

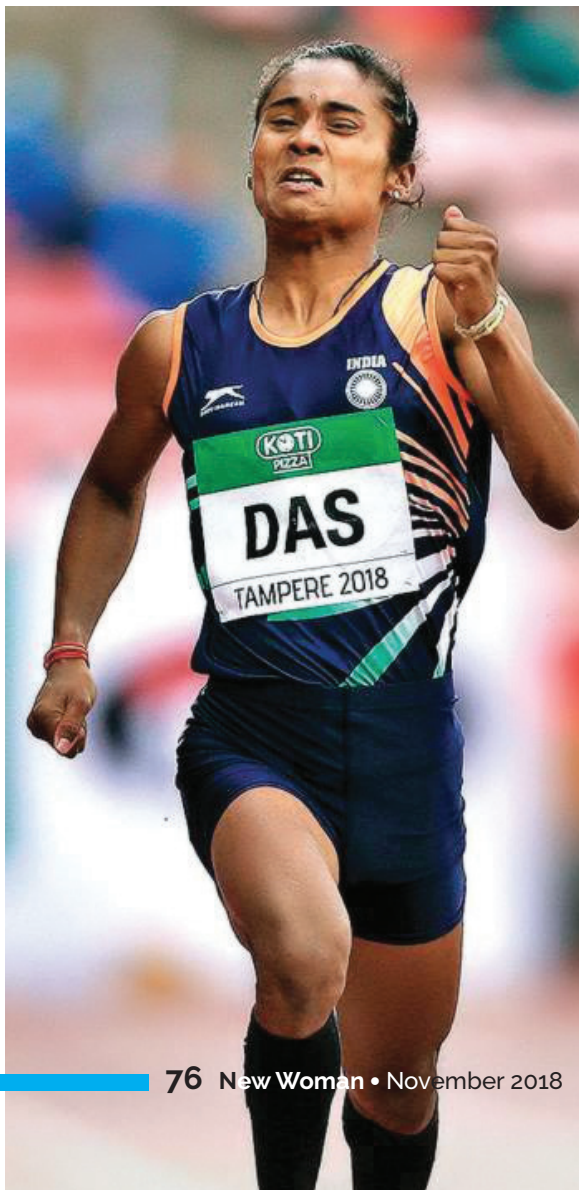
Gaming Heroes

FOUR INDIAN WOMEN ATHLETES—FROM SPRINTING TO WEIGHTLIFTING TO SHOOTING AND HOCKEY—TURNED EVERY STEREOTYPE ON ITS HEAD WHEN THEY WENT ON TO CLINCH ONE MEDAL AFTER THE OTHER ON MAJOR INTERNATIONAL PLATFORMS—REDEFINING OUR NATION'S STATURE IN EVERY GAME CONCEIVABLE. **RHEA TONY** GOT **HIMA DAS**, **HEENA SIDHU**, **MIRABAI CHANU** AND **RANI RAMPAL** CHATTING ABOUT SPORTS, FAMILY AND MORE.



HIMA DAS

Indian Sprinter, Asian Games Gold Medallist 2018



When Indian sprinter Hima Das crossed the finishing line in the final second at the 400 metres with a timing of 50.79 s ahead of everyone else at the Asian Games earlier this year, the world suddenly could not stop talking about her. Social media was full of videos of Hima at the finishing line, and before she knew it, Hima had gone viral. Everyone wanted to know more about this girl from Assam, who had battled every hardship to clinch the coveted title.

Talking to her on the sidelines of the Edelweiss press conference in Mumbai, when I quizzed her on what inspired her to become a sprinter, the 18-year-old girl from Assam's Dhing jokingly said, "I ran because I could,"—a simple statement, with a much bigger meaning, Hima elaborated how running made her feel like she could run away from anything in her life. Hima is known to have run in a fit of rage, when in Class III, a Tata

Sumo—filled with village kids—could not accommodate her on the ride to school. And she continued running with steadfast determination—in tracks across Assam, in coaching camps in Patiala and Sonepat, to the Asian Games track. Hopefully, she won't stop there.

Growing up in a 17-member joint family, she learned to make do with things that she had around her; never once asking her parents to fulfil any of her needs. Her first love was football; playing with the neighbourhood boys on the streets and in the farms. But once into her teens, stereotypes of how a single girl could continue to play with so many boys began cropping up. Luckily for her, her football-loving father came through and rallied behind her to follow her dreams nonetheless. Playing at club levels, the prize money earned went towards her passion for football and in material goods like shoes and clothes. Through all this, her coach,



HEENA SIDHU

Shooter, Asian Games Silver Medallist 2018

Nipon Das, spotted her talent for running and egged her to take to the tracks seriously. The Dhing Express, as Hima is popularly referred to now (Hima hails from a village called Dhing) is sponsored by clothing brands and shoe companies who consider her a role model for young aspirants. The 2018 Arjuna Award winner confides that at the start line, the only thoughts in her head are that she gets to run and be free on the tracks and that titles and medals don't matter! Hima preps by exercising and with yoga before a sprint and begs the working class to make time for themselves in this dynamic world.

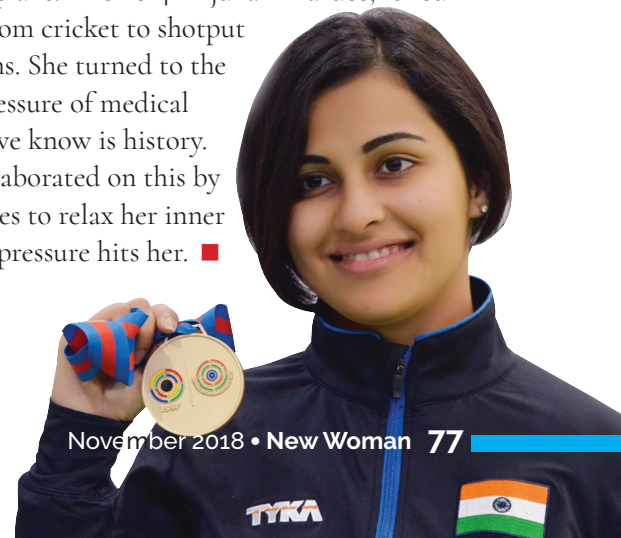
Golden tip: Run for yourself and your passions, instead of chasing money and deadlines. ■



A professional dental surgeon, 28-year-old Heena Sidhu is better known for her record—creating 25m air pistol shot at the Commonwealth Games 2018, and for her most recent silver in 10m air pistol event at the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta. Competing against her younger brother for her family's attention made her turn to the riskiest sport she could find—shooting. Even as

her mother pushed her to be financially independent and finish her degree in dentistry, Heena's heart lay in playing with guns just like her father and brother. While her yesteryear sports shooter father assumed her brother would make India proud, Heena of course had other plans. The 2014 Arjuna Awardee, tried and tested every game she could—right from cricket to shotput before settling on hitting targets with guns. She turned to the joint family business of guns when the pressure of medical school started getting to her. The rest as we know is history.

Golden tip: Live in the 'present'. Heena elaborated on this by saying how before every match, she chooses to relax her inner mind and gather her thoughts before the pressure hits her. ■



November 2018 • New Woman 77



SAIKHOM MIRABAI CHANU

Indian Weightlifter, Commonwealth Games Gold Medallist 2018

Triggered and motivated by her mother, 24-year-old Indian weightlifter Saikhom Mirabai Chanu now holds multiple records in weightlifting around the world. Her biggest record, both personally and professionally was made at the recent Commonwealth Games in Jakarta in April 2018 (she participated in the 48 kg weightlifting event), when she ended up lifting 196 kg in two separate attempts. On the other hand, her record-creating lift and gold medal at 194 kg still stands unbeaten in Anaheim, United States at the 2017 World Weightlifting Championship. Running around her village in Imphal, Manipur with the local boys, Mirabai was not at all the typical Indian girl. The youngest child and the only girl of the footballer family, she ended up choosing weightlifting as her sport instead. Picking up firewood from the nearby jungles for cooking, Mira practised her skills regularly and ended up converting her talent into a world-recognised sport.

Unfortunately, the disheartening loss at Rio Olympics 2016 left her feeling low and almost made her give up on the game. But with the support of her parents and coach, her friends and her colleagues, Mirabai worked harder than ever, to first lift the gold at the 2017 World Weightlifting

Championship in the US, followed by the gold medal at the Commonwealth Games 2018 in April. Chanu will next be seen competing in the 2020 Olympics with renewed vigour, and we are sure she will make India proud once again.

Golden tip: Believe in yourself and focus on your goals rather than on the negativity of a loss. ■





RANI RAMPAL

Captain of the Indian Women's Hockey Team,
Asian Games Silver Medallist, 2018



The youngest player at 15, Rani Rampal represented India at the 2010 hockey World Cup before going on to become Captain of the Indian women's hockey team. Her motivating factor was the yearly torrential rains in her home state Haryana—watching how every monsoon, the floods would ruin her small house, she decided to help her family out in whatever way she could. The huge age gap between her and her younger siblings made her responsible to earn for her ageing parents.

A bigger house and many achievements later, the 24-year old now leads a team of equally strong and capable women on the hockey field. Rani was chosen as the flagbearer of India at the closing ceremony of the Asian Games 2018

in honor of leading the Indian women's hockey team to the finals after almost 20 years. Losing the gold against Japan has only inspired her and the team to work harder for the next battle!

When quizzed on how she processes her thoughts before every match, the 2016 Arjuna Awardee reveals getting a good night's rest and loosening up with exercise as crucial. And how does the skipper herself unwind in pressure situations? "By hitting the gym and winding down early for bed, so that I wake up with a clear mind," she signs off.

Golden tip: To always remember why you started doing whatever you are doing in the first place. How else can you continue chasing your dreams? **NW**