



# From Devsar to Olympics, Kaushik traces his idols' route

NITIN SHARMA  
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 11

TWO DAYS ago, when Manish Kaushik lost to Chinrozig Baatarsukh—who he had beaten at the World Championships last year—in the quarter-final of the Asia/Oceania Olympic Qualifier in Amman, the Haryana boxer had a chat with his eldest brother Vipin Kaushik.

The brothers recollected the day they saw Vijender Singh, Akhil Kumar and Jitender Kumar receiving a warm reception at their village Devsar near Bhiwani, before the Kaushik brothers led Kumar to his home. With the 63-kg category offering six spots from Asia/Oceania qualifiers, Kaushik had one chance left in the play-off against reigning Commonwealth Games champion Harrison Garside of Australia, to whom he had lost in the 2018 Commonwealth Games final. As the 24-year-old scored a split 4:1 win over Garside to bag the ninth Olympic quota for India and became a part of the biggest ever Indian boxing contingent to ever head to the Olympics, the youngster remembered the day his Olympics journey started.

"I still remember the day Vijender bhai, Akhil bhai and Jitender bhai were brought to our village on a Gypsy and people were chanting their name. At that time, I did not know about the Olympics but I asked my brother and told him that I will also get a reception like that one day. This was going through my mind, *Jaise bhi ho yeh bout jeetna tha agar Olympic medal ka sapna pura karna hai* (Come what may, I had to win this bout to realise the dream of winning an Olympic medal)," Kaushik told *The Indian Express*.

Young Manish would spend a lot of time on 12-acre farmland his family owned, helping the family during the harvest of wheat, barley and cotton. When Kaushik joined the Bhupender Singh's boxing academy in Bhiwani in 2008, the brothers would cycle more than 15km every day, a journey which would sometimes offer them a chance to spot Tiwary running on the village roads. The training also meant that Manish's uncle Pawan, who also ran a vegetable shop, took the responsibility of his diet.

"But he was shy to disturb him. In 2009, when Manish won bronze medal in sub-junior nationals in Pune, he got a cash award of Rs 20,000 and we spent the whole amount on getting him gloves and shoes. Our uncle promised my father that he would give money for Manish's diet and juice every day. He does it even now and Manish still takes it even though he is earning a salary (laughs)," remembers Vipin.

Kaushik reached the quarter-finals of the World Junior Championships in Kazakhstan in 2011, but it was a silver medal in the 60-kg category at the 2015 Nationals that helped Kaushik make his way into the Indian camp. He then won the silver medal at the 2016 Nationals, losing to Shiva Thapa -- a fellow boxer with whom his paths would cross many times.

The following year, Kaushik avenged his loss to Thapa in the 60kg final at the senior nationals before defending his 60kg title against World Championship bronze medalist Gaurav Bidhuri the year after. That same year, Kaushik booked his ticket to the Commonwealth Games and won a silver.

But the Bhiwani boxer once again lost to Thapa in last year's trials for Asian Championship before avenging that loss once again, this time at the trials for the World Championships and then went on to become India's fifth medalist at the World Championships in Russia.

National coach CA Kuttappa remembers Kaushik's early days in the national camp and



Kaushik scored a split 4:1 win over Garside to bag the ninth Olympic quota for India, their highest ever squad. File

**Manish has a good long-distance range, but needs to improve his close-range fighting. Sometimes, he stands still while fighting from close and medium range and it can signal passiveness to the judges."**

CA KUTTAPPA

the improvement and wins against Thapa, a two-time Olympian in his own right.

"When Manish came to the national camp, we had to work on his strength and also told him to try a combination of punches. He had a good straight punch but did not have any answer when the opponent counter-attacked. So we made him train extra while sparring. Against Shiva Thapa too, Manish would face problems initially as Shiva is good on counterattacks. So we told Manish to work on his long range and to throw a combination of 3-4 punches before Shiva tried to counter," remembers Kuttappa.

## Fighting injury

On Wednesday, Kaushik had suffered a muscle cramp in his right elbow after Garside caught him there. While Kaushik's strength has been his left punch, the cramp caused him trouble and the coaches came out with a strategy after the opening round. "A muscle cramp hampered Manish's movement but we told him to focus on his left punches. We told him to show the right hand to Garside and hit with the left and it worked for him. When he had shifted to 63kg last year, he had worked a lot on adding more power to his left punches and it helped him today," said Kuttappa.

The national coach believes that Kaushik has to iron out some flaws before the Tokyo Olympics to realise the medal dreams. In the last round against Garside, Kaushik looked tired but managed to hold his edge and Kuttappa believes that the youngster needs to add more to his defence. "Sometimes, he stands still while fighting from close and medium range and it can signal passiveness to the judges," added Kuttappa.

On Wednesday evening, former boxer Jitender Kumar praised Kaushik and hopes he would win his village's first Olympic medal, which he had missed in 2008. "Manish has the game to win medals at the world level and he showed that in last year's World Championships. I am waiting for him to end our village's wait for an Olympics medal, a thing which I missed narrowly," Kumar said.

## OF LAUGHTER & FORGETTING

Ravindra Jadeja and Co. would look to banish the memories of the trip to New Zealand in the ODI series against South Africa. AP

# India look for return gifts

The return of Pandya and Bhuvneshwar may provide India much-needed boost against South Africa

VISHAL MENON  
DHARAMSALA, MARCH 11

WHEN SEEN in isolation, the three-match ODI series between India and South Africa offers little context, especially since the shortest version of the game has gained more importance in the run-up to the T20 World Cup that's just seven months away. However, there's a lot on the line for two key India players — all-rounder Hardik Pandya and pacer Bhuvneshwar Kumar — whom are making comebacks after long injury layoffs.

Pandya had been ruled out since September 2019 with a back injury. Bhuvneshwar suffered a side strain in July 2019, recovered, and was included for the T20 series against West Indies last year. But the Uttar Pradesh bowler broke down again, this time due to a groin injury, following which he underwent a sports hernia surgery. Over the last two months, he has spent considerable time at the National Cricket Academy in Bangalore, where he underwent a rehabilitation programme.

Both Pandya and Bhuvneshwar know that this short series assumes utmost importance for their respective careers. Robust performances against the Proteas will not only get them back into the groove, but also serve as a confidence-booster with the Indian Premier League starting later this month and the T20 World Cup later in the year.

Pandya attended an optional practice session, where he bowled at full tilt for close to half an hour, to show that the problem with his back is a thing of the past. A little while later, when he turned up to bat, he sent everyone scampering for cover with his belligerent hitting. From the outside, it looked like the all-rounder had hit his straps. It's not as if he is coming into this series absolutely cold. In fact, at the DY Patil T20 tournament



Hardik Pandya, who hasn't featured in an international game since a T20I against South Africa in September last year, will make a much-awaited comeback. AP

in Mumbai last week, the 26-year-old smashed a 55-ball unbeaten 158, which included 20 sixes. That innings came on the heels of a 39-ball 105 two days earlier.

Captain Virat Kohli and head coach Ravi Shastri will breathe a huge sigh of relief after Pandya's return. He adds balance to the playing XI as a seam-bowling all-rounder. His sharp, incisive medium pacers give Kohli the cushion to play five genuine bowlers, and his big-hitting prowess the flexibility to utilise him either as a finisher in big chases, or prop him up the order to boost the run rate while setting targets.

In essence, Pandya's success in the two roles would solve the twin issues of the lack of batting depth and a quality fifth bowler, something that came to the fore during the

ODI series in New Zealand. In Pandya's absence, the team management experimented with the likes of Vijay Shankar and Shivam Dube, with little success, since neither Shankar nor Dube possess Pandya's ability to alter a match through bowling, batting or athleticism on the field. Simply put, Pandya brings energy and dynamism to this team.

## Memorale venue

The all-rounder couldn't have asked for a better venue than the scenic HPCA Stadium to make a comeback. He will have fond memories of the ground, where he made his ODI debut in October 2016 against New Zealand. Back then, neither the sense of occasion nor the big stage seemed to rattle Pandya. He bagged three wickets that day to

walk away with the Player of the Match award.

Like Pandya, Bhuvneshwar is a vital cog in India's limited-overs plans. To know how arduous it is for a pacer to make a comeback after an injury, he needs to look no further than Jasprit Bumrah, who has not quite looked the irresistible force he was after recovering from a stress fracture in the lower back at the end of last year. Bumrah's lacklustre performances in New Zealand — he went wicketless in the three ODIs before finding some of his rhythm in the final Test in Christchurch — are a useful case study.

Ahead of the series opener, Bhuvneshwar opened up on his insecurities as a bowler returning from an injury.

"It's difficult to maintain your pace when you're returning from an injury since the possibility of getting injured again remains at the back of your mind. The best option is to play matches like I did before returning (he also played in the DY Patil T20 tournament). In doing so, you gain confidence from playing matches before stepping it up," he reasoned.

Bhuvneshwar would be relishing the prospect of sharing the new ball with Bumrah again. For a brief time, the two had forged a great partnership together, with their vastly contrasting bowling styles. Bumrah with his slinky, unorthodox action and Bhuvneshwar with his swing made it a match-winning combination.

Bhuvneshwar's return comes at a time when the confidence of India's famed pace attack seems to have taken a hit. Mohammed Shami looked jaded, while Navdeep Saini and Shardul Thakur conceded plenty in the series in New Zealand. However, like Pandya, Bhuvneshwar will not mind bowling at Dharamsala. It's a venue that tends to aid swing, and if stars align, he could be quite a handful on this pitch.

## RANJI TROPHY FINAL

# Limited DRS has teams fretting; BCCI says full version too expensive

DEVENDRA PANDEY  
RAJKOT, MARCH 11

THE INDIAN cricket board, the richest in the world, chose to go with a sub-par limited use of Decision Review System (DRS) in the Ranji Trophy final because the full system was too expensive, it is learnt. The technology in use doesn't have ball-tracker, snickometer, and hotspot. The absence of snickometer/hot spot affected the detection of edges and the lack of ball-tracker affected the lbw decisions.

Only the pitch map and stump mic are in use in the semi-finals and the final of Ranji Trophy. Since the cost of other tools were high, the Committee of Administrators (COA) last year had given permission to use of limited DRS. Saba Karim, the general manager cricket operations for BCCI, stated that intention of BCCI behind limited DRS was to eliminate howlers and assess umpires.

He pointed out that teams were given four reviews per innings (two more than usual). "We have limited DRS that is why we allowed four reviews. All this is explained to both the teams before the game is started. It will help players and umpires to get right decision. The positive sign is that players have started to understand how to use it," Karim told *The Indian Express*.

The decision has already thrown up problems. On Wednesday, Abhimanyu Easwaran went for the DRS to try reverse the lbw decision given by the on-field umpire Yeshwant Barde. While replays suggested the ball might have missed the leg stump, the absence of the ball-tracker made the third umpire SRavi to stick with the original decision.

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SABA KARIM  
GENERAL MANAGER OF CRICKET OPERATIONS

Apart from the cost to use ball-tracking and hotspot, it also requires more operators and some equipment has to be hired from abroad. Since all the Ranji games weren't telecasted, the BCCI opted for the sub-par route.

The absence of technology meant teams weren't satisfied with the decisions made. In the final session, Saurashtra's prolonged appeal for a lbw decision against the Sudip Chatterjee was upheld by the on-field umpire but the batsmen was confident that he had got an inside edge and successfully overturned it through DRS.

The third umpire arrived at the decision through split-screen replays and visual perception of deviation. Some in Saurashtra camp felt the evidence wasn't conclusive; Bengal were confident the right decision was taken.

On the first day, Chetan Sakariya was ruled out after a caught-behind appeal. When Bengal went for DRS, the TV umpire C Shamshuddin reversed the decision, going by the sound he heard on stump mic. But the woody sound doesn't crank up always and things could heat up in the coming days.

# Saurashtra nudge ahead in crawl-fest

DEVENDRA PANDEY  
RAJKOT, MARCH 11

ON A pitch that has consistently tilted each day's final session towards the seamers and demanded a cautious crawl for the rest of the day, Saurashtra moved ahead in the contest at the end of day 3. Bengal need 292 more runs for the all-important first-innings lead while Saurashtra seemed better poised to take seven wickets first.

Two key events transpired in the final session where Bengal didn't get a run off the bat in the last 59 minutes of play: Manoj Tiwary, their best batsman, was taken out and the final 30 minutes threw up reverse swing and invariable bounce more than before in the game, hinting more trouble awaits the batsmen.

Bengal have Sudip Chatterjee, under pressure after two lacklustre seasons but on a tenacious 45, and Wriddhiman Saha at the crease with Anustup Majumdar to bat but it will need grim persistence and a great resolve to get to that lead.

Bengal would take strength from the fact that they lost just one wicket, even if it was of Tiwary, in that intense session. However, the good thing for Saurashtra is that even if the conditions overtly favour bowlers only post tea on the fourth day, enough play has been seen to safely assume that the first two sessions would be a crawl again. It would take immense discipline and skills to survive the next two days to get the lead and it is only going to get tougher out there.

Saurashtra's lower order had hung in there to add 38 runs on the third morning to reach 425 in their first innings. Bengal



Much of Bengal's Ranji-winning hopes hinge on Wriddhiman Saha.

played out 65 overs to get to 134 for 3, 292 runs still adrift of the lead. His batsmen too showed similar determination after the second wicket fell at 35. Chatterjee and Manoj Tiwary showed commitment and smarts to do the job.

With the odd ball keeping low, the pair dead-batted anything that was on the middle-stump line. Since they didn't have to worry about balls bouncing and ricocheting off gloves/edge to short leg, they chose to stretch forward to the seamers. Taking care, not to let the pad get in the way. The

# Bengal have Sudip Chatterjee and Wriddhiman Saha at the crease with Anustup Majumdar to bat but it would need grim persistence and great resolve to snatch lead.

cover fielder wider towards cover point. Tiwary had played a few good drives earlier and he now tried once, the ball squirted off the edge in the air but didn't carry to the fielder. Then, Jani brought one in, and Tiwary pushed out at it, bat outside the line of the ball, and he was struck on the pads in front of the stumps.

There was a close call when Chatterjee was on 47; for once, he was trapped inside the crease and the ball hit the pad even as he tried to stab it out at the last instant. The umpire ruled it out after deliberating through a prolonged appeal but Chatterjee knew he had got an inside edge during the attempt to keep the ball out. Even without the snickometer or Hot Spot, the replays offered enough evidence to overrule the initial decision. By the end, nearly every ball had the potential to derail Bengal but the pair came through the stern examination. The bad news for Bengal is that they have to show similar intensity for two more days.

**BRIEF SCORES:** Saurashtra 425 in 171.5 (Arpit Vasavda 106, Cheteshwar Pujara 66, Dharamendrasinh Jadeja 33; Akash Deep 4/98; Shahbaz Ahmed 3/103) lead Bengal 143/5 in 65 overs (Sudip Chatterjee 45 batting) by 291 runs.