

IPL 17: Four men, four narratives and a Cup on the horizon

STATE TIMES NEWS
NEW DELHI: The never-ending speculation surrounding Mahendra Singh Dhoni's retirement, Virat Kohli's 16-year-itch, the second chance that life has offered Rishabh Pant and Rohit Sharma's bleeding heart will make for intriguing sub-plots in the annual carnival called the Indian Premier League starting on Friday.

Known to do the unexpected, Dhoni stepped down as captain on the eve of the IPL opener against Royal Challengers Bengaluru, handing over the reins to Rituraj Gaikwad, a man he mentored for the leadership role.

But the 42-year-old will once again smile wryly when asked if it's his last year.

His heir apparent Pant, literally back from the brink after a life-threatening accident, will be desperate to show the world that he can still hit those one-handed sixes with elan.

In between, he could also be slipping in those quotable quotes behind the stumps that are considered broadcast gold.

Rohit will be the last person to show his scars hidden behind the typical 'Mumbaiya' nonchalance as he gets down to enjoying his evening dates at the Wankhede albeit without the captain's title. The partisan crowd would nonetheless look forward to those pulled sixes.

As for King Kohli, he would be in pursuit of that elusive jewel in his crown. By his own admission, he has been longing for a big title and his own passionate approach to the game would be a key factor in deciding whether the RCB men manage to emulate the women this year.

A bigger prize is also at stake for at least 10 to 12 other players, who will be vying for eight slots in the New York-bound flight that will take off at the end of May for the T20 World Cup in the USA and the Caribbean.

There will be unbelievable comebacks by some, a few new stars will emerge, there will also be those usual rags to riches stories and all of it could unfold in a matter of four minutes, the time it takes to deliver one over.

Just like overnight stars, the merciless social media will find villains too.

The likes of Pat Cummins (SRH) and Mitchell Starc (KKR), who raked in big money during the auction, will shoulder a massive burden of expectations through the season.

For every six that they concede at the death or each yorker that turns into a full toss, the two will be reminded of salaries which are north of USD two million.

Away from the money talk and purely on cricketing prowess, CSK would be the favourites for a sixth IPL title with a squad that has all bases covered.

Rachin Ravindra was a breakout World Cup star and now he has the chance of becoming a T20 superstar.

Deepak Chahar, the much-maligned seamer who is often accused of making CSK his first priority, would like his wrists to do the talking for him and with new captain Rituraj Gaikwad, Moeen Ali, and Ravindra Jadeja in the mix, anything can happen.

And how can one forget

Dhoni, the smiling assassin. All it takes is one six in T20 cricket and Dhoni's love affair with the maximum is eternal.

For Mumbai Indians, it has been a story of all or nothing.

Five titles till 2020 and three years of lull forced them to change a captain, who can still whip up crazy sentiments.

It will be a tightrope walk for Hardik Pandya the leader.

For other captains, they need to win the on-field games but Pandya needs to win the dressing room too. There will be seniors with bruised egos, knowing that a shot at leadership has bypassed them. They could well be difficult to handle.

If he wins that dressing room, half of his battle will be won as MI do have a solid batting line-up even if the bowling looks weak.

For RCB, the greatest inspiration could be the women's team that gave the men a crash course on how to play calmly at the business end where Kohli and Co. have faltered.

Kohli wouldn't mind 200 runs less but he would badly want that trophy. Dhoni has laid his hands on it five times, so has Rohit Sharma.

But what would rankle Kohli is the fact that even KKR has won it twice under his bete noire Gautam Gambhir.

However, Kohli alone cannot win it. The Dinesh Karthik, the Faf du Plessis, the Glenn

Maxwells and likes of Akash Deep need to believe that 'E saala Cup Naam de' (This time Cup is Ours).

Gambhir, who is now back in the KKR camp, would be as ambitious if not more.

No one has forgotten the ugly war of words that broke out between him and Kohli. In his familiar KKR dugout, Gambhir the coach could make a difference.

A middle-order comprising Shreyas Iyer, Nitish Rana, Rinku Singh and Andre Russell can send shivers down any bowling attack's spine. And then comes Starc, who would need to justify his nearly Rs 25 crore deal.

The team that Gambhir quit, Lucknow Super Giants has a new coach in Justin Langer and it would like to do better than Play-offs this time but with a bowling attack that doesn't exactly inspire confidence.

Ditto for Delhi Capitals although Pant's comeback could well be the most emotionally charged story of this IPL.

Gujarat Titans, the team of the last two seasons, might not make it this time with no Pandya or Mohammed Shami, who is out injured, in its line-up.

Rajasthan Royals with Yashasvi Jaiswal, Sanju Samson, Dhruv Jurel and Jos Buttler will be serious contenders.

Sunrisers Hyderabad, despite having Pat Cummins as captain, and Shikhar Dhawan's Punjab Kings are not expected to go the distance.

Powerlifters Ashok, Parmjeet qualify for Paris Paralympics

STATE TIMES NEWS
NEW DELHI: Asian Games bronze medalist Ashok and Parmjeet Kumar qualified for the Paris Paralympics by winning a silver medal each at the Para Powerlifting World Cup in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt on Thursday.

Competing in the 41kg category, Manpreet Kaur earned a bronze medal after lifting 86kg.

In a display of sheer strength and determination, Ashok lifted an impressive 192kg and 196kg respectively, which gave him the silver medal.

After his second attempt was declared a 'no lift', he cleared 196kg in his third.



In the fiercely-contested 49kg category, Parmjeet lifted 160kg and 166kg in his first two attempts and narrowly missed out on the gold. Ashok said after his effort, "To participate in the Paralympics is the dream of every para athlete, and I am elated to have taken a significant step towards realising that dream. I am determined to achieve greatness and bring glory to my country."

Mithun Manhas, Nikhil Chopra, junior selector Krishan Mohan in race to become BCCI selector

STATE TIMES NEWS
NEW DELHI: Former India spinner Nikhil Chopra, Delhi veteran Mithun Manhas and current junior selector Krishan Mohan are in the race to become a BCCI selector for the senior national team.

The BCCI had invited the applications for the single position in the five-man selection panel back in January.

Currently, West Zone is represented by two men Salil Ankola and chairman Ajit Agarkar. Ankola is likely to make way for a selector from North Zone, which is not represented in the panel following the resignation of Chetan Sharma.

Former Punjab cricketer Mohan, who is part of the junior selection panel since September 2021, is among the aspirants who have applied for the job.

Former India wicketkeeper Ajay Ratna has also thrown his hat into the ring.

The application deadline was January 25 but with the IPL starting Friday, the board

still has enough time to fill the vacancy. The Cricket Advisory Committee headed by Ashok Malhotra is expected to interview the shortlisted candidates in the near future.

"There are a few strong candidates who are in the race and they include Mithun, Chopra and Mohan," said a BCCI source.

Mithun played as many 157 first class games for Delhi and was a regular in the IPL form 2010 to 2014. Recently, R Ashwin spoke glowingly about Mithun's special abilities with the bat ahead of his 100th Test in Dharamsala.

Ratna, a level 3 coach, was with the A team on the tour of South Africa last year.

Chopra, who played one Tests and 39 ODIs for India, is now a well known commentator.

The applicant should have played either 7 Tests or 30 first-class matches. A candidate with experience of 10 ODIs or 20 first-class matches will also be considered.

Sharath Kamal to be India's flag bearer, Mary Kom appointed chef de mission for Paris Games

STATE TIMES NEWS
NEW DELHI: Veteran table tennis player and reigning CWG champion Sharath Kamal will be India's flag bearer at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games while legendary boxer MC Mary Kom was on Thursday appointed the chef de mission of the country's contingent.

The 41-year-old table tennis player symbolises "the unity and spirit of our contingent as they compete on the Olympic stage", the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) said in a statement while making the announcement.

"It has been an unbelievable three weeks. From not even sure of Olympic berth to playing the way I did in Singapore last week, jumping 54 spots in the rankings to being named India's flag bearer," Kamal told PTI. "It is the biggest honour and fairytale stuff considering it is going to be my fifth and last Olympics. Also, not many TT players have got that honour, globally. I just got a call from IOA and I could not believe it."

Kamal was India's flag bearer at the closing ceremony of 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games, where he won three gold medals. Recently, the Indian men's and women's



team had qualified for the team events of Olympics for the first time by the virtue of their rankings.

Six-time World Champion Mary Kom, bronze medalist at the 2012 London Olympics, will be assisted by luger Shiva Keshavan, who has been appointed the deputy chef de mission.

"Mary Kom's unparalleled dedication to sports and inspiring journey makes her a natural choice to guide and mentor our athletes at the Olympics," IOA said.

"Keshavan, a former Olympian in luge, brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to support the team's management and coordination efforts."

Olympic bronze medalist in rifle shooting Gagan Narang will oversee India's operations at the shooting range, which is very far from the main venues.

World Aquatics boss in India, Swimming Federation top brass clueless

STATE TIMES NEWS
NEW DELHI: India has huge potential but the lack of leadership and proper infrastructure is impeding the country's swimmers from achieving Olympic glory, said World Aquatics (WA) president Husain Al Musallam on Thursday.

Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) interim chief Randhir Singh also criticised the swimming scenario in the country, saying as a sport it has lagged behind other Olympic disciplines.

The comments were made at an event where no high-ranking Swimming Federation of India (SFI) official was present, leaving SFI secretary-general Monal Chokshi "very surprised".

"I am very surprised (by the development)," Chokshi, when asked if he was invited for the meet, told PTI.

Pointing out several deficiencies in India's aquatics system, Al Musallam, who also met Indian Olympic Association (IOA) chief PT Usha here, said, "From the sport I come from as Water Aquatics president, I believe India has a huge

potential to be at the podium at the Olympic Games and the World Championships (in swimming)."

"But (they) need a lot to work on, not just the infrastructure but to change the methods of training, taking care of athletes, high-level competition, organisation at the national level and also to take the best from outside... World Aquatics needs India to be one of the top nations in the world."

"I am not far away from the Indian sport and the Indian Olympic movement. But I can't see good leadership, good management. India deserves a lot for the youth, the athletes and you have a good potential to be one of the top nations in the world."

Echoing similar views, Singh said, "swimming is a sport in our country which is lagging behind many sports we have taken up."

"Shooting and archery are doing well; wrestling and boxing all are doing good. Only in swimming we are not going anywhere. Some proper development should be done and that's one of the reasons he (Al Musallam) is here."



However, SFI secretary-general Chokshi was clueless about the visit of the WA president.

"Al Musallam must have come to India on Randhir Singh's invitation. They are in the OCA together," he said.

While Al Musallam is the OCA director general as well, Randhir is its interim chief.

"We have the World Aquatics, Asian (swimming) federation and OCA elections happening, so there would be some meetings slotted. Officially, they had not scheduled any discussion with SFI," said Chokshi.

Asked when the talk largely centered around swimming, shouldn't SFI officials have been invited, he said, "Al Musallam has come for a meeting with Randhir Singh and

with the IOA president in context to their personal whatever agendas they may have.

"But it is right that if he is going to address issues related to swimming, then SFI should have been there. Still, I don't know what the agenda was. Was there an official conference related to swimming?"

Reminded that he spoke mostly on swimming, Chokshi said, "Since he is the swimming president, he will speak on swimming only."

The WA president asked India to "show its potential" in organising international competitions.

"India, in my opinion, with a new look in sport and new look in the dynamic economy should aim to also organise some international event with latest technology, cost-effective and add positive impact on society."

"I would like to ask you, you have a good potential and you need to show this potential," added Al Musallam.

The SFI has been in advanced talks with the highest level authorities in World Aquatics for a FINA development centre accreditation for the modern Aquatic Complex

in Odisha and has even extended invitations to Al Musallam and the international body's technical team to visit the facility.

"One of the proposals we put on the table, since a long time ago, is to create high-level training centres for Indian athletes in aquatics, maybe diving, maybe swimming. Because I believe it's scattered all around India, but to get the top athletes in one place, we provide them with education that will make a big difference," Al Musallam said.

"We have a special team that tracks the day-to-day progress of athletes. This is what we can offer and we are committed to do that. Because, for us, India is important to be there, don't forget that aquatics is the biggest in the Olympic Games."

The SFI recently recruited Chris Martin, a member of the World Aquatics Coaches certification curriculum cell.

"We have been working closely with World Aquatics. We have brought in Mr Martin as a full-time program director to focus on junior development and coaches upskilling," Chokshi said.

LS polls: Training session on distribution, utilisation of postal ballots held

STATE TIMES NEWS
KISHTWAR: District Election Officer Kishtwar, led by District Election Officer, Dr. Devansh Yadav on Thursday organised a pivotal training session at conference hall of DC Office Complex here for the upcoming General Lok Sabha Elections 2024.

The session focused on efficient distribution and utilisation of postal ballots to ensure smooth electoral conduct.

The training session was attended by Assistant

Officers (AROs) from all three Constituent Assemblies of Kishtwar district, along with Booth Level Officers and Supervisors, who were briefed about the importance of enabling voting rights for senior citizens aged above 85 years and Persons with Disabilities (PwD).

Master Trainer, Riyaz Ahmed Butt explained the procedures for distributing and filling postal ballots, emphasising inclusivity and accessibility in the electoral process.

Postal ballots play a crucial role in enabling eligible voters, especially those unable to visit polling stations in person, to participate in elections. This mechanism aids individuals facing mobility challenges, those away from their home constituencies and those engaged in essential services on Election Day.

During the session, Supervisors and BLOs were provided with Form 12-D, a crucial document for the postal ballot process. They were tasked

with ensuring seamless distribution of postal ballots to eligible elderly and differently-abled voters.

It was reiterated that individuals aged 85 years and above, as well as those with over 40% disability, are eligible to exercise their voting rights through postal ballots in the forthcoming Lok Sabha election scheduled for April 19.

BLOs were further instructed to distribute the requisite forms to elderly and differently-abled individuals who prefer to cast their votes from their residences, ensuring their active participation in the democratic process.

SSP Kishtwar reviews crime/security scenario, inspects lodgements centres of incoming troops for parliamentary elections-2024

STATE TIMES NEWS
KISHTWAR: SSP Kishtwar, Abdul Qayoom, accompanied by Dy. SP Hqrs Dr. Ishan Gupta, visited Jawalapur to conduct a comprehensive review of the crime and security situation in the area. During the visit, conducted inspections of PP Jawalapur and issued necessary directions to the officers and officials in preparation for the upcoming Parliamentary Elections-2024.

Subsequently, SSP Kishtwar chaired a Police Public Meeting at Jawalapur, which was attended by local residents, youths, and dignitaries of the area. Participants were given the opportunity to raise various



SSP Kishtwar, Abdul Qayoom interacting with people.

issues, ranging from security concerns to civil administration matters. The officers listened to their grievances attentively and assured them that police-related issues would be prioritized, while concerns related to civil administration would be promptly addressed by the concerned departments.

Emphasizing the impor-

tance of community vigilance in combating drug addiction, alcoholism, and anti-national activities, SSP Kishtwar urged citizens to remain alert and report any suspicious behavior.

Expressing gratitude for the active participation and valuable suggestions received, SSP Kishtwar thanked the community

members for their support and cooperation. The participants applauded the efforts of Kishtwar Police in fostering dialogue and collaboration between law enforcement and the public, advocating for the continuation of such initiatives in the future.

Following the PCPG meeting, SSP Kishtwar and his team conducted thorough inspections of CAPF accommodations and polling stations, lodgement centres in the area, ensuring readiness and security preparedness.

District Police Kishtwar remains committed to strengthening its ties with the community and upholding its duty to ensure the safety and security of all citizens.

DEO dwells on MCC guidelines

STATE TIMES NEWS
REASI: District Election Officer, Reasi Vishesh Mahajan on Thursday held a press conference at DC Office here to inform public about the imposition of Model Code of Conduct and guidelines set by the Election Commission of India ahead of Lok Sabha General Elections 2024.

Addressing the media, the DEO provided a comprehensive overview of the district, including details on polling stations, voters and constituencies. He

assured that all necessary facilities have been arranged at each polling station to ensure a smooth and efficient voting process.

The DEO also spoke about the ongoing implementation of Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) activities across the district to increase voter awareness and participation. Additionally, he mentioned the establishment of control rooms and complaint cells to promptly

address any concerns or grievances related to the electoral process.

Reiterating the administration's commitment to conducting free, fair and transparent elections in Reasi district, the DEO urged voters to come out in large numbers to vote on April 26.

ADC, Kulbhushan Khajuria; ACR, Anshumali Sharma; Dy. DEO Rakesh Kumar; DIO (Information) Nasir Ahmed; Tehsildar Reasi and BDOs were also present on the occasion.

Distt Admin Kathua establishes eco-friendly polling station

STATE TIMES NEWS
KATHUA: District Election Office, Kathua, spearheaded by District Electoral Officer, Dr. Rakesh Minhas, on Thursday organised SVEEP event in collaboration with forest department here.

During the event, an eco-friendly polling station was inaugurated in the border sub-division Hiranagar of

district, ahead of the Lok Sabha Elections 2024, aligning with the SVEEP objective of sensitising voters about eco-friendly measures and encouraging them to exercise their right to vote.

The green polling booth situated near the Indo-Pak international border at Government Higher Secondary School, Chakda, showcases a blend of natu-

ral elements and eco-friendly materials.

Divisional Forest Officer, Social Forestry Kathua, Ashok Kalsi, highlighted the features of the eco-friendly polling station, ensuring a green and sustainable polling environment for upcoming polls.

The eco-friendly green model polling station aims to attract voters and ensure maximum electoral

participation while promoting eco-friendly practices among voters and polling officials.

This initiative encourages voters to exercise their right to vote while adopting innovative eco-friendly measures, contributing to a litter-free electoral process and underlining efforts toward environmental safety on International Day of Forests.

Various ornamental and fruit saplings were distributed among participants followed by a plantation drive at GHSS Chakda.

The Kathua district administration urges stakeholders and citizens to visit and experience the eco-friendly green model polling station, promoting a collective commitment to sustainable practices and responsible citizenship.