

Big game for Knight Riders, Royal Challengers

[Kolkata](#) Knight Riders and [Bangalore](#) Royal Challengers will be fighting it out to stay afloat in the inaugural Indian Premier League (IPL) at the Eden Gardens here Thursday.

Though, Knight Riders have been boosted by the inclusion of Pakistani Shoaib Akhtar, the speedster will not take the field against Royal Challengers owing to lack of match-fitness.

'He (Shoaib) needs to spend some more days with the team so that he can gel well with all the members. Besides I need to be sure about his fitness before allowing him play,' Knight Riders coach John Buchanan said.

Both teams are in similar situation, having won two matches. Knight Riders started their campaign on a bright note winning their first two matches, but since then have lost four matches on the trot and are lying in fifth place with just four points.

Royal Challengers had a disastrous championship, winning the odd game. In seven matches, the Rahul Dravid-led side has managed to win just two and is at the bottom of the standings.

Liquor baron Vijay Mallya has removed the team's chief executive officer Charu Sharma and brought in former Test player Brijesh Patel in his place.

Though, the team management claims that Sharma has stepped down due to personal reasons, the noted broadcaster had to go because of the team's poor results.

The Royal Challengers batting has been the most inconsistent. The top-order has been out of sorts on most occasions and when it has given a good start, the middle and lower order batsmen have failed.

Skipper Rahul Dravid played the lone hand in their last match against Kings XI Punjab that saw five of the Punjab batsmen failing to open their account.

However, with the likes of Jacques Kallis, Mark Boucher and Misbah UI Haq in their ranks, they can turn the tide, but the time is running out for them.

Incidentally, batting has been a serious concern for Knight Riders as well and skipper Sourav Ganguly will have to inspire his boys to raise their game to bring back the team in winning ways.

The Knight Riders will be making quite a few changes in their batting-line with Pakistani Salman Butt and Delhi's Akash Chopra all set to make their debut up the order and Ganguly dropping himself to No. 4.

Knight Riders will take positive from the fact that they demolished the Challengers in the opening match of the competition last month.

Squad:

Kolkata Knight Riders: Sourav Ganguly (captain), Aakash Chopra, Ajit Agarkar, Ashok Dinda, Brad

Hodge, Cheteshwar Pujara, David Hussey, Debabrata Das, Iqbal Abdulla, Ishant Sharma, Laxmi Ratan Shukla, Mohammad Hafeez, Murali Kartik, Wriddhiman Saha (wicketkeeper), Rohan Banerjee, Salman Butt, Saurasish Lahiri, Siddarth Kaul, Shoaib Akhtar, Tatenda Taibu (wicketkeeper), Umar Gul, Yashpal Singh

Royal Challengers: Rahul Dravid (captain), Abdur Razzak, Balachandra Akhil, K.P. Appanna, Jagadeesh Arunkumar, Praveen Kumar, Devraj Patil, Vinay Kumar, Mark Boucher (wicketkeeper), Nathan Bracken, Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Bharat Chipli, Shreevats Goswami (wicketkeeper), Anil Kumble, Dale Steyn, Cameron White, Wasim Jaffer, Sunil Joshi, Jacques Kallis, Zaheer Khan, Virat Kohli, Misbah-ul-Haq, Ross Taylor.

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