NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS

Triple Hockey Olympian Balbir Singh's Donation To His Alma Mater

Vancouver - In a novel and unprecedented gesture, three times Olympic gold medallist Balbir Singh has donated his entire one year's pension to his alma mater, Dev Samaj Senior Secondary Boys School, Moga, Punjab.

His pension in a year comes to about Rs 1 lakh. Balbir Singh retired as Director of Sports, Punjab, in the early eighties and is currently settled in Burnaby, B.C.

Balbir Singh told The Link that he was making the donation to coincide with the centenary celebrations of his alma mater earlier this week which were inaugurated by Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal.

"The purpose of my making this token donation is to encourage young and budding sports boys from the school. I have requested the school authorities to put the entire amount in fixed deposit and from the interest accruing on it, a scholarship should be introduced for the outstanding sportsboy of the school. The scholarship should be on annual basis," Balbir Singh added.

Former international hockey star and Olympian Balbir Singh had his first lessons in hockey in this school at Moga. His father Dalip Singh, a devout Dev Samaji, was a teacher in the same school. A freedom fighter and a recipient of 'Tamra Patra', Dalip Singh served the same institution throughout his career.

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Hockey ace festival visit

AN Indian hockey legend will be the guest of honour at the sixth Shaheed sports festival.

The enduring Asian sports weekend will be held at the Queen’s Park hockey centre on July 17 and 18, and three-times Olympic gold medallist Balbir Singh will present the awards on Sunday evening.

Mr Singh is revered in India after he scored five of the six winning goals at the Helsinki Olympics in 1952.

And he is also upheld as a symbol of true sportsmanship, honesty, gentleness and dignity.
Indian Olympian Balbir Singh, second from right, being honoured at a function in Bedford, England recently. Also standing with him are A. S. Sangha, president of the Shahid Sports Council of Bedford (extreme right), A.S. Jammu, its secretary (extreme left) and B.S. Atwal, treasurer (second from left). Balbir Singh, who is settled in Burnaby, B.C., was the guest of honour at the Bedford Sports Festival 99, organized by the Council and he gave away prizes. He also addressed budding sportspersons at various forums and educational institutions there.
A Reception For Olympian Balbir Singh

Triple Gold Olympian of Indian hockey Balbir Singh (third from right) with Gopal Singh Dhillon, Mayor of Hounslow county in Middlesex, England (third from left), the police chief and deputy police chief of the county and members of the Indian community in Britain during a reception hosted in his honour during his visit to England. He was also honoured on this occasion. Balbir Singh now resides in Burnaby, B.C.
BALBIR SINGH HONORED WITH HONORARY MEMBERSHIP

World renowned hockey player and triple-gold Olympian Balbir Singh, who is now residing in Burnaby, has been made an Honorary Member of the Vancouver Hawks Field Hockey Club in recognition of his many services to field hockey and his remarkable sporting achievements.

Recently at the club's annual dinner the honorary membership was conferred on him.

Balbir Singh captained the victorious Indian hockey team at Melbourne, and he was manager and chief coach of the Indian team in 1975 that won the World Cup.

Balbir Singh becomes the 5th honorary member of the Vancouver Hawks Field Hockey Club, and the first Asian for this honor.

It was in 1895 that the first hockey organization was set up by the name of Vancouver Hockey Club. And in 1963 the Hawks Field Hockey Club was established. In the year 1974, both the clubs were amalgamated and given the new name of Vancouver Hawks Field Hockey Club.

At present the club has seven men's and five women's hockey teams, beside 45 junior teams for boys and girls.

BALBIR SINGH

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What it takes to be a triple gold Olympian?

Born in October 1924, Balbir rose to fame at the 1948 Olympic Games where he spearheaded India's attack against England. He went on to win Olympic Golds for India in 1952 at Helsinki and in 1956 at Melbourne. He was honoured by the Union Government with Padamshree in 1957 for his contribution to sports.

Balbir is a household name in the country commanding acceptance for his outstanding sportsmanship. He was adjudged the Indian Sportsman of the Century in the opinion poll of 1982 floated by the Daily Patriot. It added grace to the occasion to invite this greatest living sportsman of the country to lit the sacred flame at the Asian Games opening at New Delhi in 1982.

Balbir continues to be associated with Hockey as a veteran. He was the Manager and Chief Coach for the Indian National Teams at Bangkok (1970), Barcelona (1971), Kuala Lumpur (1975), Amsterdam (1980) and Melbourne (1982). He was the Guest of Honour at the Moscow Olympic Games in 1980 and Manager for World Eleven against Olympic Champions at Karachi in 1985.

Coaching sub-juniors with a missionary zeal to regain India's lost glory is Balbir's craze. He talks of it softly, but pursues it with a devotion. It is the reason d'etre for his blessing the establishment of the Academy in his name and agreeing to accept its Captaincy. "BALBIR" IS HIS YOUNG. His plan and he stresses translating it into reality through scientific selection and training at the grass-roots.
CATCH THEM YOUNG

World Cup victorious team with 1975 Victorious Olympic Team, 1956

Vice-presidential Olympic Team, 1956

With Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, 1952

With Dr. Rajendra Prasad, 1952

World Cup victorious team with 1975

NATION'S PRIDE
FORMER Olympian Balbir Singh, former Punjab Sports director, has expressed shock over the demise of Udham Singh and said in an e-mail message from Canada: “To ensure the continuity of ‘The Kids Hockey Academy’ at Sansarpur would be the most befitting tribute to a very dear member (Udham Singh) of our hockey family. It has been really hard to reconcile to the fact that our evergreen Udham has passed away.”

Balbir expressed surprise at the fact that a player of Udham’s calibre was not given the honour of leading an Olympic team or even ‘Padma Shri’ that has become so common of late.

Here is the message The Indian Express received from Balbir Singh:

“All these days I was not in a mood to think or write on Udham. I have been extremely shocked to learn about the most untimely and sad demise of dear Udham. When a friend broke the news to me, I did not believe him and thought it was some other person having the same name. Udham was one of the all time great super stars of Indian nay world hockey. He represented the country in the four consecutive Olympic Games, during the period when India and hockey were synonymous. He used to be an invaluable asset to the teams he represented. What a pity, a player of his calibre was not given the honour of leading an Olympic team or receiving an award like Padma Shri, that has become so common of late. I had very long association with Udham. We played together for 13 years. It was the golden era of Indian hockey; Udham-Balbir combination had become proverbial. We could frequently exchange passes without looking at each other. It invariably baffled many a seasoned defender. I feel sorry for those brilliant players who excelled on the inside-left and centre-forward positions during that period and still were deprived of the honour of representing the country in the Olympic Games, because of us two.

Udham was four years younger than I. I met him for the first time in 1947, when he accompanied the Punjab team to Bombay as a reserve, where we won the Nationals for the second time in a row. Udham, Dharam, Tarlochan and Bakhshish joined Punjab Police after partition of the country. Not for a day did Udham let me feel the absence of my pre-partition teammate inside-left Aziz, who too was a complete hockey player.

Dear Udham was gem of a person — a gentleman on and off the field. I still wonder how a health conscious sportsman like him suffered a fatal heart attack! Hearing the sad news, many old-timers residing in Canada, USA and Europe have been contacting me to express their shock and sad sentiments on Udham’s untimely demise.

May Almighty grant peace to the departed soul and courage to his wife, close relatives and friends to bear this tragic loss.

To ensure continuity of The Kids Hockey Academy at Sansarpur would be the most befitting tribute to a very dear member of our hockey family, who has left us for ever. I have no doubt, that my friends like Col. Balbir, Ajitpal and other hockey stalwarts of the village would do the needful.”
Hockey Olympian Balbir Singh
Honoured

Former Indian Prime Minister H.D. Dave Gowda (left) honouring Balbir Singh who was part of the Indian hockey teams that won the Olympic Games in 1948, 1952 and 1956 during the 18th International Congress of Non Resident Indians in New Delhi. Balbir Singh, who retired as Director of Sports, Punjab, is now settled in Burnaby, B.C. He will be honoured by the Shaheed Sports Council, Bedford, England at its annual sports festival being held July 17 and 18. The veteran sportsman was awarded Padma Shri by the Government of India in 1957.
Balbir Singh presents memorabilia to SAI

Balbir Singh, who led India to hockey triumph at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, on Thursday presented his priceless collection of memorabilia to the Sports Authority of India.

"I have gained so much from the game, I want to share it with my countrymen," Balbir said while presenting the collection to SAI secretary A S Talwar.

The collection, which includes 24 medals, a blazer of the Melbourne Olympic Games, some rare snaps with India's first Governor General C Rajagopalachari, first President Dr Rajendra Prasad, first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed and Mrs Indira Gandhi, will be housed in the SAI sports museum at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium.

Balbir also offered his services "in a missionary capacity" to SAI to spot and nurture young talent in hockey.

Balbir represented India in the 1948, 1952 and 1956 Olympics, was director of sports, Government of Punjab, manager of Indian teams to the first World Cup at Barcelona, to the third World Cup at Kuala Lumpur where India won it for the first time, ninth Asian Games and the Esanda World Cup.
Regaining the past glory is our goal

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, MAY 30

"INDIAN, and not the foreign coaches can revive hockey in the country," felt Balbir Singh, a triple Olympic gold medalist. "Our coaches have the capability to lead the players. For this they need a good run and should not be changed and chopped at the drop of a hat," further said Balbir Singh, who scripted many an Indian win playing as a centre-forward, adding, "The foreign coaches can only study the videotapes and direct the players accordingly. They would be oblivious to the needs of the players, being unaware of our social system."

"A foreign coach is like a babysitter. He will take care of your needs but can he do what a grandmother can do?"

He was a key member of the London (’48), Helsinki (’52) and Melbourne (’56) gold winning hockey sides and said that the recent low in Indian hockey pains and heckles him constantly. "We need to change our attitude if we hope to win medals at the international level. Our officials have to stop saying 'reaching the semis or finishing among the top six is our target' before every tourney. Do these statements make any sense? Just say we have to win the championship, plain and simple. Rather than encouraging the boys they instill inferiority complex in their minds. Remember we are what we do. We have to make winning a habit."

The former Punjab Sports Director, who was also the manager of the ’75 World Cup winning Indian team (with Ajit Pal Singh as team skipper), now shuttles between India and Canada (where his three sons are settled). "It given a chance I would love to coach the present team. We have the talent. It only needs proper channelisation."

He further felt that India’s disappointing performance in the ongoing World Cup is due to a major selectorial goof up. "Remember what we did in the ’96 Atlanta Games. We recalled players who were over the hill and made them play. The result was another step backwards as far as development was concerned. On the contrary, they have blooded youngsters ‘en bloc’ this time and pitted them against world class players. Further, they are carrying passengers alongwith, in the form of injured players," he said.

"Dhanraj is one player whose greatest asset is his speed. Normally he runs to the wings from his position of a centre-forward, but in this championship he is clearly struggling. The team is suffering as a result," he said. "I don’t know what pressure Dr Cruz was under to clear all the injured players."

Balbir Singh, however conceded that the Europeans had indeed caught up with us, though at the same time our skills were also going down. "Our passing, trapping, hitting, stopping, scooping — all — have gone down. The players are not putting in efforts as we did in our times. They should practice (individual skills) more and more and give it all they have. There is no reason why we cannot revive the glorious tradition of hockey in our country," he said, adding, "I am writing a book on all these aspects and it will be released very soon."

"The system is to blame for all the mess. Our national championship is obsolete. It has no competition as only four-five teams have been dominating ever since it began, though there are 30odd affiliated units participating, we ought to have divisions and make the championship more competitive,” he said.

"I idolized myself on the great Dhyan Chand. We shared many things in common — he too was a triple Olympic gold medalist and a centre-forward but I would always be number two to him in value," said Balbir, who interestingly started as a goalkeeper, played at different positions before carving a niche for himself as a centre-forward. "I can proudly recall that I scored nearly sixty per cent of the goals Indian team scored in my playing time," concluded Balbir who has celebrated 73 birthdays.
Balbir stresses need for improving skills

By Prabhjot Singh

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence is not an act but a habit," says three times Olympic gold medalist in hockey Balbir Singh.

Rated as one of best centre-forwards in the 40s and 50s, Balbir Singh, who immigrated to Canada after retirement as Director of Sports, Punjab, is here on a short visit. I managed to butt­tonhole him at ShASHabd Stadium where he had come to witness the second "unofficial" Test match between the visiting Sitora team from Uzbekistan and India Whites.

"I am convinced unless you have skills, you cannot work out good combinations. And without good combinations, you cannot retain your hold on the ball for long. So the underlying principle for success in hockey is mastering of basic skills," says Balbir Singh, who had several stints as coach of the Indian hockey team.

"I have prepared tests for checking skills of individual players. These tests can be introduced at different levels. To make them attractive and competitive, I suggest that some prize money be introduced, say in hitting, stopping, dribbling or trapping. Practising skills individually may be monotonous. But once we make them competitive with prize money, they will help in building the basic skills because of which we dominated the hockey scenario for almost four decades," he says.

Balbir has been in touch with the game. He went to Berlin to watch the last Champions Trophy Hockey Tournament. In Delhi, where he stays with his son-in-law, he manages to come out of his schedule to be at ShASHabd Stadium to witness each and every game.

"What we lack in our present team is mastering of skills. Our hitting, stopping and trapping is much below standards. See the Russians. They have beaten Indian Airlines and Punjab and Sind Bank convincingly in the ShASHabd Hockey Tournament. Their trapping is good," he adds.

For Balbir Singh, there are four spheres to build the strength of a team. In physical fitness he feels the new rules to be aimed to make the sport more spectacular for television coverage so that it can get more and more sponsorship. The new rules will ensure high scores and make the game tougher and harder than what it is now.

Talking about "position" play, he says a team of 11 players has to mark the entire field, both horizontally and vertically in such a manner that when it is in possession of the ball, it can create openings and when it loses the ball it can seal the gaps.

He feels that return of grass hockey at the international level is difficult as a big industry is engaged in the manufacture of synthetic surfaces, synthetic balls and other equipment which will never allow the International Hockey Federation to revert to grass.

"But there can be a separate game of grass hockey. How far India or other third world nations can go in this direction will be interesting to see. It will not be a bad idea if grass hockey as an old and independent game other than the present field hockey can be revived internationally. Poor countries cannot afford the way the present field hockey is becoming expensive day by day," says Balbir Singh.

He feels the new rules to be introduced after the Atlanta Olympic Games are basically aimed to make the sport more spectacular for television coverage so that it can get more and make the game tougher and harder than what it is now.
Balbir condemns team selection

Tribune News Service
CHANDIGARH, May 30 — "Introducing young players in the hockey World Cup was a folly due to which India fared poorly in the competition," according to former Olympian Balbir Singh.

Speaking at a "Meet the Press" programme at the Chandigarh Press Club here today Balbir did not mince words in criticising the selection of the Indian team for the World Cup. "For the Atlanta Olympics they recalled players who had retired from the game while for the current World Cup they picked youngsters en bloc and exposed them before top outfits of the world", said the veteran who was a member of the Indian hockey team in the 1948, 1952 and 1956 Olympics. Induction of young players in the team should be a gradual and continuous process. When small tributaries join a river, the current becomes strong. Similarly induction of youngsters should be a continuous and gradual process, he said.

The former Olympian also flayed the team management for picking unfit players for the World Cup. "No doubt skipper Dhanraj Pillay is a good player. But at Utrecht he found it difficult to run between the 25-yard line and the 'D' due to his injury. I fail to understand how the doctor declared these players fit for the World Cup", Balbir Singh said.

Referring to India's performance at Utrecht, Balbir said it was shocking to know that the Indians had lost to teams like Canada. "In Canada field hockey is conspicuous by its absence and India has 100 times more players than in Canada. Unlike in India, the Canadian players pay for themselves when they go to play matches. Although the standard of Indian clubs is quite high, yet there is something wrong with the selection of the national team. For instance, prior to the World Cup, India sent different teams for the series against Australia and Pakistan. This was the time for combined practice of the national team. The veteran hockey player also lamented the absence of sharp shooters in the team. In the absence of scorers everything goes wrong. Our players have developed the 'D-phobia'. On entering the striking circle, they seem to run out of ideas, he said.

Balbir Singh was also critical of the National Championship format. Sometimes the championship is not held. Most of teams which participate come without proper practice, he said adding that it was hockey which was suffering ultimately.

Referring to the Europeans, Balbir said it is difficult to beat them in strength. "We can only beat them in skill through effective manning of the entire field, both horizontally and vertically."

On the coaching aspect, the former Olympian who incidentally was also the chief coach of the Indian team which won the gold in the Kuala Lumpur World Cup in 1975, said a coach should be fully involved in the affairs of his team. He must know the problems of each member of the team and try to solve them. Only names or reputations as players are not enough to make a good coach. Sometimes even an unknown player may turn out to be a better coach than a player known at the international level, he added.

Balbir Singh is in Chandigarh at present and is writing a book on techniques of modern hockey. Earlier, he had authored 'The Golden Hat-Trick'.

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