

RANJI ROUNDUP

Nair guides

Karnataka to KOs

AT BANGALORE: Karun Nair might be the forgotten man as far as the national selectors are concerned, but in domestic cricket he continues to score important runs. The Karnataka captain's 71 not out was a reason why his team sauntered to victory against Baroda, securing a quarterfinal berth in the process. Baroda, though, had lost the game in the first innings. **BRIEF SCORES:** Baroda 85 and 296 (Prasidh Krishna 4/45) lost to Karnataka 233 and 150/2 (Karun Nair 71 not out) by 8 wickets
Points: Karnataka 6, Baroda 0

Axar Patel stars for Gujarat

AT NADIAD: Axar Patel bagged a five-for during Andhra's second innings, helping Gujarat inch closer to victory. Andhra still require 13 more runs to save an innings defeat, although they are already through to the quarterfinals. Gujarat, too, have qualified for the knockouts. **BRIEF SCORES:** Andhra 177 and 216/7 (Karan Shinde 64; Axar Patel 5/77) vs Gujarat 406

Vasavada hits ton for Saurashtra

AT RAJKOT: Arpit Vasavada's unbeaten century was the highlight in the Saurashtra innings but it hasn't yet secured a first innings lead for his team against Tamil Nadu. Going into the final day, Saurashtra still trail by 78 runs with four wickets remaining. Saurashtra have already reached the quarterfinals, while Tamil Nadu are out. **BRIEF SCORES:** Tamil Nadu 424 vs Saurashtra 346/6 (Arpit Vasavada 126 not out)

Jayant Yadav bags seven-for

AT JAMMU: The match is intriguingly poised, going into the final day. But Jammu and Kashmir are already in pole position, in Elite, Group C, and irrespective of the result against Haryana, they will be through. Jayant Yadav's seven-for, though, has given Haryana a sniff at the victory, as they require another 121 runs with five wickets remaining. **BRIEF SCORES:** J&K 340 and 174 (Jayant Yadav 7/58) vs Haryana 291 and 103/5 (Parvez Rasool 3/35)

Orissa on verge of knockouts

AT CUTTACK: Odisha are on the verge of securing a first innings lead that would all but take them to the quarterfinals from Elite, Group C. Jharkhand still need 82 runs to surpass Odisha's first innings total. **BRIEF SCORES:** Odisha 436 vs Jharkhand 355/9 (Kumar Suraj 107; Suryakant Pradhan 3/86)

Twin tons peg back Services

AT RAIPUR: Services needed to win outright against Chhattisgarh to upstage Odisha and they took a healthy first innings lead. But twin tons from Jiwanjot Singh and Harpreet Singh during Chhattisgarh's second innings appears to have slammed the door shut on Services, unless something dramatic happens on the final day. **BRIEF SCORES:** Chhattisgarh 179 and 325/1 (Jiwanjot Singh 152 not out, Harpreet Singh 101 n.o.) vs Services 398.a

Man City banned from Champions League for two years

AP/AGENCIES
LONDON, FEBRUARY 14

UEFA has banned Manchester City from the Champions League for two seasons for "serious breaches" of financial regulations. The Abu Dhabi-owned English Premier League champion has also been fined 30 million euros (\$33 million) in an investigation that was sparked by leaks showing City oversteated sponsorship revenue. The punishment prevents City from playing in any European competition, including the Europa League, until the 2022-23 season.

"The adjudicatory chamber, having considered all the evidence, has found that Manchester City Football Club committed serious breaches of the UEFA Club Licensing and financial fair play regulations by overstating its sponsorship revenue in its ac-

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counts and in the break-even information submitted to UEFA between 2012 and 2016," UEFA said in a statement.

City said it would appeal against the sanctions, criticizing a "flawed" process. City responded with a statement on their website, saying UEFA came up with the decision even before the actual probe had started. "Manchester City is disappointed but not surprised by today's announcement by the UEFA Adjudicatory Chamber," the statement said. "The Club has always anticipated the ultimate need to seek out

an independent body and process to impartially consider the comprehensive body of irrefutable evidence in support of its position.

"In December 2018, the UEFA Chief Investigator publicly previewed the outcome and sanction he intended to be delivered to Manchester City, before any investigation had even begun. The subsequent flawed and consistently leaked UEFA process he oversaw has meant that there was little doubt in the result that he would deliver. The Club has formally complained to the UEFA Disciplinary body, a complaint which was validated by a CAS ruling.

"Simply put, this is a case initiated by UEFA, prosecuted by UEFA and judged by UEFA. With this prejudicial process now over, the Club will pursue an impartial judgment as quickly as possible and will therefore, in the first instance, commence proceedings with the Court of Arbitration for Sport at the earliest opportunity."



Manchester City Football Club committed serious breaches of the club licensing and financial fair play regulations, UEFA said in a statement. File

Best Bengal

Left-arm spinner Shahbaz Ahamad helps team fashion 48-run win over Punjab to enter quarterfinals

NITIN SHARMA
PATIALA, FEBRUARY 14

AT THE end of the second day, after he had taken a career best seven-wicket haul in Punjab's first innings, the left-arm spinner Shahbaz Ahamad shied away from the Bengal coach Arun Lal. He had bundled out Punjab for 151 but Bengal had collapsed to 199 for 9 at stumps. A No.8 batsman, Ahamad had got out to a rash shot and felt he had let down Lal, a backer of his batting talents. Lal's hopes of setting a bigger target was hit and he kept away from Ahamad for 25 minutes before chiding him for his shot. On Friday, chasing 190, Punjab had recovered from 37 for 5 to reach 100 without further loss before Ahamad took three more wickets – four in all – to push Bengal through to the knockouts.

His 11-wicket match haul was a major contributing factor in the triumph – Manoj Tiwari's 73 and 65 in the two innings were priceless of course – and he was paraded on the shoulders of his team-mates when Lal gave a congratulatory pat on his back. In the last match, Ahamad had made his highest first-class score (61* against Rajasthan) and now delivered a match-winning contribution with the ball.

Valuable suggestions from R Ashwin during Deodhar Trophy earlier in the season has helped his bowling. "Ashwin bhai told me to work on the finishing aspect of my action and that has helped," Ahamad says.

Chasing 190, after Bengal just added three runs more in the morning, Punjab had recovered from 37 for 5 to reach 100 without any additional loss. It was then that Ahamad, who had taken the fourth wicket, dragged Bengal back, taking three more to bundle out Punjab for 141.

Bengal had begun their defense of the 190-run target strongly, with the seamer Akash Deep striking twice in quick time. When Arnab Nandi removed Rohan Marwaha Punjab were reeling at 5 for 3 in 5.1 overs. Shahbaz Ahamad broke the 26-run stand between Punjab captain Mandeep Singh and Krishan Alang, a spinner who was promoted to bat at No. 5. Ahamad had trapped Mandeep lbw.

However, Punjab rallied through debutant Ramandeep Singh and Anmol Malhotra, moving from 37 for 5 to 100, when Ahamad stepped up. To counter the stiff winds that was upsetting his rhythm, he changed ends at the advice of his team members and struck with his first ball, trapping Malhotra lbw.

"We had a discussion at lunch time and the team thought I should bowl from the club end as the wind was hampering the ball's planned trajectory. Once I got the wicket of Anmol Malhotra, we knew that we are back in the game and wickets fell," Ahamad said. "The wicket was getting a bit slow and I knew that we, spinners, had to make extra effort as the ball wasn't bouncing as much as it did yesterday."



Bengal's Shahbaz Ahamad finished with a 11-wicket match haul. Harmeet Sodhi

Ramandeep, who was out for zero in the first innings, fought hard with an unbeaten 69 but it didn't prove enough. He added 21 runs with Abhishek Gupta and then 14 for the ninth wicket with Sidharth Kaul but the last two batsmen were run out off successive balls, and that was that.

"Yesterday, Arun Lal sir wanted me to carry my momentum in my batting too but I got out to a rash shot. He didn't speak to me for some time afterwards. Thodi dant bhi padi thi baad main (he chided me later)," Ahamad says with a smile. Claiming Mandeep Singh's wicket twice in the match and removing Anmol Malhotra in the second innings chase was the high point for me

from the match.

Born in Haryana

Ahamad grew up in Shikrawa village in Nuh district in Haryana with a cricket-loving father Ahamad Jaan, a clerk in a sub-divisional magistrate's office. Jaan would bowl for hours to his son before Ahamad graduated to playing in local clubs. He would later commute 78 kilometres daily in bus to train with coach Mansoor in Gurgaon at the Teri cricket ground. Sometime in 2015, at the advice of Haryana player Pramod Chandela, Ahamad shifted his base to Kolkata to play club cricket.

"I used to play in village as a medi-

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umpacer but coach Mansoor told me to start bowling left-arm spin as I didn't have much pace. But when I didn't break into Haryana teams, a player Pramod Chandela bhai told me to try my luck in Kolkata. My father also agreed with that decision, asked me not to worry as the shift was to realise my dream. And when I made it to Bengal Ranji team last year, my family was so happy; they would call every day to ask about the matches," Ahamad said.

He played just two matches last season, picking up two wickets, but he has performed consistently this season. He has taken 29 wickets and scored 216 runs that includes two fifties. His unbeaten 61 in the last game helped Bengal chase a 320-run target with two wickets to spare against Rajasthan. His selection to Deodhar Trophy, where he had chats with Ashwin, after he had taken four wickets and tallied 197 runs, including a hundred against Tamil Nadu, in a game in Vijay Hazare tournament.

"I have always spent time on my batting and playing for Bengal meant that I got chance to train under Arun Lal sir, VVS Laxman sir and Joydeep Mukherjee sir and it helped my batting. The fifty against Kerala had come on a difficult track and the pitch in the Rajasthan match too was a turning track."

Ahamad watches a lot of videos of Ben Stokes as he wants to emulate by contributing with both bat and ball. "I am happy that my batting has also helped the team and I keep watching Ben Stokes videos to make my belief stronger that I can help my team like he does in every department. I also keep talking with my friends Pramod Chandela, Arun Chaprana and Rahul Tewatia and we often share inputs about each other's game."

The coach Lal is confident about the knockouts. "We are a flexible team and with Ishan Porel back, we have more options. Manoj Tiwari's experience always helps young players and we hope this team can win big this season," Lal said.

BRIEF SCORES: Bengal : 138 and 202 all out in 69.3 overs (Manoj Tiwari 65, Arnab Nandi 51; Krishan Alang 6/53, Siddharth Kaul 2/37) won by 48 runs against Punjab : 151 and 141 all out in 47.3 overs (Ramandeep Singh 65 n.o, Anmol Malhotra 17, Mandeep Singh 17; Shahbaz Ahamad 4/44, Akash Deep 2/17, A Nandi 1/22, Ramesh Prasad 1/46).

Hamilton ready for young rivals

JEROME PUGMIRE
FEBRUARY 14

FORMULA ONE champion Lewis Hamilton sees "a sign of weakness" when his rivals start doubting his ability to handle pressure. The Mercedes driver is aiming for a seventh F1 title this season to equal Michael Schumacher's record, and is seven race wins away from equaling the F1 great's other record of 91. Last season, Hamilton won a third straight title by 87 points over teammate Valtteri Bottas, who led early before fading.

Red Bull driver Max Verstappen finished third in another impressive campaign. The 22-year-old Dutchman won three races and had some close duels with Hamilton in Monaco and Hungary. Verstappen said last week he could beat Hamilton with the right car. Hamilton was asked on Friday at Silverstone — where Mercedes was testing its new W11 car — what he made of recent comments about him.

"I find it funny seeing that. I have just always known to do my talking on the track," Hamilton said in a video from the team's garage. "I tend to see that (kind of talking) as a sign of weakness."

Two-time F1 champion Fernando Alonso previously said rivals were not exploiting Hamilton's weaknesses, but did not say what those were.

Mercedes has had the quickest and most reliable car since winning the first of six straight drivers' and constructors' titles in 2014. Ferrari was quicker at times last year — but on straight-line speed only. And it was the Honda engine-powered Red Bull making the biggest leap forward.

Verstappen is increasingly confident about what he could do in a car good enough to push Hamilton over a season, rather than a random race.

"Lewis is very good. He is definitely one of the best out there but he is not God," Verstappen said last week. "When you can put the pressure on, of course it is a lot harder for the guy in the lead ... If you never really have pressure, you can drive at 97-98% and you never make mistakes, or maybe one weekend out of 21-22."

He responded with a "Yes" when asked if he could beat Hamilton, but added that being able to do so "is very car-dependent."

Hamilton has not faced sustained, season-long pressure since a tension-filled 2016 when then-Mercedes teammate Nico Rosberg clinched the title at the last race, then abruptly retired from F1.

The 35-year-old Hamilton has stepped up his off-season training to be in even better shape, telling fans online this week that he feels "physically and mentally on another level." The first of two F1 pre-season testing sessions starts next week. "Last year I arrived into testing with a lot of water weight and around 78kg (kilograms)," Hamilton wrote on his Twitter account. AP

[SPORTS BAR]

Bopanna-Shapovalov advance

India's Rohan Bopanna and his Canadian partner Denis Shapovalov advanced to the men's doubles semifinals of the ABN Amro World Tennis Tournament with an impressive win over fourth seeds Jean-Julien Rojer and Horia Tecau in Rotterdam. The unseeded Indo-Canadian combine beat the Romanian-Dutch pairing of Tecau and Rojer 6-2, 3-6, 10-7 in a quarterfinal played on Thursday. Bopanna and Shapovalov had a decent first serve percentage of 67 and won three of the seven break points on offer. They next meet the winners of the quarterfinal between Henri Kontinen and Jan-Lennard Struff, and, Jamie Murray and Neal Skupski.

Tanvi upsets Sunayna at squash nationals

Tanvi Singh pulled off a surprise win over 2nd-seeded Sunayna Kuruvilla, winning in five games to reach the women's singles final of the 77th Senior National Squash Championship in Chennai. The top-seeds in the men's and women's sections—Saurav Ghosal and Joshna Chinappa marched into the finals with easy victories while the experienced Harinder Pal Sandhu, on a comeback trail, crashed out with a defeat at the hands of No.2 seed Abhay Singh. In the women's semis, Tanvi Khanna prevailed 11-6, 3-11, 11-8, 8-11, 12-10 in a thriller against Sunayna, the local girl.



Shoaib Malik has retired from Tests and ODIs

Decision on retirement closer to World T20: Malik

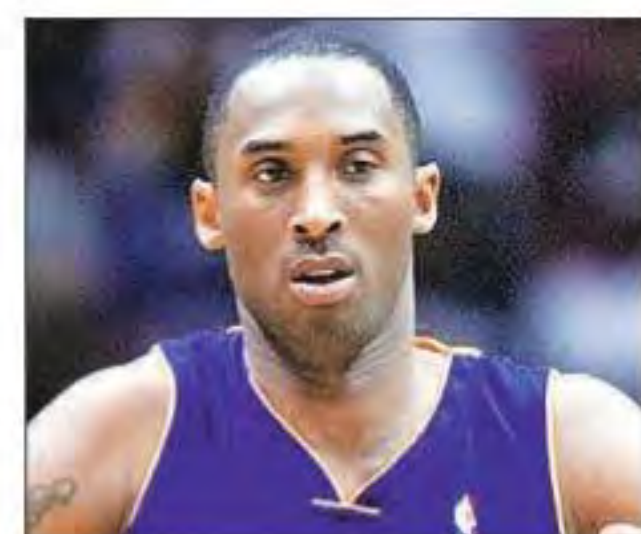
Pakistan's senior all-rounder Shoaib Malik on Friday said he will take a decision on international retirement closer to the T20 World Cup, scheduled to be held in October. "The World Cup is still far off and I think right now my focus is on the Pakistan Super League and coming matches for Pakistan. When I get closer to the World Cup I will see what to do," he said. Malik, 38, has already retired from Tests after 35 matches and One-day Internationals (287) but is still playing T20 format in which he has appeared in 113 games for Pakistan besides appearing in different leagues around the world. Malik, a former Pakistan captain, had said after retiring from ODIs after the last World Cup that he would also call it quits in T20 Internationals. "I will have to see my fitness and position in the national side closer to the World Cup than I will take a decision on final retirement," he told reporters. The all-rounder also said he didn't take criticism to heart as it is like having breakfast in the morning in Pakistan cricket.

Ex-England defender has brain illness

Former England defensive stalwart Dave Watson is suffering from a degenerative brain disease probably brought on by repeatedly heading the ball, his wife revealed. Penny Watson said her 73-year-old husband's consultant thinks it is "in all probability Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy" — a disease determined as the cause of former West Brom striker Jeff Astle's death in 2002. She says the 65-times capped Watson — a member of the Sunderland side that stunned favourites Leeds United in the 1973 FA Cup final — contracted the illness probably as a result of one of his great strengths as a player, namely heading the ball.

Bad day for seeds at Bengaluru Open

Two more seeds crashed out of the Bengaluru Open here on Friday with Italian Julian Ocleppo and Frenchman Benjamin Bonzi ousting their fancied opponents in the quarterfinals. The 22-year-old Ocleppo knocked out 13th seeded Ilya Ivashka of Belarus 7-6(4), 6-7(3), 6-4 in a three-setter that lasted two hours and 40 minutes. Another seed bit the dust in the form of number three Yuichi Sugita of Japan who went down to the unseeded Bonzi 7-6(5), 5-7, 4-6. Bonzi will next meet second seed Stefano Travaglia of Italy who overcame a stiff challenge from 11th seed Blaz Rola of Slovakia before prevailing 6-4, 4-6, 6-2.



Kobe Bryant tribute at NBA All-Star game

Tributes to the late Kobe Bryant, the Los Angeles Lakers legend who died last month in a helicopter crash, will play a major role in Sunday's 69th NBA All-Star Game. This year's annual showcase of league talent will be played in Chicago and feature numerous nods to Bryant, a five-time NBA champion who also matched a league record with four NBA All-Star Game Most Valuable Player awards. All-Star teams guided by LeBron James of the Lakers and Greek star Giannis Antetokounmpo of the Milwaukee Bucks will compete to win each of the first three quarters, which will all start 0-0 and last 12 minutes. At the start of the fourth quarter, the clock will be turned off and a final target score will be established by taking the leading club's cumulative score through the first three quarters and adding 24 points — the number representing the jersey number worn by Bryant.