

# » SPORTSTAR

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## POSTER

**MANU BHAKER &  
SARABJOT SINGH**

INTERVIEW

**Arshdeep  
Singh on  
T20 WC  
win and  
more**

PARIS OLYMPICS

**Nadal  
makes  
early  
singles  
exit**

# » MANUFICENT!

The youngster entered the annals of sporting greatness by becoming the first Indian woman to win two medals in the same Olympics



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Proposed Chengalpet - Tambaram Elevated Corridor



Upcoming Metro at Kilambakkam

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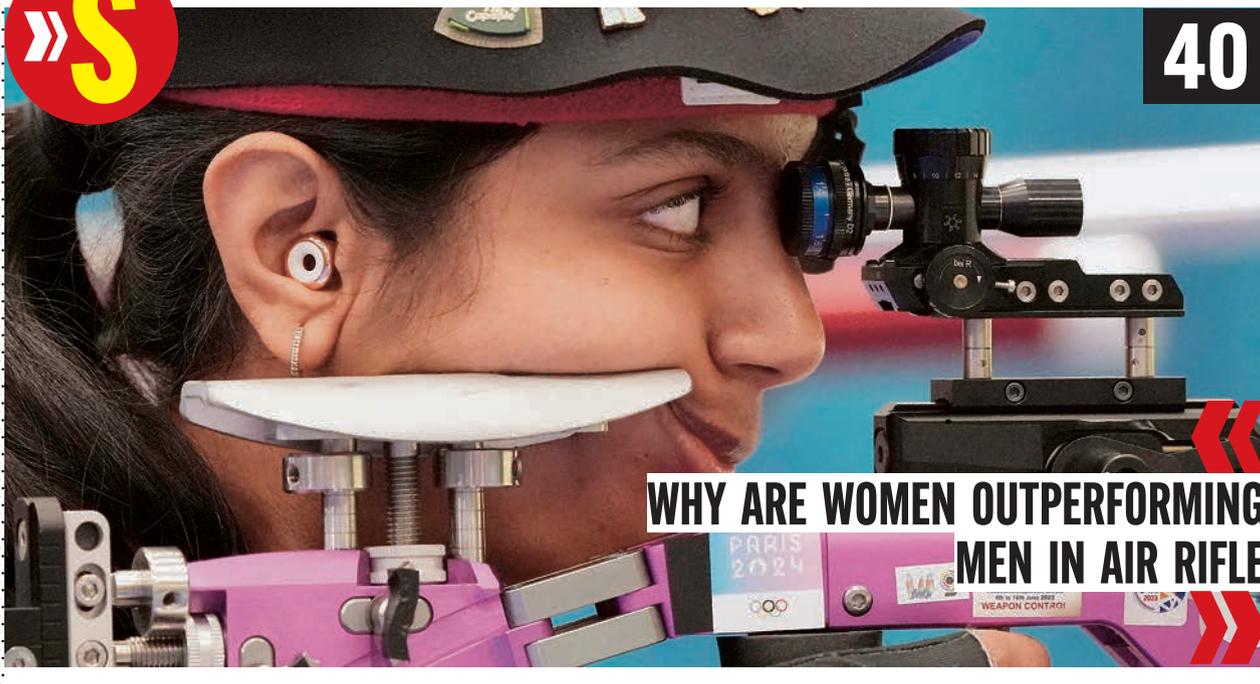
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## WHY ARE WOMEN OUTPERFORMING MEN IN AIR RIFLE

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Early action from Paris



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**Cover Story**  
**Manu Bhaker**

With two medals in three days, the Indian shooter is breathing rarefied air in India's sporting pantheon at this point

Cover: Manu Bhaker  
(Ritu Raj Konwar)

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Poster: Manu Bhaker & Sarabjot Singh (Ritu Raj Konwar); Pages 45-52

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mail to: [sportstar@thehindu.co.in](mailto:sportstar@thehindu.co.in)

**Published by** Nirmala Lakshman, Kasturi Buildings, 859, 860, Anna Salai, Chennai-600 002 and Printed by SDT Rao at Kala Jyothi Process Private Ltd, Plot no CFC-1&2, Survey No 18, E-City, SEZ & General Industrial Park, Raviryal & Srinagar (Village), Maheswaram(M), R.R.Dist, Telangana - 501359 on behalf of THG PUBLISHING PVT LTD., Chennai-600 002.

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## OFF-SIDE

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# OH SO CLOSE, YET SO FAR

Arjun Babuta joined the unfortunate ranks of 17 other Indians who had painfully finished fourth in Olympic history. Here's hoping he is blessed with a **touch of magic and a bit of mercy** at LA 2028.

**T**here's a special circle of despair reserved for those who finish fourth at the Olympics. It's a cruel purgatory that separates the medal winners basking in glory from the also-rans fading into obscurity. You linger awkwardly in between, robbed of the chance at immortality, with nothing to show but the sting of being so painfully close.

For Arjun Babuta, the wretched 9.5 came at the worst possible time. It was his lowest score in the 10m air rifle final at the ongoing Paris Olympics. The score, this tiny numerical betrayal on the 20th shot, was the gulf between him and the podium. And he joined the unfortunate ranks of 17 other Indians who had finished just outside the podium in Olympic history.

"It was not my day. It is very hard to deal with fourth. It is the worst place to finish. It is disheartening," Babuta said, emerging from the cocoon of the changing room where he was whisked away by compatriot Elavenil Valarivan to deal with his emotions away from the prying eyes and probing questions.

**The 25-year-old was second after 12 shots and he recovered from a poor 13th — 9.9 — to hold on to his position after four more shots. A 10.1 on the 18th put him outside the medal bracket, but he scrambled back with a 10.5. But fate had its own cruel twist reserved for him.**

The first member of India's unfortunate Heartbreak Club was wrestler Randhir Shinde, who lost the bronze medal playoff in the men's featherweight freestyle to Philip Bernard of Great Britain at the 1920 Antwerp Olympics. Since then, there has been a steady influx of

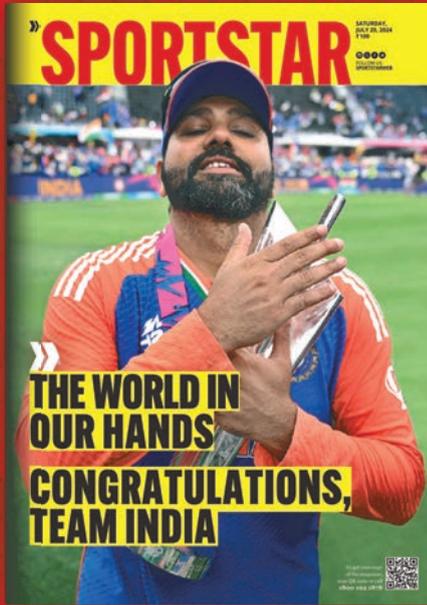
many illustrious names — the men's football team in the 1956 Melbourne Games, Milkha Singh (400m, Rome 1960), P. T. Usha (women's 400m hurdles, Los Angeles 1984), Leander Paes/Mahesh Bhupathi (men's doubles tennis, Athens 2004), Joydeep Karmakar (men's 50m rifle prone shooting, London 2012) or Aditi Ashok in women's golf from the last edition in Tokyo.

Abhinav Bindra, who savoured the dizzying heights of Olympic glory in 2008 and later the bitter taste of almost-but-not-quite in 2016, was quick to offer solace. "Arjun, congratulations on your inspiring performance today. You came so close, and your dedication shone through every shot. I couldn't be more proud of your composure under pressure. This performance is just the beginning and am sure a sign of things to come. Keep pushing, keep believing. The entire nation stands behind you," the 10m air rifle winner of the Beijing Olympics posted on X.

**Bindra knows competitive sport can be both magical and merciless.**

Ask poor Max Litchfield, who was in tears again after finishing fourth in the 400m individual medley for the third consecutive Olympics. "I've come fourth at three Olympics on the trot, there are not many people that can say they've done that. It's just tough that it's so close again," the British swimmer said. "I gave it my everything so I can't complain. Well, I can, I'm upset, but I've done everything I possibly could, so it is just sport."

Sport, often, asks for more than what we can possibly give. Here's hoping that it offers a touch of magic and a bit of mercy for Babuta and Litchfield at LA 2028.



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## Jon Rahm's moment of glory

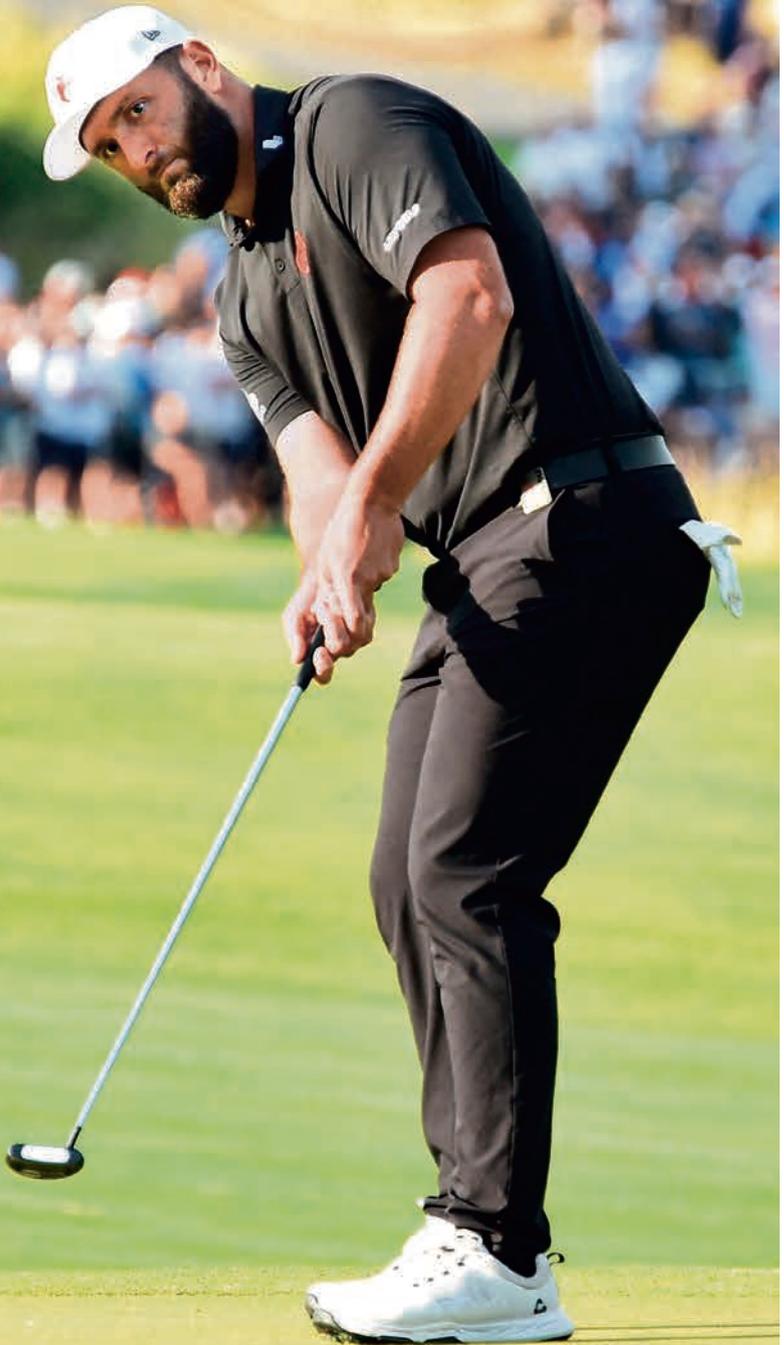
Jon Rahm won LIV Golf UK for his first victory on the Saudi-funded tour when Legion XIII teammate Tyrrell Hatton three-putted his final hole for a bogey.

Rahm closed with a 4-under 68 to finish at 13 under at JCB Golf & Country Club, a stroke ahead of Hatton (69), season points leader Joaquin-Niemann (65) and defending champion Cameron-Smith (69).

Rahm is one of seven LIV players in the Olympics next week at Le Golf National outside Paris. The 29-year-old Spanish star joined LIV in December. He has had a foot problem this season.

Jhonattan Vegas won for the first time in nearly seven years, holing a 3-foot birdie putt on the 18th hole for a 1-under 70 and a one-shot victory over Max Greyserman in the 3M Open.

Vegas finished at 17-under 267 at the windy TPC Twin Cities. The 39-year-old from Venezuela won his fourth PGA Tour title and first since his second straight Canadian Open victory in 2017.



REUTERS



« Obviously, he has already experienced this; he already knows what it's like to play in the Olympics and win gold in both singles and doubles. I'm new; I'm the rookie here, so I have to keep my mouth shut and just listen to him. – Carlos Alcaraz on teaming with Rafael Nadal at the Olympics »



« “You know people who don't like my language; don't listen in; turn the volume down, you know. I'm very driven to success, and I think I've proven that already.” – Max Verstappen, ahead of the Belgian Grand Prix »

## 29

Ferrari driver Carlos Sainz, 29, will be joining Williams next season, alongside Alex Albon. Sainz has been with Ferrari since 2021, but the Spaniard will be leaving the team as Ferrari has decided to sign Lewis Hamilton, who will join the team next year.



## 60

Samoa's boxing coach, Lionel Erika Fatupaito, 60, died at the Paris Olympics village after he had a cardiac arrest, officials said. The governing body, the International Boxing Association (IBA), sent its "heartfelt condolences to the family, friends and colleagues" of Fatupaito following his sudden death on the day of the opening ceremony.

He was treated by emergency services, but they were unable to save him, according to the local prosecutor's office, which said he died of "natural causes."

"Lionel's dedication and passion for the sport have left an indelible mark on the boxing community," the IBA said in a statement. "His legacy will continue to inspire future generations. Our thoughts and prayers are with Team Samoa and all those affected by this profound loss."

## TASTING SUCCESS



**Yoshihito Nishioka captured his third career ATP title**, outlasting Australia's Jordan Thompson and a rain delay of nearly six hours to win the Atlanta Open final. The 28-year-old Japanese left-hander rallied after the showers to defeat Thompson 4-6, 7-6(2), 6-2. Nishioka, playing in his sixth career ATP final, added to a trophy haul that included the 2018 Shenzhen Open and the 2022 Korea Open in Seoul. AFP

» FIGHT CLUB

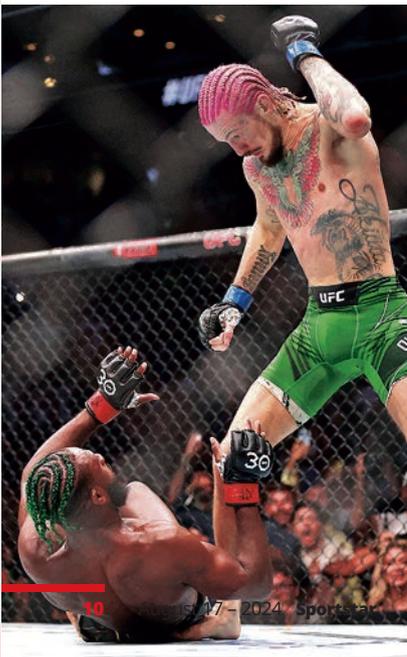
# BEHOLD THE CHALLENGER

Merab Dvalishvili's long pursuit of a title shot **culminates in a showdown** against Sean O'Malley for the bantamweight championship at UFC 306 in Las Vegas.

**Nigamanth P**

nigamanth.p@thehindu.co.in

AFP



**M**erab Dvalishvili's long-standing wish will be finally fulfilled in a few weeks.

The 'Machine' is set to take on reigning bantamweight champion Sean O'Malley (**left; standing**) for the belt at UFC 306 at the Sphere in Las Vegas on September 14. UFC CEO Dana White announced this fight via an *Instagram* live session last week.

"This is good; he has finally mentioned my name, and now we are going to fight. Because I have been calling him for six years, and he has been ignoring me. It feels good that he finally wants to fight me," said Dvalishvili in an interview.

The O'Malley vs. Dvalishvili bout has been in the works since March. In February, Dvalishvili defeated Henry Cejudo by unanimous decision at UFC 298 before O'Malley beat Marlon Vera at UFC 299 in March.

O'Malley, known for his electrifying fighting style, will seek his second title defence after notable victories over Aljamain Sterling and Marlon 'Chito' Vera. O'Malley has maintained a six-fight winning streak, excluding a no-contest against Pedro Munhoz.

His challenger, Dvalishvili, boasts a remarkable 10-fight win streak and



## THE O'MALLEY VS. DVALISHVILI BOUT HAS BEEN IN THE WORKS SINCE MARCH

**Hot form:** Merab Dvalishvili boasts a remarkable 10-fight win streak and has long been at the forefront of title contention. AFF

has long been at the forefront of title contention. Due to his friendship with Sterling, he refused to fight him for the belt. With Sterling moved to the featherweight division, Dvalishvili finally gets a shot at bantamweight gold.

In the co-main event, UFC flyweight champion Alexa Grasso will face former champion Valentina Shevchenko in a trilogy fight.

The two fighters have fought twice before. The first meeting was UFC 285 in March 2023 and served as the card's co-main event. Grasso defeated Shevchenko with a fourth-round rear-naked choke. The victory shocked most of the world, as Shevchenko was primed to

defend her title for a whopping eighth time.

The second meeting took place six months later at the inaugural Noche UFC. The fight was closely contested and went all 25 minutes. Though everyone had an opinion, the only ones that mattered were the three judges', who collectively scored the fight a split draw.



### Thunderous win

UFC 304 in Manchester on Sunday ended with the packed house at Co-op Live left in stunned silence as Belal Muhammad closed out the show by wrestling the UFC welterweight title away from home favourite Leon Edwards.

The surging challenger took the fight to Edwards straight out of the chute, putting him on the canvas in each of the first two rounds while showing quicker, more dangerous hands to race out to an early lead.

After the champion worked back into the fight in the third by taking Muhammad down, the Chicago native went back on the wrestling

offensive in the fourth to enter the final round with a 3-1 lead.

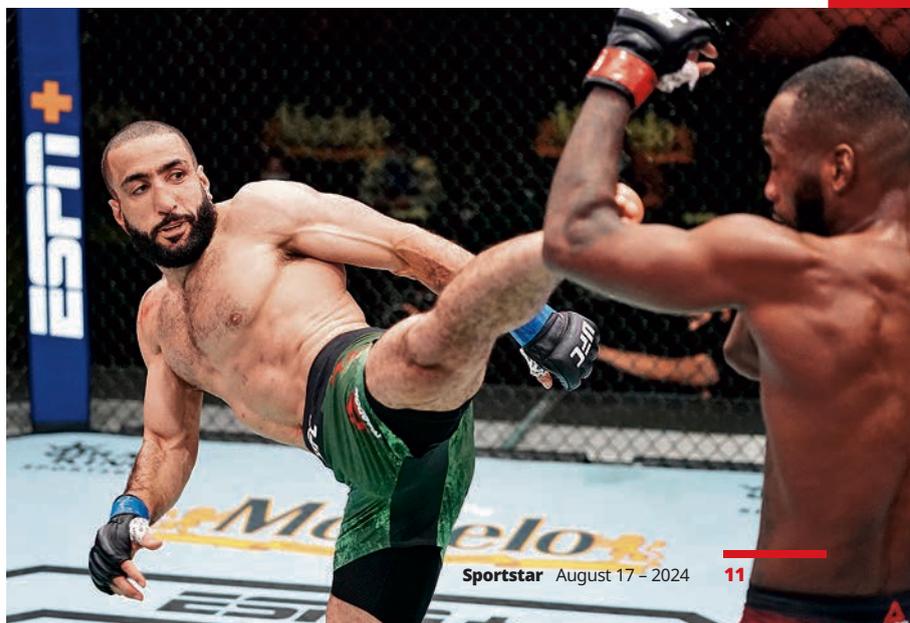
Muhammad continued to overpower Edwards in the final two rounds as he found success with his aggression via takedowns. His face bloodied, Muhammad (24-3) dropped to his knees moments after he remained unbeaten in his 11th straight fight and had the championship belt wrapped around his waist.

He became the first UFC fighter of Palestinian origin to clinch a title. In the co-main event, Tom Aspinall demolished Curtis Blaydes to successfully defend his interim heavyweight title.

The fight played out much like his matchup with Sergei Pavlovich in November, as Blaydes flashed his power in the initial exchange, only for Aspinall to reset and topple him with a short left hook.

Capitalising on the upper hand, Aspinall unloaded a series of follow-up blows that brought about the first-round stoppage. Aspinall is now set to compete for the undisputed heavyweight title, after White confirmed the winner will face the victor of the Jon Jones vs. Stipe Miocic fight, which is slated to happen later this year.

**Champion slayer:** Belal Muhammad (left) closed out the show by wrestling the welterweight title away from home favourite Leon Edwards (right). AFF



Sportstar August 17 - 2024

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**Crowning glory:** Manu Bhaker created history by becoming the first Indian woman to win multiple medals at an Olympic Games with her twin bronze medals in Paris.

RITU RAJ KONWAR

**MANU BHAKER IS BREATHING RAREFIED AIR IN INDIA'S SPORTING PANTHEON AT THIS POINT. SHE COULD POTENTIALLY BE ALONE AT THE TOP.**

# MANU MANIA GRIPS PARIS

IT TOOK SUSHIL KUMAR AND P. V. SINDHU — TWO OF INDIA'S GREATEST SPORTSPERSONS — FOUR YEARS TO WIN A SECOND INDIVIDUAL OLYMPIC MEDAL. NOW, **IN THE SPACE OF THREE DAYS**, MANU HAS WON TWO OF HER OWN.

Jonathan Selvaraj

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It's probably fair to say that even a week ago, most Indians would not have heard (let alone pronounced it correctly: it's Chateau + hoh) of Chateauroux — the location of the shooting competition for the Paris Olympics. For the record, the town of 70,000 is located some 300 kilometres south of Paris, almost three hours by train from the French capital, in the heart of the Gaelic countryside.

Now it will be an inseparable pilgrimage site on the map of Indian sporting lore.

Chateauroux gets its name from the 11th-century castle (Chateau) of Raoul, the prince of Deols. But there's a new queen in town now. Her name is Manu Bhaker.

It's in Chateauroux that the 22-year-old wrote her name into the history books by accomplishing one of India's greatest sporting achievements.

It's hard to do justice to the magnitude of what pistol shooter Manu has accomplished here. Let's try to put it in perspective. It took 40 years for India to go from one individual medal (through KD Jadhav) to a second one (through Leander Paes). It took Sushil Kumar and P.V. Sindhu — two of India's greatest sportspersons — four years to win a second individual medal. Now, in the space of three days, in this provincial French town, Manu has won two of her own.

She opened India's medal tally two days after the opening ceremony with a bronze medal in the women's 10m air pistol competition. Two days later, in partnership with Sarabjot Singh, she

won another bronze in the 10m air pistol mixed team event.

She's breathing rarefied air in India's sporting pantheon at this point. She could potentially be alone at the top. At the time of going to press, Manu had another event to go.

### A shot in the arm

She's done more than enough already. Not just for herself or even for Indian shooting — a discipline that had nothing to show for the efforts at the Olympics for 12 years — but for Indian sport. Her shots fired in Chateauroux have sounded all the way in Paris, where the rest of the Indian contingent is competing. She has ignited India's Olympic campaign — perennially diffident and underconfident — with energy, action, and, more importantly, belief.

"It has given a lot of boost to the whole contingent. Before we came

**Double whammy:** Manu Bhaker won her second bronze medal of the Paris Olympics as she combined with Sarabjot Singh to win bronze in the 10m air pistol mixed team event.

RITU RAJ KONWAR

for the match, we saw that she had won the bronze again. So, we were like, 'It's our time; nobody can stop us'. Really (feeling) positive," said Satwik Rankireddy, a medal favourite alongside Chirag Shetty in badminton men's doubles.

Manu's humour helps in breaking down the stress of the Games. After winning a second medal in the mixed team event, she told *Sportstar* how she once created a fake social media profile to defend two-time Olympic medallist Sindhu from trolls. Sindhu, pursuing her place in history and a third Olympic medal, laughed at the youngster's unstinted support while wishing Manu the best for a third medal of her own.

The records will show just how many medals she won in such a short time, but only Manu will know how hard it was to get to this point. "It might have looked easy, but it's not. It was very hard. There were a lot of lessons I had to learn. Not all of them were easy. But they all had a role to play in what I am today," she says.

She is just 22, but there's a lifetime of wisdom packed in her. Her story is not just of a prodigy — she had won World Cup and Commonwealth Games gold by the time she was 16 — but of redemption. After a reality check with the harshest of bruising at the Tokyo Olympics, the teenager was put under the kind of stress that few people ever experience and fewer survive. For a lesser person, the story would have ended there.

It took immense strength of character to find her way back into the sport. Nothing will exemplify that personal growth more than how Manu learned to work once again with her coach, Jaspal Rana. It's a decision he says he never would have made if he were in her



shoes. It's also a decision that, even she says, has been instrumental in her performance at Chateauroux.

#### **Calming influence**

There was a moment early in the final of the women's 10m air pistol event at the Olympic Games when Manu turned away from the target in front of her towards the spectator gallery.

She knew exactly where to look.

When she entered the finals hall a few minutes earlier, Manu had scanned the faces in the crowd sitting in the bleachers behind her.

She had looked past the sea of spectators, with a smattering of hopeful Indian faces, and zeroed in on a man in dark glasses with a notebook in his hands. It was her coach, Jaspal. She would remember his position on the extreme left-hand side of the viewing gallery.

After shooting two consecutive scores of 9.6 in her eighth and ninth shots of the final, Manu had slipped from the medal bracket to fourth place behind Asian Championship bronze medallist Thu Vinh Trinh of Vietnam. She needed reassurance.



As she looked at him, Jaspal would close his fist and bring it close to his chest. "Be brave. All that you need is inside you," he'd say in a wordless sign, hoping that Manu would understand immediately. She didn't need to look at him; she only needed to look within.

The moment of nervousness passed. Manu turned back once more, steely-eyed, towards the targets 10 metres in front of her. She lifted her pistol once again, aimed at the black dot in the centre of the target, and fired. 10.3 – the

score read on the digital board above her. Good enough to bring her back in the medal bracket. She'd never leave it again. While she competed, there was no other moment where even a hint of emotion creased her face.

She'd keep her nerve while others crumbled. Three-time World Cup gold winner Veronica Major was the first to fall. She was followed by Turkey's junior world champion Tarhan Sevval Ilayda. China's Asian Games champion Jiang Ranxin dropped out following three shots in

the '8' point ring over four series. World Championship bronze medallist Li Xue exited right after. Finally, it was the turn of Vinh Trinh.

Manu, though, outside of that early blip, was never out of medal contention in the final and was in the silver medal position going into the final shot of the competition. Manu was leading by .1 at that point, but South Korea's Kim Yeji shot 10.5 to the Indian's 10.3 to nose ahead by 0.1.

#### **Relief & joy**

It was only then that Manu cracked a wry smile — the first real bits of emotion she'd shown in a while — at what could have been. When she had the medal around her neck, she even wiped away a few tears. It didn't matter at this point. She'd already done more than enough to create history, winning India's first medal at the Paris 2024 Olympics.

It was nerveless shooting in the most stressful of situations. The ability to stay calm can't be taken for granted. And while it may have looked easy, it's something that's been worked on and paid for — in some cases, quite literally.

#### **Priceless training regime**

A few weeks ago, after their performance, a street dancing troupe held out a hat in front of two Indians having dinner at a cafe in Luxembourg. They had expected a few coins at most for their efforts. Instead, their eyes bulged as a young woman emptied a stack of Euros into their makeshift bowl.

The slightly glum donor was Manu, who was training in the European country ahead of the Olympic Games. Her generosity was an enforced one, part of a training method employed by the other Indian at the table, Jaspal. It was designed to make sure she'd never let the intensity of training slip. It's a way to replicate, as much as possible, the stress Manu felt at a competition in the otherwise inconsequential environs of a training hall.

As part of the system, Jaspal would set ambitious targets for his shooter. She'll be given a target of,

say, 582 (out of the theoretically possible 600 in air pistol). The consequence of any shortfall is made up for by a fine. If she shot a 578, Manu would be paying a fine of four Euros. The money was meant for charity.

Closing in on the Olympics, Jaspal progressively raised the stakes. One Euro for every missed point became 10, and then 100. The eventual sum of money was a windfall for some lucky street performers. But the lesson for Manu was priceless.

She'd later credit Jaspal's unusual methodology. "He made the training so difficult for me that this was not very difficult for me when it came to performing. So yeah, definitely he played a huge role in this medal, and definitely it's the sweat and blood of both of us," she would say after the win.

### **Metamorphosis**

Manu, though, has not always been steely-eyed and emotionless. Her equation with Jaspal was not always as trusting. In contrast to the tears of joy she blinked away in Chateaux, the last time she competed at the Olympics,

she wept in frustration as she competed and failed across three different events.

The Olympics, meant to be the highlight of the then 19-year-old's career, were anything but a nightmare. There was no doubting her prodigious talent; at 16, she became the youngest Indian to win gold at the ISSF shooting World Cup and was soon enough winning Games gold medals, almost for fun, and became one of the youngest to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics.

Her impressive results had been achieved while training under Jaspal, a former two-time Olympian and one of the country's top pistol shooters in the 1990s. At the turn of the millennium,





Jaspal helmed a highly successful Indian junior programme. He had been Manu's coach since she made her international debut in 2018.

A disagreement over the makeup of the squad [Jaspal wanted Manu to focus on two events, while she wanted to compete in three] was followed by court intrigues, the mother of all meltdowns and falling outs that involved a heated phone call and Jaspal walking around New

Delhi's Karni Singh shooting range in a t-shirt with Manu's mother's last caustic message to him printed on it.

In the years that followed Manu's debacle in Tokyo, her form fluctuated. She failed to win a medal in the individual events at the Hangzhou Asian Games, where Indian shooters went on to win two individual gold medals and four silver.

She says she became disillusioned with the sport. She started thinking about writing the Civil Service exam. Before that, though, as a last throw of the dice, she called Jaspal in the middle of last year. Jaspal immediately agreed to work with her. "I'll work with any athlete who gives a 100 per cent. Manu gives 100 per cent. And I will give her 200 per cent," he said.

We, as Indians, are glad that he did. They came together to deliver a fairytale performance that Indian sport was praying for.

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**Deadly duo:** Last year, Manu Bhaker decided to return to her former mentor, Jaspal Rana, under whose tutelage she had bagged 10 senior WC medals (2018–2021) and a Commonwealth Games gold medal in 2018. RITU RAJ KONWAR

# MANU'S AUTOGRAPH ON A LEGEND'S CAP



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The shooting event in Chateauroux, despite being far away from the main action in Paris, attracts a significant number of spectators. Unlike the venues in Paris, access here is much more relaxed, allowing fans to collect plenty of sports memorabilia. One 'fan' was going around the range, getting medal winners to autograph a white 'Paris 2024' cap.

A closer look, though, made it clear that this wasn't just any fan, but six-time Olympic shotgun medallist and three-time champion Kimberly Rhode of the USA. The most decorated women's shotgun shooter of all time was in Chateauroux, collecting signatures from every Olympic medal winner on her hat, which she plans to auction off to raise money for children's charities in the USA.

As a shooting legend, Rhode finds it fairly easy to get all the signatures she wants. She was particularly pleased to get an autograph from Manu Bhaker. "The goal is to get all the medal winners' autographs, but I'm happy to get Manu's. I saw her shooting yesterday, and I think it's great that she's become the first Indian woman to medal at the Olympics. It's fantastic for Indian shooting. I'm really proud of her, and I hope she does even better," Rhode told *Sportstar*.

### People's champion

Rafael Nadal played a significant role at the opening ceremony of the 2024 Paris Olympic Games. As he was handed the Olympic flame by Zinedine Zidane towards the conclusion of the opening ceremony, it was difficult to determine who received the bigger cheer from the audience — the French World Cup hero or the 14-time French Open champion.

After Nadal received the Olympic flame, he joined Serena Williams, Carl Lewis, and Nadia Comaneci on a boat to begin the final stage of transporting the flame to the Tuileries Gardens, where it would be used to light the Olympic Cauldron.

After his part was done, Nadal didn't leave with the other sports stars at the ceremony. Instead, he went back to the Trocadero Gardens where the opening ceremony was happening. When his event was over, Nadal left through the exit gates just like any other

**Collecting signatures:** Six-time Olympic shotgun medallist and three-time champion Kimberly Rhode of the USA. JONATHAN SELVARAJ



As Rafael Nadal was handed the Olympic flame by Zinedine Zidane towards the conclusion of the opening ceremony, it was difficult to determine who received the bigger cheer from the audience – the French World Cup hero or the 14-time French Open champion.



spectator. While it initially took a few spectators by surprise, they soon decided to make the most of the opportunity and requested selfies. Although the French police and Gendarmerie (a branch of the French armed forces) initially attempted to shield Nadal, some of them eventually decided to take selfies themselves.

To his credit, the Spaniard, who would be playing in the men's doubles competition alongside Carlos Alcaraz the very next day, seemed happy to pose for pictures with whoever asked. After indulging several requests, a couple of security personnel finally guided Nadal to an

official van, which took him back to the Athletes' Village.

#### **Village atmosphere**

The Athletes' Games village in Paris has been full of fun and activity, providing the opportunity for athletes to stay with top contenders from different nations. However, it's a different story at the Games village in Chateauroux, where the shooting events are taking place. Rather than one Athletes' Village, there are two: the PESI (Pôle d'Enseignement Supérieur International) in the nearby town of Déols, and the Lycée Blaise Pascal boarding school in Chateauroux.

Some athletes have complained

**True legends:** After a three-month journey from Greece to Paris, the Olympic torch was handed to former French footballer Zinedine Zidane, before being passed on to tennis stars Rafael Nadal and Serena Williams.

RITURAJ KONWAR

about the size of the rooms and the quality of the food available at the school. One international coach told Sportstar that due to a lack of space, some athletes have been asked if they would be willing to take up rooms in the town at the organisers' expense. However, this is not a sufficient incentive for many. There's



**Much-awaited debut:** Paris has hosted two Olympics in the previous century, but Roland Garros, one of the most iconic tennis stadiums in the world, made its Olympic debut only now. GETTY IMAGES

also a general sense of boredom in a town with a population of around 70,000. Although public transportation is free, it's relatively rare.

Jaspal Rana, Manu's coach, who is staying at an apartment in the town, had to wait for nearly an hour for an official bus after organisers changed the timings at the last minute but failed to update either coaches or athletes.

#### **Roland Garros' Olympic debut**

Paris hosted two Olympics in the previous century, but Roland Garros, one of the most iconic tennis stadiums in the world, made its Olympic debut only now. When the

Games were held in Paris in 1900, Roland Garros was only nine years old. For some reason, tennis competitions in 1900 and 1924 were not held at Roland Garros. The Cercle des Sports de l'Île de Puteaux was the venue for tennis during the first Paris Olympics, while the Yves du Manoir Stadium was the venue for the second.

With its eye-catching clay courts, Roland Garros has hosted many epic matches and has been home to the French Open for 94 years, giving birth to several mega tennis stars over its 133-year-old history. Hosting

the prestigious 2024 Olympic Games was another deserving honour for the stunning venue, and the much-anticipated last meeting of Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal was the icing on the cake.

#### **Mixed-gender umpiring**

In line with the Paris Olympics' goal to achieve gender equality, the International Hockey Federation (FIH) has showcased its commitment to inclusion and diversity by introducing mixed-gender on-field umpiring for the first time in the sport's Olympic history. This marks a significant change, as mixed-gender

« Jaspal Rana, Manu's coach, who is staying at an apartment in the town, had to wait for nearly an hour for an official bus after organisers changed the timings at the last minute but failed to update either coaches or athletes. »

**Gender parity:** In Paris, umpires and technical officials are evenly split between genders at hockey matches, with a 50:50 ratio. GETTY IMAGES

umpiring has not been a regular occurrence at the Olympic Games. In Paris, umpires and technical officials are evenly split between genders, with a 50:50 ratio.

"Gender equality is anchored into hockey's DNA, and FIH won't miss any opportunity to promote it. With the introduction of mixed-gender on-field umpiring at the Olympics, FIH is showcasing once more its determination towards a more gender-equal sport and society," said FIH president Tayyab Ikram.

### **Paris, the cycling capital**

It's fitting that the country hosting one of the most iconic annual sporting events, the Tour de France, has successfully transformed Paris into the cycling capital. The authorities have used the opportunity presented by the Olympic Games to promote Paris's image as an environmentally friendly place, emphasising cycling. The city has a wide rail network, excellent tram and bus services, and a high number of expensive luxury cars and motorbikes on its roads. However, in 2015, a comprehensive plan to turn

the city into a cycling-friendly place was launched. The updated 2021-2026 plan expands on these commitments with increased investment and the creation of 180 km of new cycle lanes, reflecting a significant shift towards sustainable mobility in Paris.

It's now common to see people cycling on dedicated lanes to reach their workplaces and other destinations all over the city. Notably, these efforts have resulted in 11.2

per cent of journeys being made by bicycle, compared to 4.3 per cent by car. It's hoped that other cities will adopt similar strategies to reduce carbon emissions and promote healthier citizens.

**Promoting cycling:** It's appropriate that the nation hosting one of the most iconic annual sporting events, the Tour de France, has successfully turned Paris into the cycling capital. GETTY IMAGES





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# INDIA'S SHOW: A MIXED BAG OF A START

Here's a look at India's **standout moments and disappointments** in the first week at the quadrennial games.

**Netra V**

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India has experienced a mix of triumphs and setbacks at the Paris Olympics in the initial days. Manu Bhaker made history by winning bronze in the women's 10m air pistol event. In contrast, veteran table tennis player Sharath Kamal faced an early exit, losing 2-4 to Slovenia's Deni Kozul in the men's singles round of 64. Here's a look at India's standout moments and disappointments in this grand sporting spectacle.

## Shooting

Manu became the first Indian female shooter to secure an Olympic medal and opened India's medal tally in Paris after scoring 580 points in the qualification round to finish third. Her compatriot, Rhythm Sangwan, however, did not advance past the qualification stage, finishing 15th with 573 points.

Ramita Jindal and Arjun Babuta placed sixth with 628.7 points while Elavenil Valarivan and Sandeep Singh finished 12th with 626.3 points in the 10m air rifle mixed team qualification. Both teams failed to make it to the medal rounds.

In the men's 10m air pistol event, Sarabjot Singh and Arjun Singh Cheema did not qualify for the final. Sarabjot was ninth, missing a spot by one inner-10, scoring 577

points, while Cheema placed 18th.

In the women's 10m air rifle final, Ramita placed seventh with 145.3 points after a shoot-off against France's Oceanne Muller. She had qualified fifth with 631.5 points. Elavenil failed to advance to the final, finishing 10th in the qualification.

In the men's 10m air rifle, Babuta narrowly missed a podium finish, coming in fourth with 208.4 points in the final. He had qualified seventh with 630.1 points. Sandeep, with 629.3 points, finished 12th.

**Curtain call:** Rohan Bopanna announced his retirement from tennis after he and N Sriram Balaji lost to the French duo of Edouard Roger-Vasselin and Gael Monfils in the men's doubles first round under lights at the Paris Olympics. PTI



**Despite his retirement from national duties, the 44-year-old Rohan Bopanna has stated he will continue to compete on the ATP circuit.**

Rhythm and Cheema, who placed 10th with 576 points, did not advance to the medal rounds of the 10m air pistol mixed team event.

#### **Badminton**

Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy became the first Indian men's doubles pair to reach an Olympic quarterfinal in badminton. They were set to face Germany's Mark Lamsfuss and Marvin Seidel, but the match was cancelled due to Lamsfuss' injury. The world No. 3 duo began their campaign with a 21-17,

21-14 win over France's Lucas Corvee and Ronan Labar, who were eliminated by Indonesia's Muhammad Rian Ardianto and Fajar Alfian.

In women's doubles, Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa failed to make it to the knockouts.

In men's singles, Lakshya Sen won 21-19, 21-14, against Julien Carraggi of Belgium, following a withdrawn match against Guatemala's Kevin Cordon. Sen is currently second in Group L behind Indonesia's Jonatan

Christie. In Group K, H.S. Prannoy began his campaign with a 21-18, 21-12 win over Germany's Fabian Roth.

Double Olympic medallist P.V. Sindhu defeated Fatima Nabaaha Abdul Razzaq of the Maldives 21-9, 21-6 in her singles Group M match.

#### **Boxing**

Two-time World Champion Nikhat Zareen won her first-round match in the women's 50kg category by defeating Germany's Maxi Kloetzer with a score of 5-0. Next, she will be



## MANIKA BATRA BEAT HIGHER-RANKED PRITHIKA PAVADE 11-9, 11-6, 11-9, 11-7 TO REGISTER A HISTORIC WIN, WITH THE INDIAN'S BACKHAND BEING THE HIGHLIGHT OF THE MATCH

**Trailblazer:** Manika Batra became the first Indian table tennis player to reach the round of 16 in the Olympic Games singles competition after a 4-0 thrashing of higher-ranked Prithika Pavade of France. AFP

facing the top-seeded Chinese and Asian Games champion Wu Yu in the pre-quarterfinals.

Asian Games bronze medallist Preeti Pawar also had a strong start, winning 5-0 against Vietnam's Vo Thi Kim Anh to advance to the round of 16. Preeti's next match will be against World silver medallist Yeni Arias of Colombia.

### Table Tennis

Harmeet Desai had a great start in the men's singles by defeating

Jordan's Zaid Abo Yaman 4-0, but unfortunately, he was eliminated in the round of 64 by France's Felix Lebrun, suffering a 4-0 loss. In a surprising turn of events, Sharath Kamal, India's flagbearer at the opening ceremony, was also knocked out in the round of 64 by Slovenia's Deni Kozul, with a 2-4 defeat.

In the women's singles, Manika Batra and Sreeja Akula performed exceptionally well. Manika defeated Great Britain's Anna Hursey 4-1, while Sreeja won 4-0 against Sweden's Christina Kallberg.

Manika then advanced to the round of 16 with a decisive 4-0 win over France's Prithika Pavade. This makes her the first Indian table tennis player to reach this stage at the Olympics.

### Rowing

Balraj Panwar advanced to the men's single sculls quarterfinals with a strong performance in the repechage round. He finished second with a time of 7:12.41. In an earlier heat, he placed fourth, where only the top three automatically qualified for the quarterfinals. This left Panwar and others to compete in the repechage for another chance to advance.

### Hockey

In an exciting match, Harmanpreet Singh scored a late goal to secure a vital point for the Indian men's hockey team, drawing 1-1 with Argentina in their second Pool B game. India started its campaign with a 3-2 win over New Zealand and currently holds the third



position in Pool B, with Belgium and Australia occupying the top two spots. The top four teams from both pools will qualify for the quarterfinals.

#### **Tennis**

The Indian tennis challenge at the Paris Olympics came to an end when Rohan Bopanna and N. Sriram Balaji were defeated by the French pair of Gael Monfils and Edouard Roger-Vasselin, with a score of 7-5, 6-2 in the first round of men's doubles. Following this match, Bopanna announced his retirement from Indian tennis.

Additionally, earlier in the men's singles first round, Sumit Nagal lost to Frenchman Corentin Moutet with a score of 6-2, 2-6, 7-5.

#### **Archery**

The women's archery team,

featuring Deepika Kumari, Ankita Bhakat, and Bhajan Kaur, encountered a tough quarterfinal match against the Netherlands, losing 6-0.

Despite their strong performance in the qualification round, where they finished fourth with 1983 points, they were unable to progress beyond the quarterfinals.

Similarly, the men's team, comprising Dhiraj Bommadevara, Pravin Jadhav, and Tarundeep Rai, also made it to the quarterfinals but was defeated 2-6 by Türkiye after securing third place in the qualification round with 2013 points.

#### **Swimming**

Srihari Nataraj swam the 100m backstroke in 55.01 seconds, finishing second in his heats. Despite

**Purple patch:** Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy became the first Indian men's doubles pair to reach an Olympic quarterfinal in badminton.

PTI

his strong performance, he finished joint 33rd overall, falling short of the semifinals.

With only the top 16 from the heats advancing, Nataraj's time wasn't enough to push him into the next round.

In the women's 200m freestyle, Dhinidhi Desinghu won her heat. However, her overall finish of 23rd place with a time of 2:06.96 was not enough to advance further in the competition.

**All event results updated till July 29, 2024.**

# CANADA'S DRONE SCANDAL AND DJOKO DOWNS RAFA

Japan took an **early lead in the medal tally.** At the time of filing this report, it had six gold, one more than host France, China, Australia and South Korea.

**P. K. Ajith Kumar**

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**C**hateauroux is located about 280 kilometres away from the Stade de France, the main venue of the Paris Olympics. The town, situated along the Indre River, has a population of about 43,000 and boasts a colourful history dating back to the 10th century. In the 18th century, Marie Anne de Mailly-Nesle persuaded Louis XIV to make her the Duchess of Châteauroux in exchange for securing her love. Huang Yuting and Sheng Lihao will always remember the town for a different reason. They won gold in the 10m mixed air rifle team event at the Chateauroux Shooting Centre on July 27. It marked the first gold medal of the 2024 Olympics. Nineteen-year-old Sheng also won gold in the men's 10m air rifle event.

Japan took an early lead in the medal tally. At the time of filing this report, it had six gold, one more than host France, China, Australia and South Korea. The giant at the Olympics, the United States, had three gold while Great Britain, Italy, Canada, Hong Kong and Germany had two each.

Swimmer Mollie O'Callaghan from Australia stood out early in Paris, winning gold in the women's 200m freestyle and the 4x100m freestyle relay. Winning the

individual gold must have been very satisfying for the 20-year-old. In the Tokyo Games, she was part of three medal-winning teams for Australia but hadn't won an individual medal. In Paris, she claimed gold in the 200m freestyle, finishing ahead of her teammate and the winner from Tokyo, Ariarne Titmus, making it a 1-2 victory for Australia.

The Aussie swimmers have indeed been impressive at La Défense Arena. They have so far won three gold medals and as many silver. Titmus took the gold in the women's 400m freestyle.

There was no gold for the world-record-holding American swimmer Gretchen Welsh in the women's 100m butterfly.

She had to be content with the silver, as the gold was snatched by her compatriot, Torri Huske. Just .04 seconds separated the pair of 21-year-olds. Welsh had arrived in Paris after winning gold in every seven of her events at the National Collegiate Athletic Association's



**Caught red-handed:** Canada's women's soccer coach, Bev Priestman, has been suspended for a year, and the team penalised six points at the Olympics due to FIFA's findings of Canadian staff using a drone to spy on an opponent's closed practice session. GETTY IMAGES

swimming championship.

There was also much to cheer for the host in the swimming pool. Leon Marchand, the Frenchman who is the face of the Olympics, won the men's 400m individual medley with a new Olympic record.

He also holds the world record in the event, but it is his maiden Olympic medal after he came home

empty-handed from Tokyo.

Canada's teenage sensation, Summer McIntosh, has begun her Olympic career on the right note, though. The 17-year-old won gold in the women's 400m individual medley, an event in which she holds the world record. That was her second medal in Paris, after winning silver in the women's 400m freestyle,

ahead of her idol Katie Ledecky.

The women's 4x100m freestyle final, in which Australia won its straight fourth gold, made news outside the pool, too. Veteran commentator Bob Ballard was taken off the air by Eurosport for making a sexist remark: "Well, the women just finishing up. You know what women are like... hanging around, doing



**In one of the most anticipated clashes across all sports in Paris, Novak Djokovic defeated Rafael Nadal in a second-round match in men's tennis.**



**Rare defeat:** Novak Djokovic handed Rafael Nadal just his fifth defeat in 118 singles matches at Roland Garros.

GETTY IMAGES

their makeup."

On a more positive note, Britain's Tom Daley, who came back from retirement at his son's request, won his fifth Olympic medal in diving. He, along with Noah Williams, claimed the silver in the men's synchronised 10m platform. He had made his Olympic debut at the 2008 Beijing Olympics as a 14-year-old.

Chase Budinger has had to wait a little longer. He is 36, but that is not why his story is so special. He is not making his debut in a sport that he has played for most of his life—basketball. The former NBA star took up beach volleyball only six years ago. He teamed up with Miles Evans to book the ticket to Paris, where the duo made a winning start to its campaign with a straight-set victory over the French pair of Youssef Krou and Arnaud Gauthier-Rat.

The men's artistic gymnastics also

brought much joy to the large USA contingent. The bronze ended a 16-year-old medal drought in the team event for the Americans. The gold went to Japan and the silver to China.

In another bit of good news for the United States, fencers Lee Kiefer and Lauren Scruggs ensured the gold and silver for their team in the women's individual foil. Keifer took the gold, retaining the colour of her medal from Tokyo.

In one of the most anticipated clashes across all sports in Paris,



Novak Djokovic defeated Rafael Nadal in a second-round match in men's tennis. In the match between two of the all-time greats, Djokovic won 6-1, 6-4 at Roland Garros, a familiar court for both. Nadal has won the French Open singles title 14

times, and Djokovic on three occasions.

Perhaps the most bizarre moment of the early stage of the 2024 Olympics came outside the sporting arena. Canada's women's football team was deducted six points, and

**All smiles:** Britain's Tom Daley (left), who came back from retirement at his son's request, won his fifth Olympic medal in diving. GETTY IMAGES

coach Bev Priestman was banned for a year by FIFA for flying a drone to spy on rival New Zealand ahead of their opening group match. Canada won that game 2-1.

And Canada had won the gold in Tokyo.

**All event results updated till July 30, 2024.**

« Britain's Tom Daley, along with Noah Williams, claimed the silver medal in the men's synchronised 10m platform »

» SNIPPETS  
PARIS OLYMPICS



**A laser light show took place in front of the Eiffel Tower**, decorated in the Olympic rings. French president Emmanuel Macron declared open the 33rd Olympic Games in a rain-soaked Paris. "Thank you and your creative genius for this grandiose ceremony," Macron later said on social media platform, X (previously Twitter). "Thank you to the artists for this unique, magical moment. Thank you to the police and emergency services and volunteers. Thank you to all who believed ... We did it!" RITU RAJ KONWAR



**The opening ceremony featured the River Seine as the main attraction.** More than 10,500 athletes are competing across 32 sports at the Games, which will close on August 11. To kick off the event, fireworks were set off on the Pont d'Austerlitz bridge over the River Seine, displaying the colours of the French flag. GETTY IMAGES



**Popstar Lady Gaga greeted the crowd in French**, performing with a troupe of dancers and their pink feather pom-pom routine. Lady Gaga gave a spirited rendition of *Mon truc en plumes* by the legendary dancer, actor and singer Zizi Jeanmaire. GETTY IMAGES



**Celine Dion gave an emotional comeback performance during the opening night ceremony** that marked her first live show since revealing her rare medical disorder in 2022. The Canadian icon, also known as the Queen of Power Ballads, sang Edith Piaf's "Hymne AL'Amour," from halfway up the Eiffel Tower, beneath a set of giant Olympic rings. Piaf wrote the lyrics to this ballad in 1949 in the home she had bought with her lover, the French boxing champion Marcel Cerdan. GETTY IMAGES



**Veteran table tennis player Sharath Kamal and two-time Olympic medallist in badminton, P.V. Sindhu, India's flag-bearers,** travel with teammates down the Seine River during the opening ceremony of the 2024 Summer Olympics. India has sent its largest contingent in recent years, with last three editions having more than 100 athletes each. PTI



**The setting was romantic enough** for Great Britain's flag-bearers, rower Helen Glover and diver Tom Daley, to recreate the famous Titanic scene during the opening ceremony.

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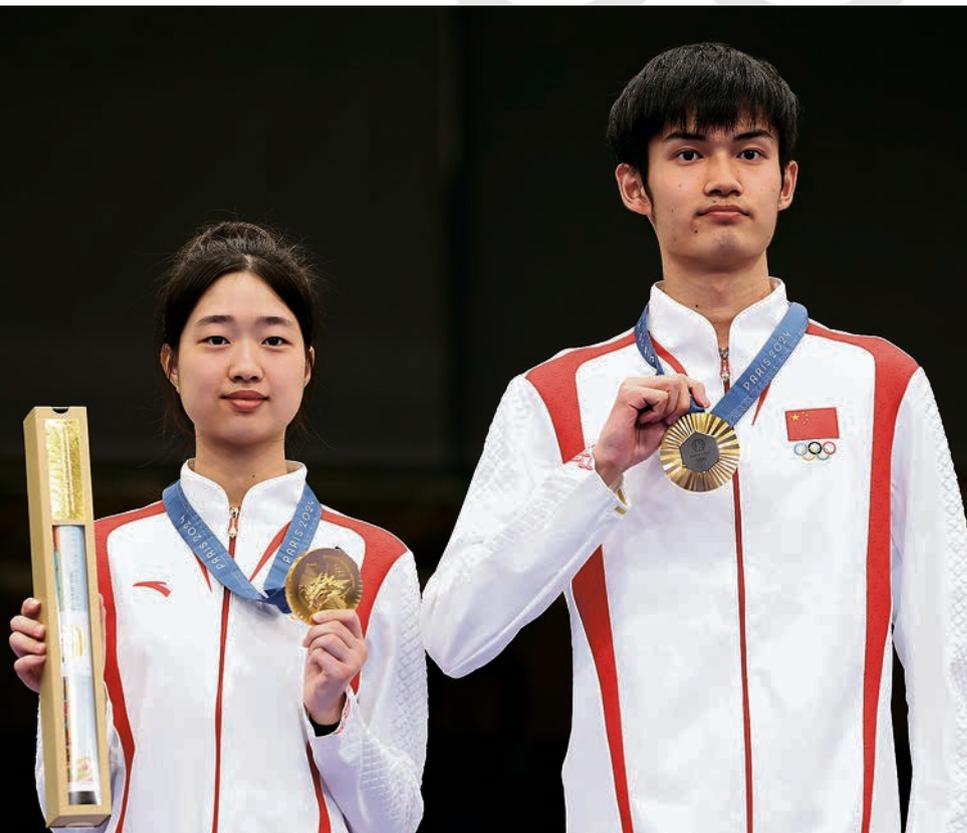


**The first Olympic football match was suspended for nearly two hours due to crowd trouble**, resulting in chaotic scenes. Morocco led Argentina 2-0, with Argentina scoring a goal and pushing for an equaliser. In the 16th minute of the 15 scheduled minutes of injury time, Cristian Medina's apparent equaliser was ruled out by VAR. After a lengthy delay, play resumed in an empty stadium, and Morocco secured a controversial 2-1 victory. REUTERS



**In front of 4000 noisy spectators**, India rallied to beat a spirited New Zealand 3-2 in its opening Pool-B hockey match at the Yves-du-Manoir Stadium. India's captain, Harmanpreet Singh, scored his side's third goal from a penalty stroke, with a minute left on the clock.

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**Huang Yuting and Sheng Lihao of China bagged the first gold medal of Paris Olympics.**

The pair beat South Korea's Keum Ji-hyeon and Park Ha-jun 16-12 in the mixed air rifle event at Chateauroux Shooting Centre. China also won the event three years ago in Tokyo, when Yang Qian and Yang Haoran took the gold medal as mixed team air rifle made its debut on the Olympic programme. GETTY IMAGES

**Antoine Dupont showed why he is regarded as the world's finest rugby player** as France's poster boy of these Games scored two tries that turbocharged the host to the gold medal with a 28-7 victory over Fiji, sending a sold-out Stade de France into complete delirium. GETTYIMAGES



**Australian swimmer Ariarne Titmus landed her second consecutive Olympic gold medal** in the women's 400m freestyle at the Olympic Games. She took the win with a time of 3:57.49 ahead of seven-time Olympic champion Katie Ledecky, who won the bronze medal in 4:00.86 behind Canadian teenager Summer McIntosh, who clocked 3:58.37. Titmus became the first-ever female to take three Olympic medals in the event. GETTYIMAGES



**Novak Djokovic outclassed his long-time rival Rafael Nadal** (above) with a 6-1, 6-4 victory on the Roland Garros clay, advancing his quest for the elusive gold medal. This match marked their 60th encounter, the most frequent rivalry in men's tennis history. GETTY IMAGES



**Brazil's Gabriel Medina reacts after getting a large wave in the fifth heat of the men's surfing round 3**, during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, in Teahupo'o, on the French Polynesian Island of Tahiti. Teahupo'o, located almost 10,000 miles from Paris, is the venue for surfing's second appearance at the Olympics. This isn't the first time that an Olympic Games has spanned two continents. When Melbourne hosted the Games in 1956, the equestrian events had to be held in Stockholm five months prior because the Australian government refused to relax its strict six-month quarantine laws. GETTYIMAGES





**Manon Apithy-Brunet (far right) of France claimed the gold medal in women's fencing sabre individual** at Paris 2024 with a 15-12 win over compatriot Sara Balzer (centre) in the final inside the Grand Palais in Paris. Balzer had defeated Ukrainian Olga Kharlan (far left) 15-7 in one semifinal, while Apithy-Brunet defeated Choi Sebin of the Republic of Korea by a score of 15-12 in the other to set up the fully French finale.

REUTERS



**Team Japan watches as Daiki Hashimoto** performs on the high bar during the final rotation of the men's artistic gymnastics team finals at Bercy Arena at the Summer Olympics in Paris, France. Japan won gold ahead of China and USA. AP



**Italy's Filippo Macchi (left) and Hong Kong's Cheung Ka Long** compete in the men's foil individual gold medal bout at the Grand Palais in Paris. With scores level at 14-14, a video review overruled the referee to hand Ka Long the gold. AFP

**Zhiying Zeng believed her Olympic dream** had ended when she left China's table tennis team in 1986. However, 38 years later, she made her Olympic debut in Paris, representing Chile. Despite losing to Lebanon's Mariana Sahakian in the preliminary rounds, Zeng, at 58, became the oldest debutant in Olympic table tennis history. AP





# WHY HAVE WOMEN OUTPERFORMED MEN IN AIR RIFLE SHOOTING?

According to coaches and experts, rifle shooting rewards isometric strength – which is the **ability to overcome resistance** – rather than the dynamic strength seen in most other sports.

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**A** couple of years ago, Divyansh Singh Panwar, then India's leading men's 10m air rifle shooter and an Olympian at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, observed the SCATT reading of the then 18-year-old Ramita Jindal, the latest member of the Indian team.

SCATT is a high-precision optical sensor attached to the rifle barrel that tracks barrel movements and displays the entire

aim-point trajectory in real-time as shooters aim and fire at the target. Panwar was astonished at how little the barrel of the relatively raw Jindal was moving.

Jindal says, "My SCATT reading showed that the barrel was moving

about 6mm. Divyansh wondered why because his movement was about 10mm despite the fact that he was much more experienced than me.” Lower the barrel movement, more the time for the shooter to hit the bullseye.

This observation made Jindal think about whether she had an advantage over her senior male counterpart. It turned out she did, and she wasn't the only one.

According to coaches and experts, rifle shooting rewards isometric strength — which is the ability to overcome resistance — rather than the dynamic strength seen in most other sports.

**Interestingly, the physical anatomy of women provides female shooters a physical advantage, contrasting with almost every other sport where men have the edge.**

Over the years, women have consistently outscored men in the 10m air rifle event. The Paris 2024 Olympics is no different. The qualification cut-off (eighth place score) in the men's 10m air rifle event at Chateauroux was 629.8. The same score would have placed only 12th in the women's event, where the cut-off was 631.3.

It was the same scenario at the three ISSF World Cups — the highest standard of competition in shooting — this year. The qualification cut-off for women at the Cairo World Cup was 632.3, compared to 630 for men. At the Baku World Cup, it was 631.2 for women and 630.5 for men, while at the Munich World Cup, it was 632.5 for women and 631.5 for men.

This pattern was also noticed in the mixed team event in Paris. In qualification, only Kazakhstan and Mexico finished in the top 10 with the man outscoring the woman in the pair. Kazakhstan's male competitor, Islam Satpayev, had the highest score, but the next five highest scores belonged to women. In contrast, the six worst scores were all posted by men.

This isn't a new trend. At the Tokyo Olympics, researchers discovered no statistical difference between men and women in air rifle competitions. In contrast, men did slightly better in



air pistol, trap, and skeet competitions.

Even a competition with no statistical difference in performance between men and women is remarkable. In nearly every other sport (with the exception of equestrian, where men and women compete in the same competition), men generally have the advantage.

**The physical advantages that men enjoy in most sports, such as taller frames and more muscular upper bodies, prove to be a disadvantage in rifle shooting.**

For instance, the men's world record in the 100m is nearly nine per cent faster than the women's over the same distance.

“Normally in sports, men have between 5-12 per cent more performance than women in the same category. This isn't happening in rifle shooting,” says Professor Daniel Mon Lopez of the University of Madrid, who studied the phenomenon in his publication — *Recent Changes in Women's Olympic Shooting and Effects in Performance* — released just before the Tokyo Olympics.

Daniel Burger, the chief coach of the Swiss shooting team, which won a bronze medal in the women's 10m

**Unique advantage:** The more seasoned Divyansh Panwar (above) realised that the rifle barrel movements on the SCATT reading for Ramita Jindal (left) was significantly lesser than his own, despite her lack of experience. Turns out there was more to it than meets the eye. PTI

air rifle event through Audrey Gogniat, has no doubt why that is so.

“If there is a sport that is almost designed for a woman, it would have to be the 10m air rifle competition,” he says. “It is a precision sport — it isn't your physical strength that is most important here. In fact, the three most important factors for shooters in the air rifle event are balance, fine motor skills, and mental control, and I think women have the edge here,” he says.

This is mostly true, he says, when it comes to natural anatomical advantages. “Generally, women are shorter than men, have narrower shoulders, and wider hips. This is great for a shooter. A smaller shooter is more stable. And if your weight is distributed lower in your body — as is generally the case for women — you have a lower centre of gravity, which allows you to stay balanced.



When you are shooting, very minute pushes and pulls — such as wind from the air conditioning or even the pulse in your body — can cause you to miss your target. The larger you are, the more this will affect you," he says.

There are other such advantages, says Burger. "In the standing position, women place the elbow of their arm supporting the rifle hand-guard very close to their hip bone, if not exactly over it. They can use bone structure to hold up the gun. There's almost a direct line from their hands to their elbow to their hips to the ground," says Burger.

Finding the same posture is generally harder for men. "For a lot of guys, their elbow ends several inches above their hipbone. They end up using their ribcage to support their elbow," he says.

All these advantages, Burger says, are particularly highlighted in standing events like the 10m air rifle. He doesn't think there's as much of an edge for women rifle shooters in

events like the 50m rifle 3 positions event. "Being taller doesn't help when you are shooting standing up. But in positions like kneeling and prone, there's no advantage to having longer arms," he says.

While these arguments generally hold true, not everyone is completely convinced. "While women do have certain advantages, not every woman shooter has the same physiological advantages. Even within women, there is a lot of variation. A lot depends on the qualities of the individual shooter," says Kim Jin-Oh, coach of the South Korean team that won gold in the women's individual category through Ban Hyojin, who also scored the highest qualification score across men and women at the 2024 Olympics.

Recent developments in the sport — especially in the stabilising suits that men and women wear during competitions — have flattened the distinction between men and women. For the first time in many years, the current men's world record

**Nerves of steel:** Republic of Korea's Ban Hyojin (in pic) won gold in the 10m Air Rifle Women's Final in Paris. She was tied with China's Huang Yuting at 251.8, whom she beat in the final shoot-off by 0.1 point. GETTY IMAGES

in qualifying is higher than that in the women's discipline. "The material is so strong and stiff that it makes your internal structure a little less important than it used to be," says Burger.

At the end of the day, Jindal says, the fact that women compete in different categories than men means that any physical advantages are nullified. "I know that there are certain advantages that women have in air rifle when it comes to body shape, but at the end of the day, we compete in two different events. There's a lot we can learn from each other. There's a lot I do learn from my seniors, and that doesn't matter whether they are boys or girls," she says.



**Momentous occasion:** Indian tennis great, Leander Paes, with ITHF CEO Dan Faber. Leander was recently inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame. PHOTO COURTESY: ITHF

# ‘This is the golden era of inductees’

The **ITHF CEO Dan Faber** gives an insight into the institution’s plans as it gears up to welcome a few illustrious members over the coming years.

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**F**or a regular tourist to the United States of America, Newport — an idyllic ocean-front town on the East Coast — is an unlikely destination. But for tennis fans worldwide, this town of mansions and manors is a pilgrimage. The original home of the US Open between 1881 and 1914, it

also hosts the International Tennis Hall of Fame (ITHF) and its museum. An induction into its hallowed halls is considered the greatest honour for tennis professionals, and India’s Vijay Amritraj and Leander Paes are the latest inductees to a club that only has 267 members from 28 countries.

The ITHF CEO Dan Faber spoke to *Sportstar* about the institution’s plans

as it gears up to welcome a few illustrious members over the coming years.

**Vijay Amritraj and Leander Paes are the first Indians to enter the ITHF. The ITHF Museum has 30,000 footfalls a year. Now with two Indians in the fray, do you expect the number to go up significantly?**

When you look at someone like Leander and meet someone like Vijay, they are an inspiration. To be the first two men from India to be inducted into the Hall of Fame is iconic, special and magical. Given the fact that there are so many people in India, I would only think there would be more footfalls.

**The Museum in Newport is supposed to go through extensive renovation from November onwards. Tell us a bit about the project.**

We're renovating our museum, which is already unbelievable. It will cost us around \$3 million. Starting in November, we're going to make it a little bit more digital and more fan-friendly so they can interact with the different displays. It's going to be prepared to put all these iconic names that are currently there and get ready for those who are joining the Hall of Fame in the future.

**The big four (Roger Federer, Andy Murray, Serena Williams, and the Bryans) may come soon...**

From an eligibility standpoint, all you have to do is do the math. This year, as you know, we've got Leander, Vijay and Richard Evans, who are three incredible inductees. Next year, from an eligibility standpoint, you have the Bryan brothers and Maria Sharapova. In 2026, from an eligibility standpoint, you've got this unknown guy named Roger Federer. And then it just continues to go from there. Then Serena Williams will become eligible. Ash Barty will become eligible. We are calling this the golden era of inductees.

**Are there any plans to take the Hall of Fame to other locations? Making it more accessible to the tennis-loving public.**

From the museum perspective, yes. It's the International Tennis Hall of Fame, and we are a global organisation. I was hired to try to make sure that we continue to grow. We're going to do that in a couple of different ways. From a physical standpoint, you will start seeing the International Tennis Hall of Fame at



## New features that will be added to the Museum

The current USTA Wing will become the new **Hall of Famers' Gallery**, with each Hall of Famer represented by a new cast racquet that signifies their legendary place in tennis history

**The Celebration Gallery:** A space celebrating the sport of tennis through the stories of its legends. The area will have a new Augmented Reality Sculpture to engage fans of all ages

**The Roger Federer Hologram** will offer a new immersive experience  
**The Newport Tennis Traditions** gallery, celebrating Newport's tennis origins and a new display for US Open trophies

tournaments all over the world. In the museum, which will now be more digital, people from all over the world can access certain components of it. We have worked with our partner, Infosys, who have created a metaverse. So, you can technically go into our museum through the metaverse. You just have to create an avatar.

**Will we see branches of the physical museum elsewhere?**

We're going to try to be more physically located in terms of presence. We envision that there will be pop-up museums. We have so much material and so much content that we could easily, depending on where we are in the world, put up these pop-up museums so that fans all over the place can experience some aspect of our museum.

**Are there any plans to have a pop-up museum in India anytime soon?**

Based on my conversations with Leander and Vijay, we're going to crack that code. I'm looking forward to visiting India after the ceremonies and working on that.

**The ATP 250 Hall of Fame Open, which has been held in Newport since 1976, is not part of next year's ATP calendar. What is the future of professional tennis in Newport?**

We said from the moment I started a year ago that professional tennis is in

the fabric of the International Tennis Hall of Fame. It will never go away. We have an opportunity to bring in both men's and women's tennis, which has not happened in this Newport region for over 35 years.

So, now we're looking to move it to the second week of Wimbledon, and we're going to turn it into a festival of tennis in addition to the actual tennis tournament. We're going to have double the professional tennis and double the participants, and it's going to be super exciting.

Imagine that people could come here, maybe watch and participate, watch Wimbledon on big screens, and then, with the time change, the tournament starts soon after. We're excited about equal prize money. We hope that there are people out there — corporations and donors — who will get behind us.

**What are the reasons behind the change in dates?**

From a tennis calendar perspective, it might be the right time to get the right players to Newport. We're a grass-court tournament, and so far, Wimbledon is kind of out of the grass-court season, and you're getting more into the hard court. But if we go to the second week of Wimbledon, which seems to be a bit of a trend nowadays, challengers are piggybacking on certain tournaments. We think this is the right thing to do from a grass-court tournament perspective.



**One for the album:** Welcoming Vijay Amritraj, Leander Paes and veteran tennis journalist Richard Evans, a chronicler of 200 Majors and the biographer of Amritraj, to the illustrious club were many of the game's greatest and fellow Hall of Famers. PICTURE COURTESY: ITHF

# Tennis stars Leander, Amritraj make it India's day in Newport

Leander Paes and Vijay Amritraj were inducted into the International **Tennis Hall of Fame** in Newport, Rhode Island in July.

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**T**he three-and-a-half-hour Amtrak ride on the NorthEast Regional Rail Network from Moynihan Train Hall in midtown Manhattan brings you to Kingston Station, which looks like a setting from an old Western (though this is the US East Coast) with its wood-panelled salon. But there's no

gun-toting cowboy in leather overalls waiting outside. Instead, you'll find an empty driveway, devoid of cars, people, or horses. It's as if the movie ended long ago; the actors and extras have all gone home, leaving the set behind.

With the nearest Uber ride 17 minutes away, you, with chirping crickets for company, pray it's not

another driver (like in India) who cancels after quizzing you about the fare. But, mercifully, Ruben — in his red Honda, not a red mare — arrives in half the time. The ride to Newport, crossing bridges over the Atlantic Ocean that stretch longer than the Mumbai Sealink, is pleasant and chatty as Ruben worries about the future of the New England Patriots



**Family time:** Leander Paes with his daughter and parents. "I am here because of all the love and support I got from so many people," said Leander, struggling to hold back tears in a hall crammed with his well-wishers. PICTURE COURTESY: ITHF

after the retirement of Tom Brady, the NFL's greatest quarterback.

He's surprised to learn that Indians play tennis, let alone that two of them have made it into the International Tennis Hall of Fame, right there in the Casino Theatre. But as you pull up to the nearly century-old brownstone Viking Hotel in Newport's Historic Hill neighbourhood, it's easy to mistake the scene for a big, exuberant Indian wedding. The lobby is awash with colour and chaos as men and women embrace like long-lost friends, even as bemused hotel staff and locals do their best to navigate around the lively spectacle.

A short walk, quicker than the ancient-looking trolley cars trundling along the street, past columned manors and mansions, brings you to the Hall of Fame Museum. Here, you find even more Indians buzzing with impatient energy, all awaiting the arrival of soon-to-be inductees

Leander Paes and Vijay Amritraj.

Among Leander's memorabilia, now on display in this quaint, rich oceanfront town, is his most cherished possession: his 1996 Atlanta Olympics bronze medal.

"The main reason I started playing sports was to emulate my dad, who won an Olympic [hockey bronze in Munich 1972] medal. My parents were there [in Atlanta], and they mean the world to me. Both of my siblings gave up a lot for me. I am here because of all the love and support I got from so many people," said Leander, struggling to hold back tears in a hall crammed with his well-wishers.

Leander's victory in Atlanta, defeating Brazilian Fernando Meligeni for the bronze, propelled him into Indian sports folklore. In a country starved for Olympic success, he became a new hero. And his triumph inspired a generation of Indian athletes to believe they could compete with the best. Since that historic medal, India has never come back from the Olympics empty-handed, a stark contrast to the previous routine disappointments.

Leander always wore his heart on his sleeve on the tennis court; his emotion and courage were as much

part of his game as were his lightning-quick reflexes at the net. His passion was even more intense when he played for India, be it at the Davis Cup, Olympics or the Asian Games. That same emotion was evident as he spoke about Martina Navratilova, with whom he won two mixed doubles Grand Slams. Navratilova and Leander's 2003 Wimbledon trophy is also on display. Calling the 59-time Grand Slam winner his 'North Star', Leander said: "She has been my guiding light and has inspired me through longevity of lifestyle—diet, sleep, training methods, recovery. I got a chance to play with her in 2003, and we won the Australian Open and Wimbledon. Playing with her was special, as I grew up watching her play on black-and-white television in Kolkata. And then getting to know her as a person and winning Wimbledon together is special. She is not just a champion of tennis, but she is a champion of life."

For Amritraj, inducted in the contributor category, sport has always been a way to unify the world. "My parents were flying blind when we got into this sport we call tennis. Never knew where it was going to take us. I've often said that my greatest talent was being born to the



**Picture perfect:** Vijay Amritraj with his family members. "This is not just an honour for me, my parents, and my family, but for my fellow Indians and my country," he said. PICTURE COURTESY: ITHF

right parents," Vijay said. "My biggest sadness, I would say, is them not being here with me to be able to share this. But it has been such a monumental task and effort on their part to get me into this situation and make something of me, which I never dreamt about."

Among his memorabilia on display are his Rolex watch from his 1976 victory here in Newport, his ITF Golden Achievement Award, the key to the city of Los Angeles, the Padma Shri medallion, and his World Championship Tennis jacket.

Welcoming Amritraj, Leander and veteran tennis journalist Richard Evans, a chronicler of 200 Majors and the biographer of Amritraj, to the illustrious club were many of the game's greatest and fellow Hall of Famers, including 18-time Grand Slam winner Christ Evert, her greatest rival and friend Navratilova, Andre Agassi, Stan Smith, and WTA founding member Rosie Casals.

The Indians, in vibrant sarees and crisp bandhgalas, were everywhere,

outnumbering the more stoic, buttoned-up members of the club. It was a splash of Bollywood into an old-school English tea party, and the setting was chaotically beautiful.

Navratilova introduced Leander, the 18-time Grand Slam winner, as the player who played tennis "the way most of us would like to play." "He has got that off-speed serve, the big forehand, and the sliced backhand where it lands exactly where you don't want to land. When he comes to the net, he has a big forehand volley and reflexes like a leopard. He runs every ball down, and if he can't, he dives for it. And if all else fails, he smiles, and then everybody's heart melts," Navratilova said. "Leander, it was truly my honour to play against you. I enjoyed it a lot more when I played with you. You have done your family proud; you have done our sport proud; and most of all, you have done India proud."

Leander, dressed in a cream-coloured sherwani and the Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan proudly pinned to his lapel, said: "It is a privilege to be on this stage with these people who have inspired me every single day of my life. They are not just Grand Slam winners, but they have shaped the world we live

in. I thank all of you for giving this Indian boy hope."

Amritraj, winner of 28 tour-level titles, including three in Newport, was introduced by his son Prakash, who called him "my greatest hero, who also happens to be my father."

Amritraj reached the Wimbledon singles quarterfinals as a 19-year-old in 1973 and was the president of the ATP between 1989 and 1993. He became the first Asian to join the ITHF in the contributor category. "When I was given the news that this year I would be inducted, a feeling came over me that I had never experienced. Tennis has allowed me to meet people I never thought I would meet, and it has given me more things than I could have ever imagined.

It will always be a part of our lives and always bring families, communities, and countries together," Amritraj said. "This is not just an honour for me, my parents, and my family, but for my fellow Indians and my country."

With the Tiranga flying high atop the old Casino Building and bhanga moves breaking out to AP Dhillon's 'Brown Munde', it was unmistakably India's day in Newport. The two Brown Mundes had made the country proud.



## ON THE WRITE LINE

Sunil Gavaskar



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# BASKING IN GLORY OF MANU'S OLYMPIC MEDAL AND LEANDER, VIJAY'S INDUCTION INTO TENNIS HALL OF FAME

Manu Bhaker's Olympic bronze and the induction of Vijay Amritraj and Leander Paes into the International Tennis Hall of Fame were **proud moments** for India and Indian sports.

**M**anu Bhaker winning India's first medal in the Paris Olympics was such a heartwarming moment. When the Indian tricolour goes up, the chest swells with pride. She didn't let the disappointment of the Tokyo Olympics get her down. Instead, she worked harder and was rewarded with a medal this time.

Speaking of the Tricolour, it is so disgusting to see some people deface it by putting their company or institution's name on it. They are Indians but not Indian passport holders, so perhaps they do not understand the importance of the flag. Their wholehearted support for the Indian team is most welcome and much appreciated. And hopefully, they will devise a flag of their own that will be easily recognisable and not deface the Indian tricolour.

**It was disappointing to see that the ICC turned a blind eye to this during the last two World Cups and did not do anything about it.**

The TV production companies are now aware of the insensitivity of this and rarely, if ever, show the defaced flag. Also, because the name on the flag is that of a company, that amounts to ambush marketing. For the UK and USA flags, it is different as those countries and their

citizens may not be concerned about the defacing of their country's flags. But the Indian government is pretty clear that the flag cannot be tampered with at all. Hopefully, good sense will prevail, and next time around, these Indian team supporters will attend the game with their own designed flag, which I am sure will become popular and recognised all over the cricketing world.

**Last week also saw two of India's greatest sportspersons, Vijay Amritraj and Leander Paes, inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame.** That was another chest-swelling moment for India and Indian sports. Both have not only been fabulous tennis players but also great role models. They have been India's unofficial ambassadors wherever they played and have won millions of friends for the country. Both are wonderful speakers too, gracious and witty to boot, which makes listening to them such a pleasure. Well done, both of you, and may you continue to serve the game for a long time.

The Major League Cricket, where I had the pleasure of commentating, has a new winner, with the Washington Freedom franchise winning the trophy. For some reason, the crowds were not quite there this time around. Maybe it was viewer fatigue because of the ICC



T20 World Cup preceding the tournament. The cricket was also not of the same high quality as last year. Maybe, because there were too many ordinary players there. The international stars who play in various T20 leagues around the world also seemed a little casual.

**This makes one feel that while nobody wants the players' source of income to be curbed, it is worth considering if players should be restricted to playing in, say, three leagues.**

The whole world agrees that the IPL is the best and most competitive tournament because of the talent pool it attracts from all over the world. So maybe a player should be restricted to the IPL and two other leagues of his choice. It is also a bit strange to see players who play for one franchise in the IPL playing for the team of another rival IPL franchise in the other

**Red-letter day:** Manu Bhaker won bronze in the women's 10m air pistol event at the 2024 Paris Olympics. RITURAJ KONWAR

leagues. It is perfectly understandable if the franchise they play for in the IPL does not have a team in the various countries' T20 leagues, but it does seem odd to see them wearing the jersey of a rival IPL team franchise in the other leagues.

Anyway, that's something for more knowledgeable people than me to think about and, if required, do something about it.

For now, I am just basking in the warm glow of Manu's medal and the induction of my good friends Vijay and Leander into the International Tennis Hall of Fame.

**Vijay Amritraj and Leander Paes have been India's unofficial ambassadors wherever they played and have won millions of friends for the country. Both are wonderful speakers too, gracious and witty to boot, which makes listening to them such a pleasure.**

# Abhishek Sharma in elite list

**4** } The number of Indian batters to register a maiden T20I century before the age of 24 years. After registering a duck on debut, Abhishek Sharma became the latest to join the list of young Indian batters to record a maiden T20I century. While making his maiden T20I century, Abhishek became the first Indian to hit three sixes-in-a-row to get to his three-figure mark across formats. His 46-ball century makes him the joint third-fastest for India in men's T20Is. Only Rohit Sharma (35 balls) and Suryakumar Yadav (45) have done it quicker, while Abhishek equalled K. L. Rahul.

## Youngest to score a maiden T20I century for India

Yrs-days	Batter (Score)	Against	Venue	Date	Result
21-279	Yashasvi Jaiswal (100)	Nepal	Hangzhou	3 Oct 2023	Won
23-146	Shubman Gill (126*)	New Zealand	Ahmedabad	1 Feb 2023	Won
23-156	Suresh Raina (101)	South Africa	Gros Islet	2 May 2010	Won
23-307	Abhishek Sharma (100)	Zimbabwe	Harare	7 Jul 2024	Won

**3** } The number of batters from Test-playing nations to score a maiden T20I century in fewest innings since debut. Abhishek Sharma now joins South African Richard Levi and West Indian Evin Lewis in achieving this rare feat.

## Fewest innings to register maiden T20I century (for Test-playing nations only)

Inns	Scores	Batter	For	Against	Venue	Date	Result
2	13, 117*	Richard Levi	South Africa	New Zealand	Hamilton	19 Feb 2012	Won
2	0, 100	Evin Lewis	West Indies	India	Lauderhill	27 Aug 2016	Won
2	0, 100	Abhishek Sharma	India	Zimbabwe	Harare	7 Jul 2024	Won
3	21, 47*, 104	Deepak Hooda+	India	Ireland	Malahide, Dublin	28 Jun 2022	Won
4	10, 5, 61, 117	Chris Gayle	West Indies	South Africa	Johannesburg	11 Sep 2007	Lost
4	0, 47, 22, 110*	K. L. Rahul	India	West Indies	Lauderhill	27 Aug 2016	Lost

+ Hooda did not bat in the first two T20I matches

**3** } The number of batters to register three-figure scores in T20Is on Zimbabwe soil. India's Abhishek Sharma became the latest to do so, in Harare on 7 July 2024.

## T20I centuries on Zimbabwean soil

Runs	Batter	For	Against	Venue	Date	Result
172	Aaron Finch	Australia	Zimbabwe	Harare	3 Jul 2018	Won
101*	Steven Taylor	USA	Jersey	Bulawayo	11 Jul 2022	Won
100	Abhishek Sharma	India	Zimbabwe	Harare	7 Jul 2024	Won

**117** } The target India failed to chase against Zimbabwe in the T20 international on 6 July 2024 in Harare. This is now the lowest it had failed to achieve in this format. By losing this game, India became only the second T20 World Cup men's champion to lose its first T20I after the title win. England, which won the previous T20 WC title in November 2022, had also lost its first T20I outing as the World Champion, against Bangladesh in March 2023.

## Lowest totals successfully defended by opponents against India in T20Is

Opponents (Total & overs)	India (Total & overs)	Venue	Date	Result for India
Zimbabwe (116/10 in 20)	India (102/10 in 19.5)	Harare	6 July 2024	Lost by 13 runs
New Zealand (126/7 in 20)	India (79/10 in 18.1)	Nagpur	15 Mar 2016	Lost by 47 runs
South Africa (130/5 in 20)	India (118/8 in 20)	Nottingham	16 Jun 2009	Lost by 12 runs
Zimbabwe (145/7 in 20)	India (135/9 in 20)	Harare	19 Jul 2015	Lost by 10 runs
West Indies (149/6 in 20)	India (145/9 in 20)	Tarouba	3 Aug 2023	Lost by 4 runs



India's Abhishek Sharma. AFP

**12** } The consecutive wins for India across formats in men's international cricket before the defeat in Harare. However, this was its joint-longest winning streak across formats, equalling the feat achieved in 2017. The defeat in Harare also ended India's joint-longest consecutive T20 international victories. The second table has the details.

#### Consecutive victories for India across formats in international cricket

Matches	From	To	(Victories in Tests, ODIs, T20Is)
12	26 Jul 2017	24 Sep 2017	(3 Tests, 8 ODIs, 1 T20I)
12	2 Feb 2024	29 Jun 2024	(4 Tests, 8 T20Is)
11	6 Feb 2022	12 Mar 2022	(3 ODIs, 6 T20Is, 2 Tests)
10	8 Oct 2023	15 Nov 2023	(10 ODIs) +
9	5 Jul 2013	10 Oct 2013	(8 ODIs, 1 T20I)
9	22 Feb 2013	23 Jun 2013	(4 Tests, 5 ODIs)
8	20 Feb 1985	25 Aug 1985	(8 ODIs)
8	22 Nov 1993	18 Feb 1994	(5 ODIs, 3 Tests)
8	23 Feb 2003	20 Mar 2003	(8 ODIs)
8	20 Mar 2011	11 Jun 2011	(7 ODIs, 1 T20I)
8	8 Mar 2018	3 Jul 2018	(7 T20Is, 1 Test)
8	2 Aug 2022	31 Aug 2022	(5 T20Is, 3 Test)

+ India had an unbeaten run of 13 games from 8 Oct 2023 to 15 Nov 2023, which included a no-result game after its first two victorious matches.

\*\* India's record across all formats in 2024, so far, has been — 22 games (won 20, lost 2). The only matches it lost were the Hyderabad Test against England in January 2024 and the Harare T20I defeat. Its 20 victories came five times in Tests and 15 T20 Internationals.

#### Consecutive victories for India in T20Is

Matches	From	To
12	3 Nov 2021	27 Feb 2022
12	14 Dec 2023	29 Jun 2024
9	7 Jan 2020	6 Dec 2020
7	28 Dec 2012	4 Apr 2014
7	12 Feb 2016	6 Mar 2016
7	8 Mar 2018	3 Jul 2018

Note: India also had a run of 11 consecutive victories without defeat from 11 December 2019 to 6 December 2020, which included a no-result match against Sri Lanka in Guwahati on 5 January 2020. This match was abandoned without a ball bowled after the toss was done. This winning sequence also included two tied games in New Zealand in January 2020, which it won via Super Overs.

**102** } India's total in its unsuccessful run chase against Zimbabwe in the T20 international on 6 July 2024 in Harare. This is its second lowest in a run chase. It is also the third-lowest total for a full-member against Zimbabwe in T20Is, behind West Indies' 79 for 7 in 2010 and Pakistan's 99 all out in 2021.

#### Lowest totals for India in a run chase

Total	Overs	Against	Venue	Date	Target	Result for India
79/10	18.1	New Zealand	Nagpur	15 Mar 2016	127	Lost by 47 runs
102/10	19.5	Zimbabwe	Harare	6 Jul 2024	116	Lost by 13 runs
118/8	20.0	South Africa	Nottingham	16 Jun 2009	131	Lost by 12 runs
135/9	20.0	Zimbabwe	Harare	19 Jul 2015	146	Lost by 10 runs
135/10	17.4	Australia	Bridgetown	7 May 2010	185	Lost by 49 runs

**2** } The number of occasions, when seven or more ducks were recorded in the same T20I, involving games between Test-playing nations. Interestingly, on both occasions Zimbabwe has been involved and surprisingly won both its games — against West Indies and India respectively.

#### Most ducks in a T20I match (by both sides) involving at least one Test-playing side

Ducks	Team1 (ducks)	Team2 (ducks)	Venue	Date	Won by
8	Zimbabwe (6)	West Indies (2)	Port of Spain	28 Feb 2010	Zimbabwe
7	Zimbabwe (4)	India (3)	Harare	6 Jul 2024	Zimbabwe
6	Kenya (6) +	New Zealand (0)	Durban	12 Sep 2007	New Zealand
6	Bangladesh (4)	Hong Kong (2)	Chattogram	20 Mar 2014	Hong Kong
6	South Africa (4)	Sri Lanka (2)	Colombo, RPS	14 Aug 2018	Sri Lanka
6	Pakistan (2)	Hong Kong (4)	Hangzhou	3 Oct 2023	Pakistan

+ the top four Kenyan batters were dismissed for a duck in Durban

\*\* The record for the most ducks in a T20I match was in the game played between the Czech Republic and Turkey for the Romania Cup in Moara Valsiei on 30 August 2019. The game saw nine ducks — 8 by Turkey and one by Czech Rep.

All records are correct and updated until 26 July 2024



# BRIGHT START TO GAMBHIR-SURYAKUMAR ERA IN T20IS

In Suryakumar Yadav, India seems to have found the **right leader** going into the next T20 World Cup cycle.

**Pranay Rajiv**  
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**T**he cool climes of Kandy — sitting at an altitude of 1,400 feet above sea level, the Pallekele Stadium here is one of the highest international cricket venues in the world — combined with a hospitable Sri Lankan side provided the perfect backdrop for India's 3-0 T20I series sweep.

Even the usually hard-to-impress Gautam Gambhir was beaming at

the presentation ceremony after the third T20I in his first outing as the national team coach. His men had the better of the home side throughout, winning the first two games with considerable ease to secure the series.

The third match, though, was hardly straightforward, with India rallying from the precipice of defeat to clinch an incredible win, with its skipper Suryakumar Yadav's leadership skills coming to the fore.

Chasing a middling 138 for a consolation win, Sri Lanka needed just nine runs in the last two overs

when Suryakumar threw the ball to Rinku Singh, who had never bowled on the international stage before. Rinku conceded just three runs and took two wickets, including that of danger man Kusal Perera, who made 46 off 34. That left Sri Lanka needing six from six balls.

**With the ball turning a mile, Suryakumar, surprisingly, decided to bring himself on for the final over.**

Bowling for the first time in T20Is, he gave just five runs to force a Super Over, where India easily defeated Sri Lanka.

Suryakumar's captaincy nous was

# INDIA'S BATTING STRATEGY MIRRORED KKR'S 2024 APPROACH, WHERE GAUTAM GAMBHIR WAS INVOLVED AS MENTOR BEFORE BECOMING INDIA'S COACH



composed figure on the field through his debut series as full-time captain, giving his bowlers the freedom to get the job done, as vouched by Axar and Ravi Bishnoi during the series.

Excluding the final T20I, where the team experimented with its batting order and fielded a heavily rotated side, India's victory was primarily based on an aggressive batting strategy. This strategy resembled the approach of Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) from IPL 2024, the team that Gambhir was previously involved with before taking over as the Indian coach from Rahul Dravid.

Like KKR earlier this year, India attacked early with its openers and maintained an aggressive approach with the middle order, focusing on aggression rather than consolidation.

India's eight-man batting order included four left-handed options,

# ONS



PTI

on display throughout the series, albeit in subtler ways. In the first game, India was in a spot of bother as Pathum Nissanka led Sri Lanka in a record-breaking chase of 214. However, the calm Indian captain used Axar's left-arm spin to dismiss right-hander Nissanka for a 48-ball 79, triggering a collapse that saw the host side lose nine wickets for 30 runs.

The 33-year-old Suryakumar was a

**Rewarding partnership:** India's T20 World Cup title defence at home in 2026, under new head coach Gautam Gambhir and skipper Suryakumar Yadav, has started on a positive note.

PTI





**Toss-up between two:** The third all-rounder's spot in India's T20I team is likely up for grabs, with Riyan Parag (in pic) and Washington as the contenders. AP

allowing it a left-right batting pair in the middle without much difficulty. This tactic meant the Sri Lankan bowlers had to constantly adjust their lines, resulting in erratic bowling and easier run-scoring opportunities.

Yashasvi Jaiswal and Shubman Gill offered renewed vigour at the top, while Suryakumar demonstrated his aggressive batting style, unaffected by the added responsibility of captaincy. Rishabh Pant and Hardik Pandya also made significant contributions with the bat when required.

The Indian bowlers were impressive, taking 27 out of 30 Sri Lankan wickets. Spinners Axar and Bishnoi continued to prove their reliability, with Bishnoi's three-wicket haul being crucial in India's win in the second game.

Bishnoi's sharp bowling has strengthened his position, and he may challenge the rested Kuldeep Yadav for the primary spinner role in the T20I setup.

Gambhir's decision to bench

all-rounder Washington Sundar for the first two games raised a few eyebrows initially given that many expected Sundar to replace the now-retired Ravindra Jadeja in the T20I unit. However, India chose Riyan Parag, a more reliable batting option, as the sixth bowler.

**To his credit, Parag bowled with great heart, using a mix of off-breaks and leg spin to keep the Lankan batters guessing.**

Washington, though, made the best of the only opportunity that came his way. He put in a man-of-the-match winning performance in the third T20I, taking two wickets after an innings-salvaging cameo of 25 (18).

A major blot in the Indian performance was Sanju Samson's failure to make his chances count. The Kerala batter tallied consecutive ducks and had a disappointing day behind the stumps in the third T20I.

Similarly, pacers Khaleel Ahmed and middle-order batter Shivam Dube too had forgettable outings in the third game.

For Sri Lanka, the series defeat, coming after a shock group-stage exit in the T20 World Cup, means a further drop into the abyss.

A weak middle-order, prone to consistent collapses, was the main

cause of Sri Lanka's downfall. In the three games, the Sri Lankan middle order (numbers four, five, six and seven) combined to score 61 runs for an abysmal average of 5.08.

It also didn't help that the home bowlers were consistently taken apart by the Indian batters, except in the third match, where a crumbling Pallekele surface came to their aid.

Nissanka's excellence with the bat (137 runs in three matches) was the lone bright spot for Sri Lanka. He received considerable support from fellow openers Kusal Mendis and Perera. The Lankan top three aggregated 354 runs at a more-than-handy average of 39.33. But their efforts ultimately proved insufficient.

With a quick turnaround between the two white-ball legs, Sri Lanka will be hoping for a change in luck in the ODIs, especially with the bat.

For India, the transition following the retirement of T20I stalwarts Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, and Jadeja couldn't have been any smoother. In Suryakumar, the side seems to have found the right leader going into the next T20 World Cup cycle. Most of the slots in the lineup are filled, with only the third all-rounder spot likely up for grabs, with Parag and Washington as the contenders.

# 1st

**Walk the talk:** The newly appointed T20I captain, Suryakumar Yadav, led from the front as he scored a 26-ball 58 to take India to 213/7 after being asked to bat. PTI

»  
**THE INDIAN SKIPPER SMASHED EIGHT FOURS  
AND TWO SIXES DURING HIS KNOCK**  
»



## 2nd

**Fighting knock:** Pathum Nissanka led Sri Lanka's 214-run chase with his 79 off 48 balls, which included seven fours and four sixes. However, Indian bowlers struck late and managed to bowl out the host side for 170, comfortably winning the game. **PTI**



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IMAGES

## 3rd

**Ravi's day out:** Ravi Bishnoi took three wickets in the middle overs, limiting Sri Lanka to 161/9 in a rain-affected match. India then successfully chased down the revised target of 78 with nine balls to spare. **AP**



# 4th

## Stabiliser:

Shubman Gill (39) and Riyan Parag added 54 runs for the sixth wicket after India was reduced to 48/5. They rebuilt the innings, taking the team to 137/9. PTI



# 5th

**Golden arms:** Rinku Singh bowled the penultimate over when Sri Lanka needed nine runs and picked up two wickets while conceding just three. Suryakumar Yadav then rolled his arm in the final over and picked up two more wickets to take the game into the Super Over, which India won. AFP





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« Rohit Sharma is a player's captain. He is keen to lead the fight from the front »

# VIKRAM RATHOUR

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**V**ikram Rathour's journey as the Indian team's batting coach since 2019 has been remarkable. He witnessed the team's embarrassing 36 all out in the Adelaide Test in 2020, but those bitter memories were wiped away when India won the 2024 T20 World Cup in Barbados.

Rathour looks back on his coaching career in this interview with *Sportstar*.

## How do you look back at your tenure as a batting coach after serving Indian cricket as a national selector?

I've been incredibly fortunate that my journey has progressed within Indian cricket. I served as a selector for four years, starting in September 2012. Coaching has always been my first love, and I transitioned into that role before becoming a director at the Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association. Eventually, I had the opportunity to work with the Indian team. Throughout this incredible journey, I've experienced many ups and downs, gained invaluable

knowledge, formed lasting friendships, and built excellent bonds. Working with a great set of boys has been truly rewarding.

## What was on your mind when the offer came to you? Was deciding between coaching, selection, and ultimately being in the dressing room challenging?

When I returned from England in 2010 (after retiring, Rathour lived in England for a few years), I got into coaching right away. I was coaching the Punjab team, then worked with the [Indian Premier League] franchise Punjab Kings for a few years. Then the selector's offer came, to which I said yes. Once I was done with the selector's job for four years, I was always going to go back to coaching; there was no doubt that I enjoyed working as a coach. It wasn't a difficult decision because that was always something that I was looking to do.

## What did you learn as a selector and then as a coach? You had to make some tough decisions, especially with such a

## star-studded Indian team.

That comes with the job. Selection isn't just about choosing players; it also involves the difficult task of dropping someone. During that period, the team was in transition, with many senior players gradually being replaced. Thankfully, it all turned out well. As a coach, you need to be fair with the big names. I always believed it's better to err on the side of giving one extra chance than one less. It would help if you provided one more game or extra opportunity. But there are still some decisions to be made. And sometimes, unfortunately, things don't work out with some cricketers. And there are times when you need to move ahead.

## During your time as a selector, can you share some of the players who struck you as a longtime investment?

We picked Mohammed Shami, Jasprit Bumrah, KL Rahul and Shikhar Dhawan and even helped Rohit Sharma grow as a player in his initial phase. But to say that everybody we picked went on to become a good



**Long journey:** Vikram Rathour, the former India and Punjab wicketkeeper-batter, was appointed to the post of batting coach in 2019. R. V. MOORTHY

player is not true. There were a few players who could have done better.

### **How has the approach to T20 batting changed?**

When I joined, we batted using a traditional method. We batted with an anchor who looked to bat deep with the tail around him. We were lagging behind the other teams. We had to play with more intent throughout the innings. It changed in the last two World Cups. We didn't have someone who could bat at No. 8 in the previous World Cup because of the injury to Ravindra Jadeja. You have to have a decent No. 9 who can bat. This time, we had Axar Patel in that position. That gave a lot of freedom to the batters, even though the conditions were not favourable. That's the new template. We are playing more aggressive cricket and looking to score par-plus every time.

**The approach to Test batting has changed, too. We hardly see matches lasting five days. Do you**

### **think defensive batsmanship to save a game is a relic of the past?**

Yes. There are two reasons: the emergence of T20 and white-ball cricket. People are batting differently. Batters are playing more positively and taking more risks, so wickets also fall more regularly. The Test Championship has contributed, too. Every team wants to win to earn points. You are batting on more challenging pitches, with the home team wanting to win. A draw is in nobody's interest. You look to win every game. I can only see a few draws happening in the future.

### **Rohit has refined his white-ball game over the last two years.**

**What sort of work went into changing his intent at the top?** It was his thinking. As captain, he extensively discussed adding more aggression to our batting approach. The character that he is, Rohit, is keen to lead the fight from the front. Rather than telling others to do it, he wanted to do it himself. And he did

that. He has been phenomenal with his batting approach. It rubbed off on others, too. They were inspired by what the leader was doing. He did not hold back, even when he failed, at times, and it helped the team.

### **India enjoyed some great Test success overseas during your tenure...**

We became a successful team overseas due to our bowling unit. The bowlers started picking up more wickets. The change began when Virat and Ravi (Shastri) were together. They decided to always play with five bowlers. As a batting group, we prepared better. This generation is better equipped to deal with fast bowlers and short bowling.

### **We also saw a transition, with senior pros like Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane giving way to juniors. How did you go about this process?**

Both of them had done well for a long time, but then you have such

**Doyen of the game:** Vikram Rathour reckons Rahul Dravid is the best coach he has worked with to date. K. R. DEEPAK

muscular bench strength in Indian cricket. The team boasts a solid lineup with emerging talents. Shubman Gill, for instance, has made his mark, and Dhruv Jurel played an extraordinary innings in the last Test match against England. As the next generation steps in, the future looks even brighter. A lot of credit goes to how domestic cricket is played in India, producing players, who are ready to step into international cricket.

**Do you think bowlers who are poor with the bat are a thing of the past? We have seen the emergence of R. Ashwin as a Test batter. What sort of work went behind it?**

One of the key areas I worked on, and I would love to take credit for it, is lower-order batting. I worked extensively with lower-order batsmen. I would give them more batting practice. It helped. We are contributing more in the lower order now than before. Ashwin was always a good batter. He had Test hundreds before I joined the team as batting coach. He loves to discuss a lot of cricket. There was a slump and he worked on specific areas. He rediscovered himself as a Test batter.

**What are your impressions of Virat Kohli as a player and a captain?**

Virat is the best batsman of this generation in all three formats. He is a phenomenal player with a great work ethic. Virat wants to do well every time he bats, wanting to win every game he plays. That is his best quality.

He has a fantastic ability to adapt. He can change his game according to the situation. He plays all three formats differently. As a captain, his trait is to play fearlessly. He taught the team to stand up to the big teams. He puts the opposition under pressure with his aggression as a leader. He introduced the concept of fitness in Indian cricket and changed the team's mindset.



**How is Rohit as a player and a captain?**

He is exceptional. I call him a player's captain. I haven't seen anyone who spares so much time for the players. He backs his players. The players also know that he will be there to support them if things go wrong. He is part of every meeting. He also wants to sit in the batter's and bowlers' meetings. He wants to know everything discussed to implement it in the field. Tactically, he is marvellous. He does certain things that will surprise you. You wonder as to why this guy is bowling at this juncture and why this guy is fielding in a particular position. Eventually, it turns out that Rohit is spot on. He reads the game well.

**Your biggest challenge would have come in Australia, when India played with almost a B team, came back strongly, and won an epic series.**

We prepared well for that series. We were there early; we had some practice sessions. Those were COVID times, and we were in isolation. We had an exclusive practice area, which gave us an excellent opportunity to work and prepare well. We were in a perfect position in the first Test, and the 36 all-out happened. It was a freak session. The message in the group was simple: There's nothing

wrong with what we did. Let's not start overthinking and overanalysing. We did not panic. It turned out to be one of the best series ever.

**Coming back to the T20 World Cup, did playing on those poor pitches in the USA help before the Super 8 stage?**

It was too challenging. Those are not the pitches on which you should be playing T20 cricket, but they helped us. As a team, you want some tight games. One of the areas we needed to get better at was batting first. We were always an excellent team chasing. It was good to see that we could put up challenging totals.

**Were you stern as a batting coach?**

I don't believe in that philosophy because mistakes are part of the journey and process. Keep moving forward, learning from your mistakes, and practising your strengths or areas for improvement. You will be fine if you keep preparing well and practising those things sincerely.

**What did you learn from Ravi Shastri during his term as head coach?**

Great man management skills. He doesn't let a poor session or a match affect him too much. After the 36 all

out, his reaction was brilliant. 'Let's wear it as a badge on a shirt. And let's be fine. Let's keep the chin up'. He likes to keep good vibes in the room. I had a great time being with him.

### **And how was the experience with Rahul Dravid?**

Rahul is the best coach I've worked with. He has a great character and is good at what he does. He talks well, is very thorough, and is disciplined with his coaching. He took over when India was in a transition phase with significant challenges ahead. We were good friends. And we are even better friends now. The expectations were higher when he joined. He was calm and composed through these challenging times.

### **What was this talk of India changing the pitch ahead of the 2023 ODI World Cup final in Ahmedabad?**

I've heard this story that the pitch was different, which I don't agree with at all. We played on similar wickets in the earlier matches as well. Matches against Australia, Pakistan, England were also played on slow pitches. The Ahmedabad pitch, however, eased out.

### **What were your memorable moments from the T20 World Cup?**

Suryakumar (Yadav) taking that catch in the final. Jasprit Bumrah won it for us, honestly. What he did as a bowler is beyond explanation; the level of control he demonstrated is unbelievable. We are incredibly fortunate to have Bumrah on our team. Also, Hardik (Pandya) came good when needed.

### **What is your biggest takeaway as a selector and coach — picking Jasprit Bumrah, winning the series in Australia, or winning the T20 World Cup?**

Both. Australia will always be a very special series for us. We played different formats and faced challenging situations, especially after Virat's departure following the first Test. We had new players, initially net bowlers, stepping up to



**Pillar of strength:** Vikram Rathour says he owes much of his success to his wife, Deepali, who managed the household brilliantly, allowing him to focus on his work. V. MOORTHY

play Test cricket.

The open-bus ride in Mumbai [after the T20 World Cup win] was unforgettable; it was the first time I had seen such a huge turnout on Marine Drive. It was an incredible experience.

### **When identifying a player for big platforms, is it only about talent?**

We put too much emphasis on talent, which is the skill to bat or bowl. Eventually, I learned that there are bigger things in cricket— your decision-making. Are you under pressure? What is your character when under pressure? How do you deal with adversity? So, those are the things that matter more than just having talent.

### **How about the IPL?**

IPL has helped in a big way because that has given a lot of confidence to many players. You are competing with international players in a domestic tournament, which is

excellent.

When I played for the Indian team, the only guy who bowled 140+ kmph was maybe Javagal Srinath. I had played him only once. So, that was my exposure to fast bowling. Now, people are playing against the best fast bowlers in the IPL. So, their experience is entirely different. It's easier for them to handle that pressure.

### **A word on your family's contribution during your successful tenure.**

I am deeply grateful to my family for their unwavering support. I owe a great deal of credit to my wife, Deepali, for enabling me to concentrate on my work. She managed the household brilliantly and raised our son and daughter with love and discipline. Despite my constant travels, my family has always stood by me. I am indebted to them as they are my most dedicated support team.



# CHAMARI'S LANKA CREATES HISTORY IN DAMBULLA

Host Sri Lanka **handed India a reality check** with an eight-wicket victory in the final of the Women's Asia Cup, clinching its maiden title in the process.

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Last month, two fixtures between India and Sri Lanka were scheduled on July 28: one between the senior men's teams (the second fixture of a three-match bilateral series), and the other between the senior women's sides in the final of the Women's Asia Cup.

The former was a bilateral fixture in Kandy that took the 7 pm prime time slot for the benefit of television

audiences in the country while for the latter crowds in Dambulla were witness to two of the strongest sides in the continent.

**Prime time or otherwise, the Women's Asia Cup put on a show for the hordes of fans assembled at the Rangiri Dambulla International Cricket Stadium** and for those following the match broadcast, with Sri Lanka pulling off an upset for the ages, beating India by eight wickets to lift its maiden Asia Cup title. The long penance for the Asian crown had borne fruit on the nation's sixth

attempt.

For Chamari Athapaththu and Co., this win capped an incredible turn of fortune over the last couple of years that has seen the side match historically superior opponents toe-to-toe. But the biggest problem for this team was never its opponents; it was its own inexperience and tendency to retreat into a shell when things got rough.

Chamari, the leader of the pack, is one of the last remaining members of a generation of experienced players who have slowly made their

**Captain courageous:** Chamari Athapaththu, the experienced leader of the pack, is one of the last remaining members of a generation of experienced players who have slowly made their way out of the active playing system. ACC

way out of the active playing system. Those who've barely seen a few seasons were left in her care to try and carve out a framework that could work beyond her time on the field. It might sound reductive to say that Sri Lanka's chances began and ended at Chamari's feet, but it is a hard truth. For a long time, she carried this team on her back. Sri Lankan wins were automatic consequences of a good day in the office for the all-rounder.

Sri Lanka was tested only twice in this tournament — once in the semifinal against Pakistan and then against India in the trophy match. A Lankan chase was underway in both instances. Chamari set up the game in her team's favour but fell before the job was done and was forced to pace around the sidelines praying to every god she knew for her girls to see the win through. Anushka Sanjeevani and Achini Kulasuriya held their nerves to scrape through in the penultimate clash, but what unfolded in the final took that spirit a few notches higher. Sri Lanka managed to unlock a new gear, moving past survival to dominance.

When Chamari fell in the final, 72 runs were still needed off 48 balls. It was all starting to look all too familiar for the captain as she trudged up and down the dugout, dreading any déjà vu she might feel. But this is Chamari's Lanka. She has taught her kids well. Harshita Samarawickrama and Kavisha Dilhari did not bow down to an Indian side waiting to strike again. They took on Pooja Vastrakar and Radha Yadav with disdain, a raucous crowd perfectly scoring their exploits with rising decibel levels. A last-over finish

wasn't even needed. The pair saw Lanka through with eight balls to spare. Kavisha's war cry, Harshita inconsolable as she sank to the ground before being hounded by her teammates, players racing onto the field, a stoic Chamari wiping tears by the boundary — the scenes were picture-perfect.

The last year or so has been incredible for the Sri Lankan side. It won the qualifier for the T20 World Cup. The side beat Bangladesh, England, and South Africa (the last two were away fixtures) in T20Is. It beat New Zealand and West Indies in the ODIs. All of these brought with it an expanding pool of contributors to Sri Lankan victories, just what Chamari wanted all along.

The Asia Cup, Chamari's first major international title as skipper, will only strengthen the faith ahead of the World Cup in Bangladesh.

In a parallel universe, the script for this final had an India win. It was only logical. India was head and shoulders above the rest in quality, experience, and form. In a tournament where par scores of 130-140 would often be discussed, India was the side eyeing the 190s.

But when has sport ever been purely about logic? It needs heart. Sri Lanka's bowlers offered India its first proper challenge in the tournament,

asking probing questions to India's batting line-up. Sri Lanka's batters were easily the hardest India faced in the tournament. And when things got the slightest bit more uncomfortable, India panicked.

Fielding was a problem for Harmanpreet and co. throughout this tournament, and it came to bite India yet again in the final. Without regular successes, the bowlers strayed in their line and length. Harmanpreet herself was frantic in trying out as many options as possible to unsettle the Lankans, all in vain.

One can argue that a win here would have closed out India's preparations for the World Cup perfectly, but one must also agree that this loss will actually do some good than otherwise. It gave India a reality check — that form alone cannot win you games. Taking opponents lightly rarely pays off, and the biggest test of tactical acumen happens when you have to ditch your binder of plans and think on the go.

India's campaign was far from

**Perseverance personified:** Sri Lanka's long penance for the Asian crown had borne fruit on the nation's sixth attempt. ACC



**Highlights galore:** A total of 200, fifties aplenty for Smriti Mandhana (in pic), a fluent Shafali Verma alongside her, and runs from the middle order — all bodes well for India as it gears up to take on similarly on-song sides with the bat in the World Cup. **Below:** Captain Harmanpreet Kaur in the final. Pics: PTI



flawless. It began the calendar year with Richa Ghosh — a potent finisher — earmarked for the no. 3 role in the batting order. A technically gifted and explosive batter, Richa adapted. The Women's Premier League's second edition brought D. Hemalatha into the equation, and she took to the job well in Bangladesh but has since struggled. Jemimah Rodrigues, who has enjoyed an on-and-off relationship with the position, now finds herself firmly in no. 5. Yastika Bhatia is on the mend after an injury. **So who is India's no. 3 for the World Cup? That there is no concrete answer yet is a bit worrying for India.**

All isn't well in the spin department either. Radha Yadav, who marked her comeback into the Indian side with solid performances, struggled to dominate in Sri Lanka. She even conceded the most runs (47) by a bowler in a women's T20 Asia Cup game in the final. Tanuja Kanwer, who was brought in for the injured Shreyanka Patil, showed promise

but was taken to the cleaners by Chamari's Lanka. Surprisingly, Asha Sobhana Joy — the leg spinner who enjoyed good returns in Bangladesh — wasn't even given a look-in during this tournament.

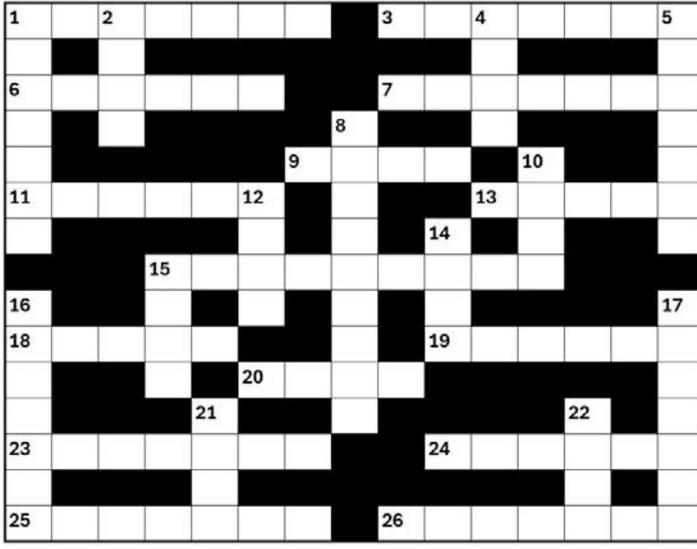


**It's not all gloom and doom. India's batting throughout the tournament will inspire a lot of confidence.** A total of 200, fifties aplenty for Smriti Mandhana, a fluent Shafali Verma alongside her, and runs from the middle order — all bodes well for India as it gears up to take on similarly on-song sides with the bat in the World Cup. If there's any department on life support in the Indian camp, it would be its fielding, and that needs resuscitation on priority.

Sri Lanka's resurgence aside, the report card was not encouraging for Asian cricket as a whole. **The tournament, although expanded, continued to be lopsided in quality for no fault of the participating nations.** With the ICC toying with expanding the World Cups too, increased exposure for nations like Nepal, Thailand, UAE and Malaysia against stronger, more established sides is the need of the hour to strengthen the health of the game in the continent.

# CROSSWORD

N. SOORYA PRAKASH



## SOLUTION TO LAST FORTNIGHT'S CROSSWORD

### ACROSS

- 1 Who scored the fastest goal in European Championship history? (7)
- 3 Who scored Germany's winner in a Round-of-16 encounter in EURO 2024? (7)
- 6 & 26 Who won the man of the match award in Bangladesh's win over Sri Lanka in the T20 World Cup? (6,7)
- 7 During the 2024 Copa América quarterfinal between Argentina and Ecuador, Lionel Messi missed the opening kick of the penalty shootout when he attempted this (7)
- 9 This Dutch footballer is also among the top goal-scorers of EURO 2024. (4)
- 11 Who is the only spinner to take four or more wickets in an innings twice in the T20 World Cup recently? (6)
- 13 Identify this tennis player who took a sabbatical for three years and did office job before returning to the professional circuit and went on to win the men's doubles title in Wimbledon 2024? (5)
- 15 Name this Czech tennis player who won the women's doubles crown in this year's Wimbledon. (9)

- 18 Who won the best player of the tournament award in the Copa America 2024? (5)
- 19 What is common between these three Indian cricketers — (a) who scored most runs for India in the T20 World Cup 2024, (b) who took most wickets in the ODI series against South Africa women & (c) who scored the only hundred in the five match T20I series against Zimbabwe? (6)
- 20 Who scored the equaliser for England in the fifth minute of stoppage time in the Round-of-16 encounter versus Slovakia? (4)
- 23 Which country scored the most number of goals at the end of the round stages of Copa America 2024, besides finishing third in the tournament? (7)
- 24 What is the name of the mascot of EURO 2024? (6)
- 25 & 14 Down Who scored the most number of runs for the co-host USA in the T20 World Cup? (7,4)

### DOWN

- 1 Who became the eighth different champion to win the Venus Rosewater Dish in as many years in this year's Wimbledon Championships? (7)
- 2 Who scored the winner for Panama

- in its win over the host USA in Copa America 2024? (4)
- 4 Who scored the most number of runs for South Africa Women's team in the one-off Test versus India? (4)
- 5 Who scored the goal for Turkey in its quarterfinal match against the Dutch? (7)
- 8 Who scored a hundred in both the one-off Test and the ODI series for South Africa women's team versus India? (9)
- 10 Who won the man of the match in the first T20I match of the series held recently between Zimbabwe and India? (4)
- 12 Who scored the winner for Spain in its semifinal and ended up as one of the top goal-scorers of EURO 2024, too? (4)
- 15 & 22 Who took 10 wickets for India in its one-off Test versus South Africa women? (4,4)
- 16 This footballer not only scored an own goal but also scored the equaliser in the same match in EURO 2024. (7)
- 17 What is the name of the mascot of Copa America 2024? (7)
- 21 What is the name of the animal oracle which predicted correctly, the first match of EURO 2024? (4)

« Glad we could give Rahul sir a memorable farewell by winning the T20 World Cup »

# ARSHDEEP SINGH

**Shayan Acharya**

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**N**avigating the winding lanes of NRI Colony on the outskirts of Mohali can be overwhelming for a first-timer. However, as you stroll through the calm and quiet locality, you'll come across a three-storey building that houses the Aulakh family. While we waited outside the residence, Arshdeep Singh—India's young fast-bowling talent and an architect of the historic T20 World Cup win—walked up to open the gate. *"Dhoondhne mein mushkil toh nahi hai? (Did you have difficulty finding the place?)"* he asked.

As we entered the drawing room, we were greeted by his trophy cabinet and a framed India U-19 jersey. Since returning home, Arshdeep hasn't slept much due to jet lag, but his parents, Darshan Singh and Daljeet Kaur, have ensured their younger son gets all the 'home-cooked food' he was craving while on tour. "I love the *rajma chawal* that my mom cooks," Arshdeep said with a smile, as we started our conversation over a cup

of cardamom tea and some local savouries.

## Let's begin by talking about your preparations for the T20 World Cup.

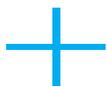
The process started early. We had conversations with the captain and the coach about approaching the tournament. After that, it was all about understanding how to adjust to the conditions and play according to the situation. Leading up to the World Cup, we had a couple of home series in which we bowled many slower balls. We did not think about what was happening (the outcome) in that particular series. Bowling those slower deliveries helped us understand which areas needed work before we played on those surfaces (in the US and the West

Indies). A lot of credit goes to the coaching staff and the captain for preparing us this way.

## How did you adjust your training to handle the different conditions in the US and the Caribbean?

Acclimating to the new time zone was tough due to jet lag, but our strength and conditioning team, physios, and coaching staff did a fantastic job getting us ready during practice sessions. These sessions were competitive and match-based, allowing us to utilise the available facilities effectively. Knowing that the US wickets favoured fast bowlers, we focused on hitting the right areas. After a few sessions, we had a clear plan and were ready to execute it.

## What are your thoughts on the



**I dream of donning the whites and bowling with that red cherry. I want to play all three formats.**



**Topping the charts:** Left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh was India's top wicket-taker in the recent T20 World Cup, taking 17 wickets in eight matches with an economy under eight, helping Rohit Sharma's team to victory.

R. V. MOORTHY

**current group of Indian pacers? How competitive is it with players like Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, and Hardik Pandya?**

Healthy competition within the team is great. As individuals, we always strive to improve and compete with our teammates, which brings out the best in everyone and benefits the team. With Jassi (Bumrah) bhai, Siraj bhai, or Shami bhai around, we aim to match their skills and contributions. This drives us to work hard and perform at our best. During training, our target sessions are competitive, and bowling well to our legendary batters boosts our

morale.

Playing with Jassi bhai is challenging because his skills are exceptional. We try to get as close to his level as possible to improve our game and help the team. I'm focused on learning about body management, skill enhancement, and discipline.

**What was going through your mind when you were given the 19th over in the final? How did you stay calm?**

Since joining the Indian team in 2022, I've focused on bowling in the death overs and have become accustomed to it. By the 19th over, Jassi bhai and Hardik bhai had already set us up well by taking two key wickets and increasing the required run rate.

My job was to keep the runs down and give Hardik bhai a cushion for the final over. I used my variations against the new batter,

and it worked, leaving us with enough runs to defend in the last over.

**Not long ago, you would bowl too many variations, getting hit in a few crunch situations. But over the last year, that seems to have changed. How much did the county stint with Kent help you on that front?**

Before my time at Kent, I was mainly focused on playing T20 cricket. When you play T20s, you tend to rely on a lot of variations. However, while at Kent, I got the opportunity to bowl long spells and learned how effective length balls can be. This experience helped me a lot. Previously, when a batter attacked me, I would mainly use yorkers or a slow ball. My time at Kent taught me that bowling at a good length can make it difficult for a batter to score easy runs. After my stint there, I played ODIs in South Africa and



**Quick breakthrough:** Arshdeep's wobble-seam delivery dismissed South African captain Aiden Markram early in the T20 World Cup final. K. R. DEEPAK

achieved good results by hitting those hard lengths and getting the ball to move around a bit. I also give a lot of credit to the BCCI for encouraging me to take up the county stint. It really helped me improve my red-ball skills as well.

**As a T20 specialist, do you aspire to play Test cricket too?**

Of course, I dream of donning the whites and bowling with that red cherry. I want to play all three formats, and whenever I have spoken to Jassi bhai, he has told me, *"Tere ko teeno format khelna hai. White ball khelega toh achha hai, but jab tu red ball khelega, you can create a legacy... (You have to play all three formats. Playing white ball is good, but when you play red ball, you can create a legacy."* He has always motivated me to focus on

red-ball cricket. During most of our conversations, Jassi bhai asks me, *"Tujhe khelna hai red ball?"* and I always tell him that I am very eager to start my red-ball journey with the Indian team.

**You spoke about your camaraderie with Bumrah. But on the field, we have often seen Bumrah and Rohit Sharma getting into animated discussions with you, especially during the death overs. How do those discussions go?**

(Smiles) Rohit bhai and Jassi bhai are legends. They have been dominating international cricket for a long time. Whenever I have a plan, I ask them whether I can implement it. They take my suggestions into account and the field is set accordingly. That helps me focus on the job at hand. As a batter, Rohit bhai understands which areas trouble the batting unit, so he suggests a thing or two about how to bowl an over, and those little things matter in crunch times.

Jassi bhai is a unique bowler with a different bowling action, so the

things that work for him might not work for others. But he guides me on how to adjust the lengths to get bounce and even suggests areas *jahan pe ball jaldi reverse hoga* (where the ball will reverse quicker). During the World Cup, he told me not to go searching for swing early because on those surfaces, the ball won't swing much, so it was better to hit the hard lengths. He keeps telling me those things throughout the match, and our discussions often get animated because *apna bhi toh young khon hai, so at times, hum bhi disagree kar jatein hain un ke saath* (I am young, so at times, I do disagree with him) (laughs). But later, I realised that Jassi bhai's suggestions would have worked if I had listened to him. I learn from my mistakes and strive to improve.

**Did anything of that sort happen in the T20 World Cup as well?**

(Smiles) Yes. Against Afghanistan, the ball was reversing a lot, so he suggested a few field placements. But I thought otherwise and suggested a different field setting.



He told me calmly, *"Tu mujh pe bharosa kar* (You should have faith in me), and send the fielder to where I am suggesting..." I followed his advice and bowled in the right areas. We got an edge, and the ball went straight to the fielder. Jassi bhai walked up to me with a smile and said, *"Dekha na! Tu mujh pe bharosa rakh and bowl your best..."* (See, you should have faith in me...)"

**From being a member of the Under-19 World Cup-winning team in 2018 to winning the T20 World Cup for the senior team, it has been a long journey. How has the experience been?**

Playing in the U-19 World Cup may make you feel like you're at the top of your game, but in reality, it's just the beginning. The real test starts when you play senior cricket. It demands strong character and patience. Unlike in U-19 cricket, there's little room for mistakes in the senior category, so it's crucial to plan well if you want to take wickets and put pressure on the batters. There will be days when you may not get a

wicket despite hard work, so mental strength is important.

A lot of the credit goes to Rahul (Dravid) sir as he tracked my journey since the U-19 days, and that helped me a lot. With him around, it has been relatively easier for me to transition from the U-19 to the senior level. Since he had known me for a long time, it was easy to interact with him, and he was aware of my skill set and my limitations. My family also helped a lot. It's all about adapting to the situation. If you are flexible and not rigid in your approach, it helps you immensely. For instance, in T20s, there will be days when you have to bowl 20 slower balls out of the 24 legal deliveries. And there will be days when you have to back your skills

**Backbone of success:** Arshdeep with his doting parents, Darshan Singh and Daljeet Kaur, at his residence in Chandigarh. R.V. MOORTHY

and just keep things simple. So, adaptability and flexibility have been key.

**Do you approach a game with specific plans for certain batters, or is it more pitch-specific?**

I watch old videos of the batters and analyse their strengths and weaknesses. The surface certainly plays a key role, and you need to check what deliveries would be suitable on a particular pitch. We have a lot of team meetings, and they (the team management) tell us

« Inspiring young fans brings me great joy, and I always try to oblige them with selfies and autographs »



**Stacked cabinet:** Arshdeep has an impressive collection of trophies at home. R. V. MOORTHY

how we should approach a game. There are times you need to look beyond your strength and yet ensure that you find breakthroughs.

In the end, execution is what counts. You can plan and practise a lot, but it's how you perform on match day that matters. You can't be rigid; you need to adapt to the situation and stay flexible.

**Fitness and diet are two important aspects for an athlete. Can you shed some light on your fitness regime and your diet plans?**

More than diet, fitness is important for the players. When you play multiple formats, your body takes on an immense amount of load, and not always do you have time for recovery.

So, it's about how quickly you

bounce back. The physios and the S&C coaches play a huge role in getting us back in shape. The most crucial part is how fast you can recover. The more you bowl and run, the fitter you get, and of course, the gym sessions are important. There needs to be a balance.

I am not too strict about my diet. I eat whatever I like, and since I come from a Punjabi household, *mere khaane mein swaad bhi zaroori hai* (taste is a necessity in my food). There have to be spices and butter in my food (laughs). But that does not mean I have burgers and all that stuff. I look for healthier options that are both nutritious and tasty. However, you need to avoid overeating and burn calories to remain healthy and fitter.

**What's your favourite food?**

When I'm at home, I really enjoy the *rajma chawal* my mom cooks. I also love having *aloo ke parathe*, sweet curd, and *lassi* for breakfast once a

week. Although I don't eat these regularly because of my diet, I always make sure to have *paratha* for breakfast and *rajma chawal* for lunch when I return home after a series.

**How do you unwind?**

I love sleeping, though it's been a bit challenging lately due to jet lag. When I'm stressed or overwhelmed, I find that sleeping helps me start fresh. I also enjoy cycling, but these days it's harder to get out because of the selfies and autograph requests I receive. Despite that, cycling remains a genuine passion of mine.

**You spoke about selfie requests from the fans. Do you enjoy this attention?**

I've received a lot of love since coming home from the T20 World Cup and I'm truly grateful. Inspiring young fans brings me great joy, and I always try to oblige fans with selfies and autographs. It's an honour to

**Jubilant scenes:** Arshdeep and Virat Kohli celebrated India's victory in the Men's T20 Cricket World Cup by unleashing a few *bhangra* dance moves after defeating South Africa in the final in Barbados. GETTY IMAGES

play for the country, and with all the love we receive, this is the least we can do for our fans.

### **When things don't go your way, how do you handle things?**

Right from the start, I have learned that no matter how you fare on the field, it's important to be level-headed. It's human nature to bask in the glory after success and be in a rough state of mind when things go awry.

But you need to be calm and stay focused irrespective of the time. There are times when you might strike back on the fourth delivery and win the game for your team despite leaking runs early on. And that comeback is only possible when you have self-belief and confidence. Ultimately, it's a team game, and it's important to support all the teammates through thick and thin and enjoy every moment on the pitch.

### **Do you follow social media?**

I would be lying if I said I don't follow social media. In today's time, it's impossible to ignore it. I follow social media and also laugh at the creativity and imagination of the people, especially because of the memes that they come up with. *Kaafi maaza aata hai woh sab dekhke* (it's fun watching them), but I try to ensure it does not affect my game.

### **Apparently, you also have an additional role in the team now.**

I'm the team's official DJ. I play a mix of Hindi, Punjabi, and English music on the team bus. Lately, we've added Mexican and Spanish tracks, including El Alfa's *La Mama De La Mama* before games. The team often suggests songs, and I choose tunes based on the mood and situation. On travel days, we go for



soothing songs, while on match days, we play upbeat tracks to boost confidence.

### **Coming back to the game, earlier in the conversation, you mentioned Dravid. How has this long journey been with him?**

From the beginning, I've had a great bond with Rahul sir. I frequently asked him questions about the game, which has helped me improve as a cricketer.

It was rare to see him so emotional after we won the T20

World Cup. It's rewarding to see him, someone who deserves it so much, finally get a World Cup title for all his hard work. I'm glad we were able to give him a memorable farewell by winning the title.

### **Where do you see yourself in the next couple of years? Have you set any personal benchmarks?**

I love living in the present, and that's how I approach things. I am not thinking too far ahead. I would like to contribute to my team's success and handle situations as they arise.

« Perhaps God wanted me to be in the World Cup-winning team »

# AXAR PATEL

**Shayan Acharya**

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**W**hen a left quadriceps injury ruled Axar Patel out of India's ODI World Cup squad last year, uncertainty clouded his future.

However, he did not lose hope. Relying on his vast experience, Axar remained positive and dedicated himself to rigorous training during his rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy.

Focussing on building mental toughness, Axar regained his form during the home series against Afghanistan and followed this up with a commendable IPL season for the Delhi Capitals. Despite the batter-friendly conditions and rules, Axar managed to stifle the opposition, claiming 11 wickets and scoring 235 runs.

He carried this newfound confidence into the T20 World Cup, emerging as a pivotal player for the Indian team, which ultimately clinched the title. Axar bowled economical overs, took a stunning catch against Australia near the

boundary, and contributed significantly with the bat. His crucial partnership with Virat Kohli in the final against South Africa was instrumental in India's victory.

The left-arm spin-bowling all-rounder, managed by JSW Sports, shared his journey in the T20 World Cup with *Sportstar*, highlighting how he thrives in a competitive environment and cherishes the challenges that come with it.

**From missing out on an ODI World Cup spot last year to being a key member of India's T20 World**

**Cup-winning side. How would you look back on your journey over the last one year?**

It was quite an emotional roller-coaster. I missed the ODI World Cup [in India] last year due to injury and found myself reflecting on missed opportunities from the past. Dealing with setbacks was nothing new, so I focussed on preparing for future opportunities. My sole focus was on earning a spot back on the Indian team. I underwent rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy [in Bengaluru], made adjustments to my batting and



**When you bat with the security of a strong lower-middle order, you can play with more freedom than when batting at No. 7 or No. 8. In those positions, you need to take calculated risks.**



**Timely strike:** Axar Patel clean-bowled a dangerous-looking Tristan Stubbs (31, 21b) in the final after he missed an attempted sweep.

K. R. DEEPAK

bowling, and carried a positive mindset into my performances in the bilateral series (Australia T20Is, followed by the series against Afghanistan), which translated to success in the Indian Premier League.

I had a satisfying performance for Delhi Capitals, which boosted my confidence ahead of the T20 World Cup. It feels like life has come full circle as I was part of the tournament-winning team. I realised that you don't know what the Almighty has in store for you. *Shayad bhagwan mujhe World Cup-winning*

*team mein rakhna chahte the* (Perhaps God wanted me to be in the World Cup-winning team).

**In the final against South Africa, you scored a crucial 47 off 31 balls while batting at No. 5. Earlier in the tournament, you batted at No. 4 against Pakistan, your preferred position. How did that experience help?**

I have batted at No. 4 for my district, Kheda, and the Gujarat state team. So, I had a fair idea about how to pace the innings, having batted at that position in the IPL as well. When you bat with the security of a strong lower-middle order, you can play with more freedom than when batting at No. 7 or No. 8. In those positions, you need to take calculated risks.

When I was asked to bat at No. 4, I

knew I could take some time to settle down, and there wasn't a mad rush to hit every ball. I played to my strengths and targeted specific areas. If I knew I could play a shot to my strength, I would not hesitate to go for it. And when some deliveries were beyond my radar, I preferred to rotate the strike.

"When you have to play according to the situation, keeping a positive mindset is the key, and I just did that. The captain, Rohit Sharma, and the coach, Rahul Dravid, also backed me throughout the tournament. They told me, *"Tujhe slog nahi karna hai* (you don't need to slog); you just play your natural game..."

**How do you handle tricky situations?**

As a player, it's crucial to understand your game, but equally important is



**Fulcrum of fightback:** Axar Patel, promoted to provide a left-handed option, scored a vital 47 in a partnership of 72 with Virat Kohli in the final against South Africa. K. R. DEEPAK

recognising how you can contribute to your team's success. In any situation, take a few moments to assess what your team needs from you. I always take those few seconds to determine my role at that moment. It's a simple question, and

by thinking it through, you can devise the best solution. This helps you decide whether it's the right time to accelerate or to play conservatively.

Similarly, when bowling, you must decide whether to focus on economical overs or bowl more

aggressively for breakthroughs. That's the approach I always take.

People often pigeonhole players into specific styles of play, but that's not accurate. While everyone knows their strengths, they also adapt their game based on the situation.

**Capable everywhere:** Despite the batter-friendly conditions during IPL 2024, Axar Patel had a rewarding season with Delhi Capitals, claiming 11 wickets and scoring 235 runs. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR



**India has a strong spin bowling line-up. How do you view the healthy competition among your fellow spinners?**

It is essential. Without competition, complacency can set in, and you might start taking things for granted. In a competitive setting, I focus on my game and how I can improve. I don't concern myself with how others are batting or bowling; my focus remains on working hard on my own performance.

It's crucial to control what is within my power; otherwise, I'm not being fair to myself or my game. Constantly worrying about competitors will only hinder my growth.

*Agar main constantly uss barein mein soch raha hoon, toh main*

*automatically haar raha hoon* (If I am constantly thinking about it, then I am automatically losing).

**With Gautam Gambhir as the new head coach and Suryakumar Yadav taking over as T20I captain, what's your plan for moving forward?**

They will share their thoughts, and I will also express myself. Together, we will decide our roles, set targets, and approach things accordingly.

While people usually set targets, I don't set too many expectations and prefer to go with the flow.

When playing continuous cricket, it's important to keep asking yourself what's next and plan accordingly. Although there are long-term goals, I haven't set anything specific. Our primary goal was to win a World Cup, and having achieved that, we will now sit together to plan our future course of action.

« People often pigeonhole players into specific styles of play, but that's not accurate »



REUTERS

# England completes clean sweep against West Indies

**1** Pacer Gus Atkinson, who made his Test debut in what was James Anderson's final match, was adjudged the **Player of the Series** for picking up 22 wickets.

England completed a 3-0 clean sweep against the West Indies with a commanding 10-wicket win in the third and final match of the Test series in Birmingham.

Mark Wood was the pick of the bowlers for England with seven wickets and dismantled the visiting West Indies team in the second innings.

Pacer Gus Atkinson, who made his Test debut in what was James Anderson's final match, was adjudged the Player of the Series for picking up 22 wickets.



2

GETTY IMAGES

Steven Smith led the Washington Freedom to the Major League Cricket (MLC) 2024 title with a commanding 96-run victory over the San Francisco Unicorns in Dallas. Smith, alongside his Australian teammate Glenn Maxwell, excelled with the bat. During the Unicorns' chase, their efforts fell apart as Marco Jansen took charge, claiming three wickets, including both openers.



3

GETTY IMAGES

Rocky Flintoff, son of former England all-rounder Andrew Flintoff, became the youngest player to score a hundred for the England Under-19s. The 16-year-old's record-breaking score came during the second Youth Men's Test against Sri Lanka in Cheltenham. His 106 from 181 balls helped the visitor set a target of 477 and establish a first-innings lead of 324 runs. The Young Lions went on to win the match by an innings and 53 runs.



4

GETTY IMAGES

Ireland registered its first-ever home Test win with a hard-fought four-wicket victory over Zimbabwe. The one-off Test took place in Belfast, making Northern Ireland the 23rd country to host a men's Test match. Ireland, which lost half its side for 21 in the second innings, fought back through half-centuries by Lorcan Tucker and Andy McBrine (**above**) to help the host chase down the 158-run total.



5

REUTERS

A review of the conduct of the T20 World Cup 2024 will be carried out by ICC after the global body set up a panel. Three of its board directors — Roger Twose, Lawson Naidoo and Imran Khawaja — will oversee the review and submit findings later in the year. It was reported earlier that there was scrutiny on the extent of expenditure on the US leg of the tournament and the organisation of the Caribbean leg. The decision to appoint a review panel was taken at the ICC annual conference in Colombo from July 19 to 22, which was attended by all 108 members. Meanwhile, USA Cricket has appointed Johnathan Atkeison as its new CEO. Atkeison's appointment follows the cricket board being put on notice of suspension by the ICC. This was due to its inability to appoint a full-time CEO and its failure to receive recognition from the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC).

# HEARTBREAK FOR RUSSELL

**Ecstasy fizzled into disappointment** for the Mercedes driver when stewards found his car 1.5 kg below the minimum weight limit at the end of the Belgium Grand Prix, disqualifying him and handing Lewis Hamilton a dramatic win.

**Dipak Ragav**  
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**A**s the curtains came down on the first half of the Formula One season following the Hungarian and Belgian GP double-header, it capped off an exciting run of races.

The year started with fears of another Red Bull domination, but now three to four teams are evenly matched and capable of fighting for wins depending on track layout and ambient weather conditions.

With little to choose between the teams, the role of the driver and how the team executes its race strategy are proving vital, which has also spiced up the racing.

The big storyline since May has been how Red Bull lost the mighty advantage it enjoyed in the first five races while rivals McLaren and Mercedes caught up to the reigning champion.

The last two races in July showed just that, as McLaren and Mercedes dominated proceedings in Hungary and Belgium, respectively.

## **The kids are alright**

McLaren was at its best at the Hungaroring, locking out the front

row. Lando Norris took pole position ahead of teammate Oscar Piastri, and the team enjoyed a majestic 1-2, its first since 2021. However, due to McLaren's conservative decision-making, it ended up feeling like a pyrrhic victory.

For two-thirds of the race, McLaren controlled the race beautifully. Piastri was in the lead ahead of his teammate Norris, whom he edged at the start. But the race came alive when McLaren decided to shoot itself in the foot with a messy strategy that caused them a lot of grief.

During the second round of stops, McLaren serviced Norris first, going against convention in which the lead driver gets priority in taking fresh rubber. The team said it was to help Norris avoid being undercut by the likes of Lewis Hamilton, though it was

**Late surge:** This was Lewis Hamilton's second victory in three races, taking him to sixth in driver standings. AFP

a distant threat. As Norris made up time on his new tyres, he pipped Piastri, who was left out on worn tyres, before stopping two laps later.

McLaren promised Piastri that Norris would give up the position, but things got complicated when the latter refused to do so immediately. Piastri led the race by two seconds before the pit stop but fell six seconds behind Norris through no fault of his own.

Following a series of messages from the pit wall that went from pleading to something slightly more stern, Norris slowed dramatically on the pit straight to let his teammate get back into the lead.

The Aussie eventually took the chequered flag, but not in the way he would have envisioned for his maiden Grand Prix win. Norris' shenanigans and the team's overcautious approach eventually overshadowed a measured drive from the 23-year-old. The win made Piastri (**below**) the first driver born in the 21st century to win a Grand Prix, and the triumph should be the first of many for the Melbourne-born.

### Elation turns to dismay

After McLaren's 1-2 in Hungary, Mercedes achieved the same feat in Belgium when the chequered flag fell at the iconic Spa-Francorchamps. However, the German marque's celebrations were short-lived.

Verstappen and Red Bull were back on pace, taking pole position. But the team's decision to take a 10-grid penalty for using a fifth engine on the defending champion's car meant he had to start 11th. Up front, Hamilton got into the lead on the third lap, passing Charles Leclerc, who inherited pole position. After the first round of stops, Hamilton led from Leclerc, followed by Piastri and George Russell in the other Mercedes.

The seven-time champion was in complete control of the race and was rarely threatened by the Ferrari. At the second stop,



Hamilton, Leclerc, and Piastri took new tyres, but Russell stayed out, trying to finish the race without stopping again.

It was a brave call, but it also made sense, considering that had he stopped, he would have, at best, finished fourth or fifth.

So the stage was set for Hamilton to breeze past his teammate on his new tyres.

Russell's battle was whether he would have enough life left in his tyres to repel an attack from Leclerc, who was overtaken by Piastri, to salvage a third-place finish.

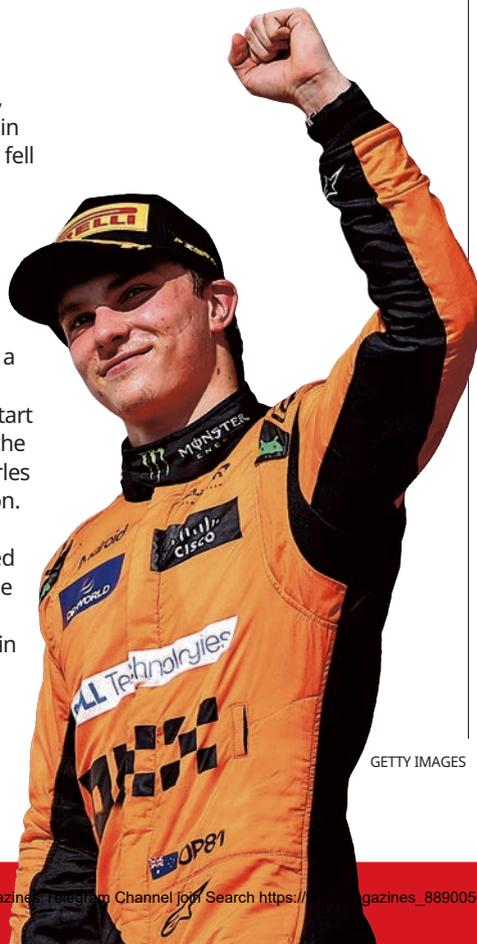
But the British driver, who started sixth, did a tremendous job of staying ahead, keeping Hamilton and Piastri at bay in the closing stages.

Russell eventually crossed the line ahead of Hamilton and Piastri, and the top three were covered by just 1.5 seconds.

It was probably Russell's finest drive, but that ecstasy quickly fizzled into disappointment when stewards found his car 1.5 kg below the minimum weight limit at the post-race scrutineering.

Russell was disqualified from the race, and Hamilton inherited the win. In a quirk of fate, the one-stopper might have contributed to Russell's disqualification, as he burned a lot of rubber by going long and could have led to his car being under the weight limit.

In Austria, Russell was gifted a victory when Norris and Verstappen collided. In Spa, the gods of fate took one away from him.



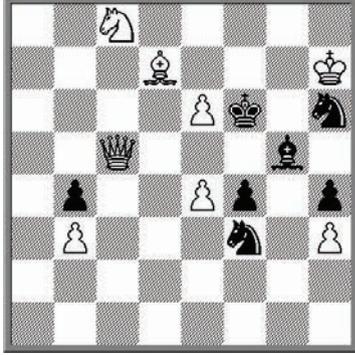
GETTY IMAGES

## Zagoruiko mutates

By C.G.S.Narayanan

In complete block problem the key is totally neutral, preserving a situation in which black's duty to move condemns him to immediate mate. There is a special form of complete block termed a **mutate** in which white can retain all the set mating possibilities nor make an effective threat. He must, therefore, abandon some of the set mates substituting changed mates. The idea of changed mates in three or more phases, following the same two (or more) black moves in each phase is known as the Zagoriyko, named after the great Russian composer. The problems in this article present a relatively rare combination of mutate and Zagoruiko.

Yuri A. Lazarev  
Comm, Leipzig Olympiad 1960

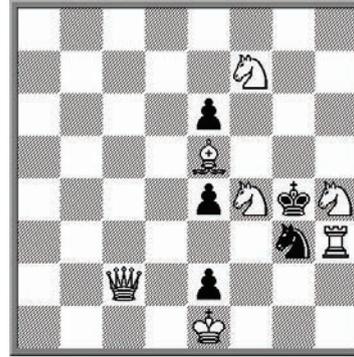


Mate in two moves

Set: 1...fN any 2.Qd4; 1..hN any 2.Qf5  
White has no safe move to maintain these set mates. Qa5? is a natural try which changes both these mates  
1...fN any 2.Qa1; 1..Ne5 2.Qd8 but 1..Nd4! refutes. **Key 1.Ne7! wating**  
1...fN any 2.e5; 1...Ne5 2.Nd5 1...hN any 2.Ng8  
The second two-mover (below) has set mates 1...e3 2.Qg6; 1...N any 2.Qxe2. A natural try 1.Qc6? with

changed mates 1 ...e3 2.Qf3; 1...N any 2.Qxe2 but 1...Nf5 refutes. The fine key grants two flights to the king  
**key 1.Nf3! waiting**

Vyacheslov Vladimirov  
Sp.Pr, Noni Teni 1972

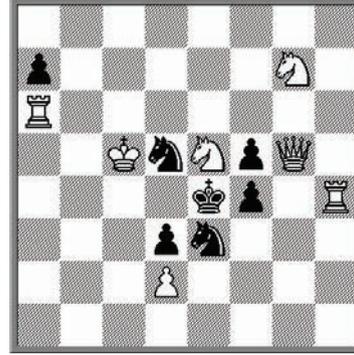


Mate in two moves

1...Kxf3 2.Qxe2 (pin mate)  
1...Kf5 2.Nh6 The thematic defences now open white lines to the flight squares, leading to another pair of changed mates 1...e3 2.Nh2; 1..N any 2.Nh6. Two self blocks on the flight squares complete the play 1...Nf5 (again a correction - this time preventing 2.Nh6) 2.Nh2; 1..exf3 2.Qg6. The set and post key play illustrate Rukhlis theme.

One more of this combination is given below for solving

Michael Caillaud  
Pr, Kingston TT, 1999



Mate in two moves

Solution to problem for solving in the article 'Duels galore': **Key 1.Qe8! zz**  
1...Rb4+ 2.Kxb4; 1...Ra4 2.Kxa4  
1...Rc3+ 2.Kxc3; 1...Rxc2 2.Kxc2  
1...Rxd4 2.Kxa3; 1..Rxc5 2.dxc5

Readers may send in their queries to  
cgsnarayanan@hotmail.com



## Muddappa registers triple victory in National Drag Racing

Bengaluru's Hemant Muddappa of Mantra Racing continued his dominance with a superb triple victory and second place in the third round of the MMSC-FMSCI Indian National Motorcycle Drag Racing Championship.

The 'King of Drag Racing' with 12 national titles, Muddappa was at his best, winning four podium places and the fastest rider tag.

The reigning champion in the unrestricted class once again put paid to the hopes of the opposition in the premier Super Sport class, adding two more victories in the 1051 to 1650cc and the 851 to 1050cc sections. He added another podium, a second place in the 551 to 850cc class, to become the most successful rider in Round 3.

He began with a podium in the 4-stroke 551 to 850cc Super Sport class astride a Ninja 6R, behind his arch-rival Mohammed Riyaz of Hyderabad. Another Hyderabad rider, Altaf Khan, came in third.

Muddappa clocked 8.110 seconds in the unrestricted class, leaving Attaulla Baig and Mujahid Pasha in second and third places, respectively. Muddappa came out triumphant in the 851 to 1050cc Super Sport final run, clocking 08.006 to leave behind Niranjan R Kumar (08.805) in second and Khaja Awais in third (08.950).

TEAM SPORTSTAR

## INDIAN PLAYGROUND

### SPORTOON



**1** Vidhatri Urs picked up a second title in just her fourth start as a professional as she grabbed the 10th leg of the Women's Pro Golf Tour at Prestige Golfshire in Bengaluru. Vidhatri, who was tied third in her first two starts, which were the seventh and eighth legs of the Tour, won the ninth leg and made it back-to-back victories with a win in a play-off in the 10th leg. Vidhatri, who started the day with a two-shot lead over the field, could afford a 2-over 74, but with Amandeep Drall playing a fine round of 2-under 70, the best card of the day, the clash headed into a play-off. Vidhatri kept her nerves as Amandeep missed the fairway and did not recover.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

**2** Andhra Pradesh girls emerged as champions by defeating Tamil Nadu 3-0 in the final of the South Zone sub-junior hockey championship in Kollam, Kerala. Prior to the final, Andhra scored a 3-0 win over Telangana, defeated Puducherry 10-0, and recorded a 3-0 win over Karnataka, before settling for a two-all draw against Kerala in the final round match. A. Varshini of Andhra Pradesh was adjudged the 'Best Goalkeeper' of the championship. **The result: Final:** Andhra Pradesh bt Tamil Nadu 3-0.

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## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Ryan Fernando



FOR MORE  
STORIES

# Quinoa biryani, anyone?

The author **reimagines the multicultural menu** from a recent wedding, infusing it with a healthy twist.

In Indian weddings, while the grandiose clothes and elaborate decorations are certainly a highlight, it is often the food that steals the show.

The sumptuous spreads and diverse flavours are a testament to India's rich culinary heritage. It was no different at the wedding of Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant, a dazzling affair of opulence and grandeur that left everyone in awe.

The food menu at the reception was nothing short of extraordinary. Renowned chefs from around the world were flown in to create a culinary spectacle. Among them were Chef Massimo Bottura, famous for his innovative Italian cuisine; Chef Nobu Matsuhisa, renowned for his exquisite Japanese dishes; and Chef Alain Ducasse, a maestro of French gastronomy. With over 2,500 dishes served, the event was a gastronomic extravaganza.

Celebrities from around the world indulged in the culinary delights, but it's essential to remember that your body is the most expensive real estate you'll ever own. Maintaining a healthy diet is crucial for them.

If I were tasked with making the menu healthier, here's how I would approach it, especially considering the Ambanis' preference for vegetarian cuisine.

### Italian Cuisine

#### Truffle Risotto (Chef Massimo Bottura)

Healthier Version: Quinoa Truffle Risotto — Replaced arborio rice with quinoa to increase protein content and reduce glycemic load.

Protein: 12g per serving; Carbs: 45g per serving

#### Classic Margherita Pizza

Healthier Version: Cauliflower Crust Margherita Pizza — Used a cauliflower crust to reduce carbs and increase fiber content.

Protein: 10g per slice; Carbs: 20g per slice

### Japanese Cuisine

#### Sushi Platter (Chef Nobu Matsuhisa)

Healthier Version: Brown Rice and Vegetable Sushi — Substituted white rice with brown rice and added more vegetables for fiber and vitamins.

Protein: 8g per roll; Carbs: 30g per roll

### Tempura

Healthier Version: Baked Vegetable Tempura — Baked instead of deep-fried to reduce fat content.

Protein: 4g per serving; Carbs: 25g per serving

### French Cuisine

#### Coq au Vin (Chef Alain Ducasse)

Healthier Version: Mushroom and Lentil Coq au Vin — Replaced chicken with lentils and mushrooms to create a vegetarian version rich in protein and fiber.

Protein: 15g per serving; Carbs: 40g per serving

### Crème Brûlée

Healthier Version: Greek Yogurt Brûlée — Used Greek yogurt instead of heavy cream to reduce fat and increase protein.

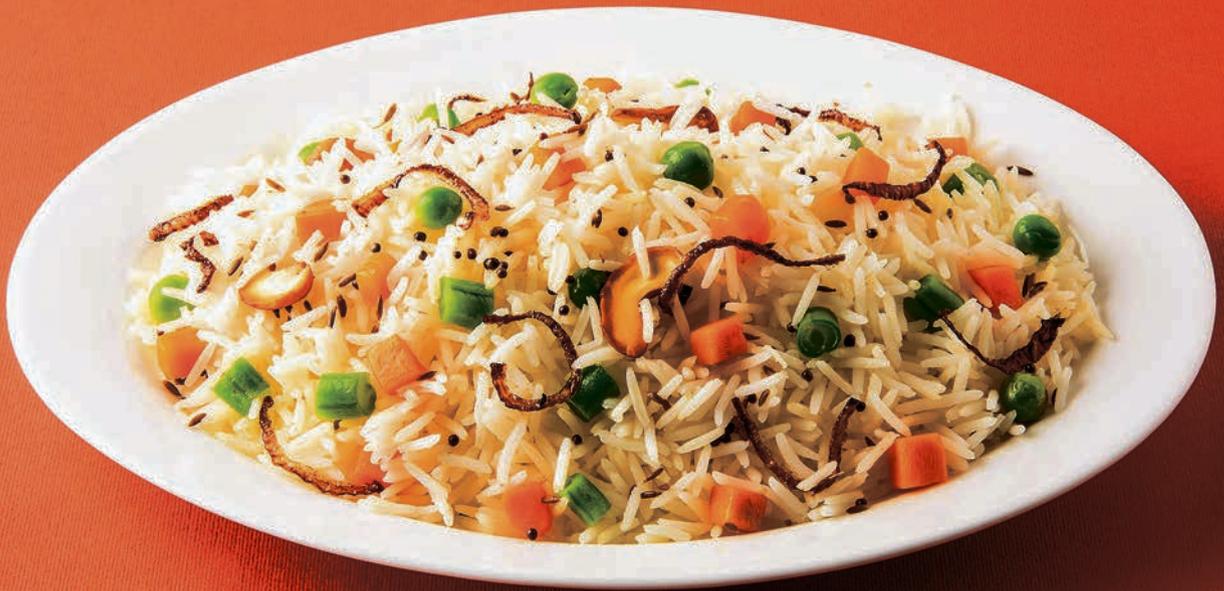
Protein: 10g per serving; Carbs: 20g per serving

### Middle Eastern Cuisine

#### Falafel

Healthier Version: Baked Falafel — Baked instead of deep-fried to reduce fat content.

Protein: 6g per serving; Carbs: 18g per serving



### Shawarma

Healthier Version: Chickpea Shawarma — Used chickpeas instead of meat for a plant-based protein source.

Protein: 12g per serving; Carbs: 35g per serving

### Indian Cuisine

#### Paneer Butter Masala

Healthier Version: Tofu Butter Masala — Substituted paneer with tofu for a lower fat and higher protein content.

Protein: 20g per serving; Carbs: 15g per serving

#### Biryani

Healthier Version: Quinoa Vegetable Biryani — Used quinoa instead of rice to increase protein and fiber content.

Protein: 14g per serving; Carbs: 40g per serving

#### Banarasi Chaat

Healthier Version: Baked Sweet Potato Chaat — Replaced fried potatoes with baked sweet potatoes to reduce fat and increase vitamin A content.

Protein: 4g per serving; Carbs: 30g per serving

#### Banarasi Paan

Healthier Version: Herbal Banarasi Paan — Used natural sweeteners and herbs to make it a healthier, refreshing digestive treat.

Protein: 1g per serving; Carbs: 10g per serving

#### Rajasthani Dal Baati Churma

Healthier Version: Multigrain Baati with Steamed Churma — Used multigrain flour for baati and steamed the churma to reduce ghee content.

Protein: 12g per serving; Carbs: 35g per serving

#### Punjabi Amritsari Kulcha

Healthier Version: Whole Wheat Amritsari Kulcha — Used whole wheat flour instead of refined flour to increase fiber content.

Protein: 8g per serving; Carbs: 45g per serving

#### South Indian Dosa and Idli

Healthier Version: Millet Dosa and Idli — Used millets instead of rice to increase protein and fiber content.

Protein: 6g per dosa/idli; Carbs: 20g per dosa/idli

**Health is wealth:** It is essential to remember that your body is the most expensive real estate you'll ever own. Maintaining a healthy diet is crucial.

GETTY IMAGES/REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE

### Bengali Sandesh

Healthier Version: Stevia-Sweetened Sandesh — Used stevia instead of sugar to reduce calorie content.

Protein: 5g per piece; Carbs: 10g per piece

Transforming the luxurious menu at the wedding into a healthier feast would not only cater to the dietary preferences of the family but also ensure that the health-conscious celebrities can indulge without compromising their fitness goals. By substituting high-calorie ingredients with nutrient-dense alternatives and incorporating more plant-based proteins, we can create a menu that is both delectable and nourishing.

This balanced approach ensures that the celebration of love and unity is complemented by a commitment to health and wellness.

# Quadrennial extravaganza

The buildup, the spending, the **promise** of gaiety and moral purpose, the scandals and finally, the confirmation that the latest is the greatest — it's Olympics time.

Suresh Menon

Once every four years, we say old things in new ways and new things in old ways. After all, the Olympics don't change that much. There is the buildup, the spending, the promise of gaiety and moral purpose, the scandals and finally, the confirmation that the latest is the greatest.

**There are things that elicit the response, What?**

These are sports, and in the Olympic Games too?

Take breaking, for instance. Known as breakdancing and a hit at parties in the 80s (the decade, not the age), the surprise is that athletes have even heard of it.

Like most men above a certain age, I fantasise about running in the Olympics, rowing, or fencing. Not swimming since I have a thing about taking off my shirt in public. Fencing is ideal — it leaves me fully clothed, and I can outsource the job since the face is covered too.

I watch the Olympics and ask myself: Which event would I be good at? I could jump up and down the trampoline, I think, but equally, I might land in a judge's lap — they don't give you points for missing the trampoline altogether.

I can see myself twisting any number of times in the air, straight up, upside down, or sideways, but then I might end up in the handbag of the lady sitting in the sixth row.

No marathon swimming for me, thank you. Not even on TV, where it never ends. There's no fun watching



**Added attraction:** Breaking, popularly known as break dance, is included in Paris 2024. AP

anonymous people go on and on. As Lennon nearly sang, life is what happens to you when you're busy watching marathon swimming. What of BMX racing? I had to google it. Much like riding two-wheelers on some Indian roads, and where's the fun in that?

The best part of the Games is the telecast. You watch random people do random things in random order before the ads take over. The U.S. wins basketball, the Cubans top in boxing and Eastern

Europeans close out wrestling.

**Gymnastics is fun, as are the athletics events, but dressage? Even horses watching TV look confused.**

The modern pentathlon's five events — walking the dog, putting out the garbage, fixing the fence, rearranging your books, and trying to get a plumber — have, I must admit, a unique charm.

The Olympics pump you with a false sense of self, although friends tell me the reverse is also true. The perfection in some of the attempts depresses them to no end. What is the point of living, they ask, if they can't do the 400 metres in under 44 seconds?

After a period of intense watching, you are confronted with the closing ceremony. Just like the opening ceremony, only worse. For some time, you breakdance your way into the dining room, jump over the gate, or punch a wall like you saw men and women do on television.

The fantasies continue for a while. And are then kept in storage for four years more when even thinking about running causes a hamstring injury.

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*The Hindu Sportstar's 'Hockey and India - A Golden Legacy'* celebrates Indian hockey as it traces the roots of the game and chronicles India's eight gold medals at the Olympics and the epoch-making triumph in the 1975 World Cup apart from an overall view of both competitions. The Legends section is packed with quite a few superstars and, of course, the superstar of superstars - Dhyan Chand. Relive India's memorable journey with a copy of the Golden Legacy.



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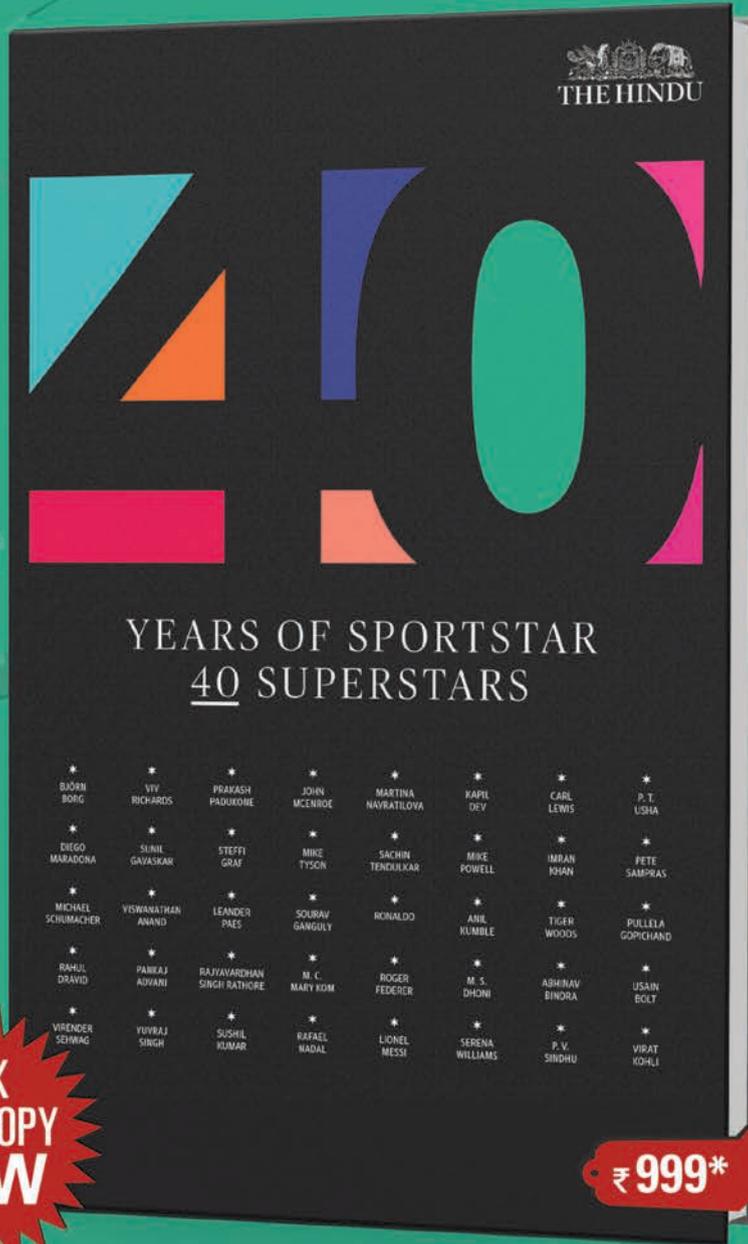


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Roger Federer is poetry in motion, he makes it look so simple,  
 writes *Sachin Tendulkar*

Sachin Tendulkar and other Super Writers pay tribute to 40 Superstars



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