

The 90m club in men's javelin: As Neeraj Chopra breaks barrier, a breakdown of an elite group in athletics

Late Friday night in Doha at the Diamond League, the rather exclusive 90m club in men's javelin throw found not one, but two entrants. First, off his third attempt, India's Neeraj Chopra achieved a long-standing dream. He had been knocking on the door for ages but finally he broke it down with a mammoth 90.23m throw to become the 25th man in history to achieve the feat. But there was to be another late twist. Germany's Julian Weber got ticket No 26 into the list, throwing 91.06m and pipping Neeraj to the title. The organisers of the event called it "one of the greatest javelin competitions of all time."

Here are a few interesting nuggets about the 90m club:

The 90m mark in men's javelin (800g) has been breached a total of 129 times in history by 26 different athletes, considering of course the one best throw in any given event. One man alone is responsible for 34 of those: Czechia legend Jan Zelezny, the world record holder and, more relevantly, Chopra's coach. "Growing up, I admired Jan's technique and precision and spent a lot of time watching (YouTube) videos of him," Chopra had told World Athletics last year. One of those videos would surely have been the massive 98.48m that is currently the world record, set in May 1996 in Jena, Germany. It has stood the test of time.

Among the 26 athletes who have now breached the 90m barrier, Doha is a popular destination. The Suhaim bin Hamad Stadium in the Qatari capital is where five members of this club – Thomas Röhler, Anderson Peters, Jakub Vadlejch, and now Chopra and Weber – have come up with their best throws. Seven different athletes have thrown 90m+ at the venue with Rohler achieving it twice. Kuortane in Finland has also seen 8 90m+ throws achieved by 5 different athletes.

The other name apart from Zelezny that is unmissable in this list is Germany's Johannes Vetter who, until recently, was throwing beyond 90m for fun and even threatened the world record, going as close as 97.76m. Indeed, it is the Germans who dominate this mini group, with 7 members over the years, the most recent being Weber on Friday. The second best is Finland – which is regarded the spiritual home of javelin – followed by two from Czech in Zelezny and Chopra's peer Vadlejch. A total of 16 countries feature in this club and thanks to Chopra, India is now one of them.

Since the new records have been maintained since the late 1980s, a decade wise breakdown indicates that we might be entering an golden era. While seven men broke the 90m club in the 1990s, it went down to six in the 2000s and 2010s. But halfway into the 2020s, we already have seven new members in the club. The 1990s also witnessed 40 different events where 90m was broken, thanks mainly to Zelezny — and that number is up to 21 in 2020s.

If Chopra, like he always has been, hits a new patch of consistent 90m+ throws in the company of Zelezny, we are in for some highly enthrallingly competitive events.