

Gujarat win IPL opener against Chennai Super Kings in front of more than 100,000 fans

April 1, 2023

Online Desk: Opener Shubman Gill smashed 63 as holders Gujarat Titans beat Chennai Super Kings by five wickets in the Indian Premier League opener in front of more than 100,000 fans in Ahmedabad on Friday. Chasing 179 for victory, Gujarat rode on Gill's 36-ball innings to achieve their target with four balls to spare at the world's biggest cricket stadium and their home ground. The 16th edition of the money-spinning T20 tournament began with a glitzy opening ceremony and fireworks at a ground which has an official capacity of 132,000, AFP reports.

A roar erupted when home captain Hardik Pandya won the toss and elected to field first but it was Chennai opener Ruturaj Gaikwad who soon silenced the home fans with a flurry of boundaries in his 92 off 50 balls. Ruturaj lost partners Moeen Ali for 23 and then new signing Ben Stokes — the England all-rounder bought for \$1.96 million in the auction — for seven but kept up the attack against the opposition bowlers.

But Mohammed Shami, who reached 100 IPL wickets, Rashid Khan and Alzarri Joseph took two wickets each to check the opposition scoring. Gujarat suffered a blow when new overseas player Kane Williamson jarred his knee while attempting a catch at the boundary and limped off the ground. "We were very happy because at one point they were looking to go past 200, but we got wickets at the right time," Pandya said. "Obviously when we lost Kane, we had to make sure we cover those runs and as many less runs as we can give."

– Impact player –

Sai Sudharsan replaced Williamson under the new "impact player" rule, which was also taken by Chennai, who replaced Ambati Rayudu with pace bowler Tushar Deshpande before they fielded. The impact player, who can only be an Indian unless the team has fewer than four overseas players in their XI, is chosen from one of five substitutes listed with the team.

Other innovations include captains being allowed to announce their XI after the toss and teams being able to review umpires' decisions on no-balls and wides using the Decision Review System. "Having this Impact rule makes my job difficult," said Pandya. "I have too many options, and because of this someone will bowl less."

Deshpande got the prized wicket of Gill after being hit for a six on the previous ball to boost Chennai's hopes of a turnaround but unbeaten cameos from Rashid (10) and Rahul Tewatia (15) steered their team home. Rashid was named man of the match for his all-round show.

There was more of Chennai's yellow than blue of Gujarat at the stadium, which welcomed 41-year-old M.S. Dhoni with loud cheers at the start of the game in what could be the last IPL as player for the former India captain. "We were slightly short," Dhoni said of his team's 178-7. "Another 15-20 runs would have been good. We all know there would be a little bit of dew."

The league, which began in 2008 and this year returns to a home-and-away format following the Covid pandemic, has grown to be the world's richest cricket tournament and a huge revenue earner for the BCCI. Gujarat pulled off a fairytale title win in their debut season last year in front of a record crowd of 101,566 at the same venue. The 2023 tournament runs until May 28.