

More Than a Game: The Untold Story of Major Dhyan Singh and His Bais Rajput Roots

(A podcast transcribed into text by Harshit Singh)

Abstract:

In this insightful episode of The White Lotus Podcast, hosted by the dynamic duo Lokeshwar Singh and Archit Pratap Singh, we embark on a compelling journey into the life and legacy of Major Dhyan Chand, one of the most celebrated figures in the history of Indian sports. Revered as the "Wizard of Hockey," Major Dhyan Chand's extraordinary skills and unrelenting dedication to the sport have left an indelible mark not only on Indian hockey but also on the global sporting landscape. The podcast delves into the inspiring stories of Major Dhyan Chand's remarkable journey, highlighting the pivotal role played by his brother, Captain Roop Singh Bais, and the continued legacy championed by Sh. Ashok Dhyanchand. This episode offers an illuminating exploration of the illustrious family history that not only shaped Indian hockey but also served as a beacon of discipline, perseverance, and excellence for generations to come, with contributions from Sh. Ashok Dhyanchand, a renowned figure in his own right and a key player in India's 1975 Hockey World Cup victory, this episode offers a unique perspective on the values of hard work and dedication. It also celebrates the power of family and heritage in shaping sports history. This episode is a treasure trove of motivational stories and life lessons that emphasize the importance of perseverance, pride in one's roots, and the unbreakable bond between passion and excellence. Whether you are a sports aficionado or someone seeking inspiration, this podcast promises to leave a lasting impression. Archit and Lokeshwar conducted this podcast, transcribed into English by the independent scholar Harshit Singh, to ensure broader access and dissemination of this inspiring conversation. (Transcription of Video Premiered on December 03, 2024) The video can be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Px5gfUKipc>

Sh. Ashok Dhyanchand: Ashok Kumar Singh, widely known as Ashok Dhyanchand, stands as a distinguished figure in Indian hockey and is the son of the legendary Dhyan Chand. His remarkable contributions to the sport, including the pivotal goal that secured India's victory in the 1975 Hockey World Cup, are deeply ingrained in the history of Indian sports. A two-time Olympian and Asian Games medallist, he has been honoured with prestigious awards such as the Arjuna Award (1974), Yash Bharati (2013), and the Hockey India Major Dhyan Chand Lifetime Achievement Award (2024). Ashok Dhyanchand's legacy continues to inspire future generations.

Corresponding Author: Harshit Singh

Email: harshitsbais@gmail.com

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Archit: Ashok Sir, Welcome to The White Lotus Podcast. Ashok Dhyanchand: Thank you very much.

Archit: Many people know about you and Major Dhyan Singh, but very few know about your family's background. Where do you belong, where does your family belong, and how did Major Dhyan Singh step into the world of hockey? Sir, please tell us a little bit about this.

*Ashok Dhyanchand: My grandfather, **Thakur Someshwar Dutt Singh**, belonged to a **Bais** family.*



*Moreover, all the **Bais Thakurs** of our society have come from a village near Etawah called **Baiswara**. Moreover, the biggest name in his ancestral land, which has been a big part of the **freedom struggle** and has done much work in it, is **Rana Beni Madhav Singh Bais**. Rana Beni Madhav Bais has been a significant figure in Uttar Pradesh, where the Thakur Rajput families have played an important role in the freedom struggle, **Rana Beni Madhav Singh, Dhyan Singh Bais, and Roop Singh Bais** were the names who introduced this **Bais family to the world impressively**. On **August 29, 1905**, a crucial day for all of us, all the players, with all the knowledge of hockey, Dhyan Singh started a new era in hockey.*

Dhyan Singh, my father were two brothers, elder brother Mool Singh, who was also in the army, and younger brother Captain Roop Singh, a famous name in the world, on whose name a road was also built in the Munich Olympics. When I went, I saw it and came. Moreover, in the 2012 Olympics,

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the names of the three stadiums that were named as Major Dhyan Chand Metro Station, Captain Roop Singh Metro Station, and Leslie Claudius Metro Station out of respect. Now, this recognition was given by the government, which ruled over us. However, in Hockey we ruled over them, Whenever we Indians participated in Hockey England team withdraw from the Olympics games due to fear of losing.

Dhyan Chand: Early Life and the Path to Greatness



When Dhyan Singh, later renowned as Dhyan Chand, arrived in Jhansi, he was just like any other child. His journey began with a modest start in schooling, where he displayed a keen interest in sports from an early age. However, academic performance took a backseat to his athletic pursuits. During his 9th or 10th-grade exams, his marks fell short, drawing the ire of his father. Dhyan Chand later recounted in his autobiography that his father, furious with his grades, once dragged him by the ears as a reprimand. At the

tender age of 16, Dhyan Chand joined the **Brahmin Regiment**, a prominent military unit of the time, as part of the child platoon. Alongside his duties as a soldier, he embraced the regiment's rigorous physical training culture, which included mandatory participation in evening sports activities. When asked about his preferred game, Dhyan Chand chose hockey, a decision that would change the course of his life. The sprawling army grounds became his training ground, where hockey and football matches took place simultaneously. **Subedar Major Bala Tiwari**, an influential figure in Dhyan Chand's life, quickly noticed the young soldier's extraordinary talent. Tiwari observed a lean, wiry boy on the field, effortlessly manoeuvring the ball with such finesse that even seasoned players struggled to intercept him. Impressed by his skills, Tiwari summoned Dhyan Chand and inquired about his background. Dhyan Chand introduced himself as **Dhyan Singh Bais** and shared that his dribbling abilities were honed during his time with the **Jhansi Heroes**, a local hockey club from his childhood. Recognizing the potential in the young player, Tiwari offered a crucial piece of advice: while Dhyan's dribbling was exceptional, he needed to **focus on ball distribution** to elevate his game. This mentorship played a pivotal role in shaping Dhyan Chand's approach to hockey. Tiwari's encouragement and technical guidance laid the foundation for Dhyan Chand's transformation into one of the greatest hockey players the world has ever known. His legendary skill, coupled with his tactical evolution, would go on to inspire generations and redefine the sport itself.

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Dhyan Chand, also known as Dhyan Singh, achieved extraordinary milestones in hockey, amassing over 1,000 domestic goals and more than 500 international goals throughout his illustrious career. His remarkable scoring record remains unparalleled in the history of the sport. Following his triumphant tour of New Zealand in 1926, where his skill and performance captivated audiences, Dhyan Chand returned to his service duties in the Indian Army. However, his exploits on the field had already caught the attention



of the international community. Newspapers highlighted his achievements, and his fame reached the Olympic Committee. At that time, hockey had been excluded from the Olympic Games after 1916, missing the 1920 and 1924 editions. The game was perceived as less attractive, characterized by a rudimentary "hit and run" style that failed to draw spectators. However, the success of Dhyan Chand and the Indian Army's hockey team during the 1926 New Zealand tour changed this narrative. Photographs and reports of massive crowds attending these matches were shared with the International Olympic Committee, showcasing hockey's growing popularity.

This renewed interest, coupled with Dhyan Chand's exceptional performances, played a pivotal role in reinstating hockey in the 1928 Olympics. The inclusion of hockey marked a monumental moment for the sport, as it gained international recognition and respect. The Indian Hockey Federation, established in Gwalior before eventually moving to Kolkata, organized the selection of the Indian national team for the 1928 Olympics. At that time, India was divided into provinces rather than states, and Dhyan Chand represented the Central Province. His selection to the national team was not only a personal triumph but also a source of immense pride for his family and supporters. The 1928 selection marked a significant turning point for Indian hockey. Institutions like the Indian Army and the railways played a crucial role in promoting the sport, providing platforms for players to hone their skills. For Dhyan Chand, earning a place in the Olympic team was the realization of a dream shared by countless athletes—a testament to his

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unparalleled talent and dedication. His journey inspired a nation and laid the foundation for **India's dominance in hockey on the global stage.**

The selection of the 1928 Indian hockey team raised an important question: how would the team travel to the Olympics? A committee was formed, but funding became a significant challenge. As India was under British colonial rule at the time, the government was not supportive, and resources were scarce.

In a remarkable act of solidarity and patriotism, the soldiers of the **Indian Army**, many of whom were part of the hockey team, collectively **donated one day's salary** to fund the team's participation. This extraordinary gesture enabled the team to compete in the Olympics. However, due to financial constraints, only 11 players could be sent, as there was not enough money to include a 12th player.

This act of selflessness and determination highlights the sacrifices made by the players and supporters to represent India on the international stage.



Lokeshwar: Sir, I have heard that in the reception committee, there were only 3 people at Bombay Port.

Ashok Dhyanchand: When the team reached Bombay for their departure, they assembled at the Gateway of India, the point from where steamers would transport them to their destination. Despite the significance of the occasion, only three people were present to see them off: the Mayor of Bombay and two members of the Hockey Federation. However, behind the scenes, the most significant contributor to this historic journey was **Mr. Pankaj Gupta**, a mentor whose name has largely faded from memory in India. Mr. Gupta's relentless dedication and efforts were instrumental not only in advancing hockey but also in supporting other sports like football. His contributions to the development and success of Indian hockey remain unparalleled. In 1928, the team embarked on their journey to Amsterdam, traveling via England. Upon arriving at English ports, they relied on practice matches for sustenance. Clubs, communities, or

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even local Gurudwaras often provided food for the team. Through such resourcefulness, the Indian Hockey team managed to reach Amsterdam for the Olympic Games.

Their first match of the tournament attracted only 200–250 spectators. However, the team’s unique style of play, led by Dhyan Singh, captivated the small audience. Dhyan Singh’s remarkable dribbling skills, precise passing, and ability to control the ball mesmerized those in attendance. He scored a goal with such finesse that it was widely discussed in newspapers. His stamina, physical strength, and incredible control over the ball fascinated not only the spectators but also the media.



Soon, Dhyan Singh earned the illustrious nickname **"Hockey Magician,"** a title bestowed upon him by the media and celebrated worldwide. This unique moniker, unparalleled in any other sport, became synonymous with his extraordinary skills on the hockey field and marked the beginning of a legacy that commenced at the 1928 Olympics.

In the tournament, the Indian team participated in five matches, as opposed to the seven matches played in modern competitions. On the eve of the final match, Dhyan Singh was struck by a severe fever, with his temperature soaring to 103 degrees Fahrenheit. Concerned for his health, the team manager asked him if he would be able to play. True to his soldierly spirit, Dhyan Singh replied, "Do not worry; I am a soldier. I know what I have to do."

The following day, despite his fever, Dhyan Singh took to the field and delivered a phenomenal performance. He scored two goals in the final match, with his teammates contributing the remaining two goals. India triumphed over the Dutch team in Amsterdam, securing its first Olympic gold medal—a victory that would come to define an era of Indian sports. This historic win, now approaching its centenary, was a moment of immense pride for the nation. It marked a turning point in India’s identity on the global stage, shifting perceptions from a land of princely states, landlords, and colonial rule to a country of extraordinary talent and resilience. Indian hockey became a symbol of national pride and recognition, with Dhyan Singh at its forefront.

This monumental achievement in 1928 not only elevated India’s standing in the world but also laid the foundation for its legacy in hockey. The gold medal victory remains a testament to the skill,

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determination, and unity of the Indian team, with Dhyan Singh standing as the pivotal figure who ignited the nation's passion for the sport.

Archit: Sir, after the 1928 Olympics comes the 1932 Olympics. Sir, the Indian team performed very well in that. Sir, tell us some stories about that.

See, before the 1932 Olympics, tensions arising from global conflicts and the brewing World War created significant friction between America and European countries. As a result, many nations hesitated to send their teams to the event. Only three teams were invited to participate in the hockey tournament: India, Japan, and the host nation, the United States. India, however, faced a monumental challenge—there were no funds to send the hockey team to Los Angeles. The situation was dire, as the tournament required at least three teams to proceed. If India failed to participate, the hockey event risked being removed from the



Olympic Games altogether. In this critical moment, the efforts of Mr. Pankaj Gupta, India's hockey mentor, proved decisive. Driven by his dedication to the sport, Mr. Gupta secured a **loan from the Punjab National Bank** to ensure India's participation. His commitment allowed the Indian team to embark on the arduous journey to America to compete in the Games.

In the 1932 Olympics, India showcased its dominance in hockey. In their opening match, they defeated Japan with a resounding 10-0 victory. However, it was the second match against the United States that etched an unforgettable record in Olympic history. India triumphed with an astonishing 24-1 scoreline, a feat that remains a record to this day. The Indian players left the American spectators in awe with their dribbling skills and coordination. Mr. Gupta often remarked how the Americans would rise from their seats, captivated by the sheer artistry of the Indian team's play. This match also marked the debut of Roop Singh, Dhyan Singh's younger brother, as a member of the Indian team. The two brothers delivered an

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extraordinary performance, dazzling the audience with their exceptional skills. The victory in Los Angeles not only solidified India's dominance in hockey but also captured the hearts of the American public. The remarkable achievements of Dhyan Singh and Roop Singh elevated the sport's profile internationally and further entrenched India's reputation as a global hockey powerhouse.

Lokeshwar: Sir, I heard both brothers scored 18 goals in the 24-1 match.

Yes, 11 goals were scored by Captain Roop Singh and eight goals....

Lokeshwar: So, both of them scored 19 goals.

Yes, 10 and 8. My father scored eight goals, and both brothers scored 18 goals.

The 1932 Olympics not only marked a historic victory for Indian hockey but also saw Captain Roop Singh begin his journey toward Olympic glory. His exceptional skills quickly earned him recognition as an outstanding player. Together with his elder brother, Dhyan Singh, they became a formidable duo, drawing comparisons to the legendary partnership of Ram and Laxman from Indian mythology.



Newspapers of the time often referred to them as the "**Ram and Laxman**" of Indian hockey, emphasizing their mutual respect and synergy on and off the field. Their bond extended beyond the hockey field and reflected the deep-rooted cultural and familial values they upheld throughout their lives. Despite their fame and accomplishments, they remained humble and grounded. Roop Singh, as a mark of respect, never raised his eyes to meet Dhyan Singh's gaze directly, even in conversations. Their profound respect for one another was evident in small but significant gestures. For instance, if one needed something, he would call the other with deference rather than issuing a direct command. This mutual admiration and respect were hallmarks of their relationship, demonstrating how they balanced their roles as teammates, brothers, and cultural exemplars. Whether sharing victories on the Olympic field, living in

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camps, or navigating their lives together, the two brothers remained steadfast in their commitment to their shared values, leaving a legacy that extended beyond sports and into the realm of personal integrity and familial pride.

Archit: Sir, please tell us about Captain Roop Singh. He was the younger brother of Dhyanchand. He was a great player of his time, and he was respected. But there was not much discussion about him because his brothers was such a great player due to which he is not discussed enough, so please tell us a little bit about Captain Roop Singh Bais.

Ashok Dhyanchand: Captain Roop Singh was widely regarded as one of the greatest scorers of his time, earning a reputation as the best scorer in the world. Unlike many others, he was an all-round player, excelling in various roles on the hockey field. Whether taking penalty corners, playing defence, or advancing as a forward, Roop Singh's versatility and skill were unparalleled. His most defining characteristic, however, was his extraordinary hitting power.



His physical stature—taller and more robust than his brother Dhyan Singh—gave him a natural advantage. Yet it was his lethal and precise hitting that truly set him apart. Stories of his powerful hits, which could burst the goal net or potentially injure players, are legendary. In fact, my father, alarmed by the force of his strikes, would sometimes send him off the field, jokingly admonishing him for playing too aggressively, as though he were there to harm rather than compete.

Roop Singh's reputation as a masterful all-round player was solidified through consistent performances and an unwavering dedication to improving his game. His advice to aspiring players was both simple and profound. When I asked him about improving my skills during the 1971 Nationals, his guidance was

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succinct: “A player is one who avoids injuries.” For him, the foundation of hockey success lay in three principles: **see, learn, and apply.**

See: Observe exceptional players and their techniques.

Learn: Practice those skills rigorously to incorporate them into your gameplay.

Apply: Utilize those techniques effectively during matches, relying on instinct and quick decision-making.

Roop Singh believed that success in hockey depended on a player’s ability to make split-second decisions. The interaction between the mind and nervous system—deciding whether to hit, pass, or scoop—occurs almost instantaneously in the heat of a match. A truly great player is one who can swiftly choose the right action and execute it flawlessly.

Even today, his philosophy remains relevant. Aspiring players are encouraged to practice diligently, integrate new skills, and rely on their instincts during gameplay. Roop Singh’s legacy is not just one of unparalleled skill but also of profound wisdom about the sport, guiding generations of players toward excellence.

Once a TV Anchor asked, “Dada (Major Dhyanchand), you are called the magician of hockey.” He showed both his hands and said, “This was the wonder of my wrists, whose instructions came from my mind, and it acted accordingly.” So this thing was understandable and knowledgeable. It was an eye-opener for me, too. This thing is terrific. Everything has to come out of the mind. Moreover, the sharper the mind, the more you keep it in the present, then your capabilities will increase. Roop Singh's game was such that it was terrific. For the team, Dhyanchand even wrote in his book that Roop was better than me. People say that Roop Singh was better than Dhyanchand. Dhyanchand used to play center forward. Roop Singh, up and down, lefthand, playing penalty corners, hitting, doing defence, then scoring, was also a good scorer.

Captain Roop Singh’s journey as an extraordinary player was not without its challenges. Despite securing two Olympic medals and achieving remarkable success on the field, his life was marked by struggles that went largely unaddressed by the government at the time. After his illustrious career, he joined the state army of Maharaja Scindia in Gwalior, but like many other athletes of his era, he faced numerous difficulties that were often overlooked. One of the most poignant aspects of his life was the hardship he endured after retirement. Despite his contributions to Indian hockey and his status as a national hero, Roop Singh lived in a rented house throughout his life, and his family also had to face similar struggles. The lack of financial security and recognition was a harsh reality for many sports figures of that generation, whose sacrifices went largely unacknowledged, especially during the pre-independence era.

While the country remained under colonial rule, such issues were often sidelined. However, with India’s independence, there was hope that more could be done for athletes like Roop Singh. Unfortunately, the long-overdue recognition and support for these players came too late for many, including Roop Singh,

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whose legacy continues to be admired but whose personal struggles were never fully addressed. **These stories highlight the need for ongoing attention to the welfare of athletes, ensuring they are honored not only for their achievements but also for the sacrifices they make throughout their lives.**

Archit: Sir Germany recognized his talent and in Munich...

Ashok Dhyanchand: See, the sky is the same as the earth. Today, we talk about living in a rented house. Furthermore, when I went to another country for the 1972 Olympics, I got the news that there was a road in the Olympic Village named after my uncle, Captain Roop Singh. I was very excited... He was from our family. Why not? I went to see the road So, **'Captain Roop Singh Bais'** The name of that road is on that board in Germany. From our family. From our country. So, in this way, his name is still established in Germany. Now, these are the things that should make the country's people proud that player is not a multimillionaire or prominent politician, but he **was just a Hockey player.**

Hockey has played a pivotal role in honouring our nation, with eight Olympic gold medals to its name. Had the Indian team not participated in the 1928 Olympics, or if the Indian Army had not laid the foundation in 1926, it's possible that hockey would not have been included in the Olympics at all. This could have meant that India would not have the prestigious legacy of these eight Olympic gold medals. The contributions of these athletes not only make us proud but also serve as a testament to the global recognition India has gained through the sport.

These achievements highlight the immense pride and honour that sports can bring to a nation. Through their dedication and sacrifice, these players have shown how far the honour of a country can reach through games. Their legacy has paved the way for future generations, inspiring others to follow in their footsteps. The recognition of these achievements is evident in the numerous *Dronacharya*, Padma Shri, and Arjuna awardees, with hockey players contributing greatly to the list. India has won 14 Olympic medals in hockey, a remarkable accomplishment. However, there is potential for even more. The journey is far from over, and our aspirations to achieve further success in the world of sports continue to grow.

Archit: Sir, in 1971, there was a war between India and Pakistan, and Bangladesh was partitioned; after that, in 75, you went to play the World Cup Hockey match. This is the only World Cup in which India won the Hockey World Cup. India had never won before nor after that. It is a coincidence that your final match was also with Pakistan, and it is a matter of good fortune that you scored the winning goal. Sir, tell us a little about it, how much pressure was there that you had to play against Pakistan, and so that there should not be any problem, tell us about it.

Ashok Dhyanchand: First of all, it was the 1971 World Cup, it was introduced for the first time by the Hockey International Committee, it was to be first organised in Pakistan but the way news was coming from Pakistan in that time, our high tension was also going on with the Bangladesh war. There was also a fear within Pakistan that if the Indian team comes to play then people will destroy the ground, due to which the first World Cup of 1971 which was to be held in Karachi was shifted to Barcelona, where the Indian team was successful in winning the bronze medal.

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The second thing that happened which I remember is of 1973 Although we won in 1975 but what people used to call a sad experience and a happy experience. My sad experience was of 73. In 1973, the Indian team reached to play the final after defeating Pakistan in the semi-finals. In our final match with Holland



in Amsterdam, Late Surjit Singh ji of the Indian team who is not alive today, died in an accident. India's team takes the lead due to his first two penalty corner goals, but in the second half, the condition of the ground is such that it is like a horse race ground because in Europe, if a little rain falls, because of the wet grass and the studs that we were wearing, entire ground got kind of destroyed. It was difficult for the ball to move forward on the field. The Europeans were well-trained, and they put much pressure on us. With two penalty corners, they scored a goal, and our team managed to equalize. The match went into extra time. In extra time, neither the Indian nor the opposing team could score a goal. Then came sudden death, marking **one of the longest matches in hockey history**. This was the 1973 World Cup final. The match lasted 70 minutes of regular play, followed by 15 minutes of extra time and another 15 minutes. During sudden death, India was awarded a penalty stroke. It was a golden opportunity to score the penalty stroke, and the medal would be in our hands. Unfortunately, that opportunity slipped away. The player initially meant to take the stroke was replaced by VP Govinda. Govinda, a name synonymous with the world of hockey and an excellent teammate of mine, stepped up. We had a great combination, a strong understanding that had always been effective. He went to take the penalty stroke. I can still see it vividly: the Holland goalkeeper, anticipating the shot, dived to the right. The left post was wide open; all that

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needed to be done was putting the ball into the net. However, the ground conditions worked against us. As I mentioned earlier, the field was poor. The ball did not rise as it should have; it should have been scooped. Instead, it rolled on the ground and missed the goalpost by just two inches. It was bad luck, pure and simple. This kind of misfortune—10%, 20%, maybe 30%—is something we face in life no matter how much effort, strength, or resources we put in. The remaining 70% to 80% is in our control, but the rest depends on fate or divine will. That missed penalty stroke in the 1973 World Cup sudden death haunts me to this day. The tiebreaker followed, and our team lost. **The gold medal slipped from our hands.**

Archit: Now, let us talk about the good experiences, notably the 1975 World Cup.

Ashok Dhyanchand: We flew from Madras to Singapore and played two or three test matches before the main event. After playing practice matches, we reached Malaysia. The hotel where we stayed was remarkable. When our bus arrived, and the entire team entered the lobby, we were asked to write our addresses at the reception desk. While doing so, I noticed a wardrobe in front of me. Inside it was the same World Cup trophy from 1973, the one we lost. It was a beautiful trophy donated by Pakistan. I walked over to the field, stood there, and a wave of emotions swept over me. In that moment, I made a silent vow to give my absolute best and to apply everything I had learned throughout my journey, especially during this tournament. The matches began, and it was a roller coaster of highs and lows. We lost some, drew others, but we kept moving forward, thanks to our accumulated points. Eventually, we reached the semifinals, where we faced Malaysia, a formidable team with a strong legacy in the sport. The match kicked off, and within just 10 minutes, Malaysia took the lead with a penalty goal. The stadium erupted with the deafening cheers of their fans, which only fuelled their momentum. As the game progressed, our team struggled. Our shots went wide, to the side, or were blocked by the Malaysian defence. As the clock ticked down, the score remained 2–1, with only 4 minutes left. I can still vividly recall the sight of that ticking clock, just as I remember when we scored the winning goal against Pakistan. With time running out, Coach Sardar Gurbachan Singh Bodhi, a three-time gold medalist and former captain of the Indian hockey team, made a bold move. He substituted Michael Kindo, our fullback from Odisha, with Aslam Sher Khan, who was about to make his debut on the field in this critical moment. In those final minutes, I earned a penalty corner for the team. Govinda pushed the ball, and Ajit Pal stopped it perfectly. With his first touch, Aslam Sher Khan struck it with precision, scoring the equalizing goal. That moment, with just 4 minutes left, revitalized our team. Without that goal, we would have been eliminated. Soon after, Sardar Harcharan Singh, our forward who had been left out for most of the match, scored the winning goal, securing our place in the final. While Aslam Sher Khan's goal had kept us alive, Harcharan Singh's strike sealed our victory.

Before the final, we had a day of rest. Our team, led by Coach Bodhi, visited a temple, mosque, gurudwara, and church in Malaysia to pray. Each player prayed in their own way, and I did as well. The following morning, around 5:30 or 6:00, there was a knock at my hotel room door. When I opened it, I found Balbir, our manager, Coach Bodhi, and a stranger holding a bag.

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The stranger pulled a red cloth from his bag and said it was a "*totka*" (a charm). He suggested that we would win the match if every player kept a piece of it in their pocket. We were willing to try anything to win, so we followed his advice. Everyone carried the red cloth piece in their shirt pocket as we headed for the match. The final began with the Indian team playing exceptionally well. It was a historic match, one of the most memorable in hockey history. It reminded me of the legendary 1936 match where Dhyan Chand and his team defeated Germany 8–1 in front of Hitler.



In the 15th or 17th minute, Pakistan's Mohammad Zahid scored a goal. Before this match, in 1974, we had played as part of the **All-Asian Star Team**, which included eight Indian players. Eight players of Pakistan. One from Malaysia and one from Singapore. We went to play four matches in Pakistan. In 1974, without a visa and a consulate, In the same way. They also came to our country. At that time, we played eight matches.

There was a fight for a year or two then Enmity after that it was a time of pacification. It was a way to normalize relations between both countries and rekindle the friendship that once existed. We were neighbours, sharing camaraderie before conflicts began. I remember the 1976 Olympics. Islahuddin and I played together; he was right out, and I was right in. We met during breaks, and he often asked, "Ashok, sing a song." Light-hearted moments like these reflected the bond we shared through the game.

However, in matches like these, emotions run high. After Pakistan scored, our team started to feel demoralized. It was a high-pressure match, where every move by one team directly affected the other. Pakistan began to attack more aggressively. The tension was palpable.

During the interval, we regrouped. Standing on the field, we strategized, motivated each other, and discussed how to turn the tide. Our senior players led the discussion. I remember saying, "We have 35

Corresponding Author: Harshit Singh

Email: harshitsbais@gmail.com

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minutes left—they are ours. If we play as we know we can, we will win." It was a moment to rally the team and remind ourselves of our strength and unity.

The second half began with renewed energy. Our team went on the offensive—Philips, Shivaji Pawar, Govinda, Mahendra Singh, Captain Ajit Pal, Aslam Sher Khan, and Surjit Singh all contributed to the momentum. Sardar Surjit Singh scored an equalizing goal in a penalty corner, bringing us back into the match. As the game progressed, the intensity escalated. With 17 minutes left, Vijay Philips, playing right-out, received a pass from me. He moved ahead and attempted a strike, but a Pakistani player tackled him, resulting in a penalty corner. Unfortunately, Surjit Singh's shot missed, and the ball went out for a long corner. In those days, long corners were hit from the edge, unlike the 25-yard starts of today. Harcharan Singh, our left-out, took a shot. Ajit Pal stopped the ball, and I was positioned nearby, playing right-in. Ajit passed it to me, and I moved forward, dribbling past two or three Pakistani defenders.

I saw Philips on my right from about 8-9 yards away. I passed the ball to him—a parallel ground ball. Philips delivered an exceptional strike, flicking the ball with precision to the corner of the goalpost. The stadium erupted. It was a moment of brilliance etched into my memory.

With 16 minutes remaining, we knew the real challenge was holding onto our lead. Those 16 minutes felt like a lifetime. Our nervous systems, our bodies—everything had to stay in control. The Pakistan team, led by their captain Islahuddin and supported by Zahid fought relentlessly. They were in a do-or-die situation, pushing their limits to equalize.

The 16 minutes of the 1975 World Cup final were crucial. The intensity was unmatched. **Aslam Sher Khan**, **Ashok Dewan** (our goalkeeper), and **Captain Ajit Pal** were pivotal during that time. In those critical moments, they played an indispensable role. **Ajit Pal**, a solid centre, led exceptionally calmly while the other players, especially our defence team, demonstrated their full potential. They were sharp, determined, and resolute in keeping the game alive.

The final whistle blew, and **Sardar Jasdev Singh's** commentary in Hindi rang through the air: *India won the World Cup* with one goal. With those powerful words, that moment became immortal in Indian sports history. What happened next was pure emotion. As the game ended, I took my hockey stick and tossed it into the crowd, a gesture of gratitude. I ran around the field, exhausted but with my heart racing. My muscles were spent, but the feeling of victory overwhelmed me. It was a moment of triumph for me, the entire team, and the country.

We had won the World Cup—our third attempt after a bronze and a silver. The reception back in India was nothing short of phenomenal. We were celebrated across the nation in 1978, 1975, and beyond. In **Bombay**, we shared the spotlight with **Raj Kapoor** and other beloved actors. It was a memorable moment, not just for the sport but for the whole of India, as we were showered with appreciation and honour.

More than just the title, this victory was a victory of hard work, resilience, and unity. It marked a moment of **national pride** celebrated far beyond the field.

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The celebrations following our victory in 1975 were unforgettable. We played several memorable matches in large stadiums, and one such match was a show match with **Vinod Khanna**, featuring all the heroes of the time. The team's success was celebrated across India, and **Raj Kapoor** hosted a grand party for the team in **Pune**, in a farmhouse where the film *Bobby* was shot. **Every state** gave us a warm reception, showing their respect for the team and the honour we brought to the country. This recognition was more than just a celebration of victory; it was a tribute to the dedication and pride with which we represented India.

Lokeshwar: Sir, you have described like a live commentary, every moment, whatever it was. So much was changed, sir when Dhyanchand Ji-won in 1928 and you won in 1975, so much difference had come. Sir, what happened in Munich during the 1972 Olympics in Germany? Where were you? One of the famous incidents took place there: 11 Israeli athletes were abducted by a Palestinian terrorist group by the name of Black September and later were murdered. Did you see what was happening? What was your reaction to that because you were also in the Olympic Village then?

*Ashok Dhyanchand: The evolution of global events was glaringly evident, and one of the most horrific moments occurred at the **1972 Munich Olympics**, where I was present. It was there that terrorism entered the Olympic arena for the first time. Our coach, **KD Singh Babu**, who had won the World Cup and served as our captain, was with us. We were all in the Olympic Village when the unimaginable happened. We witnessed a scene that would forever haunt us as we left our flats. Black-masked men armed with guns were confronting the German police in an open area near the Israeli team's quarters. It was surreal. The security screenings were thorough, and there was a sense of safety. Who would have thought such hostility could unfold in a peaceful, open area?*

The situation escalated quickly. The terrorists infiltrated the Israeli quarters, taking hostages. It was a chaotic and tragic series of events. Some Israeli athletes were shot and killed. We did not know the full extent of what was happening, but the news had already spread when we left for practice the following day. The press bombarded us with questions about the situation. My response was to express how tragic it was for the game and how we should focus on humanity in times of crisis.

Later that evening, we learned of the Palestinians' demand: a helicopter to take the hostages out of Germany. The German authorities complied, providing the helicopter, but the fate of those held captive was sealed unimaginably. **The terrorism that had entered the Olympics marked a dark chapter in history, forever changing the security dynamics of international sporting events.**

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The German police did the same. They gave them a helicopter. It was night, and by the next day, we received the news. In the helicopter, someone fired. After that, they dropped all the bombs. The Palestinians had ammunition, and everyone there—every single person—died at that spot. It was an unfortunate moment for the Olympic Games. We call it the "**black chapter**" It was heartbreaking. When the Games resumed, we kept quiet, observing a silence. It all started from there.

Archit: Sir, you have played on Turf and the Ground. So, when hockey rules were changed regarding where hockey should be played, did India have an advantage or disadvantage as a country? Moreover, where was it easy to play, and where was it challenging?

Hockey, however, was a natural sport for us. It had been introduced at the first Olympics and grew from there. The most memorable thing about it was that every child could play hockey anywhere—whether at school, on the ground in front of my house, or in a big field or stadium. It was accessible in India, and we played it as an available sport. However, as time went on, they made it more complicated. To make it more challenging, they invented something called **AstroTurf**. The introduction of AstroTurf was massive. It was a game-changer, but the biggest challenge was still the availability of grounds.

In the 1980s, we had only one ground in India where we could practice and play. For a vast country like ours, this was an incredibly limited resource. I am a player who competed on **AstroTurf** during the 1976 Olympics and later played on the National Turf in Asia. Prior to that, there was no AstroTurf in India. The most significant difference back then, however, was the equipment. In 1976, we played with wooden hockey sticks on AstroTurf while other teams used modern gear. Today, fibre and carbon sticks cost anywhere between 50,000 to 70,000 rupees each. A hockey ball costs around 4,000 to 5,000 rupees. The shoes and other gear are also much more expensive now and the biggest cost of all—the grounds. The price of one modern hockey ground today is 5 to 6 crores, which is unaffordable for most people in India. In foreign countries, there is a club system that helps fund such infrastructure, making it easier to

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maintain grounds. However, in India, collecting the money and setting up proper facilities for hockey has been a challenge. Pakistan faced similar difficulties. After winning the 1980 Olympics, we entered a long dry spell, and for many years, we did not experience the same level of success. This gap persisted until 2014, when we saw a glimmer of hope in Asia. That long stretch without success was partly due to a lack of resources—where would children even play? There were no systems in place to help them develop their skills or interest in hockey. We didn't have academic institutions or academies dedicated to the sport at that time. The government only introduced such systems much later.

Archit: Sir, looking at Indian hockey and Major Dhyan Chand's life, two things become clear. First, Major Dhyan Chand united Indians before independence, and he was a great patriot in his own right. During the Munich Olympics, Hitler offered him three times the salary and a high-ranking position, but Major Dhyan Chand, who was just a Lance Naik then, refused. Later, when he fell ill in the next Olympics, he refused others idea that he should not play, considering his health. His respect for his country was immeasurable, and it is clear how much he valued that above everything else. Hockey lovers and sports enthusiasts have been demanding for years that Major Dhyan Chand should receive the Bharat Ratna. When do you think— Major Dhyan Chand will get Bharat Ratna? What can hockey lovers and sports lovers do about it?

Ashok Dhyanchand: The Bharat Ratna will not just belong to Dhyan Chand's family. It will belong to the people of this country. It will be for millions of people with great hope and respect for him. They see Dhyan Chand as the man who brought so much respect to the country. Back in those days, we had nothing. Our country was in a very different place. However, he elevated India on the international stage through the Olympics. He brought respect to India in newspapers and across the world. The rulers of England even bowed their heads in respect for him. They didn't allow their teams to compete in the Olympics because they feared losing to Indians. However, They supported Dhyan Chand and never stopped him. These are remarkable things that Dhyan Chand achieved through his game. There are a few things I can say about him. Only Dhyan Chand could tell Hitler that he would play only for his country, not for his. This happened in 1936 when **Dhyan Chand rejected Hitler's offer.**

In 1972, Dhyan Chand received offers from both Australia and Germany to coach their hockey teams. Despite facing financial challenges at home, he refused to coach teams from countries that he had once defeated on the hockey field. This was a remarkable stance. In 1936, when the entire world was celebrating the Olympics, Dhyan Chand stood under the flags of all the nations, but India's flag was absent. **He sat there, quietly crying.** His teammates tried to console him, telling him that they had defeated Hitler and Germany. But Dhyan Chand replied that his tears were not for the victory, but because India's flag, the **Tiranga**, was not flying high alongside the others. These are extraordinary moments that reflect his deep love for his country. I am proud that such great people have come from this land and become part of our heritage. Dhyan Chand shaped the world not only with his work and his game but also with his words and behaviour.

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Look at the legacy he has left behind—25 to 26 statues across the country. That is something rare. No other country has honoured a player in such a way. **The U.P. Government, under the leadership of Mr. Yogi Adityanath Ji, has even created a 19-crore museum in Jhansi, at the stadium where Dhyan Chand used to play.** A statue of him stands there, immortalized forever. This country has honoured him with **National Sports Day**, a rare tribute. Who else has been honoured in such a way? Only Dhyan Chand. His legacy is eternal, and I believe he will continue to inspire generations of players to come.

Our children should carry forward the medals we aim to win in the Olympics. That will bring happiness to the whole country and to our governments. We hope our children will win medals in the upcoming Olympics.

Archit: On that note, we should thank Ashok Dhyan Chand Ji for being here. It is a matter of great pride for us that such a person, Major Dhyan Chand Ji, was born in this country—such a great patriot. He united India at a time when the country was divided. There were many differences. If you are a sports lover and a hockey enthusiast, I request that you appeal to the Sports Ministry and the Indian Home Ministry to award Major Dhyan Chand the Bharat Ratna. It would be an authentic tribute to him.

Thank you so much for joining us on the White Lotus Podcast.

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