



**ATHLETICS
FEDERATION OF INDIA**

AFI Newsletter



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LORD COE lauds AFI-SAAF initiative for women technical officials

Athletics Federation of India and the South Asian Athletics Federation took up the task of hosting a five-day online seminar for women technical officials in the region. The seminar had more than 900 registrations making it the largest online seminar with focus on women in track and field sport. World Athletics President Lord Sebastian Coe said he was delighted with this effort and called it a groundbreaking seminar.

"A large part of our roadmap is to create better partnerships with the people in our sport, including technical officials, volunteers, parents, athletes and stakeholders. The importance of making sure that while we are encouraging technical officials, we are also encouraging women to take up that role and make a massive contribution. This is a powerful step in the right direction," he said.

Lord Coe said nothing was more important than the key element in World Athletics reforms that recognizes the importance of having women in all our governance structures. "We have led the way in the work that we have been undertaking in the World Athletics Council and our Area Associations," he said.

Lord Coe complimented SAAF President Dr. Lalit K Bhanot and AFI President Adille J Sumariwalla for being leaders in technical education of officials in World Athletics, particularly in the times of COVID-19.

"It has taken extraordinary efforts to remain connected and remain collaborative. I would like to compliment AFI and SAAF for being so imaginative in the way we have all been kept together," he said.



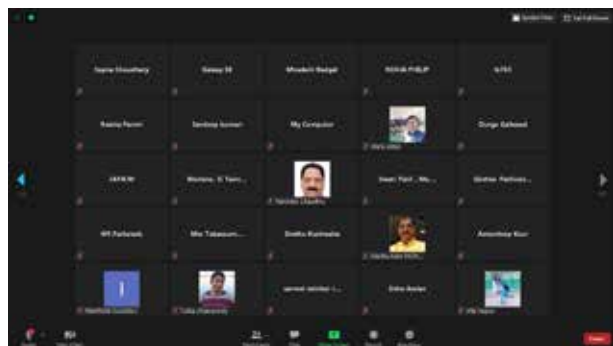
"Your footprint is going way beyond the region, with officials from Oceania and Europe also joining with the Asian family. This is a unique effort and I applaud this."



AFI President Adille Sumariwalla said it was the World Athletics President Lord Coe's vision to have women play an equal role in the conduct of the sport. "I am glad that we are leaders in this direction, empowering the women technical



officials in the region to upgrade the knowledge that can and enhance their participation in the conduct of competitions at various levels," he said.



SAFF President Dr. Bhanot said the content of the seminar would surely help the women technical officials enhance their knowledge. "This seminar becomes important for us to be ready to meet the vision of World Athletics President Lord Coe in ensuring that there would equal participation by women technical officials in the conduct of competitions," he said.

Athletes have done well to cope with lockdown: Radhakrishnan Nair



Athletics Federation of India Deputy Chief Coach Radhakrishnan Nair is relieved that the elite athletes have emerged from lockdown in better physical and mental shape than most would have expected.

Radhakrishnan Nair pointed out that the break caused physiological and psychological problems for the athletes. "If there is no target or competition to look forward to, it is hard to achieve focus. They are having a different emotional situation and wanted to be home for a month or month and a half. We convinced them to face the difficulties of not being home," he says.

The athletes were made to understand why it was a very good decision to keep them in the camp itself. "Atleast they would be able to do some training at camp. They would not have been able to do any sports activity in their home States where most stadia were quarantine centres. And if they had gone home, they would have had to undergo a COVID-19 test and be in quarantine before being allowed to resume sports activities," he said.

"The AFI President and Dr. Bhanot have held three video conferencing sessions with the athletes and coaches and that helped, too," he says.

"We were uncertain of what shape the athletes would be in when they returned to sports activities in the national camp. The early indications are that the athletes have done well," he said.

"It is the efforts of AFI with SAI to bring the athletes out of lockdown and put them back in sports activities. We were pushing AFI for this from the first week of April. We realized that it was important for the athletes to continue training because of the workload that they had been given just before lockdown was imposed since they were preparing for competition," he says.

The coaching staff has been mindful of easing the national campers into some basic movement as they have returned from nearly two months of no sporting activity as a result of the nation-wide lockdown to curb the spread of COVID-19 in the country.

"We started with only basic activities for the athletes on May 26, focusing on movement over two hours a day for each of them while maintaining social distancing," said Coach Radhakrishnan, the only Indian to complete in International Olympic Committee's International Coaching Enrichment Certificate Programme.

"It helped that they were doing some fitness work, including core strength training and flexibility, in their hostel rooms. We did not want any of them injured when they returned," he says.

"We are following all the Standard Operating Procedures laid down by the Sports Authority of India and AFI," he said.

"The high security in the NIS campus here and in the SAI campus in Bengaluru will help reduce the risk. The athletes' area is highly secure and no contact with an outsider."

The Deputy Chief Coach believes that it appears as if the coaches can increase the duration of the athletes' sports activities to two hours twice a day for each athlete, with social distancing and other guidelines laid down in the SOPs. "The athletes are comfortable. None of them is injured or has let the lockdown have an adverse psychological impact," he says.

Radhakrishnan Nair reiterates that the coaching and support staff are greatly aware of the responsibility in getting the athletes back in competitive shape without exposing them to the risk of injuries. "It is up to the coaches to motivate the athletes to be fit and keep their minds occupied, though the COVID-19 situation is so unpredictable and uncertain now," he says. "Yet, it is our responsibility to keep their morale positive and high," he says.

Feels good to return to track: Anas



Mohammed Anas, India's best 400m runner, leads the bunch of national campers who are relieved and feel good that they can resume training after being confined indoors in the Nejtaji Subhash National Institute of Sports in Patiala during the nation-wide Lockdown imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19.

"It feels good. Yes, to be on running on track feels good. Training indoors is totally different. It's great we are able to ease into our training routines now," he says, admitting that it was tough initially to remain indoors. "In the early stages, it was tough, but we got used to it. I would do some core and strength exercise each day to maintain my fitness."

Anas says the Lockdown and the consequent inability to train outdoors for more than two months was a different experience to anything he had faced before. "Yet, we could have one training session within the space. Besides, some meditation and yoga helped the mind stay positive during the tough phase," he says.

He expressed confidence that national campers could train in the pristine location in Patiala without fear of being infected. "As all of our athletes were locked down over the last two months and because no one is allowed to enter the campus from outside for training, I believe it would be safe and I don't think we need to fear being infected," he says.

Anas says it is natural that like all other athletes, he would shift his attention to preparing for events like Olympic Games and Asian Athletics Championships in 2021 and the World Athletics Championships in 2021. He aced the philosophy that espouses focus on what can be controlled rather than lament about the postponement of the Olympic Games by a year.

One of the factors that has kept him and his team-mates on the 4x400m relay squad is the wonderful camaraderie which they share with one another. "They all are friendly, and we all are united, no matter what situation we face. We are encouraging and motivating one another," he says, indicating that they fell back on one another to stay cheerful and positive.

He is delighted that Arokia Rajiv and Ayyasamy Dharun have shaped up well on return to the national camp after spending time away because of injury. "They were on rehab but as professional athletes, they maintained some fitness. They returned to the camp in good shape. So, they were good when they trained with us," he said.



Enthusiasm & energy are high on return to training outdoors: Annu Rani

Javelin thrower Annu Rani, the top-ranked Indian woman athlete in the National Camp at the Netaji National Institute of Sports, Patiala, says that returning to the sport after two months in Lockdown is a new experience alright, but believes that the enthusiasm and energy are on the higher side now than when she first took up throwing the spear competitively.



"Of course, 64m is on my mind as it is the qualifying standard for the Olympic Games. But my coaches and I believe that I can develop into a 70m thrower. I have to improve my technique and eliminate the faults so that I can use my power to throw the javelin farther," says the Meerut-born athlete. "But that will have to come later. The challenge will be to avoid injury when coming back.

"We had to contend with boredom during lockdown as we are used to training continuously. And I am now happy to be training outdoors. I have not yet started throwing as I'm doing some basic work and will resume the javelin only in a while," says the World No. 12 from her training base in Patiala. "I saw the inactivity during lockdown as a temporary phase and I understood the need to be patient and kept doing my fitness. Of course, there were some negative thoughts. But I kept the mind occupied on analysing my technique and identifying areas of improvement," says Annu Rani, who secured an eighth-place finish in the IAAF World Championships in Doha last year.

"Yes, we now have to follow social distancing when we train outdoors for two to three hours a day. We are developing new habits and rediscovering saying Namaste to one another rather than hi or hello. "The coaches are managing my workload and I know it will be gradually built up over a period of time," she says.

Lockdown also helped her identify some good things that she adopted after a lackluster effort in the Asian Games in Jakarta where she was unable to breach 54m for the first time in three years. "I had worked very hard, but I was unable to replicate my throws from practice during competition. The mind was stressed over a securing medal," she says, marking it as a turning point. "I learnt a lot from the Asian Games failure. You can either sink in depression or emerge stronger for the experience. I realize that ups and downs are part of everyone's life.

"I have learnt from others not to give up as difficulties are not exclusive to any one athlete. I learnt to aim higher," she says, acknowledging the support of her father Amarpal Singh and her brother, Upendra Singh.

"Many said that I was finished but my father and brother encouraged me to continue throwing the javelin. My consistency since 2018 has been the result of sharp focus and smart training. I have also learned to take no pressure and give my 100 per cent. The results are bound to follow," Annu Rani says.

There was reward in the IAAF World Championships in Doha where she nailed the National record with a 62.43m effort in qualifying. "I believe everyone else looks at us as Indians does not recognise us by our names I was delighted that many Indians came up to support me. The sight of the flag in the stands was very motivating and I wanted to make India proud," she says.

"I did not have the experience of throwing in qualification and final on different days. On the day of the final, held two days after qualifying, "I was very motivated and went in believing that I could get a medal. Perhaps, I was too anxious and too aggressive I should have been more relaxed," says the javelin thrower who will turn 28 on National Sports Day this year.

AFI nominates deserving Neeraj Chopra for Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna award



Athletics Federation of India has nominated Commonwealth Games and Asian Games gold medal winning javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra for the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award.

Having captured the attention of athletics fans around the world when he won the crown in the World Junior Athletics Championships in 2016, he has been India's leading athlete since.

"We are sure that Neeraj will get the nod this time around after he missed out on being picked for the award when weightlifter Mirabai Chanu edged him out in 2018 and wrestler Bajrang Punia was chosen ahead of him last year," AFI President Adille J Sumariwalla said. "The immensely popular athlete deserves the award for his performances ahead of the 2021 Olympics and it will motivate him to do even better."

For the Arjuna Award, the AFI panel chaired by Anju Bobby George nominated 2018 Asian Games gold medallists, triple jumper Arpinder Singh and middle-distance specialist Manjit Singh as well as sprinter Dutee Chand, who won two Asian Games silver medals, and middle-distance runner PU Chitra who won gold medals in successive Asian Athletics Championships in 2017 and 2019 besides an Asian Games bronze.

"We believe that Awards selection committee will consider the fact that track and field sport is among the most intensely competed event in the continent. It is also important to remember that at the Asian Games in Jakarta in 2018, Athletics accounted for 20 of 70 medals, including half of 16 gold, won by Indian sportspersons," Mr. Sumariwalla said.

Deputy Chief Coach Radhakrishnan Nair, the only Indian to complete International Coaching Enrichment Certificate Programme by the International Olympic Committee with honors, has been nominated for the prestigious Dronacharya Award. "Radhakrishnan has selflessly hand-held many athletes and coaches over the past few years," he said.

Kuldip Singh Bhullar, who won the discus throw silver medal in the 1982 Asian Games here, and sprinter Jincy Phillip, who was part of the gold medal winning 4x400m relay team in the 2000 Asian Games in Busan, have been nominated for the Dhyani Chand Award, given for lifetime achievement to those who missed out on the Arjuna Award during their sports career.

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