

Tomar, PKL's most wanted

On a day of furious bidding, UP franchise pays a record Rs 93 lakh for the raider

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NEW DELHI

Nitin Tomar broke all previous records for the Pro Kabaddi League, going for a whopping ₹93 lakh at the Season Five auctions here on Monday. The 22-year old raider, previously with Puneri Paltan, not just became the highest-bid player ever but also the most expensive player in the brief history of the PKL.

A member of the World Cup-winning Indian side last year, the Services player triggered a furious bidding war between UP and Telugu Titans before the former snared him.

Coming up at the fag end of the first day of auctions, Tomar comprehensively beat experienced Manjeet Chhillar who, till then, was the highest-bid player ever, attracting interest from every team present before being picked up by Jaipur Pink Panthers for Rs 75.50 as the teams splurged on all-rounders.

With some of the biggest names through the previous four seasons, both Indian and foreign, being either retained or picked as priority players by the four new franchises, it was a matter of using the remaining amount in the most effective way and going for all-rounders was



At the auction: Franchise owners Hemant Dua (GMR Group), Nimmagadda Prasad (entrepreneur), Charu Sharma (Director, Mashal Sports), Parth Jindal (MD of JSW Cement) and Anshu Malik (Adani Group) with PKL commissioner Anupam Goswami, third from left.

perhaps the teams' way of ensuring value for their money, each team having a maximum purse of Rs 4 crore.

Tomar's price was almost double that of Mohit Chhillar's Rs 53 lakh bid last season. Chhillar, incidentally, took a pay cut of Rs 6.5 lakh this year, going to newcomer Haryana for Rs 43.50 lakh.

The experienced 30-year old Manjeet, who captained Bengaluru in the first two seasons and then led Puneri Paltan in the next two, said he was fairly confident of going for a high price and expressed confidence that he would be able to help his team reach the play-offs this time around, saying indi-

vidual points were less important than the team's performance.

However, the only player to score over 50 tackle points in two different seasons of the PKL quipped he would be happy not being captain, since it would reduce pressure on him. Asked to name one player he would have liked to have on his team, he said, "I wanted Rakesh (Kumar) in my team." Former India captain Rakesh went to Telugu Titans for Rs 45 lakh.

Close behind was Surjeet Singh, who went for Rs 73 lakh to Bengal Warriors, which had retained its Korean raider Jang Kun Lee. His price, after adjusting the 10%

increment over the highest-bid player for the team, was Rs 80.30 lakh, making him the most expensive foreign player of the PKL.

Among the foreign players, only 11 of the 60 in the fray were bid for, most of them being, not surprisingly, Iranians, five of whom were picked up.

Abozar Mohajermighani was the most expensive of overseas players, picked up for Rs 50 lakh by Gujarat. Two each were picked up from Korea and Bangladesh while Japan and Thailand had one player each. There were no buyers for the 10 Pakistanis. The auctions would continue on Tuesday.

The Chosen Ones

- **Priority Picks:** Fazel Atrachali (Iran) - Gujarat; Ajay Thakur — Tamil Nadu; Surender Nada - Haryana.
- **Retained players:** Jang Kun Lee (Korea) - Bengal Warriors; Ashish Kumar - Bengaluru Bulls; Meraj Sheykh (Iran) - Dabang Delhi; Pardeep Narwal - Patna Pirates; Deepak Niwas Hooda - Puneri Paltan; Rahul Chaudhari -Telugu Titans.
- **Top foreign picks:** Abozar Mohajermighani (Iran) - Gujarat: Rs 50 lakh; Abolfazel Maghsodlo (Iran) — Dabang Delhi: 31.8; Farhad Rahimi Milagharden (Iran) - Telugu Titans: 29; Khomsan Thongkham (Tha) -Haryana: 20.4; Dongju Hong (Kor) — U Mumba: 20; Hadi Oshtorak (Iran) -U Mumba: 18.6; Ziaur Rahman (Ban) — Puneri Paltan: 16.6; Sulieman Kabir (Ban) - 12.6.
- **Top Indian picks:** Nitin Tomar (UP) Rs 93 lakh; Manjeet Chhillar (Jaipur Pink Panthers): 75.50; Surjeet Singh (Bengal Warriors): 73; Rajesh Narwal (UP): 69; Sandeep Narwal (Puneri Paltan): 66; Amit Hooda (Tamil Nadu): 63; Jeeva Kumar (UP): 52; Jasvir Singh (Jaipur Pink Panthers): 51; Ravinder Pahal (Bengaluru Bulls): 50; Kashiling Adake (U Mumba): 48; Ran Singh (Bengal Warriors): 47.50.