

Long run: Leander Paes, who is the most successful doubles player in the history of Davis Cup with 44 wins, recently dropped out of top-100 for the first time in 19 years. ■ REUTERS

Leander Paes to retire in 2020

Prepares for one last roar in a farewell year

TENNIS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Indian tennis icon Leander Paes on Wednesday announced that he will bring the curtains down on his illustrious career in 2020, which will be his farewell season on the Pro-circuit.

His cupboard overflowing with hundreds of trophies, that include 18 Grand Slam doubles titles, the 46year-old has been enduring a lean patch for some time.

Paes, who is the most successful doubles player in the history of Davis Cup with 44 wins, recently dropped out of top-100 for the first time in 19 years.

"I want to announce 2020 as my farewell year as a pro tennis player," Paes wrote in a statement, which he posted on his twitter handle.

'Select tournaments'

"I am looking forward to the 2020 tennis calendar where I will be playing a few select tournaments, travelling with my team and celebrating with all my friends and fans around the world," the statement read further.

"It is all of you who have inspired me to become me and I want to take this year to say "Thank You" to you."

Paes is targeting to be the only tennis player in the hisIt is all of you who have inspired me to become me and I want to take this year to say "Thank

You" to you.

tory of the sport to play eight successive Olympics.

In a career spanning nearly three decades, during which he also overcame a brain tumour, Tokyo Olympic Games (provided he qualifies) is expected to be his swansong.

He is the only tennis player from the country to have won a singles Olympic medal as he grabbed a historic bronze at the 1996 Atlanta Games, beating Argentina's Fernando Meligeni in the play-off.

With compatriot Mahesh Bhupathi, he created an awe-inspiring partnership during which they dominated the circuit in late 1990s, winning three Grand Slam titles together and claiming the number one rank.

In their partnership, they also weaved a a record 24match unbeaten streak before splitting as a team due to difference of opinion.

India's Davis Cup hero thanked his parents Dr Vece Paes and Jennifer, both of whom represented India at the highest level, for giving him sports genes.

"I want to thank my parents for their genetics, guidance, discipline, environ-

ment they created and unconditional love they've always shown me throughout my life, I would not be who I am without your unstinting support and belief in me, I love you."

He also thanked his two elder sisters and daughter Aiana.

Favourite memories

Paes asked fans to share their favourite memories of him over the years using #one last roar.

"2020 is going to be an emotional one and I look forward to seeing all of you out there rolling with me.

" It has been an honour being your lionheart," he concluded.

Committed to host C'wealth shooting event before 2022 CWG: NRAI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

The National Rifle Association of India has expressed its commitment to host a separate Commonwealth Shooting Championships in 2022 and endorsed the Indian Olympic Association's idea of adding medals won in that event to the Birmingham Games tally.

NRAI president Raninder Singh was part of a recent meeting, held in Munich on December 5, between the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) and Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF). The meeting had discussed ways to make up for the sport's exclusion from the roster of the 2022 Birmingham Games.

Having got an encouraging response to its proposal to host a separate shooting event just before the 2022 CWG, Raninder wrote to IOA president Narinder Batra, assuring its full commitment to hosting the tournament and seeking the apex body's cooperation in helping it submit a "formal proposal" to the CGF.

"The NRAI is willing to host a Commonwealth Shooting Event in India at an appropriate venue commencing on the 14th of March 2022, to coincide with the occasion of Com-

monwealth Day," Raninder said in the letter.

Brief outline

Making a brief outline of the proposal, he wrote, "...this offer is made to the CGF... that upon completion of its regulatory and administrative review process, the competent authority of CGF accords its approval & acceptance to medals awarded at this proposed event being accorded equal protocol as any medals won by a competing nation at the main event conducted later in the Birmingham CWG.

"In essence, these medals would be treated in nature as an opening balance for each competing nation to build upon by competing in those other events in Birmingham. Thus affording nations the capability to maximise their medal potential at the CWG, an issue central & so established by the IOA to the CGF," he added.

The NRAI chief said the organising committee of the Birmingham CWG will be, in no way, involved in financing the shooting tournament in India, even though by implication (of medals won there are proposed to be added to the final tally) may be considered a part or extension of the 2022 CWG.

Abhishek-Yashaswini duo finishes on top

Haryana shooters on the prowl in mixed air pistol, clinch all three gold



Delightful day: The mixed air pistol medallists — Harshada Nithave and Aniket (silver), Abhishek Verma and Yashaswini Deswal (gold), and Deepak Sharma and Annu Raj Singh (bronze). • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

SHOOTING

SPORTS BUREAU

Haryana dominated the mixed air pistol competition, winning all the three gold medals in the 63rd National shooting championship on Wednesday.

The Olympic quota winners Abhishek Verma and Yashaswini Singh Deswal bagged the gold, beating Harshada Nithave and Ankiet of Maharashtra 16-10.

Problem of plenty

It was a problem of plenty for Harvana as it also had Manu Bhaker, who had won all the four World Cup gold medals this season, with Saurabh Chaudhary. Manu had won the Asian championship gold with Abhishek Verma, and won the World Cup Finals gold as well with Russian Artem Chersounov.

Manu had to, however, be content competing in the junior section of the mixed air pistol, and clinched the gold with Sarabjot Singh. The duo defeated Punjab's Khushseerat and Arshdeep Banga

Manu had earlier won the air pistol gold medals in both the women's and junior sections of the National championship, apart from the silver in the 25-metre sports pistol and the junior gold. Haryana completed its

domination as Shiva Narwal and Shikha claimed the youth gold in mixed air pistol, beating Maharashtra's Ajinkya Chavan and Janhavi Deshmukh 16-10.

Anjum dominates again

In the women's rifle 3-position event, Anjum Moudgil continued her domination as she beat Gaayathri Nithyanandam to the gold by a 2.6 point margin after topping qualification with 1172. Nischal won the bronze, ahead of Bhakti Bhaskar Khamkar, Kajal Saini, Shriyanka Sadangi, Raj Chaudhary and Megh-



Nithyanandam and Nischal, the women's rifle 3-position medallists. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The other leading shooters like Elizabeth Susan Koshy (1159) and World Cup silver medallist Lajja Gauswami (1157) failed to make it to the final.

Nischal went on to win the iunior gold for Haryana, pipping Bengal's Ayushi Podder by 0.8 point.

The results:

10m mixed air pistol: 1. Haryana (Abhishek Verma, Yashaswini Singh Deswal) 16 (393, 578); 2. Maharashtra (Harshada Nithave, Aniket) 10 (387, 568); 3. Air India (Deepak Sharma, Annu Raj Singh) 16 (383, 575); 4. SSB (Yogita, Vikram) 10 (380, 571). Juniors: 1. Harvana (Manu Bhaker, Sarabjot Singh) 16 (381, 577); 2. Punjab (Khushseerat, Arshdeep Banga) 8 (383, 563); 3. Uttar Pradesh (Sharvan Kumar, Himanshi) 16 (379, 567); 4. Rajasthan (Aadhya, Aman) 12 (380, 557). Youth: 1. Haryana (Shiva Nar-

wal, Shikha) 16 (383, 568); 2. Maharashtra (Ajinkya Chavan, Janhavi Deshmukh) 10 (381, 556); 3. Uttar Pradesh (Monu Kumar, Devanshi) 16 (376, 575); 4. Punjab (Rajkanwar, Navdeep Kaur) 6 (374, 556).

50m rifle 3-position: Women: 1. Anjum Moudgil 449.9 (1172);

2. Gaayathri Nithyanandam 447.3 (1161); 3. Nischal 434.3 (1160); Team: 1. Punjab 3467; 2. Haryana 3465; 3. Maharashtra

Juniors: 1. Nischal 451.9 (1160); 2. Ayushi Podder 451.1 (1159); 3. Prasiddhi 436.1 (1158); Team: 1. Madhya Pradesh 3446; 2. Maharashtra 3414; 3. Punjab 3413.

BCB firm on not playing Tests in Pakistan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Refusing to budge from its stand, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) said it was ready to play only T20 Internationals in Pakistan, preferring a neutral venue for the planned Test series. The message was conveyed by BCB chief executive Nizamuddin Chowdhury on Tuesday.

His comments come a day after Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman Ehsan Mani asserted that there was "absolutely no doubt" they would play all home series in the country.

"We stand firm on our ground. We only want to play T20Is in Pakistan. The stakeholders related to the series do not want us to play longer-version cricket in Pakistan," Nizamuddin was quoted by The Daily Star. "Actually, we have no other option here. We can play the T20Is but if we are to play Tests then it should be in a neutral venue."

In an e-mail to the BCB. Mani asked the Bangladesh Board to give "acceptable reasons" for refusing to send its team to Pakistan for the two matches of the ICC World Test Championship, scheduled from January 18, 2020.

Real Kashmir all set for its first home game this season

Faces holder Chennai City which has made a slow start



Ready to roll: Real Kashmir coach David Robertson, centre, will be keen to upstage Akbar Nawas' Chennai City FC. • PTI

I-LEAGUE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

SRINAGAR Real Kashmir FC takes on defending champion Chennai City FC in its first I-League home match of the season here on Thursday in the first big sporting event in the valley since it became a Union Territory.

Two draws

Real Kashmir has played only two matches this season, both away and ending in draws, against East Bengal and Tiddim Road Athletic Union (TRAU) of Imphal.

The Snow Leopards have let a one-goal advantage slip in the final 13 minutes of both their matches, conceding an equaliser in the 77th and 78th minutes against

East Bengal and TRAU respectively. Although TRAU went 2-1 up against Real Kashmir later, Mason Robertson scored a quick equaliser to snatch a point.

Assessing his team's last outing, Real Kashmir head coach David Robertson said: "In the second-half, TRAU had a go at us and we defended well. We had a great chance when Krizo was one on one with the goalkeeper and we could have killed the game. In football, these things happen. I am proud of my players and we could have scored more."

Mason's impressive outing in Imphal asserted the value he brings to the squad.

His two-goal show featured a clinical finish that went in off the inside of the woodwork for his first and a textbook header that levelled the scores for his second.

Asked about his son's performance, David Robertson said: "Mason is a valuable player. He is very versatile. We are lucky to have him at Real Kashmir. As a father, I am delighted for him plus it makes it easier to pick your son if he is doing well."

Chennai City, on the other hand, has made a slow start. It has just five points from four games, with the only victory coming against TRAU in its opener at Coimbatore.

Captain Roberto Eslava said: "We have shown intensity, so the points that we have dropped, have not been for the lack of it.

"We have shown this desire (to fight) in every game, and the next against Kashmir won't be any different."

Railways and Kerala women remain unbeaten

Make last-eight stage along with Telangana, Delhi, MP and Punjab

NATL. BASKETBALL

SPORTS BUREAU

Railways and Kerala women reached the quarterfinals, staying unbeaten in their groups in the 70th National basketball championship at the Guru Nanak Dev Stadium on Wednesday.

The two were joined by Telangana and Delhi from Group A while Madhya Pradesh and Punjab qualified from Group B.

The Karnataka women sneaked into the pre-quarterfinals beating Tamil Nadu which failed to win a match. The Maharashtra women, too, made the grade with a win over Madhya Pradesh.

From the lower groups, Chandigarh and Rajasthan entered pre-quarterfinals.

TN men on a roll

In the men's section, Tamil Nadu maintained its unbeaten record as it outplayed Telangana 95-29. Punjab, which also remained unbeaten, was joined in the quarterfinals by Services, Rail-Karnataka wavs. Uttarakhand.

The Kerala men beat Rajasthan 62-59 to advance to

the pre-quarterfinals while

compete in the pre-quarterfinals. Kerala and Karnataka will meet Chandigarh and Uttar Pradesh which progressed to the pre-quarterfinals

Karnataka defeated Harva-

na 97-74, forcing the latter to

from the lower groups. The results: Men: Punjab 68 (Amritpal Singh 16, Arshpreet Singh 12)

bt Haryana 37. Karnataka 97 (Aravind Arumugam 22, Issac Thomas 18, Abhishek Gowda 13, Jitendra Singh 12, Anil Kumar 11, S. Karthikeyan 11, M. Harish 10) bt Haryana 74 (Yudhvir Singh 24, Abhishek 18, Vikas Kumar 14).

manth Sheoran 15, Mahipal Singh 11) bt Railways 81 (Gagandeep Singh 18, Rajan Sharma 16. Lovneet Singh 13). Women: Delhi 73 (Nishita Sabarwal 13, Aparna Saini 13, Sushanthika Chakraborty 12) bt

Services 64 (Nikhil Kumar

31, Joginder Singh 23, He-

Kaur 23). Telangana 69 (Divya 31, Gulbasha Ali 18) bt Maharashtra 39 (Shreya Dekhdar 17).

Chhattisgarh 44 (Sangeetha

Karnataka 64 (Lopamudra Timmaiah 18, varsha Nandini 17, Vinaya Joseph 13, Anusha 10) bt Tamil Nadu 57 (S. Rajeshwari 23). Kerala 70 (P.S. Jeena 21, P.G.

Anjana 20, Stephy Nixon 12, Kavitha Jose 11) bt Punjab 30 (Anmolpreeth Kaur 12)

Qatar 2022 could be last chance for Messi to win World Cup: Veron

FOOTBALL

IANS FUZHOU (CHINA)

Former Argentina star midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron says he still believes Qatar 2022 could represent the last chance for compatriot Lionel Messi to win a World Cup

World Cup may be his (Messi) last chance. "As the last chance, he will have to see how to reach the goal," Veron told Xinhua

during his recent China tour. Being a brand ambassador for the inaugural FISU University World Cup, which was held in Fujian Province between November 21 and Dec. 1, Veron unveiled the trophy for the tournament.

"For me it is a new experience, especially seeing boys and girls who are not going to have the possibility of playing at the FIFA World Cup. "It is an important university championship," said the 44-year-old.

Veron now serves as the chairman of Argentina's Estudiantes de La Plata FC. He successfully persuaded compatriot Javier Mascherano to join the home team after serving out his contract with Chinese Super League side Hebei China Fortune.

"We are good friends. Javier wants to take care of his family," said Veron.

Support for Pochettino The former Argentina international, who had 73 caps



The missing one: Messi will have to think about how he would reach the goal of winning World Cup, feels Veron. ■REUTERS



Mourinho as manager of

Mauricio did a great job at Tottenham, but many times they demand results for the country, also voiced

results. support for former teammate Mauricio Pochettino, who was replaced by Jose

said.

grateful. "For me, Mauricio did a great job at Tottenham, but many times they demand

"Football, in a way, is un-

Premier League side Totten-

ham Hotspur last month.

" Now it's up to Jose Mourinho, another great coach. Hope he has more luck," he

A ND-NDE