

Thorn extends contract as head coach of Queensland Reds

Jones hopes new boy Umaga serves up a treat for England

Punjab opens up IPL playoff race with 'win' over Kolkata

Singh and Gayle smash half centuries

SHARJAH, United Arab Emirates, Oct 27, (AP): Mandeep Singh and Chris Gayle smashed half centuries as Kings XI Punjab opened up the playoff race in the Indian Premier League with an eight-wicket win over Kolkata Knight Riders.

Punjab, who lost six of their first seven league games, broke into the top four with their fifth consecutive win and pushed Kolkata down to fifth. Both Punjab and Kolkata have 12 points from 12 games, but Punjab are ahead on net run-rate.

Singh, whose father died Friday, put the personal tragedy behind him and scored an unbeaten 66 off 56 balls, while Gayle bludgeoned five sixes and two fours in making 51 off 29 balls as Punjab reached 150-2 with seven balls to spare.

Earlier, fast bowlers Mohammed Shami grabbed 3-35 and Ravi Bishnoi claimed 2-20 with his sharp googlies and leg-breaks to restrict Kolkata at 149-9.



Singh



In this Feb 24, 2020 file photo, India's Ishant Sharma bats during the first cricket Test between India and New Zealand at the Basin Reserve in Wellington, New Zealand. (AP)

Pakistan, Zimbabwe squads get all clear

Rohit, Ishant out of tour to Australia

NEW DELHI, Oct 27, (AP): India's cricket tour to Australia is closer to being formalized with selectors picking squads for a four-Test series and the one-day and Twenty20 limited-overs formats.

The most notable absentees from Virat Kohli's squads are top-order batsman Rohit Sharma and pace bowler Ishant Sharma, who have been excluded because of injuries sustained during the Indian Premier League.

CRICKET

Cricket Australia has been unable to confirm the match schedule because of protracted negotiations with state governments regarding quarantine regulations and travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

But the tour is likely to start in late November with the one-day and Twenty20 matches mostly in New South Wales state, where the India squad and Australian players involved in the IPL will quarantine on arrival Down Under.

The first Test is likely to be a day-night match at the Adelaide Oval from Dec 17, followed by the Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground from Dec 26 and January Tests in Sydney and Brisbane.

India squads:
Test: Virat Kohli (captain), Mayank Agarwal, Prithvi Shaw, KL Rahul, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Hanuma Vihari, Shubman Gill, Wriddhiman Saha, Rishabh Pant, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, Umesh Yadav, Navdeep Saini, Kuldeep Yadav, Ravindra Jadeja, Ravi Ashwin,

CRICKET

"This was very special, my father always used to tell me you should remain not out in the game. This one is for him," said Singh, who got an opportunity to open the innings in the absence of Mayank Agarwal. "Even if I scored a double hundred or a hundred, he used to ask me, 'Why did you go out?'"

Singh had eight fours and two sixes. Shami's double strike in his first over had pegged Kolkata back to 10-3 as Dinesh Karthik went without scoring in his 300th Twenty20 game. Shubman Gill (57) and captain Eoin Morgan (40) counter-punched with an attacking 81-run stand before Bishnoi struck in the 10th over when Morgan was caught at deep backward square leg.

Kolkata lost wickets at regular intervals after Morgan departed and Gill also holed out at deep mid-wicket off a low Shami full toss in the penultimate over.

Punjab skipper Lokesh Rahul (28), who is the tournament's leading run-scorer with 595 runs, provided a watchful start of 47 off 48 balls with Singh before leg-spinner Varun Chakravarthy trapped him lbw off a sharp googly.

But then it was all Gayle and Singh as the hard-hitting West Indian lofted Chakravarthy for successive sixes before thumping a straight six to fiery fast bowler Lockie Ferguson.

The batsmen shared a 100-run stand to seal the game before Gayle gloved a catch to Ferguson with only three needed for victory.

England's Ollie Lawrence during the rugby team training session in London on Oct 27. (AP)

LONDON, Oct 27, (AP): In a breakthrough season in top-tier rugby, Jacob Umaga has been putting tries on a plate for his teammates at English club Wasps.

Now, England coach Eddie Jones is hoping the 22-year-old flyhalf from a star-studded rugby family can serve up a treat at international level, too.

The nephew of former All Blacks captain Tana Umaga and the son of ex-Samoa international Mike Umaga, Jacob is in line to make his debut for England against Italy on Saturday in the final round of the pandemic-extended Six Nations.

Jones sees special traits in Umaga — the way he reads the game, the way he attacks space, the way he tackles — and cannot wait to find out how the No. 10 transitions to international rugby after just one season in the English Premiership.

"No. 10s are like sushi chefs," Jones said, as he discussed Umaga in a video call on Monday. "With sushi chefs, you have a lifetime ambition to be good. It generally takes 10 years before you can start making sushi. And No. 10s are the same."

RUGBY

"He (Umaga) is at the start of an apprenticeship. Now he might graduate quickly and be able to make sushi at the corner stall, and then he might be able to make sushi at a 5-star restaurant. The development of a player is something no one knows, but what you have to do is put them in the environment and encourage them to play to their strengths."

Umaga is one of just two flyhalves alongside captain Owen Farrell to be picked in a 36-man England squad announced Monday.

And with the other No. 10, George Ford, unavailable for the match in Rome as he recovers from an Achilles injury, the 22-year-old Umaga is likely to feature in the match in Rome — most likely from the bench but potentially in the starting XV if Farrell is selected in the centers.

There'd be pressure on Umaga, too. England could win the Six Nations tournament for the first time since 2017 with a bonus-point victory, though the result of the France-Ireland match being played later Saturday will have a bearing on where the title goes.

Umaga, however, has taken everything in his stride in a stunning and rapid rise to the top of the game.

He was born in England — his parents moved here in 1995 so that his father could play rugby league for Halifax in the north of the country — and lived up to his family's rugby heritage by joining Leicester Tigers' academy before signing for Wasps in 2016.

Umaga, whose father's cousin is the late New Zealand flanker Jerry Collins, played for England's Under-18 and Under-20 teams and was called up to the senior England camp in January for the start of the Six Nations after just

four starts for Wasps in his first season in the English Premiership.

He didn't make any of England's first four matchday squads before the Six Nations was suspended because of the coronavirus outbreak, but has remained on Jones' radar and shone since the restart of domestic competition in August.

On Saturday, Umaga scored a try for Wasps in their loss to Exeter in the Premiership final, breaking the European champion's defensive line off a flat pass before rounding the fullback and skipping over the line after a timely hitch-kick.

"When you get quick ball now, you've got to be able to go quickly. You can't sit back and wait for things to evolve," Jones said. "To do that, you need a player who is very instinctive — you can't coach them to do it, they just do it, and you saw that when he scored that try (against Exeter)."

Jones confirmed Ford is out for "a couple of weeks", which creates the potential opportunity for Umaga.

One thing is for sure: Farrell will be starting, and as captain, despite not playing competitively since getting banned for a high tackle in a match for Saracens in the European Champions Cup in early September.

England is a point behind Ireland going into the final round. Ireland has a superior points difference of 23 compared to England.

France is tied for points with second-place England but has an inferior points difference of 2.

Also:

BRISBANE, Australia: Dual rugby international Brad Thorn has agreed to a one-year contract extension to remain at the Queensland Reds as head coach.

Thorn guided a young Reds squad to the final of Australia's domestic Super Rugby competition this season after the regular five-country tournament was scrapped because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thorn played rugby league for Queensland and Australia before switching to play rugby union for New Zealand and winning a Rugby World Cup with the All Blacks.

In his first three years as head coach of the Reds, Thorn has focused on developing young talent and that has helped revitalize the Queensland Super Rugby franchise and led to the likes of 20-year-old back-rower Harry Wilson getting a test start for Australia.

"We've invested in our pathway in bringing guys through," Thorn said. "It's good to have a consistent squad with minimal changes for next year. They're all mates and you're seeing that connection out on the field."



England's Ollie Lawrence during the rugby team training session in London on Oct 27. (AP)

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