

India win by 30 runs to seal series 3-1

Ahmedabad (UNI)
India sealed the series in emphatic fashion, defeating South Africa in the fifth T20I in Ahmedabad to clinch the contest 3-1. After posting a mammoth 231/5, powered by blazing half-centuries from Tilak Varma and Hardik Pandya, who smashed the second-fastest T20I fifty by an Indian off just 16 balls, the hosts held their nerve under pressure to restrict South Africa to 201/8. South Africa threatened early through Quinton de Kock's attacking fifty, but India clawed their way back. Varun Chakravarthy turned the game on its head with a double-wicket over, while Jasprit Bumrah and Hardik Pandya removed the set batters to derail the chase. With this, India won their eighth consecutive T20I series, which they have not lost since December 2023.

Mewnwhile, In a breathtaking display of power-hitting, India's Hardik Pandya and Tilak Varma turned the 5th T20I against South Africa into a

showcase of fearless batting at the Narendra Modi Stadium.

After South Africa won the toss and elected to bowl, the Proteas were immediately under pressure as India's young and aggressive lineup laid the foundation for a mammoth total of 231 for 5 in their 20 overs.

Sanju Samson and Abhishek Sharma provided India with a strong start. Samson played a quick 37 off 22 balls, while Abhishek contributed 34 off 21 deliveries, giving India a solid platform.

Samson's innings featured crisp drives and clever placement, and Abhishek's strokeplay helped maintain a rapid scoring rate early on. However, it



was the Varma-Pandya duo that transformed the innings into an electrifying spectacle.

Tilak Varma, at number three, played a brilliant 73 off 42 balls, striking 10 fours and a six with remarkable timing and poise.

Varma's innings combined audacity with intelligence; he maneuvered the field effortlessly, exploited gaps, and dispatched loose deliveries over the boundary.

One dramatic moment saw Varma sacrificing his wicket to save Shivam Dube in a run-out, showing maturity beyond his years. His ability to balance risk and aggression set the stage for India's late surge.

Hardik Pandya, coming in after Varma, dominated the latter half of the innings. In just 25 balls, he scored 63 runs with five sixes and five fours, registering a 16-ball fifty—the second fastest for India in T20Is after Yuvraj Singh.

Pandya's timing, placement, and

HIL: Ranchi Royals' beauty Dung Dung & Sangita Kumari eager to enthrall home crowd



New Delhi, (UNI)
As the Ranchi Royals gear up for the second season of the Women's Hockey India League (HIL) that gets underway on December 28, two young stars from Jharkhand are buzzing with excitement at the opportunity of representing their home franchise in their own backyard.

Sangita Kumari and Beauty Dung Dung made their India debut in 2021 and there has been no looking back. The duo has represented their country in major international events with Sangita having scored 30 goals, while Beauty has contributed with 6 goals. Now, the two are set to embark on a new journey with their home franchise - Ranchi Royals in the HIL.

Eagerly awaiting the campaign, Kumari, who was part of the Indian team that won a bronze medal at the Commonwealth Games in 2022 said, "It's a proud feeling to play at my home ground. It's always a special occasion to play in Ranchi. Even more so now that I'm representing the Ranchi Royals. The audience here loves hockey and that makes it exciting for the players as well. For me, personally, it'll be extra special because my family will come to watch the matches as well."

Echoing those sentiments, Dung Dung also shared her enthusiasm to represent her home franchise. "Whenever we play a game in Ranchi, it's always very crowded because there are so many hockey fans in the city. It's our home ground, so we will do whatever it takes to win."

The midfielder also highlighted the impact that HIL is creating by giving young players a platform to rub shoulders with some of the best international players in the world.

"Sometimes, as juniors, you're left wondering when you'll get a chance to play for the senior team, but now this league gives junior players a chance to play with the top players from around the globe. If we raise the standards at the highest level, the grassroots system is bound to follow," she said.

"Women's hockey is on the rise and we want to take it even further."



Uttar Pradesh Kabaddi League match schedule for Season 2 released

Noida, (UNI) Uttar Pradesh Kabaddi League (UP-KL) on Friday announced the complete fixtures for Season 2, which will be hosted entirely at the Noida Indoor Stadium from December 24, 2025, to January 10, 2026.

Day 1 will commence on December 24, 2025, with an opening ceremony followed by an exhibition match, marking the formal start of the league's second edition.

The league stage will run from December 24, 2025, to January 9, 2026, featuring four matches per day.

League-stage matches will be played daily from 5:00 pm onwards, with evening fixtures running until around 10:00 pm, offering fans a consistent prime-time kabaddi viewing experience.

Shooting: Army's Lakshita Bishnoi and Sharvan Kumar clinch senior mixed team gold

New Delhi,(UNI)
Indian Army's pairing of Lakshita Bishnoi and Sharvan Kumar produced a commanding performance in the 10m Air Pistol Mixed Team gold medal match to secure the gold medal at the 68th National Shooting Championship Competitions (Shotgun), currently underway at the Dr. Karni Singh Shooting Range here. Laskhita and Sharvan defeated Haryana's Suruchi Singh and Samrat Rana 16-10 to seal the title.

Lakshita (290-12x) and Sharvan (292-9x) also shot 582-21x to qualify on top to the gold medal match, while Haryana finished second on 582-14x, with Suruchi Singh shooting 293-8x and Samrat Rana adding 289-6x, advancing to the gold medal match on inner-10 count. Rajasthan finished third with 576-21x through Anjali Shekhawat's 288-11x and Amit Sharma's 288-10x, while Railways took the

fourth qualification spot with 576-20x, courtesy Sakshi Anil Suryavanshi's 289-8x and Saurabh Chaudhary's 287-12x. In the Senior Mixed Team bronze medal match, Rajasthan claimed the bronze medal after Anjali Shekhawat and Amit Sharma defeated Railways' Sakshi Anil Suryavanshi and Saurabh Chaudhary 17-13 in the bronze medal match.

Karnataka's Jonathan Gavin Antony and Avanthika Madhu claimed the gold medal in the Junior Mixed Team event, with a commanding 17-11 win over Haryana's Kapil Bainsla and Palak Gulia in the final. Karnataka's pair controlled the match from the early stages to convert their qualification consistency into gold. Madhya Pradesh secured the bronze medal as Aaradhya Mishra and Yugpratap Singh Rathore registered a dominant 16-2 victory over Uttarakhand's Abhinav Deshwal and Yashavi Joshi.

Manchester City, Villa to keep pressure on as Arsenal faces Everton

London, (UNI)
The Premier League will be different this year with no traditional Boxing Day fixtures on December 26 but the calendar falls in such a way that the competition can fall weekend to weekend without any change in rhythm over the holiday season.

The round of matches before Christmas looks as if it has several surprises in store which could live up an already exciting title race.

Manchester City could go top on Saturday afternoon with a home win against West Ham, who kicks off the weekend in the bottom three and lost Aaron Wan-Bissaka and El Hadji Malick Diouf to the Africa Cup of Nations.

West Ham coach Nuno Espirito Santo may hope Manchester City's midweek Carabao Cup tie has taken something out of their legs, but City's



squad depth allowed Pep Guardiola to make changes to his side and also not miss Omar Marmoush and Rayan Ait-Nouri, who are also on Africa Cup duty.

Arsenal doesn't lose anyone to the

Africa Cup of Nations, but has a difficult visit to play an Everton side that is likely to defend deep and try to limit chances. It looks like the kind of game that might be decided by a moment of magic by Bukayo Saka or a header

from Mikel Merino.

Aston Villa's six-game winning run has turned Unai Emery's side into a title contender ahead of what looks to be a mouth-watering clash with Manchester United on Sunday.

A win for Villa will confirm its candidacy, while this is the sort of game that Manchester United needs to win to confirm its upward trend.

Manchester United and Bournemouth shared eight goals in arguably the most entertaining game of the season on Monday, but the defending did nothing to convince doubters and Aston Villa is unlikely to be so generous at the back as Bournemouth was. The weekend gets under way with Chelsea visiting a Newcastle United still hurting from last weekend's defeat to Sunderland in the Wear-Tyne derby and the fans in St James' Park will be demanding a reaction from the home side.

Jeetan Patel plays down fears over Stokes' bowling fitness

Adelaide, (UNI)
England assistant coach Jeetan Patel has played down concerns over Ben Stokes' fitness to bowl, suggesting sheer exhaustion may have been the primary reason behind the captain's absence from the attack on day three of the third Ashes Test here.

Stokes, who bowled 19 overs in Australia's first innings, all on day one, did not turn his arm over during the hosts' 66 overs on Friday, despite owning England's best bowling average (25.87) in the series and leading the team's wicket-taking charts in Tests in 2025 with 28 scalps.

His workload across the first three days was immense, having also spent over five hours at the crease while battling extreme heat and physical discomfort as he showcased unbelievable resilience at the crease.

According to the International Cricket Council (ICC), Patel admitted there was no clear injury concern, but acknowledged the toll Stokes' all-round efforts had taken on him.

"From what I understand, he's pretty fit to bowl," said Patel.

"I think he's just pretty knackered and he's taken a lot out of himself to get through this point in the game," he said.

The assistant coach felt the emotional and physical investment of Stokes' innings, which ended on 83,



compounded the fatigue.

"The disappointment of the way he got out this morning, well not the way, it was a pretty good delivery, but all the work he had done to get to the position where he was, where we could press on again and push that partnership further, that took a lot out of him as well and then you get that early wicket and the energies are up and all of a sudden it's not quite where you think it's going," he said.

Patel also hinted that Stokes' high standards may have influenced the decision. "We all know he doesn't do anything at 80%. Maybe he thought he was a risk, so he didn't bowl," Patel said.

Kuldeep Yadav receives Messi's autographed jersey during India tour

New Delhi, (UNI)
Indian spinner Kuldeep Yadav had a memorable interaction with Argentine football great Lionel Messi, receiving an autographed jersey during the latter's visit to the national capital as part of his 'G.O.A.T India Tour 2025'.

Adidas India shared images from the meeting on Instagram, showing Kuldeep alongside fellow brand athletes, including two-time Paralympic javelin throw champion Sumit Antil and para high-jump World Championship gold medalist Nishad Singh. The photographs also featured Antil posing with his javelin next to Messi, who was seen wearing India's T20 jersey. Indian boxer Nikhat Zareen and Women's World Cup-winning pacer Renuka Singh Thakur were also present at the event. Messi signed a cricket ball for Renuka and an Argentina jersey for Nishad, adding to the highlights of the interaction.

Kuldeep has previously spoken about his admiration for FC Barcelona, the club Messi represent-



ed for several years before moving to Paris Saint-Germain and later Inter Miami. Messi began his four-city India tour in Kolkata, followed by visits to Hyderabad and Mumbai, before concluding in New Delhi on December 15. In the capital, International Cricket Council (ICC) Chairman Jay Shah presented Indian team jerseys to Messi and fellow Argentine footballers Rodrigo De Paul and Luis

Suarez at the Arun Jaitley Stadium. Messi received a customised India jersey bearing the number 10, while Suarez and De Paul were presented jerseys numbered 9 and 7, respectively. During his visit, Messi also met Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and Delhi and District Cricket Association (DDCA) president Rohan Jaitley. Shah also invited Messi to attend the upcoming ICC Men's T20 World Cup.

Veer Ahlawat comes through as champion courtesy solid final round 67 at CIDCO Open

Navi Mumbai, (UNI)
Veer Ahlawat brought all his experience to the fore to come through as the champion in maiden CIDCO Open 2025, the first-ever professional event played at the Kharghar Valley Golf Course (KVGCG) here.

Gurugram golfer Veer Ahlawat (65-65-73-67), who was at the top of the leaderboard for the first three days being the sole leader in the first two rounds and the joint leader after the third round, produced a solid final round effort of four-under 67 despite a turbulent first half of the day to emerge victorious by three shots at a total of 14-under 270.

Six-foot four-inch tall



Ahlawat, the 2024 PGTI Order of Merit champion, secured his second title of 2025 and sixth win overall that earned him the winning

cheque worth INR 15 lakh and propelled him from 18th to 11th position in the 2025 PGTI Ranking.

Pune's Rohan Dhole Patil

(70-69-64-70), the overnight joint leader along with Veer, came up with a last round of 70 to finish runner-up at a total of 11-under 273 and thus record his best finish on the PGTI. Rohan collected a cheque worth INR 10 lakh that pushed him up from 42nd to 32nd in the PGTI Ranking.

Gurugram's Manu Gandas (68-68-70-68) and Italy's Michele Ortolani (67-66-72-69) finished tied third at 10-under 274. Ravi Kumar of Chandigarh made the third hole-in-one of the tournament during his final round of 71. Ravi aced the 13th hole. He totalled four-under 280 to claim ninth place at four-under 280.

Akash, Sayak star for Bengal in Vijay Merchant Trophy

Cuttack, (UNI)
A fine batting display by Akash Yadav and Sayak Jana helped Bengal

U-16 team bag first innings lead against Kerala in the Vijay Merchant Trophy Elite here on Friday.

After bowling out Kerala for 178, Bengal posted 193 in their first innings to bag the all-important first innings lead.

Akash (69 not out) and Sayak (43) impressed with the bat. Kerala, in their second innings were, 5/1 at stumps on the second and



penultimate day, trailing by 10 runs.

Md Ashif bagged the only wicket.

