TV PICKS

NBA: Sony Ten 1 (SD & HD), 5.30 a.m.
Ranji Trophy: Final, day three, Star Sports 2 (SD & HD), 9.30 a.m.
All-England badminton championships: Star Sports 3, 2.30 p.m.
Bangladesh vs Zimbabwe: 2nd T20I, SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 5.30 p.m.
Legends World T20 Series: South Africa vs West Indies, Colors Cineplex (SD & HD), 7 p.m.
Champions League: Sony Ten 1 & Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 1.30 a.m. (Thursday)

IN BRIEF

Murray hands Bucks third straight defeat

LOS ANGELES

Jamal Murray scored 21 points as Denver Nuggets sent Milwaukee Bucks tumbling to a third straight defeat with a 109-95 victory on Monday.

The results: Hawks 143 bt Hornets 138 (OT); Nuggets 109 bt Bucks 95; Raptors 101 bt Jazz 92. AGENCIES

Ghosal stuns Rosner, makes last eight

LONDON

Saurav Ghosal stunned fifth seed Simon Rosner of Germany 13-11, 7-11, 11-4 and entered the quarterfinals of the St. James Place Canary Wharf Squash Classic, a PSA World Tour Gold event here late on Monday.

Vardy not ruling out England return

LONDON

Leicester City striker Jamie Vardy refused to rule out a return to the England side for Euro 2020 with first-choices Harry Kane and Marcus Rashford nursing injuries, but the 33-year-old said he had not discussed it with national coach Gareth Southgate. "Who knows? Gareth and I both agreed the door would still be open for whatever reason and then we would sit down and have a talk about it (if needed)." REUTERS

Abdumalik holds Harika

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LAUSANNE

Indian Grandmaster D. Harika was held to a draw by Zhansaya Abdumalik of Kazakhstan in the seventh round of the FIDE Women's Grand Prix chess tournament here. She remained on four points, half a point behind two Russians.

The results: (seventh round):

D. Harika 4 drew with Zhansaya Abdumalik (Kaz) 4; Alexandra Kosteniuk (Rus) 2 lost to Anna Muzychuk (Ukr) 4; Alexandra Goryachkina (Rus) 4.5 drew with Mariya Muzychuk (Ukr) 3.5; Nana Dzagnidze (Geo) 4 drew with Pia Cramling (Swe) 3.5 Ju Wenjun (Chn) 3 drew with Marie Sebag (Fra) 2.5; Alena Kashlinskaya (Rus) 4.5 drew with Antoneta Stefanova (Bul) 2.5.

Akbar Travels in last four

MUMBAI: Akbar Travels (Kerala) recorded a 2-1 win against Mumbai United in the quarterfinal of the 3rd late Shri Vishwanath Anchan Memorial Veterans Football tournament at the KSA ground, Cross Maidan.

The results (quarterfinals):

Akbar Travels 2 (K.T. Asharaf, P. Shibumon) bt Mumbai United 1 (Glen Moraes).

Central Railway 3 (Ishrat Kamal, Aziz Qureshi, Chirag Shaikh) bt Xaverites SC (Vile Parle) 1 (Lawrence Pereira).

Bagan regains I-League title in style

Diawara's spectacular strike does the trick; matches Dempo SC's record

AMITABHA DAS SHARMA
KALYANI

Babacar Diawara's spectacular 80th-minute finish ensured Mohun Bagan's crowning glory moment in the I-League at the Kalyani Stadium here on Tuesday. With the clash against Aizawl FC seemingly headed for a tame draw, Diawara's winner ensured the full three points took Bagan's tally to an unassailable 39 from 16 matches.

Bagan thus matched Dempo SC's record – set in the 2009-10 season – of claiming the league title with four rounds to spare. If the NFL – the previous version of the league – and I-League are considered together then Bagan has also equalled Dempo's tally of five titles. Dempo has three I-League and two NFL crowns while Bagan collected its second I-League title to add to the three NFL titles won previously.

Bagan, which will play in the ISL from next season having being acquired by ATK this year, thus made its last I-League season memorable.

Champs: Mohun Bagan made it a memorable final season in the I-League when it regained the title with four rounds to spare. ▪ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Drab affair

The first half was a drab affair with neither opponent showing enough attacking intent.

The possession-based football that Bagan mastered under its Spanish coach Kibu Vicuna this season was largely absent as the host lacked the initiative to break into the opposition defence.

Aizawl FC, meanwhile, did a fairly good job in defence employing two towering centre-backs – Ghanaian Joseph Adjei and Ugandan Juuko Richard – whose strong physical presence posed a big challenge for Bagan's attackers.

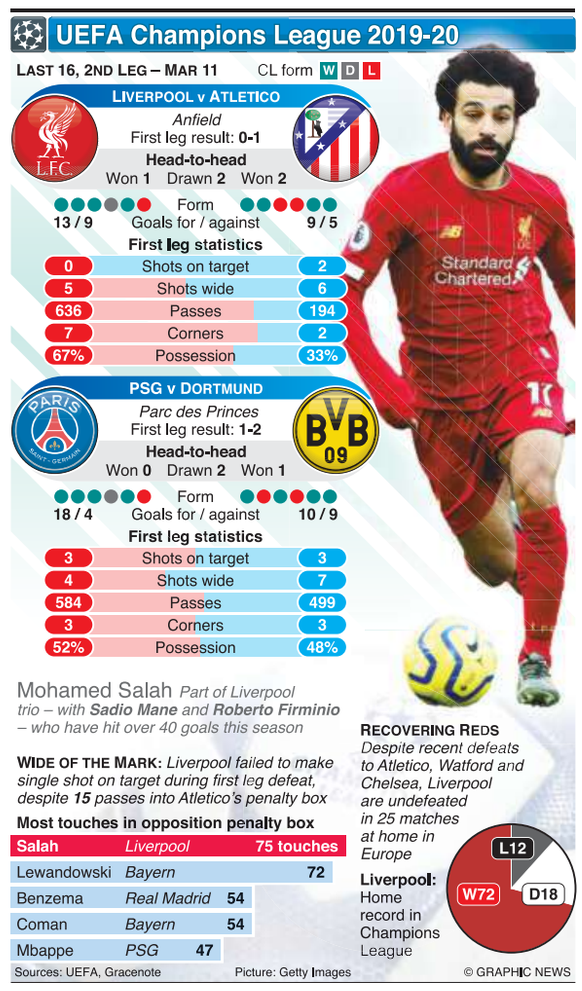
Aizawl, coached by Stanly Rozario, played the right game with regular counter-attacks that detained the host from going all out.

Good chance

Bagan created a good chance in the last minute of the opening half when Diawara released Tajikistan winger Komron Tursunov unmarked inside the box. The latter, however, failed to keep send attempt on target.

Bagan continued to struggle in the second half seeing most of its attacks fizzle out before the Aizawl FC box.

After a number of failed opportunities, emerging especially from set-piece situations, play-maker Joseba Beitia managed to create the opening that was finished brilliantly by Diawara. With this the Senegalese striker scored his 10th goal in 12 matches to become Bagan's top scorer this term.



CCFC motivated to do something special

Head coach Nawas says it's eager to do well against Maziya Sports & Recreation

AFC CUP

K. KEERTHIVASAN
CHENNAI

Chennai City FC (CCFC) hasn't had a good run in the I-League this season. However, that is not the team's concern now.

The focus is on its maiden AFC Cup campaign against Male-based Maldives team – Maziya Sports & Recreation – to be played at the Nehru Stadium here on Wednesday.

While CCFC qualified for the AFC Cup as the I-League champion last season, Maziya made it by winning the playoffs against Bengaluru FC (BFC) 4-3 on penalties after the two-leg contest ended 4-4 on aggregate.

CCFC head coach Akbar Nawas said his team was more than eager to prove itself.

"We are proud to be participating [in AFC Cup], and being the only Indian team, we are motivated to do something special.

The drill: Chennai City FC players hone their skills at a practice session in Chennai on Tuesday. ▪ R. RAGU

Respect for opponent

"We respect them [Maziya] as they beat BFC, which is a competitive team. We can't underestimate them," he said at an interaction on Tuesday.

CCFC is coming back to Chennai after playing in the I-League for one season in 2016-17 before shifting base to Coimbatore in 2018-19.

Nawas felt playing here would be a big motivation.

"Everybody is excited to play their first AFC group game because we are playing in Chennai's Nehru stadium.

"It's a good motivation. We are looking forward to it," he said. Maziya's head coach Marjan Sekulovski said the team was prepared and will go for full points.

"It is our first game in the group stage. It will be difficult and [moreover] we don't know the strength of all the teams. [But] we always we play to win," he said.

Dismal record

Maziya is no stranger to Indian clubs in the AFC Cup. It has played Mohun Bagan and BFC six times across three seasons, but has lost five times.

With four teams in Group-E, including Bashundhara Kings (Bangladesh) and TC Sports Club (Maldives), every side will play three matches each at home and away. The top two will progress to the round-of-32.

Having not met earlier, both CCFC and Maziya will fancy their chances.

Leicester blanks Aston Villa

Vardy ends goal drought to become the league's top-scorer

EURO LEAGUES

AGENCIES
LONDON

Leicester City's Jamie Vardy ended his long scoring drought with two goals after coming off the bench as it returned to winning ways with a 4-0 drubbing of Premier League struggler Aston Villa at the King Power Stadium on Monday.

Leicester's goal-machine Vardy had not found the net since December but converted a penalty just past the hour to double Leicester's lead shortly after replacing Kelechi Iheanacho.

Harvey Barnes had opened the scoring before half-time after a dreadful misjudgement by Villa 'keeper Pepe Reina.

Vardy struck again after 79 minutes to take his league tally to 19 goals for the season before Barnes claimed his second.

Back in form: Jamie Vardy came off the bench to pump in two goals for Leicester City against Aston Villa. ▪ AFP

It was the Foxes first win in five league games, ending a slump that had put its top-four place and hopes of qualifying for Champions League football next season in peril.

Caputo shines

Francesco Caputo scored a double as Sassuolo beat Brescia 3-0 on Monday in a match which could be the last in Serie A for a month because of the coronavirus epidemic. In an empty Mapei Stadium in Reggio Emilia, Caputo opened the scoring just before half time off a Gregoire Defrel cross. He added a second on the hour to bring his tally this season to 13 goals.

The results: Premier League: Leicester 4 (Barnes 40, 85, Vardy 63-pen, 79) bt Aston Villa 0.

Serie A: Sassuolo 3 (Caputo 45, 61, Boga 75) bt Brescia 0.

Sindhu looks to overturn a run of poor form

Seven Indians withdraw owing to coronavirus concerns

ALL-ENGLAND

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BIRMINGHAM

Undeterred by the coronavirus outbreak, Indian shuttlers will continue to chase glory at the All-England Championships beginning here on Wednesday, with reigning World champion P.V. Sindhu spearheading the campaign.

The season's first Super 1000 event witnessed a dramatic build-up in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. In the United Kingdom, the number of cases has gone past 300 with five deaths so far.

Seven Indians, including H.S. Prannoy and World No. 10 men's doubles pair of Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, have withdrawn from the All-England.

The $1,100,000 BWF world tour event offers 12,000 ranking points to the winner and with Olympic qualification on the line, most of the top players will be seen in action at the Arena Birmingham.

While Sindhu, who is almost assured of an Olympic berth, will look to end a nearly two-decade-old title jinx at the All-England, former silver medallist Saina Nehwal and K. Srikanth will eye valuable points to squeeze inside the top 16 before the deadline for Olympic qualification ends on April 28.

Chief National coach P. Gopi Chand was the last Indian to win the championship, in 2001. Sindhu will look to overturn a run of recent poor finishes and emulate her mentor with the top medal.

World No. 6 Sindhu, who had reached the 2018 semifinals, will need to cut down on unforced errors and strengthen her defence as she opens against USA's Beiwen Zhang.

The 24-year-old is expected to take on Korea's Sung Ji Hyun if she crosses the opening hurdle.

Upbeat: P.V. Sindhu will be hoping to emulate mentor Gopi Chand and claim a maiden title at the All-England championships. ▪ FILE PHOTO: NAGARA GOPAL

Langer in search of 'finisher' like Dhoni

CRICKET

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MELBOURNE

Australia's head coach Justin Langer says his team is desperately looking for a finisher in the mould of Mahendra Singh Dhoni or Michael Bevan in limited overs cricket.

The three-match ODI series against New Zealand, beginning on March 13, provides Australia an opportunity to test the depth in its middle order, and potentially hone in on batsmen who could fill the 'finisher' role.

"We've been fortunate in the past with a Mike Hussey or a Michael Bevan who are masters at it.

Master

M.S. Dhoni is a master of it, Jos Buttler has been brilliant at it for England," Langer was quoted as saying by ICC.

"What I've learned is everyone in the world is looking for it," he added.

Dhoni has won India innumerable matches from seemingly hopeless positions, and so have the likes of Bevan and Hussey.

Langer feels it is the right time for the potential candidates to seal the spot. The challenge starts with the upcoming ODIs against New Zealand.

"So it's a role that's there for someone to grab hold of," said Langer.

"No one at this stage has absolutely secured it, have they?

"But there are good opportunities there for someone to do that," he added.

Over the last year, as many as 13 batsmen have occupied positions 4-7 for Australia in ODIs, with nine different batsmen tried out at No.6.

M.S. Dhoni...fantastic finisher ▪ FILE PHOTO: K.R. DEEPAK

Put the smile back, urges Binotto

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MELBOURNE

Ferrari Formula One boss Mattia Binotto on Tuesday urged his team to "put a smile on people's faces" at the Australian Grand Prix as Italy went into lockdown to combat coronavirus.

"At a difficult time for Italy and the world as a whole, as part of a global sport, it is our obligation to try and put a smile on people's faces as they prepare to watch the first race of the season," he said.

Morkel predicts 2-1 win for India

Boucher's guidance will fire up Proteas, says former all-rounder

SHAYAN ACHARYA
MUMBAI

As India gears up for a three-match One-Day International series against South Africa, starting on Thursday, former Proteas bowling all-rounder Albie Morkel predicts a 2-1 win for the home side.

However, he is confident that under new head coach Mark Boucher, South Africa will play some competitive cricket.

Tough task

"Even if a team is in top form, beating India in India is almost impossible. It's gonna be a tough series for them. India will win it 2-1, but South Africa should at least compete," Morkel told *Sportstar*.

In the city for the UnAcademy Road Safety World Series, representing South Africa Legends, Morkel said the recent ODI series win against Australia had helped the South Africans gain confidence. "We have got some young, exciting guys. Our batting is coming through and there are some young fast bowlers. International cricket is a tough place to learn your trade.

Albie Morkel. ▪ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

" So, it can also be to our advantage long-term," said Morkel, who quit international cricket last year.

"If you're a youngster, you just go out there and play. Whereas, more senior players might feel a bit more responsibility on their shoulders, and get tied up.

"We've got a good mix. Faf is back, but it's unfortunate that Rabada is injured. He would have added lot to our attack," he said.

Conducive conditions

Morkel also believes the conditions in Dharamsala and Kolkata will suit the visiting side, whereas Lucknow – which will host the second ODI – maythrow up challenges.

Having played in India in the past, Morkel knows the conditions well. "White-ball cricket is a completely different game.

"Normally, in India, the wickets are fantastic for white-ball cricket. The fields are small, and there are high-scoring games.

"That suits the South Africans style of play. That's why it's gonna be a competitive series," he stated.

First thing we need to change are the cars: Aditya

SPORTS REPORTER
CHENNAI

The co-founder of the X1 racing league, Indian racer Aditya Patel said new cars would be run in the upcoming season and that one round, as street racing, might be held at a different venue if the Buddh International Circuit (BIC) is unavailable.

BIC and Madras Motor Race Track (MMRT) hosted the league's inaugural season last year. Mechanical issues were reported with the cars used last season.

"We've kind of dissected everything, and realised the first thing we need to change are the cars. We are speaking to multiple people in India and abroad. I think, by the end of next month, we should have an idea [as to] in which direction we are going," he said on the sidelines of the CII Tamil Nadu Fitness & Sports Summit 2020 at the Taj Coromandel here on Tuesday.

Aditya Patel and Vijay Shankar. ▪ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"They [the cars] were tested. They came from abroad, actually. And that guy is reputed to have run these cars for many years. He has one of the most successful teams. But we're still waiting for the final report to come, as to what the issues with the cars were.

"We're just waiting for the BIC to come back with their verdict by the end of this month. Because, they have some issues."