

Enterprising players find the space to train

Full marks to the young talent for adapting to the situation arising out of the lockdown

TENNIS

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

There is a saree drying over a clothesline which serves as the net. Yuki Bhambri volleys and jumps up for an imaginary overhead smash. The drill continues for a few minutes as Prateek Bhambri, a former National junior champion who coaches sister Purna Bhambri, helps in Yuki's training by throwing balls from a bucket.

If that is the video doing the rounds on social media, cut to Ahmedabad, where Zeel Desai has her father Mehul doing the job of ball-thrower.

In front of her home, over a garden bench that serves as the net, Zeel keeps hitting forehands and backhands. She also uses the terrace to hone her skills, using the wall as a net.

Mehul said he was happy



Sharpening her skills: Zeel Desai engaged in a rally with father Mehul. •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

to keep his daughter occupied as she was getting bored at home.

"I thought it could just freshen her up a bit, having a racket in her hands. She also does fitness routines for an hour daily. Staying at

home can control the number of coronavirus cases," he said.

Quick and proactive

Australian coach Todd Clark, who has been guiding Zeel at the Ahmedabad Racquet

Academy (ARA), said: "Even though a lockdown is inconvenient in India, the government's action has been quick and proactive.

"We have created an ARA WhatsApp group. Daily, we provide players fitness pro-

grammes and mental challenges which they have to complete.

"Though everyone is at home, we are still creating a competitive atmosphere," revealed Clark, who is based in Ahmedabad.

Todd and Zeel were in Tunisia when the ITF cancelled the tournament, forcing everyone to fly home before the borders were sealed.

Healthy trend

With the International Tennis Federation (ITF) announcing that there would be no play till July 8, this is a healthy trend as the players are utilising the time on hand instead of worrying about things beyond their control.

Many videos of enterprising tennis players, finding the space to stay healthy and active during the lockdown, are doing the rounds. In the Capital, coaches Sachin Singh and Chandra Bhushan have been sharing videos of their trainees doing physical training, yoga and wall practice.

The tennis fraternity deserves full marks for adapting to the situation and making the best use of it.

Former Wimbledon champions saddened

AGENCIES
LONDON

The Wimbledon tennis championships were cancelled for the first time since the Second World War on Wednesday. Here are some reactions from former champions to the Grand Slam - originally scheduled for June 29-July 12 - being cancelled for the first time in 75 years.

Boris Becker: "The problem is the surface, you only have the summer months to prepare and ultimately play on the best grass courts which is usually the case at Queen's and Wimbledon.

"But in order to do so the grass courts need much more preparation time than any other surface. On grass you can only play in the summer months."

Andy Murray: "Very sad that Wimbledon has been cancelled this year but with all that is going on in the world right now, everyone's

health is definitely the most important thing!"

Pat Cash: "These are just very weird and strange times. For me, it's just a big kick in the gut, because it's a tournament I love and a tournament that so many love."

Billie Jean King: "I fully understand and support the decision of the committee. I've been fortunate to go to Wimbledon every year since 1961 and I am certainly going to miss this year."

Petra Kvitová: "Definitely a tough one to take... Not only is it a special tournament to me, but it's a tournament that has been part of history for so long that it will leave a big hole in the calendar.

"I will miss playing on the beautiful grass and wearing my whites, but of course we know it will be back better than ever next year. And maybe we will all appreciate it even more!"

Online classes ensure training is not impacted

Coach Sushrutha Reddy feels Zoom a better platform to teach a group

CHESS

P.K. AJITH KUMAR

When the warning signals began to emerge from China a few weeks ago, Sushrutha Reddy felt he should be prepared. It didn't matter he was living in Bengaluru, far away from the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak.

A chess coach, he knew that he would have to explore more ways of reaching out to his trainees online.

More than anticipated

But the demand to learn the game through the internet was more than he anticipated once the lockdown in India began. That has been the



R.B. Ramesh.
• FILE PHOTO: R. RAGU

the confines of your room, provided you have internet access.

Conducting chess classes online is nothing new. India's best-known trainer R.B. Ramesh has been doing it for the last 15 years. But what is new is that more coaches and wards have opted for it because of the lockdown in several countries.

"Normally I get new students during the school vacation, but more than 50 - including a few from overseas - have joined over the last couple of weeks," said Sushrutha. "I now conduct lessons online to some 85 students right through the day."

Chennai-based T.J. Suresh

Kumar said the spurt in numbers is largely due to parents' belief that chess will keep their children occupied when schools are closed. "Coaches like me don't have any other option but to go online," he said.

Pravin Ramesh pointed out that online coaching had its own advantages. "In a city like Mumbai, where I am living, travelling can be such a huge problem," said the veteran Grandmaster. "Now you can train someone even till 10 p.m. Of late, I have been having more students online than offline."

But for Ramesh, much of his time used to be spent at his academy, Chess Gurukul, before the lockdown. He

trains some of India's brightest prospects like R. Praggnanandhaa and Aravindh Chithambaram. "Now I teach all of them online," he said.

Multiple platforms

There are multiple platforms to reach out to the students. Skype appears to be preferred the choice since it is free. But Sushrutha has found out that Zoom works better when you have to teach a group. "I had also tried Cisco Webex, which too was useful," he said.

"Zoom may not be free, but when you have a reasonable number of students, you can easily cover the cost."

Carlsen launches richest online event

RAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI

With scores of chess tournaments cancelled worldwide owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, World champion Magnus Carlsen has come up with a \$250,000-online event for eight elite players.

The Magnus Carlsen Invitational will be played from April 18 to May 3 with shorter time controls.

Participant list

The list of participants for the world's richest online event will be announced soon. Live action with commentary in nine languages will be available on Chess24.com.

Commenting on the initiative, Carlsen said, "This is a historic moment for chess, and given that it's possible to



Magnus Carlsen.
• FILE PHOTO: RAJEEV BHATT

The format involves seven rounds of single round-robin where each match features four rapid games, the time control being 15 minutes each plus 10-second increment for every move.

The winner of each match gets three points and loser gets none.

If the match ends 2-2, an Armageddon game (where the player with white pieces gets five minutes on the clock and black, four) will decide the winner. The winner gets two points and the loser, one.

The top four players will be involved in a knockout semifinals.

The semifinals, third-place match and final will use the same four-game rapid format to decide the winner.

AICF's new secretary refutes Chauhan's charges

Deshpande says Venketrama Raja has no need to cover up for anybody

RAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI

The newly nominated secretary of the All India Chess Federation (AICF), Vijay Deshpande, has refuted the charges made by predecessor Bharat Singh Chauhan and has also questioned his actions.

On Tuesday, AICF president P.R. Venketrama Raja had removed Chauhan from the post of secretary. Soon after, Chauhan shot off a letter to all the 'stakeholders',

mentioning that he continued to be the secretary.

Reacting to Chauhan's allegation that Raja's action was a "malicious attempt to cover his tracks", Deshpande said, "Chauhan should read the court order carefully and then challenge it. Raja has no need to cover up for anybody. Having made a huge contribution to chess, Raja is also known as the first sponsor of Viswanathan Anand. He does not require any certification

from Chauhan."

Irrelevant, meaningless

Deshpande described Chauhan's charge that Raja removed him to save the All Marathi Chess Association (AMCA) as "irrelevant and meaningless."

Chauhan had pointed out AMCA's delay in submitting the accounts to the State authorities after availing a grant of ₹2 crore for holding the World Youth Chess Championship (WYCC) in

Mumbai last October, and that Raja was trying to save it.

"What has AICF or its president got to do with this? The Maharashtra government has asked for the expenditure statement of the WYCC. The statement is now with the special auditors nominated for the purpose. As soon as the AMCA gets the certified audit report, it will be submitted. What is there to save AMCA?" wondered Deshpande.

The biggest challenge will be mental fatigue, says Arif

Being confined indoors for such a long time could cause problems

BADMINTON

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM
HYDERABAD

Renowned badminton coach S.M. Arif feels the biggest challenge any athlete will face after the lockdown will be mental fatigue.

"Athletes - or for that matter any individual - used to busy routines and now confined indoors for such a long time might well face this kind of a challenge. So, it is imperative to do everything possible to avoid it," says Arif.

The Dronacharya awardee says he is doing, right now, what he has never done in his 46 years of coaching - stretching exercises on the rooftop of his residence and



S.M. Arif.
• FILE PHOTO: V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM

interactions over the phone with his trainees.

The 76-year-old, whose coaching with national teams started four decades ago, has always been a regular at the Fateh Maidan, his 'second home'.

"This happens to be the longest break for me, beating the previous one during

the last General Elections," Arif says in a chat with *The Hindu*.

How difficult is it? "For me, it has been a different kind of challenge. Though I retired 16 years ago, I continue to visit the Fateh Maidan and offer coaching free of cost. I can't just be sitting at home. I love being with the trainees," he says.

It's not just athletes!

"So, it is not just the athletes who are hit badly. Coaches find it extremely challenging, too! And, being unsure of what is in store, we are keeping our fingers crossed," says the coach, the first to produce international medalists in badminton from India since joining the national

panel of coaches in 1974.

"There are no options but to stay indoors for anyone, given the grim scenario. But my genuine concern is that the players do not get too rusty," he feels.

What is his advice to the trainees? "Just to do minimum exercises possible at home to maintain basic fitness levels. Too much of rest is a scary thing," says Arif, who introduced the likes of Manoj Kumar, Praveen Kumar, Gopi Chand, and Saina Nehwal to the world of badminton.

How does he keep himself occupied? "Well, that is another huge task. I have been watching the Discovery channel a lot of late," he signs off.

Athletics anti-doping programme 'severely disrupted'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

The Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) has acknowledged that its anti-doping programme will be "severely disrupted" because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The AIU, the independent anti-doping watchdog for track and field set up in 2017, operates testing procedures

in more than 100 countries.

"Under the current conditions of the global pandemic, many of these countries have social distancing restrictions or guidelines in place, these differ from country to country and in turn are all changing very rapidly," it said.

"As a result, there is no doubt that our anti-doping

program will be severely disrupted in the short term, however we will still conduct our priority testing missions in those places where it is feasible and safe to do so."

The AIU added that it was reviewing its testing plans day by day "to ensure we are appropriately balancing considerations of public health and the health of athletes

against the need to conduct anti-doping tests".

In this respect, all 500 or so World Athletics registered testing pool athletes "must continue to fulfil their 'whereabouts' obligations".

Athletics has been hit hard the COVID-19 pandemic, with a raft of events having been postponed or cancelled.

Ring around the Rosie

~~Ringa Ringa Roses~~

Pocket full of ~~posies~~ Posies - a small bunch of flowers

~~Husha! Bussha!~~

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