SPORTS 5D

FEBRUARY 2027
ISSUE 13
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UNDER THE LIGHTS: THE FEBRUARY RUN-IN

HOCKEY
PAKISTAN'S COMEBACK BLUEPRINT

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COVER STORY · CRICKET

THE POWER SEASON

How franchise cricket turned February into the most exciting month on the calendar — from Karachi to Cardiff.

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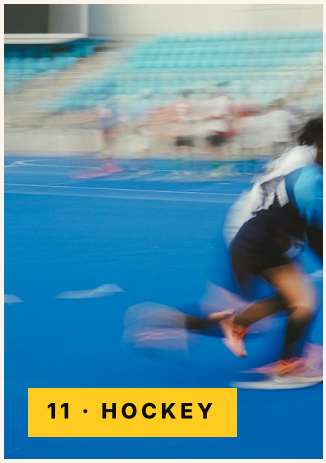
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THREE COUNTRIES.
THREE LANGUAGES.
ONE SPORTING FAMILY.

Sports 5D publishes UK, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan editions in English, Arabic and Urdu. sports5d.com

WELCOME TO THE BUSIEST MONTH IN SPORT

February has a habit of sneaking up on us. The days are short in Manchester and mild in Riyadh, but the fixture lists everywhere are long. Franchise cricket is in full voice, football's title races start to bite, and on community pitches across three countries the season's hardest yards are being run.

This issue celebrates all of it. Our cover story travels the franchise cricket circuit to ask why a single month now carries so much of the game's energy. We step under the floodlights for football's run-in, sit with coaches mapping Pakistan hockey's next chapter, and go inside squash's glass box.

Just as important are the stories closer to home. Our community pages — in English, Arabic and Urdu — follow the volunteers, school teams and neighbourhood leagues that make elite sport possible in the first place. And our inclusive sport section explains why boccia might be the most strategic game you've never tried.

As always, we want to hear from you. Tell us about the club, coach or match that deserves a page in March.

The Editor

editor@sports5d.com

> **IN THIS ISSUE'S TEAM**
>
> Writers, photographers and translators across London, Manchester, Riyadh, Jeddah, Lahore and Karachi. *Contributor names appear here in the final issue.*

FACING EDITORIAL

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Sits beside the editor's letter

THE BRIEFING

What's moving across our three countries this month.



UNITED KINGDOM

Winter pitches, warm welcomes

Grassroots clubs report rising numbers at winter training as indoor 3G sessions and walking football bring new faces through the gate.



SAUDI ARABIA

The perfect sporting season

Cooler evenings make February prime time for community leagues, padel courts and family sports days across Riyadh, Jeddah and the Eastern Province.



PAKISTAN

Cricket fever, city by city

From Lahore to Karachi, street, school and franchise cricket share the spotlight as the country settles into its favourite season.

IN NUMBERS

3 editions · **3** languages · **10+** sports covered

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Every elite career begins on a community pitch with a volunteer holding the cones."

— A grassroots coach, Greater Manchester

BRIEFING PAGE

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COVER STORY · CRICKET

THE POWER SEASON

Franchise cricket has turned February into the busiest, loudest month in the sport. We follow the money, the crowds and the young players chasing their moment.

WORDS **SPORTS 5D CRICKET DESK** · PHOTOGRAPHY **UNSPLASH**

PHOTO: UNSPLASH

There was a time when February meant county nets and quiet scorecards. Today it is one of the most crowded months in cricket. City-based franchise leagues fill stadiums, broadcast schedules and timelines, and they have changed what young players dream about.

The appeal is easy to see. Matches are short, evenings are electric and every over can turn a game. For fans who grew up on five-day Tests, it can feel like a different sport — and in many ways it is.

> **“EVERY OVER IS A HIGHLIGHT WAITING TO HAPPEN.”**

In Pakistan, the domestic franchise league has become a festival of homegrown talent, giving teenagers from school and club cricket a stage beside established internationals. City rivalries — Karachi against Lahore, Peshawar against Quetta — give each night its own story.

England’s 100-ball competition took a different path, pairing men’s and women’s matches on the same day and pitching itself at families and first-time fans. Its success has nudged other boards to rethink how and when they schedule the women’s game.

THE TALENT PIPELINE

Coaches say the biggest change is in the nets. Young batters practise ramp shots and switch hits before they master the forward defence; bowlers arrive with a slower ball, a knuckle ball and a yorker already in the kit. The challenge for academies is balance — keeping the fundamentals that long-format cricket still demands.

Scouting has changed too. Data from franchise matches helps selectors spot players who thrive under pressure, and a single standout innings can open doors that once took seasons of first-class runs.

WHAT FANS SHOULD WATCH

Look beyond the headline names. The most interesting stories are often the uncapped spinners and young all-rounders getting their first taste of a big crowd. Follow them now; you may be watching a future international captain.



Packed stands are now part of cricket’s February calendar. Photo: Unsplash

FRANCHISE CRICKET IN BRIEF

- City-based teams, short formats, evening starts
- Overseas stars beside local talent
- Women’s competitions growing fast
- A fast track for young players to be seen

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ELITE · FOOTBALL

UNDER THE LIGHTS

PHOTO: UNSPLASH

From England's Premier League to the Saudi Pro League, February is when title races are won and lost. Here's how to follow the run-in.

The Premier League's twenty clubs play each other home and away, and by February the table starts to tell its story. Every point matters at the top, every goal difference at the bottom, and three clubs will drop into the Championship in May.

In Saudi Arabia, the Saudi Pro League has become one of football's most-watched new stages. Big Riyadh and Jeddah clubs carry passionate support, and recent seasons have brought international players and fresh audiences to the Kingdom's top flight.

What links the two leagues is the February squeeze: cup ties, continental fixtures and league games stacked into a few short weeks. Squad depth, fitness staff and smart rotation often decide who comes out the other side.

THREE THINGS TO WATCH

Squad rotation. The best managers protect key players without losing momentum. **Set pieces.** Tight games are decided by corners and free kicks. **Young players.** Injuries open doors; February is when academy graduates make their names.

HOW THE LEAGUES WORK

	PREMIER LEAGUE	SAUDI PRO LEAGUE
Country	England	Saudi Arabia
Format	Home & away	Home & away
Relegation	Bottom three	Yes
Season	Aug – May	Aug – May

Structure as published by each league; check official sites for the current season.

FOLLOW LIVE ON SPORTS 5D

Live scores, results and fixtures for the Premier League, Champions League, La Liga, Serie A, Bundesliga, Ligue 1 and the Saudi Pro League update every few minutes at **sports5d.com/scores** — plus the latest highlights from official channels.

FOOTBALL SECTION

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Next to football data & live-score promotion

HOCKEY'S HEARTBEAT

Few nations love field hockey like Pakistan. Coaches, former players and academies share how the national game can rise again.

WORDS **SPORTS 5D PAKISTAN DESK**



PHOTO: UNSPLASH

Field hockey runs deep in Pakistan's sporting identity. Generations grew up hearing about famous tournament wins, and in towns across Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa the click of stick on ball is still the sound of a summer evening.

The modern game has changed quickly. Artificial turf, video referrals and a faster, more athletic style mean that talent alone is no longer enough. Coaches point to three priorities: more turf pitches at school and club level, better strength and conditioning, and regular international competition for young players.

> **"GIVE A TALENTED TEENAGER A TURF PITCH AND A GOOD COACH, AND YOU CHANGE THEIR LIFE."**

International competition offers a model. The FIH Hockey Pro League brings leading national teams together home and away across a season, giving players regular top-level matches. Experts say similar consistency at junior level would help Pakistan close the gap.

THE GRASSROOTS ANSWER

Community programmes are already making a difference. School hockey festivals, girls' sessions and coach-education courses are introducing the game to children who might otherwise never pick up a stick.

The road back is long, but the passion has never left. As one coach put it, the nation does not need to learn to love hockey again — it simply needs more places to play it.





PHOTO: UNSPLASH

ELITE · SQUASH

INSIDE THE GLASS BOX

Squash is played at a ferocious pace inside four walls, and few countries have shaped the game like Pakistan. In the 1980s and 1990s, champions such as Jahangir Khan and Jansher Khan dominated the sport and inspired a generation.

Today's professional circuit, the PSA World Tour, stages events on glass-walled show courts in iconic venues around the world. Academies in Peshawar, Karachi and Islamabad continue to develop young players who dream of returning the country to the top.

The sport is also growing in the Gulf, where modern facilities and junior programmes are opening the door to new players.

SQUASH PAGE

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Racket sports, fitness & clubs

FROM THE FIELD

MOMENTS THAT MATTER

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FILED BY OUR REPORTERS

Every image on these pages was captured at grassroots and elite venues in our three countries and approved by our editors through the Sports 5D Field Desk.

Top: A wheelchair racer at a community fun run.

Left: Match ball, school cricket final.

Right: Focus before the serve.

See more every day at sports5d.com/from-the-field



PHOTO: UNSPLASH

SATURDAY MORNING HEROES

At 8.45am the cones are already out. Across the UK, thousands of volunteers turn muddy fields into the most exciting place in town for children and adults alike.

Finding a club is easier than many people think: county football associations and local councils list teams for children, women, veterans and walking football. Most welcome newcomers to a free taster session.

And clubs always need help — coaching, refereeing and match-day volunteering are the beating heart of community sport.

COMMUNITY SECTION

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الرياضة المجتمعية · المملكة العربية السعودية

حيث يبدأ الأبطال

صورة: UNSPLASH

ملاعب الأحياء والدوريات المجتمعية ومسارات المشي تجعل ممارسة الرياضة قريبة من كل منزل.

حدائق الأحياء ومسارات المشي والملاعب المجتمعية أماكن مفضلة للحفاظ على النشاط، خاصة في الأمسيات المعتدلة من شهر فبراير.

ترحب دوريات كرة القدم وكرة السلة والبادل المجتمعية باللاعبين من مختلف الأعمار والمستويات، وتمنح الشباب فرصة للتنافس وبناء الصداقات.

الأيام الرياضية العائلية ومسابقات المدارس طريقة رائعة لجمع المجتمع عبر الرياضة، ويقف وراءها متطوعون يستحقون كل التقدير.

وفي الأندية الصغيرة يبدأ كثير من نجوم المستقبل خطواتهم الأولى، بدعم من مدربين يؤمنون بأن الرياضة حق للجميع.

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SPORT FOR EVERY BODY

Adaptive and para sport is growing across our three countries. Here's where to start.

Step-free entrances, adapted equipment and welcoming coaches make the difference between a venue people visit once and one they return to every week.

Wheelchair basketball, para athletics, blind cricket and boccia are all played in clubs and schools — and most offer taster sessions.

BOCCIA IN 30 SECONDS

- Players throw, kick or roll leather balls towards a white target ball, the "jack".
- Closest to the jack scores. Pure precision and tactics.
- A Paralympic sport — and open to all abilities.

BLIND CRICKET

A larger ball filled with ball bearings rattles so players can hear it coming. Pakistan's blind cricket team is among the strongest in the world.

FUEL FOR EVERYONE

Hydration, whole foods and simple habits that help every athlete — from Sunday league to Paralympic hopeful.

Good nutrition doesn't need to be complicated. Drink water before you feel thirsty, eat a balanced meal two to three hours before training, and refuel with protein and carbohydrates afterwards.

For young players and adaptive athletes, coaches recommend simple, natural foods and regular routines. Always speak to a qualified professional before changing diet or supplements.

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20 PREMIER LEAGUE CLUBS

38 MATCHES PER CLUB

100 BALLS PER INNINGS · THE HUNDRED

4 WALLS IN SQUASH

RESULTS TABLE · LAYOUT SAMPLE

COMPETITION	HOME	SCORE	AWAY	VENUE
Football · League	Home team	**0 – 0**	Away team	Stadium
Football · League	Home team	**0 – 0**	Away team	Stadium
Cricket · T20	Home XI	**000/0 – 000/0**	Away XI	Ground
Cricket · T20	Home XI	**000/0 – 000/0**	Away XI	Ground
Hockey	Home	**0 – 0**	Away	Turf
Squash	Player A	**3 – 0**	Player B	Glass court

LIVE EVERY DAY

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WHAT'S ON IN FEBRUARY

Layout sample · confirmed dates and local times are printed at press time.

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
1	2	3	4	5	6 ⚽ League weekend	7 ⚽ League weekend
8	9	10 🏏 T20 night	11	12	13 🏑 Schools festival	14 ⚽ League weekend
15	16	17 🏏 T20 night	18	19	20 ♿ Inclusive sports day	21 ⚽ League weekend
22	23	24 🏏 T20 night	25	26 🎾 Squash open	27	28 ⚽ League weekend

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Football's new frontier in the Gulf

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RISING STARS

Each month we spotlight young athletes nominated by coaches and readers.



PHOTO: UNSPLASH

Nominate a player. Tell us about a young cricketer, footballer, hockey or squash player — or an inclusive sport athlete — who deserves the spotlight. Email editor@sports5d.com with their name, club and why they inspire you.

Profiles are published with the consent of the player and, for under-18s, their parent or guardian.

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