

Stirling steps down as T20I captain; Ireland confirm T20I series against India

NEW DELHI: Ireland will face India in a men's T20I series in June under new leadership, after Paul Stirling announced on Thursday that he has stepped down from the captaincy following a disappointing 2026 T20 World Cup campaign.

ESPNcricinfo revealed in September about talks between Cricket Ireland and the BCCI about the prospect of Ireland playing a short men's T20I series in Ireland ahead of their white-ball tour to England in July. Graham West, Ireland's director of high performance, confirmed in a press release announcing Stirling's departure that the series will go ahead.

Stirling took over from Andy Balbirnie on a full-time basis in 2023 and has captained in 48 T20Is overall. But his tenure included two group-stage exits at T20 World Cups, and he was ruled out of the most recent edition midway through Ireland's second match after sustaining a knee injury while fielding.

Ireland were beaten by Sri Lanka and Australia at the World Cup before thrashing Oman, and their final match against Zimbabwe was abandoned without a ball being bowled. It followed a winless campaign at the 2024 edition, when they were beaten by India, Canada and Pakistan and had their match against USA washed out.

Cricket Ireland is yet to announce a permanent successor. Wicketkeeper-batter Lorcan Tucker was Stirling's vice-captain and deputised for their final two T20 World Cup fixtures, while Harry Tector could be an alternative leadership candidate.

Stirling will continue to lead Ireland's ODI side as they target qualification for next year's

World Cup in southern Africa, and said in a statement that he remains "fully committed" to playing for Ireland across formats.

"I still have a huge amount of ambition as a player and feel this decision will allow me to fully focus on being the best version of myself and making the strongest possible contribution on the field," he said.

"This feels like the right time for the team to move into a new chapter, and I wish whoever takes on the T20 captaincy every success. They will have my full support, and I look forward to working alongside them as we continue to build and push for success on the international stage.

"It has been a tremendous honour to lead Ireland in this format and something I have been incredibly proud to do. Captaining your country is a privilege that carries great responsibility, and I'm very grateful for the trust and support I have received during my time in the role."

West, who replaced Richard Holdsworth in late 2024, said: "With qualification secured for the T20 World Cup in 2028, Paul's decision to stand down as T20 captain provides the opportunity for the new captain to begin implementing their style and methodology,

starting with the India series in June."

As per the ICC's Future Tours Programme, Ireland's men are due to host New Zealand (one Test), Bangladesh (three ODIs and three T20Is) and Afghanistan (one Test, three ODIs and three T20Is) next summer. Cricket Ireland is set to confirm the 2026 summer international schedule within the next week, with some of those fixtures in doubt.

Stirling was critical of Ireland's sparse fixture list last season, which saw them go three months without playing an international match. "It's certainly disappointing that in the summer months in Ireland, as a professional cricketer, you're not playing enough cricket," he said.



'Gukesh became world champion by chance': Ex-world champion Anatoly Karpov

NEW DELHI: Former world champion Anatoly Karpov has claimed in an interview with a Russian newspaper that reigning world champion D Gukesh got the crown by "accident". It must be noted that Karpov's own first world championship title back in 1975 had come after a forfeit from the American world champion Bobby Fischer.

Karpov's comments echo a familiar refrain in

Russia, which last had a world champion in 2007, when Vladimir Kramnik was on the throne. Since then, two Russians—Sergey Karjakin in 2016 and Ian Nepomniachtchi in 2021 and 2023—have come close but have been thwarted.

In the interview, when Karpov was asked about chess becoming younger and younger, with a 19-year-old currently on the throne, the 74-year-old

said: "First of all, the Indian chess player became [champion] by chance, because he wasn't supposed to win the match against the Chinese player [Ding Liren]. The Chinese player lost a game there that he shouldn't have lost. Had he not, the Chinese player would have remained the world champion."

Karpov was being interviewed by daily Russian tabloid newspaper Komso-

mol'skaya Pravda as part of his upcoming 75th birthday celebrations. Karpov was the 12th world champion in chess history. After being made the world champion by forfeit in 1975, Karpov faced Viktor Korchnoi twice to defend his titles in 1978 and 1981. Then, he faced off in five consecutive world championship showdowns with Garry Kasparov, which saw the duo facing off in 144 games.

Scientists built a life-size Dinosaur nest and the results were surprising

How exactly did oviraptors, bird-like but flightless dinosaurs, hatch their eggs? Scientists have long debated whether these dinosaurs relied mainly on heat from the environment, similar to crocodiles and turtles, or used body warmth from a brooding adult like modern birds. A new study published today in *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution* takes a closer look at this mystery.

Researchers in Taiwan analyzed oviraptor brooding behavior and egg hatching patterns. They also ran heat transfer simulations on oviraptor egg clutches and compared the results with incubation efficiency in modern birds. To test their ideas, the team created a life-sized experimental set-up using a model oviraptor and artificial eggs designed to mimic the real

ones.

"We show the difference in oviraptor hatching patterns was induced by the relative position of the incubating adult to the eggs," said senior author Dr. Tzu-Ruei Yang, an associate curator of vertebrate paleontology at Taiwan's National Museum of Natural Science.

"Moreover, we obtained an estimate of the incubation efficiency of oviraptors, which is much lower than that of modern birds," added first author Chun-Yu Su, who attended Washington High School in Taichung when the research was conducted.

The team based their reconstruction on *Heyuannia huangi*, a species of oviraptor that lived roughly 70 to 66 million years ago in what is now China. This dinosaur was estimated to be about 1.5 meters long and weigh

around 20kg. It built semi-open nests containing multiple rings of eggs.

To recreate the brooding dinosaur, researchers constructed a trunk using polystyrene foam and wood for the internal frame. Cotton, bubble paper, and cloth were added to simulate soft tissues. The eggs themselves were produced from casting resin.

Two experimental clutches were arranged in double rings, reflecting the structure seen in fossilized oviraptor nests. This unusual layout meant that not every egg could come into direct contact with the brooding adult. "Part of the difficulty lies in reconstructing oviraptor incubation realistically," said Su. "For example, their eggs are unlike those of any living species, so we invented the resin eggs to approximate real oviraptor eggs as best as we could."

Visa prepares payment systems for AI agent-initiated transactions

Payments rely on a simple model: a person decides to buy something, and a bank or card network processes the transaction. That model is starting to change as Visa tests how AI agents can initiate payments. New work in the banking sector suggests that, in some cases, software agents may soon take on that role.

A recent example comes from Visa, which is rolling out its "Agentic Ready" programme in Europe to test how financial systems handle AI-initiated transactions. The effort involves collaboration with banks, including Commerzbank and DZ Bank. The aim is to prepare existing payment infrastructure for a scenario where software agents can search for products and make decisions, then complete purchases on behalf of users.

According to information published by Visa and reported by The Paypers, the programme focuses



on enabling secure transactions where AI systems act as the initiating party. Instead of a customer confirming a purchase, an AI agent could carry out the task after being given a goal or set of rules.

Payment systems are built around human identity and intent. A card transaction today depends on verifying that a person has authorised a purchase. If AI agents begin to initiate transactions, banks will need new ways to confirm identity and intent at the system level. That includes deciding how an agent

proves it is acting on behalf of a user, and how much autonomy it should have.

In Visa's model, software agents could handle routine or repeat purchases with limited human input, based on user-defined rules. A system could, for example, monitor supply levels and compare prices, then complete a transaction when certain conditions are met. Reporting from *Die Welt* and *Investing.com* says the company sees this as similar in scale to the early change toward online payments, when banks had to adapt to a new type of trans-

action flow.

Banks involved in early trials are testing how these ideas work in practice. Commerzbank and DZ Bank are exploring how AI agents can be integrated into existing systems without breaking compliance rules. This includes checks related to fraud, audit trails, and customer consent. These areas are tightly regulated, which means any change to how transactions are initiated must still meet oversight standards.

A RepRisk report found that banks are already dealing with more frequent and costly issues linked to AI. The report states that these incidents can lead to multi-million-dollar losses.

Visa's work is focused on infrastructure not consumer-facing tools. It's working on how payment networks should behave when the "customer" is a piece of software. That includes defining how agents are authenticated and how transactions are approved.

Riyan Parag hails Sanju Samson, says 'he is irreplaceable like Kohli or Rohit'



NEW DELHI: Rajasthan Royals captain Riyan Parag has hailed Sanju Samson's impact on the game as he termed the World Cup winners irreplaceable on Thursday (Mar 19). Speaking in a pre-season event, Parag compared Samson to Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma and said their impact is unparalleled. According to Parag, they can try different players, but replacing Samson will be a huge task. The former skipper in November 2025 was traded to Chennai Super Kings, while Ravindra Jadeja went in the opposite direction.

"We can only try to look for players with the same skills [like Samson] and someone who can fill the hole left by him in the batting order," Parag said in Jaipur. "Just like you cannot replace Virat Kohli or Rohit Sharma

in any XI, "But will we plan something new? That's what we've been discussing in the build-up. If you see last season, we lost five or six close games; in fact, a couple of games were last-ball defeats. This season, if those few games go in our favour, then we won't be asked about our issues any longer.

"In any 40-over game, there will be a few moments where you have to make the right decisions and that's what I'll focus on - like who will bat where, or what to do at the toss - and if we do that well, then this year will be a good one." In November, Samson was traded to CSK, with Jadeja going in the opposite direction. This meant Samson would end his long association with the Rajasthan Royals, where he had served for 12 seasons across two spells.

Why Erling Haaland is backing chess and the sport's new Total Chess World Championship

NEW DELHI: Erling Haaland is no longer just a goal-scorer. The Manchester City and Norway forward is also making moves on the chess board after becoming an investor in Norway Chess and its new chess tour, the Total Chess World Championship Tour. Norway Chess, in collaboration with FIDE, had already announced a new world championship, called the Total Chess World Championship. It is learnt that Haaland has joined hands with Norwegian businessman Morten Borge, to establish a company called Chess Mates, which will be a significant owner of Norway Chess.

"I'm investing in Norway Chess because I believe the new Total Chess World Championship Tour can turn chess into an even bigger sport for spectators around the world. The team behind Norway Chess has already done an impressive job growing the event, and joining the project was too exciting to pass up," Haaland was quoted as saying in a press release by Norway Chess on Thursday.

"Chess is an incredible game. It sharpens your mind, and there are clear similarities to football. You have to think quickly, trust

your instincts, and think several moves ahead. Strategy and planning are everything," Haaland added.

"Chess is ultimately about strategy and long-term thinking", added his business partner, Borge. "Those are qualities that also define both elite sport and the ability to make sound investments over time. In many ways, chess sits right at the intersection of the worlds Erling and I come from. I've even promised to give Erling a bit of chess training!"

"We expect the new championship to become one of the most prestigious events in the global chess calendar. The fact that Erling is joining us as an investor says a great deal about the commercial potential of this tour. Erling has an enormous global following and is truly world-class when it comes to creating magical sporting moments," said Kjell Madland, CEO of Norway Chess and Total Chess. "I am absolutely certain he will bring tremendous value to Total Chess, help generate increased interest in the fascinating world of chess, and attract new audiences. He has already contributed with several great ideas.

With Erling on board, we are now entering the final phase of finding host cities for the first tour."

One of the most prestigious classical chess tournaments in the world at the moment, Norway Chess has been around since 2013. The tournament has been witness to some of India's biggest moments in classical chess, such as Praggnanandhaa defeating Magnus Carlsen in a classical game for the first time and world champion Gukesh beating Carlsen for the first time in the longest format of the game.

The new world championship is expected to feature the world's best players.

The Total Chess World Championship Tour will consist of four tournaments each year, hosted by four different cities, and will crown a combined world champion across three disciplines - Fast Classic, Rapid, and Blitz chess.

This new World Championship has been approved by the International Chess Federation (FIDE) for a minimum of 16 years. A pilot tournament is planned for autumn 2026, followed by a full championship season in 2027.

New Zealand and South Africa jostle for series lead in high-scoring Auckland

NEW DELHI: Batting hasn't been easy so far during this five-match T20I series between New Zealand and South Africa. In the first T20I in Mount Maunganui, the hosts were bundled out for 91. In the second in Hamilton, the visitors folded for 107 in a chase of 176. But things are likely to change in Auckland.

Eden Park is famous for its unusual dimensions. The straight boundaries are so small that they don't meet the ICC requirements (minimum 59.43 metres from the centre of the pitch). But as an existing venue prior to those requirements being brought in, it is exempt. In the words of Lockie Ferguson, "the crowd feels like they are right on your back".

The playing area itself is in the shape of a rectangle, which makes field placement tricky. Wasim Akram, who made his Test debut here, once said if you want a fielder at fine leg, you ask him to go to midwicket.

All those things make it a batting-friendly venue. Of all the New Zealand grounds, it has the highest scoring rate - 10.19 - in the first innings of a T20I. Overall, among the venues that have hosted at least five T20Is, only SuperSport Park in Centurion (10.59) and the Wanderers in Johannesburg (10.41) have

higher first-innings scoring rates. South Africa have played two T20Is in Auckland and won both. However, they have not played an international match here since 2017, which means none of their squad members has the experience of playing here.

Theoretically, that should give New Zealand an advantage as the visiting teams may take time to adjust to the dimensions. But that is not the case. In fact, New Zealand have their worst win-loss T20I record at a venue in Auckland, with 12 wins and 19 losses, including Super Over results.

Devon Conway spent the entire 2026 T20 World Cup on the bench. At this moment, he doesn't have the gears to bat in the ultra-aggressive manner Tim Seifert and Finn Allen do. But his more traditional approach helped him tackle the difficult conditions in Hamilton and score 60 off 49 balls, the only half-century of the series so far. New Zealand will expect a similar score from him in Auckland but at a faster rate.

Wiaan Mulder opened the innings in the second T20I, something he had never done previously in international cricket. In all T20 cricket, he had done so only six times in 140 outings and never since July 2023.

Jai Mata Di

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