

India's NBA trailblazer Satnam fails dope test, provisionally suspended

MIHIR VASAYDA
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SATNAM SINGH Bhamara, who became the first Indian-born player to be drafted into the NBA in 2015, has been provisionally suspended by the National Anti Doping Agency (NADA) for failing a dope test last month. Bhamara's urine sample was collected during the preparatory camp in Bangalore for the South Asian Games, which began in Kathmandu on December 1. After the test returned positive, the 23-year-old was provisionally suspended on November 19.

The banned substance that has been detected in his sample could not be confirmed. The 7-foot-2-inch centre from Balloke, Punjab, has represented India in major tournaments like Asian Championships, 2018 Commonwealth Games, and 2019

World Cup Qualifiers. He was originally a part of the squad but has not travelled for the regional event. India's South Asian Games campaign got underway on Friday with a 138-63 thumping of Bhutan without him.

A team official said they were not aware of the failed dope test.

"He told us there was some family problem and hence had to stay back," the official told *The Indian Express* from Kathmandu after the match. Basketball Federation of India secretary Chander Mukhi Sharma, too, said he was unaware of the development as he is out of town.

"These decisions aren't sent to us via email. NADA sends a physical copy in sealed cover. Since I am not in office, I am not aware if any such communication has been sent and hence can't comment on the issue," Sharma said.

"Satnam told us at the last minute that

The 7-foot-2-inch centre from Balloke, Punjab, has represented India in major tournaments... He was originally a part of the South Asian Games squad but has not travelled for the regional event.

there was some family problem and would not be able to take part in the South Asian Games. We are not aware of a positive dope test."

Bhamara, in 2015, created history when he was picked in the NBA draft by Dallas Mavericks. He went on to play the next two years in the Development League with Texas Legends, an affiliate of Dallas Mavericks. After returning to India for a

year to focus on the national team, Bhamara once again created history in September 2018 by becoming the first India-born cager to play in the National Basketball League of Canada after signing a deal with St John's Edge.

Earlier this year, a streaming service announced a digital movie on Bhamara's life; second such thing after Netflix released a documentary based his journey to the 2015 NBA Draft. While Bhamara could not be reached for comment, his manager said: "I shall try and get you a statement tomorrow."

Bhamara joins a growing list of dope cases this year. Earlier this week, a NADA list accessed by this paper revealed that 156 Indian athletes had tested positive for consuming performance-enhancing drugs up to November 30. The number so far this year is more than double compared to 2018, when 70 athletes were caught for doping.



Satnam Singh Bhamara created history in 2015 when he was picked in the NBA draft by Dallas Mavericks. He was provisionally suspended on November 19. *File*

A plot against the palace

Real Madrid chief Perez working towards year-long tournament of top clubs away from domestic leagues

TARIQ PANJA
DECEMBER 6

REAL MADRID'S president, Florentino Pérez, recently held talks with officials from some of Europe's leading soccer clubs, as well as the FIFA president, Gianni Infantino, to outline his vision for the sport. What he is proposing, according to people familiar with the conversations, is nothing less than a ground-breaking power shift in the club game.

One elite competition comprising the world's richest clubs, untethered from their domestic leagues for a new full-season competition. Domestic leagues stripped of their biggest and most historic brands. And thousands of top-division games rendered far less valuable to everyone from sponsors to broadcasters to, perhaps most important, fans.

With financing in the works and the clout of Real Madrid backing the venture, and with the game's officials beginning to sketch the framework of the new global soccer calendar that will take effect after 2024, the outlines of a European super league could be closer than before. At the heart of Pérez's plan is his long-held desire for Europe's biggest teams, like his, to break away from their domestic leagues and form an elite European competition that would be played across an entire season, according to people familiar with the discussions.

The current iteration of the plan would see two 20-team divisions, composed almost exclusively of clubs from Europe's five biggest leagues: England, Spain, France, Germany and Italy. Some clubs have been told that, according to projections, they could expect to double their revenues by leaving their domestic leagues to join. The concept of promotion and relegation — a fixture of world soccer that rewards success and punishes failure — would be retained, but only between the two divisions.

The proposal most likely would meet fierce resistance. At a stroke any such competition would decimate the value of domestic league matches, but by taking the best teams they also could destroy the value of the Champions League, the world's richest club championship and the financial engine of European soccer's governing body, UEFA.

On Friday, UEFA's president, Aleksander Ceferin, called Pérez's plan "insane," and said it would "ruin" the sport. "I have read about this insane plan," Ceferin said. "If reports are to be believed, it comes from a single club president, not the owner, and a lone football administrator. It would be hard to think of a more selfish and egotistical scheme. It would clearly ruin football around the world: for the players, for the fans and for everyone connected with the game — all for the benefit of a tiny number of people."

Ceferin's reaction may lead to a rekindling of tension between the UEFA leader and Infantino. The two men, who were both expected to attend celebrations to mark the



Real Madrid president Florentino Perez has proposed a two 20-team division format. *File*

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100th anniversary of the Polish soccer federation on Friday, did not speak for a year after Infantino first unveiled his plans for his expanded Club World Cup in March 2018.

Pérez, who as Real Madrid's president became a founding member of a new global association for international clubs when it was begun last month at FIFA's headquarters in Zurich, declined, through the club, to comment on his proposals. During his visit to Zurich, though, he discussed his ideas with Infantino, who has spent much of the past year pushing his own idea about how to remake club soccer.

Infantino's vision for club soccer has largely been focused on the creation of a new 24-team Club World Cup that will begin play in 2021, but he also has a broader vision for

FIFA, the game's global governing body, to have a stronger hand in club soccer.

Only last week, for example, he pushed the idea of investing hundreds of millions of dollars in a new pan-African league, as a means to increase quality there and also slow the global talent drain to Europe. The FIFA president has also had talks with national associations in Asia about the possibility of creating regional or subregional leagues there, and conversations with President Trump about the quality of soccer in the top United States league. "One of the FIFA president's duties is to listen to stakeholders' perspectives about relevant topics for football," FIFA said in a statement in response to questions about Infantino's discussions with Pérez and others about changes to the club game.

"FIFA believes that an open and constructive dialogue between different members of the football community is essential to find the right balance and the best solutions for the future of the game. FIFA (including the president) has met with football clubs from around the world in order to discuss how to make the new FIFA Club World Cup an outstanding success, in particular, from a sporting point of view."

Without Infantino's patronage, Pérez's plans would not get very far. The FIFA leader told reporters in November 2018 — when details of a previous attempt at a breakaway league backed by Pérez leaked — that any players who participated in any breakaway competition that had not been sanctioned by FIFA would be barred from their national

teams and unable to play in the World Cup.

A group representing elite clubs from across Europe met in Milan on Nov. 15 to try to formulate a new format after a furious reaction from top domestic leagues, including England's Premier League and Spain's La Liga, to a plan promoted by the Juventus president, Andrea Agnelli, to create a largely closed European competition in which most of the competitors would retain their spot season after season whatever their performance in domestic league play.

Money is the driving force behind all the restructuring plans, with the biggest clubs believing they could generate more viewership and more sponsor interest, and thus much more revenue, through more frequent elite-level games. But the support of Infantino and FIFA, should they grant it, could shift control of club soccer away from its usual power base in continental federations like UEFA. Under Infantino, who assumed the FIFA presidency in 2016, FIFA has increasingly looked for ways to increase its influence on (and profit from) club soccer. The current annual version of the Club World Cup — featuring one team from soccer's six regional bodies and one from the host nation — generates little interest in much of the world. The latest edition kicks off next week in Qatar. Infantino's reasoning appears to be that by increasing the standard of club soccer in Africa, Asia and elsewhere, FIFA would create conditions for investors — who have long poured their billions of dollars into European soccer — to see value in doing so around the world. **NYT**

The blueprints

In the last couple of years, multiple plans have been proposed to restructure club football. After FIFA's Club World Cup and Juventus president's Super League proposals, Real Madrid chief Florentino Perez has proposed a format of his own...

PEREZ'S PROPOSAL

Real Madrid president Florentino Perez has proposed a two 20-team division format. According to *Financial Times*, eight of the 40 teams include the founding clubs behind the World Football Club Association, a newly-created body of which Perez was named president last month. Those clubs are Real Madrid, AC Milan, Auckland City, Boca Juniors, River Plate, Club America, Guangzhou Evergrande and Congo's Mazembe. Perez has reportedly approached CVC, one of the world's largest private equity groups with \$82.5bn of assets under management.

FIFA'S CLUB WORLD CUP

FIFA president Gianni Infantino has proposed the creation of a 24-team Club World Cup that will begin in 2021. China will host the first expanded tournament in mid-2021. CVC is in talks with FIFA to fund the competition. Last week, Infantino reportedly pushed the idea of investing hundreds of millions of dollars in a new pan-African league to increase the quality there and slow the talent drain to Europe. He has also held talks with national associations in India about the possibility of creating regional or subregional leagues there, and conversations with Donald Trump about the quality of USA's MLS.

EUROPEAN SUPER LEAGUE

Last November, a new league independent of UEFA was proposed by Juventus president Andrea Agnelli. His plan was to create a 'Super League' on the lines of Champions League but it would be a closed affair, meaning the clubs would retain their spot season after season irrespective of their performances in the domestic leagues. The 'breakaway' league would consist 11 founding members and five additional guest teams, with the founder clubs guaranteed spots in the league for 20 years. That plan drew a furious reaction from top European leagues, including EPL and La Liga, who said it would 'kill' domestic football. **ENS**

Cricket South Africa CEO suspended, to lose main sponsor; player strike a possibility

REUTERS
JOHANNESBURG, DECEMBER 6

CRICKET SOUTH Africa chief executive Thabang Moroe has been suspended following allegations of misconduct, the CSA said on Friday, just hours after the organisation's major sponsor said they would not renew their contract.

The CSA, which placed Moroe on what it termed a "precautionary suspension", has been grappling with operational shortcomings and a possible players' strike ahead of a home series against England.

The decision follows reports received by the Social and Ethics Committee and the Audit and Risk Committee of the Board "related to possible failure of controls in the organisation," it said in a statement.

The Board mandated the CSA chairman to look for an acting CEO for the duration of Moroe's suspension. It will approach former ICC chief executive Dave Richardson to fill the role on a temporary basis, it said.

Reuters was unable to reach Moroe for comment on Friday. He had been under fire after he revoked the accreditation of five journalists last weekend, saying he was unhappy with the way they were reporting on issues within the organisation.

That caused a public outcry leading to



Cricket South Africa CEO Thabang Moroe has been suspended.

their reinstatement, and a rebuke from two board members, Shirley Zinn and Iqbal Khan, who both resigned in a move that suggested they had lost faith in his leadership.

Khan was chief of the finance committee and among a list of grievances, said there had been "widespread credit card abuse" in the CSA offices.

In a further blow, the CSA's major sponsor Standard Bank announced it would not re-

new its financial support of the organisation when their current agreement ends in April 2020, citing governance concerns that have damaged the bank's reputation.

"Cricket is a national asset valued by millions of South Africans, many of them our clients, and is an integral part of the bank's heritage," its chief media officer Thulani Sibeko said in a statement.

"Standard Bank is committed to uphold-

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ing the highest levels of leadership, integrity and governance. In light of recent developments at CSA, which are a culmination of long-standing problems which have damaged Standard Bank's reputation, it has decided not to renew its partnership with CSA."

The South African Cricketers Association (SACA) also called for the resignation of the entire CSA board on Friday following a meeting of their executive and management. SACA also said it would not rule out a player strike that could have an impact on England's four-Test tour that is due to start on Dec. 26 in Pretoria, though chief executive Tony Irish told Reuters on Wednesday they would be mindful of disruptions to international cricket. "We will be responsible around the international tours, because we know that those affect teams from outside of South Africa," he said.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KATHMANDU, DECEMBER 6

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS bronze medallist Manish Kaushik (64kg) and Commonwealth Games champion Vikas Krishan (69kg) made it to the semifinals on the first day of boxing event at the 13th South Asian Games here on Friday. National Champion Ankit Khatana (75kg) was the third Indian to progress to the last four as he knocked out local boy Deepak Shrestha in the first round of his bout. Manish thoroughly dominated his quarter-final bout against Pakistan's Suleman Baloch to register a commanding 5-0 victory.

In the 69 kg quarter-final, Vikas marked his return to amateur circuit after a gap of 15 months with a superb performance against Bhutan's Dorji Tshering in a unanimous verdict. In the women's category, Sonia Lather (57 kg) had an easy outing against Bangladesh's Shamima Akter as she won via RSC in the 3rd round.

India clinch 41 medals on Day 5

Shuttlers, meanwhile, led yet another stupendous show as India widened the gap at the top by clinching 41 medals, including 19 gold, on Day 5. India grabbed another 18 silver and 4 bronze to take the total tally to 165 medals (81 gold, 59 silver, 25 bronze) and leave second-placed Nepal (41 gold, 27 silver, 48

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bronze), who won 116 medals in aggregate, behind. Sri Lanka are third with a total of 134 medals (23 gold, 42 silver, 69 bronze).

The shuttlers won the maximum gold medals -- four -- for India on Friday. They completely dominated the discipline by winning four gold and two silver in the day. Former world junior championships silver medallist Siril Verma lived up to his top seeding as he rallied from a game down to outwit compatriot Aryaman Tandon 17-21 23-21 21-13 in an all-Indian men's singles final.

Track and field athletes, who were leading the Indian charge in the past few days, fetched the maximum 12 medals but just two of them were gold. The two gold were won in men's and women's shot put events.

In men's shot put, Asian champion Tejinder Pal Singh Toor broke the SAG record with a creditable throw of 20.03m to win the gold.