

The Inside Story

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As the curtains came down in Beijing, India's bronze medallists ushered a new era in Indian Sports, an era which offers more than a glimmer of hope for sportsmen who come from a not-so-affluent background. During the past couple of weeks, the spotlight has shifted from the cricketers to Vijender Kumar and Sushil Kumar. These men have been making headlines overshadowing even the Nuclear deal; their photos are being splashed all over leading National dailies. I kid u not, before the Beijing Olympics 2008 almost the whole nation remained benighted about these boys. *bemusement*. Definitely, it's not been a bed of roses for these small town boys. Their sporting careers were fought tooth and nail to finish. Go over their careers with a fine-tooth comb; startling revelations in their life would surprise anyone.

The Inside Story:

Vijender hails from Bhiwani, a small town in Haryana. He again was one of the many Indian sportsmen (read other than cricket) who never got his due. His father was a bus driver who worked overtime to pay Vijender's boxing club's fees. I would like to emphasize at this moment that his semifinal opponent's father was a boxing champion. It establishes the fact that as long as you have the desire and the drive to win even the greatest power on Earth can't crush you. Though Vijender did receive substantial cash from the Govt., boxing still being a fickle profession in India forces him to take a job with the Haryana police.

Sushil Kumar is no exception. The son of an MTNL bus driver, a cousin whose wrestling career had to be put to an end as the family could support only one wrestler (How many such talented sportsmen has the country missed? God Knows.) Baprola to Beijing, a journey which has had more than its fair share of challenges. A gloomy, dark, dingy room, his boxing dormitory plays host to twenty people, rats, cockroaches and mosquitoes. In the name of basic amenities, a tubelight and two fans which rotate slower than the Earth have been provided. My conspiracy of silence conflicts with me. The other dormitories can't even boast of those two coolers, unlike in Sushil's case. Two sportsmen have to share the same mattresses with hardly any space to walk in between the beds. Conducive conditions to breed an Olympic Champion? Definitely, not. Unassuming, simple but serious Sushil's endurance paved the way for his rise to fame, his rightful place in the history books.

When cricketers get to experience the ambience in a posh seven star hotel it is ambiguous why the Olympians were lodged in a hotel with average facilities. Why this indifference? Shameful.

It is indeed heartening to know that towns such as Bhiwani and Baprola have produced sportsmen of such calibre. Small towns, Big dreams.

In a country, where, when even a cricketer sneezes makes headlines, Sushil and Vijender Kumar making news deserves appreciation. Behind this moment of Olympic glory lies a decade of toil, hardwork, grit and courage. Perseverance does pay! It's not through the system they have come into limelight, it's against the system. (I doubt if there was one in place, if there was one-why didn't these guys get support before their victories??? Puzzling.) Their story has all been about guts, glory, pain and gain. Sushil and Vijender have converted failures into success, obstacles into stepping stones and have confronted every problem as a challenge. The medallists have put India back in the world map as far as boxing and wrestling are concerned. As long as there are places like Baprola and Bhiwani producing men like Sushil and Vijender, despite the ineffective system India will continue to bag those medals at world sporting events. Administrators, did you hear that?!?!?