

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 Kolkata.

■ 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*

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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

presence at events.

“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 India kit.



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.



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*

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 Chahal said at the pre-match press conference.

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
VISAKHAPATNAM, DECEMBER 17

A REMARKABLY candid Deepak Chahal 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 Agra-based Chahal started with a brilliant 8 for 10 in his Ranji Trophy debut against Hyderabad, but for all practical purposes, knew that a speed of 125 kmph with the red ball would take him nowhere near international cricket.

“When I changed my action to gain speed, I struggled with my state team. Now sud-

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 first-class season, play Duleep Trophy. That’s a longer road,” Chahal said, there was a refreshing 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,” Chahal, 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 Chahal 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, Chahal 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 seven-wicket 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 five-wicket 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.”



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.