

# Parsi 'gripsters'

A combination of arm strength and technique was witnessed at the Sixth All Zoroastrian Arm Wrestling Competition

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Photos: Mahiyar Engineer



“*Mai*, please *jainé tamara nakh kaapi aavo* (Lady, please go and cut your nails),” said the woman at the registration counter handing over a nail cutter to the first-time female participant at the First All Zo-

roastrian Arm Wrestling Competition (AWC) held in 2016. “*Kai (why)?*” she asked indignantly looking down at her well-manicured fingers. “We can’t go around poking or scratching our opponents now can we? *Né tama-*

*ra laal chittal né sunna ni bangrio bhi kari nakho* (also remove your red and gold bangles),” she add-

*Youngsters, women, men and veterans wrestle it out*



ed. “Té pan (that too)?” asked the neophyte visibly horrified! “Yes, because if your bangles touch the arm pad before your arm does, you’ll be disqualified,” came the explanation. The contestant quickly complied.

At the Sixth All Zoroastrian AWC, held under the Parsee Gymkhana (PG) umbrella on January 20, 2024

**“Be consistent, have patience and follow your passion in sports”**

at their grounds, all these and other rules of the game were explained to the 62 participants at the start. A regular and a much looked forward to event on the PG calendar, the AWC is judged by referees from the Maharashtra Arm Wrestling Feder-



From far l: Team champions Malcolm Baug; Meherzad Chinoy; Vistasp Katrak; Safna Doctor

ation which has its base in Nagpur. Reportedly the only AWC event held in Bombay, this year entries were also received from Ahmedabad, Dahanu and Udvarda.

The tournaments commenced post 7 p.m. after the contestants were weighed and divided into categories by gender, age and weight. “If, however, there were more than four entries in an age category, a further classification is made by weight,” explains Rustom Jasoomoney, the moving force behind the event in an email to *Parsiana*.

Two referees, one on each side, officiate at each match. They monitor the competitors, especially their grip. A box of powdered chalk is placed on

stage for drying sweaty palms. The specially crafted table is fitted with padded elbows and touch pads with hand pegs at the sides. At the onset of the contest a red ribbon on the table was cut by Darius Master, 86, the oldest participant. The youngest amongst the 50 male contestants was all of 12 years. Their weight ranged between 50 and 135 kg. The youngest woman arm wrestler among the 12 females was 13 years old, the oldest, 66. Women’s weight ranged between 55 kg to 135 kg. Accommodation is made available for outstation participants but none availed of the offer; the visiting Federation officials, however, were lodged at a hotel in



Bombay Central.

Admitting that he had “never been to an arm wrestling competition before and (was) very keen to see something like this,” was the chief guest of the evening, Adille Sumariwalla, president of the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) and vice president and executive board mem-



*From far l: Adille Sumariwalla, Darius Master; Rustom Jasoomoney, Justice Shahrugh Kathawalla (retd); Maharukh Noble; Dr Adil Malia; below: Preeti Jhangiani*

**“We struggled a lot with arm wrestling and today we are gearing towards recognition for this sport”**

ber of World Athletics. The veteran athlete reminded the audience that it was Sir Dorabji Tata who took the first Indian team to the Olympic Games in 1920, paying from his own pocket. Sumariwalla was saddened that he has not seen a single Parsi

name on the Government Mission Olympic Cell in the last couple of years. An Olympian who participated in the 1980 Moscow Olympics, Sumariwalla stressed that “Olympic sports is important. Our youth is interested in sports and I think there are enough opportunities available. This Gymkhana itself gives enough opportunities, baugs give enough opportunities, it is for you to grab them.

“Be consistent, have patience and follow your passion in sports and in whatever you do,” he said. He hoped that more women would take part in arm wrestling. Cautioning participants that in such a power sport doping is a “big issue,” he urged them to “play clean.



You can’t take forbidden substances and get away with it.” Sumariwalla had pushed the Government of India to introduce a bill prohibiting the use of such substances. He was the first

person in India to get a ‘No Needle’ policy” initiated in the AFI. He concluded with a plea to “stay away from drugs. It doesn’t do anything except spoil your health.”

After witnessing a few bouts, the veteran sportsman departed early as he was among the main organizers of the Tata Marathon scheduled to take part the following day.

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*Above, from l: Mehli Golvala, Hoshang Katrak, Adi Pardiwala, Hutoxi Doodhwala; below: Kaiwan Randelia*

Popular Bollywood actress and president of the People’s Arm Wrestling Federation of India, Preeti Jhangiani lauded PG for their efforts in popularizing the sport. The guest of honor who founded the Pro Panja League in 2020, reportedly the biggest arm wrestling league in the world, wished the participants “more success. Did you know that arm wrestling was invented by a Parsi gentleman? (She did not mention who.) So this sport has its roots in Zoroastrian culture,” mentioned Jhangiani.

She was happy that “athletes of your (Sumariwalla’s) stature come and meet participants and inspire them. With your experience, they can learn so much... We struggled a lot with arm wrestling and today we are gearing towards recognition for this sport. Olympics are far away, but we are hoping to be there in the future,” she added.

Bodybuilder Kaiwan Randelia, Bharat Shree 2023 and National Junior gold medalist, posed his muscular and toned body to the delight of the audience among whom were seated Justice Shahrugh Kathawalla (retd), Bombay Parsi Punchayet trustees Maharukh Noble and Dr Adil Malia and *Jam-e-Jamshed* editor Shernaaz Engineer.

**Risks and rewards**

Arm wrestling requires technical skill, muscular strength and above all mental determination. Unsafe positions of the arm or body can cause body injuries such as humeral shaft (upper arm) fractures, shoulder trauma, muscle strain and pectoral or bicep rupture. The Parsi Amulance Division has an ambulance stationed at the venue. Volunteers from the Division are present to treat minor injuries.

The PG team comprising Jasoomoney, Hoshang Katrak, Adi Pardiwala and the Gymkhana staff under the leadership of president Mehli Golvala start preparations for the event three months in advance.

“We enjoy hosting this event because it is such a unique one on the Bombay sporting firmament. Initially we were worried that it might be too repetitive to be held annually,” Golvala expressed his inhibitions. “But the enthusiasm of the participants, including senior citizens, spurs us on.” He was very appreciative of the “undying spirit of Jasoomoney in organizing the tour-



nament and galvanizing his entire team of helpers.” Golvala was also grateful to their three major sponsors — Kathawalla, solicitor Ervad Burjor Antia and The World Zoroastrian Organisation Trust Funds.

The heat and energy of the evening and the aching shoulders and hands were forgotten as one and all dug into the sumptuous buffet by Caterer Inc. A cool and balmy breeze soothed the diners.

**Winners**

Defending his title of Champion of Champions (CoC), Meherzad

Chinoy won for the sixth time in a row. His opponent, Vistasp Sanjana, won the Men’s Champion of the evening. Young Safna Doctor won the Women’s Champion award. No female CoC fight was conducted as last year’s CoC did not attend. The Malcolm Baug team took home the team championship trophy.

Women winners: (Names are in order of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>) Junior (under 35 years — open weight category) Doctor, Karizma Daruvala, Dinaz Surti; Senior (above 35 years — up to 80 kg) Ferzana Daruwalla, Roxan

“Stay away from drugs. It doesn’t do anything except spoil your health”

Driver, Jasmine Vagchhipawala; Master (40 to 50 years — above 80 kg) Dilshad Daruvala, Tanaz Pir, Mahafrin Olpadwalla.

Men winners: Junior (under 25 years — up to 70 kg) Yohaana Wadia, Shayan Daruwalla, Phiroze Katrak; (under 90 kg) Pashin Zaveri, Farhan Irani, Shahzad Ambapardiwalla; (above 90 kg) Varzavand Dadachandji, Rehaan Sasoori, Kurush Wadia; Senior (25 to 45 years — above 80 kg) Sanjana, Jehangir Patel, Rishad Master; Master (45 to 60 years — above 80 kg) Cyrus Sasoori, Kaiomerz Desai, Neville Dordi; Grand Master (60 to 70 years — open weight category) Yazdi Tod-iwalla, Percy Jokhi, Yezdi Engineer; Super class (over 70 years — open weight category) Percy Bahmani, Gustad Irani, Kersi Sookhadwala.

**MISSION MOBEDYAR**

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my amazement they agreed and put me in touch with our resident priest. He has since been my mentor and his family have become dear friends. I did my mobedyar training via Zoom and video calls.

I wondered why a woman could not have performed (my navjote) ceremony

I learned the prayers for various rituals and practices that I could participate in. Since qualifying I have prayed with my mentor at various ceremonies and twice performed a navjote.

My family and friends are immensely proud and community members have been very supportive. I am aware that in India this is still not possible. Male bastions of orthodoxy hold sway and change is slow to come. Persistence, diligence and above all a huge dose of faith and trust are essential. Challenging the status quo is never easy but victory is ever so sweet.

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