

India look for fringe benefits against Australia in final series before World Cup

Final Auditions

India will continue their experiments to figure out the final pieces of a jigsaw puzzle called the 'World Cup squad' when a five-match ODI series against Australia starts today.

The team is slowly moving into the World Cup mode and even a 0-2 loss in the just-concluded T20 series won't see any shift in plans as far as skipper Virat Kohli and coach Ravi Shastri are concerned.

"Every team will look to fine-tune whatever they need to before the World Cup, and we'll keep doing that in the ODI series too, but we still want to win every match we play," skipper Kohli said after the Bengaluru T20 loss headlining his intention.

There will be at least four players for whom the series will be like a 'pre-test', a good score ensuring that they get 'admit cards' for the board exams.

The four players in question are KL Rahul, Rishabh Pant, Vijay Shankar and Siddharth Kaul, who are fighting for two available slots in that UK-bound 15-member squad.

One man who will be keenly tracking the developments from the sidelines will be Dinesh Karthik, who still, many believe, has an outside chance of making it to the team.

However, for the quartet of Rahul, Pant, Shankar and Kaul, the coming five matches will be an acid test as and when they are inducted into the playing XI.

Rahul should be in a good head space after scores of 50 and 47 in the two T20 Internationals and is expected to get a few more chances at the top of the order.

The batsman is fighting for the reserve opener's slot and who knows if Shikhar Dhawan's indifferent form continues, the Mangalore man could well be a permanent fixture in the side.

All eyes will also be on Pant, who hasn't exactly been consistent in the shorter formats but such is his talent and ability to win matches singlehandedly that the team management may give him a few more matches before taking a final call.

For Vijay Shankar, his bowling doesn't exactly inspire confidence but Hardik Pandya's doggy fitness will keep him in the race and he can still claim for a second rounder's slot if Pandya is the first choice.

Kaul is a rank outsider and could be a blind side entry as the reserve pacer as the team management's trial test with Khaleel Ahmed hasn't yielded the desired results.

With Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah being automatic choices, Kaul will probably get two games to prove his worth.

But Kohli and coach Ravi Shastri are not likely to tinker with the core team too much as a comprehensive series win is always an acceptable proposition.

With Ambati Rayudu, Kedarr Jadhav and Shami back in the Indian set-up, the ODI series will be a completely different



WATCHOUT! TODAY
1ST ODI
1:30pm India vs Australia
LIVE on Star Sports

There will be at least four players - KL Rahul, Rishabh Pant, Vijay Shankar and Siddharth Kaul - for whom the series will be like a 'pre-test', a good score ensuring that they get 'admit cards' for the board exams

FACTBOX
INDIA VS AUSTRALIA ODI SERIES

INDIA	AUSTRALIA
Ranking: 2nd	Ranking: 6th
Recent Form (Last 5)	Recent Form (Last 5)
Beat New Zealand by 35 runs in Wellington	Lost to India by 7 wickets in Melbourne
Lost to New Zealand by 8 wickets in Hamilton	Lost to India by 6 wickets in Adelaide
Beat New Zealand by 7 wickets in Mt Maunganui	Beat India by 34 runs in Sydney
Beat New Zealand by 90 runs in Mt Maunganui	Lost to South Africa by 40 runs in Hobart
Beat New Zealand by 8 wickets in Napier	Beat South Africa by 7 runs in Adelaide

'IPL will Have No Bearing on WC Selection'
India captain Virat Kohli on Friday said IPL performances will have "no influence" on the World Cup team selection. "No, I don't see the IPL having any influence on World Cup selection. I think that will be very, very radical sort of analysis," the Indian captain said on the eve of the first ODI here. There were talks that IPL could be a possible shoot-out between Dinesh Karthik and Rishabh Pant for the second wicketkeeper's slot but Kohli said that one good IPL won't make much of a difference for any World Cup hopeful. "We need to have a solid team. Before we head into the IPL, we need to be absolutely clear of what team we want for the World Cup. I don't see anything changing on how the IPL goes for any of the players. "If one or two players do not have a good IPL season, it doesn't mean that they are out of the picture for the World Cup. Those things are not going to matter," Kohli set the record straight. -PTI

challenge for Aaron Finch and his men. Also the formidable wrist spin duo of Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal will be operating in tandem during those middle overs to choke the run flow. Add to it, Jadhav's side-arm off-breaks and the likes of Glenn Maxwell, D'Arcy Short, Marcus Stoinis and Shaun Marsh may find it difficult to negotiate the overs. Bumrah, set to be India's premier bowler in England, may be rested for a game or two depending on India's position in the series.

The Australian team, buoyed by the maiden T20 triumph over India, will be eager to continue the momentum it has gained. Nathan Lyon's presence will lend teeth to the spin department and he will partner Adam Zampa. Andrew Tye, the late replacement for the injured Kane Richardson, will like to use all the variations learnt during his stints with various IPL franchises. **PTI**

They are a settled side, probably settled for such a long time now, and they are very good players. All those things go a long way to why they are so successful in India in particular
AARON FINCH explains why India are such a dangerous opposition



Karim Benzema has emerged as Real Madrid's main goal threat this season and has proven over the years that he is capable of netting in this rivalry

Lionel Messi is this fixture's all-time top scorer, with 26 goals to his name

Two in a Week?

EL CLASICO Barcelona eye double triumph over Real Madrid but defensive doubts remain

After knocking Real Madrid out of the Copa del Rey, Barcelona now have the opportunity to send their rivals packing in the title race too.

Barca's 3-0 victory on Wednesday means Barca will return to the Santiago Bernabeu on Saturday with a spring in their step, even if Madrid were the better side and had the better opportunities until the chaotic final 30 minutes, when a Luis Suarez double and Raphael Varane own goal gave victory to the Catalans.

"They had more chances in the first half, it's true," said Gerard Pique. "But in the second we knew how to get at them. They left more space and in 10 to 15 minutes we scored three goals."

A repeat this weekend in La Liga would leave Santiago Solar's side 12 points adrift of Barcelona, who'd effectively have an extra point's advantage given their superior head-to-head record. That would be a gargantuan gap to make up with 12 games left.

Atletico Madrid are closer, seven points back, and they still have to play Barca in April, albeit at the Camp Nou, where they haven't won in 18 visits. But there's no doubt bumping Real out of the chase would be a major step for the Catalans. They should feel confident if recent form between the two sides is any guide. The Copa del Rey win was Barcelona's fourth in six games at the Bernabeu and in each of those they have scored three or more. This season alone, their aggregate total against Real reads 9-2.

And while Madrid will take heart from the handful of golden opportunities they created, it was their opponents that showed the killer instinct, delivered by players used to producing when it matters most. "When Luis Suarez is in the area, he is at 200 per cent," said Valverde.

The question for Barca is also what these showings against the defending European champions say about their own chances in the Champions League. A goalless draw at Lyon in the first leg leaves their last 16 tie delicately poised ahead of the home return next month and if Barca do come through, sterner tests will lie ahead.

Three yellow cards over the course of the competition bring a one-match suspension and UEFA said Ramos had been punished "for clearly receiving a yellow card on purpose", with the aim of being clear for a potential quarter-final tie. Governing body set a precedent last season when Real full-back Dani Carvajal was suspended for two games after initially earning a booking in the group stage.

HEAD TO HEAD

Real	vs	Barcelona
43	Goals For	65
30	Goals Against	25
308	Total Shots	308
48.1%	Shot Conversion Rate	57.1%
23	Assists	45
15182	Passes	16844
373	Fouls suffered	379
284	Fouls committed	258
45	Yellow cards	45
4	Red cards	2

WATCHOUT! TONIGHT
LA LIGA
1:15am Real Madrid vs Barcelona
LIVE on Facebook Watch

Kyrgios Beats Stan to Reach Semis

Australian Nick Kyrgios, unfazed by stern words from vanquished Rafael Nadal, produced another gritty win over Switzerland's Stan Wawrinka to reach the semi-finals of the Mexico Open. A day after his dramatic comeback victory over 17-time Grand Slam winner Nadal, Kyrgios outlasted Wawrinka 7-5, 6-7 (3/7), 6-4 to book a meeting with John Isner for a place in the final. Third-seeded Isner defeated eighth-seeded Millman 7-6 (7/2), 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/4) in a three hour, five minute marathon.

'Need to Restore Bat-Ball Balance'

Power-hitting in ODI matches does not always guarantee entertainment and cricket authorities must alter the laws to restore balance between bat and ball, former England captain Michael Atherton has said. Atherton's comments came after England set West Indies a mammoth target of 418 in Wednesday's ODI in Grenada, with the hosts falling just short in a thrilling chase with 389. Both teams smashed a record 46 sixes in the match. "Six hitting alone does not guarantee entertainment and the balance between bat and ball is legitimate grounds for debate and concern in ODIs," Atherton wrote in The Times. "To provide a good spectacle, the balance in ODIs need not be skewed to the bowler as far as in Tests. This does not mean that bowlers should be denuded entirely."

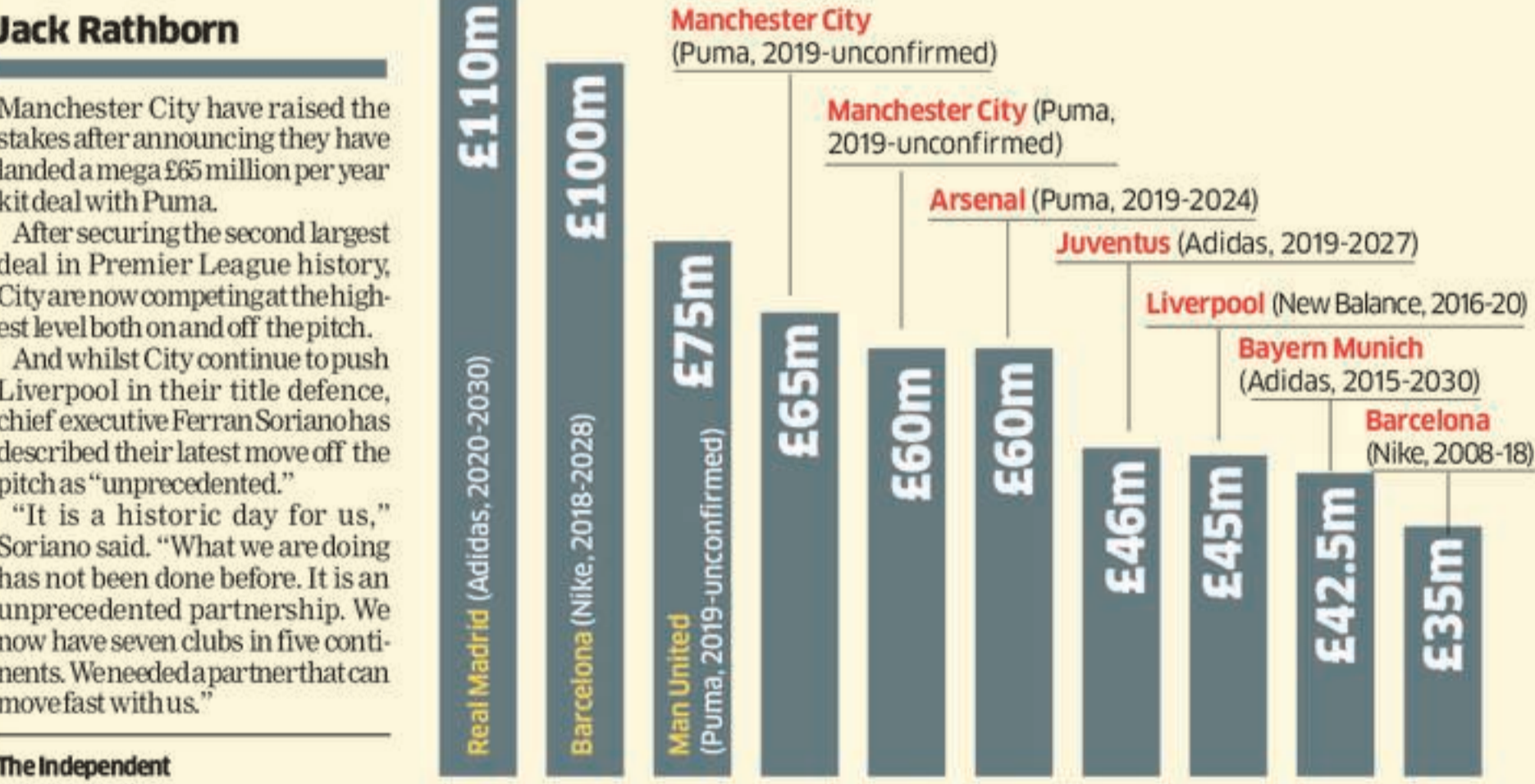
WATCH OUT! TONIGHT

PREMIER LEAGUE 6pm Tottenham v Arsenal 8:30pm Bournemouth v Man City 8:30pm Man United v Southampton	BUNDESLIGA 11pm Monchengladbach v Bayern LIGUE 1 9:30pm Caen v PSG ISL 7:30pm FC Pune v Mumbai City
WATCH OUT! TOMORROW PREMIER LEAGUE 7:35pm Fulham v Chelsea 9:45pm Everton v Liverpool LA LIGA 11pm Real Sociedad v Atletico SERIE A 1am Napoli v	Juventus ISL 7:30pm ATK v Delhi Dynamos I-LEAGUE 2pm Minerva Punjab v East Bengal 5pm Gokulam Kerala v NEROCA

PUBLISHED FOR THE PROPRIETORS, Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd. by Rajeev Yadav at Times House, 7, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi-110 002. Phone: 011-23302000, Fax: 011-23323346 and printed by him at Times of India Press, 13 & 15/1, Site IV, Industrial Area, Sahibabad (UP).
REGD. OFFICE Dr. Dabhal Naeraj Road, Mumbai-400 001. **EDITOR (DELHI MARKET)**: Javed Sayed (Responsible for selection of news under PRB Act). © Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of the publisher is prohibited. All rights reserved.
RNI NO. DE/ENCL/2006/16423 | **MADE IN NEW DELHI** | **VOLUME 1 (NO. 9)**
AIR CHARGE Rairpur, Ahmedabad, Srinagar, Leh & via © 2.00 | **PRICE IN NEPAL**: NEP ₹15.00 except Saturday & Sunday; NEP ₹25.00

MOST EXPENSIVE KIT DEALS IN HISTORY

Manchester City, Premier League champions, have ended their relationship with Nike, capitalising on their stature in the game, and joined hands with Puma. Where does their £65m per year contract rank in world's biggest deals?



For Ebdon, It's All About Well Being

Peter Ebdon, former snooker world champion, lost his father to cancer, and that changed his life



Anand Vasu Kochi

Six years ago, a friend of Ebdon's was diagnosed with Stage 4 prostate cancer and came to the snooker pro looking for advice. Ebdon handed him the 1921 book written by Joanna Brandt, the South African doctor, who had cured herself of stomach cancer by eating nothing but organic grapes for three months. The oncologist had given Ebdon's friend an outer limit of nine months to live, and the markers were not good. The Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) returns a reading of between one and four in healthy humans and his friend was at 1998. "Two months after turning vegan, his PSA levels came down to 22. In eight months it was 0.21, a normal, healthy reading," says Ebdon. "They gave him nine months. Six years on, he's still alive. Food is in the healing."

Ebdon has seen much in his lifetime, having lived in three different countries, made 3.5 million pounds and gone bankrupt and the peppery young man in a ponytail who took down the great Steve Davis in 1992 is far cry from the sage of today. When he gives up the game, Ebdon won't have a vacuum to fill. He's certified as a Professional Healer from the College of Healing in Malvern in Worcestershire, practices reiki and runs his own consultancy advising breeders on which stallions their thoroughbreds should visit. You can try to steer the conversation there, but Ebdon will bring it back to his spicy obsession. "Some marketing genius, somewhere in the past, convinced us that we should drink cow's milk. Bravo! Wonderful!" Those last two words are accompanied by sarcastic applause. "If you think about it, milk has always been species specific. So, cow's milk is for cows, rat's milk is for rats, human milk is for humans... It's not too difficult to work out, is it? But, unfortunately it's all about the profit!" Not for Ebdon, it isn't for him, it's all about well-being.

FACTBOX

Highest Ranking	3
Nickname	Psycho
Winnings	£3.5 million
Century breaks	375
World Champion	2002
Ranking tournament wins	9

LET YOUR CREATIVITY ROAR

YOUNG LIONS, gear up! Mark your creative territory globally in the world of advertising, media and marketing.

6 WINNERS GET A FULLY PAID* TRIP TO CANNES LIONS.

To participate, register on: www.etbrandequity.com/cannesindia
SEND YOUR ENTRIES LATEST BY 15TH MARCH, 2019.

Official Prep Partner: **MIAMI AD SCHOOL, MUMBAI**

Follow us on: @TimesResponse Response Solutions This is where the winners will be announced.

*Participants must be under the age of 30 (born on or after 21st June, 1988). For T&C please visit the website.

BRAND EQUITY

YOUNG LIONS

INDIA