

# Sindhu targets Olympics gold

World No. 1 ranking and a clutch of Super Series titles also on her radar

## BADMINTON

**V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM**  
HYDERABAD

World champion P.V. Sindhu said it is time to look ahead, leave the past, believe in herself and come back much more stronger.

Sindhu, a star campaigner for Hyderabad Hunters, is also looking at the Premier Badminton League starting on January 20 to fine-tune her game as she targets the top slot for India for the Tokyo Olympics.

“Post the World championship gold last August, no doubt I have had a disappointing run. But it is not all over. I can always come back,” the 24-year-old Sindhu said in an exclusive interview with *The Hindu* as she shared her thoughts for the new year.

**Was 2019 better than 2016 when you won the Rio Olympics silver?**

In 2016, no one expected me to do well. Now there is a lot more recognition, expectations are high and with that comes bigger responsibility. So both years are different but with great memories.

Essentially, I am keen to start off the new year on a high in the Malaysian Open and the Indonesia Masters this month though it is not possible always to keep winning every tournament.



**Aiming high:** P.V. Sindhu, while admitting that her performances stagnated after the World Championship win, is confident of doing well in 2020. ■ V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM

**Is there a critical review of your game at the end of 2019?**

Yes, of course. It is important to know your mistakes and work on them. I am looking to be lot more patient now in my approach

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even as the other aspects of the game are being taken care off during the daily training sessions.

**What are the three goals you are chasing now?**

The Tokyo Olympics gold, World No.1 ranking and winning a few Super Series titles including the All England.

**Your thoughts on the PBL...**

This is going to be a different PBL. There are a new set of players. Matches against World No. 2 Tai Tzu Ying (for Bengaluru Raptors) should be interesting, looking forward to them. The league has always been very interesting, lots of fun and excitement in the air.

The whole atmosphere is different out there in PBL as you play for yourself and also for the team.

The support too will be different and importantly you can correct mistakes, if any.

**On playing for Hunters.**

We have to support each other and play like a team to clinch the title.

# New year dampener for Chelsea, Tottenham

Crucial win for Aston Villa at Burnley; high-flying Wolves lose to Watford

## PREMIER LEAGUE

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**  
LONDON

Tottenham and Chelsea slipped up in the Premier League's top-four race on Wednesday but Leicester tightened its grip on second spot during a busy programme of New Year's Day football.

Chelsea remains in pole position to secure the fourth Champions League qualification place but Frank Lampard will rue conceding a spectacular late equaliser in the 1-1 draw against Brighton.

Those dropped points gave Jose Mourinho's Spurs the chance to crank up the pressure on Chelsea and Manchester United but it slipped to a 1-0 defeat at Southampton, while high-flying Wolves went down 2-1 at rejuvenated Watford.

**Early lead**

Cesar Azpilicueta gave Chelsea the lead in the early kick-off on England's south coast.

The visitors missed chances to increase their lead but were indebted to goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga for producing a series of sharp saves at the other end.

Brighton scored the goal its persistence deserved in the 84th minute when Iranian substitute Alireza Jahanbakhsh acrobatically found the bottom-left corner



**Moment of magic:** Brighton's Alireza Jahanbakhsh pulls off a stunner to leave Chelsea's defence stranded. ■ REUTERS

with an overhead kick to give his team share of the points.

Tottenham travelled to Southampton with the chance to overtake Manchester United and move three points behind Chelsea but fell behind to a 17th-minute Danny Ings goal.

Mourinho was given an extra headache with 15 minutes to go, when Harry Kane limped off, clutching his left hamstring.

**Leicester cruises**

Leicester appears to have put a mini-slump behind it, beating Newcastle 3-0 courtesy of goals from Ayoze Perez, James Maddison and Hamza Choudhury after its

win at West Ham on Saturday.

Watford continued its impressive run under new manager Nigel Pearson, holding on to beat seventh-placed Wolves 2-1 courtesy of first-half goals from Gerard Deulofeu and Abdoulaye Doucoure.

Earlier, Villa beat Burnley 2-1 despite seeing a Jack Grealish goal controversially chalked off by VAR – a result that lifted it out of the relegation zone. Wesley put Villa ahead in the 27th minute and captain Grealish doubled his side's advantage four minutes before the break as his powerful effort found the top corner.

Chris Wood pulled a goal back for Burnley with 10 minutes to go but Villa held on to secure all three points.

“It was massive. We've only had one away win all season before this,” Grealish told the BBC. “To come here, one of the hardest places in the league, it was well-deserved and well-needed.”

**The results:** Brighton 1 (Jahanbakhsh 84) drew with Chelsea 1 (Azpilicueta 10); Burnley 1 (Wood 80) lost to Aston Villa 2 (Wesley 27, Grealish 41); Newcastle 0 lost to Leicester 3 (Perez 36, Maddison 39, Choudhury 87); Southampton 1 (Ings 17) bt Tottenham 0; Watford 2 (Deulofeu 30, Doucoure 49) bt Wolves 1 (Neto 60).



**Right approach:** According to Ajinkya Rahane, the focus should be on the basics while playing in New Zealand and not think too much about technique. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

# We have to counter the breeze factor: Rahane

Getting used to the conditions will be the key, says India's Test vice-captain

## INDIA'S NZ TOUR

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
NEW DELHI

Ajinkya Rahane doesn't fuss over technical issues but India's Test vice-captain feels that the breeze in Wellington and Christchurch needs to be factored in during the team's upcoming two-Test series against New Zealand next month.

India will be playing two Tests in Wellington (February 21-25) and Christchurch (February 29-March 4) after five T20Is and three ODIs.

In an exclusive interview to PTI, Rahane spoke on a host of issues with regard to the upcoming tour where the current team has a good

chance of emulating the class of 2009 under M.S. Dhoni's captaincy.

“We played there in 2014... there is a breeze factor that is involved. I guess getting used to conditions will be the key as there will be more sideways movement because of breeze,” Rahane said when asked about the challenges.

“In the last tour, I played in Wellington but [in] Christchurch, we will be playing a Test match after long time. Getting used to conditions will be key,” he added.

**Bowler to watch**

Rahane, who has been doing his homework for the tour, singled out left-arm fast bow-

ler Neil Wagner as the bowler to watch out for after his recent exploits against Australia and prior to that, England. “Wagner did well in the recent series (27 wickets from last 4 Tests). You can't take just one name. As a batting unit, you've got to respect every bowler.

**Natural game**

“As a home team, they have an advantage knowing conditions well but, at the same time, we need to play our natural game also,” said the 31-year-old, who has scored 4112 runs in 63 Test matches.

With Trent Boult and Wagner looking to bring the ball back into the right-handers, Rahane feels that

standing outside the crease to counter the swing could be the way to deal with them but then, to each his own.

**Different ways**

“There are different ways to counter different kinds of bowling. Everyone has a different method. Few players love standing outside the crease (to negate the swing) and some stand deep inside the crease.

“Some take middle-stump guard, few take leg-stump guard. Individual players should stick to their own strengths.”

In New Zealand, playing as close as possible to the body will be very important, said Rahane. “You have to focus

on the basics as you can't think too much about your technique. It's about keeping your game simple, playing close to the body, as late as possible and according to the situation. Pace and bounce will be different.”

**Ideal preparation**

Rahane will be playing for India-A in the the second four-day ‘Test’ against New Zealand-A to prepare for the big series.

“I think it's a good idea to have shadow tours with India-A. So, before playing Test matches, if India-A matches are there, it's good preparation for us. It helps in acclimatisation.

# Malinga to lead Sri Lanka, Mathews back



**Angelo Mathews.**  
■ FILE PHOTO: AP

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE**  
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka recalled former skipper Angelo Mathews to the T20 squad on Wednesday, after a 16-month absence from the shortest form of the game for the upcoming India tour.

The Sri Lankan Board said Mathews, 32, will be in the squad led by Lasith Malinga to play three matches in India. The squad will leave Sri Lanka on Thursday, the Board said in a statement.

Mathews played his last T20I against South Africa in August 2018 when he led Sri Lanka to a three-wicket victory but failed to impress with the bat, falling for a duck after facing three balls.

**The squad:** Lasith Malinga (Capt.), Danushka Gunathilaka, Avishka Fernando, Angelo Mathews, Dasun Shanaka, Kusal Perera, Niroshan Dickwella, Dhananjaya de Silva, Isuru Udana, Bhanuka Rajapaksa, Oshada Fernando, Wainindu Hasaranga, Lahiru Kumara, Kusal Mendis, Lakshan Sandakan and Kasun Rajitha.

# 2008 under-19 World Cup an important milestone: Kohli

‘It helped us get a good platform and make our careers’

## REWIND

**ANI**  
DUBAI

India skipper Virat Kohli, on Wednesday, termed the 2008 U-19 World Cup as an important milestone in his career and said it gave us a good platform to build upon.

Kohli had led the Indian side to a U-19 World Cup win in 2008 after defeating South Africa in the final.

“The ICC U-19 World Cup was a very important milestone in my career. It helped us get a good platform to build on and make our careers from thereon, so it holds a very important place in my mind and heart. It is very important to understand and respect the opportunity it provides to you,” International Cricket Council (ICC) quoted Kohli as saying in a media release.

**Stand-out performer**

The 32-year-old Kohli had gone on to score 235 runs in the tournament in 2008 at an average of 47. He went on to pick now New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson as the stand-out performer in that competition.

“I remember playing against Kane Williamson. He was someone who always stood out in the team, his batting ability was very different from the other players who were around,” Kohli said.



**Fond memory:** Virat Kohli will always cherish India's victorious campaign in the under-19 World Cup in 2008. ■ AP

“It is good to know that so many people from that batch, like Kane and Steve Smith, have played for their respective countries,” he added.

This year's U-19 World Cup will start on January 17 and the Indian side would be led by Priyam Garg. India has been clubbed with New Zealand, Sri Lanka, and Japan in Group A and the side will play its first match

against Sri Lanka on Jan. 19. India has won the tournament four times (2000, 2008, 2012 and 2018).

**India U-19 WC squad:** Yashasvi Jaiswal, Tilak Varma, Divyaansh Saxena, Priyam Garg (Capt.), Dhruv Chand Jurel (Cice-capt. & wk), Shashwat Rawat, Divyansh Joshi, Shubhang Hegde, Ravi Bishnoi, Akash Singh, Kartik Tyagi, Atharva Ankolekar, Kumar Kushagra (wk), Sushant Mishra, Vidyadhar Patil.

# Kohli and Dhoni named captains in ESPNcricinfo's teams of the decade

**IAN'S**  
NEW DELHI

India skipper Virat Kohli has been picked as captain of the Test team of the decade, while former captain M.S. Dhoni has been named as skipper of both the ODI and T20I teams of the decade announced by ESPNcricinfo.

Apart from Kohli, ace off-spinner R. Ashwin was the only Indian to feature in the Test XI which has the likes of Alastair Cook and Kane Williamson.

In the last decade, Kohli scored 7,202 runs at an average of 54.97 while Ashwin took 362 wickets at 25.36.

In the ODI XI of the decade, star opener Rohit Sharma and Kohli both found places besides Dhoni.

In the T20I XI, leading pacer Jasprit Bumrah made the cut, besides Dhoni and Kohli. As many as five West



**Consummate leader:** M.S. Dhoni was chosen skipper of both the ODI and T20I teams of the decade. ■ REUTERS

Indies players were named in the team, including ‘Universe boss’ Chris Gayle, Dwayne Bravo, Sunil Narine, Kieron Pollard and Andre Russell.

Former skipper Mithali

Raj and fast bowler Jhulan Goswami were named in the women's team of the decade picked for both the ODIs and T20Is. Australia's Meg Lanning was named the captain of the sides.

# PCB withdraws Naseem from under-19 WC team

**ANI**  
LAHORE

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has withdrawn pacer Naseem Shah from the upcoming U-19 World Cup squad and named Mohammad Wasim Jr. as his replacement.

Wasim Jr. took three wickets each in the ACC Asia Cup and on the tour of South Africa, while he bagged seven wickets on the tour of Sri Lanka.

In the domestic circuit, he played one U-19 one-day



**Naseem Shah.**  
■ FILE PHOTO

match in which he claimed three wickets, while he snapped up seven wickets in

three U-19 three-day matches.

PCB Chief Executive Wasim Khan said in a statement: “The ICC U-19 Cricket World Cup is a stepping stone for future stars and a platform for budding youngsters to graduate to international cricket.

**Glass ceiling**

“Naseem has recently broken that glass ceiling and has established his credentials as an international cricketer.

“As such, the PCB has ta-

ken a pragmatic approach and decided to withdraw him from next year's competition to provide this opportunity to another promising cricketer so that he can show his mettle and potential at a global stage.

“Naseem will now remain in Pakistan and continue to work on his skills under the watchful eyes of bowling coach Waqar Younis. Furthermore, he will remain available for the home series against Bangladesh,” he added.