

Manavjit is the Ratna among India's top sports winners

A much trimmed ace trap shooter Manavjit Singh Sandhu led the cream of India's sportspersons as they received the country's top sports awards Wednesday, on the birth anniversary of hockey wizard Dhyhan Chand, observed as National Sports Day.

President Pratibha Patil presented Sandhu the 2006 Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna, India's highest and richest sports honour worth Rs.500,000. She also presented the 2006 Arjuna Awards to 14 sportspersons, the 2006 Dronacharya Awards to three coaches, and the 2007 Dhyhan Chand Awards to three sportspersons for lifetime achievement.

Besides, four people won the 2006 Tenzing Norgay National Adventure Awards and Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, received the 2005-06 Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Trophy at the Rashtrapati Bhawan here.

'It's the highest sports award of the country presented by the President of India. The moment does not get grander than this for a sportsperson. This award is a wonderful shot in the arm for me,' world champion Sandhu told IANS.

'It's the recognition of one's work. It is a motivation for further achievements. I'm glad I am not at the end of my career when I am receiving this,' he said, referring to the controversy that mired these awards in the past few years.

Sandhu, an Arjuna Award winner of 1998, won the award for his consistent performance in the last few years. The individual gold and team silver at the 2006 World Championship in Zagreb, Croatia, was one of his top achievements.

An interesting aspect of the award was that this was the fourth successive year when a male cricketer was not among the Arjuna Award winners. The last time a male cricketer won was in 2003 when Harbhajan Singh received the accolade.

Former India captain Anjum Chopra was the lone female cricketer to win this year, emulating current captain Mithali Raj (2005) and Anju Jain (2005). In 2004, no cricketer, man or woman, was nominated for the Arjuna.

Of the awardees, only chess Grandmaster (GM) P. Harikrishna was absent, and his mother Mrs Padmavati received his prize. According to her, Harikrishna is presently training in Frankfurt.

Chess had more to cheer as woman GM Koneru Humpy's father Ashok was conferred the Dronacharya Award, which recognises the contribution of coaches. He came along with his wife.

Asked why Koneru did not come to cheer him, Ashok said: 'She is resting at our home in Vijaywada as she returned from abroad just two days ago.'

The diminutive Geethika Jakhar made a record of sorts by winning the Arjuna Award as the Hisar-based wrestler became the first ever woman to win this prize in this discipline.

The Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna comprises Rs.500,000, a scroll of honour and a medal in recognition

of spectacular and most outstanding performance in sports.

The Arjuna Award comprises Rs.300,000, a statuette of warrior Arjuna and a scroll of honour in recognition of outstanding achievements at the international level and for showing qualities of leadership, sportsmanship and a sense of discipline.

The Dhyan Chand Award for life-time achievement in sports consists of Rs.300,000, a plaque and a scroll of honour in recognition of contribution to a sports discipline before and after retirement. It is given to a maximum of three sportspersons in a year.

The Dronacharya Award for a coach comprises a plaque and a scroll of honour and Rs.300,000 for consistent, outstanding and meritorious work. It is given to a maximum of five coaches in a year.

All Winners:

Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award, 2006: Manavjeet Singh Sandhu (trap shooting).

Arjuna Awards, 2006: Jayanta Talukdar (archery), K.M. Binu (athletics), Chetan Anand (badminton), Vijender (boxing), P. Harikrishna (chess), Anjum Chopra (cricket), Jyoti Sunita Kullu (women's hockey), Vijay Kumar (shooting), Sourav Ghosal (squash), Subhajit Saha (table tennis), Geeta Rani (weightlifting), Geetika Jakhar (wrestling), Naveen Gautam (kabaddi) and Rohit Bhakar (badminton-disabled category).

Dhyan Chand Awards, 2007: Varinder Singh (hockey), Shamsheer Singh (kabaddi), Rajendra Singh (wrestling).

Dronacharya Awards, 2006: R.D. Singh (athletics/Paralympic Games), Damodaran Chandralal (boxing) and Koneru Ashok (chess).

Tenzing Norgay National Adventure Awards 2006: Paldeb Giachho (land), Motuku Indra Kanth Reddy (air), Tapas Chowdhury (water) and Gurdial Singh (lifetime achievement).

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Trophy 2005-2006: Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar.

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