

Short Takes

Golfer Dave qualifies for National finals

Mumbai, Jan 12: Jaysinh Dave has clinched the final qualification spot of the Mumbai Leg of the Mercedes Trophy golf meet, it was announced on Friday.

Jaysinh carded a nett score of 72 to emerge victorious on the third day of the qualifications.

Jaysinh will now be competing at the National finals of the tournament to be played at the Oxford Golf Resort in Pune from April 4-6.

Commenting after the win, Jaysinh Dave said: "I appreciate the effort."

I am very glad that my five years of rigorous practice has paid off and has resulted in this achievement. I would also like to thank the Mercedes team for organising such a wonderful tournament."

The best Gross Winner of the day was Parthive Sanghrajka with an excellent round of 74 and there were a host of other prizes on offer to be won on the day.

Prominent winners included Aditya Suklikar who won the Ballantine's Long Drive Challenge with an impressive drive of 277 yards.

Adventure Sports Expo Asia to begin on January 27

New Delhi, Jan 12: Adventure Sports Expo Asia, country's first adventure extravaganza is all set to begin from January 27 at Four Points by Sheraton here, it was announced on Friday.

The three-day event will witness participation from over 60 brands. The expo expects to welcome over 15000 visitors and adventure sports enthusiasts.

The event will comprise of the exhibition, speaker sessions, adventure activities, workshops and award night will act as a one-stop destination for adventure sports fraternity.

The founder and MD of RN Sports Marketing Pvt.

Ltd said: "India already has huge potential as an Adventure Sports destination with so much diversity from mountains to rivers and desserts."

"ASEA 2018 will market India as an iconic destination for Adventure Sports to the world with the support of ATOAI. Adventure Sports Expo Asia 2018 will also be recognizing individual/groups and companies in the field of adventure on the opening night of the show," he added.

The announcement was made on Friday at the Constitutional Club of India in a special curtain raiser event which was attended by several dignitaries including Archana Sardana, India's first female BASE jumper.

Tejbir Singh Anand Vice President of Adventure Tour Operators Association of India said: "Though, at a nascent stage, the Indian adventure sports industry holds massive growth potential. ASEA 2018 on the same lines offered a platform for the Indian Adventure Sports fraternity to come together for the first time, brainstorm and address the challenges in a cumulative manner."

"I am delighted to see the real change coming already in the country, where all of the industry colleagues confirmed to come together to stir adventure sports into a real industry."

ICC U-19 World Cup commences on Saturday

Christchurch, Jan 12: Considered as the stepping stone to the big league, the 12th edition of the ICC Under-19 World Cup will witness 16 teams, including the Rahul Dravid-coached Indian colts in action, starting in New Zealand from Saturday.

The opening day of the 22-day tournament will witness four matches, including those featuring defending champions the West Indies and two-time champions Pakistan.

On Saturday, the Windies face New Zealand in a day-night fixture in Tauranga while Pakistan take on dark horses Afghanistan in Whangarei.

In other matches on the opening day to be played here, Bangladesh take on Namibia and Papua New Guinea play Zimbabwe.

From Virat Kohli to Steve Smith to Kane Williamson, most modern-day greats have learnt the ropes in the biennial event, which has gained significance with every passing edition.

Three-time champions India will be eager to bank on their strong stow in the warm-up tie against South Africa when the Prithvi Shaw-led side open their campaign against Group B counterparts Australia at Bay Oval, Mount Maunganui on Sunday.

The 16 teams have been divided into four groups of four teams each.

Along side India and Australia, Papua New Guinea and Zimbabwe are also part of the Group B while Group A consists of Kenya, New Zealand, South Africa and the West Indies.

Bangladesh, Canada, England and Namibia form Group C while Group D comprises Afghanistan, Ireland, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

After opening their campaign against the Australians, the Indians will take on Papua New Guinea on February 16 at Mount Maunganui before facing Zimbabwe at the same venue on January 19.

All teams in each group will play each other once.

The top two from each group will qualify for the quarter-finals. The top four will qualify for the semi-finals.

The final will be played on February 3 at Mount Maunganui.

ISL: Chennaiyin, Pune grapple with coaches' suspensions



Chennai, Jan 12: Both FC Pune City and Chennaiyin FC will be without their coaches at the touchlines when they meet in a crucial Indian Super League (ISL) encounter at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here on Saturday.

Pune got four points from their last two matches while coach Ranko Popovic was serving a four-match ban. However, the visitors will now also have to overcome the absence of their talisman Marcelinho.

The Brazilian is Pune City's leading goal scorer with six strikes, including a hat-trick, and has four assists to boot.

He will, however,

remain suspended for the next clash after accumulating four bookings. He has missed a match before -- against Bengaluru FC -- when he was not fully fit and was left on the bench, and it showed as Bengaluru FC walked away with full points.

"Marcelinho is one of the best player in the league. We will miss him surely but I know our team has quality. If a team cannot play without one player, it's no team. We know his importance, he is a strong player but we know how (good) is our team," Pune assistant coach Vladica Grujic said during the pre-match media interaction.

With 16 points from

nine matches, Pune are placed third, just below Chennaiyin who have an extra point. This puts them in a good position to push for a play-off place, though the assistant coach warned that they still have plenty to do.

"We have achieved nothing yet because you can be first, fourth or last. Now, it's time to try to win points to come as close as possible to first four. This is our aim to come in the first four teams," he said.

Chennaiyin are among the more impressive teams in this edition of ISL and are second only to Bengaluru FC. The home team, however, must shake off the

absence of their coach John Gregory, who curiously also remains suspended.

"Both of them are really good coaches and they are working here for the betterment of the game."

I hope to see both of them back in the dugout soon," said Grujic.

Gregory's absence should not impact Chennaiyin on the field and they should be encouraged with the return of their captain Henrique Soreno who completed serving a one-match suspension of his own.

"We know Pune is strong in attack. They look threatening. We know they are a good attacking side and will come hard at us. We are lucky that our best player, captain (Soreno) is behind. It will be a good contest," said assistant coach Syed Sabir Pasha.

Chennaiyin have conceded goals at the death in their last two matches at home against Delhi Dynamos (2-2) and Kerala Blasters (1-1). That has cost them dearly and Pasha called for focus till the final whistle.

"It hurts us, hurts the players. It's just lack of focus. We have to play as a team in those last moments. Players also understand I think. It will not happen in the matches to come," said Pasha.

Golfer Vani bracing up for European challenge in 2018



New Delhi, Jan 12: After consolidating her ground on the Ladies European Tour (LET) -- thanks to a top-10 finish at the Indian Open, ace golfer Vani Kapoor on Friday said she is aiming to put in a stronger show on the European circuit.

The 23-year-old, who finished joint sixth in the final standings of the Indian Open, said the performance did a world of good to her confidence, going into the new season.

"The 2017 Indian Open was the turning point for me. I was really nervous on the final day but I kept my nerves together and just went out there to enjoy the moment. That's something that has given me a lot of confidence," Vani told reporters on the sidelines of the launch of the Thai Golf Passport.

"Now I am travelling for the next couple of months, first Australia then South Africa. I am

lot last year, like my game has matured and also matured mentally, which helped me get a full Tour Card for 2018."

"This also means I am actually going to get many more tournaments because as a rookie you don't get much to play," added Vani, who went into the final day of the Indian Open at joint 2nd position before finally settling for the sixth spot.

Commenting on her biggest takeaways from the past year, the Gurugram golfer said: "The year 2017 helped me understand a lot about the game. The importance of being in the present and mastering over little parts of our game which actually make a huge impact."

I am all charged up for a better 2018.

"Now I am travelling for the next couple of months, first Australia then South Africa. I am

going to put in all the experience which I gathered last year and grab something more which will help me better my game.

Asked about her goals for the upcoming season, Vani was quick to spell out her European Tour dreams.

"I am going to play the European Tour, where I will be getting into, besides the Majors. Actually the European Tour will have more tournaments this year, which is 12 definitely but they are planning to add a few more probably taking it to 15."

"This year my goal is not to keep experimenting (on my game). Whatever I had to change, I am done with last year. It needs to be more field-based and I just want to have one swing thought, whatever my major fault in swing is which keeps going off," she added.

With an eye on the Olympics 2020, the diminutive golfer is full of motivation to try and rise up the order.

The Thai Golf Passport was launched by Isra Stapanaseth, Director, Tourism Authority of Thailand in presence of Vani, and Gajender Panwar, Vice President, Indian Golf Travel Association, among others.

Gold at CWG, Asiad our main targets: Hockey captain Manpreet

Bengaluru, Jan 12: India's hockey team captain Manpreet Singh on Friday declared that the side's ambition in 2018 was to win the gold medal in Commonwealth Games and clinch the Asian Games gold for the second consecutive time.

Manpreet felt that the bronze medal in the Hockey World League (HWL) Final in December 2017 gave them enormous confidence going into the new year which has as many as four major tournaments lined up.

With the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games, Champions Trophy, 2018 Asian Games, Asian Champions Trophy and the Odisha Hockey Men's World Cup, the team will be put through testing times -- but Manpreet was certain the team's goals were realistic.

"There is no doubt we are approaching this year with clear goals of winning in the CWG and defending our gold medal at the Asian Games. And it is important we convert our weaknesses into our strength before entering these major events," Manpreet emphasised on the eve of their departure to New Zealand where they will compete in the Four Nations Invitational Tour.

The team will play two separate five-day Series

ICC pulls up MCG pitch as 'poor'



Dubai, Jan 12: The Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) has escaped a fine but been given an official warning for producing a 'poor' pitch for the fourth Ashes Test between Australia and England, the International Cricket Council (ICC) has announced.

"The International Cricket Council (ICC) has on Friday announced that the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) has been given an official warning, in relation to the 'poor' rating given to the pitch for the fourth Test of the Australia versus England series played at the venue from December 26-30," an ICC statement read. The annual Boxing Day Test was the only match of this summer's five-Test series that failed to produce a result, with more than 1,000 runs and 24 wickets falling over the five days.

"In arriving at the sanction, the ICC noted the comprehensive response

provided by Cricket Australia, which did not contest the rating given to the pitch by the ICC Match Referee, Ranjan Madugalle, but highlighted that the ground is a frequently used venue that has no history of preparing poor pitches for international cricket, and indicated that there was a commitment by both the Melbourne Cricket Club (MCC) and Cricket Australia to improve the pitches presented for international cricket at the MCG in the future," the statement further read.

The MCG Test was the last match to be rated under the old ICC Pitch and Outfield Monitoring regulations, with a revised process being introduced in men's and women's international cricket from January 4.

The new regulations have the power to strip a ground of the right to host international fixtures for two years if it accumulates 10 demerit points.



against Belgium, New Zealand and Japan starting on January 17 at the Blake Park in Tauranga followed by five-day Series at the Gallagher Hockey Centre in Hamilton that ends on January 28.

With a young team that features four debutants, skipper Manpreet stressed on the importance of this tournament.

"It is always good to start the season with some good matches against top teams. We have Belgium in our pool in the World Cup this year and as many matches we play against them, the better for us."

With teams like New Zealand and Japan in the fray, this tour will certainly help us in our preparations for the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games," said the 25-year-old midfielder.

"After the HWL Final, we recognized some of the areas that we were

lacking in. We knew we can do better in defence, man-to-man marking in the circle and we did work on that in the national camp."

Looking back at the HWL Final in Bhubaneswar, Manpreet said doing well against teams like Australia, Belgium and Germany has instilled a new confidence in the team.

"It was very important to do well against these top teams in a big event. Earlier, somewhere at the back of our minds, we lacked the confidence that we can do well against higher ranked teams but now we don't doubt our abilities against top teams and play with the belief that we can win against them."

"We were the youngest team in the tournament and how we played instils new confidence in the minds of the youngsters," he said.

Real Madrid seek home comfort against Villarreal

Madrid, Jan 12: Real Madrid need to rediscover home comforts when they entertain Villarreal in the Santiago Bernabeu here on Saturday.

Although they qualified for the quarter-finals of the King's Cup knockout competition on Wednesday following a 2-2 draw at home to second division Numancia, there was little reason for cheer following another lackluster display from Zinedine Zidane's side as none of the fringe players except

Lucas Vazquez were able to give a case for a promotion into Saturday's starting 11.

The draw means that Madrid have failed to win seven of their 15 home games in all competitions this season, while in the Liga Santander 10 points have been dropped in front of their home fans.

Real Madrid will kick off on Saturday 16 points behind Barcelona in the race for the league, although the reality now is that rather than focusing on the



title, they have to ensure a top-three finish in the league to avoid a Champions League play-off at the start of next season.

Gareth Bale, who was rested in midweek, will return to the side after his two goals in Vigo and Zidane will hope his pace can inject some

much needed energy into a side that looked flat a week ago.

Karim Benzema remains a doubt, while Marcos Llorente will be sidelined after suffering a shoulder injury against Numancia and Sergio Ramos is still out with a muscle problem.

Dani Carvajal will return at right back, however, against a Villarreal side that has injury worries of their own.

Javier Calleja's project suffered an important loss with the sale of

Cedric Bakambu, who had scored nine league goals, to China last week and Calleja's men will travel without the injured quartet of Bruno Soriano, Leo Suarez, Ruben Smedo and Nicola Sansone, while central defender Victor Ruiz is suspended.

That leaves Carlos Bacca to lead the attack, while Enes Unal, who returned from loan with Levante with a goal last week, and new arrival Roger Martinez will probably await their chances from the bench.