

TV PICKS

New Zealand vs Bangladesh: 2nd ODI, 5.55 p.m. (SD & HD), 3.30 a.m.
NBA: Sony Ten 1 (SD & HD), 7.30 a.m.
Irani Cup: Star Sports 2 (SD & HD), 9.30 a.m.
South Africa vs Sri Lanka: 1st Test, Sony ESPN (SD & HD), 1.30 p.m.
I-League: Star Sports 3, 2 p.m.
Pro Volleyball League: Sony Six (SD & HD), 7 p.m.
ISL: Star Sports 1 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.

IN BRIEF



Barcelona extends Valverde's contract

MADRID
Spanish champion Barcelona announced on Friday it has extended the contract of coach Ernesto Valverde for another season with the option of one more. Valverde's previous contract would have expired at the end of this season. AFP



Pelicans overcome Westbrook triple

LOS ANGELES
Julius Randle (jersey no. 30 in pic) finished with 33 points and 11 rebounds as New Orleans Pelicans overcame another triple double from Russell Westbrook to beat Oklahoma City Thunder 131-122 on Thursday. The victory could prove costly for Pelicans as all-star Anthony Davis left the game with a shoulder injury at the end of the first half.

Nishikori storms into the quarterfinals

ROTTERDAM
Japan's Kei Nishikori carved out a comfortable 6-1, 6-4 win over Latvian Ernests Gulbis on Thursday to power into the Rotterdam Open quarterfinals. Asia's top player, the World No. 7, needed an hour and a quarter to advance as he booked a third victory against former French Open semifinalist Gulbis, who was a lucky loser at the Ahoy Arena. Earlier, Jo-Wilfried Tsonga won a lengthy opening set and then accelerated past Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor for a quarterfinal place. **The results (second round):** Kei Nishikori bt Ernests Gulbis 6-1, 6-4; Damiir Dzumhur bt Mikhail Kukushkin 6-4, 7-6(3); Daniil Medvedev bt Fernando Verdasco 6-2, 7-5; Jo-Wilfried Tsonga bt Tallon Griekspoor 7-6(5), 6-1.

Sindhu and Saina set up a dream final

Lakshya stuns Kashyap, looks for revenge in men's final against Sourabh



Powering through: Saina Nehwal got past Vaishnavi Bhale in straight games. ■RITU RAI KONWAR

NATL. BADMINTON

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA GUAHATI
P.V. Sindhu and Saina Nehwal won their semifinal in contrasting fashion to set up a mouth-watering summit showdown at the 83rd Yonex-Sunrise senior National championship.

The final will be played on Saturday. While Sindhu overcame a challenge from Assam's promising 19-year-old Ashmita Chaliha 21-10, 22-20 in the first semifinal, Saina got the better of Nagpur qualifier Vaishnavi Bhale, who was part of India's Uber Cup squad last year, 21-15, 21-14.

Saina has beaten Sindhu in their previous two encounters — at the Nagpur National in 2017 and Gold Coast Commonwealth Games gold-medal match in 2018.

While Saina has won the National crown in 2006, 2007 and 2018, Sindhu has

clinched the trophy twice — 2011 and 2013.

In the men's event, Lakshya Sen reached his second final with a 21-15, 21-16 win over former winner and 2014 Commonwealth Games champion P. Kashyap in the second semifinal.

The 17-year-old Lakshya, who had lost in the final to Sourabh Verma two editions ago, will look to settle scores in the final.

Two-time former champion Sourabh had earlier defeated Mumbai's Kaushal Dharmame 21-14, 21-17 in 44 minutes.

Other results:
Mixed doubles (semifinals): Rohan Kapoor & Kuhoo Garg bt Vighnesh Devlekar & V. Harika 21-15, 21-16; Manu Attri & K. Maneesha bt Shlok Ramchandran & Mithula 21-18, 21-17.

Women's doubles: Meghana Jakkampudi & Poorvisha S. Ram bt Kuhoo Garg & Anoushka Parikh 21-13, 21-16; Shikha Gautam & Ashwini Bhat bt Aparna Balan & K.P. Sruthi 21-19, 24-22.

Kerala Blasters blanks Chennaiyin FC

Ends 14-game winless run

ISL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA KOCHI

Kerala Blasters FC notched up only its second win of the Indian Super League season after a comprehensive 3-0 win over Chennaiyin FC at the Jawaharlal Nehru stadium here on Friday.

Potlatnik scores brace

Matej Poplatnik scored a brace (23rd, 55th) to put Blasters in the driving seat and young midfielder Sahal Abdul Samad finished things off in the 71st minute to score his first-ever ISL goal and end his team's 14-game winless run.

On the other hand, Chennaiyin saw its nightmare season continue after its 12th loss.

It is rooted to the bottom spot with eight points from 16 games, while Kerala Blasters

climbed to the eighth spot. The visitors never really got going and were on the backfoot right from the start.

Chennaiyin custodian Karanjit Singh was called into action twice early in the game as Kerala imposed itself.

Slavisa Stojanovic's shot from the edge of the box was saved by Karanjit and he had to be alert to block the follow-up effort from Poplatnik as well.

Out of rhythm

John Gregory's side could not gain a foothold into the match and looked woefully out of rhythm.

The story remained pretty much the same in the second half as well.

The result: Kerala Blasters 3 (Matej Poplatnik 23, 55, Sahal Abdul Samad 71) bt Chennaiyin FC 0.

du Plessis and bowlers put SA in control

Sri Lanka's left-arm spinner Embuldeniya takes a five-for in maiden Test

LANKA IN SA

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE DURBAN

South Africa took three Sri Lankan wickets in three overs to finish strongly on the third day of the first Test here on Friday.

Sri Lanka, needing 304 to win, was 83 for three at close. The tourists started promisingly with captain Dimuth Karunaratne and Lahiru Thirimanne putting on 42 for the first wicket but both were out in the space of five balls. Kusal Mendis fell soon after.

The flurry of wickets negated Sri Lanka's turnaround after it took the last five South African wickets for just eight runs. Left-arm spinner Lasith Embuldeniya, 22, playing in his first Test, took five for 66 as South Africa was bowled

out for 259 in the second innings. South Africa was on course for a more challenging target with captain du Plessis and Philander looking solid in a sixth-wicket partnership of 60. But Embuldeniya, who bowled with impressive control, took Philander's wicket to trigger a collapse.

SCOREBOARD SOUTH AFRICA VS SRI LANKA, FIRST TEST

South Africa — 1st innings: 235. **Sri Lanka — 1st innings:** 191.

South Africa — 2nd innings: D. Elgar c & b Embuldeniya 35, A. Markram c Mendis b Rajitha 28, H. Amla c Thirimanne b V. Fernando 16, T. Bavuma lbw b Embuldeniya 3, F. du Plessis lbw b V. Fernando 90, Q. de Kock lbw b Embuldeniya 55, V. Philander b Embuldeniya 18, K. Maharaj b V. Fernando 4, K. Rabada c Dickwella b Embuldeniya 0, D. Steyn b V. Fernando 1, D. Olivier (not out) 2; Extras (lb-2, nb-3, w-2): 7; Total (in 79.1 overs): 259.

Fall of wickets: 1-36, 2-70, 3-77, 4-95, 5-191, 6-251, 7-255, 8-256, 9-256.

Sri Lanka bowling: Lakmal 20-5-52-0, V. Fernando 17.1-2-71-4, Rajitha 13.1-54-1, Embuldeniya 26-3-66-5, Dhyananayake de Silva 2-0-8-0, O. Fernando 1-0-6-0.

Sri Lanka — 2nd innings: D. Karunaratne lbw b Philander 20, L. Thirimanne c du Plessis b Rabada 21, O. Fernando (batting) 28, K. Mendis c de Kock b Olivier 0, K. Perera (batting) 12; Extras (lb-2): 2; Total (for three wickets in 28 overs): 83.

Fall of wickets: 1-42, 2-42, 3-52. **South Africa bowling:** Steyn 4-0-19-0, Philander 8-3-13-1, Maharaj 4-0-14-0, Rabada 7-1-28-1, Olivier 4-3-3-1, Markram 1-0-4-0.



Lasith Embuldeniya... a dream debut. ■AFP

Spartans look to bounce back

A semifinal berth is up for grabs

PRO VOLLEYBALL

S. DIPAK RAGAV CHENNAI

After 12 days of action in Kochi, the Pro-Volleyball bandwagon moves to Chennai for the final three days of league games at the Nehru indoor stadium starting from Saturday before the semifinals and final.

The six-team competition has seen three teams completing their league fixtures during the Kochi leg while Chennai Spartans, U Mumba Volley and Ahmedabad Defenders have two matches in hand.

Home team Spartans will look to get back to winning ways when it takes on U Mumba on Saturday, especially after squandering a two-set lead against Kochi Blue Spikers in its last league match.

The team, which has two points thanks to a win against Black Hawks Hyderabad, will hope to make the most of it against U Mumba and Defenders, both of whom have not won a match yet.

A win here on Saturday could boost Spartans' chances grabbing the final semifinal berth along with the two Kerala teams, Calicut Heroes



Straight talk: Joy Bhattacharya, left, and Ramavtar Singh Jakhar interacted with the media ahead of the Chennai leg. ■R. RAVINDRAN

and Spikers, and Hyderabad.

One good news for the Chennai team will be that key player Akhin G.S. is fit to play on Saturday. He had twisted his ankle during the match against Spikers but has since recovered according to head coach M.H. Kumara.

"We are home and we are looking forward to just going into the match with one objective that is of winning. "The home support will certainly lift our morale. I am also glad that Rudy Verhoeff has come of age in this league and has been leading the team from the front with his game and international

experience," Kumara said.

All-Star women's match

In a bid to promote women's volleyball in India, the organisers on Friday announced an All-Star women's match to be played on the day of the PVL final (February 22).

PVL CEO Joy Bhattacharya said, "It is a milestone moment for us as this will be the first ever women's all-star match in India for any other sport league except cricket. Though, it is an exhibition match, in the longer run we want to have a full-fledged women's volleyball league in place."

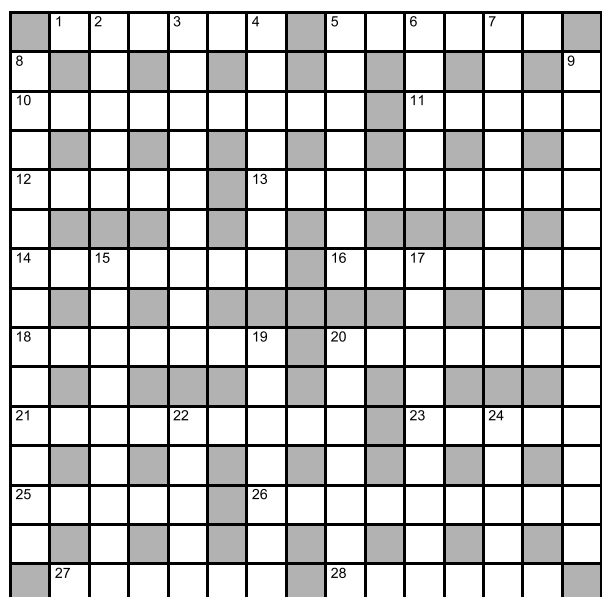
Ramavtar Singh Jakhar, former India international and current secretary-general, Volleyball Federation of India, said, "The league has given a platform to men to display their talent and is helping them trace the journey from players to becoming stars. We wish to do the same for women as it is very crucial for both to grow the sport overall."

PVL Points table

| Team | P | W | L | Pts | SD | PD |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|-----|----|-----|
| Calicut Heroes | 5 | 5 | 0 | 11 | 13 | 70 |
| Kochi Blue Spikers | 5 | 4 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 2 |
| Black Hawks Hyderabad | 5 | 2 | 3 | 4 | -3 | -20 |
| Chennai Spartans | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | -1 | -10 |
| Ahmedabad Defenders | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | -5 | -12 |
| U Mumba Volley | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | -5 | -26 |

SD: Set Difference; PD: Point Difference

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12551

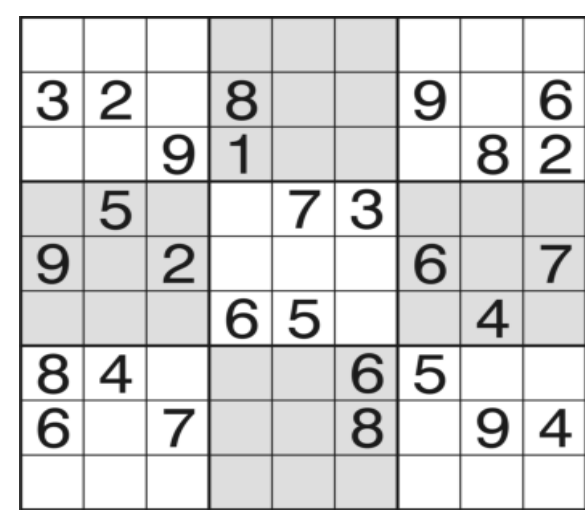


ACROSS

- Crib about master's degree becoming a struggle (6)
- Be silent softly biting edge of hard-shelled seafood (6)
- Organised e-learning as a whole (2,7)
- Opening position that's well suited (5)

- (set by Buzzer)
- Desi okra's beginning to deaden tongue (5)
 - Familiar with spin, positive going for shot (7,2)
 - Not knowing what to do in deficit (2,1,4)
 - Let in again, study at prestigious university (7)
 - Attempt to seduce date somehow not dirty? (3,2,2)
 - Hate Buzzer no end (expletive) (2,5)
 - Streaming video's end deteriorated dramatically (9)
 - Coming around before weight gets silly (5)
 - Those inclined to refuse nuclear warning (2-3)
 - Inexpensive packing box holding collection (5-4)
 - Coves from France, Japan or Germany, special (6)
 - Japanese city kilometres away from its capital, central for stay (6)
 - DOWN
 - With nothing good inside tore off newspaper (5)
 - Marsupial group one caught, too jumped-up (9)
 - Has belief to overcome heroin urges (7)
 - Say regular red soil for cultivation (7)
 - Urged nearly having regular checks of the kidneys (5)
 - Disclaim ad a campaign broadcast that's up a tree (9)
 - Kid is hear ten, in gaol for stealing — not encouraging (13)
 - Certain electric phenomena, apt to describe Tesla (5,2,6)
 - Content with missionary as a major religious body (4,5)
 - Palate boy damaged with solvent (4,2,3)
 - Sees time running out for very many students (7)
 - Ideal to have doctor primarily endorse this? (3,4)
 - Fairy godmother to dress in gold (5)
 - On reflection dismiss court demand (5)

SUDOKU



Solution to puzzle 12550

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| B | A | C | H | A | N | A | L | I | A | M | O |
| A | A | A | E | O | A | I | P | | | | |
| C | O | M | E | T | C | I | G | A | R | E | T |
| K | I | C | K | I | O | T | E | N | | | |
| A | E | S | T | H | E | T | I | C | N | I | E |
| C | O | L | O | S | E | E | L | A | R | D | |
| H | O | L | I | S | E | M | E | D | I | A | T |
| S | A | I | R | I | S | M | E | D | I | A | T |
| C | A | M | E | O | I | R | A | S | C | I | B |
| A | U | R | N | A | N | A | E | R | | | |
| R | E | S | C | I | N | D | E | S | T | R | A |
| C | E | A | I | E | T | R | A | | | | |
| E | N | D | L | E | G | E | R | D | E | M | A |

FAITH

Boons granted

Given our preoccupation with everyday life, the chances of our approaching Lord Narayana, whose divine form protects us, are remote. Knowing our tendency to hanker after material pleasures, the Lord in some temples grants us our material desires even though this is not what He wants us to seek. He wants us to seek moksha. He wants us to seek proximity to Him for no other reason than to serve Him. But knowing our nature, He is in archa form in some temples to grant us our wishes, said V.S. Karunakarachariar in a discourse. Some deities come to mind in this context, like Lord Srinivasa, Oppiliappan of Kumbakonam, the deity of Guna-seelam etc. Crowds through these temples because the deities grant their wishes.

When a Rajasuya yaga is performed, a homa is done in the gArhapatya agni. The mantra goes: "Oh Lord, I have offered to you whatever I had vowed. You must give me what I desire repeatedly and I will make offerings to you repeatedly." In the same way, in prarthana sthalas, offerings are made with a view to obtaining some worldly benefits. Although this kind of request or prayer does not please the Lord, He still grants the wishes of the devotees because even such people will eventually move away from petty requests and realise that they must seek His feet without asking for favours.

There is a Vedic reference to marut, which must be seen as referring to these deities that accept offerings and grant wishes. The Vedic description of marut is merchants of the celestial world. So we should view deities of prarthana sthalas as marut — merchants who settle for a quid pro quo from bhaktas, although this is not pleasing to these deities. They grant people boons only to make them seek moksha.