**These days athletes are not satisfied with merely being Olympians. They want to win medals | The Indian Express**

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I am in Delhis Chhatrasal Stadium and my guests today are two of Indias new crorepatis,two of the strongest Indians in whose glory we are all baskingSushil Kumar and Yogeshwar Dutt. We in India have been desperate for medals for 50-60 years. Sushil: I believe wrestling is picking up in India. It began with Beijing and in times to come,the situation will be much better. You are Indias senior-most wrestlers. You have played all over the world. How different is a wrestlers life from that of other athletes? Yogeshwar: Its different in the way that we live in akharas and not in our homes. Sushil: Some sports require speed,a thrower might require more power,some require more of stamina but wrestling involves everything. You have to be quick and you have to be powerful and you have to think as well. Within two minutes,you have to work your mind in a way that you make no mistakes. The entire country saw wrestling with such craze for the first time during the London Games. Everyone was surprised that everything was over in two hours. We learned that a wrestlers mind should be very sharp because however strong you are,if your mind fails you,youll be gone. Sushil: Yes,and you have to work your mind in such a way that you make your opponent commit mistakes as well. Give us an example of that. Sushil: In the semifinal bout at London against the Kazakh,at one point,he was three points ahead of me and he thought that was a big lead to cover in two minutes. But I gripped him and made him err. He thought,let me concede this one point because I can escape this move and will lose only one point. But there is a technique that I use on the lower body,called the Irani move and when I gripped him,I took five straight points off that. So,making him think like that worked to my advantage. So tell us about your Irani move. Sushil: You bend the leg and apply that move. I used it against the Kazakh boxer and it is a part of ground wrestling. So is it a wrong notion that wrestling is based only on power and stamina and not on the mind? Yogeshwar: We dont believe that any other athlete works his mind as much as we do. We are the ones who also eat all the almonds,cashewnuts and raisins which are considered fuels for the brain. When did you make your opponent err? Yogeshwar: In the bronze medal match,I fought a racy bout. I made sure I tired him so much before the last round that I didnt have to use brute force anymore to stop him. Because when you are tired,that is an automatic loss of power. So in the last round,he just couldnt get up. Has it happened to you that you make an error because of your opponents trick? Yogeshwar: In that match that put me into repechage (against Besik Kudukhov),I had lost the toss (for the advantageous clinch position). I didnt want the second one to go on toss as well. I had to take points and not leave it to luck (of the toss going in his favour if points were equal). So that is why I played aggressively and attacked but he went on the defensive and that resulted in errors and he took that one point and then I lost in the first period. That one moments error cost me but after that,I think I did well in the following bouts. Sushil,did you analyse what went wrong for you in the gold medal bout? Because you had beaten that opponent twice before. Sushil: The mistake I made was that I didnt attack right from the start. If I had attacked early on,I could have won. But he attacked initially and then went on the defensive. If you attack when your opponent is on defence,it can backfire,you can lose more points. There is a lot of risk. But were you also a bit tired? Sushil: Yes,all my bouts till then had lasted three rounds,so I was a bit tired. Yogeshwar: He was also sick. He was vomiting on the weigh-in day. He had lost weight for the weigh-in and then he couldnt eat anything because of the vomiting. So one gets weak,the body gets stiff. One problem with wrestlers and boxers is also that you cant weigh even half-a-kg extra than your weight category. Then you have to make sure you lose it before the weigh-in. Yogeshwar: Yes,we have to make sure we are of the exact weight. You can weigh less,but not more. Even if we weigh a gram more,we will be disqualified. So our diet is extremely important. Sushil,how much weight did you lose in that period? Sushil: About 5-6 kg. In how much time? Sushil: It is a well-planned thing and happens over fortnights. We know how much weight we should be losing per day. There was a time when people didnt know what wrestling was. Sushil: I would like to thank you and all the media for this. You have covered so much of the Olympics that I believe that has been crucial for the progress of the sport and has benefited us. When there is hope of a medal,then the whole country wants to watch it and the media wants to cover it. So this time,there was hope. I covered the 1988 Seoul Olympics and felt really bad that there was no chance of winning a medal. In 1990,I went to cover the Asian Games in Beijing and there was only one gold medal,in kabaddi. Yogeshwar: You must come to cover the next Olympic Games because this time there were six,next time we are hoping it will be double. Sushil: These days,athletes are not satisfied with merely being Olympians,they want to go to the Olympics to win medals. Yes,earlier it was all about going to the Olympics just for a trip. Yogeshwar: Yes,it was about the honour of being called an Olympian. Now,they are looking for the honour of being called an Olympic medallist or an Olympic quarter-finalist. The athletes are motivated enough to say that we are going to the Olympics to win medals. Sushil: When we stand on the podium and our flag goes up,it is a moment of great happiness. There are athletes from 204 countries there saluting their flags and you get to do the same when your flag rises. You are not only raising Indias flag,you are raising Haryanas flag as well. Haryana has great strength in boxing and wrestling. What is the reason behind that? Because we Haryanvis are not exactly quarrelsome. So why do you think this combative sport is flourishing here? Sushil: We have a very good chief minister and there are very good sports policies in place in Haryana. Yogeshwar: The Haryana government announced cash rewards for every athlete who participated in the Olympics,Rs 21 lakh to quarter-finalists. The good thing is that they give money to even those who lost. Sushil: Those who qualify for Olympics are the cream of international sports. Especially in wrestling,its very difficult to qualify and both of you were coming off injuries. Yogeshwar: Thats right. Sushil had a shoulder injury in the second qualifying chance and he was in pain. At the end of the day,wrestling is a power game. Your hands are what win you bouts,and if your hands are injured,what will you do? When you are competing,its a make-or-break situation that lasts for two minutes. If the opponent is putting too much of a resistance,then its six minutes with 30-second breaks. So your brain is working non-stop. Yogeshwar: After four-five bouts in a day,we feel like we are ill,the whole body is in pain. This sport requires both the mind and the body to be strong and you have to concentrate as well. So when we are practising on the mat,its all right,points dont really matter,but in the ring,we have to take points,not give them away. And if you give away points,it is tough to recover because there is so little time. Yogeshwar: You have to work very fast. Because of this format of two-three bouts in quick succession,you work like a machine. But people take interest in the game because of this kind of schedule and we are happy that crowds look forward to it. Like when Sushil used that move in London,where he picked the opponent from his knees and raised him above the shoulders,people were very excited. They still ask me about that move and how he did it. People ask about your move as wellagainst the North Korean. Tell us how you did that. Yogeshwar: It is called the phitle move. You have to get over your opponent,grab his legs,cross them and grip. It is such a great move that you can easily win over an opponent even if he is 20 kg heavier than you. This same move had won me gold in the Commonwealth Games and this time it gave me a bronze. This is my favourite move. Sushil,everyone wants to know about that one thing that happened in the semifinalwhen your Kazakh opponent was bleeding from the ear and he did a lot of drama. Sushil: No,he didnt do any drama,that was his coachs work. His coach did the drama. Tell us what happened. Sushil: When I lifted him up and dropped him down,I dont know what hit him and his ears bled a bit. But the score was 6-3 in my favour at that time. His coaches probably thought that there was no way they could catch up,so they tried to get some benefit by appealing. But the referees had seen that and nothing happened. But you didnt do anything to his ear? Sushil: No,I am a vegetarian. But I have heard wrestlers indulge in some mischief. Amit Kumar was poked in the eye. Sushil: Yes,wrestlers from Russia and Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan play foul a lot of times. Because they lack stamina,they try to do these things to distract you,to take your attention away from your game plan. If they poke your eye,you are going to be bothered by it for some time. But what happened to your eye? It still doesnt seem to have recovered. Yogeshwar: I had collided with my opponents head and it was a hard hit. The swelling kept increasing. I dont think it was deliberate. In wrestling,there is very little time to plan something on the spot to hurt your opponent. Sometimes they may use a tactic,but mostly its not deliberate. Sushil,what are the next targets? Sushil: What I couldnt do in London,Ill try to finish in the next Olympics. There is the Asian Games,World Championships and other big tournaments as well. Why are wrestling and boxing not becoming popular beyond Haryana? Sushil: We now have wrestlers from different states. Narsingh Yadav is from Mumbai. I think other states are encouraging wrestling as well and the sport will come up. Do you think wrestling is taken more seriously as a sport now or is it still about muscle power and entertainment? Yogeshwar: No,they consider it a sport now. They concentrate on their training and try to have a professional approach. We have some good talent now,like Amit Kumar. He did very well,fought the high-ranked Iranian medallist,got a bit unfortunate in the end. Amit,did you take to the sport seeing Sushil and Yogeshwar? Tell us about your background. Amit: I used to go to this akhara in my village,then I came to Chhatrasal. My parents work in the dairy business. So when you came here,were they like big brothers to you? Amit: I have learned a lot from them. They go abroad and learn new techniques,so we emulate whatever they do in practice. Do you wrestle with Sushil? Amit: No,I dont wrestle with him. Yogeshwar: He is in the 55-kg category while Sushil is in the 66-kg category. So that will be too much for him. He wrestles with me (60 kg) while I wrestle with Sushil. Since Sushil is stronger than me,wrestling with him trains me for better defence. Amit is one of the most powerful wrestlers internationally among others his age. But tell me about his technical soundness. Yogeshwar: He is aggressive,his defence is really good and his techniques are perfect. His biggest advantage is that he has a lot of time on his hands and he can keep on improving. The best part is that you two are such nice gurus and ideal role models for him. Yogeshwar: No,call us guru-bhai. Sushil: We too are still learning,so we are just his brothers. We hope to become a leading power in wrestling. Wrestling is one sport where Asian countries like Kazakhstan and Iran are in the lead. Yogeshwar: Definitely,Sushil is an Asian champion,so am I. Our next target is to make Amit an Asian champion. He got a bronze last time. I appreciate this thing the most that there is so much camaraderie between you all. Sushil: We support each other,we boost each others morale. Yogeshwar: We live like a family. Sushil and I have been sharing a room for almost 15 years and Amit is like our younger brother. I have noticed that some sports are unable to develop because of jealousy. I noticed that during Sushils bout,you were particularly excited and were cheering him up. Yogeshwar: The day before his bout,I reached the room at midnight and he was lying down. He had been vomiting. He said to me,there is a problem. I said,dont worry about these things,they come and go. My medal had already come by then so we were just hoping that Sushil adds a medal and makes history. You have established a tradition for Indian wrestling and now there are other people to follow it. They will try to improve on Sushil and Yogeshwars performances. I am assured that the future of Indian wrestling is in safe hands. I know wrestling doesnt tire you but incessant media demands do. You look eager to go and train now.