

12 SPORT



STOKES CRICKETER OF THE YEAR
England all-rounder Ben Stokes has ended India skipper Virat Kohli's three-year run as Wisden's 'Leading Cricketer' after being named for the honour on the back of his stellar show in 2019.

The last and perfect shot at glory

Desperate for an Olympic quota and fighting mental demons, Shirur came up with a flawless performance when it mattered most

Very few guys to look up to in this team: Yuvraj tells Rohit in live Q&A

SHAHID JUDGE

AN ETERNITY passed by, or so it seemed for Suma Shirur, as she shot at a target no greater than a centimetre in diameter, 10 metres away. The exercise — raise the rifle, control breathing, take aim with as much focus as you can muster, fire, and then do it all again till you have 40 shots on the board — took a lot out of her, both physically and mentally. When it was all over in the 50-minute qualifier, she was confident about all except four shots that she felt were not quite hitting 10.

In the qualification round of the women's 10m air rifle event before 2013, each shot was measured in round numbers — which means what would be a 9.9 or 10.9 now would be a 9 or 10 respectively. Based on this scoring format, Shirur expected at least 396. She glanced at the stands in the shooting range in Kuala Lumpur after taking her 40th shot and spotted her husband Siddharth. He followed her gaze and duly held up four fingers. For Shirur, her suspicion had been confirmed. She had doubted four shots, and her husband's signal made it clear that those four shots were 9s. But they were not.

"When I went up to him, he had a big smile on his face. I was confused. Then he told me I had shot a 400. The maximum," Shirur remembers. "I didn't believe it."

At the Asian Championships in 2004, Shirur became the first Indian, and the sixth shooter in the world, to have shot a perfect 400 in the qualifying round of the women's 10m air rifle event. A few years later, the rules were changed and as of today, women shooters take 60 shots in the qualifiers, with a maximum of 10.9 points available per shot. As of today, 16 years after that marvel in Malaysia, Shirur remains the only Indian woman to have achieved the perfect score.

But her job was not done. Shirur knew this was still just halfway in the event. The finals were yet to be played, and it was there that her hopes of winning a medal and a quota for the Athens 2004 Summer Olympics lay.

By the 2004 season, Shirur had been competing on the international stage for around 10



Suma Shirur is the only Indian woman to have achieved the perfect score in 10m air rifle.

years. Never once though had she qualified for the Olympics. As Athens beckoned, she grew restless and anxious. It didn't help her nerves that results were not going her way, and no matter how close she got to the quota, she was still far away from making the cut. The closest she got was within 0.2 points, at the Shanghai World Cup of 2002. "That was heart-wrenching," she recalls.

Tournaments came and went, but the quota place remained as distant as ever. As the 2004 season approached, Shirur had one last chance. "I was getting desperate and, for me, the Asian Championships was the last chance. This was it. There were no quota places available after this tournament," she recalls. "I had put in 10 years of my life into this, and to not have been to the Olympics at all, it was a waste of everything I had done. Those were the thoughts coming into my head."

Shirur started preparing on her own two months prior to the event. She followed a sound fitness regimen to make sure that she would at least be physically fit to compete in

the Malaysian capital. Mentally, she was fighting herself, looking for every ounce of motivation she could find. More often than not though, something negative would creep in. Like when she asked her husband — who would rarely accompany her on her tours — to join her for a post-event holiday since that "might have been the last chance" for her. His reply, however, gave her the boost she needed.

"He told me, 'I don't want to have a holiday. I'm coming for your match'," she remembers. "I was not used to him being there for my matches, maybe just once after our marriage he had come to watch me. So when he said that, I was thinking, 'this guy believes I can do it'. Somewhere it gave me a lot of strength and that's when, in a way, I started looking forward to it."

Shortly afterwards, she got a call from her old mentor, the late Bhismaraj Bam, former president of the Maharashtra Rifle Association. "He came over to meet me and asked how preparations were going. I said 'we'll see'. He said, 'there's no we'll

THOSE MONTHS. THOSE MINUTES

As the world battles the Covid-19 outbreak, sport is staring at an unpalatable future. The Indian Express looks back at the sporting moments which have given the country reasons to rejoice in the past

DECEMBER, 2003
Worked specifically on physical and mental aspects of her game

FEBRUARY 13, 2004
Becomes first Indian to score a perfect 400 in 10m air rifle

see, you are going to shoot a 400," Shirur recalls the meeting. "He said that I have to do my best, and the best had to be 400 because the Chinese were coming in, and they used to shoot 398, 399. So, I had a target now. The decision was made that I had to go for 400. It was the goal, it wasn't a score that just happened."

To get a perfect score, Shirur started focusing on breathing exercises. It helped calm her mind and enabled her to concentrate on each shot. She had to stay in the moment, not think about the result, but work on executing each attempt at that centimetre target perfectly. After spending tense weeks fretting over an elusive Olympic quota, she was now set for that final fling in Kuala Lumpur, armed with some new equipment and a renewed sense of confidence.

Siddharth's task in Kuala Lumpur was to make sure his wife stayed in a positive frame of mind. He'd observe her body language, study each and every word she'd utter and intervene when things were going off track.

"I had to fight the demons of self-belief. When the event was close, thoughts of 'maybe you can't do it' were coming out in some form or the other. Siddharth would then catch me and keep me positive, make me believe that I can do it," the current junior national rifle coach says. "He kept the mood very light, few jokes

here and there, making light conversation. He wouldn't let me stay indoors, so we'd go around, basically not allow me much time to sit and think. This was very important and it's something that I try to do with the junior team now."

Asian Championships FEBRUARY 13, 2004

Shirur remembers waking up to a chilling nervousness. She could barely eat breakfast, and instead indulged in a session of *pranayama* — a breathing exercise — to calm her nerves. It worked. She did not speak at all the entire morning, nor did she interact with anyone when she went to the range. So absolute was her focus that she hardly remembers the atmosphere inside the range. In those days, a shooter could not see the qualification scores until the end of the round, so she wasn't certain what the final score would be. And then she turned around to see her husband holding up four fingers.

For the next hour, Shirur remembers sitting under a tree outside the range, with a book in hand. "Siddharth took me outside, away from my teammates who were excited and jumping. He sat me under the tree to make sure I was still in that same focus. Then I went back into the range thinking about playing the perfect shot every time. That's when I won gold, and the quota."

At the Athens Games, she was the only Indian apart from Abhinav Bindra and Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore to have made it to the final of their discipline. And as for the sojourn in Malaysia, the Shirurs went for a short holiday to the nearby islands. What Suma remembers though was sitting on a chair in the range after the final. "The flood-gates opened. I was so exhausted, physically and mentally. It took me two days to recover," she says.

The Asian Championships took place a few months short of her 30th birthday, but it was potentially the last competition for her as a shooter — the "do-or-die event" as she describes it. She went on to compete internationally for India for another 12 years before joining the junior national team as a coach.

Asked if that win had anything to do with her staying on in the sport, she offers: "Maybe. Yes."

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI, APRIL 8

INDIA'S TEAM culture drew severe criticism from World Cup-winning former all-rounder Yuvraj Singh, who told ODI vice-captain Rohit Sharma that there aren't enough role models in the side, which lacks a sense of respect for the seniors and is prone to being distracted by social media.

The two were in conversation during an Instagram live chat on Tuesday night. The context of Yuvraj's observation was Rohit's question on the difference between the current team and the ones in which the swash-buckling left-hander turned up.

"When I came into the team or when you (Rohit) came into the team, our seniors were very disciplined. Obviously there was no social media so there were no distractions," Yuvraj said. "There was a certain behaviour that we boys had to carry, how they talk to people, how they talk to media. Because they were the ambassadors of the game and India."

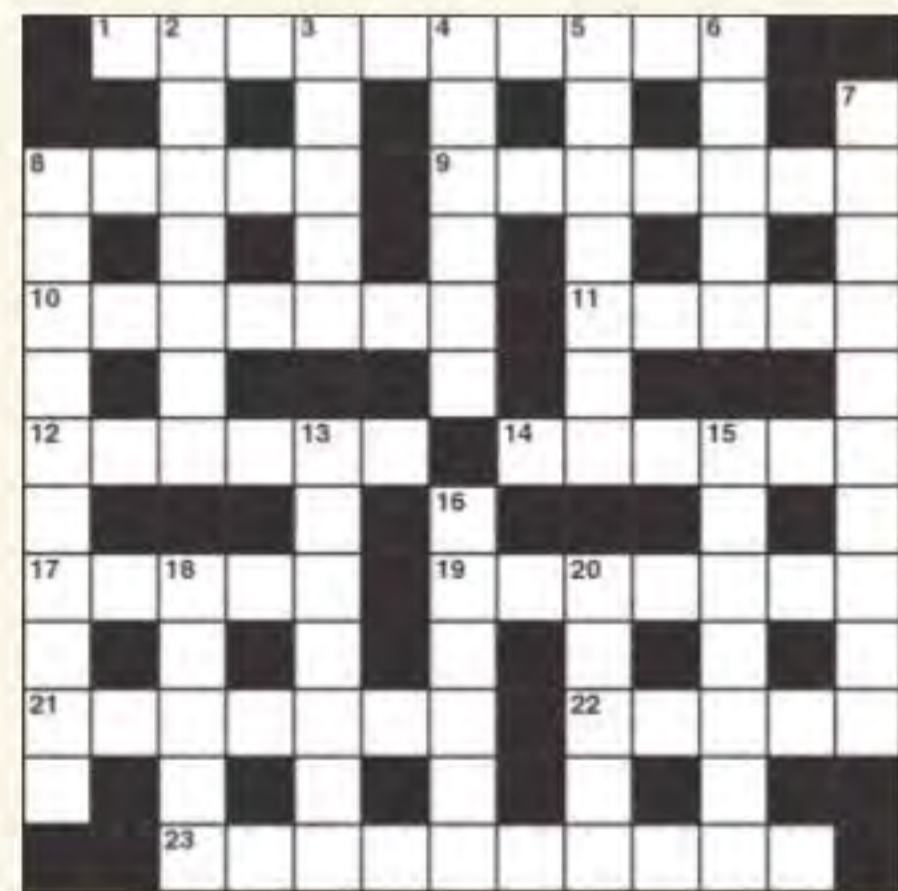
"So that is what I had told you guys. After playing for India, you have to be more careful about your image. But I feel the third generation. There are only two seniors, Virat and you, who are playing all the formats, rest of the guys are coming and going," he said.

"I just feel there are very few guys to look up to and I feel that a sense of respect towards seniors, that has become a thin line now. *Koi bhi kisiko kuch bhi keh deta hai* (anyone can say anything to anyone)," he said.

Yuvraj said players during his time were more conscious about how they were perceived by the seniors in the side. "I think juniors, because of social media, party scenes, these things, we could not even think about that in our time. Because we had that fear that if we do some mistake our senior will tell us that do not do this, this is not right," he said.

Commenting on the infamous incident involving Hardik Pandya and K.L. Rahul, who were suspended for loose talk on women on a chat show, Yuvraj added: "That incident could not have happened in our time."

CROSSWORD 4087



- ACROSS**
- Quiet address is smaller (10)
 - Type of brush undergrowth (5)
 - Runner allowed to take part in a different heat (7)
 - Took the curve or gave it (7)
 - One doesn't have to have them (5)
 - Chemical result of smoking cannabis? (6)
 - Don't get angry, just leave without a blow (6)
 - Badly riled, he's not keen to work (5)
 - They should be enough to cover the rents (7)
 - Port of granite construction (7)
 - Tests said to be passed (5)
 - Details of special importance — about stars? (10)
- DOWN**
- The chase for a job? (7)
 - Be sent up to bed, having gone into a decline (5)
 - Sets great store by (6)
 - Hence an alteration is made to increase the value (7)
 - What could be finer than a riddle? (5)
 - They are hopeless people (10)
 - Spots of trouble? (4,6)
 - Sport for boarders at the seaside (7)
 - What confuses pictures coming across (7)
 - The continual round of wage increases? (6)
 - Such law presumably implies a suspended sentence (5)
 - Narrow strip in the North on general offer (5)

Solutions Crossword 4086: Across: 1 Sorbet, 4 Scored, 9 Plateau, 10 Alarm, 11 Ensur, 12 Tending, 13 Cartoonists, 16 Reminds, 20 Clear, 22 Trust, 23 Landing, 24 Dryish, 25 Person. Down: 1 Supper, 2 Reaps, 3 Everest, 5 Chain, 6 Realist, 7 Damage, 8 Auction sale, 14 Armoury, 15 Incessant, 16 Orated, 17 Oregon, 19 Notes, 21 Exits.

JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

What is to give ___ must endure ___ - Anton Wildgans (5,7)

DGIIR **ORSHNU**

BULNT **IHWBGG**

SOLUTION: RIDIC, BULNT, ONRUSH, BICWIC
Answer: What is to give light must endure burning - Anton Wildgans

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



Difficulty Level 2s
INSTRUCTIONS
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Difficulty Level
1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy; 3s = Medium; 4s = Hard; 5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius

SUDOKU 4174

7								1
9	5		7					
8	2		6	7				
	9	3			4			
	8	6	2	3				
5		1	8					
	1	7	8	6				
	4		5	7				
5								9

SOLUTION SUDOKU 4173

1	4	6	8	5	2	9	7	3
7	5	8	4	9	3	6	1	2
2	9	3	6	7	1	8	4	5
9	3	4	5	8	7	1	2	6
6	8	1	3	2	9	7	5	4
5	7	2	1	4	6	3	8	9
4	6	7	9	1	5	2	3	8
8	1	9	2	3	4	5	6	7
3	2	5	7	6	8	4	9	1

DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)
Do you feel down-trodden? Hard done-by? This is not how other people see you, but it is often the way you feel. Anyway, with the Moon occupying an intriguing position, you may find that the scales are tipped in your favour. Give them an extra push, just for good measure.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)
You do tend to take on emotional burdens, don't you? If you are falling into the old Taurean trap of accepting life as it is, don't. With a single leap and a mighty bound you could be free of personal pressures which have bothered you for longer than you can remember.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)
You should now find it really easy to forget about intimate affairs and concentrate on making the grade — and making your mark at work. Your best course of action is to get hold of anyone who will listen and bend their ears for as long as you can.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)
It is pretty certain that you still need to use tact and diplomacy when handling one very special relationship. A romantic involvement is now coming up for its periodic review, and you will have fresh demands to make. See to it that they are realistic ones.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)
Confidence is a funny thing. First you have it, then you don't. The curious fact at the moment is that you are likely to be confident with your feelings, but not with your ideas. Or is it the other way round? All things considered, the stars aren't sure whether you're coming or going.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)
Difficult planetary alignments present you with a tough challenge, but I am sure you will rise to it. The problem is how to make a go of joint financial relationships and commitments. Fortunately, helpful planetary aspects are equally spread throughout the day.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)
You could not wish for better social influences, and you'll be putting plenty of extra effort into making relationships work. This doesn't mean that they're easy, though. I think 'interesting' might be a better term, as friends and partners chop and change, in turn making then cancelling arrangements.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)
A personal ambition appears to hang in the balance, but eventually you will come out on top. Indeed, you might have already done so, though there seems to be something deep within the Scorpio psyche that stops you recognising when you're well off.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)
You must continue to exercise due caution and discretion over a joint financial arrangement. If I could just repeat something I've been saying for a few months, it is ethical issues rather than cash balances which seem to be the heart of the matter.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)
I've not spoken about professional affairs yet this week, so just let me take you ahead a little and point out that as the days pass your work will suddenly spring into life. Even if you're not in gainful employment, there are other ambitions waiting to achieve lift-off.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)
Your solar chart is a complex one at the moment. You may say one thing and do another and then change positions on both counts. Await further developments! But not with baited breath. A cash question makes you think about fundamental issues, such as whether money or friendship is more important to you.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)
You idealistic Pisceans are not as unmaterialistic as you sometimes pretend. You must therefore agree that this is a day to get out and earn some extra cash, if only to finance ambitious spending plans. You could, if you wish, make a complete break with the past.