

In one silver medal in
the shooting event



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In all India has won eight gold medals in hockey. However despite this wonderful show in hockey, India has been unable to garner any notable success in individual sports.

When a country that boasts of a population of more than a billion is unable to secure even one gold medal in individual sports at the Olympics it is a matter of concern. India has won just six medals, none of them gold in individual sports. India won a bronze medal in wrestling at the 1952 Summer Olympics, 2 silver medals at their debut Olympics in the Men's 200m and the 200m hurdles, and one silver medal in the Shooting event in the 2004 Games. India has one bronze medal in lawn tennis and one bronze medal in Women's Weightlifting. There has to be a reason for the dismal performance of Indian athletes at the Olympics but the truth is that the reasons provided by Indian sporting officials are pathetic. Officials say that lack of proper facilities is the key reason. It is true that many Indians, especially those who live in the rural areas are not privy to synthetic tracks, trained coaches or sports equipment. It is also true that not all of India's billion people are involved in organized sport.

However that cannot be accounted for our sad performance, especially when, this number is still more than the people of Mozambique and the Bahamas, and these countries have managed to win gold medals. True, India has inadequate facilities but that is hardly an excuse either. A generation ago Kenyan runners trained while living in an old school dormitory that had no running water and they still managed to get medals for their country.

Perhaps the deficiency lies not so much in our lack of proper facilities but in our attitude. We are just not an athletic nation. We see it at every level.

Children who show potential in sports have their potential nipped in the bud. There are no big bucks to be earned in sports unless it is cricket-the countries number one passion. Weekends in India are not spent taking part in physical activity. Bollywood rules as the number one source of entertainment. Family participation in sports is not encouraged; hence the young fail to garner any interest in it. One would think that a country that is able to write software for the world would surely be able enough to come up with a rational plan to resurrect its athletes. Private sponsorship is still in its nascent stage and only available to those who have shown some performance internationally. If India wants medals at Olympics then it has to look at a long term plan.

A country that has secured only a handful of medals in over hundred years is hardly going to win dozens overnight. Changes have to be made at the grass root level. The attitude of our people has to be changed. Family sports events like triathlons should be held over the weekends to encourage family participation. Special sports scholarships should be issued to the deserving. Selections should be strictly based on performance and state wise quotas should not be the criteria to compete. In time the country will do a turn around, and perhaps the future might see India performing better at the Olympics.