Final phobia a thing of the past: Sindhu

The World champion calls triumph a collective effort, says she will start preparing for Tokyo 2020



Golden girl: P.V. Sindhu with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju, coaches Gopi Chand and Kim Ji-Hyun, and her father P.V. Ramana. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

BADMINTON

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM

P.V. Sindhu, fresh from her World championship triumph, said her ultimate target is the 2020 Tokyo Olympics gold next year.

Speaking at the Gopi Academy here on Tuesday, Sindhu said she was relieved to go all the way after losing two consecutive finals.

"Yes, many talked about the final phobia, but now that is a thing of the past and I will start preparing for the Olympics in right earnest," she said.

"I have been waiting for this gold for long and it was the result of the collective effort of everyone, including Gopi sir, Kim Ji-Hyun and others at the Academy. This performance is not because of my efforts only," said

Felt no pressure

"I believed in myself before the final, came back stronger, took it like any other match and learnt from my mistakes. I am glad I played really well, didn't think of the losses in the past, and felt no pressure at all," she

"Some meditation classes recently helped me stay calm in crunch situations," revealed Sindhu.

Confidence

"When I look at the Olympics, this means a lot in terms of confidence and to be moving forward even as I am conscious of the very tough competition in the circuit where you have to keep strategising every two minutes on the court because you will be up against different players with different styles," she explained. "I will be acquiring new

skills and be much better

Joy unlimited: Sai Praneeth and Sindhu with their bronze and gold medals. • NAGARA GOPAL

prepared for the bigger challenges," added Sindhu.

Sindhu also lauded Praneeth for his stupendous show. She said he played really well, terming the performance a "big feat."

She wished Praneeth would go on to win more laurels.

Biggest dream

Chief National coach P. Gopi Chand said Sindhu winning the gold at the World Championships was his "biggest dream" and he was delighted that she pulled it off on the biggest stage.

"I must say we badly need-

ed this, especially after Sindhu lost two finals. It was a classy victory," said Gopi.

He felt that Tokyo 2020 will be different for Sindhu compared to the 2016 Rio Games as she will be a more marked player and needs to keep improving," he said.

Inspirational

"It was also a pleasure to watch Manasi Joshi win gold in the Para Worlds at the same venue and other Indians bag medals in this cate-

"Very inspirational performances from them indeed,"

Here to produce champions: Kim

Bonding has helped get good results, reveals the Korean

Korean coach Kim Ji-Hyun

"I am over the moon defi-

nitely after the World cham-

pionship gold. Now the em-

phasis will continue on

improving on every aspect –

physical, mental and skills as

always - for you cannot af-

ford to relax in the run-up to

bonding that is really help-

ing me to get real good re-

that Sindhu is made to be-

lieve in herself more, even

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to cut down on the nega-

tives. She is a champion

player and all that she need-

ed is some fine-tuning," Kim

said. "There is definite

change in her attitude and

"We have a very good

"One thing I can say is

Olympics," she said.

sults," she said.

with P.V. Sindhu.

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

V. V. SUBRAHMANYAM HYDERABAD

"I am not here to make money, but to produce champions", says Korean Kim Ji-Hyun, former Asian Games gold medallist and now credited for playing a key role in P.V. Sindhu winning the 2019 World championship badminton gold in Basel (Switzerland) last Sunday.

"I would have left my job here (with Sports Authority of India at the Gopi Chand Badminton Academy here) if I were not enjoying it. And, also I make it a point that every one of my trainees enjoys their role," she told *The* Hindu in an exclusive chat on return her return on Tuesday.

"Yes, I believe Sindhu played the perfect and best match of the championship in the final. We were specific that she should attack from the word go against Nozomi Okuhara, and not let the opponent any freedom given her reputation to engage in long rallies," she said.

Emphasis

"We worked on a lot of things for sure and the emphasis was on all-round improvement of Sindhu's game because we all know that she is a big player with the Olympics around next year," Kim skills for the good," she added.

"Before the final, I just reminded Sindhu that she had beaten Okuhara in the recent past and all that she needed was to stay focussed and not think too what is going to happen in the final," the Korean coach recalled.

Pleasure to work

"It is a pleasure to work with these Indian players who are all responding to my training method. It is sometimes boring, like any other job. So, I try different things to keep them relaxed and be mentally fresh for the challenges ahead," Kim said.

"Definitely, it is important to maintain the kind of fitness, form and consistency Sindhu showed in the World championship. And it is a long, long way still to go before the next Olympics," she cautioned.

On working with Gopi, Kim said she was pleased with his style of functioning. "When there is scope for creating ideas, you will enjoy your job more and that's what I am doing now," she said with a big smile.

"There will be pressure on me too as coach because of the expectations but like the players themselves, I have to be ready for any task," she concluded.

There was no extra pressure and I played like in any other championship, says Sai Praneeth

V.V. SUBRHAMANYAM

B. Sai Praneeth, who won the men's singles bronze medal in the recent World championship in Basel, says it could be the beginning of a new chapter in his career.

"Obviously, it (bronze) means great to me," he said at the Gopi Chand Academy where he trains.

"There was no extra pressure and I entered this event like any other championship. But, I am happy with the end result," he said on Tuesday.

"Definitely the Arjuna Award gave me that extra motivation in the Worlds but again it is never easy to compete at that level. But beating Christie was something special which I cherish," he said.

On P.V. Sindhu winning gold, Praneeth felt that once she beat Tai Tzu the confidence was up not only for her but for the entire contingent that she could just pull it

"It was a fantastic finally

from Indian point of view," he said.

"From India in men's singles only two will be selected from India for Olympics if your are in the top 16 and so the competition is really tough among ourselves," he

said with a smile.

"This time I got enough time to prepare for the Super Series events and also for this World championship and so the training sessions have really helped me," he said.

"Now, the focus is on im-

proving my all-round game and fitness levels," Praneeth said. "It is more of endurance and intensity training now and this is good for us," he added.

"There are so many tour-

focus only one event for you have to keep an eye on the World rankings to stay in the race. You have to be consistent to be in the race for an Olympic medal which is the biggest goal I am chasing naments and you just can't now," he concluded.



I don't know who that is, says Serena of Ramos

to move past last year's US Open final meltdown. preferring to forget the umpire Carlos Ramos she called a "liar" and "thief" and fans booing a controversial ending. When asked about Ramos, who will not officiate any Serena or Venus Williams match this year, Serena replied, "I don't know who that is." AFP

Svaida, 16, revels in **Grand Slam debut**

Sixteen-year-old Zachary Svajda cherished an "awesome" professional debut in the US Open first round Monday as he became the youngest player to feature in the men's draw since Donald Young in 2005 Svaida looked on course to become the voungest winner of a singles match in New York since Michael Chang reached the fourth round of the 1988 tournament at age 16. However he struggled with cramp after claiming the first two sets against 37-years



old Paolo Lorenzi of Italy.

Statue for barrier-breaker Althea Gibson unveiled

A granite statue honouring African American tennis trailblazer Althea Gibson was unveiled outside Arthur Ashe Stadium on the opening day of the U.S. Open on Monday. In 1950, at 23 years old, she was the first African American allowed to compete at the U.S. Nationals, the precursor to the U.S. Open. In 1956, she became the first black player to win the French Open and the following year the first to win Wimbledon and the U.S. Nationals. REUTERS

Nagal rattles Federer with a gutsy display

Takes a set before succumbing in four; Serena routs Sharapova; Djokovic cruises

US OPEN

PTI, REUTERS

The fighting spirit shone through in Sumit Nagal's dream Grand Slam debut as he took a set off the iconic Roger Federer before fizzling out at the US Open, here on Monday.

In a much-anticipated clash, the 22-year old lost 4-6, 6-1, 6-2, 6-4 after giving a glimpse of his talent at the Arthur Ashe Stadium.

Nagal became only the fourth Indian – after Somdev Devvarman, Yuki Bhambri and Saketh Myneni – to win a set in the main draw of a Grand Slam in the last 20

Nagal, who made the main draw through qualifying, returns from the Open not only richer by \$58,000 but also with the experience of what it takes to compete at the biggest stage.

Federer endured a shakv start to the match but for Nagal it was the best he would have felt on a tennis court. The Indian stunned the



serve in the third game with the Swiss committing a double fault on the second breakpoint. While a "rusty" Federer

was still measuring up his newest rival, Nagal, with his deep returns, was setting up winners - some eye-catching inside-out forehands.

Showcasing his talent: Not overawed by the occasion, Sumit Nagal uncorked some fine shots

crowd by breaking Federer's

While many would not have expected such a sight, Nagal further shocked the crowd when he broke Federer for the second time and served out the set after being down 0-30.

Fearless play

Hitting deep returns and going for his shots fearlessly and not allowing Federer to come on to the net were key to Nagal's first-set exploits even as the Swiss struggled to contain his unforced errors. Federer had 19 unforced errors to nine of Nagal in the opener.

The anticipation grew but Federer shook off the rustiness to dismantle Nagal's game after that. He began serving well, if not his best, and dictated the play with his strong returns, killing points at will at the net.

After taking the second and third set with ease, the Swiss was serving for the match in the 10th game of the fourth when he went down 0-40 with Nagal making some solid returns. After saving five breakpoints, Federer closed the match with a strong serve on Nagal's backhand.

There were no problems for Novak Djokovic, who began his title defence in style with a 6-4, 6-1, 6-4 win over Spaniard Roberto Carballes

Osaka battles hard

Meanwhile in the women's draw, top seed and defending champion Naomi Osaka of Japan had to battle hard to beat the unseeded Russian Anna Blinkova 6-4, 6-7(5), 6-2 and reach the second round. Osaka hit eight aces and 44 winners but also made 50 unforced errors.

In another highly anticipated match, eighth Serena Williams trounced old foe Maria Sharapova 6-1, 6-1 in the first New York meeting between two of the sport's biggest names to get her quest for a record-tying 24th Grand Slam title off to a flying start.

IMPORTANT RESULTS

Men: Mikhail Kukushkin (Kaz)

bt 10-Roberto Bautista Agut (Esp) 3-6, 6-1, 6-4, 3-6, 6-3; 22-Marin Cilic (Cro) bt Martin Klizan (Svk) 6-3, 6-2, 7-6(6); 1-Novak Djokovic (Srb) bt Roberto Carballes Baena (Esp) 6-4, 6-1, 6-4; 23-Stan Wawrinka (Sui) bt Jannik Sinner (Ita) 6-3, 7-6(5), 4-6, 6-3; Reilly Opelka (USA) bt 11-Fabio Fognini (Ita) 6-3, 6-4, 6-7(6), 6-3; 3-Roger Federer (Sui) bt Sumit Nagal (Ind) 4-6, 6-1, 6-2, 6-4; 25-Lucas Pouille (Fra) bt Philipp Kohlschreiber (Ger) 6-3, 4-6, 6-4, 6-4; 15-David Goffin (Bel) bt Corentin Moutet (Fra) 6-3, 3-6, 6-4, 6-0; 12-Borna Coric (Cro) bt Evgeny Donskoy (Rus) 7-6(7), 6-3, 6-0,

Women: 1-Naomi Osaka (Jpn) bt Anna Blinkova (Rus) 6-4, 6-7

bt Natalia Vikhlyantseva (Rus) 1-6, 6-1, 7-6(1); 13-Belinda Bencic (Sui) bt Mandy Minella (Lux) 6-3, 6-2; 7-Kiki Bertens (Ned) bt Paula Badosa (Esp) 6-4. 6-2: 6-Petra Kvitova (Cze) bt Denisa Allertova (Cze) 6-2, 6-4:5-Elina Svitolina (Ukr) bt Whitney Osuigwe (USA) 6-1, Venus Williams (USA) bt

(5), 6-2; 26-Julia Goerges (Ger)

Zheng Saisai (Chn) 6-1, 6-0; 20-Sofia Kenin (USA) bt Coco Vandeweghe (USA) 7-6 (4) 6-3; 10-Madison Keys (USA) bt Misaki Doi (Jpn) 7-5, 6-0; 8-Serena Williams (USA) bt Maria Sharapova (Rus) 6-1, 6-1; 29-Hsieh Su-Wei (Tpe) bt Jana Cepelova (Svk) 6-4, 5-7, 6-3: 22-Petra Martic (Cro) bt Tamara Zidansek (Slo) 6-4,

No confusion!

SPORTS BUREAU NEW YORK

The on-court interview following the match witnessed a funny moment when Brad Gilbert asked Federer if he had imagined Rafael Nadal instead of Sumit Nagal.

"If you look up at the

scoreboard, we change the 'G' and add a 'D', did you think for a second that it was Nadal," asked

Gilbert. "No," said a smiling Federer. "But may be for you guys and the social media it is," he added with a laugh.

Nagal will have a solid career: Federer

Collowing his scratchy Γ opening round victory over Sumit Nagal, Roger Federer predicted "a very solid career" for the Indian youngster. "[It's] never easy to come

out and play your best," said

Federer about Nagal. "Even though it's kind of what you live for, you dream about, playing on the big stage. I think he did that very well." "He moves well, moves the ball around well. Sort of very much a clay-courter. He

knows what he can bring.

It's not the game that comes

out with the biggest surpris-

es. [But] it's really consis-

tent. He did it very well." For Nagal, playing Federer at the Arthur Ashe stadium under lights was unlike any other experience before.

"It was my first time in such a big stadium and playing one of the best tennis players. I enjoyed every mo-



like my beard, rusty" ROGER FEDERER on his show against Sumit Nagal

ment being there," he said. "Tennis-wise, it was a bit up and down. I was a bit nervous as it was my first time. In the second and third sets my energy levels went really down and I started missing a lot of first serves.

Thinking too much "After I won the first set, instead of focusing on what I

did well, I started thinking too much. Things change in a matter of seconds and that's what happened.

"He [Federer] is always making you think. You have no idea where the next ball is going to come. I have never had that feeling with anybody else I have played," Nagal added.

crack the top-100 in order to play the ATP Tour level events more regularly.

After the promising effort,

Nagal, ranked 190 now, stat-

ed that he was aiming to

Challengers for now "Challengers is not the place vou want to be for the rest of your life," he said. "You just want to do your job and get out as soon as you can. But it's just going to be Challengers until I break into the top-100. I want to do it this year. I have a few clay challengers lined up. That's what

I am chasing."

It was satisfying as I had to grind a lot, says Rahane on his century

INDIA IN WI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

India's Test vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane, who withstood intense pressure to score match-winning knocks in the first Test against the West Indies, said he made a conscious effort to ignore criticism directed at him for not reaching three figures in

the last two years. Subject of debate

Coming into the Test series, Rahane's form was a subject of widespread debate but he silenced his critics with scores of 81 and 102 in India's 318-run win over the West Indies here on Sunday.

"I try not to get affected by criticism as it is unwanted and I can't control it. You are always happy when you make a hundred," Rahane

told fellow-Mumbaikar Rohit Sharma in a chat aired on

'I try not to get affected by criticism'

the team in a good position before getting to the hundred," he added.

Persistence pays off

Despite the dip in his performance, the Indian team management persisted with Rahane and it paid off.

Skipper Virat Kohli has also backed him to do well for the team and defended the batsman's credentials in the face of questions over his form.

The second and final Test between the two sides begins in Jamaica on Friday.

The series is part of the inaugural World Test Championships, in which India is currently on top in the points table.



Back with a bang: Ajinkya Rahane repaid the faith the team management had in him. • AP