

# Varun is a big threat, we'll be putting on our thinking caps: Kiwi coach

PTI, DUBAI: New Zealand coach Gary Stead conceded that Varun Chakravarthy will be a "big threat" in the Champions Trophy final, and the Kiwis will put on their "thinking caps" to work on the ways to negate India's mystery spinner.

India will face New Zealand in the final of the ICC showpiece here on Sunday. "We certainly expect him to play after getting 5/42 against us in the last game. He's a class bowler, and showed his skills against us last time and he's a big threat in the game," Stead told reporters here on Friday.

"So we'll be putting our thinking caps on around how we nullify that and how we can still score runs against him," he added.

In that context, Stead said the Kiwis will look to take some cues from the last Group A match they played here against India a few days back. In fact, he refused to read too much into India's familiarity with the conditions here.

"The decision around that's (the schedule) out of our hands, so it's not something we worry about too much. India have got to play all their games here in Dubai, but we have had a game

**“Varun Chakravarthy will be a “big threat” in the Champions Trophy final, and the Kiwis will put on their “thinking caps” to work on the ways to negate India’s mystery spinner. I guess we’re deep into the tournament now and sometimes it’s not always a lot of training that you need, it’s just getting your body and your mind right to compete in the final and that will be our key focus – Gary Stead, New Zealand coach**

here and we'll learn very quickly from that experience.

"So when you come to this stage of the tournament, I mean, we've had eight teams at the start, we're down to two now. It's always exciting to be in this situation and from our perspective, it just comes to a one-off game now and if we're good enough to beat India on Sunday, then I will be happy," he explained.

New Zealand, however, had to shuttle between Pakistan and Dubai for their final group stage match, the semifinal against South Africa and eventually for

the final here. Stead admitted it was a bit hectic but said his side was good enough to adjust to such schedules.

"There's no doubt that coming here off playing Lahore and we had a full day of travel yesterday, then it just takes it out of you a little bit, but we've got a couple of days now of a little bit of recovery and planning and training towards the game."

Towards the business end, Stead believes that it is more about co-ordination of mind and body rather than excessive training.

"I guess we're deep into the tournament now and sometimes it's not always a lot of training that you need, it's just getting your body and your mind right to compete in the final and that will be our key focus over the next one day," he added.



## Henry doubtful for CT final

PTI, DUBAI: New Zealand pacer Matt Henry has been rendered doubtful for the Champions Trophy final against India owing to a shoulder niggle but coach Gary Stead is hopeful that the in-form bowler will recover in time for the clash on Sunday.

Henry leads the tournament's top wicket-takers' list with 10 scalps, including a 5/42 against India in their group match.

The 33-year-old injured himself when he landed on his shoulder during the semi-final against South Africa in Lahore on Wednesday.

"Matt obviously landed on his shoulder and it was pretty uncomfortable. I guess the positive thing from our perspective is that he got back out there to bowl. We've had some scans done on him," Stead told reporters here on Friday.

The coach was hopeful that Henry would be ready in time for the final.

## Kane vs Indian spinners, watch out for the battle within battle in final

PTI, DUBAI: The showdown between Indian spinners and Kane Williamson will be intense on a gripping DICS pitch, but beyond the personal realm, it also has the potential to decide the outcome of the Champions Trophy final, here, on Sunday.

New Zealand is eager to end their 25-year-long wait for an ICC 50-over title after bagging the ICC Knockouts Trophy in Kenya, beating India by four wickets in 2000.

On the other hand, India are gunning for their second Champions Trophy since 2013 and they could be fielding four spinners and two pacers for the ICC showpiece final, here, on Sunday.

The title clash could be played on the same surface that was used in the match against

Pakistan, where spinners had found some assistance.

In that context, Williamson's impeccable adaptability skills and technical nous is vital for New Zealand, and he had produced a masterclass while making an 81 in the final group match against India here a few days ago.

New Zealand coach Gary Stead thought that India will pursue the four-spinner strategy in the final as well, which he termed challenging.

It's probably what we expect for them to play against us, but we have four spinners as well within our squad and we think we're pretty well balanced. But it's always a challenge. They are very, very good spinners, all of them in their own right.

"So, for us, it's just being

clear on our plans and working out if there could be a match-up that we are deciding within our team that it's the right one for us to go after. So who knows, they (Indian spinners) might have an off-day as well and that could be in our advantage," said Stead. But Stead also knows that rather than waiting for an off-day from the well-stocked Indian spin unit, taking them head on is a better option.

We have to adapt to what's going on within the match, but all our batsmen will have their individual plans around how they want to combat them.

It is true particularly against Varun Chakravarthy who has a bottomless bag of tricks wrong'uns, leg-breaks, scrambled seam deliveries, and seam-up ones which are faster.

## Deol's unbeaten 70 overshadows Lanning's 92 in GG win

PTI, LUCKNOW: Skipper Meg Lanning's impactful 92 went in vain as Gujarat Giants defeated table-toppers Delhi Capitals by five wickets to register a hat-trick of wins and book their place in the Eliminator of the Women's Premier League here on Friday.

WPL Already through to the playoffs, Delhi Capitals rode on Lanning's 57-ball 92 laced with 15 boundaries and a six to pile up a competitive 177 for five. But the total was not enough as Gujarat rode on Harleen Deol's unbeaten 70 off 49 balls and Beth Mooney's 35-ball 44 to be in contention.

Towards the end, skipper Ashleigh Gardner (22 off 13) and Deandra Dottin (24 off 10) helped Gujarat Giants past the target in the 20th over.

The Gujarat franchise lost opener Dayalan Hemalatha in the second over, caught by Lanning at extra cover off the bowling of Shikha Pandey before wicket-keeper Mooney (44) and Deol joined

hands to stitch 84 runs for the second wicket. Mooney and Deol went about their business in calm fashion and picked up 15 runs from the ninth over bowled by Annabel Sutherland with three exquisite boundaries.

The duo shared 84 runs for the second wicket before off-spinner Minnu Mani broke the partnership, dismissing Mooney. Mani floated a delivery up on the middle and off, enticing Mooney, who came down the track and tried to smash it over the bowler's head, only to slice to Sutherland. The match turned on its head in the eventual 18th over when Dottin struck Jess Jonassen for two fours and a six before the bowler dismissed the West Indian batter and Phoebe Litchfield off consecutive deliveries, the second wicket coming in the last ball of the over.

Needing 16 off two overs, Kashvee Gautam struck Shikha Pandey for a six off the last ball to bring down the equation to seven runs in the last over.

## sportspopup

### Aravindh wins Prague Masters as Indian juggernaut rolls on

PRAGUE: India's dominance in chess continued unabated with Grandmaster Aravindh Chithambaram winning the first major title of his career after finishing ahead of established names including compatriot R Praggnanandhaa at the Prague Masters tournament, here, on Friday. The 25-year-old Aravindh ended the tournament with six points after settling for a draw with Gurel Ediz of Turkey in the ninth and final round. World No. 8 Praggnanandhaa finished tied second with five points after losing to Dutchman Anish Giri. Tamil Nadu's Aravindh ended on six points out of a possible nine after his three victories and six draws in the tournament. Praggnanandhaa concluded his campaign on five points along with Giri and top seed Wei Yi of China. Results final round: Gurel Ediz (Tur, 4.5) drew with Aravindh Chithambaram (Ind, 6); David Navara (Cze, 4) drew with Sam Shankland (Ukr, 4); Anish Giri (Ned, 5) beat R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 5); Quang Liem (Viet, 4) drew with Wei Yi (Chn, 5); Nguyen Thai Dai Van (Cze, 2.5) playing Vincent Keymer (Ger, 4).

### India's Pranav wins World Junior Chess C'ship

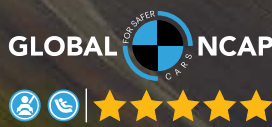
NEW DELHI: India's Pranav Venkatesh won the World Junior Chess Championship (Under-20) after settling for a draw against Matic Levrencic of Slovenia in the 11th and final round in Petrovac, Montenegro, on Friday. It turned out to be a great day for Indian chess after Aravindh Chithambaram won the Prague Masters ahead of many fancied stars. Venkatesh, who had won the challengers section in the Chennai International last year, continued his great show among juniors in the world, remaining undefeated during the course of the event. The Indian scored a total of seven victories and four draws to end up on nine points out of a possible 11 and when the final round pairings were announced it was clear that a draw will be enough for Venkatesh. Interestingly, Anand had himself made a mark on the world stage by winning the World Junior Championship back in 1987. Thereafter, P Harikrishna won in 2004 and Abhijeet Gupta had followed suit in 2008. It has nearly been a 17-year-old wait for the open title to come back to India. More recently, Divya Deshmukh had won the girls' section when it was held in Ahmedabad in 2024. Before Divya, Soumya Swaminathan won the girls' event in 2009, D Harika in 2008 and Koneru Humpy in 2001.

### Man Utd draw in Spain in Europa League last 16, Spurs beaten

PARIS: Manchester United drew 1-1 away to Real Sociedad in the first leg of their Europa League last-16 tie on Thursday, while Tottenham suffered a 1-0 loss at Dutch side AZ Alkmaar. Joshua Zirkzee drilled in from just outside the area to give United the lead on 57 minutes in San Sebastian but Mikel Oyarzabal levelled from the spot after Bruno Fernandes was punished for a handball. UEFA Europa League Results: Last 16, first leg - AZ Alkmaar 1 (Bergvall 18-og) Tottenham 0, Real Sociedad 1 (Oyarzabal 70-pen) Manchester United 1 (Zirkzee 57), FC Schalke 04 1 (Bergvall 18-og) 30, Fofana 86, 89), Fenerbahce 1 (Djiku 30) Rangers 3 (Dessers 7, Cerny 42, 81), Roma 2 (Angelino 56, Shomurodov 90+4) Athletic Bilbao 1 (I. Williams 50), Viktoria Plzen 1 (Durosini 53) Lazio 2 (Romagnoli 18, Isaksen 90+8), Bodo/Glimt 3 (Tzolakis 13-og, Hogh 45, 55) Olympiakos 0, Ajax 1 (Brobbe 10) Eintracht Frankfurt 2 (Larsson 27, Skhiri 70).

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