

IN BRIEF



Bancroft good choice for Durham captain: Smith

LONDON
Australian cricketer Steve Smith on Thursday hailed Cameron Bancroft's appointment as Durham's captain. "Cam is a good choice for captain, he has got a good head on his shoulders and has shown great character in the way he has come back after his time out," ESPN Cricinfo quoted Smith as saying. **ANI**



De Bruyne tips England for Euro 2020 glory

LONDON
Manchester City midfielder Kevin De Bruyne believes England's crop of promising teenage stars makes it favourite to win Euro 2020, alongside World champion France. De Bruyne believes the emergence of Jadon Sancho, Callum Hudson-Odoi and clubmate Phil Foden makes Gareth Southgate's side strong contender. **AFP**



UK's richest man wants to buy French club Nice

NICE
Britain's richest man, Jim Ratcliffe, wants to further expand his sport network by buying French Ligue 1 club Nice after snapping up cycling's Team Sky last month, his brother revealed to French media on Friday. Robert Ratcliffe confirmed to newspaper *Nice-Matin* that the boss of petrochemical giant Ineos wants to purchase the club. **AFP**

Weightlifting teams for Asians

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT KOLKATA

The Indian Weightlifting Federation has picked lifters with proven track record for the Asian championships to be held in Ningbo City, China, from April 18 to 28.

Former World champion S. Mirabai Chanu, Youth Olympics gold medalist Jeremy Lalrinnunga and two-time Commonwealth Games gold medalist Sathish Sivalingam feature among the selected lifters.

Another well known lifter, R.V. Rahul (89kg), who is nursing a back injury, has been named as a reserve.

The squad: Men: M. Raja (61kg), Jeremy Lalrinnunga (67kg), Achinta Sheuli (73kg), Sathish Sivalingam and Ajay Singh (81kg), Vikas Thakur (96kg), Pardeep Singh (102 kg) and Gurdeep Singh (+109 kg). Reserve: RV Rahul.

Women: Jhili Dalabehera (45kg), S. Mirabai Chanu (49kg), Swati (59kg), Rakhi Halder (64kg).

Sahil, Murad & Satish qualify

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA PUNE

Indian golfers Sahil Jain, Murad Talib and Satish Cheeti booked their spots in the World Finals of the MercedesTrophy, scheduled to be held in Stuttgart, Germany, in October this year.

Playing at the National finals at Pune's Oxford Golf Resort, Sahil in handicap CAT A (3-10) won with a score of 39 points in his category.

Murad carded a score of 37 points in CAT B (11-17) to book the second Stuttgart spot while Satish playing in CAT C (18-24) scored 36 points to complete the trika of India qualifiers.

Chen Long subdues Srikanth

The Indian lets go of initial advantage to lose in straight games

MALAYSIA OPEN

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA KUALA LUMPUR

A fighting Kidambi Srikanth suffered a straight-game loss to Olympic champion Chen Long of China to bow out of the men's singles quarterfinals at the Malaysia Open here on Friday.

The eighth-seeded Indian blew a 16-11 advantage in the opening game to lose the match 21-18, 21-19.

The 26-year-old had a 1-5 head-to-head record against Chen Long, whom he had defeated in their last meeting at the 2017 Australian Open.

The Chinese showed great defence, playing some exceptional shots like a between-the-legs return.

In the first game, the Indian opened up a 11-7 lead at the first break.

He stayed ahead till 16-11 when Chen started slowly clawing back into the contest.

The Chinese drew parity at 17-17 before sealing the game with a cross-court re-



Pulling through: Chen Long ended K. Srikanth's campaign in the quarterfinals. **AFP**

turn that left the Indian stranded.

In the second game, Srikanth kept himself close to the Chinese before Chen unleashed a down-the-line smash to grab a 11-7 lead at the breather.

Srikanth made some simple errors like misjudging line calls, hitting wide and

long and also mistiming shots as Chen led 16-8.

The Indian won a long rally when Chen went wide and then the Chinese lost a couple of more points near the net before attacking the Indian's backhand to reach 17-11.

Srikanth kept breathing down Chen's neck and reduced the margin to 17-18

thanks to the Chinese falling in a heap of errors. The Indian levelled the scores at 18-all and was 19-19 when Chen hit another long shot.

But the Chinese sent one at the backline to move to match point and sealed it when a fighting Srikanth dived full stretch but couldn't keep the shuttle in.

Jeevan-Purav duo enters semifinals

SPORTS BUREAU VILLENA (SPAIN)

Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan and Purav Raja reached the doubles semifinals of the €46,600 Challenger tennis tournament with a 4-6, 6-3, [10-8] victory over Enrique Lopez Perez and David Marrero.

In the ITF men's and women's events in Sharm El Sheikh, Adil Kalyanpur and S.D. Prajwal Dev bowed out in the semifinals; so did Sai Samhitha and Ange Oby Kaju of Japan.

The results:

€46,600 Challenger, Villena, Spain: Doubles (quarterfinals): Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan & Purav Raja bt Enrique Lopez Perez & David Marrero (Esp) 4-6, 6-3, [10-8].

\$15,000 ITF tournament, Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt: Doubles (semifinals): Men: Marek Joloviec (Cze) & Lukas Klein (Svk) bt S.D. Prajwal Dev & Adil Kalyanpur 6-4, 6-4.

Women: Zhibek Kulambayeva (Kaz) & Katarina Kuzmova (Svk) bt Ange Oby Kaju (Jpn) & Sai Samhitha 6-1, 6-2.

Delhi meets Meghalaya

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Delhi will take on Meghalaya in the first round of the Santosh Trophy to be held at Ludhiana from April 8.

Delhi, which qualified after beating Chandigarh, J & K and Uttarakhand in the prelims at Katra recently, has been placed in Group-A with Odisha, Goa, Services and Meghalaya. Group-B comprises Assam, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Punjab and Sikkim.

The semifinals are scheduled for April 19. The final will be held on April 21.

Pandit to assess future as Vidarbha coach

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

Two-time Ranji Trophy-winning Chandrakant Pandit's hugely successful tenure at Vidarbha has attracted interest from other State associations and the sought-after coach on Friday said he will "assess" his future.

More time with family

The former India wicket-keeper, who also guided Vidarbha to back-to-back Irani Trophy triumphs, added that he wanted to spend more time with his family.

"I have come to Nagpur to speak to the Vidarbha Cricket Association officials. I will



Chandrakant Pandit. **FILE PHOTO**

take a call about my future in a day or two. I am having some discussions with them. Let's see how it turns out,"

Pandit said. "It is true that I want to spend some more time with my family but I have not taken any decision yet.

Feelers

"I have received feelers through indirect sources. Therefore I don't know if these are offers unless I am officially contacted by State associations. But yes, there has been some interest shown to avail my services," he added.

Pandit has played five Tests and 36 ODIs for India from 1986 to 1992.

Under the guidance of the 57-year-old taskmaster, Vi-

darbha won both the Ranji and Irani trophies in 2017-18 and 2018-19 seasons.

He was involved in his 11th Ranji final – sixth as coach – when Vidarbha took on Saurashtra in the final earlier this year.

After featuring in five Ranji finals – four for his home team Mumbai and one for Madhya Pradesh – during his 21 seasons in First Class cricket, Pandit has done one better in his second avatar as coach.

In the past, he has been the India Under-19 coach for a World Cup, and also served as the Under-19 chief selector.

Indian women face tricky Nepal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA MANDALAY (MYANMAR)

The Indian women's football team faces a stern test against a tricky Nepal in its Olympic Qualifiers round-two match here on Saturday.

The two teams will be up against each other for the third time since February. In the Hero Gold Cup, Nepal had triumphed 2-1 in Bhubaneswar, while the Indians had a revenge of sorts in their 3-1 win in the SAFF Championship final.

India head coach Maymol

Rocky said her side will look to score first and put the opposition under pressure.

"We need to take our chances. Nepal possess the ability to hurt us. That was on display in Bhubaneswar. We will try to score first," Maymol said. "Sabitra Bhandari is one of their (Nepal's) key players in attack, and we will try to neutralise her."

Maymol spoke about her players having a good relationship with the Nepalese, but said on the field there will be no concessions.

With only one team qualifying, and both India and Myanmar level on points, a win for the Maymol-coached side will further boost its chances for a qualification from the Olympic Qualifiers Round 2.

Dalima Chhibber, who scored off a majestic freekick in the SAFF final against Nepal, said the two teams are "aware of the strengths of each other."

"It will be a battle of who can convert in front of the goal."

Zidane praises 'fantastic' Hazard

The Belgian's Chelsea contract expires in June 2020

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE MADRID

Zinedine Zidane expressed his admiration for Eden Hazard on Friday ahead of an expected move for the Chelsea forward from Real Madrid this summer.

Hazard's contract expires in June 2020 and he is yet to sign a new deal, leaving Chelsea in a difficult position if it wants to avoid losing the Belgian for free.

'Madrid the best'

After last year's World Cup, he admitted "it might be time for something different" while in October, he said it would be a "dream" to play for Real Madrid, "the best club in the world".

Asked about Hazard at a press conference before Madrid's La Liga game against Eibar on Saturday, Zidane said: "He is a player I have always rated [high], as everyone knows.

"He is a player that has played in France, that I have watched a lot and that I know personally. There's nothing new about what I think of him as a player. He's a fantastic player."

Real Madrid has certainly struggled for goals this season. It has scored 26 fewer than Barcelona in the league



Compliment: Eden Hazard is a player he has always rated high, said Zinedine Zidane. **AFP**

and rarely threatened Valencia on Tuesday, when it was beaten 2-1 at Mestalla.

Scoring problem

"I know the numbers and it has cost us," Zidane said. "This year we have had difficulty scoring. Will we change things? Yes."

Barcelona plays at home to second-placed Atletico Madrid on Saturday, meaning Real can close the gap on the top two if it overcomes Eibar at the Santiago Bernabeu.

But it is five points behind Atleti and 13 adrift of Barca while the loss to Valencia in midweek exposed its weaknesses both in attack and defence. "I'm not worried," Zidane said. "This season has

been difficult and I cannot say in two minutes what has happened but there are things that you have to accept.

"We know what all these players have won, not just in my time, but in the last five, six, seven years. We are going to try to turn it around, the club needs change, to win again, to do great things and that's what I'm here for.

"Our problems on the pitch? We accept them. Fewer people in the stadium? We accept it. But we must not forget what these players have done either. I'm not worried at all."

Dani Carvajal returned to training on Friday but Thibaut Courtois is unlikely to be available.

Colts embark for junior Davis Cup

KAMESH SRINIVASAN NEW DELHI

The Indian under-16 boys' team looked strong, at least on paper, as the players went through the final preparations, including dope test, at the R.K. Khanna Stadium here on Friday.

"We have a good team and should be able to qualify. It will be a difficult choice for me to select the players for the matches, as all are equally good. Initially, I will go by the ranking," said the captain and coach of the junior Davis Cup team, Sajid Lodi.

"Once they play, we will go by their fitness level, quality of performance and their willingness to perform, to make the team for subsequent matches," said the coach.

Divesh Gahlot, Sushant Dabas and Ajay Malik make the team, and they are all capable of beating any player, on their day.

The boys' team will compete in Thailand at Nonthaburi, in the event which was originally scheduled to be played in Delhi.

The under-14 girls' team, with Olympian Rushmi



On a mission: The members of the junior Davis Cup team – Sushant Dabas, captain Sajid Lodi, Ajay Malik and Divesh Gahlot. **KAMESH SRINIVASAN**

Chakravarthi as the captain, will be competing in the Asia-Oceania World Junior tennis tournament to be played in Kuala Lumpur.

"The girls have been playing tournaments regularly and performing well. I expect them to fight well," said Rushmi. Veda Raju Prapura had, in fact, qualified for the UK under-14 championship to be played in Wimbledon in August, with a good performance in the Road to Wimbledon event on the grass courts of the Gymkhana Club here.

The junior Fed Cup will be held in Thailand the fol-

lowing week after the boys' event next week. "We are reaching tomorrow and will have enough time to prepare and get acclimatised to the conditions," said Sajid Lodi.

There was concern about the teams not getting the playing kit as specified and the authorities were trying to find a solution.

The teams: Under-16 boys: Divesh Gahlot, Sushant Dabas, Ajay Malik. **Captain:** Sajid Lodi.

Under-16 girls: Bhakti Shah, Sudipta Senthilkumar, Sanjana Sirimala. **Captain:** Namita Bal.

Under-14 girls: Pari Singh, Veda Raju Prapura., Shruti Ahlawat. **Captain:** Rushmi Chakravarthi.