



GoodSport NEWS

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NOC NEWS

Sri Lanka's IOC Women and Sport award for the year 2021



Thilaka Jinadasa on cloud nine

Deshabandu Thilaka Jinadasa has been heralded with the rare honour of being nominated for Sri Lanka's IOC Women and Sport award for the year 2021.

Thilaka was the very first female Olympian to represent Sri Lanka in the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games and is also a double International athlete who represented Sri Lanka in both Athletics and Netball.

She is the only Sri Lankan athlete to have represented the country in five consecutive South Asian Games and won medals in all Games including one Gold, four Silver and four Bronze.

She also, was the Sri Lankan Netball team vice-captain, when the team won the Asian Netball Championship title in 1997 in Singapore.

The versatile sports veteran Thilaka expressing her feelings on this nomination said "I feel it is a great honour and privilege for being nominated as the IOC nominee of the Women and Sport Award.

"I have been involved with two sports at the very top level – as an athlete and an administrative cum coach and my greatest passion in this is my ability to uplift the cause of women's sport in this country and fight towards equality in sports".

While she was an athlete, she felt there was a lack of women participation in sports in Sri Lanka; therefore, she decided to become a coach to promote women in sports.

She turned her experience gained being a role model top athlete in the country to serve and enrich the lives of athletes in rural parts of Sri Lanka with her new role coaching girls in netball and athletics.

As she dreamed, Thilaka became an International Netball Coach, IAAF Level-1 Athletics Coach and Australian Strength and Conditioning Level-1 Coach to empower women through sports.

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Under her guidance, as a national netball coach, Sri Lanka won the Asian Netball Championship title twice in 2009 and 2018.

Also, Sri Lanka qualified on both occasions to compete at the World Cup Netball Championship in 2011 and 2019.

Her coaching career spans for over two decades and she has immensely contributed to uplifting women's sports in Sri Lanka.

“Thilaka became an International Netball Coach, IAAF Level-1 Athletics Coach and Australian Strength and Conditioning Level-1 Coach to empower women through sports.”



Her achievement was recognized by the SLT SLIK Sports Awards and awarded as the Outstanding Coach of the Year in 2018.

Thilaka accounts for international experience as well in coaching when she was sent by the International Netball Federation to India to conduct Netball Coaching workshops for coaches in 2007.

She also served as national netball coach for the national teams of Maldives and Brunei Darussalam where she shared her expert knowledge to uplift girls' sports with the limited resources in those countries.

Under her guidance, Brunei Darussalam Netballers were exposed to international experience playing netball in the international arena and won their very first medal at the South East Asian Games, which was marked as a history in Brunei Netball.



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Moreover, Thilaka also engaged herself as a commentator in sports programmes happening in electronic media nationally and internationally.

On the Academic front, she serves as a visiting lecturer at the National Institute of Sports Sciences in Sri Lanka.

As a role model in society she inspires the girls by way of her inspirational talks invited on more than 30 occasions by the schools, -



universities, and media to deliver where she is heading the netball motivational speeches to empower segment and consultant for the the children in and out of Sri Lanka. athletic segment.

She is also a working member of the International Council for Coaching Excellence and currently involved in the development of coaching systems in emerging countries.

Currently, she is working as a Team Leader Sports Development at Gateway Colleges (Group) a leading school in the country with over 5000 students.

She is also a speaker in their webinar series on different topics such as Women Involvement in Sport, Safeguard Sport and Doping in Sports.

Thilaka was the very first female sportsperson to be recognized at the national hero's day in 1988 where she was awarded National honours 'Deshabandu' by his Excellency the President of Sri Lanka for her achievement and dedication to Sports.

Last year activist and former reputed netball player Caryll Tozer was nominated for this accolade by the NOC SL.

Thilaka is a founder member of Gold March Sports (Netball), which is a high-performance framework programme for the development of athletes and coaches internationally,



Pramodya Wickremasinghe

Head *Sri Lanka Cricket* selection panel



The six-member national cricket selection panel was ratified by Namal Rajapaksa, the Minister of Youth and Sports and was done in consultation with the National Selection Committee which comprises General Shavendra Silva (Chairman) National Olympic Committee President Suresh Subramaniam, Secretary General National Olympic Committee Maxwell de Silva, Former National Tennis player Arjun Fernando and former National Rugby Player Hafeel Marso.

The Sri Lanka Cricket selection will now comprise -- Pramodya Wickramasinghe - Chairman, Romesh Kaluwitharana, Hemantha Wickramaratne, Varuna Waragoda, S. H. U Karnain and Mrs. B.A. Thilaka Nilmini Gunarathne.



Lydia Valentin

“It’s not a matter of gender, but talent”

8 APR 2021 - With three Olympic medals and many more outstanding victories under her belt, Spain’s Lydia Valentin has proven that weightlifting is not a matter of gender.

Nine years ago, there were barely 375 female weightlifters officially recognized in Spain but today that number has risen to over 1,000.

It is partly due to Olympic champion Lydia Valentin.

“I don’t know if it’s because of me, but it’s true that nowadays weightlifting is more widely known.

And maybe due to my achievements it has gained visibility,” said Valentin in an interview with the Olympic Channel Podcast in Spanish.

Despite her modesty, the impact she has had on the new generation of female weightlifters is something she noticed on social media.

“Many people message me on social media, mothers whose daughters practise weightlifting, who have seen me and liked it and want to be like me when they grow up. It makes me feel really good.”

However, Valentin never aimed to be a role model.

“I’ve always wanted to achieve my goals, but because of your results and the hours you put in, you become an inspiration without knowing it and it surprises you because you weren’t ever really looking for it.”

“I personally didn’t [aim to be a role model], but it gives you hope and pride because other people – other

“I think it has changed how people see weightlifting as a sport, and now more girls are involved. There are a lot of girls weightlifting, so we must realise it’s not a matter of gender, but talent,” she said.

Having always been passionate about weightlifting, Valentin has never listened to negative comments about the sport – particularly as she has always believed that sport is for everyone. Her love for weightlifting took her straight to the top and has opened the door for future generations.

“I think now it will be a little easier for female weightlifters than it was for me. When someone paves the way it is much easier. But I am proud to have made it easier. Someone had to,” she laughed.



young girls – want to be like you and they are thrilled by what you do. It’s very nice. One of the nicest things sport has given me,” she added. A matter of talent, not gender

The success that Valentin has had in her career has helped deconstruct the myth that weightlifting is a men’s sport.

“I believe sport is sport, period. It’s true that more boys than girls take part in sport. I’m happy to be the first person – especially as a woman – to win an Olympic medal, a World Championships title.

Valentin acknowledges the fact that people are still ignorant about weightlifting – even confusing it with bodybuilding – and that leads to stereotypes and prejudice.

“I may have made it personal, that’s just me, and I may stand out in this ‘manly’ world. I like to stand out. I also like it when people notice that there are many normal girls who practise weightlifting, there isn’t just one normal body prototype.

The sport has weight classes and you can find a very tall girl, or a short one... it depends. At the end of the day, it’s a sport. But people perceive

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"[Beauty standards] have little to do with reality. Personally, it doesn't affect me, because I know how I am and how I've always liked to be. I think it does affect a lot of girls, particularly the young ones, because they want to be fully accepted and society doesn't accept you if you're not perfect.

"So, in the end it's not about being perfect, it's about being yourself. I support strong women... I think a girl should feel strong and doesn't have to be misguided by society, which is distorted and only benefits a few people," she added.

Valentin was originally deprived of her first moments of Olympic glory, due to losing out to an athlete who was later found guilty of doping. She received her Olympic medals years afterwards. Yet, still she is able to find positives in the situation.

"In the end, I have the medals. I am the real London 2012 Olympic champion and Beijing 2008 silver medalist. What matters most is that I have a clear conscience. That peace of mind that comes with knowing you have achieved it through hours of dedication, without cheating, and in the cleanest way – no medal can buy that."

I try not to obsess about the future at all, nor look back. It doesn't do any good.

Far from retirement

At age 36, Valentin isn't thinking about retirement yet. She is focused on Tokyo 2020. "I try not to obsess about the future at all, nor look back. It doesn't do any good. It's getting ahead of myself, and feeling anguish or stress is like saying, 'God, this is going to be my last competition'.

"When it happens, it happens. It'll be the last one and I'll be happy because I gave all I have to Spanish weightlifting."

But when Valentin does retire, it won't be the end of her journey with the sport she loves.

"I can't imagine retiring, I don't know how to picture it. I see it happening while competing, at home in Spain or internationally. And it will be done how it usually is in weightlifting, taking the boots off and leaving them there, like 'now I'm finally taking my boots off'... although, I'll always keep them on as I'm going to always practise and train at weightlifting. Because I quite like it!"