



RCB pacer Bhuvneshwar speaks on team's reliance on data after reaching second successive IPL final



DHARAMSALA, MAY 27: Following his side's win over the Gujarat Titans (GT), Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) pacer Bhuvneshwar Kumar spoke on his bowling plans focusing on leg-before-wicket and bowled dismissals, the role of data in their success and thanked the staff working behind the scenes after sealing back-to-back Indian Premier League (IPL) finals with the franchise.

It is 2016 all over again as Bhuvneshwar is wearing a Purple Cap on his head and is heading into another IPL final, except he is no longer with Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) anymore, a side

which they could face in the final after a decade, if the Men in Orange overcome Rajasthan Royals (RR) in the eliminator and GT in the Qualifier two.

RCB's 92-run win was a clinical all-round show, with skipper Rajat Patidar (93* in 33 balls, with five fours and nine sixes), Virat Kohli (43 in 25 balls, with five fours and a six) and Krunal Pandya (43 in 28 balls, with five fours and two sixes). In the chase, GT's batting fell like a pack of cards, with Rahul Tewatia (68 in 43 balls, with eight fours and four sixes) and Jos Buttler (29 in 11 balls, with three fours and two sixes) being the only ones crossing the 20-run mark as GT skittled out for 162 runs.

Speaking after his side's win, he said, "A lot of credit to the planning behind the scenes. I mean, yes, the experience we (him and Josh Hazlewood) brought, but

when it comes to support staff, the small things that they are bringing, it works for us. We are data-informed; if there is something new players are doing, we look into that. But we do not depend 100 per cent on data. But yes, it helps."

On his and the team's bowling plans, he added, "If you look at the plan, anything short or fuller, it goes for a boundary. But yes, we make a lot of effort not to give any room and try to get batters out LBW and bowled," he added.

Bhuvneshwar has taken 26 wickets this season in 15 matches at an average of 18.15 and an economy rate

of 8.00, with best figures of 4/23. This is the second-best season with the ball for an RCB bowler, with Harshal Patel's 32-wicket 2021 season being the best one.

Put to bat first by GT, RCB put on 254/5 on the back of fiery performances from skipper Rajat Patidar (93* in 33 balls, with five fours and nine sixes), Virat Kohli (43 in 25 balls, with five fours and a six) and Krunal Pandya (43 in 28 balls, with five fours and two sixes). In the chase, GT's batting fell like a pack of cards, with Rahul Tewatia (68 in 43 balls, with eight fours and four sixes) and Jos Buttler (29 in 11 balls, with three fours and two sixes) being the only ones crossing the 20-run mark as GT skittled out for 162 runs. Jacob Duffy (3/39) and Bhuvneshwar Kumar (2/28) broke through GT's consistent top-order, and it was only downwards for the Titans from there.

This is the fifth time RCB has made it to the IPL finals, third-most after Mumbai Indians (six appearances and five title wins) and Chennai Super Kings (10 appearances and five title wins).

This is also the second-highest win in the history of IPL knockouts, below RR's 105-run win over Delhi Capitals (DC) back in 2008. (ANI)

"Good powerplay could have made it chasable": Shubman Gill reflects on GT's heavy defeat against RCB

DHARAMSALA (HIMACHAL PRADESH), MAY 27: Shubman Gill reflected that the Gujarat Titans fell short against the Royal Challengers Bengaluru mainly because they couldn't make full use of the Powerplay after his side faced a 92-run defeat in Qualifier 1 of the ongoing Indian Premier League (IPL) at Dharamsala on Tuesday. Gill pointed out that the pitch and outfield were excellent for batting, and a strong opening start would have made the big chase realistic.

A magnificent spell from the pacers and a sensational knock from skipper Rajat Patidar guided defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru to their second consecutive IPL final, as they defeated Gujarat Titans by 92 runs at Dharamsala on Tuesday.

"I mean, it's all about getting a good start. If you get a good power play, and on a ground like this, we know the ball travels, and the out-



field is also very quick. So if you had gotten off to a good start in the power play, any target with the kind of way the wicket was playing and the kind of ground that we were playing at, it could have been chaseable," Shubman Gill said after the match. Gill also said he was not surprised by how the pitch behaved. He felt GT were in a good position until around the 12th-13th over while bowling in the first inning, but pointed out that poor fielding, missed catches, and below-par

ground fielding cost them momentum and contributed to the defeat against Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

"(Surprised with the way the pitch behaved?) I mean, not really. I think we were going pretty well up until the 12th, 13th over, and I don't think our fielding was at par, dropping a couple of catches, and then our ground fielding was not up to the mark," he added.

With this win, RCB will be taking a shot at their second successive IPL title. GT, de-

spite their loss, will get a chance at redemption as they will play the winner of Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) vs Gujarat Titans (GT) eliminator for the second final spot in the Qualifier two on Friday.

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Jacob Duffy (3/39) and Bhuvneshwar Kumar (2/28) broke through GT's consistent top-order, and it was only downwards for the Titans from there. (ANI)

The enigmatic Riyan Parag tides over trolls, injury, patchy form to justify RR's captaincy choice

MULLANPUR, MAY 26: The 24-year-old from Assam has had to deal with criticism at every step since joining the franchise in 2019 -- partially because of his supremely confident and straight talking personality, giving him the "arrogant" tag besides his modest IPL numbers.

"I think I've seen very few players who have been criticised like Riyan has for about seven years now. He is the absolute right guy to lead this franchise," Royals head coach Kumar Sangakkara said in strong defence of Parag after sealing the top-four berth in Mumbai. Season after season his un-

der-performance was questioned until he had a breakout year in 2024, when he amassed 573 runs at a strike rate close to 150 after being promoted to number four.

A standout IPL led to an India call-up later that year but soon after he had to undergo surgery for a chronic shoulder injury, forcing him out of the national set up. With a battery of players ready to take over in the T20 format, Parag has not yet found a way back in.

The Royals top management kept believing in him, so much so that he was handed captaincy post Sanju Samson's departure ahead of Dhruv Jurel,

Yashasvi Jaiswal and Ravindra Jadeja.

Even in the ongoing season, Parag has to deal with extreme pressure, partially due to lack of runs in the first half of the tournament before countless trolls were fired at him after he was caught vaping in the dressing room on national TV. The incident coincided with the team's late season slide that almost put them on the brink of elimination. He made no bones about his team's poor performance but at the same time chose to slam the game's commentators and experts over making alleged personal remarks on the players.

Young Athletes Shine as YS&S Dept Kishtwar organizes Inter-School Competitions

KISHTWAR, MAY 26:

The Department of Youth Services & Sports Kishtwar organized Inter-School Zonal Level Competitions under the banner of "Nasha Mukht Jammu & Kashmir" across different zones of the district, witnessing enthusiastic participation of students in various sports disciplines at different venues.

The competitions were conducted with the objective of promoting sports culture, physical fitness, discipline and spreading awareness against drug abuse among the youth. The events generated great excitement and sportsmanship among the participating students.

Zone Kishtwar organized U-17 and U-19 Girls' Cricket competitions at the historic Chowgan Ground, Kishtwar, where young players displayed remarkable talent, coordination and competitive spirit. The matches attracted appreciation from officials, teachers and spectators present at the venue.

Zone Drabshalla conducted Yoga competitions for U-17 and U-19 boys and girls, where participants demonstrated impressive flexibility, balance, concentration and awareness regarding the importance of a healthy lifestyle through yoga practices.

Meanwhile, Zone Inderwal organized competitions in the U-19 boys' and girls'



categories in disciplines including Kabaddi, Kho-Kho, Volleyball, Chess, Yoga, Cricket and Athletics. The events witnessed active participation from students of various institutions, reflecting the growing enthusiasm for sports and extracurricular activities among the youth of the district.

As part of the awareness initiatives under the Nasha Mukht Jammu & Kashmir campaign, an IEC campaign titled "Jan Bhagidaari Sabse Door Sabse Pehle" was also conducted at Panchayat

Kishtwar. The campaign focused on spreading awareness regarding the harmful effects of drug abuse and encouraging collective community participation in building a healthy and drug-free society.

The entire programme was organized under the direction of Director General, Youth Services & Sports J&K, Anuradha Gupta, under the supervision of District Development Commissioner Kishtwar Pankaj Kumar Sharma and under the guidance of DYSSO

Jaffer Haider Sheikh, along with all Zonal Physical Education Officers (ZPEOs).

Officials of the department appreciated the efforts of the organizing staff, technical officials and participating students for making the events successful and meaningful.

The department reiterated its commitment towards channelizing the energy of youth into positive activities through sports and awareness programmes across the district.

Hashmatullah Shahidi to lead Afghanistan in Test and ODI series against India

NEW DELHI, MAY 26:

Left-handed batter Hashmatullah Shahidi was on Tuesday named captain of the Afghanistan squad which will play a one-off Test and three ODIs against India from June 6 to June 20.

While the ODI squad features top players including Rashid Khan, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, and Ibrahim Zadran, the Test team comprises a blend of experienced campaigners and emerging talent, with Rahmat Shah, Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Azmatullah Omarzai forming the core of the batting group.

Wicketkeepers Afsar Zazai and Ikram Alikhil have also been included, while the spin department will rely on Sharafuddin Ashraf and Qais Ahmad.

Bilal Sami, Zia Sharifi and Saleem Safi will spearhead the pace department.

Interestingly, Afghanistan



have opted for a slightly different combination in the ODI setup, bringing back seasoned stars Mohammad Nabi and Rashid Khan for the white-ball leg of the tour.

Young opener Ibrahim Zadran, Sediqullah Atal and Darwish Rasooli bolster the batting unit, while AM Ghazanfar and Bilal Sami add depth to the bowling at-

tack.

Young spinner Ghazanfar was rewarded for his exploits in the IPL. He snapped 15 wickets in 11 games for Mumbai Indians.

Afghanistan will start their tour with a one-off Test from June 6 to 10 at New Chandigarh before embarking on a three-match ODI series. The first ODI will be held on June 14 at Dharam-

sala, followed by the second game on June 17 at Lucknow and the third ODI on June 20 in Chennai.

Squad for one-off Test: Hashmatullah Shahidi (C), Abdul Malik, Sediqullah Atal, Rahmat Shah, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Rahmanullah Zadran, Afsar Zazai (WK), Ikram Alikhil (WK), Azmatullah Omarzai, Sharafuddin Ashraf, Nangyal Kharotai, Qais Ahmad, Bilal Sami, Zia Sharifi, Saleem Safi.

Squad for the ODI series: Hashmatullah Shahidi (C), Rahmanullah Gurbaz (WK), Ibrahim Zadran, Sediqullah Atal, Darwish Rasooli, Rahmat Shah, Ikram Alikhil (WK), Mohammad Nabi, Azmatullah Omarzai, Rashid Khan, Nangyal Kharotai, AM Ghazanfar, Zia Ur Rahman Sharifi, Fareed Malik, Bilal Sami.

Reserve Pool: Qais Ahmad, Saleem Safi, Bashir Ahmad.

"Not worried about my wicket": RCB skipper Patidar after sealing second successive IPL final spot

DHARAMSALA, MAY 27: Following his side's win over the Gujarat Titans (GT), Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) skipper Rajat Patidar hailed his batters' fearless intent and asserted that he likes putting bowlers under pressure without worrying about his wicket.

RCB under Patidar continues to be a gift that keeps on giving to its legion of loyal fans. After waiting 17 years for their maiden title, they sealed their first-ever IPL trophy at Ahmedabad last year and now have made it to their second successive final after a 92-run win over GT. Patidar's stupendous 93* in 33 balls took RCB to a massive 254/5,

which GT never looked like chasing, despite some resistance from Jos Buttler and Rahul Tewatia as Jacob Duffy and Bhuvneshwar Kumar broke the back of GT's batting by taking out the top-three in the power-play itself.

Speaking after the match, Patidar emphasised the need for an attacking mindset and good body language, which reflected in RCB's batting.

"It was a super game for us, and the way, especially the batsmen have dominated in this game, the way everyone was striking with intent, I think that was good for us. It is not a clear plan (to go after the GT bowlers), but I think we are ready for it

because you have to show some body language that we are coming for you. So I think that was there in every batsman. So we had a chat in the meeting. We have to give a good body language and the attacking mindset. It was a big stage, qualifier 1, and the way we played, the way we dominated in this game, I think that was superb," he said.

Patidar is enjoying a season of his lifetime this year, with 486 runs in 13 innings at an average of 44.18 and a strike rate of 196.76, with five fifties and 41 sixes.

Speaking about his batting, he said, "I think the way of my batting is similar (to the rest of his team). I think starting, I take a few

balls, 8-10 balls, to see how the wicket is behaving and what the ball is doing. And after that, I think I have a clear mind about how I have to go about it and I am not worried about my wicket. I always like to put the bowler under pressure."

Patidar also said that the wicket was not easy, where batters could get under the ball and hit long sixes, as the bounce was really good. He hailed his bowlers for being exceptional with their stump-to-stump bowling.

"The way GT played till now, I think the three main batsmen were top three (Gill, Sudharsan and Buttler), and we were clear that we have to get them out in the powerplay.