

# England Return To Winning Ways In Nations League, Austria Thrash Norway

Up until the Paris Olympics, Indian Women's 50m 3P shooter Sift Kaur Samra always had a get-out-of-jail card in her pocket. She knew that if her prone and kneeling positions weren't right up there with the best in the world, she could always just rev up the Ferrari that is her standing position scores.

Be it her fifth-placed finish at the World Championships, or the World Record breaking effort at the Hangzhou Asian Games, Samra's standing blitzkrieg would always soar her over some of the best Olympic shooters in the continent and then the World.

But come Chateauroux, the poor prone and kneeling was followed by an even worse standing performance. Qualification came to a close and one of India's favourites for a medal (she had won bronze at the Munich World Cup just a month removed) at the Paris Olympics finished a shocking 31st out of 32 shooters.

Samra immediately came back to India and went to a range to put up a score.



She needed to know whether it was the rifle that messed up that day or her.

"That was not a score that I really shoot," said the Faridkot native. Shooting a 10m rifle score back in India, Samra immediately hit a 628.

So it wasn't the rifle. "I think it was a social media thing. Because before the Asian Games and other competitions

people didn't know much about the sport. It's usually after we win a medal that people would talk about us. But this time the talk was before the event and that was a really different thing for me. I was not used to that," said Samra. The 23-year-old was part of a group of Indian shooters who had risen up the ranks in the 50m 3P position and put the country's shooters as

a legitimate force in the event. Samra, Anjum Moudgil and Ashi Chouksey on the women's side, and Swapnil Kusale, Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar and Akhil Sheoran were all putting up world class scores in the year leading up to the Olympics. While Kusale took a deserved medal, India's best 3P shooter was left wondering what happened.

When the standing position shots didn't land dead centre, Samra tried to switch things up. She slowed down the pace of her shots, she left her position and then came back after a rethink, then went through her rifle to see if some adjustments were off, and finally went through her kit to see what was wrong. But no answer appeared and the qualification ended with a promising hope of a medal dashed.

"Even when the prone position went bad, I felt that my standing could have pulled me out of the situation. But then in standing I was just out of the zone."

Immediately after that disastrous qualification, Samra's mother was by her side and took no time to deliver a roast to her daughter.

"Atleast you came second from the bottom" was the crunching tackle, albeit in jest. "Punjabi moms", explained a resigned Samra. Later the family whisked her off to Paris from Chateauroux for a day to distract her from what happened.

After the high of the Asian Games last year, the 50m 3P shooter had been

struggling to replicate similar scores at the start of the year. But then the Munich World Cup results, in a stacked field at that, indicated that she was coming back into form.

"That was about the kit. My kit was changing and it took time for me to adapt to it, which finally happened when I took part in Munich. Our kits usually get less stiff as they're used, so new kits solve that issue," said Samra.

Once back in India after the Olympics, she had to attend the trials to make it to the World University Games team. After those trials, she decided to take a month-and-a-half long break and recuperate from that heartbreak and a shoulder injury she had picked up once back in India. She was advised to take the break by her personal coach Deepali Deshpande, who had seen her ward go on a tear participating in numerous domestic and international competitions and then be struck with the curse of 'It was just a bad day' — at the Paris Olympics of all places.

## J&K UT Taekwondo Championship 2024-25 concludes successfully

JAMMU : The J&K UT Taekwondo Championship 2024-25, organized by the Taekwondo Association of Jammu & Kashmir (TAKJ), concluded today at the J&K Sports Council, Hall Bhagwati Nagar, Jammu. This prestigious event, held under the aegis of the J&K Olympic Association and India Taekwondo, saw participation from nine districts with over 150-170 athletes competing across various categories.

The event was graced by several eminent personalities: Chief Guest: Zorawar Singh Jamwal, Chairman, Team Jammu and BJP Leader, who delivered an inspiring address to the athletes, encouraging them to uphold the spirit of sportsmanship and strive for excellence.

Guest of Honour: Shri Vijay Kumar Pandoh, Vice President of the Wrestling Association of Jammu & Kashmir, who commended the participants and applauded the efforts of the organizing committee for fostering sports. As special guests we had Mrs. Ritika Slathia - Manager Indoor Sports Complex, Bhagwati Nagar & Mr. Muzaffar Mir - DySP J&K Police. The organizing team members showed their dedication and hard work in making the championship a success.

Shri Quimti Lal Jain (General Secretary TAKJ), Tarsem Sharma (Working President TAKJ), Shri Ravinder Sharma (Treasurer, TAKJ), Ajaz Rasool Mir (Joint Secretary, TAKJ), Danish Sharma (Executive Member, TAKJ), Deepak Dogra (Senior Martial Artist).

The championship provided a platform for young Taekwondo athletes to showcase their talent, with participants from different districts competing at their best. The winners of various categories were announced, and medals were distributed, highlighting the immense talent present in the region.

Words of Motivation from the Chief Guest in his address, Chairman Team Jammu and BJP Leader Zorawar Singh Jamwal emphasized the importance of perseverance, discipline, and hard work, encouraging students to embrace the values taught through sports. He highlighted how Taekwondo, as a martial art, not only strengthens the body but also sharpens the mind and builds character.

## Pep Guardiola approached by FA to take over as England's manager: Report



The Football Association (FA) is considering appointing Pep Guardiola as the England national team's next manager. Guardiola's current tenure at Manchester City is drawing to a close next summer, and The Times has indicated that the FA reached out to him informally at the season's outset, though a reply is still pending.

Roy Keane, the ex-Manchester United midfielder, has publicly encour-

aged the FA to secure the services of the City manager. Speaking as an ITV pundit following England's 3-1 victory over Finland on Sunday, Keane emphasized, "Go for the best. Pep's contract ends in the summer."

In terms of his future, Guardiola has maintained a stance of uncertainty. "Leaving City? That's not accurate. I haven't made up my mind yet," he declared on the Italian TV program Che tempo Che Fa, as per

Sky Italia's coverage. He further clarified, "And it's also incorrect to assume I'll be the next England manager. If I had made a decision, I would announce it... I'm equally uncertain; anything is possible."

Since joining Manchester City in 2016, Guardiola has led the team to six Premier League victories, including four consecutive titles, and a Champions League win, making him an exceptionally strong candidate for the England role should he opt for a new challenge. Nonetheless, Thomas Tuchel, with his background at Paris St Germain, Chelsea, and Bayern Munich, currently leads as the favorite among book-makers.

In the interim, Lee Carsley, the England Under-21s manager, is set to lead the senior team through the upcoming Nations League group stage matches next month, following Gareth Southgate's departure post-Euro 2024. Carsley has already managed three wins and a loss in this temporary capacity.

The FA has chosen not to comment on its process for selecting a new manager, while Manchester City has remained silent on the speculative reports.

## "Why Not?" Paul Pogba Opens Door For Move Away From Juventus, Wants To Try New League



French international Paul Pogba said Monday he was hungry to return to football after his doping ban was last week reduced from four years to 18 months. "Football is the strawberry cake that was taken out of my mouth," Pogba told L'Equipe television in an interview from the Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris. Pogba, who is under contract with Italian giants Juventus until 2026, will be able to return to competitive football from March 11 next year, four days before his 32nd birthday.

Capped 91 times for France, Pogba tested positive for testosterone in August 2023 after a match between Juventus and Udinese in Italy. He was provisionally suspended in September of the same year, and then banned for four years by the Italian National Anti-Doping Tribunal the following February, Pogba's representatives said the testosterone

came from a food supplement prescribed by a doctor he consulted in the United States.

At the beginning of October, the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) reduced this sanction to 18 months. "The nightmare is over," said Pogba, adding he was "really looking forward to coming back".

Asked about a possible arrival in Ligue 1, Pogba, who has never played in the French league during his senior career, responded: "Why not?" A key figure when France won the 2018 World Cup in Russia, Pogba collected four Serie A titles in his first stint at Juventus but had a string of problems, on and off the pitch, after his 2022 return from Manchester United. He was also the victim of an alleged organised extortion, for which six men, including his brother Mathias, were last month ordered to stand trial.

## "Manchester City Teammates Paid My Legal Fees": Disgraced Footballer Benjamin Mendy Makes Shocking Revelation

Former Manchester City footballer Benjamin Mendy borrowed money from team-mates for legal fees and child support after he was charged with sexual offences, an employment tribunal heard on Monday. Mendy is claiming £11.5 million (\$15 million) in unpaid wages by the Premier League champions, who stopped paying him after he was charged with rape and sexual assault in 2021. The ex-France international was found not guilty of six counts of rape and one count of sexual assault in January 2023, but the same jury could not reach a verdict on another count of rape and one count of attempted rape.

After a retrial, Mendy was found not guilty of both charges.

Mendy, who joined City from Monaco for a reported £52 million in 2017, was released by the club in June 2023 following the expiry of his contract.

Court documents shared with the Manchester employment tribunal said Mendy "very quickly ran out of money" and had to sell his Cheshire mansion to cover legal fees, bills and child support payments after his wages were withheld.



"I struggled to pay my child support, I felt awful," the footballer said in a witness statement.

"Raheem Sterling, Bernardo Silva and Riyad Mahrez all lent me money to help me try and pay my legal fees and support my family."

Mendy, who now plays for French Ligue 2 club Lorient, claimed to have been assured by a senior City official he would receive his unpaid wages once he had been cleared of the charges.

The club continued paying Mendy's £500,000 a month salary following his first arrest in November 2020, but argued they did

not have to after he was charged because of his bail conditions and a Football Association suspension meant he was not able to perform his duties as a player.

"At no point have Manchester City apologised to me or even acknowledged how their actions almost cost me everything," added Mendy's witness statement.

"I believe that it is fair and just for me to be paid the wages that I would have earned but for being falsely arrested for crimes that I did not commit."

The employment tribunal is expected to last for two days.

## Indian Army Empowering Youth Through Conduct of Volleyball League at Kotranka Rajouri



RAJOURI : The Indian Army conducted Pir Panjal Volleyball League for boys of general area Kandi part of district Rajouri. The aim of this event was to involve youth of far-flung villages of Rajouri District and motivate them to pursue healthy lifestyle. This event was a landmark step in empowering local young boys to build a career in sports. Pir Panjal Volleyball League for boys was a two day event which started and witnessed participation of four teams from Kandi. All participating teams displayed great enthusiasm & sportsmanship during the volleyball tournament. The volleyball tournament has always been a crowd puller, where local villagers cheered for their respective players. The final match of Pir Panjal Volleyball League for boys was played between Government High Secondary School, Samote Vs Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya School,

Kotranka. After a nail-biting finish, Government High Secondary School, Samote team won the tournament. At the end of the competition, the players of winner and runner up team were felicitated. The event was a huge success and a total of 254 (including 192 locals, 54 students/participants and 08 teachers) spectators witnessed the said event. Such positive engagement means away curious young minds from getting involved in issues related to drug abuse, unlawful activities and channels the energy of the youth in a positive direction, boosts competitive skills and resists them from falling into the traps of anti-national and anti-social elements. Youth and locals of the area expressed their sincere gratitude towards Army for conducting Pir Panjal Volleyball League for boys at Kotranka & taking this noble initiative towards effective youth engagement.

## Hockey India League: Inaugural women's event to have four teams instead of six

The buzz on the day of the Hockey India League's official launch event was around the inaugural women's league for the sport in the country. The six-team event was to be held concurrently with the men's tournament, which was making a comeback after seven years. However, there will now be just four teams — at least for the first season.

"Two of the women's franchises will be announced shortly after the closure of legal proceedings in the coming days," was the official statement. That did happen, as Hyderabad Toofans (who also own a men's team) and a Mumbai franchise to be owned by BC Jindal Group were confirmed by Hockey India. But there was a catch: these two teams won't be part of the upcoming season but will only take part from Season 2.

"After we announced that there would be six teams, Roundglass unfortunately had to miss out (both men's and women's). We do have two new teams confirmed, with Hyderabad Toofans and a Mumbai franchise owned by BC Jindal joining in. But on Tuesday, when the auction for women's league 2024-25



takes place, we will have only four teams," Hockey India President Dilip Tirkey told The Indian Express.

So on Tuesday, the four teams at the auction tables will be JSW's Soorma Hockey Club (Haryana and Punjab), Shraichi Rahr Bengal Tigers (West Bengal), Delhi SG Pipers (New Delhi) and Odisha Warriors (Rourkela) owned by Navoyam Sports Ventures.

Since the best players would be snapped up by the four teams during Tuesday's auction, the new teams that'll join next season might face a little disadvantage on that front. If there is no major reshuffle then the new teams would have to form their teams from the remaining talent. The process of confirming the teams did take some

time. "If the teams wanted to take part in the auction this season, they could have. But the respective managements decided they will take part from the second season. The HIL committee will discuss what can be done for the betterment of this," Tirkey added.

The task for the teams is also going to be tougher as they have to build a squad of 24 players (same as the men's) but with a purse of Rs 2 crore (the men's teams had a purse of Rs 4 crore). The slab for players remains at Rs 2 lakh, Rs 5 lakh and Rs 10 lakh. The squads will comprise 16 Indian players, with a mandatory inclusion of 4 junior players, and 8 overseas players. Focus on India internationals

It also remains to be seen if

the Indian players command a similar sort of monetary outlay as their top male counterparts. The men's team are riding a high of back-to-back Olympic bronze medals. On the flip side, after their fairy tale run in Tokyo where they finished fourth, the women's team missed out on qualifying for Paris 2024 and are in a transition phase under new coach Harendra Singh. "HIL's previous played a major role in bringing Indian youngsters for the men's team up to the world-class level. That is the sort of impact we are hoping for the women in this Olympic cycle," Tirkey had told this newspaper.

The auction will witness over 250 domestic women's players and more than 70 overseas players. As such, all eyes will be on the top internationals like current captain Salima Tete, former captain and star goalkeeper Savitla Punia, India's most capped player Vandana Kataria, and creative midfielders Navneet Kaur and Neha Goyal. Charlotte Stapenhorst (Germany), Maria Granat (Argentina), Rachael Lynch (Australia), and Nike Lorenz (Germany) could be the top international recruits.

## Indian Army Conducts Inter School Kho-Kho Competition at Nikkian Akhnoor



AKHNOOR : In a remarkable display of community engagement and sporting spirit, the Indian Army successfully conducted Saheed Hav Kalidas Inter School Kho-Kho Competition for Girls under the aegis of Operation Sadbhavana in collaboration with Directorate General of Youth Services & Sports in border village of Nikkian.

This initiative aimed to foster unity, encourage physical fitness, and strengthen the bonds between the Indian Army and local communities. The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from girls, showcasing their talents and teamwork.

It was not only a celebration of sportsmanship but also an opportunity to promote camaraderie and goodwill among the children. The spirit of healthy competition brought together participants

and spectators alike, creating an atmosphere of joy and excitement. The Army personnel engaged with the local community, emphasizing the importance of sports in building resilience and discipline. The competition is part of a broader effort by the Indian Army to enhance the quality of life in border areas through various socio-economic initiatives. By organizing such events, the Indian Army aims to empower the youth and instill a sense of pride and identity within the community.

The event concluded with an award ceremony, where winners received trophies and certificates in recognition of their outstanding performance.

The Indian Army looks forward to continuing its engagement with local communities through more such initiatives in the future.