

Neeraj Chopra wears chef's hat: 'Favourite thing to cook is namkeen chawal, you can call it veg biryani'

NEW DELHI, JUL 25: Neeraj Chopra was only 13 years old when he left home to pursue his javelin dream. Within years, he was spending months in a country far away. And as he began to live the monk-ish life of an athlete, Neeraj also took a slice of home with him – by learning some of his favourite recipes. As the years passed, he slowly began to perfect the art of cooking. And it started with his favourite dish – the Haryanvi speciality, namkeen chawal, somewhat similar to a vegetarian biryani. Speaking at a fireside chat with Duolingo English Test takers, the two-time Olympic and World Championship medallist spoke about the life skills he developed after moving away from home, starting with learning how to cook. “Cooking is a basic need, especially for athletes who need to



eat right. So I started with Namkeen Chawal and slowly learned how to make dal, vegetables, rice and roti,” Neeraj said. In the early years, Neeraj said it was tough to ‘train twice a day and

cook three times’. Gradually, he found the right balance. “As an athlete, our relationship with diet is quite deep. We have to take care of our nutrition and cook as well. So I learnt to cook

different things from the beginning. Like dal, roti, rice... But my favourite thing to cook is something that we in Haryana call ‘Namkeen Chawal’. You can call it veg biryani. And also raita and salad to accompany it. I used to cook it really well and I pour desi ghee on it. It tasted amazing. That was the first thing I learnt to cook,” Neeraj said. He added: “After that, I learnt many other things. It was quite tough in the beginning because I used to train twice a day and cook three times a day. The journey is tough but if you learn to manage everything, then things do get done.” Neeraj was addressing a group of students and he advised them to stay patient. “When you learn to manage on your own, you are ready for bigger challenges,” he said, encouraging students to take pride in becoming independent.”

Akane Yamaguchi analyses Unnati Hooda – ‘She’s quite aggressive and gave me some problems’

MUMBAI, JUL 25: Hooda lost in 33 minutes in what proved to be a mild exertion for the supremely consistent Japanese, who is not far off the veeey top levels, even if her speed is down a clip or two. In father and coach Upkaar Hooda’s mid set advice was the crux of what was going wrong and what may be remedied. It was 8-11 in the second, and not entirely beyond Hooda’s abilities. He would say, “Woh bhaagke aa rahi hai (to the net). Usko aur peechhe bhagaa.” (Yamaguchi is easily rushing the net, push her back further.) Rustic words, but absolutely pinpoint wisdom. Hooda lost in 33 minutes in what proved to be a mild exertion for the supremely consistent Japanese, who is not far off the veeey top levels, even if her speed is down a clip or two. In father and coach Upkaar Hooda’s mid set advice was the crux of what was going wrong and what may be remedied. It was 8-11 in the second, and not entirely beyond Hooda’s abilities. He would say, “Woh bhaagke aa



rahi hai (to the net). Usko aur peechhe bhagaa.” (Yamaguchi is easily rushing the net, push her back further.) Rustic words, but absolutely pinpoint wisdom. Hooda, just 17, would realise – amongst the many learnings while playing top names – that it isn’t really easy to control movements of these champion players, even if the plan is on point, and it was one of the few aspects Hooda really impressed with for parts of the game. And then executing could be an altogether different matter. So her game collapsed in a pool of errors.

Net exactitude and precision can go awry at any point. It went off for Lakshya Sen these past weeks and returned next match, it’s that ephemeral. But the technique only comes from practice – of striding and shuttle control. Pushing Yamaguchi back needed a range of skills and decisions to fall into place, and Hooda literally fell short, stabbing away rushed and reeling. “I made so many unforced errors when match was equal in some scores. Continuous two points. I tried but she was very good in her drops and she was controlling the game,” she

toled BWF. The line smashing, down-the-line-hit is in place – and the kill shot, the stroke to bury the the shuttle, being in place, is a huge victory for Hooda, for she can build her winners and isn’t relying on endless retrieving. But that’s only 20 percent of the skillset required. The other 80 percent needs more than sharpening, something she would have learnt playing Yamaguchi and Wang Zhi Yi, even as she is firmly placed after making Super 1000 quarterfinals as the youngest shuttler at 17.8 years. “Happy to make first Super 1000 quarterfinal,” she told BWF. “But lots of learnings from this tournament and this match. It was a tiring match against Sindhu but no I had recovered well. First match against Yamaguchi. We need to be more patient while playing against her because she’s really good at her defense. So we can’t be in a hurry to win the point. We should be patient until we have the right time to attack,” Hooda said.

Pakistan need a style of cricket that can give more consistency in Asia Cup and World Cup, says head coach Mike Hesson

NEW DELHI, JUL 25: After the series loss to Bangladesh, Pakistan white-ball coach Mike Hesson has emphasised the need to develop depth and competition for places ahead of a challenging six months which includes Asia Cup and the T20 World Cup. Having started his coaching tenure with Pakistan with a whitewash of Bangladesh at home in June, they suffered a setback in Mirpur, where they lost the three-match series 1-2 with Hesson even criticising the standard of pitches being used. Post their T20 World Cup and Champions Trophy debacle, Pakistan have made attempts to overhaul their squad, which is now currently led by Salman Agha and has no place for the likes Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan. Even in the pace department there was no place for Shaheen Shah Afridi and Naseem Shah. For long, Pakistan have appeared to play brand of cricket which has been outdated in T20s with Hesson – a



successful coach in T20 franchise cricket – brought in to steady the ship and give a new direction. With the team struggling for experience, Hesson before leaving for the trip to US where they face West Indies in three T20Is in Lauderdale said what he believed are key takeaways from the two series he has been in charge. “First 6 games on two contrasting pitches gave us key

insights. A young batting group shone with 200+ scores early. Mirpur which is the lowest scoring venue in T20I’s certainly tested our adaptability and after struggling early we fought back and showed an ability to learn with experience,” Hesson posted. “New players stepped up, showing promise and in some instances excelling. Specialist Coaches have played a key

role in developing bowlers both here and at the NCA. Fielding was a huge step up in last two matches and were starting to look like an International fielding side,” Hesson who has coached teams in IPL, PSL wrote. With Pakistan now focussing on building a strong squad for the T20 World Cup which is only six months away, they face a tough challenge. Post the West Indies series, the Asia Cup to be played in September would be a massive test for Pakistan as apart from world champions India, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka would also offer stern test. While they do have run of fixtures against South Africa to gain more experience and find the right combo, Hesson reckoned what is needed ahead of the T20 World Cup. “Currently sitting 8th in the world we need to create depth and competition for places as well as play a style of cricket that can give us more consistency over time, especially at key event like Asia Cup and World Cups,” Hesson wrote.

'Joe Root could pass Sachin Tendulkar in two and a half years,' says Michael Atherton



MUMBAI, JUL 25: While Manchester witnessed Joe Root go past two iconic names in Rahul Dravid and Jacques Kallis one after the other, the absolute pinnacle is not beyond his reach, as per Michael Atherton. Speaking on Sky Sports, former captain and now pun-

dit journalist Michael Atherton, said, Tendulkar’s mark for most Test runs is gettable. That number stands at 15,921. “Root averages about 85 runs a Test match, so he’d likely need 30 Test matches to get up to Sachin (Tendulkar to claim the Test record),”

Atherton was quoted as saying by Sky. Ricky Ponting with 13,378 remains ahead of him as the first Australian wall to breach. But Cook who had gone well past Alastair Cook’s 12,472 runs as England’s top run getter in Tests also centered past two big names back to back on Friday, to sit at No 3 on therun mountain. He overhauled Rahul Dravid’s 13,288 and then after one single was level with Jacques Kallis’ 13,289. Two Sri Lankans, Kumar Sangakkara and Mahela Jayawardene and two West Indians, Brian Lara and Shivnarine Chanderpaul are in the Top 10 – at 11,814. Virat Kohli retired with 9230, and Steve Smith is on 10,477. Kane Williamson is on 9276. But Root has aced the Fab Four Test test, and looks most likely to aim at Tendulkar.

A fit Ben Stokes is one of the great all-rounders in the world, says Nasser Hussain

MUMBAI, JUL 25: Captaining a bowling attack that is thin on experience, Ben Stokes has shouldered responsibility right through the Anderson-Tendulkar Trophy as he once again led from the front with the ball in the first innings at Manchester. The England captain’s five-wicket haul helped them restrict India to 358 as the hosts ended Day 2 at 225/2 to take control of the fourth Test. Having undergone a knee surgery earlier in the year, coming into the series there were plenty of doubts with regards to Stokes bowling. In the lead-up to the Test series against India, Stokes played only the lone long form game against Zimbabwe as questions were raised as to whether the all-rounder was undercooked. And former England captain Nasser Hussain said Stokes has been on the money with the ball. “Against India this summer, I cannot remember him bowling a bad spell. He has been England’s best bowler in the series. He now has 16 wickets, the most he has taken in a series in his career, and on Thursday he got his first five-wicket haul for eight years. That stat might have surprised some but Stokes has primarily been the fourth seamer in some pretty good attacks, with the likes of Jimmy Anderson, Stuart Broad and Mark Wood alongside him. If the ball is doing a bit, it is often the front three who get the wickets. If it is not, Stokes is often doing the hard donkey work. He’s the one in the enforcer role, banging it halfway down when it’s flat. Why do you think he has had so many injuries?” Hussain wrote in his column on Daily Mail. After bowling his heart out at Lord’s, Stokes came up with another impressive outing here at Manchester taking the wickets of Shubman Gill, B Sai Sudharsan, Shardul Thakur, Washington Sundar and Anshul Kamboj in the 24 overs he bowled. At Lord’s, where he was the Man of the Match, he bowled 44 overs to strangle India with the old ball.

Pakistan hockey team likely to miss playing in top league because of funding; hockey federation sends SOS to Prime Minister

NEW DELHI, JUL 25: The International Hockey Federation (FIH) on Wednesday invited Pakistan to join the top-tier Pro League after New Zealand, who had originally qualified, chose not to field a team. However, Pakistan may not be able to make it themselves. The invite from FIH has triggered a crisis in Pakistan hockey with calls now for the country’s Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to intervene. Pakistan finished second in the FIH Nations Cup, a second-tier tournament whose winner gets promoted to the Pro League. The Green Shirts lost in the final to New Zealand, who informed the FIH that they wouldn’t be sending their team. Consequently, the world body formally invited Pakistan and gave them time until August 12 to confirm participation. The Pro League



involves a series of matches between the top-ranked teams of the world over two legs. A cash-strapped Pakistan Hockey Federation estimated that it would cost them 700 million Pakistani Rupees, approximately \$2.5 million, for the entire campaign. They then put forth a request to the Pakistan Sports Board to release the funds, which

would help the hockey team to confirm its spot. However, the state-run board has informed the PHF that it doesn’t have the funds to ensure Pakistan’s participation in the Pro League. Further, the PSB has also directed the country’s hockey federation to submit detailed accounts of the funds allocated to them since last year.

Abhishek Nayar announced as WPL side UP Warriorz’s head coach

NEW DELHI, JUL 25: Abhishek Nayar was on Friday announced as head coach of Women’s Premier League (WPL) franchise UP Warriorz. The former India assistant coach had earlier helped the Warriorz in their off-season training camps in Bengaluru after the first edition of the league. “I really enjoyed my time working with the UP Warriorz before and I’m thrilled to take on this new role. WPL is a fantastic platform for women’s cricket and I’m looking forward to working closely with the management to build a strong team,” Nayar said. “UP Warriorz already have a strong foundation in place, and I believe we can build something truly special. There is incredible potential and I will give it my all to help win their first-ever title this season.” Nayar played just three ODIs for India but had a pro-



lific career in domestic cricket as an all-rounder for Mumbai. Since retiring in 2019, Nayar has developed a strong reputation for his coaching skills. Dinesh Karthik has credited him with unlocking his potential as a finisher in T20 cricket while the likes of Rohit Sharma, KL Rahul and Shreyas Iyer have all spoken about how he has helped them

as batters at various points. Nayar was a key part of the Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) staff last season when they won the 2024 Indian Premier League title. He has also served as the coach of the KKR academy in 2018 and was the head coach of Trinbago Knight Riders (TKR) in Caribbean Premier League in 2022.

MUMBAI, JUL 25: England opener Zak Crawley has shrugged off India captain Shubman Gill’s ‘Spirit of Cricket’ remarks after accusing him and Ben Duckett of taking an extra 90 seconds to walk out to bat with six minutes of play left on Day 3 of the Lord’s Test. “The English batsmen on that day had seven minutes of play left. They were 90 seconds late to come to the crease. Not 10, not 20 – 90 seconds late. Yes, most teams [do] this, in that position we would have also liked to play less overs, but there is a manner to do it,” Gill referred to the incident in which he had animatedly asked Crawley to “grow some f***ing balls”. “Yes, if you get hit on your body the physios are allowed to come on and that is something that is fair, but to be able to come 90 seconds late to the crease is not something that I would think comes in the spir-



it of the game, and just leading up to that event a lot of things that we thought should not have happened, they happened,” Gill had told. Defending his stance after thwarting the Indian bowlers with his rapid 84 off 113 deliveries on Thursday, Crawley said: “No, no. Not at all. I sit in my spot [in the dressing room] until the umpires go out. I saw

the umpires go, and I walked out. I wasn’t aware that we were 90 seconds late, but fair enough.” Crawley said such high-intensity banter and sledging generally excited him while he’s out at the crease. “I’ve always enjoyed that part of cricket, to be honest, especially when you’re batting,” he said.

Declan Rice defends new teammate Noni Madueke from critics; says he will “shock a lot of people”

MUMBAI, JUL 25: Arsenal’s midfield talisman Declan Rice has sprung in support of new signing Noni Madueke from Chelsea. The winger’s acquisition for £48.5m had triggered a massive backlash from #NoToMadueke has gained traction on X, and murals outside the club’s Emirates Stadium have been vandalised with ‘Arteta out’. But Rice is defiantly behind his new teammate, as Arsenal seek to end their prolonged drought for an EPL title, which they last won two decades ago as well as bring their first ever Champions League silverware. “He’s going to shock a lot of people and I can’t wait for him to come,” said Rice, who is also his England teammate. He added: “I know how driven he is. I’ve spoken to him and you’re going to see what he’s about this season. He wants to prove and show everyone what he really can do. He’s hungry, he wants to play for Arsenal and that’s the type of players we want. It’s so positive. People have been speaking internally – the players, the staff. We know the player that we’re getting and we’re really looking forward to having him at our club. It’s going to be really exciting.” Pacy and nimble, though wasteful in front of goals during his Chelsea days, he has 20 goals from 92 appearances for the Blues and has already played for England. His trickery to get past the defenders is seen as a big asset. “When you’re an attacking player and in your mind the first thought you have is to go past your defender, that’s an unbelievable trait to have,” Rice said about Madueke’s ability,” he observed.