

Short Takes

Dean Jones appointed interim Afghanistan head coach

Johannesburg [South Africa], Oct 10 : Former Australian cricketer Dean Jones has been roped in as the interim coach of the Afghanistan cricket team for the upcoming Hong Kong tour.

Confirming the news, the Afghan Cricket Board said that Jones would take charge for the side's four-day Intercontinental Cup game, which is to be held from October 20 to October 23.

"(The) Afghanistan Cricket Board has appointed Dean Jones, a prominent former Australian cricketer and commentator, as its head coach for the four-day Intercontinental games in Hong Kong," Sport24 quoted Afghanistan as saying. The board further confirmed that the four-day-game could become a permanent fixture.

"Both parties will consider a long-term agreement after the games," the country cricket board said.

Taking to his official Twitter account, the 56-year-old former player said that he was happy to lead Afghanistan's cricket team in Hong Kong.

"I am pleased to announce that I will be Afghanistan interim Head Coach for their Tour to Hong Kong #shouldbefun," he tweeted.

Australia Open 'top of Serena's mind', says tournament boss

Johannesburg [South Africa], October 10 : Australian Open organisers remain hopeful about new mom Serena Williams' stunning return on the tennis court in January as they raised the winners' prize money to Aus USD 4 million (USUSD 3.1 million) on Tuesday.

Last month, Serena had revealed that she has set an 'outrageous' goal for making a comeback at the Australian Open, something which will push her Grand Slam total to an all-time record-tying 24 titles.

Williams, who won this year's Grand Slam title at the Melbourne Park, while she was pregnant, is hoping to make a return just four-and-a-half months after giving birth to her baby girl.

Talking about her return, tournament director Craig Tiley said that all 100 top men and women had given their consent to play in Melbourne - which also includes the American star, who is currently ranked 24th in the world.

Tiley further revealed that the former world number one is focussed on making a return in the Australia Open, while also pointing out that the tournament coincidentally has the same initials as her daughter, Alexis Olympia.

"Her baby's initials are AO and she's suggested she should also have her name on the 2017 trophy, so the AO is well and truly top of mind for her at the moment," Sport24 quoted Tiley, as saying.

Gomes' family expected to be present during England-Mexico game

Kolkata, Oct 10 : England and Manchester United forward Angel Gomes will have the support of his family when his team takes on Mexico in a Group F FIFA U-17 World Cup tie here on Wednesday.

Sources close to the England team management said on Tuesday that Gomes will be one of the few players who are going to have their loved ones by their side during the tournament.

Gomes, United's Under-18s skipper, scored a superb free kick after coming on from the substitute's bench in the 67th minute in the game against Chile.

Arsenal youngster Emile Smith Rowe, who did not start against Chile, had his mother and brother attending practice at the Vivekananda Yuva Bharati Krirangan training site on Tuesday.

"I am impressed with the atmosphere here. The stadium looks fantastic. We are from London and I came to Kolkata last Friday," Smith Rowe's mother, a junior school teacher, told reporters.

In-form India eye T20I series win against depleted Aussies

Guwahati [Assam], October 10 : India will aim to wrap the three-match Twenty20 series against Australia by winning the second consecutive game at the ACA-Barsapara stadium in Guwahati later on Tuesday.

The Virat Kohli-led side, who clinched the ODI series against Australia 4-1 to reclaim the number one spot in the ICC rankings, had earlier continued their dominance against the depleted Steve Smith-led side as they clinched a thrashing nine-wicket win in Ranchi. It should be noted that this is the first international game that will be played at this ground.

The Men in Blue, who produced a spectacular all-round show in the opening match, will hope to deliver a similar kind of performance here today. Meanwhile, Australia will look for a better performance from their middle order to get back to winning ways and to keep their hopes alive in the T20I series.

Earlier, Australian stand-in skipper David Warner had insisted that his team was not let down by their defeat in the first T20I in Ranchi and would continue to play with the Australian brand of cricket in the remaining two games of the series.

The two squads are as follows:

India T20 squad: Virat Kohli (Captain), Rohit Sharma (vice-captain), Shikhar Dhawan, KL Rahul, Manish Pandey, Kedar Jadhav, Dinesh Karthik, MS Dhoni (wk), Hardik Pandya, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Jasprit Bumrah, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Ashish Nehra, Axar Patel.

Australia T20 squad: Steve Smith (Captain), David Warner (vice-captain), Jason Behrendorff, Dan Christian, Nathan Coulter-Nile, Patrick Cummins, Aaron Finch, Travis Head, Moises Henriques, Glenn Maxwell, Tim Paine (WK), Kane Richardson, Adam Zampa.

Indian men's hockey team meet Japan in Asia Cup opener

Dhaka [Bangladesh], Oct 10 : The Indian men's hockey team will take on Japan as they open their campaign in the Asia Cup 2017 here at the Maulana Bhashani National Stadium in Dhaka on Wednesday.

Though India are clear favourites for the title and interestingly also have the backing of the local crowd who welcomed the team with loud cheers during their practice match on Monday against Oman, they need to bring their top game to every match to ensure they top Pool A which will also see Bangladesh and Pakistan in the fray. "The opening match of the tournament is always challenging because we need to get over the early nervousness and find our rhythm. We have had two good practice sessions on the main pitch and even played a practice match against Oman. The team is upbeat and ready for the first challenge," stated skipper Manpreet Singh on the eve of their first match. India previously played Japan in the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup earlier this year where they beat them 4-3. It's Japan's ability to play fast-paced hockey with good attack that makes them an unpredictable team. At the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup they set up a shocking 3-2 win over World No.2 Australia. "We have seen how they play and they are definitely one of the fastest improving sides in Asia.

Under Marijne, India's hockey team seeks fresh start in Asia Cup

Dhaka, Oct 10 : The Indian mens hockey team will seek a fresh start under new chief coach Sjoerd Marijne as it opens the Hero Asia Cup campaign against Japan at the Maulana Bhashani National Stadium here on Wednesday.

Dutchman Marijne, who has spent around 20 days with the men's squad, replaced sacked Roelant Oltmans last month. Marijne's new wards enter an important cycle with major tournaments coming up in the next 15 months including the Hockey World League (HWL) Final in December, Commonwealth Games in April followed by the Asian Games and the 2018 World Cup.

This cycle begins with the Asia Cup, in which the Indians are favourites. India are the top-ranked side in Asia and over the past few years, they are the only Asian team to have claimed medals at global tournaments.

However, they need to bring their top game to every match to ensure they top Pool A which will also see Bangladesh and Pakistan in the fray.

They will also have to bring some technical and tactical adjustments to their game according to the ideas of Marijne.

We have had two good practice sessions on the main pitch and even played a practice match against Oman. The team is upbeat and ready for the first challenge,' captain



Manpreet Singh said.

"The opening match of the tournament is always challenging because we need to get over the early nervousness and find our rhythm." India played Japan in the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup earlier this year where they beat them 4-3. It's Japan's ability to play fast-paced hockey with good attack that makes it an unpredictable team.

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"We have seen how they play and they are definitely one of the fastest improving sides in Asia. We can never take Japan to be an easy team," said Manpreet.

India's defence line-up

is inexperienced with Rupinder Pal Singh and Kothajit Singh missing out due to injuries. The defence line-up has young players in Dipsan Tirkey, Surrender Kumar, Harmanpreet Singh, Varun Kumar and returning Amit Rohidas.

Captain Manpreet feels that Rohidas, who is making his comeback after a couple of years, will make the most of his opportunities. "But we are now joined by Amit Rohidas who has just returned from a good outing at the Australian Hockey League and he did well during India's tour of Belgium and Holland," explained Manpreet.

Manpreet, alongside

S.K. Uthappa and Sardar Singh will be key mid-fielders, while S.V. Sunil, Akashdeep Singh, Ramandeep Singh are the key forwards.

India will face Bangladesh on October 13. The team will play their third and final league match against arch foes Pakistan on October 15.

Japanese coach Siegfried Aikman minced no words when he said that every team stands a chance to make the final in this tournament. "It's a major tournament which gives us the opportunity to play at the highest level. The World Cup qualifier makes it even more challenging for us but reality learns that we need to know our place in the ranking.

"We stand for a huge challenge to compete with outstanding teams in our group. However, this is sports and in sports its always possible to flip the script. So, let's wait and see," he stated.

India squad: Goalkeepers: Akash Anil Chikte, Suraj Karkera

Defenders: Dipsan Tirkey, Amit Rohidas, Surrender Kumar, Harmanpreet Singh, Varun Kumar

Midfielders: S.K. Uthappa, Sardar Singh, Manpreet Singh (Captain), Chinglensana Singh, Sumit

Forwards: S.V. Sunil (Vice Captain), Akashdeep Singh, Ramandeep Singh, Lalit Kumar

Inaugural T20 Global League likely to be postponed

Johannesburg [South Africa], October 10 : The inaugural edition of the T20 Global League, which was due to start on November 3, is most likely to be postponed due to numerous logistical challenges.

With less than a month to go for the commencement of the South Africa's first T20 league, the Cricket South Africa (CSA) is expected to soon decide upon the immediate future of the T20 Global League.

The tournament has been facing multiple logistical challenges, including the inability to secure a

broadcast deal or a title sponsor, which is resulting in hefty financial losses.

Last week, acting CSA CEO Thabang Moroe had said that the board is preparing for a net loss of US \$25 million (approx Rs. 342.58 million) from the inaugural edition of the tournament, an amount that accounts for more than half its current cash reserves.

Moroe, however, assured that the tournament would go ahead, according to the plan, ESPNcricinfo reported.

If the T20 Global League failed

to take place this year, there will be enormous gap left in the South African cricket calendar.

As a result, neither the national side nor the domestic franchises will be in action for at least six weeks in peak summer, after the CSA created a gap in the calendar for the tournament.

The T20 Global League is an international T20 cricket league based in South Africa that will debut in the last quarter of 2017 with eight participating teams, consisting of local and international cricket players.

Being racially abused by Aussies was norm, recalls Khawaja

Johannesburg [South Africa], October 10 : Australia batsman Usman Khawaja has revealed that he was racially abused so much growing up in Sydney that he led to support other countries rather than the national side.

The 30-year-old, who was born in Pakistan, moved to Australia with his parents and two older brothers when he was just a 5-year-old. He went on to become Australia's first Pakistan-born national player and has now established himself as one of the country's leading Test batsmen.

Talking about the struggle he faced growing up, Khawaja revealed how racial abuse was widespread on the playing field, during his junior days, while also blaming racial discrimination for curtailing the sporting ambitions of a number of his overseas-born players.

"Getting sledged by opposition players and their parents was the norm. Some of them said it just quietly enough for only me to hear," Sport24 quoted Khawaja, as saying.

"It still hurt, but I would never show it. Most of the time it was when I scored runs. It is for this reason why so many of my friends, most of whom were born outside

Australia, didn't support Australia in sporting contests. I didn't either," he added.

Khawaja insisted that he was brought up to be humble and polite, but he found Australian players to be hard-nosed, confident, almost brutish.

"The same type of men who would sledge me about my heritage growing up. I started to understand that the minority of Australians who did treat me this way were just that, a minority. By High School, I was a diehard Australian team supporter. But, from a pathways perspective, the damage had been done," he revealed.

"Not to me, but to some of the other immigrant kids, who potentially could have gone on to play for Australia. They chose not to pursue a dream because of the negative experiences they had endured," Khawaja elaborated.

However, Khawaja, who made his Australian debut in the 2011 Sydney Test, said that the thinking and mindset of Australia changed radically as time passed. "It's no surprise it has taken Australia cricket so long for coloured players to come through the system. There is no doubt racism and politics played a large role in selections in the past," he said.

ICC Women's Championship gets underway with Windies-Lanka series

Dubai [UAE], Oct 10 : The second edition of the ICC Women's Championship will get underway with the series between the West Indies and Sri Lanka from October 11 to October 15 in Trinidad.

With players, administrators and officials all giving credit for a rise in standard of women's cricket to this eight-team tournament which ensures series against each of the other sides, the championship is likely to come more into focus in this cycle that will culminate in 2020.

The tournament will be played on the same format as the inaugural edition which was held from 2014-16, with all eight sides - Australia, England, India, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa, Sri Lanka and the Windies - taking on each other in series of three ODIs on a home or away basis.

2021 World Cup hosts New Zealand and the three other top teams from this championship will gain direct qualification for women's pinnacle event while the remaining sides will get a second chance through the ICC Women's World Cup Qualifier 2021.

Member boards will be encouraged to play T20Is during tours but no other ODIs can be scheduled along with Women's Championship series. Teams will get two points for each win, one point for a tie or no-result and no points for a loss.

The captains of the two sides, who figured in a well fought series last time with the Windies prevailing 2-1 in Colombo in May 2015, exuded confidence ahead of the upcoming series.

Windies captain Stafanie Taylor, said, "For many of us, we relish any and every opportunity we get to play, so the ICC Women's Championship has proven to be a very important platform in the development of the women's game in the last few years. This was evidenced by the huge response to the ICC Women's World Cup that was staged earlier this year in England, so we are looking forward to the start of the Championship and the journey that we face to qualify for the next ICC WWC.

"The journey to reach the next ICC Women's World Cup starts here, so we will be taking it one match at a time. At the same time, we also have to continue to expose players and fortify our side, so it will be an interesting challenge. We have won six of our last eight matches against the Sri Lankans, including at this year's ICC WWC, so we are working to ensure that this trend continues.

"All of the players that were involved with the last ICC Women's World Cup have been retained, so we are quite familiar with each other. We more or else know what makes everybody tick, and everyone is keen to get down to business and play. We were shattered by our performance in the ICC WWC in England. We knew we let down our fans, so we want to restore their faith in us by playing to our true potential and ability during the coming series and the remainder of the ICC Women's Championship."

"It's always good to be able to play before your own fans. We urge supporters in Trinidad to come out and watch some entertaining ICC Women's Championship matches. The matches are being played at the Brian Lara Cricket Academy and we hope that playing in a venue named after one of the greatest West Indies players of all time will inspire us all to perform at our best." "It's an honour to be given the privilege to lead this group of women into battle again. The girls have always given their fullest support and it should be no different during this series. For me, there was bit of a rest and recuperation following a busy period which included the ICC Women's Cup and the Super League Twenty20 Series, both in England. It's good to be back out on the park, and for me, it will be looking for improvement and consistency, especially in the batting.

Ronaldo, Messi lead 30-man Ballon d'or list

Paris [France], Oct 10 : Real Madrid star striker Cristiano Ronaldo and Barcelona's Lionel Messi have been selected among the 30-man short-listed players for this year's Ballon d'or award.

There are a total of seven Real Madrid players in the list following their second consecutive Champions League victory last season.

As a result, forwards Karim Benzema and Isco, defenders Sergio Ramos and Marcelo, and midfielders Toni Kroos and Luka Modric are also among nominees for the prestigious gong.

Neymar has also been named for the honour following a superb year that saw Brazilian star impress for both his national team and Barcelona, before his world-record summer transfer to Paris Saint-Germain.

Barcelona's Luis Suarez, who scored 37 goals in all competitions for his side last season, has also been picked in the elite list while Tottenham Hotspur striker Harry Kane has also got a nod after scoring 43 times in 37 appearances for the club to help them qualify for the Champions League.

Chelsea's N'Golo Kante and Eden Hazard, Liverpool's Philippe Coutinho and Sadio Mane, Manchester City's Kevin De Bruyne and Manchester United goal-

keeper David de Gea are the other Premier League representatives present in the list.

Ronaldo is among frontrunners to retain his crown, which would see the Portugal star pull level with Messi in winning it five times.

The full list is as follows:

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang (Borussia Dortmund), Karim Benzema (Real Madrid), Leonardo Bonucci (Milan), Gianluigi Buffon (Juventus), Edinson Cavani (PSG), Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool), Kevin de Bruyne (Man City), David de Gea (Man Utd), Paulo Dybala (Juventus), Edin Dzeko (Roma), Radamel Falcao (Monaco), Antoine Griezmann (Atletico Madrid), Eden Hazard (Chelsea), Mats Hummels (Bayern Munich), Isco (Real Madrid), Harry Kane (Tottenham), N'Golo Kante (Chelsea), Toni Kroos (Real Madrid), Robert Lewandowski (Bayern Munich), Sadio Mane (Liverpool), Marcelo (Real Madrid), Kylian Mbappe (PSG), Dries Mertens (Napoli), Lionel Messi (Barcelona), Luka Modric (Real Madrid), Neymar (PSG), Jan Oblak (Atletico Madrid), Sergio Ramos (Real Madrid), Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid), Luis Suarez (Barcelona).