

BRIEFLY

Jayaram ousted in Barcelona semis

Barcelona: Indian shuttler Ajay Jayaram on Saturday crashed out of the men's singles semifinals of the Barcelona Spain Masters after suffering a straight-game loss to Thailand's Kunlavut Vitidsarn. The unseeded India gave a tough fight in the opening game before surrendering 20-22 12-21 in the last-four clash of the BWF World Tour Super 300 event. With Jayaram's defeat, India's campaign in the tournament came to an end.

Late goals help ATK hold Bengaluru

Bengaluru: Two late goals by ATK cancelled two scored in the first half by Bengaluru FC as their Indian Super League match ended in a 2-2 draw here on Saturday. Bengaluru FC ended their league stage campaign with 30 points and could possibly finish fourth, should Chennaiyin FC win their final league game against NorthEast United. Meanwhile, Kolkata giants Mohun Bagan on Saturday defeated Churchill Brothers FC Goa 3-0 at the Fatorda Stadium here to inch three points closer to their second Hero I-League title.

Giroud on target as Chelsea beat Spurs

London: Chelsea's Olivier Giroud and Marcos Alonso returned to the starting lineup with stunning effect by grabbing a goal apiece in a crucial 2-1 home win over Tottenham Hotspur in the battle between the London rivals for fourth place on Saturday. It was only Chelsea's sixth win in 14 home Premier League games this season but it was fully deserved as they remain in fourth, the last Champions League qualification spot, with 44 points from 27 games. Tottenham have 40 points.

3400 athletes for Khelo India

Cuttack: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday launched the first-ever Khelo India University Games at the Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor Stadium here on Saturday. As many as 3400 athletes from 159 universities across the country will vie for top honours across 17 disciplines, including rugby which is among the six team events. Ace sprinter Dutee Chand, who is a student of KIIT, the host university, was also a part of the event. Besides Dutee, there are other talented athletes like Mangalore University's triple jumper Jay Shah, his team-mate long distance runner Narendra Pratap Singh, Pune University's long distance runner Komal Jagadale and Acharya Nagarjuna University's sprinter Yarraji Jyothi, who can lift the quality of the competition in track and field sport.

Sharan-Sitak lose to Bryan brothers

Florida: India's number two doubles player Divij Sharan and his partner Kiwi partner Artem Sitak lost to top-seeded defending champions Mike and Bob Bryan in the quarterfinals of the Delray Beach Open here. The Indo-Kiwi duo lost 2-6, 6-4, (3-10) to the Bryan brothers who are playing their last Delray Beach Open as they are set to retire post the US Open this year. Sharan and Sitak lost the first set 2-6 to the Bryan Brothers. They made a comeback in the second set, winning it 6-4 to set up a Super Tie Breaker clash.

AGENCIES



ACTION REPLAY

India's biggest Olympic medal hope Bajrang Punia lost 10-2 at the hands of his nemesis Takuto Otoguro in the final of 65 kg event in the Asian Wrestling Championship. This was Bajrang's second straight loss to the Japanese No. 1, who had also beaten the Indian in the 2018 World Championship final.

Dahiya sets the gold standard

Worlds bronze medallist strengthens claim as Olympic contender by winning continental title

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 22

FROM AN Indian perspective, the Asian Championship – despite losing a bit of sheen after China and North Korea pulled out, and the rest sending depleted teams – offered multiple storylines. From an Olympics point of view, though, just one mattered: the performance of the Tokyo-bound quartet.

After Vinesh Phogat's loss to her nemesis Mayu Mukaide of Japan on Friday, before eventually settling for a bronze medal, the focus shifted to men's freestyle, with defending champion in 65kg class Bajrang Punia, and world championship bronze medallist Ravi Dahiya taking the mat on Saturday. And the bouts offered enough for both wrestlers to build on in the run-up to the Games in July.

On one hand, Dahiya continued to live up to the hype around him by winning his maiden Asian Championship gold. Bajrang, on the other hand, surrendered his title to old foe Takuto Otoguro of Japan in a repeat of the 2018 World Championship final result.

And while Bajrang's defeat will serve as a warning sign for him, even though it doesn't diminish his chances to medal at the Olympics, Dahiya is emerging as another medal potential for India. And his performances on Saturday en route to claiming the 57kg gold have added to his credentials.

Most categories in this competition have had just one or two big-ticket wrestlers competing, given that the Asian Olympic qualifiers are scheduled to be held just next month. But Dahiya's field was among the toughest, comprising of a former world champion and a tricky Kazakh.

He began the day by beating 2017 World champion from Japan Yuki Takahashi (14-5) before pinning Mongolia's Tugs Batjargal in the



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quarterfinals. In the semifinal, Uzbekistan's Nurislam Sanayev too could not challenge Ravi much. In the final against Tajikistan's Hikmatullo Vohidov, he claimed the gold with ease, registering a victory by technical superiority. "I am doing well and hopefully we will come up with a good performance at the Olympics too. The key for me is to stay injury-free as of now," Dahiya said.

Dahiya's medal, in a way, isn't a surprise given the form he has been in. What did shock the home fans, though, was Bajrang's loss to Otoguro. India's top medal contender in men's freestyle had conceded just two points on his way to the final against the Japanese wrestler, who had emerged on top even in

the 2018 World Championship title clash between the two. World number two Bajrang entered the event as defending champion and conceded only two points on his way to the final but could not avenge his defeat to Otoguro in the 2018 World Championship title clash.

Back then, Bajrang's leg defence was seen as an issue but on Saturday he lost in a different manner. In the fast-paced bout, Bajrang's leg defence was not a problem but he lost points on smart counter-attacks by Otoguro. Much to the shock of home fans, Bajrang suffered a comprehensive 10-2 defeat against the world number nine.

An upset Bajrang said he could not fight the way he wanted. "It was important to fight

with all these wrestlers because I will wrestle with them at the Olympics. I have taken my lessons from this. I could not fight as I wanted. It was a very different fight. His counter-attacks were good and this is an area I need to work on to," he was quoted as saying by Press Trust of India.

Bajrang's coach Shako Bentinidis admitted that Otoguro emerged stronger. "Bajrang was slow, Otoguro was stronger. But I am happy with silver. It's difficult to maintain intensity and a high level of performance for two years. We still have five months and he remains a contender at Olympics," PTI quoted Bentinidis as saying.

"If you see all top wrestlers even in Europe have slowed down a bit. It's happening now and not two weeks before the Olympics, so it's okay. Wrestling is tough, it's not like football or basketball. In 65kg all wrestlers are almost at the same level."

Apart from Bajrang, Gourav Baliyan (79kg) and Satyawart Kadiyan (97kg) also had to be content with silver medals.

On Sunday, Deepak Punia – the fourth Indian wrestler who has already qualified for the Tokyo Games – will be in action along with Jitender Kumar, who will have a chance to secure a place in the team for Olympic qualifiers ahead of Sushil Kumar if he finishes on the podium. **WITH PTI INPUTS**

Sreejesh secures another shoot-out win for India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BHUBANESWAR, FEBRUARY 22

INDIA BOUNCED back in style to beat title holders Australia 3-1 via a shoot-out in the second match of the two-leg FIH Pro League match on Saturday.

Both the teams were locked 2-2 at the end of regulation time at the Kalinga Stadium. India converted two penalty corners through Rupinder Pal Singh (25th minute) and Harmanpreet Singh (27th), while Trent Mitton (23rd) and skipper Aran Zaleski (46th) were the scorers for Australia in the regulation 60 minutes.

India had lost 3-4 to the visitors in the first game on Friday. By virtue of this win, India earned three points from the game while Australia pocketed one.

Both India and Australia have 10 points from six games but the Kookaburras are a rung above the Manpreet Singh-led side at third spot in the standings on goal difference.

In the shoot-out, Harmanpreet, Vivek Sagar Prasad and Lalit Upadhyay scored for India, while only Daniel Beale found the net for the visitors. Australia made a positive start, earning a penalty corner inside the opening 30 seconds of the match, but Jeremy Hayward's flick was saved by India goalkeeper P R Sreejesh.

After that it was all India with the hosts pinning the Kookaburras deep in their own territory but failing to create clear-cut opportunities. In the eighth minute Australia secured back-to-back penalty corners, the second of which was converted by Lachlan Sharp with a rebound, but the goal was ruled out after India called for video referral for obstruction on goalkeeper Sreejesh.

The Kookaburras won another penalty corner in the 12th minute but Sreejesh once again came to India's rescue by denying Hayward. Three minutes into the second quarter, Harmanpreet Singh missed a glorious chance to put India ahead, slapping his first-time shot just wide of the left post after he was picked out by Amit Rohidas' searching cross from the right.

Seconds later, the Indians defended a fifth Australian penalty corner. Mitton broke the deadlock for Australia in the 23rd minute after beating second-choice India goalkeeper Krishan Pathak at his near-post with a powerful slap-shot.

Australia earned their sixth penalty corner soon but failed to convert. Five minutes from half time, Rupinder equalised for the hosts, converting a penalty corner with a low drag-flick that went through the legs of Australia goalkeeper Tyler Lovell.

Two minutes later, Harmanpreet converted another set piece to hand India a 2-1 lead going into the halfway stage.

Two minutes into the second half, Australia secured two penalty corners in succession, but Hayward's shot on goal from the second chance was disallowed. A minute later Tim Brand missed a penalty stroke for Australia. In the 43rd minute, Ramandeep Singh fired high and wide of the rival goal.



India 'keeper P R Sreejesh, who played a key role in the win, celebrates with fans.

RANJI TROPHY

Bengal secure first-innings lead but doors not shut on Odisha yet

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY
CUTTACK, FEBRUARY 22

ODISHA UNDONE themselves bit by bit to concede an 82-run first-innings lead, but they are still in the game – just an outside chance – because Bengal went into a shell, meandering to 79/2 in 45 overs in their second innings when stumps were drawn on Day 3.

The hosts had some fantastic opportunities in this Ranji Trophy quarterfinal. First, when they had reduced Bengal to 46/5 during their first innings on Day One. Then, on the second day, they had been riding on a 125-run second-wicket partnership.

Even on Saturday, a bit of positivity could have changed the complexion of the game. Resuming at 151/4, Odisha missed a trick by not taking the attack to the opposition, when Bengal still had to bowl at least 12.5 overs with the old ball.

The pitch was sluggish, offering little assistance to the bowlers. But Odisha batsmen played for survival rather than scoring quickly. Half-volleys had been played half-heartedly, long-hops weren't punished and twos weren't converted to threes. Odisha missed out on at



Bengal pacer Ishan Porel snapped three wickets, giving away 72 runs. PTI

least 40 runs, which eventually became their bugbear. To Bengal's credit, unlike their rivals, they kept things tight, when wickets weren't coming. Then again, with the batsmen oozing negativity, the three Bengal medium pacers – Mukesh Kumar, Nilkantha Das and Ishan Porel – bowled virtually without any pressure. The Odisha first innings that lasted for 102.1 overs, had 32 fours and a six. They were all out for 250. Anustup Majumdar alone had hit 22 boundaries for Bengal during their first innings. Night-watchman Debabrata Pradhan was

the first to depart today, chasing a wishful delivery outside the off-stump from Das. Bengal had just taken the second new ball and Pradhan, after doing the hard work, perished to a poor shot.

The experienced Biplab Samantray tried to play across the line to a straight delivery from Kumar and was trapped leg-before. Rajesh Dhuper committed the same mistake and Odisha's tail had been exposed. The elementary cricket intelligence appeared to be missing. Suryakant Pradhan tried to use the long handle and when he hit a few boundaries, eyebrows were raised in the Bengal camp. It just showed how calculated aggression from the Odisha top and middle-order could have made a difference. For a tail-ender like Pradhan, though, the task was beyond him. A yorker from Kumar breached his defence and the last two wickets fell in quick succession.

Yet again, the Bengal bowlers did the job for their team. They are the reason why Bengal have one foot in the semifinal. Das, Kumar and Porel returned with three wickets apiece. Porel, despite not being at his best, showed heart.

Collectively the four frontline Bengal pacers – the injured Akash Deep is not playing in this game – have taken 71 wickets so far this

season. Here, they showed skills and nous to tough out the conditions.

"There was nothing much for the bowlers on the wicket and that's why our target was to bowl wicket-to-wicket, leak less runs. Not many wickets fell in the morning session, the wicket became slow. There was a point of time when the wicket became completely dead." "When you are bowling on a dead wicket, keeping a tight line but not getting wickets; suddenly your brain goes blank. Manoj Tiwary, who holds a huge experience, came to me and shared a few advices. It really helped," Kumar said after the day's play.

"The wicket was dead. After the first day, nothing was happening. We forced them to make mistakes. We bowled as a unit and bowled well. We are quietly confident of moving to the semifinal," Porel added.

Somehow, the Bengal openers, Abhimanyu Easwaran and Koushik Ghosh, came out with a similar negative mindset in the second innings. Both have been going through a lean patch and maybe, they wanted to use the batting-friendly conditions to get back to form. The ball is turning at one end and also keeping low, but the door hasn't been slammed shut on Odisha yet.

Gaja's five-for flattens Goa

MEDIUM PACER Chintan Gaja's five-for blew away Goa, but rather than enforcing the follow-on, Gujarat opted for batting practice, with an eye to the Ranji Trophy semifinal. Against Gujarat's 602/8, Goa's first innings folded for 173. Only Amit Verma showed some fight, scoring 56. In Gujarat's second innings, Samit Gohel scored a half-ton and at stumps he was batting on 70. The hosts now lead by 587 runs. **Brief scores:** Gujarat 602/8 decl. and 158/1 (Samit Gohel 70 not out) vs Goa 173 (Amit Verma 56; Chintan Gaja 5/19)

Saurashtra on cruise mode

Odisha: Saurashtra all but secured a place in the Ranji Trophy semis after bundling out Andhra for 136 in their first innings. Saurashtra, too, didn't enforce the follow-on and batted again. The Andhra innings had 7 single-digit scores including three ducks. Jaydev Unadkat was Saurashtra's most successful bowler with four wickets.

Saurashtra finished the day having a lead of 376 runs. **Brief scores:** Saurashtra 419 and 93/2 (Avi Barot 44 not out) vs Andhra 136 (C Gnaneshwar 43; Jaydev Unadkat 4/42, Dharmendra Jadeja 3/27)

J&K to play party poopers

Jammu: The match resumed on the third day and Jammu & Kashmir did enough to create the chance of causing an upset. First, they restricted Karnataka to 206. With KV Siddharth's 76, the visitors would have been on the mat. For J&K, Auqib Nabi, Mujtaba Yousuf and Parvez Rasool took three wickets apiece. At stumps on Day Three, the hosts had moved to 88/2. A good morning session tomorrow can set up their march to the Ranji Trophy semifinals. **Brief scores:** Karnataka 206 (KV Siddharth 76, Manish Pandey 37; Parvez Rasool 3/36, Auqib Nabi 3/45, Mujtaba Yousuf 3/45) vs Jammu & Kashmir 88/2 (Shubham Khajuria 39 not out). **ENS**