



## Rishabh Pant's captaincy under lens as DC eye improved bowling effort against GT

**NEW DELHI, APR 23:** Rishabh Pant's leadership skills will be under scrutiny as a struggling Delhi Capitals would seek a much-improved performance from their bowlers when they take on an inconsistent Gujarat Titans in the IPL here on Wednesday.

It was not an ideal homecoming for Pant as after two consecutive wins, DC slumped to a 67-run loss against a marauding Sunrisers Hyderabad at home on Saturday.

The loss saw DC slip to the eighth position with three wins and five defeats. They very well know they can't afford to falter if they want to keep their play-off hopes alive.

Against SRH, Pant erred in his decisions a few times, starting from the toss as he misjudged the dew factor at the Arun Jaitley Stadium and decided to bowl first.

Pant's decision to hand the second over to Lalit Yadav, was even more contentious as SRH were off to a blazing start, scoring a



record 125 for no loss in the powerplay.

On the personal front, Pant wasn't in his element as he struggled for timing en route a painstaking 44 off 35 balls while chasing a mammoth score.

To chase a target of 267, a team needs its openers to fire from ball one but Prithvi Shaw and David Warner haven't been too successful.

Young Jake Fraser-McGurk smashed 65 off just 18 balls to keep DC in the hunt but he lacked support from the other end, even though Abhishek Porel (42 off 22) tried his best.

DC bowlers were taken to the cleaners by SRH and they need to pull up their

socks.

Left-arm seamer Khaleel Ahmed's, whose career has been dogged by inconsistency, decision to employ short stuff in the opening over completely backfired. With short boundaries at the Kotla, DC bowlers need to pitch it up.

Pace spearhead Anrich Nortje has been completely off-colour this season and DC would be desperately hoping veteran Ishant Sharma returns after missing the last game due to a back spasm.

Kuldeep Yadav has been DC's best bowler in the season so far with 10 wickets from five games at an economy rate of 7.60. But he didn't have a very good outing against SRH.

Even though he had the highest number of dot balls (8) among DC bowlers, he also conceded the maximum numbers of sixes -- 7.

GT have also been equally inconsistent under new skipper Shubman Gill. But the three-wicket win over Punjab Kings in their last game has helped the former champions move up slightly in the pecking order at sixth spot from four wins and as many losses.

They would be hoping to continue the winning momentum to scale up the leaderboard and be in contention for a play-off berth.

The onus would be on Gill to lead from the front.

The likes of Sai Sudharsan, David Miller and Azmatullah Omarzai also need to let their willow do the talking while Rahul Tewatia would look to continue his pyrotechnics towards the end stage of their innings.

On the bowling front, the likes of veteran Mohit Sharma, Noor Ahmad and Rashid Khan will be expected to deliver the goods.

## Sreeja Akula surpasses Manika Batra to become India's No 1 woman player

**NEW DELHI, APR 23:** Sreeja Akula, the Commonwealth Games mixed doubles champion, on Tuesday replaced Manika Batra as India's top-ranked women's table-tennis player in the latest ITTF World Rankings that was released. Sreeja rose to a career-high rank of 38 whereas Manika Batra went down a couple of spots to be placed 39th.

Sreeja, 25, has had a good season so far. She won the WTT Feeder Corpus Christi and WTT Feeder Beirut trophies while also reaching the



quarter-final of the WTT Star Contender Series in Goa.

Sreeja had won the mixed doubles gold medal at the 2022 Commonwealth Games alongside veteran Sharath Kamal.

Yashaswini Ghorpade and Archana Kamath held on to their 99th and 100th spot in the rankings.

Sharath continues to be the top-ranked male player, occupying the 37 spot in the rankings while

G Sathiyam and Manav Thakar have interchanged places to be 60th and 61st respectively. National champion Harmeeet Desai's, who was the top ranked Indian a couple of months ago, descent continues as he dropped to the 64th spot.

India has already qualified for the team events at the Paris Olympics. Two singles entries in men's and women's singles will be decided by the Table Tennis Federation of India by May 16 after considering the world rankings at the time.

## That door is now closed: Sunil Narine rules out T20 World Cup amid purple patch in IPL

**NEW DELHI, APR 23:** Former West Indies bowling all-rounder Sunil Narine, who is having a terrific IPL season, won't be reversing his retirement decision for the upcoming T20 World Cup in the Caribbean and USA, insisting that the "door is now closed".

The 35-year-old last played for the West Indies in a T20 International in August 2019 before retiring from international cricket in November last year to focus on franchise T20 leagues around the world.

But owing to his sensational form with both bat and ball for Kolkata Knight Riders this IPL season, attempts were being made to convince Narine to reverse his decision for the T20 World Cup.



"I'm truly flattered and humbled that my performances recently have moved many people to publicly express their wish for me to come out of retirement and play in the upcoming T20 World Cup," Narine wrote in Instagram post.

He asserted that he has made peace with his decision and will be supporting the team from home.

"I have made peace with that decision and whilst I never wish to disappoint,

that door is now closed and I will be supporting the guys who take the field in June for West Indies.

"Guys who have worked hard over the past few months and deserve to show our wonderful fans that they are capable of winning another title. I wish you all the best," he added.

Narine, who has been a key member of KKR since 2012, is seventh on the list of leading run-scorers in

the ongoing IPL season, having scored 286 runs, including an unbeaten century against Rajasthan Royals last week -- his maiden T20 ton.

With the ball, the off-spinner is KKR's joint-leading wicket-taker with nine scalps at an average of 22.11 and an economy rate of 7.10.

Narine's purple patch has compelled West Indies captain Rovman Powell to encourage the spinner to come out of retirement for the home World Cup.

"For the last 12 months, I've been whispering in his ears, he's blocked out everyone. Asked (Kieron Pollard, (Dwayne) Bravo, (Nicholas) Pooran, hopefully before they select the team, they can crack his code," Powell had said last week.

## Former India captain Sourav Ganguly advocates for Rohit and Kohli to open in T20 WC

**NEW DELHI, APR 23:** Sourav Ganguly, the former India captain and Indian cricket board chief, has wished for Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli to open India's innings in the T20 World Cup in June.

"I feel both should and will go to the West Indies. It's just my personal opinion and I am not saying that the selectors should do it -- it's their call at the end of the day -- but I think Rohit and Virat should open," Ganguly, the Delhi Capitals' director of cricket, said during an interaction organised by the franchise.

The national selection panel is likely to pick India's provisional squad for



the T20 World Cup over the weekend, ahead of the May 1 deadline for squad submission.

Ganguly -- during whose tenure as the BCCI chief was Rahul Dravid appointed head coach and Rohit Sharma took over as the captain across formats -- hoped for the captain and the coach to devise a

fearless method for playing T20 cricket. "I hope Rahul and Rohit find a method of playing T20 cricket because this group has an exceptional talent that six-hitting ability," Ganguly said.

During IPL 2024, Rohit and Kohli's ability to keep hitting higher gears in T20 has been questioned by a

section of fans and experts. But Ganguly was confident both had the ability to deliver.

"Virat Kohli has got the capability of getting a 40-ball hundred also. India, with the talent they have just need to go and hit. Just the mindset should be to hit and then we'll see what happens," Ganguly said.

"We saw how Rohit Sharma battered in the 50-over World Cup. He just came and hit at the top, so we just put so much pressure on the opposition in the first seven-eight overs that it gave breathing space for the lower order. Virat and Rohit should do the same (in T20s). They are great players. Let's do it."

## Shotgun shooter permitted to compete in national trials for Paris Olympics despite not meeting criteria

**NEW DELHI, APR 23:** The national shooting federation, which is fighting a court battle to uphold its selection criteria in the ongoing trials for Paris Olympics, seems to have bent the rules for one marksman recently, allowing him to participate despite lower-than-requisite scores.

Trap marksman Karan missed the National Rifles Association of India's (NRAI) criteria for shotgun selection trials by two points but was allowed to compete, while several others, who shot identical scores during last year's National Championships, were not considered.

A letter issued by NRAI in November announcing "Selection Trials as per Shotgun Selection Criteria 2024 & Olympic Selection Criteria 2024 for Shotgun event" states that shooters with a score of 110 in senior men's trap during the 66th National Championship (October-November, 2023) were eligible for the exercise held between December, 2023 and March 2024.

Karan, an Army marksman, shot 108 in the National Championships but his was the only recommendation accepted by NRAI, while the same ex-



ception was not made for a dozen more shooters, who shot identical scores.

The shooter competed in a series of four selection trials and is currently ranked 15th, thus failing to make the national squad.

NRAI secretary Rajiv Bhatia said that since Karan is a "budding" shooter and his "recommendation had come from the Army", an exception was made for him.

"We did give an exception as he is a budding, good shooter. There was a difference of just two points and he has been shooting good scores. That's why we introduced him in the trials for selecting the teams for World Cups, World Championships, Olympics (including everything)," said Bhatia.

"We cannot simply go by the rule book (laker ke fa-keer nahin ban sakte).

There was a recommendation from the Army to allow him (for national trials) because he had shot very well at the National Games (in Goa)."

Karan, representing Services Sports Control Board, was the first to be eliminated in the trap finals at the National Games in Goa, finishing sixth.

NRAI, ironically, is locked in a legal battle with some Olympic aspirants in the Delhi High Court, where it is insisting that no more than top five shooters in rifle and pistol would be allowed in the ongoing trials. The process has come under criticism from no less than former national coach and legendary pistol shooter Jaspal Rana, who has said that the federation is not following international norms.

Asked why the trials were not opened for marksmen who shot identi-

cal scores at the Nationals, Bhatia said, "I think we allowed him under a special criterion because of his previous scores."

Bhatia added that giving an exception in trials didn't mean he was selected in the national squad for international competitions like World Cups and World Championships.

"Every state recommends shooters to be included (in trials), and we go by the merit. A marksman can shoot a bad score in a competition. One day you can shoot a bad score."

Asked what NRAI would have done had he topped the trials, Bhatia said, "If somebody is performing, then why not (name him in the Olympic squad). How can we not consider him (for Olympics if he had performed)? Aim is to select the best athlete."

"But he is not going for any competition. As on today, he is nowhere in the national ranking. I think his ranking is very low (after the trials). But if he had beaten the field, he would have been (in contention)."

He added that an exception had also been made for the shooter to promote shotgun shooting as it is not as popular as pistol and rifle.

## Stoinis's Unbeaten Ton Trumps Gaikwad's Century as LSG End CSK's Unbeaten Home Run

**NEW DELHI, APR 23:** Lucknow Super Giants claimed a 6-wicket win over holders Chennai Super Kings as Marcus Stoinis' unbeaten 124 run knock helped his side chase down the target of 211 in 19.3 overs at the MA Chidambaram Stadium on Tuesday.

CSK notched up 210 runs in 20 overs thanks to skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad's unbeaten 108-run knock and a brisk 66 by Shivam Dube, but the visitors got past the finish line in style as the Australian led from the front.

CSK were put to bat first as they opened the innings yet again with skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad and Ajinkya Rahane, but the all-right-hand batting pair did not last long as Rahane was sent back to the hut by Matt Henry as LSG captain KL Rahul caught him behind the stumps.

Daryll Mitchell, who



came in at No.3 on the day was handed an early reprieve with Yash Thakur dropping him at slips. Gaikwad, who registered a fifty in his previous game at The Den, settled in well on the night as he knocked boundaries at regular intervals.

Thakur earned retribution for his error on the field as he dismissed Mitchell in the final over of the powerplay as the Kiwi went before causing much damage. Chennai got past the fifty-run mark in the seventh over of the game with Ravindra

Jadeja promoted up the batting order at No.4.

Gaikwad reached his fifty with a plethora of blazing shots around the park before Jadeja met his end at the hands of pacer Mohsin Khan after having scored 16 runs. Shivam Dube came in to replace his fallen fellow southpaw and accompanied his captain, who delighted the partisan yellow crowd as he capitalized on his good touch racking up runs with a plethora of textbook cricketing shots to keep the scoreboard ticking.

Dube resorted to what

he does best as he knocked the LSG bowlers beyond the advertisement hoardings to evoke a raucous ovation from the stands every time the ball went out of play.

Gaikwad got the Chepak faithful to their feet as he brought up his ton with a couple of boundaries off Thakur in the 18th over of the game before raising his willow in jubilation. Dube added the cherry on top with his fifty which was marked by three boundaries, two sixers and a four, off Mohsin's over.

The pair of Gaikwad and Dube brought up their 100-run partnership for the fourth wicket in 44 deliveries.

Stoinis put the finishing touches on the game as he smashed four boundaries in the final over to elicit a runout onto the field from the LSG dugout in a spur of ecstatic emotion.

## Indian team owner faces indictment for match-fixing in Sri Lankan Legends League

**NEW DELHI, APR 23:** Indian national Yoni Patel, who owns a cricket team in the unsanctioned Legends Cricket League which was held between March 8 and 19 at central Kandy district's Pallekele international stadium. A side called Rajasthan Kings defeated New York Super Strikers in the final.

Patel owns the Kandy Swamp Army team in the event. Officials said Akash, who is the manager of Punjab Royals, too, would be indicted as the case progresses.

Former Sri Lanka ODI captain Upul Tharanga, who is currently the chairman of national selectors, and ex-New Zealand player Neil Broom had complained to the Special Investigation Unit of the Ministry of Sports about the approaches by Patel and Akash to fix games by under-performing in the league.

Patel and Akash were subsequently banned from leaving the country by the magistrate's court until the investigations could be

completed.

The league is neither recognised by the ICC nor by Sri Lanka Cricket.

Sri Lanka was the first South Asian country to criminalise match-fixing and corruption in sports when it passed a law against the menace in 2019.

Anyone found guilty can be jailed for up to 10 years and also be required to pay fines. The law also seeks to punish acts of omission such as failure to report corrupt approaches.