



Here's a thought .. The IPL is played for the 5 weeks leading up to the T20 World Cup in Oz .. all players use it as the great warm up for the WC .. then the WC happens .. So important for the game that the IPL takes place but also the WC."

MICHAEL VAUGHAN, FORMER ENGLAND CAPTAIN

India was supposed to start its four-month countdown to the Olympics this moment. But forced into an unprecedented, grim lockdown as the world battles the Covid-19 outbreak, sport is staring at unfathomable despair. Indian athletes though have given the country reasons to rejoice in the past. *The Indian Express* looks back at a bunch of these memories.

'Vajpayee called me *Bharat ki beti*'

Malleswari regrets missing the gold but still relishes talking about the PM's call and his *shaayari* that she couldn't understand

SHASHANK NAIR

TO THIS day, former weightlifter Karnam Malleswari remains an underappreciated Olympic medallist in Indian history. It's six months shy of the 20th anniversary of her bronze-winning effort at the Sydney Games. She was the first Indian woman to win an Olympic medal. Add to that two World Championship golds and two bronze medals apart from two silver at the Asian Games – the 1990s saw the five-foot-four weightlifter from Voosavanipeta, Andhra Pradesh dominate the international scene – culminating in her greatest moment at the beginning of this century in Sydney.

Her greatest moment for everyone, except her. When one is really good at something – possibly the best in the world – coming third is a disappointment that refuses to fade away.

"My immediate reaction was that I had never gone there for bronze and I always felt I deserved a gold. I had worked that hard. If I thought my capacity was to just win bronze, I would have been fine with it. But because of someone else's fault (more on that later), I came down to bronze," Malleswari recalls.

"But the next day, I realised that the whole of India was celebrating my win. This medal didn't feel my own, but the whole country's. That made me feel a little better. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee called me later that day. He congratulated me and called me '*Bharat ki beti*'. He was also reciting some *shaayari* – *main sun rahi thi but samajh kuch nahi aa raha tha*," she laughs.

The conversation with former Prime Minister is one of her happier memories of the Sydney experience. On the night of September 18, the eve of her event, Malleswari was anxious, and like most nights before any competition, couldn't eat anything.

"I had won medals everywhere by then and when you become an athlete of that calibre, the expectations of people take on another level. The Olympics is a big dream for every player. If we miss one Olympics, there is no guarantee that four years later you'll get that same opportunity – especially in weightlifting."

The next morning, Malleswari plucked some flowers from nearby and after a pooja with an idol of Ganesha that she carried around with her for all competitions, left for the Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Weightlifting contests at the Olympics include two events – snatch and clean and jerk. That day, in the 69 kg snatch category, Malleswari's first lift was 105 kg, followed by 107.5 kg and then 110 kg. She was successful on all three attempts and, according to her, did it with ease.

"My coaches could have asked me to lift a bit more than what I did. I had picked all



three of my lifts very cleanly and easily. I had the capacity to lift 2.5-5 kilos more in that category," she claims.

In the clean and jerk, things didn't pan out as she had hoped.

"For the last lift, normally the procedure is to increase the weight by a maximum of 2.5 kgs. This is done because this is your last chance and if you miss it, the competition is over right there and then. If you have to take a risk, it has to be in the first lift or second lift – because if you can't lift your weight in the first try, there is a chance to find your balance and try again. My coaches asked me to lift 137.5 kg in the final lift, a jump of 7.5 kg from my previous lift. I still don't understand why they did it when it wasn't required."

Whether it was her own call or one that

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her coaches made, is an unending blame game. Malleswari would lift 137.5kgs from the ground, but couldn't complete the jerk, possibly letting go of the gold medal. Her final total weight lifted after both events would be 240 kgs, 2.5 kgs short of the gold and silver medal positions. She believes a successful clean-and-jerk lift of 132.5kg would have put her right in the mix for the top spot on the podium, not to mention a bigger lift in snatch.

Malleswari has, on multiple occasions, talked about how lifting 137.5 kg was possible for her but on that day, she couldn't pull off the play that would have likely changed the colour of her medal. But even after almost 20 years, no one in India has come close to her record and performances.



THOSE MONTHS
THOSE MINUTES

SEPTEMBER, 2000

'Afternoon sessions meant changing T-shirt at least 6 or 7 times.'

19/09

'My coaches could have asked me to lift more... 2.5-5 kg more'

In her 20s, Malleswari had to go through more hoops and roadblocks than any average Indian Olympic athlete has to go through today. And after all these years, she describes the struggle that ended up shaping her.

"The support that was truly required, like going to a foreign country to train before the Olympics, was never there for me. In Patiala, the temperature can soar up to 45 degrees. Today, the training centre over there is fully air-conditioned. When we trained, we had to open a window – no fans, no coolers. Afternoon sessions meant changing t-shirts at least 6-7 times. And despite all the facilities in the world, the sad part is that my records, my performances, have still not been overtaken or beaten in the country," says the 44-year old, who now runs her own weightlifting centre along with her husband.

Even before the 2000 Olympics, Malleswari was one of the best in the world. Her last major medal was the Olympic bronze. She had already won two golds, two bronze and two silvers at the Worlds and the Asian Games from 1993-1999 before Sydney happened. But the talent she possessed and the grit she showcased was never appreciated in her prime and that's a grudge she still holds.

"In 1994, there were three world champions from India. Me, Sushmita Sen and Aishwarya Rai. I did it in sports, they became Miss Universe and Miss World. The whole world came to receive them at the airport when they returned to India. They got huge sponsors, became film stars... *hum log auto rickshaw dhoond dhoond ke Nehru Stadium gaye.*" She adds, "In 1995, I became World Champion, broke records. In 1999, I was conferred the Padma Shri. I was the first Indian woman to win an Olympic medal, breaking 100 years of history. But the central government never gave me another award. No Padma Bhushan or Padma Vibhushan."

'Global football could emerge better after crisis'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS, APRIL 2

FOOTBALL HAS ground to a halt due to the coronavirus pandemic, and the immediate concern is the simple survival of many clubs because of the financial impact, but there is hope that the global game could ultimately emerge better from this crisis.

"We are living through something none of us were used to and which will change us profoundly," Everton manager Carlo Ancelotti told *Corriere dello Sport*.

Not since World War II has the sport been forced to stop across Europe. The sudden interruption has exposed the deficiencies of a system intoxicated by huge sums of money.

Cutbacks are inevitable in the short term. "TV money will go down, players and coaches will earn less. Tickets will cost less because people will have less money. The economy will be different and so will football. Maybe it will be better," said Ancelotti.

"As with most things, crisis is an opportunity," football historian and academic David Goldblatt, author of recent book *The Age of Football*, told AFP, before sounding a warning.

Fairer distribution of money?

"It could actually get worse. For there to be real change there has to be a change in the way power and ownership is distributed in the

Boateng fined for visiting son without permission

Paris: Bayern Munich have fined defender Jerome Boateng for leaving the city "without permission", an act in breach of the strict rules of confinement imposed due to the coronavirus outbreak.

According to TVO television, the 31-year-old had left the city in order to visit his son who suffered minor injuries in a road traffic accident on Tuesday.

"Bayern defender Jerome Boateng left Munich yesterday without permission from the club," said the German champions in a statement.

"Boateng has transgressed the guidelines issued by the club by being too far away from his home.

game." At the moment the financial power belongs to the lucky few at the top, but even they are being hurt. That is likely to affect the transfer market, and huge spending sprees on players could become a thing of the past.

"In two or three years, it will not be possible to spend the sums we have been seeing because every country will be affected. In all likelihood a new footballing world will emerge from this," insisted former Bayern Munich president Uli Hoenes.

Already players at Barcelona – the richest

"These guidelines govern the behaviour of the FC Bayern players in the current situation in line with government directives on restrictions on movement and the recommendations of the health authorities."

Bayern did not specify the amount of the fine which was being donated to local hospitals.

"I know it was certainly a mistake not to inform the club of my journey, but at the time, I was only thinking about my son," Boateng told Bild newspaper.

"He was not in good health. If a son calls his father, then of course I will go, whatever the time of day." AFP

club in the world – have agreed a 70 percent pay cut. Clubs across Europe are taking similar measures. It is evidence that clubs, even in the elite, have been living on the edge, and it raises the question of whether salary caps could finally be seen as a way forward, despite the difficulties presented by EU rules.

In Germany, the Bundesliga's four Champions League representatives this season have pledged 20 million euros (\$22 million) to help crisis-hit clubs in an encouraging sign of solidarity.

Meanwhile, lessons may also be learned about how TV revenue is distributed in future.

Fewer games

It may also be time to rework the fixture calendar. The fashion for expanding existing tournaments – like staging a 48-team World Cup and 24-team Club World Cup – is surely not sustainable. "It is now high time that we find some rules to say ok, let's get out of this crisis as well as we can, but let's also put safeguards in that manage player loads successfully moving forward," warned Jonas Baer-Hoffmann, general secretary of global players' union FIFPro, as he called for "a much healthier set-up than we what have had lately."

FIFA president Gianni Infantino has acknowledged the calls for change, telling *La Gazzetta dello Sport* that "we can perhaps reform world football by taking a step back. With different formats. Fewer tournaments, maybe fewer teams, but more balanced."

Goldblatt, meanwhile, believes FIFA need to look again at plans to stage a 48-team World Cup in 2026 all across North America.

That, and the European Championship that UEFA intend to stage in 12 cities across the continent, are being planned in ways which appear at odds with the need to face up to another imminent threat: climate change.

"If we have learned anything from the last couple of months it is that we should listen to the scientists," Goldblatt says.

National committees have final say on qualified athletes

Athens: Athletes already qualified for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics will need to be picked again by their respective National Olympic Committees to compete at the postponed Games in 2021, the International Olympic Committee said on Thursday. "All of the qualifications that have been achieved by National Olympic Committees and individual athletes remain in place," IOC Sports director Kit McConnell said in a conference call. "Any athlete needs to be individually selected because they represent their NOC. In all sports the NOC retains the right to select the athletes." Some 57% of the 11,000 athletes had already qualified for the Tokyo Games before qualification tournaments were scrapped as the virus spread.

Club Brugge declared Belgian league champs

Paris: The Belgian football league has recommended that the current season be declared finished early due with the present league table accepted as final, it said in a

statement on Thursday. The decision is set to be validated at a General Assembly on April 15, meaning that Club Brugge would be declared champions as they currently sit 15 points clear of Gent at the top of the table. In a statement, the league said it was "very unlikely" to be able to hold matches before June 30 and that it had "unanimously decided that it was not desirable...to continue the competition" after that date. Belgium would become the first European league to take such a measure.

D/L method co-inventor Lewis dies aged 78

London: Tony Lewis, co-inventor of the Duckworth-Lewis method for settling weather-affected cricket matches, has died aged 78. Former university lecturer Lewis, together with mathematician Frank Duckworth, devised the formula that was first used in match between Zimbabwe and England in 1997 and adopted by the International Cricket Council (ICC) in 1999. "It is with much sadness that the ECB has learned of the passing of Tony Lewis MBE. Our thoughts are with Tony's family," the England and Wales Cricket Board said on Twitter. "Cricket is deeply indebted to both Tony and Frank's contributions to the sport." AGENCIES