

## India to play Vietnam on Oct 12

**NEW DELHI:** The Indian senior men's team will face Vietnam in a one-off friendly match

on October 12, following the withdrawal of Lebanon from the tri-nation friendly tournament.

The match will be played at the Thien Truong Stadium in Nam Dinh, and will be designated as an official friendly, with points counting towards the FIFA Rankings.

As per the original schedule, India were supposed to face Vietnam on October 9 and Lebanon on October 12. After Lebanon's withdrawal, the All India Football Federa-

tion requested the Vietnam Football Federation to reschedule the Vietnam-India match to October 12, which was accepted by the VFF, the AIFF sources said.

India will assemble in Kolkata on October 5 and have a training session on October 6.

Manolo Marquez and his squad will travel to Vietnam on October 7, where they will continue training.

Marquez announced a list of 26 probables on Monday. The final squad of 23 players will be announced prior to the team's travel to Vietnam.

## Hockey India League returns with a bang

**NEW DELHI:** In a major boost to Indian hockey, the Hockey India League (HIL) is set to make a historic comeback after a 7-year hiatus, with the 2024-25 edition bringing an exciting new era to the sport.

Officially announced on Friday, the HIL 2024-25 will feature 8 men's teams and 6 women's teams, marking the first time a standalone women's league will run concurrently with the men's competition. This monumental expansion is a testament to Hockey India's commitment to fostering both male and female talent in the sport, elevating the status of Indian hockey on a global scale.

The return of the Hockey India League is not only a significant

moment in the history of the sport but also a major step forward in promoting women's hockey. The introduction of an exclusive women's league within the HIL framework provides a powerful platform for female athletes to demonstrate their prowess, paving the way for a more inclusive and competitive future for Indian hockey. Adding to the excitement, the press event also revealed the men's and women's franchises that will compete in this edition of the league, the Hockey India sources said.

Two of the women's franchises will be announced shortly after the closure of legal proceedings in the coming days.

Notably, the players' auction for the HIL 2024-

25 will be held from October 13 to 15 in New Delhi. Each franchise will build a 24-player squad, consisting of at least 16 Indian players (with a mandatory inclusion of 4 junior players) and 8 international stars. This balanced approach is designed to nurture local talent while adding international flair to the competition.

The HIL 2024-25 will see its matches played across two venues — Marang Gomke Jaipal Singh Astroturf Hockey Stadium in Ranchi, Jharkhand and Birsamunda Hockey Stadium in Rourkela, Odisha — with the women's league final scheduled for 26th January 2025 in Ranchi and the men's final to be held on 1st February 2025 in Rourkela. Each match will result in a win-

ner, with shootouts being introduced for tied games to ensure every encounter concludes decisively.

Each franchise owner expressed their enthusiasm for being part of this landmark edition of the HIL.

Jose Charles Martin, Chairman and MD of Charles Group said, "It's an absolute honour to be part of this historic moment, where we unite our passion for hockey with the spirit of Tamil Nadu. Our team is not just about winning matches but about inspiring the next generation of athletes, building a legacy of excellence, and making our state proud on the national stage. Together, we will elevate hockey to new heights and make Tamil Nadu a true powerhouse in the sport."

## Sreejesh withdraws from HIL auction

**NEW DELHI:** In a sporting gesture, renowned Indian goalkeeper PR Sreejesh, has withdrawn his name from the upcoming Hockey India League (HIL) player auction.

The announcement comes shortly after he helped India secure a bronze medal at the Paris 2024 Olympics, marking a high point in his illustrious career.

Sreejesh made the announcement in a heartfelt letter to Hockey India President Dilip Tirkey, stating, "After much thought, I have decided to withdraw my name from the player auction for the upcoming Hockey India League."

He expressed deep

gratitude for the retirement function hosted in his honour, highlighting how few athletes have the privilege to conclude their careers on such a significant note.

Reflecting on his recent Olympic experience, Sreejesh said, "The past month and a half has been humbling and satisfying in equal measure. I ended my playing career on a high by standing on top of the Olympic podium for the second consecutive Games."

He emphasised the emotional impact of celebrating the victory with his teammates and indicated that returning to play might compromise those cherished memories.

## Losing that 2-0 lead was really painful: Stahre

**BHUBANESWAR:** Kerala Blasters FC head coach Mikael Stahre expressed mixed emotions after his side played out an exhilarating 2-2 draw against Odisha FC in the Indian Super League (ISL) match at the Kalinga Stadium on Thursday night.

The Blasters started strongly, dominating the early stages and deservedly taking the lead through Noah Sadaoui. Just three minutes later, Sadaoui set up Jesus Jimenez to double the advantage, putting Kerala Blasters FC firmly in control. However, Odisha FC mounted a quick response, with an own goal by Alexandre Coeff giving them a lifeline before Diego Mauricio's strike levelled the score, completing a dramatic comeback within 36 minutes.

Although Stahre was disappointed to see his side surrender a two-goal lead, he was overall pleased with the performance of his players.

"We followed the game plan perfectly. We really looked like a team that played fast and aggressive, and we truly deserved the two goals," Stahre said in the post-match press conference.

"We conceded a goal out of nowhere, and then suddenly we lost a little bit of momentum and they got into the game. And they're playing at home with the fans as well. So, for a few minutes, it was a little bit sloppy defensively, and then they came into the game. First of all, losing that 2-0 lead was really painful, but I must say that I'm really proud of the guys (because) of how they came back in the second half," he added. Stahre reiterated his feelings about the missed opportunity to secure a victory after leading by two goals but acknowledged the positive shift in his team's performance during the second half, where they created more clear-cut chances than the opposition.

## Odisha FC & Kerala Blasters FC play out thrilling draw

**BHUBANESWAR:** Odisha FC played out a 2-2 draw with Kerala Blasters FC in the Indian Super League (ISL) 2024-25 at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar on Thursday night. Diego Mauricio scored for Odisha FC, while Alexandre Coeff conceded an own goal. Meanwhile, Noah Sadaoui and Jesus Jimenez combined well to get on the scoresheet for Kerala Blasters FC.

The match was lively right from the get-go as both sides produced back-to-back attempts. On one hand, Danish Farooq snatched the ball from Mourtada Fall and had free space in front only to see the latter sliding the ball out for a corner.

Similarly, Hugo Boumous passed it onto Diego Mauricio in the six-yard box, and the Brazilian falsed his kick, but Sachin Suresh comfortably collected the ball. In the 15th minute, Jimenez nutmegged both Thoiba Singh and Ahmed Jahouh to find Sadaoui in the six-yard area. However, once again, Fall came to the rescue to clear it off.

Mikael Stahre's side didn't need to wait much, as three minutes later, the duo combined again. Jimenez laid it off for Sadaoui inside the box to witness the latter curl it past Amrinder. Three minutes later, Sadaoui turned provider. He cut in and went towards the penalty box and passed it on to

Jimenez. The Spaniard glanced a shot towards the first post to see Amrinder concede another. In the 29th minute, Sergio Lobera's side got some respite. Ahmed Jahouh played a short corner and then crossed it into the six-yard area. Sachin fumbled to collect it, and the ricochet from his teammate Alexandre Coeff crossed the goal line.

Odisha FC didn't take much time to score again. Seven minutes later, Mauricio combined with Jerry Mawihmingthanga. He passed it onto Jerry, who crossed it towards his path, and the Brazilian's shot was too much for Suresh to save.

This was Jerry's 21st assist in the ISL.

## Zsiltzova leads women section

**BENGALURU:** At the end of the sixth round of the 12th IBCA World Junior and World Women Chess Championship for the Blind and Visually Impaired, WIM Zsiltzova Lisenko Lubov of Ukraine leads the women's section with a perfect score of 6 points out of 6.

Following her closely is Poland's Salamon Julia, who has amassed 5 points so far.

In a standout match, Zsiltzova, playing with the white pieces, opted for the King's Pawn opening against India's Megha Chakraborty. Although Megha started with the French Defense, she found herself on the back foot after Zsiltzova introduced an unusual line that caught her off guard. Recognising Megha's passive defence, Zsiltzova launched a decisive attack, leading to Megha's resignation on the 52nd move.

On the second board, Polish players Egeman Emilia and Tryjanska Emilia faced off in a strategic battle.

Egeman opened with the Giuoco Piano. Despite Tryjanska's

initial advantageous position, a critical blunder on her 19th move, sacrificing a piece, allowed Egeman to capitalise tactically, culminating in victory on the 38th move.

In the Junior Section, Racis Michal of Poland played the Reti opening against Slovenia's Gradisek Bor on the top board. Despite starting with a favorable position, Racis found himself in a tightly contested match that ended in a draw due to mutual time pressure, despite both players having had winning chances.

Another noteworthy match featured India's Waghmare Tanish, who employed the King's Pawn Opening against Poland's Salamon Julia, who countered with the Sicilian Defense. A pivotal moment came on the 15th move when Tanish's f5 pawn move proved disastrous. Salamon seized the advantage and secured her victory on the 45th move, putting her in the lead with a half-point advantage.

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