

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

TIMES PARA GAMES 2023

CONSUMER CONNECT INITIATIVE



●● Dignitaries and renowned para athletes at the grand opening of Times Para Games 2023 on June 23 at Sports Authority of India Complex in Salt Lake

Special Success Saga

They came, they saw, they conquered — the three-day sports marathon showcased athletic brilliance and unyielding spirit of para athletes from across West Bengal

Madhulika Tewary

The Times Para Games, a three-day long state-level competition which commenced on June 23, saw over 300 sportspersons from all over the state congregate at Sports Authority of India (SAI) Complex to prove their mettle where it matters — on the ground. Organised by The Times of India Group in association with Bengal Para Sports Association, it was by far the largest para games hosted in West Bengal. The event, presented by MSTC Ltd and energised by Indian Oil Corporation Ltd, showcased the extraordinary talents of para athletes, proving that disabilities are not limitations when it comes to achieving greatness. Times Para Games was supported by State Bank of India and Damodar Valley Corporation. The health partner of the event was Apollo Multi Speciality Hospitals, Kolkata and outdoor partner was Arun Sign.

The gala was preceded with the registration and categorisation formality on June 22 when participants started arriving from different districts with their escorts. They were put up at Nava Prajanma State Youth Hostel.

DAY ONE

Day 1 began with an opening ceremony which was graced by notable para sportsmen and dignitaries from different walks of life. In his welcome speech, Chandan Roy Chowdhury, president of Bengal Para Sports Association, said, "In India, para sportspersons have overshadowed the able sportspersons as far as winning medals in Olympic and Asian Games is concerned. There is a huge potential and talent in West Bengal as well. Times Para Games is to promote para sportspersons from West Bengal to the international level by supporting them."

According to Pramod Bhagat, Khel Ratna, Arjuna and Padma Shree awardee and gold medallist in Tokyo Paralympics (2020) for Badminton, "It is difficult to find upcoming para athletes at the ground level. State level para games that are slowly gaining popularity are a big step in discovering new talent. In last Paralympics, we won 19 medals for India, and with initiatives like these we can win more."

Raja Magotra, Para-Badminton World Championship silver medallist, shared, "Coming from the grassroots, I received no support in athletics. People did not even know that something called para sports existed. Events such as these are important and much needed as they not only help bring out new talents but also create awareness

about the sport."

Kantibhai Parmar, founder and vice president of the Paralympic Committee of India, congratulated Bengal on having its first Para Games of this magnitude and said, "In Gujarat, we started Khel Mahakumbh 2010 in which there were 20,000 participants and I feel proud to see it start off in West Bengal."

The air was filled with excitement and anticipation as spectators gathered to witness remarkable display of talent, determination, and sportsmanship in Blind Football, Swimming, Athletics and Badminton. There were impressive performances across various categories, including SL4 and SU5, Wheelchair, and Men's Doubles in Badminton. Athletes showcased their skills, agility and teamwork, delivering thrilling matches filled with precise shots and strategic gameplay. Badminton games were held in New Town Business Club.

Krishna Nagar, Khel Ratna awardee and gold medallist in Tokyo Paralympics (2020) for Badminton, shared, "We will see new players from the East zone and many of them will come up from events like these. This is a good introduction and motivational platform for players."

"Through this noble event, all participants will get a lot of encouragement and motivation to pursue their passions. Their determination is truly commendable," said Surinder K Gupta, CMD of MSTC Ltd.

The sportspersons in action were a sight to behold. Amit Dasgupta, ED, IOCL, Eastern Region, pipelines division, averred, "I had the privilege of interacting with these para sportsmen. They come from underprivileged backgrounds and are specially-abled. We have taken special care to create

this Times Para Games for them so that they can thrive and come forward in the society."

The swimming events were equally enthralling with athletes gliding through the water with grace and precision. It featured a 50-metre freestyle division on the first day. There was a total of 23 events in Swimming.

Ahammad Gazi, first place winner of 50 m freestyle swimming under S9, senior male class, shared, "My journey with swimming began after I lost my leg and the doctor advised me to do swimming to stay active. I have participated in international competitions. The greatest obstacle is the lack of sponsorship. But looking at these companies collaborating for the event, I hope that our future will be better."

The Athletics competition featured events under various para sport classifications and included women's Javelin, Shot Put and a 100-metre run for both men and women on the first day. Attar Ali, who secured the first position in the 100-metre race under T/44, Male Class, said, "Whatever I have achieved is by dint of individual practice. I want to participate in the Asian Para Games and win medals. That can happen if I get a little bit of support."

The resounding echoes of cheers and the rhythmic sound of feet hitting the ball reverberated across the stadium as the Blind Football teams battled it out on the ground. Guided by the sound of the ball equipped with a noise-making device, the players demonstrated exceptional teamwork, coordination and resilience. Under the Women's Blind Football category, Team Purulia secured the first position which Team Kolkata won under the Men's Category.

"It is truly touching to see the positivity and enthusiasm shown by the participants. They will represent India in times to come," stated Prem Anup Sinha, CGM of SBI.

John Mathai, member secretary of DVC, said, "Our para athletes have proved to the world that they have a lot of capability even with special abilities.

We thought this event would give the budding athletes an opportunity to showcase their talent. The event is to motivate our para athletes and ensure that everyone gets carried along in the progress and development of society."

DAY TWO

Day II saw the continuation of Athletics and Swimming events. Blind Judo and Fencing events also started on Saturday, June 24. Doel Majumder, mother of Abahon Adak, got teary eyed when she saw her son get the gold medal under the special category of Backstroke Swimming. She said, "My 14-year-old son has autism and this is the first time he has participated in a competition. I am so proud to witness his victory. This has been an uphill struggle for us. There is a lack of accessible pools and trainers for disabled people like my son. Events like these which showcase the talents of the disabled people need to be conducted more often to spread awareness and empathy."

Ajit Banerjee, chief patron of Bengal Para Sports Association, said, "I am happy to be here. We have done events like these but never at such a huge level. I thank everyone including The Times of India for initiating this."

Blind Judo and Fencing that occurred simultaneously showcased the remarkable strength and resilience of the athletes. In Blind Judo, competitors displayed their incredible adaptability and relied on their heightened senses to execute precise throws and manoeuvres.

Dolly Kayal who won the gold medal in Fencing and a few awards for Athletics, is a 32-year-old mother and athlete who got bed ridden seven years ago, having suffered an accident. She said, "It has been eight months since I found out that disabled people can also take part in sports which came as a beam of hope. It's my goal to win in the Nationals but this seems unachievable without the aid of sponsorships. I am hopeful that one day through events like these, I will get recognised and get the aid I need to make my life more meaningful."

"Watching these specially-abled people play so phenomenally is a truly novel experience. We are always with them to help their talents come to the surface so that they can proceed ahead in life and make a difference to society," said Sunil Kumar Dutta, DGM (CSR), IOCL, Eastern Region, Pipelines Division.

"We always crib and give excuses for every little thing but looking at these athletes play in spite of all challenges is beyond imagination," said Trina Saha, Tollywood actor.

DAY THREE

On the final day, June 25, remaining Fencing rounds were completed. Fencers in wheelchairs demonstrated remarkable precision and speed as they engaged in exhilarating duels. The competition occurred across two categories and featured three types of fencing — Epee, Foil and Sabre.

Each event concluded with distribution of prizes to the winners and certificate of participation to every athlete.

Times Para Games left an indelible impression on everyone in attendance, highlighting the incredible achievements of para athletes and the power of sports to inspire and unite.

Share your views on this with us at Irene.Saha@timesgroup.com



Through this noble event, all participants will get a lot of encouragement and motivation. Their determination is commendable.

Surinder K Gupta, CMD, MSTC Ltd

I had the privilege of interacting with these para sportsmen. We have taken special care to create Times Para Games for them so that they can thrive and come forward.

Amit Dasgupta, ED, Indian Oil Corporation Ltd, Eastern Region, pipelines division

In the pursuit of sporting glory, para athletes transcend barriers, challenge conventions and inspire us all. Times Para Games 2023 is where dreams become achievements.

R N Singh, chairman, DVC

It is touching to see the positivity and enthusiasm shown by the participants. They will represent India in times to come.

Prem Anup Sinha, CGM, SBI

In Gujarat, we started Khel Mahakumbh 2010 in which there were 20,000 participants and I feel proud seeing it starting off in Bengal.

Kantibhai Parmar, founder and vice president of Paralympic Committee of India

I feel very happy being here. We have done events like these but never at such a huge level. I thank everyone including The Times of India for initiating this. I feel very proud of where we have come.

Ajit Banerjee, chief patron, Bengal Para Sports Association

In India, para sportspersons have overshadowed the able sportspersons as far as winning medals in Olympic and Asian Games is concerned. There is a huge potential and talent in West Bengal as well.

Chandan Roy Chowdhury, president, Bengal Para Sports Association

Being a part of a healthcare organisation, we always try to associate with events promoting good health as well as spiritual, mental and physical development. Events such as these help us achieve all of that.

Dr Surinder Singh Bhatia, director Medical Services, Apollo Multi Speciality Hospitals, Kolkata

State level para games that are slowly gaining popularity are a big step in discovering new talent. In last Paralympics, India won 19 medals and with initiatives like these we can win more in coming years.

Pramod Bhagat, Khel Ratna, Arjuna and Padma Shree awardee, gold medallist in Tokyo Paralympics

I received no support in athletics. People did not even know para sports existed. Events such as these are much needed as they not only help bring out new talents but also create awareness about the sport.

Raja Magotra, Para-Badminton World Championship silver medallist

We will see new players from the East and many of them will come up from events like these. The new players will get a platform to show their talent. This is a good introduction and motivational platform for the players.

Krishna Nagar, Khel Ratna awardee and gold medallist in Tokyo Paralympics



●● Pramod Bhagat (left) being felicitated by Surinder K Gupta



●● Krishna Nagar being felicitated by Amit Dasgupta (right)



●● Dr John Mathai being felicitated by Chandan Roy Chowdhury (right)



●● Award ceremony with dignitaries



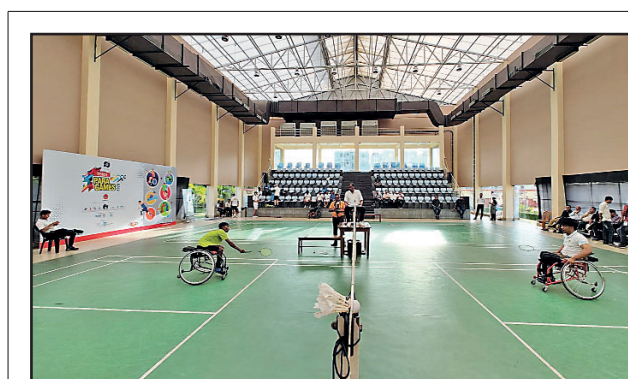
●● Team MSTC with the star para athletes



●● Team IOCL ER Pipelines Division pose with the star para athletes



●● Team DVC get up close with the guest para athletes



●● Wheelchair bound Badminton on at New Town Business Club



●● A glimpse of a Blind Judo bout



●● Wheelchair bound Fencing Duel



●● Game of Blind Football



●● Para swimmers in action