



# Scoring race heats up in Spain league

### No matter who wins the Spanish league title, there will be a battle between Ronaldo and Messi to score the maximum goals

Regardless of who wins the Spanish league title, Barcelona's Lionel Messi and Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo will be battling it out to the end. Real Madrid doesn't have much chance of keeping Barcelona from winning the league, but Ronaldo is making a strong run to snag the scoring title from Messi with nine matches remaining.

Ronaldo added another four goals in Madrid's 6-3 win over Girona on Sunday, giving him 22 for the season. That is only three below Messi, who scored his 25th in Barcelona's 2-0 win over Athletic Bilbao. "Hopefully he can catch him," Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane said of Ronaldo. "It's important for him and for us, too. When he's playing well, the team plays well. He transmits an important and positive energy to the group. He's always in very good form come the end of the season. He's got an eye for goal and he'll never lose that."

"He's unbelievably ambitious and that comes across in every training session and in everything he does on the field," Zidane said. "If he has a penalty in training, he will take it with the maximum concentration. It's what makes him different from the rest."

Despite Ronaldo's impressive run, Madrid's chances of repeating as league champion remain slim. Madrid trails Barcelona by 15 points after 29 matches. The teams will play again in May in a league match at Camp Nou. They could also meet in the Champions League semifinals or the final.

Messi scored twice against Madrid this season in a 3-1 loss in the Spanish Super Cup final at the be-

**RONALDO** has scored at least one goal in his last eight matches in all competitions. He scored 21 goals in his last 11 games.

ginning of the season and in a 3-0 win at Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in a league match late last year. Ronaldo scored against the Catalan club in that Spanish Super Cup game. "Messi is the best player in the world and he shows it game after game," Athletic defender Unai Nunez said after his team's loss to Barcelona on Sunday.

Ronaldo has scored at least 25 league goals in the last eight seasons. He scored four or more goals in a match with Madrid eight times. AP

**MESSI** has scored a goal in his last six matches. He has scored at least 25 league goals in 9 consecutive seasons with Barcelona.



Photo: GETTY IMAGES

### THE PICHICHI TROPHY

Ronaldo is trying to keep Messi from winning the top-scorer's Pichichi trophy for the second consecutive year. The Argentina forward scored 37 league goals last season, 12 more than Ronaldo. Ronaldo hasn't won the award since 2014-15, when he had 48 goals. That was still shy of Messi's record of 50 goals in 2011-12.

# Wrestlers in quandary ahead of CWG

### The grapplers will arrive in Oz on April 10, barely two days prior to the start of the wrestling competitions

The Commonwealth Games (CWG) has always been a happy hunting ground for Indian wrestlers. India is ranked second behind Canada in the wrestling's all-time medal count at the CWG, having cornered an astonishing 90 medals, including 38 gold. However, things there may not be that rosy this time around at Gold Coast CWG.

In a setback of sorts, the Indian wrestlers have been denied an opportunity to fly down to Australia early for acclimatisation and training. The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) has decided that the wrestlers will arrive at the Athletes' Village on April 10, barely two days prior to the start of the wrestling competitions on April 12.

Some participating men and women wrestlers wanted to reach Australia well in advance to prepare for the Games, since acclimatisation forms an important part of any athlete's event strategy. But WFI has decided against it, arguing that training in India would serve the same purpose.

The WFI claimed that it tried to arrange a training

stint in countries like Japan, Bulgaria and Kazakhstan, but their respective wrestling federations either turned down the proposal or didn't bother to answer back.

Double Olympics medallist Sushil Kumar has arranged for a training stint in Georgia, paying from his own pocket since he is neither the part of the TOP scheme nor entitled for Rs 50,000 monthly allowance. He will leave for Georgia with his personal coaching staff soon.

The CWG-bound wrestlers' contention is that if Indians in other disciplines can go to Gold Coast early - in some cases two weeks in advance - then why not they? Members of the athletics contingent have already left for Australia. A 12-member boxing team is already training at the Australian Sports Institute in Canberra, while shooters and shuttlers will be leaving for Gold Coast this



"It helps to prepare both physically and mentally if you reach early for the tournament. The wrestlers earlier travelled to places like Georgia or Colorado Springs in the US before a multisport event. This time we will train at home and leave for the Games at the last minute," said a wrestler.

If other federations are spending from their pockets and making arrangements for their athletes to go to Australia early, why can't the WFI extend the same courtesy to its wrestlers?," said a wrestler.

A WFI official, he said the federation tried making arrangements for training in different countries, but it did not work out. "The tickets have been booked for April 9 (arrival in Gold Coast on April 10) and the federation isn't too eager to send wrestlers earlier than that...." the official said.

# Sharath seeks another double gold

Two of A Sharath Kamal's three gold medals at the Commonwealth Games were won in Australia and it is this little statistic which is driving India's finest table tennis player to go for another double in the Gold Coast edition next month.

In all probability, the upcoming mega-event from April 4 to 15 will be the last CWG appearance for the 35-year-old, who has been leading India's mantle in the racket sport since 2006 Melbourne Games when he exceeded expectations by winning the team as well as the singles gold.

Sharath has his name on all the three gold medals India has won at the quadrennial competition and factoring in his recent form, he thinks he can add at least another two yellow metal to his overall kitty.

The Indian stunned world number 7 Koki Niwa at the Qatar

Open earlier this month for "the biggest win of his career". "I feel we have a good chance in all four categories (singles, team, doubles and mixed doubles). It is easily the strongest men's squad we have fielded at the Commonwealth Games," Sharath said, referring to the fact that India has as many as six players in the top-100 of ITTF men's rankings. "The ranking system has changed completely and the more you play, the better it is. That is one of the reasons why six of us are in the top-100. Having said that, the boys are doing really well and we really have a strong squad."

Sharath has managed to maintain a top-100 spot in the last decade but he was way outside the bracket in



the Melbourne edition 12 years ago with India number two Soumyadeep Roy being outside top-200. AP

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# India to field strongest team at Chess Olympiad

A rejig in the rules for the selection of the national chess team by the All India Chess Federation (AICF) coupled with an attitudinal change in offering facilities to the team members has enabled India to field its strongest team for the

Grand Master (GM) Viswanathan Anand. The other members are World No.26 GM P Harikrishna and World No.34 GM Vidit Santosh Gujrathi. The fourth and fifth members of team would be selected from World No.77 GM K. Sasikiran, GM Surya

An AICF sub-committee decided to select the Indian men's and women's team for Olympiad/World/Asian Team Championships based on the player's international rating. Though the AICF has been selecting the Indian team based on their global rating, lower rated players gained their place due to the old rules - like the national champion being the default member.

2018 Olympiad to be held in Batumi in Georgia this September, said a senior AICF official. These changes have surprised and piqued many chess players and enthusiasts in the country.

The five-member Indian men's team at the Olympiad will be spearheaded by five-time World Champion and presently the World No.10

Shekhar Ganguly, AGM B. Adhiban and GM S P Sethuraman based on their rating at the cut-off date. The average rating of the Indian team will be around 2,700.

"The Indian men's team for this Olympiad will be one of the strongest teams in the tournament," AICF Secretary Bharat Singh Chauhan said.



VISWANATHAN ANAND

# Roger Federer hopes Laver Cup will be popular in United States

The Laver Cup was a hit last year, and now Roger Federer is hoping it proves popular on US soil. The 20-time Grand Slam champion made his first-ever visit to Chicago to promote the second Laver Cup, a team competition that debuted last year in Prague.

Federer, shaking off a three-set loss to Juan Martin del Potro on Sunday in the final at Indian Wells that ended his 17-match winning streak, was joined by tennis legends Rod Laver and John McEnroe, along with young Australian star Nick Kyrgios.

Federer's management team was instrumental in launching the Laver Cup, which pits Team Europe against Team World. After its third year, he said he'll entertain possible changes to the format.



Photo: AP

The 2018 Laver Cup will be played September 21-23 at United Center before returning to Europe the following year. AP

# Del Potro climbs ATP rankings after Wells win

Former US Open champion Juan Martin Del Potro climbed two places to sixth in the ATP rankings after he defeated Roger Federer in the Indian Wells final.

The 29-year-old handed Federer his first defeat of 2018 with a 6-4, 6-7 (8/10), 7-6 (7/2) victory on Sunday, extending his own win streak to 11 matches including a title run earlier this month at Acapulco. Federer himself reclaimed top spot just a month ago and remains marginally ahead of his eternal Spanish rival Rafael Nadal, who missed the American tournament with a leg injury. AP



Photo: AFP

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