



Baljeet Kaur reflects on humble beginnings and road to India women's hockey team

NEW DELHI, MAR 09: Emerging Indian women's hockey team midfielder Baljeet Kaur has opened up about her arduous journey from a humble childhood to the national senior team, crediting her family's resilience and a shift in mindset—which she learned from international stars—as the key factors to her success.

In an exclusive conversation with ANI, Baljeet, the 24-year-old hockey player who is currently featuring in India's campaign at the FIH Hockey World Cup Qualifiers 2026, reflected on her early inspirations, the mental toll of being on the fringes of the national squad, and her experience in the Hockey India League (HIL).

Baljeet revealed that her love affair with hockey began not with a professional coach, but by watching her cousin. Baljeet shared that her interest in hockey began after watching her cousin leave early each morning to go to the ground. Watching her cousin, she also decided that she wanted to play hockey.

"When my uncle's daughter used to go to school, she would put on her shoes and stand outside the gate early in the morning. I would wake up early and watch her. I watched her daily. So I asked her, 'Where are you going?' She said, 'I am going to the ground.' So after that, I also told my mom that I wanted to go too. She said, 'They play hockey.' I told her that I wanted to play hockey as well. So, I started playing hockey after watching her," Baljeet said.

However, during a state tournament, Baljeet shared that she could not participate because her family could not afford a hockey kit.

"There was a state tournament. I didn't have a kit. So the coach said that I would have to buy a kit. We didn't have enough money for my family to buy me a kit. Because of that, they didn't take me to the state tournament," the midfielder revealed.

Baljeet said that over time, she learned about national tournaments and how players get selected for



the Indian team. Watching senior team matches on TV inspired her deeply, and she began going to the ground every day with the goal of one day wearing the India jersey and representing the country.

"After that, slowly I got to know what Nationals are, how one gets into the India team... gradually I got to know everything, like how girls play in the senior team. Then our coach used to show us matches. When we watched on TV, we felt very happy seeing them. After that, I felt that I also had to play for the India team. So I used to go to the ground with this target only—that I have to wear the India jersey and play for India."

Reflecting on her journey, Baljeet, who made her senior India debut in June 2022 at the 2021-2022 FIH Hockey Pro League, said that after joining the senior Indian team, she went through a challenging phase where she was not consistently part of the playing squad. The uncertainty sometimes made her think about quitting, but she kept herself mentally strong by believing that her opportunity to play regularly for India would come.

She added that she continued pushing herself on the field and drew motivation from her family's support. Whenever she felt low, she would reset the next day mentally and remind herself not to give up on her dream of representing India.

"I came into the senior team in 2022. After that, I wasn't playing continuously in the team. Sometimes I

was in the squad, sometimes I wasn't. So I kept myself mentally strong, thinking that a day will come when I will play continuously for the team, for India. And I pushed myself on the ground. Sometimes it used to happen that I felt like stopping or giving up. A lot of things came to my mind. But then the next day, I would mentally prepare myself again that no, I have to play for my family. It's because of them that I am here today, because daily I used to think that I must not give up," she said.

Baljeet Kaur was part of the Indian squad at the FIH Hockey Women's Junior World Cup 2021 in Potchefstroom, South Africa, where the team finished in fourth place. She had earlier represented India at the 2018 Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where the team won a silver medal.

Speaking about the transition from junior to senior hockey, Kaur said the biggest difference she noticed was the level of pressure. She explained that while playing at the junior level felt relatively pressure-free, competing in the senior team comes with significantly greater expectations and responsibility.

"Like when we played in juniors, there wasn't any pressure. Coming into seniors, there is pressure in the senior team," she said.

Speaking about her experience in the Hockey India League (HIL), Baljeet Kaur said playing alongside international stars was a valuable learning opportunity. Rep-

resenting the Odisha Warriors in the 2024-25 season of the HIL, she shared the team with several top players from around the world, like Australia's Kaitlin Jaye Nobbs and the Netherlands' Yibbi Jansen, which made the experience enjoyable and enriching. Notably, Baljeet Kaur won the HIL 204-25 Odisha Warriors.

She said observing their discipline and relaxed approach to the game taught her an important lesson—playing with enjoyment rather than stress often leads to better performances and improved results.

"Earlier, I was playing for the Odisha Warriors. We had quite good players in our team. Yibbi Jansen was there, a player from Argentina, and Nobbs from Australia. We had great players in our team. So it was a lot of fun playing with them. Seeing how disciplined they stay, and they have complete fun... I learned this from them, that they play for fun. They don't take anything with stress. They play freely, so I learned that if we play with enjoyment, we play quite well, and the results are also entirely different," she said.

Speaking on the toughest opponent that she has faced, Baljeet Kaur said the Netherlands is among the toughest teams to face in international hockey, as their entire squad is filled with strong players rather than relying on just one standout performer.

"The toughest seems to be Holland (Netherlands). Their entire team consists of good players. It's not like we should focus on just one player. Their whole team is good. Hockey has become such that no side has a weak player. Mostly everyone brings their best team. Obviously, they also want to win. So I don't think there is any weak player," she said.

India Women kicked off their FIH Hockey World Cup 2026 Qualifiers with a dominant 4-0 win against Uruguay on Sunday. They will now face Scotland in their second fixture of the Qualifiers tournament on Monday. After Scotland, India will face Wales on Wednesday. (ANI)

US Ambassador Sergio Gor congratulates Team India on winning T20 World Cup 2026

NEW DELHI, MARCH 9: US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor congratulated Team India on clinching the T20 World Cup 2026 title by defeating New Zealand in the final on Sunday at Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi Stadium.

India beat New Zealand by 96 runs to successfully defend their T20 World Cup title. The victory made India the first team to win the T20 World Cup on home soil, the first to win consecutive titles after their 2024 win, and the first to lift the trophy three times (2007, 2024, and 2026). In an X post, Ambassador Sergio Gor, congratulating the Indian cricket team, said, "Congratulations to Team India on their victory in the T20 Cricket World Cup!"

Earlier, Sergio Gor had also attended the India vs USA T20 World Cup 2026 match on February 7. After



the India vs USA match, Sergio Gor thanked ICC and the ICC Chairman Jay Shah and predicted the sport of cricket has a bright future in the United States, including at the upcoming Olympics.

In a post on X, Gor had said, "Thank you @ICC and @JayShah for an incredible evening of Cricket at the #T20WorldCup! I predict Cricket has a very bright future ahead in the United

States, including at the upcoming Olympics."

Coming to the T20 World Cup 2026 final, New Zealand won the toss and elected to field first. However, a return-to-form, record-breaking fifty from Abhishek Sharma (52 in 21 balls, with six fours and three sixes) and his 98-run stand with Samson made NZ regret the decision. Later, Samson stitched a

century stand with Ishan Kishan (54 in 25 balls, with four boundaries and four sixes) to take India past the 200-run mark in the 16th over. After a brief slowdown, Shivam Dube (26* in eight balls, with three fours and two sixes) made some valuable runs to take India to 255/5, the highest total in T20WC finals.

James Neesham (3/46) was the leading wicket-taker for NZ.

In the run-chase of 256 runs, Axar and Bumrah helped India reduce the Kiwis to 72/5, despite a half-century from Tim Seifert (52 in 26 balls, with two fours and five sixes). Despite a brief partnership between Daryl Mitchell (17) and skipper Mitchell Santner (43 in 35 balls, with three fours and two sixes), India kept chipping in with wickets, and the Kiwis were bundled out for just 159 runs. (ANI)

Radhamani, Sahil register wins for India on day 2 of World Boxing Futures Cup 2026

Bangkok [Thailand], March 9 (ANI): The Indian Youth boxing team continued its campaign at the World Boxing Futures Cup 2026 in Bangkok with mixed results on the second day of competition, as Radhamani Longjam and Sahil Duhan secured victories in their respective bouts.

In the women's 57kg category, Radhamani Longjam delivered a commanding performance to defeat her opponent from Uzbekistan, sealing the bout with a Referee Stopped Contest (RSC) in the third round.

In the men's division, Sahil Duhan (60kg) continued his impressive run in the tournament with a dominant 5-0 unanimous decision victory over Turkmenistan, according to a press release.

Meanwhile, Udhm Singh (55kg) put up a close fight but went down 3-2 against Japan in a tightly contested bout.

The World Boxing Futures Cup, being held in Bangkok from March 8 to 15, features some of the most promising youth boxers from across the world



competing in the Youth Olympic weight categories, offering valuable international exposure for the athletes.

Indian youth boxers had delivered a historic performance last year at the 3rd Asian Youth Games in Bahrain, clinching seven medals, including four gold, two silver and one bronze, marking India's best-ever

showing in youth boxing at the continental stage.

The Indian contingent will now look to build momentum as the preliminary rounds continue in the tournament.

Earlier in the tournament, the Indian Youth boxing team made a strong start to its campaign at the World Boxing Futures Cup 2026 in Bangkok, Thailand,

with Joyshree Devi Chhirom, Ambekar Meetei Lairenlakpam and Sahil Duhan registering victories on the opening day of the tournament.

In the women's 54kg category, Joyshree Devi Chhirom secured a Referee Stopped Contest (RSC) victory in the second round against her opponent from Tajikistan. (ANI)

ICC announces team of the tournament for T20 WC 2026, featuring four Indians

NEW DELHI, MAR 09: Naming their T20 World Cup team, defeating New Zealand by a whopping 96 runs in Ahmedabad on Sunday.

The tournament saw some incredible performances, and the ICC Team of the Tournament has been announced, featuring the best players who lit up the stage.

The selection panel, comprising cricket legends like Ian Bishop, Eion Morgan, and Natalie Germann, along with ICC representative Gaurav Saxena and journalist Rex Clementine, handpicked the top performers, as per the ICC website.

Though Pakistan were patchy in the tournament, Sahibzada Farhan was consistently brilliant. His tally of 383 runs in seven matches was the highest a batter has scored in a single edition of the T20 World Cup, despite Pakistan exiting at the Super Eight stage.



The 29-year-old opener also became the first batter to score two hundreds in a single edition of a T20 World Cup. The highlight was a century he scored against Sri Lanka in the final Super Eight clash, setting up a five-run win.

Sanju Samson was key to India's emphatic finish at the World Cup and was named the Player of the Tournament. Though unable to break into the star-studded Indian line-up at the beginning, Samson turned it around at the business end of the tournament.

The right-hand batter kicked off his scoring spree

with an unbeaten 97 against the West Indies in the final Super Eight clash, and a virtual knockout. He then piled on 89 against England in the semi-final and another 89 in the final against New Zealand.

He became the third batter to score half-centuries in both the final and semi-final, and only the second to notch three successive 80-plus scores at the T20 World Cup.

Ishan Kishan made an impact with relentless aggression at the top of the order.

His three half-centuries stood out, but the south-paw also made valuable

contributions of quickfire 38 against Zimbabwe and 39 against England.

His best performance came against arch-rivals Pakistan. After India lost an early wicket batting first, Kishan led the Indian charge with 77 off 40 balls, which was studded with 10 fours and three sixes.

Having spent the last two years on the sidelines, Kishan's redemption arc was complete as he contributed 54 runs and completed two important catches in the final.

Aiden Markram marshalled his troops well as South Africa won their first seven matches of the tournament. Never one to shy away from responsibility, he started at the top of the order, scoring three half-centuries.

He was especially effective in Ahmedabad, scoring 86 not out in the key group clash against New Zealand and an unbeaten 82 against West Indies in the Super Eight.

T20 WC: Arshdeep Singh shares funny banter with Gautam Gambhir, Sanju Samson

NEW DELHI, MAR 09: As India scripted history by becoming the only team to defend their T20 World Cup title, India's ace speedster Arshdeep Singh had the script ready for his Instagram reels.

Arshdeep shared a banter with head coach Gautam Gambhir, ensuring that Gambhir afforded a rare wide smile in his reel.

"Paaji, justice milgaya," Arshdeep Singh said in his Instagram reel.

Then came another banger with India's hero of the T20 World Cup, Sanju Samson. "Paaji, justice milgaya," Arshdeep said with Samson in the frame.

Samson made 321 runs in five T20 World Cup innings at an average of 80.25 and a strike rate of 199.37, with 27 fours and 24 sixes, and ended as the third-highest run-getter in the tournament.

He also surpassed Virat Kohli's total of 319 runs in



the 2014 T20WC edition to have the most runs by an Indian during a single T20WC edition.

Samson's brilliant run continued as he went past legendary Virat Kohli to become the Indian batter with the most runs in a sin-

gle T20 World Cup and also joined Virat and Shahid Afridi in an elite list of batters with fifties in T20 World Cup semifinal and final both.

His knock has overtaken West Indies batter Marlon Samuels' 85* against Eng-

land in the 2016 T20WC final and New Zealand star Kane Williamson's 85 against Australia in the 2021 edition final.

He owns the highest score by an Indian in a T20 World Cup knockout game. (ANI)