

Late goals sink India men again, women lose



India's Sumit (left) fights for the ball with Australia's Tim Brand during the FIH Hockey Pro League game between Australia and India at the Wilrijkse Plein in Antwerp, Belgium, on Saturday

PTI, ANTWERP (Belgium): There was no end to Indian men's hockey team's woes in the FIH Pro League as the side slumped to its fifth straight defeat, losing 2-3 to Australia despite leading the contest by two goals after Abhishek's brace, here, on Saturday.

The Indian team has already lost twice to Netherlands and Argentina in the tournament.

Starting strong, India took a 2-0 lead by the 35th minute through Abhishek's (8th, 35th minutes) brace. But the Kookaburras came out all attacking after the change of ends, scoring through Nathan Ephraums (42nd), and two penalty corner conversions by Joel Rintala (56th) and Tom Craig (60th) to secure the win.

After suffering four close defeats against Netherlands and Argentina in their first four

matches of the European leg of Pro League, the Indians looked a motivated lot against Australia and dominated the share of exchanges in the first two quarters.

The Indians were without skipper and ace dragflicker Harmanpreet Singh as he has been rested due to an injury suffered in the last match against Argentina.

Meanwhile, the Indian women's hockey team fought valiantly after conceding three goals against Australia but eventually lost 2-3 in a FIH Pro League match in London, on Saturday.

Australia took a 3-0 lead through field goals from Courtney Schonell (16th min-

ute), Lexie Pickering (26th) and penalty stroke conversion by Tatum Stewart (35th).

The Indians, however, mounted a comeback in the contest after the change of ends through two penalty corner goals from Deepika and Neha.

BCCI tweaks Ranji format as one team to be promoted and relegated; Super League in SMAT

PTI, NEW DELHI: The 2025-26 Ranji Trophy will be held from October 15 to February 28 in two phases with a tweaked format which will see the promotion and relegation of one team from the plate group instead of the current two sides, the BCCI decided in its Apex Council meeting on Saturday.

Back in 2018-19, the BCCI had added nine teams in the Ranji Trophy including the team from the North East but that has impacted the quality of cricket in the premier domestic competition.

Meghalaya played in the Ranji Trophy elite division but lost all their seven games last season.

"All multi-day men's tournaments (senior and junior), 1 team will be promoted and 1 team will be relegated for the 2026-27 season grouping," read a BCCI note in PTI's possession.

The format change in red ball

cricket will apply to all BCCI tournaments across age groups.

The first phase of Ranji Trophy will be played from October 15 to November 19 while the second phase will run from January 22 to February 1. The knockouts will be played from February 6 to 28.

The Duleep Trophy, which returns to the zonal format, will mark the start of the season and will be run from August 28 to September 15. "The team will be picked by the Zonal Selection Committee," the BCCI added.

The Irani Cup will run from October 1 to 5.

The Plate division has been reintroduced in all one-day competitions including the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (SMAT).

Until last season, the knockout games included the standard quarterfinal, semifinal and final stage but from this season, the

qualified team will get three extra matches in Super League.

Top team from group A and B will meet in the final. The bottom placed six teams from the last season will form the plate group. The SMAT will be played from November 26 to December 18.

Additionally for all the white ball tournaments, the head to head clause for qualification has been done away with and net run rate will determine which team advances in the competition if they have equal points and wins.

The likely venues for the white-ball series against New Zealand from January 11 to 31, 2026 include Hyderabad (first ODI, Jan 11), Rajkot (second ODI, Jan 14), Indore (third ODI, Jan 18), Nagpur (first T20, Jan 21), Ranchi (second T20, Jan 23), Guwahati (third T20, Jan 25), Visakhapatnam (fourth T20, Jan 28), Thiruvananthapuram (fifth

T20, January 31).

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AFI includes relay events as Asian Games medal prospects

PTI, NEW DELHI: Athletics Federation of India (AFI) has included the men's and women's 4x100m relays as priority events for the 2026 Asian Games in Japan, buoyed by the recent strong performances in domestic and international competitions. Top AFI officials are expecting medals from the two events at the Asian Games to be held in Aichi-Nagoya from September 19 to October 4, 2026.

"The AFI has included men's and women's 4x100m relay teams as a priority event for the 2026 Asian Games," AFI spokesperson Adille Sumariwalla said.

"A series of outstanding performances by relay teams augurs well for the future," said Sumariwalla, vice-president of the World Athletics. In April this year, the 4x100m relay team Borgohain clocked 38.69 seconds to better more than a decade old national record of 38.89 seconds clocked at the 2010 Delhi Commonwealth Games.

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