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**‘This group has the spirit to restore our Olympic glory,’ says Shri Ashok Kumar**

*~The hockey legend was honoured with the Hockey India Major Dhyan Chand Lifetime Achievement Award at Hockey India 6th Annual Awards~*

**New Delhi, 11th April 2024**: Life came full circle for Shri Ashok Kumar as he was awarded the Hockey India Major Dhyan Chand Lifetime Achievement Award, named after world-renowned hockey magician and his father, Major Dhyan Chand, at the Hockey India 6th Annual Awards 2023 in March this year. He joins the illustrious company of previous winners; Balbir Singh Sr., Late. Capt. Shankar Laxman, Harbinder Singh, A S Bakshi, and Gurbux Singh.

In the latest episode of Hockey Te Charcha, a podcast series launched by Hockey India, Ashok Kumar expressed his emotions upon receiving the Hockey India Major Dhyan Chand Lifetime Achievement Award. He took us through the nerve-wracking 1975 World Cup Final against Pakistan through his eyes and shared anecdotes from the life of his father Major Dhyan Chand. Ashok Kumar also shed light on the hardships present Indian Men's Hockey Team midfielder Vivek Sagar Prasad battled while training under him and outlined his expectations from the current squad at the Paris 2024 Olympics.

Speaking about the importance of the award, Shri Ashok Kumar said, “Definitely, such moments when you get awarded for your efforts, when you are recognised, make you feel proud but the effect of the award on the people around you and the youngsters in the national team is more important. I am lucky that I was awarded, in the name of my father Major Dhyan Chand, who spread India’s name throughout the world. I am lucky to stand behind legendary players who have won the award before me and I will always consider them to be above me in stature.”

“It is a prestigious award, one of the highest honours you can receive in hockey but for me, it’s the name of my father Major Dhyan Chand that holds more weightage. My whole family is delighted that I have joined a special line of hockey legends and that the Dhyan Chand name will continue to live on in history,” he added.

Shri Ashok Kumar was part of the greatly revered side that won India's only World Cup title in 1975 by defeating Pakistan in the Final. Ashok Kumar always felt that he had to emulate his father to the best of his abilities but a Gold medal had eluded him in his career till then. He was added only as the 16th man in the squad before the start of the 1975 World Cup and his chances of playing were very slim. But as fate would have it, Ashok Kumar was the one who scored to complete the 2-1 victory over Pakistan in the Final.

Recounting his memories from the Final he said, “We visited all the temples possible to pray for our victory a day before. On the day of the Final, the whole stadium was packed to the rafters but we had prepared the way we always did. I visualised myself playing the match, focused on the mistakes I’d made so far so that I don’t repeat them. I had great chemistry with BP Govinda and we decided that if we lost the ball in the final third, one of us would fall back to help win the ball back and we completely shut down Pakistan’s attack. However, they scored against the run of play. After a heated halftime talk, Surjit Singh equalised through a penalty corner in the 44th minute. After which we unleashed all hell upon them. In the 51st minute, Ajit Pal pushed the ball to me in the circle, I dodged a few players and passed to Victor Philips who passed back to me on a dime and I just had to tap it to score and seal our victory. After the final whistle, I threw my hockey stick into the crowd out of happiness and that’s when I realised, I could finally stand with pride in front of my father, Gold medal in hand.”

After his retirement, Ashok Kumar began coaching youngsters and the current team features two of his disciples; Vivek Sagar Prasad and Nilakanta Sharma. They are currently in Australia, preparing themselves for the Paris 2024 Olympics.

Stating his expectations for the current Indian Men’s Hockey Team, Ashok Kumar said, “People were hockey fanatics back when I used to play, there was a pride associated with the sport in India. No other country has been able to match the feat of India winning 8 gold medals and we have to protect this legacy at any cost. I believe this set of players can do it; they have been controlling games recently and have showcased unity. I’m sure this team has the winning spirit which can place India on the podium, will they stand on the top for the 9th time and restore the past glory is all that is left to see.”

Please see the attached pictures.

**Spotify Link:**<https://spotifyanchor-web.app.link/e/nX9IZbMnHIb>

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**About HOCKEY INDIA**

HOCKEY INDIA (HI) is the governing body with exclusive mandate to direct and conduct all activities for both men and women's hockey in India. It is recognized by the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, Govt. of India as the sole body responsible towards promoting Hockey in India.

Headquartered in New Delhi, Hockey India was established on 20th May, 2009 and is affiliated to the International Hockey Federation (FIH), the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and Asian Hockey Federation (AHF).

Committed to the development of Hockey in the country, Hockey India with the assistance of Sports Authority of India and Department of Sports, Government of India, trains players at sub-junior, junior and senior level. The governing body engages in Coaching the coaches with International Standard certification programs, educates and equips technical officials and umpires to find a foothold in international arena, provides world-class infrastructure and International exposure for the players besides regular international competition. Hockey India has also pioneered in bringing top International hockey events to India such as the FIH Men's World Cup in 2010 and 2018, FIH Champions Trophy in 2014, FIH Junior Men's World Cup in 2016 and 2021, FIH Hockey World League Final in 2017. With its vision to popularize the game and constantly promote it, Hockey India brought the Indian Men's Hockey Team into the top three in the world. Hockey India is also dedicated to getting the Indian Women's Hockey Team into the top three in the world.

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**About ODISHA**

Odisha - the Eastern State of India - is known for its love for Hockey and over the years it has evolved to be the Global Hub of Hockey. The State successfully hosted the Odisha Hockey Men's World Cup Bhubaneswar 2018, followed by the FIH Men's Series Finals Bhubaneswar Odisha, FIH Olympic Qualifiers Odisha, and FIH Hockey Pro League 2020-21. Odisha has previously hosted the Champions Trophy 2014 and the Odisha Men's Hockey World League Final Bhubaneswar 2017. Odisha also hosted the FIH Men's Hockey Junior World Cup in 2021.

Kalinga Lancers, the team owned by the State, were the winners in the Hockey India League 2017. Taking a step further towards realising the dream of restoring the glory of Indian Hockey at the global level, the State is sponsoring the Indian Hockey Teams till 2033.

Odisha also hosted the FIH Odisha Hockey Men’s World Cup 2023 and the Rourkela and Bhubaneswar legs of the FIH Hockey Pro League 2022/23 and 2023/24.

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