

Kohli named captain of the year at ESPNcricinfo awards



Kohli tweeted this picture of him sitting atop a mountain.

NEW DELHI, FEB 27 /- India Test skipper Virat Kohli has been named as the 'Captain of the Year' at the 10th annual ESPNcricinfo Awards. Kohli led India to nine wins out of 12 Tests in the year gone by. Englishman Ben Stokes won the Test Batting Performance of the Year for his incredible counterattacking innings of 258 runs off 198 balls against South Africa in Cape Town. Stokes team-mate Stuart Broad's 6 for 17 in the third Test ensured a series victory for England and fetched him the Test Bowling Performance of the Year award for the second year running. Winners were selected by an independent jury including former cricket greats, ESPNcricinfo's senior editors, writers and global correspondents, comprising Ian Chappell, Mahesh Jayawardene, Ramiz Raja, Isa Guha, Samit Bal, Courtney Walsh, Mark Butcher and Simon Taufel among others. Quinton de Kock's 178 against Australia in Centurion was the second-highest individual score by a South African player, and it was voted the ODI Batting Performance of the Year. Mystery spinner Sunil Narine was awarded the ODI Bowling Performance of the Year award for his 6 for 27 against South Africa in

the Tri-Nation series in Guyana. Carlos Brathwaite received the T20 Batting Performance of the Year award for his 34 not out against England in the World T20 final in Kolkata, in which he hit four consecutive sixes off the last over to win West Indies the match. Bangladesh left-arm fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman took away the T20 Bowling Performance of the Year award for his 5 for 22 during the World T20 against New Zealand in Kolkata. Mehedi Hasan Miraz, one of the brightest young stars of Bangladesh's national team, was declared Debutant of the Year for his 19 wickets in the two Test matches against England, one of those being possibly their finest Test win ever. This year ESPNcricinfo introduced awards for women's cricket across all three international formats. West Indian Hayley Williams received the Batting Performance of the Year award for her match-winning 66 off 45 balls performance in the World T20 final against three-time champions Australia. Leigh Kasparek, the talented New Zealand offspinner, took the Bowling Performance of the Year award for her 3 for 13 spell, defeating Australia in the teams' World T20



Jadeja too took the opportunity to post a picture with the Indian flag.

India frugal with praise for Pune tormentor O'Keefe

NEW DELHI, FEB 27 /- Steve O'Keefe was instrumental in helping Australia record one of the most famous test victories in recent times but hosts India have been quick to put their heavy defeat down to the pitch in Pune rather than the 32-year-old spinner's performance. Indian batsmen have built a reputation for their prowess against the turning ball over the years but left-arm O'Keefe shattered that aura as Australia bulldozed the world's top ranked test team inside three days.

O'Keefe's 12-wicket match haul, the best figures recorded by a visiting spinner on Indian soil, earned him the man-of-the-match award but little else in terms of praise from the vanquished hosts. India captain Virat Kohli blamed his side's twin batting collapses on their recklessness, while others felt the turning track had backfired on them. Out-of-favour off-spinner Harbhajan Singh, who has had several run-ins with Australian players, said he was not convinced by O'Keefe's performance and would need to see him in action on a better track. "I will have to see (O'Keefe) bowl on a good test match wicket. Not this one," the 36-year-old, who had predicted a 4-0 series defeat for Australia, told reporters. "Until then, I will reserve my comments." O'Keefe and off-spinner Nathan Lyon combined to claim all 10 Indian wickets in the second innings to skittle out the hosts for 107, two more runs than they managed in the first, at a venue making its test debut. "To be honest, that was a pitch," Singh, a veteran of 103 tests, said of the surface used for the series opener.

"Test cricket should last five days. You cannot play on such wickets where anyone runs in to bowl and takes wickets. I have played in over 100 tests, and I know how hard I had to work to earn every single wicket."

All O'Keefe had to do was to bowl faster through air and be accurate. Singh said. "You don't need to flight the ball or anything. You just need to bowl fast and not give the batsmen room to either come down the track, or be able to manoeuvre the ball around. "Bowling six deliveries in the same spot means all you need to get wickets on such tracks," he added. Former coach Ravi Shastri also felt O'Keefe was richly rewarded for his accuracy against the leaden-footed Indian batsmen. "Steve O'Keefe was controlled and accurate while his preys looked for spin which wasn't always there," the former test batsman wrote in a column that appeared in the Times of India newspaper. "They invariably ended up playing wrong lines. They didn't use their feet much either... It's an issue which can't be left pending even on fair tracks as even they would scruff up in second innings. Indians must find a way to break O'Keefe's rhythm," added Shastri.



Barcelona's Lionel Messi scores a goal past Atletico Madrid's goalkeeper Jan Oblak —REUTERS

Madrid stage Villarreal fightback, Messi nets winner



Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo reacts —REUTERS

MADRID, FEB 27 /- Gareth Bale and Cristiano Ronaldo hauled Real Madrid back from 2-0 down to win 3-2 at Villarreal and regain top spot in La Liga from Barcelona. Earlier, Barca had momentarily usurped Real thanks to Lionel Messi's winner four minutes from time in a 2-1 victory at Atletico Madrid. Real lead Barca by a point, but also have a game in hand on their rivals. "We showed character to turn the game around," said Real boss Zinedine Zidane. "With everything that happened today it was vitally important to get the three points." Bale was recalled to the starting line-up for the first time in three months after a long-term injury layoff and Real's shock 2-1 defeat to Valencia in midweek. And the European champions looked set for a second straight defeat as Villarreal struck twice early in the second half. Firstly, Manu Trigueros volleyed home Samu Castillejo's knockdown before Cedric Bakambu burst onto Bruno Soriano's through ball to slot past Keylor Navas. Ronaldo almost replied immediately, but Madrid's luck looked out when his

sweetly struck volley came back off the post. However, Bale started Madrid's fightback as he rose highest to power home Dani Carvajal's cross 25 minutes from time. Villarreal had enjoyed the better of the opening hour, but were swamped by wave upon wave of Real attack for the final 30 minutes.

The visitors needed a slice of luck, though, when Soriano was harshly adjudged to have handled inside his own area 15 minutes from time. Ronaldo took responsibility from the spot to smash home the equaliser. Villarreal had lost goalkeeper Sergio Asenjo midway through the first half to what looks like the fourth cruciate knee ligament injury of his career. "Asenjo seems to have torn his ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) in his left knee. It's a real shame," said Villarreal coach Fran Escriba. And his absence was to prove crucial for Real's winner seven minutes from time as substitute goalkeeper Andres Fernandez let Alvaro Morata's powerful header from Marcelo's cross squeeze under his body to complete a rousing Real fightback. (AFP)

India Vs Australia: Virat Kohli and co. go trekking to overcome Pune loss

The Indian cricket team suffered one of its heaviest losses in Test cricket when they were demolished by Australia in the opening Test in Pune. The 333-run defeat brought an end to India's 19-match unbeaten run in Tests. With the second Test slated for March 4 in Bengaluru, Kohli and his teammates took a break from cricket by going trekking on Monday. The likes of Kohli, Ravichandran Ashwin, Ajinkya Rahane along with his wife and Ravindra Jadeja all posted pictures of the team outing on their social media handles. While no other player mentioned the venue of the outdoor excursion, Jadeja tagged his location as the 'Famhini Ghat Trek, which is situated about 80 km from Pune.' Kohli tweeted a picture of himself in a backpack, sitting atop a mountain with a picturesque background showcasing the entire range.

Jason Gillespie hints at inclusion of Glenn Maxwell in place of Mitchell Marsh

CANBERRA, FEB 27 /- Former Australian pacesman Jason Gillespie has admitted that Australia would be tempted to recall Glenn Maxwell for the second Test against India despite a massive victory in Pune, which he describes as "one of their best ever overseas." After thrashing the Virat Kohli-led side by a whopping 333 runs in the four-match series opener in Pune, the visitors head to Bengaluru with a 1-0 series lead and genuine hope of claiming just their second series triumph in India in almost five decades. Gillespie said that although Australia would be unwilling to change the winning side, Maxwell's ability to take the game on in the Indian conditions could bring him into contention to play his first Test match since 2014, probably at the expense of fellow all-rounder Mitchell Marsh. "I think it'd be unlikely (they'd make any changes). I think the only guy under pressure to keep his spot will be Mitchell Marsh, who didn't bowl in the Test and is the back-up for the seamers. I think Mitch will stay in; he made 31 in the second innings in a low-scoring game so he's probably done enough, just to hang on," cricket.com.au

quoted Gillespie as saying. Insisting that Maxwell is an "underrated long-form" player, Gillespie said that the former has ability to judge length very quickly and, therefore he could be quite fearless and take the attack to the Indian spinners. "But if they feel they can get away with two seamers, I'd be tempted to potentially play someone like Maxwell. He's a fine player of spin (and I think he's an underrated long-form player)," Gillespie said. "The reason I say that is he judges length very quickly and that's the key to batting. And I think on these surfaces he could be quite fearless and take the attack to the Indian spinners. And I think he could do a decent job," he added. Australia are touring India for a full Test series for the first time since



they were white-washed 0-4 by the hosts in the 2012-13 season. The Aussies later defeated India 2-0 in a four-Test rubber played down under in the 2014-15 season. Australia have not won a Test match in India since 2004 and their last series win in Asia came against Sri Lanka in 2011. They have since suffered nine straight Test losses in the subcontinent. Meanwhile, the loss ended India's winning streak of 19 matches on the trot and also the 17-match home winning streak. This was also Kohli's first defeat as captain in Test cricket at home. The two sides will lay their second match from March 4 at the M. Chinnayya Stadium in Bengaluru.