



India likely to field two spinners due to dew; in-form all-rounder Reddy also in mix

NEW DELHI, DEC 21: With heavy dew likely to impact the proceedings during the opening T20I at Eden Gardens, India's bowlers practised with wet balls and it will not be a surprise if the hosts field only two spinners, given the conditions.

Dew is a perennial concern at this time of the year at Eden Gardens. Since dew makes it difficult to grip the ball, fielding a third spinner could prove to be costly.

Mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy, a key member of the reigning IPL champions Kolkata Knight Riders, appears to be an automatic choice for India and head coach Gautam Gambhir likely to pair him alongside vice-captain Axar Patel. As a result, Ravi Bishnoi and Washington Sundar may have to wait for their turn.

"If we know there is going to be a heavy dew, you start preparing with the wet ball. You start bowling with the wet ball during practice sessions. You field with the wet ball. So these are the things which are in your control," India skipper Suryakumar said.

"We try to control all those things which we can during practice sessions so



that when the game comes, we are prepared."

It could also open the door for in-form Andhra all-rounder Nitish Kumar Reddy, who scored a historic maiden Test century during the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne. Reddy last appeared in a T20I during the home series against Bangladesh in October, and he will be eager to carry his form into this series, if given the opportunity.

Reddy made history as the first Indian batter to score a century in Australia while batting at number eight. His inclusion would strengthen India's batting line-up further.

From opening to No. 10, the slots are almost sorted. Abhishek Sharma and Sanju Samson will open the innings, followed by Tilak Varma, Suryakumar Yadav, Hardik Pandya, Rinku Singh, and Axar Patel — in no fixed order.

"We all want to be very flexible with the batting order. Other than the openers' slots, which are fixed, I think from 3 to 8 or 7, everyone needs to be really flexible with their batting order. Anyone can go in at any time, and we have been practicing for that," Suryakumar said.

A fit-again Shami will spearhead the pace attack on his return to international cricket after nearly 14 months. He will be joined by left-arm quick Arshdeep Singh, providing variety. The duo was seen putting in the hard yards during their match-evening training session.

Suryakumar expressed excitement over Shami's return.

"It's always good to have an experienced bowler in your side, and he is making a comeback after over a year. I am really excited to see him. I have seen his

journey, how he focused on his bowling and recovery at the NCA."

"It felt good to see him (Shami) on the ground. He has bowled well too. Obviously, he has done his preparation, and he was confident from the start."

After bowling for more than an hour at full throttle during India's first training session on Sunday, Shami did not bowl on Monday. However, he was back to bowling with full intensity on the match eve.

"He has bowled well, and obviously, he has done his preparation. Even today, he is feeling good. Let's see what happens tomorrow," added Suryakumar.

It will be a homecoming for KKR star finisher Rinku Singh, who has had a quiet run recently, with scores of 8 not out, 11, 9, and 8 in his last four innings.

Suryakumar is hopeful that Rinku will come out all guns blazing.

"I want to see him hitting sixes. He has measured all the nooks and corners of Eden Gardens, having played a lot of cricket here. It will be a good welcome for him. It's always a good stadium with a great atmosphere," Suryakumar said.

Coco Gauff loses to Paula Badosa in Australian Open quarterfinals

NEW DELHI, DEC 21: Coco Gauff's forehead and serve abandoned her in the worst way and at the worst time at the Australian Open on Tuesday, and the No. 3-seeded American was eliminated in the quarterfinals by No. 11 Paula Badosa of Spain 7-5, 6-4.

Gauff entered the match at Rod Laver Arena with a 9-0 record in 2025 and on a 13-match winning streak that dated to her title at the WTA Finals in November.

Using tweaks to some key strokes to great effect in the hopes of earning a second Grand Slam title at age 20, the 2023 US Open champion had only dropped one set through four matches at Melbourne Park this year.

"She's full of confidence. But I'm playing well, too," Badosa said ahead of the contest. "I'm ready to face her." Was she ever. And Badosa now heads to her first Grand Slam semifinal at age 27.

"I'm a bit emotional," said Badosa, who had been 0-2 in major quarterfinals. "I wanted to play my best tennis. I think I did. ... I'm super proud of the level I gave today."



She kept the pressure on Gauff, who only briefly managed to showcase her skills. Gauff finished with 41 unforced errors, a total that included six double-faults — including on the last point of the game that put Badosa ahead 5-2 in the second set — and 28 missed forehands.

Gauff had to contend with 10 break points and lost four of her 11 service games. She never earned so much as a single break point while returning until after she already trailed by a set and a break in the second.

One key game — and one that illustrated Gauff's problems on this afternoon — was the second of the second set. It lasted 22 points spread over more than a dozen minutes, and Badosa converted her fifth break chance after Gauff

missed two forehands in a row. Of Badosa's 12 points in that game, 11 came via mistakes by Gauff, including seven off the American's forehand.

That sort of thing kept happening throughout the 1-hour, 43-minute matchup, and Gauff often would respond to a miss off her racket by covering her face with her palm or slapping one of her legs. After one error, she dropped her racket to the blue court.

When the quarterfinal ended with a forehand winner, Badosa placed her hand over her mouth, then knelt on the ground. This was a big moment for someone who reached a career-best ranking of No. 2 in 2022, but then dealt with a serious back injury that made her contem-

plate ending her tennis career.

"I would never think that, a year after, I would be here," Badosa said. "I've been through a lot. In the past, I was one of the best players in the world."

She next will go up against No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka, the two-time defending champion in Melbourne, or No. 27 Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, the runner-up at the 2021 French Open. Their quarterfinal was to be played Tuesday night.

That was scheduled to be followed by the day's most-anticipated matchup: Novak Djokovic vs. Carlos Alcaraz in the men's quarterfinals.

Djokovic, 37, is aiming for an 11th Australian Open trophy and a record 25th Grand Slam singles title overall. Alcaraz seeks to complete a career Grand Slam at age 21 by adding a championship in Australia to the ones he already owns: two from Wimbledon plus one apiece from the US Open and French Open.

The day's other men's quarterfinal was No. 2 Alexander Zverev against No. 12 Tommy Paul.

Norway Chess: World champion Gukesh to take on Hikaru Nakamura

NEW DELHI, DEC 21: Norway Chess on Tuesday announced that world-renowned chess grandmaster Hikaru Nakamura, currently ranked world No. 3, will compete in Norway Chess 2025.

This will be Nakamura's seventh time at Norway Chess, where his exciting games and competitive spirit have made him a favourite among fans.

This year's event promises intense battles as the youngest World Champion, Gukesh D, takes on the world's top 3

players. Adding to the excitement, India's No. 1 Arjun Erigaisi and China's No. 1 Wei Yi will make their Norway Chess debuts.

The event to be held in Stavanger, Norway from May 26 to June 6 will feature World No. 1 Magnus Carlsen, World No. 2 Fabiano Caruana, World No. 3 Hikaru Nakamura, World No. 4 Arjun Erigaisi, World No. 5 Gukesh D, World No. 9 Wei Yi. This is one of the strongest line-ups in a chess tournament ever, with 4 of them with a rating over 2800 - the av-

erage rating across players 2795. There is only 5 rating points that separate it from the strongest tournament we had, which was Norway Chess in 2017.

With a FIDE rating of 2802, Nakamura has won five U.S. Chess Championships, is the reigning FIDE World Fischer Random Chess Champion, and was the Norway Chess Champion in 2023.

Beyond tournaments, Nakamura has built a large following as a chess streamer, sharing his games and insights with fans around the world.

His presence, both online and at live events, continues to inspire both fellow players and the chess audience.

Nakamura shared his enthusiasm for returning to Norway Chess, emphasizing the relationships and challenges the event offers. "What excites me the most about returning to Norway Chess is seeing all the familiar faces I've come to know over the past decade of this event, as well as competing against the future stars of chess like Gukesh and Arjun," Nakamura said.

Aneesha secures Shooting Silver

HIMALAYAN MAIL NEWS JAMMU, JAN 21

Aneesha Sharma, a talented shooter from Jammu and Kashmir and trainee of the Mission Olympics Shooting Academy Jammu, made a mark at the prestigious Sports For All Shooting Championship 2025.

Held at the Dr. Karni Singh Shooting Range in New Delhi, the event saw Aneesha deliver a stellar performance in the 10M Air Rifle women category.

With an impressive



score of 631.5, Aneesha secured a well-deserved silver medal, earning her a spot in the coveted Champion of Champions (COC) category. Her achievement was further

recognized with a cash prize of Rs 30,000.

Aneesha's success is a testament to the tireless efforts of her coaches, Vishal Mehra and Aman Singh, who played a piv-

otal role in her preparation and performance. The Mission Olympics Shooting Academy Jammu continues to produce exceptional athletes, reaffirming its commitment to nurturing shooting talent in the country.

Dilbag Singh, Patron-in-Chief of the Jammu and Kashmir Rifle Association (JKRA), along with the esteemed president SS Sodhi, chairman Kuldeep Jamwal, and CEO DySP Sharat Chander Singh, extended their heartfelt congratulations to her.

2-day Handball tournament concludes at Mini Stadium Udhampur

HIMALAYAN MAIL NEWS JAMMU, JAN 21

The two-day Handball Tournament organized by the Kargil Martyrs Handball Club Udhampur for under-14 and under-17 boys and girls successfully concluded today here at Mini Stadium.

Deputy Commissioner Saloni Rai was the chief guest at the closing ceremony. A total of 11 teams from across the district participated in the event,



showcasing their talent and enthusiasm for the sport.

Speaking on the occasion, the DC lauded the ef-

forts of the organizers for successfully conducting the tournament. She emphasized the importance of such events in provid-

ing a platform for young talent and promoting a sports culture that fosters a healthy and vibrant society. She also encouraged the participants to actively engage in sports for their physical and mental well-being.

Among others present were District Youth Services and Sports Officer Ramesh Chander Mishra, Sanjeev Magotra, Vinod Dogra, Arun Mehta, Manmeet Singh, Ajay Sharma, Pawan Jamwal and Vinod Sharma.

Novak Djokovic overcomes Carlos Alcaraz to reach Australian Open semi-final

NEW DELHI, DEC 21: Novak Djokovic delivered a commanding performance in the quarterfinals of the Australian Open on Wednesday, defeating Carlos Alcaraz 4-6, 6-4, 6-3, 6-4 to reaffirm his status as one of the top contenders in Melbourne.

A 10-time Australian Open champion, Djokovic has long been a dominant force on the hard courts of Melbourne Park, where he secured his first Grand Slam title in 2008. Despite a disappointing semi-final exit last year and failing to win a major in 2023 for the first time since 2017, Djokovic showed no signs of slowing down in his high-quality 3-hour, 37-minute encounter with Alcaraz.

Under the guidance of coach Andy Murray, Djokovic relied on aggressive baseline play, hitting powerful shots from both wings to take control of the match.

Alcaraz, the world number three, struggled to find his rhythm in the face of

Djokovic's relentless attack, despite using his drop shot effectively early on. The wind played a part in the early exchanges, with both players struggling to maintain consistent levels. The Serbian soon found his groove, taking a 3-0 lead in the second set and capitalizing on a slight dip in Alcaraz's form.

"I want to say my utmost respect and admiration for Carlos, everything he stands for and what he has achieved so far in his career," Djokovic praised Alcaraz, as quoted by the official website of ATP.

"What a terrific guy he is, and an even better competitor. Youngest ever No. 1 in the world, four Grand Slams, and I'm sure we are going to see a lot of him... Maybe not as much as I would like, but he is going to be there for sure longer than me. I just wish this match today was the final, honestly," he said.

"It's one of the most epic matches I have played on this court, on any court really," he added.

"If I lost that second set, I don't know if I would continue playing, but I felt better and better. I managed to play a great couple of games to end the second set. I saw that Carlos was hesitant from the back of the court, and I took my chances. I started to feel and move better," Djokovic noted.

"It didn't bother me towards the end of the match [the pain], only in that second set. When the medications start to release I will see what the reality is tomorrow morning. Right now, I will try to be in the moment and enjoy this victory," he said.

Djokovic increased the intensity in the third set, where he delivered 11 winners and committed just four unforced errors, breaking Alcaraz twice. The highlight of the set came when Djokovic triumphed in a lengthy rally to claim the set and take a 2-1 lead. With momentum on his side, he sealed the match in the fourth set.

After a relentless display,

Djokovic clinched the match on his first match point, roaring in celebration before embracing Alcaraz. This victory marked his 50th major semi-final appearance, extending his own record, and gave him a 5-3 lead over Alcaraz in their head-to-head encounters. Djokovic's next challenge will be Alexander Zverev, who defeated Tommy Paul in four sets earlier on Tuesday.

At 37 years old, Djokovic becomes only the third player in the Open Era to reach an Australian Open semi-final at that age, joining the ranks of Ken Rosewall and Roger Federer. This victory also marked his first win over a Top 10 player at a major since 2023 when he defeated Daniil Medvedev to capture his 24th Grand Slam title at the US Open.

With his resilience and skill on display, Djokovic reminded everyone that he remains a major force in men's tennis, even as the younger generation, led by Alcaraz, continues to rise.

Manchester City signs Brazilian sensation Vitor Reis from Palmeiras

NEW DELHI, DEC 21: Premier League defending champions Manchester City announced the signing of Vitor Reis from Palmeiras on Tuesday.

The 19-year-old Brazilian youth international has joined Manchester City on a four-and-a-half-year deal, keeping him at the Etihad Stadium until the summer of 2029.

Reis, a talented defender, earned a strong reputation during his time in Palmeiras' youth ranks and made his senior debut in June 2024. He played a pivotal role in Palmeiras' campaign as they finished runners-up in the Brazilian Serie A.

During his time with his boyhood club, Reis made 22 appearances, including



18 matches in the league and two games in the Copa Libertadores. His exceptional performances earned him a spot in the Trofeu Mesa Redonda Team of the Year for Brazilian football in 2024.

"I'm excited to join Manchester City, one of the biggest clubs in the world. Everyone has seen the amazing achievements in recent seasons, and I want to make my mark as we

seek more trophies. Working with Pep Guardiola is something every young player wants to do, and I know he can help me to develop into the best player I can be," Reis said in a statement released by the club.

"City also have a lot of experience of working with Brazilian footballers and joining the likes of Ederson and Savinho in the squad will be a big help to

me," he added. Director of Football Txiki Begiristain gave his take on the latest edition and said, "Vitor Reis is one of the most promising young defenders in the world and we're delighted to be able to bring him here. In his short time in senior football in Brazil, he has shown he has the ability to go very far in the game and we know that working with Pep and our coaches will help to get the best out of him."

"He is excellent on the ball and outstanding in the air - he has all the attributes needed to be one of the best. Vitor is very young, but his quality is so high that we believe he can help us now and for a long time into the future," he added.