

India colts face Pakistan in U-19 WC semis



Indian Under 19 coach Rahul Dravid with captain Prithvi Shaw.

CHRISTCHURCH, JAN 29 -- After bagging lucrative deals at the IPL auction, members of the unbeaten Indian team will be eager to deliver when they face arch-rivals Pakistan in the second semifinal of the ICC U-19 World Cup here on Tuesday. Three-time champions India have played like a thorough professional outfit, winning all four matches in emphatic fashion including the quarterfinal against Bangladesh. For two-time winners Pakistan, it has not been smooth sailing all the way. They lost their tournament opener to Afghanistan before winning three in a row. However, their last two results were narrow three wickets wins against Sri Lanka and South Africa. Pakistan's bowling, led by left-arm pace sensation Shaheen Afridi, has done the job for the team but batting has been far from convincing. Ali Zaryab Asif did bulk of the scoring in the middle-order, rescuing the side from tight situations twice. He hit 59 against Sri Lanka and followed it up with a 74 against South Africa in the quarterfinal. It's time that others chip in and Indian pacers Kamesh Nagarkoti and Shivam Mavi would look to exploit that weakness in the opposition camp. The young Indian guns would also be high on confidence, having secured potentially life-changing deals at the IPL auction

with their performances in the World Cup. KKR paid Rs 3.2 crore and Rs 3 crore for left-arm pacer Nagarkoti and Mavi respectively while left-arm spinners Anukul Roy and Abhishek Sharma were lapped up by Mumbai Indians and Delhi Daredevils for Rs 20 lakh and Rs 55 lakh respectively. Batting mainstays, captain Prithvi Shaw and Shubman Gill, too impressed the IPL teams with their showing in New Zealand. Gill, who hit a match-winning 86 in the quarterfinals and is team's leading scorer with 239 runs, went to KKR for Rs 1.8 crore while Shaw was bought for Rs 1.2 crore to Mumbai Indians. Shaw's opening partner Manojt Kalra too managed a Rs 20 lakh deal with Delhi Daredevils. However, all these players will have put the post auction euphoria behind and focus on the job at hand. As rightly put by coach Rahul

Dravid, "auction will come every year but not the opportunity to play in a World Cup". And place in a World Cup final is at stake. The highly-rated batsmen will have to be wary of Afridi, who has taken 11 wickets in four games at 10.21 including a six-wicket haul against Ireland. Pakistan will be more familiar with the conditions, having played their quarterfinal at the Hagley Oval here. India had played their last game against Bangladesh in Queenstown. After the quarterfinal, the explosive Gill had said that the team was looking forward to play Pakistan. "We remembered our loss in the Asia Cup and so were determined to win the match (against Bangladesh). As for the Pakistan game, we are looking forward to the match since we did not play them in the Asia Cup. We're sure it will be a good match," he said.

SQUADS

India: Prithvi Shaw (C), Shubman Gill, Aryan Juyal, Abhishek Sharma, Arshdeep Singh, Harvik Desai, Manojt Kalra, Kamesh Nagarkoti, Pankaj Yadav, Rryan Parag, Ishan Porel, Himanshu Rana, Anukul Roy, Shivam Mavi, Shiva Singh.
Pakistan: Hasan Khan (C), Rohail Nazir, Mohammad Ali Khan, Ali Zaryab, Amdad Alam, Arshad Iqbal, Imran Shah, Mohammad Taha, Muhammad Mohsin Khan, Muhammad Musa, Muhammad Zaid, Munir Riaz, Saad Khan, Shaheen Afridi, Suleman Shaqafi. (PTI)

GAME NOTES

Paes back in top-50 after Newport Beach title win

NEW DELHI, JAN 29 -- Veteran star Leander Paes today regained his place in the top-50, courtesy Challenger title win at the Newport Beach event, as he jumped 14 places to 47 in the latest rankings, issued today. Paes had partnered American James Cerretani for the Newport Beach tournament, which fetched him 125 ranking points. This week he is playing at the USD 125,000 Dallas event, for which he has partnered Briton Joe Salisbury. Rohan Bopanna is India's top-ranked doubles player at number 20 after losing a place and is followed by left-hander Divij Sharan, who has gained three places to get to a career-best 45. In the singles, Yuki Bhambhani qualified for main draw of the just-concluded Australian Open and lost in first round, gained eight places to be ranked 118. Bhambhani is followed by Ramkumar Ramanathan (140 -1), Sumit Nagal (218 -1), Prajesh Gunneswaran (244 +3) and Sriram Balaji (381 +3). (PTI)

Bangladesh recall Abdur Razzak for first Test against Lanka

DHAKA, JAN 29 -- Bangladesh have included veteran spinner Abdur Razzak in place of injured Shakib Al Hasan for the first Test against Sri Lanka, a team of officials said on Monday. Shakib was ruled out of the Test starting Wednesday in Chittagong after injuring a little finger during the tri-series final against the islanders last weekend. The 35-year-old Razzak, who bowls left-arm spin, was recalled to the side four years after he played his last Test against the West Indies in 2014. "It is not easy to find a replacement for Shakib. We need someone experienced to replace him. Sunzamul has yet to play any Test, so we recalled Razzak," said chief selector Minhajul Abedin. "Now we will see his fitness in training before we finally include him in the playing team," he said.

ICC U-19 World Cup: Australia enter final, await winner of India vs Pakistan semifinal

CHRISTCHURCH, JAN 29 -- Australia sauntered into the ICC U-19 World Cup final by beating Afghanistan's dream run with a six-wicket victory, built around Jack Edwards' half-century after a splendid bowling show. The Aussies will now take on the winner of Tuesday's semifinal between arch-rivals India and Pakistan. Electing to bat, Afghanistan put on board a modest 161, which was never going to be in the over for the three-time champions. It was wicket-keeper batsman Ikram Ali Khil, who resisted the Australian attack with a brave 80 off 119 balls, helping his side put on board something to fight for. Australia had no trouble in knocking out the remaining five wicket opener Jack Edwards producing a solid 72-run knock at the top. They won by 75 balls to spare. Off-spinner

Mujeeb Zadran, picked up by IPL franchise Kings XI Punjab for the next edition, had provided an early breakthrough by dismissing opener Max Bryant (4) but Australia had more than able line-up to handle Afghanistan challenge. Captain Jason Singha (26) was caught and bowled by leg-spinner Qais Ahmed after a good start and Jonathan Merlo (17) also got out cheaply after getting his eye in but by that time they needed less than 80 runs. Ahmad denied Edwards a century by cleaning him up and it was the pair of Pawan Uppal (32) and Nathan McSweeney (22) that took the side to finish line. They added 53 runs in their unbeaten fifth wicket partnership. Earlier, Afghanistan struggled to create steady partnership. Ali Khil held the one end tight

with his fighting 80-run knock, which came off 119 balls and eight boundaries, but did not get support from the other end. Seven Afghan batsmen could not manage a double-digit score as pacer Jonathan Merlo ran through the middle order. After Khil, the biggest contribution came from opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz, who scored 20 off 37 balls. Merlo accounted for four batsmen and conceded just 24 runs in his 10-over quota while his pace colleague Zak Evans scalped two batsmen for 26 runs.

Brief Scores:
Afghanistan: 181 all out in 49 overs (IA Khil 80, R Gurbaz 29; J Merlo 4/24, Z Evans 2/26)
Australia: 182 for 4 in 37.3 overs. (J Edwards 72, P Uppal 32 not out, Q Ahmad 2/35)



Nathan McSweeney drives the ball as Ikram Ali Khil looks on

Evergreen Federer planning Melbourne return in 2019

MELBOURNE, JAN 29 -- Australian Open champion Roger Federer is set to continue defying Father Time after announcing he will return to defend his title next year, the Swiss said on Monday.

The 36-year-old notched up his 20th Grand Slam title and sixth at Melbourne Park on Sunday with a 6-2, 6-7(5), 6-3, 3-6, 6-1 victory over Croatia's Marin Cilic, but initially forgot to say whether or not he planned to defend the title. "Yeah, I'd love to come back. I know I forgot to say that after the match," a heavy-eyed Federer told reporters on Monday. "But I hope I come back again next year." Federer equaled the record of six Australian Open men's titles, held by Novak Djokovic and Roy Emerson, an emulated Ken Rosewall's feat of claiming three Grand Slam titles after the age of 35. His longevity has in part been put down to the careful management of his playing schedule. Despite being fully fit, he skipped the entire claycourt season last year to concentrate on Wimbledon, a decision that paid off with his eighth title on the southwest London grass courts.

He reiterated on Monday that he would continue to manage his schedule tightly and despite being within sight of the world's top ranking, a decision on whether or not his next tournament would be in



Roger Federer of Switzerland walks with the men's singles trophy as he leaves while surrounded by security guards after the winner's photo shoot at the government house in Melbourne, Australia.—REUTERS

Dubai in late February had yet to be made. "We were in talks with them (Dubai organizers) but I came out injured or not." So now we know what the situation is. "I also have to decide on the claycourt season so all these things are kind of interlinked. "But it's possible I'll play something, but it's also possible that maybe I just don't play anything (for a while). Federer said he would make the decision about his schedule after spending some time with family at home in Switzerland, where he hoped the fact he had won the Australian Open title again would finally sink in. "This year seems more surreal. I can't believe I was able to defend my title after all these years, that I could do it again," he said. "To reach number 20, number six here, it's just a lot trying to take it in. Last year was a lot more straightforward, just disbelief that I won and there I was waking up with the trophy. "But, I don't know, this year feels more surreal. I can't believe that I was able to defend my title, but I could do it again. "It's super special, one of the great moments in my career, and maybe this one is going to take longer to sink in."

Roger on Rafael Nadal's heels in rankings

PARIS, JAN 29 -- Roger Federer's victory in the Australian Open has taken him to within 155 points of world number one Rafael Nadal in the ATP rankings released on Monday. Nadal, who was knocked out in the quarterfinals in Melbourne, has 9,760 points with Federer on 9,605. Marin Cilic, who took Federer to five sets in the final, moves up three places to a career-high ranking of third. Chang Hyeon is back on top for his surprise run to the semi-finals with a 29-place leap to 29th in the world.

RANKINGS ON JANUARY 29

| Rank | Player (Country) | Points |
|------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| 1. | Rafael Nadal (ESP) | 9,760 points |
| 2. | Roger Federer (SUI) | 9,605 |
| 3. | Marin Cilic (CRO) | 4,960 (+3) |
| 4. | Grigor Dimitrov (BUL) | 4,630 (-1) |
| 5. | Alexander Zverev (GER) | 4,610 (-1) |
| 6. | Dominic Thiem (AUT) | 4,060 (-1) |
| 7. | David Goffin (BEL) | 3,460 |
| 8. | Jack Sock (USA) | 2,880 |
| 9. | Juan Martin Del Potro (ARG) | 2,815 (+1) |
| 10. | Pablo Carreno Busta (ESP) | 2,705 (+1) |
| 11. | Kevin Anderson (RSA) | 2,620 (+1) |
| 12. | Sam Querrey (USA) | 2,490 (+1) |
| 13. | Novak Djokovic (SRB) | 2,470 (+1) |
| 14. | Nick Kyrgios (AUS) | 2,395 (+3) |
| 15. | Stan Wawrinka (SUI) | 2,385 (-7) |
| 16. | Tomas Berdych (CZE) | 2,320 (+4) |
| 17. | Lucas Pouille (FRA) | 2,235 (+1) |
| 18. | John Isner (USA) | 2,230 (-2) |
| 19. | Jo-Wilfried Tsonga (FRA) | 2,050 (-4) |
| 20. | Andy Murray (GBR) | 1,960 (-1) |
| 26. | Kyle Edmund (GBR) | 1,667 (+23) |
| 29. | Chung Hyeon (KOR) | 1,472 (+29) |

I-League: Minerva Punjab aim to consolidate lead against East Bengal

KOLKATA, JAN 29 -- Surprise league leaders Minerva Punjab FC will look to continue their dream run and consolidate their position at the top of the table when they take on third-placed city giants East Bengal in an I-League encounter at the Barasat Stadium here on Tuesday.

Minerva, four points clear of second-placed Neroca FC with 25 points from 10 matches, are unbeaten in their last four matches. They beat Neroca in a

top-of-the-table clash in their previous game, with in-form Bhutaneshe striker Chencho Gyeltshen scoring the winner. Since losing to Aizawl on the road last year in December, Minerva have won away matches against Gokulam Kerala FC, Mohun Bagan, Shillong Lajong and Neroca, all away spurting talks of yet another improbable league triumph after Aizawl won it last season. Chencho, dubbed as the Bhutaneshe Lionel Messi,

has been in inspiring form since the start of the campaign, scoring five goals in ten matches so far. Off the field, Minerva have had their distractions with their owner Ranjit Bajaj complaining of several of their players having been approached via social media to fix matches. "Another low for Indian football with another five of my players being asked to fix matches in the I-League, taking the numbers to seven," Bajaj

had tweeted after two of his players were made offers earlier this month. The All India Football Federation (AIFF), the game's governing body in the country, are looking into the

matter. East Bengal meanwhile, will be hungry to get back to winning ways after facing a harrowing defeat 0-2 at the hands of Mohun Bagan in their last outing. East Bengal were very poor in that game as Mohun Bagan steamrolled them completely and could have won by at least half a dozen goals. Currently in third position with 19 points from 11 matches, the Red and Golds are running out of time in their bid

to win the first I-League title, and have to win on Tuesday to start the push. The hosts will be without the services of key Syrian midfielder Mahmoud Al Amra who picked up a knock in the last game and had to be replaced early. In his place, Bazie Armand is likely to start. New recruit Dinku Omagbemi had little impact in the last game and head coach Jamil would hope the Nigerian, in his second stint with the club, comes good against Minerva.

East Bengal will also hope new signing from Mohun Bagan, Liberian Ansumana Kromah delivers the goods in his first start for the club. Kromah replaced Trinidadian striker Willis Plaza after the latter was released owing to his string of underwhelming performances. The hosts will also need to shore up their defence which looked out of sorts against Mohun Bagan. Experienced campaigner Arab Mondal had a forgettable day.