

ACCOLADE FOR PUNIA

World championships silver medallist Deepak Punia has been named the 'Junior Freestyle' Wrestler of the Year' by United World Wrestling (UWW) after a stellar season during which he made a phenomenal transition from junior to the senior circuit.

Pressure to attend frequent events affecting Hima's training: AFI chief

NIHAL KOSHIE

NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 17

THE PRESSURE on India's star athlete, Hima Das, to attend government and private functions across the country is severely affecting her training, according to Athletics Federation of India (AFI) president Adille Sumariwalla.

Clarifying that the Junior World Champion from Assam wasn't to be blamed for taking frequent breaks from the ongoing pre-Olympic national camp in Thiruvananthapuram, the AFI chief said: "Sometimes there is pressure from the highest sources and officials (to attend functions). Athletes are not able to resist the pressure. They are being used. The AFI is finding it increasingly difficult, we want to protect athletes. One of the reasons why we send athletes overseas for training is to keep them away from all these events."

Over the last fortnight, Hima has been away from the camp, attending events in three cities.

■ November 30: Khelo India Youth Games launch at Guwahati, where she shared the stage with the Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju and Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal.

■ December 6: India Today Conclave in

■ December 13: YPO South Asia Regional Conference in New Delhi, an event that also had table tennis star Manika Batra and Minister Rijiju.

The AFI president said the public appearances of elite athletes needed to be planned better and well in advance. "If we know in advance, we have no problem because we understand that an athlete has to do certain things. If they are getting paid and they have to devote 'X' number of days, the schedule needs to be in place in advance. It can't be



Hima Das, the 400 metres world junior champion, attended three events in a fortnight in three different cities. File

"Sometimes there is pressure from the highest sources and officials (to attend functions). Athletes are not able to resist the pressure. They are being used. The AFI is finding it increasingly difficult, we want to protect athletes. One of the reasons why we send athletes overseas for training is to keep them away from all these events.'

ADILLE SUMARIWALLA AFI, PRESIDENT

last minute when the athlete is in the middle of an important training period. I am very clear about that," he said.

Sumariwalla added that Hima's training would have been hampered further had he not refused at least two other requests of her

"I am saying athletes must give back and must be a source of inspiration for youngsters, especially somebody like Hima who is a youth icon. Having said that anybody who wants her to be at an event must sit with the federation in advance and we can put out the dates for the whole year, say when she has just finished a big competition like the Asian Games, Commonwealth Games or the Olympics Games, then we have a window there. For example after the World Championships we gave people rest or a break for 15 days," the former India sprinter turned official said.

Commenting on the impact of long breaks on Hima's preparedness for Olympic qualification events, a member of her coaching staff said that each day lost in training pushed her back by a week.

"The best athletes around the world don't deviate from their training schedule. If ath-

letes like Hima are expected to win medals at the international level and bring glory to the country then such distractions should be avoided as it is draining for an athlete and disrupts the training schedule. If it is a must to have an athlete at a promotional event, then it should be held in the same city as the training base of the athlete which will ensure minimal time is wasted in travel," the coach said. Hima became a global star when in 2018

when she won the world junior gold at Tampere in Finland in the 400 metres. The athlete, who is from Dhing in Assam,

set the national record of 50.79 seconds en route to winning gold at the Jakarta Asian Games last year.

A recurring back injury put paid to her plans of qualifying for the 400 metres for the World Championships this year, but she is on a comeback trail aiming to make the cut for the Tokyo Games.

Hypenate or dehyphenate

Is the Kuldeep Yadav-Yuzvendra Chahal spin combination the best option for India going ahead?

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY VISAKHAPATNAM, DECEMBER 17

JASPRIT BUMRAH bowled off a full run-up and hurried Mayank Agarwal. He didn't look to be in any discomfort. India's fast bowling ace was at the ACA-VDCA practice arena on Tuesday as part of his reintegration process with the team after recovering from a lower back stress fracture.

For the first time since the injury had sidelined Bumrah after the West Indies tour in August-September, Bumrah trained with the Indian team.

Bumrah is not in the squad for the ongoing ODI series against West Indies. So with regards to the Indian team's immediate future - the second ODI here on Wednesday he wasn't the main focus. In the context of tomorrow's game, Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal going through their paces and bowling in tandem at the main playing arena had been of bigger relevance.

About 70 yards away, near the boundary line, Prithvi Shaw was having a session with the conditioning coach Nick Webb. That Shaw wasn't wearing a Team India kit, while Bumrah was wearing one offered a contrast. It is learnt that Bumrah collected his kit at the NCA, where he was doing his rehab. Shaw, meanwhile, came after playing a Ranji Trophy match for Mumbai and didn't have the time to go the NCA and collect his Team

Back to the wrist-spin of Yadav and Chahal, and their bowling drills were arguably the biggest attraction during India's optional practice session on the match eve.

The 'Kul-Cha' combination no longer remains the definite pick for the Indian team. Since his return to the limited-overs fold, Ravindra Jadeja has managed to provide the required balance. In fact, last time the two wrist spinners had played together in an ODI was against England in the World Cup, on June 30. The duo had been accounted for 160 runs in their 20 overs in that match with a solitary wicket to show for his efforts. In the wake of the Chepauk hiding, though, the two wrist spinners might pair up again. Tomorrow's game is must-win for India, as another slip will give the Caribbeans an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

At Chepauk, West Indies chased down 287 with consummate ease, on a pitch that became easier for batting under lights. The Vizag strip could offer a run-fest. Shai Hope said as much: "(It) looks better for batting. The ball will come on a bit more. I think it will be easier for scoring and bowlers will have a more difficult job on this surface."

The Caribbean opener is fresh from his unbeaten hundred in the first ODI and given the heavy artillery that the visitors possess, India are expected to do something different in this game. One option for them could be to play Chahal in place of Shivam Dube. The Mumbai allrounder was expensive - 0/68 in 7.5 overs - on his ODI debut. His pace, or rather the lack of it, might make him a soft target for the West Indies batters on a batting-friendly pitch. Another choice for the hosts could be to go with two wrist spinners,



Ravindra Jadeja's utility with both bat and ball could break up the Kuldeep-**Chahal pairing.** File

retain Dube and drop Jadeja. In that case, given that the Indian team has a softer batting underbelly, Manish Pandey might be included in the middle-order, at the expense of Kedar Jadhav. Then again, the latter batted well in Chennai and he can perform the role of an extra spinner, bowling skiddy off breaks with a slingy action.

The team management also have the option to include Shardul Thakur, in the squad as the injured Bhuvneshwar Kumar's replacement. Thakur bowled well at the nets today, but as a senior ACA-VDCA ground-staff told this paper on Monday, spinners might come into play in the second half of the match. So going with an additional medium pacer could be a luxury here.

West Indies' convincing win in the first match followed by the nature of the pitch at Vizag is sort of forcing India to weigh their options, with little margin for error. At the end, the hosts, as per their ODI template, will be chiefly dependent on Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli to put up a big total or chase down a big target. But they will surely prepare for

every possibility. Poor fielding is another aspect that has been affecting the Indian team of late. Some dollies were dropped in the T20Is. In the first ODI also, Hope got a life on 10, while Shimron Hetmyer was dropped on 106. Hope went on to score 102 not out, while Hetmyer made 139 off 106 deliveries. Together they had added 218 runs for the second wicket during

which misfields, too, added to India's misery. "We should have defended 287 (at Chepauk), as there was some help available from the track. We didn't bowl well to be honest. We have dropped too many catches in the last few games and that's a worry. The West Indies batsmen are more six hitters. (They have) a tendency to take the aerial route. A few catches will come your way and you have got to take them," medium pacer Deepak Chahar said at the pre-match press conference.



Jasprit Bumrah, sidelined after the West Indies tour in August-September because of an injury, trained with the Indian team in Vizag on Tuesday. AP

Hope, the glue that binds the big-hitters

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY VISAKHAPATNAM, DECEMBER 17

THAT HE is breathing down Virat Kohli's neck, average-wise, is itself an achievement. Shai Hope's ODI batting average in 2019 is 61.25. Kohli tops the list with 61.52. The India captain is also the highest ODI run-getter in the current calendar year with 1,292 runs from 24 matches, including five centuries and six half-centuries. Rohit Sharma is at No. 2 having accumulated 1,268 runs at 52.83 from 26 matches, with six hundreds and five half-centuries. Hope is in August company, at No. 3, with 1,225 runs from 26 ODIs; four centuries and seven fifties. The unbeaten

hundred he scored at Chepauk wasn't an

aberration.

The majority of the West Indies batsmen are on high demand in different T20 leagues. Hope, his consistency in the ODIs notwithstanding, is an exception. The 26-year-old 'keeper-batsman figures in the 2020 IPL auction list, to be held in Kolkata on Thursday. But unlike his Caribbean team mate Shimron Hetmyer for example, Hope is not an IPL shoo-in. Far from it. West Indies captain Kieron Pollard, a Mumbai Indians legend, belongs to a different level.

"His (Hope) game is more suited to the 50-over format. I don't think he will attract high bids at the auction," a top official from an IPL franchise told The Indian Express. Hope's ODI strike-rate, 73.81, goes against him. At the same time, his strike-rate in T20 internationals is a very creditable 136. But as a T20 batsman, Hope is yet to make an impact. The ongoing ODI series allows him the opportunity to present a strong case before the auction. West Indies will win the series if they beat India at Vizag. But that apart, the IPL auction, too, adds to the motivation.

Hope didn't disagree. "I'm sure it would," he said. But he quickly put things in perspective. "We came here to play a series against India so whatever comes secondary is secondary. I'm sure some of the guys will be looking forward to the auction but we have an India series to play and that's the main thing right now."

Hope is not too concerned about his relatively low strike-rate. The team management has given him the role to anchor the inhis relatively low strike-rate. The team management has given him the role to anchor the innings and bat through. With serious power-hitters around, the opener can play at his own

Hope is not too concerned about

nings and bat through. With serious powerhitters around, the opener can play at his own pace. He did his job to perfection in the first ODI, holding one end up and allowing Hetmyer to take the attack to the Indian bowlers. It was excellent partnership batting where Hope's assured presence at one end laid the foundation for an impressive victory

"It was about pacing my innings to the team's requirement. We only had to chase 280 (plus) and we wanted everyone to be on the same page. My role was to stay, knock around and not give any wickets. It's about doing what the team requires. If the chase required me to step it up, I can do that as well," Hope said.

At times he eschewed his ego to play second fiddle to Hetmyer. "I think it's difficult for me when you see someone at the other end going so easy. You just want to join the party but I have to keep reminding myself that I can't let the opposition make inroads. If one man is attacking at the other end, it's not necessary to have a go if the run rate is under control. The key is the ability to be aware of each situation.

Given that he plays such innings after keeping wickets for 50 overs makes Hope's contributions invaluable. Going beyond the strike-rate, he could be serious value for money.

WI to wear black armbands

West Indies players will sport black armbands during the second ODI at Vizag on Wednesday in memory of their former batsman Basil Butcher, who passed away in the early hours on Tuesday (India time). Butcher, 86, played alongside the likes of Sir Garfield Sobers, Sir Conrad Hunte, Rohan Kanhai and Clive Lloyd. He scored 3,104 runs in 44 Tests including seven hundreds.

Focussing on white ball helped me break into Team India: Chahar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA VISAKHAPATNAM, DECEMBER 17

A REMARKABLY candid Deepak Chahar on Tuesday said he understood early in his career that switching his focus to white ball cricket and IPL was the fastest and easiest route to the India dressing room. The Agrabased Chahar started with a brilliant 8 for 10 in his Ranji Trophy debut against Hyderabad, but for all practical purposes, knew that a

take him nowhere near international cricket. "When I changed my action to gain speed, I struggled with my state team. Now sud-

speed of 125 kmph with the red ball would

denly, I found that my road towards entering the Indian team to be very difficult. If I had to take the Ranji route, then I would have had to play more matches, play a whole firstclass season, play Duleep Trophy. That's a longer road," Chahar said, there was a re-

freshing honesty in his admission. "But if you do well in IPL, then you can quickly play for India and during that phase of my career, I decided to concentrate on white ball cricket," Chahar, who is an automatic choice in T20 cricket now, said ahead of India's second ODI against the West Indies.

The medium pacer came into India reckoning after two seasons with IPL franchise Chennai Super Kings. The most impressive

aspect of an interaction with Chahar was the clarity he has about his shortcomings and what he is doing to improve them. "When I came to the Ranji Trophy, I used to bowl 125 kmph. My struggle with injuries was due to my efforts to increase pace. Because I knew that I won't be able to survive with that kind of pace at the international level. I had to increase it close to 140 clicks and get it to swing."

"A swinging delivery at 135 to 137 kmph is the most difficult delivery for any batsman. I can vouch that even 150 km on a flat track can be easier to handle."

As focus shifted on becoming a good white ball bowler, Chahar realised that swinging a white ball is twice as difficult as the red ball."A red ball will even (reverse) swing if it's shiny on one side. That's why, at the Ranji level, a lot of bowlers can move the ball both ways. In white ball, the swing is not because of the shine (of lacquer). It is derived through action. So I worked on that also and increased my pace. I have a good slower bouncer and I am working on my yorker."

The confidence came under Mahendra Singh Dhoni's leadership at Chennai Super Kings ahead of the 2019 IPL season. "Before the 2019 IPL, I prepared a lot bowling on Chennai track. Since I bowl three overs in Powerplay for CSK, and if you don't have a yorker at the Chepauk, where the ball doesn't swing, it will be difficult. But I can get even better."

Left-arm spinner Sante excels despite setback

DEVENDRA PANDEY MUMBAI. DECEMBER 17

RAVINDRA SANTE'S right hand is paralyzed. He was eight months old when an injection given by a local doctor had created complications. It took a while for his family to realise the problem, only when the toddler couldn't move his right hand at all, did they realise the gravity of the issue. The doctor even suggested amputating the hand but his father

put his foot down. On Tuesday, Sante starred with a sevenwicket match haul for Central Railway Mumbai Division against JP Morgan in a Times Shield C division cricket game, the oldest corporate tournament in the country. "I don't want people to sympathise with me as I believe that I can play as good cricket as others and I do," Sante says.

For a while now, his cricketing community have been surprised how long and pow-

erfully he can hit the ball with one functional hand. Just not batting, his left-arm spin have impressed his team-mates and coaches.

A few months ago, Sante has starred for India when he hit a half-century to enable the team to clinch the maiden Physical Disability World Series 2019. During the recent Kanga League encounter, he finished with fivewicket match haul for his side Bohra. "He bowls like any other spinner and one will not come to know about his physical problem until you see him field. His right hand has no power, so whenever he runs, he holds his one hand with other. He can hit six straight, he is really gifted," says Salim Shaikh, Railway team manager.

Sante says his oppositions team always doubted whether he can play or bowl properly but they change their minds after he performs.

"People come and ask, bhai tu batting mein maar lega na (you can hit, na?) but after seeing me bat they changed their perception. Similarly, with the ball, initially the



Ravindra Sante's right arm is paralyzed because of an injection. Express Photo

A few months ago, Sante has starred for India when he hit a half-century to enable the team to clinch the maiden Physical Disability World Series 2019.

batsman think whether I can bowl well without the support of the non-bowling arm but they also change their opinion after facing me," says Sante, who works as a clerk in Central Railways.

Sante, a resident of Dombivali which is 52 kilometres from Mumbai, began to play with tennis ball like most kids before leather-ball cricket happened. One of his friends told him to train in Virar, a two-hour train journey from home. "I used to leave home by 4:30 am, practise in Virar and take the same shuttle back home," before adding, "I love this game."

Labuschagne in Australia ODI squad for India tour

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA MELBOURNE, DECEMBER 17

IN-FORM batsman Marnus Labuschagne on Tuesday earned a maiden call-up to the Australian ODI squad for the three-match series against India next month following a prolific year in Test cricket. Labuschagne has averaged 58.05 since making his Test debut last year, scoring hundreds in his last three games. All-rounder Sean Abbott has been recalled after five years while also making a comeback are pacer Josh Hazlewood and

spinner Ashton Agar. The big names missing from the squad are Glenn Maxwell, Usman Khawaja, Shaun Marsh and Nathan Lyon. Chief selector Trevor Hohns said Maxwell, who took a break to address his mental health issues but is back now in domestic cricket, is being watched closely.

"It's great to see Maxwell returning to the game with the Big Bash League. We will closely monitor his form after what would have been a disappointing 12 months in the one-day game by his standards," Hohns said.

The Indian fans will also get to see Australia's star players — David Warner and Steve Smith — in action. The first ODI will be played in Mumbai on January 14, followed by Raikot (January 17) and Bengaluru (January 19). Hohns is confident that Labuschagne will come good in challenging Indian conditions. Head coach Justin Langer will not be travelling to India for the short tour with assistant coach Andew McDonald taking charge.

SQUAD: Aaron Finch (captain), Sean Abbott, Ashton Agar, Alex Carey, Pat Cummins, Peter Handscomb, Josh Hazlewood, Marnus Labuschagne, Kane Richardson, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, Ashton Turner, David Warner, Adam Zampa.