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The Asian Champions Trophy offers the top six teams in the continent a chance to fine-tune their arsenal ahead of the sterner test at the Asian Games

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I HAVE BEEN DOING GOOD JUMPS CONSISTENTLY IN THE DOMESTIC CIRCUIT, BUT THE CHALLENGE IS TO PROVE MYSELF AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

— MURALI SREESHANKAR

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Acid test ahead of Asian Games

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OFF-SIDE

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UNWARRANTED, AVOIDABLE

The ad hoc body of the Wrestling Federation of India, in its wisdom or its lack thereof, has **contentiously bestowed direct entries** to Bajrang Punia and Vinesh Phogat, enraging the many hopefuls.

In the recent fortnight, Indian sport has found itself mired in a whirlwind of controversies. While Indian wrestling is once again entangled in a labyrinth of its own making, the Indian women's cricket team captain, Harmanpreet Kaur, brought disrepute to the game and the nation with her petulant behaviour during a bilateral series in Bangladesh.

Indian wrestling — the second most successful sport for the country at the Olympics with seven medals — is witnessing discontent around the selection process for the Asian Games.

The Indian Olympic Association-appointed ad hoc body to govern the Wrestling Federation of India, in its wisdom or its lack thereof, has contentiously bestowed direct entries to Bajrang Punia (men's 65kg) and Vinesh Phogat (women's 53kg), enraging the many hopefuls.

Exemptions from trials are traditionally offered by the WFI to those who have clinched World Championship medals the same year — a measure designed to safeguard against fatigue and injuries stemming from multiple weight cuts. But the World Championship bronze medals of Vinesh and Bajrang were secured in Belgrade a year prior to the postponed Asian Games.

Junior World champion Antim Panghal, and Vishal Kaliraman now bear the brunt of this committee's seemingly arbitrary judgment. Despite their spirited triumph in the trials, they find themselves cast aside as mere standbys. Antim and Sujeet's (the latter lost in the semifinal of the men's 65kg) plea for redressal

before the Delhi High Court was dismissed. The court ruled: "The Asian Games are to begin in about two months' time and in case injury is caused to the elite athletes, who are medal probables, the time for recovery is extremely low and, therefore, the decision taken by the Committee to exempt Respondents No. 3 & 4 from selection trials in order to ensure that they are not exposed to injuries during trials cannot be said to be arbitrary or capricious or perverse."

Nonetheless, Vinesh and Bajrang are expected to participate in the trials for the World Championships, the gateway to the 2024 Paris Olympics.

The ad hoc committee has indicated that these trials must be conducted before August 10 — a mere month-and-a-half prior to the Asian Games, forcing the athletes to shed weight and regain fitness within a distressingly short timeframe.

The Asian Games trial winners — citing the detrimental effects on their performance and health brought about by frequent weight cuts — have penned a plea to the Sports Ministry, asking for a postponement.

The ad hoc committee, perhaps, could have adopted a more judicious approach that would have accorded the wrestlers a fair opportunity to qualify for both international events. A single, comprehensive trial could have achieved this goal, sparing these athletes from the gruelling ordeal of repeated weight cuts, and thus bolstering their chances to shine on the global stage.

But common sense has seldom guided Indian sports administrators.



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On behalf of NLCIL, I would like to extend our best wishes to the Indian contingent in the Asian Champions Trophy Chennai 2023. Years of continuous dedication and perseverance of sportspersons may yield fruits and achieve desired goals. Best of Luck”



Prasanna Kumar Motupalli
CMD, NLC India Limited



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» WORLD VIEW OF THE FORTNIGHT



« I feel good – it hurt a lot but I'm really happy with the outcome. It's just a lot of hard work and really great people around me. – Katie Ledecky after winning her fifth world title in the women's 1500m event at the World Swimming Championship 2023 »



« I had a bit of wheelspin and obviously Max [Verstappen] was on the inside and ran me wide – and then I got done by the two McLarens,” – Lewis Hamilton after missing out on the podium in Hungarian Grand Prix »

304m

Boston Celtics star Jaylen Brown has agreed to terms on a five-year supermax contract extension that will pay him up to \$304 million (more than 2,400 crore rupees), his agent said.

It's the richest contract in NBA history, surpassing the \$264 million (more than 2100 crore rupees) deal signed by Nuggets' Nikola Jokic last summer. Brown is a two-time All-Star who averaged career highs of 26.6 points, 6.9 rebounds and 3.5 assists last season.

But those numbers went down in the playoffs, when the Celtics lost to the Miami Heat in the Eastern Conference finals. By virtue of making the All-NBA second team — his first such honour in his career — he was eligible for the supermax extension.



3 in 2

Lionel Messi scored a stoppage-time winner in his Inter Miami debut in a 2-1 win against Cruz Azul in the League Cup. Robert Taylor opened the scoring for Miami but Uriel Antuna equalised for Azul in the second half. Just when the match looked to end in a draw, Messi brought back memories of his Barcelona days when his left-footed free-kick found the net. In the next League Cup game, Messi scored twice against Atlanta United as Miami propelled into the top 32.

CLIMBING UP THE RUNGS



Fresh from winning the Korea Open, India's top men's doubles pair of Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy rose to a career-best second spot in the latest BWF rankings. The reigning Asian champions, who won the Korea Open (Super 500), Swiss Open (Super 300) and Indonesia Open (Super 1000) titles this season, now have 87,211 points. TWITTER SAI MEDIA



Unstoppable Inoue reigns supreme

Japanese boxing sensation Naoya Inoue **stuns the world** by beating reigning super bantamweight champion Stephen Fulton.

Lalith Kalidas
Twitter @lal_kal

When Naoya Inoue razed out Stephen Fulton at the Ariake Arena in Tokyo on July 25, 2023, the exuberant Japanese left the home crowd and the world gaping in sheer disbelief.

Barely eight months since wiping out world boxing's bantamweight division with a thumping annihilation of Paul

Butler for four titles in a unification fight at the same venue, Inoue pulled off the unthinkable by scaling a weight class to the super bantamweight class.

A gain of four pounds might be seemingly easy to pull off for a veteran, who has carved

« Inoue has great speed and lots of power behind his punches. He's a special fighter –
Manny Pacquiao, former eight-division world champion ➤



Surprise package: Fulton (right) would have never dreamt of bearing the ultimate knockout punch from a fighter debuting in a division where he was the reigning champion. AFP

25 wins from as many professional fights since debut. But Inoue's undisputed career began at 108 pounds in 2012, barely 10 km away from the venue of his latest conquest.

His supple arms do more than merely make up for his short and ordinary frame; a quality that has stood through the years and even dazed Fulton during his harrowing defeat, a first in his 22-bout career. Fulton was no pushover at 122 pounds. He had the yards behind him over his three previous fights, winning and retaining the WBO and WBC

Upcoming fights in 2023:



Boxing

August 5 — Dallas

Jake Paul vs Nate Diaz

8 rounds, 185 pounds

August 12 — London

Anthony Joshua vs Dillian Whyte

12 rounds, heavyweight



UFC

August 6 — Nashville: UFC Fight Night

Sandhagen vs Font

August 12 — Las Vegas: UFC Fight Night

Luque vs Dos Anjos

super bantamweight titles. Fulton also had the vertical advantage of four inches and a marginally better reach. However, the American would have never dreamt of bearing the ultimate knockout punch from a fighter debuting in a division where he was the reigning champion.

After playing catch-up in the first seven rounds, a drained Fulton completely froze in Inoue's flawless trap in the eighth.

After a low left tap feint, Inoue stoked a beam of the rising sun on Fulton — a crunching right-hand flush to the face dropping him to the surface. It was in the offing, but the Japanese 'Monster' still upstaged Fulton with the impact.

Surprisingly, Fulton dared to stand up and beat the count, but the contest barely lasted another ten seconds with Inoue, in samurai mode, pouncing with a slew of furious jabs to settle the deal.

With two titles in the bag before exiting the ring with utmost respect for his opponent, Inoue quickly pinned his next target. Marlon Tapales, the Filipino star and holder of the IBF and WBA world titles in the division, nimbly accepted an invitation to the ring, setting up another championship showdown for the end of the year.

With 20 wins in title fights, 18 of which were incredible knockouts, the 30-year-old Inoue will undoubtedly start favourite.

A collective thought lingers on though: what is the limit for this otherworldly beast?



Acid test ahead of ASIAN GAMES

Top-flight international hockey will **return to Chennai after 15 years** when the city hosts the Asian Champions Trophy from August 3-12. It will feature the continent's top six teams, including Pakistan.

Uthra Ganesan

Twitter @OnTheSportField

Craig Fulton has already experienced a lot since the beginning of the year: a heartbreaking World Cup final defeat with Belgium, the intensity and passion of Indian fans as a neutral, a completely different culture with his appointment as India's chief coach, and some tough outings in the FIH Pro League as he comes to terms with the resources and personnel at his disposal in a country that continues to follow a simple script vis-à-vis sports: titles equal talent.

But while Fulton was an outsider to the Odisha crowd

then, the South African will now be in the hot seat for the first time when the Indian men's team steps out for the Asian Champions Trophy (ACT) in Chennai in August, facing his toughest outing yet: **coaching the Indian team in a major tournament at home, in a city that has been starved of hockey action for close to two decades** but historically boasts of both great practitioners of the game and its most ardent supporters.

Despite the immense pressure,



Great expectations: India is joint top of the winners' table with Pakistan with three titles each.

HOCKEY INDIA

Fulton (pic right) is trying to keep the focus firmly within, working on the team, sticking to a process, and not thinking too much about the opposition. "I think other teams have also won it, and they have all become a threat, and you don't know what teams come up with in a one-off game. That's the beauty of our sport—any team can do anything on any day. But I am not worried about any specific team; it's always about a collective focus on all the teams we will be playing against, especially in the crossovers," Fulton explained.

"We want to make sure we are well prepared for any situation, and we are covering all that as we go. We are talking about it, discussing openly what our potential challenges

are and how we can overcome them. **At the end of the day our focus is on us and our process — that's 80 per cent of what we are doing — and 20 per cent on the opposition; make no mistake, they will be prepared,**" he added.

With the competition sandwiched between the present and future — a tough Europe tour at the end of July and the all-important Asian Games in September with a ticket to the Paris Olympics as the top prize — there are no doubts where the ACT lies in the scheme of things. "All the

top Asian sides will be participating in the Asian Champions Trophy, and it will be very important for all the teams; they will get a great tournament before the Asian Games. I expect all the teams to come at full strength. But even if they decide to experiment, there is no

doubt that it is a big competition for everyone," Hockey India president Dilip Tirkey insisted. Performing well at the ACT will be a big boost; besides India, there





will be Korea, China, Japan, Malaysia, and Pakistan in action through the 10-day competition. With the same teams vying for the title in Hangzhou, it will be a precursor to what might be in store. It won't be a definite sign of any team's absolute dominance, though, given the trajectory of teams at the competition and over the years — even though, as host and the highest-ranked Asian side in the world, India will be the overwhelming favourite for the top spot.

Jointly top of the winners' table with Pakistan with three

titles each, this is the first time India will be hosting the tournament, which was envisaged and first held in 2011 on a trial basis to provide more competition to Asian teams and raise the overall level of the sport in the continent. Indian hockey has changed so much since then that the originators of the idea would be impressed.

Winning the inaugural edition was a big shot in the arm, coming as it did after a two-year title drought. That was a

raw team, youngsters void of fear, that pulled off the winner in a dramatic shootout with Pakistan, turning Yuvraj Walmiki into an overnight star and kickstarting the era of PR Sreejesh's prominence under the bar, a spot he is yet to relinquish. The title also came on the back of acrimonious and disciplinary off-field issues that saw Sandeep Singh and Sardar Singh quit the camp midway and team changes at the last minute. **Hockey India was barely a year old, the winning team received a laughable Rs. 25,000 prize money, and the sport was replete with administrative uncertainties.**

A year later, India finished last at the 2012 London Olympics, again marred allegedly by groups in the



R. V. MOORTHY



Big test: Fulton (left) will be facing his toughest outing yet. HOCKEYINDIA

administrative clout of Hockey India, aided by financial gains from the Hockey India League, and a semblance of modernity in the hirings, meant Indian hockey managed to regularly attract the best in the business, which eventually led to bronze at the Tokyo Olympics. Among others, Malaysia has been a consistent number three — five times out of six — while Korea, Japan, and China have been occasionally impressive but unable to break the Indo-Pak stranglehold.

"For Indian fans, all tournaments are important; they want to win every time. But this event, especially at this time, is very important for us."

The coach has a certain way he wants to work and build the team, and this will be a very important test of that. A coach always brings his thoughts and planning as he understands the way forward for the future, but he also has to adapt to the Indian thought process and expectations," Tirkey said.

Something Fulton has already understood and begun working on, starting with bringing in Paddy Upton (facing page, bottom) as the mental conditioner. He is counting on his fellow South African's long experience with Indian sports to provide the much-needed mental edge for the hockey team. "I think it's quite plain to see in high-performance sports that those with the mental edge are normally the most consistent, and if you are consistently doing things better than the opposition, you normally win more than you lose. That's where I see a gap and where we can do some good work. The diversity in the

squad, infighting and ego issues, and an inability by coach Michael Nobbs to handle the players or the pressure of expectations. He still managed to hang on for another year before being unceremoniously dumped.

Pakistan, meanwhile, won the next two ACT editions — in 2012 and 2013 — but that did nothing to stem

its downward spiral, failing to qualify for the next two Olympics and the 2014 World Cup. By the time the two teams agreed to hold the trophy aloft together in 2018 after a rain-abandoned final, things had gone very differently for the two neighbours. The title drought continued, but the financial and

« I think it's quite plain to see in high-performance sports that those with the mental edge are normally the most consistent, and if you are consistently doing things better than the opposition, you normally win more than you lose »



team and India as a whole is huge — players from different areas, different cultures, speaking different languages — we are trying to connect the dots," the coach admitted, but warned that it was not an overnight process.

But all preparations aside, the biggest spotlight will be on the players themselves. The Olympic bronze, already two years in the past,

continues to be brought up in every conversation, making it difficult for both the fans and the players to move on.

A disappointing World Cup raised some concerns, but the following successes in the Pro League eased them — or at least overlooked them for now. Many from that inaugural win 12 years ago have now added 'former international' to their names,

while two of the newest — Sreejesh and Manpreet Singh, also the youngest on that side — now form the core. The disappointment of bronze in the 2021 edition, soon after the high of Tokyo, and the underwhelming 2018 Asiad will not be easy to forget.

"There will be pressure — of performance here, at home, in a venue that is seeing hockey return



MANY FROM THAT INAUGURAL WIN 12 YEARS AGO HAVE NOW ADDED 'FORMER INTERNATIONAL' TO THEIR NAMES, WHILE TWO OF THE NEWEST – SREEJESH AND MANPREET SINGH, ALSO THE YOUNGEST ON THAT SIDE – NOW FORM THE CORE

Focus on the field: All preparations aside, the biggest spotlight will be on the players themselves, led by captain Harmanpreet Singh (in blue). PTI

after almost two decades and hopefully heightened expectations. There will also be pressure to do well against teams India will again face after a month in a competition with much more at stake. And although it doesn't relate to the ACT directly, there will also be somewhere in the back of their minds the fact that winning the Asian Games against these same teams will help avoid the

potentially tricky situation of travelling to Lahore for Olympic qualifiers. But I feel this team is now used to the pressure, and they have proven they can handle it," hoped an optimistic Jagbir Singh, a former India international.

For Fulton, however, the targets are clear. "By the time the ACT ends, we will have gathered a lot of information about our team from

the tournament and the Spanish tour, the selected players, and our best combinations."

"For me, it's more about India being able to play to its strengths and make a difference in the areas where we have lacked previously. The last time we won the Asian Games was in 2014, so yeah, it's been a while, and it will be good to get it," he signed off.

THE HOST ADVANTAGE

The Asian Champions Trophy **comes to India for the first time**, as the hosts look to set their Asian Games prep rolling.

Uthra Ganesan

Twitter @OnTheSportField

Being a three-time champion, the highest ranked side in the competition, and the flag-bearer for the Asian continent in world hockey — the weight of expectations doesn't get tougher for India, which is also a first-time host of the ACT in its seventh edition.

The tournament has been a mixed bag for India over the years — from winning the title in the initial years and proving its continental credentials in later editions to now using it as an experiment with an eye on bigger prizes. There was no medal in 2013 (when India sent a second-string side), while a bronze in the 2021 edition turned out to be an anti-climax, four

months after the high of an Olympic medal.

With the kind of resources available to the team and considering the recent performances against some of the top sides in the world, India will be the firm favourite to win the title. It will come into the tournament straight from a four-nation Europe tour, with only a three-day gap between its last match in Spain and the first one at home against China — both in widely contrasting conditions against opponents at either end of the rankings.

But the fact that the ACT will be followed by the Asian Games makes it a tricky outing for the host. Coach Fulton will have to play the balancing game — by going all out to win at home, testing his plans and players for the Asiad, keeping a few tricks up his sleeve for the big event and keeping a close eye on the other teams. That despite the progress made by the Indian team, both in terms of rankings and respect, in world hockey, it does not hold any continental crown at the moment should be a sobering thought for the players to avoid any complacency.

Keep an eye out for Selvam Karthi, the 21-year old who leads Tamil Nadu's hopes of a hockey revival. To be playing at home, in a tournament that officials hope will mark the revival of the sport in the State, will be a huge honour for the youngster. In the Pro League games earlier this year and the Asia Cup last year, he has shown that he is not awed by names or the stage — his goals against teams like Germany and Belgium were results of a calm mind aided by excellent skills. Karthi is also the kind of poacher the Indian team had been missing for a while with his sense of positioning and ability to find the scoring angles inside the circle.

PLAYER TO WATCH OUT FOR
Selvam Karthi



SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Familiar territory:

With the kind of resources available to the team and considering the recent performances against some of the top sides in the world, India will be the firm favourite to win the title.

GETTYIMAGES

4
World Ranking



IN ASIAN CHAMPIONS TROPHY



TITLES	MATCHES	WON	DRAWN	LOST	GOALS
3	37	24	8	5	145

9

World Ranking

Perfect aim: Korea's Jungjun Lee (No. 11) strikes against Japan during the FIH Men's Hockey World Cup 2023. BISWARANJAN ROUT

All eyes on Jang

Korea will depend on **39-year-old drag flick veteran Jang Jong Hyun** to make their mark in the Asian Champions Trophy.

K. Keerthivasan

Twitter @Sportskeerthi

Argentina's Martin Ferreiro struck a 'goal' at the shoot-out in the FIH World Cup hockey quarterfinal match against South Korea at the Kalinga Stadium, Bhubaneswar in June this year. But it was disallowed as the time had elapsed (past the eight-second deadline). Which meant that Korea had won the match 3-2 in tiebreaker after the teams had been deadlocked 5-5 in regulation time.

That sparked wild celebrations in the Korean camp as its goalkeeper Kim Jaehyeon quickly removed his helmet and signalled to his players to join in the celebration.

It was remarkable progress by Korea as it was the lowest ranked side and the only Asian country in the competition to enter the last eight stage after India, Malaysia and Japan bowed out. Korea, however, lost to The Netherlands in the quarters.

The main player behind the win over the 2016 Olympic champion that day was not Kim,



the goalkeeper, but the 39-year-old drag flick veteran Jang Jong Hyun.

Against Argentina, Jang, who has played three Olympics ('04, '08 & '12), scored two goals and assisted in another to script a memorable victory for a team still struggling to regain its place in world hockey.

Jang's first goal against Argentina showed his power and accuracy in ample measure. The first hit taken by Lee Jung Jun was deftly trapped and set by Kim Kyubeom to Jang, who

pushed it firmly down the ground past the outstretched right leg of the Argentina goalkeeper. Jang second goal, too, was equally good and effective. This time, Lee Nam Yong drive from the sideline was stopped by Kyubeom and Jang's fierce hit got a slight deflection from a defender and found its way home. The assist by Jang took the cake. Jang who was going for his drag flick passed it back to Yong who pushed it home. The Argentinians were taken by the Korean's execution and Jang's intelligence.

In the previous edition of the Asian Champions Trophy in 2021 in Dhaka, Jang scored 10 goals for his team and was the highest goal scorer in the tournament. In fact, he was the key player in his team's victory over Japan in the final through shoot-outs.

No doubt, Jang, with 314 International appearances and 109 goals, will be the heartthrob of the knowledgeable fans in Chennai when the seventh edition of the Asian Champions Trophy hockey tournament kicks off on August 3.

Korea and Jang's fans will love to see him be at his best and ensure the defending champion (2021) claim a sweet double.

After the Chennai event, Jang will try to fulfil another ambition of being on the podium in the Huangzhou Asian Games.

The Games in September this year might in all probability be Jang's swansong, and he will want to go out on a high. Of the 13 times South Korea has participated in the Games, it has won the gold medal four times and was in the podium thrice. Jang was part of the team which won gold and bronze in the 2006 & '14 Games.

He will not mind it for the third time.



PLAYER TO WATCH OUT FOR
+ **Jang Jong Hyun**

IN ASIAN CHAMPIONS TROPHY

TITLES	MATCHES	WON	DRAWN	LOST	GOALS
1	25	10	3	12	60

» ACT
PAKISTAN

16

World Ranking



Experience counts:

Muhammed Umer Bhutta (in white), the only player with more than 150 international caps, will herald this young crop of Pakistan players.

Pics: GETTYIMAGES

Looking for lost glory

On a redemption trail, Pakistan faces a litmus test in the Asian Champions Trophy.

Abhishek Saini

Twitter @abhisheksainiii

Once a heavyweight in the sport — eight Olympic medals and five World Cup titles — Pakistan's fall from grace has been glaring and of catastrophic proportions.

It was absent from the Olympics in 2016 and 2020, and the World Cup in 2023.

There's still light at the end of the tunnel. The side can bring this unceremonious streak to a halt by clinching gold at the upcoming Asian Games in Hangzhou. The winner of the event seals a berth for the Paris Olympics. In Chennai, with the Asian Champions Trophy, Pakistan will set off on this quest.

With all six teams also competing at the Asian Games, the tournament is the perfect precursor to the showpiece event in China.

Pakistan will find out if it can survive the deep waters against higher-ranked India, Korea, and Malaysia.

But the team's run-up to the six-team tournament has been marred by lacklustre performances and administrative disorder. Pooled against Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, and Scotland at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, the Green

Shirts secured just one win, and had to contend with a seventh-place finish.

The side plunged further when it finished seventh in the eight-team FIH Nations Cup in South Africa in December 2022, winning just one out of its five games. Days later, the team's head coach, Siegfried Aikman, resigned over salary arrears. Hope lingers on, though, that the worst might be behind Pakistan hockey. The turnaround, still fresh, has been set in motion by the junior team that won silver at the Asia Cup in June.

As many as nine players from this junior side find a place in the 18-member team for the Asian Champions Trophy, with Abdul Hannan Shahid being the player to watch out for. Other fresh faces have been inducted into the team, leaving only eight names from the Commonwealth Games contingent.

Muhammed Umer Bhutta, the only player with more than 150 international caps, will herald this young crop of players, and hope to tick the right boxes before they take off for China.

On paper, Pakistan is far from being a contender. Titles, however, are seldom won on paper. **Pakistan may have slipped to the second rung in global tournaments, but it has stamped its authority at the Asian level.** It has won the Asian Champions Trophy thrice, been runner-up twice, and made it to the top four in every edition.

PLAYER TO WATCH OUT FOR
+ **Abdul Hannan Shahid**



IN ASIAN CHAMPIONS TROPHY

TITLES	MATCHES	WON	DRAWN	LOST	GOALS
3	38	27	7	10	114

Redemption road

Japan seeks to put its disappointing World Cup campaign behind, led by key players **Ken Nagayoshi and Kentaro Fukuda** and coach Akira Takahashi.



Strike team: Kentaro Fukuda is a goal threat for the Japanese, with 15 goals in 69 caps for the national team. PICS: GETTY IMAGES

Anish Pathiyil
Twitter @Anishpathiyil

Japan will begin its campaign at the 2023 Asian Champions Trophy against South Korea on August 3, in a rematch of the previous edition's final. South Korea had beaten Samurai Japan 4-2 in a shootout at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium in Dhaka after the match finished 3-3 at

the end of normal time.

Raiki Fujishima and Kosei Kawabe missed penalties for Japan in the shootout, forcing it to settle for second place, its best performance at the event, equalling the runner-up finish it achieved in 2013.

Japan comes into the tournament on the back of a disappointing 2023

IN ASIAN CHAMPIONS TROPHY



TITLES	MATCHES	WON	DRAWN	LOST	GOALS
0	37	10	5	22	78



19

World Ranking

World Cup held in Bhubaneshwar and Rourkela in January. Drawn in a group with Belgium, Germany and South Korea — all higher-ranked opponents, Japan finished last in Pool B.

The 8-0 hammering by India in the 9th-16th place playoff round followed, accompanied by another loss to

Malaysia. The team eventually finished 15th, level with Chile, unable to conjure up a single point during the event.

It scored only four goals in six matches while conceding 23, tallying the second-worst goal difference, with only Chile performing worse.

The disappointing campaign dropped Japan from 16th place in the FIH World rankings to 19th. It enters the Asian Champions Trophy as the second-lowest-ranked team, only above China.

Before the World Cup,

PLAYER TO WATCH OUT FOR
+ **Ken Nagayoshi**



the team participated in the inaugural FIH Hockey Nations Cup, a qualifying tournament for the 2023/24 Men's FIH Pro League. The event was held in November and December 2022, with Japan finishing sixth among the eight participating nations.

Despite a solid start to the tournament, with a 3-0 win over Canada, Japan faltered in the next two group games against South Korea and Malaysia, finishing in third place in the group.

A win against Pakistan guaranteed Japan a spot in the fifth and sixth place playoff, where it lost on penalties to France.

Ken Nagayoshi, the penalty corner specialist is one of the key players to watch out for in the Japanese team. Despite finding the back of the net only once in the 2023 World Cup, his performances in the Nations Cup, where he scored four goals, portray why he is a significant goal threat.

Kentaro Fukuda is another goal threat for the Japanese, scoring a goal in the 2023 World Cup and twice in the Nations Cup.

He has scored 15 goals in 69 caps for the national team.

Head Coach Akira Takahashi will hope the team can bounce back from the disappointment of the World Cup.

With a small core of players from the 2018 Asian Games gold-winning team still playing, Japan will be hoping to rely on their experience to ensure a better outing in a multi-nation tournament this time round.

Past inspiration:

The 2023 ACT will be a comeback tournament of sorts for China, which will be hopeful of replicating the performances it managed the last time it played in India. Pics: GETTY IMAGES

A renewed hope

China's underdog hockey team aims to create **a few upsets** in the Asian Champions Trophy.

24

World Ranking

Anish Pathiyil

Twitter @Anishpathiyil

China enters the 2023 Asian Champions Trophy as the lowest-ranked team among the six participating nations. Its greatest moment in men's field hockey came during the 2006 Asian Games in Doha where it finished with a silver medal, losing 3-1 to South Korea in the final.

China is currently ranked 24th in the FIH World rankings and last participated in a major multi-nation hockey event during the 2018 World Cup in Bhubaneshwar. China entered that tournament as the lowest-ranked team, seeded 17th, behind South Africa and France.

After finishing third in its group, China qualified for the cross-overs, where it lost against 16th-seeded France by a solitary goal. A tenth-place finish in the tournament, above top-ten-seeded teams like Spain and Ireland



was a success for the Chinese men.

China missed out on participation in the 2023 World Cup in India after withdrawing from the 2022 Men's AHF Cup, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. China, which was initially supposed to host the tournament before it was shifted to Jakarta, hence missed out on a place in the 2022 Asia Cup which is the Asian qualifying tournament for the World Cup.

IN ASIAN CHAMPIONS TROPHY



TITLES	MATCHES	WON	DRAWN	LOST	GOALS
0	24	8	1	15	48

The 2023 Asian Champions Trophy will therefore be a comeback tournament for China, which will be hopeful of replicating the performances it managed the last time it played in India. Head Coach Haiqin Weng has opted for a young squad heading into the 2023 Asian Champions Trophy with seven members of the team yet to be capped for the senior men's national team. Only four of the selected squad of twenty have accumulated more than 10 caps for the national team.

Weibao Ao is the most senior figure in the team, with 108 caps to his name. He was one of China's top performers in the 2018 World Cup, receiving plaudits for his performances as first rusher. In the game against France especially, Weibao was instrumental in thwarting France's penalty corner attempts.

Goalkeeper Caiyu Wang is another experienced player who makes the Champions Trophy squad from the 2018 World Cup team, along with Zixiang Guo and Wenhui E.

Among the debutants, Chongcong Chen will be an exciting player to look out for. Chen captained the junior team at the 2019 Junior AHF Cup held in Muscat, a tournament that China won. Chen scored a penalty corner in the opening game against Iran as China went the entire tournament unbeaten.

China will be looking to cause a few upsets in the upcoming Champions Trophy, vying to qualify for the semifinals, as it did in 2012 and 2013. It will open its campaign with a game against Olympic bronze-medallist India on August 3.



PLAYER TO WATCH OUT FOR
+ **Weibao Ao**



10

World Ranking

Time to earn their stripes

Led by coach Arul Anthoni, **Malaysia aims for glory** with Azrai Aizad's scoring prowess and Razie Rahim's defensive abilities.

Aashin Prasad

Twitter @aashin23

In the World Cup earlier this year, Malaysia showed plenty of promise before being dealt with a harsh reality check. The Speedy Tigers gave a strong fight to Spain in a penalty shootout defeat in the crossover stage. But the humbling 3-6 loss to South Africa and a

narrow 3-2 win over Japan in the classification meant there was plenty of work to be done behind the scenes.

Head coach Arul Anthoni wasn't pleased with the team's defensive performance where the team repeated a familiar pattern of going behind in the opening two quarters of the



Strike force: Malaysia's Firhan Ashari in action against Spain during the FIH Men's Hockey World Cup 2023. BISWARANJAN ROUT

new system to mixed results. The team lost once, and drew twice before winning the final game. Malaysia blew two 2-0 leads and conceded another 1-0 lead to end up drawing the game 2-2.

More importantly, Anthoni stressed on plenty of work rate and pressing within the playing system. He also interchanged positions of players with striker Azrai Aizad moved into midfield, while Fitri Saari, who is back in the squad after three years, has been shifted up top in attack.

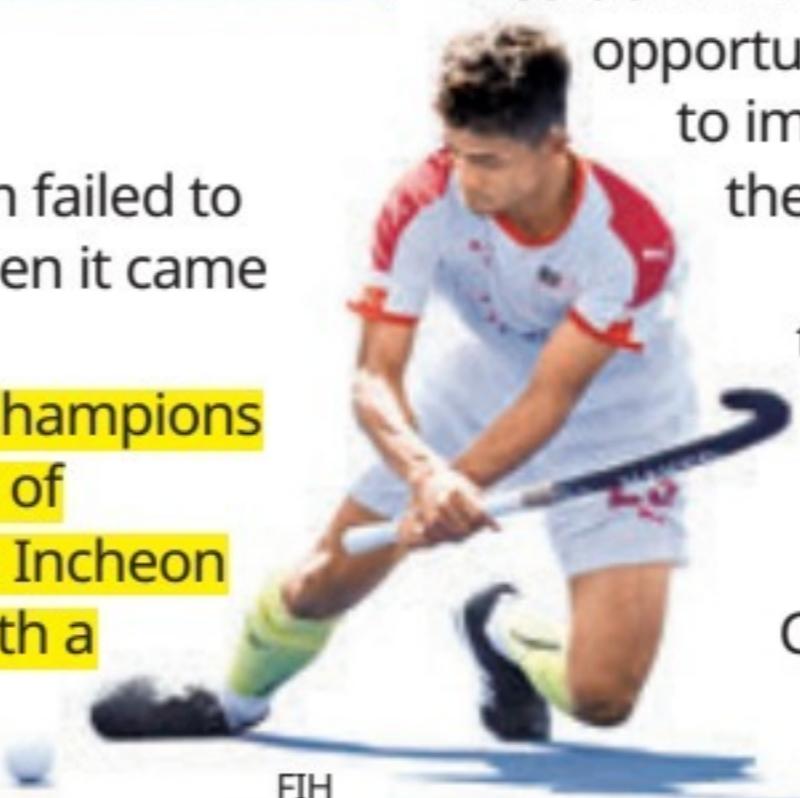
Aizad's inclusion will be important for Malaysia after an injury forced him to miss the World Cup but is now fit and firing again. The 23-year-old midfielder top-scored in the Malaysian Hockey League with 40 goals, with 33 field play goals to take his club to the final. If Malaysia is to go far in the tournament in Chennai, Aizad will likely have a big say in it.

Veteran Razie Rahim will be the key piece holding the team together in defence and the team's penalty corner specialist with his lethal drag flicks.

He found his angles and power behind the drag flicks by scoring 23 penalty corner goals in the domestic league.

Malaysia managed five successive third-place finishes in the Asian Champions Trophy since its inception before pulling out of the 2021 edition in Bangladesh. The 2023 edition will provide the World No. 10 side the opportunity to build momentum in its bid to improve on its silver medal from the 2018 Asian Games.

Anthoni's Malaysia has all the tools to make it to the semifinals of the Champions Trophy and possibly even push tournament favourite India for the title in Chennai.



FIH

game. Anthoni also said his team failed to keep their emotions in check when it came to big match scenarios.

In preparation for the Asian Champions Trophy, Malaysia played a series of friendlies against South Korea in Incheon where Anthoni experimented with a

PLAYER TO WATCH OUT FOR
+ **Azrai Aizad**

IN ASIAN CHAMPIONS TROPHY



TITLES	MATCHES	WON	DRAWN	LOST	GOALS
0	32	18	4	10	87

Squads and fixtures



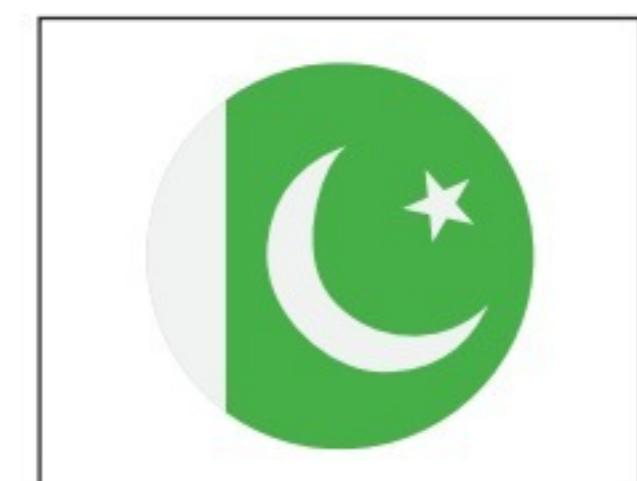
Krishan Bahadur Pathak, P.R.
Sreejesh, Varun Kumar, Jarmanpreet
Singh, Manpreet Singh,
Harmanpreet Singh, Amit Rohidas,
Jugraj Singh, Hardik Singh, Sumit,
Vivek Sagar Prasad, Nilakanta
Sharma, Shamsher Singh, Gurjant
Singh, Mandeep Singh, Akashdeep
Singh, Sukheet Singh, Selvam Karthi

Aug 3 | Aug 4 | Aug 6 | Aug 7 | Aug 9
China | Japan | Malaysia | Korea | Pakistan



Kim Jaehyeon, Kim Hyeonhong, Kim
Kyubeom, Lee Nam Yong, Jung
Manjae, Son Dain, Kim Junghoo,
Hwang Jaeil, Lee Jungjun, Ji Woo
Cheon, Park Cheoleon, Lee
Hyeseung, Kim Jaehan, Lee Gangsan,
Kim Sunghyun, Jeong Junwoo, Kim
Jinkyong, Lee Seunghoon, Kim
Daehyun, Kim Hyeongjin, Jang Jong
Hyun, Hyun Jigwang, Lee Juyoung,
Yang Jihun

Aug 3 | Aug 4 | Aug 6 | Aug 7 | Aug 9
Japan | Pakistan | China | India | Malaysia



Muhammad Umar Bhatta, Akmal
Hussain, Abdullah Ishtiaq Khan,
Muhammad Abdullah, Muhammad
Sufyan Khan, Ehtsham Aslam,
Osama Bashir, Aqeel Ahmed, Arshad
Liaquat, Muhammad Imad, Abdul
Hannan Shahid, Zakaria Hayat, Rana
Abdul Ashraf (vc), Roman,
Muhammad Yaqoob, Muhammad
Shahzaib Khan, Afraz, Abdul Rahman

Aug 3 | Aug 4 | Aug 6 | Aug 7 | Aug 9
Malaysia | Korea | Japan | China | India



Shota Yamada, Yamato Kawahara,
Seren Tanaka, Yoshiki Kirishita,
Kentaro Fukuda, Taiki Takade,
Takuma Niwa, Yuma Nagai, Manabu
Yamashita, Raiki Fujishima, Ken
Nagayoshi, Ryosei Kato, Ryoma
Ooka, Masaki Ohashi, Genki Mitani,
Kaito Tanaka, Kosei Kawabe, Takumi
Kitagawa, Takashi Yoshikawa

Aug 3 | Aug 4 | Aug 6 | Aug 7 | Aug 9
Korea | India | Pakistan | Malaysia | China



Md. Hafizuddin Othman, Md. Zaimi
Mat Deris, Md. Razie Rahim, Md.
Marhan Modh Jalil, Md. Najmi Farizal
Jazlan, Md. Aminuddin Mohammad
Zain, Muhammad Syafiq Hassan,
Muhajir Abdu Rauf, Md. Najib Abu
Hassan, Md. Amirul Hamizan Azhar,
Faiz Helmi Jali, Meor Muhammad
Azuan Hassan, Shello Silverius, Md.
Azrai Aizad Abu Kamal, Abdul Khaliq
Hamirin, Md. Firhan Ashaari, Faizal
Saari, Md. Ashran Hamsani, Md.
Ramadan Rosli, Md. Fitri Saari

Aug 3 | Aug 4 | Aug 6 | Aug 7 | Aug 9
Pakistan | China | India | Japan | Korea



Qijun Chen, Chengfu Chen, Jiesheng
Gao, Junjie Liu, Xu Ao, Dongquan
Pan, Wenhui E, Chongcong Chen,
Zixiang Guo, Shihao Du, Suozhu Ao,
Benhai Chen, Changliang Lin, Lei
Meng, Weibao Ao, Jingcheng Huang,
Bo Zhang, Weijiang Zhu, Weihao
Wang, Caiyu Wang

Aug 3 | Aug 4 | Aug 6 | Aug 7 | Aug 9
India | Malaysia | Korea | Pakistan | Japan

Breaking new ground

With a **new turf and revamped facilities**, Chennai once again welcomes international hockey action at the Mayor Radhakrishnan Hockey Stadium.

Aashin Prasad

Twitter @aashin23

The abiding memory of international hockey for fans in Chennai is of India captain Prabhjot Singh waving the Tri-colour flag under the night skies at the Mayor Radhakrishnan Hockey Stadium. Prabhjot had starred in India's dismantling of South Korea in a 7-2 win to clinch the Asia Cup title in 2007. After a long gap of 16 years a new generation of supporters now have a chance to witness high-quality hockey with the commencement of the Asian Champions Trophy in August.

With five of the top Asian sides coming to the city, the Mayor Radhakrishnan Stadium and its complex have undergone refurbishment to keep up with the international standards of the game. The turf has been relaid for the first time since 2015 with FIH-approved Poligras Paris GT, a zero-carbon hockey astroturf, similar to the one that will be used at the Paris Olympics next year.

The Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu has also adhered to the recommendation of FIH to create a practice pitch within the campus. The other aspects of the stadium that

underwent significant 'civil and electrical' facelifts in the lead-up were the dressing rooms, the stands, the VIP enclosure and the media center. The redevelopment cost came up to a tune of over Rs. 9 crore and was completed under three months.

"The challenge was the time-frame. Normally, any stadium renovation of this magnitude would need six months and we completed in less than half the time. That's a challenge we felt we succeeded in," said Meghanatha Reddy, Member Secretary, SDAT.

Speaking about the importance of the event for the hockey fans of the State, Udhyanidhi Stalin, Minister for Youth Welfare and Sports Development of Tamil Nadu, said, "We are excited to bring international hockey back to Chennai after a long gap of 16 years through the Asian Champions Trophy Chennai, 2023. Chennai has a history of hosting prestigious hockey tournaments in the past and we hope that with the Asian Champions Trophy, we will continue the rich legacy. We recall with pride the Asian Cup held in 2007 in Chennai under the guidance of Kalaignar M Karunanidhi, the then Chief Minister. To hold this mega event in the centenary year celebrations of Kalaignar is a tribute to the visionary leadership provided by

One for the album: The Asian Champions Trophy against the backdrop of Vivekananda Rock Memorial in Kanyakumari.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Kalaignar M Karunanidhi. This is also the reason we named the main Pavilion as Kalaignar Centenary Pavilion."

Udhayanidhi hopes the tournament will catalyst a hockey revival in the State. "Under the inspiring leadership of our Honourble Chief Minister, Thiru. M. K. Stalin, SDAT and other stakeholders have worked tirelessly over the past few months to renovate the Mayor Radhakrishnan Stadium in an unprecedented record time for what is a big tournament of international reputation," he said. "We hope and wish for the fans to watch high-quality action in the coming weeks and celebrate the spirit of Hockey. Chennai and Tamil Nadu have a rich tradition of hockey and we hope this tournament will kickstart a revival of the sport in the State."

The State Government has looked to stoke interest in the tournament by parading the trophy across 30 different cities in the state, including a pit stop at the picturesque beach of Kanyakumari with the backdrop of the Indian Ocean, before arriving at Chennai on July 31.

As the supporters enter the complex, they will be greeted by the official mascot 'Bomman', an elephant inspired from the Oscar-winning documentary — *The Elephant Whisperers*.



No stone unturned: Tamil Nadu Youth Welfare and Sports Development Minister Udhyanidhi Stalin inspecting the Mayor Radhakrishnan Hockey Stadium ahead of the Asian Championship Trophy.

JOTHI RAMALINGAM B



Gearing up for the mega event: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Thiru M.K. Stalin unveiling the Hockey Players Statue at the Mayor Radhakrishnan Stadium, ahead of the Asian Championship Trophy. M. VEDHAN



New look: The revamped players dressing room at the Mayor Radhakrishnan Hockey Stadium.

B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM



Spick and span: The all-new astroturf at the Mayor Radhakrishnan Hockey Stadium. B.JOTHI RAMALINGAM



A tribute: The new Kalaignar Centenary Pavilion at the Mayor Radhakrishnan Hockey Stadium. B.JOTHI RAMALINGAM



Edging past Kiwis: Rangadoss, the Madras left-winger, scored the team's second goal against New Zealand Olympic hockey team during an exhibition match in Madras in September 1960. Madras won 2-1. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

Chennai's enduring love story with hockey awaits new chapter

Barring the **two Champions Trophy tournaments** in 1996 and 2005, where India fared badly, it has won the rest of the tournaments in Chennai.

K. Keerthivasan
Twitter @Sportskeerthi

In the 1940s and 1950s, when hockey's popularity in India was at its apogee, Madras, now Chennai, saw the sport thrive in colleges.

Writing for The Hindu in 1993, ECP Prabhakar, a civil servant who played cricket (Ranji Trophy) and hockey for Madras State, said: "The attractions [in the 1940s and 1950s] for the sports-loving public of Madras were the annual hockey tournaments conducted by Madras United Club and Madras Cricket Club. The

grounds were well watered and rolled, with MCC grass presenting a billiards table surface that was a real pleasure to play on."

The tradition of impeccable ground maintenance and a loyal fan following continued into the 70s and 80s. Cricket started to gain prominence after India won the Prudential World Cup in 1983. Despite its numerous problems on and off the field, hockey kept its core

Indian hockey team members pose for a group photograph at a coaching camp in Madras for the International hockey tournament for the Rene Frank Gold Cup, starting on December 29, 1975. Coach Peter is seen in the middle. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY



audience largely intact, who came in droves for the finals of the domestic and international tournaments.

The Madras State Association staged two Test matches in 1962. The Habibullah Stadium in Wellington was the venue of the first-ever International Test fixture held within the Madras State — between India and Belgium in January. Then India played Malay in February.

In September of 1960, New Zealand played an exhibition match against Madras State ahead of the first-ever International tournament in India (Ahmedabad).

By all accounts, the first-ever official tournament in Madras was the René Frank Gold Cup at the then-Nehru Stadium in 1975, held to commemorate the golden jubilee of the Indian Hockey Federation. René Frank was the secretary of the International Hockey Federation (FIH) (1950–56) and president of the FIH (1966–83).

Around 10 countries took part in the tournament, which saw India beat Belgium 2–0 in the final. Ajitpal Singh, who led the team in the summit clash that had a sellout crowd of 20,000, received the winner's Trophy from M. Karunanidhi, the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. At the prize distribution ceremony, Ajitpal said, "It is true that we didn't have much opposition in this tournament. But I am glad that our boys gave an exhibition that must have pleased

the connoisseurs of both the old and present generations.

"That we continue to be on top after our [1975] World Cup victory augurs well for our efforts to regain the Olympic gold medal in Montreal. I do not doubt that against stronger teams, our boys would have proved equally good. Of course, we cannot be complacent. After a brief victory celebration, we must set our sights on the Olympics."

After nearly two decades, international hockey returned to

+

The Habibullah Stadium in Wellington was the venue of the first-ever International Test fixture held within the Madras State.



Epic victory: India's Dhanraj Pillay (extreme left) tries to wriggle past Pakistan's Naveed Alam and goalkeeper Mansoor Ahmad during the men's hockey final between India and Pakistan at the 1995 SAF Games in Madras. India won the gold medal beating Pakistan 5-2. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

Chennai with the South Asian Federation Games in 1995. Hockey was conducted on the artificial turf of Mayor Radhakrishnan Stadium in Egmore in 1995. India dished out a delectable and entertaining display to beat Pakistan 5-2 in the final in front of a full-capacity crowd. Pargat Singh received the winner's Trophy from the then-TN Chief Minister, J. Jayalalithaa.

In 1996, the Chief Minister's Cup, a five-nation tournament, was held in Chennai. India, South Africa, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh took part, with the host thrashing South Africa 3-0 in the final, riding on goals from Dhanraj Pillai and Edward Aranha (2).

The CM's Trophy triumph was a fine preparation for India ahead of the 1996 Champions Trophy, an elite tournament for the top six nations. But it turned out to be a false dawn for Pargat's team. The Netherlands won the crown after 14 years, beating Pakistan 3-2 in the final.

India, fighting for the bronze medal, was left battered and bruised by Germany, 5-0. Add to that Dhanraj's fracas with a section of the crowd, which gave the sport and India bad publicity.

The Champions Trophy returned to Chennai in 2005 at the same venue, the Mayor Radhakrishnan Stadium, which sported a Polyton turf this time. India finished last

among the six teams, losing to Pakistan 4-3 in the play-off contest. Skipper Gajan Ajit Singh and head coach Rajinder Singh Jr. received their fair share of the blame for the inept display. Meanwhile, Australia won the tournament, defeating The Netherlands 3-1 in the final.

But the next tournament in Chennai, the Asia Cup in 2007, was etched in the annals of Indian hockey history, with the team recording its best-ever performance in a tournament held in the city. India remained unbeaten in the tournament and was ruthless in the final, drubbing South Korea 7-2, with fans turning up in huge numbers. Forwards Prabhjot Singh, Shivendra



All smiles: The jubilant Indian hockey team poses with the trophy after beating Korea by 7-2 in the men's final of the 2007 Asia Cup hockey championship at Mayor Radhakrishnan Stadium in Chennai. M. VEDHAN

Singh, Rajpal Singh, and India's goalkeeper Baljeet Singh gave those present at the Stadium memories they will cherish for the rest of their lives. The splendid win came as a soothing balm to a side that had to endure a lowly sixth-place finish at the 2006 Asian Games in Doha.

The seventh edition of the Asian Champions Trophy is set to be held

at the brand new Poligras turf of Mayor Radhakrishnan Stadium from August 3 to 12.

Barring the two Champions Trophy tournaments in 1996 and 2005, where India fared badly, it has won the rest of the tournaments in Chennai; this does not take into account the Test matches India has played in the port city.

If not for all matches, at least the contests involving India and Pakistan will see a full-capacity crowd. The Hockey Unit of Tamil Nadu and the Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu are busy giving last-minute touches to the venue.

With the Asian Games in Hangzhou next, the onus is on India to walk the talk.

« The first-ever official tournament in Madras was the Rene Frank Gold Cup at the then-Nehru Stadium in 1975 »

» EPL

BATTLEGROUND ENGLAND

The Premier League **embarks on a new season** with reinforced teams and new contenders as Manchester City aims for a repeat treble.



Firm favourite: With Erling Haaland, who shattered the league goal-scoring record, in its rank, it would be hard to bet against the reigning European champion, Manchester City. GETTY IMAGES



WITH ITS CLUB CAPTAIN ILKAY GUNDOGAN JUMPING SHIP TO BARCELONA, CITY ROPED IN THE BATTLE-HARDENED MIDFIELDER MATEO KOVACIC FROM CHELSEA

Pranay Rajiv
Twitter @iraiva4716



FOR MORE STORIES

Reinforcements have been made, recalibrations have been done, and the battle lines are drawn all over again for a new season of the Premier League.

Defending champion and treble-holder Manchester City will kick start the 2023-34 season on August 12 when it takes on newly-promoted Burnley away from home.

Over the weekend, the rest of the field will begin their 38-game marathon to the glittering Premier League title, won three times on the trot by Pep Guardiola's City.

The highlight fixture of the opening weekend will be the one between Liverpool and Chelsea. The Blues, who finished a dreadful 12th in the league last season, are in the middle of an monumental rebuild, while Jurgen Klopp's side is undergoing a transition of its own.

Incomings galore

Almost all top teams have dipped into their transfer pool to rope in some exemplary talents, both from within the league and beyond the shores as they prepare for the new season.

The biggest transfer market activity was Arsenal's acquisition of holding midfielder Declan Rice for a British record transfer fee of 105 million pounds from West Ham. The 24-year-old had attracted attention from several elite European clubs, thanks to his ability to single-handedly anchor a midfield. But Rice chose to align with Mikel Arteta's side. The Gunners have also snatched German attacker Kai Havertz from London rival, Chelsea.

Man City was not one to be left behind. With its club captain Ilkay Gundogan jumping ship to Barcelona, City roped in the battle-hardened midfielder Mateo Kovacic, also from Chelsea. The reigning champion is also close to signing his Croatian teammate Josko Gvardiol to bolster its already-impenetrable defence.

Manchester United started slowly in the transfer market before bringing in English midfielder Mason Mount from Chelsea.

United soon phased out its long-time goalkeeper David de Gea, whose inefficient passing skills had been a cause of worry to manager Erik Ten Hag. The Spanish shot-stopper was quickly replaced with Andre Onana, who was acquired from Inter Milan.

The Cameroonian

Mauricio Pochettino. GETTYIMAGES



« Spurs is struggling to hold onto its talismanic striker Harry Kane, who is being openly courted by German giant Bayern Munich »

goalkeeper, who had previously worked with Ten Hag at Ajax, cost United a reported 50 million pounds (plus add-ons).

Liverpool, which failed to secure Champions League football last season, chose to reinforce its midfield, with Dominik Szoboszlai and Alexis Mac Allister coming in from RB Leipzig and Brighton and Hove Albion respectively.

Newcastle United, which finished a praiseworthy fourth last season, continued its lofty ambitions by recruiting Italian midfielder Sandro Tonali for a reported 55 million pounds. The Magpies have also brought in attacker Harvey Barnes from Leicester City.

Predicting the unpredictable

Man City and Guardiola did something many assumed was beyond their reach — win a continental treble. It has indeed dominated the domestic scene in the past decade. But the Manchester-based side always found innovative ways to fumble at the continental level, until the last season.

Now the Cityzens have a chance of doing it all over again and few would predict against them. With Erling Haaland, who shattered the league goal-scoring record, in its rank, it would be hard to bet against the reigning European champion.

But expect Arteta's Arsenal to put up a stronger fight than last time. After having led the league for three-quarters of the way last season, the North London side had to settle for the runner-up spot. It has reinforced

in earnest and with its youthful strike force gaining in age and experience, City can expect a tougher battle.

Meanwhile, amidst a never-ending ownership saga, United is taking the shape of Ten Hag's vision. Onana's signing will transform how the Red Devils play their way out from the back.

With them also in the hunt for Atalanta's 20-year-old attacker Rasmus Hojlund, expect United to be in and around the mix.

Klopp's Liverpool, which has fallen off from the lofty standards it set a couple of years ago, will be looking to

re-enter the title conversation this season. Its attack is still helmed by a peerless Mohammed Salah, who will be hoping for better support from his younger colleagues — Darwin Nunez, Cody Gakpo and Luis Diaz.

The Reds will be looking to build a new spine, with mainstays like Jordan Henderson, Roberto Firmino and James Milner leaving the club and Fabinho on the verge of doing so.

London rivals Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur, who had an underwhelming 2022-23 season, have new managers at the helm.

The Blues, even before Mauricio Pochettino began the Premier League campaign with them, have witnessed a mass exodus, with more than a dozen players, including stars like Mount (left), Havertz and Kovacic leaving the club.

The Argentinian manager, who is a hard taskmaster, will have a tough job at hand to mould an inexperienced squad into shape and get it back into European competitions.

Spurs, on the other hand, will be under the stewardship of Greek-Australian Ange Postecoglou, who will be managing a top-tier European side for the first time.

The North London side is struggling to hold onto its talismanic striker Harry Kane, who is being openly courted by German giant Bayern Munich. The signing of James Maddison from relegated Leicester has been the only major value addition to its squad in this transfer window.

Brighton, Newcastle and Aston Villa surprised one too many with their riveting performances last season, which earned them European qualifications. It will be



GETTY IMAGES





Premier League 2023-24: Team Guide

Premier League seasons,
including 2023-24

Premier
League titles



ARSENAL 2022-23: 2nd Coach: Mikel Arteta Captain: Martin Odegaard Record: W645-D290-L255	ASTON VILLA 2022-23: 7th Coach: Unai Emery Captain: John McGinn Record: W372-D304-L401	BOURNEMOUTH 2022-23: 15th Coach: Andoni Iraola Captain: Neto Record: W67-D48-L112	BRENTFORD 2022-23: 9th Coach: Thomas Frank Captain: Christian Norgaard Record: W28-D21-L27
BRIGHTON 2022-23: 6th Coach: Roberto De Zerbi Captain: Lewis Dunk Record: W66-D73-L89	BURNLEY Promoted Coach: Vincent Kompany Captain: Jack Cork Record: W83-D76-L145	CHELSEA 2022-23: 12th Coach: Mauricio Pochettino Captain: TBC Record: W629-D295-L266	CRYSTAL PALACE 2022-23: 11th Coach: Roy Hodgson Captain: TBC Record: W156-D141-L243
EVERTON 2022-23: 17th Coach: Sean Dyche Captain: Seamus Coleman Record: W426-D332-L432	FULHAM 2022-23: 10th Coach: Marco Silva Captain: Tom Cairney Record: W177-D161-L270	LIVERPOOL 2022-23: 5th Coach: Jürgen Klopp Captain: TBC Record: W628-D292-L270	LUTON TOWN Promoted Coach: Rob Edwards Captain: Tom Lockyer Record: W9-D0-L0
MAN CITY 2022-23: 1st Coach: Pep Guardiola Captain: TBC Record: W501-D215-L284	MAN UTD 2022-23: 3rd Coach: Erik ten Hag Captain: Bruno Fernandes Record: W726-D263-L201	NEWCASTLE UTD 2022-23: 4th Coach: Eddie Howe Captain: Jamaal Lascelles Record: W401-D278-L393	NOTTS FOREST 2022-23: 16th Coach: Steve Cooper Captain: Joe Worrall Record: W69-D69-L97
SHEFFIELD UTD Promoted Coach: Paul Heckingbottom Captain: John Egan Record: W53-D50-L95	TOTTENHAM 2022-23: 8th Coach: Ange Postecoglou Captain: TBC Record: W520-D287-L383	WEST HAM UTD 2022-23: 14th Coach: David Moyes Captain: TBC Record: W346-D260-L428	WOLVES 2022-23: 13th Coach: Julen Lopetegui Captain: TBC Record: W101-D86-L155

Source: Premier League

Team coaches and captains subject to change during season

© GRAPHIC NEWS

worth watching how these sides will handle the pressure of dealing with the added fixture crunch, thanks to the mid-week continental games.

Everton, which narrowly escaped relegation last season, will once again be under the spotlight, as it attempts to recover the ground it lost in the last couple of years.

Promoted Teams

Like every year, there are three newly promoted teams for this Premier League season — Burnley, Luton Town and Sheffield United.

Among the three, Luton's miraculous rise through the English football hierarchy — despite its limited financial resources — has piqued the attention of football fans.

Its home ground — with a seating

capacity of barely over 10,000 — is situated within a residential colony, will offer a sense of rootedness to Premier League.

Burnley, which won the Championship comfortably to secure direct promotion, is coached by Premier League-winning defender Vincent Kompany, whose first assignment as an English top-tier manager will be against Manchester City, his former side.

The Saudi Pro League Attraction

Cristiano Ronaldo's switch from Manchester United to Al Nassr last season seems to have set a precedent as the Premier League saw a slew of players opting to switch over to the rapidly-growing Saudi Pro League.

Firmino, Riyad Mahrez, Ngolo Kante, Edouard Mendy, Alex Telles, Ruben Neves and Kalidou Koulibaly are some major players who left English football to join the Saudi League. This, almost unprecedented mass flocking, has ruffled the feathers of quite a few in the Premier League setup.

"I wasn't worried about the Saudi League taking players in their 30s, a touch worried with players below the elite (Neves) but if this happens it feels like a game changer. Saudi has taken over golf, the big boxing fights & now they want to take over football. This sports washing needs to be stopped," said former Liverpool player Jamie Carragher in a social media post.



THE COAST

Max Verstappen overcomes **Hamilton challenge and a resurgent McLaren** as Red Bull strengthens its hold at the top of the standings.

S. Dipak Ragav
Twitter @dipakragav

Records have always been broken whenever a driver-team combination appears to be the dominant force in Formula One. In 2023, Max Verstappen and Red Bull are taking this to another level with their breathtaking dominance week-in and week-out.

Their triumph in the Hungarian Grand Prix is just the latest in it, as Red Bull won their 12th consecutive race in Formula One starting from the season-ending race in Abu Dhabi in 2022. Red Bull's victory run also broke the record set by McLaren back in 1988 of 11 straight wins. Much like the famed

McLaren MP4-4 car that took Ayrton Senna to his first world title in 1988, the RB-19, too, has now won the first 11 races of the season. The all-conquering McLaren won 15 out of the 16 races that year, and it would

be wild to bet against Red Bull beating that win percentage, even though it sounds improbable that a team can be that efficient over 22 races.

By now, everyone has resigned to the fact that Red Bull is set to win every race this season, barring some accident or technical trouble. However, Saturday offered hope that Verstappen might be stretched as Lewis Hamilton (left) took a sensational pole position by 0.003 of a second from Verstappen. In a track where overtaking is notoriously difficult, there was a fervent belief that if Hamilton could lead the race at the start, anything was possible, especially since the Briton is mighty around the Hungaroring, having won eight times.

Unfortunately for the Mercedes driver, Verstappen had a better getaway, took the lead immediately, and sailed off into the distance. It did

GETTY IMAGES





BY NOW, EVERYONE HAS RESIGNED TO THE FACT THAT RED BULL IS SET TO WIN EVERY RACE THIS SEASON, BARRING SOME ACCIDENT OR TECHNICAL TROUBLE



IS CLEAR

not help the McLarens of Oscar Piastri and Lando Norris too got ahead of Hamilton, who slipped to fourth within the first two corners.

From there on, it was just a fight for the remaining two positions on the podium, which Norris and Sergio Perez in the other Red Bull managed to secure. It was another poor race for Perez, who qualified ninth and managed to finish third while his teammate finished half-a-minute ahead of the rest of the pack. The only silver lining was the Mexican qualified in the top-ten, something he failed to do in the previous five rounds.

Ever since McLaren brought upgrades in Austria, the team has

shown a decisive upturn in its form, with Norris finishing on the podium in the last two events. Once again, on a track where the team was expected to struggle, the two McLarens locked out the second row.

Earlier this season, the McLaren struggled with tyre wear and for pace around the slow corners. On a hot day in Budapest with its twisty bits, it was a track that would have exposed the McLaren big time. Instead, the team came away with a second and fifth-place finish. The last race before the upgrade was in Canada, where they finished seventh and ninth. At the end of the race in Montreal, the team had just 17

points, eight of which came that weekend. Since then, the team has added 70 points in three rounds and moved to fifth in the standings ahead of Alpine.

Meanwhile, in the world of electric single-seater racing, the battle for the championship swung decisively in favour of Andretti-Porsche driver Jake Dennis. In the penultimate round at the Rome EPrix, Dennis cemented his lead in the championship with a sensational win from pole position in the second race of the weekend to extend his advantage to 24 points ahead of his closest rival, Nick Cassidy (Envision-Jaguar).

Cassidy, who trailed by one point before the Rome event, started the weekend well by finishing second in the first race and took a five-point lead ahead of Dennis, who had to settle for fourth.

But in the second race of the double-header, Dennis demolished the field to clinch pole, win and the fastest lap while Cassidy came home a forlorn 14th.

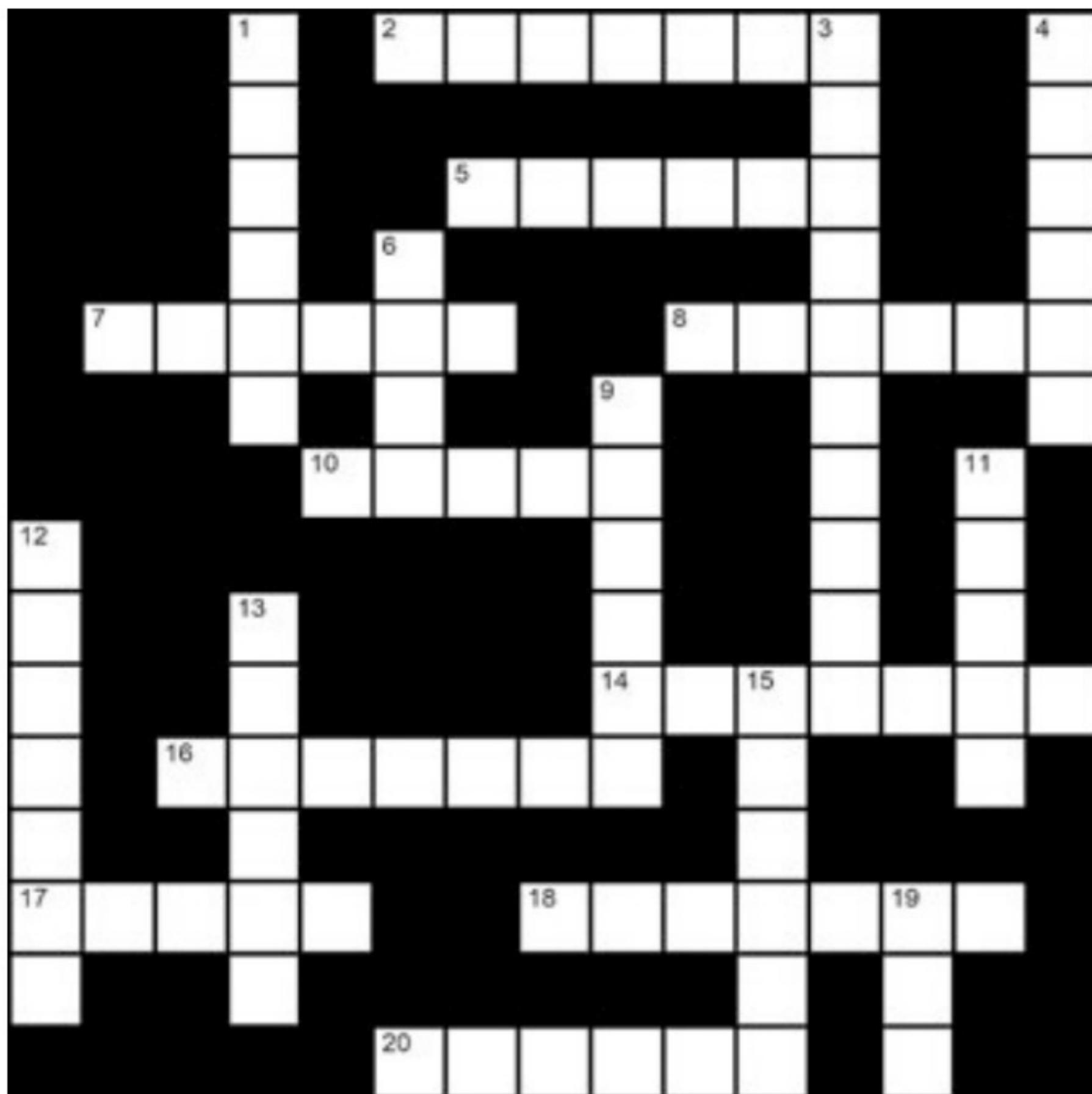
Record breaker: Max and Red Bull's victory run also broke the record set by McLaren back in 1988 of 11 straight wins.
GETTYIMAGES



Ever since McLaren brought upgrades in Austria, the team has shown a decisive upturn in its form, with Norris finishing on the podium in the last two events.

CROSSWORD

SRIRAM SRINIVASAN



ACROSS

- 2** ... Continental Kings, Global Chess League champs. (7)
- 5** The Golf Champion Trophy, commonly known as the ... Jug. (6)
- 7** Common first name of Partey, Muller. (6)
- 8** Selvam ..., Indian hockey player from Ariyalur, Tamil Nadu. (6)
- 10** British and Belgian racing driver ... Norris. (5)
- 14** The Saudi club that reportedly offered Mbappe a 300-million-euros deal. (2,5)
- 16** ... Chitravel, India's triple jump record holder. (7)
- 17** South Korea's ... Phair, who recently became the youngest

ever World Cup football player. (5)

18 ... Odilon Hetmyer. (7)

20 Indian who has dismissed both father and son in Tests. (6)

DOWN

- 1** He replaced Reid as India hockey coach. (6)
- 3** The DRV PNK stadium is their home. (5,5)
- 4** It was crowned the best FIFA esports nation for the second time. (6)
- 6** Wilfried ..., footballer from Ivory Coast. (4)
- 9** The Asian Champions Trophy 2023 mascot. (6)
- 11** ... Vingegaard, the winner of the



SOLUTION TO LAST FORTNIGHT'S CROSSWORD

» INDIA V WEST INDIES
TEST SERIES REVIEW

Dream debut:
Yashasvi Jaiswal
reaffirmed the
promise he has
shown as an
all-format player.

AFP



Chance to mould a core group of young players

Looking ahead, **India needs leadership and clarity** of thought to move forward in Test cricket. But at least there is a sense that the brains trust is building something.

Ayan Acharya
Twitter @ayan_acharya13

The transition from the old guard to the new guard carries risk. The gamble is part of the fun. There's no telling how a new, exciting talent will fit in with a team in a position previously occupied by players who have etched their names in the annals of the sport through the sheer weight of their performances. India's 1-0 Test series win against the West Indies is symptomatic of this change.

Virat Kohli. PTI

Rain denied play on day five of the second Test at Queen's Park Oval in Port of Spain and robbed the visiting team of full World Test Championship (WTC) points (win-loss percentage has dropped from 100 to 66.67). India's next Test series will be in South Africa in December later this year, and while head coach Rahul Dravid and captain Rohit Sharma



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have to contend with a squad in flux, they get the chance to mould a core group of young players.

Only a few certainties remain. Ravichandran Ashwin (right) is going nowhere, and neither is Mohammed Siraj. Virat Kohli remains **untouchable at No. 4**, as does Mohammed Shami, so long as he remains fit. As for the incomings, there is palpable excitement over left-handed opener Yashasvi Jaiswal, who made his Test debut with a fluent and mature 171; there is hope Shubman Gill will provide strong cover for Cheteshwar Pujara, who was India's No. 3 for a better part of the last decade, in a young and energetic top-order, although Gill could eke

out only 45 runs in three innings. First things first, though, the Indian Test team needs time to rebuild. The last WTC final defeat to Australia was chaotic, and the team's talent pool and approach are once again in the spotlight. The long-term injuries of Shreyas Iyer and Jasprit Bumrah have, no doubt, compounded its woes, but given its second consecutive global-event slipup, highlighted by a meek surrender at The Oval, questions have been raised over the

batting, and rightly so.

Make no mistake, India has been phenomenal in Test cricket in the last five years, as highlighted by the consecutive Test series wins in Australia and a drawn one in England. It had also made both WTC finals. But while it may be tempting to get swayed by its rather one-sided dominance, for the most part, in the Caribbean and entertain thoughts of a secure future, it is prudent to remind oneself that the win, commendable as it was, came against the No. 8-ranked Test side and some players, who are perhaps still reeling from their failure to qualify for the ODI World Cup for the first time. Nevertheless, Alick Athanaze's 47 in the first innings in Dominica and captain Kraigg Brathwaite's 76 in Port of Spain were impressive. But they were



AFP



ASHWIN AND JADEJA SHONE, AS EXPECTED, IN DOMINICA ON A PITCH WITH A SLOW, BUT SHARP TURN. THE TWO SHARED 17 OF THE 20 WICKETS INDIA TOOK, WITH ASHWIN REGISTERING MATCH FIGURES OF 12 FOR 131, HIS BEST IN OVERSEAS TESTS.

aberrations and not the norm.

Meanwhile, Jaiswal's 266 runs in three innings, with a hundred and a fifty, contributed to India's cautious optimism. The manner in which he took the attack to the West Indies bowlers was both authoritative and largely risk-free, as he unfurled a wide range of shots. His innings of 171, lasting 501 minutes and 387 balls, was the longest by an India Test debutant and reaffirmed the promise he has shown as an all-format player. "He's (Jaiswal) shown us in the past couple of years that he's ready for this big stage. He came and batted sensibly, showed a lot of patience, and the temperament was tested as well; at no stage [did it look] like he was panicking or going away from his plans, which was good to see," captain Rohit said, lauding the

youngster after his maiden Test hundred.

Virat Kohli made his first away Test century in almost five years with a 121 in Port of Spain — his 500th international match. But it was his innings in the first Test in Dominica, where he took 81 balls to hit his first boundary, that underlined the most significant aspect of Kohli, the Test batter: even as the game around him has changed rapidly, he has refrained from changing his style or adding new shots to his game. There were reprieves in Dominica along the way — two dropped catches on 40 and 72 and a missed run-out chance on 45 — but Kohli was in it for the long haul, biding time to churn out his 76 runs instead of trying to be unnecessarily aggressive. With the ODI World Cup in India just months away, Kohli's form, irrespective of the

Need of the hour: While it may be tempting to get swayed by India's rather one-sided dominance, for the most part, in the Caribbean and entertain thoughts of a secure future, it is prudent to remind oneself that the win, commendable as it was, came against the No. 8-ranked Test side. AP

format, augurs well for the team.

On the bowling front, Ashwin and Jadeja shone, as expected, in Dominica on a pitch with a slow, but sharp turn. The two shared 17 of the 20 wickets India took, with Ashwin registering match figures of 12 for 131, his best in overseas Tests. Paras Mhambrey, India's bowling coach, called Ashwin "one of the greatest match-winners" the country has produced. On a side note, why India

then decided to leave out Ashwin, its most successful bowler in the last two-year WTC cycle, from the final against Australia remains a mystery.

It is also worth noting that Mukesh Kumar, who made his debut in Trinidad, did a fine job. The Bengal pacer snapped up his first wicket when Kirk McKenzie nicked one to Ishan Kishan. He scalped two wickets in the first innings. Siraj stood out for the way he spearheaded a relatively inexperienced red-ball attack in the absence of Shami, who was rested for the West Indies tour. Siraj's five-for (career-best figures of 5 for 60) on a flat wicket in Port of Spain has raised his stakes multifold.

Looking ahead, India needs leadership and clarity of thought to move forward in Test cricket. But at least there is a sense that the brains trust is building something.

» PHOTOLINE INDIA VS WEST INDIES, SECOND TEST



Dynamic duo: Indian openers Rohit Sharma and Yashasvi Jaiswal continued their good form, forging a 139-run opening stand in the first innings. It was followed by a 98-run partnership in quick time in the second essay to help India set a record for the fastest team 100 (12.2 overs) in a Test match. AFP



Lone warrior: West Indies skipper Kraigg Brathwaite was patience personified in the first innings before a stunner from Ashwin castled him, ending his fighting knock of 75 (235 balls). Brathwaite then chipped in with a valuable 52-ball 28 in the second innings, helping his side salvage a draw in the rain-interrupted Test. AFP



Back in business: In his 500th international game, Virat Kohli scored his 29th Test century during the second Test in Port of Spain, Trinidad, ending a five-year drought for an overseas Test ton. AFP



4th

On the prowl: Mohammed Siraj was relentless with his probing line and used the second new ball well on the third day's morning session to pick up four wickets in one spell. He registered his career-best Test innings figures of 23.4-6-60-5 and triggered a collapse that saw the West Indies bowled out for 255 after being 229 for five. AFP



5th

Spin twin: Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja became only the second Indian spin pair to take 500 Test wickets together during the second innings in their 49th Test. The two are just two wickets away from breaking Anil Kumble and Harbhajan Singh's record for most wickets by a spin duo for India (501 wickets in 54 Tests). AFP



6th

Dominant force: Rohit Sharma-led India continued its dominance over the West Indies by winning the two-match Test series 1-0 after no play was possible on day five at Queen's Park Oval due to heavy rain. This is India's ninth consecutive red-ball series win against the Caribbean side. AFP



ON THE WRITE LINE

Sunil Gavaskar



FOR MORE STORIES

ALL FOR A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

The Indian team management has written to the BCCI requesting that in future there should be **no late night flights** for the team, after their flight from Port of Spain was delayed.

In recent times the BCCI has been hiring a charter plane to take both teams and match officials from one match venue to the other. They also charter a flight to take the TV commentators, crew and equipment to the next venue. This is smart as it not only saves time but also ensures that there is security for the players, especially to get a smooth entry and exit from the airports.

The players come to the airport and go to the hotels on arrival in their respective team buses. They don't have to check in their bags or pick them up from the carousel on the flight arrival in the next city. All this is done for them in India by the airport staff and BCCI travel team. Nowhere else in the world is this done for the cricket teams.

The West Indies Board also used to charter flights between islands for the players and the TV crew. **Last week after the last day's play in the Trinidad Test match got washed out, the Indian team was scheduled to catch the 11 p.m. flight to travel to Barbados for the start of their three-match ODI series.** The heavy rains in Port of Spain for the earlier two days had upset all flight schedules. So the team had to wait for four hours before they took off, which meant that they had lost a night's sleep. Luckily, since there had been no play on the last day they were not exhausted, but as

anyone who has endured even an hour's flight delay knows that it is not an experience you would wish on your worst enemy. The team management wrote to the BCCI requesting that in future there should be no late night flights for the team.

Whether it was the West Indies Board or the BCCI who had arranged the timing of the flight, the thinking behind it was to ensure that the players got a good night's rest. **If the flight was timed in the morning it would have meant the players would have had to wake up and get to the airport to catch their flight.** With a flight time of less than two hours, if it had taken off on time the players would have been in their hotel rooms by 1 a.m. and got a good night's rest.

We had a similar problem when we were in Australia in the early 1980s when, after a day-night ODI, we were booked on early morning flights with players getting barely a few hours of sleep before rushing to catch the early morning flight, which, by the way, was in economy class on a commercial airline. As skipper of the team then, I did speak to the then BCCI President informing him of the players' plight.

He came back and told us that travel arrangements were done by the home board and since early morning fares were cheaper we were booked on those flights. That said, the



Long wait: The Indian cricket team's flight to Barbados was delayed due to heavy rains in Port of Spain. AP

BCCI ensured, for the next trip four years down the line, the team was booked for late morning flights so the players got adequate rest after a day-night game.

To some, this might seem trivial but with the adrenalin still pumping after a late night finish it was tough to fall asleep before 3 a.m. however tired you were and then to wake up at 05.30 to catch a 07.30 flight was just too much for even the fittest among us. One can be certain that with the progressive outlook that the BCCI has had with players over the years, the latest request will also get the attention and remedial action taken.

While the series between England and Australia has understandably taken centrestage, the qualifying matches for the ICC T20 World Cup going on is showing the vast gulf between some of the teams playing in the event. China getting all out for 26 is an example. Yes, we have had the odd cheap dismissal in the IPL, too, but in the qualifying tournament this is more likely to be the norm.

Therefore to call these games international is really a bit too much. No wonder some batters scoring 150-plus regularly and bowlers picking up cheap wickets are common. When the records are seen, then to have players from Associate countries topping the list is hardly surprising.

By all means encourage the Associate countries but only when they qualify for the World Cup should their games be given international status. The games between Associate countries cannot be equated with those between full member countries. Let me reiterate that I am all for cricket to be a worldwide game but till the Associate countries reach the accepted standard their games should not be called internationals. This is not to discourage the Associate member countries but even their most ardent advocate will agree that it's hard to accept performances between them as World records.

Let's see what the ICC Cricket Committee headed by Sourav Ganguly does about it.



The games between Associate countries cannot be equated with those between full member countries. Till the Associate countries reach the accepted standard their games should not be called internationals.

India v West Indies: 100 not out

9 } The number of occasions two sides have managed to play each other in 100 or more Test matches. In the recent Test match in Port of Spain, the West Indies and India played the 100th Test match against each other. These sides began their head-to-head Test journey on 10 November 1948 at the Feroz Shah Kotla Ground in Delhi. West Indies is the third opponent to play 100 or more Tests against India after England (131) and Australia (107).

India's 100th Test against these three opponents

Opponent	Venue	Match dates	Result
England	Lord's	21-25 Jul 2011	India lost by 196 runs
Australia	Melbourne	26-29 Dec 2020	India won by 8 wickets
West Indies	Port of Spain	20-24 Jul 2023	Match Drawn

Head-to-head Tests of 100 matches or more

Tests	Team 1	Team 2	Drawn	First Test	Start Date
				match venue	
360	Eng (111)	Aus (152)	97	Melbourne	15 Mar 1877
163	Eng (51)	WI (59)	53	Lord's	23 Jun 1928
156	Eng (66)	SA (35)	55	Port Elizabeth	12 Mar 1889
131	Eng (50)	Ind (31)	50	Lord's	25 Jun 1932
118	Aus (60)	WI (32)	26+	Adelaide	12 Dec 1930
112	Eng (52)	NZ (13)	47	Christchurch	10 Jan 1930
107	Aus (45)	Ind (32)	30+	Brisbane	28 Nov 1947
101	Aus (54)	SA (26)	21	Johannesburg	11 Oct 1902
100	WI (30)	Ind (23)	47	Delhi	10 Nov 1948

+ includes one tied Test;
Test victories mentioned in parentheses

10 } The number of players who have the distinction of appearing in 500 or more international matches. In the recent Port of Spain Test match, Virat Kohli became the latest to join this exclusive club. Among Indians, only Sachin Tendulkar (664), M. S. Dhoni (538), and Rahul Dravid (509) have appeared in more international matches than Kohli. Kohli, incidentally, has aggregated the most runs (25582) among these players after their first 500 matches. He also became the first among these players to register a fifty-plus score in their 500th international match.

The 500 international matches club

Player	Career span	Mts	Runs	Wkts	Ct	St
Sachin Tendulkar (IND)	1989-2013	664	34357	201	256	0
Mahela Jayawardene (Asia/SL)	1997-2015	652	25957	14	440	0
Kumar Sangakkara (Asia/ICC/SL)	2000-2015	594	28016	0	609	139
Sanath Jayasuriya (Asia/SL)	1989-2011	586	21032	440	205	0
Ricky Ponting (AUS/ICC)	1995-2012	560	27483	8	364	0
M. S. Dhoni (Asia/IND)	2004-2019	538	17266	1	634	195
Shahid Afridi (Asia/ICC/PAK)	1996-2018	524	11196	541	167	0
Jacques Kallis (Afr/ICC/SA)	1995-2014	519	25534	577	338	0
Rahul Dravid (Asia/ICC/IND)	1996-2012	509	24208	5	406	14
Virat Kohli (IND)	2008-2023	500	25582	8	301	0

Note: Pakistani Inzamam-ul-Haq just missed the cut by one match. He finished his career with 499 matches while aggregating 20580 runs.



Virat Kohli. AP

Run aggregates in international cricket after 500th match

Runs	Player	Score	Opp	Venue	Start date	Format	Result
25582	Virat Kohli (Ind)	121	WI	Port of Spain	20 Jul 2023	Test	Drawn
25035	Ricky Ponting (Aus)	44	NZ	Napier	3 Mar 2010	ODI	Lost
24874	Sachin Tendulkar (Ind)	35	Eng	Jaipur	15 Oct 2006	ICC CT – ODI	Won
24799	Jacques Kallis (SAf)	6	Aus	Colombo RPS	30 Sep 2012	WT20 – T20I	Lost
23607	Rahul Dravid (Ind)	2	Eng	The Oval	9 Sep 2011	ODI	Lost
22592	Kumar Sangakkara (SL)	48	Ban	Pallekele	28 Mar 2013	ODI	Lost
20230	Mahela Jayawardene (SL)	11	Aus	Pallekele	6 Aug 2011	T20I	Won
18889	Sanath Jayasuriya (SL)	1	Pak	Abu Dhabi	18 May 2007	ODI	Lost
16330	M. S. Dhoni (Ind)	32*	Eng	Cardiff	6 Jul 2018	T20I	Lost
10899	Shahid Afridi (Pak)	22	SAf	Auckland	7 Mar 2015	ICC CWC – ODI	Won

4} The number of Indian opening pairs which registered 100-plus partnerships in successive innings in Test cricket. In the just concluded Test series in the Caribbean, India's new opening pair of Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rohit Sharma put on 229 in the only innings in Roseau and 139 in the first innings in Port of Spain. The pair then put on 98 in the second innings, thus missing the opportunity by two runs to become the first Indian pair to be involved in three successive 100-plus opening stands.

Two successive opening stands of 100+ by an Indian pair

Runs	Batter 1	Batter 2	Opposition	Venue	Month, year	Match Inns
137	Devang Gandhi	S. Ramesh	New Zealand	Mohali	Oct 1999	2nd
162	Devang Gandhi	S. Ramesh	New Zealand	Kanpur	Oct 1999	1st
233	Gautam Gambhir	Virender Sehwag	Sri Lanka	Kanpur	Nov 2009	1st
221	M. Vijay	Virender Sehwag	Sri Lanka	Mumbai WS	Dec 2009	1st
107	Mayank Agarwal	Cheteshwar Pujara	New Zealand	Mumbai WS	Dec 2021	2nd
117	K. L. Rahul	Mayank Agarwal	South Africa	Centurion	Dec 2021	1st
229	Yashasvi Jaiswal	Rohit Sharma	West Indies	Roseau	Jul 2023	1st
139	Yashasvi Jaiswal	Rohit Sharma	West Indies	Port of Spain	Jul 2023	1st



Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rohit Sharma. AFP

5} The number of Indian batters who aggregated 250-plus runs in their first three innings of their Test career. Yashasvi Jaiswal is the latest to join this list of players in the recent Port of Spain Test match. With scores of 171, 57 and 38 in the first three innings of his Test career, he has taken his tally to 266 runs. Only three other batters have managed to score more runs than Jaiswal.

Highest run aggregates after first three innings of Test career

Runs	Batter	Period	1st Test	2nd Test	3rd Test
320	Karun Nair	Nov-Dec 2016	(4)	(13)	(303*)
315	Sourav Ganguly	Jun-Jul 1996	(131)	(136, 48)	-
302	Rohit Sharma	Nov-Dec 2013	(177)	(111*)	(14)
266	Yashasvi Jaiswal	Jul 2023	(171)	(57, 38)	-
263	Mohd Azharuddin	Dec 1984-Jan 1985	(110)	(48, 105)	-



266} The number of runs scored by Yashasvi Jaiswal in his debut series. This is now the fourth highest run aggregate by an Indian debutant while playing against the West Indies.

Highest run aggregate by an Indian debutant in a Test series against the West Indies

Runs	Series	Venue	Player	Mts	Inns	Ave.	H/S	100/50
774	1970/71	WI	Sunil Gavaskar	4	8	154.80	220	4/3
288	2013/14	Ind	Rohit Sharma	2	2	288.00	177	2/0
281	1958/59	Ind	Chandu Borse	4	7	49.14	109	1/2
266	2023	WI	Yashasvi Jaiswal	2	3	88.67	171	1/1
237	2018/19	Ind	Prithvi Shaw	2	3	118.50	134	1/1

Yashasvi Jaiswal. AFP

7.54} The run-rate achieved per over by India in the second innings in Port of Spain, is now the highest ever run-rate achieved by any batting side scoring at least 100 in an innings in Test cricket history.

Fastest run rates achieved by Tests sides in an innings in history

R/O	Team	Score	Overs	Inns	Opposition	Ground	Achieved on	Result
7.54	India	181/2d	24	3	West Indies	Port of Spain	23-Jul-2023	draw
7.53	Australia	241/2d	32	3	Pakistan	Sydney	6-Jan-2017	won
7.36	England	264/7d	35.5	3	Pakistan	Rawalpindi	4-Dec-2022	won
6.82	West Indies	173/6	25.2	4	v India	Kingston	28-Feb-1983	won
6.80	South Africa	340/3d	50	2	v Zimbabwe	Cape Town	4-Mar-2005	won

Note: South Africa achieved it on the first day of the Test match after dismissing Zimbabwe for 54.

All records are correct and updated until 26 July 2023



A reality check

Though India managed to clinch the three-match T20I series 2-1, it **huffed and puffed** in the ODI series, settling for a 1-1 stalemate with Bangladesh.

Shayan Acharya

Twitter @ShayanAcharya

When the Indian women's cricket team travelled to Bangladesh for a white-ball series in the first week of July, the expectations were high. The team was returning to action after almost five months — its last outing was in the T20 World Cup in February — and ahead of a busy season, it was a timely opportunity for Harmanpreet Kaur and her side to get into the groove.

The build-up to the series, though, was not perfect. The team was without a designated head coach — the position has been lying

vacant since December last year after Ramesh Powar's exit — and Nooshin Al Khadeer, who coached India's U-19 team to the World Cup title this year, was elevated as a stop-gap arrangement.

Questions were also raised as the national selection committee, headed by Neetu David, dropped Richa Ghosh, Rajeshwari Gayakwad and Shikha Pandey and handed a maiden call-up to Kerala all-rounder Minnu Mani in the T20Is. The left-arm spinning duo of





Problems aplenty: Indian women celebrate the fall of a wicket during the T20 series against Bangladesh. India was not at its best in the series and needs to address the lower-order woes and ensure that it gives its young players a longer rope. PTI

Anusha Bareddy and Rashi Kanjolya were picked for both the formats. In Ghosh's absence, Assam's Uma Chetry was drafted in as the second wicketkeeper only to be benched throughout the series.

Though India managed to clinch the three-match T20I series 2-1, it huffed and puffed in the ODI series settling for a 1-1 stalemate. **Captain Harmanpreet's (left) sullen behaviour in the tied third ODI took centrestage as she smashed the stumps after being given out.**

She also criticised the umpires during the presentation ceremony, which saw the ICC hand her a Level 2

sanction for breaching the code of conduct.

On the field, too, it was a reality check for the Indian team.

Over the last few years, lower-order batting has been an area of concern, and in the absence of Ghosh, this tour provided an opportunity to the youngsters to make a mark. While the team fielded Yastika Bhatia, Amanjot Kaur, Deepti Sharma, Pooja Vastrakar and Harleen Deol for these positions in the T20Is, the results were not quite encouraging.

In the ODIs, however, Vastrakar batted at No. 10 in the opening

game, before being dropped for the next two outings, again raising questions over the team's strategy. Though Jemimah Rodrigues had an interesting run with a career-best 86 in the second ODI, followed by an unbeaten 33 in the tied final ODI, the lower-order once again cut a sorry figure.

It was also a disappointing campaign for Shafali Verma and Smriti Mandhana, who have been one of India's major driving forces in pressure situations. While Shafali had scores of 0, 19, 11 in the T20Is and just 4 in the solitary ODI, Mandhana managed one half-century in the entire two-week long tour and struggled often. Over the years, the team has always relied on Mandhana, Harmanpreet and Deepti to bail it out of the woods. But with the vice-captain not in her best form, India never really got off to a steady start, even though Harmanpreet hit two fifties — one in T20Is and the other in the ODIs.

Though Deepti had success with her bowling, her batting left much to be desired. Among the debutants, Kerala's Minnu Mani claimed five wickets with the new ball in three outings, whereas Anusha and Rashi failed to make an impact.

The seamers had just 42 overs across six games, and on spin-friendly surfaces, captain Harmanpreet used only one over of pace at the death each in the T20I and ODI series, and preferred to exploit the off-spin qualities of Shafali and Jemimah.

Though those moves paid dividends at times, it also showed how the Indian team management was moving on from its once-preferred approach of backing the fast bowlers.

Throughout the tour, Bangladesh challenged India in several areas, and on most occasions, it managed to put the star-studded team in a spot, especially in the ODIs. With quite a bit of high-intensity cricket lined up later this year — including the Asian Games — India needs to address the lower-order woes and ensure that it gives its young players a longer rope.



GETTY IMAGES

Aussies retain Ashes

1

The fourth Test at Old Trafford in Manchester ended in a draw as no play was possible due to rain on the final day.

Australia retained the Ashes for the third consecutive time after the fourth Test at Old Trafford in Manchester ended in a draw as no play was possible due to rain on the final day.

Australia trailed England by 61 runs in the second innings after only 30 overs of play was possible on the fourth day. England tried its best to force a result by scoring 592 in the first innings at almost

5.5 runs an over, with Zak Crawley hammering a 182-ball 189. It bundled Australia for 317, but had to settle for a draw, its first in 17 matches under the captaincy of Ben Stokes.



GETTY IMAGES

2

England Cricket Board Chairman Richard Thompson called on the International Cricket Council to find ways to ensure there is more flexibility in the schedule of Test matches after the final day of the fourth Ashes Test was washed out without a ball being bowled. Thompson suggested looking into the idea of having a reserve day for all Test matches.



REUTERS

3

Stuart Broad continued to torment David Warner by dismissing the opener in both innings of the third Test. The pacer has got the better of the left-hander 17 times in Test cricket, equalling West Indies' Curtly Ambrose and Courtney Walsh's tally against former England skipper Michael Atherton, who has been dismissed by Glenn McGrath on a record 19 occasions.



GETTY IMAGES

4

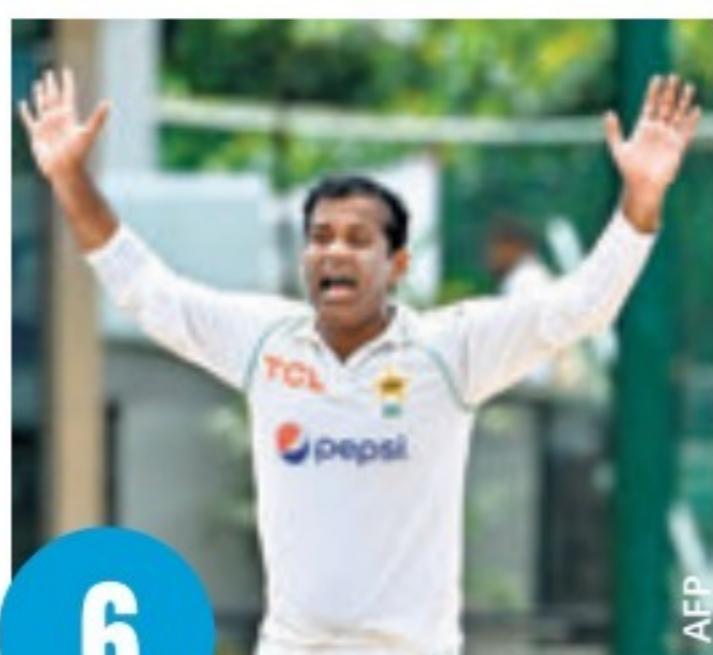
In a pulsating contest at Headingley in Leeds, England kept the Ashes alive with a three-wicket win in the third Test against Australia. The host overhauled the 251-run target in exactly 50 overs, riding on Harry Brook's counterattacking 93-ball 75 and his 59-run seventh-wicket partnership with Chris Woakes, which rescued England from the precarious position of 171 for six after Mitchell Starc removed Ben Stokes and Jonny Bairstow in quick succession. Mark Wood, who rattled Australia with a fifer in the first innings, chipped in with a valuable unbeaten 16 off eight balls to take England home.



MALAYSIA CRICKET TWITTER

5

Malaysia pacer Syazrul Idrus registered the best bowling figures in men's T20Is when he returned 7/8 against China in a T20 World Cup Asia B Qualifier match. He became the first man to take seven wickets in a T20I game and went past the previous best of 6/5 by Nigeria's Peter Aho. Among ICC Full Members, India's Deepak Chahar holds the record with his 6/7 against Bangladesh in 2019.



AFP

6

Pakistan swept the two-match series after routing Sri Lanka by an innings and 222 runs in Colombo and condemning the host to its heaviest Test defeat at home. Left-arm spinner Noman Ali ran through Sri Lanka's second innings by picking the first seven wickets. Abdullah Shafique's double-hundred and Agha Salman's century ensured Pakistan had to bat just once.



GETTY IMAGES

7

Papua New Guinea (PNG) booked its berth for the 2024 T20 World Cup by topping the East Asia-Pacific Qualifier tournament, beating Philippines by 100 runs. PNG became the 15th team to qualify for the 20-team event after Ireland and Scotland. The top eight teams from the 2022 T20 World Cup, hosts West Indies and the USA, and Afghanistan and Bangladesh have already qualified.



AFP

8

Sri Lanka's Lahiru Thirimanne called it quits from international cricket after a 13-year-long career, spanning 44 Tests, 127 ODIs and 26 T20Is. The left-hander was part of the 2014 Sri Lankan team that lifted the T20 World Cup after beating India in the final. The 33-year-old's last international appearance came in a Test against India in 2022 in Bengaluru.



« We were so accustomed to winning just about everything, hard to accept losing now »

CURTLY AMBROSE

Nilesh Mehta

West Indies fast bowling great Curtly Ambrose feels slow pitches have contributed a lot to the decline of pacers in the Caribbean. Ambrose, who took 405 wickets in 98 Tests at an outstanding average of 20.99, said that of the current lot of pacers, Jasprit Bumrah has impressed him the most.

In a chat with *Sportstar*, Ambrose delves into the state of cricket in the West Indies, how the sport has increasingly become a batter's game, and why he found Sachin Tendulkar one of the hardest to bowl to.

Clive Lloyd has said that cricket is the instrument of Caribbean cohesion and that it has brought together the Caribbean islands. With cricket currently struggling in the West Indies, do you think

the concept is a thing of the past?

I wouldn't say it's a thing of the past. He is quite right when he says that cricket unites us as Caribbean people. And I've said many times over the years that it's the only sport that unites the West Indies. Even different countries... with athletics, for instance, we've got Usain Bolt of Jamaica. Jamaica produces a lot of world-class athletes, and we support them.

But cricket is a unifying force. Back in the day, when we were the number one team in the world, everyone wanted to follow the West Indies. Nowadays, we're not playing as well. It's a bit of a turn-off for some spectators.

But we still have some talent here. I firmly believe that once we put a couple of structures in place, we will see a resurgence of West Indies cricket. It has taken a long time to

get to this point, but the talent is there.

With the youngsters now focusing more on track and field, basketball, and other sports, what can the Caribbean nations do to entice them to pursue cricket?

The thing is, cricket is an expensive sport. They can play basketball. Football is the same thing. You need a ball, a shoe, and a goalpost; they're good to go. As I mentioned, when we were the best team, every youngster wanted to play cricket. Now that we're not doing as well, some youngsters are turning to football and basketball. Cricket has now become a very lucrative game. But we need proper structures in place. However, it's about finance. We don't have the money, unlike India or Australia. It's very difficult for us at the moment. But as long as we

can get proper structures and financing, cricket will come back.

In the first Test match in Dominica, the crowd was quite sparse. When a team is struggling, fans do not want to come. What can be done to get the crowd back inside the stadium?

We have been struggling for quite some time. Many of our spectators are a bit disappointed with our team's performances. In their minds, they're saying that we are not going to be too bothered to go to support. They want us to win. But sometimes the game starts like the one [first Test against India] in Dominica; it started on a Wednesday, which is midweek, during working hours. Back in the day, when we were the best team, spectators would probably take a day or two off from work to see the cricket because they knew they'd be entertained and probably win. Now, it's not so. So, spectators are thinking twice. 'Should I take a day off? Should I take two days off to be disappointed?' It's a fine line. It is difficult. I can understand how they feel because I feel the same way. I've always said to spectators that we were spoiled by the great teams. We were so accustomed to winning just about everything. It is hard to accept losing now.

Back in your day, when the West Indies were playing, it was a foregone conclusion that the West Indies were going to win.

Well, not exactly. Maybe before my time, in the Clive Lloyd era, everyone expected them to win. When I came in, we were still number one under Viv Richards, and they expected us to win. But we have lost games along the way as well. So I want to say we won, but not all of it.

Fast bowlers and the West Indians were almost synonymous. If you look at the last decade, those fearsome performances have become a thing of the past. What do you attribute as the main reasons for the decline in that particular department of the West

Indies team?

The fast bowlers are still big. But I've said it many times before, and I will continue to say that it will require the groundsmen in the Caribbean to change. It starts with the poor surfaces we're playing on. When you look at all the regional teams, you may have two fast bowlers and maybe three spinners. Two fast bowlers: you bowl a few overs, four or five overs in a spell, and then the spinners will take over. If there is a second new ball, then maybe the fast bowlers come back and go for a couple of overs again, and then the spinners come on. It's been



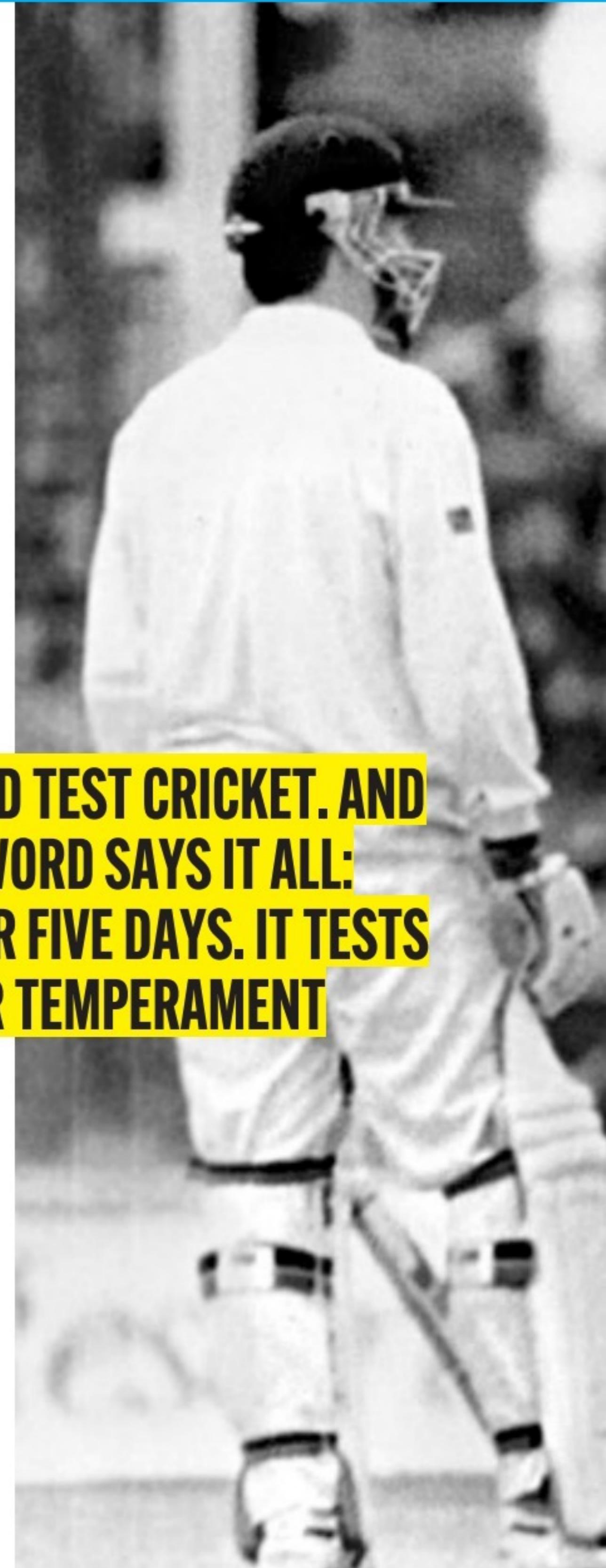
I'VE ALWAYS PREFERRED TEST CRICKET. AND YOU KNOW WHY? THE WORD SAYS IT ALL: TEST. IT IS PLAYED OVER FIVE DAYS. IT TESTS YOUR SKILLS AND YOUR TEMPERAMENT



spin-dominated for many years. So, it's a bit of a turn off. The fast bowlers are there, but they don't do a lot of bowling because the nature of the surface is too low and slow. We need to prepare better cricket pitches with help for the fast bowlers. The spinners will come into play later on. St. Lucia has the best pitch in the Caribbean, with bounce and pace; that is good. And if you're a good enough batter, you can score runs. Antigua has produced some good pitches from time to time as well.

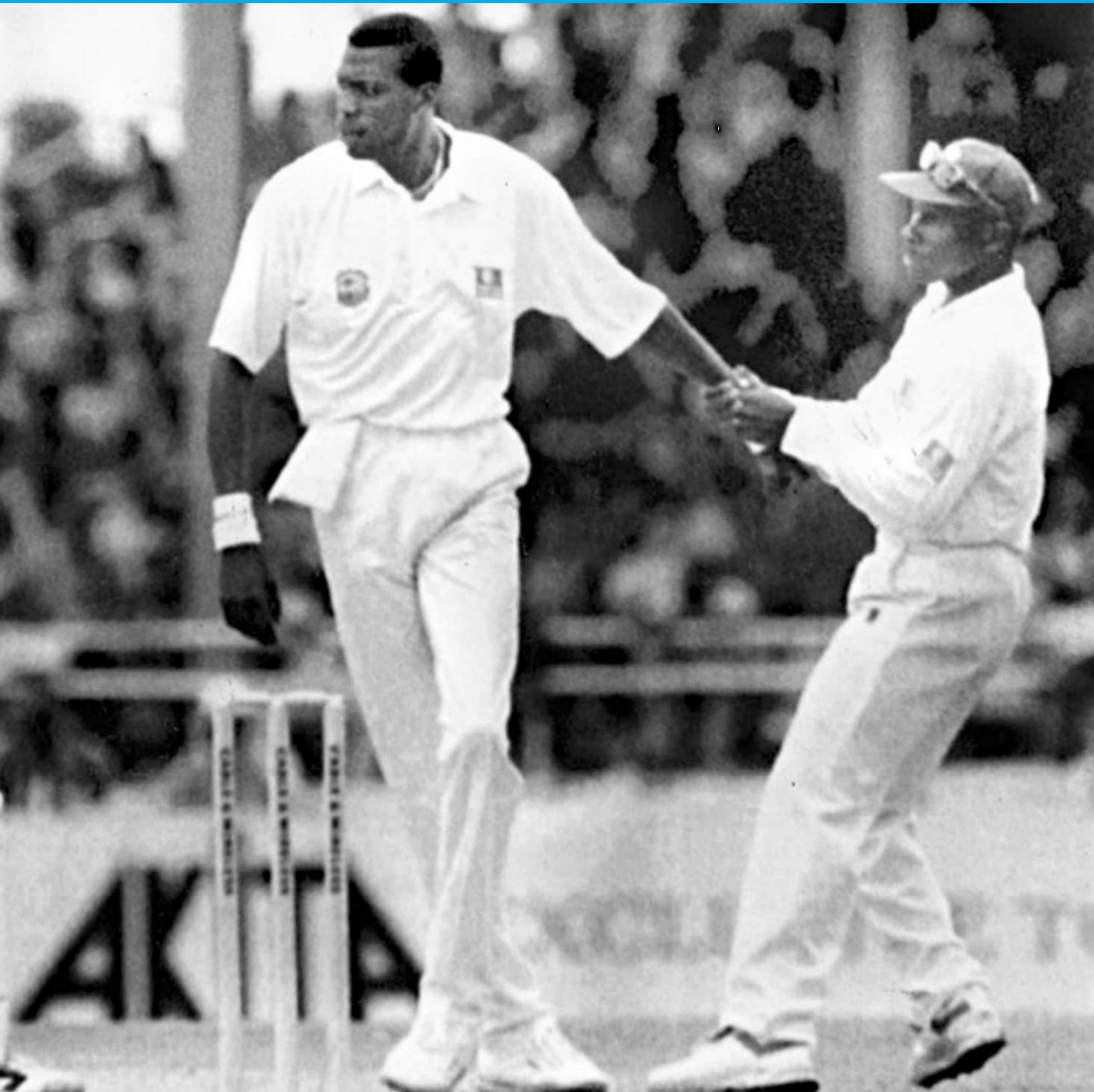
What you said about the pitches is so true. In the first Test in Dominica, we saw Ravichandran Ashwin come in and start spinning the ball on the first day.

I can't recall ever playing in a Test match or seeing a Test where a spinner was introduced within 10 overs. I think in Dominica, Ashwin came in maybe ninth. Between the two India spinners, I think they took



17 of the 20 wickets. That tells the story.

Now, talking about cricket leagues, The Major League Cricket (MLC) was launched at the Grand Prairie cricket stadium. And there are other Leagues all around: the Big Bash, the Hundred, the Indian Premier League, the Lanka Premier League, etc. What are your thoughts regarding these leagues?



I've always preferred Test cricket. And you know why? The word says it all: Test. It is played over five days. It tests your skills and your temperament. It is exciting. Anyone can win on a given day. T20 now is extremely exciting. Everyone seems to be gravitating towards T20. I have no problems with T20s or one-day internationals. Because it brings people through the gates. You can go watch the match after work with your family. I love to play Test cricket.

Fierce competitor: Curtly Ambrose is pulled away by skipper Richie Richardson after the bowler was involved in an altercation with Australian batsman Steve Waugh during their third Test match in Port of Spain in 1995. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

But then T20 is here. We all enjoy it. It's very lucrative as well. But a lot of young players gravitate towards T20. Why? It's a very short game. I have no problem with guys looking to set themselves up financially for the future. In cricket, one injury and it could be all over for you. But a lot of youngsters don't quite learn the

fundamentals of cricket. So, I believe if you can play the longer format of cricket, then you can always transpose that to T20. When you look at some of these great players who are playing T20 cricket and are doing well, they can play the longer format properly. A lot of young players can't. When they leave T20

CRICKET IS NOW PRIMARILY FOR THE BATTER. I AM NOT HAPPY WITH IT. NOT BECAUSE I WAS A FORMER BOWLER, BUT CRICKET HAS TO BE AN EVEN CONTEST BETWEEN BAT AND BALL. AT THE MOMENT, IT'S VERY ONE-SIDED

cricket and go to First-Class cricket, they struggle because they don't have the understanding of how to construct an innings and back it up. I'm not saying you can't or shouldn't play T20, but if you get a chance to play First-Class cricket, for starters, you can learn the basics of batsmanship, and then you can come to the T20.

Is it tough to be a bowler in the modern era of cricket?

Cricket is now primarily for the batter. I am not happy with it. Not because I was a former bowler, but cricket has to be an even contest between bat and ball. At the moment, it's very one-sided. 80 per cent of it favours the batter. Now, that, to me, is not good competition. And I've said it before, and I'll consciously say it again: there's no greater spectacle than that between a great fast bowler and a great batter. But too many rules and regulations have come into the game, and it cripples the fast-bowling department. For instance, if you're a fast bowler and you bowl a short ball and the batter pulls it away for a six or a four, now you want to be able to come back and let the batter prove that he can do it again. Nowadays, if you bowl a short ball, it's one for the over. So as a fast bowler, you have to think, 'Should I bowl my second one and then the contest is over, or should I wait?' So, you take that contest away, right away. I reckon the bouncer rule is just a waste. There's no



Awesome foursome:

From the mid 1970s, the West Indian pacemen always hunted in fours. Ian Bishop, Malcolm Marshall, Courtney Walsh and Curtly Ambrose were one such deadly quartet. THE HINDU

PHOTO LIBRARY

competition. I'm not saying go overboard, but a bowler should be able to bowl a little bit more. But nowadays, it's difficult. Sometimes the person may miss the ball an inch on the left side, and we're calling it wide. Now, I mean, whenever I do commentary, I usually really complain about it. How could you miss a delivery on the leg side by an inch and call it wide? Then on the offside, you could go very wide just inside that white line, which you will call the wide. All those simple things, to me, are what make it difficult for bowlers. A bowler oversteps the front crease, and it is a no-ball, and

you get a free hit. How could that be right? Everything has gotten worse for the bowlers.

What is your overall view of the state of international cricket? I'm talking about T20, ODI, and Test cricket. Your overall views of international cricket?

I've heard people say that Test cricket is dying. I've been hearing that for many years. Test cricket is going nowhere. Yes, some nations are far ahead of the rest. But I still believe Test cricket will survive. I just believe maybe for the lesser nations, whether that's with some of the





bigger nations, we need to do something to make it more attractive, make some incentives, something to spark that growth again.

But Test cricket is not going anywhere. Cricket, in general, is very strong. Even though T20 seems to be getting most of the year, except for series like The Ashes, and that's a big one. But I think cricket is in good hands.

You've been to India to play cricket for the West Indies. What are your best memories of your trips to India and cricket there?

What did you enjoy the most?

Unfortunately, I've never played a Test match in India. But I've played one-day games. I've been there quite a few times. And one thing I can say about India is that I don't think any other nation is as passionate about cricket as India. All over the world, everyone is passionate about and loves the game of cricket, but there's something about India. They have the numbers, obviously, but they're passionate about cricket. I've always enjoyed my time in India, with no issues whatsoever.

What about Indian food?

Well, that's a different story altogether. Coming from Antigua and the Caribbean, our food is different from the food in India. I'm not big on spicy food. When I go to India, it's a little bit of a struggle for me to eat because there are a lot of spices and all that stuff. Curry and all that — I'm not big on that.

You bowled to a lot of batters. You bruised them badly. Who is the best batter, in your opinion, that you've bowled at, and why?

I've been asked that question many, many times. It's very difficult to pinpoint just one particular player.

Name three.

I've had the privilege of playing against some great batters in my time. Some days you just can't get them out, and it's good. On other days, you get them cheaply. Sachin Tendulkar and Ricky Ponting — those two guys come to mind. Steve Waugh is the other one. He may not be as talented as Sachin or Ponting. But in terms of sheer heart and sheer guts, he was a stubborn cricketer. You'll have to knock him out to get him out. Those guys I always have a lot of respect for. But there are others, of course. But when I'm talking about great players, those guys come to mind.

What is it about Sachin Tendulkar that makes it difficult for bowlers?

Sachin is one of those players. It doesn't matter what you throw at him. He hardly ever shows any emotions. He hardly ever looks baffled. If a bowler could go past his edge a couple of times, some batters would get frustrated and slam the bat in the corner. With Sachin, you'll never see the man searching. Sachin may go towards square leg and maybe tap his bat a couple of times. Again, he would regain his composure. He doesn't give you a chance. He's very compact. You have to get him out. Steve Waugh is a fighter. He will take blows. He will hop and skip and look out of sorts, but he's never going to give his wicket. You have to get him out.



Making a point: "For me personally, in every team, the top six batters or so are usually the best in the team. So as an opening bowler, if I could strike out two or three of those top five or six, I would feel satisfied," says Ambrose.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

Ponting is a wonderful talent, and he has all the shots. He will give you a little bit of a chance. He'll come after you. But Sachin was just different. Even if he knew he was struggling, he never showed it; he kept it to himself. He achieved everything in cricket. I played against guys with huge egos. Sachin was different. His humility was his strongest asset.

Have you met him recently?

The last time I saw him could have been the 2016 T20 World Cup in India, when I was part of the coaching staff. We played together in a tournament in the USA.

Back in the day, and I'm sure you can correct me if I'm wrong, you didn't have that much advanced video analysis to figure out which ball was most likely to get Ricky Ponting, Sachin Tendulkar, or Steve Waugh out. It was all you. That's something that, whenever I'm coaching, I keep telling the players that when I played and before my time as well, there was no video

analysis. We will have memories. If a guy scored a hundred against us, you go to a team meeting, and then you say, 'Okay, he scored most of his runs this way. He didn't look comfortable this way.' It's a memory. So, if we don't remember, we have to try to work things out in the game. All about memory.

You took 405 Test wickets. Is there one wicket that you would say you cherish?

No. For me personally, in every team, basically, the top six batters or so are usually the best in the team.

So as an opening bowler, if I could strike out two or three of those top five or six, I would feel satisfied. It

gives me more satisfaction than if I get nine, 10, or 11. I mean, they all add up in the end. It's a number. Yes, but those top five or six always gave me the most pleasure.

Of the current lot in international cricket, in your opinion, who is the best batter?

Well, for the last few years, I think Virat Kohli, Kane Williamson, Joe Root, and Steve Smith. For me, those four, for the last decade or so, are the top four.

Steve Smith is in the form of his life. But he's not stable like a Tendulkar. He's moving around. Would that play on the bowler's mind?

It probably could because, as bowlers, you're accustomed to batsmen standing still and tapping the ground while batting. Well, nowadays, most of them keep their bats up in the air, but they're still. But Smith is very fidgety, and he's not the most attractive-looking player. He's a run machine.

That tells us that all this theory about you having to be in a certain position and have your elbow point in this direction is just talk. Every player has their style. Shiv Chanderpaul, for instance, had a very open stance, and people said that he had an awkward stance. Brian Lara had such a high backlift, and people said you could york him. But it is all individual style.

Who is the best fast bowler in the current lot?

That's a good question. It's a tough one. In the Indian team, you have (Mohammed) Shami and (Jasprit) Bumrah. Bumrah is not here for the

series in the Caribbean, because of an injury, I think.

He's different. I've never seen a bowler like that before, and he's highly effective. I do like Bumrah. I mean, yeah, but there are quite a few good boys.

But I must admit, even though I watch cricket a bit, I don't watch it as much as most people do. Even when I was playing, I didn't watch it much. I take a little peek to see what's happening, and I go to a corner, play some music in my ears, and I just relax because I find watching cricket for an extended period makes me tired. I don't watch it a lot. When I'm coaching or commentating,

I have no choice. Outside of that, I don't watch a lot. Pat Cummins of Australia is a decent bowler. He does not have any extra pace, but he bowls well.

I want to take you back to February 1, 1993. The third day of the fifth Test match between Australia and the West Indies. Curtly Ambrose, 7 for 25, with one unforgettable deadly spell of seven wickets for one run. Australia was all out for 119. Your current co-commentator, Ian Bishop, took the wickets of Justin Langer and Steve Waugh. Shane Warne was run out. And the rest of the seven batters — what did you do to them?

I remember clearly that after we won that game in Adelaide by 1-1 to level the series, we won a piece with one to go. And truth be told, everyone who has seen the game feels we should have won the game long before that.

Some questionable, unfair decisions went against us, but that's

part of the game. So, we won the game.

But anyway, we left for Perth, and history was on our side because we had never lost a Test in Perth.

Even when we went to Australia in 1975-76 and lost 5-1, the single game we won was in Perth. We were confident that we could win that game.

We got to Perth, and the morning of the game, when I saw the pitch, I remember saying to Richie Richardson, our captain, 'If you win the toss, we'll win the Test match.'

The pitch looked conducive to fast bowling. It looked really good, with pace. The great Allan Border won the toss.

To our surprise, he decided to bat first. I was like, 'What? Are you sure?' We were really happy because we wanted to bowl first. However, in the morning session, it didn't go very well for me. It was a little bit offline and a little bit short. I didn't go very well.

As you mentioned, Bishop took two wickets before lunch. I was disappointed in myself. We went into lunch thinking, 'How did you mess up on this surface?' I was itching to get back out after lunch.

I remember Richie asking me, 'Big fellow, how are you feeling?' I said, 'Just get ready to go because I want to make amends for wasting that early morning session.' I went out, and then I was focused on getting it right.

Then I got back behind, and that was it. After that, I think I got Boon caught by Richie, and then everything else fell into place. I just couldn't do anything wrong. Everything was right there, keeping them on the edge.



I played against guys with huge egos. Sachin Tendulkar was different. His humility was his strongest asset.



SHUBHANKAR'S stupendous show

The Indian was **remarkably consistent** and displayed admirable grit on a par-71 course at The Open, where many illustrious names took a beating.

Rakesh Rao

Twitter @sportyrakesh

In many individual sporting disciplines, when the world's elite is on view, Indian performances seldom count for much. Golf is one of them. That's why when an Indian finishes among the top-10 of a Major, it becomes a talking point.

Shubhankar Sharma did just that in The Open. Though it was the third time an Indian enjoyed a single-digit finish at a Major, the performance is already being seen as the best from the country.

If one goes by the net score of five-under for four rounds, it falls short of looking



Creditable performance:

Shubhankar Sharma finished tied-8th at The Open. GETTYIMAGES

impressive. But if one considers the challenges of playing on a link course, that too, for someone who does not get to play on these open, wind-swept courses, it merits appreciation. Add to it rain and slushy conditions, and the 276-ranked Shubhankar's tied-eighth finish deserves all the accolades it has attracted. For the record, in the 156-player field at the world's oldest Major played this year at the Royal Liverpool Club in England, Shubhankar shot rounds of 68, 71, 70, 70. He was remarkably consistent and displayed admirable grit on a par-71 course where many illustrious names took a beating.

Compared to Shubhankar's aggregate of 279, American Brian Harman proved a runaway winner with a stunning score of 13-under 271. Shubhankar, who turned 27 on the second day of the competition, collected Euros 361,975.97 (\$403,350) for coming up with the best finish by an Indian at The Open. In his previous two appearances at The Open, in 2018 and 2019, Shubhankar finished 51st.

Apart from the prize-money, the top-10 finish also earned Shubhankar a spot in the next edition of The Open. He jumped 111 spots to be 165 in World rankings. This was the second best finish by an Indian in a Major, following Anirban Lahiri's tied-fifth at the 2015 PGA Championship. Jeev Milkha Singh is the only other Indian to break into the top-10 of a Major by taking the tied-ninth spot at the 2008 PGA Championship.

Compared to the best showings of his predecessors, Shubhankar's effort should rank a notch higher due to the testing conditions he faced during the week. commendably, he did not shoot a single over-par round. Understandably, in such windy conditions, keeping the ball in play is never easy. Rain made it worse, especially on the final day.

"I don't like to talk much about my own game but I am very proud of what I managed to accomplish during the week. This was probably the best round of golf that I've played in my life," declared Shubhankar, when talking about his final round.

A quick look at cards reveals that he had solid starts each day, went over-par just for one hole on the second day, saved some amazing

pars and never went out of the top-10 after breaking in, on the first day. His lone double-bogey — on the par-3 17th on the second day — took him to one-over par for the round but the birthday boy immediately sank a birdie to sign off with a par.

"It wasn't easy out there at all. It was up and down. Downwind, the ball was being affected almost 20-25 yards, and into the wind, the same. But again, flight is very important when you're hitting those shots. If you hit it slightly low, the wind batters it down and it doesn't go anywhere. So that was always a challenge. With the ground being hard, connection and contact was very important," explained Shubhankar.

Talking about the second round, he said, "the wind was definitely a lot more than what we experienced a day earlier. I told myself a level par round would not be a bad round. Obviously, I didn't want that 17th to happen and finish level par like that, but if I look at it as a whole, I'm happy."

Over the weekend, Shubhankar was steady, like very few. His eagle on the par-5 fifth on the third day was partially offset by his lone bogey on the 16th. On the final day, when he had pars on 17 holes, the birdie on the 14th kept him under-par and in the top-10 for the week.

"My only disappointment was not making a 10-footer birdie putt on the 18th hole after hitting a really good five-iron approach shot over the greenside bunkers, but I just can't complain," said the man whose finish erased the previous best finish by an Indian at The Open. It was Jyoti Randhawa who finished tied 27th in the 2004 edition.

A two-time winner on the European Tour, Shubhankar is looking to build on the confidence gained from this stupendous performance. After all, this comes after missing 15 cuts since finishing tied-seventh at the Abu Dhabi HSBC Championship earlier this year.

Even in the run-up to The Open, Shubhankar believed his play was good. "I'm playing well. And I've been telling my coach and my dad that I've been playing really well. There were a few technical issues a month ago that I was trying to figure out with the swing. Now I am hitting the ball well and driving nicely, which are huge positives."

« I am very proud of what I managed to accomplish during the week. This was probably the best round of golf that I've played in my life »

Rare gold, strange happenings and calculations gone awry

Indians came up with fighting performances at the recent Bangkok Asians but there is **much work to do** before the Asian Games.

Stan Rayan
Twitter @StanByMe28

It had rained a few minutes earlier and the track appeared wet as the women lined up for the sprint hurdles final at the recent 25th Asian Athletics Championships in Bangkok.

There was a bit of drama, with China's Wu Yanni being sent off for a false start. The Chinese hurdler was not happy about it and argued with track officials.

This distracted the others to some extent too.

But Jyothi Yarraj kept her cool on the big stage. She was focused, and despite Japan's experienced Asuka

Terada taking a small early lead, the Indian came back strongly in the last few hurdles to pull off a sensational victory. It was India's first-ever gold in the women's 100m hurdles in the championship's 50-year history.

When it came to the Asian Championships, the Japanese and the Chinese had been dominating the women's sprint hurdles.

And Jyothi, who has been moulded into a fine hurdler by James Hillier at the Reliance Foundation, wrote a new chapter.



Rare gold

It was perhaps one of India's most memorable performances at the Bangkok Asians. India's haul of 27 medals (6 gold, 12 silver, and 9 bronze) was only behind Japan (37) and China (22). Indians came up with some fighting performances on their way to gold, like Ajay Kumar Saroj's (1500m) and Parul Chaudhary's (women's 3000m steeple chase) smart end-game strategy and the fine running by the last two legs in the 4x400m mixed relay that staved

Purple patch: Jyothi Yarraj opened India's gold medal account in the championships by clocking 13.09s in the final ahead of Japan's runners Asuka Terada (13.13s) and Aoki Masumi (13.26s). FILE PHOTO: V.V. KRISHNAN



off the strong Japanese challenge.

Consistent performer

Triple jumper Abdulla Aboobacker, the Commonwealth Games silver medallist, again proved that he could be a consistent performer by taking the gold, while shot put Asian record-holder Tajinderpal Singh Toor retained his title despite suffering from groin pain.

Quality-wise, the best performance came from long jumper M. Sreeshankar. Though he could

It was perhaps one of India's most memorable performances. India's haul of 27 medals (6 gold, 12 silver, and 9 bronze) was only behind Japan (37) and China (22).





Flight to Paris: Murali Sreeshankar has qualified for the 2024 Paris Olympics after winning a silver medal in the Asian Athletics Championships with a second career-best effort of 8.37m in Bangkok.

FILE PHOTO: SUDHAKARAJAIN

only win a silver (behind Taipei's Lin Yu-Tang, gold, 8.40m), the Commonwealth Games silver medallist's 8.37m in Bangkok was the fifth-best jump in the world this year. The Kerala athlete now owns two of the five best jumps in the world this season after his 8.41m at the Inter-State Nationals a month earlier, the world's second-best jump this year.

Strange happenings

There were some strange happenings, too, just as the Indian team was about to leave for Bangkok. Anjali Devi, who had not run a 400m race in nearly three-and-a-half years, clocked a stunning 51.48s — the fastest by an Indian woman this year and the third fastest in Asia — to take the quarter-mile gold at the Inter-States. But she failed a dope test taken on the day of her triumph.

Sprinter Archana Suseendran and shot-putter Karanveer Singh, the No. 2 in their respective events in the country this year, also tested positive for illegal substances and were dropped from the team.

Calculations upset

It looks like the change of dates — the Inter-State Nationals were advanced by nearly a month — upset many calculations.

All these played havoc with the Indian team, and with long jump world leader Jeswin Aldrin, triple jump Asian leader Praveen Chithravel, and javelin thrower Rohit Yadav pulling out with fitness issues,

« **Murali Sreeshankar now owns two of the five best jumps in the world this season** »

Missing out: Long jump world leader Jeswin Aldrin was forced to pull out of the competition due to fitness issues.

FILE PHOTO: RITU RAJ KONWAR





Tough outing: India's top javelin thrower, Annu Rani, managed a best of 59.10m to finish fourth.

FILE PHOTO: B. VELANKANNIRAJ



India could field only a single athlete in some of the events where it was among the continent's best.

Disappointing bronze

Though India has won gold at the last five editions of the Asian Games in the women's 4x400m relay, beginning in 2002, the country could only pick up a bronze in the event in Bangkok, with Vietnam and Sri Lanka taking gold and silver.

There was a big disappointment as well with Annu Rani, who had entered the final of the last two World Championships. She failed to finish among the medals in the women's javelin throw. Annu, a medallist at the last two Asians, had to break her training in Germany with visa problems. She came fourth in Bangkok with 59.10m. There was a big upset there, with Japan's Marina Saito shocking China's Olympic

THERE WAS A BIG UPSET IN THE WOMEN'S JAVELIN, WITH JAPAN'S MARINA SAITO SHOCKING CHINA'S OLYMPIC CHAMPION LIU SHIYING TO WIN THE GOLD

champion Liu Shiying to win the gold.

Shanti Veronica makes history

Singapore's Shanti Veronica Pereira surprised everybody by emerging as the fastest woman and finishing with a golden double by taking the 200m too. Singapore had not won any medals in the last six editions of the Asians, and it was the first time it had taken a sprint title at the Continental meet.

Bahrain, which topped the table at the last Asians in Doha in 2019, stayed away, while China, which will host the Asian Games in September in Hangzhou, did not field a strong team. So, the final medal table did not present a clear picture.

With the Asian Games just about two months away, there is much work to do.



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LISTEN TO THE
INTERVIEW

« I believe that if it is my day, and my approach and my rhythm are set, I will put up a good jump when it matters »

MURALI SREESHANKAR

Jonathan Selvaraj

Twitter @jon_selvaraj

Coming off a silver medal at the Asian Championships, with multiple jumps over 8m and a personal best of 8.41m this season, long jumper Murali Sreeshankar is looking in fine touch as he heads towards the World Championships. The 24 year-old speaks about his expectations from Budapest and how he's looking to carry forward his consistency to the international level. He also speaks about his often testy but ultimately trusted relationship with his father, his 'Mamba mindset,' and why he always carries a Rubiks cube with him during competitions.

After your last jump at the 2018 Asian Games, you stared at the jumping pit and spoke as if you were taking an oath. Do you remember that?

I do remember that moment. I finished sixth in Jakarta. I thought I had a good last jump, but fouled it by the slightest of margins. I looked into the camera and said — 'I will be back.' Hopefully, I will be able to

redeem myself at this Asian Games. I feel I'm much better and mature as an athlete now.

In every Olympics since you were born (March 27, 1999), your two best jumps this year (8.41m and 8.37m) would guarantee a medal. But at the same time, 67 jumpers have crossed 8m this year. What do you make of that?

I believe that if it is my day, and my approach and my rhythm are set, I will put up a good jump when it matters. An 8.35m+ jump will win a medal at all major championships including the World Championships and the Olympics. But it's also going to be the kind of jump that will be needed at the Asian level.

Right now, there are a lot of people who can win a medal at the Olympics. Miltiadis (Tentoglou, the reigning Olympic champion) is regularly jumping above 8.25m, but apart from him, the field is very open. I have been doing good jumps consistently in the domestic circuit, but the challenge is to prove myself at the international level. I'm getting there. I did quite well in the

conditions in Paris, in Greece and in the USA. Next year, hopefully, everything will go great.

Is there anything else about your preparation you would want to change?

My sleep routine is very bad. I usually sleep around 1am. Right now, I'm reading the book *Why We Sleep* by Matthew Walker. I'm sure by the end of it, I will realise just how disastrous my sleep habits have been. I'm trying to do better. I'm trying to sleep by, at least, midnight, and gradually bring it down to 10.30-11 pm.

You have spoken of the importance of getting your run-up right. Could you explain that?

The main purpose of the long jump approach is to get the maximum possible horizontal velocity, and, without losing much speed, convert it into the vertical velocity. I have a 19-step approach. With my stride pattern, my approach comes to about 44.50m to 46m depending on how fast the track is. A lot of athletes use an initial skip, like they have a jog and then start from one particular



spot and they take 18 or 16 steps — like Tentoglou or Jeswin (Aldrin).

I've tried different kinds of rhythms. I began the season with a skip. I've tried the 20-step approach also — starting with the other leg, just to see if my speed is right in the last 10 metres of the approach. But I've returned to the single-step approach.

We used to have a few sprinters who did the long jump back in the day. Carl Lewis, for instance.

People don't double up much now?

Carl Lewis was a once-in-a-generation athlete. Because doing the 100m, 200m and then killing it in the long jump is incredible. He could run the 100m in 9.7 seconds and also took off without losing any speed.

That's maximum translation of horizontal velocity into vertical velocity. He was a treat to watch.

When we first got a computer at home, the first thing my father got was the Carl Lewis documentary CD.

You used to be wiry earlier, but have really muscled up on your lower body. Have you changed your training routine?

Actually, my dad has planned all my weight training schedules in such a way that it is optimal for the long jump. I am not bulking much into my upper body because that might restrict my movement in the arm swings. We focus more on power and power-based movements, rather than just strength. Earlier I used to do 300kg quarter squats, but now I am doing 200kg half squats at speed so that the power output is good. I spoke to Dr. Klaus (Bartonietz) — Olympic javelin champion Neeraj Chopra's coach — about this. He told me that for a long jumper or javelin thrower, power is

True inspiration: 'Carl Lewis was a once-in-a-generation athlete. Because doing the 100m, 200m and then killing it in the long jump is incredible'

— Sreeshankar. GETTY IMAGES

much more important than just strength. Strength is just a small aspect to measure the quantity of power. Power-based training is also helping me stay injury-free.

What attracted you to the long jump?

When I was young, I used to go to a stadium with my dad. My dad used to put up hurdles and ask me to jump. I would jump over them easily without any fear. Perhaps it is in me, kind of genetically. When I spoke to my dad's friends and coaches, they used to say he was really explosive.

What is the dynamic between you and your father?

My dad says he didn't have the kind of vision I have. I have always dreamed of having an Olympic medal or a World Championship medal. My dad's dreams (S Murali was a silver medallist in the triple jump at the South Asian Games) were a lot smaller. He says in his time, they just wanted to win the National Championship, go for SAFF tournaments, or maybe the Asian Games.

My dad is really strict with me but that's because he wants me to fulfil the kind of potential I have as an athlete. The only time he is pretty chill is the day after the competition. I don't have any training session for that day but in the evening, he will go back to coach mode and ask if I am fit to train the next day. That's good too. You need to have a tough task master to guide you in the right direction, just tune you up.

Things are going well for you right now but you have faced tough times. You had serious case of appendicitis in 2018. You also didn't have a great result at the Tokyo Olympics. There was also criticism of your father's role as your coach...

I had complications in my surgery



Fam connect: Sreeshankar training with his dad S. Murali, who has played a vital role in his evolution as an athlete. **SHAJI MULLOOKKARAN**

because my appendix ruptured. There was a chance of organ poisoning as well. I was on antibiotics for a while and it made it hard to put any stress on my body. I have to give credit to my dad on how he formulated my training programme when I returned because I wasn't able to run 50m at that time.

The run-up to the Tokyo Olympics

was very hard but it made me mature. There's a saying that tough times make tough people and that is right. I remember I had to give selection trials in the rain in Bengaluru to go to the Olympics and I also remember how after I didn't do so well in Tokyo, how much criticism my dad faced. There was so much pressure to work with another coach.

Those experiences have made my mindset really strong and helped my decision-making during competitions. So, when I'm in a tough situation, I just remember that this

is nothing compared to what I have faced.

Wouldn't you say things are improving? This year five Indians have crossed 8m.

The standard of Indian jumps has gone up. Earlier, when I jumped 7.99m in 2018 Federation Cup, that was a big deal. Recently, I spoke to one of the coaches in SAI, Bangalore at the Inter-State championships. He said, "My athlete jumped 8.01m in the first round and no one clapped because they are now used to seeing 8.20s and 8.30s."

Anju (Bobby George)
Ma'am once said Indians really do have the potential to excel in technical events and I can see it. Indian jumpers have moved on from that

Kobe Bryant will always remain at the core of my heart. He had a crazy work ethic and approach to the game. I have a picture of Kobe in my living room



RITU RAJ KONWAR

mental block of jumping 8m. Now 8.30m or 8.40m can be the new barrier and, hopefully, going ahead, 8.50m could be the barrier to break. I think in Asia, apart from China, no other country has produced a lot of 8m-plus jumpers like us.

What sort of preparation do you do a day before your competition?
Apart from waking up well in advance, the warm-up, and quick naps. I don't drink coffee.

Why no coffee, Sree? It's tragic that a Malayali can't have coffee!
I can't have coffee on the day before the competition because the caffeine will affect my sleep cycle but I always have a black coffee on the day of my event so that my body is alert. I avoid dairy products just before the competition so that I don't have any trouble with my stomach.

You don't have any parotta either, we believe!
Yeah, before the Tokyo Olympics I made this vow to myself that I won't eat parotta until the Olympics. After I didn't do well in Tokyo, I decided to extend that vow to 2024. It's been four years and I haven't cheated yet. But it's hard. When my mom comes from office, she gets *parottas* for my dad and my sister. But for me, she gets only *rotis*. When we are eating, my sister will often grab a piece of *parotta* and wave in front of my face and then eat it just to tease me.

What's the one thing that you always carry with you?
I usually carry a Rubik's Cube with me. I have a theory that it keeps my mind sharp before a competition. I've been doing the cube since Class 8. My personal best is around 28 seconds. I really want to learn those speed cubing techniques, but don't have the time. I don't have a lot of superstitions in sport but solving the Rubik's Cube might be one.

You want to stay sharp before a competition but sometimes we have seen that your performance dips between the qualification rounds and the final...

It actually happens a lot with me. At the 2022 World Championships, I did 8m in qualification and then I

BEFORE THE TOKYO OLYMPICS I MADE THIS VOW TO MYSELF THAT I WON'T EAT PAROTTA UNTIL THE OLYMPICS. AFTER I DIDN'T DO WELL IN TOKYO, I DECIDED TO EXTEND THAT VOW TO 2024. IT'S BEEN FOUR YEARS AND I HAVEN'T CHEATED YET

only did 7.96m in the finals. In the Commonwealth Games, I did 8.25m in qualification and then I struggled to cross 8m in the final. The same thing happened at the Inter-State as well. It's a mental thing.

In qualifying, you just need to make the mark. In the finals there is the pressure of getting the medal. Our technique collapses. The pressure of competing in a final is completely different from qualifying. I think with more experience, I'll get past this.

You've spoken of being inspired by Kobe Bryant's Mamba mentality. But you are a fan of the Golden State Warriors. Is it the Steph Curry mentality now?
Kobe Bryant will always remain at the core of my heart. He had a crazy work ethic and approach to the game. Mamba mentality is one thing which I will always have in my heart. Whenever I'm feeling a little off, my dad will ask — 'What about your Mamba mentality?' That sparks me up. I have a picture of Kobe Bryant in my living room. If my dad allows me to get a tattoo, I will have Mamba mentality inked across my chest.

You seem to have a healthy respect for Neeraj Chopra. Do you recall the first time you met him?



I first met Neeraj Bhaiyya at the 2014 Junior nationals. I won U-14 gold in long jump and, I think, he won the U-16 gold in javelin. I didn't get to speak to him then. But even now when I speak to him, I am careful about what I say.

Even if he texts me to congratulate me on my performance, I think twice before replying. I get anxious because it has to be perfect. After all, it is going to an Olympic champion. But when you meet him in real life, he's so grounded.

I wonder how someone with such a magnitude of achievements still behaves so well with fellow competitors and young developing athletes like me.

Did you see him win the Olympic gold?

Unfortunately, I left Tokyo a day before his finals. I was sharing the apartment with Neeraj Bhaiyya and Dr. Klaus in Tokyo. Interacting with him, you would never have believed



Heroic achievement:

Neeraj Chopra's win caused a paradigm shift in the mindset of every Indian athlete, feels Sreeshankar. "We started feeling if we do things properly, we too have the potential to achieve what he has," he says. GETTYIMAGES

this person was going to create history. There was no anxiety in him. It was just like he was in any other international competition. And after he won the gold medal, I kind of realised the magnitude of what he had done.

It has caused a paradigm shift in the mindset of every Indian athlete. This was a person, who is our very good friend, who won an Olympic gold medal.

We started feeling if we do things properly, we too have the potential to achieve what he has. That mindset

was evident last year — seven athletes were in World Championships final. That graph will grow, I think.

You certainly have that self-belief. You invested your prize money to build your own gym, didn't you?
I'd been planning after the 2019 season not to depend on anyone and build a gym. After the Covid lockdown, my dad's brother bought a property and offered the space to build a personal gym. I got money from the state government for

qualifying for the Olympics and invested all of it on that gym. It's easily my best investment.

Do you think about winning medals at the Olympics or World Championships or do you think you will jinx it if you do?

My dad is a very practical person. He always believes we have to aim for the performances and, obviously, medals. We do discuss the strategies to win medals because after a certain stage, no matter how much we jump, medals matter.

Battery and half-pins

By C.G.S.Narayanan

In a half-pin set up two black pieces are positioned in between the Black king and a white line piece. When either of the black men moves off the line during the course of the play, the other gets fully pinned, and this immobility is then exploited by white to deliver a pin mate. Half pin problems generally involve pinning of each of the two black pieces in turn to produce harmonious effect of the pin mates. The half-pin lines can be either lateral or diagonal and the pieces pinned can be homogeneous i.e similar pieces like two knights or heterogeneous with different kinds of pieces. I present half-pins with white battery mates.

In the diagram below composed a century ago, after the key **1.Bc7!** (2.Ra5) the first set of variations exploit the pin of BNd4-1...Bc3/Bc5 2.Rb3;1...Ba5 2.Rb6;1...Bd2 2.Qxc2 and 1..Ba3 2.b3. Other variations are 1...Nxb5 2.bxa8Q;1...Nb3+ 2.axb3

Comins Mansfield
I prize, Hampshire & Telegraph 1918



Mate in two moves

The second has homogeneous pieces, two black rooks, and white has to decide on which piece to make the key on the long diagonal a2-g8-WRe6 or WNb3? The close try

1.Re5? with plan 2.Qg7 lead to half-pin mates 1...Rg4 2.Nd4 and 1...Rg2 2.Nd2 but defeated by 1..Bf8!

Touw Hian Bwee
Third prize, Die Schwalbe 1962



Mate in two moves

After the **key 1.Nc5!!** (2.Qg7) it is the bishop-rook battery which delivers the pin mates for the same defences. 1...Rg4 2.Re4 and 1...Rg2 2.Re2.

Half-pin mates are set for the BN moves in the diagram below and there is no waiting move that can hold the position.

Georgy Baksci
3 pr, Magyar Sakkelet 1978



Mate in two moves

Solution to problem for solving in the article: 'On tactics and effects': **Key 1.Nf4!** (2.Rc5+ Kxd4 3.Qc4) 3.Qd5 3.c3; 1...Qe6 2.Ne3+ Qxe3 3.Qc7; 1...Re6 2.Qc7+ Rc6 3.Ne3

Readers may send in their queries to
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» INDIAN PLAYGROUND

SPORTOON

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Regatta: Mallesh, Dharani clinch gold



V. Mallesh and Dharani Laveti, both from Telangana, clinched gold in the International Class 420 boat (under-19) category in the YAI-Monsoon Regatta in Hussain Sagar Lake in Hyderabad.

In the under-15 girls section, it was a tough fight for K. Deekshita of Telangana, but she squeezed into the fifth position and beat her closest rival by a single point overall to clinch another gold in this national ranking event after the previous Secunderabad Club Regatta.

Deekshita also finished a creditable fourth overall in the open category, her best career performance so far at Nationals.

"I plan to win the coming Nationals in Mumbai and will be practising for the same soon," Deekshitha said.

"We got four gold, five silver and four bronze after many months of hard work," said a visibly proud Dadi Bhote, President of the triumphant Telangana Sailing Association that proved its mettle across three back-to-back championships.

Ekalavya Batham of Madhya Pradesh further fortified his win with another clear win in the 12th race.

TEAM SPORTSTAR



1

Tokyo Olympics silver medallist Ravi Dahiya took to Twitter to announce a successful completion of his knee surgery following a first round exit at the Asian Games trials. "When a sweet result is received in the temple of life, everyone accepts it easily, but when a bitter result is received, accepting it with gratitude is the ultimate joy of life," he wrote. The CWG 2022 gold medallist lost his opening round bout of the men's 57kg freestyle against Atish Todkar in New Delhi on July 23. Dahiya was trailing 20-8 before he was pinned by Todkar, aggravating his knee injury in the process.

2

Pramod Bhagat and Sukant Kadamb were among the Indian shuttlers who qualified for the upcoming Asian Para Games scheduled to be held from September 23 to October 8 in Hangzhou, China. Bhagat booked his spot in singles, doubles and mixed doubles, while Sukant sealed his place in singles and doubles. The trials for the same were conducted at Greater Noida from July 24 to 26. Among others, Nitesh Kumar, Suhas Lalitakere Yathiraj, Tarun, Manasi Joshi, Manisha Ramadas, Thulasimathi Murugesan and Krishna Nagar also made the cut.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

TEAM SPORTSTAR



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Ryan Fernando



FOR MORE STORIES

WHEN PASSION MEETS PERFORMANCE

The captivating connection between athletic prowess and heightened libido can be further enhanced by foods that could potentially elevate performance and vitality.

Athletes are appreciated for their unwavering devotion, focus, and desire to achieve in their respective sports. This strong desire not only drives them to compete and train hard, but it also influences other parts of their lives, notably their biological need for sex.

Athletes usually have exceptional levels of physical fitness and stamina, thanks in part to their hard training programmes and smart lifestyle choices. These conditions can all lead to a boost in testosterone levels, which is a hormone related to sexual desire in both men and women.

Furthermore, regular exercise produces endorphins, which improve sensations of enjoyment and arousal. However, it is important to remember that each person's sexual desire is impacted by a variety of psychological and biological variables, and not every athlete will have the same amount of libido. While an athlete's strong drive might naturally lead to an increased desire in sex, there are several foods that can improve sexual performance and general vitality. These foods are high in nutrients that promote sexual well-being as well as function. Here is a list of the best food that can help athletes improve their sexual performance:

Nitrate-rich foods

These foods, which include leafy greens, beets, and pomegranates, improve sexual health indirectly by improving cardiovascular

function and delivering critical nutrients that influence overall vigour and endurance.

Dark chocolate

Flavonoids in dark chocolate boost cardiovascular health by increasing blood flow. Enhanced blood circulation can benefit both men and women's sexual health. Further, the mood-enhancing qualities of dark chocolate may lead to a more joyful and intimate experience.

Bananas

Bananas are high in potassium, which helps to maintain healthy blood pressure and heart function, all of which are important for sexual health.

Fatty fish

Fatty fish such as salmon is high in Omega-3 fatty acids, which support heart health and can improve sexual performance.

Watermelon

Watermelon includes citrulline, which increases nitric oxide formation and hence improves blood flow to different regions of the body, which includes the genitals as well.

Berries

Berries, like strawberries and blueberries, are high in antioxidants, which safeguard against oxidative stress and may help with sexual health.

Almonds

Almonds are high in Vitamin E, which is believed to increase blood circulation and hormone creation, both of which benefit sexual health.

Inside game: Athletes usually have exceptional levels of physical fitness and stamina, thanks in part to their hard training programs and smart lifestyle choices. These conditions can all lead to a boost in testosterone levels, which is a hormone related to sexual desire in both men and women. GETTY IMAGES



Spinach

This lush green vegetable is high in magnesium, which is necessary for relaxation of muscles and blood flow, both of which are important for sexual wellness.

Sweet potatoes

Sweet potatoes have aphrodisiac properties. The root vegetable includes Vitamin A, which aids in the production of testosterone and influences arousal. If you are not already eating it, you have a sweet reason to do so now!

While athletes may have increased sexual appetite, it is critical to stress the significance of moral principles and ethical conduct. In every relationship, consent between partners is essential, and athletes should be educated to talk honestly and appropriately with their significant others. No one should ever feel compelled or coerced into engaging in a sexual relationship, and both parties must offer enthusiastic and informed permission.

Athletes must also be cognizant of age-related restrictions imposed by their individual nations' laws and regulations. Sexual activity with a partner under the age of consent is not just illegal, but also immoral. It is critical that they are aware of the laws in their area and follow these guidelines at all times.

The use of contraception is another important part of sustaining appropriate sexual conduct. While athletes may have

increased sexual desire, they must prioritise safe sex practices in order to protect themselves and their partners from unexpected pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). It is critical that athletes use condoms or other dependable contraception techniques, and they should be informed on the numerous alternatives available.

Athletes are an incredible bunch of people who are fueled by passion and determination to achieve in the sport of their choice. This same tremendous drive frequently manifests itself in their personal life, especially their sexual appetites. Athletes may improve their sexual performance and general health by including the foods suggested in this article into their diets.



Flavonoids in dark chocolate boost cardiovascular health by increasing blood flow. Enhanced blood circulation can benefit both men and women's sexual health.

Fiefdoms abound in Indian sport

Even those who scream that politics and sports **ought not to mix** accept that politicians and sport mix all the time.

Suresh Menon

National elections are crucial in India. The tentacles of the party in power, whether Congress or the BJP or alliances cobbled together, spread everywhere. And sport is no exception. Elections to sporting bodies in India are never free of political interference.

And it is not just the Board of Control for Cricket in India, which currently has the son of the Home Minister as secretary. As the richest and most influential cricket body in the world, it naturally attracts those who deal in riches and influence.

I remember elections to the Indian Olympic Association many years ago which witnessed fisticuffs and promises made to the losing party about being accommodated in future elections. The IOA pie is not very large, but it has some attractions: foreign trips, Olympic, Asian and Commonwealth Games junkets, and the **power that officials enjoy over athletes**.

In the days when India won just one Olympic medal in hockey, or none at all, the contingent of officials was often larger than the number of athletes. Speak to any hockey player of the 1970s, and he will tell you of being kicked out of his room at the Olympic Village to accommodate the oversized (in more senses than one) administrator delegation.

And quite shamelessly, these destroyers of Indian sport would insist on taking part in the Opening Ceremony too. There's a famous photograph of the 1972 marchpast with Indian officials, out of step, uncoordinated and frankly disgusting, that featured in the media then.



Top draw: As the richest and most influential cricket body in the world, the BCCI naturally attracts those who deal in riches and influence. REUTERS

It made no difference. Officials continued to replace athletes. It was bad enough athletes' performances when compared to those of other nations gave them a complex, they had to kowtow to officials too. It is amazing how Indians won anything at international meets those days despite aggressive attempts to give them an inferiority complex.

As soon as Indian politicians heard of a sport where India had no governing body or indeed background they quickly formed an association, held 'elections' and started going abroad at the tax-payer's expense. Sepak Takraw, for example, came as a revelation.

Sportsmen and sportswomen might complain about the all-consuming focus on cricket to the exclusion of other sports, but officials were always happy at this state of

affairs. It meant that they could conduct their shenanigans under the radar, with no questions asked. Some remained in power for three or four decades, handing over the reins to their sons or daughters like royalty. Things have improved in recent years, but not by much. The Wrestling Federation of India elections will take place without Brij Bhushan who is facing sexual harassment charges, or his son. And just when you begin to think that the reign might be finally over, his son-in-law's presence in the list as a voter suggests otherwise. It has ever been so. Fiefdoms abound in Indian sport just as they do in Indian politics. All relatives are entitled to entitlement.

Even those who scream that politics and sports ought not to mix accept that politicians and sport mix all the time.

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