

Sports

Skipper Kohli hits form in Bangalore's big IPL victory

IPL info leak attempt sparks corruption probe

DUBAI: Skipper Virat Kohli hit form with his first half-century of this Indian Premier League season as he led Royal Challengers Bangalore to a comfortable win over Rajasthan Royals on Saturday. Kohli, who came into the match with scores of 14, one and three, remained unbeaten on 72 as Bangalore chased down a target of 155 to win by eight wickets in Abu Dhabi.

He put on a key second-wicket partnership of 99 with in-form opener Devdutt Padikkal, who made 63 - his third IPL fifty in four matches for last years wooden spoons. Kohli, 31, started cautiously before finding his touch to smash seven fours and two sixes in his 53-ball stay in this year's first afternoon game of the Twenty20 tournament. The players had to deal with temperatures that hit 34 celsius.

"Virat Kohli's fitness is second to none. And the way he controlled that innings in the chase was great to see," Bangalore's head coach Simon Katich told reporters. "The way we see it, we don't look at Virat being out of form at all. We thought he looked magnificent in the first game, unfortunately he holed out, and then missed out a

couple of times and that can happen. "But what helped was that he got us over the line in the super over to finish the game against Mumbai Indians (on Monday). It was only a matter of time before he gets runs in the middle."

Bangalore lost Aaron Finch - trapped lbw off Shreyas Gopal for eight - but the left-handed Padikkal and Kohli made sure their team recorded their third win. Padikkal was bowled by Royals' England paceman Jofra Archer. South African veteran AB de Villiers hit the winning boundary as Bangalore won in 19.1 overs. "It's a different feeling (batting with Kohli), I've watched him from home so much since I was young and to bat with him is an unreal feeling," said the 20-year-old Padikkal.

"I was getting tired, cramping up, but he pushed me. He said I need to see the team through. That's how he bats and he was conveying that to me too." Kohli's knock took him past 5,500 IPL runs to extend his lead at the top of the scoring chart in the absence of second-placed Suresh Raina (Chennai Super Kings) who pulled out of the tournament in the United Arab

Emirates. Earlier, leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal returned impressive bowling figures of 3-24 from his four overs to restrict Steve-Smith's Royals to 154 for six while batting first.

In the second game of the day, Delhi Capitals outplayed Kolkata Knight Riders by 18 runs after posting a mammoth 228 for four at the short-boundary Sharjah cricket ground. Skipper Shreyas Iyer hit an unbeaten 38-ball 88 before England's limited-overs captain import Eoin Morgan gave Delhi a scare with his 44 off 18 deliveries for Kolkata. South African quick Anrich Nortje claimed three wickets including the prized scalp of Morgan to help Delhi take top spot in the eight-team table.

IPL info leak attempt

Meanwhile, a player taking part in the ongoing Indian Premier League tournament said he was asked to leak information about his team, the country's richest cricket league, long plagued by corruption, is in its third week and is being played behind closed doors in the United Arab Emirates

because of the coronavirus pandemic.

All eight teams are confined to separate "bio-bubbles". "A player has been approached. He himself immediately reported it," anti-corruption chief of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) Ajit Singh told AFP. "We know who has approached... We are on the case." Singh said the "relatively unknown" player, whose identity was not released, was asked to leak some information about his team. He did not release further details about the incident. Singh told AFP before the tournament started that the bio-bubbles would make it easy for any illicit approaches to be noticed.

The BCCI last month struck a deal with Sportradar, a technology company that tracks online betting. The money-spinning IPL has a long history of corruption and match-fixing since it started in 2008. Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan was suspended last year for failing to report corrupt approaches, one of them involving the IPL. A 2013 scandal caused the Chennai Super Kings and Rajasthan Royals to be suspended in 2015 for two seasons. The matches are being played in Sharjah, Abu Dhabi and Dubai, with the 53-day league ending on November 10. —Agencies

Lak penalty save sends Persepolis into Asian final

DOHA: Hamed Lak produced a diving save off Maicon Roque as Persepolis beat Al Nassr 5-3 on penalties to reach the final of the Asian Champions League for the second time in three years on Saturday. Both teams had played out a tense 1-1 draw after 120 minutes of action forcing the match into the tie-breaker at the Jassim bin Hamad Stadium.

But it was the Iranians who emerged as the top team in Asia's west zone as they scored off all their five penalties, while Saudi giants Al Nassr watched in agony from the sidelines as their Brazilian defender Roque's shot, his team's fourth, was saved by Lak, leaping to his right. A few hours before the match Persepolis were dealt a blow when the Asian Football Confederation banned their star striker Issa Alekassir for six months for a "discriminatory gesture" while celebrating his goal against Uzbekistan's Pakhtakor in the quarter-finals on Wednesday.

In addition to the ban, the 30-year-old, who scored four times in his side's last three matches in Doha and was

chiefly instrumental to their progress to the semis, was also fined \$10,000 for his slant-eyed gesture, considered a serious racial offence. "The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Disciplinary and Ethics Committee has banned Issa Alekassir, of Persepolis FC, from taking part in any kind of football-related activity for six months for violating Article 58.1 of the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code (2019 Edition)," the AFC said in a statement. "The ban will take effect immediately," the continental body added.

Article 58.1 states "anyone who offends the dignity of a person or group of persons through contemptuous, discriminatory or denigratory words or actions concerning race, skin color, gender, disability, language, age, physical appearance, religion, political opinion, wealth, birth or any other status, sexual orientation, or ethnic, national, or social origin has committed an offence." On Saturday, however, Al Nassr, who were hoping to reach the final for the first time, couldn't make the most of Alekassir's absence or the fact that Persepolis had lost Ehsan Pehlevan just before half-time after he received his second yellow card.

The Saudis were first to score though, Abderrazzak Hamdallah foxing goalkeeper Lak with a 'Panenka'



DOHA: Persepolis's goalkeeper Hamed Lak saves a shot in the shoot-out during the AFC Champions League semi-finals match between Saudi's Al-Nassr and Iran's Persepolis on October 3, 2020. —AFP

goal in the 36th minute following Bashar Resan's foul on Khalid al-Ghannam. But Persepolis needed only six minutes to draw level, Abdi Mehdi producing an excellent header past Al Nassr goalkeeper Brad Jones off a cross from Resan. Luck came to Lak's rescue immediately after the break as Hamdallah produced a brilliant free-kick only for the ball to thud into the crossbar after the goalkeeper was thoroughly beaten.

Both teams had their share of

chances before Lak came up with his decisive save in the shootout to put his team against a team from Asia's east, who are yet to be determined. The event, which was halted in February following the coronavirus outbreak, resumed in a bio-secure bubble in Doha last month with the matches packed into a tight schedule and the knockout phase doing away with the double-legged format. The tournament's matches in the east are yet to be announced. —AFP

Bahrain royal team in season's first Nepal Himalayan summit

KATHMANDU: A team of climbers including a Bahrain prince has completed the first summit of a Nepal Himalayan peak this season after being given permission despite a coronavirus ban on tourist arrivals. The group, which includes members of the Bahrain Royal Guard and three Britons, climbed the 6,119-metre (20,075-foot) Lobuche, expedition organiser Seven Summits Treks told AFP.

It was not revealed if all 18 members of the team reached the summit, a precursor to them next tackling the 8,163-metre Manaslu, the world's eighth-highest mountain. Tourists and climbers are officially barred from the country until mid-October. The team arrived in Nepal in mid-September and quarantined in the capital Kathmandu for a week before heading to Everest base camp and on to Lobuche.

More than 50 Sherpas are part of the expedition, but the identity of the royal climber was not disclosed. The group plans to climb Everest next year. Nepal closed its borders in March and grounded international flights just ahead of the busy spring climbing season, devastating the local tourism sector. The country of 28 million people has recorded an average of 1,300 daily infections since August, for a total of more than 86,000 cases and 535 deaths. Limited international flights resumed last month, but only for citizens and foreign diplomats. —AFP



LOBUCHE, Nepal: An 18-member party of the Bahrain Royal Guard mountaineering team including a Bahraini prince and three Britons pose as they head to summit Mount Lobuche East, 6,119-metre high northeast of Kathmandu. —AFP

Swiatek shocks Halep; Nadal eases into 14th quarter-final

PARIS: Polish teenager Iga Swiatek shocked top seed and title favorite Simona Halep to reach the Roland Garros last eight yesterday as 12-time champion Rafael Nadal breezed into the quarter-finals for the 14th time. Swiatek, just 19 and ranked 54 in the world, triumphed 6-1, 6-2 on the back of 30 winners and not allowing 2018 champion Halep a single break point. "I am surprised I could do this," admitted Swiatek after ending the 17-match winning streak of Halep, the overwhelming favorite in the absence of 2019 champion Ashleigh Barty and US Open winner Naomi Osaka and following the injury-enforced withdrawal of Serena Williams.

It was a stunning turnaround for the Pole who won just

one game against the Romanian at the same stage in Paris last year, swept off court in just 45 minutes. "Last year I wasn't experienced enough, it was my first match in a big stadium so I was a little stressed, but now I can handle the pressure." Halep had arrived in Paris with claycourt titles from Prague and Rome and had demolished Amanda Anisimova, who shocked her in Paris last year, for the loss of one game in 54 minutes in the third round.

"She played really well, it was her match today," admitted Halep who said she'll quickly get over her disappointment with her season now at an end. "I will have a chocolate and I will be better tomorrow." Swiatek will face Italian qualifier Martina Trevisan for a place in the semi-finals after the 26-year-old, world number 159, registered a 6-4, 6-4 victory over fifth seed Kiki Bertens, a semi-finalist in 2016. Trevisan is the first qualifier to make the last eight since Yaroslava Shvedova in 2012. Trevisan had saved two match points in her win over Greek 20th seed Maria Sakkari. "I'm living in a dream," said the Italian whose other appearance in the main draw of a major came at the Australian Open in

January. Yesterday's early shocks mean that only four seeds remain in the women's draw-third seed Elina Svitolina, fourth-seeded Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin, two-time Wimbledon winner Petra Kvitova, seeded at seven, and Tunisia's Ons Jabeur, the 30th seed. Nadal defeated American qualifier Sebastian Korda 6-1, 6-1, 6-2, staying comfortably on course for a 13th French Open title and record-equalling 20th Grand Slam crown. Second seed Nadal racked up his 97th win at the tournament against just two defeats since his title-winning debut in 2005.

He goes on to face either German sixth seed Alexander Zverev or Italian teenager Jannik Sinner in what will be his 42nd career appearance in the last eight of a Grand Slam. Korda, the world number 213 and son of 1998 Australian Open champion and 1992 Roland Garros runner-up Petr Korda, never really recovered from slipping quickly to a 5-0 deficit in the first set. The 20-year-old, who was so in awe of Nadal when he was growing up that he named his cat after the Spaniard, had the consolation of breaking serve once in the third set. —AFP

News in brief

Atalanta on scoring spree

BERGAMO: Irrepressible Atalanta kept up their record of scoring at least four goals in every game this season as they dispatched Cagliari 5-2 on Sunday to maintain their 100 percent record in Serie A. Luis Muriel, Alejandro Gomez, Mario Pasalic, Duvan Zapata and Sam Lammers shared the goals in another hugely entertaining Atalanta performance while Diego Godin and Joao Pedro replied for the Sardinians, whose goalkeeper Alessio Cragno spared them further damage. The Bergamo side, Serie A's top scorers with 98 goals last season, have nine points from three games after previously winning 4-2 at Torino and 4-1 at Lazio. Muriel ran on to Jose Luis Palomino's through ball to score the first after seven minutes, but Cagliari replied when Uruguay captain Godin headed in from a corner on his debut after joining the club from Inter Milan. —Reuters

Doubt on Serie A fixtures

MILAN: Confusion reigned over one of the top Serie A fixtures of the season on Sunday as Juventus prepared as usual to host Napoli, while local media reported that the visitors had been unable to travel due to an order from their local health authority. Juventus, who said on Saturday that they would take the field, wrote simply "Matchday" in a post on Twitter accompanied by a photograph of forward Cristiano Ronaldo and the time and venue of the match. However, Sky Sport Italia and other media said that Napoli, where two players have tested positive for COVID-19 in the last four days, had not left for Turin and were preparing to go into a team quarantine. The reports said that the local health authority in Naples had not allowed Napoli to travel as a precaution following the positive cases. There was no official comment from either the team or the health authority, however. —Reuters

Lens beat Saint Etienne 2-0

PARIS: Lens secured a 2-0 win over nine-man Saint Etienne and moved up to second place in Ligue 1 thanks to goals from Gael Kakuta and Florian Sotoca after the visitors were hit with red cards for Timothee Kolodziejczak and Wahbi Khazri on Saturday. Kolo was the first to be sent off after conceding an early penalty with a clumsy tackle that injured Ignatius Ganago. Referee Bastein Dechepey viewed a replay of the incident before brandishing the red card at the 29-year-old defender, with Kakuta firing Lens into the lead with the spot kick. Saint Etienne sent Khazri on in the second-half but his first appearance of the season was a short-lived affair as he was dismissed in the 64th minute for a lunging tackle on Jonathan Gradiat as the two raced for a long ball. —Reuters



PARIS: Poland's Iga Swiatek serves the ball to Romania's Simona Halep during their women's singles fourth round tennis match on Day 8 of The Roland Garros 2020 French Open tennis tournament yesterday. —AFP