

Salt, Kohli & Pandya seal the fate of Knights

Half-centuries by Kohli, new signing Salt and Pandya's three-wicket haul guide Royal Challengers Bengaluru to a comfortable 7-wkt win over defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders in the opening match of IPL

PTI, KOLKATA: "Chase master" Virat Kohli once again showcased his class with a sublime unbeaten half-century as Royal Challengers Bengaluru, backed by Krunal Pandya's game-changing triple strike crushed defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders by seven wickets in the IPL opener on Saturday.

Ajinkya Rahane, who has transformed his T20 game, dazzled on his Kolkata Knight Riders captaincy debut with a 25-ball fifty, but it was Krunal's 3/29 that ensured that the defending champions fell well short of the 200-mark, managing a below-par 174/8.

During chase, Phil Salt, rubbing salt into his former franchise's wounds, gave RCB an explosive start with a 31-ball 56 laced with nine fours and two sixes. His whirlwind knock, in a 95-run opening stand with Kohli, set the tone for the chase.

Kohli then raced to a 30-ball fifty, raising his bat to deafening chants of his name in a signature 36-ball knock studded with three sixes and four fours as they sealed the chase in just 16.2 overs.

Moments after he reached fifty, the frenzy peaked when a pitch invader ran onto the field and fell at Kohli's feet, summing up the adulation he commands across all venues.

Earlier Salt came out swinging against India's in-form spinner Varun Chakravarthy, who was fresh from his Champions Trophy heroics.

The 18th season of the IPL kicked off with a grand specta-



Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Virat Kohli and Liam Livingstone celebrate after winning the Indian Premier League cricket match over Kolkata Knight Riders, at Eden Gardens in Kolkata, on Saturday

SCOREBOARD

Kolkata Knight Riders: Quinton de Kock c Sharma b Hazlewood 4, Sunil Narine c Sharma b Salam 44, *Ajinkya Rahane c Salam b Pandya 56, Venkatesh Iyer b Pandya 6, Angkrish Raghuvanshi c Sharma b Dayal 30, Rinku Singh b Pandya 12, Andre Russell b Sharma 4, Ramandeep Singh not out 6, Harshit Rana c Sharma b Hazlewood 5, Spencer Johnson not out 1. **Extras:** 6. **Total:** 174-8. **Fall of wickets:** 4-1, 107-2, 109-3, 125-4, 145-5, 150-6, 168-7, 173-8. **Bowling:** Josh Hazlewood 4-0-22-2, Yash Dayal 3-0-25-1, Rasikh Dar Salam 3-0-35-1, Krunal Pandya 4-0-29-3, Suyash Sharma 4-0-47-1, Liam Livingstone 2-0-14-0.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Philip Salt c Johnson b Varun 56, Virat Kohli not out 59, Devdutt Padikkal c Singh b Narine 10, *Rajat Patidar c Singh b Arora 34, Liam Livingstone not out 15. **Extras:** 3. **Total:** 177-3. **Fall of wickets:** 95-1, 118-2, 162-3. **Bowling:** Vaibhav Arora 3-0-42-1, Spencer Johnson 2-2-0-31-0, Varun Chakravarthy 4-0-43-1, Harshit Rana 3-0-32-0, Sunil Narine 4-0-27-1.

Man-of-the-match: Krunal Pandya

TWISTS & TURNS

■ 36-year-old Ajinkya Rahane, played a fabulous knock of 56 off 31 balls. KKR seemed well on its way towards the magic figure of 200 when he had a partnership of 103 for the second wicket with Sunil Narine (44, 26b)

■ Left-arm spinner Krunal's brilliant 3/29 in the middle overs where he dismissed a well-set Rahane, and the two KKR heavyweights duo of Venkatesh Iyer (6) and Rinku Singh (12) turned the tables

■ RCB's disciplined bowling in the death overs meant that KKR flattered to deceive

■ When Virat Kohli (59 not out, 36b, 4x4, 3x6) and Salt (56, 31b, 9x4, 2x6) made 95 runs for the opening wicket in just 8.3 overs, it was all too clear that KKR's 174/8 was just not enough this night. In the process Kohli also surpassed 1,000 IPL runs against KKR

cle, featuring a 35-minute musical performance followed by Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan's iconic introduction of Virat Kohli, which electrified the crowd that outnumbered home team KKR's fans with chants of "RCB, RCB" echoing through the stands. "Virat Bhai is the only player who has been playing in the IPL since its inception, staying with the same team -- RCB -- for all 18 years," said Shah Rukh

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