

## Sports

# An inspired Rohit Sharma is India's World Cup heartbeat

## The opener is in the form of his life

**BIRMINGHAM:** Rohit Sharma is renowned for his hunger for big hundreds and his soaring self-belief is driving India forward as they seek a third World Cup triumph. The opener is in the form of his life, hitting his fourth century of the tournament in the win against Bangladesh on Tuesday that took India through to the semi-finals.

With an attacking 104 at Edgbaston, Sharma took his overall tally of World Cup hundreds to five, second only behind batting great Sachin Tendulkar, who hit six centuries in as many tournaments. He is also the second player after Sri Lanka's Kumar Sangakkara to register four hundreds in a single World Cup. "Fifth century in 15 World Cup innings for Rohit Sharma. Amazing hunger and consistency," former India opener Virender Sehwag wrote on Twitter.

The attacking opener, who led his Indian Premier League side Mumbai Indians to their fourth title in May, is now the tournament's leading run-scorer with 544 runs in seven matches at an eye-watering average of more than 90. "I have been watching Rohit for years now, he is the best ODI player around," India captain Virat Kohli said after the win against Bangladesh. "He is a joy to watch and is having the tournament of his life. When he plays well we know we are heading for a big score. He gives everyone confidence to go out and bat."

### Sharma strokes

Kohli has admitted more than once that he does not have the repertoire of strokes of Sharma, whose elegance combined with his hunger for runs makes him such a compelling batsman to watch. Sharma, who started his

World Cup campaign strongly against South Africa with a battling 122 not out on a tough batting wicket, says he has learned to curb his instincts and finishing off a game gives him "immense satisfaction".

The India vice-captain explained his approach after scoring a century in a losing cause against England on Sunday. "Every game for me is a new game, and I try and do the same, try and see if I have the portion to finish the game or bat as long as possible and get the team in a good position, things like that," he said.

Former India batsman Sanjay Manjrekar says Sharma is showing great maturity in his ability to convert fifties to centuries. The 32-year-old is the only batsman to score three double centuries in the 50-over format, with his highest score of 264 coming against Sri Lanka in 2014. Sharma has amassed 8,554 runs at an average of nearly 49 in 213 ODI matches since making his debut in 2007. He has a strike-rate of over 88 and has hit 26 centuries and 42 fifties in his glittering career. The batsman, who gives the impression of having a devil-may-care attitude, recently credited his run of form to a happy family life, saying his baby daughter had put him in a "good space". That good space could turn into a great space if he can inspire the team to World Cup glory at Lord's on July 14.

### Rayudu retires

In related news, India batsman Ambati Rayudu has announced his retirement from all forms of cricket, the Indian cricket board (BCCI) said yesterday. Rayudu, who last played a one-day international (ODI) in March, was not picked in India's 15-man squad for the World Cup. The 33-year-old was not considered as a replacement



**BIRMINGHAM:** India's Rohit Sharma celebrates making his century during the 2019 Cricket World Cup group stage match between Bangladesh and India at Edgbaston. — AFP

when India lost opener Shikhar Dhawan and Vijay Shankar to injuries, with Rishabh Pant and Mayank Agarwal called up instead.

"I have come to the decision to step away from the sport and retire from all forms and levels of the game," Rayudu said. "It has been a wonderful journey of playing

the sport and learning from every up and down it brought upon for the last 25 years at various different levels." Rayudu, who played over 200 Twenty20 matches, scored over 4,500 runs including one century and 24 fifties. He played 55 ODIs, amassing 1,694 runs with three centuries at an average of 47. —Agencies

## Pandya now the fab fifth bowler in India's attack

**LEEDS:** For someone as flamboyant off the pitch as on it, it is fitting that Hardik Pandya's transformation into India's reliable fifth bowler has been nothing less than spectacular at this year's Cricket World Cup. The 25-year-old, known for his flash clothes and love for bling, arrived in England with many wondering if he was good enough for the fifth bowler's job in his maiden World Cup.

The seam-bowling all-rounder has since effortlessly dispelled any shred of doubt with a string of stellar performances with the ball. He bowled his full 10 overs against Australia, Afghanistan, England and Bangladesh. India's opening fixture against South Africa was the only match where the opposition lasted 50 overs and Pandya did not complete his quota.

He now inspires so much confidence in Virat Kohli that the India captain went with only five bowlers in Tuesday's victory against Bangladesh which secured their place in the semi-finals. "We experienced that Hardik, when put under pressure has, come back really well in this tournament..." Kohli said of what prompted his "gamble" with the bowling attack. "He finds a way to contain the runs and get you wickets. He's really looking forward to do stuff for the team, that's really helping his cricket." Pandya claimed 3-60 on Tuesday and his victims included Bangladesh talisman Shakib Al Hasan, who top-scored for his side with 66, and Liton Das, who he dismissed with a trademark short ball.

### Wiser Pandya

The all-rounder has fine-tuned his bowling and



**BIRMINGHAM:** India's Hardik Pandya (R) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Bangladesh's Soumya Sarkar for 33 during the 2019 Cricket World Cup group stage match between Bangladesh and India at Edgbaston. — AFP

appears to have returned wiser from a brief suspension earlier this year for his comments about women on a television show in January. Kohli suggested that underneath Pandya's casual exterior lies a cerebral cricketer who draws from his experience as an all-rounder to outwit batsmen.

"When he comes to bowl, he thinks like a batsman," Kohli said. "He actually wants the ball under pressure because he thinks like a batter, so he can check their body language and know what to bowl and when. He's bowling really well for us."

Bowling coach Bharat Arun had earlier explained how much Pandya had evolved to fit the fifth bowler's role. "It was a big challenge for him to bowl those 10 overs, and he realised that to be able to bowl those 10 overs I need to develop a certain armoury in my bowling," Arun said in Manchester last month. "And that's what he's worked on. He's worked on his slow balls, his slow bouncers, and he's also worked on perfecting his bouncers. "All these put together have given him the confidence to go through those 10 overs." — Reuters

## Asian Boxing Championship extends registration time

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** The organizational committee of Asian Boxing Championship which Kuwait will host from August 1st to August 9th, extended the registration time to 8:00 pm July 10th. This was done in order to allow other national teams in Asia that have not yet registered to do so. So far, 24 teams have expressed their wish to participate.

Treasurer of Boxing Federation Adel Al-Azmi said the time extension came at the request of some Asian teams that could not meet the deadline to register due to procedures in their respective countries. "Out of our keenness to organize the championship in a way that is worthy of Kuwait and its sports reputation besides being the first championship organized by KBF at his level, sub-committees were asked to start preparations early all the way until the opening day at Kuwait club hall", Al-Azmi said.

Al-Azmi valued the confidence of the Asian Boxing Association in Kuwait, giving it the right to organize the championship. He added that the executive board of the International Association is following up on preparations and lauded the support of Public Authority for Sport (PAS) headed by Dr Humoud Fulaiteh. Al-Azmi said Jaber Hizam and Mishal Numan, Abdelrahman Basheer, Hamed Zayed, Jassim Buftain and Saad Al-Hajraf will participate in the training camp in Azerbaijan starting next Saturday along with 20 other boxers that will also be part of the tournament.



Adel Al-Azmi

## NBK gives customers chance to attend FIFA eWorld Cup

**KUWAIT CITY:** The National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues to introduce unique and unprecedented offers, launching an exclusive campaign for its young customers of Al Shabab Package holders to give them a chance to win one of four trips to London to watch the FIFA eWorld Cup 2019 (tm) Grand Final, courtesy of Visa. Launched in partnership with Visa, NBK is the only bank in the Central and Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa (CEMEA) region to launch a campaign in support of the FIFA eWorld Cup 2019(tm), which is sponsored by Visa.

Speaking of the new campaign, Mohammed Al Othman, General Manager of Consumer Banking Group, National Bank of Kuwait, said: "We are very excited to be introducing a special new campaign to a tournament that has become an awaited global event. We are always focused at NBK at providing unique services and offers that satisfy the needs of our customers and their diverse lifestyle, especially our Al Shabab Customers whom we ensure to offer benefits and advantages to enhance their banking experience with NBK."

Al Othman added: "We continue to collaborate with Visa to develop advanced payment solutions that meet the highest standards of technology and security, and satisfy our customers' needs while rewarding them along the way. Our previous partnerships rewarding customers have received great responses and we look forward to continue introducing new ones under our strong partnership."

"Visa's aim through our various global and regional sponsorships is to enable our clients and



Mohammed Al Othman

Visa cardholders to enjoy memorable, one of a kind fan experiences. Visa has a long and proud history of supporting football, having been a sponsor of the FIFA eWorld Cup since 2007. The FIFA eWorld Cup 2019 is an exciting virtual offshoot of the physical sport and we are proud to be able to work with

NBK to reward fans in Kuwait with this incredible opportunity," said Mohammed Ismael, Senior Vice President and Head of Marketing for the Central and Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa (CEMEA) region, Visa.

The campaign extends until July 15, giving Al Shabab Customers who transfer their monthly allowance to their NBK Account five chances to enter the draw, while Al Shabab Customers who transfer their allowance and hold an NBK Al Shabab Visa Prepaid Card receive ten chances to the draw. Furthermore, Al Shabab Customers receive an addition entry in the draw for every KD 1 spent with their NBK Al Shabab Visa Prepaid Card.

Each of the four winners will receive two tickets to London for themselves and a companion, hotel accommodation, two tickets to watch the FIFA eWorld Cup 2019 Grand Final, transportation, a schedule of activities and more in partnership with Visa. NBK and Visa have jointly developed customer-centric products tailored to match customers' banking and payment solutions requirements in Kuwait, providing innovative banking products, payment solutions that are at the forefront of new banking technologies, advantages and rewards all-year-long which include cashback, discounts and unique campaigns to international tournaments.

## Palestinian FA postpones cup final after Israel denies travel

**RAMALLAH:** The final of the Palestine Cup has been postponed after Israel denied Gaza-based players permits to travel, the Palestinian Football Association said yesterday. The second leg of the final between Balata FC and Khadamat Rafah, the winners of cups in the West Bank and Gaza respectively, was due to take place yesterday, PFA vice president Susan Shalabi said.

Gaza-based team Khadamat Rafah requested travel permits to the West Bank for 35 people, but Israel granted just four, three of them to club officials, Shalabi said. "The Israelis are very adamant in their refusal," she added, saying they had cited security concerns they did not specify.

A Khadamat Rafah official told AFP the club were still waiting for final decisions and were hopeful of securing more permits in the coming days. "We are ready at any moment. If we got the permits now, in 30 minutes we will be there," Hodaifa Lafi said. "The game has to go ahead." She said it was impossible to discuss a date for the second leg until Israel granted more permits.

There was no immediate comment from COGAT, the Israeli defense ministry body responsible for Palestinian civil affairs. The first leg, played on Sunday in Gaza, ended 1-1. The West Bank and Gaza are separated by Israel, and Palestinians looking to travel between the two must apply for Israeli permits. The tournament faces problems every year with permits for players to leave the Hamas-run Gaza Strip, which Israel has kept under crippling blockade for more than a decade. — AFP

## Tomic faces fine after defeat in 2nd shortest match

**LONDON:** Bernard Tomic shrugged off the prospect of being stripped of his 45,000-pound (\$57,000) prize money after losing the second shortest match at Wimbledon on Tuesday. The controversial Australian, who has been accused of not trying previously in his career, lost 6-2, 6-1, 6-4 to France's Jo-Wilfried Tsonga in just 58 minutes. It was only four minutes longer than it took Roger Federer to defeat Alejandro Falla of Colombia in 2004.

"I think I played as best as I could. It's just I played terrible," said the world number 96, who was a top 20 player in 2011 but has been dubbed "Tomic the tank engine" by a critical Australian media. When he was asked if he was happy with the effort he was making on court, he snapped: "Next question please." Tomic has run foul of the Wimbledon authorities in the past. Two years ago, he was fined after admitting he had faked an injury and complained of being bored in defeat to Germany's Mischa Zverev. His racquet sponsor Head dropped him as a client. "I expected a match like this," said Tsonga. Tomic would not be the first player to be fined for alleged lack of effort in recent weeks. America's Anna Tatishvili was stripped of her first round prize money at Roland Garros for "not playing at a professional standard".

She lost to Greece's 33rd-ranked Maria Sakkari, 6-0, 6-1 in just 55 minutes, only three minutes fewer than Tomic who had played a set more. Tatishvili had returned to competition following a 31-month absence due to a serious ankle injury and multiple surgeries. She is appealing the ruling, claiming she is the victim of discrimination. — AFP