

India expected to dominate Pakistan

Ramkumar to open proceedings with Nagal playing second singles

DAVIS CUP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NUR-SULTAN (KAZAKHSTAN)

A formidable India is expected to demolish the challenge of a depleted Pakistan in the Davis Cup tie to be played in the indoor courts of the National Tennis Center from Friday after the fixture was shifted to a neutral venue following a drama-filled build up.

While security concerns were resolved, the shifting of the match did no good to the competition.

India, with players of the calibre of Sumit Nagal, Ramkumar Ramanathan and veteran Leander Paes, was always expected to win easily, but the pullouts of Pakistan's top players Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi and Aqeel Khan has made it a no-contest.

Learning experience

It will be a learning experience for Pakistan's junior players, who will lead their country's challenge in the tie, the winner travelling to Croatia in March 2020 for the World Group qualifiers.

The match will offer the 46-year-old Paes a chance to further better his Davis Cup record for most doubles wins. He stands on top with 43 wins, which he achieved last year while playing against China.

Jeevan set to make debut
Paes, owner of 18 Grand



All set: The Indian and Pakistan teams strike a pose after the draw was made on Thursday. • COURTESY: TWITTER

The schedule

- Nov. 29 (Fri): Ramkumar Ramanathan v Muhammad Shoaib, Sumit Nagal v Huzaifa Abdul Rehman
- Nov. 30 (Sat): Leander Paes & Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan v Shoaib & Huzaifa
- Dec. 1 (Sun): Reverse singles

Slam trophies, will be partnering debutant Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan.

The left-hander will become India's 75th player to figure in a Davis Cup match.

Ramkumar will open the tie on Friday against Muham-

Bhupathi cannot get over the 'hurt'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI

Mahesh Bhupathi on Thursday said he cannot get over the "hurt" caused by AITA's manner of sacking him for refusing to travel to Pakistan for a Davis Cup tie on security grounds.

"I am still in touch with the boys on a daily basis. I

was disappointed with the way the Federation dealt with it. When they wanted me to become captain, they flew down to Hyderabad, had a meeting with me," said Bhupathi. "I don't mind if they think that it is time for me to step out, but a courtesy phone call saying 'listen we think it is time to put

someone new in the system' and I would have respected that but I didn't even get that call." "Honestly, the way the federation has dealt with not only me but everyone in Indian tennis for the last 20 years, there is no surprise. "But at some level it kind of hurts," he added.

mad Shoaib, who has not won a single match in the main draw of an ITF Futures tournament. In the second

singles, Nagal will take on Huzaifa Abdul Rehman. "We are looking to white-wash them," said India's

non-playing captain Rohit Rajpal. Matches will start at 1:30 p.m. (IST) on Friday and at 11:30 a.m. on Saturday.

Sania plans comeback in January

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NEW DELHI

Sania Mirza on Thursday announced her return to competitive tennis at the Hobart International in January, two years after taking a maternity break.

The 33-year-old, who last played at the China Open in October 2017, will team up with Ukraine's Nadiia Kichenok - ranked 38 in the WTA doubles chart.

Sania, who married former Pakistan cricket captain Shoaib Malik, gave birth to her first child - a son which the couple named Izhaan.

"I am playing in Hobart, then I am playing the Australian Open... I am planning to play a tournament in Mumbai, which is a \$25,000 (ITF women's event) next month, but I am 50-50 about it, so let's see how my wrist behaves. We will see, but Hobart and Australian Open



Returning to action: Sania Mirza, who took a two-year maternity break, announced that she will play at the Hobart International. • AFP

(for sure)," said Sania. She added that she had experienced "a lot of change" after having a baby. "Your routine and sleep pattern changes. I (now) feel fit, my body is where it used to be before I had the baby," Sania said.

The Hobart WTA takes

place between January 11-18 and is a key lead-in tournament to the Australian Open.

Sania, regarded as India's best-ever women's tennis player, will partner American Rajeev Ram for the mixed doubles at the Australian Open.

Windies

on top

SHAYAN ACHARYA
LUCKNOW

Shamarh Brooks scored a gritty 111 against Afghanistan on Thursday, taking the West Indies closer to victory. Afghanistan's spinners spun a web, but Brooks stood firm, hitting 15 boundaries and a six.

He ensured that West Indies reached 277 in the first innings, a lead of 90 runs. In the second outing, Afghanistan ended the day on 109 for seven.

SCOREBOARD

Afghanistan - 1st innings: 187. Kraigg Brathwaite lbw b Amir 11, John Campbell c Ihsanullah b Amir 55, Shai Hope c Ihsanullah b Rashid 7, Shamarh Brooks b Amir 111, Shimron Hetmyer lbw b Rashid 13, Roston Chase c Ibrahim b Zahir 2, Shane Dowrich lbw b Zahir 42, Jason Holder st Afsar b Amir 11, Rahkeem Cornwall lbw b Rashid 5, Kemar Roach lbw b Amir 3, Jomel Warrican (not out) 4; Extras (lb-12, nb-1): 13; Total (in 83.3): 277.
Fall of wickets: 1-27, 2-34, 3-116, 4-137, 5-150, 6-224, 7-243, 8-260, 9-270.
Afghanistan bowling: Yamin 10-3-24-0, Amir 28.3-4-74-5, Rashid

32-5-114-3, Zahir 13-2-53-2.

West Indies - 1st innings: 233. Shamarh Brooks b Amir 111, Shimron Hetmyer lbw b Rashid 13, Roston Chase c Ibrahim b Zahir 2, Shane Dowrich lbw b Zahir 42, Jason Holder st Afsar b Amir 11, Rahkeem Cornwall lbw b Rashid 5, Kemar Roach lbw b Amir 3, Jomel Warrican (not out) 4; Extras (lb-12, nb-1): 13; Total (in 83.3): 277.
Fall of wickets: 1-27, 2-34, 3-116, 4-137, 5-150, 6-224, 7-243, 8-260, 9-270.
Afghanistan bowling: Yamin 10-3-24-0, Amir 28.3-4-74-5, Rashid

32-5-114-3, Zahir 13-2-53-2.
Afghanistan - 2nd innings: Ibrahim Zadran lbw b Cornwall 23, Javed Ahmadi c Cornwall b Chase 62, Ihsanullah run out 1, Rahmat Shah c Brooks b Cornwall 0, Asghar Afghan c Brooks b Cornwall 0, Nasir Jamal b Chase 15, Amir Hamza c Cornwall b Chase 1, Afsar Zazai (batting) 2; Extras (lb-4, nb-1): 5; Total (for seven wickets in 36 overs): 109.
Fall of wickets: 1-53, 2-55, 3-55, 4-59, 5-96, 6-98, 7-109.
West Indies bowling: Roach 4-2-5-0, Holder 3-0-18-0, Warrican 12-3-31-0, Cornwall 14-3-41-3, Chase 3-1-10-3.

Tamil Nadu and Karnataka start favourites in semifinals

Ashwin and Mayank expected to take the field; Rajasthan will bank on its speedsters; spin trio is Haryana's strength

MUSHTAQ ALI

S. DIPAK RAGAV
SURAT

After close to three weeks of league-style competition spread over two stages, the business end of Syed Mushtaq Ali is on with semifinals to be played at the Lalbhai Contractor Stadium here on Friday.

The stakes are high and big reinforcements in the form of Mayank Agarwal for Karnataka and R. Ashwin for Tamil Nadu have arrived with the duo wasting no time in hitting the nets within hours of reaching.

The Dinesh Karthik-led Tamil Nadu takes on Rajasthan and would want to continue its good run in white-ball cricket, having topped its group in both the league stages.

The team will start as the favourite but with the match

Making their presence felt

The Mushtaq Ali Trophy has entered its climactic phase and here's a look at the players who top the batting and bowling charts for their teams:

Team	Player	Matches	Runs/Wickets
Haryana	Harshal Patel	11	340 runs
	Harshal Patel	11	18 wickets
Tamil Nadu	Dinesh Karthik	8	264 runs
	R. Sai Kishore	10	19 wickets
Karnataka	Devdutt Padikkal	10	461 runs
	Shreyas Gopal	10	16 wickets
Rajasthan	Ankit Lamba	10	266 runs
	Khaleel Ahmed	8	12 wickets
	Aniket Choudhary	9	12 wickets

starting at 6.30 p.m., the toss will become a crucial factor as the side chasing is bound to have a clear advantage as dew could affect the team bowling second.

It is an area where Rajasthan can neutralise a spin-heavy Tamil Nadu attack and during its loss to Karnataka last week, the Tamil Nadu bowlers found it difficult to hold the ball while defend-

ing. On Thursday, Tamil Nadu went the extra mile in its preparation by shunning nets and instead opting to use the centre wicket at the C.B. Patel Stadium.

Spinners R. Sai Kishore and Hari Nishanth practised with wet balls while the batsmen tried some big-hitting, targeting specific areas.

For Rajasthan, skipper Deepak Chahar, along with



Different ball game: The Karnataka players at a training session on Thursday. • VIJAY SONEJ

fast bowlers Khaleel Ahmed and Aniket Choudhary, needs to take advantage of Tamil Nadu's opening woes and get quick wickets before leg-spinner Rahul Chahar

can apply the squeeze in the middle overs.

In the other semifinal, Karnataka takes on Haryana and both teams have had an identical path to the semifi-

nals with a loss each in the league and Super League stage.

Karnataka, which won the Vijay Hazare Trophy, has the edge with its explosive bat-

Friday's matches

- Karnataka v Haryana, 2.30 p.m.
- Tamil Nadu v Rajasthan, 6.30 p.m.

ting line-up in the form of openers Devdutt Padikkal and K.L. Rahul who have given big starts in most matches, followed by the likes of Mayank, skipper Manish Pandey and Karun Nair.

The middle-order has not been tested but Mayank's presence should address that. K. Gowtham's return in the last match against Mumbai was a welcome sign as the off-spinner can open the attack as cover-up for the pacers who have leaked runs.

Haryana will rely upon the spin trio of Yuzvendra Chahal, Amit Mishra and Jayant Yadav to set the game up, while the batting will largely depend on Shivam Chauhan.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ST. JOHN'S (ANTIGUA)

The West Indies on Thursday announced its ODI and T20 squads for the upcoming series of India. Kieron Pollard will continue to lead both the squads with Nicholas Pooran as his deputy in the shorter format and Shai Hope taking over the role of the vice-captain in the ODIs.

The squads:
ODIs: Sunil Ambris, Shai Hope, Khary Pierre, Roston Chase, Alzarri Joseph, Kieron Pollard (Capt.), Sheldon Cottrell, Brandon King, Nicholas Pooran, Shimron Hetmyer, Evin Lewis, Romario Shephard, Jason Holder, Keemo Paul and Hayden Walsh Jr.

T20Is: Fabian Allen, Brandon King, Denesh Ramdin, Cottrell, Lewis, Sherfane Rutherford, Hetmyer, Pierre, Lendl Simmons, Holder, Pollard (Capt.), Walsh Jr, Paul, Pooran and Kesrick Williams.

Bajrang finally gets his Khel Ratna

Sports Minister Rijiju awards National honours to four



Recognising excellence: Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju with Mohinder Singh Dhillon, Bajrang Punia, Muhammad Anas and Tejinderpal Singh Toor. • SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

UTHRA GANESAN
NEW DELHI

With the season all but over and the Olympics less than 10 months away, Bajrang Punia is in the final stretch of his preparations for the 2020 Games. And the wrestler is determined to make his maiden outing at Tokyo a memorable one.

Punia, who missed out on receiving the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna earlier this year due to his preparations for the World Championships, was handed over the same by Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju on Thursday. The Asian and Commonwealth cham-

pion won bronze at the competition in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, in September to secure an Olympic spot in the 65kg category.

Increased responsibility

"Any sportsperson feels good after receiving an award and it is the biggest sports award anyone can ask for. My sole focus is on the Olympics now and my responsibility has increased. I have recovered from my injury and have been training on the mat for the last 10-12 days," Punia said after receiving the award.

He was also handed a

cheque of ₹32,70,000.

Punia, who was honoured with Padma Shri this year, had caused a stir after being ignored for the Khel Ratna last year but was the unanimous choice this time around. He recently got engaged to fellow-wrestler Sangeeta Phogat.

Also receiving their respective Arjuna Awards on the occasion were National record-holders quartermiler Muhammad Anas and shot-putter Tejinderpal Singh Toor while Toor's coach Mohinder Singh Dhillon was conferred the Dronacharya Award.

Man City owner acquires stake in Mumbai City

NANDAKUMAR MARAR
MUMBAI

The City Football Group (CFG), owner of English Premier League champion team Manchester City, acquired a 65% stake in Mumbai City FC (MFCF). For the first time ever, a club in India will form part of a group of seven football teams worldwide.

The acquisition announcement was made by Nita Ambani, chairperson of Football Sports Development Limited in the presence of Ferran Soriano, CEO of CFG. The majority owners also formed the City

Football Group India (CFG), to be helmed by Damien Willoughby, as the CEO. Ranbir Kapoor and Bimal Parekh, existing co-owners, will own the remaining 35% stakes.

Mumbai City, one of the teams competing in the Indian Super League (ISL), will benefit from the football know-how available with CFG, via operations of clubs in USA (New York City), Australia (Melbourne City FC), Japan (Yokohima F Marinos), Uruguay (Athletico Torque), Spain (Girona FC), China (Sichuan Jiuniu) and England (Manchester City).



Landmark event: FSDL chairperson Nita Ambani with City Football Group CEO Ferran Soriano at the Hero ISL press meet. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

CFC-Odisha in a thrilling duel

After a barren first half, four goals shared in the second

ISL

K. KEERTHIVASAN
CHENNAI

Chennaiyin FC and Odisha FC dished out an exciting brand of football, making up for a sedate goalless first session and sharing four goals between them in the second half of their Indian Super League (ISL) match at the Nehru Stadium here on Thursday.

Chennaiyin striker Nerijus Valskis' brace went in vain as Odisha came back twice from arrears to share the honours.

Just when the home fans were raising the decibel levels for a second successive win came the equaliser from Adriane Santana. The Spaniard's powerful left-footer found the back of the net, silencing the spectators.

Earlier, Valskis reposed the faith coach John Gregory had in him with a double strike. With the match interestingly poised at 1-1, Valskis produced a fantastic finish, heading home off a flag kick from Dragos Firtulescu.

After a lukewarm first half, largely dominated by the visitors, Chennaiyin showed renewed vigour in the second. It looked much more organ-



In the thick of it: Valskis netted a brace for Chennaiyin. • B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

ised, enjoyed more ball possession and created more opportunities too.

A few minutes into the second half, Chennaiyin tore into the Odisha defence to score the first goal. Rafael Crivellaro's pass from the middle saw Anirudh Thapa square it to Thoi Singh on the right. Thoi's pass saw an unmarked Valskis fire past Odisha 'keeper Arshdeep Singh.

Striking back

Odisha equalised through Xisco Hernandez immediately. A powerful strike from the right by Jerry saw the ball ricochet off the 'keeper and in-

to the path of Xisco who made no mistake.

Though Valskis made it 2-1 in the 71st minute, Santana spoiled Chennaiyin's party with a goal in the 82nd.

Chennaiyin retained the team which had beaten Hyderabad FC recently while Odisha made one change, Vitin Rai coming in for Martin Guedes.

The draw saw Chennaiyin move to eighth with five points from six matches while Odisha remained sixth with six points from six. **The result:** Chennaiyin 2 (Nerijus Valskis 51 & 71) drew with Odisha FC 2 (Xisco Hernandez 54, Adriane Santana 82).