**Milkha claimed he bettered world record,but he has never done so: Gurbachan Singh Randhawa | The Indian Express**

Related. In an interview with The Indian Express Editor-in-Chief Shekhar Gupta on NDTV 24X7 Walk the Talk,track and field legend Gurbachan Singh Randhawa talks about his high point in Tokyo 64,owning four national records simultaneously,his contemporary Milkha Singh and the dream team of the sixties. Hello and welcome to Walk the Talk. I am Shekhar Gupta at the synthetic track at Delhis Nehru Stadium. I am most inappropriately dressed to be on the track. But my guest today is not appropriately dressed for the track either. He is somebody who has set the track ablaze in his time. Gurbachan Singh Randhawa,one of the greatest athletes in Indias history,a contemporary of Milkha Singh,and part of the same dream team. Yes,we were in the same team in the 1960 and 1962 Asian Games,1964 Olympics. We have attended many coaching camps together,we trained together. Many old-timers and athletics enthusiasts rank you even now as the greatest Indian athlete ever because you held the 110m hurdles record for a long time and you finished fifth at Tokyo Olympics… In 1962,Milkha Singh held two national records,while I held four. He won the gold medal in the Asian Games and I was declared the best Asian athlete. Because you won the decathlon,then? Yes. I was also the first sportsman to win the Arjuna Award,which is why people may consider me to be the greatest. My performance at the national level can be compared with Milkhas. However,at the Olympics,his performance was much better than mine. He finished fourth,you finished fifth. The position is not important. Milkha Singh claimed he had bettered the world record,but he has never done so. He had bettered the Olympic record. It was a wonderful race. I was the baby of the Indian contingent in the Rome Olympics (1960). You were 20 then. I was 21. Will you describe what you saw? At that time,I was busy in the decathlon. I could not complete it at that time because after the Olympic trials,we did not have any facilities to train. We were sent home after the trials held at Mt. Abu. Milkha Singh,who was in the Army,was sent abroad to train. Were you with the police? Yes,I was. Just before the Olympics,my contemporaries like Jagmohan Singh,who held the 100m record,TR Joshi and I were sent to Srinagar,where there were hardly any facilities to train. Sir,describe to us the scene at Rome. Milkhas race. Just before the race,Milkha suffered a muscle problem and took 16 injections. He ran the first 200m too fast and bettered his own record by 0.6 seconds. Milkha was third at the 200m mark. Carl Kaufmann came second,while Otis Davis came first. Davis covered 200-300m in 10.9 seconds,which is unbelievable. 10.9 seconds in those days was our 100m national record. Milkha was fifth at the 300m mark,whereas he claims that he was leading. He didnt lead for even one step in Rome. But he gave his career-best performance. He bettered his previous record. He never equaled his record after that. That was because of age,more than anything else. That record stood for decades. It was eventually beaten by Paramjeet Singh. Milkha promised him Rs 1 lakh if he breaks his record. He said it should be bettered at the Olympics. Paramjeet bettered it at the Olympics and Commonwealth Games. I personally feel Milkha should have given him Rs 1 lakh as it means nothing to him. You were counted as the greatest decathlete we have ever produced and your record stood for 11 years. In hurdles,the record stood for 29 years,whereas in decathlon the record was held for 11 years. You held four national records in four different events… Javelin,110m hurdles,high jump and decathlon. In India,in mens section I was the only person. After that you had PT Usha. But Ushas were only in sprints… (Mine were in) jumps,throws,hurdles and sprints. Not many people in this country of 120 crore cricket coaches know about athletics. In fact,standing on this ground,Ashwini Nachappa once said to me If Suresh Kalmadi can tell the distance between the two hurdles,I will stop running. I dont agree with Ashwini. It is easy to criticize. Nobody could have provided the amount of facilities like Suresh Kalmadi. I am referring to something else. I am saying people dont know about athletics. In a country that doesnt know about athletics,can you explain what is decathlon? Decathlon is derived from the word decade,which means 10. There are 10 events,comprising 3 jumps,3 throws and 4 races. Can you explain? Races include 100m,400m,1,500m and 110m hurdles. Jumps include high jump,long jump and pole vault. In throws it is shot put,discus and javelin. In decathlon,I created four national records. Even for some time,I held the record for long jump,but it was not a national record,but an inter-state record. You were a one-man team. You can say that. When a German team came to India,they wanted to go to Agra. Otto Peitzer,a well-known German athlete,was told you wont get any competition in India,so it is better to go sightseeing. Otto told them that there is an athlete in India who can give competition to the entire German team. In the same Indo-German test held at the National Stadium,I stood first in the 110m hurdles,high jump,long jump and javelin. Your record in the 110m hurdles is a four-decade record just like Milkhas. Vijay was a very talented boy. He used to train vigorously and systematically. Complete dedication. What are your views on the decathletes of today? Do they have the same talent? Bhartinder and my son Ranjit Randhawa. My son crossed my record of 6,912 points. He bettered 7,000. Bhartinder is capable of crossing 7,500,but he is suffering from a muscle problem. Do you train Bhartinder? No,my son trains him. So is Bhartinder the current decathlon champion? Yes,he is. How did you build the dream team of athletics in the 1960s? Because after that athletics in India began to decline. We were the core of the team. Athletics back then was about men. There was Jagmohan Singh,TR Joshi and BV Satyanarayan,the long jumper. Did you know Paan Singh Tomar? What was he like? He was an athlete of national level,not international level. He was a very good runner who was high on confidence. On top of that he was a gentleman. Did you see the film on him? Yes,I have. Was that film close to reality? Yes,I think it was. They have managed to project him correctly. So was that film much closer to reality than the film on Milkha Singh? I have not seen Milkha Singhs film. They say in the film,he was shown leading up to 300m. As I have told you,he did not lead even for one step. He was 0.6 seconds behind the first runner in 200m,when he was third. And fifth at the 300m mark. So,it is incorrect to say that he was leading at any distance. So if he missed a medal,it was bronze,not gold? Had he run the 200-300m better,it was very easy for him to win the bronze. But there was no chance he would have won gold or silver. They were way ahead of him. Isnt it a good thing that films are being made about our athletes too these days? It is indeed a good thing. After Milkha Singhs film young athletes have got lot more incentive and parents now want their kids to get into sports. Sir,what brought you into so many different events? At that time there wasnt so much of training and education… There were hardly any facilities during those times. We didnt even have a TV those days. Were you a natural athlete? During his time,my father was an outstanding sportsperson. Decathlon was not introduced those days in India. Otherwise,he would have participated in the 1936 Olympics. So what were his disciplines? He was into long jump. Once he bettered the national record in long jump. He jumped 22 feet and 10.5 inches. He won 120-yard hurdles,discus,high jump and triple jump. An all-rounder. That is correct. He beat him in Calcutta and in Germany on two occasions in 1964. So you were quite a team. Yes,we had a good team with proper understanding. Was the relationship between you all cordial or were there any underlying tensions? Milkha Singh was a senior. He used to keep himself slightly aloof from us. He was never my captain. But in 1964,I was the skipper of the contingent that had Milkha as part of it. Tell us about the event at Tokyo in 1964,which was in some ways,your best feat. In heats,I clocked 14.3s and the person who came fourth also clocked 14.3s. I guess I was lucky to qualify. Next day was the semifinals. In India,temperatures hover around the 27-28 degree mark in October. But on that day in Tokyo,it was raining and we did not get the cinder track. It was a synthetic track and there was water on it. That day,it was 14.2 degrees and humidity was about 96 per cent. In Tokyo? Abdul Razzak,a triple Olympian from Pakistan,teased me by saying you will come last. When I came second in the semifinals,he came up to me and said,You must stand on the podium. He is the person who gave me a massage before the finals. In 1964,a Pakistani gave you a massage? He was a close friend. He said you are capable of doing better. 14.0s was my best timing. I was the first Asian athlete to enter the final of an Olympic hurdles event. After an hour and 50 minutes,we had the finals and the temperature came down to 13.4 degrees. It was cooling off. It was still raining. The kachchha-baniyaan that I wore for the semifinals was completely soaked but I stuck with it for the final. I did not care about the temperature. I was confident that I will be able to repeat my performance. In the semifinals,I came second with 14 seconds,the person who came third also clocked 14 seconds and the person who came fourth also clocked 14 seconds. Similarly,in the finals I came fifth with 14 seconds,the person who came sixth also timed 14 seconds. I ran so many races,but despite clocking the same timings,I was never beaten by anybody. So was Tokyo the high point in your career? Yes,it was the best moment. If you compare mens athletics of the past and now,two aspects emerge. One is the decline of the Army,and the other is the decline of Punjab. Let me reverse the order,one is the decline of Punjab and the other is the Armys decline. There’s no doubt about it. Most of the athletes back then were from an Army background. The rest were civilians or from the Railways or Police. But they didn’t have same facilities as the Army. In Punjab Police,there was Ashwini Kumar,who I think is the father of Indian sports. And hockey and also classical music. I share a personal relationship with him. I too respect him a lot. I keep meeting him. He had given me all the training. I also made the most of the Army’s training facility and equipment they provided. As far as Punjab is concerned,if we see the history,in 1954,India won four gold medals in the Asian Games in the mens section. All the winners were from Punjab. In the 1958 Asiad,India won five gold medals and all the winners were from Punjab. Similarly in 1962,when Milkha and I were there,we again won five gold medals and all were from Punjab. When did you first hear of performance enhancing drugs? In 1982,during the Asian Games in New Delhi. It’s all over the place now. Yes it is. Even the cyclist,who was the world record holder (Lance Armstrong) openly said,Nobody can create a world record without the use of drugs. We don’t have enough educated people who are capable of conducting research on doping. There’s something called as gene doping as well now. By the time it comes to India,the rest of the world would have moved on. Are you disappointed that Jamaica and Kenya too are involved in this? Yes,it really hurts. It amounts to cheating. Im not in favour of that. Are you happy with life? You look happy. Is there a sense of disappointment? This whole idea of who is Indias greatest athlete ever? I am very content in life. My kids are happy and are enjoying their life. I don’t need anything else. I am getting my pension regularly. If I fall ill,treatment is free. There are times when I wonder what I did wrong that they have named the Asian Games Sports Complex after less-deserving sportsmen. There are roads named after them,and not to forget apartments. But my name’s nowhere. I was sure they’ll name a block after you in Khel Gaon. But when I checked,it wasn’t there and I wondered how could they forget. After my feats in 1964,I was expecting a Padma Shri in 1965. But you got it in 2005. I had to wait 40 years and had to run from pillar to post to get a Padma Shri. Still I am happy. My case was recommended for Padma Bhushan. I dont know how the government decided to give me Padma Shri. I was basically not interested in accepting it. Mr SS Boparai,who was the Vice-Chancellor at Panjab University said,<U+0093>Yaar tere ko kaun si punishment de rahe hain.<U+0094> I was his sports adviser in Patiala. It hurts when I think about it sometimes. This means there is no one in the government to give sports,especially athletics,a push. Now there is a talk of conferring the Bharat Ratna to Sachin Tendulkar. How would you react to this? In such issues,it is the state that fights it out. In Punjab,there is an award called Maharaja Ranbir Singh Award. I should have been the first person to receive that award. But they never considered me for it. Punjab has had so many Chief Ministers during this time but they do not know anything about sports history. What is their contribution to sports? But nobody cares about doing anything for athletes from the previous era. Even when you are complaining,you are smiling and laughing. What else can I do? You laugh and the world will laugh with you. You leave and you leave alone.