

Chennai secure fifth IPL crown

Super Kings overwhelm Titans; Dhoni eyes return next year



AHMEDABAD: Chennai Super Kings' players celebrate their win at the end of the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 final cricket match between Gujarat Titans and Chennai Super Kings on May 30, 2023. — AFP

AHMEDABAD: Indian cricket superstar MS Dhoni said he will look to return for the next IPL season after he led Chennai Super Kings to a record-equalling fifth title over Gujarat Titans in what many believed to be his last match. Ravindra Jadeja hit a six and four off the final two balls as Chennai chased down their revised target of 171 in 15 overs with five wickets to spare in a rain-hit final which went past 1.30 am local time Tuesday on a reserve day in Ahmedabad following a washout on Sunday.

New Zealand's Devon Conway led the chase with his 25-ball 47 before cameos from Ajinkya Rahane (27) and Shivam Dube, who hit an unbeaten 32, set the stage for Jadeja's heroics. Needing 13 off the final over, Mohit Sharma bowled four good balls before Jadeja hit the winning runs to trigger wild celebrations at the world's biggest cricket stadium.

"This is the best time to announce my retirement. But the amount of love I have received all over. The easy thing would be to walk away from here, but the harder thing would be working hard for nine months and try to play another IPL," said the 41-year-old Dhoni. "It would be a gift from me, won't be easy on the body. You do get emotional, the first game at CSK everyone was chanting my name. My eyes were full of water, I needed to take some time off in the dugout."

Chennai won the title for the fifth time to go level with Mumbai Indians. Dhoni kept attracting huge crowds across venues this season and over 80,000 fans cheered the veteran, who had recently said he would take a call on his future later this year, in the final. Playing his 250th IPL match, Dhoni got out for a first-ball duck as he went back to a stunned silence,

but he had the last laugh in his 10th appearance in the final as Chennai captain.

Ambati Rayudu also hit a key 19 off eight balls in his last match after he announced his retirement ahead of the final. Rain forced players off the ground when Chennai were four without loss after three balls of their innings. The downpour lasted for about 15 minutes but covers came off from one of the pitches which got damp and the groundstaff worked for over two hours to get the field ready for play. Sai Sudharsan smashed 96 off 47 balls to guide Gujarat, a team which won the crown in their debut season last year in the T20 competition and topped the table in this edition, to 214-4. "I think we tick a lot of boxes as a team," said captain Hardik Pandya.

"We play with a lot of heart, really proud of the way we kept fighting. We have a motto - we win together,

we lose together." In-form Gujarat opener Shubman Gill hit a 20-ball 39 and was named most valuable player, earning the orange cap as the leading batsman with 890 runs. Gujarat pace spearhead Mohammed Shami got the purple cap as the leading bowler for his 28 wickets with teammates Sharma and Afghanistan's Rashid Khan one behind on 27 each.

Gill, fresh from his third century this season, was dropped on three when Deepak Chahar spilled an easy catch off fast bowler Tushar Deshpande. The opener smashed Deshpande for three straight boundaries in the next over and kept up the attack with regular hits to the fence before Dhoni's lightning quick glove work sent back the batsman, stumped off Jadeja. Fellow opener Wriddhiman Saha made 54 and put on 64 runs with Sudharsan, who took charge after his partner's departure. — AFP

No tickets please: Superhero Dhoni

AHMEDABAD: MS Dhoni, who led Chennai Super Kings to a record-equalling fifth IPL title on Monday, could have spent his life inspecting tickets on Indian Railways if he had listened to his father. Instead he followed his dream and became one of his cricket-crazy country's most beloved players, second only in adulation to the "little master" Sachin Tendulkar. In a career spanning two decades, he was India's most successful skipper and even after retiring from international cricket in 2020 has had a glorious Indian summer still playing the IPL.

His journey, which was made into a Bollywood biopic, began in a cramped one-bedroom government flat in the eastern city of Ranchi provided by his pump operator father's employer. As a boy Dhoni was passionate about sport and honed his skills playing tennis-ball cricket and borrowing bats and other kit from friends. On his father's insistence, he took a job at Indian Railways but the hectic routine of juggling between collecting tickets and playing cricket finally saw him break free.

In 2004, he made his India debut and in 2007, took over from Rahul Dravid as India's one-day captain, the same year winning the inaugural Twenty20 World Cup in South Africa. In 2008, he became Test captain and won two home series against Australia, and in 2011 famously sealed winning the 50-over World Cup in India with a sumptuous six. Along the way - with constant hairstyle changes, from shaggy to spiky to shaved - numerous endorsements saw Dhoni become one of world sport's best-paid athletes, earning an estimated \$31 million in 2015.

'No CSK without Dhoni'

But he stunned the cricket world by quitting the five-day format in 2014 after finishing with 27 wins from 60 Tests as skipper. He stepped down from the limited-overs captaincy in 2017 on the pretext of preparing Virat Kohli as leader, but continued to play a big part in the team's decision-making process. His last appearance for India was in their semi-final loss to New Zealand in the 2019 ODI World Cup.

He then briefly served with an army reserve unit,



AHMEDABAD: Chennai Super Kings captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni (right) and Gujarat Titans counterpart Hardik Pandya laugh at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. — AFP

where he is an honorary lieutenant colonel, before announcing his international retirement. But he didn't quit the IPL, using his unrivalled tactical nous and experience to guide the franchise, which he has captained since the league began in 2008, to 10 finals and now five victories. "There is no CSK without Dhoni and there is no Dhoni without CSK," N Srinivasan, the industrialist who owns the franchise, famously said after the previous triumph in 2021.

'Captain cool'

Hard-hitting and always unruffled, Dhoni has many nicknames including "Captain Cool" and "Thala", which means "leader" in Tamil, the language of Chennai. Fans at the IPL go wild when he strides out to bat and cheer every shot - and not just those of Chennai but of all the other franchises. The excitement has been heightened this year because of the expectation that - at 41, with a dodgy knee and no longer the force he was with the bat - this season might be Dhoni's last. But he has kept fans guessing, saying last week that he would take until the auctions for the 2024 IPL in December to make his final decision. "I will always be there for CSK whether in playing form or sitting somewhere," he said. "I don't really know. But frankly, it takes a heavy toll." — AFP

Swiatek eyes history; Djokovic defiant in Kosovo row

PARIS: Iga Swiatek begins her bid to become the first woman in 16 years to successfully defend the French Open title on Tuesday as Novak Djokovic remained defiant after controversially weighing in on the Kosovo crisis. World number one Swiatek, a two-time champion in Paris, faces Moldovan-born Cristina Bucsa of Spain as she looks to emulate Justine Henin, the last back-to-back women's winner at Roland Garros in 2007. The 21-year-old Pole arrives in Paris shrugging off a thigh injury suffered in Rome.

"Luckily nothing serious happened. I'll be good for my first round. That's the most important thing for me," she said. Also getting underway is world number two Daniil Medvedev who was buoyed by clinching his first ever clay court title at the prestigious Italian Open last week. It was also his fifth trophy of 2023. The Russian has endured a bitter-sweet relationship with the French Open, losing in the first round in his first four visits. He ended that streak with a run to the quarter-finals in 2021.

The eccentric Medvedev faces former US Open junior champion Thiago Seyboth Wild, a Brazilian ranked 172 and who had to play the qualifiers. Meanwhile, Djokovic insisted he does not fear being punished for his potentially explosive "Kosovo is the heart of Serbia" message he scribbled on a courtside TV camera on Monday amid fresh violence in Kosovo.

The Belgrade-born superstar, chasing a record 23rd Grand Slam title in Paris, wrote the message in Serbian after his opening round victory over Aleksandar Kovacevic on the showpiece Philippe Chatrier Court. "Kosovo is our cradle, our stronghold, centre of the most important things for our country," 36-year-old Djokovic told Serb media. His comments came after NATO-led peacekeepers dispersed Serb protesters who clashed with police in northern Kosovo to demand the removal of recently elected Albanian mayors. Around 30 soldiers were injured during the clashes, along with over 50 demonstrators.



Poland's Iga Swiatek

'I have no remorse'

Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008. However, Serbs in Kosovo remain largely loyal to Belgrade, especially in the north, where they make up a majority and reject every move by Pristina to consolidate its control over the region. "As a public figure but also a son of a man who was born in Kosovo I feel additional responsibility to express my support to our people and Serbia as a whole," said Djokovic. "I hear that there were many complaints on social media and from international journalists, saying someone would punish me but I have no remorse and would do it again as my stance is clear."

"But I am against war, violence and conflict of any kind and I have always publicly shown that." Djokovic was hailed in his native Serbia. "A man of his word and integrity. He proved to be one many times over, and repeated it in Paris by doing something that raced the hearts of all Serbs," commented the Alo tabloid newspaper. On the court at Roland Garros early Tuesday, 16-year-old qualifier Mirra Andreeva marked her Grand Slam debut with a 56-minute 6-2, 6-1 victory over Alison Riske-Amritraj of the United States.

Andreeva, the youngest player in the tournament, has reached 143 in the world from 312 in April and hit the headlines at the Madrid Open earlier this month where she reached the last 16. Later, fourth seed Casper Ruud, the runner-up to Rafael Nadal last year, faces Swedish qualifier Elias Ymer while sixth-ranked Holger Rune, a quarter-finalist on his debut in 2022, tackles Christopher Eubanks of the United States. Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina, the fourth seed, faces Czech teenager Brenda Fruhvirtova with 2022 runner-up Coco Gauff taking on Rebecca Masarova of Spain. — AFP