



Veteran Indian hockey goalkeeper Savita Punia eyes Olympic medal after historic Asiad gold

NEW DELHI, OCT 16: Veteran Indian women's hockey team goalkeeper Savita Punia contemplated retirement last year, but the new coaching setup under Sjoerd Marijne rekindled her passion for the game.

Following a remarkable turnaround this season, she now believes that an elusive Olympic medal is within India's reach at the 2028 Los Angeles Games.

Savita made a crucial save from a penalty stroke against China in the final to help India win a historic gold medal in women's hockey at the Asian Games after 44 years.

The gold medal also secured India's direct qualification for the Los Angeles Olympics.

"We achieved a historic fifth-place finish at the World Cup this year. We won gold at the Asian Games after 44 years, and I feel that a medal at the Los Angeles Olympics is now within reach," Savita said in an interview at the PTI office here.

"My dream is to finish on the Olympic podium, and I am fully prepared for Los Angeles. I am sure the regret of Tokyo will be erased there." Savita revealed that she had informed Hockey India of her decision to retire last year, but the federation did not accept it and convinced her to continue playing.

"I mailed Hockey India last year, saying that I no longer wanted to play, but the federation stopped me



from retiring. I even left the camp and went home, but then Sjoerd Marijne took over as coach, and I felt I could still play," said the 36-year-old.

"I missed hockey a lot. Achievements are one thing, but when you play with enjoyment, you feel like doing even better. I played in Tokyo with this coaching staff and felt that I could play again," said the Padma Shri awardee.

She credited Wayne Lombard, head of athletics performance for the women's team, for helping her make a successful comeback following ankle surgery last year. She also emphasised that the team's improved goalkeeping performance was the result of collective effort.

"Our goalkeeping is being praised, but the crucial contributions of coach Sjoerd Marijne, Wayne and goalkeeping consultant Pirmin Blaak cannot be forgotten,"

said Savita, a three-time FIH Goalkeeper of the Year award winner.

She said that before the penalty stroke in the Asian Games final, she looked towards Bichu in the dugout rather than at the coach.

"The Chinese player had scored a goal in the World Cup with a shot to the left. I had to see whether she would shoot to the left or the right. I made eye contact with Bichu, and before the match, we had decided to go left. I paused a bit, and that's what I did," she said.

Savita, who also serves as the team's mentor, admitted that bringing the side to this level had not been easy.

"There were a lot of difficulties over the last two years. It was very difficult to mould this team into a unit. As a senior player, I also had a big responsibility to maintain coordination on and off the field because success can only be achieved if we play for each other. We worked

hard on this," Savita said the team had changed people's perceptions of women's hockey.

"We finished fourth at the Tokyo Olympics, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said that this performance was no less than a medal. But then, when we failed to qualify for the Paris Olympics, people started saying that our performance in Tokyo was a fluke.

"But we believed in ourselves, and with a new coaching staff, we found a new direction," she said.

Savita, who has broken many stereotypes throughout her career, feels that people tend to put too much pressure on women players regarding marriage, family life and age. However, she believes that success is the answer to every question.

"I have been fortunate that my family has always supported me, but I have seen many of my friends' careers end under this pressure. If I had stopped playing because of my age, I would have missed out on the gold medal I had worked hard for over 20 years."

Savita wants to open a goalkeeping academy after retirement.

"Even after retirement, I will remain involved in hockey. I believe that goalkeepers are not given enough attention at the domestic level. I would like to open my own goalkeeping academy so that I can produce good goalkeepers for Indian hockey."

Hockey That Heals, Unites and Awakens J&K , Rotary Premier Hockey League Day 2

HIMALAYAN MAIL NEWS JAMMU, OCT 16

Day Two of the Rotary Premier Hockey League, being organized under the aegis of Hockey J&K, witnessed enthusiastic participation and inspiring messages for the youth of Jammu & Kashmir.

The league is being organized by the Rotary Clubs of J&K Zone with the theme "Hockey That Heals, Unites and Awakens J&K."

The Chief Guest for the Day Two proceedings was Sh. Arvind Gupta, MLA Jammu West. Appreciating the initiative, he lauded the role of Rotary Clubs for coming together on a common platform to promote sports culture among the youth of Jammu and Kashmir. He said such leagues are vital for channelizing the energy of youth in a positive direction.

For the first match of the day, the Chief Guest was Sh.



Pawan Malhotra, Dean Principal, ASCOMS. Addressing the players, he emphasized the importance of sports for a healthy lifestyle for youth. Recalling his own association with hockey during his school days, he said initiatives like the Rotary Hockey League by the Rotary Clubs of J&K Zone will go a long way in reviving hockey and promoting fitness.

For the second match, Shri Taranjeet Singh Tony graced the occasion as the

Chief Guest. He stated that initiatives by organizations like Rotary will keep the youth away from drugs and lead them towards a healthy life. He added that promoting sports among youth will further strengthen unity and brotherhood in J&K.

PGD Dr. Dushyant Choudhary Chairing the Organising Committee for the league stated ,"the Rotary J&K Zone Premier Hockey League is giving them a new direction - a direction of health, discipline

and dignity.

Rtn. Jaswinder Singh Kukku, Co-Convenor of the league, encouraged the players to continue their passion for hockey. He assured that full support will be extended to the players to participate in state-level and national-level tournaments so that Jammu & Kashmir can mark its presence nationally and internationally in hockey.

The teams that played matches were Shaheed Bhagat Singh H.Club

Inter-District UT-Level U14 Girls Volleyball Tournament commences at Rajouri

HIMALAYAN MAIL NEWS JAMMU, OCT 16

Deputy Commissioner Rajouri Dr. Devansh Yadav today inaugurated the Inter-District UT-Level Under-14 Girls Volleyball Tournament organised by the Directorate of Youth Services and Sports here at the Mini Sports Stadium. Girl teams representing different districts of the Union Territory are participating in the tournament.

A pledge for a Drug-Free Jammu and Kashmir was also administered to the participants, spreading awareness about the harmful effects of drug abuse and encouraging young people to adopt a healthy, disciplined and active lifestyle.

Speaking on the occasion, the Deputy Commissioner congratulated the Department of Youth Services and Sports for organising the tournament and providing young athletes with a valuable platform to showcase their sports talent and compete at the UT level. He appreciated the department's efforts in promoting sports among children and encouraging greater participation of girls in various sporting disciplines.

He motivated the participating teams to play with dedication, discipline, teamwork and a positive



spirit, emphasising that winning and losing are part of every sports competition. He urged the players to give their best, respect their opponents and uphold the true values of sportsmanship throughout the tournament. The Deputy Commissioner further highlighted the significant role of sports in the holistic development of children, stating that sporting activities help build physical fitness, mental strength, self-confidence, leadership qualities and a sense of responsibility. He said that participation in sports also teaches

young people the importance of perseverance, mutual respect and cooperation, which are essential for success both on and off the field.

The tournament is aimed at promoting a strong sports culture among young people, identifying emerging talent and providing under-14 girl volleyball players with an opportunity to demonstrate their abilities at the Union Territory level. It also seeks to encourage healthy competition, strengthen inter-district interaction and inspire more girls to take up sports as a

means of personal development and achievement.

The event marked an important step towards encouraging grassroots-level sports participation and nurturing young talent, while reinforcing the message of fitness, discipline, teamwork and a drug-free lifestyle among the youth of Jammu and Kashmir.

District Youth Services and Sports Officer Wali Mohammad; District Youth Officer Akhil Arya along with officials from the department, supporting staff were also present on the occasion.

"Stay focused on medal": Neeru Dhanda urges athletes to aim for gold at Asian Para Games

NEW DELHI [INDIA], OCTOBER 16 (ANI): Star Indian trap shooter Neeru Dhanda urged athletes to remain focused on their goals ahead of the Para Asian Games, encouraging them to block out distractions, trust themselves and strive to win gold medals for India.

The fifth edition of the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Para Games will be held from October 18 to 24 across Aichi Prefecture and Nagoya, Japan.

"Cheer for India! My message to you is to create your own bubble, stay within it and protect it. Stay focused on yourself, keep your eyes on the medal, and give your best to win gold for India," Dhanda told ANI.

Dhanda also led the country's contingent as flag-bearer at the closing ceremony of the 2026 Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, capping a remarkable



campaign in which she won two gold medals and a silver.

Dhanda described being India's flag bearer at the Asian Games closing ceremony as a dream come true, saying the unexpected honour of carrying the national flag was an unforgettable and deeply moving experience.

"Being the flag bearer for India at the closing ceremony of the Asian Games is a dream for every athlete. I never imagined I would get this opportunity, so it came as a wonderful surprise. Carrying the Indian flag was an incredible feeling, one that is difficult to put into words," she added.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacted with India's Asian Games 2026 contingent at the Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium in New Delhi on Thursday, as athletes, coaches and officials gathered to mark the country's performance at the continental showpiece.

Dhanda described meeting PM Modi as a motivating experience, saying his words and efforts to promote sports in India inspired her to perform better.

Udhampur hosts UT-Level Inter-District Under-19 Girls Volleyball Tournament

HIMALAYAN MAIL NEWS JAMMU, OCT 16

The Department of Youth Services and Sports Jammu and Kashmir today organized the UT-Level Inter-District Volleyball Tournament for Under-19 Girls at Udhampur under the patronage of Director General, Youth Services and Sports, J&K UT Anuradha Gupta and under the supervision of District Youth Services and Sports Officer Tarsem Singh Kalsi here at SIKS Government HSS Boys.

Around 17 teams representing different districts of Jammu and Kashmir are participating in the tournament.

Deputy Commissioner Ananth Dwivedi was the chief guest and formally in-



augurated the tournament, declaring it open.

Chief Education Officer Sunil Khajuria and the Host School Principal Manoj Kumar Jad attended as guests of honour.

While addressing the gathering, the Deputy Com-

missioner congratulated the participating players and interacted with the contingents, appreciating their enthusiasm, dedication and commitment to sports.

He emphasized the importance of confidence, resilience, teamwork and

healthy competition in shaping young athletes. He also highlighted the vital role of sports in empowering girls, nurturing leadership qualities and promoting discipline, self-confidence and an active lifestyle among youth.

India Women beat Zimbabwe by 4 wickets in 1st T20I after Deepti-Prasad rescue act

RAIPUR (CHHATTISGARH), OCTOBER 16: India Women began their three-match T20I series against Zimbabwe on a winning note, registering a four-wicket victory in the opening match at the Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh International Stadium in Raipur on Friday. It was a nervy start for Smriti Mandhana in her first outing as India's full-time captain, as the hosts had to fight back from an early collapse to secure victory.

Chasing a target of 115, India recovered from an early batting collapse through a crucial fifth-wicket partnership between Deepti Sharma and debutant Niki Prasad.

The duo steadied the innings after the hosts lost four wickets inside the powerplay, guiding India towards

the target and helping them take a 1-0 lead in the series.

Earlier, Zimbabwe Women posted 114/5 in their allotted 20 overs after India captain Smriti Mandhana won the toss and opted to field.

Openers Kelis Ndhlovu and Sharne Mayers were instrumental in helping the visitors put up a competitive total, with Ndhlovu scoring 42 and Mayers remaining unbeaten on 43.

India's bowlers kept Zimbabwe's scoring in check, with Nandani Sharma claiming two wickets, while Kranti Gaud, Arundhati Reddy and Shree Charani picked up one wicket each.

India's chase, however, got off to a difficult start as Mandhana, Shafali Verma, Anushka Sharma and Har-

manpreet Kaur fell early, leaving the hosts under pressure. Deepti and Prasad then combined to revive the innings with an 82-run stand for the fifth wicket.

Deepti scored 49 before missing out on a half-century, while Prasad remained unbeaten on 39 as India reached the target in 15.4 overs, finishing at 116/6.

The victory marks a positive start for India under Mandhana's leadership as the team looks to build momentum in the T20I series. The second match will be played in Raipur on October 18, followed by the third and final T20I on October 20.

The T20I series will be followed by a three-match ODI series in Vadodara, beginning on October 23. (ANI)