

We can come back into title race: Marsh

MOHALI, APR 29 /- Kings XI Punjab have lost five of their eight games so far but top-order batsman Shaun Marsh feels the team can still pull itself back into the title race of the ongoing Indian Premier League. The 33-year-old Australian's solid knock of 84 against Sunrisers Hyderabad here on Saturday went in vain as KXIP lost by 26 runs while chasing a target of 208. The inconsistent Punjab, who are yet to win the IPL trophy, were let down by their bowling



and batting units and only Marsh's performance stood out. "Full credit goes to the Sunrisers. They played well and they played us in all three facets of the game. We were not on tonight," Marsh told reporters after the match. Marsh justified asking Hyderabad to bat first, saying it was a fair decision as his side is good at chasing even big totals.

"We have chased really well in this tournament. But we didn't get off to the start we were hoping for and lost three quick wickets inside six overs," he said. However, confident of putting up a good show in the upcoming matches, Marsh said there can be a quick turnaround. "We can pull ourselves back in the race and keep our hopes alive for the playoffs... The guys are training hard and we can get on a bit of a roll on Sunday (against Delhi Daredevils)," he said. In all, Punjab will play three more games in this season and table-toppers Kolkata Knight Riders. (PTT)

Indiasquander lead twice as Britains 2-2 draw

IPOI (MALAYSIA), APR 29 /- India squandered the lead twice as Great Britain rallied to earn a 2-2 draw in the rain-delayed opening match at the 26th Sultan Azlan Shah Cup hockey tournament here. Akashdeep Singh (19th minute) and Mandeep Singh (48th minute) scored field goals to give India the lead two times in the match but only to see the Britons hit back through Tom Carson (25th) and Alan Forsyth (52nd). India survived a last-minute penalty corner that was awarded against them for an obstruction outside the circle.

The penalty corner was confirmed after the video referral by India, but British captain Phil Roberts sent his drag wide to the right. In the last encounter between these two teams, India had defeated Great Britain 2-1 in the Champions Trophy in London last year. The match started two hours behind schedule after the teams, who were warming up, had to scurry off the turf when lightning and heavy showers arrived in the afternoon. Heavy showers and lightning have been a feature of the weather this season. Since the introduction of artificial pitches, hockey is no longer affected by normal rains, but matches are stopped midway at the slightest sign of lightning to avert any threat to players and officials on the pitch.

KXIP and DD clash each other in desperate bid to stay afloat

MOHALI, APR 29 /- Struggling teams Delhi Daredevils and Kings XI Punjab take on each other in an IPL match here tomorrow as they desperately seek to get back to winning ways to stay in the hunt for a playoff berth. With three wins from eight games, Punjab are placed at sixth spot while Delhi are at the bottom of the league table with just two wins from seven games. For Delhi, it would be a do-or-die match as a loss tomorrow would virtually end their already wafér-thin chances of making it to the play-offs. A win, however, would be a bit better off but a slip up tomorrow will also put them in a difficult situation to qualify for the last-four stage. Both Punjab and Delhi come into the match having been comprehensively beaten in their last games against Sunrisers Hyderabad and Kolkata Knight Riders respectively. The Glenn Maxwell-led Punjab will be in the services of in-form Hashim Amla - who was down with a hamstring injury - as they fell short by 26 runs while chasing a formidable target of 208. They will, however, be bolstered by opener Sanju Samson's 38-ball 60-run effort and Shreyas Iyer's 47 off 34 balls, Del-

hi's middle order batsmen fell cheaply which restricted their scoring. Prior to their match against KKR, Delhi witnessed a batting collapse against Mumbai Indians while chasing a target of 143 runs as they could manage just 128/7 in 20 overs. For Delhi, it will be important to have a consistent show in their batting. They have had good starts in their innings and their losses against Kolkata, Hyderabad and Mumbai have been primarily due to their inability to force the pace during middle-overs. Samson, who scored a century early in the tournament, and Rishabh Pant have contributed in some games nicely but the side will need their top order to fire in unison against Punjab. Shreyas Iyer will also be crucial for the visitors if they have to pile up a big total. In the bowling department, South African Chris Morris has to get support from seasoned pacer and skipper Zaheer Khan, Cory Anderson and Pat Cummins. Amit Mishra, who gave away 36 runs in 3 overs against KKR yesterday, will look to do what young Afghan leg-spinner Rashid Khan (4-16-1 did for Sunrisers against Pun-

jab here. **The Teams: Kings XI Punjab:** Glenn Maxwell (capt), David Miller, Manan Vohra, Hashim Amla, Shaun Marsh, Darren Sammy, Wriddhiman Saha, Nikhil Naik, Ishant Sharma, Armaan Jaffer, Martin Gupthil, Eoin Morgan, Rinku Singh, Sandeep Sharma, Arman Jaffer, Anuresh Singh, Mohit Sharma, KC Cariappa, Pradeep Sahu, Swapnil Singh, T Natraj, Matt Henry, Varun Aaron, Axar Patel, Marcus Stoinis, Gurkeerat Mann, Rahul Tewatia. **Delhi Daredevils:** Zaheer Khan (capt), Mohammad Shami, Shahbaz Nadeem, Jayant Yadav, Amit Mishra, Shreyas Iyer, Sanju Samson, Karun Nair, Rishabh Pant, CV Milind, Khaleel Ahmed, Pratyush Singh, Muralugan Ashwin, Aditya Tare, Shashank Singh, Ankit Bawane, Navdeep Saini, Corey Anderson, Angelo Mathews, Pat Cummins, Ragiso Rabada, Chris Morris, Carlos Brathwaite, Sam Billings. (PTT) Match starts at 4pm.

Support of my countrymen gives me energy: Rashid



MOHALI, APR 29 /- Afghanistan's leg-spinner Rashid Khan says the entire country watches Indian Premier League and the support of the people back home gives him energy to perform better in the cash-rich T20 tournament. The 18-year-old Rashid returned with impressive figures of 4-0-16-1 to help his side Sunrisers Hyderabad beat Kings XI Punjab by 26 runs here. "The whole of Afghanistan is watching this league. The way they are supporting us both, me and (Mohammed) Nabi, it is just amazing. The prayers of our people back home help me and whenever we have a game, they all pray for us," Rashid told reporters last night after the match. "Their back up, the support really helps me and gives me energy," said Rashid, who hails from Nangarhar province in war-ravaged Afghanistan. Rashid has impressed one and all as he not only has been among the wickets but also putting brakes on the opposition run flow. Asked how does his performance mean for Afghan cricket, he said, "It means a lot to them because coming to this stage and performing here is a very positive message for the people of Afghanistan." He said the message to the youngsters back home was "to work hard, do your best and you will achieve for which you have set your foot for." "It is my message for youngsters of Afghanistan to work hard. It does not matter whether you are from Associate or other team, just do your best, you will get your achievement in the world. He has been helping and giving me all the confidence to just go out there and give my best." Asked how much of the experience gained in IPL will help him in Test and one-dayers, Rashid said, "It makes a big difference. Playing in IPL alongside some of the big names and big coaches and getting their experience will help me a lot. I am just trying my best to get their experiences to do my best. In future, I will work hard for longer format games. Mentally I am preparing myself for that." "I am trying my best to do 100 net runs and follow what the team requirement is," he said. (PTT)

Chelsea and Spurs face stern title tests

LONDON, APR 29 /- Antonio Conte will hope Diego Costa justifies his faith in having him rather than Everton's Romelu Lukaku as his main striker and deliver another three points in Chelsea's chase for the title tomorrow. Chelsea face their biggest challenge in their remaining five matches at Everton, who are on a run of eight successive home victories. However, Conte will hope they extend their lead over rivals Spurs to seven points before Tottenham kick-off in the north London derby with Arsenal later on Sunday.

Arsenal, who are still in the race to try and secure a Champions League spot, still have a drift of fourth-placed Manchester City and a game in hand, at least have restored some battered morale with two wins this week including a gutsy victory over Manchester City in the FA Cup semi-final. Both City and fifth-placed Manchester United also have a game in hand and would need to pick up three points as they play two relegation candidates in Middlesbrough and Swansea respectively. Conte is adamant he wouldn't swap the temperamental Costa, who has 16 goals in this season, including a brace in a 3-0 win to form with a double against Southampton on Tuesday, with Lukaku, who tops the scoring charts with 24. "As I've said before, for me my players are the best in the world. I wouldn't change my players with any other players." His Everton counterpart Ronald Koeman was not happy at all with his players' attitude in the goalless draw with West Ham last weekend and is looking for a vast improvement. "It is not a good sign if you are losing seven points in the pocket and maybe they get a little bit more holiday or end-of-season feeling," said Koeman. "That is what I don't like." Spurs will be seeking to win the 50th Premier League title by closing the gap on the pressure on Chelsea. Argentine manager Mauricio Pochettino beating Arsenal is necessary not for bragging rights but to keep their dreams alive of winning the title. "My feeling is now, when you are so close - only four points the gap - I will be very disappointed if we don't win the title," said Pochettino. "My challenge or my aim is not to be above Arsenal. My aim is to be above 19 teams and to be first, to be on the top." Arsenal counterpart Arsene Wenger has a greater spring in his step since his players rediscovered their fighting spirit and he still hasn't even give up hope of a top three finish. "We have an opportunity to be in there only if we win our games, we don't have to speculate at all," said the 67-year-old Frenchman. For the Manchester clubs, victories would see them leapfrog third-placed Liverpool, who play Watford on Monday. City have had two closely-fought matches already with Middlesbrough and the league leaders, but Liverpool manager Jose Mourinho believes that whether his side qualify for the Champions League or not he has already accomplished something that was lacking last season under Louis van Gaal. "I think Mr Van Gaal left a good group of players with very good relations between them," said the Portuguese handler. "But I think they missed happiness, they missed trust, but this extra bit that brings resilience, brings fight and they have it now." (AFP)

Pakistan's role crucial in terminating 'Big Three' from ICC structure: PCB

KARACHI, APR 29 /- Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Shaharyar Khan has said that his country played a big role in the termination of the 'Big Three', featuring the cricket boards of India, England and Australia, from the structure of the International Cricket Council (ICC). The 83-year-old pointed out that Pakistan was the only country to raise the voice against the set-up from the beginning, and made other member countries realize that 'Big Three' would not serve world cricket with equality. "Big Three" was an undemocratic set-up and Pakistan was the only country which raised its voice against this set-up from the very beginning and made the cricket playing countries realize that Big Three was not going to truly serve world cricket [with equality], because it was favouring certain member countries of the ICC which was an injustice," the Dawn quoted Shaharyar as saying. While speaking at the National Cricket Academy after returning from Dubai where he attended the five-day ICC meet along with PCB executive committee chairman Najam Sethi, Shaharyar said that the abolition of Big Three by the world cricket governing body would provide Pakistan with the benefit of USD 39 million. "We [the PCB] were at loss due to the creation of Big Three in the ICC and with its abolition, Pakistan will get the [monetary] benefit of \$39 million. We, due to Big Three set-up, suffered in many ways. For example, we were scheduled to play six [bilateral] series with India, but they backed out of the commitment due to which we suffered huge financial losses," he added. Shaharyar further insisted that the ICC would be more professional and democratic as its member countries would get equal financial benefits and representation in the Council due to the elimination of Big Three. "With the abolition of Big Three, now the ICC will be more professional and democratic as its member countries will get equal financial benefits and representation in the Council," he said.



Kieron Pollard of the Mumbai Indians takes the catch of Gujarat Lions captain Suresh Raina during match 35 of the Vivo 2017 Indian Premier League between the Gujarat Lions and the Mumbai Indians held at the Saurashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Rajkot

Ready for all possible scenarios, says COA head Vinod Rai on India's Champions Trophy dilemma

MUMBAI, APR 29 /- Vinod Rai, head of Committee of Administrators (COA), on Friday said India's Champions Trophy participation will be known only after the BCCI SGM on May 7 and they are ready for all "possible scenarios". The squad for the Champions Trophy has not yet been selected with BCCI already skipping the ICC deadline of April 25 but Rai didn't want to read too much into it. "There is no such thing as a deadline. The Champions Trophy will start on June 1. The deadlines are fixed so that there is some kind of system in place," Rai told reporters on the sidelines of a book launch. Asked what are the possible options, he replied, "How can I tell you now? We are ready with all possible scenarios. So let the process happen which is supposed to take place and then we will see what to do. I can't say it in advance. I am



confident that it will be a good decision. Whatever decision you want, that will happen, but by chance if it doesn't happen, then we will see." "It is a part of the game. Let it unfold slowly. Let us see how it progresses, what happens," he added. Rai refused to answer whether COA will overrule SGM decision if they decide to pull-out of Champions Trophy. "This is a hypothetical ques-

tion. Let the SGM first take a decision. I have requested the acting President, I have requested the acting Secretary to convene an SGM and the SGM has been convened on May 7," Rai said. He also dead-batted the question if BCCI will announce the squad before May 7. "They (BCCI officials) have just come back from Dubai and the players are still playing in the IPL. So we will sit with them (BCCI officials) and discuss with them what road map needs to be followed and how we go about it." Asked if COA and eligible BCCI officials are on the same page on this matter, he quipped, "We are 100 per cent on the same page. As you know, they had an SGM before they went to the ICC meeting. The next day, I invited them to talk to us and we discussed in detail what they had decided, what we had negotiated. After all they are the office bearers, they need to represent BCCI, so they represent BCCI in the ICC." Rai said that COA is aware that ICC did not pay need to BCCI's viewpoint. "The ICC had not listed to their viewpoint. We will discuss again and we will come to a solution. That solution will be to your satisfaction. Some things didn't work out the way we wanted it to be but there is always an avenue open. So there is nothing to worry about," Rai stated that the negotiation doors are still open and nothing is lost. "Don't worry, we will not let anyone down. Nothing to worry about, nothing is lost and it is not a closed chapter," he assured. "It is still in the process of negotiation. What happens when you negotiate, like for example when you go to buy a vegetable you try and bargain, similarly an offer has been made and we will examine it," Rai concluded.

Sharapova 'extra help' blasted by Stuttgart opponent



STUTTGART, APR 29 /- Kristina Mladenovic ramped up the pressure on Maria Sharapova ahead of their Stuttgart semi-final when she claimed the Russian superstar was getting "extra help" in her comeback from a 15-month doping ban. Sharapova eased into the last four of the clay-court tournament, ranked 73rd, for a 6-3, 6-4 quarter-final win. The Russian former world number one has been given wild cards by tournament organisers in Stuttgart, Madrid and Rome and played her first match back here on Wednesday, much to the irritation of many of her rivals, including Frenchwoman Mladenovic. In sport

nowadays it is also about the media and business. Maria is a big name, who makes a lot of money to watch her," said world number 19 Mladenovic after her 6-3, 6-2 win over Spain's Carla Suarez Navarro. "On one hand, I totally understand the tournaments want her in the draw, because she is very famous and they want more attention, which is part of the business. On the other hand, you can ask if it is fair to get a wild card. It's a fact that she was caught by anti-doping, but she wasn't the first one." Others have also had the same help compared to Sharapova gave a terse answer when asked if Mladenovic's comments would motivate her in Saturday's showdown: "Not at all." "I am not given wild cards by tournament organisers in Stuttgart," she said after beating Kontaveit. "I have let my tennis do the talking. My results have spoken for everything that needs to be said. The biggest part of my comeback is what happens on court." (AFP)