



ASHUTOSH SHARMA	
RUNS SCORED:	66*
BALL FACED:	31
FOURS:	5
SIXES:	5

Delhi Capitals' batter Ashutosh Sharma celebrates after playing the winning shot during the Indian Premier League match against Lucknow Super Giants, at ACA-VDC Cricket Stadium, in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, on Monday

Ashutosh's heroics give DC 1-wkt win

Chasing 210, Delhi Capitals slipped to 7/3 in the second over and limped to 116 for six after 13 overs, but Sharma with a stunning knock of 66 off 31 balls delivered his side a sensational win

PTI, VISAKHAPATNAM: Ashutosh Sharma's late heroics earned Delhi Capitals a thrilling one-wicket win against Lucknow Super Giants in their Indian Premier League season opener, here, on Monday.

Chasing 210, Delhi Capitals slipped to 7/3 in the second over and limped to 116 for six after 13 overs, but Ashutosh's stunning knock — 66 off 31 balls with five sixes and as many fours — delivered his side a sensational win from the jaws of defeat.

Even as wickets fell regularly towards the end, Ashutosh kept his composure and executed stunning bottom-handed strokes to finish the job for his side and give Delhi Capitals a stunning start to their season.

In a contest where fortunes swung from one side to another, DC emerged on top riding on the calm and composed knock from Ashutosh, who hit the win-

ning runs as DC made 211/9 in 19.3 overs.

There was a late twist in the tale - with six runs needed off the final over and

one wicket left, LSG skipper Rishabh Pant missed a stumping on the first ball from Shahbaz Ahmed which would have given his side

the win but it wasn't meant to be. LSG, who put on a below-par total on a placid surface here after scoring 209/8, made early inroads to shock Delhi's chase.

A recovery looked largely difficult as Delhi Capitals largely appeared more in damage-control mode than to make a real crack at the target.

However, the pair of debutant Vipraj Nigam (39 off 15 balls, 5x4s, 2x6s) and Ashutosh threatened to turn the tables on LSG with their 55-run stand off only 22 balls for the seventh wicket, but the second strategic break ended their resistance right upon resumption.

But despite losing Starc as the eighth wicket, Ashutosh smacked two sixes and a four off Bishnoi in the 18th over and hit 10 more runs off the final two balls of the penultimate over from Prince Yadav, even as DC lost Kuldeep Yadav.

SCOREBOARD

Lucknow Super Giants: Aiden Markram c Starc b Nigam 15, Mitchell Marsh c Stubbs b Kumar 72, Nicholas Pooran b Starc 75, *Rishabh Pant c du Plessis b Yadav 0, David Miller not out 27, Ayush Badoni c Stubbs b Yadav 4, Shardul Thakur run out (Porel) 0, Shahbaz Ahmed c Nigam b Starc 9, Ravi Bishnoi b Starc 0, Digvish Rathi not out 0. **Extras:** 7. **Total:** 209-8. **Fall of wickets:** 46-1, 133-2, 161-3, 169-4, 177-5, 177-6, 194-7, 194-8. **Bowling:** Mitchell Starc 4-0-42-3, *Axar Patel 3-0-18-0, Vipraj Nigam 2-0-35-1, Mukesh Kumar 2-0-22-1, Kuldeep Yadav 4-0-20-2, Mohit Sharma 4-0-42-0, Tristan Stubbs 1-0-28-0.

Delhi Capitals: Jake Fraser-McGurk c Badoni b Thakur 1, Faf du Plessis c Miller b Bishnoi 29, Abishek Porel c Pooran b Thakur 0, Sameer Rizvi c Pant b Siddharth 4, *Axar Patel c Pooran b Rathi 22, Tristan Stubbs b Siddharth 34, Ashutosh Sharma not out 66, Vipraj Nigam c Siddharth b Rathi 39, Mitchell Starc c Pant b Bishnoi 2, Kuldeep Yadav run out (Yadav) 5, Mohit Sharma not out 1. **Extras:** 8. **Total:** 211-9. **Fall of wickets:** 2-1, 2-2, 7-3, 50-4, 65-5, 113-6, 168-7, 171-8, 190-9. **Bowling:** Shardul Thakur 2-0-19-2, Manimaran Siddharth 4-0-39-2, Digvish Rathi 4-0-31-2, Ravi Bishnoi 4-0-53-2, Prince Yadav 4-0-47-0, Shahbaz Ahmed 1.3-0-22-0.

Man-of-the-Match: Ashutosh Sharma

TODAY'S IPL FIXTURE

Gujarat Titans vs Punjab Kings, at the Narendra Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, 7.30 pm

Men's central contracts: Will all seniors remain in A+ category?

PTI, NEW DELHI: The BCCI central contracts for men are yet to be released, fueling speculations over some rejigging in the A+ category following the retirement of stalwarts Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja from the T20 format.

While the women's central contract list with 16 names across three categories was released on Monday, the men's list which had 30 names last time, is expected to come out in the next few days.

A+ category has a retainership fee of Rs 7 crore, followed by A where a player gets Rs 5 crore while cricketers in Grade B and C are paid Rs 3 crore and 1 crore respectively. The central

contracts are prepared by the national selection committee in consultation with the head coach and secretary (Devajit Saikia) before being placed in front of the Apex Council for approval.

It has been learned that not all stakeholders are on same page over retention of all senior players in A+ category. Bumrah, Rohit, Kohli and Jadeja were handed the highest category contracts last year.

A+ is a category where players who are automatic selections across all three formats are slotted. Now that Kohli, Rohit and Jadeja have all retired from T20 Internationals, they have become two format players. Only Bumrah, the Test

HARMANPREET, MANDHANA & DEEPTI RETAINED IN HIGHEST CATEGORY

NEW DELHI: India women's team captain Harmanpreet Kaur, her deputy Smriti Mandhana and all-rounder Deepti Sharma were on Monday retained in Grade A, the highest category of central contracts offered by BCCI. Pacer Renuka Thakur, all-rounder Jemimah Rodrigues, wicketkeeper Richa Ghosh and opener Shafali Verma managed to hold on to their Grade B contracts. Left-arm orthodox bowler Rajeshwari Gaikwad, who was in Grade B last year, didn't find a place this season. Young off-spinner Shreyanka Patil, fast bowlers Titas Sadhu and Arundhati

Reddy, all-rounder Amanjot Kaur and wicketkeeper Uma Chetry have got their first central contracts as they have been included in Grade C along side Yastika Bhatia, Radha Yadav, Amanjot Kaur, Uma Chetry, Sneha Rana and Pooja Vastrakar. Meghna Singh, Devika Vaidya, Sabbineni Meghana, Anjali Sarvani, and Harleen Deol, however, missed out. A woman cricketer in the A category earns Rs 50 lakh over and above match fee and Rs 30 lakh and Rs 10 lakh are allotted for B and C categories respectively. The Indian team will have

to rise to the occasion later this year when the ODI World Cup is at home. Despite all the resources at their disposal, Indian women are yet to win a global trophy.

COMPLETE LIST

Grade A: Harmanpreet Kaur, Smriti Mandhana, Deepti Sharma.
Grade B: Renuka Thakur, Jemimah Rodrigues, Richa Ghosh, Shafali Verma.
Grade C: Yastika Bhatia, Radha Yadav, Shreyanka Patil, Titas Sadhu, Arundhati Reddy, Amanjot Kaur, Uma Chetry, Sneha Rana, Pooja Vastrakar.

captain-in-waiting, is an all format certainty. However an influential section in BCCI wants status quo to be

maintained as far as A+ category is concerned.

In the A category, Ravichandran Ashwin will not

be there as he has already announced his retirement from international cricket. There is a strong chance

that Axar Patel, who was recently named vice-captain for England T20I series, could be elevated from

Group B to A. Axar has been a regular in both ODIs and T20Is and has also played 14 Tests so far for India.

Shreyas Iyer, who was dropped last season, is certain to make a comeback in one of the categories considering he has played 11 ODIs this season.

For any player to enter the central contract list, he needs to play either three Tests or eight ODIs or 10 T20Is during a particular calendar year to be considered for the next season.

It will also be interesting to see if young Yashasvi Jaiswal gets an elevation from his Grade B contract considering his promise across formats.

In the new list, Bengal

speedster Akash Deep, who has played seven Tests and Sarfaraz Khan, who has played three during the calendar year, should be inducted in Group C.

Ditto for Nitish Kumar Reddy, who has already played the full Border-Gavaskar series (five Tests apart from four T20Is) and will get automatic induction into the central contract list.

Shardul Thakur and Ruturaj Gaikwad were part of the last year's list but they are not fulfilling the requisite criteria at the moment to make the list. However, selection committee in consultation with head coach and secretary can always make exceptions.

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