

18th IPL razzmatazz kicks off today

Spotlight on new rules, new captains & saliva ban reversal as Kolkata Knight Riders take on perennial under-achievers Royal Challengers Bengaluru amid a looming threat of rain

PTI, KOLKATA: New rules and new captains will be in focus but the razzmatazz will be pretty much the same when the 18th Indian Premier League kicks off, here, on Saturday with defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders taking on perennial underachievers Royal Challengers Bengaluru amid a looming threat of rain.

There is plenty to look forward in the league. Among the most prominent rule changes is the lifting of saliva ban. For the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic, bowlers will be allowed to use it to shine the ball.

The BCCI lifted the ban after receiving a majority consensus from IPL captains in a landmark decision taken at the captains' meeting in Mumbai.

The International Cricket Council had made the saliva ban permanent in 2022, but the IPL operates under its own regulations and the latest move could set a precedent for the global game.

The 18th season will also witness tactical innovations, including a major change to counter dew's impact. The second innings of evening matches will see a fresh ball introduced from the 11th over, provided the on-field umpires deem the dew factor significant as the trend of high-scoring games is likely to continue.

However, this rule will not apply to afternoon games. Additionally, the Decision Review System has been expanded to include height wides and off-side wides, ensuring a fairer adjudication of deliveries.

Despite debates about its influence on the game, the Impact Player rule remains in place. As many as seven

teams will start IPL 2025 under new leadership, although some of them will be a stop-gap arrangement due to varied reasons.

The most surprising of them all is Rajat Patidar, who is yet to play a T20I for India, leading the Royal Challengers Bengaluru team that features mega-star Virat Kohli.

Axar Patel takes charge of Delhi Capitals to lead, among others, his Team India senior KL Rahul, who would be aiming to shake off the disappointment of a turbulent stint with Lucknow Super Giants in 2024.

Shreyas Iyer, fresh off leading Kolkata Knight Riders to glory in 2024, will don the captain's armband for Punjab Kings with Ajinkya Rahane replacing him in the Kolkata team.

Rajasthan Royals will start the season with Riyan Parag as interim captain for the first three matches due to Sanju Samson's recovery from a finger injury taking longer than expected.

Mumbai Indians will be led by Suryakumar Yadav in their away opener against Chennai Super Kings on Sunday, as Hardik Pandya serves a suspension for an over-rate violation from last season.

Rishabh Pant is set to begin a crucial new chapter in his career after his resolute comeback from a life-threatening accident became part of cricketing lore. The IPL's most expensive player in history -- acquired by Lucknow Super Giants for a record Rs 27 crore -- will be eager to silence his critics.

Despite making the squads for the Champions Trophy and the T20I series against England, he was not



WARNING OF GUSTY WINDS, LIGHTNING & MODERATE RAINFALL

The tournament will begin with a glitzy opening ceremony featuring Shreya Ghoshal, Karan Aujla, and Dishha Patani. However, all the excitement might quite literally be dampened as there is a forecast of thunderstorms and rain on match day. A steady drizzle in the evening brought premature end to evening practice sessions of Kolkata Knight Riders and Royal Challengers Bengaluru on the eve of their IPL 2025 opener at Eden Gardens, here, on Saturday. Practice began as scheduled at 5pm, but rain set in around 6pm, bringing the ground staff into action while the players had to pack up. Fortunately,

Eden Gardens is one of the few venues with full ground covers, ensuring the playing surface remained protected. The Indian Meteorological Department's New Alipore office has issued an "orange alert" for Friday and Saturday, warning of thundersqualls, gusty winds, lightning, hailstorms, and moderate rainfall across several districts, including Kolkata. "Thundersqualls with gusty winds, lightning, hailstorms, and light to moderate rainfall are likely in Jhargram, Purba and Paschim Midnapore, Bankura, Purulia, Purba Bardhaman, Hooghly, and Howrah on Friday," the IMD stated.

For Saturday, the forecast includes thunderstorms with gusty winds, lightning, and moderate rainfall in Nadia, Birbhum, Murshidabad, Purba Bardhaman, and North and South 24 Parganas. The match has a 7.30pm start, with the toss scheduled for 7pm. According to IPL regulations, the league-stage matches have a one-hour extension window, meaning the cut-off time for a five-over match is 10:56pm, with play needing to conclude by 12:06am. Kolkata has already experienced rain disruptions in the lead-up to the season opener, with a KKR intra-squad practice match being washed out after just one innings.

given a single match.

Now, he has a point to prove, particularly in the T20 format, where he has struggled to cement his place in the Indian team.

Pant's explosive batting style and leadership skills have long been debated, and this season presents an opportunity for him to not only justify his hefty price tag but also send a strong message to the selectors ahead of future international assignments.

There are changes in the support staff line-ups too. Ricky Ponting has moved from Delhi Capitals to Punjab

JASPRIT BUMRAH'S FITNESS

A major question mark hangs over Jasprit Bumrah's fitness. The pacer, back at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru, is undergoing assessments to determine his readiness for the IPL. Mumbai Indians coach Mahela Jayawardene remains optimistic but cautious, given that Bumrah's availability is crucial not only for MI but also for India's upcoming tour of England.

Kings as head coach. Hemang Badani has replaced Ponting as Delhi Capitals' head coach. Kevin Pietersen has joined Delhi Capitals as mentor, while Rahul Dravid returns to Rajasthan Royals as head coach, his first IPL coaching stint after leading

India to the T20 World Cup title last year.

CSK veteran Dwayne Bravo will be KKR mentor, replacing Gautam Gambhir, who is now India's head coach. As the IPL returns, so does the never-ending speculation: Is this Mahen-

dra Singh Dhoni's last season? The 43-year-old, who retired from international cricket in 2020, remains an enigma, gracing the field only during the IPL.

Both Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma retired from T20Is after India's triumphant World Cup campaign last year, making IPL 2025 their first major outing in the shortest format post-retirement.

Kohli, the highest run-getter in IPL 2024 with 741 runs, remains the linchpin for RCB, while Rohit, after a lean patch, will look to rediscover his magic for Mumbai Indians.

STATISTICAL HIGHLIGHTS OVER THE YEARS

From explosive batting displays to fiery bowling spells, and from legends with most games played to fielding maestros with most catches, here's a list that breaks down top highlights of Indian Premier League (IPL) over the years, ahead of popular T20 event's 18th season, starting Saturday.

MOST SUCCESSFUL TEAMS

- Mumbai Indians won five IPL titles: 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, and 2020.
- Chennai Super Kings won five IPL titles: 2010, 2011, 2018, 2021 and 2023
- Kolkata Knight Riders won three IPL titles: 2012, 2014, 2024

MOST RUNS

V Kohli (RCB)	8004
S Dhawan (DC/DCH/MI/PBKS/SRH)	6769
R Sharma (DCH/MI)	6628
D Warner (DC/SRH)	6565
S Raina (CSK/GL)	5528

HIGHEST INDIVIDUAL SCORES

C Gayle	175 off 66 balls	RCB vs Pune W
B McCullum	158* off 73 balls	KKR vs RCB
Q de Kock	140* off 70 balls	LSG vs KKR
AB de Villiers	133* off 59 balls	RCB vs MI
KL Rahul	132* off 69 balls	Kings XI vs RCB

MOST WICKETS

Y Chahal (MI/RCB/RR)	205
P Chawla (CSK/KKR/KXIP/MI)	192
D Bravo (CSK/GL/MI)	183
B Kumar (PWI/SRH)	181
S Narine (KKR)	180

MOST MATCHES

MS Dhoni (CSK/RPS)	2008-2024	264
D Karthik (DC/GL/KKR/KXIP/MI/RCB)	2008-2024	257
R Sharma (DCH/MI)	2008-2024	257
V Kohli (RCB)	2008-2024	252
R Jadeja (CSK/GL/Kochi/RR)	2008-2024	240

MOST CATCHES

V Kohli (RCB)	114
S Raina (CSK/GL)	109
K Pollard (MI)	103
R Jadeja (CSK/GL/Kochi/RR)	103
R Sharma (DCH/MI)	101

LARGEST MARGINS BY RUNS & WICKETS

Mumbai Indians beat Delhi Daredevils by 146 runs
Royal Challengers Bengaluru beat Gujarat Lions by 144 runs
Kolkata K R beat Royal Challengers Bengaluru by 140 runs
Royal Challengers Bengaluru beat Kings XI by 138 runs
Royal Challengers Bengaluru beat Pune Warriors by 130 runs

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