

Indian men's wrestlers happy with their progress, hopeful that competitions can restart after Covid lockdown

New Delhi/Sonepat, October 22: The Indian Men's Wrestling camp for Freestyle and Greco-Roman is currently in progress at the SAI NCOE, Sonepat. The camp had commenced on September 1 and the wrestlers had to complete a 14 day quarantine before starting their training. Wrestling is one of the most successful sports in India's Olympic history having contributed five medals to India's Olympic medal haul.

Prior to all training in National Centres of Excellence and SAI training centres being suspended due to the coronavirus lockdown, India were performing very well in the sport with their best ever medal haul at the 2019 World Wrestling Championships where they won a total of five medals. Bajrang Punia is one of India's premier Olympic medal hopefuls, having won a gold medal at the 2018 Asian Games and Commonwealth Games as well as a silver medal at the 2018 World Championships and bronze at the 2019 World Championships. The 26 year-old 65 kg freestyle wrestler is very happy to be back at the national camp and training again, "It is very good that we are back at training, it isn't that we were out of rhythm because we were training at our homes during the lockdown but that cannot be compared to what one can do at the camp and when we train on mats. The arrangements that have been made at SAI Sonepat are very good and safe, proper zoning of the campus has been done and no outsider can come in contact. All wrestlers feel very safe here."

India have so far won four Olympic quotas and three in men's freestyle wrestling, Bajrang is one of them and the others are Deepak Punia and Ravi Dahiya. National Chief Coach, Men's Freestyle Wrestling Jagminder Singh is happy to see the progress of the wrestlers since the camp resumed but reiterated that competition will give a better idea of their level. He said, "From the time training restarted to now, the wrestlers have improved considerably. We started slow but now our training is in full momentum but eventually we need to tune our training as per the competitions that lie ahead. The true test of where the wrestlers stand will only come when they participate in competitions."

The World Wrestling Championships are scheduled for December this year and both Bajrang Punia and Jagminder Singh are hopeful that the

tournament goes ahead as well as other wrestling events being able to resume. Bajrang said, "We were in good rhythm before the lockdown was announced. Even now our training is going well but we will only know our level and where we stand when we compete. A player needs to play otherwise they will never know where they stand."

India have the opportunity to win their remaining Olympic quotas in men's wrestling (6 in Greco-Roman and 3 in Freestyle) at the Asian and World Qualification tournaments scheduled for next year.