

# Roger Federer's deep passion for the Laver Cup

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Roger Federer has always been a student of tennis. While still a teenager more than 20 years ago, Federer was interested in who the sport's great historical figures were, what they won and how they styled their strokes.

Federer latched on to Rod Laver of Australia, who is the only tennis player to win the Grand Slam — Wimbledon and the Australian, French and United States championships — twice, in 1962 and 1969. Federer's own play is reminiscent of Laver's with graceful groundstrokes followed by explosive but perfectly timed forays to the net. It was with a nod to Laver that in 2017 Federer helped create the Laver Cup, an exhibition team competition featuring six top male players from Europe facing off against six from the rest of the world. The event has been held in Prague, Chicago and Geneva. After a year's hiatus because of the pandemic, it will be held Friday through Sunday at TD Garden in Boston.

"In our sport, we don't have enough of a platform for former great players, legends of the game," said Federer by telephone from his home in Switzerland, where he is rehabilitating



from surgery on his right knee that forced him to miss the U.S. Open. "If you look at golf, they have a wonderful way of going about it. Former players are always around, always welcome and always advising the younger ones. Having an event like the Laver Cup is a way to shine a light on the legends like Rod Laver and many, many others who paved the way for us."

Federer, together with his longtime agent Tony Godtsick, has done his part to link some of the best in the game, past and present, through the Laver Cup. His two captains are Bjorn Borg, winner of five straight Wimbledon titles, and John McEnroe, who won

the U.S. Open four times, and three Wimbledon championships. The vice captains are McEnroe's younger brother Patrick, an Australian Open semifinalist in 1991, and Borg's Swedish compatriot and former world No. 4 Thomas Enqvist.

Borg's European team has six players ranked in the Top 10. They are No. 2 Daniil Medvedev, who won the U.S. Open this month, defeating Novak Djokovic; No. 3 Stefanos Tsitsipas; No. 4 Alexander Zverev; No. 5 Andrey Rublev; No. 7 Matteo Berrettini; and No. 10 Casper Ruud. McEnroe's Team World has No. 11 Felix Auger-Aliassime, No. 12 Denis Shapovalov, No. 15 Denis

Schwartzman, No. 19 Reilly Opelka, No. 22 John Isner and No. 95 Nick Kyrgios. All of them take turns competing in 12 singles and doubles matches in day and evening sessions throughout the week-end.

Opelka is playing the Laver Cup for the first time. He has wanted to play for a long time.

"The Laver Cup is the Laver Cup," said Opelka, who reached the round of 16 at the U.S. Open. "They've capitalized on everything. They've built the dream event. Who wouldn't want to be there? Anything that Rod Laver has his name on, Federer has his name on, it's a huge honor."

Although it appears on paper that Team Europe, with the

more highly ranked competitors, has an advantage, the format of the event is a great equalizer. There are singles and doubles matches, and point totals are cumulative with one point awarded for each win on the first day, two points on the second and three points on the third. Players on the winning team — the first to 13 points — each receive \$250,000 in addition to appearance fees that are based on a player's ranking.

In 2017, Federer beat Kyrgios 11-9 in a match tiebreaker to seal the win for Team Europe. Then two years ago, the European team won for the third-straight year when the world team led going into the last two matches, but then Federer beat Isner 6-4, 7-6 (3) and Zverev knocked off Milos Raonic in the final match 6-4, 3-6, 10-4. At Laver Cup, a super tiebreaker is played in lieu of a third set. This year, Federer is unable to play. Also absent are Rafael Nadal and Dominic Thiem, both of whom are injured. Djokovic, who represented Europe in 2018, declined to participate.

"Obviously we're missing the top three guys, but our team is one of the strongest I think we've ever had," said Zverev,

who, along with Isner and Kyrgios, is a four-time Laver Cup competitor. "We have all the young-gun-generation guys, which is great to see. Everybody is very motivated. It's going to be a fun, entertaining week for all of us."

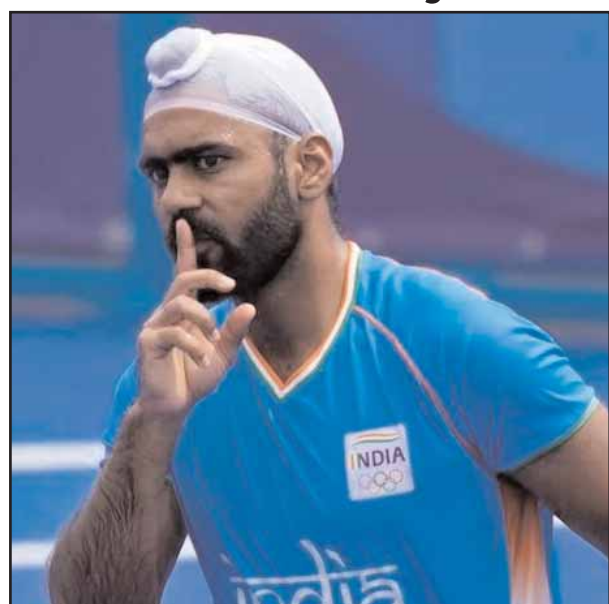
**Laver Cup Advertisement**

Laver Cup starts on Friday and ends on Sunday (26 Sep, 2021). (Twitter/LaverCup)

For Federer, the real allure of the Laver Cup is the camaraderie among players, who usually stare at each other across the net rather than sit side by side on comfortable benches. Even as his playing days wind down, Federer is sure he will continue to support the event.

"I definitely see myself being involved," he said. "I'd love to be the captain one day. I think it's a beautiful way of getting the rivals to coexist for a week together. It really is truly fun and cool to share the locker room with these guys who you usually share it with, but don't talk tactics and see how everybody prepares and actually support one another. Normally, you don't cheer against each other, but you don't really mind if they win or lose. This time it's very different."

## Aim to improve further to be part of Indian team for upcoming events: Simranjeet Singh



He played a pivotal role in India's historic hockey bronze medal at the Tokyo Olympics and midfielder Simranjeet Singh's next aim is to further hone his skills to become a regular feature in the team for the upcoming events, including next year's Asian Games. Singh had scored twice as the Indian men's team defeated Germany 5-4 in the thrilling bronze-medal play-off at Tokyo.

"I feel very fortunate, honestly. It was a great experience I had in Tokyo

and my aim was to execute the role I was given to perfection," he said in a release issued by Hockey India (HI) on Friday.

"Now, I am waiting to return to the camp and analyse our performance in detail and understand the areas I can further work on and improve." Singh was part of the India Colts team that lifted the FIH Junior Men's World Cup in Lucknow back in 2016. "That victory in Lucknow truly changed our lives for good. It really

was the stepping stone for many of us and the journey so far has been fantastic," he said.

"From here on, my aim is only to get better and be part of India's upcoming campaigns at the FIH Hockey Pro League, Asian Games and so on. There is still a lot that I feel I can improve upon."

With the FIH Men's Junior World Cup scheduled to be held in India starting November 24, Singh is excited that the best talents from across the world will get to experience the facilities in Bhubaneswar.

"It is great that the best junior players from across the globe will get to experience the world-class facilities in Bhubaneswar."

"We have played in many venues across the world but playing in Odisha is always special because of the facilities there, the Odisha State Government's hospitality and the fans. "I am really happy that hockey festivities are returning to India after nearly two years of no action in the country due to COVID-19. I hope all the players enjoy the tournament and wish them good luck," Singh signed off.

## WTT Star Contender: Indian challenge ends in Doha

All eyes were on ranked world No. 132 Archana Kamath, the lone Indian challenger remaining in the WTT Star Contender at Lusail Sports Arena in Doha, Qatar on Friday.

But the Bengaluru girl, 21, after winning the first game and putting up a brave show in the second succumbed which she lost by mere two points lost the next two and the quarterfinal match against World No. 15 Doo Hoi Kem of Hong Kong 11-9, 11-13, 8-11, 6-11.

In the earlier rounds, Archana's victims included World No. 93 Tin-Tin Ho of England, World No. 39 Zhang Mo of Canada, and World No. 57 Miyu Nagasaki of Japan. Earlier in the mixed doubles pre-quarterfinal match, Archana and Manav Thakkar lost to Wong Chung Ting and Doo Hoi Kem.

For her efforts, Archana who is ranked No. 132 in the World will add 105 points ranking points and is expected to leapfrog and break into top-100 when ITTF, the world governing body, releases the world ranking soon. "I played with her a few years ago in the Indian Table Tennis League. She has improved a lot. She might be young but she's very good. She beat Zhang Mo and Miyu Nagasaki before, so I did a lot of preparation before the match. I told myself to stay calm, and that if she played well, I shouldn't be upset. I

did my best to keep my emotions in check, focus on winning one point at a time, and take it as if she's a much stronger opponent with a much higher ranking — then I would be able to play to the best of my ability. I've never played with Pesotska before. I'll watch some videos of her matches and do my best," Doo Hoi Kem told worldtabletennis.com after the match.

Archana's compatriot Sreeja Akula, a former national junior champion and ranked No. 143 in the world, too had a good outing. The Maharashtra ousted 45th ranked Tatiana Kukulikova of Slovakia 11-5, 8-11, 11-3, 9-11, 11-9 in the round of 64 and in the round of 32, Sreeja, 23, shocked World No. 21 Suh Hywon of Korea 11-5, 7-11, 11-9, 11-7.

However, World No. 47 Bruna Takahashi of Brazil put a brake on the Indian's win spree in the match for a place in the last-8 stage winning 11-7, 11-4, 12-10.

G Sathiyani who got a bye in the first round was blanked by Andrej Cratic 6-11, 6-11, 7-11 of Croatia on Thursday in the men's singles round of 32.

In men's doubles too, Sathiyani partnering his Chennai mate Anthony Amalraj lost tamente to Japanese duo Kazuhiro Yoshimura and Yuto Kizukuri 5-11, 11-9, 5-11, 6-11 in the opening round.

## 'Back on track': An initiative to help the sports fraternity in time of need

The Indian teams — women and mixed — made it to the finals of compound events of the 2021 Hyundai World Archery Championships in Yankton, the US.

Ranked seventh in the world, the women team comprising V Jyothi Surekha with a world ranking on 13, Priya Gurjar and Muskan Kirar were in roaring form and held their nerves as they stunned hosts USA 226-225 to enter the final and will meet top seeded Colombia who overcame France 234-220 in the other semifinal match.

The mixed team, ranked fifth, of Abhishek and Jyoti shocked Korea's Kim Yunhee and Kim Jongho 159-156 and will take on second seeds Colombia in the summit clash.

This is the sixth final appearance for Indian archers who have never won the gold medal.

Jyothi Surekha, 25 and the trump card of India, has won three medals including one each silver and bronze medals in the previous edition in 2019 Mexico. The Arjuna awardee archer from Vijayawada scored 684 points out of 720 to take the sixth spot in the women's compound ranking round and top finish will enhance her reputation as she has been recommended for this year's Khel Ratna, the highest

## Milestone man Shiva Thapa eyes fresh record at world championship as 'the senior one'

Tell Shiva Thapa that he is the most seasoned boxer in the Indian squad for next month's world championships and the newly-crowned national gold-medallist takes a pause to reflect before trying to downplay that description.

At 27, he is a five-time Asian medallist and would be competing in his third world championship in Belgrade, Serbia from October 24. Adding to his credit is the fact that Thapa is among just the six male boxers from India who have a medal at amateur boxing's biggest showpiece after the Olympics.

"Being the most experienced means more responsibility. I would like to look at it this way. My job would be to ensure there is a good vibe in the squad, keep the fire ignited going forward," the light welterweight (63.5kg) boxer, the only Indian male with that many Asian medals, told PTI in an interview.

The two-time Olympian has been rebuilding after falling off the radar for a while. He couldn't make the cut for Tokyo Olympics as his rival in the weight category, Manish Kaushik, claimed the slot in the very first qualifier.

But never the one to look back or rue missed opportunities, the former youth Olympics silver-winner made a statement with his fifth Asian championship medal in May earlier this year.

Now with the national title under his belt in Bellary on Tuesday, Thapa is eager to become the first Indian male boxer to grab a second world championship medal come October.

"This was the most intense national championship that I have been a part of. Perhaps because the gold-winners were to be picked for the world championship. But seriously, I could not take it easy against even one guy," he said.

Despite the stiff challenge, he did manage to score one Knockout win during the tournament.

"The challenge coming to Bellary was my preparation. It wasn't particularly great. I was training at home but it is not the same as being in a camp. So, I called up my good friend (and fellow boxer) Kavinder (Bishi), who is with the Air Force and he invited me to join him in Bengaluru for training at their camp," he said.

"I landed here a few days before the Nationals and those 3-4 days were very helpful in getting me ready," he elaborated.

His world championship experience has been bitter-sweet. Thapa won a medal in 2015 but in 2017, when the event was held in Hamburg, a stomach ailment forced him to withdraw without competing.

As has been his approach, the soft-spoken Assamese prefers to look ahead instead of reflecting on the time that has slipped out of his grip. "We have a really good team. And I believe all of us are going to do well. It is my third world championship and it would be memorable if I win a medal," he said. The performance would be crucial because Indian men's boxing needs to recover from an underwhelming Olympics, where only one of the five in fray made it past the preliminary round.



sporting honour in the country, by the Archery Association of India.

However, the men's compound team who were seeded fifth and comprising Abhishek Verma, Sangam Bisla and Roshab Yadav, lost 235-238 to Austria in the last-eight stage. Abhishek finished seventh with 695 points.

In recurve, an Olympic event, Indians fizzled out as their events were held under gusty conditions with wind crossing 30kmph and finished 16th.

None of the Tokyo Olympians — World No.1 in recurve Deepika Kumari, Atanu Das, Pravin Jadhav and Tarundeep Rai were included in the team as they failed in the trials held in Sonapat, Haryana on the same day (August 4/5) they reached India from Japan.

Indian squads  
**RECURVE**  
Women: Komalika Bari

and Ridhi Phor and world No. 32 Ankit Bhakat.

Men: Aditya Chaudhary, Atul Verma and Parth Salunke.

**COMPOUND**  
women: Muskan Kirar, Jyothi Surekha Vennam and Priya Gurjar  
men: Abhishek Verma, Sangam Singh Bisla and Rishab Yadav

Abhishek in archery's top panel

Meanwhile, Abhishek, 2014 Incheon Asian Games team gold medallist and three-time World Cup stage gold medallist, has been elected to the prestigious World Archery's athletes' commission.

Reigning world archery champion Natalia Avdeeva of Russia and Janine Meissner of Germany were the female candidates. Naomi Folkard, chairman, Sjeff van den Berg and Crystal Gauvin are the other members of the commission.

## FC Goa storm to Durand Cup semifinal with 5-1 win over Delhi FC

FC Goa continued their brilliant run and played a dominant brand of football throughout the 90 minutes to defeat Delhi FC 5-1 in the 130th Durand Cup quarter finals at the Kalyani stadium in Kolkata on Friday. Goals from Devendra Murgaokar, Muhammed Nemil and Brandon Fernandez in the first half and Leander D'Cunha and RomarioJesuraj in the second, meant despite Delhi getting one back from Nikhil Mali, the Gaurs will take their place in the second semi-final on Wednesday, September 29, 2021, at the Vivekananda Yuba BharatiKrirangan (VYBK) in Kolkata. They await the winners of the fourth and final quarter-final game between fellow ISL side Bengaluru FC and Army Green on Saturday, also scheduled at the VYBK. Delhi FC started well in the first quarter creating quite a few opportunities for themselves. Anwar Ali and Willis Deon Plaza had their chances at scoring but failed to convert each time. It was all FC Goa post that. In the 15th minute, Devendra Murgaokar scored the first goal and his fourth of the tournament to put the Gaurs ahead. Muhammed Nemil scored another three

minutes later.

Delhi FC had chances in the remaining part of the first half but it was good work from Goa's defence that kept them at bay.

Brandon Fernandez then lobbed a curler from the left flank over Delhi keeper Lovepreet in added time, to give Goa a big cushion of 3 goals at half time.

Delhi FC looked like they came with a plan in the second half and showed some resilience initially but luck was not smiling at them on the day. They did pull one back in the 82nd minute as Nikhil Mali scored a smart goal after an even smarter Willis Plaza dummy inside the Goa box, spoiling the clean-sheet of Dheeraj under the Gaur's bar.

It took Goa just a couple of minutes to regain the three goal cushion as Leander D'Cunha scored from an overhead kick which did not quite catch his foot where he would have liked it to.

Alexander RomarioJesuraj scored the fifth and final goal in injury time to seal the deal for FC Goa. Leander D'Cunha was adjudged the Man of the Match for his match winning performance in today's quarter-final encounter.

## Struggling Barcelona held to draw again in Spanish league

Barcelona's ongoing crisis keeps getting worse, with the team unable to win on the field and the club's players, coach and president growing increasingly at odds.

Barcelona was held to a 0-0 draw by Cadiz in the Spanish league on Thursday, extending its winless streak to three matches and adding pressure on coach Ronald Koeman.

Koeman a day earlier surprisingly read from a prepared statement in the pre-match news conference and downplayed the team's chances of winning titles this season.

Players didn't hide the fact they were not on the same page.

"I'm not wearing Barca's jersey to finish second or third," veteran defender Gerard Pique said after the match.

"I'm convinced that despite our bad start we will be contending at the end of the season."

President Joan Laporta, who said he was caught by surprise by Koeman's statement ahead of the match, has been at odds recently



with the coach who was hired by former president Josep Bartomeu.

"We have to be more united than ever," Barcelona's Sergi Roberto said.

"The fans, the squad, the coach, the president... we have to be united to overcome this situation. We are not going through a good moment but I'm convinced that we will overcome it."

Barcelona, without Lionel Messi after nearly two decades, had to hold on in the end against Cadiz after midfielder Frankie de Jong was sent off with a second yellow card in the 65th minute. Koeman also was sent off for complaining to the referee in the final minutes.

"I can't complain about the attitude of the players,"

Koeman said.

"We did everything possible. It was a complicated match."

The draw left Barcelona in seventh place in the league standings, seven points behind leader Real Madrid with a game in hand.

Madrid routed Mallorca 6-1 at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium on Wednesday to stay two points ahead of defending champion Atletico Madrid, which won 2-1 at Getafe on Tuesday.

"We are Barca and we still have a very good squad," Roberto said.

"We have a team that can win this league and we will try to win it."

Barcelona was coming off two consecutive setbacks at home a 3-0 defeat against Bayern Munich in the

Champions League and a 1-1 draw against Granada in the Spanish league, when it needed a 90th-minute equalizer to escape defeat.

Cadiz nearly opened the scoring through Alvaro Negredo's shot from outside the area in the 46th, forcing Marc-Andre ter Stegen to make a difficult save by the top corner.

One of Barcelona's best chances was a low shot by Memphis Depay that was stopped by Cadiz goalkeeper Jeremias Ledesma a few minutes later. The Dutch striker missed an opportunity to score the winner deep into stoppage time when his shot from inside the area went wide in a one-on-one situation.

With an extra man, Cadiz had most of the chances at the end but couldn't capitalize on them, with Ter Stegen making a few good saves.

De Jong was sent off after sliding in to try to steal the ball from an opponent.

Barcelona remains depleted by injuries and Koeman started the match with two teenagers — 17-year-old midfielder Gavi and 18-year-old forward Yusuf Demir.

## Trailblazer basketball player Satnam Singh Bhamara to try hand at pro-wrestling



Basketball player Satnam Singh Bhamara, who became the first Indian to be drafted into an NBA team before being banned or doping, has decided to try his hand at wrestling by sealing a deal with a professional league in the USA.

The 25-year-old Singh, who created history when he was picked in the NBA draft by Dallas Mavericks in 2015, will begin his training to be a pro wrestler at the Atlanta-based Nightmare Factory, to compete in the All Elite Wrestling (AEW).

Singh follows in the footsteps of NBA legend Shaquille O'Neal, who squared off alongside Jade Cargill in a mixed tag team match against Cody Rhodes and Red Velvet on "AEW: Dynamite" in March.

"While we've recently

secured some of the hottest free agents on the planet, I'm also deeply committed to cultivating our own homegrown stars and the next generation of extraordinary professional wrestlers," Tony Khan, CEO, GM and Head of Creative of AEW, said in a media release.

"In addition to Satnam's commanding 7'3" stature, I was impressed with his high level of athleticism and charisma. He's an exciting addition to our roster, and I'm looking forward to our fans getting to know Satnam's personality and watching his development."

Singh is currently serving a two-year ban by the National Anti-Doping Agency's (NADA) disciplinary panel for failing a dope test in 2019.

His suspension is due to end on November 19.