

Olympian blames Indian Hockey Federation for hockey mess

Former hockey Olympian Balbir Singh Saturday blamed flawed policies of the Indian Hockey Federation (IHF) for the present mess in the country's national game.

Member of three Olympic gold medal-winning hockey teams in London (1948), Helsinki (1952) and Melbourne (1956), Balbir Singh (senior) said that the federation was happy with the national hockey side getting 4th and 5th rank at international events instead of winning big tournaments.

'Unfocussed attitude of the federation is responsible for the present plight of Indian hockey. Consistency is missing and in most of the tournaments our team plays only half heartedly. They are satisfied with mere fourth or fifth spot,' said Balbir Singh while addressing a meet-the-press here Saturday.

'Hockey at the grassroots level is suffering as we have very few hockey tournaments at school and college levels. Even at national level, 90 percent states come without any preparation as if they are only coming for recreation and for visiting new places,' he said.

Balbir Singh was the first sportsman to be given the Padma Shri award in 1957. Having started playing hockey at the age of six as goalkeeper in his school team, Balbir joined the Indian team as full back before becoming a centre forward.

Balbir expressed sadness over blindly following the European style of hockey. 'We have forgotten our own Asian style of hockey in pursuing the European style. It is high time to develop our own techniques and to stick to the basics of the game if we want to revive the golden era of Indian hockey,' he added.

Balbir Singh's second book on hockey, 'The Golden Yardstick', was released by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh June 2 this year.

On an optimistic note, Balbir said: 'There is immense talent in our country but the only thing that is lacking is political will and the proper channel to locate and harness that talent.'

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