



Press Release

Neeraj Chopra says Indians will ride ‘Budapest belief’ as javelin season set to start; ‘Anything possible’ in Paris Olympics

The world and defending Olympics javelin throw champion is expecting at least three Indians to be in medal contention at the upcoming Summer Games

New Delhi, May 9: India’s javelin stars will kick-off the outdoor season at the Doha leg of the Diamond League on May 10 with a new sense of ‘belief’. Leading the challenge will be world and Olympic champion Neeraj Chopra and his comrade-in-arm, Kishore Jena. The events, including the Federation Cup in Bhubaneswar on May 14-15, leading to Paris 2024 will also evaluate the returns from some intense overseas training under top coaches.

Chopra and Jena, who produced a historic gold-silver finish at the Hangzhou Asian Games, have both qualified for the upcoming Summer Olympics in July-August, but Chopra, the poster boy of Indian athletics, believes a third javelin thrower – DP Manu – should make the Paris cut as well.

“There was a time when I was not even sure of qualifying for a world championship but see how times have changed. In Budapest last year, we had three Indians (out of the top six) in the finals and that has made us believe we are no less than the Europeans who have dominated world javelin for so long. We have to take this Budapest belief forward and in Paris anything is possible,” said Chopra in an interview with SAI Media.

Manu DP is in line to join Chopra and Jena at Paris 2024. Manu is yet to breach the qualifying standard of 85.50metres but is placed comfortably in the 11th spot in the Road to Paris rankings. That should be enough to earn him a ticket to Paris unless several other pass him and he is unable to improve his own distance.

At the Indian Grand Prix I in Bengaluru recently, DP Manu won the men’s javelin throw competition with an effort of 81.91m, adrift of the Paris Olympics qualification mark of 85.50m and his personal best of 84.35. Manu had been training in Potchefstroom, South Africa with his coach Kashinath Naik, a former Commonwealth Games bronze medallist.

Leading up to the new outdoor season and until the Olympics, proper and intense training has been a top priority for the javelin throwers and all three – Chopra, Jena and Manu – have benefited from the government’s Target Olympic Podium Scheme that funds athletes to prepare and peak at global events, especially the Summer Games.

In the current Paris Olympics cycle, Government has spent more than 4.87 Crore INR on these three javelin throwers with Chopra receiving close to 4 Crore INR alone. The major expenses include training and competition related, equipment, coach's salary and out-of-pocket allowances.

Chopra said he had always paid attention to his overseas training and has meticulously chosen his competition schedule so that he is fully prepared ahead of a major global event. It will be no different ahead of Paris. "The entire scenario changes when you arrive at the Games Village. The real pressure starts building up then. But I should be prepared," said Chopra.

The genial 26-year-old Chopra attributed his preparedness to the training he has undergone overseas at different international centres in Finland, South Africa, UK and Turkey at various times.

The reigning Diamond League champion said: "After Tokyo, I found out how international athletes plan their schedule and choose their training centres so that there is minimum travel, quicker acclimatisation and proper diet leading up to a major event. These are finer details that I discuss with my coach and once a decision is made, we approach TOPS for assistance. It has worked well for us.

"Success depends on team work. My coach and physio make immense contribution. The coach reviews my technique and we talk on what's the best style for me. We also have a specialist for strength training. Planning has been key," said Chopra

A foodie at heart, Chopra says adjusting to a proper diet has been part of a process that has helped him to get better. It's a bit of a sacrifice too for a Haryanvi lad who loves his home-made *churma* (made from crushed Indian bread, sugar and ghee) and *gulab jamun* (a traditional fried Indian dessert made from milk and flour) with ice-cream.

"Yes, you have to get used to some bland food. Initially, it was tough when I was not getting Indian food but I have got used to this not-so-tasty food," said Chopra, adding that his diet is largely vegetarian.

Chopra emphasized that while "belief" will play an important part going forward from Doha, he cautioned that performance can never be guaranteed. "It will be on how we do on that day. I strongly believe we all are training hard and doing a Budapest encore is not impossible," said Chopra.

Chopra, the Indian superstar, who threw a world leading 88.67 meters to win the gold medal last year in Doha, will start as a favourite in a field that is expected to feature Jakub Vadlejch (Czech), Anderson Peters (Grenada), Max Dehning (Germany) and Jena among others.

(Eom)