

RCB aim to continue revival take on table-toppers SRH

BENGALURU, MAY 16 /- Their chances of making the playoffs still hanging by a thread, Royal Challengers Bangalore will take on table-toppers Sunrisers Hyderabad in another must-win Indian Premier League encounter, here tomorrow. The consecutive victories over Delhi Daredevils and Kings XI Punjab have revived RCB's hopes, while SRH has been on a roll, having won nine matches out of 12. RCB are still languishing at the second last position on the table, while SRH are on top of the table with 18 points. Virat Kohli's RCB has ended a tough season, having lost seven of its 12 matches so far but the recent turnaround has rekindled hopes of a possible shot at the playoffs berth provided some other results go the team's way. The hosts are overtly dependant on Kohli and South African swashbuckler A B De Villiers. The

two have combined to score nearly half of RCB's total runs this season but the side needs bigger contributions from the likes of Moeen Ali and Corey Anderson. In poor less form, Kohli has been a standout performer with 514 runs from 12 games. De Villiers (358 runs) is next to him, although he has played two games less than the Indian. On the other hand, depend quite a lot on opener Shikhar Dhawan (369 runs) and skipper Kane Williamson (544 runs) for inspiration. Williamson has been an astute leader, who would look to consolidate the team's top spot and ensure a top-two finish at the end of the league stage. Apart from Dhawan and Williamson, Yusuf Pathan (186), Manish Pandey (189) and Shikhar-Ahisan (166) have also chipped



in at crunch situations for SRH. But what has been truly outstanding for SRH is their diverse bowling attack. The bowlers, led by India pacer, Moeen Ali (8), leg-spinner Sandeep Sharma (6), leg-spinner Rashid Khan (13) and Shikhar-Ahisan (12). Given their consistent run, SRH would be expected to pull it off tomorrow but RCB, having rediscovered some form, might just spring a surprise.

The Teams (From):
Royal Challengers Bangalore: Virat Kohli (captain), Quinton de Kock(w), Brendon McCullum, AB de Villiers, Sarfaraz Khan, Mandeep Singh, Chris Woakes, Washington Sundar, Kulwant Khejroliya, Umesh Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Colin de

Grandhomme, Moeen Ali, Manan Vohra, Aniket Choudhary, Navdeep Saini, Murugan Ashwin, Pawan Negi, Mohammed Siraj, Corey Anderson, Parthiv Patel, Anurudha Joshi, Pavan Deshpande, Tim Southee.
Sunrisers Hyderabad: Kane Williamson (C), Shikhar Dhawan, Manish Pandey, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Wriddhiman Saha, Siddharth Kaul, Deepak Hooda, Khaleel Ahmed, Sandeep Sharma, Yusuf Pathan, Shreevats Goswami, Ricky Bhui, Basil Thampi, T Natarajan, Sachin Baby, Bipul Sharma, Mehdi Hasan, Tanmay Agarwal, Alex Hales, Carlos Brathwaite, Rashid Khan, Shikhar-Ahisan, Mohammad Nabi and Chris Jordan. (PTI)
 Match starts 8pm IST.

GAME NOTES

Linekers says England should 'write off' World Cup

LONDON, MAY 16 /- Former captain Gary Lineker says England should write off the World Cup and use it as a chance to blood youngsters, predicting the side can become a "serious force" in world football. England head to Russia next month hoping to improve on a dismal 2011 campaign in Brazil and an embarrassing performance at Euro 2016. The likes of Harry Kane, Raheem Sterling and Jordan Henderson have impressed this season, but former England striker Lineker feels Gareth Southgate's side are short of top players. Southgate is set to name his 23-man squad on Wednesday and Lineker wants to see the likes of Ruben Loftus-Cheek, Trent Alexander-Arnold and Ryan Sessegnon make the cut, with Euro 2020 and the 2022 World Cup in mind. "I was Gareth Southgate 1 would sell this on youngsters," he said at the BBC's launch of their coverage of the tournament. "I would say this is an experience, take total pressure off them, say 'It's all about experience, we are not going to be particularly well, we are not going to win this World Cup'."

England fans warned over flag-waving at World Cup

LONDON, MAY 16 /- Police chiefs have urged England fans attending the World Cup not to display the flag of St George as it will be seen as antagonistic to their Russian hosts. Mark Roberts of the National Police Chiefs' Council is heading to Russia with a team of fellow officers to work with their Russian counterparts to prevent up to 10,000 England fans. "I think people need to be really careful with flags. It can come across as being antagonistic... and can cause antagonism," Roberts, the national lead for football policing, told Britain's national newspaper. "We really urge some caution about people putting flags out and waving them about in public."



Paris Saint-Germain's Brazilian forward Neymar speaks as he receives the Best Ligue 1 Player award during a TV show

ICC Strategic Group report fears formation of rebel governing body

NEW DELHI, MAY 16 /- A breakthrough rebel governing body, the proposed T10 format and lack of interest from broadcasters are among "18 threats" that international cricket faces right now, according to a report of the ICC's Strategic Working Group (SWG) which will discuss these issues with the BCCI here tomorrow.

The report, which is in possession of PTI, claims to be a SWOT analysis of the issues confronting world cricket. The SWG comprises Cricket Australia's David Peewer, BCCI CEO Rahul Johri, Singapore's Imran Khwaja, Cricket South Africa's Patricia Karambami, West Indies Cricket Board's Dave Cameron and women's representative Clare Connor.

The Group will update BCCI office-bearers - Acting President CK Khanna, Acting Secretary Amitabh Choudhary and Treasurer Anirudh Chandra - on global strategy for cricket. "Yes, there has been threat to ICC. A very well-known former cricket administrator (currently banned) along with an Indian TV channel and an Australian lawyer had approached a lot of players and officials in order to form a parallel global body. They had named it Operation Watershed. It's a senior BCCI official told PTI on condition of anonymity. "They wanted to form parallel associations in each country and were offering a lot of money to the players. The project didn't take off but there's no reason that it won't take off once again," the official said. The ICC analysis does not take names. However, it is interesting to note that in 2016, there

were reports of sacked IPL commissioner Lalit Modi approaching officials from England and Australia to form a parallel body, a speculation that dies down as quickly as it is taken. Another matter of concern is the proposed T10 format amid statements from stars such as former New Zealand skipper Brendon McCullum that "Test cricket will not be sustainable in the long run."

"The T10 league is also a matter of concern. More so, it was organised by Emirates Cricket Board (last December) with a lot of current players like Eoin Morgan, Shoaib Malik, Dwayne Bravo taking part," the official said. These threats could be directly linked to point No. 8 in the report which states: "Uncontrolled private investment into sports by commercial operators whose interests are aligned with short term financial gains rather than long term health and growth of the sport." Also, football's growth in traditional cricket nations is also listed as a threat in the SWG analysis along with a "lack of competitive tension in broadcast market." "In a way, it is true. Save Star and Sony (networks), there aren't many who are ready to invest huge sums in cricket. So if it's a two-horse race, then you know that there aren't new broadcasters coming in," the official pointed out. The report also speaks about "Collapse of traditional broadcast sponsorship." Add to this, the threat from unspecified "political uncertainties". It is to be noted that India and Pakistan have not been playing each other in bilateral series owing to the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks and the volatile diplomatic ties. (PTI)

Nobody is as scared as me, admits Neymar

SAO PAULO, MAY 16 /- As Neymar, the world's most expensive player, battles to be fit for Brazil's World Cup campaign, he is aware of the pressure. "Nobody is as scared as me," he said on Tuesday. The Paris Saint-Germain striker has not played since February, but knows that soccer-mad Brazil hopes he is fit to lead their team to glory in the World Cup. "I know that people are a little anxious, but nobody more than me, nobody is as nervous about my comeback and nobody is more scared than me," Neymar told Brazilian station TV Globo. The world's most expensive player was injured on February 25 playing for PSG against Marseille in the French league. The 26-year-old striker underwent surgery on a bone in his right foot in Brazil at the start of Match and has since dedicated himself to preparing for the World Cup. "It's a very difficult time, right? I think it's one of the most difficult I've ever had, because I'm very close to a dream I have, which is the World Cup," said Neymar, who broke a bone in his neck in the quarterfinals of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil and missed the semifinal, which the hosts lost, 7-1, to Germany. "Thank God I have this further opportunity, this further chance, to try to be a world champion for my country, which is a dream that I have had since childhood."

Neymar said. "It is my goal. I hope it is my cup."

Neymar was on Tuesday included in the 23-man provisional Brazilian squad for the World Cup which starts in Russia on June 14. Brazil are aiming to add a sixth star on their shirts.

'Proper big dog' coming to County, Moeen Ali on Kohli

NEW DELHI, MAY 16 /- Some assumptions in the Surrey dressing room are sure to come crashing down when "proper big dog" Virat Kohli joins the side, said England all-rounder Moeen Ali as he reflected on the Indian captain's much talked about county stint next month. While there aren't too many big local names in the Surrey squad, there are a few international stars in the line-up, headlined by South Africa's Morne Morkel, Tom Curran, Dean Elgar and Australia's Mitchell Marsh and Aaron Finch. Moeen and his compatriot Chris Woakes are playing under Kohli for the Royal Challengers Bangalore in IPL. "I know a few of the Surrey guys and they are not what people make them out to be a lot of the time. But if anyone in that dressing room does think they are a big dog, they will need to sit down for a little while because there is a proper big dog coming," Moeen was quoted as saying by The Guardian. Moeen and Woakes also rejected the perception that the Indian captain is intimidating and aggressive. "You see him on the field and people might think he's arrogant but it is the complete opposite. He's so humble it is almost weird how nice he is. He's the biggest name in India but will ring me to check I'm OK or ask if I fancy lunch. Sometimes a player will invite the squad to their house for a meal and it would be easy for him to say no. But he would always go. I can say

with certainty that anyone who has a bad word doesn't know the guy," he said. Endorsing Moeen's view, Woakes added: "You have your perceptions of players like Virat, who is quite passionate, emotional, in your face and plays it hard. But off the field he's very calm and you can chat about anything. He's very down to earth and plays you a lot of attention walking through airports in India. But having him in the team the No 1, the king were more chilled and he'll enjoy the team. You realise what his life is like. So county cricket will be much more than that. Playing at smaller grounds, that will be an experience too. Having spoken to him about how he loves to run in the country it's a release." The English paces also spoke of how Kohli approaches a match. "Around 30 minutes before the bus leaves for a match, he does what he calls a priming session in the gym. It's like a short burst of Olympic weightlifting. It's certainly different but it works for him. Overall, his fitness work is having a serious impact on the next generation of Indian players. He's leaner, fitter, more agile than those before. (PTI)

Saudis suspend World Cup referee over bribery

RIYADH, MAY 16 /- The Saudi Football Federation have banned referee Fahad al-Mirdasi for life over bribery and urged FIFA to remove him from the pool of referees for the 2018 World Cup in Russia. Mirdari was chosen to referee Saudi Arabia's Kings Cup final between top clubs Al-Faisaly and Al-Ittihad on Saturday but was pulled from the roster just a few hours before the game. In a statement, the disciplinary and ethics committee said Mirdari had approached the president of Al-Ittihad asking him for a bribe to influence the outcome of a match, the federation's disciplinary and ethics committee said late Tuesday. The 32-year-old is one of Saudi Arabia's most prominent referees, having earned a FIFA badge in 2011

and officiating at the Rio de Janeiro Olympics in 2016 and the Confederations Cup in Russia in 2017. Mirdari was chosen to referee Saudi Arabia's Kings Cup final between top clubs Al-Faisaly and Al-Ittihad on Saturday but was pulled from the roster just a few hours before the game. In a statement, the disciplinary and ethics committee said Mirdari had approached the president of Al-Ittihad asking him for a bribe to influence the outcome of a match, the federation's disciplinary and ethics committee said late Tuesday. The 32-year-old is one of Saudi Arabia's most prominent referees, having earned a FIFA badge in 2011

England pick Alexander-Arnold, omit Hart and Wilshere for FIFA World Cup

LONDON, MAY 16 /- England omitted Joe Hart and Jack Wilshere from its World Cup squad on Wednesday and called up Trent Alexander-Arnold to cap a remarkable breakthrough season for the 19-year-old right back.

England coach Gareth Southgate stuck to his principles and selected a young, energetic and flexible group of 23 players who can fit a variety of formations but will be short of experience at major tournaments. Hart was England's first-choice goalkeeper at the last World Cup and the two most recent European Championships, and was Southgate's No. 1 only five months ago.

However, he has fallen behind Jordan Pickford, Jack Butland and Nick Pope after making errors and losing his place during a loan spell at West Ham from Manchester City. "We've got three other goalkeepers who have had very good seasons and the decision I was faced with was 'Do I keep Joe in and have experience around the group or

give the three guys who have basically had a better season a chance?" Southgate said. "We felt the players all needed to be in on merit after their performances this season."

Wilshere last played for England in one of the country's most humiliating matches, the 2-1 loss to Iceland in the last 16 of Euro 2016, and has had another injury-filled season at Arsenal. Southgate will instead rely on Jordan Henderson, Eric Dier, Ruben Loftus-Cheek, Jesse Lingard, and Fabian Delph as his central midfield options. Delph played mostly as a backup this season for Man City, the Premier League champion. Alexander-Arnold made his senior debut for Liverpool only 17 months ago. Now he is preparing to mark Cristiano Ronaldo in next week's Champions League final against Real Madrid and will be the head of the World Cup in Russia. The teenager is uncapped, although he was invited to England in its Group G with Danny Rose is one of the two left backs, along with Ashley

Young, despite starting only nine games for Tottenham this season because of injuries. The inclusion of versatile players like Young, Alexander-Arnold and Delph provides options for Southgate, who has tinkered with 4-3-3, 3-4-3 and 3-5-2 formations in his 18 months in the England job and also encourages his team to play out from the back. "I believe this is a squad which we can be excited about," Southgate said.

"It is a young group, but with some really important senior players so I feel the balance of the squad is good both in terms of its experience, its character and also the positional balance. We have a lot of energy and athleticism in the team, but players that are equally comfortable in possession of the ball and I think people can see the style of play we've been looking to develop." Southgate will discuss his squad selection at a news conference on Thursday. England is in Group G with Belgium, Panama and Tunisia. (AFP)



ENGLAND SQUAD:
Goalkeepers: Jack Butland (Stoke), Jordan Pickford (Everton), Nick Pope (Bury)
Defenders: Trent Alexander-Arnold (Liverpool), Kieran Trippier (Tottenham), Danny Rose (Tottenham), Ashley Young (Manchester United), Fabian Delph (Manchester City), Kyle Walker (Manchester City), John Stones (Manchester City), Harry Maguire (Leicester), Gary Cahill (Chelsea), Phil Jones (Manchester United)
Midfielders: Eric Dier (Tottenham), Jesse Lingard (Manchester United), Ruben Loftus-Cheek (Chelsea), Dele Alli (Tottenham), Jordan Henderson (Liverpool)
Forwards: Harry Kane (Tottenham), Jamie Vardy (Leicester), Marcus Rashford (Manchester United), Raheem Sterling (Manchester City), Danny Welbeck (Arsenal)