KL Rahul is the calm in India's ODI middle order

New Delhi, Nov 9:

KL Rahul walked in at 47/4 in Wellington on Saturday, with Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma gone and the chase slipping away. He did not try to rescue it with one big over. He put away the loose deliveries when they came, watched Shreyas Iyer, Naman Dhir and Anshul Kamboj depart, and was unbeaten on 26 off 38 balls when rain stopped play. India had won by four runs on DLS. While the spotlight is on Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, Rahul has quietly held the fort in India's middle order, batting between numbers four and seven. It was not a headline innings.



He does not have a 360-degree game or the shots that make highlight reels. But he brings something India need just as much: the ability to walk in when the innings is in trouble, handle the pressure, rebuild and make up for lost time. That composure when wickets fall has long been a feature of his batting.

The proof goes back years. Three years ago, with India reduced to 2/3 in their ODI World Cup opener against Australia in Chennai, Rahul helped see off the difficult phase, rotated the strike and built a 165-run partnership with Kohli. As the pressure eased, he began finding the boundaries more regularly, finishing unbeaten on 97 and guiding India to a six-wicket win. Earlier that year, in another chase against Australia in Mumbai, India were 16/3 while chasing 189 before slipping to 39/4. Rahul first steadied the innings with Hardik Pandya and then joined Ravindra Jadeja after Pandya's dismissal. The pair began cautiously before opening up. Rahul remained unbeaten on 75 off 91 balls, guiding India to a five-wicket win. It is not only about chases. He showed it while batting first against New Zealand at Mount Maunganui in 2020. India were 62/3 when Rahul joined Iyer, and the pair added 100 runs for the fourth wicket. After Iyer's dismissal, Rahul shared another 107-run stand with Manish Pandey and eventually finished with 112, helping India recover and post 296.

There is a method in it. He does not try to hit his way out of trouble. Instead, he looks to arrest the slide, build a partnership and bring the innings back on track before increasing the scoring rate. His first instinct is to give the innings stability, but there is an understanding that every situation calls for a different approach. In Wellington, staying at the crease was the priority. In the other three innings, once India had stability, he shifted gears.

His ability to slot into different roles is another strength. He has opened in red-ball cricket and batted at numbers five and six in ODIs, and batting coach Sitanshu Kotak pointed to that flexibility before the third ODI in Hamilton.

Sunil Gavaskar backs promoting Axar Patel to five on tricky Wellington pitch

Mumbai, Nov 9:

India were in a bit of bother at 39/3 in the second ODI in Wellington after Rohit Sharma fell. The Indian team management decided to bring Axar Patel on at number 6. Although he has played crucial innings in difficult situations before, the pitch's behaviour made facing the quality Kiwi bowlers look like an uphill task on Saturday, and he looked a little out of sorts.



Despite criticism and questions about the decision, former Indian cricketer Sunil Gavaskar agreed with the tactic of sending a left-hander up the order to break the sequence of right-handers. "The bowlers have slight difficulty if a left-handed batter comes because you have to change the line and length you would have for a right-hander. In trying to do that, your line can change slightly even to the right-hander, where more chances of getting runs are created," Gavaskar explaine.

Mercedes clinch 2026 F1 constructors' title as Norris wins Sao Paulo GP

New Delhi, Nov 9:

Mercedes clinched the 2026 Formula 1 constructors' championship at the Sao Paulo Grand Prix, completing a clean sweep of both drivers' and constructors' titles after a dominant campaign under the sport's new engine and aerodynamic regulations.Mercedes secured its first constructors' crown since 2021 after George Russell finished fourth and newly crowned world champion Kimi Antonelli took fifth place at Interlagos. Antonelli had already secured the drivers' championship at last weekend's Mexico City Grand Prix, becoming the youngest Formula 1 champion. Meanwhile, McLaren's Lando Norris claimed his second consecutive Sao Paulo Grand Prix victory, finishing 14.6 seconds ahead of Red Bull's Max Verstappen, who produced an impressive recovery drive from 21st on the grid. Verstappen's teammate Isack Hadjar completed the podium.Antonelli initially made a strong start, overtaking pole-sitter Norris on the run to Turn 1 to take the lead. However, his race unravelled after switching to dry tyres, with the Italian spinning at Turn 1 and subsequently losing positions to Norris and Verstappen.Russell's podium hopes also suffered a setback after he spun at the pit lane exit during his first stop, dropping to eighth before recovering to finish fourth. Seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton, who started 20th following engine trouble in qualifying, made an impressive opening lap to climb to ninth. However, he eventually finished ninth after a difficult race that included a spin in the rain.Antonelli was handed a five-second time penalty after the race for an unsafe pit release, but his finishing position remained unchanged. Ferrari's Charles Leclerc dropped to eighth after receiving a similar five-second penalty for a collision with Liam Lawson in the closing stages.

Tennis Premier League to award scholarships to 36 junior players

Mumbai, Nov 9:

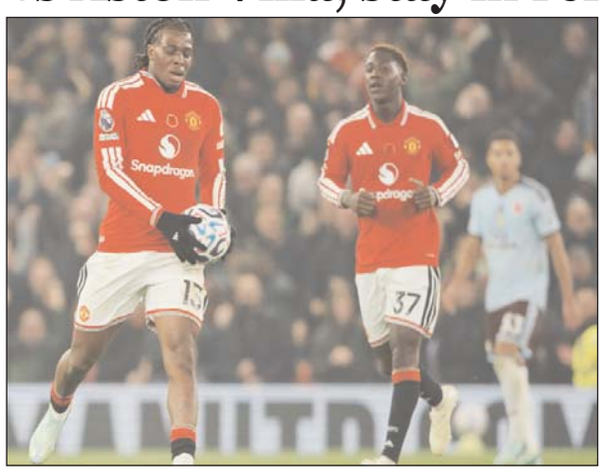
The Tennis Premier League (TPL) has announced the dates for the 2026 Race to Gold (RTG) Masters, a grassroots initiative that will see 36 promising junior tennis players from six states-Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Karnataka, along with the North Zone-receive scholarships, according to a press release. Two U-14 champions will also earn the opportunity to travel to the Australian Open 2027 through the newly introduced TPL Road to the Australian Open initiative.

The scholarships are designed to support young athletes beyond the court by providing tennis equipment, personalised apparel, professional guidance and opportunities to engage with leading Indian tennis icons such as Leander Paes and Rohan Bopanna, as well as top international players.

The 36 recipients will be felicitated during Tennis Premier League Season 8 in Hyderabad this December, with the ceremony integrated into the live broadcast on JioHotstar. Since its launch, the Race to Gold scholarship program has supported 80 young players.Alongside the RTG scholarship program, TPL and its teams also conducted eight free tennis camps across eight different states. The camps educated children and parents on nutrition, fitness and mental training, helping lay the foundations for India's next generation of tennis champions.

Adding an exciting international dimension to the Race to Gold program, the TPL Road to the Australian Open 2027 as also been announced. The six U-14 boys' and six U-14 girls' scholarship winners from the six regions will compete in a final round-robin tournament in Mumbai on November 29.The top boy and girl from this event will each earn the opportunity to travel to Melbourne for the Australian Open 2027, with Kia India covering the expenses for each player and one parent.

Manchester United play out 4-4 draw vs Aston Villa, stay in relegation zone



Mumbai, Nov 9:

Manchester United rose from the dead as they clawed their way back from 2 goals down twice in the same match, playing out a 4-4 draw at Old Trafford in an 8-goal thriller.

In the first half, United fell 2-0 behind after just 3 minutes and 40 seconds against Aston Villa, the earliest the Red Devils have ever gone 2 goals down in the Premier League.

Alysson Edward opened the scoring in the 2nd minute before Nicolas Jackson doubled the lead within 4 minutes, as two errors by Senne Lammens and a sleeping United defence left the team 0-2 down at Old Trafford.

But United levelled things up with a Bruno Fernandes penalty in the 16th minute and a Youri Tielemans strike in the 44th minute. Things followed a familiar pattern in the second half as United went down 4-2 due to individual errors from Diogo Dalot and Leny Yoro. The Portuguese defender gave away a penalty, which John McGinn duly converted in the 48th minute. 5 minutes after that, Yoro, who was trying to clear the ball, headed it straight into his own goal's crossbar, and the ball landed to Jackson, who fed Leon Goretzka to make it 4-2 in the 53rd minute. Still, United would not go quietly into the night as substitute Joshua Zirkzee gave the Red Devils a lifeline with a 90+2-minute strike before Old Trafford was sent into a frenzy as Patrick Dorgu headed in a Fernandes corner in the 90+6 minutes to make it all square.

United might have escaped with what will be a famous draw, but they finished the week, lodged at the bottom half of the table, in the relegation zone at 18th position. After the international break, things won't get easier as they travel to Anfield to take on arch-rivals Liverpool.

Messi becomes first-ever player to win back-to-back MLS Golden Boot awards



New Delhi, Nov 9:

Lionel Messi created history once again, this time in the Major League Soccer (MLS), when he became the first player to win MLS' Golden Boot in back-to-back seasons. Messi, who plies his trade for Inter Miami, scored a league-high 26 goals across 31 matches, followed by ?FC Dallas forward Petar Musa (22 goals) and Nashville SC's Sam Surridge (21 goals).

Messi had scored 29 goals the previous season, becoming the second in league history to score at least 25 times in back-to-back years. The 39-year-old Argentine retired from international football earlier this year after 21 years but signed a contract extension with the MLS club through 2028 in October.

"Back-to-Back Messi becomes the first player in MLS history to win consecutive Golden Boot awards," the league posted on Saturday.

Messi was held scoreless as Inter Miami blew a three-goal halftime lead and drew 3-3 with Charlotte FC in its MLS regular-season finale. Ian Fray put Miami ahead in the 14th minute following a corner kick. Luis Suárez tapped one in from close range in the 33rd after Germán Berterame headed Messi's corner toward the goal. Rodrigo De Paul made it 3-0 in the 42nd with a shot from outside the penalty area.

Then came Charlotte's surge. Liel Abada scored in the 50th and 55th minutes, and Rodolfo Aloko tied it in the 90th when he put away the rebound after Tyger Smalls hit the post.

What is a limitation to Auqib Nabi's bowling? Former cricketer decodes

New Delhi, Nov 9:

Auqib Nabi bowled well in the second ODI in conditions which were seaming a bit; he picked up 2/31. The seamer looked lethal in the conditions; however, Daryl Mitchell tried to charge down the track and counter the moment during his innings, as Nabi isn't as fast as some of the Indian bowlers. Former Indian cricketer Aakash Chopra pointed out the same issue, suggesting it might be a limitation in his game.



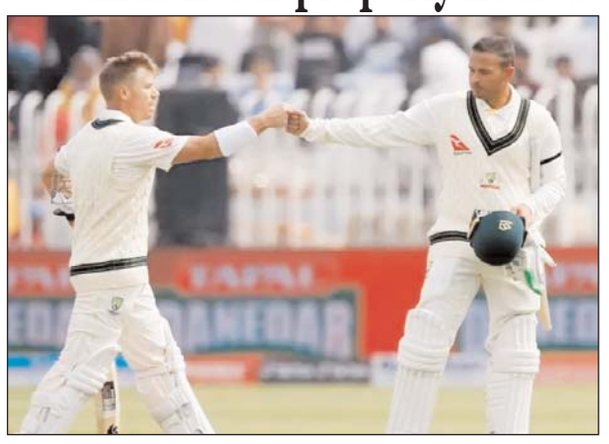
"Well, if there is help in the surface, Auqib Nabi is best suited to extract something out of it. He's a seam bowler, swing bowler. He's a hit-the-deck hard bowler. There was enough help in the surface after the game was delayed because of rain. The pitch was also under the covers for a fairly long period of time. So surface moisture was still existing. And he was just putting the ball in the right area," Chopra said."The only issue arrives a little later when Daryl Mitchell starts walking down the pitch and the keeper has to be brought up.

Mitchell starts smashing him down the ground. It has happened on two or three occasions. The lack of pace is something that will have to be worked on and he should have a plan when batters start charging down. The moment the keeper is standing up, Nabi looks half the bowler," Chopra added. It was not just Nabi; Arshdeep Singh also bowled quite miserly, conceding 16 runs from seven overs. Speaking on his performance, Chopra said. "Yeah, sometimes it happens. Last game, he conceded 70, but had four wickets to show for his efforts. On Saturday, he bowled a lot better than what he did at Auckland.

Warner stands with Khawaja for speaking up on Sandpaper Gate: 'Wounds never properly healed'

Mumbai, Nov 9:

There has been quite a bit of criticism regarding Usman Khawaja's recent comments about the Sandpaper Gate incident. "It was all of us. Not the batters, not the bowlers, not the staff. All of us," Khawaja told the Sydney Morning Herald last week, drawing polar opinions for raising the topic again after eight years.



Australian Test opener Nic Maddison accused Khawaja of using the incident as a marketing strategy to sell his autobiography 'Sabr.'

"It is obviously disappointing that it keeps coming up. But it is that time of year, isn't it, when Christmas comes along, and people have books to sell, so things come out," Maddison said ahead of New South Wales' Sheffield Shield clash against South Australia in Sydney.

However, David Warner was on the other end of the spectrum in opinions; He was one of the three players who took the brunt of the punishment after posting a video on Instagram supporting Khawaja.

"This isn't about reopening old wounds. It's about acknowledging that some wounds never properly healed. I stand with my brother Usman Khawaja. Speaking your truth takes courage, especially when people would rather you stay silent. Time passing doesn't replace accountability, and asking questions shouldn't be mistaken for holding grudges. Respect, honesty and accountability. That's all anyone can ask for," Warner wrote, captioning the post.

"It's been eight years since I've spoken on this topic. And Uzzie (Usman Khawaja), I throw my full support behind you. I thank you for what you've done.

Kane Williamson on how chat with Virat Kohli led to retirement decision

Mumbai, Nov 9:

Former New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson said that talking to close friend Virat Kohli played a major part in deciding on his international retirement earlier this year. In June, Williamson ended a 16-year international career agonisingly short of the 10,000-run mark in Tests.



"I spoke to a number of people I trust, and I've been really, really close with. And then I actually had a really, really cool chat with Virat like the day before I announced it, and it was really like looking in the mirror, just sharing the experiences that we've had in the game for so long," Williamson said on the 'Between the Two Beers' podcast.

"He's (Kohli) still playing a little bit, but largely he made some of those big decisions and that like, honestly just cheering. There's no one else, I think, even players in your own team from, at times, that have just been in that exact same position for the exact same length of time, captaincy roles, children at the same time. Like we sort of live this parallel thing.

We had a really quite special relationship, but although different worlds, and it was just quite a cool thing to be able to share some of that real vulnerable stuff and how you were feeling and just connect over it and it and I was like, I walked out of there, or I got off the phone, my wife walked into the hotel room, and I was like, it's time," he added.

The ace-batter played 110 Tests, 175 ODIs and 93 T20Is, scoring 9515, 7256, and 2575 runs respectively for the Kiwis. Williamson also said he was never driven by the personal goal of completing 10,000 Test runs.

"You don't do it for those reasons. But if they're no longer yours and there was a term that he did use, and it was this idea that you can start playing for the gallery. You can start, like holding on or doing things for reasons that aren't justâ€¦ I use the word pure, maybe like for your own measure of it, but that aren't just you that drive you back to the craft and to being a part of the team," the Kiwi legend said.

" I did, they would ask about it, and they were never the things that drove me; it wasn't a number. It wasn't to get to 10,000 runs to a point where I genuinely believe that if that was a goal of mine at the start, I wouldn't be close. We wouldn't sit here and even reference it, because what is your definition of success? Is it an average? Is it a certain number of hundreds? They're essentially limitations, and often you might have a successful career but probably fall short because your goals are lofty, and I don't know, it wouldn't have been true to me," added Williamson.

Sanjay to lead Indian men's hockey squad for New Zealand tour marking 100 years of sporting ties

New Delhi, Nov 9:

Hockey India on Monday announced the Indian men's squad for the upcoming tour of New Zealand, scheduled for 15 to 23 November 2026 in Auckland.

The tour, titled 2026 India/New Zealand Century of Sporting Unity Event - 100 Years of Unity Between India and New Zealand through Sports Partnership, will see the teams playing three matches on November 19, 21 and 22 at Lloyd Elsmore Hockey Stadium in Auckland, according to the Hockey India website. The historic milestone dates back to 1926, when an Indian Army hockey team, featuring the legendary Major Dhyan Chand, became the first Indian team across any sport to tour New Zealand.

The upcoming event will celebrate this significant chapter in the sporting history of both countries while further strengthening their longstanding sporting ties. The Indian squad will be led by Paris 2024 Olympic bronze medallist Sanjay, who will shoulder the responsibility of guiding a young side as the tour provides an important opportunity for promising players to gain valuable international exposure.



The tour will also offer the coaching staff an opportunity to assess emerging talent and build greater depth within the Indian men's hockey setup."The squad is a blend of some upcoming under-21 players and the core of the current India A group. These matches come at the right time to challenge the squad in three matches against a solid New Zealand team playing at home," said Chief Coach Craig Fulton. The selected players will look to make the most of this opportunity, demonstrate their potential and strengthen their claims for future national team assignments.

Hockey India's President, Dilip Tirkey, said: "The New Zealand tour is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate 100 years of sporting friendship between our nations. I am confident our young players will make the most of this experience and showcase Indian hockey's talent and potential. "Hockey India's Secretary General, Shri Bhola Nath Singh, added: "This tour holds immense historical significance as we celebrate a century of sporting partnership between India and New Zealand.

It will also provide our promising young players with a valuable platform to gain international experience, showcase their abilities and demonstrate their readiness for future challenges."