

Ranji Trophy semifinals: Dhoni to support J'khand in Nagpur

NEW DELHI, DEC 30 -- Mahendra Singh Dhoni, who is the unofficial mentor to the Jharkhand cricket team, is set to watch his state side take on Gujarat in its first ever Ranji Trophy semifinal beginning in Nagpur on Sunday.

Dhoni doesn't play the longer version of the game ever since retiring from Tests but often practices with the Jharkhand players during the domestic First-Class season. "He should be there in Nagpur in all probability. He wants to be there. Interactions with him has always been helpful for the boys," a source close to the team management told PTI. But with the Indian team for the home ODI and T20 series against England expected to be picked in the first week of January, Dhoni might not be in Nagpur for the entire duration of the game.

Second consecutive evening Davis Cup tie for India

NEW DELHI, DEC 30 -- Deeping in mind the fan support, India will have its second consecutive Davis Cup tie in the evening when the hosts challenge New Zealand in the Asia Oceania Group I encounter, starting February 3 in Pune. The singles matches on Friday will start at 3pm while the doubles rubber is scheduled for 6pm start. The reverse singles on Sunday will again start from 3pm. During the World Group Play-off tie against Spain in September, the singles had started at 5pm and the doubles at 7pm at DLTA. The players were consulted on the timing even as captain Anand Amrithaj was also consulted since the AITA was not sure at that time whether he will continue in the post or not. "(Tournament Director) Sumit Iyer made this proposal of having matches in the evening so that more fans can come to the stadium and support the Indian team. The players were also asked by selection committee chairman P. Misra. We also asked the IIT. The temperature is not going to make much of a difference, and we have a green signal to it," AITA Secretary General Hiromony Chatterjee told PTI. (PTI)



Keshav Maharaj exults after grabbing the last wicket of the Test match, South Africa v Sri Lanka.

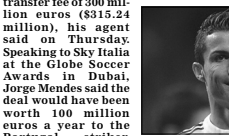
1st Test: SA beat Sri Lanka by 206 runs to take 1-0 lead

PORTELIZABETH, DEC 30 -- Kyle Abbott struck twice in the first seven overs to set up a 206-run win for South Africa on the fifth day of the first Test against Sri Lanka at St George's Park on Friday. It took South Africa just 70 minutes and 13.3 overs to claim the remaining five Sri Lankan wickets and take a 1-0 lead in the three-match series. Sri Lanka were bowled out for 281. They added 41 runs on Friday. Abbott broke through with the 16th ball of the final morning when Sri Lankan captain Angelo Mathews went across his stumps, trying to work the ball to leg, and was hit before wicket. Mathews was out for 59, made off 120 balls with seven fours. He had added only one run to his score on Friday. It left Dhananjaya de Silva as the last recognised batsman but he only lasted for another two overs before he too was leg before to Abbott. He made 22. Rangana Herath, who was struck on the fingers of his left, bowling hand by the first ball he received from Abbott, made three before he was caught and bowled by Vernon Philander, who dived to his left to hold the ball which looped up from a leading edge. Suranga Lakmal made a quick 19 not out but Dushantha Chameera was caught behind off Kagiso Rabada and last man Nuwan Pradeep was bowled by left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj.

Cristiano Ronaldo rejects whooping 300 million Euros move from Chinese Super League club

MADRID, DEC 30 -- World Player of the Year Cristiano Ronaldo has turned down the chance to leave Real Madrid for an unnamed Chinese club for a transfer fee of 300 million euros (\$315.24 million), his agent said on Thursday. Speaking to Sky Italia at the Globe Soccer Awards in Dubai, Jorge Mendes said the deal would have been worth 100 million euros a year to the Portugal striker. "From China they've offered 300 million euros to Real Madrid and more than 100 million per year to the player," Mendes was quoted as saying. "But money is not everything. Real Madrid is his life. Cristiano is happy at Real Madrid and it

is impossible to go to China. "The Chinese market is a new market. They can buy a lot of players but then again it is impossible to go for Ronaldo." News of the offer came on the same day Argentine striker Carlos Tevez joined the Chinese Super League side Shanghai Shenhua from Boca Juniors. No financial details were disclosed but media reports said Shenhua had paid 84 million euros for former Manchester City and Manchester United forward Tevez. Last week Brazil midfielder Oscar joined local rivals Shanghai SIPG from Chelsea for a fee that media reports put at 60 million euros.



Olympians' petition in SC for Lodha reforms in all sports

MUMBAI, DEC 30 -- A group of retired sports persons, including Olympians and Test cricketers, have filed a petition in the Supreme Court to incorporate the sweeping recommendations of the apex court-appointed Justice Lodha Committee for cricket into all other sports in the country. The petition, in form of PIL, has been filed in the wake of the Supreme Court passing its final order, after it accepted its specially appointed Justice Lodha Committee's recommendations for sweeping reforms in the BCCI, said a media release issued on the petitioners' behalf. "We, 26 former Olympians, Padma Shri Arjuna Awardees, Dronacharya Awardees, Test Cricketers along with some administrators from sports disciplines in Hockey, Football, Cricket, Badminton, Volleyball, Badminton, Kabaddi, Swimming and Para Olympics have filed this petition in the Supreme Court for the betterment of sports in the country," the petitioners said in the petition. The petitioners are Ashok Kumar Dhyani, M K Kaushik, Jwala Gutta, Ashwini Nachappa, Edward Sequeira, G E Sridharan, Reeth

Abraham, Gurbax Singh Grewal, Balbir Singh, Fortunato Franco, S S Narayan, Joaquin Carvalho, Varun Thapsay, Bhagyasree Thapsay, Maya Meher, Nisha Millet, Aloysius Edwards, Madhu Yadav, Kirati Azad, Bishen Singh Bedi, Sameer Bahadur, FPS Gill, Ashok Mathur and Virender Kumar. "It may be observed that some of the recommendations made by the Justice Lodha Committee are already found in the National Sports Code. However, some of the salient and salutary recommendation need to be adopted by the Government of India in the National Sports Code to ensure the smooth, transparent manner which is most beneficial for the development of the sport," they said in the release.

It is submitted that like in the game of cricket several oligarchies exist in other sports' administration which is the great detriment of the respective sports. It may also be noted that there is an urgent need to amend and rework the National Sports Code so as to ensure that sports administration is not treated as a self-perpetuating business but instead must be for

the betterment of the sports concerned. "Since all the sports associations other than the BCCI fall within the remit of Central Government, the Sports Ministry of Central Government can pass an order seeking the implementation of some of the recommendations of the Justice Lodha Committee in so far as other sports bodies are concerned," they added. "The petition is seeking a positive direction from the Hon'ble Court for the incorporation of some of the recommendations in other sports bodies in order to promote transparency in the game as well as to ensure the betterment of the sport and also in the interest of the players of the sports," said the release.

The effort is to seek an all encompassing Order from the Supreme Court in the nature of a mandamus to the Central Government to amend the National Sports Code, in order to incorporate some of the salutary recommendations made by the Justice Lodha Committee for other sports bodies," the release added. The petition was filed before the apex court was closed for the Christmas break, one of the petitioners told PTI. (PTI)

Pakistan ignores Kamran, Hafeez for ODIs against Australia

KARACHI, DEC 30 -- Pakistan on Friday ignored experienced cricketers Kamran Akmal and Mohammad Hafeez for the forthcoming ODI series in Australia while also axing leg-spinner Yasir Shah for the five-match rubber, starting next month. The national selectors ignored Kamran despite the wicket-keeping batsman having a sizzling season with the bat in which he has scored over seven centuries. Similarly, Hafeez was also ignored although he has resumed bowling in domestic cricket after being cleared by the ICC last month. Reliable sources close to the selectors told PTI that while the national selection committee headed by Inzamam-ul-Haq wanted to include Kamran as a specialist batsman and Hafeez as an ODI squad, ODI captain Azhar Ali and head coach Mickey Arthur had strongly resisted the inclusion of the two batsmen. In a meeting of debate on the inclusion of Kamran who last played an ODI for Pakistan in 2014, Arthur told Inzamam they would continue with Mohammad Rizwan as the reserve keeper batsman in the squad, a source said.

He said after holding several discussions with Arthur, Inzamam gave away. "But he (Inzamam) has made it clear to them that it is not their responsibility to perform in the ODI series and the selectors will not take any blame if the results are not good," the source added. Hafeez, 35, has also been out of favour with the selectors since returning from England midway through the ODI series in August over a fitness issue. But since then he has attained full fitness and started scoring runs in domestic cricket while also resumed bowling after clearing the ICC bowling assessment test in England last month. Hafeez completed a 12-month ban from bowling in July. The ODI team has been selected keeping in mind the conditions in Australia and the performances of players in the recent ODI series against West Indies and in domestic cricket on the final day at Melbourne Cricket Ground. Misbah's tactics and fielding strategy were questioned during the Boxing Day Test and he scored just 11 and a duck in the two days of the series. The 42-year-old veteran of 71 Tests from 2001 said he would decide in the coming days whether to call time on his career and indicated he was no guarantee to play the third Test, starting in Sydney on Tuesday.

Pakistan ODI squad: Azhar Ali (Captain), Sarfaraz Ahmed (vice-captain), Shajeeel Khan, Babar Azam, Shoaib Akhtar, Asad Shafiq, Umar Akmal, Muhammad Rizwan, Imad Wasim, Muhammad Nawaz, Muhammad Amir, Wahab Riaz, Hassan Ali, Rahat Ali and Muhammad Irfan. (PTI)

Misbah-ul-Haq considers retirement ahead of final Sydney Test

MELBOURNE, DEC 30 -- Pakistan captain Misbah-ul-Haq might retire soon. The senior batsman said he was mulling retirement after his team's shocking loss to Australia in the second Test in Melbourne. Pakistan are 0-2 down and have already lost the three-game series. Pakistan, who appeared safe from defeat after amassing 443 for nine declared in their first innings, crashed to an innings and 18-run defeat to the Australians on the final day at Melbourne Cricket Ground. Misbah's tactics and fielding strategy were questioned during the Boxing Day Test and he scored just 11 and a duck in the two days of the series. The 42-year-old veteran of 71 Tests from 2001 said he would decide in the coming days whether to call time on his career and indicated he was no guarantee to play the third Test, starting in Sydney on Tuesday.



India basks in 'Wo-mania', legend of Kohli grows in 2016

NEW DELHI, DEC 30 -- An Olympic campaign saved by the fortitude of three women, a cricket team that rediscovered itself under a bold and zealous Virat Kohli - Indian sports in 2016 were a dramatic mix of highs and lows where athletes mostly raised the bar but administrators found new ways to embark on the year. As is the case once every four years, Olympic sports found themselves in the middle of inescapable spotlight when India's biggest sporting contingent made its way to Rio de Janeiro for the 31st edition of the 'greatest show on earth'. A record number of 117 athletes (83 men and 54 women) landed in the Brazilian carnival city with the rather unrealistic expectations of going better on the half a dozen medals secured in London, 2012. The Sports Ministry and the Sports Authority of India (SAI) had contributed to the unreasonable hype with their outrageous predictions of at least 12 medals coming from Rio, a claim hardly questioned before the Games.

But what their heroes could not do was the fact that in all these years, government, SAI and the Indian Olympic Association have only been able to make it easy for athletes to claim money once they have made a mark. So, the harsh reality of Indian sports remained the absence of any systematic support for athletes in their formative years, as seen in Rio, cannot be compensated by doling out crores barely a year before the Olympics. On the cricket field though 2016 well and truly belonged to India, more specifically to Kohli and his 'weapon of choice' Ravichandran Ashwin. An 18-match unbeaten streak in Tests (starting from Sri Lanka 2015) - the best-ever by an Indian team - was a testimony to how well Kohli fitted into the leadership role in white flannels. When he took over captaincy from the cool as cucumber Mahendra Singh Dhoni in the Test format, there were apprehensions that the ever-emotional Kohli might even end up having a meltdown due to the twin pressures of leadership and being India's top batsman. So far, he has proved the naysayers wrong with the kind of elegance he generally reserves for his strokes. Kohli has remained India's best batsman and has proved to be a dynamic leader too, transforming a young team into confident world beaters at least on home turf. In the limited-overs format, where Dhoni is still in charge, India won the Asia Cup T20 before finishing semifinals in the World T20. However, the administrative mess that is common to most Indian sports caught up in a big way with cricket as well. With the Supreme Court bent on imposing governance reforms in the BCCI through the Lodha Committee, the once all-

powerful Board has been left scurrying for cover. Severely crippled on the decision-making front, the BCCI is currently staring at a tense future and a January 3 ruling by the apex court is expected to put an end to its anxiety. However, India held the high post internationally with Shashank Manohar taking over as ICC Chairman. While the BCCI fought an existential battle in the face of Supreme Court's strict view on its governance structure, there seemed no checks and balances for officialdom running the country's Olympic sports. At the biggest stage of them all - the Olympics - no less than the Minister, Vijay Goel, embarrassed the nation by defying protocol at venues, resulting in a warning from the Local Organising Committee which threatened to even cancel his accreditation. Far from being perturbed by the very public snub, the minister blamed it on "misunderstanding". The IOA, meanwhile, spent little or perhaps no time in analysing the factors that led to the disappointing Rio campaign. But it managed to find the technical grounds on which scam-tainted former Presidents Suresh Kalmadi and Abhay Singh Chautala could be offered Life Presidency. Kalmadi eventually backed out after massive outcry. Speaking of individual sports, it was brilliant year for Indian golf, which found its first female star in Aditi Ashok. The 19-year-old commanded attention with her Olympic debut in Rio, where she led the pack at one stage, and then went on to become the first Indian to clinch a title on the Ladies European Tour. The LET responded by naming her 'Rookie of the Year', a much-deserved honour for the exuberant youngster. In fact, it was a year in which Indian

sports discovered some new stars, and interestingly, they happened to be women. Sindhu, Sakshi, Aditi and Dipa became symbols of women's empowerment, with their achievements expected to put an end to the disappointments galore for some of their counterparts in other sports, a notable one being archer Deepika Kumari. The Indian archer had at best been an unrealised potential as far as success in the Olympics is concerned. Not just her, the archers in general were in a lull. When they were in Rio, where they had been sent a month prior to the Olympics to acclimatise. Once again, the wind blew away their chances and they returned empty-handed despite massive pre-game hype. No questions have been asked, neither have any answers come along on just why the archers have been underperforming at the Olympics. The usually reliable shooters also disappointed the country with also setting up a Bindra-led committee to analyse the reasons for it. The scathing report could well have held true, in parts, for other sports as well for two just fixed accounts also setting up a Bindra-led committee to analyse the reasons for it. The scathing report could well have held true, in parts, for other sports as well for two just fixed accounts also setting up a Bindra-led committee to analyse the reasons for it.



Serena Williams announces engagement with Reddit co-founder Alexis Ohanian in poetic fashion

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, DEC 30 -- Tennis superstar Serena Williams announced Thursday she is engaged to Reddit co-founder Alexis Ohanian, breaking the news in a poem on the verified Reddit account. Williams, 35, and Ohanian, 33, did not reveal a wedding date in the postings, listed under the Reddit tag 'isaidyes'. "I came home from a trip to Rome. I had a bag packed for me. And a carriage awaited. Destination: Rome. To escort me to my very own 'charming' Back to where our stars first collided. And now it was full circle. At the same table we first met by chance. This time he made it not by chance but by choice. Down on one knee He said 4 words

and r/isaidyes." Williams posted on her account. A reply from his verified account said: "And you made me the happiest man on the planet." The WTA Tour, which Williams has dominated for much of her career, posted a photo of Williams and Ohanian on Twitter with a message of congratulations. Williams won this year's Wimbledon crown, the 71st singles title of her career, to match Steffi Graf with 22 Grand Slam titles. She later completed 186 consecutive weeks as world number one, matching Graf for the longest run at the top in rankings history, but she was dethroned from the spot by Angelique Kerber in September.

After The Great Khali, Olympian Sushil Kumar likely to join WWE

NEW DELHI, DEC 30 -- Indian wrestling legend Sushil Kumar appears to be taking up the next challenge of his career after being offered a contract by the WWE. The former Olympic medalist has been settled in Haryana. But the major issue, in this case, is Sushil's willingness to continue an amateur wrestling career, a source close to the Sportskeeda. "Hence, November will be a good time for him to give this entire format a shot, post the regular wrestling season. Failing to qualify for Rio, and the

entire Narsingh scandal has increased his hunger to win a Grand Slam Open. That might be the reason why he didn't respond to the offer as quickly. "Right now we have contracts for a certain amount, but Sushil internally is unsure whether he wants to take a plunge as of now." The date for Sushil's WWE debut could change depending on the performance of the two-time Olympic medalist in his amateur wrestling career. Vince McMahon's company has been looking to tap into Indian talent after the success of The Great Khali. However, no Indian wrestler as been able to make a mark in WWE since his exit.

