

# India and the Olympics

**The Time to Go?**

*Boria Majumdar*

**92 years of competition- 1 individual gold medal.**



# The Olympic story- 1920-2012

- India first participated at the summer Games in 1920 at Antwerp and it was finally at Beijing 2008 that shooter Abhinav Bindra won gold in the 10 meter air rifle event. He remains till date the only Indian individual gold medal winner.

# 13 individual medals in 92 years

- At London 2012 India won 2 silvers and 4 bronze medals.
- At Beijing 2008 India won 2 more bronze medals, 1 in boxing and 1 in wrestling.
- India won 1 bronze medal at Atlanta in 1996, 1 bronze medal at Sydney in 2000 and 1 silver medal at the 2004 Athens Games.

# Hockey the saving grace

- India won no individual medal between 1956-1992
- However, India won Gold medals in field hockey between 1928-1956, won a silver in 1960, and golds again in 1964 and 1980.
- Since 1980 India has not won a medal in field hockey either. Interestingly this was the time when India started doing well in cricket.

# India is the Second oldest Asian country to embrace the Olympic ideal.

- The Indian Olympic Association was formed in 1923.
- India was an important strategic outpost in spreading the gospel of Olympism during the first world war- expansion into Latin America and Asia was the vision.
- With Europe in the throes of war, De Coubertin wanted to spread the movement to other parts of the world.

# Cricket and Hockey in the 1970s and 1980s

## Cricket

- Beat West Indies in the Caribbean in 1971
- Beat England in England in 1971
- Won the Prudential world cup in 1983
- Won the 7 nation mini world cup in 1985

## Hockey

- No medals between 1968-1976
- 7<sup>th</sup> in Montreal in 1976
- 5<sup>th</sup> in Los Angeles in 1984
- Moscow gold diluted by the boycott

## Time for major social change in India

- The decade of the 1980s and early 1990s was the time of major social change in India, economic liberalization was gradually being thought about and the staging of the cricket world cup in 1987 was a major step. Television was fast becoming popular in the country and the 1983 world cup was televised live back to Indian homes. India's win made it all the more significant.

# Cricket growing in currency

- While India did not win a single Olympic medal between 1984-1992, Indian cricket made giant strides in the same decade. India won the 1985 mini world cup, which added to the cricket craze after the 1983 world cup victory. These victories made cricket the hot property on television and corporate India rushed in to sponsor the game transforming the cricket stars into leading national icons.

# The Beijing 2008 resurgence

- Beijing 2008 offered a silver lining for Indian sport when India won 3 medals for the first time. 1 in shooting (gold), 1 in boxing (bronze) and 1 in wrestling (bronze). Vijender Singh, who won the bronze medal in boxing came from a small town in North India and trained in a camp at Bhiwani.
- Bhiwani goes without electricity half the day, originally had a tin shed which was turned into a camp and had no proper roads to facilitate travel. It offered too irresistible a story of human triumph for the media to refuse. Vijender soon became the nation's poster boy and started a revolution of sorts in Indian boxing.
- Boxing is a cheap sport and with the Haryana government declaring that any boxer who made the Quarter Finals of an international championship was assured of a permanent job, it soon became a stable form of livelihood. A permanent job offered respectability and meant the basics were in place.

# The CWG 2010 fillip

- The coming of the 2010 Commonwealth Games to India provided an unprecedented fillip to Indian Olympic sport. For the first time the government set aside a grant of close to 800 crores (1.8 million USD) to promote Olympic sports and help the elite athletes undertake specialized training.
- Needless to say the commonwealth games could have been far better used had the sordid tales of corruption and under-preparedness not taken over.
- While the Indian administrators became the laughing stock of the world, the athletes, however, were single minded in their pursuit.
- So much so that India won a total of 101 medals, 38 of which were gold and came second in the medals table displacing England for the first ever time in history.

## Transformation continues at the Guangzhou Asiad and the 2012 London Olympics

- The transformation continued at the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games where India stood an unprecedented sixth in the medal standings with 14 gold medals.
- Bulk of the medals came in boxing.
- This was India's best performance ever at the Asian Games.
- At London there was much expectation from the Indian athletes and though not all lived up to it India doubled the Beijing medals tally winning 6 medals.

## The London resurgence

- Mary Kom's medal in boxing for example was a major thing for India's women's sport. Then a mother of two, now three children, coming out of sabbatical to compete at the Olympics and at a higher weight category winning a medal was a fairytale.
- Sushil Kumar won back to back medals making him the most decorated Indian individual Olympian.
- For the first time an unprecedented 7 male and 1 female boxers qualified for London.
- India also had 10 shooters at London 2012.

## London 2012- A new beginning?

- There were real medal prospects in archery, badminton, tennis, women's discus, shooting and boxing. In fact, 7-8 medals at London were a distinct possibility.
- There was corporate support as well- the Mittal Champions Trust, Sahara, Samsung and others had come forward to help India's Olympic contingent.
- In many ways it was a situation similar to what happened in the 1970s- rather, it is exactly the opposite of what had happened.
- Indian cricket was on a downswing and Olympic sports finally seemed to have a chance. A good London 2012 and the dream of turning into a multi sporting nation may have come true. But.....

# The IOA ban

- Cricket will still be the nation's leading passion, the success of the 2014-2015 IPL is a testimony to cricket's popularity. Despite all the recent troubles with spot fixing matches were played to packed venues.
- But that is not to say that Olympic sports will have no presence in the Indian national imagination.
- This would surely have been the case had the IOA not been banned for administrative inefficiency and failing to adhere to the principles of the Olympic charter.
- A silver lining could have been the meeting between Prime Minister Modi and IOC President Bach in Delhi on 27 April 2015.

# No Olympic bid?

- The meeting between Thomas Bach and Narendra Modi did not result in an Indian Olympic Bid for 2024.
- There was widespread speculation that India might decide to bid but at the last moment it was decided that India is not yet prepared.
- Focus has shifted to Rio 2016.
- To India's preparedness- can India double the London medal count?
- Problems resurfaced with the motion of no-confidence against the IOA President.

# Growing currency of Olympism

- In the wake of the IOC President's visit there is a lot of talk in India on Olympism and the Olympic movement.
- What lessons have we learnt from the 2010 CWG?
- Does it make sense to invest in putting in a serious bid for the 2028 Games?
- Will this mean the IOA becomes a better managed institution?
- However, yet again infighting is taking over.

# Synergy between IOA, Sports Ministry and Sports Authority of India

- The most important thing that needs to happen is a synergy between SAI, Sports Ministry- government and the IOA.
- At the moment there are a lot of ego battles being fought.
- Federation heads charging the head of the IOA- saying he has paid bribes up to 1 crore each for votes to become President- Narendra Batra, head of Hockey India has brought the charge.
- 52 percent federations have signed the no confidence motion.

## Motion of no confidence against the IOA President

- The motion of no confidence was brought on the day of Thomas Bach's visit.
- Reason- IOA officials were not informed about the visit and they felt left out.
- In the meeting at Lausanne with the IOC President the Secretary General and Treasurer were not included.
- The IOA President has in turn filed a defammation case against Narendra Batra.
- All of this confidential correspondence has been leaked to the media.

# Leaked email-

- "Mr Ramachandran, you in January/February 2014 during the IOA elections in which you stood for the post of President IOA and got elected unopposed, had sent a gentleman to meet me in my office with a proposal that you will give Rs 1 crore every year till you remain president and I should support your presidential candidature. The man was politely asked by me to leave," Batra said in the mail addressed to Ramachandran.

# More muck in public

- "I ask you that this complaint of mine be forwarded to the Ethics Commission of IOA (which you have made defunct and inoperative under your presidentship) and if it is not done then I will approach the IOC Ethics Commission and the appropriate Court's in India for proper justice and needful. I will produce the witness and evidence before the Ethics Commission," said Batra.

# Conclusions

- Olympic movement is at a crossroad in India.
- Rio 2016 is a huge opportunity.
- With just 14 months to go, India is already late in terms of preparedness.
- However, there are individual athletes who can make the country proud- in boxing, archery, badminton, tennis, shooting, wrestling etc.
- Money has finally been made available.
- However, if the infighting continues the future will once again result in chaos and opportunity lost.

# What next?

- India needs to focus on athletes and do well at Rio.
- Need more accountability and transparency within the IOA.
- Will mean empowerment of athletes.
- Will mean Olympism as a concept will have gained currency, only then can we think of a bid.
- Finally, it will mean sport for all and the dream of being a multi sports nation isn't a dream after all.
- Question is can all of the above be done in the current context?