

# TILAK VARMA RISES TO NO. 2 IN ICC T20 RANKINGS



Tilak Varma

## Varun Chakravarthy breaks into top 5

**PTI, DUBAI:** Talented India batter Tilak Varma climbed one spot to second, while mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy made a massive leap of 25 places to break into the top five in the latest ICC men's T20I rankings released on Wednesday.

Varma now sits just behind Travis Head in the batters' list, with the Australian maintaining a 23-point lead at the top.

The young Indian left-hander has been in sublime form, posting scores of 19 not out, 72 not out, and 18 in India's ongoing T20I series against England.

With two matches remaining in the series, Varma has a chance to overtake Head and become the youngest-ever player to top the rankings -- a record currently held by Babar Azam, who reached No. 1 at the age of 23 years and 105 days.

Varma's current rating of 832 points is the fourth-highest ever achieved by an Indian batter in T20I history, behind only Suryakumar Yadav, Virat Kohli, and KL Rahul.

India's Abhishek Sharma also made significant strides, jumping 59 places to 40th, while England's Liam Livingstone (up five spots to 32nd) and Ben Duckett (up 28 places to 68th) were the biggest gainers from the visiting team.

### Chakravarthy's rise

Chakravarthy's magical 5/24 in India's 26-run loss in the third T20I propelled him to top five in the T20I bowling rankings.

Meanwhile, fellow spinner Axar Patel moved up five places to 11th, just outside the top 10.

England's Adil Rashid has reclaimed the No. 1 spot among T20I bowlers.

Rashid first claimed the top position at the end of 2023 and held it for much of last year until West Indies' Akeal Hosein briefly surpassed him before Christmas.



Varun Chakravarthy

### Bumrah continues to dominate

India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah remains the top-ranked Test bowler following his sensational performances in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Australia.

His dominance across formats also earned him the prestigious Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy for ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year 2024.

Among Test all-rounders, West Indies' Jomel Warrican has climbed to 24th, while Pakistan's Mohammad Rizwan moved up two places to 15th in the Test batters' rankings, which continue to be led by England's Joe Root.

## Adil Rashid is the most important player for us: Jos Buttler

**PTI, RAJKOT:** England skipper Jos Buttler sees veteran leg-spinner Adil Rashid as the team's most important player in the T20 setup after his special skills were on display in the third match against India here.

Rashid put up a masterclass of leg-spin to help England pull one back in the five-match series. He varied his pace beautifully and got the ball to turn a lot more than all other spinners in operation on Tuesday night.

The India batters were not even looking for boundaries against Rashid who ended up with figures of one for 15 in four overs. He applied the choke in the middle overs alongside Jamie Overton and got rid of in-form Tilak Varma with a peach of a delivery.

Even in Chennai during the second T20I, Rashid conceded less than four runs per over.

Following the 26-run win, Buttler couldn't gush enough about the 36-year-old, who has been playing T20 Internationals since 2009.

"He's the most important player for us, and he always just seems to keep getting better. He's got so many different styles of bowling, he's got so much variety."

"One of his great skills is that the first couple of balls he bowls, he seems to work out exactly how he needs to bowl on that wicket, and yeah, he's an absolute trump card to have as a captain, so yeah, he's been brilliant the last couple of games," said Buttler in his post-match press conference.

England had the Indian batters under the pump even in the previous game but Varma's individual brilliance got the home team over the line.

## sportspopup

### Paulo Fonseca will be next Lyon coach

**DÉCIMES-CHARPIEU:** Former AC Milan boss Paulo Fonseca will take over as coach of Ligue 1 side Lyon, the French club's owner told AFP on Tuesday. The Portuguese coach will take over from Pierre Sage, who was dismissed from the Lyon hotseat on Monday. "Barring the unexpected, yes, Paulo is going to be our next coach," said Lyon owner John Textor. "He has a little bit of work to tie things up with his former club. That's happening very quickly. We expect to see him there this week. We expect to announce him this week as our new coach," the American added. Fonseca, 51, has been out of work since leaving AC Milan in December after only joining the Italian giants in the close season. Lyon currently sit sixth in Ligue 1, four points from the Champions League spots.



### We will be ready: PCB on Pakistan's CT readiness amid rising concerns

**KARACHI:** The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) insists that the National Stadium here will be ready to host matches of the upcoming Champions Trophy despite mounting concerns around the venue's preparedness for the marquee event starting February 19. Pakistan's respected leading English daily 'Dawn' on Wednesday carried a story which stated that "it seems absolutely impossible to contemplate the renovation work being completed within the deadline, but the personnel handed the responsibility are beaming with confidence."

"The board would either be hero or zero for taking up such a mammoth task," the newspaper commented. Although PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi inspected the Rawalpindi stadium on Tuesday and assured that the Champions Trophy would be held as planned, it seems unlikely that the Board would get control of the renovated venues in Lahore, Karachi and Rawalpindi by the January 31 deadline. The other upcoming major international matches at these venues include the four-match tri-series with New Zealand and South Africa from February 8 to 14 with the first two games in Lahore and then two matches, including the final, in Karachi.

### Leverkusen sign Villa's Buendia on loan

**BERLIN:** Bayer Leverkusen have signed Argentina international Emiliano Buendia from Aston Villa on a six-month loan, the German club announced Wednesday. The German champions made the move to strengthen their squad with Amine Adli and Martin Terrier out injured, along with striker Victor Boniface reportedly set to leave in this transfer window. The 28-year-old Buendia departs Villa Park just days after signing a 12-month extension with the Premier League side. He scored 10 goals in 97 appearances for Villa after joining from Norwich in 2021.



## Srikanth advances in Thailand

**AGENCIES, PATUMWAN:** Former World No.1 Indian shuttler Kidambi Srikanth entered the second round of the Thailand Masters BWF Super 300 event with a straight-game win over his opponent in Patumwan, Thailand, on Wednesday.

Srikanth defeated Israel's Danii Dubovenko 21-13, 21-18 in the men's singles opening round.

This is Srikanth's second straight win over Dubovenko, having defeated him previously in the 2024 Macau Open back in September 2024.

Srikanth will next face Hong Kong's Jason Gunawan.

Among other Indians in men's singles, S Sankar Muthusamy Subramanian defeated Malaysia's June Wei Cheam 15-21, 21-15, 21-19 in a tough three-game contest. He will next be up against Indonesia's Chico Aura Dwi Wardoyo.

Ayush Shetty was shown the door by Malaysia's Jing Hong Kok 15-21, 17-21, while Mithun Manjunath lost to another Malaysian in Sholeh Aidil 14-21, 13-21



in men's singles.

Srikanth was dominant right from the start, racing to a 6-0 lead in the first game and his opponent struggled, handing the Indian a 1-0 lead.

Srikanth continued in the same vein and raced off the blocks in the second game as well, but the Israeli shuttler put up a better fight this time.

Srikanth led 11-7 at the interval of the second game and kept up his momentum to close down the encounter at 21-18.

In mixed doubles, the pair of Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Shivani Gadge defeated Thailand's Weeraphat Phakjarung and Sararat Chueboca 21-8, 21-16 to advance to the second round.

They will next play another Thai duo of Ratchapol Makkasasithorn and Nattamon Laisuan.

In men's doubles, Ruben Kumar and Hariharan defeated Thailand's Pannawat Jantubtinn and Ratchapol Makkasasithorn 21-18, 21-12.

## Khawaja, Smith tons power Australia to 330-2 in first Test

**AFP, GALLE:** Steve Smith stood unbeaten on 104 after crossing 10,000 Test runs and helped Australia pummel Sri Lanka alongside fellow centurion Usman Khawaja on day one of the opening Test on Wednesday.

Australia reached 330-2 in 81.1 overs when rain stopped play for the day after the tourists elected to bat first in Galle at the start of the two-match series.

Left-handed opener Khawaja, on 147, and skipper Smith put on an unbeaten stand of 195 to thwart the opposition attack in two wicketless afternoon sessions.

Milestone man Smith got three runs off spinner Nishan Peiris to reach his third ton in four matches as he took off his baggy green and raised his bat to acknowledge the crowd's cheers.

Smith took the crease in the first session with 9,999 runs and calmly nudged his very first delivery to mid-on for a single off Prabhath Jayasuriya. He became the 15th batsman to 10,000 Test runs and only the fourth Australian to achieve the feat after Allan Border, Steve Waugh and Ricky Ponting.

Smith survived an early reprieve in his knock when Jayasuriya grassed a sharp return catch in



Australia's Usman Khawaja and Steven Smith run between the wickets during day one of the first test cricket match against Sri Lanka, in Galle, Sri Lanka, on Wednesday

the same over, a chance Sri Lanka bowler Asitha Fernando to the fine leg boundary, a stroke brimming with elegance and relief.

Earlier, Travis Head smashed 57 off 40 balls including 10 fours and one six to put Sri Lanka on the back foot right away.

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The ton came with a flick off fast bowler Asitha Fernando to the fine leg boundary, a stroke brimming with elegance and relief.

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## Steve joins greats with 10,000 Test runs

**GALLE:** Australia's Steve Smith joined a select group of batsmen to reach 10,000 Test runs on Wednesday during the first morning of the opening Test against Sri Lanka.

Smith started the match on 9,999 runs and on his first ball pushed for a single off Prabhath Jayasuriya in Galle to be the 15th player and fourth Australian to the milestone.

The stand-in skipper raised his bat to acknowledge the applause from the crowd.

"Fortunately hit that one in the gap so nice to get that one away," the 35-year-old told Australia's 7Cricnet.

"Nice to tick that off," he added. Smith joined fellow Australians Ricky Ponting, Allan Border and Steve Waugh in a list led by India's Sachin Tendulkar, who made 15,921 runs in his red-ball career.

Former India captain Sunil Gavaskar was the first to cross 10,000 runs in Test cricket when he achieved the feat against Pakistan in 1987 at Ahmedabad.

Smith is leading Australia in the two-match series after regular captain Pat Cummins opted out due to the birth of his second child.

## Hamilton unharmed after crashing during Ferrari Barcelona test

**AFP, BARCELONA:** Seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton crashed during the second day of his new team Ferrari's private Formula One testing in Barcelona on Wednesday but was left unharmed.

The 40-year-old Briton, in his second test with Ferrari following 12 successful years with Mercedes, lost control of the 2023 car and hit the barriers at the Circuit de Catalunya.

A source close to the team told AFP Hamilton was "absolutely OK" and was still exploring the car's limits.

Hamilton is sharing the car with teammate Charles Leclerc as he gets ready for the 2025 season which begins in March with the Australian Grand Prix.

His two-year deal with Ferrari began last week when he powered through laps at the Fiorano test track near Ferrari's Maranello base.

Ferrari will unveil their new car on February 19 at Fiorano, a day after the F1 season launch event in London to mark the sport's 75th anniversary.

## Goa athletes struggle on opening day

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**PANJIM:** Goa's campaign at the 38th National Games in Uttarakhand got off to a disappointing start, with Vedanti Chevli finishing 12th in a field of 13 in the women's 10m air rifle event. Only the top eight competitors qualified for the finals. Meanwhile, in the wushu competition, Siya Pednekar secured a sixth-place finish in her event.

Speaking to **O Herald**, 16-year-old Chevli expressed satisfaction with her performance, stating that she had achieved her highest-ever score in the final round and registered a personal best overall. "It was a smooth match, and I did pretty well for myself," she said.

A student of Kendriya Vidyalaya, Chevli acknowledged the immense support from her school, despite its strict attend-

ance policy. "My PT3 exams are going on, yet the school allowed me to travel the long distance to participate," she shared. She is set to compete in the mixed team event on February 1.

Chevli also highlighted the dedication required for her training, revealing that she travels three times a week from South Goa to North Goa—a 45-minute journey each way—to train for an hour and a half. She expressed gratitude to her parents, coach Bhagyashree, and school for their unwavering support.

Reflecting on her own performance, Pednekar said, "I tried my best, but I am aware there are aspects I need to work on. In my event, there are a few jumps, and I need to improve my stamina. If I am given another opportunity, I will work hard and do very well."

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**PANJIM:** Goa will commence its campaign for the gold medal in football on Thursday, at the Indira Gandhi International Sports Stadium, Haldwani, at 2 pm, with a challenging opening match against Assam in the 38th National Games. The match is expected to be a

crucial test for the Goan squad as they aim to make a strong start in their pursuit of the top prize.

Speaking to **Herald**, Goa head coach Charles Dias acknowledged the strength of their opponents, noting that Assam, like Kolkata, is a recognised football hub. He stressed

that his team would not underestimate their rivals, who have a history of success in the tournament.

"Assam is a strong team and we will not take them lightly," Dias said. "When I came on board with my team for this assignment, we were all on the same page. Even though this is a short tournament, we are approaching it as a marathon. It will be tough, but we have to overcome the conditions and come out on top."

When asked about the composition of his squad, Dias expressed confidence in his players, describing the team as well-balanced and capable of delivering quality football. He remained optimistic about their chances but refrained from making bold predictions.

On the challenge posed by Assam, Dias highlighted the advantage their opponents might have in terms of familiarity with the climatic conditions and local food, which could reflect in their performance. "These factors are common in any competition," he said. "We are going in with a winning mindset, but I won't say much more about the match—I'll let the boys do the talking on the field."

Historically, Assam has enjoyed success in the National Games football tournament, having won the gold medal in 2007. Goa, on the other hand, has come close on multiple occasions but has yet to claim the top prize. The coastal State secured silver medals in 1997 and 2001 and a bronze in 2011.