

## Barcelona Spain Masters: Saina, Srikanth chase Olympic berth

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**BARCELONA:** Seasoned Indian shuttlers Saina Nehwal and Kidambi Srikanth will look to keep their Olympic hopes alive when they compete at the USD 170,000 Barcelona Spain Masters starting here on Tuesday. The Indian duo has been inconsistent in 2019 and didn't enjoy a good start to the new year.

While Saina has crossed the first round in only one of the three events in 2020, Srikanth has lost in the opening round in all three tournaments that he has played so far this year.

Saina and Srikanth are currently ranked 18th and 15th respectively, while being placed 22nd and 26th in the 'Race to Tokyo' rankings, which takes into consideration only the points accumulated from the tournaments played in the last one year.

According to the BWF Olympic qualification rules, only two players from each singles category can qualify if their ranking is within the top-16 by April end.

Among the Indians, world champion P V Sindhu and B Sai Praneeth and men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty have almost secured their berths for the Tokyo Games.

With the Olympic qualification cut-off date ending in April, there are only seven tournaments, in-

cluding the Barcelona Spain Masters, left in the calendar and the Indian duo will have to produce consistent performances to earn a ticket to Tokyo.

London bronze-medallist Saina, who is looking to make her fourth Olympics, will begin her campaign here against Germany's Yvonne Li.

The former world no.1 is likely to face Denmark's Line Hojmark Kjaersfeldt and third seeded Thai Busanan Ongbamrunphan on her way to the quarters, provided she wins her rounds.

Third seed Srikanth, on the other hand, will face fellow Indian Subhankar Dey, the 2018 SaarLor-Lux Open champion who notched up a morale-boosting win over world no. 20 Indonesian Shesar Hiren Rhustavito in the Asia Team Championships on Saturday.

Srikanth, who was also a part of the team in Manila, won two of his singles matches and lost one last week and he would hope to go deep in the draw in the tournament.

Among others, world no.25 Parupalli Kashyap will meet Brazil's Ygor Coelho, while H S Prannoy will face veteran Malaysian Daren Liew in the opening round.

Sourabh Verma, who is ranked 21st in the Race to Tokyo rankings, will square off against Israel's Misha Zilberman, while Sameer will be up against B Sai Praneeth.

## India to play day-night Tests vs Australia, England: Sourav Ganguly

**NEW DELHI:** India will play a day-night Test in Australia this year and another during England's visit in 2021, cricket board chief Sourav Ganguly said.

The decision of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) follows January's meeting with a Cricket Australia delegation led by chairman Earl Eddings.

Australia have pushed for more pink-ball Tests, which are favourably timed for spectators and TV audiences as they continue into the evening, as they host India in a four-match series in December-January.

"Day-night Test will happen and we will make a public announcement -- the second Test against England next year. Yes, against Australia also," Ganguly told reporters after a board meeting in New Delhi on Sunday.

India will host England in January-February 2021 for five Tests, of which one will be under lights -- and possibly at the refurbished stadium in Ahmedabad, which will be the world's biggest cricket venue when it opens.

Virat Kohli's India played their first day-night Test in Kolkata last year, thrashing Bangladesh in just over two days.



Earlier India had declined Australia's offer of playing a pink-ball Test in Adelaide at the end of 2018, but Kohli now appears more at ease with the format.

"We played the day-night Test here and were pretty happy with how it went. It's become a very exciting feature of any Test series, so we are absolutely open to play a day-night Test," Kohli said in January.

## Waugh urges modern-day greats to embrace day-night Tests

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**BERLIN:** Australian legend Steve Waugh has exhorted the modern-day greats to embrace day-night Tests and lauded India for accepting the "challenge" of playing with the pink-ball during their tour Down Under later this year.

India played their maiden day-night Test against Bangladesh last November at the Eden Gardens, winning the match quite comfortably with plenty of time to spare.

And BCCI President Sourav Ganguly on Sunday confirmed that India will play a day-night Test during their much-anticipated tour of Australia.

Waugh said the experience of playing a day-night Test in Australia is unforgettable.

"It is great. It is a great opportunity, a great spectacle. One will never forget playing a day-night Test in Australia. It's got a fantastic atmosphere. It is a new challenge and a chance for the greats of this generation to tick that box for them," Waugh said while speaking on the sidelines of the Laureus Awards ceremony.

Waugh, who is a member of the Laureus Academy, said day-night Test contests are good for the game.

"If you score a hundred or pick five wickets in a day-night Test, it



goes down in the annals of history. It's how you look at it either it is a challenge or too hard. I'm sure India will see it as a challenge. It's good for world cricket and I am glad that India have agreed to play," he said.

The limited number of day-night Tests have shown that pacers have an advantage of playing with pink ball and Waugh welcomed it.

"It's a good thing (that fast bowlers have an advantage). People in Australia love watching a day-night Test because you can't take your eyes off the action. Every ball something might happen," he said.

# DU PLESSIS quits as S A captain, says Proteas need next generation of leaders



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**JOHANNESBURG:** Senior batsman Faf du Plessis on Monday stepped down as captain of South Africa's Test and T20 teams with immediate effect, citing "the need to facilitate the emergence of next generation of leaders".

The 35-year-old Du Plessis, who stepped aside from the ODI captaincy to make way for wicket-keeper Quinton de Kock during the recent series against England, said he took the decision to help South Africa start a new era.

"In a perfect world I would have loved to lead the team in the Tests for the rest of the season as well as the T20 World Cup," du Plessis said in a statement.

"But sometimes the most important attribute of a leader is to be selfless. I am healthy, fit, energised and motivated and

certainly see myself playing an important role in the squad for as long as I continue putting in winning performances for the team," he added.

"When I took over the leadership, I did so with the commitment to lead, perform and most importantly, to serve. As the team heads into a new direction with new leaders and a young crop of players, I feel it will be in the best interests of South African cricket to relinquish the captaincy in all formats."

Du Plessis was rested from the three-match T20 series against England which South Africa lost 1-2 on Sunday.

His decision comes less than a week before South Africa's three-match T20 campaign against Australia, starting here on Friday followed by three ODIs against the same opposition.

"The last few weeks of rest away from the game have given me a lot of perspective on the great privilege and honour I have had in representing and leading my country in the three formats of this wonderful game," du Plessis said. "It has been a rewarding, sometimes tough and other times a lonely road, but I would not replace the experience for anything, because it has made me the man that I am proud to be today."

Du Plessis termed the decision as one of the toughest but said he remains fully committed to help de Kock in the transition phase.

"This was one of the toughest decisions to make, but I remain fully committed to supporting Quinton, Mark (Boucher) and my teammates as we continue to rebuild and re-align as a group," said the 35-year-old right-hand-

er. Du Plessis took over as South Africa captain for all three formats in August 2017 after AB de Villiers stepped down.

He led South Africa to a dismal 2019 ODI World Cup campaign, where the team crashed out in the group stages.

Du Plessis, however, is expected to retain his place in the squad for the three T20s against Australia after indicating that he remains open for selection in all formats of the game.

"South African cricket has entered a new era. New leadership, new faces, new challenges and new strategies. I remain committed to play in all three formats of the game for now as a player and will offer my knowledge and time to the new leaders of the team," he said.

Speaking further on his deci-

son, du Plessis said the last season of his captaincy career has turned out to be challenging.

"After the 2019 ICC World Cup, I made the decision to continue in my role as captain while the team went through a rebuilding phase following the retirement of some key senior players and a complete overhaul of the coaching staff that we had worked with until then.

"It was important to me that I stayed to help the team find its feet and plot a new way forward while assisting in identifying the next generation of leaders within the players' group during a time of turbulence in SA cricket," he said.

"The last season of my captaincy has been the most challenging to date as I had a lot of off-field issues that I devoted my energy towards," he added.

## ICC TEST RANKINGS:

### RAHUL closes in on BABAR at the top, KOHLI drops to 10



**DUBAI:**

India's KL Rahul maintained his second spot whereas skipper Virat Kohli moved down to the 10th spot in the latest ICC T20I rankings for batsmen released on Monday. Rahul was in great form in the five-match T20I series against New Zealand which India won 5-0.

Rahul had scored 224 runs at an average of 56 and played an instrumental role in India's triumph over the Black Caps. Kohli, on the other hand, could manage only 105 runs in the four T20I innings against the Kiwis. The Indian skipper has

been replaced by England captain Eoin Morgan who scored 136 runs from three innings against South Africa and helped them win the series 2-1. He went past Kohli and his deputy Rohit Sharma to claim the ninth position. Quinton de Kock, Morgan's opposite number, has climbed as many as 10 spots to occupy the 16th position, after having registered scores of 31, 65

and 35. Babar Azam remains at the top of the rankings, followed by Rahul and Australia captain Aaron Finch, while the bowling and the all-rounders charts are led by Afghanistan's Rashid Khan and Mohammad Nabi respectively. England have retained their third position in the team rankings and their series win against South Africa has taken them within two points of second-placed Australia. India come fourth in the list topped by Pakistan.



# NEYMAR BACK FROM INJURY FOR BORUSSIA DORTMUND CLASH

**DORTMUND:** Neymar has been named in the Paris Saint-Germain squad for Tuesday's Champions League last-16 first leg at Borussia Dortmund, despite missing the French club's last four games through injury.

The world's most expensive player has been struggling with a rib problem, but was expected to be fit in time for the game at Signal Iduna Park.

The Brazilian missed last season's surprise last-16 loss to Manchester United with a foot injury, while he also sat out the second leg of the defeat at the same stage of the competition by Real Madrid in

2018. Neymar was rested, along with Kylian Mbappe, for PSG's remarkable 4-4 draw at Amiens in Ligue 1 on Saturday.

"He will be in Dortmund, I'm sure of it, but without being in the best shape he was in two weeks ago," Tuchel said before the Amiens game.

"But he will help us. I am sure and convinced of that."

PSG are yet to reach the Champions League semi-finals since being bought by their Qatari owners in 2011, with their run to the last four in 1994-95 still the closest they have come to lifting the European Cup.

