

Punjab's contribution to sports in India

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Script

A healthy nation is always a wealthy nation. Therefore, it is necessary to put emphasis on sports. One can think of a healthy mind only in a healthy body. Both physical and mental well being are the prerequisites of great achievements in man's life.

Punjab play a wide variety of sports and games, ranging from modern games such as hockey and cricket, to the more traditional games such as kabbadi, wrestling and khooddoo khoondi (similar to hockey). There are 100 traditional games and sports of Punjab.

Whether it is in the sports arena or in the sphere of sports administration, Punjabi domination has been unsurpassed by any other community in the country. A host of sporting legends have their roots in this land of five rivers and they have brought triumph and glory to the state and the country.

Endowed with tremendous spirit, physical endurance and the spirit of adventure, Punjabis have made tremendous contribution to the world of competitive sports. They have also contributed to the growth of the Olympic movement in India.

Credited with winning more than 60 per cent of the country's medals in various international competitions, including the Olympics, Commonwealth and the Asian Games, Punjabis have always been at the forefront of the sports scenario—be it on the playfield or in the sphere of sports administration.

It was in 1924, in erstwhile Punjab, Lahore to be precise, that the Indian chapter of the Olympic movement was born. The founder was none other than G.D. Sondhi, the first Secretary of the Punjab Olympic Association. Lt. Col. H.L.O. Garrett, vice principal of Government College,

Lahore, was the President of the founder body. The same year, the country's first Olympic Games, now christened as National Games, were organized in Lahore, the then capital of undivided Punjab.

Interestingly, the Games are now returning to Punjab after a gap of 45 years. The last time they were organized in Punjab, it was in 1956 at Patiala. An attempt to hold the third Games under the new format in 1989 was aborted by terrorism that had engulfed the state in the early '80s. Before that, 7 out of the 12 Indian Olympic Games were organized by Punjab, with Lahore playing host six times and Patiala taking the credit by organizing the 10th edition of 1942.

The Olympic movement in the country actually started in 1919 at the initiative of Dorabjee Jamshedji Tata, the well-known philanthropist. In 1919, Pune's Deccan Gymkhana invited Sir George Lloyd, the then Governor of Bombay, where Dorabjee Tata made a suggestion for according a separate representation to British India in the 1920 Olympic Games. In 1920, India got direct affiliation to the International Olympic Committee and it sent six sportsmen – P.F. Chugle and A. Dattar (marathon and 10,000 m), K. Kaikadi (cross-country), P.C. Banerjee (440 yards), G. Navale and N.Shinde (wrestling) to the Antwerp Olympic Games. This brought India on the horizon of international sports.

Prabhjot Singh recounts Punjab's contribution to Indian sport and traces the growth of the Indian Olympic movement as the XXXI National Games start off in Ludhiana.

Four years later, when Punjab joined the Olympic movement, it started dominating it and that domination, with a few lapses, continues even today.

If India won its maiden Junior World Cup Hockey at Hobart last month, it was not without the contribution of eight Punjabi players, including skipper Gagan Ajit Singh and the top scorer of the tournament, Deepak Thakur, and the services of its chief coach, Rajinder Singh, and assistant coach, Narinder Singh Sodhi. This is true not only of hockey, but of almost all sports. Name a sport or a game, and the name of a Punjabi will pop up as a star performer.

After Partition, Patiala took over from where Lahore had left. The contributions of both Lahore and Patiala to Indian sports would be remembered for ever.

In fact, if one look back, it was Punjab University that had set the ball rolling. It was in 1903, nine years after the first Punjab University Sports Tournament was started, that the inter-college hockey competition was introduced. Hockey brought Punjab to the forefront. In the 1928 Olympics, India won its first-ever Olympic gold and that too in hockey. In the same year, Maharaja of Patiala, Bhupinder Singh, and G.D. Sondhi were elected President and Secretary of the Indian Olympic Association, respectively, after both Dorabjee Tata and A.G. Neohren resigned. In 1932, when Dorabjee Tata died, G.D. Sondhi became a member of the International Olympic Committee in his place. Punjabis have held positions in the IOC since then. Raja Bhalendra Singh and Ashwini Kumar were the other IOC members. At the last IOC session in Moscow, Randhir Singh, Secretary-General, IOA, was elected a member of the IOC.

It was again Patiala and G.D. Sondhi that paved the way for the first and the only Western Asiatic Games in New Delhi in 1934. After Maharaja Bhupendra Singh's death in 1938, his son Yadavindra Singh was elected President.

In 1938, G.D. Sondhi quit as secretary of IOA. This position came back to Punjab in 1957 when Ashwini Kumar was elected the secretary. In 1959, Raja Bhalendra Singh, father of Randhir Singh, became President of the IOA, and continued in office till the early '80s.

It was not only the IOA that saw the domination of Punjabis but administration of other sports, including track and field, hockey, badminton, table tennis, volleyball, handball, wrestling, weightlifting and cycling also witnessed Punjabis spearheading various associations.

M.C. Dhawan, Jagan Nath Khosla, Buta Singh, Umrao Singh (athletics), Naurattan Singh Bhalla (badminton), Ashwini Kumar, Professor Gursewak Singh, Swami Jagan Nath, Bishen Singh Samundri, Inder Mohan Mahajan, Gian Singh, Kartar Singh, Amrit Bose, K.P.S. Gill (hockey), R.L. Anand (handball), A.S. Harika (swimming), I.S. Bindra, S.P. Bagla (table tennis), S.P. Arora, R.K. Sood and Raj Kumar (volleyball), R.K. Khanna (tennis), Surjit Singh Majitha, K.S. Minhas, and G.S. Mandair (wrestling), Dwarka Dass Sehgal (football) and Principal Som Nath (athletics) are all big names in the country's sports administration.

Unfortunately, Punjab has lagged behind in the organizational aspect. The Punjab State Games, for example, have not been held for almost two decades now. That could be the major reason for the state's failure to win the overall trophy in any of the five editions of the National Games held under the revised format. Holding the sixth edition (31st otherwise) has afforded the state an opportunity to re-establish its supremacy.

The state can no longer boast of sportspersons like Milkha Singh, Balbir, Ajmer, Parveen, Jarnail, Udham, Kamaljit Sandhu, Manjit Walia, Labh Singh, Mohinder Gill, Parduman, Kanwal Thakur, Devinder Ahuja and Dinesh Khanna.

Sound physiques, supple and flexible bodies, extremes of climate, a good and balanced diet and spirit of adventurism make Punjabis superb athletes. One of the reasons for the overwhelming success of Punjabis both at the National and Asian levels has been the presence of a lower middle and middle class in the pre-Partition Punjabi society. It was this class that formed the backbone of the sportspersons in the state because it aspired for new levels of achievement.

Whether it was Milkha or Ajmer (athletics), Parveen Kumar or Gurdip Singh (throwers, athletics), Parduman or Joginder Singh (throwers, athletics), Manjit Walia or Sunita Rani (athletics), Kaur Singh or Palwinder Singh (boxers), Tara Singh or Parvesh Chander (weightlifters), Mohinder Singh Munshi or Balbir Singh of Police (hockey), Devinder Singh Garcha or Gurmail Singh (hockey), Ajinder Kaur or Rajbir Kaur (women's hockey) – all came from lower middle or middle class families.

There was a time when Punjabis throwers, middle and long distance runners and even sprinter, dominated the scenario of Asian athletics. This continued until the 1970 Asian Games. It was during this spell that Punjab also produced some good jumpers, including triple jumpers—Mohinder Gill and Labh Singh.

But the advent of terrorism in the late '70s cast its shadow on sports in Punjab. Playfields and sports stadia, which used to overflow with both budding and experienced athletics, were soon deserted. The upkeep and maintenance of the infrastructure touched its nadir. Organization of sports events took a severe beating. The result was obvious. Punjab's decline in the sphere of sports started. No effort was made to stem this rot. All exercises of reviving sports remained merely on paper.

Another factor that gave a setback to the promotion of sports was when the employment of outstanding sportsmen and women was discontinued.

Punjab, which boasted of the country's top soccer teams like Leaders Club, J.C.T. Mills, Punjab Police, Punjab State Electricity Board, Hoshiarpur Police and a few others can now only boast of the J.C.T. Mills, Phagwara.

However, the biggest setback for Punjab was disbanding of the sports base of the Border Security Force, Jalandhar. Until the early '80s, the Border Security Force had some of the best hockey player—Ajit Pal Singh, Baldev Singh, Tarsem Singh, Vinod Kumar and Parminder Singh—and outstanding soccer players, including Ajaib Singh, Kesho Kirpal, Narendra Gurung, Bal Gurung and Lehmbur Singh. The BSF also used to take pride in its volleyball (Nripjit Singh Bedi, Sukhpal and Balwant Singh Ballu) and basketball team (Anil Punj, Nirmal Chaudhary). It also had some good athletes.

The BSF, Jalandhar, always used to be the main and critical rival of Punjab Police in sports. Both had in common the association of Ashwini Kumar, once acknowledged as the doyen of Indian hockey.

After BSF, the decline of Punjab Police, too, started. Punjab Police also does not enjoy the supremacy in the state and national sports as it did until the early '80.

Though an attempt was made to revive sports by recruiting outstanding sportsmen at the college and university levels, but terrorism had its impact on this force also. Recruitment as well as training of sportsmen and women suffered.

The PSEB, Markfed, Punjab Mandi Board, PUNWIRE, Punjab Alkalies and others, who had recruited outstanding sportsmen, discontinued their recruitment policies. The result was obvious. Outstanding basketball players from Punjab, especially girls, started looking for job avenues elsewhere.

The same thing happened to other sports, including volleyball, hockey, track and field and handball. Punjab's dominance started diminishing. So far no attempt has been made to check this

sports drain. The beneficiaries of this drain have been various institutions, including Oil Board, Revenue initiatives to promote the Punjab rural games. The game will include sports such as kushtian in the state.

As the sports activity was on the decline, the authorities increasingly used the ill-maintained sports infrastructure for purposed other than sports. This was further discouragement to the sagging Punjab sports. In Guru Nanak Stadium, the venue of the opening and closing ceremony for the coming National Games, a film star night was organized, where the synthetic track, put up at a massive financial cost, was substantially damaged.

The five-year allocation for sports was Rs 48 crore and what ultimately was given to the fund-strapped Sports Department was perhaps even less than one-fourth of this promised budget.

The most promising aspect was that as the Government back-up and support for sports took a back-seat, the private sector and other organizations stepped in. Now, out of the eight hockey nurseries being run in the state, all but one are in private hands. Two of these nurseries – the one at Bhaini Sahib and the one in the border belt – are run under the patronage and support of religious sects. One academy is being run by the Surjit Memorial Society, while another one is being sponsored and financed by Ramesh Chander Memorial Hockey Society. Yet another one at Sansarpur, the acknowledged home of Indian hockey, is financially supported by the J.C.T. Mills, Phagwara.

If Punjab has started looking up again, it is more because of the support from these private institutions and non-government organizations.

The sports played in Punjab include the following

1. Cricket
2. Gatka
3. Kabbadi
4. Hockey
5. Football
6. Traditional Punjabi sports and games
7. Male sports and games
8. Female sports and games
9. Games for boys and girls
10. Board games

Now let us have a look on the sports player who are from Punjab and are renowned players of our country

COUPLES IN INDIAN SPORTS

- MILKHA SINGH & NIRMAL MILKHA SINGH

- AJITPAL SINGH & KIRAN
- FAROUKH KHODAIJI & KAITY
- KAMLESH MEHTA & MONALISA
- GURMAIL SINGH & RAJBIR KAUR
- BALWINDER SINGH & SUKHJIT KAUR
- JOAQUIM CARVALHO & VANDANA RAO
- PARAMJIT SINGH & BINAMOL
- WILSON CHERRIAN & SHINY ABRAHAM
- PRAVIN THIPSAY & BHAGYASHREE
- SURJIT SINGH & CHANCHAL
- SYED MODI & AMITA
- SANJAY & MADHUMITA
- J SINGH & NEELAM J SINGH

SPORTS STARS – FATHER AND SON

- DHYAN CHAND & ASHOK KUMAR
- LESLIE CLAUDIUS & ROBERT CLAUDIUS
- VACE PAES & LEANDER PAES
- AJIT SINGH & GAGAN AJIT SINGH
- DALIP SINGH & BALKISHEN SINGH
- RAMANATHAN KRISHNAN & RAMESH KRISHNAN
- NANDU NATEKAR & GAURAV NATEKAR
- LALA AMARNATH, SURINDER AMARNATH & MOHINDER AMARNATH
- MILKHA SINGH & JEEV MILKHA SINGH
- SURINDER MONGIA & ASHIM MONGIA

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

- KARNI SINGH & RAJSHREE
- BHIM SINGH & BHUBANESHWARI

BROTHERS

- AJIT SINGH & HARMIK SINGH
- ROMAN GHOSH & D DEEPU GHOSH
- PK BANERJEE & PRASUN BANERJEE
- MOHAN LAL GHOSH & ALOK NATH GHOSH
- VIJAY PHILIPS & PETER PHILIPS
- CHARANJIT KUMAR & GUNDEEP KUMAR
- BALJIT DHILLON & DALJIT DHILLON
- HARBINDER SINGH & HJS CHIMNI
- VIJAY AMRITRAJ, ANAND AMRITRAJ & ASHOK AMRITRAJ

SISTERS

- KANWAL THAKUR SINGH & KIRAN
- THAKUR SINGH
- NEELIMA VASANT & SUSHMA

INDIAN OLYMPIC GAMES	
YEAR VENUE	NATIONAL GAMES
1924 LAHORE	1948 LUCKNOW
1926 LAHORE	1952 MADRAS
1928 LAHORE	1953 JABALPUR
1930 ALLAHABAD	1954 DELHI
1932 MADRAS	1956 PATIALA
1934 NEW DELHI	1958 CUTTACK
1936 LAHORE	1960 NEW DELHI
1938 CALCUTTA	1962 JABALPUR
1940 BOMBAY	1964 CALCUTTA
1942 PATIALA	1966 BANGALORE
1944 LAHORE	1968 MADRAS
1946 LAHORE	1970 CUTTACK
	1979 HYDERABAD
NEW FORMAT NATIONAL GAMES	
1985 NEW DELHI	
1987 KERALA	
1994 PUNE/BOMBAY	
1998 BANGALORE	
1999 IMPHAL	
2001 PUNJAB	

Now let us have a look on the medals won by Punjab team

PUNJAB'S MEDALS TALLY			
YEAR	G	S	B
1985	33	25	35
1987	17	18	24
1994	26	26	29
1997	44	28	40
1999	34	31	42
HARYANA'S MEDALS TALLY			
YEAR	G	S	B
1985	16	15	14
1987	15	12	8

1994	16	6	15
1997	15	13	41
1999	8	12	23
HIMACHAL'S MEDALS TALLY			
YEAR	G	S	B
1985	3	X	2
1987	1	3	2
1994	X	5	2
1997	X	1	X
1999	1	2	2
CHANDIGARH'S MEDALS TALLY			
YEAR	G	S	B
1985	4	1	3
1987	6	5	3
1994	15	7	14
1997	1	7	8
1999	11	6	10

Conclusion- It is in all the sphere Punjab is outstanding. Whether it is in the sports arena or in the sphere of sports administration, Punjabi domination has been unsurpassed by any other community in the country. A host of sporting legends have their roots in this land of five rivers and they have brought success and splendour to the state and the country.

Necessity of sports: Sports have their great utility.

1. Sports are the sources of recreation. They provide relief and a sense relaxation in a life of monotony of routine marked by miseries, hardships and hurdles.
2. They instill or infuse a sportive spirit to take up the heavy burden of life in a lighter vein and not to think of life either as a tragedy or a comedy but as the ordinary business of living.
3. It is very essential to maintain health and physical fitness.
4. It encourages the growth of team-spirit.
5. Sports and games bring about various methods of diversions.