

KERALA'S SUCCESSES

HOW TO GET GOOD RESULTS IN SPORT WITH LIMITED MEANS

by *NORRIS PRITAM*

The interest shown in sport by the people of this province in the south west of India is a powerful incentive for athletes. A good reason for excellent sports results.

The phenomenal rise of P. T. Usha reflects the level of sports consciousness in Kerala. No doubt the federal government has helped in a big way in providing training facilities and financial assistance to Usha, and other top sportspersons in the country, but Kerala's significant contribution towards the development of its athletes cannot be ignored.

Facilities and monetary benefits, apart the sociological conditions and physical attributes of Keralites have also helped them perform better than their counterparts from the rest of the country.

Strangely for a state which can boast of national champions in most disciplines, Kerala does not have a single modern stadium or synthetic track for athletics, nor an astro-turf for hockey.

In contrast, Delhi has all the facilities built for the 1982 Asian Games — the 75,000 capacity Nehru Stadium with synthetic Olymprene track, the Indira Gandhi indoor stadium with a capacity of 30,000, modern shooting ranges, an all weather Olympic size swimming pool. But what has been the capital's contribution to sports in the international arena? Women's marathon runner Asha Aggarwal, who trains on busy roads, and swimmer Khazan Singh, who learnt the

basics of his sport in a village pool on the outskirts of Delhi. In the light of these facts, Kerala's achievements are all the more remarkable.

What are the factors responsible for the high standard of sports in Kerala?

Consciousness.— The interest in sports and sportsmen among the general populace gives a boost to athletes. Spectators in Kerala have always risen to the occasion — compare the jam-packed stands during any sports meet in Kerala, be it athletics, football or volleyball, to the empty galleries at similar venues in North India.

Like an appreciative audience for a music concert, a knowledgeable crowd always helps a player give of his best. Subconsciously, the player feels answerable to the crowds if he performs badly. Sportsmen dare not slacken at a meet in Kerala because of the crowd reaction. Stadia are always packed, even for matches where there is gate money.

The media has also played its role. While newspapers in the north give excessive coverage to things happening abroad, the papers in the south, specially the language papers in Kerala, give massive coverage to local sports and sportsmen.

In schools and colleges, due importance is given to sports and Kerala has always done well



"Persegint la Pelota" of Santi Viladrich (ESP), silver medalist in FIAP, "Fotosport'86".

in national schools championships and intervarsity meets. With this broad base support system, top stars on the national level are bound to emerge.

Diet.— Keralites mainly eat rice which gives them a heavy amount of carbohydrates. And hence their lithe physique essential for events in track and field, and sports like volleyball, basketball, etc. Fats like ghee, which slows down the muscles, are not very popular in Kerala. The proteins come from fish which along with rice forms the staple diet of Keralites. It again does not give extra body fat. It is perhaps one of the reasons why Kerala has produced some of the top jumpers and sprinters in the country. T. C. Yohannan, Suresh Babu, K. Ragunathan, Sridhar Alva, were all top jumpers and dominated the scene for a number of years.

Even the present group of top Indian athletes, including Usha, Shiny Abraham, Sany Joseph and others have maintained the legacy of their seniors.

Job opportunities.— Many years ago sports officials in Kerala wondered why their top footballers were busy playing in Calcutta where they felt disoriented by the language and the food. Money they found was the reason. Top clubs like East Bengal and Mohun Bagan gave ample money to lure players like Pappana, Ramanna, John and Lionel. That realisation gave birth to a top football team from Premier Tyres in Keraia. They gave jobs to all these players, and the same year Kerala won both the senior and junior national football championships. The team was later disbanded but it gave the authorities a direction.

Then the Kerala electricity board and transport board also created jobs for top sportsmen

and Kerala continued to dominate the national sports scene. And the trend was set.

With it came the honour to sportsmen. The Kerala government's latest decision to name a road after Usha is a typical morale booster. Huge monetary awards to athletes like Usha have inspired others in the state to train harder and harder for excellence in sports.

Most of the sportsmen from Kerala come from rural areas — unexposed to glitter and tensions of the cities. It is a treat to talk to Usha and Shiny and others. Absolutely no airs about them, refreshingly simple and direct — essential for excellence in sports and sportsmanship.

Kerala, it seems, is not satisfied with what it has achieved so far. The state government has decided to observe 1987 as sports year to tap talent. A regional centre of the National Institute of Sports will soon be set up at Cannanore.

But why are women athletes stealing the thunder in Kerala? Where have all the males gone? "They have gone to the Gulf to earn money", is the answer. Meanwhile, more power to Usha, Samy and the other marvellous sports-women of Kerala who have brought such glory to the country.

N. P.



The extraordinary success of Usha, the women's champion.