

Aizawl FC beat Minerva Punjab 1-0

PANCHKULA, FEB 1 /-/- Former champions Aizawl FC beat defending champions Minerva Punjab FC 1-0 in a 15th round match of the I-League on Friday. The all-important goal was scored by Lalrinchama in the 69th minute. With this win, the Stanley Rosario-coached Aizawl leapfrogged their Friday hosts and moved to seventh on the points table, with 14 points from 15 games. They were in 10th spot before this game, deep into the relegation zone, but this result takes them out of it for now. For Minerva, the season got from bad to worse, as they suffered their seventh defeat in 15 games. With an AFC Champions League play-off campaign coming up, it will not inspire their side, despite a heroic effort from their young keeper Arshdeep Singh. It was a scrappy affair for most part of the game, except for a period in the second half when Aizawl looked enterprising. Minerva's coach Paul Munster even played and recruits Juan Quero of Spain and Mahmood Al Anna of Syria, but his team's goal and win drought continued. The Mizoram team has now picked up five points since new coach Rosario took over. The first chance of the game came Minerva when, off a Juan Quero cross from the left flank, Dilliram Sanyasi got under a volley but the effort lacked power and direction. Then, Kussaga shot a shot in the 19th minute for Aizawl from a distance but Arshdeep in the Minerva goal was equal to it. Albert then made a purposeful foray from the right channel for Aizawl to deliver a delicious cross. Arshdeep again made a timely intervention to thwart the danger. The second half saw Aizawl pressing particularly through Isak, whose runs from the right troubled a Minerva defence without the solid Lancine Toure. (PTT)

Yusa's brace helps NEROCA do the double over Indian Arrows

BHUBANESHWAR, FEB 1 /-/- NEROCA registered a 3-2 win over Indian Arrows at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar on Friday afternoon in what was a thrilling game. Boris Singh opened the scoring for the hosts before NEROCA's Felix Chidi equaliser. Rohit Danu scored to restore the lead for Arrows but two goals from Katsumi Yusa sealed the three points for the visitors. (Agency)

Allocation for sports increased by over Rs 200 crore in 2019-20 interim budget

NEW DELHI, FEB 1 /-/- The government on Friday increased the sports budget by Rs 214.20 crore for the financial year 2019-20, including a hike in funds for the Sports Authority of India (SAI) and incentives for sports persons. In the interim budget presented by

Finance Minister Piyush Goyal, the overall sports budget for 2019-20 was increased from Rs 2002.72 (2018-2019) crore to Rs 2216.92 crore. The significant gainers in the interim sports budget are SAI, the National Sports Development Fund (NSDF)

and the corpus meant for giving incentives to sports persons. The allocation to SAI has been increased by Rs 55 crore. From Rs 395 crore, the allocation has been increased to Rs 450 crore in the fresh proposals. The SAI is the nodal organisation to

manage nationals camps, provide equipment and other logistics to the country's sports persons. Besides, the allocation for NSDF has increased from Rs 2 crore to Rs 70 crore. The Finance Minister also proposed an increase in the incentive fund for the

sports persons, from Rs 63 crore to Rs 89 crore. However, the assistance to National Sports Federations (NSFs) has been slashed slightly from Rs 245.13 crore to Rs 245 crore. The overall encouragement and awards to sports persons have been increased by Rs

94.07 crore. The previous allocation stood at Rs 316.93 crore and will now be Rs 411 crore. The Khelo India National Programme for Development of Sports too got a hike of Rs 31 crore and from the previous allocation of Rs 550.69 crore, it is now Rs 601 crore. (PTT)

Indian women walloped by New Zealand in dead rubber

HAMILTON, FEB 1 /-/- Having already sealed the series, the Indian women's cricket team put up an ordinary effort with the bat to go down by eight wickets against New Zealand in the third and final ODI here on Friday. Captain Mithali Raj, playing a record 200th ODI on Friday, had spoken about the importance of clean sweeping into the game but her team could muster only 149 after being put in to bat. The White Ferns chased down the target in 29.2 overs to register a morale-boosting win. Deepthi Sharma, batting at number three, was the only one to make a significant contribution for India, top-scoring with 52 off 90 balls. India collapsed to 149 all out in 44 overs after being at 117 for four in the 35th over. "I am happy with the first series win in New Zealand. I am happy that youngsters like Deepthi (Sharma) and Anshubh (Rodrigues) got runs. We definitely wanted to try a few things. The bowlers have done well through the tournament. But today we didn't get enough runs." Mithali said in the post-match presentation. The venue proved to be a testing one for both of India's men and women's teams. Having sealed the series 3-0, the Rohit Sharma-led side too suffered a heavy loss on Thursday after being bundled out for 82. The ball swung and seamed consistently for the first time in the series, troubling the highly-rated Indian batting. However, off-spinner Anna Peterson did the maximum damage in the women's fixture on Friday, taking four wickets for 20 runs in 10 overs. Pacer Lea Tahuhu chipped



Amy Satterthwaite steers one behind point

Mithali Raj on her 200th ODI appearance

On Friday, Mithali Raj became the first woman to play 200 ODIs. Among active cricketers, team-mate Jhulan Goswami has the most caps after Raj - 174, with England's Jonny Gunn at No. 3 with 143. After the game, Raj said about the landmark. "When I started, I definitely didn't think I would come so far. My main aim initially was to represent the country, wear the India colours, and then be one of the core members of the team. But never did I think I would continue to play for so long. "When you have a long career, there are different elements that come into your reasoning. But one thing has always been to constantly thrive and constantly work on my game to suit the different conditions and different areas of my game, and trying to keep up with the international standards is very important. "I've seen highs and lows. When you have a long career, that's part of it."

in with three wickets and conceded just 26 runs in nine overs. "We talked a lot about pride and just wanted to bounce back. Really that's what we did. But probably took us a little bit too long," said White Ferns captain Amy Satterthwaite. Considering opener Smriti Mandhana's match-winning performances in the previous two outings, the Indian middle-order did not need to do much. Such was the visitors' dominance that star batswoman Harmanpreet Kaur did not get to bat. On Friday, she did and made 24 off 40 balls before an unsuccessful charge down the wickets off Peterson led to her downfall. The in-form Mandhana attempted a big one against the spin of Peterson to only end up being caught by Sophie Devine. Her opening partner Jimimah too did not do much, leaving India at 13 for two in the fifth over. "I would have been really happy to get some more runs. The first two games were very satisfying. I was happy that I could score the winning runs. It's a lot of hard work yet to be done. I have to score more, win more matches to be tagged the best in the world," said Mandhana reflecting on her performance. A solid knock was expected from Mithali on her 200th ODI but she ended up with nine off 28 balls. New Zealand chased down the target with ease with veteran Susie Bates (57) and Satterthwaite (66 not out) scoring fine half centuries. Mandhana was awarded player of the series for 105 and 90 in the first two games. The three-match T20 series will begin in Wellington on February 6. (PTT)

Rafael Nadal all set to get married with long-time girlfriend Mery Perello



Former world No. 1 Rafael Nadal is all set to get married to his long time girlfriend Mery Perello following the recent engagement of the couple. The 32-year-old has proposed Perello for marriage and soon, the two will tie the knot. The same was confirmed by the ATP in a recent tweet. The Spaniard recently appeared in the Australian Open where he was defeated by world number one Novak Djokovic in the final match of the Grand Slam event. Nadal has won a total of 17 Major titles and has been a runner up in eight Grand Slam events. Famously known as the 'king of clay', he has bagged a total of 11 French Open titles, highest by anyone in the history of tennis. Rafael Nadal recently lost to Novak Djokovic in the Australian Open 2019 final. The Spanish second seed had played an outstanding level of tennis at the tournament without dropping a set until he met his arch-rival on Rod Laver Arena. And he had no answer to the world number one's booming groundstrokes and precision serve to limp out of Melbourne Park 6-3, 6-2, 6-3. Despite the rout, Nadal said he was content with being able to even reach the final given the injury problems that prevented him playing any matches after the US Open until he got to Melbourne. (AFP)

India staring at relegation after Italy take 2-0 lead

KOLKATA, FEB 1 /-/- The gamble of playing on grass did not work out for hosts India, at least on the opening day, as Italy lived up to their reputation to win both the singles in the Davis Cup Qualifiers at the Calcutta South Club here on Friday. Andreas Seppi experienced some early hiccups before getting past Ramkumar Ramanathan 6-4 6-2 in the opening rubber, while 22-year-old Matteo Berrettini made a winning Davis Cup debut, cruising past India number one Prajesh Gunneswaran 6-4 6-3. With 0-2 down, India's doubles pairing of Rohan Bopanna and Divij Sharan finds itself in a must-win situation on Saturday. For Italy, top-ranked singles player Marco Cecchinato was paired with Simone Bolelli, the 2015 Australian Open winner in the doubles. "Focus is on tomorrow. We know we have a job at hand. It will be a lot harder. No time to give up now," non-playing captain Mahesh Bhupathi told reporters after the opening day's struggles. India had bounced back from a similar situation to win in China 3-2 in Asia/Oceania Group I rubber last year and Bhupathi drew inspiration from that turnaround. "They are so much more experienced. If you take your chances you get rewarded. We understand the pressure of playing for the country. Strange things happen. It has happened in China. I know Indians are stronger than them but we take one match at a time," a confident



Bhupathi said. Italy opted to go with Berrettini ahead of top ranked and world number 19 Marco Cecchinato and the youngster, who made the second round of Wimbledon last year, did not appoint and broke Prajesh's serve in the first set. Berrettini, who had beaten Prajesh in the Chengdu ATP last year, raced to 15-40 with two big forehands before converting his break point. As the set wore on, Prajesh looked more settled took as his serves started getting better. Both players held their serves until the Italian sealed the issue in the 10th game without a dropping a point. Berrettini began the second set exactly the way he started the first, breaking Prajesh to take a 1-0 lead. However, he did not make a sublime volley at the net and Prajesh had no chance as the Italian dished out a couple of superb groundstrokes to make the job tougher. The Indian's serve did not hold its best supporting Prajesh but the nerves soon started playing for the Indian who remained in the game by holding his serve till the seventh game. Berrettini eventually made it 5-3, racing through his service games before breaking Prajesh again in the ninth game. After two early errors, Prajesh clawed his way back to make it 30-all but the Italian capitalised on another error to secure a match point. Prajesh hit a forehand right into the middle of the net to concede Berrettini the match and Italy a huge 2-0 advantage. (PTT) (Photo: Arjit Ganguly)

Big Burns, Head centuries put Australia in control against Sri Lanka

CANBERRA, FEB 1 /-/- Joe Burns and Travis Head plundered Australia's first centuries of the home summer Friday in a stirring fightback as they ruthlessly exposed Sri Lanka's inexperienced attack in the second Test at Canberra. Australian skipper Tim Paine won the toss at the Manuka Oval and put his side in on a flat track conducive to batting, a gambit that paid off after some early wobbles. At stumps, they were a commanding 384 for four with Burns not out 172 and Kurtis Patterson, who was dropped first ball, on 25. Head fell to 181 after a 306-run stand with Burns - Australia's first stand over 200 since Steve Smith and Mitch Marsh achieved the feat in the third Test against England in December 2017. Vishva Fernando was the best of the bowlers with 3-99. On a cool, overcast day, Burns and Head dug Australia out of a hole after they lost Marcus Harris, Usman Khawaja and Marnus Labuschagne cheaply to be in trouble at 28 for three. After

weathering the storm and as the new ball lost its shine, the pair started cashing in on a Sri Lankan attack missing their top bowlers and fieldsmen who put down a host of chances. "We knew the first hour was going to be tough, bit of grass on the wicket, so despite losing the three wickets we just knew we had to absorb the pressure," said Burns. "We also knew they were an inexperienced bowling attack that was going to present scoring opportunities if we got through those tough periods. Hopefully we can come out tomorrow and do much the same." Back in the side after being overlooked for series against Pakistan and India, opener Burns survived a dropped catch on 34, but was otherwise invincible and brought up his fourth Test ton off 147 balls with a single. His 172 surpassed his previous high score of 170 against New Zealand in 2016. Burns' knock was the first century for Australia since Khawaja's 141 against Pakistan in Dubai in October and only the second an Australian has scored



Joe Burns kisses the badge on reaching his century. Travis Head soaks in his maiden Test ton

since the fifth Ashes Test in Sydney almost 13 months ago. Vice-captain Head soon followed suit, reaching his maiden hundred off 155 balls in his eighth Test, capitalising on Dilruwan Perera dropping him on 87. It puts the pair in prime position to be selected for the Ashes series later this year, with the Canberra Test - the first-ever in the nation's capital - Australia's first before their tour of England. Their partnership followed a dire start against a team they had been beaten by an innings and 40 runs in the first Test at Brisbane. Pace duo Labuschagne and Dushantha Chameera picked up injuries in that rout, with the inexperienced Kasun Rajitha and Fernando taking their place in Canberra. And in a big blow, Suranga Lakmal, their best bowler in Brisbane, was ruled out on the morning of the Test with a stiff back, with debutant Chamika Karunaratne stepping in. The three newcomers have only five Tests of experience between them, but they initially rose to the

challenge. "First hour the ball moved a bit and our bowlers were hitting the right areas," said Karunaratne. "But after the first session... almost every over we gave a boundary. We have to stop that." Harris fell for 11 with a poorly executed square drive off Karunaratne caught at point by Kanawara. The out-of-form Khawaja soon followed, lasting just three balls before being caught at slip by Kasun Rajitha, leaving Australia on 15 for two. The gloom continued when Karunaratne struck with his fourth ball in Test cricket, removing Labuschagne with an excellent angled delivery for six, caught behind by Niroshan Dickwella. Burns watched the carnage at the other end and dug in, playing only the loss ball, as he bided his time and waited for the bowlers to wilt. Head did the same with both men accelerating the run rate once the pressure of scoring centuries was past. Head was finally undone by Fernando, who snared him lbw. (AFP)