

Bayern sink Celtic, Feyenoord beat Milan

AFP, PARIS: Harry Kane was on target as Bayern Munich beat Celtic 2-1 in Glasgow in the first leg of their Champions League play-off on Wednesday, while there were also wins for Benfica, Feyenoord and Club Brugge.

Bayern are hoping to go all the way to this season's final, which will be played at their own Allianz Arena in Munich on May 31.

They threatened to run riot against the Scottish champions at Celtic Park as they dominated the first half and took the lead just before the interval thanks to a superb Michael Olise strike.

Bayern's second goal came just four minutes after half-time, with the unmarked Kane scoring with a cushioned finish at the back post following a corner. It was Kane's seventh goal in this season's Champions League, and his 29th in 29 games in all competitions. However, the Bundesliga leaders took their foot off the pedal after that, allowing Celtic -- who had a



Bayern Munich's English striker #09 Harry Kane celebrates after scoring the team's second goal during the UEFA Champions League play-off first leg match against Celtic at Celtic Park stadium in Glasgow, Scotland

first-minute Nicolas Kuehn goal disallowed for offside -- to come back into the game. Brendan Rodgers' team pulled one back as Daizen Maeda scored following a corner with 11 minutes left, but they could not find an equaliser.

Celtic's first home defeat since December 2023 leaves them facing a huge task to try to turn the tie around in Germany next Tuesday, with the winners going through to face either Bayer Leverkusen or Atletico Madrid in the last 16.

Elsewhere, Vangelis Pavlidis scored the only goal as Benfica won 1-0 away to Monaco, as the home side were forced to play much of the second half with 10 men. Benfica had won 3-2 in Monaco in the league phase in November and they came

out on top again at the Stade Louis II thanks to a Pavlidis strike just after half-time. It was the Greek international's sixth goal in his team's last five Champions League outings, a run which includes a hat-trick in the dramatic 5-4 loss to Barce-

lona last month.

Monaco had Libyan mid-fielder Moatasem Al-Musrati sent off in the 52nd minute, when the recent signing from Besiktas gestured to the referee calling for a yellow card after his teammate Breel Embolo had been fouled, only to be handed a second caution himself.

Benfica will hope to finish off the tie in next week's return, with the winners facing either Liverpool or Barcelona in the last 16.

In Rotterdam, Feyenoord shook off the sacking of coach Brian Priske on Monday to beat seven-time European champions AC Milan 1-0 and gain the upper hand to take to San Siro for the return.

RESULTS

Club Brugge 2 (Jutgla 15, Nilsson 90+4-pen) **Atalanta 1** (Pascal 41), **Celtic 1** (Maeda 79) **Bayern Munich 2** (Olise 45, Kane 49), **Feyenoord 1** (Paixao 3) **AC Milan 0**, **Monaco 0** **Benfica 1** (Pavlidis 48). **Return legs Feb 18-19**

Families won't travel with Team India for CT

PTI, NEW DELHI: Families will not be accompanying the Indian cricket players heading to Dubai on February 15 for the ICC Champions Trophy as the BCCI's new travel policy comes into effect for the first time with this tournament.

The Indian team starts its campaign in Dubai against Bangladesh on February 20, followed by the marquee clash against arch-rivals Pakistan (February 23) and the final preliminary face-off with New Zealand on March 2.

The Rohit Sharma-led squad will play its games in Dubai while the rest of the tournament unfolds from February 19 in Pakistan across three venues.

Given that the duration of the tour is just over three weeks even if the final on March 9 is taken into consideration, the BCCI will not allow families to accompany the players. As per the new policy, fami-

lies can be with players for a maximum of two weeks during a tour which is of 45 days or more.

"If anything changes then it is different but as of now, the players are unlikely to be accompanied by their wives or partners for this tour. One of the senior players had enquired about it and he was told that the policy decision will be followed," a senior BCCI source told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

"Since the tour is of less than one month, families won't be accompanying the players. But if exceptions are made, I think that individual will have to bear the full expenses as BCCI won't be covering any cost," he added.

However, families will be there with the team during the five-Test tour of England in June-July-August as the five-Test. The window for their two-week stay during the trip will be worked out later.

Liverpool held by Everton, four red cards in fiery last Goodison Park derby

AFP, LIVERPOOL: James Tarkowski struck in the 98th minute to salvage a 2-2 draw for Everton against Liverpool as four red cards were issued after full-time on a dramatic final Merseyside derby at Goodison Park on Wednesday.

Liverpool edge seven points clear at the top of the Premier League but were denied a vital win by Tarkowski's blistering strike after Mohamed Salah put Arne Slot's men in front.

Everton's Abdoulaye Doucoure, Liverpool midfielder Curtis Jones, Slot and his assistant Sipke Hulshoff were then sent off as tempers flared at the final whistle on a night Liverpool will come to regret if they do not go on to lift a record-equalling 20th English top flight title.

Everton are set to move to a new 53,000 capacity stadium in Liverpool's



EPL RESULT

Everton 2 (Beto 11, Tarkowski 90+8) **Liverpool 2** (Mac Allister 16, Salah 73)

Bramley Moore Dock next season and gave their home

Liverpool's Egyptian striker #11 Mohamed Salah scores the team's second goal past Everton's English goalkeeper #01 Jordan Pickford during the English Premier League match at Goodison Park in Liverpool, England

since 1892 a night to remember against their local rivals. Liverpool's quest for a quadruple came unstuck with a shock FA Cup exit

to second-tier strugglers Plymouth on Sunday.

Slot made 10 changes as he resorted to his strongest available side.

Shreyas was never supposed to be benched: Gambhir



PTI, AHMEDABAD: India head coach Gautam Gambhir has rubbished speculation that Shreyas Iyer was being side-lined from the ODI set-up despite his brilliant form, saying that the consistent right-hander was always in the "scheme of things" and will be an important player in this month's Champions Trophy.

Iyer displayed excellent form during the just-concluded 3-0 ODI series sweep against England, hitting a counter-attacking 36-ball 59 in the opener when India were 19/2 chasing 249 in Nagpur, and scoring 44 and 78 in the next two games. After the opening match, he created quite a stir by stating that he got into the side only after Virat Kohli had to sit out of the game because of a sore knee. This led to speculation that he would be dropped for Kohli in the next two games.

"He wasn't supposed to be benched throughout the series. We wanted to give Yashasvi (Jaiswal) a go in the first game and see what he can bring on the table because he was in (a) really good form in Australia," Gambhir said after the third and final match. Iyer was preferred over Jaiswal eventually and Gambhir described him as an "important player" in the side.

"I know that you can't judge someone (Jaiswal) by one innings. But we always knew that Shreyas was going to be an important player for us. Sometimes when you've only got three games, you want to try and rotate your squad as well," the coach reasoned.

"(And) when you've got Champions Trophy around the corner, you want to try and maximise

these three games and try and give everyone an opportunity. But Shreyas was always in the scheme of things (and it is) good that he played all the three games," Gambhir added.

The Champions Trophy gets underway on February 19 with India talking Bangladesh on February 20 in Dubai.

Someone's missed opportunity is another person's golden chance, believes Gambhir, who expects the likes of Harshit Rana and Arshdeep Singh to step up and fill the void created by pace talisman Jasprit Bumrah's injury-forced absence from the Champions Trophy.

Bumrah, who played a decisive role in India's T20 World Cup win last year with 15 wickets including a vital spell in the final, has been ruled out of the eight-team event which begins on February 19 owing to a nagging back problem.

"Someone missing out opportunity could be a great opportunity for someone else as well, that is how sport goes. Hopefully, these guys (Rana, Arshdeep and Mohammed Shami) can deliver and put their hand up and do the job for the team," he said. "...it's a great opportunity for them to try and deliver for the country, (it is) as simple as it can get. What we don't have, we don't have. What we have is what we have, and we're going to try and go with a very clear mind," he added.

Bumrah's replacement, Rana, has done reasonably well and was drafted into the Champions Trophy squad on Tuesday night.

Gambhir said the promotion of all-rounder Axar Patel at No 5 in the first two ODIs was largely to ensure a left-handed batter in the mix.

Iyer displayed excellent form during the just-concluded 3-0 ODI series sweep against England, hitting a counter-attacking 36-ball 59 in the opener when India were 19/2 chasing 249 in Nagpur, and scoring 44 and 78 in the next two games

India to play Japan in quarter-finals

PTI, QINGDAO (China): Indian shuttlers went down to South Korea 2-3 in a Group D tie of the Badminton Asia Mixed Team Championship, but they had already made it to the quarter-finals after finishing second in the pool, here, on Thursday.

India, who had made a sizzling start on Wednesday defeating Macau 5-0, fought till the very end before the men's doubles pair of MR Arjun and Satwik-sairaj Rankiredy lost the deciding rubber in straight games to Jin Yong and NA Sung Seung.

The mixed doubles pair of Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto started the proceedings by winning opening game 21-11, but lost the next two 12-21 15-21 to go down in 56 minutes.

India's top-seeded women's player here Malvika Bansod found world No. 19 Sim Yu Jin a very tough opponent to handle, as the youngster went down without a fight 9-21 10-21 in just 27 minutes.

India will play Japan in the quarter-finals and the winner of the contest will be assured of at least a bronze medal.

Focus on domestic players as WPL begins today

Defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru take on Gujarat Giants in opener

PTI, VADODARA: The Women's Premier League is set to continue nurturing India's emerging cricket talent while showcasing top-tier international players as the third edition kicks off with defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru taking on Gujarat Giants, here, on Friday.

While the global superstars have brought immense value to the competition, the league's true success lies in the rise of domestic players. The first two seasons witnessed several domestic talents like Shreyanka Patil and Saika Ishaque thrive under pressure, earning national call-ups and making their India debuts.

With each WPL season, the list of emerging Indian

players continues to grow.

With overseas stars like Alyssa Healy, Sophie Molineux and Kate Cross missing this edition due to injuries, the upcoming season presents a golden opportunity for both experienced domestic players and fresh

talent to shine.

"As India captain, I'm very excited for this season because a lot of domestic cricketers have prepared themselves for this tournament," Harmanpreet Kaur told PTI.

The tournament has in-

MI and RCB pick Parunika and Nuzhat as injury replacements

NEW DELHI: Mumbai Indians have picked Parunika Sisodia as a replacement for an injured all-rounder Pooja Vastrakar for the Women's Premier League, the franchise said on Thursday. Royal Challengers Bengaluru, meanwhile, opted for keeper-batter Nuzhat Parween as replacement for injured wrist spinner Asha Sobhana. Parween, the wicketkeeper from Railways has represented India in 5 T20Is and will join RCB for her base price of Rs 30 lakh. Vastrakar was ruled out of the third edition of the WPL due to an injury. Parunika, who was picked by the Gujarat Giants in the inaugural edition of the league, will now feature in the Mumbai Indians squad for WPL 2025. She joins MI for Rs 10 lakh.

roduced two new venues, Vadodara and Lucknow.

Defending champions RCB face a tough challenge in retaining their title, with key players from last season such as Sophie Devine, who has taken a break from cricket to "prioritise her well-being", Molineux and Kate Cross (injuries), missing this edition.

For Gujarat Giants, Ashleigh Gardner has taken over leadership from fellow Australian Beth Moon-ey. The Giants have struggled in both the earlier editions, finishing at the bottom each time.

In a bid to turn their fortunes around, they have brought in the experienced Deandra Dottin, young batter Simran Shaikh, and fast bowler Danielle Gibson.

sportspopup

RCB names Patidar as captain for IPL 2025

BENGALURU: IPL franchise Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Thursday named Rajat Patidar as its captain for the upcoming season starting March 21, replacing South African Faf du Plessis who was released from the squad last year. Patidar was among RCB's retained players before the mega auction in November, 2024 and has the experience of leading Madhya Pradesh in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (T20) and the Vijay Hazare Trophy (ODI). The 31-year-old, who signed up with the franchise in 2022, guided Madhya Pradesh to the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy final where his side lost to Mumbai by five wickets last year. The talismanic Virat Kohli backed the appointment of Rajat Patidar, saying the batter has "earned the right to be in this position" with his consistency and discipline. "I am here to inform everyone, like the others will do as well, that Rajat Patidar is going to be the new captain of RCB. Rajat, firstly I want to congratulate and wish you all the very best," Kohli, who captained the franchise from 2013 to 2021, said in a video posted by RCB. "The way you have grown in the franchise and the way you have performed, you have really made a place in the hearts of all the fans of RCB, all over India. They get excited to watch you play. So, this is very well deserved."

Bahutule appointed RR's spin-bowling coach

JAIPUR: Former India cricketer Sairaj Bahutule was on Thursday appointed Rajasthan Royals' spin-bowling coach for the upcoming IPL season, adding to the long list of support staff led by head coach Rahul Dravid. Bahutule, a former leg-spinner and left-hand batter, played two Tests and eight ODIs taking a total of five wickets but his exploits in first-class cricket put him in the league of domestic greats. Bahutule, 52, scored over 6,000 runs and took 630 wickets, besides 197 scalps in List A games. "The 52-year-old returns to the Royals having been a part of the setup from 2018-21. He represented India in two Tests and eight ODIs and has since transitioned into a successful coaching career, mentoring teams such as Mumbai, Bengal, Kerala and the Indian national men's team where he has been instrumental in developing emerging talents," said Rajasthan Royals in a statement. Head coach Dravid said Bahutule would bring a wealth of experience to the side that won the inaugural edition of the IPL in 2008 under the legendary Shane Warne.

ECB to help county clubs with 470m pound boost as 4 IPL teams invest in The Hundred

LONDON: English county cricket clubs facing hardships will get financial boost after the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), with investments from four well-known IPL franchises, has been able to raise GBP 975 million by selling stakes in eight teams in their flagship event 'The Hundred'. The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has entered into exclusivity agreements with eight parties in the final stage of the process to secure private expertise and investment into The Hundred's teams. Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries (owners of Mumbai Indians), the GMR Group (co-owners of Delhi Capitals), Sanjiv Goenka's RPGS (owners of Lucknow Super Giants) and Sun TV Network (owners of Sunrisers Hyderabad) have all bought stakes in four of the eight franchises.

6,000 plus Indian fans travelled to Australia for Border-Gavaskar Trophy: Cricket Australia

MELBOURNE: Cricket Australia (CA) on Thursday said a record number of 6000 plus Indian fans travelled to Australia to watch the 2024-25 five-match Test series between the two teams for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Australia won the fiercely contested series 3-1 to reclaim the BGT trophy after a decade. "Over 6,000 travelling fans bought tickets from India "in addition to the many who purchased through friends and family" in Australia," CA said in a statement. The series, one of world cricket's biggest rivalries, saw a six-fold increase on ticket sales from people living in India from the previous BGT rubber hosted by Australia in 2018/19. As per the official figures, a total of 8,37,879 people attended the series, the fourth most for any Test series Down Under and the highest for any non-Ashes series. Nearly 5 per cent of all ticket purchasing fans travelled for the matches from overseas, CA said.

Liverpool's Slot banned for two matches

LONDON: Liverpool manager Arne Slot has been handed a two-match touchline ban following his red card as tensions flared at the end of a fiery 2-2 draw with Everton. "Liverpool head coach Arne Slot was dismissed at the end of the Merseyside derby for using offensive, insulting, or abusive language," the Premier League said in a statement. "He is handed a two-match touchline ban as a result." The matches affected are Sunday's game against struggling Wolves at home and Liverpool's trip to Aston Villa on February 19. Doucoure and Jones will both serve one-match bans.

Australian Open rules out mixed doubles changes after US Open furore

MELBOURNE: The Australian Open on Thursday ruled out following the US Open's move to radically overhaul the mixed doubles competition and play it before the main tournament starts. US tennis chiefs announced on Tuesday that mixed doubles at Flushing Meadows would become a standalone event in the week leading up to the main draw, with matches best of three sets, but played to just four games. Tennis Australia said it had no plans to follow suit, citing the popularity of mixed doubles at the opening Grand Slam of the year. "Mixed doubles is a fantastic showcase for tennis, and one of the only opportunities in world sport where men and women can compete alongside and against each other."