BENGALURU BULLS BREAKS GUJARAT FORTUNEGIANTS' DOMINANCE AND BOOK THEIR SECOND FINALS SPOT IN PKL HISTORY

U.P. YODDHA INCHES CLOSER TO THEIR FIRST PKL FINAL BY DEFEATING DABANG DELHI K.C.



GALLERY

Carlsen retains World blitz crown; Nihal shines

St. Petersburg: Magnus Carlsen of Norway retained his World Blitz chess title. Last year's Rapid World champion V Anand finished 23rd. However, the story of the five-day twin tournaments at St Petersburg. Russia, that concluded on Sunday was India's Nihal Sarin. The 14-year-old GM, seeded 139th in the 202-player field, finished 11th in the blitz tournament with a sensational rating performance of 2777. Already rated 2506 in blitz chess, Sarin is expected to add 151 points to his kitty. After ending 130th in the 15-round rapid meet (15 mins + 10 sec), Sarin tallied 13.5 points in the 21-round blitz (3 mins + 2 secs). He scored 11 wins including the scalps of Aryan Tari, Alexander Motylev and Alexander Zubov.

'Sri Lanka cricket rated most corrupt by ICC': Sri Lanka has been rated as the most corrupt cricket nation by the world governing body, the country's sports minister said Monday. "The ICC feels Sri Lanka's cricket administration is corrupt from top to bottom", Harin Fernando said, adding that he had been shown a confidential report on the matter at a Dubai meeting. A host of scandals have rocked Sri Lankan cricket in recent years including a match-fixing controversy revealed in a sting operation carried out for a TV documentary. "Unfortunately Sri Lanka is being ranked as one of the worst or the top worst country for cricket corruption," Fernando told reporters after returning from the meeting with ICC anti-corruption chief Alex Marshall. "They told me that the problem was not limited to bookies, but even the local game's links

Kohli, Rabada end 2018 with top

with the underworld," he said.

rankings: It turned out to be a glorious 2018 for India captain Virat Kohli and South Africa fast bowler Kagiso Rabada as both maintained their respective pole positions in the year-end ICC Test Player Rankings. Kohli dropped three points despite a first innings score of 82 in the third Test against Australia in Melbourne, but still enjoys a 34-point lead over nearest rival Kane Williamson of New Zealand. Kohli, who attained a careerhigh 937 points during the year, which is the highest ever by an India batsman, scored 1322 runs in all. He overtook Steven Smith in August and has now held the top position for 135 days. Rabada, who split the top ranking with England's seasoned fast bowler James Anderson during the year, is just six points ahead of his adversary.

Bengal women emerge one-day

champions: Bengal ended their 12-yearwait for the Senior women's one-day silverware with a 10-run win over Andhra at the Just Cricket ground here on Monday. The Jhulan Goswami-led Bengal thrived on team effort with Deepti (34, 3-33 & 2 run outs) being the stand-out performer. Put in to bat by a young Andhra unit, Bengal mustered 198/7 in 50 overs. Andhra made a mess of the chase in the latter half of their innings to fold up for 187 in 49.1 overs.

Brief scores: Bengal: 198/7 in 50 overs (Deepti 34, Paramita Roy 32, Prativa 26, Mandira Mahapatra 39 n.o; CH Jhansi Lakshmi 3-40) bt Andhra: 187 all out in 49.1 overs (N Anusha 61, V Pushpa Latha 28, E Padmaja 38; Shubh Lakshmi 2-29, Deepti 3-33).

Australia set to rest Cummins, Starc. Hazzlewood for ODIs against India: Australia is set to rest its fast-bowling trio of Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazzlewood for the first three ODIs against India in a bid to manage their workload ahead of a busy international calender. Cummins has been Australia's top performer with both the ball and the bat in the just-concluded Boxing Day Test in Melbourne and coach Justin Langer insisted that it's a great selection "conundrum" for the hosts for the ODI series which begins in Sydney on January 12. Langer said Australia need to keep its players fit and fresh ahead of busy 2019, which includes a World Cup and an Ashes tour and hinted that Cummins, Starc and Hazlewood may be rested in the ODI series against India ahead of the

Rohit to join ODI squad on Jan 8: Rohit Sharma, who flew back to India after the third Test against Australia, will rejoin the One Day International side on January 8, the BCCI announced on Monday. Rohit flew back to India for the birth of his daughter after the third Test on Sunday. TNN/AGENCIES

two Tests against Sri Lanka.

OLD RESOLVE, NEW BEGINNING

Sydney: It was a pretty good year for Team India as they bid adieu to 2018 in style, having won the Boxing Day Test against Australia at the MCG by 137 runs on Sunday. Even as Virat Kohli and his teammates joined the rest of the world in ushering in the New Year, it is unlikely that there would have been any

dilution of their new-found resolve of

winning matches overseas. In a way, the Sydney Test that gets under way on Thursday represents the 'last frontier' in Team India's quest for an elusive series win Down Under. Kohli's men, up 2-1 in the four-Test series, are just half a step away from creating history. Kohli and Co. will look to make a positive start to the year by winning the final Test before turning their focus on preparations for the 50-over World

Cup in June. A victory in Sydney will not only allow the Indian players to go into the ensuing ODI series with renewed confidence but also

put them in the right frame for the World Cup.

AUSTRALIA

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Ticking the right boxes before a big tournament is extremely important. The Indian team management, which bungled with selection issues in South Africa as well as England in 2018, must look to instill confidence in the group of players who are in the running to make the cut for the World Cup.

Coming close on the heels of the debacle in England, the Australian sojourn represented a grand opportunity for Team India for a shot at redemption. Even though they slipped up on a bouncy Perth pitch after going 1-0 up in Adelaide, India proved in no certain terms in Melbourne that they have been by far the better of the two sides so far.

The Australians have thrown everything they had at their command to unsettle India, including a fair amount of sledging. But the overall performance of the home team — particularly with the bat — has been so ordinary that India have had no problems in rolling them over.

Much of the credit for this must go to Kohli, for the manner in which he has led the team and also conducted himself on the field. For someone who wears his emotions on his sleeves, Kohli is prone to histrionics and often gets carried away in the heat of the battle. Kohli, however, has been very restrained on the field here. He may have looked his animated self on the field but has been very careful about not 'crossing the line' while initiating verbal duels with his opposite number or members of the rival team.

And with the bat, he has been both classy and single-minded. It is not without reason Kohli ends the year as the world's No. 1 batsman — a position he has held by dint of his strong show with the willow. After all, no other batsman made more runs than Kohli in 2018.

His aggregate for the year stands at 1,322 runs from 13 Tests at an average of 55.08. It included five centuries and as many fifties. Kohli, in fact, has been so good that Graeme Hick — Australia's batting coach — has urged his faltering troops to learn from the Indian captain.

Kohli, of course, has been lucky to have a very accomplished bowling unit which is well-stocked in pace as well as spin-bowling resources. The pacers — Ishant Sharma, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammad Shami, Umesh Yadav and Bhuvneshwar Kumar — have combined to script India's triumphs away from home.

With An Assured India Succeeding In Their Quest To Win More Overseas Tests, A Historic Maiden Series Win Down Under Seems Like A Real Possibility In Sydney...

India have won four overseas Tests in a calendar year only thrice in 2004, 2010 & 2018.

This is the first time India have won four overseas Tests in a calendar year under the same captain, Virat Kohli. Interestingly, in all four overseas Test wins in 2018. India have batted first.

WHEN INDIA WON **4 OVERSEAS TESTS** IN A YEAR

2004: Beat Pak in Multan & Rawalpindi (under Rahul Dravid) & Bangladesh in Dhaka & Chittagong (under Sourav Ganguly)

2010: Beat Bangladesh in

Chittagong (under Virender Sehwag) & Dhaka (MS Dhoni), Sri Lanka in Colombo, South Africa in Durban (both under MS Dhoni's captaincy)

2018: Beat South Africa in Johanneburg, England in Nottingham, Australia in Adelaide & Melbourne (Virat - Rajesh Kumar

Oz coach rues dearth of batting talent

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Sydney: Australia coach Justin Langer admitted on Monday that there is a dearth of batting talent in the country as not enough talented batsmen are coming through the ranks. Australia have added leg-spinning all-rounder Marnus Labuschagne to the 13-member squad shortly after losing the third Test at the MCG on Sunday, but Langer is still unsure about the shape of the playing XI for the fourth Test that begins on Thursday.

Australia are likely to tinker with their batting order even as they look to bring back Peter Handscomb in order to bolster the batting. Langer observed that given the paucity of talent, it is tough being a selector these days. "We've got to be careful not to reward poor performances, but it's not as if the guys are absolutely banging the door

knocking on the door are averaging in the 30s (in the Sheffield Shield)," on Monday. Langer has a point. Barring Usman Kha-

waja, no Australian figures in the list of Tests in 2018. And Khawaja's century in Dubai against Pakistan in October remains the only Test hundred scored by any Australian

'WOULD LIKE A BIT OF BOUNCE'

Sydney: Australia coach Justin Langer is hoping that the SCG pitch will have more bounce than the one at the MCG. "All the years we have gone to India, we have not had too many bouncy wickets, and it usually spins square. We are interested to see what we get in Sydney. We are not sure - it has been a bit inconsistent," he said. "India played a practice game there and it was very flat. In the Shield game there a few weeks ago, it was very flat. We certainly hope it is not." TNN

work to do," Langer said. "Whether it's the system... whether it's something we've got to change in our psyche, down. Most of our batters I'm not sure. It's something everyone is looking at."

Despite his poor run of scores in the series so far, Langer told reporters Langer backed Finch to come good. "He's the only guy playing all three forms of the game (for Australia). He's got to somehow recharge his batteries over and over and over top-10 run-getters in again. It's a great challenge."

However, Langer's close friends and former captains Steve Waugh and Ricky Ponting differed with him on selection issues for the final Test. Waugh, who posted his playing XI on Instagram, left out Finch, preferring to open with in the entire Marcus Harris and Shaun Marsh. He also revamped the middle-order by pushing up we've got some Travis Head to No. 4.

Bumrah has proved me wrong: Kapil

ON TO THE LAST FRONTIER!

Virat Kohli (left) and his

deputy Ajinkya Rahane

the victory at the MCG

head into the Sydney Test

full of confidence following

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New Delhi: Former Indian captain and fast bowling legend Kapil Dev told TOI on Monday that Jasprit Bumrah proved him wrong with his instant success at the international level.

Talking about Bumrah's unique action, Kapil said, "I have to tell you that Bumrah has proved me wrong. When I saw him first time I had thought (whether) he could last long with this kind of action, but he has. Hats off to him and I really compliment him for his superlative show in Australia. His mindset must be very strong."



Kapil, who took 5/28 in the second innings the last time India won at the MCG before this, way back in Feb 1981, said Bumrah - whose similar match-wining nine-wicket haul earned India a rare win after 37 years — has a "special shoulder". "I think he is fabulous. With such a short run-up, if he can generate 140-plus speeds consistently,

the new and old ball. He has a very good bouncer which can surprise the opposition. He is very accurate and knows where he is bowling. He applies his mind well. All this put together makes him one of the leading bowlers in the world today"

Asked if Bumrah's rapid rise up the fast-bowling ranks has any precedent in Indian cricket, Kapil said: "Srinath came into the limelight like Bumrah, in a very short time. Zaheer took a little bit of time. The only thing about fast

you have to respect him. He has a bowling is that once they start dospecial shoulder. These types of ing well they look very good for bowlers are unique," Kapil said, the team, but injuries play spoiladding: "Bumrah is good with both sport. Some fade away and come back strong, like Mohammed Shami did. Of course, injuries take a toll on your body and bowlers like Shami should be given credit for coming back strongly."

> On whether India are depending too much on Bumrah, Kapil said: "When you play in India, don't you depend on Ashwin? Even Jadeja is someone on whom the team depends a lot at home. If someone starts doing well for the team, the team starts depending on that cricketer."

AUSTRALIA A SOAP OPERA, I FEEL LIKE A DIRECTOR: LANGER

Melbourne: Australia cricket coach Justin Langer admitted on the match also focused attention Monday he feels like a "director of a soap opera" as speculation grows around the future of Steve Smith and David Warner.

Debate about the pair reared again during the third Test against India in Melbourne, after Smith and Cameron Bancroft gave TV interviews about the ball-tampering scandal.

Their comments were widely interpreted as deflecting all blame onto Warner, with some former players slamming them for unnecessarily dredging it back up on Boxing Day.

Australia's woeful batting in on how much Smith and Warner were missed. Langer, who has previously described the Australia team as a "dysfunctional family", said the

"It's all just part of the soap opera we're in every day," he said. "I feel like a director of a soap opera at the moment, I honestly do.

headlines were a headache.

"Coaching is about manmanagement and looking after people, caring for people, and that was just another distraction last week," he added. AFP

'Didn't bother changing Bumrah's action'

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Mumbai: India captain Virat Kohli isn't known to indulge in hyperbole. So, when he labelled Jasprit Bumrah the 'best bowler in the world' and someone he 'wouldn't want to face' on a spicy pitch like Perth, following India's momentous Test win over Australia at the MCG on Sunday, it more than stressed where the Gujarat fast bowler stood in the eyes of his teammates starting from the captain.

It's another matter that the experts still can't decide if the 25-year-old is better off bowling with the newer or older piece of leather. But what needs to be highlighted is that coaches at the underage level didn't cajole or coerce Bumrah to change his odd bowling action, which is turning out to be his greatest strength.

The speedster, who is proving his worth, series after series, has picked 48 wickets after nine Tests in the last one year and that too at an impressive average of 21.02.

Through biomechanics, we have learnt which part of his body needs to be strengthened. There have been minor adjustments here and there but nothing major. He also had a stint under Dennis Lillee at the MRF Pace Academy but there too his action was not changed.

Kishore Trivedi | BUMRAH'S FIRST COACH

"His different bowling action is what caught my eye and even though many felt I need to work on his action, I didn't bother to change it as he was generating serious pace and leaving batsmen puzzled," says Kishore Trivedi (father of former Gujarat and Rajasthan Royals quick, Siddharth), Bumrah's first coach at Ahmedabad's Nirmal High School.

Incidentally, the bowler's mother was the school principal and Bumrah picked up the ropes bowling on the concrete pitch, laid out by the school to tra-

in the boys for inter-school matches. It's probably there where he picked the ha-

bit of banging the ball in. Once Bumrah started picking bucketful of wickets at the school-level, the Gujarat Cricket Association didn't waste time to take him under its wings.

Vijay Patel, the coach under whom the GCA has gone from strength to strength in the last two decades, reiterates what Trivedi says.

"There have been minor adjustments here and there but nothing major. He also had a stint under Dennis Lillee at the MRF Pace Academy but there too his action was not changed," says the 59-year-old Patel.

"There were many experts who reckoned his action would get him into trouble with injuries because his bowling action puts certain parts of his body under extra pressure. But through biomechanics, we have learnt which part of his body needs to be strengthened and accordingly his training programme has been set to keep that part of the body strong," says Patel.

Smriti is ICC Women's Cricketer of Year

Dubai: Talented India vice-captain Smriti Mandhana was Monday adjudged 'Women's Cricketer of the Year' as well as the 'Women's ODI Player of the Year' by the ICC. Left-handed opener Mandhana won the Rachael Heyhoe Flint Award for the 'Women's Cricketer of the Year' for scoring 669 runs in 12 ODIs along with 622 runs in 25 T20 Internationals in 2018.

Her ODI runs were scored at an average of 66.90 while strike-rate for T20I was an impressive 130.67.

Mandhana played a crucial role in India's semi-final appearance at the Women's World T20 in the West Indies, where she scored 178 runs in five matches at a strike-rate of 125.35. She is currently ranked fourth in the ODI rankings and 10th in the rankings for T20Is, the ICC said in a statement.

Mandhana became only the second India woman player to win an ICC award afterfast bowler Jhulan Goswami, who was named the ICC Player of the Year in 2007.

Reacting to the news, a delighted Mandhana said: "...when you get acknowledged for your performances through



GLORIOUS YEAR: Smriti Mandhana

these awards, it motivates you to work harder and do well for your team. The century I scored in South Africa (in Kimberley) was quite satisfying and then I had good home series against Australia and England. A lot of people used to say I do not score that much in India, so I had a point to prove to myself," she added.

ICC Chief Executive David Richardson congratulated Mandhana, saying: "Smriti enthralled fans with some wonderful performances in what was a memorable year for women's cricket, with the

Women's ODI team of the year (in batting order): Smriti Mandhana (India), Tammy Beaumont (England), Suzie Bates (New Zealand; captain), Dane van Niekerk (South Africa), Sophie Devine (New Zealand), Alyssa Healy (Australia; wk), Marizanne Kapp (South Africa), Deandra Dottin (West Indies), Sana Mir (Pakistan), Sophie Ecclestone (England), Poonam Yaday (India). Women's T20I team of the year (in batting order): Smriti Mandhana (India), Alyssa Healy (Australia; wk), Suzie Bates (New Zealand), Harmanpreet Kaur (India; captain), Natalie Sciver (England), Ellyse Perry (Australia), Ashleigh Gardner (Australia), Leigh Kasperek (New Zealand), Megan Schutt (Australia), Rumana Ahmed (Bangladesh), Poonam Yadav (India).

ICC Women's World T20 helping build on the momentum of last year's World Cup." PTI