

## Sports

# Lucknow edge Kolkata to enter IPL play-offs, top-two finish for Chennai

## Chennai will take on holders Gujarat Titan in the first qualifier next week

**KOLKATA:** Lucknow Super Kings survived an unbeaten blitz of 67 by Rinku Singh to edge Kolkata Knight Riders by one run and qualify for the Indian Premier League play-offs on Saturday. Nicholas Pooran's 58 guided Lucknow to 176-8, a total that was threatened by Rinku, a left-hand batsman, who smashed four sixes in his 33-ball knock but Kolkata ended on 175-7. "First reaction is satisfaction," Lucknow skipper Krunal Pandya said after the win.

"We never gave up, we were put under a lot of pressure but credit to the boys. At one stage, they were 61-1 but I've seen it before that at this level, two-three tight overs and we're in the game." The result ensured a top-two finish for Chennai Super Kings, who hammered hosts Delhi Capitals by 77 runs in their march to the play-offs in the first match of the day.

Four-time champions Chennai, led by M.S. Dhoni, will take on holders Gujarat Titans, who top the 10-team table, in the first qualifier next week. The winner will head straight to the final in Ahmedabad on May 28 and the loser playing the winner of the "eliminator" between teams three and four in the second qualifier.

"There is no recipe as such," Dhoni said on his team's success in the T20 tournament. "You try to pick the best players and try to give them the best slot. You use them in the manner where they have most chances of succeeding and groom them in the areas where they are not as strong."

Two-time champions Kolkata bowed out of the race for the top four, leaving five-time champions Mumbai

Indians, Royal Challengers Bangalore—both the teams play their respective matches on Sunday—and Rajasthan Royals fighting for the remaining spot.

### Conway-Ruturaj show

Kolkata began strongly to put Lucknow in trouble at 73-5 before the left-handed Pooran hit back in his 30-ball blitz to guide his team to 176-8 at Eden Gardens and was named man of the match. In reply, England's Jason Roy, who hit 45, and Venkatesh Iyer gave Kolkata a brisk start in their stand of 61 in 5.5 overs before the Lucknow spinners hit back. Kolkata lost track after Roy's wicket but Rinku, who became an IPL sensation with his five sixes off five balls last month, made Kolkata dream again even when they needed 41 off the last two overs.

In the opening match, New Zealand's Devon Conway (87) and Gaikwad (79) set up Chennai's win with an opening stand of 141 to steer the team to 223-3. Skipper David Warner hit a valiant 86 but Chennai kept down Delhi, who are coached by Ricky Ponting, to 146-9 and finish the group stage with eight wins. The season remains special for Dhoni, who is believed to be playing his last season and has attracted huge crowds wearing the teams' yellow as a tribute to the legendary cricketer.

Dhoni, 41, though has kept the fans guessing and still not clarified on his swansong. The wicketkeeper-batsman and former India captain walked in to bat amid thunderous applause at Delhi's Feroz Shah Kotla ground and stood unbeaten with Ravindra Jadeja, who hit a seven-ball 20. — AFP



**KOLKATA:** Kolkata Knight Riders' Rinku Singh plays a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Lucknow Super Giants and Kolkata Knight Riders at the Eden Gardens Stadium in Kolkata. — AFP

## Haney retains undisputed crown

**LOS ANGELES:** American Devin Haney retained his undisputed lightweight world title on Saturday, defeating Ukrainian former champion Vasiliy Lomachenko by a unanimous points decision in Las Vegas. A bruising 12-round battle that featured several close rounds finished with Haney shading it on all three scorecards, with judges scoring it 116-112, 115-113, 115-113 in his favor.

The unbeaten 24-year-old Haney, who improves to 30-0 with 15 knockouts, started the fight aggressively to win the opening round. But veteran Lomachenko, 35, battled back brilliantly to land several hard shots in the second and third rounds, wobbling Haney with a solid uppercut in the third.

Haney appeared to just gain the edge in the mid-

dle rounds of the fight before Lomachenko finished strongly with the crowd in the MGM Grand Garden Arena roaring the former champion on.

Haney though rocked Lomachenko with a left hook in the seventh round and continued to find his target with crisp counter-punching even though the Ukrainian eventually landed more punches throughout the fight, 124 to the American's 110.

The win means Haney retains his World Boxing Association, World Boxing Council, International Boxing Federation and World Boxing Organization belts. He became the first undisputed lightweight world champion since Pernell Whitaker in 1990 with a lopsided decision over George Kambosos in Melbourne in June 2022.

Lomachenko returned to the ring in October last year after enrolling in a territorial defense unit for Ukraine after the invasion of the country by Russia. The veteran's record fell to 17-3 with 11 knockouts after Saturday's defeat. — AFP



**MELBOURNE:** Devin Haney of the US (C) celebrates defeating George Kambosos of Australia to become the undisputed lightweight boxing world champion in Melbourne. — AFP

## Rybakina sets sights on Roland Garros

**ROME:** Elena Rybakina won the Italian Open on Saturday and promptly turned her attention to Roland Garros and the pursuit of a second career Grand Slam title. Kazakhstan's Rybakina captured her second WTA 1000 title of the season at Foro Italico when Ukrainian opponent Anhelina Kalinina retired with a thigh injury which she had been carrying all week.

Rybakina hugged her friend and rival at the net as the tearful loser explained how the physical problem had finally caught up with her. World number six Rybakina, the reigning Wimbledon champion, was leading 6-4, 1-0 when Kalinina called it quits shortly after midnight in a final long-delayed by rain.

Rybakina, 23, became the first woman to capture two WTA 1000 titles this season, having already won the prestigious Indian Wells hard court tournament in March. She was also runner-up at the Australian Open and in Miami and now she is eyeing up the French Open.

"Hopefully I can go far at the French Open," she said. "I have good memories playing there. Now that I've got more matches on clay, it's a bit easier and (gives) a bit more confidence definitely. It's always important to be healthy, be ready physically, then hopefully I can go far there."

She offered wishes for a speedy recovery to Kalinina. "She has done an amazing job. I hope she is fit for Roland Garros," Rybakina said. The 68-minute match didn't get underway until 11 pm, Rybakina telling the hardy fans in the stadium who sat through more than four hours of delays that she knew it wasn't easy for them.

Rybakina, who will rise to four in the world ahead of Roland Garros, is only the third woman to have reached the finals at the Australian Open, Indian Wells, Miami and Rome in the same season. The others were Monica Seles in 1991 and Maria Sharapova in 2012.

The Russian-born Rybakina has now won 28 matches this season—only world number two and Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka has won more, with 29. "I'm proud that I can maintain this level, it's not easy with all the scheduling, traveling."

"I think we're doing a good job with the team," Rybakina said. "I can see improvements on the court, physically also. I think we're on a right way." But she added: "There is still a lot of room to improve. But for



**ROME:** Ukraine's Anhelina Kalinina (2ndL) and Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina (R) pose with trophies after Kalinina forfeited due to injury during the final match of the Women's WTA Rome Open tennis tournament against Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina at Foro Italico in Rome. — AFP

now it's going well, and hopefully I can continue like this till the end of the season."

Kalinina, 26, said that her physio had kept her fit enough to compete until the end in Rome. "I tried my best but I just could not play," Kalinina said, apologizing to spectators. — AFP

but pulled it back in a tense point-for-point second game to eventually triumph 18-21, 22-20, 21-8.

A jubilant Zheng jumped up and down in excitement, ripped off his shirt and threw it into the crowd. His partner Huang threw her racket to a delighted spectator. In the men's singles, Lee Yun Gyu was easily outmatched by Shi Yuqi, unable to deal with Shi's powerful smashes and laser focus.

The long rallies between Chen and An, who looked increasingly frustrated as the match wore on, drew gasps from the crowd. Virtually all international sports events ground to a halt in China after the coronavirus pandemic emerged there in late 2019, with a notable exception being last year's Beijing Winter Olympics that were held in a virus-secure "bubble". — AFP

that I have in other races, not having won this one was definitely (something) missing," Velazquez said. Blazing Sevens, trained by Chad Brown and ridden by Irad Ortiz, nearly denied Velazquez again.

Velazquez had his horse in the lead early and heading into the stretch. When Blazing Sevens made his move—even poking a nose in front—National Treasure dug in and won by a head. Kentucky Derby winner Mage, whose challenge from the middle of the seven-horse field came too late, finished third to end the chance that a 14th Triple Crown champion could be celebrated at the Belmont Stakes next month. Baffert, who trained the most recent Triple Crown winner, Justify, in 2018, saddled his first Triple Crown race runner since 2021.

He'd been suspended for a medication violation that disqualified Medina Spirit from his 2021 Kentucky Derby victory. But it was far from a celebratory day after the death of Havnameltdown again put horse safety in racing under scrutiny. — AFP

## China claim record Sudirman Cup badminton title

**SUZHOU:** China claimed a record 13th Sudirman Cup title on Sunday, defeating South Korea on home soil at the first major sporting event in the country since the lifting of pandemic restrictions. Cheered on by a raucous crowd brandishing red and white thundersticks and loud horns in the eastern city of Suzhou, China made short work of the Korean side, beating them 3-0.

## National Treasure gives Bob Baffert Preakness win

**WASHINGTON:** National Treasure fought off Blazing Sevens in the final strides to win the Preakness Stakes on Saturday, taking trainer Bob Baffert from grief to glory hours after one of his horses was euthanized. Baffert claimed his eighth Preakness win, breaking a tie with 19th-century trainer Robert Wyndham Walden for most by a trainer, but that seemed far from his mind as he contemplated the day's earlier grim events in the 148th running of the middle jewel in US flat racing's Triple Crown.

Baffert-trained Havnameltdown suffered a catastrophic front left leg injury during the sixth race

of the day and had to be euthanized on the track at Pimlico Race Course in Baltimore. Jockey Luis Saez was thrown when the horse stumbled forward and taken to hospital with leg pain, but was released after X-rays were negative.

"We've been totally wiped out after that horse got hurt," Baffert said of his team, that still had to prepare National Treasure for the 1 1/16-mile Preakness. "There's so many responsibilities a trainer has: employees, horses, jockey safety," Baffert said, his voice breaking in a post-race television interview. "And then to win this... losing that horse today really hurt."

Baffert paid tribute to his staff for making sure National Treasure got his chance. "This horse deserved it," he said. And he was delighted for jockey John Velazquez, who filled a hole in his Hall of Fame resume with a first Preakness win to go with three Kentucky Derby victories and two Belmont Stakes triumphs.

"All the blessings that I have and all the success

## Koepka turns boos to roars in grabbing PGA lead at rainy Oak Hill

**ROCHESTER:** Four-time major winner Brooks Koepka shrugged off rain-soaked conditions and boos from spectators Saturday to fire a second straight four-under par 66 and grab a one-stroke lead at the PGA Championship.

Koepka, among US stars who jumped to the Saudi-financed LIV Golf League from the PGA Tour, sank a 47-foot putt at the par-4 17th hole for his fifth birdie to finish on six-under 204 at soggy Oak Hill. "I putted pretty well and I was pretty happy with my game," Koepka said. "It was tough with the rain, moisture on the greens slowing them up. But I felt like I was a lot more aggressive than I was the two previous days on the greens."

That was good enough for a one-stroke ahead over Norway's Viktor Hovland and Canadian Corey Conners, with LIV's Bryson DeChambeau fourth on 207. All three shot 70 on Saturday. Koepka and DeChambeau, high-profile players in the PGA Tour-LIV split, were booed by the crowd when they were introduced on the first tee. But both turned jeers into roars with spectacular shotmaking.

"I love when the fans are on you, cheering for you, or giving you crap if you screw up," Koepka said. "That's the beauty of it. I want that atmosphere." After a day-long deluge, Koepka birdied the par-5 fourth and par-3 fifth, took his lone bogey at seven, then sank birdie putts of 15 feet at 12 and 18 feet at the par-5 13th before his penultimate-hole bomb.

Koepka could join Tiger Woods and LIV's Phil Mickelson as the only players since 1990 to win five majors by capturing a third career PGA crown. Hovland, ranked 11th, was set to share the lead in quest of his first major title but found a greenside bunker and made bogey at 18.

"I'm playing really solid tee to green, giving myself a lot of easy pars," Hovland said. "Haven't quite made enough putts to get the most out of my game. Hopefully that will change tomorrow." In his slog across the water-logged layout, Conners made clutch par saves and birdie putts from inside four feet at the eighth and nine feet at the par-3 15th, but was undone by a double bogey six at 16.

"It was a really challenging day with the conditions," Conners said. "I kept it out of trouble and played a lot of good shots." Conners, ranked 29th, is trying to join 2003 Masters winner Mike Weir as his homeland's only men's major champions. He won last month's PGA Tour Texas Open and had his best major finish, a share of sixth, at last year's Masters. DeChambeau was two-over on the day after a bogey at 13 but nearly drove the 14th green to set up a birdie and made an eight-foot birdie putt at 15.

He wasn't thrown off by his poor reception at the start. "I don't care. It's not a big deal," DeChambeau said. "They're going to do that no matter what. I appreciate the fans, them doing that to me. I've got no problem, either way. It still was fun today."

Justin Rose, the 2013 US Open champion trying to become the first Englishman to win the PGA Championship since Jim Barnes in 1916 and 1919, shot 69 to share fifth with second-ranked American Scottie Scheffler on 208, four adrift.

Scheffler, last year's Masters champion, would overtake Jon Rahm atop the world rankings with a victory. He could become the first man to win the PGA and Players Championship in the same year since Hal Sutton in 1983.

### McIlroy five back

Four-time major winner Rory McIlroy fired a 69 to stand seventh on 209 with five birdies and four bogeys in a roller-coaster round. "It hasn't been great. I can play a lot better," said the world number three from Northern Ireland, who seeks his first major title since 2014.

"It's just tough to play in. It's tough to execute in those sort of conditions." Rahm, last month's Masters winner, fired a 72 to join Jordan Spieth on 216. Three-time major winner Spieth, who hoped to complete a career Grand Slam with a victory, fired a 71, his low round this week. — AFP