

Emerging from the shadows

With Bolt having hung his spikes, Blake trains his eyes on gold at 2020 Tokyo Olympics

SHAHID JUDGE
MUMBAI, DECEMBER 2

A QUESTION comes from the media scrum: “Have you ever beaten Usain Bolt in the nationals?” Yohan Blake smiles before saying, “I won’t say. I won’t say.”

Through all his career, the 29-year-old Jamaican has lived in the shadow of the world record holder and eight-time Olympic gold medallist Bolt. The only times Blake has managed to win the yellow metal at the Olympics has been when he shared the podium with the world’s fastest man, in the 4x100m relay races at the 2012 London and 2016 Rio Games. But that’s not to say Blake is an insignificant name in the world of athletics.

With a personal best of 9.69 seconds and 19.26 seconds in the 100m and 200m respectively, Blake is the second-fastest sprinter in history – behind Bolt’s mark of 9.58 seconds (100m) and 19.19 seconds (200m). And now that ‘Lightning Bolt’ has hung his spikes, Blake is looking to make his move up the podium at the Olympics next year.

“I’m always the favourite, I’m the second-fastest man in the universe,” he said at a promotional event in Mumbai on Monday. “Everyone has to look up to me. This is going to be my last Olympics, so I’m definitely going for the gold. I have got many medals in the past, but this will put the icing on the cake for me at the Tokyo Olympics.”

The Jamaican sprinter, whom Bolt dubbed ‘The Beast,’ had first announced his name at the 2011 World Championships in Daegu, when he surprised the field and raced to gold. That made him the youngest ever sprinter till date – at 21 years and 245 days – to win a 100m gold at the World Championships. On that occasion though, Bolt, the favourite, was disqualified because of a false start. It’s an achievement that will always have an asterisk beside it. But Blake doesn’t care.

“If you take Usain out of the picture, I’d be the fastest man. I feel I was born in the wrong time,” he says lightly. “Nevertheless, I’m still proud with what I have achieved. It was Usain’s time and I was competing against a giant.”

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Yohan Blake is the second-fastest sprinter in history – behind Usain Bolt’s mark of 9.58 seconds in 100m. *File*

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YOHAN BLAKE

patriot set an Olympic record in the 100m at London 2012. And he was also there when Bolt stumbled past the finish line, in last place, in his last competitive race, at the 2017 World Championships.

“He was hardly training (in the run-up to the event). He was partying a lot instead.

He didn’t feel the urge as it was his last race. He said he was just going to have fun, he just wanted a medal. Everyone wants to win, but he just wanted a medal,” recalls Blake. “On the day of the race, he said he was feeling his hamstring. When I came around the corner to give him the baton, I knew he was not going to make it. I thought, ‘what about my medal?’ “But he had done so much for Jamaica, for the world, and I forgive him that once. But it was a bad end to his career.”

Now Blake’s looking forward to his own swansong at what will be his third Olympics. He reckons that his body is “firing” and that everyday he’s “hungry and running with purpose.”

But in the longer run, for athletics, he’s critical of the changes the world body – The

International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF), now called World Athletics – has been making to international events. In the coming season, the 15 Diamond League meets will no longer have the 200m sprint, discus throw, triple jump and 3000m steeplechase.

“If he (IAAF president Sebastian Coe) can take away the 200 and triple jump, I don’t know if he is trying to build athletics or trying to kill it. But that’s a stupid move he is making. He must enhance the sports, but he is killing it,” he says. “This is people’s career and where they make money. For Coe to be doing that, everybody is hating him. It’s madness.” But whatever comes of the alterations with the Diamond League, Blake remains unfazed in his goal. Gold. At the Olympics. On his own terms.

‘New generation should have replaced me by now’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 2

VETERAN INDIAN tennis player Leander Paes on Monday hinted at a possible retirement, saying he has lived his career and doesn’t see himself playing past another year. Paes was named in India’s Davis Cup squad for the Pakistan tie after several top players made themselves unavailable to travel to Islamabad. The 46-year-old Indian went on to better his own record by achieving his 44th Davis Cup doubles win, this time partnering debutant Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan, as India routed Pakistan 4-0 last week.

“My experience carries me through now but in the longer run what’s best for the team is that I should not be playing past another year,” Paes told reporters.

“I am not going to play much longer, I have had a great 30-year stint in Davis Cup. I have lived my career playing for the country.” However, Paes said he will always be there to represent his country, if need be. “For me, when it comes to being called for a tie whatever the circumstances I will represent my country.”

The Atlanta Olympic bronze medallist said that nurturing a young team should be the main objective for Indian tennis right now. “Already by 46, I should have been moved out by the next generation coming up,” Paes said.

“So to really be looking at it objectively, to nurture a younger team is what’s impor-

tant,” he said. Paes, who has won 18 Grand Slam titles, said coaching youngsters is one of the things he plans to do in the future.

“I was really focused on this tie, I had to motivate the youngster. Now I’m going to think about my 2020 season. I will be thinking hard about these 30 years I have just completed. And I’m going to evaluate with my team what this new season brings,” he said.

“There are other things that are motivating me so much. A dream of mine is to coach and train and nurture youngsters to win Olympic medals, to win the Wimbledon championship.” Talking about the Pakistan tie, Paes said he volunteered to play because he didn’t want India to be relegated in the Davis Cup.

“My reason for this Davis Cup was to make sure India as a team didn’t forfeit the tie with the players not going to Islamabad to play ... then for the next three to four years we would be relegated to a zonal group and would have to fight our way up,” he said.

“None of us have put 30 years to see that happen. The last time that happened was in 1974 when India was to play South Africa.”

Meanwhile, coach Zeeshan Ali and non-playing captain Rohit Rajpal lavished praise on Paes, saying the experience the veteran brings with him is unmatched.

“Experience is one thing that he brings to the table, having played the amount of Davis Cup matches that he has played and won. No matter where we go and which team we play, they all look up to him. It does not have to be only Indian players,” Ali said.



Leander Paes says coaching youngsters is something he plans to do in the future.

Starc opts out of next year’s IPL; Maxwell, Lynn in auction pool

PTI/ENNS
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 2

AUSTRALIA PACE spearhead Mitchell Starc has opted out of the Indian Premier League for a second successive year even as compatriots Glenn Maxwell and Chris Lynn have listed their names for the player’s auction to be held on December 19 in Kolkata.

The 29-year-old Starc last featured in the IPL in 2015 when he represented Royal Challengers Bangalore. The left-arm quick had been signed by Kolkata Knight Riders for Rs 9.4 crore in the auction before the 2018 IPL, but was unavailable for the entire tournament because of injury.

Earlier this year too, Starc was recovering from injury ahead of the IPL 2019 auction and had opted out to give priority to Australia’s World Cup campaign. He is the highest wicket-taker in the last two editions of the 50-over World Cup. He will feature in the first edition of The Hundred in the UK, where he will represent Welsh Fire.

England’s Test captain Joe Root is another notable absentee from the auction pool of 971 players.

Maxwell and Lynn, however, will be up for grabs and have set their base price at the highest level of Rs 2 crore. The former, who had taken a break from cricket to deal

with “difficulties with his mental health” made a positive return to club cricket on November 23.

Apart from Maxwell and Lynn, the others to list their base price at Rs 2 crore are Australian fast bowlers Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood and all-rounder Mitchell Marsh, South Africa quick Dale Steyn and Sri Lanka batsman Angelo Mathews.

Among other overseas big names in the auction list is South Africa pacer Chris Morris, who became the only retained player in 2018 to be released ahead of the upcoming auction. Out of the 971 cricketers to go under the hammer, 713 are Indians and 258 overseas players. There are 215 capped players, 754 uncapped and two cricketers from Associate Nations, who will compete for the available 73 spots in the eight franchises.

Apart from India, the countries represented in the auction pool are Afghanistan (19), Australia (55), Bangladesh (6), England (22), Netherlands (1), New Zealand (24), South Africa (54), Sri Lanka (39), USA (1), West Indies (34) and Zimbabwe (3).

With the IPL Player Registration closing on November 30, teams now have time till December 9 evening to submit their short-list of players that will make up the final Player Auction list.

NITIN SHARMA
CHANDIGARH, DECEMBER 2

A SILVER medal at the wrestling nationals is a big achievement for anyone, especially one who had once quit the sport and drove a truck – without licence – to support himself and his family for four years.

Sonaba Gongane Tanaji had to settle for second place in the 61 kg category at the nationals in Jalandhar last week, losing to World U-23 championship silver medallist Ravinder. But he has come a long way from the time he rode a pick-up truck throughout the day for four years. Those memories came rushing back for the 23-year-old when he saw a mini pick-up truck parked just outside the tournament venue.

“I wanted to put the medal on the mini truck and remember all the days when I drove a similar vehicle, sometimes for more than 14 hours in the day, to support myself and my family,” the Kolhapur grappler said.

“When I started wrestling in 2006 at the village akhada, my father’s health was a big concern and we couldn’t earn as much as we should have from our 4.5 acre of land. That’s why, three years later, I quit training at the akhada and bought a mini pick-up truck after taking loan of Rs 1.5 lakh. I would manage to save Rs 400-500 after buying diesel for the truck. I didn’t have a licence and wouldn’t enter towns for fear of being caught. A year later,



Sonaba Gongane won silver in the 61 kg category at the nationals in Jalandhar.

I exchanged the truck for a bigger tempo after taking another loan of Rs 3 lakh.”

It was a chance meeting with 2008 Youth Commonwealth Games champion Ranjeet Nalawade at the Pune Railway station that brought Sonaba back to wrestling in 2013 and he started making progress through the ranks. He first won a bronze at the Cadet Nationals before becoming state champion.

“Nalawade bhai was the main reason that I resumed training and when I won the bronze medal at the cadet nationals, my fa-

ther distributed sweets in the village,” he remembers.

In 2017, Sonaba claimed his first medal at the senior level – a bronze in the 61 Kg category in the nationals at Indore. He had also joined the Maratha Regiment in the Army by then, and is a Havildar now.

It was the year when his father suffered a paralysis attack but his job with the Army meant that Sonaba could support his family financially. Last year, the youngster had to miss the nationals due to injury but won the

title in the mud wrestling nationals at Pune. He also reached the quarterfinals at the world championships in Budapest, Hungary, where he lost to Gadzhimurad Rashidov of Russia.

The accolades kept coming for Sonaba this year with a silver medal at the Asian U-23 Championships in Mongolia.

The youngster has also been sparring with 2019 World Championship bronze medallist Bajrang Punia in the national camp and considers him his idol, even though a freak injury during one of those sessions kept him out of action for a while.

“I often seek tips from Bajrang bhai and he always helps me. I suffered a shoulder injury as Bajrang bhai’s hand slipped due to sweat from the grip in practice, but things like these happen. Apart from Bajrang bhai, I also talk with (world championship bronze medallist) Rahul Aware bhai. We fought in the Maharashtra dangal last year where I lost 6-9. I plan to shift to 65 Kg category next year and my target is the CWG and Asian Games podium,” said Sonaba.

National coach Jagmandar Singh believes avoiding injuries will be key to Sonaba’s success in coming years.

“He has the willpower and stamina to succeed but his style of wrestling is more prone to injuries. Perhaps he did not put much focus on technique during his early days but is improving with time. If he can avoid injuries, he can win more medals,” said Singh.

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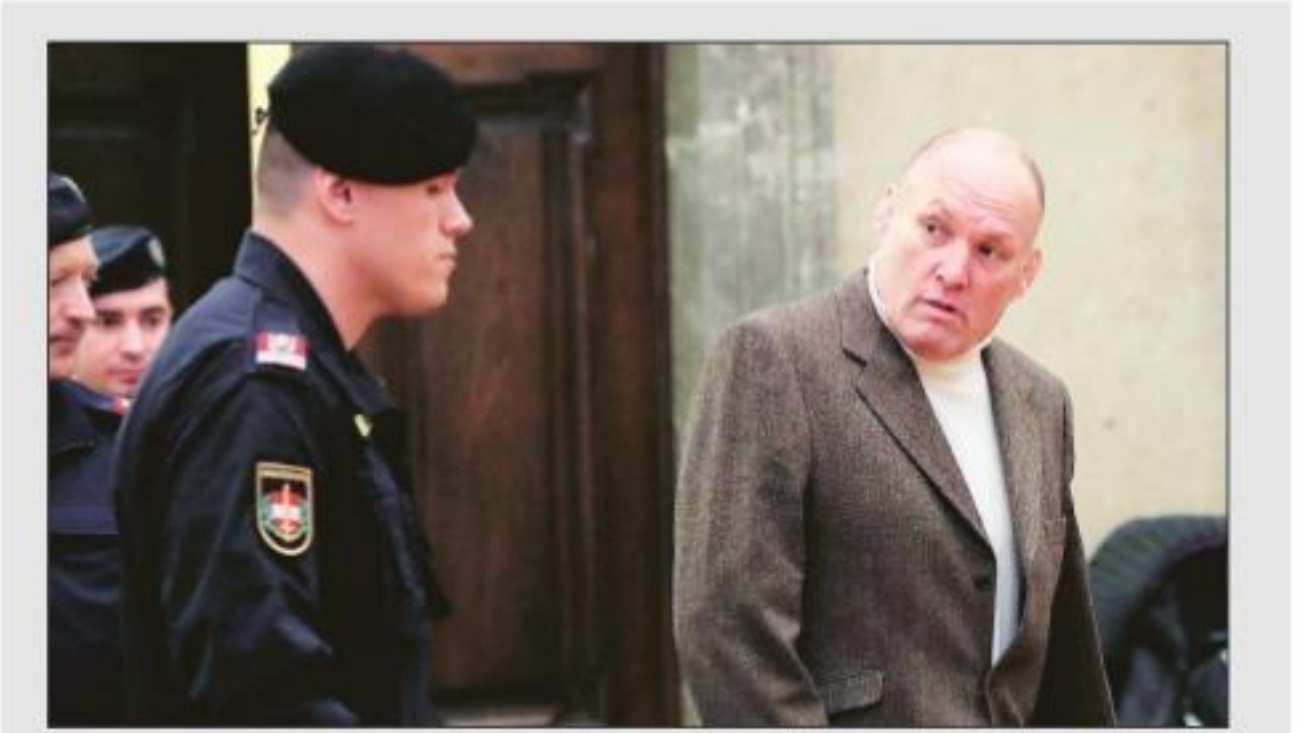


Minakshi, Rituz win on Day 1 of boxing nationals

Punjab’s Minakshi, Chandigarh’s Rituz and crowd favourite Anchu Sabu emerged winners on the opening day of the fourth Elite Women’s National Boxing Championship on Monday. A total of 235 boxers from 33 teams will be seen in action at Mundayad Indoor Stadium. A total of 23 matches were played on the first day with Punjab pugilist Minakshi (48kg) beating Meghalaya’s Eva Marbaniang 5-0. Rituz defeated Ladakh’s Dechen in the light fly weight category. Anchu Sabu (48kg) sprung the surprise of the day as she beat Manika Kumari from Bengal with an RSC verdict in round 2.

Pressure is all on Joshua, says Ruiz Jr

World heavyweight champion Andy Ruiz Jr believes his re-match with Anthony Joshua will be a harder fight than his stunning victory in June but says all the pressure is on the Briton ahead of their showdown in Saudi Arabia this weekend. Mexican-American Ruiz produced one of boxing’s biggest upsets when he dethroned the previously undefeated world champion Joshua with a seventh-round stoppage at New York’s Madison Square Garden. “We’ve got to see where he’s at because all the pressure is on him. The pressure isn’t on me because I followed my dream, made my dreams come true,” Ruiz said ahead of the so-called ‘Clash on the Dunes’.



Austrian Peter Seisenbacher won judo gold at 1984 and 1988 Olympics. *Reuters*

Olympic champ gets 5 years for child sexual abuse

Two-time Olympic judo champion Peter Seisenbacher was sentenced to five years in prison on Monday for sexually assaulting two young girls he was coaching in the early 2000s. An Austrian regional criminal court found Seisenbacher guilty of the abuse, which took place in Vienna between 1999 and 2004. The women filed charges against their former coach in 2013. Seisenbacher has always denied wrongdoing, claiming the women made up their stories. However, chief judge Christoph Bauer called the victims “extremely credible.” “We didn’t get the impression that they were lying, that they were misleading us, that they were plotting,” Bauer said. The 59-year-old Seisenbacher started coaching following a successful career, which included winning gold medals at two consecutive Olympics in the 1980s. Seisenbacher was convicted of sexually assaulting one of the girls in 1999, when she was 11, and abusing her on multiple occasions until 2002. Also, he allegedly sexually assaulted a 13-year-old girl in 2004.

SAG: Badminton teams win gold medals

Indian men’s, led by Kidambi Srikanth, defeated Sri Lanka 3-1 while the women’s side blanked the same opponents 3-0 to make gold medals at the 13th South Asian Games (SAG). In the taekwondo event, India won nine medals, including two golds. In male team poomsae (17 years above to under 23 category) the trio of Lalthlamunapua, Lalafakzuala and Daniel Lalhumthanga claimed the top honours. The country’s second gold was won by the duo of Gaurav Singh and Harsha Singha in the pair poomsae (23 years above to under 29 category) event.

NorthEast secure late draw vs Jamshedpur FC

NorthEast United scored a late equaliser to secure a 1-1 draw against Jamshedpur FC in an Indian Super League match at the JRD Tata Sports Complex here on Monday. The hosts were the dominant side in the encounter and surged ahead through Spanish striker Sergio Castel’s fifth goal of the season in the 28th minute. But a 90th minute equaliser from Panagiotis Triadis ensured NorthEast United’s unbeaten record remained intact. The result enabled Jamshedpur to remain on the second spot on the table, while NorthEast are now fourth with 10 points in their kitty.



Federer’s face to be minted on Swiss coin

Tennis great Roger Federer is to become the first living Swiss to have a coin minted in their honour, with a commemorative 20 franc (\$20.06) silver piece bearing his image being issued in January. The 38-year-old 20-time Grand Slam champion is regarded by many as the greatest tennis player ever and is a national hero in Switzerland. Swissmint confirmed that 55,000 of the coins, featuring Federer delivering a backhand, will be produced and will be available for pre-order from Tuesday until Dec. 19. “Roger Federer’s sporting achievements, his charitable commitments, his easy-going nature and his accessibility to his fans have prompted Swissmint to dedicate this 20-franc silver coin to him – the first time it has done so with a living person,” a Swissmint spokesperson told Reuters.