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S R I L A N K A O L Y M P I C W E E K L Y N E W S B U L L E T I N



GUNARATNE AND WIJESEKERA RIDE THE WAVES - LANKANS ON TOP

Sri Lanka has made history in the world of rowing, with two young rowers securing gold and bronze medals at the Asian Rowing Beach Sprint Championships 2023. The event was not only a showcase of rowing talent and skill, but it also marked a significant milestone for Sri Lankan rowing for this was the very first time in history, Sri Lanka participated in the Asian Rowing Coastal Beach Sprint Championship,

organized by the Asian Rowing Federation and hosted by the Rowing and Canoeing Association of Thailand. This was a momentous occasion for the Sri Lankan team, as they competed alongside some of the best rowers in Asia. The picturesque beaches of Pattaya played host to the Asian Rowing Beach Sprint Championships, a qualifying event for the World Beach Games 2023, from April 28-30 2023.

Twelve nations including Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, South Korea, United Arab Emirates, Japan, Malaysia, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Thailand sent their best rowers to compete for glory. The three-day event featured 68 teams and 114 athletes competing in 10 events, all hoping to qualify for the World Beach Games 2023 to be held in Bali, Indonesia.

From page 01

The competition was fierce, and the participants displayed impressive skill and determination in their respective events.

The event was not only a matter of pride for Sri Lanka, but it also served as a qualifier for the World Rowing Beach Sprint of the World Beach Games 2023. The World Beach Games will be held from August 5 to 12 in Bali, Indonesia, and the top-performing teams from the Asian Rowing Beach Sprint Championships will qualify for the event.

The Sri Lankan rowers were well aware of the importance of the event, and they put in a lot of effort and hard work to prepare for it. They were determined to make their mark and show the world what they were capable of.

The efforts paid off as Sri Lanka won their first ever gold in the men's single scull event.

16-year-old Shaylon Gunaratne, delivered a stunning performance to secure the top spot on the podium in the men's single skulls event (CJM1x), beating out six other competitors from Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Malaysia, the UAE, and Hong Kong. His gold medal-winning performance marks a momentous occasion for Sri Lankan rowing.

Gunaratne then went on to partner with his schoolmate, Rovinya Wijesekara, 17, in the mixed skulls category, where the duo displayed excellent teamwork and coordination, securing the third spot on the podium, defeating teams from Thailand, Indonesia, Hong Kong, and Malaysia. Wijesekara also competed in the CJW1x, the women's single skulls event, finishing fourth out of five competitors.

It was a significant achievement for the Sri Lankan team, as the previous medal won at an Asian level was a bronze medal in the women's quad at the Asia Cup meet in 2019.

The Sri Lankan rowers' excellent performance in Pattaya has undoubtedly given them a massive confidence boost ahead of the World Beach Games in Bali later this year.

The President of the Amateur Rowing Association of Sri Lanka Dimuth Gunawardena said; "For the first time, Sri Lanka National Anthem was played in the arena. This is the future; this is why we send youngsters to the international stage and this is how we can take the country forward."

The Sri Lankan team's performance at the Asian Rowing Beach Sprint Championships was a testament to their hard work and dedication. The Lankan rowing duo's impressive performances have put Sri Lanka on the map in the world of rowing, and their success is sure to inspire future generations of rowers in the country. We hope to see more Sri Lankan rowers participating in international events and making their mark on the world stage.



SPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE PERSPECTIVE OF GLOBAL SOUTH YOUNG SPORTS LEADERS



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SPORTS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE WEBINAR
APRIL 6, 2023



The speakers L-R: Nashon, Sarah, Lawrence, Taymaa, Umair, Deandra, and Gobinath

Kafka Welfare Organisation in partnership with the Dream Together Masters Alumni hosted the 4th edition of the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace webinar on the 6th of April. The webinar coincided with the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace marked globally every year.

The webinar was moderated by Gobinath Sivarajah, Marketing and Media Manager of the National Olympic Committee in Sri Lanka & included;

- Sarah Moamen Abdelsamie, an IOC Young Leader and former professional volleyball player from Egypt,
- Deandra Farnita, a Sport for Development Practitioner and Researcher, currently working as a class supervisor in Norway, from Indonesia,
- Taymaa Qatamesh, a former national team football player, a football coach cum manager assistant from Palestine,

- Nashon Owano, a Sports Journalist, and Content Creator from Kenya, and
- Pakistani Umair Rana, Founder of Kafka Welfare Organisation and reading PhD in University of Quebec in Montreal, Canada.

The key theme highlighted by the panelists included how sports contribute to SDGs and the challenges faced by sports for development and peace campaigns in developing countries.

They also highlighted the role of sports in social development and its contribution to women's empowerment, gender equality, and community building in the Global South.

With stakeholders playing a crucial role in the growth of sports, the discussion centred on how more stakeholders should be involved in capacity-built sports initiatives in developing countries.

The session started with the IOC Young Leader and former professional volleyball player Sarah Moamen Abdelsamie highlighting some of the sports initiatives she has worked on in Egypt that target refugees and students to help them deal with mental health.

“The initiative combines physical health, mental health, and family network by helping them deal with family insecurities to help address the sustainable development goals.”

Speaking during the session Umair Asif, Founder of Kafka Welfare Organization underscored the role that sports play in promoting values and acting as a tool for creating an inclusive society.

“As young leaders from the Global South, we understand that sports have the power to transcend boundaries and bring people together.”

From page 03

“Through sports, we can promote values such as teamwork, respect, and fair play, which are essential for building peaceful and inclusive societies. Let us harness the power of sports to drive positive change and create a brighter future for all.”

On his part, Lawrence Tapiwa Kamukapa a sports administrator and co-founder of the Academy of Hope pointed out the role that sports play in empowering and building stronger communities.

“Sports can play a vital role in fostering development and peace by promoting inclusivity, building bridges across communities, and empowering individuals and groups to overcome social, cultural, and political differences through healthy competition and cooperation.”

In underscoring the role of stakeholders in the development Mohammad Amer said that stakeholders are an important part of the sports development agenda.

“Collaboration between stakeholders is crucial to ensure sustainable development through sport, and SDP programs must be designed with a focus on the specific needs of communities they serve to ensure effectiveness to empower young people to become agents of change and create a more peaceful and equitable world,” the moderator of the day emphasized more on the need for sustainability of sports initiatives and programmes.

“The sustainability of the SDP programs is very important to inculcate the values and create positive vibes among the vulnerable groups through a continuous process.

“Therefore, the implementors should play their roles seriously by developing strategic plans to conduct the programs for the long run,” Taymaa Qatamesh a former national team football player, reiterated the need for SDP programs to address social and health issues that touch on more people in society.

“There is a need to incorporate more pertinent issues that affect the community in SDP programs so that the youth can feel more engaged an important aspect that could provide sustainability for such programmes.”

While acknowledging the need to practice community involvement in setting up Sports initiatives Deandra Fanita a Sport for Development Practitioner and Researcher, reiterated the role of involving the community in setting up and running sports initiatives.

“ The sustainability of the SDP programs is very important to inculcate the values and create positive vibes among the vulnerable groups through a continuous process ”

“Sports academies should have community dialogues and involvement where they exist because they are the key component of the society that could define the success of the initiatives by making the locals feel involved in SDP programs in the community.”

In addressing the role that the media plays in enhancing the image of SDP programs Nashon Owano a Sports Journalist, and Content Creator from Kenya pointed out that the media could either guarantee the success of SDP programs or their failure.

“The media has a big role in the success and failure of SDP programs when the initiatives are portrayed in good light this could encourage more people to join sports. When the programs are painted in a bad light this could attract more stakeholders.”

Focus now shifts to the fifth annual event by the DTMA to commemorate the International Day of Sport Development and Peace will be on April 6, 2024.

The complete webinar discussion is available at <https://www.facebook.com/Kafkawo/videos/601451108304329/>



ALLANA SLATER AT SYDNEY 2000: SPOTTING THE TWO-INCH ERROR THAT THREW AN OLYMPIC FINAL INTO CHAOS



Slater won three Commonwealth gold medals including the vault title at Manchester 2002

Under the lights and amid the sparkling sequins, Allana Slater's words hung in the air. Slater turned and looked at her rivals. No-one answered her question.

"I thought that maybe they don't speak English, maybe they don't understand me or maybe they are so focused on what they are doing and where they are in the moment," she told BBC World Service's Sporting Witness.

Maybe they didn't think Slater's words even warranted a reply. Her question was certainly odd.

Slater and 35 other gymnasts were halfway through the Olympic all-around final at the 2000 Sydney Games.

It was the peak of their careers. For Slater, just 16 years old, the pressure came with added decibels.

More than 15,000 fans in the Sydney Superdome roared every time their compatriot approached an apparatus.

But, in the midst of it all, Slater had suggested the impossible.

Could the biggest stage of all really have been set too small?

Up until that moment, Slater's gymnastics career had been marked by how fast she had risen, despite a loss that would have weighed down most others.

She had started gymnastics as a toddler.

"I was the kid that walked on the beam at 16 months old," she said.

"I would be like 'no don't hold my hand, I'm fine'. For me it was really a sense of joy and love. I got to explore my physicality and push the limits of my mind and what I could do as a person."

Slater pushed those limits all the way to the world's elite.

She made her national debut aged nine and competed internationally at 11. She was 13 when she travelled to one such youth-level competition - the Junior Pacific Alliance Championships in Colorado Springs in the United States.

Her father had insisted that Slater's mother accompany her on the long journey. His concern proved well founded, for reasons he could never have expected.

Slater's mother, stricken with grief, was there to tell her that her father's flight from Jakarta to Singapore had nosedived to the ground.

All 104 people on board had died.

"His plane went down while I was competing and I actually had a moment in competition where I forgot how to run down the vault runway," said Slater.

From page 05

"I have never been able to explain it. I have never done anything like that before or after and I literally forgot how to run.

"We worked out from the time-frames that that was the moment his plane was going down.

"That experience gave me so much perspective. I found an inner strength I didn't know I had. It really helped shape the person I became, not only as a strong woman but also as a strong athlete."

Olympic competition is an extreme test for every athlete. The form Slater's took though was unique.

Slater was not expected to contest the medals in Sydney. She was too young and the competition too strong.

Russia's Svetlana Khorkina, the 1997 world champion and reigning European champion, was in hot form. She had been well ahead of her nearest rivals - a pair of Romanians - in qualification.

But Khorkina's campaign had rapidly and unexpectedly derailed. After a strong display on the floor - the first of the four disciplines - she went to the vault.

She didn't even get close to landing during her warm-up attempts, coming down on her knees. Trusting her hours of practice and polish though, she stuck to her routine for the competition.

After a little shout of self-encouragement on the runway, she launched into the air, off the vault, twisting and spinning.

Once again, the floor arrived too soon. Her shins walloped into the crash mat. She hopped to her feet, struck a pose, but her face was already crumpling with disappointment.

Her hopes of gold were dashed.

She was not the only one to struggle.

American national champion Elise Ray botched both her vaults. Great Britain's Annika Reeder injured herself and had to withdraw from the competition.

Brazil's Daniele Hypolito bashed her head as she whiplashed into her landing.

Even allowing for nerves, the standard was well below what was expected from the best in the world.

Having completed two disciplines, it was Slater's turn.

She was the first of her group of gymnasts to attempt their third rotation - the vault.

"I was standing at the end of the 25m runway, I looked at the vault and I thought 'it is too low'. It just looked low," she said.

"I turned to my competitors and said 'the vault looks too low, does the vault look too low to anyone?'"

No-one spoke.

The vault may have looked low. Now, Slater decided to test if sensation backed up her eyesight. She took off down the runway.

"I was not a tall athlete and as I went off the big board and into the vault, the feeling I would normally get was one of going into the side of the vault," she said.

"But instead I coming down on top of it, it was absolutely a feeling I had never had on vault. I knew the feeling from the end of the runway was 100% correct - the vault was the wrong height.

"I had a choice as a 16-year-old - say something and stop the competition or just get on with it.

"I chose the first option."



Khorkina's all-around campaign never recovered from a calamitous performance on a wrongly-set vault

Continued on Page 07

From page 06

Slater walked back to the vault, turned to her coaches Peggy Liddick and Nikolai Lapchine and motioned to show that the vault was nearer her stomach than her chest, where it usually came up to.

"Unless I had grown overnight it was too low," Slater said.

"Nikolai looked me dead in the eye, measured it up on his own body and then this horrified look came over his face."

In the next few minutes, stunned realisation spread around the arena.

Tape measures revealed Slater was right.

The vault was wrong. Instead of 125cm, it was set at 120cm.

A difference of 5cm, almost two inches.

It is a margin that could wreck a finely calibrated routine, it could be the divide between perfection and humiliation.

Olympic staff crowded around the vault, unscrewing bolts and shuffling it up to its proper height.

Officials gesticulated awkwardly on the sidelines as the scale of the error became clear. Television commentators were aghast. Coaches were furious.

"I've never seen anything like it, even at a little, local meet," said Kathy Kelly, the United States head coach at the time. "It's bizarre is what it is."

Half the field had already competed on a vault set too low.



Great Britain's Annika Reeder's injury was so severe she had to be carried off the mat before Slater's discovery

It was decided to offer those 18 the chance to repeat their vault. But for many it was too late.

Their confidence and concentration had been irrecoverably shaken.

With her gold-medal hopes apparently dashed, Khorkina had committed another error on her next apparatus, the uneven bars.

Too far off the podium pace, she opted against a re-do and ultimately settled for 10th. Gold was eventually won by Romania's Simona Amanar.

"The sad thing is nobody really won out of the situation," said Slater.

"But what did win was a young athlete having a voice and being able to use it in one of the most pressured situations in her sporting career and being heard and listened to."

The inquest into how it all happened rumbled on. It was suggested that the height of the vault had simply been overlooked when it should have been adjusted after the men's all-around final the previous day.

An error in the paperwork setting out the equipment dimensions has also since come to light.

But the incident has been part of celebrations as well as the source of recriminations...

In April 2013, Slater married Scott Penney.

While her father couldn't be there, her coaches from that day more than a decade before in the Sydney Superdome were.

"Nikolai walked me down the aisle," remembered Slater, who is now 39.

"It was such a beautiful moment. I have since heard from the girls who were training in the gym with him that he was so nervous that he had been practising, walking down the vault runway.

"Peggy gave a speech and the story of the vault was one of the highlights. She summed up by telling my husband, 'If Allana thinks she is right, she probably is right, and you had better believe her!'"

Courtesy BBC