

'A reminder of the magic sport brings to our lives'

Tendulkar dedicates Laureus award to all champion athletes who have inspired youngsters

LAUREUS AWARDS

**STAN RAYAN
BERLIN**
The other day Onkar Singh, a journalist with *Deutsche Welle* in Bonn, spoke about how football changed people's lives in Germany.

"Whenever there is a major football competition, the Germans are all happy. And when Germany won the FIFA World Cup, people were so happy that they were even hugging strangers in the street," said Onkar, who was at the 20th Laureus World Sports Awards function here.

When Sachin Tendulkar won the Laureus Sporting Moment of the last 20 years at the Verti Music Hall here on Monday, he spoke about a similar feeling, how it unites his countrymen back home.

"This is a reminder of how powerful sport is and what magic it does to all our lives. We experience the power of sport and even now, as I watch this film (about India's 2011 ICC World Cup triumph and how his teammates carried him around the stadium), it is really amazing. It is



Making a point: Boris Becker and Steve Waugh are all ears as Sachin Tendulkar stresses that the sporting moment from the 2011 ICC World Cup, which won the Laureus on Monday, was worth voting for. ■GETTY IMAGES

an incredible feeling, something beyond words," said Tendulkar.

Everybody who had come for the Laureus ceremony, especially the Germans, clearly understood the feeling. The Laureus Sporting Moment 2000-2020 was decided through an online voting sys-

tem open to the public and with India's huge population and Tendulkar's massive popularity back home, it was clear that the Master Blaster would be the big favourite.

"I'd like to thank the Laureus Academy members and also for the people who voted and felt that the moment

(aptly titled, 'Carried on the shoulders of a nation') that we saw on the screen, was worth voting for," said Tendulkar. "There is a tricolour in my hand in the image, this was obviously the proudest moment of my life. I had waited for this trophy for 22 but I never gave up, I never lost

hope. I was merely lifting that trophy on behalf of my countrymen and India. I couldn't have asked for anything more."

Tendulkar saluted Laureus for its impressive work to change people's lives.

"With everyone celebrating Laureus' 20th anniver-

sary, it's incredible what the Academy has been able to achieve in the last 20 years, how much it has impacted so many lives through various mediums for gender equality, education etc."

He also spoke about the moment he met Nelson Mandela.

"I had the honour of meeting the great man Nelson Mandela when I was only 19. His hardship did not affect his leadership. Out of the many big messages that he left behind, the most important I felt was that sport has the power to unify everyone," said Tendulkar.

"Today, sitting in this room with so many greats, some of them did not have the best of everything but they gave the best of everything they had and have gone on to become champion athletes. I want to thank all of them for inspiring youngsters to pick up a sport of their choice and chase their dreams. I feel this trophy belongs to all of us for having inspired youngsters and it's not just about me."

(The author was in Berlin at the invitation of Laureus)



Atalanta rides wave of remarkable run

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MILAN

Gian Piero Gasperini's Atalanta is counting on the wave of enthusiasm generated by the Italian outsiders' remarkable run in its Champions League debut season to surge past Spanish club Valencia in the knockout rounds.

The team from Bergamo in the foothills of the Italian Alps takes on Valencia on Wednesday in the last 16, first leg, at the 80,000-seater San Siro, which has nearly four times the capacity of its home stadium, 55 kilometres away.

"This is a game that we have been waiting months for," said Gasperini.

"Being able to play on front of so many of our fans at a venue like San Siro is a beautiful achievement that we have been waiting a long time for."

"The Champions League is a dream which we'll try to carry forward as much as possible."

"The whole city of Bergamo is practically travelling

to Milan."

The team's stunning run comes despite losing its opening three Champions League group games, including 4-0 away to Dinamo Zagreb before a 5-1 loss at Manchester City.

The revival

But a 1-1 draw against Man City in the San Siro sparked the revival of 'La Dea' (The Goddess) who finished seven points behind the Premier League side in second to reach the knockout stage.

Atalanta's confidence has been further boosted after seeing off AS Roma 2-1 in a cauldron in front of its home crowd at Atleti Azzurri d'Italia stadium on Saturday.

The win consolidated its fourth place in Serie A.

"This victory gives us confidence for the next games, it was a fundamental clash to be won," said Mario Pasalic who came off the bench and hit the match winner 19 seconds later.

Tottenham vs Leipzig

Tottenham meets Leipzig in the other match on Wednesday.

'Made people with two different mindsets believe in each other'

RANJI TROPHY

**SHREEDUTTA CHIDANANDA
JAMMU**

Very early into his tenure as the Jammu & Kashmir coach, Milap Mewada realised one thing: this was not a united team. So when Mewada and Irfan Pathan drew up a plan for the future last year, they quickly decided that one thing had to happen. "We needed to remove the 'and' in Jammu and Kashmir and make it J-K," says Mewada.

"There were always two parts in this team - players from Jammu and players

from Kashmir. We were able to unite them. We know that no sportsman likes to lose. [But] there were two teams, two different colours, two different mindsets. We made them believe in each other."

That Mewada, a former Ranji Trophy cricketer and coach from Baroda, and Irfan, currently the J&K mentor, were able to achieve their objective is evident in the results this campaign. J & K finished on top of Group C, advancing to the quarterfinals of the Ranji Trophy for only the third time in its history and the first time since

the 2013-14 season.

On the field, Mewada and Irfan operated with a seriousness and professionalism the J & K players had not perhaps known previously. Off it, they organised continual team-building sessions. "We made it mandatory for players to eat dinner in groups of four - we picked players from different parts of the State, those who did not know each other well," says Mewada.

"They had to learn some secrets about one another, something fun they had done. For example, someone admitted to puncturing so-



Milap Mewada.
*SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

meone's tyre, someone had pursued [a girl] and been slapped, someone had shat-

tered someone's window. They had fun, they felt togetherness and brotherhood."

Then there came the drawings. Groups of four players had to produce a hand-drawn picture that summed up the team best: one came up with a bunch of logs bound together; another drew a river feeding a turbine, except the river had a few minor streams that branched off, weakening it; a third saw the squad as a tiger hiding inside a goat. "All this made it clear what the players were thinking. Eve-

ryone wanted unity," says Mewada.

At the start of the season, he and Irfan handed every player a questionnaire. One of those questions was how long J & K had been playing in the Ranji. Players made various guesses.

The next one was how many titles the side had won. "Nobody got that wrong," smiles Mewada. "So I told them, 'You have been playing for 50 years and you have not won anything. So don't play just another season this time. Make it a mission instead.'"




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