

# Deepti Sharma becomes women's T20I leading wicket-taker

Thiruvananthapuram, (UNI)

Deepti Sharma headlined India's dominant series triumph over Sri Lanka with a historic feat, becoming the highest wicket-taker in women's T20 International cricket during the fifth and final match here on Tuesday. According to the International Cricket Council (ICC) website, the 28-year-old all-rounder surpassed Australia's Megan Schutt to go past the 150-wicket mark, claiming her 152nd scalp in the 14th over when she trapped Nilakshika Silva leg before wicket. Deepti now averages an impressive 19 after 133 T20I appearances, underlining her consistency and impact in the shortest format.

Her landmark wicket proved crucial as India went on to clinch the series finale by 15 runs.



Batting first, the hosts posted a competitive 175 for seven in their allotted 20 overs, with skipper Harmanpreet Kaur leading from the front. Harmanpreet struck a fluent 68

off 43 balls, an innings studded with nine fours and a six, to anchor the Indian batting effort.

Reflecting on the series win, Harmanpreet said the team's sustained

hard work had finally paid dividends. "2025 has been great for us. All the hard work we have done this year, we have got the credit. It's about repeating these habits," she said after the match.

"Shifting to T20 from ODI wasn't easy, but everyone was excited to play. We fought for this, and happy how all things came together," she added. With the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2026 in England and Wales on the horizon, Harmanpreet stressed the importance of maintaining momentum.

"The next six months are important. We want to keep working hard and raising the bar," she said.

India will kickstart their campaign at next year's tournament against Pakistan on June 14.

## Ranchi Royals enjoy dominant 5-0 win over Shracchi Bengal Tigers in Women's HIL



Ranchi, (UNI)

Ranchi Royals enjoyed a comfortable 5-0 victory over Shracchi Bengal Tigers in their second match of the Women's Hockey India League (HIL) 2025-26 Season at the Marang Gomke Jaipal Singh Munda Astro Turf Stadium here on Tuesday. Lucina von der Heyde (33', 57'), Hannah Cotter (10'), Beauty Dungdung (14') and Sangita Kumari (44') registered goals for Ranchi Royals.

Ranchi Royals started the match on a strong note, controlling possession of the ball and creating an array of chances on goal.

In the first half itself, the Royals had made 17 circle entries asserting their dominance in attack. In the fifth minute, Ranchi Royals won the first penalty corner of the evening but couldn't score as Sabine Plonissen's shot was deflected away by the first rusher. However, in the 10th minute, Ranchi Royals scored the first goal of their campaign thanks to New Zealand's Hannah Cot-

ter (10').

Sakshi Rana played a good pass into the circle from the left flank as the ball fell to Hannah Cotter after a deflection and she slotted it into the net to take the lead.

Moments later, Shracchi Bengal Tigers won a penalty corner on the other end but they couldn't make a good effort on goal.

In the 14th minute, Neha won another penalty corner for Ranchi Royals, which was successfully converted by the home side. Lucina von der Heyde took the initial shot that was stopped by a defender, but Beauty Dungdung (14') showed great determination to pounce on the rebound and slot the ball into the goal, extending their lead to two goals.

The trend followed in the second quarter as the Royals continued to operate the ball well on the flanks and create good chances but Shracchi Bengal Tigers held their ground and were resilient in their defence.

## Shaheen Afridi ends BBL stint early with injury

Karachi (UNI)

Pakistan fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi has been forced to cut short his maiden Big Bash League (BBL) stint after sustaining a knee injury while representing Brisbane Heat, the franchise confirmed.

The left-arm pacer suffered a cartilage injury while fielding during the Heat's last-over win against the Adelaide Strikers at the Gabba on Saturday night.

Following consultations between the Brisbane Heat and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) medical staff, it was decided that Shaheen would return home for further treatment ahead of the upcoming ICC Men's T20 World Cup. In a post on social media platform X, the pacer said, "Due to an unexpected injury, I have been called back by the PCB and will have to take a rehab. Hopefully, I will be back in the field soon."

Afridi struggled during his brief spell with Brisbane Heat, claiming only two wickets in four matches while maintaining a costly econ-



omy rate of 11.19.

In his season opener, he was taken out of the attack in the 18th over after delivering two waist-high full tosses to Melbourne Renegades batsmen Tim Seifert and Oliver Peake. The Heat are now exploring replacement options for the remainder of the competition, while Shaheen will focus on recovery as Pakistan gears up for the T20 World Cup, scheduled for February-March, 2026.



## Vijay Hazare Trophy: Mayank Agarwal hits 19th List A century

Ahmedabad, (UNI): Karnataka captain Mayank Agarwal continued his sublime form in the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy, delivering another commanding performance with the bat against Puducherry at the ADSA Railways Cricket Ground.

Electing to bat first, Karnataka were propelled by a masterful innings from Agarwal, who scored 132 off 124 balls, including 15 fours and 2 sixes. He shared a record-breaking 228-run opening stand with Devdutt Padikkal, who also scored a brilliant 113, anchoring Karnataka's innings for nearly 38 overs.

Jayant Yadav eventually broke the partnership by dismissing Padikkal, but Agarwal carried the momentum forward, guiding his team past 250 with support from Karun Nair before departing. Karnataka finished strongly at 363/4 in their 50 overs.

This century marked Mayank's 19th in List A cricket, underlining his consistency in the format. His recent form has been outstanding, with three 50-plus scores in his last four List A innings. Agarwal began his Vijay Hazare Trophy campaign with a 54-run knock against Jharkhand, followed by a match-winning 58 against Tamil Nadu.

Agarwal also surpassed 3,500 runs in the Vijay Hazare Trophy, becoming only the second batsman after Ankit Bawne (4,164 runs) to achieve the feat. He now has 3,581 runs from 75 VHT matches at an average of 52.66, which includes 12 centuries and 18 half-centuries.

Looking at his overall List A career, Agarwal has amassed 5,861 runs in 127 matches at an average of over 48, with a strike rate around 100. His tally includes 19 centuries and 26 half-centuries. He has also represented India in five One Day Internationals. With this performance, Mayank Agarwal continues to lead from the front for Karnataka, reinforcing his reputation as one of India's most consistent and prolific batters in domestic cricket.

## Zambia gov't decries Chipolopolo's early AFCON exit

Lusaka, (UNI)

The Zambian government on Tuesday expressed disappointment with the senior men's national football team's early exit from this year's Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON), currently underway in Morocco.

The Chipolopolo, as the team is affectionately known, was eliminated from the tournament on Monday night following a 3-0 loss to host Morocco, after previous draws against Mali and Comoros.

Minister of Youth, Sport and Arts Elvis Nkandu said the government was not satisfied with the team's performance, particularly given Zambia's history as former African champions.

"I am disappointed with the performance of our boys. We need to immediately start reorganizing



ourselves. Our players did not show the required character, patriotism, sense of responsibility, and the will to win," he said in a statement.

Nkandu urged the country's soccer governing body and the technical bench to reflect and assess whether the results truly reflected the aspirations of the nation.

While acknowledging that junior national teams have performed well in recent tournaments, Nkandu said the government was concerned that the senior national team's performance has remained average and, in some instances, poor.

Since winning the title in 2012, Zambia has failed to progress past the preliminary rounds of Africa's premier soccer tournament.

## Johnson to decide future after Palace deal agreed

London, (UNI)

Brennan Johnson is set to decide whether he wants to join Crystal Palace after the south London club agreed a £35m deal to sign the Tottenham attacker.

BBC Sport revealed on December 18 that the Eagles were advanced in their efforts to land the Wales international but decided not to make a formal move until after the two clubs faced each other in the Premier League on Sunday. There is now an agreement between the clubs for Johnson to move across London.

However, the 24-year-old is yet to agree to join the Selhurst Park club. Johnson is set for talks over his future in the next 48 hours, amid interest from other Premier League sides.

Bournemouth are among the clubs who rate him highly and see him as a potential replacement for Antoine Semenyo, should the Ghanaian leave in January.

Tottenham manager Thomas Frank said the Wales international was available to face Brentford on New Year's Day. He said: "Brennan has been a top professional. He has trained well today and is ready in two days' time [for the game against Brentford]." Tottenham are in the market for a new attacker this January which would limit Johnson's opportunities even more. It is understood that they have an interest in RB Leipzig winger Yan Diomande, 19, and Manchester City attacker Savinho, 21.



BBC Sport disclosed earlier this month that Tottenham were open to selling Johnson, who was the club's leading scorer last season with 18 goals. He etched his name in Spurs folklore by scoring the winner in their Europa League final over Manchester United in Bilbao in May, ending the club's 17-year wait for a trophy.

The departure of Ange Postecoglou and arrival of Frank as manager has meant Johnson has had more of a peripheral role this season.

He has made only six Premier League starts under Frank, and has not scored a league goal since the opening two games of the season.

## Prajwal Dev awarded a wild card to 10th edition of Bengaluru Open ATP Challenger 125

Bengaluru, (UNI)

Indian tennis star Prajwal Dev has been handed the wild card for the upcoming Bengaluru Open 2026, reinforcing the tournament's long standing commitment to nurture and promote Indian talent on the international stage. The prestigious event, which celebrates its landmark 10th edition, will be held in Bengaluru from January 5-11, 2026, and will once again feature a strong international field alongside top Indian players on the ATP Challenger Tour.

In hot form after clinching the Men's Singles title at the ITF World Tennis Tour M15 event in Bhubaneswar last month, the wild card entry gives the 29-year-old a valuable chance to compete against a field of exceptional talent at one of India's most prestigious tennis events. Upgraded last year to an ATP Challenger 125 level, the Bengaluru



Open now features a prize purse of over USD 225,000 and awards 125 ATP ranking points to the singles champion, enhancing its appeal and competitive significance.

"It's a proud moment for me to compete at the Bengaluru Open ATP

Challenger, especially in my home state. This tournament has consistently provided us a world class stage to test ourselves against formidable international competition and this being the 10th edition is certainly special.

## Elche's Barcelona loanee Hector Fort sidelined after shoulder operation

Madrid, (UNI)

Elche defender Hector Fort has undergone an operation on a dislocated left shoulder, the club has confirmed.

The 19-year-old, who is on loan from FC Barcelona with the recently promoted club, suffered the injury as he scored the opening goal in Elche's 4-0 win at home to Rayo Vallecano on December 21.

"Hector Fort has been operated on by the FC Barcelona medical services after the injury suffered against Rayo Vallecano," explained Elche in a statement.

But it does not disclose how long Fort will be out of action, saying only that his



"recovery time will be determined by how the injury progresses."

Fort joined Elche from Barcelona over the summer and has played an in-

creasingly important role at the club, with coach Eder Sarabia using him as a wing-back or even as a wide midfielder ahead of three central defenders.

He has scored one goal in La Liga and another in the Copa del Rey as Elche ends 2025 in a creditable ninth place in the La Liga standings.

## Padikkal belts third ton in four Vijay Hazare games

Bengaluru, (UNI)

Karnataka batsman Devdutt Padikkal continued his scintillating form in the Vijay Hazare Trophy on Wednesday, scoring his third century in four matches and sending a clear message to India selectors ahead of the upcoming ODI series against New Zealand.

Padikkal, who opened the innings alongside Karnataka captain Mayank Agarwal against Puducherry, played a composed and confident knock. The duo ensured Karnataka got off to a solid start, punishing loose deliveries while batting sensibly. Their partnership provided stability and momentum, frustrating the Puducherry bowlers who struggled to make breakthroughs.

The Agarwal-Padikkal opening stand proved monumental as the pair put together a 228-run



partnership. Padikkal was eventually dismissed for 113 in the 38th over by spinner Jayant Yadav, ending the partnership. Agarwal also reached his century, scoring 132 before getting out, as Karnataka reached 266/2 in

the first innings. Contributions from Karun Nair, who scored a fiery 62, and cameos from Smaran Ravichandran (21) and Abhinav Manohar (21) helped Karnataka post a massive total of 363/4 after 50 overs.

