

Nadal runs hot; Sharapova crashes out

Kyrgios moves into second round; Konta loses to Tunisia's Jabeur; Halep survives a series of falls

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MELBOURNE

Top seed Rafael Nadal turned on the style as he launched his bid for a record-equalling 20th Major title at the Australian Open on Tuesday, but falling star Maria Sharapova hit a career low. Australia's Nick Kyrgios also cantered into the second round, but fourth seed Daniil Medvedev had to fight his way past American Frances Tiafoe in four sets.

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Tunisia's pride: The unseeded Ons Jabeur knocked out 12th seed Johanna Konta. ■GETTY IMAGES

stranglehold that has brought them all but one of the last 14 Australian Open titles. Nadal, the first player to be World No. 1 in three different decades, is still thriving at 33 but it's a different story for five-time Grand Slam winner Sharapova.

Dubious hat-trick

The 32-year-old, playing on a wildcard as she wrestles with a shoulder injury, lost 6-3, 6-4 to Croatian 19th seed Donna Vekic, making her an opening-round loser at three

straight Grand Slams for the first time. Britain's Johanna Konta, a two-time Slam semifinalist, also fell at the first hurdle as she battles to overcome a knee problem, losing 6-4, 6-2 to unseeded Tunisian Ons Jabeur.

A new star emerged in 18-year-old Italian Jannik Sinner, last year's NextGen champion, who earned his first Slam victory against Australia's Max Purcell.

Women's fourth seed Simona Halep survived some

painful-looking falls to beat America's Jennifer Brady, and 2016 champion Angelique Kerber dropped only four games against Elisabetta Cocciaretto of Italy.

Prajnesh bows out

Prajnesh Gunneswaran, who entered the main draw as a lucky loser in the qualifiers, lost 6-4, 6-2, 7-5 to Japanese wild card Tatsuma Ito, ranked 22 places below the Indian, in a rescheduled first-round tie that lasted two hours and one minute.

THE RESULTS

First round
Men: 1-Rafael Nadal (Esp) bt Hugo Dellien (Bol) 6-2, 6-3, 6-0; 23-Nick Kyrgios (Aus) bt Lorenzo Sonego (Ita) 6-2, 7-6 (3), 7-6(1); 10-Gael Monfils (Fra) bt Lu Yen-Hsun (Tpe) 6-1, 6-4, 6-2; 5-Dominic Thiem (Aut) bt Adrian Mannarino (Fra) 6-3, 7-5, 6-2; 4-Daniil Medvedev (Rus) bt Frances Tiafoe (USA) 6-3, 4-6, 6-4, 6-2; 15-Stan Wawrinka (Sui) bt Damir Dzumhur (BIH) 7-5, 6-7(4), 6-4, 6-4; 7-Alexander Zverev (Ger) bt Marco Cecchinato (Ita) 6-4, 7-6(4), 6-3; 12-Fabio Fognini (Ita) bt Reilly Opelka (USA) 3-6, 6-7(3), 6-4, 6-3, 7-6 (5); 9-Roberto Bautista (Esp) bt Feliciano Lopez (Esp) 6-2, 6-2, 7-5; Tatsuma Ito (Jpn) bt Prajnesh Gunneswaran (Ind) 6-4, 6-2, 7-5.
Women: 10-Madison Keys (USA) bt Darya Kasatkina (Rus) 6-3, 6-1; Ons Jabeur (Tun) bt 12-Johanna Konta (GBR) 6-4, 6-2; 6-Belinda Bencic (Sui) bt Anna Karolina Schmiedlova (Svk) 6-3, 7-5; 19-Donna Vekic (Cro) bt Maria Sharapova (Rus) 6-3, 6-4; 4-Simona Halep (Rou) bt Jennifer Brady (USA) 7-6(5), 6-1; 5-Elina Svitolina (Ukr) bt Katie Boulter (GBR) 6-4, 7-5; 17-Angelique Kerber (Ger) bt Elisabetta Cocciaretto (Ita) 6-2, 6-2; 2-Karolina Pliskova (Cze) bt Kristina Mladenovic (Fra) 6-1, 7-5.



COURTSIDE BYTES

REILLY OPELKA

6

Fabio really stepped it up today, which I was expecting. I remember watching him beat Nadal at the US Open from two sets down

RAFAEL NADAL

6

I don't know (why I have only one Australian Open title). Maybe the conditions are better for me in New York than here. That's the only reason I can find

DANIIL MEDVEDEV

6

It's tough to know where I'll be in 12 months' time. Last year, I played only seven or eight tournaments. I was injured most of the year. I would love to [play at the highest level again]

SIMONA HALEP

6

As I remember well, it was the same in 2018 (I suffered a fall while playing in the first-round), probably I can repeat that (runner-up then). I don't know why in the first round always I fall down. Maybe it's a good sign

Wednesday's picks

Men

- 2-Djokovic v Ito
- 3-Federer v Krajinovic
- 6-Tsitsipas v Kohlschreiber
- 8-Berrettini v Sandgren
- 9-Bautista Agut v Mmoh
- 12-Fognini v Thompson
- 18-Dimitrov v Paul
- 31-Hurkacz v Millman

Women

- 1-Barty v Hergog
- 3-Osaka v Saisai
- 7-Kvitova v Badosa
- 8-Serena v Zidank
- 10-Keys v Rus
- 11-Sabalenka v Navarro
- 13-Martic v Goerges
- 16-Mertens v Kovinic
- 23-Yastremska v Wozniacki

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Compiled by Lalith Kalidas

40 Years of Sportstar, 40 Superstars

LAVANYA CHENNAI

World badminton champion P.V. Sindhu launched the 40 Years of Sportstar, 40 Superstars book on Tuesday.

Featuring essays by Vijay Amritraj, Shashi Tharoor, Michael Holding, Brian Glanville, and Rajdeep Sardesai among others, the book was commissioned to commemorate Sportstar completing 40 years and features a champion for each year, ranging from Bjorn Borg, Kapil Dev, Mike Tyson and Imran Khan to Rahul Dravid, Michael Schumacher, M.S. Dhoni, Mary Kom among others.

The 24-year-old Sindhu is one of the subjects, with tennis star Sania Mirza writing about her.

"Sania is a dear friend, we meet from time to time. Her comeback from motherhood and her win this week has been phenomenal. I congratulate her for the win and it is an honour to be written about by someone like her," said Sindhu. The ace shuttler released the

book along with L.V. Navaneeth, CEO, THG Publishing, and Ayon Sengupta, Editor, Sportstar.

"Sportstar marked its 40th year on July 15, 2018. It is only fitting to look back on our journey so far and pay tribute to the legends of sports who have dominated the landscape in these four decades. But this had to also be a tribute to writing, a tradition the magazine has held dear since its inception" said Sengupta.

Navaneeth said: "We have Little Master Sachin Tendul-

kar writing on tennis legend Roger Federer and West Indian great Michael Holding talking about fellow-Jamaican Usain Bolt.

"Each writer brings in his own unique style and understanding of the game and the editorial team has dug deep into our archives to curate images that enable us to relive many iconic sporting moments."

The book, priced ₹999, can be pre-booked online with a discount of 20% on <https://publications.thehindugroup.com/bookstore/>



Relive the moments... P.V. Sindhu, along with L.V. Navaneeth, centre, and Ayon Sengupta. ■K. PICHUMANI

Samson replaces injured Dhawan

Shaw gets maiden ODI call-up; Ishant likely to miss Tests

INDIA IN NZ

SPORTS REPORTER MUMBAI

Sanju Samson has replaced Shikhar Dhawan for the New Zealand T20Is, the BCCI announced on Tuesday.

In the ODIs, Mumbai's Prithvi Shaw got a maiden ODI call-up in the wake of Dhawan's injury.

Dhawan, who suffered a shoulder injury during the Australia series, did not travel with the team to New Zealand.

Our Special Correspondent adds from New Delhi:

Delhi speedster Ishant Sharma is in doubt for the Test series, beginning on February 21, in New Zealand following a ligament tear on his right ankle. Ishant suffered the injury during Vidarbha's second innings in the Ranji match on Monday. He has been advised six weeks' rest after preliminary investigations revealed a grade three tear.



Selfie time: Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer and Shardul Thakur after landing in Auckland on Tuesday. ■COURTESY: INSTAGRAM/VIRAT.KOHLI

The T20I series

- Jan. 24 & 26, Auckland
- Jan. 29, Hamilton
- Jan. 31, Wellington
- Feb. 2, Mount Maunganui
- All matches start at 12.30 p.m. IST

Though he came to the Ferozeshah Kotla ground on Tuesday and checked out his ankle movements under the supervision of a physiotherapist, further treatment is

set to continue at the NCA.

The squads:

T20Is: Virat Kohli (capt.), Rohit Sharma (vice-capt.), Sanju Samson, K.L. Rahul, Shreyas Iyer, Manish Pandey, Rishabh Pant (wk), Shivam Dube, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Washington Sundar, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, Navdeep Saini, Ravindra Jadeja, Shardul Thakur.

ODIs: Kohli (capt.), Rohit (vice-capt.), Prithvi Shaw, Rahul, Shreyas, Manish, Pant, Dube, Kuldeep, Chahal, Jadeja, Bumrah, Shami, Saini, Shardul, Kedar Jadhav.

Pitches in NZ have changed: Tendulkar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

The pitches in New Zealand have become a lot more batting-friendly over the years, says Sachin Tendulkar, insisting that India has the "ammunition" to trouble the sprightly hosts during the upcoming series.

Tendulkar, who has been on a record five New Zealand tours since 1990, feels that from seaming tracks during his early trips years, the tracks became high-scoring, hard ones during his last tour back in 2009.

"Of late, the Tests in New Zealand have been high-scoring and surfaces have changed," Tendulkar told PTI during an exclusive interview.

India will play five T20Is, three ODIs and two Tests during the tour starting with the shortest format on January 24.

"I remember when we played in 2009, the Hamilton pitch was different. Oth-

er pitches got harder (Wellington and Napier) but not Hamilton.

"It remained soft. But Napier became hard with passage of time (where Gautam Gambhir scored an epic match-saving 12-hour hundred in 2009).

Meanwhile, Tendulkar and Courtney Walsh will coach star-studded teams in a charity match to raise funds for victims of Australia's bushfires, organisers said on Tuesday.



Sachin Tendulkar. ■FILE PHOTO: K.R. DEEPAK

Lanka closes in on lead

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE HARARE

Angelo Mathews and Kusal Mendis both struck half-centuries as Sri Lanka reached 295 for four at close on the third day of the first Test against Zimbabwe on Tuesday.

The scores: Zimbabwe 358 vs Sri Lanka 295/4 in 106 overs (Angelo Mathews 92 batting, Kusal Mendis 80, Dhananjaya de Silva 42 batting).

U-19 WC: India thumps Japan



Bishnoi. ■COURTESY ICC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA BLOEMFONTEIN

India outclassed debutant Japan by 10 wickets in its second match to all but secure a spot in the quarterfinals of the ICC U-19 World Cup here on Tuesday.

Opting to field, India bowled out Japan for 41 in 22.5 overs with leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi taking four. India needed 4.5 overs to complete the formalities.

The scores: Japan 41 in 22.5 overs (Ravi Bishnoi 4/5, Kartik Tyagi 3/10) lost to India 42/0 in 4.5 overs (Yashashvi Jaiswal 29 n.o.).

Balance means different things in different formats

The lessons of IPL haven't translated well for India onto the bigger stage



BETWEEN WICKETS

SURESH MENON

To begin with the obvious, a cricket team is made up of players with diverse skills. The key to success lies in a concept that is still often misunderstood: balance. For Test matches, specialists who have specific roles fill the slots, but as the colour of the ball changes and the number of overs is restricted, there has to be greater fluidity. What appears to be a balanced team for a five-day match may not be so for a T20.

In the shorter formats, it helps when a player brings more than one skill to the game. T20 is a specialised sport, but teams cannot afford to have too many specialists. The exception is the big-hitting batsman. This is something India will have to give much thought to while preparing for the T20 World Cup nine months away. They have enough time and matches (they are scheduled to play 14 beginning with the New Zealand tour) to get it right. It is worrying that they haven't won the World Cup since 2007 when a whole country was transformed from non-believers in the format to passionate supporters of it. A year later came IPL, and cricket has never been the same.

In the early years of one-day cricket, India made the mistake of playing it the way they played Test cricket. They now sometimes approach T20 like a 50-over game ignoring the fact that it is not a reduced version but a different sport altogether.

T20 may be the least sophisticated form of the game, often turning on luck and power hitting, but looking down on these aspects is not a guaranteed way to win an international tournament. Over a decade ago, much was made of how the IPL would ensure India would win many World Cups, but reality hasn't caught up with marketing hype yet. The lessons of IPL haven't translated well for India onto the bigger stage.

Bigger hitter

The manner in which India lost the semifinals to the West Indies in 2016 – thanks to the six-hitting prowess of Andre Russell – suggested that the big-hitter had the key role. This was confirmed three days later when Russell's colleague Carlos Brathwaite hit Ben Stokes for four sixes in the final over to snatch the final from England.

The lesson was clear, and endorsed over the years. You need batsmen, at least a couple of them, capable of hitting big and hitting consistently. India have Rohit Sharma at the top of the order but need players lower down who can hit with power and abandon. The likely candidates, Shreyas Iyer, Rishabh Pant, Manish Pandey, hold out hope – lack of consistency is a problem such batsmen have to live with. But just as teamwork implies shared individual success, it can also be about shared individual failure – where a teammate makes up for another's failure in a particular match.

It is worth investing in a couple of players who are expected to do little more than hit sixes at will. This might go against the single-skill theory, but works towards team balance.

Despite shots into the stands having become commonplace, no bowler is happy to see the ball disappear thus. The big six – not the well-run single or

two, despite Virat Kohli's incredible record in this area – is to T20 what the forward defence is to Test cricket.

Greater options

Kohli has said that K L Rahul keeping wickets has given the team greater options. The other Rahul, Dravid, was a reluctant keeper, and took up the job under Sourav Ganguly for 73 matches in the middle phase of his career.

In the traditional game, the wicket-keeper was chosen for his abilities behind, rather than in front of, the stumps. India were early rule-breakers and chose Test 'keepers who could bat, perhaps even open the innings, rather than the specialists whose runs came as a bonus. There were two reasons for this: the theory that since wicket-keepers had quick reflexes, they would play fast bowling best, and the reluctance of many batsmen to open against the kind of fast bowlers not seen in India.

One of the problems India had at the last World Cup (the 50-over version in England last year) was the lack of team balance. The problem of who should bat at No. 4 was never resolved satisfactorily. When he was coach, Greg Chappell had a theory he applied in the shorter format: flexibility of batting positions. Batsmen should be prepared to go in at any number since the game could swing dramatically at short notice.

This makes team balance even more important. Rahul showed in the recent series against Australia how he could move up and down the order without any discomfort. That, added to his wicket keeping, has given India an unexpected bonus, reducing further the need to go back to Mahendra Singh Dhoni who turns 39 before the World Cup, with only the IPL to test his preparedness.

Warriors have the final say

Sansomboonsuk delivers the decisive win in the final match

PBL

K. KEERTHIVASAN CHENNAI

North Eastern Warriors pipped defending champion Bengaluru Raptors 4-3 in the Premier Badminton League (PBL) here on Tuesday.

With the contest tied at 3-3, it was the fifth tie – second men's singles – that decided the outcome. Tanongsak Sansomboonsuk outplayed Brice Leverdez 15-7, 15-8 to spark celebrations in the Warriors camp.

Pulling level

The men's doubles Trump pair of Warriors got the team back on track as it came from 3-1 down to pull level.



The final blow: Tanongsak Sansomboonsuk defeated Brice Leverdez in the fifth match. ■R. RAGU

Bodin Isara joined hands with Lee Yong Dae, the London Olympics bronze medalist, to drub Arun George and Rian Agung Saputro 15-12, 15-6. Despite his bulky frame, Bodin was unstoppable, attacking with gusto and pulling off some remarkable retrieves.

Chen Peng Soon, the 2016 Rio Olympic medalist, was the pivot as Bengaluru won the first match, the mixed doubles. Partnering Eom Hye Won, the Malaysian-South Korean duo put it across Lee Yong Dae and Kim Na Ha 15-8, 15-11 in the first rubber.

Falling flat

The second match, the men's singles, between Sai

Praneeth and Lee Cheuk Yiu fell flat as the 23-year-old from Hong Kong outplayed Praneeth 15-14, 15-9 as Warriors got their first point. The 23-year-old, ranked 18th in the world, seven spots below the Indian, has been in good form, shocking a few top 10 players.

In fact, in the Indonesia Masters early this month, Lee entered the semifinals with wins over Chou Tien Chen and Shi Yu Qi.

He had won the Hong Kong Open last year, defeating Yu Qi, Viktor Axelsen and Anthony Ginting along the way.

Against Praneeth, he came up with jump-smashes and down-the-line winners. His diving returns, when the point seemed lost, unnerved Praneeth.

As expected, World No. 2 Tai Tzu Ying, as Trump for Bengaluru, increased the lead (3-1) with a convincing 15-7, 15-5 victory over Ashmitha Chaliha. But it was Warriors' Sansomboonsuk who had the last laugh.

The results: North Eastern Warriors bt Bengaluru Raptors 4-3 (Lee Yong Dae & Kim Na Ha lost to Chan Peng Soon & Eom Hye Won 15-8, 15-11; Lee Cheuk Yiu bt Sai Praneeth 15-14, 15-9; Ashmitha Chaliha lost to Tai Tzu Ying (T) 15-7, 15-5; Bodin Isara & Lee Yong Dae (T) bt Arun George & Rian Agung Saputro 15-12, 15-6; Tanongsak Sansomboonsuk bt Brice Leverdez 15-7, 15-8).