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POSTER

SHIKHAR DHAWAN

CHESS OLYMPIAD

Indians  
eyeing gold  
in Hungary

MASSIMO COSTANTINI

Indian TT  
coach on  
winning  
mentality



## » MONDO FLIES, GRAVITY SIGHS

From soaring into the night sky and hanging in the air before swooping down to an enthralled reception, Armand Duplantis has done it all. Yet, he's just begun



## Education for All Excellence for Everyone

Enrollment of more than **1.92 crore** students under School Chalo Abhiyan

An amount of **Rs 1200 per student** transferred through DBT to bank accounts of parents (class 1 to 8) for purchasing uniforms, sweaters, shoes, socks, school bags and stationery

Establishment of Sainik School and NCC Training Academy in Gorakhpur

Specialized training for teachers under the **Nipun Bharat** initiative to enhance the quality of education

**Sharda program** focuses on out-of-school children, involving an intensive household survey for their identification and enrollment

27 universities have signed 111 agreements with national-level institutions to enhance academic standards

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's mantra, "Padhega India, Badhega India," has been fully embraced by the Uttar Pradesh government. The state has achieved record enrollment in government schools through the 'School Chalo Abhiyan.' With a significant increase in teachers recruitment, the quality of education has seen substantial improvement. 'The Operation Kayakalp' has transformed schools with upgraded infrastructure, while digitalization efforts have made learning accessible through various apps. Quality education has also paved the way for new employment opportunities across the state.



Establishment of **Maa Shakumbhari University** in Saharanpur, **Raja Mahendra Pratap Singh State University** in Aligarh and **Maharaja Suhail Dev State University** in Azamgarh

Under Operation Kayakalp, infrastructure facilities have been developed in over **1.40 lakh** primary and upper primary schools

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Letter of intent issued for establishment of **15 private universities**. Proceedings are underway of issuing letters for 8 additional ones





# FAREWELL GABBAR, THANKS FOR THE BLOCKBUSTER ENTERTAINMENT



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## 10 Cover Story Armand Duplantis

The pole-vaulter is so far ahead of the rest of the field, he can continue to break the world record one centimetre at a time. But just how far can he go?

Cover: Duplantis (Reuters)

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## OFF-SIDE

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# SPORT ISN'T ONLY ABOUT WINNING — IT HAS LESSONS TO TEACH US

Sport, usually our refuge from the **world's harsh realities**, at times becomes the stage where we must confront them head-on.

Kolkata's football fans — the Mohun Bagan, East Bengal, and Mohammedan Sporting loyalists who can't agree on anything — recently found common ground in their grief and anger over the horrific rape and murder of a medical professional at R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital.

Though the Kolkata Derby, scheduled for August 18, had been called off and local authorities had issued prohibitory orders, the supporters took to the streets to show solidarity with the victim and to express their fury at an administration that had dropped the ball. Mohun Bagan captain and India international Subhasish Bose — unlike the typical Indian sports stars with rehearsed lines and glossy endorsements, who steer clear of messy social issues — joined the protest march.

**It was a reminder that sport, usually our refuge from the world's harsh realities, at times becomes the stage where we must confront them head-on.**

For all its trivial disputes and tribal loyalties, sport has this uncanny ability to unite us in ways few things can. It can make us forget, at least for those sweaty 90 minutes, the petty disagreements that usually drive us mad — politics, religion, pineapple on pizza... And in those brief, intense moments, we find a shared purpose, convinced that screaming expletives at a television screen will somehow alter the course of a game.

The redeeming feature of this shared insanity is that it is more than just a distraction. It can be a powerful force for change. Athletes are not just there to sell energy drinks and shoes that cost more than a week's groceries; they get a chance to be heroes, to do something good with their fame.

Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympics, their black-gloved fists raised in defiance — that was not about a medal. It was about making a statement, about

turning sport into a stage for something far more important. The dissent of the fans stopped the greedy European Super League programme hatched by the already-rich football clubs of the continent.

At the Paris Olympics, Kimia Yousofi didn't exactly set the track on fire with her time in the women's 100m, but she was not there running for a personal best. "I've run at the Tokyo Olympics and the Rio Olympics. But in them, I was running for myself. I was running because I loved to run. But now I'm here for Afghanistan's girls," Yousofi told *Sportstar*.

The back of her race bib carried a message: "Education, Sport, our right." A right that the Taliban has cruelly denied.

But Afghan B-girl Talash, representing the Refugee Olympic Team, was disqualified after she competed wearing a "Free Afghan Women" cape during the preliminary rounds of the breaking competition.

Rule 50 of the Olympic Charter states: "**No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas.**" Yet, the irony was not lost on anyone. As Minky Worden from Human Rights Watch said: "Athletes do not surrender their human rights in competition, including to speak out on women's rights. Talash has already faced discrimination and hardship just for being an Afghan woman, and her statement at the Paris Games aligned with the Olympic Charter's recognition of the importance of human rights."

Whether in Kolkata's streets or on an Olympic track, we find that the most powerful messages don't need a scoreboard or a podium to make a mark.

Sometimes they come from a cape, a race bib, or simply by walking together. Sport is not just about winning — it's about standing up for something that matters.

# ORTHO ONE JOINS ABHINAV BINDRA IN CELEBRATING A NEW OLYMPIC MILESTONE!



We are immensely proud of our sports medicine partner, Mr Abhinav A. Bindra, who has been appointed as the 2nd Vice-Chair of the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Athlete Commission and awarded the prestigious Olympic Order by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for his exceptional contribution to sports and his commitment to promoting the Olympic values of excellence, respect and friendship.

**Ortho-One proud to be associated with Abhinav Bindra Targeting Performance(ABTP) for the past 2 years. Ortho-One is the First and Only Abhinav Bindra Sports Performance Enhancement Centre in Tamilnadu**



**Halt Sports Injuries (HSI) : An Ortho One Initiative which helps the athletes from injuries by creating awareness through learning session and medical support at subsidised amount for deserving sports person.**

(Note: Donation are exempt under 80(G) and CSR Income Tax act)



**« It has always been one of my dreams to compete on American soil at a championship meet. So, yes, my eyes are on 2028.**

— Olympics swimming gold medallist Caeleb Dressel »



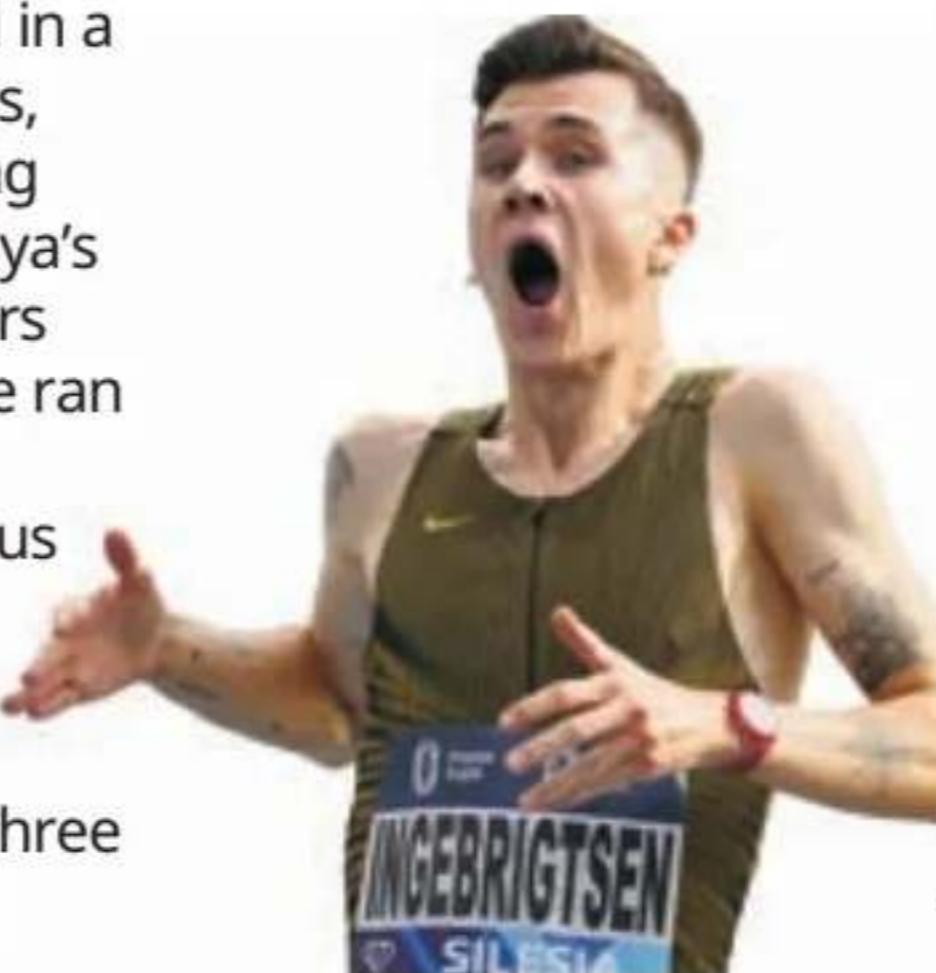
**« I honestly thought we were past colourism in Jamaica, especially as a nation that is filled with black people. I have been getting cyberbullied for weeks, and when it gets talked about, I'm a liar.**

— Jamaica's Junelle Bromfield on being cyber bullied over her relationship with Noah Lyles of the USA »

**28**

Norwegian Jakob Ingebrigtsen shattered the long-standing 3,000-metre world record at the Silesia Diamond League meet by more than three seconds. Ingebrigtsen finished in a time of seven minutes, 17.55 seconds, erasing the record set by Kenya's Daniel Komen 28 years ago, in 1996, when he ran 7:20.67 in Rieti, Italy. Ingebrigtsen's previous best time over the distance came in September last year, when he was nearly three seconds slower than

Komen's mark. The 23-year-old was in shock when he crossed the line and looked at his time. Ingebrigtsen received a cheque for 50,000 USD and posed with it in front of the clock.



**93**

Nick Milioti, the founder of the Cleveland Cavaliers and former owner of the city's MLB franchise, has died. He was 93. Milioti died in his sleep in Rocky River, Ohio, according to a spokesperson for the Cleveland Guardians, one of several teams Milioti once owned. He became a key figure in ownership groups that started purchasing or founding other franchises. In 1970, they brought the NBA to Cleveland.

### WORLD NO.1 TESTS POSITIVE!

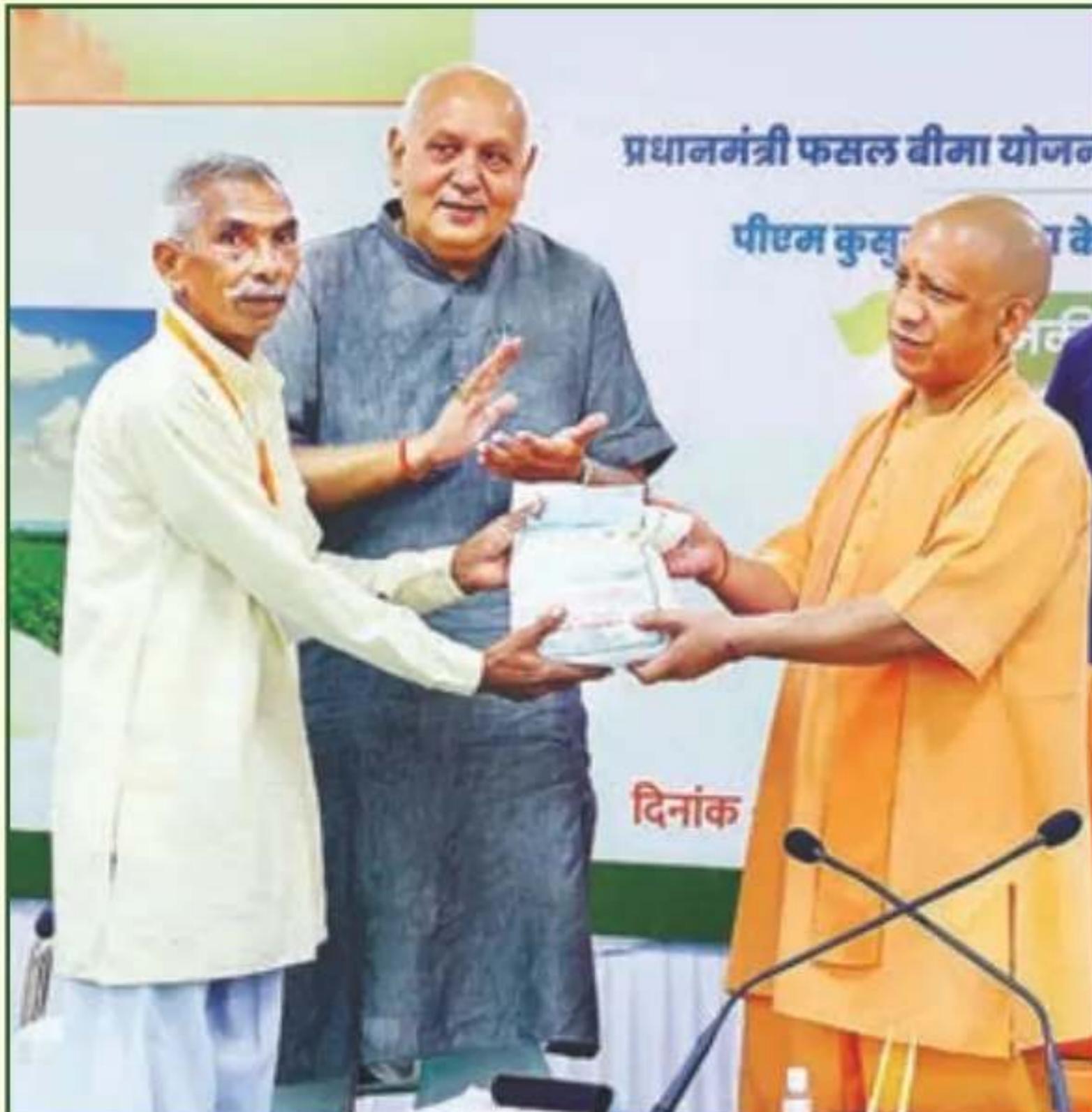


**Top-ranked tennis player Jannik Sinner tested positive twice for a banned anabolic steroid in March** and was stripped of prize money and points earned at a tournament in Indian Wells, but will not be suspended because an independent tribunal said it was not intentional, announced the International Tennis Integrity Agency. GETTY IMAGES



# Prosperous Farmers

## Identity of Uttar Pradesh



The double-engine government in Uttar Pradesh has made several pivotal decisions aimed at agricultural development. Farmers' economic conditions have notably improved through various initiatives such as free electricity for irrigation, the issuance of soil health cards and support for multiple crops. Advancements in irrigation techniques, the adoption of modern technology and an annual increase in the agricultural sector budget have further bolstered this progress. Farmers have benefitted from the government's record procurement of wheat, paddy, pulses and maize, along with the increased minimum support prices. The availability of fertilizers and seeds has been ensured. Farmers have been provided financial security against crop losses due to natural causes through the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana.

- ⦿ More than ₹74,376 crore transferred to 2.62 crore farmers under the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi
- ⦿ Sugarcane farmers received more than ₹2.53 lakh crore as payment for sugarcane prices
- ⦿ 100% rebate on electricity bills for irrigation from private tubewells
- ⦿ Allocation of 63,190 solar pumps to farmers under the PM Kusum Yojana
- ⦿ Compensation of ₹5,104 crore for 61.32 lakh farmers Under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana
- ⦿ Loan redemption of ₹36,000 crore for 86 lakh farmers
- ⦿ 38 irrigation projects have been completed, creating an additional 23.23 lakh hectares of irrigation potential
- ⦿ Under the Mukhyamantri Destitute Cow Participation Scheme, over 2 lakh cows have been given to farmers and animal husbandry families
- ⦿ Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Kisan Samriddhi Yojana implemented
- ⦿ Ban on tubewell connections in dark zone ended
- ⦿ Natural farming has been promoted across 85,710 hectares of land in 49 districts
- ⦿ Establishment of veterinary science colleges in Bhadohi and Gorakhpur
- ⦿ Over ₹41,301 crore has been directly paid to 47,89,493 farmers through government procurement of wheat at the minimum support price
- ⦿ Over ₹74,751 crore has been directly paid to 61,54,251 farmers through government procurement of paddy at the minimum support price
- ⦿ 36% increase in the production of pulses and oilseeds in the last 7 years, has surged by 127 %



**So close, yet so far:** Angad Bisht (left) had the opportunity to become only the fourth Indian fighter to secure a UFC contract, following Bharat Khandare, Anshul Jubli, and Puja Tomar. But it was not meant to be. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

# BISHT BRAVADO IN VAIN

It was yet another **heartbreak for India** at the Ultimate Fighting Championship, as Angad Bisht failed to make the cut after his loss to DongHun Choi.

Nigamanth P

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The UFC contract was just within arm's reach for Angad Bisht. He needed only two more wins to secure a spot for himself in the promotion.

Bisht had the opportunity to become only the fourth Indian fighter to secure a UFC contract, following Bharat Khandare, Anshul Jubli, and Puja Tomar. But it was not

meant to be.

In the semifinals of the Road to UFC, the Dehradun-based grappler faced DongHun Choi of South Korea, who entered the bout with a spotless record of seven wins out of seven fights. Bisht, on the other hand, had seven in 10.

Choi and Bisht battled back and forth for the full 15 minutes in the

second flyweight matchup, with a spot in the final hanging in the balance.

Bisht started exceptionally well, landing a right hand that caused Choi's nose to bleed instantly.

However, the South Korean wore it well and returned the favour in the second round, executing a perfect knockdown that rattled the Indian fighter in the dying moments of the round.

The match remained highly competitive in the final two rounds, leaving the judges to decide the winner.

When the scores were tallied, Choi emerged the winner by split decision, retaining his perfect record and advancing to the finals in Macau later this year.

**Although Bisht's journey ended prematurely, there is still Indian-born Kiru Singh Sahota in contention. He is set to face Choi in the final.**

In the opening round, neither Sahota nor his opponent, Ruel Panales, landed any significant blows. However, in the second round, Sahota began to utilise his significant reach advantage, drawing himself away from Panales and threatening with an armbar at the buzzer. In the third round, Sahota continued to land stronger shots, allowing him to pull away from his Filipino opponent.

The judges unanimously favoured Sahota, who improved to 12-2 with the victory and secured his spot in the final.

However, earlier this year at the start of Road to UFC, Sahota was embroiled in controversy. During the ceremonial photoshoot before the main fight card, he refused to hold the Indian flag due to his alleged affiliation with Khalistan.

His actions sparked massive outrage on social media and even prompted UFC India's official Instagram handle to delete the promotional post featuring him.

UFC India posted pictures of all the other Indian fighters but removed Sahota's photo after the controversy.



## Free Treatment Free Medicines Enhanced Health Facilities

The government of Uttar Pradesh has steadfastly prioritized enhancing medical and health services. PHCs, CHCs and district hospitals have been comprehensively equipped with essential medicines and medical equipments. The consistent deployment of doctors and paramedical staff have been assured. Initiatives such as Ayushman Bharat Yojana, PM Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan scheme and National Immunization Campaign have been successfully implemented. Affordable generic medicines are being provided through Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Kendras. The state is witnessing the progressive development of specialized infrastructure, including the Medical Device Park, Bulk Drug Park and Medtech Park. Medical services are being extended to the public through the Mukhyamantri Jan Arogya Mela. Uttar Pradesh has received appreciation from global institutions for encephalitis prevention and COVID-19 management.



**Medical insurance of ₹5 lakh per family has been provided to 9 crore beneficiaries under the Ayushman Bharat Scheme, more than 5.11 crore Ayushman cards distributed in the state, highest in the country**

- Under One District- One Medical College Mission, 65 medical colleges are operational, 22 medical colleges are under construction
- 7 new medical colleges will begin operations in Bijnor, Bulandshahr, Kanpur Dehat, Kushinagar, Lalitpur, Pilibhit and Sultanpur in the academic session 2024
- AIIMS operational in Gorakhpur and Rae Bareli
- Successful treatment of more than 12.48 crore patients through Mukhyamantri Jan Arogya Mela
- The death rate from AES and JE has been reduced to zero percent as of May 2024
- Financial assistance of more than ₹3200 crore for treatment of people suffering from serious illnesses
- 4,550 MBBS seats in the government sector, 5,600 MBBS seats in the private sector and 350 MBBS seats available under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode
- The Number of MD/ MS/ Diploma seats has increased from 900 to 1,543, a total 1,775 PG seats in private sector

- Increase of 7,000 seats in Nursing and 2000 seats in Paramedical
- Establishment of Atal Bihari Vajpayee Medical University in Lucknow and Mahayogi Guru Gorakhnath AYUSH University in Gorakhpur
- Construction of Government Ayurvedic College in Ayodhya
- Establishment of Government Homeopathic Medical College in Varanasi
- Nursing/Paramedical courses in 300 institutions under Mission Niramaya
- Health ATMs are being installed in all CHCs and PHCs
- Establishment of 22,555 Arogya Mandir
- Free dialysis facility in all districts

### Ambulance Service

2,270 ambulances  
operational under 102  
170 mobile medical  
units operational

2,200 ambulances  
operational under 108  
250 ALS ambulance  
operational



# ONE SMALL CENTIMETRE FOR MAN, A GIANT LEAP FOR DUPLANTIS

POLE-VAULTER ARMAND DUPLANTIS IS SO FAR AHEAD OF THE REST OF THE FIELD, HE CAN CONTINUE TO BREAK THE WORLD RECORD ONE CENTIMETRE AT A TIME. BUT JUST HOW FAR CAN HE GO?

Jonathan Selvaraj

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No medals are awarded at the Diamond League competition in track-and-field, but a day before the Silesia Diamond League competition in August, organisers announced an award for the most valuable athlete of the meet, as judged by the World Athletics points system. At the customary pre-competition press conference, they displayed a sparkling 14-carat gold diamond-encrusted 'Champion Ring' worth \$10,000, along with a cheque for the same amount.

On a sweltering August afternoon at the Silesian stadium the next day, it had seemed that that ring was going to be firmly on the finger of Jakob Ingebrigtsen. The Norwegian shattered one of the longest-standing track world records, clocking a staggering 7:17.55 for the 3000m, taking more than three seconds off the mark of

7:20.67 set by Kenya's Daniel Komen in 1996. It was one of the most remarkable moments in track and field history.

But it wasn't the most remarkable event of that day. Because Armand Duplantis was also competing.

He had already started the men's pole vault competition while Ingebrigtsen was running. Ten other athletes were competing. By the time he had casually attempted his second jump — to seal his place in the top three, his competitors had gone through 64 of their own. The next three made another 13 jumps, while Duplantis went on top with a single clearance at six metres. Two jumpers cleared six metres — the first time in history that three pole vaulters have



crossed six metres in a single competition. But while Sam Kendricks and Emmanouil Karalis have done all they could, Duplantis is just getting started. From here on, his competition is with himself. Almost casually, Duplantis set the bar up at 6.26 metres — 1 centimetre higher than the world record he himself had set less than a month before at the Paris Olympics.

At the Stade de Paris, amidst the ecstatic cheers of 40,000 spectators and the applause of his competitors, Duplantis had cleared the height. After landing on the mat, he sprinted off to celebrate with family and friends. Earlier, he had marked his Olympic Record achievement with a finger-pistol salute for the cameras, inspired by Turkish shooter and Paris Olympics silver medallist Yusuf Dikec.

In Silesia, Duplantis follows a nearly identical routine. He charges down the runway with incredible speed, holding his pole high above his head to maximize the energy needed to bend the fibreglass instrument. His plant is near perfect, transferring the energy efficiently into his swing. Without hesitation, he inverts himself completely until he is almost vertical above the ground. Each step gains him crucial inches, and as he turns his body at the peak of the movement, he ensures he retains every bit of height.

When he lands on the mat, it seems Duplantis doesn't really know how to celebrate the new world record. He high-fives the mascot, then runs past a gaggle of photographers before lying down on the track.

**Peerless:** When Armand Duplantis enters an event now, his only real competition is with himself. What else can you expect from the man who has broken the world record 10 times over the last four years. REUTERS

When you are Duplantis, though, this makes sense. Just how many different celebrations can you come up with, even if for a new world record?

Duplantis should probably practise a few options for the future. When he enters an event now, his only real competition is with himself. What else can you expect from the man who has broken the world record 10 times over the last four years.

In fact, Duplantis is so good at his

event that it actually pays him not to give his 100 per cent every time he competes. **Track-and-field athletes receive an additional bonus each time they break the world record.** The caveat is that you only get the prize money one time at the meet you broke it at. So, each meet, Duplantis raises the bar just one tiny centimetre. And each meet, he earns another bonus. That's why when you scroll the 'All Time Top Lists' section of the men's pole vault event on the World Athletics statistics page, you'd have to scroll all the way to No. 11 to see someone not named Armand Duplantis.

That level of dominance that's almost unheard of in track-and-field. The last athlete to have anything similar was Ukrainian great Sergey Bubka, who broke the pole vault record 35 times. But Bubka topped off at 6.15 metres. Duplantis has equalled or gone past that mark 13 times already. **Indeed, of the top 101 jumps of all time in the pole vault event (6.02 m and above), Duplantis (6.26) has 44 of those; everyone else combined has 57.**

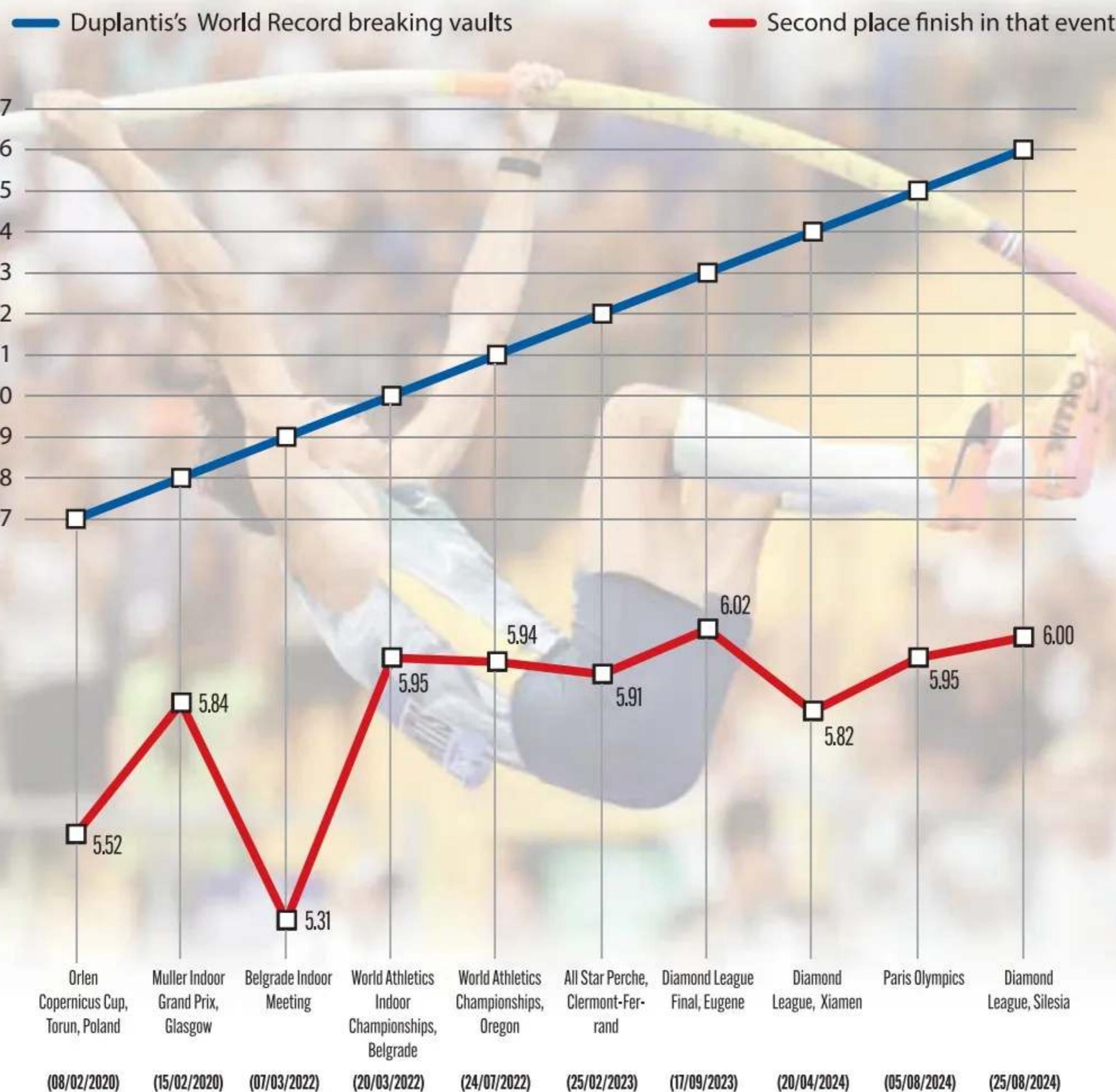
Duplantis seems like even more of a statistical anomaly when you compare his world record to the next best in his sport. The next highest

vaulter after Duplantis is France's Renaud Lavillenie, who jumped 6.16m in 2014. So, Duplantis' record is 1.623% better than the next best vaulter ever. For perspective, Usain Bolt's world record in the 100m is 1.15% better than number two, Tyson Gay. Ingebrigtsen, who smashed the 20-year-old world record in the 3000m in Silesia, is 0.71 per cent faster than the next best runner over the same distance.

So what makes Duplantis so good?

He's that rare combination of nature and nurture. Most athletes come into the pole vault — perhaps one of the most technically

## BAR NO BAR



Compiled by: Pranay Rajiv

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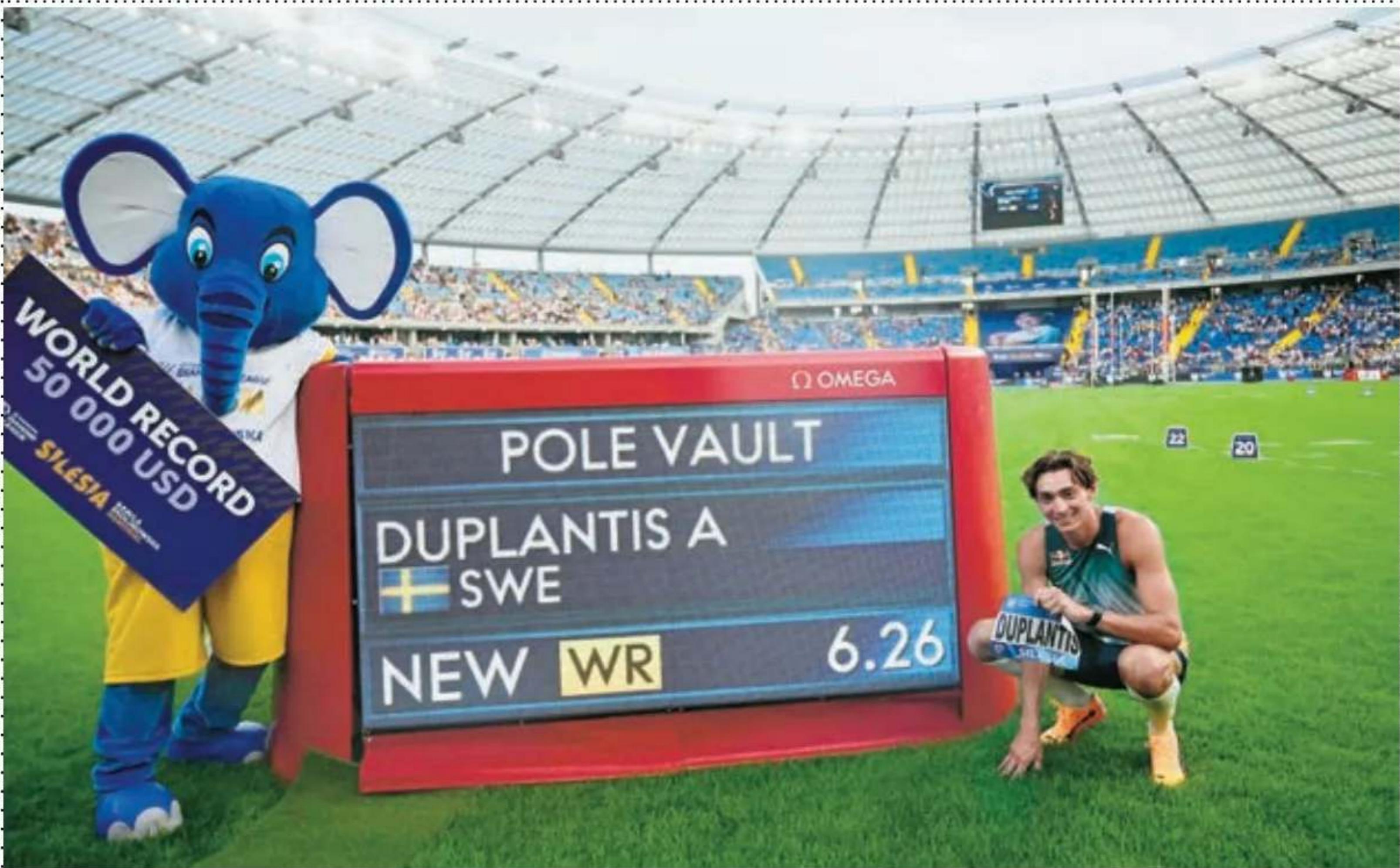


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**Smashing records:** Armand 'Mondo' Duplantis cleared a height of 6.26 metres at the Silesia Diamond League meet to break the pole vault world record again. AFP

challenging events in track-and-field — relatively late in their development. That isn't true for Duplantis. The child of an elite jumper (Greg Duplantis had a PB of 5.80m) and an international heptathlete — Mondo — or Armand as he was originally named has been practising on the home-built pole vault pit in his family backyard in South Louisiana since the time he was six. Even though he's just 24, he already has the level of technical experience of someone many years older.

Duplantis was someone who was almost destined to be a pole vaulter. Speaking to *Athletics Weekly*, Scott Simpson, a former Olympic medal-winning coach, spoke of the jumper's almost manic obsession with the sport. "I've heard them (Mondo's parents) tell stories about having to go to his room and drag him off YouTube at midnight when

he was watching pole vault videos! He has had an obsession with it and that competitiveness, irrespective of what he's doing. That creates a mindset that is very difficult to beat. When he doesn't do as well as he would like, you can see that frustration in him, which is fascinating to watch," Simpson says.

And then there are the technical bits. At the Paris Olympics, American Sam Kendricks, who took silver in the pole vault, said Duplantis "had the hand of God behind him." He was referring to Duplantis's incredible speed on the runway, which allows him to put in incredible energy to bend the pole.

Kendricks isn't just speaking in hyperbole. As a schoolboy, Duplantis had a 100m personal best of 10.54 seconds, and in a couple of weeks he will be taking on 400m hurdles Olympic gold medallist Karsten Warholm in an exhibition 100m race.

"Mondo's speed on the runway is almost unprecedented," Simpson told *Athletics Weekly*. "The speed that he puts into the takeoff at the end of the approach run is higher than we have seen from anybody else previously. The more speed you

have, the higher the amount of energy you have available to you. Pole vault is an energy storage game. You store energy in the pole as it bends, and the more energy you can store in that pole, the more energy there is that can be returned to you to propel you into the air at the end of the jump," he said.

"In addition, the guys that have had good speed at takeoff typically don't complement it with on-pole technique, which is as good as the slower guys, but Mondo manages to do both. He puts a lot of speed through the take-off point but also has incredible on-pole abilities for the speed at which everything is happening — something that is quite unique to him. He is also so consistent. He has this huge toolbox that he has built up from doing pole vault from such a young age, which enables him to produce a really consistent output. Regardless of whether there's wind, rain, high pressure, a competitive environment, or him jumping on his own, it doesn't seem to matter because he still produces this incredible output and leaves him head and shoulders above everyone else," Simpson says.

**Saluting 78<sup>th</sup>**  
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**Independent India's Growth and Glory**



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**Owning the moment:** Duplantis celebrated for the cameras with a finger-pistol salute, inspired by Turkish shooter and Paris Olympics silver medallist Yusuf Dikec. REUTERS

For now, Duplantis is so far ahead of the rest of the field, he can continue to break the world record one centimetre at a time. But just how far can he go? Is the sky really the limit for him?

As easy as he makes it seem, the fact is that the higher Duplantis goes, the harder it gets to get even that one centimetre of height. Duplantis reflects on its scale: "It's so marginal, but makes more of a difference than you can imagine," he says. "Even if it's one centimetre, it gets to a certain point where you hit it and it suddenly becomes so much more difficult."

The fact that he's literally in a league of his own means Duplantis ends up having to compete in two separate competitions — having to beat everyone else first, then getting to target the world record. Whereas others might build up from their

competition-winning height to the world record, Duplantis has no option but to go straight for it. This completely flips the physical and mental demands. Just like in Silesia, he has to make a couple of jumps while the rest of the field does their things, and then all of a sudden, he will have to be prepared to jump higher in quick succession.

But as his jumps in Silesia and in Paris earlier this year have shown, there's still a lot of height left in him. At both competitions, Duplantis failed his first attempt at the world record, not because he didn't clear the height but because he landed on them on the way down. When he did clear the height successfully, there were

several inches between his chest and the bar on the downward journey.

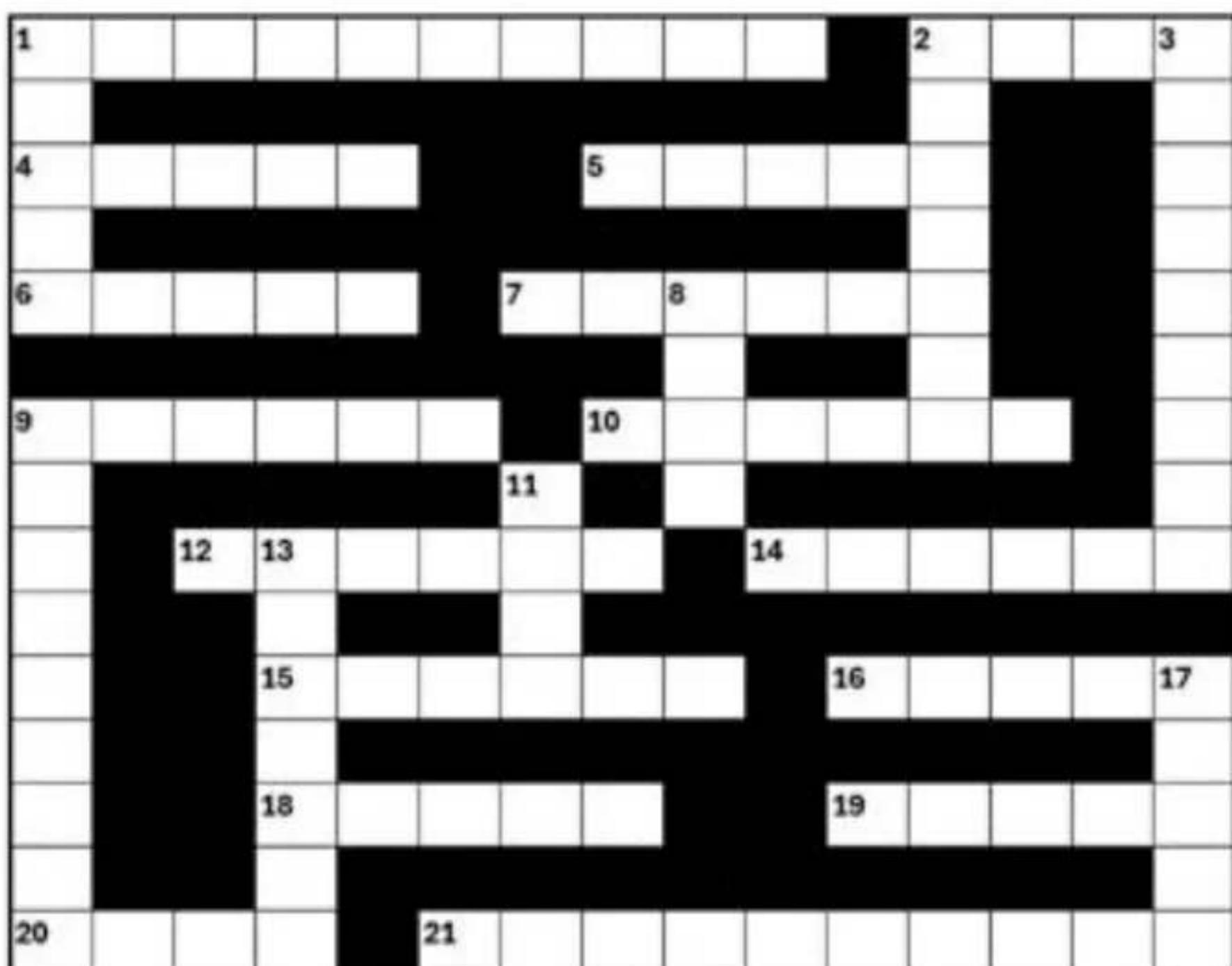
"I don't think he's at his peak right now. He's only 24, and pole vaulters typically peak in their late 20s to early 30s," coach and father Greg told *Red Bull.com*. "He's still getting stronger, and I think he's going to be better in four years than he is now. He's already jumping higher than anyone ever has, and to predict how high he can jump is crazy. This probably does sound crazy, but I think he can get close to 6.40 m. If not 6.40m. But it will require a lot of work."

That mark may be several years into the future. There are going to be a lot of shiny rings and shinier medals for Duplantis to collect until then.



**As easy as he makes it seem, the fact is that the higher Duplantis goes, the harder it gets to get even that one centimetre of height.**

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## PARIS OLYMPICS 2024 SPECIAL

**ACROSS**

- 1 Who won the most number of medals at this Olympics? (5,5)
- 2 Who won most gold medals in this edition? (4)
- 4 Which world number one ranked doubles player won the tennis gold for men's doubles? (5)
- 5 Identify this legendary French judoka who lit the Olympic cauldron? (5)
- 6 Who was the Chef de mission of the Indian contingent? (5)
- 9 Which country won the gold medal in men's long jump in which India's Jeswin Aldrin finished 26th? (6)
- 10 & Down 13 Who won an individual gold medal for Denmark? (6,7)
- 14 Who won the gold in the decathlon event? (6)
- 16 Who won three gold medals in women's gymnastics, including the individual all-around event? (5)
- 18 Who became the first Indian

athlete to qualify for the final of the men's 3000 metres steeplechase? (5)

- 19 Identify this second seeded American tennis player who lost in the pre-quarterfinals to the eventual runner-up in the women's singles? (5)

- 20 Who won a bronze medal in the men's freestyle 57kg wrestling event? (4)

- 21 Who became the first Indian shuttler to enter the semifinals in Olympic history? (7,3)

**DOWN**

- 1 & Across 7 Who won the gold medal in women's singles event in tennis? (5,6)
- 2 Who won a bronze medal for Italy in the men's singles event in tennis? (7)
- 3 Who won the gold medal in the 100m athletics for men? (4,5)
- 8 Who scored goals for India in hockey against both Belgium and Australia? (4)
- 9 Identify this country in Central

America which won its first-ever gold medal in Olympics history — a gold in the women's trap event in shooting? (9)

- 11 & Across 15 Who completed the career Golden Slam in women's doubles by winning gold? (4,6)

- 17 & Across 12 By winning the marathon event, who became the only woman in Olympics history to win gold in 5,000 metres, 10,000 metres and marathon races? (5,6)



PUMA

CHOPRA

DOHA



LISTEN TO OUR  
REVIEW OF THE  
OLYMPICS

# CHASING MOUNT 90

Neeraj Chopra vows to continue his pursuit of the **elusive 90m mark**, as he prepares to overcome the recurring groin injury that has become an irritable thorn in the flesh for the Olympic champion.

**Abhishek Saini**

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**N**eeraj Chopra was assured of a podium finish by the time he loaded his sixth and final attempt at the Lausanne Diamond League. However, there was still something far greater at stake.

As the javelin floated over the Stade Olympique de la Pontaise, Neeraj was already indulging in his preferred routine. With his back turned to the flying neon-coloured shaft and arms spread skyward in an embrace, Neeraj was convinced he had done it. This celebration has become a common fixture during all his landmark throws, including at the Tokyo Olympics and the Budapest

**Let it be:** "I have left it to the Almighty. Just work hard, prepare, and give it your best; after that, whatever has to happen will happen. The 90-metre target has been talked about so much now that I have decided to let it be," Neeraj said. GETTY IMAGES

World Championships.

The javelin landed on the 89.49m mark, just 51 centimeters shy of 90 metres. Even though Neeraj actually needed 67 centimeters more to take first place from Anderson Peters, those 51 centimeters would have sufficed for him.

"I have left it to the Almighty. Just work hard, prepare, and give it your best; after that, whatever has to happen will happen. The 90-metre target has been talked about so much now that I have decided to let it be," Neeraj said.

**Neeraj is India's only Olympic medallist in athletics. He is the reigning world and Asian champion.** The Diamond League crown in 2022 meant his trophy cabinet was unblemished. The 90m throw is merely a collector's item at this point. But the heart wants what it wants, and Neeraj, too, is human after all. While he may downplay the need to achieve the elusive 90m throw, Neeraj is still fighting a recurring groin injury as he tries to prolong his season and take a shot at it.

"The injury is fine. It usually gets worse after competition, but this time Ishan [Marwaha] bhai treated me in Paris. I would like to thank him. The final treatment will be after the season ends. There is just one month left. I will try to take care of it as much as possible and consult the doctors later," Neeraj said.

**Such is Neeraj's artistry that a layman fails to notice the physical handicap he has been operating with.** Such are his ridiculously high standards that people expect him to deliver nonetheless. In fact, two of his three personal best attempts, including the 89.45m throw at the Paris Olympics, were made while enduring the discomfort of his injury.

"I did not think for a second that I could not go that far [Arshad Nadeem's throw of 92.97 metres]. It is not too difficult to get those two or three extra metres if you get the angle of release right. Even Arshad had a best of 90.18 before this, mine was 89.94. He got those two metres all of a sudden, and it wasn't that I couldn't. Again, with the groin injury,



I could not push myself how I wanted to. The leg work on the runway was not the best. To make up for that, I tried to put more effort into the throw but could not get it right. I had a positive mindset at that particular point in time, so I got a good throw. Then again, the physical aspect pulled me back," Neeraj said after his Paris Olympics silver.

Terseus Liebenberg, a javelin throw coach and biomechanics expert based in Potchefstroom, South Africa, explained how a groin injury hampers the mechanics of javelin throwing.

"It's quite common for javelin throwers to sustain groin injuries. There's tremendous force placed on the body. It happens in two phases — on the penultimate stride when you are entering the final phase of the run-up, and during the throw. The lower body then moves the upper body, and you get a tremendous stretch on the groin," Liebenberg said.

Neeraj himself admitted that a weak left leg results in his body collapsing to the left side, thereby affecting the trajectory or line of the throw. "My attempts were going inwards rather than straight in Paris. The arm speed was fine, but the line could have made a difference of a couple of metres had it gone straighter," Neeraj said.

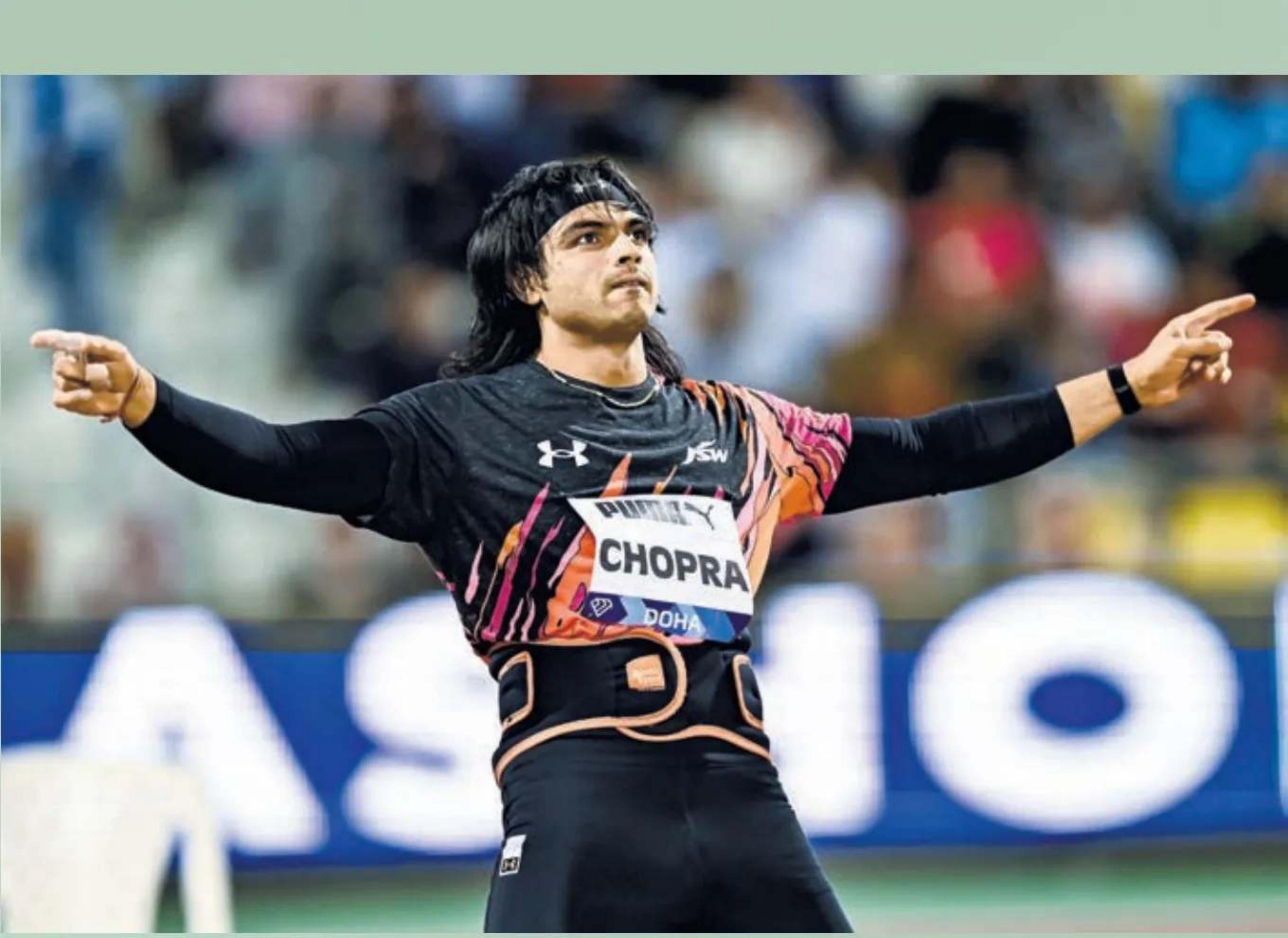
Neeraj is no stranger to groin issues. He was recommended surgery in 2023 before the World Championships in Eugene. In his pursuit of pushing his limits and nudging closer to greatness, he opted for a conservative approach rather than surgery.

But this season, his injury has restricted him to just five competitions, making going under the knife the only plausible permanent solution.

"I wanted to get that gold [at Worlds]; that was the only missing

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**Left is not right:** Neeraj has admitted that a weak left leg results in his body collapsing to the left side, thereby affecting the trajectory or line of the throw. GETTY IMAGES



GETTY IMAGES

piece. The few sessions before the pain surfaced had been good. The doctors said that surgery is the only way to cure this.

"Had I gone for surgery, I would have been out of that World Championship and the remaining year. Plus, the recovery time for the Olympics would have been limited. Even in the off-season, we did not have enough time to recover and come back for the Olympics," Neeraj said.

With the Olympics now out of the way, and him having the distinction of being India's first back-to-back Olympic medallist in athletics, Neeraj can focus on his journey to return to full fitness.

He does not have to look far to see athletes who have recovered and only gone one better after undergoing surgery. His close friend and rival, Arshad, who won gold at the Paris Games with an Olympic

record throw, underwent surgical intervention to treat his knee in 2023. Anderson Peters, too, underwent an operation for a knee ailment in 2019 and is now back among the upper echelons.

The Pakistani national record holder had sought the tutelage of Liebenberg to get back in shape with minor adjustments to his technique.

"Arshad had some knee problems and then also some elbow problems. He was here for five weeks. We were doing technique work and rehabilitation, making the whole body strong. It's about strengthening the whole body. Then, it's also about working around the injury.

"We were working with a physiotherapist and in consultation with Dr. Bajwa, his physician, who would always explain exactly what he'd like to do. We would just work around the injury," Liebenberg said.

Liebenberg added that with Dr. Klaus Bartonietz and Ishan Marwaha, Neeraj has a team that could make him fire on all cylinders seamlessly.

"I consider myself lucky to be with such a team. I have been with him [Klaus] since 2019. We have a good relationship; we plan things together. After Paris, we mainly discussed the lack of throwing due to the injury. He also cannot work too much on this if I do not throw," Neeraj said.

If this version of Neeraj, the one that depends largely on his upper body strength, can nearly crack 90 metres, then surely the one at the peak of his powers can sail past the mark with ease.

*"Bohot kuch hai andar, karenge agar shareer ne saath diya,"* Neeraj quipped after relinquishing his Olympic crown. He knows this, and the world might get a glimpse of it soon.



# Hung(a)ry for domination and gold!

India, after winning bronze medals in 2014 and 2022, is **eyeing its first gold medal** in an on-the-board tournament.



**Mayank**

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**C**hess is an individual sport by nature, but the excitement and dynamics of playing it in a team format elevate the Olympiad to a unique and special status. This year, the world's biggest multi-national chess tournament returns to Budapest for the first time since 1926, with the 45th Chess Olympiad set to take place in Hungary from September 10 to 23.

A total of 193 teams in the Open section and 181 in the Women's will

battle it out over 11 rounds of the Swiss format for a chance at a podium finish. India, which hosted the previous edition, bagged bronze medals in both sections and will be looking to build on that success.

With an average rating of 2755, India enters the open section as the second-seeded team, just behind the USA (2758). It boasts a supremely talented lineup, including world championship challenger D. Gukesh, world No. 4 Arjun Erigaisi, and world No. 12 R. Praggnanandhaa. They are well supported by the experienced shoulders of Vidit Gujrathi and Pentala Harikrishna, making India one of the strongest contenders.

**Bragging rights:** D. Gukesh will meet defending champion, China's Ding Liren, in a 14-game series for the world crown from November 20 to December 15. LENNARTOOTES

Having secured bronze medals in 2014 and 2022, India will pin its hope on this dynamic team to clinch its first gold medal at an on-the-board tournament. India did share a gold medal with Russia at the 2020 Olympiad, albeit in a COVID-19-induced online event.

This tournament also serves as a crucial preparation ground for Gukesh, who is set to challenge China's Ding Liren for the world championship title in less than three months.

Gukesh recently made history by becoming the youngest-ever World Championship challenger, securing his spot by winning the Candidates' tournament in Toronto earlier this year.

Although Praggnanandhaa finished fifth at the Candidates', he went on to beat World No. 1 Magnus Carlsen for the first time in over-the-board en route to a podium finish at the prestigious Norway Chess.

However, it's Arjun who has truly stolen the spotlight. Dominating open events, Arjun's meteoric rise has earned him the title of India's new No. 1, bringing him tantalisingly close to the coveted 2800 Elo rating mark.

On the other hand, the last two boards — Vidit and Harikrishna — could pose a potential vulnerability for India at the Olympiad due to their recent inactivity. Vidit took an extended break following a disappointing Candidates' campaign, while Harikrishna, who has slipped to India's No. 7, has only participated in a handful of events, resulting in a significant drop in his rating, now well below 2700, placing him behind Aravindh and Chithambaram.

To support the Indian team's preparation, the All India Chess Federation (AICF) has enlisted Srinath Narayanan, known for his calm demeanour and strong



**Defending the crown:** The young Uzbekistan men's team stunned the favourites — the USA, China, and India — to claim the title at the last Chess Olympiad in Mahabalipuram. STEV BONHAGE

management skills. Srinath, who was the non-playing captain in the last Olympiad and the Asian Games in Hangzhou, will continue in the same role for the men's team.

Gukesh, Erigaisi, and Praggnanandhaa — three of India's top chess talents — have previously teamed up in various events and are expected to replicate their individual brilliance as they come together once more.

On the other hand, the aura of invincibility surrounding the heavyweight USA team has faded

somewhat in the absence of world No. 2 Hikaru Nakamura, who has opted to skip the multi-nation tournament for the second consecutive time. However, the USA still boasts two of the world's strongest chess players — Fabiano Caruana and Wesley So. Alongside experienced Levon Aronian and Leinier Dominguez Perez, the top-seeded USA remains a title favourite.

India should also keep a close eye on the Chinese team, led by Wei Yi. The defending world champion,

Ding, and Yu Yangyi form a powerful trio, making China a strong contender for a podium finish and possibly even a top-two spot, with an average rating of 2726.

While the board order has yet to be finalised, a potential Ding vs. Gukesh clash is likely to be a thrilling preview of their upcoming world championship match in November and December.

However, the true challenge may come from the defending champion, Uzbekistan. This young and extraordinarily talented team stunned the favourites — the USA, China, and India — to claim the title in Mahabalipuram. Despite being one of the youngest squads, with four players born after 2002, the Uzbeks are fully capable of defending their crown. With rising stars like Nodirbek Abdusattorov, Javokhir Sindarov, and Nodirbek Yakubboev, their team is reminiscent of the Indian setup.

In a bid to defend its crown, Uzbekistan roped in former world champion, Russia's master tactician Vladimir Kramnik as the coach. Kramnik will also be the non-participating captain.

While the wait for an Olympiad medal from Magnus Carlsen (Norway) and Anish Giri (Netherlands) might persist given their teams' past performances, host Hungary and Iran could emerge as dark horses this time around.

Hungary, with Richard Rapport



## Top five seeds in the Open section

**1. United States (2758) Captain:** John Donaldson  
Fabiano Caruana (2796); Wesley So (2757); Leinier Dominguez Perez (2748); Levon Aronian (2729); Ray Robson (2700)

**2. India (2755) Captain:** Srinath Narayanan  
Arjun Erigaisi (2778); D. Gukesh (2763); R. Praggnanandhaa (2757); Vidit Santosh Gujrathi (2720); Pentala Harikrishna (2695)

**3. China (2729) Captain:** Yang Wen  
Wei Yi (2755); Ding Liren (2745); Yu Yangyi (2720); Bu Xiangzhi (2697); Wang Yue (2652)

**4. Uzbekistan (2684) Captain:** Vladimir Kramnik  
Nodirbek Abdusattorov (2769); Javokhir Sindarov (2674); Nodirbek Yakubboev (2648); Shamsiddin Vokhidov (2643); Jakhongir Vakhidov (2571)

**5. Netherlands (2679) Captain:** Jan Smeets  
Anish Giri (2745); Jorden Van Foreest (2671); Max Warmerdam (2663); Erwin L'ami (2635); Benjamin Bok (2587)



## Top five seeds in the Women's section

### 1. Georgia (2459) Captain:

Vladimir B Tukmakov  
Nana Dzagnidze (2505); Nino Batsiashvili (2451); Lela Javakhishvili (2451); Bella Khotenashvili (2427); Salome Melia (2325)

### 2. India (2458) Captain: Abhijit Kunte

Harika Dronavalli (2491); R. Vaishali (2488); Divya Deshmukh (2464); Vantika Agrawal (2390); Tania Sachdev (2386)

### 3. Poland (2416) Captain:

Marcin Dziuba  
Alina Kashlinskaya (2474); Monika Socko (2419); Aleksandra Maltsevskaya (2404); Oliwia Kiolbasa (2367); Alicja Sliwicka (2357)

### 4. China (2416) Captain: Yang Shen

Zhu Jiner (2469); Miaoyi Lu (2449); Yuxin Song (2383); Qi Guo (2362); Shiqun Ni (2352)

### 5. Azerbaijan (2414) Captain:

Mihail Shereshevsky  
Gunay Mammadzada (2441); Govhar Beydullayeva (2412); Khanim Balajayeva (2404); Ulviyya Fataliyeva (2399); Gulnar Mammadova (2341)

returning to his homeland just two years after switching to Romania and the availability of veteran Peter Leko, is well-equipped to deliver some surprises. Meanwhile, Iran, led by Parham Maghsoodloo and backed by skilled GMs Amin Tabatabaei and Bardiyar Daneshvar, has a team that could be very challenging to face.

India will field an equally strong lineup in the women's section, led by Dronavalli Harika, in the absence of Koneru Humpy, who opted out of



the tournament due to a packed schedule. As the second-seed team behind Georgia, India is well-positioned to make a strong impact. Abhijit Kunte will act as the non-playing captain for the women's team.

Newly minted GM R. Vaishali, who had an impressive outing at the Candidates', will be joining forces with Divya Deshmukh, the reigning World Junior Champion, along with Vantika Agrawal and Tania Sachdev.

Tania's return to competitive chess after a long hiatus will see her take up the fifth board. With Harika providing stability at the top and the dynamic duo of Vaishali and Divya adding flair, this Indian team brings a perfect mix of strength and flamboyance to the tournament.

The top-seeded Georgian team, rated at 2459, is spearheaded by Nana Dzagnidze, the only player in the world's top 10 competing in the women's section. She is supported by Nino Batsiashvili, Lela Javakhishvili, Bella Khotenashvili, and Salome Melia, making Georgia the rating favourite.

Meanwhile, third-seed Poland, led by Alina Kashlinskaya, and fifth-seed Azerbaijan will fancy their chances ahead of the usually heavyweight contenders Ukraine and China.

Defending champion Ukraine and the Chinese team have relatively inexperienced squads this time.

Sixth-seed Ukraine's title defence

**Spearheading the challenge:** India's women's team, led by Dronavalli Harika (in pic), will be without Koneru Humpy, who chose to skip the tournament due to a busy schedule.

ANASTASIA KOROLKOVA

seems at risk following the withdrawal of the Muzychuk sisters (Anna and Mariya). Meanwhile, China, despite having the top four women's players — GMs Hou Yifan, Ju Wenjun, Lei Tingjie, and Tan Zhongyi — will be without all of them in the Olympiad, significantly weakening its challenge.

While Yifan has taken semi-retirement (she plays online) from competitive chess since 2018, Wenjun and Zhongyi will give the Olympiad a miss as they prepare for the women's world championship title.

The Chinese team is now led by GM Zhu Jiner, alongside 14-year-old national champion WGM Lu Miaoyi, making the path to gold potentially easier for the Indian team.

Liechtenstein, Guernsey, Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Kitts and Nevis, the US Virgin Islands, St. Lucia, Nauru, and the Cayman Islands will make their debuts in the women's section in Budapest, while there will also be a refugee team.

The first round will start at 11:30 a.m. IST on September 11.

# WOMEN OUTSHINE MEN ON THE MAT, PROVIDE GLIMPSE INTO FUTURE

The WFI **needs to support** promising women wrestlers and focus more on men's freestyle wrestling to enhance the country's chances of winning medals in future Olympic Games.

Y.B. Sarangi

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Indian women wrestlers continued their impressive ascent by breaking Japan's dominance and clinching the team title at the Princess Sumaya Bint al-Hasan Arena in the World Under-17 Championships in Amman, Jordan, for the first time.

With a stellar performance, the Indian team secured five gold, one silver, and two bronze medals, amassing 185 points — 39 points ahead of Japan and 106 ahead of Kazakhstan. This remarkable achievement signals a promising future for Indian women's wrestling, especially as the country looks forward to the upcoming Olympics.

**Notably, this victory follows India's maiden triumph in the World U-20 Championships in Amman the previous year.**

India, which has consistently finished in the top five of the World

U-17 women's wrestling event over the past five years, had previously secured second place behind the USA in 2021 (when Japan did not participate) and Japan in 2022.

The Indian men, however, had a less successful tournament. Two Greco-Roman wrestlers won bronze medals, while the freestyle wrestlers, who are traditionally stronger in the country, returned empty-handed from Amman.

In the women's categories, Aditi Kumari (43kg), Neha Sangwan (57kg), Pulkit Kandola (65kg), Kajal (69kg), and Mansi Lather (73kg) each won gold medals. Shruti Patil (46kg) earned a silver medal, and Bala Raj (40kg) and Muskan (53kg) secured bronze medals.

Hailing from Daulatabad, 16-year-old Aditi, an Asian U-15 silver medallist in the 46kg category last year, elevated her performance to

compete successfully in a higher age group.

**Under the guidance of her father, Swapna Janghu, a former state-level wrestler, and coach Pradeep Malik, Aditi showcased her dominance with commanding victories, including a notable quarterfinal win against Egyptian Mareim Ahmed.**

Neha, a former Asian U-15 and U-17 champion who grew up in a wrestling family, surpassed her bronze medal finish in 2023. She defeated Japanese wrestler So Tsutsui 10-0 in the final through technical superiority, just days after

**Dominance personified:** India won 10 medals, including five gold medals, at the 2024 U-17 World Wrestling Championships, with women claiming eight of the 10.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

# UNITED WORLD WRESTLING

WRESTLING  
U17 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS  
*Alia Wali Gazi ka jamaal palki algha*

UNITED  
WREST



welcoming her village mate and idol, Vinesh Phogat, following her return from the Paris Olympics.

Pulkit Kandola, a Jind native and Asian silver medallist in 2022, displayed impressive fitness and skill, scoring 36 points while conceding just six in five bouts. Returning to international competition after a two-year recovery from knee surgery, Pulkit's success is a testament to her father's support and belief in her potential on the global stage.

Kajal, from Lath village in Sonipat district, drew inspiration from her wrestler relative, Krishan. An Asian U-15 champion in 2022 and an U-17 champion the following year, Kajal overcame formidable opponents, including Ulyana Lapanik of Russia, Ako Uchiyama of Japan, and Oleksandra Rybak of Ukraine [in the final], to achieve victory.

Mansi, the daughter of a wrestling couple, embraced the sport naturally at her family's *akhara* in Jind. She quickly distinguished herself, securing gold medals at national competitions before becoming the Asian champion in the 69kg category and the U-17 World champion in her breakthrough season this year.

Known for her aggressive style, Mansi pinned three of her opponents and defeated the gold and silver medallists from the previous year to claim the title with impressive flair.

"At any level, a World Championships is always tough. Some of our girls defeated accomplished wrestlers at this level. For the next two Olympics, we have a good batch of women wrestlers who can go on to qualify in all weight categories and do well," said coach Jai Bhagwan, who accompanied the wrestlers.

Asked about his daughter Mansi, Jai said, "Her biggest strength is her confidence. I was apprehensive ahead of her bout against the world champion, but she performed much better than I expected and dominated. She has won two school national golds, one national gold, an Asian gold, and a Worlds gold in about a year's time."



**Filled with pride:** Mansi Lather celebrating her 73kg title win with father, Jai Bhagwan. Mansi was leading 5-0 in her final against Hanna Pirskaya before pinning her opponent to win by fall. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Jai also praised Bala, Shrutiika and Muskan (a multiple World U-17 medallist). "The girls who won silver and bronze are equally good, and they could have landed gold as well. In sports, sometimes it is not your day. They are all at the same level."

Shilpi, a former wrestler making her debut as a coach on an international assignment, mentioned that the coaching staff worked hard to motivate the girls. "We worked on keeping the wrestlers relaxed and motivated and keeping them insulated from any negative thoughts.

They were disciplined, dedicated and focused. Their confidence level

was up. Someone like Mansi has conceded just two points in all her bouts, while Neha defeated her Japanese opponent 10-0," said Shilpi, the wife of former World Championships bronze medallist Narsingh Yadav.

"Their resilience was something. Whenever anyone conceded a point, we asked her to be relaxed and fight back at the right time. Our girls had the stamina, so instead of being unnecessarily aggressive, they needed to focus and attack at the right time.

"Even when they were cutting weight prior to their bouts, we made sure that they should not feel it was



**Trendsetters:** All gold medal winners at the World Under-17 Championships, including five Indian wrestlers. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

a burden. They needed to be in a positive frame of mind."

Fifteen-year-old Sainath Pardhi (51kg), fifth in the Asian U-15 championships, bounced back to take a bronze.

Ronak Dahiya (110kg), a Chhatrasal Stadium product like his father and international referee Jaibir, secured a bronze medal in 110kg Greco-Roman after taking a silver last year.

"Ronak trains in both freestyle and Greco-Roman and has medalled in both in the same National events. His competence in Greco Roman will help him improve his gripping and power.

But he will switch to freestyle at the senior level as it is more popular in India," said Jaibir.

Given India's sole bronze medal by Aman Sehrawat in the 57kg freestyle category at the Paris Olympics and the performance of U-17 wrestlers in Amman, the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) should adopt a proactive approach. It needs to support promising women wrestlers and focus more on men's freestyle wrestling to enhance the country's chances of winning medals in future Olympic Games.



**Podium finish:** India's Greco-Roman wrestler Ronak Dahiya won bronze at the the U-17 World Wrestling Championships. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

# The classification conundrum



Para athletes talk about their **varying experiences** with classification, the defining foundation of para sports where the playing field is levelled.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Lavanya Lakshmi Narayanan  
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**P**ara badminton player Sukant Kadam (**left**), who will feature in his maiden Paralympics in Paris, chuckles when asked about his first classification experience. “There’s a funny story here. I was domestically classified as SL3 and played and perfected those rules. In 2014, when I went to England for my first international tournament, the classifiers there suddenly placed me in the SL4 bracket instead. That was a shock for me,” Kadam told *Sportstar* in the run-up to the Paris 2024 Games.

SL3 and SL4 are competing classes in para badminton for athletes with lower limb impairments. SL3 is for those with more severe levels of disability, requiring athletes to play on a half-width court. Kadam suffered a severe knee injury as a child, and multiple surgeries left him with impaired movement.

“SL4 meant I had to learn to play full court. There were such accomplished athletes already in this bracket, and I found

**All in the letter:** In para athletics, track and jump events are denoted by the letter T, while field events take the letter F, followed by a numerical classification of disability class.

GETTYIMAGES

myself having to deal with new space, new rules. I came in fully prepared for SL3 and its opponents, and I was so confident, but it was all taken away.

"I didn't play for two years. I was not prepared for that level of competition. It was in mid-2016 that I returned to an event in Ireland. I defeated the World No. 5 there and got my first international medal in my second international competition."

#### Complaints from compatriots

Former Paralympic Committee of India president Deepa Malik also has numerous such classification 'nightmares' that she now speaks about with a smile on her face.

A spinal tumour left her paralysed from the waist down, but Deepa found her calling in sports. Her journey began with swimming, but a lack of adequate facilities led her to switch to athletics.

In para athletics, track and jump events are denoted by the letter T, while field events take the letter F, followed by a numerical classification of disability class. Seated throws in javelin, shot put, discus, and club fall under the F51-58 bracket.

"I got classified in Taiwan in the F54 category in 2007. Two years later, I participated in the International Wheelchair and Amputee Sports Federation's World Games in 2009 in India.

"I was competing in the javelin throw, but I was told that I was going to be disqualified as I didn't belong to that particular class. That was pretty heartbreaking. I had to go for re-evaluation when I found that my results were not on the final sheet.

"A medical protest had been

raised about me not belonging to the F54 category. From there, I was surprised when they placed me in the F53 bracket, where the disability requirement was more severe."

In her new category, javelin — in which Deepa had won a silver and two bronze medals at the Asiad — was not an option.

"I randomly picked shot put. I had played it in school, so I knew the technique. I wanted to at least get a participation certificate, as a disqualification would be pretty demeaning. I finished with a bronze medal from there."

The 2010 Commonwealth Games came next, and it was the only year the F53 category was included in the roster.

"It felt like a silver lining. I felt very dejected about how it all turned out. I have a severe spinal cord injury, and sometimes this is what happens in disability categorisation. More unfortunately, a lot of these protests came from my own compatriots," she exclaimed.

"I had to undergo three more classification sessions. I would head to various competitions, and there would be a letter preceding my arrival.

"It's agonising to go through this mentally and emotionally, as this brings a lot of uncertainty. You're going all the way, with so much time and money spent, and sometimes you might not even be able to compete.

"Fortunately for me, after three such classification exercises, I was given a permanent confirmed class."

Deepa went on to win silver in the shot put F53 bracket at the Rio Games.

#### Need for sports literacy

Ekta Bhyan, a club thrower in the F51 bracket, registered a season's best effort of 20.12m to win gold in the women's F51 class at the World Para Athletics Championships in Kobe, Japan. However, by then she

knew her bracket wouldn't be included in the Paris Games — a normal passage in Olympics/Paralympics where sports and classes get rotated in and out of the roster.

An accident that damaged her spinal cord left Ekta with complete paralysis of her lower limbs and partial paralysis of her upper limbs. She was classified in the F51 category, which is for athletes whose movement is highly affected in the trunk, legs, and hands, with low to moderate impairment affecting arm movement. She generates all the momentum she needs from her shoulders and hands.

While the Paralympics is an evolving canopy, Ekta believes that plenty of resources are available to athletes, coaches, and governing bodies to figure out their para sports plans.

"The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) has a detailed guide on disabilities and their classification. For us, perhaps, the one issue is that this resource is in English. But lately, we've seen that the Sports Authority of India is recruiting para athletes as coaches, and they know the drill. There are domestic classifiers, but to be eligible for international events, you need to be assessed by the IPC's classifiers."

The only area of concern she identifies is the potential difference between how athletes are classified domestically and what happens in international classifiers.

Ekta was witness to what happened with Vinod Kumar. At the 2021 Tokyo Paralympics, the para discus thrower threw an Asian record mark of 19.91m to secure a bronze medal in the men's F52 class, adding to India's historic medal haul in a single edition.

However, within 24 hours, the former Border Security Force officer's medal was stripped away after multiple complaints from competitors casting doubts over his



**Grit hit:** Ekta Bhyan, a club thrower in the F51 bracket, registered a season's best effort of 20.12m to win gold in the women's F51 class at the World Para Athletics Championships in Kobe, Japan. GETTYIMAGES

disability class. Then 41, Vinod was put under review by a classification panel, which later decided that he was ineligible to compete in the F52 class — a section where athletes compete in a seated position, either in a wheelchair or a throwing chair, due to impaired muscle power, restricted range of movement, limb deficiency, or leg length difference.

The Board of Appeal of Classification (BAC), an independent body, then banned him for intentionally misrepresenting his abilities in classification, suspending him from participation in para athletics for two years.

This isn't a rare occurrence.

Athlete classification is the defining foundation of para sports, as that's where the playing field is levelled. There are instances where athletes are mistakenly classified into the wrong classes. This could happen because of a change in ability/function (improvement or decline) over time. There are times when athletes purposefully exaggerate their disabilities too. The latter has been decried heavily with each passing Paralympic cycle, likened to how immoral and unsportsmanlike doping is.

#### Evolving yet sacrosanct

At the heart of it all lies the process of classification itself and awareness among athletes and classifiers alike.

"It's fairly common for young and new athletes to see back-and-forth with their classification, but it shouldn't be the case for established athletes who have competed in a bunch of major events," Ekta added.

Manish Rana, Director of Sports Development and Performance with

the PCI, underlines that classification from an administrative perspective is a diverse exercise. Disciplines like athletics and swimming have multiple subclasses, while others like powerlifting or judo have one or two classes.

"There is a minimum impairment criterion, and classifiers look at underlying health conditions that lead to permanent disability, which then makes them eligible to play certain sports. For example, someone could lose a digit. That is technically a disability, but it doesn't mean they might qualify for para sports," Rana said.

Classifications can only be done in IPC-approved events, which is why Indians seek out Grand Prix events or World Championships to get this out of the way. It comes with massive costs, monetary and otherwise. The fact that nations only get a certain number of slots makes that process more competitive.

"We have to make tough choices based on how many slots we're allowed. Priority is given to

## Know your class

If an athlete's physical impairment is part of these 10 eligibility criteria parameters, he or she can be a part of the Paralympic movement:

- **Impaired Muscle Power** – Reduced or no ability to voluntarily contract muscles in order to move or to generate force.
- **Impaired Passive Range of Movement** – Restricted or a lack of passive movement in one or more joints.
- **Limb Deficiency** – Total or partial absence of bones or joints as a consequence of trauma (for example traumatic amputation), illness (for example amputation due to bone cancer) or congenital limb deficiency (for example dysmelia).
- **Leg Length Difference** – Difference in the length of legs as a result of a disturbance of limb growth, or as a result of trauma.
- **Short Stature** – Reduced length in the bones of the upper limbs, lower limbs and/or trunk.
- **Hypertonia** – Increase in muscle tension and a reduced ability of a muscle to stretch caused by damage to the central nervous system.
- **Ataxia** – Uncoordinated movements caused by damage to the central nervous system.
- **Athetosis** – Continual slow involuntary movements.
- **Vision Impairment** – Reduced, or no vision caused by damage to the eye structure, optical nerves or optical pathways, or visual cortex of the brain.
- **Intellectual Impairment** – Restriction in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour which affects conceptual, social and practical adaptive skills required for everyday life. This impairment must be present before the age of 18.

\*Source: [paralympic.org/athletics/classification](http://paralympic.org/athletics/classification)

performance, people who are young and who we can groom for longer," he added.

A workaround for this is to have an IPC-backed event in India.

"We want to bring an IPC-approved Grand Prix to India around March or April next year. This is a calendar classification event and will be the first time India hosts it. Around October or November, we also want to host the Para Athletics World Championships. When we are the host country, we get more slots. If we get that approved, then this will be an event we will have every year."

Athletes across the board explain that they need to move abroad to get internationally classified, but Rana clarifies that athletes can very well get qualified in their own countries, provided the classifier isn't of the same nationality.

Rana, a UK-certified Musculoskeletal Physiotherapist, has spent time at the IPC, training as a classifier in swimming, and understands the grey area para sports classification comes with.

**Ruthless rules:** "I would head to various competitions, and there would be a letter preceding my arrival. It's agonising to go through this mentally and emotionally, as this brings a lot of uncertainty": Deepa Malik. GETTY IMAGES

"A lot of times, athletes aren't very aware of their classification. Amputees give us visual evidence of the body part that is missing, but with cerebral palsy or spinal cord injuries or visual impairments, the grey area becomes a bit larger. It's not about tools or tests being inadequate; it depends on assessing the disability on a case-by-case basis. The same condition can present different consequences for different people.

"It's also important to remember that the sport itself is a massive leveller. Swimming's class system is point-based. The entire body is divided into points, and your class depends on how many points are deducted from 290. How those points get cut might be different for

two athletes, but the athletes in a class are put at a similar disadvantage by the water," he added. The need to be as foolproof as possible with classifications is also key in preventing malpractice, and the IPC's new classification code seeks to address just that.

"Next year, a new edition of the classification code has been approved by the International Paralympic Committee's Annual General Body. Another criterion will be introduced.

"First, we went with meeting the minimum impairment criterion, but now athletes need to provide evidence for the underlying health condition that's causing the disability as well. It will help guard against malpractice in a better way," Rana said.



# Looking beyond the silver lining

Yogesh Kathuniya talks about **overcoming** personal and health challenges as he strives for gold at the 2024 Paris Paralympics.

Lavanya Lakshmi Narayanan  
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This past month, India has had a close brush with the bittersweet emotions that come with finishing second. Neeraj Chopra missed out on a gold medal at the Paris Olympics, falling short by 3.52m. The same happened at the Lausanne Diamond League a little over two weeks later, with a deficit of 1.12m denying him the top spot once again. His face of utter disappointment on both occasions was something that's hard to forget.

6,568 km away, in New Delhi, para discuss thrower Yogesh Kathuniya could empathise. Ever since he won silver at the Tokyo Summer Games, Yogesh has found himself stuck one step away from the middle of the podium in international events.

"I won't lie," he tells *Sportstar*, ahead of the 2024 Paris Paralympics. "I was quite happy with how I performed in Tokyo. It was my biggest medal until that point. After that, a lot of things changed. My family was happy. I had a good throw there that could have bumped me to the gold medal position, but it ended up being a foul."

"I got silver here (Tokyo), I got a bronze



before (Dubai World Championships in 2019), so I thought going forward, I would get that gold medal. But then, in the World Championship in 2023 in Paris, the Asian Games in Hangzhou before that, and this year at the Kobe World Championships, I got back-to-back silver medals. That demotivated me a bit. I wasn't able to satisfy myself, even if others were happy with what I was doing."

Yogesh recalls countless conversations he's had with himself in front of the mirror, despite technically doing the job — winning a medal.



"Whenever I travelled to competitions, I'd tell the other athletes not to come anywhere near me if I won silver. I used to get really angry. Realistically, even a silver is such a big honour, especially for those coming through the ranks. But in me, there's this big fire, and it's just not getting extinguished. That's a good thing, I guess. It keeps me going."

#### Never say never

At the age of nine, Yogesh was diagnosed with Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) — an

**Tough people last:** At the age of nine, Yogesh was diagnosed with Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) — an autoimmune condition that attacks the body's nerves. It left him wheelchair-bound for two years. GETTY IMAGES

autoimmune condition that attacks the body's nerves. It left him wheelchair-bound for two years. Yogesh never thought he'd walk, let alone play sports.

His mother, Meena Devi, a homemaker, and his father, Gyanchand Kathuniya, a retired Indian Army officer, didn't give up on him. Meena learned physiotherapy to assist her son and help with his recovery. Sure enough, in three years, Yogesh was on his feet again.

In 2016, a 19-year-old Yogesh discovered para sports with help from Sachin Yadav, the General Secretary of the student union at Kirori Mal College. Yadav introduced Yogesh to the world of para athletics, showing him videos of inspiring athletes from all over the world.

Two years later, Yogesh staked his claim in this universe with a world-record 45.18m throw in the F36 category at the 2018 European Championships in Berlin.

He would break the world record two more times in 2022, this time in the F56 category at the Indian Open National Para Athletic Championship, with the latest mark being a massive 48.34m throw on home soil.

#### Fight to be fit

Yogesh towers over his competition, some of whom are in wheelchairs, but his GBS diagnosis means he can never take feeling healthy for granted.

"I tire out very soon. I have a neurological disorder, so muscle loss happens very quickly for me. I need to focus a lot on my diet and my workout. Sometimes, if I work out too much, I have trouble walking. It's all about striking a balance."

Towards that end, Yogesh — previously a vegetarian — added eggs and meat to his diet to better meet his protein requirements, given that his sport requires muscle strength and explosiveness.

2023 brought with it more health issues for Yogesh. He contracted chickenpox early in the year and was

**Hoping for a better reprise:** Yogesh poses with his Tokyo Games silver medal. The Paris edition will be his third visit to the French capital, with each one marking a significant phase in the athlete's life. "The one thing I want to do this year, hopefully after winning my medal, is to go back to Disneyland and ride that roller coaster again," he chuckles. GETTYIMAGES

later diagnosed with cervical radiculopathy centred in the C4, C5, and C6 vertebrae. He fought through it to win a silver at the Asian Games.

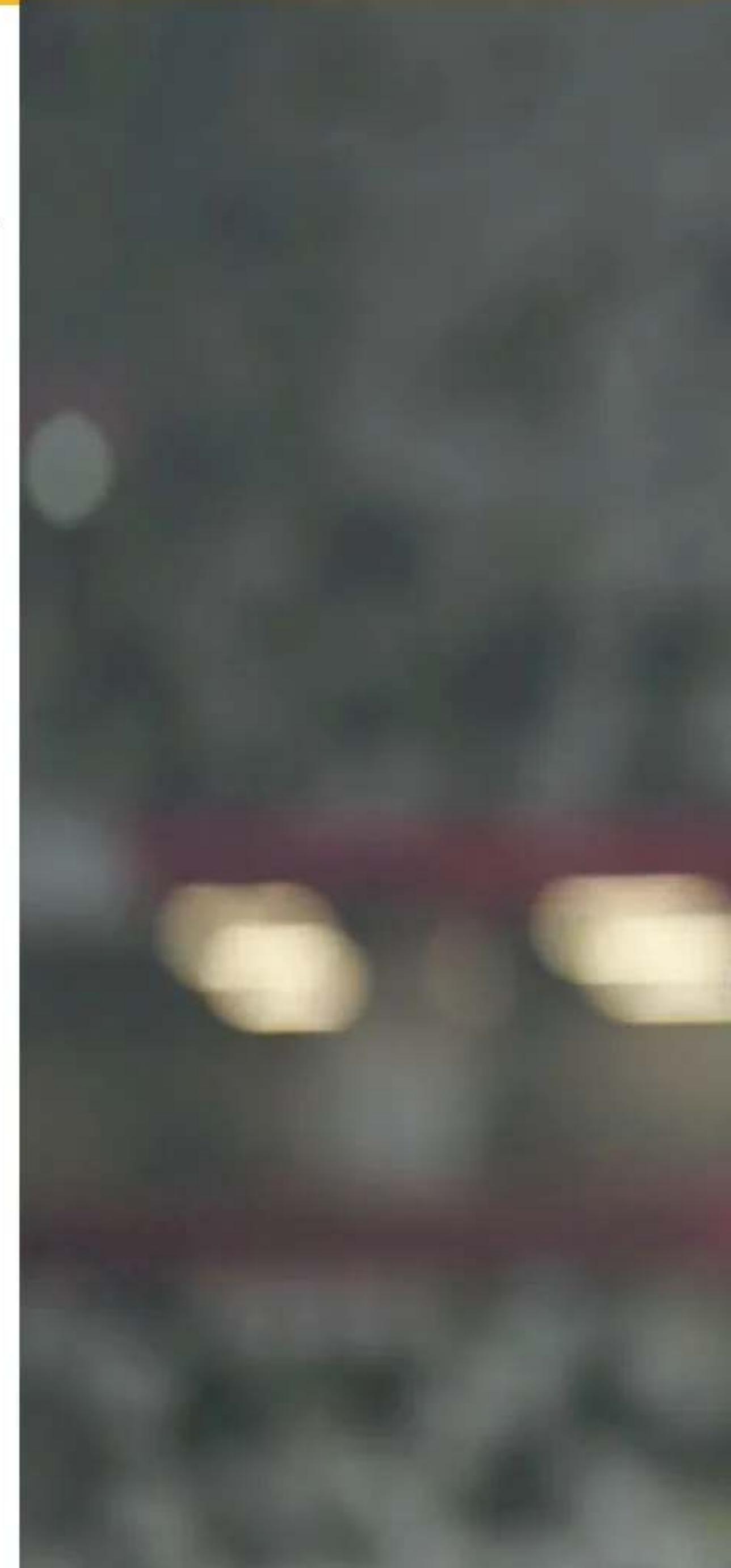
"I had numbness in my left arm because of it. I didn't realise what was happening. The pain kept increasing. I was unable to sleep properly. There were times I had to sleep sitting up. Anytime I straightened my neck, I would have pain." Eventually, I went for an MRI and got this diagnosis. Surgery was initially suggested, but I wanted to handle this with just rehab. My doctors told me that there was an 85 per cent chance to sort this out without surgery, and thankfully, that's what happened.

"This injury caused a dip in my performance. For a long time, I couldn't understand what was happening. I then hired a mental conditioning coach who continues to work with me. I was told that I tend to focus on the end result too much without focusing on the process. It's something I've been working on to this day."

#### Eat, breathe, sleep sports

Yogesh's routine is simple and focused. He starts his day at 6 a.m. and fits in two hours of training in the morning. After breakfast, he returns home. Due to the heat in Delhi, he prefers to slot his second training session in the evening.

Yogesh, like his parents, is god-fearing and is soothing his nerves ahead of an important Paralympic campaign with some help from the Shiv Puran.



"In the run-up to the Olympics, I started reading the Shiv Puran and want to finish it before I leave for Paris. "I talk to God a lot. I can't tell you how many times I've asked God to change the colour of my medal. I have told God that if He stays with me and helps me get the job done in Paris, I'll install a shivling near my house."

Besides faith, one nagging ambition keeps Yogesh going — crossing the 50m barrier in discus throw. This particularly helps on days when he just isn't mentally ready to get up and seize the day.

"I don't have a plan B. My plan A — sports — is my only plan. Sometimes, if I wake up and don't feel motivated, I only think about the 50m mark, and that pushes me to get going again."



#### Check list

Much like that 90m mark becomes a safety cushion for someone like Neeraj, the 50m mark — uncharted territory in men's discus throw — might just comfortably seal the deal for Yogesh.

"I just hope on the day of my event, I get a massive adrenaline rush or get nicely pumped up to break that mark."

The Paralympics will be Yogesh's third visit to the French capital, with each marking a significant phase in the athlete's life. Don't think Yogesh is all work and no play — there's a touristy checklist safely tucked away somewhere in his kit bag.

"I went to Paris for the first time in 2019. It is such a beautiful city. We roamed around a lot; visited Eiffel

## MUCH LIKE THAT 90M MARK BECOMES A SAFETY CUSHION FOR SOMEONE LIKE NEERAJ, THE 50M MARK MIGHT JUST SEAL THE DEAL FOR YOGESH

Tower, Champs Élysées, and more. We didn't have much money then, so I didn't explore too much. My financial condition improved last year, and I did all the roaming I wanted to do then.

"I went to Disneyland, rode the roller coasters, and visited all the major landmarks.

"The one thing I want to do this year, hopefully after winning my

medal, is to go back to Disneyland and ride that roller coaster again. I am scared, but it is so much fun," he chuckles.

Yogesh admits he has a sweet tooth, something a city known for its pastries can satiate quite well. But his sights are set on grabbing a serving of his favourite *rasmalai* if he wins that elusive gold medal in a few weeks' time.

# END OF AN ERA

Rahul Chaudhari's **departure from the Pro Kabaddi League** marks a significant shift, with franchises now prioritising performance and potential over star power, as the latest auction showed.

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If you're an Indian kabaddi fan, there's likely a special place in your heart for Rahul Chaudhari. As one of the sport's original superstars, Chaudhari became the face of the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) and, by extension, the sport in India during a time when fans were searching for the next big name to follow the legacies of veterans like Anup Kumar and Rakesh Kumar.

Long before players like Pawan Sehrawat and foreign stars like Mohammadreza Shadlou Chiyaneh brought their own patented brand of effortless confidence to the mat, Chaudhari was the showman who cast a spell on arenas and audiences alike.

His prime years with the Telugu Titans saw him imperiously build a loyal fan-base, and his subsequent moves to Tamil Thalaivas, Puneri Paltan, and later Jaipur Pink Panthers, with whom he won the league in 2022, only added credence to a storied career.

The raider from Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh, has featured in every PKL edition so far. However, a sharp decline in his consistency led to no takers ahead of the 11th edition. In response, Chaudhari announced he would step back from his PKL career, though he remains available to represent his state and country.

Chaudhari going unsold was anticipated by pundits and fans alike, who had been dreading this eventuality for a while. He is part of a generation of players who have been fading from the upper

tiers of performance metrics for some seasons now — whether it's Chaudhari, all-rounders like Deepak Niwas Hooda (former India captain) and Nitin Tomar, or defenders like Surender Nada and Vishal Bhardwaj. Gone are the days when legacy and celebrity guaranteed space under the spotlight. The message was clear — perform or perish.

## Reality checks all around

That explains why Sachin Tanwar, a hardworking and under-the-radar raider, became the top buy of the auction, fetching ₹2.15 crore from the Tamil Thalaivas. It also explains why emerging players like Jai Bhagwan (Bengaluru Bulls, ₹63 lakh), V Ajith Kumar (Puneri Paltan, ₹66 lakh), and Sunil Malik (U Mumba, ₹1.015 crore) attracted significant backing and bidding wars.



» A SHARP DECLINE IN CONSISTENCY LED TO NO TAKERS FOR RAHUL CHAUDHARI. IN RESPONSE, HE ANNOUNCED THAT HE WOULD STEP BACK FROM HIS PKL CAREER, THOUGH HE REMAINS AVAILABLE TO REPRESENT HIS STATE AND COUNTRY



**Taking it slow:** Outfits like Jaipur Pink Panthers (above) and Puneri Paltan (right), which have built a young core over the years, focused on making strategic additions to enhance their squads. Pics: PKL MEDIA



LAVANYA LAKSHMI NARAYANAN

Even those who managed to secure spots on teams know that the brief has changed. Siddharth Desai can no longer rely solely on his 'Bahubali' reputation when the going gets tough. He must find a way to stay fit and contribute consistently to elevate his ₹26 lakh price tag to the ₹1 crore he used to command.

Iranian legend Fazel Atrachali (left), once the league's most expensive foreign player, was snapped up by Bengal Warriors for just ₹50 lakh — a significant drop in his value.

Although Shadlou has since dethroned him, Fazel's tactical insight remains unmatched, even as his body's begun to slow down.



However, in the physically demanding world of kabaddi, a sharp mind alone isn't always enough to secure a place on the mat.

Auctions are a useful tool for price corrections, especially for teams fielding more expensive players. For instance, the Telugu Titans successfully reduced its expenditure on Pawan Sehrawat from ₹2.61 crore last season to ₹1.725 crore this year, while Shadloui's price saw only a marginal drop from ₹2.35 crore to ₹2.07 crore. Haryana Steelers' Pardeep Narwal, another PKL icon and one of its most expensive players at one point, only drew a top bid of ₹77 lakh from Bengaluru Bulls — far below his previous lofty standards and popularity.

With a purse of ₹5 crore, teams were largely conservative in their spending. Outfits like Puneri Paltan, Haryana Steelers, and Jaipur Pink Panthers, which have built a young core over the years, focused on

making strategic additions to enhance their squads. Meanwhile, teams like Tamil Thalaivas, Telugu Titans, Bengaluru Bulls, and Bengal Warriors sought to build new cores for the upcoming season.

Young Indian raiders from the domestic circuit were the primary targets for most franchises. Their lower base prices helped, but it also highlighted the increased scrutiny of district tournaments and senior national championships.

Randhir Sehrawat, the only head coach to remain with the same

franchise from the start (Bengaluru Bulls), is a strong advocate of such talent scouting. A regular at regional tournaments, he has discovered and nurtured talents like Pawan, Pardeep, and Bharat Hooda (who replaced Pardeep in the UP Yoddhas lineup this season) within the PKL and National set-up.

#### Global footprint shrinks again

On the international front, Iran once again dominated the player pool, with 17 of the 21 chosen players hailing from the country.

**Young Indian raiders from the domestic circuit, who had lower base prices, were the primary targets for most franchises.**



The most notable pick from other nations was Jang-Kun Lee, who is back in the Patna Pirates setup. A kabaddi veteran in South Korea, Lee is an Asian Games bronze and silver medallist and a member of a pathbreaking kabaddi generation trained by India's E. Prasad Rao. He was a member of the team that handed India its first-ever Asian Games defeat in the 2018 Jakarta Games, and became an imperious raider for the Bengal Warriors first, and the Pirates in 2019.

Over the last few years, kabaddi lost favour in the South Korean sporting setup when a new



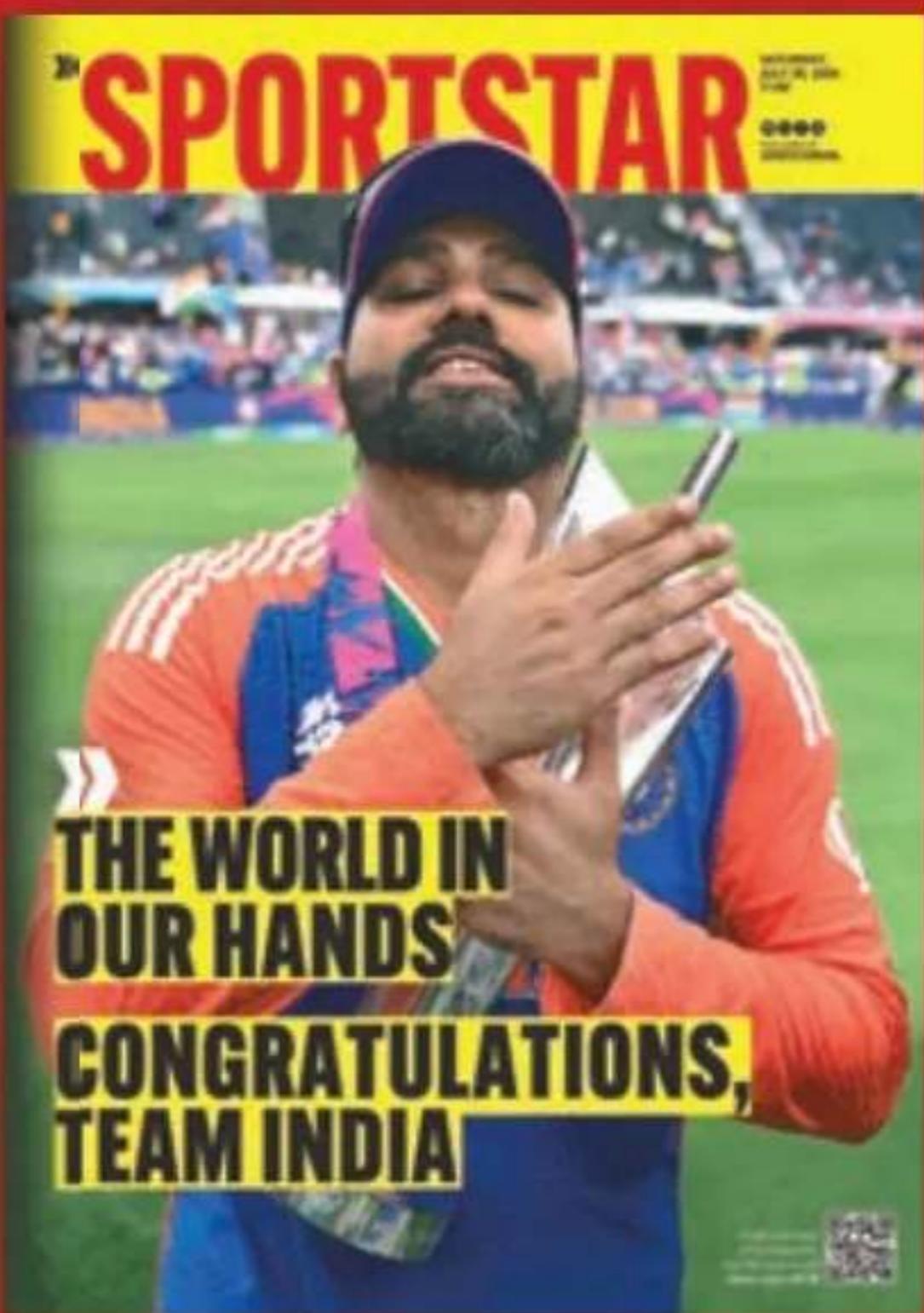
administration took over and the existing player pool was shuffled. Lee even explored other avenues of work, taking to football, teaching kabaddi, and even acting. However, his return to the Pirates brings hope for a revival of South Korean kabaddi, which stunned the world in the past decade. Other countries represented this season include Bangladesh, Thailand, and Chinese Taipei, likely due to their performances at the 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou last year. Sri Lanka, Kenya, England, and Poland — nations that had players in the PKL mix last season — have all dropped off this season's list. The Bengaluru Bulls is one of the few teams that regularly rotates its foreign player pool, ensuring opportunities for one or two players to gain experience in the game and culture of kabaddi.

**Changing fortunes:** Sachin Tanwar (**above**) was the top buy of the auction, fetching ₹2.15 crore from the Tamil Thalaivas. However, Pardeep Narwal (**left**), one of its most expensive players at one point, only drew a top bid of ₹77 lakh from Bengaluru Bulls.

Pics: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"We want kabaddi to be promoted. It shouldn't be limited to Iran and India. We've previously brought players from Poland, Nepal, and Bangladesh. I make different changes — one year for Iran, and another year for another country's player, and so on. I want them to learn something from me in two months," Sehrawat said.

Rao told *Sportstar* on the sidelines of last season that it's not enough for teams to sign international players and keep them rooted to the bench. "There should be playing opportunities for these players; that's the only way to truly gauge the quality of the sport in India," he explained.



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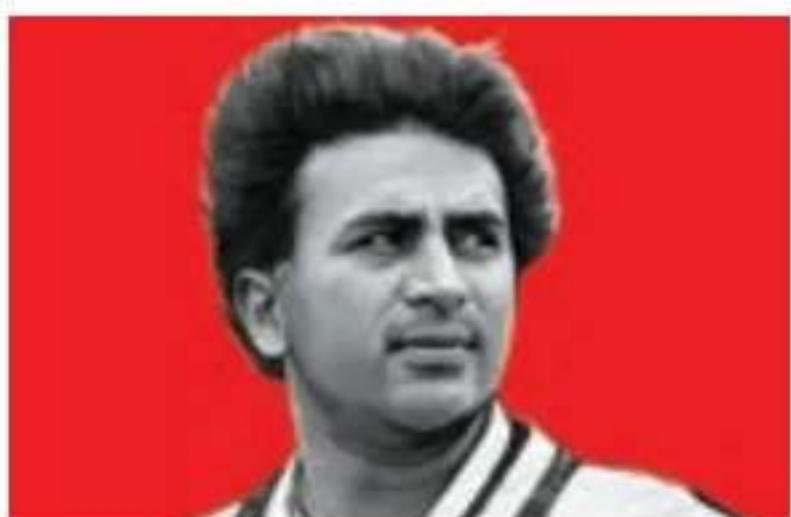
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## ON THE WRITE LINE

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# ICC'S DEDICATED TEST MATCH FUND A BIG STEP FORWARD

Ever since the Indian broadcasters as well as **corporate sponsors** came to the fore, the various cricket boards have gotten more money than ever before from the ICC.

**S**hikhar Dhawan's retirement from all forms of the game is going to leave the sport poorer than before. The ever-smiling, ever-positive Shikhar, also fondly called '*Gabbar*', was a player of enormous talent. But as befalls opening batters, a lean series or tournament can mean the selectors wielding the axe. In later years, injuries were part of Shikhar's career, which seldom allowed him to fully display his skill and probably helped him make the decision to quit the game while he was still enjoying being part of the circuit.

Taking that call is the hardest thing to do. But when the body tells the mind, 'Enough, enough', then that's the right time to go. **Retired cricketers today have many more avenues open to stay connected with the game, and Shikhar could well avail of them.** There's no doubt that whatever he chooses to do, he will do it with the same cheer that he brought to the game and was loved by teammates and fans for.

On the field, with Test matches being played around the same time in different parts of the world, the red-ball game is back in the news. Along with that also comes the news of a special Test match fund being planned by the ICC to help some countries that are struggling to sustain the longer format. Ever since the Indian

broadcasters as well as corporate sponsors came to the fore, the various cricket boards have gotten more money than ever before from the ICC.

**Still looking at the neighbours' garden and then comparing it to yours is an old human quirk.** With it come the complaints and excuses about why they are not getting the same as the others. It would be worthwhile to do a forensic audit of where the ICC's revenue share to the various boards goes. That would be far more revealing and could well nullify the case of giving additional share to the usual moaners. Make no mistake, whatever share the various boards are getting is more than enough to run the game in their countries and still have something left over. Depending on getting an increasing share of the ICC pie makes for lazy administration, for then, they just have to enjoy the perks of office without looking to strengthen the game in their country.

That said, it is a good idea for the ICC to suggest that the home team should bear the hotel and internal travel costs of the visiting country's team. **That can be a big relief for some, for sure, and would help them balance their budget to a great extent.** Clearly, there has to be a minimum standard set for hotels and travel; otherwise, like it happened in the past,



some boards will get away by accommodating visiting teams in places no better than college hostels. If the ICC does set up a fund, then that's a big step forward. However, determining the playing fees would be best left to the discretion of individual boards. Standards of living vary from country to country, so having one fixed fee may not be such a good idea.

In all probability, Jay Shah will be the next ICC president. Just as he has done for Indian cricket, both men and women, players worldwide will benefit. When Greg Barclay announced his decision not to go for a third term, which he was entitled to, there were reports in the media of the Old Powers that Barclay's decision had been forced by Shah.

Only when the perennial cribbers were questioned about what the representatives of their Old Powers were doing did it suddenly occur to them that if indeed Barclay was forced to not seek a third term, then what were their own representatives at the ICC doing at the meeting? Where were their voices of objection?

**Right step:** The Test match fund, which is expected to be in the region of US \$15 million, is understood to have the backing of BCCI secretary Jay Shah and ECB chair Richard Thompson.

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And if there were none, then they were as culpable as the one they were unnecessarily pointing a finger at. It's called the *Tall poppy syndrome* as well as the realisation that they don't run the international game anymore.

The way Indian cricket has shaped up over the years is also a tribute to the BCCI and its administration. The kind of cricket that the teams, both men and women, have been playing is another huge reason why the sport is flourishing in India.

If the team was not winning, the sponsors would stay away. Terrific teamwork from both the players and the administrators explains why Indian cricket is in such a healthy state. May it always remain so.



**Determining the playing fees would be best left to the discretion of individual boards. Standards of living vary from country to country, so having one fixed fee may not be such a good idea.**

# Virat and Rohit – pillars of world cricket

On June 29, 2024, after leading India to victory in the T20 World Cup in Bridgetown, Barbados, two of the most celebrated players in Indian cricket, Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, announced their retirement from the T20 format. This comparison between Virat and Rohit delves into their batting performances across all formats in international cricket, shedding light on their contributions to the game.

**Name:** Virat Kohli; **Born:** November 05, 1988, in New Delhi; **Batting:** Right-hand batter

**ODI debut:** vs Sri Lanka in Dambulla on August 18, 2008

**T20I Debut:** vs Zimbabwe in Harare on June 12, 2010

**Test debut:** vs West Indies in Kingston on June 20, 2011

Career batting in international cricket across formats

	M	Inns	NO	Runs	HS	Ave.	B/F	S/R	100s	50s	4s	6s
Tests	113	191	11	8848	254*	49.15	15924	55.56	29	30	991	26
ODIs	295	283	44	13906	183	58.18	14866	93.54	50	72	1302	151
T20Is	125	117	31	4188	122*	48.69	3056	137.04	1	38	369	124
Total	533	591	86	26942	254*	53.35	33846	79.60	80	140	2662	301

	M	Inns	NO	Runs	HS	Ave.	B/F	S/R	100	50	4s	6s
home	218	241	38	11989	254*	59.05	14566	82.30	38	59	1192	148
Away	315	350	48	14953	200	49.51	19280	77.55	42	81	1470	153
Total	533	591	86	26942	254*	53.35	33846	79.60	80	140	2662	301

	M	Inns	NO	Runs	HS	Ave.	B/F	S/R	100	50	4s	6s
as captain	213	250	35	12883	254*	59.92	16847	76.47	41	58	1280	138
not as captain	320	341	51	14059	186	48.47	16999	82.70	39	82	1382	163
Total	533	591	86	26942	254*	53.35	33846	79.60	80	140	2662	301

Batting against each opponent in international cricket across formats

Opp	M	Inns	NO	Runs	HS	Ave.	B/F	S/R	100s	50s	4s	6s
Aus	97	113	10	5203	186	50.51	6971	74.63	16	27	494	56
SL	75	79	14	4076	243	62.70	4665	87.37	15	18	390	41
Eng	85	107	11	3979	235	41.44	5824	68.32	8	23	423	33
WI	73	75	10	3850	200	59.23	4627	83.20	12	23	387	46
SA	61	70	11	3306	254*	56.03	4509	73.32	8	16	337	35
NZ	52	62	6	2822	211	50.39	3549	79.51	9	14	280	35
Ban	28	31	8	1577	204	68.56	1713	92.06	7	5	153	18
Pak	27	27	7	1170	183	58.50	1073	109.04	3	7	112	18
Afg	9	7	2	347	122*	69.40	260	133.46	1	3	32	9
Zim	11	8	2	305	115	50.83	337	90.50	1	1	30	3
Net	3	3	1	125	62*	62.50	120	104.16	0	2	10	3
Ire	5	5	1	88	44*	22.00	110	80.00	0	0	8	1
HKg	1	1	1	59	59*	—	44	134.09	0	1	1	3
UAE	2	1	1	33	33*	—	41	80.48	0	0	5	0
Scot	1	1	1	2	2*	—	2	100.00	0	0	0	0
USA	1	1	0	0	0	0.00	1	0.00	0	0	0	0
Nam	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nep	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	533	591	86	26942	254*	53.35	33846	79.60	80	140	2662	301

**Name: Rohit Sharma; Born: April 30, 1987, in Bansod (Nagpur), Maharashtra; Batting: Right-hand batter**  
**ODI debut: vs Ireland in Belfast on June 23, 2007**  
**T20I Debut: vs England in Durban on September 19, 2007**  
**Test debut: vs West Indies in Kolkata on November 06, 2013**

#### Career batting in international cricket across formats

Pics: K. R. DEEPAK

M	Inns	NO	Runs	HS	Ave.	B/F	S/R	100s	50s	4s	6s
Tests	59	101	10	4137	212	45.46	7251	57.05	12	17	452
ODIs	265	257	36	10866	264	49.16	11755	92.43	31	57	1012
T20Is	159	151	19	4231	121*	32.05	3003	140.89	5	32	383
Total	483	509	65	19234	264	43.31	22009	87.39	48	106	1847
											620
M	Inns	NO	Runs	HS	Ave.	B/F	S/R	100	50	4s	6s
Home	178	192	19	8679	264	50.16	9322	93.10	27	35	885
Away	305	317	46	10555	171*	38.95	12687	83.20	21	71	962
Total	483	509	65	19234	264	43.31	22009	87.39	48	106	1847
											620
M	Inns	NO	Runs	HS	Ave.	B/F	S/R	100	50	4s	6s
As captain	126	136	14	5199	208*	42.61	4989	104.20	11	32	516
Not as captain	357	373	51	14035	264	43.58	17020	82.46	37	74	1331
Total	483	509	65	19234	264	43.31	22009	87.39	48	106	1847
											620



#### Batting against each opponent in international cricket across formats

Opp	M	Inns	NO	Runs	HS	Ave.	B/F	S/R	100s	50s	4s	6s
Aus	80	87	8	3571	209	45.20	4157	85.90	9	16	303	132
SL	81	82	11	2941	264	41.42	3176	92.60	8	14	276	86
WI	65	64	12	2884	177	55.46	3159	91.29	7	19	275	88
Eng	50	61	9	2338	161	44.96	3340	70.00	7	11	275	48
SA	55	62	3	1973	212	33.44	2448	80.59	7	4	223	58
NZ	52	55	6	1917	147	39.12	2307	83.09	2	15	167	76
Ban	33	33	3	1296	137	43.20	1198	108.18	3	8	111	50
Pak	31	30	4	1000	140	38.46	1053	94.96	2	8	88	33
Afg	9	9	3	354	131	59.00	251	141.03	2	1	37	16
Zim	10	10	2	267	114	33.37	351	76.06	1	1	20	5
Ire	6	5	2	265	97	88.33	211	125.59	0	4	19	12
Net	2	2	0	114	61	57.00	93	122.58	0	2	12	5
UAE	2	2	1	96	57*	96.00	83	115.66	0	1	17	2
Nep	1	1	1	74	74*	—	59	125.42	0	1	6	5
Nam	1	1	0	56	56	56.00	37	151.35	0	1	7	2
Hkg	3	3	0	55	23	18.33	64	85.93	0	0	6	1
Scot	1	1	0	30	30	30.00	16	187.50	0	0	5	1
USA	1	1	0	3	3	3.00	6	50.00	0	0	0	0
Total	483	509	65	19234	264	43.31	22009	87.39	48	106	1847	620

All records are correct and updated until 24 Aug 2024



AP

# Bangladesh secures 10-wicket win over Pakistan

1

Pakistan **crumbled** to 146 all out in its second innings, leaving Bangladesh just 30 runs to chase, which it achieved in under seven overs.

Bangladesh secured its first-ever Test win over Pakistan with a 10-wicket victory in Rawalpindi, following a dramatic second-innings collapse by the

host. Wicketkeeper-batter Mushfiqur Rahim's impressive 191 off 341 balls helped Bangladesh post 565 runs in response to Pakistan's 448-6 declared, giving it

a 117-run lead. Pakistan then crumbled to 146 all out, leaving Bangladesh just 30 runs to chase, which it achieved in under seven overs.



2

Mark Wood has been ruled out of England's final two Tests against Sri Lanka due to a thigh injury. The 34-year-old sustained the injury on day three of the first Test and was unable to participate further, as England went on to secure a five-wicket victory at Emirates Old Trafford. In his place, 20-year-old Josh Hull has been called up to the squad.



3

Fast bowler Fatima Sana has been appointed as Pakistan's captain for the upcoming Women's T20 World Cup in the UAE this October, taking over from veteran all-rounder Nida Dar. At 22, Sana brings prior captaincy experience from leading the emerging team and domestic sides. She also stepped in for Dar in a couple of ODIs during Pakistan's tour of New Zealand in December 2023.

GETTY IMAGES



4

The Board of Control for Cricket in India announced the 15-player Indian team for the Women's T20 World Cup 2024, scheduled to be held in the UAE. Harmanpreet Kaur is named the skipper, while Smriti Mandhana has been chosen as her deputy. Wicket-keeper batter Yastika Bhatia and all-rounder Shreyanka Patil were also included in the squad subject to fitness.



5

The West Indies hit 13 sixes (**Rovman Powell** in pic) in its innings to defeat South Africa by 30 runs, clinching the Twenty20 international series with a game to spare. South Africa had earlier won the preceding two-match Test series, securing victory in the second Test at Providence, Guyana, after a rain-affected draw in the opener at Port of Spain, Trinidad.



6

Afghanistan has brought on experienced Indian coach R. Sridhar to its coaching staff for the upcoming fixtures against New Zealand and South Africa. Sridhar will serve as an assistant coach under Jonathan Trott, participating in the one-off Test against New Zealand and the three-match ODI series against South Africa. Sridhar was part of India's coaching staff for two ICC Men's Cricket World Cups and two ICC Men's T20 World Cups in recent times.

SANDEEP SAXENA



# Home Tests loom as red-ball grind returns after white-ball excess

India has **played just seven Tests** in the last 13 months, but with 10 more scheduled in the next four, the upcoming Duleep Trophy gains added significance.



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**Point to prove:** Shreyas Iyer and Ishan Kishan were overlooked for BCCI's 2023-24 retainers list, with the board at the time stressing the importance of participating in domestic cricket when not playing for the national team. R.V. MOORTHY

months — two against Bangladesh and three against New Zealand at home, and five against Australia in its backyard.

The participation of as many as 19 capped Test players, even if only for the first round, to sharpen their skills ahead of the crucial phase, underscores that domestic cricket

from the Duleep Trophy in Anantapur and Bengaluru, which has dropped the zonal format this year. The national selection panel, led by Ajit Agarkar, has selected four teams — India A, India B, India C, and India D — each comprising 15 players.

#### Plenty at stake

Seldom in the recent past has a domestic tournament thrown up as many storylines as this Duleep Trophy. The most prominent is the new lease of life offered to Ishan and Shreyas.

Shreyas was given a chance during India's white-ball series against Sri Lanka in July, while Kishan began his comeback in the Buchi Babu Invitational tournament. A series of strong performances here and in the Ranji Trophy could propel both players back into the Test side. Kishan hasn't featured in any form of international cricket since opting out of the two-Test series in South Africa, while Iyer, left out after the second Test against England, missed the Ranji Trophy quarterfinals due to back spasms, despite being medically cleared by the board's doctors.

Then there is Rishabh Pant. His flamboyance had proved crucial in India edging past Australia the last time it went Down Under for a Test series. Coming off a year-long injury hiatus after a road accident, Pant has been able to get back in the limited-overs side. While his reputation alone warrants a place in the Test team, especially for the Australia series, having to go through the rigours of domestic cricket will only ease his re-entry into the side.

Contesting Pant for the same spot is K.L. Rahul, who is trying to replenish his stocks in the longer format. A hundred in South Africa as wicketkeeper-batter in December

## SEDOM IN THE RECENT PAST HAS A DOMESTIC TOURNAMENT THROWN UP AS MANY STORYLINES AS THIS DULEEP TROPHY

**Abhishek Saini**  
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This September, several Indian cricket A-listers will join forces to reignite the Duleep Trophy, aiming to restore its relevance. The tournament will serve as a dress rehearsal for the packed Test calendar that lies ahead for Rohit Sharma and his team.

India has played only seven Test matches in the past 13 months, with the most recent one against England in March. Now, the team is set to play 10 Tests over the next four

has indeed risen on the selectors' priority list. It also indicates that the omissions of Ishan Kishan and Shreyas Iyer from the central contracts list earlier this year for not playing for their Ranji Trophy teams was not merely posturing.

The only major absentees will be Virat Kohli, who last played a Test match in January, along with Rohit, Jasprit Bumrah, and R. Ashwin — the four guaranteed starters whom the selectors are keen to wrap in cotton wool for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy later this year. Mohammad Shami, recovering from ankle surgery, won't be fit in time for the tournament but is expected to return for Bengal in the Ranji Trophy in October.

Even with this quintet missing, the spotlight is unlikely to shift away



**Training ground:** Sarfaraz Khan and Dhruv Jurel, part of the five home Tests against England this year, would look to use the Duleep Trophy as a platform to prep for the home season. REUTERS

last year should hold him in good stead for a place in the upcoming home series. Dhruv Jurel's impressive outing against England makes him another enticing option for the wicketkeeper role.

Suryakumar Yadav, a master of T20 cricket and now a World Cup winner in the shortest format, admitted that he still harbours ambitions to don the whites. After the Duleep Trophy call-up, the Mumbai cricketer will think he is still in with a shot.

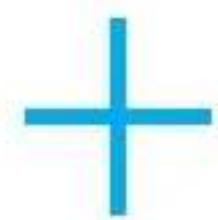
Shubman Gill being made captain of India A, following his recent appointment as vice-captain for the Sri Lanka white-ball tour, suggests that the management is preparing him for a future leadership role.

Abhimanyu Easwaran, Ruturaj Gaikwad and Shreyas will captain

the other three teams.

#### Moving on

With the exclusion of Umesh Yadav, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Hanuma Vihari and Ishant Sharma, the BCCI has formally signalled its intention to prepare the



**With the exclusion of Umesh Yadav, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Hanuma Vihari and Ishant Sharma, the BCCI has formally signalled its intention to prepare the next set of players.**



next set of players.

Their replacements, including the five who made their Test debuts against England earlier this year — Sarfaraz Khan, Rajat Patidar, Akash Deep, Jurel and Devdutt Padikkal — have been slotted across the four teams.

There is also space for Riyan Parag, Harshit Rana and Tilak Varma, who have made a name largely through their T20 exploits.

With Ashwin, 37, and Ravindra Jadeja, 35, approaching the final stages of their careers, R. Sai Kishore, Saransh Jain, Tanush Kotian, and Manav Suthar — who have tirelessly honed their skills in the domestic circuit — will be eager to solidify their candidacy when an

opening arises in the upper echelons.

#### Testing bench strength

India's home Test series against Bangladesh starts on September 19, while the Duleep Trophy is slated to run from September 5 to 22. Due to the dates coinciding, the first-team mainstays, including Shubman, Kuldeep Yadav and Yashasvi Jaiswal are likely to depart after the first game. However, the selectors could also find it prudent to protect the mainstays, or even let them carry on with the Duleep Trophy.

India is fairly well placed to advance to a third consecutive World Test Championship final, enabling the selectors to back young guns

**At the helm:** Shubman Gill will lead Team A that has the likes of Riyan Parag, K. L. Rahul, Shivam Dube and Kuldeep Yadav. K.R. DEEPAK

without hesitation.

The urge to use Bumrah sparingly will leave the field open to quicks Arshdeep Singh and Tushar Deshpande to earn a Test cap.

But beyond opening up slots for youngsters, India's crammed Test schedule allows First-Class cricket a long-overdue return to vogue.

With the team management emphasising the importance of maintaining a strong talent pipeline, it seems likely that this trend will continue.

# Farewell Gabbar, thanks for the blockbuster entertainment

Shikhar Dhawan's – **nicknamed Gabbar** – on-field competitiveness mirrors his off-field calm. Retirement at 38 will allow him to pursue his off-field ambitions.

Vijay Lokapally

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The Roshanara Club in Delhi holds an iconic place in India's cricket history. It was here that the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) was founded, and the venue has hosted numerous first-class matches. In one such game in 2010, Shikhar Dhawan learnt an unforgettable lesson that would shape his career.

While leading a depleted Delhi team against the Railways, Dhawan, with a comfortable target of 136, played a shot that gave him nightmares for a season or two. His outrageous shot, a wild heave off seamer Anureet Singh, cost him his wicket and Delhi the match. As the only international player on the team, Dhawan had a huge role, but a moment of madness left him the most embarrassed person on the field as Delhi tasted defeat.

Dhawan did not shy away from assuming the responsibility and vowed not to play aerial shots for some time. "Lift nahi maarni hai (I will not lift the ball)," he told Delhi team coach Manoj Prabhakar. Matters flared up in the team dressing room, but then it dawned on Prabhakar and Dhawan that they hailed from the same club (Sonnet). Both buried their issues at the Roshanara Club.

Dhawan's determination was far stronger than the challenge he faced. He knew how to stay buoyant. In 2011–12, his scores of 177 and 155 in the Irani Cup match against Rajasthan in Jaipur reignited his confidence, which had been dormant for some time.

His Test debut in 2013 at 27 against Australia was a feat documented by accomplished journalists, coaches, and the many eyes who have longed to witness his stunning demonstrations throughout his career. "I was not surprised," gushed his state coach, Vijay Dahiya. "He has the time to adjust and the range of shots to make a mockery of the opposition."

He successfully filled the void left by Virender Sehwag and Gautam Gambhir. It was almost like nothing had changed, and his ballooning confidence left the Australian side starstruck. One may not be stretching far to say they did not even realise it was his debut. He brought along the same aggression and control that Sehwag was known for. His spectacular 187 was an innings that is hard to erase from memory.

It's hard to overlook the similarity and happenstance of Dhawan stepping in to fill Sehwag's shoes.

Both shared the dressing room for Delhi and the North Zone and scored centuries on their Test debuts. Their sharp hand-eye coordination matched their instinct to be aggressive when the situation called for it.

Dhawan owed it to his coaches for correcting his form and style at the right time. He was not a side-on batsman. His prudence helped him respect Prabhakar's suggestion to close his stance, which worked wonders. Dhawan got the balance right, which was sufficient to turn the keen eyes of the selectors towards his

game and his promise to deliver high-class batting for his country.

Known to be resilient under pressure and someone who never shied away from a good challenge, Dhawan loved to field at short leg. In this position, the fielder must quickly react to catch the batter off-guard. This position makes one vulnerable to injuries, so newcomers are usually coaxed into fielding there.

But Dhawan had his intentions. Perched right next to the batters, he could quickly resort to a light sprinkle of hazing to break their concentration.

Dhawan was conferred the moniker *Gabbar* since he used to repeat the dialogues of the famous movie character in the Bollywood film *Sholay* within the batter's earshot. A lip injury prevented him from shaving, giving him the excuse to grow his moustache. Once his fans started emulating the same fashion, he had all the reason to brandish it and make it part of his persona. The slap on the thigh was a typical Dhawan expression to celebrate.

Known for his upbeat attitude throughout the cricket circle, Dhawan greeted you with a firm handshake, welcomed you home with a warm smile, and even spotted a dear friend from afar in a bustling crowd to rush and hug them tight. In the words of Ashish Nehra, "We call him *Shikhar befiqar*.

**Bowing out:** Shikhar Dhawan captained India in 15 games (12 ODIs and 3 T20Is). The left-hand opener scored 24 hundreds across 269 matches for India. AFP



### Barnstorming start: Shikhar

Dhawan made a stunning Test debut in 2013, scoring a century off just 85 balls against Australia in Mohali - the fastest by a debutant. He finished with a match-winning 187. PTI

Have you ever seen him under pressure? I have not. It is not easy to tackle international challenges with such an attitude. If you talk to Shikhar, the toughest of cricket is nothing but a minor obstacle."

Dhawan had come to Roshanara following a disappointing ODI (in Visakhapatnam) against Australia, where he was out second ball for nothing. He had toiled to gain a place in the Indian team and was discouraged when he was ignored for a long time in 2012. The failure to keep his place in the Indian squad tormented him.

"I would ask myself, 'Am I good enough to play at the international level?' I knew I had the talent; I was working hard like anyone else, but something was missing," Dhawan once recalled.

His coach, Tarak Sinha, was perturbed when Dhawan spoke about quitting the game. For Madan Sharma, the coach dedicated to working with Dhawan at Sonnet, it was a challenging phase. But Dhawan returned to his rightful place with that extraordinary Test debut in Mohali.

With a philosophical bent, Dhawan loved to analyse his game and character. "I criticise myself and appreciate myself. I am my best friend. I love cricket, but I have learnt that one can be in love and still be detached. If I am dropped from the India team, I can't let it bring me down. It will hurt big time, but then there is life outside cricket, too," he said once.

His life outside of cricket is a lovable world. Charity and friendship matter to him. His competitive flair on the field is reflected in his profound calmness off it. He learnt to play the flute and aspired to perform on a public platform. Retirement at 38 would give Dhawan the time to achieve his ambition.



### Shikhar in numbers

Format	M	Inn	Runs	HS	Ave.	S/R	100s	50s
Tests	34	58	2315	190	40.61	66.94	7	5
ODIs	167	164	6793	143	44.11	91.35	17	39
T20Is	68	66	1759	92	27.92	126.36	0	11



AFP

# LEADER ON THE RADAR

Dipak Ragav

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**A**fter a four-week break, the Formula One bandwagon regrouped at Zandvoort for the Dutch Grand Prix. Since its return to the F1 calendar in 2021, the Dutch GP has been one big party, coinciding with the rise of its local hero, Max Verstappen.

The reigning three-time champion had won all three previous races on home soil in dominant fashion. However, heading into this year's race, expectations weren't as high, as Red Bull had been struggling lately against McLaren and Mercedes. The big question ahead of the

championship's resumption was where would Red Bull rank in light of McLaren's surge. **inch closer to the top** of the standings.

championship's resumption was where would Red Bull rank in light of McLaren's surge.

#### Orange rules, but not the Dutch variety

Since the start of the Verstappen era, Dutch fans have painted every F1 race track around the world in their national colour of orange. Sunday at Zandvoort was no different. However, for the first time since the return of F1 to the Netherlands, Verstappen found himself on the back foot when Lando Norris (**above**) took pole position, setting a time more than three-tenths faster than the Red Bull driver.

When the race started, Verstappen got the crowd on their feet when he pipped Norris at



VERSTAPPEN NOW FACES A REAL THREAT TO HIS CROWN.  
ALL IT MIGHT TAKE IS ONE OR TWO NON-FINISHES FROM  
HIM, AND THE DRIVER'S TITLE RACE WILL COME ALIVE



the start and took the lead. For nearly 18 laps, Verstappen managed to stay ahead.

But beneath the surface, it became apparent that the joy wouldn't last long for the home crowd. Norris and McLaren were on a different level, and it was a matter of when, not if, the British driver would reclaim the lead.

Just as Verstappen started complaining on the radio that he didn't have the grip to post quick times, Norris passed the defending champion on lap 18 to take the lead.

From there on, Norris unleashed the pace of the McLaren and sailed into the distance, finishing a commanding 22 seconds ahead of Verstappen to clinch his second career victory. It was McLaren's third win of the season, and the orange-coloured cars cut Red Bull's lead in the constructors' standings by 12 points. It could have been even better for McLaren had Oscar Piastri managed to get onto the podium, but he was thwarted by a resolute Charles Leclerc, who kept the faster McLaren at bay in the final third of the race. Piastri, like Norris, lost out at the start, slipping one place to fourth and ending up fifth after his pit stop. While he quickly passed George Russell's Mercedes, the Australian struggled to get past Leclerc's Ferrari despite having nine laps fresher tires.

Nevertheless, with McLaren trailing by just 30 points, the team now looks like the odds-on favourite for the constructors' title if the form book continues for the rest of the season.

#### Code red at Red Bull

While Verstappen still managed to finish second, the margin of defeat to Norris, despite leading for nearly 18 laps, should worry the

reigning champion. For the Dutchman, it was a case of minimising the damage, and he came out of this round still 70 points ahead of Norris. Despite the handy lead, the 26-year-old now faces a real threat to his crown. All it might take is one or two non-finishes from Verstappen, and the driver's title race will come alive. The alarm bells are ringing at Red Bull as the team looks completely lost in the developmental race. It even returned to an older-spec floor on Verstappen's car, which was used in the first race of the year in Bahrain, indicating that Red Bull's new parts aren't working at all. The fact that Sergio Perez had a decent outing and still finished only sixth behind both the McLarens and the Ferraris laid bare the outfit's struggles.

It has been a tumultuous year for Red Bull despite its brilliant on-track performance at the start of the season. The year began with harassment charges against team boss Christian Horner by a female employee. Though Horner was cleared of the charges, the incident exposed the internal power struggle between Horner and Dr. Helmut Marko, the head of Red Bull's young driver's programme. The team then lost Adrian Newey, the greatest F1 designer and the architect of all its championships. Earlier this month, another key member, Jonathan Wheatley, the Sporting Director, resigned. Wheatley had been at Red Bull since 2006 and ensured the team's track operations on race day were inch-perfect, making the team sharp on strategies and pit stops.

At a time when the team's on-track performance has nosedived, these upheavals portend a worrying time for the energy drink giant.

AFP



## MotoGP



Meanwhile, in the world of two-wheeler racing, two-time reigning champion Francesco Bagnaia (**above, front**) regained the lead in the championship after a stunning performance at the Red Bull Ring in Austria. Riding his factory Ducati, the Italian rider did the double, winning both the Sprint and Grand Prix to open up a five-point lead over rival Jorge Martin (**behind**) of the Prima Pramac Racing customer Ducati. It was an important weekend for Bagnaia after Martin's performance in the British GP had put him ahead in the standings. Bagnaia was unbeatable all weekend and cruised to victory, significantly boosting his title hopes. The 27-year-old will want to seal a hat-trick of crowns this year before six-time MotoGP champion Marc Marquez joins him as a teammate in 2025. A title loss to Martin on the customer Ducati would be a massive blow to Bagnaia's reputation, something he will look to avoid.

# INDIA GEARS UP FOR AN INTERCONTINENTAL QUEST



Manolo Marquez takes charge of the Indian national football team, **facing the challenge** of revitalising the Blue Tigers, with his first test being the Intercontinental Cup in Hyderabad.

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After Igor Stimac's curtain call as India's national football team head coach, the spotlight falls on Manolo Marquez as he hopes to usher in a new chapter for the Blue Tigers. Languishing at 124th in the official FIFA rankings and already out of contention for qualifying for the 2026 World Cup, the Indian ship is in choppy waters. Manolo needs to steady the hull and galvanise his crew.

In these turbulent conditions, he will be missing the services of veteran Sunil Chhetri, the former captain and India's record goalscorer who announced his international retirement after being a part of the Blue Tigers setup for 20 years. Manolo's first test comes in the Intercontinental Cup, where India will play Syria and Mauritius in a three-match tournament.

**Taking charge:** Manolo Marquez recently put out his list of 26 probables for the Intercontinental Cup, and there are some surprise additions.

FOCUS SPORTS/ISL



The teams will battle it out from September 3 to 9 in Hyderabad — a city that holds special memories for the 55-year-old, as he had coached Hyderabad FC to the Indian Super League (ISL) title in the 2021-22 season.

Marquez recently put out his list of 26 probables for the Intercontinental Cup, and there are some surprise additions. Focusing on choosing "the correct group of players," he has included three uncapped players in the preparatory camp starting on August 31: forwards Kiyan Nassiri and Edmund Lalrindika, along with midfielder Lalthathanga Khawlhring (Puitea).

#### Options at the back

Given that this is his first international tournament in India, it is unlikely that Manolo will shift from his preferred 4-2-3-1 formation. In this system, the Spaniard might opt for a more traditional back four or maintain a three-man defence with two wing-backs to aid the attacking

build-up. With a midfield pivot in place, which would act as a bridge between offence and defence, there are likely to be two wingers with a central attacking midfielder operating behind the No. 9.

The Indian head coach has already raised eyebrows by not choosing Vishal Kaith as one of his three goalkeepers. Last season, with nine clean sheets and 61 per cent save percentage, Kaith played an important role in helping Mohun Bagan Super Giant win the ISL Shield with his shot-stopping prowess and quick reflexes. Instead, Manolo has selected East Bengal's Prabhsukhan Gill as the third keeper, behind the familiar names of Gurpreet Singh Sandhu and Amrinder Singh.

Manolo has the luxury of having players who can play multiple positions in the backline and different systems. For example, if he chooses a three-man defence, he can use the robust presence of Subhasish Bose as a left centre-back or play him as a right-back in the more traditional

**Eye on the ball:** Anwar Ali (centre), who recently made headlines for his shock move to East Bengal from Mohun Bagan, has retained his place as a centre-back. RITU RAJ KONWAR

back-four setup.

He has a familiar face in Jay Gupta, who he will also coach at the club level in FC Goa, and it is difficult to see anyone else occupying that left-back role, given his ability to join the attack and his excellent trackbacks during transitions. Nikhil Poojary, despite not performing at his best last season, might get another shot, given that Manolo is familiar with his style of play from their Hyderabad FC days.

Anwar Ali and Rahul Bheke should retain their places as the two centre-backs in the heart of the defence. However, Manolo might want to experiment by starting Chinglensana Singh — another crucial player for Hyderabad FC during its title run.



**Fiery frontman:** Lallianzuala Chhangte will be one of the major contributing factors in building and finishing India's attacking moves. REUTERS

#### Operating from the middle of the park

In a 4-2-3-1 system, a solid midfield pivot is crucial. Manolo has two solid players — Jeakson Singh Thounaojam and Lalengmawia (Apuia) Ralte — who can excel in that position. However, given the unpredictable nature of injuries, the Spanish coach may want to utilise his squad depth and not start Jeakson and Apuia together. Therefore, there is a chance that Suresh Singh Wangjam will play as one of the midfield pivots alongside Jeakson or Apuia. Additionally, Manolo has the versatile Anirudh Thapa at his disposal, whose experience will be invaluable.

In the No. 10 position, Manolo will have an excellent player in Sahal Abdul Samad, whose immaculate vision is a luxury for the forward line.

However, the Spaniard is bound to rue the absence of Brandon Fernandes as he recovers from injury. Playing under Manolo last season in FC Goa, Brandon was one of the best performers in the ISL,

## LAST ISL SEASON, BRANDON FERNANDES CREATED 60 GOAL-SCORING CHANCES

creating 60 goal-scoring chances (the most in the league) and contributing to four goals. Along with his defence-splitting passes from open play, India will miss the threat Brandon brings from set-pieces with his pinpoint crossing.

#### Finishing the attacks

In the forward line, the choice for the two flank players should be fairly straightforward for the Indian coach, with Lallianzuala Chhangte on the right and Liston Colaco on the left. Both are pacy wingers with the ability to beat markers with their quick feet and will be two of the major contributing factors in building and finishing India's attacking moves. Mohammad Yasir, another of Manolo's players at Goa, and Naorem

Mahesh Singh can be the alternatives on the flanks.

The Spaniard's decision to omit Rahim Ali was unexpected, but his stats from last season (three goals and two assists) have not helped his case. There might have been a selection headache if Vikram Partap Singh were available. However, his injury will keep him out of the Intercontinental Cup, which indicates that Manvir Singh, who usually plays on the right flank for Mohun Bagan, will start as the No. 9 — a position that is not alien to him at all, given his off-the-ball movement, aerial prowess, and finishing ability.

Uncapped forwards Nassiri and Lalrindika are not expected to start but can get valuable minutes from the bench.

»

# DID NOT JOIN PROTEST AS MOHUN BAGAN CAPTAIN BUT AS CITIZEN OF INDIA

## PER GIANT



Subhasish Bose, the Mohun Bagan Super Giant captain, explains why he joined hands to **protest against the rape** and murder of a trainee doctor at a state-run hospital in Kolkata.

Amitabha Das Sharma

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The evening of August 17 served as a precursor to an upheaval that would grip the city's sporting scene in an unexpected way. It was the day when the organisers of the 133rd edition of the Durand Cup decided to

abandon the showpiece event of Indian football — the Kolkata football derby — which was scheduled to take place the following day. The decision was prompted by the denial of necessary clearance by the Bidhannagar Police Commissionerate, which is

**Lead by example:** Subhasish Bose, the Mohun Bagan SG captain, turned up with his wife, Kasturi Chhetri, to lend their voices to the call for justice.

FOCUS SPORTS / ISL

responsible for providing security during matches at the Salt Lake Stadium. The rape and murder of a postgraduate trainee doctor at R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital in the city had sparked an unprecedented wave of protests by citizens across Kolkata and its



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**United front:** The day after the cancellation of the Durand Cup match between Mohun Bagan and East Bengal due to security concerns, fans from both teams, along with supporters from other clubs like Mohammedan Sporting, gathered to protest the rape and murder of a doctor at R.G. Kar Hospital. DEBASISH BHADURI

adjoining districts. The police, struggling to contain the widespread protests, feared that the 'derby' match day, which generally sees an attendance of over 60,000, would turn the stadium into a major venue for demonstrations.

The cancellation of the season's

first major football derby between Mohun Bagan Super Giant and Emami East Bengal enraged fans. Both sets of supporters had planned to display large tifos and banners demanding justice for a crime that had deeply shocked the city. The protest calls quickly spread across

social media, drawing thousands of fans to gather at the main entrance of Salt Lake Stadium. Fans of Mohammedan Sporting Club, the third major team in the city's football scene, also joined the protest, creating a rare and powerful alliance among supporters of all three rival

# SUBHASISH BOSE, MOHUN BAGAN SUPER GIANT CAPTAIN, SAID THAT EVERYONE IN WEST BENGAL IS GRIPPED WITH A SENSE OF APPREHENSION ABOUT THE SAFETY OF THEIR FEMALE FAMILY MEMBERS AFTER THE INCIDENT



clubs for a shared cause.

Subhasish Bose, the Mohun Bagan SG captain, turned up with his wife, Kasturi Chhetri, to lend their voices to the call for justice. While active sportspeople in India generally distance themselves from such events, Subhasish was a glaring

exception. "I did not go there as the captain of Mohun Bagan but as a citizen of this country and joined my fellow countrymen to demand justice for the victim of that brutality," Subhasish told *Sportstar*. It was the very day that the renowned defender turned 29, but he chose not to celebrate his birthday and spent the evening with the fans.

"The R.G. Kar incident was absolutely horrific and mind-numbing, but the details coming out along with the authorities' attempts to hide the truth and silence the people are beyond shocking. As a society, we've failed our women again and again. But now, let's do what we can to make our voices heard. They can cancel events, prevent gatherings, and shut down protests, but we must continue our demand for justice for our women."

"This is not just a fight for

women, but for every father, brother, husband, and friend. It's on every one of us to fight back and help build a safer country for the ones we love," Subhasish laid bare his anguish as a concerned citizen on his Instagram account.

"I want to see the perpetrators of such a dastardly act punished, and I felt that I should join the voices protesting to stir the authorities into action. A family had lost their daughter, and I felt it was my duty to be on their side along with thousands of others who felt the same way as I did," Subhasish said. "I want the state and the country to be safe places for women. There are many incidents of rape happening in the country almost daily, and I want the government to take strict action against the perpetrators with stricter implementation of the laws so that it deters anyone from harbouring any such thoughts in the future," he added.

Subhasish said that everyone in the state is gripped with a sense of apprehension about the safety of their female family

members after the incident. "The situation in Kolkata is so bad now that even my wife is afraid of going out alone. I feel this kind of fear is gripping every woman in every family in this state, and so it is of paramount importance that adequate steps be taken to create a safe environment for women here," he said, while adding that he is willing to join the protests again against any wrongdoing in the future.





# SUBDUED STARTS AND SUBLIME FINISHES

The football season has returned after its usual hiatus, and as expected the usual suspects **have made merry**, barring a few surprises.



REUTERS

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While Erling Haaland is back to scoring hat-tricks, Kylian Mbappe (**left**) awaits his first league goal in the Royal White. Here's what else unfolded in the beautiful game across the globe.

## Premier League

Manchester City began its Premier League defence with a confident 2-0 win against Chelsea. However, in its following match against newly-promoted Ipswich Town, Pep Guardiola's men delivered an onslaught, securing a dominant 4-1 victory. Haaland was at his ruthless best, scoring a hat-trick, with captain Kevin de Bruyne also finding the net. If the scoreline wasn't

**Goals galore:** Newly promoted Ipswich Town was at the receiving end of Erling Haaland (left) and Mohamed Salah (below). **Right:** Chelsea's Joao Felix (14) set things rolling with a goal against Wolverhampton Wanderers.

REUTERS & AFP

enough, the return of Ilkay Gundogan (after a one-year stint with Barcelona) amplified the atmosphere at the Etihad, as several fans held banners reading, 'Welcome home, Gundo'.

For Arsenal, the priority this season is to avoid creating another 'if only' scenario after coming close to challenging City for the title but stumbling at the final hurdles in recent seasons. Mikel Arteta and his men have at least started on the right foot, winning 2-0 against Wolves in their opening fixture and following it up with a hard-fought victory against Aston Villa by the same margin. Arteta has stressed the importance of multiple players contributing to the scoreline, rather than relying on a single player, and the Spaniard will be pleased to see four different scorers in two matches — Kai Havertz, Bukayo Saka, Leandro Trossard, and Thomas Partey.

Backed by INEOS and a successful transfer window, Erik Ten Hag will have limited scope for excuses, especially after being reprieved from a potential sacking following the FA Cup win against Man City. Before the Red Devils' season-opener against Fulham, the Dutch manager admitted that his team wasn't ready for the new season, and this was evident as his men struggled to secure a 1-0 win against Fulham, courtesy of a late goal by new arrival Joshua Zirkzee. However, United failed to maintain momentum, falling to its recent bogey team — Brighton and Hove Albion, the latter notching up a 2-1 win.

Mohamed Salah surprised many with his new look ahead of the season. But on the pitch, things were the same, as the Egyptian was at his lethal best. In Liverpool's season opener against Ipswich, Salah set up Diogo Jota for the opener before



getting on the scoresheet himself. With that goal, the Egyptian entered the record books as the all-time top scorer on Premier League opening days with nine goals. Salah found the net again in the Reds' next match against Brentford, while Jota set up Luis Diaz to guide Liverpool to a 2-0 win.

Chelsea has been under the spotlight for its active summer transfer window, signing 11 players, and receiving considerable criticism for its inflated squad size of 42 first-team players. However, manager Enzo Maresca has brushed off claims of an inflated squad, highlighting the importance of every player. The Blues did not have the easiest start, facing City in its campaign opener. A 2-0 loss against City didn't raise eyebrows, but the Blues came back in prime fashion, beating Wolverhampton Wanderers 6-2 in the following game week. Noni Madueke starred with an excellent hat-trick, while Cole Palmer exuded his usual class with three assists and a goal. Nicolas Jackson also got on the scoresheet, while Joao Felix marked his permanent move to London with an excellent finish for Chelsea's sixth.

Tottenham Hotspur delivered a dominant display after a frustrating 1-1 draw against Leicester in its opener, drubbing Everton 4-0, with Son Heung-Min grabbing a brace.

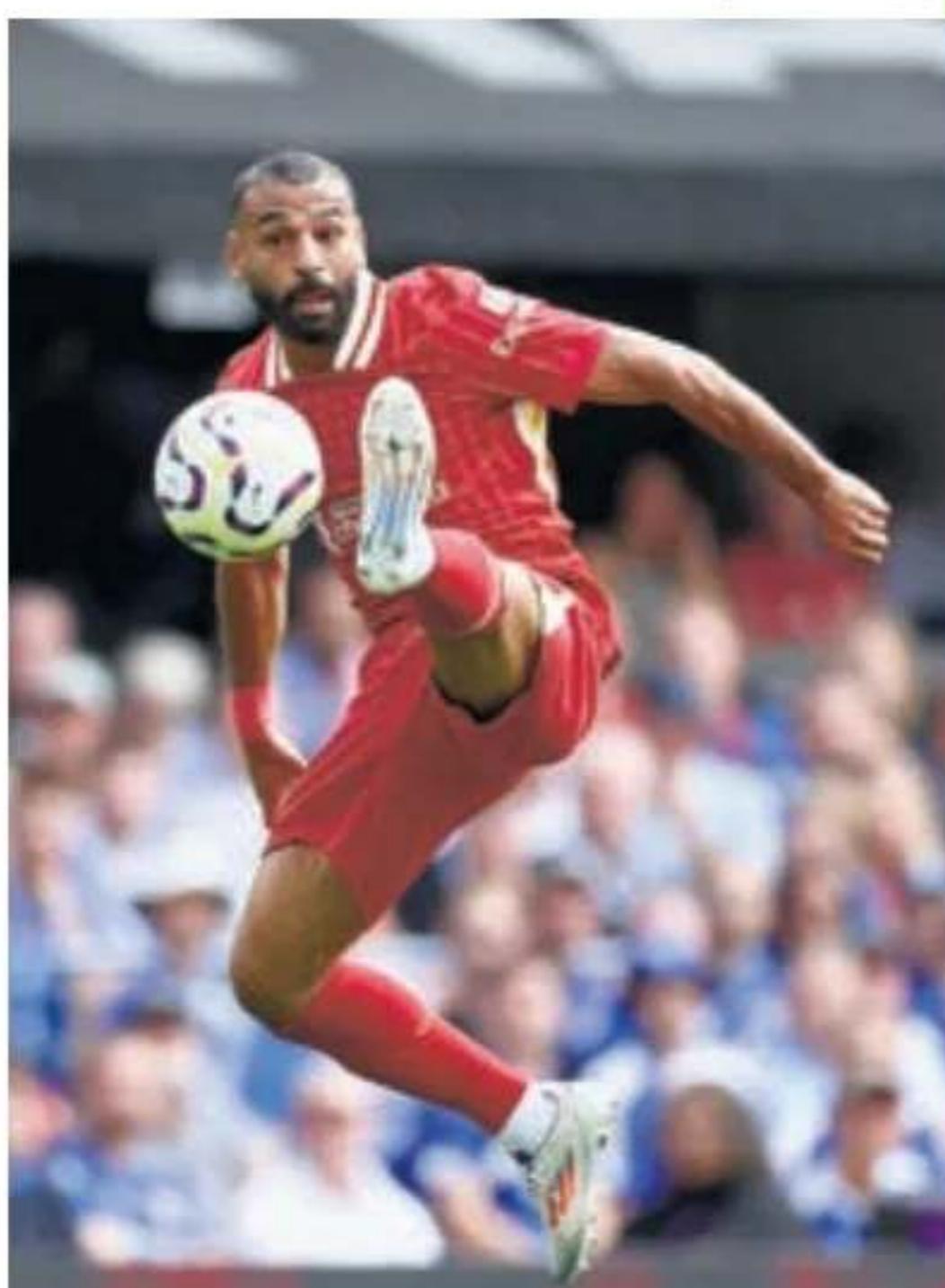
Newcastle United, now backed by cash-rich Saudi Arabian owners,

started with a 1-0 win against the promoted Southampton but was held to a 1-1 draw against Bournemouth.

After the first two rounds of fixtures, the top four teams have six points each. However, courtesy of goal difference, City sits at the top, followed by Brighton, Arsenal, and Liverpool in second, third, and fourth, respectively. Tottenham and Newcastle are fifth and sixth, while Man United languishes in the bottom half of the table in 11th.

Among promoted teams, only Leicester City has a point on the board, while Ipswich and Southampton are yet to open their accounts.

GETTY IMAGES





### La Liga

Real Madrid had the perfect chance to stamp early authority in its title defence, facing lowly Mallorca in its league opener. The news of Mbappe making his league debut naturally dominated discussions.



However, it was an anti-climactic start for Los Blancos as not only did Mbappe fail to find the net, but Mallorca also held it to a hard-fought 1-1 draw. However, Carlo Ancelotti's men bounced back strongly, beating Real Valladolid 3-0 the following week. It was a match where Madrid's young blood shined brightly. While Federico Valverde and Brahim Diaz found the net and kept the Santiago Bernabeu crowd happy, the loudest cheer was reserved for Endrick, who had a dream debut, scoring Madrid's third goal deep in second-half stoppage time.

Barcelona has been in the news for all the wrong reasons, mainly due to its financial constraints. It started the campaign with a 2-1 win against Valencia, courtesy of a brace from Robert Lewandowski after Hugo Duro gave Valencia the lead just before halftime in the 44th minute. Lewandowski carried his goal-scoring momentum into Barcelona's next match against Athletic Bilbao, scoring again in a 2-1 win, with Euro 2024 star Lamine

**On target:** Endrick had a dream debut, scoring Real Madrid's third goal against Real Valladolid. **Left:** Robert Lewandowski does what he does best, scoring at will. REUTERS

Yamal scoring the other.

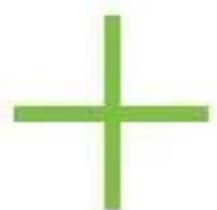
Atletico Madrid flexed its muscles in the transfer market to challenge Real Madrid and Barcelona for the league title. With new signings like Alexander Sorloth, Julian Alvarez, and Robin Le Normand, Diego Simeone hopes his team can go the distance as it did in the 2020-21 season. In its season opener, Sorloth began his Atletico career on a high, scoring on his league debut, but his team drew 2-2 against Villarreal.

After a shaky start, Atletico needed a strong response in front of home fans, but it wasn't going to be an easy task, with Girona as its opponent, a team that upended the usual La Liga narrative last season by challenging for the title at one point, eventually finishing third and grabbing a Champions League spot. Atletico's response, however, was



immaculate. Backed by raucous home support at the Wanda Metropolitano, Simeone's men cruised to a 3-0 win.

After two rounds of fixtures, Celta Vigo is the surprise leader atop the table with six points after winning its two matches against Alaves and Valencia. Barcelona, also on six points, is second due to an inferior goal difference. Madrid clubs Atletico and Real occupy third and fourth with four points each.



## From the bizarre corner

The Copa Peru tournament witnessed a strange incident during a match between Atletico Awajun and Cantorcillo FC. Awajun striker Sebastian Munoz was caught urinating on the pitch while waiting to take a corner kick as the Cantorcillo goalkeeper was receiving treatment for an injury. Despite his attempts to discreetly hide from the cameras and face a spectator-free area, Cantorcillo players noticed and alerted the referee. Munoz was subsequently shown a red card. It remains unclear if further disciplinary action will be taken against Munoz for his unsportsmanlike behavior.

### Bundesliga

Defending champion Bayer Leverkusen grabbed a late winner in its season opener against Borussia Mönchengladbach. After Granit Xhaka and Florian Wirtz put Leverkusen 2-0 ahead, it seemed like a routine day at the office for Xabi Alonso's men. However, goals from Nico Elvedi and Tim Kleindienst brought the game to 2-2, with the latter's equaliser coming in the 85th minute. In the ninth minute of

**Mixed bag:** Bayer Leverkusen's Florian Wirtz had a dramatic stoppage-time against Borussia Mönchengladbach, missing a penalty but redeeming himself with the winner two minutes later. GETTY IMAGES

stoppage time, VAR awarded Leverkusen a penalty but Wirtz failed to convert. But in the 11th minute of stoppage time, Wirtz redeemed himself by scoring the winner, securing three points for the defending champion.

Bayern Munich raised eyebrows after bringing in Vincent Kompany as head coach. Wolfsburg almost gave enough fight to cast further doubts about his appointment after holding Bayern to a 2-2 draw until the 81st minute. However, Serge Gnabry saved the day by scoring in the 82nd minute, guiding Bayern to a win in the five-goal thriller.

As with every season, Borussia Dortmund and its fans are hopeful, but with Leverkusen's dominance and Bayern's desperation to regain



the top spot, Dortmund faces a monumental challenge.

Under the leadership of new head coach Nuri Şahin, a former player who spent six years at the club, Dortmund took a small but significant step towards its objective

with a 2-0 win against Eintracht Frankfurt, with Jamie Byrne-Gittens scoring both goals.

After the first round of fixtures, SC Freiburg, Heidenheim, Dortmund, and Leverkusen occupy the top four spots, respectively, with three points each. Bayern, also with three points, sits fifth.

#### Serie A

Inter Milan didn't have the strongest start to its title defence, drawing 2-2 against Genoa in its league opener. Marcus Thuram, who grabbed a brace, believed he had done enough to ensure a comeback win for the Nerazzurri after Genoa's Alessandro Vogliacco opened the scoring in the 20th minute. However, Genoa, known as 'La Superba' in Italy, kept the fight alive, with Junior Messias equalising in the fifth minute of second-half stoppage time.

Inter responded strongly in its next match, posting a comfortable 2-0 win against Lecce, with goals by

Matteo Darmian and Hakan Calhanoglu (**above, left**).

AC Milan has had a rough start, with the Rossoneri yet to win in the current Serie A campaign. After a frustrating 2-2 draw against Torino in its opening match, a 2-1 loss to Parma in the following matchweek was a significant upset. It's safe to say that things haven't gone according to plan for new head coach Paulo Fonseca.

Juventus has also entered a new phase under new coach Thiago Motta, who enjoyed a comfortable start to his managerial career at the club with a 3-0 win against Como, coached by legendary Spanish footballer Francesc Fàbregas.

Antonio Conte's return to Italy has not been pleasant. Taking charge as Napoli's head coach, he saw his team thrashed 3-0 by Verona in its season opener. However, the team bounced back with a 3-0 win against Bologna, keeping a clean sheet in the process.

Atalanta made headlines last season after ending Leverkusen's





51-match unbeaten streak with a 3-0 win in the Europa League final. It carried that momentum into the new season, beating Lecce 4-0, but lost its way in the following game against Torino, succumbing to a 2-1 defeat.

During his playing days, Roma's head coach Daniele De Rossi was admired for his dedication to the game and his no-nonsense attitude.

Often feared for his temper, one can imagine that the atmosphere inside the Roma dressing room has not been pleasant after the club's tepid start to the campaign. He has yet to see his team win this season.

Roma had a fairly easy start, opening against Cagliari and then facing Empoli, but a 0-0 draw with the former and a 1-2 loss to the latter have caused early headaches for the Giallorossi.

After two rounds of fixtures, all the top six teams have four points, but goal difference keeps Inter, Torino, Genoa, and Parma in the first four slots. No team has won both its matches in the new Serie A season.

**Right moves:** PSG players acknowledge fans after a win against Le Havre. **Below:** Kenan Yıldız during Juventus' match against Como. AFP

#### Ligue 1

The script hasn't changed much in French top-flight football, with Paris Saint-Germain winning 4-1 and 6-0 against Le Havre and Montpellier in its first two matches.

Some might argue that Ligue 1 would lose global interest after Mbappe's departure to Real Madrid. However, PSG's Qatari management has publicly claimed that the club is still capable of challenging for major trophies even without Mbappe.

Former champion Lyon has made another disappointing start, losing its first two matches against Rennes and Monaco. Marseille started the season well with a 5-1 win against Brest but was later held to a 2-2 draw by Reims.

After two rounds, PSG, Lille, Monaco, and Lens (all with six points) occupy the top four spots.

## Elsewhere in Europe



**Turkey:** The Süper Lig features one of football's all-time managerial greats this season, with José Mourinho taking charge of Fenerbahçe. So far, it has been smooth sailing for Mourinho, with his team sitting top after three matches with seven points.

**Portugal:** In the Primeira Liga, Sporting and Porto have made strong starts, winning their first three matches. F. C. Famalicão, which finished eighth last season, also started strongly and is third with nine points. Benfica, with two wins and one loss in their first three matches, sits sixth in the standings.

## Rest of the world



### Miami running smoothly without Messi

Major League Soccer has been a topic of interest since Lionel Messi's move to Inter Miami. Despite the Argentinian being out with an injury, Miami seems to be coping well, currently topping the Eastern Conference standings with 56 points. Los Angeles Galaxy tops the Western Conference table with 52 points.

### Rough sailing for Ronaldo and Al Nassr

Things are not going well for Al Nassr and Cristiano Ronaldo. After losing 1-4 to rival Al Hilal in the Saudi Super Cup final, Ronaldo and Co. had a mild start to the campaign, drawing 1-1 with Al Raed in their Saudi Pro League opener. While Ronaldo found the net in the 34th minute, it was not enough for a win after Mohamed Fouzair scored the equaliser with a 49th-minute penalty. After failing to win the league for two seasons, Ronaldo will hope fortunes turn in his favour and that his record of winning the league in every country he has played in remains intact.

« Need to sustain the winning mentality at business end of tournaments »

# MASSIMO COSTANTINI

Santadeep Dey

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**A**n interaction with Massimo Costantini, the Italian coach who has returned to lead the national table tennis team for the third time (2009–10, 2016–18, and 2024–present), brings to mind the ancient Japanese proverb: “Better than a thousand days of diligent study is one day with a great teacher.”

At 66, he has a remarkable ability to make anyone feel at home with his warm and generous hospitality. When he speaks, it’s from the heart, and his eyes sparkle with genuine emotion as he expresses his belief that India has the potential to break into the top four in global table tennis. In an interview with *Sportstar*, Costantini discusses a variety of topics, including the approach to developing the next generation of talent, the preparations for Los Angeles 2028, and 10-time national champion Achanta Sharath Kamal’s farewell Olympics.

## What has returning to India been like thus far?

It's been good so far. I joined in May, but even before that, I was keeping an eye on the players' performances globally. I was already prepared with a plan for how to work with them.

At the [Paris] Olympics, we saw a good performance, especially in the team event. The men were not very lucky with the draw. But they played very well (against China).

It was the first time India competed in the team event. The women did well to beat Romania, one of the top countries, in the

pre-quarterfinals. These good results make me very optimistic about a bright future for Indian table tennis.

## Is it time to lounge for a while before proceeding, or does the grind for the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028 start now?

The Olympic cycle is a slow process. We have time in the next two years to create a better and stronger internal system. We will be stressing a little bit more on their international performances. In the meantime, we can achieve a better winning mentality. And that mentality can



**My core philosophy has changed over the years. Earlier, I used to think I was the key person. Now, I say that the player is the key person.**



only be achieved by winning more games.

We have to start thinking that we can do it even at the business end of tournaments. It is the direct experience that makes the player confident. One shouldn't think that 'my medal is in my range'. One should only think about winning every contest.

We now have two players in the top-25 (Sreeja Akula and Manika Batra). I hope it is consistent. If we can make the top-15 and top-10 in men's and women's events, we can start thinking a little bit bigger. We need time to achieve certain statuses to consolidate our values and individual positions.

We also need to be consistent in the team events at the Olympics. This time we made it to the top-16, the very last position. If India aims to be in the top four, we can prepare the team better. We had a short time before the Paris Olympics. We came to know only in March. We didn't have time to prepare for the doubles.

For LA, we aim to have a team that we can thoroughly prepare. In

the past, our players have struggled to qualify for the Olympics through continental and world rankings. But once we secure a team spot in the Olympics, we automatically get two players in singles, which will transform our preparations, improve our setup, and elevate our expectations as well.

**With LA 2028 as the focus, do you think the time has come for a centralised training system like they have in Germany and South Korea?**

There is a plan to have one in place. To regularly gather all the coaches, players and talented players from youth, sub-junior, and junior levels from across the country in one place.

Finding a place to train every time causes a little bit of inconvenience. It is better if we don't have to think about where we need to go for training. You would know where to go to get access to staff and coaches. These are things we should have by default so that we can calmly work with the players.

**You are here on a two-year**

**Evolving as a coach:** In his nearly three-decade-long coaching career, Massimo Costantini said his philosophies have evolved to put the player at the centre of things. NIGAMANTHP

**contract, which can be extended to two more. What are your plans for the other major multi-discipline events, like the Asian and Commonwealth Games (CWG)?**

My goal is to create the conditions that will help us become a leading country in the sport within a few years. India deserves to be in the top four because of its population, system, government, different institutions, players, coaches, the TTFI (Table Tennis Federation of India), and lots of academies.

It is a great microcosm we have to exploit. We need to develop coaches and a better system. I want to make every player and coach think that we can be right up there.

**Sharath Kamal has contributed immensely to the sport. He was also the joint-flagbearer for the**



**Last dance:** At the Paris Games, 42-year-old Sharath Kamal competed in his fifth and final Olympics. He was also India's flag bearer for the opening ceremony. AP

#### Indian contingent alongside P. V. Sindhu at the Opening Ceremony of Paris 2024. How did he handle the burden of the expectations of 1.4 billion people?

Being a flagbearer is a humbling honour for Sharath. Paddler Ma Long was the joint-flagbearer for China. Every Olympic Games, we have had a couple of table tennis players be flagbearers; it's good for TT.

There are big expectations from every player. I've played in the Olympics. I coached Italy before. Expectations are there. You have to face the reality. Other players too face the same. Sometimes, you make the mistake of thinking that the outcome is only in your hands. Our performance is always dependent on the opponent, and we have to accept that. We have to accept when we do

well and accept when others also do well.

I kept my expectations low. I don't want to expect a lot and get super disappointed, thinking I didn't achieve anything. Every player must have low expectations and see how they must gain every point. That's what happened with the women when we played against Romania. We succeeded at first. When we started to play against Germany, one would have expected us to make the semifinals or even get the medal. But Germany is better than us. That's the bottom line.

**Sharath said Paris was his last Olympics. Do you think it was the**

#### right moment to call it a day?

Sharath is a monument and an institution for Indian TT. He will always be supporting the fraternity. His wisdom and experience are our legacy. Whoever is taking his place can only learn to treasure his results, personality, and whatever he did in his career.

I thank him for whatever he has done. I had even worked with him at the 2010 Commonwealth Games, when he won the gold medal in doubles with Subhajit Saha. The cycles work like that. Sometimes, when careers end, we have to accept them. I've learnt a lot from him.

A new chapter is coming. I wish him good luck. I hope he will

**Sharath is a monument and an institution for Indian TT. He will always be supporting the fraternity**



continue to help the Indian team in some way.

**Since you were talking about expectations earlier, India taking part in the Olympics itself was a huge thing, and now it is even getting closer to a medal. What is stopping India from reaching the pinnacle?**

Let me take an example from another sport. About the Italian women's volleyball team, people kept saying how an Olympic medal was missing from the cabinet. Sometimes, we don't need to think about what is missing, but thought must be given to what opportunities we need to create to make it happen. We just need to prepare. We need to create the conditions. And now, finally, the women have won gold in volleyball. It was a long, long process. When the time is right, we will win medals.

**How do you see the next generation of players, and how does UTT help in grooming young talent?**

We must nurture the up-and-coming talent and ensure they have access to opportunities like the UTT. It's crucial to get them on the TTFI or TOPS (Target Olympic Podium Scheme) radar. By planting the right seeds now, we can expect a strong future harvest. Everything about the UTT is helping Indian table tennis. The atmosphere, the level of players, and the teams. Add to that the level of coaches and international players. They all play under a certain kind of pressure, which is certainly helpful. I see the players changing. I see them getting to the table with a different attitude and determination.

And whatever helps Indian players achieve better and stronger grit is always welcome.

**You are managing the country's best bunch. There's bound to be a difference of opinion. How do you work on conflict resolution?**  
There is no conflict, only dialogue. We come up with ideas. I have mine, and they have theirs. Then we discuss. We can put on the table what is best for the players. I am not

**Great feeder line:** Manika Batra in action in the Ultimate Table Tennis tournament. Costantini believes that the atmosphere, player calibre, and team competition in Ultimate Table Tennis (UTT) are significantly enriching the sport's ecosystem in the country.

B.JOTHIRAMALINGAM

trying to convince them of what I wish. I am trying to follow their skills, nature and attitude.

That's what the coach should do. The coach should not think that players should listen to him alone. I should not tell them to use the forehand from the backhand, like the Chinese and Japanese. A kid who is good at mathematics — I can't ask him to study history.

**A plethora of ideas must come through during the national camps, when the personal coaches also get involved. How do you bring everyone under the same umbrella?**

It is a big family working together. We have one common goal, which is the performance of the athletes. We



**Changing streams:** Indian table tennis player Archana Kamath, who was part of the women's team that made a historic quarterfinal run at the Paris Olympics earlier this month, has decided to retire from professional play to focus on her higher studies. AFP

know what the players need and what we try to provide.

The work we put in in the past few months has been absolutely positive. We work in good cooperation; I have given my contributions, and they have given theirs. It was fine. I haven't seen any disturbance at the national camps, and the players were absolutely comfortable.

**You are considered a lucky mascot. All the players adore you. What is it about you and this Indian team?**

(Laughs) I don't know. I trust the players, and maybe that's why they feel like that. I never had the feeling that 'this player cannot make it' or 'this one is difficult'. One of the first things I tell my players is, 'I trust you'.

They feel the support. They need someone to back their talent.

Sometimes we get stuck, thinking maybe some player is attacking on my forehand or someone else's serve is good. Well, what about your skills? Why do we place so much importance on what our opponents are doing well? We are here to just change the perspective.

**Then, to what extent does one need to analyse the opponent before a tie?**

Every player has some sort of fixed pattern. It is important for coaches to identify these skills quickly. Ultimately, it is the player who controls the rally when they serve and receive. It is a flow, and there is not much time for players to think and do what the coach says. My job is to give them a little bit of warning as to what the opposition may do in certain match situations, as players tend to play in recurring patterns.

**You have trained so many teams since 1995, like the UAE and the USA. What has been your core**

**guiding philosophy?**

My core philosophy has changed over the years. Earlier, I used to think I was the key person. Now, I say that the player is the key person. Many coaches have this attitude of being the ones who make things happen. Yes, it is true.

But again, players are the performers. I try to develop myself to identify more potential in the players. I don't talk too tactically, but I try to find in every player an additional way to win points. The rest comes with discussion and implementation. It is a process.

**Finally, how do you see Archana Kamath's retirement from the sport to take up academics?**

She was always good at academics. The news hasn't surprised me much. At 24 itself, she has had a lot of experience. During her time in the US, she can choose to continue playing. If she wants to join some training with the national team again, she is always welcome. I am sure it is not a goodbye. I hope to see her again.

### Half-battery masterpieces

By C.G.S.Narayanan

Half battery is an arrangement where two pieces of the same colour stand between a friendly linear piece (rook, bishop, queen) and the opponent's king, so that moving of either of the intermediate pieces off the line would produce a battery with the remaining piece.

Half battery problems make solving much more difficult in that the solver has to not only spot the correct piece which makes the key but also decide on the destination of the key piece. Here I present here three half-battery two-move masterpieces with varied ideas all published in the same year!

N.G.G.Van Dijk

1 prize, Die Schwalbe 1961



Mate in two moves

The first example above by the Norwegian master is a typical try problem which shows a complete tour by each white knight. Each of the sixteen mates is forced threatening eight mates by its stable companion..

Try 1.Ng3? threat (dN any) 1...Nb6 2.Nxb6; 1...Nc7 2.Nxc7; 1...Qf8/Qe8 2.Ne7; g6 2.Nf6; 1...Bg3 2.Nf4; 1...Bf2 2.Ne3; 1...Bc3 2.Nxc3; 1...Bb4 2.Nxb4 But fails to 1...h6! **Key 1.Nc3!** threat (2.fN any) 1...Nb6 2.Qxb6; 1...Bd2 2.Ne3; 1...Bxc3; 1...Bg3 2.Nxg3; 1...g6 2.Ng7; 1.Qf8 2.Nd6; 1...Qb8 2.Nd6 1...Bh4 2.Nxh4

The second problem below is a splendid zagoruyko exposition of half battery theme. In the set play the position of WNs enable him to meet 1...fxe3 2.Rg4; 1...Rxc2 + 2.Qxc2. Try 1.Nd3? (threat Nxf2) 1...Rxc2+ 2.dNxc2; 1...fxe3 2.Nc6; 1...Kxe3 2.dNc6 but 1...h1Q! Key 1.Nb3! threat 2.Nd2. 1...Rxc2+ 2.bNxc2; 1...fxe3 2.dNc6

L.I.Loshinski & Chepizny

Die Schwalbe 1961



Mate in two moves

The third half battery problem below for solving shows changed mates after star-flights in half-battery.

J.M.Rice, 2 prize

Dutch PS Jubilee Ty 1961



Mate in two moves

Solution to problem for solving in the article 'Try in two-movers': Solution to problem for solving in the article 'Try in two movers': set 1...e1Q 2.Rd4; 1...e1N 2.Be3 Try 1.Ne3? 1...e1Q 2.Qc2; 1...e1N 2.Nf1; 1...Ke1 2.Qxc1; 1...Ba3 2.cNe4 but 1...Bb2! **Key 1.Nf2!** zz 1...e1Q 2.Qd3; 1...e1N 2.fNe4; 1...Ke1 2.Qxc1; 1...Ke3 2.Qs3

Readers may send in their queries to  
cgsnarayanan@hotmail.com



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Ryan Fernando



FOR MORE  
STORIES

# THE SECRET SAUCE TO SPORTING SUCCESS

While nutrition does transform good athletes into champions, parents, schools and holistic health play **crucial roles in shaping** India's future sports stars.

In my exciting journey alongside some of India's finest athletes — from Olympic medallist Kenneth Bednarek to wrestling champion Sushil Kumar and cricket superstars like Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma — one thing is crystal clear: nutrition is the secret sauce that turns good athletes into legends. What we put on our plates isn't just fuel; it's the magic ingredient that powers greatness. Winning isn't just about the hours spent training; it's about what's on the menu. This realisation underscores a fundamental truth: a well-nourished body is the foundation of sporting excellence.

### Parents as the MVPs in young athletes' nutrition

Athletes might be the ones on the field, but guess who's the real MVP? Parents! They are the ones who shape those future sports stars with the power of nutrition. Yet only 30 per cent of them fully understand what their kids need on their plates.

- **More fruits and veggies = more wins:** These colourful powerhouses are packed with vitamins and minerals that turn kids into champs.
- **No sugar please:** Cut out the sugary drinks and watch the energy soar — just like that young footballer from Chennai, who went from sluggish to supercharged with just a few small changes.

Parents are the real all-stars, setting their kids up for victory both on and off the field!

### Turning nutrition into a fun adventure

Who says nutrition has to be boring? Let's make healthy eating a fun and exciting journey! Think of it like a treasure hunt — only that the treasure is lifelong health and athletic success. In India, where 14.4 million kids are

battling rising obesity rates, making nutrition fun isn't just important, it's essential.

- **Interactive games and challenges:** These can make learning about food fun! Imagine kids competing to create the most colourful (and nutritious) plates or discovering the 'superpowers' of different fruits and veggies.
- **Healthy eating = future success:** By making nutrition an adventure, we're not just feeding kids' bodies — we're fuelling their futures as champions.

### The power of a holistic health game plan

Nutrition is just one piece of the puzzle. To truly excel, athletes need a holistic approach to health — think of it as their secret game plan. But here's the kicker: only half of India's teachers are clued in on health and nutrition. That's like trying to win a match without knowing the rules!

- **Schools could be the ultimate training ground:** Imagine a world where health and nutrition are taught like life's most valuable playbook, preparing young athletes for success both in and out of the arena.
- **Building a strong foundation:**

Teaching these skills early isn't just smart — it's game-changing for a healthier, stronger future.

#### Teen athletes fuelling the fire for competition

Teens aren't just growing; they're gearing up for serious competition! Their nutrition game plan needs to be on point. But it's not just about chowing down — it's about getting the balance right.

- **For the girls:** Think of nutrition as your best teammate. Track your menstrual cycles, stay on top of hygiene, and bring probiotics into the mix.
- **For the boys:** You need more than just protein shakes. Balanced nutrients and regular check-ups

on your testosterone levels can make all the difference.

And don't forget, a solid pre- and post-workout routine can be the secret weapon that keeps you in the game and out of the injury zone.

#### Blood tests are the athletes' secret superpower

Want to know what's really happening under the hood? Regular blood tests are like the superhero cape you never knew you needed. They reveal everything from hidden vitamin deficiencies to hormone imbalances, helping you tweak your diet for peak performance.

- **Essential tests:** Keep an eye on magnesium, calcium, iron, and B12 levels. For female athletes,

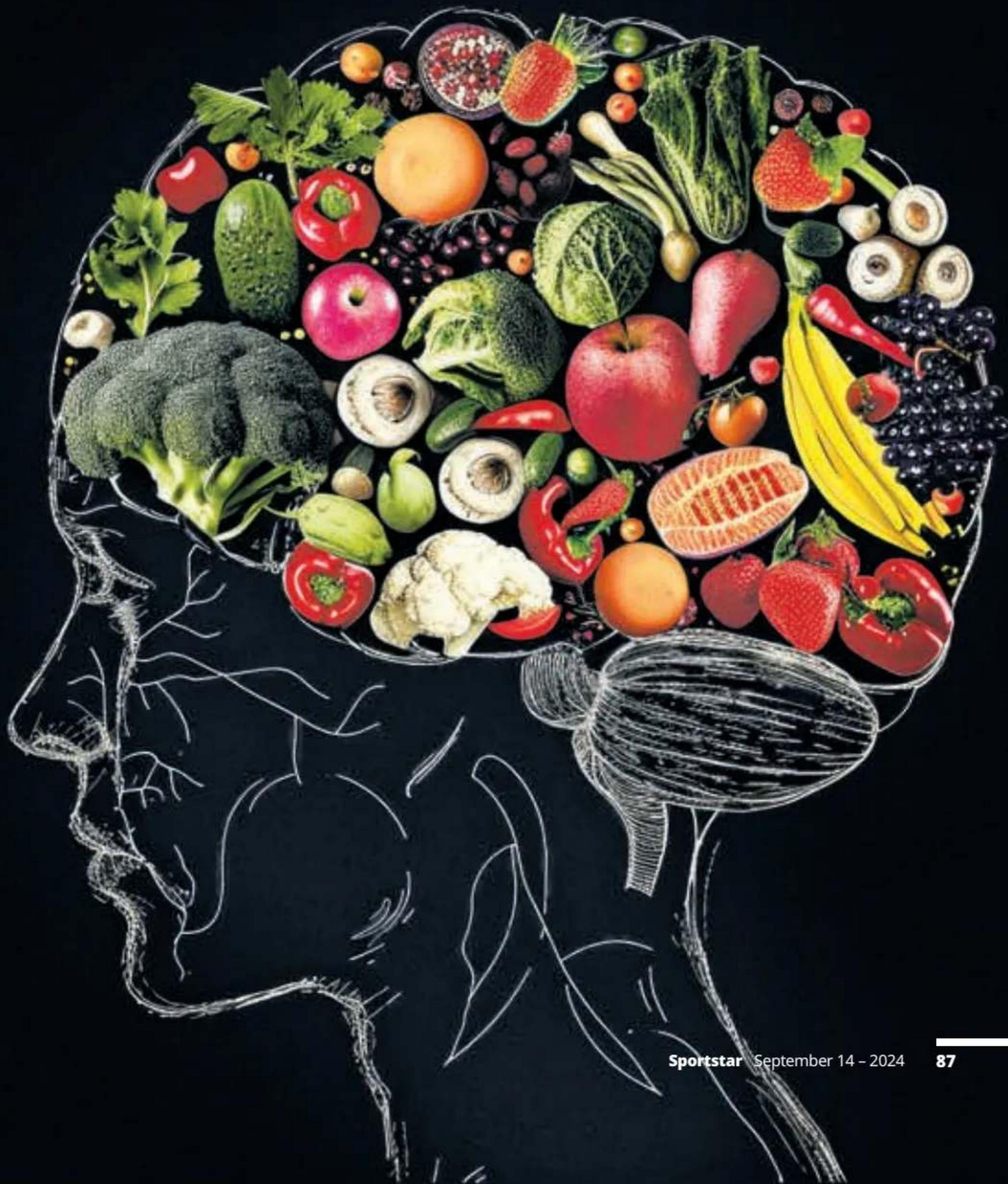
monitoring inflammatory markers and hormones is crucial.

- **Health tune-up:** Think of it as your regular pit stop — keeping your body in top shape so you can stay on track for greatness.

#### Sports nutritionists, the unsung heroes behind every champion

Behind every champion, there's a sports nutritionist quietly working their magic. These pros don't just create meal plans — they craft

**Healthy eating:** More fruits and veggies = more wins. These colourful powerhouses are packed with the vitamins and minerals that turn kids into champs. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT





**Divisive moment:** World No. 1 Jannik Sinner tested positive for a banned substance, an anabolic steroid called Clostebol. However, the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) later determined that it was unintentional, much to the displeasure of many. GETTY IMAGES

personalised strategies that fuel performance, speed up recovery, and prevent injuries. And in a country as diverse as India, they're experts at navigating cultural food traditions to keep athletes at the top of their game.

- **Tailored diets:** From protein-packed meals to anti-inflammatory diets rich in Omega-3s, sports nutritionists ensure that athletes are fuelled for victory.
- **Respecting traditions:** They know how to balance cultural preferences with the nutritional demands of a high-performance lifestyle.

#### Unlocking the code to peak performance via genetic testing

Even with the best diets, some athletes need an extra edge. Enter genetic testing — a game-changer that decodes your body's unique needs. Whether it's understanding your VO2 max potential, managing lactic acid buildup, or pinpointing injury risks, genetic insights help tailor training and nutrition plans to

your DNA.

- **Personalised insights:** Think of it as your custom blueprint for athletic success, fine-tuning every aspect of your regimen to turn national champions into global superstars.

#### Supplements, the sidekicks to a super diet

Supplements are like the Robin to your Batman — they're not the hero, but they sure can help. But beware! Over-relying on them without a solid diet is like building a house on sand.

- **Must-have supplements:** Glutamine, protein (if needed), Vitamin D, and multivitamins (especially B12 for vegetarians) can give you an edge.

- **Hydrate smartly:** Swap high-caffeine drinks for electrolytes to keep hydration and performance on point.

#### Dodging the doping trap by playing clean and winning clean

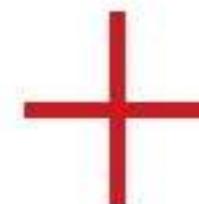
Doping is the dark side of sports, and too many athletes fall into the trap without even knowing it. Shockingly, nearly 70 per cent of athletes caught doping didn't realise they were taking banned substances. That's a huge red flag that we need better education and awareness about.

- **Play with integrity:** Understanding the risks of doping keeps athletes on the path to clean, fair competition. Winning isn't just about being the best but being the best the right way.

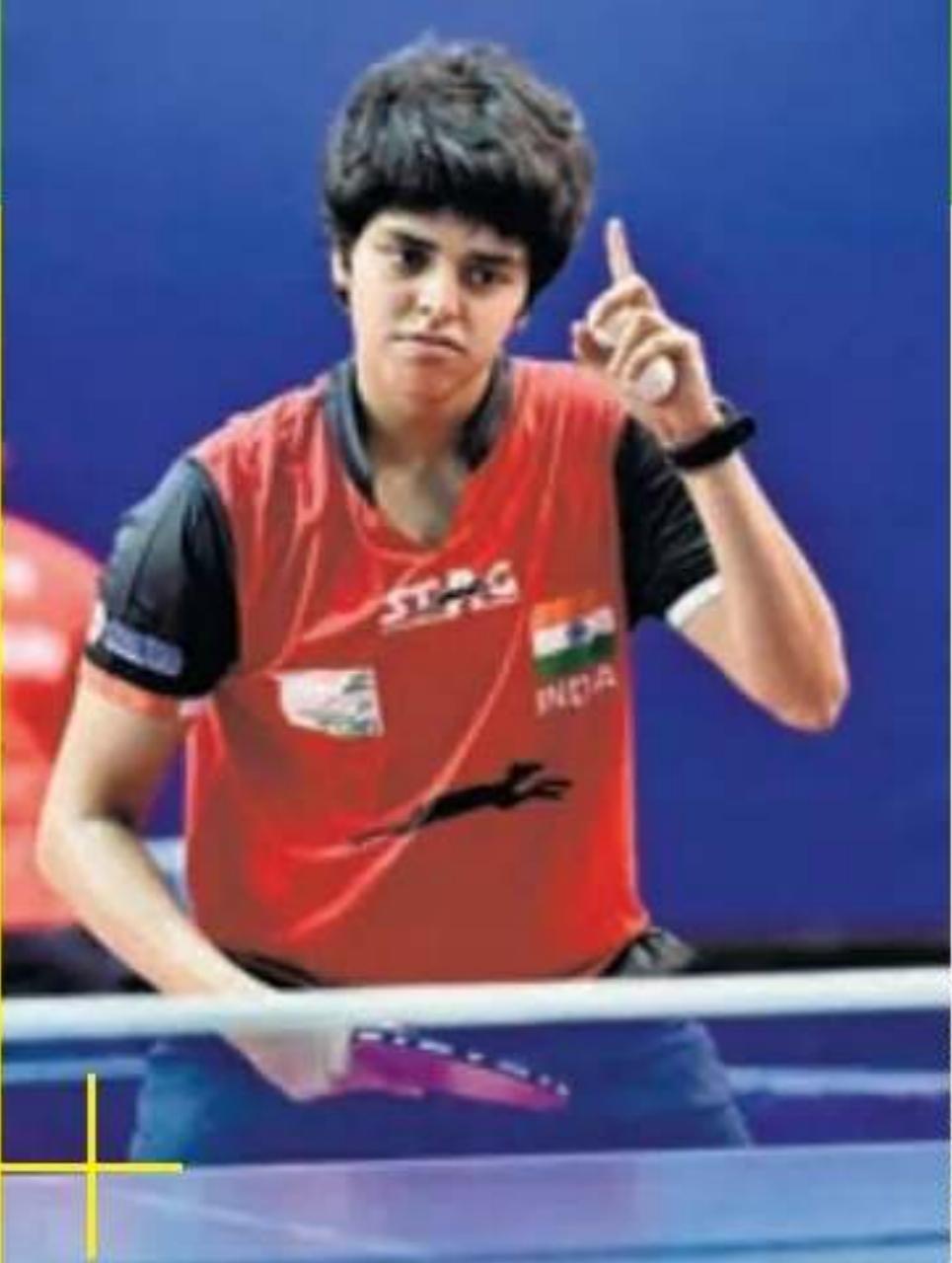
To elevate India to a global sports powerhouse, we must invest in grassroots development, world-class facilities, expert coaching, and sports education, all while fostering a culture that values athletics.

Supporting athletes financially and integrating cutting-edge sports science and nutrition into every training regimen are essential steps.

The future of Indian sports is being crafted right now, with every meal we serve and every lesson we impart. By fuelling our young athletes with the right nutrition, we're not just creating stronger bodies — we're shaping the champions who will elevate India to global glory. Let's make holistic nutrition the heartbeat of every athlete's journey, ensuring that we're not just nurturing athletes but forging the legends of tomorrow. Together, we can turn dreams into medals and potential into greatness. India's future champions are counting on us!



**To elevate India to a global sports powerhouse, we must invest in grassroots development, world-class facilities, expert coaching, and sports education.**



K. MURALI KUMAR

## Archana Kamath quits TT to pursue higher studies

Archana Kamath, a member of India's women's table tennis team that reached the Paris Olympics quarterfinals, announced her retirement from competitive sports to focus on higher studies.

The 24-year-old from Bengaluru, ranked 122 in the world, said she was moving away from the sport purely because of her love for academics. 'It was not an easy decision for me to make, but if I have retired from competitive table tennis, it is only because of my love for academics. TT is an amazing sport that I have had the privilege of playing for a long time, and my love for it continues. I have never thought about nor played TT with financial returns in mind,' the paddler said.

'I took a decision to pursue my higher education after the Paris Olympics by enrolling in a full-time, two-year Master's programme in Public Policy. I somehow felt inside that now was the time and that I did not want to postpone my academic pursuits any further.'

The former national champion thanked the Indian Oil Corporation, Olympic Gold Quest, SAI/TOPS, the Department of Youth Empowerment and Sports (DYES, Karnataka), and all her coaches in her journey for helping her play the sport in a competitive manner.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

## » INDIAN PLAYGROUND

### SPORTOON



SATISH  
ACHARYA

**1** Top Indian race walker Bhawna Jat has been handed a 16-month ban for whereabouts failure by the Anti-Doping Disciplinary (ADD) Panel of the National Anti-Doping Agency after she committed the offence in August last year. Bhawna, a former national record holder in the women's 20km race walk, was provisionally suspended by NADA in August last year. She was recalled from Budapest, where she had reached to take part in the 2023 World Athletics Championships. Her 16-month ban period will, however, begin from August 10, 2023, the date of her provisional suspension. Her ban will thus be over on December 10 of this year.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

**2** Ace cueist Pankaj Advani of ONGC extended his dominance on the green baize as he completed a grand double by winning the senior snooker title at the Western India Billiards and Snooker Championships 2024 in Mumbai. Advani showed steely resolve to shrug off a strong challenge from Railways' Kamal Chawla 6-4 in a long-drawn final that lasted close to seven hours at the Khar Gymkhana billiards hall. Advani sealed his win with the frame scores reading 11-72, 31-58, 95-40, 52-42, 69-43, 43-74, 22-59, 75-62, 84-58, and 58-10. The Bengaluru-based Advani had earlier in the day defeated S. Shrikrishna in the three-hour session billiards final.

TEAM SPORTSTAR

# No foolproof system

The problem with boxers Imane Khelif and Lin Yu-ting, who punched their way to gold medals in the Olympics, is not that they are transgender nor are their testosterone levels abnormally high. There is a **system that allows them to participate**, imperfect as it stands, but with a nod to science.

Suresh Menon

**W**hen British swimmer Sharron Davies missed out on an Olympic gold in the 1980s, it was due to blatant doping among the East Germans. Now she thinks a new issue is keeping women like her from winning medals at the Olympics: biological males being allowed to compete against women.

As the boxers Imane Khelif and Lin Yu-ting punched their way to gold medals, Davies said she thought a woman might soon be killed in the boxing ring. The two boxers had been banned by the International Boxing Association. They carry male chromosomes.

**Males punch 162 per cent harder than females — but the question remains unresolved: who is which?**

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has decided to go by what the passport says. By leaning towards inclusion, fair sport for women might be threatened. And we don't need to wait for a death in the ring before a more research-based approach is used.

Dr. Emma Hilton, the biologist whose research established how much harder a man could punch when compared to a woman, was quoted in the *Daily Telegraph* as saying, "They (the IOC) are trying to balance fairness, inclusion, and safety. But safety isn't about balance. Safety is a cut-off. If it's not safe, nobody cares if it's fair or inclusive."

Both Khelif and Yu-ting have been victims of social media abuse, mainly from those outside their countries (Algeria and Taiwan, respectively). They are the victims of



Sebastian COE

**Fair enough?**: The president of World Athletics, Sebastian Coe, said last year, "If we ever get pushed into a corner to that point where we're making a judgment about fairness or inclusion, I will always fall on the side of fairness."

GETTYIMAGES

two separate strains: the politics of the IOC (which neither endorsed the IBA testing nor did its own), and the belief by the average person that they can distinguish between sexes without any need for science or tests. The gold medal might be compensation, but the system has certainly let them down.

Khelif was quoted as saying, "I'm a woman like any other woman. I was born a woman, I have lived as a woman, and I competed as a woman; there's no doubt about that. [The detractors] are enemies of success. And that also gives my success a special taste because of these attacks." You cannot help but sympathise.

The president of World Athletics (and possibly the next head of the IOC), Sebastian Coe, said last year, "If we ever get pushed into a corner to the point where we're making a judgement about fairness or

inclusion, I will always fall on the side of fairness." The problem with Khelif and Yu-ting is not that they are transgender nor are their testosterone levels abnormally high (there is a system that allows them to participate, imperfect as it stands, but with a nod to science). They are biologically male.

**The Olympics have struggled with the definition of "female," one that should be readily available given that all competition is divided into two groups, "male" being the other.** We have moved on from parading women athletes in the nude to chromosome testing, threshold of functional testosterone testing to self-identifying, but there is no all-encompassing and foolproof system. Ironically, we just don't know enough about something so fundamental.



# Empowering Women

## A Journey towards Progress



देश ने किया नारी शक्ति को बढ़ने गोदी जी का अभिनंदन



The double-engine government in Uttar Pradesh is dedicated to enhancing the self-reliance and prosperity of women. Initiatives such as the Mukhyamantri Kanya Sumangala Yojana, safe motherhood programs, free vaccinations, free education up to graduation, increased representation in government jobs, free LPG connections and Izzatghar (toilets) have significantly improved women's lives. Ownership rights have been granted through the PM Awas Yojana and PM Svamitva Yojana. Protections against violence for women and adolescent girls have been strengthened.

- ➲ Government jobs to more than 1.50 lakh women
- ➲ Ranks first in the country in conviction rate for crime against women and POCSO cases
- ➲ Construction of 2.75 crore toilets (Izzatghar) under Swachh Bharat Mission, more than 10 crore people benefitted
- ➲ More than 60 lakh mothers benefitted under Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana
- ➲ More than 66 lakh house ownership certificates (ghaurani) distributed under PM Svamitva Yojana
- ➲ Free LPG connections to 1.75 crore families under Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana
- ➲ Free education to girls till graduation
- ➲ Women's helpline 1090 service has resolved 99.55% of complaints
- ➲ Women's Night Escort Security Scheme : From 10 pm to 6 am, UP-112 will arrange for an escort to ensure a woman reaches a safe destination
- ➲ 3,195 anti-romeo squads operational
- ➲ On Rakshabandhan, 1.03 crore mothers and sisters enjoyed free travel on government buses
- ➲ Monthly pension of ₹1,000 per month to 31.50 lakh destitute women
- ➲ Through the Livelihood Mission, 1 crore women have been empowered by forming 10 lakh self-help groups
- ➲ Appointment of more than 58,000 women as Banking Correspondents (BC Sakhi)
- ➲ 19.50 lakh daughters benefitted under Mukhyamantri Kanya Sumangala Yojana
- ➲ 65,132 children benefitted under Mukhyamantri Bal Seva Yojana (General and Covid)





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