

Mithali keeping herself fit for the future



Awards and rewards: Mithali Raj with mementos and souvenirs at her home in Hyderabad. •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Trips down memory lane liven up 'forced break'

CRICKET

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM
HYDERABAD

The coronavirus pandemic has led to a 'forced break' for athletes across the world and it is no different for one of India's best-ever woman cricketer, Mithali Raj.

"I have been following the developments on social media. These are dangerous times, but I do feel a sense of pride that India is much better off than most countries hit by it," Mithali said in a chat with *The Hindu* here on Sunday.

And, the 37-year-old Mithali, at home for more than a week for the first time in her illustrious career spanning 21 years, is digging into her treasure house of mementos, trophies and India jerseys to rekindle memories of memorable feats in a brilliant career.

"Other than the trips down memory lane, I am also doing some basic exercises to keep fit as all gyms are closed.

"I am doing everything to be mentally and physically fit once this virus is eradicated and we are back on the field," said the leading ODI run-getter in women's cricket.

"But for the pandemic there would have been some serious moves towards organising a women's IPL," she said.

Mithali also has some suggestions for the women's IPL. Six foreign players should be permitted per team, she said. Unlike in men's cricket, women's teams might find it difficult to find capable domestic players to form the team if only four foreigners were allowed, she said.

"I strongly believe you need to start somewhere and it is high time we came

up with a women's IPL."

Interest

The massive response to the T20 World Cup final in Melbourne showed that there was great interest in women's cricket, she said.

"It was an unforgettable experience. The atmosphere was unbelievable and the crowd response matched men's cricket in terms of not just attendance but the passion with which they supported the finalists - India and Australia," said Mithali, who was there as ICC ambassador.

"Like all other sports bodies, the ICC has been forced to reschedule many events. We were supposed to play the World Cup (50-over) qualifiers in Sri Lanka this June, then tour England this July-August. But, given the grim battle against the virus, everything will go for a toss," she concluded.

Bhaker looks at the bigger picture

Says she is, however, prepared for the Tokyo Games

GENERAL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Postponement of tournaments, and cancellation of trials and camps hardly matter at this point to Manu Bhaker, one of India's biggest young achievers in sport. The 18-year-old is hoping to see the world win the battle against COVID-19.

The pandemic has cast serious doubts over the upcoming Tokyo Olympics, but Manu, a medal prospect at the quadrennial extravaganza, is not thinking about things beyond her control.

"Trials and events should be postponed in the current situation as there are other very important things for the world to deal with," said Manu.

She says the shooters are abiding by the protocols and guidelines issued by the concerned authorities. "We are strictly following the instructions of the health ministry and the guidelines of the World Health Organisation (WHO)."

The pistol ace was one of the few shooters who participated in a trial organised



Manu Bhaker.
•SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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not long ago by the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI). The trial was arranged to allow the shooters to register their scores after the postponement of the New Delhi ISSF World Cup and the Indian team's pull-out from the Cyprus World Cup owing to the coronavirus outbreak.

"The camp situation was fine as there were only a few shooters, there was no large

gathering and it lasted only three days."

Asked about the Olympic Games which has a cloud hanging over it, Manu said she will look to carry on with her routine that is part of her preparation.

"I am relaxed at home. The current situation doesn't affect my preparation and mindset. I am continuing with my yoga sessions, meditation and things that help me stay calm and composed.

"The Olympics, whenever it happens, is huge, so we need to be prepared. I am preparing for the Olympics as planned," she said. "Shooting is very competitive now, especially 2019 and after, and it is evident from the scores."

Manu, who secured an Olympic quota for India in women's 10m air pistol, enjoyed a successful season last year where she won five World Cup gold medals in individual and team events.

She burst on to the National scene at the start of 2018 with a victory at the ISSF World Cup in Mexico, and has not looked back since.

My fallout with Taylor a stain on NZ cricket: McCullum

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WELLINGTON

Former skipper Brendon McCullum, describing his fallout with Ross Taylor a "bad stain for New Zealand cricket", attributed it to a race for captaincy between the two in 2011, and admitted that they still aren't the best of friends despite mutual respect.

Taylor, who is still active in international cricket, took over the captaincy after Daniel Vettori stepped down following the 2011 World Cup.

"It put some pressure on my friendship and relationship with Ross. I have played a lot of development and age cricket with Ross. I was the captain of the under-19 team

and Taylor was my vice-captain. We've always got on really well," said McCullum.

However, after a 1-1 draw in a Test series in Sri Lanka in 2012, it emerged that Taylor had issues with the then coach Mike Hesson. That followed series defeats in South Africa, the West Indies and India.

Unnecessary

"We had to go for an interview for the job. It was about presenting the map for the future of New Zealand cricket to a panel. I don't really know what we were doing. If I had my time, I would've said: 'no, I'm not going to come and go through the process, you appoint Ross as captain and then we'll see



Who will it be? The captaincy battle between Taylor and McCullum eventually swung the latter's way.
•FILE PHOTO: K. BHAGYA PRAKASH

what unfolds from there.' "It's a bad stain for New Zealand cricket and put pressure on Ross and me. Then it led me to eventually take over from Ross," said McCullum.

McCullum said he and Taylor are still not the best of friends, but he has a lot of respect for New Zealand's all-time highest ODI run-scorer. "We are not the best of friends, but I have an im-

mense amount of respect for him," said McCullum.

Taylor was given the option of remaining the Test captain, with McCullum leading the limited-overs sides, but he declined.

"I was asked if I wanted to take over the role of New Zealand captain in all three formats. So initially, I told them I would get back to them. I needed to think long and hard about it. I knew it would be a major controversial decision. I knew it could have major ramifications on NZ cricket, and also on my time as a player," he said.

McCullum eventually took over in all formats in December 2012 and remained in the role until his retirement in 2016.

Bedade accused of sexual harassment, suspended as coach

IAN S
NEW DELHI

Former India batsman Atul Bedade has been suspended as the head coach of the Baroda women's team after the players accused him of sexual harassment and public shaming.

A source within the Baroda Cricket Association (BCA) said action was taken after the players complained about his misbehaviour during the women's senior one-day tournament

in Himachal Pradesh in February 2020.

According to *ESPNCricinfo*, the BCA's apex committee will now form a probe committee that will look into the allegations made against Bedade.

'Baseless and false'

The 53-year-old, who played 13 ODIs for India in 1994 and scored one half-century, said the allegations were a "surprise" to him, and "baseless and false."



Atul Bedade.
•FILE PHOTO: VIJAY SONEJI

'All efforts will go waste if Games are cancelled'

I just want to get an Olympic medal for myself, says Mirabai Chanu

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Mirabai Chanu has only one prayer on her lips, that the Tokyo Olympics go on as per schedule despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Otherwise, all her efforts of trying to win an Olympic medal will go down the drain.

For the last four years, Mirabai has laboured for a successful Olympics outing but all she can think of right now is about the fate of the July 24-August 9 Games, which could be postponed due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

"If the Olympics don't happen all our efforts for the last four years will go to waste. I don't want it to cancel, I am praying to God every day. I just want to get an



Mirabai Chanu. •FILE PHOTO: PTI

Olympic medal for myself," Mirabai said.

Mirabai's maiden Olympic campaign had ended in disappointment as she failed to lift the weight in any of her three attempts in the clean and jerk section.

"The pressure (of winning a medal) has changed to the

Olympics and it should not be cancelled. That's all I'm thinking.

"The rest, training, etc. I am not worried about right now. Even if it's postponed there will be a lot of problem because a lot can change in a short period of time for us," she said.

Schedule gone haywire

Weightlifting's Olympic qualifying schedule has also gone haywire.

The International Weightlifting Federation (IWF) had to cancel five continental championships, including the Asia event.

The Asian Championships, which was relocated from Kazakhstan to Tashkent in Uzbekistan was the

last tournament before the Olympics for Mirabai. She had missed out on a bronze by a whisker last year.

The Manipuri, had aimed to improve her total effort of 203kg (88kg+115kg).

"I was preparing for Asian very well. There was a lot of uncertainty whether it will happen or not. I have already qualified for the Olympics but in the Asian Championship we would have got a clear picture," she said.

"I wanted to improve my effort here so that I could go to the Olympics high on confidence. That was the target. If the Asian Championship had taken place it would have been a good platform for me to better my performance."

SAI centres to be used for quarantine

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Sports Authority of India (SAI) centres, which have been shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, will be used as quarantine facilities for patients of the deadly disease, the Sports Ministry said on Sunday.

The decision to allow all SAI regional centres, stadiums and hostels to be used as quarantine facilities was taken following a request from the Health Ministry.

"Yes, we have decided to allow all our centres to be used as quarantine facilities after the Health Ministry asked for it. It is a pandemic and all the SAI centres are public properties," sports secretary Radhey Shyam Julaniya said. He, however, did not specify exactly when these centres will be put to use.

SAI has 10 regional centres and five stadiums in the national capital under it.

Gasly vows to be 'stronger' for F1 start

Says he is happy to shun the hastily organised virtual world

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

Pierre Gasly admitted on Sunday that he was happy to shun Formula One's hastily-organised virtual world as he concentrates on getting "physically stronger" for real racing, when it gets underway belatedly in June.

The French driver said he had been ready to hit the ground running for last week's scheduled season-opener in Melbourne.

"When I arrived in Australia, I had almost zero jet lag, I felt great. But when they announced that we would not be racing, it hit me," said 24-year-old Gasly. "I had been so excited, there had been so much preparation with the team and physically all winter."

The 2020 season will not now start until June 7 in Azerbaijan, at the very earliest.

Gasly is spending his unexpected down time with his physical trainer in the United Arab Emirates. He is des-



Pierre Gasly. •REUTERS

perate to get behind the wheel of his Alpha Tauri car after he was unceremoniously dumped by sister team Red Bull in the middle of the 2019 season.

However, he at least had the last laugh, taking a first career podium in Brazil behind race winner and former Red Bull teammate Max Verstappen.

"We have a plan for the next few weeks and we're doing even more than usual," he added. "I have never had, over the past 10 years, two months ahead of

me before the season resumes to prepare physically.

That strength and stamina will prove useful in August when it's possible that some of the postponed races will be shoe-horned breathlessly into successive weekends.

Challenging

Gasly said it would be challenging to race three weekends in a row.

"It's exhausting as you lose between two and three kilos per race and then you have the flights," said Gasly. "There is an intensity during a race weekend - from morning to evening, it never stops.

However, Gasly insisted that taking part in F1's virtual reality races, announced on Friday, was not an option to prepare for the real thing.

"In Dubai, we don't have a 'sim' (simulator), just a PlayStation, so I play games other than F1," explained Gasly.

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~~Husha! Bussha!~~

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