

MIGHTY MANDHANA

Smriti smashes 70-ball ton as records fall by wayside in India's 304-run victory; Pratika scores 154

PTI, RAJKOT: Records tumbled like nine pins as the Indian women's cricket team, powered by skipper Smriti Mandhana's 70-ball century, demolished Ireland by a whopping 304 runs to claim its biggest-ever ODI win and complete a 3-0 clean sweep here on Wednesday.

WOMEN'S ODI

The result of the match was a mere formality once India set Ireland a massive target of 436, and Ireland could only garner 131 before getting bundled out in 31.4 overs.

India put the first step forward towards a crushing victory through record-breaking Mandhana (135, 80b, 12x4, 7x6) and her opening partner Pratika Rawal (154, 129b, 20x4, 1x6), reaching 435/5, highest total by an Indian team — men's or women's — in ODIs.

India men's highest ODI total is 418/5 made against the West Indies in Indore in 2011. Mandhana and Rawal added a whopping 233 runs for the first wicket in just 26.4 overs and there was no looking back.

Then spinners Tanuja Kanwar (2/31) and Deepti Sharma (3/27) took over, sharing five wickets among them to decimate the Irish line-up, which was well short on experience.

Orla Prendergast (36) and Sa-

rah Forbes (41) added 64 runs for a fluent third wicket stand that helped Ireland to recover from a shaky 24 for two to reach 88 without further damage.

But once Prendergast was cleaned up by Kanwar, India were all over the tourists like a bad rash, claiming the remaining seven wickets for just 33 runs.

It also helped India eclipse their previous largest margin of victory (by runs) — 249 registered against the same opposition in 2017 at Potchefstroom, South Africa.

Mandhana's 10th ODI century came off just 70 deliveries as the left-hander surpassed Harmanpreet Kaur's 87-ball hundred mark against South Africa last year.

It also set the tone for India breaching the 400-run mark for the first time, joining Australia and New Zealand in that elite list.

Mandhana was in her usual destructive self, and was not afraid to take the aerial route over the 'V' and clear the 30-yard circle.

Pratika complemented her captain brilliantly with a measured knock, making the occasion even more special by notching her maiden international century in her sixth innings.

Pratika relied on precise placement and deft touches in the point region and she showed her aggression only after reaching the ton, hitting Freya Sargent for her first six.

Demonstrating hunger for a bigger knock, she powered her way to an impressive 150 — a perfect blend of composure and aggression.

Their 233-run partnership made them only the fourth Indian pair to record a 200-run stand in Women's ODIs.

It was also the third instance of both Indian openers scoring hundreds in ODIs, following Reshma Gandhi and Mithali Raj's feat at Milton Keynes in 1999 and Deepti and Raut's partnership at Potchefstroom in 2017 -- all against Ireland.

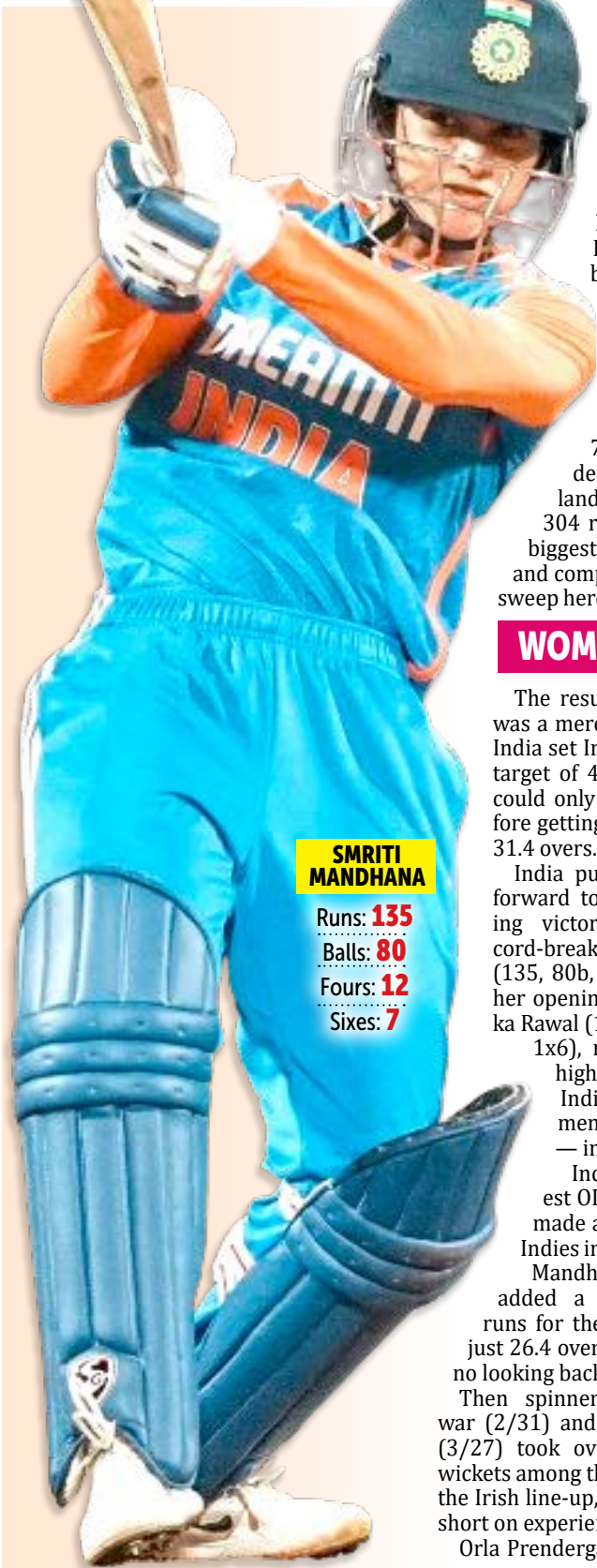
The duo added 90 runs during the Power Play and 67 in the subsequent 10 overs, maintaining a brisk scoring rate.

Mandhana reached her first century of the calendar year with an exquisite drive off Arlene Kelly.



PRATIKA RAWAL

Runs: 154
Balls: 129
Fours: 20
Sixes: 1



SMRITI MANDHANA

Runs: 135
Balls: 80
Fours: 12
Sixes: 7

Champions Trophy opening on February 16 or 17

PTI, LAHORE: The opening ceremony of the Champions Trophy will be held either on February 16 or 17 and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is confident that India captain Rohit Sharma will be in attendance at the event.

The PCB source also said that it is awaiting communication from the ICC on the schedule of the customary captains' photo-shoot and the pre-event press conference.

The eight-team tournament will get underway on February 19 in Karachi. However, India will play all their matches in Du-



bai, starting with the clash against Bangladesh on February 20, after refusing to travel to Pakistan owing to security concerns.

The source said PCB has procured all relevant clear-

ances from its government to promptly issue visas to all captains, players and team officials who will come here for pre-tournament events.

"This obviously includes Rohit or any other Indian team player or official or board official," he added.

Another source confirmed to PTI that the PCB has made it clear to the ICC that the opening ceremony, featuring all teams and their captains, will take place in Pakistan.

He said the schedule of the opening ceremony would depend on the warm-up matches list.

Anupama, Tanisha-Ashwini win; men disappoint in singles

PTI, NEW DELHI:

Former national champion Anupama Upadhyaya advanced to the second round, but India's men's singles campaign suffered a setback as none of the players could make it past the opening round on Day 2 of the India Open here on Wednesday.

For all the talk of home advantage, Kiran George was the only Indian to survive in men's singles as Lakshya Sen, Priyanshu Rajawat, and HS Prannoy all suffered contrasting defeats on Day 2 of the USD 950,000 Super 750 tournament.

In women's singles, Anupama joined PV Sindhu in the second round, defeating her good friend and fellow Gopichand Academy trainee Rakshit Sree 21-17, 21-18.



Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa

INDIA OPEN

Priyanshu put up a valiant fight before succumbing 16-21, 22-20, 13-21 to world number 7 Kodai Naraoka of Japan in a physical battle that lasted an hour and 22 minutes. Meanwhile, Prannoy was defeated by Su Li Yang of Chinese Taipei 21-16, 18-21, 12-21 on the adjacent court.

Lakshya, who won the

Syed Modi International Super 300 title last month, sunk to a 15-21 10-21 loss to Chinese Taipei's Chun Yi-Lin in another opening-round match.

Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa, who clinched the Guwahati Masters title last month, eased past Kavya Gupta and Radhika Sharma 21-11, 21-12 to advance to the second round.

The Panda sisters, Rutuparna and Swetaparna, also advanced to the second round with a remarkable come-from-behind win, overcoming Thailand's Phattharin Aiamvareesrisakul and Sarisa Janpenng 7-21, 21-19, 21-14.

The mixed doubles combination of Ashith Surya and Amruta Pramuthesh then teamed up to beat K Tarun and Sri Krishna Priya Kudravalli 21-14, 21-15 to advance to the second round.

In the morning, Aakash Kashyap fell to Thailand's Pornpawee Chochuwong 17-21, 13-21.

Djoko marks milestone on road to 11th title

Breaks a tie with Federer for most Slam matches; Zheng stunned; Gauff, Osaka, Alcaraz win

AFP, MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic celebrated a slice of Grand Slam history on his way into the Australian Open third round on Wednesday, but last year's women's finalist Zheng Qinwen was knocked out in the biggest shock so far.

Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka, in-form Coco Gauff, former Melbourne winner Naomi Osaka and a rampant Carlos Alcaraz were all victors on a rainy day four.

Alexander Zverev also progressed but Norway's Casper Ruud went down in four sets to Czech teenager Jakub Mensik to become the highest men's seed to fall at six.

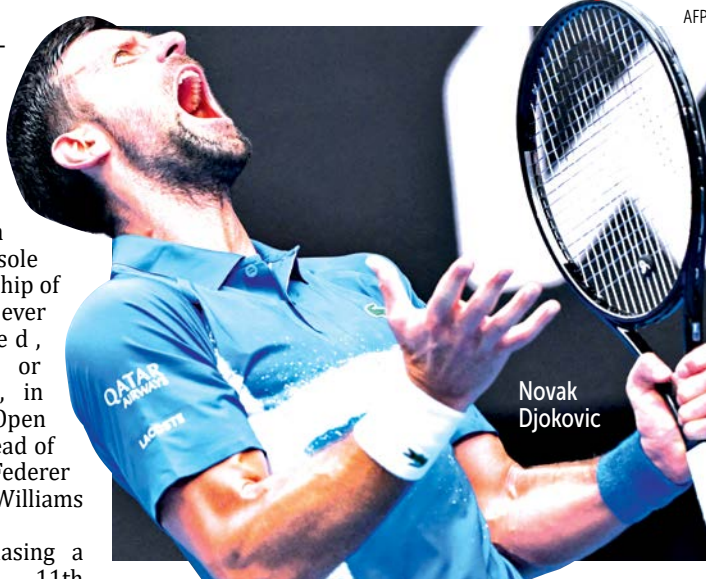
Playing under the roof on Rod Laver Arena, Djokovic needed four sets for the second match in a row be-

fore defeating Portuguese qualifier Jaime Faria 6-1, 6-7 (4/7), 6-3, 6-2.

It was Djokovic's 430th singles match at a major to claim sole ownership of most ever played, men or women, in the Open Era ahead of Roger Federer (429) and Serena Williams (423).

The Serb is chasing a record-extending 11th Australian Open title and historic 25th Grand Slam crown.

"Whether I win or lose, I will always leave my heart out on the court. I'm just blessed to be making another record," said Djokovic, 37, now coached by



AFP

Novak Djokovic

former rival Andy Murray. Djokovic faces Czech 26th seed Tomas Machac next and is drawn to meet Spain's Alcaraz in the last eight.

Four-time Grand Slam winner Alcaraz showed no mercy to Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka in a 6-0, 6-1, 6-4 rout in 81 minutes.

Heading home on Wednesday with Ruud was qualifier Hady Habib, who on Sunday became the first player from Lebanon to win a Grand Slam match.

Olympic champion Zheng was sent packing 7-6 (7/3), 6-3 by world

number 97 Laura Siegemund, the second-oldest player in the women's draw at age 36.

Sabalenka dropped her serve three times and faced 11 break points before overcoming Spain's Jessica Bouzas Maneiro 6-3, 7-5, rattling off the last five games in a row.

Former world number one Osaka stormed back to defeat 20th seed Karolina Muchova 1-6, 6-1, 6-3.

World number three Gauff fought back from 5-3 down in the second set to see off Britain's Jodie Burrage 6-3, 7-5.

Yuki-Olivetti make opening round exit

PTI, MELBOURNE: India's Yuki Bhambri and his French partner Albano Olivetti bowed out of the Australian Open after a straight-sets loss to local wildcards Tristan

Schoonkate and Adam Walton in the opening round here on Wednesday. The Indo-French duo, struggling with errors, fell 2-6, 6-7 in the men's doubles match that lasted one hour

and 20 minutes. Bhambri and Olivetti failed to convert any of their three break points and committed five double faults, compared to just one by their Australian opponents.

Title chasers Atalanta held by Juventus

AFP, MILAN: Atalanta crept closer to Serie A leaders Napoli on Tuesday after drawing an entertaining match with Juventus 1-1 and moving to within four points of the summit, while AC Milan came from behind to beat Como.

Mateo Retegui salvaged a point for Atalanta with a close-range header 12 minutes from time, not long after returning to action from the bench following four weeks on the sidelines with a hamstring injury.

The Italy striker's finish, which levelled Pierre Kalulu's 54th-minute opener for Juve, put him out on his own at the top of the Serie A scoring charts on 13 goals and pushed Atalanta to 43 points, ahead of table-topping Napoli's

crucial trip to Bergamo this coming weekend.

Gian Piero Gasperini's side, who are bidding for their first league title after winning the Europa League last season, sit level on points with second-placed Inter Milan.

Juve remain unbeaten but have now drawn 13 of their 20 league fixtures and sit fifth, 13 points behind Napoli.

Earlier, Theo Hernandez and Rafael Leao saved Milan from an embarrassing defeat at Como with the goals which gave Sergio Conceicao's new team a 2-1 win.

Trailing to Assane Diao's fine low strike on the hour mark, star players Hernandez and Leao turned the match around by the 76th minute, handing Conceicao his first league win as Milan coach.

Liverpool frustrated by Forest; Man City draw at Brentford

AFP, LONDON: Liverpool's charge towards the Premier League title was halted by stubborn Nottingham Forest in a 1-1 draw between the top two on Tuesday as Manchester City's resurgence came undone in a 2-2 draw at Brentford.

Chris Wood fired Forest in front early on at a raucous City Ground, but Liverpool dominated almost the entire 97 minutes and got back on level terms thanks to substitute Diogo Jota's goal with his first touch.

Only a brilliant goalkeeping performance from Matz Sels denied the leaders victory, but the point maintained a six-point cushion



Liverpool striker Diogo Jota (2right) scores the equalising goal against Nottingham Forest, at The City Ground, in Nottingham

over Forest for Arne Slot's men, who also have a game in hand.

Forest had won their last seven games in all competitions to raise the possibility of matching Leicester's incredible title win of 2015/16.

The in-form Wood had the home fans believing af-

field a matter of seconds when he nodded in Kostas Tsimikas' corner.

Sels then made incredible saves to deny Jota, Mohamed Salah and Cody Gakpo a winner, while Salah also had a goalbound effort cleared off the line.

RESULTS

Brentford 2 (Wissa 82, Norgaard 90+2) **Manchester City 2** (Foden 66, 78); **Chelsea 2** (Palmer 13, James 90+5) **Bournemouth 2** (Kluivert 50pen, Semenyo 68); **Nottingham Forest 1** (Wood 8) **Liverpool 1** (Jota 66); **West Ham 3** (Soler 31, Soucek 33, Paqueta 67) **Fulham 2** (Wobi 51, 76)

sportspopup

Yashasvi Jaiswal joins Mumbai Ranji camp

MUMBAI: India opener Yashasvi Jaiswal on Wednesday joined the Mumbai camp after confirming his availability for the next round of Ranji Trophy but skipper Rohit Sharma was not to be seen after turning up for a couple of practice on the opening day of training. Rohit, who batted alongside Mumbai captain Ajinkya Rahane on Tuesday here at the Wankhede Stadium, is expected to resume training in a day or two. However, it remains to be seen if the incumbent Indian skipper would play in the domestic giant's next Ranji Trophy fixture.

Rohit is yet to confirm his availability for the Elite Group A contest against Jammu and Kashmir starting on January 23 but so far, no formal discussions have been taken place.



England batter James Vince quits First-Class cricket to play in PSL

LONDON: England batter James Vince on Wednesday quit First-Class cricket to play for Karachi Kings in the upcoming Pakistan Super League, defying ECB's decision not to grant NOCs for its cricketers to appear in the T20 competition. The England board had decided in November, 2024, to refrain from issuing NOCs to all-format players to play in the PSL, scheduled for April-May this season, because the league clashes with the early rounds of the County Championship. Vince, who has played 13 Tests, was expected to lead Hampshire this season as well, but he was retained by the Kings ahead of the PSL draft.

Orient stun Derby to earn Man City tie in FA Cup

LONDON: Leyton Orient will face Manchester City in the FA Cup fourth round after the League One side scored a shock penalty shoot-out win over second-tier Derby on Tuesday. Orient earned their lucrative showdown with the Premier League champions by beating Derby 6-5 on penalties following a 1-1 after extra-time at Brisbane Road. Zech Obiero was Orient's match-winner as he beat Jacob Widell Zetterstrom from the spot after Callum Elder's spot-kick was saved by Orient's Josh Keeley. Orient took the lead on 20 minutes when Omar Beckles headed the ball on to Sonny Perkins and he found Charlie Kelman, who steered in his 11th goal of the season.

Lazio sack doc who performed far-right falconer's penis surgery: club owner

MILAN: Lazio on Tuesday sacked the club doctor responsible for performing penis surgery on their fascist-sympathising falconer, who was dismissed the day before for publishing the results of the operation online. Speaking to journalists outside Italy's parliament building in Rome, 67-year-old senator and Lazio club owner Claudio Lotito said that Gabriele Antonini had been fired "at the speed of light" after appearing in controversial photos and videos posted on social media by Juan Bernabe. Spaniard Bernabe, who has been present at Lazio home matches with club mascot Olimpia the eagle since 2010, caused scandal when he posted images of his erect penis following surgery.