

# Young and old shine bright in India's eventful CWG campaign

**GOLD COAST, APR 15 /-** / The exuberance of youth, the endurance of experience and a bit of usual drama that is signature of Indian sports - the country's Commonwealth Games campaign was all this and much more with a medal count that turned out to be the third best ever. From the teen shooting trio of Manu Bhaker, Mehuli Ghosh and Anish Bhanwala, the historic table tennis performance by Manika Batra to the arrival of a very confident Neeraj Chopra on the big stage, India had its next crop of stars ready to challenge the world. The redoubtable Saina Nehwal provided the final day golden touch with her women's singles gold, much like the 2010 Games where her top finish was a shade more significant for it took the overall tally to 100. With 26 gold, 29 silver and as many bronze medals, India signed off third on the table - a promotion of two positions from Glasgow and it was a combination of youth and experience which delivered the results. At the 20 Games in New Delhi, India won 101 medals, including 38 gold while at 2002 Manchester Games India had managed a total of 69 medals of which 30 were gold. The likes of MC Mary Kom, Seema Punia and Sushil Kumar showed that experience can never be discounted either, turning back the clock to deliver performances which were nothing short of awe-inspiring. While the shooters, weightlifters, wrestlers and the boxers were expected to bring home the maximum share of medal, there was a significant new addition to that in table tennis. After just one bronze in the 2014 edition, there were significant concerns about how the performance might shape up this

## CWG MEDALS TALLY 2018

| POS | COUNTRY      | Gold | Silver | Bronze | TOTAL |
|-----|--------------|------|--------|--------|-------|
| 1   | Australia    | 79   | 59     | 60     | 198   |
| 2   | England      | 45   | 45     | 46     | 136   |
| 3   | India        | 26   | 20     | 20     | 66    |
| 4   | Canada       | 15   | 40     | 27     | 82    |
| 5   | New Zealand  | 15   | 16     | 15     | 46    |
| 6   | South Africa | 13   | 11     | 13     | 37    |
| 7   | Wales        | 10   | 12     | 14     | 36    |
| 8   | Scotland     | 9    | 13     | 22     | 44    |
| 9   | Nigeria      | 9    | 9      | 6      | 24    |
| 10  | Cyprus       | 8    | 1      | 5      | 14    |

time. But Manika was determined to ensure that things turn out differently. The 22-year-old, who dropped out of college to focus on her game, justified what many would call a massive risk. It was by far the best individual performance by an Indian athlete as she ensnared a historic individual gold, a team gold, a women's doubles silver and a mixed doubles bronze. On the other end of the spectrum were Mary Kom and Sushil. Without a shadow of doubt among the greatest athletes of their respective sports but faced with questions about their future quite often now, the duo decided to show what it means to turn the clock back. So, both a 35-year-old Sushil and a 34-year-old Mary Kom gave performances to remember, quite literally schooling their younger opponents just how turn on the style without

compromising on the substance. The sheer diversity of medal winners was a heartwarming aspect of the Games for India. There were medals from squash, although not gold, there were nine medals from boxing, 12 from wrestling, 16 from shooting and nine from weightlifting. In fact, it was the weightlifters who set the ball rolling with their best ever performance - the highlight of which was the absence of any doping suspicion. Records tumbled as the likes of Mirabai Chenu, Sanjita Chenu and Sathish Sivalingham remained heads and shoulders above their competitors. Shooters were not to be left behind and almost every day, a gold tumbled out of the Belmont Shooting Centre in Brisbane. The only blip was the seasoned Gagan Narang going empty-handed from the event but the mantle was

passed on to the likes of Manu, Anish and Mehuli - the teen trio that lived up to the pre-event hype. With shooting not a part of the 2022 Birmingham CWG, India would be at a massive loss on the medal count and the performance this time is likely to be cherished for a long time to come. At the badminton courts, it was mostly about Saina and PV Sindhu but Kidambi Srikanth continued to create a space of his own, taking down the legendary Lee Chong Wei during the gold-winning team competition. In the Saina vs Sindhu battle, the former came out trumps, displaying a very special kind of aggression in the final. The boxing arena at the Oxford Studios was witness to a historic Indian performance in which all eight men in fray won medals - two gold, three silver and three bronze, while

Mary Kom continued to be the top performing woman with her gold. And there was lots to celebrate in track and field too with Neeraj's season's best 86.47m show for gold being the biggest takeaway. The 20-year-old showed he is one for the future with a performance that had brilliance written all over it. Seema Punia delivered a silver, her second successive, in discus throw; a remarkable achievement for the 34-year-old, whose doping past continues to cast a shadow on her present. But there were disappointments too, the biggest being the two hockey teams. The women managed to improve to fourth this time from fifth of the past two years but the men's silver-medalists in 2010 and 2014 embarrassed themselves with a new crop of athletes. Manpreet Singh's team lacked finesse and re-

solve, the lowest point of its campaign being a 2-2 draw with a Pakistan in shambles. The gymnasts, cyclists and swimmers were not really expected to throw up surprises and they didn't either, fading into oblivion without much of a fight. Outside the competition arena, India battled a couple of embarrassing controversies. Two athletes - race walker KT Irfan and triple jumper V Rakesh Babu - were sent back for failing to explain the presence of needles in their room. Before that, the doctor of the boxing team earned a reprimand for not disposing the needle properly after use, having fulfilled the declaration norms of the no needle policy. Away from the furore, however, India could certainly be glad about emergence of a new crop of athletes ready to conquer the world.



Athletes of India attend the closing ceremony —REUTERS

CWG gold is right next to my Olympic bronze: Saina

**GOLD COAST, APR 15 /-** / An exhausted mind, a bruised body and an unsavoury controversy - Saina Nehwal had to contend with quite a bit ahead of and during the Commonwealth Games. Little wonder then that the Indian shuttler placed her singles gold in the event right up there with the trail-blazing Olympic bronze in 2012. "I really treat it as next to my Olympic medal and my world No. 1 ranking. So I would keep it somewhere there. It's a gift to my father and my mother, my country. It's a very emotional moment for me after the disappointing loss in Rio due to injury," second seed Saina said after a straight-game but draining victory over top seed and compatriot P V Sindhu in the final in Gold Coast. Saina played all the matches in the mixed team championship before competing in the individual event. Asked how her legs were holding up after continuous competition, Saina quipped: "They are dead."

Saina had a 3-1 head-to-head lead over Sindhu going into Sunday's match and she ensured that the gap widened with a vintage performance. "It was a neck to neck game for me, it was even tougher because I have been playing for the last 10-12 days. She is tall, she has longer legs and covers the court better than me. I have to reach here and there," Saina said of her rival and teammate. "I lost five kgs in the last few months, that helps you move faster," she added. It was a perfect end to what was an imperfect start when her accident-prone father did not gain access to the Games village. She threatened to pull out if he wasn't accompanied, which he eventually was, but she drew criticism for her stand. Then there were the niggles, which were aggravated during the team competition. (PTI)

## Aggressive Saina clinches women's singles gold in CWG



Gold medalist Saina Nehwal of India, silver medalist Venkata Puserla of India and bronze medalist Kirsty Gilmour pose with their medals and Boboli plush dolls —REUTERS

**GOLD COAST, APR 15 /-** / Saina Nehwal's aggression and intensity quite literally wilted P V Sindhu as she picked up the women's singles Commonwealth Games gold medal with exhilarating triumph in the all-India final in Gold Coast on Sunday. Saina, who led the head-to-head count 3-1 before Sunday's match, won 21-18 23-21 in the high-pressure match that lasted an hour. The triumph marked a remarkable end to her CWG campaign this edition. She was the pillar of India's gold-winning campaign in the team championships earlier, playing every one of the singles matches due to Sindhu's injury. In a match that started on equal footing, Saina managed to dominate, bringing a rarely seen aggression to the court. The brute force of Sindhu's smashes was something that Saina found hard to deal with. On the other hand, Saina found it tough to adjust to the delicate placement of strokes of Saina, who took the pace off the shuttle by attacking the net. The strategy worked quite well for the London Olympics bronze medalist and she raced to an 9-4 lead. As the gap widened, Saina's command on the baseline also improved. The two contrasting styles of the two shuttlers made for an exhilarating contest. What also stood out was Saina's sharper instincts to leave the returns that landed out. Sindhu struggled to control the power she put on her shots, losing at least four points for pushing the shuttle outside and trailed 6-11 at the lemon break. Sindhu came back strongly after the break and narrowed the gap a bit but the drift factor affected her strokeplay way more than Saina, who also seemed the more pumped up of the two, grunting quite a bit after every point won.

Saina's court coverage was also the more impressive of the two. A telling image of the opening game was when Sindhu was brought to her knees trying to return a smash that didn't really have any power in it but was just placed perfectly on the left corner. Sindhu found her bearings after Saina had taken a 20-14 lead and closed it 18-20 but Saina brought her own brute force to fore with a smash targeting Sindhu's body which was simply unreturnable. Saina claimed the opening game 21-18 in 23 minutes. The second game followed a similar tangent and despite having the more tired set of legs, Saina was a delight with her trademark angled smashes. But to Sindhu's credit, she too exhibited a better command on her smashes and improved considerably court-coverage to take a 9-7 lead, which she widened to 13-8 after the break. For the full hour, mostly packed with the diaspora, it was a brilliant Sunday outing as the top two women of Indian badminton slugged it out, displaying an array of strokes. Sindhu led 19-16 at one stage but a 64-stroke rally to narrow it to 19-18 brought Saina right back and she equalised at 19-19. However, Sindhu edged ahead to a 20-19 lead and a game point. The see-saw battle continued when Sindhu hit one out to give Saina the equalising point yet again. This time, it was Saina who got the championship point when Sindhu struck a return out. The lady, who looked the hungrier of the two all through, was surprisingly late in picking one up as Sindhu made it 21-21. But Saina was back in lead with a cross-court smash that Sindhu just could not reach. Serving for the gold, Saina forced a wide stroke from Sindhu and then let out a scream to celebrate the triumph. (PTI)

## IPL 2018: Rajasthan beat Bangalore by 19 runs

**BANGALORE, APR 15 /-** / Rajasthan Royals rode on a magnificent Sanju Samson innings to post a mammoth 217/4 in the 20 overs against Royal Challengers Bangalore at M Chinnaswamy Stadium on Sunday. Virat Kohli, winning the toss, put Rajasthan into bat. Ajinkya Rahane and D Arvy Short started steadily and upheld the ante as they hit boundaries comfortably. However, Chris Woakes provided the breakthrough and sent a dangerous looking

Rahane back in the hut for 37. After Rahane's departure, Short followed suit and returned back to the dressing room. Sanju Samson and Ben Stokes, the two new batsmen at the crease, steadied the innings and scored occasional boundaries to keep the score board ticking. Samson took it on himself and changed gears soon as he sent the RCB bowlers on a leather hunt in the last few overs leaving Virat Kohli unimpressed. Samson's 92 off 45 balls included 10 sixes and

four boundaries, leaving the opposition bowling department in tatters. For Bangalore, Yuzvendra Chahal finished with the figures of 2/22 and on the other hand, Umesh Yadav leaked 59 runs in his four overs. RCB will have to go deep and find their form in order to overhaul a record-chase. However, on the other hand, Rajasthan Royals bowlers will try their hard and stop the RCB top four - Brendon McCullum, Quinton de Kock, Virat Kohli and AB de Villiers - from going full-throttle.



Rajasthan Royals celebrate a wicket