

Iyer's Punjab Kings brace for RCB challenge in Qualifier 1

PTI, MULLANPUR (Chandigarh): Shreyas Iyer's re-surgent Punjab Kings will face their toughest test yet when they host Royal Challengers Bengaluru in Qualifier 1 of the Indian Premier League on Thursday.

PREVIEW

With a top-two finish securing both sides an extra shot at the final, expect a no-holds-barred contest to open the play-offs.

Punjab Kings, in the play-offs for the first time since 2014, appear unburdened by history under the leadership of Iyer and head coach Ricky Ponting. Their partnership has sparked a remarkable turnaround, finally delivering consistency after more than a decade of underperformance.

The side's transformation has seen young openers Prabhshimran Singh and Priyansh Arya laying strong foundations for Iyer and Josh Inglis. Finisher



Punjab Kings Azmatullah Omarzai, Yuzvendra Chahal and head coach Ricky Ponting share a light moment during a practice session at Maharaja Yadavindra Singh International Cricket Stadium, in New Chandigarh, on Wednesday

Shashank Singh continues to grow in confidence, while Australian Marcus Stoinis has found form, adding firepower to the middle order.

However, the bowling department faces challenges, particularly after South African pacer Marco Jansen's return home for national duty. Jansen had delivered in both the powerplay and death

overs, and his absence will be felt. Kyle Jamieson, who showed promise on debut, will need to step up, with Azmatullah Omarzai likely to replace Jansen.

Leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal is expected to return after missing two games due to a finger injury, pairing with the reliable Harpreet Brar. Arshdeep Singh

has been outstanding, consistently delivering across all phases of the innings.

RCB, too, have battled injury concerns, but pacer Josh Hazlewood is expected to be fully fit, and Tim David is likely to return, giving the team better balance.

Traditionally seen as top-heavy, RCB have seen the middle order step up, with

At Maharaja Yadavindra Singh International Cricket Stadium, Chandigarh, at 7.30 pm

Jitesh Sharma playing the best knock of his IPL career earlier this week. His confidence will be crucial in the play-offs. Phil Salt's explosive starts and Virat Kohli's consistent run of half-centuries remain central to RCB's chances.

RCB will draw confidence from their league-stage win over Punjab at this venue, though the pitch has proven unpredictable, with a 200-plus total posted just once in four first innings here.

Punjab, however, will be buoyed by their recent home success, notably defending 111 against KKR last month.

With both sides eyeing a maiden title, Thursday's clash will be more than just a knockout—it's a statement of intent.

Gauti sidesteps query on Iyer's exclusion for England tour

PTI, NEW DELHI: Head coach Gautam Gambhir on Wednesday sidestepped queries on Shreyas Iyer's exclusion from the Indian squad for England tour but lauded the BCCI for inviting the chiefs of the country's armed forces to attend the IPL final on June 3 in Ahmedabad.

Iyer could not find place in India's 18-man squad for the five-match Test series against England, starting June 20 in Leeds.

"I am not a selector," was Gambhir's terse reply when he was about Iyer, who has led Punjab Kings to the IPL play-offs.

Gambhir was effusive in his praise for the Indian cricket board for inviting the three chiefs of armed forces to attend IPL title clash, saying, "It's an unbelievable step".

"We normally criticise the BCCI a lot on a lot of things, but this is something which is unbelievable. BCCI has taken an initiative from the point of view that the entire nation is one and the entire nation has to salute the armed forces," he said.

Erigaisi hands Gukesh second defeat in 2 days

PTI, STAVANGER (Norway): World champion D Gukesh finds himself in deep trouble as compatriot Arjun Erigaisi broke through his defences in the second round to move into joint lead, while Hikaru Nakamura stunned Magnus Carlsen in the Armageddon tie-break on an eventful day in Norway Chess here.

NORWAY CHESS

Labelled as the favourite in the six-player double round-robin 'Open' category, Gukesh is scraping the bottom of the points table having lost the opening two rounds. World No.4 Indian Erigaisi has emerged the joint leader with American Grandmaster Nakamura on 4.5 points.

In an all-Indian tension-filled clash, Erigaisi, playing with white pieces, seized the early initiative but Gukesh's resilient defence created a somewhat equal endgame.

As the clock became a decisive factor, the position erupted into chaos before Erigaisi finally broke through to secure victory in a slugfest that lasted over four hours.

Erigaisi, who had also spoilt Gukesh's party at the Tata Steel Chess earlier this year by taking a game away from him just when he looked set to win the title, again dealt a huge body blow to the teenage world champion -- who turns 19 on Thursday, beating him in 62 moves.

Erigaisi, playing here for the first time, forced Gukesh to resign after giving him a check with his knight.

The victory for the 21-year-old, who achieved his peak rating of 2801 making him the 15th highest-rated player in history and only the second Indian after Viswanathan Anand to ever to cross the 2800 threshold in December, had on Monday overcome Chinese GM Wei Yi in Armageddon to secure 1.5 points.

Pant's calibre and ability was never in doubt: LSG mentor Zaheer

PTI, LUCKNOW: Lucknow Super Giants mentor Zaheer Khan has asserted that skipper Rishabh Pant's calibre and ability were never in doubt despite his underwhelming performances for most of the IPL season and the charismatic stumper will emerge stronger after this learning curve.

Bought for a whopping Rs 27 crore at the mega auction, Pant endured a lean patch, managing just 269 runs from 13 innings. He found his trademark big-hitting touch only in the last game of the season with a 61-ball 118 but that too ended up in a losing cause against Royal Challengers Bengaluru here on Tuesday.

"He's been good as a leader. That was a positive for us throughout the season. The form with the bat was definitely a learning experience for him, having this kind of season.

"But the ability and calibre -- no one had any doubt about it," Zaheer said in the post-match press conference on Tuesday.



RISHABH, LSG FINED FOR SLOWER OVER RATE

LUCKNOW: Lucknow Super Giants skipper Rishabh Pant has been fined Rs 30 lakh for maintaining a slow over rate during his team's defeat to Royal Challengers Bengaluru in their last IPL match here.

The rest of the playing XI, including the Impact Player, were handed a penalty of Rs 12 lakh for the breach on Tuesday.

"As it was his team's third offence of the season under the IPL's Code of Conduct relating to minimum over-rate offences, Rishabh Pant was fined Rs 30 Lakh," an IPL media release stated.

"The rest of the members of the Playing XI, including the Impact Player, were each individually fined either Rs 12 Lakh or 50 per cent of their respective match fees, whichever is lesser."

Hosts LSG went down by six wickets despite Pant's magnificent 118 not out off 61 balls to sign off the season with a loss.

India win gold in mixed relay; TJ, 3 others bag silver at Asian Athletics C'ships

PTI, GUMI (South Korea): India's 4x400m mixed relay team defended its gold with a domineering performance after four individual silvers and a bronze in varying events bolstered the country's overall tally to eight medals on a brilliant second day outing at the 26th Asian Athletics Championship here.

The Indian quartet of Rupal Chaudhary, Santhosh Kumar, Vishal TK and Subha Venkatesan won the top honours with a timing of 3:18.12sec. Of these, Rupal also claimed the individual women's 400m silver earlier in the day.

Subha, on the other hand, was a part of the mixed team that claimed gold in the 2023 edition.

China, who finished a distant second with a time of 3:20.52s, and Sri Lanka, who clocked 3:21.95s to take third place, were both disqualified. The reasons for their disqualification have not been disclosed yet.

Due to the disqualifications, Kazakhstan (3:22.70s) and Korea (3:22.87s) clinched the silver and bronze medals respectively.

The largely US-based Tejaswin Shankar was among the silver-winners for India, finishing second in decathlon after accumulating a score of 7618 following the regulation 10 events. He ended behind China's Fei Xiang (7634) and ahead of Japan's Keisuke Okuda (7602).

Praveen Chithravel also bagged a silver medal in men's triple jump with a best effort of 16.90m.

Earlier, Rupal (400m) and Pooja (1500m) picked up silver medals, Yoonus Shah fetched a bronze in men's 1500m.

The mixed gold was India's second top finish after national record-holder Gulveer Singh's (10,000m) brilliance on Tuesday.

Quarter-miler Rupal opened India's account for the day, clocking 52.68 seconds to finish second in the women's 400m final. Fellow Indian Vithya Ramraj was placed fifth with a time of 53.00 seconds.

Pooja followed with another silver, clocking 4:10.83sec in the women's 1500m, just ahead of compatriot Lili Das, who finished fourth (4:13.81sec).

Alcaraz, Swiatek win; Ruud knocked out of French Open



Carlos Alcaraz

AFP, PARIS: Reigning champion Carlos Alcaraz overcame a minor blip to reach the French Open third round as a dominant Iga Swiatek continued her bid for a fourth straight Roland Garros crown.

Men's title favourite and

second seed Alcaraz came through 6-1, 4-6, 6-1, 6-2 against Hungarian Fabian Marozsan to earn his 17th win in 18 matches on clay this season. Alcaraz, a four-time Grand Slam winner, goes on to face Bosnian journeyman Damir Dzumhur for

a place in the last 16.

In the women's draw, Swiatek outclassed fellow former US Open champion Emma Raducanu to rack up her 23rd consecutive win at Roland Garros.

The Pole beat Raducanu 6-1, 6-2 to make it five wins in as many meetings with the Briton. She improved her career win-loss record at the tournament to 37-2.

The 23-year-old arrived in Paris under a slight cloud, having not reached a WTA final since lifting the Coupe Suzanne Lenglen last year, but has made serene progress through the first two rounds.

Jasmine Paolini moved into the third round as she brushed aside Ajla Tomljanovic 6-3, 6-3 to stretch her winning streak to eight matches following her triumph at the Italian Open earlier this month.

Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen punched her ticket to the last 32 with a 6-2, 6-3 win over Colombia's Emilian Arango.

Twice former French Open runner-up Casper Ruud was the biggest casualty in either draw on Wednesday, crashing out in four sets to Portugal's Nuno Borges.

Seventh seed Ruud won the first set against world number 41 Borges but was hampered by a leg injury as he slumped to a 2-6, 6-4, 6-1, 6-0 defeat.

There were no such problems for in-form Italian eighth seed Lorenzo Musetti, who raced past Colombian lucky loser Daniel Elahi Galan 6-4, 6-0, 6-4.

BOLLIPALLI-BARRIENTOS BOW OUT

PTI, PARIS: Rithvik Bollipalli's search for his maiden win in a Grand Slam main draw continued as the Indian and his Colombian partner Nicolas Barrientos suffered a tame straight set defeat in the French Open men's doubles opening round, here Wednesday.

Canada's Gabriel Diallo and Briton Jacob Fearnley, who knocked out Stanislas Wawrinka in the singles on Monday, dominated the contest, winning 6-0 6-2 in just 56 minutes at Court 8.



Iga Swiatek

sportspopup

India beat Argentina on penalties in Four-Nations jr women's hockey

ROSARIO (Argentina): Goalkeeper and captain Nidhi pulled off four consecutive saves as India edged past hosts Argentina 2-0 on shootout following a 1-1 deadlock in the Four Nations junior women's hockey tournament here. Kanika (44') scored India's lone goal during regulation time, while Lalrinpuui and Lalthanluangi netted in the shootout to secure the victory in their third match of the tournament. Argentina got off to a strong start, with Milagros Del Valle (10') giving the home side the lead in the first quarter before India responded in the third quarter through Kanika's strike. With no further goals, the match stayed tied and went into the penalty shootout. India will take on Chile in their next fixture on Friday.

Satwik-Chirag make winning return; Lakshya concedes due to back pain

SINGAPORE: India's top men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty made a winning return but there was heartbreak for Lakshya Sen, who was forced to retire midway due to lower back pain at the Singapore Open Super 750 badminton tournament here on Wednesday. Back on the court for the first time since their withdrawal from the All England Championship in March due to Chirag's back injury, the former world No.1 pair displayed no signs of rust as it beat Malaysia's Choong Hon Jian and Muhammad Haikal 21-16 21-13 in just under 40 minutes in the round of 32. India's no. 1 singles player Sen was forced to retire during his opening round clash against Lin Chun-Yi of Chinese Taipei. Sen, currently ranked 17th in the world, started strong and took the first game 21-15. But his opponent, world No. 19 Lin, bounced back to claim the second 21-17.

Serena Williams awarded Spain's Princess of Asturias Prize for Sports

MADRID: Serena Williams has been awarded Spain's Princess of Asturias Prize for Sports for her stellar tennis career, organizers said Wednesday. The 43-year-old American won 73 career singles titles including 23 Grand Slams. She said in 2022 that she was stepping away from tennis to focus on her family and business interests. The 50,000-euro (\$57,000) Princess of Asturias Award is one of eight annual prizes covering different areas, including arts, literature and science among others. The awards ceremony, presided over by Spain's Princess Leonor, takes place each fall in the northern city of Oviedo. Past winners of the sports prize include skier Lindsey Vonn, the IOC Refugee Olympic Team and the New Zealand rugby team.



Slot pulls out of award ceremony after Liverpool parade tragedy

LIVERPOOL (England): Liverpool manager Arne Slot opted against attending a ceremony in London where he was due to receive an award, saying he withdrew "out of solidarity" with those affected in the team's city-center parade tragedy. Slot was named both the Premier League's Manager of the Season and League Managers Association's Manager of the Year after guiding Liverpool to its record-tying 20th league title in his first season at the club. Hundreds of thousands of fans lined the streets of Liverpool on Monday to celebrate with the players as they paraded the trophy on open-top buses, only for joy to turn to anguish when a man rammed his car into a crowd of people. Sixty-five people were injured and 11 remained hospitalised Tuesday in stable condition.

Judge steps down in Maradona trial after documentary controversy

BUENOS AIRES: One of the three judges overseeing the trial of seven health professionals accused of negligence in the death of Diego Maradona stepped down from the proceedings amid controversy over her participation in the making of a documentary about the case. Julieta Makintach withdrew from the case after the prosecutor showed footage of the documentary that spans the first moments after the soccer star's death in 2020 to the start of the trial more than two months ago, in which the judge appears as one of its lead characters. Following Makintach's resignation, the other two judges will have to decide how the case will proceed. The trial was suspended for a week after prosecutor Patricio Ferrari asked the San Isidro court to review Makintach's role in allegedly allowing the documentary to be filmed during the trial.

Saldanha and Murthy win RC2.1 class in RAAT Rally of Thailand

LOPBURI (Thailand): Indian rally driver Jason Saldanha and co-driver PVS Murthy dished out a commanding performance in the second round of the RAAT Rally of Thailand to clinch overall second place and a win in the RC 2.1 category to emerge as the front-runners in the 2025 international rally season. In 2023, Saldanha became the first Indian to win a class title in the RAAT Rally of Thailand and has since continued his upward trajectory. Behind the wheel of a 1.4-litre turbocharged Suzuki Swift, a 2WD machine, Saldanha was up against a field packed with more powerful 4-wheel drive (4WD) cars. Yet his strategic driving and relentless pace secured him a place on the overall podium with a timing of 1 hour, 7 minutes and 58 seconds. "The roads were extremely slippery due to the rains. It was one of the toughest events... Just one mistake could have ended it for us," said Saldanha, who hails from Sakleshpur, a small town in Karnataka. Veteran co-driver Murthy, with 25 years of rally experience, played a key role with precise pace notes and steady calls, enabling Saldanha to push the limits safely across all stages.

Big surprise in sumo. The sport has a new champion-and he's Japanese

TOKYO: Japan has a new sumo grand champion — or yokozuna — and the big news is he's Japanese. Onosato, the new grand champion, weighs 191 kilograms (421 pounds) and he is the first Japanese competitor to reach the top rank since 2017. By comparison, the average weight of an NFL lineman is about 140 kilos, or just over 300 pounds. The sport has recently been dominated by Mongolians and prior to Onosato, six of the previous seven yokozunas have been from Mongolia. "I'll devote myself to training so that I will not disgrace the title of yokozuna," Onosato said Wednesday, dressed in a formal kimono and bowing as he sat on the floor. "I will aim to become a one-and-only yokozuna." Onosato, whose real name is Daiki Nakamura, is only 24 and was promoted Wednesday to sumo's top rank by the Japan Sumo Association. Onosato was promoted by winning last week's Summer Grand Sumo Tournament, which came after he won another prestigious tournament in March.