

TV PICKS

NBA: Sony ESPN (SD & HD), 5.30 a.m.
Miami Open: Sony ESPN (SD & HD), 8.30 p.m.

IN BRIEF



Spurs beat Warriors; Nuggets in playoffs

LOS ANGELES
DeMar DeRozan, in pic. right, scored 26 points as San Antonio Spurs rolled to a season-best ninth straight win by toppling two-time defending champion Golden State Warriors 111-105 on Monday. Elsewhere, Denver Nuggets punched its ticket to the postseason by rallying past the Boston Celtics 114-105.
The results: Trailblazers 106 bt Pacers 98; Mavericks 125 lost to Pelicans 129; Celtics 105 lost to Nuggets 114; Raptors 128 bt Knicks 92; Cavaliers 126 bt Pistons 119; Wizards 95 lost to Jazz 116; Suns 101 bt Bulls 116; Thunder 107 lost to Heat 116; Spurs 111 bt Warriors 105.



Tributes pour in for Australian swimmer

HONG KONG
Record-breaking Hong Kong and Australia swimmer Kenneth To passed away aged 26 after falling unwell at a Florida training camp, leaving fellow competitors in shock. Chinese star Sun Yang, a one-time teammate of To's, was among the mourners for the popular swimmer who won Commonwealth and World championships medals with Australia before switching to represent his native Hong Kong. AFP



Ospina out of hospital after head injury scare

MILAN
Napoli goalkeeper David Ospina has been discharged from hospital and is recovering from his frightening collapse after a knock to the head at the weekend, the Serie A club announced on Monday. The 30-year-old, who is on loan from Arsenal, will miss Colombia's international friendlies against Japan on March 22 and South Korea four days later after suddenly falling to the ground 41 minutes after receiving treatment following his collision with Ignacio Pussetto during Sunday's 4-2 win over Udinese. AFP



Wrestler Ritu Phogat dropped from TOPS

NEW DELHI
Wrestler Ritu Phogat was on Tuesday dropped from the government's Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) after she decided to shift her loyalty to Mixed Martial Arts (MMA). The Sports Authority of India (SAI) decided to axe Ritu from the TOPS programme after the young wrestler made herself unavailable for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and decided to try her luck in MMA in Singapore. PTI



Casillas plans to play until 40 at Porto

LISBON
Former Real Madrid goalkeeper Iker Casillas wants to end his career at Porto and continue playing until he's 40, he told Spanish television. "This week I think I'll extend my contract until I'm 40. I'll be 38 soon and I'll most likely finish my career with FC Porto," the 37-year-old Spaniard said on the *El Dia Despues* programme. AFP

No trophy, no regrets: Federer

Thiem denied the Swiss a record sixth Indian Wells title

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MIAMI

Roger Federer departed Indian Wells empty-handed for a second straight year, but the Swiss great sees no reason he can't get back on track at the Miami Masters.

"Sure, it's frustrating and disappointing and sad to some extent," Federer said after falling 3-6, 6-3, 7-5 to Austrian Dominic Thiem in Sunday's final.

Thiem, 25, denied Federer a record sixth Indian Wells title and returned to his career-high of fourth in the world -- bumping Federer down to fifth going to the second leg of the "Sunshine Double" of Indian Wells and Miami.

But Federer, the 20-time Grand Slam winner who claimed a remarkable 100th career title in Dubai last month, can afford to take the defeat in stride -- especially when he's playing well and feels his 37-year-old body is fully fit.



Positive outlook: Roger Federer can afford to take the defeat in stride -- especially when he's playing well and feels his 37-year-old body is fully fit. •AFP

"It's just not as dramatic," he said of falling to a player who was "just a bit better when it mattered".

"Whereas, when you're hurt and things are difficult, maybe those hurt more.

"I'm going to Miami. The body is perfectly fine. That

also always keeps me upbeat, and I feel it's a privilege when I feel this way leaving a tournament.

"I have been playing every single day for the last three weeks. I can be very happy and proud of that fact."

As at Indian Wells, Federer

could meet fellow Swiss Stan Wawrinka in the third round in Miami.

Federer is a three-time winner at Miami, but he lost his second-round opener last year after falling to Juan Martin del Potro in the final at Indian Wells.

FIH to do away with Hockey Series events after 2019

To enable members to focus on continental qualifiers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LAUSANNE (SWITZERLAND)

The International Hockey Federation (FIH) will do away with its Hockey Series events after this year to enable its member associations to focus more on continental qualifiers and championships, the game's governing body said on Tuesday.

Insisting that the inaugural edition of the ongoing FIH Pro League has been a success, the world body said it will stop the Hockey Series events, which also serve as World Cup and Olympic qualifiers, after this year.

Instead, the world body has decided to give more emphasis on continental tournaments for qualifications in big events like the World Cup and Olympics.

The decision was taken at the FIH Executive Board's first meeting of the year on March 15 and 16 at its head-

quarters here under the chairmanship of its president Narinder Batra.

"The FIH Series events will be discontinued after 2019, allowing National Associations to focus on participation in continental qualifiers and championships," the FIH said in a statement.

"The FIH will review the World Cup qualification system with more weight given to Continental championship performance.

"A report about the FIH Pro League highlighted the successful launch and first two months of the new global FIH competition, and how all parameters, in particular athlete welfare, are being thoroughly analysed in order to finalise the 2020 match schedule with all stakeholders," it added.

The FIH has ratified the new WADA approved anti-doping programme.

Aditya stuns Fardeen

SPORTS BUREAU
DEHRADUN

Aditya Vardhan Roy Chowdhury knocked out second seed Fardeen Qamar 6-7(5), 7-5, 6-3 in the boys first round of the ITF grade-5 junior tennis tournament at the Shanti Academy courts on Tuesday.

However, top seed Denim Yadav blanked qualifier Sameer Mohammed to set up a second round against Arjun Sriram of the US.

In the girls section, second seed Bhakti Parwani battled past lucky loser Maitree Diksha Rout 6-3, 1-6, 6-3.

The results (first round): Boys: Denim Yadav bt Sameer Mohammed 6-0, 6-0; Aman Patel bt Gourav Gulia 6-3, 7-6(6); Aditya Vardhan Roy Chowdhury bt Fardeen Qamar 6-7(5), 7-5, 6-3.

Girls: Smriti Bhasin bt Niyati KKukreti 6-3, 6-3; Prena Vichare bt Ameek Kiran Batth 6-4, 6-2; Elf Sanem Karadag (Tur) bt Sana Khanna 7-6(5), 6-2; Renne Singla bt Harleen Kaur 6-1, 6-2; Juliette Bovy (Bel) bt Mekhala Manna 6-1, 6-1; Bhakti Parwani bt Maitree Diksha Rout 6-3, 1-6, 6-3.

BFC hungry to win Super Cup: Chhetri

SPORTS REPORTER
BENGALURU

At a time when the Super Cup has been hit by a raft of team pullouts, newly crowned ISL champion Bengaluru FC is set to put its best foot forward.

"We will go there not as a complacent ISL-winning team, but as hungry as ever to try and win the trophy," declared skipper Sunil Chhetri.

"I know so many teams that have spent so much money but still don't have trophies. So if we are in form now and we can win a

trophy, we want to grab the chance. Because no matter how hard you work, you are never guaranteed trophies."

Club CTO Mandar Tamhane echoed Chhetri's words.

"When the coach spoke after the [ISL] final, he wanted to be the one who won two trophies in one year," said Tamhane. "Every player shares that mentality. We have always played full-strength teams. People ask us about marquee players, but all the players who are on the pitch are marquee for us."

Shagun Chowdhary misses the final

SPORTS BUREAU
ACAPULCO

Olympian Shagun Chowdhary was in irreplaceable form as she shot 49 out of 50, winding up with a perfect 25, but missed the final by three points with a total of 116, in women's trap in the shotgun World Cup in Acapulco, Mexico.

After having shot 67 out of 75 on the opening day, Shagun, who has been guided by former World Champion Danielle Di Spigno of Italy, shot near flawless.

She was tied on 116 with five others, but missed the best placing to Fatima Galvez of Spain on the count back.

Rajeshwari Kumari also wound up with a perfect fifth round of 25, but a below par 20 in the fourth round saw her finish with 112 and the 36th place. Varsha Varman managed to shoot 105 for the 52nd spot in a field of 56.

Multiple World Champion and London Olympics gold medalist Jessica Rossi of Italy beat Laetisha Scanlan of Australia 45-43 for the gold, after having shot 121 in qualification.

There was a lot better cheer for the Indian camp, as Prithviraj Tondaiman had two perfect rounds and Olympian Kynan Chenai had 49 out of 50 in men's trap.

Prithviraj was tied in the top spot with six others, while there were 32 on 49, which should give a hint of the high quality contest.

Former World Champion Manavjit Sandhu was on 46, as he shot 21 after a perfect round, to be languishing in the 84th place in a field of 107.

The results: Women's trap: 1. Jessica Rossi (Ita) 45 (121); 2. Laetisha Scanlan (Aus) 43 (119)8; 3. Deng Weiyun (Chn) 32 (120)1; 19. Shagun Chowdhary 116; 36. Rajeshwari Kumari 112; 52. Varsha Varman 105.

Super Cup: East Bengal at loggerheads with investor

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

The East Bengal Club executive committee decided to shoot down the decision of its investor Qness by announcing its willingness to participate in the upcoming Hero Super Cup.

Qness, which revived the fortunes of East Bengal by investing in the team, had decided to be part of the unity showed by the group of I-League clubs in withdrawing from the Super Cup to protest against All India Football Federation's inaction on various issues.

The East Bengal Club executive committee decision exposed a simmering discontent among the officials of the original club who have felt left out by its investor, Qness Corp Limited.

According to the East Bengal club officials, the Bengaluru-based company, which owns a major share in the Qness East Bengal FC (QEBFC) Pvt. Ltd. after the senior team was incorporated into a separate entity in July 2018, had been ignoring it while taking its decisions.

Gopi's journey from player to coach

'Love the sport... that is the key for any athlete'

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM
HYDERABAD

It is the month of March and 18 years ago two Hyderabad-based sportsmen made a significant name for themselves. P. Gopi Chand won the prestigious All England title before V.V.S. Laxman scripted a magnum opus 281 against Australia at the Eden Gardens Test.

At the insistence of "very good friend" Laxman at the Telangana Sports Journalists Association annual awards function here on Tuesday, Gopi traced his evolution from player to India's chief national badminton coach.

"I think I am probably one of the very few coaches who is recognised consistently. But there are many more who deserve this," he said on receiving the 'best coach of the year' award from IPS officer C.V. Anand and Laxman.

"Whatever I am today is because of my parents, coaches. And I always believed that every step I climbed, the next one too is possible," Gopi said.

Broken panes

"My mom took me for cricket after I broke a few window panes at my place. I wanted to join cricket, but there were no slots.

"Then at a tennis court my parents -- on seeing many cars parked outside -- felt it was too expensive for them. Then, I went to a badminton hall which was empty.

"My first coach Hamid sir



Proud moment: P. Gopi Chand receiving the coach of the year award at the TSJA annual function from C.V. Anand, IPS, and V.V.S. Laxman on Tuesday. •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

was such a beautiful person. He actually never taught me how to hold the racket or play strokes. He just taught me to love the sport. I think that is the key for any athlete," Gopi said.

"Then, Arif sir entered my career. He is a super disciplinarian par excellence. I learnt this from him. That's how every kid should be.

"Later on, there was a Chinese coach, hired by Government of India for two years, who believed in me. He nurtured me and thought I had the game. I feel as a coach, when you see the spark you need to trust the talent," he said amidst applause.

"I was very fortunate to see someone like Prakash Padukone. No one before him from India had won the All England title. He made us dream about that prestigious event. To achieve great heights and still be humble are his greatest traits, a great

role model.

"In the late 90s, after three surgeries and losing in the first round of the Dutch Open, I was alone, sobbing, and desperate as there was no funding and my knee was hurting.

"Then, one coach told me -- it is not how hard you fall but how quickly you get up each time. These turned out to be critical observations in my career," Gopi said.

"I was also fortunate to have someone like Ganguly Prasad as coach when I won the 2001 All England title. He was more like a friend, could speak to him and connect, could plan and plot against top players.

"I always believe that as a player you see everything in front of you and think whether it is good for your practice. As a coach you think whether it is good for the athlete. This is the fundamental difference," he said.