Barman hopes focus shifts from feet to feat

JAKARTA, AUG 31 /--/ Swapna Barman's claim to fame before landing in Jakarta was as the athlete with 12 toes but the 21-year-old will return home having forged a new identity after winning India's first Asian Games gold in the heptathlon. The extra width of Barman's feet, each containing six toes, and her struggle to find suitable footwear have often impacted the performance of an athlete who came fifth on her Asian Games debut in Incheon four years ago.

Compounding her problems in Jakarta was a throbbing toothache and Barman, her stocky frame already ravaged by ankle, knee and back injuries over the last year, competed with a taped up jaw at the Gelora Bung Karno Stadium. Her march to victory was completed in a personal best score of 6,026 points and Barman hopes the focus will now shift from her unusual feet to her breakthrough performance. "I hope so," Barman, her jaw still taped, told Reuters in an interview outside the GBK Stadium on Thursday. "After all, nobody from India won a heptathlon gold at the Asian Games before. I hope people will now remember me more for winning the gold than for my toes. It's like a new identity for me." The transformation was not served on a

platter, however, he coach Subhas Sarkar said. "She had to work really hard to come this far," he told Reuters. "She had to overcome massive odds — be it her frame, feet or the spate of injuries. In the end, the hard work paid off." For Barman, the priority now is to heal her body with an eye on the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. "This is the most important thing for me now," she added. "I have had a long battle with injuries and these need to be fixed immediately. There's no real big event next year. I have plenty of time before Tokyo." Once she has rested and recovered, Barman plans to target the Indian national record of 6,211 points, set by JJ Shobha 14 years ago. "I felt I was below par in certain events but still posted my personal best," Barman admitted. "I was once punished for a lane infringement in Doha. That still plays on my mind. That's why I did not go flat out in 200 metres. "I'll go for a new national record. There is room for improvement in all seven events. I can be better, particularly at 200m, shot put, high jump and 800m." Barman's pursuit has kept her away from her family — her father became paralysed in 2013 and her mother used to work at a tea garden — for long periods. "I have not been home for nearly a year. I want to go home. It's been really long."

The Indian women's squash team celebrates after defeating Malaysia in the semifinal on Friday

Chopra misses bronze by a whisker in Diamond League Final

ZURICH, AUG 31 /--/ Newly-crowned Asian Games champion Neeraj Chopra produced yet another impressive performance but missed the bronze medal by a whisker, finishing fourth in the prestigious Diamond League Final here today.

The 20-year-old Indian, who was competing in the season's Diamond League Series Finale just three days after winning Asian Games gold in Jakarta, sent the spear to a best distance of 85.73m to end at fourth position in the eight-man event here last night. Chopra, a Commonwealth Games gold medallist, was at the third position till the fifth and penultimate round but the reigning Olympic champion Thomas Rohler of Germany came up with a 85.76m effort in his last attempt to pip the Indian by a mere 0.03 meter.

The star Indian could not repeat his national record shattering throw of 88.06m in Jakarta but his effort here earned him USD 6000 besides the enormous amount of experience he got by rubbing shoulders with the best in the business. Meanwhile, a third-round monster throw of 91.44m from Germany's Andreas Hofmann earned him his first big international javelin prize as he claimed one of the 16 Diamond Trophies on offer in the first of the Diamond League Finals here. The second Final will be held in Brussels today which will see competition in another 16 sets of events. In the absence of world champion Johannes Vetter (who pulled out of the event), Rohler was the favourite to win the gold here but Hoffman, Germany's 'Third Man' (after Vettel and Roeler), upstaged his more illustrious compatriot to win gold. Roehler had beaten Hofmann to the European title in Berlin earlier this season. Estonia's Magnus Kirt took second place with 87.57m. Chopra had qualified for the Final as sixth best in terms of points. He took part in three Diamond League Series legs. He finished fourth in Doha, sixth in Eugene and fifth in Rabat. He missed the Birmingham leg on August 18 due to the Asian Games. The points were accumulated over the 14-leg Diamond League Series in a season. The top eight finishers in each leg gets prize money. The eight-place finisher gets USD 1000 while the winner pockets USD 10,000. Chopra will compete in the IAAF Continental Cup in Ostrava, Czech Republic from September 8 to 9 as a member of the Asia Pacific team before winding up the international season. Top two athletes from four regions -- Europe, Americas, Africa and Asia-Pacific -- compete in the prestigious Continental Cup and Chopra will pair with Taipei's Cheng Chao-Tsun, who is the only Asian to have 90m-plus throw. Cheng, however, has been struggling this season as he was carrying a minor shoulder injury and he finished fifth in the Asian Games while Chopra won the gold. Mohammed Anas (men's 400m), Jinson Johnson (men's 8800m), Arpinder Singh (men's triple jump), Hima Das (women's 400m), P U Chitra (women's 1500m) and Sudha Singh (women's 3000m steeplechase) are the other Indian taking part in the Continental Cup. (PTI)

Govt approves Kho Kho team's participation in 1st International Championship

NEW DELHI, AUG 31 /--/ The Sports Ministry today approved the participation of a Kho Kho team from India in the first International Kho Kho Championships to be held in England from September 1 to 4.

The approval means the government will extend financial support to the squad. "Financial support for participation of the Kho Kho team in an international event has been approved for the first time in relaxation of extant guidelines of the Ministry, which lay down that sports disciplines like Kho Kho, which are categorised as 'Others', will not be eligible for financial support for participation in international sporting events," Sports Minister Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore said in a statement. The statement said that the decision to provide financial support to the Kho Kho Federation of India for participation in the first International Kho Kho Championship has been taken with a view to give boost to the traditional Indian sport and its players. It also added that the support will pave the way for Kho Kho's future mainstreaming at the international level as well as its possible inclusion in multidisciplinary sporting events like the Asian Games, Commonwealth Games and the Olympics. (PTI)

Federer, Djokovic overcome the heat, move on to next round at U.S. Open

NEW YORK, Aug 31 /--/ Roger Federer says his favorite drinks are cold water and a sparkling glass of champagne. Both could be on tap at the U.S. Open: Federer needed a few swigs of water on another steamy day at the Open and he played like a former champion set to uncork a celebratory bottle of bubbly. ''I don't like warm drinks, let's put it that way,'' Federer said, laughing. Federer's coolness on the court belied another day where players needed cooling towels as much as their rackets. Federer, a five-time U.S. Open champion, had steeled himself for the heat by changing up his routine—he made an early trip to New York to prep his game in the sweltering sun.

''I felt like it's maybe one of these years where it could be hot,'' Federer said Thursday. ''I had the plan to go to Dubai first, where it's extremely hot. I didn't want to be away from the family. I changed plans and said, 'Let's go early to America and prepare over here in the conditions that I'm actually going to see during the Open.' (PTI)

Indian men's team lose to Hong Kong, settle for bronze

JAKARTA, AUG 31 /--/ Defending champions India settled for a bronze medal after losing 0-2 to Hong Kong in the semifinals of the men's squash event at the 18th Asian Games here today. The Indian men's team comprising Saurav

Ghosal, Harinder Pal Singh Sandhu, Ramit Tandon and Mahesh Mangaonkar was no match for Hong Kong, who had won bronze in the last edition at Incheon, South Korea. Earlier, the Indian women's team assured itself of at least a silver after reaching the finals, following a stunning 2-0 win over title-holer Malaysia

Modric pips Ronaldo, Salah to UEFA player of year prize

MONACO, AUG 31 /--/ Real Madrid and Croatia star Luka Modric received the accolade of UEFA Player of the Year in Monaco, beating his former teammate Cristiano Ronaldo and Liverpool's Mohamed Salah to the prize.

"I'm very happy to receive this great prize. I have worked hard for this, to get to the highest point possible," said Modric, who starred in the Real side that won the Champions League for the third year running before also leading Croatia to the World Cup final.

"I can say for sure that this has been the best year of my career, collectively and individually, and I am enjoying the moment," added the 32-year-old, who was announced as the winner of the prize after Thursday's draw in Monaco for this season's Champions League group stage. Modric started out at Dinamo Zagreb and then had four years with Tottenham Hotspur before Real prised him away six years ago. His success here, after he was named the best player at the World Cup, confirms that he should be among the favourites to win the Ballon d'Or, a prize dominated by Ronaldo and Lionel Messi over the last decade. Salah was in attendance at the Grimaldi Forum on Thursday, but Ronaldo, now with Juventus, was not there. "I'm sorry that he couldn't be here. I am sure there is a reason why he couldn't come. I would have liked to see him. Hopefully we will see each other soon somewhere else," said Modric of his old colleague.

Modric has also been linked with a move away from Real this summer, with Inter Milan said to be keen on him, but he claims to be more than happy in the Spanish capital. "As I have always said, I am at the best club in the world, where I want to be. I am not just happy but very happy to be here." Real's achievement in winning yet another Champions League last season was further recognised as Modric also won the UEFA award for the best midfielder of last season. His clubmate Sergio Ramos was named best defender while Real shot-stopper Keylor Navas won the best goalkeeper prize.

Ronaldo, in his absence, was awarded the prize for best striker chosen by Champions League and Europa League coaches from last season and journalists. The award "recognises the best players, irrespective of nationality, playing for a club within the territory of a UEFA member association during the past season." Danish international Pernille Harder, of German club Wolfsburg, won the UEFA women's player of the year prize. Wolfsburg lost to dominant French outfit Lyon in the Champions League final in Kiev in May. There was also an award for David Beckham, the former Manchester United, Madrid and England star collecting the UEFA President's Award for his achievements in the game and his work since retiring as a player. (AFP)

Delhi Dynamos rope in three new players

NEW DELHI, AUG 31 /--/ Indian Super League side Delhi Dynamos FC today added three new players -- Adria Carmona, Pradeep Mohanraj and Gianni Zuiverloon -- to its ranks ahead of the upcoming season. The signing of the Carmona and Zuiverloon completes the side's foreign quota for the new season.

Zuiverloon, a former Dutch U-21 defender, joins from Spanish side Cultural Leonesa, following stints with Feyernoord, Mallorca, ADO Den Haag and West Bromwich Albion. The 31-year-old joins the Indian outfit on the back of a Segunda B Division title with Cultural. Joining Zuiverloon will be forward Carmona. The 26-year-old had previously plied his trade with the likes of AC Milan, Girona, Real Zaragoza and Albacete. The former Spain U-17 international joins from Spanish side Lugo and will bolster the attacking options of the club. Completing the roster will be Indian midfielder Mohanraj. Playing in I-League side Chennai City FC Mohanraj will add more depth to the midfield department of the club.

Semenya, Lyles cruise to Diamond League trophies

ZURICH, AUG 31 /--/ South African Caster Semenya wrapped up another fantastic season by claiming the women's 800m trophy in the Diamond League on Thursday as American sprint hope Noah Lyles took the 200m crown.

"It was just fantastic," said Semenya, who won in 1min 55.27sec, more than 2sec ahead of American Ajee Wilson in second. "It has been a long month of racing for me and I feel it on my body. "I am consistent at this level, but the world record is actually not on my mind," said Semenya, the double Olympic champion (2012, 2016) and three-time world champion (2009, 2011, 2017) who is now unbeaten over the 800m since her elimination in the semi-finals of the 2015 worlds in Beijing. It was a fitting end to the season for the 27-year-old, who did a Commonwealth double in the Gold Coast early in the season but then came under the spotlight off the track as she turned to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in her challenge of IAAF rules on testosterone levels in female athletes to be introduced in November. Under the new regulations, "hyperandrogynous", athletes like Semenya would have to chemically lower their testosterone levels to be able to compete, something the 800m runner says is discriminatory and in violation of the IAAF's constitution and the Olympic Charter. Lyles was one of the headline acts in Zurich and the 21-year-old made no mistake as he won the 200m in 19.67sec, just two-hundredths off his personal best set in Monaco last month. It was Lyles' fifth win on the Diamond League circuit this season, with Turkey's world and European champion Ramil Guliyev coming in second in 19.98sec. "I came here for the win and I did it, I'm very happy," said Lyles. The women's blue riband event saw Britain's newly-crowned European champion Dina Asher-Smith, who struck triple gold in Berlin after also winning the 200m and taking the 4x100m relay with her British team, clocked 11.08sec to take second in the 100m. Nigerian Blessing Okagbare-Ighoteguonor having false started, Asher-Smith finished behind Murielle Ahoure in 11.01sec with another Ivorian, Marie-Josee Ta Lou, in third.

"Before the African championships I had to pull out and I was so disappointed to miss out on them," said Ahoure. "I wasn't sure about my shape then. I wanted to do at least one more race and I'm so happy to come here and to win it." In the field, New Zealand's Tom Walsh wrapped up his shot put trophy with a meetig and Diamond League record of 22.60m. And Greece's double defending title holder Ekaterina Stefanidi continued the for m that saw her clinch European gold for a third successive title. Stefanidi, with the world, Olympic and European titles to her name, cleared a best of 4.87m to nudge out American Sandi Morris, who holds the season's best. Disappointingly, Norwegian teenager Jakob Ingebrigtsen was a late withdrawal because of sickness, having himself only been named in the field as a late replacement. Aged just 17, he took gold in both the men's 1500m and 5000m at the Berlin Euros, but in his absence in Zurich, Kenyan Timothy Cheruiyot timed 3:30.27 to beat out compatriot and current world champion Elijah Manangoi to defend his Diamond League trophy. China's Lijao Gong having won the women's shot put a day before the main action in Brussels, 15 Diamond League disciplines remain to be decided at a sell-out King Baudouin II stadium on Friday. (AFP)

Laliga Football Schools come to India

■ *Young footballers to train under LaLiga*

EOI CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA, AUG 31/--/Spain's top division football league, LaLiga has launched a comprehensive grass-roots football development programme in India, LaLiga Football Schools, in partnership with India On Track (IOT). The historic move aims at developing the beautiful game at grassroots level in India, as the game is growing rapidly in the country. The LaLiga Football Schools are going to be set up pan-India, including major centres like Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Bengaluru and Cochin, among others. The rigorous training programme at LaLiga Football Schools will be delivered using LaLiga's technical curriculum and detailed methodology and will be overseen by the programme technical director appointed by LaLiga for India. It will be a holistic, comprehensive football development programme, with a focus on students within the age range of 6 to 18 years. With India being one of the priority markets for LaLiga, this initiative is part of the several that have been undertaken to bring LaLiga closer to the passionate fan base here and inspire a change in the football environment. This announcement comes just days after LaLiga announced a three-year broadcast partnership with Facebook for the Indian subcontinent. The social media giant will show all 380 matches live and free, it will mean over 270 million people in India will have access to watch LaLiga each and every week. Select LaLiga matches will also be telecast on the sports channels of one of the India's largest broadcasters, Sony Pictures Networks India giving the Indian football fan the most comprehensive viewing experience. Jose Cachaza, Head of LaLiga India said, "LaLiga is a strong propagator of developing young football talent. Seeing the kind of talent and passion Indians have for the beautiful game, we decided to collaborate with IOT and create a base to nurture the talent here. We are excited to see young boys and girls from India train with our best coaches and facilities and learn to play the LaLiga way." Vivek Sethia, Founder, India On Track (IOT) said, "The future of any sport lies in the development of its grassroots. India On Track has always partnered with top sporting entities to provide the talented youth of India with the best possible training opportunities. Our partnership with LaLiga bears testament to that and LaLiga Football Schools is a continuation in that direction."

Liverpool face PSG in Champions League group stage, Juventus draw Manchester United

MONACO, AUG 31 /--/ Last year's beaten finalists Liverpool were paired with Neymar's Paris Saint-Germain in Thursday's draw for the group stage of the Champions League. The Premier League leaders also face last year's Serie A runners-up Napoli and former European champions Red Star Belgrade. English champions Manchester City were placed in Group F with Shakhtar Donetsk, Lyon and Hoffenheim. Tottenham, who last year topped a group containing reigning and eventual champions Real Madrid, will face three former European champions-Barcelona, PSV Eindhoven and Inter Milan. Thursday's Champions League group draw in Monaco turned up a plum when Cristiano Ronaldo's new team Juventus were drawn to face Manchester United, the team he first tasted glory with, in 2008 final. Ronaldo joined Juve this summer from holders Real Madrid, whom he helped to beat Liverpool to win the competition for the third year in a row in May. Real were drawn against AS Roma, CSKA Moscow and Viktoria Plzen while Liverpool must take on Paris Saint Germain in their group as well as Napoli and Red Star Belgrade. Valencia and Young Boss of Switzerland complete the Manchester United and Juventus pool.

THE COMPLETE DRAW

■ GROUP A
Atletico Madrid, Borussia Dortmund, Monaco, Club Bruges

■ Group B
Barcelona, Tottenham, PSV Eindhoven, Inter

■ Group C
Paris Saint-Germain, Napoli, Liverpool, Red Star Belgrade

■ Group D
Lokomotiv Moscow, Porto, Schalke, Galatasaray

■ Group E
Bayern Munich, Benfica, Ajax, AEK Athens

■ Group F
Manchester City, Shakhtar Donetsk, Lyon, Hoffenheim

■ Group G
Real Madrid, Roma, CSKA Moscow, Viktoria Plzen

■ Group H
Juventus, Manchester United, Valencia, Young Boys

The first round of group stage matches will start on Tuesday, September 18.

The final will be played on June 1 at Atletico Madrid's home, the Wanda Metropolitano in Madrid.