



Rafael Nadal says he is not 100 pc fit ahead of Madrid debut; unsure about playing French Open

NEW DELHI, APR 24: Rafael Nadal will play in the Madrid Open despite not being fully fit and didn't seem too optimistic about his chances of being ready for the French Open later this month.

Nadal said Wednesday he would not play in Paris if he arrives there feeling the same way that he is feeling ahead of his debut in Madrid this week.

"The sensations haven't been perfect this week. If it wasn't Madrid, maybe I wouldn't play. But there are a lot of emotions involved," Nadal said.

"I don't know what's going to happen in the following three weeks. I'll keep fighting and doing the things that I think I need to do to play in Paris. And if it's possible, then it's possible. If not, then not. I'm not going to play in Paris the way I'm feel-



ing today. If it was Paris, I wouldn't be playing."

The 37-year-old Nadal has said this is likely his farewell year on tour, and is hoping to be competitive one last time at Roland Garros, where he is a 14-time champion.

The 22-time Grand Slam winner is a record five-time champion in Madrid, with his last title in the Spanish capital coming in 2017. He is scheduled to debut on Thursday against 16-year-old American Darwin

Blanch. "Hopefully I can play without many limitations," Nadal said. "Then we'll see what happens. If I play without limitations, even if I lose, then it will be positive."

Nadal, who had hip surgery last summer, lost to Alex de Minaur in the second round in Barcelona in what was his first tournament in more than three months.

"The goal is to be on court. Enjoy as long as possible," he said.

"I mean, that's the thing. Try to finish the tournament alive in terms of body issues, and enjoy the fact that I will be able to compete one more time in the professional tour and here at home in Madrid, a place that give me everything, no, in terms of support."

He said he is giving himself "a chance" and hopes to "find better feelings" in his body going forward.

"I don't lose hope. I just accept the situation that I have today," he said. "I mean, I am not playing bad. It's about more body limitations."

He said the "body feelings are not enough good to feel myself playing with free enough in terms of body issues. That's not allowed me to compete the way that I would like to compete."

Gujarat Titans Bite the Dust as Rishabh Pant's Classic Keeps DC Afloat in Playoffs Race

DELHI, APR 24: Another epic battle, another epic finish and the crowd at Kotla were delighted as Rishabh Pant's Delhi Capitals (DC) clinched a final-over thriller by 4 overs, defeating the Gujarat Titans (GT) for the second time this season.

Delhi's sinking ship got a little more time to stay afloat in the playoff race, levelling points with Mumbai Indians before facing the 5-time champions this weekend in what will be a survival battle.

The game was hung by a fine thread as the Titans needed 19 off the last 6 balls with a proven hard-hitter Rashid Khan in the middle, up against an under-fire Mukesh Kumar. But the fast bowler managed to save Delhi's pride despite getting hit for a couple of boundaries and a six.

A mammoth chase always needed a top-show from a top-order batter and Sai Sudharshan, the Impact Sub, thrived under pressure with a 65 off 39, including 2 sixes and 7 boundaries. But his belligerent innings was cut short by DC's Impact player Rasikh Dar. The right-arm quick not only returned 3 wickets but also picked up the catch of a dangerous David Miller who had almost taken the game way from DC's claws before falling prey to Mukesh Kumar in the 18th over.

Stay updated with the latest from IPL 2024, including top contenders for the IPL 2024 Orange Cap and IPL 2024 Purple Cap. Explore the complete IPL 2024 Schedule, IPL 2024 Points Table and players with the Most Sixes, Most Fours and Most Fifties in IPL 2024

If Delhi had Dar, the Titans found a great aid in Sandeep Warrier. In a league of big-hitters and colossal totals, Warrier's sheer brilliance with the new ball stole the limelight away



from Delhi Capitals in the Power-play. Playing just his second game for the Titans this season, his 3/15 was neatly spread over the 3rd and 6th over where he had the DC openers, Jake Fraser McGurk and Prithvi Shaw, and Shai Hope in his pocket.

The same old story seemed to be repeating for Delhi - least assistance from the top-order and the middle-order doing the heavy lifting. But Axar Patel, promoted to No. 3, and skipper Rishabh Pant painted a completely different picture, filling it with vibrant colours, dipping their brushes in GT players' sweat.

Pant didn't go bang-bang from the word go, instead they held their nerves to decode Gujarat's slower-ball theory. By the end of 15th over, the southpaw had reached his fifty off 37 balls while the skipper was still catching up. While they were huffing and puffing, a Mohit Sharma over fuelled their partnership and the Titans were all over the place.

Pant whipped the GT senior pacer

over the cow corner for a six and another one over long-off, recharging himself to deliver the best knock this season. Meanwhile, Noor Ahmed chipped in to decimate Patel on 66 off 43. However, his figures - 3/36 in 3 overs - devalued the crucial breakthrough he provided to break the 113-run partnership.

Axar gone and just a few deliveries left in the innings, the focus was solely on Pant as DC eyed a 200-plus score. GT could have foiled Delhi's plan but they shot themselves on the foot with a listless bowling strategy. Holding back Sai Kishore and deploying him in the 19th over backfired as Tristan Stubbs whacked him for a hat-trick of sixes.

The final over turned even worse as the visitors tried containing the DC storm with an expensive Sharma ahead of an economical Warrier. The experience pacer had the last laugh, registering the worst IPL figures - 0/77 - as Pant belted him for three consecutive sixes as DC collected 31 runs in the final over.

Indian men's and women's compound teams eye gold in Shanghai after assuring country of medal

NEW DELHI, APR 24: The Indian men's and women's compound archery teams assured the country of a podium finish by nailing down final berths in the season-opening Hyundai Archery World Cup in Shanghai on Wednesday.

The fourth-seeded men's team comprising the experienced Abhishek Verma, newcomer Prathamesh Bhalchandra Fuge and reigning U-21 world champion Priyansh defeated the Philippines and Denmark before displaying ominous form to upset top qualifier South Korea to book a title showdown against the Netherlands on Saturday.

The Indian women, who are the reigning world champions and seeded No. 1 here, set up a title clash with Italy, defeating Turkey and Estonia to confirm their status as the leading side in the category.

The trio of reigning U-18 and senior champion



Aditi Swami, Asian Games gold-medallist Jyothi Surekha Vennam and Parneet Kaur dropped just 10 points through the two matches to confirm their superiority.

The Indian men's team created a major upset, defeating Korea by just two points at 235-233. Tied at even after two ends, the Indians grabbed a point after the third and finished with a 59 to secure the final spot.

"Our coordination was good today and we read the wind well," said Abhishek after the nerve-racking semifinal contest against the Koreans. "The semifinals are al-

ways tight matches. We were prepared to shoot well and happy to make it to gold," he added.

An elated Priyansh said after the match against Korea that he was thrilled to be competing against the strong opponent, which he had so far seen only on social media.

"We played alongside players that we used to watch on YouTube," said Priyansh, who trains with Abhishek in Delhi. "We could have shot even better," he added.

The Indian women's team defeated Estonia 235-230 and Aditi attributed the performance to the process the side has

been following for long.

"We maintained our shooting process and it worked well," said Aditi.

"I hope we can repeat the success of the World Cup in Paris last year where both the Indian men and women won the team gold medals."

The squad here is without its charismatic Italian coach Sergio Pagni, who is currently in the national camp back home.

India's opponent in the final, Italy, overcame Kazakhstan in a semifinal shoot-off after the scores were tied at 227 points.

The 10th seeded Dutch men also won a tie-break - against France - to book their ticket to the final.

Mike Schloesser, Sil Pater and Stef Willems shot three perfect X-ring 10s, compared to their opponents' standard 10s, to survive the match.

Kazakhstan's women and the Korean men's team secured bronze medals at the end of the session.

From outsider to top contender, Candidates winner Gukesh is on the move

NEW DELHI, APR 24: The young, like over-enthusiastic puppies, are eager to bound into the unknown with reckless abandon, thrilled by the thought of defying convention. But as the years pile on, so do the caution signs. We are tethered by the weight of past missteps, hesitant to stray too far from the beaten path.

Those careful voices of experience had thought little about 17-year-old Dommaraju Gukesh. According to former champion Magnus Carlsen, he was not exactly expected to set the chess world on fire at the FIDE Candidates in Toronto. "I cannot imagine him winning the Candidates. I can see him being anywhere from +2 to -5 (at the end of the tournament). I don't think he will do poorly, but I don't think he will do too well either. He's not quite ready yet to make the leap," Carlsen had told chess.com ahead of the tournament.

But youthful audacity triumphed over seasoned scepticism. While the old guard crumbled like last



week's stale biscuits under the harsh glare of the spotlight, Gukesh held steady. Carlsen's picks - two-time World Championship contender Ian Nepomniachtchi, World No. 2 Fabiano Caruana, and World No. 3 Hikaru Nakamura - finished half a point behind him.

During a post-victory introspection, the youngest winner of the Candidates confessed that his heart-wrenching seventh-round defeat to Iran's Alireza Firouzja fuelled his quest for glory. Up a pawn and pressing for victory, Gukesh miscalculated under time pressure and lost a precious advantage. "If I had to pinpoint when I really felt this could be my moment, it was probably af-

ter I lost to Firouzja. I was actually quite upset, but during the rest day, I already felt so good. Even though I just had a painful loss, I was feeling at my absolute best," India's youngest-ever Grandmaster said.

Gukesh has had his fair share of misses, like a stumble at the Swiss Masters, where he finished 81st after starting as the fifth seed, and a third place at the London Chess Classic, where he began as the top seed. A loss of 43 rating points towards the end of 2023 had almost derailed his chances of making it to the Candidates.

But Gukesh won the hastily organised Chennai Grand Masters 2023 on tiebreaks to secure the

lone qualifying spot from the FIDE Circuit to the Candidates.

In Toronto, too, he bounced back from the loss to the Iranian to win three and draw four of the last seven games.

Gukesh is in a realm where Viswanathan Anand (at 26) had once trodden as the first Indian in 1995. It had taken Anand four years to become a Challenger from a Candidate. But Gukesh, under Anand's tutelage and the support of the WestBridge Anand Chess Academy, has bridged that divide between candidate and potential champion in one go.

"Age considers: Youth ventures," Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore once said. Gukesh, at 17, is ready to venture into uncharted territory and create his own legacy. His Toronto triumph will inspire every aspiring chess player in India. And a victory over China's Ding Liren in November will make him the youngest world champion. Carlsen and Co. will no longer consider him an outsider.

Usain Bolt named ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 ambassador

NEW DELHI, APR 24: The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Wednesday announced Olympic legend Usain Bolt as the ambassador for the upcoming ICC Men's T20 World Cup, which will be played in the West Indies and USA in June 2024.

Bolt, who holds the world records in the 100m, 200m and 4x100m, will play a key role in promoting the event, starting with a cameo appearance in next week's release of the event's official anthem music video alongside artists Sean Paul and Kes.

The eight-time Olympic Gold Medallist will also attend T20 World Cup matches in the West Indies and be part of fan engage-



ment events promoting the sport within the United States.

Usain Bolt expressed his excitement about his new role. "I am thrilled to be an ambassador for the upcoming ICC Men's T20 World Cup. Coming from the Caribbean where cricket is a part of life, the sport has always held a special place in my heart,

and I look forward to attending West Indies matches at the World Cup and making a contribution to the growth of cricket globally."

"While I will of course be supporting West Indies at the World Cup, getting the sport into the US is big for cricket. It's the biggest sports market in the world and the energy that we will

Paris 2024, Shooting: Sift, Niraj triumph in first Olympic Selection Trials in Rifle 3P

NEW DELHI, APR 24: Asian Games gold medallist and world record holder Sift Kaur Samra asserted herself by topping the women's 50-metre rifle 3-position final with a score of 466.3 in the Olympic shooting trials at the Dr. Karni Singh Range, Tughlakabad, on Wednesday.

The 22-year-old Sift beat qualification topper Ashi Chouksey (590) by 3.7 points, while Olympian Anjum Moudgil took third place ahead of Nischal and Olympic quota winner Shriyanka Sadangi.

In the men's rifle 3-position event, Niraj Kumar shot 469.2 in the final to beat qualification topper Swapnil Kusale (592) by 1.3. Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar took the third spot, ahead of Olympian Chain Singh



and Olympic quota winner Akhil Sheoran.

Olympic quota winners Tilottama Sen (632.4) and Sandeep Singh (634.4) topped the air rifle qualification phase in the women's and men's sections respectively.

Rhythm Sangwan focused better to top women's air pistol with a modest score of 578, one point ahead of Esha Singh. Asian Games gold medallist Palak Gulia and Olympian Manu Baker shot 572.

In men's air pistol, Olympic quota winner Varun Tomar topped with 583, three points ahead of Arjun Singh Cheema. The other Olympic quota winner Sarabjot Singh was a bit off target and shot 575.

10m air pistol (qualification stage):
Men: 1. Varun Tomar 583; 2. Arjun Singh Cheema 580; 3. Naveen 575; 4. Sarabjot Singh 575; 5. Ravinder Singh 574.
Women: 1. Rhythm

Sangwan 578; 2. Esha Singh 577; 3. Palak Gulia 572; 4. Manu Baker 572; 5. Surbhi Rao 570.

10m air rifle (qualification stage):

Men: 1. Sandeep Singh 634.4; 2. Sri Karthik Sabari Raj 630.9; 3. Rudranksh Patil 630.5; 4. Arjun Babuta 629.4; 5. Divyansh Singh Panwar 629.2.

Women: 1. Tilottama Sen 632.4; 2. Nancy Mandhotra 631.2; 3. Ramita Jindal 631.1; 4. Mehuli Ghosh 630.7; 5. Elavenil Valarivan 628.7.

50m rifle 3-position:
Men: 1. Niraj Kumar 462.2 (579); 2. Swapnil Kusale 460.9 (592); 3. Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar 450.5 (576).
Women: 1. Sift Kaur Samra 466.3 (583); 2. Ashi Chouksey 462.6 (590); 3. Anjum Moudgil 449.2 (581).