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# Hearing-impaired shooter Dhanush wins double Asian gold

**NITIN SHARMA**  
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DHANUSH SRIKANTH won the individual and team gold medals in the men's 10m air rifle junior event at the Asian Shooting Championship in Doha.

While sharing his joy with his parents back in Secunderabad, the 17-year-old used a bit of English and sign language on the video call.

"Dhanush was born with a hearing impairment but we never saw it as something that could hamper his ability and talent. He got his first cochlear implant at the age of one but it was replaced at the age of nine, as it malfunctioned. Me and my wife wanted him to believe that he can achieve anything in

life," his father Srikanth, who works as a project manager in Bengaluru, said.

On Monday, Dhanush paired up with Shreya Agrawal to clinch the gold in 10m Air Rifle mixed team junior title with a 16-14 win over China, and a day later took the individual honours with a score of 248.2 in the final, beating China's Jiang Xuanle by 2.5 points. Dhanush had shot 625.3 in qualification.

"Dhanush's biggest strength has been the ability to handle the situation very well and he can execute shots as he likes to and as he has practised in training. In the final, he got a yellow card after he loaded early but recovered. I hope this first international medal will propel him to further glory," says Suma Shirur, high performance director of the Indian junior team.

London Olympics bronze medallist

Gagan Narang has played a key role in Dhanush's progress as a shooter. It was an advertisement for Narang's Gun for Glory academy in 2015 that helped the youngster's take a big leap in the sport. He won the junior, youth and senior titles in the Telangana State Shooting championships last year and followed that with a gold in U-21 category at the 2019 Khelo India Games in Pune.

"I am happy with the way Dhanush is progressing. He is very persistent in his training and keeps on doing things told to him until he gets it right. I was looking to train a shooter like him and when he came to train, his parents' first question was whether he can shoot? And I said most definitely yes, as he might shoot better than most of us as his other senses would be stronger. We developed a shooting sign language with him and

**When (Dhanush) joined the academy, it posed us a challenge initially. We relied on lip movement and sign language initially apart from making him understand the technical points of the sport on paper and by making drawings."**

**NEHA CHAVAN,**  
GUN FOR GLORY ACADEMY COACH ON WORKING WITH DHANUSH

I am happy that he has been able to turn his impairment into his biggest strength," says Narang.

Prior to the Asian Championships, Dhanush had shot 252.5 in the junior event at the nationals trials in June, a score better

than the world record of 251.2. He followed that score with a score of 252.1 in the senior men's final in the national trials in September and won the gold medal. Dhanush had shot 626.9 in qualification, better than Narang himself, who managed 623.4.

"When he joined the academy, it posed us a challenge initially. We relied on lip movement and sign language initially apart from making him understand the technical points of the sport on paper and by making drawings. With time, we understood him and he understood us," academy coach Neha Chavan recalls.

"This year, when he won the gold at the Khelo India Games, it motivated him a lot. His score of 629.7 was as good as those of senior shooters and it gave him a lot of confidence."

# Warming up for a sub-zero challenge

After unconvincing draw against Bangladesh, India prepare for tricky Afghanistan tie in Dushanbe

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SUB-ZERO TEMPERATURE, a spate of injuries, poor away form and a tricky, equally desperate opponent.

When the groups were drawn for 2022 World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup joint qualifiers, Afghanistan away was always going to be a tricky tie for India. Many had even rated this tie as a potential banana skin for Igor Stimac's side in what otherwise looked like a sure-shot 12 points from the two matches each against Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

However, an embarrassing 1-1 draw against Bangladesh has punctured the optimism that surrounded the team after they returned from the home of Asian champions Qatar with one point. The Afghanistan tie thus assumes a lot of significance, not just in terms of India's position on the points table but also to gauge whether the Bangladesh performance was a one-off or if it was the beginning of the team's unravelling after a scarcely-believable run.

But the gritty Afghans aren't the only concern for Stimac. The Croatian has been left to deal with the elements of nature too, as he leads his under-strength team to Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe in search of maiden win of this campaign.

## Afghanistan, a tricky opponent

Going by past results, India have enjoyed an upper hand over Afghanistan. The two teams have played each other on eight occasions and India have won six times. But the Afghans have shown signs of improvement in the last two matches.

They outplayed India 2-0 in the 2013 South Asian Football Federation Cup final and then stretched them in the 2015/16 final, before losing 2-1 after extra time. Afghanistan have since started to play in a more competitive Central Asian zone. The switch seems to have worked for them, as they have managed to hold teams like Jordan, Vietnam and Palestine to draws in recent times.

They started their 2022 World Cup qualifying campaign with a 6-0 hammering away at Qatar, but they recovered to beat Bangladesh 1-0 before losing 3-0 to Oman. It's been a tough year for them on and off the field, as they have been forced to play their home matches in Dushanbe owing to security concerns in Afghanistan.

## Turf, temperature concerns

India have prepared for a match that will most likely be played in sub-zero temperature by practicing in humid conditions, where the mercury stays around 30-degree centigrade.

Since there are no direct flights to Dushanbe, India were forced to make a stopover in Dubai. They will reach Dushanbe only on Wednesday, a little more



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than 24 hours before kickoff. For Stimac, acclimatisation is the biggest concern.

"The climatic condition in Dushanbe is very different from what we have experienced in India at this time. It's very cold and mercury level drops to closer to sub-zero," Stimac was quoted as saying by PTI. "Moreover, the match is scheduled on an artificial turf which our players are not used to. Afghanistan have chosen the venue to make others' life difficult and we have an uphill task in front of us to overcome it."

India reached Dubai on Monday night, had a training session on Tuesday morning. Later in the day, they took another flight for Dushanbe, where they were expected to reach only on Wednesday morning. Stimac admitted the journey to Dushanbe and the flight itinerary was 'tedious'. It only adds to the tricky nature of this tie. "As professionals, we have to adapt to newer challenges," Stimac said.

## Away blues

India haven't been great at adapting to new challenges. The team has perennially been poor travellers. Sample this: since 2015, the team has lost half of its matches away from home and the few wins they have managed have come against teams inferior to them, like Bhutan, Laos and Macau.

No doubt, there has been an improvement in the last year or so as the string of encouraging performances against China (0-0), Thailand (1-0 win) and Qatar (0-0) at their homes showed. The challenge, however, for India will not just be to find a goal, something they've struggled for in this campaign, but also to ensure they do not concede given how fragile the back-line has looked.

Injuries to talismanic defender Sandesh Jhingam and midfielder Rowlin Borges, who uses his strong physique to win tackles and shield the defence, will make India vulnerable at the back. The central defensive pairing of Adil Khan and Anas Edathodika did not exude confidence against Bangladesh and Rahul Bheke was guilty of leaving gaps on the right, which gave them space to launch attacks.

Whether Stimac will be tempted to shuffle the back-line remains to be seen. India's 2017 under-17 World Cup hero Dhiraj Moirangthem has received his first senior team call-up, but it is unlikely he will make the cut for the first 11. Gurpreet Singh Sandhu will remain the first-choice keeper

## Ready to host ties in Srinagar: Real Kashmir

**New Delhi:** Real Kashmir FC co-owner Sandeep Chatteroo on Tuesday said he is confident of conducting his side's home matches of the upcoming I-League in Srinagar. The abrogation of Article 370 and the ensuing communication lockdown in the valley had raised concerns over the visiting teams' security, but Chatteroo said they are ready to go ahead with the home matches.

"We have unofficially been informed about our matches. We will be playing at home and 12th (December) is our first home game. You all are welcome," Chatteroo said on the sidelines of the unveiling of the team's new jersey, alongside its partner Adidas. Asked about the assurances from the concerned security agencies, he said they will expect the same guarantees clubs from other states get while hosting their home matches. **PTI**

and a lot will rest of his shoulders if India are to return with three points.

Sandhu will have to marshal the inexperienced defence once again to make sure they do not concede a goal. "Maintaining clean sheets will be of paramount importance in order to stay alive in the race," full-back Subhashish Bose told the aiff.com. "We will need to be sharper."

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TOP INDIAN shuttler Kidambi Srikanth advanced to the men's singles second round without playing a shot after his opponent Kento Momota's pull-out while Sourabh Verma entered the main draw of the Hong Kong Open after clinching straight-game wins in his two qualifying clashes here on Tuesday.

Srikanth was to play against Momota in the first round on Wednesday but the Japanese world number one pulled out of the tournament on Tuesday. The reasons for his withdrawal were not known.

A few days back, the 24-year-old Momota had beaten Taiwan's world number two Chou Tien-chen to claim his 10th title of the year at the Fuzhou China Open.

World number 10 Srikanth will now face either compatriot Sourabh or Frenchman Brice Leverdez, who will clash in the second round on Wednesday, to reach the quarterfinal.

Sourabh, seeded fourth in the qualifiers, first defeated Thailand's Tanongsak Saensomboonsuk 21-15 21-19 before getting the better of Lucas Claerbout of France 21-19 21-19 in the final qualifying round.

In the mixed doubles, the Indian pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Ashwini Ponnappa rallied from a game down to beat the Thailand duo of Nipitphon Phuangphupet and Savitree Amitrapai 16-21 21-19 21-17 in a 55-minute match and advance to the second round. But in another mixed doubles first round match, the Indian duo of Pranaav Jerry Chopra and N Sikki Reddy lost 10-21 18-21 to the third seeded Thai pair of Dechapol Puavaranukroh and Sapsiree Taerattanachai to bow out of the tournament. The other Indians featuring in the men's singles main event will start on Wednesday. B Sai Praneeth, Sameer Verma, H S Prannoy and Parupalli Kashyap are those in fray in the competition.

Sourabh's brother Sameer will be up against Tzu Wei Wan of Taipei. B Sai Praneeth too has a tough opening round encounter against third seed Shi Yu Qi of China, while Prannoy and Kashyap will take on China's Huang Yu Xiang and Kenta Nishimoto of Japan.

## Miss following football: Gopi

**NATIONAL COACH** Pulella Gopichand caught up with the sport that's catching the younger generation's imagination: football. Lending his considerable coaching heft to a mentoring programme for football's grassroots coaches as part of a mass-scale event in Mumbai, he said the game has got even budding shuttlers hooked. "I used to watch World Cups but I'm not a regular watcher of all the leagues. However, the sport's definitely caught the imagination of young Indians and even at the academy (in Hyderabad), they are immersed in their spare time into fantasy leagues and everything," Gopi said.

What's more, at home, the television is monopolised by his football-loving son, Sai Vishnu,



National coach Gopichand rued that a packed calendar, along with the pressure of Olympic qualification has not given any respite to the players.

which has driven another sport out of focus. "I barely get to watch cricket since my son is always watching football. I end up being the only one at home that wants to watch cricket because I think people have moved to other sports - badminton, tennis and football."

As part of the day-long mentoring, the Dronacharya awardee with two Olympic medals from his wards, took questions on topics as wide as parents, grassroots planning and how coaches needed to be role models themselves. "I was fortunate to have some very good coaches growing up. So I just talked them through what a good coach needs to be like."

He also said it was refreshing to have an Indian men's doubles pairing do well internationally, even as he remained hopeful that the singles players would be back on track as they slowly emerge from setbacks of illness and injury. India continues to sweat over the slow recoveries of H S Prannoy, who was down with dengue, and K Srikanth, who has been battling injuries.

## No scope for break

**PTI adds:** Gopichand on Tuesday rued that the tournament calendar, packed with mandatory events, combined with the pressure of Olympic qualification has not given any respite to the players, who are now dealing with injuries and lack of form. "There is no respite. You are actually playing way too many tournaments. If you look at world badminton, a number of players have withdrawn (from tournaments) from Tai (Tzu Ying) to Carolina Marin," said Gopichand. "Ideally Sindhu should have rested but world badminton makes it mandatory for you to play all the 1000s, 750s and 500s. So we almost end up playing 14-15 tournaments which are mandatory."

## [SPORTS BAR]



## Kathuniya claims bronze at Para worlds

Promising Yogesh Kathuniya overcame three foul attempts to claim the bronze medal in men's discus throw F56 final at the World Para Athletics Championships and sealed India's seventh slot at the 2020 Tokyo Paralympic Games. Praveen Kumar had ensured India's sixth qualification spot on Monday evening with a fourth-place finish in the men's high jump T64 final. Under International Paralympic Committee rules, the top four ranked athletes at the World Para Athletics Championships in each of the individual medal events on the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Programme (excluding Marathon) will obtain one qualification slot for their respective country. The 23-year-old Kathuniya hurled the discus to a distance of 42.51 metres in his sixth attempt to take the bronze.

## Joshi eyeing second Panasonic Open title

No golfer has won the Panasonic Open India more than once and India's Khalin Joshi will be among the select band of players to try and do it for the first time, when the event tees off at a new venue on Thursday. The USD 400,000 full field Asian Tour event will be played from November 14-17 at the Classic Golf and Country Club in Gurgaon for the first time. The previous editions were held at the Delhi Golf Club. The 2019 edition will see five of the eight previous winners return to the event with Joshi leading the way and Shiv Kapur, Mukesh Kumar, Chiragh Kumar and Digvijay Singh giving Joshi company in the winners' gallery.

## Asian Youth Boxing: 2 Indians enter quarters

Two Indian boxers -- Ankit Narwal (60kg) and Aman (+91kg) -- advanced to the quarterfinals of the Asian Youth Championships in Ulaanbaatar on Tuesday. While Aman defeated Uzbekistan's Makhmudov Mimukhsin 5-0, Ankit prevailed 3-2 over Mongolia's Tulga Oyunbaatar. However, Mohit (75kg) lost 2-3 to Kazakhstan's Bektas to bow out in the opening round itself. India were assured of two medals in the event after Komalpreet Kaur (+81kg) and Sushma (81kg) got direct entry into the semifinals owing to the small size of their respective draws in the women's competition.



Leonard's first five points all came on free throws, including two technicals. AP

## Leonard leads Clippers past old team Raptors

Kawhi Leonard wasn't at his best against his former team. His new teammates knocked down big shots and won anyway. Leonard struggled on 2-for-11 shooting and had nine turnovers, prompting Clippers coach Doc Rivers to joke about "almost a quadruple-double." Throughout the game, Leonard faced plenty of double coverage. "As soon as I walked across half-court they tried to get the ball out of my hands," he said. "They did a great job on me defending and sending an extra body. It got me better and it's going to get my teammates better." Last season, Leonard led the Raptors to their first championship, averaging 30.5 points and 9.1 rebounds in 24 postseason games to earn his second Finals MVP award. "I had a great time there. It's the next chapter now. I can't live in the past," he said.

## Watson heads Aussie Cricketers' Association

Former all-rounder Shane Watson has been appointed as the president of the Australian Cricketers' Association (ACA), a position, he says, will help him "to give back to the game". The appointment was made at the ACA's Annual General Meeting (AGM) which took place here on Monday night. "I am truly honoured to be elected as the President of the ACA as it evolves into the future. I have big shoes to fill with the people who have gone before me and I am super excited about this opportunity to continue to give back to the game that has given me so much," Watson tweeted following his appointment. Watson had represented Australia in 59 Tests, 190 ODIs and 58 T20Is.

## Doping ban for Kenya's marathoner Kiptum

Former half-marathon world record holder Kenya's Abraham Kiptum has been given a four-year doping ban, the Athletics Integrity Unit said. The ban follows irregularities that showed up on Kiptum's biological passport, which is used to track potential doping. "The World Athletics Disciplinary Tribunal has banned the long-distance runner for four-years with effect from 28 April 2019," a statement on Twitter said on Monday. The Tribunal suspects the 30-year-old Kiptum has blood doping, but the athlete has denied any form of doping or blood manipulation.



## WADA wants lengthy suspension for Sun

The World Anti-Doping Agency wants China's star swimmer Sun Yang banned for up to eight years for alleged doping rules violations. The Court of Arbitration for Sport said on Friday that WADA requests a ban of two to eight years. Sun served a three-month ban in 2014 for a positive test. If WADA wins, the three-time Olympic freestyle champion will miss the 2020 Tokyo Games. WADA has challenged world swimming body FINA's ruling to merely warn Sun after a disputed attempt by sample collectors to take blood and urine from him at his home in China in September 2018. WADA believes Sun broke anti-doping rules by refusing to submit to a sample collection. All sides agreed to Sun's request to hold a first CAS appeal in public for 20 years. A verdict is unlikely until early next year.