

## Sport

# Asian track queen going full steam at 34

by Raghunath Rau, India Abroad News Service

New Delhi, July 14 - The "Payyoli Express" keeps steaming ahead, long after everyone thought it would have sputtered to a halt. Payyoli Express, as the Asian track queen P.T. Usha from the village of Payyoli in the southern Indian state of Kerala is endearingly called, has not let age become an obstacle. At 34, and a mother of one, she still continues to amaze the Indian sports world with comebacks after comebacks. In the latest, Usha travels to Fukuoka, Japan, next week to take part in what will be her fifth Asian Track and Field Championship beginning with the one held in Kuwait in 1983. At the Fukuoka meet, Usha is slated to take part in three individual events, the 100 metres, 200m and 400m, plus the two relays. Expected to be a grueling test for anyone, certainly for someone of Usha's vintage, the "golden girl" is expected to have a major share of whatever medal haul the 33-member Indian squad is able to manage.

Ironically, 1998 could still be one of Usha's best years since her heydays in the late 1980s. She broke a string of her own national records at the Federation Cup in the southern Indian city of Chennai last week, though she strictly qualified only in the 200m and 400m for the Fukuoka meet. In the 200m, Usha clocked 23.30 seconds, as against her best-ever of 23.27 recorded at the New Delhi Asian Track and Field meet of 1989. Later, Usha insisted that this was the best race she had ever run, "no matter what the timing shows," implying that she did not really trust the clocking mechanism in Chennai. Usha made her international debut at the boycott-ridden Moscow Olympic Games of 1980. She crashed out in the opening heat of the 400m. Just four years later, she drew international media attention at the Los An-

geles Olympics when she made the final of the 400m hurdles, the first Indian woman to do so. She missed the bronze medal in a photo finish, and her fourth place timing of 55.42 seconds is still a national record.

Just a year after Los Angeles, Usha took the Asian athletics world by storm at the Jakarta ATF meet. She won all the three individual events, and had the satisfaction in the process of beating the celebrated Lydia de Vega of the Philippines in the 100 m. In addition, Usha was

4x400 event and was second in the 4x100m race. The downside started a year later. Usha made it to the Seoul Olympics of 1988 amid controversy following a heel injury. She crashed out in the heats of the 400m hurdles and was kept out of the relay team after much drama. Still, Usha won three golds (200m, 400m and 400m hurdles) at the New Delhi ATF in 1989. She won a silver in the 100m, was part of the gold medal winning 4x400m team and of the silver medal winning 4x100m squad.

The 1990 Asian Games at Beijing was a highly emotional occasion for Usha. Even though she finished second in the 400m, the entire attention of the stadium and of the media was on her. Many felt it was her swan song. That impression was soon reinforced. In 1991 came her marriage, and motherhood followed soon. The athletics world then wrote off Usha. But she stunned everyone in 1993 by expressing a desire to get back onto the track. Then followed much disappointment and even humiliation. She made it to the Hiroshima Asian Games of 1994 where she was once again the cynosure of media attention. But she could manage only a fourth position in the 200m and was part of the silver medal winning 4x100m relay team.

If motherhood has enhanced Usha's performances, another Indian athlete, Shiny Wilson, has achieved some of her best timings after becoming a mother. This, in fact, is a worldwide phenomenon, and has been attributed to the secretion of particular hormones in the body during pregnancy. As for Usha, there is yet another Asian Games round the corner, in Bangkok in December. This wonderful saga of Indian sport promises to endure for some more time.

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part of the gold medal winning 4x400m relay team and of the bronze medal winning 4x100m relay squad. The dream run continued at the Seoul Asian Games in 1986 and at Singapore in 1987. At Seoul, Usha won four golds and a silver -- winning in the 200m, 400m, 400m hurdles and was a member of the 4x100m relay team. She came second in the 100m race. At Singapore, Usha was second in the 100m, first in the 400m and first in the 400m hurdles. In addition, the relay teams of which she was a part won the

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## Real about to rope in Scala

MADRID, July 15: Italy's Nevio Scala looked set to become Real Madrid's new coach, replacing Jose Antonio Camacho who tendered his resignation last week after less than a month on the job, news reports said Tuesday, reports AP.

Scala, former coach of Germany's Borussia Dortmund, arrived in Madrid on Tuesday for contract talks with Real chairman Lorneo Sanz. National television said a two-season contract could be announced later in the day.

If appointed, Scala would replace Camacho who resigned last Thursday after disagreements over the contract for one of his assistants. His decision came just over a month before the start of the next Spanish first division season on Aug. 30.

Camacho, in turn, had replaced German Juup Heynckes who was let go in June after one season, despite leading Real to a record seventh European Champions title. The side defeated Dortmund to reach the final.

Madrid had initially indicated it was chasing Dutch national team coach Guus Hiddink for the job.

## Italian boomer joins Everton

LIVERPOOL, England, July 15: Italian defender Marco Materazzi joined Premier League side Everton on Wednesday in a four-year transfer deal from Perugia valued at 2.8 million pounds (4.4 million dollars), reports AP.

Materazzi, 24, is the first player signed by Walter Smith since he left Glasgow Rangers to take over as Everton manager.

"We are very pleased to have got hold of him," Smith said. "He is an honest player who I hope will do very well for us. He is tall, quite aggressive, can pass the ball, has a good shot from free kicks and is in good the air at set pieces. He should be beneficial to us overall."

Smith confirmed more signings will follow soon.

"This won't be the end," he said. "We need midfield players. We have signed a good defender and now we also hope we can improve our midfield position in the next seven to 10 days. It looks like being an active period for us."

Paris mayor's Olympic dream

PARIS, July 15: Paris is to consider a bid to stage the Olympic Games following the success of the French World Cup, mayor Jean Tiberi said here Tuesday, reports AFP.

"We are going to study the possibility of an Olympic candidacy," Tiberi said at the annual Bastille Day garden party at the Elysee Palace. "We were so encouraged by the World Cup."

But he said that many factors would have to come together before an official approach could be made to the International Olympic Committee.

Sydney next stages the summer Olympic Games in 2000, with Athens getting the nod for 2004. For the 2008 games, five cities are in the running — Osaka, Toronto, Istanbul, Seville and Buenos Aires.

## 20 new stadiums for 2002 World cup

TOKYO, July 15: Japan and South Korea, co-hosts of the 2002 World Cup, are pushing ahead with their plans to build new stadiums despite the economic crisis in Asia, reports Reuters.

Officials say the problems facing their economies will not derail the preparations despite the feasibility check conducted by president Kim Dae-Jung's Koran administration.

"We are aiming to complete construction of the stadiums by October 2001," said Lee Yun-Je, an official of south Korea's organising committee.

Each country has already identified 10 host venues.

Two stadiums, Yokohama and Osaka, have been completed in Japan, while those in three South Korean cities, Pusan, Taegu and Inchon, are now under construction.

"There is no sense of urgency yet since it would only take about 32 months to complete a stadium," said Lee.

South Korea's organising committee has estimated it will cost 10 trillion won (7.8 billion US dollars) to build all the 20 stadiums selected by the two countries could be expected to host only three matches.

The opening game will be held in Seoul along with the third place play-off if FIFA does not scrap that match.

The South Korean government will provide 30 per cent of the costs of building each of the 10 stadiums.

As well as the two completed stadiums, Japan's host venues include Kobe, Ibaraki, Miyagi, Niigata, Oita, Saitama, Sapporo and Shizuoka.

The cost has been included

in the budgets of the local governments for the past three or four years so the plans will not be affected," Junji Ogura, general secretary of the Japan football association (JFA), said in Paris last week.

The construction of nine of the stadiums will be completed by the spring of 2001 with the last one in the city of Kobe set to be finished by the autumn.

Hiroshi Uchijima, general-secretary of Japan's World Cup organising committee (JAWOC) said the running costs of hosting the World Cup, which excludes building the stadiums, could be double the amount spent to stage France '98.

Basically, the cost for Japan to host the event would be about the same as that for France. The same could be said for South Korea as well. In other words, the cost would be double the amount France had to shoulder.

But in the run-up to the year 2002 we don't know how much extra cost we'll end up with. I believe the total cost could be 50 to 60 billion yen each," he said.

With 64 matches taking place in the 2002 finals each of the 20 stadiums selected by the players could be expected to host only three matches.

The opening game will be held in Seoul along with the third place play-off if FIFA does not scrap that match.

The World Cup final will be staged in Japan at either the newly constructed 70,000-seater Yokohama international stadium or the 63,000-seater Saitama prefectoral stadium.

A decision on which venue will host the final will be taken next year.

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## Manchester yet to catch up

LONDON, July 15: As England prepares to send their biggest ever team to the Commonwealth Games in Malaysia, preparations for the 2002 games in Manchester are coming under increasing scrutiny, reports AP.

Norman Sarsfield, chairman of England's Commonwealth Games Council, admits the facilities at Manchester are still only in the planning stages.

Sarsfield, speaking at the announcement of England's swimming team for the games in September, said the stadium in Kuala Lumpur were the best he had ever seen.

But he said he was "ashamed" because the facilities at Manchester did "not measure up at all."

The swimming pool at Kuala Lumpur is better than the pool used for the Atlanta Olympics and the (track) stadium — it's the best I've seen. Better than the Stade de France (venue of the World Cup soccer final)," he said.

Sarsfield, who visited Malaysia last month to inspect the facilities, said the Malaysian government had supported the Commonwealth Games and used it as an way to improve infrastructure.

"Everything will be perfect. And the smog won't be a problem the Malaysian's have ensured the air quality will be at suitable levels for the athletes," he said.

Kuala Lumpur is the first Asian city to host the Commonwealth Games, which started as the Empire Games in New Zealand in 1930.

British Sports Minister Tony Banks responded to questions about Manchester's lack of visible facilities by saying he was confident England would host a successful competition.

"There was an agreement between the Sports Council and the Manchester authorities about the 2002 Commonwealth Games — there's time enough for us to get it right," he said.

England will send a 452-strong team to Malaysia in a bid to restore some confidence in England's sporting ability for the nation's public.

Sarsfield predicted England would challenge Australia, which he rated among the top three swimming countries in the world, for Commonwealth Games supremacy.

Losers but not out of favour

BRASILIA, Brazil, July 15 (AP/Internet): Brazilian fans turned out by the thousands Tuesday to give their team a hero's welcome to the capital, despite their worst World Cup defeat ever.

President Fernando Henrique Cardoso hailed "our glorious team" and bestowed the National Merit Order on each player at a ceremony in the Presidential Palace.

"It is possible there is happiness across France. But we were four times world champions this century — they are champions just once," Cardoso said of France's 3-0 victory Sunday. "Our destiny is to grow and become champions. There will be other tournaments."

Two Brazilian air force fighters escorted the jetliner bringing the team from Paris as it approached the airport.

The welcome by thousands of cheering fans in Brasilia contrasted with the more subdued tone in Rio de Janeiro a few hours later, where only a few hundred fans greeted the players.

Rio authorities had been organising a massive welcome in hopes the team would bring home Brazil's fifth World Cup title, but called off the celebration after the defeat.

Soccer star Ronaldo, who suffered a sudden fit of convulsions hours before the game, looked tired Tuesday as he left the plane.

He was holding the leash of a white dog — a gift for his girlfriend, a television report said.

The first assignment was the Silver Jubilee Independence Cup tournament in Dhaka. After beating Pakistan in the preliminary game, it was back to

the last straw came in the Sharjah four-nation tournament held in December '97 in which India lost all matches and looked totally at sea.

Drastic steps were needed to salvage India's cricketing pride and to the eternal credit of India's national selection committee, drastic steps were taken. In effect the five-man team had said their mea culpas in front of the entire nation, and wonder of wonders, not for the first time, an India captain was recalled to his post and the immediate results were remarkable.

The next opponents were the West Indies in a disastrous run-out against the West Indies at Sharjah in December, the former captain was a picture of defeat and dejection.

Just a month later, he was back at the helm and totally in control. Even as gloom descended on Dhaka and the umpires walked off the field in the deciding match, the current captain stood rooted to his spot.

The umpires and the Pakistan players had no choice but to return and the record was established in light not fit for a school game.

Finally, the team had established faith in itself. The captain was back among the runs and Tendulkar was about to begin one of the most amazing streaks in international cricket.

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Aime Jacquet (C) holds aloft the FIFA World Cup while being landed by French President Jacques Chirac (L) and Prime Minister Lionel Jospin (R) during the Bastille Day Garden party at Elysee palace on July 14. — AFP photo

## Azhar — the comeback captain



NEW DELHI, July 15: Indian cricket has rarely seen comebacks of the calibre and kind which Moham

that old rivalry in the best-of-three finals. The decider can be put down as the turning point for the team's morale fortunes. India's feat of scoring 316, the highest winning total ever achieved in a one-day international, put them into the record books.

Playing his first Test at Calcutta in 1984-85 against England, Azhar scored a century on debut and then went on to score two more in the next two Tests. A unique feat in Test cricket. He has now played 91 Tests with 20

notches.

Azhar led India to a record number of Tests and victories before he was deposed shortly after the 1996 tour of England. Though the Indian team was far from disgraced during the series, the feeling was that the incumbent skipper did not have his mind on the job and it was

time for a change.