



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

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 leaptfrogged 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 a 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!"

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 for six.

BRIEF SCORES

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

RAJSHAH: 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

FROM PAGE 16 they have proved how good they are on 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 vying 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



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 Pivovarova.

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 Lalami 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 Oudin 7-5, 5-7, 6-0 in a 2hr 45 minute marathon and will face Safina for a place in the final.

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, Kushitia, Comilla, Chittagong, Mymensingh, BKSP, Faridpur, Borguna and Sylhet -- will host matches.

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

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

A team's 3rd

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-dayer 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.

New cricket

FROM PAGE 16 for the national team's coach is concerned, it is somewhat delayed due to the ongoing Indian Premier League (IPL) where most of the top coaches are playing their trade.

Board sources have said that they prefer someone from Australia or South Africa for the position of head coach.

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 VS 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 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.

Bhajji spin sinks CSK

CRICINFO, Mumbai

Rohit Sharma dazzled the senses, Harbhajan Singh sucker-punched with three wickets in an over, and Mumbai Indians hustled on the field to go around a sublime Subramaniam Badrinath and clinch a well-fought win at the Wankhede Stadium.

Though Badrinath batted with so much serenity under pressure that he eclipsed Rohit's knock on the elegance scale, he was left with too much to do on his own. And in the end overs, he looked a forlorn figure in the middle, hardly getting the strike as his team-mates succumbed meekly.

Badrinath tried his best, though. His first scoring shot -- a gorgeous off-driven boundary against Munaf Patel of the third ball he faced, set the tone for the night but it was the late cuts that really caught the eye. In the seventh over, he caressed Harbhajan Singh to third man and in the ninth over, he glided Rohit Sharma to backward point boundary. He even lofted Rohit for a pretty six -- with the high front elbow and a graceful swing of the bat -- over long-off in the same over. He pulled down the shutter briefly to consolidate after the fall of Michael Hussey and MS Dhoni before he opened up again in the end overs.

With 59 runs required from 37 balls, Badrinath sashayed to the leg side and laced an excellent square drive off Lasith Malinga to close the gap. The situation turned grim again as S Anirudha, who had pulled Kieron Pollard for a six,

swung a full toss from Harbhajan Singh to deep midwicket to leave Chennai needing 42 from 24 deliveries.

It was an over later that Harbhajan, who had earlier lured Suresh Raina into hitting a return catch, killed the contest with a triple strike. He slipped one past the attempted slog-sweep to bowl Albie Morkel, lured R Ashwin to hole out to long-on, and induced Joginder Sharma to top-edge a slog. Badrinath kept up with the fight, even getting a six in the final over, but Chennai's fight had evaporated into the Mumbai night during that Harbhajan over.

Before Badrinath's sensuous knock, Rohit Sharma owned the evening. He collected three boundaries in his first four deliveries, never looked back from then on and charged Mumbai Indians to a competitive 164. Big hitters usually pulverise the opposition with violence but Rohit seems to caress them to submission.

When Sachin Tendulkar fell in the fourth over with Mumbai on 13 for 2 and with the ball jaggling around, Chennai had a great chance to strangle the hosts but they were thwarted by Rohit's belligerence and let down by their bowlers. Rohit was involved in a 61-run partnership with the enterprising Ambati Rayudu and a brutal 87-run stand in 8.1 overs with Andrew Symonds but it was his imprints that lay all over the Wankhede.

Sometimes, you just need a shot or two to get going. Rohit entered the scene after Tendulkar was done for pace and bounce by a sharp lifter but got two gift-wrapped boundary deliveries from

Doug Bollinger to kick start his innings. He creamed two over-pitched deliveries to the point boundary and all of a sudden, venom evaporated out of Chennai's bowling. Even Albie Morkel, who was menacing until then, slipped a half-volley on the legs and Rohit collected his third boundary in just four deliveries.

A potentially nervy setting-in period in seamer-friendly conditions had turned into an imperious start and Rohit never looked back, unfurling an array of dazzling shots. He crashed a length delivery from Joginder Sharma over long-on before he was involved in a mini-contest with Suraj Randiv. The off breaks, the doosras, and the topspinners came swirling down and Rohit started to caress and steer his way out of trouble. He glided one to backward point boundary, late cut another to third man and nonchalantly lifted another over extra cover.

He brought up his fifty and Mumbai's 100 in the 15th over with a six over long-off against Randiv and the floodgates were well and truly open. With Mumbai on 107 for 3 in 15 overs, Dhoni turned to Joginder. Mistake. Rohit flayed a length ball to point boundary and shuffled across to pull another to square-leg boundary. That was the start for more imperious innovations.

He paddle-scooped a low full toss from Bollinger for a six over fine-leg before he turned brutal against Suresh Raina in the 19th over. He smote the second delivery, a gentle length ball, over wide long-on, top-edged a slog sweep for couple, and torpedoed the next delivery over cowcorner as Raina leaked 17 runs. Rohit fell in the final over, holing out to long-on, but by then he had entertained the Mumbai crowd in some style.

Rohit had one more crowd-pleasing, and game-turning, moment left in the night. When Chennai needed 64 runs from 47 balls, Dhoni top-edged a swat-flick and Rohit charged in from third man and flung himself forward to pouch a stunner. It was the beginning of the end for Chennai.

SCORES IN BRIEF

MUMBAI INDIANS: 164 for 4 in 20 overs (Sharma 87, Symonds 31 not out, Rayudu 27; Bollinger 2-30, Morkel 1-19)

CHENNAI SUPER KINGS: 156 for 9 in 20 overs (Badrinath 71 not out, Hussey 41; Harbhajan 5-18, Malinga 2-20)

Result: Mumbai Indian won by 8 runs.

Man-of-the-match: Harbhajan Singh.



PHOTO: AFP

BHAJJI BLAST: Mumbai Indians bowler Harbhajan Singh hugs wicketkeeper Ambati Rayudu after picking up his fifth wicket, and third in one over, against Chennai Super Kings at the Wankhede Stadium on Friday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 Memo-rized
4 Round Table address
7 Old hat
12 "... — on forever": Tennyson
13 Praise in verse
14 "American Idol" runner-up
15 Burst
16 "Forget it"
18 Mound stat
19 Steam room
20 Bronx cheer
22 Writer Buscaglia
23 Super-man's alias
27 Gaffer Ernie
29 Jaundiced
31 Zero-star movies
34 New Orleans stew
35 Ducks
37 Drunkard

DOWN
38 Informa-tion
39 Triumphed
41 Region
45 Gulf money
47 Scratch
48 Raven's word
52 Commo-tion
53 Farewell
54 Calendar abbr.
55 Stashed
56 — over (thorough examina-tion)
57 Med. approver
58 Exist

Solution time: 25 mins.
ALL PYLE PUNS
LEE RAIN ATOP
PATDOWNS RATI
DIM GUNSHOT
SHOPPEEON
HOW TAB WIRES
ISNT RUM PUTT
AESOP SAM BAY
REAP NEEDLE
IMPEACH AGO
REAR HOEDOWNS
ORSO EURO NIL
NESS DRAW SPY

2 Old market-place
3 November birthstone
4 Half the offspring
5 Standards of perfec-tion
6 Skit show
7 Legal worker, for short
8 Intent
9 Schuss
10 D.C. address
11 Conclu-sion
17 Grandson of Eve
21 Striped equine
23 Ungrace-ful one

24 Shade provider
25 San Fran-cisco's — Hill
26 Pair
28 W.W.II craft
30 Of old
31 Awful
32 Eggs
33 Encoun-tered
36 Take to the pool
37 Caught
40 Type of switch
42 Nebraska city
43 Bottom point
44 Wear away
45 Pharma-ceutical
46 Singer McEntire
48 Run-down horse
49 Tokyo's old name
50 Leon Uris' "QB —"
51 Still, in verse

1	2	3		4	5	6		7	8	9	10	11
12					13				14			
15					16			17				
18					19							
20				21		22				23	24	25
				27	28			29	30			
31	32	33							34			
35					36		37					
38						39	40			41	42	43
					45				46		47	
48	49	50	51								52	
53						54					55	
56						57					58	

CRYPTOQUIP

OBSMZ FGZ FRW NWWH MGVTO
RWQX FWNZFGZQ DF FGZ
ORZHB OG TBSF, MWVIH WSZ
MDII FGZT XQWSD MQWSBZO?

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: SHOULD PROSPECTORS
ATTEMPT TO WEIGH THEIR SOLID GOLD
NUGGETS WITH MINER SCALES?

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Q equals R