

Press Release

Sports Minister speaks to men's and women's hockey teams, assures practice will resume in controlled environment

New Delhi, May 14, 2020: Union Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Shri. Kiren Rijju interacted with the senior men's and women's hockey teams housed in Sports Authority of India's National Center of Excellence in Bangalore over video conference for over two hours and sought suggestions from over 57 athletes, coaches and the high performance director, to resume on-field training after the lockdown is lifted.

In an online meeting that was attended by Ravi Mital, Secretary Sports, Sandip Pradhan, Director General, SAI, Dr. Narinder Dhruv Batra, President, Indian Olympic Association, Md. Mushtaque Ahmad, President, Hockey India, David John, High Performance Director, Hockey India, hockey coaches Graham Reid, Sjoerd Marijne and other senior officials of the hockey federation, the athletes and coaches spoke of the need to resume training in small batches on 4-5 players within the SAI campus.

"If we are able to start training on basic skills and specialised skills in small batches and work on other techniques like penalty corners, it will help the teams to make a start towards Olympic preparations," suggested Manpreet Singh, Captain of the Men's Hockey Team.

Rani Rampal, Captain of the women's team said while fitness wise they are in top-shape but they want to get back on the field to build stamina and remain focussed for the Olympics. "We are safer here than we would be even at home. I feel we can start training while following protocols of health and social distancing."

Having been restricted to their rooms and the parts of the campus for over two months now, and having not met their families for a long time, many of them are homesick. "It is important for us to be in top mental shape and if we start training it can help us refresh our minds and handle homesickness. Since there will be no events in the next few months, staying focussed on the game will be tough unless we start to train," said Sreejesh PR.

"We will need sustained support of the government in these difficult times. And once the senior teams are back to on-field training, we must also chart the way forward for the junior teams to start their practice since the Junior Hockey World Cup is also scheduled in 2021," said Hockey India President, Md. Mushtaque Ahmad.

Stressing that the teams are not at a disadvantage vis-à-vis other national teams who have qualified for the Tokyo Olympics, David John said, "Most countries in the world have not been able to resume sports training yet. Only Holland and Belgium have started training and that too in small groups. If we resume training soon, we will be on the right track and probably at an advantage. The players have

used the two months to study in detail the moves of opponent teams and players and I think that will be a huge advantage.”

After the interaction, Sports Minister assured the athletes and coaches that training within the campus will be resumed, but only upon implementation of the Standard Operation Procedures created by the committee instituted at SAI. The SOP is being prepared after consultation with medical experts and National Sporting Federations. “The SOP is being drawn up and now we have the inputs from coaches and hockey players. We will resume practice soon but in a controlled manner. Those technicalities have to be drawn up by health experts in consultation with the coaches, federation officials and the government. I assure that we will extend all support to get our athletes back on the ground to train, but we must be careful. We cannot afford to risk the health of even one athlete because that will jeopardise the entire training plan. We must accept that in post Covid-era sports will not be played in the same way and we will have to adjust to the changes and move forward,” the Sports Minister said.

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