

Law against graft needed, says ACU chief, as TNCA clears own league

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY
KOLKATA, OCTOBER 3

BCCI ANTI-CORRUPTION Unit (ACU) chief Ajit Singh said corruptors would continue trying to influence matches until there's a law against their malafide activities. He also opined that making sports betting legal would help curb corrupt approaches.

Singh's comments came on the heels of the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association's (TNCA) internal inquiry report finding "no actionable incidents" against anyone with regards to the alleged corruption in this year's Tamil Nadu Premier League (TNPL). The inquiry was conducted by a three-member panel — comprising a retired Chennai police commissioner, a senior lawyer and a former India spinner.

After its Apex Council's meeting on Thursday, the state association stated in a press release: "The Report of the Committee which went into the information made available to the TNPL has been studied by us. We have decided to accept the report which has

opined that no actionable incidents had been noticed. However, this Committee has also made certain confidential recommendations to uphold and safeguard the integrity of the TNPL which we will follow scrupulously."

Asked if he agreed with the TNCA inquiry committee's conclusion, Singh said: "What are the reasons, one has to see. Without seeing the report, I can't say anything."

An internal inquiry of the BCCI's ACU, which is ongoing, however, found that alleged corrupt approaches from "non-participants" had been made to an India player, an IPL regular and a Ranji Trophy coach.

"Our inquiry was on issues of the approaches that were made, which the players have reported. That's a different matter," Singh said.

The former Rajasthan Director General of Police said the ACU probe is centred upon the people who made the approaches. The players, coaches and team officials aren't on the "wrong end" here.

"Basically, we are trying to find out who made the approaches. Players, coaches, team



The inquiry was conducted by a three-member panel — comprising a retired Chennai police commissioner, a senior lawyer and a former India spinner. *Express*

owners/officials are complainants. In fact, they told us, 'somebody called us on WhatsApp, or somebody sent a message, try-

ing to get information about the matches'. They are not on the wrong end," Singh told *The Indian Express*.

He agreed that despite strict vigilance, stopping approaches from bookmakers and fixers is "difficult" without a law against sports corruption. "If we don't have a law against sports corruption, it's difficult. Even Sri Lanka is going to have a law soon. Now if an approach is made, as a BCCI official, I don't have any authority over someone who makes the approach. I have authority only over the participants. Non-participants are making the approaches, so until and unless we have a law pertaining to sports corruption, these people don't get covered," the BCCI's ACU chief said.

He added: "Once there's a law, then police can take action against them. Right now, the police's fact-findings take a lot of time (and) until and unless they get other corroborative evidence (they can't make a water-tight case). As far as (S) Sreesanth is concerned, this has been the case."

The BCCI disciplinary committee had banned the fast bowler for life for his alleged involvement in the 2013 IPL betting and spot-fixing scandal. But the Supreme Court set aside

the life ban earlier this year and accordingly, the cricket board's ombudsman Justice (Retd) DK Jain reduced Sreesanth's ban to seven years, which would end in September 2020.

Singh also spoke about the benefits of making sports betting legal in India, which in turn would help curb sports corruption. "It will bring a lot of revenue to the exchequer. Another advantage is that things will become more transparent. Because then you can access the betting data; who is putting what amount on which particular event. And if there's a suspicion of corruption, then the data can be assessed," Singh told this paper.

Last year, the Law Commission had recommended legalising sports betting in India but left the final call to the Parliament and the state legislatures.

The Commission also recommended that match-fixing and sports fraud should be made criminal offences with severe punishments.

The TNCA Apex Council also authorised TNCA secretary R Ramasaamy to attend and vote in the BCCI's October 23 AGM/elections.

How the times have changed

In the absence of World and Olympic champion Semenya, the women's 800 metres regressed in terms of timing

NIHAL KOSHIE
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 3

THE ABSENCE of Caster Semenya at this World Championship, the South African middle-distance superstar, saw a massive dip in the winning timing of the 800-metres event. Ugandan Halimah Nakkayi's 1:58.04 was way slower than Semenya's best of 1:54.25.

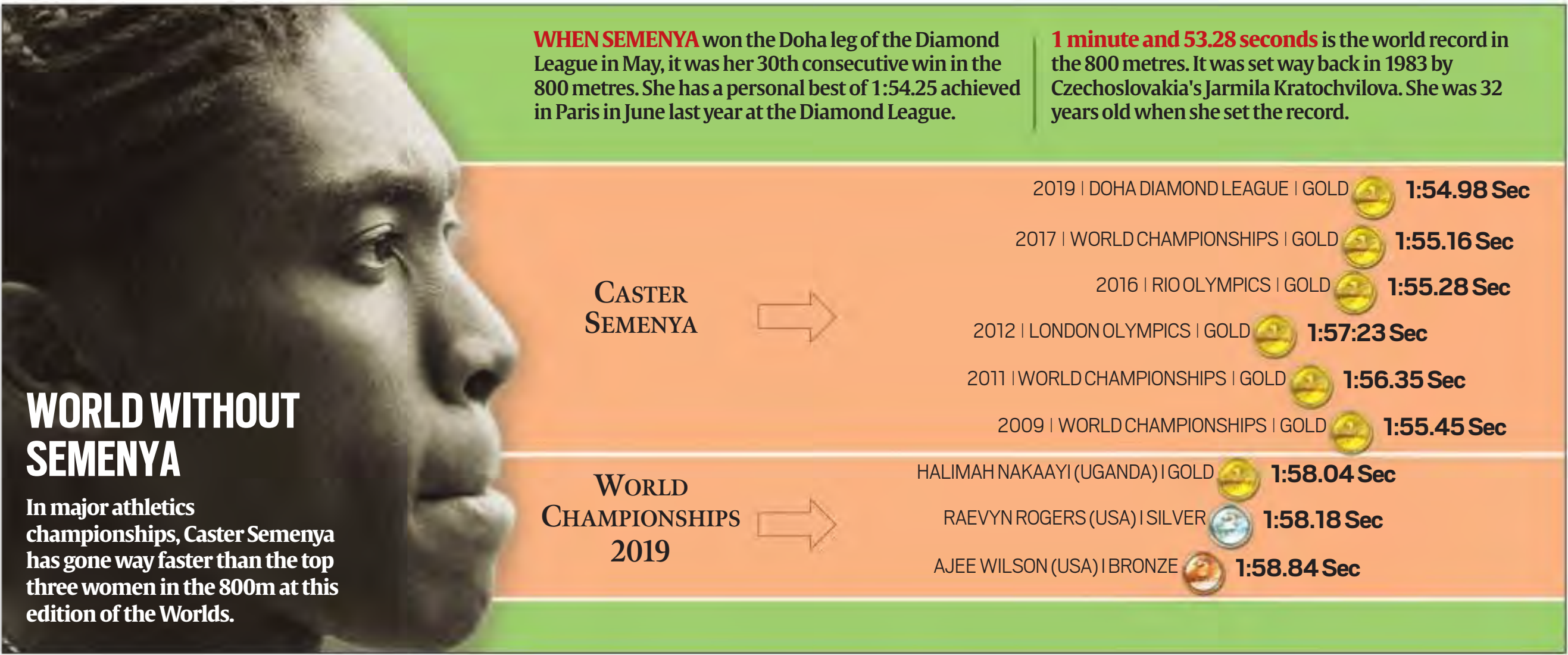
Nakkayi's rise came as a surprise since the athlete had finished 19th in the World Championships two years ago. As for Semenya, who was tipped to break the world record, she was forced to opt out because of the new eligibility regulations, which put a cap on testosterone levels for women athletes.

America's Aje Wilson, the favourite in the absence of Semenya, had finished third in London two years ago but had to once again settle for bronze after she was overtaken by Nakaayi and America's Raevyn Rogers on the home stretch. Wilson had won six of the eight races, including Diamond Leagues at Stockholm, Monaco, Birmingham and Brussels.

Wilson had struggled to top races when Semenya was around. Wilson's wins in the Diamond League came after Semenya's last appearance in the global series, incidentally at Doha this year, where the South African won the gold with a blistering 1:54.98 — her third fastest ever time which also brought up her 30th consecutive win.

In May, the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) had upheld an International Association of Athletics Federations's (IAAF) ruling which barred women with high levels of naturally occurring testosterone from competing in events between 400 metres and a mile without taking hormone-suppressing medication.

Semenya since has refused to take medication and has joined a South African women's football team, Gauteng-based JVW FC, and hopes to get playing time from next season.



Semenya since has refused to take medication and has joined a South African women's football team, Gauteng-based JVW FC, and hopes to get playing time from next season.

clear that the new rules would affect them. "For me, it's about discrimination. It doesn't make sense. For sure, I didn't choose to be born like this," Niyonsaba told the *Olympic Channel*.

The regulations, she said, would make her change events, she added.

"I can even run the marathon. I will keep my passion. I love running, and I will not stop running."

Wambui didn't want to take medication to ensure she met the testosterone cap and be eligible to run 800 metres.

"Drugs is out for me. Other options like moving up to the long distance or scaling down, I can consider, but drugs? No," Wambui said in an interview to the *Olympic Channel*.

In May, CAS came down on the IAAF's policy called 'Eligibility Regulations' for female classification by calling it 'discriminatory'.

At the same time, in a shot in the arm for the IAAF, two of the three arbitrators accepted the IAAF's argument that naturally-occurring but high levels of testosterone in women athletes can give them advantage in terms of strength — during training and also when it came to clocking timings.

Asher-Smith seizes her golden opportunity

REUTERS
DOHA, OCTOBER 3

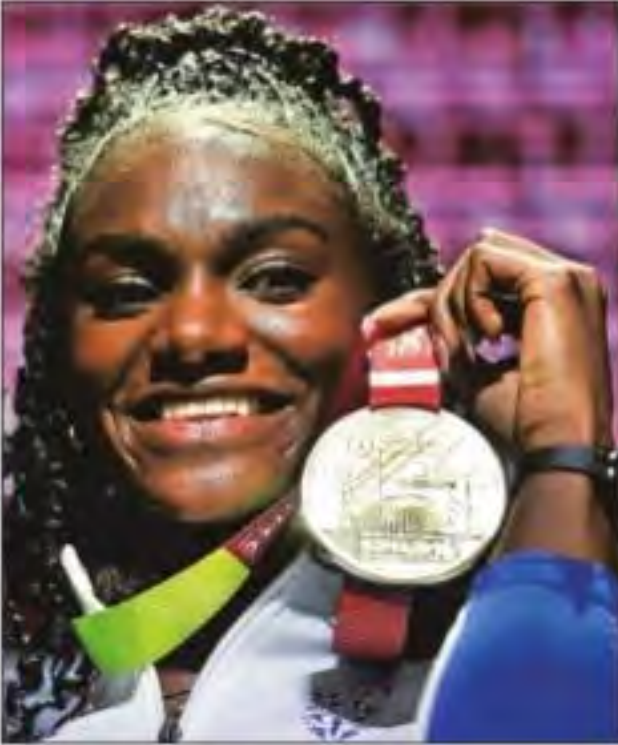
DINA ASHER-SMITH seized her golden opportunity to win the world championship 200 metres on Wednesday and become the first British woman to claim a global sprint title. With many of the top medal contenders pulling out or skipping the event, Asher-Smith proved the class act in the field, powering home in a national record 21.88 seconds to add gold to the silver she won in the 100m.

"You're only the favourite if you go out and perform how people expect you to and I was really focused on putting together a good race," said Asher-Smith. "I dreamt of this but now it's real. 'I know I was tired and woke up today knowing this was the last individual chance and this was the moment I did all my work for,'" she added.

"This is what we knew we could achieve if the season went well and the tiredness just disappeared when I needed it to. It's a different thing with everyone saying you're the favourite but it's a different thing going and doing it."

The once mighty United States, who had been a non-factor in the women's sprints in Doha, also benefited from the scratches as Brittany Brown grabbed the silver in 22.22. Switzerland's Mujinga Kambundji completed the podium by grabbing bronze in 22.51.

The fight for medals was blown wide open when some of sprinting's biggest names withdrew during the earlier rounds.



Britain's Dina Asher-Smith holds up her gold medal at the World Athletics Championships in Doha. *AP*

The race was missing the reigning world and Olympic champions in Dutchwoman Dafne Schippers and Jamaica's Elaine Thompson who withdrew due to injuries. Shauna Miller-Uibo of Bahamas, owner of the fastest time this season, elected to race the 400m only due to scheduling issues.

The world 100m champion Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce and bronze medalist Marie-Josee Ta Lou scratched because of soreness

from earlier races while Nigeria's Blessing Okagbare, who had run the third fastest time this season, was disqualified in her heat.

None of that mattered to Asher-Smith who was focused on making history, the 23-year-old blasting out of the blocks and in command coming off the bend before cruising to victory. "I made sure that I remained focus," said Asher-Smith.

"It's very easy to come here, to be in great shape but to lose focus over something very silly like getting caught up in the moment. 'Whenever I finish a championship, I always want to be able to look back and say I absolutely gave everything that I could have.'" The victory doubled Britain's medal tally at the championships to two, both coming from Asher-Smith.

But the last few days of the competition could bring more gold for Britain with Katarina Johnson-Thompson taking a 96-point lead into the second day of the heptathlon.

Mayer out of decathlon

World record holder Kevin Mayer of France pulled out of the world championship decathlon after six events on Thursday after suffering what appeared to be a pulled hamstring in the 110 metres hurdles.

Mayer, locked in a duel with Canadian Damian Warner for the gold medal, made his first pole vault attempt but ran straight through the pit then stood on the mats and blew a kiss to the crowd. The Frenchman wiped away a tear, then sat down and buried his head in his arms.

Peerless break Big 3 dominance in Calcutta league

Kolkata: Peerless SC effectively became the Calcutta Football League (CFL) champions Thursday after East Bengal offered a no-show against Calcutta Customs in their final league fixture. The Indian Football Association (IFA) will make the formal announcement after receiving match commissioner Bikash Mukherjee's report. Peerless' achievement is historic, because it's after 61 years that a team other than the Big Three — Mohun Bagan, East Bengal and Mohammedan Sporting — will lay their hands on the CFL title. Back in 1958, Eastern Railway had clinched the crown. Peerless finished with 23 points from 11 matches.

East Bengal's original game against Customs was abandoned on September 29 due to a waterlogged pitch at the East Bengal ground. The IFA rescheduled the match to Thursday at Kalyani Stadium. The red-and-gold brigade appealed for postponement till October 21, as their coach Alejandro Menendez and players were on leave. Today, after waiting for the East Bengal team for 32 minutes, officials blew the final whistle. East Bengal had an improbable task of winning by a seven-goal margin. Following the forfeiture, they face potential points deduction. As per rules, East Bengal should lose three points and three goals.

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY

Hield living his dream – from Bahamas to Mumbai via Sacramento

SHAHID JUDGE
MUMBAI, OCTOBER 3

THE SOUND of the 'swoosh' as a basketball floats neatly through the hoop and net comes often. The Sacramento Kings have spread out on the court and are shooting hoops during the cool-down drill. It's an exercise not uncommon in the basketball world, but the sight of a team — one among the 30 giants that make up the NBA — that plays at a level unseen in India before has a certain style to it.

On one side of the court, De'Aaron Fox executes a perfect back-flip — for no apparent reason. But at the other end, as the rest of the players make their way off court, the 'swooshing' still continues, courtesy one of the shorter players on the Kings' roster.

It stops when the player, Buddy Hield — standing at 6-foot-4 — is called for a press interaction. He decides to take one last shot, misses, and is immediately encouraged and forgiven by his teammates watching on. After all, the 26-year-old, just last season, set the record for most 3-pointers scored by a player in his first three seasons in the NBA. The previous record of 599 was owned by Damian Lillard, till Hield bettered it to register a tally of 602.

"I'm alright," says the man from the Bahamas, with a shrug when praised about his shooting skill outside the 3-point circle.

He's one of the bigger names in a team that has roped in a new set of players brimming with youthful energy. But he remains the one who needs to be, time and again, told to leave the court once practice ends. More often than not, he somehow gets back on court for one more shot. Just as he did at the NSCI Stadium in Mumbai on Thursday, on the eve of the Kings' pre-season match against the Indiana Pacers.

Hield's work-ethic stems from a childhood dream, and a goal to make it in the NBA to escape a life of poverty.

Not unlike many NBA stars, Hield had a humble beginning. He grew up in a small home with six other siblings who would jostle for space on the only bed, while his mother was out working three jobs a day to make ends meet. But unlike the players who grew up in the US, a basketball court wasn't an accessible luxury to the future Kings shooting guard.

Child kidnappings were rife when he was growing up at the Eight Mile Rock village, just outside Freeport in the Bahamas. Consequently, his mother was never keen on letting him wander too far to shoot some hoops. So Hield sawed off the bottom of a milk crate, attached it to a piece of plywood for a backboard, nailed it to a light pole, and then spent hours learning how to curve the ball in from close and long range. That's how he learnt to shoot, he says.

"The crate, you had to shoot the ball in



Sacramento Kings' Buddy Hield during practice at the NSCI Dome in Mumbai. *NBA*

(and not rebound). The goal was always to shoot the ball in," he says. "You can't use the backboard, you have to shoot exactly in. That helped me concentrate and lock in focus. That was good for me."

By then, basketball had become his goal, and a way out.

"(It was a) hard life. Growing up I didn't have nothing," Hield says in a typical Bahamas drawl. "But my dream was to make it in the NBA. I had a vision, a dream and goal. I kept it with me. I wanted to be in the NBA

and I kept working. No matter what it takes me, whether I had to go out on the street and sell something to get some money to sponsor me, I did what I did to get here."

It was a path and a career choice mostly unknown to the Bahamas. Ever since the NBA was launched in 1946, six players have emerged from the Bahamas. But including Hield, only three have played more than a 100 matches.

It's been a long path — from Eight Mile Rock, to getting scouted for a school in Kansas, then

being the sixth pick at the 2016 NBA draft by the New Orleans Pelicans, and now a star figure in the Kings' outfit. But it has been a journey that has earned him the riches that come with being a high-profile NBA player. His earnings from last season were reported to be around the \$4 million mark, but he's remained true to his humble roots, collecting over \$300,000 for relief material when Hurricane Dorian hit the island nation last month.

At that point, the only way he could get in touch with his family was through Whatsapp. But now his mother is safely at his Sacramento home, as he's travelled with his team to India for the first global NBA games in the subcontinent.

But he's enjoyed the trip so far.

"It was a good bonding trip," he says of the flight from Sacramento to London to Agra and finally Mumbai. "We didn't have any wifi on the trip, which I think was good for team spirit. So you get to learn about your teammates and that's good for the trip. We played a lot of cards."

There's almost 13,500 km separating the basketball nets at the Golden 1 Centre in Sacramento — where he has been dead-end from distance — and the freshly fashioned poles in Mumbai. But the hoops never mattered to him. He remembers the crate and plywood board from his childhood, that still stand at his mother's backyard in Eight Mile Rock. "No matter where you go," he says, "it's just a basketball and a rim. I love it."