

ROVERS LOOK TO CONTINUE DOMINATION

S. BAGAWATI PRASAD
DECCAN CHRONICLE

Jolly Rovers, the defending champions and 19-time winners of the Rajah of Palayampatti Shield, will once again be the team to beat in the TNCA first division league starting July 4. Ajay Kudua, in charge of the Chemplast-promoted team, said the prime focus of Jolly Rovers is to continue the domination in the revamped league. "It's a very competitive format. It ensures that teams sweat it out throughout the league. A trophy for the Plate winners is a great incentive," he added.

Kudua said the management is determined to see its other first division team, Alwarpet CC, qualify for the Elite format (at the end of the first phase the top three teams from each pool will make it to Elite). "In a bid to strengthen Alwarpet, we have made a few internal transfers. The fact that Alwarpet finished fourth last season underlines the potential of our teams," he said.

Chemplast has roped in some of the finest talents in domestic circuit as their 'outstation' players. "We have signed up Sheldon Jackson (wicket-keeper batsman from Saurashtra), Ankit Bawne (top-order batsman from Maharashtra), Manan Vohra (opening batsman from Punjab) and Parveez Rasool (all-rounder from Jammu & Kashmir). Sheldon will represent Rovers, while we are yet to assign the team for Bawne, who scored close to 900 first-class runs last season," Kudua said.

"Vohra and Rasool would be available once they return from the India 'A' tour of Australia. We already have the services of Robin Bist (Rajasthan batsman) and Basil Thampi (Kerala medium-pacer) in our squad but they will complete the 12-month residential qualification

only in August," he added.

The 38-year-old, veteran of the first-division league, said the Jolly Rovers would be led by C. Hemanth Kumar. "Shijith Chandran will be at the helm for Alwarpet for the third year in a row," he added.

Ajay said the move to make a U-19 cricketer mandatory in the playing eleven during the preliminary phase is excellent as it provides youngsters the exposure of playing alongside top cricketers. "We have eight U-19 players (both Jolly Rovers and Alwarpet) and all of them are exciting talents," he added.

The fact that the top performers — K.H. Gopinath (1036 runs), K. Bharath Shankar (952 runs) and M. Prabhu (57 wickets) — in the league are from the Jolly Rovers highlights their domination. Ajay hopes the opening combination of Gopinath and Bharath continue the good work. "The duo gave us a solid platform almost every time they walked out and it made matters relatively comfortable for our experienced middle-order to drive home the advantage. When it comes to bowling, Prabhu has been exceptional and credit must be given to the rest of the pack for their consistent show," he added.



Vohra and Rasool would be available once they return from the India A tour of Australia. Ajay Kudua



SQUAD JOLLY ROVERS CC



C. Hemanth Kumar

K. Bharat Shankar, K.H. Gopinath, N. Einstein, C. Hemanth Kumar (C), M. Vijay, Piyush Chawla, R. Sathish, Prasanth Parameswaran, Syed Mohammad, M. Prabhu, Sheldon Jackson (outstation), J. Gowjith, Sandeep Sharma, T. Natarajan, D.T. Chandrasekar, K. Vignesh, M.U.B. Sriram, Vasudevan, Basil Thampi, Robin Bist, Lokeshwar, A. Jerome, Manikandan (all three U-19).

Coach: G. Jayakumar

OTHER OUTSTATION CRICKETERS

Ankit Bawne, Parveez Rasool, Manan Vohra

ALWARPET CC

S. Karthik, B. Rahul, S. Anand, Shijith Chandran (C), Ashwin Venkatraman, G. Chiranjeevi, P. Sakthi, R. Jesuraj, J. Kaushik, R. Suthesh, Bilwaprasath, Prasanth Varma, M. Ganesh, Daryl Ferrario, R. Kavim, Vignesh Rao, R. Vishal, Ajithkumar (all five U-19). Coach-cum-player: R. Jesuraj.



Shijith Chandran