked first for passes completed in the opposition half (182), ahead of England's Keira Walsh (171).

From the perspective of European dominance in recent times, Spain has solidified that position after beating France

Class apart: Eight-time champion Germany will be led by Lea Schuller in the front.

in the 2024 UEFA Nations League final. The Spaniards will aim to become only the second women's team in history to win consecutive World Cup and EURO tournaments after Germany, which won five in a row between 2001 and 2009 (2003 and 2007 World Cups, 2001, 2005 and 2009 Euros).

The EUROs have not been a happy hunting ground for the Spaniards, however, as they could not make it past the quarterfinals in each of the last three editions and have never reached a final. While they will miss all-time top scorer Jenni Hermoso (57 goals from 123 caps) after she failed to make the cut, Spain would still be the prime favourite, with Opta saying it has a 24.8 per cent chance of lifting the title.

Sarina Wiegman's England will be keen to become only the second team in the competition's history to successfully defend its title, after beating Germany 2-1 in the 2022 final at the Wembley Stadium. However, the Lionesses' build-up to the tournament has been tumultuous.

England's No.1 keeper, Mary Earps, retired from international duty just six weeks before the tournament. Millie Bright chose not to play in the competition, prioritising her mental and physical well-being, and 22-year-old defender Ella Morris suffered an ACL injury, ruling her out.

However, it is not all doom and gloom for England. It will still have plenty of experience, with players such as Lauren James, Alessia Russo, Lauren Hemp and Beth Mead (**facing page, below;** Golden Boot winner in the last edition with six goals). Add to that Wiegman's match-winning formula, and the Lionesses might go on to defend their title. England has won each of its 14 group-stage games at major tournaments (World Cup/EUROs), the longest-ever such run by a European nation.

Who will be the dark horse?

Not much pomp and attention surrounds Andrea Soncin's Italy side, but it can cause a few upsets, as it has shown the capability to beat the heavyweights on its day.

Five players to watch out for

Marie-Antoinette Katoto (France)
Celin Bizet Ildhusoy (Norway)
Stina Blackstenius (Sweden)
Mariona Caldentey (Spain)
Ewa Pajor (Poland)

Participating teams

Group A
Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, Finland

Group B
Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Italy

Group C
Germany, Poland, Denmark, Sweden

Group D
France, England, Wales, Netherlands

Even though it has not been able to gain any momentum ahead of the tournament, it could spoil the plans of other teams in its group. However, consistency remains the biggest issue for Soncin's group. Placed in a challenging Group B alongside world champion Spain, Belgium (that beat defending champion England 3-2), and Portugal (that drew 1-1 with the Lionesses), the first aim would be to make it out of the Group of Death and reach the quarterfinals.

While international tournaments have often had fairytale stories, realistic predictions suggest a quarterfinal run would be considered a good tournament for the Italians. Anything beyond that will be a bonus.

How is the record-time champion placed?

Eight-time winner Germany (that won this tournament six consecutive times between 1995–2013) might not rank ahead of teams like Spain and England in terms of being favourites to win the title this time. However, it's a strong contender to reach the latter stages of the tournament. In the last edition, the Germans came close to defending their title.

While boasting a decent balance in midfield and defence, it is the attacking department that looks exciting for the record-time champion. Finding the net should not be a problem for Germany, with Bayern Munich's Lea Schuller (52 goals in 75 games) leading the charge, alongside another exciting talent in Selina Cerci.

The Germans are not short of momentum. It has remained unbeaten this year (W5, D1) and have also reached the Nations League final in consecutive seasons. While a ninth crown looks slightly out of reach, expect to see them in the semifinals.

REUTERS

SHOCK TREATMENT

While European teams dominated proceedings, there were some **upsets** too.

Joan Mathew Jacob
joan.mathew@thehindu.co.in

The Club World Cup's rollout in a new format in the United States has certainly captured the American glitz and glamour. From individual player walkouts to Juventus players and staff visiting President Donald Trump in the Oval Office hours before a match, the tournament has been anything but dull. The games themselves have been engrossing, with goals aplenty — Bayern Munich set the tone in the second game by putting a record 10 past New Zealand club Auckland City. The 32-team competition has also allowed lower-ranked sides from around the globe to showcase their grit against the best in the world. Off the pitch, 'soccer' fans have turned up in thousands to meet their favourite superstars in the flesh. At the same time, the debate around player welfare has continued to escalate, driven by match timings and erratic weather. On one hand, players have been forced to play under a scorching afternoon sun; elsewhere, up to six matches were delayed due to thunderstorms and severe conditions. Despite the criticism from players and managers being loud and persistent, the one billion dollar prize pool and the subsequent millions in participation money have made it nearly impossible for teams to ignore the tournament.

Brazilian flair

Some of the most eye-catching spectacles of this revamped edition have been the performances of the Brazilian clubs. In the group stage, European giants such as Chelsea and Paris Saint-Germain were slayed by Flamengo and Botafogo respectively, while Fluminense and Palmeiras also held their own against superior opposition. All four Brazilian teams progressed to the knockout phase, while its neighbour Argentina was not as fortunate. Both of its representatives — Boca Juniors and River Plate — buckled under the pressure, with the former even being held to a 1-1 draw by Auckland, a side ranked 4,586 places below it. However, the Brazilian clubs' fortunes began to fade as the round of 16 commenced, with Botafogo losing to rivals Palmeiras in a heated contest, courtesy of an extra-time winner from Paulinho. The following day, Flamengo met its match against Bundesliga champion Bayern Munich, losing 4-2.

Shock exits

Defending champion Manchester City was the only team to maintain a perfect record in the group stage. Meanwhile, City's compatriot Chelsea bounced back from its defeat against Flamengo to progress from the group. It then ruthlessly dispatched Benfica 4-1 in their round of 16 clash, which was suspended in the 85th minute for nearly two hours due to a storm warning. Meanwhile, both Real Madrid and Borussia Dortmund overcame lacklustre starts to finish top of their respective groups, partly thanks to the performances of the Bellingham brothers — Jude in Madrid, and Jobe, who eased into his first campaign with the Black and Yellow. Following its loss against Botafogo, Atlético Madrid was eliminated from the competition after finishing third in a three-way tie in its group. Other European exits included Porto and RB Salzburg.

One of the most debated topics ahead of the CWC was the inclusion of Lionel Messi's Inter Miami as a host nation representative, rather than qualifying through the ranking system like the rest. However, the Major League Soccer side brushed off the criticism and embraced the opportunity. It earned draws against Al Ahly and Palmeiras, while a vintage Messi free-kick helped the club record a landmark 2-1 win over Porto. This also meant that the 38-year-old Argentine maintained his streak of never exiting in the group stage of a knockout tournament — at both club and international level.

That said, the disparity in quality between MLS and elite European sides became apparent when Miami faced UEFA Champions League winner PSG in the round of 16 **(above).** Four first-half goals, including a brace from Joao Neves, settled the contest early, putting the Parisians one step closer to adding another trophy to their cabinet after a historic treble-winning season.

(All results updated as of June 29)

FROM OUR ARCHIVES: DILIP DOSHI ON INDIA'S VICTORY OVER ENGLAND AT THE WANKHEDE STADIUM IN 1981

Our last call: Remembering Dilip *da*

Remembering Dilip Doshi: left-arm spinner, sharp mind, **generous mentor.** A reflection on the man behind the numbers.

Shayan Acharya
shayan.acharya@thehindu.co.in

A familiar voice greeted me when I answered the phone on a Saturday evening. It was raining heavily in Mumbai, and the person on the other end said, "Oh, I can hear the sound of the rain... Hope things are fine there."

Having lived in Mumbai for years, he knew how annoying the rains could be. But as we spoke over the next 20-odd minutes, Dilip Doshi said the sound of the rain made him realise how much he missed the Mumbai monsoon. I had come to refer to him as Dilip *da* — a name that seemed to suit his mix of wisdom, grace, and understated authority.

Calling from his home in London, he was watching India's first Test against England in Leeds. During the lunch break, he suddenly decided to ring me.

"I'm quite impressed with the way Shubman (Gill) and (Rishabh) Pant batted," he said, lauding the centurions.

"This might be a young team, but it has enough firepower..."

A former India left-arm spinner, Doshi claimed 114 Test wickets in 33 appearances, including six five-wicket hauls. He represented Bengal and Saurashtra domestically and played County cricket for Warwickshire and Nottinghamshire — an experience that, he often said, shaped his understanding of modern-day cricket.

Knowing the Leeds conditions well, Doshi expected India to dominate — if the weather held up. He hoped to attend the third Test at Lord's from July 10. "It should be a highly competitive series. If you're here, we'll watch it together," he said.

Little did we know that it would be our last conversation.

On June 23, Doshi passed away at 77, following a cardiac arrest — leaving behind a rich legacy and a lifetime of memories. A true gentleman, he never hesitated to talk cricket. If a young player reached out, he made time, always eager to guide.

That was him.

Despite debuting in Tests at 32 and often finding himself in and out of the squad, Doshi proved his mettle.

Teammates remember him as a "thinking man's

VIJAY SONEJI

Craft mastery: Dilip Doshi, known for his classical left-arm action, took 114 Test wickets in 33 matches and claimed 22 more in 15 ODIs. He also played First-Class cricket for Saurashtra, Bengal, Warwickshire, and Nottinghamshire. GETTY IMAGES

Archival moment: East Zone captain Dilip Doshi receives the runner-up trophy from the then BCCI president after the Duleep Trophy final in Bombay, November 8, 1981. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

cricketer".

In his post-retirement life, he entered the corporate world and famously introduced Mont Blanc pens to India in the 1990s. But cricket was never far. He had a star-studded circle — Rolling Stones lead songwriter and vocalist Mick Jagger, former West Indies captain Garfield Sobers, former Pakistan skipper Zaheer Abbas among them — but lived simply.

WHENEVER IN INDIA, DOSHI WOULD VISIT HIS HOMETOWN RAJKOT AND QUIETLY WATCH DOMESTIC MATCHES AT THE NIRANJAN SHAH STADIUM. "THIS GIVES ME IMMENSE SATISFACTION," HE WOULD SAY

Whenever in India, he'd visit his hometown Rajkot and quietly watch domestic matches at the Niranjan Shah Stadium. "This gives me immense satisfaction," he once told me during a Ranji Trophy quarterfinal between Saurashtra and Punjab.

His warmth drew people to him. Sachin Tendulkar recalled their first meeting — in England, 1990. Doshi, already retired, bowled to Tendulkar in the nets. "He was really fond of me, and I reciprocated his feelings. A warm-hearted soul like Dilip-*bhai* will be deeply missed. I will miss those cricketing conversations which we invariably had," Tendulkar wrote on social media.

The cricket fraternity will long remember his five-wicket haul in the 1981 Melbourne Test — achieved while playing with a broken toe. "I'd apply electrodes every evening to manage the swelling," he once told me. "It was a crucial game — I couldn't miss it."

Off the pitch, he enjoyed Jagger's company. The two watched cricket

together often, including the recent World Test Championship final. Last Saturday, he reminisced about watching it with "Mick" and praised Temba Bavuma's captaincy.

I recall him calling late one night during the 2023 World Cup. Jagger was in India.

"I need your help," Doshi said. What for? "Mick wants to post a message in Hindi for his fans. I've written something. Can you check if it reads well?"

We spent half an hour working on it. Eventually, the message went out. The next morning, I found a long message from Doshi, thanking me for the help. "We finished it in 30 minutes because it was a great partnership," he wrote.

That was quintessential Doshi — serious but full of wit.

During the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, he gave us a long interview on the art of spin bowling. The 5,000-word piece ran in *Sportstar's* ebook (the print edition was paused then). That edition also carried an interview with Bishan Singh Bedi. When it came out, Doshi called me and said, "It's not for nothing that Bishan is a legend. He's spoken so well." This, from a man whose own early career was overshadowed by Bedi. "He's the best we have," Doshi said. Then he spoke fondly of Chuni Goswami, the football captain and First-Class cricketer who once led Doshi.

I wasn't even born when he played for India. But in school, I borrowed his autobiography 'Spin Punch' from a friend's dad. It was one of the most explosive cricket memoirs I had read. Years later, I got to know the man behind it — affectionate, welcoming, and full of stories.

In our chats, he often quoted one of his favourite Rolling Stones songs:

"You can't always get what you want
But if you try sometime
You'll find you get what you need..."

Travel well, Dilip *da*. And thank you for the memories.

Spirited bond: Over the years, Dilip Doshi was a regular at cricket matches, often seen alongside his good friend Rolling Stones' Mick Jagger. CAB

Warm remembrance: From nets in England to long chats later — Sachin Tendulkar and Dilip Doshi shared more than just passion for cricket. PTI

FOR MORE IMAGES

1st

Generational talent: Yashasvi Jaiswal smashed 101 off 159 balls — his third overseas Test century — after India was asked to bat first. At 23, Jaiswal is the second youngest Indian opener to score a Test hundred in England.

GETTY IMAGES

WATCH THE TEST REVIEW

2nd

Double delight: India captain and vice captain, Shubman Gill and Rishabh Pant, notched up centuries to help the team score 471 in the first innings. While Gill became the fifth player to score a ton on Test captaincy debut, Pant's seventh century took him past M. S. Dhoni's record of most hundreds by an Indian wicketkeeper in the format.

AP

3rd

Fightback: Ollie Pope led England's response with the bat as he notched up his eighth Test century, scoring 106 off 137 balls, finding the fence 14 times during his innings. GETTY IMAGES

4th

One short: Harry Brook ran out of luck and was left heartbroken after Prasidh Krishna had him caught in the deep on 99, becoming the 14th England batter to be dismissed just a run away from a century. Brook was dropped twice and got out on a no ball during his 112-ball stay. REUTERS

5th

Maestro: Jasprit Bumrah was at his best as he claimed his 12th five-wicket haul outside India and equalled Kapil Dev's record. This is Bumrah's third five-for in England — the most by an Indian bowler. His five for 83 helped India bowl out England for 465, taking a paltry six-run lead.

GETTY IMAGES

6th

Fire and ice: K. L. Rahul struck a pleasing 137 off 147 balls. Rahul now has the most Test centuries in England by an Indian opener — three. Rishabh Pant continued to take on the English bowling attack and recorded another ton and became the second wicketkeeper to register centuries in both innings of a Test match after Zimbabwe's Andy Flower. GETTY IMAGES

7th

Dominator: Ben Duckett not only scored 149 — the second-highest by an England opener in the fourth innings — but overpowered the Indian bowlers to help his team chase down the 371-run target by five wickets — the second-highest fourth innings chase for the host. REUTERS

FOR MORE STORIES

Inside England's Bazball blueprint: Turning chasing into a strength

England has made fourth-innings chases a **core strategy** under Bazball, leading the world in successful run hunts since 2022. Here's how and why it works.

Pranay Rajiv and Anish Pathiyil
pranay.rajiv@thehindu.co.in,
anish.p@thehindu.co.in

For long, Test cricket never regarded chasing prowess as a strategy or a strength to rely on. It was something teams resorted to when pushed into a corner – an act born of necessity rather than preference.

But England, under the leadership of coach Brendon McCullum and captain Ben Stokes, has rewritten that age-old convention, laying down a bold new template for Test cricket.

Since 2022, the Three Lions, embracing a hyper-aggressive batting philosophy, have welcomed the challenge of chasing in the fourth innings — and have reaped rich rewards.

England's latest fourth-innings conquest — a thrill-a-minute, final-day heist against India at Headingley in the opening Test — marked its seventh successful 200-plus chase in the Bazball era.

That's the most by any team in a four-year span in the history of Test cricket.

Tossing tradition

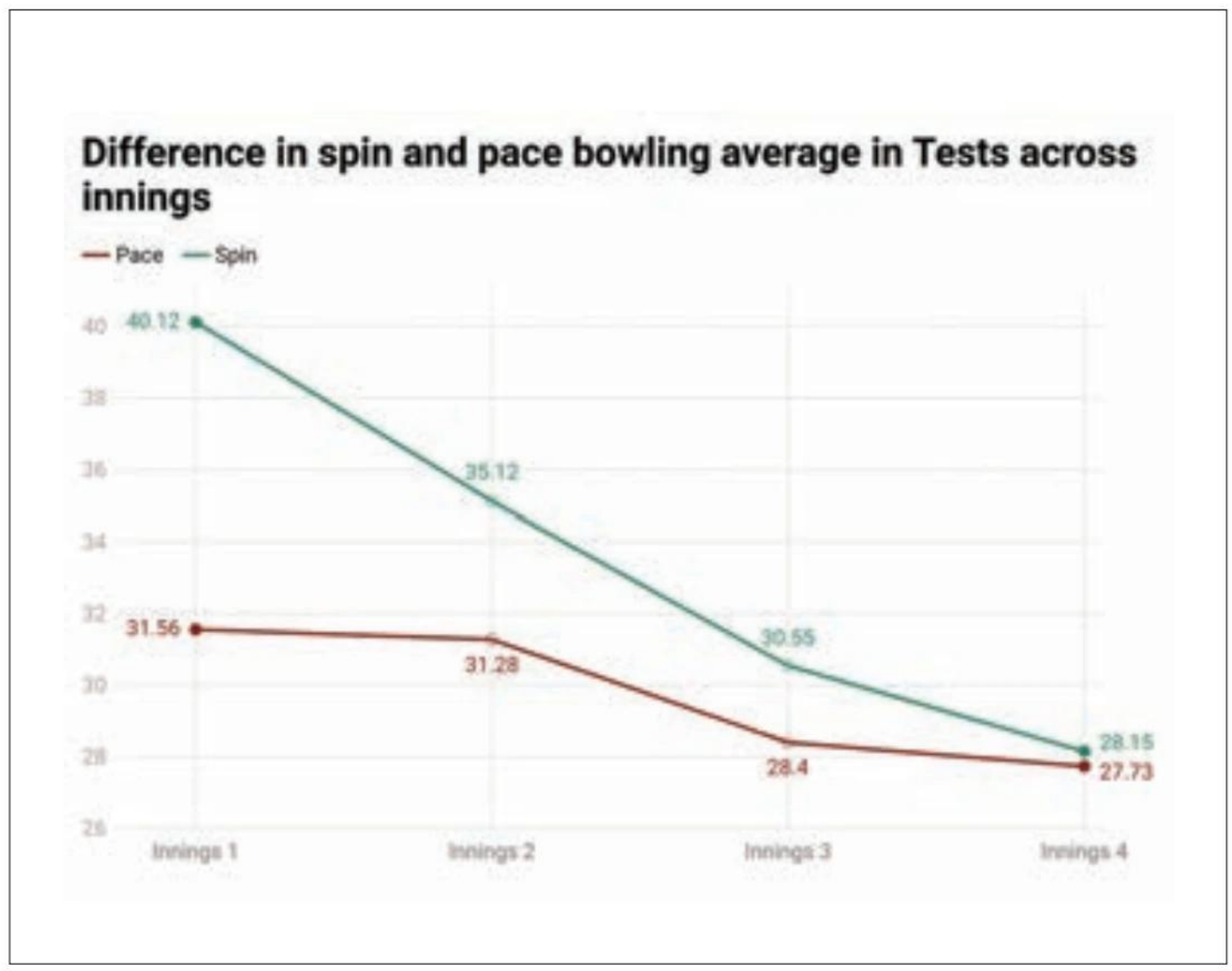
Right from the outset of McCullum's tenure, England has made clear its preference for chasing in Tests.

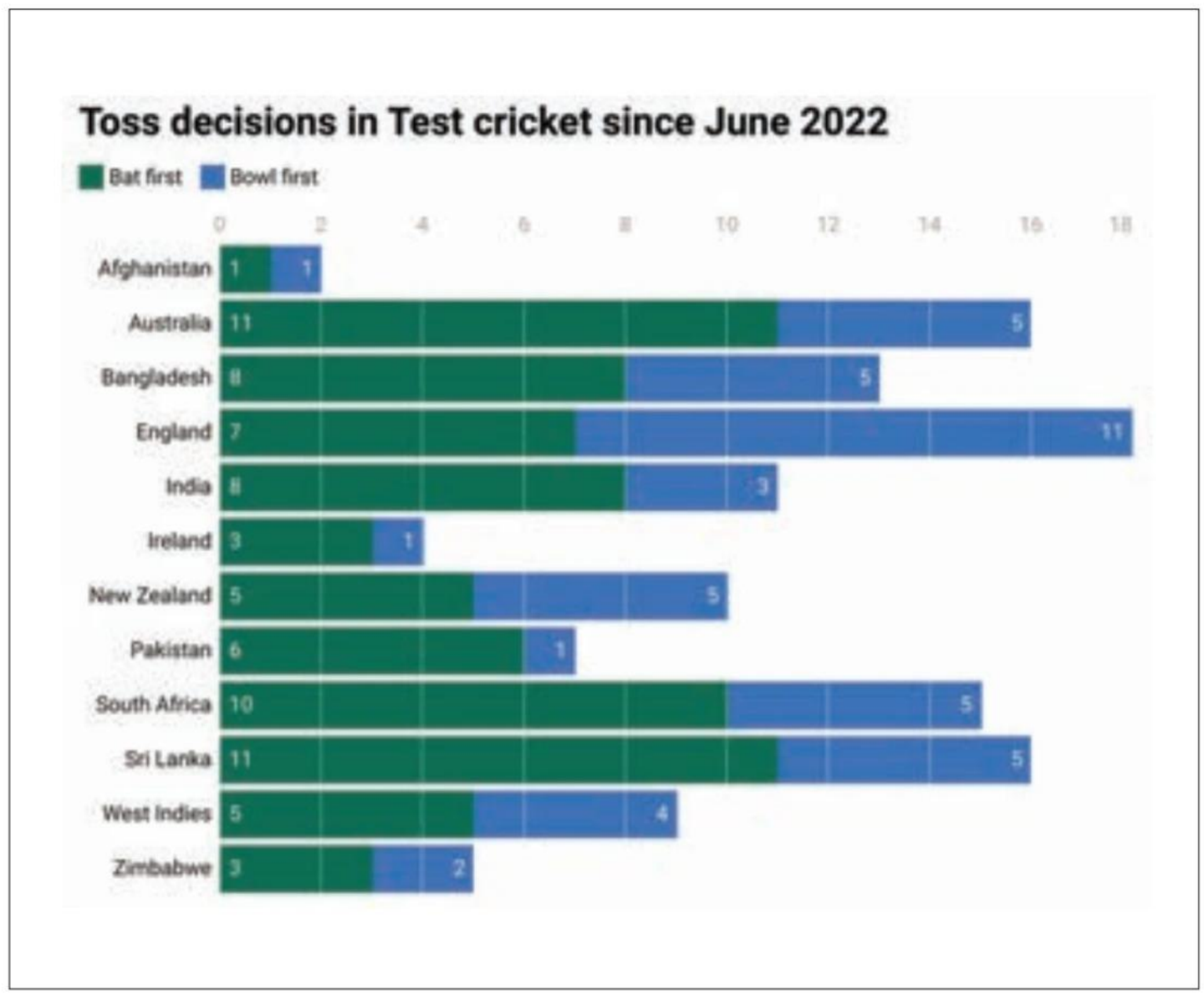
Stokes and McCullum's aggressive approach marks a sharp departure from

New template: England, under the leadership of coach Brendon McCullum and captain Ben Stokes, has embraced a hyper-aggressive batting philosophy. GETTY IMAGES

England's 200+ chases in Test cricket in Bazball Era

Opposition	Target	Venue	Date
New Zealand	277	Lord's	2 June 2022
New Zealand	299	Nottingham	10 June 2022
New Zealand	296	Leeds	23 June 2022
India	378	Birmingham	1 July 2022
Australia	251	Leeds	6 July 2023
Sri Lanka	205	Manchester	21 August 2024
India	371	Leeds	20 June 2025





traditional English Test strategy.

Until their leadership began, England chose to bowl first in home Tests only once every five matches. In the 539 Tests hosted in England up to that point, teams opted to field first on just 114 occasions.

Since June 2022, when McCullum took over as Test coach, no team has inserted the opposition more often — both in absolute numbers and proportionally.

The only side that comes close is New Zealand, which has split its toss decisions evenly.

The first toss won by England under the Kiwi coach came in the second Test against New Zealand at Nottingham in 2022. Stokes chose to field, laying the groundwork for a successful chase — a method soon to be replicated with style.

Over the past four years, England has won more Tests (15) batting second than any other side, registering a staggering win-loss ratio of 3.00 in such matches.

In this period, England has twice entered the top 10 highest successful chases in Test history — both against India, first in Birmingham in 2022 and again in Leeds in 2025.

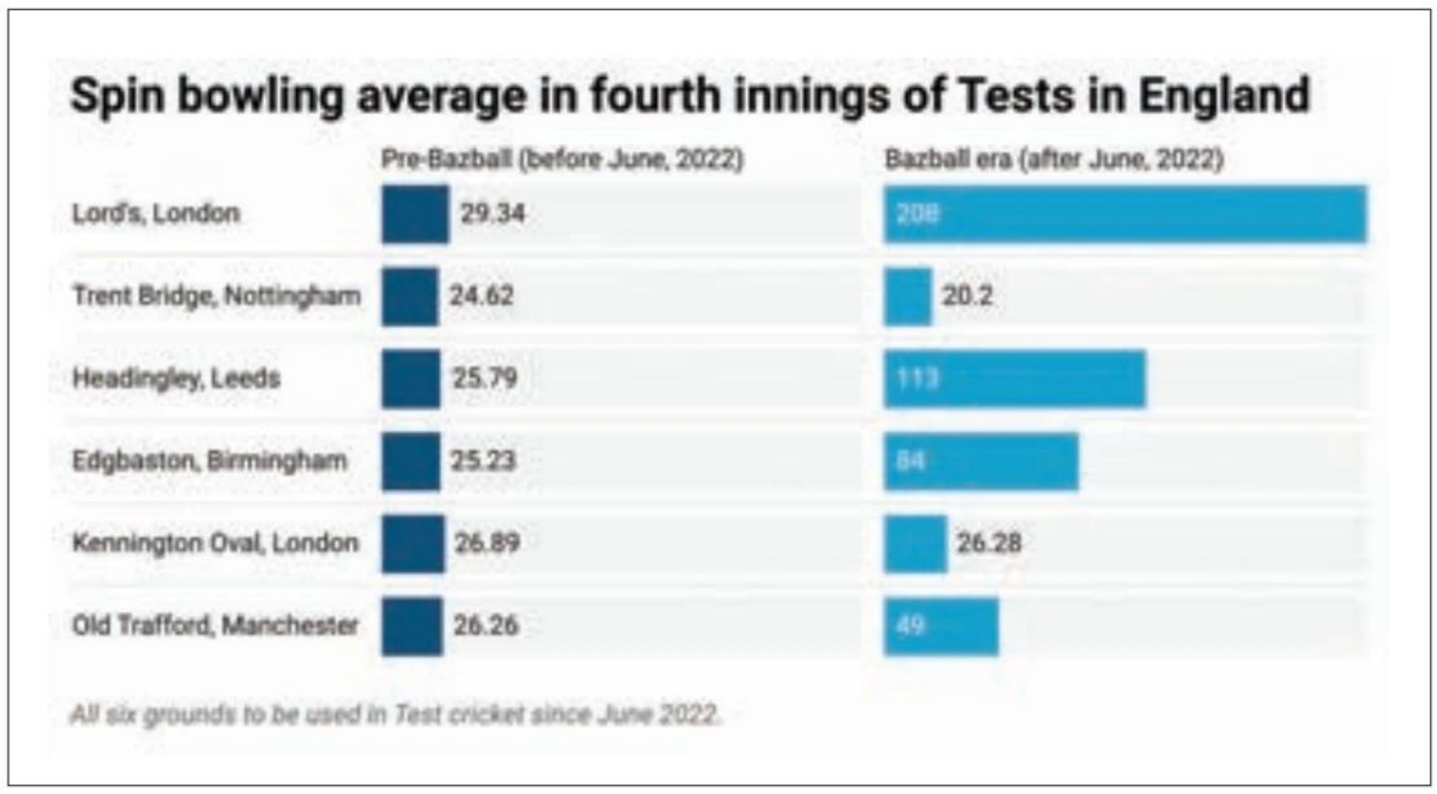
Only once in eight home Tests has England failed to chase down a target above 200 — at Lord's during the 2023 Ashes. Despite Stokes' valiant 155, the side fell 43 runs short of a 371-run target.

It's worth noting that all of England's 200-plus chases in the past four years have come at home. Its highest successful fourth-innings chase overseas under Stokes and McCullum remains 167, against Pakistan in Karachi.

All its attempts to chase a higher total away from home have ended in defeat — including a narrow one-run loss to New Zealand in 2023.

Dulling spin threat

A key element of England's successful chases at home has been how it has subtly tweaked its conditions to reduce the impact of spin in the fourth innings, offering its batters a more familiar, less volatile surface.



Historically, chasing in the fourth innings was often considered futile due to pitch deterioration, which brought turn, bounce, and spin into play at crucial moments.

In Test cricket, spinners average worse than pacers in all four innings — but the gap narrows significantly in the final one.

Until 2022, spinners averaged 26.42 in fourth innings in England — the best figure outside India among nations to have hosted 100 Tests.

Since the advent of Bazball, however, that average has surged to 51.84 — the highest for any host country during this period.

At Headingley, for example, spinners averaged 25.59 in the fourth innings prior to 2022. Since then, the figure has ballooned to over 113. Not surprisingly, three successful 200+ chases have come there in the Bazball era.

At Lord's, spinners have averaged an astonishing 208 in the fourth innings across seven Tests, with the side batting second winning five of them.

England's reluctance to chase in spin-friendly conditions is evident in its toss decisions abroad. In 2024, it played eight Tests in India and Pakistan. Of the four tosses it won, it chose to bat first in all of them.

Chasing a new era

England's chasing success — though helped significantly by maximising home advantage — also reflects a broader trend in Test cricket: a growing frequency of successful fourth-innings hunts.

For much of Test cricket's early history, a successful 200-plus chase was a rare feat — just 14 such matches occurred until 1950.

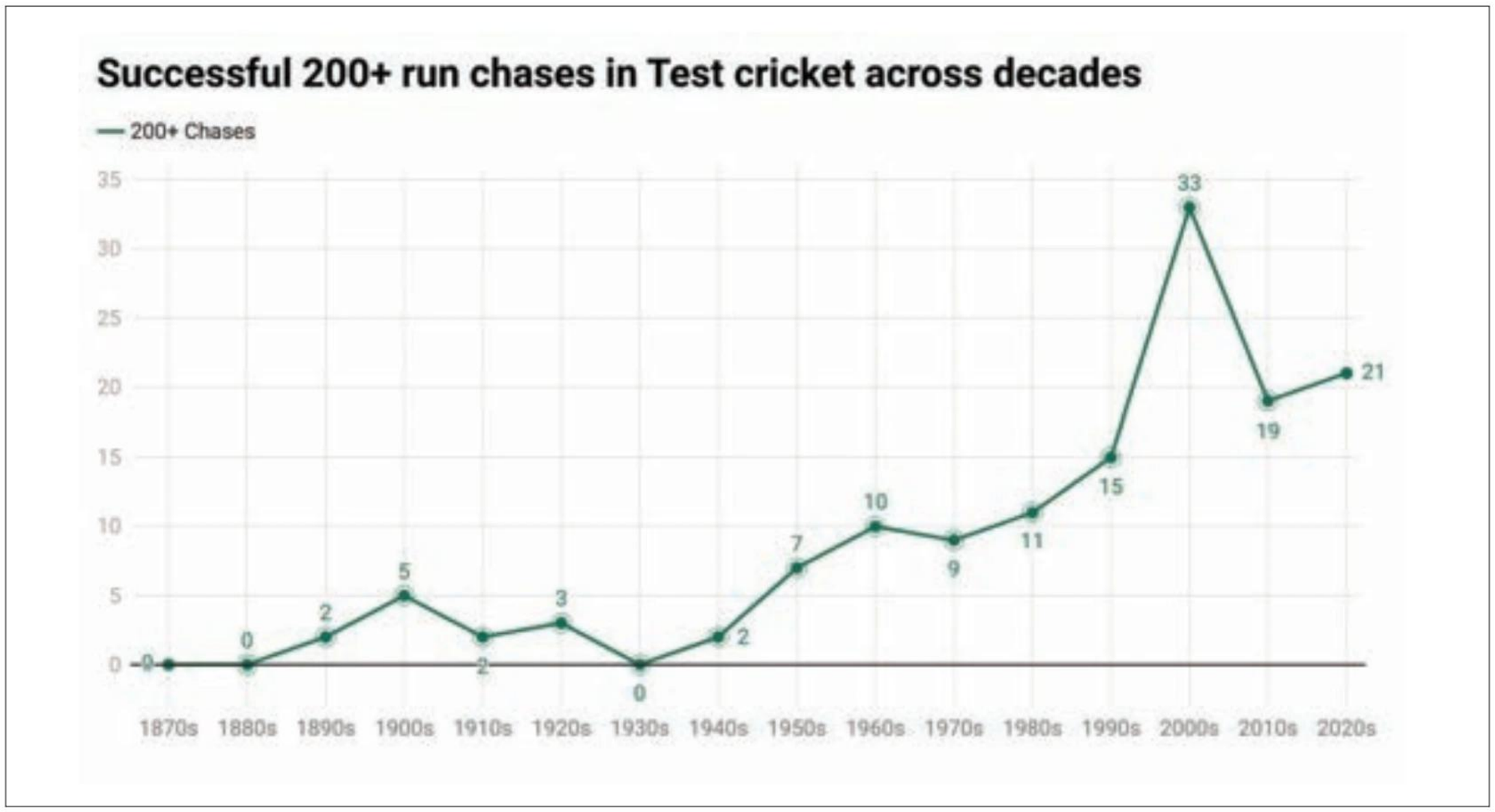
Gradually, that began to change — particularly with the advent of covered pitches, which preserved the surface for longer and gave batters more of a chance in the final innings.

This shift peaked in the 2000s, when teams chased down 200+ totals on 33 occasions — aided by flatter pitches that took bowlers out of the game across much of the world.

The 2010s saw a partial rebalancing, with juicier tracks and more bowler-friendly conditions resulting in just 19 such chases.

The current decade, however, has seen a resurgence: 21 successful 200-plus chases so far, with England accounting for eight of them.

England's relentless charge with the bat on accommodating home pitches is unlikely to stop. The onus now lies with visiting teams: out-bat the host or out-think its batters to disrupt this dominance.



Media hub: The main pavilion at Headingley Stadium in Leeds, with the media box (the rectangular structure at the centre), as seen from the pitch. N. SUDARSHAN

Hidden grounds, lukewarm meals, and the heat that won

A Test without stars, food without soul, and summer without mercy. The Diary begins its English tour with a **rude wake-up call.**

N. Sudarshan
sudarshan.narayanan@thehindu.co.in

The Yorkshire Cricket Ground at Headingley, Leeds, is deceptive at best. It is hardly visible from a distance, surrounded as it is by smallish hills, but not really in a valley to be so well hidden. The sight of the not-so-high floodlights as one approaches the gates is a giveaway, but it doesn't truly dawn until one enters the ground that there is an 18,000-seater in there.

On the eve of the first Test between England and India, this veil and haze extended to the cricketing atmosphere too. Most cab drivers in Leeds are of Asian origin, with a majority from the cricket-mad countries of India and Pakistan. Yet, hardly anyone knew there was a match scheduled. One Mansoor knew of Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma but bluntly told the Diary that it was wasting time covering a series without the two stalwarts.

The Diary is often told in familial circles how elite sport is a wasted exercise. But this was a rude shock. The stadium, however, was packed with fans all through the tie, and most of them were English. By the fifth day, they all went home a happy lot, for England pulled off a stunning five-wicket win. Perhaps the Asians knew there wouldn't be a happy ending — and that's why they feigned ignorance?

Of plain rice and crushed expectations

The Diary loves food, especially good vegetarian fare. It has been spoilt by years of good catering

service at many Indian cricket stadiums and simply assumed things at Headingley would be just as wonderful. But on day one, hopes crashed with a serving of plain rice, mac and cheese, and a sorry-looking vegetable.

At one moment, the Diary began thinking of itself as Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist asking for more. But it soon climbed down from its perch, took things in its stride and admonished itself for having lofty expectations. Food at a stadium is a complimentary service, not a right, said the Diary's mind voice.

But by the end of the Test, the grapevine suggested that even local journalists were aghast at the food arrangements. One senior scribe claimed that those in charge had slashed the catering budget. The Diary was now relieved and decided to up its expectations from Birmingham, the venue for the second Test. "It cannot be as bad as Leeds," said another scribe of the sharp-tongued variety.

Namesakes

Bradford and Leeds are like twin cities, separated by around 10 miles. One of Bradford's most famous sons is England spinner Adil Rashid, and most cricket-loving Asians in the Bradford-Leeds area — especially those of Pakistani origin — are proud of Rashid.

A taxi driver, also named Adil, told the Diary that he had played childhood cricket with Rashid. "His father was very good. He supported him throughout. Without family, nothing is possible," he added. Adil said there could have been three Rashids playing for England, not just one. "Haroon, his brother, was a very good batter. But he went the wrong way," he said.

The Diary was in no mood for controversies and slipped into silent mode. The return taxi from the stadium was driven by one Mohammed Siraj, who, apart from sharing a name with an illustrious Indian bowler, also claimed to be Rashid's neighbour. For a fleeting moment, the Diary had the itch to ask the driver to take it to Rashid's locality. But barging in uninvited is not really the Diary's style — and that thought died a quick death.

Trial by heat

The Diary has often been condescending towards those from the global West complaining about heat. "Nothing compares to subcontinental heat and we can tolerate temperatures up to 40°C," the Diary had always believed.

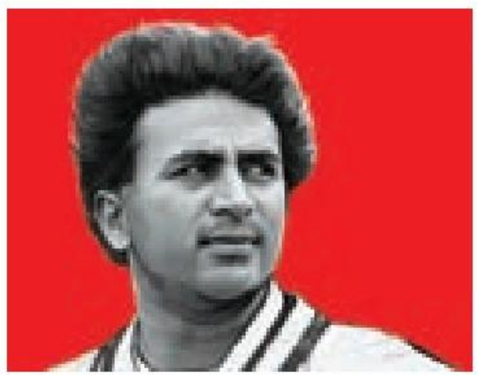
The first few days in Leeds and then Birmingham burst that bubble spectacularly.

It couldn't even handle the 30-degree temperature, for it felt far more oppressive than the same reading back home. It felt like that famous boast of Indians saying they were better players of spin bowling. We all know how that has panned out in recent years.

The fact that most of the United Kingdom doesn't have air-conditioning made it worse for the Diary. The Headingley stadium press area made for a fantastic viewing experience, but it had just a handful of portable table fans for 100-odd people. The Diary was, however, lucky to be seated next to one and thanked its stars daily.

Days four and five in Leeds saw cooler temperatures before Birmingham put the Diary to test again with another sweltering spell. It was then decided to humbly not brag anymore about the Diary's heat-resisting capabilities.

Headingley hustle: Fans walk along narrow St. Michael's Lane leading to Headingley Stadium in Leeds on day one of the first Test between England and India. N. SUDARSHAN



FOR MORE STORIES

TODAY'S CROWD LOVES A SHOWMAN

As Wimbledon begins, Alcaraz and Sinner's **rivalry** and respect signal a shift, not just in who dominates, but in how they do it.

The start of the Wimbledon tennis fortnight immediately brings to mind the epic men's singles final of the French Open played in June. It was a final between two players who could possibly dominate the world of tennis for the next decade or so. There are others, too, who on their day can take the trophies away from them, but the completeness of their game means that these two will be incredibly hard to beat. Even the Big Three — Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic — each had a surface they weren't fully comfortable on. If it was the clay at the French Open for Federer and, to a certain extent, Djokovic, too, it was the grass at Wimbledon where Nadal cracked more often than not. Even though it's early days, that doesn't seem to be the case with Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner, who seem equally at home on all the surfaces.

That final at the French Open last month stands out not just for the quality of tennis but also for the sportsmanship on display. In touch-and-go situations where every point could well be the turning one, both were quick to indicate that some of the calls by the line judges were wrong and conceded the point to the other. In a time when it's fashionable to question every call, watching two young superstars in the making concede points that could have swung a Grand Slam final was truly heart-warming. Not to speak of losing a million dollars or so, if by conceding the point, they lost the match. May the example of these two wonderful players be adopted by other sportspersons too.

What that final also showed was that today's crowd loves a showman. So Alcaraz, the defending champion, was the crowd favourite because he would play to the gallery with his gestures.

Sinner, on the other hand, was the strong, silent type just going about his business, and apart from having a go once at his coaching staff in the box in the final set, he just went about his game, showing no emotion whatsoever. There was no throwing or smashing of racquets even after the heartbreaking loss.

If the French Open relied on the keen eye of

Setting the right example: In a time when it's fashionable to question every call, watching two young superstars in the making concede points that could have swung a Grand Slam final was truly heart-warming. REUTERS

the line judges, at Wimbledon, it's going to be AI making the line calls, which means no line judges at all. While some players have expressed reservations, most seem to have welcomed it because a line call can make the difference between winning and losing. It sure will be interesting to see how it goes, and this could well be the future at tennis events — and even in cricket, when it comes to judging no-balls. Technology has certainly helped make some decisions that would have been tough for humans.

That said, if technology is being worked and operated by humans, there's always a slim chance of it being wrong.

For sports lovers, the fortnight promises plenty to look forward to — with Wimbledon underway and two Test matches between India and England. There's cricket in the West Indies with Australia touring, and in Sri Lanka too, where Bangladesh is playing ODIs. So, if the rains are keeping you from work or play, don't fret — there's loads of sport to watch on TV. Enjoy.

Unlike Federer, Nadal, and Djokovic — each vulnerable on a specific surface — Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner, even this early in their careers, appear equally comfortable across clay, grass, and hard courts, hinting at a more complete all-surface dominance.

Gill in elite list

5 The number of players to lead India for the first time in Tests before the age of 26 years. Shubman Gill became the latest to join a small group of players during his captaincy debut in the recent Leeds Test. At 25 years, 285 days, he is the fifth youngest Indian and the fifth youngest visiting captain in Tests in England. Gill, however, is the youngest to lead an Indian side in England.

India's Shubman Gill. GETTY IMAGES

Youngest Indian Test captains

Age	Captain	Opp	Venue	Date	Result
21y-77d	M A. K. Pataudi	WI	Bridgetown	23 Mar 1962	Lost
23y-169d	S. Tendulkar	Aus	Delhi	10 Oct 1996	Won
24y-48d	Kapil Dev	WI	Kingston	23 Feb 1983	Lost
25y-229d	Ravi Shastri	WI	Chennai	11 Jan 1988	Won
25y-285d	S. Gill	Eng	Leeds	20 Jun 2025	Lost

Youngest visiting Test captains in England

Age	Captain	For	Venue	Date	Result
22y-173y	G. Smith	SA	Birmingham	24 Jul 2003	Drawn
23y-64d	Shakib	Ban	Lord's	27 May 2010	Lost
24y-23d	J. Burki	Pak	Birmingham	31 May 1962	Lost
25y-285d	J. Holder	WI	Birmingham	17 Aug 2017	Lost
25y-285d	S. Gill	Ind	Leeds	20 Jun 2025	Lost

Note: Burki & Gill are the only players in the above list to make their captaincy debut in England.

Youngest Indian Test captains against England in England

Age	Captain	Venue	Date	Result
25y-285d	S. Gill	Leeds	20 Jun 2025	Lost
26y-154d	M. A. K. Pataudi	Leeds	8 Jun 1967	Lost
27y-150d	Kapil Dev	Lord's	5 Jun 1986	Won
27y-168d	M. Azharuddin	Lord's	26 Jul 1990	Lost
28y-207d	J. Bumrah	Birmingham	1 Jul 2022	Lost

Note: Gill & Bumrah are the only players in the above list to make their captaincy debut in England.

402 The number of international matches (Tests/ODIs/T20Is) Karun Nair missed since March 2017 when he made his international comeback to Team India playing XI in the recent Leeds Test match, which is now the maximum number of matches missed by any player in international cricket. Nair has also missed 77 Test matches since he last played one, which means only three other Indian players have missed more Tests than Nair, as shown in the second table.

Most consecutive matches missed for a team in international cricket

M	Player	For	Match date before hiatus	Comeback date	Missed games span	Comeback Against	Format
402	K. Nair	Ind	28 Mar 2017	20 Jun 2025	8y-2m-22d	Eng	Test
396	R. Emrit	WI	31 Jan 2007	3 Jan 2018	10y-11m-2d	NZ	T20I
384	J. Denly	Eng	20 Feb 2010	27 Oct 2018	8y-8m-6d	SL	T20I
380	F. Reifer	WI	7 Feb 1999	9 Jul 2009	10y-5m-1d	Bang	Test
374	M. Udawatte	SL	4 Sep 2009	26 Oct 2017	8y-1m-21d	Pak	T20I

Most consecutive matches missed for India in Test cricket

M	Player	Match date before hiatus	Comeback date	Missed Tests span	Comeback Against	Venue
118	J. Unadkat	20 Dec 2010	22 Dec 2022	12y-2m-22d	Bang	Mirpur
87	D. Karthik	21 Jan 2010	14 Jun 2018	8y-4m-23d	Afg	Bengaluru
83	P. Patel	11 Aug 2008	26 Nov 2016	8y-3m-14d	Eng	Mohali
77	K. Nair	28 Mar 2017	20 Jun 2025	8y-2m-22d	Eng	Leeds

5 The number of players to make a three-figure score on their captaincy debut for India. Gill became the fourth Indian to do it in his very first knock with the bat as a captain; however, he is the first Indian to reach a three-figure score on his very first day as captain.

Test centuries by Indian players on their captaincy debut (listed chronologically)

Runs	Captain	Against	Venue	Date	(Day)	Result
164*	V. Hazare	Eng	Delhi	4 Nov 1951	(3)	Drawn
116	S. Gavaskar	NZ	Auckland	25 Jan 1976	(2)	Won
102	D. Vengsarkar+	WI	Delhi	28 Nov 1987	(3)	Lost
115	V. Kohli	Aus	Adelaide	11 Dec 2024	(3)	Lost
147	S. Gill	Eng	Leeds	20 June 2025	(1)	Lost

+ in the third innings of the Test
Gill is the only Indian to reach a three-figure score on the first day as captain.
Kohli made 141 in the second innings in Adelaide

6 The number of sixes hit by Rishabh Pant during his first innings knock of 134 at Leeds. This is now the most in an innings by any visiting batter in the last 145 years of Test cricket in England. Only four other visiting batters (two Aussies, a West Indian and a Kiwi) have hit five sixes in a Test innings in England. However, the record for the most sixes in a Test innings in England is by Ben Stokes, who hit nine sixes during his 155 at Lord's in the Ashes Test in June 2023. Incidentally, Pant's six sixes is the second most hit by an Indian batter in an away Test match. Hardik Pandya's seven sixes during his 108 against Sri Lanka at Pallekele in August 2017 is on top.

Most sixes hit by visiting batters in an innings in England

6s	Batter (Score)	For	Inn	Venue	Date	Result
6	R. Pant (134)	Ind	1st	Leeds	June 2025	Lost
5	S. Luxton (93)	Aus	2nd	Leeds	Jul 1948	Won
5	M. Holding (59)	WI	2nd	Leeds	Jul 1984	Won
5	A. Gilchrist (152)	Aus	2nd	Birmingham	Jul 2001	Won
5	R. Taylor (154*)	NZ	1st	Manchester	May 2008	Lost

Most sixes hit by India batters in an innings in away Tests

6s	Batter (Score)	Opp	Inn	Venue	Date	Result
7	H. Pandya (108)	SL	1st	Pallekele	Aug 2017	Won
6	V. Sehwag (309)	Pak	1st	Multan	Mar 2004	Won
6	M. S. Dhoni (69)	WI	3rd	St John's	Jun 2006	Draw
6	R. Pant (134)	Eng	1st	Leeds	June 2025	Lost

Note: The combined total of nine sixes in both innings by Pant in the Leeds Test match is the joint most hit by a batter in any Test match on England soil, equalling the tally of Andrew Flintoff (at Birmingham in 2005) and Ben Stokes (v Lord's in 2023) — both in the Ashes series.

1 The number of sides to lose a Test match after their batters registered five three-figure scores. In the recent Leeds Test, India achieved this dubious record, which never occurred before in Test cricket history, as shown in the table below. To summarise, sides losing a Test after batters registered three or more centuries have occurred on 13 occasions, with England on four occasions, and Pakistan and now India twice. New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Ireland and Afghanistan are the only sides not on this dubious list. India, meanwhile, at Leeds, became the sixth side in history to register five centuries in a Test match and, as mentioned above, the first side to do this in a lost cause. The tables below have the details.

Sides with three or more individual centuries in lost Tests

100s	For	(100s 1st +2nd)	Against	Venue	Month, year	Result
5	Ind	(3+2)	Eng	Leeds	June 2025	Lost by 5 wickets
4	Aus	(2+2)	Eng	Melbourne	Dec-Jan 1928/29	Lost by 3 wickets
3	Eng	(1+2)	Aus	Sydney	Dec 1924	Lost by 193 runs
3	Eng	(2+1)	Aus	Melbourne	Jan 1925	Lost by 81 runs
3	Ind	(2+1)	Aus	Adelaide	Jan 1948	Lost by an innings & 16 runs (f/o)
3	SL	(3+0)	Aus	Colombo SSC	Aug 1992	Lost by 16 runs
3	Eng	(2+1)	Pak	Manchester	May-June 2001	Lost by 108 runs
3	WI	(1+2)	Aus	Georgetown	Apr 2003	Lost by 9 wickets
3	Eng	(1+2)	Ind	Chennai	Dec 2008	Lost by 6 wickets
3	SA	(2+1)	Ind	Kolkata	Feb 2010	Losy by an innings & 57 runs
3	Bang	(1+2)	NZ	Hamilton	Feb-Mar 2019	Lost by an innings & 52 runs
3	Pak	(3+0)	Eng	Rawalpindi	Dec 2022	Lost by 74 runs
3	Pak	(3)	Eng	Multan	Oct 2024	Lost by innings & 47 runs

Note: England's defeats in 1924/25 came in successive Tests
(f/o) – followed on

All records are correct and updated until 28 June 2025.

AP

Sri Lanka clinches 1-0 series win against Bangladesh

1 The first Test which ended in a draw, marked the final Test appearance of Sri Lanka veteran **Angelo Mathews.**

Sri Lanka wrapped up a 1-0 Test series win over Bangladesh with a dominant innings victory in the second match.

After Bangladesh posted 247 in the first innings, Sri Lanka replied strongly, thanks to Pathum Nissanka's 158, Dinesh Chandimal's 93, and Kusal Mendis' 84, taking a 211-run lead.

Bangladesh then folded for just 133 in its second innings, with Prabath Jayasuriya taking a five-wicket haul to seal an innings-and-78-run win.

The first Test had ended in a draw, despite twin centuries from Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto, who stepped down from leadership duties after the series.

The opener also marked the final Test appearance of Sri Lanka veteran Angelo Mathews.

AP

Australia claimed a 159-run win over West Indies in the opening Test in Barbados to go 1–0 up in the three-match series. Bowled out for 180 in the first innings, the visitor trailed by 10 runs before Travis Head, Beau Webster, and Alex Carey led a fightback to set a 301-run target. Josh Hazlewood **(in pic)** starred with a five-wicket haul, while Nathan Lyon sealed the win by taking the final two wickets in consecutive balls as the host was dismissed for 144 in the final session. Shamar Joseph's resistance gave West Indies a glimmer of hope, but Australia held firm.

ICC

Zimbabwe will make its ICC Women's Championship debut with a white-ball tour of New Zealand in March 2026. The historic campaign will begin with three ODIs at the University of Otago Oval in Dunedin, preceded by three T20Is in Hamilton. The Championship also serves as a qualification pathway for the 2029 Women's World Cup. Zimbabwe will first travel to Ireland next month for three T20Is and two ODIs.

AP

Former England fast bowler David Lawrence, the first British-born Black cricketer to play for England, died at the age of 61. A highly promising pacer, Lawrence played five Tests and one ODI between 1988 and 1992 before a horrific knee injury ended his career. Off the field, he became a passionate advocate for diversity and inclusion in cricket. In 2025, he was appointed MBE in the King's Birthday Honours and named one of the ECB's inaugural Honorary Life Vice-Presidents.

AFP

Bangladesh will host Pakistan for a three-match T20I series from July 20 to 24 in Dhaka. The teams last met in May–June in Pakistan, where the host swept the series. Currently ranked eighth and 10th in the ICC T20I rankings, respectively, both sides will use the series to fine-tune preparations for the 2026 ICC Men's T20 World Cup.

ICC

Canada has become the 13th team to qualify for the 2026 ICC Men's T20 World Cup. It joins co-hosts India and Sri Lanka, as well as Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, England, Ireland, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa, United States, and West Indies. Seven spots remain, to be filled via regional qualifiers — two each from Europe and Africa, and three from the Asia–East Asia-Pacific regions. Canada made its T20 World Cup debut in 2024, earning a group-stage win over Ireland.

TALES FROM THE TRENCHES: THE MANY FACES OF INDIA'S T20 PATHWAYS

A behind-the-scenes look at how India's domestic T20 leagues shape the **next generation** — and the quirks along the way.

A total of nine players from Madhya Pradesh featured in the recently concluded 2025 Indian Premier League (IPL) — eight of whom had come through the State's premier T20 competition, the MPLT20, in 2024. Just a week after the IPL final, the MPLT20 got underway in Gwalior on June 12 — and so did the work of talent scouts from franchises such as Mumbai Indians, Royal Challengers Bengaluru, Chennai Super Kings, and Rajasthan Royals, along with State selectors preparing for the season ahead. The Diary, too, found itself alongside these sharp-eyed observers. There are a few qualities they consistently seek in a player: skill across departments, fitness, temperament, and attitude. Even a century doesn't always guarantee notice. "You need to check the bowling quality — how they handle a quick bowler," said one IPL scout.

While the players try to stay locked into the game, the scouts make it a point not to miss a single delivery. At times, they count where the fielders are positioned, check whether the bowler adheres to the field setting, and observe if the batter responds to changes quickly. Amid all this, there's the occasional sideways glance at India's Test match unfolding in England.

Between matches, conversations wander — from updates across the domestic scene to nostalgic banter. Since many of these scouts are from different State associations, swapping notes is par for the course.

When the Diary asked one of them to reflect on the constant travel, he shrugged with a grin: "I love it. Being on the move is fine, but watching cricket is always great fun."

Sahil Mathur

A TNPL matchday that refused to end

The Tamil Nadu Premier League (TNPL) drew a full house for the opening game of the 2025 season's final leg. Roughly 4,000 fans had gathered at the NPR College Ground in Natham, eager to watch local stars M. Shahrukh Khan and Vijay Shankar in action.

But nature had other plans. A torrential downpour just before the toss delayed the game between Chepauk Super Gillies (CSG) and Siechem Madurai Panthers (SMP) by nearly an hour. Spectators scrambled for shelter as the players watched the

Scouting ground: From field placements to footwork under pressure — every ball is watched closely at Gwalior's MPLT20.
SAHIL MATHUR

Buzzkill: From rain delays to insect swarms, the TNPL match in Natham tested more than just cricketing skills.
NIGAMANTH P

outfield turn soggy from inside the pavilion.

With the Super Soppers pressed into service, the game eventually resumed. CSG's bowlers exploited the conditions well and restricted SMP to 156/7 — slightly below par given the venue's short boundaries.

CSG, the most successful team in the league's history, looked assured in the chase. But midway through the ninth over, with the score at 71/3, the match was disrupted again — this time, not by rain, but by an unexpected swarm of winged insects that descended upon the stadium.

The acrid smoke of burning neem leaves wafted through the air in an attempt to repel the bugs, but they lingered stubbornly. Despite the infestation, officials pressed on with reduced overs.

Players struggled to focus, swatting away insects between deliveries, while the crowd shared in their discomfort.

Eventually, Vijay Shankar and Narayan Jagadeesan guided CSG home, preserving their team's unbeaten league record.

For the Diary, which had clocked in around 5 a.m., the day didn't end until 2 the next morning. A 21-hour TNPL shift was perhaps not the kind of "special" the diary had imagined when signing up for sports journalism.

Nigamanth P

Balancing act

Despite Saurashtra's dominance in red-ball cricket, its T20 record remains underwhelming. The team has yet to lift the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, and representation in the Indian Premier League has been thin. In 2025, only Chetan Sakariya **(pic, below)** and Jaydev Unadkat featured in the IPL, while players like Harvik Desai and Prerak Mankad, once seen as promising T20 prospects, couldn't cement their places.

In this context, the launch of the Saurashtra Pro T20 League has served dual purposes — as a platform for local players and as a competitive tournament that prioritised balance between bat and ball. Hosted entirely at Rajkot's Niranjan Shah Stadium — notorious for its flat, batter-friendly surfaces — the league marked a conscious shift.

"The tournament is long. Each team plays eight games. Only three black-soil pitches have been used. They've been prepared to last the tournament," explained Sakariya.

Rajkot's reputation precedes it: in four ODIs played here, 300-plus totals were breached thrice, and in T20Is, the average first-innings score is 187. But in the Pro League, that number came down to 165. Teams even defended totals under 140 on three occasions.

Unseasonal rain towards the end of the tournament added a layer of unpredictability, injecting just enough moisture to help bowlers stay relevant. In the final, Anmol Kings Halar was dismissed for 142, yet managed to push JMD Kutch Riders deep into the 17th over.

"There was help for bowlers early on, but later the tracks eased out — which actually made matches more competitive," said Aryan Sorath Lions' Arpit Vasavada. A first step, perhaps, but the league has shown that Saurashtra's T20 future might just be worth investing in.

Abhishek Saini

SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

Breaking the scrum ceiling: What the RPL means for Indian rugby

Can franchise sport breathe life into Indian rugby? Inside the making of RPL — **a bold experiment** in commercialising and scaling a niche game.

Shayan Acharya
shayan.acharya@thehindu.co.in

When Javed Hussain, the Hyderabad Heroes star, walked into a plush Mumbai hotel for the first time, he instinctively video-called his parents. For the next 20 minutes, words eluded him. He silently walked around, showing them every corner of the luxurious room. His parents, emotional and wide-eyed, had never experienced such opulence. As they blessed their son through the screen, Javed, too, struggled to hold back tears.

It was a long way from the informal settlements of Vasant Kunj in New Delhi, where Javed's rugby journey had begun. Back then, the idea of playing in a televised, franchise-based league — let alone sharing space with global icons — was unimaginable. But the inaugural edition of the Rugby Premier League (RPL) has turned that distant dream into a vivid reality.

The RPL has not only elevated Indian rugby's visibility but also opened new doors for players like Javed.

"We lived in *juggis* (makeshift homes), and there was a jungle behind where we used to go to relieve ourselves since we didn't have toilets," Javed told *Sportstar*. "Then, Earth Foundation, an NGO, cleared the jungle and made it into a rugby ground."

That piece of land became a turning point. Coaches from Delhi Hurricanes, in collaboration with the NGO, began training children there.

"I didn't even understand the sport at first. I was scared of the older boys. But one of the coaches told me he'd give me a 'Tiger' biscuit packet after training. For those biscuits, I got greedy and started playing," he said with a grin.

Javed grew to love the game, but the COVID-19 pandemic nearly ended his journey. Forced to stop playing, he began delivering milk in his neighbourhood to support his family.

"I thought my career was over," he recalled. But when normalcy returned, so did his dream. Eventually, Javed broke into the Indian national team.

His story isn't an outlier. Many promising players have dropped out mid-way, unable to balance passion with survival. But for the first time, the RPL offers a glimmer of hope. Despite rugby sevens enjoying global popularity, in India the sport has historically remained confined to Kolkata, Mumbai, and Odisha — each carrying its own social and economic contours.

When actor and former rugby international Rahul Bose took charge as president of Rugby India, he envisioned a future where Indian players could compete and learn alongside international stars. For that, he knew, a well-structured, broadcast-friendly league was essential.

Mumbai emerged as the ideal launchpad: equipped with suitable venues and the logistical ease that comes with being India's financial capital.

Still, the road to RPL was anything but easy. Convincing stakeholders to invest in a sport seen as niche and commercially risky took months of effort. But perseverance paid off. GMR came on board as title sponsor, and GMR Sports partnered with Rugby India to organise the world's first franchise-based rugby sevens league. The debut edition featured six franchises and attracted some of the sport's most recognisable names.

As the Chennai Bulls clinched the inaugural title, Bose remained clear-eyed about the task ahead:

"The spillover effect of the RPL has to permeate into the larger Indian rugby ecosystem. That's our responsibility as a federation," he said.

For GMR Sports, the move into rugby wasn't a shot in the dark.

"It's not as if rugby randomly came our way," said Satyam Trivedi, CEO of GMR Sports. "We had a clear, structured framework. Rugby fits into it."

He added that while rugby in

Bulls rampage: The Chennai Bulls emerged as the inaugural champion of the Rugby Premier League, thrashing the Delhi Redz 41-0 in a one-sided final in Mumbai. AFP

India isn't yet commercialised, it's played in over 250 districts.

"Globally, it's aspirational. In some countries, rugby is a private school sport while football is played in public schools. But in India, rugby defies these boundaries — it's played both in urban hubs like Mumbai and in rural belts," Trivedi explained.

The RPL has also attracted serious backers. Groups like Manipal and Dream11 now own teams, while corporate sponsorships have started to trickle in. Weather-related disruptions led to thin turnouts at the Andheri Sports Complex, but the league found substantial traction via broadcast. Looking ahead, expansion is key. Team owners believe the RPL shouldn't remain Mumbai-centric.

"This sport deserves to reach new cities," said Sanjith Shetty, co-owner of Bengaluru Bravehearts and a former rugby player himself.

For Shetty and others, the investment isn't short-term.

"We've seen startups evolve. Nothing big happens in the first few years. This is a long-term vision," he said.

Yet infrastructure remains a concern. While Mumbai can host a league of this magnitude, the same isn't true for Kolkata or Odisha. Grounds exist, but purpose-built rugby stadiums do not. Bose and the federation are hopeful that the RPL's steady start will help build momentum — and facilities.

On the field, the players have already started reaping benefits.

"Earlier, people would ask, *'Kya khelte ho?'* They didn't even know rugby existed," said India captain Mohit Khatri. "But the RPL has given us visibility. That's invaluable."

He's also optimistic about the ripple effect.

"In the past, getting jobs was tough for rugby players. But with the sport gaining traction and government backing for athletes, our boys now stand a chance at public sector jobs too," Khatri noted. "We used to play maybe three matches a year. Now, the more we play, the better we'll get."

International coaches agree. Mike Friday, head coach of the Kalinga Black Tigers and a respected name in global rugby, spent extensive time with Indian players and noted rapid development.

"Earlier, their skills weren't really tested. But playing alongside elite athletes forces them to respond to real-game scenarios. That's how you grow," Friday said.

Of course, there were teething troubles — rains dampened crowds, publicity was underwhelming, and the sport still has miles to go in breaking into the mainstream. But despite it all, the RPL has delivered something invaluable: belief.

For players like Javed and Khatri, the league isn't just a tournament — it's proof that their dreams have a place in the sun.

LISTEN TO OUR PODCAST

« As soon as you're an Olympic winner, the power of your voice starts to rise and you can achieve so much more »

THOMAS ROHLER

Jonathan Selvaraj
jonathan.selvaraj@thehindu.co.in

Two Olympic champions will be on the field at the Neeraj Chopra Classic event in Bengaluru on July 5. One, of course, is Neeraj himself. The other is Thomas Rohler who won gold at the 2016 Games in Rio.

Rohler was one of the men to beat during the 2016–2020 Olympic cycle — his 93.90m throw at the 2017 Doha Diamond League placed him third on the all-time list for the javelin throw. He would likely have been among the favourites to defend his Olympic crown in Tokyo, but a serious back injury put an end to his hopes, paving the way for Neeraj to enter the history books.

Since then, Rohler's comeback has been slow. He has struggled to recapture the form that once made him a world-beater and eventually missed out on the 2024 Olympics as well. However, the 32-year-old isn't done with the sport just yet.

In this interview with *Sportstar,* Rohler opens up about making peace with his injuries, what keeps him motivated, and what goals remain for an athlete like him who has already won nearly everything there is to win.

He also reflects on Neeraj's role in growing the sport and the recent burst of talent in India in a discipline that was once dominated by European athletes.

Why did you decide to come to India?

Competing in India was on my bucket list. I mean, it's the fastest-growing javelin community in the world right now, and it's just logical to have an international meet here. Getting the invite directly from the Indian Olympic champion was an honour. I was happy to hear that he's super involved. I know from my own experience that conducting a meet is an extra bit of work for an athlete. I'm glad he is putting in the work to help the javelin community, and I'm happy to come and help him as well.

Neeraj was a big fan of yours back in 2016 when he was still starting out. What is it like to now compete at a tournament alongside him?

We have interacted and competed before and are genuinely respectful to each other. I also think we share the same Olympic values. This is how sport works — you start competing with your role models. I know it from my own experience. When I first started competing with javelin throwers like Norwegian Andreas Thorkildsen or Tero Pitkamaki from Finland, that was a huge moment for me. So I can feel how he must have felt competing for the first time against — or with — me. This is just how sport evolves: the young ones eventually start to beat you. And it's a good thing.

Pics: GETTY IMAGES

COMPETING IN INDIA WAS ON MY BUCKET LIST. IT'S THE FASTEST-GROWING JAVELIN COMMUNITY IN THE WORLD RIGHT NOW

What are your goals for the 2025?

I was struggling with a major back injury in 2020 that took quite a long time for me to recover from. Last year, I tried to get back to competitions — it wasn't amazing, but it was OK considering where I was coming from. Since then, I've had a really, really good winter. Unfortunately, during the fall season, there was another break due to a Lyme infection, which really put me down.

But honestly, since January, I've been healthy and training really well. I'm just looking forward to competing again. Training is one thing, and competing is another — and I'm just glad to be back on track soon. I'm taking the long route back to where I was, and I'm starting to eye the World Championships a little. I have strong competitors in my own country, which is good for Germany and for the sport — but at the same time, it's a challenge for me.

Right now, the more important goal is to have a steady season: to compete in at least eight to ten meets and get back to stable distances above 80 metres. If I can do that, then I can take the next steps towards 2028.

What would you be satisfied with by the end of this year?

A good-quality throw and a run-up that works. Over the last ten years, I've never set a distance as a target before any meet, and I'm not going to change that in 2025 either. For me, it's about maintaining good quality — both in training and in competition. I just want to see myself doing in competitions what I'm currently capable of in training. If I can do that, I'll be able to move forward confidently into the season.

You have won the Olympic title, the World title, and have the third-best throw of all time. Are there any goals left for you?

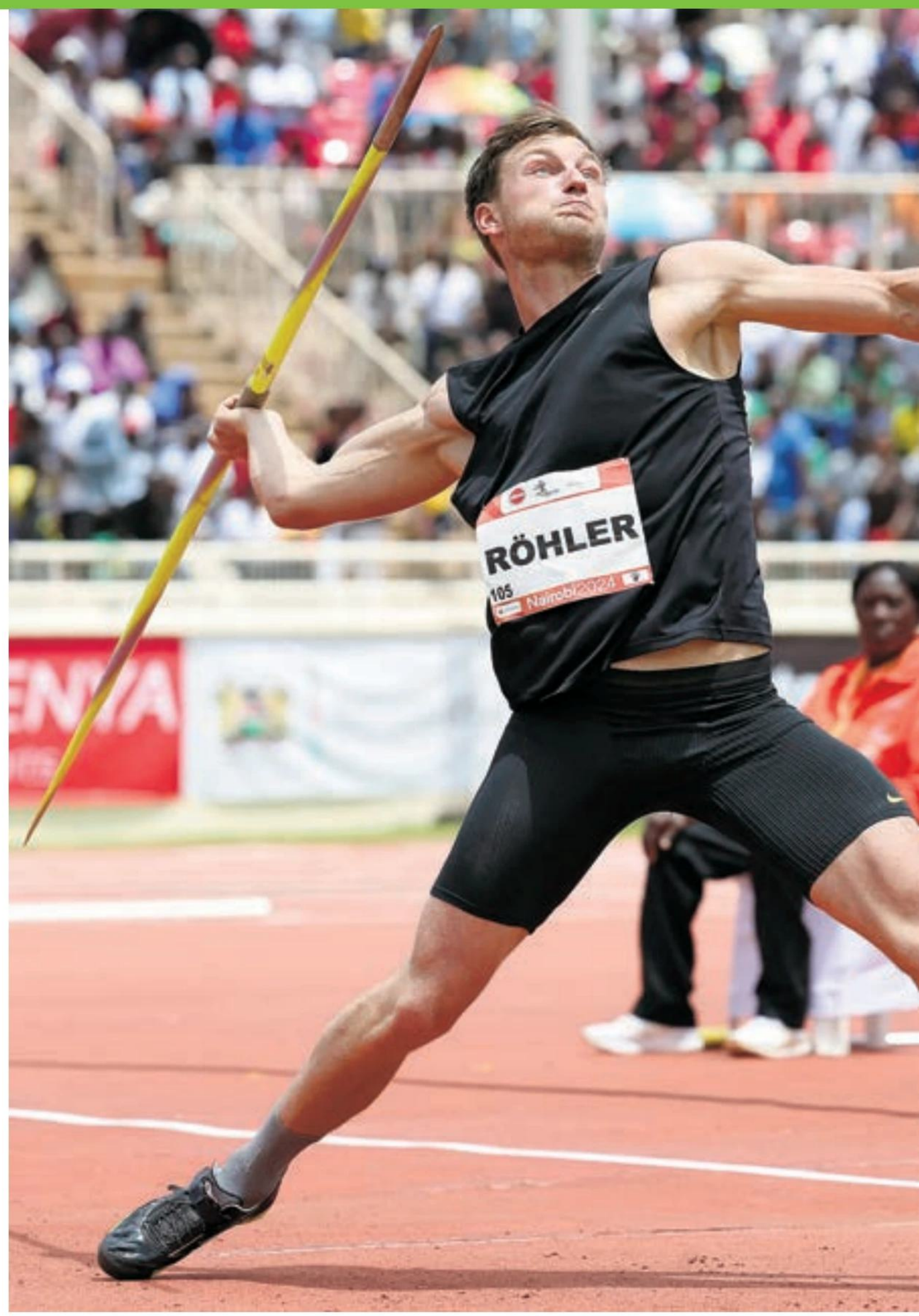
I actually started thinking about this question after I won my Olympic gold in 2016. Before those Games, I had told the German media that one day I wanted to throw over 90 metres and that I wanted to compete at the Olympics. I'd never really thought about winning gold — I just wanted to be an Olympian. That was what truly drove me into sport, and it's what still gives me goosebumps when I look back at my career.

And then came all these cherries on the cake. What I've come to realise is that what makes me genuinely happy is the lifestyle — and the fact that I love leaving footprints. The way I'm able to do that — not just for the next generation of athletes, but also, in a way, for myself — is by staying active in the sport.

So now, I just want to stay healthy and remain associated with the sport. If I can win another big title, that would be amazing. But there's no longer a sense of 'I have to'. I just want to enjoy it and be present.

You almost never made it to the Olympic final in 2016 — you qualified for the final only on your last throw in qualification. Could you take us through your Olympic experience?

2016 was one of the most challenging seasons of my whole career. Something most people don't know is that I injured myself really seriously at the European



Championships in Amsterdam, just a few weeks before the Olympics. I tore my latissimus (back) muscle, which is one of the bigger muscle groups. I was badly bruised all over my right side, and when I showed up for the MRI, they asked if I'd been in a motorcycle accident. I had to tell them I got it just by throwing a javelin.

Those six and a half weeks between that injury and the Olympics were among the most challenging phases of my career. Still, I knew I was throwing well and had the best throw of the season (91.28m at the Paavo Nurmi Games in Turku). So at least on paper, and according to the data, I was ready to go for a medal in Rio — but given the condition of my body, I also knew it was going to be difficult.

That qualification round was actually a proving ground for me — a test of whether I was ready enough to attack hard. I was really pushing myself in the Olympic qualifier. I'm never a particularly good qualifier

anyway. I think many top athletes are like that — weak qualifiers and great final performers.

That's something I've found over time, talking to all these javelin champions, long jumpers, high jumpers, and so on — we tend to spare our power and mental energy in qualifications. We save our focus for when it really matters, so qualifying can often be a bit tough for us.

Over the years, I've started using qualifications to test javelins, run-up angles, and get a sense of how I'm feeling. So even though I only qualified at the end, I was never super nervous in the Rio qualifications. Still, I know I gave people back home — and my fans — a really hard time.

In fact, you weren't even in the gold medal position in the final before your last throw. Were you nervous before that sixth throw?

« I DON'T THINK I UNDERSTOOD RIGHT AWAY WHAT IT MEANT TO ACTUALLY WIN THE OLYMPICS. IT ACTUALLY TOOK A FEW WEEKS FOR ME TO REALISE IT »

I wasn't looking at the other throwers in the final. I was just focusing on my individual control, going from throw to throw. I was in this state where I was simply aware of where I was and just sticking to the game plan. There were no overwhelming emotions or anything — I wasn't really nervous. Before the final throw, I could see on the board that I was in the silver medal position. It was possible that someone else could have overtaken me, but that day was really hot and we had some bad wind blowing towards us, so I wasn't expecting the others to land a great throw. When I got my chance, I just stuck to my plan — which turned out to be a good idea.

What was it like when you actually won?

At first, it just seemed to me that winning the Olympics was simply another meet in my season — even if it was an important tournament. I don't think I understood right away what it meant to actually win the Olympics. It actually took a few weeks for me to realise what I had accomplished. It didn't really strike me during the competition, and I think that was because I was just exhausted — both from the athletic performance and from all the emotions I was feeling. Sure, I realised I'd won the Olympics, but it took more time — and possibly returning home to Germany — to understand what a big thing it was to be an Olympic champion.

How did the Olympics change your life?

As soon as you're an Olympic winner, the power of your voice starts to rise and you can achieve so much more. Your footprint gets bigger, of course, but your obligations grow too. People expect more from you. There are a lot of good things, but challenges come with it. Even so, I wouldn't trade it for anything. It's the best thing that ever happened to me.

Where do you keep your Olympic medal?

It's not mounted on a display or anything, because I try to keep my home life somewhat separate from my sports career. At the end of the day, sport is still something like a job. And I also want to get away from my job a bit, even though I love it very much. My Olympic gold is in my wardrobe with my clothes. I don't bring it out often — usually only when other people ask if they can take a picture with it. But there are times when I take it out for myself — when I feel the need for a bit of motivation. The last time I took it out was two years ago. I was struggling with a lot of issues, with injury and all that, and I wanted to feel some of the old emotions once again.

You're now a family man and the father of a young boy. Does your Olympic medal mean more to him?

My son is still really young. He doesn't care much about the medal, but he loves the javelins a lot more. Sometimes he comes with me to training and wants to do everything I do. He wants to lift the bars. He wants to throw the balls. He's a kid — he just wants to play. He does know the medal is something valuable, but

No pressure: "I just want to stay healthy and remain associated with the sport. If I can win another big title, that would be amazing. But there's no longer a sense of 'I have to'. I just want to enjoy it and be present," says Rohler.

he doesn't see it as something super holy or precious like adults do. For him, it's just this heavy golden thing. He'd rather just play.

To him, I'm just dad — not an Olympic champion. And honestly, that's the way I prefer people to deal with me. I don't want anyone to think I'm some sort of superhero. I'm just one of the guys who played sports and made it to the top. We too often forget all the people along the way who helped make me that champion — the training group buddies, the coaches, and everyone around me, including my family — they're important too.

The medal is, of course, nice, but the one thing I really like to have around me are my competition bibs. Those are my only real mementos. I keep all my bibs. Sometimes people ask me for one, and I can't give it to them because I only have one for each competition, which I keep for myself.

You were at your peak between 2016 and 2019, after which you suffered an injury. How hard was it to come back from that?

If you play at the highest level of sport, you always have to be prepared for something to happen. I was extremely lucky to avoid any major injuries — in what is a very injury-prone event — for nine years in a row. But in 2020, I was really pushing myself in training. And when you go for that high-risk approach, you can get high rewards — but there's also a downside. For me, it was that back injury. It happens. You need to accept the situation and keep working through it. I needed a lot of patience because it took a long time to recover. It was especially strange to have that injury during COVID, which was such an unusual time. The whole world of sport felt different. Even though I missed the Olympics, I think it was easier to deal with because competing in those ghost competitions was never that appealing to me. Honestly, even if I had been in good shape, I would've struggled to compete then. There was no emotion left in the sport. It wasn't really the sport we love. There was no engagement with fans. Because of that, I was able to focus on my rehab and do all the boring stuff without feeling like I was missing out on throwing the javelin.

Of course, I missed throwing, and it was tough sometimes to watch competitions. But I think it helped that I had already picked the big fruits of being a professional athlete. I had the Olympic and European golds. I'm very happy and satisfied with what I've already achieved in sport. So the injury became a personal challenge — to also accept the bad parts of sport.

Was there ever a moment where you felt like you didn't need to push yourself and deal with the heartache of missing a second Olympics?

You do have bad days, and on those days, you feel like quitting. Sometimes you don't train either. But then, two days later, you start to miss that feeling. I've told myself that I'll continue to compete as long as I still have that feeling of missing training. As long as that stays alive, I'm going to keep training.

I think I'm blessed to be able to do what I do. I know many talented people who would love to do this, but they have to take the nine-to-five route. I'm lucky enough to do this at a really high level. It's not like I'm throwing at a city level. I'm still one of the world's best javelin throwers. I'm throwing above 80 metres. And that's something I'm pretty happy about.

Were you always interested in being a javelin thrower?

I loved throwing stones from the shore when I was a small kid. I'd say I just had this throwing gene. But I was a very skinny, small kid. I wasn't big and strong like the other boys at the beginning. [He's currently 6'3"] So early on, I tried my luck in the more technical events. I started out as a high jumper and triple jumper.

That made a lot of sense because, if you want to stay in the high school sports system in Germany, you need to meet certain standards. And I just wasn't hitting those standards with the javelin at the time. So I went into high jumping and met the standards there. But on the regional level, I always competed in throwing.

I was okay. Not great, but okay. And my heart was always telling me that throwing was way more fun. So I invested more time in it. Luckily, I had people who supported that. And yeah, then things went really well. I

was a decent high jumper — my personal best was 1.96m. I always wanted to get over two metres. I think if I had jumped for one more year, I would have made it. But then it was time to switch to javelin.

I also jumped about 14 metres in the triple jump at the U-18 level. People said I could have been a good decathlete, but in Jena — the place where I grew up and did my training — we never had the opportunity to do the pole vault because our gym wasn't tall enough.

Javelin throwing isn't a full-time career in Europe. So how do you manage?

I understood very early on that by just throwing javelins I wasn't going to make a living for me or my family. So I work with sponsors. I'm an ambassador for different brands. I also do management coaching for leaders of big businesses. I focus on this especially in the fall, which is the off-season and when I have a bit more time on my hands. It's definitely time-consuming, and I know that if I were in another country, I'd probably treat my sport a bit differently — I'd allocate my time differently as well. These days, I'm usually up by six, sending and replying to emails. Once I finish that part of my job, I move on to my other job — javelin training.

I enjoy both sides of my work. I love it when big companies call me. I was recently contacted by Allianz and BMW. I enjoyed being able to spread the word about javelin throwing, but in most cases, they wanted me to speak about elite performance. Most people are happy with being average, but I believe there's amazing value that can be brought from the Olympic side of things into society and business.

What do you enjoy the most about your life right now?

Beyond sport and business, my partner and I also started a farm in 2020. We teach people about vegetables, how to live a natural life, and how to nourish the body properly. From time to time, we even host school visits. I really enjoy having the freedom to be in the

garden at lunchtime and to raise a healthy family. On top of that, I get to have a good workout every day — and all of this makes me really happy.

Javelin throw used to be dominated by European throwers, but now there's talent from all over the world.

There was always talent — it just needed a spark. Neeraj was that spark that ignited the flame in India, and now there's a huge talent pool in the country. I think there's another reason too. Here in Germany, performances in events like the javelin throw aren't appreciated as much. In a country like India, your performance gets rewarded. I think that — along with the growing passion for the sport, the time invested in it, and the sheer mass of people — helps the sport grow.

I also have another theory: cricket has played a huge role in the development of javelin talent. In Germany, the sporting culture is built around football. In India, it revolves more around cricket, which is far more related to javelin than football is. So, it makes sense that cricket-playing nations would have a bigger talent pool. Some people might say the right leg swing is like a football kick, but honestly, football has nothing to do with javelin.

Germany had some excellent throwers, but now, apart from Weber, there doesn't seem to be much talent coming through.

I don't mind. I love that there's an international community of throwers. It doesn't matter much to me where people come from — I just want them to be respectful and to enjoy seeing what the human body can achieve in this sport. I've had connections to so many countries and training groups, and I love seeing them all do well.

German javelin is doing okay, but because we had so much talent coming through at the same time — me, (Andreas) Hofmann, (Johannes) Vetter, and before us Bernhard Seifert — it made it hard for the next generation. We created a big youth gap. Sure, we inspired a lot of young throwers by performing well, but we were too good for too long. The younger guys never really had the chance to step up, and eventually, they quit. We've seen the exact same thing happen in Finland. They had a lot of success in javelin, and then there was this huge gap. It's just the nature of things.

What's the one thing you're looking forward to doing in India?

Well, I hope to try Indian food, even though I still need to see what's on the plate first! By German standards, we already eat Mediterranean and spicy food at home, including Asian cuisine. So I'm okay with spices. But I'd never go crazy, especially not before a competition.

THE GREAT AMERICAN DREAM

Curtis Thompson is America's **top hope** in javelin. But before the throws came cookout badminton, football drills, and YouTube videos.

GETTY IMAGES

Pranay Rajiv
pranay.rajiv@thehindu.co.in

In another life, Curtis Thompson would have been an American footballer.

In an even more unlikely alternate world, where Thompson leaned further into his maternal heritage, he could have been a badminton player — a curious scenario, considering he is a six-foot-tall, 102-kilo American of Jamaican descent.

But in this reality, Thompson thrives as a professional javelin thrower, ranked among the world's best. As we reach the midpoint of the year, he sits third in the global standings, behind Germany's Julian Weber and India's Neeraj Chopra.

Only two Americans have ever thrown farther than Thompson — and many believe he could finally end the nation's 50-year wait for an Olympic javelin medal.

Still, things could have gone very differently. Growing up in New Jersey, he explored a variety of sports with restless curiosity — including badminton thanks to a family connection.

"My mom's side is from Jamaica, and there were a few who played badminton, which is one of the sports we played at cookouts or get-togethers," says Thompson over a video call from Alabama.

"Outside of playing football, I also tried basketball and baseball. I gave soccer a try when I was little, but didn't like it. And then when I got to high school, I played basketball, football and track.

"Over the years, I would drop one sport. I stopped basketball after my second year of high school. And then after my third year, I stopped playing football and just focused on javelin," he says.

He traces the transition to a serendipitous moment in high school, when he initially took up track to improve his football speed. One day, disillusioned by the repetition of sprint drills, he walked over to the javelin coach and asked, "Can I throw that stick thing?"

That throw sparked a chain reaction. He quickly surged through the ranks, establishing himself as the top javelin thrower in the country.

"By the end of my junior year, I had gone over 200 feet and became the number one US thrower at that time. That was the moment I realised I am good at it," says Thompson.

He was also nudged toward javelin by the toll football was taking on his body.

"Football is a very rough sport. It's a lot of contact. And once I started javelin and saw the path, I just stuck with it. I knew that was going to be what I would do in college and beyond. I realised javelin is kinder than football, health-wise," he adds.

Like many javelin throwers, YouTube was his first coach.

"To start, it was a lot of YouTube. After a year, I went to a javelin clinic and gained some technical ideas. First, it was just get out there and throw it. The clinic allowed me to learn. Slowly, I added small technical things over and over," he says.

After cutting his teeth on the national circuit and entering the global stage, Thompson's breakthrough came in 2023 when he won gold at the Pan American Games.

In 2025, he raised his level with a personal best throw of 87.76m in Texas — the world-leading mark for nearly two months before Neeraj and Weber overtook it.

Thompson credits that throw to finding his "zone."

"It was one of those days where everything kind of hit right. There was less thinking going into it; it was more of reacting."

One of the keys to his recent improvement has been switching from the American grip to the Finnish one — the preferred choice of many elite throwers globally. The Finnish grip, with an extended index finger, offers more control and power.

"I was curious about it and decided to go Finnish. It just worked for me right at the beginning of the season. So I kind of just stuck with it."

Coach Curtis

From an Indian lens, shaped by the underfunded nature of athletics, the USA might appear to offer abundant opportunity. But for a niche sport like javelin, the trickle-down effect hasn't fully taken hold. Even for someone as accomplished as Thompson, making ends meet is a challenge.

"You have to figure out how to pay bills, on top of funding your season. We do have athletes who get support from the government, which is great. But it's tough on the development side if you're not quite at that level.

"You have to work those jobs to make money so that you can attend meets. I'm hoping that before my career is done, it will

Early success: Anderson Peters, Curtis Thompson and Tyriq Horsford completed a podium sweep for Mississippi State at the 2019 NCAA Division I Outdoor Track & Field Championships. Pics: GETTY IMAGES

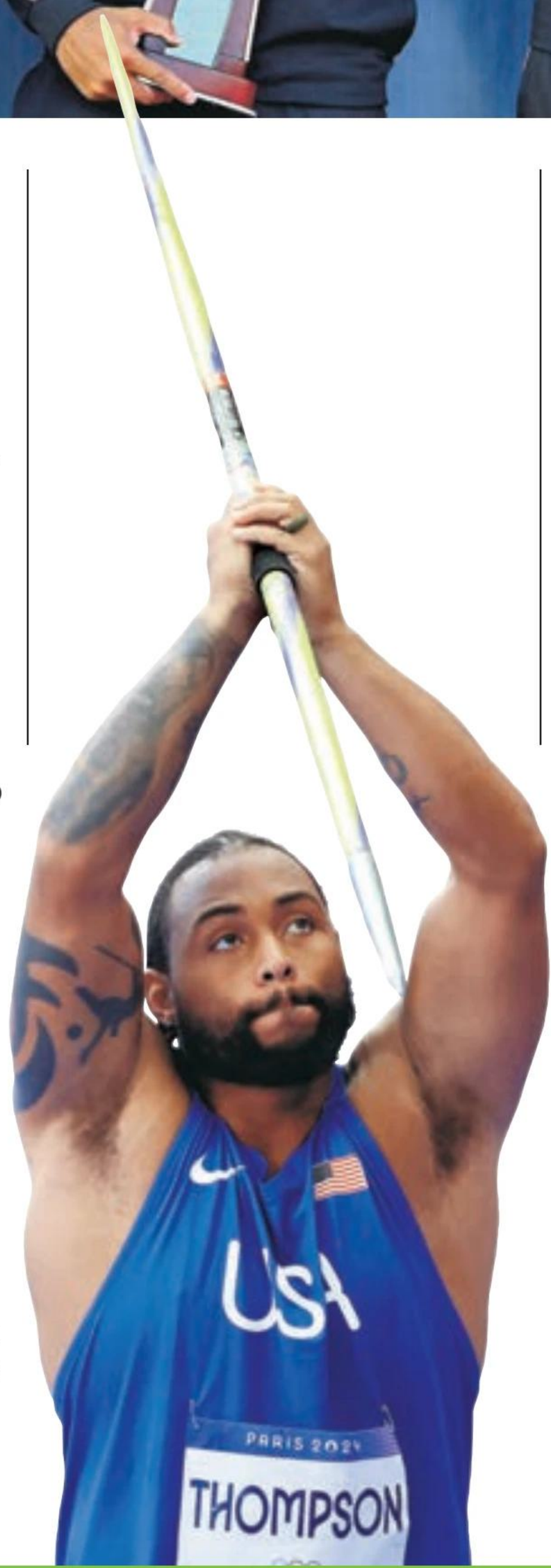
come to a point where our top athletes can just train and compete."

Fortunately, his secondary vocation keeps him connected to his passion. As an athletics coach at Spain Park High School in Alabama, Thompson finds renewal in teaching the sport to others.

"Coaching kids reminds you of some of the basics that you tend to forget by the time you get to that top level. Also, there's a type of joy in coaching the youth and watching their passion grow for something that you've learned to grow, love and enjoy."

That joy comes at a cost. Coaching eats into his training, and he has to fine-tune his routine to stay aligned with his javelin goals.

High on that list is the Los Angeles Games. The USA's last Olympic javelin medal came in 1972 — a bronze for Bill Schmidt. "I am excited for 2028. That's going to be a big one. And to have the opportunity to win a medal in the US is something I'm looking forward to."



Also within reach is the 90m mark — a distance only one American, Breaux Greer (PB: 91.29m, Indianapolis, 2007), has ever surpassed.

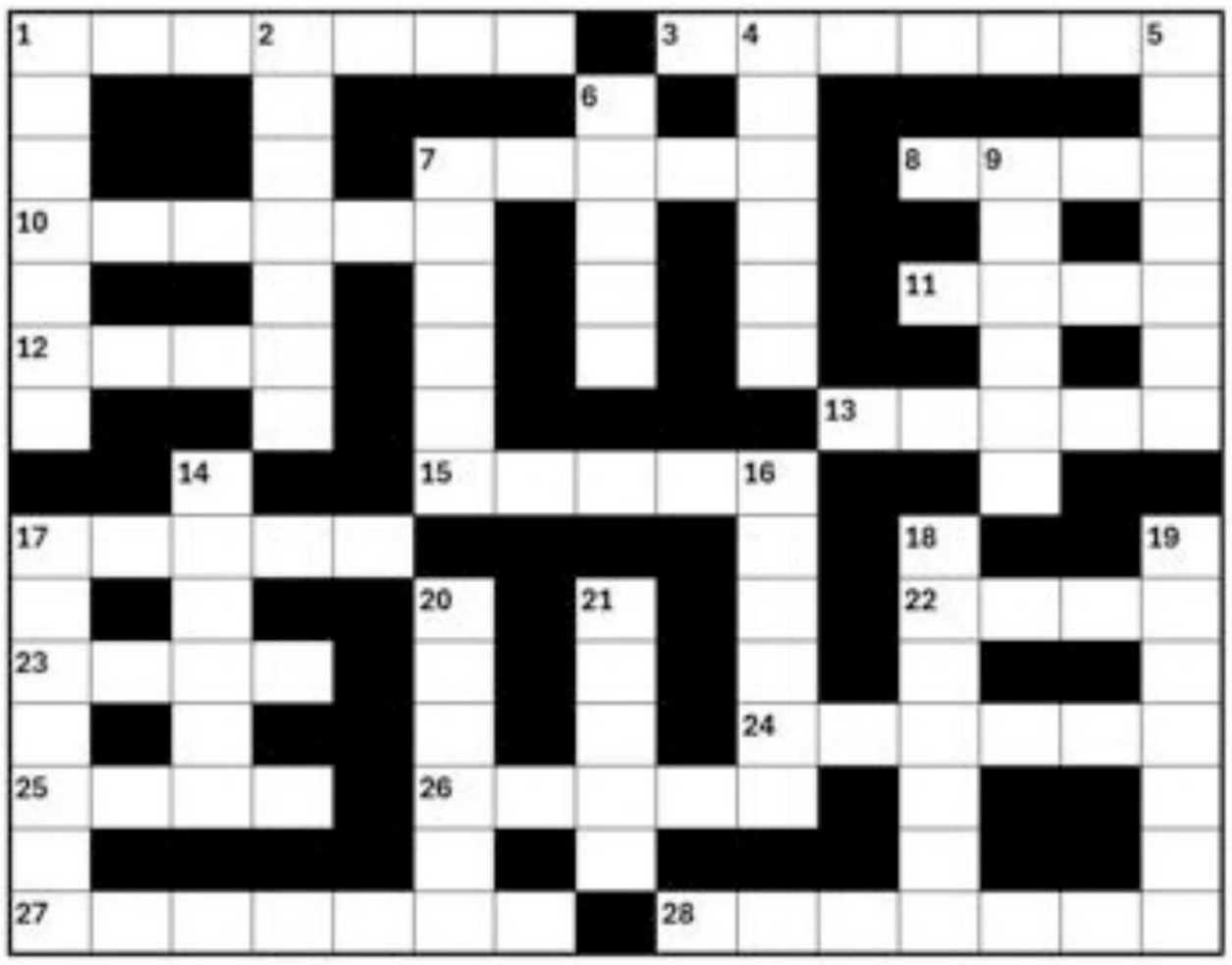
But beyond medals and milestone throws, Thompson's ultimate goal is bigger. "One of the things that I want is to have the US pop up in conversation whenever anybody talks about javelin. I also hope that by the time I'm done, the US javelin standard rises.

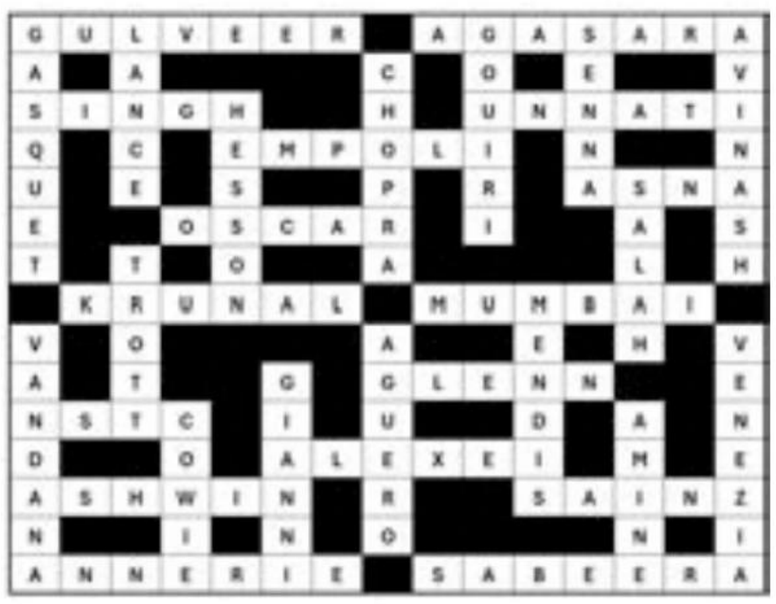
"We need guys who are striving not just for the 80-metre mark, but go beyond that. So, if I can do that, then I'll be satisfied, even if I don't get a medal or anything. But of course, would love to win a few."

Next up is his first trip to India, for the Neeraj Chopra Classic in July — another country added to a globe-trotting career that still surprises him.

"Javelin has taken me to so many places that I never would have. I think if you pick up a sport and get to this level, it will help you see the world while doing your job. There have been plenty of places that I've gone to and realised, 'I probably never would have been here if I wasn't throwing a javelin,'" says Thompson.

CROSSWORD
N. SOORYA PRAKASH





SOLUTION TO LAST FORTNIGHT'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS

3 What is the first name of this Indian domestic legend from Gujarat who announced his retirement recently? (7)

7 Who scored the fastest 150 in T20 cricket recently? (5)

8 & Down 9 Who is appointed as the new coach of Real Madrid FC? (4,6)

10 Which West Indian white ball specialist recently announced a shocking retirement from international cricket? (6)

11 Who won the women's singles title at the French Open 2025? (4)

12 Identify this former Dutch international footballer who is the current manager of Belgian Pro League club Beerschot. (4)

13 Who was the lead runner of the Indian 4x400m relay team which bagged gold at the recently held Asian Athletics Championships in Gumi, Korea? (5)

15 Which former English opener became the first player ever in the world to score a century in ODIs? (5)

22 Who is the vice-captain of Worcestershire for the T20 Blast? (4)

23 Who won the gold medal at the 2023 IBA Women's World Boxing Championships and 2022 Commonwealth Games in the minimum weight category? (4)

24 Who is appointed as the Director for EURO 2028? (6)

25 Who holds the world record of scoring most runs in a single innings in Test cricket? (4)

26 & Down 19 Who ended up as the top scorer of the 2024-25 season of Italian Serie A? (5,7)

27 & 1 Who ended up as the top scorer of the 2024-25 season of French Ligue 1? (7,7)

28 Who became the 86th GM in chess for India? (7)

DOWN

1 Who won the bronze medal at the Archery World Cup Stage 2 in the women's recurve individual event? (7)

2 Who scored the most hat-tricks in the 2024-25 season of French Ligue 1? (7)

4 Identify this first-ever coloured referee in Premier League history who passed away recently. (6)

5 Which former women's singles champion is given a wild card in Wimbledon 2025? (7)

6 Who is the Thai born British racing driver who competes under the Thai flag in Formula 1 for Williams? (5)

7 & Across 17 Who won the ITF women's doubles title in Guimaraes, Portugal held in June 2025? (6,5)

14 Who ended up as the top-scorer of the 2024-25 season of Primeira Liga? (6)

16 Who scored a century in each innings in the first Test between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in June 2025? (6)

17 Who scored the crucial equaliser in the UEFA Nation's League final in which his country won through penalties? (7)

18 Which Indian table tennis legend announced his retirement recently? (7)

20 & 21 Which South African batter scored 109 against India in the women's ODI tri-series in Sri Lanka in May 2025? (6,5)

OKC Thunder as NBA Champion: A story of shrewd management, selfless cohesive play and some luck

Oklahoma City Thunder's 2025 **NBA title crowns** a 13-year rebuild, powered by Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and Presti's long-term vision.

Srinivasan Ramani
srinivasan.vr@thehindu.co.in

The Oklahoma City Thunder's journey to the 2025 NBA championship began with heartbreak 13 years earlier. In 2012, a young Thunder team featuring Kevin Durant, Russell Westbrook, and James Harden reached the NBA Finals, only to fall to the star-studded Miami Heat. The Thunder never returned to the Finals despite their trio of future Hall of Famers.

By 2019, those stars had scattered to other teams, forcing the Thunder into a complete rebuild. General manager Sam Presti, the same architect who had drafted Durant, Westbrook, and Harden beginning from the team's Seattle SuperSonics days, orchestrated another masterful reconstruction. He traded away established stars for prospects like Shai Gilgeous-Alexander (SGA) from the LA Clippers and accumulated a treasure trove of draft picks.

The strategy paid off spectacularly. Over six years, the Thunder transformed from league bottom-feeders into championship contenders, with SGA blossoming into the league's Most Valuable Player and a supporting cast of unheralded players developing into stars.

Building a juggernaut

The Thunder's 68-win regular season in 2024–25 established them as overwhelming championship favourites. However, this success came after learning from previous failures. The team had finished first in the league the previous season, only to lose to the eventual finalist Dallas Mavericks in the Western Conference playoffs.

Those playoff defeats became stepping stones to success. Presti addressed the team's weaknesses by adding veteran centre Isaiah Hartenstein and defensive specialist Alex Caruso before the 2025 season. These additions complemented the Thunder's existing core of SGA, All-Star Jalen Williams, and defensive anchor Chet Holmgren.

The team's identity centred on suffocating defence. Its scheme featured aggressive trapping, hedging, and paint-packing that generated steals and transition opportunities. On offence, SGA's masterful playmaking anchored a steady attack that maximised the team's deep roster.

Road to glory

The Thunder's playoff journey tested their championship mettle. They dispatched the Memphis Grizzlies easily in the first round, but the Denver Nuggets presented a formidable challenge. Led by former MVP Nikola Jokic, SGA's fiercest rival for league honours, Denver pushed the Thunder to a gruelling seven-game series before falling to the upstarts.

The Minnesota Timberwolves offered less resistance in the Western Conference Finals, setting up what appeared to be a favourable Finals match-up against the Indiana Pacers.

Unlikely opposition

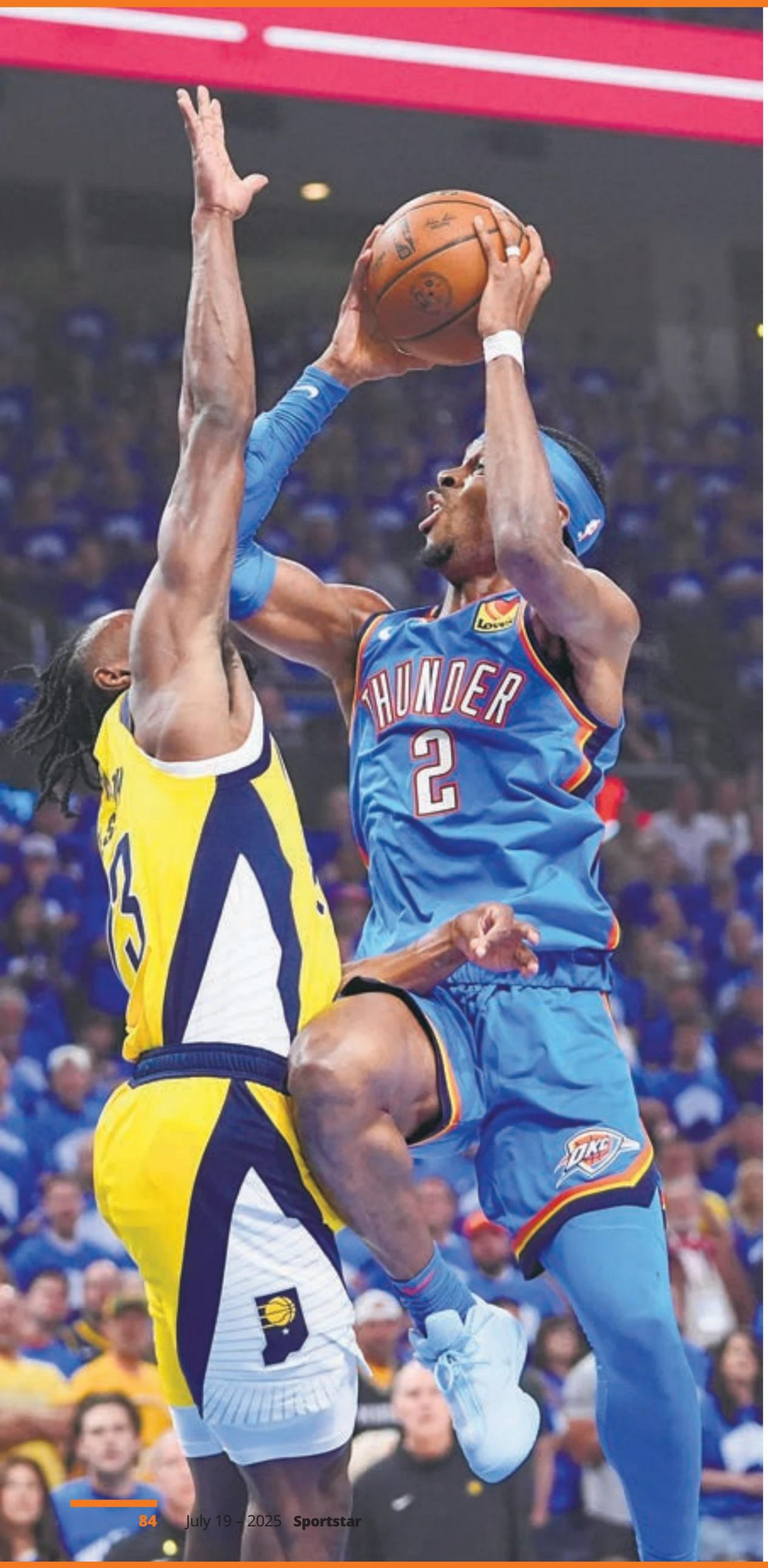
While the Thunder entered as heavy favourites, the Pacers had crafted their own compelling story. This unheralded group finished fourth in the Eastern Conference with 50 wins, 18 fewer than the Thunder, but its playoff run was equally impressive. Led by All-Star point guard Tyrese Haliburton and veteran forward Pascal Siakam, the Pacers upset higher-seeded opponents through superior execution and clutch performances. They swept the injury-depleted Milwaukee Bucks before shocking the conference-leading Cleveland Cavaliers, which had compiled a 64–18 regular season record. The Pacers outshot the Cavaliers in their own game, displaying better composure in crucial moments.

Their Eastern Conference Finals victory over the New York Knicks was driven by stellar performances from Haliburton and Siakam, setting up a David-versus-Goliath Finals match-up. The Pacers' roster featured many players discarded by other contenders, including Aaron Nesmith, TJ McConnell, and Obi Toppin. Their greatest asset was head coach Rick Carlisle, whose championship experience and tactical adaptability gave them hope against superior talent.

Finals for the ages

The Finals defied expectations from the opening tip. Game 1 saw the Thunder control most of the action before the Pacers mounted a resilient comeback, culminating in a Haliburton buzzer-beater that stunned Oklahoma City.

The Thunder's superior talent shone through in Game 2, evening the series at home. However, the Pacers' formula continued working in Game 3 in Indianapolis. While Haliburton and Siakam delivered consistent excellence, role players like Ben Mathurin, Toppin, and McConnell rose to the occasion on both ends of the floor.



High-octane play: (Left) Shai Gilgeous-Alexander (No. 2) scored 29 points and had 12 assists in the Thunder's 103-91 victory over the Indiana Pacers. **(Above)** Thunder's Chet Holmgren and Alex Caruso reach for a rebound against the Pacers in the first half of Game 3 of the 2025 NBA Finals in Indianapolis. AP

SGA remained steady and effective throughout, but Jalen Williams' inconsistent performances became the Thunder's biggest variable. Game 4 marked the Thunder's turning point. Trailing by 10 points in the fourth quarter, they mounted an epic comeback powered by SGA's clutch brilliance to even the series at 2–2.

With momentum shifting, the Thunder appeared poised to close out the series in Game 6 after easing to a win at home in Game 5, withstanding a furious Pacers fourth-quarter rally. But the Pacers had other plans.

Dramatic conclusion

Playing with the same defensive intensity that defined the Thunder, the Pacers dominated Game 6 in Indianapolis, forcing a winner-take-all Game 7. The vast talent gap between the teams seemed irrelevant as the series returned to Oklahoma City.

However, the Pacers faced a crucial concern. Haliburton had

Major blow: Indiana Pacers superstar Tyrese Haliburton could miss the entire 2025-26 NBA season after having surgery on a torn right Achilles tendon. AP

battled through a calf strain to play in Game 6, managing limited minutes only because of his team's dominant performance. The injury raised ominous questions about his availability for the decisive game.

Game 7 remained competitive through the first half, but disaster struck the Pacers when Haliburton suffered a devastating Achilles tear and had to leave the game. The injury, which typically sidelines NBA players for at least a full season, was particularly cruel given that calf strains often precede Achilles problems.

Playing Haliburton with the injury had been a calculated risk with little alternative. His elite playmaking ability, three-point shooting, and fearless clutch play had been the catalyst for the Pacers exceeding expectations all season. Without him, they had no realistic chance in Game 7.

Guards Andrew Nembhard and McConnell tried valiantly to fill the void, but replacing Haliburton's production proved impossible. The Thunder's defence regained its dominant form in the third quarter, building a lead that exceeded 20 points by the period's end. Despite a spirited fourth-quarter effort, the Pacers couldn't overcome the massive deficit.

The Thunder emerged as deserved champions, though fortune played a role in their victory. Whether Haliburton could have led the Pacers to an upset will forever remain one of basketball's great what-ifs, but the Thunder's championship was earned through years of patient building and exceptional execution.

Dynasty in the making

This championship appears to be just the beginning for the Thunder. Their young core remains in their prime, while Presti's shrewd resource management and Mark Daigneault's effective coaching provide a foundation for sustained success.

Presti deserves particular credit for seamlessly transitioning from one championship-calibre core to another. The same executive who drafted Durant, Westbrook, and Harden has now built around SGA, Williams, Holmgren, and their supporting cast.

After 13 years of waiting, the Thunder have returned to the apex. With their combination of talent, depth, and organisational excellence, expect them to remain a championship threat for years to come.

Key Stats from the Thunder's Historic 2024–25 Season

The Thunder became just the fourth team in NBA history to win 84 games in a season (regular season and playoffs combined), joining:

- 2015–16 Golden State Warriors (88–18).
- 1995–96 Chicago Bulls (87–13).
- 1996–97 Chicago Bulls (84–17).

They were the best defensive team in the regular season by a wide margin:

- Allowed 2.5 fewer points per 100 possessions than the second-ranked Orlando Magic
- This is the second-largest gap between the top two defensive teams in any season over the last 29 years (play-by-play era).

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander averaged over 30 points per game across the regular season and playoffs:

- He is just the fourth player to do so for a championship team
- The others: Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (1970–71), Rick Barry (1974–75), Michael Jordan (four times).

Stats credit: NBA

Directionless descent: Despite experience and expectation, the Indian women's team faltered across the European leg of the FIH Pro League — lacking leadership, structure, and spark. GETTY IMAGES

PRO LEAGUE STRUGGLES EXPOSE DEEPER WOES IN INDIAN HOCKEY

A **difficult European leg** for Indian hockey in the FIH Pro League 2024-25 ends with the men barely surviving and the women facing relegation.

Uthra Ganesan
uthra.ganesan@thehindu.co.in

A month is a long time in sport. Before the men and women left for the European leg of the FIH Pro League 2024–25, Indian hockey appeared to be on the right track for the bigger, tougher challenges looming over the next 18 months. By the time they wrapped up a forgettable tour, however, both players and coaches were left grappling with more questions than answers.

The men, who were third with 15 points after the first round of eight home games in Bhubaneswar, managed to add just three more during their final European stretch to finish eighth in the nine-team competition. They suffered the ignominy of a record seven-match losing streak — the longest ever for the Indian men's team across all competitions — slipping from title contenders to a side merely relieved to cling on to its top-tier status, owed more to Ireland's dismal run than India's own doing.

The women weren't so fortunate. Having earned promotion from the Nations Cup — the second tier of the Pro League — two seasons ago, the team finished bottom and was relegated. It has been replaced by Ireland, which was promoted through the FIH Hockey Nations Cup played in Chile earlier this year. While New Zealand won that tournament, the Black Sticks later declined the invitation to join the Pro League this time. As per tournament regulations, the runner-up — Ireland — was offered the vacant slot, and it has confirmed its participation.

With just two outright wins, and

Isolated impact: Abhishek emerged as India's standout performer in the Pro League with four goals, but his tendency to hold onto the ball too long inside the circle often allowed defenders to recover and shut down scoring opportunities. AP

Broken transitions: Coach Craig Fulton's "defend-to-attack" philosophy — built on a solid backline and high fitness levels to enable quick transitions — was exposed in Europe as repeated defensive lapses cost India crucial moments and matches. GETTY IMAGES

another from a shootout, India ended with 10 points. The relegation is embarrassing, but it also signals deeper concerns for the team than just a loss of prestige.

Close, but not close enough

Despite similar outcomes, the men are in a better position — both in terms of their shortcomings and the avenues available to address them. Barring a couple of games, they were never entirely outplayed. Six of their seven defeats came by a single goal, five of those in the final quarter. The team remained in the contest throughout but paid the price for a combination of erratic defending and poor decision-making in attack.

The tour began on the back foot: several squad members were unable to travel to Ireland for practice games due to visa issues. Injuries to Gurjant Singh and captain Harmanpreet Singh further compounded problems. Coach Craig Fulton's "defend-to-attack" philosophy — which relies on a robust backline and elite fitness to transition quickly — was undermined by defensive lapses. India conceded 26 goals across eight games, with slack clearances, ill-timed tackles and poor positioning proving costly.

There was no dearth of experience — Amit Rohidas, Sumit, Jugraj Singh, Jarmanpreet Singh, Sanjay, and Harmanpreet — yet the group failed to play to its potential. Turnovers were frequent, and the basics seemed to have been forgotten, exposing a gap no strategic planning could paper over.

Goalkeeper Krishan Pathak had a tournament to forget, especially when dealing with aerial balls — a weakness the taller European teams exploited with ease. Suraj Karkera fared no better. Together, the duo made the absence of now-retired P.R. Sreejesh more glaring than ever.

Selection conundrum

Up front, Abhishek emerged as India's standout player, scoring four goals. Yet even he was guilty of holding onto the ball too long inside the circle, allowing defenders to regroup. His shot selection and angles saved him more than once, but simplicity could have been more effective. The rest of the attack was underwhelming. Mandeep Singh was used sparingly, Lalit Upadhyay (who has since retired) and Sukhjeet Singh were off-target, Dilpreet Singh looked unsure on the ball, and Shilanand Lakra lacked tenacity.

While Hockey India League and junior-level performers are waiting in the wings, Fulton has indicated that he does not intend to make wholesale changes until after the Junior World Cup later this year. Araijeet Singh Hundal, Boby Singh Dhami, Arshdeep Singh, Mohammed Raheel, and Selvam Karthi are all options — but the coach must soon decide whether to persist with the current group for the Asia Cup or accelerate the transition.

Penalty corner routines also need revisiting. In Harmanpreet's absence, India lacked a reliable drag-flicker. Rohidas was the next best; Jugraj continued his goalless streak and even missed a penalty stroke, Sanjay was ineffective, and Nilam Xess was

Subdued presence: India women's team captain Salima Tete failed to rise to the occasion. GETTY IMAGES

barely tried. With set-pieces playing such a decisive role in modern hockey, this shortcoming is critical.

Two players who did enhance their reputations were Manpreet Singh and Hardik Singh. Manpreet, the second Indian to earn 400 international caps, continued to set high standards of fitness and work rate. Hardik, meanwhile, remains the team's heartbeat. Together, they played key roles in salvaging pride — if not points — during a grim tour.

If one were to play Devil's Advocate, the men endured a similarly dismal Pro League campaign in 2023–24 — five wins and six draws en route to a seventh-place finish — yet bounced back to retain their Olympic bronze in Paris. In that sense, this latest failure could be well-timed, giving Fulton space to rethink strategies and personnel ahead of a crucial year. The Asia Cup, at home in two months, offers India its best chance to qualify for the World Cup. If they make it, Fulton and his squad will have a year to fine-tune plans — with the Asian Games also looming shortly after.

Back to the drawing board

For the women, the road ahead is murkier. With just two wins from 16 matches and a paltry 10 points, the team finds itself on a worrying downward spiral — with few signs of an imminent turnaround.

Having missed out on the Paris Olympics, India was expected to rebuild. While the India leg of the Pro League hinted at promise, the European leg quickly crushed such optimism. Last year's Asian Champions Trophy triumph, too, now feels hollow — most opponents, including China, Japan and Korea had fielded inexperienced squads.

India's tour of Australia yielded just one win in five games. And despite coach Harendra Singh's emphasis on fitness, the team could not match higher-ranked sides across London, Antwerp, and Berlin the way it had in Bhubaneswar.

Penalty corner defence remained India's Achilles heel. Belgium, Argentina, Australia, China — all feasted on a fragile backline. A 3-0 loss to China in the penultimate match — with two PC goals — effectively sealed its fate. Even winning the final game wouldn't have helped a -20 goal difference.

India looked second-best in every area. Rarely did it threaten the opposition, barring brief spells in a few matches. The build-up play was impatient, attacks too individualistic, the defence unsettled, and the midfield unable to link or create alternatives. There was little imagination or tactical flexibility, and the experienced players failed to lead.

Neha, Lalremsiami, Navneet Kaur, and Salima Tete didn't rise to the occasion. The youngsters — Sakshi Rana, Rutuja Pisal, Jyoti Singh — could not fill the void. Inconsistency, which was brushed off during the India leg, returned to haunt the team under pressure. Deepika and Manisha Chauhan, brought in for PC duties, looked ineffective. Even Savita Punia, one of the more reliable players, was left stranded by a porous defence.

Ahead of a pivotal year, relegation is a hammer blow. Unlike the men, the women do not dominate Asia. The Asia Cup will be fiercely contested, and if that fails, India will be left relying on the World Cup qualifiers. It'll also miss the Pro League's exposure — 16 top-tier games they can no longer count on.

Last year, India had similarly poor numbers, with the same number of wins but two fewer points — but were saved by an even weaker USA, which had already booked its Paris spot. This time, there's no safety net. Not winning the Asian Games, missing Paris, and now two consecutive seasons of poor returns — these are not signs of a team in transition. They are signs of a team in trouble. The decline from that fourth-place finish at the Tokyo Olympics is not recent — and it's certainly not just about who's in charge.

MEN
Matches Played: 16
Wins: 6
Draws: 0
Losses: 10
Goals Scored: 34
Goals Conceded: 38

WOMEN
Matches Played: 16
Wins: 2
Draws: 3
Losses: 11
Goals Scored: 22
Goals Conceded: 43

THE HINDU GROUP

GET A RINGSIDE VIEW TO THE WORLD OF SPORTS

SUBSCRIPTION ORDER FORM

SPORTSTAR

SUBSCRIPTION WITH DISCOUNT

Periodicity	Price
6 months	₹1299
1 Year	₹2299

To subscribe, visit:
sstar.news/SSPS
or Scan QR code

❍ **New Subscription** ❍ **Renewal (Subscription No.)**

For Subscription, please fill the form, sign and send it to Circulation Department, The Hindu, Kasturi Buildings, 859 & 860, Anna Salai, Chennai - 600 002. E-mail: customercare@thehindu.co.in Toll-Free No.: 1800 102 1878

Name:_____

Mailing Address:_____

_____ City: _____

Pin: _____ District: _____ State: _____

Landline: _____ Mobile: _____ E-mail: _____

I am remitting ₹ _____ *(Rupees in words.....)* towards annual subscription.

Please furnish remittance details: Bank UTR No..... Subscription No .....

By ❍ DD/Cheque Number - **in favour of THG Publishing Private Limited.,** (Add ₹ 10 for non-Chennai cheque

DD/Cheque Number: ..... Amount: ₹ ..... Date: .....

Bank: .....

Branch: ..... **Signature with date:** .....

PAPAYA POWERPLAY

It's become clear that in the current landscape, there's **no one else** capable of consistently challenging McLaren.

Kavita Menon
kavita.menon@thehindu.co.in

Eleven races into the Formula One season, the spotlight has firmly been on McLaren throughout. And for yet another weekend, it was a tight, riveting contest between the thriving drivers of the defending constructors' champion. Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri have been the centres of attention, and rightfully so, with the two McLaren drivers having only each other standing in the way more often than not.

At the Austrian Grand Prix, it was the bright papaya cars — a similar shade to the orange hue that usually swallows this track when a certain Max Verstappen shines — that stole the show at the Red Bull Ring. But it was Norris' turn to be the leading car, keeping Piastri behind by bare margins to take his seventh career victory and third this season.

The Red Bull Ring, a small track with blistering lap times, has always been a fun contest for the drivers. With backmarkers, however, often impeding the way, it adds an obstacle element to the event — a frustrating one at that. Piastri would agree, considering his attempt to catch the back of the Briton was often strained by the lower-down drivers.

Norris was sure to leave behind his miserly pole-to-win conversion after an authoritative performance in qualifying. But he knew it wouldn't be long before his friendly foe was right on his tail. Piastri only had Charles Leclerc standing in his way — the Ferrari driver, despite his vow to trouble the McLarens, fell well short of his far-fetched claim.

The two soon began their tussle for the top spot, but the opening lap is never without its theatrics and collisions. Crowd favourite Verstappen, who had triumphed here a record five times, could only manage a seventh-place start. To make matters worse, his outing ended early when Mercedes rookie Kimi Antonelli lost control and crashed into the Red Bull driver.

Both were forced to retire, prompting a brief Safety Car intervention that cleared the way for a straight fight between the McLaren teammates. When racing resumed, all

Unstoppable duo: Lando Norris (right) and Oscar Piastri celebrate their 1-2 finish for McLaren in Austria.
GETTY IMAGES

eyes turned to the front, and Norris had only one goal in mind: keep Piastri behind. But it was easier said than done. The Australian's sudden bursts brought him agonisingly close to Norris — he even managed to nose ahead for a few seconds before being forced back behind. It was only a couple of weekends ago when the two were involved in a not-so-friendly fight, which resulted in Norris' retirement from the Canadian Grand Prix. The hard-core racing was once again a reminder of the infamous papaya rules that were sternly followed by the McLaren garage. The intra-team rivalry was only starting to break into the scene — one that the paddock had long been waiting for.

The last time a team had both its contenders fighting for the prized position? Back in 2016, when an in-form Lewis Hamilton and a charging Nico Rosberg were at each other's throats for the title. The competitive spirit of both Mercedes drivers sometimes left a huge mess on the track, and an even bigger one within the garage.

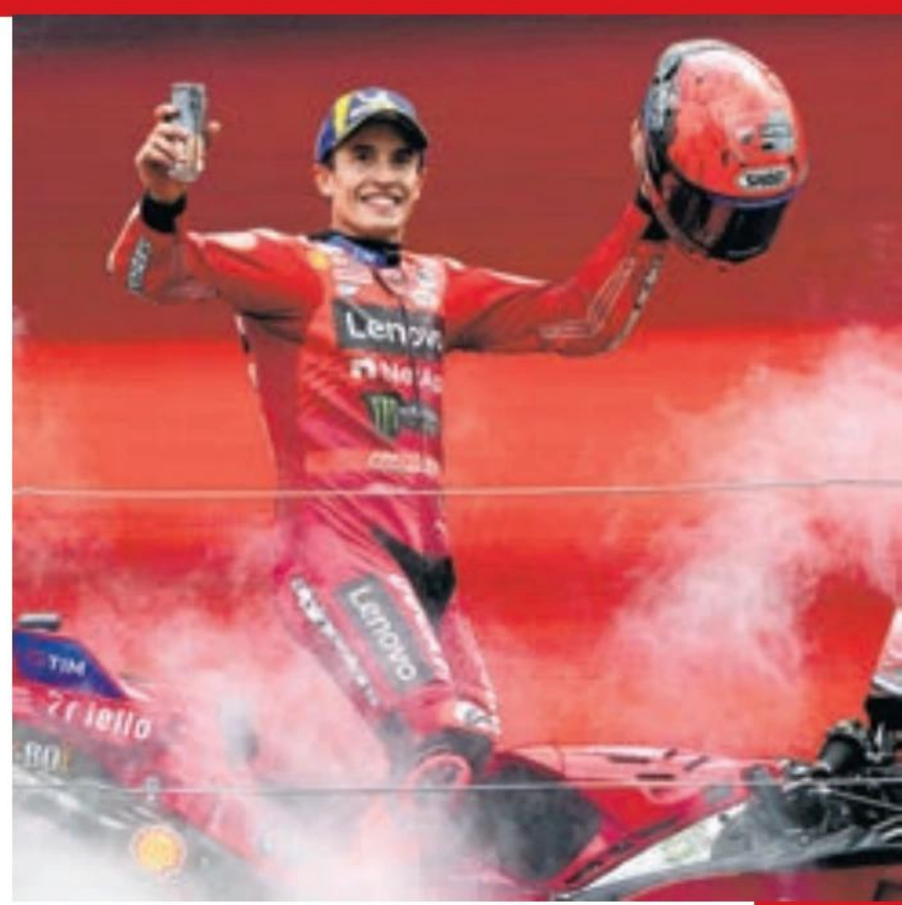
McLaren, to its credit, has so far handled this brewing rivalry with greater calm, but not without a few bumps along the way. A no-points show in Montreal threw the Briton off his catch-up game, once again having to start fresh. But if Canada showed the dangers of friendly fire, Austria was the perfect rebound for Norris.

The 25-year-old delivered a near-flawless drive, showcasing not only his skill but also his newfound ability to rebound under pressure. By stitching together the perfect weekend and executing a clean race, Norris is capable of staying in the hunt for his maiden championship — one he realises is more within reach.

But standing in his way is arguably the most formidable opponent he could have asked for — a teammate in the form of his life. The younger contender, Piastri, made use of the opportunity at hand to unleash his full potential and come into his own. The Australian was quicker to power ahead to five race victories and snatch the lead in the World Championship.

While his talent was never in question, it certainly was not how many — in fact, most in the Formula One paddock — expected the season to unravel, especially Norris. The 25-year-old could learn from his counterpart on staying composed and avoiding mistakes. A couple more races like Austria, and he could soon find himself becoming the frontrunner — a position he will need to learn to protect better.

It's become clear that in the current landscape, there's no one else capable of consistently challenging McLaren. The battle instead is internal, and as the championship wears on, the stakes will only grow. Norris' win in Austria was vital — a reminder to Piastri, who still enjoys a 15-point lead, and to the paddock, that he remains in the title conversation.


AP

MotoGP

There's no stopping Marc Marquez and his quest for a record-equalling seventh MotoGP world title.

The Ducati rider made it two wins from two successive weekends in Italy and the Netherlands, strengthening his grip at the top of the standings.

The Spaniard claimed the 93rd win of his career across all classes — matching his motorcycle number — at the Italian GP. He completed a perfect weekend in Italy, claiming pole, winning the sprint, securing his fifth race win this season, and his first at Mugello since 2014. He also broke teammate Francesco Bagnaia's three-race win streak at the Mugello circuit, his home track, and in Assen later on.

Marquez backed up the positive result with another clinical outing at the Dutch GP, extending his championship advantage to a commanding 68 points over his younger brother, Alex Marquez. His closest contender, Alex, suffered a race-ending crash that left him with a fractured hand. The 32-year-old also equalled Giacomo Agostini's 68 premier class victories.

ALL EYES ON RIYADH

The **Esports World Cup 2025** will have 26 events across 25 titles with a prize pool of a whopping USD 70 million, the biggest in an esports event ever.

Neeladri Bhattacharjee
neeladri.b@thehindu.co.in

Esports, in its infancy, has always been a vocation in entertainment: gaming has been looked down as a pastime rather than a competitive sport. That belief has now transcended into a realm of competition, gaming enthusiasts have become virtual athletes, and the gaming parlours have become colosseums.

Esports, now a multi-billion-dollar industry, is a medal sport at the Asian Games. It is no longer knocking on the door of mainstream sport, it's kicking it down.

A fresh new chapter of that will be the Esports World Cup 2025, set to be played in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, between July 8 and August 24. The tournament will have 26 events across 25 titles with a prize pool of a whopping USD 70 million, the biggest in an esports event ever.

Galaxy of stars

The World Cup aims to draw more people into the tournament through glamour, traditional sports and entertainment.

And who does it turn to? Cristiano Ronaldo, a Portugal

BGMI RANKINGS

TANISHK "ADMINO" SINGH

JONATHAN "JONATHAN" AMARAL

ALDAN "VIPER" SHAIKH

ANKIT "AK" SHUKLA

RUDRA "SPOWER" BANSWANI

legend, a European champion and the most-followed individual on Instagram. The 40-year-old, who won the UEFA Nations League last month, was named the brand ambassador of the tournament.

The tournament's opening ceremony will feature American rapper Post Malone, who is an avid gamer too, having played titles like Warzone and PUBG live for fans on the streaming platform, Twitch.

Moreover, Amazon Prime has released a five-part documentary on the tournament, named 'Esports World Cup: Level Up'. Sports docu-series has been a proven avenue to expand reach, with Drive to Survive drawing over 360,000 fans to Formula 1 after its first season.

Another sporting spectacle in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has emerged as the sporting capital of Asia, hosting major tournaments in football, motorsports, golf and combat sports.

In esports, the country has shone both on and off the gaming stage, producing FIFAe World Cup champions like Mossad 'Msdossary' Al Dossary *(in pic)* and investing USD 37.8 billion through Savvy Games Group, owned by the Public Investment Fund, for the development of gaming.

The inaugural edition of the Esports World Cup was also held in Saudi Arabia last year, and this time, the tournament returns with more titles (26 instead of 22) and a higher prize pool.

Uncharted territory

Among traditional sports, Chess – a touchstone for the brain — has always maintained a niche for itself. So has esports, building its own ecosystem and then making inroads into traditional sporting events.

The World Cup will now see a merger of the two: online chess entering uncharted territory, with a prize pool of USD 1.5 million.

Twelve of the 16 players were selected from the Champions Chess Tour (CCT) 2025, while the final four would be confirmed in the Last Chance Qualifiers (LCQ) later this month.

India will have a chance to shine both as a team and/or player(s).

At the LCQ, Grandmasters Nihal Sarin and Aravindh Chithambaram from the Indian esports organisation S8UL will have a chance to represent the tricolour, while Praggnanandhaa, the highest-ranking Indian at the time of writing, will compete as part of Dutch organisation, Team Liqud.

Even if all three are unsuccessful in qualifying for the finals, Arjun Erigaisi, representing Gen.G, will still be in contention to make India proud.

Qualified players in Esports World Cup:

Alireza Firouzja, Fabiano Caruana (Team Liquid), Ian Nepomniachtchi (Aurora Gaming), Magnus Carlsen (Team Liquid), Nodirbek Abdusattorov (NAVI), Vladislav Artemiev (Team Spirit), Arjun Erigaisi (Gen.G), Hikaru Nakamura (Team Falcons), Jan-Krzysztof Duda (Twisted Minds), Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (Team Vitality). Vladimir Fedoseev, Wei Yi (Weibo Gaming).

Did you know? Brazil's record goalscorer Neymar will play an esports showmatch in Counter-Strike 2, Rocket League and Tekken 8 at the Esports World Cup 2025.

WHO AM I?

I co-founded my Counter-Strike team with Aakash "RiX" More. My gaming tag contains the word, a synonym for poison, but it's spelt with a "3" instead of an "E"?

The answer will be revealed in the next issue.

Answer to previous issue's quiz:
Raunak "Crowley" Sen

BUSINESS OF ESPORTS

PUBG developer Krafton plans to have an IPL-style esports league in India. It is currently accepting "expressions of interest" from corporates, public figures, athletes, content creators, and investors to take the plan forward.

EASTER EGG 'GANK'

Gank is a strategy where players sneak up on an opponent and attack them by surprise, often teaming up with others. It is commonly used in League of Legends, Dota 2 and Smite.

Rankings and quiz powered by NODWIN Gaming

Excelsior, the lone warrior

By C.G.S.Narayanan

The pawn, the humblest of all chessmen, is the most potent force when it reaches lucrative eighth rank to promote. In excelsior a pawn on its original square travels to promote.It is not very often that the pawn can wend its way through to the promoting square all on its own in a direct mate problem. The ingenious and the most famous excelsior is the direct mate in five by the American chess problem wizard, Sam Loyd, who once asked his friend that in the position given below as to which white piece has least chance of making the key. Who can guess that the innocuous white pawn at b2 would be delivering a fatal blow with a promotion on a8! After the key 1.b4 white rook threatens mate on the base rank via Rd5 or Rf5.

The defence Rc5+ is met by bxc5 the pawn jumping to the next rank. Now the white pawn sets up another threat Rb1 which black defends by 2…a2.The juggernaut rolls on with 3.Rc6.The defence Bc7 tries to delay the eventual.4.cxb7 is yet another climb closer to the peak and the final assault bxa8=Q is unavoidable. Before black could take notice of the lurking movement of WP it has advanced menacingly to promote.

Samuel Loyd
Second prize,Set.Paris Ty 1861

Mate in five moves

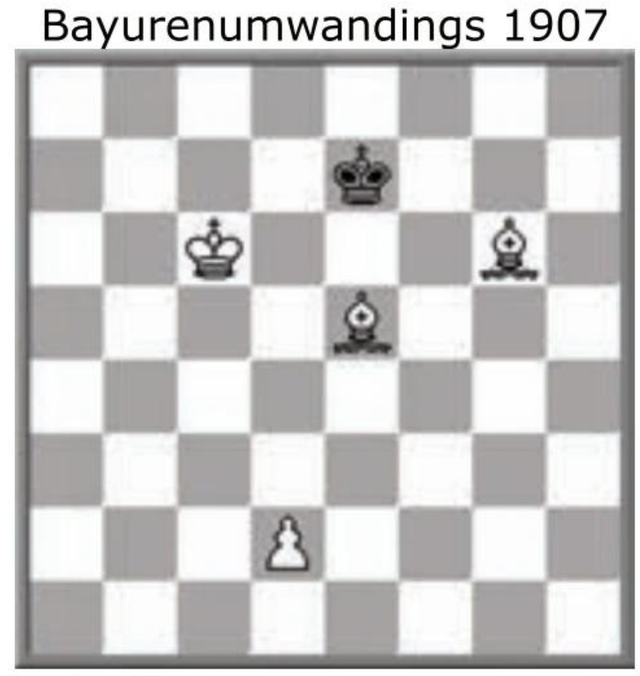
Solution: **1.b4** (2.Rd5/Rf5 3.Rf1 or Rd1) Rc5+ 2.bxc5(3.Rb1) a2 3.c6 Bc7 4.cxb7 and 5.bxa8Q mate(1…2.Rf5 Bc7/Bg5 2.Rf5;1…Rc6 2.Rd5;1…Rc4 2.Rf5 and 1…Rc2 2.Nxc2). Loyd's own comment on this masterpiece was "It was composed in a spirit of fun and is a joke from beginning to end".(Source:Sam Loyd and his chess problems (A C White)

Two excelsiors for solving
Wormald Robert
Illustrated London News 1857

Mate in five moves

A **slowed-down excelsior** which starts with a pawn's single-step advance thus taking him one move more to reach the promotion rank.

Shinkman W.A
Bayurenumwandings 1907



Mate in six moves

Solution to problem for solving in the article 'Patterns in problems'(CGSN)
Try 1.Ra3? waiting 1…Kb4 2.Qxb3(A) 1….c2 2.Nd6(B)1..N any 2.Rxd4(C)
But 1…Nd2! **Key 1.Qb1! waiting** 1…Kb4 2.Rxd4(C);1…c2 2.Qxb3 (A) 1…N any 2.Nd6(B);1…Bb4 2.Nxb6

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

SAI Centre Bengaluru the go-to venue for Indian athletes seeking world-class facilities

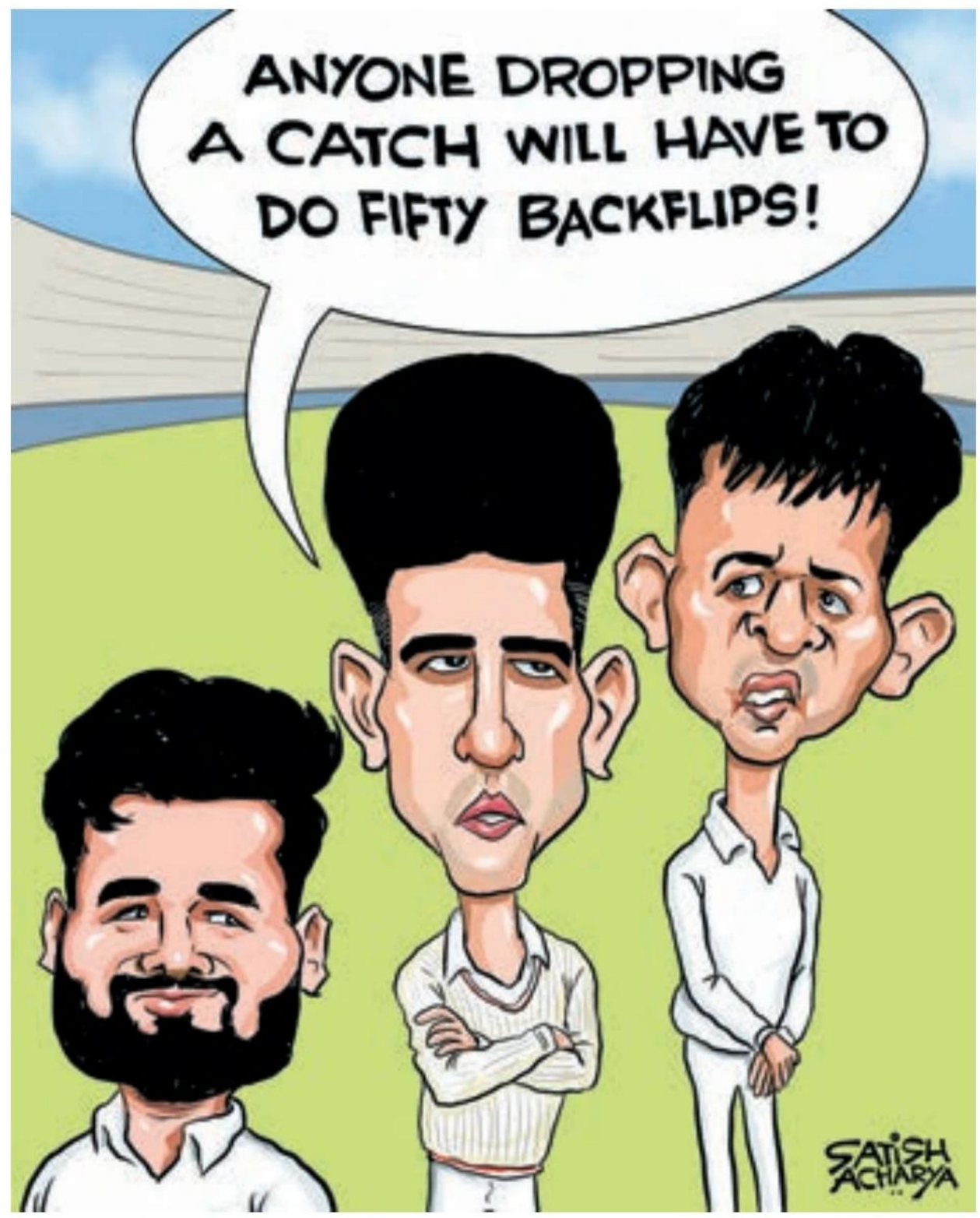
From a modest training base with limited facilities to a key hub responsible for implementing all SAI schemes across three states and housing National Centres of Excellence (NCOEs) for hockey, athletics, and volleyball, the Netaji Subhash Southern Centre has emerged as a go-to destination for athletes seeking world-class facilities at home.

With cumulative investments exceeding INR 140 crore, the Sports Authority of India's Southern Centre has undergone a major transformation over the past decade. In addition to the three NCOEs offering comprehensive training across age groups, the centre also hosts national camps in table tennis, kabaddi, and water polo, and runs academic programmes across 11 disciplines.

The centre has a state-of-the-art sports science centre with labs for biomechanics, sports medicine and sports psychology equipped with some of the latest testing and training machines from across the world. Out in the field, the athletics stadium boasts a smart track with sensors that can gather and analyse data of every stride, an exclusive strength and conditioning area, a recovery room and modern changing rooms for hockey.

UTHRA GANESAN

SPORTOON



1 Adamas Howrah Warriors rode on valuable batting contributions from Shakir Habib Gandhi and Aditya Purohit, along with a three-wicket haul from Kanish Seth, to defeat Murshidabad Kings by nine runs in the final and clinch the title in the second Bengal Pro T20 League at Eden Gardens in Kolkata.
The scores: Adamas Howrah Warriors 150/9 in 20 overs (Shakir Habib Gandhi 31, Aditya Purohit 30) bt Murshidabad Kings 141/8 in 20 overs (Tanmoy Pramanick 48, Kanisk Seth 3/39).

TEAM SPORTSTAR

2 The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) has set a July 31 deadline for mandatory registration of all the coaches — qualified and unqualified — in the country in its bid to tackle spiralling doping cases, making it clear that non-compliance with the directive will lead to their blacklisting. In its latest circular, following its decision in the January Annual General Body Meeting (AGM) to crack the whip on coaches suspected to be involved in doping of their wards, the AFI said that unregistered coaches, regardless of their qualifications, will not be permitted to impart training to athletes.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Ryan Fernando

FOR MORE STORIES

9.86 seconds of precision

How diet, data, and discipline powered Kenneth Bednarek's **personal best** run in Philadelphia last month.

There's a number that echoes in my mind every time I watch Kenneth Bednarek, also known as Kung Fu Kenny, explode out of the blocks: 9.86. That's his personal best in the 100 metres. It's the kind of time that demands silence before applause. It stops conversation. It changes the narrative.

But the question remains: is that time the result of intense practice, precise nutrition, or just pure luck?

Let me tell you what I know from being on the inside. No one lands a 9.86 by chance. You don't roll out of bed, sip a protein shake, lace up your spikes, and touch that number.

9.86 is earned.

When Kenny joined my programme, he was already an Olympics silver medallist and a World Championship medallist. He had the accolades. He had the raw material. But he came with something more important — questions. He wanted to know how to go faster, how to recover better.

The first clue was in his blood. Inflammation markers hovered at borderline levels. There were signs of gut distress, including blood in his stool and occasional constipation. Most would have dismissed it. I did not. To me, that was noise in the system. And noise slows you down.

We eliminated gluten from day one. Within a week, he reported clearer skin, better bowel movements, no more bloating, and lighter energy. The inflammation dropped, and so did his internal stress. This wasn't just about avoiding a food group — it was about removing friction from the engine.

From there, we built what I call a performance ecosystem. Every gram of carbohydrate, every drop of liquid, every supplement is designed to perform a job. Training happens once or twice a day. Nutrition happens 24 hours a day. That's the difference.

Kenny trains in fasted states twice a week, but never close to race day. His fasted runs in the morning push mitochondrial adaptation. We fine-tune when to feed, when to supplement, and when to hold back. The timing of his meals changes based on training loads and travel schedules.

Speaking of travel, our approach borders on military logistics. He flies with a customised supplement bag — double-locked, colour-coded, with customs clearance papers in place. He packs jerky, nuts, dried prunes, chamomile gummies, and sealed electrolyte sachets. Whether he's in Kenya or Paris, he never eats off-plan. That's not discipline. That's professionalism.

Race day? That's another beast.

The protocol is rehearsed weeks in advance. One hour before warm-up, Kenny takes a specific dose of pre-workout and BCAAs — not exceeding 10 grams. Then comes an isotonic sports drink or plain water. Thirty minutes out: a cold banana or caffeine slush. Beta-alanine only if he's not experiencing itchiness. We avoid surprises. We build a routine.

What about supplements? We made the full switch to Klean Athlete — BCAAs, creatine, ATP, multivitamins, glutamine. All WADA-compliant. All batch-tested. No mystery ingredients. We also use red light therapy, sauna, and cold plunges. Recovery is a full-time strategy.

A perfect run: Kenneth Bednarek (centre) won the men's 100m race at the Grand Slam Track event in Philadelphia. GETTY IMAGES

Now let's talk about food.

Kenny's chef isn't just a cook — he's an engineer of biology. Every plate is crafted for hormonal balance, digestive support, and immune resilience. Pineapple rinds for bromelain. Prunes for fibre. Broccoli and asparagus to manage testosterone pathways. Garlic for natural defence. Even bedtime snacks are evaluated for their impact on sleep cycles.

This leads us to a critical truth: Kenny's sleep is sacred. Ten-thirty to seven-thirty. No compromise. Magnesium before bed. Melatonin only when travelling. Ambient room setup, blackout curtains, and digital detox. If sleep is broken, performance is broken.

Still think 9.86 is luck?

Let me tell you what people don't see. Kenny logs his breathing patterns during training. He tracks his HRV. He fasts once a month on rest days to induce cellular renewal. He avoids gluten like it's poison. He monitors muscle stiffness with his physio. And he doesn't eat a single piece of food without understanding its function.

In the off-season, he tested a vegetarian diet for five days. Why? To reduce inflammatory load and check his heart rate baseline. That's not an experiment — that's data gathering. It worked. His resting heart rate dipped. His energy stayed consistent.

And let's be honest. Kenny is not just an athlete. He's a machine of intent. He visualises his races. He journals his reactions. He adapts supplement timing based on sleep quality and soreness. He adds manuka honey and zinc carnosine when immune flags go up. He responds to his body like a scientist and performs like an artist.

People often ask me what makes an athlete elite. The answer isn't medals. It's awareness. It's ownership. It's the willingness to invest in your biology as much as your speed.

So, was 9.86 born from practice? Absolutely. Kenny trains with intensity you can feel in the air. His sprint mechanics, gym routines, and mobility drills are obsessive in detail.

Was it nutrition? Without question. The man eats to win. And every bite is aligned to purpose.

Was it luck? Not a chance. If there was luck, it was in the fortune of finding the right tribe. The right team. The right plan.

As I always tell Kenny, the podium isn't built on game day. It's built in your choices. The extra hour of sleep. The meal you packed instead of ordered. The recovery you respected instead of skipped.

That's where the real medals are made. When I watched him hit 9.86, I didn't just see speed. I saw every prune packed before a flight. Every stretch held 10 seconds longer. Every cold shower, magnesium dose, and food diary entry.

So, let's call it what it is.

Not practice. Not nutrition. Not luck. It's Kung Fu Kenny.

And it's deliberate excellence.

Against the established order

In the **Enhanced Games** to be held next year, drugs are allowed, and so is enhanced equipment, shoes, cycles, swimsuits that are banned in regular competition.

Suresh Menon

The fastest 50m freestyle time trial was set by a Greek swimmer recently. The world record has stood for 16 years — and will continue to stand for a while yet. For the swimmer, Kristian Gkolomeev, had begun taking drugs after signing up for the Enhanced Games to be held next year. This is the Olympics on steroids — literally. Drugs are allowed, and so is enhanced equipment, shoes, cycles, swimsuits that are banned in regular competition.

Is it sport? Swimmer Kristian Gkolomeev had begun taking drugs after signing up for the Enhanced Games to be held next year. REUTERS

Even if it weren't for the drugs, the fact that it is to be held in Las Vegas and is part-sponsored by Donald Trump Jr ought to be enough to warn people that this is something out of the ordinary, and perhaps even against the established order. And with the latter's father the President of the United States when the Olympics are to be held in Los Angeles in 1928 — a sporting extravaganza that hopes to be free of drugs — it makes for an intriguing discussion in the interim. We cannot dismiss that as a side issue, although no Executive Order can make drug-taking legal at the Olympics. Or maybe it can. Like the rest of the world, I am confused too.

Using science to overcome the limits set by nature is an old strategy. It has led to the development of better boots, superior cycles, focused training, and artificial turf. The key word is 'limit'.

Like a sonnet or a haiku, sporting events have limits within which they must be conducted. A sonnet is of 14 lines, and in the iambic pentameter if it is Shakespearean with the last two lines rhyming. You can't 'enhance' it by reducing it to 10 lines in free verse with the last two lines in Morse code.

The argument that we try to find the fastest athlete or the strongest at the Olympics and not the most morally upright athlete who takes no drugs has sometimes been used to philosophically justify drug abuse in sport. Television loves villains as much as it loves heroes. There might be an attraction in watching someone collapse on the track due to drug abuse in a sporting competition. It may not happen in Las Vegas at the Enhanced Games, but the possibility exists. Every record-breaker will get a million dollars, and that's an incentive too, even if World Athletics President Sebastian Coe says, "No one within athletics takes the Enhanced Games seriously."

But there will be enough athletes, and possibly enough curiosity value to make television a packet of money, which, after all is what this is all about.

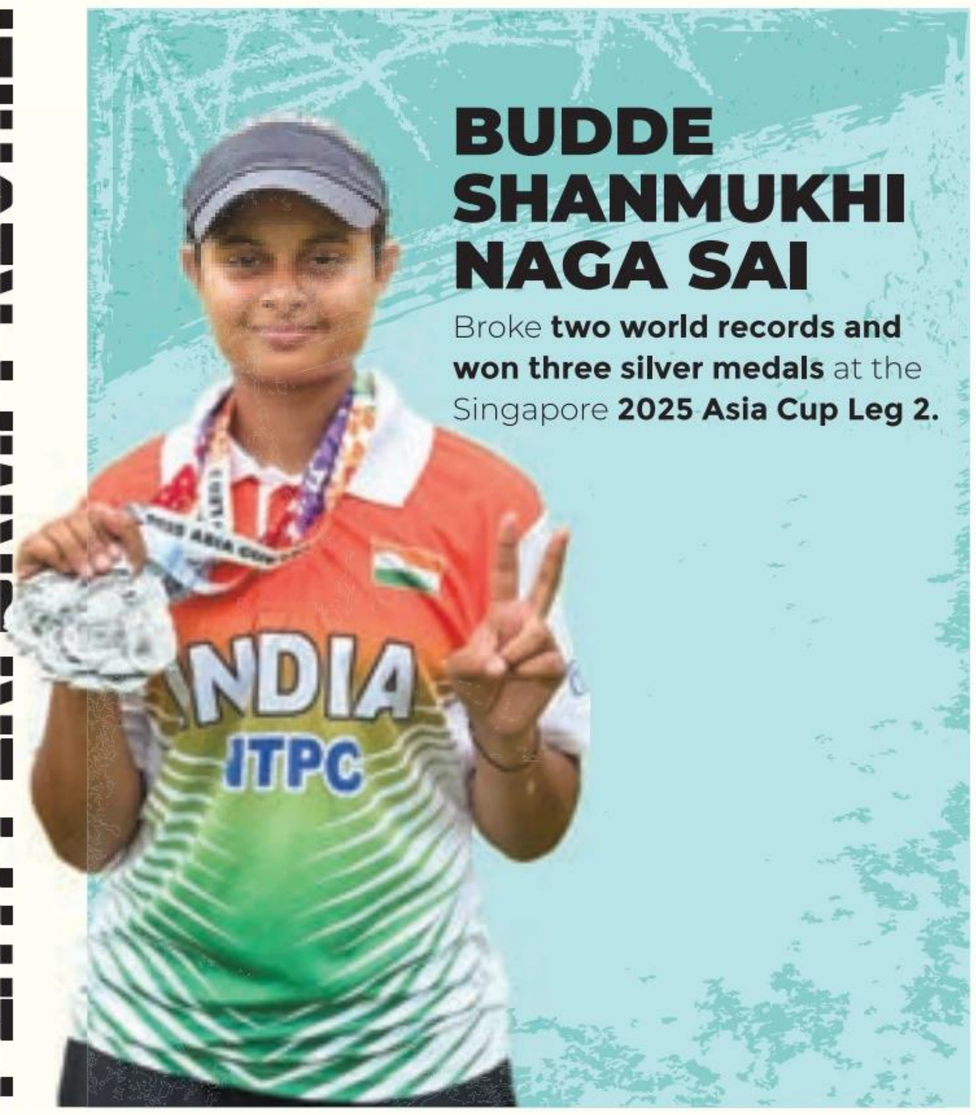
Australian businessman Aron D'Souza, whose brainchild this is, calls the International Olympic Committee corrupt and greedy and the World Anti-Doping Agency an "anti-science police force for the IOC." He may be right.

But an anti-Olympics is hardly the appropriate response. He argues that the drugs — only cocaine and heroin are banned — will be taken under medical supervision and are therefore safe and out in the open. Ah! But is it sport?

SRM UNIVERSITY *AP*
Andhra Pradesh

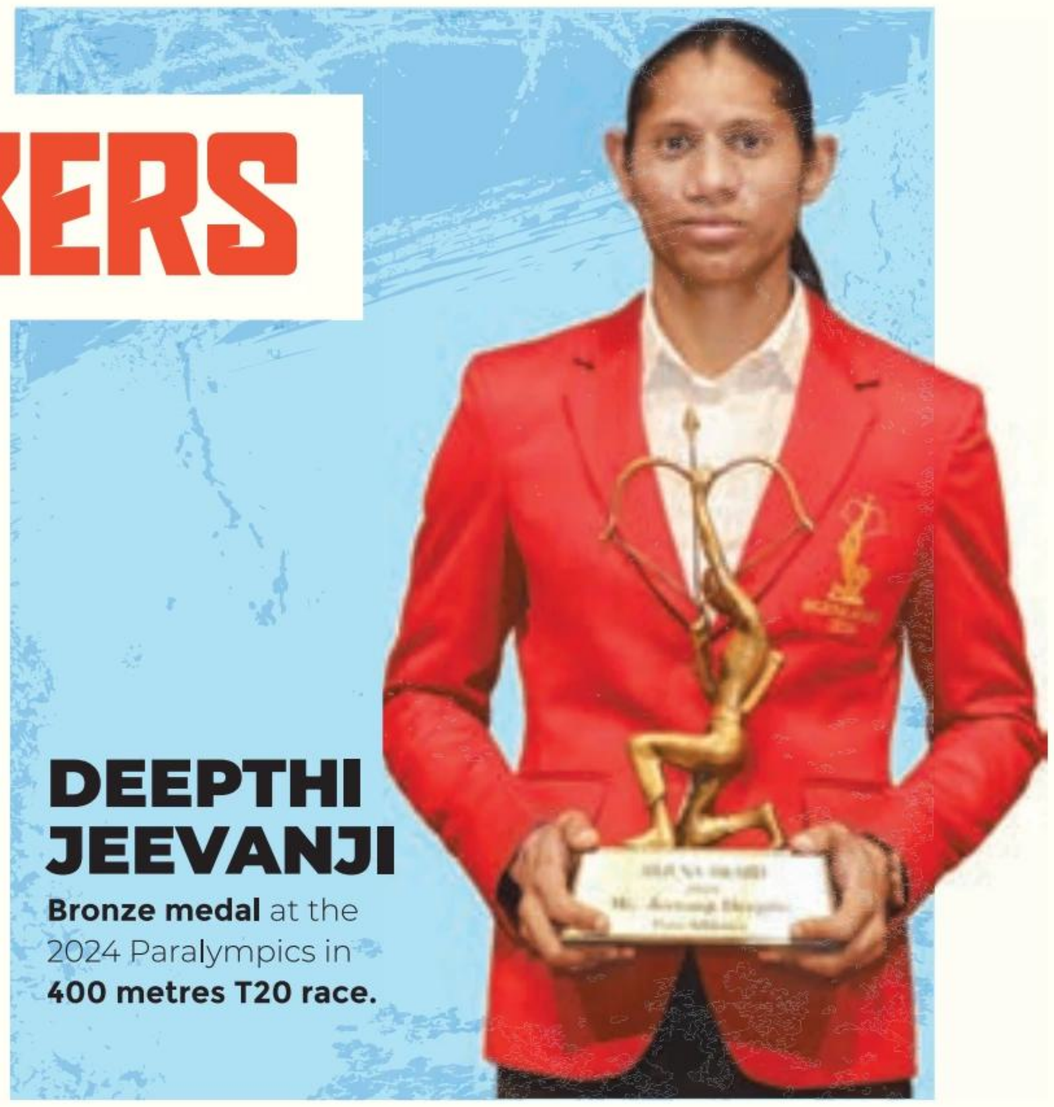
JOIN THE LEGACY OF ATHLETES AND RECORD BREAKERS

PLAY. PERFORM. PREVAIL.



BUDDE SHANMUKHI NAGA SAI

Broke **two world records and won three silver medals** at the Singapore **2025 Asia Cup Leg 2.**



DEEPTHI JEEVANJI

Bronze medal at the 2024 Paralympics in **400 metres T20 race.**

KUNJA RAJITHA

Gold Medalist in **Women's 4×400m Relay** at 26th Asian Athletics Championship.

SRM UNIVERSITY–*AP*, AMARAVATI : **WHERE CHAMPIONS ARE MADE**

- State-of-the-art indoor & outdoor sports infrastructure
- Expert coaching from qualified professionals
- Focused, intensive training across multiple disciplines
- Up to 100% scholarships under Sports Quota
- 1,500+ students actively engage in sports every day

THEIR GRIT. OUR GUIDANCE. YOUR FUTURE.

SRM UNIVERSITY–*AP*, AMARAVATI- ACADEMICS AND ATHLETICS, BALANCED FOR BRILLIANCE.

SRM University-*AP*, Amaravati

Neerukonda, Mangalagiri Mandal, Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh - 522240
Website: www.srmap.edu.in | **Helpline:** +91 70365 89973 | 080 6988 6999
Email Id: sports.officer@srmap.edu.in | admissions@srmap.edu.in

Follow us : SRMUAP | SRMUAP | srmuap | SRMUAP | SRMUniversityAP

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

GAIN MORE KNOWLEDGE REACH GREATER HEIGHTS

PRESIDENCY UNIVERSITY

Established under Section 2(f) of UGC Act, 1956 | Presidency University Act, 2013 of the Karnataka Act No. 41 of 2013 | Approved by AICTE, New Delhi

Bengaluru

NAAC A ACCREDITED UNIVERSITY

PRESIDENCY GROUP OVER 50 YEARS OF ACADEMIC WISDOM

Discover Excellence

10 Advanced Schools | **61** Specialized Programs | **97%** Placement Record | **600+** Corporate Partners | **2700+** Students Got Placed in 2024-25

SCHOOL OF COMPUTER SCIENCE & ENGINEERING

B.Tech. - Computer Science & Engineering
B.Tech. - Computer Science and Engineering
(Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning)
B.Tech. - Computer Science & Engineering (Data Science)
B.Tech. - Computer Science & Engg. (Cyber Security)
B.Tech. - Computer Science & Engineering (Block Chain)
B.Tech. - Computer Science & Engg. (Internet of Things)
B.Tech. - Computer Science & Technology (Big Data)
B.Tech. - Computer Science & Technology (Devops)
B.Tech. - Information Science & Engineering
B.Tech. - Information Science & Technology
B.Tech. - Artificial Intelligence & Data Science
B.Tech. - Robotics & Artificial Intelligence
M.Tech. - Data Science
M.Tech. - Artificial Intelligence

SCHOOL OF LAW

(5 - Year (Hons.) Integrated Programme)
BBA LL.B. (Hons.)
BA LL.B. (Hons.)
LL.M.

SCHOOL OF DESIGN

B.Design
Specialisation : Product Design / Communication Design / Space Design / Fashion Design / Game Design
B.Sc. - Multimedia (VFX / SFX / Gaming)

SCHOOL OF ALLIED HEALTH SCIENCES

B.Sc. - Operation Theatre & Anaesthesia Technology (OT&AT)
B.Sc. - Medical Laboratory Technology (MLT)
B.Sc. - Cardiac Care Technology (CCT)
B.Sc. - Respiratory Care Technology (RCT)
B.Sc. - Medical Imaging Technology (MIT)
BPT - Bachelor of Physiotherapy

SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES

BA Psychology
BA English
M.Sc. Psychology

INTERNATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AVAILED BY 300+ STUDENTS
165+ Partners from **35+** Countries

SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING

B.Tech. - Civil Engineering
B.Tech. - Electrical & Electronics Engineering
B.Tech. - Electronics & Communication Engineering
B.Tech. - Mechanical Engineering
B.Tech. - Mechanical Engineering -Spl. In Mechatronics
B.Tech. - Petroleum Engineering
B.Tech. - VLSI
M.Tech. - Embedded System and VLSI
M.Tech. - Building And Construction Technology

SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

BBA
Specialisation - Finance / Logistics / Marketing / HR
BBA (Aviation Management)
BBA (Digital Marketing)
BBA (Business Analytics)
BBA (Digital Business)

MBA
Specialisation - Finance / Marketing / Human Resource Management / Operations & Supply Chain Management / Business Analytics / Fintech [Dual Major]
MBA (Digital Marketing)
MBA (Banking and Finance Management)
MBA (Marketing and Finance)
MBA (Business Analytics)

SCHOOL OF MEDIA STUDIES

BA - Journalism and Mass Communication

SCHOOL OF COMMERCE

B.Com.
Specialisation - ACCA / Corporate Accounting Integrated With CMA-US / CA - Foundation / Accounting And Taxation / Business Analytics - CBA / Banking and Finance

SCHOOL OF INFORMATION SCIENCE

BCA
BCA - Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning
BCA - Data Science
MCA

Hostel Facility Available

presidencyuniversity.in | admission@presidencyuniversity.in

SCAN TO APPLY NOW

ADMISSIONS OPEN 2025-26 +91-90240-60000

Presidency University, Itgalpura, Rajanakunte, Yelahanka, Bengaluru 560119

INTEREST FREE EDU. LOAN FACILITY