



## Gujarat boys Axar, Bumrah look to take centrestage as Delhi Capitals host MI

**NEW DELHI, APR 26:** Axar Patel and Jasprit Bumrah both hail from the same state. They have been friends since their age-group days.

Donning different shades of blue (Patel - Delhi Capitals, Bumrah - Mumbai Indians), they have stood with their craft with the ball in an Indian Premier League (IPL) season dominated by towering totals.

No wonder the economy rate between allrounder Axar and pace spearhead Bumrah could be decisive in the clash between Delhi and Mumbai here at the Arun Jaitley Stadium on Saturday.



After the 41st league match, Bumrah (6.37 runs per over in 32 overs) tops the list of best economy rate for bowlers with at least 10 overs this season. Axar is placed third in the list (7.06 runs in 31 overs).

Against a batting line-up full of power-hitters, the Gujarat duo will look for-

ward to repeating their heroics, at the Wankhede Stadium, earlier in the month.

Considering that both teams are still languishing in the bottom half of the points table, a loss on Saturday could well push them into a must-win position for the remaining

phase.

While Delhi - with veterans David Warner and Ishant Sharma being unavailable due to fitness issues - will hope to carry on the momentum from Wednesday night's win, Hardik Padya and Co. will be keen on switching gears with time running out.

Barring Bumrah, the remaining bowling unit has been a huge concern.

With an on-song Rishabh Pant and Axar Patel on fire with the willow along with Jake Fraser-McGurk's range-hitting, Mumbai captain Hardik will be banking on his bowling group to deliver against the odds.

## Rajasthan Royals looks to seal playoffs spot against high-flying Lucknow Super Giants

**NEW DELHI, APR 26:** Far from the pack involved in the mid-table scrap, Rajasthan Royals will indulge in the prospect of strolling its way into the playoffs when it visits Lucknow Super Giants at the Ekana International Cricket Stadium here in the Indian Premier League (IPL) on Saturday.

Runaway leader Rajasthan has won all three away games so far, and a fourth triumph will take its tally to 16 points, all but sealing a place in the knockouts.

Yashasvi Jaiswal regaining his mojo with an unbeaten 104 in the nine-wicket mauling of Mumbai Indians wiped out the only blemish in Royals' top order. Captain Sanju Samson would hope to emulate his exploits (82\* off 52 balls) from the Royals' 20-run victory over the Lucknow



side earlier this season and stay in the Orange Cap race.

But Super Giants, high on the twin triumphs over Chennai Super Kings (CSK), will be no pushovers. The K.L. Rahul-led side chased down 180 and 211 in its last two matches to not only rekindle its campaign with four points but also leapfrog CSK to the fourth spot in the points table.

The side will wait with crossed fingers for Mayank Yadav's return from injury.

The pace phenom, who last played against Gujarat Titans on April 7, bowled in the nets on the match eve, and assistant coach S. Sri-

ram was optimistic over his inclusion on Saturday. Mayank's economy rate of 6.00 will be precious for a misfiring Super Giants' pace attack.

Should Mayank not make the cut, Ravi Bishnoi, with four wickets and a 7.84 economy this season, will be the bowling spearhead for the home team.

Taking cognizance of

Rahul and Marcus Stoinis' telling contributions in Super Giants' two wins, another leg-spinner, Yuzvendra Chahal, could be the Royals' go-to deployment too. This IPL, Rahul's strike rate has dipped to 93 against leg-spin while Stoinis has fallen to spinners five times in eight innings. Even Keshav Maharaj could offer a favourable match-up and slot back into the starting eleven.

Lower down the order, Royals will seek a solution for Nicolas Pooran. The southpaw has salvaged his side by injecting momentum, hitting at a strike rate of nearly 170 - the highest for a Lucknow batter. Against the most economical side at death in IPL 2024 (9.37), a little help from Krunal Pandya and Deepak Hooda at this stage could go a long way for Lucknow.

## Indian men eye consistency in Thomas Cup title defence, women too look to shine in Uber Cup

**NEW DELHI, APR 26:** Star singles players will aim for a consistent run as Indian men embark on a tough journey of defending their title at the Thomas Cup, while a young women's team, sans the peerless P V Sindhu, will look to punch above its weight when it begins its campaign in Uber Cup here on Saturday.

Just two years ago, India had sent shockwaves across the badminton world when they clinched their maiden Thomas Cup crown, considered the team world championship for men.

Without the burden of expectations, India went on to dismantle the world's best teams to script an unprecedented chapter in the history of the sport, and now they return to the 33rd edition with the arduous task of once again showing their might against the top echelons of the sport.

However, the underdog tag won't be there this time. In fact, all the teams will be gunning for the defending champions, who have retained the core of the 2022 side which had made history in Bangkok.

India will count on the experience of last edition as they have been put in the 'Group of Death', featuring multiple-time winners Indonesia, Thailand and England in Group C.

Indian men will begin their campaign against Thailand, who boost of

reigning world champion Kunlavut Vitidsarn and young Panitchaphon Teeraratkul.

But the most formidable will be third-seeded Indonesia, who have the likes of Jonatan Christie and Anthony Ginting—the two played the finals of All England in March—and world number seven pair of Muhammad Rian Ardianto and Fajar Alfian.

"It will be tough this year. Based on current form, there are lots of teams with three strong singles and two doubles (players) like China, Denmark, Chinese Taipei, Japan, and Indonesia," HS Prannoy said.

A lot can happen in two years' time and none of the Indian players coming to China this week are the same.

Prannoy, who had delivered the goods under pressure in the deciding fifth singles, is coming into the tournament after struggling in the first half of the season, owing to a chronic stomach disorder which returned after troubling him in the past.

However, his 90-minute marathon battle en route to a morale-boosting win over China's Lu Guang Zu showed he is close to recovery and will carry the onus of giving the team a good start as he is the top-ranked singles player at world number nine now.

Lakshya Sen has found his mojo just in time with successive semifinal fin-

ishes at the French Open and the All England Championships after enduring a difficult 2023 and early 2024.

Kidambi Srikanth, who had won all six matches in 2022, has blown hot and cold in the last two years. He also endured tough losses in the team championships final at the 2022 Commonwealth Games and 2023 Asian Games.

Another player who could be entrusted with the third singles is young Priyanshu Rajawat, who was part of the team which won the epic title in Bangkok, and since then has gone on to claim his maiden Super 300 title last year in Orleans.

While the rest had an inconsistent run, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty have looked unstoppable and are coming into the prestigious event with four straight finals on the World Tour. The duo will be the spearhead of India's campaign.

Dhruv Kapila and Arjun MR, who will play the second doubles, have weaved a few title wins at the Uganda International Challenge and Orlen Polish Open, besides signing off with a quarterfinal finish at the Spain Masters in March.

"As a team we have evolved in the last 2-3 years. Everybody has been able to keep aside their individual problems for a one-week time and has been able to push through

emotional challenges in a much better way during the team events," Prannoy said.

It is likely that Prannoy and Srikanth could be rotated during the event, putting the onus more on Sen and Rajawat to deliver. There is also Kiran George, who has been in decent touch.

In Uber Cup, Ashmita Chaliha will lead a young Indian team with all the big guns skipping the tournament after competing in a series of tournaments to qualify for the Paris Olympics.

The greenhorns will look to test their mental and physical fortitude against the top international players when they open their campaign against Canada in Group A.

Top seeds and multiple-time winners China and Singapore are also in their group, making it improbable for the young women's team to go past the group stage. Besides Ashmita, national champion Anmol Kharb, who was the star performer for India en route their maiden Asia Team Championships title, will also look to test their wares as will Isharani Baruah and 15-year-old Tanvi Sharma.

India, who have reached the semifinals of the Uber Cup thrice in 1957, 2014 and 2016, will also be served by the doubles pair of Shruti Mishra and Priya Konjengbam, and Simran Singhi and Ritika Thaker.

## PBKS Complete Highest Successful RunChase in T20 Cricket to Beat KKR by 8 Wickets

**NEW DELHI, APR 26:** Punjab Kings (PBKS) completed the highest run chase in T20 cricket to beat Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) by eight wickets in the 2024 Indian Premier League (IPL) at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata on Friday.

With the win, PBKS got to six points and climbed over Mumbai Indians in the IPL 2024 points table, with a better net run rate as KKR stayed on 10 points.

It was a usual blistering start from the KKR opening duo as Phil Salt and Sunil Narine put the PBKS pacers to the sword - bringing up their 50-run partnership in just 23 deliveries.

Punjab's fielding was dismal, especially their catching. Narine, dropped by Harpreet Brar at point on 16, smashed his fifty in 23 balls. Salt was dropped twice - by Curran on 34 and then by Rabada on 35. The pair reached the 100-run mark in eight overs as Salt got his fifty in 25 balls.

Narine departed as Jonny Bairstow finally held on with Rahul Chahar



getting the first breakthrough. The KKR star made 32-ball 71, with 9 fours and 4 sixes.

Narine and Salt registered the highest opening partnership - 138 off 63 balls - this season.

Venkatesh Iyer walked out to bat but Salt kept powering through. In the 13th over, Salt smashed identical sixes down the ground before Curran bowled a near-perfect yorker to send back his fellow Englishman.

KKR did not stop the attacking intent, despite the PBKS spinners causing uncertainty with some balls sticking in the pitch. Russell along with Venkatesh smacked a couple of fours and sixes to take the home side to 190 at the end of 15

overs.

Russell took Arshdeep apart with a monstrous six and a streaky boundary but the bowler got the last laugh as a short ball was skied and caught confidently by Harshal Patel.

KKR skipper Shreyas Iyer came out and smashed his opposite number Curran for three sixes. In the very next over though, Shreyas tried to hit Arshdeep but was caught by Rabada in the deep.

Rinku Singh was next as he too came out swinging, hit a boundary but was immediately sent back by Harshal. Harshal managed to contain things in the last over but Kolkata Knight Riders registered the highest IPL total at Eden Gardens.

Bairstow and Impact Sub Prabhshimran Singh started the chase brightly for PBKS, reaching the 50-run mark in 3.3 overs. The latter reached his fifty in just 18 balls, as Bairstow joined him soon with two fours and two sixes off Impact Sub Anukul Roy. On the last ball though, an attempt at a quick single led to Prabhshimran being run out by Narine to end the powerplay.

Bairstow smashed Harshit Rana and Varun Chakaravarty for a couple of sixes as he brought up his fifty in 23 deliveries.

At the halfway stage of the innings, PBKS scored 132 runs and needed 130 more.

Bairstow and Rilee Rossouw joined forces and despite the controlled bowling of KKR's spinners, brought up their 50-run stand in just 29 balls. Lusty blows to Russell followed but Narine managed to get the wicket of Rossouw, with Shreyas taking a good high catch and ending the second-wicket stand for 85 off 39 deliveries.

## Jyothi Surekha Vennam, Abhishek enter compound mixed team final; archers eye four gold medals

**SHANGHAI, APR 26:** The compound mixed team of Jyothi Surekha Vennam and Abhishek Verma assured India of a fourth medal in the ongoing Archery World Cup, advancing into the final here on Friday.

The world number two Indians dropped just five points to prevail over their Mexican opponents Andrea Becerra and Lot Maximo Mendez Ortiz 155-151 in the semi-final.

They will face lower-ranked Estonia in the gold-medal clash on Saturday. Jyothi is also a member of the women's compound team, which had entered the final on Wednesday.

With Jyothi also securing a semifinal spot in the individual section on Thursday, the World num-



ber three and Asian Games gold medallist is in the hunt for a hat-trick of top podium finishes.

Overall, Indian archers have qualified in four finals, all in the team events, and are in the hunt for two medals in compound individual events—where Jyothi and Priyanshu have made the semifinals.

The four events where Indian teams have made the gold-medal round are compound men's,

women's, mixed categories and men's recurve.

The elimination round in the recurve individual category is slated to begin later in the day.

Having got an opening round bye, the second-seeded Indian pair of Jyothi and Verma started off by producing a flawless 160 out of 160 to knock out the lower-ranked Australian pair of Geogina Graham and Brandon Hawes by eight points.

Next up, 10th ranked Luxembourg's Mariya Shkolna and Gilles Seywert were also no match for the Indian pair, which dropped just five points from 16 arrows to storm into the semi-finals with a 155-151 win.

In the semi-final, the Indians started on a back-foot after Andrea and Mendez Ortiz capped three 10s and one nine to take the opening end 39-38. But the Mexicans slipped in the next set of arrows as Jyothi and Verma snatched the lead by dropping one point.

The Indians then extended their lead by three points in the penultimate round after another slip-up by the Mexicans.

Jyothi and Verma sealed the issue with a perfect 40 in the fourth end.

## World wrestling body threatens to reimpose ban on WFI if ad-hoc committee is brought back

**NEW DELHI, APR 26:** Wrestling's world governing body UWW on Friday threatened to reimpose the ban on India and bar its wrestlers from the final Olympic Qualifiers next month if an ad-hoc committee was brought back to run the sport.

Recently, the Delhi High Court directed the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) to file an affidavit stating the circumstances which led to the dissolution of the ad-hoc committee for running the national wrestling body.

The UWW (United World Wrestling) in a letter to WFI (Wrestling Federation of India) reiterated its stand that they won't allow any third party interference in the running of the national association of any country.

"We have been informed that the Wrestling Federation of India is once again threatened by your Ministry of Sports with the imposition of an Ad-hoc committee to oversee its affairs," UWW president Nenad Lalovic wrote in his e-mail to



WFI.

He reminded the WFI of the serious implications the move could have, including jeopardising India's preparations for the upcoming Olympic Games.

"Besides our lassitude for this additional affair impacting your federation and its members, we would like to reiterate UWW's determination to uphold the principle of autonomy and independence of its national federations in accordance with the UWW Statutes and the Olympic Charter.

"In case any decision or order should be made against your federation, and a third party be designated to run the daily affairs of our sport in India

in violation of the UWW Statutes, UWW would have no other option than to re-impose a temporary suspension of your federation until further notice, and which, this time, could maybe include your athletes," Lalovic warned.

Earlier, in a big relief for WFI, the UWW had lifted its suspension on it on after it conducted elections. However, the sports ministry is yet to lift its suspension. A number of court cases are also pending in the matter as elite wrestlers have challenged the legality of WFI's elections.

The Indian wrestling contingent have always returned with medals since Sushil Kumar's bronze medal in Beijing in

the 2008 edition and the comeback of an ad-hoc committee would mean robbing the wrestlers a chance of qualification for the Paris Games.

"This suspension would apply to the final Olympic Games Qualifying Tournament in May, and will certainly attract the attention of the IOC on this matter, who may also consider further action.

"Please note that the UWW Bureau is informed of this situation and eventually," it further stated.

This threat from UWW comes days after the Delhi High Court was considering an application filed by four wrestlers including Tokyo Olympics bronze medallist Bajrang Punia after the IOA dissolved the ad hoc committee on March 18 saying that there was "no further need" for it to run.

The ad hoc committee was constituted by the IOA on the directions of the sports ministry on December 27 after the ministry suspended the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI).