

Churchill Brothers one step away to bask in I-League glory today

Face unbeaten Real Kashmir in their season's last match to emerge national champions at the TRC football Stadium, Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir, at 4 pm

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PANJIM: Churchill Brothers will be going into their last match against Real Kashmir on April 6, Sunday. They need just a point to win the I-League and qualify for the Indian Super League, the top division league in the country.

There are so many scenarios for each team to succeed and fail, that this is only the tip of the iceberg. We can run into ifs and buts, and this and that, but there's only one team that can break this ice - Churchill Brothers.

The leaders are the only team among the four with everything in their hands. Win in Kashmir and the trophy will be theirs, irrespective of anything that transpires in Kalyani or Kozhikode, or even in the hearing. It just emphasises the significance of that late Lalremruata equaliser against Inter Kashi last week.



PREVIEWS

But then, it's winning in Kashmir we're talking about. That attempt was made by 10 teams this season. Only seven goals have been scored by visitors at the TRC football Stadium, Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir. The Red Machines will have their task cut out, especially against a Real Kashmir side, who also have their shot at history. The Snow Leopards can bring the trophy to the valley by beating Churchill Brother with a three-goal margin, and wishing Gokulam Kerala don't beat Dempo Sports Club.

The other issue is that they're not known to be prolific scorers. With 30 goals, Real Kashmir are only the ninth-highest scorers in the league. But flip to the other side of the coin, and you realise Churchill Brothers have kept only three clean sheets this season. This is a match to go all out for the win, exactly how title contenders should be.

The **O Herald** takes a look at the squad preparing for the tie.



STENDLY FERNANDES

The 24-year-old is a forward who has starred in 19 matches for Churchill Brothers. He has scored four goals in the campaign. His pace and power has caused trouble for many teams in the Goa league from his days with Sporting Clube de Goa but that has been few and far in between for the team in this campaign. The management will hope he plays to his potential because he has the game to win on his own. He has been with the squad from October 2023. The number 7 with his performance has helped his team win matches by scoring goals during crucial moments in the match.



WAYNE LEKAY

The South African national is without a doubt the talisman of the squad. The highest goal scorer for the team with 12 goals in 20 matches, the 27-year-old from Cape Town is a very good addition

HERALD PIC



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GOLDEN EAGLES AIM TO SIGN OFF CAMPAIGN ON A HIGH

PANJIM: Dempo SC will look to sign off their I-League 2024-25 campaign on a high as they square off against Gokulam Kerala FC in a high-profile clash on April 6, at the EMS Corporation Stadium, here.

Heading into the season's final fixture, the Golden Eagles are brimming with belief after a spirited 1-1 draw against Real Kashmir. Ivorian midfielder Didier Brossou capped off a solid run of form with his first goal of the season, but the Snow Leopards clawed back with a second-half equaliser from Kamal Issah. Reflecting on the club's resurgence in the second half of the season, Head Coach Samir Naik credited the January transfer window as a turning point. "We brought in a few key names in January, and that really elevated our level. Even before that, we were punching above our weight with just three foreigners. But those additions added depth and balance. Had we secured

them earlier, I truly believe we'd be in a much better place in the standings," Naik shared.

Among the standout arrivals, striker Marcus Joseph has proven to be a revelation. The Trinidadian's clinical finishing has added bite to Dempo SC's attack, scoring 10 goals and chipping in with assists since joining mid-season. "Marcus has been phenomenal," Naik added. "He brought hunger, experience, and a natural goal-scoring instinct. Players like him change games. He's got the quality to score 15-20 goals a season, and we've seen glimpses of that already."

Their opponents, Gokulam Kerala, come into the match off the back of a narrow 1-0 victory over Sreenidi Deccan, courtesy of Thabiso Brown. Sitting third with 37 points, the Malabarians will be aiming to close out their campaign with a statement win. But Dempo SC will have other plans.

The reverse fixture at Fatorda saw Dempo SC dominate large portions of the game, only to be undone by a late strike. It's a memory that still lingers, and the team is keen to settle the score.

"They caught us with a late goal the last time, but we were the better team for much of that match," Naik recalled. "We've grown since then. We know what we're capable of, and Sunday is about finishing with pride, purpose, and a performance that reflects our journey."

Naik confirmed that the squad is nearly at full strength, with Juan Mera Gonzalez the only absentee due to illness. Currently ninth with 26 points, Dempo SC will be eager to deliver a complete performance and end the campaign on a positive note, a fitting conclusion to a season that, despite its ups and downs, has laid a solid foundation for the future.

TODAY'S I-LEAGUE FIXTURES

Gokulam Kerala FC vs Dempo SC, at the EMS Corporation Stadium, Kozhikode, Kerala
Real Kashmir FC vs Churchill Brothers FC, at the TRC football Stadium, Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir
Inter Kashi vs Rajasthan United FC, at the Kalyani municipal stadium, Kalyani, West Bengal
All matches, kick off at 4 pm, will be streamed live on sbn.co and broadcast on Sony Sports Network

cards. Very accurate with his passes, his team will depend on him keeping his nerve on Sunday.



TRIOJOY DIAS

The 25-year-old midfielder is the player to watch out for in the squad. He has individual skills which can outfox the opposition. His play has helped him score six goals in 19 matches. His individual skills were on display in the match against Rajasthan United in which he scored two goals. The team will expect a similar performance on the field against the team from Real Kashmir.

PAPE GASSAMA

The 28-year-old Senegalese plays as a central midfielder for the team. He has played in all the match-



JOSE LUIS MORENO

The 28-year-old Colombian defender is a former U-20 representative of the national team. He joined Churchill Brothers from Gokulam Kerala FC. He is a player with no serious strengths but he does



ANIL RAMA GAONKAR

The 27-year-old forward has played 16 matches and has scored one goal. He is a creative

player but recent injury concerns could mean he could be watching the game from the benches. He has been good at assisting the attacks of the team but has not started a match for a while because of his injury concerns.



RAFIQ AMINU

The tall 25-year-old Ghanaian is another striker in the team. He has scored one goal in 10 matches. He is a solid player but has been wasting chances when the opportunity arises to score a goal. He came as a free agent from Al Kahraba, a team based in Iraq. Churchill Brothers have always prided itself on its smart moves when it comes to foreign players and they will hope he will come good in the crucial final match of the I-League season.



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AUBIN KOUAKOU

The veteran Ivorian footballer is 33 years old and plays in the midfield for the team. The tall six foot plus player has not had a noteworthy campaign and has started in only 38 per cent of the matches. It remains to be seen if he makes it to the starting 11.



LESLY REBELLO

The 24-year-old defender has only started in four matches this season for a total of 27 minutes. As a defender he has not conceded a goal which is a plus point given the worries over the team defence in the last two matches.



NISHCHAL CHANDAN

The 25-year-old defender from Chandigarh. He has played all 19 games in the campaign. His leadership, combined with his vocal presence on the pitch, sets him apart from his peers. A valiant defender and formidable tackler, always willing to put his body on the line, this player has consistently delivered standout performances. He will have to be at his best on Sunday.

LALLIANSANGA RENTHLEI



The central midfielder has played in 12 matches and has scored one goal. Very confident in his role, he has however received four yellow cards in his name. Against a tough opponent that will be playing at home he can expect the opposition to goad him. He will have to stay calm and ensure the team achieves its goals.

LALREMUATA RALTE



The young defender has scored two goals in 20 matches but has also managed to snag six yellow cards against his name. He scored the dramatic goal in extra time to achieve a 2-2 draw in the match against Inter Kashi. A dramatic loss of concentration by the defence saw the opposition score two goals in five minutes before he made up for his loss of concentration. That will have to be avoided in the final match.

NIRAJ KUMAR

He is a former U-19 goalkeeper with the national team and has been doing a great job ensuring the team stays in the hunt. The young goalkeeper has done a great job with his calm collection of the ball in crucial moments of the game and the management will hope his calmness will continue to inspire the team.

sportspopup

Sift wins India's first gold at Argentina Shooting World Cup, Esha bags silver

NEW DELHI: Indian shooter Sift Kaur Samra produced a sensational come-from-behind performance to win her first individual ISSF World Cup gold in the women's 50m rifle 3-positions final, while Esha Singh bagged a second individual World Cup silver in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The 23-year-old Sift from Faridkot thus earned India its first gold of the season-opening World Cup stage event at the Tiro Federal Argentino de Buenos Aires shooting range late on Friday. Sift finished with 458.6 points at the end of the 45-shot final, while Mangold ended 3.3 points behind on 455.3. Junior World Championship medallist Arina Alukhova of Kazakhstan was third, bowing out after the 44th shot with a tally of 445.9. Air Pistol Mixed Team world champion Esha tallied 35 in the women's 25m pistol final to finish behind China's Sun Yujie, who won gold with 38 hits after the 10th and final five-shot series. Sun's compatriot Feng Sixuan won bronze. Double Olympic medallist Manu Bhaker, who also made the final, finished sixth eventually.

World Boxing Cup: Clinical Jamwal storms into 65kg final

NEW DELHI: Abhinash Jamwal delivered a near perfect performance against Italy's Gianluigi Malanga to storm into the 65kg final of the World Boxing Cup in Brazil's Foz Do Iguacu city. The 22-year-old Indian used his tall frame and athleticism to stay clear of Malanga's reach, but was quick enough to pounce when his rival's guard was down to earn a 5:0 unanimous verdict on Friday. Four of the five judges awarded Jamwal a perfect 30, with all them awarding the first and third rounds to the Indian unanimously. On Thursday, Hitesh became the first Indian to reach the World Boxing Cup final after defeating French Olympian Makan Traore in 70kg weight category. While Hitesh will take on England's Odel Kamara, Jamwal will face off local favourite Yuri Reis in the final.

Pant fined Rs 12L for slow over-rate, Digvesh docked half match fees once again

LUCKNOW: Lucknow Super Giants skipper Rishabh Pant copped a fine of Rs 12 lakh for maintaining slow over-rate during their 12-run victory over Mumbai Indians in an IPL match, here, on Saturday. The stipulated time for a bowling team to finish 20 overs is 90 minutes and Pant's LSG were running short after the 19th over due to which, they were forced to keep one fielder less outside the 30-yard circle. "As this was his team's first offence of the season under Article 2.22 of the IPL Code of Conduct, which pertains to minimum over-rate offences, Rishabh Pant was fined INR 12 Lakh," BCCI press release stated. Meanwhile, LSG's trump card Digvesh Rathi has now been fined 50 percent of his match fees for the second successive time after breaching Level-1 code of conduct of IPL. Rathi was also docked half of his match fees for his over the top wicket-taking celebration against Punjab Kings.

Dhoni is still going strong: Fleming quashes Dhoni's retirement speculation

CHENNAI: Chennai Super Kings head coach Stephen Fleming said MS Dhoni is "still going strong" and putting an end to the former skipper's run in the IPL is not a role assigned to him. The presence of Dhoni's parents -- Pan Singh and Devaki Devi -- at the Chepauk for CSK's match against Delhi Capitals on Saturday had fuelled speculation about an imminent his retirement. "No, that's not my role to put an end to it. I have no idea. I'm just enjoying working with him. He's still going strong. I don't even ask these days. You guys are the ones that ask (about retirement)," said Fleming in the post-match press conference.

Thomas Muller to leave Bayern Munich after this season

MUNICH: Thomas Muller will leave Bayern Munich this summer after a 25-year career at the German club. The 35-year-old Muller said Saturday, in a joint announcement with Bayern, that his "incredible journey" with his boyhood club will end in July. The midfielder's contract is set to expire after the season and he's seen limited game time. "It's clear that today is not like any other day for me," Muller said. "My 25 years as an FC Bayern Munich player will come to an end in the summer. It's been an incredible journey, shaped by unique experiences, great encounters and unforgettable triumphs. "I feel immense gratitude and joy that I got to make this career with my beloved club. The special connection to the club and our fantastic fans will always remain. What I want as a farewell should be clear: titles we can celebrate together, and moments we'll remember fondly for a long time." Muller has helped Bayern win 33 trophies after joining the club's academy at age 10 in the summer of 2000. He's made a club-record number of appearances with 743 matches. The team said Muller's final game with Bayern will be at the FIFA Club World Cup in the United States in June and July.

Arsenal drop points at Everton to further boost Liverpool's EPL title chances

LONDON: Everton did local rival Liverpool a big favor in the Premier League title race by taking points off second-placed Arsenal on Saturday. A 1-1 draw at Goodison Park left Arsenal 11 points behind Liverpool with seven games to play in what is looking like an increasingly forlorn task to catch the leader. Iliman Ndiaye converted a penalty in the 49th minute to earn Everton a point after Leandro Trossard gave the lead in the 34th to Arsenal, which left key players -- like Martin Odegaard and Bukayo Saka -- out of its starting team ahead of hosting Real Madrid in the Champions League on Tuesday. Liverpool's game in hand is at Fulham on Sunday, with the Reds' task having gotten much easier as they look to secure a record-tying 20th English top-flight title. Results: Crystal Palace 2 (Mateta 3, Munoz 55) Brighton 1 (Welbeck 31) Everton 1 (Ndiaye 49-pen) Arsenal 1 (Trossard 34), Ipswich 1 (Delap 16) Wolves 2 (Sarabia 72, Strand Larsen 84), West Ham 2 (Fullkrug 61, Bowen 68) Bournemouth 2 (Evanilson 38, 79).

India must deal with education of trainers to progress in football, feels Brazil's Edmilson

MUMBAI: India must deal with the education of its football trainers and assess the ambitions of young players in order to progress in the sport, feels Brazil's 2002 World Cup winner Jose Edmilson. Edmilson is among a host of star players of the past from Real Madrid and FC Barcelona who will play in a 'Legends Faceoff' at the DY Patil Stadium, here, on Sunday. Among those who will be seen in action are Carlos Puyol, Luis Figo, Xavi, Javier Saviola, Rivaldo, Fernando Morientes, Michael Owen and many more. There are a lot of matters to deal with before having to get the technique to be a good football player. India has to deal with education in trainers and also checking the kids' ambitions," Edmilson told a media conference here ahead of the match. "Because, before creating a good player, they have to create a good man, and that's very important. In a lot of places, kids dream about becoming players. But there are a lot of society problems that have to be solved before that."