

India look to seal series in penultimate Pune game today

Sanju's technical weaknesses against express pace along with Rinku's dip in form and fitness issues will be a concern for India when they take on a resurgent England

PTI, PUNE: Sanju Samson's technical weaknesses against express pace along with Rinku Singh's dip in form and fitness issues will be a concern for India when they take on a resurgent England in the fourth T20 International, here, on Friday.

4TH T20I: INDIA VS ENGLAND

Having fluffed their chances in the third T20I in Rajkot, the penultimate game of the five-match series gives the hosts another opportunity to seal the series going into the final game in Mumbai on February 2.

During all three games, Samson couldn't even get his bat down as deliveries would thud into Phil Salt's gloves.



India's players during a training session ahead of the fourth T20 cricket match between India and England, at Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium, in Pune, on Thursday

The hard lengths and steep bounce are creating a problem and even on batting shirt-fronts, it is not easy to hit through the line if one doesn't have proper technique or doesn't regularly face this quality of fast bowling.

Samson is one of head coach Gautam Gambhir's

favoured and it is expected that he would be persisted with going into next year's T20 World Cup.

But his technical issues need to be sorted out at the earliest by Gambhir, new batting coach Sitanshu Kotak and the himself.

Rinku Singh's back

spasms forced the team management to try Dhruv Jurel in the No.7 position but he has looked out of place in this particular format unlike Test cricket.

Rinku played the first game and was rested in the next two games but assistant coach Ryan ten Does-

TEAMS

India: Suryakumar Yadav (captain), Abhishek Sharma, Sanju Samson (wk), Tilak Varma, Axar Patel, Hardik Pandya, Washington Sundar, Varun Chakravarthy, Ravi Bishnoi, Arshdeep Singh, Mohammed Shami, Dhruv Jurel (wk), Rinku Singh, Shivam Dube, Ramandeep Singh, Harshit Rana

England: Jos Buttler (captain), Phil Salt (wk), Ben Duckett, Harry Brook, Liam Livingstone, Jamie Smith (wk), Adil Rashid, Brydon Carse, Jamie Overton, Gus Atkinson, Rehan Ahmed, Jofra Archer, Mark Wood, Jacob Bethell, Saqib Mahmood

Match starts at 7 pm

chate declared the batter fit for Friday's contest in the pre-match press conference.

When Gambhir became Kolkata Knight Riders mentor, Rinku got to play a total of 70 odd balls in the 2024 IPL. As a result, he couldn't make it to the T20

World Cup as Shivam Dube, with his bowling ability, was considered better in the Americas.

The Indian middle order hasn't exactly beaten England spinner Adil Rashid well so far and with Dube back in the mix, will Gambhir take a chance with him?

India eye final berth

PTI, KUALA LUMPUR (Malaysia): India would like to continue their flawless campaign when they take on England in the semi-final of the Women's U-19 T20 World Cup, here, on Friday.

U-19 WOMEN'S T20 WORLD CUP

Following a 10-wicket thrashing of hosts Malaysia, India hammered Sri Lanka by 60 runs, Bangladesh by eight wickets in their first Super Six game and ended the round with a massive 150-run win over Scotland. The Niki Prasad-led side has been in red-hot form across departments with their last Super Six outing against Scotland sounding an ominous warning to the opponents.

England will be wary of India's batting firepower and hope their players find their touch quickly in the contest.

TEAMS

India: Niki Prasad (c), Sanika Chalke, G Trisha, Kamalini G, Bhavika Ahire, Ishwari Awasare, Mithila Vinod, Joshitha VJ, Sonam Yadav, Parunika Sisodiya, Kesari Drithi, Aayushi Shukla, Anandita Kishor, MD Shabnam, Vaishnavi S.

England: Abi Norgrove (c), Phoebe Brett, Olivia Brinsden, Tilly Corteen-Coleman, Trudy Johnson, Katie Jones, Charlotte Lambert, Eve O'Neill, Davina Perrin, Jemima Spence, Charlotte Stubbs, Amuruthaa Surenkumar, Prisha Thanawala, Erin Thomas, Grace Thompson.

Match starts at 12 pm

India still favourite to enter play-offs

PTI, NEW DELHI: Low on ranking but high on emotions and zeal, a talented bunch of spirited players from Togo, led by Thomas Setodji, exuded confidence that they will be able to surprise hosts India this weekend in their Davis Cup World Group I Play-Off tie.

Steedji is the only ranked player from the tiny African nation way down at number 1256 but in the Davis Cup he has a decent 9/3 win-loss record for his country.

On Tour, he is also a travelling coach of French player Calvin Hemery, who is ranked 206.

Together with his teammates Liova Ayite Ajavon, Hod'abalo Isak Padio and M'lapa Tingou Akomlo, they have won 10 of their last 11 Davis Cup ties since 2022.



India's Davis Cup team during a press conference ahead of the Davis Cup World Group I Play-Offs tie against Togo, in New Delhi, on Thursday

DAVIS CUP WORLD GROUP I PLAY-OFF TIE

They do not train in Togo but in France and USA mostly where they get better facilities and coaching. At the time of Davis Cup fixtures, they come together and churn out some impressive results.

Punching way above their weight, they even

stunned Latvia last year apart from winning against Indonesia (3-2) Benin (2-1), Algeria (2-1), Rwanada (3-0) and Congo (2-1).

The only blemish was 0-3 reversal against South Africa in August 2023.

India do not have their best singles player in Sumit Nagal but still the hosts will enter the tie as favourites. The gap in rankings is huge but Steedji said anything

can happen in sport.

India's number two singles player Ramkumar Ramanathan also acknowledged that the Togolese were hitting the ball nicely.

"I just saw them the last couple of days. And, yeah, these guys are hitting the ball well. So we should just stick to our strengths and we should play to our capabilities and not think much about them."

Afghan women cricketers reunite in first game after fleeing Taliban

AFP, MELBOURNE: Afghanistan's women cricketers on Thursday played their first game since fleeing the Taliban three years ago, a charity match in Australia that captain Nahida Sapan hoped would spark "a movement for change".

Hundreds of women athletes fled Afghanistan as the Taliban took over in August 2021, escaping a hard-line stance that essentially banned women's sport and education. Most of the national women's cricket side settled as refugees in Australia, where they reunited for the first time on Thursday to play a charity match in Melbourne.

The Afghanistan Cricket Board made a significant stride in November 2020



Afghanistan Women's XI pose during the cricket match at Junction Oval in Melbourne

when it handed 25 promising women cricketers professional contracts.

But before the fledgling squad had a chance to play together, the Taliban captured capital Kabul and declared an end to women's cricket. Of the 25 women once contracted by the Afghanistan Cricket Board, 22

are now settled in the Australian cities of Melbourne and Canberra.

Some of these players have lobbied the governing International Cricket Council in the hopes of forming a refugee team with some kind of official status.

The council has so far ignored these calls.

Thursday's game was played at Melbourne's Junction Oval, a storied ground where a young Shane Warne once plied his trade.

The Afghan side played an invitational outfit representing Cricket Without Borders, a charity which aims to draw young women into the game.

Young players in Hockey India's probables list for

PTI, NEW DELHI: India on Thursday included more than half-a-dozen young players in the long list of probables for the upcoming FIH Pro League, based on their performance in the Hockey India League and junior level competitions.

Among those included in the list of 32 senior probables for the first time are goalkeeper Princedeep Singh, defender Yashdeep Siwach, midfielders Rabichandra Singh and Rajinder Singh, and forwards Angad Bir Singh, Uttam Singh and Arshdeep Singh.

PROBABLES

Goalkeepers: Krishan Bahadur Pathak, Suraj Karkera, Princedeep Singh
Defenders: Jarmanpreet Singh, Amit Rohidas, Harmanpreet Singh, Sumit, Sanjay, Jugraj Singh, Nilam Sanjeev Xess, Varun Kumar, Yashdeep Siwach
Midfielders: Rajkumar Pal, Shamsher Singh, Manpreet Singh, Hardik Singh, Vivek

Sagar Prasad, Nilakanta Sharma, Moirangthem Rabichandra Singh, Rajinder Singh
Forwards: Abhishek, Sukhjeet Singh, Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Mandeep Singh, Gurjant Singh, Angad Bir Singh, Bobby Singh Dhami, Shilanand Lakra, Dilpreet Singh, Arajeet Singh Hundal, Uttam Singh, Arshdeep Singh

Man City, PSG stay alive in Champions League as Arsenal reach last 16

AFP, PARIS: Manchester City came from behind against Club Brugge to reach the Champions League knockout phase, where they were safely joined by Paris Saint-Germain as Arsenal qualified directly for the last 16 on Wednesday in the final round of league-phase matches.

Inter Milan, Atletico Madrid, Bayer Leverkusen, Lille and Aston Villa also followed Liverpool and Barcelona in securing top-eight finishes to skip the new play-off round.

On a dramatic night in which only two of the closing 18 games were dead rubbers, Man City got the win they needed to avoid



Barcelona's forward Lamine Yamal (centre) scores his first goal defended by Atalanta BC's defender Sead Kolacinac during the UEFA Champions League, league phase football match at the Estadi Olimpic Lluis Companys in Barcelona

4-2 last week, produced an emphatic display in a 4-1 triumph at Stuttgart.

Arsenal only needed a point to wrap up a last-16 berth and goals from Jorginho and Ethan Nwaneri gave them a 2-1 victory at Girona.

Inter finished fourth in the standings by seeing off 10-man Monaco 3-0, while

Atletico made it five straight Champions League wins with a 4-1 thumping of Salzburg in Austria.

Bayer Leverkusen also completed the job, beating Sparta Prague 2-0, as Lille were the only French side to seal a top-eight slot thanks to a 6-1 thrashing of Feyenoord.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE DRAW LINE-UP

PLAY-OFFS
Atalanta/Borussia Dortmund vs Sporting/Club Brugge
Real Madrid/Bayern Munich vs Celtic/Manchester City
AC Milan/PSV Eindhoven vs Feyenoord/Juventus

Paris Saint-Germain/Benfica vs Monaco/Brest
ALREADY THROUGH TO THE LAST 16
Liverpool, Barcelona, Arsenal, Inter Milan, Atletico Madrid, Bayer Leverkusen, Lille, Aston Villa

sportspopup

Narmada clinch women's 10m air rifle gold; Bhanwala wins 25m rapid fire pistol

DEHRADUN: Former World Cup winner Narmada Nithin Raju overcame a strong field, which included Asian Games medallist Ramita Jindal and Olympian Elavenil Valarivan, to not just create a national record but miss equalling the world mark by a fraction of a point on her way to clinching gold in the women's 10m air rifle event at the 38th National Games, here, on Thursday. Among other results, Haryana's 2022 World Championships silver medallist Anish Bhanwala bagged gold in the men's 25m rapid fire pistol event. Narmada, representing Tamil Nadu, clinched the top podium finish with a score of 254.4, beating back the challenge from Maharashtra's Arya Borse (252.5) and Ramita (230.4) in the eight-shooter final. In the process, she broke the national mark of 252.9 set by Olympian Apurvi Chandela at the 2019 World Cup in New Delhi. The world record in the event is 254.5 points, set by Huang Yuting of China at last year's ISSF World Cup Final in New Delhi. Meanwhile, Bhanwala finished with 31 hits, three ahead of the silver medallist Gurpreet Singh of Services (28 hits) in the men's 25m rapid fire pistol final. Vijayveer Sidhu (Punjab) secured the bronze with 26 hits. In total, 364 shooters are representing 29 teams at the National Games, making shooting the star attraction of the Games.

Srikanth, Subramanian enter Thailand Open quarters

BANGKOK (Thailand): Former world No 1 Kidambi Srikanth and S Subramanian won their respective matches to reach men's singles' quarterfinals of the Thailand Masters BWF Super 300 tournament here on Thursday. Srikanth needed only 42 minutes to get the better of the 20-year-old Jason Gunawan from Hong Kong 21-19, 21-15 in his round of 16 contest. He had previously beaten Gunawan in the Badminton Asia Team Championships last year. Subramanian had to work hard for his victory over Chico Aura Dwi Wardoyo from Indonesia. Subramanian lost the opening set before sealing the issue 9-21, 21-10, 21-17. In mixed doubles, however, the Indian pair of Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Gadde were beaten 19-21, 15-21 by Thailand's Ratchapol Makkasasithorn and Nattamon Luisuan.

CWG gold-winning boxer Manoj retires, to take up coaching

NEW DELHI: Former Commonwealth Games gold-winning boxer Manoj Kumar, who dominated the light welterweight (64kg) division in India at his prime and did not hesitate to voice his disagreements with national federation's policies, announced his retirement on Thursday to begin a career in coaching. The 39-year-old, who won his first and only CWG gold in the 2010 Delhi Games, is also a two-time Asian Championships bronze-medallist. His second and last CWG medal, a bronze, came in Gold Coast in 2018. "It's a carefully thought out decision because once I turn 40, I can anyway not compete in amateur events as per international rules. I am retiring as a content man after representing my country to the best of my ability," Manoj, who hails from Kaithal in Haryana, told PTI. He now intends to devote time to the academy that he has set up with elder brother and long-time personal coach Rajesh Kumar Rajound in Kurukshetra.

The 'King Kohli' effect: Fans make a beeline for Delhi's Ranji game

NEW DELHI: The unmatched aura of Virat Kohli was on full display in and around the Arun Jaitley Stadium even before the Ranji Trophy fixture between Delhi and Railways could start here as thousands of fans queued up to watch the superstar in his first domestic red-ball appearance in 13 years. The DDCA (Delhi and Districts Cricket Association) had projected a crowd of around 10,000 for Kohli's homecoming, which is unheard of for a Ranji Trophy game. But such was his magnetic pull that even those lofty calculations went for a toss. Long before the start of play at 9.30am local time, Kohli's loyal band of supporters were jostling to enter the stadium. At first, the DDCA opened the roughly 6,000-capacity 'Gautam Gambhir Stand' for spectators but sensing the crowd situation could go out of hand, the officials were forced to open the 'Bishan Bedi Stand' which can accommodate around 14,000 people. "I have been involved in Delhi cricket for more than 30 years but I have not witnessed such scenes for a Ranji Trophy game. It just shows the Kohli's popularity is unmatched," an overwhelmed DDCA secretary Ashok Sharma told PTI.

Gaddafi Stadium to be handed over to ICC for Champions Trophy on Feb 11: PCB source

LAHORE: Amid rising concerns over the readiness of Champions Trophy venues in the country, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has said that the iconic Gaddafi Stadium here would be handed over to the ICC on February 11, little over a week before the start of the ODI showpiece. The PCB posted a video of the new-look stadium on 'X' and wrote, "Under the lights, it's a sight to behold!... We can't wait to welcome fans, officials and teams for the tri-nation series and Champions Trophy." The mega-event begins on February 19. A Board source told PTI that the stadium will be handed over to the International Cricket Council (ICC), "for branding and other stuff on February 11" after Pakistan's tri-series against New Zealand and South Africa. The ICC had set January 31 as the deadline for the handover of all three stadiums -- Gaddafi Stadium (Lahore), National Stadium (Karachi) and the Rawalpindi Stadium -- which will host the global event in Pakistan.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE RESULTS

Sporting Lisbon 1 (Harder 77) Bologna 1 (Pobega 21), Manchester City 3 (Kovacic 53, Ordonez 62-og, Savinho 77) Club Brugge 1 (Onyedika 45), Aston Villa 4 (Rogers 3, 5, 90+1, Watkins 60) Celtic 2 (Idah 36, 38), Juventus 0 Benfica 2 (Pavlidis 16, Kokcu 80), Young Boys 0 Red Star Belgrade 1 (Kanga 69), Inter Milan 3 (Martinez 4-pen, 16, 67) Monaco 0, Girona 1 (Danjuma 28) Arsenal 2 (Jorginho 38-pen, Nwaneri 42), Borussia Dortmund 3 (Guirassy 17, 44, Bensebaini 79) Shakhtar Donetsk 1 (Marlon 50), Dinamo Zagreb 2 (Baturina 19, Pjaca 60) AC Milan 1 (Pulicic 53), Brest 0 Real Madrid 3 (Rodrygo 27, 78, Bellingham 56), Bayern Munich 3 (Muller 8, Kane 63, Coman 84) Slovan Bratislava 1 (Tolic 90), Bayer Leverkusen 2 (Wirtz 32, Tella 64) Sparta Prague 0, Barcelona 2 (Yamal 47, Araujo 72) Atalanta 2 (Ederson 67, Pasalic 79), Red Bull Salzburg 1 (Daghim 90+1) Atletico Madrid 4 (Simeone 5, Griezmann 13, 45+1, Llorente 63), PSV Eindhoven 3 (Bakayoko 35, Saibari 45, Pepi 45+6) Liverpool 2 (Gakpo 28-pen, Elliott 40), Stuttgart 1 (Fuehrich 77) Paris Saint-Germain 4 (Barcola 6, Dembele 17, 35, 54), Sturm Graz 1 (Malic 42) RB Leipzig 0, Lille 6 (Sahraoui 4, Trauner 38-og, 76-og, Gomes 57, David 74, Cabella 80) Feyenoord 1 (Gimenez 14)