

Sports

Indian women's cricket sensation needed boy's haircut to play

NEW DELHI: India's 15-year-old women's cricket sensation Shafali Verma had to get her hair cut like a boy so that she could get into the local academy to train, her father said. Now India's cricket establishment is relying on Verma, who made her Twenty20 debut for the national team against South Africa last month and will soon go on a tour of the West Indies. The teenager has become known for her aggressive batting. But her father Sanjeev Verma told of the struggle to get her daughter accepted in games.

"I introduced her to cricket when she was eight or nine. I used to take her to play neighborhood teams on Sundays," he said. "Most teams refused to play against her. They said that she could get hurt and that I would complain if that happened. "Even when I insisted she was my daughter and I was okay, most didn't agree," said Verma, who makes jewelry in Rohtak near New Delhi. That is when he decided to give her a "boy's haircut" to trick opponents. "At eight or nine, all kids look the same. After the haircut, most didn't even notice she was a girl and she started playing regularly at weekends," he said.

The father said he was never worried about

seeing her play against male teams, believing it would improve her skills. But when he tried to get professional training, he hit a new equality obstacle when academies refused to take Shafali. "Most in town refused to take a girl. I eventually found one which took boys and girls. It was eight kilometers from our house and she used to cycle there for training each day," the proud parent added.

Father and daughter are "diehard fans" of Sachin Tendulkar, holder of many scoring records and a legend in Indian cricket. "I have always been a Sachin fan and I made sure that I introduced her to his batting very early. We watched so many Sachin innings together," he said. With Shafali already in the national team, at least two other members of the Verma family hope to find cricket success. Shafali's 17-year-old brother, Sahil, also hopes to rise through the ranks. "Even my youngest daughter Nancy, 6, has started playing cricket. Both of them are inspired by their sister. I just hope she plays for national team for a long time and is part of the first Indian women's team to win the World Cup," he said. — AFP



SURAT: In this photo taken on September 28, 2019 cricketer Shafali Verma trains during an Indian cricket team practice session in Surat, ahead of a Twenty20 match between India and South Africa. — AFP

Asher-Smith delivers historic 200m gold for Britain

DOHA: Dina Asher-Smith became the first British woman to win a short sprint world title on Wednesday with a dominant performance in the 200 meters. The 23-year-old — silver medalist in the 100m — led from the start to time a national record 21.88 seconds at the Khalifa Stadium. Asher-Smith — winning only Britain's second medal over 100/200m in the championships with Kathy Smallwood-Cook taking a bronze in the 200m in 1983 — said she was still in shock.

"I don't know what to say. I don't think it's properly sunk in," an emotional Asher-Smith told the BBC. "Jon (Blackie) and I knew I could do it, it means so much. "I woke up today thinking 'this is it. This is the moment you did all your work for'. The tiredness disappeared. "All the support means so much. For my mum, my dad and his wife to be here, it means so much. "I'm lost for words. I dreamt of this and now it's real."

Brittany Brown of the United States took silver in 22.22sec and Mujinga Kambundji of Switzerland was third in 22.51sec. Asher-Smith showed no signs of nerves at being title favorite bursting from the blocks to round the bend in control of the race. Brown gave chase down the straight but the Briton never faltered crossing the line clear of the field and put her hands to her face when she realized she had also set a new British record and added the world title to the Euro-



DOHA: Britain's Dina Asher-Smith celebrates after winning the Women's 200m final at the 2019 IAAF Athletics World Championships at the Khalifa International stadium. — AFP

pean one she won last year. Asher-Smith had been propelled into favoritism when a whole swathe of major contenders dropped out. The 100m world champion Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce was advised by her coach not to attempt the double. Two-time defending champion Dafne Schippers was injured and Olympic gold medalist Elaine Thompson failed to show for her semi-final. Asher-Smith — who carried the athletes kit at the Olympics in London in 2012 and was inspired by Jessica Ennis-Hill's title in the heptathlon — said it was a relief to have justified her favorite's tag. — AFP

dropped a set in three matches in the Chinese capital and also did not lose a set on the way to winning her home Pan Pacific Open last month. It is in contrast to the stuttering form the world number four endured after winning the Australian Open at the start of the year.

"I'm relaxed, but I'm a little bit angry, it's an angry relaxed," said Osaka, asked what was behind her recent success in Japan and now China. "I know after Australia I was like, 'I'm going to have fun'. It was not fun, I did not have fun." The Japanese said she took a week off after her last 16 defeat at the US Open, where teenager Andreescu went on to triumph over Serena Williams in the final. "I was sorting out my thoughts," said Osaka, adding that she has "self-diagnosed ADHD" because "if I tell myself to relax, I play three-set matches. "Out here, if you see, I'm kind of 'angry' right now, I can get through straight-set wins." — AFP

Osaka 'angry relaxed' after reaching quarters

BEIJING: Naomi Osaka said yesterday that she was "angry relaxed" after the Japanese tennis player set up a potential first meeting with US Open champion Bianca Andreescu in Beijing. The 21-year-old, the reigning Australian Open champion, won the last 10 games against unseeded American Alison Riske to surge into the last eight at the China Open, 6-4, 6-0. Osaka and Andreescu, two young stars of women's tennis, will meet if the 19-year-old Canadian wins her match later Thursday against American qualifier Jennifer Brady. Osaka has not

Ben Stokes wins players' award after World Cup heroics

LONDON: Ben Stokes has been voted the Professional Cricketers' Association players' player of the year after starring in England's maiden World Cup win and repeating his heroics during the Ashes series. Somerset's Tom Banton picked up the PCA young player of the year award, while England bowler Sophie Ecclestone collected the women's prize.

Highlights of the English cricket season for Stokes included an unbeaten 84 in the World Cup final and a sensational 135 not out to win the third Test against Australia at Headingley. All-rounder Stokes, 28, was England's top run-scorer in the Ashes, which ended in a 2-2 draw. Speaking at the PCA awards ceremony in London on Wednesday, Stokes told the Press Association: "In terms of reflection, I think there will come a time where I will be able to take it all in but I don't think that will come until I retire really because it all comes so thick and fast.

"This will definitely be a summer that I will be able to look back on forever." He added: "Winning the World Cup was an amazing feeling to be a part of — seven weeks of hard toil to then walk away with the World Cup was brilliant, and then a great Ashes series to be part of." England Test skipper Joe Root paid tribute to his "awesome" team-mate, who is the Test vice-captain. "He's a massive driving force of this team, one of the senior players across the board," Root said. Young player of the year Banton has been included in England's Twenty20 squad for the winter tour to New Zealand after amassing more than 1,000 runs across the two domestic limited-overs competitions. — AFP