Praneeth's sights set on Tokyo

Looking forward to another fruitful season

PBL

CHENNAI

K. KEERTHIVASAN

In more ways than one, it has been a truly memorable year (2019) for Sai Praneeth. The 27-year-old was conferred the Arjuna Award and also went on to bag a historic World badminton championships bronze.

On the personal front, too, it was just as memorable, having tied the knot with Swetha Jayanthi last month.

"2019 was good news for me other than [just] badminton. I played consistently well. Reaching the Swiss Open final in March really changed things for me at the beginning of the year," said Praneeth, at a media interaction here on Saturday, ahead of Premier Badminton League Season-5.

In good position

In the race against time by Indians to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics, Praneeth is in a relatively good position to make the cut – being ranked 11th in the world and 19th according to Olympic qualification rules (only those in the top 16 and two from a country can qualify).

"Four months still remain.



The prize: S. Sankar Muthusamy, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, Tanongsak Saensomboonsuk, Sai Praneeth, Christinna Pedersen, and Lakshya Sen with the PBL trophy. • M. VEDHAN

Everyone is fighting for the spot. There is a very big competition. I want to confirm my berth as soon as possible," said Praneeth.

He said World No. 1 Kento Momota would be the player to beat in Tokyo as he is physically and mentally much fitter than the rest, but felt the Japanese might not win at the Olympics.

"The one-year ban [in 2016] made him strong, and that helped him so much. He trained very hard [during

the time]. But my sixth sense says Momota will lose in the Olympics, but we can never say for sure.

"Because he has won everything – the Super Series, the BWF Super 1000, 750 and 500 - there might be extra pressure on him at Tokyo," he said.

Praneeth felt the BWF schedule had become hectic as players have to play a minimum of 12 tournaments in a calendar vear.

"At some point, it be-

comes difficult. We can't play that many tournaments but we have no choice. Unless the BWF makes a change, we can't do anyth-

ing about it," he said.

On playing in PBL-5 beginning here on Monday, Praneeth, representing Bengaluru Raptors this time, said he had a great time playing in the previous four seasons.

"I've good memories as I have won two PBL titles," he

'Young black players need equal opportunity'

Rhodes says cricket in his country has a lot to do to address racial inequality

CRICKET

SHREEDUTTA CHIDANANDA

South Africa's decision to overlook Temba Bavuma for the second Test against England earlier this month turned the spotlight on the complicated, sensitive issue of racial representation

By omitting Bavuma, who had recovered from injury, South Africa fell short of its transformation target which requires the team to field six coloured players, including two black Africans, averaged over a season - for the second straight Test match.

Real issue

The absence of a big pool of talented, black players on the domestic circuit is a real issue, leaving South African cricket with a tricky balance to strike during what is clearly a painful phase of transition.

Jonty Rhodes understands the difficulty of the task before the team management. "Now you have a scenario where (Kagiso) Rabada is suspended (for the fourth Test).

"If (Lungi) Ngidi is injured and can't play, that will mean Bavuma has to play. produce a steady stream of young black players is due to lack of opportunity. • FILE PHOTO: SUDHAKARA JAIN have economic freedom," he

ler but you're bringing in a batsman. From that perspec-Rhodes is brutally honest tive, it really is tough," he in reflecting on his own privileges when he started out, as a white cricketer. "I cer-**Quotas needed** tainly benefited from the fact But Rhodes, who grew up that I wasn't really competduring the apartheid era in a ing with 50% of the popularacially-segregated South tion. I literally was compet-Africa, is in no doubt about ing only with the white

players.

Plainspeak: Jonty Rhodes says that South Africa's failure to

You're dropping a fast bow-

the need for racial quotas in

"So they might have polit-

ical freedom but they don't

it take to address that?

sport. "We in South Africa "You talk about white prihave a legacy of apartheid. vilege and it raises a lot of How many generations does heat and debate on social media but it is the case. I'm "You still have disadvanvery aware of that. My cricktaged communities based on eting statistics as a player were very average when I

was selected. "If I was competing with the rest of the country then possibly I wouldn't have been picked. And I would not have been diving around

Rhodes is here for the Global Sports Injury Conclave (GSIC) 2020. The two-day conference aims to build an injury-free sports ecosystem, with the participation of experts from various

sporting disciplines. The 50-year-old believes that South Africa's failure to produce a steady stream of young black cricketers is due to lack of opportunity.

Struggles

The country's triumph at the Rugby World Cup - the side was led by a black captain and both the Springboks' tries in the final were scored by players of colour - put into stark contrast cricket's struggles with transformation.

"The biggest question for me is why in over 20 years have we not produced opportunities for young players in disadvantaged communities? It's not about racism. It's about equal opportunity and that's not happening.

What rugby has done well is in building their structures, working in disadvantaged areas. Cricket has a lot

Spat with VFI: Arbitrator rule favours Baseline Ventures

K. KEERTHIVASAN

Baseline Ventures, on Saturday, received the thumbs up as the Arbitrator K. Kannan, appointed by the Madras High Court, indicated that Volleyball Federation of India (VFI), while terminating its contract with Baseline, didn't follow the right and just process.

The Arbitrator ruled that there is no financial irregularity in the accounts submitted by Baseline Ventures

Actually, VFI in its termination letter dated November 19, 2019, had stated that widespread manipulation of accounts was done and it was one of the major reasons for terminating the agreement. The Arbitrator stated that the audit report submitted by Baseline does not suggest any manipulation of the accounts and that the VFI has no reason to claim any manipulation.

VFI gained

The Arbitrator also stated that apart from earning ₹3.5 crore from the Pro-Volley■ The Arbitrator stated that the audit report submitted by Baseline does not suggest any manipulation as claimed by the VFI

ball League, the Federation had gained everything from the conduct of the League. The players, who were usually remunerated in the range of ₹40-50,000 were now paid in the range of ₹5-8 On the matter of Intellec-

tual Property (IP) rights of the PVL, which was another reason given by the Federation for termination of the agreement, the Arbitrator stated that the matter has no relevance to the present as tne ip rights are non-transferable as per the terms of the agreement.

For the benefit of the players and the development of the sport, the Arbitrator stated that the Federation may initiate process of its own league but with the stringent condition that it should declare the pendency of arbitral proceedings and that any fresh contract will be subject to finalisation of the decision of the arbitral tribunal.

The Arbitrator further noted that the Federation would also need to return Baseline ₹2.25 crore before initiating any such process which would be over and above the damages claim which Baseline is entitled to

The Arbitrator finally said the date of next arbitral sitting is already notified [likely to begin on February 1], and the parties will endeavour to secure conclusion of the proceeding at the earliest, keeping in mind the larger national interest of the

Surprisingly, secretary of press release (without attaching the Arbitrator's Order) said the judgement was a victory for VFI. However, he couldn't be reached for clarifications.

Joy Bhattacharjya, CEO OF Baseline Ventures said: "Our stand has been vindicated. This clearly shows that the termination was motivated and absolutely ar-

I believe I can run below 3:34: Jinson

Ready for a comeback, the 1500m specialist's goal is the Tokyo Olympics

ATHLETICS

V.S. ARAVIND

India's premier middle-distance runner Jinson Johnson is targeting a comeback in the next couple of months, his eyes firmly set on Olympic qualification. Although the 1500m specialist hasn't marked a date, he is confident of getting back on track

"I can't wait to get back

on track as I have completed my rehab. My goal is to qualify for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics," Jinson told Sportstar in an exclusive chat here on The Asian Games gold

medallist, who suffered an Achilles neel tendon was in Colorado Springs, training under Scott Simmons. However, the Kerala star ended

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Bengaluru FC (BFC) chief

coach, Carles Cuadrat, criti-

cised his players for the mis-

takes at the back against

Mumbai City FC (MCFC).

Gurpeeet Singh and Harman-

jot Khabra were at fault, re-

sulting in two 'gift goals' in fa-

vour of the home team at the

The defeat did not change

the league placing for the se-

cond-placed visitor, which

had a goal by Sunil Chhetri

The Spaniard, prowling on

the sidelines near the BFC

bench, called for foreign re-

ferees in the Indian Super

League (ISL) to ensure better

Mumbai Football Arena.

disallowed for off-side.



Honour: Southern Railway Sports Association president V.G. Bhooma presents the KESPA-V.P. Sathyan award to Jinson Johnson in Chennai on Saturday. Others from left: KESPA secretary Jayasankar Menon, president Jose Varghese, Thejo Engineering president V.A. George and Olympian Shiny Wilson. • M. VEDHAN

as the trip abroad turned in- to underwater training, a to a disaster.

linson returned to India and had his rehab at the HN Reliance Foundation hospital in Mumbai. From jogging

Calls for foreigners to ensure better decision-making

decision-making.

Cuadrat questions the quality of refereeing

up injuring both his tendons on an anti-gravity treadmill confident Jinson is raring to

Difficult period

"It was a difficult period, to

be honest. But I did my rehab well and the support of the federation, family and friends was always there. "Before the end of June,

there will be the Olympic qualification and that is my only goal. I have recovered, but I have a little pain on my left tendon.

"If I spend more time in the hospital, that will get cured too, but I feel it's time to train," he said.

The Tokyo qualification time is 3:35:00s, but Jinson's personal best is 3:35:24s.

When asked if he can bridge the gap, Jinson, who broke the long-standing 800m National record of Sriram Singh in June 2018 when he clocked 1:45.65s, eclipsing the 1:45.77s mark, the inter-state athletics championships, said, "Of

course, I am confident. "I have said even earlier that the qualification mark is 3:35 for Tokyo, but the gold at Rio came in 3:50! I need to get the basics right.

All about fitness "I believe I can run below

3:34, but athletics is all about fitness. "Currently, I am not able

to run 3:35, so the target is to achieve full fitness and then focus on the timing. The federation will decide my training regimen and I +am waiting for that," said Jinson.

To further boost his training and performance, the Armyman insisted on adopting a strict routine.

"It's important to stick to that and it's not that I wasn't doing it. But with the Olympics coming up, I want to give my best and I am willing to put in the hard yards," he

Liverpool treading cautiously

Klopp & Co aware that only United has taken points off it

PREMIER LEAGUE

AGENCIES

LIVERPOOL Liverpool can widen the chasm between itself and Manchester United to a staggering 30 points if it comes out on top in the battle between England's two most successful clubs at Anfield on Sunday.

Jurgen Klopp's men look destined to end a 30-year wait to win a top-flight title, with a 14-point lead over defending champion Manchester City plus a game in hand.

Klopp, however, that his team will be wary of United after being held earlier this season. The 1-1 draw between the teams in October was the only time the European champion has dropped points this season.

"Our team has winning mindset. We always think about the next game, we don't look too far ahead," said Liverpool goalkeeper Alisson Becker, who has conceded just one goal in his past 10 games.

Rashford a doubt

The Brazilian number one will be confident of another clean sheet on Sunday, with



relentless march on when it faces United. • REUTERS

United's top scorer Marcus Rashford a serious doubt after lasting just 15 minutes as a second-half substitute in Wednesday's 1-0 win over Wolves in the FA Cup.

But the striker will be given the maximum time to prove his fitness. "We will give him the absolute amount of time to find out," said United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, who will also be without injured midfielders Paul Pogba and Scott McTominay, on Friday.

Liverpool, meanwhile, has been handed a double injury boost with defender Joel Matip and midfielder Fabinho both fit, Klopp said on

However, the league leader will be without defender Dejan Lovren (thigh) as well (groin) and James Milner (thigh). 'Yes, it looks like Joel and

Fabinho (will be back). They trained completely normally yesterday and the day before. So that means they are likely to be in the squad," told a conference.

Full of confidence Solskjaer said fifth-placed United was heading into the clash full of confidence.

"The last two performances we've had against Liverpool, we've drawn twice (at home) and been closest to winning both those games," the Norwegian added.

as midfielders Naby Keita

SPORTS BUREAU pion G. Aakash defeated higher-rated IM C. Praveen

master Ponkratov Pavel had an easy start in the inaugural round of the 12th Chennai Open International Grandmaster chess tourna-

that lasted 29 moves.

girl K.M. Shrija scored an upset win over IM T.U. Navin

National under-11 cham-

Referee R. Shrikrishna had blown the whistle for off-side after seeing the linesman raise the flag, just before Chhetri twisted into position on the line near the left post for a shot high into the net from a difficult angle. Later in the game, the striker was shown the yellow card for

On BFC's third loss in 13 games and the second in a row to MCFC this season. Cuadrat noted: "We made a few mistakes, but sometimes this happens in football. As I said before the game against Mumbai City, if you concede, it becomes very difficult because they are very good defensively and they try to go for the counter-attack."



Cuadrat. ■ FILE PHOTO

The coach added: "We gave them two presents, so congratulations to Mumbai (City) to receive so many pre-

"The referee was making a nice present (to MCFC) by not giving the goal to Sunil (Chhetri). I don't understand... if I am in a winger position and can see it, this linesman cannot see that."

BFC would have drawn level 1-1 had the goal stayed. Cuadrat pointed out:

They don't know the game. Lam sorry (to state that). This week we have been in meetings, talking about what can everybody do to improve football in India. We have to bring foreign referees."

Defensive blunder

His team went on to commit another defensive blunder, leading to the home team doubling the lead through Amine Chermiti. Modou Sougou headed in the first goal.

Responding to the success MCFC, coached by Jorge Costa, is having against the ISL champion, the Spaniard was

what they need to do. We had a plan too but after 1-0, it changed. Mumbai have a plan and it is working for He signed off on a humorous note: "I have been trying to change things in every

game against Mumbai, to get

the points but it is not hap-

pening.

blunt. "I don't really think it

was a very good game of foot-

ball (for BFC), there was a lot

of tension. Mumbai knew

"I will tell my defenders to try to reach the play-offs (from here) and try not to find Mumbai City in the play-

Costa's side is now fifth with five wins in 13 games and within range of a place among the top-four.

Sumer prevails over Ayush Smooth start for Pavel

Top seed Russian Grandment here on Saturday.

In the top board, Ponkrantov swept away S.K. Kanishk in the opening game

Shrija stuns Navin

In the lower board, Neyveli

Kumar.

ra Jose Eduardo (Per); Pantsulaia Leven (Geo) bt Sahib Singh, M.S. Midilesh lost to Aleksandrov Aleksei (Blr): Goganov Aleksev (Rus) bt Abhinav Chakrapani; Rushyendra Chowdary Kantipudi lost to Mchedlishvili Mikheil (Geo); Rozum Ivan (Rus) bt Tiwari Vivek: Hermon Dain Saldanha lost to Bogdanovich Stanislav (Ukr); David Alberto (Ita) bt Rebecca Jesumarian; A. Krishan lost to Fedorov Alexei (Blr); N.R. Visakh bt Rudra Pathak; Vishnu Menon lost to Yudin Sergei (Rus).

The results: Ponkratov Pavel

(Rus) bt S.K. Kanishk; Swayham

P. Das lost to Martinez Alcanta-

SPORTS BUREAU

Sumer Mago (Maharashtra) clinched a nail-biting tie 3-1 against Avush Sinha (Bihar) to garner full points in junior snooker at the Manisha-Vascon National billiards and snooker championship, organised by BSAM and PY-CHindu Gymkhana.

After the first frame ended 68-47, the former managed a break of 41 points to take the second frame 80-13, then saw Sinha coming back to wrest the next 67-23. Mago won the fourth 100-19.

The results (league): Junior snooker: Khaja Moinuddin (AP)

(62-52, 79-49, 38-49, 62-37); Krieshh Gurbaxani (Mah) bt Amir Khan (UP) 3-0 (74(58)-14, 44-39, 86(68)-02); Kabir Sharma (Mah) bt Jai Chopda (Goa) 3-1(36-60, 57-17, 73-24, 75-

bt Satyan Shivhare (MP) 3-1

26); Bhauneet Walia (Pun) bt Karmesh Patel (Guj) 3-2 (77-52, 35-77, 01-84(50), 55-40, Mehoi Saini (Har) bt Aman Thacker (Jha) 3-2 (64-04, 23-61, 50-61, 64-52, 71-59); Vishwajeet Mohan (UP) bt Jashn

Bhal (Pun) 3-1 (83-48, 64-31, 36-69, 72-40); Ranveer Singh Marwa (Guj) bt Kunj Patel (Guj) 3-1 (56-44, 63-10, 09-68, 93 (67)-15): S Srikrishna (PSPB) bt Sameer Kumar (Jha) 3-0 (59 (49)-02, 63-02, 65-07); Aldrin Moses (Kar) bt Pinak Anap (Mah) 3-1 (57-07, 66-10, 62-64, 43-26). Vishwas Mangla (Har) bt

Anand Barot (Goa) 3-0 (64-06, 65-12, 67-23); Rayaan Razmi (Mah) bt Gaurav Malhotra(Har) 3-0(67-39, 88(32)-01, 67-14): Aman Bansod (MP) bt Jeet Bhojani (Guj) 3-1 (56-60, 54-43, 71-23, 62-19); Ranveer Duggal (Chg) bt Ali Raza Khan (Ben) 3-0 (52-49, 62-10, 60-10).

Sparsh Pherwani (Mah) bt Gowtham Prasad (AP) 3-0(72-08, 65-22, 93(50)-01); Varun Kumar (Kar) bt Arshnoor Singh (Har) 3-1 (60-35, 11-62, 57-46, 66(40)-21): Dhruv Chawla (Pun) bt Danish Khan (Kar) 3-1 (55-28, 58-23, 51-57, 66-48).