

# STATETIMES

# SUNDAY

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## 2021 flashback:

### The 'Super Seven' who gave India its best ever medal haul at the



to give it his all in the Olympics. With Bajrang's medal, Indian wrestlers matched their best performance at the Olympics. After his 2019 World bronze, Bajrang hardly lost a tournament and most probably if not injured, the colour of his medal would have been different. Bajrang is currently training in Moscow as he is set to compete in UWW Ranking events, the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham and the 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou, China.

#### Indian men's hockey team - Bronze

If ever a bronze felt like a gold medal, this was it. On August 5, the Indian men's hockey team beat Germany 5-4 to win the bronze and claim an Olympic medal in field hockey after a 41 year gap. India were clubbed alongside defending champions Argentina, three-time world champions Australia, New Zealand, Spain and hosts Japan in Pool A. India lost only to the Aussies (1-7), but won all their remaining matches to enter the quarter-finals. In the quarters, India beat Great Britain 3-1 to storm into the semi-finals. But in the semis, India lost to Belgium 2-5. That result meant they entered the bronze medal match where they played Germany. Fighting from being two goals down, the Indians made a superb comeback to turn the match in their favour. Simranjeet Singh (17th, 34th minutes) scored a brace, while Hardik Singh (27th), Harmanpreet Singh (29th) and Rupinder Pal Singh (31st) were the other goal scorers for India. Timur Oruz (2nd), Niklas Wellen (24th), Benedikt Furk (25th) and Lukas Windfeder (48th) scored the goals for Germany. This was India's third hockey bronze medal in the history of the Olympics. The other two before this were won in the 1968 Mexico City and the 1972 Munich Games. The eight-time former gold medal winners made the resurgence of the last couple of years count in the best way possible with an Olympic medal.

India signed off the Tokyo Olympics with a record haul of seven medals (1 gold, 2 silver and 4 bronze), bettering their previous best haul of six medals in a single edition of the Games (London 2012).

With this, India finished 48th overall on the medals tally. If one were to go by the total number of medals won, India would have actually finished 33rd. However, rankings are calculated based on gold medals won, followed by silver and bronze.

In cricket it is said that statistics and scorecards do not tell the full story. Similarly, India finishing at the 48th spot on the medal tally of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics does not really tell the complete story. Some sections of the sporting fraternity were disappointed that India's medal total did not touch double figures, but the fact is that Tokyo 2020 saw a stupendous show by the Indian athletes at the highest level. India bagged 7 medals in total - 1 gold, 2 silver and 4 bronze. This was India's best medal haul ever at the Olympics.

#### Neeraj Chopra - Gold, Javelin (Athletics)

This is what dreams are made of. Having been taken to a sporting field to shed extra weight by his uncle, Neeraj Chopra took up javelin after being asked by another athlete, instead of sitting idle after his gym session at the Panchkula stadium in Panipat. And earlier this year he became the first Indian athlete to win an Olympic gold medal in track and field and only the second after Abhinav Bindra to win an individual Olympic gold.

Neeraj, who has a personal best of 88.07m, clinched the historic gold with a throw of 87.58m at the Tokyo Games on August 7. Neeraj started with a throw of 87.03m and it was in the second attempt that he made history as he hurled the javelin to a massive distance of 87.58m.

Such was his confidence after the throw that Neeraj didn't even look at the javelin and turned around raising his arms in jubilation. No one came close to the mark set by Neeraj, including the likes of Germany's Johannes Vetter and Arshad Nadeem of Pakistan. Neeraj, holder of the current national and world junior records, became the youngest Indian to win an individual Olympic gold at 23 years of age and also the only one to bring home a medal in athletics.

Neeraj is also the reigning Commonwealth Games and Asian Games champion and is currently at Chula Vista, in California preparing for the World Athletics Championships to be held in Eugene (USA) from July 15 to 24.

#### Mirabai Chanu - Silver, 49kg (Weightlifting)

Mirabai Chanu opened India's medal account on the first day of the competition, with a silver medal in the women's 49kg category. Mirabai won the silver behind China's Hou Zhihui in the 49kg category on July 24. Mirabai almost matched Hou Zhihui in the clean and jerk category - she lifted 115kg, while the Chinese managed 116kg. But Mirabai was let down in the snatch where she lifted 87 kg and Hou had a lift of 94 kg - a big difference of 7 kg.

Mirabai lifted a total of 202 kg (87kg in snatch and 115kg in clean and jerk) during her four successful attempts across the competition. With the silver in Tokyo, Mirabai wiped out her disappointing performance at the Rio Games in 2016, where she had failed to register any successful lifts in any of her three attempts in the clean and jerk section. Mirabai is also a former world champion and holds the world record in the clean and jerk event in the 49kg category.

#### Ravi Dahiya - Silver, Men's Freestyle 57kg (Wrestling)

On August 5, Ravi Dahiya became only the second Indian wrestler, after Sushil Kumar, to win an Olympic silver medal, losing to Zaurv Uguev, a two-time world champion. A product of the national capital's Chhatrasal Stadium, Dahiya rose to prominence only when he qualified for the Tokyo Games with a bronze medal winning effort at the 2019 World Championship in Nur Sultan. Dahiya produced a performance of stunning audacity and endurance while trailing 2-9 against opponent Nurislam Sanayev in the semis. Desperate to get out of his iron grip, the Kazakh bit him badly on his forearm but Dahiya wouldn't let go till the tide was turned. Dahiya fought hard but lost in the final against Zaurv Uguev. Dahiya tried every trick to breach the defense of the world champion but the Russian wrestler stayed solid, not allowing the Indian to launch his relentless attacks.

#### PV Sindhu - Bronze, Women's Singles (Badminton)

On August 1, PV Sindhu became the first Indian woman to win two Olympic medals by defeating China's He Bing Jiao in the badminton women's singles third-place play-off to secure a bronze. Sindhu registered a straight-games 21-13, 21-15 win over Bing Jiao to add a bronze to the silver that she had secured at the 2016 Rio Games. Sindhu showed great determination to outplay Bing Jiao as she recovered from her painful semifinal loss against Tai Tzu Ying. Sindhu's hopes of securing India's first-ever gold medal in badminton were dashed when she lost 18-21, 12-21 in the semifinals. Sindhu had lost six of the last nine encounters against Bing Jiao but she raised her game to decimate the challenge of the Chinese shuttler. Sindhu is the only Indian shuttler to claim the season-ending World Tour Finals in 2018 and a year later lay claim to the World Championship title in Basel. This year though, Sindhu couldn't successfully defend her world title, crashing out in the quarter finals after losing in straight games to Tai Tzu Ying.

#### Lovlina Borgohain - Bronze, Women's Welterweight 69kg (Boxing)

On August 4, Lovlina Borgohain became the third Indian boxer after Vijender Singh (2008) and MC Mary Kom (2012) to win a medal at the Olympics. The 23-year-old from Assam signed off with a bronze medal after a 0-5 loss to reigning world champion Busenaz Surmeneli. Lovlina stood up to the strong challenge of her opponent but came undone after Surmeneli got down to connecting her vicious hooks and body shots. In the pre-quarterfinals, Lovlina had beaten Nadine Apetz of Germany. Lovlina defeated former world champion Nien-Chin Chen in the quarterfinals to reach the semifinal and assured herself and the country a medal. Her mother's illness and Covid-19 affected her preparation, but Lovlina kept training hard and even lifted LPG cylinders and worked in paddy fields to keep herself fit.

#### Bajrang Punia - Bronze, Men's Freestyle 65kg (Wrestling)

Bajrang Punia was expected to win the gold medal in Tokyo, but unfortunately he suffered not one but two injuries. Despite that he went on to win the bronze medal on August 7. Bajrang suffered a knee injury in Russia in a tournament and then also pulled his left hamstring. Bajrang outclassed Kazakhstan's Daulet Niyazbekov 8-0 in the 65kg bronze medal bout. Bajrang took the mat for that bout without taping his knee and beat Niyazbekov, to whom he had lost in the semifinals of the 2019 World Championship.

The team doctors had told Bajrang about the risks involved in taking the mat but the star wrestler said he had no option but