

## DU's legendary marksmen did India proud !



**Dr Karni Singh**

The last Maharaja of Bikaner won the national championship in trap and skeet a record 17 times and represented India in six Olympics from 1960-1980 . He also won India's first medals at the World Shooting Championships ( a silver in 1962 ) and at the Asian Games ( silver 1974 ) fittingly , *the international range in New Delhi is named after him.*



**Randhir Singh**

Inspired by Karni Singh , Randhir Singh – who belongs to the royal family of Patiala - went on to represent India from 1963 to 1994 , **the longest representation by any sportsman for India in international competition** . He took part in six Olympic Games and got the country its first gold at the Bangkok Asian Games in 1978 .



**Jaspal Rana**

He contested in 25m centre fire pistol category. He won eight medals in the Asian Games : four gold , two silver and two bronze . As a junior , Jaspal won gold at Milan in 1994 at the ISSF Shooting Championships . He has also won gold at the Asian Shooting Championships in 1995 at Jakarta.

**Randhir Singh** attended his **15th Summer Olympics**, when he set foot in Rio de Janeiro September 2016. His first Games was Helsinki in 1952, travelling there with father Bhalendra Singh, who went in his capacity as an International Olympic Committee member.

Goad him to paint a picture of that bygone era, and he points out he was *only seven* when he went to the Finnish capital. Now 70, the former Indian Olympic Association secretary-general and IOC member looks forward to witnessing another spectacle in Rio. However, 'Raja Saheb' has seen shooting grow from being the pursuit of royalty to that of an elite few and those from army to today's bunch from a cross-section of the society.

### EARLY DAYS

Around the time Randhir was being introduced to the biggest stage, Indian shooting was also taking baby steps. Harihar Banerjee and Souren Choudhary are the first Indian shooters to compete in an Olympics, at Helsinki. The results were modest.

Banerjee also competed at the 1956 Melbourne Games, where Haricharan Shaw was the second entrant. Banerjee was also the first to participate in the World Championships, at Oslo in 1952.

Those were trying times. Governments, state or centre, were not attuned to the idea of shooting as a sports discipline.

Olympians then had to buy their clothing for the Games, and even buy dollars directly from the Reserve Bank of India. Nothing was free. "We bought our uniform, shirts and ties *from a shop in Connaught Place called Devichand,*" says Randhir Singh, the 1978 Asiad trap champion.

Practicing and organising national meets were big hurdles. Ranges were set up temporarily. Five trap machines used to come from the private range of the Maharaja of Bikaner, Dr Karni Singh. They had to be set up at Delhi's Parade Grounds for the nationals. The rifle men gathered at the Nicholson range in Delhi Cantonment for their nationals; they used to shoot at stationary targets till 1982, when the world had already shifted to turning targets.

## INDIVIDUAL LARGESSE

In those years, shooting survived on the generosity of maharajas and aristocrats. **Dr Karni Singh** was one such benefactor. Many shooters, including **Randhir, a six-time Olympian**, benefited. Pranab Kumar Roy, part of the quintet that won silver at the 1982 New Delhi Asian Games and included Randhir, Karni Singh and Gurbir Singh Sandhu, remembers those days. “There were no ranges then. The only one that was in working condition was in Bikaner run by Maharaj,” Roy says. “He was kind enough to loan us cartridges and also not charge us for using his range.”

The 1982 Asian Games brought an end to some of these tribulations. Import duty on weapons and ammunition was done away with on the initiative of Rajiv Gandhi. “It changed everything for us. Now, Arjuna awardees get to import a number of weapons,” Randhir says.

Shooting had entered public consciousness when an 18-year-old **Delhi collegian - our Jaspal Rana** - set the pistol competition alight at the 1994 Commonwealth Games in Victoria, Canada, winning the centre fire gold and silver in the 10m air pistol.

Jaspal Rana’s was a story with a difference. Winning the centre fire gold at the 1994 Hiroshima Asian Games as well, the boy next door became a star. “I was given the ownership of the pistol, which was owned by SAI. It was Walther GSP, model no: 1237509. I shot with it in the 2006 Asian Games too,” he says. **Jaspal won all three of India’s gold medals in Doha.**

## RUNS IN THE FAMILY



Dr Karni Singh with daughter Rajyashree Kumari.

Like father, like daughter. Six-time Olympian Dr Karni Singh’s daughter Rajyashree Kumari was also a first class shooter and received the Arjuna Award in 1968, at the age of 16. Princess Rajyashree broke the national record in 1970 as a 18-year-old after she broke 92 out of 100 targets in women’s trap.

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Maharaja Dr Karni Singh and Apurvi Chandela