



Vervoort won gold and silver in wheelchair racing at the 2012 London Paralympics

‘Life is hard’ paralympian resorts to euthanasia

ASSOCIATED PRESS
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PARALYMPIAN MARIEKE Vervoort said when the day arrived, she had signed the euthanasia papers and was prepared to end her life. That day came Tuesday in her native Belgium, her death confirmed in a statement from the city of Diest. Vervoort, who was 40, won gold and silver medals in wheelchair racing at the 2012 London Paralympics, and two more medals three years ago in Rio de Janeiro. In an interview attended by The Associated Press at the Paralympics in Rio, Vervoort described living with unbroken pain from an incurable, degenerative spinal disease. She talked of sleeping only 10 minutes some nights, described severe pain that caused others to pass out just watching her, and detailed how sports kept her alive.

“It’s too hard for my body,” Vervoort said in the 2016 interview. “Each training I’m suffering because of pain. Every race I train hard. Training and riding and doing competition are medicine for me. I push so hard to push literally all my fear and everything away.”

Vervoort spent her last evening with close friends and family, even sharing a glass of sparkling wine, which she referred to as a painkiller. Condolences streamed in from across the nation, including from the royal family. “Marieke ‘Wielemie’ Vervoort was an athlete tough as nails and a great lady. Her death touches us deeply,” the family said in a statement.

Vervoort was a strong advocate of the right to choose euthanasia, which is legal in Belgium. Like training hard, she said it gave her control and put “my own life in my hands. ‘I’m really scared, but those (euthanasia) papers give me a lot of peace of mind because I know when it’s enough for me, I have those papers,” she said.

“If I didn’t have those papers, I think I’d have done suicide already. I think there will be fewer suicides when every country has the law of euthanasia. ... I hope everybody sees that this is not murder, but it makes people live longer.”

Vervoort also had epileptic seizures and had one in 2014 when she was cooking pasta and spilled boiling water over her legs. That resulted in a four-month hospital stay. A loyal Labrador named Zenn began staying with her, pawing her when a seizure was about to occur. Zenn also pulled her socks out of the sock drawer, she said.

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MARIEKE VERVOORT

Wushu gets a poster boy

Praveen, who gave up boxing alleging favouritism, wins gold at World Championships

SHIVANI NAIK
MUMBAI, OCTOBER 23

ROHTAK IN Haryana was always known for its boxing and its municipality Kalanaur for its rasgulla; 22-year-old resident Praveen Kumar loved them both as a teenager. Then the quiet son of a peon, who worked shuffling around tiringly for a vigilance office of the Haryana State Electricity Board, felt severely let down by both.

Favouritism in boxing left him bitter and the rasgulla became far too sweet for his maniacal weight control needed for sport. So in 2013, the then-15-year-old shifted to another combat sport, Wushu, channelling his anger with the boxing selection system into India’s fastest growing martial art. On Wednesday, Praveen was crowned India’s first Wushu male World Champion in the 48 kg at Shanghai.

“Today my opponent Russel Diaz was sending flying kicks like a windmill. *Par maine andar ghuske punch maar kar usko haraaya. Boxing ki poori bhadaas nikaal di*, (But I punched him hard. I took out all the frustration I had because of boxing)” says the man who dreamt of nothing but boxing after seeing Akhil Kumar box at Beijing in 2008.

Praveen who won 2-1, countered Filipino Diaz with uppercuts from the inside unleashing a flurry in the last round, and fulfilled his dream of punching to world glory, albeit in a different sport.

The sport-obsessed lad had first watched Wushu in passing on television during a National Games repeat telecast, and was immediately smitten. “Boxing *mein dhoka khaaya*, (Boxing let him down)” says his father Harish Kumar. Feeling betrayed by nepotism of a local coach, Praveen would join a small Wushu centre under coach Pramod Katariya with two jaded mats discarded by wrestlers, at Bahu Akbarpur.

Wushu, essentially Chinese kung fu, incorporates punches, kicks, jumps, sweeps and throws, and has seen a phenomenal rise in the north and north east of India - especially in J&K and Haryana. When he was sidelined by the boxing coach, he would tell his father he needed an outlet and Wushu was a good combination of fitness and self defence.

India’s first men’s medal, however, came in the sanda (wushu’s full contact format), which combines elements of kick-boxing, boxing and wrestling.

“He was always good at sports - kho kho, cricket and wrestling too besides boxing. He even went to Kanyakumari as a school boy representing Haryana in Manipuri fight sport thang ta,” says his brother Pawan, who would end up a very reluctant sparring partner.

“I am 70 kg and he is 48 kg. And he would charge towards me and challenge



Praveen Kumar (centre) with coach Kuldeep Handoo (left). *Twitter*

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PRAVEEN KUMAR

me to thrown him down. He is tactically so good and his presence of mind is excellent. I’ve not even managed to push him one step behind till today,” he laughs.

Praveen who won the trials for the World Championships earlier this year, is also known in Wushu circles for his obsessive training. “There’s an Indira Gandhi Park nearby where he gathers young wrestlers

and spars with them for hours. He’ll run 15-20 km on the road or a bypass, after returning from a camp, when I’d expect him to be exhausted from travel. And though he still swears by *kachcha doodh* (fresh milk), he can scarily go for days on just water while keeping his strength when he needs to get his weight down from a normal 53 kg to 48 kg,” says Pawan, with much awe.

Heartbreaks aside

Befitting martial arts fairytales, Praveen had a heartbreaking loss in the 2016 finals of the Asian Championship that changed him overnight - he turned to manic training. “He would talk in his sleep about why he’d lost and didn’t eat for 2-3 days. He

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PAWAN KUMAR

PRAVEEN’S BROTHER ON HIS LOSS IN THE 2016 ASIAN CHAMPIONSHIP

would keep crying to our mother, explaining why he might have lost and saying *galti ho gayi*. She told him - he would need to work harder,” Pawan recalls.

It was his mother Darshna Devi, who had understood very early, how obsessed her child was, with sport. The family would often need to borrow money from her brothers, for Praveen’s diet and equipment. There was some respite when he beat many-time National champion, Umesh Chandra, impressed coaches of Indian Army. Praveen is now attached to the Assam Regiment serving as Havaladar.

On Wednesday, the family would gather around the only phone with internet data, brother Pawan’s and watch the final at 8 a.m. Playing a former junior world champion, Praveen knew he was up against a very combustible kicker and puncher in the Filipino.

Swinging momentum

The Indian would win the opening round, and go down in the second with the momentum having swung wildly and kicks raining down on him. It was at this point that Praveen would throw himself into the whirring blades of kicks and punches, cutting down their efficacy.

“We told him to play close and not give his opponent any range. He overcame a rampaging opponent in the third round to win 2-1,” coach Kuldeep Handoo, says. It was a strong attacking counter when he moved in and unleashed short, snappy punches.

“This was my first world championship and to win the world title is a great feeling because I’ve worked hard all my life. I know Wushu is not in Olympics, but this was important so other players know they can win a world title too,” Praveen said.

The government’s financial support hinged on a world gold medal (also 2 silvers, 2 bronze), though the Indian contingent was happy to get their best-ever finish at the world’s - third behind China and Iran.

“Wushu flies under the radar because it’s not at Olympics. But it’s very popular at the ground level. You will be surprised with how many girls are taking it up, and obviously our first ever gold medallist was Pooja Kadian last time. Praveen’s was a tough category to win, but he fought excellently,” said Wushu federation’s Suhel Ahmed.

Rahul keeps chipping in, guides Karnataka to final



KL Rahul began his comeback bid on a positive note, scoring 546 runs at 60 this season. *PTI*

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BENGALURU, OCTOBER 23

KL RAHUL hit 88 (111 balls, 6 fours, 1 six) and shared a century partnership with fellow opener Devdutt Padikkal (92) to power Karnataka to a nine wicket over Chhattisgarh and into the final of the Vijay Hazare Trophy here on Wednesday, where it will face Tamil Nadu, which beat Gujarat by five wickets in the other semifinal. Chasing 224 for victory, the host romped home in 40 overs as Rahul and Padikkal and then Mayank Agarwal (47, 33 balls, 3 fours, 4 sixes) toyed with the Chhattisgarh attack.

Batting first, Chattisgarh was in trouble at 19 for 2 and 35 for 3 as medium-pace V Koushik (4/46) did all the damage, removing the openers - Jiwanjot Singh (6) and Shashank

Singh for a duck. Later, he got Ashutosh Singh (20), who was playing well to nick one to ‘keeper Rahul as Karnataka reduced the opponent to 35 for 3 in the 11th over. Skipper Harpreet Singh Bhatia, who has been one of the mainstays of the Chhattisgarh batting in the tournament, which included an upset win over Mumbai in the league, was involved in a 40-run stand with Amandeep Khare (78, 102 balls, 4 fours).

Khare held fort for Chhattisgarh even as the Karnataka bowlers kept plugging away and picked up wickets at regular intervals. He was the eighth wicket to fall, caught by captain Manish Pandey off Abhimanyu Mithun’s bowling. Sumit Suresh Rao Raikar (40, 37 balls, 1 four, 2 sixes) helped Chhattisgarh’s cause with some late hitting before the innings ended in the final over at 223. While Kaushik finished with 4 wickets, Mithun (2/44), offie K Gowtham

(2/30) and leggie Pravin Dubey (2/43) were among the wickets.

In the chase, Rahul and Padikkal kept Karnataka ahead of the required run-rate and played some beautiful shots. The left-handed Padikkal continued his fine run, notching up his fifth half-century on the trot. Rahul, who was recently dropped from the India Test team, showed his class with some lovely strokes and finished the match with a superb straight six. Padikkal missed out on a well-deserved ton, being bowled by Ajay Mandal for 92. After his 155-run opening partnership with Padikkal, Rahul and Mayank Agarwal (47 not out), fresh from his exploits in the Test series against South Africa, added 74 runs in impressive fashion. In the Tamil Nadu-Gujarat encounter, the Dinesh Karthik led side chased down the rival’s 177 for 9 in a game reduced to 40 overs due to a late start owing to overnight rain and a wet out-

WFI offers new contract for snubbed Bentineidis

PRESSTRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 23

THE WRESTLING Federation of India (WFI) has brought Bajrang Punia’s coach Shako Bentineidis under its wings by offering him contract till the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and also appointed Russian Murad Gaidarov to help out Deepak Punia and Ravi Dahiya. Bentineidis was attached with the JSW and the WFI was always interested in having the services of the Georgian.

Bentineidis had refused the offer earlier but was left with no option but to bow down to the Federation since it was not happy with him and was contemplating getting Bajrang a new coach. There were complaints that Bajrang’s coach criticised WFI for its working style and the Federation took exception to that.

Apart from that Bentineidis had protested a four-point move during Bajrang’s semifinal loss at the World Championship which the WFI believed robbed the Indian of appearance in the gold medal bout. Wilfredo Garcia was tried for a few days but Bajrang, who won his third world championship medal at Nur Sultan, was not convinced on hiring the Cuban.

“The Georgian was under pressure since WFI was putting pressure on Bajrang to change the coach. Bajrang told WFI that Bentineidis was best suited for him to which the Federation agreed but put a condition that the Bentineidis has to come under them,” said a source.

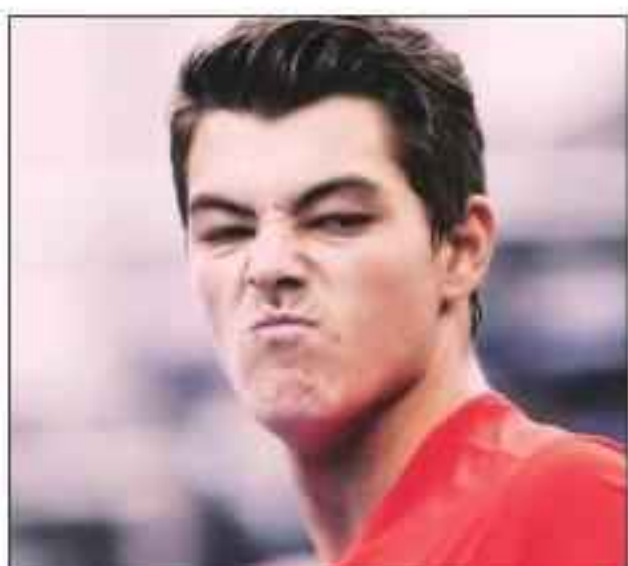
WFI Assistant Secretary Vinod Tomar, who had earlier denied that WFI was looking for a new coach for Bajrang, said Bentineidis has been appointed on request of Bajrang. “We just want our wrestlers to win medal at Tokyo Games. Bajrang wanted to train with Shako (Bentineidis) only, so we hired him,” Tomar said.

JSW’s Manisha Malhotra said it was a transition and that they have not terminated Bentineidis. “By this WFI will have direct control over Shako. We had no objection to that. There was no reason to sack him, he got Bajrang to world number one rank. Yes, he is a difficult person to handle but you can’t ignore the good work he did with Bajrang,” she said.

It has been learnt that WFI will pay USD 5000 per month to Bentineidis and Gaidarov, the Beijing Olympics silver medalist.

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[SPORTS BAR]



Fritz ousts Zverev, Tsitsipas advances

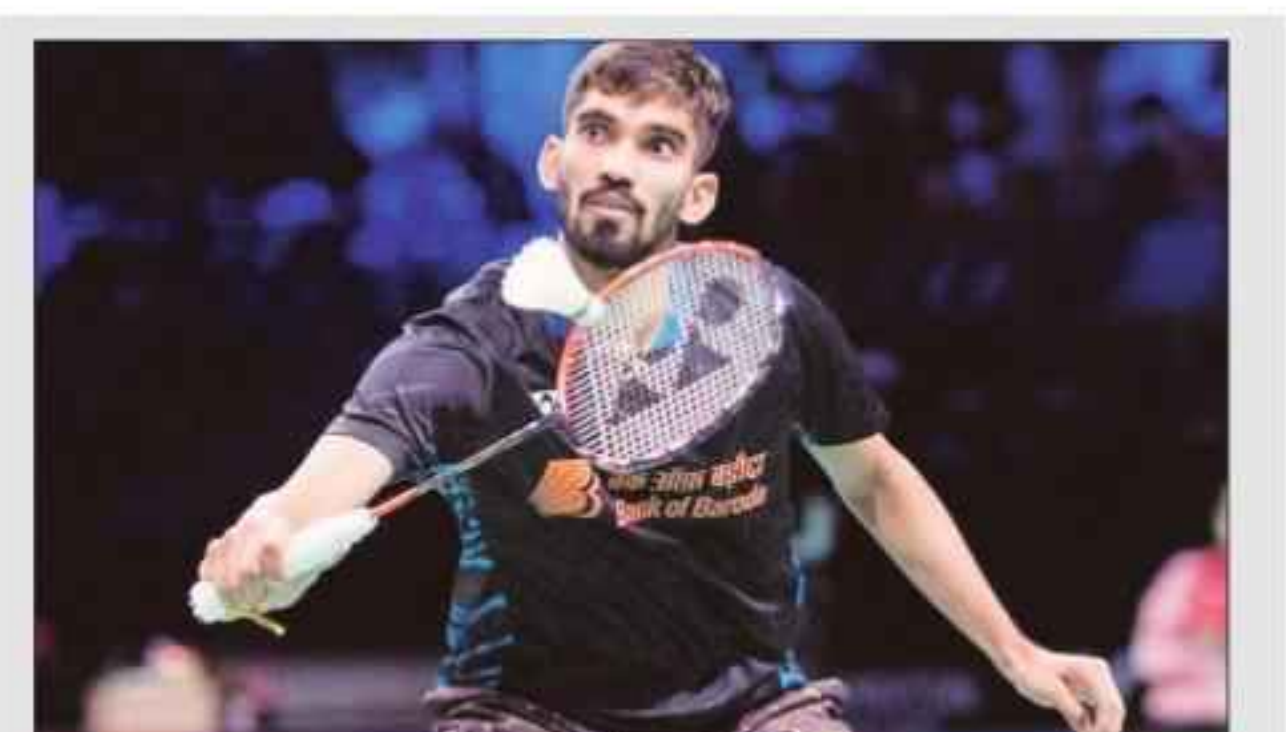
American Taylor Fritz notched up his fourth top 10 win of the year when he upset German second seed Alexander Zverev 7-6(7) 6-4 in the first round of the Swiss Indoors championship in Basel on Tuesday. Fritz fired 14 aces, won 85% of his first service points and needed to convert only one break point in the second set to dispatch the German in straight sets. “I played really solid, so it feels good to get that (win) instead of him getting me for the third time in a row,” Fritz said. “I got out there today and the sliders were working well.” Despite trailing 4-0 in the opening set tiebreak, Fritz managed to fight back and the two traded set points before the unseeded American unleashed a forehand and an ace to take the set.

FC Goa hammer Chennaiyin FC 3-0

FC Goa defeated Chennaiyin FC 3-0 in their opening game of the Hero Indian Super League 2019-20 season at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here on Wednesday. The ISL runners-up were a step ahead of their opponents in all areas of the field and were the better team overall. New signing Seiminlen Doungel scored on his debut to break the deadlock in the 30th minute. All-time ISL top-scorer Ferran Corominas struck in the 62nd minute and substitute Carlos Pena added a third in the 81st minute to get the better of an unimpressive Chennaiyin.

Women footballers in Spain to go on strike

Almost 200 female footballers in Spain from various first division clubs have voted to go on strike over pay and working conditions. The vote late Tuesday won the support of 93 per cent of 188 players from 16 clubs after more than a year of failed negotiations with the Association of Women’s Football Clubs (ACFF). Clubs are proposing part-time salaries worth 8,000 euros a year while the players are demanding a minimum of 12,000, amounting to 75 per cent of minimum full-time contracts. “We are footballers 24 hours a day, 100 per cent of the time,” said Ainhoa Tirapu, goalkeeper for Athletic Bilbao and the Spanish national team.



Srikanth fought hard before losing 15-21 21-7 21-14 to Chou Tien Chen.

Srikanth, Kashyap crash out in opening round

India’s Kidambi Srikanth and Parupalli Kashyap were both ousted in the opening round of the men’s singles event at the French Open here on Wednesday. While Srikanth fought hard for 55 minutes against second seed Chou Tien Chen of Chinese Taipei before losing 15-21 21-7 21-14, Kashyap was no match for Hong Kong’s Ng Ka Long Angus, losing 11-21 9-21. Another Indian male shuttler Sameer Verma to suffered the same fate as he lost 22-20 18-21 to Japan’s Kenta Nishimoto in the first round. Shubhanker Dey now remains the lone Indian in the men’s singles contest, having progressed to the second round where he will be up against Shesar Hiren Rhustavito of Indonesia. India’s challenge, however, came to an end in the opening round of the mixed doubles event with the ouster of the pairs of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Ashwini Ponnappa and Pranaav Jerry Chopra and N Sikki Reddy. Rankireddy and Ponappa lost 17-21 18-21 against fourth seed Seo Seungjae and Chae Yujung of Korea.

Iran banned for pressuring fighter

Iran has been banned indefinitely from international judo competition until it can give strong guarantees that its athletes will be allowed to face Israelis, the International Judo Federation (IJF) has said. The IJF decision follows a protective suspension imposed on the Iran Judo Federation last month for putting pressure on one of its fighters to withdraw from the world championships to avoid facing an Israeli opponent. Iran has 21 days to appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport. Saeid Mollaei was pressured by Iranian authorities to drop out of his quarter-final and semi-final bouts at the Aug. 25-Sept. 1 worlds in Tokyo to avoid a potential final against Israel’s Sagi Muki, the IJF said.

Yash, Sanya win u-19 national squash titles

Top-seeds Yash Fadte and Sanya Vats won the boys and girls under-19 titles respectively in style, posting easy wins in the finals of the HCL Sub-junior and Junior National Squash Championship here on Tuesday. While the promising Fadte eased past Sankalp Anand (Delhi) 11-2, 11-8, 11-4, Vats outplayed Amira Singh 11-5, 11-8, 11-6. Host Tamil Nadu finished with two titles as Darshil Parasrampuria and Arihant KS won in the boys under-11 and under-13 sections respectively.



Nayar retires from all forms of cricket

Veteran Mumbai all-rounder Abhishek Nayar has retired from all forms of cricket. “I’m absolutely satisfied... there are so many cricketers out there who would want to be in the position I am today. I can only be grateful and thankful to have had the opportunity to play for this long... absolutely no regrets... I’m a happy man,” Nayar said Nayar represented India in only three ODIs but his record as a first-class player is more promising. Known as the Mumbai team’s crisis man for his penchant to bail the side out of difficult situations, the 36-year-old has played 103 first-class games, the bulk of them for Mumbai, and scored 5749 runs while taking 173 wickets. Nayar, during his illustrious career, won many games for domestic heavyweights Mumbai during a career spanning a decade and a half.

