

# Graeme Souness critical of Arsenal's set-piece strategy: 'You block anyone on the pitch...'

**NEW DELHI:** Former Liverpool boss Graeme Souness was critical of Arsenal's set-piece tactics but also predicted them to win the Premier League trophy. The Gunners are at the top of the table with 70 points from 31 games, which is 10 points more than Manchester City, who are placed in second spot with 60 points from 31 games.

"Arsenal get away with a hell of a lot by crowding goalkeepers and blocking goalkeepers. You block anyone on the pitch, anywhere else on the pitch – a centre-half half blocks a centre forward as he's trying to make a run – and that's a foul. I just think we've got daft referees. We've got poor referees who don't really understand the game. They know all the rules from the first page to the last one, but nuances of the game they don't get," said Souness to Daily Mail.

"I love the term 'free-kick guru'. Their guru [Jover] is all about fouling the goalkeeper. That's as simple as, black and white. Now, of course, there's people like



Gabriel, Saliba who are really brave and will put their heads where most people wouldn't put their feet, and they attack these balls that Declan Rice whips in, and they're great quality."

Mikel Arteta, speaking ahead of the Premier League game against Brighton, said he was upset that his team did not score from the set-pieces. "I am upset we haven't scored more and that we have conceded [from set-pieces] as well.

We want to be the best and most dominant team in every aspect of the game. That is the trajectory and the aim of this team," Arteta said.

"Teams are adapting, teams know after every sequence of play – whether it is a throw-in, a restart of play, an open-pitch situation – after that, they know exactly what they have to do and everything is almost man to man. So it is not going to be a different game, unless we change the rules,

because the evolution of the game is that," he added.

Speaking of the league winner Souness said: "I think Arsenal will win the league." [On quadruple] No, but they're a pragmatic team. They know how to win football matches, and it's not everyone's cup of tea. But I've won leagues and were always the prettiest outfit? No, we just got the job done. And no one will remember how we did it," he further added.

## Kirsten blames PCB interference for short Pakistan coaching stint

**NEW DELHI:** Former Pakistan head coach Gary Kirsten has spoken about his brief tenure with the side, revealing that extensive involvement from the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) played a significant role in his premature departure.

Kirsten, who was appointed in April 2024 on a two-year contract, stepped down as head coach of Pakistan's ODI and T20I teams after just six months, leaving only days before the team's scheduled ODI tour of Australia.

The former South Africa opener said the level of external influence in team matters was unlike anything he had encountered before.

"The thing that surprised me more than anything was the level of interference. I don't think I have ever seen it at that level before. Did it surprise me? I don't know, but it was significant," Kirsten told talkSPORT Cricket.

Following his resignation, the PCB appointed Test coach Jason Gillespie as interim coach of the white-ball

team for the Australia tour, which featured six limited-overs matches. However, Gillespie also stepped down from his role a few months later.

Kirsten explained that the persistent external pressure made it difficult to build a stable working environment with the players. "It is quite difficult for a coach to come and formulate a way that you can work with the players when there is just this constant noise from the outside. It was tough, just this constant noise from the outside and a lot of punitive actions around poor performance and stuff like that," he said.

He further noted that coaches often become the easiest targets when results do not go a team's way.

"As a coach, you are the lowest hanging fruit when the team isn't going well, so let us get rid of the coach or let us put a

restriction on the coach because that is the easiest thing to do when the teams are performing, and that is kind of counterproductive in my view," he added.

## Hamstring injury keeps Ronaldo out of Portugal friendlies against US and Mexico

**NEW DELHI:** A hamstring injury will keep Cristiano Ronaldo out of Portugal's friendlies against the United States and Mexico ahead of the World Cup in North America.

The 41-year-old Ronaldo hasn't played since Feb. 28 when he limped off the field while playing for Al-Nassr in the Saudi Pro League.

As expected, Portugal coach Roberto Martinez did not include the five-time Ballon d'Or winner in the squad he announced on Friday. Ronaldo hasn't played in the U.S. since an August 2014 preseason friendly with Real Madrid against Manchester United in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Portugal plays Mexico in Mexico City on March 28 and the U.S. in Atlanta on April 1.

Ronaldo holds the record for the most goals in men's international soccer after scoring 143 times for Portugal.

The World Cup starts in June. Portugal squad:

**Goalkeepers:** Diogo Costa (Porto), José Sá (Wolverhampton), Rui Silva (Sporting Lisbon)

**Defenders:** Matheus Nunes (Manchester City), Diogo Dalot (Manchester United), João Cancelo (Barcelona), Nuno Mendes (Paris Saint-Germain), Gonçalo Inácio (Sporting Lisbon), Renato Veiga (Villarreal), António Silva (Benfica), Tomás Araújo (Benfica)

**Midfielders:** Rúben Neves (Al-Hilal), Samú Costa (Mallorca), Mateus Fernandes (West Ham), João Neves (Paris Saint-Germain), Vítinha (Paris Saint-Germain), Bruno Fernandes (Manchester United), Rodrigo Mora (Porto)

**Forwards:** Ricardo Horta (Braga), Pedro Gonçalves (Sporting Lisbon), João Félix (Al-Nassr), Francisco Trincão (Sporting Lisbon), Francisco Conceição (Juventus), Rafael Leão (AC Milan), Pedro Neto (Chelsea), Gonçalo Guedes (Real Sociedad), Gonçalo Ramos (Paris Saint-Germain).

## Chennaiyin FC eye back-to-back wins against FC Goa

**CHENNAI:** Chennaiyin FC will aim to carry forward their winning momentum when they host FC Goa in their first home game of the Indian Super League 2026 on Sunday at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium.

The Marina Machans secured their first victory of the campaign with a 1-0 win over Kerala, thanks to summer signing Imran Khan's debut goal. Head coach Clifford Rayes Miranda, speaking on Saturday, emphasized the importance of building on that result against a fourth-placed FC Goa side that remains unbeaten so far.

Miranda outlined his approach to containing the visitors' attacking threats: "I won't give away the plan, but we try to stop the opponent as a team and as a group. We don't usually go for man-marking. We work collectively and look to nullify the opposition together, rather than focusing on individuals, unless it's a set-piece situation."

He also reflected on the team's offensive development, noting the need for better composure and finishing in the final third. "We have been creating good moments and generating chances, but we need to be more dominant, especially in the final third.

# 'You are right. Colour discrimination': Laxman Sivaramakrishnan alleges racial bias after being overlooked for key on-air roles by BCCI

**NEW DELHI:** Former India leg-spinner Laxman Sivaramakrishnan has alleged a serious issue of racism and discrimination by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) while also announcing his retirement from commentary after 23 years on Friday.

He blamed BCCI for the lack of opportunities and went on social media to display his grudge.

He wrote on X, "If I have not been used for TOSSES and PRESENTATION for 23 years and new comers come in do pitch report, tosses, presentation even when Shastri was coaching, what do you think could be the reason?"

Sivaramakrishnan said he was consistently overlooked for key on-air roles like toss duties and post-match presentation cere-



monies despite being part of the setup for over two decades. He then responded to a user who suggested race could be a factor for discrimination. "You are right. Colour discrimination," wrote Sivaramakrishnan.

Then he wrote, "I am retiring from commentary for BCCI."

will see the bigger picture." Who is Laxman Sivaramakrishnan?

Sivaramakrishnan played nine Tests and 16 ODIs for India between 1983 and 1986, where he picked 26 wickets in Tests, which includes three five-wicket hauls, and 15 wickets in the ODIs. Nicknamed Siva, he began his commentary career in the year 2000.

He made his Test debut during the 1983 tour of the West Indies and gained early attention after picking up seven wickets for two runs in a domestic game as a youngster. Although he went wicketless in his debut Test, he later became famous for his match-winning 12-wicket haul against England in 1984.

He has also served as a player representative on the ICC Cricket Committee.

## Iyer, Arshdeep confident as Punjab Kings begin IPL countdown

**NEW DELHI:** With the Indian Premier League (IPL) season fast approaching, Punjab Kings captain Shreyas Iyer and fast bowler Arshdeep Singh expressed confidence and excitement about the campaign ahead during the franchise's new jersey unveiling event in Mohali on Friday.

Speaking on the team's preparations during the event, which was also attended by Punjab Kings CEO Satish Menon, Chief Commercial Officer Saubh Arora, among others, Iyer highlighted the importance of building strong relationships within the squad before the start of the tournament, noting that bonding off the field plays a key role in on-field success.

"This is the period where we live as a family for two months. The more time we spend together, the more we get to know each other. Now is the time to build that camaraderie. We spend most of our time in the game room, playing FIFA and other games. The planning and plotting for matches usually happens a day or two before the game, but building this bond off the field helps us get better results eventually," Shreyas said. Iyer also reflected on his return to competitive cricket after recovering from an injury that kept him out for a period. "It is always challenging to come back after an injury. I had lost around seven kilos and it took a lot of effort to gain that weight back. But I love challenges. I am glad I overcame that part of my life, and I am back here proudly representing the team."

## Virat Kohli warns RCB teammates ahead of IPL 2026

**NEW DELHI:** India batting stalwart Virat Kohli warned his Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) teammates that IPL 2026 season will be more difficult because, they are the current champions, so other teams will try harder to beat them. During the team's first practice session at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium, Kohli spoke to a small group of mostly Indian players and asked them to give their full effort in the coming weeks.

For many years, RCB was often seen as a "banter franchise," struggling to win a title despite having top players for 17 years. However, coach Andy Flower and director of cricket Mo Bobat changed the team's approach and focused on building a balanced team with consistent performers instead of only relying on big stars. Their strategy paid off in 2025, when RCB claimed their first IPL title by defeating Punjab Kings in Ahmedabad.

Kohli said the team worked very hard over the past few seasons to achieve success, but now the challenge will be bigger because other teams will come pre-



pared. He told his teammates not to waste any time and to stay focused, giving more than their best for the next two and a half months. He also added that the team looks excited and ready for the challenge.

"We worked really hard over the last two to three seasons to achieve what we did last year, and it's only going to get tougher because the other teams are going to come hard at us," Kohli said.

"We don't waste these days. We stay ahead. So, switch on now. Let's not waste even a minute of every session we are a part of. We must give our 120% for these two and a half

months. I can see from everyone's faces that we are excited enough to be challenged," he added.

Coach Andy Flower kicked off the session by greeting the new players and said that combining them with experienced ones like Virat Kohli and Rajat Patidar will help build a solid team. Flower also mentioned that having a star on their jersey as champions is a proud moment, but last season is over and the team must now focus on winning again this year.

"We had an interesting auction. I think we've improved our squad, to be quite frank," Flower said in the video.

## KKR's Akash Deep ruled out of IPL 2026

**NEW DELHI:** Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) will be without Akash Deep for IPL 2026 after the seamer failed to recover in time from a lower-back stress injury. He has been ruled out for the entire season and needs another three months to recover.

Akash Deep was not part of the franchise's preparatory camp, having instead been at the BCCI's Centre of Excellence for rehabilitation. His absence adds to a growing list of concerns in KKR's fast-bowling department.

Harshit Rana is all but ruled out, while Matheesha Pathirana is expected to miss parts of the first half of the tournament, leaving the

side short on both availability and experience. KKR had already made a change in the lead-up to the season, bringing in Blessing Muzarabani as a replacement for Mustafizur Rahman, but beyond that, their fast-bowling resources now appear thin.

Their Indian seam options currently comprise Vaibhav Arora, Umran Malik and Kartik Tyagi, with Cameron Green providing a seam-bowling allrounder option.

The franchise is also conducting trials for an Indian fast bowler, with a replacement for Rana a priority as they look to rebuild a depleted pace attack ahead of the new season.

### TENTH DAY CEREMONY (DASWAN)

On the sad demise of our father  
**Late Sh Sham Lal Sharma (Amb Wale)**

With deep sorrow, we inform that the Tenth Day Ceremony of our beloved departed soul will be observed as per following schedule:

<p><b>Daswan (10th Day):</b></p> <p>📅 23/03/2026 (Monday)</p> <p>🕒 Timing: 11 AM to 12 PM</p> <p>📍 Jio Pota Mandir, Akhnoor</p>	<p><b>Kirya Ceremony:</b></p> <p>📅 24/03/2026 (Tuesday)</p> <p>🕒 Timing: 11 AM to 12 PM</p> <p>📍 Residence – Ward No. 8, Behind Dudhadhari Mandir, Akhnoor</p>
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We humbly request relatives, friends, and well-wishers to join us in prayer for the departed soul.

**Grief Stricken**

Vishal Sharma (Chief Officer, Merchant Navy)  
Amit Sharma (Skyline Tutorials)  
Vikas Dubey (Sr. Journalist)  
Prop. M/s Latitude 33 Fine Dining Restaurant Akhnoor

Jai Mata Di

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Candidates with experience and a good command of English will be preferred. Salary negotiable. Interviews will be conducted at the Exchange Road, Jammu campus of SP Smart School. Accommodation will be provided at the Rajouri campus.

Walk in or share your CV at: [hr@spsmartschools.com](mailto:hr@spsmartschools.com)