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**YUVENDRA
CHAHAL**

INTERVIEW

**TT legend
Sharath
Kamal**

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Mayank Yadav's impressive pace and control in IPL 2024 have garnered widespread praise.

However, his susceptibility to injuries necessitates careful workload management

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of the new
two-bouncer
rule**





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34



EVERYONE HAS THEIR OWN STORY; IT'S ABOUT HOW YOU WRITE IT – DHRUV JUREL

» Indian Premier League

- 20 Photoline Action from the IPL
- 29 Interview Rachin Ravindra, the rising star at CSK
- 51 Analysis Impact of the two-bouncer rule



10 Cover Story Mayank Yadav

Does Lucknow Super Giants' latest pace sensation 'fit' into India's T20 World Cup squad?

» Read more...

- 58 Big Interview Table tennis legend Sharath Kamal reflects on India's qualification for both team events for Paris 2024, his post-retirement plans and more
- 70 Football A statistical deep-dive in search of Sunil Chhetri's successor
- 80 Equestrian Asian Games bronze medallist Anush Agarwalla and his special bond with Sir Caramello Old

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OFF-SIDE

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HARDIK, A VICTIM OF MISPLACED VITRIOL

The Mumbai fans, and those devoted to Rohit Sharma, are yet to unleash their anger upon the Mumbai Indians' top brass — the **decision-makers behind the captaincy call.**

The titans of wealth and influence find themselves in quite the pickle. The wealthiest family in the country, the owners of the Mumbai Indians in the Indian Premier League, has been suddenly caught off guard by a wave of public discontent. The Mumbai team management's decision to swap the wily local lad, Rohit Sharma, for Hardik Pandya as captain has backfired like an old Premier Padmini on a Mumbai street.

Pandya, who had left the frenetic shores of Mumbai for the quieter, less intoxicating roads of Ahmedabad and the captaincy of its new franchise two years prior, made a return to the Mumbai dugout after some miraculous post-retention financial jugglery ahead of the 2024 IPL mini-auction. Pandya's homecoming, however, has been far from happy, as the five-time champion is languishing at the bottom half of the IPL table after one win in four matches. Skipper Pandya has found no support or solace as the Mumbai fans have turned against him for his perceived disloyalty towards Rohit, who had captained him to stardom in his initial years with the Mumbai blues. A rumoured captaincy clause in his return negotiations has further fuelled the fans' ire, even as the decision to replace Rohit — also the Indian captain — came as a bolt from the blue.

The affection of sports fans flows freely, yet wrath lurks just beneath the surface, ready to pounce at the faintest whiff of injustice. We elevate our heroes to towering pedestals, judging them by a yardstick loftier than the unreachable top shelf at the kitchen counter, conveniently overlooking our own foibles in the process. We strive for prominence in our mundane daily grind yet baulk at the audacity of a player to surpass their mentor.

Pandya's first match as Mumbai's leader took him back to his old stomping ground, and the Ahmedabad locals were quick to voice their displeasure, though,

mercifully, no animal carcasses came flying his way. Luis Figo was greeted at Camp Nou in November 2002 by the Barcelona faithful with a pig's head for his betrayal in crossing the El Classico divide and moving to Real Madrid. "I must be one of the very few sportsmen to have had to perform with 120,000 people against me and focused on me, not the team," Figo would later tell *The Guardian*.

Pandya's hecklers, fewer in number — the official attendance figure at the Narendra Modi Stadium was 80,081 for that night, and Wankhede Stadium has a capacity of 33,006 — have been no less loud, prompting Sanjay Manjrekar to urge the Mumbai crowd to "behave" at the toss for the match between the Mumbai Indians and the Rajasthan Royals.

Fans turning on their own is a tale as old as time. Ask the poor Mohammed Shami, who faced a barrage of online trolling after India's 10-wicket loss to Pakistan at the 2021 T20 World Cup, while it is our national pastime to set fire to effigies of cricketers after every lacklustre showing or defeat. Superstar David Beckham and his family were subjected to years of abuse by the English fans who held him responsible for the nation's ouster from the 1998 FIFA World Cup.

Fury against clubs and club ownership — for poor results or mismanagement — has been equally commonplace, like the longstanding "Glazer Out" campaign by Manchester United's supporters against their absentee American owners.

The Mumbai fans, and those devoted to Rohit, are yet to unleash their anger upon the Mumbai Indians' top brass — the decision-makers behind the captaincy call. But with every dismal display and every questionable decision, the rumblings will grow louder. After 17 years of entwining themselves with the fabric of the 'Maximum City', one misstep, one miscommunication, should not undo it all.

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« You have no idea how hard it is for me to not be able to play at these events. The only thing I can do is accept the situation and try to look at the immediate future. –

Rafael Nadal, after pulling out of the Monte Carlo Masters »

0.3s

Ireland basketball team Portlaoise Panthers refused to replay the final 0.3 seconds of its Division One game against Limerick Sport Eagles because it would be “against the spirit” of the sport. Limerick beat Portlaoise 80-78 in the quarterfinal. The Panthers appealed the result on the grounds that a foul call, which led to the Eagles’ winning free throws, was awarded 1.6 seconds after the buzzer. Ireland basketball chiefs ordered the teams to

replay 0.3 seconds of the game. However, the Panthers said in a statement that replaying a fraction of a second in the quarterfinal would go against the “values of the game of basketball.”



1000

The Wuhan Open is back on the women’s tennis schedule for the first time since 2019 after organisers announced it will be staged in the Chinese city in October, *Xinhua News Agency* reported. The 1000 tournament has not featured on the WTA circuit since COVID-19 was discovered in the city. The tournament will be held from October 7 to 13 at the Optics Valley International Tennis Center in Wuhan.

SMASHING ANOTHER RECORD!



Novak Djokovic became the oldest World No. 1 in ATP rankings history, a record previously held by Roger Federer. Serbia’s Djokovic, the most decorated male tennis player in the Open era with 24 Majors, is 36 years and 321 days old. He already holds the record for most weeks (419) spent as the top-ranked male player with second-placed Federer (310 weeks) way behind. Djokovic became World No. 1 on July 4, 2011 at the age of 24. Both of Djokovic’s great ‘Big Three’ rivals, Federer and Rafael Nadal, reached No. 1 for the first time aged 22. AP

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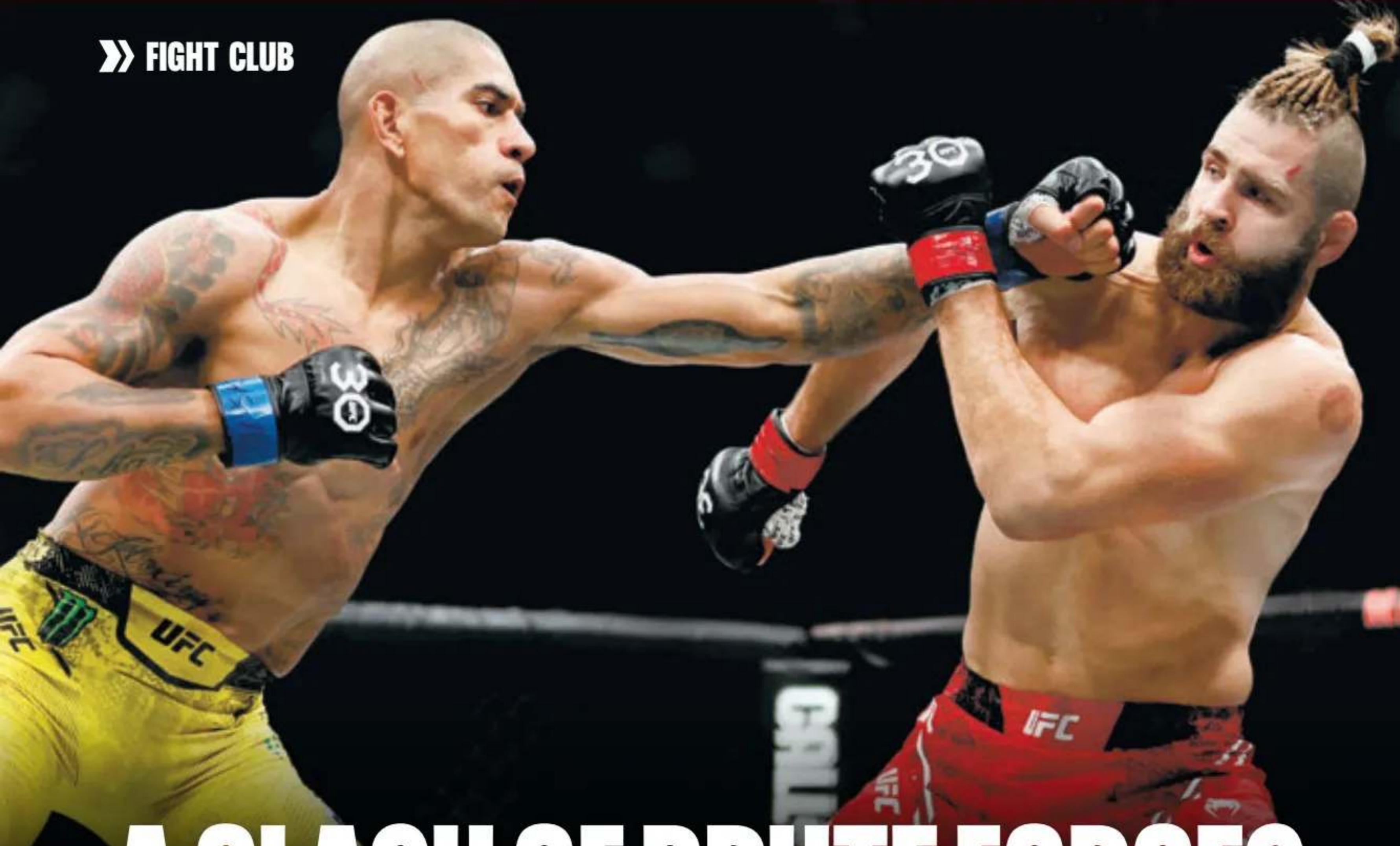
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A CLASH OF BRUTE FORCES

An **explosive showdown** is on the cards when Alex Pereira and Jamahal Hill clash in their heavily anticipated light-heavyweight title fight.

Nigamanth P
nigamanth.p@thehindu.co.in

One of the most anticipated combat sport events is set to take place at the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas on April 14.

The UFC 300's main card boasts all the necessary ingredients to become not only the biggest hit of the year, but also one of the most iconic events of all time.

The main event features Alex 'Poatan' Pereira defending his light-heavyweight belt against former champion Jamahal 'Sweet Dreams' Hill. Pereira became the ninth UFC fighter to win a title in multiple divisions when he defeated former

light heavyweight champion Jiri Prochazka in the second round at UFC 295.

Hill hasn't fought since January 2023, when he beat Glover Teixeira to capture the light heavyweight title for himself in an impressive unanimous decision. However, an injured Achilles tendon kept him sidelined for over 10 months, forcing him to vacate the belt. It will be Pereira's first UFC title defence since winning the championship in November. On the other hand, Hill is coming off his recovery from the injury he suffered in July of last year.

Versatile fighter: Pereira (left) became the ninth UFC fighter to win a title in multiple divisions when he defeated former light heavyweight champion Jiri Prochazka (right) in the second round at UFC 295. AFP

Both fighters are currently on their respective win streaks, with Pereira and Hill winning two and four successive bouts, respectively.

Both are dynamic strikers with enormous power that could put anyone in the division to sleep. However, they take different approaches when engaging their opponents.

Pereira uses powerful calf kicks to chop down his opponent's leg.

Hill, however, takes the more laid-back route and plays the waiting game to capitalise on mistakes by his opponent.

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HOSMAT Hospitals, established in 1993, is one of the first major private trauma and orthopaedic hospitals in India, and the first in Bengaluru. Dr Thomas Chandy, Orthopaedic Surgeon, started the hospital after years of specialised orthopaedic training, and as a consultant. He was running a successful orthopaedic practice, as Chief of Orthopaedics in Tulsa Oklahoma USA. The original HOSMAT Hospital was founded with high American standards, which the organization strives to maintain to this day. With 3 Orthopaedic hospitals in Bangalore today, HOSMAT is one the largest, and one of the best equipped, group of Orthopaedic hospitals in India, having 550 beds and 28 operation theatres. In 30 years, HOSMAT has treated over 16 lakh-satisfied patients. It is one of the premier Orthopaedic specialities hospitals, with knee/hip/shoulder replacement, Arthroscopy (Key Hole Surgery) - Knee & Shoulder, Ligaments. Spine, Hand, Children Orthopaedics.

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» COVER STORY

Breathing fire: With repeated bursts touching speeds well over 150 kilometres per hour (kmph), Mayank has seasoned international batters dancing to his rhythm. K. MURALI KUMAR

MAYANK YADAV LOOMS LARGE AS T20 WORLD CUP SELECTION NEARS

The fiery pacer should prioritise being fit and bowling at top speed. Selection for India will follow naturally.



Ayan Acharya

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When Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) signed Mayank Yadav in the 2022 IPL auction for his base price of ₹20 lakh, their fans would have been forgiven for asking — “Who?” No one could claim to have much knowledge of the 21-year-old. The Delhi pacer had not been unearthed by a scouting database nor had he been talked up by informed commentators.

In old-school, word-of-mouth fashion, Mayank had been recommended to LSG by the franchise’s assistant coach and talent scout, Vijay Dahiya, who had spotted the bowler in the nets during the Vijay Hazare Trophy in 2021. Unpredictability makes for a special kind of viewing in sports. When would he play? What could he offer?

At the time of going to press, Mayank’s bowling profile on the official LSG website remains unchanged, still labelled as right-arm

medium-fast. Yet the cricketing landscape tells a different tale. With repeated bursts touching speeds well over 150 kilometres per hour (kmph) — including one that clocked 156.7 kmph against Royal Challengers Bengaluru — Mayank has seasoned international batters dancing to his tune.

Such prowess has ignited whispers of his selection for the T20 World Cup, set to be played in the USA and the West Indies in June. T.A. Sekar, a former India quick and fast bowling coach, feels it is best to strike while the iron is hot. “If he performs well in the remaining IPL matches, rattling the best in the business, there is no reason why he shouldn’t be considered for higher honours,” Sekar told *Sportstar*.

Former West Indian pacer Ian Bishop has called Mayank ‘the child of the wind’ on X after the latter ran through RCB’s batting line-up with a spell of 4-0-14-3. “Nothing else needs to be seen to add a sixth name to the fast-bowling contracts list,” Bishop wrote on social media, referring to the fast-bowling contracts handed

Variation is key: During this IPL, LSG captain KL Rahul (right) has not used Mayank in the final overs yet. Working on an effective slower ball might help him if he is summoned between overs 17 and 20. K. MURALIKUMAR

out by the national selection committee. The five bowlers currently on the list are Akash Deep, who made his debut in the fourth Test against England in Ranchi, Vijaykumar Vyshak, Umran Malik, Yash Dayal and V. Kaverappa.

Former national selector Jatin Paranjpe thinks that adding Mayank to the above list would be a prudent first step. “In fact, it wouldn’t be surprising if five or six names were added to the list after this IPL to create a pool of bowlers who are managed slightly differently. If Mayank does well consistently, his name should be in it,” Paranjpe said.

The raw pace and the ability to hustle batsmen with the short ball make Mayank a key component of the LSG attack. But to make the step up and be in World Cup contention,



AS A MIDDLE AND DEATH-OVER ENFORCER, MAYANK WOULD, IN THEORY, ALLOW INDIA TO USE JASPRIT BUMRAH MORE FLUIDLY THROUGHOUT THE INNINGS

Tall order: Mayank also brings a third advantage: his height. Standing at 6 feet 3 inches, he releases the ball from a considerable height.

K. MURALIKUMAR

he needs to build on his IPL start. He could provide India with the option of a middle and death-over enforcer. He would, in theory, allow India to use Jasprit Bumrah more fluidly throughout the innings. LSG has used Mayank in a similar role, with five of his six wickets so far coming between overs 7 and 16. "Mayank is not giving you the lengths to hit out of the ground. All sixes against him will be behind the wicket only; hitting him through long-on and long-off will be a challenge for any batsman. Even in this IPL, batters who have tried to hit Mayank through mid-wicket or mid-on have gotten out

because their timing is awry due to the high pace. Mayank is also able to vary the lengths without changing his speeds, which is commendable," Sekar pointed out.

Much focus will also be on the kinds of pitches used in the World Cup. It has been a long time since the West Indies has been a fast bowlers' paradise while the pitches in the USA could be high-scoring. Mayank can bowl extremely fast in the middle overs, even when conditions are not necessarily favourable for seam and swing, complementing Bumrah's



guile. Accuracy is key, of course. RCB captain Faf du Plessis touched upon this aspect after his side bore the brunt of Mayank's pace. "It was impressive to see his pace. But more impressive for me was his ability to control length and bowl with some good discipline. That's more impressive — pace combined with accuracy."

Surendra Bhave, another national selector, spoke about the risks of a broken radar, especially for someone who bowls that fast. "Recent trends show that bowlers exceeding

150 kmph often struggle with accuracy. The selectors will observe Mayank closely during this IPL to assess his performance and gauge his fitness level. Given his pace, monitoring his fitness is essential, as there's a higher risk of injury when bowling at such speeds. However, Mayank appears to be in excellent shape and focused on his game," Bhave said. "From the limited exposure I've had to him, Mayank doesn't seem to be a bowler who concedes too many runs while bowling very fast. With his pace, precision becomes crucial; otherwise, he can be expensive. It's natural for bowlers to get hit occasionally in T20 cricket, but Mayank's ability to trouble top players with his pace is noteworthy. His fielding efforts seem commendable as well," Bhave added.

But one thing India will want to keep an eye on is Mayank's performance at the death. During this IPL, LSG has not used him in the final overs yet. His lengths in the first two



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STORIES

phases of the games err strongly towards shorter lengths. That hard length, pitching 8–10 metres from the batsman's stumps, is hard to hit at that speed. If Mayank can also work on an effective slower ball, something that is now an important feature of death bowling, it might help him if he is summoned between overs 17 and 20.

Mayank also brings a third advantage: his height. Standing at 6 feet 1 inch, he releases the ball from a considerable height. When the release point is that high, the line becomes doubly important. Therefore, his key strength as a bowler lies in his ability to control the line effectively, making him well-suited to execute this strategy due to his skill and physique.

Rohit Sharma prefers to have a bowling unit that includes at least one specialist spinner, along with three fast bowlers and at least one all-rounder. Mohammed Siraj and Bumrah are guaranteed to play in the XI. With Mohammed Shami all but ruled out of the T20 World Cup as he recovers from an ankle surgery, the third fast bowler, if India plays a six-man attack, could be a tussle between Mayank and possibly Arshdeep Singh or Mukesh.

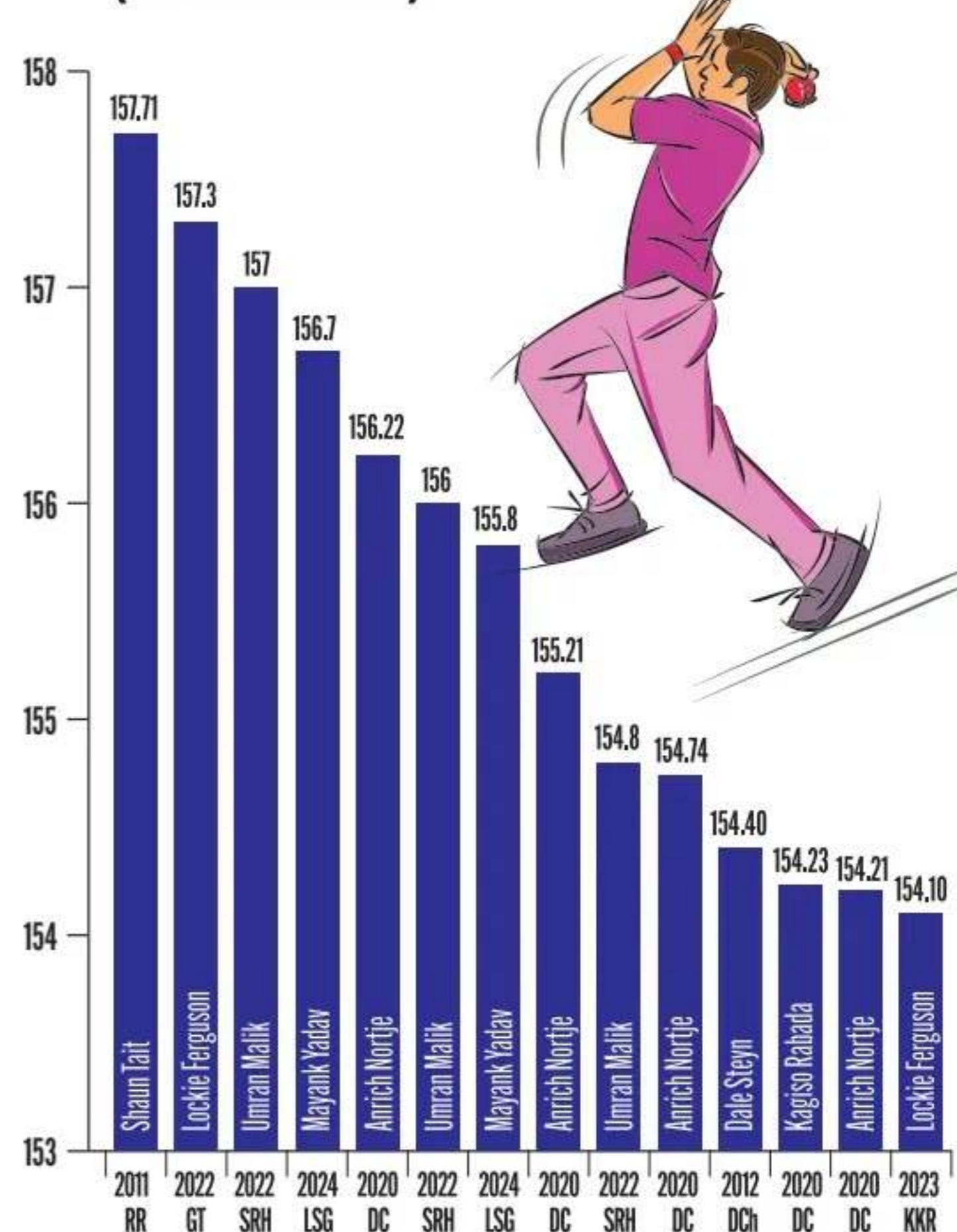
That said, these are still early chapters of Mayank's story. He will no doubt play matches in which he needs to dig deeper to make things happen. "When a young cricketer enters the scene causing excitement, both in terms of potential and performance, and progresses to playing more matches, particularly at the IPL and international levels, the intensity and pressure on their body increase significantly," Paranjpe said.

"Longevity becomes crucial for fast bowlers, making workload management imperative. So, let's not get carried away and instead give Mayank the space to express himself. From initial impressions, it's evident that he possesses the qualities to make an impact on the international stage. But discussing Mayank's participation in the T20 World Cup is premature; it would be more appropriate for him to complete a full season of first-class cricket first."

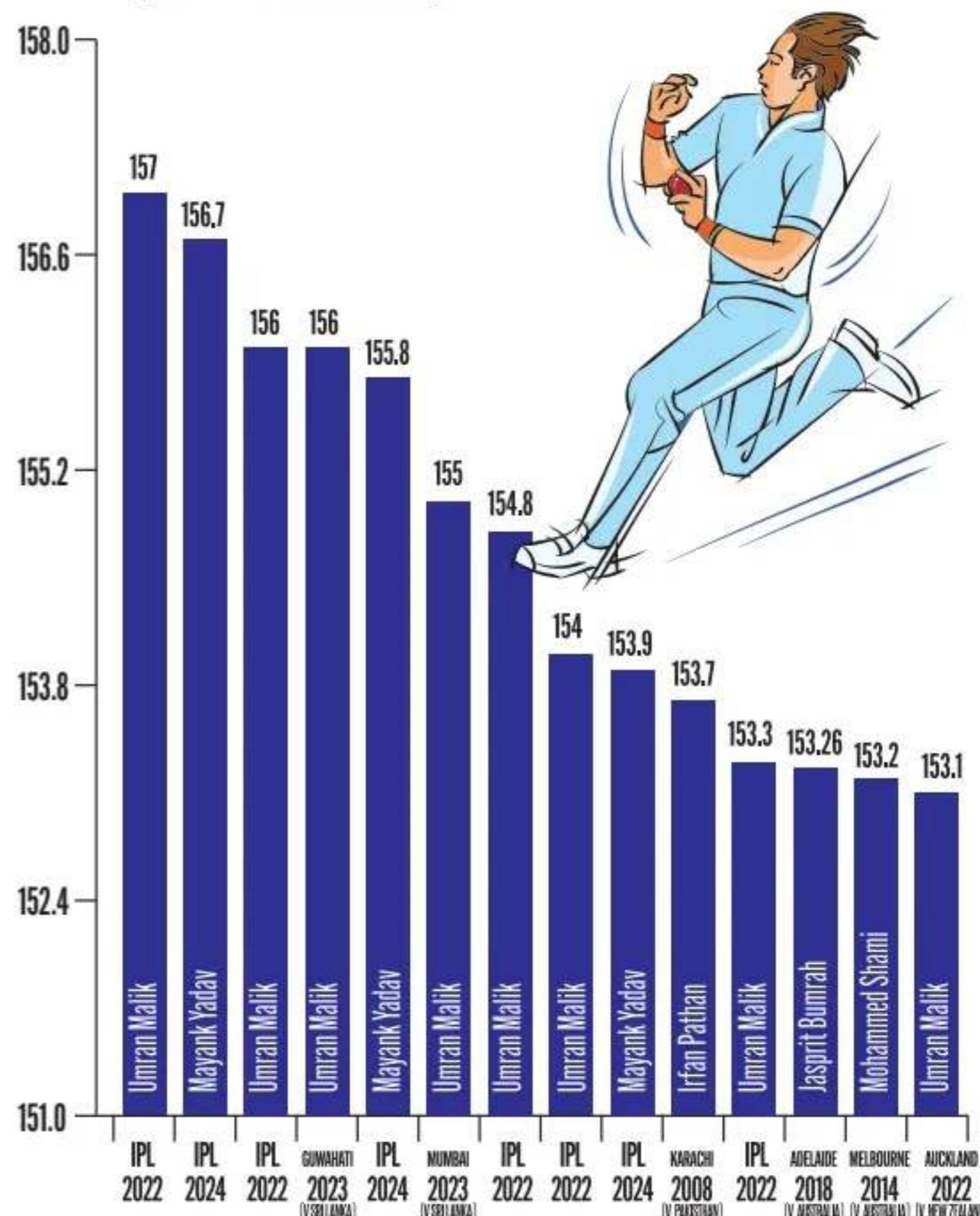
Bhave, however, begs to differ. "It's advantageous to give fast bowlers opportunities while they're still at their peak. In India, there's a tendency to subject fast bowlers to the grind of first-class cricket, leading some to lose their pace or skills over time."

Mayank, of course, must be groomed along the way with the right guidance and good facilities. While the excitement is understandable, the selectors will take a cue from the routes charted by another pace sensation, Umran. The Sunrisers Hyderabad

Fastest deliveries in IPL (where recorded)



Fastest deliveries by Indian bowlers (where recorded)



Statistics: Rajneesh Gupta



bowler burst onto the scene in 2022 with searing pace and was fast-tracked into the Indian team, but has since retreated to the peripheries, having featured in just 10 ODIs and eight T20Is. His inexperience showed, as he missed his lengths often and was guilty of spraying the ball on both sides of the wicket.

Umran's case is not a one-off. Kolkata Knight Riders batter Venkatesh Iyer earned a call-up to the national squad in 2021 after he played a stellar role in the second leg of that year's IPL to turn Knight Riders' season around. But after just two ODIs and nine T20Is, Iyer too has been searching for a comeback opportunity.

Another example is KKR mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy, who made the cut for the 2021 T20 World Cup squad after having impressed since the 2020 IPL where he took big wickets.

However, in IPL 2022, his form plummeted so much that he was benched for three games. He eventually fell out of favour with the

national selectors after playing only six T20Is.

For now, Mayank has shown glimpses of talent that promise to make him a force for a long time and a generational cricketer. "His delivery to dismiss RCB's Cameron Green (above), who hails from Western Australia where fast bowlers abound, speaks volumes. Mayank consistently clocks speeds of 150-plus, a feat few can match. As a fast-bowling coach, I take pride in India's potential to produce superior fast bowlers in the years to come," Sekar said.

Given the way Mayank is bowling, there are already talks of carrying him as a spare pacer for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Australia later this year. But five-day cricket will put too much load on his body, reckons Sekar. 'To succeed there, he needs to work on his technique, especially his feet alignment. His front leg is going slightly outside the back leg; as of now, he is not using the non-bowling arm much. These are the things he could fine-tune,' he said.

Sekar has been following Mayank

for the last three years. He saw him perform in the U-23 category in Pondicherry and then again in 2022 during the Mumbai Indians trials. He knew then that Mayank was cut from a different cloth.

But Mayank's focus for now needs to be on being fit. He walked off after bowling just one over against Gujarat Titans in Lucknow. Before he left the field, Mayank's pace had dropped below 140 kmph, and he was hit for three boundaries in the fourth over of Gujarat Titans's unsuccessful chase of LSG's 163 for 5. Mayank has had a history of injuries, which ruled him out of the last IPL and restricted him to just one first-class match.

LSG CEO Vinod Bisht said: "Mayank felt soreness in lower abdominal area and as a precaution we are managing his work load over next week. We hope to see him soon in the field."

Needless to say, Mayank needs to be wrapped up in cotton wool while he continues to bowl thunderbolts and tick the boxes he is required to tick on a given day. India selection will take care of itself.

FROM SONNET CLUB NETS TO IPL STARDOM

Mayank Yadav may have just made his IPL debut, but his searing pace and accuracy have **already earned him** plenty of admirers on and off the pitch.

SPORTZPICS / IPL



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He caught Tarak Sinha's attention at the Sonnet Club nets six years ago. Sinha could not take his eyes off this lanky, consistently quick bowler. In fact he was so impressed with his talent that he had instructed the Sonnet Club officials to not charge any fees from him. For Sinha's assistant, Davendra Sharma, the boy looked like a discovery worth investing in. "He had walked in with his father (Prabhu). Mayank's determination to play for Delhi was evident in his approach. The senior

group noticed him, and soon he rattled them with his raw pace. We found a fantastic talent, and I am glad he built on the guidance from Ustaad Ji (Sinha)," recalled Sharma.

"**I always wanted my son to play cricket, and that too as a fast bowler,**" said Prabhu Yadav, who ensured he provided Mayank with the platform to chase his cricketing dreams. Prabhu was self-employed, manufacturing sirens and lights for police vehicles.

"I went to a club in West Delhi where he was not encouraged even to join, let alone play. Then I heard of the Sonnet Club, where Mr. Sinha was famous for being an unbiased coach. That was the best decision of

my life, and I chose to take Mayank to Mr. Sinha. That was the only time I went with him to the club because I was assured that Mr. Sinha and Davendra Ji were the best people to care for my son," said Prabhu.

Mayank's blistering pace in Delhi caused discomfort for the batters. And he relished the challenge on the grandest stage, as demonstrated in his standout performance for the Lucknow Super Giants against the Punjab Kings in the 2024 Indian Premier League match.

The ball thudded onto the bat as Mayank bowled with a splendid rhythm.

"His rhythm is his strength," said Gursharan Singh, who pushed for

Speed demon: During his spell against Royal Challengers Bengaluru, Mayank Yadav (right) clocked 156.7 kph, the fastest delivery of IPL 2024. (Below) Mayank Yadav and coach Davendra Sharma paying tribute to the late Tarak Sinha. K. MURALIKUMAR & SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Mayank's selection in the Delhi team for the Vijay Hazare tournament in December 2021. "He got wickets (six in two matches — three each against Saurashtra and Haryana) but essentially confirmed his talent."

Sinha's passing two years ago could've derailed Mayank's aspirations, but Sharma was there to support him.

"Ustad Ji was fond of him. He was convinced he was India material, and Mayank realised he had to work hard to attain his goals. The lad was raw, but he was different. He made batters back away, which was uncommon in Delhi cricket," said Sharma.

Recalling Mayank's early days at the Sonnet, Sharma said: "He was amazingly accurate. For a fast bowler, it is difficult to bowl a consistent line, but Mayank was outstanding."

Sharma told Mayank to improve his fitness. His ability to bowl fast was innate. "I just let him be and bowl fast," said Sharma.

The IPL match in Lucknow confirmed Mayank's ability to bowl at 150-plus, and suddenly, the batters looked at him with awe. At 102 for no loss, Punjab was cruising when Mayank put a brake on its chase by taking the wickets of Jonny Bairstow,



Prabhsimran Singh, and Jitesh Sharma. It was a performance that earned Mayank Player of the Match honours on his IPL debut.

"I was not surprised at all," said Sharma. "He belonged to the big league because of his speed and the gift of bringing the ball in. It was the only time for Mayank to make an impression nationally."

The Ranji Trophy debut against Maharashtra in 2022 was a welcome step in his pursuit to play for India, but a hamstring injury halted his progress.

"The injury was a blow. He could not play first-class cricket," Sharma pointed out.

Mayank turned out for Delhi in the Vijay Hazare (10 wickets in five matches) and Syed Mushtaq Ali (seven wickets in six matches) tournaments in 2022. "He worked tirelessly on his fitness. Mayank has a

natural ability to push himself, and I am glad no one asked him to cut down on his pace," said Sharma. In 2023, Mayank finished with five wickets in four matches in the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 Trophy, seven in five in the Vijay Hazare Trophy, and an impressive 12 in five Deodhar Trophy appearances.

With a classy high-arm action, Mayank is known to attack the off-stump. Most fast bowlers spray the ball to generate speed, but Mayank's strength is his accuracy. "He does not stray, which puts pressure on the batters," noted Sharma.

The 21-year-old is undoubtedly surprised by the praise heaped upon him following his IPL debut, but coaches at the Sonnet Club always knew his potential. "It's not easy to play him consistently on the front foot. The batters are often





WITH A CLASSY HIGH-ARM ACTION, MAYANK IS KNOWN TO ATTACK THE OFF-STUMP. MOST FAST BOWLERS SPRAY THE BALL TO GENERATE SPEED, BUT MAYANK'S STRENGTH IS HIS ACCURACY

caught short of time adjusting because Mayank is quick — consistently quick," said Gursharan, the Delhi team's batting coach. It was Mayank's fortune that he got the support of Gursharan, who is well aware of the system in Delhi cricket.

The Delhi selectors often

overlook talented players, as seen in their past neglect of Virender Sehwag, Virat Kohli, and Rishabh Pant during their initial trials. In 2018, Mayank initially faced rejection but compelled the selectors to take notice of his impressive bowling speed, causing discomfort and fear among opposing batters in local tournaments.

Such pace at such local platforms was unnerving for the batters; quite a few were saved because of the helmets. "We won the Premier III Division DDCA title in 2023, thanks to his impactful bowling," recalled Sharma.

raved about Mayank in a social media post, even as former India wicketkeeper Vijay Dahiya took pride in his decision to rope the Delhi speedster into the Lucknow squad.

Dahiya was stunned to watch Mayank in action at the nets during the Vijay Hazare Trophy two years ago. He needed little time to convince the Lucknow franchise to invest in Mayank. Known as a promising talent scout, Dahiya knew immediately that he had found a "super talent." Mayank earned a spot to play in the IPL and, in the process, may have taken a massive step towards achieving an India slot.

The season ahead holds promise for Mayank, already in the books of the national selectors, where Ajit Agarkar knows a thing or two about giving breaks to fast bowlers.

Mayank can always take that journey by getting drafted as a nets bowler when India travels for the ICC T20 World Cup in June and Australia for the Test series. India may be tempted to pick him for Australia, where the pitches suit his style.

At 6'1", the 21-year-old Mayank is a hot property in Indian cricket. He can bowl a deceptive slower one and unleash a vicious bouncer, which makes him a dangerous bowler, especially on helpful pitches.

His well-wishers hope he maintains his fitness and serves the national team.

Mayank joins a long list of West Delhi cricketers who rose based on their resilience: Sehwag, Kohli, Ishant, Shikhar Dhawan, Amit Mishra, Gautam Gambhir, Aakash Chopra, Atul Wassan, Raman Lamba, K.P. Bhaskar, Sanjeev Sharma and Ashish Nehra.

"A fast bowler of his potential is rare," emphasised Sharma. With Mayank's mind-blowing speed, Indian cricket can look forward to some exciting times.

Good old days: Mayank Yadav (standing third from R-L) with his teammates at Sonnet Club.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



DARYL MITCHELL WALKS THE TIGHTROPE TO EQUILIBRIUM

New Zealand and CSK batter Mitchell talks about the **risk-and-reward** equation that forms the foundation of his batting.

Sahil Mathur

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Daryl Mitchell began his international cricket career relatively late, debuting in T20Is at 27, in Tests at 28, and in ODIs at 29. Despite his delayed start, he has accumulated 4445 runs across formats for New Zealand since his debut, with only Kane Williamson (5333) and Tom Latham (4581) scoring more. Mitchell sees his late entry as a blessing, as it has allowed him to develop both as a cricketer and as a person.

"I guess playing international cricket at a little bit of a later age, you could say, is a blessing. It allowed me to learn my game at the domestic level for a period and look out not only for the cricketer that I want to be and how I want to play but also for the person I want to be off the field as well," he said during a select media interaction.

"I just love competing. That's what drives me — getting stuck in whatever job I've got to do to help us try to win games at cricket," he added. His competitive nature stems from that of his father, John Mitchell, a former rugby player and coach. During most of his school holidays, he would spend time on the field with his father, honing his skills and catching the ball.

"There are probably things that have rubbed off on me that I

probably didn't realise as a kid growing up. I was able to experience different sporting environments as a kid," he said, adding that eventually it was cricket, which he was most passionate about and played in the backyard.

Mitchell's performance against spin was widely discussed during the 2023 World Cup in India. He made history by becoming the first player to score two centuries against India in a single World Cup edition, with scores of 127 in Dharamsala and 134 in Mumbai. Mitchell attributes this success to his late start in international cricket, which allowed him to refine his game, utilise his physique effectively, and learn from players worldwide.

"It allowed me to take a while to get to these sorts of stages before I was able to work out how I wanted to go about things. Being a New Zealander, I guess naturally the wickets aren't conducive to spin," Mitchell, who hails from Hamilton, explained. "So, it's finding ways to work out what works best for you. I'm 6 feet 3 inches and weigh 100 kg, so it's about using my size and base to find ways to put pressure back on the spinners."

"We've obviously got a guy called Kane Williamson on our team back home who's a pretty good player of spin, and I've learned a lot from him," he added.

Striking spinners at over 123 and averaging 31 in T20s is one of the

reasons why Chennai Super Kings (CSK) spent Rs 14 crore on him and gave him a spot in the middle order.

"That's the cool thing about batting in the middle order — it's never the same. Each innings is always different, and that's something. I pride myself on being able to adapt to different situations and work out ways to keep trying to extend partnerships and put pressure back on the bowlers," Mitchell said.

To him, the method of scoring runs doesn't matter — whether they look good or not — as long as they achieve the desired outcome.

"My blueprint is pretty simple, whatever format that might be. You just tinker with the risk vs reward aspect of the game, whether it's Test cricket or T20. It's making sure again that you just stick it out in the middle and just adapt to whatever format it might be."



Raking in the millions: In December 2023, Chennai Super Kings acquired Daryl Mitchell for ₹14 crore at the IPL auction. S. R. RAGHUNATHAN



»
STRIKING SPINNERS AT OVER 123 AND AVERAGING 31 IN T20S IS ONE OF THE REASONS WHY CSK SPENT A HUGE AMOUNT ON MITCHELL
«

» PHOTOLINE
INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

1st

Poised: Rachin Ravindra smashed 46 runs in 20 balls to give Chennai Super Kings a flying start against Gujarat Titans. S. R. RAGHUNATHAN



2nd

Middled: The spine of CSK's middle order, Shivam Dube, scored 51 runs off 23 with the help of five sixes and two fours against at Chepauk. CSK defeated GT by 63 runs.

S. R. RAGHUNATHAN



3rd

Punched: Abhishek Sharma (63 off 23) and Travis Head (62 off 24) set up a solid platform for Sunrisers Hyderabad to score big against Mumbai Indians. AP



4th

Klaasy: Heinrich Klaasen hit seven sixes and four fours on his way to 80 in 34 balls as SRH posted the highest-ever IPL total — 277 — against Mumbai.

K. R. DEEPAK



5th

Down but not out: Tilak Varma hit 64 off 34 as Mumbai Indians fought till the end to chase the record total and only fell short by 31 runs. K. R. DEEPAK

6th

Revival: After some not-so-memorable seasons, Riyan Parag has begun this IPL edition with a bang. The 22-year-old set up Rajasthan Royals' 12-run win over Delhi Capitals with an unbeaten 84. SHIV KUMAR

PUSHPAKAR



7th

Power play: Phil Salt (30 off 20) and Sunil Narine (47 off 22) smacked 85 runs inside the Power Play to take Kolkata Knight Riders to a comfortable seven-wicket win over Royal Challengers.

PTI



8th

Rocketman: Debutant fast bowler Mayank Yadav rocked Punjab Kings' middle order to help Lucknow Super Giants defend the 200-run target comfortably. SANDEEP SAXENA



9th

Silent assassin: Mohit Sharma's economical spell of 3/25 laid the foundation for Gujarat Titans' seven-wicket win over Sunrisers Hyderabad. VIJAY SONEJI

10th

Guess who's back: Rishabh Pant found his rhythm against Chennai Super Kings as he raised his bat to celebrate a fifty after 465 days. K.R. DEEPAK



11th

Vintage: M.S. Dhoni played his first knock of the season in Visakhapatnam and smacked 37 off 16 balls including three sixes. However, it came in a losing cause as DC beat CSK by 20 runs. K.R. DEEPAK





12th

New ball, old story: Trent Boult picked two wickets in first over of the game, and another in the next over to derail Mumbai Indians' innings that eventually won the match for Rajasthan Royals.

EMMANUAL YOGINI



13th

Scorcher: Mayank Yadav flew high in Bengaluru after another breathtaking performance—3/14—of his helped Lucknow Super Giants gather two more points.

K. MURALIKUMAR



14th

License to kill: Knight Riders' opener Sunil Narine provided another power-packed start as he scored 85 in 39 balls against Delhi Capitals. KKR smacked 272—IPL's second-highest total ever and secured a 106-run victory. K.R. DEEPAK



15th

Shashank Redemption: Shashank Singh's counter-attacking 61 off 29 balls took Punjab Kings home in an away match against Gujarat Titans chasing a 200-run target. VIJAY SONEJI



16th

Strong start: Abhishek Sharma hit four sixes and three fours in his 12-ball 37 to set up Sunrisers' chase on a tricky Hyderabad pitch against CSK.

B.JOTHI RAMALINGAM



17th

Centurions: Jos Buttler (100 off 58) stole Virat Kohli's (113 from 71) thunder as he helped Rajasthan Royals win four out of four games by beating Royal Challengers Bengaluru comfortably by six wickets. AFP



18th

4, 6, 6, 6, 4, 6: Romario Shepherd blasted 39 off 10 balls including 32 from the 20th over by Anrich Nortje to lift Mumbai Indians' score to 234. He then picked a wicket too as MI defeated Delhi Capitals by 29 runs to register its first win of the season.

EMMANUAL YOGINI

19th

Wrecker-in-chief: Yash Thakur claimed his career-best T20 figures 5/30—and the first five-wicket haul of the season to help Lucknow Super Giants defend a modest 164-run target against Gujarat Titans. SANDEEP SAXENA



20th

Turning up: Ravindra Jadeja struck on the first ball of his spell—also the first wicket for a spinner at Chepauk this season—and ended up with 3/18 against Knight Riders. Jadeja completed 100 catches in IPL later in the innings. CSK won by seven wickets.

R. RAGU

» INTERVIEW

HOW RA'CHILL' RAVINDRA CLICKED FOR CSK

In the 2023 ODI World Cup in India, the Kiwi batter scored 578 runs, with **three centuries**, while averaging 64.22 and striking at over 106.

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Chennai Super Kings' Rachin Ravindra began his Indian Premier League (IPL) career with a boundary off the first ball.

Within six deliveries, he was on 17 and got out off his 15th ball, having already scored 37. In his next innings, he scored 46 in 20 balls.

This isn't the first time Ravindra has begun a tournament with such a flourish. In the 2023 ODI World Cup held in India, the Kiwi batter hit 123 in his first game, against England, and finished the tournament with two more centuries, scoring 578 runs at an average of

IN HIS IPL DEBUT, RACHIN RAVINDRA SCORED 37 OFF 15 AGAINST RCB, FOLLOWED BY A 46 OFF 20 AGAINST GUJARAT TITANS



64.22 while striking at over 106.

Add to that the fact that, barring five T20Is in 2021, he had never played in the top order for New Zealand.

How did the 24-year-old manage to make Indian conditions his own?

"I guess that's the thing with cricket and sport in general — things can happen quickly," Ravindra said.

It helped that he played plenty of cricket during his teenage years in India, practising with his former Wellington and New Zealand A coach, Sriram Krishnamurthy, who is now with CSK academy.

"I think through my teenage years, and you play on pitches that aren't quite as good as what these ones have been out here. So, you learn a few skills and adapt, which is quite important," Ravindra said during a media interaction.

"Working with Sri has been great. I've known him since I was 15. Just about learning about different things, and he's good at having a hard word every now and again. He can tell me when something's not right. I think it helps having the familiarity around it being in India and having played a lot of cricket here," he added.

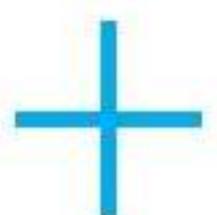
After an impressive show in the World Cup in October and November, it was only a matter of time before an IPL franchise would pick him in the auction held in December. It turned out to be CSK, which got him for Rs. 1.8 crore, although as a backup opener to compatriot Devon Conway.

As things turned out, Conway, who scored 672 runs in IPL 2023, got injured before the current season began, opening up an opportunity for Ravindra to face the new ball.

"It's sort of big shoes to fill. If I can do half (of) what he does, it'll be really good for the team," he added.

The CSK management hasn't given him any specific instructions on how to go about things, and the "chill" environment in the team has helped him be himself.

"They talk about strike rates and all that stuff. Role clarity comes from playing your game, and that's



Rachin Ravindra shone against spin in the ODI World Cup with an average of 141 and a strike rate nearing 118.

Early days: Rachin Ravindra's focus remains more on learning and understanding how he can contribute to the team. REUTERS



important for us all as a team. So, just do our things in the T20 game, and we'll be fine. Everyone's different. The freedom to go out and play your own game, not trying to be someone else, probably helps a lot in that," he explained.

One of the most remarkable things about the youngster has been how easily he has adapted to batting at the top and also how he played spin bowling during the World Cup, averaging 141 against the tweakers and striking them at almost 118.

"I've sometimes batted at the top

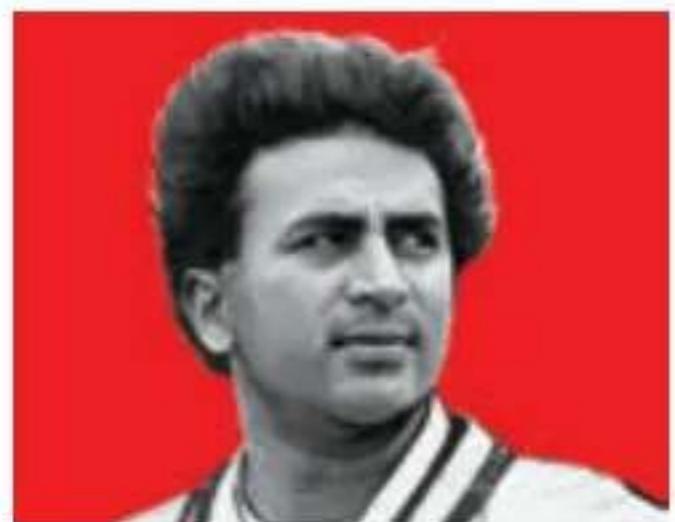
for my domestic team (Wellington) in New Zealand. You also have opportunities to face a new ball, which is great for me. It was more about how I can get better against playing spin and put a little bit more pressure on the bowlers in that way," he said.

"It was just like a development thing being in the nets and hitting specific shots that I wanted to work on. And lucky enough, it sort of happened. It took a long time. I practised these shots for years, and it was nice to get in the middle, and

you have a nice wicket to play on, and suddenly it all falls into place."

Ravindra is aware that despite his career's rapid rise — both on the international arena and in the IPL — he's still early in his career. His focus remains more on learning and understanding how he can contribute to the team.

"It's just about trying to get better day by day, and even in the nets, learning from the guys around me, learning from Flem (Stephen Fleming), and learning from M.S. (Dhoni)."



ON THE WRITE LINE

Sunil Gavaskar



FOR MORE
STORIES

RANJI TROPHY HEROICS NOT CELEBRATED AS MUCH AS ONE-OFF IPL EXPLOITS

Just one performance here and there catapults an **unknown player** to the fringes of the Indian team.

The one thing that the IPL has done is pretty much ensure that it is a shortcut to the India cap. Just one performance here and there catapults an unknown player to the fringes of the Indian team. Many of them fade away in the next season once the novelty and the unknown nature of their game are sorted out by the analysts. Already, some players and their families and coaches have got more media exposure than ever before. No wonder a solitary performance in the IPL pretty much takes you close to the India cap.

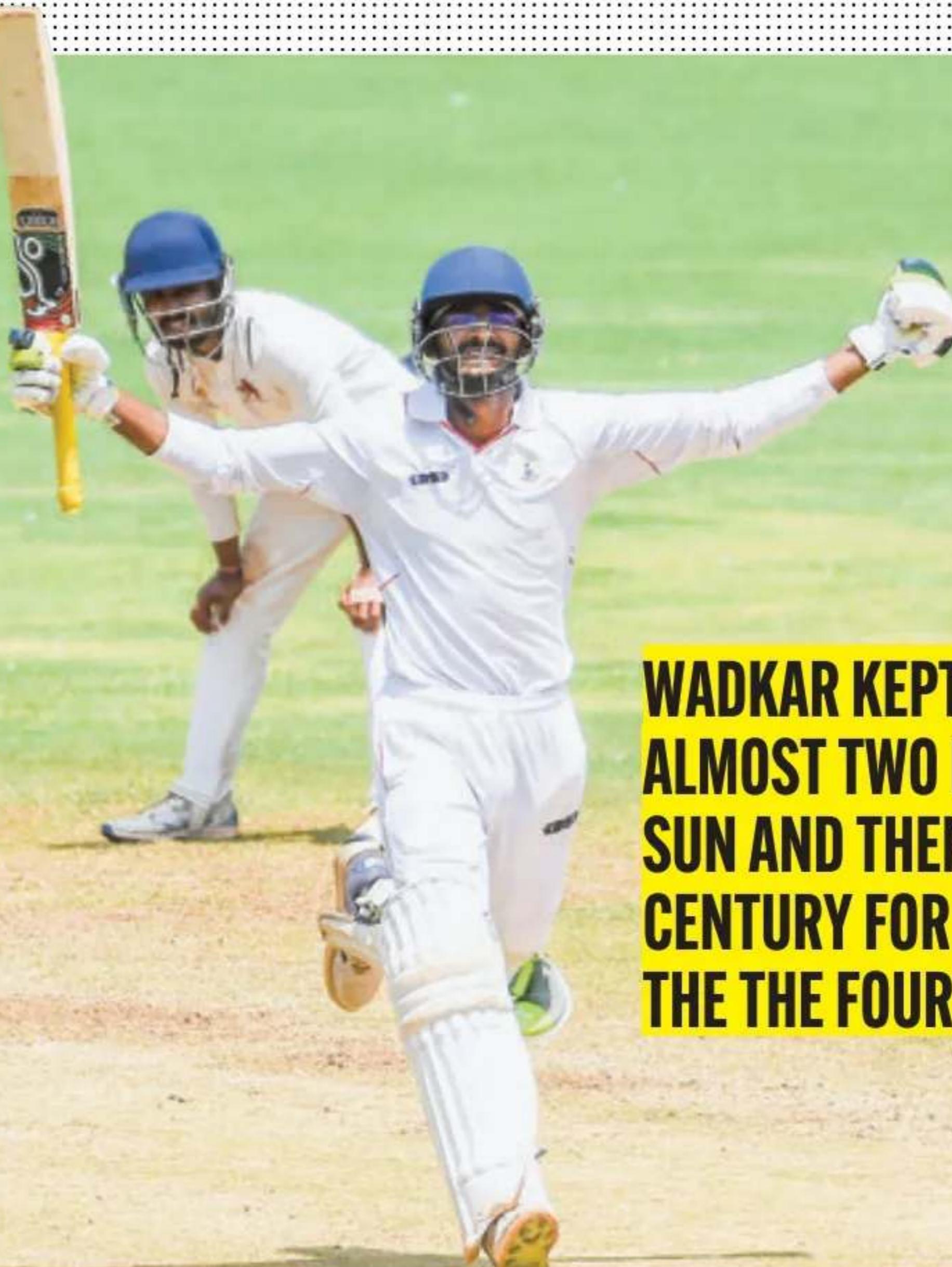
Sadly, the Ranji Trophy, which should be the national championship, has been relegated way below the white-ball tournament. Take, for example, the magnificent century scored by Vidarbha's captain Akshay Wadkar in the finals of the Ranji Trophy; none of his family members or anybody else has been interviewed. Don't forget that Wadkar had also kept wickets for almost two days in the hot sun as the Mumbai batters tried to put a score beyond the reach of Vidarbha in the fourth innings. To score a hundred despite that physical and mental tiredness with the challenge to stop the Mumbai batters deserved much, much more coverage than what he got. The left-handed all-rounder Harsh Dubey of Vidarbha, who captured a five-for and batted stubbornly in the second innings, has got almost zero coverage for that magnificent effort.

Contrast this with the huge media coverage

that the parents, kindergarten teachers, uncles, coaches, and sports shop owners, who may have been marginally involved, get for being around the IPL performer after just one performance. The player also suddenly talks about how he was deprived by someone or another, perhaps failing to understand that he may not have deserved to have been picked up at all at that particular time. It looks like Indian coaches are fair game. If all these one-hit wonders also bring out the deficiencies of the overseas coaches, then they could be taken seriously. The overseas coaches may actually pass the domestic member of their franchise in the lobby of the hotel without even recognising the player. Still, nothing will be said about them. The Indian coaches are the ones who have seen domestic cricket and are, therefore, well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of India's domestic players.

Not too long ago, another former Mumbai player, Sulakshan Kulkarni, came in for criticism following his comments after Tamil Nadu's loss in the Ranji Trophy semifinal against Mumbai. Once the match was over, when asked by the media, he commented that Tamil Nadu lost the match when the decision to bat first was taken instead of fielding, despite earlier being decided by the think tank to field first. Some of Tamil Nadu's former players and Test stalwarts went up in arms against that statement, totally forgetting that it was made after the match was over.

Many times there are turning points in a



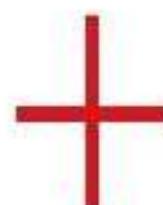
WADKAR KEPT WICKETS FOR ALMOST TWO DAYS IN THE HOT SUN AND THEN SCORED A CENTURY FOR VIDARBHA IN THE THE FOURTH INNINGS

match, and in this game, taking the wrong decision to bat first after winning the toss was the biggest turning point. One could argue that this could have been conveyed to the association in the confidential report given at the end of the tournament. But if the coach is asked by the media and he has given his frank assessment, then that should be taken on board rather than trying to stamp on him as being an outsider. To suggest that he thought like a Mumbaikar and spoke like a Mumbaikar is completely missing the point that Mumbai have won the Ranji Trophy almost more times than the rest of the states put together.

Tamil Nadu, despite producing some of the most brilliant cricketers for India, have won the

Ranji Trophy only twice, and maybe, just maybe, a bit of thinking like Mumbaikars may help them win it more often. Don't forget that this season Tamil Nadu qualified for the knockouts after six years, and they almost put it across Mumbai in that semifinal. Mumbai cricketers may not have fancy degrees in education, but over the years, they have shown cricketing intelligence and commonsense, which often make the difference between winning and losing.

How one longs for the day when Indians will support Indian cricketers and those in the cricketing ecosystem, like the Australians, South Africans, and English cricketers, support each other.



Tamil Nadu, despite producing some of the most brilliant cricketers for India, have won the Ranji Trophy only twice, and maybe, just maybe, a bit of thinking like Mumbaikars may help them win it more often.



Inspiration: "I am a big fan of Kobe Bryant and the Mamba mentality, so whenever I am a bit low, I listen to his old podcasts and draw inspiration." R.V. MOORTHY

« Everyone has their own story; it's about how you write it »

DHRUV JUREL

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On a scorching Sunday afternoon at a cafe in Jaipur, Dhruv Jurel, the young wicketkeeper-batter, is gracefully balancing his mealtime with fan interactions — signing autographs, and posing for selfies.

Debuting in the 4-1 Test series win against England at home, Jurel's composure under pressure underscored his readiness for the big stage. Yet he remains grounded, attributing his success to the unwavering backing of his IPL team, Rajasthan Royals.

Spotted and nurtured by the franchise three seasons ago, Jurel honed his skills under the guidance of Zubin Bharucha, the High-Performance Director.

As the son of a Kargil war veteran, Jurel's focus on continuous improvement defines his approach. The 23-year-old from Agra wants to repay Rajasthan Royals' faith in him.

Can you summarise your journey from being a rookie to earning a Test cap for India in the past year?

It was an unexpected journey. After being on the bench for a season, I made my debut for Rajasthan Royals in 2023, and to be honest, I was not thinking too far ahead. My only target was to play as many matches as possible in the IPL and make my team win. So, I would prepare for about eight to nine hours a day, even during the off-season. I knew that I couldn't be thinking about what can happen in the future, but I focused on keeping myself ready for any opportunity.

Since my father was in the Indian Army, I always wanted to join the Armed Forces or the Indian Navy, but that did not happen. Since then, I wanted to serve the nation by playing cricket.

So yes, the last year has made me realise *kahan se kahan leke jaati hai zindagi* (you never know where life takes you), and all I have is gratitude. The journey has not only boosted my confidence but has also made me understand that one should never shy away from working hard. The rest will follow.

It's a great feeling to have played Test cricket for India. For me, it's the

ultimate format of the game, and there's a sweetness to it: as you play over five days, you can never take things easy, and when the hard work that the team puts in over the five days gets rewarded with a win, you feel the happiest.

In the England Test series, your strong wicketkeeping and batting earned praise, while banter with teammate Sarfaraz Khan unsettled the visiting team...

(Laughs) Those are normal things. As a wicketkeeper, it's my job to gauge the batter's movement and accordingly alert the bowlers. But in Dharamsala, it was Sarfaraz who predicted that Ollie Pope would step out, and that assessment helped both me and Kuldeep (Yadav).

As a batter, I have realised that while at the crease, if someone constantly talks behind your back, you sort of lose your concentration. So, we adopted a similar approach. The aim was to irritate the English batters by constantly talking. *Thoda kaan khana* (Being in someone's ears) is good at times because it not only breaks the batter's



The giant leap: Earlier this year, Dhruv Jurel, Rajasthan Royals wicketkeeper-batter, earned his maiden call-up to the India side.

GETTYIMAGES

concentration but also allows the bowling team to find breakthroughs. So, when we are on the pitch, we make it a point to constantly talk from the back and bother the batters. That trick seemed to have worked against England.

Wicketkeeping is not an easy job, especially catching edges and making quick stumpings. Did you focus on specific areas to prepare for this challenge in Test cricket?

It's all about practice. Things get a bit difficult in red-ball cricket because you need to judge a swinging delivery. In Tests, after 80 overs, you take a new ball, so it's another challenge to adapt to it.

While batting during the Test series, I even faced new balls, so you need to be ready for those situations.

Since I am a middle-order batter, I hardly get to face the new ball in the white-ball format, so I can still train with old balls. But you can't afford to do that in red-ball cricket. In Tests, you need to face new balls or be ready to face reverse swing. So, one needs to practise hard. Adaptability is the key. You need to have a clear-cut vision and approach things differently for red-ball and white-ball cricket.

How do you handle the pressure?

A year ago, I would feel the pressure or be nervous ahead of a big game. But ever since I have played for Rajasthan Royals and the Indian team, I don't feel any

pressure. If you do a reality check, you will find that no cricketer could maintain an upward graph forever in his career. Just like success, failures are also part of the game, and they come suddenly.

I also know that if I don't lead a disciplined life, take things easy, or become a bit lackadaisical in my training regime, there is a possibility of downfall. Hence, it is important to keep working hard because that's in your control and not crib about the uncontrollables.

You said that those few weeks with the Indian team were a learning experience. What did you learn?

I got a chance to rub shoulders with some of the legends of the game and pick their brains. It was also a reality check for me. Ultimately, it's about sustainability. A lot of players have featured for India, but not everyone could hang in there, so I need to ensure that I don't get carried away. I genuinely believe that *jo bhi milestones banaya hai, woh toh insaan hi banaya hai* (milestones are set by human beings after all), so if they can do it, why can't I? And, who knows, I can do even better than them. Everyone has their own story; it's about how you write it.

With Rishabh Pant and K. L. Rahul back in the mix, the competition has gone up for the wicketkeeper-batter's slot. Do you enjoy this healthy competition?

I am a big fan of Kobe Bryant and the Mamba mentality, so whenever I am a bit low, I listen to his old podcasts and draw inspiration. I don't see it as a competition because, at the end of the day, everyone is playing for India and

winning matches. That's what matters.

I keep asking myself whether I am moving forward and taking my game to the next level, as I believe that we compete with ourselves and not with anyone else.

With the game evolving, has the role of a wicketkeeper-batter become more difficult, especially in white-ball cricket?

Every wicketkeeper-batter has his designated batting position, and people often criticise players without understanding their job. Batting at No. 7 or No. 8 is always difficult. I had a conversation with (MS) Dhoni *bhaiya* regarding this, and he told me that "if you bat at No. 7 or No. 8, failures are certain. You need to cut out the noise and not think about what people say. If you manage to win two out of 10 games for your team, that's enough..."

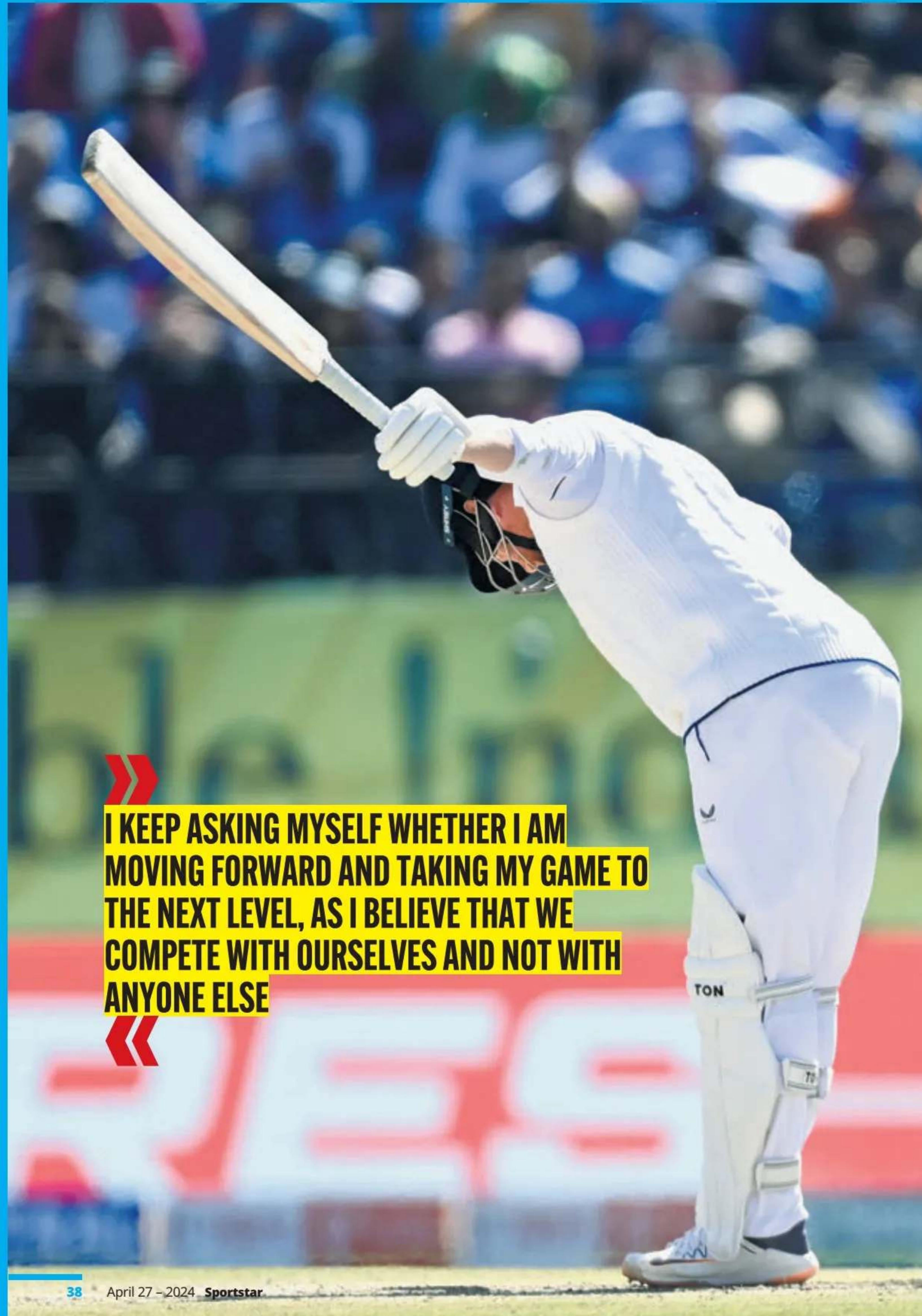
Those words inspired me a lot. When you bat down the order in a high-pressure situation, you don't know what the bowlers are thinking, and you can't afford to waste time. People often consider wicketkeepers as additional batters, but it's not always easy to bat in tricky situations.

(Smiles) The competition will be there, but you just need to focus on your game and move on.

Soon after the Test series against England got over, Rohit Sharma took to social media to post a picture with Sarfaraz, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Shubman Gill. What has been the impact of Rohit on your career so far?

Off the ground, Rohit *bhai* treats us like his younger brothers, but on the field, he is pretty strict, and those videos that have gone viral indicate

« It's a great feeling to have played Test cricket for India. For me, it's the ultimate format of the game »



» I KEEP ASKING MYSELF WHETHER I AM
MOVING FORWARD AND TAKING MY GAME TO
THE NEXT LEVEL, AS I BELIEVE THAT WE
COMPETE WITH OURSELVES AND NOT WITH
ANYONE ELSE

«



Rewarding outing: Dhruv Jurel was nimble on his feet and acrobatic in his movements behind the stumps.

GETTYIMAGES

how strictly he manages the youngsters (*laughs*). It's fun to be around Rohit *bhai*, as you get to learn so much from him.

You have worked with two tough taskmasters: Rahul Dravid and Kumar Sangakkara. What have you learned from the two?

When I was part of the India U-19 team, Rahul sir was my coach. So, when I entered the senior team's dressing room, I felt comfortable since he was around.

I have worked with Sanga sir for three years. He never talks negatively, and even in tricky times, he backs me. As a young player, you need security, and Sanga sir has ensured that.

Initially, your father was not in favour of you pursuing the game, but now that you've made it to India's Test team, what's the reaction back home?

Now people have started recognising me, and of course, there's a bit of financial security. Since my father is an Army man, he always believes in staying grounded, and I try to follow in his footsteps. It's a simple thing: *aap ki cricket kitna chalegi*, maximum 10 years, but when you move on from the game, people will judge you as a person.

So, I try to be humble and kind and stay connected to my roots.

I know what I had to go through to come so far. There were times when people told me that I was wasting my time.

But now, if I can inspire even two or three youngsters from Agra, I will consider that a huge achievement. *Paise toh aate jaatein rahenge* (Money will come and go), and in life, all you need is some food and peace, but nothing can be more satisfying than inspiring youngsters to chase their dreams. I will continue doing that.

Big hitting Russell

9 } The number of IPL batters who have the distinction of smashing 200 or more sixes during their careers. KKR's Andre Russell, known for his big hitting, became the latest entrant to this elite group of maximum hitters in IPL cricket history during his unbeaten 64 in 25 balls, with seven sixes and three fours against SRH at the Eden Gardens on 23 March 2024. What is remarkable among this particular group of IPL players is that Russell took the fewest balls to reach the 200 sixes landmark. He needed 1322 balls to hit the 200th maximum of his IPL career, which translates to hitting a six every seven balls.



Kolkata Knight Riders' Andre Russell. K. R. DEEPAK

Quickest (i.e. in fewest balls) to reach 200 sixes in an IPL career

Balls	Batter	Milestone achieved on				Total sixes hit in an IPL career					
		For	Agst	Venue	Date	Teams	Sixes	Mts	Inns	Balls	Balls/6
1322	Andre Russell	KKR	SRH	Kolkata	23 Mar 2024	DC, KKR	203	115	98	1344	6.62
1811	Chris Gayle	RCB	SRH	Bengaluru	13 Apr 2015	KKR, PBKS, RCB	357	142	141	3333	9.34
2055	Kieron Pollard	MI	SRH	Chennai	17 Apr 2021	MI	223	189	171	2316	10.39
2790	AB de Villiers	RCB	MI	Mumbai WS	15 Apr 2019	DC, RCB	251	184	170	3403	13.56
3126	MS Dhoni	CSK	RCB	Bengaluru	21 Apr 2019	CSK, RPS	242	254	220	3757	15.52
3798	Rohit Sharma	MI	KKR	Abu Dhabi	23 Sep 2020	DCh, MI	261	246	241	4818	18.46

523 } The total runs scored in the IPL 2024 match between Sunrisers Hyderabad and Mumbai Indians in Hyderabad on 27 March 2024, which is now the highest match aggregate for not only an IPL match but for any T20 match in history. The run-aggregate surpasses the previous highest of 517 runs in the T20 international match between South Africa and West Indies in Centurion on 26 March 2023. This is only the fifth time the run-aggregate of 500 runs has been crossed in a T20 match.

Highest match run-aggregates in T20 cricket

Match aggregate	Overs	Team1 (total)	Team2 (total)	Venue	Date	Won by
523/8	40.0	SRH (277/3)	MI (246/5)	Hyderabad	27 Mar 2024	SRH by 31 runs
517/9	38.5	West Indies (258/5)	South Africa (259/4, 18.5 ov)	Centurion	26 Mar 2023	SA by 6 wkts
						& 7 balls remaining
515/11	40.0	Multan Sultans (262/3)	Quetta Gladiators (253/8)	Rawalpindi	11 Mar 2023	Multan Sultans by 9 runs
506/10	39.2	Surrey (252/7)	Middlesex (254/3, 19.2 ov)	The Oval	22 Jun 2023	Middlesex by 7 wkts
						& 4 balls remaining
501/12	40.0	Titans (271/3)	Knights (230/9)	Potchefstroom	31 Oct 2022	Titans by 41 runs

Highest match run-aggregates in IPL cricket

Match aggregate	Overs	Team1 (total)	Team2 (total)	Venue	Date	Won by
523/8	40.0	SRH (277/3)	MI (246/5)	Hyderabad	27 Mar 2024	SRH by 31 runs
469/10	40.0	CSK (246/5)	RR (223/5)	Chennai	3 Apr 2010	CSK by 23 runs
459/14	40.0	KKR (245/6)	PBKS (214/8)	Indore	12 May 2018	KKR by 31 runs
458/15	39.5	LSG (257/5)	PBKS (201/10, 19.5 ov)	Mohali	28 Apr 2023	LSG by 56 runs
453/9	40.0	PBKS (230/6)	MI (223/6)	Mumbai WS	11 May 2017	PBKS by 7 runs

277} The total number of runs scored by Sunrisers Hyderabad against Mumbai Indians in Hyderabad on 27 March 2024 is now the highest match total by a side in IPL cricket. Overall, it is the fourth-highest total ever made by a side in T20 cricket history. Meanwhile, Mumbai Indians' 246/5 is the joint fifth-highest total for a chasing side in T20 cricket but the highest for any side chasing in IPL cricket.

Highest team totals in T20 cricket

Total	By	Opponent	Venue	Date	Won by
314/3	Nepal	Mongolia	Hangzhou, China	27 Sep 2023	Nepal by 273 runs
278/3	Afghanistan	Ireland	Dehradun, India	23 Feb 2019	Afghanistan by 84 runs
278/4	Czech Republic	Turkey	Ilfov County, Romania	30 Aug 2019	Czech Rep by 257 runs
277/3	Sunrisers Hyderabad	Mumbai Indians	Hyderabad, India	27 Mar 2024	SRH by 31 runs
275/6	Punjab	Andhra	Ranchi, India	17 Oct 2023	Punjab by 105 runs

Note: Eight days after the Hyderabad game on 3 April 2024, Kolkata Knight Riders registered 272/7 in its 20 overs against Delhi Capitals in Visakhapatnam, the seventh-highest total in T20 history.

Highest team totals in an IPL match during a chase

Total	Batting	Batting	Venue	Date	Result
	2nd	1st			
246/5	MI	SRH	Hyd	27 Mar 2024	MI lost by 31 runs
226/6	RR	KXIP	Sharjah	27 Sep 2020	RR won by 4 wkts
					(3 balls rem)
223/5	RR	CSK	Chennai	3 Apr 2010	RR lost by 23 runs
223/6	MI	KXIP	Mumbai WS	11 May 2017	MI lost by 7 runs

38} The number of sixes in the Hyderabad match is now the maximum hit in any T20 match in history. The Hyderabad side hit 18, while the losing side, Mumbai, had 20 sixes in its chase. This is the most hit in an IPL match, obliterating the previous best tally of 33 sixes achieved on three occasions.

Most sixes hit in a T20 match (by both sides)

Sixes	Team1 (sixes)	Team2 (sixes)	Venue	Date	Won by
38	SRH (18)	MI (20)	Hyderabad	27 Mar 2024	SRH by 31 runs
37	Balkh Legends (23)	Kabul Zwanan (14)	Sharjah	14 Oct 2018	Balkh Legends by 21 runs
37	Jamaica Tallawahs (21)	St. Kitts & Nevis Patriots (16)	Basseterre	10 Sep 2019	Patriots by 4 wkts & 7 balls remaining
36	Titans (17)	Knights (19)	Potchefstroom	31 Oct 2022	Titans by 41 runs

Most sixes hit in an IPL match (by both sides)

Sixes	Team1 (sixes)	Team2 (sixes)	Venue	Date	Won by
38	SRH (18)	MI (20)	Hyd	27 Mar 2024	SRH by 31 runs
33	RCB (16)	CSK (17)	B'luru	25 Apr 2018	CSK by 5 wkts
					(2 balls rem)
33	RR (17)	CSK (16)	Sharjah	22 Sep 2020	RR by 16 runs
33	CSK (17)	RCB (16)	B'luru	17 Apr 2023	CSK by 8 runs

349} The total runs made in the opening match of this year's IPL is now the highest combined total by both sides without any individual registering a fifty score. RCB's Anuj Rawat's 48 was the highest score of the match.

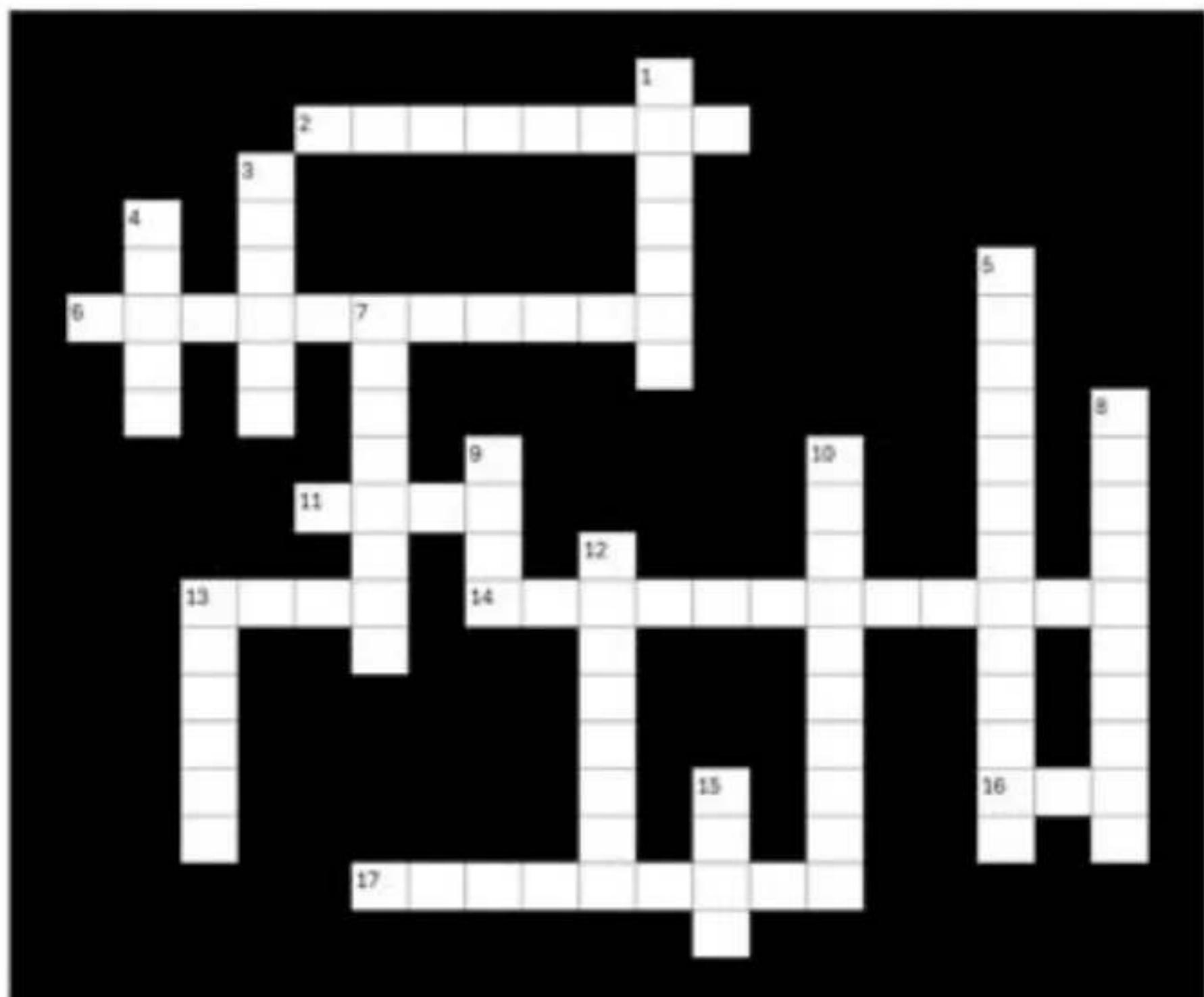
Highest combined total in an IPL match without any 50+ score

Total	Team1 (Total)	Team2 (Total)	Venue	Date	Won by	Highest scorer
349/10	RCB (173/6)	CSK (176/4)	Chennai	22 Mar 2024	CSK	Anuj Rawat (RCB) 48
343/11	RPS (171/8)	GL (172/3)	Rajkot	14 Apr 2017	GL	Brendon McCullum (GL) 49
343/14	KKR (171/6)	CSK (172/8)	Abu Dhabi	26 Sep 2021	CSK	Rahul Tripathi (KKR) 45
342/12	PBKS (179/4)	RR (163/8)	Mohali	23 May 2014	PBKS	Shaun Marsh (PBKS) 40
337/17	KKR (171/9)	SRH (166/8)	Hyderabad	4 May 2023	KKR	Rinku Singh (KKR) 46

All records are correct and updated until 5 April 2024.

CROSSWORD

KARAN PILLAI



SOLUTION TO LAST FORTNIGHT'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 2** Which sport is held over a distance of 42.195 km? (8)
- 6** Who is the most successful athlete in the history of the Paralympic Games? (7, 4)
- 11** How many rings are there in the Olympic flag? (4)
- 13** A term for a zero score in cricket. (4)
- 14** Who holds the record for the fastest ball in cricket — 161.3 km/hr? (6, 6)
- 16** South Africa is abbreviated as ... (3)
- 17** Strawberries and cream are served at this sporting event. (9)

DOWN

- 1** There are three kinds of creases on a cricket pitch — bowling, return and? (7)
- 3** An indoor version of football. (6)
- 4** The only time cricket was part of the Olympics, in 1900, was when it was held in this city. (5)
- 5** Whom did Novak Djokovic level with by winning his 24th Grand Slam title? (8, 5)
- 7** In which city was the first edition of the World Athletics Championships held? (8)
- 8** Who is the first cricketer to score two triple centuries in Tests? (3, 7)
- 9** The ancient Olympics were held

in the honour of which Greek god? (4)

- 10** Who is the oldest person to win an Olympic gold? (5, 5)
- 12** Ebenezer Cobb Morley is regarded as the father of which sport? (8)
- 13** In his prime, Allan ... was one of cricket's most fearsome bowlers. (6)
- 15** Smooth Operator, the song commonly associated with F1 driver Carlos Sainz, is composed by whom? (4)

Small change, big impact:

The IPL this year decided to allow bowlers two bouncers per over instead of the usual one in T20, including international T20 cricket.

SPORTZPICS/IPL



TWO-BOUNCER RULE: TOAST THE SUCCESS, BEWARE OF EXCESS

Short balls, most effective at the death (overs 17-20), went at 11.23 runs per over in IPL 2023, whereas in the current edition, there is a **considerable dip** – 9.02 runs per over.

Dhruva Prasad, Anish Pathiyil

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Twenty20 cricket in general, and the Indian Premier League (IPL) in particular, is constantly reinventing itself and pushing the bar of impossibility to stratospheric levels.

The ongoing season of the IPL, less than a quarter of the way into the league stage, has already witnessed the two biggest team totals in the league's history. It is the fastest-scoring edition of the T20

extravaganza, which has seen cumulative average batting run rates rise by more than a full run since its inception in 2008, from 8.30 to 9.36.

The Impact Player rule, introduced last year, has only played into the

hands of the willow-yielders further, allowing teams to beef up the line-up with specialists.

To offer bowlers some respite, the tournament organisers decided to permit two bouncers in an over this year, doubling their capacity to opt for the short-pitched stuff. The decision came after the two-bouncer-per-over provision, trialled during the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy 2023-24 T20 tournament, received positive feedback.

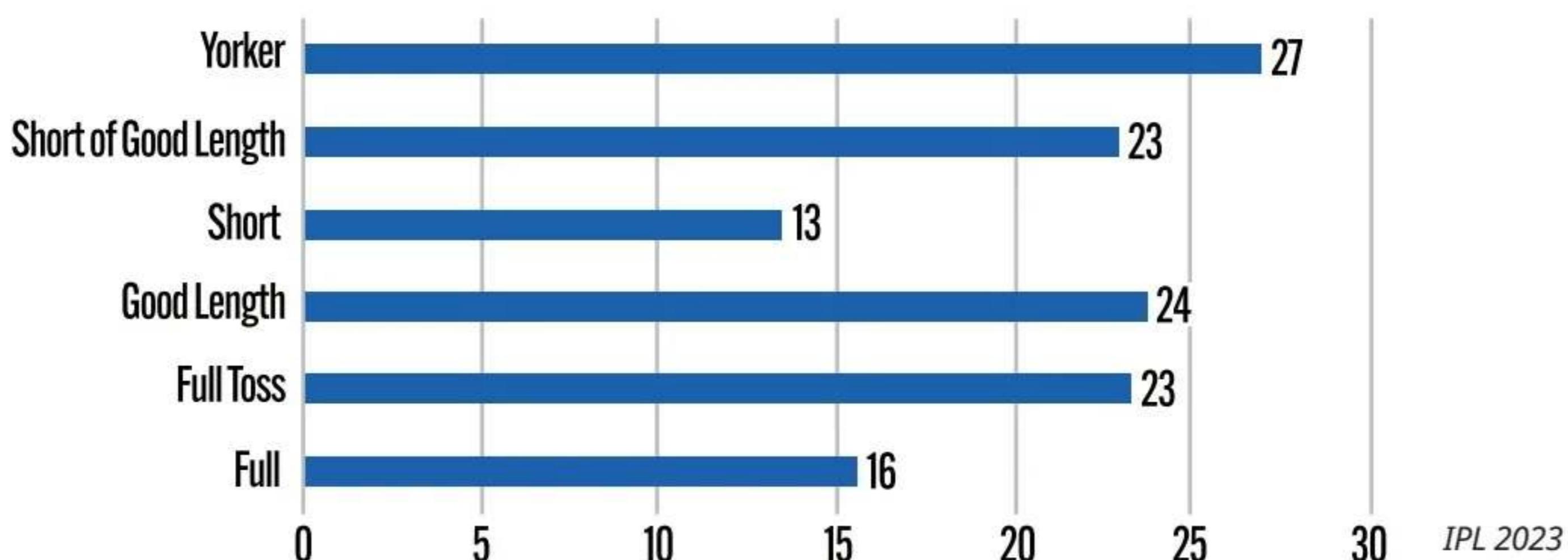
The bowlers readily accepted the munificence and put it to work. **The short ball has gained increasing currency in the IPL, with its frequency rising from one in every 11 deliveries bowled by pacers in 2022 to one in every nine the following year.** With the cushion of bowlers being allowed an extra bouncer this year, the short ball recurred almost every five balls in the first 13 matches of this edition of the IPL.

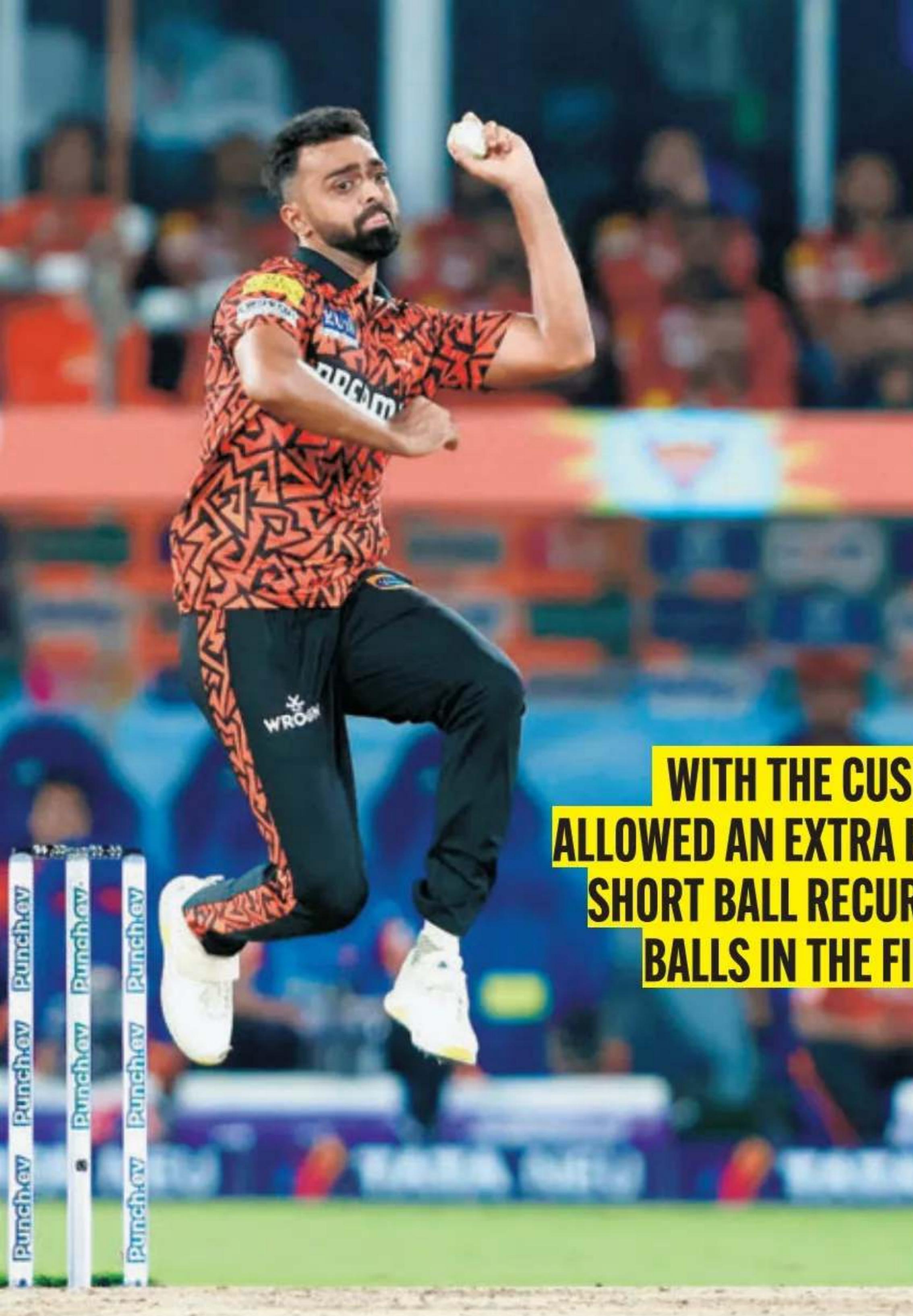
"... the moment it was decided that there were going to be two bouncers in an over, that's when all the bowlers decided that we got to use it at a certain point.

"Someone who has pace can use those bouncers, but slower bouncers are working nowadays because the batsmen are trying to muscle the ball out of the ground, especially with the Impact Player rule. You have to use those variations in T20 and keep the batsmen guessing," Sunrisers Hyderabad seamer Jaydev Unadkat, who used the slower bouncer effectively against Chennai Super



Balls per wicket





WITH THE CUSHION OF BOWLERS BEING ALLOWED AN EXTRA BOUNCER THIS YEAR, THE SHORT BALL REURRED ALMOST EVERY FIVE BALLS IN THE FIRST 13 MATCHES OF THIS EDITION OF THE IPL

Effective weapon: Sunrisers

Hyderabad seamer Jaydev Unadkat's wily use of the slower ball bouncer has left the batters guessing. SPORTZPICS/IPL

Kings, said.

In keeping with what Unadkat says, the provision to allow two bouncers in an over has drastically reduced the predictability of the short ball, an element that is key to making the delivery more potent. The ongoing season of the IPL has witnessed a more equal distribution of the short ball across the first six deliveries of an over.

But even though bowlers are allowed to spring a surprise more often, the short-pitched ball is still an option fraught with danger. After the rank full toss, which yields more than 13 runs every six times it is bowled, the short delivery is the second-most profligate, going at almost 11.5 runs an over.

Despite the apparent expensive character of the short ball, it remains a key cog in the bowler's arsenal due to its proficiency in providing crucial breakthroughs. Among the different lengths employed by fast bowlers, the short ball is the most effective wicket-taking weapon.

In IPL 2023, short balls induced a wicket every 13 balls. The fuller length was the next best delivery for the pacers, scalping one every 16 balls, while the yorker, considered a potent delivery, produced a wicket every 27 balls.

The enforcement of the two-bouncer rule has given the bowlers the license to put this munition to better use.

Rajasthan Royals' bowler Sandeep Sharma is among those exultant over the new rule. "Earlier, the batters were able to predict where the bowler would bowl if he had used his one bouncer already. But with two bouncers, the batters are also in two

minds that there is still one bouncer left for the bowler to use," the pacer said.

"Talking about the [batter's] body weight, even if you have not executed it [the second short ball] and the body weight has not yet been transferred, the bowler can still be on the safer side. Hence, this rule is beneficial," the 30-year-old said.

The data also suggests that teams have exploited the rule well in the second innings. Teams have used the short ball 20 per cent more in the second innings than in the first, employing it astutely while defending targets — eight out of 13 matches have been won by the team batting first.

A comparison of data between the current and previous IPL seasons provides further evidence but with a small caveat. The short ball ploy proves to be effective only through

the middle overs and at the back end of the innings.

The economy rate of these balls in the PowerPlay stands at 14.04 runs (2023) and 13.14 runs (2024) per over.

The run rate during middle overs across both seasons varies between 10.2 and 10.7.

The third over of the opening match of the tournament was a case in point, when Deepak Chahar's medium-pace short deliveries were

THE SHORT BALL PLOY PROVES TO BE EFFECTIVE ONLY THROUGH THE MIDDLE OVERS AND AT THE BACK END OF THE INNINGS

easy pickings for a well-set Faf du Plessis, who carted him for four fours, two of which came off the short-pitched stuff.

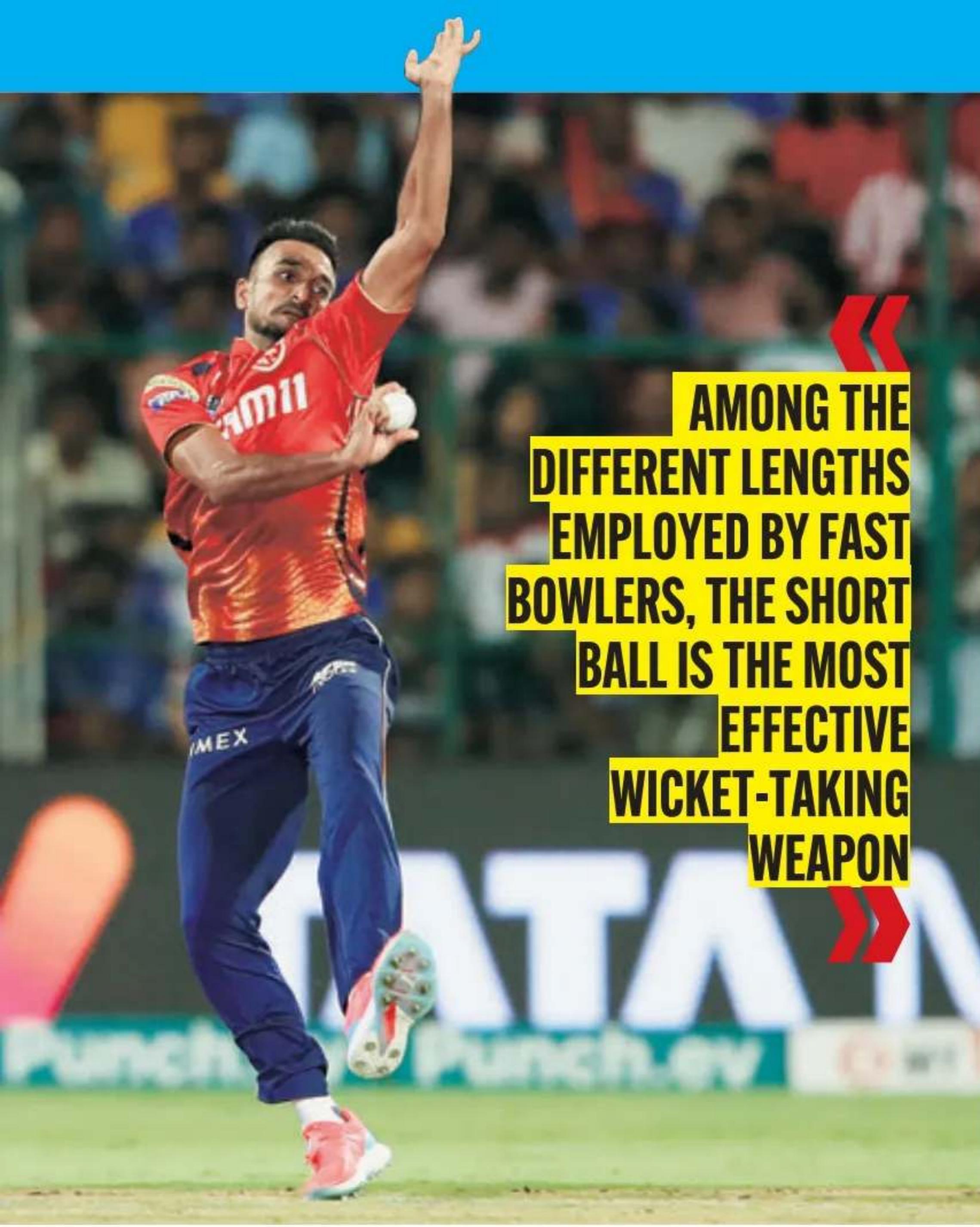
But with RCB losing three wickets in quick succession, Chahar sent Cameron Green looking for shelter with two bouncers in the final three balls of the PowerPlay. It was the first



Run Rate



IPL 2023



AMONG THE
DIFFERENT LENGTHS
EMPLOYED BY FAST
BOWLERS, THE SHORT
BALL IS THE MOST
EFFECTIVE
WICKET-TAKING
WEAPON

Not the be all and end all: Data suggests bouncers are a double-edged sword and their efficacy will more often than not depend on the craft and deceit of the bowler.

SPORTZPICS/IPL

instance of the new provision being used, and it emerged as a bowler's ally when the opposition was under the pump.

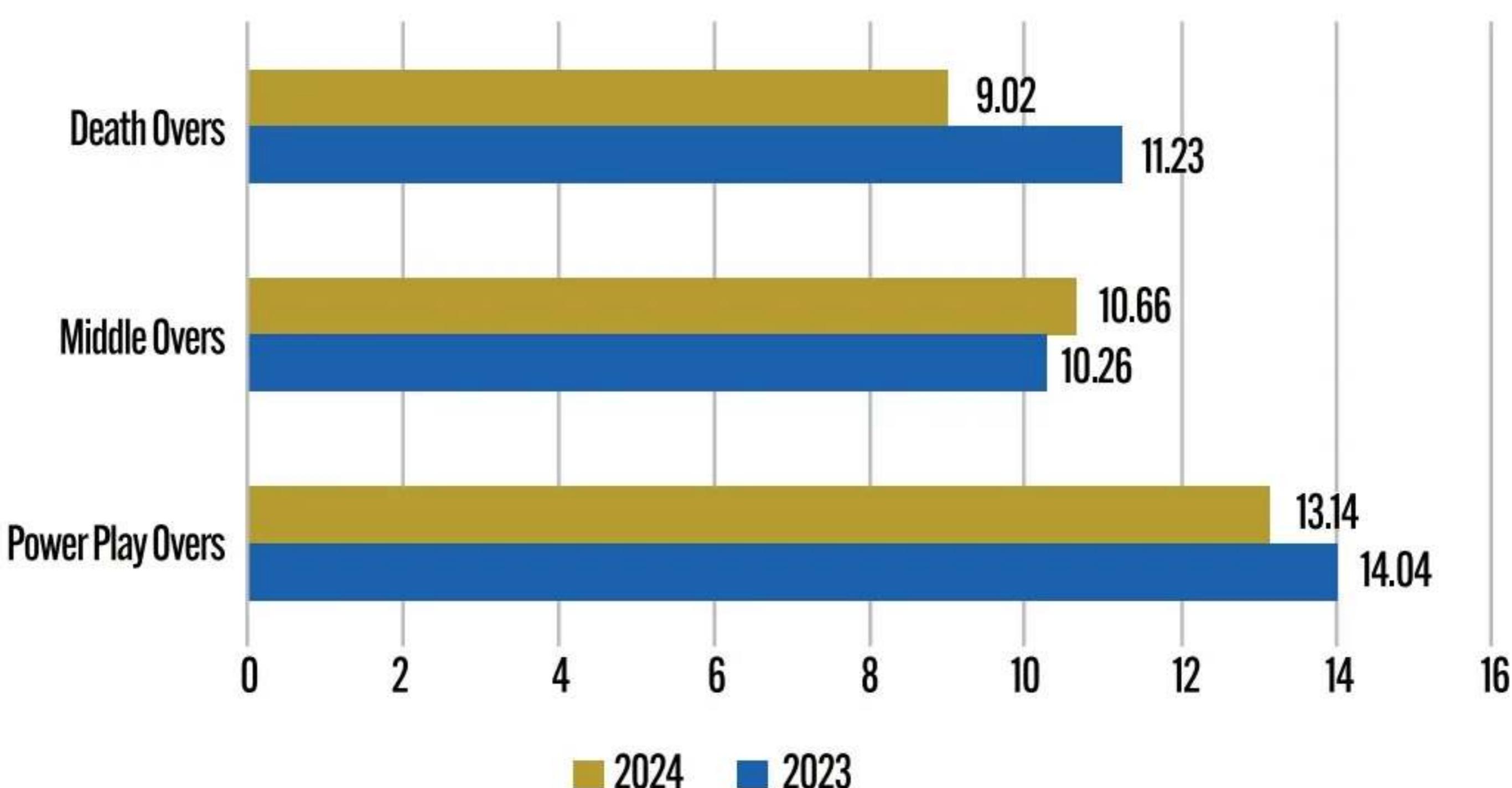
Short balls are more effective at the death (overs 17–20) this season. While they went at 11.23 runs per over in IPL 2023, in the current edition there is a considerable dip — 9.02 runs per over — a clear indication of the positive effect of the two-bouncer-per-over rule.

Data suggests bouncers are a double-edged sword, and their efficacy will more often than not depend on the craft and deceit of the bowler.

West Indies fast bowling legend Curtley Ambrose had decried the limit on bouncers permitted per over in an interview with *Sportstar* last year by saying, "Eighty percent of it [cricket] favours the batsman."

The latest ruling in the IPL may have taken the edge off that number a notch and made T20 bowling more than just an unforgiving walk of life.

Short Ball Run Rate





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England women on a roll

- 1 The team won both the T20I and ODI series.

England Women dominated the host on their tour to New Zealand, winning the T20I and ODI series with convincing margins of 4-1 and 2-1, respectively. Wicketkeeper Amy Jones had a

scorching run with the bat in the ODIs, amassing 190 runs in three innings, and etched her name in history when she stitched the highest seventh-wicket partnership (130) with Charlie

Dean to bail England out of trouble in the first match. The 25-year-old opening batter Maia Bouchier was England's star in the T20I leg, scoring 223 runs in five innings, including two fifties.



2

Sri Lanka made short work of Bangladesh in the second Test to complete a series sweep and move up to joint-third on the World Test Championship points table. The 192-run win came on the back of Sri Lanka's massive 531 in the first innings, which saw six of the top seven batters score half-centuries. Leading the way was Kamindu Mendis, who backed up his twin hundreds in the first Test with an unbeaten 92. Sri Lanka's pace trio of Vishwa Fernando, Asitha Fernando and Lahiru Kumara picked 13 wickets between them as Bangladesh's batting didn't prove equal to the task.



3

The Australian women's team steamrolled Bangladesh, thrashing the host by an identical 3-0 margin in both the ODI and T20I series. Such was the Alyssa Healy-led side's dominance that Bangladesh failed to surpass the 100-run mark in four of the six matches. While off-spinner Ashleigh Gardner was the wrecker-in-chief in the ODIs, with eight wickets in three games, left-arm tweaker Sophie Molineux's six wickets in three T20Is earned her earn a Cricket Australia central contract for 2024-25. With its thumping triumph in spin-friendly Bangladesh, which will host the T20 World Cup later this year, six-time champion Australia issued a stern warning to title aspirants.

GETTY IMAGES



4

The Sri Lankan women's team claimed its first bilateral series win over South Africa with a thrilling four-wicket victory in the third T20I in East London. Skipper Chamari Athapaththu struck a 46-ball 73 while Harshitha Samaratunga, unbeaten on 54 off 43, imparted the finishing touches as Sri Lanka clinched the series 2-1, overcoming a 0-1 deficit. South Africa began with a thumping 79-run win, set up by skipper Laura Wolvaardt's 63-ball 102, before the visitor levelled the series with a facile seven-wicket win. Despite her side's loss, Wolvaardt's 158 runs in two innings won her the player-of-the-series accolade.

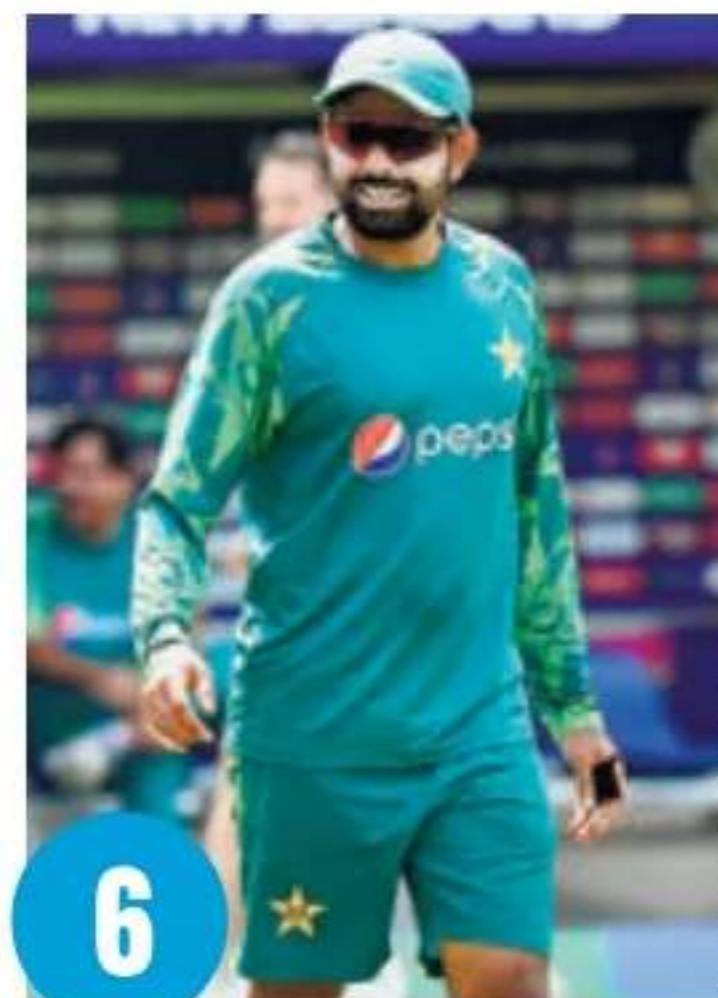
GETTY IMAGES



5

England fast bowler Jofra Archer could be in line to play at this year's T20 World Cup in June, according to England managing director Rob Key, who said the 29-year-old will not feature in Test matches until 2025. Archer, who has been plagued by injuries, last played competitive cricket in May last year during the Indian Premier League and hasn't featured for England since March 2023.

REUTERS



6

Babar Azam was reappointed Pakistan's skipper for the white-ball formats after being removed from the position following the team's disastrous ODI World Cup campaign in India last year. Wahab Riaz was named the team manager and Mohammad Yousuf batting coach.

K. MURALI KUMAR

LISTEN TO THE
PODCAST

« I don't do politics, I do sports »

SHARATH KAMAL

K. Keerthivasan & Nihit Sachdeva

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In August 2023, Achanta Sharath Kamal, the 10-time national table tennis champion, slipped out of the Top 100 in the ITTF Rankings, which was soon followed by a disappointing campaign at the Hangzhou Asian Games.

However, less than a year after hitting that low, the 41-year-old first helped the Indian men's team reach the round-of-16 at the World Team Championships in Busan in February, which made it possible to clinch a historic Paris Olympics quota for the team event via world rankings. He then reinstated himself as the country's top-ranked player, jumping from 88 to 34 in the ITTF Rankings after a sensational run from qualifiers to the quarterfinals of the Singapore Smash event, and is now a prime contender for one of the two quotas India will get for the men's singles event.

Sharath, who has won 13 Commonwealth Games medals (including seven gold) and two Asian Games bronze medals over his two-decade-long career, has also been announced as the flagbearer of the Indian contingent for the opening ceremony of the Paris Games, which will be his fifth Olympics.

In an interview with *Sportstar*, Sharath reflects on India's qualification for both team events for Paris 2024, his amazing run in Singapore, his post-retirement plans and more.

If, at the beginning of the event in Singapore, someone had told you that you would reach the quarterfinals, what would have been your response?

When my wife and son asked me when I would return, I said I'd come back on Sunday when the main draw's first round starts. I said if I can make it, I'll make it to the main draw in the first round. Beyond that, I'm not very sure. I played until next week's Friday. In between, my son was asking, "Which Sunday did you say you would come home?"

I didn't expect it, but when I look back, there are a lot of attributes that went into the kind of mindset I was in. The first thing was the qualification for the Olympic Games after the World Team Championships.

For the last six to eight months, my primary focus after the Asian Games or even one year prior was on qualification for the team event. I knew that we had a chance at it because we were around there with the rankings, and that would make a

big difference to Indian table tennis. The whole focus was on making sure that we got into the Olympic Games in the team championships, and that's one thing that I had never done in my career. We beat Kazakhstan on a very close front. One or two teams had to lose at the same time. So, the combinations worked very well, and we made it. Once we made it, a lot of pressure was off our minds.

Also, I knew I had to go into Singapore Smash because it was so close to the World Championships. So, the match practice and the whole mental frame that I would be in for the World Championships would carry forward into the Singapore smash. I had the confidence to qualify for the Olympic Games. I went into that tournament physically and mentally fit, with no pressure at all.

I had lost to a player from Japan (Yuta Tanaka) six months ago at the Asian Championships, and he had beaten me 4-1. I didn't have a challenge there. When I beat him 3-0

+

With my administrative roles with Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF), I want to build a good ecosystem for table tennis.

Standing tall: Sharath Kamal has been the flagbearer of Indian table tennis over the last 20 years.

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Deadly duo: Sharath Kamal and Sathiyan Gnanasekaran compete against Paul Drinkhall and Liam Pitchford of England during the Table Tennis Men's Doubles Gold Medal match at the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. GETTY IMAGES

here in the second round of qualification, I felt like this tournament was going to be very open for me.

How did you prepare specifically for matches against World No. 13 Darko Jorgic and World No. 22 Omar Assar in Singapore? Do you look at the rankings of your opponents when you enter a contest?

The rankings are not the final verdict when we go to play matches. In the first round of the main draw, I beat World No. 51 from Chile. I knew my game was far better than his, even though I was ranked 88th at that point. To beat World No. 51 was not difficult because I'm a much better

THE FIRST THREE WEEKS IN APRIL ARE GOING TO BE VERY HARD. I'M SPENDING ALMOST THREE HOURS IN THE GYM AND THREE ON THE TABLE

player than him.

More than the ranking, we look at the style of play, and that is why, for me, playing Darko Jorgic was a tough one because he is the opposite of me. He's covering the table a lot with his backhand. He's dominating the game with his backhand, and his passive game is very good and stable. So, even though I have the most ferocious attack, for him, it's not so difficult. He can keep making me move around the table and wait for a weaker return, and he goes for it. That is the reason why the last two



times were quite tough for me, even though the first time I played him, I had a pretty good chance. The last time, in 2022, just before the Commonwealth Games, he beat me 3-0.

This time, I told myself that what happened before couldn't pull me down. It can't weigh on my shoulder. Just because I lost to somebody

doesn't mean that I'm going to lose to that player now, and just because I won against somebody two or three times before doesn't mean that I'm going to win this time. Also, of course, if you're playing against a player you have never lost to, you are more positive, and vice versa.

As an experienced player, what I've learned is that you need to stay



neutral and see what comes in. When I lost the first game to Darko, I felt it was going to be a very tough task because, against these kinds of players, you need to win the first game.

Especially in the best-of-five, you need to put the pressure in the first game. I felt like I was holding myself back. At that point, the coach told me

to just go for the shots and be more confident in the shots that I played. I did that, and slowly, I could feel I was finding rhythm. At one point in the third set, I was able to challenge him on his strength. Because I was able to put the pressure on him, challenge him on his strength, and win a couple of points, that broke him down. I was able to

psychologically beat him.

I played Omar Assar recently in UTT (Ultimate Table Tennis), and just before that, I lost to him in a Bundesliga game 12-10 in a deciding set. He also has a difficult style for me to play, but the way I started the first game that I won 11-4, it was like an explosion. With my game style, where I'm so aggressive, it becomes

Finding the happy place: "For this Olympics, what is going to change for me is more mental, where I'm not going to hit through the walls." GETTY IMAGES



very tough for the opponent to find solutions.

How do you see the wins at this stage of your career in comparison to those when you had just started playing professionally? Do you value the former more?

More than me, society values it more. They give more respect: "Oh! He is 41 years old, and he's still doing it." If I did this in my 20s, is it not good enough? It's still a good performance.

It's a little bit tough to also compare your younger self when you don't hit that kind of stardom to now when you are older and get this kind of attention. Let's say if the same run had happened at Singapore Smash when I was 20, we would not be talking so much about it. We would have spoken about it for a week or something and moved on. Now, because of social media and society, there's a lot more awareness about sports and about what you're doing.

I won the Commonwealth gold in 2006 as well as in 2022. In 2006, people were still asking what I was studying because academics were important. In 2022, it was, "How do you still play?"

So, it is more of a perception, but what you can constantly see is that Indian sport is developing rapidly, going higher, and involvement in sports science is much higher, and that is the reason why all of us can prolong our careers.

I wanted to quit after the Rio Olympics when I was 34. Back then, or even now, at 34, you feel old. You feel like a fossil fuel. In the first round of the Singapore Smash qualifiers, I played against an 18-year-old. In the second round, I played a 23-year-old. In the third round, I played a 26-year-old. In the first round of the main draw, I faced a 22-year-old. Darko Jorgic is 25. The oldest opponent I faced was Omar Assar, who is 32.

And then Felix Lebrun is 17-years-old. My wife says, "You lost

to somebody who's just slightly older than our daughter."

So, back when I was young, I needed to have discipline and single-mindedness. I had to focus and run through it, and I ran through it even until the Tokyo Olympics. You just go through the wall, make sure everything works for you, and push yourself through that.

For this Olympics, what is going to change for me is more mental, where I'm not going to hit through the wall. I'm going to push myself physically, but I also have some deviations. Not distractions, but deviations. In terms of spending a little bit more time with family, or if I want to have a meal with a friend, I will do that. Back then, I would not go to any social gatherings. I have spent a lot of years doing that. We also want to enjoy a little bit of life. So, when I'm able to have that mental space, I think Singapore Smash can happen again.

You mentioned that you wanted

to quit after the Rio Olympics. Can you elaborate on the reasons and what changed your mind?

It is not that my game was not growing. It was more due to the age factor and personal reasons; the family was also growing. We decided to move back from Germany after the Rio Olympic Games. We had decided two years before that that we would move back to India. We will slowly get back to our usual lives.

But I had this injury in 2015 and started working and putting myself back into training. In 2016, just qualifying for the Olympic Games was a herculean task. I somehow made it and went there, but I lost very early, and the way I lost, it was one of the worst Olympic Games that I ever played in terms of the quality of matches.

When we came back to India, I wanted to look forward to the 2018 Commonwealth

Games since I had worked so much. I spent nearly 19 years in Europe and gained a lot of experience and knowledge. At that point, I focussed a lot more on physical fitness. Ramji Srinivasan put me through a tough fitness routine, as he always does, and I was able to prolong it. 2018 was a watershed year for Indian table tennis, with eight Commonwealth Games medals, including team golds. Then, winning medals (two bronze) at the Asian Games for the first time was phenomenal.

I felt if I could get an Asian Games

medal, let me try for an Olympic medal. Tokyo getting postponed by another year gave me more time to prepare, and the gap between Tokyo and the Birmingham Commonwealth Games became shorter. And once it came, the Hangzhou Asian Games moved. The target just kept moving. But now I feel I can't push it to LA 2028. It's not fair on my family because they are sacrificing a lot for something they are not aspiring to be. It also adds responsibility for me to take care of them, spend more time with them, and be around them. That's also the reason why I keep telling people that



SHARATH KAMAL, THE SPORTSTAR ACES 'SPORTSTAR OF THE YEAR – MALE', FOR THE YEAR 2023, RECEIVES HIS AWARD FROM FORMER INDIA WICKETKEEPER SYED KIRMANI



this is going to be my last Olympic Games.

What is going to be your physical and mental preparation for the Paris Olympics? Have you discussed a plan with your team?

For the next four months, my younger brother Rajath and strength-and-conditioning coach Ramji Srinivasan have made a plan.

The first three weeks in April are going to be very hard. I'm spending almost three hours in the gym and three on the table. We're going to mix that up for three weeks in April. Then, as we slowly get into May, we will spend more time in the hall. So, four to five hours of table tennis,



I wanted to quit after the Rio Olympics when I was 34 years old.



All smiles: Sharath Kamal after winning the gold medal at the 2022 Commonwealth Games in England.

GETTYIMAGES

one to one-and-a-half hours of fitness. As it comes to June and July, 45 minutes of fitness because that is how much a match takes. Within that period, it has to be intense, and it has to be as rigorous as possible because that's how a match is.

Practice schedules will also vary in those patterns. In these three periods, what is the kind of diet that I have? What kind of recovery and sleep would I need? We discuss all of this with the playing coach and the fitness coach, and then we build up accordingly. Then, we talk to the physio, the mental coach, and the nutritionist and tell them what we are looking for.

At this point, the mental coach will have to make sure that I don't lose focus on the goal or lose confidence. When you start to build something and work on it so much, the quality drops because the quantity is increasing. When the quality drops, still, how do I keep myself up there? What are the things I need to focus

on? What is the self-talk that I need to keep doing, and what are the techniques that will help me peak going into the Paris Olympic Games?

What are your plans once you retire?

I would like to set up a high-performance centre in Chennai with the support of the state government. The paperwork is going on. The SDAT (Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu) is trying to make it a Centre of Excellence first and then have everything.

At the high-performance centre, I would be like the sporting director. I would not be coaching, but making sure the curriculum is built, training the trainers, and getting foreign coaches. Over a period of time, maybe try to build that into a national training centre so players always have a place to come back and practise.

India is a big country. One high-performance centre is not

going to be enough. We need to have it in multiple places because I can't expect somebody from the north or the east to come down to the south and get used to the weather, the customs, and the food.

Apart from that, try to also help the federation build the structure. With my administrative roles with Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF), I want to build a good ecosystem for table tennis.

Some people have questioned your selection as the flagbearer of the Indian contingent for the opening ceremony in Paris...

I didn't ask for it, and I don't want to address it. There's nothing much I have to prove.

I have proved all that I have to, and the questions raised are, I feel, a lot more political than having actual substance. I don't do politics. I do sports. So, let me do my sport, and I'm happy doing that.

In the big league: Next season will be the first time that the ISL sees three Kolkata maidaan football clubs — Mohun Bagan Super Giant, East Bengal and Mohammedan SC (in pic) — which could provide a much-needed fillip to the league.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



AGLORIOUS ACHIEVEMENT

Mohammedan SC made a **historic return** to the ISL after winning the I-League for the first time in its history.

Aashin Prasad

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It has been a long journey but Mohammedan SC — the second oldest football club in the country — is back in the top division of Indian football. After 10 years, it earned a promotion to the Indian Super League by winning the I-League for the first time in its history.

Once Sreenidi Deccan dropped points in Shillong to relegated NEROCA, Mohammedan needed just a point to clinch the title in the same city a day later. The Black Panthers needed less than 60 seconds to get on the scoreboard when Alexis Gomez pulled off an audacious chip from over 40 yards. While Lajong

equalised 15 minutes later, Mohammedan marked the special day with another stunning goal, courtesy of Evgeny Kozlov, who rifled in a left-footer from outside the box.

Next season will be the first time that the ISL sees three Kolkata *maidan* football clubs — Mohun Bagan Super Giant, East Bengal and Mohammedan SC — which could provide a much-needed fillip to the league.

Mohammedan had to bide its time to have its moment under the sun. "This is a very significant day for Mohammedan Sporting. We have been able to re-establish ourselves as a national-level club by qualifying to the ISL. As a first step towards regaining our status in the national format, we qualified for the I-League

in the 2020-21 season after doing well in the qualifiers. That was the start of our journey, which concluded in such a fantastic way," said Dipendu Biswas, the club's secretary.

Biswas also praised the team's head coach Andrey Chernyshov for the club's revival in recent years. The Russian led the club to runner-up finishes in the I-League and Durand Cup in 2021-22. He left in 2022 and returned to the club for a second spell last September. He finally got over the line this year with a winner's medal.

"We are not a hugely invested side but have the commitment and the spirit to achieve it. The players have remained committed to the cause. Chernyshov's coaching acumen gave the necessary guidance and direction to the team to achieve the target," said Biswas.

TRAU was the second club to be relegated after Aizawl FC's win over Churchill Brothers late last month. TRAU then followed it up with a shock victory over third-placed Real Kashmir with a 99th-minute stoppage-time winner.

» MATCH OF THE
FORTNIGHT

GREAT ESCAPE



Manchester United's '**Fergie Time**' curse strikes again as Chelsea secures a dramatic last-minute win in their latest Premier League thriller.

CHELSEA

4

Conor Gallagher 4'
Cole Palmer 19', 90'+10', 90'+11'

MANCHESTER UNITED

3

Bruno Fernandes 39'
Alejandro Garnacho 34', 67'

Over the years, Manchester United made a habit of hurting opponents right at the end — 'Fergie Time' being the popular word for it. The sight of Sir Alex Ferguson tapping on his watch in the dying minutes of a match became a cult move, which would see the Red Devils make a late surge to churn out all three points from the contest. Even after the Scotsman's retirement, any late United comeback is correlated with that phrase.

However, in its Premier League contest against Chelsea, 'Fergie Time' went against Erik Ten Hag's Man United, as the Red Devils conceded two goals in 80 seconds in the second-half additional time to succumb to a 4-3 defeat.

Playing at Stamford Bridge, Chelsea got off to the best start possible as Conor Gallagher side-footed the ball inside the net from Malo Gusto's deflected cross in the fourth minute.

Conceding early, United's urgency for the equaliser was evident, but the Red Devils fell into deep waters when Antony clipped Marc



Cucurella inside the box for a Chelsea penalty. A familiar face in Cole Palmer stepped up to take the spot-kick and successfully converted to score his 16th league goal of the season (out of which eight have come from penalties).

The script looked simple, where Chelsea would enjoy a healthy 2-0 lead at half-time, but it lost the plot at the back, allowing United to score two in five minutes.

United's first strike was from Alejandro Garnacho, who capitalised on a loose pass by Moises Caicedo in the final third. Getting the ball, he made a surging run inside the Chelsea box and coolly slotted the ball past Dordé Petrović to claw one back in the 34th minute.

The equaliser came after five

Last laugh: Chelsea's Cole Palmer (left) delivered two late strikes to hand the Red Devils an agonising defeat.

GETTY IMAGES

minutes when Diogo Dalot's cross found Bruno Fernandes at the far post, with the Portuguese making no mistake in guiding the ball into the net with a solid header.

With the scores level (2-2) at half-time, the match was poised to have a cracking second-half and it did not disappoint.

United struck first in the second-half, with Garnacho scoring with a rare header in the 67th minute to give United the lead. The Red Devils had made a successful comeback.

With the score at 3-2 in their favour, they were in the driving seat, but it was always going to be a difficult prospect to protect a one-goal lead, especially in an away match. The Blues kept knocking on the door and in the 10th minute of second-half additional time, found

an opening for a last-gasp equaliser. A tired Dalot (left) failed to keep up with the fresh legs of Noni Madueke and tripped him inside the box. VAR had a check and confirmed the penalty.

Palmer, having already scored one from the spot, stepped up again for Chelsea in a pressure situation. Sending Andre Onana the wrong way for a second time, he rattled the net to make it 3-3, to the relief of Chelsea fans who, under the circumstances, were happy with the point after recovering from a losing position.

But the script had one last twist to throw. Chelsea got a late corner a minute later after Carney Chukwuemeka's shot was blocked. Enzo Fernandez spotted Palmer unmarked at the edge of the area and quickly sent the ball to him, and the latter lashed it home through a big deflection from Scott McTominay. A 4-3 win for Chelsea and all three points after a chaotic night.



In vain: Alejandro Garnacho (right) produced a sublime display with two goals for Manchester United. GETTY IMAGES

» FROM THE
WORLD OF FOOTBALL



1

City and Arsenal's potential title decider ended in goalless draw

Manchester City and Arsenal drew 0-0 on Sunday to give Liverpool an edge in the title race.

In a game of few chances, defending champion City came closest to finding the net when Nathan Ake headed straight at goalkeeper David Raya from a corner in the first half.

The goalless draw ended City's run of scoring in its last 57 home games in all competitions.



2

Mbappe scores winner to help PSG reach French Cup final

Kylian Mbappe saw his first-half penalty saved but scored the solitary goal of the night moments later in the 40th minute to help Paris Saint-Germain beat Rennes and reach the French Cup 2024 final. PSG eyes a record-extending 15th French Cup trophy when it faces first-division rival Lyon on May 25 in the summit clash.

The French giant remains on course for a treble with a healthy lead in the league and will face Barcelona in the UEFA Champions League quarterfinal.



FOR MORE
STORIES



3

USA wins CONCACAF Nations League

The United States beat Mexico 2-0 in the CONCACAF Nations League final, winning the tournament for the third time in as many editions.

Gio Reyna and Tyler Adams scored the only goals of the match in the 45th and 63rd minute respectively, to clinch the title.

USMNT had previously won the trophy in 2011 and 2023 beating Mexico on both occasions.



4

Athletic Bilbao wins first Copa Del Rey in 40 years

After four decades and half a dozen finals which ended in defeat, Athletic Bilbao was able to lift the coveted Copa del Rey trophy after edging Mallorca 4-2 on penalties on Saturday. The game ended 1-1 after extra-time but Bilbao dominated the shootout.

It had won its 23rd and last Copa in 1984. It beat both Barcelona and Atletico Madrid in the quarterfinal and semifinals respectively, before securing the trophy.



5

Wunderkind Endrick scores first goal for Brazil

Brazilian forward Endrick, who is set to join Real Madrid next season found the net for the first time in national colours, against England in an international friendly in Wembley. The 17-year-old scored again, a couple days later against Spain, at his future home stadium, Santiago Bernabeu.

"He has a bright future ahead of him, and he's maturing amazingly well," Brazil's head coach Dorival Junior stated after the England game.



6

Dortmund won its first Der Klassikier in Bayern's home after 10 years

Dortmund won its first league game against Bayern in Munich in 10 years beating the heavyweight 2-0 and ending the champion's Bundesliga title hopes.

The goals were scored by Karim Adeyemi and Julian Ryerson against an underperforming Bavarian side.

With this loss for Bayern, Leverkusen is one game away from winning the league title, ending Bayern's 11-year streak.



7

Vinicius losing desire to play football because of racist insults

Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior has been subject to racial insults from opposing fans in Spain on multiple occasions recently.

The winger broke down in tears ahead of the 'One Skin' friendly game between Spain and Brazil while talking about the racism, saying, "I've made so many official complaints but no one is ever punished."

"More and more, I'm losing my desire to play. But I'll keep fighting," the Brazilian added.

Aneesh Dey & Karthik Mudaliar

IN PURSUIT OF THE PERFECT HEIR

With Sunil Chhetri, the leading goalscorer for the Indian national football team, now 39 years old, the country will have to **look for his replacement** sooner rather than later.

Neeladri Bhattacharjee
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The inability to score goals has been the Indian football team's Achilles heel for quite some time now. The last time Igor Stimac's men won a game with a goal off a striker from open play was in June 2023, a 2-0 win against Nepal in the SAFF Championship.

And now, having lost five of its last six games, the morale of the team as well the fans has deteriorated further after a drop in its FIFA World ranking.

At the AFC Asian Cup 2023 in Qatar, India conceded six goals but failed to score a single one. Amongst 24 teams, it was second from bottom in the xG (expected goals) table, just above Kazakhstan.

The most important reason for this goal drought is the lack of Indians playing as centre-forwards in the Indian Super League (ISL), the top division of men's football in the country.



Who's next: Sunil Chhetri has been the leader of the Indian attack for years. The time has now come to find an able successor. AIFF MEDIA

With Sunil Chhetri — India's leading goalscorer and the regular striker for the national team — having his playing days numbered at 39 years of age, it becomes imperative to find his replacement sooner rather than later.

This is not to say that teams without strikers have never succeeded before. Pep Guardiola did wonders with Barcelona and Manchester City in club football, winning league titles with both sides.

But this structure is hard to replicate in international football, where coaches get their players for a limited time in the national camp and depend primarily on strikers for goals.

So has been the case with India, which has had strikers like Mohammed Rafi, Jeje Lalpekhlua, Robin Singh and Chhetri over the past decade.

Under the previous coach, Stephen Constantine, the Blue Tigers had taken the long-ball approach, playing with a typical British formation of 4-4-2.

Players such as Anirudh Thapa, Pranoy Halder and Eugeneson Lyngdoh delivered floated balls from the midfield, which were then handled by the strikers.

The strategy seemed to have worked well during Constantine's second stint (2015-2019), as the team scored 72 goals in 42 matches, winning 23 of them. It also won the 2015 SAFF Championship and the 2018 Intercontinental Cup.

India also performed relatively better at the Asian Cup during this period compared to the 2023 edition, winning one game (4-1 against Thailand) with a three-goal margin.

Under Stimac though, the team shifted to a more modern approach, adopting a 4-2-3-1 shape for most of its games. The build-up of play in this case started at the back, with more dependency on crosses and set-pieces to find a breakthrough.

In both cases, however, the

striker's role as the head of the attack has been paramount. But game-time for Indian strikers in the top division has been very low as compared to that of foreign forwards.

ISL teams have started Indians as one or both strikers in about one-fourth of their games this season (62 of 234 – total games are 117 and two teams in each game gives a sample size of 234 considering each team's matches individually).

That falls to one-fifth (46) if Chhetri is taken out of the equation. On the contrary, foreign players have started as strikers in over half of the matches (172) in the league.

What makes a striker a proven marksman?

The clubs have a penchant for using experienced foreign strikers because they score more goals and that, in turn, goes a long way in helping teams win matches and titles — the *raison d'être* of playing a football match in the first place.

"Many coaches (in ISL) have the tendency of not preferring Indian forwards because of some fake pressure to find results. Most of the teams sign foreign strikers for that," Ivan Vukomanovic, the head coach of Kerala Blasters, had told reporters on ISL media day last year.

"And because of this fake pressure, most of the coaches are not allowing Indian forwards with good profiles enough minutes on the ground."

In a 4-3-3 formation or a three-man forward line, the player in the middle is the centre-forward (CF). But in a two-man forward line — as seen in formations such as 4-4-2, 5-3-2 and 3-5-2 — or a

single-man-in-the-front shape (4-2-3-1 and 4-1-4-1), the players in the front are termed as strikers (ST).

In two-man forward lines, one player plays as a secondary striker (SS) and the other is the ST.

This ISL season, 62 players have started as a CF or a ST, of which only 23 are Indians, while 39 are foreigners.

Among the top 20 players who have started as a CF or ST and have completed the full 90 minutes, there are only two Indians — Chhetri (eight matches) and Lallianzuala Chhangte (three matches).

These two already play in the Indian national team. But the problem seems more acute when you consider that one of them is 39.

In the last two editions, one factor was common for the ISL playoff winning sides — a foreign striker who finished top of the scoring charts.

In 2022, it was Bartholomew Ogbeche (Nigeria) of Hyderabad FC and the last edition saw Australian Dimitri Petratos of ATK Mohun Bagan (now known as Mohun Bagan Super Giant) led their respective clubs to trophies.

In a decade of ISL, there have been no Indian Golden Boot winners. Even before that, the I-League — India's former top division — had foreigners as the highest goalscorers, except for Chhetri in the 2013-14 season.

The I-League was dominated by two Nigerians, Ranti Martins (5 Golden Boots) and Odafe Onyeka Okolie (3 Golden Boots), while the ISL has had Brazilians (Elano, Marcelinho, Diego Mauricio, Cleiton Silva) and Spaniards (Coro, Angulo) leading the table.

« We need to allow young boys to start playing as a centre-forward for us, in the lower leagues, then the ISL and hopefully, in foreign clubs someday. And then hope that someone like Sunil Chhetri will appear to represent the country. But unless people start working seriously on a long-term plan, nothing will happen — Igor Stimac, head coach of the Indian men's football team »

On the charge: Aizawl's 23-year-old striker, Lalrinzuala Lalbiaknina, recently scored 15 goals in 20 matches, breaking a decade-old joint record of Chhetri and Rafi of most goals by an Indian in an I-League season. AIFF MEDIA

"For an Indian striker, it's difficult to get a chance to play. Every team has overseas strikers and it is hard for an Indian to get into the team," Jeje had told in an interview with *Goal*.

This season, Indians who started as strikers have scored just nine goals while that number for foreigners is a staggering 98. Kerala Blasters' Dimitrios Diamantakos (**below**; 13 goals) alone has scored more than all Indians combined.

This might just be the reason that nine of the 12 clubs have chosen to play only foreign strikers in 3/4th of their matches while three clubs — Odisha FC, Punjab FC and FC Goa — have not started an Indian striker at all throughout the season. Two of the three have qualified for the playoffs.

It is also interesting to note the names of the three clubs that have chosen to swim against the current — Bengaluru FC, Hyderabad FC and Chennaiyin FC.

Bengaluru FC had 16 of its 19 matches with Chhetri as one of its strikers. Without Chhetri in the



equation, the number drops from 16 to just three — a fall of 69%, which only embellishes the mammoth impact the Indian skipper has had, both in terms of consistency and performance.

Hyderabad FC, a club embroiled in financial turmoil, turned to Indian strikers, Aaren D'Silva and Joseph Sunny.

But neither of them has scored in over 883 minutes of play while starting as a CF or ST. With just nine goals in 21 games so far, the club is set to finish at the bottom of the

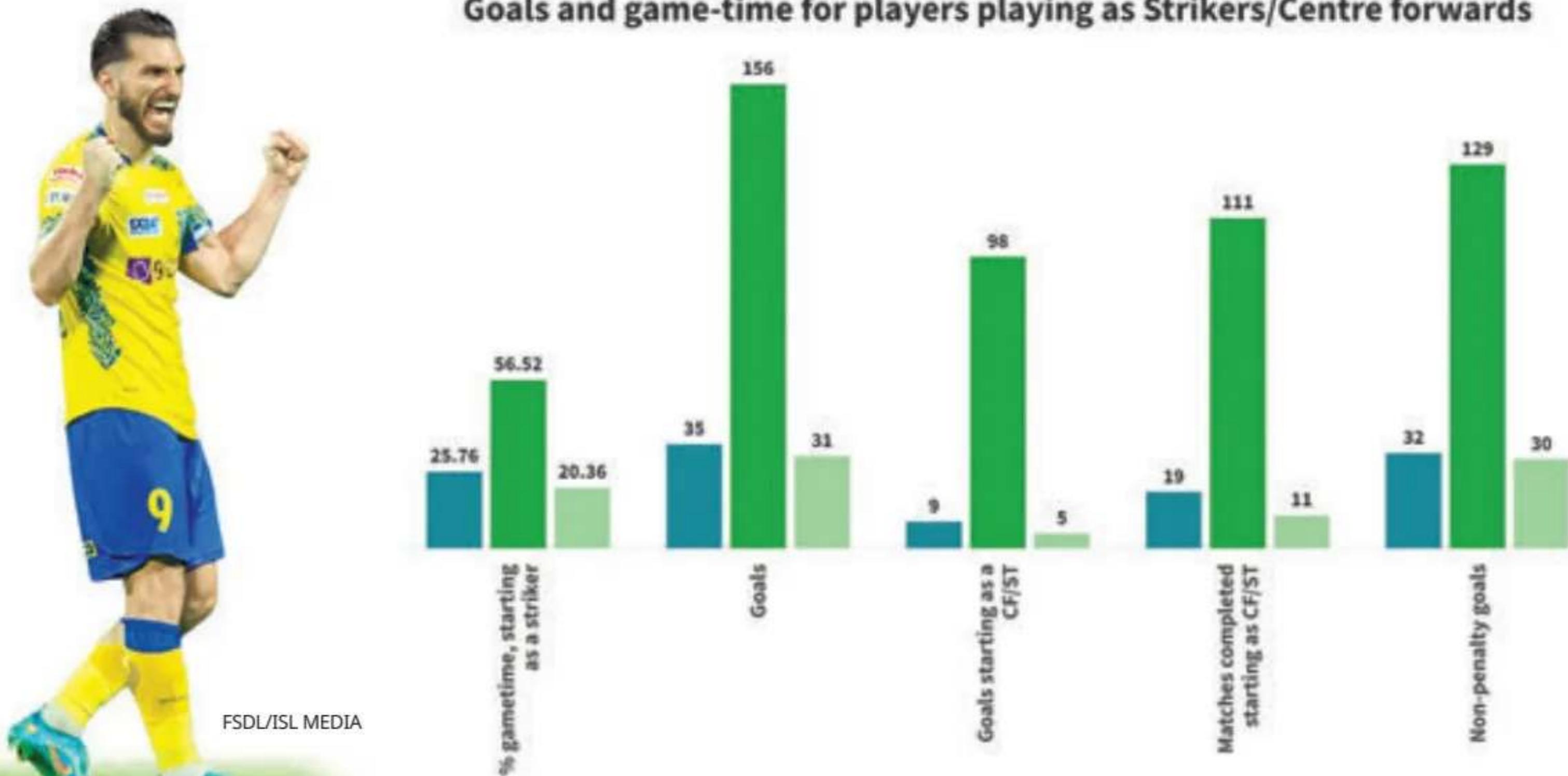
table this season.

Chennaiyin, however, gives a ray of hope for Indian forwards — Rahim Ali and Farukh Choudhary. They have honed their talent well under ISL League Winners Shield-winning manager, Owen Coyle.

While Rahim led India's attack at the FIFA Under-17 World Cup in 2017, Farukh played primarily as a winger and an attacking midfielder under Coyle at his former club, Jamshedpur FC.

"It is understandable because if you are a coach, you put the better

Goals and game-time for players playing as Strikers/Centre forwards



FSDL/ISL MEDIA

Source: FBREF, Opta • All data in the article is till the ISL match Odisha FC vs Punjab FC on April 2, 2024.

Leading the pack: Vikram Partap Singh is the highest Indian goalscorer in the ISL this season, with seven goals. FSDL/ISL MEDIA

player in the first XI. More often than not, it is the overseas striker. But coaches need to give confidence to Indian strikers. If the coach believes in you, you can invariably do well," Jeje had added.

"Indian strikers have to work harder than other players. If you don't score soon, it might be a problem because you will be compared to a foreign striker. The club has to give more opportunities to Indian strikers ultimately. Maybe, then you will see their performances improve."

Scratching beyond the surface

In the ISL, Indian goalscorers (other than Chhetri) hardly play regularly as a striker. For instance, Vikram Partap Singh, the highest Indian goalscorer in the league this season, with seven goals, has not started as a striker in a single game for Mumbai City FC (MCFC).

In fact, among the league's top 20 goalscorers, according to the ISL website on April 7, there are three



Indians — Vikram, Nandhakumar Sekar and Chhangte — and only one of them has played more than a game as a striker.

"People are always looking at the question that we all know the answer to. Someone will. When the time comes, we need to see who is the most stable player in that position. How many centre-forwards do we have in India? Hardly any," Stimac said during the Asian Cup.

"So, where do you think I'm going to find them from, Croatia? The people need to work on that seriously."

On having a look at the graph, it is evident that teams with no Indians starting as centre-forwards have still found goals from them, with MCFC leading the list.

Though MCFC has three proven Indian goalscorers — Bipin Singh (three goals), Chhangte (five goals) and Vikram (seven goals) — all have spent most of their match-time playing as wide midfielders or wingers.

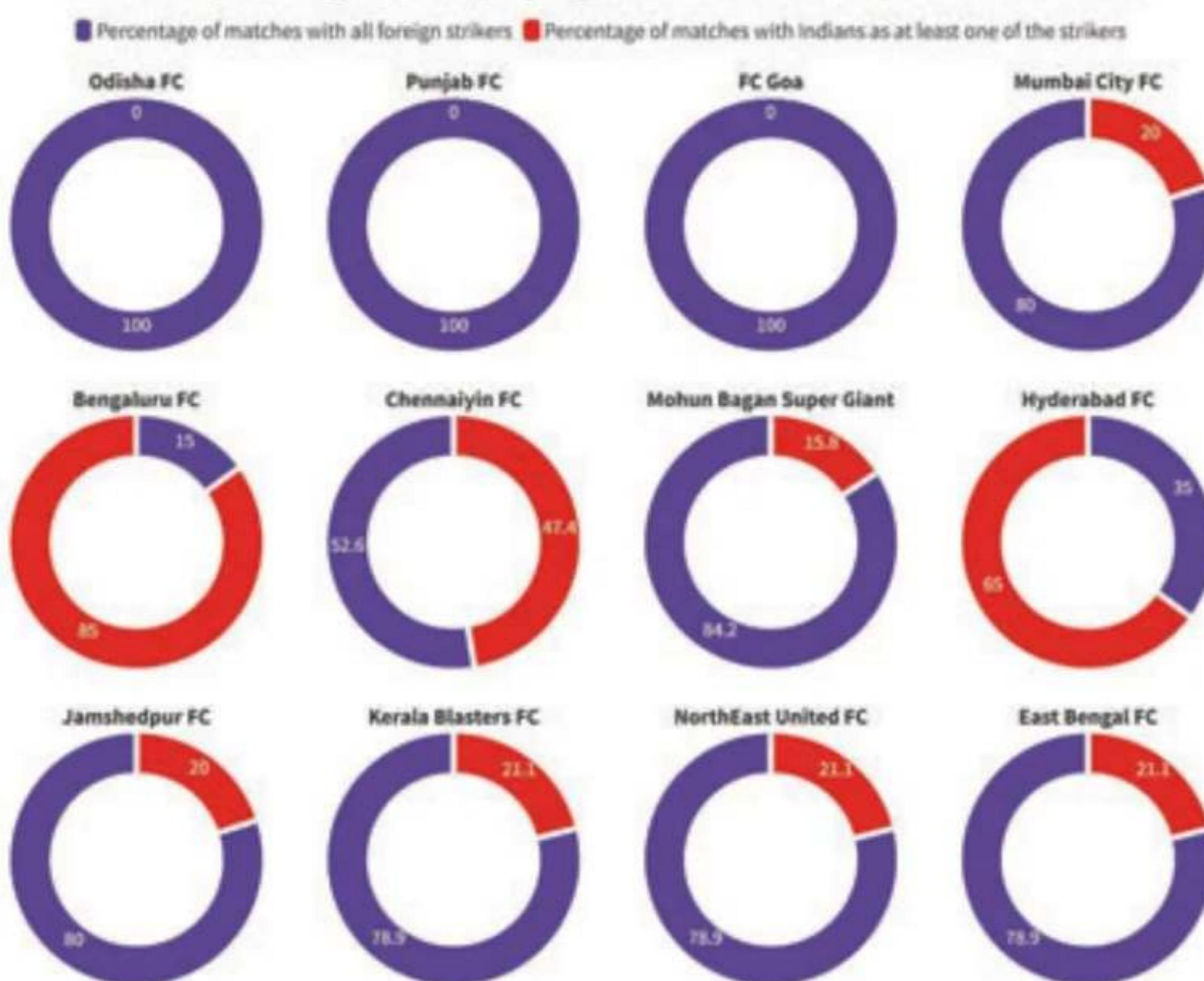
An important data point for goalscorers would also be the age of Indian and foreign goalscorers. For overseas players, the average age of goalscorers is 31.34 years while that of Indian goalscorers is 25.13 years. This shows that the ISL has youngsters in India who can score but are not often used as centre-forwards.

"We need to allow young boys to start playing as a centre-forward for us, in the lower leagues, then the ISL and hopefully, in foreign clubs someday," Stimac had suggested.

"And then hope that someone like Sunil Chhetri will appear to represent the country. But unless people start working seriously on a long-term plan, nothing will happen."

Stimac has tried to deploy other

Indian Super League clubs playing Indians as strikers in 2023-24 season



Source: FBREF, Opta • All data in the article is till the ISL match Odisha FC vs Punjab FC on April 2, 2024



Strike force: Parthib Gogoi has nine goals and an assist in all competitions this season for NorthEast United FC (NEUFC). FSDL/ISL MEDIA

coach to identify a striker and expect goals from him.

But for club coaches to do so, they would need the right balance between giving local talent opportunities to shine and having players who can play full games and score goals.

Though the list of Indian midfielders and wingers scoring in ISL is a long one, if the goalscorers alone, who are already conventional forwards, are compared for the sake of the problem statement of finding strikers, a few names pop up.

Chhetri and Chhangte dominate understandably, leading the national team's attack regularly under Stimac, but five other names make it to the list as well, considering the goal-scoring ability.

Bipin, though being a menace along the wings, is 29, while Sivasakthi Narayanan, once touted as the next No. 9 of India, is "no longer the player he used to be", according to Stimac, after his injury in the ISL final last year.

While Rahim has found the net a few times in the league, his poor finishing and inconsistency have

players as a No. 9 in some of his matches, such as Manvir Singh against Syria in the Asian Cup and even Vikram against Afghanistan in the away game of the FIFA World Cup qualifiers.

But both these players haven't started a single game as a striker for their respective clubs.

Manvir plays as a winger or a

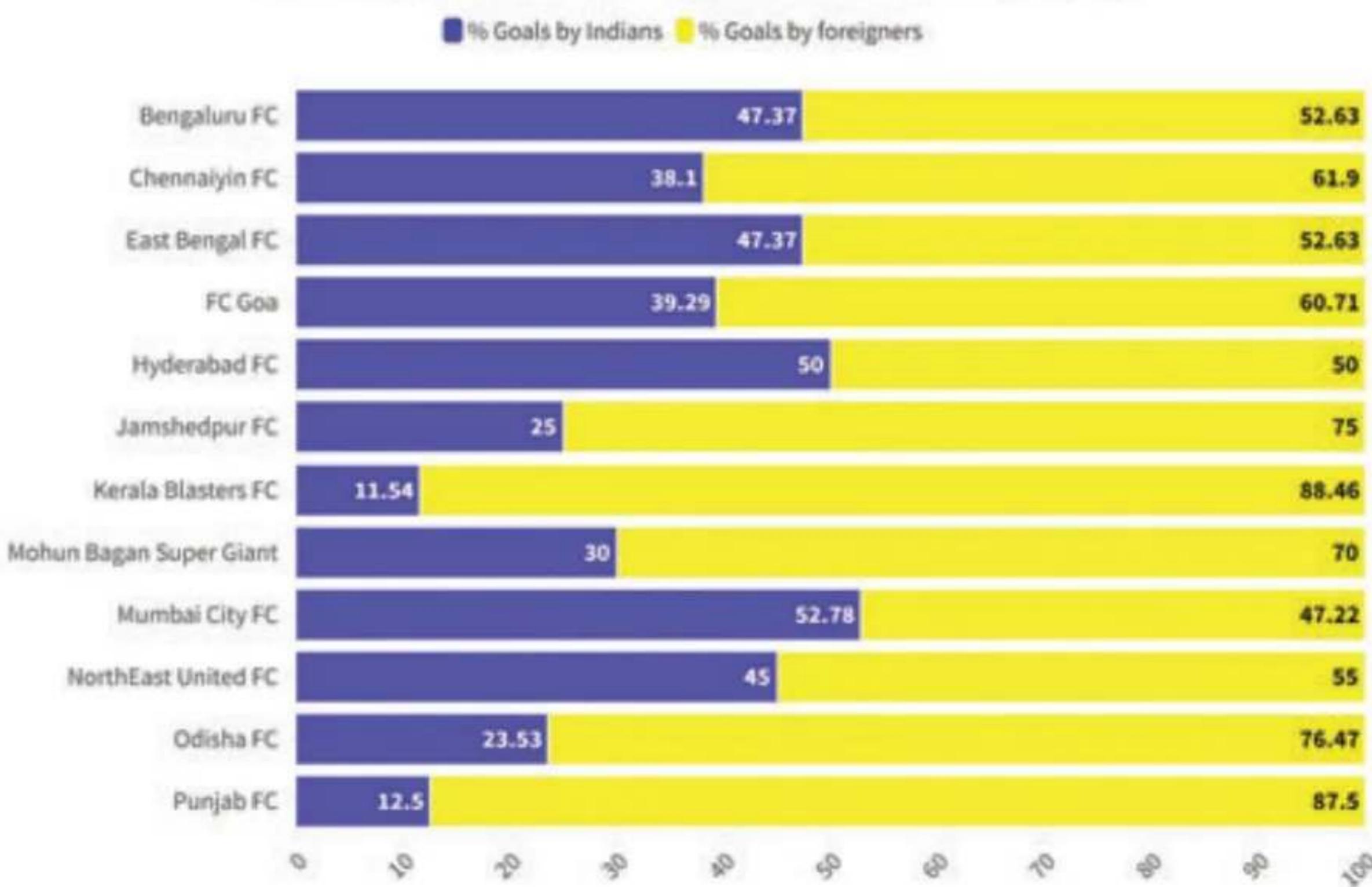
wing-back for Mohun Bagan.

The way forward

Stimac has admitted that he follows the ISL while India's assistant coach, Mahesh Gawli, looks after players from lower leagues.

Unless the ISL clubs deploy Indians as strikers, it becomes an uphill task for a national team head

Team-wise breakdown of goalscorers in ISL 2023-24



often put his selection in jeopardy.

On the other hand, two new names, Irfan Yadwad and Parthib Gogoi, have turned heads in the league this season.

Irfan had scored 36 goals in 34 games for I-League 2 side, Bengaluru United, before moving to Chennaiyin last summer.

Despite getting limited game time this season, he had his moment in the sun when he scored the winner against defending champion Mohun Bagan on March 31.

"He's a young Indian No. 9 who has got a lot to learn. He scored in the Super Cup. He's had five or six chances before in the Indian Super League to score. So to get his goal (winner) and what it meant and the quality showed, that will stand him in good stead," Coyle said.

Gogoi, on the other hand, has nine goals and an assist in all competitions this season for NorthEast United FC (NEUFC).

"We're lucky to have him. And he needs to grow slowly. He needs a lot of experience. He needs to work more."

"Yes, he scores, but he needs to participate more in the game," Juan Pedro Benali, the head coach of NEUFC, said about Gogoi.

Irfan is 22. Parthib, a year younger. Neither has played under Stimac in the senior team yet. Their proper grooming and opportunities would only help the Blue Tigers.

AIFF MEDIA



Beyond the gamut of ISL

Though ISL houses the best senior talents in the country, there are youngsters in the I-League — the second division of Indian football — who have impressed with their attacking prowess.

Aizawl's 23-year-old striker, Lalrinzuala Lalbiaknna, recently scored 15 goals in 20 matches, breaking a decade-old joint record of Chhetri and Rafi of most goals by an Indian in an I-League season.

David Lalhlansanga, 22, has been

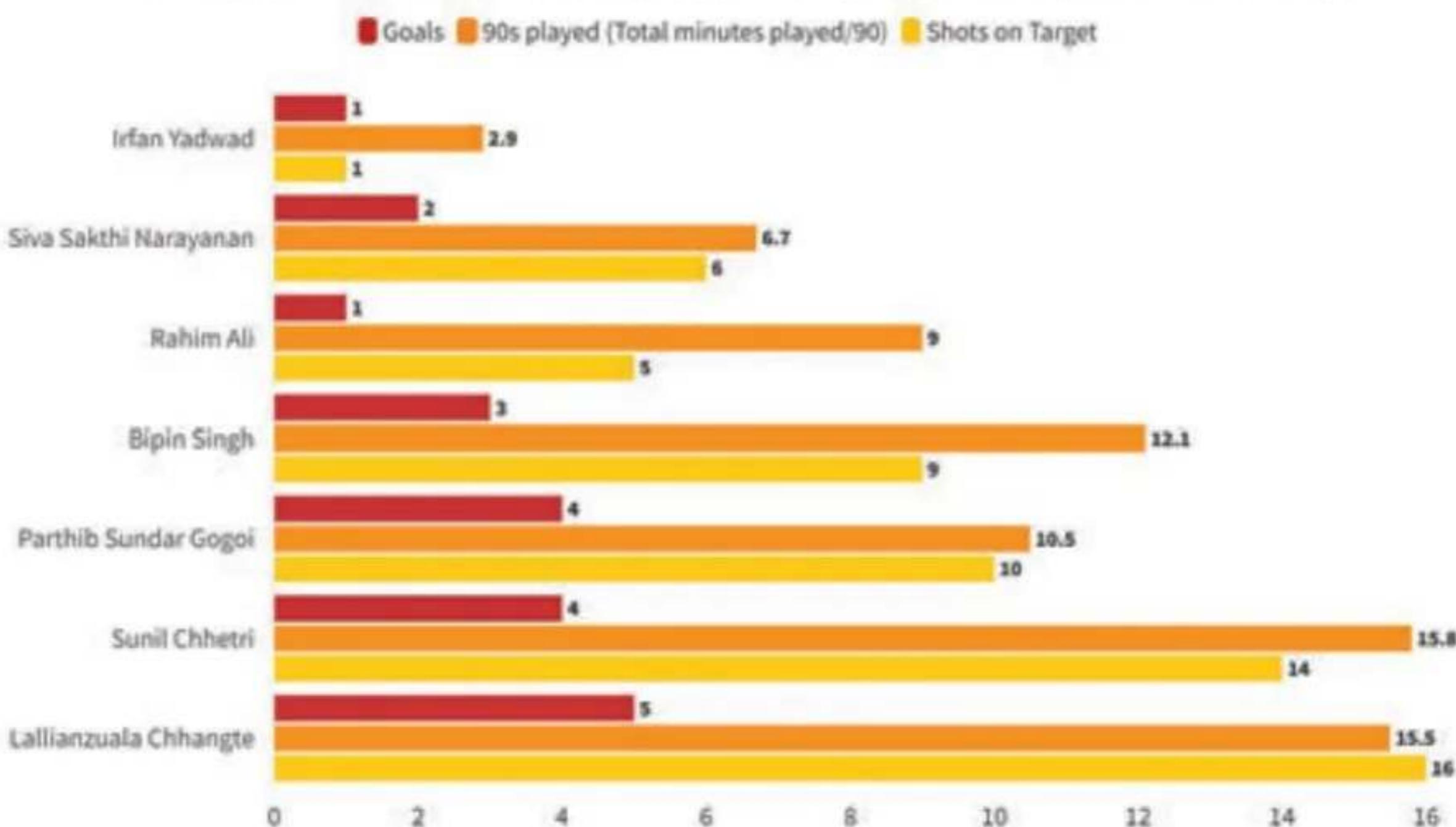
another sensation, scoring 11 goals and assisting three more (in all competitions) for Mohammedan Sporting, eventually helping his side win its maiden I-League title and secure ISL promotion.

For Stimac (**seen with Chhangte above**), these will be probable avenues to explore.

Just like the discovery of diamonds in South Africa, a rightful heir to Chhetri might just be found in the most unpredictable of places, like a transparent rock on a river bed.

(All data recorded till April 2, 2024)

Indian goalscorers in ISL 2023-24 who are conventional forwards



Source: FBREF, Opta • All data in the article is till the ISL match Odisha FC vs Punjab FC on April 2, 2024



BEYOND BOUNDARIES

Roy Krishna is a **rare instance** of a foreign player singing the Indian national anthem prior to kick-off in ISL matches.

Nationalities get blurred when the mind gets enamoured by the culture and language of the new address of employment. This is the case of the Fijian striker Roy Krishna, who has developed a great affinity with the land of his ancestors ever since he arrived in India. Krishna is a rare instance of a foreign player singing the Indian national anthem prior to kick-off in the ISL matches.

"When I first landed here, I felt I had been here before. My ancestors left Indian shores 140 years ago but I was surprised to see hundreds of fans waiting to receive me when I came to Kolkata. It revived the mental connect that I always had with this country. The fans were chanting my name, Krishna, the way I like to pronounce it and that made me feel more at home. I always wanted to come back here on a holiday to experience what I saw in the Bollywood movies," said Krishna during a chat with ISL's YouTube programme, *In The Stands*.

"I learnt Hindi in school and it was easy to understand the Indian national anthem. I like the culture and food of this country and my child was also born in Goa in India. I feel greatly connected to this

country," Krishna said, when asked about the reason he joins his Indian teammates in singing 'Jana Gana Mana'.

Having scored 54 goals in the 102 games he has played so far, Krishna, who has made India his second home since arriving to play for ATK in 2019, flourished in his role as a fine striker. After ATK, he also turned out for Mohun Bagan and Bengaluru FC before joining Odisha FC, where he has already scored 12 goals to be in the race for the Golden Boot again.

Amitabha Das Sharma

Story of two different halves

Two years ago Hyderabad FC was on a high, winning its maiden ISL title

History matters: "My ancestors left Indian shores 140 years ago but I was surprised to see hundreds of fans waiting to receive me when I came to Kolkata," says the Fijian striker, Roy Krishna. BISWARANJAN ROUT

after beating Kerala Blasters in the tiebreaker in the final. But now, it is languishing at the bottom of the 12-team table with just one win to show from its 21 matches (at the time of going to the press).

Ivan Vukomanovic, the Blasters head coach, feels that the case of Hyderabad proves that clubs have a lot of work to do.

"When you have an ISL club like Hyderabad, getting the trophy two years ago yet dropping in this kind of situation, it means that every club has to find a possible formula...how to function as a club, how to stay independent, sustainable, financially stable, which we, in our club, are taking care of because you cannot just go away throwing out money for something that you don't have," said Vukomanovic.

"I think, maybe, improvement in a way about salary caps, especially for one group of players... I cannot find any club in the league who, at the end of the year, are saying that they are in a profit. I suggest that it should be changed."

"In my honest opinion, at the end of this season, I would give Hyderabad also one kind of medal because of everything what they were going through, with all the bans and with all the problems they had. Hats off to them, they are still fighting with enthusiasm."

The ISL will have one more club next season — the I-League champion Mohammedan Sporting Club—but Vukomanovic feels that it will not change the scene in the league, which is virtually a story of two different halves.

"If you speak about next year, there will be one more club and everybody is saying maybe that will improve the quality...I don't think that will be the case," said the Serb, pointing out that the difference between the top six teams in the ISL



and the bottom six is huge.

"The difference between teams at the top of the table and the bottom will be even bigger. The gap will increase because the product is not there... there are not enough players who will fill all the gaps. (If given a chance) I will tell the clubs to invest in training centres, developing young players and the youth system, give them time to grow up. Trying to implement those projects and trying to improve. Because, these guys will grow up and become an important part of the young national team and senior national team. This will also help the national team improve because the present format never thinks. At the end, the end product is the national team ...if it keeps going like this, there will never be results with national teams."

Stan Rayan

Chennai in the hunt

Chennaiyin FC, making a late surge to qualify for the ISL-10 playoffs, has its fate in its own hands, needing four points from its last matches.

It's latest win, 2-1 against Jamshedpur, was an important one for Owen Coyle and his men. Given the team's impressive form, one would expect the Marina Machans to have more support in their first home

Where's the love?: With Chennaiyin FC on the brink of playoff qualification, the home support for the team was underwhelming. PTI

match since the ISL resumed after the international break.

The diary entered the venue just in time, expecting a healthy turnout. Making his way towards the press box, he was welcomed by the familiar sight of the sprawling green, where the players were in position for the national anthem. But the stands were a sorry sight to witness.

With the team on the brink of playoff qualification, the home support for Chennaiyin was underwhelming.

The official attendance record said 4000, and when Rei Tachikawa headed in the opener, the only cheers were from the Jamshedpur players celebrating the goal.

But the narrative changed in the second-half, as Chennaiyin mounted a successful comeback, courtesy of strikes from Rafael Crivellaro and Rahim Ali.

Once the referee blew his full-time whistle, confirming Chennaiyin's win, 4000 suddenly seemed like a lot, and the sight of the players doing Viking claps with the fans was a pleasing sight.

Aneesh Dey

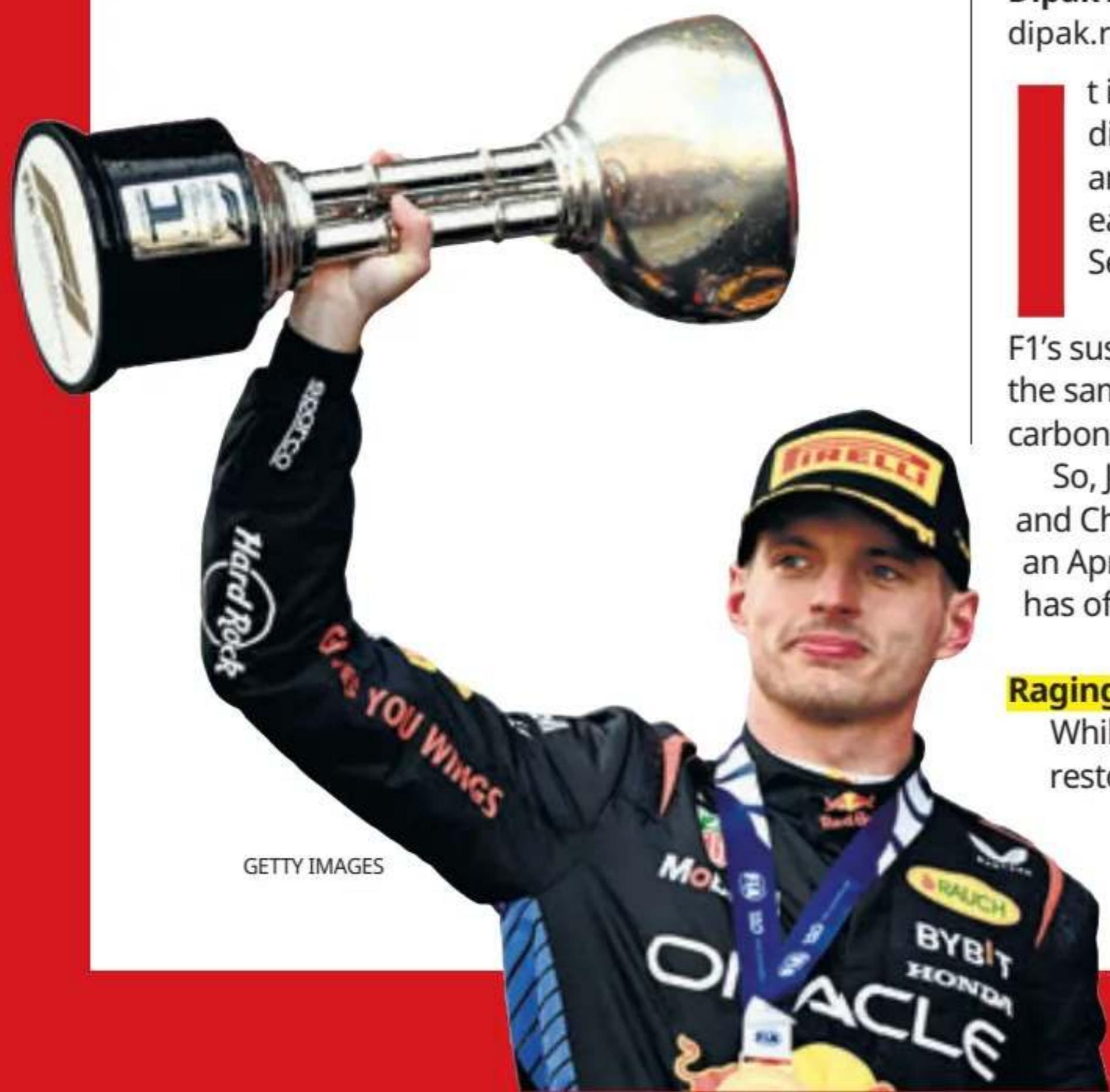
» CHEQUERED FLAG

MAX REIGNS SUPREME IN SUZUKA

Back to the norm: It was Max's third win of the season in four races after retiring due to a technical failure in Australia a fortnight ago. GETTY IMAGES



The defending champion dominated the Japanese GP as Red Bull **clinched another 1-2 finish** while Mercedes continued to struggle.



GETTY IMAGES

Dipak Ragav

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It is springtime, and the cherry blossoms were in full display in Suzuka when Formula One made its annual stop there for the Japanese Grand Prix, albeit earlier in the season rather than its traditional late September or early October slot.

The Japanese GP was mainly moved because of F1's sustainability push. The sport is trying to club races in the same geography together to reduce logistics costs and carbon footprint by moving things across the world.

So, Japan was sandwiched between races in Australia and China. Also, October is typhoon season in Japan, and an April date ensures minimal risk of heavy rains, which has often affected race weekends.

Raging bulls

While the scheduling changed, Max Verstappen restored things to normalcy on track, doing what he



PEREZ HAS BEEN CLOSER TO VERSTAPPEN THIS YEAR AND NEEDS TO CONTINUE THIS FORM FOR THE REST OF THE SEASON IF HE HOPES TO RETAIN HIS DRIVE FOR NEXT YEAR

does best by winning the Japanese GP without breaking a sweat.

It was the reigning champion's third win of the season in four races after retiring due to a technical failure in Australia a fortnight ago.

Together with teammate Sergio Perez, they completed another 1-2 finish, the third of the season, illustrating Red Bull's searing pace.

Interestingly, all races this season have had 1-2 finishes, with Ferrari's Carlos Sainz and Charles Leclerc finishing top two in Melbourne.

At the Japanese GP, Perez did a great job in qualifying to finish within 0.066 seconds of Verstappen's pole-position time, while Lando Norris produced a superb lap to put his McLaren third.

But on Sunday, in unusually hot conditions at Suzuka, Verstappen was in a league of his own. After nailing

the start, an early red flag due to the crash between Daniel Ricciardo and Alexander Albon meant the race was red-flagged and had to be restarted again. Yet again, Verstappen nailed it and sailed off into the distance.

Even as other drivers suffered from high tyre degradation, the Dutchman showed great mastery over his tyre management skills. He was able to extend his first stop until lap 16, which ensured he didn't have to worry about his tyres over subsequent stints and was never threatened from behind.

Perez's only chance of getting ahead of his teammate was at the start, but he failed to do so on both occasions. Once the first round of pit stops played out, the Mexican driver also fell behind Lando Norris but muscled his way through with some fine overtakes. Perez has been closer to Verstappen this year and needs to

continue this form for the rest of the season if he hopes to retain his drive for next year.

Behind Perez, Sainz completed the podium, starting fourth, and was again the fastest of the two Ferrari drivers. He executed a two-stop strategy to perfection, which required him to come through the field a bit to get his third podium in as many races.

The Spaniard, out of a drive for next year, is operating at the top of his game and has beaten his illustrious teammate Leclerc 3-0 so far. Even Red Bull team boss Christian Horner praised Sainz, a former Red Bull junior team driver, as a potential driver for his team, following his victory in Australia. Whether it is a

serious interest or just a way to keep Perez on his toes is something to watch out for.

Mercedes' misplaced optimism?

It was another disappointing day for Mercedes as George Russell and Lewis Hamilton started and finished seventh and ninth, respectively. But despite the result, team boss Toto Wolff exuded confidence that the car was getting better and felt that without a poor first stint, his team was even in the hunt for the podium.

Even Hamilton sounded upbeat after Friday's practice sessions, saying, "The car's been much nicer to drive this weekend, particularly on a track like this, where you need a nice balance. This is the nicest it's felt over the last three years. I think last year, we were over a second off." However, finishing nearly 50 seconds behind the winner doesn't exactly scream progress.



A remarkable connection: Over the course of five years, Anush Agarwalla has developed an unshakable bond with his ride. GETTY IMAGES

IF I HAD TO COMPARE SIR CARAMELLO TO ANYONE, IT WOULD BE CRISTIANO RONALDO. BOTH ARE APPROACHING THE END OF THEIR CAREERS. BUT AT THE SAME TIME BOTH ARE REALLY EXPERIENCED AND MOTIVATED TO GIVE THEIR BEST

Chillin' with Caramello

Anush Agarwalla and his horse, Sir Caramello Old, is enjoying a **well-deserved break** ahead of the Paris Games, after becoming the first Indian to secure an Olympic spot in dressage.

Jonathan Selvaraj

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With a little less than four months to go until the Paris Olympics, Anush Agarwalla (who, earlier this year, became the first Indian to win a quota in dressage), is on a break.

To be a bit more precise, his horse is. The 25-year-old and his horse — Sir Caramello Old — last competed at the Mechelen Grand Prix in December last year, where he all but assured himself a place at the Paris Games. He was allotted the quota on the basis of his performance in four FEI (Fédération Equestre Internationale) events — Wroclaw (73.485%), Kronenberg (74.4%), Frankfurt (72.9%), and finally Mechelen (74.2%).

Although technically the quota belongs to India, it is a certain guarantee that Agarwalla will be riding at the Olympics. "Officially, others from India can still try to compete until June 24 (when the ranking period for the Olympics closes) but no one else has matched the MER (Minimum Eligibility Rule) to

be eligible for the same," he says.

It helps that there's no one breathing down his neck. That's allowed Anush and his horse to extend their break longer than originally planned. The two were supposed to compete at the Aachen Grand Prix in the last week of March but will now resume their season only at the CDI Hagen this month end.

While Anush, who won a historic bronze for India in dressage at the Asian Games last year, was ready to go, he says he realised that his horse needed to rest a little bit longer.

"He competed a lot in November and December, which was when we actually got our quota. It was a very intensive period for him due to all the competitions. And so I decided to give him a bit more rest until April, because our goal is to be at our peak during the Paris Olympics," he says.

Many of the world's elite and potential rivals for Agarwalla at Paris will be riding in Aachen. In a 20-by-60 metre arena that's

bordered by a low rail, the horses and their riders will show their paces — walk, trot and canter — and be judged according to their smoothness in transition.

Sir Caramello on the other hand will be at Agarwalla's training base at Borchen, Germany, where the pressure will be a lot less. "Although my horse is on vacation, it isn't that he's just going to sit in his stable all day. He is still being ridden a little bit, just like an athlete on active rest. Of course, the intensity of my training session with him is very less and the program is very different. The goal of the training is to just keep him very loose and happy," says Agarwalla.

Instead of the dressage arena, Agarwalla says he'll take Sir Caramello on light rides. "It will be a lot less stressful than preparing for a competition. We'll go hacking (cross country rides) in the forest and the woods. For a horse, that's a bit like going on a holiday. He loves raspberries so he'll eat a lot of that too. Horses find relaxation in

venturing into the woods, where they encounter new surroundings, allowing their brains to unwind from the constant focus on training in the arena," says Agarwalla.

Horse like Ronaldo

A horse's need to take a break depends on multiple factors — when they last competed, what they are peaking towards and, more so, the age of the horse. "Sir Caramello is physically very strong but at the same time he is 17 years old, which is fairly old for a horse. I'm not going to stretch my luck with him," says Agarwalla.

Agarwalla compares him to any other high performance athlete who is at the end of their career. "If I had to compare Sir Caramello to anyone, it would be Cristiano Ronaldo. Both are approaching the end of their careers. But at the same time both are really experienced and motivated to give their best. Ronaldo is still among the best in his league and scoring goals. Sir Caramello is exactly like that. You can see that he still gets excited when he sees a crowd. I am very proud to say that we are currently the highest scoring Indian combination at the Grand Prix level. And of course we were the first from India to win a quota for the Olympics so in our own way we are breaking records," says Agarwalla.

While having a relaxed horse going into any tournament makes complete sense from a competitive perspective, Agarwalla says it goes beyond it. "I want him to get into a slightly relaxed state of mind before we restart training. For me that's the basic goal of horsemanship. When people get into the sport, it's almost never the case that the first thought is — 'I want to go to the Olympics or I want to win a medal'. The first reason almost anyone gets into the sport is because you love horses. I think it's very important that this feeling is maintained, no matter what your goals are. Of course, you know, everybody wants to go to the Olympics but it's very important for me that this bond and this love and respect for horses is not forgotten,"

he says.

The bond between the horse and rider was one of the primary reasons Agarwalla chose to specialise in the dressage discipline. "All equestrian events require you to have a connection with your horse but perhaps it's more so in dressage. You can feel that the horse is happy, full of energy and wants to help you. When things go right you are in perfect sync with the horse. And you just feel that you are dancing with the horse. It's hard to recreate this with any other discipline," he says.

Even before he started dressage, it was this bond that developed Agarwalla's interest during the time he first started riding as an eight-year-old in Kolkata's Tollygunge club. "I didn't come from an equestrian family like nearly

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WHILE HAVING A RELAXED HORSE GOING INTO ANY TOURNAMENT MAKES COMPLETE SENSE FROM A COMPETITIVE PERSPECTIVE, AGARWALLA SAYS IT GOES BEYOND IT
«

every one else at the Olympics. When I first started riding, it was something I really enjoyed since I loved being around animals. Riding was just an excuse to spend time with a horse," says Agarwalla. Three years after he first started, he was making weekend trips to New Delhi in order to train. In 2017, he moved to Germany to hone his skills under the tutelage of 2004 Olympic champion, Hubertus Schmidt.

A special partnership

He acquired Sir Caramello two years later, when he was looking to try out for the Tokyo Olympics. And while there were thousands of horses available for sale, Agarwalla says he knew very soon that the honey-coloured Sir Caramello was the right one for him.





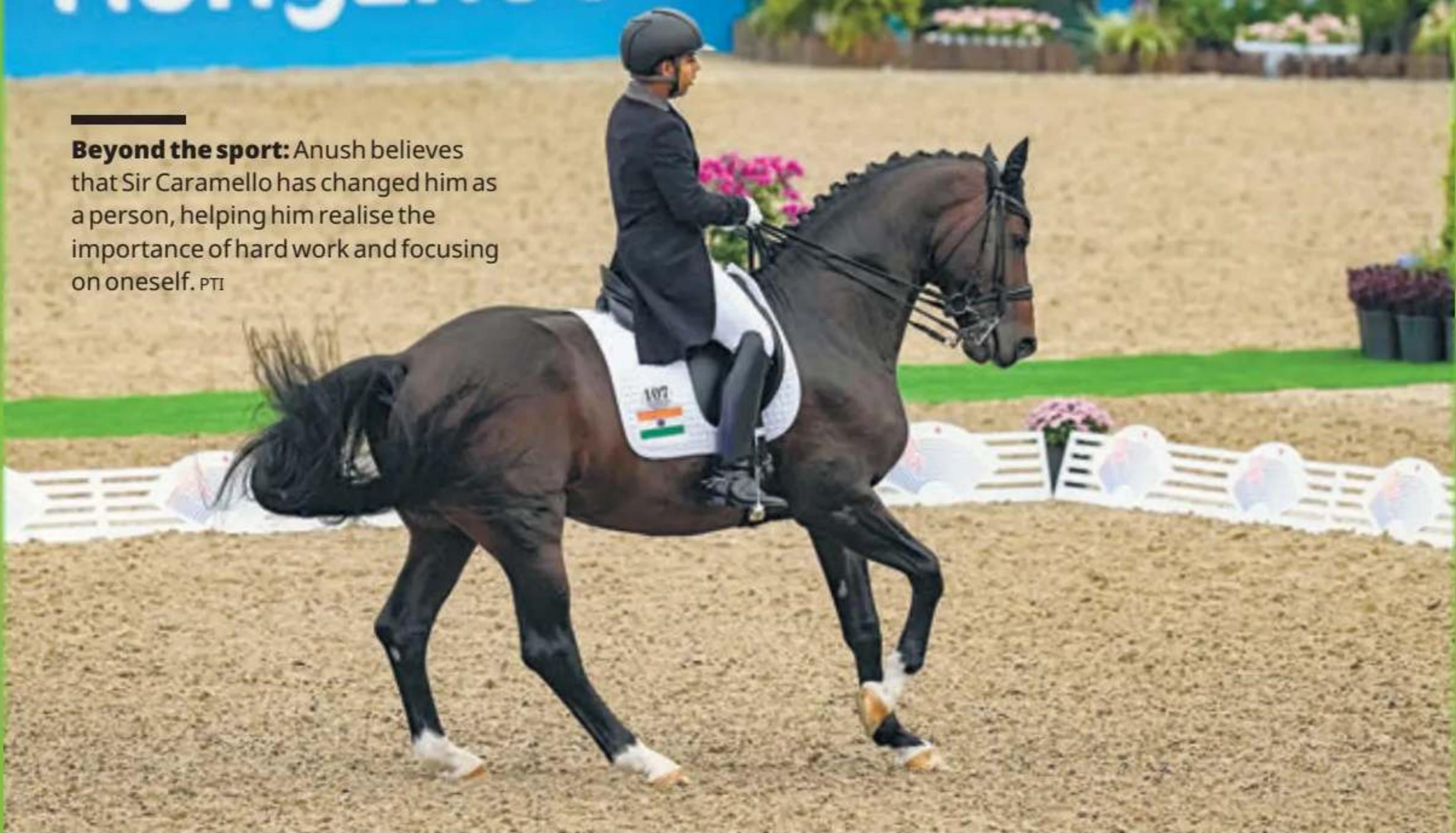
杭州第19届亚运会 The 19th Asian Games

Victory lap: (L-R) Anush Agarwalla, Sudipti Hajela, Divyakriti Singh and Vipul Chheda Hriday won gold at the Hangzhou 2022 Asian Games, in the equestrian dressage team event. AFP

19th Asian Games Hangzhou

19th Asian Game

Beyond the sport: Anush believes that Sir Caramello has changed him as a person, helping him realise the importance of hard work and focusing on oneself. PTI



"He suits his name perfectly. He knows he's a pretty horse. He also has that attitude where he knows people look at him. He thinks he is a 'sir' for sure. When I acquired him in 2019, I was not very experienced at this level of sport. I had just started competing in the Grand Prix level very recently.

"I was only 19 and had competed in just one Grand Prix competition when I first found him. While I needed a horse that had the potential to go to the Olympic Games, I also needed a horse who was not too difficult to ride for an inexperienced and young rider like me. I needed one who could be like a schoolmaster for me — a horse who could teach me how to grow as a rider. I think he's done his job perfectly," says Agarwalla.

Over the course of five years, Agarwalla says he's developed an unshakable bond with his ride. "I think Sir Caramello had a major role in completely changing who I am as a person. That first year I worked

with him in 2019 was filled with failure, at least for me. Our results were nowhere near where I would have liked them to be. That was a very, very difficult period of my time. I had to accept the fact that while I have an amazing horse, I myself am not at the level I wanted to be. He taught me how important it is to work hard and just focus on myself. Even though we just missed the

Olympic quota for the 2020 Olympics by one place, this time we made history by qualifying," he says.

And although Agarwalla has ridden other horses [he won the Asian bronze on a younger horse, Etros (above)] he understands that the journey to Paris will be made on Sir

Caramello. "We are a team. I know that without the horse I am nothing. I might be the one who controls the horse, but he has to be willing to help me. And unless you have the strongest bond with the horse, even if you have the most amazing horse, you won't be able to ride it well. Otherwise it would be very easy for people to just buy top horses and win medals. That's not how it works, really. It's a team sport and both the rider and the horse have to complete each other. It's the combination that works out in the end," he says.

And with that in mind, Anush doesn't mind his horse getting some extra time off. "We are already at a decent level now and from here on, until Paris, there are only marginal improvements that can be made. I want him to be in the best shape possible in Paris. I know that if I give him a little more time now, he'll respond well when I actually start competing. I think he's earned it," says Agarwalla.



SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Loshinski's masterpieces

By C.G.S.Narayanan
IM for chess composition

The purpose of this article is to re-visit and analyse a couple of three-move masterpieces of Lev Loshinski, the greatest composer of the last century. The main challenge in magnet theme, named after him, is to ensure logical reasoning so that White's second move must follow Black's first move. Here the whole idea is carried by the need to have a second threat, besides 3.Nh5, which will be fulfilled when the white Knight g3 is captured at black second move.

Lev Loshinski

I prize, Chess in USSR 1947



Mate in three moves

1. Qb1! (2. Sh5+ Kxe4 3. Re3#)
- 1... Rd5 2. Rd4 (3. exd5, Sh5#)
- 1... Rd6 2. Rd5 2... Rxg3 3. Bxe5#
- 1... Rd7 2. Rd6 2... Rxg3 3. Rf6#
- 1... Rc4 2. Rc3 (3. Sh5#)
- 1... Rb4 2. Rb3 (3. Sh5#)
- 1... Ra4 2. Ra3 (3. Sh5#)

What does the great composer wants to show in the three-mover below? There is a set mate provided for the flight - 1...Kxc3 2.d4+ Kxd4/Qe3 2.Rd3/Qxd3. This is discarded for the key 1.Rh4! creating a powerful battery but c3 is still vulnerable so the threat has to be clever 2.Qe7 followed by 3.Ne2, with 2...Kxc3 now met by 3.Qb4

Lev Loshinski
1 HM, Trud 1950



Mate in three moves

1...Kxc3 leads to 2.Qd2+. The thematic variations see the BQ obstructing her counterpart's travel plans with 1...Qe6/Qe5/Qe4 met by 2.Qe5+/Qe4+/Qe3+ a different take on the famous Loshinski's magnet this time with queens performing the *pas de deux*. Examination of the details shows the BQ acting as a distant self block /adjacent self block/battery enabling sacrifice to a pawn. These are the main features but the nuanced construction is pure wizardry. By play 1....Nc2/Rxa3 2.Ne6+/Rc5! "Hugely ambitious ideas fulfilled with the greatest virtuosity—that was Lev!" wrote David Friedgood.

A classic Loshinski to solve.

Lev Loshinski D
1 HM L'Italia Scchistica 1930



Mate in two moves
Solution to problem for solving in the article 'Critical play': **Key 1.Bc4!**

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



K. BHAGYA PRAKASH

Advani outwits Causier to retain CCI billiards crown



World champion Pankaj Advani continued his impressive run as he thrashed Englishman David Causier 1836-743 in a lopsided final to retain the All India CCI Billiards Classic title.

Advani was in outstanding form as he constructed two big breaks of 801 and 460 to outwit Causier, a former 10-time world champion, in the four-hour summit clash played at the CCI's Wilson Jones billiards hall.

This was Advani's fourth successive triumph at this venue. He claimed the CCI Snooker Classic over the last two years and now retains the billiards title.

In workmanlike fashion, Advani went about his task of building those massive breaks that knocked the fight out of his rival.

The Bengaluru-based cueist, who has 27 world titles, showcased his artistry as he executed his shots with a silken touch and a high degree of precision and consistency.

Advani was presented with the winners' trophy and a cash prize of Rs. 2,50,000, while Causier was awarded a cheque of Rs. 1,25,000 and the runner-up trophy.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

» INDIAN PLAYGROUND

SPORTOON



1 **The Federation Cup wrestling tournament** will be held in Varanasi from April 24 to 26. According to a notification from the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), participating states will be eligible to send entries in all three styles — freestyle, Greco Roman and women. The WFI has given wild card entries to 10 units, including several non-traditional states, apparently including the wrestlers who competed in the Jaipur Nationals conducted by the Indian Olympic Association's appointed ad hoc committee in select categories.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

2 **Defending champion Lyca Kovai Kings and Chepauk Super Gillies** will kickstart the eighth edition of the Tamil Nadu Premier League on July 5 in Salem. As in the previous two years, the TNPL will follow a caravan format, with the first leg to be held in Salem (July 5–11), followed by Coimbatore (July 13–18), Tirunelveli (July 20–24), and Dindigul (July 26–28). Dindigul will also host the first two playoff games (Qualifier-1 and Eliminator on July 30 and 31, respectively), while Chennai will host Qualifier-2 on August 2 and the final on August 4.

S. DIPAK RAGAV



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WHY SAUNA TRUMPS COLD THERAPY

Recent research suggests that while cold therapy may provide temporary relief, sauna therapy offers **superior long-term benefits**, making it the ultimate recovery tool in sport.

In the realm of post-workout recovery techniques, cold therapy has long been hailed as a go-to method for reducing inflammation, accelerating muscle recovery, and enhancing overall performance. From ice baths to cold showers, athletes and fitness enthusiasts have sworn by its benefits. However, recent scientific research suggests that cold therapy might not be as effective as its counterpart — sauna therapy. In this article, we delve into the comparative efficacy of cold therapy and sauna therapy, backed by scientific evidence.

Understanding cold therapy

Cold therapy involves exposing the body to cold temperatures, typically through methods like ice baths, cold plunges, or cold showers. Advocates of cold therapy argue that it constricts blood vessels, reduces inflammation, numbs nerve endings, and promotes recovery after strenuous physical activity.

Scientific evidence

While cold therapy indeed provides temporary relief and may help in reducing acute inflammation, its long-term benefits are questionable. A study published in the European Journal of Applied

Physiology compared the effects of cold water immersion (CWI) with active recovery on performance and inflammation markers after exhaustive exercise. Surprisingly, the researchers found that CWI did not enhance recovery or reduce inflammation compared to active recovery alone.

Moreover, another study published in the Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research examined the effects of cold water immersion on muscle soreness and strength recovery after resistance training. The results revealed that although cold water immersion reduced perceived soreness, it did not accelerate strength recovery when compared to passive recovery methods.

Limitations of cold therapy

One of the main limitations of cold therapy is its potential to impair muscle growth and adaptation. Cold exposure may interfere with the body's natural inflammatory response, which is crucial for muscle repair and growth. A study published in the American Journal of Physiology — Cell Physiology found that cold exposure inhibited muscle satellite cell activation, a key process in muscle repair and hypertrophy.

Furthermore, cold therapy's vasoconstrictive effects may hinder

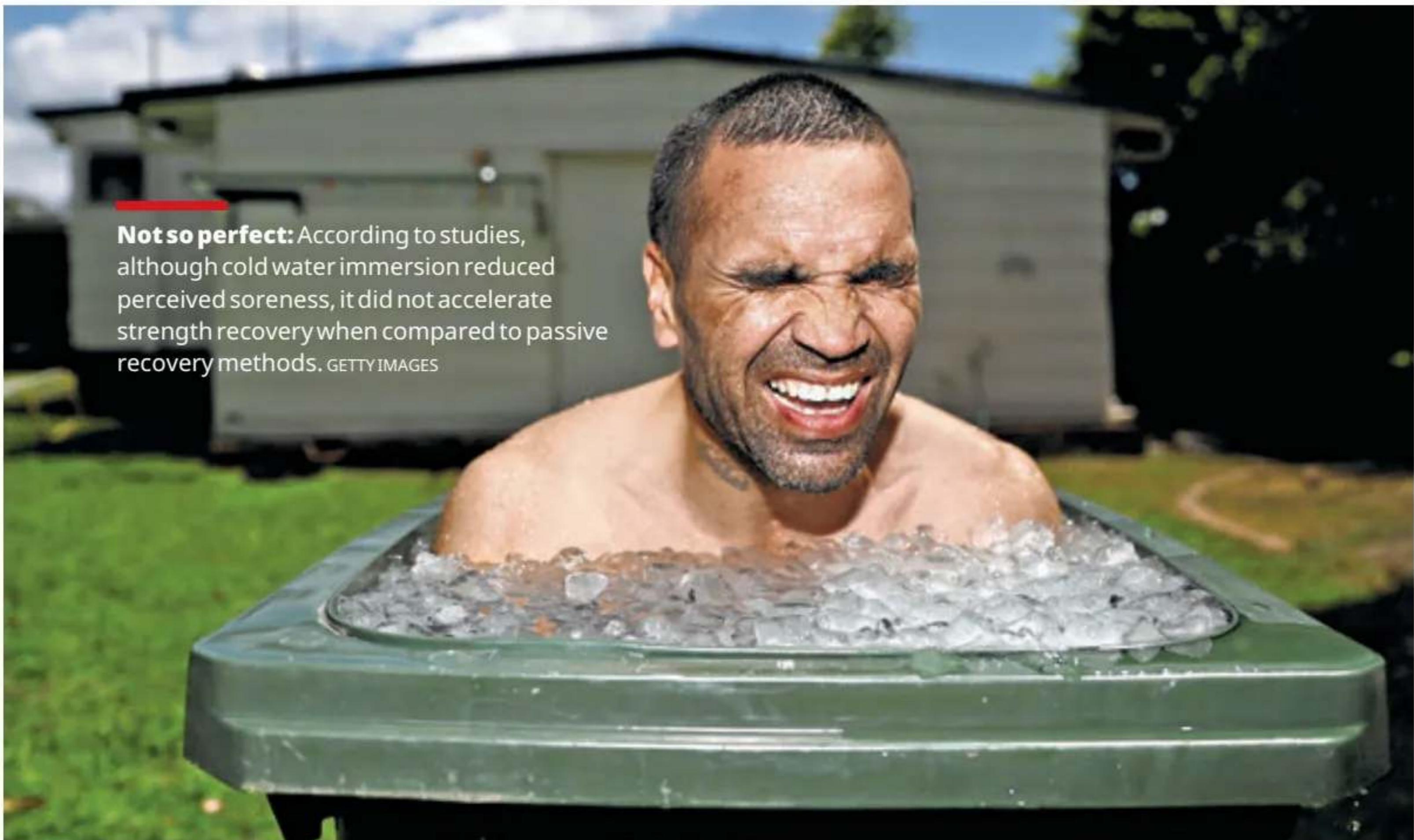
nutrient delivery to muscles, thereby compromising the recovery process. Additionally, prolonged exposure to cold temperatures can lead to tissue damage and increase the risk of cold-related injuries, especially in individuals with underlying health conditions.

The rise of sauna

In contrast to cold therapy, sauna therapy involves exposing the body to high temperatures in a dry or wet sauna environment. Saunas induce sweating, increase heart rate, and promote vasodilation, leading to improved blood flow and circulation. Advocates of sauna therapy argue that it offers a myriad of health benefits, including enhanced cardiovascular function, improved endurance, and better recovery.

Scientific evidence

Numerous studies support the efficacy of sauna therapy in promoting recovery and enhancing athletic performance. A study published in the Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport investigated the effects of sauna bathing on endurance performance and recovery in competitive male runners. The researchers found that sauna bathing post-exercise improved time to exhaustion and increased plasma



Not so perfect: According to studies, although cold water immersion reduced perceived soreness, it did not accelerate strength recovery when compared to passive recovery methods. GETTYIMAGES

volume, indicating enhanced recovery and hydration status.

Moreover, a systematic review published in the International Journal of Sports Medicine analysed the effects of sauna bathing on athletic performance and recovery. The review concluded that sauna bathing had positive effects on cardiovascular function, thermoregulation, and hormonal response, all of which contribute to improved recovery and performance.

Advantages of sauna therapy

Sauna therapy offers several advantages over cold therapy, including:

1. Enhanced circulation: Sauna therapy promotes vasodilation, leading to increased blood flow and nutrient delivery to muscles, which aids in recovery and repair.

2. Hormonal response: Sauna bathing stimulates the release of endorphins, growth hormone, and heat shock proteins, which play crucial roles in muscle repair, adaptation, and stress reduction.

3. Improved cardiovascular function: Regular sauna use has been shown to improve



Better alternative?: Sauna therapy is said to help develop enhanced cardiovascular function, improved endurance, and better recovery.

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cardiovascular health, including reduced risk of hypertension, lower cholesterol levels, and improved endothelial function.

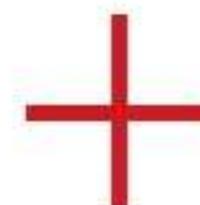
4. Relaxation and stress relief:

Sauna bathing induces a state of relaxation and promotes stress relief, which is essential for recovery and overall well-being.

While cold therapy has been a popular recovery modality among athletes and fitness enthusiasts, scientific evidence suggests that sauna therapy may offer superior benefits in terms of recovery, performance enhancement, and overall health.

Sauna therapy's ability to improve circulation, stimulate hormonal response, and promote relaxation makes it a more effective option for post-workout recovery.

As research continues to unveil the therapeutic properties of sauna bathing, it's time to reconsider its place as the ultimate recovery tool in the fitness arsenal.



Saunas induce sweating, increase heart rate, and promote vasodilation, leading to improved blood flow and circulation.

Power sports!

On his birthday, Russian President Vladimir Putin took part in a hockey game as part of a **so-called all-star team**, and personally scored seven individual goals all by himself exclusively, as his team routed the opposition.

Suresh Menon

The Roman emperor Nero (yes, he who fiddled while his country burned) was an Olympian. Like many others, he had greater desire than talent, but unlike others he could change the rules.

He decreed that the Olympics be held in the year 67. It wasn't scheduled then, but he was in the mood to participate and on an extended tour of Greece, so those were good enough reasons.

He won all the contests he entered. His record in the chariot race remains unsurpassed. First, he took part with 10 horses when only four were allowed. Then he fell off the chariot and couldn't complete the race. He was declared winner, however, because, well, he was Nero and had a gigantic ego and a well-honed brutality to match.

Korean dictator Kim Jong-il was 52 when he played his first round in golf — at the championship course in

Pyongyang. According to the state media, he shot a 38-under at the 7,700-yard course. It included 11 holes-in-one. No one dared point out the story had more holes than a golf course. On his birthday, Vladimir Putin took part in a hockey game as part of a so-called all-star team, and personally scored seven individual goals all by himself exclusively, as his team routed the opposition.

Although not in the same league as the dictators (even if he would like to be), Donald Trump's shenanigans in golf are of a piece. In a recent message to the world, the former U.S. President wrote: "It is my great honour to be



In the limelight: Russian President Vladimir Putin takes part in an ice hockey match between former NHL stars and officials at the Shayba Arena in the Black Sea resort of Sochi, Russia. AP

at Trump International Golf Club in West Palm Beach tonight, AWARDS NIGHT, to receive THE CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP TROPHY & THE SENIOR CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP TROPHY. I WON BOTH!" The all-caps are in his patented style.

Rick Reilly, a former *Sports Illustrated* columnist and author of *Commander in Cheat: How Golf Explains Trump*, and who has played with the president, has described how Trump "cheats like a mafia accountant" and keeps "kicking the ball out of the rough so many times, the caddies call him Pele." He also takes endless free shots and falsifies scores.

After Trump's recent 'triumph' Reilly told him: "Call us if you ever win one on a course you DON'T own and operate."

As with his other boasts, Trump's dubious claims to titles won on his own courses are well documented. And easily discredited. His West Palm Beach club listed him as its 1999 champion, which is really quite impressive since it opened only in the year 2000.

Still, Trump has some way to go before catching up with Kim Jong-il. Twelve holes-in-one and a 39-under are what he should be aiming for.

I think it was Eisenhower who said that since becoming President he noticed he was winning more regularly at golf. It was a later President, Lyndon Johnson, who clarified (in case clarification was needed): "One lesson you better learn if you want to be in politics is that you never go out on a golf course and beat the President."

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Build-up area: 2400 sq.ft
Plot area: 1525 sq.ft



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