

India's T20 WC Squad: No fresh faces likely; Shivam vs Rinku, Gill vs Jaiswal shootout possible

NEW DELHI, APR 17: The national selection committee is unlikely to blood any rookie IPL performer during the upcoming T20 World Cup in the Americas but a couple of tried-and-tested faces might have to brace up for disappointment when the squad is finalised by the end of this month.

With the ICC making it mandatory to announce the provisional 15-member squad by May 1 cut-off date, Ajit Agarkar and his colleagues have some straight-forward choices to make if every member of the team is fit.

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date, Ajit Agarkar and his colleagues have some straight-forward choices to make if every member of the team is fit.

The other close call could be for the second wicketkeeper's slot where Sanju Samson has competition from Jitesh Sharma, KL Rahul and Ishan Kishan.

Rahul and Kishan bat at the top of the order, and they haven't tried batting in the middle order in this IPL so far, which makes it difficult for the selectors to analyse their impact down the order.

Although Hardik Pandya's bowling fitness remains a concern, there is no immediate doubt on his

selection. Much like him, Virat Kohli's inclusion is also a formality.

The other automatic selections are skipper Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, Ravindra Jadeja, Rishabh Pant, Arshdeep Singh, Mohammed Siraj and Kuldeep Yadav. These 10 names, if fit, will definitely be on the flight across the Atlantic.

It is understood that Siraj is being rested by RCB as he has been playing constantly and needed workload management.

In the choice between Gill and Jaiswal, the former has scored more runs but in case of Jaiswal, who has been a big find for In-

dian cricket, the selection committee might not give up easily on him merely for a few low IPL scores.

Also, being the only left-hander in inside the top four is a novelty and in a largely unidimensional top order.

However, if Gill piles up enough runs, it will be a difficult choice unless the selectors accommodate both and drop one among Shivam and Rinku from the 15.

The reserve spinner's slot could also be a three-way battle between Axar Patel, a handy batter apart from being an accurate left-arm spinner, Yuzvendra Chahal, who is yet to play a single T20 World Cup match in his nine-year international career, and Ravi Bishnoi, who plays for Lucknow Super Giants.

While Chahal is head and shoulders above the other two in terms of bowling skills, his repeated omissions from important squads leaves a big question mark about his inclusion showpiece in June.

Bhushan's aide Sanjay Singh was elected the new president of the WFI months after the former had resigned from the top job in Indian wrestling.

The Anurag Thakur-led Sports Ministry had suspended the Sanjay-led WFI Executive Committee shortly after the elections were conducted on 21 Dec, putting an ad-hoc body appointed by the IOA in charge.

The Sports Ministry, however, recently put the WFI back in charge of the sport in the country following pressure from United World Wrestling, the body in charge of running the sport at a global level.

Rohit and Ishan Kishan's form thus become crucial for Mumbai Indians, for whom Suryakumar Yadav has produced mixed results.

TEAMS (FROM):
PUNJAB KINGS: Shikhar Dhawan ©, Matthew Short, Prabhsimran Singh, Jitesh Sharma, Sikandar Raza, Rishi Dhawan, Liam Livingstone, Atharva Taide, Arshdeep Singh, Nathan Ellis, Sam Curran, Kagiso Rabada, Harpreet Brar, Rahul Chahar, Harpreet Bhatia, Vidwath Kaverappa, Shivam Singh, Harshal Patel, Chris Woakes, Ashutosh Sharma, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, Shashank Singh, Tanay Thyagarajan, Prince Choudhary, Rilee Rossouw.

MUMBAI INDIANS: Hardik Pandya ©, Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Dewald Brevis, Jasprit Bumrah, Piyush Chawla, Gerald Coetzee, Tim David, Shreyas Gopal, Ishan Kishan (wk), Anshul Kamboj, Kumar Kartikeya, Akash Madhwal, Kwen Maphaka, Mohammad Nabi, Shams Mulani, Naman Dhir, Shivalik Sharma, Romario Shepherd, Arjun Tendulkar, Nuwan Thushara, Tilak Varma, Harvik Desai, Nehal Wadhwa, Luke Wood.

Barcelona Open: Nadal crashes out after second round loss to De Minaur

NEW DELHI, APR 17: Rafael Nadal suffered his first defeat on his return to tennis after injury as he fell 7-5, 6-1 against Alex de Minaur on Wednesday in the Barcelona Open second round.

The 22-time Grand Slam title winner, back on court this week after three months on the sidelines, battled well but eventually crumbled against the hard-working world number 11 from Australia.

Nadal, 37, who missed virtually all of the 2023 season, is hoping to compete at the French Open in May where he is the record 14-time champion.

The Spaniard, who has won the Barcelona clay-court title on 12 occa-



sions, had eased past Flavio Cobolli on Tuesday in his first ATP Tour match since January but said he was not a favourite against De Minaur who has now won his last two clashes against the former world number one.

It proved a far tougher challenge and despite showing flashes of his supreme quality on the

court named after him, Nadal came up short in what he believes is his final appearance at the tournament.

The Australian broke in the first game and tested Nadal with a series of brilliant drop shots which Nadal could not reach.

However, Nadal hit back with a break of his own in the sixth game and consolidated with a

fizzing backhand for a 4-3 lead.

De Minaur broke to love to take a 6-5 lead as Nadal went wide and sealed the first set when the Spaniard pushed a shot into the net, winning the final 10 points as Nadal started to struggle.

The 25-year-old Australian broke for a 2-1 lead in the second set when Nadal could not return a powerful passing shot, and secured another break for 4-1. De Minaur wrapped up his emphatic second-set performance with a third break when Nadal went long.

Monte Carlo Masters champion Stefanos Tsitsipas faces Sebastian Ofner later Wednesday in the second round.

Manika Batra, Sreeja Akula make group stage exits from ITTF World Cup

NEW DELHI, APR 17: Star Indian table tennis player Manika Batra and her compatriot Sreeja Akula exited in the second-round group stage after losing against China's Wang Manyu and defending champion Chen Meng respectively at the ITTF World Cup in Galaxy Arena in Macau on Wednesday. World no. 39 Sreeja lost 1-3 (4-11 4-11 15-13 2-11) to reigning Olympic champion and



world no. 4 Meng of China and finished second in Group 4.

Manika also made an

exit finishing second after losing 0-4 (6-11 4-11 9-11 4-11) against world no. 2 Manyu of China.

Both the Indian players had earlier won their respective first-round group stage matches on Tuesday.

There are sixteen groups in each of the men's and women's singles competition.

Group stage matches consists of four games, with the ratio of wins and losses determining the final rankings that will further help them to book a berth for the knockout rounds.

Olympic medallist Sakshi Malik included in Time's '100 Most Influential People' of 2024

NEW DELHI, APR 17: Olympic medal-winning Indian wrestler Sakshi Malik was on Wednesday included in Time magazine's '100 Most Influential People' of 2024.

Malik, who had won bronze in the the 2016 Rio Olympics, finds her name in the elite list for waging a relentless battle against former Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, who had been accused of sexually harassing several female athletes.

"Proud to be included in the 2024 #TIME100 list," Malik wrote in a post on microblogging website X, formerly Twitter.



Malik was one of the key faces of the protest staged by some of the country's top wrestlers against Bharatiya Janata Party MP Brij Bhushan last year alongside Tokyo Olympics bronze medallist Bajrang Punia and two-time world championships bronze medallist Vinesh Phogat.

"This fight is no longer only for India's female wrestlers. It is for the daughters of India whose voices have been silenced time and again," said Sakshi of the movement she helped spark.

She had announced her retirement from the sport in December after Brij

Faltering Punjab Kings, Mumbai Indians desperate to resurrect Indian Premier League campaign

NEW DELHI, APR 17: Punjab Kings (PBKS) and Mumbai Indians (MI) will be desperate to resurrect their faltering campaigns in the Indian Premier League when the two bottom-rung teams face-off here on Thursday.

Only a few decimal points separate the two teams after six matches each with Punjab's marginally better net run rate of -0.218 keeping them at the seventh spot in the IPL points table, one above Mumbai Indians (-0.234).

Both Punjab and Mumbai have lost four matches each and are coming off defeats in their respective last outings, which means pressure will be high on both the camps to get their act together.

For Punjab, the challenge of getting the best out of their top order has compounded with regular skipper Dhawan being sidelined for 'seven to 10 days' due to a shoulder injury.



ran Singh — 119 runs in six matches at 19.83 — is a concern and the same can be said for India wicket-keeper-batter Jitesh Sharma.

With selection for the World Cup squad on the horizon, Jitesh, who has managed a mere 106 runs in six outings at 17.66, would be under the pump too.

PBKS will have to find more support for their overseas bowling duo of Sam Curran (126 runs and 8 wickets) and Kagiso Rabada (9). The Indian pair of Arshdeep Singh (9) and Harshal Patel (7) have both been easy targets for batters.

Mumbai Indians would know they have enough firepower in the camp to turn the tide but a collective effort on a consistent basis is the need of the hour.

Two wins at home against Delhi Capitals and Royal Challengers Ben-

galuru did end their three-match losing run, but a loss to Chennai Super Kings despite Rohit Sharma's century meant the five-time winners have forced them to go back to the drawing board.

It starts with Hardik Pandya's form and role in the side. The all-rounder has looked to share responsibility in the bowling department but his economy rate of 12 is alarming. On the same parameter, Gerald Coetzee (9) and uncapped Akash Madhwal (4) have given away more than 10 runs an over.

With the bat, Pandya has not provided any consolidation while batting first or finished matches in the latter half.

At the same time, Pandya has faced hostile environments at various stadiums in all the games he has played so far this season, something that could have an adverse impact on a player.

Shikhar is undergoing rehab: PBKS spin-bowling coach Sunil Joshi

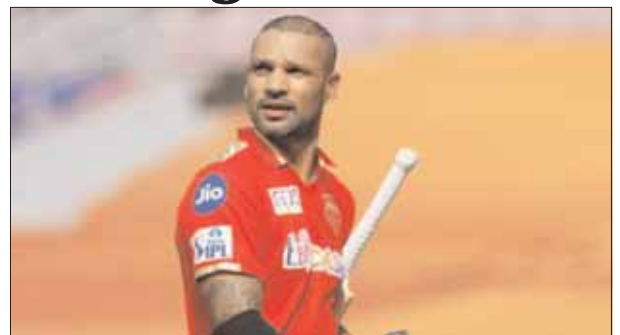
NEW DELHI, APR 17: Punjab Kings' influential skipper Shikhar Dhawan is currently undergoing rehabilitation after suffering a shoulder injury, the team's spin-bowling coach Sunil Joshi said on Wednesday.

Sam Curran stood in as Punjab Kings captain in Dhawan's absence in their match against Rajasthan Royals.

While he is set to miss Thursday's match against Mumbai Indians here, Dhawan also remains doubtful for the April 21 game against Gujarat Titans.

"Regarding Shikhar, the medical team will update. As for now, he is under rehab," Joshi said at the pre-match press conference. Dhawan hasn't had a great time with the bat in IPL 2024, but is still Kings' highest run-getter currently with 152 runs from five innings, scoring at a strike rate of 125.61.

Joshi also said it's high time the top-order batters find their groove and lift the team that is struggling at the seventh place with



just two wins and four losses.

The only bright spot for PBKS this season has been resolute displays from their unsung Indian players Shashank Singh and Ashutosh Sharma, who both bat lower in the order and have had to make up for the shortcomings at the top more than once.

"See it's always like bowlers win tournaments, batsmen win matches. And our bowling unit is definitely doing well consistently in all the areas. It's time our batters take responsibility," Joshi said.

"Straightway, unlike other wickets in India, this is a challenging wickets for every batter, especially for the visitors, it's going to be a challenge because the na-

ture of bounce is completely different. So, it's advantage for us, I guess," the former India left-arm spinner added.

Jonny Bairstow, Dhawan's opening partner, has had a rough time too, scoring just 96 runs in six innings, while Prabhsimran Singh (119 runs in six innings) and Jitesh Sharma (106 runs in six innings) have struggled for consistency and impact also.

With selection for the World Cup squad on the horizon, Jitesh, who is averaging 17.66, would be under the pump.

In T20s, when you go through the first half of the tournament you will understand what sort of an approach you need to look.

Windies' Powell trying to coax Narine out of retirement for home T20 World Cup

NEW DELHI, APR 17: West Indies skipper Rovman Powell said he is trying to persuade all-rounder Sunil Narine to come out of international retirement for the home T20 World Cup in June.

Narine, 35, announced his retirement from international cricket in 2023, four years after playing his last match for West Indies against India.

The Indian remains active in franchise cricket, evolving from a lower-order batter to a flamboyant opener. His batting



pross was on full display for the Kolkata Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League (IPL) on Tuesday.

Narine smashed 109 off 56 balls and claimed two wickets, including Powell's,

but it was not enough to secure victory, with Buttler leading Rajasthan Royals' successful chase of 224 with an unbeaten hundred.

"For the last 12 months, I've been whispering in his

ears, but he's blocked out everyone," Powell said, adding that he had even asked senior players to try to get Narine to change his mind.

"Hopefully, before they select the team, they can crack his code."

Narine was cryptic in his response when asked if he would come out of retirement to play in the World Cup, where conditions are expected to be conducive for spinners.

"It is what it is, but let's see what the future holds," Narine said.