

With a draw, I-League title is so close yet so far for Churchill Brothers

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RAIA: It was a match that was billed as a title decider but Churchill Brothers FC took a baby step towards securing their third I-League title after a 2-2 draw against Inter Kashi, at the Raia panchayat ground, on Sunday.

The injury-time equaliser by Churchill Brothers' Lalremruata (90+4') was akin to a death knell for Inter Kashi's I-League 2024-25 title hopes. José Luis Moreno (57') had earlier put the hosts in the lead, before Inter Kashi roared back with two stunning strikes from Edmund Lalrindika (63') and Nikola Stojanović (65'), after a goalless first half.

The ball is well and truly in Churchill Brothers' court after this result, as they now move on to 39 points from 21 matches, three ahead of third-placed Real Kashmir, who they face in the unlikely of league finales, on April 6. Inter Kashi, at fourth in the table with 36 points from as many matches, are out of the title race. Gokulam Kerala FC, who are placed second with 37 points, face Dempo SC on April 4, at home.

Local supporters waiting to see Churchill Brothers win the I-League title for the first time in 12 years witnessed a rather cagey opening to the game, with sudden spurts of attacks by each side.

Both sides were cau-

INACIO NORONHA



Churchill Brothers FC and Inter Kashi players vie for the ball as the Sunday crowd in background was eagerly waiting to see the local team win the I-League title for the first time in 12 years during the decisive match at the Raia panchayat ground, on Sunday

tious early on and had close chances from free-kicks. Stojanović had a seventh-minute dead-ball opportunity saved by Churchill goalkeeper Sayad Bin Abdul Kadir, while Pape Gassama's looping free-kick went just a foot over the top-right corner of Inter Kashi's goal.

Edmund was a constant thorn in the Churchill Brothers' backline, looking to get into dangerous positions. He was, however, wasteful. The 25-year-old had the perfect opportunity to put Inter Kashi ahead

in the 25th minute, when Prasanth K broke free from the right and slipped it past the goalkeeper, only to hit the upright. Edmund rushing in from the far side, and an open goal to aim at, albeit from a rather tight angle, his shot went agonisingly wide.

Minutes before the half-time, Edmund was played through inside the Churchill Brothers box by Stojanović, but a precise sliding interception by Lamgoulen Semkholun

swept the ball away from the Inter Kashi forward's feet. If the first half seemed intense, the two sides seemed to have doubled down on each other after the change of ends.

Inter Kashi looked to play piercing through balls, while Churchill Brothers looked to load the away side's box. The Red Machines drew first blood.

Sebastian Gutiérrez, three minutes from the hour mark, sent in a free-kick from mid-range

STANDINGS					
Team	P	W	D	L	Pts
Churchill Brothers FC	21	11	6	4	39
Gokulam Kerala FC	21	11	4	6	37
Real Kashmir FC	21	10	6	5	36
Inter Kashi	21	10	6	5	36
Rajasthan United Football Club	21	9	6	6	33
Namdhari FC	21	9	5	7	32
Shillong Lajong FC	21	7	6	8	27
Sreenidi Deccan Football Club	21	7	6	8	27
Dempo Sports Club	21	7	5	9	26
Aizawl FC	21	5	5	11	20
Sporting Club Bengaluru	21	5	5	11	20
Delhi Football Club	21	3	4	14	13

for Moreno to head it in at the near post, leaving Inter Kashi goalkeeper Arindam Bhattacharya with no time to react to the change in direction of the ball. Churchill Brothers lead was short-lived, however.

Mario Barco, seeing Edmund in some space, played a precise aerial ball behind the Churchill Brothers defence. The India international ran onto the ball and chipped Churchill Brothers goalkeeper Kadir, to draw his side level.

Two minutes later, Stojanović, seeing Kadir off his line, decided to try his luck from the half-line from a free-kick. The ball contained just enough hang-time to be just out of the goalkeeper's reach, as it flew into the net. The home crowd that was just minutes ago in delirium, had now been silent.

The Red Machines kept pegging away at Inter Kashi,

however, and the numbers they would put in the opponents' box would finally pay off. They threw everything forward and earned a free-kick in injury time.

Lalremruata's dead ball, whipped in from the right flank, could have taken a touch from any number of players inside the box and gone in, be it friend or foe. However, it missed everyone, only to hit the far post and ricochet back in, sparking wild celebrations.

Churchill Brothers had, by no means, sealed their third I-League title, but the celebrations said it all. They are just one draw away from it.

RESULT

Churchill Brothers 2 (José Luis Moreno 57', Lalremruata 90+4') drew with Inter Kashi 2 (Edmund Lalrindika 63', Nikola Stojanović 65')

Starc's fifer, Du Plessis' half century set the tone for Delhi Capitals 7-wkt win

PTI, VISAKHAPATNAM: Faf du Plessis' excellent fifty and Mitchell Starc's five-wicket haul were the lead acts in Delhi Capitals' comprehensive seven-wicket win over Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL match, here, on Sunday.

Du Plessis (50, 27b, 3x4, 3x6) added 81 runs with his opening partner Jake Fraser-McGurk (38, 32b) as the Capitals overhauled Hyderabad's inadequate 163 all out in 16 overs, for their second win on the trot.

Once DC openers made a quick start off the block, the result was never in doubt, but their approach was vastly different.

Du Plessis wound the clock back with some stunning shots, such as a straight six off Pat Cummins.

But at other end, McGurk was struggling for his timing, partly because of his exaggerated backlift and partly because of his desire to hit all the balls out of the park.

However, his senior partner was willing to do the heavy-lifting and brought up his fifty in 26 balls.

The South African thus became the third 40-plus batter to score a 50 in the IPL after Adam Gilchrist and Chris Gayle.

But the alliance was snapped when debutant leg-spinner Zeeshan Ansari (3/42) dismissed Du Plessis, who departed after Wiaan Mulder took a brilliant running catch to the join the list of stunning catchers in the evening.



Delhi Capitals Mitchell Starc celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Sunrisers Hyderabad's Travis Head during an Indian Premier League, at the ACA-VDCA International Cricket Stadium, in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, on Sunday

■ Once Delhi Capitals openers made a quick start off the block, the result was never in doubt, but their approach was vastly different

■ Jake Fraser-McGurk was struggling for his timing, partly because of his exaggerated backlift and partly because of his desire to hit all the balls out of the park

■ The impressive 25-year-old Ansari, who once was a part of India Under-19 World Cup squad which also had Rishabh Pant, Ishan Kishan and many takers for that route in the Sunrisers camp.

The impressive 25-year-old Ansari, who once was a part of India Under-19 World Cup squad

SCOREBOARD
Sunrisers Hyderabad: Abhishek Sharma run out (Nigam) 1, Travis Head c Rahul b Starc 22, Ishan Kishan c Stubbs b Starc 2, Nitish Kumar Reddy c Patel b Starc 0, Aniket Verma c Fraser-McGurk b Yadav 74, Heinrich Klaasen c Nigam b Sharma 32, Abhinav Manohar c du Plessis b Yadav 4. *Pat Cummins c Fraser-McGurk b Yadav 2, Wiaan Mulder c du Plessis b Starc 9, Harshal Patel c Patel b Starc 5, Mohammed Shami not out 1. **Extras:** 11. **Total:** 163-10. **Fall of wickets:** 11-1, 20-2, 25-3, 37-4, 114-5, 119-6, 123-7, 148-8, 162-9, 163-10. **Bowling:** Mitchell Starc 3.4-0-3-5, Mukesh Kumar 2-0-17-0, *Axar Patel 4-0-43-0, Vipraj Nigam 2-0-21-0, Mohit Sharma 3-0-25-1, Kuldeep Yadav 4-0-22-3. **Delhi Capitals:** Jake Fraser-McGurk c and b Ansari 38, Faf du Plessis c Mulder b Ansari 50, Abhishek Porel not out 34, KL Rahul b Ansari 15, Tristan Stubbs not out 21. **Extras:** 8. **Total:** 166-3. **Fall of wickets:** 81-1, 95-2, 115-3. **Bowling:** Mohammed Shami 3-0-31-0, Abhishek Sharma 3-0-27-0, *Pat Cummins 2-0-27-0, Harshal Patel 3-0-17-0, Zeeshan Ansari 4-0-42-3, Wiaan Mulder 1-0-16-0.

Man of the match: Mitchell Starc

MI skipper Hardik fined Rs 12 lakh

PTI, AHMEDABAD: Mumbai Indians skipper Hardik Pandya has been fined Rs 12 lakh after his team maintained a slow over rate in their Indian Premier League match against Gujarat Titans here.

Five-time champions MI lost to GT by 36 runs at the Narendra Modi Stadium on Saturday.

"Mumbai Indians captain Hardik Pandya has been fined after his team maintained a slow over rate during Match No. 9 of the TATA Indian Premier League (IPL) 2025 against Gujarat Titans at the Narendra Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad," the IPL said in a statement on Sunday.



"As this was his team's first offence of the season under Article 2.2 of the IPL's Code of Conduct, which pertains to minimum over-rate offences, Pandya was fined INR 12 lakhs," it added in the statement.

GT posted 196 runs on a black-soil pitch which was used in Ahmedabad for the clash and MI struggled in their chase to eventually finish at 160 for six, as Gujarat registered their first win of the ongoing campaign. This was MI's second successive loss and they are yet to open their account.

Nitish, Hasaranga star as Royals win over Super Kings

PTI, GUWAHATI: Nitish Rana smashed a blistering 36-ball 81, while leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga starred with a four-wicket haul as Rajasthan Royals (RR) opened their account with a hard-fought six-run victory over Chennai Super Kings (CSK) in the IPL, here, on Sunday.

Promoted to number 3, left-handed Rana dominated the CSK bowlers, hitting 10 boundaries and 5 sixes en route his scintillating knock

but Royals struggled towards back-end just about manage a par-score of 182 for 9.

CSK, who had never successfully chased a target over 180 since 2019, faltered again, managing 176 for six in the allotted overs. The chase was built around skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad's 63, but it wasn't enough as CSK succumbed to their second consecutive loss.

The legend of Mahendra Singh Dhoni's last over finishes in IPL is fast becoming a

story of yesterday as he failed to muscle Maheesh Theekshana and Sandeep Sharma.

Chasing 183, CSK found themselves at 5/1 in the first three overs, with Jofra Archer starting with a maiden wicket over, dismissing Rachin Ravindra (0). A few lusty blows from Rahul Tripathi (23) and

Gaikwad (63) helped CSK reach 42/1 in the powerplay.

Hasaranga made an immediate impact, removing Tripathi, who was caught by Shimron Hetmyer, while Shivam Dube (18) looked dangerous, hammering two sixes off the Sri Lankan spinner. However, a moment of brilliance from

stand-in captain Riyan Parag proved to be a game-changer.

Parag, playing in front of his home crowd, dived to his right from cover to take a stunning catch to dismiss Dube.

Despite Gaikwad's resistance, CSK continued to lose wickets, with Hasaranga dismissing Vijay Shankar (9) after a big six. Gaikwad reached his fifty off 37 balls, but soon fell to Hasaranga, becoming his fourth victim, as CSK slumped to 129 for 5.

Rajasthan Royals: Yashasvi Jaiswal c Ashwin b Ahmed 4, Sanju Samson c Jadeja b Ahmad 20, Nitish Rana st Dhoni b shwin 81. *Riyan Parag b Pathirana 37, Dhruv Jurel c Pathirana b Ahmad 3, Wanindu Hasaranga c Shankar b Jadeja 4, Shimron Hetmyer c Ashwin b Pathirana 19, Jofra Archer c Gaikwad b Ahmed 0, Kumar Kartikeya run out (Ahmed) 1, Maheesh Theekshana not out 2, Tushar Deshpande not out 1. **Extras:** 10. **Total:** 182-9. **Fall of wickets:** 4-1, 86-2, 124-3, 134-4, 140-5, 166-6, 174-7, 175-8, 176-9. **Bowling:** Khaleel Ahmed 4-0-38-2, Jamie Overton 2-0-30-0, Ravichandran Ashwin 4-0-46-1, Noor Ahmad 4-0-28-2, Matheesha Pathirana 4-0-28-2, Ravindra Jadeja 2-0-10-1.

Chennai Super Kings: Rachin Ravindra c Jurel b Archer 0, Rahul Tripathi c Hetmyer b Hasaranga 23, *Ruturaj Gaikwad c Jaiswal b Hasaranga 63, Shivam Dube c Parag b Hasaranga 18, Vijay Shankar b Hasaranga 9, Ravindra Jadeja not out 32, MS Dhoni c Hetmyer b Sharma 16, Jamie Overton not out 11. **Extras:** 4. **Total:** 176-6. **Fall of wickets:** 0-1, 46-2, 72-3, 92-4, 129-5, 164-6. **Bowling:** Jofra Archer 3-1-13-1, Tushar Deshpande 4-0-45-0, Sandeep Sharma 4-0-42-1, Maheesh Theekshana 4-0-30-0, Wanindu Hasaranga 4-0-35-4.

Man-of-the-match: Nitish Rana

SCOREBOARD

India to tour Australia for 3 ODIs and 5 T20Is in October-November

MELBOURNE: The Indian team will tour Australia later this year for a multi-format limited overs series comprising three ODIs and five T20 Internationals, Cricket Australia (CA) said on Sunday. The visitors will play the white-ball matches between October 19 and November 8. While the 50-over matches will be day-and-night fixtures, the T20s will be night matches. The 2025-26 season will be the first-ever to feature men's international matches in all eight Australian states and territories, with Canberra and Hobart both set to host India during the five-game T20 series. That will come after the 2023 World Cup finalists face off in 50-over matches in Perth, Adelaide and Sydney. Gold Coast's Carrara Stadium will then see T20 action along with the regular venues, the MCG and the Gabba. India will be returning to Australia after the gripping five-Test Border-Gavaskar Trophy in 2024-25 which set new attendance records Down Under. Fixtures: October 19: Perth Stadium, Perth (D/N). October 23: Adelaide Oval, Adelaide (D/N). October 25: SCG, Sydney (D/N). October 29: Manuka Oval, Canberra (N). October 31: MCG, Melbourne (N). November 2: Bellerive Oval, Hobart (N). November 6: Gold Coast Stadium, Gold Coast (N). November 8: The Gabba, Brisbane (N).

India women's cricket team to play all-format series against Australia early next year

SYDNEY: The Indian women's cricket team will travel to Australia early next year for a gruelling all-format tour, which will culminate with a one-off Test at the WACA Ground in Perth in March. The tour, scheduled from February 15 to March 9, will see the teams play three T20Is and an equal number of One-day Internationals. The series will commence with the first T20I in Sydney on February 15, which will be followed by matches at the Manuka Oval and Adelaide Oval. The ODI series will commence on February 24 at the Allan Border Field in Brisbane, which will be followed by matches on February 27 and March 1. The one-off Test will be played at the newly-redeveloped WACA Ground in Perth from March 6-9. The 2025-26 summer will be the first under the new ICC Women's Future Tours Program, which was released last November and runs until 2029. The report added that with the BCCI shifting its Women's Premier League (WPL) forward into January from 2026 onwards, Cricket Australia had to move the series to February-March. Schedule: T20Is: February 15: SCG, Sydney; February 19: Manuka Oval, Canberra; February 21: Adelaide Oval, Adelaide. ODIs: February 24: Allan Border Field, Brisbane; February 27: Bellerive Oval, Hobart; March 1: CitiPower Centre, Melbourne. One-off Test: March 6-9: WACA Ground, Perth (D/N).

Punia and Udit to fight for gold; Dahiya, Dinesh in bronze contention

AMMAN (Jordan): Comeback-man Deepak Punia and Udit put themselves in contention for their maiden Asian Championship titles while Dinesh and Mukul Dahiya will fight for bronze medals as Indian wrestlers put up a decent show on the last day of the event, here Sunday. The 25-year-old Punia, who could not qualify for the Paris Olympics, began his comeback with a hard-fought contest against Bekzat Rakhimov in 92kg category. He faced stiff resistance from his Kyrgyzstan rival but prevailed 12-7 in a high-scoring quarterfinal. Japan's Takashi Ishiguro was supposed to be a tough rival but Deepak outplayed him to comfortably win 8-1. He now faces Iran's world number one Amirhossein B Firouzpour-bandpei in the gold medal bout. The surprise package of the day was Dahiya, who logged two impressive wins to reach the semi-finals.

Gulveer eclipses his 10,000m national record in USA meet

NEW DELHI: India's long-distance runner Gulveer Singh improved on his national record in the 10,000m race in The Ten Track Festival -- an event on the World Athletics Continental Tour -- by clocking 27:00.22 minutes to finish sixth in San Juan Capistrano, California. The previous record held by the Hangzhou Asian Games bronze-medallist runner was 27:14.88 set in Hachioji, Japan in November last year. The 26-year-old Army man, winner of the bronze medal at the 2023 Asian Athletics Championships in Bangkok, had re-set the national record twice last year. He timed 27:41.81 minutes at San Juan Capistrano in California in March before improving on it in Japan. "Gulveer Singh clocks 27:00.22 to improve his national 10,000m record. He finished 6th at The Ten competition in USA on Saturday," said the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) in a social media post. Gulveer, who hails from Uttar Pradesh, is also the national record holder in 5,000m with a time of 13:11.82 minutes set last year. Gulveer's goal on Saturday was to break the 27 minutes barrier. Despite churning out an average pace for each lap, he missed his goal of a sub-27 timing.

Sabalenka beats Jessica Pegula in Miami Open final for 19th tour title

MIAMI GARDENS (Florida): Aryna Sabalenka entered the Miami Open final against Jessica Pegula with 18 career titles on her elite resume. The Miami Open crown had proved elusive until Saturday. The No. 1 seed from Belarus knocked off fourth-seeded American Jessica Pegula 7-5, 6-2 for her first Miami Open title in a rematch of the 2024 US Open final. Sabalenka fired up her lethal forehand in posting 24 winners on that wing to win the \$1.1 million first prize. Sabalenka hit a backhand passing shot on match point after which she raised both hands to the air, looked up to the sky and blew a kiss. "Thank God the rain stopped," Sabalenka said during the trophy ceremony. "It was like Miami was crying that I won this tournament." Sabalenka, a three-time Grand Slam champion, had won the U.S. Open over Pegula, also in straight sets, 7-5, 7-5, but in 2025, Sabalenka's finals luck had run out.