

It's a do-or-die for Punjab Kings against rampant Mumbai Indians in Qualifier 2

PTI, AHMEDABAD: A rampant Mumbai Indians will present a stern test of character for a rattled Punjab Kings in a virtual semi-final when the two teams face off in Qualifier 2 of the Indian Premier League, here, on Sunday.

An eight-wicket hammering at the hands of Royal Challengers Bengaluru in a one-sided Qualifier 1 may have eroded some amount of confidence in Shreyas Iyer's Punjab Kings, who are now in a do-or-die situation as they dream of winning a maiden IPL trophy.

IPL PREVIEW

On the other hand, Mumbai Indians took another stride towards a potential sixth title with a comprehensive victory, which knocked out title favourites Gujarat Titans in the Eliminator.

History tells Mumbai Indians know their way around these lanes of IPL knockouts better than either of the other two teams left in the competition and that certainly tilt the scales in favour of Hardik Pandya's side.

But coach Mahela Jayawardene's challenge would be to keep his troops organised which the former Sri Lankan captain has been able to do exceedingly well after taking over a side that finished at the bottom in the previous season.

For the Iyer-Ricky Ponting pair, the task would be to ensure their players put behind the crushing defeat in their last game and channel their energies



Punjab Kings' skipper Shreyas Iyer with teammates during a training session ahead of the Indian Premier League 2025 Qualifier 2 match against Mumbai Indians, at the Narendra Modi Stadium, in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, on Saturday

PUNJAB KINGS

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MUMBAI INDIANS

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TEAMS

Mumbai Indians: Hardik Pandya (c), Suryakumar Yadav, Rohit Sharma, Tilak Varma, Bevon Jacobs, Robin Minz (wk), Krishnan Shriji (wk), Naman Dhir, Raj Bawa, Mitchell Santner, Jasprit Bumrah, Arjun Tendulkar, Ashwani Kumar, Reece Topley, Karn Sharma, Trent Boult, Deepak Chahar, Satyanarayanan Raju, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Raghav Sharma, Jonny Bairstow (wk), Richard Gleeson, Charith Asalanka.

Punjab Kings: Shreyas Iyer (c), Nehal Wadhwa, Vishnu Vinod (wk), Josh Inglis (wk), Harnoor Pannu, Pyla Avinash, Prabhsimran Singh (wk), Shashank Singh, Marcus Stoinis, Harpreet Brar, Azmatullah Omarzai, Priyansh Arya, Aaron Hardie, Musheer Khan, Suryansh Shedge, Mitch Owen, Arshdeep Singh, Yuzvendra Chahal, Vyshak Vijaykumar, Yash Thakur, Kuldeep Sen, Xavier Bartlett, Pravin Dube, Kyle Jamieson.

Match starts at 7.30 pm

to fight the fires that have erupted particularly in the bowling line-up, where Arshdeep Singh is carrying extra pressure.

The absence of Marco Jansen and unavailability of IPL's highest-ever wicket-taker in Yuzvendra Chahal was evident when PBKS scrambled to find options to apply pressure on a spicy wicket in Mullanpur against RCB.

But at the same time, PBKS camp could feel that that 'one bad day', collec-

tively for their batters and especially in the knockouts, is now behind them and that it did not rob them of an opportunity to make the final.

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out spotting any chink in Mumbai Indians' armour who have fired on all cylinders. They would continue to lean on their rich blend of Indian players including Rohit, Jasprit Bumrah, Suryakumar Yadav, Tilak Varma and Pandya to come together.

MI will also be particularly pleased with how their new recruits Jonny Bairstow and Richard Gleeson eased into the heat of the competition to deliver their bits, which at the end, proved vital in crushing GT on a batting-friendly pitch.

After all, the outcome of the contest at the Narendra Modi Stadium could well be decided over how the two bowling attacks execute their plans since the surfaces here have regularly produced high-scoring games.

Jasprit Bumrah's exploits and a clever deployment of the ace Indian bowler across the 20 overs have been one of MI's biggest strengths this season.

While Bumrah's accuracy and guile has not allowed the batters to score runs off him easily, PBKS would also want to draw from their win over MI earlier this season when despite his measly returns, they were able to go over the line with seven wickets in hand.

Suryakumar's unmatched consistency with the bat met with a sparkling knock from Tilak Varma against the Titans but for PBKS, it will be important to have their explosive opening pair of Prabhsimran Singh and Priyansh Arya finding their rhythm to set the tone.

Asian Athletics: India sign off with 24 medals

PTI, GUMI (South Korea): A new national record, a string of personal bests, and six final-day medals capped India's campaign at the 26th Asian Athletics Championships with the country signing off with a total haul of 24 medals here on Saturday.

While gold proved elusive on the final day, Indian athletes delivered a series of gritty performances to secure three silver and as many bronze medals.

Parul Chaudhary claimed her second silver of the meet with a strong run in the women's 5000m, clocking 15:15.33s to finish second, adding to the silver she had earlier won in the 3000m steeplechase.

While javelin thrower Sachin Yadav earned his silver with a personal best effort, the women's 4x100m relay team, featuring Abinaya Rajarajan, Sneha SS, Srabani Nanda, and Nithya Gandhe, clocked a season-best 43.86s to bag India's final silver.

Sprinter Animesh Kujur blazed to a national record of 20.32s to clinch a bronze in the men's 200m for India.

Middle distance runner Pooja recorded a personal best to take bronze in the women's 800m, while Asian Games medallist Vithya Ramraj secured the third place in the women's 400m hurdles. India thus wrapped up the championships with 8 gold, 10 silver, and 6 bronze medals.

While the overall count fell short of the 27 medals won in the previous edition, the contingent has improved on the gold tally, increasing it from 6 to 8.

India finished second in the medal tally behind China (19 gold, 9 silver, 4 bronze), marking the country's best performance since the 2017 edition in Bhubaneswar, where it topped the standings with 29 medals (10 gold, 6 silver, 13 bronze).

Japan finished third with 5 gold, 11 silver and 12 bronze.

shorttakes

56-year-old Indian powerlifter Lalit wins three gold at IBBF World Championship

AHMEDABAD: Lalit Patel, a 56-year-old powerlifter from Gujarat, won three gold medals at the IBBF World Powerlifting Championship held in Pattaya, Thailand. Competing in the Master Two category (85-93kg), Patel topped the podium in the bench press, deadlift and squat events in the competition held between May 10 and 12. Patel has been training intensively for the past eight months to prepare for the global event. He took up powerlifting just five years ago and follows a strict vegetarian diet. "Age and diet are no barriers to success," said Patel.

Satwik-Chirag sign off with semi-final finish at Singapore Open

SINGAPORE: Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty's gritty run at the Singapore Open Super 750 came to an end in the men's doubles semifinals, as the Indian pair went down fighting in a tense three-game contest against Malaysia's Aaron Chia and Soh Wooi Yik, here, on Saturday. The former world number one Indian pair squandered the advantage of an opening game win but saved as many as seven match points before losing 21-19, 10-21, 18-21 in a high-intensity 64-minute clash. Facing a familiar opponent who had ended their Paris Olympic hopes, the Indian duo—currently ranked world number 27 after battling health and fitness issues—showed their class by pocketing the opening game. However, they struggled with the drift in the second and couldn't recover after giving away a healthy lead in the decider.

UPCA's Yudhvir appointed as Indian team's manager for England tour

NEW DELHI: Seasoned administrator Yudhvir Singh from Uttar Pradesh Cricket Association (UPCA) has been appointed as the Indian team's manager for the upcoming tour of England, the BCCI sources informed. Yudhvir, who is currently a life member of the UPCA, has served as the association's secretary and the director in the past. India will face England in a five-match Test series, starting with the first match at Leeds on June 20. Young batter Shubman Gill was appointed as the team's captain after Rohit Sharma announced his retirement from Test cricket. Wicketkeeper batter Rishabh Pant will be Gill's deputy during the away assignment.

Shoib gets legal notice from cricket historian for defamation

KARACHI: Nauman Niaz, a well-known cricket historian, writer and television personality has sent a notice to former Pakistan pacer Shoib Akhtar for discrediting and defaming him. Dr Niaz, a former Director of Sports at the State-owned Pakistan Television Network, has sent the notice through his lawyer after Shoib allegedly described him as a "kit man" during his time with the Pakistan team. "Dr Nauman basically used to carry our bags luggage for us in the team," Shoib said on a podcast. Dr Nauman served as the data analyst of the Pakistan team on a couple of tours some years back when Shoib was playing for his country. Deriding the role of coaches, managers in the team, Shoib went onto narrate about how Dr Niaz was in the team to carry bags of the players. "That is what he did in the team. I don't know about anything else he did," he added.

India's in-form Sudharsan to draw on county stints for England Tests

CHANDIGARH: In-form Sai Sudharsan will draw on county cricket experience as he switches from the IPL to the five-day game for his first Test tour with India when they travel to England. The left-handed opener made a valiant 80 on Friday as Gujarat Titans went down to Mumbai Indians and were knocked out of the IPL. The 23-year-old was key to Gujarat's journey to the playoffs. He is the leading batsman in the league with 759 runs, including one century and six half-centuries, at an average of 54.21. Gujarat's exit will give him extra time before he heads to England for a five-Test series beginning at Headingley on June 20. Sudharsan, part of an 18-man India squad led by new captain Shubman Gill -- his Gujarat skipper and fellow opener -- had stints with English county Surrey last year and in 2023.

Bangladesh ex-captain Aminul new cricket Board chief

DHAKA: Bangladesh's first Test centurion Aminul Islam has been named president of the cricket board after Faruque Ahmed was ousted. "This is a new high for me," Aminul, who captained Bangladesh in their first World Cup appearance in 1999 and is better known as "Bulbul", told reporters. Since his retirement from playing, the 57-year-old has worked in development for the International Cricket Council and Asian Cricket Council.

How Bobat, Flower & Karthik changed RCB's auction dynamics to lead team into IPL final

PTI, BENGALURU: Insight, perhaps, was not the watchword in Royal Challengers Bengaluru's auction process, for long. In the past, they assembled a slew of stars and then tried to build the team around them.

It was so glaring in the mid 2010s 'Galactico' era of Virat Kohli, Chris Gayle and AB de Villiers when RCB was a three-man team. But the appointment of Mo Bobat and Andy Flower and Dinesh Karthik into the coaching staff changed the template, and it reflected in RCB's approach in the auction room in 2024.

In Rishabh Pant, KL Rahul and Shreyas Iyer some of the biggest names in contemporary Indian cricket were available to buy, and going by the past precedent, RCB would have broken their vault to acquire at least two of them.

Instead, they focussed on value buys such as Josh Hazlewood, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Krunal Pandya, Phil Salt, Suyash Sharma, Romario Shepherd and Tim David.

Each of them have played important roles in RCB's wins this season to prove their worth home and away.

It was clear that RCB wanted certain players to suit certain roles within the team, rather than purchasing players merely on their reputation.

"I think we got predominantly

what we wanted in terms of playing personnel. But more importantly, with the actual shape of the team and the vision of that team that Andy and I spent so much time thinking about and talking about, we pretty much nailed that. And you get to see that come to life on the field," said Bobat, the RCB's director, in a release.

The acquisition of Salt offers the most palpable validation of those words.

The RCB was ready to let go Will Jacks, who had blitzed a 41-ball hundred against Gujarat Titans last year, for Salt, whom the coaching staff thought can produce big overs consistently upfront. He plays the high-risk game, and has taken apart the biggest names in opposition ranks like Mitchell Starc (Delhi Capitals) and Pat Cummins (Sunrisers Hyderabad) to destroy their morale.

However, Salt has also produced those little cameos that made a big difference in the eventual outcome of the match.

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RCB did not let that early momentum slip away.

Karthik, the mentor who had a critical role in finalising the RCB auction pattern, explained the rationale behind selecting players like Salt.

"I thought we did beautifully in picking a very balanced squad, knowing what sort of players we want and which player would fit in which role. As we were picking the team, we used to put players in certain roles and see how they fit.

"We were very sure this is the kind of batting order we wanted. And in the auction prep as well, we had a few eleven as combinations, and in that, we had certain

players, certain names in mind, said Karthik.

It reflected even while picking up replacement for an injured player. The RCB management did not hesitate to draft in Mayank Agarwal when the in-form but injured Devdutt Padikkal was ruled out of this IPL season.

The management considered Agarwal's experience at this stage, and his ability to replicate the role Padikkal did this season for them, allowing the bigger hitters to do their job while keeping his end going.

The Karnataka batter also has a solid case for himself, racking up 179 runs from seven matches at a strike-rate of 153 at this season's Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy.

"The difference between this RCB squad and some of the ones that were picked previously are: the amount of experience through the 12 players, the strength and depth in batting, said Karthik.

Agarwal did not disappoint either. He made an unbeaten 41 off 23 balls at a strike-rate of 178, while giving strong support to Jitesh Sharma (85, 33b, SR: 257) against LSG.

Their unbroken 107-run stand for the fifth wicket gave RCB a remarkable six-wicket win.

These players have been part of several T20 competitions, and that experience meant that they

needed minimal hand holding in a pressure situation.

Karthik acknowledged that fact. "And many leaders not just one or two big names but lots of leaders through the players that we had picked from auction," he said.

However, a majority of these cricketers were first-time entrants to the RCB dressing room, and they had to be made to feel secure in a new environment.

It was imperative because RCB handed the captain's armband to Rajat Patidar, a fine player but someone who does not command a similar stature as some others in the dugout.

By all accounts, the think-tank has done that coordination job to perfection and Patidar has now grown into an accepted and respected leader of the pack.

"For Andy and I, creating a sort of environment where people feel safe, where they feel backed, where they feel like they're accountable for their own decisions, and where they're able to hopefully showcase their strengths that's the key bit," said Bobat.

Now, they stand just one win away from their maiden IPL title and the Ee Sala Cup Namde' (This time the Cup is ours) tagline sounds much more realistic than in any previous seasons.

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German third seed Zverev, who lost last year's final to Alcaraz, won 6-2, 7-6 (7/4), 6-1 on Court Philippe Chatrier against Hamburg champion Flavio

Cobolli. In the women's tournament, American third seed Jessica Pegula battled into the last 16 with a 3-6, 6-4, 6-2 win over Czech Marketa

Vondrousova.

Pegula, last year's US Open runner-up, next meets unheralded Lois Boisson, ranked 361, the last French player competing in Roland Garros.

Boisson fought through the pain to see off 138th-ranked countrywoman Elsa Jacquemot 6-3, 0-6, 7-5.

The 31-year-old, who missed the 2024 tournament due to injury, is hoping to better her previous best run in Paris which was a quarter-final appearance three years ago.

Earlier, 18-year-old Andreeva eased into the last 16 with a 6-3, 6-1 win over Kazakh Yulia Putintseva.

Sixth seed Andreeva took 78 minutes to dispatch Putintseva to set up a

showdown with Daria Kasatkina, ranked 17.

Kasatkina, now playing for Australia after switching allegiance from her native Russia, got past Spanish 10th seed Paula Badosa 6-1, 7-5 in their third round match.

Andreeva is competing in just her ninth Grand Slam event, but the teenager has now reached the second week in five of them.

After a closely-contested first set, Andreeva took control winning nine of the last 10 games of the match.

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