

Greetings from Special Olympics Bharat

## Scripting history with the Gothia Cup 2024 Trophy



Dr Mallika Nadda and Mr Mukund Vasudevan at the welcome ceremony



Team India in Sweden  
Photo Credit: SKF



Chief Guest, Ms Raksha Khadse, Union Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports, with the officials & footballer Adib Khan, athlete from UP, at the welcome ceremony

The SO Bharat Champions scripted history at Gothenburg this year as they aced the tournament, lifting the Gothia Cup, unbeaten in all the matches leading to victory. Supported by SKF India, the Indian team, comprising of ten athletes with Intellectual and developmental delays from six states of India, namely, Delhi, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Puducherry, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal, stamped its maiden entry with an extraordinary performance at the tournament.

SO Bharat won their opening group game against SO Finland 3-0, and then followed it up with a big win of 6-0 against SO Germany. The Indian contingent won over Hong Kong by 6-0 in Match 3, and then followed it up with another big win by 3-1 against SO Denmark to make it into the final. SO Bharat lifted the trophy after a nail-biting 4-3 win in the final clash with SO Denmark

Alongside the sports experience, the heart-warming send-off hosted by the Embassy of Sweden in New Delhi and facilitated by the SKF India team, a meeting in Sweden with the ambassador of India, followed by a rousing welcome at the Hotel, The Lalit back in India, completed the experience holistically.

**Mukund Vasudevan, President of SKF India and Southeast Asia**, said, "We extend our heartfelt congratulations to our incredible team of football players for their outstanding victory. This achievement

is a testament to their unwavering dedication, resilience, and the power of inclusivity. We are immensely proud to have supported these talented individuals in showcasing their abilities on an international stage. I thank Special Olympics Bharat and the Sports Authority of India for their incredible support, training, and care. This success not only brings glory to our nation but also reinforces our commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive environment. Welcome back, champions! It is your moment!"

While extending a warm welcome to the football team, **SO Bharat President Dr Mallika Nadda** said, "Today is a significant day for us as it's the Global Day of Inclusion. It gives me immense pleasure to mark this day with the victory of the SO Bharat Champions at the Gothia Cup tournament. The stellar performance of the athletes is a result of impeccable training, practice and motivation. I am grateful to team SKF India for opening this phenomenal opportunity for our Athletes and also for their enthusiastic support. The support of the Embassy of Sweden in India further made the experience heartwarming and inspirational. It is delightful to see diverse organisations converging to drive inclusion forward."

[More details](#)

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## A Footballing Lifestyle



Mohd. Shaheer, Athlete  
from Kerala

Mohammad Shaheer, footballer, returned jubilant from the Gothia Cup tournament held in Gothenburg Sweden from 14-18 July 2024, having netted the maximum number of goals for team India.

Shaheer hails from Malappuram, Kerala, a city located about 160 kms from Kochi and also known to be 'football-crazy'. His father is a fisherman, mother a home-maker and, he has two siblings, both older than him. The daily toil of his family did little to stop him from aspiring to be Cristiano Ronaldo. He refreshes each time he enters the football arena, indigenously marked at the sea-shore, where his house is located, a regular practice that he follows since the age of 7yrs. This is the space that lifts his spirits and gives him friends. Outside the 'arena' he hesitates to socialize

Sports provided him a respite and then happiness from the dejection he faced at school. Along with Football he plays cricket, volleyball and Handball as well. [Read More](#)



## Champions Forever

Shrey Kadian, softball player, never imagined that he would someday, rub shoulders with none other than the Cricket legend, Mr Kapil Dev. It was a chance meeting that came as a surprise to him, weaving a 'just another day' into a memorable one.

Since his victory at the Special Olympics World Summer Games held in LA. USA in 2015, he moved on demonstrating his leadership qualities beyond the sports field while continuing to nurture his passion for softball and football. In this journey he earned several 'firsts' including, being the first Indian to represent the Asia Pacific region at the SO Global Youth Input Council. Mindful of his duties towards his family, he attempted employment few times, and seems to have reached a place he loves, called, 'Potentials' which is a full-service clinic where therapy is fun, safe and effective. He joined it in May 2024 training children between ages 4 and 18 yrs., Yoga, fitness and roller skating. With Ms Parul Gupta, Child Psychologist & his mentor, he plans to open training in Athletics and softball as well.



L-R: Shrey Kadian with Kapil Dev



Rithik Hukku, Athlete leader

Rithik Hukku, a passionate Cricketer, is another story SO Bharat is proud of. Transitioning into a leader, from being shy and mostly silent in his childhood, He played Cricket and football, representing India in both the sports at international levels as well. The cheer and confidence that sports brought to him gave way to an effective Athlete leader, representing India at various levels, including at the youth summit held parallel to the LA summer games in 2015, as Shrey aced the softball arena at the same event. Rithik is currently employed with the Hotel 'The Lalit' in Jaipur, Rajasthan, thriving there as well, in an environment that embraces inclusion. Supported by his mentor, Dr DC Gupta and Mr DK Singh, Area Director, Rajasthan Chapter, he, despite his full-time job, continues to be an agent of change.

In celebration of the 56th year of Special Olympics, he organised an athlete development training program, assuming his role as an 'event planner', & providing an opportunity to the athlete leader 'Kamakshi Sharma, mentored by Ms Shikha Sharma, to lead the session. The trainees included students and adult mentors from four schools, namely, Disha Foundation, Sharda, Milestone & Shree Nirmal Vivek special schools. The session was held at the Shree Nirmal Vivek special schools with about 40 persons in attendance.



Training program in progress in Jaipur

For both Shrey and Rithik, Special Olympics is a way of life they have grown with. No matter what they do, their continuing participation in the movement comes naturally.

## Healthy Athletes screenings held in Kashmir valley for the first time



Health screening in progress in Kashmir



Dental screening in progress in Himachal Pradesh

Kashmir and Ladakh alone conducted screenings of 947 Athletes from the areas which are considered



A young athlete drill underway

‘politically disturbed’ but enjoys a scenic backdrop and houses wonderful people. The screening covered athletes from the nearby villages such



Extreme Left: Dr Mohd Jaffer Akhoun, Chief Executive Councilor, Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council, Kargil with the SO Bharat officials



as Draas, Anantnag etc as well. Young Athlete drills were organised for the athletes to ensure fun and activity with a joyful splash of color. The administration at Leh plans to hold a special OPD (outpatient department) for children & adults with Intellectual Disabilities and equip the District Early Intervention centers suitably for the benefit the special athletes. They have appointed a nodal officer from their hospital to interact with Special Olympics to develop the SO Health Programming locally. The administration has also promised a Special School with residential facilities to support the training of the athletes. In the words of Dr Ayoub, Area Director, SO Bharat Kashmir, "We want to tell the world that the challenges that we confront will not stop us from developing our motherland and nurturing all our children in the best way possible"

The month of June witnessed medical screenings held across the states of Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand & Ladakh. 1456 Athletes from three districts in Kashmir, five districts in Himachal Pradesh, one in Jharkhand and two in Ladakh were screened. Supported by GIC (General Insurance Ltd) Medfest screenings were held in the states excepting Himachal Pradesh where the Sports Centre athletes were screened in the Opening eyes & Special Smiles disciplines, supported by NHPC.

## Vignesh shares the change he experiences with the hearing aid provided to him at the Berlin Games 2023



The SOI Global Webinar held on 18 June 2024



L-R : Sheetal Negi , Ms Maria Shriver , Vignesh Naik in Berlin in June 2023

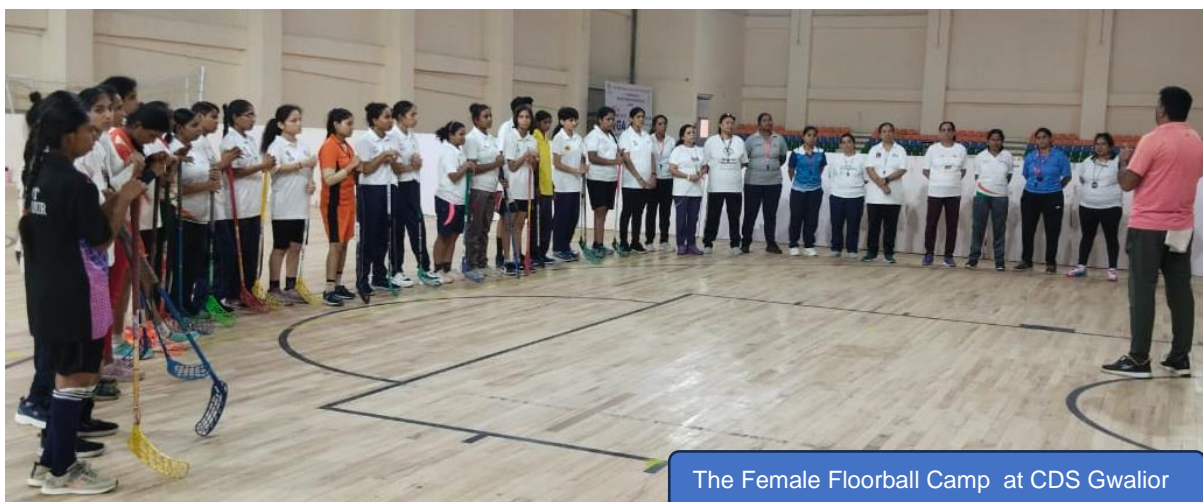
Vignesh Lokeshwar Naik, 21 yrs old, a Table Tennis participant of the Special Olympics world summer games held in Berlin Germany in June 2023, was invited by SOI for the global webinar held on 18 June 2024. His Coach Ms Sheetal Negi and his mentor Mr Cyril Lopes were invited as well, to share their experience of the change that the Starkey funded hearing aid has brought to Vignesh, the athlete from the state of Karnataka. Mr Brandon Sawalich, President & CEO Starkey interacted with the team and expressed his delight at the response and the impact the device has made to Vignesh. The webinar that was organised by Special Olympics International in celebration of one year of the Berlin World Games & viewed by over 350 people globally, ran a short video of the overwhelming moment captured in real time. [View video here](#)

According to Ms Sheetal Negi, Vignesh excitedly called his brother and mother as soon as he wore the hearing aid in Berlin. He could hear his coach. He won two gold medals in Table Tennis, one each in

singles and doubles, at the Berlin games 2023 and the hearing aid continues to improve his quality of life

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## The Female Floorball Camp builds momentum for the Special Olympics World Winter Games 2025



Forty-eight campers, including 26 Athletes from 14 states of India participated in the floorball Camp held for the Special Olympics World Winter Games to be held in Turin, Italy in March 2025. SO Bharat Madhya Pradesh hosted the National Coaching camp at the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Training Centre for Disability Sports, Gwalior (also referred as Centre for Disability Sports - CDS) from 20-29 June 2024. This is the first Preparatory camp held in the sport following the National Championship held earlier this year in Delhi. The subsequent camps will enable SO Bharat to filter down to a suitably prepared team of 8 female floorballers and 2 Coaches to face competition at the Italy

World Games 2025.

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## Athlete Leaders stand tall with the conclusion of the offline Training



The Macquarie officials at the concluding session of the Athlete leadership Training

The first ever Athlete Leadership Training, supported by Macquarie, held with 15 Athletes and 10-15 Mentors from the Delhi NCR region concluded on 22 June 2024. The Athletes appeared as shining examples of emerging leaders and agents of change. As the leaders dropped their inhibitions to speak, share and support each other, the National Youth leadership Council members brushed their modules, leading sessions and learning through this exercise. The trained Athlete leaders will be absorbed in the NYLC and nearly all will get a chance to enter panel discussions, lead sessions at the online sessions of the training which commenced on 24 July 2024, tapping Athlete potential from nearly 10-12 states of India.

The last session of the Delhi NCR in the offline mode, concluded with an interactive session with over 20 employees of Macquarie. A session on 'Risk Management' was led by Mr Prashant Jain, from Macquarie, after which Unified Table Tennis, monitored by Coach Suresh Kumar, was played enthusiastically with the officials as unified partners.

The preparation now, is of running the online sessions with the aim of exploring talent all over India. The online module has kick-started and the NYLC is furiously putting their minds together to review and smoothen creases, wherever observed.



The Macquarie officials playing as unified partners with the Athletes

## Exploring the wider world through Sports



Raghudeep Singh, 47 yrs, is a physically well-built Athlete from Jammu, who was diagnosed with a 42% disability. He had epileptic seizures when he was a few days old and was later referred to a neurosurgeon and a speech therapist as well. 'We accepted his condition as gift of God", says his father, Mr Jagdev Singh Thakur

Raghudeep has a younger sister and his parents, now retired, worked as a banker and a teacher. He attended school till class eight but could not cope any further, with studies. His learning, to a large extent, came from his mother who was a teacher. Raghudeep has no friends outside his family, who are his companions too.

Before sports he did not perceive a world beyond his family. Sports opened

Raghudeep, Athlete from Jammu

a world of joy and achievement. He placed a picture of Ms Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the founder of the Special Olympics movement, world over, at his home. He played Badminton, Bocce and Cricket and competed in Bocce at the Purple fest held in 2023. He participated in Bocce in January 2024 at the Jammu State games and won a gold medal. Wearing the medal brought a new feeling of victory and fulfilment. He beamed on the victory stand, having discovered an athlete within himself. [Read More](#)

## Unified Coaches Training for the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan Coaches and Special Educators



Trainees from SSA at the session



Mr C Rajasekhar, Area Director Andhra Pradesh, opening the session

A five-day workshop and camp for Inclusive Sports was held at Anantapur Andhra Pradesh in June 2024. Smt. Waikhom Nidya Devi IAS, Assistant Project Coordinator of Samagra Shiksha Andhra



Pradesh and CEO of Zhila Parishad of Anantapur, played Unified Bocce, a popular Italian game in Special Olympics.

26 school assistants and 26 students representing each district of Andhra Pradesh participated wherein CWSN students and teachers were introduced to various Inclusive Sports and implementation that would allow all students to participate in the best of their capacities, in sporting activities.

A NO BARRIER adventure sports team was selected among the CWSN who will be trained in adventure sports at the Gandhi Kota Adventure Sports Academy. The project is based on Andhra's ambitious Vision 2025 – Inclusive Andhra project, in which 45000 government schools will be revamped and trained to include Students with Special Needs using a unique digitally accessible pedagogy and accessible schools.

## The youth leaders from India promise to notch up Inclusion following the Youth Summit in Singapore



Youth leaders from the Asia Pacific region at the Singapore Summit



SO Bharat team awarded the 'Regional Hub of Excellence' Trophy by Mr Dipak Natali, PMD, SO- Asia Pacific Region

Special Olympics- Asia Pacific organised two back- to- back summits from 5-11 June 2024 in Singapore, bringing together 82 participants from 15 countries. Overall, the academy witnessed participation of Special Olympics Program Athlete Leaders, youth leaders without IDD, Program National Directors, Mentors, and Special Olympics Asia Pacific regional staff.

Unified Leadership Academy: Leader II, was held from 5-8 June 2024. The Unified Leadership Academy Is a development opportunity for Special Olympics individuals with and without IDD to learn about leading oneself, others, their organizations and communities. Kalash Kaushal, Manager, Communications & Youth Initiatives

participated in the academy. Rithik Hukku, Athlete leader and a member of the SOAP Regional Athlete Leadership Council, his Mentor Dr DC Gupta, Shrey Kadian, Athlete leader SO Bharat, his mentor, Mr Jignesh Thakkar, Mahi Dheri, Simran Sahni Youth leaders SO Bharat and members of the SOAP Youth Leadership Council participated in the Academy.

The 'Youth for Inclusion 2024: Expanding Unified Champion Schools' Summit was held from 8-11 June 2024. Ms Raman Rekhi, Director Communications & Youth Initiatives was joined by a team from Assam that included Ms Parishmita Baishya, Youth leader with Intellectual Disabilities, Ms Loni Kalita, Youth leader without Intellectual Disabilities and Ms Priyanka Goswami, Adult Mentor. The Summit was designed to utilize the experiences of Special Olympics Bharat and Pakistan to teach new programs about the Unified Champion School (UCS) programming. Over the past four years, the two national programs have expanded UCS programming within their countries, achieving impressive results and reaching "Regional Hub of Excellence" status, a recognition reserved for programs with the highest level of programming. [Full Report](#)

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