

Ton-up Vasavada consolidates Saurashtra

His 142-run stand for the sixth wicket with Pujara frustrates Bengal as the host reaches 384 for eight

RANJI TROPHY

Y.B. SARANGI
RAJKOT
Arpit Vasavada, Saurashtra's rescuer in the semifinal against Gujarat, played the role of a consolidator against Bengal to strengthen the host's position in the Ranji Trophy final at the Saurashtra Cricket Association Stadium here on Tuesday.

Vasavada's second consecutive century (106, 287b, 11x4) within a week and his 142-run chanceless stand with childhood friend Cheteshwar Pujara (66, 237b, 5x4) on the second day enabled Saurashtra, resuming on 206 for five, to gather 178 runs in 79.1 overs and aggregate 384 for eight in its first innings at stumps.

Two wickets by Mukesh Kumar and one by Shahbaz Ahmed helped Bengal gain some control in the final session.

After Pujara — who retired on five overnight due to



Rising to the occasion: Southpaw Arpit Vasavada notched up a crucial century on a sluggish and testing track. ■ VIJAY SONEJI

health issues — joined Vasavada, the left-right combination used their experience to make the task of surviving on a testing track look easy.

Tremendous application
The two — looking to wear out the opposition — showed tremendous application on a slow surface even as the Bengal pacers bowled tight lines

to do the containing job. The spinners posed a threat by capitalising on the natural wear and tear, and unpredictable bounce.

In the opening session, Vasavada bravely faced Akash Deep, whose hostile spell was peppered with bouncers on the left-hander's leg-stump, while Pujara had a fascinating duel

with left-arm spinner Shahbaz.

Pujara, troubled by the odd ball that jumped suddenly, stepped out on numerous occasions and survived a few leg-before appeals. Bengal once went for a DRS review too, but in vain.

Vasavada, 29 overnight, played every ball on merit. He cut and drove confidently

on the off-side.

Fourth hundred

Vasavada and Pujara defended solidly after lunch. The left-hander, who got to his half-century with a four, sent part-timer Anustup Majumdar to the point fence to notch up his fourth hundred of the season, including three on the same ground.

Umpire replaced

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
RAJKOT

On-field umpire C. Shamshuddin, who was hit by a freak throw during the first day of the Ranji Trophy final, will be replaced by Yeshwant Barde.

Shamshuddin, who was hit on his lower abdomen by a throw in the 66th over of the Saurashtra first innings, completed his duties for the day.

Following a medical check-up on Tuesday, it was decided to substitute

him on the field.

Piyush Kakkar, a BCCI umpire from the host association, did on-field duty with K.N. Ananthapadmanabhan in the morning session of the second day. After lunch, TV umpire S. Ravi took Kakkar's place and Shamshuddin took over as TV umpire.

According to SCA sources, Barde will replace Shamshuddin as on-field umpire and Ravi will go back to his TV umpire's role.

Irfan Pathan's day out

Takes India home against Sri Lanka



Cutting loose: Irfan Pathan hit six fours and three sixes in his match-defining innings. ■ VIVEK BENDRE

LEGENDS T20

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NAVIMUMBAI

India lost Sachin Tendulkar off the third ball of the innings and Virender Sehwag shortly after while chasing Sri Lanka's modest 138.

Mohammad Kaif steadied a drifting ship with 46 off 45 balls (4x4, 1x6) before Irfan Pathan took charge.

His unbeaten 57 fashioned a five-wicket win for the hosts in the UnAcademy Road Safety World Series on Tuesday.

Pathan blasted six fours and three sixes in 31 balls, batting at No. 6, as India won in 18.4 overs.

The Lanka bowlers were in control till the lefthander

cut loose. With the ball, Pathan had removed the dangerous Romesh Kaluwitharana for 21.

This was after Munaf Patel had sent back Tillakaratne Dilshan (23, 23b, 4x4), the Sri Lankan skipper top edging to Kaif on the fence.

Marvan Atapattu reacted late to a Manpreet Gony delivery pitched short and the ball flew off the bat for a diving catch by wicketkeeper Sameer Dighe. Kaif and Pragyan Ojha, too, came up with superb catches.

Munaf was easily the best bowler on view, finishing with figures of 4-0-19-4.

The scores: Sri Lanka 138/8 in 20 overs (Munaf Patel 4/19) lost to India 139/5 in 18.4 overs (Mohd. Kaif 46, Irfan Pathan 57 n.o., Chaminda Vaas 2/5).

Welcome to Dharamshala!



Getting ready: The Indian players train for the ODI series against South Africa beginning at the picturesque venue on March 12. **Below:** Manish Pandey and Kuldeep Yadav landed in the city on Tuesday. ■ BCCI & TWITTER

COVID-19: Sports events hit worldwide

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NEW DELHI

The final round of the Hero Santosh Trophy 2019-20, scheduled to be played in Aizawl, has been postponed in wake of the novel coronavirus outbreak. This comes after a health advisory issued by the government with regards to the Covid-19 outbreak.

Lockdown in Italy

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte announced the suspension until April 3 of all sporting events in the country, including the top-flight Serie A football league.

Questions remain about getting the season finished. At least three rounds of matches will need to be rearranged after April 3 before the end of the season scheduled for May 24.

There is little room for manoeuvre because of Euro 2020 beginning on June 12. And there are also concerns that Euro 2020, due to be hosted across 12 countries in-

Coronavirus has KSCA worried

ASHWIN ACHAL
BENGALURU

The Karnataka State Government expressed concern over the hosting of Indian Premier League (IPL) matches in Bengaluru, in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak.

"I have written to the Centre saying there are IPL matches scheduled to be held in Karnataka, and that Maharashtra has already taken a decision in this regard. We have asked

including Italy, might face an unprecedented cancellation.

LaLiga too confirmed on Tuesday that first and second division matches in Spain will be staged behind closed doors for at least two weeks.

Fans banned
Barcelona's Champions

for the Centre's guidance on what action we should take," Karnataka Medical Education Minister K. Sudhakar said.

Karnataka has so far reported four cases of coronavirus.

Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) is scheduled to play its first home match at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium on March 31.

RCB is set to play a total of seven home matches,

extending till May 17.

The Karnataka State Cricket Association, meanwhile, will adopt a wait and watch policy.

"We have not received any official information about this till now. If there is anything that comes from the State government to us, we will pass it on to the BCCI.

"The KSCA only hosts the matches; the BCCI will take a decision," a senior KSCA official stated.

A brief statement released on Monday by the Miami organisers on Twitter said preparations for the March 23-April 5 event were "moving forward as scheduled."

A day after the ATP/WTA Indian Wells event in California was cancelled due to coronavirus.

Vikas and Simranjit make final

Panghal, Mary Kom, Pooja, Ashish and Lovlina take bronze

BOXING

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AMMAN

A resolute Vikas Krishan (69kg) and Simranjit Kaur (60kg) advanced to the final with impressive victories but M.C. Mary Kom (51kg), Amit Panghal (52kg), Lovlina Borgohain (69kg), Pooja Rani (75kg) and Ashish Kumar (75kg) signed off with bronze medals at the Asian Olympic Qualifiers here on Tuesday.

All the seven have secured tickets to Tokyo.

Vikas fought with a cut sustained just below his left eyebrow before claiming a

split decision victory over second seed Ablaikhan Zhussupov of Kazakhstan, a two-time World bronze-medallist.

Sachin still in fray
Sachin Kumar (81 kg) beat Manh Cuong Nguyen of Vietnam 4-1 in the first of his two box-off bouts to keep India in the hunt for its highest-ever Olympic quota haul.

However, in a major disappointment, six-time World champion Mary Kom lost to China's Chang Yuan, a former Youth Olympics champion, 4-1.

Also bowing out with a bronze was world silver-me-

dallist and top seed Panghal, who went down to Hu Jianguan of China in a split decision.

Earlier, two-time World bronze-medallist and second seed Lovlina lost to third seed and 2018 World silver-medallist Gu Hong of China 5-0.

The results (semifinals): Men: 52kg: Hu Jianguan (Chn) bt Amit Panghal; **69kg:** Vikas Krishan bt Ablaikhan Zhussupov (Kaz); **75kg:** Umir Marcial (Phi) bt Ashish Kumar.

Women: 51kg: Yuan Chang (Chn) bt M.C. Mary Kom; **60kg:** Simranjit Kaur bt Shih-Yi Wu (Tpe); **69kg:** Gu Hong (Chn) bt Lovlina Borgohain; **75kg:** Qian Li (Chn) bt Pooja Rani.



Getting through: Vikas Krishan used his jabs effectively to prevail over Kazakhstan's Ablaikhan Zhussupov. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

O'Brien pulls it off for Ireland

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
GREATER NOIDA

Kevin O'Brien hit a last-ball six as Ireland clinched a consolation Super Over win against Afghanistan in the third Twenty20 International here on Tuesday.

With three needed for a win off the final ball, O'Brien cleared the long-off fence to end his team's 12-match losing streak in T20s against the Afghans.

Ireland had made 142 for eight after electing to bat and Afghanistan, which won the series 2-1, replied with 142 for seven.

The scores:
Ireland 142/8 (Kevin O'Brien 26, Gareth Delany 37, Harry Tector 31, Naveen ul-Haq 3/21, Qais Ahmed 3/25) tied with Afghanistan 142/7 (Rahmanullah Gurbaz 42, Asghar Afghan 32, Delany 2/21, Simi Singh 2/37).
Super Over: Afghanistan 8/0 lost to Ireland 12/1.



Kevin O'Brien. ■ AFP

India's day will come, but...



BETWEEN WICKETS

SURESH MENON

India Women choked in the World T20 final. That is not unusual, nor is it unheard of. The best have, at various times. While taking a penalty in soccer, for example, the great Diego Maradona choked at the 1990 World Cup. Greg Norman, who accomplished a 'Saturday Slam' in 1986, leading after the third round in all four golf Majors, lost on the final day in three of them. South Africa are yet to shake off the tag of 'chokers' in World Cups.

At the end of the final, Indian fans' emotions were mixed: there was disappointment, of course, but also sympathy, pride, keen anticipation for the future and satisfaction that India are indeed a world class team. Significantly, the one emotion missing was anger, despite what a commentator predicted.

Young team

It is a young team which had done so well till that point, and had caused Australia's medium-pace Megan Schutt to say before the match, "I just hate playing India — they've got the wood over me." It was not Aussie-like, and highlighted India's reputation.

India did extremely well to reach the title round in a format they aren't really comfortable with, and for this credit should go to the coach Woorkeri Raman and the spirit of the players who appeared to be a bunch that trusted one another and had fun together. There was too the unspoken confidence that if the top players didn't get runs, someone lower down would; likewise with the bowling. So what went wrong?

"High pressure environments induce a range of brain and body reactions," wrote Sian Bellock in his book on choking. "Your heart rate goes up, your adrenaline kicks in, and your mind starts to race — often with worries.

"When the worries begin, many people do something that seems quite logical on the surface: they try to control their performance. Unfortunately this increased control can backfire — especially for well-learned skills — because bringing your conscious awareness to skills that once operated outside your working memory can disrupt them."

Bellock is a cognitive scientist and the quotes are from *Choke: The Secret to Performing Under Pressure*.

It is not a difficult concept to understand. The speaker who suddenly loses it during a lecture, the model who abruptly seems incapable of taking a few steps on the ramp, the brilliant student who cannot remember his physics formula during an exam — we are familiar with them. "Choking is a suboptimal performance, not just poor performance. It's a performance that is inferior to what you can do and have done in the past and occurs when you feel the pressure to get everything right," according to Bellock.

Tension leads to mistakes

And that sums up the performance of an Indian team that had depth in batting, variety in bowling, yet played like a team that had lost self-confidence. When you are anxious or nervous, you tense up, and that leads to mistakes.

Starting the bowling with full tosses is a symptom of this, as were the two early catches put down by Shafali Verma and Rajeshwari Gayakwad — catches these fielders would have taken smilingly on another day. But that is sport! The real difference between the teams was in the level of fitness. Australia were far fitter, quicker, recovered better and took some terrific catches.

India did enough to suggest that they are future world champions. Two things need to fall into place, though. This column has been suggesting for a while now that the cricket board needs to seriously consider a Women's IPL. As Melbourne showed, create the excitement and the crowds will come.

India's men haven't won the T20 World title since the IPL was introduced in 2008, so you could point at that and say this is being too facile. But the women need more match practice, and better competition that the entry of players from the top teams promise.

The second issue to be looked at is appointing a psychologist. Modern teams have specialist coaches in the physical aspects of the game — bowling, batting, fielding, fitness. They need to have one who specialises in an equally important aspect — the mental.

Playing a final before a huge audience against a top team is its own pressure even before a ball is bowled. Even a team as experienced as the men's at the 2003 World Cup choked under that kind of pressure.

India have a fabulous women's team. It needs better support from the authorities. Women's contracts need to be looked at afresh. But it's not just the money. We need to look no farther than Australia for guidance.

The Australian model

Last year Australia announced a "parental leave policy". Players are eligible for 12 months' paid parental leave and are guaranteed a contract extension for the following contract year. Also, partners of players who give birth are entitled to three weeks' paid leave.

There's more. Once a player returns after giving birth, travel support is provided for primary carers, including flights, accommodation and other travel expenses. This, till the child is four.

World champions evolve when we care.