

Starc out of India tour; Marsh, Siddie ignored

MELBOURNE, FEB 7 /- Australian pace spearhead Mitchell Starc was on Thursday ruled out of the limited-overs tour of India due to a pectoral injury while all-rounder Mitchell Marsh was ignored for the two T20s and five ODIs starting February 24. Eleven players in the 16-man squad featured in the home series against India last month, when Australia lost 1-2. The touring Indian team also won the Test series. Down Under for the first time and drew the three-match T20 series 1-1. Starc suffered the injury, which causes strain in the shoulder, arm and chest, during the final day of the second Test between Sri Lanka in Canberra three weeks ago. "Unfortunately, scans have revealed that Mitchell Starc sustained a substantial tear to his left pec muscle while bowling on the final day of the Test match in Canberra," national selector Trevor Hohns said in a statement. "This means he will be unavailable for the tour of India, but we will instead target a return to play for the ODI Series against Pakistan in the UAE in March." Senior pacer Josh Hazlewood is also unavailable as he is recovering from a back injury. Pacer Peter Siddie, who made an ODI comeback with the India series, having played his last game in November 2010. He played three games, conceding 162 runs at 6.48 runs per over and taking two wickets. Another pacer, Billy Stanlake, too has been overlooked. Aaron Finch will captain the side on the tour starting with the T20 International in Vizag on February 24. The second game will be played in Bengaluru on February 27. The ODIs will be held in Hyderabad (March 2), Nagpur (March 3), Ranchi (March 8), Mohali (March 10) and Delhi (March 13). (PTI)

Esqueda brace keeps EB title hopes alive

EAST BENGAL : 2 E. Esqueda (67) E. Esqueda (86)

NEROCA : 1 C. Gyetlshen (3)

KOLKATA, FEB 7 /- A fit-again Enrique Esqueda struck twice with his clinical headers as East Bengal came from behind to down NEROCA FC 2-1 and continue their surge for a maiden I-League title here Thursday. In a half-an-hour of brilliance, the Mexican, who had suffered a rib injury, turned it around for East Bengal single-handedly with his goals in the 67th and 86th minutes after coming off the bench. East Bengal found the going tough at the Saltlake Stadium, conceding a third minute goal with former Bengaluru FC striker Chencho Gyetlshen scoring on his debut from a Katsumi Yusaku assist. But as he turned out Esqueda, who had also struck a brace in the first leg, once again proved to be the difference. At fourth place, East Bengal (28) are now two points



Enrique Esqueda celebrating after a goal against Neroca — Arijit Ganguly

I LEAGUE POINT TABLE

1.	Real Kashmir	16	9	5	2	19:8	32
2.	Chennai City	14	9	3	2	31:18	30
3.	Churchill Brothers	16	8	5	3	29:17	29
4.	East Bengal	14	9	1	4	25:16	28
5.	NEROCA	16	7	4	5	21:17	25
6.	Mohun Bagan	15	6	4	5	19:18	22
7.	Indian Arrows	16	5	1	10	13:22	16
8.	Aizawl	15	3	5	7	16:22	14
9.	Minerva	16	3	5	8	8:15	14
10.	Gokulam	15	2	6	7	19:25	12
11.	Lajong	15	3	1	11	17:39	10

behind second-placed Chennai City FC, the two teams with 14 matches each, even as debutants Real Kashmir lead the table with 32 points from 16 matches. Having blanked them 2-0 in the first leg with Esqueda scoring both the goals, East Bengal thus did a double on last season's runners-up. Down 0-1 at the break, Alejandro Menendez, who fielded an unchanged East Bengal XI, brought in Esqueda in place of Antonio Rodriquez Dovalie in the 58th minute. East Bengal soon took charge of the proceedings and won the second-half comprehensively as the Imphal outfit looked to have shut their shops, adopting a defensive approach. With NEROCA going deep into the defence, East Bengal displayed fine creativity in the

which the Mexican converted with a clinical header. Chencho scored on his debut for NEROCA. Katsumi floated the corner but Rakshit failed to collect the ball. Didika accidentally passed the ball to Butanese who found the back of the net. Esqueda's attempt from a freekick then went over in the 65th minute. A couple of minutes later, Jaime Santos found himself unmarked in the left-flank and he set it up for Esqueda inside the box. With Joby Justin by his side, the Mexican went under the ball, timed his jump to perfection before putting it past goalkeeper Lalit Thapa with a swerving header. It was yet another collective effort for East Bengal to snatch the lead when substitute Brandon Vanlalremdika brilliantly passed the ball to Samad Ali Mulkok on the edge of the box. The ball reached Esqueda after a deflection as the Mexican once again found himself at the right position, at which he drove the ball into the winning header. (PTI)

midfield spacing out the opponents backline. Minutes after coming on the pitch, Esqueda got a 35-yard freekick but the shot well over the bar. Acosta then sent a curling cross but Vame Kallon intercepted the ball in the air. Enrique Esqueda finally equalised for East Bengal with Jaime Santos sending a curling cross inside the box

India aim for strong comeback after Wellington hiding



AUCKLAND, FEB 7 /- A strong comeback will be expected from India after the hammering from New Zealand in the series-opener when the two teams square-up in the second T20 International at Eden Park here on Friday. After suffering their biggest loss in T20 Internationals in terms of runs on Wednesday night, India don't have a lot of time to introspect with just 24 hours separating the two games. It was the kind of day when nothing went right for India who lost New Zealand amass 218 before surrendering meekly in the step chase. Opener Tim Seifert took the Indian bowlers to cleaners with a 43-ball 84 and the visitors must have a plan to contain him on Friday. Not even the seasoned Bhuvneshwar Kumar was spared as he, alongside Hardik Pandya and Khaleel Ahmed, leaked 12 runs an over. Despite having eight batsmen in the eleven, India lost by 80 runs. "As a team, we have been good at chasing down targets which is why we play with eight batsmen. We believe in the attack," Khaleel Ahmed, Shubman Gill, Vijay Shankar, Hardik Pandya, Mohammed Siraj. New Zealand: Kane Williamson (C), Doug Bracewell, Colin de Grandhomme, Lockie Ferguson, Scott Kuggeleijn, Colin Munro, Daryl Mitchell, Mitchell Santner, Tim Seifert, Ish Sodhi, Tim Southee, Ross Taylor, Blair Tickle, James Neesham.

Vidarbha champions again

Saurashtra end second best for 3rd time



NAGPUR, FEB 7 /- Vidarbha lifted their second successive Ranji Trophy title in a comfortable 78-run win over Saurashtra in the final, proving that their maiden triumph last year was no "fluke". Vidarbha needed five wickets to defend their title while Saurashtra, in a chase of 206, were left a mountain to climb after a top-order collapse on Wednesday. They required 148 runs for their maiden title on the fifth and final day at the VCA stadium. "Everyone thought it was a fluke when we won last year and we were under pressure to retain the title. But our focus was process, we never bothered about reputation," Vidarbha's talismanic coach Chandrakant Pandit said. The fiercely fought final swung early on but Vidarbha went into the final day with a tight hold on the proceedings and bundled out the visitors for 127 with more than two sessions to spare. Overnight batsmen Vishvaraj Jadeja (52) and Kamlesh Makvana (14) batted resolutely for the first hour but once the partnership was broken, the end was inevitable for Saurashtra. Man of the match left-arm spinner Aditya Sarwate claimed three of the five wickets that fell on Thursday, to end with career-

FIFA rankings: India slips out of top 100 in latest charts

NEW DELHI, FEB 7 /- The Indian football team slipped out of the top 100 in the latest FIFA rankings following their back to back group league defeats during the AFC Asian Cup in the UAE. Skipper Sunil Chhetri and Co. slumped six places to be ranked 103 with 1219 points in the FIFA rankings released Thursday. India also dropped out of the top 16 in the AFC rankings, plummeting to 18th. India had crashed out of the Asian Cup after losing to UAE and Bahrain, despite thrashing Thailand 4-1 in their opening group to make a good start to their campaign. Following India's exit, Stephen Constantine stepped down from his role as India chief coach. The country will now hire to play friendlies in March against higher-ranked countries to improve its ranking ahead of the draw of the second round of 2022 FIFA World Cup Qualifiers, which is likely to be held in April. India had regained its place in the top-100 in March last year, after breaking the top 100 barrier for the first time in 21 years in 2017.

MATCH STARTS AT 11.30 AM IST.

QUIZ Contest
CQ052

WHAT IS A ZEBU?

a A FLOWER?
b AN ANIMAL?
c A SMALL FERD?

Yesterday's Answer: Quill
Name: Ankur Des, Jyungjigat, Prakash Gok, Minnie Bay.

We will publish your name, correct answer in this space. Send the answers alongwith your name, address, correct answers to the following mobile number: 8334826380

Match starts 7.30 am IST