



June 23, 2023

INDIAN OLYMPIC ASSOCIATION

CENTENNIAL



**CONSISTENT
NEERAJ CHOPRA
AIMS FOR 90**

**"IMMENSELY PROUD OF
INDIAN ATHLETES'
ACHIEVEMENTS"**

- PT Usha
President, IOA



President's Note

PT USHA

On this auspicious occasion of Olympic Day 2023, I extend my warmest of greetings to all the athletes, coaches, officials, and sports lovers across our great nation. This day serves as a reminder of the indomitable spirit that fuels our pursuit of excellence in the world of sports.

I am filled with immense pride as I reflect upon the recent achievements of our Indian athletes. Our athletes have shattered records, broken barriers, showcased exceptional talent, determination, and resilience, bringing glory to our great nation on the global stage. With each victory, they have inspired millions, transcending boundaries and uniting us in our shared love for sports.

I am delighted to share with you the remarkable achievements of Indian athletes at the recent 20th Asian U20 Athletics Championships. The young talents from India have exhibited exceptional skills, determination, and resilience, making the nation proud on the international stage.

Our Jr. Women's Hockey team displayed exceptional prowess at the Junior Hockey Asian Championship. With a perfect blend of agility, strategy, and teamwork, they emerged as champions, securing a well-deserved gold medal. Their cohesive play and determination on the field were truly commendable.

Indian wrestlers demonstrated their dominance in both the U23 and U17 Wrestling Championships. With their impeccable technique, strength, and resilience, they clinched numerous medals in different weight categories. Their remarkable performances highlighted the depth of talent in Indian wrestling and bodes well for the future of the sport.

Indian shuttlers left a lasting impression at the Badminton Championships. With their lightning-fast reflexes, precision, and mental fortitude, they consistently delivered stellar performances. Several Indian players secured podium finishes, winning medals, and capturing the attention of badminton enthusiasts worldwide.

Indian archers showcased their exceptional marksmanship skills at the Archery Championships. With a keen eye, steady hands, and unwavering focus, they hit the bull's-eye with remarkable accuracy. Their consistent performances in both individual and team events earned them numerous accolades and elevated India's standing in international archery.

Indian para-athletes showcased their incredible resilience and determination at the Para Championships. Overcoming various physical challenges, they participated in a wide range of sports, including para-athletics, para-badminton, para-archery, and para-wrestling. Their remarkable performances not only won them medals but also inspired countless differently able individuals worldwide.

Overall, the recent performances of Indian athletes across these and many other championships highlight our great nation's growing prowess in various sports. These remarkable achievements are a testament to the relentless efforts of our athletes, the unwavering support of their coaches, and the countless hours of training and sacrifices they have made to achieve their dreams. I am sanguine that we can proudly bring home a multitude of Olympic medals at 2024 Paris Olympic Games, establishing India as a formidable sporting nation.

As the President of the Indian Olympic Association (IOA), I am committed to upholding the Olympic Charter's fundamental principles. The IOA adheres to the principles of non-discrimination, ensuring equal opportunities for athletes of all backgrounds, and emphasizes the importance of integrity, respect, and solidarity in sports. The IOA strives to inspire and unite the nation through the power of sport and contribute to the Olympic movement's global objectives of building a better world through sport.

My vision is to create a robust ecosystem that nurtures talent at the grassroots level, providing equal opportunities to all aspiring athletes across the nation. Together, we must strive to cultivate a culture of sportsmanship, instil values of fair play, and promote inclusivity in every aspect of Indian sports. By encouraging greater participation from underrepresented communities and empowering women athletes, we can harness the true potential of our diverse nation.

Our mission is to make India a sporting superpower, where every athlete has the opportunity to excel and reach their full potential. We will strive to create a culture of sports in our society, where sports is embraced as an integral part of our lives. I urge each one of you to join hands in this mission, whether as athletes, coaches, administrators, or passionate supporters. Together, we will formulate strategies to identify and nurture promising athletes, invest in their training and infrastructure, and create favourable conditions for their development. By synergising our efforts, we should aim to maximise India's medal prospects and elevate the nation's stature in the global sporting arena.

Let us all work towards creating a future where every Indian child has access to quality sports education, training and infrastructure, where our athletes receive the support, they need to excel on the world stage, and where India becomes a powerhouse of sporting talent.

On this Olympic Day, let us renew our pledge to support our athletes, celebrate their achievements, and encourage the next generation of sporting talent. Together, we can shape a bright future for Indian sports and bring honour to our nation on the global stage.



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From the Editor's Desk



KALYAN CHAUBEY

The times have indeed changed. India is no more the country it once used to be. From a nation that clung to hopes of the odd sporting success, we have moved on to being a nation that expects the finest from our land to charge their way to the podium. The level of expectation, I must say, has increased manifold in Women's Sports.

While the likes of current Indian Olympic Association President PT Usha gave hope to women in Indian sports by dominating the track at the Asian level in the 1980s, it was in the 2000s that eyebrows were raised and everyone took notice of one Karnam Malleswari, who stunned the world when she became the first Indian woman to win a medal at the 2000 Sydney Olympics, where she clinched bronze in the 69 kg category.

Malleswari did not just lift 110 and 130 kgs in her two categories. She also lifted the hopes and dreams of dozens of women athletes from India who were watching on their TV screens at that moment. Just a couple of years later, a certain MC Mary Kom started rippling her way through the world of boxing. In her typical fighting spirit, she fought her way through her career as a pugilist, not giving up even after childbirth.

While Mary Kom was carving her golden routes in the World and Asian Championships in the mid-2000s, a young Saina Nehwal was being put through the paces at the junior levels of badminton. The two would ultimately lead the way for women at the 2012 London Olympics, where both won bronze medals in their respective categories – an unprecedented event thus far.

The astonishing fact despite repeated attempts that many may look at as failures, the Indian women never gave up, each generation paving the way for the next to go one step further, perfectly encapsulating the spirit of sports, sometimes perhaps better than the men could.

Indeed we had a poor medal haul in the 2016 Olympics but the tenacity of Indian women was clearly on show in Rio de Janeiro. In a Games that would otherwise have been a disappointment for India, PV Sindhu and Sakshi Malik stood tall and salvaged their silver and bronze medallions, respectively. On to the 2022 Games in Tokyo, and it was Neeraj Chopra, who rightfully took all the headlines by winning India's first Track and Field gold medal in Javelin Throw, but Mirabai Chanu was not far behind, clinching silver in weightlifting. It is our hope that she one day goes further,

carrying forward the legacy of Malleswari. Not far behind were PV Sindhu, who won her second back-to-back Olympic medal, and Lovlina Borgohain, who took the country by storm by winning a boxing bronze.

Today, we have a number of women in Indian sports, who are fighting it out, not just with hopes of participation, but to win medals in their respective sports. As India prepares for the Asian Games we are all happy to see that there is expectation on every athlete to bring medals for the nation. As a former sportsperson myself, I can vouch for the fact that this is something that we all yearn for. Of course, when people do not expect anything from you, there is less pressure, but it also means that there is a certain amount of apathy. However, pressure to perform means that the public sees something in a certain sportsperson, or in a team. They understand and appreciate their potential, and that is a precious connection.

One athlete who I personally very much look up to is Deepa Malik, who has been a sheer inspiration to everyone. Her feat at the 2016 Rio Paralympics to win silver medal was of course historic, but it is what she has done to encourage other women, especially those with disabilities, that sets her apart, in my books.

She has been a mentor and a guide to the next generation of women, and surely the likes of Avani Lekhara, who clinched gold and bronze in shooting, and Bhavina Patel, who won silver in shooting, and table tennis, respectively, at the 2022 Paralympics, look up to Malik in a big way.

Hockey is one sport that we as Indians take special pride in. Our women's hockey team have performed admirably in recent times, and the expectation remains on them to do well again this year as well. They performed brilliantly in the 2018 edition of the Asian Games in Jakarta to win the silver medal. A 1-2 loss at the hands of Japan in the summit clash might have left a lot of teary eyes on that night in Jakarta, but the Indian women have used that to fuel a number of good performances since then. While a bronze medal in the Commonwealth Games last year was much celebrated, we hope that they go one better this year in China.





Overall, women's sports in India has improved by leaps and bounds in the last few years, and that speaks a lot about the societal progress of the nation. Anyone who has even the faintest idea about Indian sports would readily agree that the Indian sporting scenario has undergone a sea change since 2014. This government, especially the honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji, has taken so much personal interest and care in promoting sports that a wave of change is currently being witnessed across the country. Despite his busy schedule, the Prime Minister always makes it a point to congratulate and personally meet every medal winner for India. His constant encouragement for the development of women's sports can easily be described as a definite turning point.

I personally hope to see more such inspiring performances in the future, paving the way for an equitable Indian society.



100 years of the IOA: How it all started

Preparations for the 1924 Paris Games sparked the formation of the Indian Olympic Association, and India's emergence on the world stage

BORIA MAJUMDAR

The organized planning for the Indian participation at the Paris Games of 1924 was driven by the formation of a permanent All India Olympic Association in 1923. Sir Dorabji Tata was invited to assume the presidency of the new body and advise on India's involvement in the Olympic movement going forward. The All India Olympic Association, which was formed in 1923 did not survive for more than three years. But soon after in 1927, another body, the IOA, was formed and it continues to administer Indian sports to this day. Once again, Dorabji Tata was the president and A.G. Noehren the secretary.

By 1924, funding for the Olympic cause poured in from diverse regions across the country. The subscription drive undertaken by the All India Olympic Association to finance selected members for the Paris Games was a success. A detailed breakdown of public funding shows the marked progress of the Olympic idea in the public mind by 1924.

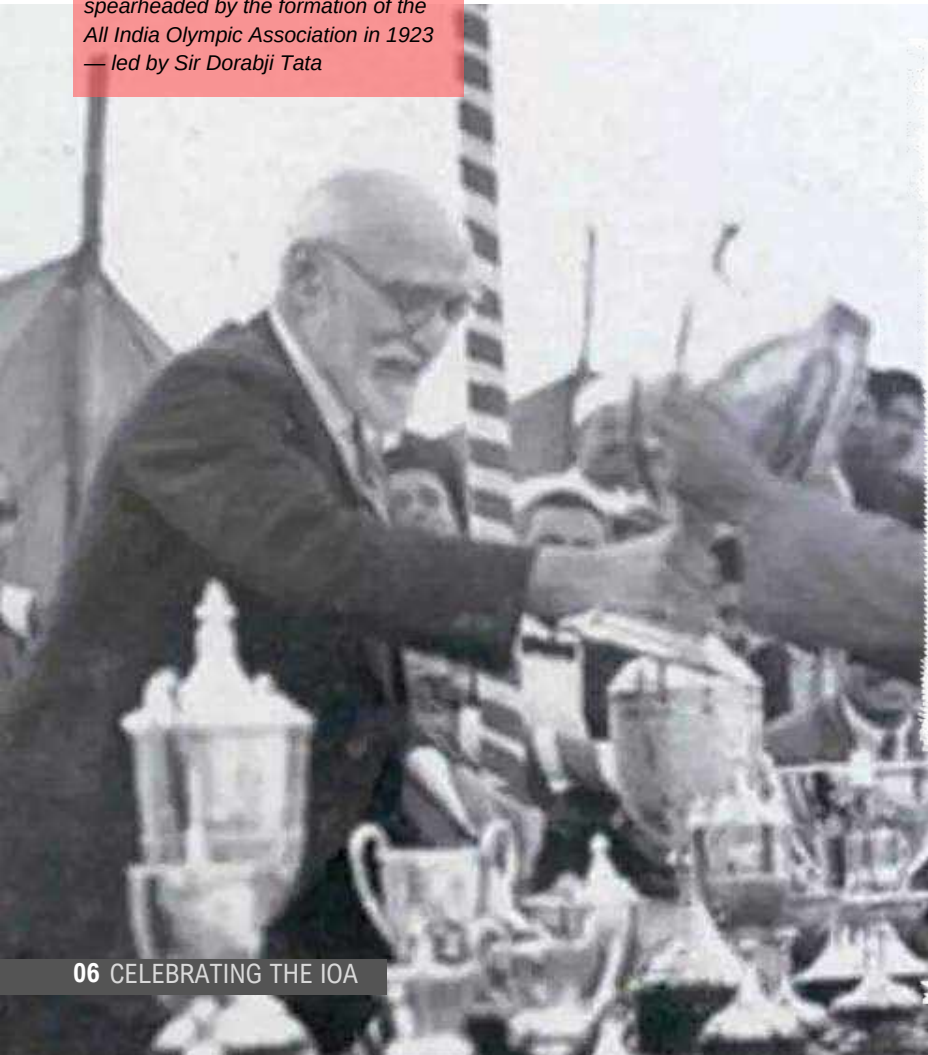
The Punjab Olympic Committee took the lead, contributing Rs 1,114, 'which represented contributions made by Punjab school boys through forty-seven schools'. Punjab, in total, contributed Rs 2,500. Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa and Madras contributed Rs 2,000 each while Central Provinces contributed Rs 1,500. Calcutta too contributed Rs 4,000 towards the fund.

Across the nation, the Olympic ideal seemed to be catching the public imagination. As before, the princes were also approached and the Maharaja of Patiala, the nation's leading sports patron, contributed enough to fund the participation of the Patiala long jumper, Dalip Singh. The Army too was sounded out to contribute to the passage of its representative and the government was called upon to put in a sum of Rs 5,000.

That Olympic sports were gaining currency in India is evident from the increase in press coverage between 1920 and 1924. Newspapers across the country carried news of multiple regional 'Olympic trials' and the 'Olympic Games' in Delhi were reported thus:

"The All India Olympic meeting to be held at the Roshanara Club, Delhi on February 8-9 promises to be a unique event in the history of sports in India. Reservations have already been booked for the Indian team, which will proceed to France on the steamer 'Lancashire' ex-Colombo on 29 May. The team will be accompanied by a professional coach who will continue to train the players on [the] steamer deck and in France for a month before the Olympic begins."

Planning for the 1924 Olympics was spearheaded by the formation of the All India Olympic Association in 1923 — led by Sir Dorabji Tata



THE OLYMPIC GAMES.

PREPARATIONS IN INDIA.

Arrangements are at present being actively pushed forward to organise India's participation in the Olympic Games to be held in Paris in 1924 on a truly representative basis. The task is a formidable one, taking all the factors in the situation into consideration. It involves, first of all, the organisation of local Provincial Committees and eventually the formation of an All-India Olympic Association. The competition for this great international event is open to every youth in the land, provided he is permanently domiciled in India and provided he is an amateur. There will be no denying the fact that the only fair way of choosing India's representatives is on the basis of actual performance, and this again can only be accomplished by holding sectional athletic contests in all the provinces and Native States of the Indian Empire. Successful competitors would then be sent to an All-India Athletic Meet to be held in Delhi early in 1924, about February 1, the exact dates to be determined by the meeting of the Legislative Assembly. The competition will be open to the winners of first place in all the official events featured in the sectional meets, which will be held in every province and Native State in India, including Burma and Ceylon between the 10th and 15th December next. Finally India's team will participate in the Eighth Olympiad from the 5th July to the 27th July, 1924.

THE OLYMPIC GAMES, 1924.

BENGAL ASSOCIATION FORMED.

(THROUGH ASSOCIATED PRESS),
CALCUTTA, September 6.

A meeting attended by the representatives of different athletic organisations in Calcutta was held to-day in Government House for the purpose of considering the steps to be taken to promote India's participation in the Olympic games, to be held in Paris next year. In the absence of the Governor, the Hon'ble Mr. P. C. Mitter presided. The Chairman read a letter from His Excellency in which, after expressing regret for his inability to preside, he said, besides arousing world-wide interest in physical development, games served to form a bond of union promoting friendship among all nations. It was fitting, therefore, that India should send her best athletes to an All-India meeting which would select her representatives, and to secure Bengal's representatives a provincial meeting would take place in Calcutta next cold weather. The Governor assured the meeting that he would give all the assistance he could to make the athletic meeting in Bengal a success.

The meeting then decided to start a Bengal Olympic Association for stimulating interest and formed a strong committee to raise sufficient funds for the purpose.



Mohammed Sleem, a tennis player and lawyer represented India in singles in 1924, losing in the 3rd round to the eventual Olympic champion.

The detailed programme of the meet and the timings of all the events featured prominently in the dailies and provincial successes at the meet were greeted with considerable cheer in their respective regions. For instance, the fact that Bengali athletes made the finals in nine events was reported at length in the province and much was made of the fact that Bengal had beaten Madras (with six final qualifications) and Punjab (with five finals appearances). The two stars from Bengal, T.J. Pitt and J.S. Hall, were both eventually selected to travel to Paris. The overwhelming popularity of this meet and the regional pride it evoked is evident in the following report in Calcutta's Amrita Bazar Patrika on February 1924:

"The weather condition was excellent and spectators numbered several thousands. Viceroy and Lady Reading were present. In four events - hurdles, one mile, long jump and three miles, provincial and Indian records were beaten, although the world records have not been touched. Bengal was first in the composition of India's Olympic team having won three places ... At a meeting of the All India Olympic Committee held after the meet it was decided to send these men to Paris as the money is available -

Dalip Singh of Patiala for Long Jump Lakshmanan of Madras (Hurdles) M.R. Hinge of Bombay (Marathon), T.K. Pitt of Bengal (100 and 440 Yards) J. S. Hall of Bengal (220 Yards) Sepoy Pala Singh of UP (Three Miles) J. C Heathcote (Madras), High Jump M.V. Venkatramaswamy (Madras), One Mile."

Patiala, Madras, Bombay and Bengal - the regional composition of the Paris team was already beginning to represent the disparate regions of India and from the very start the Olympic movement in India was a pan-India phenomenon. H.C. Buck of the YMCA College of Physical Education in Madras, an American who had pioneered athletics coaching in India, escorted the athletes. Though the Indians did not win medals, they acquitted themselves well, with two of them - T.K Pitt in the 400 metres and Dalip Singh in the broad jump - performing well.



Painting new horizons for Olympic sports

G RAJARAMAN

These are exciting times for Olympic sport in India. There are visible signs that the country, aware of the power of sport and hungry for more success, is building on the gains of the past nine years, capped by the largest medal haul by the Indian athletes in the history of the Olympic Games. And, these are just as exciting times for the revamped Indian Olympic Association.

There is a fair expectation that the Indian Olympic Association will provide empathetic and proactive support to athletes across disciplines, given that a number of wonderful former and contemporary athletes have come to occupy positions in the Executive Council and the Athletes Commission.

But let us focus on the strengthening of the Indian Olympic Association's relationship with Government and the likely outcome in the coming multi-discipline events. There is more than one prism which bends our perspective, but it is imperative to see it with the one that entails the bigger picture.

The Indian sports ecosystem has perhaps discovered that it is better to work together – and be seen as working together – rather than at cross purposes. Sports fans are concerned with the performances of India's elite athletes in events like the Olympic Games, Asian Games and Commonwealth Games as these bring the country together like little else can.

Sport being the soft power that it is, India cannot afford to lower its expectations. While the Niti Aayog's visualisation of 50 medals in the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris may seem a mirage at the moment, it would be fair to expect that with multiple medals in Shooting, Wrestling and Boxing, India will be able to make it the top 20 on the medal table.

There can be no doubt that the Union Government is the biggest benefactor of Olympic sport in India, funding elite athletes' training and competition through various National Sports Federations. Therefore, the greater synergy between Indian Olympic Association and Government is now being seen as a good augury for Olympic disciplines by many in the system and those from outside.

With the National Games far from being the proverbial goose that lays the golden egg in terms of earning revenue from media rights and sponsorship, the Indian Olympic Association has no option but to fall back on public funding for some more time. And in doing so, it has understood that is a win-win situation for everyone if there is a greater coordination with the Government.

In the past few months, the Indian Olympic Association has shown a greater penchant to hear all stakeholders, including Government and athletes, and incorporate their suggestions in its day to day functioning. And such an approach has only endeared it to officials in the Ministry and the Sports Authority of India, which aim at an athlete-centric regime.

The coordination among Government, Indian Olympic Association, and National Sports Federations was severely tested during the Covid-19 pandemic that swept the world. After a short break, training camps resumed under strict protocols and the results were there for all to see in Tokyo2020, held a year behind schedule, with India earning its biggest Olympic medal haul ever.

The silver medals won by weightlifter Mirabai Chanu and wrestler Ravi Kumar Dahiya and the bronze claimed by Badminton ace PV Sindhu, Boxer Lovlina Borgogain and Wrestler Bajrang Punia held the nation in thrall. However, Javelin Thrower Neeraj Chopra won India's maiden gold in Athletics and the men's Hockey team returned to the podium after 41 years to whip up passion.

With the seamless coming together of all stakeholders and benefactors and finding a commonality of purpose, there can only be on way for India's Olympic sport to move – onwards and upwards. The past few months have given rise to more such hope and aspirations to arise in the hearts of sports fans than at any time in the country's apex Olympic organisation's history.



The Indian Olympic Association's income from grants from the Ministry, International Olympic Committee, Olympic Council of Asia and sponsorships etc. as shared in its annual Audited Statement of Accounts for nine years from 2009-10 to 2017-18 is a total of Rs. 118.17 crore. This amount includes a mere Rs. 20.81 crore from sponsorships, indicating the room for improvement.

With Rs. 24.79 crore in this period received as grants from the Ministry, it is clear that Indian Olympic Association has relied more on public funding than on sponsorships. It is an indication of the historical dependence on Government funding to send teams to take part in multi-discipline events at the Continental and Global levels.

Truth to tell, in the time since its last Annual Statement of Accounts is available on public domain, the Indian Olympic Association would have raked in a bit more from sponsorships, especially around the Tokyo Olympic Games where the expectations were of the medal tally reaching double figures and a therefore a greater buzz preceded the unprecedented haul of seven medals.

Yet, without Government support, most, if not all, Olympic disciplines would struggle to make an impression on the collective consciousness of the people. The investments needed in terms of training facilities, coaching and other support staff, travel to competition for exposure and ranking are so enormous that the richest of National Sports Federations would be on shaky ground.

In a society that celebrates the success of sporting achievers, even encouraging some to draw the best of Government support until well past their peak, it is but natural that the Indian Olympic Association has accepted the financial reality and embraced the opportunity to establish greater coordination with the Ministry for the greater good of sport in the country.





Penalty Pain That Hurts Till Date

India's footballing debut at the 1948 Olympics saw them lose in heartbreaking fashion to France

JAYDEEP BASU

India's journey in international football began in July 1948 in London Olympics, 11 months after they attained independence. The report below on the match was written by an unnamed British journalist for the book, "All India Football 1945-50", compiled and edited by Sourendra Lal Ghosh, and published in October 1950. Ghosh himself was a noted sports journalist and an efficient sports administrator, who served as the honorary secretary of the Delhi Football Association in the 1950s and 1960s. Reproduced is the entire article. The spelling and grammar remain unchanged.

I was a spectator at Ilford on July 31, 1948, when India, playing a better game, went down to France in the XIVth Olympiad. I have many times seen fortune swaying the luck of the game and those who should have won on merits leaving the playground licked; but never in my life was my sympathy so strongly aroused for the losing team whose tactics were far cleaner than those of any European team that took part in the Olympiad and whose style of play was something that our players might emulate for imparting more dignity and beauty to the game. Losers as the Indians were, there could be no doubt in the minds of competent observers that they were better exponents of the game than their more fortunate rivals.

Ilford is a small town with a small stadium. But the ground is well rolled and on this day the gods of the weather were in a pleasant mood. A dry ground, a light ball and nearly 10,000 appreciative spectators – not a bad setting for players who are used to baked-dry grounds and hot, tropical summer sunshine. Accustomed as we are to seeing broad shoulders, athletic physiques and ripping calf muscles not to be disguised by thick socks and heavy boots, we all had a spell of suspended breath as the Indians trooped into the field. In sharp contrast to their rivals they were lithe and supple; not only that, most of them had turned in with bare feet. Thousands of fingers wagged to take a count of the barefooted wonders. They were seven in a team of eleven.

Ten thousand bodies were hunched forward, ten thousand necks were craned in curious expectation to see these frail-looking, barebodied men from the Orient locked in combat with their more robust and stockier adversaries. My neighbours, basking in the light of their wisdom, thought the darkies would be swept of the field. I myself had some misgivings....

But soon after the game started all misgivings were dispelled in a continuous roar of applause. Although the light ball bumped too much over the hard ground to allow perfect ball control by the barelegged Indians, their swiftness and thrustfulness, their dribbling and cross passes made the rough and ready bodyline tactics of the French appear futile. So much so that they were forced to fall back upon the there-back defence formation and the old expedient of charging the man instead of the ball. Every three minutes on the average there was a pull-up for a foul charge.

In sharp contrast to France, the Indian players were lithe and supple and bare footed, a fact that provoked wonderment within the crowd



The Indians were dominating the game right from the start. Had the English or the Sweden team been in their position they would certainly have scored at least three goals in the first half, but the Indians were so weak in shooting at the goalmouth that they disappointed their 10,000 supporters time after time. Were Indian forwards never taught to do sharpshooting with their feet but only to dribble their way into the net? – I began to wonder. It began to look as if they were only mildly testing Rouxel, the French goalie and not giving him what the French forwards were giving, though less frequently, to his Indian counterpart, Varadraj.

I am of the opinion that this great weakness alone cost India the match and also the chance of shining at the Olympic Football tournament. France had fewer offensive leads to the goal than India, but she shot harder and truer at the net. Varadraj, the Indian goalie, was very efficient and a master of style. But the shot from Courbin that eluded him in the 28th minute of play was a sharply swerving one that probably no goalie would have been able to stop.



For most of the time till the half time interval India was on the offensive and should have more than equalised. Not that there were no stinging shot from the Indian forwards at the French goal; I remember two fine efforts, one each by the Indian captain Aao and Parab. But there should have been a dozen more at least. The shots that ended tamely into the hands of Rouxel might have been, for all I know, cannon shots shaking the net. If only the Indian forwards had practised the art of sharpshooting!

Early in the second half the Indians led some spectacular attacks on the French defence. Three times they pierced the defence with only goalie to beat, but faulty goalmouth tactics robbed them of success. Then Raman was brought down within the penalty area, and a penalty kick was awarded. Manna, who impressed me as the soundest of four backs in the field, took the shot – and sent the ball flying over the crossbar.

Twenty minutes after resumption a beautiful combined movement between Indian forwards Mewalal and Raman saw the latter past the French defenders. Rouxel barged forward to tackle him, but Raman eluded him and placed the ball into the empty goal.

The spectators greeted the equaliser with loud cheers. Thereafter India dominated the play and France took more



earnestly to body-charging. The spectators, who had started booing the French mildly since the early stages of the game, now began booing more loudly and more continuously.

Ten minutes before the end, Raman was again brought down inside the penalty area. The resultant penalty kick Mahabir placed high and straight at the goalkeeper who fisted it away over the crossbar. I have seldom seen, in first class football, two penalty kicks going astray in one match.

As the closing minute drew near the general impression was the extra time would have to be played for a decision. But almost at the very last minute the French broke through and their inside-left, Strappe, beat the Indian goalie with a bullet of a shot.

Thus India lost the match which she should have won. Her defence was sound, with not one weak link. Her forwards were clever and better masters of sprinting and dodging. They went through the 90 minutes of play without visibly tiring although they looked frail in comparison with their heftier rivals. Where they failed was in shooting at the goal. Once they make up this deficiency, it will have to be very very strong national side that would be able to beat the Indians. They have evolved a technique which baffles the Western player and makes his physical superiority appear futile.

I expect India will do much better at the next Olympiad.



In conversation with
Abhinav Bindra

He is one of the best India has ever seen. And the best thing about him is his clarity. His ability to see things how they are and get better. Seek solutions rather than just ask the questions. He is one of the best thinkers in sport and in this interview with **Boria Majumdar** he answers some questions that every young athlete will do well to listen to.

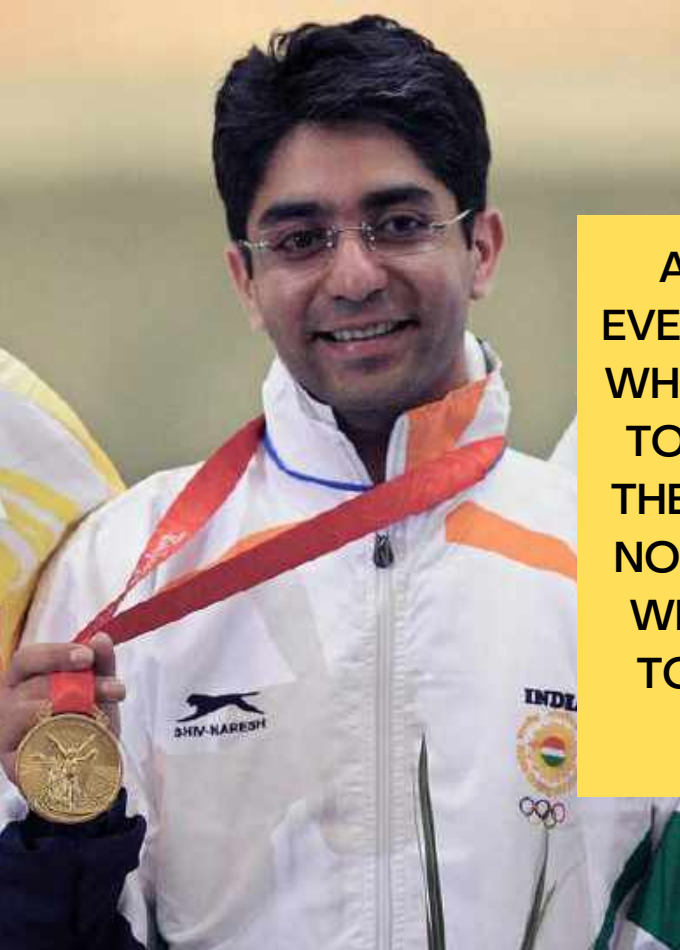


Yet another year when we have the Asian Games and next year is Paris 2024. When you look back and see your own career what are the lessons you think stay relevant for the youngsters who are now playing the sport?

First and foremost you need to be self aware. I played in five Olympic games and each was different. At 17 I was a growing boy in Sydney and in Rio I was a 35 year old man. My body underwent change. I changed as a human being. And you needed to be aware of how things were changing and change with it. Take Athens for example. If you ask me I was shooting the best I ever did in 2004. It was effortless. I was sailing through competitions. But that's when I realised I had to change if I had to get to the next stage. Trying to change when you are doing well is the toughest decision of all. For the next two years for example I won nothing. But then this decision to change was the best of my career. It set me up for Beijing. It is this self awareness that I needed to change even when things were going well that I am talking about. And decisions like these will help every athlete aspiring to be the best.

How do you deal with the disappointment of failing in a world cup or a world championship or in a major event like the Asian Games or an Olympics? More often than not it will happen. Only a few will win and it is tough after years of preparation?

Of course it is tough. Having said that it is the greatest learning sport can offer you. It teaches you how to lose and then get better. See after a disappointment it is natural you will feel low. You are allowed a day of low. That's it. After a day of whining and feeling low you have to come back and start doing the same things again. Get back to training and doing the things that make you the best. Get back to the process. The problem with us is we spend far too much time thinking of the past and the future. What happened in the past and what can happen in the future. In doing so we lose track of the present. You need to stay in the present and get ready. That's what sport teaches you and that's what you need to do to get better. Stay in the present and follow the process after a day of feeling low.



AN OLYMPIC GAMES DOESN'T COME EVERY FOUR YEARS, IT COMES EVERYDAY. WHAT IT TEACHES YOU IS THAT YOU NEED TO FALL IN LOVE WITH THE BORING AND THE MUNDANE. THERE ARE NO CAMERAS. NO PEOPLE AND FANS. NO MEDIA. THAT'S WHAT YOU NEED TO FALL IN LOVE WITH TO BE ABLE READY YOURSELF FOR THE BIG STAGE.

But then when you fail in an Olympic games for example it is a 4 year long wait thereafter isn't it. It is a long time for the next Olympics to come along.

Exactly the point. If you fail in one Olympic games it is not as if you will get another the next day and go and win. So while you have your long term goal of winning an Olympic medal you also need to set several short term goals that will keep you going. And if you achieve them you deserve a pat on the back for that's how you get set for the bigger goal. Simply put you need to turn up for work everyday to be ready for an examination a year later. I had to turn up for training every day to be ready for an Olympic games four years later. And turn up with the same passion and enthusiasm. That's why I say an Olympic games doesn't come every four years, it comes everyday. What it teaches you is that you need to fall in love with the boring and the mundane. The process is the boring and the mundane. When no one is watching you. There are no cameras. No people and fans. No media. That's what you need to fall in love with to be able ready yourself for the big stage. You need to find joy in effort.

This is easier said than done isn't it.

Of course it is. That's why few are able to do it. But it is something extremely powerful. It is about empowerment. If you find joy in process and in training, you feel extremely powerful from within. Before Beijing for example I was already a winner. So what if I failed. I had tried everything possible and done so to the best of my ability. I had done so with complete passion and dedication. I had found joy in doing so. I was fulfilled. As an athlete that's what it is all about. Even before I travelled to Beijing I was already a winner in my own eyes. That I think is the key. You need to seek joy in the process and in the mundane like I said. Be your best every single day in training and keep getting better. You can't just turn up one fine day and win an Olympic medal. You need to be able to win it everyday in training. That's what will get you the best prepared for the games when they eventually come. That's what I did all through in my career.



The Man with the Golden Arm

Tokyo changed it all. The throw of 87.58 meters to win Olympic gold catapulted him to greatness in the echelons of Indian Olympic sport. Wherever he goes, whenever he throws, people follow. That's the change he has brought about. And yet **Neeraj Chopra** hasn't changed. That's why he says, "Main competition mein yeh manke nahi jata hoon ki main Neeraj Chopra Olympic champion. Main just khelta hoon. Mera poori koshish hain achha karna. Bas itna hi". That's what makes him the champion he is. He has stayed humble and is aware of his responsibilities. He knows he can repeat Tokyo in Paris. Do even better. With a huge year ahead, Neeraj spoke to **Boria Majumdar** about his expectations from the forthcoming events, being Neeraj Chopra and more. Excerpts from the conversation:

World Lead performance, almost 90 meters in difficult conditions, you must be immensely satisfied with how things started this year.

The conditions were difficult in Doha. Especially the wind. None of us could understand what was happening with the wind. And while you can say I could have done better, given that the wind was making things difficult it was a satisfying performance. There are many other competitions coming up so there is reason to believe that I will keep doing better.

Neeraj, Tokyo changed it all. Since that gold medal winning effort each time you throw the nation follows you. Your every throw trends on social media. How do you see all this?

Yes that's true and it feels good that the sport has become popular. People have started following athletics in India. They are speaking about it. Not just me. If you see people are following Olympic sports and are talking about it. That's where the real change has come and Tokyo helped us in bringing about that change. Having said that we need to keep performing to be able to sustain this momentum and that's what all of us need to do now. It is not about one Neeraj Chopra. When you see Indians across the board start to do well you know that things will only get better from here on.

TOKYO HELPED US IN BRINGING ABOUT A CHANGE. PEOPLE FOLLOW AND TALK ABOUT OLYMPIC SPORTS NOW. BUT WE NEED TO KEEP PERFORMING TO BE ABLE TO SUSTAIN THIS MOMENTUM.





Spot on. In fact, it wasn't easy coming back after Tokyo. All of a sudden you had it all. Everyone wanted a piece of you. To refocus and make it back again couldn't have been easy.

I am an athlete. Throwing the javelin is what I do. And I know that's why people want to be with me. Because I have done reasonably well in my field. But if I ever ignore the basics and that is my training and my preparation, I am no one. At no point did I lose focus. We always had an eye on training, how we needed to restart, plan things and get back. My world is on the field and with the javelin. That's where I belong. While everything else feels good I can tell you it is all because of my efforts on the field. And I will always be conscious of that.

What has stood out for me is that you have improved consistently. You have won a medal in every competition you have participated in. That speaks for serious consistency.

That's what sport is all about- consistency. Unless you are able to do it consistently it is impossible to sustain it at this level. Everything has to be in order. Your training, your diet, your health, your mental focus. And I am pleased that each of the other throws were also good and that tells me I am in my zone. If I am able to throw well consistently means things are going in the right direction. I was close to the 90 meter mark in the diamond league. Now it is time to improve further and build on these performances. If we can do that there is no reason why we can't do well in the forthcoming competitions.



Jakarta-Palembang: A landmark Asian Games for India

SOUOMO GHOSH

The Asian Games holds a special spot in the hearts of the Indian sports fans and athletes. In fact, it was a newly independent India that emerged from the clutches of colonialism, which hosted the first ever edition of the Asian Games in New Delhi in 1951, paving the way for the entire continent that had just emerged from the brink of a holocaust.

That start has paved the way for progress, not only in India, but also in the rest of Asia, which now, along with India, boasts of some of the biggest economies in the world.

Till date, 672 medals have been won by India at the Asian Games over the years, with the highest haul of 70 coming in its last edition in 2018 in Jakarta and Palembang, Indonesia. While India's best finish at the Asian Games came in its inaugural edition in New Delhi, when the host finished second, their best gold medal haul came in the latest edition in 2018 in Jakarta with 18 medals.



The Indian contingent at the 2018 Asiad comprised of 570 competitors, and was let out into the Opening Ceremony of the games by golden boy Neeraj Chopra, who then went on to win the country's first ever Asian Games gold in javelin throw, setting a new national record of 88.06 m. Chopra later went on to clinch Olympic gold in Tokyo 2020, and extend his national record to 89.94 m as he clinched silver at the Stockholm Diamond League in 2022.

Apart from Chopra, there were many other firsts for India at the 2018 Asiad. PV Sindhu and Saina Nehwal enthralled the fans of racquet sports, clinching bronze and silver, respectively, in women's singles badminton. Nehwal's bronze was India's first medal in a women's singles badminton event at the Asian Games. Meanwhile, Sindhu etched her name in the annals of history by becoming the first Indian shuttler to make it to the final of a singles badminton event at the games, losing the summit clash to the then world no. 1 Tai Tzu Ying.

While athletics has yielded the most number of medals for India in the history of the Asian Games (672), the nation's second most successful sport has been wrestling, which has yielded 59 medals thus far. However, it was in 2018 that an Indian woman, Vinesh Phogat, rose to the forefront, and became the first Indian woman to win a gold medal in wrestling at the Asian Games, as she grappled her way through the 50 kg freestyle category.

Two other Indian women pioneered in their respective fields, as Swapna Barman became the first Indian to win gold in the Women's Heptathlon, while Rahi Sarnobat became the first Indian woman to clinch gold in shooting, winning the 25 m rapid fire pistol event.



Indian table tennis experienced a watershed moment at the 2018 Asiad, when the Indian men's team comprising Sarath Kamal, Sathiyam Gnanasekaran, Manav Thakkar, Anthony Amalraj, and Harmeet Desai secured the bronze medal. They soon followed that up with a second medal in the mixed doubles event, when Sarath Kamal and Manika Batra clinched another bronze.

India's performance in athletics in Jakarta was one of the most impressive medal hauls in the Games, with 20 metallic discs earned by our athletes. The 4 x 400 m mixed relay, which was introduced into the Games for the first time ever, was dominated by India, as Hima Das, Muhammed Anas Yahiya, MR Poovamma, and Rajiv Arokia, as they finished more than three seconds ahead of second and third placed Kazakhstan and China, respectively.

Hima Das was the star of the show for the women athletes helping India win another gold in the 4 x 400 m women's relay, while she also clinched silver in the women's 400 m relay event. Dutee Chand was also in full flow at the 2018 Asiad, winning two silver medals in the 100 m and 200 m sprints.

While Das dominated the track for the women, it was Anas who did the same for the men, clinching his own individual 400 m men's relay silver, while also playing a key role in India's second placed finish at the 4 x 400 m men's relay.

Overall, it was a hearty performance for the Indian participants in Jakarta-Palembang, one that paved the way for a good performance in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, and that inspired many in the upcoming generations.



Indian hockey

The thread that binds a century

Indian hockey's brilliance is a significant part of Olympic folklore, one that transcends time while also remaining the only constant



VAIBHAV RAGHUNANDAN

On May 26 1928, the day India established themselves as a force in world hockey, the captain of their team, the man who had brought it all together, was nowhere near the stadium. In his absence, India beat the Netherlands 3-0 in the gold medal match at the Amsterdam Olympics. The Olympic Games website credits Major Dhyan Chand with two of those goals. The third scorer remains unknown. It makes no mention of the captain at all because a few days before that game Jaipal Singh Munda (pictured left) returned to England, following a squabble with management (most of them British) about the treatment of the Indian players in the squad.



Playing on a pitch muddied by a night of rain, India triumphed against the Netherlands in the 1948 Olympics to win the country's first gold post Independence

At 25, fresh from becoming the first Indian to win his blue playing hockey for Oxford, Munda turned up at the Olympics despite having his leave rejected while training as a probationer in the Indian Civil Services. After the Games, Munda dabbled in hockey almost as an extracurricular activity, something to keep the mind fit and the spirit going. He helped start Mohun Bagan's hockey team, served as Secretary at the Bengal Hockey Association, worked with grassroot sport and was, for a brief while a member of the Indian Sports Council. He never played for India again.

But Indian hockey roared on, the feats of men like Major Dhyan Chand, Leslie Claudius, Zafar Iqbal, Balbir Singh Sr, going from fact to legend to myth to fable in the span of a century. That first gold in 1928 set the stone rolling, as India romped to six golds in succession. In that run India played five finals (the 1932 tournament was a round robin format), scoring 22 goals and conceding 2.

At the 1936 Berlin Games, Major Dhyan Chand mesmerised not just fans, and locals but even opposing teams, many, it is rumoured asking to examine his stick, fearing that it had been corrupted by some adhesive that made the ball stick to it. His contributions and accolades at the Olympic stage, on their own merit, would outdo a few generations of hockey players across the world.

To call it domination would be an understatement. It was annihilation by mere appearance. The team inspired such fear that till 1948, the British refused to enter their own team, fearful of a whipping by a colony.

So much so, that by the time 1948, and newly found Independence arrived, India didn't so much win the gold as much as demand it. On August 13, 1948, the day after the hockey final, the Hindustan Times' headline wrote: 'India retain World Hockey title'.

They were right. India had always been Olympic hockey champions. For a newly independent nation, the hockey team was a crown jewel. The 1948 gold medal winning team even went on a victory tour across Europe, playing friendlies in Germany and Czechoslovakia. Upon their return to Mumbai (then Bombay) by ship, low tide prevented an immediate docking. When they did dock, they were quickly whisked to Delhi to play an exhibition game at the National Stadium in front of 70,000 people. Among the dignitaries were Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and India's soon to be first President, Dr Rajendra Prasad.

In subsequent years, as other nations got more competitive, playing surfaces changed, and the game evolved, India's medal rush reduced to a trickle, and yet the Indian men's hockey team remained the one constant every four years at the Olympic Games.

The wait for a medal finally ended on August 5, 2021, when the Men's hockey team beat Germany in the bronze medal match, to nab India's first medal in the sport in over four decades. The core group of that bronze winning team had also won the 2017 Hockey World Cup, the investment in youth paying off on the big stage in Tokyo.

On an even sweeter note, the Women's Team, despite ending up a heartbreaking fourth in Tokyo, captured the hearts of the nation that has always been emotionally attached to the sport. Their bronze at the 2022 Commonwealth Games has sparked not just interest but also hope that a new era is on the cards.

It also laid a foundation to build on for the future. A new hope: What was and has been will be again.





INDIA

