

Sports

Smith replaces Rahane as Rajasthan captain in IPL

Ton-up Kohli hails Moeen for crucial IPL win

JAIPUR: Struggling Indian Premier League side Rajasthan Royals yesterday named Steve Smith as their new captain despite the Australian being barred from leading the national team over a ball-tampering scandal.

Smith, who along with compatriot David Warner missed the 2018 IPL because of the scandal, will replace India's Ajinkya Rahane.

"Ajinkya has done a terrific job over the last year and a half," Smith said after winning the toss in his first game as leader against Mumbai Indians in Jaipur.

"The owners thought there should be a change in the leadership, and he'll be part of the leadership group as well," Smith added. The former Australia captain has made his way back into the national team for the upcoming World Cup but cannot take on formal leadership responsibilities for another year.

Smith and Warner's one-year cheating ban ended March 28 and the two have launched into the IPL campaign as they seek to restore their reputations.

Smith has scored 186 runs in seven IPL games, including a 73 not out. The 2008 champions are seventh in the eight-team table with just two wins.

The team management are gambling on Smith boosting confidence to get the side to the play-offs.

"Steve is one of the most innovative and successful captains in the world, in all formats of the game," said Rajasthan's head of cricket Zubin Bharucha.

"We are confident he can lead the Royals to success." The duo's suspension did not include club games, but IPL's governing council decided not to allow Smith and Warner to compete in last year's tournament to avoid controversy.

The pair were banned for cheating in a South Africa-Australia Test in March last year along with teammate Cameron Bancroft, who was banned for nine-months.

Earlier, Virat Kohli scored his first IPL century of the

year, then paid tribute yesterday to Royal Challengers Bangalore teammate Moeen Ali for setting up a crucial second win of the season.

"Moeen changed the game completely and that allowed me to play my game," said the India captain, who completed his 100 on the penultimate ball of the Bangalore innings against Kolkata Knight Riders.

While Kohli's 58-ball century anchored the Bangalore innings on Friday, England allrounder Moeen blitzed the Kolkata spinners, making 66 off 28 balls including six sixes and five fours.

With Bangalore needing to up the run rate, Moeen hit the second ball he faced off left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav into the long-on stands for six.

In the 16th over, he hit Kuldeep—who he will have to face in the World Cup in June—for three sixes and two fours. Kuldeep then dismissed his rival with the last ball of the over.

Bangalore were suffering with veteran South African star AB de Villiers rested because of illness but through Kohli and Moeen made an impressive 213-4 off their 20 overs.

No team has ever successfully chased a target this big at Kolkata's Eden Gardens, and the Knight Riders got to only 203-5.

Nitish Rana made an unbeaten 85 while Andre Russell hit two fours and nine sixes in a 25-ball 65 before being run out off the penultimate ball.

"It was important to bat along when AB is not here," said Kohli, whose team remain bottom of the table with just two wins.

"AB was disappointed for not making it for the game tonight and I told him that I'll give him a hug if we win," he added.

Moeen let Kohli know in advance that he was going to set off some T20 fireworks.

"Moeen said 'I am going to go now' and I asked him



MUMBAI: File photo shows Rajasthan Royals bowler Jofra Archer (C) celebrates with captain Ajinkya Rahane (L) and Steven Smith after taking the wicket of Mumbai Indians captain Rohit Sharma during the 2019 Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Mumbai Indians and Rajasthan Royals in Mumbai on April 13, 2019. — AFP

to go for it. He targeted the small boundaries and changed the game in those few overs."

Kohli also praised veteran South African pace bowler Dale Steyn who has joined the team this week to replace injured Australian Nathan Coulter-Nile.

The 35-year-old Steyn took the crucial wickets of Kolkata opener Chris Lynn and then number three

Shubman Gill to hobble the home side's response.

"Steyn getting those crucial wickets was important for us. I think picking up wickets in the powerplay is crucial as it sets the tone for the rest of the innings," said Kohli.

His team remain bottom of the table and face a struggle to reach the playoffs. — AFP

India fines cricketers for 'sexist' remarks

NEW DELHI: India's cricket board yesterday fined players Hardik Pandya and Lokesh Rahul \$29,000 each for making sexist remarks on a TV chat show that saw them ordered home from a tour of Australia.

Pandya "must make amends" for boasting about his sexual conquests during the celebrity show in which he appeared with Rahul, said an ombudsman who investigated the case. But with both heading for the World Cup in England and Wales which starts May 30, the inquiry said the fine should close the controversy.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India said the money from the fines will be given to 10 widows of paramilitary constables killed in action and to a fund for the blind created by the sporting body. Star all-rounder Pandya, 25, and opening batsman Rahul, 27, missed several internationals because of a suspension imposed when they were sent home.

But after making public apologies, both have returned to the national team and are playing in the Indian Premier League. They have spoken in recent interviews about how they were forced to stay home, as criticism raged.

"I have no hesitation in observing that the remarks made by the player, even by his own admissions, did offend sensitivities, which should have been avoided," said the ombudsman, D.K. Jain.

"In our country, the game of cricket is often treated as a religion, revered, and the cricketers are idolised," Jain said in a warning to Pandya and Rahul to improve their behaviour. — AFP

Irving puts Celtics on verge of sweep

INDIANAPOLIS: Kyrie Irving had a hand in 11 of Boston's final 16 points Friday night as the Celtics withstood a late charge by the Indiana Pacers to record a 104-96 win at Indianapolis and go up 3-0 in an Eastern Conference first-round playoff matchup. The Pacers, playing at home for the first time in the series, got within 88-87 with 6:05, but that's when Irving took over. He had two hoops, assisted on 3- and 2-point baskets by Al Horford and made two free throws down the stretch, helping the Celtics pull away. He finished with 19 points and 10 assists. Jaylen Brown had 23 points to lead the Celtics, who held the Pacers under 100 points for the third consecutive game. Tyreke Evans led seven Pacers in double figures with 19 points off the bench.

THUNDER 120, TRAIL BLAZERS 108

Russell Westbrook scored 33 points as Oklahoma City beat visiting Portland to take a two-games-to-one lead in a Western Conference first-round playoff series. After vowing to play better following the Thunder's Game 2 loss, Westbrook shot 11 of 22 from the floor while adding 11 assists and five rebounds. He also made 4 of 6 3-point attempts after sinking just 1 of 10 long-range attempts over the first two games. Portland's Damian Lillard had a quiet first half, scoring only four points on 2-of-6 shooting. However, Lillard dominated in Portland's 43-point third quarter, scoring 25 points to make a game of it. Lillard, who finished with a team-high 32 points, shot 8 of 11 from the floor in the third. But he did not score in the fourth until less than two minutes remained and the Thunder were ahead by 12.

RAPTORS 98, MAGIC 93

Pascal Siakam scored a playoff-career-best 30



INDIANAPOLIS: Kyrie Irving #11 of the Boston Celtics handles the ball against the Indiana Pacers during Game Three of Round One of the 2019 NBA Playoffs on April 19, 2019 at Bankers Life Fieldhouse in Indianapolis, Indiana. — AFP

points and grabbed 11 rebounds as visiting Toronto won in Orlando to take a 2-1 lead in their first-round Eastern Conference playoff series. Kawhi Leonard added 16 points and 10 rebounds for the Raptors while Danny Green scored 13 points and

Kyle Lowry had 12 points and 10 assists. Nikola Vucevic scored 22 points and grabbed 14 rebounds for the Magic. Terrence Ross added 24 points, Jonathan Isaac scored 14, and Aaron Gordon had 10. — Reuters

Matthews steers Leafs to win over Bruins

LOS ANGELES: Auston Matthews and Kasper Kapanen scored third period goals as the Toronto Maple Leafs held on to beat the Boston Bruins 2-1 for a 3-2 lead in their first round playoff series. Matthews, of the US, broke a scoreless tie in the third and Toronto goaltender Frederik Andersen made 28 saves including several late when Boston had pulled their goalie for an extra attacker.

David Krejci scored the Bruins' only goal with the Boston net empty but they couldn't get the second one to tie it up. "This was his best 200 foot game of the playoffs," Leafs coach Mike Babcock said of Matthews. "He was outstanding."

The Maple Leafs can get their first NHL playoff series win in 15 years and advance to face the Columbus Blue Jackets in the next round with a victory in game six Sunday in Toronto.

With the teams locked in a scoreless tie after two periods, Toronto's Jake Muzzin found himself alone at the blue line, skated to the left circle and passed to Matthews, who notched his fourth goal of the playoffs from the right faceoff circle at 11:33.

The play was reviewed for goaltender interference after video showed Leafs' Zach Hyman bumping into Boston netminder Tuukka Rask just before the puck went into the net. The goal was upheld and Toronto's 1-0 lead stood.

"I had so many taken back that I got one back tonight," Matthews said of the fortunate call in the Leafs' favour. Krejci scored at 19:16, but Toronto killed the final 44 seconds for the win. — AFP

Kiprop insists on innocence despite doping ban

PARIS: Kenya's former Olympic and world 1500m champion Asbel Kiprop has vowed to fight on to clear his name after being handed a four-year suspension yesterday for using the banned blood-booster EPO. The 29-year-old failed an out of competition test in November 2017 and was provisionally suspended in 2018.

Yesterday, the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) upheld that ban, concluding that the case had been "convincingly made out" despite an "a la carte menu of reasons why the charges should be dismissed" from Kiprop's representative.

After the verdict, Kiprop continued to maintain his innocence. "The decision is not only a blow to me, but it is not good for the sport of athletics," Kiprop told AFP. "I have been insisting that I did not dope," he said. "I will continue to maintain my innocence, even if this decision now means I will

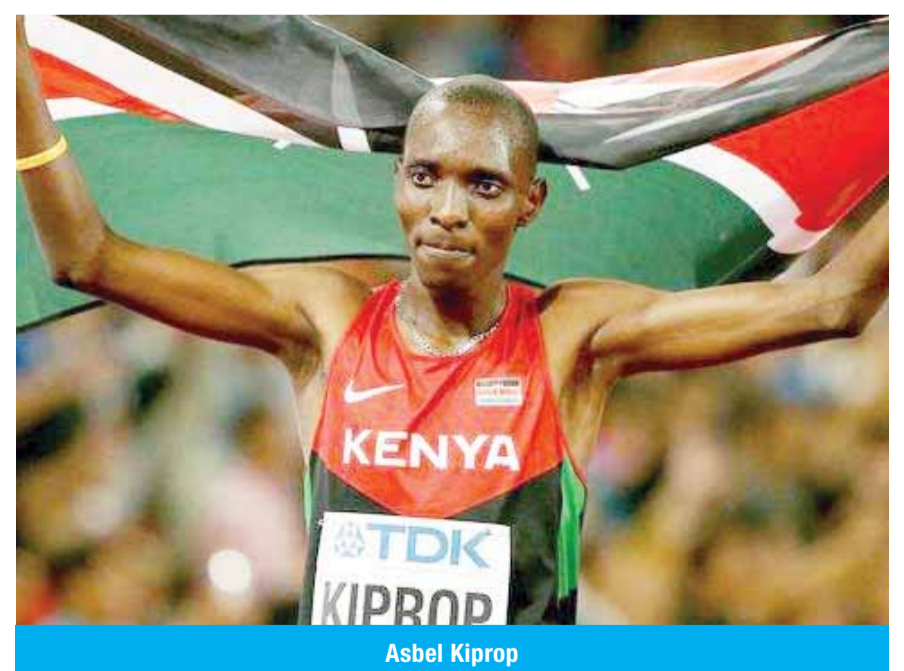
not be eligible to run again for the next four years.

"It's sad that the world will believe that I am guilty of taking the performance-enhancing drugs and yet I have been at the forefront of fighting doping in the sport." The AIU said in its statement that Kiprop had "at various times and various formats...proposed a number of possible explanations" for the positive test.

It went on to state that at the hearing his representative, Katwa Kigen, presented an "a la carte menu of reasons why the charges should be dismissed." Among these, the AIU said, were that the "EPO was naturally produced due to intense exercise at altitude," that it was produced by medication, that the test, or the analysis, was badly conducted or that the sample was spiked.

His ban is backdated to last February. The AIU statement added that while Kigen presented his arguments with "tenacity and charm" the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) representative Ross Wenzel had argued that "none of the various reasons proposed...when subject to strict scrutiny had any plausibility."

The three-man panel agreed. It concluded that high altitude could not explain the presence of EPO in the test and that Kiprop had produced no evi-



Asbel Kiprop

dence to support the other possible explanations.

Kiprop accepts the long ban virtually puts an end to a long and illustrious athletic career, but he can still appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport. He originally came second in the 1500m final at the 2008 Beijing Olympics but was upgraded when Rashid Ramzi tested positive for a performance-enhancing drug and was

stripped of the gold medal.

A total of 138 Kenyan athletes have tested positive in anti-doping campaigns since 2004. In 2016, Kenya were placed on the list of countries under IAAF surveillance. And it was only after the adoption of a new anti-doping law just before the Rio 2016 Olympics that the country was removed from the list of "non-compliant" WADA nations. — AFP