

Wrestling coach Chand Roop, 80, awaits recognition

He looks frail and can barely stand, but every morning he is at his akhara in Azadpur Mandi here to pack power into his trainees. Chand Roop has raised a host of international wrestlers and at 80 is still going strong.

For Chand Roop, the akhara - traditional Indian training school for wrestling - is his home and the 300 trainees there his family. He looks after their accommodation and other requirements too.

'I don't know why the government is not recognising my contribution. I have been waiting to get the Dronacharya Award (for coaches) for a long time,' Chand Roop told IANS with sullen eyes.

'Four of my wrestlers won medals at the Commonwealth Games 2007. The government was supposed to give me a cash prize for coaching them, but they gave me the money for only one medal. I train hundreds of wrestlers and this is the treatment I have been meted out.'

It was in 1965, when he was in the army, that Chand Roop started training wrestlers, the notable among them being Vijay Kumar Valmiky, who created a record by winning the sporting honours Bharat Kumar and Bharat Kesri at the same time, and Netra Pal, Bharat Kesari and a Commonwealth silver medallist.

His pupils also include four Arjuna Awardees, nine Bharat Kesaris and hundreds of international-level wrestlers. He is also the coach of young talent Joginder Kumar, the youngest wrestler to become a Bharat Kesari at the age of 18 who is also a gold medallist in the 2009 junior Asian Championship.

It was not easy for Chand Roop to have his own akhara, but with his dedication he realised his dream in 1980.

'I never sought contribution from anybody. I faced strong opposition from my family, but wrestling is my passion and I managed to pull it off with my pension money,' Chand Roop told IANS.

Chand Roop has shifted from his village in Haryana and lives at the akhara, single-mindedly giving shape to the dreams of his trainees.

Two of his pupil, Joginder Kumar (120 kg, freestyle) and Dharmender Dalal (120 kg, Greco-Roman) will be representing India at the World Wrestling Championship from Sep 24.

'I have been with Guruji for over 10 years and I have seen his dedication. Now he can't walk but still we make him sit on the chair while we practise,' says Dharmender, a silver medallist at senior Asian Championship.

But the government has done little to recognise the contribution of Chand Roop. Neither has it provided facilities to the akhara which has been producing such star players.

Though the profile of the sport has gone up since Sushil Kumar's bronze medal feat at the Beijing Olympics, the training centre such as these somehow continue to run with lack of funds and international facilities.

'We don't have the advanced equipment which our counterparts in other countries have. If we have to lose weight, we wear a packed track suit and just sweat it out even in the month of June. We run on the streets wearing those track suits in the afternoon,' a trainee wrestler said.

Apart from their fight to get better facilities, Chand Roop's trainees have also been raising their voice to get their mentor the recognition he deserves.

Recently Chand Roop's Arjuna awardee trainees staged a protest demanding the Dronacharya Award for him.

'Guruji's name has been recommended more than 14 times, but still the government did not consider him. It is very painful for us to see Guruji not getting his worth as he has dedicated his entire life to wrestling,' Arjuna awardee Rohtas Singh Dahiya.

They called off the protest after getting an assurance from the sports ministry that Chand Roop's name would be considered next year.

Raj Singh, vice-president of the Wrestling Federation of India, admits Chand Roop is a deserving candidate for the Dronacharya Award.

'He deserves the award, the government should acknowledge his contribution and give him a lifetime achievement award.'

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