

Chelsea players ‘must fight for Pochettino’

AFP, London

Cole Palmer says Chelsea players “love” under-pressure manager Mauricio Pochettino and must fight for him as they target a European spot after an inconsistent season.

The Argentine boss’s future has been a source of ongoing debate during his first campaign.

But the Blues, who finished a lowly 12th last season, need just a point at home to Bournemouth on the final day of the campaign on Sunday to clinch sixth position.

That would mean they would qualify for either the Europa League or the UEFA Conference League depending on various permutations.

The Blues head into the weekend on the back of Wednesday’s 2-1 win at Brighton, during which in-form attacking midfielder Palmer opened the scoring during Chelsea’s fourth straight victory.

“For it to be in our hands to get sixth place is big for us,” Palmer told Chelsea’s website.

“Hopefully we can do it. Chelsea is a big club, everyone wants to finish higher than sixth but we have to look at where we’ve been at the start of the season, throughout the season.”

The 22-year-old England international added: “We’ve been 13th and 12th this season. Last season was the same, so to get back into Europe is a step in the right direction.

“Big credit to the manager because all the players love him, we’ve got to fight for him. It’s been a good season and hopefully we can get European football at the end of it.”



Bangladesh’s flag flies on the backdrop as the Tigers’ vice-captain for the upcoming T20 World Cup, Taskin Ahmed, makes his way through a mob of fans and media at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in the wee hours of Thursday to board the USA-bound flight. The Tigers are scheduled to reach Texas at around 4:00am Bangladesh Time on Friday. Bangladesh will play a three-match T20I series against the USA, beginning on May 21.

PHOTO: BCB

Ederson out for rest of season

REUTERS

Manchester City goalkeeper Ederson will miss the last two games of the season, including the FA Cup final, due to a small fracture of his eye socket, the Premier League club said on Thursday.

Ederson suffered the injury on Tuesday away at Tottenham Hotspur in a collision with defender Cristian Romero in the second half of City’s 2-0 win.

The Brazilian needed lengthy treatment on the pitch and looked groggy before manager Pep Guardiola replaced him with Stefan Ortega.

“He has since undergone scans of the affected area that have revealed a small fracture to the right eye socket,” City said in a statement.

“The injury will prevent Ederson from playing any further part in the remaining games of the 2023-24 season.”

League leaders City host West Ham United on Sunday and victory will guarantee a fourth title in a row before they face Manchester United in the FA Cup final on May 25.

‘You won’t see me for a while’

ICC

Virat Kohli, India’s superstar batter and former captain, has given a hint of his post-retirement plans in an emotional interview.

During a recent gala dinner hosted by Kohli’s Royal Challengers Bangalore team, a significant question was raised to the batting stalwart regarding his retirement plans and the motivations behind his drive to score.

“It’s quite simple,” Kohli told RCB. “I think as a sportsman, we do have an end-date to our careers. So I am just working backwards. I don’t want to finish my career thinking ‘oh, what if I have done this on that particular day’ because I can’t keep going on and on forever.

“So it’s just about not leaving any undone business behind and not have any regrets later, which I am sure I won’t.”

Kohli hinted at taking a break after retiring and expressed his desire to give his best for as long as he continues to play.

“Once I am done, I will be gone, you won’t see me for a while (smiles). So I want to give it everything I have till the time I play, and that’s the only thing that keeps me going,” he said.



Roles expand for Mahmudullah, Shakib

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are going into the upcoming T20 World Cup with quite a few young guns in the squad, led by a young skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto. But it is two of their veterans – Mahmudullah Riyad and Shakib Al Hasan – who could give the side a lift with their experience in the USA and the West Indies.

Mahmudullah’s journey to this World Cup was one of determination. Unable to make the squad in the 2022 T20 World Cup in Australia, Mahmudullah showed the virtue of remaining steadfast in his own plans, staying away from media attention, and being keen on following his own process to earn back his place in the lineup for the 2023 ODI World Cup before he made the cut for the 2024 T20 World Cup.

While many of his veteran colleagues such as Mushfiqur Rahim, Tamim Iqbal, and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza have not been in the T20 picture for a while now, Mahmudullah’s resilience has seen him not only earn his place back in the side but also made him a crucial cog in the Tigers’ machine.

In the last 12 months, Mahmudullah averaged 47.66, the highest among Bangladesh batters who bat in the middle order (from wickets 4-7). His strike rate is also the highest amongst batters in the middle-order who at least played five matches during this period.

Fondly called the ‘silent killer’, Mahmudullah’s steps may have been silent but his impact had been felt by the

team management. Head coach Chandika Hathurusingha said that a change in approach worked for him, and, come the end of the innings, his role would be a crucial one for the Tigers in the shortest format.

“He’s been playing regularly but his come back, I thought, was strong. Lately, if you see, he’s playing his best cricket.



He’s changed his batting approach a lot and is in good form. His role is going to be batting in the middle order, probably be the enforcer in the middle as well as playing the role of a finisher, which he has done remarkably well in all formats and in the domestic matches as well lately,” Hathurusingha said on Wednesday at the press conference during which the World Cup squad was named.

The veteran had also earned the board’s trust and the high-ups have ensured him that they would not push for his retirement after the World Cup. “We haven’t spoken

about these things (his retirement from T20s after the World Cup). I don’t think there is anything like that because he is still playing and the way he is playing now is brilliant,” BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon told reporters following a recent meeting with the player.

Along with Mahmudullah, another experienced campaigner in Shakib’s role will be vital for Bangladesh in crunch moments. In what could be both the stalwarts’ last dance at a World Cup, Shakib, and Mahmudullah would be expected to make an impact not only through their performances but also by spreading their knowledge of the game among a rather inexperienced and young side.

Shakib, who recently returned to the T20I lineup after a 10-month gap, led the side in both the T20 World Cups in Australia and the ODI World Cup in India in 2023. This time, Shakib’s leadership would be spread across a different arc, not related to just on-field decisions.

Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto did not feign to have knowledge of their retirement plans but felt the younger stars needed to give those two some ‘good memories’ in their final years.

“What we will want is that they spread their experience among the other players so that the small improvements can be made,” Shanto had said about Shakib and Mahmudullah.

The Tigers’ young squad would certainly be looking up to the two veterans’ experience to guide them.

SHORT CORNER

Sprint great Bolt backs West Indies

Eight-time Olympic champion and cricket fan Usain Bolt is backing his home team West Indies to become the first nation to win a hattrick of T20 World Cup titles when the tournament kicks off next month. “I’m always going to go with my home team,” Bolt said on Wednesday. “Because we have some big hitters, if we get it right, then definitely West Indies (can win).”



AFC back Palestine bid to suspend Israel

The Asian Football Confederation gave its backing to Palestine’s proposal to suspend Israel from FIFA due to the ongoing war in Gaza at its congress in Bangkok on Thursday.

Griezmann hattrick fires Atletico into Champions League

Antoine Griezmann secured Champions League qualification for Atletico Madrid with a hattrick in a 3-0 triumph at Getafe on Wednesday in La Liga. Diego Simeone’s side ensured they will finish in the top four and therefore reach Europe’s top competition.

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In a largely uninspiring final in Rome on Wednesday, Dusan Vlahovic’s only strike saw Juventus clinch a record-extending 15th Coppa Italia with a 1-0 victory over Atalanta 1-0, who were denied a first trophy in six decades.

PHOTO: X

‘The giant that walked amongst men’

AFP, New Delhi

India captain Sunil Chhetri said Thursday he will retire from international football aged 39, ending a record-breaking career for his country spanning two decades.

The attacker has hit 94 goals in 150 appearances for India, behind only Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi in the list of active international goal-scorers.

He is also India’s most-capped player.

In a video message on social media platform X, Chhetri said the 2026 World Cup qualifier against Kuwait on June 6 will be his last international outing.

“It’s not that I was feeling tired, not that I was feeling this or that,” he said.

“When the instinct came that this should be my last game, I thought about it a lot and eventually I came to this decision,” he said.

“Will I be sad after this? Of course...the kid inside me never wants to stop if given a chance to play for his country. It’s time for our country to see the next number nine.”



India are second in qualifying Group A with four points, behind Qatar.

“The game against Kuwait demands pressure, we need the three points to qualify for the next round. It’s hugely important for us,” the skipper said.

“But in a strange way, I don’t feel the pressure because these 15-20 days with the national team and the match against Kuwait is the last,” he added.

Across club and country, Chhetri’s goal tally stands at 252 from 515 appearances, averaging almost a goal every two games.

“He’s going to do it one last time, and we can never be grateful enough for the giant that walked amongst men,” Chhetri’s Indian Super League club Bengaluru FC said on X after the announcement.

Chhetri began his football journey in 2002. It was reported in 2009 that he had signed for

English Championship side Queens Park Rangers, but was unable to take up the contract after being denied a work permit.

He joined Kansas City Wizards in the United States in 2010 and in 2012 signed for Portugal’s Sporting CP, where he played for the reserves in the country’s second division.

In 2022, FIFA honoured Chhetri with a documentary titled “Captain Fantastic”.