

IN BRIEF



Fury to take on Schwarz in June

LOS ANGELES
Unbeaten British heavyweight Tyson Fury will return to the ring against German Tom Schwarz on June 15, fighting for the first time in Las Vegas, promoter Top Rank has confirmed. Fury will be fighting for the first time since a controversial split-decision draw at Los Angeles in December against American Deontay Wilder. **AFP**



Ko Jin-young powers to Founders Cup title

PHOENIX
South Korea's Ko Jin-young's seven birdies included a late string of three in a row that pushed her to a third LPGA title at the Founders Cup here on Sunday. She totalled 22-under 266 for a one-shot lead over Liu, Spain's Carlotta Ciganda and American sisters Jessica and Nelly Korda. **AFP**



Aussie bowler Richardson dislocates shoulder

SYDNEY
Australia fast bowler Jhye Richardson has dislocated his shoulder and will head home from the Pakistan tour, officials said, as he faces a battle to be fit for the World Cup. Richardson took two for 16 in the second ODI in Sharjah on Sunday but fell awkwardly on his bowling arm and left the field in the 11th over. **AFP**

India will need to be on its toes against Malaysia

Can ill-afford to concede another last-minute goal

AZLAN SHAH

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
IPOH

Conceding last minute goals has continued to haunt India for long now and the team would look to avoid that when it take on 'new-found' nemesis Malaysia in its third league match of the Azlan Shah Cup hockey tournament here on Tuesday.

After a not-so-convincing win over Asian Games gold medallist Japan in the opener, Manpreet Singh and his men conceded in the final minute of the match to draw 1-1 against Korea on Sunday.

India is currently third in the six-team standings with four points while Malaysia leads the chart with wins over Poland and Japan respectively. Korea has the same points – four – as India, but is ahead on goal difference.

On Sunday, India was well on course to register its second win in the tournament

after taking a 28th minute lead through Mandeep Singh. But a defensive error, just 22 seconds from the final hooter, enabled Jonghyun Jang score the equaliser from a penalty corner.

And come Tuesday, the Indians can ill afford to repeat similar mistakes. Specially against Malaysia, which in the recent past, has exploited such grey areas and remains a thorn in the flesh for the Blue Sticks.

Dark horse

Considered as the dark horses of Asian hockey for long, Malaysia has repeatedly showed its capabilities by upsetting big teams, at least on the continental level, when it mattered.

It all started back in 2010 when Malaysia stunned India 4-3 with a last-minute goal at the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games semifinals.

Eight years later, India conceded a last minute goal in the semifinals of the Jakar-

ta Asian Games to enable Malaysia draw level and eventually win the encounter 7-6 in a dramatic penalty shoot-out.

In Roelant Oltmans, a former India coach and High Performance Director, Malaysia has a shrewd tactician who knows the ins and outs of Indian hockey.

Caution

India should be wary of penalty corner specialist Muhammad Razie Rahim. The 31-year-old has flattened India on more than one occasion, including in the Jakarta semifinal. The Indian defence will also have to keep at bay the 'Saari brothers' – Fitri and Faizal – especially the latter who has already scored a hat-trick and is currently the leading scorer in the competition with five.

India can take heart from the fact that it is the same Malaysian side that it thrashed 5-1 at the same venue in the last edition.



On guard: India will have to put behind the defensive deficiencies, which cropped up against Korea, when it takes on Malaysia. **•PTI**

Manoj shocked by charge that he hid injuries

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Indian boxer Manoj Kumar has written to Sports Minister Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore, rejecting allegations that he hid injuries in the run up to last year's Asian Games and reasserting that the system failed him when he needed it.

A two-time CWG medallist, Manoj is currently being treated for a groin injury in Mumbai. He had alleged that the SAI did not cooperate in paying for his treatment, a charge that the SAI denied and instead accused him of hiding injuries. "I am saddened by allegations that I hid injuries. In fact, I am shocked given that my struggles have never been a secret for them. I would like to tell them that I achieved what I did on the basis of merit. Yes, I lost in the Asiad prelims but so did some others, why am I the only one targeted?" Manoj wrote in the letter.

Manika parts ways with coach Sandeep Gupta

He has been guiding her since she was an eight-year-old

TABLE TENNIS

RAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI

Twin gold medal-winner from the 2018 Commonwealth Games Manika Batra has split with long-time coach Sandeep Gupta.

It is learnt that the country's top-ranked women table tennis player, winner of four medals at the Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast, has decided to train with Pune-based Sanmay Paranjape.

Manika added a historic mixed doubles bronze medal in the company of Sharath Kamal in the 2018 Asian Games.

Last year, she also received the Arjuna Award while Sandeep missed out on the Dronacharya Award. Manika also became the first Indian to receive the International Table Tennis Federation's 2018 Breakthrough Star award.

Though Manika could not be contacted despite repeated attempts, Sandeep confirmed the development and said, "She told me she wanted to move on and train with a different coach. I wished her the very best, as always."

Manika, who will turn 24 in June, took to table tennis as an eight-year-old. Sandeep re-

mained her only coach all these years.

The last time Manika trained under Sandeep was at Budapest during the Hungarian Open in the third week of January. Earlier that month, Manika's performance in the National championship was below expectations.

Understandably, Sandeep did not want to elaborate on the subject. The Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI) secretary M.P. Singh also chose to underplay the split. "I don't want to comment on something personal between the coach and his trainee. The Federation has nothing to do with it. We wish them well."

Aman advances

NEW DELHI: Third seed Aman Patel edged out Udit Gogoi 4-6, 6-3, 7-6(5) in the boys' first round of the ITF grade-5 junior tennis tournament on Monday.

In another match, Chetan Prashant Gadiyar beat sixth seed Tejasvi Mehra 7-6(3), 6-3. In the girls' section, Reshma Challarapu knocked out fifth seed Deepshika Sriram 6-4, 6-0.

Girls: Shreya Chakraborty bt Shreya Mandalapu (US) 6-0, 6-1; Qinglin Zang (Chn) bt Van-shita Pathania 6-4, 3-6, 6-2; Renne Singla bt Lenien Jamir 6-2, 6-3; Ameet Kiran Bhatt bt Priyanshi Sharma 6-0, 6-0; Juliette Bovy (Bel) bt Vaishnavi Adkar 6-0, 6-2; Veda Raju Prapurna bt Sai Bhoyar 6-3, 6-3.

The results (first round): Boys: Pranjal Tiwary bt Shourya Manik 6-4, 6-4; Sushant Dabas bt Arjun Sriram (USA) 2-6, 7-6(4), 6-2; Vansh Bhagatani bt Sanjith Devineni (USA) 6-0, 6-2; Dhruv Tangri bt Anartha Ganguly 6-2, 6-0; Chetan Prashant Gadiyar bt Tejasvi Mehra 7-6(3), 6-3; Prasanna Pravin Bagade bt Andrei Jovanovic (Srb) 7-6(4), 6-1; Yash Chaurasia bt Parakram Bakiwala 7-5, 6-2;

Nikhil Niranjan (US) bt Suvrat Mall 6-2, 6-2; Aman Patel bt Udit Gogoi 4-6, 6-3, 7-6(5); Sarthak Suden bt Kartik Saxena 6-3, 6-1; Chirag Duhan bt Rohan Srivastava 6-1, 6-3; Ajay Malik bt Aashutosh Kulkarni Prachet 6-3, 6-3.

Riya Uboveja bt Emma Van Poppel (Ned) 6-0, 6-3; Vipasha Mehra bt Vidhi Jani 6-1, 6-2; Reshma Challarapu bt Deepshika Sriram 6-4, 6-0; Yi-mei Zhao (Chn) bt Banhi Panchal 6-2, 6-0; Jagmeet Kaur Grewal bt Keya Pattavai 6-1, 6-0.

Chance for Sindhu, Srikanth to regain form at home

No overwhelming favourites in the singles draw



Not so tough: Given the draw, P.V. Sindhu should ease into the semifinals without being really challenged, provided she plays to her potential. **•RITU RAJ KONWAR**

INDIAN OPEN

RAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI

A new venue, a strong Chinese presence and the uninspiring recent showings of P.V. Sindhu and K. Srikanth presents an unclear picture in the minds of country's badminton fans on the eve of the Indian Open here.

When the action commences with the qualifying rounds on Tuesday, there are no overwhelming favourites in the singles draw, hit by the withdrawal of the Chinese top seeds – Shi Yuqi and Chen Yufei.

Given the draw, Sindhu should ease into the semifinals without being really challenged, provided the second seed plays to her potential.

With Saina Nehwal deciding to skip the event to recover from a bout of acute gastro-enteritis, there is no other woman player in the field to give the home fans anything to cheer about.

■ Srikanth's rival in the pre-quarterfinals will be a Chinese, either Lu Guangzu or Zhao Jungpeng

■ Axelsen could run into compatriot O Jorgensen for a place in the semifinals

Srikanth, looking to regain his fitness of old, has looked a pale shadow of the man who won four titles in 2017.

Srikanth's rival in the pre-quarterfinals will be a Chinese, either Lu Guangzu or Zhao Jungpeng.

Sai Praneeth, on a high following his recent conquest of Chen Long, and fifth seed Sameer Verma are drawn to meet in the pre-quarterfinals, thereby ensuring an Indian in the last-eight stage.

Man to beat

Among the other overseas challengers, the 2017 World champion Viktor Axelsen could well be the man to beat. Runner-up in All En-

gland earlier this month, Axelsen is looking good to retain his form of old. He could well run into compatriot Jan O Jorgensen for a place in the semifinals.

In the women's section, third-seeded Chinese He Bingjiao, potentially the semifinal rival of Sindhu, former World champion and fourth-seeded Thai Intanon Ratchanok, the 2012 Olympic champion on a comeback trail Li Xuerui and last year's surprise winner Beiwenzhang, seeded six, are the ones to watch out for.

In all, the presence of a large Chinese contingent across all five categories is a reflection of the country's priority on gaining maximum points aimed at qualifying for the 2020 Olympic Games.

It could get tougher for some accomplished names against the far lesser-known Chinese rivals this week. For the Indians, it will be their first experience of playing in the large, main hall of the IG Stadium.

Looking to make amends

RAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI

P.V. Sindhu is looking to make amends for an ordinary 2019 so far, after finishing last season with a historic triumph in the year-ending BWF World Tour Finals. She has set her eyes on the Indian Open, beginning here on Tuesday.

"It hasn't been a really good start (to 2019). I have been losing and winning."

"It is these three tournaments (Delhi, Malaysia and Singapore) and then the Olympic qualifications will also start. I have to be mentally and physically fit to give my best."

"A couple of weeks break after the All England and I have prepared well. I have the confidence and hope to do well."

Talking about the first round exit from All England earlier this month, she said, "I felt bad about it because I had actually prepared very well, but then I lost. I felt bad for a few days but then I thought it's not over with this and there is a lot more to come. Right now I am prepared and back."

Without a title for 17 months, K. Srikanth said, "The results haven't really come my way but happy with the way I have been playing. Working on to be more consistent and looking to do well at the Olympics. I hope to keep the momentum up to the Olympics. Keep training and keep working hard."



K. Srikanth. **•K. MURALI KUMAR**