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Outsourcing Sports

Now that the moaning and whimpering over our Olympic debacle has subsided, here's my \$ 0.02 cents worth for the future: Outsource sports training. If we can send our wards abroad for 'higher studies,' there's no reason not to send them out to reach greater heights and lengths. Sure, this is already happening one-off (Anju Bobby George mostly trained in the United States), but it has to be a consistent commitment. Don't let anyone kid you -- there is just not enough expertise and infrastructure in India in an area that is evolving rapidly, daily. A lighter shoe by a few grams or a leaner diet by a few calories provides the hairs-breadth advantage that means the difference between a medal and none. We have the material, but not the science.

If you have had an eye or ear on the sports section lately, you would have noticed a number of people of Indian origin hitting the high spots in the sporting world. Devoid of domestic heroes, the Indian media has clung to Shikha Uberoi, Mohini Bhardwaj, Vijay Singh and the likes as if they were our own native born. Anecdotally, I get the sense that Indians who live abroad are able to perform better (in almost any endeavor) because they are able to lead an uncluttered life and can focus a great deal more on their goals (this makes the achievements of Indians in India all the more remarkable.) Remember, even our world class tennis team consists of guys who all live and play abroad (Leander, Mahesh, Harsh Mankad are all products of the US system). Our one true sportsman of consistent international standard, Vishy Anand, is a resident of Spain.

To confirm the impression that living and training abroad is more conducive to achieving results, I spoke to Shive Gowda, a former Indian athlete and sports coach who now lives in Maryland. Gowda's son Vikas, 21, is a giant (height: 6 feet 10) discus thrower who represented India at Athens. He did just okay, throwing only around 62 meters to end up 13th. But Gowda is not worried. His real target, he says, is Beijing, by which time the kid would have stopped growing (he's been adding an inch a month past few years) and stabilized enough to train him correctly.

The Gowdas moved to the U.S in 1989 when Vikas was just five. Shive Gowda, a decathlete who represented India, says it was the best thing he could have done for Vikas, because “no matter how much we love our country, it is simply not sports-friendly, except in cricket.” In the Gowdas mind, Vikas’ progress is linked to an uncomplicated life, where he is free and focused to pursue his

Although Vikas has consistently thrown over 60 metres in US meets, he could manage only 58 metres in the inter-state meet at Chennai, which was used as a benchmark to include him in the Indian team. Even that sub-par effort was far better than anything thrown at home. “I am not offering excuses, but as a general rule, life is too enervating in India. Too much energy and focus is taken away by basic hassles...travel, ticketing, commuting...top flight athletes don’t need that. They need to be babied.”

If all goes well Gowda maybe our best gold bet for Beijing. KM Binu, but Gowda feels he has left it too late even though a stint here might see him win asian level competitions. We really need to send our kids here when they are in their teens or before.

Sporting glory is going to come from the rich class. Conversely, we will get sporting glory when we become a richer nation.

Unless the issue of sporting non-prowess is addressed starting now, the embarrassment at Athens will be nothing compared to the humiliation that awaits us in Beijing 2008, when China will almost certainly top the medals table ahead of the United States, while we, having inched up to China’s population, will be at the tail end. The world will notice and compare.
