



‘Gold hi chahiye tha’: Baljeet Kaur’s journey from Punjab village to Asian Games glory

JALANDHAR, OCT 02: “Silver nahi lena tha, gold hi chahiye tha,” Baljeet Kaur told *The Tribune* after the Indian women’s hockey team won the gold medal at the Asian Games in Japan. “I knew we would win gold.”

The 25-year-old hockey player from Kaka Kandiala village in Tarn Taran was the only woman from Punjab in the national team that won the gold medal. Even before the tournament began, Baljeet had already made plans for her return. She had asked her elder brother, Dalsher Singh, a taxi driver, to arrange dhols to welcome her home.

For a young woman who had grown up in a family that often struggled to make ends meet, the journey was far from easy.

There were days when even following her coach’s advice on nutrition was a challenge. Her coach would repeatedly tell the players that a good diet was essential and ask them to eat chanas and almonds regularly. But for Baljeet’s family, even these seemingly basic foods were sometimes beyond their means.

“Our coach would say it was very important to have a good and proper diet. He would ask us every day to get chanas and badam,” she recalled. “When I did not have enough, I would ask other players to give me some so that my coach would be satisfied that I had eaten them too.”

Lakhwinder Singh, worked as a labourer. Yet,



despite the financial difficulties, he never asked his daughter to give up hockey.

“My father was a labourer and was not earning much, but he never asked me not to play. He encouraged me and motivated me,” Baljeet said. Even asking her father for money was an emotional struggle.

“I would ask my father for money with a lot of difficulty and embarrassment because I knew it was difficult for him to arrange it,” she said.

Her mother, Rajwant Kaur, remembers how Lakhwinder would somehow manage to find the money whenever his daughter needed it. If necessary, he would borrow from others so that Baljeet could continue playing.

For Baljeet, however, hockey had begun almost instinctively. She was inspired by a cousin who played the sport.

“I would see her putting on her shoes and leaving in the morning to play. I think that was my calling,” she said.

The family did not always understand where that calling would lead her. Her elder brother, Dalsher, admits that he once questioned why their father was spending money on Baljeet’s hockey.

“I would often ask my father why he was spending money on Baljeet when she was only playing hockey. I thought she was avoiding her studies and that my father was wasting money on her,” he said.

Today, those doubts have turned into pride.

“Now I am so proud of her,” Dalsher said. “People who travel in my taxi often ask me about Baljeet and her story.”

Now, Baljeet’s wish is simple: that her village gets a proper sports ground.

“I want the ground in my village to have proper facilities so that youngsters can play instead of getting into drugs,” she said.

Asian Games 2026: Lalremsiami’s strike, Bichu Devi’s wall of resistance power India to hockey gold

KAKAMIGAHARA (JAPAN), OCT 02: India ended a 44-year wait for the Asian Games women’s hockey gold and qualified for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics with a performance built on one stunning strike and an extraordinary rearguard action, upstaging defending champions and Olympic silver-medallists China 1-0 in the final here on Friday.

Lalremsiami’s superb reverse-stick strike in the 10th minute gave India the lead, but it was goalkeeper Bichu Devi’s heroics and a defence that refused to yield that ultimately settled the final.

With China throwing everything at them, India absorbed wave after wave of pressure, putting their bodies on the line to protect their slender advantage and complete a memorable triumph.

For India, the victory delivered two long-awaited prizes—their first Asian Games women’s hockey gold since 1982 and direct qualification for the Los Angeles Olympics, a key target for coach Sjoerd Marijne’s side.

The final began an hour behind schedule after the team buses of both finalists were caught in a traffic snarl caused by an accident unrelated to either side. But once the contest got underway, India made their mark early and then showed the resilience to withstand everything China threw at them.

The breakthrough came when Sakshi Rana threaded a pass into the circle to find Lalremsiami near the goal.



The forward made no mistake, unleashing a fierce reverse-stick hit on the run that sent the ball crashing into the upper netting, leaving the Chinese goalkeeper with no chance.

It was a goal of outstanding quality and an early statement of intent from India, who had begun the contest with purpose against an opponent that had claimed silver at the Paris Olympics.

China enjoyed marginally greater possession in the opening exchanges, but India’s compact defensive structure made it difficult for them to create clear openings.

India had already weathered an early setback when Baljeet Kaur was shown a green card in the sixth minute, leaving them a player short for two minutes.

But the defence stood firm, denying China any meaningful opportunity to capitalise on their numerical advantage.

The contest remained largely confined to midfield, with both sides struggling to establish control.

India, however, looked threatening on the counter and earned their first penalty corner through a move down the right flank initiated by Baljeet.

Navneet Kaur’s powerful drag-flick went wide with two minutes left in the opening quarter, but India had shown they could trouble the Chinese defence.

China gradually began to push forward, probing down the flanks through Li Hong, Zou Meirong and Tan Jinzhuang. Their attacks, however, lacked the depth and support needed to seriously test Bichu Devi.

China earned their first penalty corner in the 18th minute, but India read the indirect variation well, with a defender intercepting the routine.

The second attempt was directed towards the goal but was comfortably dealt with by Bichu Devi.

The goalkeeper, however, was called into action in the 24th minute when China were awarded a penalty stroke after Lalremsiami was penalised for obstructing a forward from behind. With the defending

champions presented with a chance to draw level, Bichu Devi produced a crucial save, diving sharply to her left to keep out the low shot and preserve India’s lead.

It was a defining moment in the final, with the goalkeeper displaying the composure and reflexes that would prove vital to India’s resistance.

China continued to press, and India were forced to dig deep as the first half wore on.

A dangerous move threatened to produce an equaliser with six minutes remaining in the second quarter, but Shilpi intervened with a timely clearance and superb stick-work to neutralise it.

The first quarter belonged to India, China increasingly dictated the second, enjoying greater possession and pushing more players forward.

Yet despite their territorial dominance, the they struggled to penetrate the Indian circle with any consistency. India’s defenders remained tightly organised, cutting off passing lanes and forcing China to operate on the fringes.

A green card to Dan Wen shortly before half-time gave India some breathing space and allowed them to push forward, but a greater challenge awaited after the break.

China came out aggressively in the second half, determined to make their possession count. Fan Yunxia threatened down the right in the 31st minute, forcing India captain Salima Tete to intervene.

After WADA ban and Olympic quota loss, Rohtak’s Parveen Hooda punches her way to Asian Games gold

ROHTAK/SONEPAT, OCT 02: Parveen Hooda, a 26-year-old boxer from Rurkee village in Rohtak district, brought laurels to her village, state and country by landing a golden punch at the Asian Games 2026 in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan.

As she won the gold medal, family members, villagers and relatives gathered at her home and celebrated the victory by distributing ladoos and bursting firecrackers in the village.

Posted as Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) in the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), Parveen had begun her journey by winning a bronze medal at the Asian Games in Hangzhou in 2023, but she was handed a 22-month ban (from December 2022 to May 2024) by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) for three whereabouts failures within a 12-month period in May 2024.

The suspension not only cost India the 57 kg Olympic quota she had earned but also stripped her of the Asian Games bronze medal. But Parveen is a fighter, and



fighting against all odds, she made a comeback to the boxing ring and won the gold medal at the Asian Games.

Parveen Hooda secured the gold medal by defeating Chinese Taipei’s Chen Nien-Chen in the final of the women’s 65 kg event at the ongoing Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya on Friday.

Parveen’s father, Lakshpat Hooda, has been a cancer patient for the last four years and is also a heart patient. The family owns a small piece of land, while

her mother Neelam, a housewife, also sells milk.

Feeling elated, Neelam, mother of Asian Games gold medallist Parveen, said her daughter started boxing at the village ground at the age of 11-12 years.

“It is a proud moment not only for the family but for the entire village, as a daughter of the village has won a gold medal for the country at the international tournament. It is the result of Parveen’s hard work and dedication to her game,” she said.

Indian hockey umpire Sangha sent back from Asian Games after sexual harassment complaint

NEW DELHI, OCT 02: In a major embarrassment for India, hockey umpire and technical official Gurinder Singh Sangha, has been sent back from the Asian Games in Japan owing to multiple complaints of alleged sexual misconduct by him during the mega-event.

A well-placed Hockey India (HI) source said that Sangha allegedly misbehaved with a female hockey official from Malaysia and a hotel staffer during his stay in Nagoya.

“Yes, Sangha has been sent back home after a sexual harassment complaint was filed against him by a female official from Malaysia that is what we know. He has gone back two days ago,” the HI official told PTI from Nagoya.

Asked whether HI would initiate any action against Sangha after the Games, the official said they will do whatever is needed after getting a detailed report



from the Asian Hockey Federation (AHF).

“Definitely, we will take strict action against him if AHF gives an adverse report. There is no question about it. He will not be spared if he is guilty,” the official said.

The umpires and technical officials for hockey events at the Asian Games are appointed by AHF.

It is not the first time that such a complaint has been filed against Sangha.

In 2025, during the Hockey India League in Ranchi, a female umpire had lodged a complaint against him. Subsequently, HI formed a three-member committee to investigate the allegations.

But the HI official said the committee didn’t find any

“It was a tough time for the family when Parveen’s father developed heart problems in 2004 and underwent surgery. He has been fighting cancer for the last four years. But the situation changed when Parveen got selected in ITBP and after that she began taking care of the family,” Neelam said.

Vijay Hooda, a coach in Rurkee village, said he along with former sarpanch Sudhir Hooda was nurturing talent in boxing, especially for girls, at the village stadium at that time. Parveen came to the boxing ring in 2012 and practised very hard.

Parveen is around 6-ft tall, which gives her a technical edge during bouts. Her game is defensive and she plays maintaining good distance, and her footwork is also good, said Vijay, Parveen’s childhood coach.

She is presently practising at the SAI centre in Rajiv Gandhi Stadium in Rohtak under a SAI coach. However, during Covid she returned to the village ground and practised there, Vijay added.

substantial proof against Sangha during the investigation.

“Yes we did form a committee and investigated that matter but the inquiry committee didn’t find any substantial evidence,” he said.

An Indian Olympic Association (IOA) official said that the incident has nothing to do with IOA and HI as it is AHF which appoints officials.

“IOA and HI have got nothing to do with it, it’s AHF who appoints umpires and technical officials in Asian Games,” the IOA official said.

When contacted, AHF officials in Nagoya refused to comment.

The Sangha episode is the latest misconduct complaint surrounding Indian hockey as earlier this year, HI removed a member of the support staff with the national women’s team after harassment allegations were lodged against him.

Asian Games 2026 LIVE: India win historic women's hockey gold, end 44-year wait

NEW DELHI, OCT 02: India ended a 44-year wait for Asian Games women’s hockey gold, edging defending champions China 1-0 in the final on Friday to clinch the title and secure direct berth for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

Lalremsiami scored the all-important winning goal for India with a fantastic tomahawk in the 10th minute.

The Indians were at their best in defence as they thwarted relentless Chinese attack thereafter, including a penalty stroke save by veteran goalkeeper Savita Punia.

With this, India ended a 44-year wait for their second Asian Games gold.

India have won the women’s hockey gold only



once, in 1982, when women’s hockey made its debut at the Asian Games, and have since come close to reclaiming the title on two occasions. They finished runners-up in 1998

and 2018, losing to South Korea and Japan respectively.

Paris Olympics’ silver medallist China settled

for the second place, while Japan bagged the bronze after defeating South Korea 4-2 in shoot-out in the third-place play-off game.