

2018 Odisha HWC Analysis:

From India's point of view only.

By Shiv

Jagday

Introduction:

The 2018 Odisha Hockey World Cup is over. We have brand-new world champions, **Belgium**. A well-deserved one too.

India the host of the world cup, with a rich hockey heritage and the only country to win 8 Olympic gold medals. (I know you know this. But, please let me say it). Last time made the world cup semis, was in 1975 KL, where they won too. India again fell short this time, breaking so many Indian hearts. **Why so?** despite investing so much money in the coaching staff, players and preparation.

Why this article?

The whole purpose of this article is to answer this **WHY?** In order, to bring awareness and **know what to do and what not to do and more importantly Why, while** designing their future strategic plans, for elite youth development, national teams and competitions. My objective is not to point fingers at any one, but to bring awareness, so we learn from one's mistakes and progress.

It hurts me sitting oceans apart in North America, when I see the former greats, making rookie mistakes off and on the field, which includes the administrators, the coaches and the players. BTW, somethings which happen in India, can only happen in India. No other top hockey playing nation's - Governing body - will allow it to happen. It is hard to guess, whether these rookie mistakes are done deliberately or out of ignorance?

Past can predict the future:

I had written a detailed article, under the heading, **Asian style hockey and European style coaching**, after the 2004 Athens Olympic games, while covering the then situation with suggestions. Looking back, same very mistakes, which were identified and cautioned to be avoided with suggestions, were committed. The article link will be added later. First enjoy this one.

Background of a Talent Hotbed:

India used to develop and produce **highly skillful and intelligent** players, from their hot beds of “**natural self-organized organic nurseries**”, based in different parts of the country. They were a gold mine in producing world class hockey players, year after year, like Brazil did and still does in Football.

Let's not go too far to the golden era of Dhyan Chand or Prithipal Singh, the highest goal scorer in 3 Olympic Games (1960 Rome, 1954 Tokyo and 1968 Mexico) while winning 3 Olympic medals in all 3 colors.

Looking back to move ahead:

We will focus upon the players who represented India at the 1996 Atlanta and 2000 Sydney Olympics, when the **knowledge and skill gap**, was almost levelled between India and the opponents. India missed making the semis narrowly, in both these Olympic Games. Yes, these results were achieved **purely upon technical skill-based performance**, while having **minimum knowledge of the latest tactics and scientific based long-term plans and trainings methods**. It is fair to say, **India did well if not very well**. Equally or slightly better than, with what the highly respected and acclaimed foreign coaches have helped achieve, in the past 10 years.

Why these foreign coaches, including Harendra Singh, have not been as successful as was anticipated?

These foreign coaches started joining the Indian national teams' around the spring of 2004, just before and during the Athens Olympic Games. They have been and are running the show. David John, an exercise physiologist, self-proclaimed hockey tactician cum national team Coach, is a brave one to survive and duck the arrows of the Hockey India authorities. Yes, this can only happen in India, where a physical trainer becomes a High Performance, Director and a National team coach. Looking back, India also hired some coaches, who were not even capable of coaching their local club, state or provincial team, yet they got a job, as a national coach in India. **This is Mind boggling.**

Comparative Analysis to advocate my point in contention:

I am taking four players, namely Pargat Singh, Baljeet Dhillon, Dhanraj Pillay and Mukesh Kumar for the comparative analysis. My imaginative - day dreaming - views are that, if we had 4 players of their caliber on the current or future Indian national teams, with the physical fitness and work ethic of the current members, winning a medal, will become a high probability and a realistic goal. As the missing weak link would be covered. **In regard to the foreign coaches**, was any one able to develop players of their caliber, from hockey intelligence point of view?

Continuous learning and improving:

It is a different story that unfortunately, the former Indian coaches did not know, how to further manage and develop these above 4 players - and for that matter any player - to reach their true potential. By setting short term, long-term goals, with a strategic plan to achieve them, **based upon scientific training methods**. This was not in their repertoire. **To a certain degree**, it is - was - also the same with foreign coaches, whereas specific technical and tactical soft skills were concerned. I have seen the current players making the same very mistakes, year after year, without detection, correction and improvement, due to knowledge gap and learning errors.

Quote: If you don't know what you are doing wrong, you can never know, what you are doing right.

Chen Xinhue.

If India had one full back of Pargat's caliber, one midfield play maker like Baljeet, a winger like Mukesh and a striker like Dhanraj on this current team, with the fitness and work rate level of Harmanpreet, Surinder, Akashdeep and Mandeep for that matter, the whole team. A goal of winning a medal, would have been more realistic.

Foreign Coaches and exercise physiologists; what did they bring and what did they not?

With all due respect to all the foreign coaches who came on the Indian scene from 2004 till now, **added strengths and improvements**, in the various departments of the Indian team. At the same time, ignorantly robbed the current generation of players from their **biggest unique strengths**; Footwork, stickwork, dexterity, Ball control, possession skills

under pressure, game intelligence, tactical creativity, 1 on 1 elimination skills and other soft skills. **Their coaching mantra was “Force, Speed, more speed, more speed, with Power, rather than “Speed, dexterity, grace and game intelligence”.**

I also have no hesitation in confessing, that most of the past Indian players; did hang on to the ball too much, **over dribbled aimlessly and did not play first time**. This sure was a recipe for failure. A self-defeating prophesy.

On the other hand, we have now simply developed the current Indian players into Robots, to a certain degree. They are deprived from playing the game intelligently and creatively. This has also affected negatively the future generation of Indian coaches and budding stars. **There must be a balance**. And it is not easy to strike, especially when you have coaches, who do not know or understand the Indian technical skills, its value, and how to optimize its utilization.

Shinning example: During the 1996 Olympic Qualifier in Barcelona, Spain, where India defeated Netherlands convincingly with a 4 -1 margin. I still vividly remember, sitting in the stands, how Pargat played in the deep defense while the **Dutch forwards gave him time, space and respect**. The way Dhanraj and Mukesh played, turning **Dutch defenders inside out**. Leaving them behind, wondering what hit them. No wonder **Dhanraj scored 2 beautiful goals** after eliminating couple of Dutch defenders in a confined space, near the penalty spot. Yes, Ramandeep, who is settled in Canada, also scored two penalty stroke goals. Since then we have only defeated Netherlands once, during the 2014 Hero Champions trophy by a margin of 3 - 2.

BTW Roelant Oltman’s was the Netherlands Head Coach, at the 1996 Barcelona Olympic Qualifier, who later guided them to win their first ever Olympic gold medal at the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games.



This is my message: We need to know, how to **blend the old with the new**, while Incorporating science and art. Thus, the Indian team performs at its best, in the peak performance zone, soon. **This applies to the current top teams also.**

Quote: You play **football with your head**, and your legs are there to help you. **Johan**

Cruyff, Dutch Player / coach. The brain behind FC Barcelona's success. Fair to say, what Steve Jobs did for apple ... modern Football.

Isn't it the other way around now? We play hockey with our legs more and less with our head? Do the current Dutch HWC silver medal winning players, follow the philosophical advice of their national hero. You be the judge.?

Need Analysis:

Based solely upon India's last match performance against Netherlands, here are my views regarding, what India needs to improve upon, to defeat the top teams, when it matters the most.

Shiv knows; "If you want to make enemies, try to change something". Woodrow Wilson

Forwards.

When I look at the current batch of forwards namely, Mandeep, Dilpreet, Lalit etc., I don't see them being a real threat with the ball. As they don't have the skills to receive and control the ball under pressure, in a confined space, against top teams/players. Further, having the ability to hold the ball for a few seconds to pass or cleanly dodge the opponent or opponents to make the next move, like Dhanraj and Mukesh were able to do.

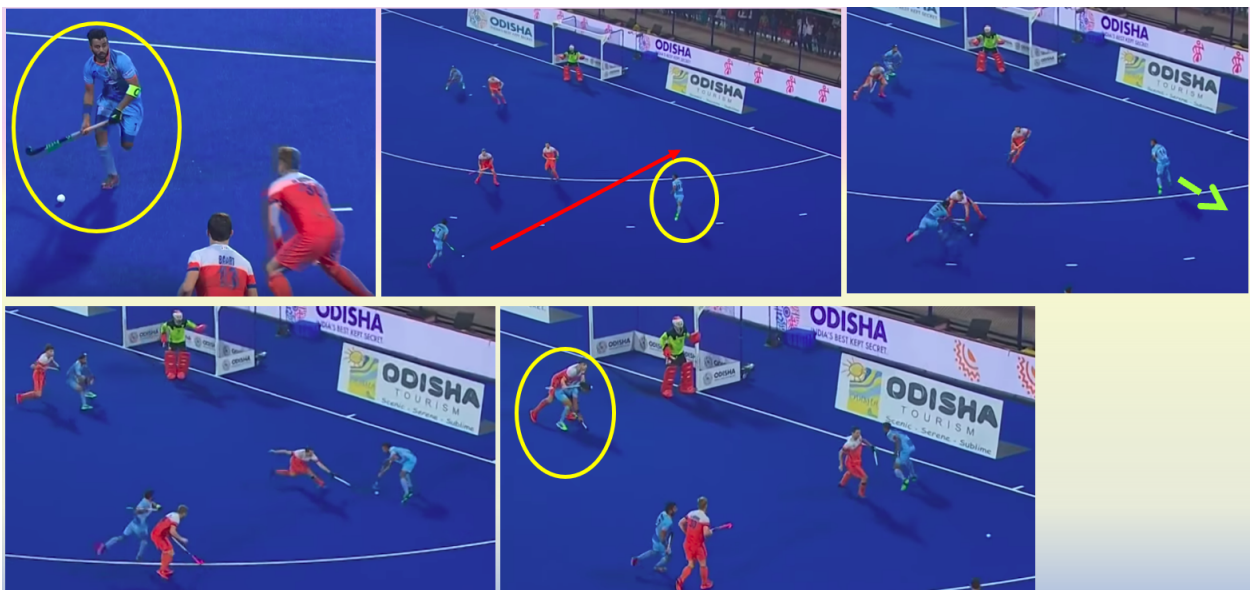
To be fair to the current forwards, we neither now have midfielders/ inners, who can make quality passes, with **pin point accuracy, pace and timing, under pressure.**

For example: Dilpreet (CF) could not receive the ball and neither could Lalit (RW) deliberately delay it for a split second or pace the pass to link

it effectively and score a goal. Study the photo sequence of the game situation below.



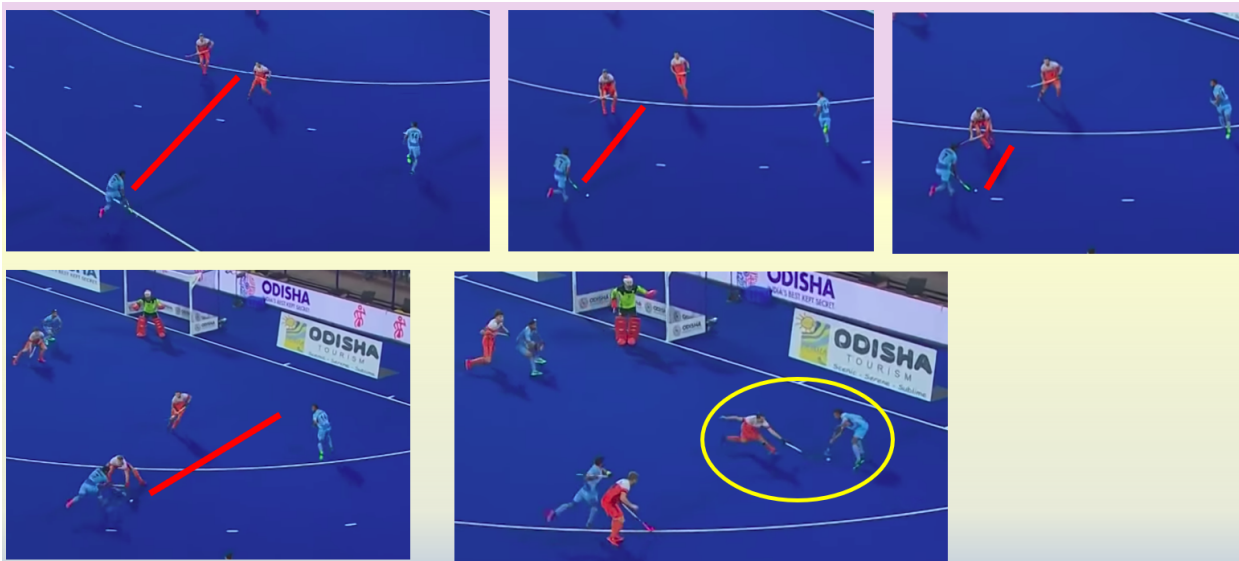
Photo sequence 2:



During the dying minutes, of this match, Lalit could not read the game and lead wide - taking a double lead - to receive a pass from Manpreet successfully.

Photo sequence 2 A:

Let's now focus upon, how **Manpreet's taking extra steps** diminished the chances of making a more effective pass, as the space and angles were narrowed. He forgot or was not taught by his foreign coaches and Harendra Singh that, **"Slowing down is sometimes the best way to speed up. Let the ball do the work for you"**.



Clock wise: Manpreet in spite of being stick obstructed earlier, kept on going. Only thing he could have done different, was to slow down. Avoid running 6- 8 meters, after crossing the 23 meters line. Pass the ball to Lalit, split seconds earlier at an optimum pace. **Slowing down is sometimes the best way to speed up. Knowing when to hold the ball & when to run with it, is a hallmark of a effective & efficient player.**

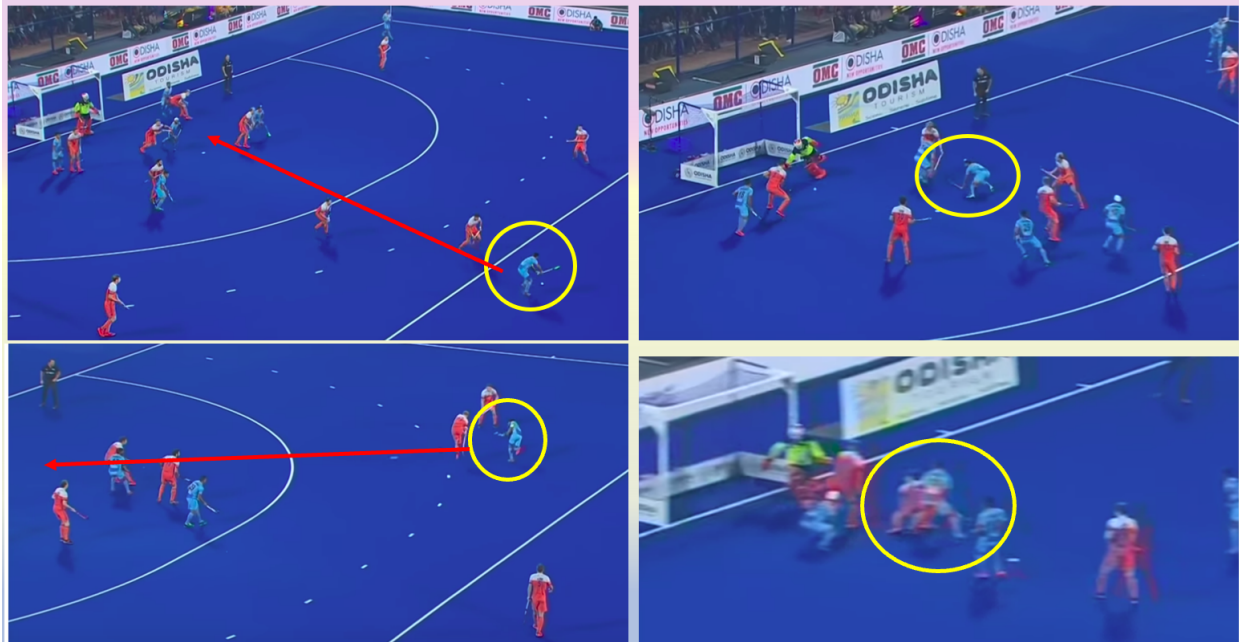
Midfielders:

It was hard to see any midfielder, who had the **ability and confidence to hold** the ball and make semi penetrating dodges. And generate defense splitting passes, with optimum pace on them. Majority of the time, players implemented the **hit and hope** tactics around the opponents 23 meter.

To add insult to injury, as soon as the midfielders got the ball, they started running with it - like wild horses - resulting in a turn over or a big long hit, near the goal mouth to be deflected. **This is not hockey at its best.**

Please refer to Manpreet and Lalit's example above and the 2-photo sequence example below.

Photo sequence 3:



Clock wise: Here are 2 game situations, where like most other teams, India is also taking a direct hit, with the aim of deflecting it into a goal. Cutting corners. We all coaches can be – should be – a little bit more imaginative and creative. Rather than just relying on Hit and Hope Strategy. This is not hockey at its best.

Quote: If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail”.

Abraham Maslow

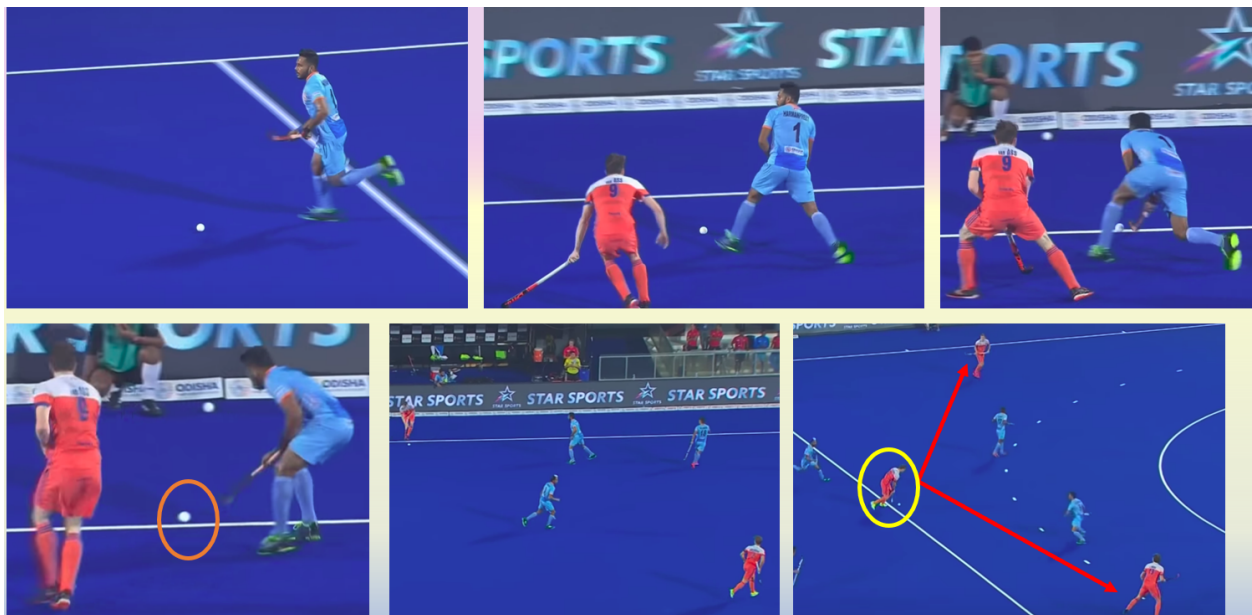
BTW, this is an epidemic which our game has been plagued with. Think about it. It has snatched its beauty and creativity. This has been happening for decades. We need to do better.

The good - Great - News, is that we did see flashes of creativity and nice give and goes during the 2018 Odisha HWC. A fresh change. It is - Soft Skills - are making a comeback.

Deep defenders.

They are lacking the ability to hold the ball under pressure, and make pin point long or medium range pass, when the right opportunity presents itself. Further, Have the possessions skills to control the ball in a confined space and pass it to their team mate to launch the attack. The players usually cop out and make a safe negative pass, or just scoop it to release the pressure. Nothing wrong in it, but when the time comes, players should have the **skill set** to be creative from their deep defensive zone, especially, when there is a counter attack opportunity. Please don't confuse this with circulating the ball in the back, which is a vital cog of team strategies and tactics, in the modern game. It has done wonders to our game.

Please study the below photo sequences, where Harmanpreet fail's to control the ball under mild pressure, from the Dutch opponent, resulting in a turn over.



Clock wise: Harmanpreet ran 10 – 15 meters with the ball, while playing as a L.F. B. There was no need to run in this game situation. Turn over occurred. See photo # 4. Dutch got the side line free hit. Scooped the ball, resulting in a dangerous counter attack. Dutch were neither smart, to release the ball first time. See passing options in arrows. Photo # 6. Opportunity vanished. As delays are dangerous and so is unnecessary running with the ball, in certain game situations.

When we compare Harmanpreet's game with Pargat, there is a vast difference. Pargat had an edge, because he was cool, calm, confident and creative under pressure in deep defensive zone.

So here was some comparative analysis of the former and current players to make my point. Any questions, I am only a phone call away.

Goalkeepers.

It is no secret that Sreejesh, has been developed into one of the top goalkeeper's in the world, by Foreign coaches. But he tends to let in soft goals in big games. Period. Whereas all the medal winning teams, had stellar goal keepers. **Shining example;** the way Belgium goal keeper, Vincent Vanasch, performed under pressure, especially in the final match, which fetched them a Gold medal.

Goal scoring power.

The Indian forwards need to have a skill of changing their mind, employing a surprise element at the last split second, with a hit, push or a body dodge to score goals with deception. India and most of the teams, score more fluky goals, while implementing a hit and hope strategy and deflections. Rather than well-constructed goals with moves and build up plays. Yes, you can argue, defenders have improved in marking and tackling, so need the forwards have to. See how ordinary international players do so in football and basketball, before a goal or point is scored.

I can bet, if Netherlands Brinkman, would be able to score the same type of an equalizer goal with deflection, against India, for more than 2 or 3 times out of 10 tries.

Forecasting the Future; India be aware:

The game is changing and improving. The traditional soft skills are making a comeback, although slowly but steadily. We could see them being demonstrated during the 2018 Odisha HWC, by only the top teams. **The final gold medal match is a classic example.** I have no hesitation in saying, that the way the top teams were executing soft skills, **is still in an embryo stage.** They have a long way to go. **Mind you these top coaches are very intelligent** and will develop them quickly.

It will be a shame to witness, India and for that matter all the hockey playing nations, who were deprived of the medal, not being able to **recognize and anticipate this powerful change**. Just the way we all, especially India, were caught napping, while **Germany and Netherlands mastered the strategic plays of circulating the ball in the back**. Didn't they conquer the world from 1996 - 2012? In which Netherlands and Germany shared 2 Olympic gold medals back to back, while Australia won their first and only one, at the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, under Coach Barry Dancer's guidance.

There are three type of coaches; First the ones who make it happen, second who watch it happen, and the third who wonder what happened? Please don't be like Coach Shiv, who just always wonder's what happened. Poor me. 🙄🙄🙄

Quote: Future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.

Eleanor Roosevelt, Former first lady of USA

Conclusion:

In a nut shell, India needed the Hard skills set, team structure, planning and organization. And the advanced training methods, to improve their fitness level and eating habits. Credit goes to the foreign coaches and the sports scientist, who introduced these concepts and developed them.

The Himalayan blunder foreign coaches made was not recognizing and working upon the unique strengths of the Indian players mentioned earlier, which was a second nature to them and the winning edge they had, over Europeans. Better late than never. It can be done now, by being creative and imaginative.

May I please suggest:

Hockey India, instead of hiring foreign coaches, as National Team Coach's, hire foreign experts as visiting coach / consultant, for a period of 6 - 8 week, two or three times a year. This should be done for the next four years.

Just the way Australia did, inviting Balkishan Singh, former Indian national team coach, in the 60's. He did do lot of coaching there. As did the Anglo Indians, who immigrated to Australia during the tail end of 40's and 50's. And guided them to become a consistent hockey powerhouse.

What should their role be?

These visiting coaches / consultants should act as educators, mentors, working at all levels, from the grassroots to the top. **Coaching Coaches.** Indian coaches from all levels, **must attend** their seminars and practice sessions. It is a long process, which operates on the principle of **Short-term pains for long term gains.** Belgium the winners of the world cup are a prime example of operating upon it.

I strongly belief that Australians will be the best choice for India's system. Here are some names, Barry Dancer, the only Aussie coach, who has won their Men's national team an Olympic gold medal, Ric Charlesworth and Richard Aggiss.

Barry and Richard have the best people skills and know - tactfully - how to get the best of their students. Wise and kind hockey minds.

Coach Education Program:

Sukvir Singh Grewal, Director Training, Punjab Institute of Sports, under whose leadership, Punjab, has developed majority of the players, who are playing on the current national team, will be a good choice to lead it. He is one of the very few Indian coaches, **who walk their talk.** Yes, Sukhvir, did develop his coaching knowledge/ strategies, while sitting near the feet of his Hockey Guru, none other than legendary Balkishan Singh

Quote: Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.

Peter Druker. American

Management Guru

Think about this?

The big question is who in India will teach the players the skills, identified earlier? Can these players who are so drilled into playing a different style of hockey, be changed at this stage of their career?

My answer is positive. It can be done, with deliberate practice, **changing the cognitive thinking - thought process - and belief system, taking one step at a time.** On top of this designing and executing **targeted new training methods**, with specific goals and a plan to achieve them. Management by measurement.

My strong believe is that it won't be easy for India, to beat the Europeans, by just playing their style of play and imitating their tactics. It took them close to seven decades to invent their style of play and wrestle down India. How can India match their style and tactics to defeat them realistically and consistently?

We all know, Spain and FC Barcelona conquered the football world, in the recent past. Xavi and Iniesta, their key play makers, played successfully against opponents, who were much **bigger, stronger and faster** than them. Majority of the current Indian hockey players have their style and size of built.



Let's compare Manpreet's game with Xavi:

Who runs - works - less on the Field?

Who controls the ball better under pressure?

Who makes better quality passes?

Who uses his head more than his legs?

Who makes more fool of his opponents?

Who has better game sense; reading and anticipating the patterns of play?

Who is more effective?

On all the above 7 questions, my vote goes to Xavi, whom will you vote?

We must first recognize and understand the causes. And then Treat the causes and not the symptoms.

Develop each players Growth Mindset, Belief system and the ability to Perform under pressure. As every individual player needs attention. And 1 on 1 and mini group coaching, is the coaching need of the day.

Quote: Everybody is a Genius. But If you judge a fish by Its ability to climb a tree, It will live Its whole life believing that It is Stupid.
Albert Einstein.

I like to leave you all with some motivating quotes, by high achievers.

Quote: Whatever the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve, no matter what the present circumstances or obstacles surrounding a situation.
Napoleon Hill

Quote: Impossible is a word to be found only in the dictionary of fools.
Napoleon Bonaparte

During the 2nd quarter of the 2018 Odisha HWC final match between Belgium and Netherlands, when the score was 0 - 0, while covering it as expert commentator, Ric Charlesworth whispered to his fellow commentator Charlie.

“The longer this goes Charlie, the more I think that it will take a piece of **individual brilliance** or perhaps just some **terrible error**.”
Charlie Brougham replies, I hope it is **brilliance**.”

Looks like deep down Ric wants to see – Individual brilliance - in the game, to make it beautiful.?

Vote of Thanks:

A special Thank you to Ranbir Kahlon, for his **valuable input** in writing this article. Ranbir also helps me publish my quarterly coaching newsletters. His dad Professor Dr Kahlon taught me a microbiology course, during my university days. He awarded me a F grade in the course, because I was not good enough and deserved it. Now his son is helping me. Some things never change. Wake up coach Shiv.

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