

Narine helps Knights to keep play-off hopes alive

Snaps up three crucial wickets in the space of seven balls to help Kolkata Knight Riders beat Delhi Capitals by 14 runs

PTI, NEW DELHI: Veteran off-spinner Sunil Narine snapped up three crucial wickets in the space of seven balls to help Kolkata Knight Riders beat Delhi Capitals by 14 runs and keep their playoff hopes alive in the IPL, here, on Tuesday.

Sent in to bat, KKR, who came into the game with three losses in their last five matches, managed to post 204 for nine, riding on a blazing start by their top-order batters.

Chasing the total, DC were 62 for 3 in seven overs, but Faf du Plessis (62) and Axar Patel (43) kept them in the hunt with a 76-run partnership for the fourth wicket.

However, Narine (3/29) picked up three key wickets at a crucial juncture to derail DC's chase, as the hosts

were restricted to 190 for nine in their 20 overs to succumb to their third loss in four home games at the Arun Jaitley Stadium.

With this win, defending champions KKR reignited their playoff hopes, though they remained at the seventh spot with nine points. DC stayed in the top four with 12 points.

KKR skipper Ajinkya Rahane's gamble to hand the ball to Anukul Roy paid off as the spinner dismissed Abhishek Porel (4) with his second delivery. Vaibhav Arora then trapped Karun Nair (15) lbw before a direct hit from Narine found KL Rahul (7) short of his crease, reducing DC to 62 for 3 in the seventh over.

Axar Patel, who had left the field in the 18th over due to a hand injury, re-

turned to join opener du Plessis. The duo negotiated the spinners well, adding 76 runs off 42 balls to keep DC in the contest.

Du Plessis smashed Chakravarty for two fours and a six in the ninth over before bringing up his fifty off 31 balls.

Axar then took charge, clobbering three sixes and four boundaries in his 23-ball 43 to keep the score-

board ticking.

However, Narine's return in the 14th over changed the game as he dismissed Axar and Tristan Stubbs (1) in the same over, before removing du Plessis with the second ball of his next to derail DC's chase.

With 59 needed off 30 balls, Impact Player Ashutosh Sharma deposited Harshit Rana over long-off, but Chakravarty

returned to remove him and Mitchell Starc in successive deliveries. Vipraj Nigam tried to mount a late charge with two sixes and three fours, but it wasn't enough.

Earlier, KKR got off to a flying start as Narine (27) and Rahmanullah Gurbaz (26) put on the team's highest opening stand of the season -- 48 runs off just 17 balls.

On a better batting surface compared to the previous game, Narine took the attack to Dushmantha Chameera (1/46), smashing him for 25 runs in an over, including two sixes -- one of them a one-handed slog over midwicket -- and a four.

Gurbaz then took on Mitchell Starc, hitting two boundaries and a six before edging to Abhishek Porel in the third over to end the stand. Skipper Rahane (26) carried the momentum, hitting Starc for a six and a four, and then adding two more boundaries off Mukesh Kumar to take KKR to 79/1 at the end of the powerplay.

However, DC's spinners pulled things back. Vipraj Nigam (2/41) trapped Narine leg-before, before Axar Patel removed Rahane and Venkatesh Iyer (7) in quick succession, reducing the visitors to 117 for 4 in 10 overs.

The Gaurs have reached the semi-finals after two victories, a breezy 3-0 defeat of Gokulam Kerala FC, followed by a nerve-wracking 2-1 comeback win over Punjab FC on Saturday.

Head coach Manolo Marquez now stands two wins away from his first silverware with FC Goa.

Chasing domestic treble, Mohun Bagan SG face FC Goa in semis

In other semi-final, Mumbai City face Jamshedpur FC

COACH TALK

“FC Goa are without a doubt, a better and a stronger team than Kerala Blasters. So my job is not easy. But my players are focussed and ready. It's an exposure trip for the young boys and some seniors as well. It's a semi-final and I've told my boys to enjoy the game. We're not thinking about being champions right now. It's a semi-final and if we win, we will get a chance to play the final, and then we'll think of being the champions

– Bastab Roy, Mohun Bagan Super Giant coach

“Mohun Bagan are here with half the squad of the main team, and the other half were champions of ISL two weeks ago. I think the game will be very difficult because they have nothing to lose. They have already won two trophies. They already have the slot for the Asian competition. Obviously, the foreigners are important. But the Indian players of Mohun Bagan SG are very good. People think that the team with more foreigners are the favourites, but that doesn't matter

– Manolo Marquez, FC Goa head coach

owing to their full strength, but Marquez emphasised that the number of foreign players is not an indication of a team's strength, citing examples from the Super Cup so far.

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SUPER CUP PREVIEW

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During this Super Cup, Mumbai (City) played with only one or two foreigners, and they beat Chennaiyin FC, who played with all six. We were very close to losing to Punjab FC, who played with only two foreigners.

“Obviously, the foreigners are important. But the Indian players of Mohun Bagan SG are very good. People think that the team with

more foreigners are the favourites, but that doesn't matter,” said Marquez.

In the other semi-final, Mumbai City face Jamshedpur FC. Both bowed out of the Super Cup at the semi-final stage last year, but this season presents them a chance to make the final for the first time ever.

With both sides yet to concede a goal in the tournament so far, it will be fascinating to see who finally unlock the other's defence.

Mumbai City head coach Petr Kratky has the opportunity to take the Islanders to an Asian competition for the third time in the club's history, and the anticipation is high in the dressing room.

Jamshedpur FC find themselves in the Super Cup semi-final for the third time in a row. They lost 0-2 on both previous occasions to East Bengal (2024) and Bengaluru FC (2023). While the Men of Steel will count on being third time lucky, head coach Khalid Jamil highlighted that they consider every tournament a new challenge.



Kolkata Knight Riders' Rinku Singh (right) celebrates with Sunil Narine (centre) and wicketkeeper Rahmanullah Gurbaz after taking a catch to dismiss Delhi Capitals' Faf du Plessis during the Indian Premier League match at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi on Tuesday

SCOREBOARD

Kolkata Knight Riders: Rahmanullah Gurbaz c Porel b Starc 26, Sunil Narine lbw b Nigam 27, *Ajinkya Rahane lbw b Patel 26, Angkrish Raghuvanshi c Nair b Chameera 44, Venkatesh Iyer c Nigam b Patel 7, Rinku Singh c Starc b Nigam 36, Andre Russell run out (Porel) 17, Rovman Powell lbw b Starc 5, Anukul Roy run out (Porel) 0, Harshit Rana not out 0, Varun Chakravarty not out 1. Extras: 15. Total: 204-9. Fall of wickets: 48-1, 85-2, 91-3, 113-4, 174-5, 177-6, 203-7, 203-8, 203-9. Bowling: Mitchell Starc 4-0-43-3, Dushmantha Chameera 3-0-46-1, Mukesh Kumar 2-0-17-0, Vipraj Nigam 4-0-41-2, *Axar Patel 4-0-27-2, Kuldeep Yadav 3-0-27-0.

Delhi Capitals: Abishek Porel c Russell b Roy 4, Faf du Plessis c Singh b Narine 62, Karun Nair lbw b Arora 15, KL Rahul run out (Narine) 7, *Axar Patel c Rana b Narine 43, Tristan Stubbs b Narine 1, Vipraj Nigam b Russell 38, Ashutosh Sharma c Narine b Chakravarty 7, Mitchell Starc c Gurbaz b Chakravarty 0, Dushmantha Chameera not out 2, Kuldeep Yadav not out 1. Extras: 10. Total: 190-9. Fall of wickets: 4-1, 043-2, 60-3, 136-4, 138-5, 146-6, 160-7, 160-8, 189-9. Bowling: Anukul Roy 4-0-27-1, Vaibhav Arora 2-0-19-1, Harshit Rana 4-0-49-0, Varun Chakravarty 4-0-39-2, Sunil Narine 4-0-29-3, Andre Russell 2-0-22-1.

Man-of-the-match: Sunil Narine

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