



PHOTO: AFP

Deccan Chargers cricketer Paul Valthaty (R) has emerged from the unknown as the most effective player in the IPL so far, and will be central to captain Adam Gilchrist's (C) plans.

## Valthaty making merry

AFP, New Delhi  
**DLFA  
INDIAN  
PREDIER  
LEAGUE**

Paul Valthaty may not inspire much confidence when he trudges in to bat -- no funky haircut and no flashy bling on show at the glitzy, celebrity-centred Indian Premier League.

But the 27-year-old is still commanding the loudest cheer from fans and utmost respect from critics, thanks to his explosive show in the Twenty20 tournament so far.

Valthaty is enjoying his time under the sun as one of India's little-known players who have been stealing the thunder from international stars at the fourth edition of the cash-rich tournament.

"No one has shone brighter than Valthaty, easily the star of the tournament after his brilliant performances," said former India captain Anil Kumble.

"He has suddenly caught the eye and could well be here to stay, at least in the limited-over format."

Valthaty's rise to stardom from obscurity has the feel of a fairytale.

He was picked by Kings XI Punjab as a backup to expensive international buys at a player auction in January this year.

When skipper Adam Gilchrist came out to open the innings with Valthaty against reigning champions Chennai in Mohali, it looked a risky move.

More so because Punjab were chasing an imposing 189 and Valthaty's previous three innings had yielded only 12 runs.

But what unfolded before a packed stadium and those watching the game on television, would remain etched for a long time in the memory for the sheer class of the act.

Valthaty unleashed stylish, copy-book shots on either side of the wicket to race to 120 off just 63 balls with 19 fours and two sixes.

The stunning counter-attack by the hitherto unheard-of player, forced a wry smile from Chennai and India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

"We have to learn the lessons from this game. Valthaty was brilliant and he really took the game away from us," said Dhoni.

Valthaty went on to prove his knock the other day was no flash in pan.

Up against Deccan, he grabbed four wickets with medium-pace bowling to restrict Deccan to 165 and then struck a blazing 75 to steer his team to victory.

His dream run continued in the next game against Rajasthan, scoring a

quickfire 46 and sharing 67 runs off just 26 balls with Gilchrist to set the platform for a comprehensive 48-run win.

The genial batsman has now leapfrogged to the top of IPL batting charts with 247 runs ahead of superstar Sachin Tendulkar (236).

Gilchrist predicted it won't be long before Valthaty breaks into the Indian team.

"It is quite extra-ordinary the way he has played," said the wicketkeeper-batsman. "His performance has been of the highest class."

"He is very calm, very controlled and that is great thing for our franchise. Hopefully, that should help him progress and achieve higher honours."

Valthaty, whose three older sisters and mother are all doctors, could have achieved recognition earlier but for an eye injury sustained during the Under-19 World Cup in New Zealand in 2002.

He remained in wilderness despite recovering fully and could not even get a chance to play a first-class game, but Valthaty did not give up hope.

"Cricket was all I knew. Any extra motivation was not needed," says Valthaty, by his own admission a reluctant talker.

"My dream has not been fulfilled yet, there is still a long way to go!"

## Inter-district cricket from today

SPORTS REPORTER

Sixty-four districts in twelve groups will take part in the 31st inter-district cricket championship across the country today.

On the opening day, all twelve venues -- Pabna, Gaibandha, Bogra, Bagerhat, Kushtia, Comilla, Chittagong, Mymensingh, BKSP, Faridpur, Borguna and Sylhet -- will host matches.

Defending champions Khulna will be eyeing a hattrick of titles after they won the last two competitions. Tomorrow, they take on the winners of today's Jessor-Magura game in Bagerhat.

All venue champions will qualify to the second round while the top two from there will play the final.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

## New cricket

FROM PAGE 16

Jacques Rudolph's 89 and paceman Vernon Philander's four-wicket haul helped them come back after Mohammad Ashraful's all-round show clinched the first one-day at Buffalo Park in East London two days earlier on April 19.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

Safina, who is through to her first WTA semi-final since her runner-up finish at Cincinnati in 2009, has won nine of her last 12 matches, stretching back to the start of Indian Wells.

Romanian seventh seeded Simona Halep, the runner-up 12 months ago, reached the last four with a 6-2, 6-1 win over Hungarian fourth seed Greta Arn.

The 19-year-old next faces Belgium's Kirsten Flipkens who never let Moroccan wildcard Nadia Lalam find any rhythm in her first career quarter-final. Flipkens won the first 11 games on her way to a 6-0, 6-1 win.

Italian veteran Alberta Brianti defeated America's Melanie

## COACHING INDIA Flemo has not made up mind

PTI, Mumbai

Stephen Fleming's name has been doing the rounds as a possible successor to Gary Kirsten as India coach but the former New Zealand captain on Saturday said he had not thought of taking up full-time coaching job yet.

"I'm enjoying coaching Chennai Super Kings. I got my hands full at CSK. It is a good experience. I haven't thought a lot about my coaching career. It is something that I'll consider as time goes on," said Fleming, who is currently the coach of IPL side Chennai Super Kings.

## Kapali, Mizanur

FROM PAGE 16  
leg-spin, getting the breakthrough as he trapped newbie Bikash Sharma leg-before sixes.

## BRIEF SCORES

DHAKA: First innings 294 all out (Mosharraf 69, Arman 65; Delwar 4-70).

RAJSHAHI: First innings 206-0 (Mizanur 139 not out, Avishek 56 not out).

BARISAL: First innings 257 all out and second innings 26-1 in 10.5 overs (Faruq 11 not out; Kapali 1-10).

SYLHET: First innings 252 all out in 77.4 overs (Kapali 86, Rajin 50; Gazi 5-77).

Battle of

they have proved how good they are in field. So there is no scope for complacency," said Liton.

Indeed there is no scope for complacency for either of these sides, because they will be seeing for their first ever trophy in the final of the Independence Cup which is sure to go down in the country's footballing history.



PHOTO: AFP

Spanish tennis star David Ferrer celebrates his win over countryman Nicolas Almagro in the semifinals of the Barcelona Open yesterday. He won 6-3, 6-4.

## Safina keeps soaring

**Tennis**

AFP, Fes

Former world number one Dinara Safina's resurgence continued at the Fes claycourt tournament on Friday with a gruelling 6-4, 2-6, 6-4 quarterfinal win over fellow Russian Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova.

Safina, who is through to her first WTA semi-final since her runner-up finish at Cincinnati in 2009, has won nine of her last 12 matches, stretching back to the start of Indian Wells.

Romanian seventh seeded Simona Halep, the runner-up 12 months ago, reached the last four with a 6-2, 6-1 win over Hungarian fourth seed Greta Arn.

The 19-year-old next faces Belgium's Kirsten Flipkens who never let Moroccan wildcard Nadia Lalam find any rhythm in her first career quarter-final. Flipkens won the first 11 games on her way to a 6-0, 6-1 win.

Italian veteran Alberta Brianti defeated America's Melanie

Delwar 4-70 in a 2hr 45 minute marathon and will face Safina for a place in the final.

## Dhoni more influential than Obama

SPORT DESK

World Cup-winning India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni was on Friday named among 2011's 100 most influential people by Time's Magazine, and was ranked higher than names such as US President Barack Obama and ace Barcelona and Argentina footballer Lionel Messi.

Dhoni, ranked 52, was also the highest ranked Indian in 2011, leading a five-strong Indian contingent that also consists of petrochemicals millionaire Mukesh Ambani, US-based neuroscientist V S Ramachandran, IT tycoon Azim Premji and activist Aruna Roy.

The Indian captain is only the second Indian cricketer to make the list, the first being superstar batsman Sachin Tendulkar. The magazine praised Dhoni's rags-to-riches story. "As astonishing as Dhoni's talent is his background. Indian success stories are usually associated with pedigree, connections and power. Dhoni, from a small-town family of modest means, had none of these, but he's shown India

that you can make it with only one thing: excellence," read the accompanying profile penned by acclaimed author Chetan Bhagat.

Obama came in at 87th place and Messi at 88th.

## Deccan meet Mumbai today

PTI, Hyderabad

Their campaign has been inconsistent so far and the task does not get any easier for former champions Deccan Chargers as they take on in-form Mumbai Indians in their Indian Premier League match here today.

Kumar Sangakkara's Chargers have been struggling to gel as a team and that has reflected in their roller-coaster run so far.

In five matches they have played so far, the 2009 champions have won twice while finishing on the losing side on three occasions.

But the Chargers go into the match as a confident unit after beating Delhi Daredevils in their previous outing, in which the batting came good for them.

The line-up does not exactly boast of established stars except for Kumar Sangakkara and to some extent Shikhar Dhawan.

On the opening day, all twelve venues -- Pabna, Gaibandha, Bogra, Bagerhat, Kushtia, Comilla, Chittagong, Mymensingh, BKSP, Faridpur, Borguna and Sylhet -- will host matches.

Defending champions Khulna will be eyeing a hattrick of titles after they won the last two competitions. Tomorrow, they take on the winners of today's Jessor-Magura game in Bagerhat.

All venue champions will qualify to the second round while the top two from there will play the final.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking up three top-order wickets.

The discarded national player hammered 118 off 99 balls after picking